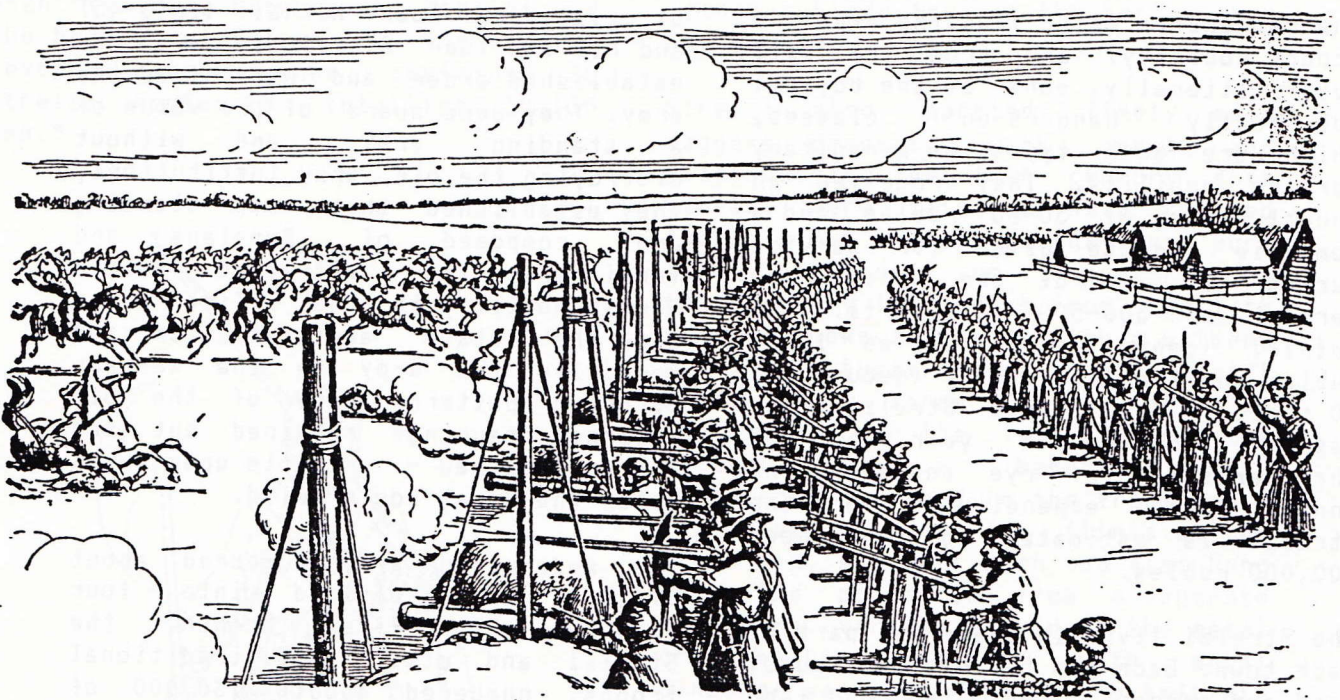


# The Strelzi - 1550-1705

(Part One)

by Richard L. Sanders



The creation of Russia's first permanent standing infantry - the *Strelzi* - was among the military reforms of Tsar Ivan IV, the Terrible (1530-1584). The exact date of this event is historically controversial, but it appears to have happened around 1550. The name *Strelzi* derives from the Russian '*strela*' meaning 'arrow' or 'shooter', because these troops carried muskets which distinguished them from other native Russian forces at that time.

*Strelzi* units were raised in Moscow and other cities and towns. The day-to-day duty of the Moscow *Strelzi* was to guard the Tsar's court and the cities and towns, to suppress internal revolts, and to protect the frontier until the entire army could be assembled. In peacetime they were on permanent garrison duty, guarding the walls, towers and gates of the cities as well as government buildings. They also guarded the state saltpetre works, convoys of money and prisoners and ambassadors. The foot *Strelzi* were on guard duty by weekly turns in Moscow and were sent to strengthen

the garrisons in other towns.

All larger cities had their own city *Strelzi* - cities like Archangel, Astrakhan, Kazan, Novgorod, Pskov and Smolensk. In the border towns there were garrisons of 20-100 *Strelzi*. The *Strelzi* garrisons were mostly on the northwest border in cities such as Pskov and Novgorod. There were fewer on the southern borders because the government had other troops such as the Cossacks in those regions. In 1682 Peter the Great sent some of the Moscow units to the southern frontiers in order to reduce their political influence in the capital.

The *Strelzi* were recruited from among the freemen and they promised to serve permanently. They were a caste of their own, often married, and their occupation became inheritable from the father to the son. To become a *Strelzi*, a newcomer needed a large number of sponsors from among the ranks. Peasants, serfs and vagrants were not admitted. The *Strelzi* came from the local people as a rule, but in Kazan, for example, 13% were



arrivals from elsewhere. They had to be volunteers in good health who could shoot.

The commanders were from the *dvoriani* (court nobility) and from the *deti boyar* (literally, sons of the boyars, but really 'hangers-on') classes, which were both types of hereditary service nobility. They received an annual salary of 30-60 rubles and a *pomestie* (estate given for service during the life of the person who served) of 300-500 *chertverts*. The *sotniki* (centurians) received 12-60 rubles and the *desnatiyiki* (decurians) 10 rubles. The simple Strelzi's pay was 4-7 rubles a year and 12 *chertverts* each of rye and oats. The annual state expenditures on the Strelzi is estimated to have been 100,000 rubles.<sup>1</sup>

The Strelzi lived in their own part of each town. Each man had his own house, yard and garden. They also had land allocated to the unit for use of the members for farming. The size of the area varied according to rank and from town to town. The Strelzi also enjoyed the privilege of trading without having to pay any tax or contributions. They engaged in small industry as well. Their commercial interests frequently brought them into conflict with the boyars.

#### ORGANISATION

The Strelzi were initially organised in units of 500 men, called *prikazi* (also meaning district). The *prikaz* was further divided into units of 100 men called *sotnia*, or 'hundreds'. The *sotnia* were divided into units of 50 men called *polisotnia*, which were finally divided into units of ten men, called *desyatoki*. In war the city Strelzi were designated to the various *polki* (regiments). The *polk* was commanded by a *golova* (pl. *golovoi* - colonel or head), the *sotnia* by *sotniki* (centurians), the 50's men by *pyatidesyatniki*, and the ten-man units by *desyatniki* (decurians).<sup>1\*</sup>

During the Time of Troubles (1584-1613), which lasted from the death of Ivan IV until Tsar Mikhail Fyodovich took the throne, Russia was in a state of civil war. Tsar Mikhail (1613-45) and his son Tsar Alexei (1645-76) re-established order and modernised the army. They were aware of the value of a standing army, and without destroying the old army institutions, they established their own standing army composed of Russians and foreigners. They attracted Baltic German nobility to the officer corps and the state administration and remodelled the army on the western European pattern. Many of the old external trappings remained but the content was new - a basis upon which Peter the Great would build.

