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# Napoleonic Uniforms



## Synopsis

In 1993 The Macmillan Publishing Company set the Napoleonic enthusiast community alight when it produced the major two volume work, Napoleonic Uniforms by John R. Elting, featuring the superb works of the famous illustrator Herbert Knotel. Now, in an unprecedented transatlantic co-operation, Greenhill Books in London and Casemate Publishing in the USA are together bringing these books back into print after some 14 years. This new edition, as before, will be sold as a two volume set. In addition, the new edition will be presented in a cloth bound slipcase. Pagination and an index have been added, significantly enhancing its reference value. Napoleonic Uniforms is the only reference work of its kind to depict accurately the entire Grande Armée in detail. It portrays the French armies as seen by their contemporaries, and combines authoritative text with lavish illustrations, enabling the reader to experience the spectacle first hand. Napoleonic Uniforms also depicts the various types of soldiers within the various regiments of the Grande Armée - officers, sergeants, color-bearers, bandsmen, drummers and trumpeters, privates and surgeons. In addition the volumes contain material on lesser-known formations such as the Army of Egypt (1798 - 1801), the pre-Revolutionary French Army, and Napoleon's police and internal security organizations. Nine hundred and eighteen original watercolors by Herbert Knotel, an internationally acclaimed authority on military uniforms, with a special talent for depicting men and horses in action, bring the nineteenth-century French soldier to life. Together with the late Colonel John R. Elting's definitive captions, they preserve a significant aspect of this famous era for historians, researchers, teachers, students, model makers, "uniformologists", and the general reader interested in this historical period. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This unique work illustrates French military costumes from the 1780s to 1830: infantry, cavalry, engineers, musicians, cadets, aviators (in a balloon corps!), fencing masters, Swiss Guards (and other foreign units under French command), and many other categories. All ranks are shown, as are the distinctive uniforms of many different regiments. Elting, a military historian, supplies informative comments on each plate. The nearly 2000 watercolors were painted for him by Knotel (d. 1963), a German authority on military costume whose father Richard (d. 1914) was in his time the world's leading expert in the field. The younger Knotel's *Handbuch der Uniformkunde* (Hamburg: Schulz, 1937; 7th ed.) is a classic but does not compare in beauty with the present work. Though *Napoleonic Uniforms* has an inadequate glossary and lacks page numbers, index, and an over-all table of contents, it is indispensable to anyone seriously interested in the subject. - Margarete Gross, Chicago P.L. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Along with the striking artwork by Herbert Knotel, Elting's tome provides the background and history of each uniform of the various types of soldiers in the Grand Armée (who would have thought there could be so many?). Besides historians, toy soldier buffs will love this title. A stunner. (Library Journal) This edition is quite stunning! From its gold embossed red cloth covers with stitched binding to its beribboned red slip case it is destined to be a collector's item very quickly! (R. Burnham, *The Napoleonic Series*) A Major Upgrade of an Outstanding Work!... Anyone interested in Napoleon and/or military art in general will want a copy of this truly outstanding set. Knotel captured the soldiers in a unique and fascinating way that makes the viewer feel he is seeing them as they really were. Congratulations to Greenhill and Casemate for bringing this important work back to life. I am certain that John would be very pleased! (J. David Markham, Historian/Author, [www.NapoleonicHistory.com](http://www.NapoleonicHistory.com)) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Beautiful fabric covered books and slip case with gold lettering look like they belong in a classic library. Content is of course the best reprint of plates. Cost can put many off, but the tremendous amount of content could only be made up with 15+ other uniform books, making it a decent value also a very good book.

"There are three sorts of uniforms for every period of history: those described in uniform regulations; those shown by the artists of that period; and that the soldiers really wore." Roger Forthoffer

In the early 1950s, John Elting, who was teaching at West Point, was put in touch with Herbert Knäpfel, the son of the famous uniformologist, Richard Knäpfel. Herbert was living in war-ravaged Berlin and was trying to make a living selling military art. Colonel Elting initially began ordering two watercolor pictures every month from Knäpfel. He was able to convince his wife that he should increase the number he ordered every month, because he needed them for his work as a professor and that they would make a nice collection. Colonel Elting decided that he wanted the collection to be representative of the Napoleon's Grande Armée and began commissioning Mr. Knäpfel to paint specific uniforms or units for him. Mr. Knäpfel died in 1963, but during the decade before he died, he had painted over 1500 watercolors of the Napoleonic Era that were purchased by Colonel Elting. Over 900 of these paintings were of La Grande Armée and they form the basis of this book. Napoleonic Uniforms consists of two massive volumes, each with over 450 color plates. Virtually every type of unit and the different uniforms they wore is represented. Not surprisingly, the Imperial Guard has the largest number of illustrations, with 173 plates. Colonel Elting did not just include the French units. The foreigners who served with La Grande Armée are also well represented with 144 plates!

