

Spanish soldiers on Nakkegaard

In the early spring of 1808, 26,924 foreign soldiers came to Denmark. An international mercenary army hired by Emperor Napoleon of France. They were to help keep Denmark on the French side in the fight against England during the Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815).

After first the Battle of Rheden in 1801 and then, the English bombardment of Copenhagen and the raid of the navy in 1807, Denmark went from neutrality to supporting Napoleon in the war against England. Hence the many foreign soldiers on Danish soil. The largest force consisted of Spanish soldiers. About 15,000 men. They were privately accommodated in many different places around the country. With citizens of the towns and on the farms in the countryside. Also on Funen.

A small group has lived here at Nakkegaard, and there are many stories about the strangers. The fairytale poet Hans Christian Andersen has met them and wrote about his experiences in (Mit Livs Eventyr) My Life's Fairy Tale, about how he as a 3-year-old experienced the Spanish soldiers in Odense. Others tell that the soldiers fell in love with Danish girls, that they came with foreign customs; Ate snails and generally froze in the cool north.

Most attention in posterity came to the fact that some of them, the soldiers, caused a large fire at Koldinghus on 29 March 1808. They have not been used to the winter cold and fired up far too violently in one of the old castle kamines.

Whether they were soldiers from Funen we do not know, but we do know that they stayed here on the farm and found time to write a little verse on the stable door:

((Foto) ***"I ask where fate takes us, either hither or thither we must follow it, but when God governs us, I also like fate"***)

The stable has long since been demolished, but the door was preserved by the descendants of those who lived here at that time. Now it is in Museum Vestfyn and will be preserved for posterity. But it was here that it happened that the small classic text found its way from the Aeneid to a farmhouse on West Funen.

What were they doing here at Nakkegaard – besides making "graffiti" on the barn door? Probably like so many other soldiers: bored and waiting to move on or to get into battle with the enemy. In battle they did not come here in Denmark. They left in May 1808. First to Jutland and then further out into Europe.

Although there was no fighting in connection with the Spanish soldiers' stay, it was a great strain on the Danish economy. Copenhagen's bombardment was a disaster. The surrender of the navy, trade blockade and subsequent inflation were part of the process that led to the State bankruptcy in 1813 and the loss of Norway in 1814.

Facts about the Aeneid:

A story about the Trojan hero Aeneas, who after the fall of Troy in the 1200s BC traveled to Italy, where he became the founder of the Roman Empire. The Roman poet Vergil wrote his great work of poetry in the years before his death in 19 BC.

Knowing your classics was compulsory reading for many people well into the 17th and 18th centuries. The text is an expression of how the soldiers have had it far away from home – in the cold north, where it has probably been difficult to see the meaning of life. The text expresses both longing for home and an affair with the whims of fate.