

## *Spanish Support of the American War of Independence 1775-83*

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The War of Independence of Britain's American Colonies against the Crown began in 1775. Events went badly for the Americans until their victory at Saratoga in 1777 over a British army descending from Canada into upper New York.

Meanwhile, American diplomats, principally Benjamin Franklin, had been importuning France to assist the colonies against its old enemy the British. The decisive victory demonstrated to the French that the Americans were militarily viable. France began pouring arms and munitions into the colonies. These were followed by troops in 1779 and 1781.

For its part, Spain had no more love of the British than did France. Towards the end of the Seven Years War 1756-63 (known in the Colonies as the French and Indian War) Spain had joined France against the British. With the defeat of France by 1760, Britain turned against Spain in the Caribbean. Spain lost both East and West Florida and several islands. It was further humiliated by the temporary loss of the mighty fortress of Havana, Cuba in 1762 to a combined British-American force.

This put the British to the east bank of the Mississippi River, the border with French Louisiana. Louisiana had been a troublesome colony so the French were happy to cede it to Spain, presumably in compensation for its losses to the British on France's behalf.

In 1769 LtGen Alejandro O'Reilly arrived in New Orleans to suppress an insurrection against the new Spanish rule. He was one of those Irish

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expatriate «wild geese» soldieradventurers who found employment in many 18th century European armies. Arriving with 2,000 soldiers he quickly put down the rebellion. In 1770 he turned over the colony to a new governor, Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga, an old soldier.

In 1776 with the American Revolution well underway two American soldiers, Major George Gibson and a Lieutenant Linn, arrived in New Orleans to request Spanish aid from Unzaga. They pointed out that should the British prevail against the colonies the Spanish West Indies and Mexico could be next on the British list for conquest.

Gibson's immediate need was for gunpowder. He paid for 9,000 pounds of it with an 1,850 Spanish dollar draft on the Virginia Colony. Linn took most of it up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to Fort Pitt with the remainder going by sea to Philadelphia.

At about this time Bernado de Gálvez arrived in New Orleans with orders in hand. They read, in part, Lieutenant Colonel Don Bernado de Gálvez, captain in the Seville Infantry Regiment has been named by the King, Colonel of the permanent Battalion of New Orleans.

On his way, Gálvez stopped in Havana to visit his friend O'Reilly, now in command in Cuba. O'Reilly added to the orders a glowing recommendation and pointed that Galvez's uncle, José de Gálvez Minister of the Indies, was his particular friend. Concurrently, Unzaga received orders to be captain-general of Venezuela and on the first day of 1777 swore in Bernado as acting governor of Louisiana.

Gálvez was 30 years old with a reputation for flamboyant heroics equal to his very good family connections. In 1762 at 16 he entered the army as a cadet and served under Reilly in the invasion of Britain's ally, Portugal. When uncle José came to New Spain, as Mexico was then known, as *visitador* or inspector general, he brought along Bernado as a captain of infantry.

In 1770 Bernado led a successful expedition against Apache indians on the northern frontier. This was followed by a second expedition in which Gálvez was severely wounded. He took a leave of absence to serve in the French Army and returned to Spain in 1775 in time to go with O'Reilly on an expedition against the Moors of Algiers where he was again wounded.

Uncle José saw to his promotion to lieutenant colonel and went him to Louisiana with detailed instructions. They included tightening up Unzaga's loose administration and to reorganize the militia into a bigger better disciplined force.

Major Gibson had spoken to Unzaga of an American plan to send an American force down the Mississippi to clear out British settlements on the east bank. The force would then sieze Mobile and Pensacola on the West Florida coast and turn all these British holdings over the Spain. In return the Americans requested urgently needed material — munitions, arms, medicines, and blankets.

The cautious Unzaga referred the request to Minister of the Indies, José de Gálvez, who approved the American request adding that the supplies would be drawn from Havana but also stressing secrecy. He also indicated that Spain would accept any captured British territory.

By the time the minister's approval and instructions arrived in New Orleans, Bernado Gálvez was in charge and he immediately went to work arranging clandestine supply lines to the American Colonies. This occupied most of 1777 but by 1778 Gálvez was ready to take the field against the British.

A small party of Continental Marines and irregulars under a Captain Willing came down the Mississippi after receiving supplies from the Spanish in St. Louis, now in the state of Missouri. He rolled up British settlements along the shore before reaching New Orleans. Resupplied by Gálvez, Willing returned to St. Louis where the following year joined George Rogers Clark's 11th Virginia Regiment in his campaign against British forts in Illinois.

The American irritation on the Mississippi and Gálvez's openly secret war supply shipments to the Colonies stirred up the British who began to reinforce Mobile and Pensacola and strengthen their two fortified posts on the Mississippi at Manchac and Baton Rouge. When word of this reached Gálvez he improved his defenses on the west bank of the Mississippi and received reinforcements. By then he had 700 regulars and 17 militia companies with nearly 1,500 men.

On 21 June 1779 Spain formally declared war against Great Britain and Gálvez was ordered to clean the British out of West Florida and their remaining posts on the Mississippi. Gálvez began by moving up the Mississippi with 700 men and adding militia companies and indians along the way until his force numbered 1,500.

Using his regulars to block reinforcement of Manchac from the north, Gálvez captured the lightly defended fort by a *coup de main*. Baton Rouge was a different matter. It was a proper ditched and palisaded work mounting 18 cannon to Galvez's 10 pieces and defended by 400 regulars and 150 volunteers. Gálvez's troops threw up countervailing works and an artillery duel followed with the weaker Spanish guns proving superior. By mid-afternoon two British officers came out under a flag of truce to arrange a surrender. Fort Panmure at Natchez farther up river with 80 grenadiers was included in Gálvez's surrender terms.

Gálvez's success gave him both banks of the Mississippi and a promotion to major general. His next task would be the taking of Mobile but for this undertaking he would need reinforcements from Havana.

Don Diego Navarro had replaced O'Reilly at Havana as captain-general. Gálvez had asked him for 7,000 troops and a fleet to take Pensacola. Navarro responded with fewer than 600 men with which first to take Mobile.

At the beginning of 1780, Gálvez sailed from New Orleans with 754 men. He made a base at Mobile Point at the mouth of Mobile Bay where

he was joined by 567 men from Havana. From there he sent an officer to Fort Charlotte, Mobile's main defense, with gifts of wine, fresh food, and Havana cigars and a demand for surrender. Captain Elias Durnford, the British commander was not ready to surrender however.

Gálvez moved his guns into position and began a two-day cannonade. Again Spanish guns proved better than the British and at sundown of the second day the British raised the white flag over the fort. Durnford marched his 269 men down to the beach and surrendered.

The next day a reconnaissance party reported that Major General John Campbell with 1,100 men was marching from Pensacola to relieve Mobile. Two days later scouts brought in prisoners with the information that Campbell, learning of the loss of Mobile, had reversed his course back to Pensacola.

Campbell was under orders from Sir Henry Clinton, commander-in-chief, and Lord George Germain, secretary of state for the colonies, to seize New Orleans in the event of war with Spain. Galvez's offensive preempted the British and put Campbell on the defensive.

1780 was a year of preparation and false starts. While Campbell rearranged and strengthened his defenses, Navarro embarked 2,000 troops at Havana but returned when he mistook a British supply convoy for the battle fleet. Galvez visited Havana to plead his case for reinforcements and coincidentally two days later Vice Admiral José Solano arrived from Cádiz with 17 warships escorting 140 transports bearing 12,000 troops.

The expedition against Pensacola was mounted with 49 transports with 3,900 troops escorted by seven ships-of-the-line and five frigates. It sailed on 16 October and was quickly hit by a five-day hurricane which scattered the fleet around the Gulf of Mexico. British Admiral George Rodney's fleet suffered even greater damage to the Spanish advantage. Solano returned to Havana after remarshalling his force and promptly resumed preparation for another try at Pensacola.

At year's end Campbell sent a small force, mainly Waldecker German Auxiliaries, against Mobile. The attack against Fort Charlotte, launched on 7 January 1781, was supported by the frigates *Mentor* and *Port Royal*. The commander, Colonel Von Hanxleden of the Waldeckers, was quickly killed and his second-in-command elected to retreat back to Pensacola.

Also in January the Spanish fleet in Havana was joined by a French squadron of four ships-of-the-line and four frigates. A council of war or *Junta de Generales* was held and another expedition was approved by month's end. Gálvez was given virtually a free hand and an additional 1,300 elite troops to strengthen Louisiana. If he could get enough additional forces from New Orleans and Mobile and if prospects were favorable he could attack Pensacola. Of course Galvez would attack.

