

Austrian Cavalry Standards in the Campaign of 1866

Introduction

The colours carried by the Austrian cavalry during 1866 closely resembled those carried by the army during the Napoleonic Wars, and even earlier. Indeed, the overall patterns had been more or less standardised during the reign of Maria Theresia.

In 1866 the Cuirassier regiments carried two standards, a *Leibstandarte* and an *Ordinärstandarte*; the other cavalry regiments (Dragoons, Hussars, Uhlans) carried just one standard, an *Ordinärstandarte*. As with the infantry, when not being carried into battle, the flag remained furled and protected inside an oilskin cover carried by the standard-bearer. This bore the name of the regimental patron in white. In battle, the flag was unfurled, and the protective oilskin cover could be wrapped around the body of the standard-bearer. Standard-bearers also had a bandolier over their left shoulder, with braid edging. The standard-bearer was generally a sergeant or sergeant major.

Description of the colours, streamers etc.

Both the *Leibstandarte* and *Ordinärstandarte* were rectangular, with painted designs on the 1836 and 1837 pattern flags, this changing to woven silk on the 1859 pattern. The colours were considerably smaller than those for the infantry, a little over 2 feet in height and a little under 2 feet in length. The flagpoles averaged a little over 8 feet in length. Flags were attached to the pole by four rows of gilt nails. The poles themselves were brightly painted, with a spiralling design in red, white, black and yellow. The top of the pole was completed by a pear-shaped finial of gilded metal, engraved with a variety of designs, most usually a crowned Emperor's cypher, or the Habsburg double-headed eagle.

Both designs of flags bore smaller versions of those used on infantry colours, with one important difference: the crowned Habsburg double-headed eagle was not surrounded by the smaller shields bearing coats of arms that infantry colours used. Thus, the *Leibstandarte* had a white field, bearing a figure of the Virgin Mary on the obverse, the reverse carrying a crowned Habsburg double-headed eagle, with a multiplicity of heraldic features. The *Ordinärstandarte* bore this same double-headed eagle on a yellow field. The three open sides of both flags bore a decorative border approximately 3 inches wide, known as 'flames'. These were in the Habsburg colours of red, white, black and yellow, although they could sometimes be red, silver, black and gold. Some units also bore a small coloured rectangle in the upper corner nearest the flagpole (usually orange) on which was woven an abbreviated description of the unit. The principal difference between the 1836/1837 and 1859 patterns

was that the latter featured the Order of Franz Joseph, along with some slight changes to the eagle's wings and tail. The majority of regiments appear to have carried the 1859 patterns during the 1866 Campaign. For the specific appearance of the colours see our flagsheets.

The Austrian army did not have any fixed system of campaign streamers, as did the Prussians. Many regiments did, however, carry brightly woven or silk ribbons tied to the flagpoles. These frequently commemorated regimental patrons and/or benefactors. They were made of silk or velvet, tied in a large bow and hung at the front of the top of the flagpole. They were approximately 3½ feet long, with 6-inch fringes of gold or silver. Some examples:

K.u.K. Uhlan Rgt Nr 9	Dark blue on one side, red on the other, with silver fringes, inscriptions and garlands
K.u.K. Uhlan Rgt Nr 13	Red on one side, light blue on the other, with gold fringes and inscriptions

The 2nd Dragoons also uniquely carried a large golden medal, fixed near to the finial on the standard pole, originally awarded in 1791.

As a traditional Habsburg field sign, colours also sometimes carried sprigs of oak leaves at the top of the flagpole.

Standards lost during the Campaign of 1866

K.u.K. Cuirassier Rgt Nr 4 (both *Leibstandarte* and *Ordinärstandarte*) Nachod, 27 June 1866.

Further reading

Lehmann, Gustav *Die Trophäen des Preussischen Heeres in der Königlichen Hof- und Garnisonkirche zu Potsdam* (Berlin: Mittler, 1898)

Pavlovic, Darko *The Austrian Army 1836-66 (2): Cavalry* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1999)

Sutherland, Stuart *The Austrian Army of 1866* (N.p.: R & S Publications, 1996)

We would also like to thank Ralph Weaver for his assistance with this research.