

Extracted from the Regimental Chronicle of
The Oxfordshire Light Infantry 1894

A HISTORY OF REGIMENTAL HEAD-DRESSES.
1741 - 1894

The Light Infantry soldier has not always been unrecognizable from his brother of the Line, for, until the introduction of the present pattern helmet, the Light Infantryman generally wore something to distinguish him as such. Now, although Highlanders, Riflemen, and Fusiliers wear hats of varied pattern, the Light Infantry soldier has to content himself with a "shade of green" which, at half a dozen yards, might be blue or black. The powers that arrange such minor details doubtless have good reasons for their disregard of Regimental feelings; but if we can boast at present no head-dress worth speaking about, at any rate we can have the satisfaction of looking back at the hats of our ancestors, who doubtless, in donning them, had feelings akin to the Pharisee, and thanked God that they were not as other men.

To attempt to record every little change in a century and a half would be almost an impossibility, yet we have, by carefully searching all available records, been able to collect a certain amount of information regarding the head-dresses worn at different periods by the 43rd and 52nd, and, with the assistance of our artist, we now lay down our kits for inspection.



1741.



GRENADIER COMPANY, 1741.

To go back to the earliest times, we find that from 1741 to 1768 the three-cornered hat was the universal head-dress of the Infantry of the Army. Fusilier Regiments and the Grenadier Companies of all Regiments wore the conical Grenadier hat. The men's head-dress was bound with white lace, and the Officers' with silver lace both in the 43rd and in the 52nd. The Grenadier hats were made of cloth, stiffened with buckram. The front was white in the 43rd and black in the 52nd; the back was scarlet in both Regiments, and elaborately embroidered in coloured silks and worsted. The front flap was scarlet in both corps with *Nec aspera terrent* and the "White Horse" embroidered in white. The turn-up back flap was of the colour of the Regimental facing, like the front of the hat.

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1768.



GRENADIER COMPANY, 1768.

In 1768, as will be seen from the sketch, the "cock" of the hat was considerably altered, and the Grenadier cloth hat was superseded by a bear-skin hat with black japanned plate in front, on which the King's Crest and *Nee aspera terrent* appeared in relief, in white metal for the men, and silver for the Officers of both Regiments.

At this period a Company was formed in each Battalion, called at first the "Picquet," afterwards the "Light" Company. A great variety of head-dresses, differing regimentally, was worn by them; some wore helmets similar to the Light Dragoons, others ordinary beaver hats with bear-skin crests, but what patterns the 43rd and 52nd adopted unfortunately the records do not say. Later on, about 1790, certain Regiments were permitted to wear feathers in their hats of various colours. This was conferred for distinguished services, and hence probably arose the expression "a feather in his cap."

In 1792 the "cock" again changed, and in 1798 the hats increased to colossal proportions, and a red and white feather was ordered to be worn universally, except by the Grenadiers, who wore white in their bearskins, and the Light Companies, who wore green in their helmets or hats.



1792.



1798.

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In 1800 the shako was issued to all infantry soldiers, even the Grenadiers, who, however, wore bearskins on great occasions. The Officers still wore their huge cocked hats, but fore-and-aft instead of broadside on. The Officers of Light Companies and Light Infantry Corps were ordered to wear shakoes like their men, with a green feather. The first pattern (worn in Egypt) was straight up and down, and received the nickname of the "smoke-jack." In ensuing years it became more conical in shape, and was in use in many corps as late as Waterloo. Our illustration represents this as worn in the Regiment in 1805.

General Order.—" In future, the use of hats is to be entirely abolished throughout the whole of the Infantry of the Army, and instead thereof caps are to be worn, of which a sealed pattern has, by order of His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief, been deposited in the office of the Controller of Army Accounts, there to be had recourse to as occasion may require.

"His Majesty is pleased to permit the Colonels to engrave the number of their respective Regiments on each side of the lion on the lower part of the brass fronting; and likewise to the Regiments which are entitled to that distinction His Majesty grants permission to bear their badges in the centre of the Garter. The Grenadiers, who are allowed to wear these caps occasionally, when they do not use their proper Grenadier caps, may, if the Colonels choose it, bear the grenade in the same manner as Regiments entitled to them wear their badges. It is His Majesty's pleasure that the tufts used by the Grenadiers shall be white; those of the Light Infantry (who are likewise included in this order) dark green.