On 9 March with the 1,300 light infantry and grenadiers as an advance force he captured the abandoned fort at Siguenza Point and all of Santa

Rosa Island as the rest of his force came up by sea from New Orleans and Mobile.

Gálvez entered the harbor with a four-ship squadron under his own command. He was shortly followed by the fleet under Captain Don José Calvo de Irazabal. By the 24th 2,250 men from Mobile and New Orleans had arrived to the west and north of Pensacola. Gálvez moved his 1,300 from Santa Rosa Island and with the newly arrived troops began the investment and reduction of Pensacola's landward defenses, the redoubts Queen's and Prince of Wales's and Fort George.

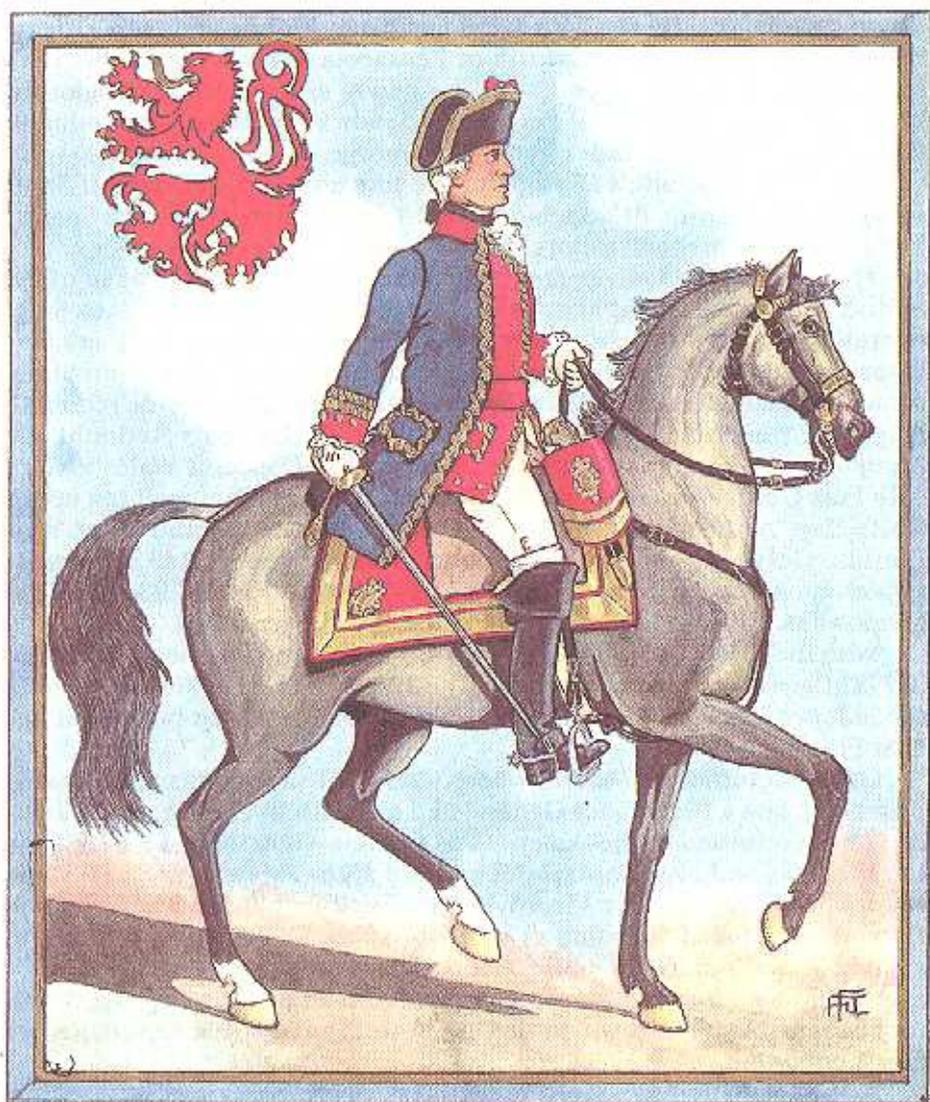
On 23 April Solano's 15 ships-of-the-line and 7 frigates lay off Santa Rosa island and with 40 launches landed 1,600 soldiers plus 1,500 Spanish and French marines and sailors.

Thus reinforced Gálvez moved his lines within gunshot range of the British and in the ensuing skirmishing was wounded two more times. Siege operations began with driving saps to some higher ground which dominated Queen's Redoubt and emplacing batteries of 24-pounders. The redoubt was soon reduced by this fire culminating with a shell penetrating the redoubt's magazine which blew up killing 85 British. The Queen's Redoubt was occupied and more guns brought to bear on the Prince of Wales's which with Fort George was rendered untenable. By 3 p.m. Campbell ran up the white flag. After some negotiations Campbell surrendered all of West Florida. Gálvez's spoils of war included 1,113 prisoners, 143 cannon, 40 swivel guns, 6 howitzers, 4 mortars, 2,142 muskets, and 298 barrels of gunpowder. His own losses were 74 killed and 198 wounded.

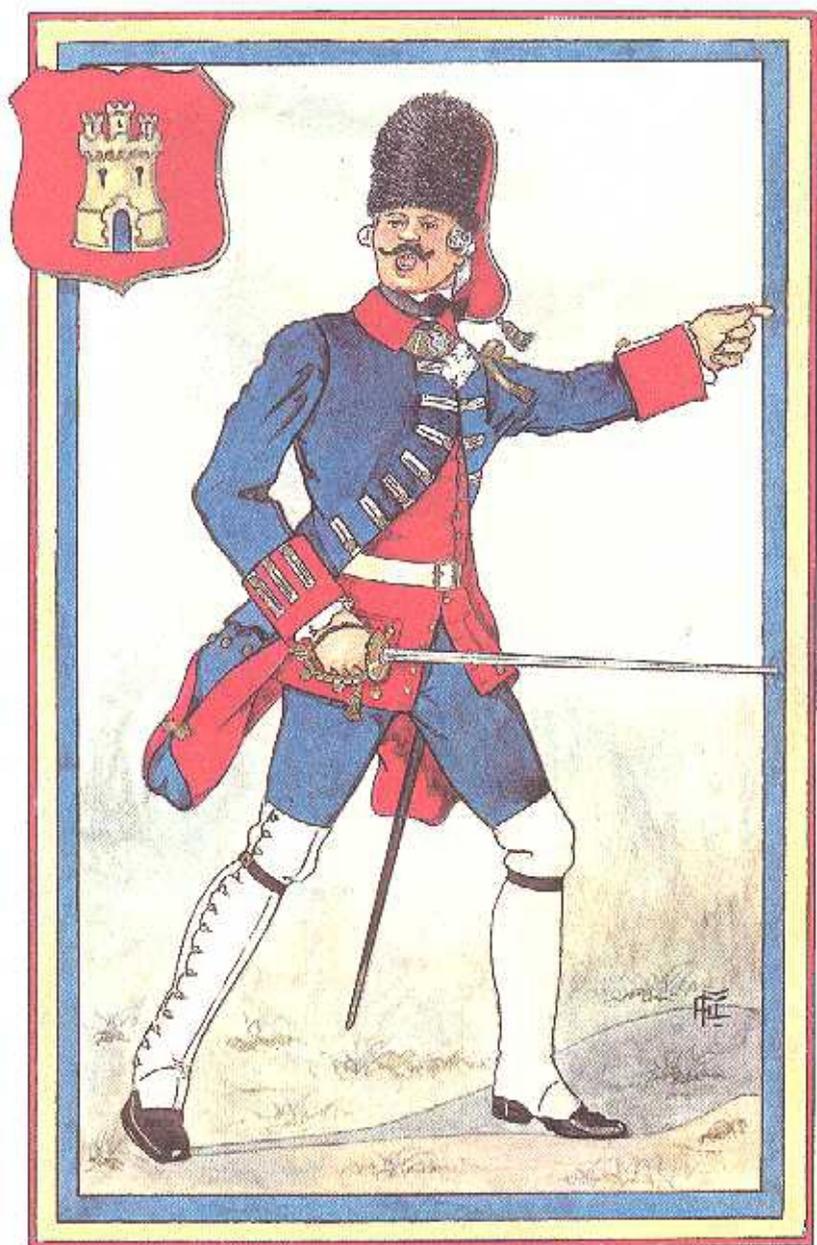
With the capture of both Yorktown in Virginia and Pensacola in Florida in 1781 the war was essentially over. The Treaty of Paris in 1783 recognized the independence of the American Colonies and returned both West and Last Florida to Spain.

