

FIRST WORLD WAR BATTALION PATCHES FOR THE FOOT GUARDS

by Alan Jeffreys

The use of distinguishing marks on soldiers' uniforms began to be used generally during the First World War from about 1915 onwards, in the form of coloured or embroidered cloth patches on the back or shoulders, signs being devised for divisions, brigades, battalions and companies. In 1916, 41st Division used the Divisional sign of a white diagonal stripe against different coloured backgrounds to denote different brigades and divisional troops. Elsewhere, some brigades adopted their own signs. For example, 19 Brigade adopted a butterfly of which Captain Dunn commented 'one of the men defined as "an insect" that does as they does, it flies from one (obscene) flower to another.'¹ At battalion level, the 1/5th Leceisters adopted a yellow patch which, according to the unit history 'were rather bright at first, and earned us the name (amongst other ruder epithets) of the "Corn-plasters".'² In the plans for the Battle of the Somme, a small number of battalion patches were even listed and described in Corps orders.³ Distinguishing marks were also used tactically and by 1916 it was acknowledged that they were particularly useful in night assaults and raids.⁴ But there was little commonality in the way these very low level signs were employed. For example, runners in 21st Division during the Battle of the Somme wore a two-inch square yellow badge on each forearm whereas runners in 8th Division in the October 1916 attack on Le Transloy wore bright green brassards.⁵

By 1917 most units had adopted a battalion patch and the War Office compiled a list with colour diagrams of the signs adopted by the Armies, Corps, Divisions, Brigades and Battalions for sale. Q Branch also made a complete list for General Donald, Director of War Trophies but it does not seem to have survived.⁶ The only collection of these distinguishing marks to exist is held in the Imperial War Museum as the then secretary of the National War Museum, Martin Conway, sent out a circular letter to all the units in the British Army in Autumn 1917. In particular he requested 'the special Battalion badges or marks of distinction worn by the Battalions on the sleeve or on the back of the Service Dress Jacket' as 'These badges were as you know, not made by the Army Clothing Department, and therefore unprocurable except from the Regiments themselves.' There was a huge response to the letters, all the more commendable as a large number of the units were involved in the Third Battle of Ypres. Commanding Officers usually sent examples of the patches worn or sent a description or illustration. A questionnaire was also sent out to all the regiments in 1919-1920 but the information sent back depended on whether any surviving officers were still in the battalion and a number of battalions had been disbanded by this time. The response was not as complete as the 1917 survey, but together these surveys provide a unique reference to all the cloth patches worn by the British Army except unfortunately for Corps and Services as the correspondence does not appear to have survived for the 1917 survey and questionnaires were not circulated to these units in the second survey.

The post 1915 revival of military heraldry in the British Army was short-lived and regular army formations and units discontinued the wearing of formation signs and battalion patches at the end of the First World War. They had all but disappeared by

1920. Some of the territorial divisions retained their signs, or variations of them, when the Territorial Army was reformed in 1921, for example the 51st (Highland) Division with their recognisable HD that remained in use until the end of the twentieth century. Formation and unit badges had to await the arrival of the Second World War to see a revival, when they enjoyed considerable elaboration. However, the Guards regiments did use battalion badges prior to the First World War. The Coldstream Guards wore them for a brief period after the introduction of Service Dress in 1902. They were also worn on Battledress from 1938-1972 and revived in the late 1980's with the introduction of the SA80 rifle. Officers in the Guards regiments did not wear shoulder titles on Service Dress, but did on Battledress. These examples listed were re-introduced in all the Guards regiments during the First World War.

All measurements are in millimetres (height x width) with Imperial War Museum catalogue references after the battalion name. Details of Divisions and Brigades for each battalion are taken from Brig EA James, *British Regiments 1914-1918* (Naval & Military Press, 1993). Other references are to the museum's Art and Photograph collections (Q numbers) and illustrations in publications. All of the following badges were in use in December 1917.

1st Battalion Grenadier Guards (INS 8317)

Description: embroidered white serif on red curved shoulder title: GRENADIER GUARDS with separate Roman numeral: I underneath (23x139) & (33x6)

Notes: 1st Battalion, Grenadier Guards were in 20th Brigade in 7th Division from September 1914 until August 1915 when they joined 3rd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division until the end of the war. For a visual image of the badge see *A Grenadier Guardsman* by Sir William Orpen ART 3045.



