

Warrior

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French Napoleonic Infantryman 1803–15



Terry Crowdy • Illustrated by Christa Hook



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FRONT COVER: Battle of Chiclana, by Lejeune Louis
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FRENCH INFANTRYMAN OF THE NAPOLEONIC WARS (1803-1815)

INTRODUCTION

Republican governments had established conscripted mass armies, which had gained substantial combat experience during the 1790s. Napoleon perfected their equipment and training at the camps of Boulogne from 1803 to 1805, creating the huge *Grande Armée*, with which the new emperor embarked upon expanding French power in Europe. Himself a product of the royal military academies, Napoleon drew inspiration for his reforms from the period prior to the revolution. At the same time, he discreetly swept away many symbols of the republican era: in 1803 the revolutionary term *demi-brigade* was replaced by the traditional designation *régiment*; the eagles, which the newly crowned emperor issued to the army in 1804, were a mark of its allegiance to the imperial throne, not the nation; the republican tricolour was reduced to a secondary status; military academies opened their doors to officer cadets drawn

As Leipzig militia look on helplessly, two off-duty chasseurs take it upon themselves to moonlight as customs officers. (Geissler)



from the sons of imperial France's new social élite. In a measure supposedly to deprive Britain of a market for indigo, Napoleon briefly experimented in 1806 with a return to the white uniforms of the Royal Army. The republican-style blue coat soon returned, although as an economy measure a less elaborate style was promulgated in 1812.

Napoleon's first major organisational reform was the conversion of one company in each battalion into *voltigeurs*. In reality, this measure was not particularly innovative as the new regulations largely standardised an existing unofficial practice. In the Royal Army, companies of *chasseurs* had been attached to each battalion to act as scouts and skirmishers, and many demi-brigades had maintained the practice with *eclaireurs* who fulfilled the same function. In 1808 another reform returned infantry battalions essentially to their 1776 arrangement of four companies of fusiliers and one each of grenadiers and light infantry. The main innovation of the 1808 reforms was the increase in the size of infantry regiments from two to four *bataillons de guerre* with a fifth forming the depot. In 1812 Napoleon added a sixth battalion.

After victories against Austro-Russian forces in 1805 and then Prussia in 1806, the Grande Armée suffered heavy losses against the Russians during the 1807 campaign in Poland. Soon after, Napoleon became bogged down in an increasingly unwinnable war in Spain, largely to keep his brother Joseph on the throne. Meanwhile, in central Europe, Napoleon was less able to win the quick, decisive victories he needed. Casualties rose as artillery increasingly dominated the battlefield, and disaster in Russia was followed by a revolt in Germany against French occupation. With enemies on all sides, despite being the most able general of his age, Napoleon could not be everywhere at once. He was systematically worn down, defeated, exiled, and his army was broken up on the return of the same family of Bourbons that had sat on the throne in 1792.

CHRONOLOGY 1803–1815*

*Actions and events of the Peninsular War in *italics*

- 1803** Britain declares war on France (16 May); Camp of Boulogne set up (15 June); Infantry demi-brigades revert to title of régiment (24 September).
- 1804** Napoleon proclaimed emperor (18 May); Coronation of Napoleon I at Notre Dame in Paris (2 December); Napoleon distributes eagles to his regiments in Paris (5 December).
- 1805** Formation of Third Coalition against France (9 August); Grande Armée crosses the Rhine (25 September); Austrian Army capitulates at Ulm (20 October); Napoleon enters Vienna (14 November); battle of Austerlitz (2 December); Peace of Pressburg (26 December).
- 1806** War of Fourth Coalition; battle of Jena–Auerstadt (14 October); Napoleon enters Berlin (27 October).
- 1807** Battles of Eylau (7–8 February) and Friedland (14 June); Peace and Treaties of Tilsit (7–9 July). *General Junot occupies Lisbon* (30 November).
- 1808** *Revolt in Madrid* (2 May); *Dupont capitulates at Bailen* (21 July); *battle of Vimiero* (21 August); *Napoleon assumes command of army in Spain* (5 November); *battle of Somosierra* (30 November); *Napoleon occupies Madrid* (4 December).
- 1809** *Battles of Corunna* (16 January), *Medellin* (29 March); creation of Fifth Coalition (9 April); *battle of Eggmühl* (22 April); *battle of Oporto* (12 May); Napoleon

- enters Vienna (13 May); battle of Aspern–Essling (21–22 May); battle of Wagram (5–6 July); armistice of Znaim (12 July); *battle of Talavera* (28 July); Treaty of Vienna and Peace of Schönbrunn (19 October).
- 1810** *Siege of Cadiz begins* (5 February); *battle of Bussaco* (27 September); *Massena held at Torres Vedras* (10 October).
- 1811** *Battles of Barrosa, Massena retreats from Torres Vedras* (5 March), *Fuentes de Onoro* (3–5 May), *Albuera* (16 May).
- 1812** *Badajoz lost* (6 April); Sixth Coalition formed (20 June); French cross the River Niemen (24 June); *battle of Salamanca* (22 July); *Madrid lost* (13 August); *siege of Cadiz abandoned* (24 August); battle of Borodino (7 September); Napoleon enters Moscow (14 September); retreat from Moscow begins (19 October); battle of the Beresina (27–29 November); French rearguard reaches the Niemen (14 December).
- 1813** Prussia declares war on France (16 March); battles of Lutzen (2 May) and Bautzen (20–21 May); *battle of Vitoria* (21 June); Austria declares war on France (12 August); battle of Leipzig (16–19 October); Saxony and Bavaria join Allied coalition (18 October).
- 1814** Campaign in France; Allies enter Paris (31 March) Napoleon abdicates (6 April); *battle of Toulouse* (10 April); Napoleon begins exile on Elba (4 May).
- 1815** Napoleon returns to Paris (20 March); Seventh Coalition formed (25 March); Armée du Nord crosses the Sambre (15 June); battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras (16 June), Waterloo (18 June) and Wavre (18–19 June); Napoleon abdicates again (22 June); Allies re-enter Paris (7 July); French Army pulls back behind the Loire and from August is disbanded.

FROM CONSCRIPTION TO THE DEPOT

The majority of the recruits to Napoleon's infantry regiments were conscripts. During the Revolutionary Wars, Jourdan's Law (5 September 1798) had established a conscription process that rendered all unmarried males aged 20–25 liable for military service. A lottery was used to decide who would actually be called up to meet the quotas set by the government. Service was set for four years in peacetime, or the duration of the war. As the wars of the empire continued and the need for manpower became more pressing, conscripts were 'borrowed' from the following year's class, thereby increasing the numbers of teenagers in the ranks.

The Parisian L. Gille learned that his name had been entered one year early into the draw on 7 April 1807:

This unexpected news threw my family into despair. I tried to console them by reassuring them that Fate would favour me, but inwardly I abandoned all hope ... Accompanied by my mother, I went to the *Hôtel de Ville*, where I found a large number of youths had already gathered. The Prefect together with both the civil and military authorities were present. The lottery began ... my turn came and I drew the number 99 from the bag. Their response informed me that my stay in the bosom of my family would not last much longer. They asked me if I had any infirmities I wished to disclose. After replying in the affirmative, they passed me over to the medical council, who were assembled in a room. My weak constitution still left me with a ray of hope. Several medical officers were of the opinion that I ought to be declared unfit for service, others that a decision should be adjourned. However, a devil of a man, who was present and whose authority

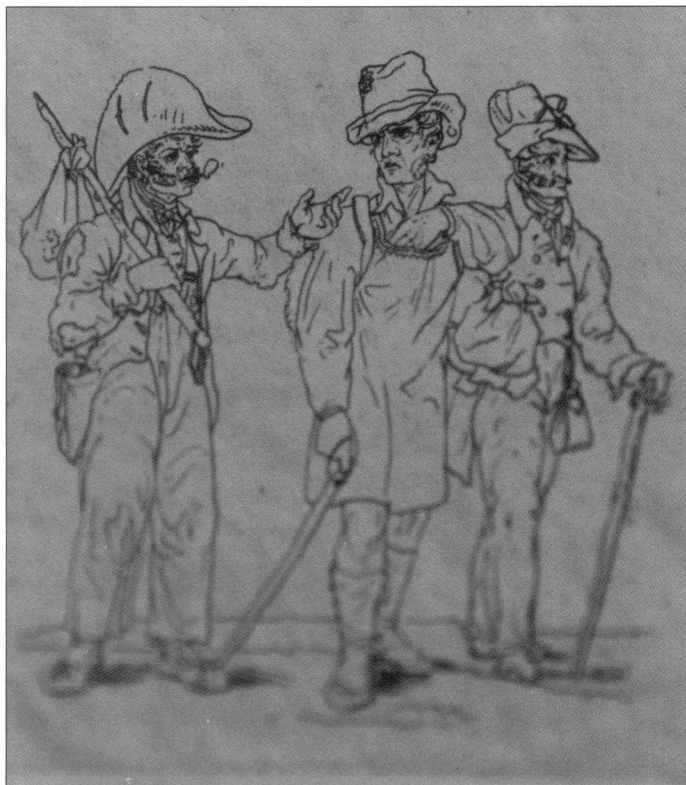
appeared to carry very great weight, added that, although I certainly had a weak complexion, my condition would not pose any difficulty to me carrying arms. Deferring to his view, these *messieurs* unanimously declared me 'fit for duty'. I left the room, condemning them all to the Devil. When I was outside, I found my mother waiting for me near the hall. I could not hide the result of the decision that had been made. Her tears flowed and I struggled to hold mine back so as to console her, only succeeding with great difficulty.

In charge of a regimental recruiting detachment based in the town of Epinal in eastern France, Capitaine Godet oversaw five levies from 1806–09. He regularly saw conscripts' vain attempts at failing the medical examination: 'Each conscript ... appeared as if afflicted by three or four sicknesses, each asking to be declared unfit for service. The piteous look that they knew how to make would have earned an exemption from service, if it had been made before less practised eyes. The council, however, could see the truth and as soon as the Prefect pronounced the cabalistic word "fit" then you saw the individual straighten up and go stand in the middle of his laughing comrades.'

Except in Paris, since 1799 it had been possible to purchase a substitute to take a conscript's place in the ranks. The arrangement was a private matter between the individuals concerned, with the going rate between 2000 and 4000 francs, rising to as much as 12,000 francs during the last years of the wars. This fee was out of reach of most families, with only about 5 per cent of the population being able to afford that kind of sum. Other than being in government service, the only other alternative was to simply vanish and be listed as a deserter. In the south and west of France, where there had been numerous rebellions against Paris since the revolution, draft-dodgers could better expect to be hidden from the *gendarmes* sent to arrest them.

Being from Paris, Gille had no real alternative and resigned himself to fulfilling his duty:

Conscripts discussing the possible merits of their new career. (Beyer)



A short while after I received my departure orders, I was selected to join the 82e de Ligne. I tried to gain admission to the 6e *Hussards*, where I had a friend. Not being able to join them ... I was told to present myself at *Temple*, with my baggage on 11 June, to take part in a departure parade. I immediately returned to give this news to my father and

mother. It is useless to speak of the effect that this news had on them ... I did my best to prepare, proceeding to purchase the various necessary items. My haversack was soon ready and the moment I feared arrived. I went to make my final farewells to my father. Alas, my heart was sealed; I could not utter a single word. My father, who had been unable to speak for several months (following a stroke), led me to his writing desk and there, having taken up a quill, wrote with a trembling hand, a farewell, which he said would be eternal.

I finally left the house, escorted by my twelve-year-old brother and some friends who wanted to accompany me as far as the gates of Paris. Before turning the corner of the street and losing sight of the family home ... I saw my mother and father outside watching me. I waved them a last goodbye, to which they responded, before, with sorrow, heartache and regret, I lost sight of them. We soon arrived at the assembly point, along with nearly three hundred youths destined, like myself, for departure. They did not delay putting us on the march.

This *revue de départ* was an event repeated each year in the towns and villages all across France. Pierre-Louis Mayer made up part of a group of 200 conscripts en route to the depot of the 35e de Ligne. He light-heartedly recalled how all 'the girls of our commune cried on seeing their childhood friends leaving. I called out to them "Mesdemoiselles, don't cry, we'll be back in two years to marry you!" For conscript Gille, however, saying his final goodbyes took a heavy toll on his emotions:

I left Paris by the Saint-Martin Gate. Arriving at Bourget, we ate and on leaving this village, I begged my brother and those of my friends who had accompanied me, not to go any further. The child stood as if petrified in the middle of the road, with his two arms held out towards me. Even after I had gone some distance, he had not changed his stance and as he passed from view, tears finally overcame me. After giving a final wave to the child, I caught up with my travelling companions and continued on my way. We arrived at Louvres, a town situated eight leagues from Paris, an old *sous-officier* distributed lodging billets to us and announced that a distribution of ration bread was about to be made ... We went to the home of a farmer, who was to be our host. I asked him to take us to the room set aside for us. In response, he smiled and signalled to a farm boy, who, after leading us across a yard full of dung and pools of stagnant water, pushed open the door of a cowshed. Spread out in there, I saw my fourteen companions ... I put my billet away and went to look for an inn.

The realities of military life were also made clear to Mayer while en route to his regiment's depot, then stationed in Italy. Stopping at an inn, Mayer and an old dragoon, acting as a gendarme, had a drink together. 'It appears that in these lands, when asking for wine, they always have it brought to you by a pretty girl somewhat lacking in virtue and open to

courtship without the least restraint,' noted Mayer. 'I asked this young girl if she wanted to be my bedmate. She answered "with pleasure" but then asked me how much money I would pay her. I agreed to pay a *dollar*. She wanted the money up front, which I gave to her and thus we were agreed. She touched me on the hand as if to confirm the arrangement and we had a drink. While I chatted with the dragoon, the little angel left us and descended a staircase that led into the kitchen ... After a quarter of an hour waiting for my goddess, and seeing that she had not returned, the dragoon told me, "she has played a trick on you, taken your money and will not return.'" Mayer was shocked and exclaimed, 'Not Possible!' A lengthy check around the inn and the local area proved the dragoon's prediction to be correct.

Meanwhile, Gille's march continued, with the detachment making preparations for a grand entry to the regimental depot. 'We arrived at Lille which was our journey's objective,' he recalled:

We marched in with a drum major, two drummers, eight sappers and twenty musicians at our head. All of these had been selected from among the conscripts in our detachment. A very fine flag, in the French national colours flew above our ranks. The cry of "*Vive l'Empereur!*" was repeated a thousand times making it necessary for the commander of the detachment to order silence when we were in front of the Major's quarters. The Major soon appeared and expressed his satisfaction to the officer at the fine quality of the detachment ... After enduring a visit to the regiment's medical officers at the garrison hospital, we received lodging billets for that night only; our formal incorporation into the regiment being set for the following day.

At the depot

In the regimental depot, the new recruits received their basic training and uniforms before being sent off to the regiment's *bataillons de guerre* out in the field, in garrison or in camps dotted around the empire. The length of time spent in the depot varied depending on the needs of the field army – times of crisis speeding up the processing from several months to a matter of days. In 1809 Page found himself one of 500 conscripts sent from Epinal to the depot of 9e Léger at the fortress of Longwy: 'We arrived in the first days of March; they organised us into squads immediately. They read us the penal code, led us through the drill and showed us the position of the soldier without arms. Three days later, they uniformed half of the contingent, sending them off to the Grande Armée the following day, training them en route.'

The first significant stage was the entry of conscripts into the regimental register, or *contrôle*, which recorded the conscript's full name, parents' names, and date and place of birth. For identification purposes, a rough physical description was added, including the conscript's height (in metres), the colour of his eyes and hair, the shape of his nose, chin and

The Conscript of 1810

*I'm a poor Conscript,
Of the year eighteen-ten.
Must leave my Languedoc,
With a pack on my back.*

*Both the Mayor and the Prefect,
Are two nice fellows.
They had us draw straws,
Only to lead us to death.*

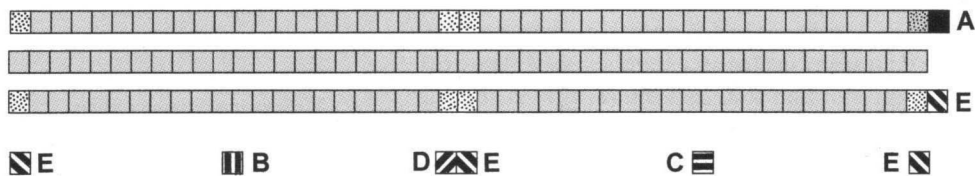
*So farewell, my father, fare thee well,
And goodnight to you, mother;
Write to me from time to time,
To send me some money.*

*So farewell, my poor beloved
You'll comfort my sister
When you tell her that Fanfan,
Aye, that Fanfan, went down fighting.*

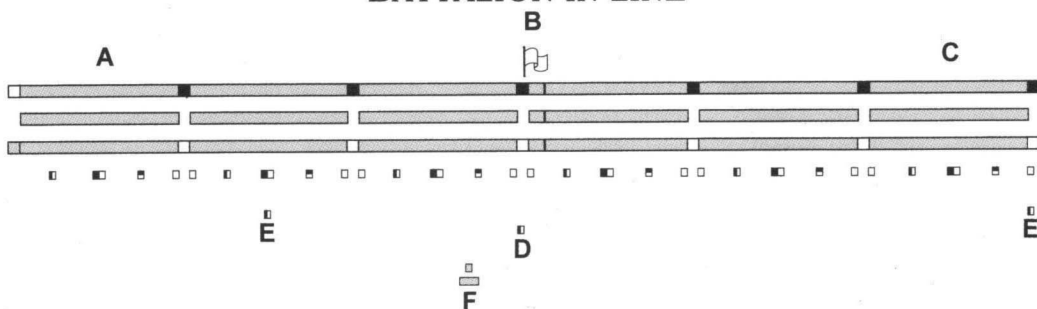
*Who then wrote this song?
Only three young lads
Who were stocking-makers
And now they're soldiers.*

A translation of a popular yet melancholic song from the period.

