

# Uniforms of the Thirty Years War

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## Introduction

The concept of uniforms was under development during the Thirty Years War. Therefore all comments are neither exclusive nor definitive. Gustavus Adolphus was the driving force behind standard uniforms.

Although no armies of the period really had uniforms as such, coat colours and sometimes facings and, or, cuff colours for each regiment were common by the end of the war. Early war armies, on the other hand, were much closer to the landsknecht style of dress. When money permitted mercenary units still tended to dress flamboyantly contrasting sharply with the drab civil dress of the period and emphasising that they were soldiers.

The following information and theories on uniforms have been culled from my reading about the war, with the most useful sources in the bibliography. Osprey has several books that cover specific armies. Armies so covered are given limited treatment in this article. There is a tremendous amount of material available for the English Civil War and the style of dress is similar. Osprey also covers Samurai, (the Age of War is the same time frame and similar tactics) and Moghul (same time frame). Remember that anything you want to paint can not be disproved and sometimes each soldier in a regiment would have different dress to hardships and scrounging. Renaissance type units would not offend me, especially prior to 1631, so have fun and let your imagination run free.

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## General comments on clothing and equipment

Any really good ECW book on uniforms, (which are readily available) will supply most of your needs in this area. The key difference between the ECW and the continent is the armour worn by mounted troops. Most cavalry wore 3/4 armour, at least until the 1640s. This armour was often blackened (they weren't called swartz reiters for nothing). The French, Swedes and Poles were the only armies with significant numbers of medium cavalry. Harquebusiers and caribins, an early form of dragoon not used in the ECW, usually wore either back and breast plates with a pot helmet, or no armour. Wallenstein banned backplates for harquebusiers after their poor performance at Lutzen, and the Austrian Army continued this practice until cavalry stopped wearing armour altogether.

- **Buff coats** could be worn over or under 3/4 armour. Foot officers also wore buff, as did dragoons and some medium cavalry. These coats were sometimes washed black, and

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usually sleeveless. The reason buff coats were used as the primary armour in the ECW was the lack of armour. The infantry rarely used buff coats. (Infantry was treated as a disposable commodity, particularly during the last half of the war.) Although Sweden was a primary source of elk hides used to make buff coats, the Swedes seldom used this armour and based tactics partly to offset their lack of armour. The hides were too valuable as a cash export to use. After 1635, as Swedish tactics became the standard cavalry tactic, the use of 3/4 armour declined. Buff coats became more popular for cavalry as a result.

- **Pants.** The Swedes tried to have the pants match the coats, as did late war armies. Better-dressed units, (such as elite troops, Wallenstein, or Saxon) would match or contrast. Otherwise, brown, tan, dull red, white, or whatever was stolen from the peasants that morning could be used.
- **Leather** was usually not washed black nor dyed white, but if you want to spruce up your elite units, feel free. Danes, Swedes, and possibly Brandenburg used grey eelskin and this can be used to give a nice contrast with primary coat colours. Shoes were brown or black, except for eastern troops. Most nobility wore red heels, except the Danes who were banned from doing so.
- **Stockings and hose.** Good units had stockings that contrasted with the coats. Spanish hose were often stripped: red and yellow, blue and brown, and yellow and blue were common. Bavarian foot mostly used bright red stockings. Otherwise, white, tan, light brown, dull red, blue and green were used.
- **Cuffs, trim and facings.** These sometimes contrasted with primary coat colours, particularly with elite units. Cuff colours were more prevalent after 1635.
- **Coat styles.** At the start of the war, style followed the Spanish wambus, with a triangle shape broad at the shoulders and narrow at the waist. The Dutch alternative was the doublet that flared out at the waist and hung below the waistline. Eastern armies (Saxon, Poles, and Swedes) tended to go their own way, with coats that ended mid thigh. The types of coats worn were directly related to whoever the country was allied to or what religion they were, if purse permitted. Also, whoever won last year's battles would be copied in next year's fashions. Coat length tended to shorten as the war continued, from 1640 on, and reached the waist by the end of the war.