Galvez returned to Madrid where Carlos III showed his appreciation by making him a Lieutenant General and a Count. In 1785 the new Conde de Gálvez returned to the Americas as Captain-General of Louisiana and the Floridas and also Captain-General of Cuba. Meanwhile his father, Marias de Gálvez, became Viceroy of New Spain or Mexico. The same year Bernado succeeded his father as Viceroy of New Spain while retaining his captain-generalships. He died at Mexico City of fever in November 1786 after building a fort and his summer palace on an adjacent hill which was to become better known under its Aztec name of *Chapultepec* or grasshopper hill.

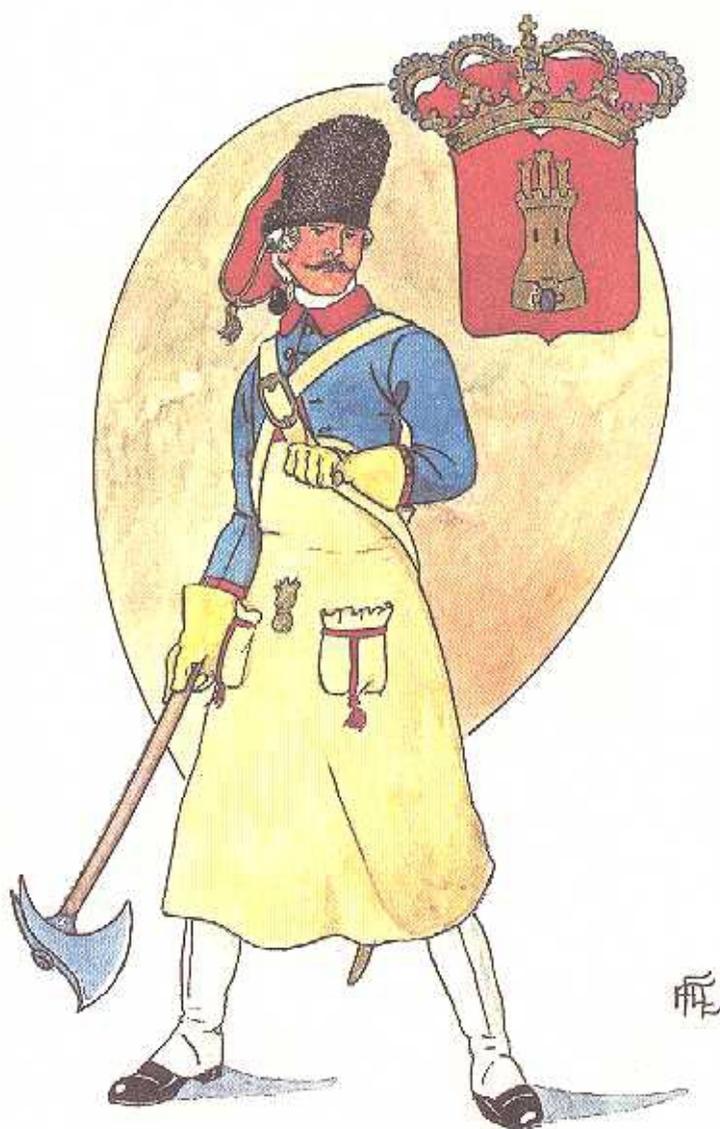
Although little recognized in histories of the American Revolution, Bernado de Gálvez must stand alongside George Washington and Jean-Baptiste Rochambeau in the military pantheon of the United States.



179; Spanish Army in the Independence War.  
General in company.



*Spanish Army in the Independence War 1779.  
Inmemorial del Rey 1. Inf. Regt.  
Grenadier Officer.*



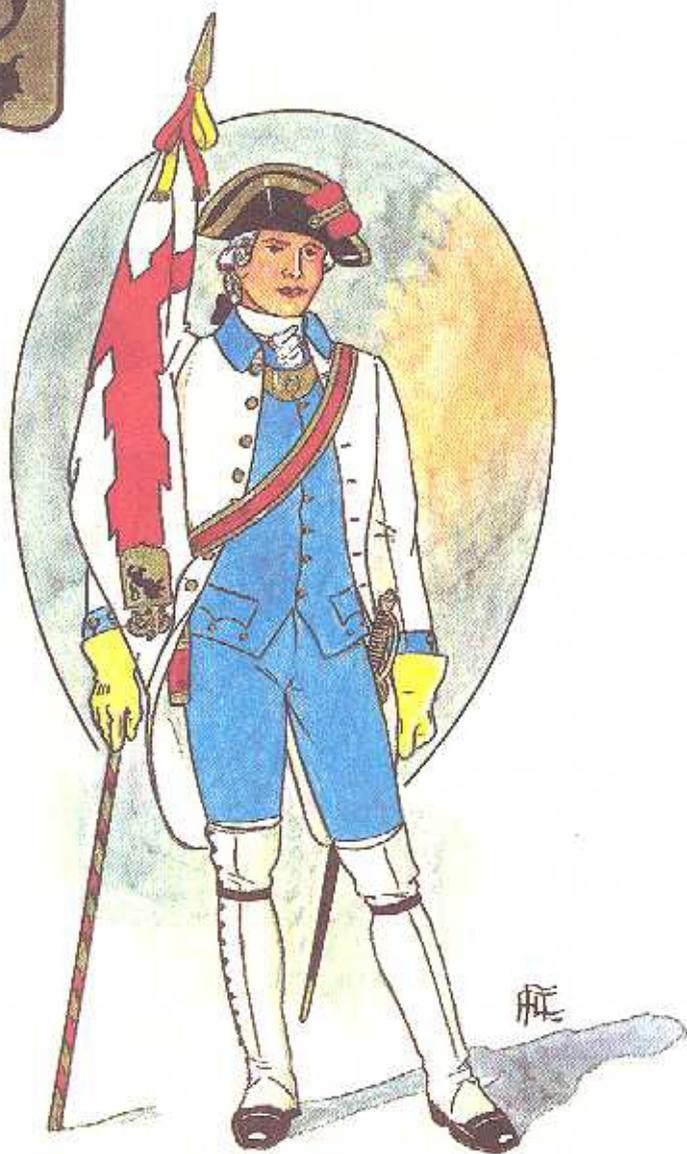
*Spanish Army in the Siege of Ponferrada. Homage to the Rey Regt.*



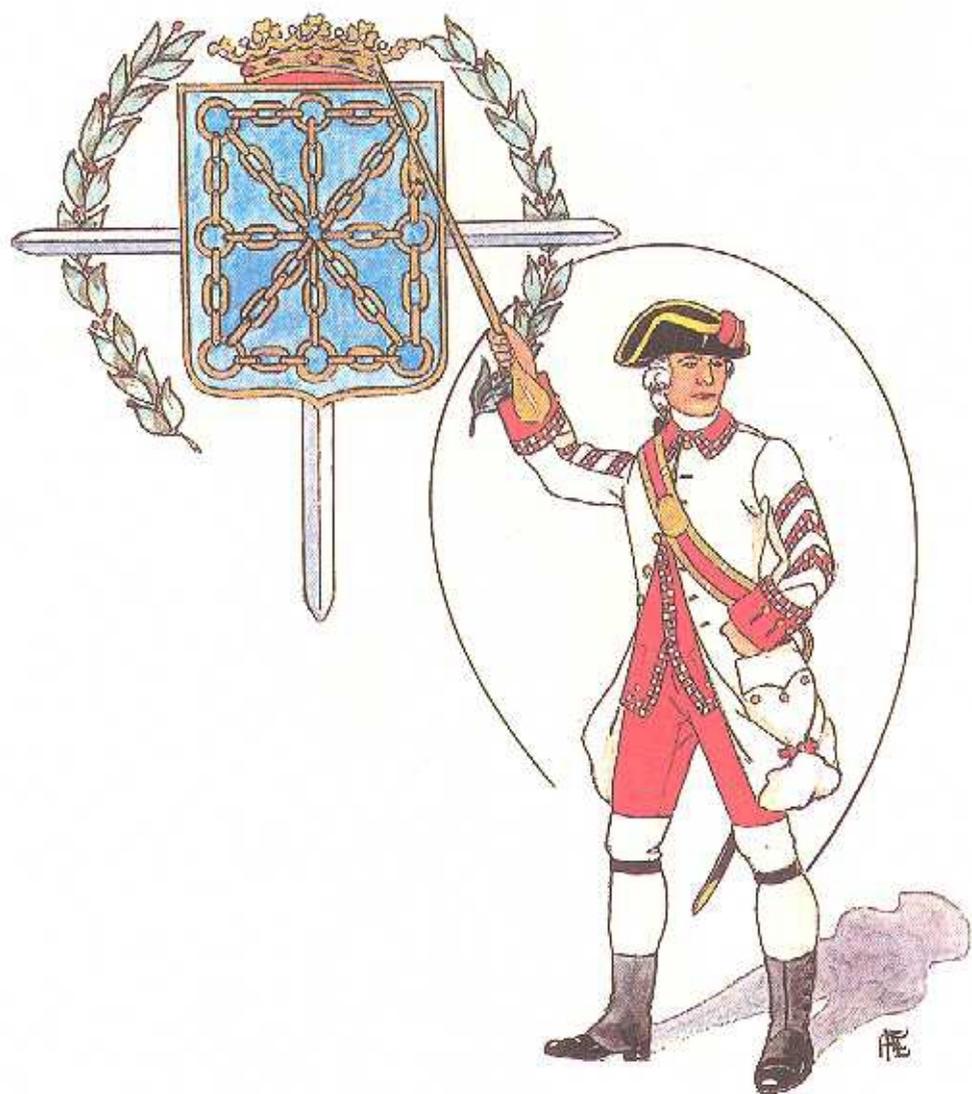
*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola.  
Principe Regiment (fusileer Sergeant).*



