

# IMPERIAL GUARD

*Guides 1854-1870*

FRENCH ARMY

PLATE No. 98

The origin of the Guides goes back to 1848 when, on 4th April, eight squadrons of guides were created by decree for the Military Correspondence Service and for the use of the Staff Corps. In the following month five squadrons were effectively brought into being.

The decree of 21st July 1850 disbanded Squadrons 3 and 4 and the No. 5 Squadron took the third position, then on 16th November another decree merged Squadrons 1 and 2 together, and No. 3 took the second place.

The decree of 23rd October 1852 disbanded the two existing squadrons and set up a six squadron regiment with the same internal organization as a Line cavalry regiment. The reconstitution of the Imperial Guard by the decree of 1st May 1854 brought the Guides into the Garde in which they formed the Cavalry Brigade along with the Cuirassier Regiment.

The regiment was still composed of six squadrons, but it was augmented by a band and a section of Sappers.

When the Guard was reorganized in 1855 and new regiments were created, the Guides formed, with the Regiment of Chasseurs-à-Cheval, the Light Cavalry Brigade of the Cavalry Division.

The uniform worn by the new regiment as announced on 15th January 1852 was the same as that adopted at the end of the previous year by the two existing squadrons.

**Dolman:** very dark green cloth with a red, open collar and cuffs ornamented with golden yellow braid and cord, the front bore eighteen rows of doubled square cord and three rows of eighteen copper buttons, the centre row being spherical, the outer rows semi-spherical. As the dolman was worn without a sash it had two crows-feet lace ornaments, similar to those on hussar pelisses, with five buttons at the base of the centre back.

**Corporals' rank insignia** was red woollen braid, and the long service chevrons were scarlet, whilst those of the Non-Commissioned officers were gold lace.

According to some watercolours by Lalaisse Corporals' insignia and probably also the braiding on the troopers' cuffs was accompanied by a golden yellow tracing cord. The stable dress waistcoat was dark green with red collar patches.

The overalls were red cloth, without pleats, reinforced with the same cloth between the legs; a band of dark green cloth 50mm wide extended down each outer seam. False black leather boots were attached to the lower legs; they were cut in heart shapes at the front and points at the rear.

**Greatcoat:** standard pattern with a collar and a cape, made of white cloth shot through with blue.

**Portemanteau:** dark green piped in golden yellow and with an embroidered grenade.

**Colback:** the internal structure was leather 220mm deep at the front and 270mm at the rear, covered with black bearskin, ornamented with a red bag whose four seams were piped with golden yellow cord terminating in a red tassel. The chin strap was black leather.

In full dress a white hair plume was worn with, at its base, an oval section in the squadron colour.

In undress the bag was withdrawn inside the hat and the top of the headress filled in with a disc of varnished black cloth.

**Breast cord:** golden yellow woollen cord terminating in two made up discs and three tassels. For part of its length it was plaited and hung across the left breast.

**Forage cap:** the bag red, the band green ornamented with a yellow grenade.

**Cartridge pouch:** the same as for the Lancers with oblong double jointed rings. The flap was ornamented with a copper eagle without a crown.

**Cartridge pouch belt:** black polished leather of Artillery pattern. A copper grenade bearing a touch-hole pricker on the front.

**Sword belt:** black leather with a roller buckle and three rings. Slings of black leather with double-ended copper fixing studs.

**Sabretache:** black polished leather with two pockets. Front flap ornamented with a copper eagle without a crown; three black leather suspension straps with copper buckles.

**Sword knot:** black leather.

**Boots:** standard pattern with screwed-in polished iron spurs.

**Armament:** Light Cavalry Pattern sabre and one pistol.

**Saddlery:** Light Cavalry Pattern saddle in natural leather, but with deeper panels.

**Stirrups** of polished iron.

**Bridle:** standard pattern with straight bit. Bit bosses and breastplate decorated with grenades.

**Holster covers** in dark green cloth trimmed with golden yellow; hand rest and access panel in black leather<sup>1</sup>.

Housing (the rear part of the cloth cover) dark green trimmed yellow. Black leather rubbing panels between the legs and where the sabre hangs.

According to Lalaisse both fore and hind parts had an additional yellow piping.

A decision of 29th April 1852 changed the design of the forage cap; the new model had a square peak, the bag was red with golden yellow piping, the band green with a yellow grenade on the front.

The description of the clothing given on 9th June 1853 was more complete than the foregoing, and brings to light the changes made in the uniform of the Guides.

