

# Wearing British Accoutrements

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## Historical context:

- During the period of linear warfare a soldier's dress uniform was his duty uniform
- The uniform coat was fitted to provide a proper appearance according to the aesthetics of the time
- Accoutrements (which comprised part of the uniform when on duty under arms) were similarly fitted to the soldier

**Thesis: The coat-plus-accoutrements comprised an integrated system for carrying equipment in the field**

## The military “Look”

Period images portray a military appearance regarding the wearing of accoutrements that is consistent throughout the late Georgian period:

- *Accoutrement belts fitting snugly* at the front and sides
- *Accoutrements at the rear* of the soldier

### *Implications:*

- Suggests *accoutrements fastened at the rear*
- Consistent portrayal across numerous regiments and various geographic locations suggests *widespread Army practice*



The elite



On foreign service



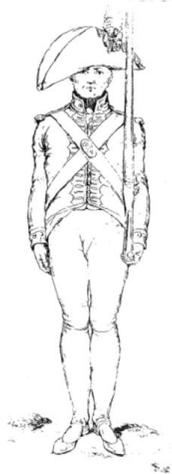
Colonial



Marines



1750



1798



1799



1812



1830



The AUKWARD SQUAD or ENRAGED SERGEANT

*London Feb. July 17 1781 at Bickersmoot, Valley St. or Strand*

*GS-4 (Austrian) 1781-2*

## How do we reproduce this appearance?



## **Or: utilize period practices to standardize how we wear accoutrements**

- *Fit accoutrements to the same relative height on each soldier.*
- *Fasten the cartridge box and the bayonet belt behind the soldier by either (a) attaching the belts to the coat hip buttons, (b) attaching the belts to each other via an accoutrement strap, or (c) using a waist belt (if light infantry).*
- *Put our accoutrements on in the same order.*
- *Place the bayonet scabbard in the belt frog so that the shank curves down and to the right.*
- *Use leather straps to attach pricker and brush to the belt plate.*
- *Wear the canteen and haversack at or above the waistline.*

# 1. Accoutrement height

Bennett Cuthbertson, *A Sytem for the Complete Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry* (1779)

## **Cartridge pouch:**

*The Pouches...should always be buckled up so short, that the upper part of them, may in general rise to the hip-button of the coat, and be thereby not only tighter, and more convenient for marching, but also readier for the Soldier to take out his Cartridges, without being obliged to bend his body...*

## **Bayonet belt:**

*...its length should be, the upper part of the Carriage for receiving the Bayonet, to rise just to the hip-button of the coat*

Anthony Walsh, *A Catechism and Hand-Book on Regimental Standing Orders* (1852)

**[To fit accoutrement belts]**

*The Pouch is to be fitted so as to hang horizontally, and the distance between the Pouch and the man's right elbow, when bent, to be the breadth of two fingers. The Pouch being thus placed, the Bayonet-belt is to be so fitted as that the angle of the Belt be in line with the top of the Pouch, and the handle of the Bayonet not to be seen from the front. Thus the Bayonet will be entirely free from contact with the left, and the Pouch from contact with the right elbow.*

*The Bayonet-belt is to be then fitted in Front, and wherever it crosses the Pouch-belt, there the Breast-plate is to be placed.*

## To fit accoutrement belts (Cuthbertson plus Walsh):

- Adjust the **cartridge pouch belt** so that the pouch rides on your right hip, the pouch button tab near the right hip coat button (about where the hip pocket is on modern trousers), the top of the pouch at approximately waist level, two fingers' distance from the right arm, when the elbow is bent. The side of the pouch should be far enough back to allow the right elbow to move freely.
- Position the **bayonet belt** relative to the cartridge box. Place the frog over the left hip pocket area, near the left hip coat button, the bottom of the "V" at the same level as the top of the cartridge box. It should be far enough back so that the bayonet socket is not visible from the front, and the left elbow can move freely.
- Loop the long portion of the bayonet belt over the right shoulder to cross the chest. The short portion is brought up to meet it; the **belt plate** is then placed where the bayonet and cartridge pouch belts cross.

