

BMS Meeting notes of 2.12.21: 'The Brave Cuirassier' [or the 'Dashing Hussar'] by Mick Atkinson.

Introduction:

Tonight's presentation features the extraordinary military career and adventures of Major François Clément Chipault dit Bézancourt ['Chipault'] – Mick has recently amended the title of this talk to reflect that half of Chipault's soldiering was spent as an Hussar!



Mick explained his collecting habits and how they'd evolved over the years. After an OMRS convention in 2015, Mick was inspired to acquire the Waterloo medal to William C. Burgess of the Scots Greys and there followed other acquisitions to British Heavy Cavalry units. **[see photo below].**



Types of Légion d'Honneur and examples:

Next he felt he should acquire just one of the enemy's awards but, very quickly, has become a keen collector of the Légion d'Honneur award and has an avid interest in Napoléon Bonaparte! Mick explained there were five grades of the Légion d'Honneur from this era ranging from the Knight's award [of which there are four different versions] to the Officer Award in gold. The rarest are the badge and the Grand Eagle of the Légion d'Honneur. The first type 1803-06 is a Légion d'Honneur without a crown: the next type has a crown followed by a third type with an 'articulated crown' [as the second type was prone to breakage]. There are balls at the end of the rays on the 4th type.



Picture above: The evolution of the Légion d'Honneur [please see above text].

For mention, the three rarest types are the Commander of the Légion d'Honneur neck badge, the Grand Cross of the Légion d'Honneur breast badge and the Grand Eagle of the Légion d'Honneur worn on the Grand Cordon sache.



Pictured above: Awards to Ambroise Delamarre with his type III Légion d'Honneur in the centre.

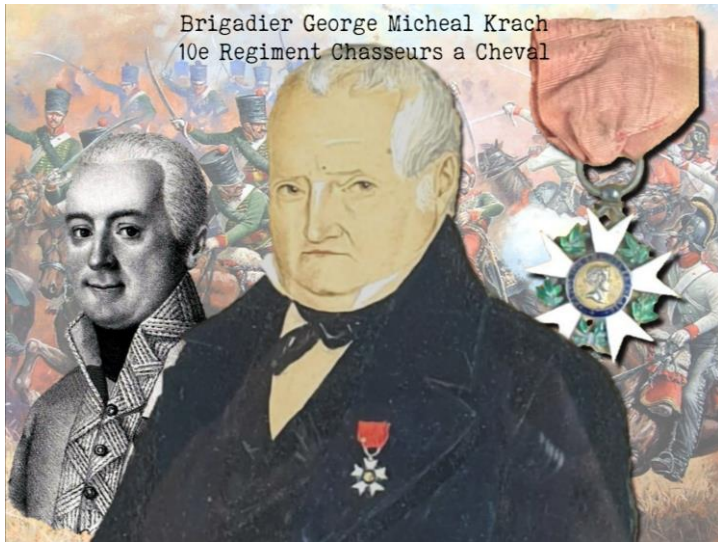
The Légion d'Honneur to Sergeant-Major Ambroise Delamarre was a 'type III' to a Knight. Delamarre was wounded on the retreat from Moscow and also injured at Waterloo. He was the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Cuirassiers [the 'Imperial Guard'] and was wounded in their famous defeat at Waterloo where he would have been wearing his medal.

The Légion d'Honneur to Lieutenant Jacques Richelet, also a Cuirassier, was awarded by Napoléon Bonaparte and would have been worn the very next day at the battle of Champaubert 10th February, 1814.



Pictured above: 4th Type Légion d'Honneur to Jacques Richelet.

The award to Brigadier George Michael Krach was a type I Légion d'Honneur [awarded in 1803] but was issued retrospectively to reward Krach's gallant actions in Italy in 1797 where he had captured a General. The award had been sold with a watercolour painting of the recipient wearing his award! He was a member of the 10ème Regiment of Chasseurs de Cheval.



Pictured above: Type I Légion d'Honneur to Brigadier George Michael Krach.