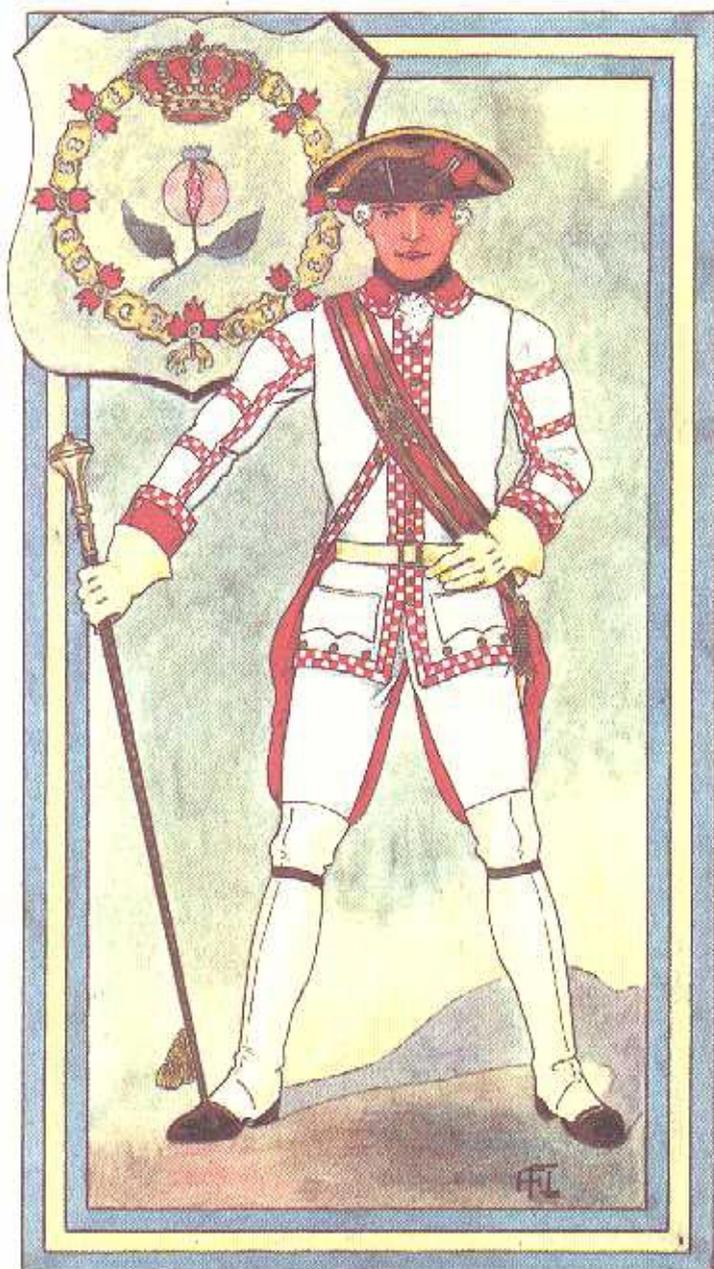
*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola 1811.  
España Regiment fifer.*



*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola  
Mandés Regiment. (Battalion-Flagbearer.)*



*Spanish Army in the siege of Pampelona, Navarra Regiment.*



*Spanish Army in the Independence War, 1809.  
Príncipe 2, Inf. Regt. Tambour Major.*



179. Spanish Army in the Independence War  
Soria 8 Inf Regt. (Whimmer in fatigues)



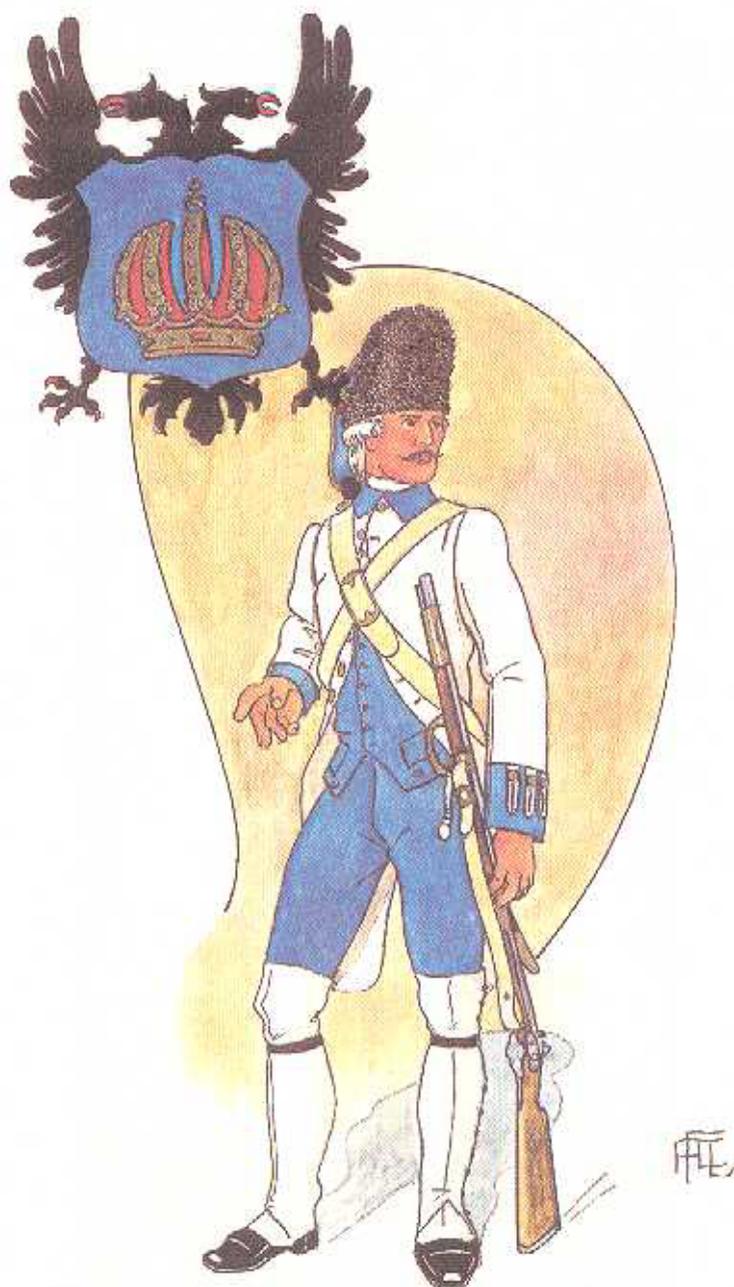
*Spanish Army in the siege of Pensacola, 1781 Regt.*



*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola, Guadalajara Regiment.  
TasKunzofm.*



