Case 4 (2012-13): An officer’s embroidered grenadier cap

Expert adviser’s statement

Reviewing Committee Secretary’s note: Please note that any illustrations referred to have not been reproduced on the Arts Council England Website

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item

An officer’s embroidered grenadier cap, 27th (Enniskillen) Regiment, c1751-1768.

This type of cap, sometimes known as a ‘Mitre cap’ after its shape, was issued to grenadier companies in British Army infantry regiments during the mid-eighteenth century. Grenadiers were the elite soldiers of the age and this brimless highly decorated headgear distinguished them from other soldiers. Such caps were very expensive to manufacture and reflected the status of the wearer.

The cap is 31cm high by 26cm wide and manufactured from coloured cotton velvet with gold and silver embroidery, spangles and threads.

2. Context

There are many contemporary depictions of British soldiers wearing the ‘Mitre cap’, most famously David Morier’s ‘The Battle of Culloden” (1746) and Edward Penny’s “The death of Wolfe” (1763) [please see attachments].

3. Waverley criteria

The cap meets all of the Waverley criteria. In particularly:

- It is thought to be unique.
- It is of outstanding importance to the history of Enniskillen specifically, and Northern Ireland generally.
- It is of outstanding aesthetic quality.
- It is of outstanding importance to the history of Ireland and its relationship with the British Army.
DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

The officer's embroidered grenadier cap under review is thought to be a unique survivor from the Inniskilling Regiment, not represented in the collections of either the National Army Museum nor The Inniskillings Museum collection.

The NAM holds eleven similar grenadier caps from other British Army regiments dating between 1751-68, and more are thought to survive in regimental and private collections (please see: Cecil C P Lawson, A History of the Uniforms of the British Army: from the beginnings to 1760, Vol. II, p17. London, 1941 and also Appendix 1, attached). However, a strong case can be made that this cap is of outstanding importance to the local history of Enniskillen in particular and Northern Ireland in general. It certainly reflects an important period in the story of the British Army and its relationship with Ireland.

The origins of the regiment lie in a local force raised in defence of the town of Enniskillen against the catholic King James II. This regiment was originally known as 'Tiffin's Inniskillings' (after its first colonel) and was taken onto the establishment of the British Army in June 1689. It fought in Ireland and Flanders under William III, and was at the final defeat of the Jacobite cause at Culloden in 1746. In 1751, when foot regiments were given numbers to reflect their seniority, it became the 27th (or Inniskilling) Regiment, and was the first regiment in the army formally to boast a territorial element to its title, a fitting acknowledgement of the strong ties it maintained with the town of Enniskillen. Thereafter the regiment served with distinction at the capture of Montreal in 1760, Waterloo in 1815 (where it suffered the heaviest casualties of any British unit), the wars of empire of the nineteenth century and the world wars of the twentieth. Amalgamated in 1968, the regiment is today represented by the Royal Irish regiment.

The design on the grenadier cap depicts the Castle of Enniskillen (centre) with the flag of St George, above the motto nec aspera terrent (“by difficulty undaunted”) and the White Horse of Hanover – a symbol of the British Hanoverian kings. The whole is surmounted by an embroidered royal crown. Interestingly, Enniskillen is spelt in the traditional Irish manner used today, rather than the Anglicized Inniskilling more commonly adopted by the regiment and the British Army.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item.

It's most outstanding significance lies in its potential use and display for telling the story of soldiering in Northern Ireland – both from a military and social
history perspective. The origins of the regiment and its close ties with both the town of Enniskillen and the British Crown are clearly reflected in the iconography of the embroidered badges.

The survival of other similar caps from this period in publicly accessible collections lessens the overall significance of the object as a primary source of information about grenadiers’ headgear in the eighteenth century. However, this does not undermine its status as a significant relic of Irish history.

The quality of the gold and silver thread embroidery is of the same very high standard found in other officers’ caps from this period. However, grenadier caps were never uniform in design, making each cap unique. Although a template would have been used, considerable variation is seen in, for example, the execution of the White Horse of Hanover. Methods of stitching vary as well as the quality of the work.

This cap is of outstanding aesthetic quality, showing the buff-facing colour of the regimental uniform on the main body of the cap. There does not appear to be moth damage, or missing spangles, and the embroidery is skillfully applied. Such a cap would have been of considerable cost – possibly as much as 20 shillings in the money of the time, or the equivalent of four weeks pay for a manual labourer.

RECOMMENDATION:

The cap is a unique example of a type of headdress worn by grenadier officers of the Enniskillen Regiment in the mid-eighteenth century. It is manufactured to the highest standards of the age and represents a significant cultural artifact for the region.