BATTLEFIELD COMPANY LAYOUT



BATTALION IN LINE



ABOVE TOP The men were arranged from the right, in height order. The tallest were put in the front rank (they were expected to kneel during volley firing), the shortest formed the middle rank, with the remainder in the third. The captain would stand on the right of the company, but when firing he would take position next to the sergent-major, to the rear and centre of his platoon. The platoon was divided into two sections, with corporals stationed in the corners. Key: (A) capitaine, (B) lieutenant, (C) sous-lieutenant, (D) sergent-major, (E) sergents. (Martin Lancaster)

ABOVE BOTTOM The battalion formed *en bataille* or in line formation. Key: (A) voltigeurs; (B) eagle; (C) grenadiers; (D) chef de bataillon (mounted); (E) adjudant; (F) drummers. (Martin Lancaster)

mouth, and any notable distinguishing features such as scars or freckles. Finally the conscript was issued with a serial number, and the name of the battalion and company in which he would serve. Later in his career, the conscript's service history would be recorded alongside this initial information, including transfers, promotions and wounds. The entry would eventually conclude with the reason for his career's termination: whether killed in action, invalided, retired, or listed as a deserter.

The regiment's medical officers had examined Gille and this process was repeated for everyone during the first few days. The day after his arrival in the depot, the surgeon visited conscript Beulay: 'He found me a little frail for the harsh conditions of the active army and thought it prudent to delay my incorporation into the *bataillons de guerre*.' In extreme cases the regimental surgeons could choose to reject any conscripts they deemed unfit for service. This happened infrequently: the 9e Léger, for example, rejected only 20 out of a total of 2463 conscripts they received between the years 1805 and 1807.

Once these formalities were completed, the process of incorporation could begin in earnest. Pierre-Louis Mayer remembered his first day: 'We assembled and paraded before the flags in the Colonel's presence. We were treated very kindly. They put us in a single line, in height order and then the *sergent-majors* took us one by one and placed us in our companies.' Once the soldiers had been shown to their respective companies, they were then detailed to an *escouade* under the supervision of a *caporal*.

The *escouade* was the most basic administrative unit of the regiment. A dozen to 15 men would find themselves in each squad, where they would share fatigue duties, and cook and eat together. The *caporal* was responsible for assigning duties and keeping up-to-date and coherent records. On arrival in the barrack room, Gille found himself quizzed by his superior: '*Messieur le Caporal*, a very brave man, but who believed



ABOVE LEFT **Caporal in garrison holding his musket at *l'arme comme sergent*. This position was reserved for NCOs. (Martinet)**

ABOVE RIGHT **Behind this *caporal fourier*, laundry hangs from the barracks windows. Note the soldiers in fatigue uniform and the sentry box.**

himself a very important personage, deigned to address me with the tone of a protector. He asked me if I knew how to read, I replied affirmatively and I added that I even knew how to write. He appeared both happy and surprised at the same time, and announced to me that he was going to leave all his paperwork to me.'

While the conscripts got used to their new surroundings and comrades, the business of providing them with uniforms began. The supply of uniforms was the responsibility of the *capitaine d'habillement*, (clothing officer), who headed a team of master-artificers, their assistants and apprentices. Uniforms and shoes were manufactured in just three standard sizes. The quality of these uniforms varied considerably depending on the resources and time available for making a proper fitting. After three days in the depot, Mayer 'received a white *veste* and a forage cap'. This basic uniform would suffice during the earliest days of training in the depot, only those with rank being routinely required to wear their coat or *habit*.

On paper at least, the uniform of line and light infantry was impressive. Elzéar Blaze proclaimed that 'no one but a soldier of that

period can conceive what magic there was in the uniform.' If so, then it was a spell regularly broken. Writing to his father from Strasbourg in 1809, Dominique Rutten, a conscript in 18e de Ligne, complained, 'If you saw what uniforms they have given us ... I believe that you would take me for a beggar.' These then were the extremes, and it is Blaze's image that has been remembered over the years; clearly, however, a wide range of uniform standards could be seen within the Imperial Army.

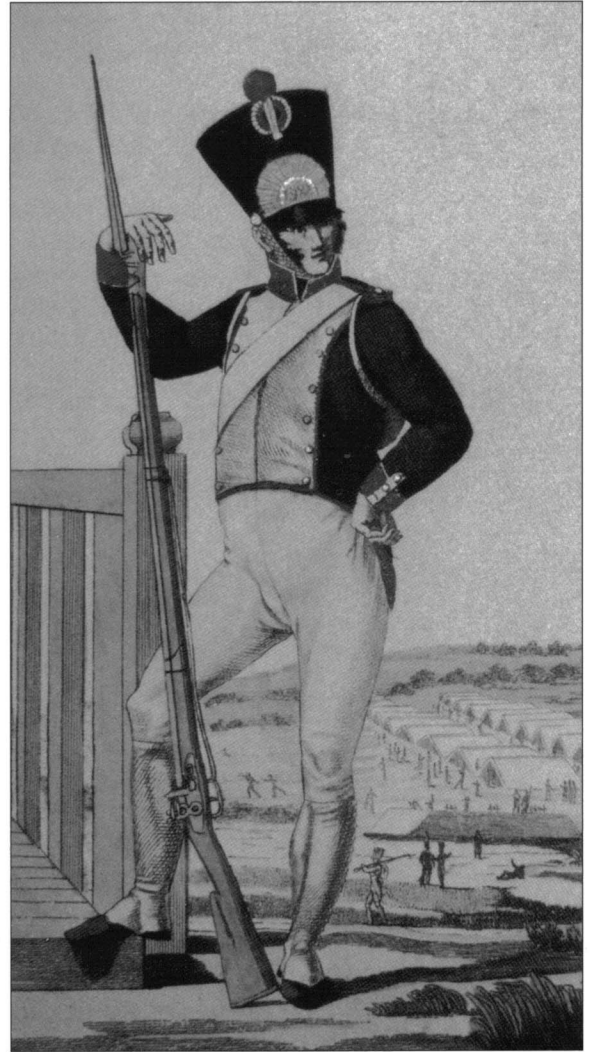
As the years of the empire passed, the uniform became more practical. The splendid parade uniform of the early empire, with its breeches, gaiters, neck stock and long-tailed coat, gave way to greatcoats, short gaiters and baggy trousers. Hairstyles also evolved. At the outset of the imperial era, soldiers were required to have their hair cut short like a brush at the front, with the back grown long and dressed into a *queue* (pigtail) of six inches. Over time, the queue disappeared in favour of a closely cropped style.

Perhaps the most impractical and unpopular garments were the tight breeches and long gaiters worn by line infantry. 'Now tell me, if a person wished to devise a most inconvenient method of clothing the soldier, could he have hit upon one more to the purpose?', complained Blaze. 'You should have seen the grotesque figure cut by the young conscripts, with these breeches and gaiters, which, not being kept up by the calves, fell down about their heels. For this dress a man should be well *built*, well made; he ought to have legs furnished with fair protuberances ... A man of twenty is not yet formed; nay, we were joined by conscripts who were under nineteen; this accoutrement gave them an absolutely silly look.'

Although training was in accordance with the 1791 regulations, there was a wide variation in the quality of instruction. Mayer recalled that after a few days rest on arrival at the depot, 'they made us exercise three times a day. We were without muskets for a month.' Jean Marc Bussy remembered: 'We exercised from five until nine o'clock in the morning and then from three until eight o'clock in the evening. On Sunday mornings there was a very tedious, full parade. On Sunday afternoons, we were free.' 'What afforded me the most misery,' recalled Girod, 'was the arms-drill. The musket, which they placed in my hands, was larger than me and enormously heavy. As an instructor, they gave me one of my comrades, who tormented me regularly for two or three hours each day.'

While some of Nicholas Page's comrades were sent to the Grande Armée within four days of arriving at the depot, he spent much longer in garrison. 'I stayed in the depot where I performed the duties of *caporal*. After the departure of the others, I stayed for two months more. After a short while, I knew my drill and I was made a full *caporal*.' Honoré Beulay, who was initially kept behind from the war battalions due to his frailty, also found himself made *caporal*. 'It was with pleasure that I received the woollen stripes, which exempted me from the fatigue and guard duties I had to perform as a soldier. Having taken over the running of my *escouade* I applied myself to the instruction of my men, who made noticeable progress.'

The tedium complained of by Jean Marc Bussy could be broken, especially by the excitement of burning powder on the target range. Nicholas Page recalled how the depot's commanders turned one such exercise into a competition:



They ordered us to do some target practice. Everyone who was available was there. There were three prizes to win. It was proposed among the company's caporals that, 'if anyone wins it will go towards having a drink.' We all agreed to this, as the prizes were not big: The first was 3 *Francs*, the second 2 *Francs* 50 *Centimes* and the third 2 *Francs*. The next day we went off, accompanied by the depot commanders to the place designated for manoeuvres. Major Gros said: 'This is the manner in which you are going to shoot. The first shot will not count for the prizes. However, only those that put their first shot inside the target will go on to shoot for the prize ... There is a small, black circle at the centre of the target. I'll give 12 *Francs* from my own pocket to the one who hits it.' They continued to fire, no one could hit the black. He offered 18 *Francs* with the same result. He said: 'Now I'll give 24 *Francs* to the one who puts it in the black.' At that moment my turn arrived. I aimed, fired and pierced the centre of the target. A shout went out for the adjutant to verify the hit. He replied: 'It's in the black.' Although this news gave me great

The Bardin 1812 uniform (right) shortened both the coattails and gaiters. The front of the coat had a new cut and the shako decoration was reduced. (Martinet)



The alterations to the light infantry carabinier uniform were less pronounced and the symbols of their elite status were retained. (Martinet)

pleasure, I asked myself: 'If it's in the black will he actually pay me?' When the hit had been confirmed to the Major, he put his hand in his pocket. He gave me four 6 *Franc* coins, saying to me: 'It's yours my friend, have a good drink with your comrades, but drink a toast to my health too.' I said to him: 'Thank you Major, I won't forget.' He added: 'I'm not playing with you any more, you've won all my money.' On top of that I had the prize of three *Francs*, giving me 27 *Francs* in total ... The others said, 'You were lucky.' My comrades, who were as happy as I was myself, shouted: 'Long live the *4e compagnie!*' They took us back to barracks, the drummers leading the way, singing. We had to give them something to buy a drop to drink with, which gave them more pleasure than it did us. I did not forget to do what my Major had requested: We drank a toast to his health.

Departing the depot

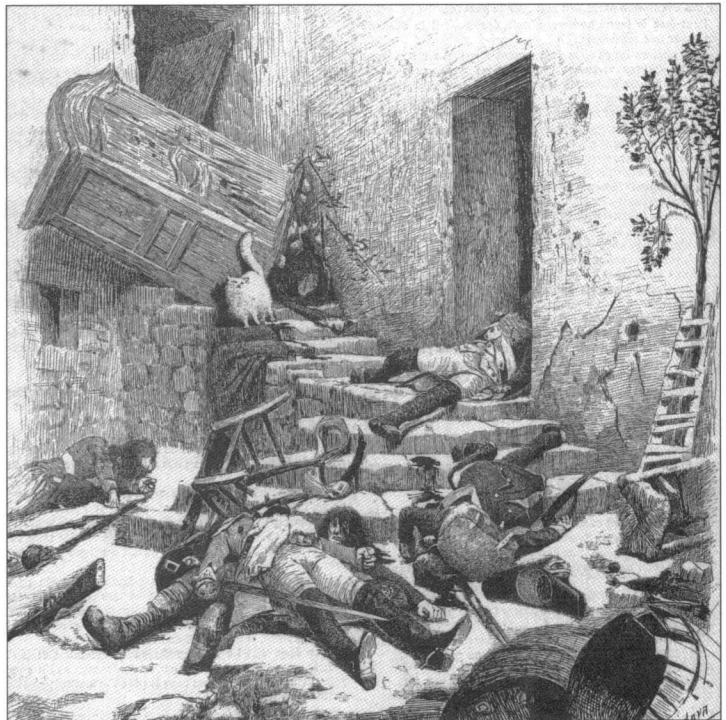
Whether the conscripts found military life mundane and tedious, or if it seemed like the beginning of a big adventure, all must have known that

there was a deadly serious side to their training. News from the field armies found its way back to the regimental depots, as the wounded returned, spreading the latest campfire gossip. The news coming back from Spain was particularly unsettling for the conscripts: 'Each moment convoys arrived telling of the events in that country and the way in which the war was being fought there,' remembered Page. 'They told us that the priests, the women, everyone had taken up arms against the French, and that if one was unfortunate enough to fall into their hands, one would be made to endure atrocious suffering, saying that they would pull out their tongues, or cut them into pieces, more still, that they would be hanged from the branches of trees.'

It came as a great surprise to Nicholas Page that:

shortly after two months of being in garrison, a convoy of wounded arrived, which had several of my comrades who had left Epinal with me. One had his arm in a sling, another a ball in his thigh ... The wounded were put into barracks and a detachment was formed to take their place ... I was chosen for departure ... The day before leaving, after evening roll call, my fellow corporals said to me, 'Page, you're going to leave tomorrow, we must have a good drink to say goodbye.' I consented with pleasure ... We went to an inn telling the landlady to put us in a room to one side, fearing that our commanders would find us, because it was forbidden to go out drinking immediately prior to the day of departure. We ate supper together, as friends. My comrades told me, 'You're leaving tomorrow and it won't be long before we rejoin the regiment.' At the moment we were about to leave the inn, an adjutant arrived with several sergents, who asked the landlady if several soldiers were in the building. She responded: 'There are six in a room to the side.' As they came in, they said to us: 'Messieurs, is this how you carry out your orders? We're taking you the guardhouse.' We responded: 'Messieurs, some of us are leaving tomorrow and we have had supper together. We were going back to barracks right away.' They had other ideas however: 'You will be sleeping in the guardhouse and you must go there right away, without further debate.' We followed our escort without saying a word. We had thought that it was all just a show to make us scared. They took us to a stable to spend the night on a stone floor without a shred of straw for us to rest on. That was a good way to spend the night before making a day's march! It was January, extremely cold. We

The atrocities being committed in the Peninsular War were common knowledge. Writing to his sister, Cardron broke the news of his latest posting: 'I see you open mouthed, pronouncing the terrible word "Spain", and well, yes, you are not wrong at all.'



were dressed in *petite tenue*, namely linen breeches and a fatigue jacket without greatcoat. Good God, what a night we spent. We thought it would be the last of our lives and in my life I have not spent one similar, nor ever will before I die. We walked about on the stones all night without having a moment's sleep beating our fists against the walls and the doors; our cries and lamentations were fruitless. In our despair we each would have rather been dead. They came and let us go at eight in the morning. They had forgotten us: only when they gave roll call did they think of us. We were numb and could not walk.

Officer cadets

Although it was by far the biggest source of recruits, conscription was not the sole source of manpower for the army, some men volunteering for service quite willingly through a sense of duty, adventure or as a means of social advancement. Volunteers had three options: the simplest was joining a regiment as a common soldier. Some men, such as Jean-Baptiste Cardron, managed to enrol in a regiment in which a friend of the family served as an officer. Having a well-placed family friend meant that if Cardron was lucky enough to dodge the bullets, he could expect to be shown some favouritism. On the eve of his first campaign in 1806, Cardron would gleefully write home that his mother's friend, his battalion commander, Monsieur Rigéard, 'assures me that I will win my officer's epaulettes on this campaign'.

For those from affluent backgrounds, there were two additional possibilities: the first was to gain admittance to the *Vélites* of the Guard, where an officer's commission was promised after four years' service. The alternative for those with the means available was to enrol in the Fontainebleau military academy, and on graduation gain a commission. In effect, this allowed the sons of the empire's social élite to buy commissions for a tutelage fee of 1,200 francs a year. The result was to considerably limit the opportunities for common soldiers to rise swiftly through the ranks, which had been one of the defining characteristics of the Revolutionary Army and the route many of the new élite had utilised themselves.

The former officer cadet Girod de l'Ain had opted for a military career at the age of 16:

This career little appeared to suit me. With below average height and a quiet inclination that made me appear distant to some, the people that believed they knew me best predicted that I would never amount to anything other than an unhappy soldier. ... My unfortunate brother, Marc (who was later killed), embraced this career himself and I believe that I took this course of action, above all, to do as he had done. This was against his advice and council, for in his letters, he never ceased telling me tales of how he loathed Military School.

Another cadet Elzéar Blaze recalled:

The drum awoke us at five in the morning. The courses of history, geography, mathematics, drawing and fortification, occupied us from hour to hour; we relaxed with a change of study and, to vary

our pleasures, four hours of exercise skilfully distributed, diversified our day in a very agreeable manner; so that we lay down at night with our heads full of the heroes of Greece and Rome, rivers and mountains, angles and tangents, ditches and bastions. All these things were mixed up rather confusedly in our minds; the exercise alone was a positive matter: our shoulders, our knees and our hands, prevented us from confusing that with the rest ... The supreme *bon ton* of the school was to smoke; in the first place because it was forbidden, and, in the next, because it was thought to give one a military air. Tobacco was smuggled in, night and day, in small quantities ... From morning till night the drummers were engaged in no other business, and yet they could scarcely supply the demand.

As graduation loomed, cadet Faré was asked to name his preferred posting. He recorded his thoughts in a letter to his mother:

When my turn came I said to him that I wanted to enter the Light Infantry, or if that was not possible, into the *Chasseurs à Cheval*. I absolutely wanted to serve with the Light Troops; as I have told you, it is there that a junior officer can best employ his knowledge and distinguish himself most easily. Detached with a troop, he alone is in command and if he performs some dazzling feat, it reflects on him alone. Always the first under fire above all the infantry, no occasion to distinguish himself escapes him. Meanwhile a line infantry officer, unhappily stuck behind his company in the *serrez-file*, commands nothing by himself and comes under fire like a common soldier.

Girod also wanted to serve in a light regiment and was disappointed at his initial appointment. 'My commission was that I be employed with the rank of *sous-lieutenant* in the 72e Régiment d'infanterie de Ligne, at that time stationed in Holland. However, I desired to serve with the *Grande Armée* ...' With good family connections to government ministers, Girod had this decision overturned, and before he knew it he was en route to serve in the 9e Léger. Faré was not so lucky – he was posted to a line regiment and lacked the family influence to have the decision overturned.

