







# Russian Infantry at Austerlitz, 1805

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Paintings by GERRY EMBLETON

Continuing our occasional series of articles on the character, organisation, and uniforms of the major armies engaged at significant Napoleonic battles, we follow our examination of the French infantry at Austerlitz ('MI' No.15) with an introduction to the Russian army of Alexander I — an army soundly beaten, but nevertheless deserving credit for the efforts already made to undo some of the damage inflicted by the Czar's mad predecessor.

## THE ARMY

Unlike the majority of European powers, the Russian military establishment was not concerned in the early wars of the French Revolution. Only in 1798 did the mad Czar Paul I (1754-1801) elect to join the fight against France, and only then largely for no better motive than the French occupation of Malta, the Czar having declared himself Grand Master of the Order of St. John! His influence upon Russia's mighty army had undone most of the modernisation achieved by Prince Potemkin in the last years of the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-96), mainly from hatred of anything associated with his mother; so that under Paul, out-dated uniforms and tactics were re-introduced,

much to the army's detriment. Only after Paul's murder in 1801 and the installation of his son as Czar Alexander I was the damage redressed.

Nevertheless, the resources of the Empire were vast. In 1795 the College of War calculated the enrolled army at 541,741 men, plus about 150,000 cossack light cavalry which could be mobilised in wartime, the immense population permitting the maintenance of such vast forces (at his accession Alexander ruled almost 44 million people). Over half the male population were serfs tied to agricultural estates, with which they were bought and sold, and from among whom the army was raised by conscription. Enlistment was for life (25 years after 1793), with no



## Captions to colour plates overleaf:

(1) Musketeer, Narva Regt.; his cartridge box is pulled round to the front for easy access, he wears his undress cap, and his greatcoat is rolled and slung, serving as rudimentary protection against sword-cuts.

(2) Grenadier, Kiev Grenadiers. He wears the new shako, and his greatcoat, which in this case has regulation Inspection-coloured collar and regimentally coloured shoulder straps. Note how the cylindrical valise was carried at an angle across the back.

(3) Musketeer, Perm Regt.; he has not yet received the shako, and wears his old bicorn, minus the pompon.

(a) Undress cap, Little Russia Grenadiers, Ukraine Inspection; the blue tassel identifies the 3rd Company.

(b) Undress cap, Riazan Regt., Finland Inspection; the red tassel identifies the 2nd Company.

(c)-(f): Old Grenadier caps, many of which must still have been in service in 1805. Metal cap fronts were often in the button colour of the old uniform, and designs varied. (c) is taken from an extant cap; (f) resembles that worn by the Pavlov Regt., whose caps were handed down to succeeding generations complete with dents and holes made by blows and musket balls, 600 remaining in use as late as 1917. The other caps show variations: (e) has the 'old' colouring of the Kursk Regt., with a white back, green band, white metal plate and yellow/black piping; (d) shows the 'new' pattern of the Perm Regt., with the rear in Smolensk Inspection colour and the band in regimental shoulder strap colour.

The caps of Fusiliers of Grenadier regiments were much squatter than the pattern shown.

(4) Grenadier, Jaroslav Regt., wearing an 'old' cap (raspberry rear, green headband), and a variation of the greatcoat without facing-coloured distinctions.

(5) Musketeer, 3rd Bn., Narva Regiment. His musket has a waterproof lock cover; and, unusually, he

carries the bayonet scabbard — normally these were not taken on campaign, the bayonet being permanently fixed.

(6), (7): Musketeers in greatcoats of the Kursk (left) and Riazan Regts., the former wearing the old bicorn stripped of ornaments — apparently a common campaign practice.

(g) The infantry shako.

(h) Variation with the leather neck-protector, abolished in 1812.

(i)-(k): Pompons of, respectively, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bns. — the coloured centres varied with each regiment.

(l)-(o): Sword knot tassels showing company distinctions in the fringes: white, red, sky blue and orange for 1st to 4th Cos, respectively. The Inspection colours of the 'bells' are Ukraine, Dniester pre-1805, Finland, Smolensk.

