

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH GORGET AS SHOWN BY EXAMPLES FROM MY COLLECTION

by Ralph Spears

Gorget is a French word, it means throat. As a part of armor garniture, a gorget was the component that protected a fighting man's neck and throat. By the end of the 16th century, improvements in ballistics rendered suits of armor ineffectual and plate armor began to disappear. By then, in fact, full suits of armor were no longer being worn. Only half or three-quarter armor were still being worn during European warfare through most of the 17th century. By the end of that century the gorget no longer provided any protection. Instead of iron or steel, it was only made of thin copper or, later, silver and was only worn as decoration and a symbol. In the British Army, gorgets, made only for uniform decoration, were worn by officers for almost 150 years beginning in the 1680s until they were abolished as part of the uniform in 1830.

As part of the uniform, the gorget was worn suspended from the officer's uniform below the neck affixed by silk ribbons; the ribbons usually further adorned with silk rosettes. For much of the period gorgets were worn as decoration, the design was the same as worn universally in other regiments but the ribbons and rosettes were only of the color of the specific regiment's uniform facings. The color of the uniform coat in infantry regiments of the British Line was universally red, but the color of the uniform coat facings differed. Riflemen of the 60th and 95th Foot regiments did adopt green coats after 1802 but these are the only exceptions for foot regiments during this period. In order to identify the regiment of the officers and men, coats had the coat collars, lapels and cuffs made in a specific color, each color identifiable to a specific regiments. This was the facing color. To further identify individual regiments, regiments also had specific designs of lace and the arrangements for uniform buttons. Regiments also adopted either gold or silver as the color of lace and buttons worn on uniforms. After 1751, the Royal Warrant for the Clothing of Infantry also required the Regiment's precedence number be shown on buttons.

The earliest gorgets worn in the British Army solely as decoration and not actually armor were adopted during the last years of the reign of Charles II (1660-1685). In 1684, his Royal Warrant confirmed the wearing of the gorget, as a badge of rank. Note that the gorget is only worn by officers.

For the better distinction of Our several officers serving in Our Companies of Foot or Troops of Dragoons Our will and pleasure is that all Captains of Foot and Dragoons wear no other gorget than of the colour of gold, all Lieutenants black gorgets studded with gold and Ensigns gorgets of silver.

By the time of the reign of William and Mary (1688-1694), the distinctions of the different colors to designate the officer's rank had been abolished. Gorgets were no longer made of iron or steel, but, as a decorative badge, they were made of a thin plate of brass constructed with the brass rolled over a metal wire along the edge. The wire provided shape and strength. In this early period and for the next 80 years, the brass was gilded and the gorget had an engraved or embossed design of the Royal Coat of Arms.

The Royal Arms was a display of the monarch's personal badge. The Royal Arms of William and Mary, and later William only after the death of Mary, was a central crowned garter on a panoply of flags and arms. Within the garter was the monogram of the monarchs. When Anne, the second daughter of Charles II became Queen upon the death of William in 1702, the Royal Arms of England and later Great Britain became standardized. The monarch's monogram was replaced with a personal badge showing the monarch's claims of sovereignty over the realm. The claims were shown on a shield (escutcheon) within a garter surmounted by a St Edward's crown. Refer to the appendix showing the variations in the Royal Arms over the period when gorgets were worn. The garter is flanked on the left by an English lion and on the right by a Scottish unicorn. On the garter is the motto of Henry VIII, in French, "*Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense*" (Shame on him who thinks evil of it). Below the garter is a ribbon with the English royal motto, also in French, "*Dieu et mon droit* (God and my Right).