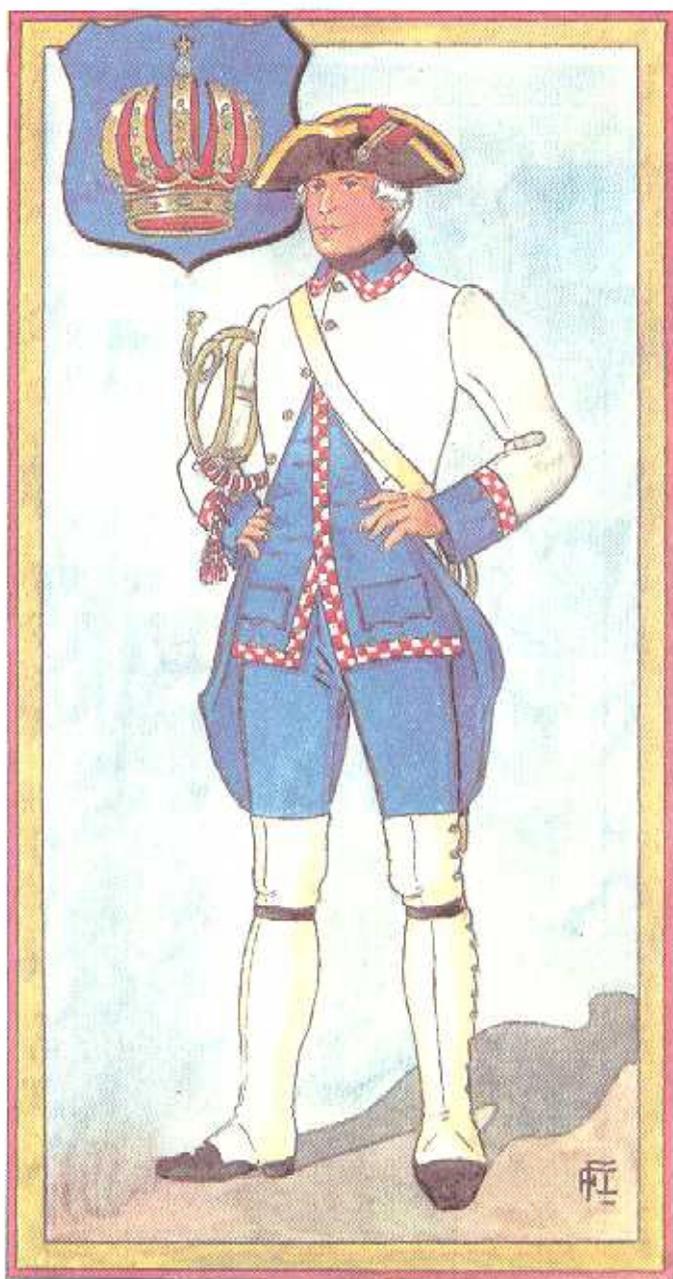
329; Spanish Army in the Independence War.  
Guadalajara-10 Inf. Regt. (fifer).



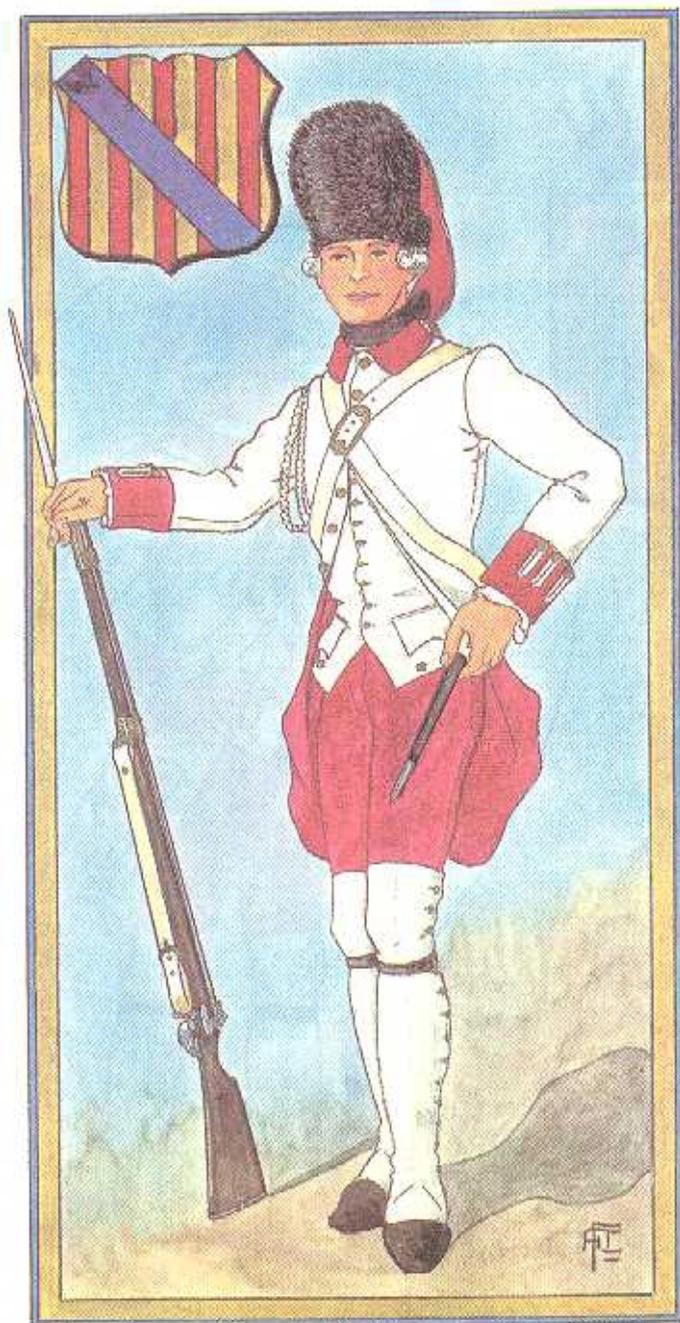
*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola Toledo Regt.*



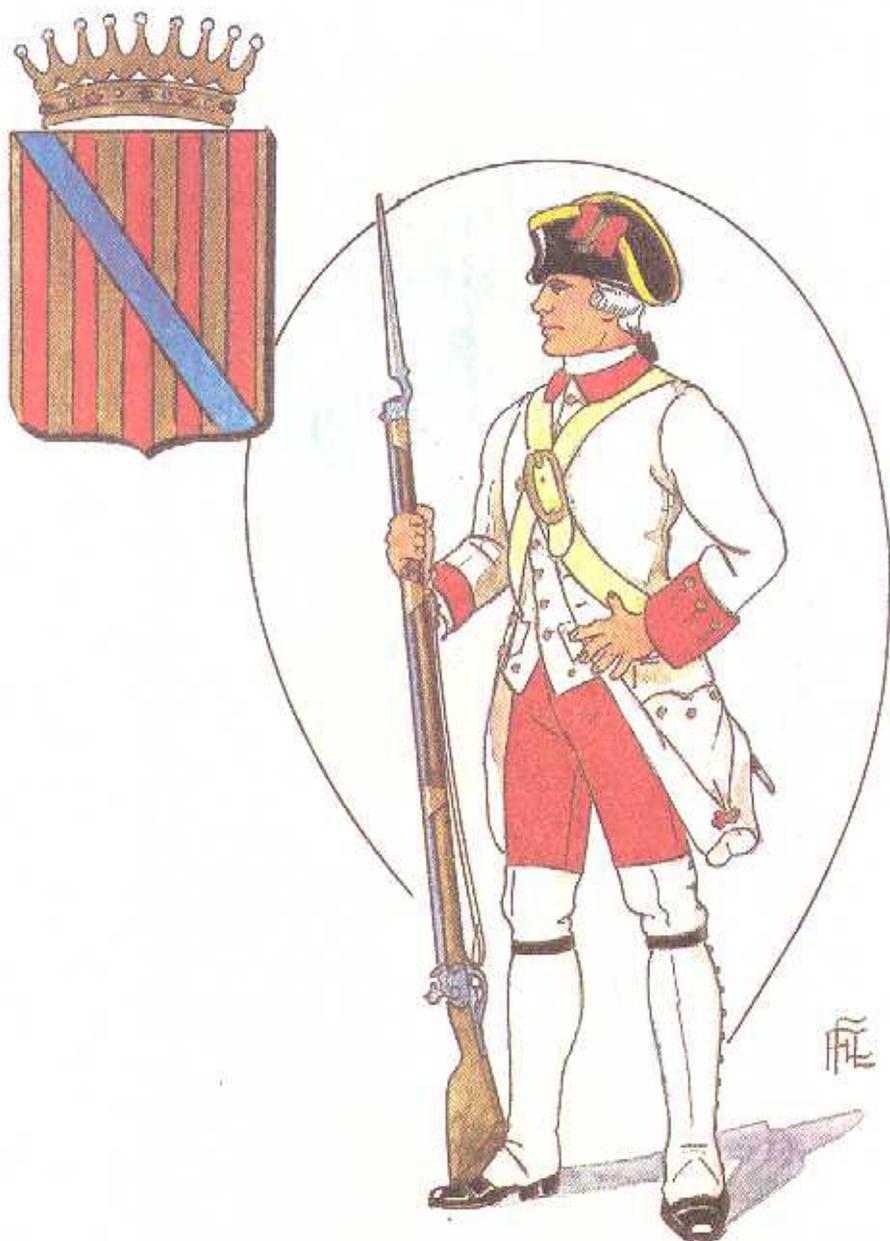
*Spanish Army in the Independence War 1819.  
España 15. Inf. Regt. Flagbearer.*