2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards (INS 5000)

Description: embroidered white serif on red curved shoulder title: GRENADIER GUARDS and separate number title: 2 underneath (21x142) & (25x30)

Notes: 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards were in 4th Guards Brigade, 2nd Division from August 1914 until August 1915 when they joined 1st Guards Brigade in the Guards Division until the end of the war. The badges were donated to the museum by the Regimental Adjutant of the 2nd Battalion in 1917. For a visual image of a Grenadier in the 2nd Battalion see Henry Hanning, *The British Grenadiers* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2006), p154. See also Q 9182 Bavincourt 3rd June 1918 and Haswell Miller drawing ART 4116.



3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards (INS 8318)

Description: embroidered white serif on red curved shoulder title: GRENADIER GUARDS with separate red Roman numerals: III underneath all on khaki service dress material (19x132) & (32x6)

Notes: 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards were in 2nd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division from 19 August



1915 until the end of the war. According to the Regimental Adjutant who donated these battalion patches to the museum in 1917: 'On arrival in France, this Battalion wore the brass numerals supplied by Ordnance; in May 1916 these were done away with and "Grenadier Guards" sewn on the sleeves directly under the shoulder straps, herewith pattern. In January 1917 the 3 numerals were added to denote battalion.' See also Photograph Archive Q 6979 Second German Line occupied by 3rd Grenadier Guards on 21st August 1918.

4th Battalion Grenadier Guards (INS 8319)

Description: embroidered white serif on red curved shoulder title: GRENADIER GUARDS with separate red Roman numerals: IV underneath (20x146) & (34)



Notes: 4th Battalion, Grenadier Guards joined 3rd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division on 19th August 1915 until 7th February 1918, they then served with 4th Guards Brigade in 31st Division from 8th February until 19th May 1918 and from 20th May until the end of the war remained as 4th Guards Brigade part of GHQ Reserve. See Haswell Miller drawing ART 4116.

1st Battalion Coldstream Guards (INS 8320)

Description: embroidered red Roman numeral: I (36x11) on khaki background (65x27) below a red on white COLDSTREAM GUARDS curved shoulder title



Notes: 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards joined 1st Guards Brigade in 1st Division on 4th August 1914 until 24th August 1915, they then served with 2nd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division from 25th August 1915 until the end of the war. See Q7056 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards at Noreuil, 6th September 1918.

2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards (INS 8321)

Description: red Roman numerals: II (37x10 each) below a red on white COLDSTREAM GUARDS curved shoulder title



Notes: 2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards joined 4th Guards Brigade in 2nd Division in August 1914 until 24th August 1915, they then served with 1st Guards Brigade in the Guards Division from 25th August 1915 until the end of the war.

3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards (INS 8322)

Description: red Roman numerals: III on khaki material (42x68) below a red on white COLDSTREAM GUARDS curved shoulder title



Notes: 3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards joined 4th Guards Brigade in 2nd Division in August 1914 until 19th August 1915, they then served with 1st Guards Brigade in the Guards Division from 20th August 1915 until 7th February 1918, from 8th February until 19th May the Brigade served in 31st Division and on 20th May 1918 the battalion reverted to 4th Guards Brigade in GHQ Reserve until the end of the war. See Q3011 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards at Langemarck, 12th October 1917.

4th Battalion (Pioneers) Coldstream Guards (INS 8323)

Description: embroidered red Roman numerals: IV on cut square khaki material (54x52) below a red on white COLDSTREAM GUARDS curved shoulder title

Notes: 4th Battalion (Pioneers) Coldstream Guards was formed at Windsor on 17th July 1915 as the Guards Pioneer Battalion but was re-named the 4th Battalion. The Battalion went to France on 15th August to join the Guards Division. The badge was worn on the upper arm by NCOs and Guardsmen. See Q6047 Battle of the Ridge, men of 4th Battalion Coldstream Guards round a German 5.9 gun which they captured in the attack on the outskirts of Houlthurst Wood, between Pilkem and Langmarck, 10th October 1917.