The earliest of these decorative gorgets bear the Royal Arms of William and Mary (1688-1694), but the earliest of the gorgets in my collection was worn by an officer during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714). Anne, was raised, as had her elder sister, Mary, as a Protestant, and was the last daughter of Charles II. Being Protestant, she was acceptable to Parliament and became Queen on the death of William in 1702. The gorget in Figure 1 was actually worn by Captain (later Brigadier General) John Middleton of Seaton and Fettercairn, Aberdeenshire. He was a Captain in the 25th Regiment of Foot at the time. The gorget actually dates to about 1707 as it shows the Royal Arms adopted that year. In 1707 the Parliaments of England and Scotland combined and formed Great Britain. Before 1707, England and Scotland were ruled as separate kingdoms.

A characteristic of these earliest gorgets was the size. At this period gorgets measured at least 5½ inches across and compared to later gorgets, were relatively flat. Gorgets like this were worn by British Army officers in service against France during the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714). Foreign policy on the continent during Anne's reign, as it had been for William and Mary, was to contain the expansionist policies of France's Louis XIV, especially to protect the frontiers of the Dutch Republic. British Army officers wore a gorget like this when defeating the French attack on the Netherlands at Oudenarde (1708) and in the bloody drubbing of the French the next year at Malplaquet. In America, the colonists knew the conflict as Queen Anne's War. Fighting erupted in Florida and Georgia against the Spanish, in Newfoundland against the French and all along the western frontier against the Indians allied with the French.

Queen Anne died in 1714 without heirs, ending the dynasty of the Royal House of Stuart. Anne's elder brother, James II, who had been converted to Roman Catholicism by his wife had been disposed by Parliament in 1688. James had fled England when Parliament invited William of Orange and his wife, Mary, the el-



Figure 1 Gorget worn during the War of Spanish Succession c. 1710.

dest daughter of Charles II, to rule in England, because they were Protestants. The sons of James II, although in the direct male line to become monarch, were unacceptable to Parliament because they had been raised as Roman Catholics. Anne had followed William and Mary, but she died without issue. Her nearest Protestant relative was the Elector of the German Duchy of Hanover. As only Protestants were acceptable to Parliament, George became King and established the reign of the House of Hanover as George I. Gorgets from the reign of George I (1714-1727) and George II (1727-1760) like the one in Figure 2 have the revised Royal Arms. The white horse of Hanover is superimposed and the Arms now

show the joining of the Arms of England and Scotland, the Arms of Ireland, the Arms of France and, now, symbols of Hanover. The gorget has more curve and depth. The size is somewhat smaller, now about 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches across.

This is the gorget worn by British officers quelling the Jacobite rebellion when the son of the deposed James II landed in Scotland to reclaim the British crown in 1715-16, fighting the Spanish in the Carolinas and Florida during the War of Jenkin's Ear in 1739-40 and fighting the French during the War of Austrian Succession (1744-1748), known in the American colonies as King George's War. This gorget is also like the one worn by British officers in



Figure 2 Gorget worn during the reign of George I (1714-1727) and in the reign of George II until about 1750.

Scotland quelling the final Jacobite rebellion (1745) when the grandson of the deposed James II landed in Scotland to reclaim the British crown, culminating in the victory over the rebellious Highland clans at Culloden. During the War of Austrian Succession, British officers wore this design of gorget as the British fought alongside Austrian, Hanoverian and Dutch allies against the French. For the British in Europe, there was a lot of campaigning but not much fighting. The British Army did distinguish itself at Dettingen, 1743, breaking out of a French trap that threatened the Allied withdrawal to its base in Hanover. In America during King George's War, the British and American colonist were more successful, capturing the key French fortress at Louisburg and fighting the French and allied Indians to a standstill all along the northern frontier.

