

...And Hats on Their Heads

By Robert B.D. Hartman

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For more than a century, Culver uniforms have been, well, hardly “uniform.” Change, particularly in the early years, came with some frequency as the school administration experimented with styles, the selection of vendors, and attempted to hold down student costs.

Almost immediately after Major Leigh Gignilliat arrived in 1897 as the new commandant, he determined that juvenile bodies of varying sizes and shapes would not fit into off-the-shelf uniforms. He was appalled that the inventory being issued to the cadets was, as he put it, something from “Mother Hubbard’s cupboard.”

With the superintendent’s approval, he hired a tailor from Plymouth and presented him with marching orders. Gignilliat wanted the uniforms to fit “snugly.” He got his way and the smart appearance of the corps of cadets brought a huge boost to morale.

But selecting a tailor and uniform was easier than deciding what style of headgear and brass ornamentation the cadets would wear. Early Academy photographs show a variety of headgear, including Civil War forage caps, British pith helmets, Horse Guard-style helmets, Spanish-American war campaign hats, kepis, and even felt crushers. All were transitory were gone almost as fast as the cameraman’s flash powder.



Most items of headgear came from the inventory of military surplus dealers like Bannerman’s of New York that, as the world’s largest buyer and seller of used military equipment, could provide almost anything on Gignilliat’s wish list. Bannerman’s problem, however, was an inability to maintain a consistent supply of a particular uniform article, forcing Gignilliat to move to more reliable sources.

The dark blue forage cap or kepi, however, was practical, easy to obtain and became the Academy's first headgear issue. It continued in the inventory and was used for daily functions until about 1904.

Gignilliat was forever tinkering with headgear and introduced a white formal cap or kepi to the cadet corps in 1897. When the newly formed Black Horse Troop made its first appearance at Richmond, Ind. in 1897, the riders wore the new issue. After performing to enthusiastic applause from the Union army veterans that April day, the kepis disappeared, never to be seen again.

In 1897, Gignilliat also added Culver's first dress uniform topped with a black shako (left), an off-the-shelf eagle of unidentifiable origin, and a small black pom-pom. It remained in service until 1904. Like the kepi and forage cap, it has failed to survive as part of the Academy's archival collection.

Over the years, alumni have contributed to Culver's memorabilia by acquiring various items and presenting them to the school. The Henderson-Ames shako (right) represents Culver's oldest headgear and is the gift of Dr. William Daley '70 of Ashland, Mass. Like so many items from Culver's past, it has a very sketchy provenance. Daley acquired it from a military collector in Pennsylvania via a now-defunct military museum in Brownsville, Ore. How it made its way to the West Coast is an unknown.

The scripted Culver logo (left) was used only in 1904 and 1905 before passing into the historical memory book. Never one to discard good inventory items, Gignilliat had the remaining shako ornaments affixed to the cover of the 1906 *Roll Call*.

The earliest military shakos were made of leather and sometimes heavy fur and designed for protection from a saber slash, a bursting artillery shell, or the impact of a musket ball. Hence a very rigid shape was required. Often capped with colored plumes or pom-poms to identify units or combatants during the cacophony of battle, the martial traditions were continued into the 20th century. By the time the Academy selected its new shako in 1904, the wartime function had passed and it had become little more than an easily identified showpiece in the formal uniform.

The 1904-06 Henderson-Ames model was supported by an internal cage of eight narrow vertical metal strips extending from the sweatband to the top of the shako and locked in place by three horizontal wire bands. This provided a rigid framework to support the shako's outside shell of felt on a buckram backing. From leather brim tip to its felt top, it stood just less than 8 inches in height. Flowing plumes of coque feathers identified officers and increased the overall height by another 13 inches.

Until Daley's gift in June of 2002, Jennifer (Budstick) Applegate '84, of Tuscumbia, Mo., held the record for presenting Culver with its earliest shako, also a Henderson Ames model. Her find was worn between 1906 and 1909 and is particularly interesting since it is supported by a large collection of period photographs and establishes the use of a third eagle.

The swooping eagle (left) lacked the majesty Gignilliat desired. Appointed as superintendent in 1910, he placed his creative stamp on virtually every part of the Academy, including the adoption of a new Culver eagle (below). Interestingly, he took the design directly from the gold medal won by Henry Harrison Culver's Wrought Iron Range Company at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904. With only minor changes, it has been the symbol of Culver for more than nine decades.

