

# English mounted infantry

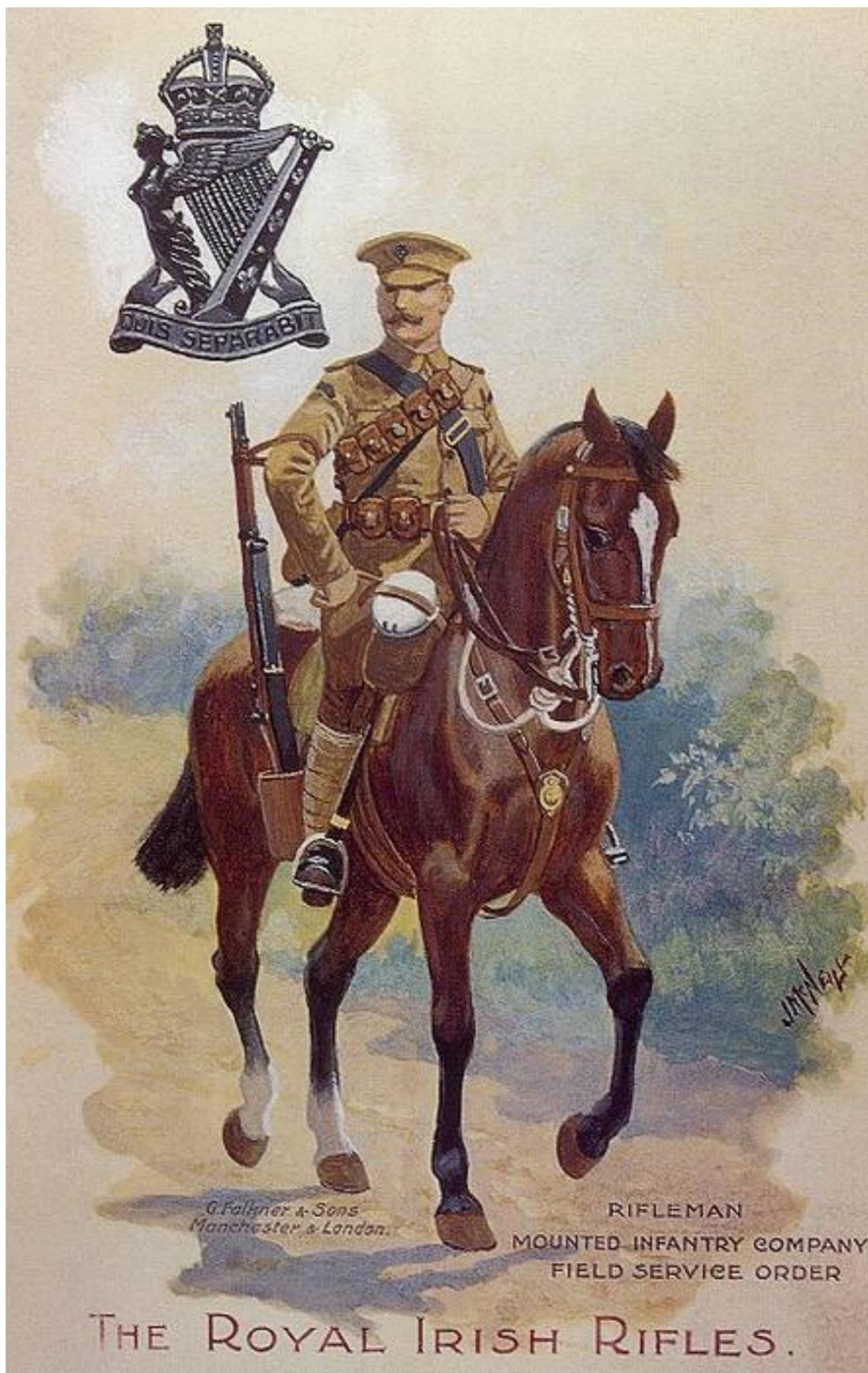
## Introduction

If you are interested in drawings of British military uniforms, I can recommend the book *British Army Uniforms in Colour*, As illustrated by John McNeill, Ernest Ibbetson, Edgar A. Holloway and Harry Payne c. 1908-1919. The book contains 137 color illustrations of the parade uniforms of the British Army as they wore them in the years before the First World War.

A single of the plates shows a soldier in the Model 1902 field uniform - and even from such a rare unit as the Mounted Infantry, while the rest of the plates show the soldiers in their more brightly colored service and parade uniforms.

This article will - in addition to showing the plate in question - briefly mention the history of the mounted infantry and show examples of its uniforming.