Also referred to was a 'Grand Cordon' sache of a General's Légion d'Honneur retrieved from the Waterloo battlefield bought along with other Waterloo battlefield relics with validated provenance.

[See image below]



The Légion d'Honneur of Napoléon Bonaparte [from when he was on St Helena] was recently auctioned. Mick had successfully purchased this on his 'second attempt' at auction in Bordeaux. In the first attempt, Mick had ended up outbidding himself because of a software glitch and had then thought he had been the unsuccessful bidder!



Pictured above: Napoléon Bonaparte's Légion d'Honneur from St Helena with lock of Napoléon's hair.

Terminology: The French have three medal sizes: full sized medals, miniature medals and 'reductions' which are half-sized medals.

The medal group of Chipault:

This group of three medals has a full-sized Officer type Légion d'Honneur of fine excellent detail with enamelled laurels of different greens. Also in the group was the 'Order of the Two Sicilies' [a reduction sized medal] and a miniature Légion d'Honneur [Knight's type].

His full-sized Légion d'Honneur Officer Grade had been awarded in January 1808. This was quite probably a prototype made for Napoléon Bonaparte which shortly after, had been awarded to Chipault. It had been made by Napoléon's personal jeweller.



Above left: Trio of awards to Chipault [see text] Left to right: The Order of the Two Sicilies, Officer Grade Légion d'Honneur and miniature Légion d'Honneur [Knight's type].

Above right: Enlarged view of full-sized Légion d'Honneur showing the different green enamels.

The career of Chipault.

Chipault had an extensive military career over 28 years during which included being a POW for two years. He'd been posted on two [one was secret] historic missions and had even saved the life of the Pope Pius VI! He is famous for the number of his wounds he had received during one battle the battle of Heilsberg 10th June, 1807.

Born in 8th December, 1765 in Orléans, he enlisted in the 1er Dragons between 1781-1787. He re-enlisted in the 'Garde Nationale d'Orléans' between 1789-1792 after the storming of the Bastille 14.7.1789.

The Dashing Hussar:

During the turmoil of revolutionary France, Chipault was located in Paris where he joined the 'Hussards de la Liberté' with the rank of Captain 1794-1802. He commanded about sixty men. The unit will become the '7th Regiment of Hussars'.

On 13th October, 1793, he was distinguished in a cavalry charge at Kaiseberg [near Weissembourg]. Then on 2nd December, 1793, he and his unit seize the village of Laventzone which is defended by a superior force capturing Officers, the colours, men, weapons and supplies. He is bayoneted in the leg in this battle. Accurate research of event dates is more challenging in this era as the French were using the new revolutionary calendar.

Another development in France at the time was the attachment of a 'people's representative' ['Représentant du Peuple'] to each regiment. Représentant du Peuple Duroy à L'Armé du Rhin ['for the Army of the Rhine'] in 'Year III' is responsible for removing him from the Regiment for presumed financial irregularities. After a six month absence, Chipault rejoined his regiment which by then had returned to Paris.

These early years in revolutionary France are known as the 'reign of terror' with many executions by guillotine. Not long after, Duroy himself was on trial for treason, found guilty and, knowing he faced the guillotine, tried to commit suicide by stabbing himself. He was still guillotined before he could succumb to self-injury.

Not all convicted of treason are guillotined as they might still command considerable support so instead face deportation. His next mission in 1795 is to escort three such important prisoners from Paris to Ile d'Oléron for onward deportation to Guinea. They are Bertrand Barrière, Collot d'Herbois and Billaud-Varenne [\[see image below\]](#).



Italian Campaign 1796-99:

Chipault is involved in many battles in the Italian Campaign 1796-1799, for example Mondovi [22nd April, 1796], Lodi [10th May, 1796] and Rivoli [14-15th January, 1797] to name a few. This is a hugely successful military campaign for the French showcasing the emergence of a new General and future leader Napoléon Bonaparte.

