

The Bugle



Quarterly Journal of the
Camp Curtin Historical Society
and Civil War Round Table, Inc.

Spring 2007
Volume 17, Number 1



Union Army Corps Insignia

Union Army Corps Insignia

Practical Identification and Symbols of Unit Pride

The Civil War was big, bigger than anything in the American experience to that time. Prior wars had been small-scale affairs by comparison. Most battles of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War and various Indian Wars had involved field armies of only a few thousand soldiers. Rarely did a United States force number more than 10,000 men in one field army.

As the United States approached the Civil War, the Regular Army had an authorized strength of about 18,000 but it was not up to full strength and could probably field only about 16,000 men when needed. Although this number appears large, it should be remembered that most of the troops were dispersed throughout the western territories at company-level posts of about 100 men or less. The only troops east of the Mississippi were the artillery units manning the coastal forts. With the firing on Fort Sumter, everything would change.

The first big battle of the Civil War – Manassas/Bull Run – brought two armies of more than 25,000 against each other. From there, the armies only got bigger and it was not unusual for either side to have 50,000 to 100,000 men in a battle. This change in the scale of warfare meant massive changes in a number of areas. Weapons, ammunition, uniforms, food, equipment and transportation had to be supplied and organized. Officers who had commanded a company now had to lead regiments, brigades, divisions, corps and armies.

One of the biggest problems, especially on campaign, was identifying a soldier's unit. The U.S. Army Regulations did not specify any unit insignia other than small brass numbers for regiments and letters for companies. These were to be worn on the



The number of each army corps has been added to the insignia on the commemorative G.A.R. scarf pictured on the cover.

dress hat, which was usually not worn in battle and when it was, it was rarely “dressed” with its brass eagle, branch insignia, regimental number, company letter, woolen cord, and feather. This lack of identification sometimes led to problems in identifying groups of soldiers who performed well or badly on the battlefield or those who straggled along the march or who were in the process of deserting since it was easy to get lost in a crowd of similarly dressed soldiers.

A case of mistaken identification by Maj. Gen. Philip Kearny, in the summer of 1862, during the Peninsula Campaign eventually led to a system of unit identification in the army. As described by E. D. Townsend, in his *Anecdotes of the Civil War*, Kearny mistook a group of officers resting under a tree as stragglers from his division and berated them with a few choice expletives. After he had finished, one of the officers explained that they were not part of his command. Kearny apologized and said he

would take steps to recognize his men in the future. Thereafter, Kearny's men were to wear a red piece of cloth on their hats. Initially, no shape was specified for what became known as the "Kearny Patch."

The patch remained popular in Kearny's division, even after his death and became an emblem of unit pride. Kearny's officers also instituted the "Kearny Medal" and "Kearny Cross" as unofficial decorations in memory of their fallen leader. Unfortunately, the idea of unit insignia did not immediately catch on with the army.

When Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker took command of the Army of the Potomac in 1863, he instituted a number of administrative changes to improve the organization and operation of the army, including



creating a system of unit insignia. Major Gen. Daniel Butterfield (above), Hooker's Chief of Staff, gets credit for developing the system. The order for the new insignia was simple and straight forward. Each of the seven infantry corps in the army was assigned a simple geometric symbol that could be easily cut out of cloth. Each division in the corps was then assigned a color: red for the first, white for the second, blue for the third, and green for the fourth. Later orange would be specified for any fifth divisions.

A circular (next page) was issued throughout the army to explain the new corps/division insignia system. The original drawing attached to the circular showed each insignia about two inches across.

In practical usage, however, the resulting insignia that survive were slightly different

than the drawings. The lozenge of the 3rd Corps was usually more of a diamond rather than a square; the Maltese cross of the 5th Corps almost always has straight sides rather than wavy; the cross of the 6th Corps was often worn as an "X" during the war but after the war it was usually turned vertical on monuments and in publications; the crescent of the 11th Corps had points on the end and was worn with both points up as shown but also facing left or right; and the star of the 12th Corps was usually worn with a point up.

The insignia were designed to be worn on the top of the forage cap (below). The purpose of this positioning was to allow officers, provost marshals (military police), and messengers riding by on horses to look down on soldiers and immediately identify their corps and division.



From most accounts, it appears that most of the Army of the Potomac had their corps insignia by the time the army began its long march to Gettysburg in June 1863. Originally designed to improve discipline, the insignia became emblems of unit pride after that battle, especially for the 2nd and 5th Corps that claimed most of the glory and responsibility for winning the battle. There was probably somewhat less pride in wearing the crescent of the 11th Corps, which many claimed had been routed on the first day unfairly earning them the nickname "Howard's Cowards."

Headquarters Army of the Potomac

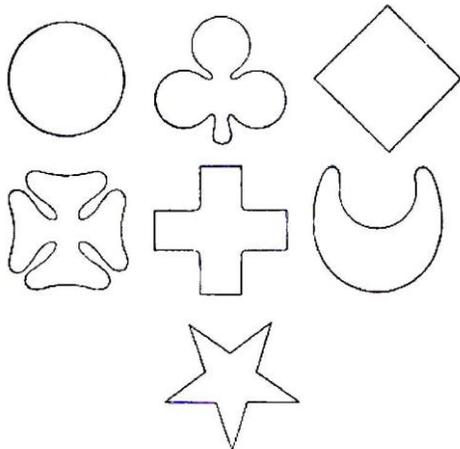
March 21, 1863

For the purpose of ready recognition of corps and divisions in this army, and to prevent injustice by reports of straggling and misconduct through mistake as to organization, the chief quartermaster will furnish without delay the following badges, to be worn by officers and enlisted men of all regiments of the various corps mentioned. They will be securely fastened upon the center of the top of the cap.

Inspecting officers will at all inspections see that these badges are worn as designated:

First Corps, a sphere-First Division, red;
Second, white: Third, blue.
Second Corps, trefoil-First Division, red;
Second, white: Third, blue.
Third Corps, lozenge-First Division, red;
Second, white: Third, blue.
Fifth Corps, Maltese cross-First Division, red;
Second, white: Third, blue.
Sixth Corps-cross-First Division, red;
Second, white: Third, blue. (Light Division, green.)
Eleventh Corps, crescent-First Division, red;
Second, white: Third, blue.
Twelfth Corps, star-First Division, red;
Second, white: Third, blue.

The size and colors will be according to pattern.



