Interpreting Napoleonic Prints

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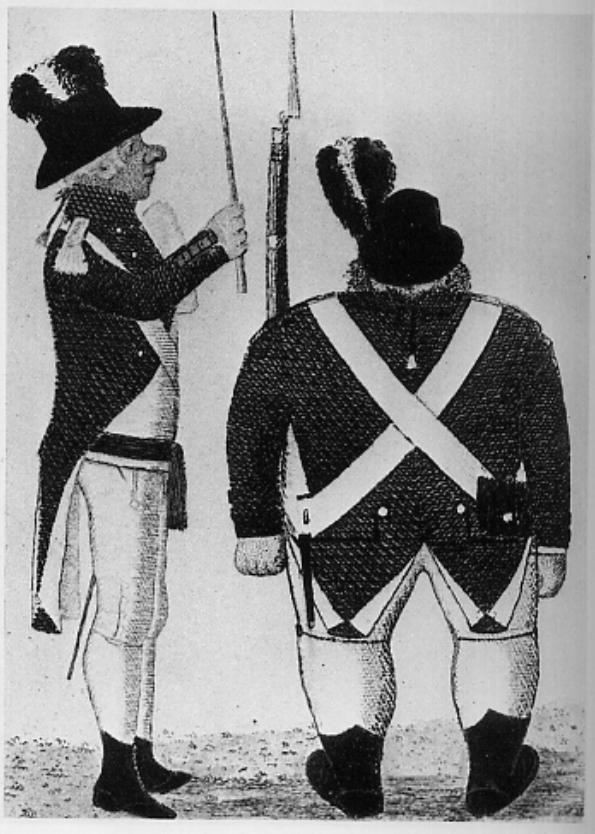
To the historian, and most especially to the uniform enthusiast, contemporary illustrations form the single most valuable source of information on the appearance of our military ancestors. Such illustrations fall into two categories: original works, and prints, of which the latter are by far the more common. The simple fact of a print's production during the period of the subject it depicts is not, however, a guarantee of its veracity. The ability to distinguish between an accurate print and one of dubious authenticity is to some degree a matter of experience; but even the tyro can pass reasonably informed judgement when in possession of a number of basic facts concerning the varieties of prints produced at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century.



PRODUCTION METHODS

It is useful to understand the processes involved in the production of various types of print, if only as an aid to identification and date. Basically, a 'print' is any impression made from a metal plate, stone or wooden block, the terminology varying with the process involved.

Line engravings were produced by cutting an image with a sharp tool into a plate of copper (later steel), which was then coated with ink, wiped to leave ink only in the engraved lines, and clamped in a press upon a slightly damp sheet of paper, so that the ink was transferred from the engraved lines to the paper. At the edges of such prints may sometimes be seen a 'plate-mark' or depression in the paper, the mark of the edge of the metal plate. *Stipple engraving* employed a similar technique but with dots instead of lines carved into the plate.

Etchings were produced by coating a copper engraving-plate with a wax film, scraping away the required design down to the metal and then immersing the plate in acid, which bit into the exposed copper to produce an image on the plate. *Mezzotinting* — a process reputedly invented by Prince Rupert of the Rhine — involved roughening the surface of a copper plate and then scraping away the roughened surface to produce lighter shades and white lines. *Aquatinting* was a variety of etching invented by J. B. Le Prince in 1768, involving the immersion in acid of a copper plate covered with powdered resin, the result giving delicate shading resembling a water-colour or wash drawing, hence the name.

Lithography, invented by Alois Senefelder in 1798, was a medium based upon the fact that water and greasy ink repel each other; a design

Above right:
Fig. 1: Sgt. Maj. Patrick Gould, Royal Edinburgh Volunteers; mezzotint by John Young after George Watson, 1794. The uniform was dark blue with scarlet facings and gold lace, white waistcoat and legwear, and a black 'round hat' with black and white feathers.

