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.

1 France: 4th Hussars. Troopers, 1796 and 1790
2 Russia: Chevaillers Garde. Officer (left) and N.C.O. (right). 1796

3 Switzerland: Light Cavalry. Trooper (left) and Officer (right). c. 1800
4 Poland: Artillery. Gunners, 1799 and 1808

5 Saxony: Kurfürst Cuirassier Regiment. Trooper (left) and Officer (right), 1803
6 Britain: The King's German Legion. Hussar Officer (left) and Infantry Private (right). c. 1813

7 France: Hussars. Troopers, c. 1807
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
12 Baden: Hussars. Officers, 1812

13 Nassau: Jägers. Officers, c. 1807
14 France: 33rd Regiment of Infantry. Privates (left and centre) and N.C.O. (right), 1807

15 Holland: Private. 3rd Light Infantry (left) and Officer 2nd Line Infantry (right), c. 1807
16 France: Mameluke. Trooper, 1806

17 Spain: Villaviciosa Dragoons. Trooper, c. 1806
18 Saxony: Guard Grenadiers. Privates, c. 1806

19 France: Dragoons. Officer 17th Regiment (left) and Officer 4th Regiment (right), c. 1812
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; Trooper in stable dress; Officer in undress cape coat.
Officers in full dress (continental, c. 1808)
28 Württemburg: Garde Jäger Squadron. Officer, c. 1809

29 Prussia: 2nd Life Hussars. Trooper (left) and Officer (right), c. 1809
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
36 France: Geographical Engineers. Officers. c. 1809

37 Bavaria: Sharpshooter (left) Preysing Regiment. and Grenadier (right). Leib Regiment. 1809
42 The Brunswick Corps. Jager (left) and Infantry Private (right), 1809

43 France: Chasseurs à Cheval of the Line. Troopers, Elite Company 1st Regiment, 1810
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
48 France: Infantry of the Vistula Legion, c. 1810

49 Hesse-Darmstadt: Chevau-Légers, Trooper, 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
52 Saxony: Jägercorps 1813 and Light Infantry 1810

53 France: 1st (Polish) Chevaux-Légers-Lanciers of the Imperial Guard. Trooper mounted (left) and Officer (right), 1811
54 Spain: 7th Regiment Lancers of La Mancha. Trooper, c. 1811

55 France: Valaison Battalion. c. 1810
France: Neuchâtel Battalion. (Left to right) Cloth, Gunner, Driver, Engineer Private and Officer, c. 1812
58 France: 30th Chasseurs à Cheval. Officers, 1811

59 Poland: General Officers. Parade dress (left) and Undress (right), c. 1796
60 Saxony: Chevau-Légers. Polentz Regiment Officer (left) and Prince Clement Regiment Officer (right), 1812

61 Britain: 10th Royal Hussars. Trooper, 1812
62 France: Corsican Regiment. Officer (left), Carabinier (centre) and Voltigeur (right), c. 1812

63 France: Lithuanian Tartars. Trooper, c. 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
68 Bavaria: Foot Artillery, Officer (left) and Private (right), c. 1812

69 Prussia: 10th (Colberg) Regiment, Grenadier (left) and Musketeer (right), 1812
70 Britain: 42nd Royal Highland Regiment. Officer (left) and Private (right), c. 1812

71 France: Aides de Camp. Officers, c. 1812
72/73 Russia: Cuirassiers. (Left to right) N.C.O Czarina's Regiment, Mounted Officer Pskoff Regiment, Officer Military Order Regiment, mounted Trooper Pskoff Regiment, Officer New Russland Regiment, 1812
76 France: 4th Swiss Infantry. Officers, 1812

77 Saxony: Garde du Corps. Officer, c. 1812
78 Hanover: Feldjägerkorps von Kielmannsegg. 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 sixty-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 coat, 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 coat was ornamented by a band of silver lace, with a red edging on either side.

The officer is shown wearing a 'supraveste', a sleeveless coat cut to resemble a cuirass. This was of black
MILITARY UNIFORMS AND WEAPONS OF THE

NAPOLeONIC WARS

The Emperor's Guard was well equipped by those who produced uniforms and weapons. The regulation uniform for officers was a red coat with gold buttons, epaulettes, and a white cockade. The coat was often embroidered with the name of the regiment. The trousers were black and the shoes were black with gold laces. The hat was a bicorne with a gold plume. The officers wore a sword with a gold handle and a gold scabbard. The cavalry officers wore a similar uniform, but with a different color scheme. The field officers wore a red coat with gold epaulettes and a white cockade. The general officers wore a red coat with gold epaulettes and a white cockade, and a white hat with a black plume. The uniforms were well made and the officers were well trained. The uniforms were well maintained and the officers were well disciplined. The uniforms were well known and the officers were well respected. The uniforms were well loved and the officers were well admired. The uniforms were well respected and the officers were well honored.

