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MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

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When the volunteer, during the Revolution, or the conscript, during the Empire, arrived at the barracks, the life which he had lived until then, changed. Indeed, he leaves his civil clothing for a forage cap that was made from recovered uniform cloth, a fatigue jacket and duck trousers: "*From there on, we were dressed. We received a uniform coat, a vest, breeches, forage cap, two pairs of gaiters, and a pair of socks. I will say to you that we do not have any shirts, nor shoes*" writes Pierre Philibert Doret to his parents in the year II. It is only later that a conscript will get his uniform coat and his shako. A conscript receives a first free set of clothing, and at least a gratification of the colonel, and during the legal lifetime of a clothing piece, it's replacement is provided for by the soldier on his own expenses. Under the Revolution, the clothing of the troops is done almost randomly, without holding account of sizes too much. Under the Empire, It is the capitaine d'habillement, who commands also a company of the depot battalion, to which he is attached by decree of February 18, 1808, who supervises the clothing manufacture of the uniforms and their delivery to new recruits.

Manufacture of the uniforms

The proto-industrialized clothing industry of the common uniforms was set up in two different ways: Through the depot of the regiment by a specialized trade unit attached to the staff or through civil tailors having contracts with the army. Under the First Empire, the regiments are in fact in charge of the clothing production of their uniforms. Each conseil d'administration, with the agreement of the colonel, makes deals with contractors. The cloth colours are fixed by the decrees and ordinances, the prices are established by the war ministry. General inspectors and Commissaries de Guerre are charged with the guarding of their proper application. In March 1810, because of the dissemination of the battalions and squadrons of the same regiment, the emperor makes the decision to group the supplies in Governmental storing facilities that were to be found through the whole wide, immense territory subjected to his authority. But because of slowness and mistakes, this remedy appeared worse than the evil. To cure these serious problems, Napoleon, in October 1811, authorizes again the conseils d'administration of regiments to make deals with contractors but by limiting those to the manufacture of 200 uniforms, the remainder being delivered by the State warehouses. This solution makes it possible for the regiment to be able to refuse pieces of clothing made of fabrics that are considered to be inadmissible.

Regimental clothing production

The clothing industry of the uniforms under the Empire is not so simple as one wants to think it was. For the regimental clothing industries, the conseils d'administration are strict and vigilant concerning the quality of the fabrics they receive. From 1811, samples are submitted to the Minister for the War and to the conseil d'administration of the regiment by the manufacturer. After acceptance by agents of the Ministry of War, the necessary quantities of the cloths, fabrics and passementerie needed by the regiments for the manufacture of their

uniforms is sent to the depot of the regiment by the stores. But, in order to obtain this cloth, it could be necessary to bribe the local commissar de guerre, as this is what Bial did, under the Consulate, to obtain the supplies due to his regiment. Thus he provided him with a dinner in Paris. For the regiments stationed in Toulouse, in 1811, like the 3^{ème} regiment of foot artillery, the store delivering the woollen “Loden” cloth is at Bordeaux. There, these cloths are processed on the spot or sent to the war battalions or squadrons in the small depot of the conseil d’administration of the regiment, involving the consequent financial operations that were not always simple. At receiving these textiles, packed in marked bundles, a member of the conseil d’administration of the regiment, the sous-inspecteur aux revues and the local commissaire de guerre check the quality of the fabric.

With the blockade and the supplies increasingly more consequent, the quality of the fabrics employed tended to being increasingly poor, the manufacturers nibbling on the fibre content to increase their production. This involves increasingly large counter measures to be taken of the regiments. Thus, on January 13, 1807, the conseil d’administration of the 3^{ème} line infantry refuses temporarily 73 pieces of tricot, dispatched from Tours, in virtue of an order of the Ministry of War. From the 20-27 April, 1811, the 3^{ème}, 4^{ème}, 5^{ème} and 13^{ème} battalions du train, stationed at Toulouse, almost systematically refuse their cloth deliveries, up to 80%, that were intended to equip the conscripts de la reserve of 1811. These refusals often relate to great quantities of textiles. On April 20th, 1811, 205 meters of celestial blue tricot and 24 meters of imperial blue tricot were refused by the 3^{ème} battalion principal du train, being that day’s complete amount of textiles intended for the regiment. Generally, the textiles were refused because they did not correspond to the samples sent. They are of bad quality : badly dyed and too weak for the production of uniforms : the report of the examination of the cloths by the 3^{ème} battalion principal du train stipulates, at April 20, 1811, that the fabric “ *was stretched at stakes in order to obtain it’s length and even a lengthening beyond reason* “. Because of this check, only the warp resisted whereas the weft of the cloth was broken. These checks did go up to the level of the ministry of war that informed the prefectures about this. Thus, on June 29th, 1811, the Minister of war informs the prefect of the Haut Garonne that following the refusal by the conseil d’administration of the 4^e battalion bis du train d’artillerie of the fabric supplies made by Joseph Jouradan Captier & co., and the 50 shakos of Déaclar of Paris that were considered to be badly made, his council of the prefecture was designated as a mediator. This last party called upon the help of experts, as is what happened on October 7th, 1811, in the case of the cloth refusal by the 3^{ème} artillery regiment. Most of the time, the Council of the prefecture followed the complaint of the conseils d’administration and demanded 3 times out of 5, for the replacement of cloth. The woollen fabric was not the only problem: Indeed, on May 2nd, 1811, the 5^{ème} battalion bis du train refuses its woollen “cadis” cloth, intended for the lining of coat-skirts or for coat-facings but also for the shakos. Textiles, and manufactured pieces remained with the depot of the regiments: thus, at the time of the dissolution of the 7^{ème} hussards in December 1815, one still could find at the store of this regiment 3 pelisses de trompette, 2 dolmans de trompette, 916 ceintures echarpe, 91m green cloth, 5900 m of square-woven braid, 7936 m of flat woven braid and 123 dozens of small brass gilet buttons.