## Mounted Infantry



Mounted Infantry was from 1874 to 1912 a special unit in the British Army. When I use the term special unit, it is because mounted infantry units did not exist on a permanent basis, but were fielded when the need arose.

In the style of dragoons of earlier times, the task of the mounted infantry was to use horses as a means of transport and to fight on foot.

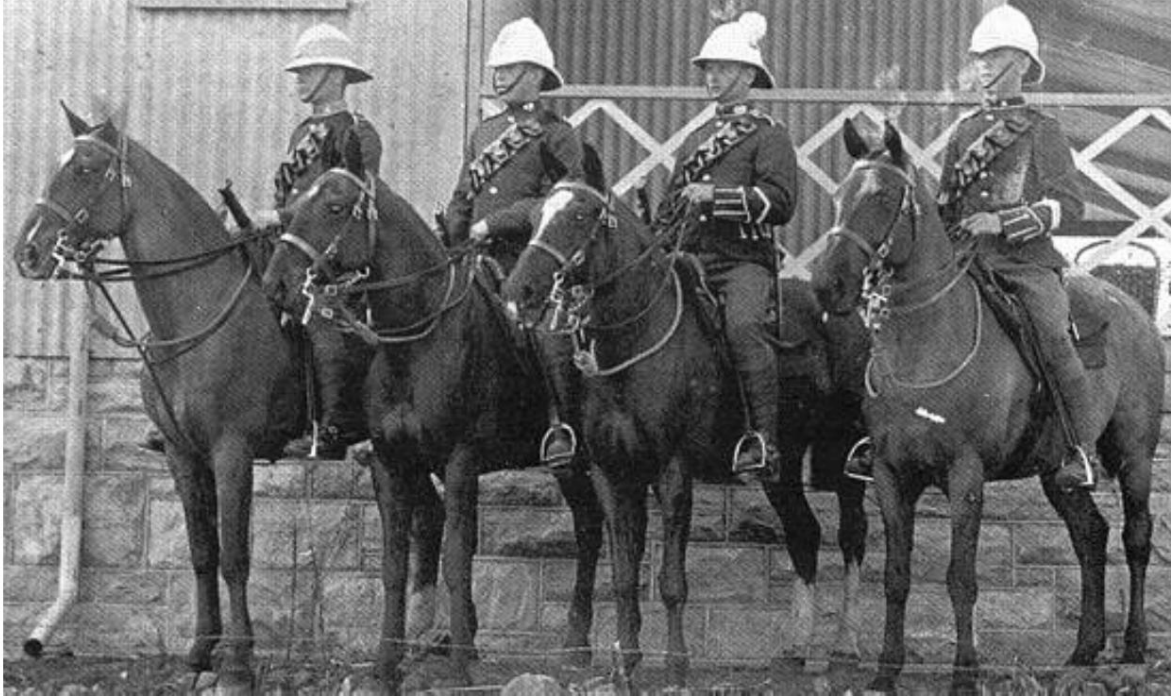
Each of the army's infantry battalions stationed in England fielded one platoon—one officer and 32 non-commissioned officers and privates—who received special training in the handling and use of horses and in small-arms combat.

The training took place at schools in Aldershot, Shorncliffe and Curragh (Ireland). The personnel had to have marks of distinction in marksmanship - *Marksmanship* or *First-Class Shot*. The training lasted 2½ months, after which the personnel returned to their home units; the training was subsequently maintained at annual

exercises.

The mounted infantry wore the respective regiments' own uniforms and badges, but adapted the need to ride. Uniform trousers and kilts were therefore replaced by breeches, and the footwear became short boots with spurs and winding boots, instead of gaiters. The headgear was usually a field hat (slanted hat and later a cap), and in warm climates - a tropical helmet or felt hat.

The drawing comes from Source 1.



Mounted infantrymen from (from left): *2nd Bn. Norfolk Regiment*, *3rd Royal Fusiliers*, *2nd Bn. Argyll* and *2nd Bn. Cameron Highlanders Sutherland Highlanders* and (From photographed on parade in South Africa, 1907. Source 3.)

The soldiers of the *Norfolk Regiment* and the *Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders* wear troop helmets of the *Wolseley* model, while the other soldiers' helmets are of the older model.

The uniform jackets are red, while the breeches and wraps are khaki. The leather strap is from Model 1903.



The mounted infantry became most famous during the Boer War, where the English army made good use of the mobility of these forces.

In addition to units of the regular army, a large number of various volunteer mounted infantry forces were raised by local residents as well as volunteers from across the English Empire.