(p)-(r): Coat details of (p) Vladimir Regt., Dniester Inspection; (q) Apheron Regt., Brest Inspection; (r) Riazan Regt., Finland Inspection.

On a prolonged campaign the coats must often have resembled (q) — patched and repaired in places, but whenever possible in correct colours: there are many references to Napoleonic troops repairing uniforms with cloth from coat tails, discarded coats, etc. From a distance they must have looked smart, but close up, a mass of darns and patches; the men lived in these coats, out of doors in all weathers. The artist has handled a Russian coat of the 1850s with many such patches.

The uniform cloth was supposed to be a very dark green (even black cloth was used for some jackets); but paintings show many different tones — dyes must have varied particularly for the quite subtle facings, and uniforms must have faded and weathered unevenly.

A good reference for further study may be found in plates in Patrice Courcelle's series 'Ceux Qui Bravaient l'Aigle', reviewed in 'MI' No.14.

provision for leave; a recruit's family mourned his departure as death, for the chances of seeing him again were remote. As it was possible to buy substitutes for those conscripted, landowners normally only surrendered their most inefficient serfs.

The soldier's daily life was as wretched as that of the serf; despite Paul's attempts to decrease the severity of discipline, beating by the canes of NCOs was the usual method of instilling obedi-

ence, which the men, inured to flogging as serfs, accepted without complaint.

The officer corps was universally regarded as the most inefficient in Europe, its

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Line infantry, c.1800; Grenadiers (left) wear their mitre caps and have grenades on their cartridge boxes; all wear the earlier 'open' coat with coloured lapels which was replaced by the closed jacket. The officer (right) carries a spontoon; next to him is an NCO with a battalion marker flag. (Contemporary engraving).

members largely minor gentry and its higher ranks the preserve of the nobility, so that chances of promotion were limited. Largely uneducated and usually untrained, the officers were brave but inept — spending more time drinking, gambling and sleeping than training their men, as one observer remarked.

Nevertheless, from such unpromising material was forged a formidable army, possessing astonishing fortitude and blind obedience to orders, and a total reverence for Czar, religion and

The 1805 shako showing Grenadier distinctions of tall, bushy black plume and a grenade below the cockade. (Engraving after Vis-kovatov).



motherland. Living under the most miserable of conditions and with the most appalling rations (in 1805 an infantryman's annual maintenance, excluding grain, cost 9½ rubles — 2½ rubles less than the cost of his uniform!), they behaved like machines which only death could halt. Marbot wrote with incredulity of Golymin (1807), where Russian regiments marched to within 25 paces of the French musketry, yet the many who fell wounded made not a sound, having been forbidden to make a noise. Well might the English observer, John Spencer Stanhope, remark: 'I found them a fine hardy race, almost insensible to pain; they were, indeed, men of iron. . . though I witnessed the sufferings of many of their wounded men, I do not think that I ever heard a single one utter a groan. They really seemed to be made of different stuff from other men; their frames and

sinews were, apparently, as hard as their minds<sup>(1)</sup>.

Upon his accession Alexander I began to repair the mad Czar's damage; though the process took some time, it is interesting to note the improvement between 1799 and 1805. Most of the 'foreign' commentaries on the Russian army concern the post-1805 period, the most familiar (at least in English) being Sir Robert Wilson's two books<sup>(2)</sup>; but a witness who served alongside the Russians in both 1799 and 1805 was Sir Henry Bunbury. In 1799 the Russians were regarded as idle, inefficient, plundering drunkards, as an anonymous British witness colourfully remarked of those in the Netherlands that year: 'The Russians is people as has not the fear of God before their eyes, for I saw some of them with cheeses and butter and all badly wounded, and in particklar one man had an eit days clock on his back and

fitting all the time which made me to conclude and say all his vanity and vexation of spirit<sup>(3)</sup>.

Bunbury wrote with surprise at the difference between the Russians of 1799 and those of 1805: 'Those who had served with us in Holland were exactly the stiff, hard wooden machines which we have reason to figure to ourselves as the Russians of the Seven Years' War. Their dress and equipments seemed to have remained unaltered; they waddled slowly forward to the tap-tap of their monotonous drums; and if they were beaten they waddled slowly back again, without appearing in either case to feel a sense of danger, or the expediency of taking ultra tap-tap steps to better their condition.