"All soldiers shall wear the button of their respective Regiments in the centre of the cockade except the Grenadiers who will use the grenade.

"The caps are to be made of a sufficient size to come completely on the soldiers' heads; they are to be worn straight and even, and brought forward well over the eyes.

"The Field and Staff Officers, as also the Officers of Battalion Companies, are to continue to wear hats as usual. The Grenadier Officers are permitted to wear hats when their men do not parade in dress caps. The Officers of the Light Companies are to wear caps similar to those ordered for the Light Infantry."



43RD OFFICER.



1809-16.



52ND OFFICER.

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The next change which we have to notice occurred in 1809, when a new pattern shako (closely copied from the head-dress worn at that period in the Austrian army) was issued, and ordered to be worn by both the Officers and the men; it was of felt, with a "false front" and a leather peak. The late Rev. J. R. Gleig, who was an authority on these matters, described the pattern worn by Light Infantry Regiments as having a much lower front, and as being much smaller at the top, than that worn by the Line; the badge was a bugle-horn in brass, and the feather and cap-lines were green; the men's feathers were worn at the side, while those of the Officers' were worn in front; the peak of this shako could be worn up or down. There was a slight difference in the shako worn by the Officers of the 43rd and 52nd, that of the former being conical, with a green feather and a gilt bugle as a badge, while that of the latter was cylindrical in shape, with a stiff peak, small neat green feather, and a silver bugle badge. There is in the Print Room of the British Museum a coloured plate (published in 1812 by Hamilton Smith, who was an Assistant Adjutant-General at the Horse Guards) in which a private of the 52nd is shown as wearing a similar shako to the Officer; this, however, is certainly an error. The undress (or forage-cap) of this period was somewhat peculiar, and resembled a night-cap; it was of white with the number in front. With this headdress was worn the sleeved white waist-coat having Regimental facings.



1809.



1820.

Throughout the Peninsular War the head-dress remained unchanged, but shortly after Waterloo the broad-topped shako was issued. Light Infantrymen wore long green hackle feathers, brass chin-scales and badges, black cockades with Regimental buttons, and neck-guards at the back, which could be let down in bad weather. The Officers of the 43rd wore heavy drooping plumes (green), silver lace round the top of the shako, silver ornaments, and black cockade and cap-lines. The 52nd Officers wore a similar shako with high green hackle feathers, and silver lace and mountings.



43RD, 1826.



52ND, 1826.

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In 1830 the black cockade was abolished, and in 1831 a smaller shako was introduced both for Officers and men; this was surmounted by a green ball-tuft for Light Infantry Corps, and a white feather for others. The plate was a large star of brass for the men and of gilt metal for the Officers, the Regimental number appearing within a bugle (silver for Officers); chin scales of the same metal as the plate. This was the first date at which a recognized forage cap was adopted by Officers (they previously wearing any cap they liked); it was of dark green cloth, with a band and a welt round the top of Regimental facing, but without badge or numeral. About 1836 this band was changed to one of black oak-leaf lace.



1832.



1832.



1832.

The broad-topped shako remained in use until about 1846, when the Albert shako, surmounted by a green ball, was introduced. The men's plates were circular, the Regimental number appearing within a laurel wreath under a bugle; the chin-strap was of black leather with brass bosses. The Officers' shako was ornamented with a gilt star, chin-chains replacing the scales. At this period the men wore round woven-worsted forage caps with brass badges (bugle and number beneath), and the crowns of the Officers' forage-caps were greatly reduced.



1852.



1852.

Officers 1852



Privates 1852

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In 1857 the Albert shako was altered in shape, and the pattern was the same for both Officers and men, the latter, of course, wearing brass mountings. A drooping green goat's-hair plume superseded the ball-tuft, and the Officers wore leather chin-straps like the men. The Officers' forage-cap now had a straight peak, and was much smaller in the crown than formerly. This pattern continued to be worn until 1880, but in later years was somewhat smarter in appearance and "capped" to fit the back of the head.



