

The Spanish Tercios 1536–1704



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Illustrated by Gerry & Sam Embleton

Men-at-Arms • 481

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INTRODUCTION



Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (1453–1515), a Spanish veteran of the final campaigns of the Reconquista, was given the title of the 'Great Captain' at the battle of Atella in July 1496 by Neapolitan soldiers, who saw how their king and nobles relied upon his counsel. His historic victory at Cerignola on 25 April 1503 was achieved by a counter-attack from a defensive position. This was contrary to the medieval idea that still reigned in most of Europe, whereby success was to be gained by gallant cavalry charges and massive assaults by pikemen. Córdoba's versatile generalship was underlined on 29 December 1503 by another victory, at the Garigliano – a victory achieved by skillful preparatory engineering work, allowing an audacious surprise attack across the swollen river. (Spanish Army Museum, Toledo)

'Everyone fought, from the Duke of Alba, a Spanish grandee, to Pizarro, a swineherd.

They all fought: noblemen and labourers, shepherds and burghers, scholars and magnates, clergymen and rogues, clerks and knights. Every region of Spain sent its sons to fight. Garcilaso, Ercilla, Cetina, Alcázar, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderón fought. An entire people fought, without differences of class, loyalty, duty, profession or wealth.

'They fought over the Andes and in the Alpine foothills, on the plains of the Po and on the Mexican plateau; beside the Tiber against the Pope, and beside the Mapocho against Arauco; on the banks of the River Plate and the Danube, the Elbe and the Tagus, the Orinoco and the Escalda; at Pavia and Cuzco, in the Alpujarras and in the Amazon jungles, in Tunisia and in Amberes, in the Gulf of Lepanto and off the English coast, at Navarino and Terceira, in La Goleta and La Habana, in Algeria and in the Philippines, in Lombardy and in Naples; at all four points of the compass in France, from Provence to Brittany, from the banks of the Bidassoa to the banks of the Marne and from Rousillon to Normandy; in the Netherlands, in Portugal, in Africa and in Ireland...'

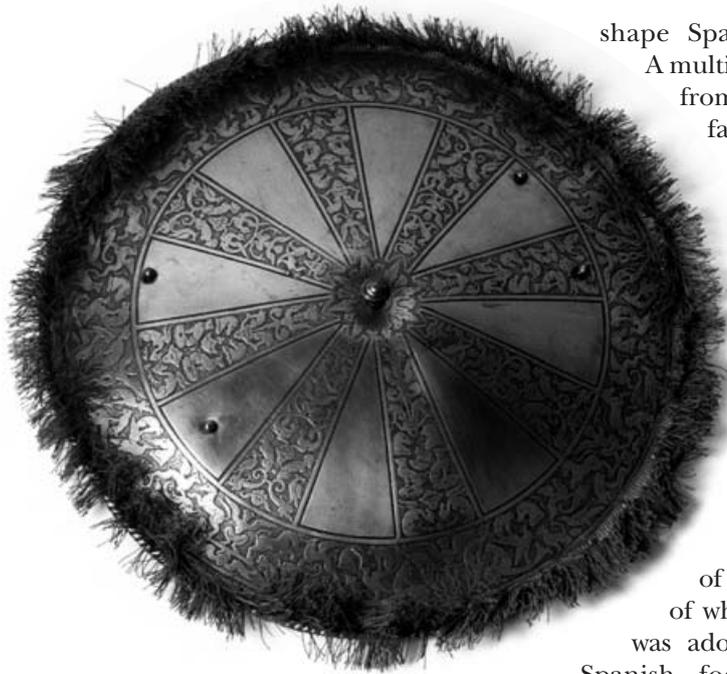
(Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, *España, un enigma histórico*)

The Ordinances of the 1490s

In January 1492 Granada, the last Muslim enclave on the Iberian Peninsula, surrendered to the 'Catholic Monarchs' Ferdinand and Isabella. In the varied terrain of a peninsula cut by mountain ranges, the infantry had always been a fundamental element of the Christian armies; unlike the case in the rest of Europe, they had never ceded the predominant role to the heavy armoured cavalry.

Several years before this successful conclusion of the *Reconquista*, contingents of Swiss soldiers had arrived in Castile to serve not only as mercenaries, but also as instructors in a new form of fighting that was particularly effective against heavy cavalry. Renowned throughout the continent, the Swiss infantry fought in dense formations of pikes, not only on the defensive but also manoeuvring in the attack, supported by small numbers of crossbowmen and handgunners. The successful employment of these tactics required strict discipline and training, to harness the individual fighting men into a co-ordinated group.

With the end of the *Reconquista*, the opening up of new fronts in Italy – which would be, for generations, the cockpit of Franco-Spanish rivalry – permitted the Spanish monarchy to realize an old dream: the creation of a standing army, backed by regional militia. For this purpose legal decrees known as 'ordinances' were issued, and these began to



A finely decorated and fringed example of a buckler. Used at the turn of the 15th to 16th centuries by the *escudados* who made up one-third of the Spanish infantry, bucklers were later discarded except for particular types of actions – assaults on or the defence of fortifications, and other occasions of hand-to-hand fighting both on land and at sea. (In the Imperial armies a minority of sword-and-buckler men still had a place in infantry tactics well into the 1630s.) Some Spanish bucklers bore engraved decoration of the Pillars of Hercules with the Latin motto *Plus Ultra* ('Further Still') – the national symbol of Spain, signifying that the king's power extended from Europe out across the 'Ocean Sea'. (Spanish Army Museum)

shape Spain's emerging military organization. A multitude of details were now to be regulated, from the fines to be paid by towns that failed to provide the necessary arms, to the accounts that were to be kept by the armies.

The 1493 Ordinance defined the *capitanía* (the future company) as the basic infantry unit; it was to be commanded by a captain, seconded by a lieutenant who was also the standard-bearer. The company was divided into 'squadrons' (from *cuadrado*, 'squared'), led by sergeants or *cuadrilleros*. Initially the numbers in these companies were not fixed.

The 1497 campaign, against the army of Roussillon, saw the embryonic creation of what would become the Tercios; the pike was adopted in important numbers, and the Spanish footsoldiers were divided into three categories. One-third of the infantry carried pikes; one-third

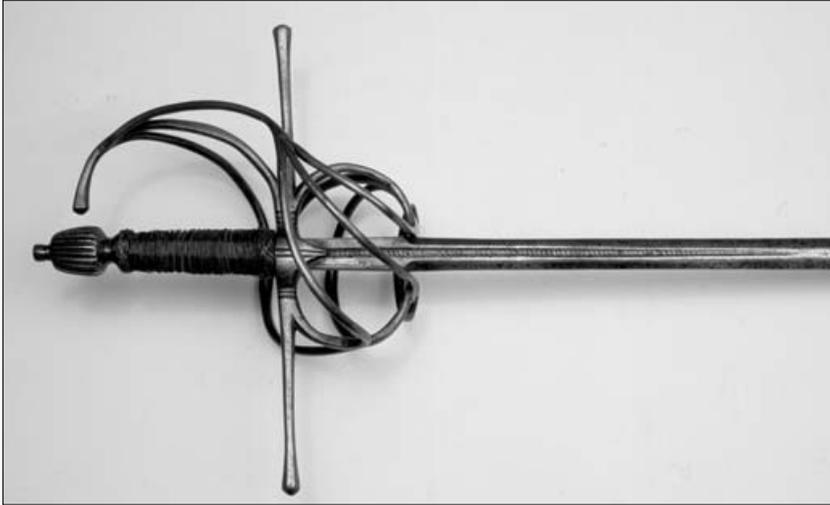
bore the old name of *escudados* (sword-and-buckler men); and the final one-third consisted of crossbowmen and handgunners. The adoption of a cuirass to protect the pikemen had already been regulated in an ordinance of two years previously. The task of the sword-and-buckler men was to try to reach the enemy, making their way through the mass of their own and the enemy pikemen. Meanwhile, support would be provided by the marksmen with missile weapons, although crossbows were at first more trusted than the fairly primitive firearms of the day.