Volume I is devoted mostly to the combat arms and is broken into five parts:

Part	Topic	Number of Plates
1	The Royal Army	182
	Emigrant Troops	73
	Revolutionary Troops	394
	The Army of Egypt	465
	La Grande Armée: Command and Staff	515
	La Grande Armée: Light Infantry	375
	La Grande Armée: Line Infantry	575
	La Grande Armée: Special Infantry Units	215
	La Grande Armée: Chasseurs-à-Cheval	445
	La Grande Armée: Hussars	605
	La Grande Armée: Dragoons	295
	La Grande Armée: Lancers	195
	La Grande Armée: Heavy Cavalry	31
Total Plates in Volume 1:		459

Volume II finishes Part 5 and ends with Part 6. Two-thirds of the plates in this volume cover either the foreign units or the Imperial Guard.

Part	Topic	Number of Plates
5	La Grande Armée: Artillery	285
	La Grande Armée: Engineers	145
	La Grande Armée: Gendarmes, Police, and Disciplinary Organizations	245
	La Grande Armée: Service Troops	225
	Foreign Troops -- Foreign Regiments	195
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Swiss Units	295
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Miscellaneous German Units	125
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Italians	85
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Poles	215
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Lithuanians	65
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Balkan Troops	175
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- a Sepoy	15
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Spaniards	195
	La Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- Portuguese	55

Grande Armée: Foreign Troops -- King Joseph's Spanish Units 75 La Grande Armée: National Guard, Schools, and Guards of Honor 255 La Grande Armée: the Navy 155 La Grande Armée: the Imperial Guard 1736 The Royal Army 1814 - 1830 13 Total Plates in Volume II: 458

Herbert Knittel first sketched the figure in pencil and then painted the image with watercolors. Since the paintings are one of a kind and were not meant for mass production, you can often see the pencil lines faintly in the background. You also can see faint traces where the painting was secured in a photo album. Occasionally, the corner of the plate is slightly crumpled. Below each figure would be a hand-written caption stating what the figure was. Interestingly, if you look closely you can see where the original pencil caption had been erased and someone wrote over it with ink. Unfortunately, there is no indication if this was done by the artist or later on by Colonel Elting. These are not imperfections that detract from the value of the plates. Instead they leave the reader with a sense that he has the privilege of viewing someone's much treasured, private collection. Each plate consists of a single mounted or foot figure. There is no background scenery and there is no ground-- all there is are the figures themselves. As mentioned already, the plates cover a wide range of units and uniforms. They depict the soldier in every type of uniform - whether on parade, in the midst of a campaign, or the mundane everyday chores that are the life of a soldier on garrison duty. Some of the choice of plates were a bit surprising - such as one of a regimental fencing master and another of a senior blacksmith. But this just adds to the charm of the collection. One of my favorites is a line infantry soldier who is foraging. He is sitting bareback on a small horse, with a pig draped over the front and a couple of geese slung over his soldier. All the plates contain incredible detail and the faces are filled with expression. Those soldiers that are on campaign are often shown to be scruffy - even with a touch of five o'clock shadow on their faces - while those on parade are spit and polish. Below each plate is a short paragraph providing a few lines on the history of the unit and about the uniform itself - whether it is compliance with the uniform regulations or if not, how it is different. This edition includes a functional index in each volume. It has entries for the different nationalities, different types of troops, and personalities. It does not list specific units or regiments, but instead refers the reader to the contents at the beginning of each major part. Napoleonic Uniforms closes with a short essay on sources and a glossary. I found the essay fascinating because it compares the styles and the accuracy of numerous different artists. He closes with a bit of advice: "You will find inconsistencies in the best sources. Variations are inevitable, even for the same unit during the same year. An infantry regiment might have one battalion at its depot, handsomely uniformed according to a compromised between regulations and its colonel's whims; another battalion on the Polish frontier would be in patched field uniforms; a third in Spain would be

