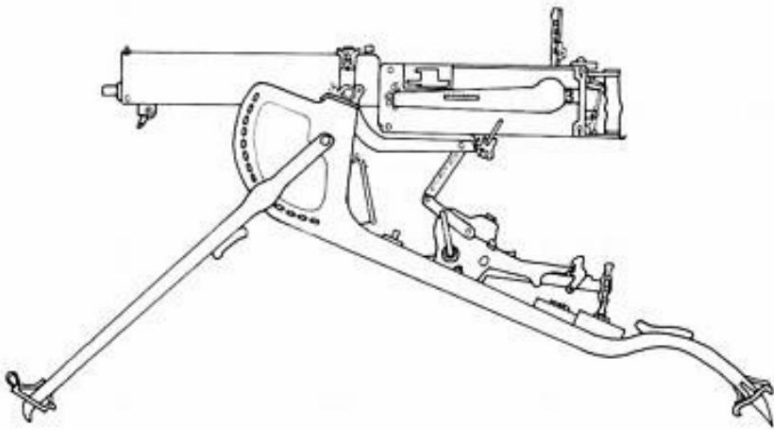


German machine gun and hunter units, 1914

Introduction

In 1898, the German army began experiments with a number of the different machine gun types of the time and on the basis of this it was decided in 1901 to create actual machine gun units. Given the importance attached to the new weapon, the machine gun units were organized as an independent type of weapon. With regard to machine guns, the choice fell on Hiram Maxim's water-cooled model, which had previously also been offered to the British army, which, however, did not find the model suitable.

Machine gun Model 1908



The German water-cooled machine gun Model 1908 (*Maschinengewehr 1908* or *MG 08*) was throughout the First World War the standard weapon in the German machine gun units.

Machine gun Model 1908.

From Source 2. Machine gun 08:

Caliber: 7.92 mm

Firing range: Approx. 4,000

m Combat sight: 1,800

m Rate of fire: 400-500 rounds/min.

Total weight: Approx. 63 kg

The machine gun was belt-fed, with 250 cartridges in canvas belts. The normal stock for the machine gun was 12,000 cartridges.

The machine gun had a crew of 5 men - group leader, gunner, helper and 2 supply men.



Machine gun section in position, approx. 1905.

After drawing by Richard Knötel 1). —

The machine gun existed in a number of variants (1901, 1908 and 1909), i.a. with different types of flame arrestors. Correspondingly, there were different versions of the sled-like field effigy. All machine guns produced before the war came from *the Deutsche Waffen und Munitions-Fabriken (DWM)* in Spandau.

Note the circular "front end" of the field flue, which characterizes the earliest version of the field flue.

In the years leading up to the war, the number of machine gun units was expanded so that at the outbreak of war, i.a. possessed:

- 11 machine gun divisions in the cavalry divisions 219
- machine gun companies in the infantry regiments 16 machine
- gun companies in the light infantry battalions 88 machine gun
- companies in reserve infantry regiments 2) 43 machine gun divisions in
- reinforcement infantry divisions (*Ersatz Division*).

It is estimated that the German army had a total of approx. 2,400 machine guns in 1914.

Machine gun sections

In 1914, there were 11 machine gun divisions, which were included in the cavalry divisions during mobilization, as the cavalry regiments did not have their own machine gun squadrons.

The following devices...

Garde-Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Nr. 1 Garde-
 Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Nr. 2 Maschinengewehr-
 Abteilung Nr. 1 Maschinengewehr-
 Abteilung Nr. 2 Maschinengewehr-Abteilung
 Nr. 3 Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Nr. 4
 Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Nr. 5

Included after the mobilization in...

Guard Cavalry Division
 Cavalry Division 4
 Cavalry Division 5
 Cavalry Division 3
 Cavalry Division 7
 Cavalry Division 2
 Cavalry Division 1

Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Nr. 6

Cavalry Division 6

Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Nr. 7 Kgl.

Cavalry Division 9

Saxon. Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Nr. 8 Cavalry Division 8 Kgl. Bayerisches 1.

Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Königlich Bayerisches Cavallerie Division

The divisions were easily mobile and could be used as a kind of mounted artillery.