Escort of the Sardinian Royal Family to exile:

On his return to France, Napoléon Bonaparte plans the Egypt campaign of 1798 but, although the 7th Regiment is posted to Egypt, Chipault is not to go as he has been given a secret mission. This is to escort to exile King Charles Emmanuel IV of Sardinia whose Queen is Marie-Clotilde de France [the younger sister of Louis XVI King of France who was guillotined 21st January, 1793]. King Charles Emmanuel was refusing to leave their base in Turin despite the threat of trial and execution.

Talleyrand, the French Foreign minister, is involved to persuade the royal family to leave on a tricky journey that was to take three months. Queen Marie-Clotilde was later to document these experiences in two chapters of her book.

The party left on the night of 7th December, 1798. Chipault has 100 Hussars to escort the Royal Family to the safety of the port of Leghorn [known as Livorno today]. Difficult mountain passes and crossing the River Po are some of the natural hazards encountered as well as hostile locals.

At a republican tree planting ceremony in Casale 19th December, 1798, the Royal Coach is defended from a mob of 5,000 by Chipault's Hussars. There can be no advance warning of the Royal Party's journey as its progress could be endangered.

At Parma, they are met by Prince Victor Emmanuel, Duke of Aosta. Chipault's military record states that in Parma he saved the Duke's life by protecting him from a group of Piedmontese insurgents and is gifted a large jewel by the Duke in reward.

Their route to avoid danger took them over several dangerous mountain passes when on one occasion, the coach was almost lost but *'although one of the wheels just went over the edge and the carriage was left hanging over the precipice, it was held onto the road apparently by the snow in which the other wheel was embedded.'*

Meeting and saving the life of Pope Pius VI:

At Firenze [Florence], the mission visits the nearby Certosa de Firenze Monastery where Pope Pius VI has been imprisoned for six months having been captured in the Vatican by the French.

The plan of the 'Directoire' in Paris [the controlling group of five of the early revolutionary politicians – **see image on next page**] is for Chipault to take the Pope to exile in Sardinia as well.

The Five Leaders of France – The Directory



Three weeks pass but the Pope is too unwell to travel. Chipault sympathises with Papacy and even arranges for Sardinian Royals to meet the Pope who still cannot be persuaded to travel. Chipault organises further medical assessment by three other physicians about the Pope's lack of fitness to travel which is again confirmed.

By his actions, effectively countermanding his orders to ensure the Pope flees to Sardinia, he saves the Pope but, in consequence, the Directoire deny him promotion.

On 3rd March, 1799, he is assaulted at Firenze, stripped of his uniform and robbed of the jewel [the reward given to him by the Duke of Aosta] is stolen. Italian soldiers observe the assault but offer no intervention. Chipault is compensated for his losses by the Italians who are also made to apologise but **they** are aware that Chipault's journey that day was an attempt to sell the jewel in the first place!!

Pope Pius VI died in 1799. The next Pope, Pius VII, would declare Marie-Clotilde the 'Venerable' Marie-Clotilde. [Veneration – the first step to sainthood in the Catholic Church].

Later military career:

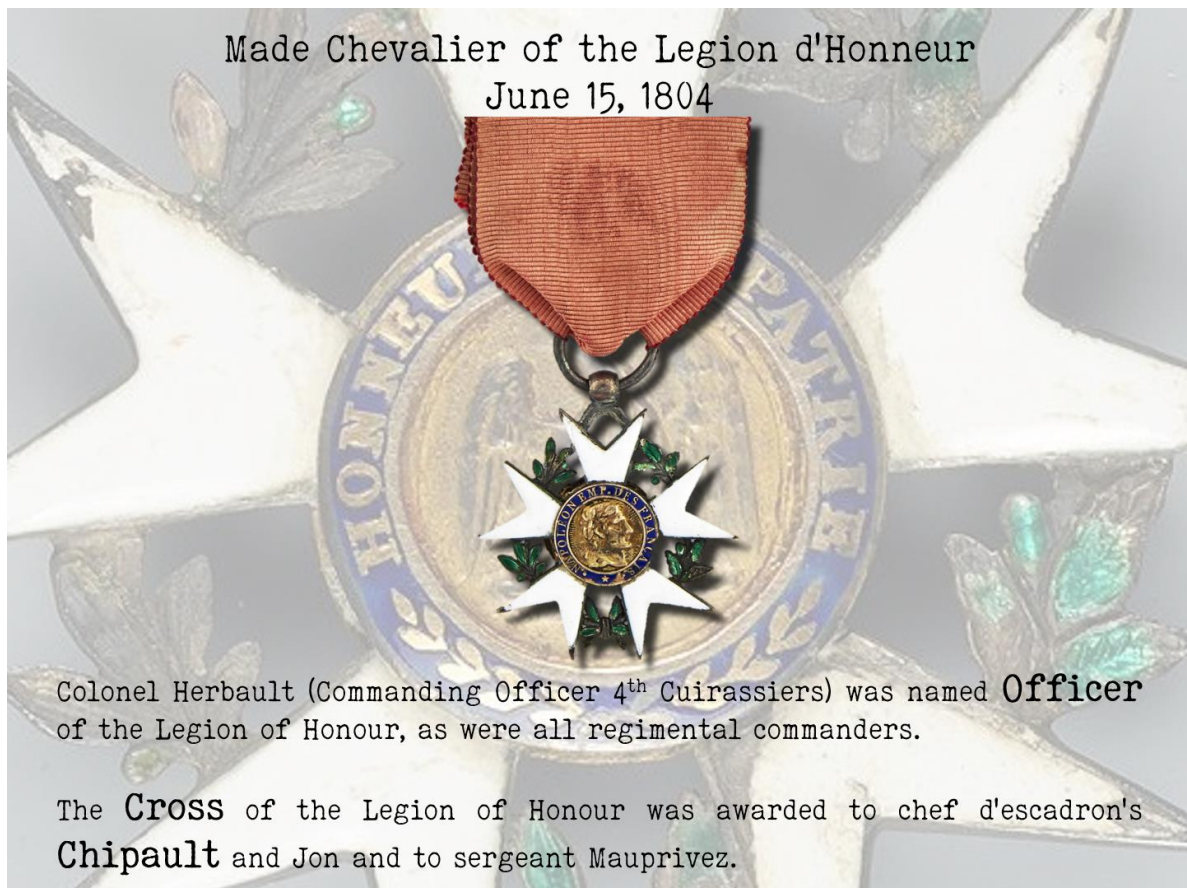
In June, 1799, the fighting in North Italy had resumed. It is here Chipault is captured, stripped of all belongings and left to languish as 'prisoner number 13' in solitary confinement, a shackled POW in an Austrian dungeon for twenty-two months. His Commanding Officer General Joubert had been killed in the fighting in August, 1799. Chipault's incarceration contrasts sharply with the more typical

favourable conditions for captured Officers of both sides when a signed 'parole' would allow comforts befitting their rank.

Chipault had a necessary 1-2 years of recuperation after this imprisonment.

In January, 1803, he becomes a Cuirassier in the 4th Regiment de Chasseurs eventually becoming 2nd in command of the regiment. [The regimental officer structure was a Colonel and two Captains - Chipault was 2nd in command because he was the more senior Captain]. He will spend five years with the 4th Regiment de Chasseurs.

On 5th June, 1804, Chipault is awarded the Chevalier [= 'Knight'] of the Légion d'Honneur. There are four or five awards per regiment which reflected largely on rank but also on a recipient's earlier service. Some 4,000 awards are all awarded individually by Napoléon Bonaparte in a ceremony which takes six hours!



Pictured above: Knight's class Légion d'Honneur awarded to Chipault by Napoléon Bonaparte.

On 2nd December, 1804, he is one of 343 Officers invited to the Coronation of Napoléon Bonaparte [note that Pope Pius VII is invited as an observer].



Pictured above: The Coronation of Napoléon Bonaparte 2nd December, 1804.

Inset top right: Chipault listed on the guest list for Cuirassiers.

