
The Polish Legions

The Polish Legions in Italy 1797 - 1799

Following the third partition of Poland, the patriots of the Republic sought to fight the partitioning powers. If they could not do so in Poland, then perhaps Revolutionary France would help them. The area we now know as Italy was facing troops from the Austrian and Russian Empires and hence became fertile ground for the Polish Army-in-Exile. Napoleon's Victories in Northern Italy created the Cisalpine Republic, but as it was unable to raise troops of its own, Dombrowski persuaded General Bonaparte to allow him to raise a Polish Legion in Lombardy for the republic. In January 1797 a convention was signed to allow the Poles to enter service of the Republic in exchange for citizenship, but with commands given in Polish.

According to Pachonski the two initial legions based the battalion uniform designs on units from the Republic with dark blue kurtkas, trousers and hats –

1st Legion			
Battalion	Old Unit	Facings	Buttons
I	National Cavalry	Crimson	Silver
II	3 rd Inf. GDL	Green	Gold
III	10 th Crown Inf.	Yellow	Silver

The piping around the collar, cuffs and lapels was white. The cockade was (from the center) white/blue/red.

2nd Legion			
Battalion	Old Unit	Facings	Buttons
I	8 th Inf. GDL	Black	Silver
II	16 th Crown Inf.	Light Blue	Silver
III	2 nd / 3 rd Crown Inf.	Red	Silver

The piping around the collar, cuffs and lapels was crimson. The cockade was (from the center) blue/red/white.

For the first time the troops universally wore the four sided konfederatka which has morphed into English as the czapka ("hat" in Polish). The band was black with a white piping above and cords of red and white.

When the fusiliers wore plumes, in theroy they were distinguished by battalion from top to bottom – 1st blue/red/white, 2nd – red/white/blue and third white/blue/red. The vests that showed through the bottom on the lapels were white and the belting was black, though Pachonski shows group of soldiers with waist belts striped red/white/blue.

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The grenadiers had red epaulettes and plumes and the chasseurs had green plumes and epaulettes. In Morawski this green is a kaki coloured. One drawing from the period shows a chasseur with a cocked hat similar to the headgear the Polish light infantry wore in the Republic and Italian troops wore. It would not be out of the realm of possibilities that one of the light companies retained this vestige of their former units as well.

The battalions were organized in ten companies with one being grenadiers and the other chasseurs. The stated strengths were 1,036 plus a staff of 17. In 1797 Pachonski lists the strengths as:

Legion	1 st Battalion	2 nd Battalion	3 rd Battalion
1	1,049	1,047	828
2	1,055	820	620

Officers had silver (white) and crimson sashes tied on the right side or passing over the left shoulder. Sabers were black leather with brass bindings and hilts.

Bibliography

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