About 1750, the size of the gorget was reduced further, to about 5 inches across. The gorget in Figure 3 of this period shows increasing curve and depth. The Royal Arms engraved on the gorget remains unchanged. The period gorgets like this one were worn included many years of fighting. The global Seven Years War (1755-1763) saw the British Army fighting in Europe, North America, the Caribbean, West Africa and Asia. The British Army suffered heavy losses early in the War. In North America, General Braddock was soundly defeated and his Army routed (1755). The British garrisons at Forts Oswego and William Henry on the New York frontier surrendered to the French (1757). In Europe, the British lost Menorca in 1756 and Hanover in 1757. Only in India were the British successful, capturing Calcutta and decisively beating the French and Mughals at Plassey (1757). However, in the later years of the War the British were much more successful. In Europe, they scored major victories at Minden (1759), and Warburg (1760), recovering Hanover, capturing Belle Isle of the coast of Britany that provided a close base for the Royal Navy's blockade of the French coast (1761) and at Vellinghausen (1761) and Wilhelmstadt (1762)

securing Hanover from further French attacks. In North America, the British and American colonist again captured the key fortress at Louisburg (1758) and Quebec (1759), essentially eliminating the French from North America. In the Caribbean, the British captured the French islands of Guadeloupe (1759) and Martinique (1762) and captured Havana from the Spanish (1762). In Asia, The British captured Manila from the Spanish (1762) and in Africa, they captured the main French outpost at Senegal (1758).

Soon after the Seven Years War, by about 1765, gorget size was reduced again. Figure 4 shows an example. It still only displays the engraved Royal Arms, unchanged since George I became King in 1714. The gorget remains gilt on copper but shows increasing curvature and is smaller. This one measure 4¾ inches across.

The gorgets as the example shown in Figure 4 were only worn for a few years. Gorgets displaying only the Royal Arms were being replaced by ones that displayed regimental badges. The Royal Warrant for Clothing of 1768 confirmed major changes in the uniform. Most importantly for the uniform, the coat was shortened and the tails tied back. The coat was opened up, lapelled to the waist, with the lapels the color of the regiment. Also, introduced as part of military fashion was the display of unit badges and honors on belt plates and gorgets. Moreover, gorgets began to be made in both gilded copper and in silver, the color to match the color of the officer's regimental lace. These were the gorgets worn by British Army officers during the American Revolution. The design and metal of gorgets differed with every regiment. Most gorgets, however, during this period remained with a similar size and shape. For the gorgets of this period, the size was further reduced to about 4¼ inch across and the wings more pinched and the depth correspondingly increased.

One example of these new gorgets is shown in Figure 5. This gorget was worn by an officer in the Fifth Regiment of Foot about 1780. Instead of the Royal Arms displayed, it has engraved St.



Figure 3 Gorget worn in later years of the reign of George II and early years of George III c about 1750 to 1765). This is the gorget worn by officers during the Seven Years War.



Figure 4 Gorget worn during the reign of George III c. 1765- 1780.

George slaying the dragon, the regimental badge of the Fifth Regiment of Foot, The gorget is no longer gilt as had been previous gorgets. It is silver displaying the color of the Regiment's uniform lace. The Fifth Foot was sent to Boston in 1775 and elements fought at Lexington and Bunker Hill. After the British evacuation of Boston, the Regiment joined General Howe's attack on New York fighting at Brooklyn, White Plains and Fort Washington (1776) and during the Philadelphia campaign suffered heavy loss at Germantown (1777). This gorget is a later pattern of the Regiment's gorget. The pattern was worn by an officer in the regiment during the later years of the Revolution, after the regiment joined an expedition in 1778 to capture the French colony at St. Lucia in the Caribbean.

In the later years of the American Revolution until the early years of the War with France (1793-1802) following the French Revolution, a standard pattern of gorget displaying only the Royal Arms were no longer being worn. Some regiments continued to display the Royal Arms but, if the regiment had adopted a unique badge, commonly, they would display it instead. Additionally, the regimental number was also displayed. Officers in all British Army regiments wore gorgets in the color of the uniform lace, either gilt or silver. The size of gorgets continued to shrink, but neither the shape or the size remained consistent among the various regiments. Most are now typically $3\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches across, but the depth and degree the wings are pinched together vary. Several examples are shown in Figures 6 through 9. These examples display many of the variations seen in the gorget design of this period including shape, color and type of decoration.

