Uniforms of the Napoleonic Wars in Colour 1796~1814

Devised and Illustrated by Jack Cassin-Scott
INTRODUCTION TO THE COLOUR PLATES

The study of military costume is a most inexact science. There are three basic sources from which information on military uniforms may be obtained: firstly, actual items of uniform and equipment still in existence; these are, at this distance in time, very scarce. Secondly, there are 'dress regulations'; and thirdly, pictures by contemporary artists. These three sources, however, more often than not present conflicting evidence. Dress regulations, where they existed at all, were frequently and flagrantly disregarded; officers often incorporated features of their own design into regulation uniform, and it was not uncommon for whole regiments to wear items of uniform not officially recognised. This applies equally to pieces of uniform still in existence; a coat, for example, may include a feature unique to the officer to whom it belonged. To complicate matters further, some contemporary artists were less accurate than others, and the uniforms they sketched might contain features adopted on campaign.

When on campaign, uniforms quickly changed their appearance when non-regulation items of uniform were adopted of necessity. To give an example of how a regiment's uniforms might incorporate unusual features, take the extreme case of the British 95th Rifles in Spain in 1812; Lieutenant George Simmons described them as 'a moving rag-fair'. John Kincaid, another officer of the 95th, described his regiment: 'there was scarcely a vestige of uniform among the men, some of whom were dressed in Frenchmen's coats, some in white breeches and huge jack-boots, some with cocked hats and queues; most of their swords were fixed on the rifles, and stuck full of hams, tongues, and loaves of bread, and not a few were carrying bird-cages! There never was a better masked corps!' Rifleman Edward Costello also described them 'dressed in all the varieties imaginable, some with jack-boots on, others with frock-coats, epaulettes, &c., and some even with monkeys on their shoulders... I was afterwards told by several of our men that the Duke of Wellington, who saw us on our march, inquired of his staff, “who the devil are those fellows?”... Costello himself wore a pair of trousers captured from a French dragoon, while Kincaid had two pairs of trousers, one made of common brown Portuguese cloth, and one of black velvet which he wore on Sundays!

For these reasons, it is extremely difficult to say with absolute accuracy exactly what was worn by a regiment at a particular time, beyond the general pattern of uniform. Some of the uniforms illustrated in the following plates may not agree with other recognised authorities, but all have been checked against their sources.
2 Russia: Chevaliers Garde. Officer (left) and N.C.O. (right), 1796

3 Switzerland: Light Cavalry. Trooper (left) and Officer (right), c. 1800
8/9 France: Marshals. *(Left to right)* Undress Foot, Undress Mounted, Full dress Foot, with greatcoat, Marshall Bessières, c. 1805
10 Switzerland: Volunteer Jägers of Zurich. Riflemen, c. 1805

11 France: Cuirassiers. Troopers, 1812
16 France: Mameluke. Trooper, 1806

17 Spain: Villaviciosa Dragoons. Trooper, c. 1806
20 Sweden: Royal Life Guards. Trooper (left) and Officer (right), 1807

21 Denmark: King's Life Rifle Corps. Riflemen (left and centre) and Officer (right), 1807
22 Sweden: Life Grenadier Regiment and Grenadier Corps. Officers, c. 1813

23 Italy: Guard of Honour. Troopers, Bologna (left), Rome (centre) and Milan (right), c. 1808
Italy: Guard of Honour. (Left to right) Officer in full dress, mounted officer in stable dress, trooper in stable dress, officer in undress cape coat, officers in full dress mounted, c. 1808.
26 Spain: Guerrillas, c. 1809

27 France: Chasseurs à Cheval of the Guard. Trooper, 1808
30 Portugal: Caçadores. Corporal 4th Battalion (left) and Private 5th Battalion (right), 1808

31 Prussia: General Staff. Parade dress (left), King’s Adjutant-General (centre) and Cavalry Service dress (right), 1808-12
32 Austria: Hungarian Grenadiers. Officer (left), Private (centre) and Officer (right) 1814

33 Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld Infantry. Service dress (left) and Review Order (right), 1809
34 Russia: Jäger Regiments. Officers, 1809

