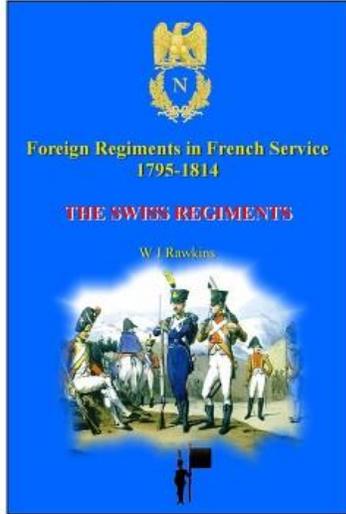


Napoleon Series Reviews

Rawkins, W.J. *Foreign Regiments in French Service 1795 – 1814: the Swiss Regiments*. History Book Man, 2014. £4



Between 1977 and 1984, W.J. Rawkins published a series of uniform guides on the various armies that fought in the Napoleonic Wars. During that time, over 200,000 copies of the books were published. These books have been long out of print and because they were published as pamphlets, they were very fragile. Hence only the most fortunate collector still have them. In 2013 Mr. Rawkins decided to update and expand the books and publish them as e-books. A review of the first of the new editions can be read at [Armies and Uniforms of the Napoleonic Wars](#).

The rarest of his original books is probably *Swiss Regiments in French Service 1800-14* which was first published in 1974, and was later included as part of a larger work *Foreign Regiments in French Service* (Volume 1), which was published in 1984. Both of these books were so rare that I have never been able to find a copy of them! I was very pleased to hear from Mr. Rawkins that

he has decided to republish it.

The Swiss have a long history of providing troops to France, dating back to the 16th Century. This service would continue through the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. During that period, the Swiss agreed to provide a force of 12,000 soldiers to Napoleon and maintain it at that level. These soldiers would fight in virtually every campaign and theater of war, from Italy to Spain to Russia to central Europe. There was even a regiment that fought in the Waterloo Campaign. The bulk of the units were line infantry, but over the years there was a cavalry regiment, coastal artillery company, and a battalion that was attached to the Imperial Guard. *The Swiss Regiments* is their story.

The Swiss Regiments covers in detail the following units that saw service with the French:

- The Légion Helvétique 1798-1802
- The Légion Helvétique d'Italie 1799
- The Hussards de la Légion Helvétique 1798-1803
- Garde-Côtes Suisse 1803-1806
- The Demi-brigades Helvétiques 1798-1805
- The Régiments Suisse 1805-1814
- 1e Régiment Suisse
- 2e Régiment Suisse
- 3e Régiment Suisse
- 4e Régiment Suisse
- 2e Régiment Etrangere 'Suisse' 1815
- The Bataillon Valaisan 1805-1811
- The Bataillon du Prince de Neufchâtel 1803-1814

Like his previous books the author uses the same format for all of the Swiss units. He begins with a breakdown of the organization of each, including a listing of the authorized position,

ranks, and number of each at regimental / battalion headquarters and at the company level. For example between 1812 and 1814, a Swiss infantry regiment headquarters was authorized¹

1 Colonel	1 Lieutenant-colonel (OC Depot)
1 Major	3 Chef de Bataillon
4 Adjutant-majors (Capitaine)	8 Adjutant-sous-officers
1 Quartier Maitre	1 Officier d'habillement (Depot)
1 Officier payeur	1 Juge
1 Chirurgien-major	3 Aides-chirurgien
4 Sous-aides-chirurgien	4 Prévôts
1 Ministre du culte	1 Aumônier
1 Tambour-major	8 Musiciens
1 Caporal-tambour	4 Ouvriers Maitre (Armurier, Tailleur, Cordonier and Guêtrier)

The Organization Section is followed by a history of the unit. These histories provide an overview of the unit's service from the time it was formed until its disbandment. It provides information on where it was stationed, the campaigns and battles it fought in, and how it distinguished itself.

The real value of the book lies in the copious information on uniforms. Not only is there information on what the soldier wore and the equipment he carried, Mr. Rawkins also provides data on the non-commissioned officers, the officers, and the musicians; and there is a section devoted to the standards of each unit carried! The uniform descriptions fill the volume. For example, the four line Swiss line regiments have over 50 pages devoted to their uniforms, while the chapter on the Neuchâtel Battalion has 15 pages! Mr. Rawkins even tackles the thorny question on what color was the coat of a soldier of the Neuchâtel Battalion and makes a recommendation on what the modern equivalent is!

