

Siege of Paris 19th September 1870 – 28 January 1871 The Garrison of Paris

The French regular army was virtually destroyed within six weeks of its mobilisation. With the Emperor Napoleon captured France was dependent on reserve and volunteer forces, whilst the country transitioned to a Republican government.

The essential difference in uniforms was that unlike the imperial regular army they did not wear epaulettes. Some regular infantry were still to be seen; units that had not been committed such as regts. returning from Algeria and Italy and also composite battalions made up from the odd company here and there. However the garrison of Paris was mainly made up from the following forces.

Navy - French Sailors formed an important part of the garrison of Paris. In addition to the battalions of Marines, the Sailors provided several battalions and numerous gun crews. They wore a standardised field uniform. Marines in theory had Yellow Epaulettes but seemed not to wear them.

Government Departments- The Government distrusted the Mobiles and National Garde and in an attempt to create reliable and disciplined units on 9th August they militarised several existing organisations including:

Customs department: 6 Battalions green coats red piping

Forestry agents: 2 Battalions green coats yellow piping

Fire fighters: 2 Battalions dark blue red facings

Police: 2 (?) Battalions National guard uniform.

Figures: 1 Foresters 2 Customs



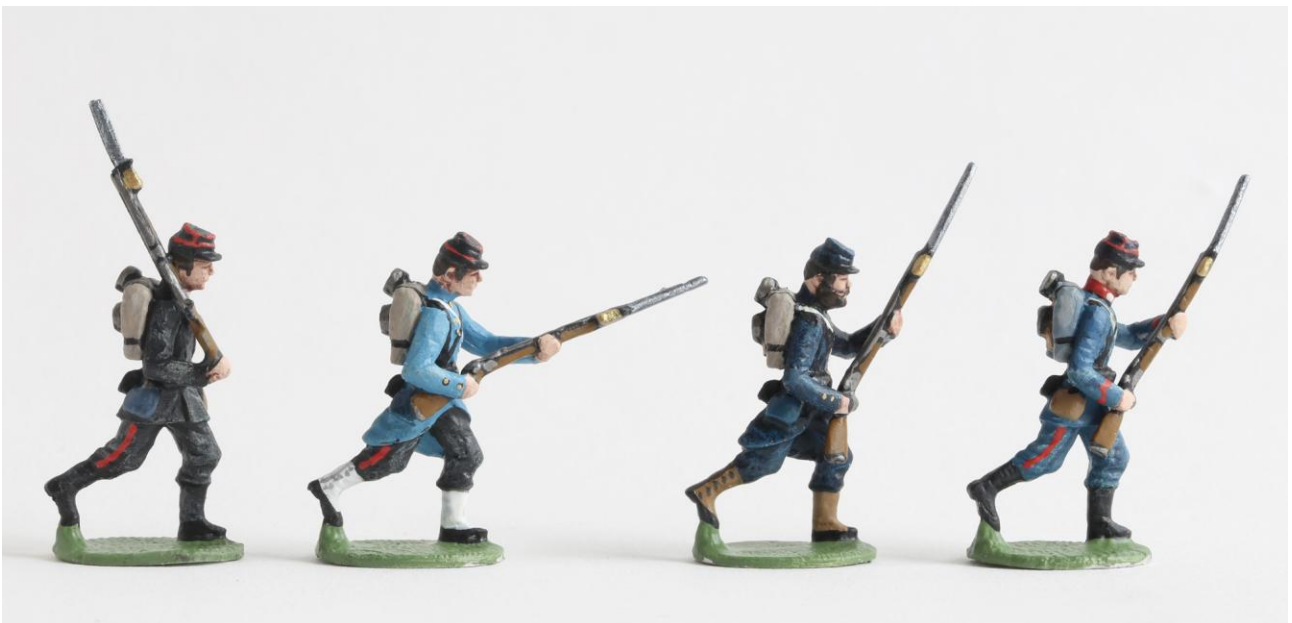
The Garde Mobile was envisaged as an army reserve similar to the Territorial Army or the Landwehr. However the politicians had hampered it in every possible way, obstructing training and equipment. Nevertheless it existed prior to the war and its members had been issued with uniforms. Omissions and rapid expansion led to a scramble for equipment and clothing, overcoats being issued in several colours and water bottles with improvised covers or plain metal. The units of Paris (The Seine) were significantly better served than the rest of the country partly because of the closer oversight of the Emperor and because the city contained a warehouse of 100,00 uniforms. They wore Dark blue kepi with red band, dark blue tunic with red facings, collar and cuffs, iron grey trousers with red stripe. Gaiters vary though often black.

