

What the Colonel Taught His Soldiers

A colonel was teaching his soldiers how to greet a general and how to answer him. The conversation must go as follows:

“Where are you from?”

“From Poltava.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-three.”

“How long have you been in the army?”

“Three years.”

“Where did you get your uniform?”

“From the storeroom.”

And after every answer they must add “your gracious Excellency.”

And if he asked them further, “How many companies are there?” they must reply, “Sixteen. The seventeenth is non-combatant.”

Also, when asked, “Who taught you?” they must reply, “The colonel and you, your gracious Excellency.”

The soldiers learned their lesson well and one day who should arrive but the general. The colonel arranged them in ranks. The general came out onto the stand and began to ask them the following questions:

“Where are you from?”

“From Poltava, your gracious Excellency.”

The general became confused and didn't bother to ask their ages. Instead, he said, "How long have you been serving?"

"Twenty-three years, your gracious Excellency."

"And how old are you?"

"Three years, your gracious Excellency."

"How many daughters has the tsar?"

"Sixteen. The seventeenth is non-combatant, your gracious Excellency."

The general saw that something was amiss so he became very angry and roared, "Where did they get such fools as you?"

"From the storeroom, your gracious Excellency!"

"Well, who taught you fools?"

"You, your gracious Excellency, and the colonel!"