## 2. Sequence for putting accoutrements on

**!Bayonet belt goes on first!**

Captain George Thomas, *Local Militia Paymaster* (1812):

*On this private parade the captain and his subaltern will attend, and minutely (after the serjeant has examined the company) inspect the arms and accoutrements, and see that the latter are properly adjusted. **The bayonet-belt to be under that of the pouch;** the pouch buttoned to the strop that is fixed to the bayonet belt.*

*Period images most often show the bayonet belt to be under the cartridge pouch belt.*



Bayonet belt worn when other gear is not:

*“A Non-commission-officer, Drummer, Fifer, or private Man should never appear abroad, without having his Sword, or Bayonet properly fixed in his Belt....”* (Cuthbertson, 82)

*“Soldiers are always to appear regimentally dressed, wearing side arms. Working parties otherwise[GR1]...”* (Hood, *Elements of War*, 100-101)

This is easily done if the bayonet belt is worn underneath the pouch belt, so that it will remain when all other accoutrements are removed.

## Correct sequence for putting on accoutrements:

- Bayonet belt first
- Cartridge box second
- Re-buckle the bayonet belt plate over the cartridge pouch belt



### 3. Fasten accoutrements in the rear

- Period images show accoutrements close together
- Other images suggest accoutrements are fastened in place (defy gravity)



## **Uniform coat + accoutrement straps form an integrated equipment set**

### **Accoutrement straps secured at three points:**

- Buckled together in front by the bayonet belt plate
- Held at the shoulders by the uniform coat epaulettes
- Fastened at the rear

### **Rear fastening:**

- Holds accoutrements back, out of the way.
- Pulls accoutrement straps snug across the chest.

***Only if the accoutrements are secured in the rear will the accoutrement belts achieve the period “look.”***

# Period images of fastened accoutrements



## How are the accoutrements secured in the rear?

- (a) Buttoned to the coat**
- (b) Attached to each other by a short strap**
- (c) Held in place by a waist belt**



## (a) Buttoned to the coat

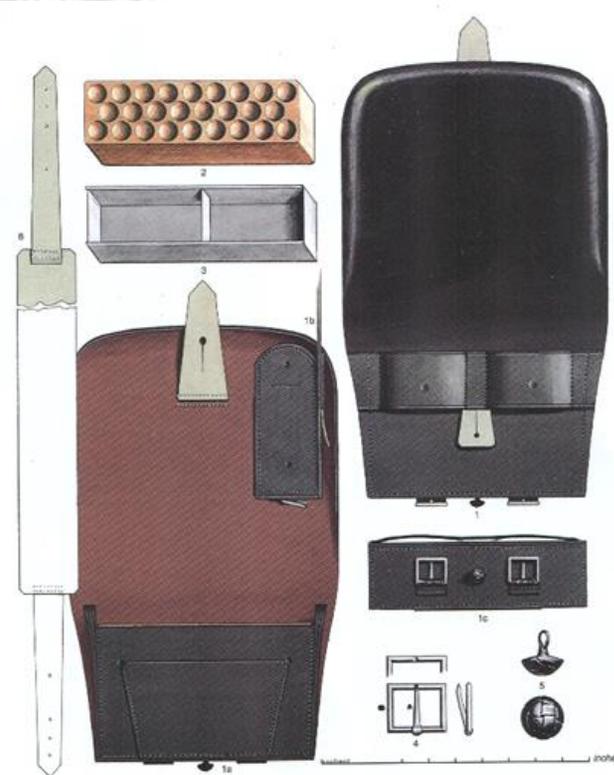
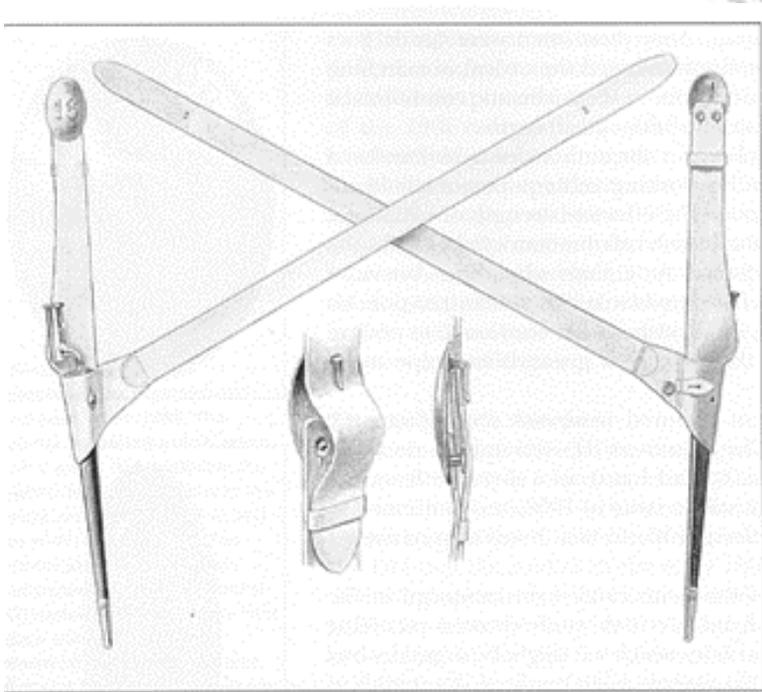
Cuthbertson:

*...the Pouches...must also be worn so much back, that when the Soldier's right hand is hanging in its proper position, down his side, the front corner of the Pouch may just touch the elbow, and by that means, be entirely out of the way, in the performance of his Exercise...and to prevent their shifting forward, in the motions of grounding the Firelock, and to keep them always steady in their proper place, a small leather loop must be fixed to the inside of the front Buckle of the Belt, to fasten on the right hip button of the coat.*

*...the Bayonet to be thrown so back, as not to interfere with the Firelock, when shouldered; and to keep it in such a position, a loop should be fixed to the hook [shank] of the Bayonet, to fasten on the left hip button...*

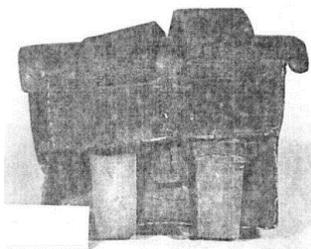
## Accoutrements with button tabs

Modern illustration of bayonet belt (Mike Chappell)



Modern illustration of cartridge pouch (Pierre Turner)

## Original cartridge pouches with button tabs

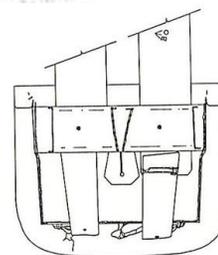
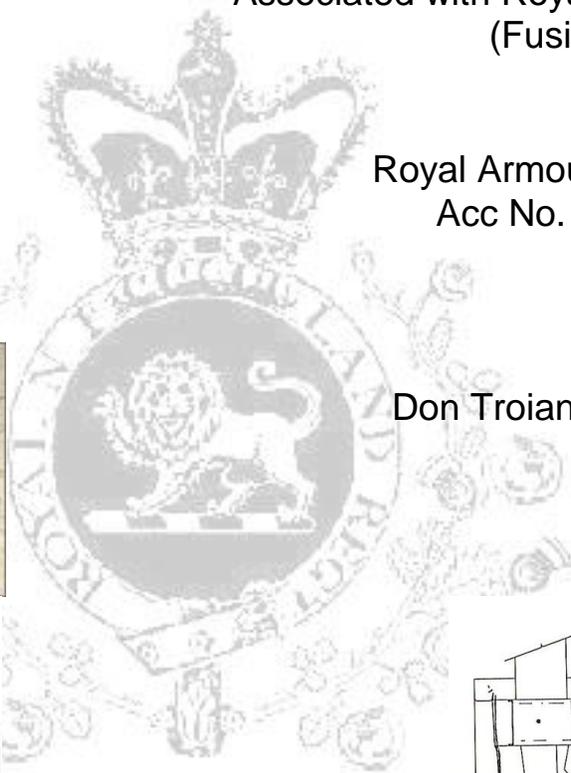