## General comments on uniforms

- **Elite units** wore red, blue, or green. Red was often used as the coat colour for the Queens Regiments. For example, The Queen of Brandenburg's Regiment wore red coats trimmed in green. Denmark and England's queens also used red coats. Of course red dyes were the cheapest.
- **Artillery** used dark colours to hide the dirt and powder residue. Black, brown, and dark blue were common. The first units of artillery that were part of an army, as opposed to being contracted, were Swedish. Uniforms were usually not used by artillerymen. Medium Artillerymen were known to use brown or green to discourage snipers. Perhaps brown or pearl grey for Austrians, and blue for Swedes, other wise make artillerymen as irregular as possible.

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- **Cavalry** wore light grey, white, or buff coats either with or instead of 3/4 armour. Cavalry also wore coats the same colour as either their national colours or the heraldic colours of the man they served.
- **City Militias** wore black, grey and brown mostly, although a good example of militia dress for Danzig is in the Osprey Polish Infantry book. Militias often wore very baggy 'shorts' that reached to the knee and then hose. This would be very practical clothing for muddy siege work and if not active in open country. The French and the Poles seem to be the only troops that wore this type of outfit while on campaign. The Spanish, of course, still adhered to the wambus and trunk hose. Although this had a different look, the Spanish outfit had the same advantages and problems as the 'shorts' of the city militias. These two modes of dress were suitable for troops garrisoning towns or engaged in siege work.

## Field signs

Various signs such as sashes, ribbons, feathers, were used to identify troops on the battlefield. This expedient was used throughout the war and was based on the Kings' or Regimental commander's coat of arms, much like livery. Field signs were needed because opposing force's uniforms were similar or identical. Also, allied armies would have to agree on common signs. Passwords and battle cries were used to help reduce confusion.

The following lists commonly used field signs:

- **Bavaria.** Light blue and white.
- **Christian of Brunswick.** Blue and yellow.
- **Denmark.** Blue and orange with white feathers. After 1625 the Danes reverted to the Oldenberg colours, red and yellow.
- **Dutch.** Orange. States troops wore a orange, blue and white cockade. City militias wore Red, white and blue. Amsterdam wore blue and white. Haarlem wore white, red and gold.
- **Imperial.** Red and yellow or red and white.
- **French.** White and red or blue and white. French officers always wore white sashes.
- **Saxony.** Yellow to 1630, often dark green after 1630.
- **Palatine.** Possibly white.
- **Poland.** Red and white or straw.
- **Sweden.** Blue, straw, yellow, or green.
- **Wallenstein.** Green, yellow, or Imperial.
- **Hesse.** Silver, blue, and red.
- **Hanover.** White feather.
- **Swiss.** Red, blue, and yellow. In French service; white blue and red.

## National armies

### France

The French were fond of broad collars and lace. The jackets were flared at the waist and short (mid thigh). As the war continued, the jacket length continued up towards the waist. Late war, post 1635, troops sometimes copied the knee length coat trends of Saxony and Sweden. Pants had ribbons at the knee and could reach mid calf with buttons running down the outside seams. By the 1640's the pants ended at the knee. French headgear was a grey or black, brimmed felt hat. The boukinkan, (a hat similar to the montero) was also used.

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Officers wore capes or tabards (cassocks), as did the musketeers, and French officers always wore white sashes. The baldric was worn on the right shoulder and the bandoleer, if any, on the left. The French drummer wore their drum on the right side with the head almost vertical. Most drummers of the period wore the drum on the left, but the head of the drum was vertical.

Pikemen were unarmoured. The exceptions to this rule were the Guards, The Swiss (who even wore greaves), and the Vieux Corps. Some 'pikemen' would not even have pikes. French Infantry liked to melee and the 'Fury of France' dates from this period. When it came to defending or prolonged fire fights, they tended to wilt.

Dragoons were for additional firepower and attached to cavalry units. They were disbanded from 1626 to 1635. Prior to 1626 they were useful against the Huguenots, and after 1635, when France became actively involved in the war, it was recognised that dragoons were still needed.