Right:
Fig. 2: 'To the Right About-Face': Sgt. Maj. Patrick Gould (left) in an engraved cartoon by John Kay, 1797.

drawn in a greasy medium, damped and covered with ink (adhering only to the greasy design) will transfer the image onto a printing surface. Initially stone was used for printing, though zinc was the commonest alternative. Lithographs bear no plate-mark; and it was not until the Napoleonic Wars had ended that lithography became common, the various types of engraving being the almost universal medium. Similarly, *woodcuts* (made by drawing the design on a wooden block and carving away all except the lines to be printed) are rarely encountered with Napoleonic subjects.

COLOURING

The most important factor to be remembered concerns the colouring of prints. Virtually without exception, no 'colour prints' of the Napoleonic Wars were produced at the time; i.e. none were printed in colour, as colour printing for all practical purposes was unknown. Instead, what existed were *coloured* prints: engravings printed in black-and-white and then commercially hand-coloured for sale. Herein lies one of the pitfalls concerning all such prints: that the accuracy of colouring was dependent upon the journeyman colourist, not upon the artist or engraver. But this does not automatically disqualify the veracity of coloured prints; for when prints were offered for sale and could be compared for accuracy with uniforms which might be seen in the streets of any European city, it is obvious that considerable care would have been taken to ensure that the colourist made no errors.

He would usually be given a sample print to copy, coloured by the artist or under the artist's instruction. Colouring of prints requires some skill — some are in themselves truly works of art — but as in most cases the shading is already present as etched lines, it often involved no more than applying a single wash of transparent water-colour, thus taking so little time as to render it a commercial proposition. Most coloured prints of this era are competently coloured; those which are crudely executed may, in fact, be cases of later or amateur colouring, of little historic value.

Left:
Fig. 3: Flanqueur *of the French Imperial Guard, an engraving by Pierre Martinet; and Fig. 3a (above), an alternative 'state' of the same print.*

Portraits

Military prints of this period may be divided into three basic subject types: portraits, uniform studies, and battle scenes.

Portraits of named individuals were very popular, especially those of famous heroes, whose image would enjoy wide commercial appeal — though prints of lesser-known soldiers were produced in smaller numbers, sometimes by subscription, as mementoes for persons who knew the subject or his relations, or as examples of the work of a renowned painter. Portrait-prints were almost invariably copied from oil paintings taken from life, and thus are as accurate as the original; they are the most reliable military prints ever produced.

One of the finest examples is reproduced here (Fig. 1): Sgt. Maj. Patrick Gould of the Royal Edinburgh Volunteers, a mezzotint by John Young after a painting by George Watson, 1794. Another depiction of this noted Edinburgh drill-sergeant (who as a reward for his services was permitted to wear his uniform ever afterwards, a singular distinction) is shown in Fig. 2: 'To the Right About-Face', an engraved cartoon by John Kay dated 1797. A comparison with the Watson portrait establishes the Kay version as having equal accuracy in the depiction of the uniform (note the removal by this date of the hat-crest), illustrating perfectly the point that accuracy of uniform-depiction is not necessarily dependent upon artistic finesse — crudely drawn illustrations by eye-witnesses may well depict uniform detail as accurately as immaculate oil portraits.

Uniform prints

In the majority of uniform prints *per se* the uniform aspect was of primary importance, and generally, such uniform studies have a high degree of accuracy. Exceptions do occur, however, especially when the subject is an army foreign to the artist — e.g. the foreign uniforms shown in Goddard & Booth's *Military Costume of Europe*, published 1812–22, which should be approached with circumspection. In uniform prints accuracy of detail takes precedence over artistic appearance, though frequently the two are combined in such series as Charles Hamilton Smith's *Costume of the Army of the British Empire* (1812); while Edward Dayes' series of uniform studies of British Foot Guards and infantry published in 1792–93 are masterpieces of the first order.

