

Austrian Ulans

The Austrian decision to raise lancer regiments was a consequence of conquering former Polish provinces: manpower was there to be exploited. The first units were raised by the order of Emperor Joseph II (1741-90), but it was under his successor, Leopold, that the first proper regiments were created. The Poles had a long tradition of fielding lancer regiments, and the Austrians made full use of this experience. Uhlans were armed, dressed and trained in a distinctly Polish style: the rank and file were also mostly Polish.

Brunswick Infantry

Brunswick Infantry fought alongside British troops in the Peninsular War (1810-14). They were organised, armed and equipped in a largely British fashion, as might have been expected: the men came from the “Black Band”, a Brunswicker force that had been evacuated from Germany by the Royal Navy just ahead of a French army. Once reformed on the Isle of Wight and then despatched to Spain, the Brunswickers proved their worth time and again as troops who could be relied on to fight, and fight hard. They kept this reputation, and were in the Anglo-Allied army at Waterloo (18 June 1815), gallantly defending the farmhouse of La Haye Sainte against repeated attacks.

French Cuirassiers

In many ways, Cuirassiers hark back to an older style of warfare: cavalymen had always been armoured, until the widespread use of firearms meant that armour was more trouble than it was worth. The magnificence of their appearance, however, added to their worth on the battlefield. Their “Minerva” style helmets merely added to the impression that here was a unit of giants. The effect was intended to be quite intimidating, and it worked: Cuirassiers were always big men on big horses, heavily armoured and well trained to use shock against any weak enemy. The brightly polished cuirass was only abandoned by the French army in 1915.

Black Watch

The 42nd (Royal Highland) Regiment of Foot recruited most of its soldiers in Scotland and supposedly got its nickname from the dark green tartan sett that the regiment wore; unlike other Scottish units, it did not wear a clan tartan but a government-issue pattern. The regiment was originally raised after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715, to police the more rampantly Tory clans. In this it was only partly successful. The 42nd fought under Wellington in Spain and were present at both Quatre Bras and Waterloo in 1815. The regiment still exists as the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Regiment of Scotland, within the British Army, and retains the proud traditions of its forebears.

British Heavy Cavalry Officer

Officers in the British Army were rarely trained soldiers. Only artillery and engineer officers had any kind of formal training; others were expected to pick up the trade of war as they went along.

This led to many privately issued books of instruction being published so that young gentlemen could learn their trade, not that anything so vulgar as trade would ever be mentioned. While many infantry officers did rise from the ranks on merit, the same was not always true for the cavalry. The expense of providing uniforms and mounts of the required standard meant that most officers came from a moneyed background. This was not seen as a bad thing: on the contrary, men with a stake in the country were the best ones to defend it against all enemies. It did, however, mean that good breeding and wealth were more likely to lead to a successful career than intelligence.