NAM. 1970-09-22-5

Associated with Royal Carmarthen Militia  
(Fusiliers)

Royal Armouries, Leeds  
Acc No. XIII.154

Don Troiani collection



Reserve collection of Heritage Toronto, at Historic Fort York, Toronto, Canada. Photo Toronto Historical Board, from Bruce E. Cane, "Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ammunition Pouch," *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research*, 67 (1989) 122-124; drawing J. Williams, Dec 1966.

Original cartridge pouch buttoned to uniform coat right hip button



Musee de l'Emperi

## **(b) Use a strap to connect the accoutrement belts**

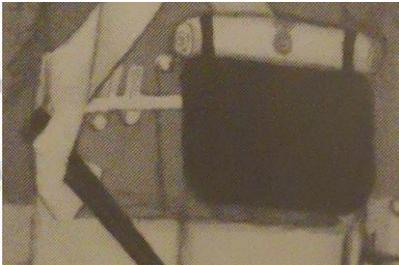
Thomas (1812):

*The bayonet-belt to be under that of the pouch; the pouch buttoned to the strop that is fixed to the bayonet belt*

*“Inspection of a Company &c”, Standing Orders of the Archenfield Local Militia (1812):*

*...then he will see that his belts are of a good colour, and well put on, and such a length as to allow the elbow to ply clear of the cartouch-box; that the breast-plate is exactly on the centre of the chest, and that the accoutrements are so secured behind with straps, as to prevent them moving out of their proper situation....*

# Period image of connecting strap



# Reproduction connecting strap



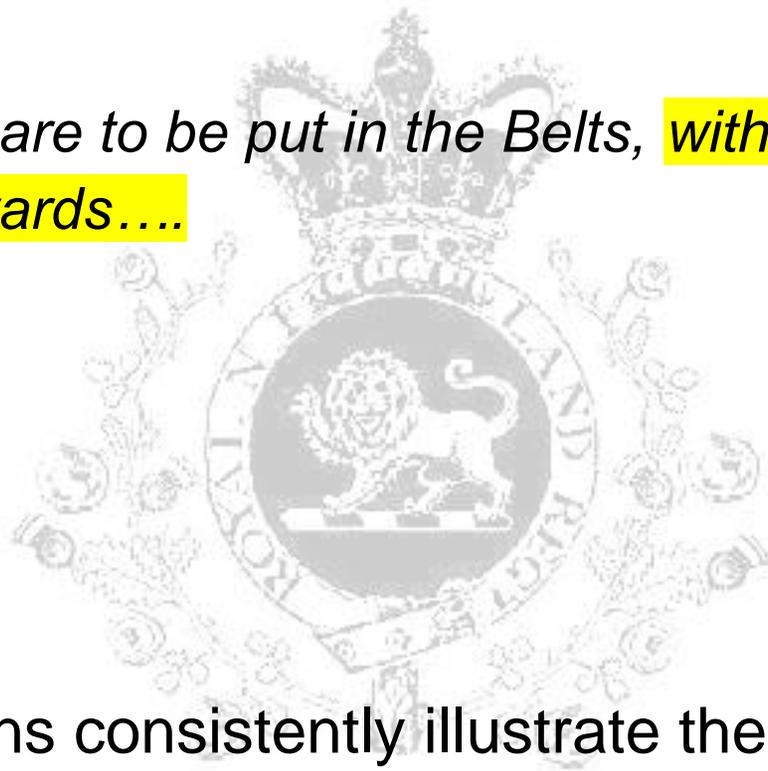
**(c) Use a waist belt (light infantry)**



## 4. Bayonet shank down and to the right

Cuthbertson:

*...the Bayonets are to be put in the Belts, with the hooks [shanks] downwards....*



Period illustrations consistently illustrate the bayonet in its scabbard with the shank and socket down, and towards the wearer's right.



