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ON THE INSTITUTION OF ROYAL HUSSAR COMPANIONS IN BOTH KOMPUT ARMIES OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH *under King Jan III (1674–1696)*

Abstract

The institution of the royal hussar banner or companion (Polish: *chorągiew*) in the permanent mercenary army appeared during the reign of King Władysław IV. From the time of King Jan Kazimierz, it was a constant element of the Crown army. Under the last Vasa king, the institution of the royal hussar banner also appeared in the Lithuanian army. After his ascension to the throne in 1674, King Jan III returned to the practices of King Jan Kazimierz and consistently expanded the number of his lancer detachments – among which were the units of his sons. In 1674, the king had at his disposal in the Crown *Komput* army his old unit from the time he was a hetman, and a unit inherited from King Michał Korybut and named after Prince Jakub. In 1691, the institution of the royal hussars reached the number of five units – two under the name of the king (one in the Crown Army, the other, after 1683, in the Lithuanian Army), and three crown banners of the princes (Jakub, Aleksander, and Konstanty). The institution of the royal hussar banners fulfilled a wide spectrum of duties, including non-military ones. Their units were awarded the highest positions, performed important tasks on the battlefields, constituted a school of military cadres, fulfilled official duties and gave direct access to the royal court. The military associated with hussars also performed a number of political missions for the king and his family. In general, the institution of royal hussar banners made up the elite of the most selected cavalry formation, which was made up of half-legendary lancers.