

Austrian Infantry, c.1809

PHILIP J. HAYTHORNTHWAITE
Paintings by GERRY EMBLETON

The Austrian Empire was one of Napoleon's most implacable adversaries. Despite successive defeats (Marengo, 1800; Austerlitz, 1805; Wagram, 1809), Austria played a major rôle in the campaigns of 1813-14 which led to Napoleon's downfall. Throughout this period the Austrian military effort was founded upon the 63 regiments of line infantry, a number reduced to 55 in 1809 when their recruiting-grounds were lost by the surrender of Austrian territory after Wagram. Beset by the parsimony and strangulating conservatism of the Austrian military establishment, the infantry almost invariably fought with great discipline and resolution; and inflicted upon Napoleon his first major defeat, at Aspern-Essling in 1809.

The Austrian Empire consisted of vast territories, its military forces being divided for convenience into 'German' and 'Hungarian' units. The former included regiments whose recruiting-grounds were originally in the Austrian Netherlands, Bohemia, Galicia and northern Italy; the latter included units from Hungary, Croatia and Transylvania. Among the most significant distinctions between the two is the fact that 'German' regiments were raised by a mixture of conscription and voluntary enlistment, and Hungarian units were formed from recruits provided by their own *Diet* (parliament), whilst Italian, Netherlands and Tyrolean regiments relied exclusively on free enlistment. Perhaps as many as half the 'German' recruits were volunteers from the smaller south German states attracted by generous bounties. Such men were regarded as the best in the army, and because of their greater degree of literacy than found among Austrian subjects they provided more than half of the army's NCOs.

Regimental establishment

Each regiment was controlled by a 'proprietor' or *Inhaber*, a colonel-in-chief whose powers extended even to the appointment of officers below field rank. Although regiments were numbered, it was usual for them to be known by the title of the *Inhaber* — creating confusion when changes of *Inhaber* resulted in the same regiment bearing several titles during a short period, or when the *Inhaber* relinquished one regiment and took over another. For example, Regt. No. 41 was known as 'Bender' from 1778 to 1797, 'Württemberg' 1803-04, 'Saxe-Hildburghausen' 1805, 'Kottulinsky' 1808-1814, and 'Hohenlohe-Bartenstein' 1815-16. (It had no *Inhaber* in 1797-1802 and 1806-08). Similarly, at Austerlitz Regt. No. 55 was styled 'Reuss-Greiz' after its *Inhaber*, Prince Henry XIII of that state; but the regiment was disbanded in 1809, whereupon the title transferred to Regt. No. 18, which had been known previously as 'Stuart' and later 'd'Aspre'.

German fusilier officers in 1798 uniform, which continued in use as late as 1809, characterised by the crested leather helmet with large brass front-plate. For field officers the crest was in gold cord; for lower ranks, in silk.
(R. von Ottenfeld).



Regimental organisation remained reasonably standard throughout the period, consisting of two field battalions each of six fusilier companies, and a third or garrison battalion of four companies which served as a *dépôt* for the field battalions; in addition, each regiment had a 'division' of two grenadier companies, which in wartime were usually detached and formed with the grenadiers of other regiments into composite grenadier battalions. Hungarian regiments had three field battalions with a total establishment of 5,508 men; German regiments had a nominal strength of 4,575 men, but in peacetime especially this was often reduced to as little as half that figure: fusilier companies with a 'war' establishment of four officers and 230 men often had as few as three officers and 120 men. Grenadier companies were nominally 112 strong, about 140 in wartime. The wartime increase was achieved by recalling men on furlough and those officially enlisted but permitted to follow their

civilian occupations until required. In addition, regiments had a *Reservedivision* of 720 men (620 for Hungarians) to be used as a reservoir of personnel, and from 1808 German regiments possessed two reserve battalions of men whose conscription to active service had been deferred.

A hasty re-organisation was attempted in 1805, by which each regiment was to be arranged in one grenadier and four fusilier battalions, each of four companies of 160 men; but, being introduced immediately before the 1805 campaign, this step only caused confusion, so that 'common soldiers no longer knew their officers and the officers did not know their men'.

Austria's most capable general, Archduke Charles, appears never to have implemented the change in the forces under his control; and the previous organisation was re-instituted in 1807, save that peace and war establishments would henceforth be the same, except that in wartime the third battalion would be augmented to six

companies. After the 1809 defeat third battalions were reduced to cadres, German companies to about 60 rank and file and Hungarian to 100. From 1811, regimental fourth battalions were formed by affiliating the *Landwehr* (militia) to the German regiments; Hungary possessed no *Landwehr*, her home defence forces being the old feudal levy or *Insurrectio*, and it was thought unwise to form *Landwehr* in Galicia, whose inhabitants were thought to be disaffected.