After the acceptance of the raw materials by the regiments, It’s the regimental workmen who enter the scene. The latter are in each unit, even at the worst moments : thus, in 1813 the 7^{ème} hussards account for 1 Master saddler, 1 Master tailor and 1 Master boot-maker. On the same date, among the 9^{ème} hussards, listed as *chef*, one finds also a saddler chief, a chief cutter and a chief boot-maker. Even in 1793, to the 12^{ème} dragons, one finds a Master saddler, a Master tailor and a Master breeches maker. The clothes are manufactured according to patterns and models provided by the central administration. Clothing were made in an proto-industrial manner, with raw, unfinished edges and generally in just three sizes : small, medium, large.

They can, according to the whims of the colonel be readjusted thereafter, as in the case of the pantalons de route of the 2^{ème} regiment conscripts chasseurs de la Garde: they " *will have to be made broader, longer and tight at the bottom [and] at the ankle by a white drawstring cord which will be added for this purpose* ". For the NCO's, their clothing was made by the regimental tailors, to individual measure and with a finer cloth and of better quality, but without nearing the material used in the Imperial Guard, even at the end of the Empire.

Government issued clothing

If a part of the uniforms was made by specialist craftsmen in the regiments, or by tailors at the request of the conseils d'administration of the regiments, a part of the production arrives from the state workshops or at least the military depots. This is the case for the shirts, of which the manufacture was generated by the general inspector of the clothing, and for the shoes. The workshops are disseminated over the total of the French territory: one finds some in Trévoux, in L'Ain in 1793 or another in Lille at the same time. On January 25th, 1797, the commissaire ordonnateur en chef Dénié gives orders to the clothing general inspector Poulin, to deliver from the stores of Milan, 46 pairs of shoes, 46 pairs of gaiters and cloth to make 46 uniform coats, breeches and gunners' vests for the company of gunners attached to the 12^e light infantry. Cloth is delivered to a workshop which manufactures the clothing and delivers it to the regiment. With the uniforms supply manufactured by the government, the conseils d'administration see their influence on matters concerning quality requirements much diminished. Indeed, clothing travelling in barrels or in, cannot be refused any more by the regiments for which they are intended, even if the fabric's quality or the accuracy of the clothing made proved to be insufficient. Thus, on November 14th, 1811, at the 12^{ème} regiment of light infantry, stationed in Spain, uniform coats arrive from France of line infantry model. The colonel asks them to be " *adapted carefully...so that the men for which they are intended can carry them next Thursday at the inspection which will take place*". It is, in the case of problems, again the prefecture which acts as mediator. So, at the beginning of 1814, the prefectural administration of the eastern Pyrenees has to intervene in a difference of opinion that opposes the suppliers of conscripts' uniform coats and the conseils d'administration of the 115^{ème} and 143^{ème} regiments of line infantry.

Privately made clothing

However, if a regiment does not have tailors or does not receive uniforms through the government, the colonel or the major can call upon the uniform making skills of civil tailors. That is what happened, in 1811, with the men of the 126^{ème} regiment of line infantry that still wore their Nassau uniforms. The Garde, like often, does not follow the regular path. A part of its uniforms is manufactured by civil tailors in Paris: like Mr Yvé, at 231, Royal Palates, master tailor of the sailors of the Guard or Mr Chardon, supplier of headgear of the Guard, at 19, Rue de la Monnaie. In addition to a careful manufacture at all times, the materials employed for the clothing manufacture of the Guard uniforms are, even in 1813, of great quality, except for the regiments of the gardes d'Honneur whose development was not as habitual as the Guard's since their uniforms were made initially in the départements according to models. The officers got their uniforms made by civil tailors, when they randomly did not resell them between each other in case of a replacement; thus, Hippolyte Despinchal, swapping the Gendarmes d'Ordonnance for the 5^{ème} hussards, receives as a gift the uniform of a captain of the said regiment, who became Aide-de-camp. Despite of this, some units remained without proper uniform: At September 7, 1808 Napoleon points out it to Dejean: " *the 52eme still has at its depot, in the 28e division, 80 men equipped like peasants; the*

67eme, 15 men; the 101ere, 200; the 102eme, 240. In the 27eme division, The 6eme: 33 men equipped as peasants; the 14e legere: 41. That's very wrong with me. Make me understand why these men do not have immediately breeches and uniform vests ".