The modernised army numbered about 370,000 men, divided into four branches. The first branch, the Strelzi and other old traditional troops, numbered about 130,000 of which 49,000 were cavalry (mainly Cossacks) and 64,000 infantry.

Secondly, there were forces of about 90,000 men (including 50,000 cavalry and 38,000 infantry) modelled exclusively on the Western pattern. The third branch consisted of irregulars - mainly cavalry (160,000 men), and the fourth branch of artillery (3,600 men). Even among the Strelzi, western European influences were evident. The *polk*, for example, was now organised like a regiment and its leader, the *golava*, was renamed the *polkovnik*, like a colonel. The leaders of the *sotnia* (hundreds), called *sotniki*, became *kapitanii* (captains).

The information on the Russian army of this period is very limited, and what little there is, comes mostly from foreign observers. Giles Fletcher said there were 5,000 Moscow Strelzi, of whom 2000 were mounted, while another observer said there were 10,000 Strelzi in Moscow. By the end of the

Refs. <sup>1</sup> Koch p.110. <sup>1\*</sup> Razin vol.II p.338.



16th century they had increased to 20-25,000 men.<sup>2</sup> At their peak in the mid-17th century they numbered 50,000 cavalry and 45,000 infantry<sup>3</sup>. By 1682, when rivalries between the Strelzi and the boyars culminated in the Strelzi revolt, Moscow alone contained 30 Strelzi regiments totalling 30,135 men.<sup>4</sup>



#### EQUIPMENT AND UNIFORMS

The clothing and basic equipment of the Strelzi were supplied by the state. They were normally armed with long arquebuses, muskets or clumsy matchlocks with straight stocks, curved swords and *berdische* poleaxes. Along with these, the state furnished them with one to two pounds of gunpowder, lead and gunpowder flasks.

The *berdische* had a handle which reached to about shoulder height and the Strelzi would rest his musket in the crook of the axe's curved blade when firing or at the ready. The pole butt sometimes was spiked to steady the axe when planted in the ground and

it could serve as a supplementary weapon in close combat. The *berdische* had a sling attached to the pole so it could be slung over the shoulder, with the blade toward the bottom when not in use.

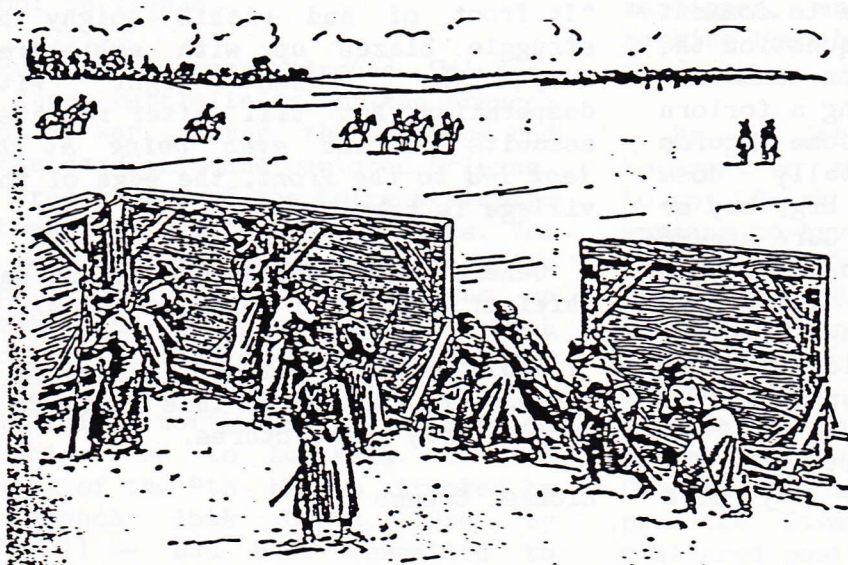
Strelzi also carried finely made daggers decorated with jewels and diamonds. In the 16th century some Strelzi were said to have carried "pikes", but it appears they were more like halberds or spontons. A contemporary lithograph from the 17th century shows a Strelzi with a halberd with a natural wood shaft, metal blades and a large red tassel below the blade. Over the left shoulder the Strelzi wore a bandolier with cartridges attached to the front and a small leather pouch for flints at the right hip. A powder horn was also hung below the pouch or from a separate cord worn over the shoulder. The metal or leather scabbard with metal bindings was suspended on the left hip by means of two straps.





# The Strelzi - 1550-1705 (Part Two)

by Richard L. Sanders



Officers normally were armed with a sword and some type of battleaxe, mace or battle pick, and carried a walking stick or cane as a sign of rank - a custom which lasted for centuries in Russia. Drummers and standard bearers are usually depicted as being armed with just a sword, but they probably carried daggers as well. The drums were rather small compared with those of western Europe and they sometimes had rounded bottoms like kettle-drums. Strelzi cavalry were certainly armed with sabres, and probably pistols as well, which would have been carried in saddle holsters. Much of the Russian cavalry of the 16th and 17th centuries was armed with lances and bows and arrows; however, the Strelzi were probably distinguishable because they would have been equipped with firearms. The majority of other equipment such as food, extra clothing, gunpowder kegs, tents, etc, were carried in baggage trains. According to contemporary sources, their trains were much larger than those one would find with comparably sized west European armies.

Strelzi, being devout Russian Orthodox "old believers", wore their beards and hair rather long - a custom which led to controversy with Peter the Great when he began westernising Russia.

The Strelzi's issued clothing seems to have been semi-official from an early stage, with the *prikazi* and *polki* distinguished by the colours of their coats, coat linings and trim, hats and boots. The long, heavy coat, called a *kaftan*, was ornamented on the front with button lacing which was silver or gold for the officers and in the distinctive colour for the soldiers. The coloured coat lining could be seen at the cuffs, which were sometimes sewn back and appeared like rounded cuff flaps.

The officers' *kaftanii* sometimes had a very long left sleeve, which could reach from below the fingertips, as far as to the knee! If it reached to the knee, a slit was provided on the inside of the elbow so the arm could be extended and the left hand used. Such sleeves were traditional among the nobility and were quite common in their civilian attire. Some officers also had fur capes and lining to their *kaftanii*. One contemporary source shows an officer with his coat-tails turned up with the corners tucked below his sash. Inside the *kaftan* he wears a pink smock and baggy dark green pants which could not be



easily seen with the coat front closed. Whenever the baggy pants are shown in contemporary sources, they are worn tucked into the boots. The pants were probably in a distinctive colour such as that of the hat or coat trim, if isolated contemporary sources are indicative. The boots were probably made of felt and were coloured red, yellow or green. At least one contemporary source shows brown boots.

Caps, also coloured according to the *prikaz* or *polk*, had natural fur trim and for officers they had a small, flat, metal crown-shaped device in the front just protruding from the fur trim. Some Strelzi wore rather modern-looking helmets, similar in shape to ones worn today in west

European armies. They were smaller than the modern ones, fit closer to the head, and were made of curved plates bolted together.

