

# The Connoisseur

November 1971

£1.00

\$3.00 U.S.A.









# Mitred Soldiers and the Role of Grenadiers

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INFANTRY regiments raised after the restoration of Charles II in 1660 consisted of one or sometimes two battalions, each of which usually numbered ten to twelve companies. At first, the companies were armed as musketeers and pikemen, the former outnumbering the latter by two to one. These proportions were maintained until 1678 when, following the style of the continental armies, companies of grenadiers were introduced into the 'eight old regiments of Foot'.<sup>1</sup> At first, a certain number of men were selected from each existing company for duty as grenadiers but shortly afterwards the grenadiers of each regiment were formed into a separate company. It was positioned on the right flank of the battalion and was usually of the same strength as a battalion company. That is, it consisted of one captain, two subalterns, three sergeants, three corporals and one hundred privates. Gradually grenadier companies were introduced into every infantry regiment and a troop of mounted grenadiers was added to each of the three troops of horse guards.

The grenadiers were the picked men of the regiment, chosen for their height, strength and dexterity, qualities required for carrying their heavy equipment and throwing the hand-grenades with which they were armed. In a short time, because they were specially selected, they came to be regarded as the premier company of the battalion and the cream of the regiment. In 1678, their arms and equipment, besides the grenade, consisted of a fusil with a sling, a cartridge box with a girdle, a grenade pouch, a hatchet and a bayonet.<sup>2</sup> They also carried a matchbox and, from 1688, a hanger, a small slightly curved sword. The grenadiers were often employed on particularly dangerous missions and were expected to be first in the attack, using their hatchets to hew down obstructions and their grenades to clear the enemy.

The status of a grenadier in 1705 is illustrated in the play, *The Recruiting Officer* when Sergeant Kite says, 'Besides I don't beat up for common soldiers: no I list only granadeers, granadeers, gentlemen. Pray gentlemen, observe this cap – this is the cap of honour; it dubs a man a gentleman in the drawing of a trigger, and he that has the good fortune to be born six feet high was born to be a great man'.<sup>3</sup>

The cap to which Kite refers is peculiar to grenadiers. When the first grenadier companies were formed they were issued with a cap, which is said to have been more convenient than the usual

wide-brimmed hat, as grenadiers had to sling their fusils when handling the grenades. Its shape is difficult to determine but it seems to have been on the lines of a fisherman's or brewer's cap, being made of cloth with the hood or bag hanging down behind, often with a tassel at the end and with an edging of fur. Its origins are also obscure, but its similarity to the caps worn by the Turkish janissaries has led to the suggestion that it was borrowed by the continental armies from the Turks, at that time a leading military nation. The diarist John Evelyn describing his impressions of a review on Hounslow Heath in June, 1678, wrote: 'Now were brought into service a new sort of soldiers called Granadeers who were dexterous in flinging hand-grenades, every one having a pouch full: they had furred caps with coped crowns like Janizaries which made them look very fierce, and



## Colour plates

Above left. Grenadier officer's cap bearing the cypher of Queen Anne; the Honourable Artillery Company, c. 1710 (6005-158). On loan from The Victoria and Albert Museum, reproduced by permission of The Director. Above right. Grenadier officer's cap (front), 43rd Regiment of Foot, 1740-49 (6406-30).

Below left. Grenadier officer's cap (back), 43rd Regiment of Foot, 1740-49. Below right. Grenadier cap believed to have been worn by Captain Robert Parker, the Royal Regiment of Ireland, c. 1710 (5909-257).

1. Grenadier's cap, 49th Cholmondeley's Regiment of Foot, 1747-48 (6902-1).





2. Grenadiers of the 1st and 3rd Foot Guards and the Coldstream Guards, c. 1751. Oil on canvas, by David Morier, on loan to the National Army Museum. Reproduced by gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

some had long hoods hanging down behind, as we picture fools. Their clothing being likewise piebald, yellow and red'.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly afterwards, the furred caps began to give way to cloth ones, still with a bag at the back but with a raised and stiffened front which bore the embroidered crown and cypher of the sovereign or the colonel's crest, the edges trimmed with lace. At the back on a circular cloth panel was embroidered a flaming grenade. Francis Sandford, *Lancaster Herald* at the coronation of James II in 1685, describes the dress of the First Regiment of Foot Guards and states that the grenadiers were distinguished by caps of red cloth lined with blue shaloon, and laced with silver galoon about the edges.<sup>5</sup> He describes the frontlets of the caps as being embroidered with the king's cypher and crown.