'But I must do their troops in 1805 the justice to say that

<sup>(3)</sup>Superior numerals refer to notes at the end of this article.

#### Russian infantry regiments present at Austerlitz

Regiment	Inspection	Collar/cuffs	Shoulder straps	Pompon centre	Halberd-shafts & drumsticks
Fanagoria Grenadiers	Smolensk	white	white	white	white
Kiev Grenadiers	Ukraine	pink	white	white	white
Little Russia Grenadiers	Ukraine	pink	red	white	black
Apcheron	Brest	straw yellow	raspberry	light green	black
Archangel	Lithuania	light green	light green	turquoise	black
Azov	Brest	straw yellow	turquoise	red	yellow
Boutirsk	Kiev	raspberry	white	turquoise	black
Briansk	Ukraine	pink	raspberry	light green	coffee
Galitz	Ukraine	pink	turquoise	—	—
Jaroslav	Dniester	dark green	yellow	turquoise	yellow
Kursk	Smolensk	white	pink	pink	black
Moscow	Kiev	raspberry	red	red	white
Narva	Kiev	raspberry	pink	light green	white
New Ingermanland	Dniester	dark green	pink	lilac	coffee
Novgorod	Kiev	raspberry	raspberry	white	white
Old Ingermanland	Brest	straw yellow	red	yellow	white
Perm	Smolensk	white	raspberry	yellow	white
Podolsk	Brest	straw yellow	pink	—	—
Pskov	Lithuania	light green	yellow	white	yellow
Riazan	Finland	yellow	yellow	white	white
Smolensk	Ukraine	pink	yellow	yellow	yellow
Viazma	Kiev	raspberry	turquoise	white	coffee
Viborg	Brest	straw yellow	yellow	(or yellow?)	—
Vladimir	Dniester	dark green	white	white	coffee
				light green	white

**Note:** it is not possible to determine which of the above was completely newly-equipped at Austerlitz; some may have retained their old caps and other outdated items; for example, prior to 1805 the distinctive colour of the Dniester Inspection was lilac.

in appearance at least . . . they had made a surprising progress; they were now well armed and equipped, and had very much the outward character of good German soldiers. They were regular and firm in their movements, but they were still slow; and their regimental officers appeared to be very deficient in intelligence and activity. Even some of their major-

