

# The British Infantry Officer of the Peninsular War (2)

PHILIP J. HAYTHORNTHWAITE  
Paintings by BRYAN FOSTEN

Part 1 of this article described the officer's uniform clothing and insignia. In this concluding part we cover the swords, belts and plates carried and worn by officers in the field; their campaigning equipment and privately purchased kit; and some known regimental distinctions recorded among their uniforms.



Shoulder belt plates. That of the 48th Foot, c.1812, is gilt, with a silver rim and central number, the latter on a matted ground. The rectangular plate of the 20th Foot, worn c.1802-20, is silver with a mounted design of the regimental number in Roman numerals within a crowned wreath, above the 'Egyptian' badge awarded to the regiment in July 1802.



Right: Serpent and lion-mask waist belt clasp, as worn by light companies.

## Belts and Plates

Although on active service pistols or even muskets might be carried, infantry officers were officially armed only with a sword. This was suspended from a belt of buff-leather, worn over the right shoulder to the left hip. This was normally worn over the coatee and secured by the epaulette strap; for undress, it was worn over the waistcoat but under the coatee. The belt was whitened or, in those regiments with buff uniform facings, left in its natural colour.

The belt was fastened by an ornate plate situated in the middle of the wearer's breast; each regiment had its own pattern of plate, in metal corresponding to the gold or silver lace worn by regimental officers, with devices mounted in the contrasting metal. Devices included any distinctive badges possessed by the regiment, and usually (though not invariably) the regimental number. There were, in addition, plates of what might be termed a 'general pattern', bearing a crowned royal cypher, which may have been used by

officers who did not possess the official regimental plate.

Plate design seems to have been determined regimentally, not by orders from higher authority; indeed, it was not unknown for different battalions of the same regiment to wear plates of different designs, or for the flank companies to sport variations incorporating their own grenade or bugle devices. At the turn of the century the majority of plates were oval and engraved; as time passed, embossed plates or those with mounted designs (occasionally with fine enamelling) became increasingly common, as did rectangular plates. Workmanship was often of high quality, involving precious metals, e.g. silver and silver-gilt.

Officers of battalion companies wore the sword suspended from a frog at the left hip. For flank companies the usual suspension was by two slings, in light cavalry fashion, either from the shoulder belt or (unofficially) from a narrow waist belt instead. Field officers, whose mounted duties made slings more convenient, also used the waist belt; and occasionally a whole battalion would adopt a non-regulation style, such as the black waist belt universally worn by officers of the 5th Foot. A belt fitting favoured by officers of light companies was a silver whistle, used for signalling

when their men were skirmishing in open order; this could alternatively be suspended from a buttonhole on the jacket.

## Swords

Prior to 1796 no definite regulation pattern of sword had existed, the official instructions noting only that it should have a 'strong, substantial', straight blade at least 32 in. long, and a hilt of gilt or silver according to the lace colour. These instructions produced the 'spadroon' pattern of 1786. In 1796 a new sword was ordered, with a similar blade and a new gilt hilt with a single knuckle-bow, shell guards, and a grip bound with silver wire. As the shells prevented it lying flat against the body, the left-hand shell was often hinged to fold flat when not in combat. Handsome though this sword appeared, it was of limited use, and the guard was fragile: Mercer of the Royal Artillery noted that '... nothing could be more useless or ridiculous ... [it was] good neither for cut nor thrust and was a perfect encumbrance'.<sup>1</sup> But, as it was never intended that infantry officers should become involved in hand-to-hand fighting, the pattern remained unchanged for a quarter of a century.

Originally the straight-bladed 1796 pattern was intended for use by flank company as well as by 'battalion' officers; but, even before its introduction, grenadiers and light infantry had begun unofficially using curved, light cavalry-style sabres as a further demonstration of their elite status. In 1799 sabres were officially approved; but no official pattern was specified until 1803, when a version with an exaggeratedly curved blade some



<sup>1</sup> Superior numbers in this article refer to source notes at the end.

30 in. long was introduced. It had a gilt hilt with a single knuckle-bow (sometimes mounted with small grenade or bugle badges) connecting a lion-head pommel to a small, voided handguard. Incorporated in the knuckle-bow was a moulded or pierced crowned royal cypher. Both the 1796 and 1803 patterns had black leather scabbards with gilt mounts, those for the sabre often including a very long chape and wide lockets.

Attractive though it appeared, as a weapon the 1803 sabre, too, was reviled. Kincaid described it as 'better designed to shave a lady's-maid than a Frenchman's head'.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Austin of the 35th, after actually using it in combat, noted that '... the only use we could make of our weapons, which were curved like reaping-hooks ... was to jab away with the hilts at the head and faces of those in front of us', concluding that by the end of the fight there must have been many Frenchmen in need of a dentist!<sup>3</sup>

It was presumably because of the impractical nature of the regulation weapons that wide use seems to have been made of unauthorised swords, ranging from the 1796 pattern light dragoon sabre — an unwieldy but effective weapon — to the oriental 'mameluke' sabres favoured by light companies. Most of these were acquired privately by individuals; but certain regiments (notably the light infantry corps, not covered in this present article) adopted distinct patterns, some of which are listed in the table of facings and distinctions which follows. Additionally, it should be noted that the minor variations on the regulation patterns — especially the 1803 sabre — were legion. For all types, the sword knot had a crimson and gold lace strap with a knot of gold bullion or fringe over a crimson silk pad or centre.

