



1A. (left) A British cavalry sword with brass basket-hilt having a guard made up of three open "S" panels. B. (right) British infantry sword, or "hanger," with steel basket-hilt having a guard of two open "S" panels.

Mid-18th Century British Military Swords With Open “S” Paneled Guards

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The two swords illustrated and discussed in this paper are of particular importance to students and collectors of 18th century British military edged weapons, primarily those in use prior to the first regulation patterns of 1788.¹ One (1A), having a brass hilt, is a cavalry sword while the other (1B), with steel hilt, is the weapon of an infantryman. Contemporary pictorial evidence indicates that the latter was in use as early as 1742 and, as the former’s guard configuration resembles its infantry counterpart so closely, we can safely assume that both swords date from this period. What is strange is that so fragile a metal as brass would have been used for the hilt of a mounted man’s sword, his primary weapon, whereas swords were rarely used by infantry, and, if so, only as a last resort. In fact, swords were abolished for infantry privates save for grenadiers,² Highlanders and drummers in 1768.³ Records indicate that many infantry regiments had in fact stopped wearing swords during the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763).⁴

Infantry Sword

This sword, or “hanger,” has a slightly curved, single-edged 28-inch blade with one narrow fuller. The blade is stamped with the remains of a “running fox” mark which may indicate the work of the Birmingham sword cutler, Samuel Harvey.⁵ The hilt, of steel, consists of a mushroom-shaped pommel with affixed tang button⁶ and a guard made up of an open-work, heart-shaped counterguard and three narrow vertical bars, one of which serves as a knuckle-bow. The apices of these bars are welded to a ring into which the base of the pommel fits. The bars are interconnected by two open “S” figures,⁷ thus forming a basket-hilt. There is a wristguard—an extension of the rear quillon—at the cusp of the counterguard. The grip is wood carved in a spiral and wrapped in leather; the braided wire binding is missing. Sharkskin is also known to have been used as a grip wrapping on examples of this sword pattern.

Swords with hilts of this configuration were issued to the battalion company privates of the 23rd



Regiment of Foot, or Royal Welsh Fusiliers, as it is shown worn by the figure representing that regiment in *A Representation of the Cloathing of His Majesty’s Houshold and all the Forces upon the Establishments of Great Britain and Ireland* printed in 1742 by order of William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland.⁸ Of the 52 infantry regiments represented in the *Cloathing Book*, only three were designated as “fusiliers” and are the only ones having swords with curved blades.⁹ In addition to the 23rd, the establishment included the 7th Royal Fusiliers and the 21st Royal North British Fusiliers.

The Royal Welsh was raised in 1688 as a regular marching regiment and for a time known by the name of each successive colonel. It was formed into a fusilier regiment in 1702 and called the Welsh Regiment of Fusiliers.¹⁰ The regiment served with much distinction in Marlborough’s campaigns during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and was designated “royal” in 1714. After a long tour of home service the Royal Welsh was dispatched to Flanders in 1742¹¹ and fought in the battles of Dettingen and Fontenoy. When Prince Charles Edward landed in Scotland in 1745, the regiment was one of several sent back to England but remained on the south coast. Subsequently returned to Flanders, the Welsh Fusiliers were involved in the battle of Val and other engagements.¹²

In modern literature the sword was apparently first illustrated in 1967 in the works of Warren Moore and George C. Neumann.¹³ Moore, without

NOTE: Although not a “talk” at Albuquerque, this article by Mr. Darling was prepared for use at this time.



2. Hilt of the infantry sword (outboard side).



3. Hilt of the cavalry sword (outboard side).

documentation, associated the sword's use with the grenadiers of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.¹⁴ In 1973, Neumann tied in the association with the regiment more closely by illustrating¹⁵ an example having a wood grip covered with sheetmetal (originally gilt) embossed with the three-feathered crest of the Prince of Wales, the motto "Ich Dien" (I serve), and a royal crown. In the same publication,¹⁶ Neumann pictured a curve-bladed, brass-hilted sword having a guard made up of a knucklebow and a heart-shaped counterguard. Its brass grip is cast with the same regimental devices as above but with the addition of the Hanoverian "running horse."