By command of Major-General Hooker:

S. Williams,
Assistant Adjutant-General

When the 11th and 12th Corps were sent to the western theater of operations, they took their corps badges with them and the concept began to spread to the other Union armies. When the eastern soldiers asked the westerners what was their corps insignia, a widely circulated story reports that a soldier slapped his cartridge box and said that those forty rounds were all the insignia he needed. Whether true or not, ultimately the insignia of the 15th Army Corps did become a depiction of a cartridge box and the words "Forty Rounds." Incidentally, the 11th and 12th Corps were redesignated the 20th Corps and used the five-pointed star.

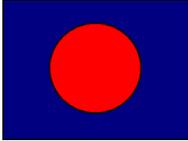
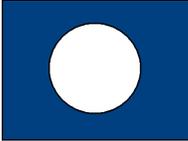
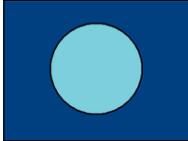
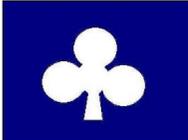
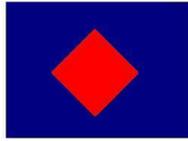
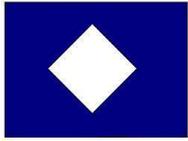
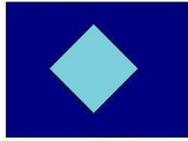
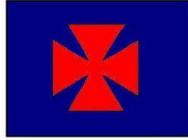
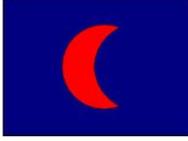
Most of the badge designs have no relation to the number of the corps, except perhaps the 7th Corps that had a five pointed star inside a crescent moon, thus showing seven points. The 9th Corps adopted the most complicated badge – a shield with a crossed cannon and anchor. Although never officially adopted, the insignia of the 16th Corps was a circle with four Minie balls pointing toward the center (depicted on the scarf as a circle, with an "X" for the bullets).

Many of the insignia were not adopted by the various corps until late in the war or even after the cessation of hostilities. Nevertheless, they became potent symbols of unit pride and often appear on reunion ribbons, in regimental histories, and on monuments at battlefields.



The star leaves no doubt that the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry was in the 12th Corps at Gettysburg.

Army of the Potomac Insignia at Battle of Gettysburg

	<i>1st Division</i>	<i>2nd Division</i>	<i>3rd Division</i>
1st Army Corps			
2nd Army Corps			
3rd Army Corps			
5th Army Corps			
6th Army Corps			
11th Army Corps			
12th Army Corps			

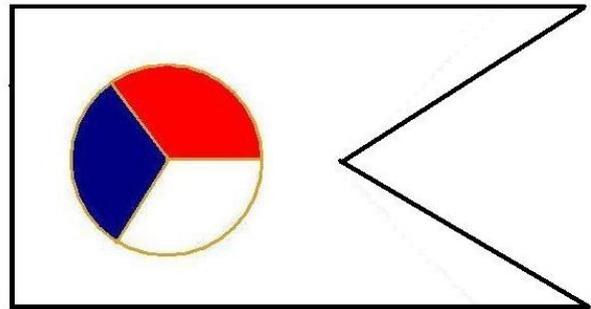
In addition to creating the corps insignia, Hooker and Butterfield also established a new system of headquarters-designating flags for the Army of the Potomac, using the new corps insignia as the basis for the design. The corps headquarters flag was blue with a swallow-tail, division flags were rectangles and brigade flags were triangles.

Oddly, the 1863 issue of corps headquarters flags did not have the corps insignia. All corps headquarters flags had a white botonee cross with the corps number in red. Later, the corps headquarters flags were logically changed to display the corps insignia.

The corps insignia on each division and brigade flag matched the color of those worn on the men's hats: red for the 1st division (with a white field and blue trim on the brigade flags), white for the 2nd division (with a blue field and red trim on the brigade flags), and blue for the 3rd division (with a white field and red trim on the brigade flags).

At Gettysburg, Major General John Reynolds, commander of the 1st Army Corps and the Left Wing of the Army of the Potomac, apparently had a personal flag that

followed him onto the battlefield. It was a white swallow-tail flag with the circle insignia of the corps divided into three parts of red, white and blue to symbolize the three divisions. Some of the corps staff officers wore such a tri-colored insignia on their caps. The flag appears in Peter Rothermel's painting "The First Day and the Death of Reynolds," one of a series on Gettysburg painted in 1871 at the request of the Pennsylvania Legislature.

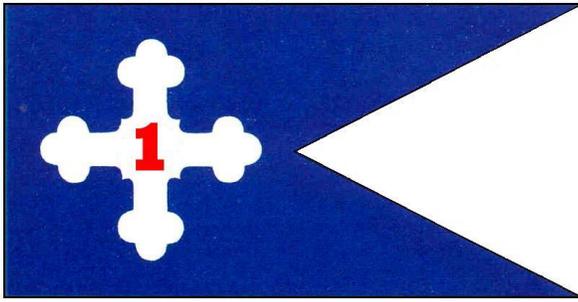


As with the corps insignia themselves, the Army of the Potomac flag system was also eventually adopted by other Union Armies. Shown below are the flags for the various corps at the Battle of Gettysburg. The purpose of the flags was to mark the location of the commander on the battlefield and in camp so that he could be easily found by messengers.

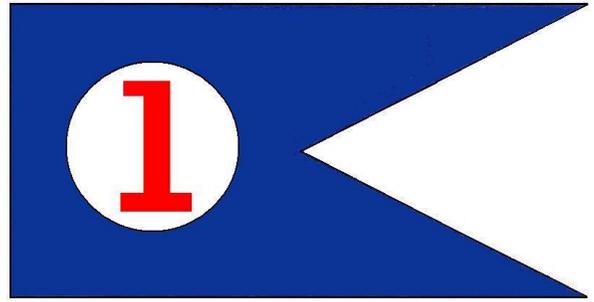


Third Army Corps flags on the march.