Maschinengewehr-Abteilung Stellung suchend, approx. 1910.

The rendering comes from a postcard found for sale on the Internet.

The map was probably published around 1914 and modernized for the occasion with the inserted aircraft silhouettes.



Deutsche Maschinengewehr-Abteilung in Deckung, approx. 1910.

The rendering comes from a postcard found for sale on the Internet.

Organization (from Source 1)

A machine gun section consisted of:

- 2 officers, 115 non-commissioned officers and privates, as well as 87 horses, of which 27 were riding horses.

- 6 machine guns, each transported on a special machine gun carriage, pulled by a 4 horse carriage.
- A fencing train on 3 ammunition wagons and 1 field kitchen.
- A baggage train of 1 supply wagon, 1 feed wagon and 1 baggage wagon.

The department also had 1 machine gun in reserve, complete with transport.

Uniforms

The machine gun divisions were already given a grey-green uniform from the time they were established. While the peacetime uniform had red notices, collar and shoulder pads, which, among other things, is shown on Knötel's planche from 1905 and can be seen on the postcard above, the red color was less prominent on the field uniform.



The plan from Source 5 clearly shows how the grey-green uniform of the machine gun sections and the hunter units stands out from the (field) gray uniform. You can also see the red weapon color of the machine gun divisions and the corresponding green of the hunter units.



Maschinengewehr-Abteilung in the Vosges, 1914.

The hunter from *the Hannoversche Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 10* wears a blue ribbon with the inscription Gibraltar on his right forearm. Along with two other units, the battalion carried on the traditions of three Hanoverian infantry battalions that formed part of the English forces trapped in Gibraltar during the Spanish siege from 1776 to 1783 [3](#)).

The machine gun company in an infantry regiment

The machine gun company was included as the 13th company in the organization of the regiment, which numbered 3 battalions of 4 infantry companies.

The organization was much like that of the machine gun section, only with fewer horses, as the machine gun company did not need to be quite as mobile as the machine gun section.

From the Deutsch Historisches Museum's online history of the First World War.



Maschinengewehr in Deckung, approx. 1914.

The reproduction comes from a postcard that has been for sale at GermanPostcards.com.

Organization (from Source 1)

A machine gun company consisted of:

- 2 officers, 95 non-commissioned officers and privates, and 45 horses, a number of which must have been riding horses. 6 machine guns, each transported on a special machine gun carriage, pulled by a 2 horse carriage.
- A fencing train on 3 ammunition wagons and 1 field kitchen.
- A baggage train of 1 supply wagon, 1 feed wagon and 1 baggage wagon.

The company also had 1 machine gun in reserve, complete with transport.

Uniforms



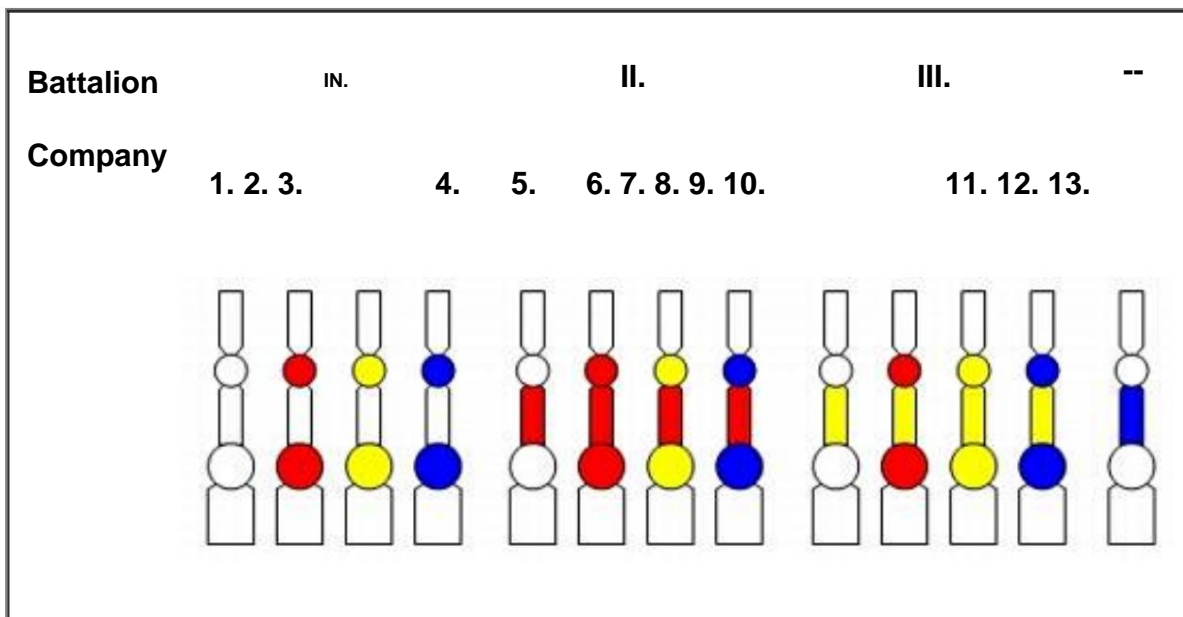
Machine gun from Grenadier-Regiment Prinz Carl von Preußen (2. Brandenburgisches) Nr. 12 [4](#).