improvising shoes from raw cowhide and cutting up the cloaks of dead Spaniards for trousers. Some of the colors in the original drawings may no longer accurate: crimson fades to a pink; pigments containing white lead will turn black. Also, officers often wore their old uniforms into the field, and the best artists sometimes made mistakes. But there are lost collections to rescue and new discoveries to be made."The book is quite stunning! From its gold embossed red cloth covers with stitched binding to its beribboned red slip case it is destined to be a collector's item very quickly! I have both the original edition of "Napoleonic Uniforms" and Greenhill's new release; the originals were not as nicely packaged. The originals are extremely scarce and if you can find a copy, it will be a very expensive purchase. The cheapest used copy will cost over \$700, while 'new' ones are being offered for \$1750. I strongly recommend that you do not delay in ordering your copy of this new edition. If you do not order it now, in a few years you will be looking at used copies going for four or five times of what they cost today.

I had purchased the original edition (all 4 volumes) when it was first released. These 4 volumes represent a sizeable and credible amount of documentation on the broad sweep of Napoleonic uniforms. The earlier reviews says it all - a must have for the Napoleonic library uniformologists. There are caveats, however, on the quality of the documentation and the drawings. Honestly, the captions are adequate only. One should be familiar with Napoleonic uniforms in general to fully appreciate the limited captions for each drawing. There are infrequent references to modern day American forces parlance which is out of context. There are also some errors in identifying bits of items. The accuracy of the uniforms is based on usually secondary sources - generally accurate but there will be nitpickers who will spot the occasional errors, slip ups and variations. The drawings themselves are quite attractive - rough sketches done up in watercolour washes. Thus, the precision required by reenactors and model makers (number of buttons, exact shade of colour etc) is not there. Some of the drawings are obviously repeated poses done with different uniforms. I have given this set 5 stars, based collectively on the amount of documentation versus the cost - truly a bargain.

There are a plethora of uniform collections throughout the world, both public and private. Many are highly reliable, some of these not the most artistic in nature, but cold, hard, and accurate representations of the men, and women, who have fought wars down through the ages. Not the least of these collections are those which depict the fighting men of many nations who followed the rolling drums and thundering guns through twenty-five years of unimaginable hardship, horror, and

bloodshed that was the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The Otto Manuscript, the Luneberg Manuscript, the Manuscripts of the Bourgeois of Hamburg, the Rivotti and Freiberg Manuscripts, were followed by the works of later researchers and artists as displayed in the Martinet Prints, the Vernet collection, the famous Bucquoy cards, the works of Lucien Rousselot and Eugene Lelievre. These artists have brought these soldiers to life for the generations who have studied those who marched and fought across the length and breadth of Europe, the West Indies, Russia, and the Middle East from 1792 to 1815. Not the least of these collections is the work of Herbert Knäpfel (son of Richard Knäpfel, the noted uniform authority), an acknowledged authority on uniforms in his own right. Herbert Knäpfel was an expert on the way armies looked both in the field and on the parade ground. The work of Herbert Knäpfel on the Grande Armée and its allies and enemies has now been presented to us in four magnificent volumes; assembled, annotated, and commented on by the noted authority on the Napoleonic Epoch and the Grande Armée, Colonel John R. Elting. Herbert Knäpfel's watercolor prints in these four volumes are 'all...products of [his] extensive, post World War II research that cleared away many errors common to earlier collections-including his father's famous Grosse Uniformkunde.' Herbert, carefully trained by his father, and a veteran cavalryman on the Eastern Front in World War I, 'worked almost exclusively from manuscript pictorial collections assembled by actual eyewitnesses during or shortly after the Napoleonic era, having an unequalled knowledge of such sources.' Colonel Elting, while teaching at the United States Military Academy at West Point, was put in touch with Herbert Knäpfel in Germany, wishing to commission accurate renderings of Napoleonic soldiers to enhance his instruction to the cadets in the history of the military art. This developed into a long-term friendship and a definitive uniform collection, a collection that I would consider one of the best private collections in the world today. With Herbert Knäpfel's untimely death in 1963, the production of the watercolors came, sadly, to a halt. I have had the privilege of viewing some of the collection with Col. Elting, and it is truly impressive. Equally impressive is Col. Elting's knowledge and understanding of the period, as well as his personal expertise in the uniforms of the epoch. The first two volumes of the series cover the Grande Armée, its antecedents, the foreign units who fought with it, and its worthless Bourbon successor. Volume I includes sections on the Royal Army, the Armies of the French Revolution, l'Armée d'Egypte, command and staff, line and light infantry, special infantry units, and the line cavalry, both heavy and light, and the dragoons. Volume II covers the foreign troops, the artillery, the Imperial Navy, engineers and the incomparable Imperial Guard. Both of these volumes were published in 1993. Volumes III and IV of the set were published in April 2000. Volume III covers the Confederation of the Rhine, Denmark, the Republic and