**Right:**

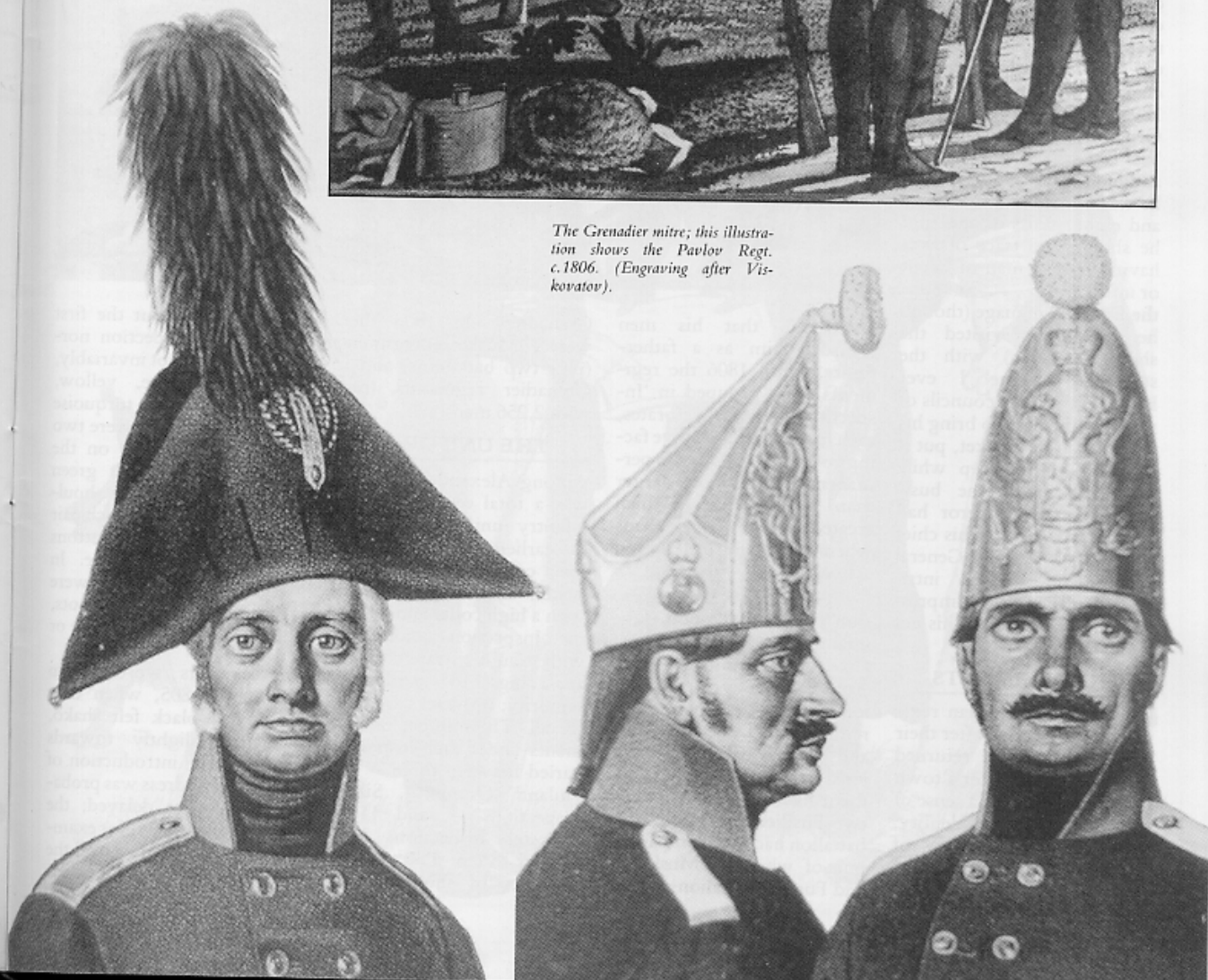
*Line infantry, c.1800. Whilst this depicts the earlier uniform, it shows a number of common campaign variations, including the removal of hat-ornaments and the use of hide knapsacks. The officer (left) carries a sponoon; the taller mitre cap is worn by a Grenadier and the shorter by a Fusilier, though the latter is portrayed rather too tall. (Engraving after L. Ebner).*

**Below:**

*Infantry officer, showing the bicorn and full ornaments, and the laced-shoulder straps. (Engraving after Viskovatov).*