The soldiers wear the distinctive carrying harness (made of leather) which was used to move the machine gun when it was not being carried on its horse-drawn carriage.

When the harness, as here, was not in use, the two ends were attached to the right hip.

The soldiers in the machine gun company wore the same uniforms as the regiment's other officers, non-commissioned officers and crew, however non-commissioned officers and privates wore bayonet tassels in the special company colour.

Bayonet tassels in a German infantry regiment



Portepeer - schematic representation of own design based on Source 4 and Die alte Armee, Seitenwaffen.

The catch phrase in the Imperial German Army for the order of the heraldic colors was: *Wir* (white/Weiss)

rauchen (red/Rot) *like* (yellow/Gelb) *Brazil* (blue/Blau).



A machine gun is brought into position.

The drawing comes from Scale Link's catalog of 54 mm figures.

The drawing shows how the machine gun is transported forward, resting in the gunner's and assistant's slings.

The two suppliers also carried slings (it is not clear whether the figures show it), so that they could assist with the transport, alternatively be a reserve for the gunner and the helper.

Two types of ammunition boxes appear to have been in use. A larger and deeper one - as shown in the photograph from the Vosges (with carrying handles in the end pieces of the box) and a smaller and lower one - as in the drawing above. The latter type was also used for the later light version of the MG 08/15 machine gun.

The machine gun company in a hunter battalion

At the time of mobilization in 1914, there were the following light infantry units (hunter and marksman units) in the German army:

The following devices...

Garde-Jäger-Bataillon

Garde-Schützen-Bataillon

Jäger-Bataillon Graf Yorck von Wartenburg (Ostpreußisches) Division

Jäger-Bataillon Fürst Bismarck (Pommersches) Nr. 2

Brandenburgisches Jäger-Bataillon No. 3

Magdeburgisches Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 4

Jäger-Bataillon von Neumann (1. Schlesisches) Nr. 5 2.

Schlesisches Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 6

Westfälisches Jäger-Bataillon No. 7

Rheinisches Jäger-Bataillon No. 8

Lauenburgisches Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 9

Hannoversches Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 10

Kurhessisches Jäger-Bataillon No. 11

Kgl. Sächsisches 1. Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 12 Kgl.

Sächsisches 2. Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 13

Großherzoglich Mecklenburgisches Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 14

Included after the mobilization in...

Cavalry Division 2

Cavalry Division 2

73. Infantry Brigade/37. Infantry No. 1

87th Infantry Brigade/35. Infantry Division

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure II

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure II

Cavalry Division 6

Cavalry Division 3

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure II

61. Infantry Brigade/39. Infantry Division

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure II

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure II

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure I

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure I

Höhere Kavallerie Kommandeure I

61. Infantry Brigade/39. infantry-

Royal Bayerisches 1. Jäger-Bataillon König 5) —

Division

Königlich Bayerisches Kavallerie
Division

Royal Bayerisches 2. Jäger-Bataillon

Königlich Bayerisches Kavallerie
Division

Royal Sächsisches Schützen (Füsilier) Regiment Prinz Georg Nr.108

23. Infantry Division



Machine gun of the Gardens Hunter Battalion, 1914.

