

Elite Company of the General Headquarters of the Army, Trooper

Winkler's title understandably misidentified this soldier who does indeed appear like a "French Dragoon in Infantry Service" — as apparently indicated by the figure's gaiters and shoes instead of cavalry boots. This distinction, however, existed only in 1805-1806. This is actually a "guide" from an elite Imperial Headquarters company, and the uniform details are excellent.

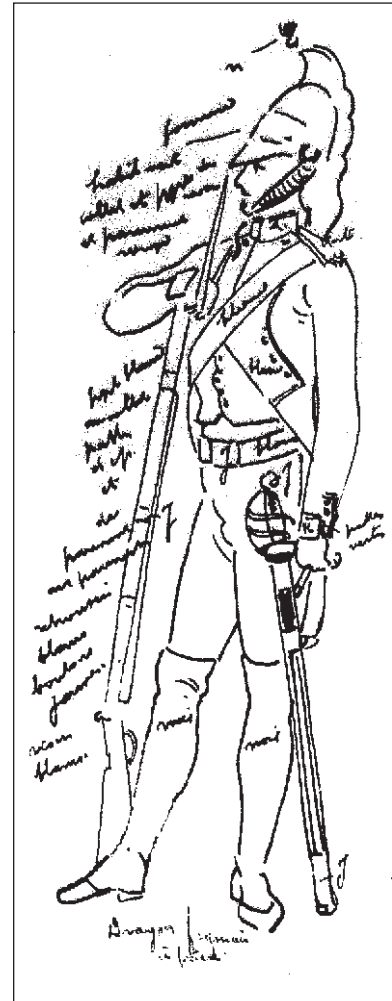
Guides typically *guided* columns along the route of march. Other duties included acting as interpreters, escorts, and bodyguards for important officers. This trooper from the *Compagnie d'élite du grand quartier-général* shared a common origin with all French guide units, which eventually belonged only to Marshals. Three companies were authorized by the French government in 1792. Subsequently, various generals (Bonaparte in 1796, Charles-Pierre-François Augereau in 1797, and André Masséna in 1799) created their own companies. From this nucleus, a 500-man "corps of guides" was formed in 1799, and in March 1800 a decree abolished all other guide units. New units were to be created from dragoons, and First Consul Bonaparte (Napoleon's title in 1800) stipulated a dragoon uniform for guide units. The First Consul promptly ignored his decree for his own guides, formed in 1796, who retained their light cavalry uniforms to become the Guard *Chasseurs à Cheval*. The Marshals frequently uniformed their own guides in fanciful ways; after 1800, Joachim Murat, Bon-Adrien-Jannot de Moncey, and GD Jean Rapp also had their guides in *chasseur à cheval* (light cavalry) uniforms, while Masséna, Jean-Baptiste-Jules de Bernadotte, and Jean Lannes had theirs in hussar uniforms.

During the life of the first *Grande Armée*, Napoleon forbade his marshals to employ entire cavalry companies (half squadrons) as guides, much to the relief of many cavalry commanders. Instead, some marshals, like Louis-Nicolas Davout, selected a number of men from various cavalry companies, while other marshals cast their net more widely. These practices contributed to a great variation in uniforms among the guides.

This figure's white lapels and red collar distinguish the Elite Company of the General Headquarters of the Army from any unit of dragoons; none of the line dragoon regiments had white lapels, and the Empress Guard Dragoons had a green collar, not red. The material shortages of 1813 affected even elite units. This figure, wearing a standard dragoon helmet without a red plume, lacks the prescribed bearskin, a headdress clearly shown in Knötel's plate (in Elting, *Napoleonic Uniforms*, Vol. 1) of the *Guides du Prince du Neufchâtel* in Spain.<sup>1</sup> Elting, drawing on E. L. Bucquoy's *Les uniformes du premier empire*<sup>2</sup> to explain a figure from the same unit two plates later,<sup>3</sup> notes that "probably because of the difficulty and expense of procuring new bearskin caps, [Marshal Louis-Alexandre] Berthier ordered them issued helmets of the pattern worn by the French (line) lancer regiments. Napoleon intervened to order their uniform unchanged, but somehow they ended wearing standard dragoon helmets."

Other items of note depicted here include the short dragoon musket and a saber of apparently Prussian origin.

Freiberg I, 41 >



Brun's annotated tracing (above) of I, 41. Brun never completed a final illustration.



5-Französischer Dragoner im Infanterie Dienste

<sup>1</sup> See also: "Otto Manuscript" published in G. Dempsey, Jr.'s *Napoleon's Soldiers*; RIGO, "Le Plumet," plate 174; "De nouveau sur les guides," *Tradition Magazine*, N°16, 117<sup>th</sup> Series, Vol.1, Chapter 5 for Elting's source for commentary on H. Knötel's Plate 14 in Elting, *Napoleonic Uniforms*, Vol.1, Chapter on "Command and Staff."

<sup>2</sup> Bucquoy, *Les uniformes*, Vol. 6, page 157, N° 109 and 110.

<sup>3</sup> Elting, *Napoleonic Uniforms*, Vol. 2, "Command and Staff," plate 16.