

# INTRODUCTION

*"The best source [on uniforms] is the drawings of Napoleon's soldiers and their allies made by amateur artists who sketched them as they passed."*

— John Elting, author of *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armée*, and the four-volume study, *Napoleonic Uniforms*

This book presents a bound collection of 148 color uniform plates of Napoleon's army, reproduced or derived directly from the remarkable illustrations most probably begun in Saxony during the two-month summer armistice of 1813. All of these images belonged to French historian and collector Gabriel Cottreau in the early twentieth century. These images came from two separate portfolios designated here as the *Freiberg* and the *Dresden Manuscripts*. What the original German illustrators separately witnessed that summer and recorded in these two portfolios was the assembly of Napoleon's last *Grande Armée*, a vast and colorful multinational force that included, among others, French, Belgian, Dutch, Polish and Italian soldiers.



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Nearly a century after they were first rendered, 98 of the original images of both portfolios were "copied" by the French artist Charles Brun on a commission from Gabriel Cottreau. While Brun did not make exact copies, he faithfully rendered the original figures with minor changes in detail and color that are explained in the text accompanying the uniform plates in *Napoleon's Last Grande Armée*. This collection is the first time all of Brun's commissioned illustrations are published as plates. (Nine additional original *Freiberg* figures that Brun traced, but of which he did not complete a color rendering, are shown at the end of the section for the *Freiberg Manuscript*.)

The men who posed for the original artists marched off to fight in one of the most destructive campaigns of the nineteenth century, a series of long marches and bloody battles that culminated in Napoleon's catastrophic defeat at Leipzig in October 1813. The famous Battle of the Nations, the largest of the period, compelled Napoleon to retreat beyond the Rhine and ultimately sealed the fate of the French First Empire. Although more fighting would occur in 1814 and during the "Hundred Days" in 1815, no French army would ever again bear the title "*Grande*." The uniform plates in this collection offer a glimpse of that colorful but ill-fated army.

This book is not a military history of the campaign of 1813, nor is it an in-depth study of the French army's composition and organization. Rather, the text augments the information presented in the uniform plates.

The images in *Napoleon's Last Grande Armée* have seldom been seen before and until now were not publicly accessible. The publication of these previously scattered images rescues many of these compositions from obscurity. The exceptional works included in this limited edition collection provide rare eyewitness evidence of the uniforms of the period.

— The Publishers

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**—Alfred Umhey served as curator of the German Army Museum at Rastatt from 1992-1995, where he gained international recognition for his expertise in uniformology. After two years as a manager for a militaria auction house, he became an independent consultant for museums and historical exhibitions. Umhey has assembled one of the finest reference collections of uniform illustrations in existence, consisting of more than 1,400 volumes plus 500,000 pictures, including prints, drawings, watercolors, photos, color copies, black and white copies, tracings, as well as cutouts from newspapers and journals related specifically to uniforms. It also incorporates both partial and complete collections of former famous collectors, such as Roy Belmont-Maitland, Ludwig Scharf, Herbert Knötel, and Dr. Hans Bleckwenn. A distinguished re-enactor, Umhey presided over the German Napoleonic Society for two years before becoming a founding member of the European Napoleonic Society, of which he is actively serving as press spokesman. Appointed as a Fellow of the International Napoleonic Society in 1997, Umhey is currently one of the principal authors of *Tradition* magazine and a member of the editorial committee of *Soldats Napoléoniens*.

# THE STORY OF THIS COLLECTION

## 1. THE "LOST" FREIBERG MANUSCRIPT

— Alfred Umhey

Until very recently, few uniform experts could have imagined that this *Freiberg Manuscript* would ever come to be published — its location was unknown for the last decades of the twentieth century. Behind the unveiling of these extraordinary uniform plates is an historical detective tale, replete with obscure artists, eccentric collectors, and dedicated "uniformologists," all of whom played their parts in the recovery of these precious artifacts of Napoleonic uniform history.

Appropriately, the story of the search for the original paintings of the lost *Freiberg Manuscript* — 50 of which are reunited and presented in *Napoleon's Last Grande Armée* — begins with the man who is regarded as the father of modern uniformology, German painter Richard Knötel (1857–1914). Knötel is perhaps best known for his massive work *Grosse Uniformkunde* ("Great Uniform Studies," with 1,060 hand-colored plates in 18 volumes, 1893–1918), as well as for many remarkable tableaux of battles and military events. He was also a diligent collector who, before his early death in 1914, systematically amassed a library of uniform sources that numbered nearly 10,000 pieces. Much of the collection inherited by his son — the equally famous artist Herbert Knötel (1893–1963) — was destroyed in World War II when Berlin was devastated, resulting in the loss of countless irreplaceable pieces.

*Die Freiburger Bilderhandchrift* (translated "The Freiberg Picture Manuscript," but referred to throughout this book as the *Freiberg Manuscript*) was reviewed in 1912 by Richard Knötel in his *Mitteilungen zur Geschichte der militärischen Tracht* ("Notes on the History of Military Costume"), the newsletter published along with the above-mentioned *Uniformkunde* plates. The name given to the manuscript refers to the place where it originated: the town of Freiberg in Saxony. Richard Knötel attributed this three-part work to a young German student named Kurt Alexander Winkler (1794–1862), an artist who also happened to be studying at Freiberg's Mining Academy preparing for his eventual career as a mining bureaucrat. The senior Knötel wrote, in part:

"We emphasize that the artistic value of the sheets is not our major concern. Even if the manuscript is the work of an amateur, he is a very skillful one who had without any doubt a sharp view for details.

"The execution of the watercolors is a painstaking one. The artist goes so far — in contrast to the rather superficial 'Elberfeld Manuscript' — as to show the remains of white powder beneath the queue of the old Guard Grenadiers and the hooks and eyelets on the open collar of a Russian cuirassier officer."

Richard Knötel went on to catalog Winkler's illustrations in great detail before returning them to the care of their owner, a wealthy German collector living in Paris named J. P. Zarn. Thanks to Knötel's vivid and detailed descriptions, the manuscript served as a source of information for the next two generations of uniform researchers and artists, despite the fact that very few people had ever seen the originals!

The uniform information contained within the *Freiberg Manuscript* was considered so valuable that noted French military artist Henri Boisselier (1881-1959) and Dr. Friedrich Hermann (in the 1984 publication *Zeitschrift für Heereskunde*), both produced black and white illustrations of French soldiers based solely on R. Knötel's descriptions.

### A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

The entire collection disappeared after Zarn's death in 1963 at age 90. Needless to say, this lost *Freiberg Manuscript* attained a legendary status among uniform enthusiasts. Thirty-one years after Winkler's illustrations vanished, Edmund Wagner made an interesting discovery in the summer of 1994. Buried in the Brunon Library of the renowned *Musée de l'Empire*, located in the *Château de l'Empire* in Salon de Provence, 91 tracings of soldiers matching Richard Knötel's description of Winkler's distinctive figures emerged. These tracings were apparently copied from the original *Freiberg Manuscript*. If the original watercolors could not be found, perhaps it would be possible to work backward to reconstruct these famous lost *Freiberg* illustrations. Curiously, no evidence existed as to who had made these tracings, a riddle compounding the mystery of the whereabouts of the original plates.



Contemporary print showing the student uniform of the Freiberg Mining Academy.