The following coat colours were used:

- The Maison Du Roi (gendarmes) wore red or blue coats. The only other cavalry Regiment that wore red was the Royal Rousillon. The guards' horse furniture was black. Cavalry often wore cassocks with livery.
- Dragoons coat and cuffs combinations included; blue blue; red blue; green red; and yellow red.
- French infantry were mostly in grey (or gris blanc) with red, white or blue also used.
- The Guard was in gris blanc by 1670.
- The Swiss dressed in national / cantonal style from the 16th century. There were usually in 300 man companies recruited from the same canton and replacements came from the same canton or village. They used the pike longer and stayed with the 1 pike per 1 musket ratio throughout the period. They also stayed in full kit for most, if not all, of the period.
- The musketeers wore light blue tabards with a white cross and fluer de lis at the points of the cross. The Oriflame was in the arms of the cross, either red or yellow.
- Richeleu's and Mazarin's men wore red tabards with a white cross.
- French Royal Regiments (both mounted and infantry) could be either in dark or light blue.

## **Savoy**

Savoy used dark blue or grey for infantry and also used French national colours. Most Savoyards that fought in Germany were Mansfield's mercenaries and dressed like landsknechts. The light blue used by Palatine and Bavaria was known as Savoy Blue, perhaps the Savoyards also used. During the war Savoy tried to play France and Spain off against each other to Savoy's benefit, with limited success.

## **Denmark and Saxony**

These two Protestant countries were two of the major players of the war. Both armies were of good quality, (Breitenfeld aside, the Saxon Army probably was the third best army of the war, after Tilly's Catholic League and the Swedes). Both did not have the size and staying power to go it alone in the war and eventually had to switch sides to survive. Saxon and Danish troops fought on both sides and make a great allied contingent that can be used for either side. Both armies tended to dress well, until the treasury became exhausted.

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## Denmark

Tarnstrom's "The Sword of Scandinavia" is a surprising fount of information.

- Denmark's elite units wore red, with green, blue, or yellow cuffs and stockings.
- Christian IV's personal units of foot, the Blue Regiment, wore blue with white trim by 1625 and were armed with firelocks. Hats were grey.
- The Queen's regiment of foot may have worn red with green trim.
- Other foot wore green, (2 regiments), yellow, and red.
- English troops (Morgan's from Palatine and Mansfield's service) and Scottish troops (Monroe) probably wore blue.
- Danish harquebusiers wore light blue coats.
- The first cavalry regiment wore red cassocks and the second regiment wore blue cassocks. Pants were red, blue and yellow by squadron.

## Saxony

They dressed as Protestants and fought tactically as Imperialists. There is an abundance of information in *The Armies of Ducal Saxony in the Thirty Years War* by Belarus (Trans. Condrey). As this is a rare book, the following is a summary along with other sources.

The Saxons used buff more than most armies, for both pants and coats. They were also fond of striped shirts, blue and yellow being most common. Hats were grey, black, and unusually, sometimes white. Officers wore black jackets or doublets and black pants. Any sleeves showing were yellow striped. A grey hat and coat completed their garb. Horse furniture would be yellow, red, yellow and black striped or green with gold trim for the generals and their bodyguards. The Saxons used yellow sashes and trim if not noted for a particular battle.

Pre 1623 and most Protestant militia

- All foot wore grey hats, short grey coats with red collars and cuffs, and grey or buff pants.
- Pikemen's armour was blackened and the pike wore white collars. Pikemen usually wore buff pant and buff coats under their armour.
- The Dresden Militia guards wore blue and yellow and were an exception to the general rule.
- The Saxon Cavalry of this period was formed from the feudal levy into two regiments. The 3/4 armour was regulation issue and blackened. Schlieber's Regiment wore red coats and Goldstein's Regiment wore yellow coats. The pant colour varied by squadron and grey, black, blue, and buff is mentioned.
- This army is basically Saxon militia and could be used as such throughout the war. The colour combinations are typical for Protestant militias.