The cost of a sword represented a considerable expense for an impecunious subaltern: even the plain sabre carried by



Field officer of the 25th Foot, 1812: print after Goddard & Booth. Note the lace on the breast of the coatee, on both red and blue sides of the 'lapels'; the short plume on the bicorne hat; and the non-regulation mameluke sabre slung from a waist belt, apparently with a badged plate. (Unless otherwise attributed, photographs used in this article are from the author's collection.)

the 52nd, for example, cost four guineas — 16 days' pay for an ensign.

#### CAMPAIGN DRESS

A major modernisation in the appearance of the British officer occurred in 1808, when hair powder and 'queues' were abandoned, much to the relief of all who had suffered this uncomfortable style. Henceforth the hair was to be cut short, with sideburns normally extending no lower than the bottom of the ear. However, it became the style in the Peninsula to grow sidewhiskers and even moustaches (the latter hitherto exclusively a grenadier distinction in certain regiments only). When worn in Britain this facial hair became the hallmark of the

seasoned campaigner, and even found its way into a popular joke of the day:

*Civilian, to veteran on leave:* 'When will your whiskers go on to the Peace Establishment?'

*Veteran:* 'When your tongue goes on to the Civil List!'

A relic of the queue remained in the form of the black ribbons worn at the rear of the collar by officers of the 23rd Foot, a traditional regimental distinction worn to this day, which may well have appeared as soon as the queue was abandoned.

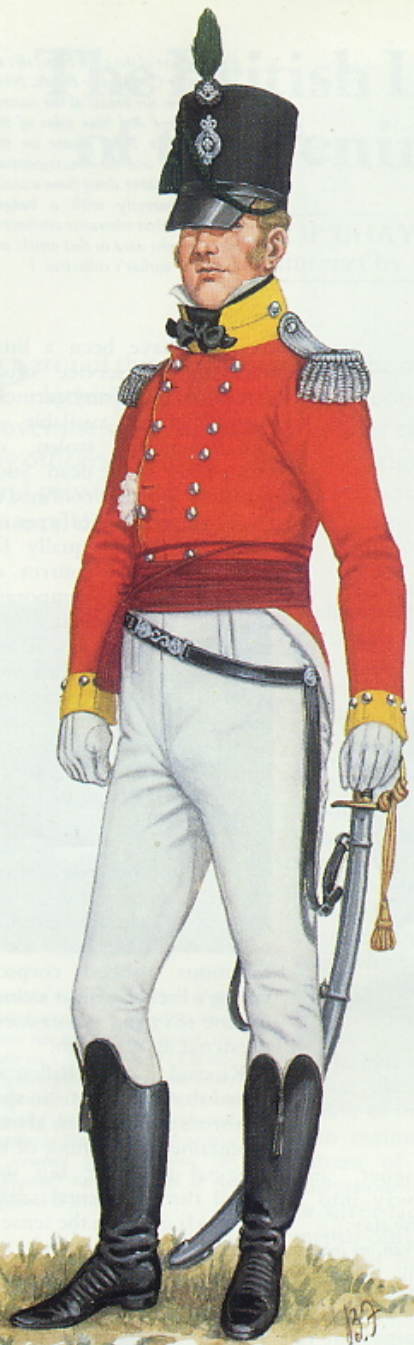
Numerous modifications of dress were affected when on campaign, from personal choice or grim necessity. While describing a regiment as a 'moving rag-fair' would

seem to have been a little harsh, hard service often forced the use of any garment which became available — either bought, stolen, or stripped from the dead. Such practices were not confined to the rank and file: officers on campaign were equally far from the usual sources of resupply, and contemporary accounts make much of the wretched state of clothing and the lengths to which men went to repair or replace ragged garments. George Simmons was typical; writing in 1811, he said: 'Clothes are expensive and bad. My jacket is brown ... Never was seen such a motley group of fellows. I luckily got some French shirts and other articles, or I should be nearly naked.' Twice at least, Simmons robbed corpses, taking a French officer's cloak in June 1813 and a cuirassier's greatcoat at Waterloo.<sup>4</sup>

Kincaid, the Rifleman, noted that his jacket, 'in spite of shreds and patches, always maintained something of the original about it; but woe befell the regimental small-clothes [i.e., from the sense of this passage, trousers], and they could only be replaced by very extraordinary apologies, of which I remember I had two pairs ... one of a common brown Portuguese cloth, and the other, or Sunday's pair of black velvet.'<sup>5</sup>

Brown Portuguese cloth — the undyed wool of the brown native sheep — was made up into all garments from jackets and trousers to greatcoats, adding to the motley appearance of the army. Footwear was also scarce. Many officers preferred stout shoes and gaiters to ordinary boots, and replaced worn-out pairs with civilian

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**Captain, light company, 82nd (Prince of Wales) Volunteers) Regt., 1808**

Based upon a contemporary portrait, this regimental variation on the light company uniform includes a cap bearing the regiment's Prince of Wales' plumes within a crowned garter instead of the usual bugle-horn, and non-regulation cords; the large, squared peak was a common feature. A further remarkable peculiarity is the wearing of epaulettes instead of the regulation wings; and the use of a waist belt should be noted. The 1803 pattern sabre is carried instead of the 82nd's stirrup-hilted regimental pattern, with a knot much larger than normal. The

silver belt plate usually worn was oval, broader than normal, and bore the Prince of Wales' plumes over '82' within a scroll. The 82nd served at Roleia, Vimiero, Vittoria, the Pyrenees, Nivelle and Orthes.