Figure 6 is an example of a gorget worn during this period by officers in the battalions First Regiment of Foot (The Royal Regiment). The design does retain the Royal Arms but that is understandable as this Regiment was the "Royal Regiment" and the Royal Arms was the Regiment's badge. Its unit number is also engraved on the wings of the gorget. The gorget is gilt as the color

of officer's lace for the regiment is gold. Consistent with gorgets of this period, it is smaller than earlier gorgets at only $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches across.

The First Foot is actually the oldest regiment in the British Army and its formation predates the actual formal beginning of the British Army in 1660. In that year, Parliament invited the son of the last King to return to England to be crowned Charles II. His father, Charles I, had been executed by order of Parliament in 1649 during the English Civil Wars (1642-1651) and England became a Commonwealth. After the death of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord High Protector, who had ruled the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, the inept rule by his son who succeeded him with much in fighting for control of the Commonwealth by Cromwell's generals, Parliament sought a more stable government by restoring the monarchy. This Regiment, already in the service of Charles during his exile, was the first to declare its loyalty to the new King. When this gorget was worn, the 1st Battalion of the Regiment served mostly in Ireland until 1800 when it joined an expedition to the West Indies and participated in the capture of the Dutch colonies along the South American coast, now modern Guiana. During the French Revolutionary War (1793-1802), the 2nd Battalion was in almost constant foreign service fighting the French. It was first at Toulon in 1793 supporting anti-Revolutionary French Royalists. When the British and French Royalists failed to hold Toulon, the Battalion became part of the expedition to capture Corsica. Corsica was held for several years but the Revolutionary French finally forced the British to withdraw in 1797. The Battalion participated in a failed expedition to Holland in 1799. It finally joined a successful expedition in 1800, fighting to expel the French from Egypt in 1801.

The example of a gorget shown in Figure 7 was worn by an officer in the 77th Regiment of Foot. It is silver, the same as the lace worn on the uniforms worn by regimental officers.. The gorget has an embossed design and not the engraved design common on pre-



Figure 5. Silver gorget worn by officers in the Fifth Regiment of Foot c. 1780.



vious gorgets. This Regiment does not have a unique badge. Instead, the design shows a crowned Georgian double “GR” cypher flanked by the unit’s number. This is a popular design adopted by regiments that do not have unique badges. The wings on this gorget are severely pinched together. The gorget is quite deep but is the one of the narrowest at only 3¼ inches across.

The 77th Foot was the last of four regiments raised in 1787 for service with the Honorable East India Company in India. The offi-

cer who wore this gorget served with the Regiment in India during the entire period this design of gorget was worn. The Regiment was a participant in all of the major battles to subdue the Mysore Kingdom in southern India during the 3rd Mysore War (1791).

An example of a gorget worn by an officer in the 79th Regiment of Foot (Cameron Volunteers) is shown in Figure 8. It is gilt and has the Royal Arms mounted in silver. The Officer’s lace in this regiment is gold. The unit’s number is engraved on the wings.



Figure 6. Gorget worn by an officer of the First Regiment of Foot (Royal Regiment) c. 1793.

Like the gorget worn by officers in the 77th Foot, this gorget is also deep but the wings are not pinched. Because the wings are not as severely pinched, the width of the gorget measures 3½ inches across.



Figure 7 Gorget worn by an officer in the Seventy-seventh Regiment of Foot, c. 1788.

