

ARMAMENTS OF THE TROOPS OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD 1788-1931
(1)
PISTOLS OF THE ROYAL CORP OF “GUARDIAS DE CORPS”
DURING THE REIGN OF CARLOS IV

(Translation by Hector J. Meruelo)

The last monarch of the House of Austria, Carlos II “el Hechizado” (Charles II, the Bewitched one), died in the year 1700 without leaving a descendant and named Felipe de Anjou, in his will, as his successor. He was the first Spanish monarch of the House of Borbon and reigned as Felipe V from 1700 to 1746.

Felipe de Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV of France, reorganized his personal Guard and by Royal Decree of June, 21, 1704, proclaimed the formation of the “Real Cuerpo de Guardias de Corps” (Royal Corp of “Guardias de Corps”), which was inspired by the French “Garde du Corps du Roi” from which it took its name, translated literally as “Guardia del Cuerpo del Rey”.

Before we discuss the actual organization of the Corp the following clarifications are necessary:

In the (regular) Army the Cavalry was organized in Regiments each with its own name: “del Rey” (the King’s own), “de la Reina” (the Queen’s own), “del Principe” (the Prince’s own), etc. Each Regiment was then formed by “Escuadrones” (Squadrons) each with a number of “Compañías” (Companies), which depended on the Regulations in force, which varied frequently.

By comparison, the Royal Corp of “Guardias de Corps” was a force equivalent to a regular Army Cavalry Regiment, but the customary “Escuadrones” (Squadrons) were called “Compañías” (Companies), usually, three of them, respectively named “Española” (Spanish), “Italiana” (Italian) and “Flamenca” (Flemish), each one composed of four “Brigadas” (Brigades).

These peculiarities and idiosyncrasies in the naming of the forces were due to the desire to differentiate them from the regular Army, as a unique unit composed only of noblemen, to whom the custody of the Monarch was entrusted.

This uniqueness extended to the naming of the different positions. In 1869 Don José Almirante, a military writer, published his well known “Diccionario Militar” (Military Dictionary), and in it he criticized the existence of such a body as the “Guardias de Corps”, as follows: “*Suffice it to say that (in the Guardia) plain soldiers were actually (Army) officers, the “Cadetes” were Captains, the “Exentos” and “Ayudantes” were Lieutenant Colonels, the “Tenientes” (Lieutenants) were actually Generals, and the “Capitanes” (Captains) were “Grandes de España” (Grandeas of Spain)¹ and Captain Generals.... I believe this says it all*”.

This singularity of the Royal Corp of “Guardias de Corps”, in both their general organization and in the naming of its components, makes a literal translation very difficult and at risk of creating confusion in the reader.

¹ Whose title of nobility gave them the right not to take off their hat in the presence of the King



Cavalry Pistol, made around 1790. This model equipped the Guards of the Royal Corp of Guards de Corps; Barrel in 18 mm (“de á 17” caliber), 270 mm long, with crowned marking “ANT/GVI/SAS/OLA” (Antonio de Guisasola, Eibar), with the Royal Arms and the inscription “GVARA. DEL CUERPO DEL REY” Its front sight in silver; Spanish lock; Model of 1789. Juan Garcés Collection.

The Royal Corps of “Guardias de Corps” was, throughout its history, subject to constant modifications; In 1788, at the onset of Carlos IV’s reign it was still organized according to the 1769 Regulations as follows:

Functional structure: General Staff: a “Sargento Mayor” (sergeant major), an “Ayudante General” (general adjutant), a “Comisario” (comissar), a “Furriel Mayor” (furrier major), an “Alguacil” (bailiff), an “Alcayde de Cuartel” (barracks warden), an “Asesor” (legal assistant), an “Escribano” (clerk), a “Fiscal” (prosecutor), an “Armero” (armourer), and a “Teniente de Alcayde” (warden’s Lieutenant).

And, in each of the three “Compañías” (four “Brigadas” each): a “Capitán” (captain), a “Teniente” (lieutenant), a “Segundo Teniente” (second lieutenant), an “Alférez” (sub-lieutenant), four “Exentos” (with rank of brigadier or colonel in the Army), four “Brigadieres” (functioning as first sergeant), four “Sub-Brigadieres” (functioning as second sergeant), twenty “Cadetes”, (cadets, functioning as caporal) including two “Garzones” (bat boys), two

“Portaestandartes” (standard bearers), a “Timbalero” (kettle drummer), four “Trompetas” (buglers), one hundred and eighty Guards, a “Capellán” (chaplain), a “Cirujano” (surgeon), a “Mariscal” (blacksmith) and a “Sillero” (saddler).