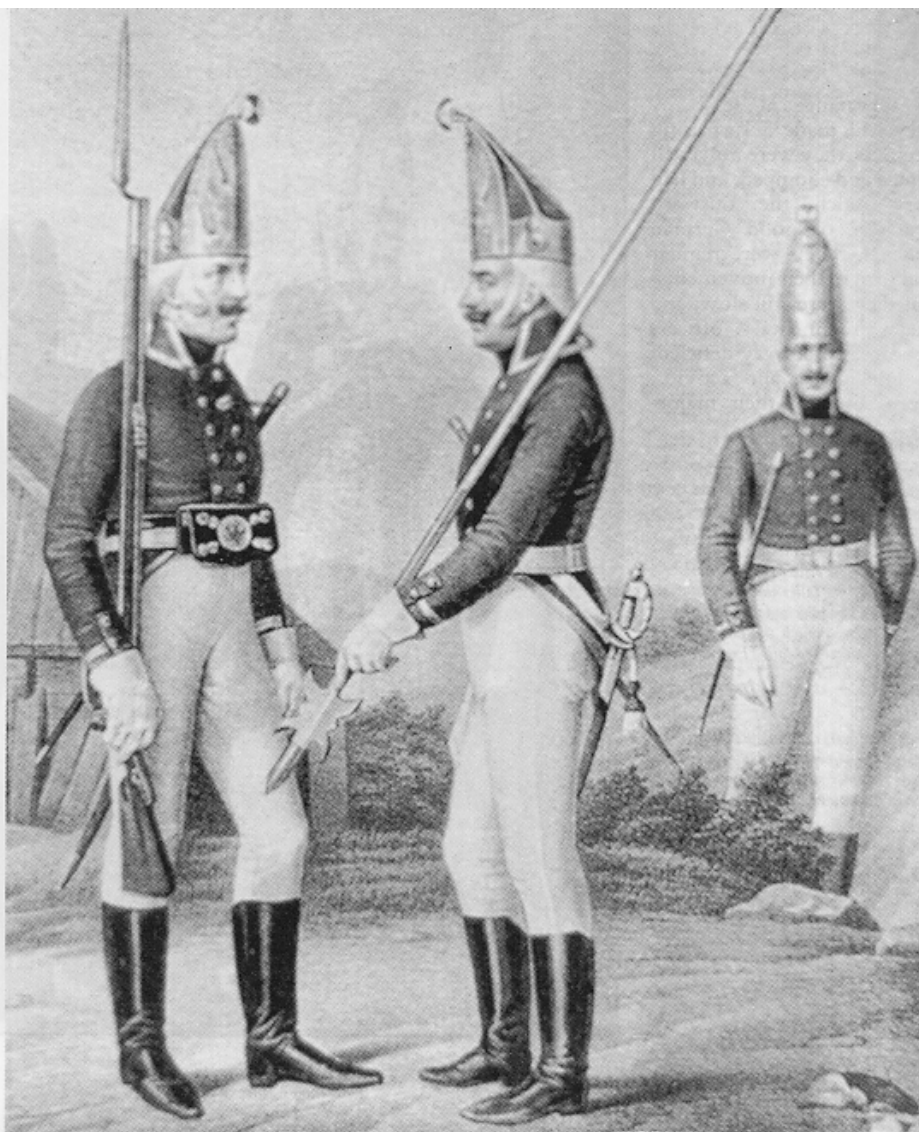


*The Grenadier mitre; this illustration shows the Pavlov Regt. c.1806. (Engraving after Viskovatov).*





NCOs of the Pavlov Regt. c.1805, depicting the quartered pompon (also worn on the shako), the lace edging to collar and cuffs, and (centre) the partizan. The cane was usually carried in the manner shown, suspended from a button on the jacket. (Engraving after Viskovatov).



generals were little better than semi-barbarians, ignorant, sensual, selfish, and perhaps venal . . . as brave as the soldiers may be, I cannot regard their armies as very formidable out of their own country, or in a protracted campaign. Their hospitals and commissariat were . . . deplorably bad; they are always in want of money, nor ever have they credit . . . <sup>(4)</sup>

The criticism of the higher command was valid throughout the period; in 1812, for example, Admiral Chichagov dismissed Gen. Markov who confused roads and rivers on a map! Bunbury's account of the Russian commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean in 1805 he regarded as typical: Gen. Lacy (of Irish descent) 'had been, no doubt, a brave and meritorious officer: but he was now between seventy and eighty years of age, and he showed no trace of ever having been a man of talent or information . . . he spoke the English language (though he had never visited the shores of Erin) with the strongest brogue I ever heard . . . At the councils of war . . . he used to bring his nightcap in his pocket, put it on, and go to sleep while others discussed the business . . . his Emperor had attached to Lacy, as his chief of staff, a certain General Oppermann . . . an intriguer, and he left an impression on one's mind of his not being too honest'<sup>(5)</sup>.

### THE REGIMENTS

Under Paul I, Russian regiments were named after their colonel. Alexander returned to naming them after a town or province, giving a sense of continuity and local identity; and until the expansions of 1812 it was usual for a colonel to spend many years in com-

mand, so that his men regarded him as a father-figure. Until 1806 the regiments were grouped in 'Inspections' or inspectorates, each having its distinctive facing colour; there were no permanent organisations larger than the regiment, which created appalling problems when they were ordered on active service.