The stiffened front of these caps was generally fairly low and pointed but there were variations. A portrait of Francis Hawley a grenadier officer of the First Regiment of Foot Guards during the reign of James II, shows the cap with a square-shaped front. Similar caps are illustrated in a print of 1698 where William, Duke of Gloucester, as a child, is drilling a company of small boys dressed as grenadiers. The price of a grenadier's cap at this time was eight shillings.

The pointed stiffened front gradually became taller, low turn-ups developed at the front and back and during the reign of Queen Anne the bag became stiffened, its tassel thus appearing as though mounted on a cone. The grenadier cap had now the form of a bishop's mitre. It was not a sudden change, as the *Blenheim* tapestries, for instance, show some grenadier caps with the bag stiffened while on others it hangs down. Even the fur cap had evidently not yet entirely disappeared, since an advertisement in 1708 for deserters from the grenadier company of Colonel Wynn's regiment describes one as wearing a cap faced with bear's fur.

Generally, however, the embroidered cloth cap was worn. The

stiffened bag was usually of red cloth while the front and the turn-ups at back and front were of the regimental facing colour. The front continued to be elaborately embroidered with devices from the coat of arms of the colonel of the regiment while the turn-ups were embroidered with swords, muskets, grenades, laurel sprays and similar devices. The richness and quality of the cap depended on how much the colonel was prepared to spend on his troops.

A fine example (see colour plate) from this period in the National Army Museum is believed to have been worn by Captain Robert Parker, who served with the Royal Regiment of Ireland from 1706 to 1718. It is blue with a red bag and bears an embroidered Irish harp and a crown, flanked by sprays of shamrock. The flap at the back is decorated with a flaming grenade and shamrock sprays. Of coarse cloth trimmed with yellow worsted lace, the cap is not of the quality normally associated with officers' clothing but possibly Captain Parker wore it on active service.

Another fine cap of the period (see colour plate) was made for the Honourable Artillery Company. The origin of the Company is unknown but as the Guild of St. George it was in existence in 1537. Its volunteer members, mostly London merchants with military experience, trained the common soldier in the defence of the realm and mainly officered the London Trained Bands, a form of the militia. From 1686, a number of the Company were trained in the duties of grenadiers and wore caps of crimson velvet. In 1711 the grenadiers were replaced by fusiliers but were re-established in 1714. The cap, which is on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum, is of crimson velvet, richly embroidered with the devices from the coat of arms of the Honourable Artillery Company flanked by Union flowers. The little flap bears the cypher of Queen Anne. On the back is an embroidered grenade.



In early Georgian times, the embroidered mitre cap bearing the colonel's devices continued to be worn. In Westminster Abbey, a memorial of Sir Charles Wills, Colonel of The Buffs, includes a representation in enamel of a grenadier of c. 1725. The front of his cap is buff, the regimental facing colour, and bears the crest of the Wills family. The little flap bears a black grenade with red flames.

With the accession of George II in 1727, serious efforts were made to standardise the dress of the army. These culminated in the issue of a Clothing Warrant in 1751.<sup>6</sup> One of the regulations contained in the warrant was that no colonel was to put his arms, crest, device or livery on any part of the appointments of his regiment. Another was that the regiments were to be known by the number of their ranking. Some of these regulations had already been adopted as numerous earlier orders all tended towards uniformity throughout the army and the curtailment of the licence which the colonels had previously been allowed. Two grenadier caps dating from the 1740s in the museum, for instance, bear the regiments' numbers and devices associated only with the sovereign. One is an officer's cap of the 43rd Regiment of Foot (see colour plate). The buff velvet front bears the sovereign's crown and cypher flanked by Union flowers. The little flap is embroidered with the badge of the House of Hanover, the white horse and the motto, *Nec aspera terrent* (Difficulties do not dismay us). On the back is an embroidered flaming grenade and the regimental number. In 1749 when the disbandment of some regiments caused re-numbering, the 43rd Regiment became the 42nd, later the Black Watch. Two years earlier, as a special distinction, the grenadiers of this regiment were allowed to wear black bearskin caps with the king's cypher and crown on a red cloth flap.

