

# Lesson 2

## Danish Soldiers and Gendarmes The Colonial Law Enforcement

**Essential Question:** How did the introduction of Danish soldiers and gendarmes affect the communities values, struggles and societal norms over time?



## Reading Material

The Danish Crown employed first contract soldiers and then Royal West Indian Troops to police the sugar colony. They were the group that responded to the Emancipation uprising of 1848 and the Firebun of 1878. By 1906, there was a change in colonial law and soldiers were replaced by a para-military force known as the gendarmes. According to Danish archival records, gendarmes were young men, aged 30 or younger who had completed military service in Denmark. They were required to be unmarried with no criminal record. The gendarmes were recruited for 3-year terms of service in the colony, which could be extended one year at a time.

Andreas Lauridsen was a Danish gendarme between 1911 and 1914. He came from a family of bakers in Denmark and as a skilled photographer, he brought his camera to the islands and set up a small shop at the Barracks where he sold snuff, cigarettes, cigars, tobacco, soft drinks, photos and postcards. His grandson documented his life on St. Croix in a book entitled: "Grandfather's Footsteps" that includes his pictures and postcards that he exchanged with his girlfriend Anna during his posting to St. Croix. Some gendarmes formed relationships with women of African descent. Some got married and stayed in the islands. Some returned to Denmark with their island families. Others left their island families behind and returned to Denmark.

The two and a half century old Barracks complex survived both storm and fire and has undergone the rebuilding of structures and the reimagining of purpose in that time. Its present condition is due to the devastation of Hurricane Hugo in 1989, the first Category 4 to directly hit St. Croix in more than a half century. Hurricane Hugo emptied the town of Christiansted, and destroyed Building One, rendering it uninhabitable for more than 30 years. The double hurricane hit of Irma and Maria in 2017 further weakened structures and only a skeleton crew of Education workers still occupy the once bustling site. In 1914, the Barracks was destroyed by fire. St. Croix historian Bill Cissel writes that the Captain of the Gendarmes Jorgen Hoyer set his office ablaze to destroy the evidence of disappearing funds. He had learned that inspectors from Denmark would soon arrive, and he feared that his skimming off the top to pay his personal debts would be revealed. The fire spread out of control and engulfed the entire Barracks and Hoyer was subsequently court-martialed and sentenced to 12 years hard labor in a Danish prison. The Barracks would be rebuilt and would go on to serve as the Barracks for the Marines that occupied the Virgin Islands after the United States purchase and later as St. Croix's first public high

school and the headquarters of the Department of Education, Labor and Public Safety.

## **Part 1 Key Terms**

*Review these key terms from your reading to help you complete the packet.*

**Emancipation:** The act of freeing someone from control or slavery (e.g., the 1848 Emancipation uprising on St. Croix).

**Danish West Indies Militia:** A traditional colonial military force that was largely stationed at static forts and government posts.

**Gendarmes:** A professionally trained police force with military authority tasked with patrolling towns and rural districts, enforcing colonial laws, guarding prisons and government buildings, and responding to public disturbances.

**Para-military:** A semi-militarized force whose organizational structure, tactics, and training are similar to those of a professional military, but which functions as a civil law enforcement body.

**Skimming off the top:** A form of fraud involving the illegal taking or stealing of funds from an organization before the transactions are officially recorded.

**Court-martialed:** Tried in a military court for violating military law or committing a crime while in service.

**Skeleton crew:** The minimum number of personnel or workers needed to keep an office, ship, or organization running at a basic operational level.

**Reimagining:** Changing or rethinking the core purpose, concept, or use of a place, object, or system over time.

## **Part 2 History Quiz**

*Circle the correct letter for each question based on the historical context.*

**1. What was a key administrative reason for transitioning from regular Danish military troops to a gendarme corps in the Danish West Indies?**

- A) Gendarmes were brought in solely to construct new coastal fortifications.
- B) The entire Danish military was completely disbanded due to national bankruptcy.
- C) The Danish government dissolved the static Danish West Indies Militia to establish the Gendarmerie as a professionally trained police force with military authority.
- D) Local residents demanded the immediate deployment of foreign naval marines.

**2. How did the daily responsibilities of the gendarme force differ from those of traditional garrison troops or the old militia on St. Croix?**

- A) The militia patrolled rural sugarcane fields daily, while gendarmes only fought in overseas naval battles.
- B) Gendarmes were exclusively responsible for setting international maritime trade tariffs.
- C) Garrison troops focused entirely on agricultural production instead of island security.
- D) While the militia stayed stationed at forts, the Gendarmerie maintained a regular presence in everyday life by patrolling towns and rural districts, enforcing colonial laws, guarding prisons, and responding to disturbances.

