

The Military

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Louis XV's army

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The Royal Army was a typical 18th century force. The ranks were filled with mercenaries, volunteers, adventurers and others. The discipline was harsh (a soldier who struck an officer had his offending hand chopped off before he was hanged) and the morale low. The Royal Army used linear tactics, copied from Prussian system. The first 20 years of Louis XV were generally peaceful, a marked contrast to the war-like disposition of Louis XIV (the Sun King). France had a population of 25 million and maintained the largest standing army in Europe. It consisted of the following troops:

- guard cavalry
 - Life Guards (*Garde du Corps*) had 4 companies (350-420 each) on black horses
 - Gendarmes (*Gendarmes de la Garde*) had 1 company (220 men) on bay horses
 - Lighthorse of the Guard (*Chevauxx-legers de la Garde*) had 1 company (220 men) on bay horses
 - Horse Grenadiers (*Grenadiers a Cheval de la Garde*) had 1 company (140 men) on bay horses
 - Musketeers (*Mousquetaire de la Garde*) had 2 companies (240 men each) on black and grey horses
 - Life Guards of the King of Poland had 2 companies (75 men each) on bay horses
 - [The Queen of France was a Polish princess, whose father, King Stanislav Leszczyński, was exiled in 1737.]
- guard infantry
 - French Guards (*Gardes-Francaises*) had 6 battalions (1000-1200 each)
 - Swiss Guards
- cavalry
 - Gendarmes of France (*Gendarmerie de France*) had 16 companies
 - heavy cavalry had 60 regiments (incl. 3 German, 1 Irish, 1 Belgian)
 - carabiniers had 5 regiments called brigades
 - dragoons had 17 regiments
- line infantry
 - in 1740 were 155 battalions (on average each had 540 men)
 - in 1747 were 227 battalions
 - in 1750 were 172 battalions
 - in 1762 were 187 battalions (on average each had 630 men)

The battalions were formed in regiments. Only the senior regiments had more than one battalion, but most had a single battalion. ~~Until 1718 each battalion had 1 grenadier and 14 fusilier companies, this was then reduced to 1 grenadier and 8 fusilier. This was raised again to 15 companies in 1734, then dropped to 13 companies from 1749. In 1756 the number of companies was raised to 17 per battalion." (Chartrand - "Louis XV's Army (2) French Infantry." p 5)" The company had approx. 40 men. In 1757 each battalion going on campaign in central Europe received a light-calibre cannon with limber and 3 horses.

- militia
 - - Provincial Militia had 100-120 battalions (on average each had 600 men)
 - - Coast Guard Militia
 - - Bourgeois Militia

The Provincial Militia was drafted for garrison duty but they were also used as army reserves and considered part of the royal forces and listed as such in the army registers. In 1780s reaction reigned supreme over the French military administration. In 1781 the courtiers extorted from Segur, the Minister of War, against his will, a royal decree to the effect that every candidate for a commission must satisfy the court genealogist that he was possessed of 16 quarters of nobility ! The effect of this was to shut the doors of the army in the face of the rising middle class.

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