The collar of the dolman was made straight and square. This garment had false pockets, a butterfly knot in cord between the shoulders and the back seams were covered with braid which was traced in cord. All these details had existed in 1852, but they were not mentioned in the brief early description.

The collar patches on the stable waistcoats had three points.

The semi-tight Regulation trousers and the baggy riding overalls, reinforced with cloth and with false boots, were decorated down the outer seams with two yellow laces with a green piping between them.

The greatcoat remained the same.

The ends of the portemanteau were edged and laced in golden yellow, and had a yellow Imperial crown in the centre.

The colback bag became scarlet, and the terminal tassel golden yellow like the braid which covered the seams. The chin strap in shiny black leather was overlaid with copper chain made with flat links.

The colback pompom was made of golden yellow wool and was oval in shape.

The plume was 200mm tall, the upper half was white, the lower half black, and was held in an embossed copper tulip.

The breast cord, much longer than formerly, was plaited and extended right across the chest.

The peaked forage cap was replaced by one with a false bag of scarlet cloth and a dark green band. Yellow piping covered the seams of the bag, trimmed the top edge of the band and formed, on its front, an Hungarian knot, and at the rear a trefoil. A yellow woollen tassel was sewn to the right upper edge of the band in the notional position of the end of the bag. In addition this cap was fitted with a black leather chin strap.

The cartridge pouch flap, in black polished leather, was bordered with a copper trim and ornamented with an embossed oval plate bearing a crowned N with the sun's rays behind. The sides of the box were copper and were provided with swivels.

The shoulder belt for this pouch was now whitened buff leather stitched along the edges. Its copper fittings comprised four double-ended studs, a buckle and slide, a trimming piece at the free end of the strap and, on the front, an Imperial crown connected by two chains to a sunburst plate bearing an eagle.

The sword belt of Hussar type was whitened buff leather sewn along its edges. The central buckle, the three rings connecting the four elements of the belt together, the hitching up hook for the sabre, and the double-ended studs for the slings were all made of copper.

The black leather sabretache had one pocket; its flap was faced with dark green cloth edged with golden yellow braid and bordered with yellow chamois leather. In the centre was an embossed copper plate bearing the Imperial arms. The slings were whitened buff with copper buckles. The foul weather cover for the sabretache was made of black tanned sheepskin lined with green canvas.

The sword knot was the common pattern in whitened buff leather sewn along the edges. The boots, polished spurs and armament remained the same.

Saddlery: saddle with a spoon cantle in natural leather and with deep panels, the fore-edges of which were trimmed to facilitate the fit of the shabraque. Surcingle in natural leather, copper buckles with rollers, polished iron stirrups, breast plate and martingale of black leather with copper buckles and slides; breast plate ornament - an eagle and crown against a rayed background; black leather crupper with copper buckles and slides.

The black leather bridle formed a combined parade halter and bridoon bridle; it had copper buckles and slides. The brow band was whitened buff leather sewn at the edges. The crown piece was reinforced with copper scales fixed with polished iron rivets and on the centre scale appeared a stud for the attachment of the halter. On the bottom scale on each side appeared an Imperial crown. There was an extended throat lash with a copper crescent.

The bit bridle was of black leather; cross-faces joined the brow band to the nose band (the former was hidden underneath the white brow band). The centre of the cross-faces was decorated with an N set on a sunray disc, and an Imperial crown appeared in the middle of the nose band.

The bit in polished steel was in the style known in France as "Constable" with curved bars. The oval copper bosses bore N's and a crown above; the curb chain was iron. The bridoon was of the type known as link and bar<sup>2</sup>.

The shabraque was dark green laced with golden yellow and with the devices embroidered in wool. The fore part covering the pistol holster/wallets had a hand rest and access panel in black sheepskin edged with golden yellow vandyking. The rear part had rounded lower corners and black leather rubbing panels falling behind the saddle panels. In addition the area behind the cantle was overlaid with black sheepskin trimmed yellow.

We should mention that the Imperial crowns which decorated the equipment and saddlery of the Regiment of Guides were of a form special to this unit.

The 1853 description makes no mention of rank insignia so we must assume that those for Corporals remained red and those for Sergeants and above gold.

A watercolour by Lalaisse shows a Sergeant Major whose rank stripes, which appear without piping, completely replace the normal golden yellow cuff lace.

The dress which we have just described was that which the Guides wore on their being taken into the Imperial Guard in 1854.