Upon Alexander's accession there existed both Line infantry (or 'Musketeer') and Grenadier regiments, from April 1802 with three battalions each. Each Musketeer regiment had one Grenadier and two Musketeer battalions; each Grenadier regiment had one Grenadier and two Fusilier battalions. Each battalion had four companies, one of which in Musketeer and Fusilier battalions was of

Grenadiers. In 1805 there were 77 Musketeer regiments (plus two battalions) and 13 Grenadier regiments, each with 2,256 men.

### THE UNIFORMS

Among Alexander's reforms was a total overhaul of the infantry uniform, replacing the earlier 18th-century-style open coat with a dark green jacket, closed to the waist, with a high collar and cuffs of the Inspection colour and with shoulder straps coloured according to regimental seniority; turnbacks were red for all. The number of regiments under each Inspection varied between three — e.g. Finland, Orenburg, Siberia Inspections — and 11 — Dniester Inspection. Most had six to ten. The seniority sequence of shoulder strap

colours varied, but the first five in each Inspection normally, though not invariably, wore red, white, yellow, raspberry and turquoise respectively. There were two rows of six buttons on the breast, three to each green cuff-flap, one to each shoulder strap and one on each pair of turnbacks, the buttons usually a copper shade. In winter white breeches were worn with black knee-boots, and in summer with white or black gaiters.

Musketeers wore bicorne hats until 1805, when they adopted a black felt shako, widening slightly towards the top. The introduction of the new headdress was probably somewhat delayed; the Pavlov Grenadiers, for example, still had not received the shako by the Battle of Fried-



land (1807), and in commemoration of their bravery in that action were ever after permitted to retain their old caps. The shako bore a black cockade with orange edge and brass button; and a woollen pompon which was white for a regiment's 1st Battalion, yellow for the 2nd and red for the 3rd, with a regimentally-coloured centre. The black leather chinstrap buckled at the right ear. Grenadiers wore metal-fronted mitre caps until 1805, the back in the Inspection colour and the headband in the shoulder strap colour; their new shakos bore a brass grenade below

the cockade and a very bushy 20-in. black plume. Queues were retained until 1806, but powdered only on special occasions.

**Equipment** consisted of a black leather cartridge box at the right hip, on a wide white belt over the left or right shoulder, with a white metal mess tin attached. The knapsack was a cylindrical black leather valise on a white belt over the left or right shoulder, with a white metal mess tin attached. The **undress cap** resembled the French *bonnet de police*, in dark green with the headband in the Inspection colour, piped in the shoulder strap colour, with a tassel of

with the 'bell' in the Inspection colour and the fringe in company colour (white, red, sky blue or orange). The knapsack was a cylindrical black leather valise on a white belt over the left or right shoulder, with a white metal mess tin attached.

The **undress cap** resembled the French *bonnet de police*, in dark green with the headband in the Inspection colour, piped in the shoulder strap colour, with a tassel of

Russian infantry officers in a variety of orders of dress; these examples all conform to the St. Petersburg Inspection, whose colour was red.

(1) Plain, un-ornamented, single-breasted coat often worn on campaign, here with shoulder straps removed; plain bicorne; riding overalls of personal acquisition. All turnbacks were red; the red collar and cuffs are the Inspection colour.

(2) The same coat, but here showing uncoloured collar and cuffs — although officially green facings were the distinction of Jäger regiments. The caped greatcoat was usually green, but sometimes grey; they were often lined white, and sometimes piped in colour. The undress cap is the *furashka*, a non-regulation item.

(3) The *surtuk*, a frock-cum-greatcoat, with white-lined lapels showing.

(4) Full dress uniform, with decorated hat, gorget, and laced shoulder straps (here in the light green of the Lithuania Regiment). White-grey 'gaiter-trousers' were another alternative to the ordinary white breeches and knee boots.





Grenadiers c. 1804-05, showing the rear of the infantry equipment — the cartridge-box with additional grenade badges, and the mess tin atop the valise — and the greatcoat. (Engraving after Viskovatov).