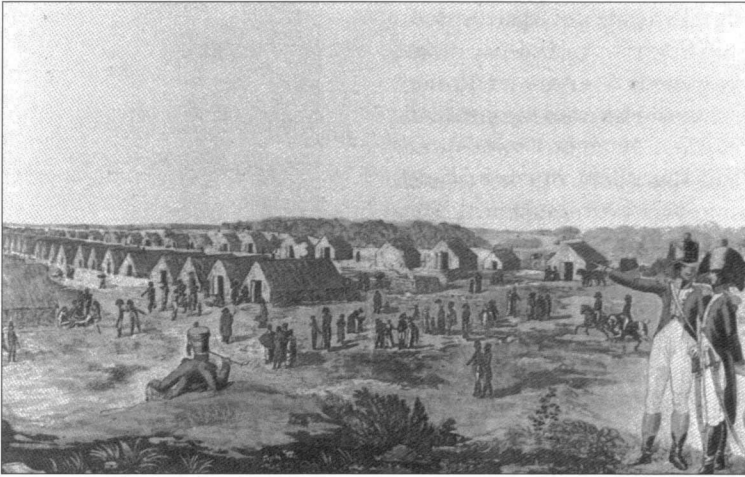
After receiving their commissions, the graduates of Fontainebleau had their uniforms fitted and bought what equipment they considered necessary for life out in the field. Blaze recalled how they tried to look the part in their new uniforms, vainly emulating the heroes of Marengo or Egypt, despite a lack of stubble on their chins: 'The ambition of us all was to assume a certain air of profligacy: we smoked, we drank drams, conceiving that these commendable habits would give us a military appearance. Our uniform, our swords, our epaulettes were all new, all fresh from the shops. We exposed them to the rain and sun, that they might impart to them somewhat the look of the bivouac.'

IN CAMP

Between campaigns, huge camps were erected to house the soldiers and hone their skills. Here large-scale manoeuvres, the like of which would



Voltigeur officer. Like the men they commanded, these officers were of small stature. During a skirmish, Cardron saw one voltigeur officer 'run at least 300 paces, leaping hedges and bushes like a kid goat.' (Martinet)

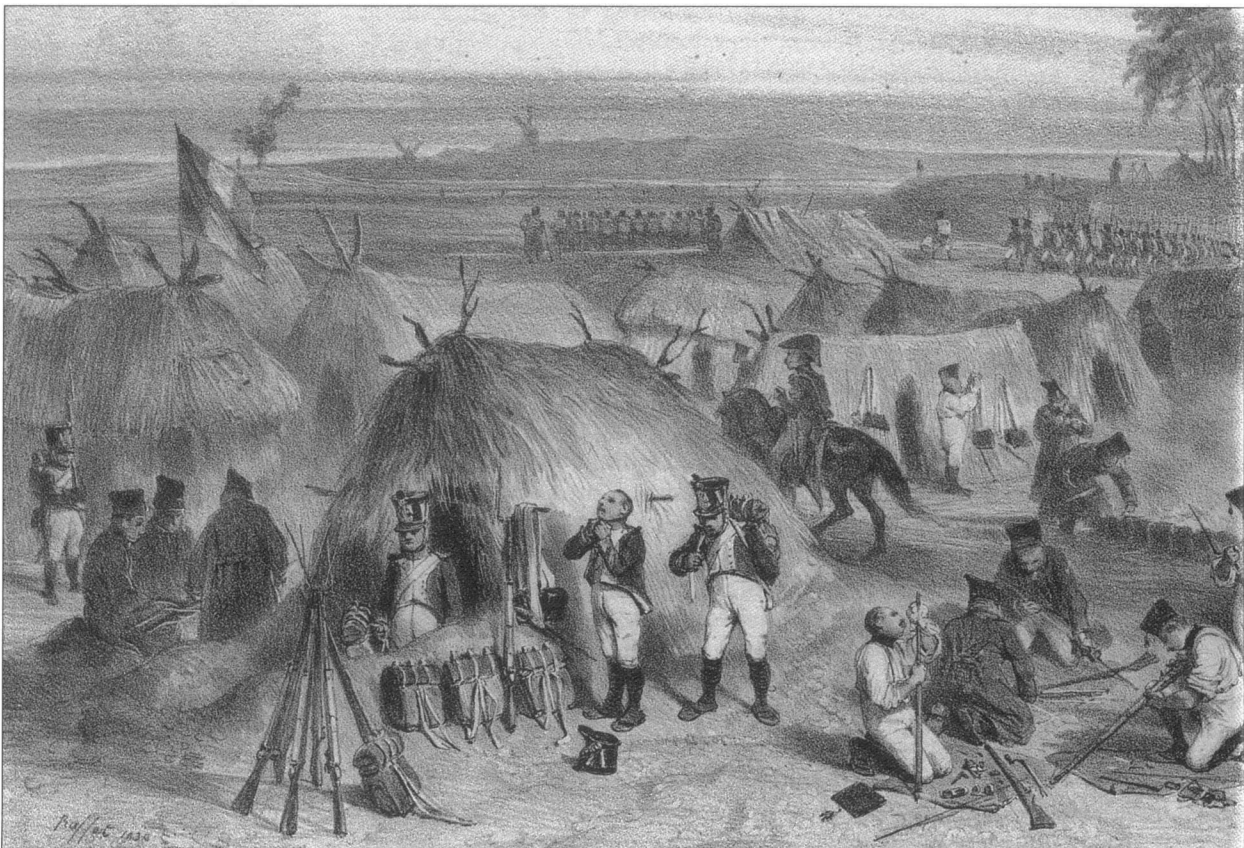


The soldiers' huts are lined up in two rows, with cooking areas behind. The officers' huts form a third line in the distance. Compare this with a tented camp's layout on p. 21

have been impossible in the depots and urban areas, could be practised. These camps were an enormous success and were especially useful for training the detachments of conscripts sent from the depots to replenish losses in the ranks. 'One knows of nothing,' believed Girod de l'Ain, 'that teaches a soldier his trade better than a stay in camp.'

Girod went on to describe the construction of one of these camps (named Napoléonbourg by the soldiers) on the banks of the Spree near Berlin in 1808:

We were given a free hand to take as much wood from the forest as was necessary for the construction of the huts. We then built an enormous *abatis*. The works were considerable and very tiring; we had to bivouac for 15 days before we could live in the huts. However, the finished camp presented a superb sight. The roads were very wide; the soldier's huts were in two ranks, behind one another on the same alignment. We constructed each company's



kitchens with their stoves and chimneys made of brick. These offered a large covered area, which served as a room both for dancing and fencing in. Behind the kitchens and at a fair distance, the captains' huts were lined up, then those of the *lieutenants* and the *sous-lieutenants*, those of the battalion commanders and adjudant majors, then finally the colonel's. In front of the parade ground, the Général de Division had his, which was a veritable palace. The Généraux de Brigades had theirs in the centre of their brigades, not as vast, but still very large. These plank-covered huts were constructed from wooden uprights covered with cob; every Sunday we whitened the exterior with lime.

The interiors of these sturdily built huts could be made into quite comfortable dwellings: 'Myself and the company's *Lieutenant*,' remembered Girod, 'occupied the same hut, the interior of which we divided into two alcoves and a small lounge. From the city we rented some mahogany furniture, window glass, furnished beds, etc, and ended up being exceptionally well lodged.'

Girod remembered how, 'in the streets of the camp and along its front, we planted fine avenues of large trees, which we cut from the forest, having taken care to preserve their foliage. As they withered, we progressively replaced them with others.' The explanation for this feature is provided by Blaze:

A regiment conceived the idea of cutting down several loads of firs in a neighbouring forest, and planting them in the line of the piles of arms, which produced a fine effect, because that tree keeps its green colour for a long time, even after it is cut. On the following day, an order of the day directed the example set by this regiment to be generally followed; but the imitators, striving to outdo their model, planted a tree at each angle of each hut, which was deemed a great improvement, and in consequence an order was issued to imitate the imitators. Then with a view to eclipse all, we marked out in front of the colours of our regiment an immense rectangle, which was levelled and swept for parades; and this space was bordered on each side by six rows of trees, which presented the appearance of a magnificent avenue. All this was done as if by magic, for when you have two or three thousand hands at your disposal, and they turn to work cheerfully, the business is soon completed.

New arrivals

Arriving in *bataillons de marche*, conscripts went to the camps to be incorporated into the regimental field battalions. 'When a detachment of conscripts arrived,' recalled Blaze, 'the first question put to all of them was what business he had followed before he had entered the service: when the young man owned the glorious title of cook; it became a point of dispute who should have him in his company ... These conscript cooks did not fight; we would not expose their precious lives.'

With the cooks identified and safely entrusted to preparing a mouth-watering evening meal, the rest of the army got down to working

Le Camp by Raffet: Soldiers in shirtsleeves and forage caps clean their disassembled muskets, while a cook tends the marmites (cook pots). To the sound of the drum, soldiers emerge from their bivouacs and get dressed to go out on patrol. Notice how the haversack straps are fastened.



up a serious appetite. Limitations on time, manpower and space in the depots meant that it was only practical to teach the conscripts individual arms drill and platoon-level manoeuvres there. In camp, it was a different story as there was ample space to practise battalion manoeuvres. The complex procedures of forming columns from lines and vice versa could be practised until it became second nature. There was also an opportunity to practise the vital skills for the formation of squares with lightning speed and calm to repel cavalry. Once the individual battalions were deemed proficient, then the entire division could manoeuvre in the field together.

These exercises not only trained the conscripts, but also kept the veterans busy and stopped them grumbling. Girod describes some of the additional instruction the men received to supplement the parade-ground drills prescribed by the 1791 regulations: 'We engaged in arduous manoeuvres and military exercises. From the break of the day we were in the field ... Every day we led our companies to the river to teach them to swim; we also gave them fencing and dancing lessons.'

Following a short spell of leave after leaving the academy, the officer cadets also began to arrive and meet their new comrades. Faré found himself warmly received, but was amazed at how much money he had to lay out. In a letter to his mother from a camp at Étapes near the Channel coast, he wrote:

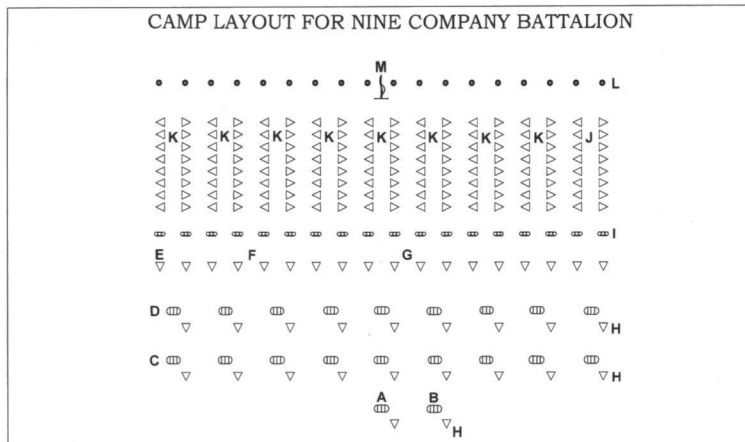
Today I was received at the head of the regiment. My reception cost me more than we had expected. I had to give a *Louis* to the company, 12 *Francs* to the drummers (there are eighteen) and as much again to the Musicians, who are of an equal number. ... Besides this I had to pay 3 *Louis* for my share of the construction of our hut. Under orders to make a bed for myself, I have bought a straw palliasse and some sheets, which has to make do for a mattress, those being too expensive in this region ... Of the 44 [francs remaining] I have used them for some small pleasures and to treat the officers that I have met. There remains a total of 100 *écus* out of which I must buy a pair of boots, two or three pairs of nankeen trousers.

Glory, Faré had discovered, came at quite a price.

Officer cadets from the academy could not always expect to be well received. Each one of these fresh-faced *officiers de magasin* denied a long-serving, veteran sergent-major the chance to be rewarded with a commission. After graduating, Girod de l'Ain left Paris and followed in the wake of the army across Germany, only to be met with a frosty reception:

The following morning I hurried to visit to Colonel Meunier who commanded that Regiment: I presented myself at his quarters, just as he was giving the Order of the Day to a gathering of all the *sergent-majors*. He was without doubt delighted to show them how much he was upset that they were giving, to their detriment, officer places to school pupils, and in consequence, he received me quite badly, confining himself to telling me that he had not had any notice from the Minister [of War] that I was to join his unit. I asked his permission to follow while waiting for my

nomination to reach him, to which he very tersely replied that his Regiment was setting off the next day at eight o'clock in the morning and that I was free to follow, if that pleased me. At this he turned his back on me and dismissed the *sergent-majors*, on the faces of whom I could not fail to notice the satisfaction that the welcome I had received, had caused them.



As well as the many newcomers arriving at the camp, many soldiers were returning to the ranks after leaving hospital, recovering from wounds, illness or even coming back from rare moments of leave. As Capitaine Bial of the 22e de Ligne recalled, these reunions were not always happy ones. He had been away from the regiment for some time, recovering from an illness, which had confined him to bed. During his convalescence, his hair had become quite unkempt and so he decided to have it dressed by a barber before reporting back for duty. The barber advised Bial to have his hair closely cropped in the new fashion, as opposed to the traditional, and still at that time regulation, brush-and-queue style. Bial agreed and returned to the regiment. Despite the emperor himself sporting such a cut, Colonel Schreiber – a conservative-minded Swiss soldier – was not impressed. After examining Bial, he exploded with rage, exclaiming: 'What! You have cut off your queue! You can't have done! What example are you giving to your comrades and subordinates? An officer without a queue! An officer without a queue! Oh good God, what has become of us? It angers me to do this to you, but I cannot do anything other than put you under arrest. It is too serious, you see! ... I regret doing this to you, but it is too serious. To cut off the queue without permission! What will become of us?' Bial was declared unfit to resume active service and told to find somewhere nearby to stay while the colonel's temper subsided.

Camp layout for a battalion of nine companies. Key: (A) chef de bataillon; (B) adjudant major; (C) captains; (D) lieutenants and sous-lieutenants; (E) adjudant; (F) drummers; (G) cantinières; (H) orderlies; (I) cook fires (J) grenadier company; (K) fusilier company; (L) piles of arms; (M) flag post. (Martin Lancaster)

À la amitié! According to Blaze, 'dram drinking is an essential military practice.'

Camp life

These camps soon became like small towns, but with so many energetic young men concentrated together, distractions were essential. While the men were taught to fence and dance, off-duty officers made and lost their fortunes playing cards. On arrival Girod found his brother officers playing a card game known as *drogue*. 'It is the game for those who have neither money nor credit, or at least those who are not prepared to risk it on cards. The loser is left to wear a long piece of slit wood on the end of his nose, which pinches him in such a way as to produce an amusing grimace.' Of course, for these pursuits suitable venues had to be created: 'Behind the camp and on the edge of the forest,' recalled Girod, 'some super



establishments were created – coffee shops and restaurants which we furnished largely at our own expense.’

In a separate camp, musician Girault and his wife decided to be enterprising and set up a canteen themselves. Having taken a loan for 200 francs from the colonel’s secretary and managing to borrow a wagon, Girault took the money to his wife:

so that she could go straight to make her purchases, which consisted of wine, brandy, rum, beer, butter, cheese; in short, everything that one could sell in the camp. The following day, before they had dressed the camp, my merchandise arrived. The adjutant-major who distributed the tents and who knew that I wanted to set up a canteen, gave me everything that was necessary and, with the camp traced out, I put up my tents ... Hardly had my wife arrived with her wagon, and before it had been unloaded, it was surrounded and we were soon no longer owners of the merchandise. Everything was sold before the canteen was set up: It was a good debut ... I continued setting up my canteen. I made a wine store. I dug up the earth around my two tents, so as to improvise benches and a table and I provided everything that I thought necessary to attract regular customers. Often, on Sundays and festival days, local residents came to visit the camp and they refreshed themselves at our canteen ... We earned a lot of money there, and if we had remained longer we would have collected a small fortune.

Some of the best customers at the canteens were the rough-and-ready older officers who had worked their way up through the ranks during the Revolutionary Wars. Still fresh from Fontainebleau, Girod was quite astonished at the exploits of some of his superiors, particularly when the epic drinking sessions ended in tragedy:

Captains Dongée and Nicholas died ... following the immoderate use of brandy. I wanted to assist with the autopsy that our surgeons performed on *Capitaine* Dongée’s body. However, I fainted and could not stay until the end. I had and I have since had, many occasions to see quite horrible spectacles involving dead and wounded, without it ever having the effect that this had on me. The two captains whom I have named were from Lorraine. They were without formal instruction, but good officers. *Capitaine* Dongée had been a locksmith in his youth and all his life had kept a great fondness for this trade, in which he would have probably acquired a reputation if the Revolution had not forced him to swap his file for a musket. As for *Capitaine* Nicolas, he could manoeuvre troops well and passed for a very capable battalion commander – when he had his head about him. Unfortunately, when the occasion to lose it was offered, he hardly knew how

‘When we arrived in a garrison,’ recalled Blaze, ‘our overriding priority was to seek a female with whom we could pass our time. As soon as we found one, our minds were at rest. “He has got his daily bread,” was the expression used.’