Swords, top to bottom: two varieties of 1796 pattern battalion company sword; two varieties of non-regulation flank company sabre; regulation 1803 flank company sabre; non-regulation flank company sabre with brass scabbard.



**Officer, light company, 36th (Herefordshire) Regt., 1811**

A further variation on the light company uniform, again from a contemporary portrait. The cap bears the usual badge of regimental number and bugle-horn, but has an unusually large cockade, a gold lace band, and green cords. The usual jacket has the lapels folded back as triangles, and a whistle is suspended from one. The wings are of regulation style, but the sash is of 'line' pattern instead of the prescribed corded light infantry type. The oval gilt belt plate had a beaded silver edge and bore a silver star bearing a gilt strap inscribed 'HEREFORDSHIRE REGIMENT' with a silver lion on a crown above '36' on the gilt centre. The 36th served at Roleia, Corunna, Vimiero, Salamanca, the Pyrenees, Nivelle, Orthes and Toulouse.



Officers' personal kit, all of the Peninsular War period: a portable canteen holding a tinned food box, ivory cruet, bone-handled knives and forks, with a glass tumbler and a napkin; a portable brass spirit lamp with a glass top; a pocket telescope with waterproof container; and a Peninsular War account book.



Officer, light company, 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regt.; campaign dress, 1812

This depicts the regulation light company uniform without major regimental peculiarities. The short jacket has typical pocket decoration of silver lace loops, and the turnbacks bear silver embroidered bugle-horns. The wings are of the style with interlocking chains, with bullion edging, and a central device of a gold bugle-horn on a silver disc.



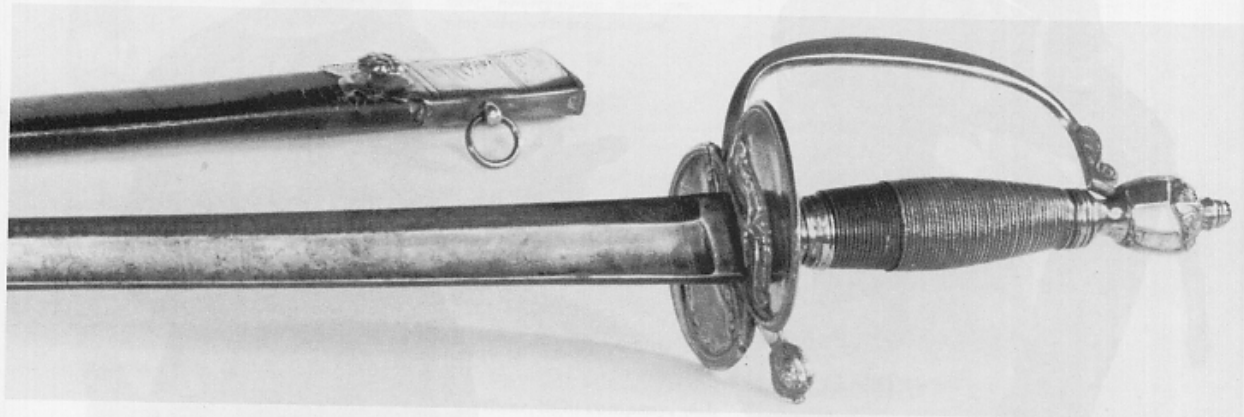
Officer, 53rd (Shropshire) Regt.; campaign dress, 1812

This typical winter campaign uniform includes the voluminous greatcoat, overalls, a covered hat, and a haversack. The belt plate, the only visible sign of regimental identity, consisted of a gilt oval bearing a crown over '53' over a foliate spray, all in silver. The 53rd Foot served at Talavera, Salamanca, Vittoria, the Pyrenees, Nivelle and Toulouse.

purchases or those captured from the enemy; or, *in extremis*, copied Assistant Surgeon Brookes of the 87th, who was compelled in June 1809 to resort to burglary to cover his bare feet! By the end of a campaigning season a regiment might well appear like Ross-Lewin's description of his 32nd Foot: 'No one . . . could possibly have discovered . . . the original colour of our clothing, for it was so patched with a diversity of colours, and so bespoke a variety of wretchedness that . . . we must have borne an un-

