

At first glance, the uniforms of the Frederician era are one thing: They are utterly colorful. Too colorful for many reenactors, it seems, who, instead, prefer to re-enact less „gaudy“ (and more modern) eras.

So while it seems that German reenactors of the 18th century are a color-loving bunch of folks, this attitude changes completely when it comes to the shafts of soldiers' muskets. And, on a less obvious note, also comes to include the poles of regimental colors and polearms. While reenactors prefer to leave those in naturally wood-colored fashions, this does not represent historical facts. For, in fact, the wooden parts of arms were also gaily colored, just like the rest.

Two years ago, after a long time of research, some of No. 12's members announced that they were going to paint our musket shafts. In bright red. Just as the real shafts of our regiment and era had been. No big deal, you think? On the contrary! Other reenactors' reactions were mostly like: „But it will look different! It will look like crap! Muskets were always brown! This is not military!“

This article here is meant to shed some light on the lively discussion we had just started! And now here's some historical research on the topic of the colors of the wooden shafts and poles used in muskets, regimental colours and polearms in the *Ancien Régime* Prussian army.

The first time we found some information on the red colored shafts of our regiment was in Hans Bleckwenns „Die Uniformen der Preußischen Infanterie“ (1973). With this in mind, we decided to take a closer look at the „Darmstädter Grenadierbilder“^[1]. Those portray our regiment before and after 1752. It was clearly visible that the musket drawn here was painted in the same hue as the red musket strap – and, thus, differed clearly from the brown sheath of the sabre!

A mistake? A coincidence? Did the painter just run out of brown color and decided to paint the musket, instead, in just any random colour he had left? We don't think so. The painter,



after all, spent a lot of attention to detail and portraying all the rest of the uniform as closely to reality as he could!



Grenadier of Regiment Erbprinz von Hessen Darmstadt (Nr.12) provided for the second rank as depicted in the „Darmstädter Grenandierbilder“. Note the red color of the Musket compared to the brown scabbard. (Source: Darmstädter Grenandierbilder)

Last assurance we found in the daily orders of our Regiment from the 15th of June 1750:

„The Captains shall remind the fellows not to paint their muskets with the yellow vanish but with the red one as ordered by His Highness from the pharmacist Eggert. Also they should always smear their cartridge boxes with vanish, thus in future no one will be tolerate at the parade ho hasn't painted his musket with vanish and the cartridge box with other vanish, the old paint shouldn't be scrapped and only painted over.“ **[2]**

Thus the red painting of the musket shafts is proved with certainty. The *parolebuch* even mentions the details about the color used to paint the musket red. They used oil paint which allows the texture of the wood to shine through. Also, it doesn't cover it like modern paint.



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An M 1740 Potsdam replica painted with the reconstructed red oil paint (middel) compared with a standard Indian made M1740 replica coated with brown paint. (Source: bq photography)

Based on this knowledge we painted our muskets red. The results were very good in our own eyes since the red is a good contrast to the silver of the steel and the gold from the brass parts of the muskets. Besides this the drill looks somewhat more artificial and of course it's authentic. But which colors had the musket shafts and Standards of other regiments in the Prussian army? Besides some examples nothing is published or researched about this topic. Although it would be an interesting work.



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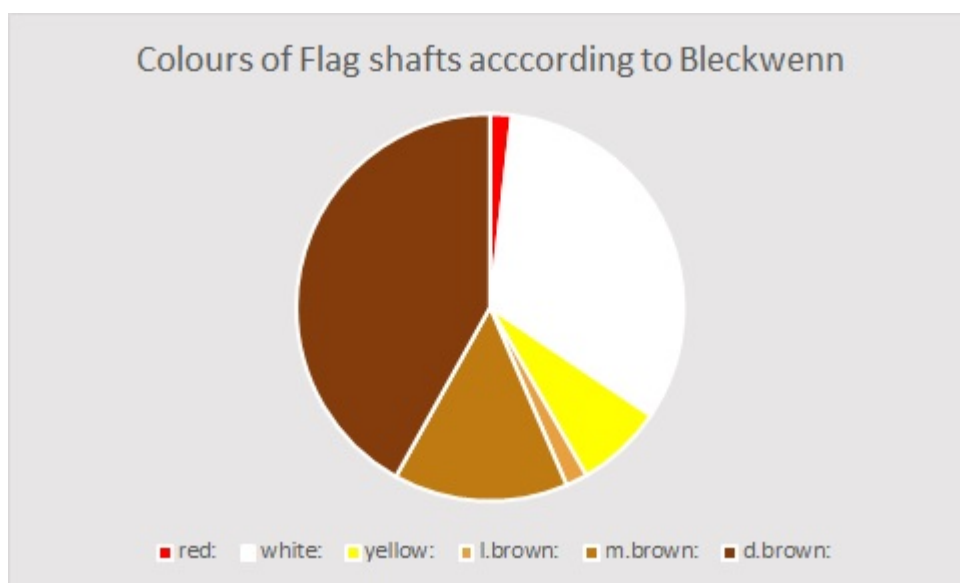
Remains of white color on the shaft of a prussian fusilier Kurzgewehr dated 1775 in Wehrhistorischen Museum Rastatt. (Source: own picture)

Nevertheless we will take a look with the help of two similar examples. Using the identifiable units in the *Grenandierbilder* we can find three musket colors. Black and brown muskets both make 41% (nine regiments each) red its third color it can be found in the pictures of four Regiments 18%. Sadly the pictures don't show every regiment.

color:	Regiment:	Total:
black	6/7/27/30/34/36/37/41/P	9=41%
brown	3/4/8/9/11/18/20/24/42	9=41%
red	12/14/22/25	4=18%

Color of Musket shafts in the prussian Infantry according to the Grenandierbilder (Source: own research)

What we have for every regiment are the colors of the standards. Based on Bleckwenns „Die Uniformen der Preußischen Infanterie“ we can distinguish four colors. Light or dark brown are only found in 16,3% of the regiments The biggest part of the standards were painted black (41,82%) or white (32,55%) yellow (7,27%) and red are the minorities.



color:	Regiment:	overall:	%:
red:	12	1	1,80%
white:	2; 33; 35; 36; 37; 38; 40; 41; 42; 43; 46; 47; 48; 49; 52; 53; 54; 55	18	32,55%
yellow:	6; 15; 34; 39	4	7,27%
l.brown:	3	1	1,80%
m.brown:	1; 5; 10; 11; 13; 17; 19; 25	8	14,55%
d.brown:	4; 7; 8; 9; 14; 16; 18; 19; 21; 22; 23; 24; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32; 50; 51	23	41,82%

Colors of prussian Standard shafts according to Bleckwenn. (Source: own research)

Of course the colors of the standards doesn't necessarily have to be the colors of the muskets but it shows it's a complex and interesting field of research. Moreover it shows that before the blackening of the shafts in the late 18th century brown by far wasn't the only color of muskets.

In the hobby however we find mainly brown shafts. The reason could be that we as people of the 21st. century prefer the pure nature color of the brown muskets. But the people in the eighteenth century had a very different sense of aesthetics, and therefore research is necessary!

Have the courage to be authentic, don't accept the not meaning or assumption of others as true if you can do research on contemporary sources.

[1] A collection of Contemporary scatches painted by Ludwig of Hessen Darmstadt

[2] Parole Buch of Regiment Erbprinz von Hessen Darmstadt 1750, 15.06

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