

## **British Medals and Orders of the Napoleonic Period**

At the time of the Napoleonic Wars, many of the Orders known today existed.

The Senior Order was the Order of the Garter. As Wellington was the only military Officer to be awarded this Order, we can forget it from our point of view as re-enactors, unless we are to play the Duke himself!

Next in line is the Order of the Thistle. Today this is Scotland's principal order, however in the reign of George II and early in the reign of George III it was given to Senior Officers of Scottish Regiments who had provided troops for the suppression of Jacobites. This may be worn by Senior (and old!) Officers of Highland Regiments.



Next in seniority was the Order of St Patrick. This was presented to Irish Peers who provided support for the Government as well as troops and support in Ireland.



The Order of the Bath was possibly the most common Order worn by Napoleonic Officers. The Order of Knight Companion was given to Military Officers for meritorious service.

It must be noted though, that in our period of history there were only two versions: Military and Civilian. It was only after 1815 that today's various levels were introduced (Knight Commander, Knight Grand Cross, etc.) Consequently, the only acceptable Military star of this Order for our period is as shown below:



The Order of the Bath was replaced later in our period by, first, the Army Gold Medal, but then by the Army Gold Cross (for the Peninsular Period). This was awarded to senior Officers who had taken command in four or more overseas campaigns.

Unfortunately the rank and file were not awarded medals in our period. The first medal awarded was the Waterloo medal, followed by the Military General Service Medal (for the Peninsular Campaign) which was known as the 'Dead Man's Medal' as it was not issued until the reign of Queen Victoria!

#### Commemorative Medals.

Some commemorative medals were issued for individuals to purchase. These were often issued in pewter, silver and gold and commemorated such actions as Seringapatam, Trafalgar, The peace of Amiens, etc.

Whilst ordinary soldiers may have purchased these, they were not allowed to be worn on duty. Officers however were not subject to such constraints!

This then is brief summary of what Orders and medals might be worn by Senior Officers of the British Army during the Napoleonic Wars. Hopefully it may help us to more accurately portray the various characters in a re-enactment situation.

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