

# Muster rolls of the Croatian Military Frontier as sources of historical demography

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## Abstract

This paper deals with 18th and 19th century muster rolls from the Military Frontier in Croatia as extraordinary valuable sources of historical demography. The authors will discuss the possibilities, advantages and shortcomings of these military lists for demographic research, and present some preliminary solutions for data entry based on sources like these into a longitudinal database.

## Introduction

The Military Frontier (*Militärgrenze*) was a completely militarized region along the Austro-Ottoman border that existed from the first half of the sixteenth century until 1881. It was governed by military authorities under the direct command of the Court War Council (*Hofkriegsrat*) in Vienna. During its highlight the Frontier stretched from the Adriatic to the Carpathians. The borderland in Croatia was the

oldest and most western part of this extensive defense system.

At first an open desolate area, this borderland continued to be exposed to Ottoman raids and very hard to defend. Only few strongholds had been able to resist the Ottoman advance. In addition to these last remaining fortifications, the Habsburg government decided to erect fortified villages and outposts that were manned by military colonists, so-called *Grenzer*, who had agreed to settle this Frontier as free farmers in return for lifelong military service.

In 1553 the Military Frontier was split up into two military districts under the command of one general officer with full military and civil authority. The southern district was named the Croatian Frontier and the northern district the Upper Slavonian Frontier. Both districts were divided into several captaincies commanded by captains and named after their most important



fortresses. After the construction of the fortress Karlovac in 1578, the name Karlovac Generalcy (*Karlstädter Generalat*) came into use for the southern district while during the 1630s that of Varaždin Generalcy (*Warasdiner Generalat*) replaced the name Upper Slavonian Frontier.

The rout of the Ottoman army during the second siege of Vienna in 1683 was followed by a great war of liberation which yielded Croatia a huge territorial expansion. Most of the liberated territories that made up Croatia proper were ceded to the Military Frontier. Of all Croatian lands under Habsburg rule, 65.5 % belonged to the Military Frontier and only 34.5 % to Civil Croatia.

During the eighteenth century the frontier system was subjected to numerous consecutive reorganizations that successfully transformed it into a bulwark of Habsburg state control. Between 1745 and 1750 the Military Frontier in Croatia was divided into eleven separate regiments: the Lika, Otočac, Ogulin, Slunj, Glina, Petrinja, Križ, Đurđevac, Gradiška, Brod and Petrovaradin Regiment. These Grenzer regiments served not only as tactical military units in the field but also as administrative districts.

The Grenzer were expected to serve in the Austrian army from age 16 until 60 years of age. Even though the Military Frontier made

up 10 % of the Habsburg Monarchy, every fourth soldier in its armed forces was drawn from the Frontier.

### Muster rolls

During the mid eighteenth century Austrian military authorities started to keep military lists (*Standestabellen*, *Verpfleglisten* and *Monatsakte*) of the officers and men in every regular regiment including all regiments of the Croatian Military Frontier.

Muster rolls contain detailed personal data such as: rank, name and surname, birthplace, age, sex, marital status, religion, skills or profession, children's names, ages and gender, military post or location, and even height. The rolls were updated annually under supervision of the regimental command which makes it possible to chronologically track the career of nearly every soldier.

The muster rolls often have enclosed certificates relating to promotion, transfer and death with detailed additional personal information on civil status, offspring, cause of death etc. So-called *Conduite-Listen* of officers refer to special skills, character traits, behaviour etc.

rank	first and surname	birthplace	age	religion	marital status	skills	son's name	son's age	daughter's name	daughter's age	location	remarks
	Laut und Zimarian											
	Alexis Paul											
	Jozef Malharck											
	Jandro Berckhovec											
	Stevan Hagan											
	Jozef Prohaja											
	Alsteria Lapic											
	David Babonac											
	Jozef Kantevec											
	Jozef Regula											
	David Rucic											
	Jandria Belluta											
	Vase Perach											

Muster roll of the Đurđevac Regiment, 18th century (extract)

All in all the muster rolls are particularly relevant for building a longitudinal open access database that combined with data collected from censuses, ordinary church registers and other records will provide a very high level of logistical support to research aiming at reconstructing families in the Military Frontier during the 18th and 19th century.

### Calculating possibilities

Muster rolls have a standardized structure consisting of key fields that are filled out with direct data in German gothic handwriting (names and surnames are in Roman script). An important part of the numerical data in these records needs extra calculation. For example the muster rolls do not mention the date of birth of each individual soldier and his children (if there are any) but only his (and their) age.

It is nevertheless possible to match the basic data on age with the creation date of each muster roll and thus calculate the estimated year of birth of each soldier, as well as the year he entered military service. The calculation is a simple subtraction of the soldier's recorded age from the creation date of the muster roll:  $dmr - samr = eybS$  (*dmr* being the official date of the muster roll, *samr* the soldier's age mentioned in the roll and *eybS* the estimated year of birth of the soldier).

The same calculation can also be applied to the children of individual soldiers mentioned in the muster rolls:  $dmr - camr = eybC$ ; (*dmr* being the official date of muster roll, *camr* the child's age mentioned in the roll and *eybC* the estimated year of birth of the child).

Even though the main shortcoming of these calculations is imprecision, they are nevertheless essential for research focusing on family reconstructions in the Military Frontier (characterized by extended households) in cases where no other records such as church registers exist.

### ID issues

ID matching of individual soldiers mentioned in muster rolls that cover successive years is easy enough by comparing their first names and surnames, birthplace, names, gender and age of their children etc. Matching does

however require setting fixed rules and parameters for different levels of accuracy. This does not apply only to matching data between different muster rolls but also to matching data from muster rolls with data found in other records (e.g. church registers).

One possible approach would be the division of the levels of accuracy in ID matching into five categories, whereby in a 1-to-5 rating scale, 1 stands for a very incomplete match and 5 for a very certain match. In other words:

1. only the name and surname of the soldier match;
2. name, surname and age match;
3. name, surname, age and religion match;
4. name, surname, age, religion and birthplace match;
5. name, surname, age, religion, birthplace and rank match.

It is important to mention that before any ID matching can be carried out, personal and geographical names need to be unified and standardized.

ID matching that combines muster rolls with other records will provide extra information such as the wife's name and surname, accurate dates of birth, marriage and death, i.e. information that is necessary for a complete family reconstitution and the calculation of fertility rates among married couples, infant mortality and so on.

### Combining muster rolls with parish registers

Muster rolls relating to the Croatian Military Frontier are very well preserved and data rich sources. Even in cases where no data is available from other sources it is still possible to extract relevant data for certain specific research issues through very cautious and well prepared calculations.

However, most possibilities lie in matching data from these muster rolls with relevant censuses and data from registers of parishes belonging to the respective regiments. Such matches will make detailed family reconstructions possible and provide the necessary material to answer many different research questions that have not been addressed yet, e.g. what was the life expectancy of the Grenzer? Did their military service (especially in times of war when soldiers were far away on different battlefields