Subsequent career and wounding:

France invades Germany and defeats the Prussians at Berlin in 1806.

Russian Campaign – Maréchal Lefebvre captures Danzig thus protecting the French Army so it can travel east.

At Marianwerder 12th February, 1807 with Chipault in command, there was a great success of 150 French defeating 800 Prussian dragoons. Many prisoners were taken. Chipault is again wounded having two horses killed under him. The Cuirassiers were very much the ‘shock troops’ of their day.

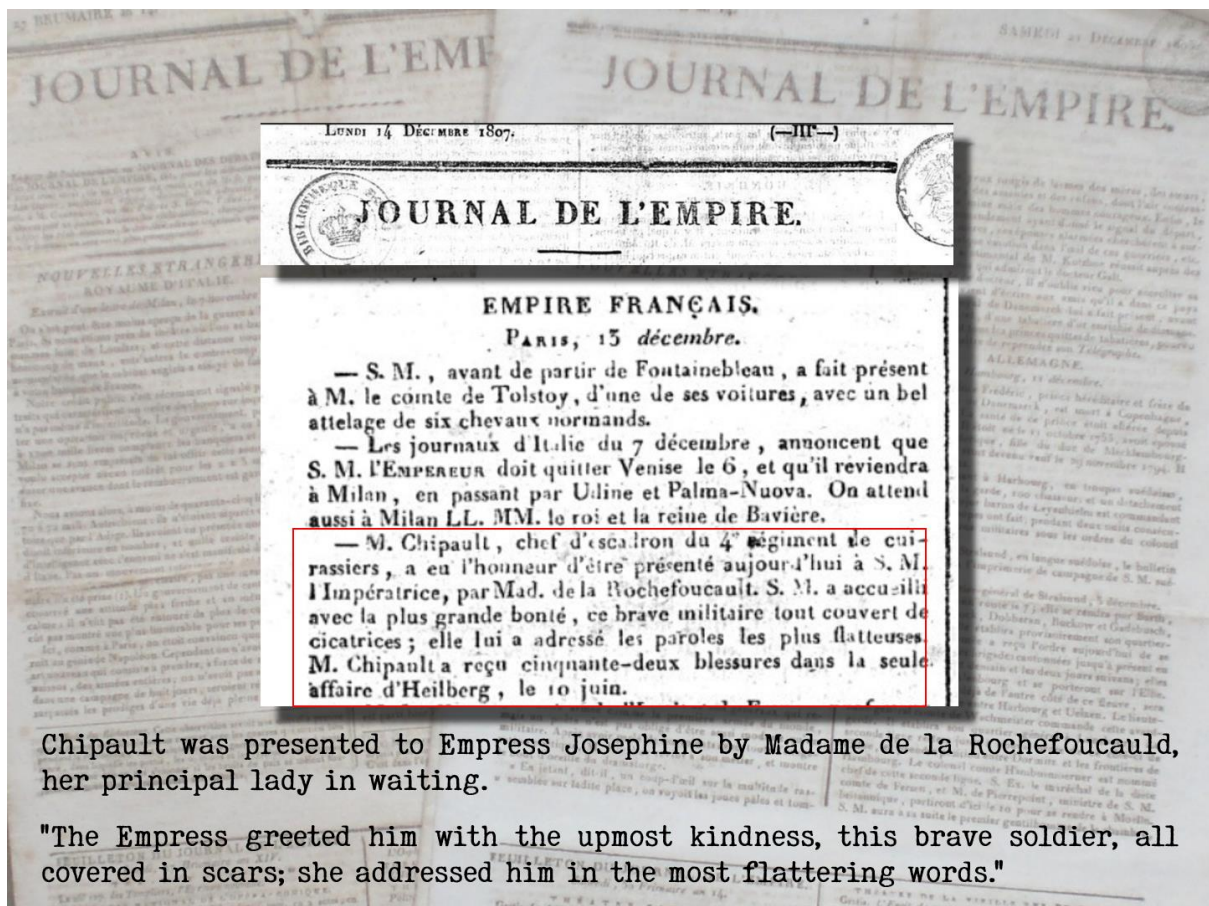
At the Battle of Heilsberg, 10th June, 1807, the Regimental Commander Colonel Houblot is seriously wounded in the first of five cavalry charges that day - the title of Commander goes to Chipault.