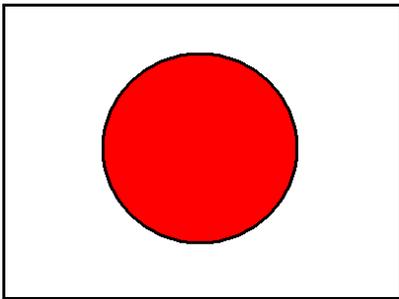
1st Army Corps Flags



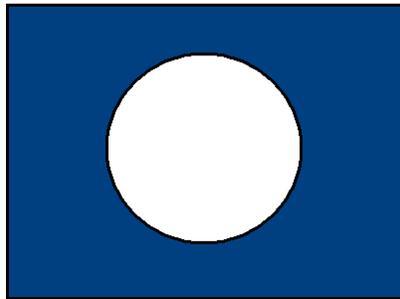
1st Army Corps (First Pattern)



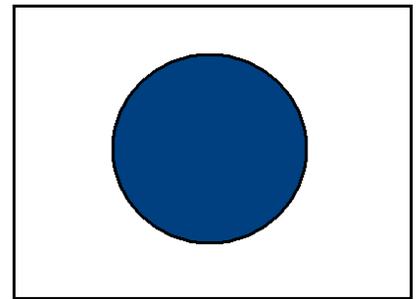
1st Army Corps (Second Pattern)



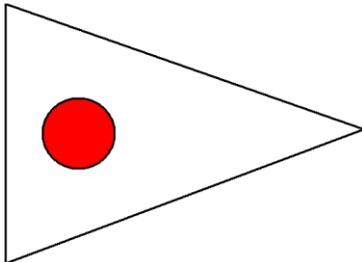
1st Division



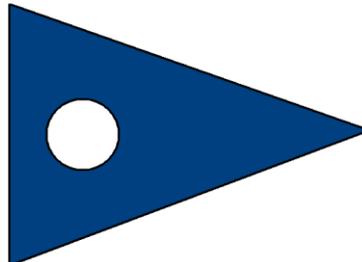
2nd Division



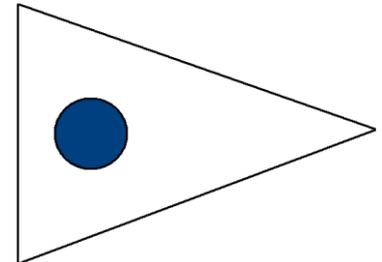
3rd Division



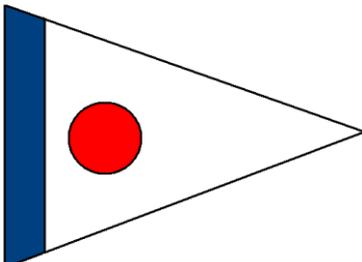
1st Brigade – 1st Division



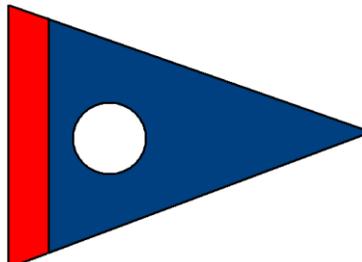
1st Brigade – 2nd Division



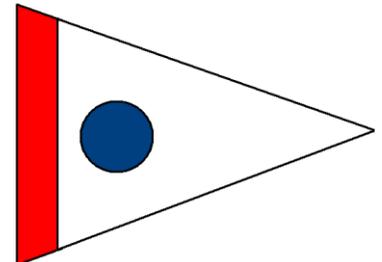
1st Brigade – 3rd Division



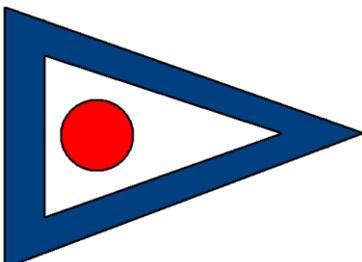
2nd Brigade – 1st Division



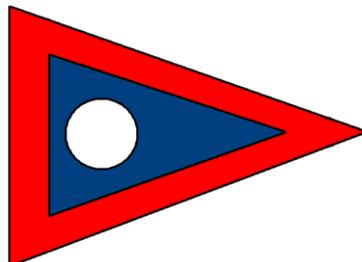
2nd Brigade – 2nd Division



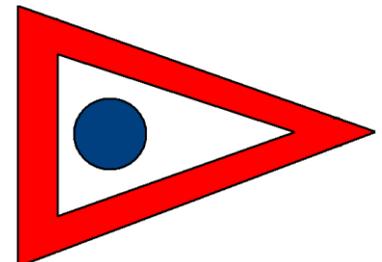
2nd Brigade – 3rd Division



3rd Brigade – 1st Division

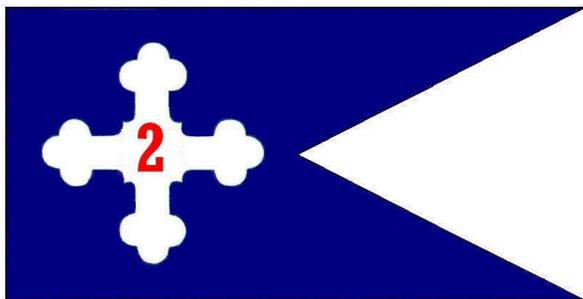


3rd Brigade – 2nd Division

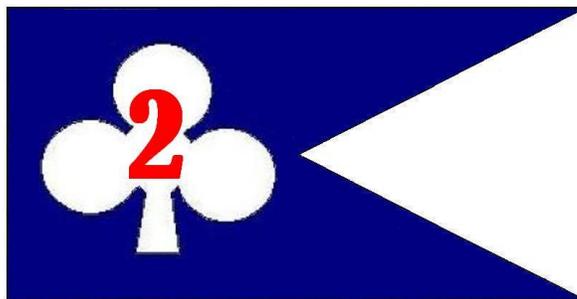


3rd Brigade – 3rd Division

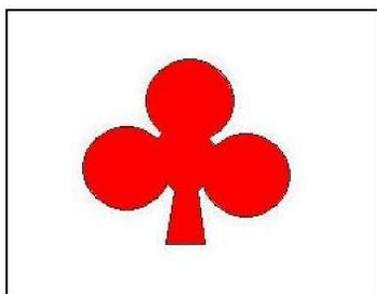
2nd Army Corps Flags



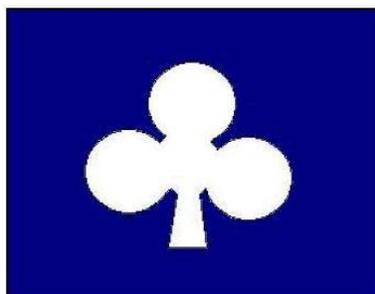
2nd Army Corps (First Pattern)



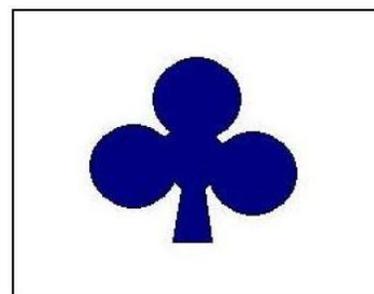
2nd Army Corps (Second Pattern)