Drawn by DA Moss and reproduced from Source 3.

Organization (from Source 1)

A hunter battalion 6) consisted of:

- Battalion staff
- 4 companies (with 5 officers and 259 non-commissioned officers and
- privates). 1 cyclist company (with 3 officers and 124 non-commissioned officers
- and privates). 1 machine gun company (with 2 officers and 95 non-commissioned
- officers and privates). 1 transport element (*Jäger-Kraftwagen-Kolonne*) (each 10 lorries, each with driver and security guard)

The organization of the hunter companies and the machine gun company was similar to the companies in the infantry battalion and the infantry regiment, respectively. The hunter companies had a train of a total of 8 wagons, against the infantry company's 4 wagons.



*Patrouillenfahrt einer radfahrenden Jägerabteilung
Verteidigung gegen plötzlichen Angriff.*
From the Historische Bildpostkarten.

The organization thus nicely supported the mobile role that the hunter battalions were intended for - in cooperation with the cavalry divisions.

The picture gives a good impression that the hunters have quickly got off their bikes and gone into position.



Jäger auf Vorposten.
From the Historische Bildpostkarten.

The soldiers in the light infantry units were largely recruited from chieftains.

In the coloring of this photograph, one has not been quite lucky in hitting the right grey-green shade on the hunter uniforms, which here appear almost grey.



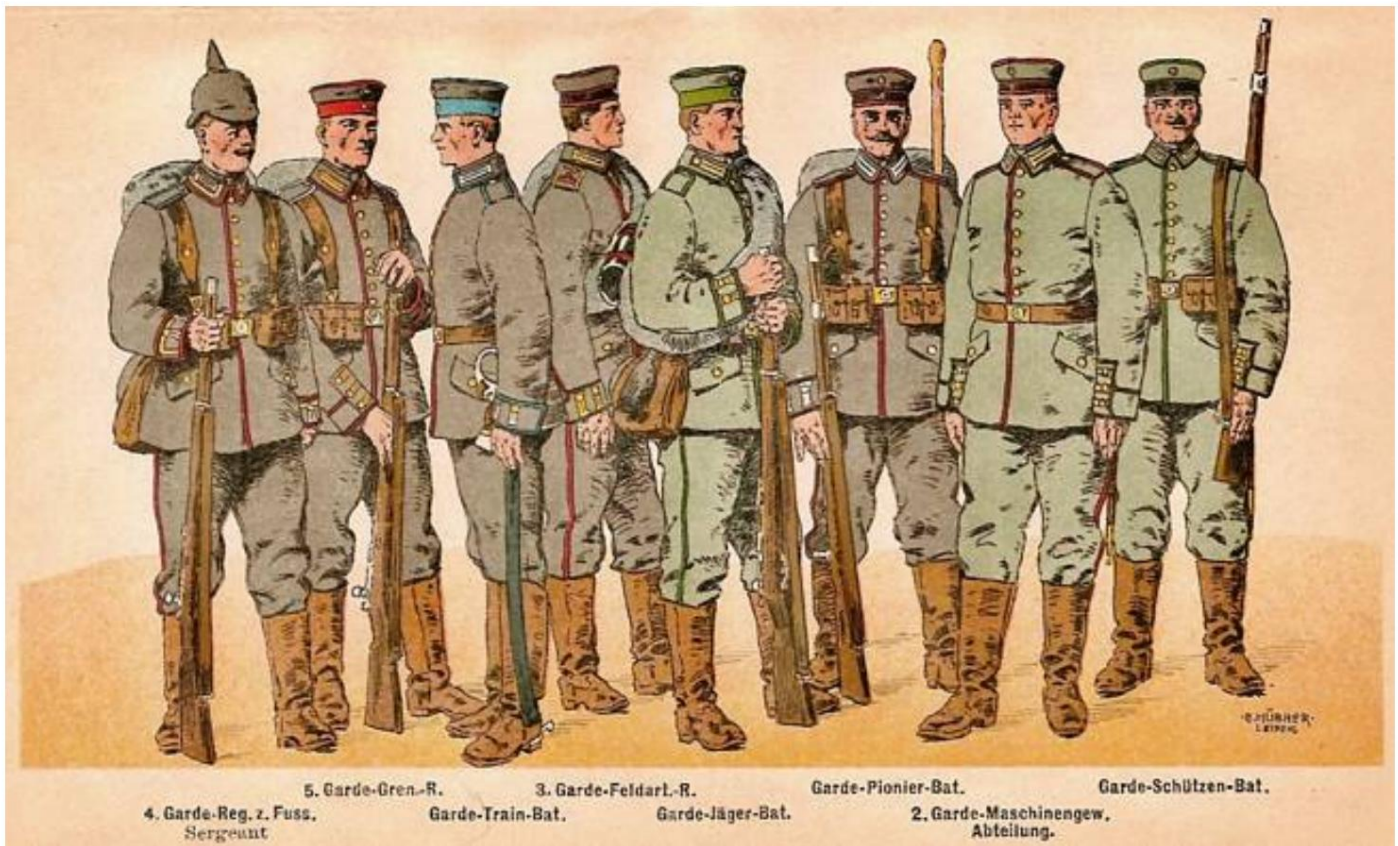
Im Schützengraben.

