









# CAVALRY

## *Ordonnance of 1750*

FRENCH ARMY

PLATE No. 6

The last Ordonnance concerning the dress and equipment of the cavalry had been published on 28th May 1733; by the middle of the century it was largely forgotten and many deviations from it were tolerated; there was much frippery and changes of uniform were frequent. It was in order to remedy this and "to do away with the different practices which are harmful to our service" that the King promulgated the Ordonnance of 1st June 1750.

Since May 1749 the Inspectors of Cavalry had been meeting in committee taking important decisions which were to be the basis of the new Ordonnance.

At the same time Monsieur de la Porterie, Major in the Regiment of Dragoons, Mestre-de-Camp-Général, had been making efforts to improve the harness and equipment then in service. He had new patterns of saddles and bridles carefully made taking account of the observations and suggestions of fellow officers and horsemen. Encouraged by these officers and riders of renown, to whom the prototypes had been shown, de la Porterie submitted them to the Committee of Inspectors, which in turn, forwarded them to the Minister. Having been approved and adopted by the King and his Minister of War it was decided to have the items copied and circulated to regiments with the instruction that they conform to the new pattern.

De la Porterie known by his "Institutions Militaires"<sup>1</sup> published in 1754, has left us at least two earlier manuscripts, one of which, preserved in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal and dated 1750, contains several pages of drawings. They compliment, in certain cases, the somewhat imprecise text of the Ordonnance.

Due to lack of space we can only give an extract from this Ordonnance. Note that we have converted all the measurements into millimetres.

"The uniform coat or justaucorps of Corporals and troopers will be made of blue, red or grey cloth, the latter shot through with blue threads; it will have lapels and cuffs of bright red, the former coming down to waist level. The regiments Colonel-General, La Reine (Queen's), Harcourt, Fitz-James and Noailles will retain red as the colour of their coats, but they will not be permitted to use bright red (demi-ecarlatté).

La Reine, Harcourt and Fitz-James will continue to wear blue lapels and cuffs.

The coat shall be lined with serge or cardiss<sup>2</sup> and pockets will be provided hidden in the fan pleats—the pocket flaps on the front skirts are for ornament only.

The coat will have 38 large buttons and four small ones and a pair of woollen epaulettes to retain the carbine and cartridge box belts. There will be no aiguillette.

Troopers' cuffs will be round, 162mm deep and 486mm in circumference; Corporals will be distinguished by a 22mm silver lace cuff edging and a 34 mm silver lace inside that; Carabiniers<sup>3</sup> will have only a 22mm silver lace.

Troopers will wear a waistcoat of buff leather 250mm shorter than the coat and buckskin breeches with a double waist band. The cloak, in the same colour as the uniform coat, will be turned up with serge or cardiss and will have on each side of the breast three laces in braid similar in design to the epaulettes.

Hats will be made of lambs' wool with a silver lace 36mm wide rolled over the brim, 27mm of which will show on the outward face. The crown will be 108mm tall and the wings 155mm wide.

The horse housing and holster covers will be made of blue cloth, lined with canvas and decorated with an aurore woollen lace 42mm wide mixed with the colours of the King's livery for Royal regiments, with the colours of the Princes' livery for Princely regiments and for Gentlemen's regiments certain distinctive colours as shall be laid down. The Regiments Harcourt, Fitz-James and Noailles will have blue housings, like the rest of the cavalry, and their lace will conform with the patterns laid down for them. The Queen's Regiment will retain its housings in Her Majesty's livery as they have been formerly.

The boots will be soft for Caporals and troopers and will conform to the Ordonnance of 1733, only the knee flap and spur will be modified.

Each Corporal and trooper will be armed with a musketoon and two pistols, the calibres and barrel lengths as laid down in the Ordonnance of 28th May 1733. In addition they will have iron breast plates and secrets (skull caps) which they are ordered to wear on exercise, during marches and at reviews. Their sword with a double bar copper guard and a single edged blade 891mm long will be carried in a buff leather waist belt, sewn along the edges, having a double pendant, well sewn and without rivets, 67mm wide. The musketoon belt, whitened for Royal regiments only, and buff sewn with white thread for the others, will be the same width as the waist belt. The cartridge pouch containing twelve rounds will be slung from a shoulder strap from left to right.