Post 1623

- Artillerists, pioneers, and dragoons attached to artillery wore blue coats with yellow trim. Pants could be blue or yellow.
- Saxon dragoons not attached wore blue coats with gold trim.
- The cavalry wore black, white, red, and brown coats with gold trim under their armour with the squadron pants as before. Some cavalry also wore red, black, and brown coats with silver trim. Additionally, yellow coats with black trim and white coats with red trim were worn.
- Saxon foot combinations included red coats with yellow trim, red and white, yellow and black, green and white, and blue with red.

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## Imperial Armies

The Imperialists tended toward the landsknecht style of dress, so less uniformity was evident in the armies fighting for and allied with the Holy Roman Emperor.

Tilly, the commander of the Catholic League (Bavarian) Army, always said, "a ragged soldier and a bright musket". The old warrior monk Tilly was one of the most successful generals of the war and his ragged (poorly dressed) soldiers made short work of the better-uniformed Protestants until Gustavus changed the methods of war.

Wallenstein's armies were an exception; the greatest military entrepreneur of the period took pains to insure his armies were well dressed. After his demise, the Imperial armies inherited most of his units and they formed the basis of the Austrian Army.

- Imperial troops in general wore either red, yellow or pearl grey/white (undyed linen)
- Isolani's Croats were described as dressed in black with red coats and cloaks. They wore red or black boots. They never wore green or blue boots since the Turks wore those colours.
- Other Croats are mentioned as wearing red coats with gold trim.
- Croats and Grenziers (Austrian border skirmishers) often wore striped vests or waist sashes.
- Austrian units wore pearl grey or white.
- The artillerists may have worn brown.
- Austrians also wore red and yellow coats.
- Bavarian and Catholic League units wore light blue or red coats and sometimes Imperial colours.
- The infantry almost always wore bright red stockings.
- Pappenheim's cuirassiers wore all black armour with polish type helmets, reputed to be pistol proof.

Spanish troops usually fought the Dutch but did conquer the Lower Palatine in the 1620s and reinforcements travelling from Italy to Flanders could be involved en passant, most notably in the Nordlingen campaign (1632). The painting "The Siege of Breda" is a good starting place for Spanish troops, so is the Osprey Armada book. Spain still looked like a 16th century army.

- Spanish troops wore ruffs and wambus with trunk hose. The wambus was usually dark brown and dark red stockings were the most usual colour, but stockings were often striped.
- Members of the Council of Blood (1580s) wore dark green wambus with red hose.
- Walloons wore red coats and served as mounted arquebus or musketeers for Spanish and Imperial Armies.
- Spanish dragoons wore yellow or buff coats with red cuffs.
- Other Flanders dragoons wore red, blue, or green coats (elite colours).
- Foot Officers and gentlemen volunteers wore a tan tabard with violet and white checked trim. The Burgundy cross was in violet on the shoulders and the Spanish coat of arms was centred on the front and back of the tabard.

Wallenstein was the most successful of the mercenary entrepreneurs, until murdered by his employer. He started as a petty noble and went on to rival the Austrian Hapsburgs.

- The most common coat colours were green, yellow or the Imperial colours. I believe that the green was a lighter shade than the Danes or Saxons.
- Wallenstein had a Lancer guard unit, as did his Croat general Isloni, 200 men each. His guard at Lutzen wore red with light blue lining and trim, the foot guards (600) trimmed with gold and silver.

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- Bertold Wallenstein's foot wore green coats and Max Wallenstein's foot wore yellow coats.

The Austrian Army absorbed most of Wallenstein's army. For example, Hardegg's Regiment from Upper Austria was Wallenstein's Lifeguard that he led as a Colonel at Zablau in 1619 and wore grey in the 1630s. Gallas' Regiments that formerly served Wallenstein were specifically re-uniformed in grey in 1642. This army was usually well supplied and equipped so should be as snappy dressers as the Saxons.

