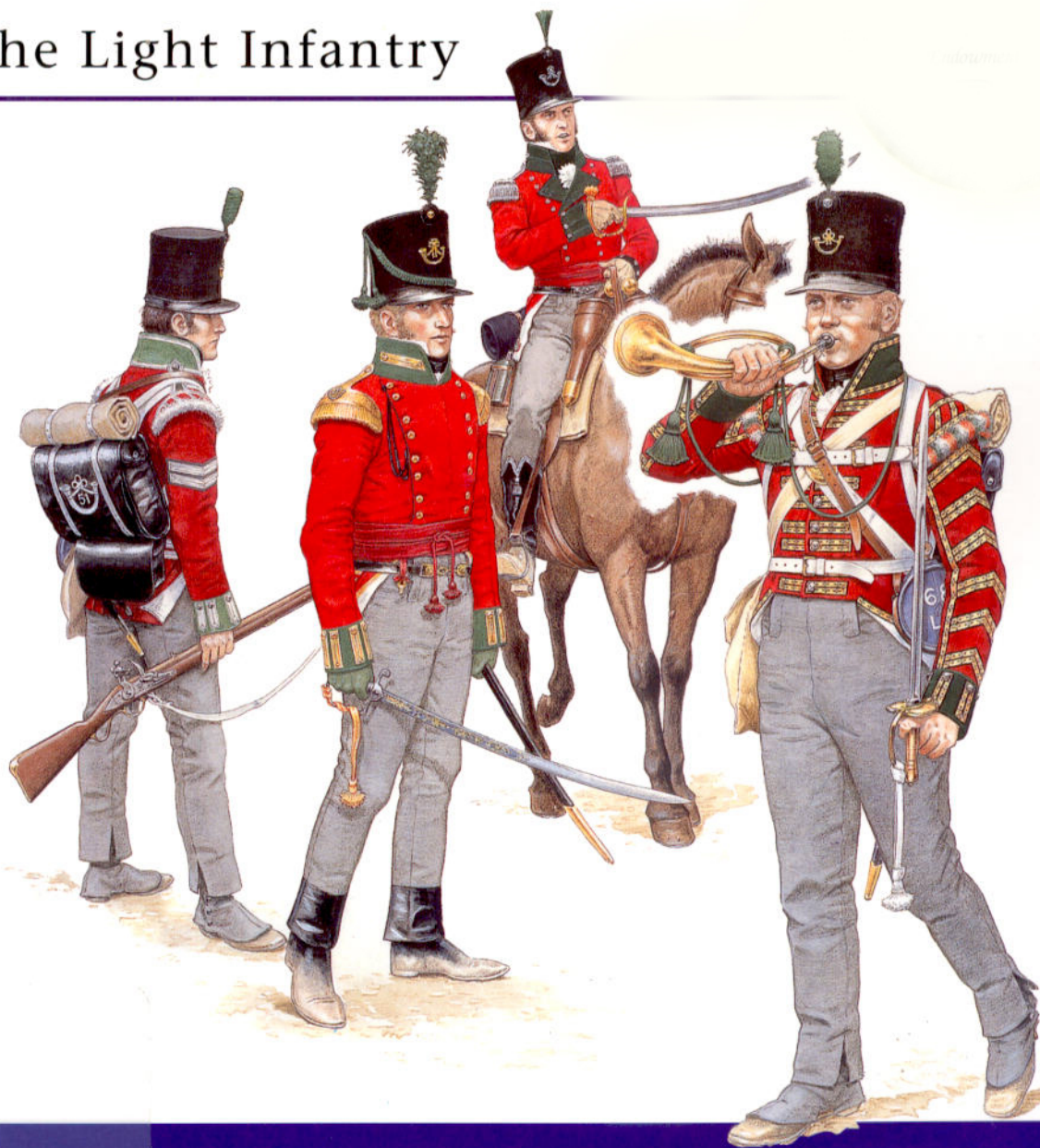


Wellington's Peninsula Regiments (2)

The Light Infantry





MIKE CHAPPELL comes from an Aldershot family with British Army connections stretching back several generations. He enlisted as a teenage private in the Royal Hampshire Regiment in 1952. Over the next 22 years of infantry soldiering, many of them spent with the Gloucester Regiment, he held every rank and many regimental appointments up to WO1 and Regimental Sergeant Major. He retired in 1974, as RSM of the 1st Battalion The Wessex Regiment (Rifle Volunteers), after seeing service in Malaya, Cyprus, Swaziland, Libya, Germany, Ulster and home garrisons. He began painting military subjects in 1968 and since then has gained worldwide popularity as a military illustrator. Mike has written and illustrated many books for Osprey.

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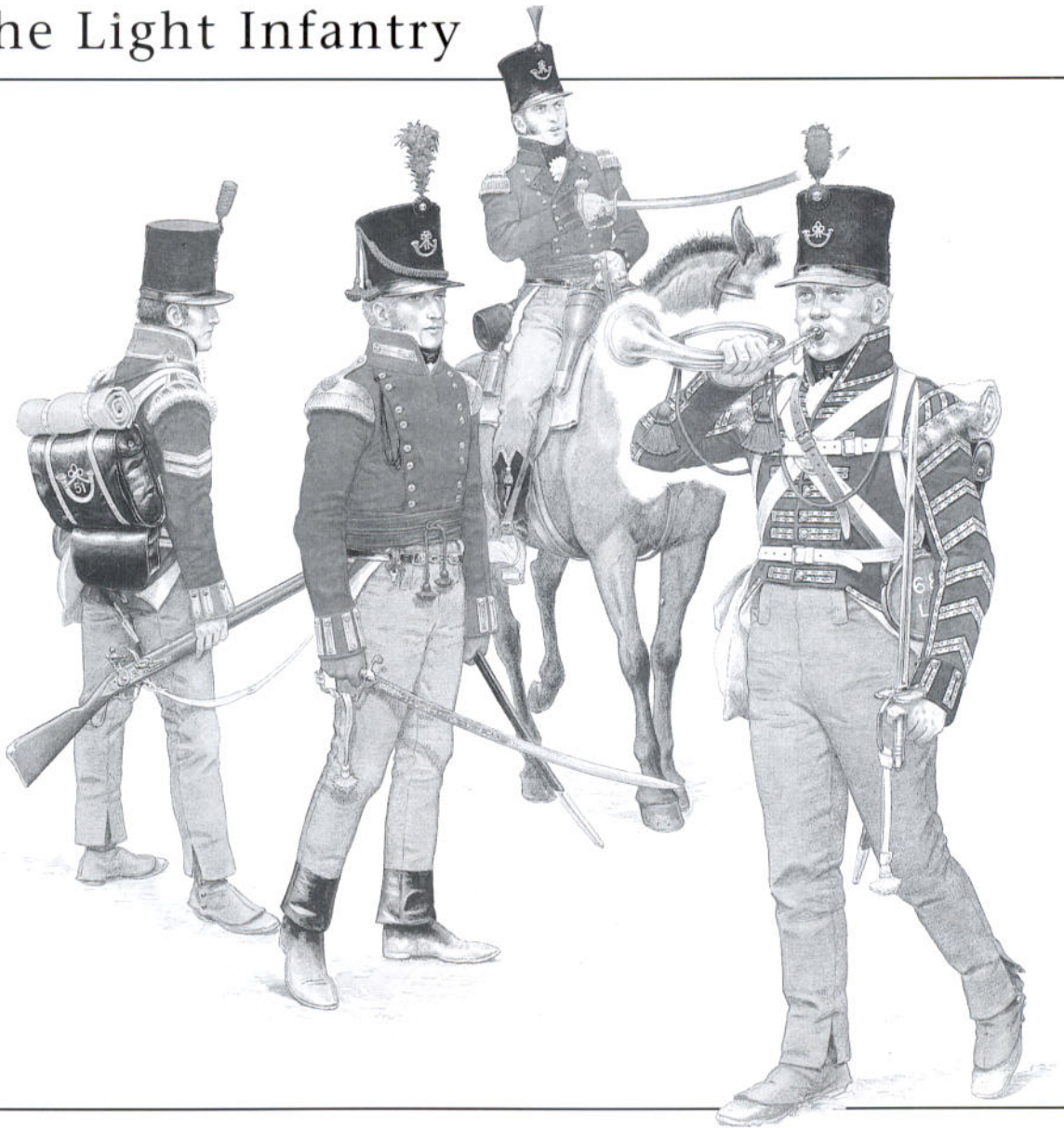
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The Light Infantry



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Series editor Martin Windrow

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Editor's Note

The spelling of the words 'Peninsula/r' often causes confusion. The former is used in this text, as the noun form, in most contexts; the adjectival form with a final 'r' is used in the term 'Peninsular War' but rarely elsewhere.

WELLINGTON'S PENINSULA REGIMENTS: THE LIGHT INFANTRY

THE PENINSULAR WAR

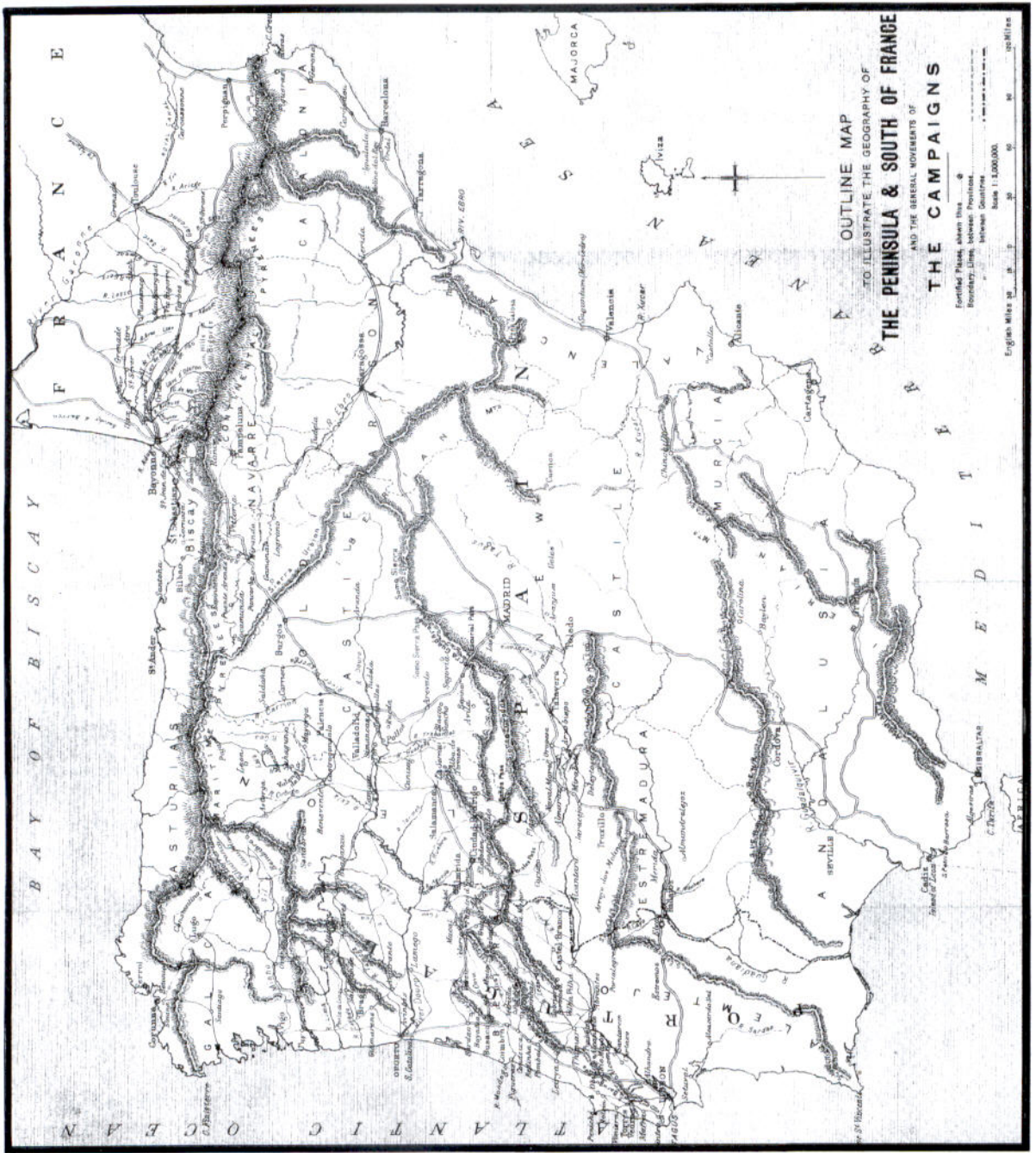
THE HISTORY OF BRITAIN'S standing or regular army is a long and honourable one which reaches back more than three centuries to the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660. In that time its regiments have been sent overseas to fight many wars in the name of their king (or queen), wars from which they have usually returned in triumph, despite often being poorly led, badly prepared and few in number. They continue, quite properly, to take pride in those battles from which they emerged the victors, commemorating their involvement in the likes of Minden, Quebec, Alexandria and Salamanca by marking their anniversaries with parades and feasting.

There are episodes, however, when the achievements of particular British armies so shine from the pages of history that they can only be described as glorious. Perhaps the finest of these was the Peninsular War of 1807–14 when, led by Sir Arthur Wellesley, later 1st Duke of Wellington, a small British force fighting beside Portuguese and Spanish allies drove from the Iberian Peninsula the numerically superior forces of Napoleon's France. It was a war of hard fighting over difficult terrain, in which both sides suffered terribly from privation, exhausting marches and an inhospitable climate. As it developed it tied down hundreds of thousands of Napoleon's troops – sorely needed elsewhere, particularly after the disastrous failure of the emperor's Russian campaign of 1812 – in attempts to suppress the insurrection of the people of Spain and to defeat the British-Allied forces. Eventually the French were driven across the Pyrenees and well into the south of their homeland before Napoleon, under pressure elsewhere by the combined forces of Russia, Prussia and Austria, accepted defeat, abdicated and went into his first exile, on Elba, in the spring of 1814.

While never aspiring to Napoleon's visionary genius, unleashed by the emperor's absolute political power, in terms of professional soldiering Wellington was arguably the best commander of his times; and under his leadership the British regiments in the Peninsula achieved a succession of stunning victories until it seemed that, with him at their head, they were invincible. Many reasons have been advanced for this extraordinary flowering of military effectiveness, but high on any list must be Wellington's talents as a general combined with British regimental *esprit de corps* – that special mixture of factors that produced within a regiment or battalion a level of morale which enabled it to endure the shock of battle and fight on until the enemy broke. At a time when soldiers of other armies

A miniature portrait of Major Macleod of the 43rd Light Infantry, the hero of the defence of the Coa crossing in July 1810. Macleod was killed at the storming of Badajoz in April 1812. Note that as a field officer he is portrayed wearing a pair of epaulettes over a pair of Light Infantry 'wings'. (Author's collection)





A contemporary map of Portugal, Spain and southern France at the time of the Peninsular War. (Author's collection)

sought inspiration from political idealism, the worship of their God and his saints, or the praise of their emperor, the British soldier looked no further for that which sustained him than his regiment. His comrades, his leaders, the regimental colours and title were (and still are) tangible things, more suited to a British character which even today finds satisfaction and enjoyment in clubs, pubs and the communal 'support' of sports.

However they came by their fighting spirit, Wellington's Peninsula regiments served him well, winning 19 pitched battles and innumerable

other combats, laying ten sieges and taking four great fortresses, and killing, wounding or capturing 200,000 of the enemy to bring the duke his honours, position and great wealth. All they asked in return was for 'that bugger with the long nose' to lead them to further victories (especially if these brought them 'the spoils of war' – prize money, plunder and drink). He rarely failed to do so; but the cost was great. Forty thousand of his men died during his campaigns, their bodies thrown naked (since their clothes had value) into unmarked graves, rivers or pyres, or simply left for the wolves and crows.

The account that follows tells the story of a number of these regiments – those converted to light infantry, a role that found them ever the first into battle.