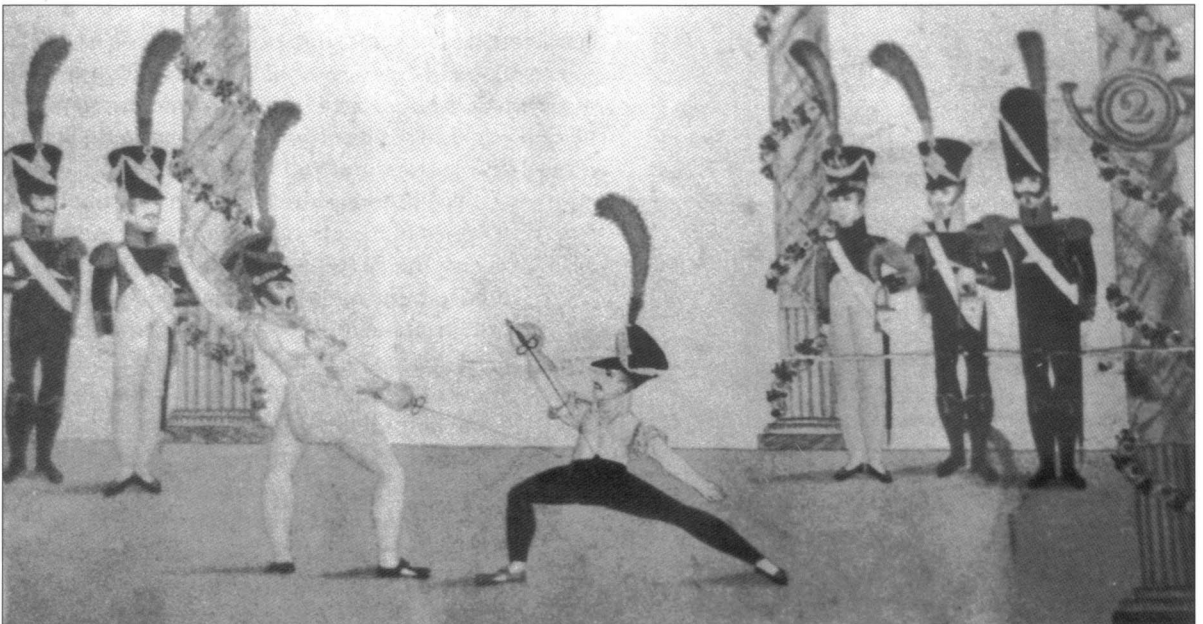


to restrain himself. All the same, he was a very good man and I regretted his loss greatly, even though a few days before his death he had tried to murder me. This is how: Each evening, while the poor man no longer had the use of his reason, we played all sorts of tricks on him. One evening, when almost ready for bed and already in my shirt, I played a prank on him. He took his épée and, although quite wobbly, pursued me to my bed, where I cowered, having no escape and no means to parry the blows of his épée: I only escaped by a miracle.

With so many men gathered in one place, disagreements and fights that led to duels were, if not everyday occurrences, certainly not uncommon. *Affaires d'honneur* constituted not only a challenge to individual pride but also the honour of the man's regiment. Girod witnessed one particular flare-up:

Capitaine Watt, the battalion's *adjutant major*, had been grossly insulted by an officer of the 24e de Ligne, who had hit him in the middle of a café. A duel followed, in which Watt lightly wounded his adversary. We believed the matter was over, until we saw the wounded man come back after his recovery, demanding a second duel. The officers of his regiment declared that his wound had been too light and had forced him to go back and demand satisfaction, under pain of being deprived of all association with his comrades. One had to say that this officer did not enjoy much respect in his corps. We had, on the contrary, great esteem and affection for *Capitaine Watt*, and after having conferred together, we decided that there was no reason for a second duel. Two deputies, one of whom was myself, were selected to go and notify the 24e's officer corps of this decision ... We addressed ourselves to a senior officer of that regiment, who called together several

An affaire d'honneur (duel) between light and line infantry. Although in shirtsleeves, both wear shako and plume in honour of their regiments. Vigilant seconds ensure that satisfaction is met.



captains and lieutenants to hear us. We gave our reasons, insisting above all that it was not equal, that on our part we had one of our best officers, while on their part they had one who enjoyed only mediocre esteem and who had caused the quarrel that had led to the first duel. Our speech for the defence was a complete success and, after having accepted some punch that they offered us in recognition of the harmony between the two officer corps, we went back, charmed by the welcome that we had received and rendered a complete account of our successful mission to our delighted comrades.

With curious local townfolk visiting the camp and taking refreshment at the canteens, officers came into contact and struck up relationships with the fairer sex. While in camp, Bial became particularly attached to one German lady. One year they enjoyed 'Napoleon's birthday, which was celebrated on 15 August, with revues, music, games, etc. It was crowned by a beautiful firework display, during which cannon spewed grapeshot. I had Madame Hausse with me the whole time, a very sentimental woman, as are all good Germans. She was very moved by this spectacle, as it evoked in her gentle soul the dangers and horrors of war to which I was exposed. I was thankful to her for the tender solicitude that she demonstrated for my person.'

All over the empire, and much to the annoyance of husbands, brothers and single men everywhere, relationships between local girls and soldiers flourished. However, it was not just the relatives of local girls that were concerned; anxious that he might marry a German girl, Sous-Lieutenant Faré's mother wrote to her son. In response, Faré reassured her about the wife he hoped to one day find: 'I am a Frenchman, I want to live and die

in France; therefore I will take a French girl ... On the subject of German girls, they are big, fine and brave women, but they have, here and there, some shortcomings that would hardly accommodate me. They are too big, and as I do not like excess, this characteristic does not suit me.'

French soldiers were able to write home and receive mail in the field. If the army was on the move, the delivery service was erratic, but in camp the letters were delivered regularly: 'The letter box of the regiment ... is placed beside the colours,' wrote Blaze, '(the post) goes out every day, it comes in every day; and we receive the Paris papers within a fortnight.'

This service went some way towards alleviating the problem of homesickness, which was a widespread cause of depression among the soldiers. The post gave the men a link with home and an outlet for their gossip. In one of his letters, Cardron wrote to his sister informing her of some disturbing news regarding a fellow officer who had been considered as a possible suitor for her at the war's end: 'They have given me news of F... whose conduct is always the same; that is to say that he plays around and always gets himself drunk, as is his custom. He has been struck by a

In a letter home, Grenadier Philippe Humbert included this self-portrait of himself standing to attention.



malady that one dares not to name, that he had always hidden from us and that a regimental doctor regards as incurable. Here is the monster that dared to claim the hand of my poor sister!’

Most soldiers simply wrote home to say that they were alive and to ask for money to be sent to them quickly. Army mail was censored, and it was widely known that, especially in the later years of the war, letters were often opened to prevent the terrible truth about the war’s course from reaching the population back home. Jean-Baptiste Cardron entrusted one of his letters to the former colonel of his regiment, who was on his way back to France following a promotion. He told his sister that he took this course of action ‘in the hope that this letter will not be opened [and] that you will learn a few things of our sad situation, things that I would be obliged to hush up if I did not make use of this opportunity.’

The reverses of 1812 in Russia and Spain produced plenty to hush up, but the soldiers still managed to get word back to their worried families: Writing on the 13 February 1813, Faré described the terrible retreat from Moscow: Oh my good parents, it is in such circumstances that I am aware how much I love you. But I must ignore these thoughts, which bring tears to my eyes, for I have not the time to cry. I am going to tell you, therefore, what has happened to me as briefly as possible. The first and foremost point, the most important to me, is that I am doing well, with neither frozen feet, hands, nor anything else. My eyes, which the dust and the fires of Moscow had put into a pitiful state, have almost recovered, despite the bivouacs and are now in a passable state ... Like everyone else, I have lost everything: horses, baggage, even my poor servant, who was frozen to death. I miss him a lot: he was a little lazy, but faithful and intelligent. To top this misfortune, they had paid us four months’ wages, three of which were in advance up to and inclusive of February, so as to unload the treasury wagons. That put me eight hundred *Francs* in clear credit, which I put in my portmanteau and which was stolen with it. I arrived at Königsberg naked and without a penny.

ON CAMPAIGN

The relatively light-hearted atmosphere in the camps swiftly changed as war approached. Having never seen action before, Jean-Baptiste Cardron related the build-up and movement of troops to his sister:

For 4 days, several regiments that, like us, were on this side of the Rhine, have re-crossed and been directed on Frankfurt. Today our whole Division marches out and our initial destination is also Frankfurt. Your brother therefore, is going to find out what war is all about. Our poor mother is going to be very sad when she learns that hostilities have resumed. Try to console her. You know as I do that she has already

As hostilities resume, French troops prepare to leave Frankfurt. In the right foreground are a group of sappers.



experienced much sorrow. Make sure that this news does not add to it. She is all we have and you can imagine well enough yourself how much sorrow her loss would cause me. All that we hold most dear in the world is therefore confided into your care. Furthermore, if the fortunes of war do not allow me to see you again, you have enough character to believe yourself right in thinking that you can render our good mother all the care that she could expect from both her children.

Good-bye, my dear sister, love me as I love you and believe me your brother. CARDRON. ps. As far as I will be able to, I will always send you my news, but if that is not always possible, you must not alarm yourself.

The distance marched each day on campaign was referred to as an *étape* (stage). 'After marching for an hour, there is a halt of five minutes for lighting pipes, and is therefore called the *halt of pipes*,' wrote Blaze:

The soldier ought not to be deprived of any pleasure, for many this pleasure is an absolute necessity. At mid-day there is the grand halt, which lasts for an hour; each dines upon what he has in his knapsack and the march is then resumed, broken by a halt of five minutes after every league ... When the roads are bad, if the soldier is not well shod, if the gaiter does not entirely cover the shoe, the mud finds its way into it, makes the feet sore, causes blisters, the men fall behind. A very important point for an officer is to see that the soldiers have good shoes and that each of them has in his knapsack a pair of gaiter-straps, an awl, and strong thread to sew them on if required.

The length of the *étape* could vary considerably, depending on the urgency of the moment. On average the infantryman could be expected to cover 30 kilometres (eight leagues) a day, but with an accelerated pace it could be doubled. The march could also be forced, continuing longer than usual, sometimes through the night and well into the next day. By limiting the march to eight leagues, there was plenty of time for food



After a day's march, soldiers discuss their destination. While one catches up on his sleep, another peels vegetables with his pocket knife. Note how the marmite is strapped on top of the standing man's haversack. (Beyer)

Soldiers share bread and drink. A drummer (bottom left) rests on his instrument, smoking a pipe, while horsemen speed past carrying important despatches.



and shelter to be prepared and for the stragglers to catch up, but an extension would inevitably increase the numbers left by the wayside. 'Nothing is more fatiguing to a soldier than night-marches,' Blaze continued:

the first necessity for man is sleep. Sometimes the soldiers slept while marching; a false step made them roll into a ditch, one over the other. In Bavaria and Austria a great many bees are kept and, consequently, there is an abundance of wax: the soldiers found great quantities of it in the peasants' houses. In the night-marches, when the weather was calm, each would light two, three, four tapers, nay, some carried so many as fifteen or twenty. Nothing could be more striking than the appearance of a Division thus illuminated, ascending a hill by a winding road; all those thousands of moving lights presented a most delightful view. Here the jovial fellow of the company sang a sentimental song chorused by all the rest.

The French Army's reliance on 'living off the land' evolved from necessity, and was not official military policy. Although attempts were made to set up food stores, Napoleon's emphasis on speedy marches meant that the supply services could not keep up. Napoleon was hoping that his campaigns would be short and that his soldiers would find enough food along the way to prevent starvation. By 1807, as the campaigns were being fought for longer periods with larger armies in poor weather, Faré bemoaned the growing problems: 'Our magazines, which are to the rear, overflow with grain and forage, but the transporting of them is extremely slow and difficult. The roads are awful and of the small number of horses that are left in this campaign, half of them are dying from hunger and the others are so exhausted that they have difficulty carrying anything. The government just does not supply the other things, such as wine, beer, cloth, in short, everything that is necessary for life and clothing. The *cantinières* go far in search of them and as they experience the same transport difficulties, these supplies are very rare and sold at an insane price.'

Faced with these shortages, there was only one solution open to the soldiers in the field. Unhappily, Mayer realised that 'it was a sad omen to be obliged to steal to live. On arriving at the bivouac some occupied themselves



While waiting for the soup to boil, an officer emerges from his bivouac to add his point of view to the debate.

Foragers collecting supplies. The soldier with a scythe is cutting straw for building shelters. Note the *cantinière's* improvised cradle. (Beyer)



with making shelters for the night, while the others made the soup. When this was done, the best marchers went marauding and brought back food for those in camp.' This practice was confirmed by Blaze:

We lived upon what the soldiers found – a soldier never steals anything, he only finds it ... In every regiment, in every company, there were determined plunderers who marched some way off the main route two or three leagues from the column ... These fellows chose one of their number for their chief, who commanded them as absolute dictator ... To carry on this kind of profession, it was necessary to be indefatigable; for after marching the whole day with the regiment, the marauders ran about all night; coming back in the morning to the camp, they started again and scarcely ever lay down to rest themselves.

When food was obtained, the men, including Girault, busied themselves cooking it:

We had procured a piece of meat, with which we had to make the soup in an old cauldron that we had found. It was necessary to go more than a quarter of a league to find water. The cauldron was put on the fire, but we did not have time for a broth to be properly made. We watered down the broth after a few hours, without adding any bread, for we only had one loaf between four and we had eaten over half of that while waiting for the broth to be made. Half satisfied, we slept around the fire, seeking in sleep a respite from our fatigues.

Sleeping rough on damp ground under the stars took its toll on even the fittest soldiers, many of whom would experience rheumatism early in their lives. The quickest cure seemed to be copious amounts of alcohol, even among the officers, as *Capitaine* Godet recalled disapprovingly: 'The Officers were brave; the soldiers were brave. However, these qualities were tarnished by a large number of officers, some the most influential with the rank of captain, by their tendency to abuse drink, especially spirits. I can still see *Capitaine* Gabriel leaving his bivouac, looking through haggard eyes and stupefied, mounting his horse only then to fall from the opposite



ABOVE TOP **'Our conscripts,'** remembered Blaze, **'were bent low under the weight of a knapsack, a musket, a cartridge box; add to these fifty ball-cartridges, bread, meat, a kettle, or perhaps a hatchet and you may have some conception of the plight of those poor fellows, especially in hot weather.'**

ABOVE BOTTOM **Exhausted soldiers catnap during the advance into Russia, 1812. (Adam)**

side, with the soldiers shouting: “he’s up, he’s not up, etc” Coudreux used another means to survive: ‘I march, I smoke my pipe’

When not marching, the soldiers were often billeted in a town or village for a few days. The quality and quantity of food available depended largely on the time of year, the location, and on how many regiments had already passed through the area. ‘For eight days,’ grumbled Coudreux in a letter to his brother, ‘we occupied miserable villages, where we drank water, and lived on potatoes, carrots, cabbages and oxen that we had to kill ourselves. They call this a billet.’

Improvisation was the key, but even the best ideas could end in unpalatable catastrophe. ‘We were always on a diet of horsemeat,’ remembered Girault of the 1809 campaign. ‘No longer having any salt, one of our comrades ... had the idea of replacing it with two or three cartridges, the saltpetre in the gunpowder taking the place of the salt. I did not enjoy this new type of seasoning at all, the soup tasted like polish.’ Marching to Spain, Gille encountered another exotic seasoning. Although still in France, he and his comrades were surprised to discover that they could not understand a single word spoken by the locals – worse was to follow. Billeted on a local family, Gille and his comrades eagerly awaited their dinner:

French troops loot a ruined church. Recently buried coffins are opened in the search for jewellery.

After having waited with an appetite that promised to honour the table, we saw the much desired soup being brought to us. Our astonishment was plain to see though, as the dish appeared to



have been sprinkled with vermilion. However, necessity determined that we taste it; but as we put it into our mouths, a burning fire devoured our lips. Monsieur Buron, who was known for his kindness and patience, fell into a terrible rage and threw his plate and its contents at the head of the poor woman, who appeared to be waiting for our compliments on her cooking. Her husband and her son, or at least that is what they appeared to be and who had until then sat wrapped in their coats in a corner of the room, wanted to throw themselves on her assailant. Monsieur Buron drew his sabre and an angry brawl would have ensued if my comrades and I had not separated them. Calm was re-established and I learned that what had first appeared to be poison, was nothing other than a spice – a pepper from India.

Although attacks on civilians and their property did occur and the stealing of food was often tolerated, the French Army was not without discipline. If rations were provided, the official response to looting could be severe, and the sentence of death was occasionally imposed where it was thought the mark had been overstepped. Corporal punishment had been outlawed in the French Army since the revolution, but necessity often meant that officers resorted to it and with good effect. En route to Spain, Girod de l'Ain caught some of his men roughing up a civilian, so he beat them off with the flat of his sabre: 'Assaults made against soldiers are, without doubt, strictly forbidden by military regulations; but on campaign or while on the road, the guard house, prison or any other punishment of this type was not very practical; to bring a man to justice before a court martial, one must have a very serious motive ... The simplest and most expedient method was to beat the soldier to correct them. Our Soldiers did not believe it dishonourable to receive a few blows from the flat of a sabre.'

Looking on suspiciously, an officer listens to a suspected spy beg for his life after being caught by a patrol. The use of local peasants as guides and spies was common practice – their families were often held hostage to ensure their reliability.



Closing with the enemy

Guided by an unseen hand, the various army corps began drawing near to one another, with artillery, cavalry regiments, and wagons laden with baggage and munitions all competing for space on tiny country roads while the infantry walked alongside. At night the men slept fully clothed, according to Blaze, 'with one eye open', ready to be called to arms in an instant. Experiencing his first campaign, the hardship of life in the field took Girod by surprise. Having just completed a forced march of 20 leagues, he found that:

For several days I had terribly blistered feet. The forced marches, the poor diet and the rigours of the season had also altered my health. I suffered from dysentery relentlessly, which gave me a fever. The colonel took pity of my condition and sat me next to him at dinner, taking all possible care of me. I hoped to spend at least one good night there, which I had a great need of, but my hopes were thwarted. It was only with difficulty that we were able to finish our meal, which was interrupted two or three times by alerts caused by nearby enemy outposts. Between eleven and midnight, we received the order to prepare to march out. Somebody advised me to throw an entire egg, including its shell, into each of my boots, assuring me that I would not suffer as much on the march: I followed this advice.

The calm that had existed since the last campaign was about to be shattered. 'In the middle of the night we were woken by a fusillade and two cannon-shots,' recalled Girault. 'The Division took up arms and marched on the enemy, which had resumed the offensive.'

THE DAY OF BATTLE

At first light, drums sounded the *appelle*, calling the troops to their ranks. 'From dawn we were under arms,' remembered Girod. With the troops assembled, 'a proclamation from the Emperor was read at the head of each Corps to repeated cries of "Vive L'Empereur!"' 'It was a truly wonderful spectacle that appeared before our eyes,' thought battalion commander Bial as sunrise revealed the adversaries facing each other: 'The movement of so many troops of different arms, in a rural landscape, in splendid weather, at the moment where a vivid sun projected its rays across hillsides that marked out the horizon.'

The imminence of combat caused a mixture of sensations: 'An hour before the battle,' recalled a young musician from Geneva, Jean-Louis Sabon, 'we were going at a magical pace. Every face was glowing, as if we had been drinking, but that was not the case. It was the certainty of victory that beamed from each face; as if to live fully, we needed to experience this great clash of arms. At such moments, the brain is overexcited and so is the body. An incomprehensible shiver runs right through you.'