## Protestant armies

Having already covered the turncoat Protestants - see Saxony and Denmark - I now turn attention to the remaining Protestant protagonists. Protestants tended to dress more soberly than their Catholic opponents and tended to be more uniformly dressed. The Protestants recognised the morale value and esprit de corps that uniforms impart sooner than the Catholics. It also helped reduce desertion. The comments on Saxon militia apply to many Protestant militias, but not their main army.

- Protestant Union forces may have worn ruffs and dressed in trunk hose and wambus.
- Early war Protestants also used the older style Birkheim helmets, Burgonets, and crested helmets.
- No specific colours are mentioned but blue seems to be the Protestant colour of choice.

The only colour mentioned for both Brandenburg and Brunswick Wolfenbuttel (the mad Halberstadter troops) is blue. Three regiments of Brandenburgers sent to join the Poles in the 1630s defected to the Swedes; these troops are mentioned wearing 'dark' blue. So, Swedes could have some dark blue. What I find interesting is that the Brandenburg troops were raised as part of the Ducal Prussian contingent for the Polish Army, and as such should have been worn black and yellow the Ducal colours. The problem with black is that it fades to green and you end up with green and faded yellow/brown, so maybe George William was trying to improve the long-term look of his army's uniforms.

- Palatine Guardsmen wore white uniforms with light blue trim, a possible reversal of the typical uniforms of the rank and file? It was common with drummers. Palatine was a major member of the Protestant Union, so blue is possible.
- English volunteers played a major role in the Lower Palatine battles against the Spanish and wore blue with yellow lining and white braiding, possibly Palatine forces wore this in general.
- Mansfield had regiments named Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow but probably only were named after their flags' colours and not their coats.
- Hanoverian troops had red coats with grey stockings. Possibly blue shirts and brown pants complete the uniform. These troops were raised in 1630 to fight with Sweden.
- Hesse Cassel had some uniforms were dark blue with red stockings and possibly red or silver cuffs, (cuff colours for late war). Red or grey coats with grey pants were also used. Silver, blue and red from the coat of arms were used as trim. Mounted jaegers were raised in 1631, 300 man company, and probably in blue.
- Hanseatic League. Three regiments went over to the Swedes and were called the black Regiment. Another source says Hansards wore white coats. Perhaps both are right and either would be correct.
- Wurtemberg. Sources in the early 1700's state that Wurtembergers traditionally wore white. Whether this tradition reaches back to the war is unproven, but likely. Yellow and black were the livery colours and would make a nice contrast to white uniforms, but I have no direct evidence to support.

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Volunteers from Great Britain.

- The ECW provides plenty of examples of the type of clothing worn by individuals serving on the continent.
- Scots usually served the Protestant, the Irish served the Catholic. English volunteers served in both.
- The Scots had entire regiments in Danish, Swedish and French Armies.
- The English and Irish had Regiments in the Army of Flanders.
- English troops serving the Palatine, Mansfield, or the Duke of Hamilton are always mentioned in blue coats, and usually grey stockings.
- Scottish troops did not wear tartan. For that matter what is known as tartan was not worn anywhere during this period. They did however, wear 'hodden grey' as did the English and the Irish.

Hodden grey was described by Oman as "motley or other sad green colour, or russet" (p. 385). Anything from grey to red brown or dark green would suffice. I believe that tweed would be appropriate for these homespun articles of clothing. The English in the Osprey book on Swedish Infantry are a good example of this type of cloth.

Dutch troops

- The sea beggars (the first Dutch troops), wore grey and was the first uniform by default.
- Dutch troops wore grey, black and brown and almost always wore a orange, blue and white cockade to identify states troops.
- Saxon 1620's militia uniforms would be good for most and Dutch guards wore blue.
- Cavalry wore stripped shirts and pants and infantry sometimes wore stripped pants.
- Blue and yellow uniforms are also possible.
- Early war troops wore ruffs and wambus, later period discarded the wambus and ruffs for long coats. Their hose were often red.
- The Dutch were paid regularly each month and trained regularly, but were more concerned with results and less concerned with looks.