35 France: Portuguese Legion. Cavalry Officer (left) and Infantry Officer (right), c. 1809
38 Prussia: Garde Jäger Battalion. Jäger (left) and Officer (right). 1809

39 Austria: Grenadiers. Officer (left) and Private (right). 1809
40/41 Britain: (Left to right) Officer, Private, mounted General Officer and Officer, 1809
46 Bavaria and Saxony: Surgeons. Bavarian (left) and Saxon (right), 1810

47 France: Engineers of the Imperial Guard. Privates (left and centre) and Officer (right), 1810
50 France: 2nd Chevau-Légers-Lanciers of the Imperial Guard. Trooper (left), Officer in Campaign dress (centre) and Trooper (right), 1810

51 Britain: 2nd Greek Light Infantry. Privates, 1813
54 Spain: 7th Regiment Lancers of La Mancha. Trooper, c. 1811

55 France: Valaison Battalion. c. 1810
60 Saxony: Chevau-Légers. Polentz Regiment Officer (left) and Prince Clemant Regiment Officer (right), 1812

61 Britain: 10th Royal Hussars. Trooper, 1812
64 France: Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard. c. 1812

65 Duchy of Warsaw: The Krakus. Officers, c. 1812
66 France: The Isembourg Regiment. Carabiniers (left and centre) and Voltigeur Officer (right), c. 1811

67 Cleve-Berg: Infantry. Officer (left) and Grenadiers (centre and right), c. 1812
69 Prussia: 10th (Colberg) Regiment, Grenadier (left) and Musketeer (right), 1812

68 Bavaria: Foot Artillery, Officer (left) and Private (right), c. 1812
70 Britain: 42nd Royal Highland Regiment. Officer (left) and Private (right), c. 1812

71 France: Aides de Camp. Officers, c. 1812
74 Russia: Infantry. Musketeer (left) and Grenadier (right), 1812

75 Württemburg: Artillery. Officer (left), Private (centre) and Officer, c. 1812
78 Hanover: Feldjägercorps von Kielmannsegge. Sharpshooter (left) and Rifleman (right) c. 1814

79 Prussia: Landwehr Infantry. c. 1814
1. France: 4th Hussars.
Troopers, 1796 and 1790

The corps of Hussars raised in 1783 as the 'Colonel-Général' Regiment became the 4th Hussars of the French Republic following the Revolution. The uniform changed very little from then until 1815, except that the style followed the trends of military fashion.

The uniform was typical of the hussar style: the braided dolman or jacket; the fur-lined pelisse, which could be worn either hanging from the shoulder, as illustrated, or as a coat; the tight breeches and 'Hessian' boots (frequently replaced on active service by overalls), the 'barrelled' sash (crimson with yellow 'barrels' or bars of braid for the 4th), and the sabretache suspended from the sword-belt. The headdress shown in this plate, the 'mirliton' cap, was a cylindrical, peakless shako, which had a long tail or streamer of coloured cloth worn round the body of the cap and allowed to hang loose down the wearer's back.

Two uniforms are shown; the right-hand figure is in the uniform of 1796, when the regiment was still wearing the dress of the latter days of the Ancien Régime; the sabretache bears the cipher of King Louis XVI. This design was changed under the Republican government to one of the lictor's fasces within a wreath of laurel. The left-hand figure shows the uniform of 1796; by this time the plume on the mirliton had become red over black. Both figures are troopers; officers wore basically the same uniform, but with gold lace instead of yellow.

After distinguished service in the Napoleonic Wars, the regiment was amalgamated with the 13th and 14th Hussars to form the new 4th Hussars, the 'Hussards de Monsieur'.

2. Russia: Chevaliers Garde.
Officer and N.C.O., 1796

Raised by Peter the Great as a six-man royal bodyguard, the Chevaliers Garde was the most distinguished unit in the Russian service. It served as a palace guard until 1800, when its strength was increased from a squadron to a regiment, and became the senior corps of cuirassiers in the Russian army. The uniforms depicted are conspicuously Prussian in pattern.