The sword-and-buckler men had a major impact during the first Italian campaign against the French in 1494–98, when they won the battle of Atella practically singlehanded. Protected by their shields, they cut their way into the mass of King Charles VIII's hired Swiss pikemen, breaking up their formation and putting the famous mercenaries to flight. The subsequent North African campaigns (1509–11), and above all the renewed Italian wars (1501–04, and 1521–26), served as experimental laboratories for Spanish military reforms. During these conflicts, which coincided with the extension of military science during the Renaissance, Spanish military organization evolved from a medieval to a modern form.

'El Gran Capitán' and the Italian Wars

One of the chief promoters of reform was Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, 'the Great Captain'. The Catholic Monarchs gave this veteran the command of the Spanish expeditionary corps that travelled to Italy to fight against a French invasion, in support of King Ferrante of Naples.

At Seminara (28 July 1495), Córdoba disagreed with the Neapolitan nobility's eagerness to go into battle against the French, as he was aware of the enemy's superiority, but he had no option but to agree. Mistaking a tactical withdrawal by the Spanish horsemen for a retreat, the Italian infantry gave way to panic and fled the battlefield. Only the Spanish



A 16th-century Spanish sword with *gavilanes* or 'bows' at the hilt, providing greater protection to the hand; a skilled swordsman could even use them to catch and snap the blade of his opponent. The sturdy, two-edged blades of such weapons measured between 35.5in and 40in (90–105 centimetres). As time passed the sword hilts used by officers and wealthy soldiers became even more complex in design, and styles spread across Europe. (Spanish Army Museum)

infantry formation stood firm, before beginning an orderly retreat under pressure from Swiss pikemen and French heavy cavalry *gensdarmes*. This event exemplifies one aspect of the reputation earned by Spanish infantry over the coming centuries – their imperturbability. Ignoring everything around them, the Spaniards managed to retreat from the field of Seminara in good order, protected by their pikes from any approaching enemy. The French, content to have taken the ground, decided not to contest their withdrawal.

From then on, free from interference, Córdoba assumed command of operations, and began to lay the foundations of future Spanish military doctrine. The central characteristic of what would be known as 'war in the Spanish mode' was watchfulness and realism; Córdoba would fight only when it was in his interest to do so, never when it would favour the enemy, so his troops gained experience and confidence. He also employed mixed troops and tactics in ways long familiar to Spanish commanders: 'He agreed to... set up ambushes for the French cavalry in the way used in Spain against the Moors, a true novelty for the people there'. A main tenet of his doctrine was: 'Never bring your warriors to battle unless you are sure of their hearts and know that they are fearless and orderly; never test them if you do not see that they expect to win' (Inspección de Infantería, *La infantería...*).

Additionally, his infantry were extremely mobile; the varied terrain favoured them and placed the French heavy cavalry at a disadvantage. This mobility allowed the Spanish to give the impression that they were everywhere, repeatedly surprising enemy garrisons. All these factors, together with the massive use of artillery to take strongholds so as to avoid long sieges, changed the face of the campaign.

His experience in the Kingdom of Naples encouraged Córdoba to organize *coronelías*, field commands inspired by the Roman legions. He ordered that each *capitanía* should consist of 500 men: 200 pikemen, 200 sword-and-buckler men, and 100 arquebusiers with firearms. Ten mixed companies, plus another two of pikemen alone, formed a *coronelía* commanded by a *coronel* (colonel), with a total of 6,000 men. This would also have two attached cavalry squadrons, one with 300 'men-at-arms' (heavy cavalry) and the other with 300 'horsemen' (light cavalry).

Two *coronelías* made up an army, led by a *capitán general* (commander-in-chief). However, two points should be understood. Firstly, these numbers were only theoretical, and were unlikely to be achieved in practice due to recruiting problems, desertion, and attrition during campaigns. Secondly, this organization was not inflexible; the *capitanías* could be concentrated or could operate separately, according to the requirements of particular operations.

The next Italian (or Neapolitan) war would further refine the new ways of fighting. On 23 April 1503, at Cerignola, Fernández de Córdoba crushed a French army and won a resounding victory by the massed use of firearms from behind obstacles created on carefully chosen terrain. Outnumbered by the French and Swiss led by the Duke of Nemours, Córdoba emplaced his 6,000 men on a hillside protected by ditches and palisades. A disastrous powder explosion robbed Córdoba of the use of his artillery from the outset, and the French heavy cavalry and Swiss pikemen attacked with support from their own cannon. Nevertheless, volley-fire from the Spanish arquebusiers reduced the attackers to confusion, and was followed by a devastating counter-attack by Córdoba's Landsknecht mercenaries, Spanish infantry and cavalry.

* * *

Although the Great Captain died in 1515, the military 'school' that he had developed survived him, and was to triumph again during the war of 1521–26 in the north of Italy and south of France. King Charles I of Spain (r.1516–58), now simultaneously the Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire, unleashed a climactic struggle against King Francis I of France, and two battles of far-reaching importance were fought during the first of the four successive Habsburg-Valois wars in Italy.

The first was at Bicocca (27 April 1522), where a combined Spanish-Imperial-Papal army was commanded by Prospero Colonna, a former second-in-command to Fernández de Córdoba. The outnumbered Colonna entrenched his army in much the same way as his mentor had at Cerignola, and Marshal de Lautrec's French, Swiss and Venetians attacked it in much the same way. An impatient assault by the Swiss was bloodily repulsed, some 3,000 of them being shot down by the Spanish



The wall-hook under the barrel suggests that this 16th-century arquebus is of early manufacture, and its simplicity and plain finish identify it as a military weapon. Throughout the period civilian firearms, e.g. for hunting, were better finished and often richly decorated, so cost much more than those ordered in bulk by the Spanish authorities. (Spanish Army Museum)

arquebusiers. This defeat more or less put an end to the myth of Swiss supremacy on the battlefield.

French and Imperial armies met again at Pavia on 24 February 1525. A stalemate between the two emplaced armies was broken by an Imperial outflanking manoeuvre on a stormy night, and despite King Francis' gallant leadership of cavalry charges the Spanish arquebusiers were again decisive (this was an arm in which the French were weak). Imperial casualties were about 1,000; the French lost some 8,000 men including many nobles, and King Francis was among those taken prisoner. A new epoch of professional soldiering had begun. Guillaume de Bonnivet, who was killed at Pavia, had said of his opponents: 'I can only say that the 5,000 Spaniards seem to be 5,000 men-at-arms, and 5,000 light cavalry, and 5,000 infantrymen, and 5,000 sappers – and 5,000 devils supporting them' (*Inspección de Infantería, La infantería...*).

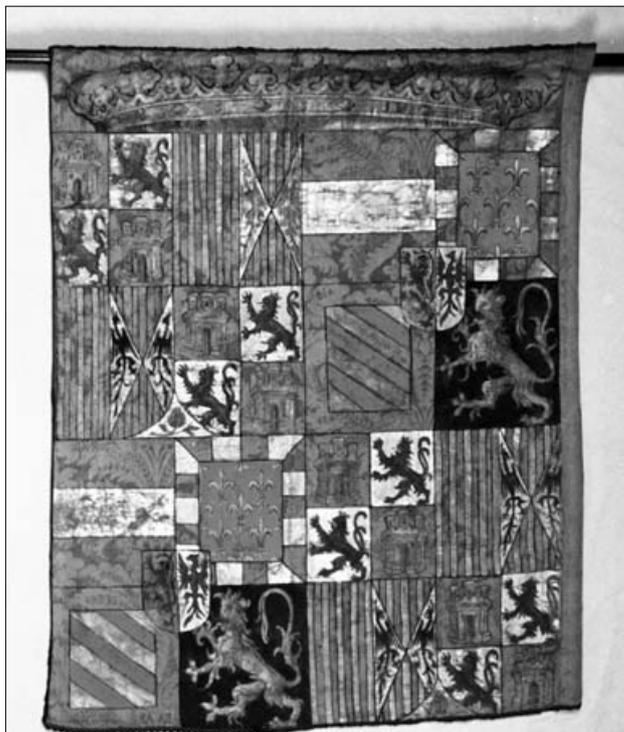
It was against this formative background in the previous generation that the true Tercios would be created.