A typical entry for the uniforms is this one of the coat of a soldier of the 1st Swiss Regiment:

"The fusilier companies are shown wearing bastion tipped shoulder straps of regulation colour, red piped yellow but also yellow piped blue or alternatively a round tipped shoulder-strap is depicted of red piped yellow. The turnbacks are consistently shown either without decoration or with blue Imperial Eagle motifs and *von Escher* shows turnbacks for fusilier companies as being plain white without piping. Grenadiers of the 1e Régiment Suisse were distinguished by full fringed epaulettes of white with red crescents or all red epaulettes and the turnbacks decorated with blue grenade motifs. The voltigeur companies had plain yellow collars without piping and epaulettes were green with yellow crescents although there is some evidence to suggest that at creation of the companies in 1808 they wore plain round tipped yellow shoulder-straps. The voltigeur turnbacks were decorated with yellow bugle horn motifs."²

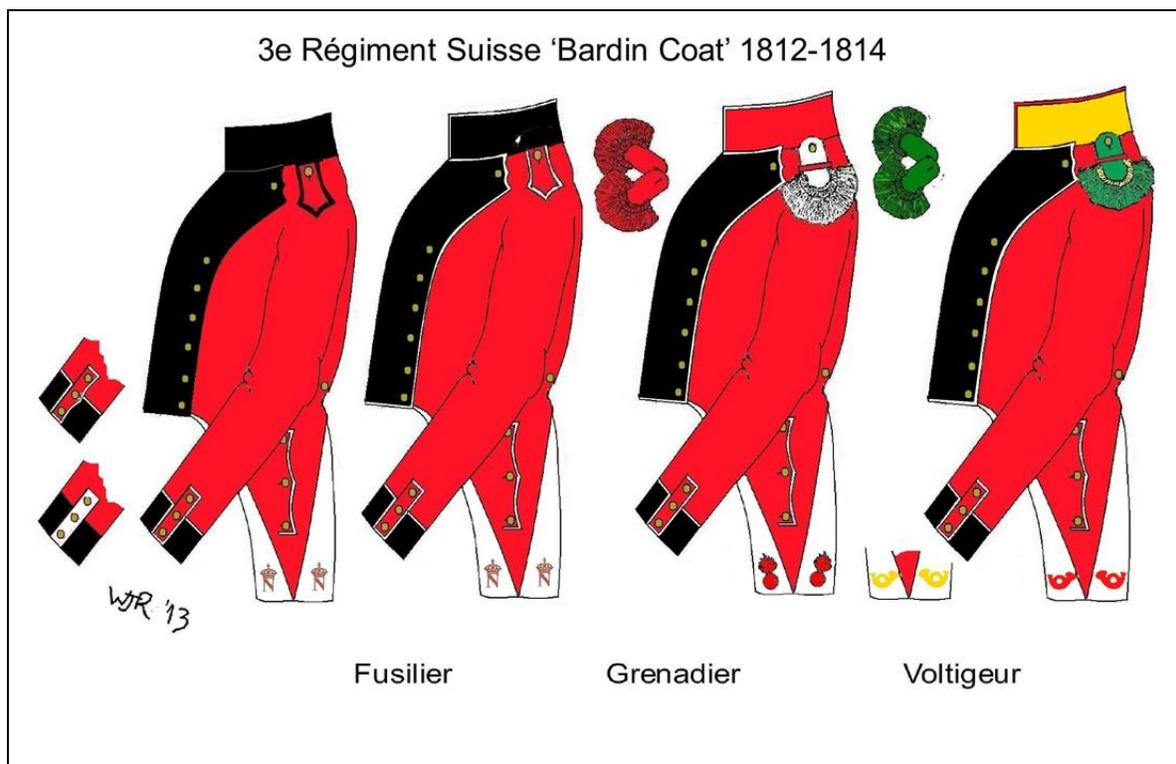
While there are entries for the waistcoats worn by the soldiers:

¹ Page 50

² Page 83

“The 1806 waistcoats were single breasted, white, with brass buttons and had two small three pointed pockets at the waist. From 1808 new waistcoats issued from French stores could either have squared pocket flaps or three pointed with three buttons. The waistcoats of the 4e Régiment Suisse in 1806 are shown as sky-blue and double breasted with two rows of white metal buttons, but conventional garments were being worn in 1808.”³

Like the previous volumes in the series, *The Swiss Regiments* is lavishly illustrated with over 100 color images. Several of them are full page and many are taken from contemporary sources. Particularly valuable are the uniform plates. Unlike other books, the author has the philosophy of a picture is worth a thousand words. In addition to a detailed written description of a uniform it, there is a color drawing illustrating what the text was describing. Below is a typical line drawing found in the book.



Once again I will repeat what I have said in previous reviews of the *Armies and Uniforms of the Napoleonic Wars*. I am a big fan of the series. For the wargamer who is looking for information on how to paint his Swiss troops, *The Swiss Regiments* is worth its weight in gold! Considering how fast the first editions sold out, I strongly recommend you do not wait to buy the new ones. At £4 (\$7) each, they are steal!

The Swiss Regiments can be ordered through [The History Book Man](http://www.thehistorybookman.com) website.

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: November 2014