

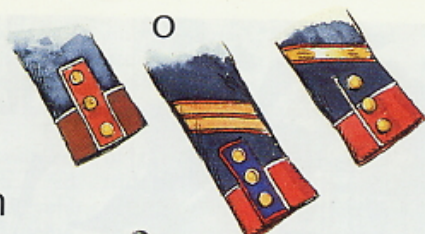
French Infantry  
1805-06







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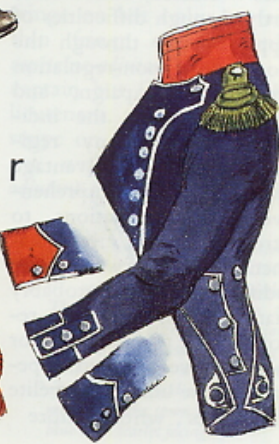
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# French Infantry at Austerlitz, 1805

PHILIP J. HAYTHORNTHWAITE  
Paintings by GERRY EMBLETON

The battle of Austerlitz on 2 December 1805 — 'The Battle of the Three Emperors' — was one of the tactical masterpieces of history, and established Napoleon's reputation as the foremost commander of his age. It was probably the high point of his entire military career.

Taking advantage of Napoleon's apparent weakness in having the bulk of his forces concentrated on the Channel coast, the Third Coalition (Austria, Russia, Britain and Sweden) planned an Austro-Russian advance towards the Rhine. To counter this threat, Napoleon broke up his Channel camps and marched east on 31 August 1805 at the head of the finest army he ever commanded — experienced and well trained, it was not yet diluted by the influx of conscripts which in later years replaced the casualties of successive campaigns. Following a series of almost unbroken successes, the morale of the army was exceptionally high, and Napoleon used it to devastating effect in the operations leading to Austerlitz.

Advancing on a wide front, and undiscovered by his opponents, Napoleon's forces crossed the Rhine on 26 September, swinging north and west in a wide arc to sever the communications of the Austrian army of the inept Gen. Karl Mack von Leiberich (1752-1828). Isolated from his supports,

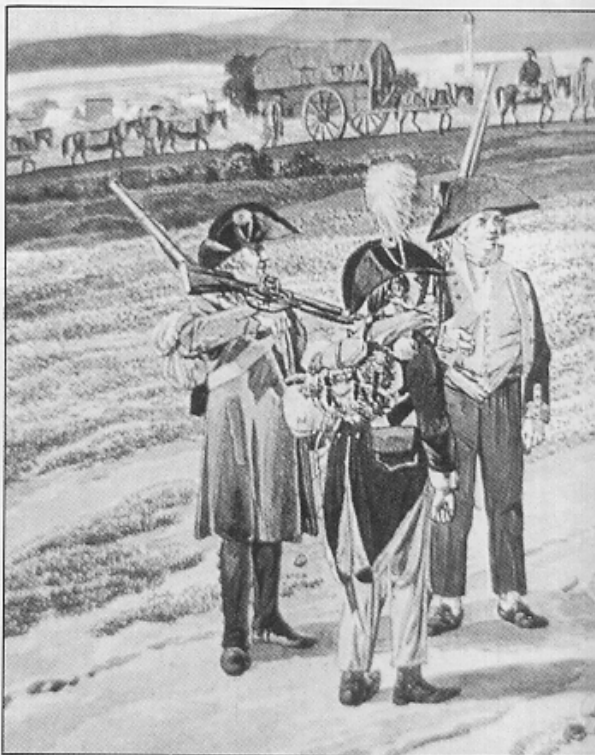
Mack surrendered at Ulm on 20 October: a stunning strategic victory by Napoleon, achieved without the necessity of a major battle, and costing Austria some 50,000 troops.

Napoleon pushed on to occupy Vienna and engage the second enemy army, that of the Russian Gen. Mikhail Kutuzov (1745-1813), which was accompanied by the Austrian Emperor Francis I and Czar Alexander I (hence 'the battle of three Emperors'). On 2 December, a few miles east of Brunn in Moldavia, the two forces met at Austerlitz.