**Below:**

*Hilt, and scabbard, of the 1796 pattern officer's sword carried by battalion companies: the hinged left shell guard is extended here. (Black Watch Regimental Museum)*



desirable resemblance to Falstaff's ragged regiment.<sup>6</sup>

**CAMPAIGN EQUIPMENT**

Campaign kit was limited to what could be carried by the individual in his haversack, or on his mule (which might be shared with other officers) in a portmanteau or valise. The extensive campaigning equipment which some took with them was usually reduced to a practical minimum as an officer's increasing experience taught him what was really necessary and what was an encumbrance. Lt. G. R. Gleig of the 85th described assembling his kit for the Peninsula in spring 1813:

' . . . A selection was made

from our respective wardrobes of such articles of apparel as, being in a state of tolerable preservation, promised to continue for some time serviceable; canteens were hastily fitted up, and stored with tea, sugar, and other luxuries; cloaks were purchased by those who possessed them not, and put in a state of repair by those who did . . . I . . . packed up in two small portmanteaus [sic], so formed as to be an equal balance to each other when slung across the back of a mule; my kit was not remarkable either for its bulk or its tenuity . . .

'In one of these portmanteaus, then, I deposited a regimental jacket, with all its appendages of wings, lace,

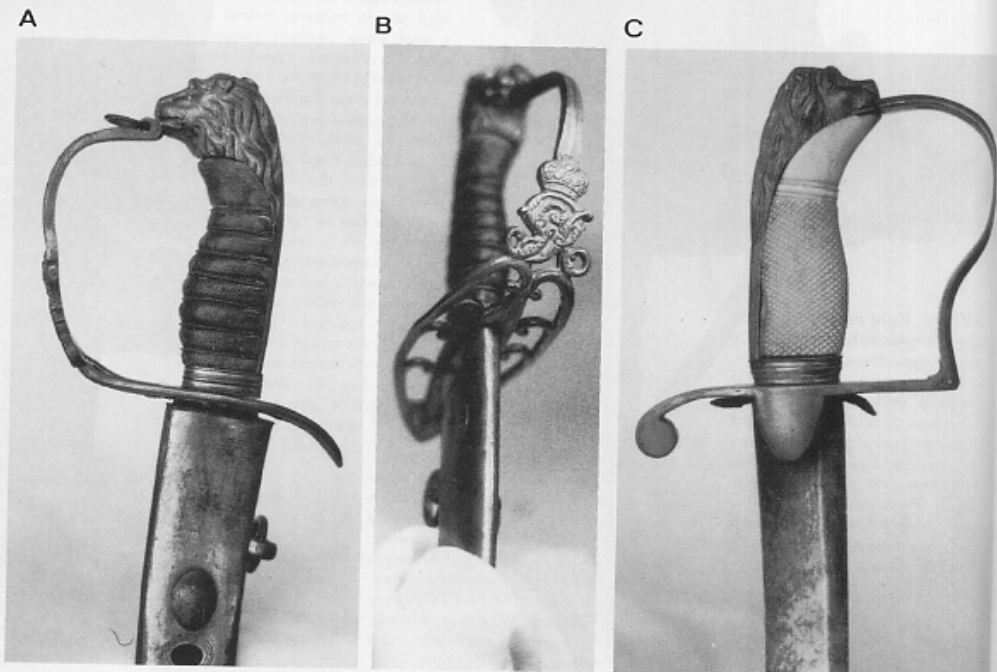
etc.; two pairs of grey trousers; sundry waistcoats, white, coloured, and flannel; a few changes of flannel drawers; half-a-dozen pairs of worsted stockings, and as many of cotton. In the other were six shirts, two or three cravats, a dressing-case completely filled, one undress pelisse, three pairs of boots, two pairs of shoes, with pocket-handkerchiefs, etc., etc., in proportion. Thus, though not encumbered by any useless quantity of apparel, I carried with me quite enough to load a mule, and to insure myself against the dangers of falling short for at least a couple of years to come.'

By the autumn of that year Gleig was a hardened campaigner and, typically, had

**Right:**

*A variety of flank company sabre hilts typical of the range of weapons carried by British officers of the period:*

(A) 1803 flank company sabre. (B) One of several varieties of cypher borne upon the guard of the 1803 sabre. (C) Non-regulation hilt with chequered ivory grip and lion-head pommel. (D) Non-regulation brass stirrup hilt with reeded ivory grip. (E) Non-regulation brass stirrup hilt, the leather grip bound with gilt wire. (F) A cut-price way of producing the fashionable 'mameluke' hilt: a flank company sabre with the stirrup hilt cut away. The pommel and quillon might have been joined by a detachable length of chain.



reduced his immediate impedimenta to a black leather haversack slung on his back containing a few clothes, cold meat, biscuit and rum, plus a pair of pistols, his sword, belt, and a 'pelisse' (in this case probably used in the sense of an overcoat). He had, however, added to his kit those items indispensable to an English gentleman, even on campaign: a fishing rod, a fowling piece, a spaniel, two greyhounds and a pointer!

