



War of Spanish Succession Guide

Notes on Philip V's Infantry Flags

As usual in most armies of that period, Spanish Infantry units used to fly two different kinds of flags, respectively called *Bandera Coronela* (=Colonel Flag) and *Bandera Simple, o Batallona* (=Simple, or Battalion's Flag). A Spanish "Colonel Flag" was in fact the same kind of device as a *King's Colour* in English terminology. It was flown on behalf of the King and the Nation, usually placed by the unit's commander position in the field. Likely due to that symbolism, each regiment had only one Colonel Flag, and all of them shared a common pattern –or such would be King's own wish, at least...



1 . King's Colours: background



Colonel Flag
1632 pattern obverse

Spanish Colonel Flags changed several times over 17th Century, from red to white field and inversely. Most of the time the Burgundy Cross remained as the main flag motif –but not always it was so.

Between 1632 and 1642, flags had to be red, with an image of Virgin Mary replacing the Burgundy Cross traditionally used since Charles I Habsburg. According to the reputed Spanish vexillologist Sergio Camero, it became common to still display a white Burgundy Cross at the reverse.

In 1642 it was prescribed Colonel flags to be white with a red Burgundy Cross; but in 1668 they reverted to red again. The saltire was then kept, but it had to be also red. Such coincidence of colours was sometimes solved by outlining the cross in black, as some surviving samples attest, or by using different shades of red for cross and field, as shown in the image in next page.

The latest Regulations about Colonel Flags right before the outbreak of War of the Spanish Succession must be traced back to 1695, during Charles II Habsburg reign. According to Sergio Camero again, these had to be white with a red Burgundy Cross. Such is still the pattern followed by the flag captured by Dutch troops in 1703 at Eckern, as described by James Hinds in his booklet *The Spanish Army of Philip V*. That 1695 Regulation does not explicitly forbid the use of other decorative motifs such as flaming edges, and in fact some cases are known.



Colonel Flag
1632 pattern reverse
(non regulation)



Colonel Flag
1642 pattern
(and 1695 again)

It was after the defection of the Crown of Aragon States in 1705 (siding with the Allies and by such becoming the platform for Archduke Charles to build a Spanish Army of his own) when Philip V finally took the decision of substantially changing Colonel and Battalion flags patterns, along with several organizational and dressing features else of his Infantry, through a completely new Regulation –which coincidentally was to be published almost simultaneously with that one of his rival King Charles III Habsburg in Barcelona.

Under these new regulations dated as of December 1706, Philip V decreed the addition of two lions and two castles in alternate angles around the Burgundy Cross, as shown in the image at left –often reproduced in specialized works of Spain; that seemingly do correspond to a surviving copy preserved in a place unknown to me so far. On the next year, that design was slightly improved and standardized in the following terms:

“...y es mi voluntad que cada cuerpo traiga la bandera Coronela blanca, con la Cruz de Borgoña, según estilo de mis tropas a que he mandado añadir dos castillos y dos leones, repartidos en los cuatro blancos, y cuatro coronas que cierran las puntas en las aspas...”

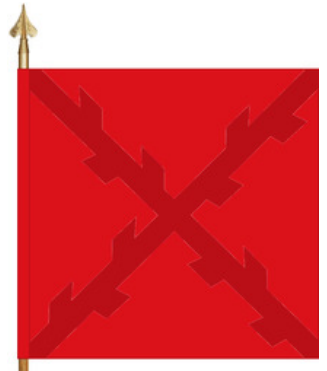
Roughly, *“...and it is my will that every unit displays a Colonel white flag with the Burgundy Cross according to my troops style (=pattern?), which I have ordered to be added two lions and two castles, distributed in the four white [fields], as well as four Crowns enclosing each of cross tops”.*

This new order confirms the general pattern described the year before, with only a slight modification implying the addition of a crown at each of the flag corners. Such final design fully corresponds to the middle-late period of war, extending through the Triple Alliance War till the end of hostilities with the now Emperor Charles VI in 1725.