Dayes 1792



Rowlandson 1799



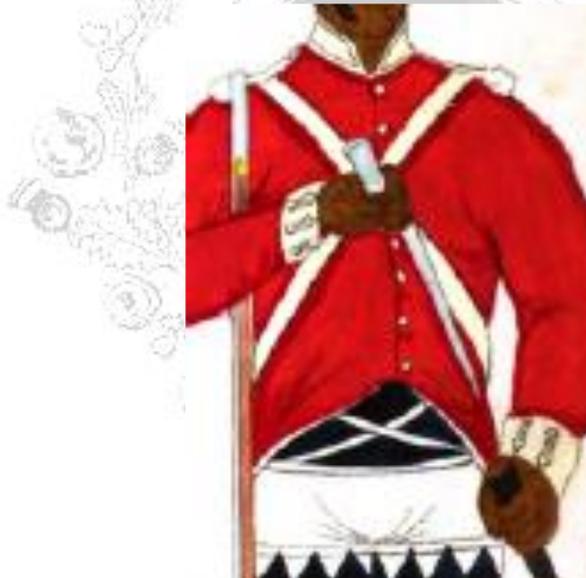
Loutherbourg 1806



Porter 1798



Rowlandson 1799



James 1813



Mitchell 1830

## 5. Attach your pricker and brush to your belt plate with whitened buff leather straps

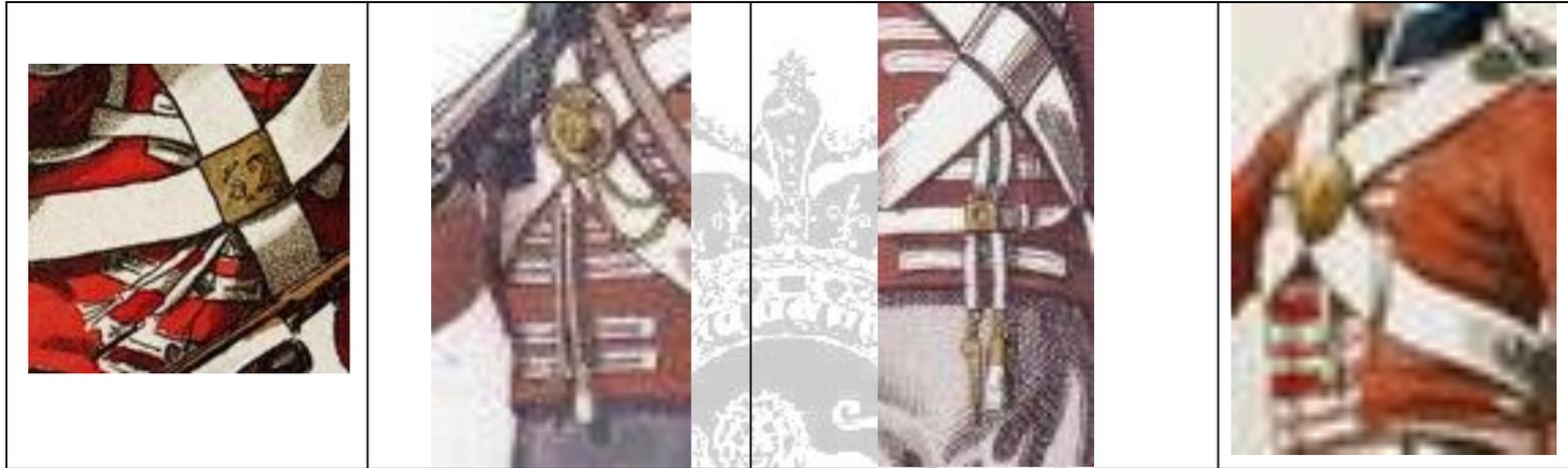
*15 June 1807 [GO]- Loose coarse canvas trousers to be worn on marches at night and on fatigues; brush and prickers provided and attached to bayonet belt.*