The other cap of this period belonged to a soldier in the 49th Cholmondeley's Regiment of Foot (No. 1). The coarse buff cloth front and the little flap of red cloth are embroidered with the royal devices. The back bears the grenade and the numeral '49'.

The Clothing Warrant of 1751 dealt with the mitre caps of grenadiers of the Marching Regiments (i.e. infantry of the line): 'The front of the Grenadiers Caps to be the same colour as the

facing of the Regiment, with the King's Cypher embroidered, and Crown over it; the little flap to be Red, with the White Horse and Motto over it, *Nec Aspera Terrent*; the back part of the cap to be Red, the turn-up to be the colour of the Front, with the Number of the Regiment in the Middle part behind. The Royal Regiments, and the Six Old Corps differ from the foregoing Rule as specified hereafter'.

The three regiments of Foot Guards, the Royal Regiments and the Six Old Corps were authorised to use a special badge instead of the royal cypher. This was the beginning of the use of a regimental badge as part of the dress of the British army.

An interesting series of oil studies in the collection of Her Majesty the Queen was painted by David Morier, an artist of Swiss origin, who enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Cumberland. They represent a soldier of every regiment in the regular army and appear to agree with the 1751 regulations, the infantry being represented by a grenadier of each regiment. Details of dress are shown very clearly and it is believed that the paintings were made from actual uniforms. Morier's painting of the grenadiers of the three regiments of Foot Guards (No. 2) shows all three wearing blue fronted caps with a device consisting of the Cross of St. George on the Cross of St. Andrew, all on a blue ground within the Garter. The whole is superimposed on a white rayed star.



3. Grenadier officer's cap worn by Lieutenant Averell Daniel, the 2nd (or Queen's Royal) Regiment, c. 1760 (5911-141). On loan from the Queen's Royal Surrey Regimental Museum. Reproduced by permission of the Regimental Headquarters, The Queen's Regiment (Queen's Surreys Office).





4. Grenadier officer's cap worn by Captain W. Stiell, 3rd Regiment of Foot (The Buffs), c. 1760 (6309-306).

Another regiment permitted to use its own device was the 2nd or Queen's Own Royal Regiment. A grenadier officer's cap worn by Lieutenant Averell Daniel (No. 3), who served as an ensign and lieutenant in the regiment between 1757 and 1770, survives. The red velvet cap has a 'sea-green' velvet front. Its rich embroidery includes the Garter surrounding the cypher of Queen Catherine of Braganza. Below, embroidered on a scroll is the regimental motto, *Pristinae virtutis memor* (Mindful of our ancient valour). The back is embroidered with silver wire laurel leaves and a gold wire flaming grenade with the numeral '2' on the ball.

Another fine example of the embroidered mitre cap of this period (No. 4) belonged to Captain W. Stiell who served with the 3rd Regiment, or The Buffs, from 1756 to 1775. The cap is of regulation pattern, the front being of buff velvet. It is embroidered with the regimental device of a dragon encircled by the motto, *Veteri frondescit honore* (The glory of our fathers lives again in us). The back of the cap bears the Roman numeral III flanked by crossed swords and muskets. This example can be dated c. 1760.

A few years later, the grenadiers lost their embroidered mitre caps. A Clothing Warrant of 1768 ordered them to wear black bearskin caps with a metal frontal plate bearing the king's crest and the motto, *Nec aspera terrent*.<sup>7</sup> On the back they were to wear a grenade with the number of the regiment. The height of the cap, without the bearskin, was to be twelve inches. Later, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the cap became taller. It was worn with cords and tassels, and a white feather. In the 1830s it was twenty-one inches high with a chinstrap covered in metal scales. The white feather was worn on the left.

The grenadiers gave up the bearskin cap in 1842 when the shako was worn with a white ball tuft. Sixteen years later the abolition of grenadier companies was ordered.

#### NOTES

1. Royal Warrant, 13th April, 1678. P.R.O. W.O. Records.
2. Royal Warrant, 13th April, 1678. P.R.O. W.O. Records.
3. George Farquhar, 'The Recruiting Officer' (1705), Act I, Scene 1.
4. 'The Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn'. From the original manuscripts at Wotton. London, 1818.
5. Francis Sandford, 'History of the Coronation of James II', London, 1687.
6. Royal Warrant for Clothing, 1st July, 1751. P.R.O. W.O. 26/21.
7. Royal Warrant for Clothing, 19th December, 1768. P.R.O. W.O. 30/13.