Examples of all the different items of equipment above, as well as gloves, cockades, cravats and the horse furniture in general, will be sent to each regiment; these patterns will be conformed with.

Officers will have the same uniform in fine cloth lined with wool without epaulettes. They will not have gold or silver lace or buttonhole embroidery on the coat nor on the waistcoat, which latter shall be made in cloth of the same colour as the cuffs; the only decoration will be the silver buttons mounted on wood<sup>4</sup>. The



horse housings shall be the same colour as those of the troops bordered with a single silver lace 54mm wide for Captains and 40mm wide for Lieutenants. The uniform swords of the officers shall have gilded copper guards and single edged blades 837mm long. To conclude they must wear the full cuirass on the same occasions as the troops wear the breastplate.

Sergeant-Majors will have the same uniform as the officers, but of semi-fine cloth and without lace or buttonhole decoration of any sort. Their horse housings will have a single silver lace 27mm wide, and their double branched single edged swords shall have blades wider than those of the officers.

As an exception to the above rules the three Staff Regiments<sup>5</sup> will retain the lapels and cuffs of black plush as well as the housing braid and other distinctions which they enjoy at present (copper buttons and trophies in the corners of the housing and on the holster covers), but they will conform to the new patterns in all other respects. Their officers will not wear braid on either coat or waistcoat.

The Royal Regiment of Carabiniers and the Royal Allemand will continue to have coats without lapels, and similarly the Royal Cuirassiers will have waistcoats of cloth not buff leather.

The German regiments alone are authorized to wear caps<sup>6</sup> and no officer may appear at the head of his troop with a riding coat or greatcoat of a colour other than that of his regiment."

As the text is very incomplete we will add some details from the de la Porterie manuscripts cited earlier.

The coat had to overlap at the rear in order to give greater protection from the cold; the sleeves came down to the wrist and had four buttons with buttonholes on each cuff. The lapels 486mm deep were 108mm wide at the top and 72mm wide at the base and had seven buttons each. Four more buttons appeared beneath the right lapel and four buttonholes beneath the left. The pocket flaps were each equipped with four buttons and their holes; two buttons were at the rear waist, and two more in the fan pleats in the skirt. In addition there were two small buttons on each epaulette, one at either end. The coat had a collar 30mm high which had to be capable of being buttoned over.

The Ordonnance is less than clear as to how the carbine and cartridge box belts were to be worn. In one part it says "two epaulettes... to retain in position the carbine and cartridge pouch belts", and elsewhere it is specified that the cartridge pouch will be slung from left to right. The two works of de la Porterie mentioned above show that the buckle of the cartridge pouch strap falls on the right, which would seem to indicate that it was worn from right shoulder to left hip, as the buckle normally appears on the back.

Under the coat the buff waistcoat was worn; it fastened with hooks and eyes down the front and had a 27mm standing collar which closed with a small metal button. The sleeves cut in the "mariniere" style, had three buttons and holes, and were ornamented "for the sake of elegance and dash" with a small red cloth cuff 57 mm deep. (Fig. 20). On dismounted service the buckskin breeches were replaced with red velveteen ones; the cravat was made of black muslin and the gloves of buff coloured leather.

The hat was "cocked" and the foremost horn of the tricorne was shorter than the others by 27mm. The brim was held up against the crown by hooks. Figure 11 bis shows the hat reinforced with the iron secret in use at the period, as shown in the Arsenal manuscript. There was no uniform fashion of dressing the hair, and in the same regiment one could see the hair tied up in a queue, plaited or worn in a bag. In general the hair on the temples was little cared for. De la Porterie advocated the adoption of the queue and a simple curl at the temples.

The insides of the front opening of the cloak were faced with a serge lining strip 400mm wide; the turned down collar, cut in a point at the rear, was 120mm wide and the insides of the rear vent of the cloak, 325mm deep were similarly turned up. (Fig. 21).

According to the Ordonnance of 28th May 1733 the musketoon had an overall length of 1m 147mm, the barrel being 756mm long, but de la Porterie tells us that according to a regulation of 1734 "sent to the Manufactories and made to apply retrospectively to the Ordonnance" the musketoon was made 1m 107mm long, the barrel 756mm and the butt, measuring from the breech, 357mm; it was to be 35mm in diameter at the small of the butt and 45mm thick in the butt itself. (Fig. 15).