In the course of that year various modifications were made to the clothing: the dolman was given five rows of buttons and golden yellow piping appeared between the rows of breast frogging. The plume was made taller being increased to 250mm, and the individual feathers at the very top were also made longer; the black base measured 40mm.

The pelisse was adopted in principle in 1855 and was briefly described in the dress regulations. It appears actually to have come into use with the Guides during 1856. It was made of dark green cloth lined with red flannel and had an edge of black sheepskin. It was cut quite long, but had only six cord loops across the front and in all respects was similar to the 1858 Pattern Hussar pelisse.

The same dress regulations tell us that the collar of the dolman was dark green and that the shoulder cape on the greatcoat had four yellow buttonhole laces.

Corporals' insignia was golden yellow woollen lace woven "cul de dé" 22mm wide; Sergeants' was gold in zigzag pattern of the same width, and their long service stripes were likewise gold "cul de dé" pattern<sup>3</sup>.

The description of the harness given on 5th May 1857 provides full details of the saddlery and accessories and they are shown in Figures 6-9.

The complete and definitive description of the uniforms of the Imperial Guard dates from 15th June 1857. It is very detailed, giving the size of all the decoration on the clothing and of all the dress accessories, and is completed with a set of high quality working drawings.

In particular it gives the first full description of the pelisse.

This practical but somewhat inelegant garment, covered the thighs and the lower back of the horseman when mounted, and came to within 50mm of the saddle. It was big enough to be worn over the dolman.

Like the latter its outer edge was trimmed with flat golden yellow tape which sat inside the fleece border. The braid which covered the back seams was traced in cord made up in eyelets. The breast of the jacket had six frogs in square section golden yellow cord, the top one 250mm wide, the bottom one 150mm wide. Those on the right carried a spherical button while those on the left formed buttonhole loops. At their outer ends each frog was formed into an Hungarian knot with a half spherical button in its centre.

The bottom corners of the skirts were slightly rounded and the loose fitting sleeves had no opening at the cuff, although a vertical line of sheepskin on their outer face and a double width of flat braid on the inner side, gave the impression that there was one. A vertical vent trimmed with fleece was provided at each side of the jacket. The two part slinging cords were sewn 50mm in from the border at the neck, the left one had four fixed stops, the right one ended in an olive toggle. Both cords were of double strand cord.

Among the interesting details given in this document we should note that: the four buttonhole laces on the greatcoat cape in golden yellow Soubise braid varied in width, from the top downwards they were 150mm, 130mm, 105mm and 80mm, the right hand ones each having a small uniform button. The tulip plume holder was 40mm tall, the woollen colback pompom was 70mm tall and 40mm wide. The colback retaining cord was 4m 70cms long overall, when doubled as worn it was 2m 35cms therefore, it had four moveable runners, two 80mm made-up discs and three tassels 80mm deep, of which 50mm was fringe. This cord was plaited for part of its length and worn hooked up across the breast, the terminal tassels being suspended from the third button on the left and the upper end of the plait being fixed to the top button on the right by means of one of the runners.

The uniform of the Guides remained like this until the end of the Second Empire.

On 21st March 1860 the colback cord was done away with and the following 15th May a new forage cap was adopted. The concave green band on the old model was replaced with convex flaps which dipped in a V to the front. The Hungarian knot in tracing braid was therefore transferred to the scarlet inner bag.

The regulations of 1857 laid down the Walking-Out dress for Non-Commissioned officers. They were to wear a cardboard shako covered with waxed cloth with flaps, a square peak and an oval pompom in golden yellow cord. In addition they wore either the dolman or pelisse, the regulation trousers, the sword belt and a shiny black leather sword knot. According to regulations they should have worn the green sabretache, but an undress version, like the Adjutant's, in shiny black leather was tolerated.

Sappers: They wore Other Ranks uniforms and were distinguished by crossed axes surmounted by the special Guides version of the Imperial crown embroidered in golden yellow on patches and sewn on both sleeves of the dolman and pelisse. They were equipped with an axe carried bandolier-fashion by means of a whitened buff leather brace, and their gloves had white gauntlet cuffs. They had beards and were mounted on black horses.

Non-Commissioned Adjutants: The 1853 description says nothing about them except that they had a great-coat cape like the officers.

Their clothing was the same as that of the troops, but made of better quality cloth, with three gold lace rank stripes outlined in red. When the decisions of 24th December 1852 were put into effect their sword knot,



waist belt and cartridge pouch belt became polished black leather, but their sabretache, armament and harness remained that of the troops.

The description given on 15th June 1857 was very complete.