Should be noted here the significant variability that can be observed regarding the location, orientation and color of the above mentioned heraldic pieces (castles and lions). Modern spanish vexillological literature on the matter usually show these with a slightly different arrangement of pieces and colours.

This way, in modern times castles are always depicted upright on the upper and lower quarters of flag, leaving the sides for the lions, which are commonly coloured in red colour –sometimes purple, the correct colour for León coat of arms according to modern Heraldry.

Regardless of how much such modern depictions could be considered appropriate from a strictly Vexillological or Heraldical point of view, I know no actual data sustaining them though.



Colonel Flag
1668 pattern



Colonel Flag
1706 first pattern



Colonel Flag
1707 ultimate pattern

Our designs



Modern depiction #1

Given the scarcity of real factual data, then, it has seemed me appropriate to follow a definite criteria from my own. Therefore, our Philip V's King's Colours are going to use the earlier pattern or the ultimate 1707 one depending on the date when the affected unit was reformed from *Tercio* to Regiment.

Also, disposition and colours of heraldic pieces will usually follow the «matching colours» criteria with regard to those displayed in the respective Battalion's Colour, so as to reflect modern depiction usage common in nowadays' Spain.

Arbitrary as such criteria admittedly are, these offer the advantage of showing in a single collection all the alternative design depictions known, so eventually allowing user's choice if he so desires.



Modern depiction #2

2 . Battalion Flags: background

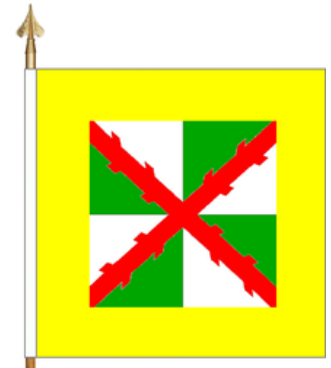


Company Flag
Unknown Tercio
Rocroi 1643

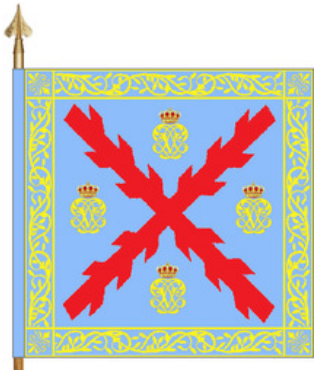
It must be pointed in advance that not any single, universally accepted, sample of WSS times Philip V's army Battalion flags have been preserved. Therefore, any reconstruction can only take as a base the specific Regulations published by Philip V in 1707, with little factual data else behind them –if any at all.

By late XVII century, spanish infantry units, still named *Tercios*, flew a number of different flags besides of the Colonel's Colour, nominally one for each company --this is why these were called *Banderas Capitanas* (=Captains' Flags). No common patterns were followed, so that each company had a flag of its own, whose design was decided by its Captain at his entire will. Such lack of regulations on the matter produced certainly colourful designs, where geometrical backgrounds and borders were common, as well as personal or heraldic devices, coats of arms and almost any kind of symbol it could be imagined. Burgundy Crosses used to occupy a preference location there, usually in red.

This customary freedom produced such amount of lavishly decorated minor flags that, most often, the simplest, humblest flag of any given *Tercio* was the King's Colour –that one in theory intended to represent the Sovereign and his Nation.



Company Flag
Unknown Tercio
Marsaglia 1693



**Early war
Company Flag**

The new Bourbon king would hardly bear with such contradiction, so that means for fixing this issue were taken little after his arrival to throne. At first, he just constrained himself to ordering Company Flags to include his own monogram to be sewn or painted somewhere in the fly. Some of such temporarily used flags have been preserved as war trophies, as echoed by J. Hinds and C. A. Sapherson. But such «ad hoc» arrangement wasn't destined to last for long.

According to all sources requested, when Philip V finally started a Spanish Army thoroughful reformation after 1704 (that would eventually transform the old *Tercios* into modern Regiments), besides of establishing new organization and uniforms, the king also gave to each regiment the name of a province or town, and ordered their respective Coats of Arms to be sewn on the new Battalion flags that were to replace the older Company ones. This can be set around 1706.