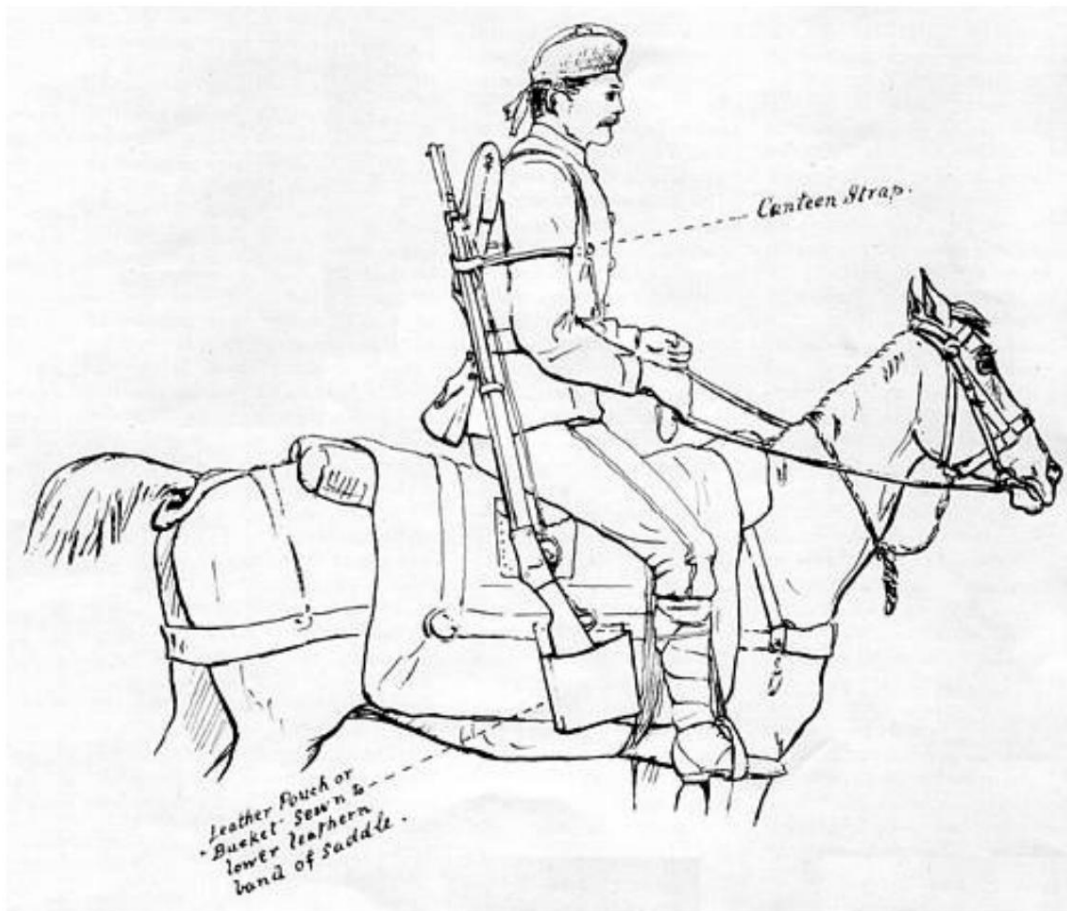
The illustration, based on photographs from the period, shows an officer from one of the regular mounted infantry units. The felt hat was a popular headgear in South Africa and was found more useful than the trope helmet.

The officer wears the same equipment as private soldiers, including the overhung rifle (of the *Lee Metford type*). A telescope is carried over the left shoulder for use in observing over the long distances on the South African *veldt*. The leather bag on the right hip contains binoculars of a traditional model, which with its 3x3 magnification are more suitable for shorter distances.

Field bottle, cooking pot and raincoat are carried on the horse.

The leather leggings are of the so-called *Stohwasser* model, which was very popular around the beginning of the 20th century.

The drawing comes from Source 3.



The drawing comes from Source 3 and shows a mounted infantryman from 1880, when an improvised mounted infantry battalion was formed during the war in Afghanistan.

Horses and saddles were sourced locally. It remains uncertain whether the horse's harness here suggests that an artillery horse is being used; alternatively, the soldier may come from the battalion's ranks, where, among other things, non-commissioned officers' horses were often equipped with draft harnesses, so that they could quickly replace lost draft horses.

Among the improvisations was that the strap from the soldier's field bottle was used to attach the rifle barrel to the right upper arm - a method similar to the one officially introduced in 1894.