Chipault loses his helmet in the very first charge leaving his head very exposed to the efforts of enemy cavalry. He sustains multiple wounds during these charges but refuses to leave the battlefield. He was eventually incapacitated after being hit by a musket ball in the body and arm. Despite blood loss and being covered in blood, he is told to leave by General Savary but still refuses – he is after all Commander of the 4th Cuirassiers! Eventually, Chipault is ordered to leave the battlefield by General Espagne.

On 8th August, 1807, his wounds are documented by 4th Cuirassier Regimental Surgeon-Major Labouisse. He counts and certifies 52 wounds of various sorts [sword and lance wounds to his head, chest, hands and sacrum].

The details of important court events were published in the French government's 'Journal de L'Empire' [typically detailing state affairs and promotions and similar to the 'London Gazette']

In the publication dated 14th Dec, 1807 a very cordial meeting is documented between Chipault and the Empress Joséphine as '**Chef de Squadron 4th Cuirassiers is presented to Empress Joséphine**'. The usual ranks referred to in this Journal are General and higher! The reason for the encounter appears as a result of Chipault presenting himself at the Tuileries Palace asking to see Empress Joséphine. The request is taken by Joséphine's lady-in-waiting Madame de la Rochefoucauld as Chipault appeared a forlorn, scarred soldier who had been forgotten and insufficiently rewarded by the state.



Chipault was presented to Empress Josephine by Madame de la Rochefoucauld, her principal lady in waiting.

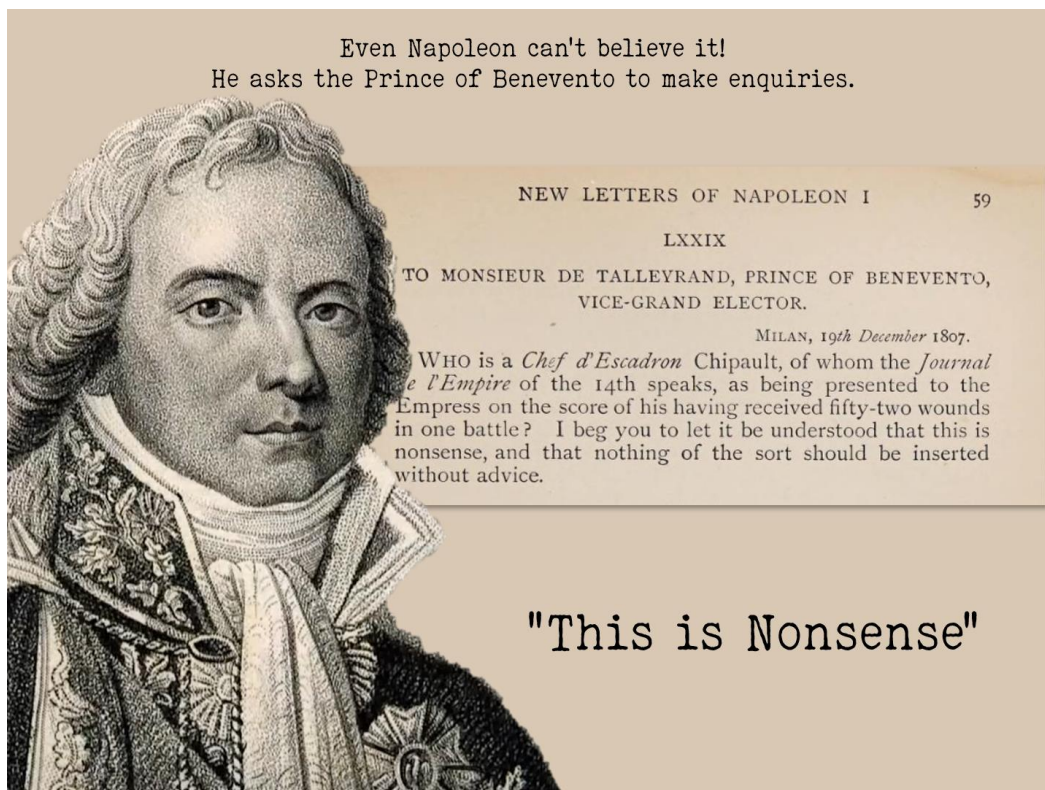
"The Empress greeted him with the upmost kindness, this brave soldier, all covered in scars; she addressed him in the most flattering words."