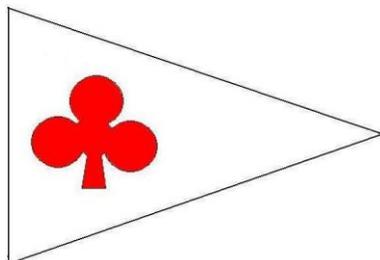
1st Division



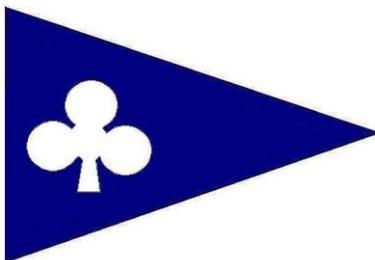
2nd Division



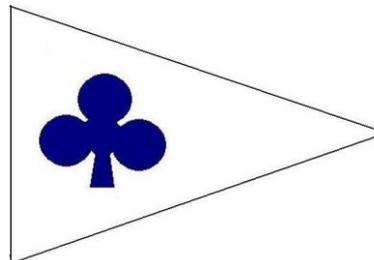
3rd Division



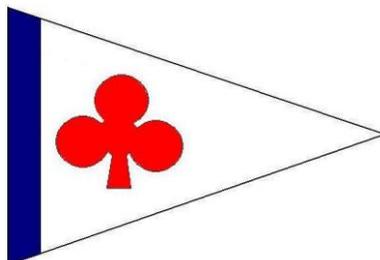
1st Brigade – 1st Division



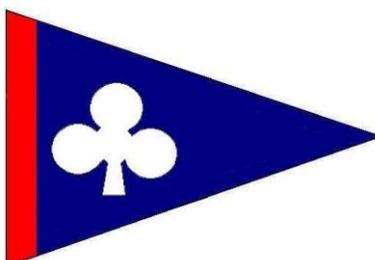
1st Brigade – 2nd Division



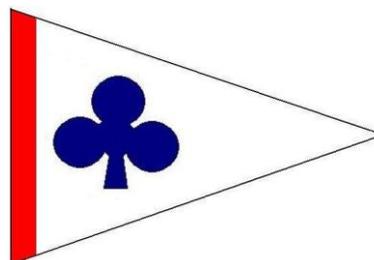
1st Brigade – 3rd Division



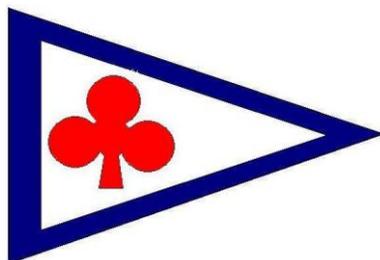
2nd Brigade – 1st Division



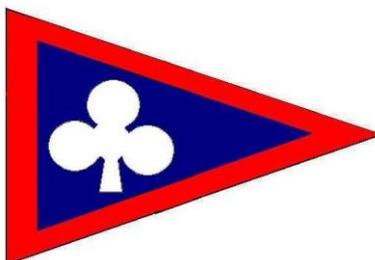
2nd Brigade – 2nd Division



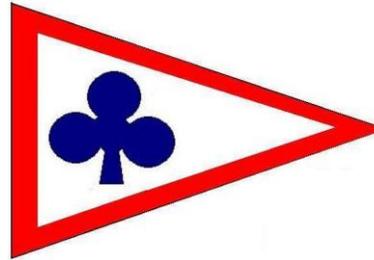
2nd Brigade – 3rd Division



3rd Brigade – 1st Division

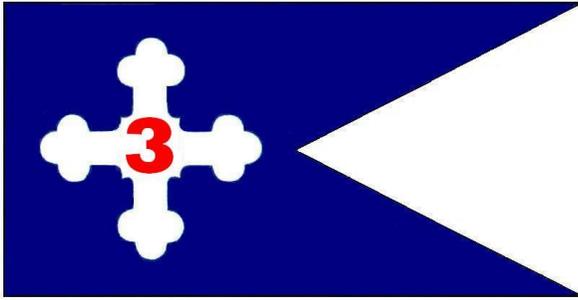


3rd Brigade – 2nd Division

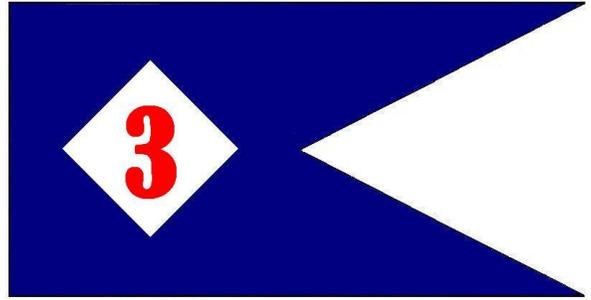


3rd Brigade – 3rd Division

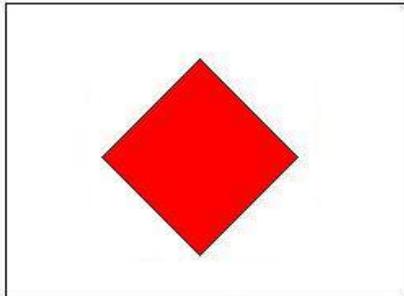
3rd Army Corps Flags



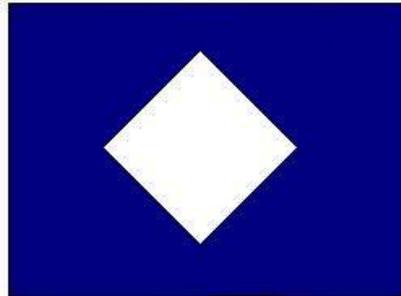
3rd Army Corps (First Pattern)



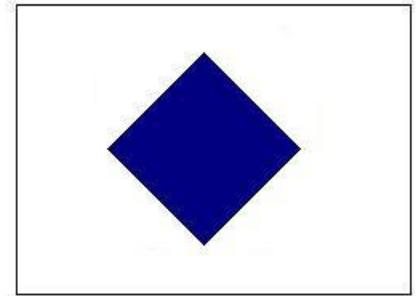
3rd Army Corps (Second Pattern)