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Figure 2. 2nd Cheva-Légers-Lanciers of the Imperial Guard ('The Red Lancers')

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, peak-edging 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.

(a variant is still worn by Britain’s Brigade of Guards). Leather helmets with fur or woollen crests were favoured by several German states, notably Bavaria.

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 Cheva-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
Military Uniforms and Weapons

Figure 3: French equippaments

[Diagram of French uniforms and weapons]

The development of military uniforms and weapons has been driven by various factors, including technological advancements, strategic needs, and socio-political influences. As nations expanded their territories, the need for effective communication and organization became crucial, leading to the creation of distinct uniforms and weapons to identify and distinguish soldiers from different branches of the military. The evolution of military uniforms and weapons also reflects the changing dynamics of warfare, from medieval combats to modern conflicts, each era shaping the design and technology applied to the equipment. The historical context of military uniforms and weapons is rich with the stories of the battles that have defined the strategies and outcomes of wars throughout history.
green, and the Hussar costume relieved the otherwise sombre appearance of the Russian army.

The remaining combatants in the Napoleonic Wars based their designs on those of the larger powers. The states not under French influence adopted a combination of styles copied from those of Russia, Prussia and sometimes France, incorporating items of their own design, for example the Swedish 'kuske' helmet. Styles changed and interchanged, were copied and modified, until the result was a 'glittering panoply' of almost incredible dimensions.

Weapons and equipment, on the other hand, changed little throughout the period. The infantry private was equipped with leather 'cross-belts', supporting a black cartridge-pouch, a haversack, a bayonet, and in most continental armies, a short sword, which was a near-useless relic of the eighteenth century. On his back he carried a 'pack' or knapsack, which might be constructed of varnished leather, canvas or animal skin, in which he carried his spare clothing, food and few personal belongings. The total weight might be anything up to 60 pounds, which, coupled with his tightfitting and unfunctional uniform, made simple movements difficult, let alone fighting. The cavalry had similar equipment, though much of theirs was carried on the saddle.

The basic weapon of the Napoleonic Wars was the smoothbore, flintlock musket, which generally had a maximum range of 250 yards, though it was wildly inaccurate at 100; approximately 250 musket balls were fired in battle for every man killed. The ball or bullet was a spherical piece of lead, which caused appalling wounds. Tactics were controlled by the weapons available, and the army of the Napoleonic period fought in compact blocks of troops, in which the individual was virtually transformed into an

**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, 'tricolour' 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.

E. 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.

F. 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 bear skin, 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.
The most powerful weapon on the field of battle was the artillery.

The heaviest and most potent were the field guns. These were divided into two classes: 6-inch and 10-inch. The 6-inch guns were lighter and more easily handled, while the 10-inch guns were heavier and more powerful. The field guns were used for both defensive and offensive purposes.

The field guns were pulled by teams of horses and were operated by a crew consisting of three men: the gunner, the loader, and the limber driver. The gunner was responsible for the operation of the gun, while the loader was responsible for loading the ammunition into the gun. The limber driver was responsible for driving the limber, which was a carriage that held the gun and the crew.

The ammunition for the field guns was stored in a magazine, which was a large, fortified building that was designed to protect the ammunition from enemy fire. The ammunition was stored in wooden boxes, which were filled with gunpowder and gunmetal. The gunmetal was a mixture of lead and tin, which was used to make the bullet.

When the field gun was ready to fire, the gunner would load the ammunition into the gun and set the fuse with his hand. The fuse was a wick that was lit with a match and burned for a set amount of time. Once the fuse was lit, the gunner would pull the trigger, which would ignite the gunpowder and send the bullet flying.

The field gun was a valuable weapon in the hands of a skilled crew. It was able to fire a large number of rounds in a short amount of time and was effective against both infantry and cavalry. However, it was also a dangerous weapon, as it required a large crew and a significant amount of ammunition.

The field gun was a symbol of power and was often used as a show of force. It was a weapon that was not to be taken lightly, and its presence on the battlefield was a sign of the strength of the nation that possessed it.
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.


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 'spontoon' 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.