*The picker and brush is to be fastened on the bayonet belt, between the holes for the studs of the breast plate. (SOs, Shropshire militia, 1813)*

*Picker and brush to be suspended by two buff straps 8 inches [long] and ¼ inch broad. (Regimental orders of the 56<sup>th</sup> foot, quoted in Turner)*

(Worm and turncrew [additional musket necessaries] are kept in the implement pouch of the cartridge pouch.)

Period images consistently show the use of *leather straps for line and flank units* (chain for rifle units)



## 6. Haversack and canteen: hoist your gear up

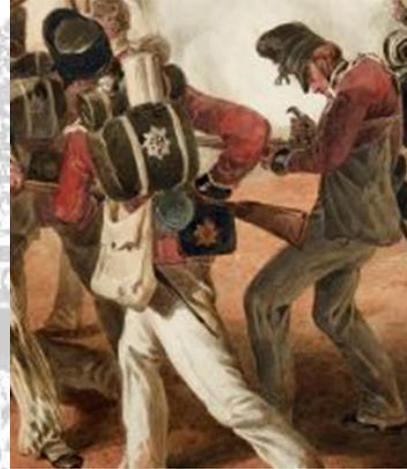
Commissary General:

- strap for canteen **68 inches** when unbuckled
- strap for haversack **35 inches** prior to attaching (total internal circumference approximately 48")



“Haversack, other ranks” Royal Carmarthan Fusiliers, ca. 1810 NAM

Period images show the canteen and haversack worn at approximately the same height as the accoutrements



## Summary

Practitioners of living history can reproduce the typical appearance of a British Army soldier by following period practices when wearing their accoutrements:

- ***Fit accoutrements to the same relative height on each soldier.*** Match up the button tabs on the back of the cartridge pouch and the bayonet belt frog with the hip buttons of the coat. This places the accoutrements at the back hips, just below the waist.
- ***Fasten the cartridge box and the bayonet belt behind the soldier.*** Fasten the coat epaulettes over the accoutrement belts. Attach the accoutrements to the coat by buttoning them to the hip buttons, or to each other by using a connecting strap (light infantry may use a waist belt). This will keep the accoutrements back and out of the way, not visible from the front.

- ***Put our accoutrements on in the same order.*** When wearing the accoutrements, put on the bayonet belt first, then the cartridge pouch, re-buckling the bayonet belt plate over the cartridge box belt.
- ***Place the bayonet scabbard in the belt frog so that the shank curves down and to the right.*** This places the bayonet socket close to the soldier, so it does not protrude and interfere with musket movement.
- ***Attach your pricker and brush to your bayonet belt plate with strips of whitened buff leather.*** Straps are 8" long, 1/4" broad.
- ***Wear the canteen and haversack at or above the waist.*** Fit these items with straps of correct length (68" strap for canteen, 35" strap for haversack). Wearing them at the same relative height as the accoutrements will reduce interference with movement, and the reproduce the period appearance of a soldier in the field.

*Many [cartridge pouches] have a white buff tab with a button hole to fasten into the hip button of the coat to keep it from flopping about, the bayonet belt usually has one on the inside also. Something most reenactors haven't caught onto yet. In addition, a properly worn cartridge pouch should have the top about even with the hip button and about level with the elbow of the soldier. I always hate to see reenactors with their boxes worn so low they are slapping on their behinds!*

— Don Trioni