**3. What major illegal activity was Jorgen Hoyer implicated in during the notable 1914 scandal on St. Croix?**

- A) An arson scheme connected to property destruction and insurance fraud.
- B) The illegal smuggling of Danish military weapons to foreign revolutionaries.
- C) Organizing a massive violent labor strike against local sugar plantation owners.
- D) Falsifying government documents to sell the historic Christiansted Barracks.

**4. What broader social or economic context did the Jorgen Hoyer arson scandal highlight in the Danish West Indies around 1914?**

- A) An immediate and massive economic boom following the anticipated US purchase of the islands.
- B) The financial strains and economic vulnerabilities faced by local merchants during a period of uncertainty.
- C) The complete collapse and abandonment of all agricultural exports in favor of tourism.
- D) The total breakdown of the judicial system and local police forces across St. Croix.

**5. Who was Andreas Lauridsen in the context of Danish West Indian history?**

- A) The revolutionary leader who successfully overthrew the Danish colonial governor in 1914.
- B) The chief architect who designed the original stone structure of the Christiansted Barracks.
- C) A notable figure whose life and career mirrored the experiences and social dynamics of Europeans in the colony.
- D) An American diplomat who negotiated the final 1917 transfer of the islands.

**6. By examining the archival records of individuals like Andreas Lauridsen, what can historians better understand about St. Croix during the colonial era?**

- A) How advanced hurricane forecasting technology was invented in the 19th century.
- B) The secret naval strategies used by the Danish fleet against Great Britain.
- C) How indigenous Taino populations interacted with the earliest Danish settlers.
- D) The personal networks, daily challenges, and interactions between authorities and the local community.

**7. What is the ongoing historical and structural significance of the Christiansted Barracks in relation to severe tropical weather?**

- A) As a historic masonry structure, it has endured centuries of tropical storms and hurricanes, requiring continuous preservation.
- B) It was completely demolished by a severe 1914 hurricane and was never

rebuilt.

C) It was built specifically as a modern meteorological weather observatory to track cyclones.

D) It is the only building on St. Croix that is completely immune to wind and flood damage.

**8. Why is repairing and preserving historic buildings like the Christiansted Barracks after modern hurricane damage particularly challenging?**

A) Modern building materials and cement are completely illegal to use anywhere on St. Croix.

B) The building is permanently submerged underwater for the majority of the hurricane season.

C) Conservationists must balance implementing modern storm-resilient techniques with preserving authentic historic materials.

D) No original blueprints, photographs, or construction records survived the colonial era.

**9. Which European nation held colonial sovereignty over St. Croix during the 1914 arson scandal and the transition to a gendarme force?**

A) Great Britain

B) France

C) Spain

D) Denmark

**10. How do local events like the 1914 Jorgen Hoyer arson scandal and the administrative shift to gendarmes collectively reflect the condition of the Danish West Indies?**

A) They prove that the islands had already achieved complete political independence by 1914.

B) They demonstrate that military defense was unnecessary due to completely peaceful international relations.

C) They show that modern hurricanes were the sole factor driving political changes in the Caribbean.

D) They illustrate a society experiencing internal economic pressures and institutional adaptation during the final years of colonial rule.

## **Part 3: Critical Thinking Discussion Questions**

*Answer the following questions in complete sentences, using evidence from the text to support your analysis.*

### **1. The Impact of Changing Colonial Laws:**

The transition from the static Danish West Indies Militia to the professionally trained Gendarmerie fundamentally shifted how colonial law enforcement interacted with the public. Because the Gendarmerie became a regular presence in everyday life—patrolling towns and districts, enforcing laws, and guarding institutions—how might this constant surveillance alter the relationship between the colonial authorities and local Virgin Islanders compared to the old fort-bound militia system?

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### **2. The Reimagining of Spaces:**

The Christiansted Barracks complex has transformed over two and a half centuries—moving from a Danish military and gendarme base, to a U.S. Marine barracks, to St. Croix's first public high school, and finally to a government office site. When a community continuously repurposes an old colonial building rather than tearing it down, what does that say about their values? What are the benefits and challenges of trying to preserve a site that faces regular devastation from major hurricanes like Hugo, Irma, and Maria?

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