Confident of victory, the larger Russo-Austrian army planned to 'pin' the French left, whilst the main assault drove towards Napoleon's right-centre, which he had

deceived them into believing was his weakest part. As the Allied troops were deploying, Napoleon launched a counter-attack which split their centre and drove them from the field, a victory

which shattered the Allies and ended the war at a stroke. His first victory after the assumption of the imperial mantle, it confirmed Napoleon's reputation as a military genius, but was firmly built upon the



## Above:

French infantry on campaign. Though dating from c.1800, this print by Bartsch after W. von Kobell shows the typical non-regulation campaign appearance of the French infantry.

## Centre:

Fusilier, 8th Line: print after V. Huet from the Bucquoy series, showing (inset) the distinctive regimental turnback ornament.

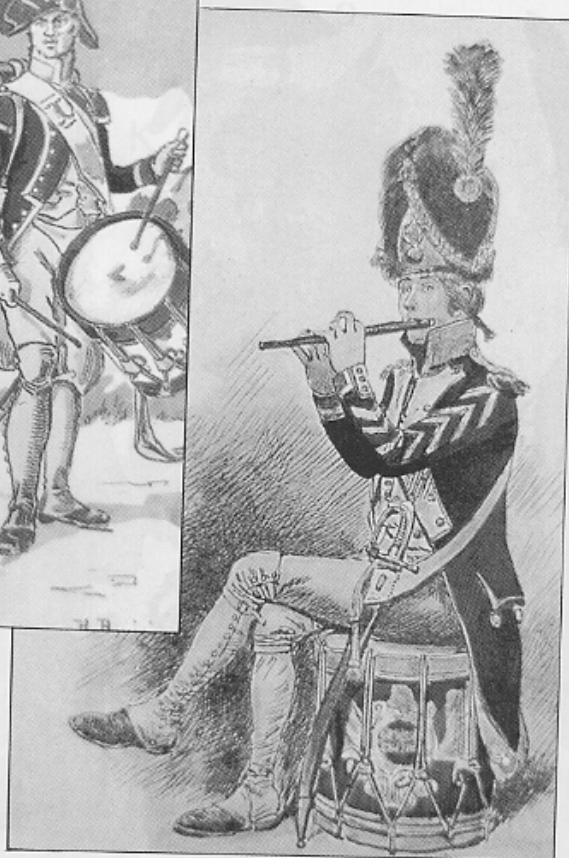
## Right:

Fusilier sergeant (left) and fusilier in campaign dress, 57th Line, showing their unique plumes. (Print after H. Boisselier).



**Above:**

Sapeur (pioneer) and fusilier drummer, 18th Line. The sapeurs wore grenadier distinctions with their traditional apron, axe and beard. Musicians frequently had additional regimental distinctions, e.g. the sky-blue facings and orange lace in this case. (Print after H. Boisselier).



**Below:**

Grenadier drummer in full dress; a further example of musicians' distinctions, in the yellow lace chevrons on the sleeves. (Print after Maurice Orange).

#### Captions to colour plates:

- A, B, C)** Grenadiers, winter campaign dress, 1805: **(A)** Grenadier, marching order, carrying the bearskin in a linen bag atop the knapsack. **(B)** Grenadier officer. **(C)** Grenadier, battle order, with his bicorn strapped to his knapsack. Prior to issue of the strap passing right round the pack in 1806 soldiers had to improvise stowage straps or cords. The canteen is one of many varieties. Note, beneath overalls, captured Hungarian breeches, and matching Hungarian ankle boots.
- d)** Bicorn of 4th Line, with orange 'ties'.
- e)** Grenadier's bicorn with old-style drooping plume.
- f)** Fusilier's bicorn, front and side.
- g)** Grenadier epaulette variations.
- h)** Voltigeur epaulette variations.
- i)** Variations on the grenadier bearskin, with regulation blue and red rear patches; the more common red with a white cross; red or white cords; and at right, a cap of the 57th Line with double white raquettes (after Boersch Colln.)
- j)** Undress bonnet de police with 'stocking' extended; and, below, as worn, with in this case Light Infantry badge and tassel.
- K, L, M)** Infantrymen, campaign dress, 1805-06: **(K)** Fusilier, 8th Line, showing regimental turnback badge and cuff variation. **(L)** Fusilier, showing another cuff variation, and position of bayonet scabbard on pouch belt. **(M)** Chasseur, Light Infantry. Note sabre and bayonet in double frog; waterproof musket lock cover; and 1806-pattern lozenge shako plate — it has been suggested that some regiments anticipated the general introduction of these, but details are unclear.
- n)** Infantry coat of regulation pattern, apart from the old-fashioned flapless cuff.
- o)** Cuff variations: (left to right) private, regulation pattern apart from white-piped red flap instead of red-piped blue flap; corporal, regulation pattern, with double orange rank bars; sergeant, flapless style, single gold rank bar.
- p)** Varieties of turnback insignia.
- q)** Variations on the Light Infantry shako, with green ornaments for chasseurs and scarlet for carabiniers; note example with 1806 lozenge plate.
- r)** Chasseur's short-skirted Light Infantry coat, with variations of cuff design noted among regiments.