### **In the field**

As mentioned in *The History of the 15th The King's Hussars 1914-1922* (Source 5), the mounted infantry was disbanded in 1912. The horses - and the tasks - were taken over by the cavalry and later by bicycle-mounted infantrymen.

The English version of the weapon had its heyday during the colonial wars of the late 1800s and early 1900s, mainly on the African continent.

Camels were also used here as an alternative to horses and a number of different corps were formed by volunteers from different regiments, for example *the Guards Camel Regiment*, which was formed during the campaign in Sudan, 1884-85.

In other parts of the Empire, the weapon continued to thrive, with Australia, New Zealand and South Africa being the primary users. During the First World War, the Australian and New Zealand units fought in Palestine, among other places, and here the mounted infantrymen showed their value to a great extent.

However, it is interesting to note that towards the end of the campaign in Palestine several of the Australian *Light Horse* regiments were equipped with sabers, so that they could also fight as regular cavalry.

To round off the story, the English *Yeomanry* units must also be mentioned. These units were intended



to function as mounted infantry. However, the units that were sent to the front as mounted units in 1914 and later were most often equipped with and trained in the use of sabres, so that they could also function on an equal footing with their comrades from the regular cavalry.

## Closing

The merits of traditional cavalry versus mounted infantry were the subject of often highly emotional discussions. The English cavalry officers' pride in their own regiments and their achievements often led them to enter the discussions with blinders over their eyes. They often displayed as much ferocity in their verbal defense as matched their bravery on the battlefield.

The efforts of the mounted forces during the First World War showed on the plus side that the mobility of the mounted forces was great - especially in the large desert areas of the Middle East - and that there were occasionally - also in Europe - favorable opportunities for cavalry attacks in the traditional sense.

On the negative side, it must be stated that the effect of the modern weapons was so violent that the risk of an almost total annihilation of the attacking force was often greater than the chance of success.

### Here it went well...



On the afternoon of 13 November 1917, *the 6th Mounted Brigade* attacked Turkish positions at El Mughar in Palestine.

At the front of the picture are *The Royal Bucks Hussars*, on the left *the Queen's Own Dorset Yeomanry* and at the back *the Berkshire Yeomanry*.

After painting by JP Beadle (Source 7).

Source 8 lists the Turkish and English losses as follows:

The Turkish losses were calculated at approx. 2,000 dead and wounded. In addition, 18 officers and 1,078 men were taken as prisoners of war, along with 14 machine guns and two field guns.

The losses among the English riders were 16 dead, 107 wounded and 1 missing, corresponding to approx. 16% of the attacking force. 265 horses - or approx. 33% - was lost.

