

### Chapter 3 : Jean Bernadotte (II) (1780-1791) – Private and Non-Com.

Jean's time as a private and as a non-commissioned officer is known in broad terms. Most of the information comes from the regimental history. The regiment consisted of a staff of 25 men + two battalions of 560 men each. The battalions in turn consisted of four rifle companies each of 120 men (6 of which were officers & 17 non-coms.) + one small elite company; Grenadiers in one battalion, Rangers in the other. Since the regiment's main tasks were guarding and pacification, the recruitment took place at a distance from the regiment's barracks. During Jean's service, the regiment was August 1778 to April 1784 placed in Corsica in the interval between the dissolution of Corsican self-rule in 1769 and the French takeover in 1789. After Jean left the regiment in 1792, it split. In 1792-96, Battalion 1 suppressed the royalist Vendée revolt in the area of the Loire Valley. In 1792-94, Battalion 2 put an end to the slave revolt in Haiti, but suffered heavy losses from fever.<sup>1</sup>

Regimental commanders during Jean's time were:

- June 22, 1767, Colonel Philippe Mathieu Marie (1738-1819), marquis de Lons.
- January 1, 1784, Colonel Agricole Marie de Merle (1753-1798), marquis d'Ambert.
- July 25, 1791, Major Marie Joseph Gabriel Apollinaire Morard d'Arcès.
- November 23, 1791, Colonel Henri François Morille de Boulard.

I have summarized Jean's military career in a table.

1780-09-03	volunteer	fusilier	comp. de Chalabre
1782-05-21	[grenadier]	[grenadier]	
1783-07 <sup>1</sup>	[6-18 months on sick leave at home in Pau]		
1785-06-16 <sup>2</sup>	Corporal	caporal	comp. Saint-Hilaire
1785-12-30	Sergeant	sergent	
1786-08-31	Quartermaster	fourrier-écrivain	comp. de Chalabre
1787-03-11	[ranger]	[chasseur]	
1788-05-11	Sergeant major	sergent-major	comp. Duvernet el Belcastel
1788-07-07	[Grenoble unrest]		
1788-09-03	[Jean reached maturity; new employment contract]		
1790-02-07 <sup>3</sup>	Adjutant	adjudant	Regimental staff (?)
1790-02-28	[the exclusive right of the nobility to an officer's service ends]		
1790-03-20	[the Marseille riots]		
1792-03-26 <sup>4</sup>	Lieutenant		36:e regementet Anjou

<sup>1</sup> Uncertain data. The leave was extended in three periods until 1784-11.

<sup>2</sup> According to other information 1783-06-16. <sup>3</sup> According to other information 1789-02-07.

<sup>4</sup> The appointment was backdated to 1791-11-06, when he became (or should have become) junior lieutenant by seniority.

---

<sup>1</sup> Barjaud 1978.

At the time of his recruitment Jean had a seven-year elementary school education - reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography and a little Latin. He had also had time to begin his legal studies.<sup>2</sup> However, as was pointed out, at the time of recruitment in 1780, Jean was able to read but not write. After 1785, his writing skills were better. The letters home were very lively, although the grammar & spelling was long time poor.<sup>3</sup> There is no record that he later attended a military school but a like education was included in the service. Jean did well. On May 21, 1782, he was reassigned to the Grenadier Company - the elite unit of the battalion. I continue Edholm's story:

Johan Baptist Julius Bernadotte spent two years in Corsica as a grenadier; But since his health had suffered in the military service on this unhealthy island, he was dismissed, returned to Pau, and stayed there for some time. However, despite all his family's beliefs, who made a great effort to dissuade him from re-entering a career, that those days for a commoner was a dead end, the young man, perhaps anticipating the great things that were coming, decided to follow his calling;<sup>1</sup> in early 1785 we find him as a simple soldier in Marseille, at the same regiment (Royal-Marine), that now changed garrison. On June 16, 1786, he became Corporal, on August 31, Sergeant, on June 21, 1786 Sergeant-Major, on May 11, 1788, Sergeant-Major; And finally on February 7, 1790, Adjutant, the limit for a commoner, which he, fifty years before, had probably never crossed. For this rapid promotion, he had to thank his excellent behaviour, skill, upbringing and good looks. Adjutant Bernadotte [belle-jambe called<sup>2</sup>] was the most handsome and at the same time most knowledgeable subaltern of the Royal Navy.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Edholm's version of Jean's record is in some cases incorrect. See the table above.