When the Royal Welsh Fusiliers ceased to wear steel-hilted swords having open "S" paneled guards is not known. However inspection reports issued in 1768, just prior to the abolition of swords for battalion company privates, reveal that the entire regiment had only 55 swords.¹⁷ The David Morier paintings of 1751, commissioned by the Duke of Cumberland, depict the grenadier of every infantry regiment and the Foot Guards. Many varieties of sword hilt are shown but the only one resembling this style is worn by the grenadier of the 31st Regiment; this

sword has a straight blade and a guard made up of a single "S" panel.¹⁸

Cavalry Sword

This sword has a straight, single-edged 34½ inch blade with one narrow fuller. The blade is stamped on both sides with the Solingen "anchor" mark. The brass hilt consists of a flattened, mushroom-shaped pommel with affixed tang button and a guard made up of an open-work counterguard and four narrow vertical bars whose apices are soldered to a ring into which the base of the pommel fits. The bars are interconnected by *three* open "S" figures thus giving more protection to the thumb and fingers than the infantry sword. The hilt was fabricated without a wristguard. The grip is wood, covered with sharkskin which is secured by two strands of braided brass wire. The pommel is engraved:

K

3 = N = 27

These markings are believed to indicate the 27th private of the third troop of the King's Own (or simply "King's") Regiment of Dragoons.¹⁹ Unfortunately, there is no contemporary evidence, pictori-



4. Hilt of the cavalry sword (front view).



5. Pommel markings on the pommel of the cavalry sword which are believed to indicate the 27th private in the third troop of the King's (or King's Own) Regiment of Dragoons.

ally, to support this premise. The first occasion this sword appears in literature is in Charles Henry Ashdown's *European Arms and Armour*, 1909.²⁰ Two swords of this configuration are shown as a panoply with a mid-17th century pikeman's armor in Edinburgh Castle. In 1916, Charles ffoulkes described two specimens in H. M. Tower Armouries as "Backswords, 18th century, with a basket-hilt formed of large S scrolls."²¹

In the early 1930s, ffoulkes, in collaboration with E.C. Hopkinson, published a series of articles titled "Swords of the British Army" in the *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*. In one article, the authors stated that the King's Own Dragoons had brass hilted swords by 1742 but cited no source.²² Later in the article, ffoulkes and Hopkinson quoted from an unpublished MSS, by Hastings Irwin, then in the Royal United Services Institution: "The hilt was divided into four²³ equal panels divided by vertical bars with S shaped pieces in between." According to the authors, Hastings Irwin suggested this to be the sword covered by the resolution of 1788 for heavy cavalry and also that the hilt was brass.²⁴

With modifications, this series of articles was published as *Sword, Lance & Bayonet* in 1938.²⁵ The authors illustrated this brass hilted cavalry sword (plate III, 31) and incorrectly captioned it "grenadier 1751" mistaking it for the steel hilted sword worn by the 23rd Royal Welsh Fusilier private in the 1742 *Cloathing Book* and the 31st Regiment's grenadier in the Morier paintings of 1751. To confuse this issue further, ffoulkes and Hopkinson made reference (p. 75) to a print in the British Museum by Saint Fal, published in 1815, showing a Highlander, presumably a sergeant, with a brass "S" hilted sword.²⁶

Neumann, writing in 1967, illustrated²⁷ the sword and correctly identified it as a cavalry weapon. In the late 1960s, I researched 18th century British cavalry swords and published some of my findings in 1969.²⁸ I noted in the caption to the illustration (fig. 13) of this hilt configuration that three of the four troops of the Horse Guards had hilts of vertical and horizontal brass bars according to the 1742 *Cloathing Book* and also stated, without documentation, that the King's Own Dragoons also carried brass hilted swords. My sources at the time for this second