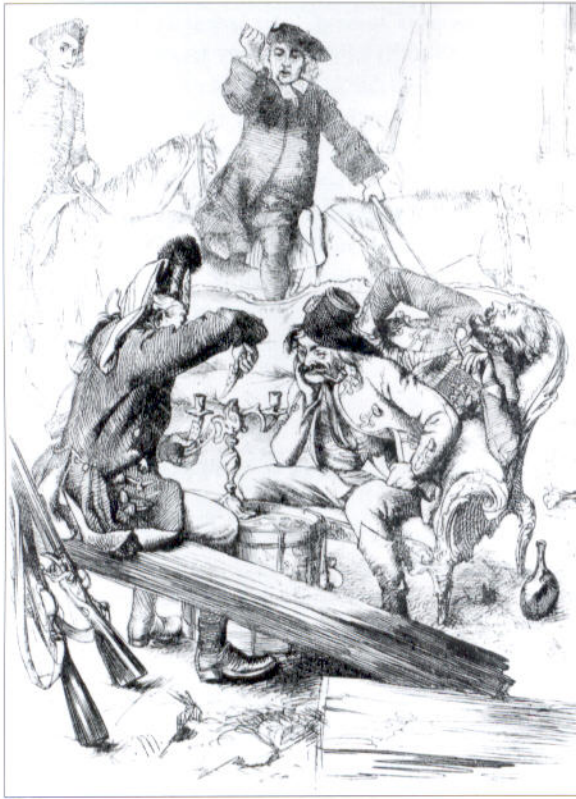
THE EVOLUTION OF LIGHT INFANTRY

Throughout the 18th century, infantry weapons and tactics were developed and tested in a series of European wars that led to the system developed by the Prussian drillmasters being adopted by the armies of most of the nations involved. Their infantry were trained by rote and harsh discipline to march and manoeuvre, shoulder to shoulder, in columnar formations, before deploying into line to confront the enemy with rolling volleys of musketry. In the ensuing slaughter of such firefights victory – according to theory – went to the side which could continue to maintain formation as enemy fire took its toll, while itself keeping up steady and regular fire.

War was prepared for on the drill square, where infantry spent hours of every day performing the evolutions required of them in battle. Always under the critical supervision of their officers and non-commissioned officers, they marched like clockwork toys to the orders relayed to them by drumbeat, and they handled their heavy muskets within the close confines of ranks and files as they practised the 'manual exercise' of loading, firing, and bayonet thrusts. Moving as part of a great machine, the individual soldier was not required to think for himself, only to keep his place in the ranks and to listen for the commands that applied to him. His greatest motivation was fear of the punishment that would follow – swiftly and brutally – any mistake that he made.

The perfection of such a system had been reached in the Prussian Army under Frederick the Great (1713–86). His succession of victories in the wars that blighted central Europe from 1741 to 1762 established him as the leading strategist and tactician of his age, and his methods were studied and copied widely. But there had been times when Frederick's army had found itself disadvantaged by the harassment of what history has been pleased to call 'guerrillas', particularly those operating in the pay of Austria. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was able to draw on the service of numerous bands of irregulars recruited among peoples accustomed to the use of arms in their everyday lives for hunting, protecting their herds and villages from marauders, and pursuing other activities often beyond the law.

To face the earliest of Frederick's incursions the Austrians summoned 'the Transylvanians, Croates, and other irregular and undisciplined corps, – Marshal Saxe appointed Uhlands, and regiments were then



This print, after Menzel, neatly typifies the opinion of light troops held by most of Europe's military establishment in the 18th century. It shows a Prussian chaplain of the Seven Years' War rebuking looters of his own army – at right, two Croats of Von Kleist's Free Corps.

raised – called Light Troops'. Also pressed into similar service were the hussars and border troops who had kept Austria's south-eastern frontiers against the incursions of the Turks, becoming in the process expert in the arts of skirmishing and scouting. Although dismissed as thieves and murderers by their enemies, these 'light' forces made a sufficiently valuable contribution that other nations felt compelled to raise similar units to combat them.

It was towards hunters and gamekeepers that Prussia and her allies turned to recruit their units of light troops, naming them Jägers and, in the French service, Chasseurs – both terms mean 'hunters'. Skilled in marksmanship, observation and concealment, these men brought with them the green clothing that was to become the uniform of most light troops, and the hunting horns they would use to communicate orders. This proliferation of light infantry was witnessed by the British armies that campaigned on the Continent, particularly during the Seven Years' War (1756–63), when they were largely content to depend on the light troops of their German allies – except for raising two light infantry regiments, Keith's Highlanders and Campbell's Highlanders.

But it was campaigning against the French, the natives and eventually the rebellious colonists in America that brought home the need for trained light infantry in the British service.

At first small groups of colonists and Indians were paid to provide scouting and intelligence services; but in 1755 a 62nd (Royal American) Regiment of Foot was raised by Colonels Bouquet and Haldimand. These two Swiss soldiers-of-fortune trained the four battalions of the regiment (soon renumbered to 60th) so as 'to qualify for the service of the Woods – to load and fire lying on the ground and kneeling – to march in order, slow and fast in all sorts of ground – [and to] pitch and fold their tents, and to be accustomed to pack up and carry their necessities in the most commodious manner'. In addition to the regulars of the 60th, bodies of 'rangers' were raised from among the local colonists.¹

Like the Austrian Empire, Britain too had a region of hills and mountains populated by fierce, hardy and independent men versed in arms. It was from the north of Scotland that several regiments of Highlanders were sent to America, where they were to prove most adept at light infantry duties and operations.

From 1758, all British infantry battalions were ordered to train one of their companies as light troops. For warfare in the forests of America the regulation uniform of the British infantry was adapted to provide a more comfortable and less conspicuous costume, and equipment was either discarded or adapted to allow freedom of movement. Knapsacks were carried in the manner of Indians, from whom the light troops copied items of dress such as leggings and moccasins and weapons such as tomahawks.

¹ See MAA 383, *Colonial American Troops 1610–1774* (3)

After the Seven Years' War light companies were ordered to be disbanded; and although they were re-established in 1771, they were found to be lacking in the former skills during the first skirmishes with the rebellious American colonists in 1775. Still a frontier people, the Americans readily found hunters and woodsmen within their ranks who were already expert at scouting and skirmishing. Many were also adept in the use of the rifled musket, a skill brought to the New World by German settlers and developed by American gunsmiths and riflemen. It was soon appreciated that red coats, pipe-clayed belts and close formations provided easy targets for American rifles. As the American Revolution wore on a number of units of light troops were raised, including the 'legions' of Colonels Tarleton and Simcoe, various 'ranger' units, and at least one unit of riflemen under a Captain Ferguson. Light companies of Line regiments were grouped into 'light infantry battalions'; and the German mercenary units hired by the British government added their light troops. During the campaigns of this seven-year war a hard-won expertise in light infantry operations was built up once again.

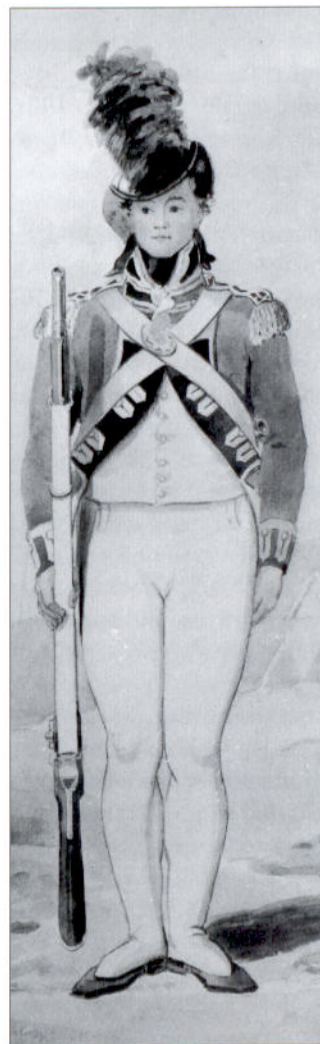
The British armies in America were eventually forced to lay down their arms – in one case, to 'an undisciplined rabble: but they were all woodsmen; that is marksmen – if there had been in that [British] army about a thousand well-trained Chasseurs, that army would not have been lost – had half of them been Chasseurs, it would have marched to Albany, even to New York.' The lesson was there for all to see; but with the loss of the American colonies the British regiments were brought home, the strength of the army was drastically reduced, and the importance of light infantry in two American wars over 30 years was all but forgotten.

The continued policy of raising light regiments for particular campaigns only to disband them when their services were no longer required did not make for efficient light infantry in the British service, at a time when Continental armies were increasing their light infantry regiments and, in some cases, arming and training riflemen as part of them. The attitude of most senior British officers to the 'light bobbery' used in America may be found in their letters: they wished it gone as swiftly as the memory of their ignominious defeat by the militias and frontiersmen of the new republic. And so, as Europe moved towards the 25-year-long turmoil – the virtual world war – that the end of the 18th century would bring, Great Britain allowed her army to decline in strength and efficiency, while those of her future enemies massed.

From the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 the British government viewed events across the English Channel with growing apprehension, as it made efforts to repair the neglect its army had suffered following the American Revolution. These efforts had barely begun when war broke out in 1793, and it became necessary to send an expedition to Flanders to counter the French armies menacing the Netherlands. The poor showing of this force revealed the dismal state of the British Army at a time when such manpower as it could muster was dispersed around the globe in places as diverse as the Mediterranean, the West Indies and India, with a large force guarding Ireland from a threatened invasion by the French.

The French Army had developed new and potent tactics since the Revolution, greatly increasing the strength of light infantry in order to

Painting by E. Dayes of a member of the light company of the 2nd Foot Guards, 1792; compare this soldier of the Coldstream with Plate A3. (Courtesy the Trustees of the National Army Museum)



harry an enemy as never before prior to a decisive assault by infantry in column. Fired by revolutionary fervour, the French infantry seemed invincible. Observers also noted the increase in the numbers of their light troops, and the way in which they made best use of cover to close with their enemy before raking his line with musketry in order to cover the deployment of artillery, cavalry and the infantry of the Line. In Britain it was well understood that the counter to the tactics of the French Army was to oppose their light infantry with a similar force; but such a force could not be raised and trained at short notice. It was to take some years before a re-organisation could be effected and the first regiments of regular British light infantry took the field.

The British Army of 1793 was badly in need of reform; it was barely 40,000 strong, and its administration could not have been worse. Each colonel of a regiment ran it as the proprietor of a business, some looking after their investment and some not. At a time when battles were fought to drills, there was no laid-down form of drill. Commissions were purchased with little regard to the suitability of the purchaser as an officer. Few officers studied their profession, while all who could grew rich by bilking the meagre pay of the common soldier through the stoppages that bought his rations, clothing and equipment. In 1795 Frederick, Duke of York, became commander-in-chief, and set about the monumental task of reforming the army – a difficult enough task in peacetime, and an almost impossible one in time of war.

In the struggle to raise new regiments for the war with France the problem of the shortage of light troops in the British service was at first tackled by hiring them. Mercenaries came from the German states, from among those Frenchmen still loyal to their dead king, from regiments formerly in Dutch pay, and – odd as it may seem – from the Catholics of Ireland, previously prevented from enlistment into the British Army. Later several Swiss regiments were brought into British pay.²

Many of these mercenary regiments were raised as light infantry, especially German units such as Hompesch's Chasseurs, Hompesch's Light Infantry, Loewenstein's Chasseurs, Lüninck's, Rohan's Light Infantry, the Salm-Kirburg Light Infantry, Waldstein's, and Ramsey's York Chasseurs. These units not only made up the shortfall in light infantry, especially for the fighting in the Low Countries, but they brought into British service



² See MAA 328 & 335, *Émigré & Foreign Troops in British Service (1): 1793–1802, and (2): 1803–15*



A drawing of Sir John Moore after the painting by Lawrence. (Author's collection)

the first German rifles. In 1797 400 men of Hompesch's Mounted Rifles and 500 of Loewenstein's Chasseurs were drafted (forcibly transferred) to form a 5th Battalion of the 60th (Royal American) Regiment. Raised on the Isle of Wight under Lieutenant-Colonel Baron de Rottenburg, this regiment of Germans became the first regular light infantry unit of the British Army and the first to be armed completely with rifles – the weapons with which its parent corps were armed. Two years later, a 6th and a 7th Battalion were added to the 60th Regiment. Again the men were mostly Germans, but with some former prisoners-of-war of Dutch, Swiss and Hungarian origin. Of the 800 rank and file that made up each of these battalions, 640 were classified as 'light infantrymen' and 160 were armed with rifles.

It is worth noting that the Germans, with considerable experience of light infantry fighting, usually chose to establish a skirmish line that was a mixture of riflemen (who could shoot with accuracy up to about 250 yards), and the much faster-loading musketeers or 'carbineers' (who were able to protect the riflemen from enemy rushes while they were laboriously reloading). The King's German Legion, raised in 1803, organised its riflemen in detachments; and the 5/60th campaigned through most of the Peninsular War with its rifle companies detached to various brigades, as were the riflemen of the Brunswick Oels Jägers and the Portuguese Cazadores.³ Although much fame came the way of the three battalions of the British 95th Rifles in the Peninsula, it should be remembered that much more lead was shot at Frenchmen by German and Portuguese riflemen, who greatly outnumbered the men of the gallant 95th.

When ongoing reforms brought about the publication of a regulation drill manual, this set standards for British Line infantry, but included few instructions for the operation of Light infantry – there was little to guide officers of the light company that each battalion was required to field. Many senior officers still considered the 'light bobs' to be little better than irregulars, holding them in similar regard to that held by a later generation of regulars for Commandos. With little guidance or experience, the light companies of most Line regiments were light infantry in title and dress only. They lacked the skills of their French counterparts, and suffered badly when they came into contact with them during the Flanders campaign.

By the closing years of the century the potency of French light infantry operations had been accepted, and ways and means other than hiring foreign mercenaries were being sought to counter it. Light companies were ordered to practise shooting 'at a mark' in order to improve individual marksmanship, and to exercise in the tactics of light infantry deployed as skirmishers – always assuming their leaders knew what these were. But there was still resistance at the highest levels to the expansion of light infantry in the British Army beyond the level of one company per Line battalion.

A crack in this intransigence appeared with the suggestion that an increase in light troops might be effected by having four of each

OPPOSITE **O**pposing the British skirmish lines in the Peninsula were those of the French Army. This veteran *carabinier* of a battalion of *infanterie légère* was depicted much later in the century by Detaille, but follows contemporary sources. His uniform is dark blue with white piping and touches of scarlet, making no more concessions to his skirmishing role than was seen in the British Light Infantry. Unit organisation differed even less from the standard Line model: each French battalion had four centre companies of *chasseurs*, one light company of *voltigeurs*, and one heavy company of *carabiniers*, equivalent to Line *grenadiers* and likewise wearing uniforms with red epaulettes and other embellishments. (Author's collection)

³ See MAA 167, *Brunswick Troops 1809–15*; and MAA 346, *The Portuguese Army of the Napoleonic Wars (2)*



Typical of the irregulars in the service of Austria is this officer of the Styrian Free Corps – ‘Wurmser’s’ – in 1793, the year the unit was raised in Slavonia on the Turkish frontier. It fought against the French in Alsace before being disbanded in 1801. The uniform was dark blue with red facings, and his peakless shako bears the cockade of Austria and the national field sign of a sprig of oak leaves. Weapons include a rifle, pistols, dagger and sword. (Author’s collection)

battalion’s ten companies acting in the light role instead of just one; and it was simultaneously proposed that certain regiments – particularly the Highlanders – be transformed entirely into Light infantry. An argument raised against such ideas by many British officers was that the light troops of France were irregulars – mobs of ‘citizens’ no better than gangs of brigands, with alarming revolutionary ideas, and certainly no model to be aped by British soldiers. A particular tactic of the *infanterie légère* was that of firing and retiring when confronted with superior force; this ‘shooting and then running away’ was conduct thought reprehensible by most British officers.

Matters were moved forward by the Duke of York in 1798, when he authorised Lieutenant-Colonel de Rottenburg, commanding officer of the 5/60th (Royal American) Regiment, to write and publish his *Regulations for the Exercise of Riflemen and Light Infantry*, which was to be the manual for British light infantry operations. Much discussion followed over the manner in which to create a British corps of Light infantry at best, or light units at least. It was fully appreciated, even by those who opposed its formation, that the only effective way to raise such troops was by the selection of fit and intelligent officers and men before training them in units larger than companies. The old expedient of forming battalions of light companies when necessary by taking them from Line regiments was proposed as an emergency measure, and resorted to in the expedition to Holland in 1799.

With the newly raised 6th Battalion of the 60th Regiment, these inadequately trained light troops clashed with the French Chasseurs and Tirailleurs, and received a drubbing from an enemy who

made much better use of cover and the firepower of their carbines and rifles. At the landing alone their fire killed two lieutenant-colonels and 50 men and wounded a lieutenant-general, five field officers and 400 others. It was the second time that the Duke of York, commanding the expedition, had received a demonstration of the effectiveness of French light infantry and the weakness of his own. He determined to set matters to rights.