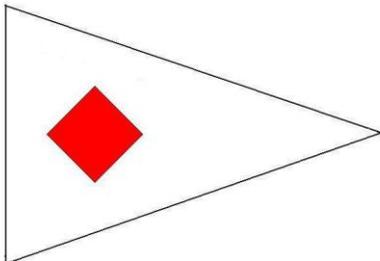
1st Division



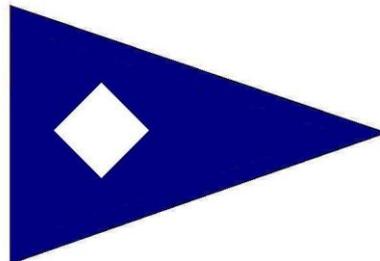
2nd Division



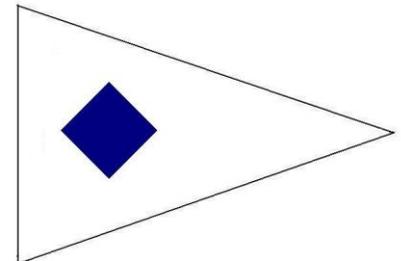
3rd Division



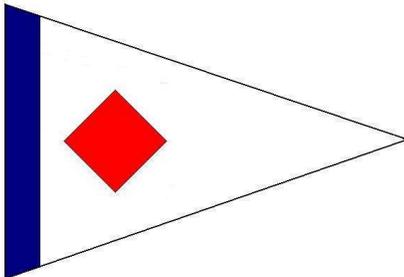
1st Brigade – 1st Division



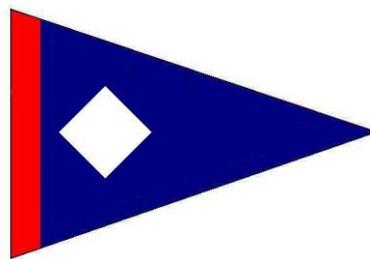
1st Brigade – 2nd Division



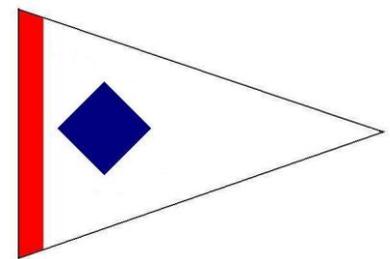
1st Brigade – 3rd Division



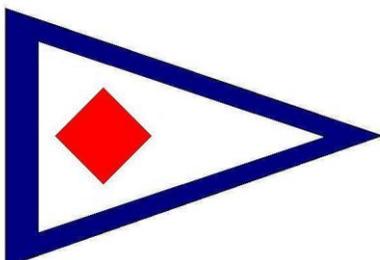
2nd Brigade – 1st Division



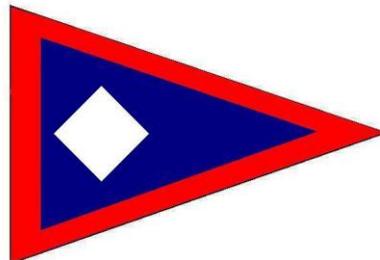
2nd Brigade – 2nd Division



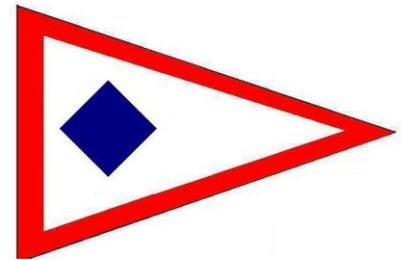
2nd Brigade – 3rd Division



3rd Brigade – 1st Division

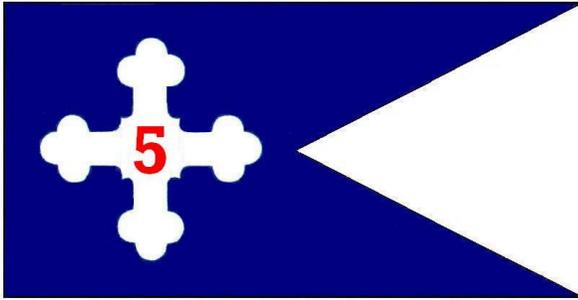


3rd Brigade – 2nd Division

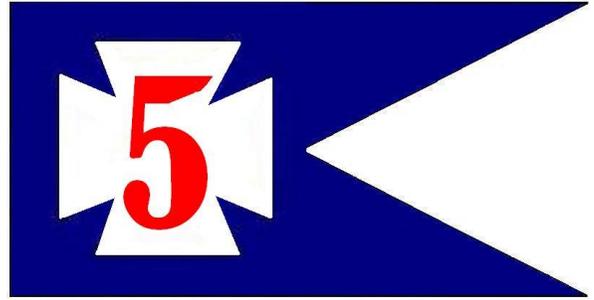


3rd Brigade – 3rd Division

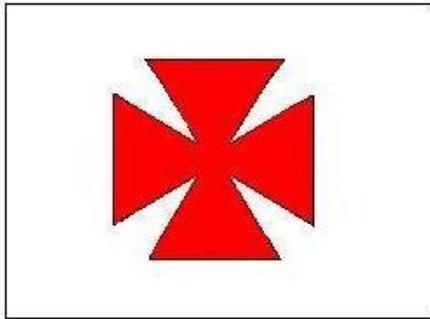
5th Army Corps Flags



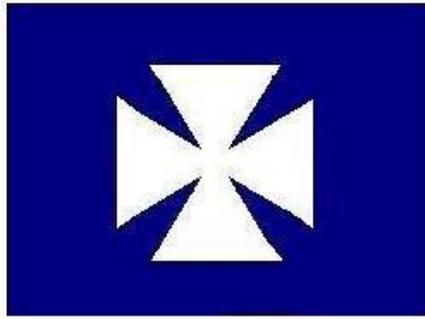
5th Army Corps (First Pattern)



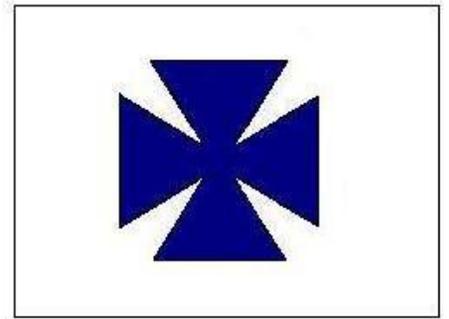
5th Army Corps (Second Pattern)