1857.



1856-80.

In India, where both the 43rd and 52nd were serving at this time, the Officers and men wore forage-caps with peaks, and white quilted covers and neck-guards. The sun-helmet had been introduced in some corps, but it was not worn by either the 43rd or 52nd until some years later. About the year 1862 the shako, hitherto of beaver, was replaced by a much smaller one of cloth, quilted all over and rather soft in the crown; it had a ventilating button at each side near the top, and a very small star in front.



1857.



1862-70.

The Officers and men wore the same pattern, except that the Officers' badge had the Regimental number within the bugle.

About 1866 the men's round forage-cap was superseded by the glengarry, dark green in colour, and with a badge consisting of a bugle and the Regimental number within. The Officers' cap badge at this date was a bugle with strings, and the Regimental number underneath in gold embroidery. The Officers of the 52nd continued to wear this cap badge until the abolition of numbers, but the Officers of the 43rd, in 1869, adopted a badge with the number within the bugle.

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1866-94.



1872.

In 1870 a stiff-crowned shako, with a laurel wreath plate, took the place of the old soft-crowned shako. The men's shako was ornamented with a light green line round, the top and two similar lines round the base, while the Officers had two lines of gold braid (one line of gold lace for Majors, two for Colonels and Lt.-Colonels), and single lines round the base and sides. The hair plume continued in wear for several years, but was eventually superseded by the black ball-tuft.

In 1872 the 43rd went to India, where the Officers and' men wore the white sun-helmet, with brass chin-chains but no other ornaments. The helmet was given a glaze by means of white-of-egg and pipe-clay, and the puggaree consisted of two rolls of padded cloth (also glazed); brass spikes were worn on full-dress parades. On the introduction of khaki uniform, a cover of that colour was issued for the helmets and worn on "khaki parades."



1878.



1878.

In 1880 the Officers' forage-cap underwent a change, a new pattern being introduced. "Dark green cloth, straight up, three inches high, with black patent leather drooping peak. "The peak ornamented with half-inch full gold embroidery. Band 1/2 inches wide, of black oak-leaf lace. Field-Officers a gold French braid welt instead of green cloth round the top of the cap. Badge, a bugle with strings and the Regimental number inside, in gold embroidery on a green cloth ground."

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1881 saw the introduction of the helmet (a modified form of the German head-dress) which is still worn. On 1st July of this year, all numbered badges, both for Officers and men, were abolished, and the forage-cap badge became for Officers a bugle with strings, and for the men a bugle within a circle, on which was inscribed "Oxfordshire Light Infantry." At this time a second, or undress, cap was authorised for the Officers, "for active service and peace manoeuvres"; it was a glengarry similar to that worn by the men, except that the badge was a plain silver bugle.



1880-94.



1881-94.

In 1885 the Officers of the 43rd adopted a "field service" cap of the pattern of the men's present forage cap, with a white welt round the top and a green and white cord boss in front. About the same time the Officers of the 52nd adopted a somewhat similar cap, having a button and gold cord in front and at the back. These patterns remained in wear until 1892, when the present "field service" cap was introduced into the two Battalions; it is almost identically the same cap as worn by the men, except that it has a black cord boss in front and the badge is a silver bugle.



43RD, 1885.



52ND, 1885.

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The helmet worn at home at the present day, and. referred to above as having been introduced in 1881, is of the same pattern as that of all Line Regiments, except that the cloth is green instead of blue. The Officers' badge is as follows : —."In silver, on a ground of black enamel, a bugle with strings. On the universal scroll, 'The Oxfordshire Light Infantry.' The plate is of gilding, not of gilt metal." The men's helmet is very similar to the Officers' but without the metal bindings.



1881-94.