BRITISH LIGHT INFANTRY, 1800–08

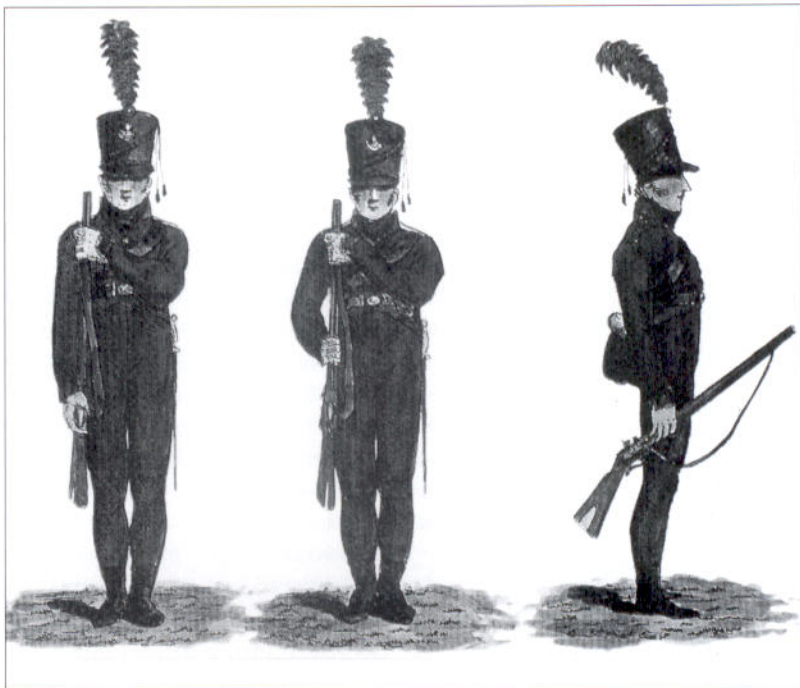
Had Britain continued to have free access to those areas of the Continent, particularly the German states, from which it had recruited mercenary corps of riflemen and light troops, it is probable that no British Rifle or Light Infantry corps would ever have been formed.

However, following the 1799 debacle in Holland an expansion of French control increasingly isolated Britain from these recruiting grounds. Those foreign light troops who had taken British pay since 1793 had nearly all been sent abroad, especially to the West Indies, where many died of sickness in the inhospitable climate. By the end of the century the survivors were mostly drafted into one or other of the battalions of the 60th (Royal American) Regiment, and only the light and rifle units of the Dutch Emigrant Brigade – some 3,000 men evacuated to Britain in late 1799 – stood available for operations in Europe. (It also became increasingly difficult to obtain from Continental gun-makers the rifles that they were so skilled in manufacturing. A proposal for the formation of rifle companies within Line battalions was eventually turned down because of the impossibility of obtaining sufficient ‘rifled arms’.)

In January 1800 Colonel Coote Manningham, an officer with considerable experience of light infantry operations, was informed that ‘the Commander-in-Chief proposes the assembling a corps under your command – for the purpose of instructing them in the use of the rifle, and in the system of exercise adopted by soldiers so armed.’ This ‘Experimental Corps of Riflemen’, formed with drafts from Line regiments, was established as a unit of the Line in February 1801.⁴

In late 1802, the General Officer Commanding forces in southern England, John Moore, ordered this battalion of riflemen to a newly established camp of instruction for light infantry at Shorncliffe in Kent. Here, it was hoped, could be established the ranges and training areas most suited to instruction and practice in the light role. With the coming of the year 1803 the new corps gained the title of 95th or Rifle Regiment; and the first units of the Line were brought to Shorncliffe to be trained and converted into Light Infantry regiments. The commander-in-chief was by now anxious to have these, and in the course of correspondence General Moore had suggested that his own regiment, the 52nd (Oxfordshire), might be the first, advising that it should be trained to act in the Light role when required to do so, while retaining its ability to fight as a regiment of the Line. Thus, the new Light Infantry regiments were not to play a wholly separate part on the battlefield, but to have a dual purpose. Moore, who has passed into history as the founding father of the British light regiments, had enough conservatism in his make-up to draw back from copying completely the example of the French light infantry.

An illustration from one of the many light infantry manuals, in this case dating from 1804. It shows a rifleman performing the movements to get from the ‘advance arms’ to the ‘trail arms’. (Author’s collection)



⁴ See Warrior 47, *British Rifleman 1797–1815*



The 'New Land Pattern Light Infantry Musket'. Of the same calibre as the India Pattern - 0.75in - the Light Infantry musket featured a browned (dulled) barrel, a notched backsight, and a scrolled trigger guard in the shape of a pistol grip. All of these were supposed to enhance accuracy and make it a superior weapon for skirmishing, a role in which individual marksmanship was much more important than in linear tactics. Although it was approved in 1803, uncertainty persists over when the weapon actually came into service. (National Army Museum)

In January 1803 his ideas were approved. By now there was no shortage of publications on the training of light infantry, for in addition to Baron de Rottenburg's manual there were Jarry's *Instructions concerning the Duties of Light Infantry in the Field*, and Manningham's own *Regulations for Rifle Corps*. The methods and ideas they recommended were studied and discussed by officers who took their profession seriously, and ignored by those who did not; but at least there was by now no excuse for ignorance as to the proper role and conduct of light infantry in war.

Major-General John Moore had been the colonel of the 52nd Regiment since 1801. It was a regiment with two battalions; and in January 1803 orders were issued transforming the 2/52nd into the 96th Regiment, and the 1/52nd into a 'corps of Light Infantry'. Officers and men were cross-posted to ensure that the fittest went to the 52nd, which marched into camp at Shorncliffe in July, and formed a brigade under the command of General Moore with three Line regiments and the 95th Rifle Regiment. Moore 'explained to the commanding officers of the regiments the system he wished them to adopt', and then watched them as they drilled their regiments. Commanding the 52nd Light Infantry was Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth Mackenzie, who soon had the light companies of the other regiments in the brigade attached to his unit for instruction.

Mackenzie and the Shorncliffe system

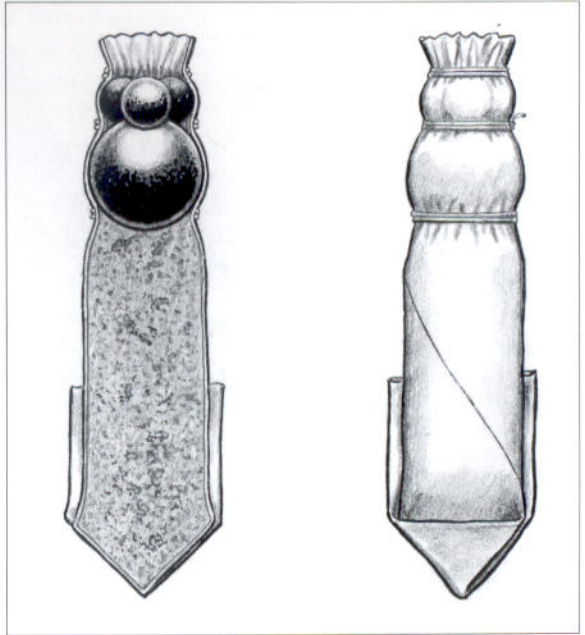
Colonel Mackenzie had been a soldier for 23 years, during which time he had served as a light infantry officer in the West Indies and in various parts of Europe. He joined the 90th 'Perthshire Light Infantry' in 1794, and led it in Portugal in 1796 and on Minorca. He also led it on the expedition to Egypt in 1801 when his brigade commander was John Moore. On his return to England he was called to the 52nd by Moore, who later arranged for Mackenzie to command the battalion. There is no doubt that Moore recognised Mackenzie's talents as a leader of light troops and his abilities as a trainer of men. There is also sufficient evidence to believe Mackenzie to be the officer who, in turning the 52nd into a light infantry unit that became the model for those that came after, also devised the drills and tactical training which history has ascribed to Moore.

Mackenzie began 'by assembling the officers and telling them that the only way of having a regiment in good order was by every individual thoroughly knowing and performing his duty: and that if the officers did not fully understand their duty, it would be quite impossible to expect that the men could or would perform theirs as they ought;

therefore the best and surest method was to commence by drilling the whole of the officers, and when they became perfectly acquainted with the system, they could teach the men, and by their zeal, knowledge and, above all, good temper and kind treatment of the soldier, make the regiment the best in the service.' Mackenzie's was a seriously radical attitude at a time when few officers took their profession seriously, being content when on parade to have a sergeant whisper the next word of command to them or to read it off a crib-sheet. The 'kind treatment' of the soldier was certainly contrary to common practice in the British Army. Most officers believed the lash to be the most effective instrument of discipline available to them, with the firing squad an ultimate deterrent.

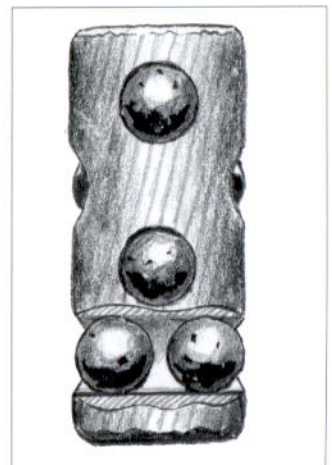
Yet the tyro light infantry officers relished Mackenzie's methods. One from the 43rd Light Infantry wrote that: 'When an officer entered this corps it was an invariable custom to send him to drill with a squad, composed of peasants from the plough tail, or other raw recruits, first learning the facings, marching, and company evolutions. That being completed, the officer put on cross-belts and pouch, and learned the firelock exercise; then he again marched with the same: and when it was considered that the whole was perfect, with, and without arms, they began to skirmish in extended files, and last of all learned the duties of a sentry, and to fire ball cartridge at a target. The officer after all this was not considered clear of the adjutant, until he could put a company through the evolutions by word of command, which he had already practised in the ranks. It generally took him six months – at four times a day (an hour at each period) to perfect him in all he had to learn – Subalterns inspected squads on parade: the company was then formed and given over to the Captain, who, with the rest of the officers, never quitted their company to lounge about, so long as the soldiers were under arms. The corps paraded twice a week in heavy marching order, and the [officers'] mess was equally well conducted, in a system of style and economy happily blended.'

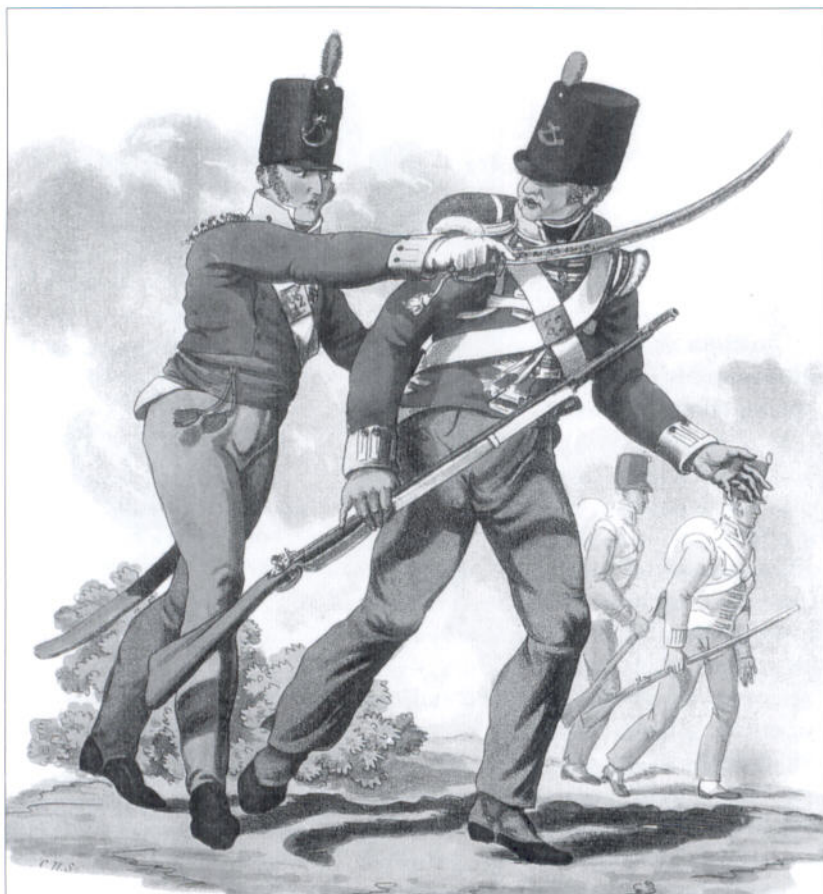
The foregoing routine was followed by all the light troops at Shorncliffe, and Mackenzie's influence rapidly brought them to a state of excellence that attracted much favourable comment. Both Moore and Mackenzie knew that light infantry operating in advance of their main line or position needed to be thoroughly trained in their duties as skirmishers, but also needed to be able to act with initiative in order to exploit cover and any opportunities offered up by the enemy. Skirmishing drills would get officers and men forward, but once there they had to be able to fight in small groups according to how they 'read' the battle. As initiative in junior officers and soldiers had been firmly suppressed in the British Army, and only slightly encouraged in light troops in the American Wars, much of the training at Shorncliffe had to be aimed at creating a force of men who could think for themselves.



Cross-section and drawing of the American 'buckshot and ball' cartridge of the late 18th century, which enabled four missiles to be fired from a musket together. (Author's drawing)

Drawing of the French 'sabot' musket load containing eight pieces of shot in a wooden matrix. Rammed down on top of a standard cartridge and ball, the wooden sabot splintered on firing and the shot spread like a miniature canister charge. (Author's drawing)





A print after Charles Hamilton Smith of an officer and private soldiers of the 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry skirmishing, c.1812 – note the ‘file’ of two men in the background. Although a fine representation of the uniform of the time there is much in the detail which conflicts with what is known of regulation and practice. (Author’s collection)

Weapons and ammunition

Away from the drill field, Moore’s units were accustomed to the hardships of route marching by doing a lot of it, always in full equipment. Tactical training included practising outposts, patrols, advance and rear guards, and ‘shooting with ball ammunition’. This last practice was carried out with the standard infantry musket of the time – the 0.75in ‘India Pattern’ – until better weapons became available. History is uncertain as to exactly what these were. A ‘New Land Pattern Light Infantry Musket’ of the standard 0.75in calibre was approved for Light Infantry regiments in 1803: ‘The barrel shall be browned, a grooved sight shall be fixed at the breech end of the barrel and a canvas cover similar to that used by the

Austrian troops shall be provided for the purpose of covering and protecting the butt and lock of each piece’, ran the specification for the new musket. The gunmaker Henry Nock produced some muskets for the 52nd adapted to this pattern, but the regimental history records them to have been ‘defective’, and they were replaced in 1806 by a new set of arms ‘made on an improved plan’.

Whatever the pattern, these weapons were smooth-bore muskets firing the standard ball ammunition. It is known that multi-shot ammunition was used with great effect at short range by certain irregulars; that the United States Army had a combined ball-and-buckshot cartridge by the 1790s; that the French used a grapeshot ‘sabot’ in muskets; and that shot was commonly used for shooting game world-wide – nevertheless, no evidence exists that multiple-shot ammunition was tried or used by the British Army other than in artillery. Its value in light infantry skirmishes went unproved.

The skirmishing line

Skirmishing was the main purpose of light infantry, and was extensively practised by Mackenzie’s men. From a battalion in line one or more companies would move forward to form a fighting line of pairs or ‘files’, each man covering the other while he reloaded, never firing himself until his covering file was once more ready to fire. Unlike the musketry of the Line, which simply produced a rolling screen of missiles in front

of a regiment, that of the skirmish line was aimed fire, each light infantryman carefully selecting his target and shooting at it with care. Behind the engaged skirmish line the rest of the battalion remained in reserve – rarely less than half the total strength. The deployment of the skirmishers would depend upon the cover available, with best use being made of hedgerows, woods, buildings and embankments. Orders were passed to them by voice, bugles and whistles. Bugle sounds were complicated and many, and were preceded by regimental and company calls. It took much time and much sounding-off by buglers until everyone in a battalion could recognise orders issued in this way.

The aim of skirmishing was, of course, to neutralise the light troops of the enemy and to harass his line. Describing a battle of 1813, a subaltern of the 85th Light Infantry wrote: 'Troops sent out to skirmish, advance or retire in files; each file of men keeping about ten yards from the files on both sides of them. On the present occasion, I beheld a line of skirmishers, extending nearly a mile in both directions, all keeping in a sort of irregular order; and all firing, independently of one another, as the opportunity of a good aim prompted each of them.'