119; Spanish Army in the Independence Wars  
Toledo 16 Inf. Regt. Musician



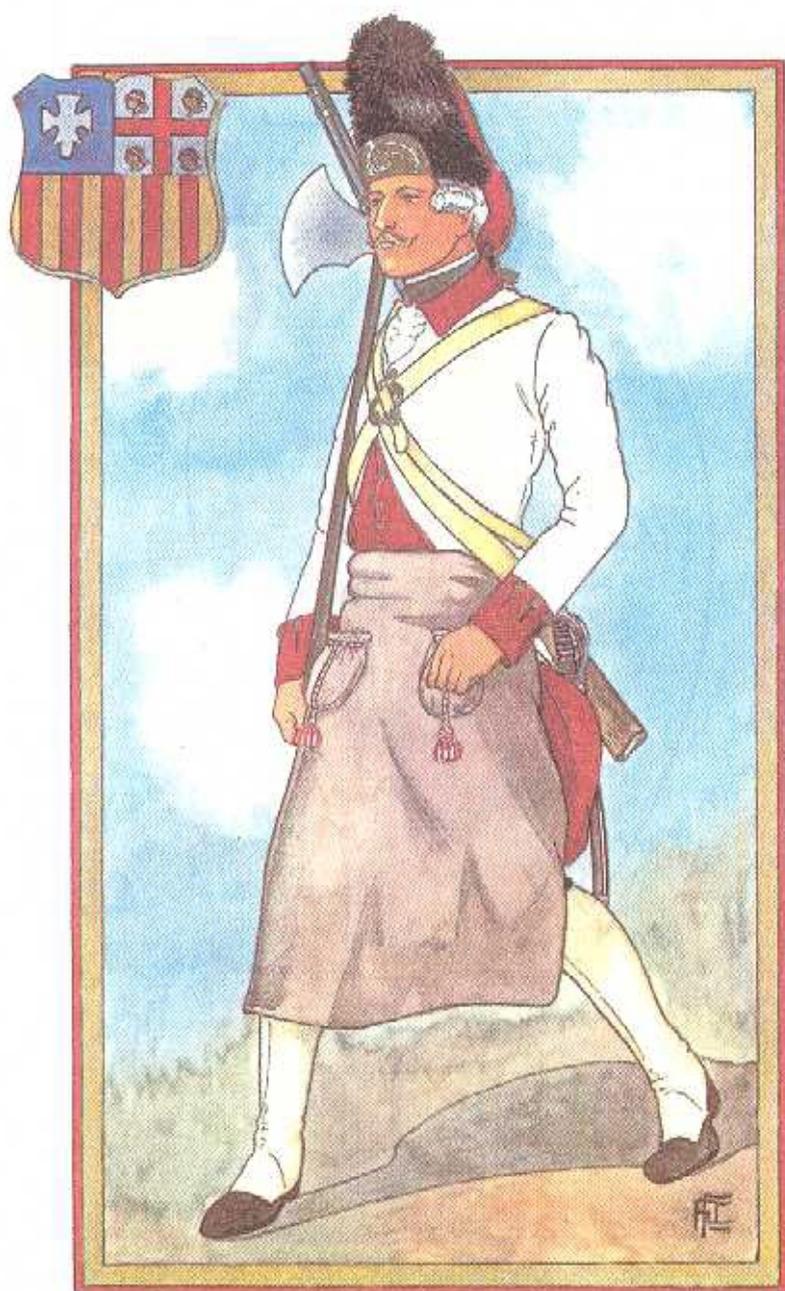
1779 Spanish Army in the Independence Wars  
Mallorca 1<sup>st</sup> Inf Regt. Cadet.



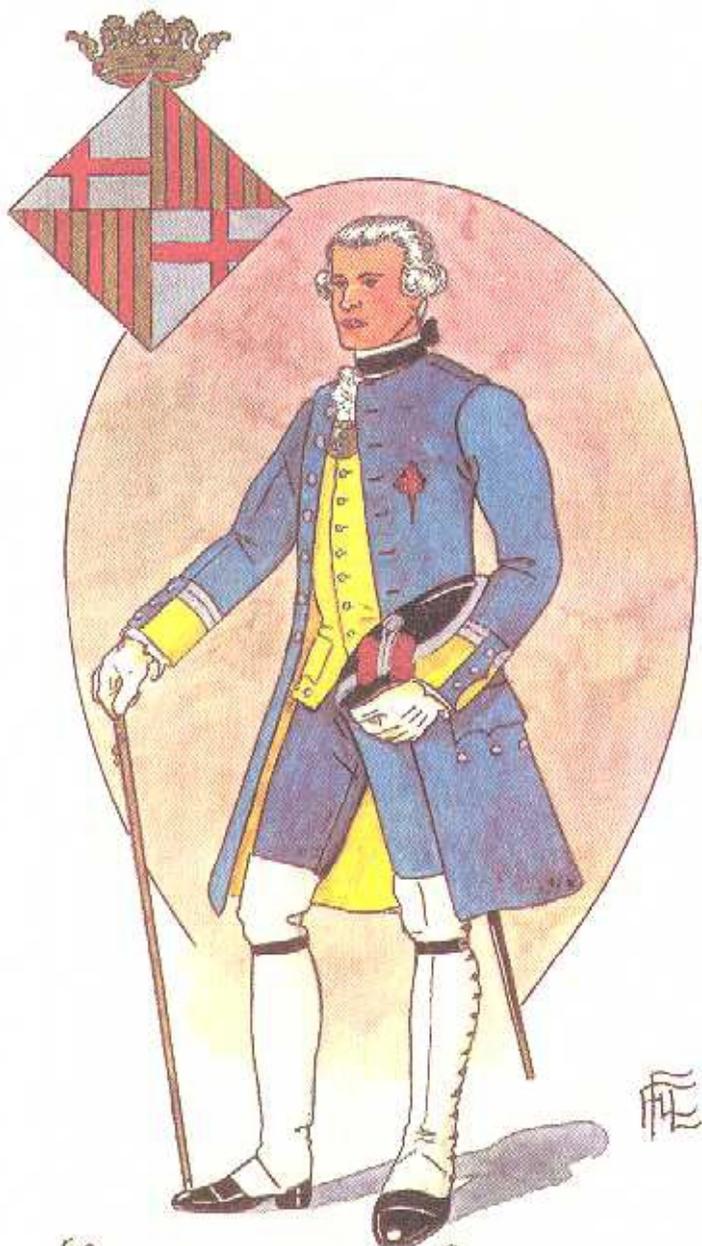
*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola, Mallorca Regt.*



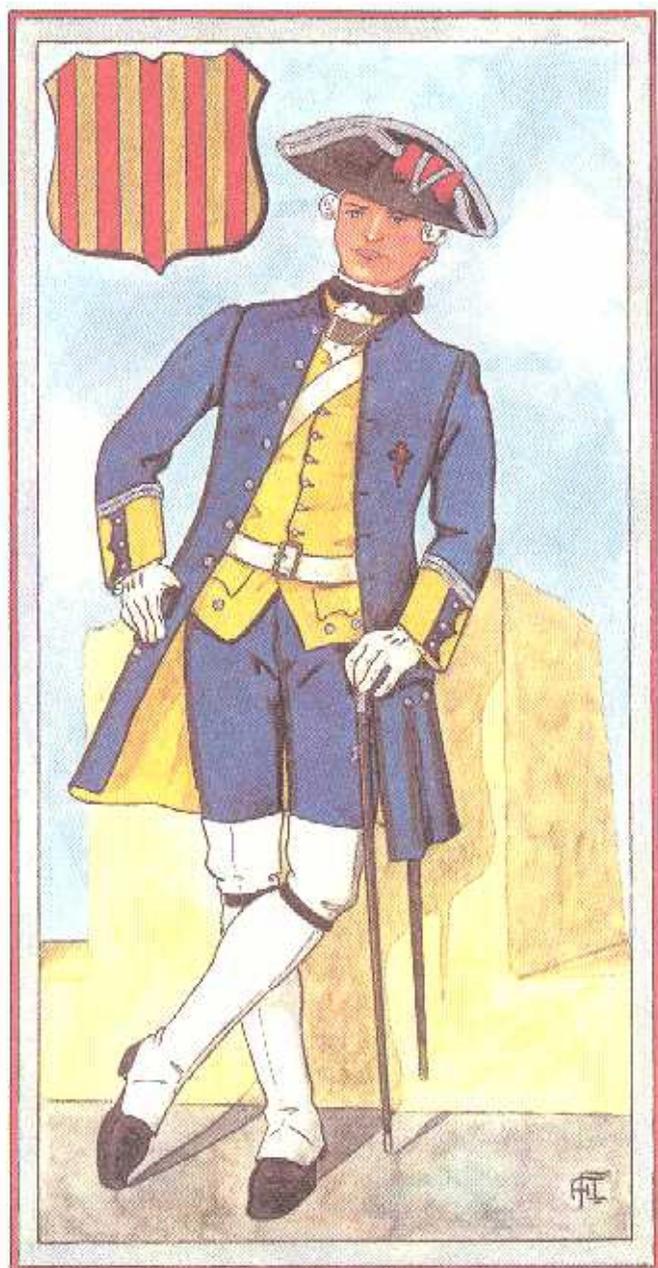
*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola, Aragon Regiment.*