'A corps of invincible order'

The Spanish Tercios were only ever a part of the army of the Spanish Crown, but the heaviest burden of battle would frequently fall on their shoulders. Following the maxim of Antonio de Leyva in the Pavia campaign: 'The Spanish companies should never be deployed to guard the city, but should be kept together in a corps of invincible order, reserved for uncertain, difficult and harsh exploits of war' (Pierre de Bourdeille, *Gentilezas...*).

During Alba's campaign in Flanders (1568–73) the Tercios represented only between 8 per cent and 20 per cent of his total troops; the others came from the 'Army of Nations' – Walloons, Italians, Germans, and to a lesser extent Irish and other mercenaries. These proportions would change little over the years; in 1621, for example, of the 47 Tercios (Spanish, Walloon and Italian) or regiments (German, Burgundian and Irish), only seven – 14 per cent – were Spanish.

Despite the wealth of the empire, in time the Spanish monarchy would prove to lack sufficient means to maintain operations on four continents. Problems of recruitment would lead to the enlistment of unsuitable material, including vagabonds and criminals; this, and constant financial difficulties, would lead to the repeated undermining of discipline by the threat of mutiny. Subsequent reforms would only serve to slow down this creeping decadence, not to reverse it. Consequently, at the beginning of the 18th century the new Bourbon dynasty installed by France introduced the French military system, and did away with the title 'Tercio' – thus ending a tradition dating back to the first years of the 16th century.



The heraldic arms of the Emperor Charles V, showing his European dominions: Castile, Leon, Aragon, the two Sicilies (Sicily and Naples), Granada, Austria, modern Burgundy, old Burgundy and Brabant, with Flanders and the Tyrol in the escutcheons at upper right and lower left. The amalgamation of Habsburg power in the Kingdom of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, in the person of Charles I & V, gave a considerable boost to Spanish resources, confidence and success in the first half of the 16th century. (Spanish Army Museum)

CHRONOLOGY

- 1516 Charles of Austria, grandson of the Catholic Monarchs and of Emperor Maximilian, is crowned King of Spain as Charles I.
- 1519 King Charles is elected Holy Roman Emperor, as Charles V.
- 1521 Failed French invasion of Navarre (May–June). Spanish-Imperial-Papal army under Prospero Colonna captures Milan from French (23 November).
- 1522 Spanish arquebusiers decisive in Colonna's defeat of Marshal Lautrec at Bicocca (27 April).
- 1525 Spanish arquebusiers again prominent in decisive victory of Imperial generals Lannoy and Pescara over King Francis I at Pavia (23–24 February).
- 1526 Under short-lived Treaty of Madrid, King Francis renounces claims in Italy and cedes Burgundy, Artois and Flanders to Emperor Charles.
- 1526–30 Second Italian war between Francis and Charles ends with Imperial successes.
- 1536–38 Third Italian war ends with French gains in northern Italy.
- 1536 Ordinance of Genoa – 'creation' of the Tercios.
- 1542–44 Fourth Italian war ends after Imperial defeat at Ceresole (14 April 1544).
- 1547 During German Protestant rebellion (Schmalkaldic War), Emperor Charles decisively defeats Maurice of Saxony at battle of Mühlberg (24 April).
- 1556 Abdication of Charles V and separation of Habsburg possessions. Charles' brother Ferdinand succeeds him in Germany as Holy Roman Emperor; Charles' son succeeds him as King Philip II of Spain.
- 1557 Duke of Savoy routs Montmorency's French army at St Quentin (10 August).
- 1558 Count Egmont defeats Marshal des Thermes at Gravelines (13 July).
- 1559 Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (3 April) ends Habsburg-Valois wars, and secures Spanish dominions in Italy for 150 years.
- 1567 Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba (or Alva), appointed governor of Spanish Netherlands, and marches Tercios up from Italy.
- 1568 Start of 'Eighty Years' War' for Dutch independence; William 'the Silent', Prince of Orange, raises rebel army in northern Netherlands. Rebels win small battle of Heiligerles (23 May), but routed by Alba at Jemmingen (21 July).
- 1569–72 Alba's occupation is largely effective by land, but rebel maritime 'Sea Beggars' skilfully harass Spanish communications, trade and coastal towns.
- 1572–73 Renewed uprising drives Spanish out of most of northern Netherlands. Alba recaptures many cities and carries out harsh reprisals, before resigning command in November 1573.
- 1575–78 Netherlands revolt spreads. Unpaid Spanish troops sack Antwerp (October 1576). Spanish reinforcements under Alexander Farnese recover much territory; Farnese appointed



Map showing some of the major battles fought by the Spanish Tercios during the wars of the Spanish monarchy and Habsburg Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries.

viceroy in October 1578.

1579–89 William of Orange appointed Stadtholder of republican United Provinces of northern Netherlands. Against complex political background, repeated campaigns by Farnese restore Spanish control over much territory. William of Orange assassinated (10 July 1584), and succeeded by son Maurice of Nassau. After his capture of Antwerp (17 August 1585), Farnese becomes Duke of Parma.

1580–89 Spanish-Portuguese War, ending with Philip II securing throne of Portugal (which will remain under Spanish rule until 1640).

1588 The *Grande y Felicísima Armada* ('Spanish Armada') fails in attempt to embark Parma's army to invade England.

1589–99 After Parma is withdrawn to command in France, Maurice of Nassau's repeated offensive campaigns retake northern Netherlands; defeat of Spanish under Count Varas at Turnhout (24 January 1597).

1598 Philip III succeeds his father on throne of Spain. During his reign, peace with France and England is achieved.

1600 Maurice defeats Spanish army under Archduke Albert at battle of Nieuwpoort (2 July) but is unable to exploit his victory. Sieges and desultory field campaigns continue.

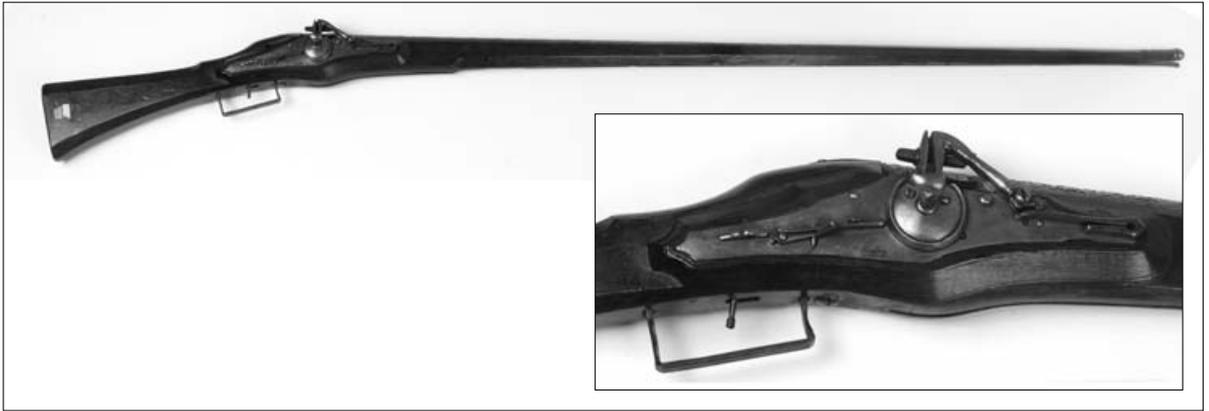
1609 Both sides in Dutch war of independence are exhausted, and conclude the Twelve Years' Truce.