An account of what it was like to fight as part of a skirmish line was recorded by Private Wheeler of the 51st, who tells of his covering file, Pte Brown, who 'had never missed an action or skirmish from the time he joined until the day he was wounded. I never knew a more cool, collected and determined soldier in action than he was. Let the danger be ever so great, if he saw an opportunity of firing to advantage there would be no moving him, he was a good shot. When our bugles sounded to advance no one answered or obeyed more cheerfully than Brown. But when the retreat would sound, he could not bear the idea of turning his back to the enemy. On these occasions I have often said "Come along Jack, don't you see they are closing on us". "That is what I want" he would say, "don't you see that fellow, I shall have him within point blank distance directly, let us wait 'til I fetch him down". 'Point blank', or the distance at which a marksman could see the whites of an enemy's eyes, was little more than ten yards; even a 'good shot' like Jack could not be sure

A print by Goddard & Booth published in 1812 and showing (right to left) a private of the 43rd Light Infantry, a dragoon of the 23rd Light Dragoons and a rifleman of the 95th Rifles. The 43rd and the 95th served together throughout the Peninsular War, but the 23rd Light Dragoons were sent home after a disastrous charge at the battle of Talavera in 1809. Uniform details are from a time several years earlier than 1812, probably when all three regiments were serving under Wellington. (National Army Museum)



of a kill with a service musket at a greater range. We may deduce, therefore, that firefights between skirmish lines were carried out at ranges of 50 yards or less.

Alas, not all skirmishers were brave and bold. Rifleman Harris tells how 'my front rank man... seemed inclined to hang back, and once or twice turned round in my face – porting my piece I swore that if he did not keep his ground, I would shoot him dead on the spot'.

When it came to the matter of choosing a suitable uniform in which the new Light Infantry regiments would fight, conservatism won the day. The 95th Rifles had been permitted to adopt the green clothing and black leather equipment of the German regiments in British service; but the 52nd and the other regiments converted to the light role were ordered to conform to the regulations in existence for light companies of Line regiments. Bugle-horn badges and 'wings' at the shoulders marked their role; but they were condemned to skirmish in the hedges, ditches and woods in their red coats and pipe-clayed equipment – a costume providing as excellent a mark for the French Chasseur as it had for the American rifleman.

* * *

In July 1803 a second regiment, the 43rd (Monmouthshire), were ordered to become Light Infantry, arriving at Shorncliffe in June 1804. Later ordered to raise second battalions, the 52nd and the 43rd Light Infantry remained the only units of their type for a number of years. The continuing war with France brought into the British service several new foreign light infantry corps, notably the Light Battalions of the King's German Legion, the Chasseurs Britanniques, and later the Brunswick Oels Jägers. However, from 1808 further regiments of the British Line were converted to Light Infantry, including the 51st (2nd Yorkshire, West Riding), the 68th (Durham), the 71st (Glasgow, Highland) and the 85th (Bucks Volunteers). (The story of the Scottish 71st may be told in a later title.)

Colonel Mackenzie suffered serious injury resulting from a fall from his horse in November 1803, and did not return to service until 1811 when he took command of the light infantry training barracks at Brabourne Lees, near Ashford, Kent. It was there that many of the converted regiments underwent training in their new role, as well as Militia and drafts. (A previous commander at Brabourne Lees was Baron de Rottenburg.) Promoted to major-general, Kenneth Mackenzie continued as a trainer of light infantry and was eventually promoted to lieutenant-general and knighted for his services; he died in 1834.

The history of light infantry in the British Army reveals contradictory schools of thought regarding its utility and employment. One group continued to scorn 'irregulars', but grudgingly admitted that foreign light corps were necessary to counter the light troops of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. This was opposed by those theorists who felt that regiments of light troops on

Rank-and-file brass shoulder belt plate, 52nd Light Infantry. Said to have been in use from 1798 to 1812, it more likely dates from the time of the regiment's conversion to Light Infantry, when slightly broader shoulder belts were ordered. (National Army Museum)



the French model should be part of the British Army. The compromisers – the most influential group – believed that Line regiments could be organised and trained to act as light troops when required to do so, reverting to the role of Line infantry afterwards. The fact that the two roles might be incompatible if a unit was to be efficient at either seems not to have mattered to them. The compromisers eventually won the day. It is therefore to the undying credit of the regiments reviewed here that they fought with great distinction in the Peninsula whatever the role they were called upon to play.

THE 43RD (MONMOUTHSHIRE) & 52ND (OXFORDSHIRE) LIGHT INFANTRY

The history of these regiments was increasingly entwined from the year 1803, when they became Light Infantry. Battalions of the 43rd and 52nd served together under 'Black Bob' Craufurd in the famous Light Division in the Peninsula; in the Cardwell infantry reforms of 1881 they were united as the Oxfordshire Light Infantry (becoming in 1908 the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry); and in 1958, during one of the periodic infantry reductions that have dogged the British Army since 1945, the regiment became the 1st Battalion The Green Jackets (43rd & 52nd), brigaded once again with the regiment which had been the 95th Rifles at the time of the Peninsular War. Their service in that war is best reviewed jointly, especially from the time when Wellington established the Light Division.

Officer's shako, 52nd Light Infantry, worn from 1803 to 1815. Note the horsehair plume worn by the officers of the 52nd; the corded cockade (missing a regimental button at its centre); and the ornate bugle-horn badge worn at this time. Contemporary paintings indicate that a green band or turban was sometimes worn around the crown. (National Army Museum)

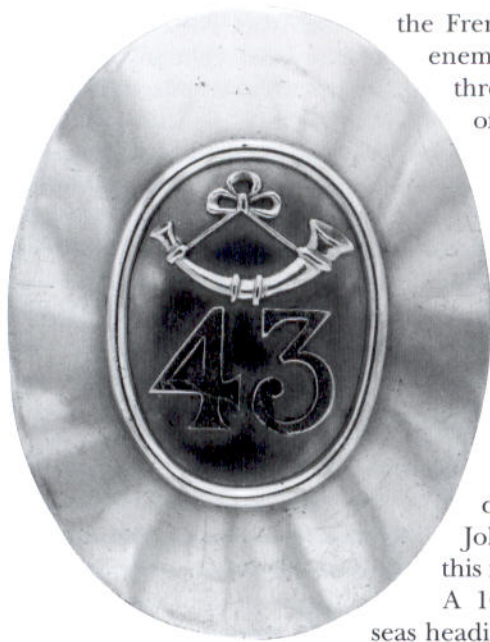


Vimiero and Corunna

The 43rd received the order to train in the light role in July 1803, joining General Moore's brigade at Shorncliffe in June 1804. Training was greatly assisted by the model set for them by the 52nd Light Infantry, and by the transfer of personnel from that regiment. In 1804 orders were issued raising second battalions for both regiments.

In August 1806 the 1/43rd and the 2/52nd took part in the expedition to Copenhagen under the command of Major-General Sir Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington and soon to be their commander in the Peninsula.

In August 1808 the 2/43rd and the 2/52nd landed in Portugal as part of a force under Sir Arthur, and were deployed near the village of Vimeiro with the force covering the ongoing landings. On 21 August the French attacked, and in the ensuing fighting three companies of the 2/52nd, posted with the advance guard, clashed first with the enemy; the 2/43rd later engaged them in a desperate hand-to-hand fight in the vineyards outside the village. After the defeat of



Officer's shoulder belt plate, 43rd Light Infantry; gilt with silver bugle-horn, numerals and oval, it is of the type seen in a portrait of a major of the 43rd c.1803-08. See Plate H1. (National Army Museum)

the French, Sergeant Armourer Patrick was found dead beside an enemy soldier 'still grasping the muskets with the bayonets driven through each body from breast to back'. Patrick was one of six officers and 113 men lost by the 43rd that day.

The British victory at Vimeiro was not completed by a pursuit of the beaten enemy, but by a ridiculous game of military musical chairs when Wellesley was superseded, on grounds of seniority alone, first by Sir Harry Burrard and then by Sir Hew Dalrymple. Within ten days they had signed the Convention of Cintra, by which the French agreed to leave Portugal with their arms and accumulated loot, to be transported home in British vessels. The scandal that followed resulted in all three being recalled to England to face a court of enquiry, while command of the British Army in Portugal (which had by late 1808 grown to 30,000 men) devolved upon no less a figure than Lieutenant-General Sir John Moore of Shorncliffe fame. In October he marched part of this force into Spain, reaching Salamanca by early December.

A 10,000-strong reinforcement was by this time on the high seas heading for Corunna. With them, in the '1st Flank Brigade', were the 1/43rd, 1/52nd and the 1/95th Rifles, old comrades from the early days at Shorncliffe. Their brigade commander was Robert Craufurd. By 20 December 1808 the reinforcements had been landed and had joined Moore, bringing the strength of his army to 25,000 men. With it he advanced deeper into Spain in search of the French; but he found to his dismay that an enemy army 200,000 strong, led by the Emperor Napoleon himself, had defeated the Spanish, entered Madrid, and was now marching upon him. He decided to fall back on his base at Corunna, intent on embarking his army and returning it to Portugal. The retreat was conducted in fearsome winter weather, over almost impassable mountain roads, with the pursuing French cavalry kept at bay by the rearguard provided by the Reserve Division. (This included Craufurd's Flank Brigade as far as Borillas, from where it marched with other light troops to Vigo and embarkation.)

An incident that occurred on the night of 26 December exemplifies the hazards of rear-guard duties. Two privates of the 43rd were on outpost guard beyond the bridge at Castro Gonzalo; their orders were that in case of attack one should stand and shoot while the other ran back to the bridge with a warning. A party of French cavalry, following a hay cart, got close to them and suddenly galloped upon them: 'Jackson fired, but was overtaken and received 12 or 14 severe wounds in an instant; he came staggering on, notwithstanding his mangled state, and gave the [alarm] signal. Walton, with equal resolution and more fortune, defended himself with his bayonet, and wounded several of the assailants, who retreated, leaving him unhurt; but his cap, his knapsack, his belts and his musket were cut in about twenty places, and his bayonet was bent double, his musket covered in blood, and notched like a saw from the muzzle to the lock.'

Moore turned his force at Corunna, and in the ensuing battle lost his life. Thus died the general who had supervised the training of the first Light Infantry regiments, both of which had battalions in the combat that was to be his last battle. With the French checked, Moore was

buried in the citadel while his army embarked, its destination no longer Portugal but England.

The Coa, Bussaco and Sabugal, 1810–11

Both battalions of the 43rd were quartered in Colchester on their return from Spain, with both battalions of the 52nd at Deal. Little time elapsed before the 1/43rd, together with the 1/52nd Light Infantry and 1/95th Rifles, embarked and sailed again for Portugal. They formed what was termed a 'light brigade' under the command of Robert Craufurd, which reached Lisbon on 29 June 1809, and immediately set out to join the British army in Spain – once again commanded by Sir Arthur Wellesley.

Despite a spectacular final forced march the brigade reached Talavera too late to participate in the battle fought there on 27–28 July. They were soon assigned to outpost duty, and from this point on were nearly always the first troops in contact with the enemy. Their first task was to cover the withdrawal of the army from the Talavera position back into Portugal.

On 22 February 1810, the now Lord Wellington issued an order attaching the 1st and 3rd Battalions of Portuguese Cazadores to Craufurd's brigade, which was from then on to be called 'the Light Division'. By August the division comprised two brigades: the 1/43rd, 3rd Cazadores, and four companies of the 95th Rifles in the brigade commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Beckwith of the 95th; and the 1/52nd, 1st Cazadores and another four companies of the 95th in the other, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Barclay of the 52nd. The division was supported by the six guns of Captain Ross' 'Chestnut Troop' of Royal Horse Artillery, and the whole was under the command of Craufurd, still a brigadier-general.

Wellington had begun the construction of a vast fortification before Lisbon known as the Lines of Torres Vedras, into which he intended to withdraw if threatened by a superior French force. In the meantime he held the frontier of Portugal with the Light Division pushed well forward. The role of Craufurd's command was to observe and report, falling back upon Wellington's main position in the event of an enemy advance. Little happened until July 1810 when, in the face of a French army advancing on the border fortress of Almeida, the Light Division was ordered to fall back across the River Coa. Exhibiting either a lapse of judgement or a surfeit of confidence, Craufurd failed to do so until the enemy was upon him, and he was faced with the problem of getting his battalions to safety over a single bridge. 'Then the British regiments, with singular intelligence and discipline, extricated themselves from this perilous situation. Falling back slowly and stopping to fight whenever opportunity offered – the retreating troops

Major-General Robert Craufurd, considered to be one of Wellington's best generals. 'Black Bob' commanded a 'light brigade' and then the famous Light Division until his death in action on 19 January 1812. Short, brooding and bitter, his style of command was the opposite of that of Moore and Mackenzie; he imposed discipline by the lash for the rank-and-file and with the lash of his tongue for his officers. Craufurd was something of a 'book soldier' who wrote copious and detailed standing orders for the field and insisted on their being observed to the letter. He was certainly fortunate to be given the excellent regiments that formed his commands, and which suffered no discernible drop in standards after his passing. (Author's collection)





Officer's shako, 43rd Light Infantry, c.1814. An interesting example of the later pattern 'stovepipe' shako with a leather top, this cap has had a number of items added, including a green turban and cords, chinscales and bosses, and a rosette – the latter is a leather rank-and-file hair ornament of the type discarded in 1808. (National Army Museum)

approached the river – but the left wing, hard pressed and having the shortest distance, arrived while the bridge was crowded with artillery and cavalry – Major Macleod of the 43rd instantly rallied four companies of his regiment on a hill to cover the line of passage. He was joined by some riflemen, and at the same time the [brigade] major Rowan posted two companies on a hill to the left – the French, gathering in great numbers, made a rush, forcing the British companies back – but Macleod – turned his horse, called on the troops to follow, waved his cap and rode with a shout towards the enemy – the soldiers rushed after him, cheering and charging as if a whole army had been at their backs; the enemy's skirmishers – stopped short, and before their surprise was over the 52nd passed the river, and Macleod followed at speed: it was a fine exploit!

Disaster had been averted. 'General Craufurd wanted glory, so he stopped on the wrong side of the river, and now he is knocked over to the right side,' quipped one of the privates of the 43rd who had helped save his general's bacon. Wellington, whose orders Craufurd had disobeyed, was

'displeased'. Falling back upon the defences of the Lines of Torres Vedras, he decided to turn and offer battle to the French along the Bussaco ridge.

On 27 September 1810 the Light Division held part of the British position above the village of Sul, in which Craufurd had established an advanced guard of the 1/95th Rifles and the 3rd Cazadores. The French struck the British centre first, advancing in the morning mists up the rugged slopes of the Bussaco ridge, only to be bloodily repulsed. They next struck at that part of the British left held by the Light Division, pressing Craufurd's riflemen back up the slope from Sul as they 'fired and retired' to rejoin the division's line beyond the crest. The oncoming French now came under fire from the guns of the Chestnut Troop as they climbed to the crest of the ridge, which appeared to them to be held only by the riflemen, gunners and a single horseman. The horseman was Craufurd, waiting until the French had reached the crest. A captain of the 1/52nd described what happened next:

'... He turned round, came up to the 52nd, and called out, "Now, 52nd, revenge the death of Sir John Moore! Charge! Charge! Huzza!"; and waving his hat in the air, he was answered by a shout that appalled the enemy, and in one instant the brow of the hill bristled with two thousand bayonets wielded by steady English hands, which soon buried them in the bodies of the fiery Gaul!' Both the 1/43rd and the 1/52nd poured a murderous fire into the French before they closed with the bayonet, and drove them back down the slope in complete rout. Some 1,200 Frenchmen were killed, wounded or captured, including a general and 61 other officers; the Light Division's casualties amounted to 132 all ranks. By mid-day all French attacks on the ridge had been repulsed, and the battle fizzled out in clashes between skirmishers. The



French had lost some 5,000 men compared to Wellington's 1,300 casualties. The next day he withdrew from the Bussaco position and resumed his march into the Lines of Torres Vedras, the Light Division forming the rearguard.

The construction of the vast system of fortifications had been carried out in secrecy. The French came upon the works, spent a month before them, and then retired eastwards to Santarem and winter quarters, watched by the outposts of the Light Division. In March 1811, the starving French began a withdrawal, pursued and harried by Wellington in a series of clashes. These included that at Sabugal on 3 April when, having forded the River Coa and climbed a wooded hill in mist and rain, Beckwith's brigade contacted the French as the weather cleared, and found themselves confronting 12,000 enemy infantry with cavalry and guns. In the fierce fighting that followed Beckwith's men maintained their hilltop position as reinforcements joined. A howitzer was taken, around which no fewer than 300 enemy dead were counted after the combat, which lasted barely an hour. Wellington later wrote: 'I consider that the action that was fought by the Light Division, by Colonel Beckwith's brigade principally, with the whole of the [French] 2nd Corps, to be one of the most glorious that British troops were ever engaged in. The 43rd, under Major Patrickson, particularly distinguished themselves.'