First, the meat was boiled then left to simmer and partially boil off. After several hours, the vegetables were added and the broth left to thicken. When the meat was cooked, the broth was watered down and bread mixed in. (Beyer)

Across the field, men made final preparations to withstand the storm that was about to break around them. Caporal Nicolas Page's battalion had been designated part of the advance guard. Taking control of a farm complex, the light infantrymen fortified their position by building a defensive wall: 'Just after sunrise, our battalion was put to work. Our colonel was with us, urging us on. We still had four to five metres of wall left to finish, and our work was complete ... Suddenly, the outposts came under attack. The shout went up: "*Aux armes!*" We left the works to run to our piled arms ... A murderous fusillade began on either side ... Arriving at the wall, everyone opened fire, officers and drummers too.'

The first shots attracted everyone's attention. Girod noted: 'Our forward posts had begun firing on the enemy advance-guard, which had moved up on the other side of the ravine. One of our *voltigeur* companies held a wooden house that had been turned into a blockhouse from where they fired ... on anything that came up. Some field guns had been placed in a battery on the edge of the ravine to rain cannonballs and canister on any enemy attempting to cross it.'

Out of the initial exchange of musketry between the outposts, a storm now thundered into life. All along the line, the massed batteries of artillery were ordered to open fire. *Chef de bataillon* Bial believed that Hell had been unleashed around him: 'In an instant, clouds of dust and smoke obscured the view of the combatants. The wind soon dissipated it, making room for more clouds and plumes of smoke. Add to all that, the roar of several hundred cannon and musketry and you will have only a slight idea of what is called a battle. It is the invention of the Devil, or rather one which the human genius has invented for his own destruction.'

Posted in the first line, Adjudant Beulay's regiment took a terrible hammering from the enemy guns:

The Russians had good sport with us. They immediately moved their batteries nearer and looked to flatten us with projectiles. Cannonballs fell on us like hailstones in a storm. Truly, it was butchery! I was covered from head to foot with the blood of my neighbours ... Taken aback by the horrible din made by the shouts of the wounded, the groans of the dying, the whistling of musket balls, the humming of cannonballs and the rumblings of the cannon, I felt myself asking if I was dreaming: Was it really true that I still numbered among the living?

Sous-Lieutenant Putigny's company had also suffered terribly from the opening bombardment, which had centred on a duel between the opposing gunners:

The Division's guns came into play, but were silenced by their artillery. The battle raged. My battalion went forward to support our reserve pieces. Their discharges ripped our eardrums and their cannonballs roared over our heads. Once again our artillery was silenced, and along the top of a nearby slope the muzzles of the enemy cannon hurled terrifying, fiery explosions on us. A cannonball tore off my coattail, another rebounded against my shin. The Captain of the company was killed, the *Lieutenant* put out of action and I, the *sous-lieutenant*, took over myself.

Voltigeur, 1806



School of the soldier



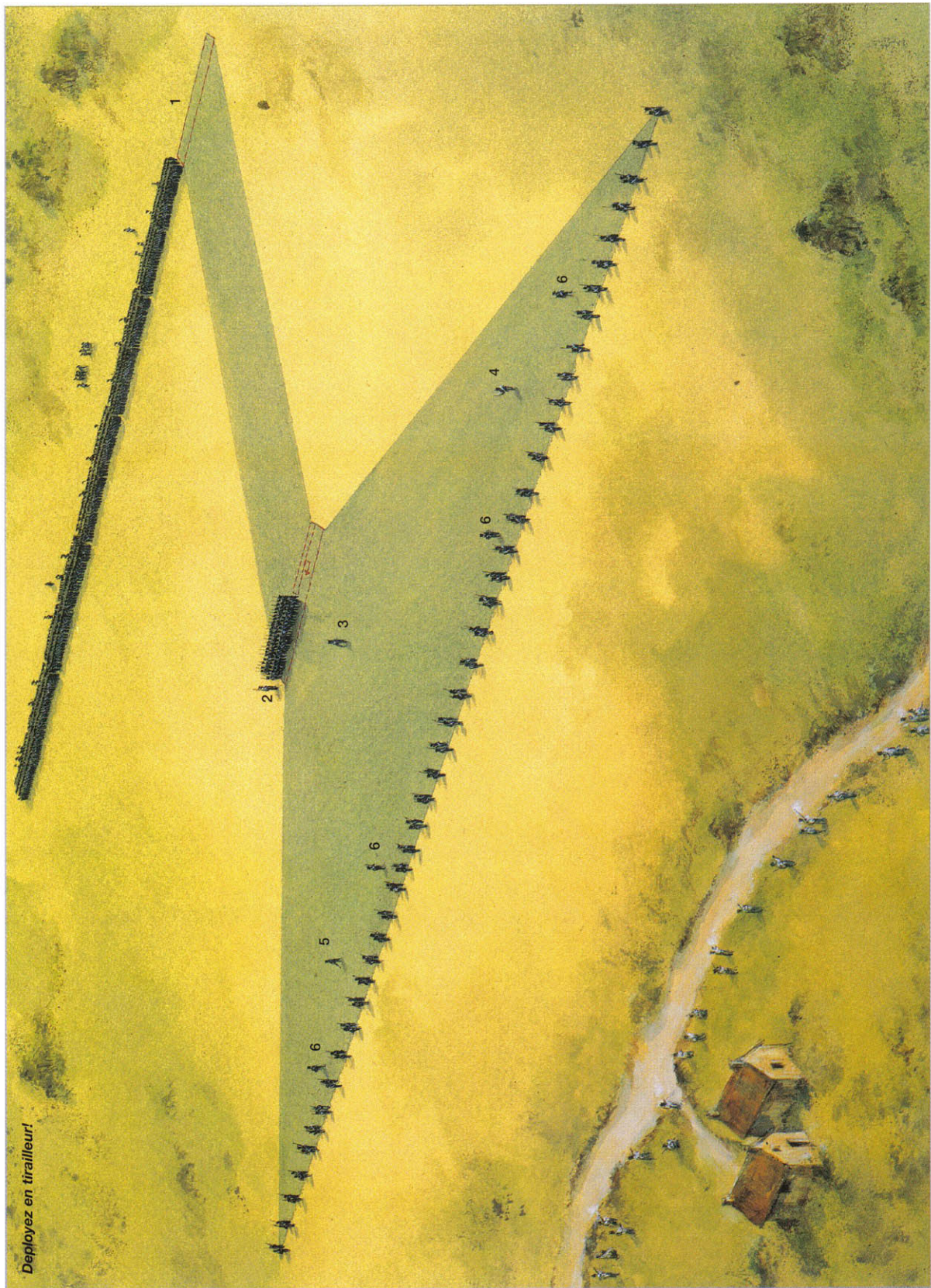
Barrackroom life





Poland, 1807

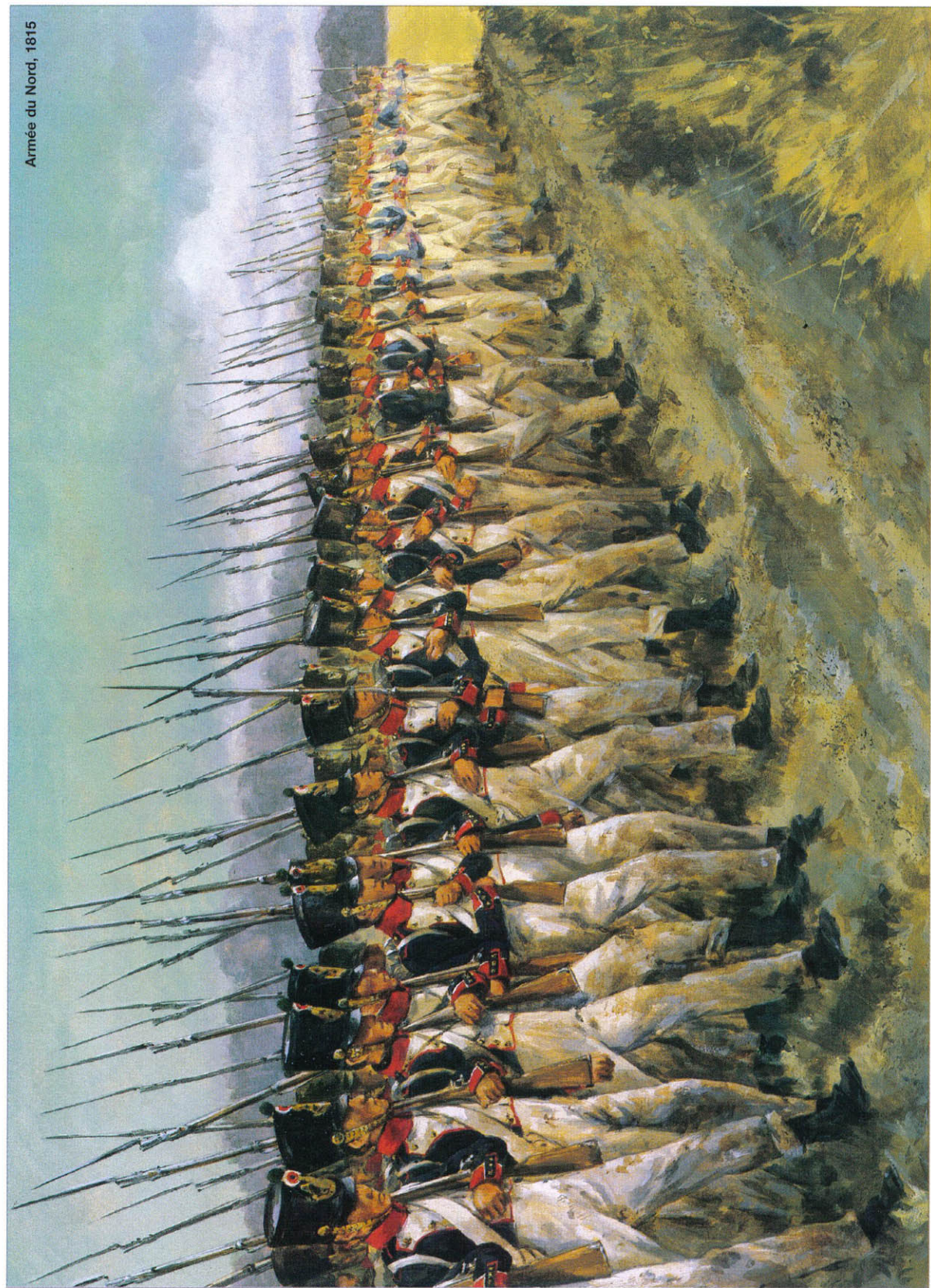
Deployez en tirailleur!





The Marie-Louises





Being under cannon fire while protecting artillery made Blaze wonder what unseen force compelled the men to remain in their ranks, rather than run in terror:

Very often the infantry plays a purely passive part in a battle; it protects the artillery and receives the balls fired against that. It is obliged to stand motionless, to receive without returning. Ah! If the point of honour, if pride were not there to prevent a break up, what droll scenes would frequently occur! But each man is watched by his neighbour, each wishes to have the esteem of all, and not a creature flinches. It behoves the officers, in particular, to set an example; they remain firm, and, with a loud voice, order the ranks to close up ... When you manoeuvre, when you fire, when you are actively engaged, these qualms go off; the smoke, the thunder of cannon, the shouts of the combatants, intoxicate everyone; you have no time to think of yourself. But, when you are forced to continue fixed in your rank, without firing and exposed, at the same time, to a shower of balls, that is by no means an agreeable situation.

Such bravery was not universal and sometimes fear gained the upper hand. Beulay describes the terror instilled by cannon fire in one of his comrades:

There was one young soldier in our battalion who was terrified by the noise of artillery. During previous engagements, his commanders had already noticed that, at the sound of the first cannon shot, he turned pale, was taken by a cold sweat and removed himself from his rank, reappearing only after the battle. On this particular day, as usual, when the artillery thundered into life, he left his company and disappeared into the woods. His *Lieutenant*, wanting to toughen him up, had him seized by four men and carried into the line of fire. Before he arrived there, a shiver took him and his head fell down on his chest: he had died with fright in their arms.'

Held in reserve, Desboeufs' regiment had a somewhat easier time: Being only in the second line, we were permitted to open up our ranks to allow cannonballs to pass, most of them only reaching us by ricochet. Nevertheless, we lost a few men to the fire of a battery that was much nearer. A soldier, placed in the third rank, had sat down and fallen asleep; I was on my way over to get him up, when a cannonball, striking against the musket which he held between his arms, laid him flat out dead, without him apparently sustaining the slightest wound.' Ironically, Desboeufs soon found himself falling prey to fatigue: 'I was so overwhelmed by lack of sleep that, despite the terrible din of the artillery, I laid on the ground and fell asleep.

The first infantry assaults

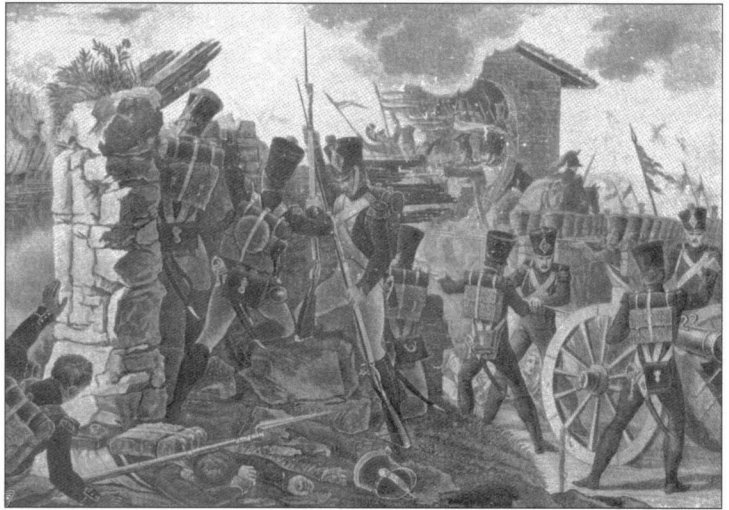
Swarms of skirmishers were ordered forward ahead of the main infantry formations to perform several vital missions. They would attempt to drive off enemy skirmishers, clear woods, occupy buildings and, perhaps

most importantly, harass the enemy artillery crews to prevent the advancing columns from suffering too much from their fire. All French infantrymen were capable of skirmishing, but usually it was a task allocated to the *voltigeur* company of each battalion. According to Girod, it was common practice to form special advance-guard battalions, by amalgamating a division's *voltigeurs* into battalions to spearhead the attack.

As the engagement began, Girod recalled:

The enemy's fire was most lively; to reduce its effects, we dispersed *en tirailleur* and at the run, amidst canister discharges, we reached a small isolated house ... Our intention was to lodge ourselves inside and from there, shoot the enemy gunners at their pieces; but this house only had a single door, situated on the side facing the [enemy] and through which we could not attempt to enter without exposing ourselves to great loss. Gathered in a large enough number behind this house, under cover from the firing ... we made a hole in the wall with our bayonets. I entered first, quickly followed by our whole advanced-guard. ... We stacked all the furniture that we found inside along the wall, which enclosed a small forecourt. From the top of this wall, as well as from the windows and skylights, we directed on the enemy battery almost opposite us, a fire which was all the more murderous as the shots we fired were steadily aimed. Annoyed by our fire, the gunners directed several discharges at our house that wreaked horrible devastation. Demolition – fragments of stone and wood, as well as cannonballs and canister: We sustained significant losses. At last, suddenly the enemy fire slowed and we saw that the gunners had begun abandoning their pieces.

While the skirmishers performed their tasks and the artillery continued to soften up the enemy ranks, the bulk of the infantry remained waiting for the order to advance. Commandant Bial waited impatiently with other senior officers for Marshal Davout to judge the right moment for the main attack: 'I found myself at this moment near to Davout, who, with his spyglass, observed the battlefield. Suddenly, he



ABOVE TOP *Tirailleurs* fire from behind a wall, while formed troops wait to deliver a volley at point-blank range. (Tharron)

ABOVE BOTTOM As the farm buildings are set ablaze, roof timbers fall on the wounded in the improvised field hospitals. In the courtyard a shell explodes as reserves rush to defend the gate. (Strasberger)

cried: "Messieurs, to your posts!" And "*en avant!*" We advanced head on, in closed columns, by regiment. This solid formation could resist all shocks, but was a prize target for cannonballs. In high spirits we advanced, through ball and canister at the *pas de charge.*' Blaze recalled: 'On the point of marching to attack the enemy, everyone, from the commander-in-chief to the corporal, uses the same form of expression: – "In the name of God, *En avant!* – *En avant,* in the name of God!" This is understood from one end of the line to the other.'

Weathering the storm of shot, Commandant Bial's battalion closed nearer to the enemy:

At that moment, my battalion was so near to the enemy that I could read [the] unfurled flag in front of me ... I resolved to seize it and I ordered a new charge. But while advancing, my horse's head was smashed by a cannonball and the two of us hit the dust. ... The enemy maintained a terrible fire. I picked myself up, stunned from my fall, when three musket balls struck me. One passed through my shako, another entered my pocket and broke my snuffbox and lastly, the potentially most fatal passed through my clothes and penetrated my chest. I could no longer breathe and I truly believed that the projectile had passed right through me. I was as upset by and as mournful for the loss of my beautiful, fine horse as for my own wound.

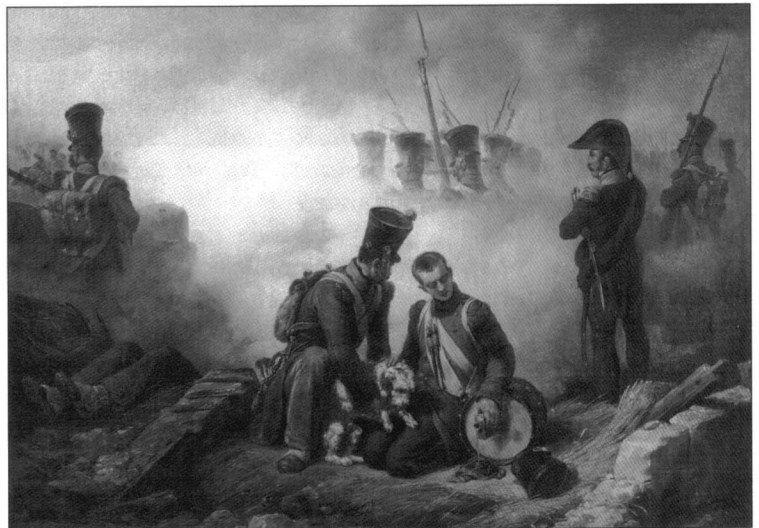
Meanwhile, Adjutant Beulay's regiment moved up close enough to engage the enemy:

Our regiments formed in closed columns, then deployed themselves in line: The fusillade soon crackled along the front. A double line of corpses marked the site of this first engagement ... Believing the enemy to have been sufficiently shaken, our commanders drove us to make a bayonet charge and the first ranks of Russians were pushed back. But reinforcements arrived at that point and frightful hand-to-hand fighting followed. Ah! We cut into them with sabres and bayonets ... The Russians finally yielded. Not without difficulty, we reformed and several lines were established.