The Thirty Years' War, 1618–48:

1620 Spanish army under Marquis of Spinola marches from Flanders to the Palatinate to intervene on side of Catholic League.

1621 Philip IV succeeds to Spanish throne. Twelve Years' Truce ends.

1625 In Netherlands, Spinola takes Breda (5 June) after year-long siege.



A wheellock infantry weapon. Invented in the early 16th century, this system employed a wind-up 'clockspring' mechanism; when released by the trigger, a serrated metal wheel revolved against a piece of pyrites, sending sparks into the priming pan. Wheellocks were used until the end of the 17th century, and pistols and carbines were widely issued to cavalry for several generations. Their advantages were safety, and concealment at night, since they did away with the burning matchcord and could be carried loaded and ready to fire. But they were much more complex and thus more costly than matchlocks, so their use by infantrymen was limited to some wealthy officers. (Spanish Army Museum)

- 1634 Victory of Spanish-Imperial army over Swedes at Nordlingen (6 September).
- 1640 Uprisings against Spanish throne in Catalonia and Portugal.
- 1641–44 Spanish-Portuguese War ends in negotiations after Portuguese victory at Montijo (May 1644).
- 1643 Duke of Enghien's French army defeats Spanish Army of Flanders at battle of Rocroi (19 May).
- 1648 Most European powers, exhausted, conclude Peace of Westphalia (24 October), but Spain and France fight on.

- 1653–57 Spanish army under Condé manoeuvres against Turenne in northern France.
- 1657–58 Franco-British alliance. Turenne decisively defeats army of Condé and Spanish viceroy Don John of Austria at 'Battle of the Dunes' outside Dunkirk (14 June 1658).
- 1657–68 Another Spanish-Portuguese War ends with Spanish recognition of Portuguese independence.
- 1659 Peace of the Pyrenees marks end of Spanish supremacy in Europe, and rise of France under King Louis XIV.
- 1665 King Philip IV of Spain is succeeded by Charles II.
- 1667–68 War of Devolution. Louis XIV claims Spanish Netherlands, and Spanish suffer defeats in Flanders and Franche Comté.
- 1689 France declares war on Spain (April) during War of the Grand Alliance/ Nine Years' War (1688–97) against most other European powers. French operations in Catalonia (1693–94).
- 1701 After death of King Charles II without an heir, Louis XIV installs his grandson on Spanish throne as Philip V. Outbreak of War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14) between Spain and France on one side, and the anti-French Grand Alliance.
- 1704 Army reforms of Philip V include disbandment of the Tercios and their transformation into regiments.

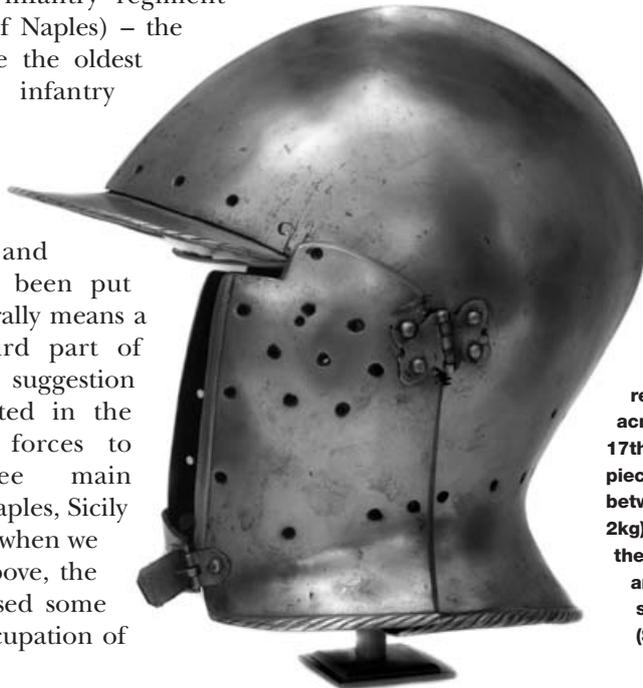
‘THE OLD TERCIOS’

Traditionally, the Ordinance issued in Genoa by Emperor Charles V in 1536 has been considered the document by which the *tercios* were created. However, the reference to Tercios in the Ordinance states: ‘The Spanish infantry of the Tercio of Naples and Sicily in our army have been paid until the end of September this year, and those of the Tercio of Lombardy until mid-October this year, and the soldiers of the Tercio of Malaga who stayed in Nice, and the company from Jaen that serves in our army, until 25 October’. Therefore, this ordinance did not mark the birth of the Tercios, but simply recognized – under a term which had become official over time – units that had already been formed.

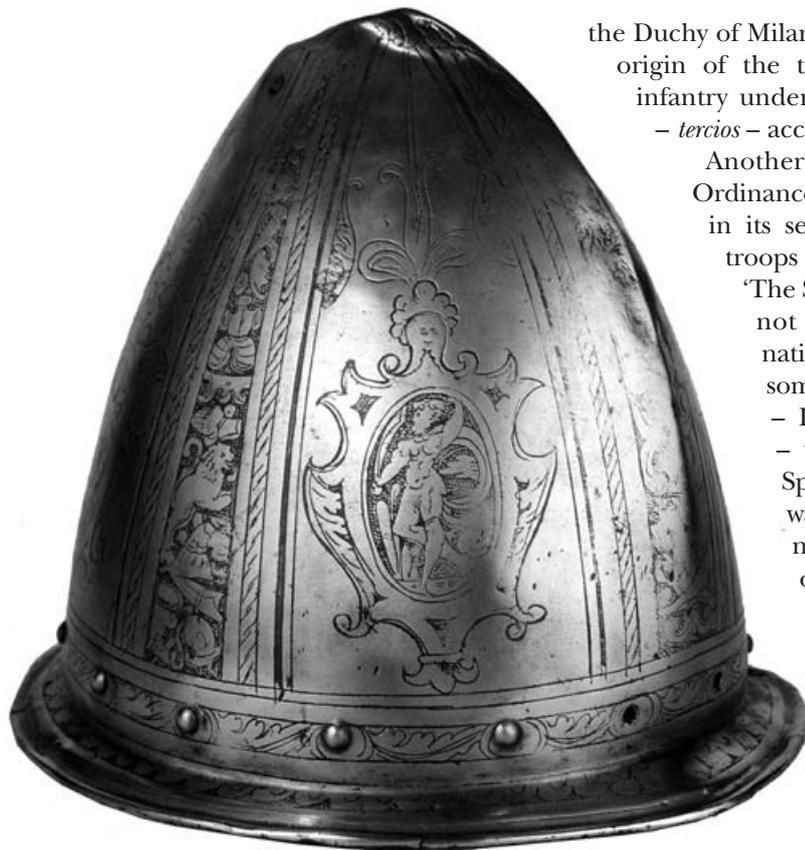
‘Tercio’ as the title of a military unit may have been used first in 1509 for the Tercio of Zamudio (its commander’s name), which became the Tercio of Naples in 1513. Similarly, the Tercio of Sicily was created in 1534 with forces employed in the North African campaign against the Berbers and Turks; and two years later the Tercio of Lombardy was formed in the recently acquired Italian territory of the Duchy of Milan. Eventually these three units became known as the *Tercios Viejos* (‘Old Tercios’) of the Spanish infantry; they were the original formations, and had permanent standing. On the other hand, the Tercio of Malaga (or of Nice, as it was named after it had garrisoned that city) did not have permanent standing, and subsequently received several names.