foundations of his magnificent army (which was to a considerable degree his own creation); but only at the cost of approximately one-eighth of the French Grande Armée, who fell at Austerlitz. Never again was Napoleon to command so matchless a force.

#### THE INFANTRY REGIMENTS

The backbone of the French army were the infantry regiments, the successors of the *demi-brigades* of the Revolutionary Wars (the term 'regiment', eschewed because of its elitist connotation, had been reinstated on 24 September 1803). In August 1805 there were 87 Line Infantry regiments, usually of three battalions (occasionally four), with a field establishment of nominally around 1,100 per battalion; in practice many of the units in the 1805 cam-

paign could muster little more than one-third of this number. Each battalion comprised seven fusilier companies and two of 'élites', one each of grenadiers and voltigeurs, the latter being the battalion's light infantry.

The Light Infantry regiments were supposedly more adept at skirmish tactics than the Line, but in reality were hardly any different except in uniform and terminology, having *chasseurs* instead of *fusiliers* and *carabiniers* instead of *grenadiers*. They were distributed through the army as if they were in fact different from the Line, normally each division having one Light Infantry regiment. Only in I Corps was the distinction actually practiced, in which neither division had any light troops, but the 27th *Léger* (Light Infantry) was attached to the Corps as 'advance

guard'. In III Corps the 15th *Léger* was divided, the bulk of the unit serving with the 2nd Bde. and the voltigeur company with the 1st Bde.

Units present at Austerlitz included the Line regiments numbered 3, 4, 8, 14, 17, 18, 28, 30, 33, 34, 36, 40, 43, 45, 46, 48, 51, 54, 55, 57, 61, 64, 75, 88, 94, 95, 108 and 111; and Light regiments 10, 13, 15, 17, 24, 26 and 27. In addition, Gen. Oudinot's division of *Grenadiers de la réserve* was formed by detaching companies from their parent units to create an élite reserve of five regiments. These took men from the following corps: 1st Regt., 13th and 58th Line; 2nd Regt., 9th and 81st Line; 3rd Regt., 2nd and 3rd *Léger*; 4th Regt., 28th and 31st *Léger*; 5th Regt., 12th and 15th *Léger*. An example of this organisation is provided by the 4th Regt., com-

posed as follows:

1st Bn.: carabinier and one chasseur company from each of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bns., 28th *Léger*.

2nd Bn.: the same from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bns., 31st *Léger*.

continued on page 18



Carabinier, 17th Léger. Distinctions shown by the Boeswillwald Coltn. include orange epaulette straps with scarlet 'crescent' and fringe, scarlet cuff flaps, white cap cords, a green tobacco pouch suspended from the sabre hilt, and blue overalls worn over white and sky blue striped stockings with low shoes.

#### Right:

French infantry entering Leipzig, 1806: an eyewitness print after C.G.H. Geissler. In the centre is a carabinier with white overalls and gaiters; extreme left is a fusilier of the 57th Line, who has red numerals '5' and '7' on the turnbacks, and a white fabric cartridge box cover bearing the regimental identity written in black.



elaborate uniform emphasized their ostensibly superior status.