The pistol described in 1733 had an overall length of 432mm, although the regulation of 1734 says 499mm, of which 310mm was the barrel. (Fig. 17).

Before 1750 the foul weather lock covers were very varied, some examples enveloping almost the entire weapon. The pattern sent to the regiments was 297 mm long, and was furnished with a strap which buckled to the tent-pole or picketing post retaining strap, thereby stopping the cover falling to the ground when the trooper uncovered his carbine before firing it. (Fig. 16).

The sword with a copper double branch guard had a straight single edge blade 891mm long. Its scabbard of wooden box construction covered with leather, was provided with a chape with a hook and a drag cap in copper. The sword knot was supposed to be wool, but because it was not hard-wearing it was replaced in some regiments by a leather sword knot. (Fig. 18).

The example of cartridge pouch sent to the regiments accommodated a dozen made-up cartridges. The strap was made of buff leather 45mm wide, 1m 945mm long and provided with a copper buckle. The best cartridge boxes were covered with Russia leather. (Fig. 10).

The carbine belt in whitened or natural buff, according to the regiment, was 1m 647mm long and 67mm wide with a copper double pin buckle and was provided with a roller and loop to which was attached the spring hook to which the carbine clipped. (Fig. 9).

The waist-sword belt, the same colour as the carbine belt, was made up of five pieces sewn together and called the band, the bar, the face and the two pendants.

The waistband was 67mm broad, 1m 34mm long and was fitted with a copper buckle. (Fig. 8).

The soft boots had rounded toes, of so-called Bull's Nose shape, and the heel was 54mm high. The leg was flexible, but to protect the knee when the troopers were riding in formation, the knee guards had to be stiff and were 162mm high from the fold to the top edge measured along the seam; they were cut away at the rear down to the level of the leg part of the boot, and the circumference of the "bucket top" was approximately 550mm. (Fig. 12).

In 1754 de la Porterie recommended the use of fabric boot hose in cotton or knitted wool to protect the breeches from the rub of the knee guard.

The new pattern spurs had very sturdy side pieces 108mm long which were broken, that is to say with hinges; the ends had studs to which attached the straps going under and over the foot. The neck was 27mm long and was provided with a six-point rowel. (Fig. 13).

The instep strap was cut with a wide central section, 80mm, narrowing towards each end, that on the outside being 16mm wide to engage with the fastening buckle. The spurs were to be positioned four or five centimetres above the heel resting on the spur support, a ledge of leather sewn at the base of the leg.

Figure 5 shows the saddle as improved by de la Porterie. We cannot give the full description, but we think our drawing is sufficiently clear. The panels and seat were of black leather, and the pistol holsters were covered in Russia leather.

A semi-circular iron staple, called a Dragonne, was fixed to the pommel and two rings hung from it. Through these latter passed straps which secured the butt of the musketoon and the picketing post or tent-pole. The muzzle bucket for the musketoon was attached by straps to the right-off side-pistol holster and the spare horse shoe fitted into the eyelet of the attachment strap for the rolled cloak, and was retained by a loop and a thong. The complete saddle had five leather straps 1m 620mm long; the three luggage straps were 27mm wide and had buckles, those for the cloak were 18mm wide and had no buckles.

The holster covers were of the double flap type; the upper flap having a button at the top and a button-hole at the base so that it could be fastened back to give access to the pistol. (Fig. 6).

The portemanteau or kit bag made of twill was approximately 1m 13mm long and 430mm wide.

The bridle had no nose band and the crown strap could be fitted with a reinforcing chain. The adoption of the bridoon or snaffle dates from 1750, but it had no separate bridle being part of the bit bridle to which it was attached by two small straps which passed through the buckles which held the bit. The halter was of black leather, only its head strap, which extended to act as a throat lash, and the leading rein being made of Hungarian leather. (Fig. 7).

Under their uniform coats officers wore cloth waistcoats in the cuff colour or in pale brown; the cuirass could be worn either under or over the coat. The soft round toed boots had supple knee protectors which came to the point of the knee; they were made of waxed calf-skin. Their spurs were more delicate and shorter than those of the troopers and they had solid branches. (Figs 3 & 19).