The unofficial title of ‘Old Tercio’ came to have such proud significance that it was usurped by later units, and to differentiate them from these later foundations the original Tercios became known as the *Grandes Tercios Viejos* (‘Great Old Tercios’), for purely emotive reasons. It should be noted that infantry regiments tracing their identity to the original Tercios Viejos still serve in the Spanish Army today: the mountain light infantry regiment ‘Tercio Viejo de Sicilia’ No. 67, the infantry regiment ‘del Príncipe’ No. 3 (Tercio of Lombardy), and the infantry regiment ‘Soria’ No. 9 (Tercio of Naples) – the latter considered to be the oldest continuously existing infantry regiment in the world.

The origin of the term *tercio* for a military unit is not precisely known, and various theories have been put forward (the word literally means a bundle, or a one-third part of something). A logical suggestion that the term originated in the division of Spanish forces to garrison the three main possessions in Italy – Naples, Sicily and Milan – falls down when we recall that, as noted above, the term had first been used some 20 years before the occupation of



The burgonet, a style of helmet that combined good protection with visibility, was used widely by horsemen but also by armoured infantry. It first appeared in Italy and Germany in c.1510, and in developed forms it would remain in widespread use across Europe until the late 17th century. The 16th-century pieces like this example weighed between 2.6lb and 4.4lb (1.2 to 2kg), and from c.1520 onwards they might have various arrangements of hinged sidepieces for face protection. (Spanish Army Museum)



Both period and modern terms for types of helmet, which vary from country to country, can be confusing. The Spanish word *morion* simply means 'helmet'. Today a Spanish morion is sometimes assumed to be the type that appeared in Italy from c.1550 (see page 45), with a very high raised comb on a skull of pronounced 'clamshell' shape, and the brim swept upwards at front and back. In fact, the photo above shows a finely decorated example of the true 'Spanish morion', which evolved from the *cabaceta* in Castile at the end of the 15th century, and was the type most widely used by 16th-century pikemen and some arquebusiers. Its main characteristics are the 'almond-shaped' skull, which sometimes terminated in a small back-swept 'stalk' at the apex ridge, and the narrow horizontal brim. (Spanish Army Museum)

the Duchy of Milan. The most likely theory finds the origin of the term in the organization of the infantry under the 1497 Ordinance into thirds – *tercios* – according to their types of weapon.

Another important aspect of the 1536 Ordinance that is frequently overlooked lies in its separation of Charles V's Imperial troops into distinct groups by nationality: 'The Spanish infantry companies should not have soldiers from any other nation, except for fifes and drums, and some soldiers at present with them – Italians and men from Burgundy – who have long served us in the Spanish infantry; and in the same way the Italian infantry should have no Spaniards or soldiers from any other nation, except for some Spanish ensigns and sergeants; and the German infantry should have no Spaniards or Italians, but rather each national should serve in the companies of his own nation and not of any other.'

Therefore, except for a few previously enlisted soldiers who were permitted to serve out their time, the citizens from the different Imperial and Spanish possessions were restricted as to the units in which they could serve. Men born in Castile or Aragon were understood to be Spaniards, but not those from the Italian possessions. (In the 17th century the Canary Islands, conquered by Castile at the end of the 15th century, would also form a part of this military structure, providing recruits and organizing levies.) The purpose of these restrictions, as the Ordinance recognizes, was to avoid fraud and to promote constructive rivalry. On many occasions these distinct unit identities indeed motivated the troops, but on others it was the cause of quarrels and problems.

UNIT ORGANIZATION

Evolution, 1536–1704

The necessary reorganization of the forces after the Italian Wars became official with the 1536 Ordinance of Genoa. From being the major unit, the *coronelía* of Córdoba's day became just one of three making up a *tercio*. Each Tercio consisted of 12 companies – ten of pikemen and two of arquebusiers. The normal *coronelía* had four companies, but it could vary in size according to operational necessities when – like a modern task group – it was deployed away from the rest of the Tercio to carry out a particular mission. In theory, each company would have around 250 men, giving the Tercio a total of 3,000; in fact, throughout their history their average strength was only about 1,500 men.

In 1560 an order was given to increase the proportion of firearms against pikes (although it was already often greater than officially stipulated). The Tercio was reduced to ten companies, eight of pikemen and two of arquebusiers, each with around 300 soldiers; however, in practice about one-third of the men in 'pike' companies were actually armed with arquebuses. In 1567 the Duke of Alba added 15 musketeers to each company of shot.

The Tercios that went to Flanders in 1567 were: Tercio Viejo of Naples, 3,200 men; Tercio Viejo of Lombardy, 2,200; Tercio of Sardinia, 1,600; and Tercio Viejo of Sicily, 1,600 – giving Alba a total of 8,600 men instead of the theoretical 12,000. Although understrength, however, his army was of high quality: '[Alba] did not wish to be served by any infantry other than the Spanish. But what an infantry! One of the most excellent ever to have gone on campaign... a corps of up to 10,000 soldiers, magnificent, well supplied, beyond all reproach... even as to their courtesans, who with their adornments appeared to be princesses' (Pierre de Bourdeille, *Gentilezas*...).

At the beginning of the reign of Philip III (r.1598–1621), the number of companies was increased to 15 if serving in peaceful Italy, or 20 if serving elsewhere in Europe; however, the number of men in each company was reduced to 100–150. In Tercios with 15 companies, two of them, and in those with 20, three companies, were formed chiefly of arquebusiers but included 10 per cent of musketeers. The nominally 'pike' companies were in fact already formed of pikemen and musketeers in equal numbers. In 1632 further reforms standardized all Tercios at 15 mixed companies, each to have 90 arquebusiers, 40 musketeers, and 60 pikemen.

To support the Tercios, Philip II had created many militia units throughout the Peninsula. In 1637, during the reign of Philip IV (r.1621–65), it became necessary to draw upon these levies due to difficulties in recruitment, and these militiamen were the basis for the creation of the Provincial Tercios that were the principal element during the 1640 campaigns in Portugal and Catalonia. Each consisted of only 12 companies totalling about 1,200 men.

When Philip V ascended the throne in 1701, establishing the Bourbon dynasty in Spain, he instituted many reforms. His army had 65 Tercios, including the Provincial units, spread throughout Europe. This should have meant a theoretical total of nearly 200,000 soldiers, but in reality there were fewer than 30,000; only half of them were Spanish, and they were very short of weapons. The initial order was that each Tercio should have 12 musketeer companies and one of

Reproduction of soldiers of the principal elements of the Tercio in the early 17th century: from left to right, armoured coselete, unarmoured *pica seca*, and musketeer.

Soldiers received a basic wage, plus a variable sum termed the *ventaja* according to the duties they discharged. A *coselete* or an arquebusier/ musketeer received the same basic wage as the lowly *pica seca*, but were paid successively higher *ventajas* because of the weight of the cuirass in the former case, and the need to buy ammunition in the latter. For similar reasons, *ventajas* were added according to the responsibilities assumed by each man – e.g. the drummer, 'for knowledge of his art', or the captain, 'for commanding the company'. *Ventajas* could also be granted for outstanding feats in combat. (Figures by Gerry Embleton, Time Machine; Spanish Army Museum)



Reproduction of the costume of a 17th-century musketeer of the Tercio of Savoy, with original powder flask. The expensive lace collar is a reminder that whenever they could afford to, soldiers of the period advertised their status by costly display (shirts of the day usually came with a spare collar, so it was easy for a man to 'upgrade' his appearance). (Spanish Army Museum)



grenadiers. Finally, on 28 September 1704, the monarch ordered that the unit designation was to change from 'Tercio' to 'Regiment'.

