THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (19TH CENTURY)

Portrait miniature of an Officer of the 'd'ordonnance de l'Empereur' (Orderly officer to the Emperor), wearing Imperial green uniform with gold lace/buttons and the Cross of the Legion d'honneur[1]; the background with officers on horseback and battle scene

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: W3SNEKH4

Ebonised wood frame with inner gilt-metal mount

Rectangular, 100 mm (4 inches) high

The officer portrayed here belonged to an select group of soldiers, who belonged to the personal staff of Napoleon. Known as the Maison Militaire de l'Empereur, there were three sections: the emperor's aides-de-camps, the cabinet, and the officers d'ordonnance of whom the present sitter was part. This last element of the maison, the officers d'ordonnance, or orderly officers, conducted inspections in the emperor's name, collected information, and then reported those results back to Napoleon.

Although the sitter here is yet to be identified, there were only 20-30 men who held such a position in the army, most of them receiving the Legion d'honneur which the sitter wears here. The miniature can be dated to prior to 31st January 1809, as after that date the uniform changed to a medium blue with silver lace/ buttons.

It is also not possible to identify with any certainty the battle and cavalry shown in the distance, but they are likely to be the chasseurs à cheval of the Imperial Guard officers. The Napoleonic Wars took place between 1803/04-1815, heralding a period of French domination in Europe. The cavalry in the background of the miniature, their helmets sporting white brush, may be French troops or retreating enemy. One suggestion is that the officer was present at the Battle of Austerlitz, which took place in

December 1805, where the French army was victorious over the armies of Russia and Austria. Napoleon considered Austerlitz his greatest battle, as it demonstrated his ability to see the terrain and understand the role it would play, also his close personal connection with his soldiers and his clear communication of orders.

[1] The gold cords hanging from the sitter's right shoulder indicate that he was part of the military household of the Emperor (Imperial guard/ personal military household). His intricately laced waistcoat shows that he was of superior rank and personal wealth.