Portable dining-sets existed in a variety of styles; some included food containers, cutlery, salt and pepper pots, even a glass tumbler and a serviette, all packed in a stout, portable box which would fit in a haversack. Another variety included cutlery contained in a leather roll, to take up even less space. But such richly equipped canteens were more often replaced by the kind of basic kit described by Kincaid:

'A haversack on service is a sort of dumb waiter. The mess have a good many things in common, but the contents of the haversack are exclusively the property of its owner; and a well-regulated one ought never to be without the following furniture, unless when the perishable part is consumed, in con-



sequence of every other means of supply having failed, viz, a couple of biscuit, a sausage, a little tea and sugar, a knife, fork and spoon, a tin cup (which answers to the name of tea-cup, soup-plate, wine-glass and tumbler), a pair of socks, a piece of soap, a tooth-brush, towel, and comb, and half a dozen cigars.<sup>8</sup>

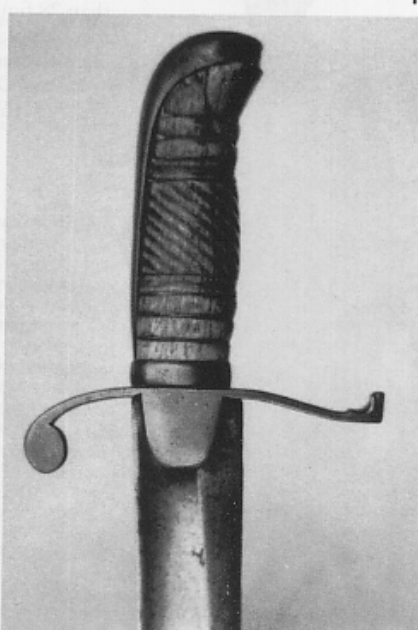
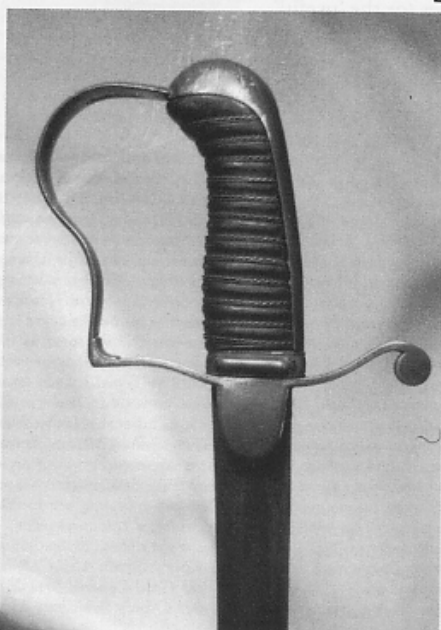
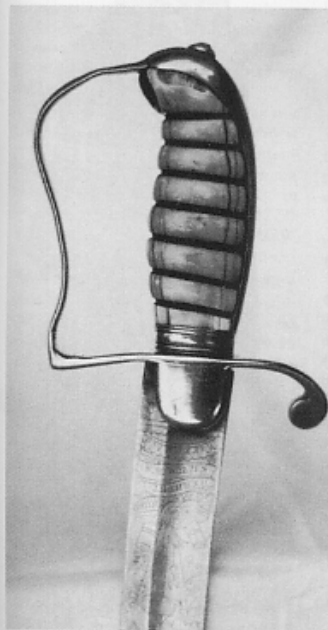
In 1814 Thomas Austin of the 35th Foot noted: 'Our stock of cutlery was confined to a clasp-knife and a clasp-fork, the handles of which fit-

ted by pins and slots to each other; and, with the addition of a clasp-spoon, attached to the opposite end of the fork handle, made a very useful pocket apparatus, but at the same time one that was by no means suited to delicate and skilful carving.'

The remaining kit would include all the other items needed by a gentleman when travelling: razors, writing set, perhaps a portable lamp (all made to pack into the smallest space possible); an account book; usually, something to

*Etching by Thomas Rowlandson from The Military Adventures of Johnny Newcome, a satirical verse story of the experiences of a young officer going out to the Peninsula. Here we see Johnny, pursued by beggars, visiting an outfitter to order his campaigning kit before leaving England. Caricatures, though distorted, can be useful references to uniform styles: they may exaggerate noticeable features, but they seldom invent them. There are three points to note in this example: the very low bicorne, the dandified neck-cloth at the throat, and the very short 'jockey' boots (?) or deep overall reinforcement. (National Army Museum)*

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## PENINSULAR WAR LINE REGIMENTS

The following regiments of British line infantry all served at some time during the Peninsular War. In addition to details of title, facing colour and officers' lace and/or button colour, a few regimental features are noted (immediately below the unit concerned) to demonstrate the type of variety which existed. These are selected as examples only: most regiments had some distinctive features, even if only in the minutiae of e.g. turnback badges and epaulette design. Shoulder belt plate varieties are only noted in those cases where plates exhibited a wide divergence from the usual shape.