* * *

In 1537 Charles I & V had posted certain companies of soldiers from the old seagoing companies to the galleys stationed in the Mediterranean, who became the oldest marine infantry in the world. Later, Philip II founded the Tercio Nuevo of the Sea of Naples, the Tercio of the Ocean Fleet, the Tercio of Galleys of Sicily, and the Tercio Viejo of the Ocean and of Neapolitan Infantry. These, too, lost their old names in the reign of Philip V.

MILITARY RANKS & DUTIES

Like all military units, the Tercio was formed on a hierarchical structure. In descending order of seniority, the ranks were as follows:

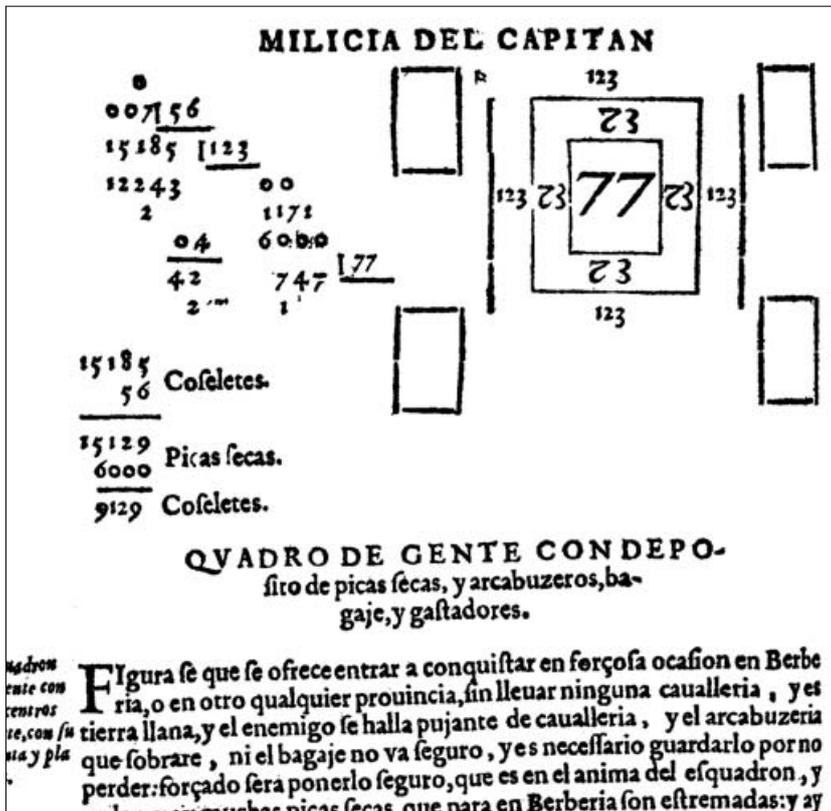
Maestre del campo (*field marshal*) Chosen by the Crown to command a new Tercio, or by the captain-general of a field army to fill a vacancy. He was to pass on the orders given by the captain-general, and to take command in the latter's absence.

His main duty was to oversee administration – particularly, the safeguarding of the prices of the soldiers' food supplies – and the application of military justice. In his judicial capacity he had to take account of morale, dealing with complaints fairly; an error in judgement – particularly when imposing the death penalty – could provoke unrest, even mutiny, especially when pay was in arrears.

He had to ensure that the soldiers obeyed their officers, but also that the officers 'governed [their subordinates] without offending them, and spoke to them with respect'. He was also officially the captain of the Tercio's first company, and the corporal of a squad. This was no ordinary squad, however; many of its members were *oficiales reformados* (officers without a command), and it was more like an 'HQ platoon', consisting of expert councillors and experienced veterans. The field marshal had a personal escort of eight halberdiers, paid by the monarch.

Sergento mayor (*sergeant-major*) The second-in-command of the Tercio, he was responsible for passing on the field marshal's orders to the captains. This man had to be an experienced and respected soldier, and we might consider his work to be a combination of that of the *primus pilus* chief centurion of a Roman legion, and of a present-day executive officer (S-3, operations).

The sergeant-major had three basic duties. The first was the billeting of the soldiers, and the second the organization and implementation of troop movements. This was no simple task, as the soldiers 'generally abhorred travelling in orderly fashion ... because of the climate their character is more heated than others, and they lack patience for marching in order' (Francisco Valdés, *Espejo y arte militar*). Thirdly and most importantly, the sergeant-major was responsible for the formation of the tactical 'squadrons' for battle, for which he required some mastery of arithmetic. He had to know the precise number of his soldiers, and be able to adapt the numbers available to the various different formations



It is important to understand the difference in 16th- and 17th-century armies between 'administrative' units – companies and regiments – and 'tactical' units – the 'squadrons' that physically formed the battle line. This illustrates the calculations made by Capt Martin de Eguiluz to form the *cuadro de gente* ('square of men') tactical formation, as shown in his book *Milicia, Discurso y Regla Militar* – a copy of which was signed by King Philip II in 1591. Forming the Tercios into tactical squadrons was no simple matter, and the sergeant-major required a more than basic knowledge of the mathematics of the period. Consequently books such as this, with useful mathematical tables, were widely printed. (Author's collection)

that could be used (see 'Tactics', below). In recognition of his prestige, he had the privilege of not dismounting before the generals, and he was the only person able to cross the front of the squadron on horseback. As insignia of his office he carried a short wooden baton.

Capitán (*captain*) This – the most attractive rank in the public imagination – could be obtained in two ways. It could be granted either by the Supreme Council at court when authorizing the raising of a new company, or by the captain-general to fill a vacancy occurring when on campaign. Contrary to what might be imagined, it was not obligatory to be an ensign first; candidates could be ordinary soldiers, corporals or sergeants, provided that they had ten years of distinguished service on their record.

If the captain wanted the company to obey his orders he had to set an example, since 'It is more efficient to command by example than by order; the soldier prefers to keep his eye on his captain's back, rather than to have the captain's eye on his back. What is ordered is heard, [but] what is seen is imitated' (Francisco de Quevedo). The captain had to select his subordinates from among his soldiers, trying to choose the most capable and putting each in the position most suited to his physical and intellectual abilities. His badge was the *gineta*, a short polearm adorned with fringes below the head. However, when in combat captains commanding arquebusiers and musketeers carried the respective firearm, and captains commanding pikemen bore a pike or a sword and buckler.

Alfárez (*ensign, lieutenant*) The second-in-command of the company, and the captain's principal assistant. This officer had to be skilled in military



The standards, a priority target for the enemy, were protected in the centre of the formation; the *alfarez* who carried the company flag sometimes had a special escort of halberdiers. Many pictures of the Tercios – e.g. that of an early 17th-century parade at Ommergang – show standards carried on a short staff, with only about 12in (30cm) protruding below the silk to hold it by. While they were certainly brandished on short staffs for ceremonial purposes, other period art shows that on campaign they were mounted on longer and more practical staffs – e.g., Jan Cornelis Vermeyen's eyewitness painting of 'The Landing at La Goulette' during Charles V's 1535 Tunisian campaign. For the standard on the left in this re-enactment group, see Plate H5. (Luis Angel Cozar Collection)

affairs, but his primary responsibility was for the standard – the icon of the company's honour and reputation.

The ensign had to be physically strong, since he often had to bear the standard aloft with one hand, and – since it was a priority target for the enemy – he had to be able to use his sword at the same time. At the defeat of Heiligerles seven of the ten ensigns of the Tercio Viejo of Sardinia fell, but it was the unit's proud boast that not a single standard was lost. The ensign had several assistants to help him carry the standard. He himself bore it on parade, at the beginning and end of a march, and, of course, in battle; but on occasions when he had to accompany his men in circumstances where the standard could not be risked, it was left in the care of the assistants.