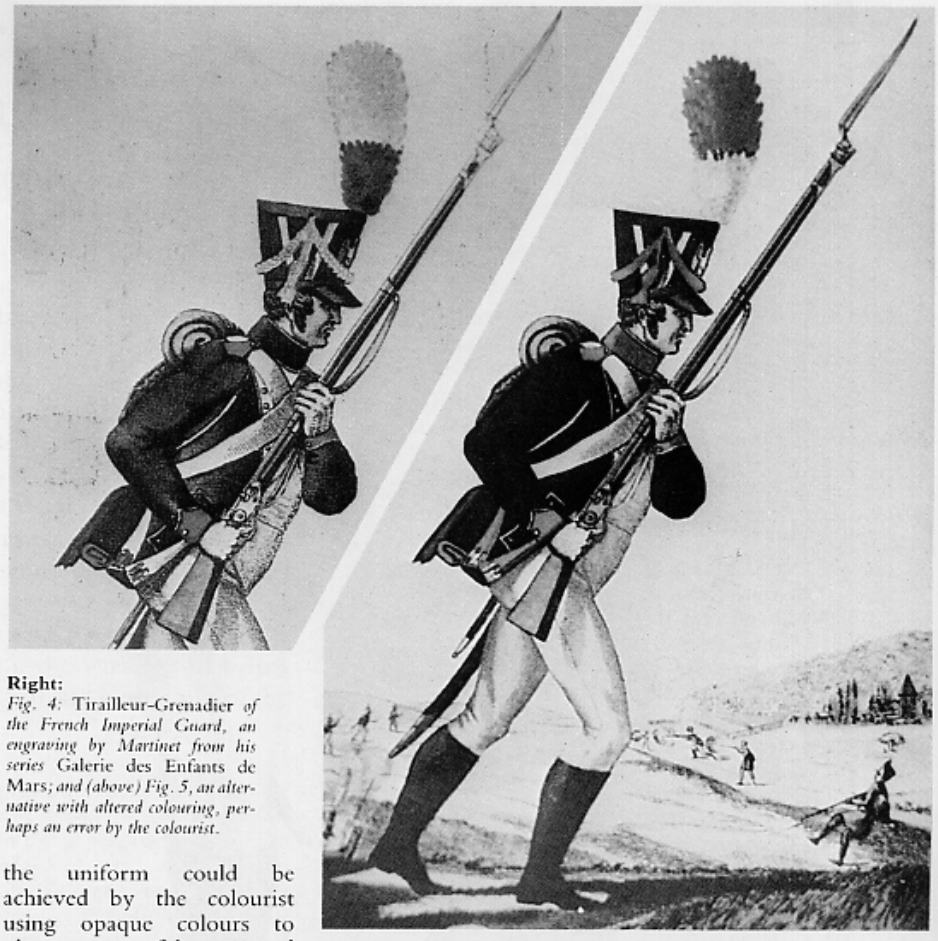
(NB: 'Remote' caption placing for easy reference to right-hand plate)

Colour captions, p. 41:

Plate D: Grenadier sergeant, 2nd (Coldstream) Foot Guards, 1792; engraving by T. Kirk after Edward Dayes. The Dayes' series are among the finest military prints of all time.

Plate F: Sapeur *of the French* Garde Nationale, *c. 1814; illustrative of the best and most accurate of French popular prints.*

Plate G: Private, Prussian Foot Guards, 1814. A French popular print which again demonstrates the accuracy of many of these; in this case it can be dated precisely, as it illustrates the so-called 'liberation brassard', a white band tied around the arm as a way of identifing all Allied soldiers, whose many and varied uniforms had led to considerable confusion in action.



Right:
Fig. 4: Tirailleur-Grenadier *of the French Imperial Guard, an engraving by Martinet from his series* Galerie des Enfants de Mars; *and (above) Fig. 5, an alternative with altered colouring, perhaps an error by the colourist.*

Print 'states'

The ever-changing minutiae of military uniforms throughout the period resulted in a peculiar feature known as the 'states' of a print, by which a detail of uniform would be altered on the engraving-plate to bring the uniform shown up to date with the latest regulations. Where the change of uniform was not dramatic this was achieved easily; in other cases the entire design might be re-drawn and improved.