Regiment	Facings	Lace
1st (Royal Scots)	Blue	Gold
<i>Regimental pattern sword, 1796 and 1803 patterns having regimental badge on guard. Brass scabbards for field officers.</i>		
2nd (Queen's Royal)	Blue	Silver
3rd (East Kent, Buffs)	Buff	Silver
4th (King's Own, Lancaster)	Blue	Silver (gold from 1807)
<i>Velvet facings, traditionally of extra width. Flank coy. wings red with gold zig-zag lace, bearing silver grenade on red patch, or lion on crown over silver bugle.</i>		
5th (Northumberland)	Gosling green	Silver
<i>Whole regt. had worn grenadier caps in full dress, commemorating capture of French caps at Wilhelmstahl, 1762; may have been retained into this era, but 1810 Inspection noted 'no grenadier caps'. Whole unit may also have continued to wear white plumes. 1811 Inspection noted that officers wore black waist belts instead of shoulder belts. Headdress decorated with laurel on 6 April after 1812, commemorating Badajoz.</i>		
6th (1st Warwickshire)	Yellow	Silver
7th (Royal Fusiliers)	Blue	Gold
<i>Fusilier caps worn for dress occasions, and perhaps in early part of Peninsular War. Epaulettes had gilt scale straps bearing 'R' and 'F' on either side of rose within crowned garter.</i>		
9th (East Norfolk)	Yellow	Silver
<i>Very small shoulder belt plate recorded. In 1890 officers of 1st Bn. wore blue pantaloons, and may have continued to do so.</i>		
10th (North Lincolnshire)	Yellow	Silver
<i>Epaulettes and wings had silver scale straps; crescent-shaped shoulder belt plates; both these and epaulettes bore '10' in wreath.</i>		
11th (North Devonshire)	Deep green	Gold
<i>Light coy.: maneluke sabre with gilt guard, black grip, steel scabbard.</i>		
14th (Bedfordshire; from 1809, Buckinghamshire)	Buff	Silver
<i>Grenadier cap plates red with silver devices.</i>		
20th (East Devonshire)	Yellow	Silver
23rd (Royal Welsh Fusiliers)	Blue	Gold
<i>Fusilier caps as noted for 7th; epaulettes had gilt scale straps but wings were red. Regimental sabre like 1803 pattern but with gilt stirrup hilt with large langets bearing regimental badge.</i>		
24th (Warwickshire)	Green	Silver
26th (Cameronian)	Yellow	Silver
27th (Inniskilling)	Buff	Gold
28th (North Gloucestershire)	Yellow	Silver
<i>Extant flank coy. sabre has gilt scabbard.</i>		
29th (Worcestershire)	Yellow	Silver
30th (Cambridgeshire)	Pale Yellow	Silver
31st (Huntingdonshire)	Buff	Silver
32nd (Cornwall)	White	Gold
<i>Horn badge on light coy. cap — officers mistaken for musicians!</i>		
34th (Cumberland)	Yellow	Silver
36th (Herefordshire)	Gosling green	Gold
<i>White piping to facings. For ball dress officers wore tight green pantaloons with gold stripe, and gold-laced Hessian boots.</i>		

Regiment	Facings	Lace
37th (North Hampshire)	Yellow	Silver
38th (1st Staffordshire)	Yellow	Silver
39th (Dorsetshire)	Pea green	Gold
40th (2nd Somersetshire)	Buff	Gold
<i>Extant sword of 1796 pattern has knuckle bow replaced by chain; light coy. modification?</i>		
44th (East Essex)	Yellow	Silver
45th (Nottinghamshire)	Dark green	Silver
47th (Lancashire)	White	Silver
48th (Northamptonshire)	Buff	Gold
50th (West Kent)	Black	Silver
<i>Silver epaulette straps had interwoven black lines.</i>		
53rd (Shropshire)	Red	Gold
<i>Flank coy. wings very richly embroidered with gold wire.</i>		
56th (West Essex)	Purple	Silver
57th (West Middlesex)	Yellow	Gold
58th (Rutlandshire)	Black	Gold
59th (2nd Nottinghamshire)	White	Gold
61st (South Gloucestershire)	Buff	Silver
<i>Shoulder belts had silver buckle and slider instead of belt plate.</i>		
62nd (Wiltshire)	Buff	Silver
66th (Berkshire)	Gosling green	Silver
67th (South Hampshire)	Yellow	Silver
74th (Highland)	White	Gold
<i>De-kilted 1809; thereafter, line uniform.</i>		
76th (Hindoostan)	Red	Silver
77th (East Middlesex)	Yellow	Silver
81st	Buff	Silver
82nd (Prince of Wales' Volunteers)	Yellow	Silver
<i>Extant light coy. sabres have either stirrup hilt with langets bearing a bugle, or are 1803 pattern but with all-metal scabbard.</i>		
83rd	Yellow	Silver
84th (York & Lancaster)	Yellow	Silver
87th (Prince of Wales' Own Irish)	Green	Gold
88th (Connaught Rangers)	Yellow	Silver
91st	Yellow	Silver
<i>De-kilted 1809; light coy. wore gilt thistle on cap front.</i>		
94th (Scotch Brigade)	Green	Gold
96th	Buff	Silver
97th (Queen's Germans)	Blue	Silver

The following regiments, which also served in the Peninsula, are not included in the main list as none were uniformed as ordinary line regiments, and they thus fall outside the scope of this present article:

Highland regiments: 42nd, 79th, 92nd, 93rd  
 Light infantry regiments: 43rd, 51st, 52nd, 68th, 71st, 85th  
 Rifle corps: 60th, 95th

**Distinctive badges** granted to regiments which served in the Peninsula, according to 1802 Clothing regulations:

1st: thistle and crown 2nd: Queen's cypher and lamb 3rd: dragon 4th: lion 5th: St. George and dragon 6th: antelope 7th: rose within crowned garter 9th: Britannia 23rd: Prince of Wales' feathers 27th: castle with three turrets and St. George's flag.

