

Some aspects of the founding
of the collection of the Swedish
banners of the Memorial Hall in
18th–19th centuries

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The decree on June 28, 1756, given to Second Lieutenant Ivan Meller about collecting tools, and also the military miscellanea in provincial arsenals and garrisons laid the foundation of the central storage for a large variety of military objects, including trophies. It was officially opened in 1761 in the St Petersburg arsenal on Liteyny Avenue since the end of the 18th century called Memorial Hall. By that time the collection had a total of 6000 objects. Among them, banners, both discontinued Russian ones and Swedish trophies, constituted a special and quite numerous group. Unsurprising, since Russia and Sweden had fought two wars only during the 18th century.

Swedish trophy banners began to appear in St Petersburg in the first years of the Northern War. As a result of battles in Ingermanland, Poland and Saxony, trophy tools, uniforms and banners were brought to Russia almost immediately after the last shots were fired. Most were transported to the Moscow Armoury where by 1709 - 1710 a special room had been set aside for trophies of the current operations, in particular battles at Lesnaya and Poltava. But some Swedish banners also appeared in the St Petersburg arsenal, and after the capture of Vyborg in 1710 and the Gangutsky triumph in 1714 many Swedish banners were exhibited in the Peter and Paul Cathedral.

After the Battle of Poltava the fortunes of war changed in favour of the Russian army, and the number of trophies steadily increased. In this regard the operations in Finland 1713-1714 and the landing operations of the Russian armies closer to the end of war should be noted.

However, the largest group of Swedish banners was kept in Moscow; in total some hundred items. In 1710-1711 there were 295 banners with detailed descriptions

Separate examples of Swedish banners ended up in garrisons of the cities which were recently at the epicentre of military operations. So, for example, in 1716 the Reval garrison registered 36 various Swedish banners, destroyed

by mice, and the Arkhangelogorodsky arsenal two Swedish worsted blue flags with "crosswise" two yellow strips.¹

From 1730 necessary inventory work on the trophies was carried out when possible, but never finished: this concerned banners especially. It was necessary to order, systematize and annotate all "odd" and memorable objects which had been dispersed in different places.

The work of gathering information about the trophy banners' whereabouts in garrisons and arsenals can be seen as preparatory work for the future exhibition in the Memorial Hall. At this time the Swedish banners were mainly found in Baltic garrisons and Reval recorded a cloth of white damask with the image of the royal coat-of-arms without staff. In the sheet it is noted that the cloth is badly damaged. At the same place a banner of azure blue damask with a royal monogram was found which had a gilded staff and finial. In the Riga garrison there were four banners in poor condition without staffs: one white and three red, all made of taffeta. In Dunamynde was found two banners in poor condition in taffeta; white with blue stripes.²

At last, according to the inventory of the St Petersburg arsenal from 1734 there were 245 infantry and 36 dragoon banners. Most were in very poor condition and could not be restored. These banners were trophies from the Northern War and represented all ranges of insignia from the times of Karl XI and Karl XII. There were for example banners of household troops; regiments raised among tenured farmers; the Finnish divisions; and mercenary battalions. Descriptions given are brief, but to the point. For example: "A banner of taffeta yellow with crowned lions of chamber which hold the inscription; under them on a hillock: 1712; a circle of grass painted".³ An even shorter type of description is as follows: "Banners taffeta cornflower-blue". The descriptions of dragoon banners correspond stylistically: "damask banner is red with fringe of red silk; on it are painted two hands with swords under a crown". Or: "Damask banner with coat of arms painted on gold blue silk".



9.1 Estland infantry regiment of landmilitia. Company color. Time of the Northern war BC № 3625 The State Hermitage.

It is obvious that a considerable part of these trophies appeared in the Memorial Hall, a fact which can be confirmed by their descriptions made in 1817, 1830–1832 and 1862. Some of them however were transferred to the Peter and Paul Cathedral to supplement its trophy collection.

The information on trophies from the Russian-Swedish war of 1741–1743 is limited. Documents in the Russian naval archive can testify to some Swedish white and cornflower-blue banners being sent to St Petersburg. However data of the arsenal book with information about some artefacts stored in Memorial Hall in 1841 shows that many more had been transferred from the St Petersburg fortress in 1778. This group consists of 103 infantry banners of which some were taken by the Russian armies in the war against Sweden under the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna. Even though most of them had preserved staffs no more than 30 could be said to be in satisfactory condition.⁴

In 1785 about 40 Swedish banners of different colours – red, white, blue and gray – were delivered to the Memorial hall, although they had serious damage. As for standards,

there are descriptions of no more than 10. Their damask cloths with patterns from taffeta are of different colours and have very typical and traditional designs both for cavalry and infantry insignia. The designs consists of Carolean monograms, inscriptions in Latin, the Swedish coat-of-arms with two lions, and so forth. Also dragoon standards of the Karelian cavalry (Two hands with sabres and with a crown), panels with a fringe and the embroidered monograms.

The collection of Swedish banners in the St Petersburg arsenal grew after the termination of the war of 1788–1790 in spite of the lack of victories by the Russian army and fleet. Nevertheless a quantity of trophy banners, standards and flags appeared in the Russian capital. It is worth mentioning a white banner of the Guards and also a multi-colored infantry banner from an unknown regiment.

At the same year two standards and six banners were transferred to the St Petersburg arsenal from the Peter and Paul Cathedral. These insignia were known to be a result of landing operations of the Russian marines. They



9.2 Västmanland regiment. Company color 1686. BC № 3615. The State Hermitage.



9.3 Fragment of the Swedish navy flag. 18th century. BC № 6251 The State Hermitage.

represented a large group which didn't vary much and were in a good shape. Generally these patterns were red damask cloths. Some had fringes of silk or gold and some also had tassels. Damages to the cloth were recorded but the motifs were only rarely mentioned – in particular, the image of a hawk on one of them, and monograms on others.⁵

The Swedish kettledrum damask curtain with the crowns embroidered in the middle from silver threads complemented the trophy collection of the Memorial Hall.

The Memorial Hall exhibition also presented examples of Swedish navy flags taken by Russian marines, guards and seaman in battles in the Russo-Swedish War of 1788–1790. There were 6 ship flags and 8 flags of small vessels⁶.



9.4 Tavastehus regiment. Company color 1686. BC № 3717. The State Hermitage.