A classic example is that shown in Figs. 3 and 3a, Pierre Martinet's print of a *Flanqueur* of the French Imperial Guard, which exists in two states or varieties: identical poses but one showing a spherical pompon on the shako, and the other a mushroom-shaped plume. Such variations in designs did not always necessitate the re-engraving of the plate; for example, a number of Martinet's prints were suitable for use to represent a number of different regiments, according to the colouring. Figs. 4 and 5 show Martinet's version of the uniform of the *Tirailleurs-Grenadiers* of the Imperial Guard, with colour variations in the plume, shako cords, lapels and turnbacks (though one of these varieties *may* represent a colourist's error!).

Even greater alteration in the uniform could be achieved by the colourist using opaque colours to obscure some of the engraved designs; for example, Martinet's plate of the 2nd (Dutch) Lancers of the Imperial Guard was originally that used for the 1st (Polish) Lancers, with the Polish shabraque-eagle obscured by opaque paint (but incorrectly leaving the Polish cross visible on the cockade); while prints like the Martinet *Garde d'Honneur* of the Imperial Guard were printed with a blank in the title, '— *Régiment*', for the regimental number to be added by the colourist in accordance with the colour-scheme he had applied. A better example even than this might be the series known as the '*British Military Library*', a set of 29 engravings published by J. Carpenter of London in 1799–1801, which may be found with varieties covering the uniforms of almost 80 regiments.

More radical changes might be made in the improved state of a print. Figs. 6 and 7 are examples, being two versions of three known to exist of Plate 7 of Thomas Rowlandson's *Loyal Volunteers of London and Environs* (1798–99). While slight, intriguing variations of colouring are known in this series — for example, did the Billingsgate Association really change their wings from red to blue or is one version an error by Rowlandson's colourist? — several prints were re-drawn more than once. Fig. 6 shows what is probably the first version, featuring a remarkably lumpish St. Clement Danes' Volunteer; when the print was re-drawn to show the addition of a coloured plume, the opportunity was taken to transform the man into the more elegant figure in Fig. 7. (A third version had to be produced to alter the long gaiters to ankle-length light infantry style.)

Having praised the overall standard of accuracy of those prints designed specifically as depictions of a uniform, we should make some mention of those which are inaccurate. 'Inaccuracy' covers a multitude of factors, from sheer bad observation to more subtle and interesting distortions.

Generally, the most unreliable of all uniform prints of this era are those published in Paris during the Allied occupations of 1814 and 1815–16: popular prints produced in great haste and profusion, sometimes negligently coloured. In many cases all that these provide is an 'impression' of how the Allied troops appeared to the French; all finer details were too complex for the colourist to attempt to master, and the intricacies of uniform too time-consuming for either the artist or engraver. The result is a quaint conversation-piece of little documentary significance.

Even here, though,

Right:
Fig. 9: Sgt. Patrick Masterson of the 87th (Prince of Wales' Irish) Regt., capturing the Eagle of the French 8ème Ligne at Barossa; the earliest and most accurate version, drawn and published by Denis Dighton within two months of the event.

Far right:
Fig. 10: Charles Hamilton Smith's version of the capture of the Barossa Eagle, showing Masterson and his regiment wearing the 1812 shako: an accurate uniform, but not for the date of the action. The chevrons are discussed in the text.

Below:
Fig. 11: The Clark & Dubourg print of the combat between Sgt. Masterson and the French Eagle-bearer, S/Lt. Edmé Guillemain; published two years later than the Hamilton Smith version, but more accurate in depicting the earlier 'stovepipe' shako.

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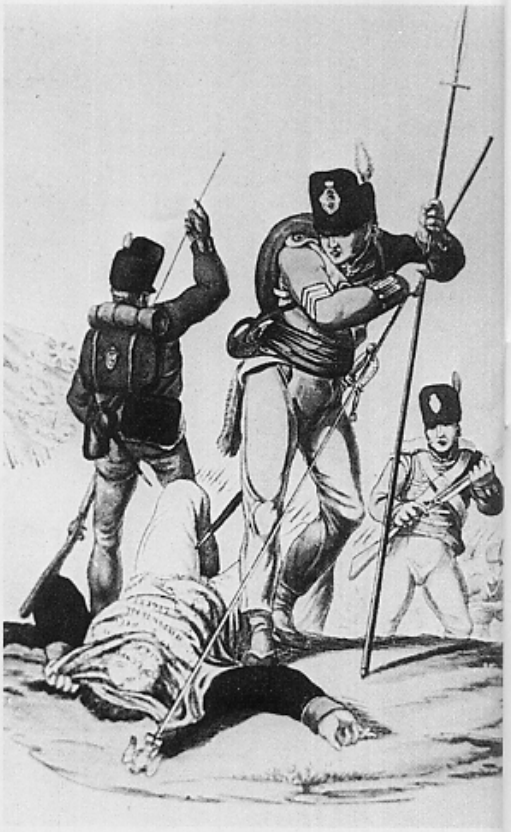