The uniform was made of fine cloth with all braid, cord and tracing cord in golden yellow goat hair. Rank insignia were as before.

They wore the troopers' colback with a white pompom, but the piping and tassel on the bag were mixed two thirds gold wire and one third goat hair; the head of the tassel was all gold. The colback/breast cord was mixed gold wire and goat hair in the same proportions.

Their forage caps had all piping in mixed braid and the yellow tassel had the two outer rows of fringe in gold; the tassel head was also gold.

The 1860 Pattern forage cap had the piping in mixed red and gold braid.

The equipment was all of polished black leather; for full dress they wore the troopers' green sabretache, but in undress they had one of black leather.

The greatcoat, armament, portemanteau and saddlery was the same as for the Other Ranks.

The Walking-Out dress shako was similar to that of the NCO's, but had a white pompom. According to some notes in the Deghile collection, now preserved in the archives of "La Sabretache" the colback bag piping, as well as that of the forage cap, should have been silver. This was probably in the latter years of the Empire.

Moreover their rank insignia – an Hungarian knot in tracing braid – appeared in silver in their undress dolmans which were laced in black.

A photograph dating from 1870 shows an Adjutant dressed in this dolman and wearing a kepi with a square peak, a green band and a red crown on which all the tracing could be either mixed gold and yellow, but more likely all silver. In addition he wears loose red trousers tucked into the large fawn boots which were permitted on campaign, as often seen in paintings by Detaille and de Neuville.

The Guides only went on two campaigns.

During the Italian campaign they wore the colback with pompom, but without the plume, and with the bag pushed inside the hat, the dolman, the riding trousers and complete equipment, including the sabretache in its cover, the shabraque and portemanteau.

In 1870 they wore the waistcoat with the pelisse over it and the colback without plume or bag. The dolman, sabretache and shabraque were put into store.

Cavalry carbines, Pattern 1866, were issued to Corporals and troopers shortly before the start of the campaign and the pistol was withdrawn. The carbine was carried slung across the back.

The metal waterbottle covered in greatcoat material was suspended from its white strap on the left hip.

Over the saddle wallets were strapped the rolled greatcoat, the ration bag, the tent canopy and pegs and the large messing tin. The forage bag in striped cloth was placed in front of the portemanteau and saddle bags in undyed fabric hung down either side.

L. ROUSSELOT  
Painter of the Army  
Member of "La Sabretache"

#### CAPTIONS TO THE FIGURES

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| 1. Guide. Full Dress 1852-53              | 11. Dolman, rear view                             |
| 2. Corporal. Full Dress 1852-53           | 12. Colback                                       |
| 3. Guide. Stable Dress 1855-60            | 13. Cartridge pouch                               |
| 4. Sergeant-Major. Full Dress 1856-60     | 14. Sabretache                                    |
| 5. Guide. Full Dress 1853-54              | 15. Pouch belt decoration                         |
| 6. Bridles with Parade halter and details | 16. Forage cap 1853-60                            |
| 7. Saddle and shabraque                   | 17. Guide. Full Dress 1860-70                     |
| 8. Bit bosses                             | 18. Campaign Dress 1870                           |
| 9. Shabraque decoration                   | 19. Guide in greatcoat                            |
| 10. Dolman with breast cord               | 20. Non-Commissioned Adjutant. Full Dress 1855-60 |

#### NOTES

- 1 The shabraque Pattern 1845 introduced buttoned flaps onto the fore parts of the cloth or sheepskin holster/wallet covers. This obviated the necessity to roll back the whole cover in order to be able to get at the pistol or the contents of the wallets.
- 2 See "La Cavalerie Française et son Harnachement" by Colonel M. Dugue MacCarthy, Maloigne, Paris 1986, pages 371-372 for further details.
- 3 A "cul de dé" means literally like the end of a thimble. The weave of the braid is a very fine criss-cross pattern, the gaps between the threads forming dimples like those which retain the needle in the end of a thimble.

Translated with notes by  
Andrew Cormack



L ROUSSELOT  
Membre de la Sabretache

# L'Armée Française

SES UNIFORMES  
SON ARMEMENT  
SON ÉQUIPEMENT

## GARDE IMPÉRIALE GUIDES

1854-1870

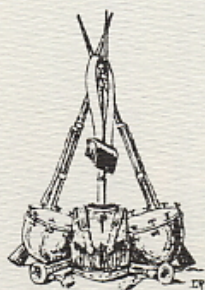


PLANCHE N° 98





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