Wide sashes were often worn over or inside the *kaftan* knotted in the front. They were of bright coloured cloth such as sky blue or yellow, but do not appear to have been uniform among the *polki*. Brown and black leather belts with metal buckles were also worn. Leather gloves with cuffs were also worn by some Strelzi, especially by standard bearers. In the winter all Strelzi probably wore gloves or mittens.

Table No.1 gives uniform details for the fourteen Moscow Strelzi *polki* of 1674 according to A.V.Viskovatov.<sup>5</sup>

TABLE NUMBER 1

Regiment (number & name)	Kaftan	Buttonloops (troops)	Lining	Hat	Boots
1 Igor Lutokhin	red	raspberry	*	dark grey	yellow
2 Ivan Poltev	light grey	raspberry	raspberry	raspberry	yellow
3 Vassili Bukhvostov	light green	raspberry	raspberry	raspberry	yellow
4 Feodor Golovlinsky	cranberry	black	yellow	dark grey	yellow
5 Feodor Alexandrov	light red	dark red	light blue	dark grey	yellow
6 Nikofer Kolobov	yellow	dark raspberry	light green	dark grey	red
7 Stepan Ianov	light blue	black	cinnamon	raspberry	yellow
8 Timofei Poltev	orange	black	green	cherry	green
9 Petr Lopukhin	cherry	black	orange	cherry	yellow
10 Feodor Lopukhin	yellow-orange	raspberry	raspberry	raspberry	green
11 David Vorontzov	raspberry	black	cinnamon	cinnamon	yellow
12 Ivan Naramanski	cherry	black	light blue	raspberry	yellow
13 Lagovskin	dark red	black	green	green	yellow
14 Afanassi Levchin	light green	black	yellow	raspberry	yellow

\* Zwieguintsov suggest that the lining for the first regiment may have been yellow since that colour is found in the regimental flag.

Little information is available about the dress of the Strelzi cavalry. They supposedly wore red *kaftanii*, however it is possible that they were dressed just like the foot units. A painting by W.G.Schwarz in the Moscow Tretyakov gallery shows what may be mounted Strelzi on escort duty wearing dark green *kaftanii*,

black boots and some red and yellow caps.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> W.W.Zwieguintsov, *L'Armée Russe, 1<sup>re</sup> Partie: 1700-1762*, Paris, 1967, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Peter der Grosse und seiner Zeit, Wiesbaden: Emil Vollmer Verlag, 1967, p.54.



# The Strelzi - 1550-1705 (Part Three)

by Richard L. Sanders

## Flags of the Strelzi<sup>7</sup>

The fourteen Moscow Strelzi regiments had flags with a common pattern during the late 1600s. It consisted of a central rectangular field, quartered by a straight cross, and surrounded by a border. Some flags had additional ornaments such as stars, crosses and crescents. The flags of the Moscow regiments are illustrated here and described in Table Number 2.

Staffs were probably of natural wood, and a metal spike or point was fixed at the top, and a coloured cloth tassel was at the base of the pole covering. It was probably of a like colour. Some flags, such as those of the 1st and 10th regiments from Moscow were further adorned with cords and tassels attached below the staff head.



TABLE NUMBER 2

Regiment (number & name)	Field	Cross	Border	Corners	Stars & Wreaths
1 Igor Lutokhin	raspberry	white	yellow	---	---
2 Ivan Poltev	grey	raspberry	yellow	---	---
3 Vassili Bukhvostov	light green	raspberry	white	---	---
4 Feodor Golovlinsky	cranberry	yellow	white	yellow	---
5 Feodor Alexandrov	vermillion	yellow	white	light blue	---
6 Nikofof Kobolov	yellow	dark raspberry	light green	white	---
7 Stepan Ivanov	light blue	yellow	black	yellow	---
8 Timofei Poltev	orange	white	green	---	---
9 Petr Lopukhin	cherry	orange	white/yellow/ red	cherry	---
10 Feodor Lopukhin	orange	black	white/green	white	2 white, 2 raspberry
11 David Vorontzov	raspberry	black	white/light blue	yellow	---
12 Ivan Naramanski	black	white	yellow/cherry	---	cherry
13 Lagovskin	dark red	azure	white	green	white
14 Afanassi Levchin	light green	yellow	white	---	---



The flags shown here (Figs. A-F) and described below were recorded by Zwieguntsov based upon records in the Military Museum in Stockholm. They are thought to be Strelzi flags as well.

*Flag A:* Border in alternating chevrons of green, light yellow and blue; in the corners, black squares. The central field is red with yellow crescents and stars. White cross with red ornaments. Violet staff sheath.

*Flag B:* White border with red flowers. Red central field with a gold cross. In the corners were red squares with gold stars. The flag was attached to the staff with blue laces.

*Flag C:* Green border; white central field with raspberry stars and black cross. The staff sheath was raspberry.

*Flag D:* White and red border with small light yellow cross. In the corners were light blue squares with red ornaments. The central field was light blue with a light yellow cross with a small red cross in its centre. The staff sheath was dark rose.

*Flag E:* The border was of alternating white and yellow chevrons. In the corners were dark blue squares with red flowers. The central field was dark blue with a red cross, and the staff sheath was dark rose.

*Flag F:* The border was light yellow. The red central field had a white cross, and in the upper right quadrant were a white cross and stars. The staff sheath was raspberry.

## Tactics

Little is known about the tactics employed by the Strelzi. During the 16th century, Russian order of battle consisted of the centre of peasant troops dominated by the *Gulay Gorod* (a sort of "wagon castle"), and covered by the Strelzi and part of the artillery. About one thousand horsemen were deployed in front of the centre. Artillery was placed or entrenched on the left and right wings, flanked on

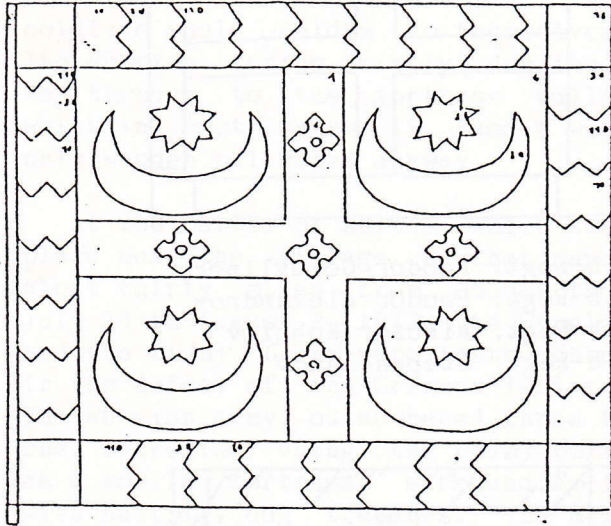
each side by a *polk*. A rearguard which also served as the reserve was intended to be used a surprise weapon in a battle formation which was inherently defensive.<sup>9</sup>