The 'Egyptian badge' — a sphinx upon a plinth inscribed 'Egypt' — was authorised for the 1st (2nd Bn. only), 2nd, 10th, 20th, 23rd, 24th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 30th, 37th, 40th (flank coys. only), 44th, 50th, 58th, and 61st. The honour 'Minden' was authorised for the 20th, 23rd, and 37th; and the honour 'Gibraltar' for the flank coys. only of the 39th, 56th and 58th.

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night and morning. At Madame's side walked an Irish nurse, carrying slung across her shoulder a bassinet made of green silk, in which lay an infant, the hope of the family. Behind Madame's mule marched a huge grenadier, the captain's faithful servant, with his musket over his shoulder, urging on with a stick the lady's long-cared steed. Behind him again came a donkey laden with the voluminous baggage of the family, surmounted by a teakettle and a cage of canaries. A groom or jockey in livery brought up the rear, mounted on a sturdy English horse . . . and . . . kept order among the four or five hunting dogs . . . which served as scouts to the captain during the march of his little cavalcade.<sup>12</sup>

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As an example of the type of expenses which an officer would incur, and the purchases which he would make, the following are random extracts from the Peninsula account book of Wellington's engineer Sir Richard Fletcher, Bt., for 1811-13:<sup>13</sup>

Many officers equipped themselves with travelling dressing cases; this black leather example belonged to Lt. Gen. Sir Rowland Hill. (National Army Museum)

	£	s	d
Military Hat	3	12	0
25 Eight-dollar Pieces	45	15	6
Girths		9	0
Silver Cups	5	1	3
Subscription to Lisbon Gazette		18	0
Braga Shawls Paid	5	8	0
Portuguese Farrier for Horse Shoes		12	7½
Spanish Dictionary Paid Mr. Lindergreen for Flannel	2	6	6
1812 Income tax	148	3	8
Cash paid for 50£ Bank of England Notes	40	15	8
Paid to Cook Domingus	3	17	10
Paid Mr. Batchlay for Poultry	7	14	0
Paid Antonio for a Mule	40	10	0
Paid Col. Hartman for a Horse	90	0	0
Paid Domingus' Wife	2	5	0
A View of Coimbra	5	8	0
Loaned to a French Deserter	21	7	6

While few line officers would trouble with carrying with them pictures of Coimbra, such expenses are otherwise typical, and reflect the demands upon the pocket of ordinary officers. The prices of items of uniform and equipment (see also Part 1) can be seen to be considerable, if compared with the average price of £30 for a horse. (The price of £90 quoted here probably reflects both the distance from the ports at which the deal was struck, and thoroughbred quality. In 1812 Fletcher bought another animal for £18.)

During the height of the campaigning season, however, when an officer's world was that which could be carried on his mule, his horse, or his own back, the comment which rings most true is that of Ensign Frederick Mainwaring of the 51st Foot: 'No one thought about the cut of a coat, or the fashion of a boot, or looked coldly upon his neighbour because his ragged garment was less fashionable than his own; sufficient was it that he had a coat on his back.'<sup>14</sup>

**Source notes:**

- (1) *History of the Dress of the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, R. J. Macdonald (London, 1899)
- (2) *Adventures in the Rifle Brigade* (London, 1830), and *Random Shots from a Rifleman* (London, 1835). Capt. Sir J. Kincaid, combined edn., London, undated

(3) *Old Stick Leg: Extracts from the Diaries of Major Thomas Austin*, ed. Brig. Gen. H. H. Austin (London, 1926)

(4) *A British Rifle Man: Journals & Correspondence of Major George Simmons during the Peninsular War*, ed. Col. W. Verner (London, 1899)

(5) Kincaid, *op. cit.*

(6) *Life of a Soldier, a Narrative of 27 Years' service in various parts of the World*, Maj. H. Ross-Lewin (London, 1834)

(7) *The Subaltern*, Rev. G. R. Gleig (London, 1823)

(8) Kincaid, *op. cit.*

(9) Austin, *op. cit.*

(10) Kincaid, *op. cit.*

(11) *The Life of John Colborne, Field-Marshal Lord Seaton, compiled from his letters . . .*, G. C. Moore Smith (London, 1903)

(12) *Mémoires du Général Lefevre, En Prison et en Guerre. A Travers l'Europe 1809-1814* (Paris, 1896)

(13) Author's collection

(14) *Four Years of a Soldier's Life, by a Field Officer, Frederick Mainwaring: Colburn's United Service Magazine and Naval and Military Journal* (London, 1844)

In addition to the sources noted above, the following will be found of use:

*Wellington's Army*, Sir C. W. C. Oman (London, 1912)

*History of the Uniforms of the British Army, Vols. IV and V*, C. C. P. Lawson (London, 1966 & 1967)

*Military Dress of the Peninsular War*, M. C. Windrow and G. A. Embleton (London, 1974)

*Uniforms of the Peninsular War*, P. J. Haythornthwaite (Poole, 1978)





# The British Infantry Officer of the Peninsular War (2)

PHILIP J. HAYTHORNTHWAITE  
Paintings by BRYAN FOSTEN

Part 1 of this article described the officer's uniform clothing and insignia. In this concluding part we cover the swords, belts and plates carried and worn by officers in the field; their campaigning equipment and privately purchased kit; and some known regimental distinctions recorded among their uniforms.