The bicorn hat was made of black felt, with silver tassels at the corners; the plumes were white over orange for officers, and orange over white for other ranks. The hat bore the black and orange cockade of Imperial Russia. The coatee, of the traditional white, had a 'stand-and-fall' collar in the red facing colour, and was edged with silver lace. The breast of the coatee was ornamented by a band of silver lace, with a red edging on either side.

The officer is shown wearing a 'supreveste', a sleeveless coat cut to resemble a cuirass. This was of black
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MILITARY UNIFORMS AND WEAPONS OF THE
A & C. Trooper's Kurtka. Scarlet with dark blue facings and piping. Brass buttons. Yellow epaulette and aiguillette, the epaulette having a blue 'crescent'.

D & E. Trooper's czapka. Red cloth top, with black leather peak and turban. Yellow centre band and piping; yellow cords and tassels. Brass plate, peaked and brass chinscales on a red cloth backing. "Tricolor" cockade and white plume. Officers wore a similar shako, but with gold lace, cords and piping; senior N.C.O.s had cords of mixed scarlet and gold.

Cavalry uniforms were influenced by the large variety of corps raised in the French army: Hussars, Dragoons, Cuirassiers, Chasseurs à Cheval, Horse Grenadiers, Carabiniers and Lancers, each with a distinctive uniform and colouring, the Hussars as always retaining their resplendent colouring and in some cases their fur caps, which were also adopted by the Chasseurs à Cheval. The emergence of light infantry as an important force on the battlefield resulted in a new style of uniform, more functional and, of necessity, more sombre than before, to act as an early version of camouflage, though in the French army in particular this aspect was somewhat negated by the plumes and epaulettes in the yellow, red and green colours of the 'Voltigeur' arm.

The military fashion of Europe was to a large extent influenced by that of France. Those countries under French domination or alliance adopted costume of a totally French style, sometimes combining 'native' items with those of French origin. Even the opponents of France felt the influence of French fashions.

At the beginning of the period, the French uniform was in the cut of that of the 'Ancien Régime', with blue as the predominant colour. Although the legwear remained basically unchanged, the coat gradually became shorter, and in 1812 a jacket, closed to the waist, was adopted by the infantry, a direct influence of the Polish styles which had prevailed since the introduction of Polish troops in the late 1790s. The shako, which replaced the cocked hat in 1806–7, changed slightly over the years but retained its characteristic, slightly bell-topped form, which was extensively copied throughout Europe. Different types of infantry had varying distinctions— for example, the red plumes and epaulettes of the Grenadiers.

The neo-classical style of art popular in France resulted in the metal helmet worn by dragoons, cuirassiers, carabiniers and some of the Chevaux-Légers-Lanciers, though the helmet had its origin in a peakless version worn before the Revolution. The cuirass, a return to the armour of the medieval period, had been adopted by several regiments of cavalry in Europe in the eighteenth century, but it was the formation of the cuirassier arm of the French army which brought about the general revival of armoured horsemen, the great 'shock weapon' of the Napoleonic Wars. The braided dolman and pelisse of the Hussar corps remained largely unchanged, but became progressively more splendid. Ironically, the most vital arm of service, the artillery, wore the plainest and least elaborate
The above image contains a diagram illustrating various aspects of military uniforms and weapons. The text appears to discuss historical military attire and equipment, possibly from different periods, with annotations that could be related to descriptions or explanations of the depicted items. The layout includes numbered images, likely corresponding to different sections or parts of the text.
Figure 4. French headdress

A. Undress cap ('bonnet de police'), officer, Chasseurs à Cheval of the Imperial Guard. Green cloth, with gold lace, tassel and badge, with red piping.

B. Officer's hat, Chasseurs à Cheval of the Imperial Guard. Black felt, with gold lace loop, gilt button, 'tricolor' cockade, and green plume with red tip.

C. Fusilier officer's shako, 81st Line Regiment, 1812 pattern. Black felt with leather reinforcements. Gilt plate and chinscales. 'Tricolor' cockade of white, red and blue (reading from the outside). White pompon with coloured surround and tuft: 1st company, green; 2nd company, sky blue; 3rd company, orange; 4th company, violet. Company number was borne in the centre of the cockade.