On campaigns and during sieges the Strelzi were deployed in rows, usually behind the *Gulay Gorod*, or "walking city". The *Gulay Gorod* consisted of wood planks in a wood frame, assembled like a section of wall about 3m high and 3.5m long and pierced with a number of firing ports. The structure was mounted on top of a four-wheel or four-ski assembly so that it could be dragged by men. Along each vertical end of the *Gulay Gorod* were locking devices to allow them to be secured to adjacent sections.<sup>9</sup>

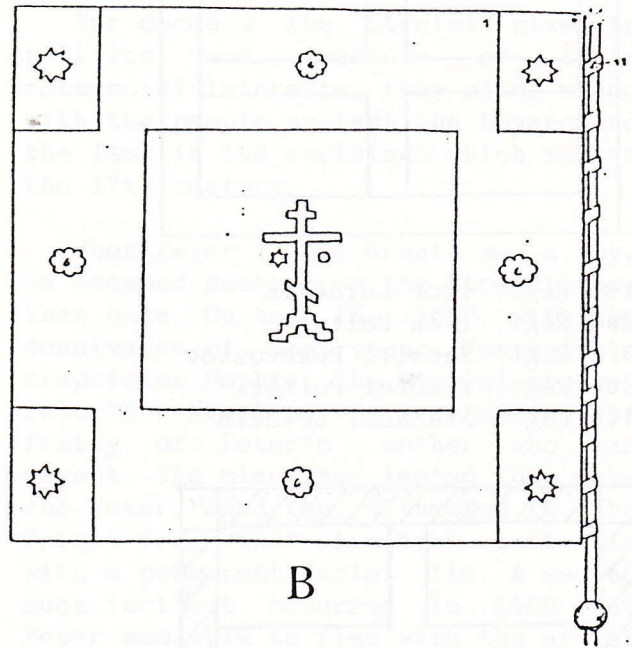
Since the Strelzi did not generally carry pikes -- the standard infantry weapon of the 16th and 17th centuries -- the *Gulay Gorod* served as a protection from cavalry charges, as well as giving cover from arrows and musket balls. A drawing from J.A. Razin's *The History of the Military Art* shows Strelzi and artillery in the field defending from behind a different kind of barricade against a cavalry charge. The barricades appear to have been made up of mounded dirt topped with straw. Three Strelzi stand firing from behind each mound. Between the mounds are one or two wooden posts about 4m tall, held upright by guide ropes, and probably driven into the earth. These appear to have been used to anchor wheeled artillery pieces which appear between each set of mounds. This could have been used to reduce the recoil effect and hinder movement of the guns by enemies. A second row of Strelzi stands about 3m behind those at the barricades, and would replace them to alternate in firing volleys.<sup>10</sup>

During the campaigns against the Tartars and in the Livonian wars, fortresses had to be frequently attacked or besieged. In the siege of Kazan by Ivan IV, it was a systematic and protracted assault, even though the Tsar had 150 artillery pieces. During such sieges all earthwork,