Sargento (*sergeant*) This rank was created in 1492 at the end of the Spanish Reconquista. Directly responsible for discipline in the company, the sergeant – like the sergeant-major of the whole Tercio – also had to know the precise number of men available to form the tactical squadron. He therefore had to master sufficient arithmetic to be able to draw up the ranks and files, and he

had to be literate, in order to allocate and note the billets during troop movements. He deployed the men in their exact positions according to their equipment and tactical skills, and had to supervise them constantly, grouping them in *camaradas* and organizing their training. Since his authority depended upon keeping his soldiers' respect he had to maintain a certain distance from them, and could not join in their off-duty amusements. His insignia was the halberd.

Cabo (*corporal*) As the sergeant's assistant, he had to give the former his support at all times. His main task was the discipline and training of his squad. He had to ensure good relations among comrades, and he was specifically to concern himself with the sick and wounded, attending to them whenever possible. He was armed like the men in his unit, although he also had a *partesana* polearm as a formal mark of rank.

* * *

The men who initially filled the ranks of the Tercios were professional soldiers who volunteered for a military career, whether permanent or temporary. As time went by, due to the constant attrition of manpower during the long wars (and also to emigration to the Americas), it became necessary to have recourse to levies. Predictably, these conscripts did not always perform as efficiently as might be desired.

The soldier usually began as a *pica seca*, armed with a pike but without armour protection. As time passed and he gained experience, he could buy himself a cuirass and become a *coselete*, thereby earning higher wages; in the same way he might progress to become an arquebusier or musketeer. If he showed the necessary qualities he might be promoted from the ranks. No minimum period was stipulated, but it was estimated to take around five years for promotion to corporal, another year to make sergeant, another two years to be considered for promotion to ensign, and three more for captain. At all stages in his service the soldier had to have the physical and moral qualities to be able to bear the hardships of campaign, and he was expected to treat civilian subjects of the Crown – particularly women – with proper respect.

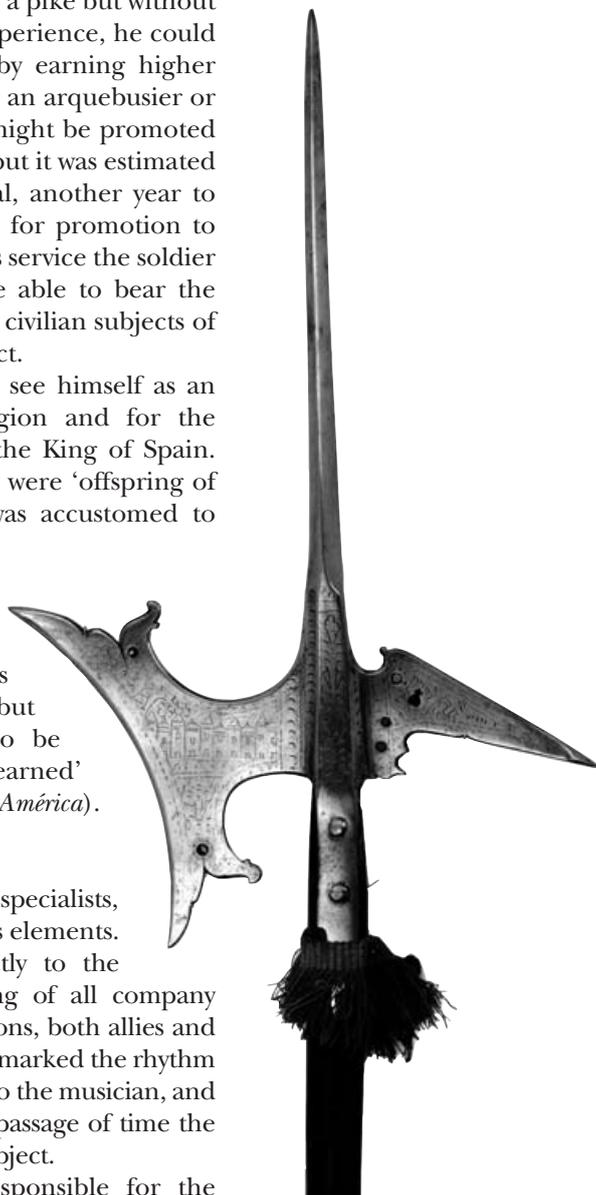
The Spanish soldier of the period was taught to see himself as an instrument for the defence of the Catholic religion and for the expansion and maintenance of the possessions of the King of Spain. Educated in the tradition of the *Reconquista*, soldiers were ‘offspring of a nation that after seven hundred years of war was accustomed to acquiring wealth by the sword. During those seven centuries, two customs had become firmly rooted in the Spaniard: through war, a man of good heart acquired wealth earlier and more honourably than a man who laboured; and the man of good heart does not rest on his laurels after acquiring his wealth, but goes on fighting, as there are always infidels to be destroyed, riches to be won and honours to be earned’ (Salvador de Madariaga, *El ocaso del imperio español en América*).

* * *

The hierarchy of the Tercio was completed by other specialists, grouped in what we would call today the headquarters elements.

The *tambor mayor* (drum major) reported directly to the sergeant-major, and was responsible for the training of all company drummers. He had to know the drumbeats of all nations, both allies and enemies. Together with the fife-players, the drummers marked the rhythm for marching. At that period the word *tambor* referred to the musician, and the instrument was called the *caja de guerra*; with the passage of time the word ‘drum’ was transferred from the person to the object.

The *furriel mayor* (quartermaster-major) was responsible for the distribution of equipment and supplies, the organization of quarters, and the necessary bookkeeping. Below him, each company had a quartermaster to perform the same duties on a lesser scale. The *barrachel* was the military provost, keeping good order in the camps with the help of his assistants. The *auditor* was the legal officer; one of his most important tasks was to validate the soldiers’ wills, which they customarily drew up before going into battle. Each Tercio had a doctor and a surgeon responsible for medical treatment, including maintaining a pharmacy, and the medical team could be completed with a ‘barber’ in each company. The spiritual welfare of the troops was the business of the chaplain-major, and each company had its own chaplain.



Halberd head. This polearm was both a symbol of rank for sergeants, and also a practical weapon used by detachments to defend deployed arquebusiers or musketeers against enemy cavalry. (Spanish Army Museum)

RECRUITING, TRAINING & LOGISTICS

Once the Crown had taken the decision to recruit new troops, captains and others aspiring to appointment or promotion had to submit their claims to the Supreme Council of War, furnishing documents signed by superior officers to certify their merits.

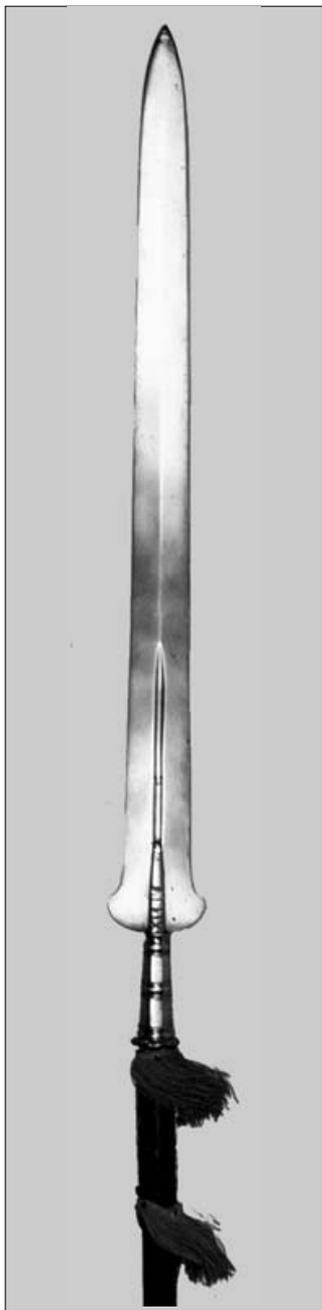
If promotion was granted, the new officer received a series of documents. The 'letters patent' recognized his new rank; the *conducta* or pass gave instructions such as the towns in Spain to which he should travel, the ages of the volunteers to be enlisted, etc.; and any necessary supplementary orders gave details such as the port of embarkation for the voyage to Italy. The captain's first tasks were to select his junior officers, and to choose the design of his standard. He then travelled to the specified area to begin the recruitment of volunteers.