A later decree from February 1707 expanded that concept in the following terms:

“...y las otras banderas serán de tafetán, de los colores principales que tuvieren las armas de la provincia o ciudad del nombre que yo señalo al Regimiento, en el cual siempre que tenga más de un batallón, las banderas de los demás batallones que tuviere serán de esta forma...”

That is, “...the rest of flags [besides of the King's one] will be of taffeta, in the main colors of the [Coat of] Arms of the province or town whose name has been assigned to the Regiment by me. In which, provided it had more than one battalion, the flags of those other battalions will conform to that design...”

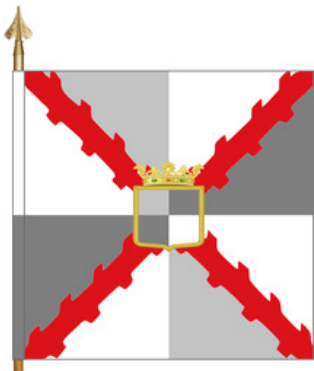
It is generally assumed that coloured cloths would be arranged as 8 triangles, as in late XVII often were. However, there is no precise regulation stating so (or I know of none, at least), so such assumption should be taken as speculative.

Otherwise, it seems quite logical to assume arrangements such as 4 squares if fewer colours were present in the respective Coat of Arms, or even plain backgrounds if only one significant colour was there.

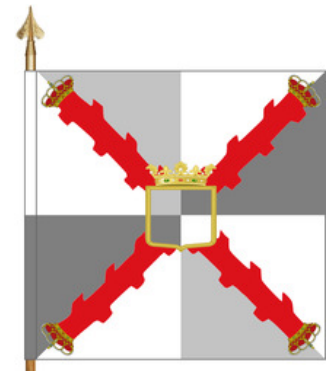
Such criteria would also match the customary practice in their now sister flags, those of French Army, whose heavy influence in uniforms and organization is generally accepted by all knowledgeable authors.



Philip V's monogram

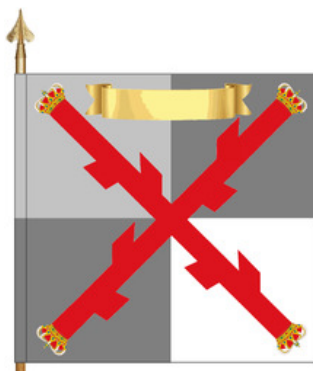


Battalion Flag
Matching King's Colour
1706 first pattern



Battalion Flag
Matching King's Colour
1707 ultimate pattern

Discrepancies



Battalion Flag
1707 ultimate pattern,
according to IHCM

According to the «*Instituto de Historia y Cultura Militar*» (IHCM), the Coat of Arms at the flag's centre, as described, was replaced few months later by a scroll with the Regiment's name. However, in his paper «*Evolución de las Banderas*» in *Militaria* magazine (1997), Antonio Manzano implicitly discards such interpretation, stating instead that "*Prácticamente todas las banderas desde el principio del siglo XVIII hasta ahora llevan escudos*" (this translating as "Virtually all [regimental] flags from the beginning of the 18th century until now do carry shields").

Moreover, the IHCM interpretation enters in contradiction with at least one known sample dating back from 1711. This is the reproduction of a battalion flag generally accepted as belonging to the Aragon Regiment, created after the 1711 crisis –when Charles Habsburg briefly regained this kingdom after Almenar and Monte Torrero and even occupied Madrid for a second time. It is also commonly accepted that the 1711 batch of flags were manufactured in France, so the mentioned sample enlightens us about the likely existence of a third, simplified, pattern that might also be extended to King's colours of that critical year.

Worth to be pointed out a further discrepancy at regard, when the well-known Spanish vexillologist Luis Sorando openly doubted whether the sample above actually belonged to the 1711 Aragon Regiment, speculating instead that it could rather be older, having possibly belonged to the Tercio of Aragon between 1678 and 1698...