year later than the incident depicted. An even greater curiosity is the fact that the most obvious 'error' — Chamorin's red trousers, which the French army did not adopt until a later date — is in fact no error at all; for many French cavalrymen in the Peninsula adopted baggy non-regulation overalls (similar to the Arab *saroual* so popular later in the century) of various shades of red or brown local cloth, to replace their worn-out regulation legwear.

Figs. 9 to 11 illustrate a similar case, all prints showing the capture of the Eagle of the French 8th Line Regt. at Barossa in 1811 by Sgt. Patrick Masterson of the British 87th Foot. The incident itself offers interest enough: for example, the 8th endeavoured to conceal the capture from their own War Ministry, stating the Eagle to have been destroyed by a cannon-ball; and the incident laid the foundation of the Masterson family's prosperity, a descendant being the Maj. J. E. I. Masterson who won a Victoria Cross for the Devonshire Regiment in the Boer War. The three depictions of the action, all produced within four years of the incident, exemplify a range of interesting features.

Fig. 9 was drawn and published by Denis Dighton in May 1811 (only some two months after the battle, while the subject was fresh in the public mind). It is the most accurate of the three, showing Masterson correctly accoutred, even though his one-piece gaiter-trousers might well have been replaced by loose overalls at this period.

Fig. 10 is Charles Hamilton Smith's version, published in January 1813; again it shows the Eagle-bearer, *Sous-Lieutenant* Edmé Guillemain, lying dead at Masterson's feet; but this time the 87th are shown in the uniform current at the time of the print's publication, including the 'Belgic' shako authorised in 1812 — again, a uniform correct for a date later than that of the incident it depicts. The third version of the action (Fig. 11) was one of a series of battle-scenes by Clark and Dubourg, published in 1815; altogether more hectic, it is alone of the three in showing (right foreground) the body of Ensign Edward Keogh, killed trying to capture the Eagle, while Masterson struggles violently with Guillemain. Uniforms are accurate (note the correct 'stovepipe' shako of the 87th, and the baggy, pink-brown French trousers), though the French shako-lace is probably in error.

A final point relates to the strange depiction of rank-chevrons in the Hamilton Smith version, with the point up instead of down. This is probably an error by the artist — it is not impossible, though unlikely, that it shows a hitherto unrecorded regimental variation — yet is of interest in showing how one artist would copy from another. In Baron Lejeune's painting *The Battle of Chiclana* (the French name for Barossa), in the foreground is a British sergeant (not wearing the green facings of the 87th, it is true) but with the Belgic

shako and the eccentric point-up chevrons. The coincidence is surely too great; Lejeune must have required an 'authentic' print on which to base the British uniforms in his painting, and used as a reference a print by the artist normally regarded as the most accurate source for British uniforms, Hamilton Smith. He could not know that the chevrons probably represent one of Hamilton Smith's rare errors, nor that the shako was actually not introduced until the year after the event it depicts.

(Confusions over the Belgic shako are not uncommon, and though not strictly appropriate to an article concerning prints contemporaneous with the events they depict, it is worth mentioning the *caveat* regarding the battle paintings of the popular Victorian artist Richard Simkin, which decorate many Messes and regimental museums. Simkin habitually painted his British Napoleonic infantry wearing the Belgic cap, even for actions fought years before its introduction. It is especially ironic that Elizabeth Butler's famous painting *Quatre Bras*, which does show the infantry uniform of 1815 correctly, including the Belgic shako, in fact illustrates the only Line regiment in the entire army — 28th Foot — which never adopted the pattern, but retained the earlier 'stovepipe'.)

made in a print, it was likely to be repeated if the plate were copied by another artist. Plate B is an example: published in George Walker's *Costume of Yorkshire* (London & Leeds, 1814), it is an engraving by R. & D. Havell after Walker, dated 1 February 1814 and depicting a grenadier of the 1st West York Militia. The uniform is portrayed accurately, but note the left cuff: by an artist's oversight, the buttons are mistakenly shown near the bottom of the cuff instead of on the upper edge.