Pictured above: Chipault's meeting with Empress Joséphine is recorded in the Journal de L'Empire.



Pictured above: Napoléon Bonaparte reacts to the article detailing Chipault and Empress Joséphine's meeting.

Pictured below: Napoléon Bonaparte enquires of Chipault and his injuries.



Napoléon Bonaparte was soon to read the same article and thought the report was ‘nonsense’ that so many injuries could be survivable but requested confirmation through Talleyrand. They soon have the evidence of Maréchal Lefebvre, General Espagne on the battlefield and also the report of Surgeon-Major Labouisse. Very rapidly, General Denis made arrangements for the award of an Officer grade Légion d’Honneur.

Chipault is transferred to a new regiment the 6th Hussars, promoted to Major and posted to Padua near Venice, Italy. A miniature portrait is painted of him with the silver epaulettes of his new rank and wearing his Légion d’Honneur. Such portraits would show the Officer without any wounds.



Above left and right: The two portraits of Chipault [see text for more information].

Other information:

Before 1803 [but not after], a ‘Sabre d’Honneur’ could be awarded to cavalymen in respect of gallant action. That Chipault received a Sabre d’Honneur is referred to in an article titled ‘Recherche Histoires de la Ville d’Orléans’ written by the family and published in 1847. In this article, there are some errors in Chipault’s personal identifiers [e.g. rank stated as Colonel but he was a Captain and the meeting date with Empress Joséphine 12th December, 1807 is incorrect] but the article does reflect correctly his military career, relates his meeting with Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte and Empress Joséphine and part of the conversation was how Chipault had saved Pope Pius VI’s life. The article states he was presented with a ‘Sabre d’Honour’ but presumably what was really meant was **he’d received the Legion d’Honneur** as well as a snuffbox from Napoléon Bonaparte.

The ‘Order of the Two Sicilies’ medal:

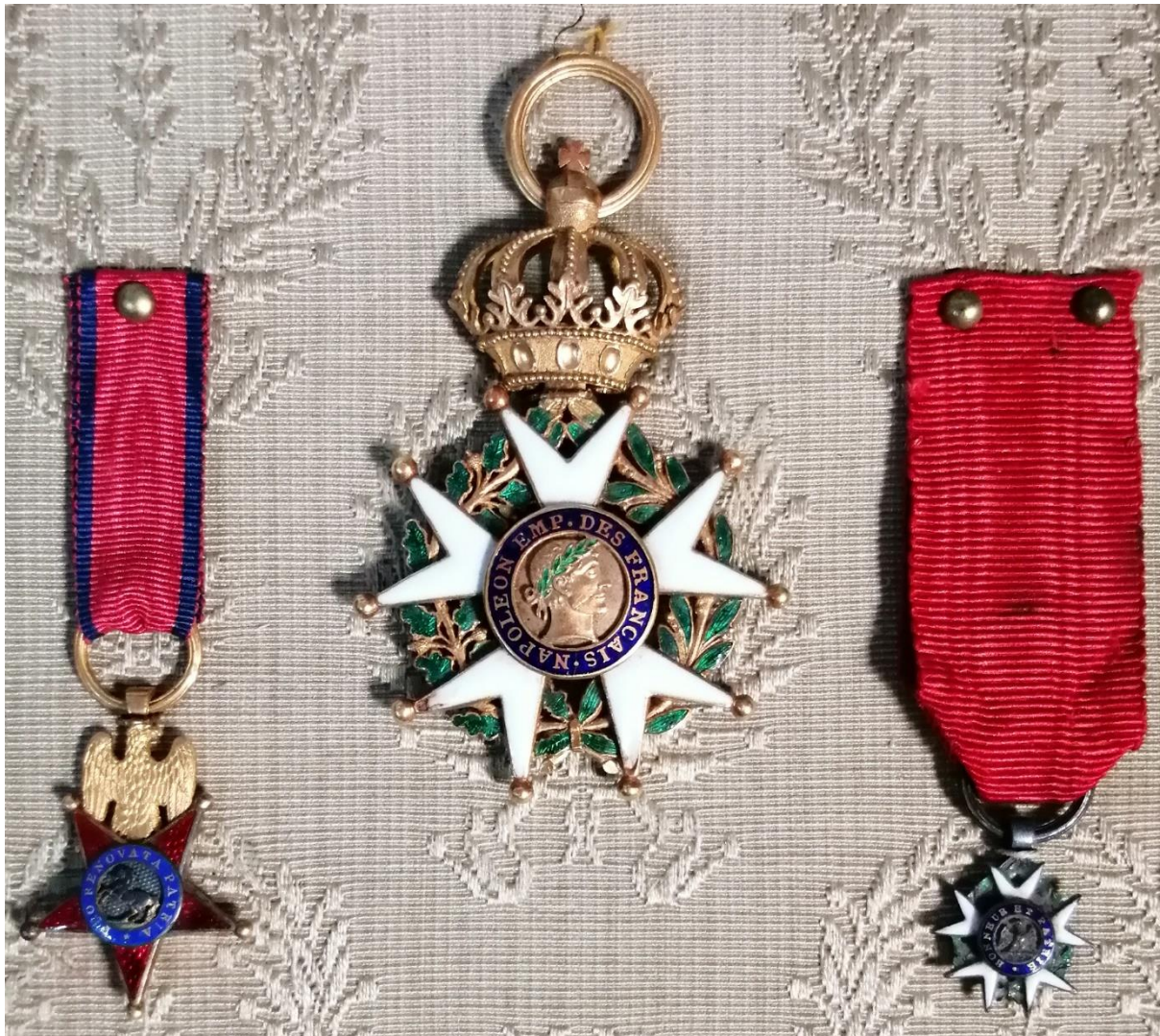
Between 1808-1814, Napoléon’s brother Joseph Bonaparte, King of Naples, institutes an exclusive order known as the ‘Order of the Two Sicilies’.

The numbers awarded were as follows: Fifty for dignatories, one hundred for commanders and six hundred and fifty for knights.

Two types were awarded – ‘with’ or ‘without crowns’. The Order is much rarer without the crowns. Chipault writes to Maréchal Murat [his old Commanding Officer] to request an ‘Order of the Two Sicilies! Murat remembers in writing Chipault’s services and fine conduct at the Battle of Heilsberg and makes sure he is awarded the Order of the Two Sicilies.

Chipault died 24.2.1809. The whereabouts of his grave is unknown but must be in Northern Italy where he had died. Chipault had married Anne Rabier with whom he had a daughter. Chipault's name and rank is marked on Anne Rabier's headstone. Napoléon Bonaparte founded schools for the education of orphaned daughters of his soldiers who were Légion d'Honneur winners. They were called the 'Maisons d'éducation de la Légion d'Honneur'.

His medal trio was returned to Anne Rabier who had carefully mounted them on a piece of table cloth on which they remain displayed. [**Image below**: Chipault's Trio of French awards].



After much post talk discussion, President Roger Bragger thanked our speaker for his enlightening and entertaining talk!

Meeting notes prepared 15.1.2022-6.2.2022

With my usual apologies for any typos or errors.

Chris Davies BMS Secretary

Full permission for use of photos and powerpoint slides has been obtained from our speaker.