<sup>2</sup> It has been assumed that belle-jambe was a *nomme de guerre* that he received at enrolment, but according to Paul Barras (1895: p. 171), it was the wife of the regimental commander Marquis d'Ambert who called him so.

There is no portrait from Jean's youth, but on arrival at Bastia he was described thus: "Length 5 feet, 3 inches and 5 lines [178 cm]; dark hair and dark eyebrows; brown, slightly deep-lying eyes; nose long and pointed; mouth small, with thin lips; chin short and rounded; face round and full-bodied; the forehead narrow with two scars, one at the forehead, the other over the eyebrow, caused by a stone." There is an 1834 portrait of Louis-Félix Amiel depicting Jean in 1792 as a newly appointed lieutenant in a newly purchased uniform and carefully permed & powdered hair. The first contemporary portrait - a miniature by J. B. Isabey - dates from 1797 when he had switched to shoulder-length hair, high collar and scarf in the style of the time. He looks remarkably arrogant. The so-called Örebro portrait of Jean with a half-drawn saber on the battlefield is from the following year. Five years later he had settled with the curly haircut we are used to seeing in the portraits. As a private, he probably had a crew-cut and sideburns.

The timing of Jean's sick leave in Pau is unclear: According to different authors 1782-83, 1783-84 or 1786-87. Likewise the length: 6, 12 or 18 months. Also the reason: Overexertion<sup>5</sup>, "the unhealthy climate" or a difficult to heal pleural inflammation<sup>6</sup>. Even the renown duel has

---

<sup>2</sup> Wrangel 1889: ss. 39-40.

<sup>3</sup> Duféy 1833: s. 388.

<sup>4</sup> Edholm 1844a; ss. 7-8. [Moderniserad stavning.]

<sup>5</sup> Schönbeck 1878: s. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Kock 1963: ss. 130-131.

been placed at different times: 1780, during sick leave or 1786-87. Since sources are lacking, it is even uncertain whether it took place.

In connection with Jean's death, some memories were published. According to them he would have spent 18 months in Pau in his 23<sup>rd</sup> age (i.e. 1786-87) as a *sergeant-recruteur*, i.e. recruiter, and it was during that period that he made himself known for his snobbish outfit, games of chance, women's affairs, fierce moods & duel with the dragoon Castaing.<sup>7</sup> There is an application to lock up Jean (or a cousin), dated April 30, 1787.<sup>8</sup> When he did not terrorize his surroundings, however, he is supposed to have read history books and military biographies. Maybe so.

Since it is actually documented that he in 1786 suffered from a lung disease, even allegedly was near death, there has perhaps been a confusion about the timing of his sick leave. There is no reliable source. Erik Gustaf Geijer & his doctor Edholm mentions the sick leave, but not the time or the length.<sup>9</sup> However, Atterbom, Hedrén, Swederus & Schönbeck do: 6-18 months in connection with the enlistment 1780 or a leave -82 or -86.<sup>10</sup> The information has not been verifiable, but according to the relative Fourcade he should only have visited Pau once after 1785.<sup>11</sup> Despite the uncertainties, the information has found its way into Jean's later biographies, where it is described as family rumours. One can surmise that the authors have quoted each other rather than verify the data.

In addition to drill, gun care, training & surveillance, the regiment engaged in road works, etc. Probably the regiment commander leased his regiment as a labour force and kept the income. Jean is said to have supervised the workforce while at Bastia.<sup>12</sup>

\*

On November 9, 1784, Royal-la-Marine was transferred to Grenoble. The regiment had a new colonel, the marquis d'Ambert, with whom Jean got along well. They were both members of the newly formed Masonic lodge. Jean was now of age, well groomed and settled. d'Ambert considered him ready for promotion. The Grenoble period of 1785-88 Jean rose from corporal to sergeant. The positions were not honorary, but the candidates were questioned as to knowledge and character by a board of regular and non-commissioned officers. As a sergeant-major Jean was involved in administration, procurement, teaching, discipline, and hunting deserters. On June 7, 1788, the regiment was involved in suppressing a riot, the so-called *Journée des Tuiles* (the participants threw roof tiles on the regiment), and one person was shot dead. Jean was long after accused of ordering the shot (see below), but this has not been confirmed. Jean has written a memoir draft about the sentiments at this time:

»I was a sergeant in the regiment and stood very well with my commander [battalion commander Marquis Joseph de Damas], he respected me and sometimes consulted me about things even outside the service. One day he said to me: “You shall advise me, which party I will take; You know how the revolutionary

---

<sup>7</sup> Julien Le Rousseau [JLR]. [Anecdotes sur Bernadotte.] *Observateur des Pyrénées*, 1844-05-19, 24 & 26. I: *Bulletin du Musée Bernadotte*, 1975:20, ss. 32-38.