THE UNIFORMS

Throughout the Napoleonic era, the Austrian infantry presented a smart and well-disciplined appearance; as Sir Charles Stewart wrote in 1813, their 'military air that marked the soldier, especially the Hungarian, must ever fix it in my recollection as the finest army of the continent'.

The infantry uniform was extremely smart, the more so because it was very plain with few unnecessary embellishments, and included the most modern design of jacket worn by any European army, for which reason it was copied by Britain. Single-breasted and closed to the waist, its skirts were neat from 1798, and became slightly smaller in 1808-09 when the turnbacks were reduced. (It was usual throughout for outdated uniforms to be worn out before the issue of new styles; for example, although the shako was authorised in 1806 it was not even worn by the majority in the 1809 campaign). The coat was in the traditional Austrian colour of white (for the rank-and-file actually off-white or even very pale grey), with ten white or yellow buttons on the breast. The collar (upright from 1798), turnbacks

and cuffs (fastened by two small buttons on the rear seam) were in the regimental facing-colour, which also appeared on the rear piping of the skirts (three vertical lines, reduced to two in 1808-09), the piping to the vertical pockets (with a single button), and on the shoulder straps, which were either facing-coloured with white piping or vice-versa. The buttons were plain, without regimental numbers.

The colour-schemes adopted meant that in theory no two regiments had the same combination of facing- and button-colour, which necessitated a large number of facing-colours which were described by such terms as 'crab red', 'parrot green', etc.; though in practice it is likely that batches of cloth might not be dyed exactly the same shade, and would fade on campaign, so that exact nuances of colour might be somewhat academic. Cuffs were plain for German regiments, but for Hungarians were pointed, with a single button and tassel-ended lace loop (known as *Bärenatzen* or 'bear's-paw').

German regiments wore white breeches, black knecgaiters and black boots; Hungarians were distinguished by light blue pantaloons with mixed black and yellow braid on the outer seams and as knots on the thigh, tucked into lace-up shoes with raised anklets.

Headdress

From 1798 the headdress was a crested black leather helmet with a yellow and black woollen comb, but this proved unsatisfactory and was replaced in August 1806 by a shako, 8 ins. high and one inch wider at the top than the bottom, made initially of black cloth (or cloth on leather) and of felt from 1810. On the front it bore a brass loop and button, and a pressed-brass cockade made to resemble pleated cloth, painted in the national colours of black and yellow; leather cockades and lace

Colour plate captions, pp.42-43:

(1) German grenadier, Regt. No. 10 (green facings, white buttons). The equipment is standard for grenadiers, including sabre and cartridge-box grenade.

(2) Hungarian grenadier officer, Regt. No.37 (poppy-red facings, yellow buttons). Officers' breeches-lace was 1/4-in. wide until the 1811 regulations specified 1/2-in. lace, and 1-in. for field ranks.

(3) German grenadier, campaign dress. Note the cap-cover, and the facing-coloured grenade to the rear of the collar-patch.

(4) German fusilier officer, wearing the Oberrock. The pistol holster slung on a strap over the shoulder was a common addition on campaign.

(5) German fusilier corporal, Regt. No.22 'Emperor' (yellow facings, white buttons). Note the rank distinctions: the lace shako-band and the cane.

(6) Hungarian grenadier, Regt. No.39 (poppy-red facings, white buttons). Note the grenade badge on the shoulder belt, and the distinctive Hungarian legwear.

(a) Three grenadier caps, showing varieties of cloth rear patch and 'bag'.

(b) Cuffs of German regiments, left, and Hungarian (with *Bärenatzen* lace), right.

(c) Officer's coat, Regt. No.17 (light brown facings, white buttons). This shows the unofficial coloured turnbacks.

(d) Drummer's 'wing'.

(e) German drummer's jacket, showing crenellated lace.

(f) Hungarian infantry jacket, Regt. No.19 (light blue facings, white buttons).

(g) German pioneer's jacket, Regt. No.27 ('Emperor yellow' facings, yellow buttons).

(h) German private's jacket, Regt. No. 49 (light pike grey facings, white buttons). It was noted in some cases that the light grey facings were scarcely distinguishable from the jacket colour.

loops also existed. Above the cockade was a yellow woollen pompon with black centre; the chinstrap, front and narrow rear peak were black leather; and among recorded variations are some with small side-peaks to divert rainwater off the wearer's ears. First issued to

continued on page 44

Left:

Hungarian grenadier officer and private, c. 1805; the grenadier's belt bears a brass match-case. (R. von Ottenfeld).