Honoré Beulay now found himself in pursuit of the Russians:

They halted beyond a wood, where they had initially rested and then re-formed on the other side. Our Brigade traversed the woods, right on their heels, at the *pas de course.* As we were about to exit the trees, an aide de camp, moving like the wind, ran up to warn

A drummer and cornet tend a wounded dog, while fire is turned on enemy cavalry. The dense gunpowder smoke has reduced visibility placing the officers and sergent in the serrez-file in the role of spectators. (Vernet)



our colonel ... that a regiment of cavalry was waiting for us to debouch and was going to fall on us. There was no time to lose. The squares formed themselves with such coolness and speed that we resisted the tremendous shock of heavy cavalry without flinching. An almost point-blank discharge littered the ground with men and horses and threw disorder into the ranks of the assailants as they rode at an oblique angle to us across the plain, under our murderous fire ... One of the Russian cavalymen, carried on by the vigour of his mortally wounded horse, rolled with it into the interior of our square. As he could not release his leg from under the beast, one of us went to his aid and helped him get up. Profiting then from the fact that we were very busy repelling the charge of his regiment's other squadrons, he exited the square without any opposition, and he ran like lightning after his own. We could not stop ourselves laughing and nobody dreamt of firing on him.'



Although the square gave protection against the cavalry, this formation offered an irresistible target to enemy gunners:

Soldiers evacuating a wounded comrade, using a musket as an improvised stretcher. This practice was frowned upon in combat as it removed fit men from the firing line.

Finding itself in range, the Russian artillery riddled us with projectiles. It had already greeted our exit from the woods, even before the cavalry charge ... As we were forming the squares and as I urged my grenadiers to hasten their movements, the man to my right was hit square in the chest by a cannonball. I was covered in his blood: I thought I had been hit too, but fortunately that was not so ... A terrible fusillade was soon added to the artillery fire. The Russians, having had the opportunity to study the terrain, had massed their infantry at a point where their fire was most effective. We could not remain in such a critical situation. To silence the artillery fire, our regiment and the 44e de Ligne, the other part of our brigade, received the order to form attack columns. The 44e set off first at the *pas de course*, hurling itself at the cause of the destruction in its ranks.

The intensity of the fighting proved too much for one man. As Beulay and his comrades prepared to follow the 44e, he noticed something that deeply disturbed him:

At the moment when the plain resembled a flaming crater, with the drummers furiously beating the charge, in the middle of a hail of musket and cannon balls, [the colonel was seen] to break down under a tree, sad and solitary, after having thrown the bridle of his horse to the soldier, who followed him like a shadow. He was as pale as death and stared at the earth. Squatting at the foot of a large birch tree, struck by an inopportune colic and thrown into deep contemplation on the perils of war, he did not appear in any way to think it urgent that he resume his place to

the head of 36e and it was in vain that his orderly pointed out to him that the General had given the order to charge.

Nevertheless, the charge was made and Beulay later noted that neither the colonel or the orderly were ever seen again. As the advance continued, 'it was very hard for us to hold ourselves upright advancing over terrain full of small undulations ... Alas, many fell, never to get up. I saw Lieutenant Corrigeux drop ahead of me ... his chest smashed by a shell.' Meanwhile Commandant Bial had been evacuated from the front line and found himself treated by one of the foremost military surgeons of the age: 'Relieved and transported to the dressing station, surgeon Larrey told me, after having examined and probed the wound, "Another fraction of an inch, commander, and you would have departed on that final journey." Then he took a lancet to widen the opening and retrieved the murderous ball with pliers.'

Not everyone was lucky enough to be treated so quickly or so expertly. Musician Girault was distinctly unhappy with the state of medical provision for the battle casualties: 'No one at all had organised an ambulance service and everywhere one heard only the shouts of the wounded calling for help. My comrades and myself went to relieve the poor mortally wounded as much as we could. I stripped shirts from several of the dead among them and I cut them into bandages with my knife. We had a tin pan with which we went to seek water.'

The army's musicians had a poor reputation among the combat troops, but there were exceptions: The plucky Genevan, Jean-Louis Sabon, went up as far as the skirmish line, much to the surprise of the *voltigeur* officer he found in command there. Taking umbrage at the officer's jokes about the bravery of musicians, Sabon decided to prove his worth:

Give me a musket and you will see that this little Genevan will fight well enough; "Myself," I said, "I fear nothing." – "Ah! You want a musket?" – "Yes." – "Oh! Well you are going to have one, but it is necessary first to earn it. Hold on, do you see that Russian lying down, thirty paces from here to the side of the enemy? I believe that he is dead. I am going to give you Sergent Robert, a *légionnaire* who will give you covering fire while you are taking the Russian's musket and cartridges." The Russian had been felled by a ball, which passed through his forehead. He was dead, although still warm. Sergeant Robert did not cease in firing all the time that I took out the fifty cartridges that were in his cartridge box: He kept shouting at me: "Hurry up," but that made me laugh. I made it back to the company, earning the admiration of all the *voltigeurs*.

The arrival of reserves

As the battle heated up, messages despatched to the rest of the army ordered a concentration on the point of attack with all speed. Approaching the field of battle, the reserve forces began to come into contact with the first sights and sounds of the battle raging ahead of them. Girod watched as:

the Emperor passed through the middle of our ranks; he had on his grey overcoat, which was so well known to soldiers. We marched, for most of the day, with the Imperial Guard. At two o'clock we passed through [a village] where a large number of wounded had already arrived; they told us that there had been fighting since the morning. They made us double the pace and as we marched with the wind behind us, we were less than a league

from the battlefield before we could hear the cannon. The ever growing number of wounded we encountered showed us that this was certainly a fierce action. I noticed among some of them, several who were entirely naked and blackened head to foot. They were blind and walked with their arms held out, uttering pitiful cries. I did not know to what to attribute the sad state in which I saw them: it was explained to me that they were gunners or soldiers of the artillery train, whose ammunition wagons had blown up.

Blaze concurred with Girod's unhappy impressions: 'On approaching a field of battle where the combat has begun, there is nothing so disheartening to young soldiers as the language held by the wounded who are coming back from it. "Take your time," says one; "don't be in such a hurry; 'tis not worthwhile to run so fast to get killed." You should see the faces of the conscripts on hearing such language, and especially on perceiving the first dead bodies they come to. They make a circuit of twenty paces round them for fear of touching them; presently they approach nearer; and at last they march over them without scruple.'

Girod explains his regiment's last-minute preparations:

Finally they stopped us, to prepare us for action and to leave a little time for stragglers to catch up ... My Captain pulled a bottle of brandy from his saddle, which for several days he had preciousy preserved for a suitable occasion: this could not be a better one. We each drank a good mouthful, and although there were four of us taking a share of this distribution, there still remained enough for a second, and even more to come to the aid of those among us who might be wounded ... We debouched from the woods around four o'clock. A very extensive plain, covered with innumerable masses presented itself to me; I had never seen so many troops together. The cannonade was most lively and the smoke, which we saw extending into the distance ... allowed us to judge the extent of the terrain that was disputed. After having moved several hundred paces in line, we entered, if I can express it thus, the zone of bullets,



ABOVE Reserve troops on the march. The trouser stripe was a distinguishing feature of elite troops during later years.



from which we would not leave until the end of the day. We manoeuvred for a little while in the second line; then they made us form square and my battalion was placed near to a large battery, to protect it ... The gunners were filled with enthusiasm: they had taken off their coats and rolled back their shirtsleeves above the elbow, to better serve their guns. The enemy, disturbed by their fire, directed a part of his on this battery and being nearby, we suffered dearly ... We suffered very little from musketry but sometimes the cannonballs removed whole files from us. There were a good number of conscripts in our ranks, who seeing fire for the first time, stood admirably. I saw one, among others, who sat on the ground in the middle of our square, calmly eating a piece of bread. I went over to him to order him to get up and rejoin his rank; in response, he raised the corner of his overcoat and showed me that one of his legs had been half taken away by a cannonball; then, without uttering a word and without, not that I noticed, making the least change of his facial expression, he continued to eat his bread.

On another part of the front line the fighting became confused. Skirmishes broke out as both sides tried to seize control of a wood. With visibility limited by the dense foliage and gunpowder smoke, Desboeufs was sent forward to drive an enemy platoon away. Blundering forwards through the haze he did not realise how close to his adversaries he had come:

BELOW While the emperor watches the battle from a hilltop, the reserves are thrown into battle.



I was only five or six paces from that platoon, when seven or eight soldiers opened fire on me, I automatically dropped and fell back rather rapidly, bent down towards the ground. A second discharge whistled past my ears. At that same instant, those of my soldiers that had followed nearest to me, having been joined by some others, attacked the enemy platoon, which scattered before the approaching bayonets and fled. This success was short-lived: A half-battalion advanced, its fire silencing ours, and all my soldiers were killed or wounded. Balls rained in such a way that they appeared to avoid only the place which I occupied. It seemed to me that I was in a narrow circle from which I could not exit without being killed, but in which I could not remain. I inclined a little to the right therefore, to bring myself closer to some *tirailleurs* and I took cover behind a corpse. From there, on one knee, I fired at the enemy until my musket, which burnt my hands, became too clogged up. I picked up another. The man to whom it had belonged was stretched alongside his weapon; I dragged his corpse by the foot and I placed it on top of the first. From behind this human rampart, I continued to fire. When I had exhausted my cartridges, I used those of the two corpses' and several packets that I picked up from the ground. As those balls that did not hit the [enemy] skirmishers carried on into the columns behind, I put a good number of men out of action. Suddenly, I perceived ahead of me a line of twelve to fifteen hundred [enemy troops] advancing in line. I promptly stood up. The few *tirailleurs* that had remained, beat a retreat; I discharged my musket on the enemy and imitated their example.

The enemy's advance made itself felt in other places too. Jean-Louis Sabon, the musician from Geneva, was still out with the *voltigeurs* in the skirmish line and was coming under severe pressure. The enemy:

had received the order to advance and our company was obliged to beat a retreat. I had no more cartridges to load my musket ... I then asked a *voltigeur* to lend me some; he was taking aim: 'Look in my cartridge box,' he replied. There remained a single cartridge between the leather and the wooden box. I took it, I loaded, aimed and at that same instant, I received two balls in my left arm. The barrel of my musket was so hot that I could no longer hold it except by the strap. I threw it away therefore and fled like everyone else, without being bandaged other than by a soldier who tied my arm tightly with my cravat, to prevent me from losing too much blood.

The enemy attack and the hasty withdrawal of the French *tirailleurs* threatened to spread panic through the rest of the army. Decisive action was required, before the situation got out of hand: 'All at once, we perceived disorder in the first line,' recalled Girod:

It was Marshal Ney's Corps that, after having suffered heavy losses, began giving ground to the enemy ... Desperate to stop the retrograde movement of his troops, Marshal Ney galloped to the



front of our second battalion that had come up to take up position on our left, and shouted '*Vive l'Empereur!*' and spurred it on against the enemy. Having thrown back the heads of the first columns that it met, it crossed a deep ravine that cut through this part of the battlefield and was met on the other side by musketry and canister fire, which in a few moments took out nearly 300 men and fifteen officers. Seeing itself unsupported, the battalion was obliged to fall back across the ravine; but its fine conduct had given Marshal Ney the time to rally his Corps and re-establish the line at that point.

A detachment of soldiers under Cossack attack. Irregular Russian cavalry were a constant irritation to the French, attacking detachments and disrupting supplies.

Elsewhere, an amalgamated battalion of voltigeurs found itself heavily outnumbered. Standing in the ranks, Gille recalled the effect of the commander's fiery speech: '(He) turned to us and said, "the enemy forces are double ours; well, redouble your courage and the odds will still be equal. *Voltigeurs, en avant!*" We responded spontaneously: "*En avant! En avant!*" ... We advanced in good order, at the *pas de charge* and at *l'arme au bras* ... Arriving within close range, [the enemy] formed in a line, fired a terrible discharge at us. We did not leave them time to reload their weapons; we advanced on them rapidly, lowering our bayonets. They did not wait for us and took flight in great disorder.'

Final assaults

With the enemy attacks held and the initiative firmly back in French hands, it was now the turn of the reinforcement infantry to move forward and make a final attempt to break the enemy line. Adjutant major Coudreux remembered the final advance:

At eight o'clock, we received the order to cease fire and to close on the enemy with the bayonet. In charging at the head of his

brigade, my General was hit by a cannon shot. The cannonball removed his epaulette and badly damaged the right shoulder; his horse was wounded by two gunshots at the same instant. A shell fragment glanced my leg above the ankle and I had a large bruise; a second hit broke the sabre I held in my hand and hurt my horse's eye. A moment previously, a cannonball removed the head of a battalion commander, to whom I was bringing an order, covering me with his blood and a part of his brain.

Enemy troops would continue to resist the French advance. Girod found that:

we had advanced a certain distance and we found ourselves formed in columns on the edge of a woods that extended to our right. Suddenly we saw arriving like a storm, a charge of Russian cuirassiers, who directed themselves, not precisely at us, but on a battery of thirty guns that, under the cover of our advance, had come to take position a little to the rear and left of us. Sweeping past us, this charge took casualties from our fire; but they were not slowed by it nor, by the discharges of canister from our battery, which they crashed into, sabering at their guns those gunners that could not, by throwing themselves between the wheels of the cannon and caissons, take shelter from the enemy cuirassiers' blows. However, soon the enemy were in turn thrown into disorder by some French squadrons and they again passed by the right flank of our column, suffering once again from our fire and the bayonets of our soldiers who, leaving the ranks in mobs, ran ahead of them to cut off their retreat ... A little in the distance, a mass of infantry, which had advanced under the cover of their charge ... had advanced too far and become isolated. After they had retreated, [the infantry] stopped and just for a moment we watched as they appeared to collapse in on themselves and then fell back in some disorder; but in retreating, they in turn unmasked a battery, which sent several volleys of canister into us from which we suffered severely.

Elsewhere though, enemy resistance was broken. Beulay describes the closing drama of the battle: 'Suddenly, on the Marshals' order, all our regiments moved off at the same time and fell impetuously on the enemy masses which wavered and finally began to give way. We pursued them relentlessly, our bayonets in their backs, to the pounding rhythm of the drums beating the charge. There was an awful slaughter; the ground was littered with their soldiers. Carried away by a warlike fury, we did not run, we flew after them, intoxicated by blood.'

AFTERMATH

'What could be sadder than passing through a battlefield in the evening, when the battle fever has past, and one is obliged to step over the dead and all the unfortunate wounded?' asked Beulay. 'On the battlefield, which extended for approximately a square league,' Jean-Baptiste

Ricome could not see 'a single place where there were not piles of soldiers, some breathing their last, others pleading for our help. Our sterile pity confined itself to sympathising with their pain.'

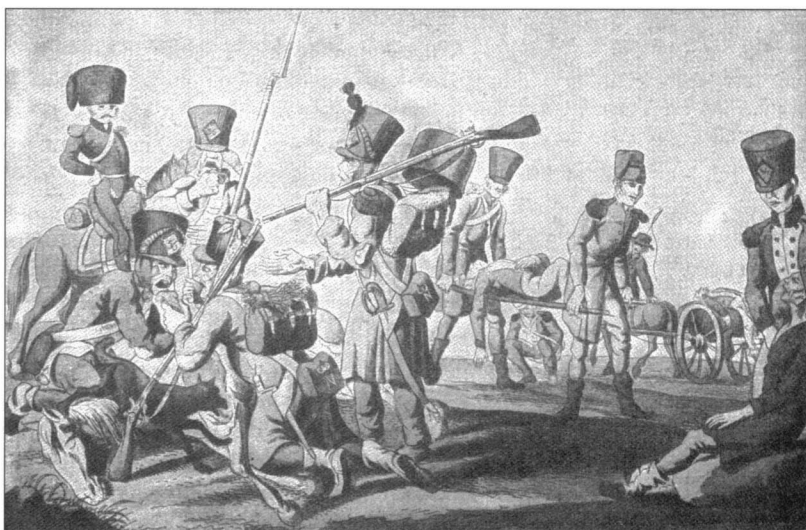
As battle fever subsided and some semblance of humanity returned to the combatants, the full horror of what had taken place began to sink in. 'As we passed through the woods where we had pursued the Russians that morning,' recalled Beulay, 'an officer of the artillery train, who had received a sabre cut across the stomach and whose intestines dragged along the [ground], called me and implored me to finish him and put an end to his indescribable sufferings. I recoiled in horror at this thought and while pitying this unfortunate fellow with all my heart, I walked away, abandoning him to his unhappy fate.'

Burned-out buildings from which the wounded had been unable to escape often presented the worst scenes of carnage. During the 1809 campaign in Austria, a village was set ablaze by shells while soldiers from both sides still contested it. Girault was sickened by what he saw:

The houses, the streets and the banks of the river were covered with the dead and wounded who had been caught in the fire, and when one could penetrate into the village, it was impossible to find anything more than pieces of half burned corpses. The spectacle was so horrible that they wanted to save it from the view of the army; they made it march to the right of the village ... Curiosity caused me to go and visit this scene of slaughter. Never have I seen anything more frightful than these burned corpses, no longer having any resemblance of humanity ... There was a heap that clogged the entry to a street: it was a pile of arms, legs and shapeless, half-carbonised bodies ... There were several officers and Generals, whom curiosity had also brought there ... Tears flowed from every eye and nobody dared utter a word.