#### Line infantry

The infantry *coat* (*habit à la française*) was dark blue with white lining, turnbacks and lapels piped red; red collar and cuffs piped white; blue cuff flaps and shoulder straps and horizontal pockets piped red; and brass buttons. Variations included red cuff flaps, or white flaps piped red; or even the retention of the earlier flapless cuff, with a line of white piping running up the cuff instead, as worn by the 8th Line perhaps as late as 1812. An order of 13 July 1805 noted that 'Many colonels have abolished the red piping on the lapels, others have made vertical pockets instead of the horizontal ones'.

Great variety was found in the design of turnback badges, including hearts, diamonds and stars in red or blue cloth, red grenades for *grenadiers*, and regimental devices including the 8th Line's red diamond bearing a white '8' and inner diamond, and the 48th's blue number '4' on one turnback and '8' on the other.

Netherwear consisted of a white, single-breasted, sleeved *waistcoat*, with red collar and cuffs for some regiments (yellow for *voltigeurs*); and white *breeches* with black knee-length *gaiters*. Many regiments used unofficial white gaiters for summer or parade, and off-white or grey linen for everyday use. On campaign it was common to wear loose *overalls*, beige, white or grey being the commonest colours, worn over or sometimes in place of the gaiters. A white *stock* was worn for ordinary dress, or black for parade and active service, but this was often replaced by a more comfortable cravat.

The *headdress* was a low bicorne hat, usually ornamented only with a tricolour cockade with yellow lace loop; the lace 'ties' which held the sides erect were usually black, but sometimes coloured red, popular with *grenadiers*. The 4th Line had orange ties (traditionally awarded for bravery at Arcola), and the 18th Line red, or yellow for *voltigeurs*. Short plumes were sometimes added to distinguish *grenadiers*, or to identify the battalion; on 21 June 1805

Gen. Vandamme ordered 'only round pompons and forbid the use of those as worn by the 57th, which place an undue strain on the hats and give generally a bad effect' — that regiment using carrot-shaped plumes to identify its battalions, in sky-blue, orange and *lie-de-vin* (the latter a violet shade, literally 'wine dregs').

*Grenadiers* wore scarlet epaulettes and were permitted to use fur caps, usually donned only for parade or combat. Made of bearskin (hence its name *oursion*) or goatskin, the cap had a brass front plate embossed with a grenade, and sometimes with regimental distinctions. (For example, the 45th had a '4' on one side of the grenade and '5' on the other; the 108th had a triangular plate with a grenade occupying the upper point, with '108' cut out below.) The cap's cloth rear patch (nicknamed *cul de singe* or 'monkey's backside') officially was quartered in red and blue, but was more usually red with a white lace cross. The cap had a scarlet plume at the left, above the cockade, and partially braided cords hanging in a 'raquette' at the right, often

#### UNIFORMS

The French infantry uniform had evolved from the introduction of a universal uniform in 1793, officially devoid of regimental distinctions save for the number on the buttons. Countless varieties existed, however, partly through difficulties of supply, partly through the adoption of non-regulation items on campaign; and equally, through the individualism of many regiments, which took advantage of the less than comprehensive dress regulations to introduce untold minor distinctions, none of which were codified and which probably changed with successive reclothing of the unit. Minor varieties were noted especially in the uniforms of élite companies, whose more



red, but white cords were not uncommon (worn by the 3rd, 18th, 21st and 57th, for example). The 8th Line wore peaks on their *grenadier* caps. For ordinary dress, the *grenadiers* wore the bicorne with a red pompon or plume, the old drooping plume still being retained in some cases.

**Voltigeurs** usually wore a *chamois* or yellow collar, often piped red, and green or green-and-yellow epaulettes and pompons, with yellow horns on the turnbacks. The 64th's *voltigeurs* had red hat ties, green pompon with red tuft, red collar piped white, green epaulettes with red crescents, and '64' on the turnbacks. The 95th's in 1806 had green pompons with yellow tufts.