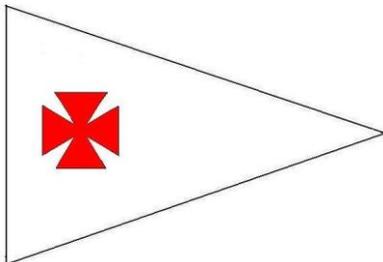
1st Division



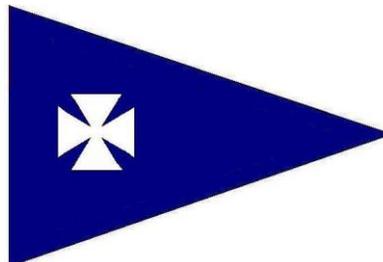
2nd Division



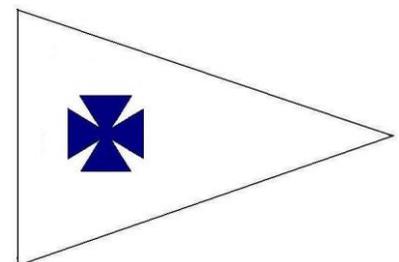
3rd Division



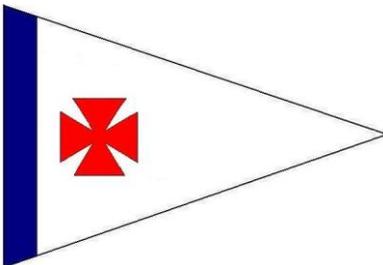
1st Brigade – 1st Division



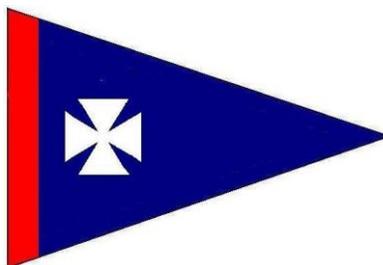
1st Brigade – 2nd Division



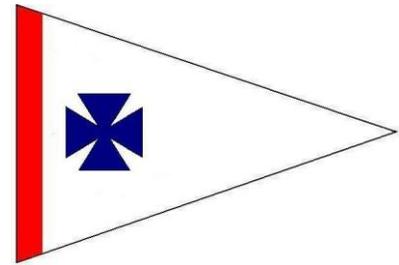
1st Brigade – 3rd Division



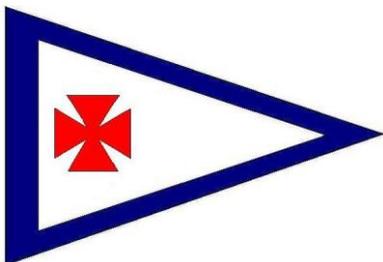
2nd Brigade – 1st Division



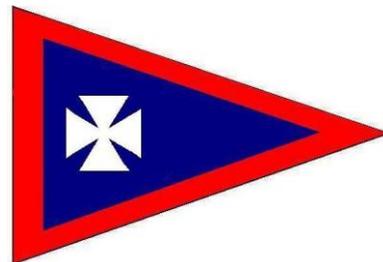
2nd Brigade – 2nd Division



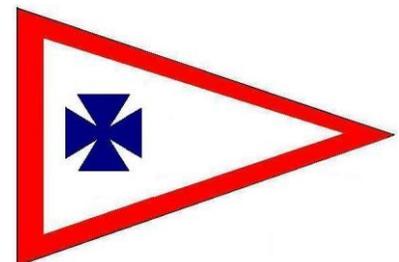
2nd Brigade – 3rd Division



3rd Brigade – 1st Division

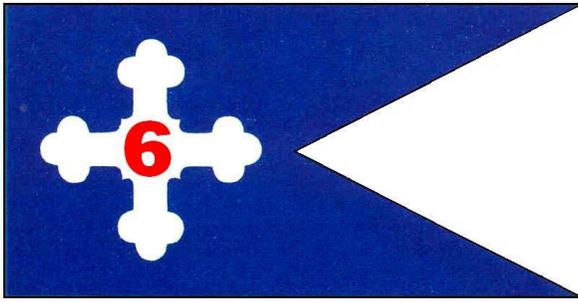


3rd Brigade – 2nd Division

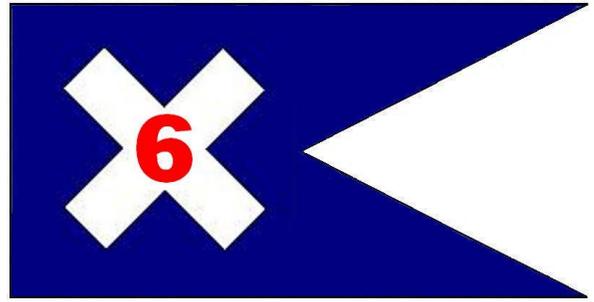


3rd Brigade – 3rd Division

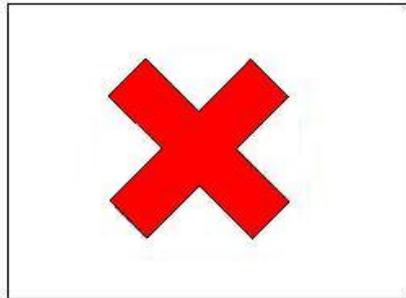
6th Army Corps Flags



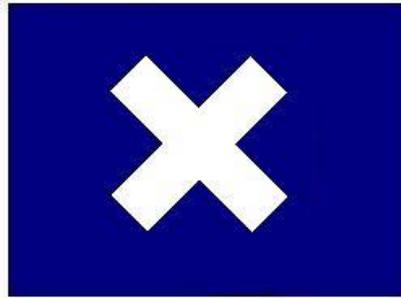
6th Army Corps (First Pattern)



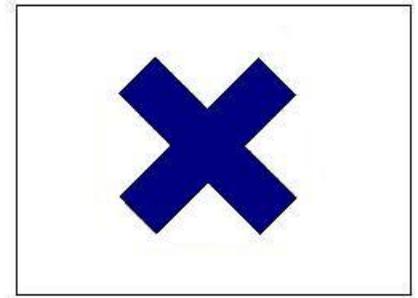
6th Army Corps (Second Pattern)