On arrival at a designated town he met with the local authorities, then raised the standard at a prominent place and beat the drums to summon attention. When curious onlookers gathered around, the officers – swaggering about in the best clothes they could afford – recounted their adventures and extolled the attractions of the military life. In theory, youths under the age of 20 were not eligible for recruitment, but in practice this was not always the case. Some lied about their age, and at the beginning of the 17th century the demand for recruits was such that many teenagers were enlisted. Even younger boys were accepted to work as porters or servants for the fighting men (but on more than one occasion these lads, too, would be obliged to take up arms).

If there was a surplus of candidates, those with weapons of their own were given preference; those without arms had to pay out of their future wages for the arms they were issued. Once the required number of recruits had been assembled, a review was carried out by officials of two types: the *veedor* (inspector), and the *pagador* (paymaster). The first had to certify that the men were fit for service, and the second advanced them a sum of travel money deducted from their first monthly wage. (This led some chancers to fill their pockets by the practice called '*tornillazo*' – enlisting, collecting this advance, and then deserting; but if they were caught, they could end up on the gallows.) After the review the recruits were given a written document recognizing their status as soldiers, and began the march towards their appointed stations.

A typical journey during the 16th and much of the 17th century would take the new company to a port on the Mediterranean in order to embark for the Spanish possessions in Italy or one of the garrisons in North Africa. Once they arrived they would begin to receive instruction from their officers and the veteran soldiers; it was a basic principle in the Tercios not to send anyone on campaign until he had been properly trained to fight, although in the late 16th century new units were sometimes marched straight up to Flanders (where the veteran Tercios regarded them cynically). An important institution was the *camarada*, a group of eight to ten soldiers who lived and ate together, helping and supporting one another, and strong bonds of comradeship were naturally forged.

On arrival at their barracks, the new companies were often dissolved and their members distributed among existing companies, both to make up their numbers and to achieve the quick integration of the new arrivals into the military machine. This process, known as '*reforma*', might see



This example of a *partesana* has a very long, knife-like blade; period paintings show bladed polearms with a variety of different heads. The *partizan* was the mark of rank for infantry corporals, but in battle such under-officers tended to use pikes or firearms like the men of their squad. (Spanish Army Museum)



Re-enactment of a *cuadro de terreno* field formation, with a 'garrison' of musketeers visible at the right. Since the effectiveness of a tactical 'squadron' depended on mass and momentum, it was vital that recruits were trained to act together promptly upon orders, so as to maintain the integrity of the formation under all circumstances. Although these re-enactors wear gear corresponding to the mid-17th century, their deployment in less than 10 ranks is typical of the later years of that century. In combat, the pikemen in the left file handled their shafts with their right arms and their comrades on the right flank used their left arms.

The relative importance of the shot element in the Tercios over the pike companies was clearly recognized by at least 1595: 'The greatest part of the victories gained at this time is obtained with artillery or the readiness of the arquebusiers with their lively volleys, disordering the squadrons of the enemy in such manner as to put them in rout' (Bernardino de Mendoza, *Theoretica y Practica de Guerra*). However, in 1634 Gerat Barry, an Irish officer in Spanish service, still recognized – in his *A Discourse of Military Discipline* – that the armoured pikeman was the strength of the formation, and the shot the 'furie of the field', and that either one without the other was only half as strong. (Luis Angel Cozar Collection)

single companies or entire Tercios transferred to fill gaps in other units; it was also an opportunity to expel those who had proved undisciplined. Captains left without a command were known as '*reformados*', and were placed at the disposal of the commanders to fulfil individual missions (which might even include such special tasks as espionage in disguise) while they waited to be given a company to command.

A surviving soldier's service with the army was eventually ended by a 'licence', the document by which the authorities terminated his contract. Frequently, the licence was a way of getting rid of soldiers who had become incapacitated or whose discipline was unsatisfactory. The soldier was also entitled to request a licence himself. If this was not granted it could lead to desertion, but this was not then a capital offence, since it was merely considered as a breach of contract. Soldiers no longer able to bear the hardships of campaign because of age or wounds might hope for places in the garrisons of the forts scattered all over the Spanish possessions, but since only a few such positions were available they were hard to obtain.

Training

To keep the men in proper physical condition, foot races, ballgames, swimming and other physical activities were organized. According to a commentator of the period, the purpose of their training was: 'First, to harden the body, making it apt for the work, more agile and skilful. Second, to learn the handling of arms. And third, to obey orders' (Diego de Salazar, *De re militari*).

As in present-day armies, the new soldier was first given individual instruction, to learn how to handle his specific weapon; pike training was usually given first, although men had to be acquainted with all the standard weapons, since the hazards of war might oblige them to use any one of them. The next stage consisted of group instruction, by which the soldiers learned to fight in formation. For this purpose they practised adopting, moving in, and maintaining the formation in any situation. This tactical formation was known as the 'squadron', and was determined by the number of men available and the tactical situation. At a time when



The overland route of the 'Spanish Road', the main corridor of communication for troops and supplies from Italy up to the Spanish territories in Flanders. Depending on the exact itinerary used – which might vary according to military and diplomatic events – its length was between 620 and 745 miles (1,000 to 1,200 kilometres). On average, the Tercios took rather less than 50 days to make the journey, although in 1578 one expedition accomplished it in 32 days. The documents of the Army of Flanders contain complaints about the ragged and exhausted state of the troops arriving there, who sometimes suffered significant numbers of deaths on the march.

armies had to manoeuvre and fight in close formations it was of vital importance for each man to fulfil his duty. This was summarized, by Bernardino de Escalante in his work *Diálogos del arte militar*, in three parts: always follow the flag; always obey the officers; and always be armed and ready to form the squadron. It was recommended that the squadron be formed several times in the course of marches, to accustom the troops to adopt it at any time. To keep the men busy and alert, commanders also organized 'simulated wars' – tactical exercises – in which they practised the fighting tactics they would actually use in battle.

Logistics

The functioning of the military machine depended upon contracts issued to merchants to provide food, weapons, ammunition and all other necessary items. (The efficiency, or otherwise, with which this was accomplished depended upon the regular supply of money from the Spanish government to the armies in the field, which – as the Duke of Parma's records reveal – could by no means be guaranteed.)

Foodstuffs were provided by *vivanderos*, who could sell their produce centrally to the quartermasters, or, on payment of a fee, could set up their stalls in the camps and sell directly to the soldiers at specified prices. Arms and ammunition were supplied by the army authorities, their cost being deducted from the soldiers' wages, but they could also be bought individually. Official contracts to supply the army with weapons stipulated the required features, date and place of delivery, and even a warranty period during which the supplier had to replace faulty weapons at his own expense. The weapons were checked on delivery, and if they failed to comply with the agreed specifications they were returned to the supplier. Arquebuses and muskets were supplied complete with all the accessories necessary to make their ammunition, since each soldier had to make his own. The whole process of placing and fulfilment of contracts was overseen by the *veedores*.

One important consideration was the transport of troops and supplies to the theatre of operations, which during this period was mainly the Low Countries. The difficulty of controlling the sea routes from the northern coasts of Spain to Flanders in time of war meant that it was necessary to maintain an overland corridor linking that territory with the Spanish possessions in Italy. This route, known as the 'Spanish Road', was inaugurated by the Duke of Alba in 1567. The exact itinerary varied – see map above – since intensive diplomatic efforts were required to guarantee that all stages of the route were kept open. This corridor was used until 1622, when French territorial gains interrupted it, isolating some Spanish territories from overland communications.