

History of Indian Military Flags & Ranks

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In news—The new Naval Ensign (flag), which was recently unveiled by the Indian Prime Minister has brought into focus the flags and ranks adopted by the Indian military after Independence.

History of Indian Military Flags & ranks-

- According to the National Archives of India document, **Lord Louis Mountbatten**, former Viceroy and Governor General of India, **played a major role in suggesting new flags and rank badges when India** was about to become a Republic on January 26, 1950.
- The switch from British-era flags and ranks took place when India became a Republic.
- Prior to that the flags and badges of ranks of the military were of the British pattern.
- The **new, Indian pattern of flags of Army, Navy and Air Force, and also the Regimental Flags of the Army and badges of ranks of all three services were adopted on January 26, 1950.**
- The **'Kings Commission' granted to Indian military officers was also changed to 'Indian Commission' on the same date;** and at a subsequent date the King's Colours of the various Regiments were laid to rest in Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun.
- **The national archives have files, dated 1949,** that include a detailed note from Lord Mountbatten regarding names, flags and ranks of the armed forces, and then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to the then Defence Minister Baldev Singh regarding Mountbatten's suggestions.
- The six page note (dated May 1, 1949) signed as

Mountbatten of Burma, begins by saying that consequent to becoming a Republic the word 'Royal' shall be dropped from India's Army, Navy and Air Force.

- **Lord Mountbatten strongly recommended that no other word like 'State' or 'Republican' should replace the word 'Royal'** because it "would have the effect of separating the forces of India psychologically from the other services in the Commonwealth".
- He further suggested in the letter that the **Crown should be replaced from the insignias and replaced by the "three lions of Ashoka"**.
- **Regarding the Naval Ensign**, he said that all Commonwealth navies fly the same flag which consists of a **large white flag with a red cross and Union Jack** in the upper corner nearer the staff and is known as the 'White Ensign'.
- The new Ensign, the note suggested, should continue to have the red cross but the **Indian national flag should replace the Union Jack**.
- Similarly, **for the IAF he proposed that the light blue Flag which has Union Jack and red, white and blue roundel should be replaced with one having the national flag with green, white and saffron roundel**. Again, he suggested this to maintain commonality with the Commonwealth flags.
- In his note, he strongly urged that existing uniforms should be changed as little as possible.
- He added that the **Crown worn on badges of ranks of Majors and above should be replaced by the "three lions of Ashoka"** and that the Star of the Order of the Bath should be replaced by Star of India or another form of star.
- He also suggested that the **crossed sword and baton on the badges of ranks of Generals should be retained**.
- The former Viceroy **advocated retaining the stripes of rank in Navy and Air Force** saying these were internationally almost the same.

- Lord Mountbatten further went on to suggest **changes in the cap badges and buttons of uniforms** down to the minutest detail and followed up on the note by sending actual designs of flags, ranks, cap badges and buttons.

Indian government's reaction to Mountbatten's suggestions-

- Nehru wrote to the then defence minister in September 1949 saying that he agreed with the suggestions made by the former Governor General that there should be as little change as possible.
- The then prime minister particularly mentioned the changes suggested by Mountbatten for the Navy.
- Then Governor General C Rajagopalachari also wrote back to Nehru in May 1949 itself agreeing to Mountbatten's suggestions.
- He initially differed in opinion about the need to replace the Star of the Order of Bath but followed up with another letter to Nehru saying the Star had a Latin inscription which referred to the Holy Trinity or the United Kingdom of three nations, and said the five pointed Star of India would be an apt replacement.
- He ended his letter with the sentence, "So Dickie is right all through".
- **In the end, Mountbatten's suggestions were virtually all accepted and implemented with effect from January 26, 1950.**