As uniforms of many regiments followed a similar basic pattern, the same print might be used with altered colouring to depict another corps (as in the Martinet cases noted above); thus Walker's grenadier may be found re-titled to represent the 66th Foot. But when copied by another artist, even obvious errors might not be corrected, as Fig. 12 shows. In this plate from *Historical Records of the Second Royal Surrey* (J. Davis, London 1877), both figures are copied directly from Walker, the grenadier even having the buttons in the wrong place as on the original.

Similarly misleading can be modern captions to contemporary prints which are often reproduced in books and articles. Whereas even some contemporary captions are ambiguous, the uniform enthusiast can easily be led astray by misuse of contemporary material. A classic case is found in the fine history *The Royal Manx Fencibles* (B. E. Sargeaunt, Aldershot 1947), which reproduces plates of 'Types of Uniform' which the reader would suppose illustrated the costume of the corps about which the book was written. In fact, though no explanation is given, the prints actually show units as diverse as the 2nd and 3rd Foot Guards and the Royal Lancashire Militia, being taken from Edmund Scott's *Manual Exercise*, a series of stipple engravings published in 1797. An accurate print with a wrong caption is almost as useless as an inaccurate print, unless the researcher is sufficiently expert to recognise the print without needing to refer to a caption.

IDENTIFYING PRINTS

By artistic convention, the identity of artists, engravers, etc. was usually recorded by means of an abbreviated Latin inscription; thus a few lines, once deciphered, provide the researcher with all the information he requires to identify the print. The commonest include *caelavit, inc.* (*incidit*), *sc.* or *sculp.* (*sculpsit*), all signifying 'engraved'; *del.* or *delin.* (*delineavit* or *delineator*), meaning 'drew' or 'draughtsman'; *fec.* or *f.* (*fecit*), 'engraved' or 'etched'; *composuit*, 'designed'; *excudit* or *pub.*, *'published'*; and *pinx.* (*pinxit*), 'painted'. Thus an inscription 'aquat. F. C. Lewis, eng. Meyer, del. Jas. Green, pub. John Wallis Jun.' describes one of Wallis's *London Volunteers* series of 1801–04, a drawing by Green, engraved by Meyer, aquatinted by Lewis and published by Wallis.

This article may cause the amateur uniform-researcher to doubt what he had hitherto regarded as infallible sources, and to call into question the entire range of contemporary illustrated material. But take heart; experience can be acquired without pain, and although no comparable catalogue for European prints exists, the *Index to British Military Costume Prints 1500–1914* (London, 1972) is an invaluable guide; while an introduction to the technical aspects is contained in two publications by the British Museum, *Looking at Prints: a Guide to Technical Terms* (P. Goldman, 1981), and *Prints and Printmaking* (A. Griffiths, 1980). MI

Colour captions, p. 40:

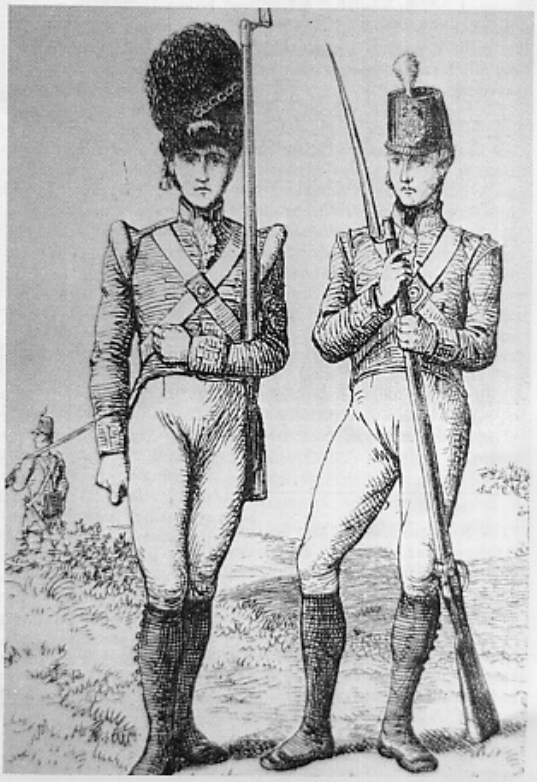
Plate A: Grenadier of the 3rd (Scots) Foot Guards, 1815; an engraving published chez Genty *in Paris, and lightly tinted. A remarkably accurate example of a French popular print; note the design on the rear of the knapsack.*

Plate B: Grenadier of the 1st West York Militia; engraving by R. & D. Havell after George Walker, dated February 1814. An accurate depiction, apart from the error in the position of the buttons on the left cuff.

Plate C: 'A Corporal of the 13th Light Dragoons Killing a French Colonel'; engraving by M. Dubourg after Denis Dighton, showing the duel between Cpl. Logan and Col. Chamorin at Campo Major. Logan's uniform is 'accurate' — but for a date significantly later than that of the action depicted.

Plate E: Gunners of the Royal Foot Artillery, 1815; aquatint by I. C. Stadler after Charles Hamilton Smith, from the latter's Costume of the Army of the British Empire.

Fig. 12: A print purporting to show the uniform of the 2nd Surrey Militia, from Davis's regimental history (1877), but in fact copied directly from Walker's Costume of Yorkshire, *even to the error on the left cuff, as shown in Plate B.*



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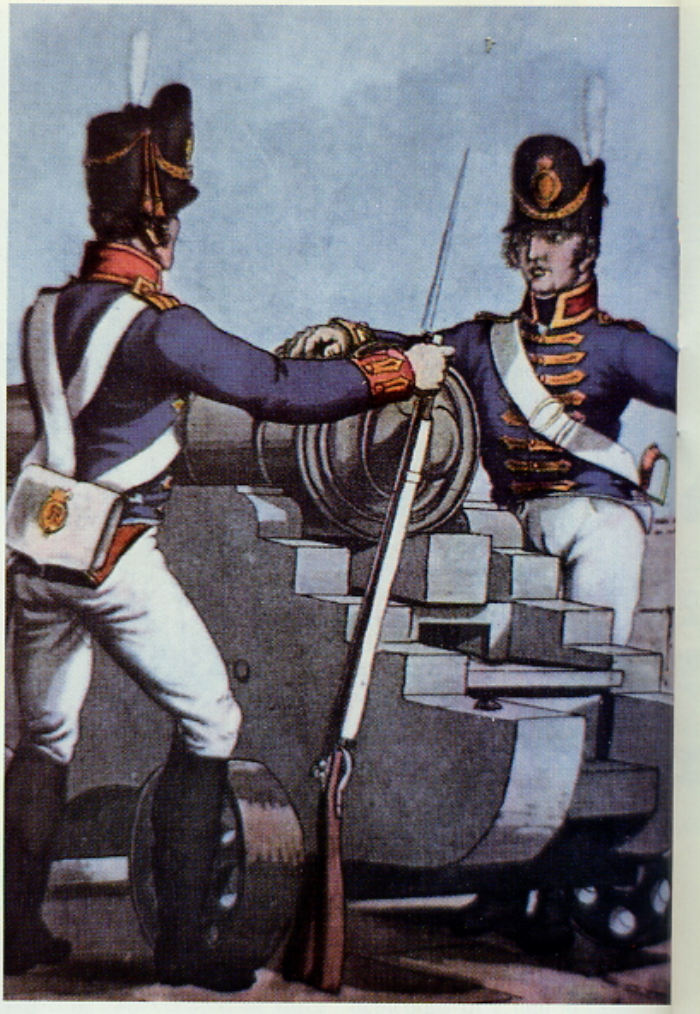

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