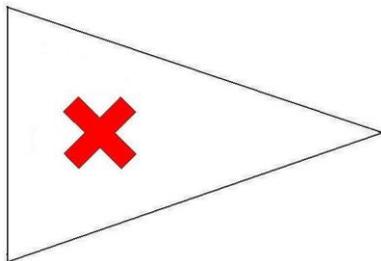
1st Division



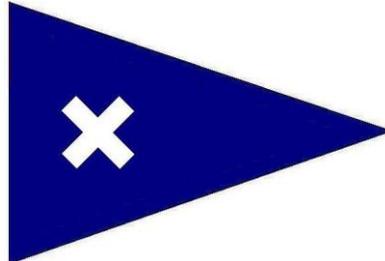
2nd Division



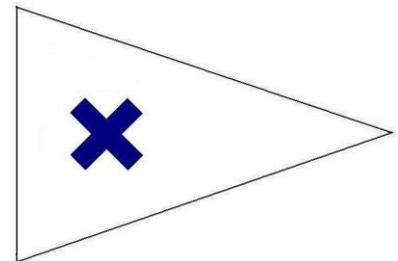
3rd Division



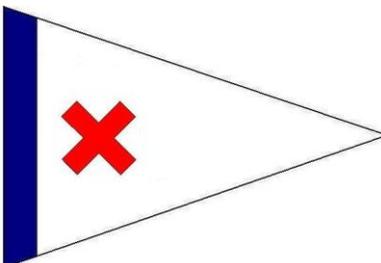
1st Brigade – 1st Division



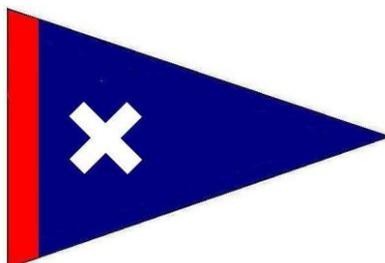
1st Brigade – 2nd Division



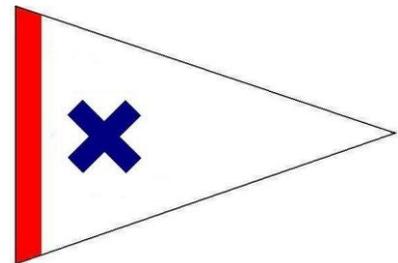
1st Brigade – 3rd Division



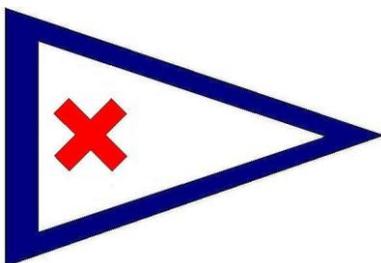
2nd Brigade – 1st Division



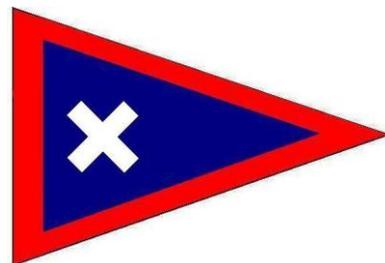
2nd Brigade – 2nd Division



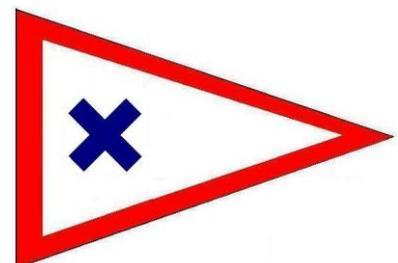
2nd Brigade – 3rd Division



3rd Brigade – 1st Division

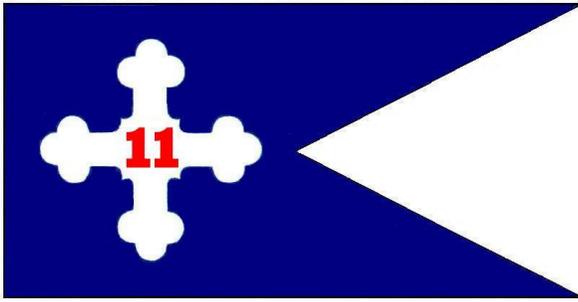


3rd Brigade – 2nd Division

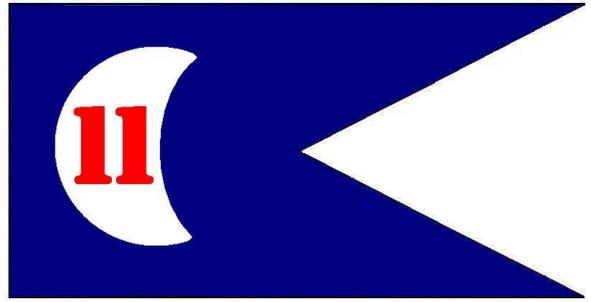


3rd Brigade – 3rd Division

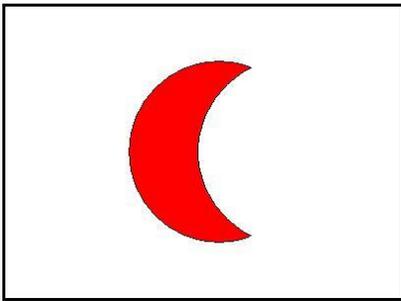
11th Army Corps Flags



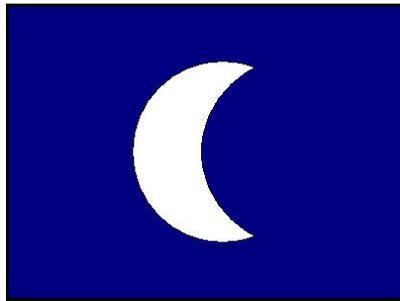
11th Army Corps (First Pattern)



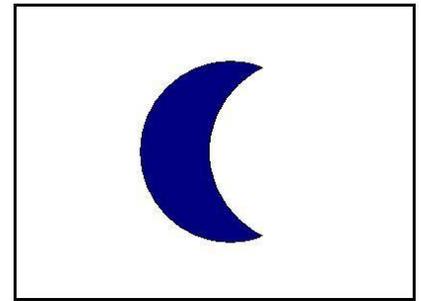
11th Army Corps (Second Pattern)