Cavalry pistol, made around 1790; This model equipped the Officers of the Royal Corp of “Guardias de Corps”; 273 mm long barrel, in 18mm (“de a 17”) caliber, with crowned marking “BUS/TIN/DUY” (Juan Esteban de Bustinduy, Eibar); The Royal Arms and the front sight in silver, with the inscription “GUARA. DEL CUERPO DEL REY”. Spanish lock, Model of 1789, inscribed “DOIZTUA” (Antonio de Doiztua, Eibar).

With the new Regulations of 1792 the Main Staff was composed of: a “Sargento Mayor” (sergeant major), two “Ayudantes Generales” (general adjutants), a “Comisario” (commissar), a “Secretario de la Sargentía Mayor” (secretary to the Sergeant Major), a “Archivero de la Comisaría” (clerk to the Commisariat), a “Furriel Mayor” (furrier major), an “Alcayde de Cuartel” (barracks warden), a “Sub-Alcayde” (assistant warden), two “Picadores” (horse tamer), a “carcelero” (warder), a “Mozo de Salas” (barracks maintenance), an armourer, an “Asesor” (counselor), a “Fiscal” (prosecutor), a “Escribano” (clerk), and an “Alguacil” (bailiff).

In 1793 one Company of American Horsemen (composed of sons of noble families from the American possessions) was added to the Guard so that in 1795 it was composed of four “Compañías” (Companies), each one with: A

"Capitán" (Captain), a "Teniente" (Lieutenant with a rank of Brigadier), an "Alférez" (sub-lieutenant with a rank of "Exento"), six "Exentos" (with a rank of Colonel), one "Ayudante" (Aid with rank of "Exento"), two "Brigadieres" (first sergeants), two "Sub-Brigadieres" (second sergeants), fourteen "Cadetes" (cadets - caporal), one "Portaestandarte" (standard bearer), one "Garzón" (bat boy), one hundred and eighty four Guards, one "Timbalero" (kettle drummer), two "Trompetas" (buglers), one "Picador" (horse tamer), one "Domador" (horse trainer), one "Mariscal" (blacksmith), one "Sillero" (saddler), and one "Furriel" (furrier); The general Staff was composed of; a "Sargento Mayor" (sergeant major), an "Ayudante General" (general adjutant, with the rank of Field Marshall), two "Capellanes" (chaplains, one a priest), two "Cirujanos" (surgeons), one "Carcelero" (warder), one "Mozo de salas" (barracks servant) and one "Archivero" (file clerk).

After 1798, a "2º Ayudante General" (second adjutant general), two "Brigadieres" (First sergeant), and two "Sub-Brigadieres" (second sergeant) per Company were added; The "Cadetes" (cadets, in function of caporal) increased to eighteen per Company, the Guards were again one hundred and eighty, forty five to each "Brigada", and the "Cirujanos" (surgeons) were increased to four.

In 1807 the Ordinances of 1792 were re-established and the Corp was reorganized in three "Compañías", First, Second, and Third, but, in May of 1808, when Prime Minister Godoy was relieved of his titles, the ordinances of 1792, which were his creation, were abolished and a return was made to those of 1769.

In the Royal Corp, the Officers were designated either Major or Minor depending on their assignment; Minor Officers were those who, if in the Army, would do the functions of sergeants and corporals (non commissioned officers); although in the Corp they were called "Brigadieres", "Sub-Brigadieres", and Standard Bearers.

In my opinion the only pistols that can be defined as Models of the Royal Corp of "Guardias de Corps" are those bearing that inscription on the barrel; Already in 1753 the Royal Guipuzcoan Company of Caracas was named the "general purveyor" of the Royal Factory of Placencia for the pistols and carbines produced there to equip the "Guardias de Corps" and which *"should be engraved on the barrel with the Royal Arms and the usual inscription"*.

From the reign of Carlos IV (1788-1808) I am aware only of those two models, specimens of which are illustrated in this article, both produced around 1790 in the Royal Placencia Factory, and issued to Guards and Officers, respectively; It is possible that the Officers Model was issued to Minor Officers and that the Major Officers equipped themselves with privately purchased pistols, not of official Government issue.

Juan L. Calvo
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