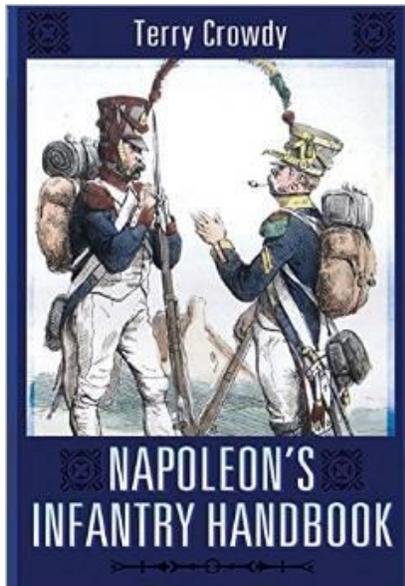


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Crowdy, Terry. *Napoleon's Infantry Handbook*. Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword, 2015. 303 pages. ISBN# 9781783462957. Hardcover. £25 / \$40



Many years ago I was an infantryman. One of the daily routines we had, even in the field and regardless of the weather, was shaving. When it was warm or hot, it was not a big deal. However when the temperatures were below freezing and there was snow on the ground, it was not something I looked forward to doing. Over the years I have read hundreds of memoirs written by soldiers during the Napoleonic Wars. Yet I never read one where a soldier mentioned shaving, except for Captain Jean-Roch Coignet, a member of the French Imperial Guard. He wrote at Eylau:

“By the light of the pine logs I shaved those of my comrades who needed it most. They each sat down on the rump of a dead horse, which had been there long enough for the intense cold to freeze it as hard as a stone. I had in my knapsack a towel, which I passed around their necks, and I had also some soap, which I mixed with snow melted over the fire. I daubed it over them with my hand, and then performed the operation.”¹

It also occurred to me that other than the evidence of hundreds of paintings and drawings I have seen, I had no idea what the French regulation was on shaving. Terry Crowdy, had similar thoughts. In *Napoleon's Infantry Handbook* he writes

“In the English speaking world, much of our knowledge of this multitude originates from a handful of translated memoirs of infantrymen such as Captain Coignet, Sergeant Bourgogne and Captain Elzéar Blaze. These memoirs *are* essential reading and *are* the mainstays of any Napoleonic collection, but they are the mere blink of an eye on a colossal subject. Take the memoirs of Blaze (a personal favourite). They tell of the absurdities of military life, the throwing away of useless articles of uniform, the practice of marauding, the pursuit of the fairer sex, the drinking of drams, the smoking of pipes and so on; but are they truly reflective of the experience of 2.4 million men? Even great memoirists such as Blaze ignore the basic practices and procedures they knew too well: what time they woke, how frequently they mounted guard, what the procedure was for applying for leave, or what time they went to bed. These memoirs were written for the amusement of fellow old soldiers initiated and steeped in the same rituals of army life as the author, and such pedantic attention to detail would have excited cognitive function in greying years.”²

In *Napoleon's Infantry Handbook*, Terry Crowdy tries to answer these and other questions by examining the French Army regulations of the period. Unfortunately “. . . the laws, decrees, regulations, orders and procedures which governed the French Army were often contradictory.”³ One of Napoleon's soldiers, Colonel Etienne Bardin, recognized this and tried to rectify the

¹ Coignet, Jean-Roch. *The Note-Books of Captain Coignet*. London: Greenhill, 1998. Page 143

² *Napoleon's Infantry Handbook*; pages ix - x

³ *Ibid*; page xi

problem by writing manuals for the soldiers and the officers. Much of the material in *Napoleon's Infantry Handbook* draws heavily from three works written by Bardin: *Manuel de l'Infanterie* (both the 1807 and 1813 editions), *Mémorial de l'officier d'infanterie* (both the 1809 and 1813 editions), and the 17 volume *Dictionnaire de l'armée de terre*.

Napoleon's Infantry Handbook consists of 30 chapters that are group together in eight parts:

Part I: Organisation & Personnel
Part II: Uniform, Arms & Equipment
Part III: Recruitment & Administration
Part IV: Discipline & Honours
Part V: Tactical Organisation & Drill
Part VI: Garrison Service
Part VII: Service in the Field
Part VIII: Health & Medical Treatment

Within each Part there are several related chapters. For example Part II: Uniforms, Arms & Equipment, there are six chapters that cover the appearance of the soldier . . . his uniforms, equipment, weapons, and hairstyles:

Chapter 7: Uniform – General Description
Chapter 8: Articles of Uniform
Chapter 9: Headgear & Hairstyles
Chapter 10: Equipment
Chapter 11: Weapons & Ammunition
Chapter 12: Flags

Each chapter is also sub-divided by topics. Total topics in the book is 254. For example Chapter 9: Headgear & Hairstyles has the following entries:

66. Infantry helmet
67. Cocked hat
68. Shako (schako)
69. Bearskin cap (bonnet à poil)
70. Forage cap (Bonnet de police)
71. Plumes (plumet)
72. Hairstyles
73. Beards and moustaches
74. Tattoos and jewellery

Each entry is assigned a number. Most are one page long, while others such as that on tattoos and jewellery are two pages. One of the unique things that the author did was after each entry, he included a "See also" note, pointing the reader to related topics. For example under "Beards and moustaches" the "See also" has 30. Corporal; 50. Barber; 80. Petty equipment; 134. Military Justice.

So how often was a French soldier expected to shave? Well you will have to read Entry 73, which tells you. Unless of course you wanted to know if the regulations applied to a convicted deserter who was sentenced to life as a labourer on public works. Then you need to read Entry 134!

Napoleon's Infantry Handbook contains a wealth of information that is encyclopedic in scope. In it you can find pay scales for all ranks, pay deductions, target practice, physical fitness training, daily routine in garrison, the duties of non-commissioned officers in combat, prisoners-of-war, how to tell if your bread had been mixed with something other than flour, the expected lifespan of issued clothing, how much weight a soldier carried based on his rank and position (e.g. grenadier, drummer, etc.) and a wide host of other topics.

Napoleon's Infantry Handbook is an invaluable source for anyone interested in the era. Whether the reader is a scholar, re-enactor, wargamer, or all three, he will find much to hold his interest and answer those questions that he has had for a while! When I first picked up the book I thought I would just skim through it and read entries that caught my eye. However the writing was so engaging before I knew it, I had read about 100 pages! Highly recommended!

Reviewed by: [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: August 2015