Fuentes d'Oñoro, 1811

Leaving a garrison in the fortress of Almeida, the French then left Portugal. The Light Division took up outposts along the line of the River Aguada, from which they watched for any attempts to relieve Almeida. By this time the division had been strengthened by the arrival of the 2/52nd Light Infantry, who were brigaded with their 1st Battalion. Matters came to a head in early May at the village of Fuentes de Oñoro, where for three days the French attempted to force Wellington's army to give way in a series of bloody attacks centred on

A similar shako of the 52nd Light Infantry; again, the embellishments seem to have been added at a later date. (Private collection; photos Ian Pigstock)



A print – probably after a drawing by Thomas Heaphy – of a private soldier of the 43rd Light Infantry, c.1815. Although many contemporary portraits exist, especially by Heaphy, of the officers of Wellington's Peninsula army, those of members of the rank-and-file are rare. Either the artist or his engraver have been careless with uniform details of this anonymous hero – perhaps a Peninsula veteran? Let us hope that at least they captured his likeness. (National Army Museum)

the maze of houses and alleys that formed the hillside village. The Light Division was posted as a reserve until the morning of 5 May, when a critical moment in the fighting occurred on the British right wing. This was the celebrated occasion when 'The French [cavalry] – with one shock drove in all the outguards, cut off Norman Ramsay's battery of horse artillery, and came sweeping in upon the reserves and the 7th Division. Their leading squadrons, approaching in a loose manner, were partially checked by the British, and then a great commotion was observed in their main body – Ramsay burst forth sword in hand at the head of his battery – the 14th Dragoons, instantly galloped to his aid with a squadron – the main body came forward rapidly, and the British cavalry retired behind the Light Division, which was thrown [out] in squares.' In these formations the regiments of the Light Division covered the retirement of Wellington's right wing for over three miles as he repositioned his line. The French cavalry never dared to close within musket or rifle shot of them, and the manoeuvre was carried out faultlessly. Later in the day a brigade of the division was sent into

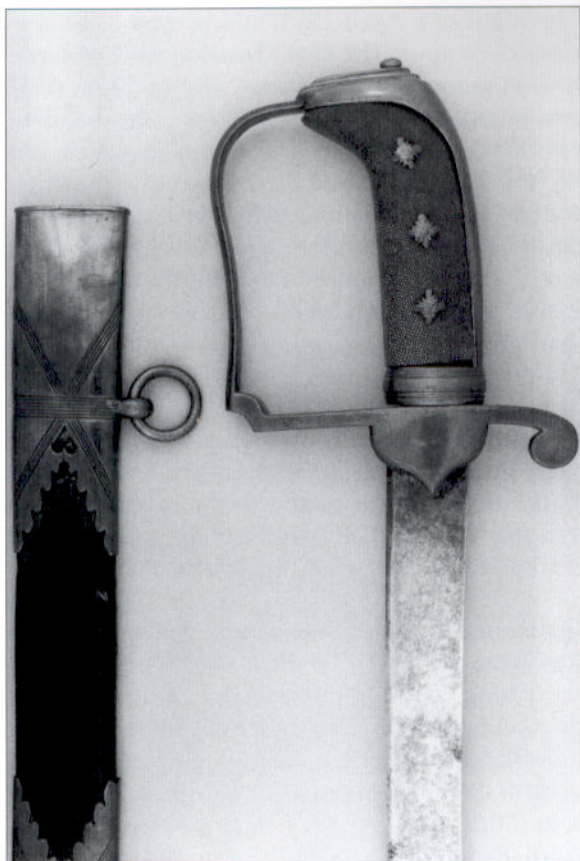
the village as a reinforcement, and as night fell the fighting ceased. On 7 May the French gave up the attempt to reach Almeida and withdrew. (The garrison of the fortress later blew it up and broke through to their own lines.)

Early June found the Light Division once more manning outposts on the Coa, from which they marched and countermarched to conform to the movement of the French for the rest of the year of 1811.

Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, and the winter retreat of 1812

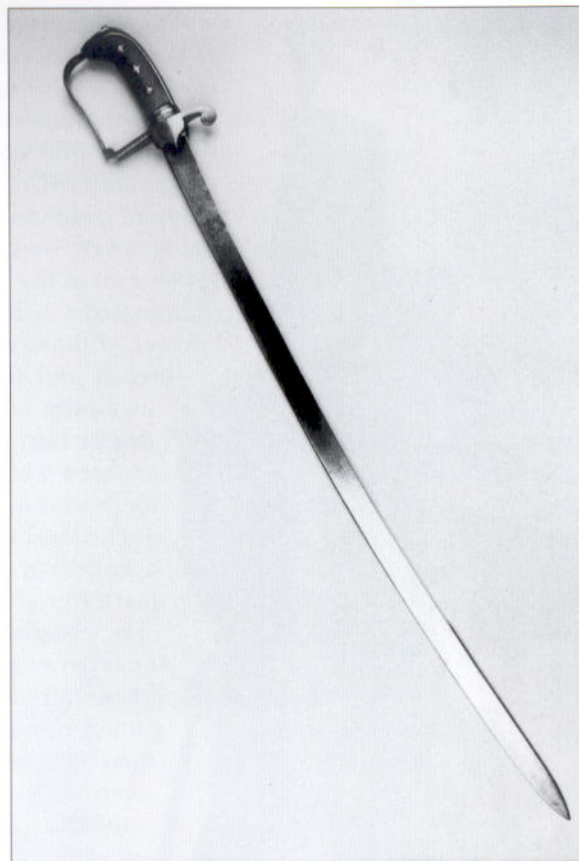
On 8 January 1812 the Light Division marched to begin the investment and siege of the fortress of Ciudad Rodrigo. After nightfall Colonel Colborne of the 52nd led ten companies forward, and captured the Francisco redoubt with a stealthy approach followed by a charge. Then began the tedious task of digging trenches in a series of parallels, nearer and nearer to the fortress, all the time under the fire of its defenders. By 13 January Wellington's siege batteries were beginning the business of breaching the walls. On the 17th the garrison refused the offer of surrender, and preparations were made to storm the fortress; four columns would be deployed, one of which was found from the Light Division. All were in position at 7pm on the evening of the 19th when the word was passed, and the silent columns rose from their trenches and commenced the storming of Rodrigo.

The Light Division approached their allotted breach from the cover of the walls of the convent of San Francisco, where they had been addressed by General Craufurd who exhorted them to be steady, cool



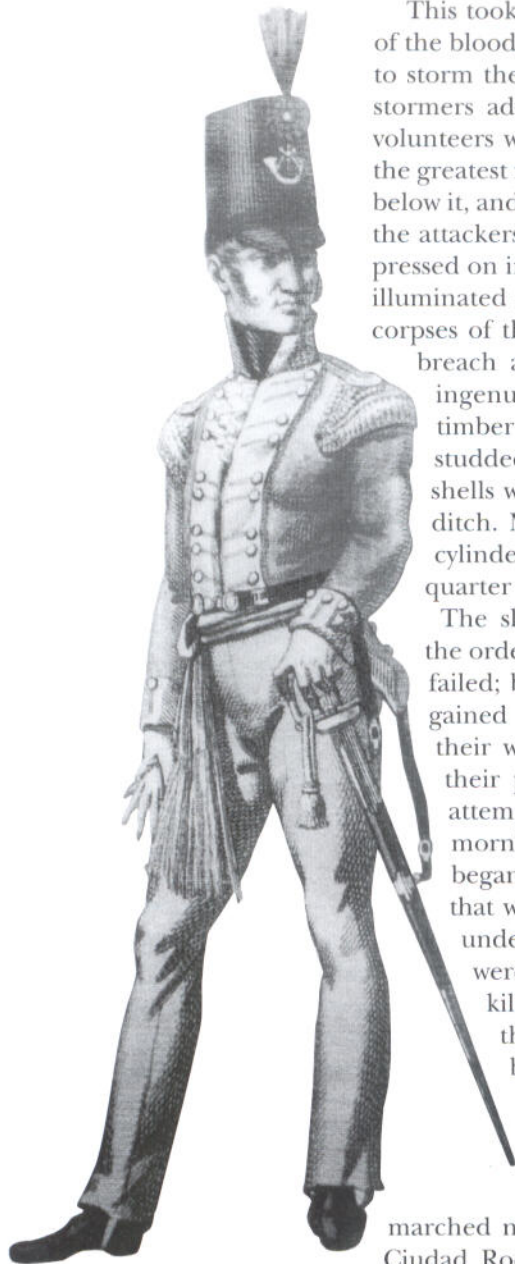
Hilt and scabbard details of an officer's sword, 52nd Light Infantry, c.1805. Later swords to this regiment had a bugle horn badge on the grip - see Plate H3. (National Army Museum)

RIGHT Full view of the 52nd sword. Note how little the blade curves, making it an efficient weapon for both cutting and thrusting, unlike the 'reaping hook' blades of some light infantry 'sabres'. (National Army Museum)



and firm. It was to be the last occasion he would speak to them. The 300 'stormers' of the Light Division ran up the glacis, leapt into an 11-foot ditch and clambered up the rubble leading to their breach. The silence which had preceded the storming was broken as the defenders began pouring a storm of musketry and grape on their attackers, but they were overpowered and the breach was carried. The regiments following passed through it and began to fight their way along the ramparts and into the fortress. Its capture took barely half-an-hour, but the slaughter that had taken place in that short time was horrendous: the French lost 300 dead and 1,500 prisoners, while the British and Portuguese lost 1,300 killed and wounded. That night Rodrigo was sacked, according to the rules of war. Amongst the wounded was Major-General Robert Craufurd, who had been shot through the body at the beginning of the action. He lingered in great pain for five days before dying on 24 January, and was buried in the breach that the men of his division had taken at such cost.

Leaving Ciudad Rodrigo with a garrison of Spanish troops, Wellington then marched for the other great frontier fortress, Badajoz. Twice before he had attempted to take it, and this time he was determined to succeed. On arrival the Light Division began the familiar routine of digging trenches and parallels around Fort Picurina, which was stormed on 25 March. Siege batteries were then established in and around the fort to commence their bombardment, and ten days later the breaches made were judged 'practicable' for assault.



Captured by a French artist in 1815, this officer of the 52nd Light Infantry wears the regulation uniform of the time but has opted for the conventional sash and the straight sword of an officer of a Line regiment – albeit with a waist belt and sword slings. (Author's collection)

This took place on the night of 6 April 1812, and proved to be one of the bloodiest operations of its kind. The Light Division were ordered to storm the breach in the bastion of Santa Maria, and at 10pm their stormers advanced upon it led by the 'Forlorn Hope', the band of volunteers who would be first into the breach and who therefore ran the greatest risk of death. The French allowed them to get into the ditch below it, and then exploded a huge mine concealed there. Hundreds of the attackers were instantly killed or wounded, but those who survived pressed on in the teeth of the fire now poured down on them. Fireballs illuminated a hellish scene as the living clawed their way up over the corpses of those who had gone before, in an attempt to climb to the breach and to get at those defending it. Every obstacle French ingenuity could devise barred their way, including baulks of timber into which sword blades had been embedded, and planks studded with spikes. Fused barrels of gunpowder and artillery shells were rolled and thrown down to add to the carnage in the ditch. Muskets were loaded with ball cartridge, on top of which cylinders of wood studded with lead slugs provided fearful close-quarter projectiles.

The slaughter was stopped at midnight when Wellington gave the order to withdraw from the glacis. Attempts at the breaches had failed; but elsewhere along the walls entry to the castle had been gained by escalade (ladders), and British troops began to work their way along towards the breaches, their bugles announcing their progress. At this Wellington ordered the breaches to be attempted again, and this time they were carried. By 2am on the morning of 7 April Badajoz was in British hands – and there began a three-day orgy of drunkenness, looting, rape and murder that went far beyond even the licence then universally accepted under the ancient customs of war.⁵ British casualties at Badajoz were exceptionally heavy: over 5,000 officers and men were killed or wounded including five generals. The battalions of the 43rd and 52nd lost 39 officers and nearly 700 men between them, including Lieutenant-Colonel Macleod of the 43rd, who had so valiantly rallied his men in the action before the Coa bridge. It was at this time that the 2/52nd was reduced.

No sooner was Badajoz in his hands than Wellington marched north to counter a French army threatening Almeida and Ciudad Rodrigo once again. The French withdrew and Wellington followed, with the Light Division in the van of his army. By mid-June they were approaching Salamanca, about which city there took place almost continual marching and countermarching as both armies sought the advantage of the ground, like wrestlers circling each other before one attacks. Wellington's opportunity came on 22 July when he observed that a gap had opened in the French line. The attack that he ordered started a battle which resulted in the French being soundly beaten and driven from the field, losing between 12,000 and 14,000 men and 20 guns

(continued on page 33)

⁵ When permanent barracks were built at Aldershot in the late 19th century, those nearest the town were called 'Wellington Lines' and were named after his famous victories; one such was 'Badajos Barracks'. As a small boy the present author remembers being told that Badajoz was a piece of the Army's history best forgotten. Some 130 years after the event, military folklore still regarded what took place there as too awful to be openly discussed.

LIGHT TROOPS PRE-1803

1: Private, Hompesch's Light Infantry, 1796

2: Private, 6/60th (Royal American) Regiment, 1799

3: Private, Light Company, 1st Foot Guards, 1793



SHORNCLIFFE, 1803-08
52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry:

1: Subaltern officer

2: Sergeant

3: Private

4: Major-General Moore



LIGHT INFANTRY OFFICERS, c.1808

- 1: Captain, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry
- 2: Lieutenant, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry
- 3: Field officer, 43rd (Monmouthshire) Light Infantry



1

2

3

Chappell ~ 03

SKIRMISHING, C.1811
43rd (Monmouthshire) Light Infantry:
1 & 2: Privates
3: Field officer



SPAIN, 1812

68th (Durham) Light Infantry:

1: Bugler

2: Field officer

51st (2nd Yorks, West Riding) Light Infantry:

3: Subaltern officer

4: Corporal



Chappell ~ 03

SPAIN, 1813

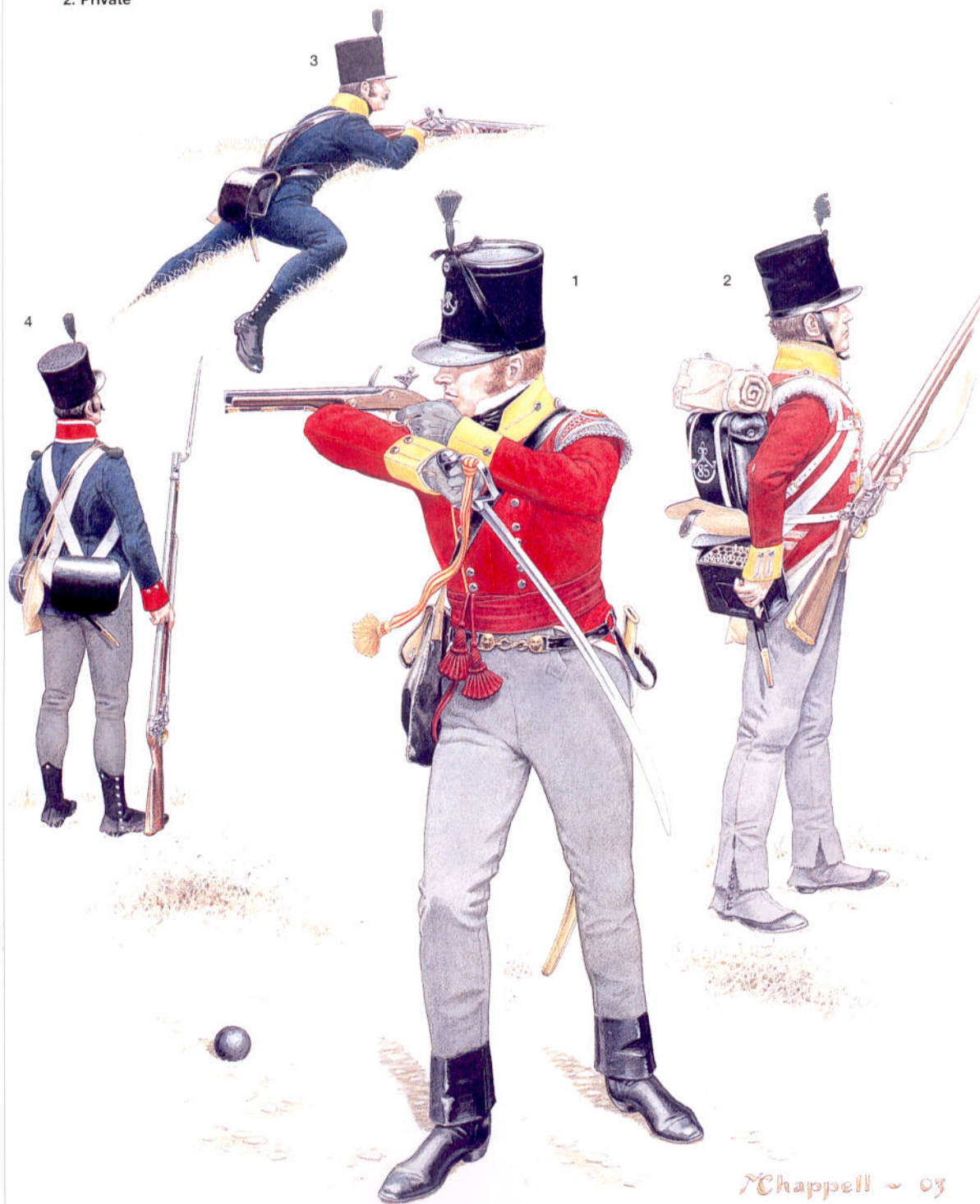
85th (Bucks Volunteers) Light Infantry:

1: Subaltern officer

2: Private

3: Private, Calabrian Free Corps

4: Private, Italian Levy



Chappell ~ 03

FRANCE, 1814

1: Colour Sergeant, 52nd (Oxfordshire)
Light Infantry

2: Tirador, Portuguese 3rd Cazadores

3: Private, 51st (2nd Yorkshire,
West Riding) Light Infantry



Chappell ~ 03

INSIGNIA, 1803-14
see text commentary for details



in the process. During this action the Light Division remained in reserve, marching the following morning in pursuit of the retreating French. By mid-August Wellington and his army had entered Madrid to a tumultuous welcome.