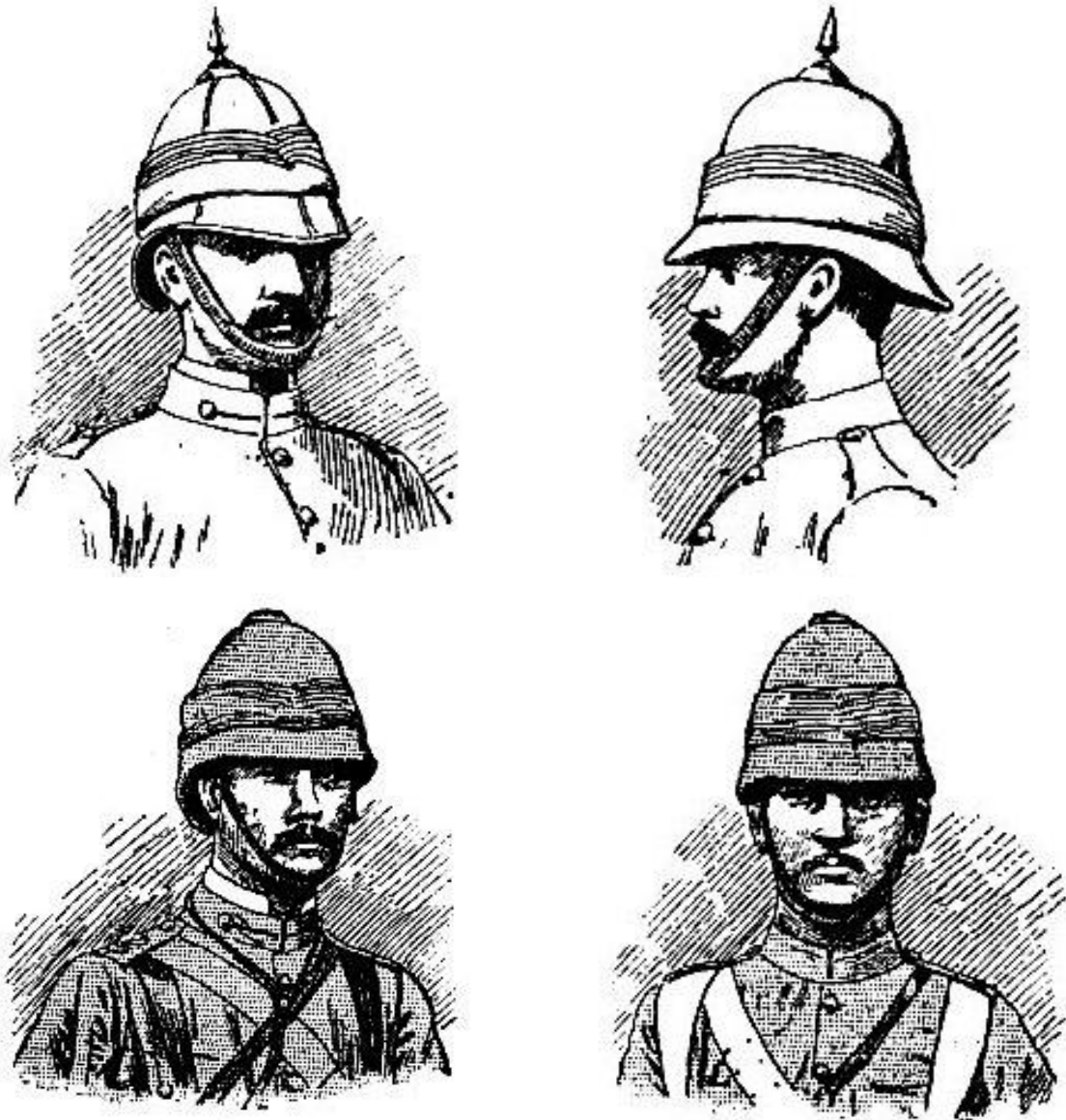
OFFICER, 1892.



PRIVATE, 1894.

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The Battalion abroad wears the ordinary white helmet, with white cloth puggaree, brass spike and curb-chain. With *khaki* clothing a *khaki* cover is worn on the helmet, and a button takes the place of the spike, a *khaki* puggaree also being worn instead of the white one.



Our illustrations are from drawings by the well-known military artist, Mr. R. Simkin, to whom we are also indebted for much valuable information regarding the different changes in the head-dresses.