

Austrian Infantry Colours in the Campaign of 1866

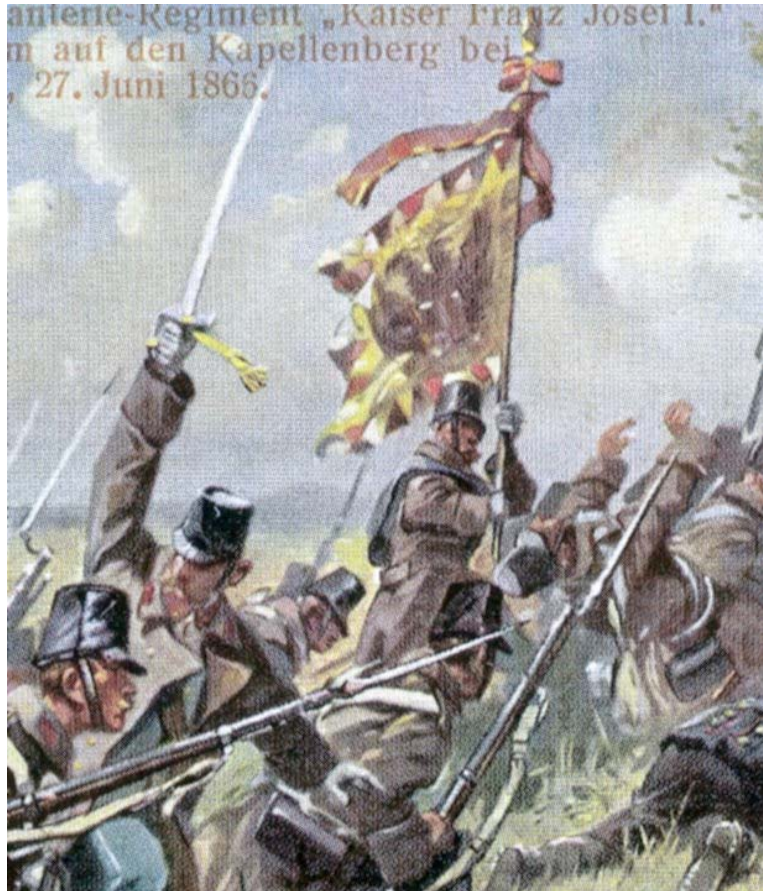


Fig 1. K.u.K. IR Nr 1 at Trautenau, 1866. A good impression of the colours with their ribbons and streamers as seen in battle.

Introduction

The colours carried by the Austrian infantry 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.

Each infantry battalion carried one colour, the 1st Battalion of each regiment carrying a *Leibfahne*, the other battalions carrying an *Ordinärfahne*. 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 wrapped around the body of the standard-bearer. The standard-bearer was generally a sergeant or senior NCO.

Description of the colours, streamers etc.

Both the *Leibfahne* and *Ordinärfahne* were rectangular, with painted designs on the 1836 and 1837 pattern flags, this changing to woven silk on the 1859 pattern. The colours were generally a little over 4 ½ feet in height and approximately 5 foot 9 inches in length. The flagpoles averaged a little under 10 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, although this could vary from regiment to regiment. For example, the 3rd Battalion of K.u.K. (*Kaiserlich und Königlich*, e.g. 'Imperial and Royal') IR Nr 6 had a flagpole painted in bands of 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.

The *Leibfahne* 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 arms and features. The *Ordinärfahne* bore this same double-headed eagle on a yellow field. The three open sides of both flags bore a decorative border approximately 4 ½ 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. IR Nr 30 (1st & 2nd Battalions)	Red and white with gold embroidery and gold inscriptions
K.u.K. IR Nr 34 (4th Battalion)	Red with white borders and silver fringes, plus silver inscriptions and garlands
K.u.K. IR Nr 37 (<i>Leibfahne</i>)	White silk with gold fringes, the Virgin Mary and the arms of Hungary on the upper parts, both in coloured embroidery, and inscriptions on the bottom in gold
K.u.K. IR Nr 43 (<i>Leibfahne</i>)	White on one side, red on the other, with gold embroidery and inscriptions
Unidentified	Poppy red with gold fringes, tassels and inscriptions, as well as garlands

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



Fig. 2. Flagpole with ribbon belonging to K.u.K. IR Nr 37



Fig. 3. Typical appearance of ribbons/streamers. As can be seen, these were richly decorated with embroidery, fringes etc.

Colours lost during the Campaign of 1866

K.u.K. IR 6 (<i>Ordinärfahne</i>)	Königinhof, 29 June 1866
K.u.K. IR 2 (<i>Ordinärfahne</i>)	Soor, 28 June 1866
K.u.K. IR 20 (<i>Leibfahne</i>)	Nachod, 27 June 1866
K.u.K. IR 32 (<i>Leibfahne</i>)	Königgrätz, 3 July 1866
K.u.K. IR 37 (<i>Leibfahne</i>)	Schweinschädel, 29 June 1866
K.u.K. IR 46 (<i>Leibfahne</i>)	Königgrätz, 3 July 1866
K.u.K. IR 51 (<i>Ordinärfahne</i>)	Königgrätz, 3 July 1866
K.u.K. IR 52 (<i>Ordinärfahne</i>)	Königgrätz, 3 July 1866
K.u.K. IR 80 (<i>Leibfahne</i>)	Königgrätz, 3 July 1866

Several streamers were also captured by the Prussians, including an unidentified one lost at Königinhof on 29 June (probably belonging to K.u.K. IR 13, 26, 79 or 80), and one belonging to the 4th Battalion of K.u.K. IR 34, found the day after Königgrätz.

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 (1): Infantry* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1999)

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

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