Kingdom of Italy, Naples, and Joseph's Kingdom of Spain. Volume IV covers the Republic and Kingdom of Holland, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and the myriad allies who were the Grande Armée's enemies, including major sections on the Prussians, Austrians, Russians, and Great Britain. There are a total of 1,461 watercolor plates, including those on the dust covers, in the four volumes: 920 in Volumes I and II, and 541 in Volumes III and IV. Cuirassiers, hussars, jagers zu pferd, lancers (or uhlands), irregulares, free corps, legions, chasseurs, both horse and foot, grenadiers, light infantrymen --be they l'Armée's, jagers, chasseurs, or riflemen-- carabiniers, and the various Guard contingents grace these pages and remind us that the Napoleonic period was truly 'the golden age of the military tailor.' Here are the generals, officers and men who fought the Napoleonic Wars, and they leap out of the pages at you. The worn-out drummer of the 3e Etranger, formerly the Irish Legion, holding his musket at the ready just one more time, with his drum slung on his back. The artillery general in his full dress finery à la hussard, bellowing 'En Avant!' to his massed companies. The field officer of the Artillerie à Pied of the Imperial Guard having an argument with his horse. The Prussian hussar officer, his saber dangling elegantly by its sword knot from his wrist, speaking to his trumpeter. The infantry sapper with a '1000 yard stare.' The Württemberger Garde du Corps trotting past on a magnificent black horse. Infantrymen of many nations trudging along God knows what roads to their next bivouac. Also depicted are the deadly specialists, the 'veteran marchers and killers,' such as the Corsicans of the Tirailleurs Corses or the infantry of the Old Guard. All these soldiers await us within these four volumes. Errors in the prints are few, and Col. Elting points these out quite readily. If there is a doubt on the accuracy or probability of a print, the author rates it a 'probable'; when primary sources differ on a uniform, the alternate renderings are given in the captions; when a uniform item is missing, the details are filled in so the reader can be assured of accuracy. Instead of lessening the impact of the print in question, this raises the validity of the study as it tells us of Col. Elting's endless search for veracity and accuracy. One thing that has been left out of the books, and is in Col. Elting's collection, are the group prints by Knästel which are breathtaking with all the color and sweep of the period. These have been left out because of the parameters of the book, which is understandable, yet it would have been ideal to have these reproduced in their own section. Having personally viewed these prints, oozing character and the gregariousness of military men, I can assure you that these are undoubtedly Knästel's best work. The watercolors are painstakingly accurate, lively, and portray the combat soldier as few artists have done. The horses are particularly well done, and one can tell that Knästel was completely familiar, and at home with, the loyal, hardworking companions of the fighting man. Additionally, having Col. Elting's wry and witty insight into uniforms and personalities is



definitely a bonus, each print having a caption by the author, and each section having an appropriate introduction. With these two volumes, Col. Elting has completed his planned trilogy on the Napoleonic Wars and the Grande Armée. This has taken over 40 years of study, painstaking research, and writing. No other author I can think of, past or present, has had the expertise to contribute to the growing library of credible Napoleonic scholarship in three distinct areas: the operational study that is *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars*, the organizational history of the Grande Armée in *Swords Around A Throne*, and this four volume uniform study. We as students are extremely lucky to have him in our midst. These four volumes are a must for any historian, uniformologist, collector, and painter of military miniatures of the Napoleonic period. Nowhere else can we find today a collection of uniform prints with the accuracy, detail, color, sang froid, and realism of combat soldiers as they are depicted within this collection. These four volumes, and the work they contain, are simply masterpieces and belong on all of our bookshelves. They are worth the price asked. In fact they are a bargain for what you get, and have been definitely worth the wait. This is the definitive uniform study of the Napoleonic Wars. Col Elting's collection of Herbert Knotel's work is now in the West Point Museum, except for the large group watercolors which are in private collections.

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