Here the Light Division stayed, while Wellington unsuccessfully laid siege to the fortress of Burgos until late October; he was then obliged to withdraw into Portugal yet again in the face of the French armies then uniting to attack his dispersed forces. In Madrid the Light Division took up positions to screen the withdrawal of the forces there, which began on 31 October. The onset of winter, heavy rain, and a breakdown of supplies combined to turn the retreat from Burgos into an ordeal comparable to Moore's on the road to Corunna. Faced with the difficult task of rearguard, the Light Division had frequent brushes with the French pursuers. In one action alone, while covering the crossing of the River Huebra, the 43rd and 52nd between them lost 95 officers and men, 46 of them as prisoners. Ciudad Rodrigo and safety were reached on 19 November 1812, and the units of the Light Division moved into winter quarters.

During the next few months reinforcements were received, new clothing was issued, and every opportunity was taken to relax after the arduous campaigning of 1812. Regimental histories make note of the entertainments enjoyed, which included a 'Light Division Theatre'. The leading lights in this enterprise may be supposed by the following: 'The 43rd were a gay set – the dandies of the army; the great encouragers of dramatic performances, dinner parties, and balls, of which their headquarters was the pivot. The 52nd were highly gentlemanly men, of a steady aspect; they mixed little with other corps, but attended the theatricals of the 43rd with circumspect good humour, and now and then relaxed, but were soon again the 52nd. The Rifle Corps were skirmishers in every sense of the word, a sort of wild sportsmen, and up to every description of fun and good humour.'

Vittoria, and into France

By April 1813 preparations for campaigning were well underway. Wellington had laid plans to drive the French from Spain once and for all, and as he crossed the border he turned in his saddle and cried out, 'Adieu, Portugal!' His army marched north-east, past Salamanca and the abandoned fortress of Burgos, and by mid-June was approaching Vittoria. Here the French had decided to stand and give battle, with their army deployed before the city, denying Wellington the passage of the River Zadora.



A painting depicting Major Macleod of the 43rd Light Infantry leading his men into the breach in the bastion of Santa Maria at the storming of Badajoz, 6 April 1812 – his last fight. It provides a reasonably convincing impression of such actions. (Author's collection)



Rank-and-file shoulder belt plate ('breastplate') of the 43rd Light Infantry, early 19th century. (Author's collection)

The battle began on the morning of 21 June with the Light Division in the centre of Wellington's line, within 200 yards of the bridges of Villodas and Tres Puentes. The skirmish lines of both sides were active, with the riflemen of the Light Division keeping up a telling fire on the French guns covering the bridges. At about midday, hearing that the Tres Puentes bridge was then unguarded, Wellington ordered Kempt's Brigade of the Light Division to seize it, to cross the river, and to deploy before the French centre. Shortly afterwards Vandeleur's Brigade of the Light Division rushed the Villodas bridge, crossing behind Kempt's; as part of the general advance that was by then taking place, the brigade carried the heights of Margarita on the French right. Gradually the French were forced back upon the town of Vittoria where, for a time, their line held; but an assault upon their centre at 6pm caused a general retreat that turned quickly into rout and flight. It had been a bloody affair, with almost 6,000 casualties on each side; the slaughter was brought to an end by the onset of night, and by a frenzy of looting, as the Allied soldiers fell upon the deserted French train and the accumulated plunder of the occupation of Spain and Portugal. By noon the following day the Light Division was marching after the French, clashing with their rearguard on the 24th – the first of many actions fought as the army approached the borders of France.

In August, a call was received for volunteers to aid in the storming of the fortress of San Sebastian. From the many who volunteered 100 were chosen, and of these many were killed or wounded. (Those of the 52nd who survived were later awarded a special badge as 'Valiant Stormers'.)

On 7 October the Light Division crossed the River Bidassoa to attack the redoubts on the heights above Vera. When the French had been driven from them, the men of the 43rd and 52nd planted their feet firmly on the soil of France. Confident that Napoleon was under pressure from the forces of Austria, Russia and Prussia, Wellington pushed his army northwards over the Pyrenees, fighting a series of battles culminating in that at Toulouse, which was fought on 10 April 1814 – four days after the abdication of the Emperor of the French. In the sweep into southern France the Light Division had fought at the battle of the Nivelle in November 1813; at the battle of the Nive in December of the same year; at the battle of Orthes in February 1814; and at the battle of Toulouse, where the 18-year-old Lieutenant George Whichcote of the 52nd was reputedly the first British soldier into the city.⁶ Many examples of individual and collective bravery in these battles by the officers and men of the 43rd and 52nd are recorded, from the terrible hand-to-hand fighting on the Greater and Lesser Rhune before the Nivelle crossing, to the pointless sacrifice at Toulouse.

With the Peninsular War at an end the regiments of the Light Division were dispersed, the 43rd being sent to America (where it was

⁶ Although he only joined his regiment in January 1811 as a 16-year-old ensign, Whichcote received nine clasps to the Military General Service medal, including Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Salamanca and Vittoria. He went on to fight at Waterloo, and was one of the last survivors of the Peninsula, dying in August 1891 at the age of 96 or 97.

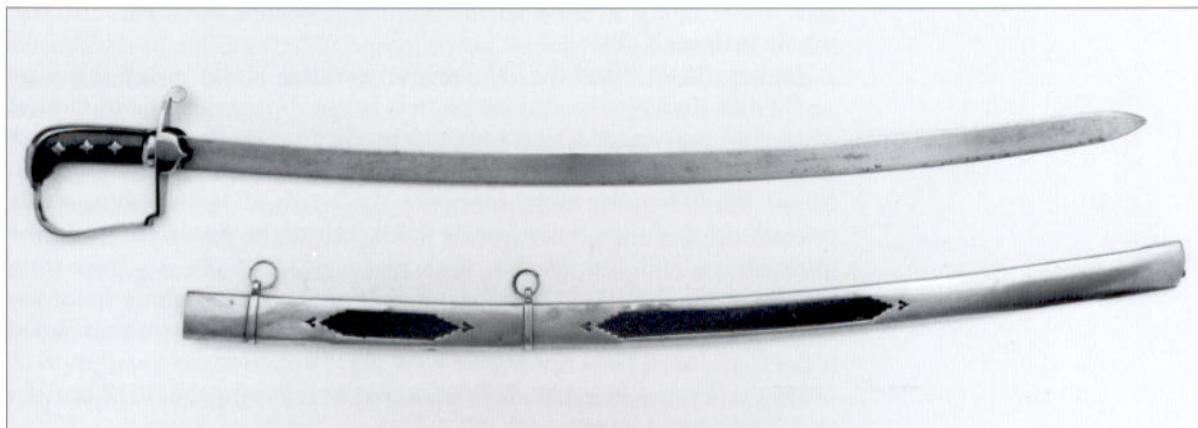
involved in the ill-fated attack on New Orleans) and the 52nd to Belgium, where it took part in the battle of Waterloo and the ultimate defeat and exile of Napoleon. When battle honours for the Peninsular War were awarded the 43rd and 52nd, who had marched and fought side by side first in the Flank Brigade, then the Light Brigade, and then the Light Division, received almost identical honours. They were PENINSULA, VIMIERA, BUSACO, FUENTES D'ONOR, CIUDAD RODRIGO, BADAJOZ, SALAMANCA, VITTORIA, NIVELLE, NIVE and CORUNNA. Only the 52nd received the battle honours ORTHES and TOULOUSE.

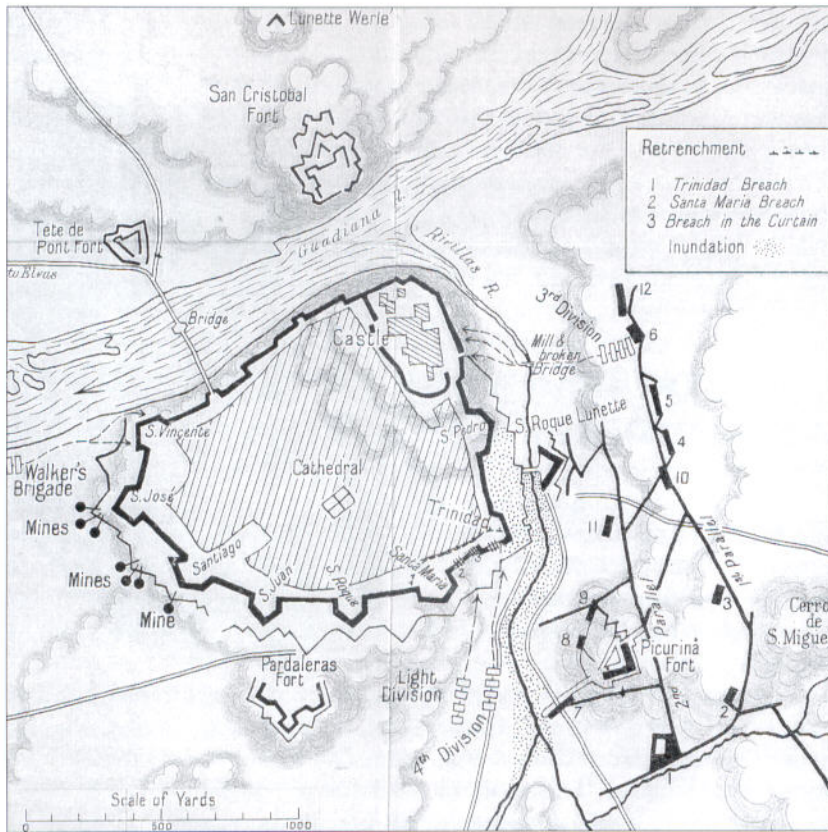
THE 51st (2nd YORKSHIRE, WEST RIDING) LIGHT INFANTRY

The 51st returned to England in 1807 after 16 years of overseas service, and in October 1808 sailed as part of Sir David Baird's force bound for Corunna. Scarcely had it landed when it was caught up in Moore's retreat upon the port, and the battle to cover the embarkation of the army. Moore had been colonel of the 51st, who were boarding ships as he was being buried.

Once more in England, the regiment received orders transforming it into a 'light infantry corps' in May 1809, but had little time to exercise in the new role before being sent as part of an expeditionary force to the Scheldt in August. The malarial marshes of Walcheren did more damage to the 51st than any enemy they faced there, and the recurring 'Walcheren fever' continued for years afterwards to lay low the officers and men who had served there. By October 1809 the regiment was considered 'fit for service' once again, but it was to be January 1811 before the 51st began the journey to Portugal to join Wellington's army. Under Lieutenant-Colonel Mainwaring, 24 officers and 703 men set out, arriving by late March to become one of the units of the newly formed 7th Division. Brigaded with the 85th Light Infantry, the Chasseurs Britanniques (a corps originally of French royalist émigrés, but by then mostly former prisoners-of-war of many nations under French officers), and riflemen of the Brunswick Oels Jägers, the 51st formed what was, in all but name, a light brigade.

Officer's swords of the 51st Light Infantry followed the pattern set by the 52nd. The example shown here dates from c.1809, and was made for Lieutenant Hawley of the 51st by Henry Tatham, a London sword cutler and maker of the 52nd sword shown on page 23. The scabbard is of wood encased in steel. (National Army Museum)





Badajoz. At top on the far bank is the outlying Fort San Cristobal, which men of the 51st helped to storm in June 1811 during the unsuccessful first siege of this key border town. This map shows the sites of the attempts on the southern breaches on 6 April 1812; No.2, the Santa Maria bastion breach, cost the regiments of the Light Division many killed and wounded. (Author's collection)

From Fuentes d'Oñoro to Vittoria

With sickness thinning its ranks, by early May the regiment formed part of Wellington's army confronting the French at Fuentes d'Oñoro where, on the third day of the battle, the 7th Division came under attack by a large force of enemy cavalry. Forced to conduct a fighting withdrawal, Colonel Mainwaring imagined his command about to be surrounded and ordered the Colours to be burned. According to the accounts of Pte Wheeler of the 51st, Mainwaring might be judged to be a man of eccentric behaviour, to put it no stronger. His conduct on 7 May 1811 caused Wellington to order him to be placed in arrest, and

eventually sent back to the base at Lisbon. (This unjustly coloured Wellington's opinion of the regiment, and it was to be 60 years before the 51st was awarded the battle honour that acknowledged its brave conduct at Fuentes d'Oñoro.)

In late May the 51st were part of the force investing Badajoz, and on 6 June, 150 volunteers from the regiment took part in the storming of Fort Cristobal. The attack was beaten back, as was a further attempt on 9 June. The siege was given up as Wellington pulled his army back into Portugal, but the attempts had cost the 51st over 100 casualties, which – with the continuing sick list – reduced the regiment to 382 officers and men 'at duty'. The rest of the year 1811 was spent in marching, countermarching, and a few sharp actions as the opposing armies attempted to outmanoeuvre each other.

January 1812 found the 7th Division and the 51st covering the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo, mounting piquets in the bitter weather in clothes worn thin and ragged by a year's campaigning. By then the regiment had only 332 officers and men at duty. The new campaigning season found the 51st once more tramping the roads of Spain, occasionally encountering the enemy in small fights, but never participating in the great sieges and actions that took place about them. An inspecting officer noted that their 'number of sick appear to originate from the Regiment having been in Walcheren – The officers, non-commissioned officers and men have not yet the Caps and Pantaloon as fixed upon by HRH the Prince Regent'. This presumably refers to the 1812 pattern shako and grey trousers.

By July the 51st were marching with Wellington's army as they manoeuvred with the French around Salamanca, and were engaged in the fighting for the forts of that city, suffering 20 casualties. In the great battle fought on the 22nd the regiment were in the second line, suffering only two men wounded. Following the defeated French, the 51st were with that part of the army that entered Madrid on 12 August, where they enjoyed the welcome of the Spanish until orders were received to march to Burgos to screen the siege operations there. In late October these were given up, and the 51st set out on the march back to the Portuguese border under conditions that have been likened to the retreat to Corunna. Discipline broke down as, harried by the French, the army struggled back to sanctuary. The year 1812 had been one of hard marching: one soldier reckoned the miles as '2,328. This is not overrating it'. Wellington castigated his army for its conduct during the retreat from Spain – unfairly, it was thought by some – and kept it hard at work during the early months of 1813 until he was ready to advance yet again.

In early May the 51st were on the march, and on 21 June fought in the great battle at Vittoria. There the 7th Division attacked the French right in front of the villages of Margarita and Hermandad, before pushing on to assault the hill of Arinaz. The casualties of the 51st amounted to one officer and ten men killed and one officer and 20 men wounded. That night the French baggage was looted: 'the camp [of the 51st] represented a great fair and the money and goods soon became more equally distributed – Twenty four hours before we had not enough in the regiment to bait a mouse trap, this night we could scarce move without trampling on all kinds of provisions'.