From the Historische Bildpostkarten.

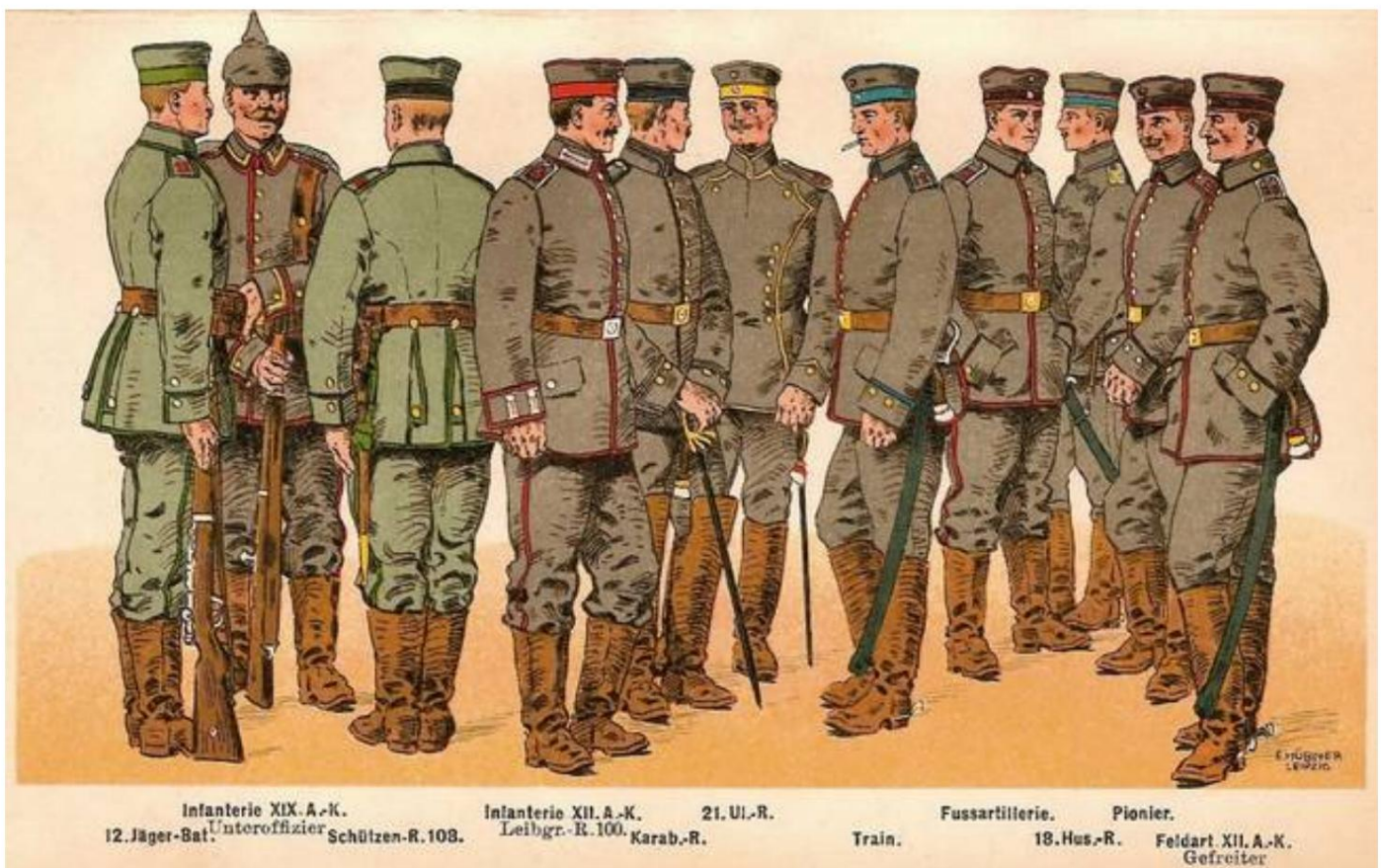
After the first months of the war of movement, the tactics of the light infantry, in which the units were specially trained, were not used quite so much.