Aragon Inf. Regiment
Battalion Flag, 1711

Our designs

Given the serious discrepancies above, I'm prone to favour Manzano's interpretation over that other of IHCM –so following the criteria of using a battalion flag pattern matching that one of the respective King's Colour, normally placing the unit's Coat of Arms at the centre, unless otherwise is advised.

Also, multi-coloured cloths are going to be placed in the field as either 4 squares or 8 triangles, depending on the number of colours there, and following as a criteria the usual procedures in French Infantry flags of that time –I'm going to always have an eye open to these while recreating Philip V's flags..

Arbitrary is such criteria obviously are, any evidence refuting a particular design is always welcome and can be easily mended.

3 . The 1718 Transitional Pattern

In 1718, the Infantry regiments involved in the invasion of former Italian possessions were given a specific new model of “sencilla” or Battalion flag, that was no longer multicolored but all white with a red Burgundy cross and the unit’s name inscribed on a scroll in the flag upper margin (like the design at left in the previous page, but on an all-white background).

Also, according to IHCM it was ordered to remove from flags all religious imagery, mottos and invocations.

4 . The 1728 Flag Pattern

A new pattern for military flags was set in 1728, in the following terms:

"En cada Batallón de nuestras tropas habrá tres banderas de once pies de alto [...]. La Coronela será blanca con el escudo de nuestras Armas Reales y las demás blancas con la Cruz de Borgoña; y en una y otras se podrán poner en la extremidad de las esquinas las armas de los reinos y provincias de donde tengan el nombre, o las divisas particulares que hubiesen tenido o usado, según su antigüedad..."

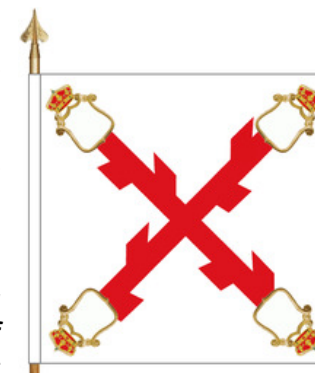
Which translates as:

"For each Battalion of our troops there will be three flags eleven feet high [...]. The Colonel flag (=King’s Colour) will be white with our Royal Arms, while the rest will be white with the Cross of Burgundy; it will be allowed to show at the corners the arms of the old kingdoms and provinces from which they have the name, or the particular devices they accustomed to use, according to their antiquity..."

Such basic design survived until 1843, with not too many significant changes meantime; such as the number of flags per battalion progressive reduction (from three to two in 1768, and then to just one in 1802), or the Royal Arms change in 1760.



Colonel Flag
1728 pattern



Battalion Flag
1728 pattern

Sources

- Ministry of Defence of Spain, «Instituto de Historia y Cultura Militar» (IHCM) website, [https://ejercito.defensa.gob.es/en/unidades/Madrid/ihycm/Actividades/Ciclos-Divulgativos/vexi-historia-bandera.html?_locale=en] page (spanish text only, despite multi-language options)
- Sergio Camero, «Banderas Militares» website, [<https://sites.google.com/site/banderasmilitares/>] page, spanish language
- James Hinds, «The Spanish Army of Philip V» booklet by Editions Brokaw, softcover, 40 pages, english language
- C. A. Sapherson, «Armies of Spain 1701-1715» booklet by Partizan Press, softcover, 36 pages, english language
- José L. Calvo Pérez & Luis Grávalos González, «Banderas de España» book by Silex 1983, ISBN 84-85041-78-X, hardcover, 254 pages, spanish language
- Antonio Manzano Lahoz, «La evolución de las banderas» paper in «Militaria, revista de cultura militar» magazine #9 (1997), spanish language
- Luis Sorando Muñoz, «Trofeos austríacos y sardos obtenidos por los ejércitos de los reyes hispanos Felipe V y Fernando VI (1717-1759)» paper in «Emblemata» #14 magazine (2008), spanish language
- Luis Sorando Muñoz, «Bandera del Tercio de Aragón 1678-1698», paper in «Emblemata» #3 magazine (1997), spanish language