The 79th Foot was raised in 1793 at Inverness as part of the major Army expansion at the beginning of the French Revolutionary War. The Regiment did service during the earliest campaigns against the French Republicans in Flanders and Holland in 1794-1795. After the French had forced the British Army to withdraw to safety near Bremen in Germany, the Regiment was evacuated with

the rest of the surviving British back to England in early 1795. In July 1795, the Regiment was sent to garrison the captured French colony at Martinique. As with so many British units stationed in the Caribbean, the Regiment suffered severe loss due to tropical diseases and the Regiment returned to England in 1797 to recover and recruit. In 1799, it returned to active service in Holland during the unsuccessful attempt overthrow the Batavian Republic, then allied with France. The Regiment participated in a more successful campaign in 1800-01 when the British Army expelled the French from Egypt.

A final example of a gorget worn by an officer during the French Revolutionary War is shown in Figure 9. This gorget was worn by an officer in the 101st Regiment of Foot. This was an Irish Regiment raised in Dublin in 1794 as part of the major expansion of the British Army for the War with Revolutionary France. The gorget is gilt, as the color of the officer's lace in this Regiment was gold. This gorget is an excellent example of one with a new "stepped" design that was becoming fashionable. A slight ridge across the middle can be seen. The Regiment does not have a badge and the Royal Arms is engraved below the ridge. Above the ridge is engraved a wreath with the unit's number. The gorget is narrow at only 3¼ inches across. Unable to recruit to full strength, within a year this Regiment was disbanded, officers either transferred into other Regiments or placed on half-pay and the men drafted into other regiments.

For British Line regiments, variations in gorgets ended in 1796. General Orders issued by the Adjutant General on 19 July 1795 directed that only a gilt gorget with a Universal pattern was authorized for wear. All line regiments adopted the Universal pattern. An example of this new Universal pattern gorget is shown in Figure 10. All of these gorgets have the same shape and dimensions. They measure 3 7/16 inches across. All have the engraved design of the Georgian "GR" monogram flanked by sprays of laurel and surmounted by a St. Edward's crown. This is the gorget worn by British officers during the last years of the French Revolutionary War and during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). Officers wore this gorget in the regiments commanded by the Duke of Wellington during the Peninsula campaigns (1808-1814) and at Waterloo (1815). Officers also wore this gorget in North America during the



Figure 8 Gorget worn by an officer in the 79th Regiment of Foot (Cameron Volunteers) c. 1783.

War of 1812 (1812-1815), in India defeating the powerful Kingdom of Mysore (1799), the final subjugation of the Maratha Empire (1803-1805 and 1817-1818) and in the expansion of Empire into Burma (1824-1826).



Figure 9. Gorget worn by an officer of the 101st Regiment of Foot c. 1794-5.

There were two exceptions to the wearing of the Universal pattern gorget by regular line regiments. The three regiments of Foot Guards would continue to wear an individual pattern gorget. The three regiments of Guards included the First Regiment of Foot Guards, later, after 1815 named the Grenadier Guards, the Coldstream Guards, and the Third Regiment of Foot Guards, later, but after the wearing of the gorget was abolished, named the Scots Guards. Figures 11, 12 and 13 shows three examples of the Guards gorget. On all of these gorgets, the central design is the Royal Arms affixed in silver. The earliest, Figure 11, worn before 1802 has the Royal Arms the same as engraved on gorgets since 1714 when George I became the King. In 1802, George III, as part of the brief peace negotiated with Napoleon, dropped the claim of English kings since Edward II in 1340 as Kings of France. France was now recognized as a Republic, not a Kingdom. The Arms of France were removed from the Royal Arms and the House of Hanover arms, previously displayed in the lower right quadrant of the shield are moved to the center of the Royal Arms as a separate small escutcheon surmounted by a coronet. The coronet was required because George was not the King of Hanover. He was the Elector, thus the coronet rather than a crown. This is the second variation, Figure 12. In 1816, after the defeat of Napoleon, the Congress of Vienna in 1814 restored Hanover as a Kingdom. George III again became King and the coronet above

the escutcheon was replaced with a crown. This is the third variation, Figure 13. Note the variation in gorget shapes. The Guards gorgets before 1802 (Figure 11) measure is more pinched and is about 3¾ inches across. Gorgets worn from 1802 to 1816 (Figure 12) are less pinched and wider, about 4 inches across. The final design, gorgets worn after 1816 (Figure 13), reverts to a smaller size, again, about 3¾ inches across.