BELOW TOP Aftermath of Leipzig, 1813. The dead were treated impersonally; at best they were stripped of their equipment and clothing and interned anonymously in mass graves.

BELOW BOTTOM Ravenous soldiers share a meal of raw horsemeat with a dog. Meanwhile, wounded soldiers are evacuated on stretchers and carts.





Civilians help evacuate young wounded soldiers on barrows. (Beyer)

Quite often, the battle would continue until nightfall, and exhaustion overcame the combatants. The victors would finish the day exhausted, those alive resting among piles of the dead and dying. Looting began at once, with few qualms about robbing the dead. As Girault noted, the view of many was simply that, 'If I myself do not do it, another will: better that I profit from it.' Others were sent in search of food. 'At the end of the battle, several of my company's marauders were sent out into the town,' remembered Girod. 'They took part in the pillage of a provision store and brought us back some sugar and dried raisins; the provision of bread would have made our condition much better.' After the battle, Desboeufs 'found the soldiers busy grilling large slices of horsemeat.' Unable to find any trees, the soldiers 'had made fires from the debris of ammunition wagons and the wood from broken muskets.'

Wherever possible, the pursuit of the retreating enemy was left to those divisions least engaged. Those that had taken the brunt of the fighting were often rested and left to help with the clean-up operation while they reorganised. For the wounded, however, the misery had only just begun. Crowded into whatever shelter was available, they waited to be examined by overworked surgeons, who amputated without anaesthetic or ignored those they knew were beyond help. A full-scale battle was a catastrophe on a scale surgeons of the age were simply not equipped to deal with. Those that were strong enough to survive the wound, the subsequent loss of blood and the trauma of primitive surgery were stalked by the fear of infection. Those evacuated to hospitals often found them overcrowded and disease ridden. Depression set in, at the loss of a limb, fever, and the separation from their comrades and their families back home – only the very fittest could hope to survive.



In defeat, it was often a case of everyone for themselves. The wounded were left on the field at the mercy of the foe. Often they were treated no worse, but in the hands of Spanish guerrillas mercy usually came in the guise of execution, often after prolonged humiliation and torture. Nevertheless, many would be patched up and held as prisoners of war until they could be exchanged at the termination of hostilities. Some veterans of the Army of England even made that voyage across the Channel, not as conquerors, but as prisoners. Many were left to rot on overcrowded prison hulks, while others were detained in prisons, counting away the days as they awaited repatriation.

French prisoners guarded by an Austrian soldier. The men have been stripped of their side-arms and cartridge boxes, and have replaced their muskets with walking sticks.

GOING HOME

At the end of the campaign, returning to the family home, whether on a few days leave or permanently, was very emotional experience for the survivors. Having been away for over two years, Girod and a fellow officer were granted a period of *cong * (leave). 'After sixty hours on the road, we reached Paris: It was midnight. Neither of us dared to present ourselves at our parent's home at this hour, so we lodged in an inn off the rue Saint-Denis. The following day, a little rested and refreshed, we headed for our respective homes, in full uniform with plume on the shako. I hardly need to tell with what joy I embraced my father.'

Todtenschein.

Über nachbenannten, in obgedachten Armee Feldspitale verstorbenen Mann:

Regiment Bataillon oder Corps	Compagnie oder Escadron	Charge	Lauf und Zunahme	Gebürtig		Zahr alt	Religion	Stand	An welchen Tage, Monat und Jahr, dann an welcher Krankheit gestorben.
				von	aus				
<i>35. Regt.</i>	<i>1 Grenadier Bataillon</i>	<i>Porpo</i>	<i>Nicolaus Jungschläger</i>	<i>Prural</i>	<i>Pruland</i>				den 1 ten <i>August</i> 1809 an <i>Starkem Fieber</i>

Urkund dessen bezeuget dieses unsere eigene Handschrift, und Siegelbedrückung,

Sig. *Süßhimmeln* am 2 ten *August* 1809

W. K. m. m.
Jungschläger
Major

Augustine
Süßhimmeln

Death certificate issued by a hospital in Germany for a 23-year-old grenadier from Brussels, serving in the 35e de Ligne who had died on 1 August 1809.

Absent from home for 11 years, Jacquin found himself passing near to his family home and asked permission to quit the ranks for a few days. On arriving home:

I went into the kitchen, where I found my mother and I asked her if she did not recognise me? After having stared at me she let out a huge shout and flew into my arms, which raised the whole house: In an instant everyone rushed in and they hurried to separate my mother from me, saying 'let go, soldier, what are you doing?' My mother could not speak! My father said that I could not be his son; my brothers said the same, that I was not their brother, that I didn't look like him, that if they saw him again they would easily recognise him and that besides he was much younger and taller. They had received a letter from him – he was 400 leagues from home and they did not believe that they would ever have the happiness of seeing him return home again. I told them: Do not believe that I deceive you, to prove the truth to you, here is the last letter that you have written to me, I received it at Mainz ... On seeing it, they all recognised the handwriting and they began crying.

Almost six years in the army had changed Nicholas Page too, as his parents discovered on his return in 1815. 'I arrived unexpected ... as

they had not received news from me for two years. I arrived at the home that I had thought I would never see again ... My poor father told me: "I would have passed you ten times without recognising you," so much had I wasted away. They clothed me and I remained at home.'

Page did not settle easily back into civilian life. Like so many other young men, the war had robbed him of the opportunity to complete an apprenticeship and left him with a somewhat bitter view of the world. He wrote his memoirs while living in a workhouse, still hoping for better days to come. Many continued their military careers, serving France as faithfully under a king as they had under an emperor. 'I don't know the Bourbons,' wrote Faré in 1815, 'and in a way I have fought against them.' However, he accepted them because 'they are French.' Some, like the former officer cadet Girod, gained high rank under the new regime before entering the world of politics. Many would marry and have children, for whose benefit some wrote their memoirs.

The cost of the war was summed up by one of the countless, but often forgotten cantinières who followed the men, supplying them with drinks, tobacco and the occasional smile. In January 1815, writing as eloquently and formally as possible, she begged: 'His Excellency the Minister of War' to be granted her late husband's pension:

'Monseigneur, I have the honour to make known to you Catherine Campagne, wife of Joseph Sabatier of the 9e Léger, her second husband, who was killed with the Army of Spain near Sarragossa. Her first husband had also been killed in the defence of the country and she has lost all those objects she possessed when a *cantinière*. Taken prisoner, she ... asks His Excellency, as the mother of a family that includes two children in the service of His Majesty, to obtain a pension as granted by law, and also because the petitioner was imprisoned on a barge at Cadiz, where she remained for two years. Her father was also killed at sea, on board the squadron commanded by Monseigneur le Comte d'Estaing, and her two husbands were killed, as she has said above. Hoping, that as a woman without resource, His Excellency will allow her a pension of a wife, who for almost thirty years has followed the troop as a legally authorised *cantinière* and who has two small infants in her arms. Now Monseigneur, the petitioner, finding herself lacking of everything, having lost her possessions with the Army of Spain, implores and hopes that, having pity of her sad position, she will be granted her request. It is with this hope that she is with profound respects, (signed) Catherine Sabatier, née Campagne.'

A veteran (signified by his long-service stripes) helps a cantinière and children across a river in 1812. She carries a brandy barrel across her shoulder and cooking pans tied to her saddle. Cantinières' wagons were commonly issued with a registration number painted on the side to show that the divisional chief of staff had officially sanctioned them. (Bellangé)



GLOSSARY

Abatis	Defensive feature made from logs and branches.
Appelle	Roll call.
Aux armes!	Lit. 'To arms!'
Bataillons de guerre	Field battalions.
Carabinier	Light infantry equivalent of a grenadier.
Chasseur	Member of centre companies in light infantry regiments.
De Ligne	Of the line.
Département	Following the Revolution, France's regions were reorganised into Départements.
Eclaireur	Scout.
En avant!	Lit. 'Forwards!'
En bataille	In line formation.
En colonne	In column formation.
En tirailleur	Deployed in skirmish formation.
Escouade	Squad of men under caporal.
Fusil	Musket.
Gamelle	Mess tin shared by up to seven men.
Giberne	Cartridge box.
Habit	Soldier's coat.
Hôtel de Ville	Town Hall.
Léger	Light, as in <i>light infantry</i> (properly <i>Légère</i>)
Légion	Usually a body of troops comprising infantry and cavalry.
Légionnaire	Holder of the <i>Légion d'Honneur</i> award.
Pas accéléré	Pace regulated at 100 steps per minute.
Pas de charge	Attack pace, commonly calculated as being 120 steps per minute.
Pas de course	At the run.
Pas de route	Route march pace, most commonly 85–90 paces per minute.
Pas ordinaire	Pace regulated at 76 steps per minute.
Petit bidon	Water canteen – these were non-regulation items.
Sous-officier	Non-commissioned officer, (not including caporal).
Serrez-file	The fourth rank where the officers and NCOs are located.
Veste	Fatigue jacket.
Voltigeur	Member of light infantry company attached to each battalion.

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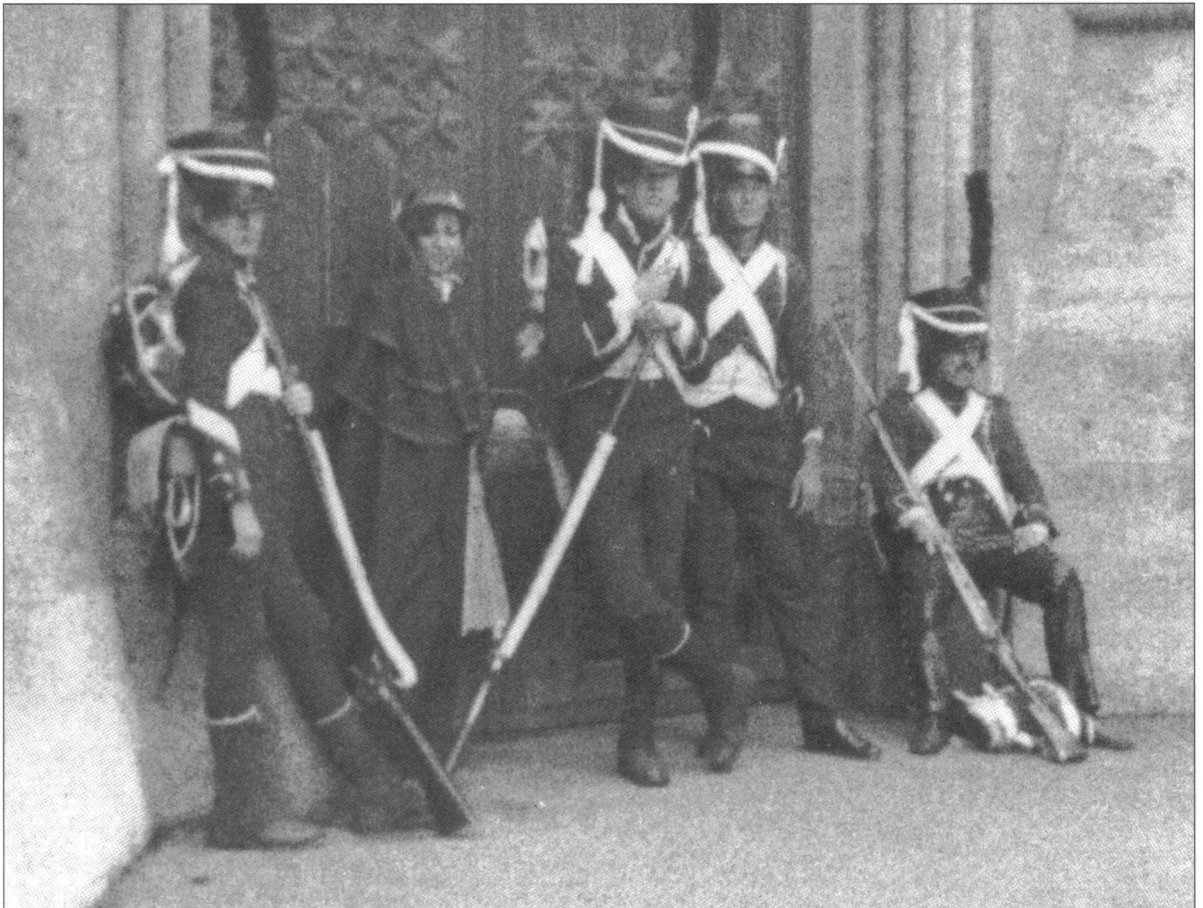
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Two books in particular provide a good foundation for further study on Napoleonic infantry and their campaigns: J. R. Elting's *Swords around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armée* (1989) and David Chandler's *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (1966). The Internet gives readers the opportunity to learn about and debate this subject, with dedicated forums as well as links to associations, re-enactment groups and museums worldwide. A visit to the Napoleonic collections in Paris, at Musée de l'Armée and the Musée de Carnavalet are highly recommended, while the palace of Versailles contains many famous paintings. For research, the Military Archives at Vincennes hold surviving regimental inspections, organisational changes, service records, registers, and a library holding many regimental histories. Outside Paris, the Musée de l'Empéri in Salon de Provence and the Musée de l'Armée in Brussels are both of interest. Most major European military collections hold artefacts relating to the period. Many battlefields have interesting museums, particularly at Austerlitz (Czech Republic), Borodino (Russia) and Waterloo (Belgium).

Re-enactors from the 9e Léger, one the largest international groups. Many recreated units exist across the world and can be contacted at events and fairs or through magazines and the Internet.



COLOUR PLATE COMMENTARY

A: VOLTIGEUR, 1806

In order to regularise the traditional practice of forming special companies to act as scouts and sharpshooters, voltigeurs were introduced into light infantry regiments in March 1804 and into the line in September 1805. Although all infantry could fight dispersed *en tirailleur*, skirmishing was increasingly left to the voltigeurs. The maximum height for voltigeurs was 1.597m (1.624m for officers), allowing men who fell below the grenadier height requirement (1.759m) to attain élite status.

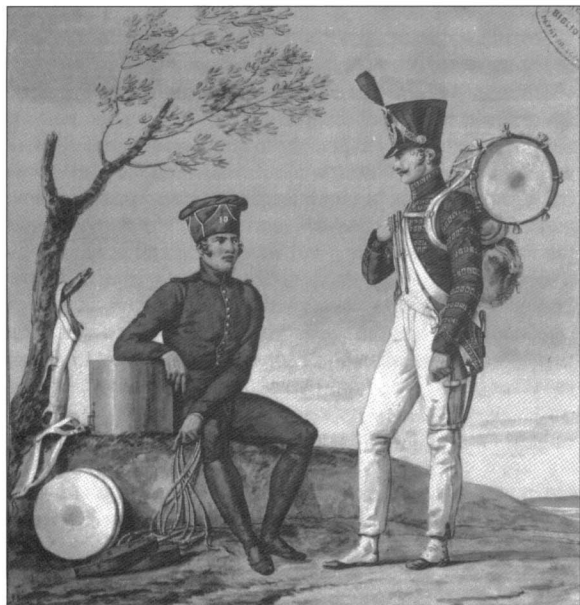
In 1806 Napoleon experimented with replacing the blue coat (introduced in 1793) with the traditional white of pre-revolutionary times. Its introduction was short-lived and unpopular: 'It was a preposterous idea to give a white dress to troops destined to spend their lives in the bivouac,' complained Blaze. 'You should have seen how dirty all these young men were: in consequence, the moment the Emperor set eyes on them, a counter order was issued, and the white uniform was abolished.'

This voltigeur is holding a 17.5mm calibre, year IX pattern dragoon musket (1), which was 141.7cm long and weighed

4.275kg. Almost 10cm shorter than an infantry musket, this weapon was more suitable for men of shorter stature. The 46.5cm steel bayonet (2) has a 38cm triangular blade. A modified version of the 1777 *Charleville* musket, the year IX pattern *fusil d'infanterie* (3) was 151.5cm long and weighed 4.375kg. The leather *giberne* (cartridge box) (4) contains a wooden block with two compartments. Each held a pack of 15 paper cartridges, which contained a lead ball approximately 27 grams in weight and a 12.5 gram charge of black powder. A 50mm x 17mm oil flask (5) was kept in one of the six central slots. The external pouch held rags for cleaning the musket and gun tools, including a turnscrew (6), a ball extractor (7), which screwed on to the end of the ramrod to remove fouled cartridges, spare flints (8) and lead envelopes (9) and a wooden practice 'flint' (10). Suspended from a brass chain, hooked over a lapel button, was a pick (11) for unblocking the musket's touchhole. The brass *cors de chasse* badge (12) symbolised the voltigeur's special status and was worn on the *giberne's* outer flap. The *sabre-briquet* side-arm (13) was traditionally worn by élite company troops and sous-officers.

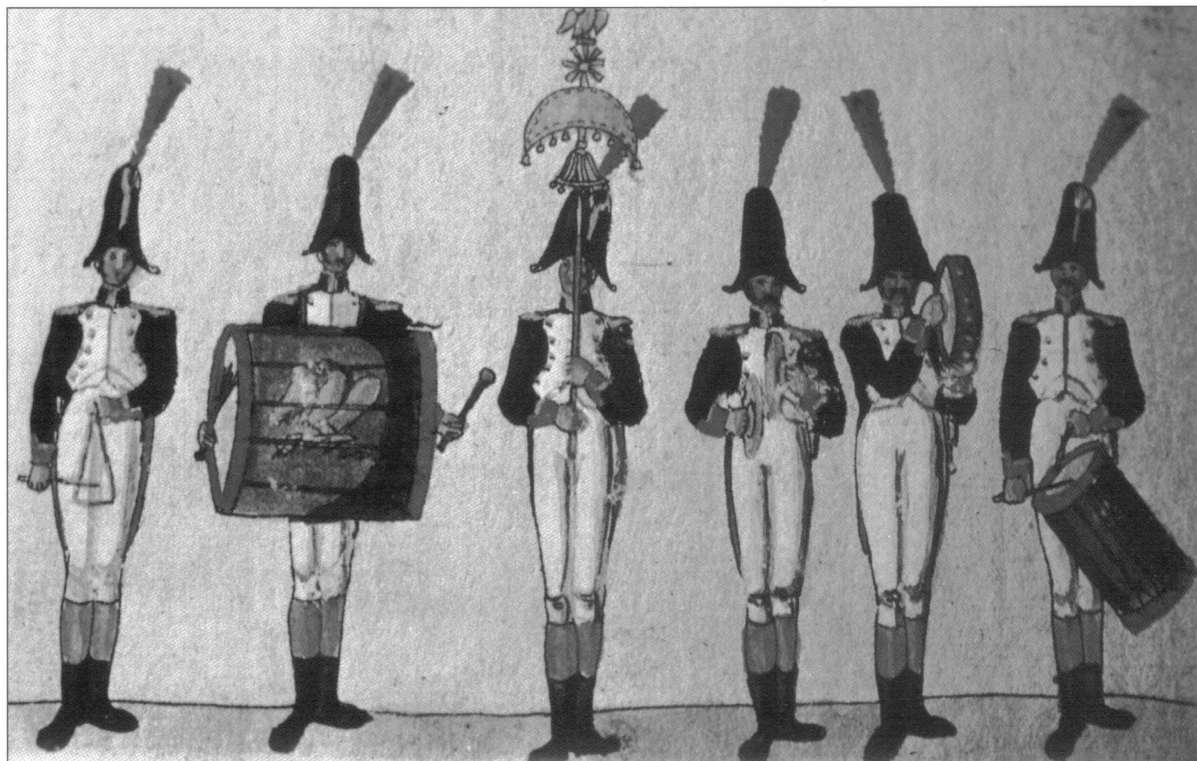


Study of soldiers in Germany. The four figures on the left are conferring on an order they have received. The sergeant (second from left) holds a notebook. Note the high cut of the waistcoats.