D. Colpack, Chasseurs à Cheval of the Imperial Guard. Black-brown fur with red 'bag'. Piping and tassel of bag and hanging cords or 'raquettes' of gold for officers, mixed green and gold for N.C.O.'s, and orange for other ranks. Gilt chinscales for officers, brass for other ranks. 'Tricolor' cockade bearing small Imperial eagle badge. Green plume with a red tip for all except senior officers, who had white plumes.

E. Ornament worn on the rear of the bearskin caps of the Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, 1808–15. Red cloth patch bearing gold grenade for officers and N.C.O.'s, white grenade for other ranks. Prior to 1808, the red patch bore a white cross; from 1801–2 the cross was orange.

G. Shako plate, 81st Line Regiment, 1812 pattern. Gilt for officers, brass for other ranks.

H. Cors or 'raquettes' for colpack of Chasseurs à Cheval of the Imperial Guard.

I. Bearskin cap, Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard. Black bearskin, with a gilt plate for officers and copper for other ranks. The cords and tassels were gold for officers, mixed gold and scarlet for sergeants and senior N.C.O.'s, and white for Grenadiers. Scarlet plumes worn by all ranks, except senior officers, who wore white. At the rear was borne the cloth patch shown in figure F.

J. Cap plate, Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, 1804–15. Gilt for officers, copper for other ranks.
Figure 6. French Swords

A. Sabre, Grenadiers of the Consular Guard. Short sword carried by the rank and file only. Brass hilt, black leather scabbard with brass fittings. White sword-knot with red tassel for all except senior N.C.O.s, who had knots of mixed scarlet and gold. Black leather grip bound with wire.
B. Light cavalry sabre, c. 1812. Brass hilt, steel scabbard. Black leather grip bound with wire.
C. Chasseur à Cheval sabre, c. 1801. Brass hilt, black leather scabbard with brass fittings. Black leather hilt bound with wire.
D. Chasseur à Cheval of the Imperial Guard, c. 1812. Brass hilt, black leather grip bound with wire. Brass scabbard with black leather inserts. Gold sword-knot for officers, white leather for other ranks.
E. Officer’s sabre, Dragoons, c. 1812. Brass hilt, black leather grip bound with wire. Black leather scabbard with brass fittings.
F. General Officer’s sword, c. 1812. Gilt hilt, Black leather scabbard with gilt fittings.

Figure 7. Weapons

C. British socket bayonet for the ‘Brown Bess’ musket. Steel, carried in a black leather scabbard.
D. British sword-bayonet for the Baker Rifle, 2nd pattern, 1801–c. 1815. Brass hilt; carried in a black leather scabbard with brass fittings.
F. French carbine, Chasseurs à Cheval of the Imperial Guard, with fixed bayonet.
G. The flintlock mechanism.
H. British ‘spoon’ head; a ‘half-pike’ carried by sergeants of infantry.
but were unreliable and only effective in weakening the morale of the enemy.

Compared to arms of the present age, the weapons of the Napoleonic period were in their infancy. But sabre, musket-ball and roundshot could inflict hideous wounds, and kill, maim and slaughter with appalling efficiency; in the Italian campaign of 1943–44, from the landings at Salerno to the fall of Rome, the Allied Fifth Army lost scarcely any more men than the French lost at Borodino in eleven hours, on a front of three and a half miles.

Figure 8. French shabraques

A. 2nd Chevau-Légers-Lanciers of the Imperial Guard. Dark blue cloth with yellow lace and ornaments. Scarlet valise with yellow lace and piping. Black sheepskin saddle-cover edged with yellow. Black leather straps. Officers had similar shabraques, but with gold lace, a pantherskin saddle cover, and red leather straps.

B. Chasseurs à Cheval of the Imperial Guard. Officer’s shabraque of pantherskin, edged with a band on gold lace with red piping on either side of the lace, and a green cloth outer edge.

C. 5th Cuirassiers. Blue shabraque and valise with white piping and numerals. White sheepskin saddle-cover trimmed with the regimental facing colour (light orange). Black leather straps.