<sup>8</sup> Wrangel 1889: s. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Edholm 1844a; ss. 7-8; Geijer 1844: s. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Atterbom 1844: s. 7; Hedrén 1844; Swederus 1877; s. 26; Schönbeck 1878: s. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Schönbeck 1878: s. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Atterbom 1844: s. 7.

movements in this country are growing. My social position and the grace His Majesty the king still shows me, demands that I stick to his party and fight against the revolution, but on the other hand, if I should follow my conviction, it is to fight for the new order of things, for I like them in my heart. What do you advise me to do?" I answered, that I advised him to be faithful to his social position and to defend the old order of things. Admittedly, this advice was contrary to my own advantage, for as long as the old form of government existed, I could never become an officer, because one had to be of noble birth in order to become one, then, on the other hand, if the revolution came about, I could have hope of advancing to any position; But I gave him that advice, because I believed that it had been less noble of him, if he, having enjoyed so much mercy from the king and the royal family, would forsake them and fight against them. He did not follow my advice, but for love of the new ideas went over to the revolutionary party.» Karl Johan then added to me: »See, my friend, at that time I was a republican, now I'm a royalist. Do you understand?» I answered: »I think so, Sire, and for good reason.»<sup>13</sup>

Put differently: Jean's world was feudal. One swore allegiance to a benefactor. The benefactor expected something in return. Once the debt of gratitude was paid, one could enter into a new contract with someone else or work for one's own benefit without your honour suffering damage. Loyalty was a commodity.

\*

On October 22, the regiment broke up to Vienne and six months later continued to Marseille where it was garrisoned until April 1790. On February 7, 1790, Jean was promoted to adjutant at the Regimental Staff, the highest non-commissioned post, almost an officer post without title. A few weeks later, on 20 March, the most famous event of Jean's non-commissioned era took place. The regimental commander, Marquis d'Ambert, became involved in an argument with the National Guard, who claimed that the regiment was subordinate to them, which d'Ambert could not agree upon. D'Ambert was so haughty and unyielding that it came to trial. Jean & 11 other non-commissioned officers supported their commander morally, if not in substance, and wrote a report to the National Assembly in that spirit. d'Ambert was detained for 18 days, acquitted, took great offence, left the regiment and emigrated to England. During his detention, Jean & the others took turns guarding him as protection against the National Guard.

The regiment, now without its colonel, was garrisoned in Lambesc. There must have been further unrest there. The soldiers mutinied and the remaining officers were given 24 hours to pack. It came to a meeting at a church on the site. Jean stepped into the pulpit and managed to avert the proposal. He afterwards claimed that he was elected deputy regimental commander but declined. He was offered a position at the National Guard in Pau, but declined that as well. There is a memoir draft about the time immediately afterwards:

»He realized that happiness would not meet him in Béarn or Corsica. He longed to come to Paris, and wished to arrive there at the great Federation feast at the Martian field. [The predecessor of the National Day on 14 July.] He received permission and dedicated himself to the beautiful dreams that he had long made for himself. He was then an adjutant. It was in July 1790. The party was already over on his arrival, but the large city with its sights and people sufficiently captivated the aspirations of youth.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ulfsparre 1907: ss. 171-172.

»Mirabeau's<sup>1</sup> and Lameth's<sup>2</sup> eloquence surprised this inexperienced youngster. He could not resist the rapture that had seized all the better classes and subdued the wisdom of philosophers. Bernadotte did not feel that he could remain in the dark of yesterday. Although his imagination was not free of exaggeration, he had a very sound judgment and a certain instinct.

“The Constitution was then adopted by the king and the representation, and everyone had the conviction that the revolution was now finished. Everything hinted that this was the case.

“One day he decided to court his former boss, the Marquess d'Ambert, where the memories from Marseille made him welcome. The Marquess was not at home, but he was received by the Marquise. She said that he was now happy with his success. “A beautiful future may well be expected, but do not forget the monarchy, do not exalt yourselves, and remember that with the monarchy you may go far!”

