

ROYAL MARINE SABRETACHES

by William Y Carman

As I was challenged when the *Full Dress Sabretaches of the British Army* was published, for overlooking the Royal Marines I claimed that I was writing for the Army but that an article on the Royal Marines was possible. John Atherton, who specialises in the Royal Marines, offered to supply some illustrations.

Sabretaches were intended to be worn by mounted troops and not by infantry. It was General Order 18 of 1st February 1872 that stated formally that field officers and adjutants of infantry who rode horses to accompany large bodies of men at reviews and inspection could wear sabretaches. A description of these articles appeared in the 1874 *Dress Regulations for Officers of the Army* (page 3), which were to be of black leather with metal mounts of regimental pattern with slings to match the sword belt (which was white enamel). Later Dress Regulations forbade the metal ornaments. However, the Royal Marine Light Infantry at once adopted the allowed item, having their Sabretache with three gilt mounts, the scroll for GIBRALTAR, the lion on the Crown the Royal Crest and a scroll with PER MARE PER TERRAM.

Col C Field illustrated this pattern with a drawing on p309, Vol II of his *Britain's Sea Soldiers* and quotes the dates of 1872-1902, which is repeated on the example to be seen in the Royal Marines Museum at Southsea. Photographic evidence of the Sabretache being worn is scarce, but a late Victorian photograph by Gregory & Co of London shows an officer in full-dress helmet wearing the item and other photographs in Malta and China indicate the same. The Royal Marine Artillery, although not a mounted body, adopted a full-dress Sabretache for certain officers and Col C Field also included a sketch of this type in his work with the same dates but no information as to material or colour. However, John Atherton's fine photographs show all of the details.

The full-dress Sabretache is of dark blue leather with a navy blue cloth face and edges with gold lace as worn by the Royal Artillery (stand and fall). The gold wire embroidery begins with the Lion on the Crown, the Royal Crest, then the gold GIBRALTAR on crimson velvet, an honour which dates back to early days before the Marines had become Royal. The elaborate badge, including the silver globe, was surrounded by many laurel leaves and below this was the Artillery badge of crossed cannon barrels. At the base was the long scroll of PER MARE PER TERRAM, gold on crimson velvet.

Evidence of this being worn is not available, but the undress RMA Sabretache is, where one may see four gilt mounts, similar to that of the RMLI, but with the addition of the crossed gun barrels below the Royal Crest.

The full dress Sabretache is shown in colour on page 212.



R.M.L.I. Undress Sabretache 1872-1901. Brian L Davis

G. O. 18.—Officers' Dress.

I. With reference to G. O. 5 of 1872, it is further notified that pantaloons and high boots are to be worn by mounted officers of infantry on all mounted duties.

II. A pattern mess jacket and waistcoat have been approved, to which all officers on joining or requiring new articles of this description will conform.

III. A sabretache to be worn on field duties by all staff or mounted officers has also been approved.

IV. Patterns have been sealed and are deposited at the Horse Guards, War Office, for inspection.

General Order 18 of 1st February 1872



R.M.A. Full Dress Sabretache 1872-1901. Brian L Davis.