## Postscript

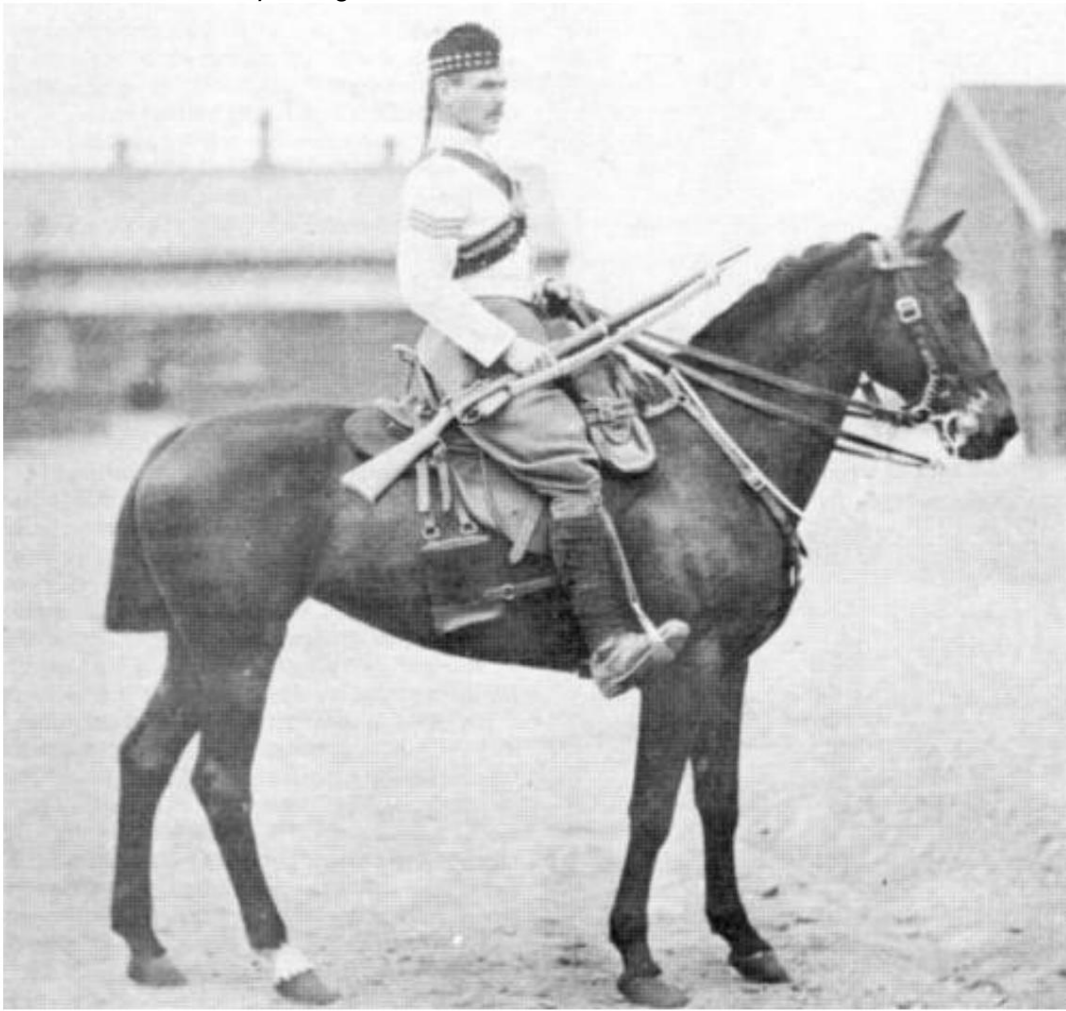
The draftsman John McNeill was the master of a large number of watercolors, with motifs from the English army. The images were used, among other things, in the postcard series *History and Tradition*, which Gale & Polden published with permission from the Ministry of War. See an example of a card from the series here: Uniform postcard of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Gale & Polden was based in Aldershot, which was the center of the English Army's operations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition to newspapers and books, postcards were one of the big articles. Read more about Gale & Polden's history here: [www.hants.gov.uk/museum/aldershot/gale/cole.html](http://www.hants.gov.uk/museum/aldershot/gale/cole.html).

The publisher entered with some of the best cartoonists of the time - Ernest Ibbetson and John McNeill - and the series *History & Tradition* was published from 1908. A list in source 2 shows that in 1910 there were 119 different maps. More people came to the page and the single card is available in more than one version, so there is enough to tackle if you want to collect the whole series!

## Sources

1. *British Army Uniforms in Colour, As illustrated by John McNeill, Ernest Ibbetson, Edgar A. Holloway and Harry Payne c. 1908-1919* af Peter Harrington, Schiffer Military History, Atglen/PA 2001, ISBN 0-7643-1302-9.
2. *ABC of the Army* by Captain J. Atkinson (editor), Gale & Polden, Aldershot, 1910.
3. *British Mounted Infantry* af Michael Barthorp, Military Illustrated, Nr. 14 og 15, 1988.
4. *Mounted Infantry Detachments* af Don Fosten, Military Modelling, August 1980.
5. *The History of the 15th The King's Hussars 1914-1922* af Lord Carnock, Naval & Military Press, London 2003, ISBN 1-84342-537-8. (Reprint - the original edition is from 1932.)
6. *Old Military Postcards* af Thomas McGuirl, Military Modelling, marts 1987.
7. *Yeomanry Wars - The History of the Yeomanry, Volunteer and Volunteer Association Cavalry: A Civilian Tradition from 1794* by Peter D. Athawes, private edition, 1994, ISBN 1-8987218-02-1.
8. *A History of British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 5: 1914-1919 Egypt, Palestine & Syria* af The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1994, ISBN 0-85052-395-8.



This is one of the most commonly used images of mounted infantry. It originally appeared in *Army and Navy Illustrated*, but is reproduced here from Source 4.

This is shown by Sergeant *Seymour* (2nd Bn. *Gordon Highlanders*), who was part of *The Highland Company* in a mounted infantry battalion which was formed for deployment in Rhodesia. In the field, however, the battalion wore khaki-colored uniform jackets and wraps. The sergeant is wearing a white poo shirt, khaki breeches and blue wraps. The leather clothing is from Model 1882. Karabinsko Model 1894 is seen behind the sergeant's right leg. The rifle is of the *Lee-Metford* type.

The horse is a typical example of the relatively small, stocky horses used by the mounted infantry.