#### Below

Grenadier drummer (left) and NCO musician. Musicians wore the ordinary uniform with the addition of white lace and laced shoulder-wings; plumes were red or white over red for the regimental band; NCO pompons were quartered red and white. Equipment was white leather, but the drum-apron usually brown hide; the drums were brass with white cords and hoops painted in green and white triangles. (Engraving after Viskovatov).

company colour with fringe of mixed Inspection colour and dark green. The **great-coat** (*shinel*), looser and more comfortable than the jacket and often worn in its stead, was made of brownish-grey cloth (in differing shades), single-breasted, and usually with collar and shoulder straps coloured like those of the jacket.

**NCOs' rank distinctions** consisted of a quartered shako pompon, the sides white and the upper and lower sections mixed black and orange; and gold lace on the upper edge of the shako, on the front and lower edges of the collar, around the top of the cuff and down the forward-facing edge of the flap. For Grenadiers, the top of the plume was white with a vertical orange stripe over the top. A cane (often suspended from a button on the breast) acted as a sign of office, and most NCOs carried a partizan-like weapon with the shaft painted in the regimental colour.

**Officers' uniforms** resembled those of the rank-and-file, but with longer skirts. They retained the bicorn until 1807, though it is possible that those of the Caucasus Inspection abandoned it as early as 1805. The black bicorn had a black and gold cockade, gold loop and gilt button, silver and orange corner tassels and a black cock-feather plume. Further marks of rank were laced-shoulder straps (*epaulettes*) were adopted only in 1807); a large silver gorget (gilt for field ranks) bearing a



gilt crowned trophy of arms with a white-enamelled centre bearing a black and gold double eagle; and a silver sash, often wrapped twice around the waist, with three interwoven lines of black and orange and two large silver tassels. Their arms were a straight-bladed *épée* with gilt hilt with shell-guards, urn pommel and single knuckle-bow, a grip bound with silver wire, with a gilt-mounted black leather scabbard, and a silver knot with black and orange intermixed. Officers carried a cane and junior ranks a spontoon, with shafts coloured like the NCO's partizans, until 1807. **MI**

#### Notes

- (1) *Memoirs of Anna Maria Wilhelmina Pickering*. . . Extracts from the Journals of her Father John Spencer Stanhope. . . (London, 1903, p.529).
- (2) *Brief Remarks on the Character and Composition of the Russian Army, and a Sketch of the Campaigns in Poland in the Years 1806 and 1807* (London, 1810); and *Narrative of Events during the Invasion of Russia by Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Retreat of the French Army* (London, 1860).
- (3) *Recollections of the British Army*, in Colburn's *Military Magazine*, February 1836; Sir John Fortescue (*History of the British Army*, IV [London, 1906] p.677) believed that the author belonged to the 35th Foot.
- (4) *Narrative of some Passages in the Great War with France 1799-1810* (1854; 1927 edn. pp.145-46).
- (5) *ibid.* p.127.

#### Sources

The major source of information is *Historical Description of the Uniforms and Armaments of the Russian Army* (A.V. Viskovatov, St. Petersburg, 1844-56) which has splendid plates; others include *L'Armée Russe* (W. Zwegintzow, Paris, 1973) and *L'Armée Russe sous le Tsar Alexandre Ier* (A. Krijitsky & M. Gayda, Paris, 1955). Modern works in English include *Uniforms of the Imperial Russian Army* (B. & J. Mollo, Poole, 1979); *The Imperial Russian Army 1805-15* (W.H. Murray, New York, 1965); *The Russian Army of the Napoleonic Wars (I): Infantry 1799-1814* (P.J. Haythornthwaite, Osprey Men-at-Arms series, London, 1987); and especially useful for establishments and manoeuvres is *The Russian Army 1800-1815* (G.F. Nafziger, Cambridge, Ontario, 1983). C.W. Hansen's *The Russian Army 1805* was published in the Danish periodical *Chakoten* in 1985; edged weapons are described in *Russian Military Swords 1801-1917* (E. Mollo, London, 1969). *L'Esercito Russo 1805-15: Fanteria* (I. Falzone & G. Rava, Parma, n.d.) reproduces Viskovatov engravings. *Austerlitz* (C. Duffy, London, 1977) remains the best modern study of the campaign.