Heavy losses and persistent sickness

The next day the 51st marched with the force pursuing the French towards the Pyrenees, becoming involved in many actions and skirmishes, including that at Sorrauren on 30 July which resulted in the regiment being mentioned in his despatches by Wellington. A month later the regiment again saw fierce fighting on the Bidassoa, which cost 85 officers and men killed and wounded and once again earned them a special mention. By early November the passage of the river had been won and entry into France gained. At the battle of the Nivelle, on 10 November, the 51st played its part in the capture of the heights beyond the crossing, losing 81 officers and men in the process. By this time the regiment had only 284 all ranks at duty and 241 sick. The last general action in which the 51st were involved was at Orthes in February 1814. The regiment embarked for England in June in the knowledge that it had been awarded the battle honour PENINSULA two months earlier; to this would later be added those of VITTORIA, NIVELLE, CORUNNA,



A post-1815 portrait of Lieutenant Dyas of the 51st Light Infantry who, as an ensign, led the attacks on Fort San Cristobal at Badajoz in June 1811. His extraordinary bravery availed him little, for he remained a subaltern for ten years before obtaining a captaincy. (Author's collection)

SALAMANCA, ORTHES, PYRENEES and (after the dead hand of Wellington had been lifted) FUENTES D'ONOR.

THE 68th (DURHAM) LIGHT INFANTRY

In September 1808 the 68th received orders to convert to and train as a light infantry battalion 'with all practicable dispatch'. Then stationed at Hull, the regiment marched south to the barracks at Brabourne Lees, Kent, where it was trained in its new role under the direction of Col de Rottenburg. Even so, the training was far from complete before the 68th were sent to Walcheren in July 1809. In a report, de Rottenburg thought that the men had made 'considerable progress' but that the officers 'require a great deal of instruction yet'; the absence of 20 on recruiting duties cannot have helped.

Like the 51st, the 68th returned to England with the melancholy legacy of a 'Walcheren regiment' – one that was to have up to half its men in hospital with recurring bouts of fever at any given time. It was to take until the summer of 1812 before the regiment was (optimistically) considered free from the after-effects of malaria, whose cause and cure were then unknown. However, by the spring of 1811 the 68th were judged 'very satisfactory, the light infantry movements were performed with celerity and precision, and the men are perfectly acquainted with the sounds of the bugle'.

The regiment embarked for the Peninsula in June, having left its Colours at its depot in England – 'an arrangement not unusual in light infantry'. Disembarking at Lisbon, the 68th marched up to the army to join the units forming up as the 7th Division. On paper 808 strong, the 68th was brigaded with the 51st, whose fortunes were to be closely paralleled by the 68th. Thus the soldiers of the 68th began to experience the ordeal of marching and countermarching in the extremes of the Peninsula climate; by late October they had 367 men sick and only 323 'present fit'.

In early 1812 the regiment was deployed to screen the siege operations at Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz. In May it was reported on by its brigade commander, who noted that 'the junior officers do not possess that activity and intelligence which is required of a light infantry officer'. The men, he thought, were 'not so clean or healthy as could be wished', and were 'not well set up'. Further criticism noted court-martials for looting, and that the regiment had no Colours – hardly their fault under the circumstances. Nevertheless, it was not the best report with which to begin a campaign.

By June the men of the 68th were marching with Wellington's army as it closed on Salamanca, and on the 20th of that month they fought a spirited outpost action at Moriscos. At the great battle on the 22nd they began the day by clashing

An officer's gorget of the 68th Light Infantry, early 19th century. The gorget – the last surviving reminder of 'body armour' in the British officer's uniform – was worn at the throat suspended by ribbons of the regimental facing colour; see Plate B1. (National Army Museum)



An early 20th century water-colour by Richard Simkin of an officer of the 85th Light Infantry, c.1812. The accuracy of the uniform detail is somewhat marred by the artist depicting the subject with queued hair, a practice abolished in 1808. Otherwise, note his cap cords and turban, wings, light infantry sash, sword belt, light infantry sword, and grey overalls. (Shropshire Regimental Museum)



with French skirmishers advancing on the positions of the 7th Division, driving them off and holding their ground until relieved; later the regiment formed part of the divisional line in its advance on the retiring French.

1813: recovery and vindication

Subsequently the 68th occupied Madrid, screened the siege of Burgos, and marched in the retreat back to the Portuguese border after the siege had been given up. By the year's end the strength of the regiment was so low (235 rank and file at duty, and 247 sick) that Wellington contemplated forming the 51st and 68th into a 'provisional' light infantry battalion, but in fact did not resort to this expedient.

By late April 1813, however, rest, reinforcements, new clothing and equipment had brought about a transformation in the 68th, with 439 rank and file fit and only 97 sick; and an inspection report noted that the regiment was 'particularly well drilled in light manoeuvres', and 'much improved in health, cleanliness and conduct'. It was a restored 68th that marched into Spain in May 1813. At Vittoria the regiment lost 24 officers and men killed and 100 wounded in a day of hard fighting, before camping amidst the wagons and carriages of the abandoned French train. (When the men were later searched for plunder, an average of £32.50 per man was recovered – equivalent to about six years' pay per man after stoppages.)

Soon the 68th were engaged in the fighting in the Pyrenees, and at Sorauren on 30 July they fell on the two battalions of the French flank guard and drove them headlong from the field, causing Wellington to call it 'the finest thing he ever witnessed'. But in this and subsequent actions the cost was such that after the Nivelle crossing – during which the 68th took three redoubts – the regiment had fewer than 200 officers and men fit for duty. Nevertheless, as Wellington's army pushed into France the 68th stormed the Ardour bridge at Oeyregrave on 23 February 1814, before fighting its last battle at Orthes; there, on 27 February, the regiment charged with other units to restore an attack which had faltered.

With the first abdication of Napoleon the regiment marched to its port of embarkation and passage to Ireland. It had been on service for just over three years, in which time, although never a battalion strong in numbers, it had lost nearly 500 officers and men killed in action or died of wounds or disease. The battle honours of the 68th (Durham) Light Infantry – PENINSULA, SALAMANCA, VITORIA, PYRENEES, NIVELLE and ORTHES – had been hard earned.

THE 85th (BUCKS VOLUNTEERS) LIGHT INFANTRY

The 85th was yet another of the regiments which had the misfortune to be ordered to the Scheldt to take part in the Walcheren campaign of 1809. Transformed into light infantry in 1808, the regiment received training at Brabourne Lees and was stationed at Hailsham, Sussex, when it received orders in January 1811 for the



Another Simkin watercolour, showing a corporal and a private soldier of the 85th skirmishing, c.1812. Once again the artist – painting a century after the event – shows the men with cap cords and queued hair; and also a pattern of knapsack not introduced until 1823. Note their full marching order equipment, wings, and grey trousers over short gaiters. (Shropshire Regimental Museum)

posted as killed, wounded or missing in the fighting – casualties that were shortly to seal the fate of the regiment.

Withdrawal and reorganisation

By early June the 85th were part of the forces besieging Badajoz where, in the attempted storming of Fort San Cristobal, more casualties were incurred. By September the numbers of the regiment were so low that it was ordered to return to England in order to recruit. December 1811 found the 85th in the familiar surroundings of Brabourne Lees, where the task of restoration began – a process which included a quite extraordinary happening.

'Considerable dissension amongst the officers' led to a series of courts-martial for offences as diverse as embezzlement, duelling, and a fist fight between an officer and a sergeant. These events led to the commander-in-chief deciding that he would have the officers of the 85th dispersed among the other regiments of the army, to be replaced by others from regiments as diverse as the Duke of York's Greek Light Infantry, the African Corps and the 3rd Garrison Battalion. Most came from regiments of the Line, ten officers from other Light Infantry regiments. The new arrivals, resplendent in a variety of 'regimentals' ranging from the highland dress of the 79th to the dark green of the Rifle regiments, were immediately nicknamed the 'Elegant Extracts' and, as history was to prove, led the regiment well from this point on.

Peninsula. It is interesting to note that although the paper strength of the 85th was 936 officers and men, only 27 officers and 459 rank-and-file sailed for Portugal. It may be assumed that most of those left in England as a 'depot' were suffering the after-effects of malaria, then called 'the ague'.

On arrival in Portugal the 85th joined the 7th Division on 19 March 1811, and was brigaded with the 51st Light Infantry and the Chasseurs Britanniques. At Fuentes de Oñoro the 85th was kept in reserve until 5 May, when it was heavily engaged with the French cavalry and infantry in the long running fight as it fell back with other units of the 7th Division to positions ordered by Wellington. Of the 220 officers and men at duty that day 101 were

By the spring of 1813 the 85th had recruited up to a strength of 936 officers and men, and when orders for embarkation to the Peninsula were received in July, 36 officers and 360 rank-and-file under Lieutenant-Colonel Thornton set out, landing at the Biscayan port of Passages on 19 August. Brigaded with the 62nd, 76th and 84th Regiments, the 85th Light Infantry were soon involved in the siege of San Sebastian, before taking up positions along the Bidassoa. On 7 October the river was forded by Wellington's army and the fortifications above the opposite bank were stormed; the 85th played a conspicuous part in the capture of the village of Hendaye. After a month spent in the cold and rain facing down the French, Wellington's army once more attacked over the Nivelle. The task of the 85th in this battle was the capture of the fortified village of Urogne, which they took and held before advancing to ford the river at St Jean de Luz, and leading the pursuit of the retreating French. On 17 November the army was ordered into winter quarters, though this did not end the fighting for the year 1813.

The 85th were allotted an area of heathland north of St Jean de Luz, and there they pitched tents and 'wintered', disturbed from time to time by alarms such as the French incursion on the village of Bidart. On that occasion the regiment was rushed to help stabilise the situation, during which much confused fighting took place around the mayor's house. At a critical point Wellington rode up to the hard-pressed 85th and called out, 'You must keep your ground, my lads, there is nothing behind you – Charge! Charge!' His order stirred the regiment into firing a volley into the enemy and then charging them with the bayonet; they did not stand to receive the 85th.

Outpost duty and the construction of defence works took up much time during what proved to be an extremely cold winter.

In February 1814, while the main army under Wellington drove towards Toulouse, the 85th was with that part of it that marched to lay siege to Bayonne. By the end of the month the city was completely surrounded; work began on the construction of battery positions for the heavy artillery, and the routine of siege operations was only brought to an end by the news of Napoleon's abdication, which was received on 11 April. Unfortunately the French would not believe the report, and on the 14th mounted a sortie from Bayonne which resulted in the needless deaths of 1,000 Frenchmen and 900 Allied soldiers. Eventually the garrison capitulated, and the 85th (Bucks Volunteers) Light Infantry marched for Bordeaux, where it embarked for the war in America on 31 May 1814. In its two short tours in the Peninsula it had earned the battle honours PENINSULA, NIVE and FUENTES D'ONOR.

A watercolour of the 85th painted in 1912 by P.W. Reynolds, who was a serious student of uniform history. He depicts an officer and a private soldier c.1809, the year they were training to be light infantrymen at Brabourne Lees. (Shropshire Regimental Museum)





Brass rank-and-file shoulder belt plate of the 85th Light Infantry, c.1808-15; the riband is inscribed 'BUCKS.LIGHT.INFANTRY'.
(Shropshire Regimental Museum)



A gilt regimental Medal of Merit awarded to Major M'Intosh of the 85th Light Infantry for his conduct at 'Fuentes d'Onor'; the ribbon is red edged with blue. Before the institution of national awards for bravery and campaign service, many hundreds of medals were awarded to the gallant and deserving by individual regiments, including a 'forlorn hope' badge for Badajoz by the 52nd Light Infantry - see Plate G1.
(Shropshire Regimental Museum)



A cartoon of 1912 depicting how the 'Elegant Extracts' might have looked on joining the 85th Light Infantry in early 1813. There was certainly a highlander, and more than one rifleman, but no light dragoon is actually listed...
(Shropshire Regimental Museum)

A Simkin watercolour of an 85th Light Infantry skirmish line clashing with French skirmishers at the battle of the Nivelles, 1813. While Simkin's paintings are more or less worthless for details of uniform, this scene does have one virtue: it reminds us of the very close range at which skirmishers armed with smooth-bore muskets engaged one another, as confirmed by memoirs such as that of Private Wheeler of the 51st, quoted in the text. (Shropshire Regimental Museum)



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THE PLATES

The dress of Light Infantry regiments in the Peninsular War differed only in detail from that of Line regiments. The 'stove-pipe' shako of the time has been described as 'conical' when worn by Light Infantry, and was likened by at least one witness to a 'sugar-loaf', which at the time had a tapered shape; but no surviving example shows this to be so. What is probable is that shakos were 'blocked' in imitation of the mirleton caps of the cavalry, by wetting them and then letting them dry to the desired shape (much as berets were 'set up' by a later generation of British soldiers). Light Infantry shakos had green plumes or tufts, bugle-horn badges, and sometimes green 'turbans' and cords. One history records that in the heat of a Portuguese summer shakos became uncomfortable to wear unless 'ventilated' by punching small holes in the crowns. Other modifications included the addition of neck-flaps and tape chinstraps.

Officers and men wore 'wings' on their jackets, a former flank company distinction, on which officers sported bugle-horn badges. These devices were also worn on the 'turnbacks' – the exposed triangles of lining visible at the tails of jackets – by officers and sergeants, and often on the crossbelt plates ('breastplates') of all ranks. Officers adopted a distinctive sash which was fastened about the waist by means of cords, tied or looped in various fashions; they also

frequently wore light cavalry-type waistbelts and sword slings in place of the regulation (shoulder) sword belt.

Light Infantry sergeants carried neither pikes nor swords, but were armed with muskets and bayonets like the rank-and-file. A later distinction of Light Infantry non-commissioned officers was that of wearing badges of rank on both sleeves of the jacket. Whistles were carried by officers and NCOs in some regiments; these were not the showy items later adopted by Light Infantry and Rifle regiments, but plain and utilitarian, and were kept in a pocket or suspended from a jacket button by a cord.

Legwear consisted of breeches and gaiters for the rank-and-file, and 'pantaloon' and boots – usually 'Hessians' – for the officers. On campaign the rank-and-file at first wore white serge 'overalls', then white cotton trousers, and finally grey woollen trousers, with short gaiters of the same material. Officers adopted various patterns of overalls, usually aping the style of those worn by the light cavalry, before taking into use a pattern closely resembling the cut and colour of the trousers worn by their soldiers.

The equipment worn by Light Infantry regiments departed from common practice in two respects. The first was the 'light' marching order in which they first landed in Portugal. This featured a reduced kit wrapped in a blanket or greatcoat, worn on the back in place of the knapsack. The second peculiarity was that of officers carrying knapsacks, haversacks, rations and water the same as their men. How

long this practice lasted in the Peninsular campaigns is hard to tell, but at least one young officer was carrying 'a black leathern' haversack as late as 1814.

When studying the dress of the British Army at this time it should always be remembered that the rigours of campaigning often reduced the clothing of officers and men to a travesty of 'uniform'. What is shown in the colour plates is what should have been worn; what was actually worn can only be guessed at.

A: LIGHT TROOPS PRE-1803

A1: Private, Hompesch's Light Infantry, 1796

The war with Revolutionary France brought about a rapid expansion of the British Army, during which many foreign light infantry corps were brought into British pay. This soldier serves with a unit raised in Germany in 1796, and eventually 'drafted' in the West Indies into the 2/60th and 5/60th (Royal American) Regiment in 1798. The entire regiment was originally armed with 'carbines' except for ten men in each company armed with rifles, although the proportion of riflemen grew to nearly half by the time they sailed for the West Indies. Our subject's uniform features the shako, green jacket and black equipment adopted by many of the Rifle regiments raised later, including the 5/60th and the 95th Rifles. Note the turban, chains and plate adorning his shako, and the 'breastplate' securing his pouch and sword belt. Note also the breech cover and loose sling on his carbine.

A2: Private, 6th Battalion, 60th (Royal American) Regiment, 1799

Another German light infantry unit was the 6/60th, raised in 1799; the battalion were armed partly with muskets and partly with rifles – this soldier carries the standard British musket of the time, the India Pattern. Note the shako, green jacket and buff leather equipment, in which the 6/60th fought in Holland before being sent to the West Indies. German regiments were allowed to wear moustaches.

A3: Private, Light Company, 1st Foot Guards, 1793

The men of the light companies of British regiments continued to wear red coats. The Guards had not had light companies until 1793, and chose the uniform shown here for their 'light bobs'. The extraordinary 'round' hat is set up with laces, a fur crest and a green plume. Note also his 'gaiter-trousers' buttoned at the bottom, short jacket with light infantry wings, musket and bayonet, and the knapsack at his feet.