**Equipment** included a tanned calfskin knapsack carried on the back by buff-leather shoulder straps affixed by wooden toggles, and closed with two or three straps. Filled with spare clothing, cleaning equipment, two packs of cartridges, four days' biscuit and personal

impedimenta, it weighed around 15 to 20kg, not including mess-tin, cooking pot and spare headdress in a cover, fastened on the outside of the knapsack. The cartridge box was black leather, suspended at the right hip by a whitened buff-leather shoulder belt; the flap of the box carried a brass grenade or horn badge for élites, and occasionally the regimental number. *Fusiliers* carried the brown leather bayonet scabbard on the front of the cartridge box belt, but those armed with the sabre carried an additional belt over the right shoulder, with a combined frog for both sabre and bayonet.

The **sabre** (*sabre-briquet*) had a single-bar cast brass hilt and slightly curved blade, with black leather scabbard with brass chape; it was carried by NCOs, *grenadiers*, *voltigeurs* and musicians, with a scarlet knot for *grenadiers*, green and/or yellow for *voltigeurs* and white for *fusiliers*, though regimental distinctions existed. The **musket**

was based on the 1777 pattern, with iron fittings, slightly remodelled in Years IX and XIII of the republican calendar, hence its pattern-name *An IX/XIII*. A smoothbore flintlock of 17.5mm calibre, its length was 151.5cm and it weighed 4.375kg. *Voltigeurs* often carried the shorter dragoon musket, 141.7cm long and weighing 4.275kg, more appropriate for skirmishing.

There was no official issue of a canteen, so each man provided his own (metal flask, glass bottle in wicker frame, gourd or wooden barrel). Other unofficial items included canvas satchels slung over the shoulder, and even cloth 'sausages' containing flour.

Not until 1805 were **greatcoats** issued, and even then they were provided from regimental funds and only for campaign; thus many patterns existed — single- and double-breasted, beige, grey and brownish. The epaulettes of élite companies were usually worn on the greatcoat.

The coat was usually carried rolled atop the knapsack, but not until 1806 was official provision made by the addition of leather loops on the knapsack; before then, the coat was secured by string or leather straps provided by the individual.

The **undress cap** (*bonnet de police*) was blue cloth, with a tasselled stocking-end folded behind the headband, with red lace edging, tassel and piping, with red grenade or yellow horn badge for élites; it was usually carried beneath the cartridge box. **Hairstyles** varied, the queue declining in use from around 1803, though regimental practice varied: as late as 1804 cutting the hair short was an imprisonment offence in the 64th Line, which also prohibited the sideburns which became popular from the early 1800s. Moustaches were obligatory for élites.

**Rank** markings were in the form of diagonal lace bars on the lower sleeve: two orange bars for corporals, a gold bar on red for sergeants, and two gold for sergeant-majors; gold epaulette-edging and mixed-gold fringe and sword knots were often worn by sergeants and above. Service chevrons were worn point uppermost on the upper arm, in gold for senior NCOs and red for the remainder.

**Officers' uniforms** resembled those of the rank and file, in finer quality, with gold lace hat-loops and epaulettes, distinguished as follows: colonel, epaulettes with bullion fringes; major, the same but silver straps; *chef de bataillon*, as colonel but fringe on left only; captain, thin fringe on left only; *capitaine-adjutant-major*, as captain but fringe on right; lieutenant, as captain but red stripe on straps; *sous-lieutenant*, with two red stripes; *adjutant-sous-officier*, red



Light infantry manning a customs post at the entry to Leipzig, 1806-07; print after C.G.H. Geissler. The chasseur (centre) has the 1806-pattern lozenge shako plate; at right is a chasseur wearing a brown greatcoat with epaulettes affixed. The soldier at left is a member of the town militia in sky blue with scarlet facings.

Light infantry embarking on campaign: a German print of c.1806 showing shakos with the plume on the opposite side to the cockade.

straps with two gold stripes and mixed red and gold fringe on left.

Officers carried straight-bladed *épées* with gilt fittings and gold knot, suspended from white shoulder- or waist belts, though black or coloured waist belts, often with lace or metallic embroidered decoration, were popular. Elite company officers often carried curved sabres. On campaign, single-breasted undress *surtouts* without lapels were popular in place of the coat, dark blue throughout, save often for a red collar and (as worn by the 8th) red cuff-piping.

