



Der Hauptmann von Köpenick (The Captain of Köpenick)

Here is the story of Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt, who was actually a shoemaker, but became a world star after he put on a Prussian uniform and arrested the mayor of Köpenick ...

On the evening of 16th October 1906, Wilhelm Voigt led away ten soldiers from the “Neue Wache”(New Guard) in Berlin, whom he managed to put under his command. He was dressed in a captain uniform, which he had bought at a second-hand dealer.

They took together a suburb train in Berlin and headed to the station of Köpenick. (Köpenick did not belong to Berlin at this time. It was incorporated only in 1920.)

They first ate at a snack bar of the station before marching towards the town hall of Köpenick, which they occupied. While two soldiers blocked the main entrance, Wilhelm Voigt went with the others to the office of the mayor (Dr. Georg Langerhans) and arrested him without mentioning a reason (he said he only had a warrant of arrest). Wilhelm Voigt confiscated the cash box of Köpenick, which contained 3557,45 Marks. The captive mayor was transported by coach to the “Neue Wache” in Berlin. Wilhelm Voigt left with the words that he would return in half an hour. But he disappeared without a trace ...

When the mayor arrived at the “Neue Wache”, the fraud was uncovered and the police was informed. An amount of 2500 Marks was offered as a reward for arresting the false captain. He was finally found after ten days, sentenced to a four-year prison term and compelled to pay back the money of the cash box he did not spend away. People laughed about his story all over the world, making the “Hauptmann von Köpenick” internationally renowned.

This story could only take place because there was a great enthusiasm for militarism in the former Prussia. An officer was an officer because of his uniform.

But who was Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt?

He lived from 1849 to 1922 and was both a shoemaker and a criminal. He spent 27 years of his life in prison before getting known as the “Hauptmann von Köpenick”. Having a certain knowledge about the Prussian state, he looked for a permanent existence and needed a passport. Therefore, he occupied the town hall. William II, German emperor and king of Prussia, released Wilhelm Voigt after only two years. Voigt did then performances as the “Hauptmann” in various towns of Germany, Europe, the USA and Canada. He moved afterwards to Luxembourg and got a passport there in 1910.

The “Hauptmann von Köpenick” died in 1922 but Carl Zuckmayer perpetuated his story in a play and a novel which were published in 1930.

A memorial tablet and a bronze figure of Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt was placed in front of the town hall of Köpenick in 1996.

The story is repeated there as a little play every Wednesday and Saturday.