Figure 10. Universal pattern gorget adopted in 1796 with ribbons and rosettes.

The Marines were part of the Admiralty and not the Army. Marine officers also wore gorgets different from the Universal pattern. Figure 14 shows a Marine gorget worn before 1802. The design is engraved and displays a fouled anchor on a separate shield below



Figure 11 Gorget worn by Foot Guards officer before 1802.



Figure 12 Gorget worn by a Foot Guards officer between 1802 and 1816.



Figure 14. Silver gorget worn by a Marine officer before 1802.



Figure 13 Gorget worn by a Foot Guards officer between 1816 and 1830.

the Royal Arms. Before 1802, Marine officers wore a silver gorget as displayed. The earlier gorget is larger than the later gorget. It measures 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches across.

The gorget dating after 1802 is gilt and smaller: 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches across (Figure 15). It is also now gilt on copper. The Marines were designated as Royal in 1802. Uniform facings, previously yellow, were changed to Royal blue and the lace, previously silver to gold. All regiments designated as 'Royal' had these facings and lace. The engraved design however remains unchanged.

Gorgetes were worn in the British Army by officers when on duty until 1831 when they were abolished by consent of the new King William IV (1830-1837) in General Order 492, dated 2 August 1830.



Figure 15. Gilt on copper gorget worn by a Marine officer after 1802.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Information of British gorgets is limited. The following sources were used for this article.

Oakes-Jones, H., "The Evolution of the Gorget" published in four parts in the *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research*

"Part 1, First Period, 1400 to 1560" in Volume 1 No 3 (March 1922), pp 115-118

"Part 2, 1560-1650" in Volume 1, No 4 (June 1922), pp 170-176

"Part 3, 1650-1830" in Volume 1, No 6 (December 1922), pp 246-255

"Part 4, Conclusions" in Volume 2, No 7 (June 1923), pp 22-32

Wood, Stephen "The British Gorget in North America", a paper delivered to the ninth triennial congress of the International Association of Museums of Arms and Military History (IAMAM) in Washington DC, 1981.

REFERENCES

References on the British Army, the Wars of the 18th and 19th Centuries and the individual regiments abound. My library includes published Regimental Histories for most British line regiments, but my library also includes two general references used for the preparation of this article.

Lawrence-Archer, J.H., *The British Army, Its Regimental Records, Badges, Devices, Etc.* George Bell and Sons, London, 1888

Chichester, Henry Manners and Burges-Short, George, *The Records and Badges of Every Regiment and Corps in the British Army*, 2d Edition, Gale & Polden, London, 1900.

ENDNOTES

¹ Caption from the Royal Warrant dated at Winchester, 1 September 1684 reproduced in *Part Three, The Evolution of the Gorget 1650-1830* by Captain H. Oakes-Jones, M.B.E. published in the *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research* Vol 1 No 6 (December 1922) p 249.

² Kings and Queens had claimed the throne of France since Edward II in 1340. The Hundred Years war had been fought over this claim and despite England's loss of the War and ejection from all territories on the continent, English and later, British monarchs continued the claim. It was only in 1801 after Britain finally recognized that France after the Revolution was no longer a Kingdom but a Republic was the claim dropped by George III.

APPENDIX: Royal Arms of England and Great Britain (1689-1830)



Figure 1. Royal Arms of England Last of the Stuarts (left to right) William & Mary (1689-1694), William)1694-1702), Anne (1702-1707)



Figure 2. Royal Arms of Great Britain: (left to right) Anne (1707-1714, George I, II & III (1714-1801; George III & IV (1801-1816)



Figure 3. Royal Arms of Great Britain: George IV & William IV (1816-1837)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_arms_of_England