## Sweden

The two Osprey and Gush's books are what you need. Sweden even tried to have the pants match the coat. Gush's book also touches on the 'traditional' uniforms for cavalry. None of these books mention the Swedish field sign of the hat band. Two old accounts state that the Swedes wore a yellow hat band with blue edging on the band to identify Swedish troops. Parker's book also supports this view (see p 301).

The following is a short summary of Swedish uniforms starting with the infantry.

Infantry

- Infantry wore unwaisted long coats (smocks). The basic cut was the peasant coat that reached from to just beyond the waist or almost to the knee.
- The hat was grey felt except where noted.
- Buff coats, when worn, were sleeveless as were most buff coats of this period.
- Armour was blackened.
- Militia and pre 1626 coats were tawny orange and or light grey with white trim.
- The red, blue and yellow regiments at least wore coloured cassocks during this period.
- Native Swedish troops often wore blue. Light blue overcoats with fur trim were worn in winter.



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- Post 1626 wore blue, yellow and red coats and pants. Thurn's regiment wore blue. See also info above on defecting units.
- Officers wore white lay down collars and cuffs with a blue and yellow sash. (The sash colour is post Lutzen).
- Officer's uniform could be black, grey, or the regiment's colour.
- Ensigns and the Kings' Lifeguard musketeers wore grey.
- Dragoons dressed in red coats with grey pants and or all in brown.
- All black 'mourning' uniforms were issued after the death of the King and dragoons and infantry wore these expensive uniforms.
- Most Scots serving Sweden were quickly given uniforms, although 'redshanks' volunteers hoping to join sometimes followed the army in traditional clothing.
- British and Scots volunteers wore red and black tartan or tawny with grey pants, stockings, and cassocks. Blue bonnets and tartan trews were also worn.
- Gameshooters, or jagers, were dressed in blue.

## Artillery

- Artillery specialists were dressed in black or blue with the labourers assisting the crews in grey or blue.

## Cavalry

- Cavalry in general were dressed in blackened back and breastplate with a long coat or buff and leather gantlets, so most of any uniform was mostly covered anyway.
- The household cavalry dressed in blue and at least one other Regiment did also.
- Household troops also wore Vasa livery, black and yellow (gold).
- Known cavalry coats and possibly cuffs and trim were; Smalands = red and blue; Upplands = red and yellow; Ostgota = red and black.
- Finnish cavalry wore an orange or blue coat with grey or blue pants. They wore light coloured sheepskin and fur caps of buff leather, or orange coloured hats.

## Bibliography

- *Historical Wargamer Magazine*, August 1993, "Painting the 18th century", Charles C. Sharp. A good general article that does not directly relate, but worthwhile for ideas and the effects of weather on the dyes used.
- *Military Uniforms of the World*, 1968, Blandford Press, London. Don't look at the pictures first, read the text. A gold mine of information.
- *The Art of War in the Age of Marlborough*, D. Chandler, Page 85.
- *The Thirty Years War*, G. Parker. Armies at Breitenfeld in particular page 92. Also information on Gallas' troop's uniforms in general.
- *Osprey Men at Arms Series*. Sweden, Poland, Turkey, Spain in Flanders, Irish.
- *European Weapons and Warfare, 1618 to 1648*, E. Wagner, Octopus Press, London. City militias, Poles, Turks, Hussars, Light horse and officers in particular. Don't pass up if you get the chance to buy. Many of the color drawings come right out of *Theatrum Europeum*.
- *The Ottoman Empire and the Napoleonic Wars*, W. Johnson and C Bell, Raider Books, Leeds, 1988. The first edition was privately published in the USA and is better for the TYW than second edition because they removed some info not pertinent to the Napoleonic era.
- *Renaissance Armies*, G. Gush. A little thin on info after 1600 but still very useful.
- *Wargames Illustrated*. Various issues.
- *The Armies of Electoral Saxony in the Thirty Years War*. Belarus.