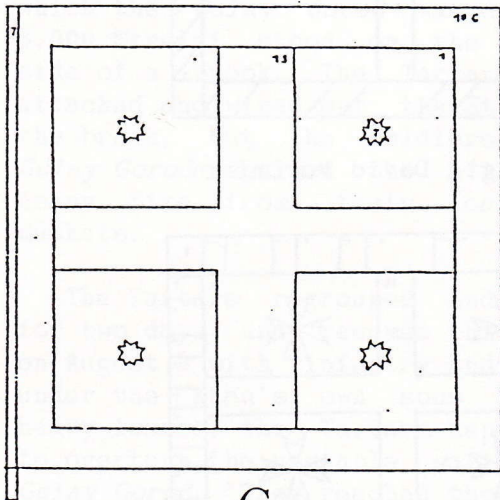




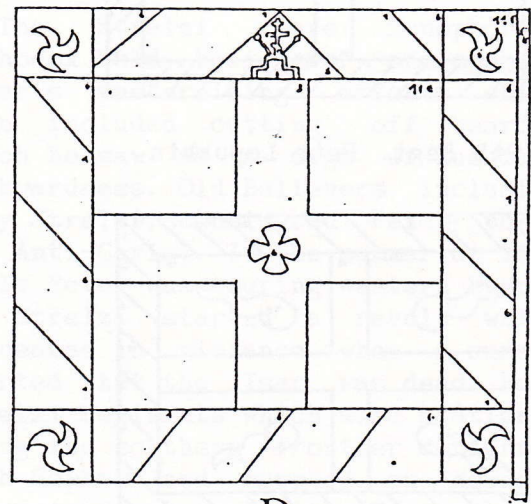
A



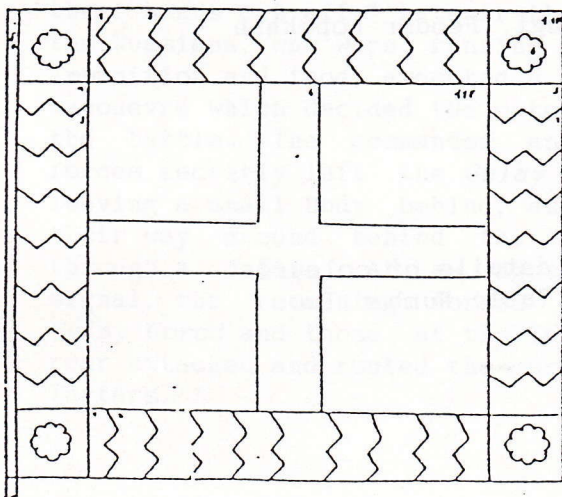
B



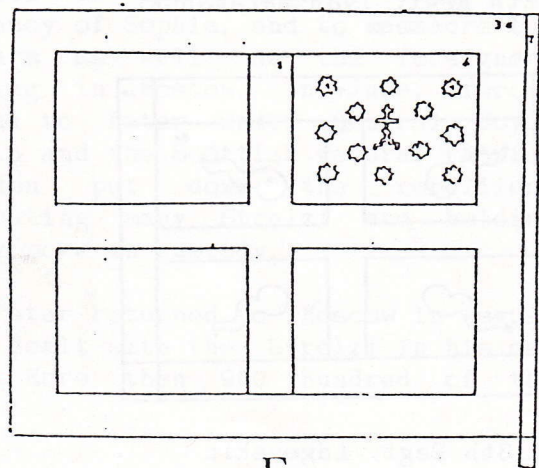
C



D

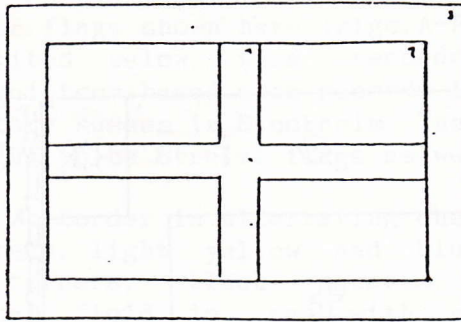


E

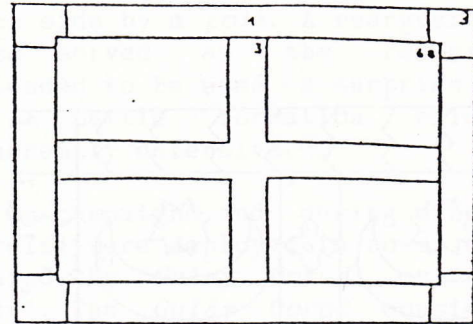


F

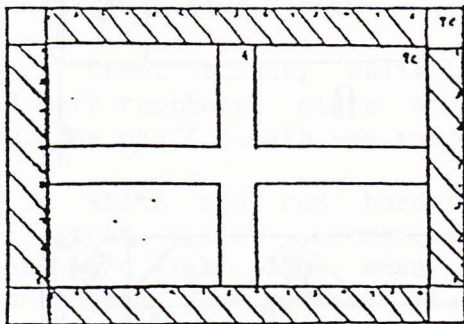




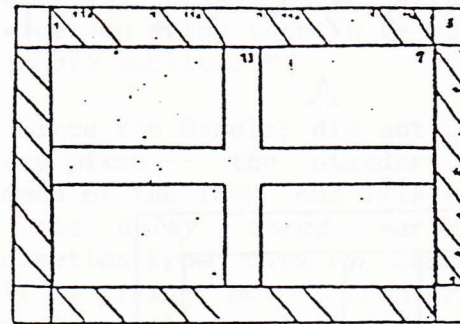
1st Regt. Igor Lutokhin  
2nd Regt. Ivan Poltev  
3rd Regt. Vassili Bukhvostov  
8th Regt. Timofei Poltev  
14th Regt. Afanassi Levchin



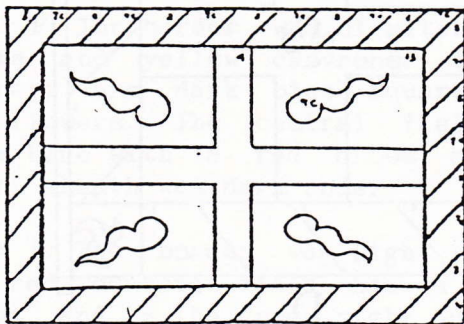
4th Regt. Feodor Golovlinsky  
5th Regt. Feodor Alexandrov  
6th Regt. Nikofof Kobolov  
7th Regt. Stepan Ianov



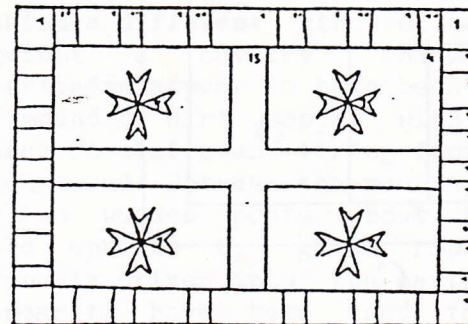
9th Regt. Petr Lopukhin



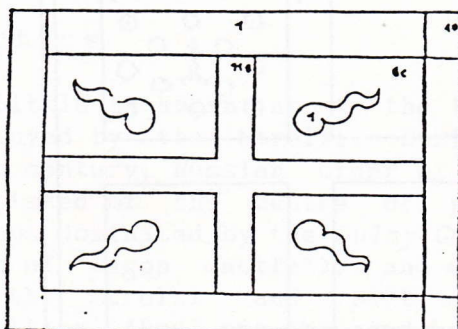
11th Regt. David Vorontzov



12th Regt. Ivan Naramanski



10th Regt. Feodor Lopukhin



13th Regt. Lagovskin

For details of colours  
see Table Number Two.



mining and sapping was done by the soldiers and peasants, a job which west European *Landsknechts* and soldiers would seldom do themselves. The Russian forces simply dug their way through to the fortress walls, which in most cases in Russia were only wooden palisades anyway.

At the battle of Molodi, which took place near the village by that name, about thirty miles from Moscow from July 28 to August 2, 1572, the Strelzi and the *Gulay Gorod* were instrumental in the defeat of the Crimean Tartars. The Russian army, outnumbered three to one, retreated, using the *Gulay Gorod* as a mobile fortress, surrounding it with hastily dug trenches. The main body concealed itself behind the walls of the *Gulay Gorod*, while outside the remaining units covered the rear and flanks. At the foot of the hill on which the *Gulay Gorod* was deployed, 3,000 Strelzi stood on the further side of a brook. The Tartar cavalry attacked and wiped out the Strelzi at the brook, but the soldiers in the *Gulay Gorod* repulsed the attack with heavy fire from their cannon and muskets.

The Tartars regrouped and rested for two days and resumed the assault on August 2 with infantry and cavalry under the Khan's own sons. Ignoring heavy losses, the Tartars kept trying to overturn the unstable walls of the *Gulay Gorod*. "They reached their hands out to the fortress wall; many Tartars were killed, and countless numbers had their hands cut off." Late in the day, the Russians, who were running low on ammunition and food, executed a daring manoeuvre which decided the outcome of the battle. The commander and his forces secretly left the *Gulay Gorod*, leaving a small body behind, and made their way around behind the Tartars through a defile. At an agreed on signal, the remaining forces in the *Gulay Gorod* and those at the Tartars' rear attacked and routed the surprised Tartars.<sup>11</sup>

## The Decline of the Strelzi

For decades the Strelzi mixed in politics and, because of their commercial interests, they often sided with the people against the boyars and the Tsar in the uprisings which marked the 17th century.

When Peter I (the Great) was a boy, he escaped death from the Strelzi more than once. On May 15, 1682, with the connivance of the young Tsarevich's stepsister Sophia, the Strelzi stormed into the Kremlin to exterminate the family of Peter's mother who was regent. The slaughter lasted four days and Peter, aged ten, witnessed it. The fright from that incident left him with a permanent facial tic. A second such incident occurred in 1689 but Peter was able to flee with the aid of some of his soldiers.<sup>12</sup>

The Strelzi were xenophobic, Orthodox "old believers" and opposed Peter's westernising efforts which even included cutting off beards, which he saw as a sign of Russia's backwardness. Old Believers, including many Strelzi, considered Peter to be the Anti-Christ. In the summer of 1698 while Peter was touring western Europe the Strelzi started a revolt which increased in violence when a rumour started that the Tsar was dead. Four Strelzi regiments which were stationed along the southern frontier conferred with Sophia and marched on Moscow, determined not to let the Tsar return. It was decided to put the Tsarevich Alexis on the throne, under the regency of Sophia, and to massacre the boyars as well as the foreigners living in Moscow. In June, forces loyal to Peter under General Boyar Shein and the Scottish general Patrick Gordon put down the rebellion, executing many Strelzi and holding many more in custody.

Peter returned to Moscow in August and dealt with the Strelzi in his own way. More than 900 hundred of the



Strelzi lost their lives by beheading, hanging or breaking on the wheel during the investigations of the cause of the rebellion. Evidence implicating Sophia, who had been locked up in a nunnery during the revolt, and her faction was inconclusive and Peter had the interrogations carried on for months in the hope of implicating her. Finally in June 1699 Peter disbanded Moscow's remaining Strelzi regiments and dispersed the men and their families to distant parts of the country. In 1705 the remainder of the Strelzi units were abolished as a special corps and the men were incorporated into the army which was reorganising along western lines.