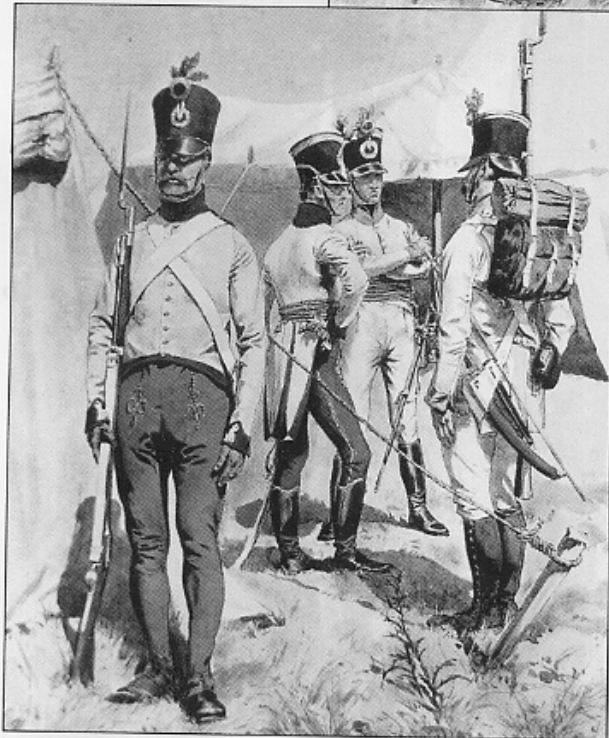
Right:

German fusiliers in the post-1806 uniform, with officer in the Oberrock. Note how the drummer carries his knapsack over one shoulder, to allow the drum to be slung on his back on the march. (R. von Ottenfeld).



Below:

The 1806 infantry uniform with shako; left to right: Hungarian fusilier; Hungarian fusilier officer; German fusilier officer, German fusilier NCO — note the cane suspended from the jacket button, the usual practice. (R. von Ottenfeld).



Hungarian regiments, the shako was not universal until after the 1809 campaign.

Grenadiers wore a uniquely-shaped fur cap, nicknamed *fauteuil* ('armchair') by the French from its shape, with a high front and low rear, the rear with a cloth patch and usually a cloth 'bag' extending from left to right side. The yellow and black pompon was borne at the right, and on the front a large brass plate bearing a coat-of-arms, which existed

in several variations. The cap almost always had the 'nap' of the fur upswept. Between 1798 and 1805 a black leather peak was added (von Kobell c. 1806 shows peaked and peakless caps worn side-by-side); and some had small rear- and side-peaks, though these are not visible in many contemporary pictures (perhaps concealed by the fur). The cloth rear was originally in the facing colour, with wavy-edged white lace in various designs,

but the 1811 regulations specified yellow patches for all. Delays in implementing these orders result in contemporary pictures of 1813-14 continuing to show the old facing-coloured patches. Hair was worn in a powdered 'queue' until 1805.

Equipment

Equipment was white leather, the hide knapsack with shoulder straps connected by a breast strap; the greatcoat could be carried rolled atop the knapsack or bandolier fashion. White leather shoulder belts supported a black leather cartridge box on the right hip; grenadiers had a brass grenade-badge on the box, and a similar badge on the shoulder-belt, replacing the earlier brass match-case, perhaps after 1809. At the left hip was a brown leather bayonet scabbard and, for grenadiers, NCOs and musicians only, a sabre with brass stirrup hilt. A feature of Austrian scabbards was the extension of the leather over the top of the brass chape, showing a bulge at the end of the scabbard. The 1798 flintlock musket had brass fittings; its successor of 1807 was slightly lighter, with

iron fittings. A wooden canteen was carried over the shoulder, though latterly metal canteens came into increasing use.

Rank distinctions

NCOs' rank-distinctions were limited to the carrying of a sabre and a cane, and bands of 1/2-in. yellow lace around the shako: a single band for corporals, and for higher ranks (known as *Prima Plana*), two bands.

Officers wore long-tailed coats with horizontal pockets and no shoulder straps. Officially the turnbacks were white, but several sources show the use of facing-coloured turnbacks, introduced either regimentally or by the personal preference of the individual. Buttons were gilt or silver, and the Hungarian *Bärentatzen* in metallic lace. Officers wore breeches (with gold or silver braid for Hungarians) and boots (metallic-laced hussar boots could be worn by Hungarians). Around the waist was worn the universal mark of commissioned rank, the gold and black sash (*Felbinde*), in silk for field officers and camel-hair for others. To conserve the expensive white uniform, on campaign officers frequently wore a double-breasted frock-coat (*Oberrock*), extending to mid-calf or less, in dark grey to almost black, with collar or collar and cuffs in the facing colour.

