

# THE SIKH ARMY 1845-1849: UNIFORM GUIDE

by Alan & Michael Perry

This article is the result of the accumulated research used for the Foundry range of figures. As there is no one reference book that covers the uniforms of the Sikh army, it seemed a good idea to publish the following in a readily accessible magazine.

## 1. Infantryman

Infantry are generally depicted in contemporary prints wearing coatees, white or dark blue trousers with a red stripe, and dark blue or white turbans. Red and pink turbans are also recorded. Pictorial and documentary sources record yellow, blue, red, green and white facings. An alternative cuff design is shown in (a). Contemporary Indian art generally shows the tight turban (b) and occasionally a waist-belt (c). The Aligol Regiment are described wearing white jackets and blue trousers.

## 2. Infantryman, winter dress

Poshteens were expected to be worn in winter over coatees or native dress, although many soldiers made do with wool or felt versions. Long shawls and sashes as well as turban tails were wrapped around head and body for added protection against the cold.

## 3. Infantryman, summer dress

Although shown in a white buttoned tunic, troops described in summer dress may simply be wearing their native white kurta. Regiments were possibly differentiated by the colours of their turbans, eg. red, yellow, green.

## 4. Drummer

Fifers as well as drummers were used in infantry regiments. The figure shown is taken from a contemporary Indian picture. The colouring is conjectural as musicians may have worn coats of reversed colours.

## 5. Infantry Officer

Officer's dress was pretty much left up to the individual, who sometimes copied British or French fashion. This figure is again taken from a contemporary Indian picture.

## 6. Officer

Officers on campaign could also choose to dress from head to toe in tight fitting silk of yellow, crimson or orange. Higher ranking officers and nobles preferred white, green and yellow silks with a profusion of jewellery. Plumes (a) in gilt fittings were common, as were turbans with many folds down the back of the neck (b).

## 7. 'Gurkha'

Ranjit Singh raised 1,500 men from Kashmir and formed them into two battalions of 'Ghurkas', imitating those from Nepal in British service. At one stage these formed part of the 'French Legion' (see no.16). The figure shown is from an Indian painting. Originally the whole of the Khalsa's infantry were to wear shakos, but the Sikhs refused to exchange their turbans.

## 8. Foot Artillery (Jinsi)

Normally shown in either dark blue or white trousers, the Jinsi used mainly 6½ to 18 pdrs drawn by oxen. Twelve pdrs and above were generally regarded as siege-pieces (kalan). Elephant batteries had 24 pdr or heavier pieces.

## 9. Horse Artillery (Aspi)

The figure depicted is based on a contemporary picture, although a written account states that Aspi wore red turbans, the same heavily frogged jacket, but white trousers, long black boots (a), black crossbelts, waistbelt and black scabbard with brass fittings. The Aspi used 4-6 pdrs.

## 10. Dragoon

The dragoons were armed with carbines which slung across the shoulder, the butt resting in a bucket attached to the saddle. They were also issued with a bayonet as well as a sword. Dragoon officers were dressed in crimson silk from head to foot and armed with a sabre only.

## 11. Lancer

The Lancers were armed with 12 foot bamboo lances adorned with red, white and blue streamers. They are also mentioned dressed in blue coats and tall red caps. (This could be a reference to the mounted Akali unit which dismounted to fight).

## 12. Cuirassier

Officers wore French brass cuirasses, while the men wore steel cuirasses depicting a Gallic cock in the middle of the star. They were armed with a carbine, slung over the shoulder, plus a pair of pistols and European sabre. The facing colour and shabraque (a) colours are conjectural.

## 13. Akali

The characteristic Dastar Bungga, over which the steel quoits (charka) were carried were worn alongside turbans. The blue kurta (dyed indigo and so ranged from dark to pale blue) was also peculiar to the Akalis, under which they wore shorts or dhoti in which they would fight. Sashes, occasionally turbans, and leaders' Dastar Bungga were commonly saffron coloured. Akali clothing was always in a poor state of repair. Two swords, knives, several charka and sometimes a matchlock musket were common armament. Ranjit Singh at one stage attempted to form these into a single unit of 3,000 to keep them out of trouble but, after this had failed, split them into smaller units and distributed them amongst the irregulars.

## 14. Irregular

Irregulars, both foot and lower class horesmen, were dressed generally in white and/or saffron (various shades of yellow) although a variety of colours were used. All shades of red, blue and saffron were used for turbans - white predominating for the poorer classes. Black and green turbans were commonest among the wealthier classes. Sashes and scarves varied greatly in colour. This armament consisted of tulwars (swords), spears, knives, fist daggers and matchlock muskets (a). Shields (dahl) (b) were commonly used throughout the Irregulars and occasionally by the Regular infantry. They were made of hide, or steel for the higher classes.

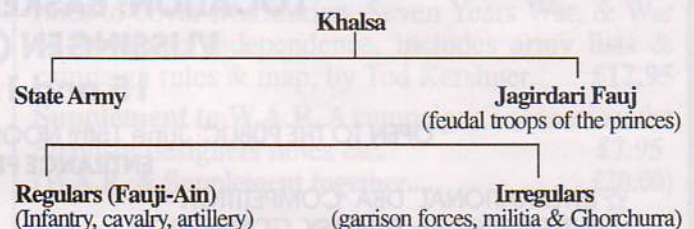
## 15. Ghorchurra Cavalryman

The nobles and higher class cavalry of the Ghorchurra tended to wear mail and 'four-mirror' armour (chakar aina) and Indo-Persian (Khulah-Kud) helmet. Clothing and accoutrements were more colourful and decorative. One source mentions a unit wearing bronze helmets, yellow turbans and black heron feathers. They were armed with lances, swords, pistols and dahls.