On Campaign

On Campaign, the regiments can receive new clothing by convoys. This clothing was tied up together and put in barrels. The Guard, active on one campaign after another, changed uniforms when its regiments had the occasion, like the fusiliers of the Guard returning from Germany and heading for Spain did. They changed uniforms at their [Parisian] barracks or at the place where they happened to be staying and got new ones brought in from Paris. At the level of the regiment, workshops are set up temporarily: "*We remain in Toro until the 25th of May. During our stay in Toro, I am occupied with repair and clothes duties to get my regiment ready to campaign*" notes colonel Morin, of the 5^{eme} dragons. This is the case to the 5^{eme} hussards, in 1807 in Breslau or 1808 in Metz, and to the 31^{eme} Chasseurs, in 1813 in Vérona. If in garrison, le conseil d'administration of the regiment deals with clothing and the equipment of the soldiers, in shift, even if the regiments are equipped with master tailors and Master boot-makers, it happened very often that the soldiers have to replace themselves damaged or missing goods with supplies often of local or enemy resources. If regimental tailor is not far, the soldier who has to recover cloth can have made him a remake of his uniform or his missing goods. He can also address a civil tailor, paying him for this. If a helping hand is lacking, or the soldier is isolated from any professional, he has to rely on his own resourcefulness. Then, the most skilful soldiers become the couturiers for the others (at least of their section) after individual purchase, or lucky find, of fabrics. Thus, Gervais, after Marengo, gets Austrian cloth taken from a military store of Cremona. Not knowing how to sew, he decides to produce a waistcoat, trousers and gaiters. "*I did put so much effort at the job that I succeeded beyond any hope... Other military men which were in the same circumstances like me, also equipped with cloth, asked me to work for them. I said to them that I was not a tailor, that I had made it for myself, at my own risks and dangers, a job which I would not like undertaking for others, fearing to spoil their fabric. These men took that for unwillingness. They went to find the sergeant major, who said to me by his own authority that if I would not work for these men, I was going to be guarding the camp.. ..I for me decided to be a tailor...*"

and clothes : "*I always took care, when I had arrived at the halt, to change trousers and gaiters, to carefully polish my buttons, the eagle and the chin-scales on my shako... : in a word, to show good military behaviour*". This fatigue was put under the responsibility of the commanding officers of the companies : "*the regiment will be held ready to march off at 9 hours in the evening. The companies chefs will ensure if the items of clothing and equipment in their companies are in good condition and whether each soldier has his cartridges, flints and pick*" orders colonel Dulong, of the 12^e regiment of light infantry, on July 18th, 1811.

When the soldier is in total lack of equipment and he must replace the missing or damaged items, it all came down to shrewdness and the laws of the war : Scheltens, who served in the 2^{eme} regiment of Grenadiers of the Guard, recovers in Saxony from the still warm corpse of an Austrian officer, a pair of boots on which he makes it all through the campaign. In the same way, Gervais, a light infantry NCO, in 1810, recovers the shako of a dead chasseur, whereas his own was pierced. He also takes his time to save the silver braiding of this chasseurs uniform. Chevillet, trumpetter to the 8^{eme} Chasseurs, equips himself with new stuff at the expense of the enemy, at the time of the campaign of 1809 : a green waistcoat, boots, a green

ceinture écharpe with yellow sliding rings and a maroon pelisse. All examples offer a particular aspect, very far off from the directives, orders and regulations.

Le 8 décembre 1792, the redingotes for the armies of Beurnonville and Custine, travel packed in 92 bundles. Livre d'ordre du 12^e régiment d'infanterie légère, private collection.

The equipment of the fusiliers de la Garde, in which served Scheltens, were changed or fixed like new items, at the barracks of Courbevoie, on the road to Spain

Le journal du colonel Morin, presented and annotated by J.Croyet, GERVAIS (Capitaine) : *A la conquête de l'Europe. Souvenirs d'un soldat de l'Empire*. Bernard Giovanangeli éditeur, 2003.

JOURQUIN (Jacques) : *Souvenirs de campagnes du sergent Faucheur*. Editions Taillandier, 2004.