<sup>7</sup> W.W.Zwieguintsov, *Drapeaux et Etendards de l'Armée Russe*, Paris, pp.2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Koch, p.111.

<sup>9</sup> See *Gulay Gorod: Building the Russian Mobile Field Fortification*, by Curt Johnson and John Sloan in *Gorget and Sash*, vol.1, no.1, pp. 21-25 for a detailed description and history of the *Gulay Gorod*.

<sup>10</sup> Razin, vol.III, p.73.

<sup>11</sup> Skrynnikov, pp. 152-155.

<sup>12</sup> Buehr, pp. 137-138, 155, 156-157; *Peter der Grosse und seine Zeit*, pp. 32-33.

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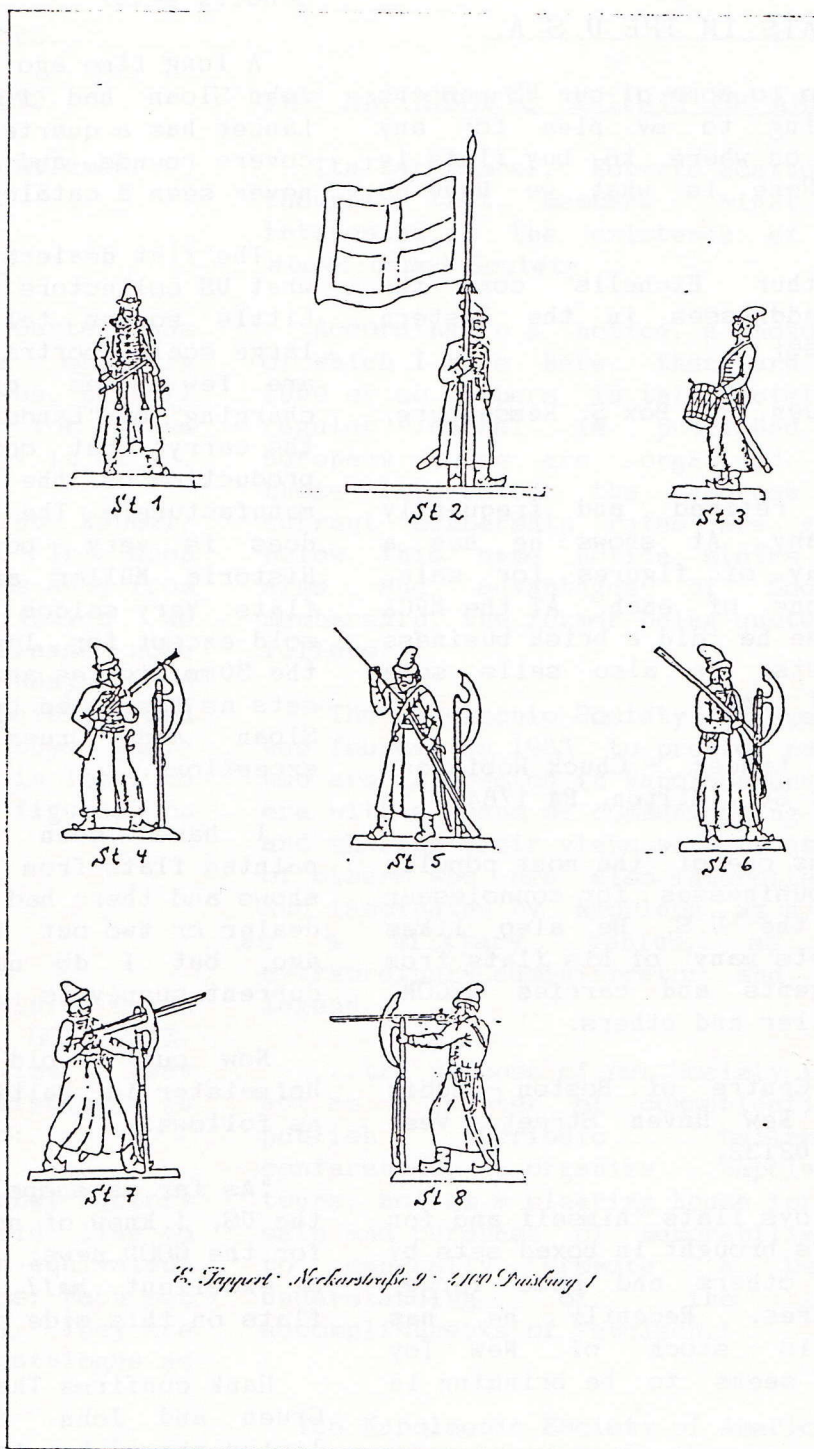
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## Figures

There are few fully round figures specifically of Strelzi available at this time. Only MINIFIG produces some 15mm wargaming figures in full round. However, Janissaries and Polish figures for that period can be converted by changing the hats, adding the axes and altering other minor details.

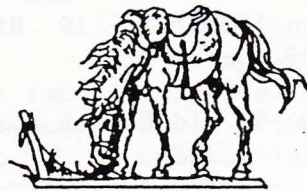
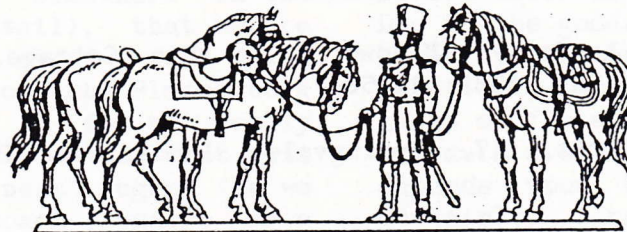
Flat figures have become available in the last few years. The most numerous figures are available from heinz and Erika Tappert (Neckarstr. 9, D-4100 Duisburg, FRG). Herr Tappert has produced thirty different Strelzi figures plus five contemporary civilians. The first eight of these 30mm figures were drawn by the author (catalogue page shown in this feature) while the balance were done by M. Block. The latter include a variety of marching, halted and firing troops plus officers, standard bearers and drummers. All of the series is very accurate historically.



The other source of flats suitable for use as Strelzi is SHA Zinnfiguren, Werner Fechner (Schoenblick 3, D-7178 Michelbach/Bilz, FRG). Herr Fechner casts several 16th/17th century Russian guards from the Harald Kebbel moulds. He likewise has a number of civilian figures which nicely complement the Strelzi. There is among them a mounted Boyar which works nicely as an officer for the Strelzi (VH13a).