1st Battalion Scots Guards (INS 8324-5)

Description: embroidered white script: SCOTS GUARDS on red curved shoulder title with separate dark blue Roman numeral: I on a label from the battalion stamped on the reverse: 1st Battalion Scots Guards Quartermaster's Officer 27th September 1917 with written inscription in pencil on the front of the label: 'worn on the top of each sleeve at point of the shoulder' (18x120) & (32x9)



Description: Royal Stewart tartan patch on a label from the battalion stamped on the reverse: 1st Battalion Scots Guards Quartermaster's Officer 27th September 1917 with written inscription in pencil on the front of the label: 'Tartan patch worn on each side of the Forage Cap' (28x49)



Notes: 1st Battalion Scots Guards served with 1st Guards Brigade in 1st Division from 4th August 1914 until 24th August 1915 and then from 25th August until the end of the war with 2nd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division. For a visual image of both battalion patches see Haswell Miller drawing ART 4115. See also Mike Chappell's, *British Battle Insignia 1 1914-1918* (Osprey, 1986), plate D.

2nd Battalion Scots Guards (INS 8327, INS 8326)

Description: two khaki cloth squares with red shoulder title with white embroidered thistle and script: SCOTS GUARDS above and separate dark blue Roman numerals: II underneath, with OHMS card: '2 B Scots Guards Titles and numerals worn by' written in pencil (92x116)



Description: two patches of diced cap band with an OHMS label: '2nd Bn Scots Guards Dice worn on each side of the cap and painted on steel helmet' (38x58)



Notes: 2nd Battalion Scots Guards served with 20 Brigade in 7th Division from September 1914 until 8th August 1915 and then from 9th August until the end of the war with 3rd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division. For both battalion patches including an image of the patch painted on the steel helmet see Haswell Miller drawing ART 4115. The diced patch was also

worn on the Wolseley helmet see Stuart Bates, *The Wolseley Helmet in Pictures from Omdurman to El Alamein* (PSB Publishing, Melbourne, 2009), p44.

1st Battalion Irish Guards (INS 8328)

Description: Dark green shoulder title with embroidered: IRISH GUARDS in white and Roman numeral: I attached (sewn) underneath (60x125)

Notes: 1st Battalion Irish Guards served with 4th Guards Brigade in 2nd Division from 4th August 1914 until 19th August 1915. From 20th August until the end of the war the battalion was with 1st Guards Brigade in the Guards Division. See also Haswell Miller drawing ART 4112 and Q 3364, Capt AWL Paget, MC and 2/ Lt PRJ Barry, MC of the 1st Battalion Irish Guards reading the Armistice news to their men, at Maubeuge on 12th November 1918.



2nd Battalion Irish Guards (INS 8023)

Description: embroidered white script: IRISH GUARDS on a green curved shoulder title and Roman numerals: II underneath (20x120) & (35x5)

Notes: 2nd Battalion joined 2nd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division from 17th August 1915 until 7th February 1918 when they served with 4th Guards Brigade until 19th May 1918 when the Brigade became part of GHQ Reserve until the end of the war.



1st Battalion Welsh Guards (INS 8329)

Description: Black shoulder title with embroidered white script: WELSH GUARDS and Roman numeral: I underneath (20x126) & (38x15)

Notes: 1st Battalion Welsh Guards served with 3rd Guards Brigade in the Guards Division from 18th August 1915 until the end of the war. See also Haswell Miller drawing ART 4153. The badge was donated by the Commanding Officer of the First Battalion Welsh Guards, in July 1917. He states in his letter to the museum that the 'numeral worn on both sleeves of the Service Dress jacket by warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the battalion under my command, the top of the numeral being placed half an inch beneath the middle of the semi-circular cloth "Welsh Guards" badge.' He also notes that it was used by officers prior to an attack. See also Haswell Miller drawing ART 4153 and a photograph of King George V investing Sergeant Robert Bye with the Victoria Cross on 27th September 1917 in Trevor Royle's *Anatomy of a Regiment* (Michael Joseph, 1990), opposite p82.



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References:

- 1 J C Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* (London: Jane's, 1987), p 381
 - 2 Captain J D Hill, *The Fifth Leicestershire* (Loughborough: Echo Press, 1919), p 244
 - 3 See VIII Corps *War Diary* July 1916, National Archives (NA) WO 95/820
 - 4 See X Corps *War Diary* 1916, NA WO 92/851 and Bernard Lewis, *Swansea Pals: A History of 14th (Service) Battalion Welsh Regiment in the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004), p 89
 - 5 See XV Corps *War Diary* July 1916 NA WO 95/922 and 8th Division *War Diary* NA WO 95/1675
 - 6 See *Distinguishing marks of Formations, Armbands etc.*, July 1915 to February 1919 EN1/60, IWM Central Archive
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