“Then Abbé Maury<sup>3</sup> arrived. He became the third in the conversation, which now the Marquise turned to the story of the incident in Marseille. The Abbé remarked in this connection: “If the king had many with such convictions and determination, the monarchies would be less to deplore.” “Don't be so sure“, the Marquise added with a smile. “M:r Bernadotte is certainly faithful and devoted to the Marquess d'Ambert, but he is also pleased to see the barriers demolished, which until now has been closed for promotion to high offices“.

King Carl Johan acknowledges that he was pleased with the great change. He adds: “Who would not have been so in my position?”

“He believed that he could reconcile the claim from his former position with the new conditions. Excited by the events, warming up to humanity, and celebrating the doctrine of equal rights, he believed that the revolution would happily transform the human race. Through the study of Roman history, he was disposed to become a Republican. He became involved in all the hopes which the revolution had evoked and promised to fulfil.

“However, regarding the future of the monarchy, he mainly thought of his own advancement within the military, and without knowing it, he was under the influence of the new teachings, which were so everywhere preached. He saw the people becoming increasingly remote from the government, seeing the continued degradation of the throne. The army was at the same time disbanded by emigration. Bernadotte was already junior lieutenant by his seniority as adjutant.»<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Honoré Mirabeau (1749-1791). Moderate Jacobin. He advocated a constitutional monarchy based on the English model. Death in a stroke.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre de Lameth (1757-1832). American Revolutionary War veteran. Moderate Jacobin. The personal enemy of Mirabeau.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Sifrein Maury (1746-1817). Preacher, Academician, “ultraroyalist“ & libertine.

A large part of the Royal Navy's officers emigrated during this time to England and the regiment ceased to function as a combat unit. It was garrisoned on the islands of Oléron & Ré outside the naval base of Rochefort for guard duty while the Ministry of War was considering its further use. The climate was unhealthy and Jean was for almost a year bedridden in some rheumatic disease “that attacked the whole body, but especially the right foot“. On March 26, 1792, he was rescued by an appointment to lieutenant in the 36<sup>th</sup> line regiment of d'Anjou garrisoned in Brittany. On April 30 he arrived for duty.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Memoarutkast av Karl XIV Johan. I: Swederus 1877: ss. 473-475. [Ur Berndt von Schinkels samling.]

<sup>15</sup> Höjer 1939b: ss. 15-16.

\*

There are some persistent rumours:

- Jean was 1782 to have served as a grenadier in “les Indes“ (Les Indes occidentales = the French colonies in the Caribbean), where he became ill or wounded, which would explain his sick leave in 1783/84.<sup>16</sup> The regiment was, however, all this time garrisoned in Corsica.
- An alternative version was that he participated in a French expedition to India, was wounded off Cuddalore, rescued by an English officer & after 10 years returned to France through a prisoner exchange. The story is impossible to fit into Jean's biography, has been denied by himself & there is a meticulous denial of all details.<sup>17</sup>
- In 1863, the historian Jules Michelet claimed that during the *Journée des Tuiles* Jean had ordered his underlings, a patrol of four soldiers, to shoot straight into the crowd and that in doing so they killed one person & wounded at least two.<sup>18</sup> According to Michelet, the event would prove that Jean was a product of l'Ancien Régime and not the revolutionary Jacobin that he himself had suggested. The incident has indeed taken place, but the officer in charge is described as adjutant, while Jean at the time was a sergeant.<sup>19</sup>
- Jean was supposed to have had the Jacobin motto “death to kings“ tattooed on his upper arm. However, it was not found at the autopsy.<sup>20</sup> The source is supposed to be a play from 1833, “Le camarade de lit“, where Karl Johan identifies himself to an old army acquaintance by showing the tattoo.<sup>21</sup>
- His duel with the dragoon Castaing, that I have not been able to verify with any credible source, is probably also a rumour.

---

<sup>16</sup> d'Anglesy 1802: s. 372; Örebro Tidning nr 45, 1810-08-23; Masson 1882: s. 151.

<sup>17</sup> Szs, 1917; Barton 1914: s. 488.

<sup>18</sup> Michelet 1876: s. 531. Citerad & kommenterad I: Wrangel 1889: ss. 61-63; Barton 1914: ss. 24,489.

<sup>19</sup> Dufayard 1888.

<sup>20</sup> Höjer 1939b: ss. 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> Wrangel 1889: s. 81; Barton 1914: ss. 481-482; Höjer 1960: s. 265.