The figures are drawn quite similar, but the coloring has gone wrong, as the edging on the uniform coats, which should have been green, is shown as red.

Uniforms (from Source 5)



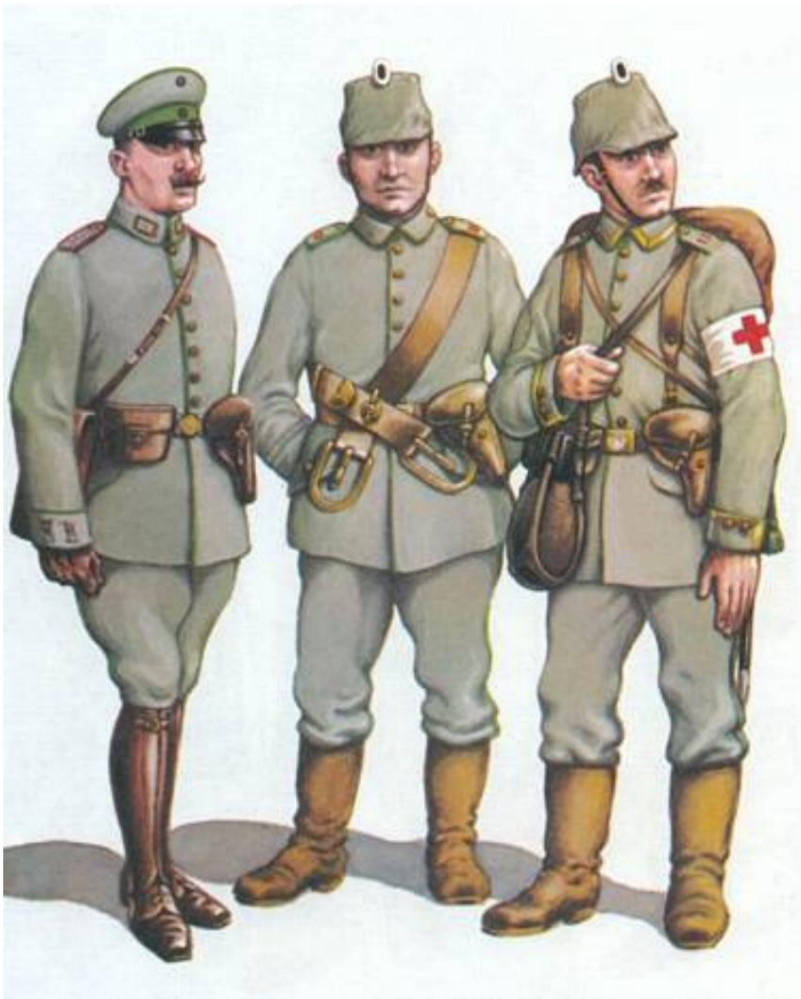
Guard units.