6. A second example of the cavalry sword having a slightly more rounded pommel. Note the contour of the counterguard. In addition to the Solingen "anchor" this specimen is stamped on the blade with a "broad arrow," indicating government ownership. The other example does not have the broad arrow. (National Army Museum, 72U5-7-36, photograph courtesy of Peter Hayes, Department of Weapons.)

statement were the research of ffoulkes and Hopkinson²⁹ and *Weapons of the British Soldier* by Colonel H.C.B. Rogers who had written, also without documentation, on page 131, "The pattern of basket-hilt varied from regiment to regiment, and those of the King's Own Regiment of Dragoons, for instance, were of brass."³⁰

In 1973, the brass hilted cavalry sword illustrated in this article, having the obviously regimental markings on the pommel as noted above, came into my collection. The following year I entered into an extensive correspondence with Colonel Rogers who very kindly examined the unpublished Hastings Irwin MSS, now in the National Army Museum. The manuscript consists of five large volumes of notes and art work, mostly of uniforms of the 18th and early 19th centuries, compiled by D. Hastings Irwin and presented to the R.U.S.I. by his widow in 1921. Unfortunately there is not much information on swords but a portion of the fifth volume is devoted to comments on the copy of the

1742 *Cloathing Book* in the War Office Library and later compared with the originals in the British Museum Library. Hastings Irwin recorded a "brass basket-hilted sword" on the page he devoted to the King's Own Regiment of Dragoons and no other cavalry regiment is mentioned in the MSS as having swords with brass hilts.

In 1977, I obtained access to the only colored copy of the 1742 *Cloathing Book* in North America, now in the New York State Library, Albany.³¹ The engraving representing the King's Dragoons' private does indeed show a brass hilted sword but unfortunately with a different guard configuration.³² This may be explained by the fact that only four figures were utilized to represent the 14 dragoon regiments; the distinctions of uniform were colored in after the engravings were completed. One figure, having his musket slung over his back, was used to represent four regiments: the Royal Dragoons, the King's, the Royal Regiment of Ireland, and the Queen's. Of course all four regiments have the same sword hilt. At this time, another cavalry regiment was known as the "King's" — The King's Own Regiment of Horse. The figure representing this regiment in the *Cloathing Book* is armed with a sword having a steel basket-hilt of the Scottish or Highland pattern.

The King's, or King's Own, Regiment of Dragoons was raised in 1685 with the title of the Queen Consort's Own Regiment of Dragoons.³³ From 1689 to 1692 it was called by the name of its colonels. In the latter year it was redesignated the Queen's Dragoons, but from 1714 to 1751 it was known by the titles used in this survey. Three years after it was raised, the regiment sided with William of Orange and fought under him in the Irish and Flanders Wars of the late 17th century. During the War of the Spanish Succession, the regiment saw service in Spain and was involved in the suppression of the 1715 Jacobite uprising in Scotland. Like the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the King's participated in the battles of Dettingen and Fontenoy during the War of the Austrian Succession.

As further evidence of the use of brass hilted swords by cavalry, there is a report of "Horsemen's Swords in the Tower," dated 8 February 1756:³⁴

Brass-hilted: 2016 serviceable
 Iron-hilted of sorts, hilts of different patterns:
 434 serviceable
 "Oliver Cromwell's"³⁵ with iron hilts: 117
 serviceable

We know that three of the four troops of Horse Guards had brass hilted swords but this, allowing for around 150 privates per troop, would account for only 650 brass hilts if indeed the swords of these three troops were returned to the Tower.³⁶

In summation, assigning use of this cavalry sword to the King's Regiment of Dragoons rests on the following premises:

- 1) We may assume the sword is British and dates in the decade of the 1740s on account of its similarity to another (the steel hilted sword worn by the Royal Welsh Fusilier) in the 1742 *Cloathing Book*.
- 2) Brass hilted swords were used by relatively few cavalry units in the British Army during the 1740s.
- 3) The *Cloathing Book* has only one regular cavalry regiment equipped with a brass hilted sword—the King's Regiment of Dragoons.
- 4) Accepting the pommel markings to be regimental (what else could they be?) then the "K" probably indicates "King's" of the regimental title.
- 5) The only other cavalry unit with "King's" in its title was a regiment of horse, the private of which is shown wearing a steel hilted sword in the *Cloathing Book*.



7. A third example which was made up with an additional bar at the rear of the guard. (Photograph courtesy of Jackey Lacey, Press Officer, Christie's and Edmiston's, Glasgow.)



NOTES

1 In 1788 a Board of General Officers recommended specific patterns in respect to hilt style and blade dimensions for both light and heavy cavalry. These patterns are illustrated and described in Brian Robson, *Swords of the British Army: The Regulation Patterns 1788-1914*, London, 1975, pp. 14-22.

2 Each infantry battalion had a company of grenadiers who long ago had ceased to be issued grenades. Grenadiers were the tallest and strongest men of a battalion; they wore the distinctive "mitre" cap that was replaced by one of bearskin in 1768.

3 Privates in Highland regiments and grenadiers were ordered to stop wearing swords in 1784.

4 Bennett Cuthbertson, *A System for the Compleat Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry*, Dublin, 1768, cited in Hew Strachan, *British Military Uniforms 1768-96*, London, 1975, p. 154.

5 The first Samuel Harvey (d. 1778) was working as early as 1748. As a rule the initials "SH" or "H" are stamped within the animal's body.

6 The tip of the blade tang, which passed through the grip and pommel, was peened over the tang button.

7 There is no evidence that the "S" is an abbreviation for anything. It is a more decorative means than a saltire to connect other bars and form a "basket-hilt."

8 Only a few copies of the *Cloathing Book* survive. It consists of 104 hand-colored engravings of a private from each regiment (cavalry and infantry), the units of the Household Cavalry, the three regiments of Foot Guards, ten regiments of Marines, eight untitled figures (probably independent companies or garrison troops), and a figure each for the Gentlemen Pensioners and Yeomen of the Guard. The Royal Welsh Fusiliers did not receive the numerical designation "23," officially, until 1751.

9 The Royal Fusiliers were raised in 1685 to serve as guards for artillery trains. They were armed with flintlock muskets, or "fusils," instead of the matchlock. The latter, requiring the use of a lit matchcord, was considered too dangerous to be used around gunpowder. The headgear of a fusilier was about identical to that of a grenadier.

10 Charles Dalton, *English Army Lists and Commission Registers*, v. V, Part II, London, 1960, p. 61.

11 War of the Austrian Succession: 1740-1748.

12 There are several regimental histories listed in Arthur S. White, *A Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army*, London, 1965, pp. 75-76.

13 *Weapons of the American Revolution and Accoutrements*, N.Y., p. 159 and *The History of Weapons of the American Revolution*, N.Y., p. 225.

14 As the figures in the *Cloathing Book* illustrate battalion company privates and not grenadiers (the figures of the fusiliers are not wearing match cases, *de rigueur* for grenadiers until 1784) we are not sure if the grenadier company of the Royal Welsh was issued this sword pattern. The David Morier painting (1751) of the Royal Welsh grenadier depicts a steel hilted sword having a heart-shaped counter-guard and two looped bars outside the hand. See A.E. Haswell Miller and N.P. Dawnay, *Military Drawings and Paintings in the Royal Collection*, Volume One, London, 1966, plate 63.

15 *Swords and Blades of the American Revolution*, Harrisburg, Pa., p. 70.

16 *Ibid*, p. 67.