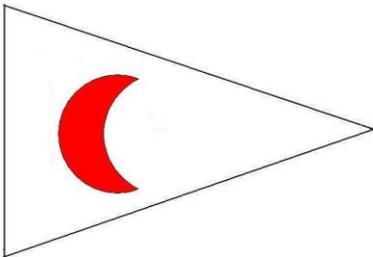
1st Division



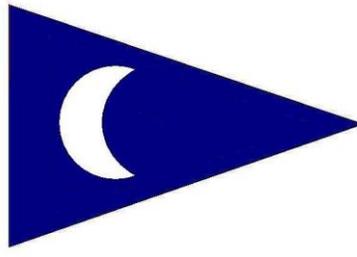
2nd Division



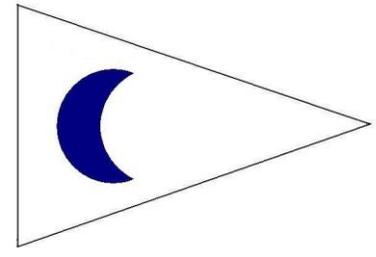
3rd Division



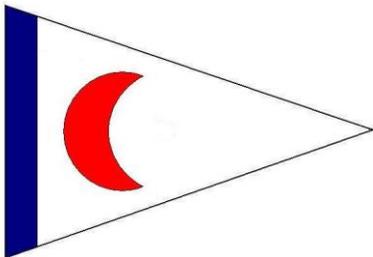
1st Brigade – 1st Division



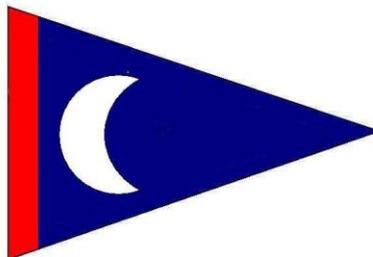
1st Brigade – 2nd Division



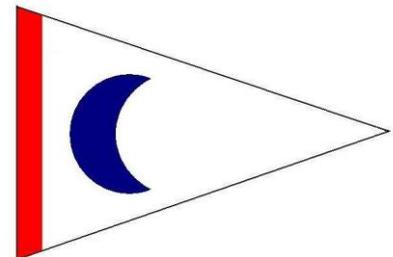
1st Brigade – 3rd Division



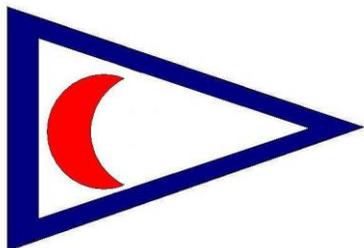
2nd Brigade – 1st Division



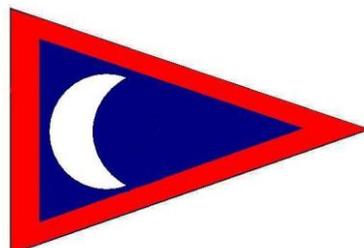
2nd Brigade – 2nd Division



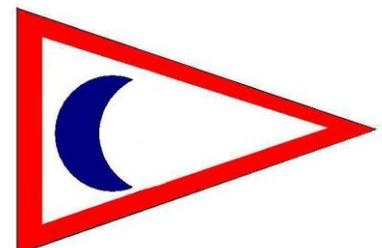
2nd Brigade – 3rd Division



3rd Brigade – 1st Division

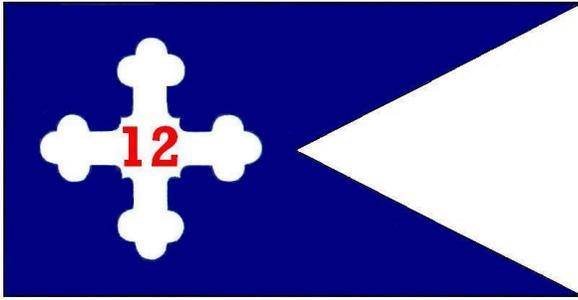


3rd Brigade – 2nd Division



3rd Brigade – 3rd Division

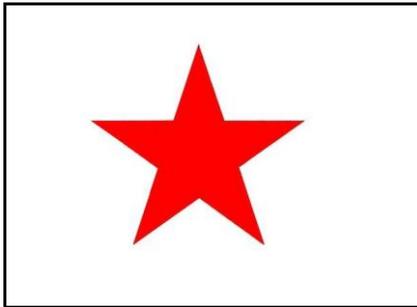
12th Army Corps Flags



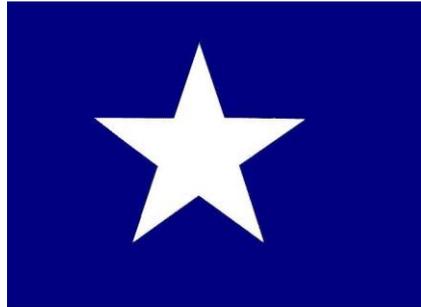
12th Army Corps (First Pattern)



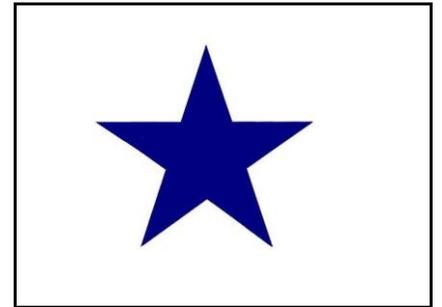
12th Army Corps (Second Pattern)



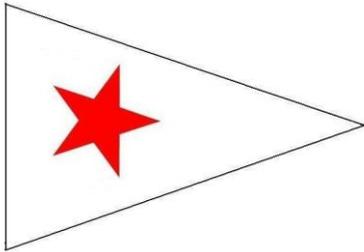
1st Division



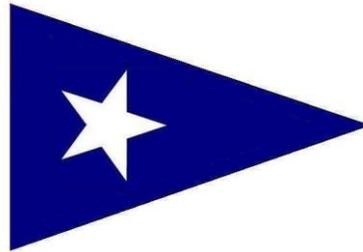
2nd Division



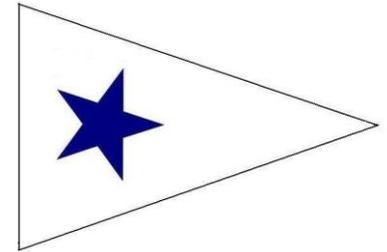
3rd Division



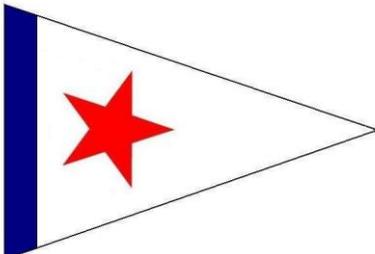
1st Brigade – 1st Division



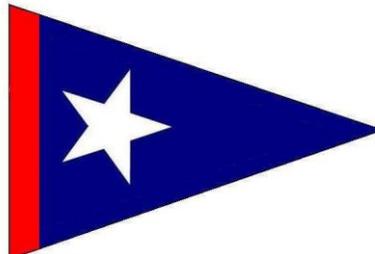
1st Brigade – 2nd Division



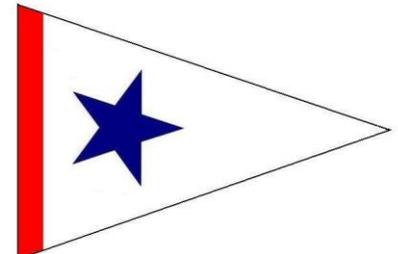
1st Brigade – 3rd Division



2nd Brigade – 1st Division



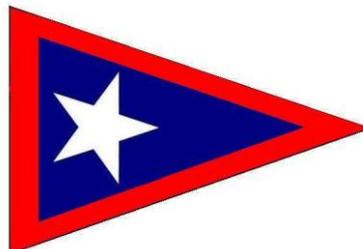
2nd Brigade – 2nd Division



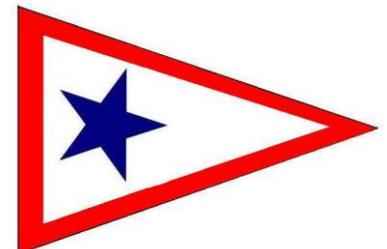
2nd Brigade – 3rd Division



3rd Brigade – 1st Division



3rd Brigade – 2nd Division



3rd Brigade – 3rd Division