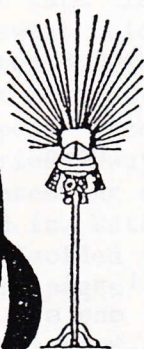
# The Journal of the British Flat Figure Society



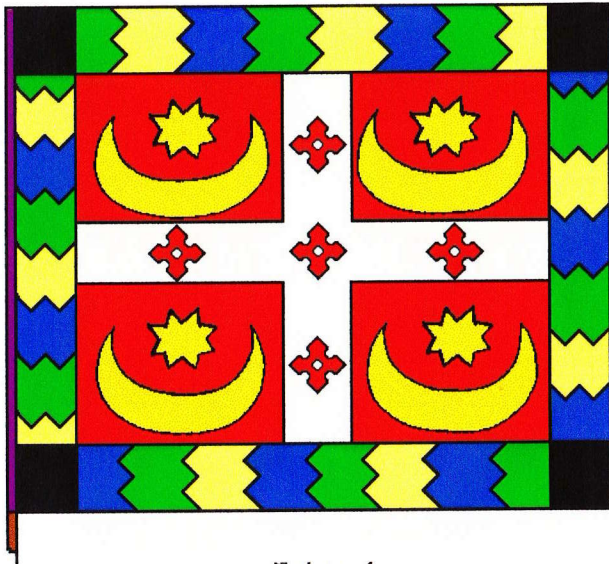
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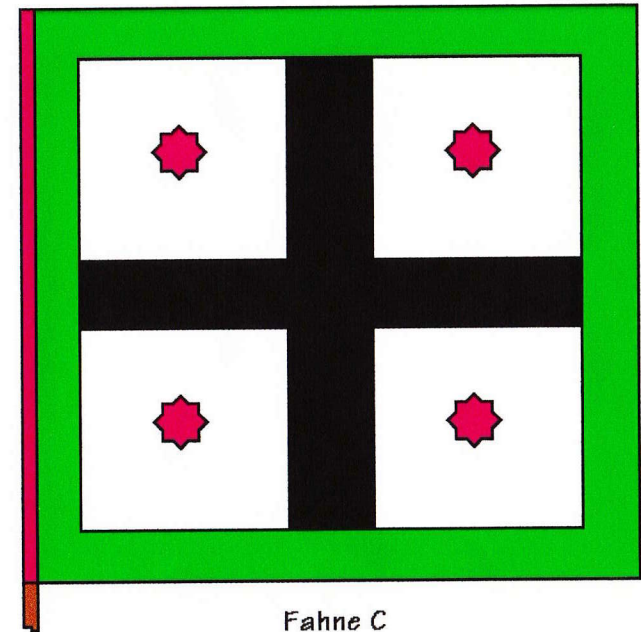
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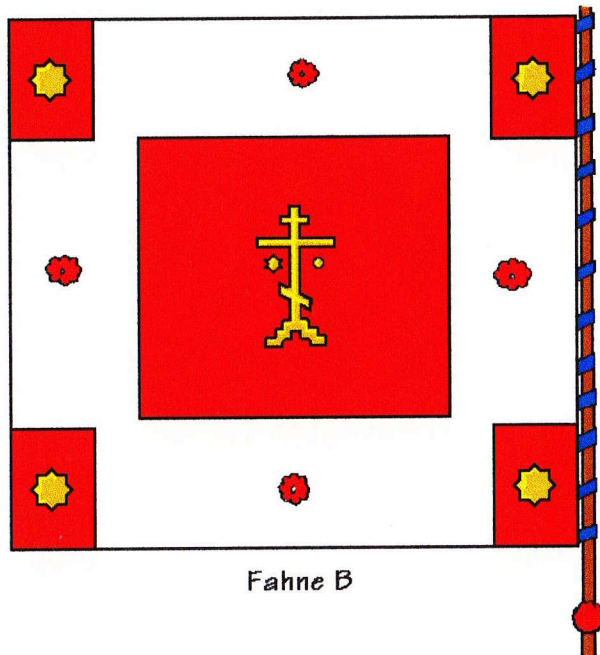




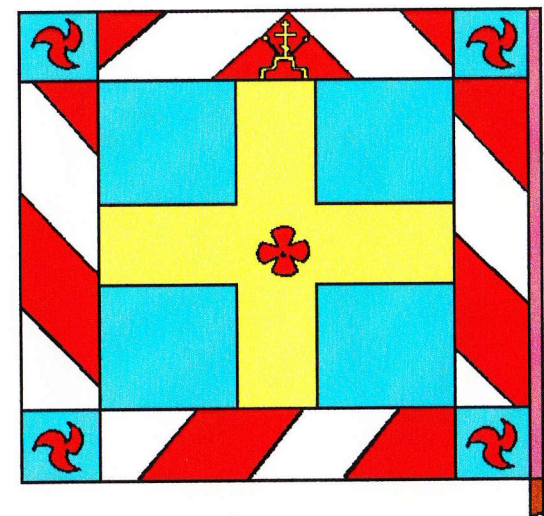
Fahne A



Fahne C

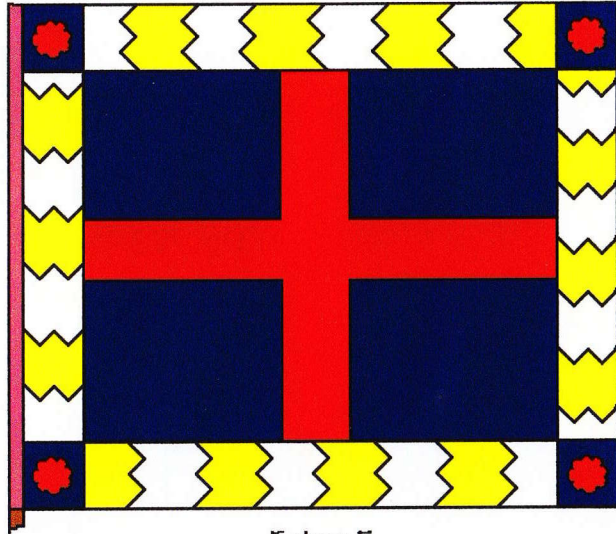


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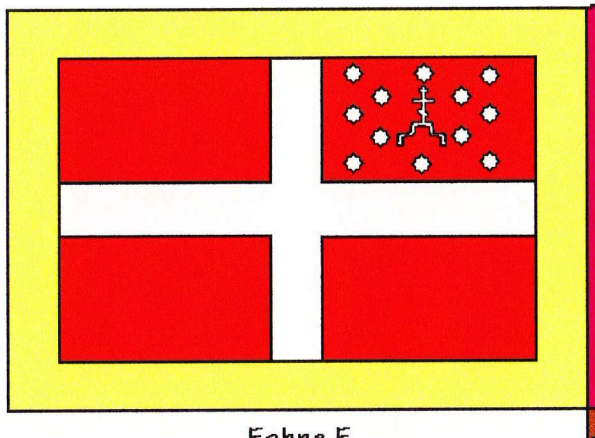