17 The Rev. Percy Sumner, "Army Inspection Returns 1753-1804," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, v. IV (1925), London, p. 110.

18 Haswell Miller and Dawnay, *op. cit.*, plate 66.

19 In the *Cloathing Book*, the regiment is called the "King's Regiment of Dragoons" but in J. Millan's *The Succession of Colonels to All His Majesties Land Forces*, London, 1742, it is listed as the "King's Own Regiment." In 1751, the regiment was given the numerical designation "3rd" and regimental equipment would probably be marked "3" or "3D" after that date. The Morier painting of that year shows the regimental private armed with a sword having a steel basket-hilt of the Scottish or Highland type (see Haswell Miller and Dawnay, *op. cit.*, plate 37). Dragoons were originally

mounted infantry who used their horses for moving rapidly from one area of the battlefield to another; once dismounted they fought with muskets as infantry. The "horse" regiments stayed mounted, taking part in massed cavalry charges as shock troops. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), Marlborough utilized his dragoons in the tactics of horse regiments and so that by c. 1740 dragoons and horse were indistinguishable on the battlefield. In 1740 there were eight regiments of horse and 14 of dragoons in the British Army.

- 20 London, plate XXIV (reprinted N.Y. 1967).
- 21 *The Armouries of the Tower of London*, v. 2, London, Class IX 232, 233. #233 is illustrated as plate 69c in Arthur Richard Dufty, *European Swords and Daggers in the Tower of London*, London, 1974.
- 22 V. XIV (1935), p. 14.
- 23 I have never seen a guard made up of four panels.
- 24 The heavy cavalry pattern of 1788 had a steel hilt of a much different configuration; it is illustrated in Robson, *op. cit.*, plate 9.
- 25 London (reprinted 1967 with a note on new edition by Brian Robson).
- 26 I have never seen the print. However a memorandum dated 2 March 1799 from the Adjutant-General required sergeants and drummers of Highland regiments to wear swords of the same shape as those of the officers (cited in Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 135). This sword has a brass hilt to be sure but it is of the conventional "Highland" style (see John Wallace, *Scottish Swords and Dirks*, London, 1970, fig. 47).
- 27 *Weapons of American Revolution*, p. 275.
- 28 "The British Basket Hilted Cavalry Sword," *The Canadian Journal of Arms Collecting*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Ottawa.
- 29 See note 22.

30 London, 1960.

31 I wish to thank Darrell Welch, Curator of Rare Books, for allowing me to do so.

32 ffoulkes and Hopkinson reproduced this hilt design in a rough sketch (fig. 13) in *Sword, Lance & Bayonet* and incorrectly associated it with what we know to be the hilt of the Pattern 1788 heavy cavalry sword (see note 24). The actual sword hilt was first illustrated in Major A.N. Ingram, "Mid-Eighteenth Century Cavalry Swords," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, v. XXIX (1951), London as figure 1 in plates I and II.

The guard has a wide oval knucklebow and a large, irregular sideplate outside the hand which are connected by three traverse, S-shaped bars. Neumann (see notes 13 and 15) illustrated this guard form but with the addition of a rectangular plate (inside the hand) connected to the knucklebow by a second series of S-shaped bars (s.84 and 268.s, respectively).

33 For regimental histories, see White, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

34 From the Cumberland Papers, Box 46, Documents 150 and 151: Note 912 (the Rev. Percy Sumner), *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, v. XXVIII (1950), London, p. 43.

35 This probably refers to the mid-17th century "mortuary" swords of the English Civil War period.

36 The 3rd and 4th Troops of the Horse Guards were disbanded in 1746. The 1751 Morier painting of the private of the 1st Troop depicts a sword with a hilt of an entirely different configuration. See Haswell Miller and Dawnay, *op. cit.*, plate 24.

NOTE: The spelling of "Houshold," "Compleat" and "Oeconomy" are proper 18th century spellings of these words.

