

# DISPUTED MILITARY POLICE CAP BADGES

by Toby Brayley

Frequently over the past forty years, many references in print, collector's forums, sales lists and internet forum have stated that the Military Mounted Police (MMP) and Military Foot Police (MFP) wore the "Lion, Crown and Scroll" cap badge throughout the early part of the twentieth century. Similarly, it is often stated that the "Corps" (the collective term used for the MMP and the MFP) wore the generic 7-pointed star and crown style helmet plate on the blue cloth Home Service Pattern helmet. However, no evidence exists of this style of badge or helmet being approved and not a single piece of evidence, either written or photographic, shows it being worn, certainly not during the Great War and yet the myth is perpetuated by authors and collectors to this day. Using Sealed Pattern extracts from the contemporary Corps Order Books held at the RMP Museum, Army Clothing Ledgers in The National Archives at Kew and contemporary photographs, the myth surrounding the cap badge and helmet plate may now, hopefully, be dispelled.

## Cap Badge

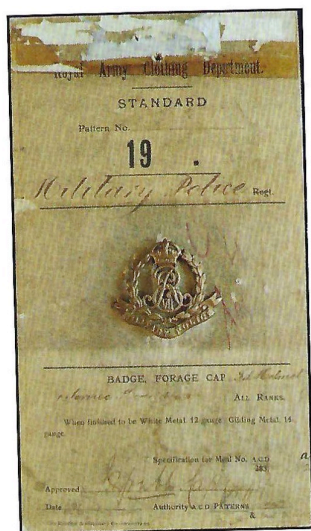
Prior to the approval of the "Brodrick" Forage Cap in July 1902, the Military Police had no headgear on which a dedicated corps cap badge was worn. When the uniform of the MMP was approved on 17th May 1877, they initially wore the pillbox *"Forage Cap as proposed for Dragoons with VR in Brass or Gilt"*. The VR in brass or gilt is last mentioned in 1879 and its use appears to be short lived. The uniform of the MFP (not raised until 1882 and not officially recognised as an independent Corps until 1885) was approved on the 17th January 1886 and included the annual issue of a Forage Cap *"Pattern as for MMP."*<sup>1</sup>

On 21st August 1889, brass initials MMP or MFP, almost identical to later shoulder titles, were approved for wear on "Field Service (FS) Caps".<sup>2</sup> The FS style cap was, however, seldom worn by the Military Police and when first introduced could only be worn between *"Retreat and Reveille when on Duty"*.<sup>3</sup> In the 1896 and 1899 Price Lists of Clothing and Necessaries (PLCN) the badges are described under *"Metal Badges for Field Caps"* as *"Initials with plates and Pins."* MMP and MFP and no other Military Police insignia are listed.<sup>4</sup>

When the Brodrick cap was first introduced, the MMP and MFP initials continued to be worn for over a year until the introduction of the EVIIR cap badge which was approved for wear by the *"Military Police"* on 26th January 19045 *"For wear on*



*The offending MFP Cap badge, A similar style has been seen for the MMP. There is no evidence to suggest either badge was ever worn.*



*Standard Pattern "Badge, Cap, Forage" with Edward VII cypher and Military Police in scroll, approved for wear on 26 January 1904. Also to be worn on "Forage Cap, Foreign Service Helmet and Service headdress". (RMP Museum).*

the cap badge was approved. This was based on a design incorporating GVR in a wreath surmounted by a crown with MILITARY POLICE on the scroll. Once again there was no mention of specific MFP or MMP versions. This style of badge was worn throughout the Great War and beyond, although the EVIIR badge is frequently seen worn in photographs well beyond 1911 and by old sweats throughout the Great War. In fact, it appears in a photograph as late as 1929! The RMP Museum holds thousands of original photographs of Military Policemen taken in every theatre of War between 1914 and 1918 and none are wearing the disputed MMP or MFP cap badges and no mention of them is recorded in the contemporary Corps Order Books or ledgers at Kew.

### Helmet Plate

Many secondary sources record that the Military Police wore Home Service Pattern helmets with the generic 7-pointed star surmounted by a crown, with the monarch's cypher surrounded by the "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense" garter style plate. This is described by some as the Garrison Staff pattern. From its formation up to the Great War this style was never worn by the Military Police. In May 1877 it was recorded that a

*Forage Cap, Foreign Service Helmet and Service headdress".* There was no differentiation between the MMP or MFP on this badge as the scroll simply read MILITARY POLICE. The Corps Order Books record mundane minutiae of day-to-day life within the Corps and note this new badge but make no mention of any interim design being trialled or approved.

At the time it is claimed the spurious MFP cap badge was worn, the MFP numbered less than 300 NCOs and there is no evidence in the extensive contemporary photographic archive of this period held by the RMP Museum that it existed or was worn. A so-called "proof copy" of an MMP style badge was sold at auction in January 2011, for a hammer price of £770, but as with the MFP badge there has been no evidence to suggest it was ever trialled, adopted or worn. Given the very small size of the Corps at this time, genuine examples of the EVIIR cap badge of the Corps are relatively uncommon yet examples of the spurious badge appear for sale in vast numbers which casts further doubt on its authenticity.