As impressive as the shako appeared in the parades of the early years, it proved less than acceptable to the members of the Black Horse Troop and the Field Artillery. A marching cadet, ramrod-straight, under arms, and in control of his own movements, did not face the problems of a trooper or artilleryman astride a galloping horse or hanging on to a careening caisson or gun carriage pulled by six horses. For them, the shako was an unacceptable accoutrement of the Academy uniform.

Hence the traditional garrison cap, firmly pulled down and with chinstrap in place, was the headgear worn during mounted exercises for cadets in the troop and artillery. In 1932, however, the garrison cap underwent a transformation when the corps began to sport what would later become akin to the Army Air Corps 50 mission hat, that is, a garrison cap minus its grommet stiffener.

The genesis of this stylistic adaptation is lost in Academy history and it is surprising that Gignilliat allowed it to "sneak" into use. One wonders if the dashing director of the Black Horse Troop, Major C.A. Whitney, was not

the instigator, at least by example. He was known to wear his personal garrison cap without its grommet stiffener and the troopers may have elected, or been directed, to remove theirs so the hat would not come off during riding exercises or mounted parades. If, on the other hand, the corps was engaging in an insipient revolt, it petered out the following year.

The dilemma of hats lost during parades was solved when a Polish-style shako became part of the uniform issue in 1935. Prompted by Whitney and Colonel George Miller, the artillery director, the mounted services began to sport a new style of shako based on a design worn by Polish army artillerymen and horsemen.

It had a rounded shape, was high in the center, and divided into quarters for flexibility. It could be crushed down on the head and was difficult to dislodge because it could be secured with a chin and back strap. It was trimmed with artillery red or cavalry yellow piping, and officers were identified by red brush pom-poms or black coque plumes

They proved an effective substitute for garrison caps and were popular with batterymen and troopers. Moreover, they provided a distinctive way of setting the mounted services off from their infantry brethren.

Interestingly, the Culver Rifles Honor Guard, formed in 1932, and the Color Guard were extended the privilege of wearing shakos with *white* pom-poms, thus befitting its role as guard to visiting dignitaries and of the national colors.

The days for the shako were numbered, however. After Pearl Harbor, uniform and hat manufacturers turned their efforts to wartime production and woolen goods became difficult to acquire. Wartime shortages of leather, wool, and brass brought an end to the corps-wide use of the full dress uniform.

When the Regimental Staff and the staffs of the Black Horse Troop (right) and the Artillery formed for their photographs in the 1942 Roll Call, they were saying farewell to the Academy shako. When school opened in September, it had become a casualty of war and replaced by the garrison cap.

Shortly after Major General Delmar T. Spivey arrived in 1957, he initiated a new high collared, brass-buttoned, full dress uniform. The design

was different from the old swallowtail cutaway worn in previous decades, but the shako returned as an integral part of the uniform issue. In contrast to earlier models, it was much lighter and finished with a black pom-pom for all ranks except officers, who wore plume.

At the conclusion of school year 1975-76, rapidly rising uniform costs brought an end to the full dress and shako. It was replaced by the regulation Dress A blouse and garrison cap and utilized white cross belts and sashes of red, blue, yellow and O'Callahan green to provide a formal look on special occasions.

The Logo

No symbol of Culver is more distinctly a part of the Culver uniform than its logo. In a case of serendipity, troopers Harry Fitton and Harris Schultz unintentionally conceptualized what would become Culver's international symbol in 1900. During an idle Sunday afternoon, they pressed a horseshoe into wet sand and scratched the "ulver" within its boundary. Gignilliat wandered by, saw what Fitton and Shultz had done and, almost instantly, it became part of the Academy lore.

Its crude representation first appeared on football jerseys in 1900 and before the end of the year had been added to other items of athletic clothing, publications, and various promotional materials.

During the following decades, the logo underwent stylistic changes, but its essential character has remained the same. Surprisingly, however, no one in the school administration thought to register it with the Patent and Trademark Office. In 1988, the oversight was discovered and steps were taken immediately to secure exclusive rights to its use. After a two year wait, the Academy was notified that it had, at last, gained sole use to Fitton and Shultz' scratches in the sand.