Saxon units.



Chakot, with cover and cockade.
From Source 3.



German Hunter Units, 1914.

Drawn by DA Moss and reproduced from Source 3.

From left: 1.

Major, *Garde-Jäger-Bataillon*.

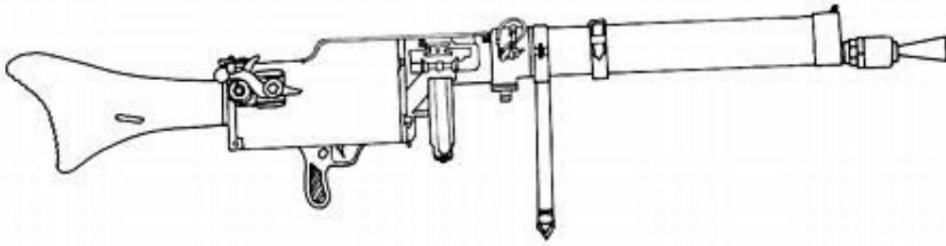
2. Private of the machine gun company in *Hannoversches Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 10*.

3. Corporal (*Oberjäger*) from the sanitary division of *the Kurhessisches Jäger-Bataillon Nr. 11*.

DA Moss may not be able to give the same elegant impression of the uniforms or the grey-green shade as the E. Hübner who drew the plates from Source 5. However, I have chosen to bring the illustration anyway, as you get quite a good impression of the soldiers' equipment, here especially the soldier from the machine gun company.

Closing

Trench warfare showed the need for a lighter machine gun, and the MG 08/15 was developed. Further information on this can be found i.a. in Source 6.



Machine gun 08/15.

From Source 2.

Sources

1. *Imperial German Army 1914-18 - Organization, Structure, Orders-of-Battle* by Hermann Cron, Helion & Company Ltd., Solihull / West Midlands 2002, ISBN 1-874622-70-1. Originally published in Berlin (1937 as *Geschichte der Deutschen Heeres im Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*).
2. *Imperial German Handbook 1914-1918* by DB Nash, Ian Allan Ltd., Shepperton / Surrey 1980, ISBN 0-7110-0968-6.
3. *Jäger & Schützen - Dress and Distinctions 1910-1914* by H. Kinna (author) and DA Moss (draftsman), Bellona Publications, Watford / Herfordshire 1977, ISBN 0-85242-491-3.
4. *World War One German Army* by Stephen Bull, Brassey's, London 2000, ISBN 1-85753-271-6.
5. *Die graue Felduniform der Deutschen Armee*, Verlag Moritz Ruhl, Leipzig, approx. 1910.
6. The Maxim Machine Gun in World War I, from The United States Marine Corps Air Ground Museum Collection.

Per Finsted

Notes:

- 1) The reproduction is from Cranston Fine Arts via Chakoten's website.
- 2) Another 25 reserve regiments were not yet equipped with machine gun companies.
- 3) Two other units were *Füsilier Regt General Feldmarschall Prinz Albrecht von Preußen (Hannoversches) Nr. 73* and *Infanterie-Regiment Von Voigts - Rhetz (3. Hannoversches) Nr. 79*. Read the story here [The GIBRALTAR Cuff-Title](#).
- 4) From *A Photohistory of World War One* by Philip J. Haythornethwaite, Arms & Armor Press, London 1993, ISBN 1-85409-210-3. However, the number on the soldiers' shoulder pads is not visible on the rendering. If this is correct, they are soldiers from Walther Bloem's regiment - see Book review - [The Advance from Mons, 1914](#).
- 5) The Bavarian hunter battalions did not, for reasons I am not familiar with, include machine gun companies.
- 6) The information about the cyclist company and the machine gun company differs slightly from the strength figure for the hunter battalion, which is mentioned in my article [On German organization and uniforming 1914](#), which is based on the English Official History, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914* by JE Edmonds, London 1922. Until something else appears, I have now chosen to lean more towards Herbert Cron's information in Source 1, which is based on official German sources.