#### Light Infantry

Light Infantry wore similar uniform, but with a shorter-tailed *coatee* with blue lining, turnbacks and lapels, all piped white, the lapels cut with a distinctive pointed lower end, and turnbacks bearing white horn badges. Officers' lace was silver, and buttons white metal, though at least the 2nd, 3rd, 12th and 28th *Léger* had brass buttons. The cuffs were officially dark blue with scarlet flaps and white piping, but variations included blue flaps, or scarlet or blue pointed cuffs; collars were scarlet with white piping. *Chasseurs* had blue shoulder straps piped white, but green epaulettes, sometimes with red 'crescents', were popular.

**Waistcoats and breeches** were dark blue, though white waistcoats were popular in summer. The short light infantry *gaiters*, cut to resemble hussar boots (with tassels and lace trim, red for *carabiniers* and white, red and/or green for *chasseurs*) were sometimes replaced by white linen gaiters in summer; loose **overalls** were popular on campaign, often dark blue.

The **headdress** was a squat shako (17.8cm high, though taller versions probably existed unofficially), of black felt with leather upper and lower bands and detachable peak. Ornaments varied: a



brass hunting horn was often worn on the front, and a tricolour cockade at the left, with a yellow or orange lace loop secured by one or two buttons; with a plume above, upright or drooping, scarlet for *carabiniers* and green for *chasseurs*. As the peak was detachable and the badge not universal, some regiments repositioned the peak so that the plume and cockade were displayed at the front. Cords suspended around the cap were green for *chasseurs* and white or scarlet for *carabiniers*; and the latter could also wear a fur cap, like that of Line *grenadiers*, but without a plate. Fur caps were not universal but granted to regiments requesting them; of those at Austerlitz, for example, the 2nd *Léger* received theirs under the Consulate, but the 27th not until December 1804.

*Voltigeurs* had *chamois* collars (piped red or white) and occasionally *chamois* cuff flaps, with epaulettes, plumes and sword-knots in combinations of yellow, green and/or red. *Carabiniers* and *voltigeurs* sometimes had red or yellow shako bands respectively.

**Equipment** was like that of the Line, though all carried the sabre, generally with red knot for *carabiniers* and green or green with red trim for *chasseurs*. The cartridge box frequently bore a brass horn badge, and greater use was made of the dragoon musket.

**Officers'** distinctions were like those of the Line, with silver epaulettes and buttons and long-tailed coats, and the bicorn was more popular than the shako. (As late as 1814 some members of the 9th *Léger* apparently wore the bicorn).

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The French infantry of Austerlitz were redoubtable men. When at the battle Gen. Sainte-Hilaire was considering withdrawal in the face of huge odds, Col. Pouset of the 10th *Léger* cried, 'General, don't pull us back... There's only one honourable way out — go bald-headed at whoever is in front of us, and above all don't give the enemy time to see just how few we are!' — an audacious tactic, which worked<sup>(1)</sup>. An ordinary *carabinier* of the 17th *Léger* revived Napoleon's flagging spirits before the battle, as the

Emperor stumped past the sentry muttering 'Those Russian b——s think they can make us swallow anything'. 'Not on your life', interrupted the sentry, 'Not if we have anything to do with it!'<sup>(2)</sup>. And their resourcefulness was legendary: after heavy fighting before Austerlitz, the 26th *Léger* were concerned that their colonel, Pouget, should pass a comfortable night, so built him a soft bivouac: 'they dragged together a number of Russian corpses, and spread a layer of hay on the top'<sup>(3)</sup>. MI

#### Notes

- (1) *Memoirs du Général Baron Thiebault* (Paris, 1894) III p.476
- (2) *Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo* (Paris, 1828) II pp.198-99.
- (3) *Souvenirs du Guerre du Général Pouget* (Paris, 1895) p.69.

#### Sources

For details of uniform and organisation, see P.J. Haythornthwaite, *Napoleon's Line Infantry and Napoleon's Light Infantry* (London, 1983) Nos. 141 & 146 in the Osprey 'Men-at-Arms' series. The best modern history of the 1805 campaign is C. Duffy, *Austerlitz* (London, 1977). A number of reconstructions of the uniforms of the period are included in E.-L. Bucquoy, *Les Uniformes du Premier Empire: L'Infanterie*, ed. L.-Y. Bucquoy & G. Devautour (Paris, 1979).