In May 1910, following the death of King Edward VII, the George V version of



*George V style cap badge introduced c1910/11. This badge is the correct style for the Great War.*



decision was made that the MMP uniform would include a Helmet "to be made of cork (with steel ribs inside), the badge being the same as that of the present Dragoon helmet with VR inserted therein instead of Numeral, the spike is to be that approved as for cavalry in India." In January 1886 the uniform scale for the MFP states that they were to have the helmet and badge "as for the MMP".<sup>6</sup> The Military Police uniform, from their inception, closely mirrored the Dragoons style.

Photographs of the Military Police in the Victorian and Edwardian era are exceptionally rare, and the RMP Museum only holds around 30 original images from this period. In slides and contemporary prints of MMP and MFP wearing the blue cloth Home Service pattern helmet they are all shown wearing the cyphered Dragoon's style helmet plate. There are only two known examples of this helmet: one VR version in the RMP Museum collection and a GVR pattern; Standard Pattern No7257 "Plate, Cork Helmet, Military Police, Gilding Metal, All Ranks",<sup>7</sup> dated 18th November 1910 in the Imperial War Museum.

With the outbreak of the Great War the British Army ceased wearing full dress and the Home Service pattern helmet and the Military Police rapidly discarded their helmets and the GVR style helmet plate was the last official version. The MMP and MFP were amalgamated in 1926, to form the Corps of Military Police (CMP).



*The incorrect style of helmet plate as recorded in the majority of publications on insignia. The correct style as depicted in all the known Military Police images is not even recorded in the works. RMP Museum.*

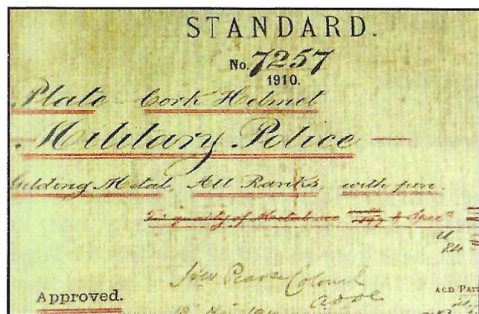


*The correct "Dragoons Style" helmet plate VR centre worn by both the MMP and MFP. RMP Museum.*

### **How has the confusion developed**

The continued depiction of the incorrect helmet plates might possibly be explained by an extract from "decision on Military Police Uniform" in the clothing ledger dated July 1879, held at Kew, which states that the "Acting" Provost Marshal at Shorncliffe (who was dressed as "Infantry Staff") wore the "Infantry Pattern" helmet "with guilt ornaments" and "Plate, Garrison Staff Pattern".<sup>8</sup>

However, the most likely explanation is that in 1950 a small MMP detachment of two sections of ten horses were brought back on strength of the Royal Military Police (RMP) in Aldershot.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently when, in 1953, the RMP Mounted Display Team was created<sup>10</sup> for ceremonial duties and to undertake mounted displays, a



George V style helmetplate "Military Police" held at the IWM, approved for wear in November 1910. IWM INS3085.

Victorian/Edwardian MMP style uniform was created for them. It would appear, that due to the immense rarity of the original helmet plates, a Garrison Staff style plate with the King's Crown was worn by the display team on their helmets. Images and a number of surviving examples of these plates also provide evidence that a generic infantry, King's crowned helmet was worn to which was affixed in the centre a GVI or EIR ROYAL MILITARY POLICE cap badge.<sup>11</sup> These helmets and the Garrison Staff style plates, all marked "Aldershot Military Tattoo," made their way into the RMP Museum collection in the 1980s and were accessioned as original period items. For over 30 years it appears that the Museum staff and researchers may have unwittingly been historically confused by these costume helmets.

If any reader can provide evidence to the contrary or as to the origin of the disputed insignia, I would be most grateful. The original sources quoted and many more original images may be consulted on request to Toby Brayley, Collections Officer at the RMP Museum.

#### NOTES:

- 1 *Army Clothing Ledger*, Kew WO539-3 Page 12 Approval of MMP Uniform.
- 2 *Army Clothing Ledger*, Kew WO539-4 Page 310 Approval and scale of MFP Uniform.
- 3 *Army Clothing Ledger*, Kew ref WO539-5 Page 133.
- 4 *Military Police Corps Order Book 7*, RMP Museum.
- 5 *Price List of Clothing and Necessaries April 1896* Page 72.
- 6 *Corps Order Book and Standard Pattern* (CHCMP N110621) held at RMP Museum.
- 7 *Army Clothing Ledger*, Kew WO539-3 Page 12 Approval of MMP Uniform.
- 8 *Army Clothing Ledger*, Kew WO539-4 Page 310 Approval and scale of MFP Uniform.
- 9 Imperial War Museum INS3085.
- 10 *Army Clothing Ledger*, Kew WO539-3 Page 114 Approval of uniform for APM at Shorncliffe.
- 11 History of the Mounted Troop, *Journal of the RMP*, 1995.



Helmet plate made for the Mounted Display Team, donated to the museum by one of its former members. The George VI Royal Military Police cap badge has just been affixed to a helmet plate with centre removed, this plate is believed to be the source of the incorrectly attributed helmet plate. RMP Museum.