Fahne D





Fahne E

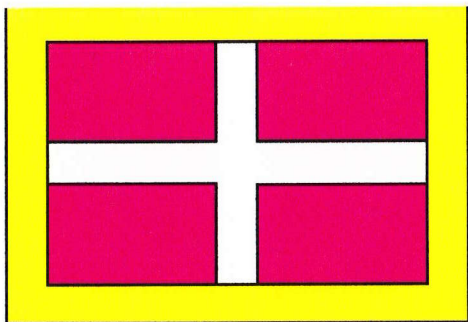


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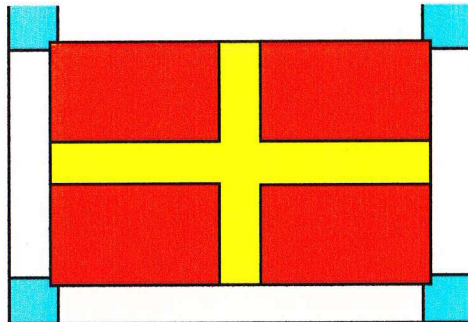


Offiziere Moskauer Strelitzen=Regimenter, um 1675

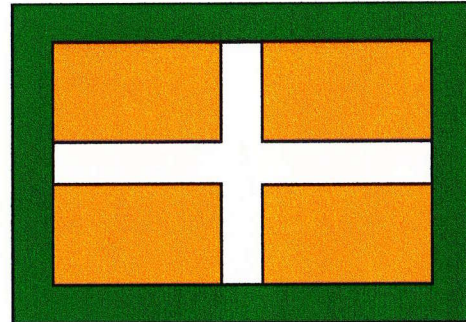




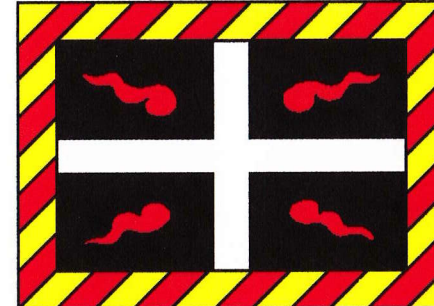
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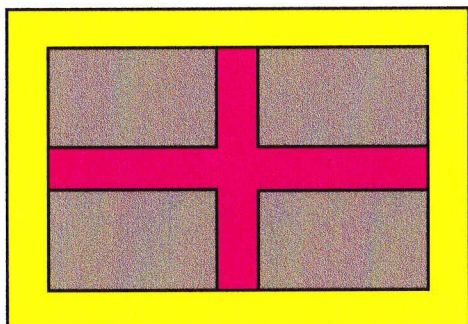
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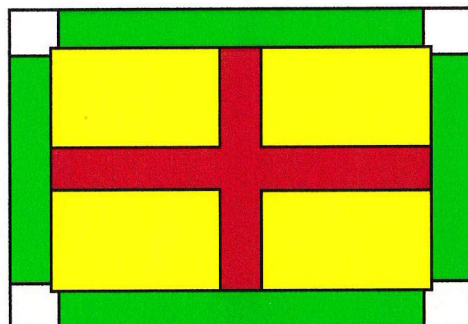
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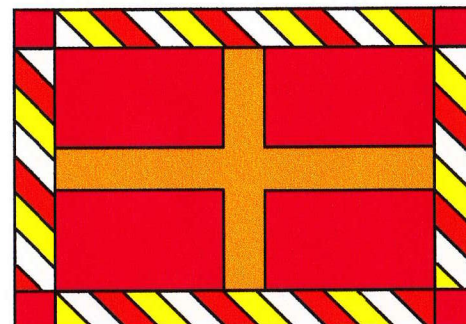
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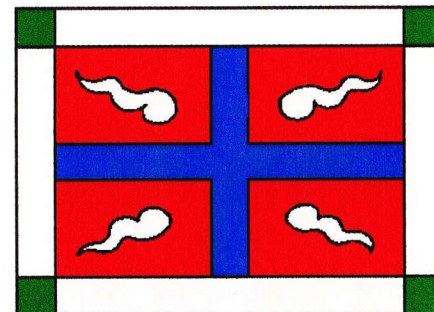
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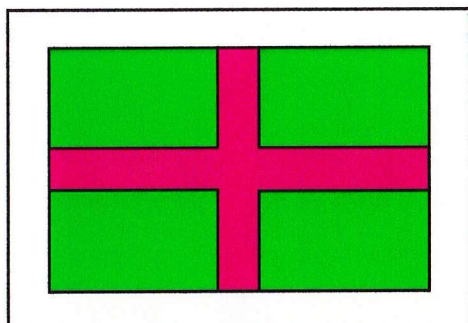
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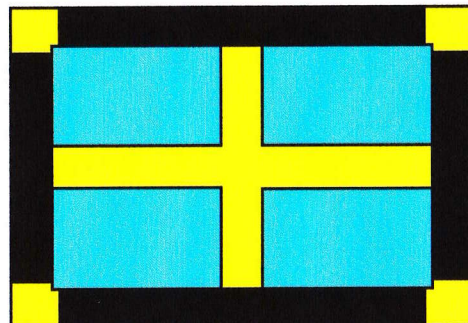
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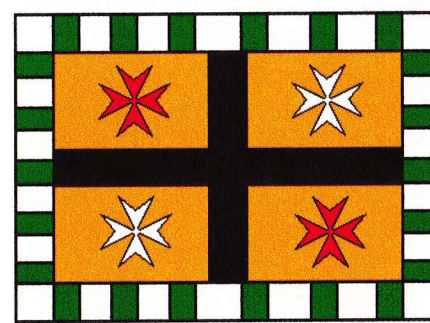
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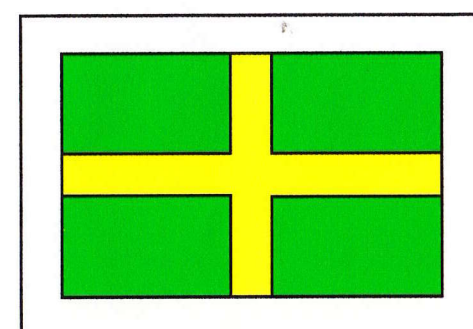
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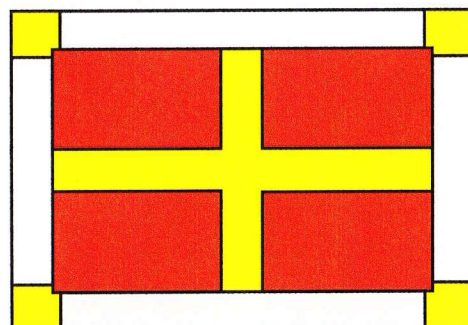
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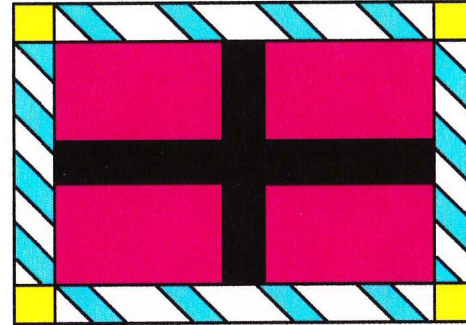
10. Regiment



14. Regiment



4. Regiment



11. Regiment