Figures: 3 Garde Mobile **4** 1st Battalions Seine **5** Mobile de la Seine



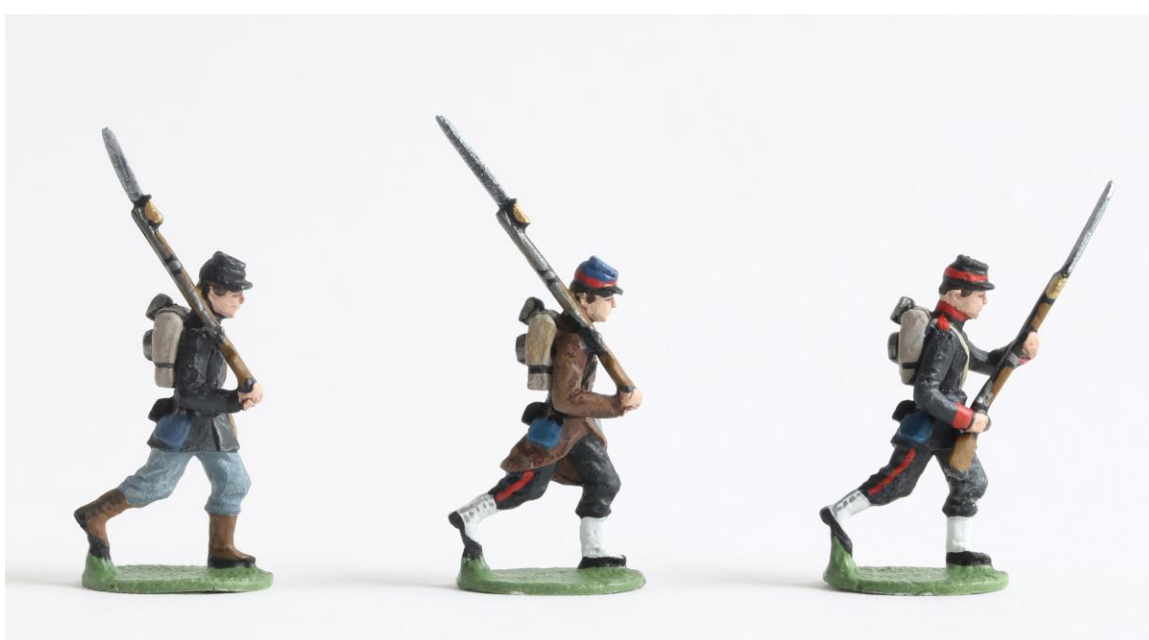
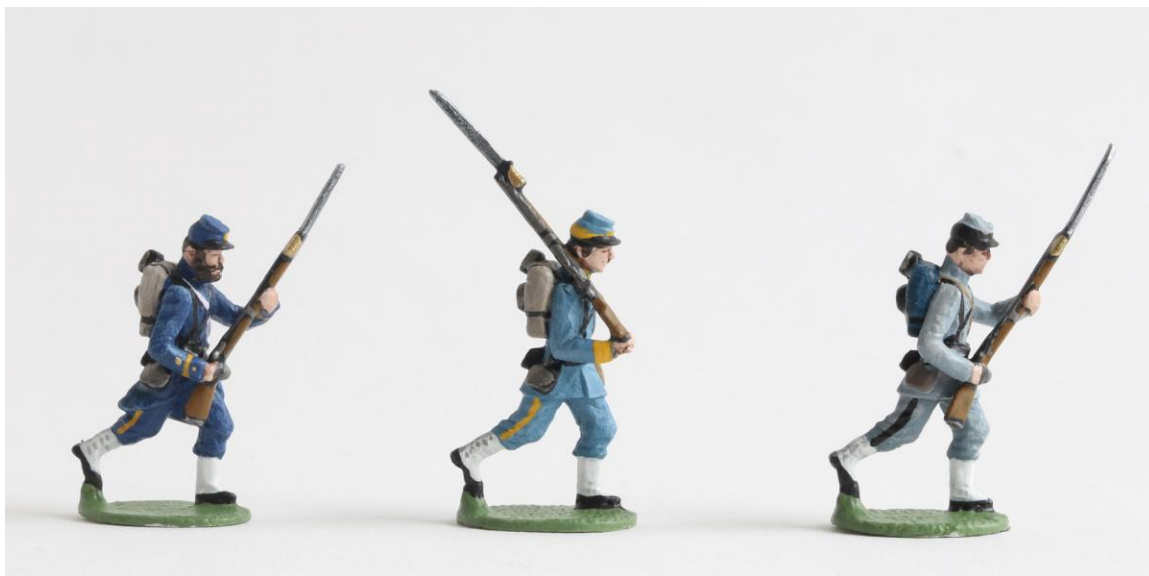
Garde National was created in the French revolution as an internal force and had been abolished by Napoleon II however it was reconstituted in the summer of 1870 first in Paris as a bourgeoisie militia to keep the workers in place but after the huge expansion of Sept this function disappeared. In theory had contributed over 200 battalions to the garrison of Paris though they appear to have been of little use.

On paper at least they wore a black kepi with red piping no cockade, Black 1852 tunic with red piping, black trousers red stripe and a greatcoat in light or dark blue or black. Equipment varied hugely.



Franc Tireurs were groups of volunteers hastily formed together and providing their own uniforms varying in size from a half company to full battalions. There was an endless variety of uniforms including one emulating The Three Musketeers. In late Sept the government sought to incorporate them within army command and it is hard to distinguish between the uniforms of the volunteer units and those of supplementary battalions raised for the garde Mobile. Both essentially wore anything they could get their hands on.

Figures: 10 Tirailleurs de la Seine, **11** Franc Tireur de Paris Neuilly, **12** Franc Tireur de Haute Marne, **13**, Franc Tireur de Mocard, **14** Mobile de la Somme, **15** Ami de Paris (foreign volunteers), **16** Franc Tireur des Enfants perdus de Paris, **17** 2nd regt Mobile des Seine et marne, **18** Mobile des Calvados



Since a large part of the population of Paris seemed to be artists there are many pictures of the siege and forces available through the internet. A definitive volume is available at:

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52505837g/f3.item>

The Osprey 237 French Army 1870-71 is a valuable resource written by a great expert on the period but needs careful reading as on occasion he struggles to fit so much information into the format.

The Eighteen painted figures show uniforms that would have been seen on the streets of Paris during the Siege.

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