The sword was suspended from a waist belt, officially white leather with a gilt plate bearing the Imperial eagle, but many officers adopted the black-and-gold striped waist belt officially reserved for field ranks. The sword was a straight-bladed épée (*Degen*) with gilded fittings and black and gold knot, though grenadiers and Hungarians were permitted to carry curved sabres with gilt stirrup hilts, decorated as elaborately as they chose.

Instead of a rear peak, officers' shakos had an up-turned dummy neck-guard at the rear, edged like the peak with 1/2-in. gold lace. Their pompon was gold with

a black velvet centre bearing the Emperor's cypher, and the cockade loop was gold with a gilt or silver button. Around the upper edge of the cap was gold rank-lace, a wide band for senior officers and two narrow bands for subalterns. Grenadier officers wore the fur cap with officers' pompon and gilt plate, but bicorn hats were equally popular for active service.

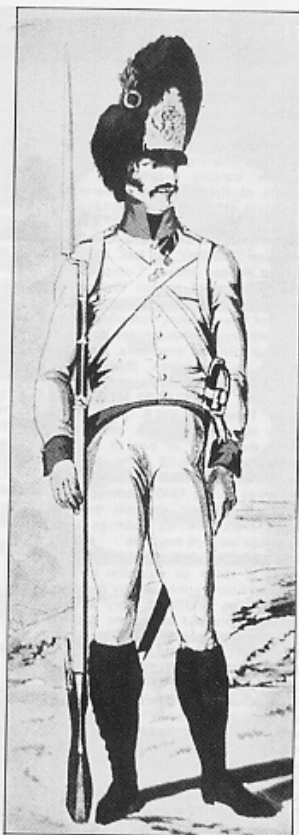
A traditional feature retained by the Austrian army until the 20th century was the use of the *Feldzeichen*, a sprig of green foliage in the headdress, a relic of the 'field sign' of the 17th century used to distinguish friend from foe in the days before recognisable national uniforms had evolved.

Regimental bandsmen often wore very elaborate uniform (dependent on the taste and finances of the *Inhaber*), but the drummers wore the ordinary uniform with the addition of facing-coloured 'swallows'-nest' style shoulder wings bearing a white lace rosette and edged with white crenellated or sometimes plain lace; similar lace might also be borne on the collar and cuffs. **Pioneers** were equipped with leather aprons and felling axes, and wore a red crossed-axes badge on the left upper arm.

The **greatcoat** was single-breasted with a standing collar and deep cuffs, greyish-brown, with facing-coloured piping on the collar and a shoulder-strap on the left (some sources show two shoulder straps); sometimes with a facing-coloured collar-patch and grenade for grenadiers. For campaign, grenadier caps might have a black waterproof cover, sometimes shown bearing a painted device on the front consisting of a yellow grenade with red flame, with the Imperial cypher 'FI' in yellow.

Sources

The most accessible source for details of the Austrian infantry organisation and uniform is the present writer's *The Austrian Army of the Napoleonic Wars (I): Infantry*



German grenadier, c. 1808; note the grenade badge on the shoulder belt. (Tranquillo Mollo).

(Osprey Men-at-Arms series No.176, London 1986). An invaluable study of the Austrian army in general is *Napoleon's Great Adversaries: The Archduke Charles and the Austrian Army 1792-1814* (G.E. Rothenberg, London 1982). The leading work on uniforms is still *Die Oesterreichische Armee* (R. von Ottenfeld & O. Teuber, Vienna 1895).



German grenadier, c.1814. (R. von Ottenfeld).



Left:

Grenadier accoutrements, including the distinctively-shaped cap, cartridge box with grenade badge, and sabre.



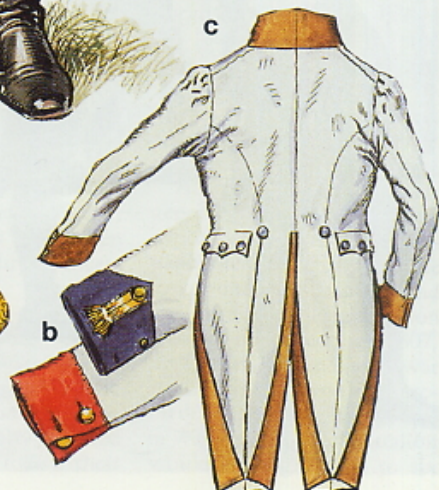
a



a



a



c

b