Shoulder belt plates. That of the 48th Foot, c.1812, is gilt, with a silver rim and central number, the latter on a matted ground. The rectangular plate of the 20th Foot, worn c.1802-20, is silver with a mounted design of the regimental number in Roman numerals within a crowned wreath, above the 'Egyptian' badge awarded to the regiment in July 1802.



Right: Serpent and lion-mask waist belt clasp, as worn by light companies.

## Belts and Plates

Although on active service pistols or even muskets might be carried, infantry officers were officially armed only with a sword. This was suspended from a belt of buff-leather, worn over the right shoulder to the left hip. This was normally worn over the coatee and secured by the epaulette strap; for undress, it was worn over the waistcoat but under the coatee. The belt was whitened or, in those regiments with buff uniform facings, left in its natural colour.

The belt was fastened by an ornate plate situated in the middle of the wearer's breast; each regiment had its own pattern of plate, in metal corresponding to the gold or silver lace worn by regimental officers, with devices mounted in the contrasting metal. Devices included any distinctive badges possessed by the regiment, and usually (though not invariably) the regimental number. There were, in addition, plates of what might be termed a 'general pattern', bearing a crowned royal cypher, which may have been used by

officers who did not possess the official regimental plate.

Plate design seems to have been determined regimentally, not by orders from higher authority; indeed, it was not unknown for different battalions of the same regiment to wear plates of different designs, or for the flank companies to sport variations incorporating their own grenade or bugle devices. At the turn of the century the majority of plates were oval and engraved; as time passed, embossed plates or those with mounted designs (occasionally with fine enamelling) became increasingly common, as did rectangular plates. Workmanship was often of high quality, involving precious metals, e.g. silver and silver-gilt.

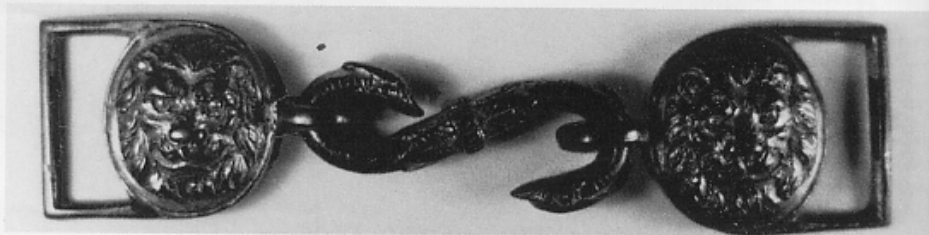
Officers of battalion companies wore the sword suspended from a frog at the left hip. For flank companies the usual suspension was by two slings, in light cavalry fashion, either from the shoulder belt or (unofficially) from a narrow waist belt instead. Field officers, whose mounted duties made slings more convenient, also used the waist belt; and occasionally a whole battalion would adopt a non-regulation style, such as the black waist belt universally worn by officers of the 5th Foot. A belt fitting favoured by officers of light companies was a silver whistle, used for signalling

when their men were skirmishing in open order; this could alternatively be suspended from a buttonhole on the jacket.

## Swords

Prior to 1796 no definite regulation pattern of sword had existed, the official instructions noting only that it should have a 'strong, substantial', straight blade at least 32 in. long, and a hilt of gilt or silver according to the lace colour. These instructions produced the 'spadroon' pattern of 1786. In 1796 a new sword was ordered, with a similar blade and a new gilt hilt with a single knuckle-bow, shell guards, and a grip bound with silver wire. As the shells prevented it lying flat against the body, the left-hand shell was often hinged to fold flat when not in combat. Handsome though this sword appeared, it was of limited use, and the guard was fragile: Mercer of the Royal Artillery noted that '... nothing could be more useless or ridiculous... [it was] good neither for cut nor thrust and was a perfect encumbrance'.<sup>1</sup> But, as it was never intended that infantry officers should become involved in hand-to-hand fighting, the pattern remained unchanged for a quarter of a century.

Originally the straight-bladed 1796 pattern was intended for use by flank company as well as by 'battalion' officers; but, even before its introduction, grenadiers and light infantry had begun unofficially using curved, light cavalry-style sabres as a further demonstration of their élite status. In 1799 sabres were officially approved; but no official pattern was specified until 1803, when a version with an exaggeratedly curved blade some



<sup>1</sup> Superior numbers in this article refer to source notes at the end.