B: SHORNCLIFFE, 1803-08

B1: Subaltern officer, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry

'In drill every man was taught his centre of gravity by the balance step, – to take an exact length of pace by the pace stick, – to step in slow, quick and double quick [time], by the plummet and tap of the drum, afterwards to move in bodies or extended order and outpost duty, etc.' So wrote a subaltern on joining the 52nd Light Infantry in 1808, and this figure depicts such an officer performing the first movement of the 'right about face' under the supervision of a sergeant. The young officer wears the 'belts' of a private and carries a musket at the 'advance'. Note his shako badge, green turban and horsehair plume, his gorget, sash, bright scarlet jacket and wings. Since his regiment has buff facings his belts and breeches conform to that colour.

B2: Sergeant, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry

The sergeant's coat is of the same scarlet colour as that of



A portrait of an officer of the 43rd Light Infantry, Major William Napier, showing the pelisse adopted by the officers of that regiment. See Plate C3. (Author's collection)

the officer, and is decorated with plain white 'lace'. Note his badges of rank on the right sleeve only, his wings, and the bugle-horn badges on his turnbacks. His sidearm is the bayonet for his 'fusil' – as a Light Infantry sergeant he carries no sword. He wears a slightly larger tuft on his shako than the 4-inch article worn by the rank-and-file; and his worsted sash bears a stripe of the facing colour. He carries the cane common to all infantry sergeants; until recently these had frequently been used to strike soldiers who were insubordinate or slow to learn. This practice was expressly forbidden by Colonel Mackenzie, who also discouraged profanity and sarcasm on the drill square.

B3: Private, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry

Beside the subaltern is a recruit, who has completed the 'right about face'. Note the fatigue dress in which he attends drill; and the manner in which his shako is tilted over his right eye, the mark of a 'light bob'. A wisp of straw in a trouser buttonhole helps him remember his left foot from his right. In the background (B4), Major-General Moore sits his horse observing the exercise.

C: LIGHT INFANTRY OFFICERS, c.1808

C1: Captain, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry

C2: Lieutenant, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry

This company officer of the 52nd (C1) is taken from a portrait of Captain Archibald Douglas, in which he wore

epaulettes instead of wings, and a plain Line officer's sash. Note the manner in which the horsehair shako plume has been tied, and also the green band around its base. Officers of the 52nd carried a regimental pattern of sabre suspended from a black waistbelt. Note also the buff facings, turnbacks and legwear. The rear view of such a uniform is shown at C2; he wears wings, a light infantry sash, and a shoulder belt in contrast to the previous figure, but the same pattern of sabre. Note the bugle-horn badges on his wings and turnbacks.

C3: Field officer, 43rd (Monmouthshire) Light Infantry

While the dress of the officers of the 52nd Light Infantry conformed to regulations, that of the 43rd departed from them to copy the dress of hussars. Looking more like a cavalryman than an officer of Light Infantry, this field officer contrasts markedly with the other two figures. The most elaborate item of dress he wears is the pelisse, a fur-lined and heavily braided jacket worn slung over the shoulder. Note his corded and turbaned shako. The Light Infantry sash (which fastened like a hussar barrel-sash), breeches, Hessian boots, waist belt and sabre all added to the appearance of a hussar, which was – no doubt – the sartorial effect sought. One officer of the regiment is reputed to have

spent £1,000 a year on his clothing and equipment, and on being captured he was mistaken by the French for a general officer.

D: SKIRMISHING, c.1811

D1 & D2: Privates, 43rd (Monmouthshire) Light Infantry

D3: Field officer, 43rd (Monmouthshire) Light Infantry
 Figures D1 and D2 depict a 'file' of skirmishers. D1 waits, selecting a target, while D2 loads his musket before calling to his mate that he is ready. Note their rather shabby appearance, typical of men who had been in the field for weeks. Their 'light service' equipment includes a rolled blanket (in place of a knapsack), haversack and water canteen, as well as musket, bayonet, and 70 rounds of ball ammunition. Securing the crossbelts at their waists are narrow waist belts intended to stabilise the pouches and bayonets while running. By this time regiments had been issued with the 'New Land Pattern Light Infantry Musket' with its distinctive rear sight, 'browned' barrel, 'pistol-grip' trigger guard, and waterproof pan. Slings were kept loose when skirmishing, in order to steady the aim, and bayonets – always a hindrance to accuracy – were left unfixd until the last moment.



A print after Charles Hamilton Smith shows, at right, a soldier of the light company of the 29th Regiment in 1812. Note that he wears the narrow waist belt that was exclusive to Light Infantry; its purpose was to hold secure the wearer's cartridge box and bayonet when he ran. See Plates D1 & D2. (Author's collection)

In the background a mounted field officer of the 43rd signals the line to advance.

E: SPAIN, 1812

E1: Bugler, 68th (Durham) Light Infantry

E2: Field officer, 68th (Durham) Light Infantry

In the hard campaigning of this year much fighting was seen by the 51st and 68th Light Infantry, brigaded together in Wellington's 7th Division. Our subject is 'sounding' his bugle as he advances with his sword drawn. Note the lace on his sleeves; the fringes on his wings, of red/green/white 'drawn thread'; the disposition of his haversack and canteen, his waist belt and his bugle cords. He wears the blue-grey trousers and gaiters that were, by 1812, part of the dress for field service. His sword is the standard pattern for buglers and drummers, but with a blade only 24 inches in length its utility as a weapon must have been limited.

To the rear is a mounted field officer of the 68th Light Infantry, issuing orders to

E3: Subaltern officer, 51st (2nd Yorkshire, West Riding) Light Infantry

E4: Corporal, 51st (2nd Yorkshire, West Riding) Light Infantry

Note the contrast between the 'bottle green' facings of the 68th and the 'grass green' facings of the 51st. Both officers carry the sabres that were a distinction of light infantry officers, the subaltern's drawn weapon showing the blueing and gilding on the upper part of the blade that was typical of high quality military swords. E3 wears leather-reinforced overalls and green gloves, both fashionable items of field wear at this date, and a whistle cord emerges from his jacket front. The corporal carries his Light Infantry musket at the 'trail arms'; and note the markings on his knapsack.

F: SPAIN, 1813

F1: Subaltern officer, 85th (Bucks Volunteers) Light Infantry

One of the best memoirs of service in a regiment of Light Infantry in 1813-14 was *The Subaltern* by George Gleig. He joined the 85th as one of the 'elegant extracts' transferred into that troubled regiment when its original officers were posted away wholesale, and landed in Spain in August 1813. Gleig went into battle with two pistols carried in a

haversack to back up his sabre, as depicted here. Note the later pattern shako, which had a leather top and band and tapes to tie under the wearer's chin in windy weather. His jacket, wings, sash, sword belt and sabre are all standard Light Infantry items.

F2: Private, 85th (Bucks Volunteers) Light Infantry

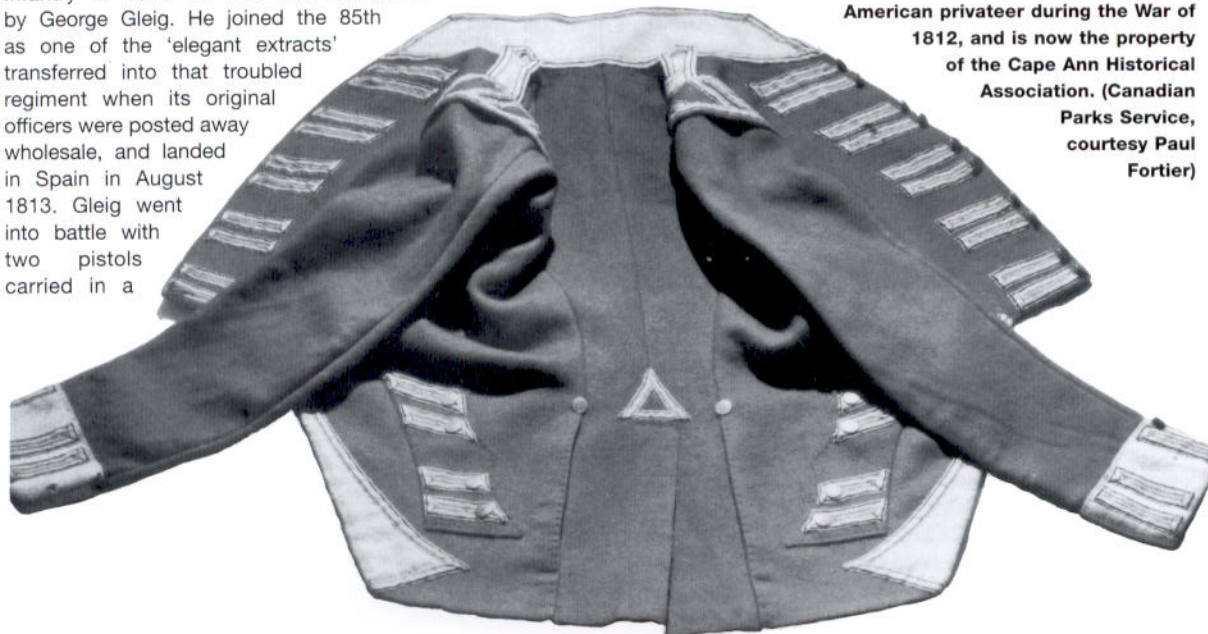
This soldier of the 85th is loading his musket. Note the markings on his knapsack; the interior of his cartridge pouch; and his Light Infantry waist belt.

F3: Private, Calabrian Free Corps

F4: Private, Italian Levy

A 'Light Brigade' was part of an Allied force operating in south-eastern Spain by 1813. It included a battalion of the 27th Regiment, light companies from battalions of the King's German Legion, and units of the large Calabrian Free Corps and Italian Levy – both mercenary corps which were active in several Mediterranean campaigns. After conducting a skilful fighting withdrawal at Biar, the brigade fell back on the main Allied position at Castalla, where the French were defeated. One British general, Lord William Bentinck, considered the Calabrians first-class light infantrymen, and noted that many of the 1st Italian Regiment's Piedmontese, Swiss and Austrian officers were 'very respectable'; but both corps were dogged by the desertion and treachery of discontented elements. The clothing, equipment and weapons of these two skirmishers are all from British sources, and but for their blue jackets they might be mistaken for British Light Infantry. (For detailed information see MAA 335, *Emigré & Foreign Troops in British Service (2): 1803-15.*)

While not a relic of a Light Infantry regiment, this extremely rare surviving example of a contemporary British infantry rank-and-file jacket was intended for issue to the light company of a Line regiment. It has the shoulder wings typical of the 'light bobs', with regimental lace all around and in six diagonal 'darts' in three pairs across the scarlet surface. This jacket was intended for the 104th Regiment at Quebec, but was captured at sea by an American privateer during the War of 1812, and is now the property of the Cape Ann Historical Association. (Canadian Parks Service, courtesy Paul Fortier)



G: FRANCE, 1814

G1: Colour Sergeant, 52nd (Oxfordshire) Light Infantry

By this time those officers and men of the Light Division who had served and survived since the first landings were indeed veterans. After the fall of the fortress of San Sebastian the survivors of the 52nd storming party were awarded a special badge as 'Valiant Stormers'. This colour sergeant depicts one such, proudly wearing his new distinction above the badge of rank on his right sleeve. Off-duty, and with a pipe of tobacco and a drink, he reflects, perhaps, on his luck. Note his sergeant's quality coat with plain white lace, his sash, sidearm belt and plate, his cane, and the bugle-horn badges on his shako, wings and turn-backs.

G2: Tirador, Portuguese 3rd Cazadores

The Portuguese light infantry battalions or Cazadores were raised from 1808, and were trained on the British Light Infantry manual translated by an ADC to Marshal Beresford. They were soon thoroughly integrated into the light troops of Wellington's army, and earned a solid reputation. Each battalion had an establishment of 628 all ranks, with five companies of which four were musket-armed Cazadores and one was armed with rifles as Tiradores ('sharpshooters'). The 3rd Cazadores, raised around the town of Vila Real in Tras-os-Montes province, served with the Light Division from its formation. Apart from its brown colour, his uniform differs little from that of a rifleman of the 95th, and his weapon is the Baker rifle. Note the cockade in the colours of Portugal on his shako, its badges, and the black facings of the 3rd Cazadores. (For detailed information see MAA 346, *The Portuguese Army of the Napoleonic Wars (2)*.)

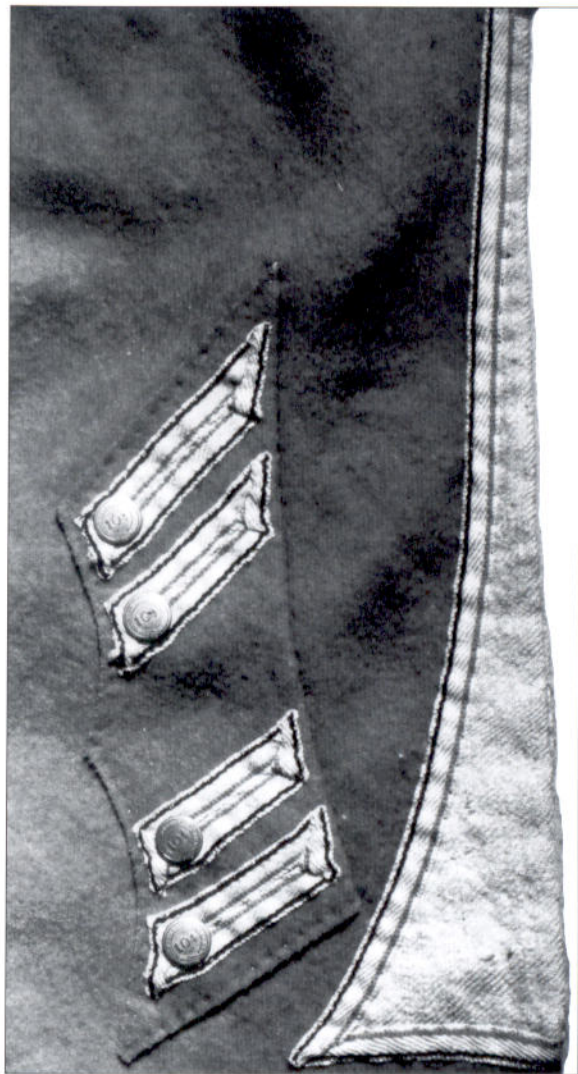
G3: Private, 51st (2nd Yorkshire, West Riding) Light Infantry

A sentry of the 51st walking his beat in the depths of the winter of 1813/1814. His shako has a neck curtain and chin tapes, and he carries his musket at the 'secure arms' to keep rain from its lock. Equipment was sometimes worn under the greatcoat in wet weather in order to keep ammunition dry.



RIGHT The false turn-back and false pocket flap of the 104th jacket. (Canadian Parks Service, courtesy Paul Fortier)

LEFT The cuff of the 104th jacket, showing the regiment's off-white ('buff') facing turned just inside the red sleeve. (Canadian Parks Service, courtesy Paul Fortier)



H: INSIGNIA, 1808-14

H1: The uniform of a field officer of the 43rd Light Infantry after a silhouette of Major H.Elers, c.1803-08. Note the manner in which hair was worn prior to 1808, the 'breastplate' then in use, and the epaulettes worn by field officers. Note also the 'Christmas tree'-shaped shako plume, later replaced by a much taller feather plume.

H2: Four patterns of bugle-horn badge. Clockwise from the top: rank-and-file shako badge; officer's wing badge; officer's turn-back badge, 52nd; officer's shako badge, 52nd.

H3: Hilt detail of an officer's sabre, 52nd.

H4: Soldiers' lace. From left to right: 43rd, 51st, 52nd, 68th, 85th.

H5: Wing of rank-and-file, 51st.

H6: Wing of an officer of the 43rd, c.1810.

H7: Hilt detail of an officer's sabre, 43rd.

H8: Light Infantry officer's sash (wound twice around the waist and fastened by a toggle); and two types of whistle.

H9: Corporal of the 51st, 1813. Note 'grass green' facings, 'breastplate' and brush and picker attached to it, and waist belt.

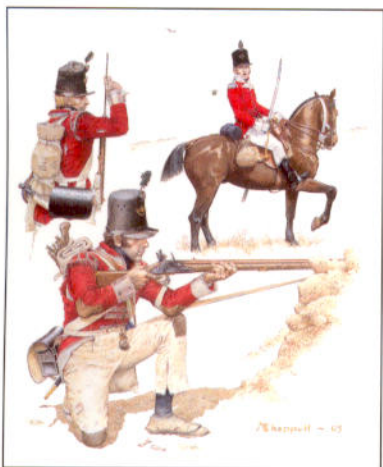
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The Light Infantry

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