According to de la Porterie the standard officers sword sent out as a pattern had a gilded copper guard and a single edged blade 864mm long.

Officers horses were harnessed according to the whim of their owners. The saddle could be covered in Russia leather, velvet or velveteen of various colours and the panels were braided. The housing was the same shape as the troopers' and the holster covers in two parts could be replaced with covers in the form of skirts. (Fig. 3).

The bridle in narrow leather included a nose band; the square buckles and the slides, varying in number, were gilded or silver. Studs of the same colour frequently decorated the edges and centre of the browband, the centre of the nose band, the breastplate and the crupper. The bridoon and its rein, in gold or silver lace or Russia leather, were often sewn to independent head straps of the same materials. For parades and reviews the manes of officers' horses could be plaited and ornamented with ribbons; the forelock cockade attached to the browband on the near side, there was a rosette at the lower end of the plaited mane and another rosette on the tail.

There seems to have been little uniformity in the manner of managing the coats of the troopers' horses, except in foreign regiments, English and German in the service of France and in some French regiments where the horses' legs were clipped and the manes plucked.

The qualification height for the men was 1m 78cms to 1m 82cms (5'10" - 5'11.5") and for the horses it was 1m 51cms to 1m 56cms (14.3 Hands - 15.1 Hands).

The trumpeters and kettledrummers wore cassocks laced in the colours of the proprietary colonel of the regiment instead of the coat. Figure 4 shows the contemporary style of decorating the cassock, which was cut without lapels and fastened by means of hooks and eyes down the front.

We will return to this subject in due course to see how this Ordonnance was applied in practice. At that time we will give the uniform details of each regiment, as far as is possible from the descriptions contained in l'Etat Militaire<sup>8</sup> of 1758 and those contemporary drawings which have come to light.

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Painter of the Army  
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# CAPTIONS TO THE FIGURES

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|---|---|
| 1. Trooper. Regiment de la Vieuville                  | 11 Bis Hat fitted with the iron secret                          |
| 2. Trooper. Regiment Dauphin-Etranger                 | 12. Boot  |
| 3. Officer  | 13. Spur  |
| 4. Trumpeter. Regiment Royal                          | 14. Troopers' breastplate                                       |
| 5. Saddle and its accessories                         | 15. Musketoon or carbine  |
| 6. Holster cover. Regiment de Toustain                | 16. Lock cover  |
| 6 bis Part of the Horse housing. Regiment de Montcalm | 17. Pistol  |
| 7. Bridle, bridoon and halter                         | 18. Sword   |
| 8. Waist-sword belt                                   | 19. Officer of a Royal regiment                                 |
| 9. Carbine belt                                       | 20. Trooper in marching or exercise dress - buff waistcoat only |
| 10. Cartridge pouch and its belt                      | 21. Trooper in cloak. Regiment de Fumel                         |
| 11. Hat   | (Items 8 to 18 are drawn to the scale shown below Figure 18)    |

## NOTES

- "Institutions Militaires" by de la Porterie, published Guillyn, Paris 1754.
- Cardiss- a thin woollen cloth of straight weave.
- There were four Carabiniers per Compagnie in the French Line Cavalry. They were armed with rifled musketoons and were chosen from amongst the best shots of the unit.
- Many French military buttons were made in two pieces; a disc of wood with four holes in it threaded with tough thin cord, which formed the shank of the button and a metal outer cover, plain or embossed, which was fitted to the disc and crimped round the edges to keep it in place.
- The three senior regiments of the Line Cavalry were known as the Staff Regiments. Their titles were 1st Regiment Colonel-General, 2nd Regiment Mestre-de-Camp-General and 3rd Regiment Commissaire-General.
- Caps refers to bearskin grenadier-type headdress. It was supposedly restricted to German regiments, but some French units wore it as well.
- The rear seam of the sleeve was open for a few inches and closed with three small buttons.
- L'Etat Militaire was a continuation of the annually published list of the distinctions of French regiments compiled by Lemau de la Jaisse since 1726. After his death in 1745 it suffered from poor compilers but became an official publication in 1758 and was maintained in production until 1793.

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