

Flag Terminology

BADGE

An emblem or other device displayed on a flag, generally in the fly.

BANNER

A rectangular flag used by a king, prince, duke, or other noble. The coat of arms of the owner covers the banner's entire surface. The term is also loosely applied to a national flag (e.g., the "Star-Spangled Banner") and today is synonymous with flag.

CANTON

The four quarters of a flag are named cantons, especially the upper quarter of the hoist, that is, the upper left hand corner of the flag. The canton is sometimes also called the union.

COLORS

The national and regimental or armorial flags carried by dismounted organizations (such as a color guard). Hence, the national color for Army and Marine Corps regiments is the U.S. flag. The term also applies to the national ensign flown aboard a naval vessel.

ENSIGN

A special flag based on a country's national flag and used exclusively on naval ships or merchant ships. The civil ensign is the merchant marine's flag. The U.S. flag serves as a national flag, naval ensign, and civil ensign. Great Britain, on the other hand, has a white ensign for naval ships, a red ensign for merchant ships, and a blue ensign for merchant ships commanded by an officer in the Naval Reserve. Great Britain also has an ensign for the Royal Air Force and one for airports.

ESTOILE

A six-pointed, usually wavy, star.

FIELD

The ground of each division of a flag.

FLY

The edge of a flag farthest from the staff.

GARRISON FLAG

A large U.S. flag flown at forts. During the war of 1812, garrison flags were 20 feet by 40 feet. The Star-Spangled Banner measured 30 feet by 42 feet.

HALYARD

The rope by which a flag is raised on a flagpole.

HOIST

Noun: The edge of a flag nearest the staff.

Verb: To raise a flag.

HOIST ROPE

The rope on which a flag is flown on a flagpole.

JACK

A flag flown at the bow of warships when anchored. Great Britain's jack – the British Union Jack – combines the Crosses of St. George, St. Andrew, and St. Patrick on a blue field. The U.S. Union Jack carries 50 white stars on a blue field (the canton of the Naval Ensign). According to U.S. Navy regulations, the U.S. Union Jack should be the same size as the canton of the Naval Ensign flown at the ship's stern.

MULLET

A five-pointed star, representative of a knight's spur.

SALTINE

An x-shaped cross.

STAFF

A small pole from which a flag is flown.

STANDARD

A flag which is colored according to the owner's livery and displays the owner's badge or badges instead of his arms. The term "national standard" is used to describe the national and regimental flags carried by mounted or motorized organizations.

STORM FLAG

The U.S. flag which is flown at military installations during inclement weather. It is smaller than the U.S. flag that is usually flown at the installation.

UNION

A flag or device of a flag symbolizing the union of countries or states. Also, the canton of (1) the U.S. flag, (2) British ensigns, and (3) British Commonwealth flags that are based on the British ensigns.