ABOVE **Drummers from 10e Léger in the Bardin uniform.** The standing figure has his drum slung in marching order over his back. The seated man is wearing the undress/fatigue uniform. Note the disassembled drum pieces.

BELOW **The percussion section of a regimental band wearing the simpler uniforms of the later wars.**



B: SCHOOL OF THE SOLDIER

A caporal and three chasseur recruits in fatigue dress demonstrate various ways of carrying the musket, taught under the *école de soldat* part of the 1791 regulations.

1. *L'arme comme sergent*: When the men were at *portez vos arms* (shoulder arms) the NCOs would maintain this position.

2. *Portez vos armes*: When standing to attention, the musket was held in the left hand, with the arm slightly bent and the elbow lightly resting against the body. The exterior edge of the butt rested 'on the first articulation joining the fingers to the palm'. The heel of the butt rested between the first and second fingers, with the thumb above, and the third and little fingers curled under the butt.

3. *L'arme au bras*: This was the usual way of carrying a musket while under arms and marching. The left arm extended across the chest, with the palm of the hand covering the right breast. The musket lock was supported in the crook of the elbow.

4. *L'arme a volonté*: When marching in column at *pas de route*, the command '*l'arme à volonté*' opened up the ranks by four paces. The soldiers were 'no longer required to march with a cadenced step, nor to keep silence'. Although at ease, they were required to maintain their place and not allow the ranks to become intermixed. The musket was carried in the most comfortable manner, the only requirement being that it was held 'indifferently, on either shoulder, with one or both hands, the barrel in the air'.

C: BARRACKROOM LIFE

Casernes (barracks) housing the regimental depots were located all over France, but especially on the eastern

frontier in the chain of Vauban fortresses stretching from Calais to Switzerland. Some were former church buildings or convents, which had been converted to military use after the Revolution. The soldier's rooms were spartan: two men shared each bed, sleeping on a straw palliasse and covered by blankets. The recruits would keep their uniforms neatly stacked on shelves, and their equipment hung on pegs. Soldiers kept their personal effects in linen sacks, which were left in the depot while on campaign. In the event of a soldier's death or desertion, these possessions would be auctioned off by the regiment's quartermaster-treasurer and the proceeds transferred to the regimental coffers. Although against regulations, some long-serving soldiers had wooden trunks.

Here recruits enjoy a brief rest after a long morning's training, playing a popular period card game called *drogue*. This game was played for forfeit, with the loser having to wear a wooden peg on the end of his nose. Another feature of the game was the use of a word or phrase for a card's number, for example: 1, 'the beginning of the world'; 7, 'the gallows'; 33, 'the two hunchbacks'; 57, 'the terrible'. Other popular games included *vingt-et-un*, dice and dominoes. Games of chance were technically illegal in the French Army, but a blind eye was often turned, as officers often enjoyed playing cards or billiards themselves in local coffee houses. Responsible for maintaining the squad's records, caporals were required to be literate so that they could also help a newly arrived, homesick recruit to read a letter from his parents.

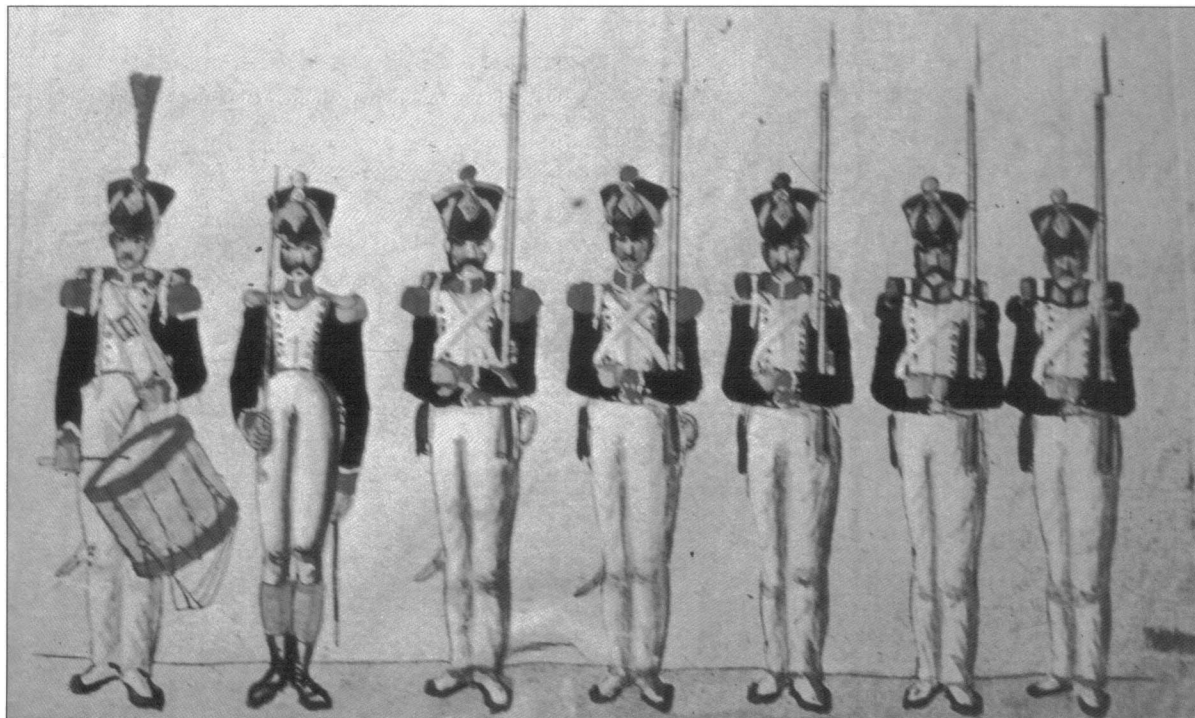
D: POLAND, 1807

A *carabinier* officer of the 9e Léger warms himself with a pipe and some brandy from a *cantinière*. He is wearing the Légion d'honneur medal, instituted by Napoleon in 1802 to

reward special service to France. In the background, the regimental eagle is carried by a sergent-major who, with one of the sappers, is befriending a local lad.

The eagle shown is of the second battalion 9e Léger, which is widely believed to have been captured at Morunghen in 1807. On 25 January this battalion was acting as an *avant-garde* when it was surprised and driven back in disorder by a much larger Russian force. As three eagle-bearers were killed in succession, a *carabinier* seized the flag in a bid to save it but was spotted and charged by a mounted officer of 5th Jäger, Basile Borodkine. Realising he could not escape, the Frenchman threw the flag like a javelin over a garden wall, from where Borodkine later recovered it. Those taken prisoner were marched to Kazan together with the flag, which was deposited in the cathedral when they arrived on 31 March 1807. Russian reports are not consistent about what was actually captured: some say that the eagle was missing, having broken off the plinth; others claim that the flag was an old pattern, emblazoned with the words 'République Française' and 'Incomparable'. This implies that the Russians captured one of three flags awarded to the 9e Léger in 1802, honouring their conduct at Marengo. When issued with eagles in 1804 the 9e Léger must have mounted them on top of their existing flags rather than adopting the regulation tricolour pattern. Several days before Mohrunghen, Girod says that the eagle had 'been detached from its pedestal and put in a wagon to be mended at the

These infantrymen show how slight were the differences between grenadier, fusilier and voltigeur uniforms. Of the five soldiers, only the two grenadiers carry the sabre-briquet side arm.



first opportunity. Consequently only the pole with the pedestal supporting the regiment's number was taken by the Russians.' During the action, Cossacks captured all the regiment's wagons, except the one containing the eagle. As rumour spread that 9e had lost this imperial symbol, Colonel Meunier ordered that the broken one be hastily mounted on top of a hop pole, and then reported that the eagle, *had* been lost, but was 'regained after a heroic fight'. (Compare with *Men At Arms* 146, p. 31.)

E: DEPLOYEZ EN TIRAILLEUR!

The French Army did not have a specific regulation for skirmishing, so individual regiments developed their own techniques, based on common experience of the Revolutionary Wars. Here a voltigeur company (1) has been sent several hundred paces forward to screen the battalion's front. Before instructing his men to deploy en tirailleur, the captain designates the size of the intervals between each file. As the first two ranks advance at the pas de course, fanning out into open order, the third rank halts and is formed into two ranks by the sergent-major (2). Standing with the reserve, the captain (3) orders the halt. These orders were transmitted by drum or voltigeur horns.

The captain could then order his men to fire in position or

A motley assortment of confused boys in uniform. Led by increasingly war-weary generals, after 1812 they were up against overwhelming odds as the Allied powers marched on Paris. (Beyer)

fire and advance by ranks. Each rank would advance a preset number of paces before firing; while they reloaded, the second rank advanced at the run. The reserve would keep pace, sending forward reinforcements as required. The lieutenant (4) and sous-lieutenant (5) would take position at the rear and centre of their sections. The sergeants' (6) positions were not fixed, so they could go where necessary. Skirmishers fought in pairs, either with their file partner or with the man to their right, ensuring that one of them remained loaded at all times. Although alignments had to be maintained, skirmishers would take advantage of any cover they found. The biggest threat to skirmishers was from cavalry, which could ride down a skirmish line rapidly. If the *ralliement* sounded, the skirmishers would run to the reserve and reform. If there was no time, they formed rally clumps around their section commanders, or took cover as best they could. (Compare with Plate J – Warrior 24.)

F: REPRISALS

The guerrilla war in Spain was notorious for its brutality, with both sides committing terrible acts of savagery. Girod was clearly shocked by the first atrocities he witnessed: 'Our advanced guard had found the hanging bodies of some unfortunate *Chasseurs à Cheval*, who had been made prisoner several days before and had been terribly mutilated. ... The enemy had let it be known that it was a fight to the death between them and us and that we could expect no quarter.' Girod adds that in retaliation for this atrocity, Marshal Victor ordered 300 Spanish prisoners to be executed.



While pursuing guerrillas in the mountains, Cardron was taking no chances with his safety. Writing home, he described being, 'armed to the teeth – a heavy sabre, two pistols and a carbine. This is how all the officers fighting the brigands are armed.'

Although rare, mercy at the hands of the Spanish was not completely unknown. Nicholas Page and his patrol were captured by Spanish regulars who stripped them of their belongings before holding a short discussion about their fate. A Spanish officer approached the Frenchmen and said, 'You must die, this is your last moment.' 'We went forwards,' recalled Page, 'as if we were approaching the gallows. That moment was terrible – as terrible as death itself. They put us ten paces in front of some armed soldiers. One of us began crying, saying to the officer: "So, you are going to kill us then?" He did not respond, but went to talk to the others. After some argument, he came back to us with a kinder expression than before. The young soldier repeated his question: "Are you going to kill us?" He replied: "No – thanks to me. I had great difficulty saving your lives – but you will not be able to keep your possessions ... I served in King

Joseph's Guard and that is why I asked for you to be spared. Without me, you would be dead." All these words came as a great relief to us. He dismissed the firing squad immediately saying, "You will not die."

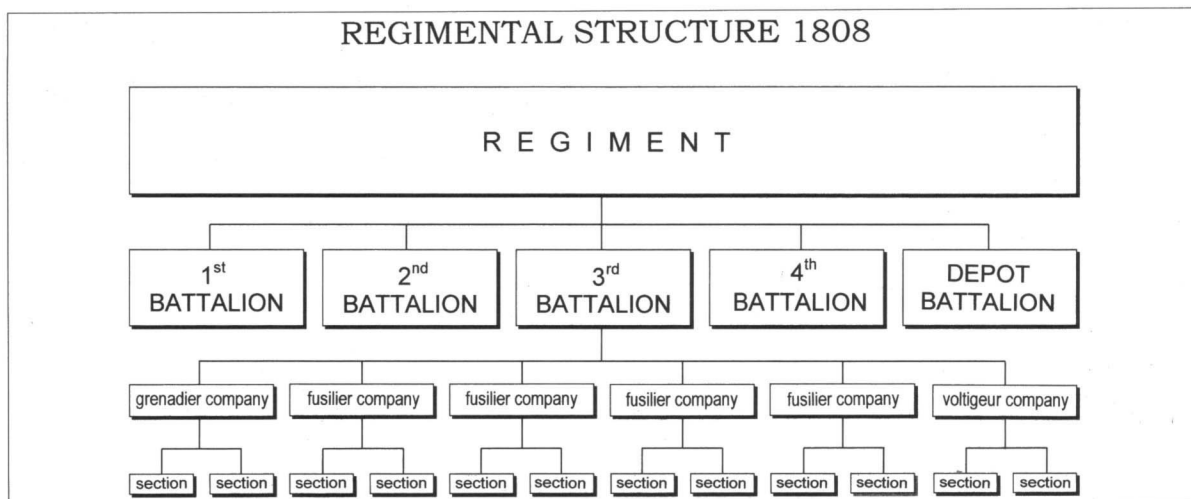
G: THE MARIE-LOUISES

The thousands of teenagers pressed into service following the Russian campaign were nicknamed the *Marie-Louises* after the equally young empress who signed the conscription decrees in Napoleon's absence. Through necessity, the uniform was stripped down to its most basic

Local children show soldiers to their billets in Leipzig (1806). The soldiers illustrate the different ways of carrying a musket, including passing the sling through the epaulette. At this time greatcoats were not issued although they could be privately purchased. Godet remembered how his regiment used the easier method of forcibly removing them from captured Austrian infantry after Ulm in 1805. (Geissler)



REGIMENTAL STRUCTURE 1808



requirements and hinted at the future style of field uniforms worn in northern France 100 years later. Even at the beginning of the war, Blaze said that 'On taking the field, everyone reduced his kit to the smallest possible dimensions, by ridding himself of all useless articles.'

A well-packed haversack (1) might contain spare shoes (2), a change of shirt (3), a sewing kit (4) containing needles, thread, awl and also a bag of cleaning brushes – the rest of the space being taken up with ammunition and food. Gun tools and up to 35 rounds of ammunition were kept in the giberne: the forage cap was strapped underneath. The soldier's few personal belongings including a spoon (5), comb (6), playing cards (7), pocket-knife (8), tobacco pouch (9), pipe (10), and a handkerchief, could be kept in his coat's internal pockets, while the larger items of kit – *gamelle*, *marmite* and hatchets were passed round the squad in rotation.

H: ARMÉE DU NORD, 1815

Fusiliers rapidly manoeuvre through the Belgian countryside at l'arme au bras. The army had enjoyed a period of rest and reorganisation during Napoleon's abdication. Released from captivity, returning from besieged garrisons or having recovered from wounds, many veterans returned to the regimental depots. Cardron described the popular reaction to Napoleon's return from exile in a letter to his sister: 'I cannot express the joy we felt when we heard the news; you can judge how much yourself, for no doubt the garrison of Philippeville feels the same way. Whoever sees one regiment sees the whole army; it is a big family that has found the father they had thought lost forever.'

This optimism was short lived: It was finally all over after 100 days and defeat at Waterloo. On his second restoration to the throne, King Louis XVIII decided to break the spirit of the Imperial Army completely and had it reorganised from scratch. On 1 September 1815 Cardron broke the news to his sister: 'Do you know the fate of the army? Nothing less than it is being disbanded and reorganised into *légions départementales*. All the officers, *sous-officiers* and soldiers of the same *département* are being directed to the regional capitals.'

After the reforms of 18 February 1808, the regiment's état-major (staff) included 1 colonel, 1 major, 4 chefs de bataillons, 5 adjudant majors, 1 quartermaster-treasurer, 1 paymaster, 1 'eagle' bearer, 2 'eagle' guards, 1 surgeon-major, 4 assistants, 5 adjudants, 1 drum-major, 1 drum-corporal, 1 bandmaster, 7 musicians, 4 craftsmen. The regiment had 108 officers and 3,862 other ranks. Each battalion had four sappers, carried as part of the grenadier company. The depot battalion consisted of only the four centre companies of fusiliers. (Martin Lancaster)

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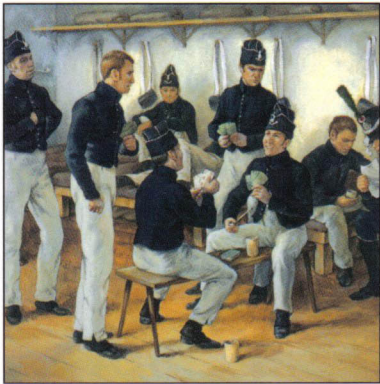
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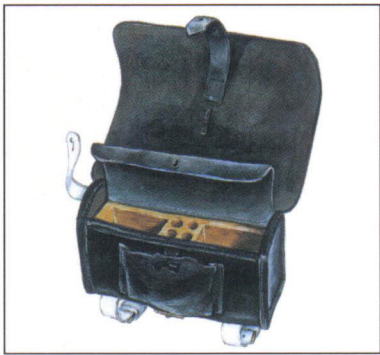
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