## 16. Sikh Colours

The two infantry colours (a) and (b) are taken from the three on display at Lichfield Cathedral. The third one is also red with a yellow border. Almost all Sikh colours were triangular. Those in Lichfield cathedral measure 7' 6" in length and between 8' 4" and 8' 10" in height, on poles of between 10' 6" and 10' 11". Streamers range from 5' to 8' 4" - they are merely tied beneath the iron head. The two red flags are covered with small (i.e. 2") gold flowers but there is no sign on any of the flags of a main central device. Three examples of central devices taken from other sources are given on the painting guide. The only non-triangular flags were used by the elite brigade. This was known as the 'French Legion' and was the favoured brigade of the mercenary French military advisors Ventura and Allard. Each unit in this brigade carried a tricolour (c).

## ORGANISATION



There were 71,000 Fauji-Ain. Brigades consisted of 3-4 battalions of regular infantry, 1 regiment of regular cavalry and 1 or 2 artillery batteries. The 'French Legion' was an exception having 2 regiments of regular cavalry: 1 cuirassier and 1 dragoon.

Infantry regiments had 2 battalions, each of which numbered between 800-1,000 men, divided into 8 companies. In 1838 there were 8 Regular cavalry regiments, 2 lancer and 6 dragoon, although the latter may have included 1 or 2 cuirassier regiments. Regular cavalry regiments numbered between 200-500 men in 4 troops. Artillery batteries (derahs) numbered between 3 and 15 guns.

The Jagirdari Fauj (feudal troops of the princes) comprised trained infantry dressed and equipped as the state regulars, untrained cavalry, artillery and irregular infantry.

The size of Ghorchurra units varied considerably from derahs of 150 - 3,000. These were attached to regular brigades, as were Zamburek derahs (camel mounted guns) and irregular infantry units.

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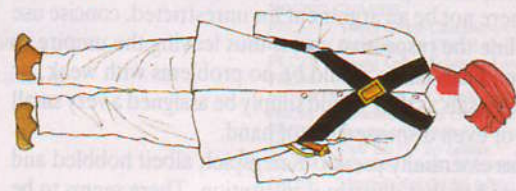
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1. Infantryman



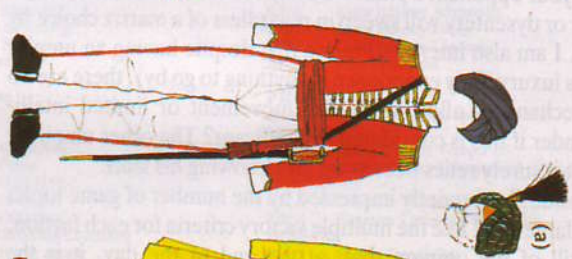
2. Infantryman winter dress



3. Infantryman summer dress



4. Drummer



5. Infantry Officer



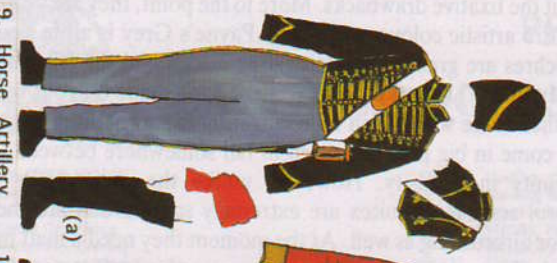
6. Officer



7. 'Gurkha'



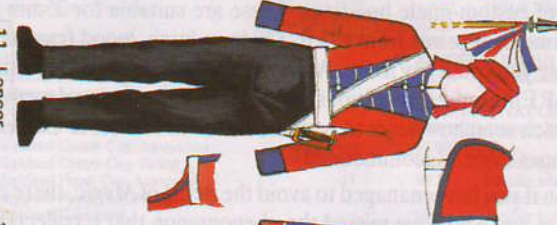
8. Foot Artillery (Jinsi)



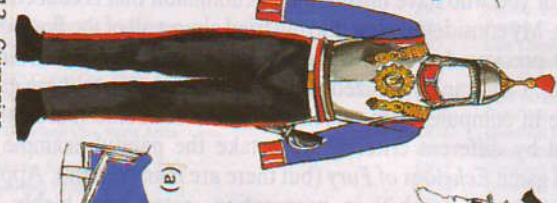
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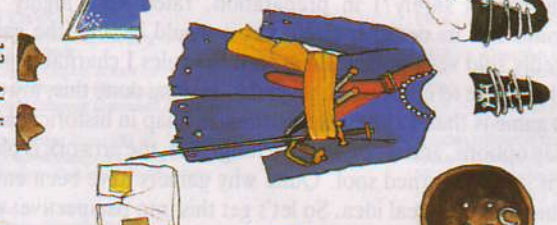
10. Dragoon



11. Lancer



12. Cuirassier



13. Akali



14. Irregular



15. Ghorchurra



16. Sikh Colours