1879. Spanish Atay in the Independence War.  
Aragon 28 Inf. Regt. (Gazpar).



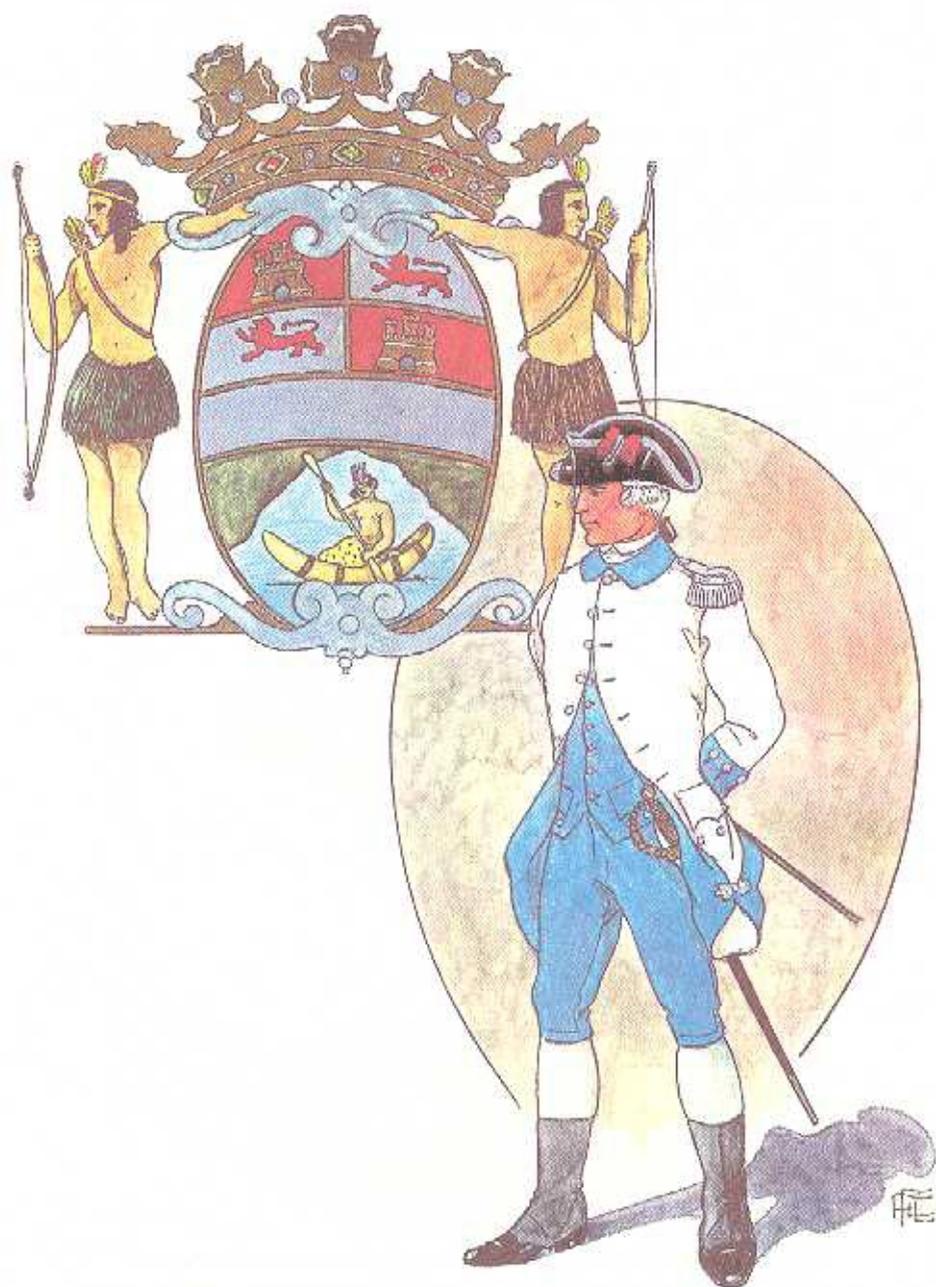
*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola.  
2nd Regiment of Cataluña Volunteers.*



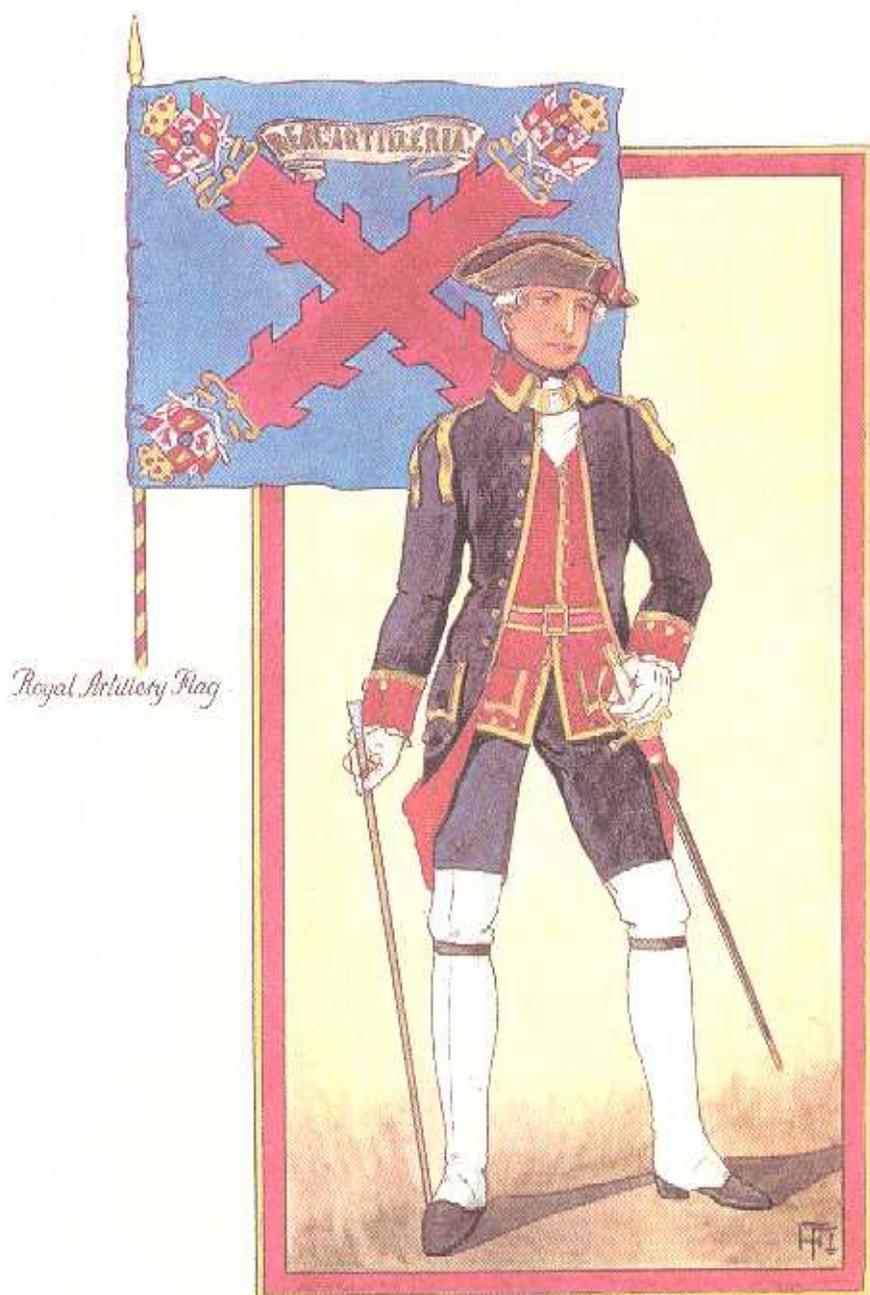
1809, Spanish Army in the Independence War.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Catalonians Volunteers Regt. 32.



*109. Spanish Army in the Independence War.  
Havana "Fijo" Regiment (Drummer).*



*Spanish Army in the Siege of Pensacola, Louisiana Regiment.*



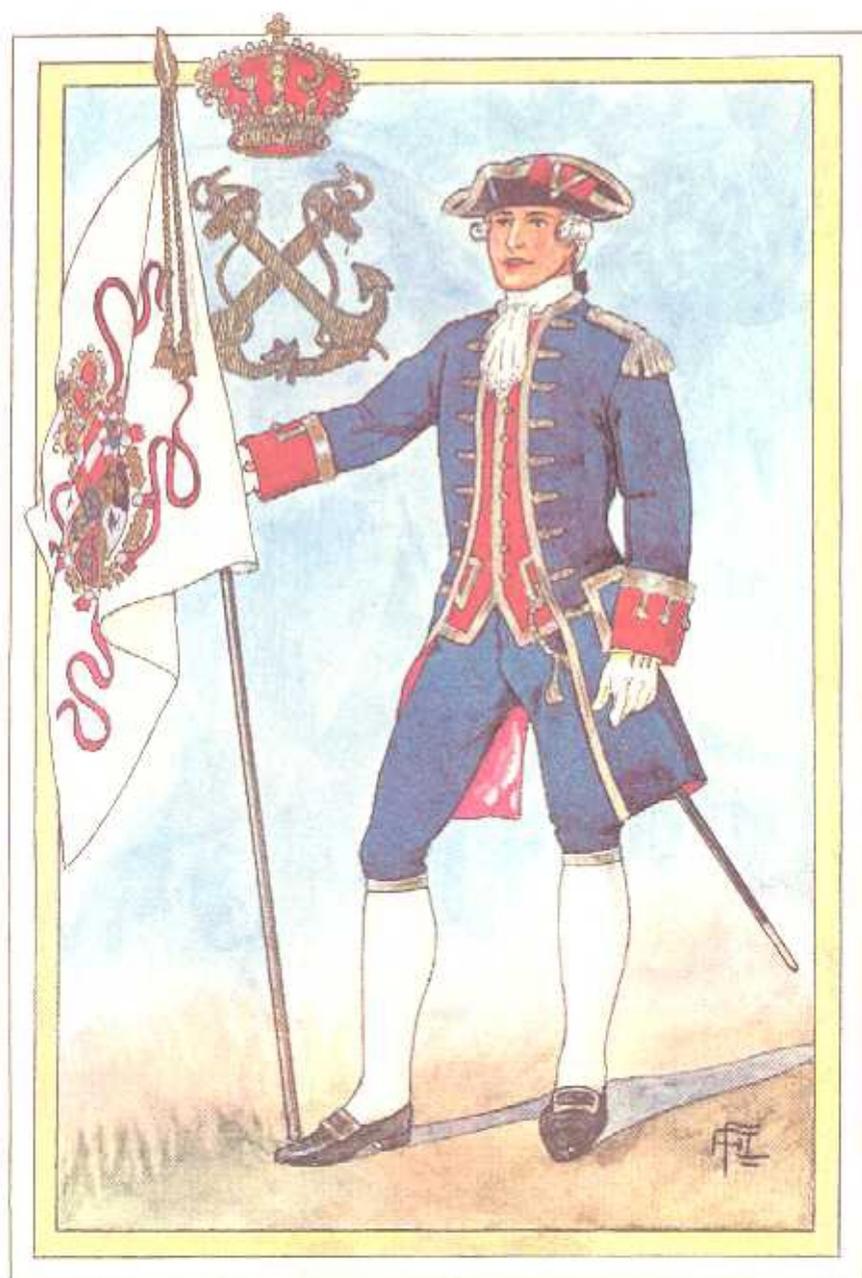
Royal Artillery Flag

ROY, Spanish Army in the Independence War.  
Royal Artillery Corp. (Commander).

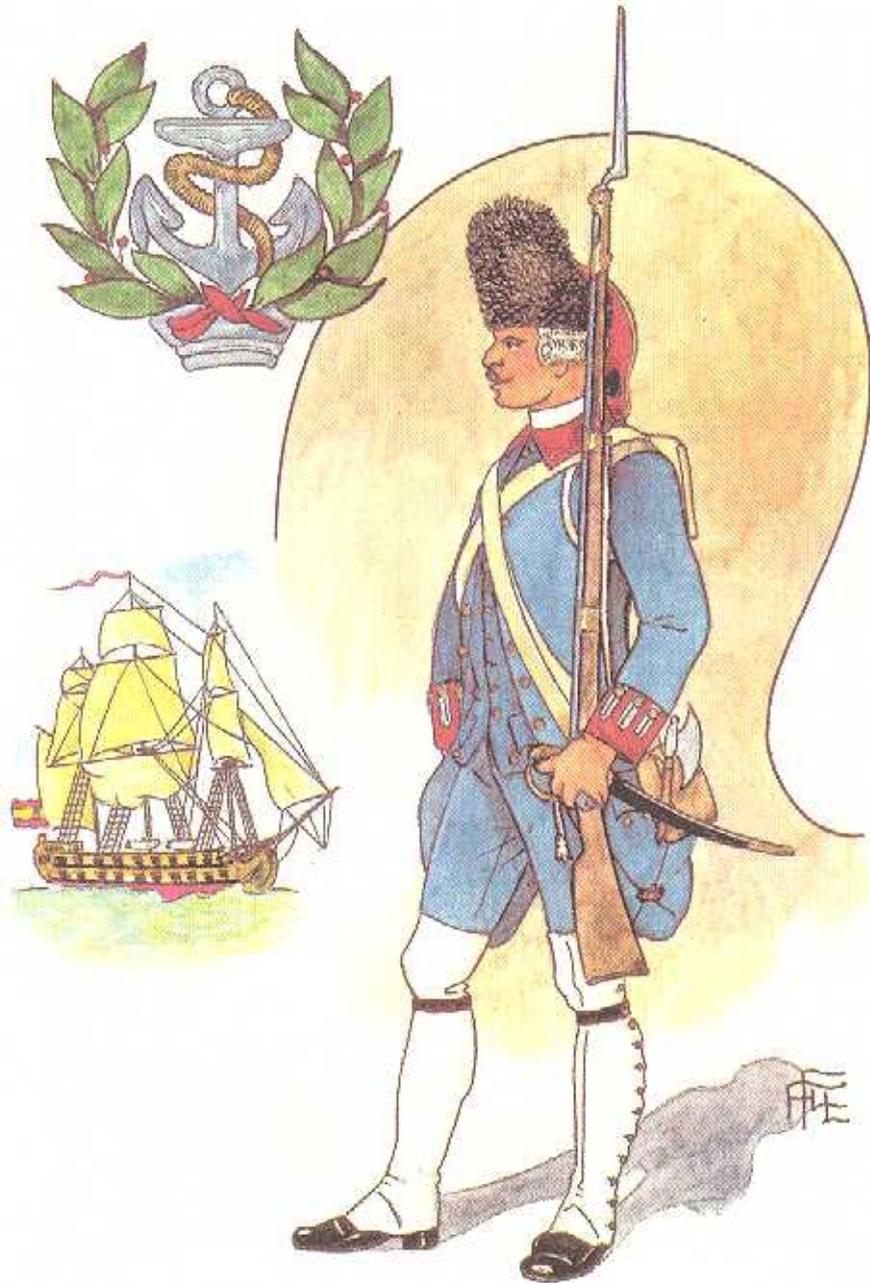


*Flag of the Royal  
Ships (Apostoleros)  
in America  
(XVIII Century)*

*1779, Spanish Royal Navy in the Independence War.  
Infantry and Naval Artillery. (Commander).*



*Spanish Royal Armada Sublieutenant with flag of  
the fleet of Admiral Solano, 1800 War*



*Spanish Army in the Siege of Penzance, Marines.*