

## The RCA Cap Badge Red Flash 1945-1969

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### Introduction

This summary is written from official orders, regulations, correspondence, and other documentary records found at the Library and Archives Canada, Directorate of History and Heritage and the Canadian War Museum. The documentary sources found are sparse and often incomplete. Other sources of information may well exist. This summary therefore reflects the flash's intended method of wear and not local unit practice. It also does not include how rigorously the regulations were followed or the time taken to implement decisions fully. Additional research would help to round out the history of the RCA flash.

### The RCA Red Flash

The British and Canadian armies adopted battledress with khaki worsted cloth rank and shoulder titles in 1939.<sup>1</sup> While this was good camouflage, it was difficult to identify officers or their arm or service at a distance. In 1940, the British increased the visibility of the badges with a system of corps colours as the background for officers' cloth rank badges. The Canadian army adopted the same colours in the spring of 1941. The corps colour assigned to the RA and RCA was "red" which was also worn by general officers, brigadiers, colonels (except colonels in the RCAMC, RCOC, RCAPC, CDC and Chaplains), the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps, Canadian Provost Corps and Canadian Officer Training Corps.<sup>2</sup> The RA and RCA adopted red as their corps colour instead of scarlet, which had been worn on pre-war undress and mess dress uniforms, to differentiate themselves from scarlet adopted by the infantry.<sup>3</sup> The coloured background was woven into the rank badge following its shape and extending  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch beyond its edge.<sup>4</sup> These corps colours were used for the flash behind the cap badge.

The British Army introduced coloured flashes worn behind the cap badge to brighten the drabness of their Cap General Service that replaced the battledress field service cap (i.e. the "wedge" or "side" cap) in 1943.<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Army (Overseas) also replaced the field service cap in late 1943 but it chose the khaki beret instead of the Cap General Service as the replacement.<sup>6</sup> Following the British lead, it approved the coloured flashes for most arms and services in the Canadian Army (Overseas) stationed in the UK beginning in July 1944. The flashes were worn only on the khaki beret. Except for soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Army Routine Orders Canada 162 dated 25 November 1939 and 204 dated 9 December 1939.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Army Routine Order Canada 1011 dated 19 April 1941, Canadian Army Order 74 dated 23 April 1941 and effective 15 April 1941 and Canadian Army Routine Order (Overseas) 790 dated 21 June 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 24 1983-84/232 Box 260, File 5250-0001/3 – Dress Instructions Royal Canadian Artillery, Vol 2, Amendment No 3 to QMG Instruction No 24 file HQ 6001-Dress Blue 1 (DOS) dated 3 July 1952.

<sup>4</sup> War Dress Regulations for the Officers and Other Ranks of the Canadian Army, 1943, paragraph 55.

<sup>5</sup> Army Council Instruction 1407 dated September 1943 and Mike Chappell, *The British Soldier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Field Service Head Dress 1902 to the Present Day*, Wessex Military Publishing, 1987, pages 4 and 17. The Cap GS was unpopular in the British Army and was eventually replaced by the blue beret in 1950. The Cap GS was not a Canadian Army item of dress.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order 4000 dated 6 November 1943 and repeated in Dress Regulations 1943, Officers, Canadian Army Overseas and Supervisors, Auxiliary Service Organizations Overseas, issued as Appendix A to Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order No 4144 dated 31 December 1943 as amended by Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order No 4591 dated 10 May 1944.

returning from overseas, troops in Canada were not authorized berets until 1946 or coloured flashes until 1947.<sup>7</sup>

The Canadian Army (Overseas) order in July 1944 that approved the first flashes read:

“4836 – BERETS, KHAKI – WEARING OF COLOURED FLASHES

The wearing of coloured flashes behind the cap badge on the beret, khaki, is approved for the corps, as noted below, subject to the following restrictions:

Complete uniformity within corps to be followed.

Backing to be obtained under corps arrangements at no expense to the public.

The final authority for taking into wear to be that of the head of the corps concerned.

The corps to which this approval is granted, to date are:

RCASC – Gold cloth backing

RCAMC – Cherry cloth backing

RCEME – Royal blue cloth backing

C Pro C – Scarlet cloth backing “<sup>8</sup>

Additional corps other than the RCA were added to the list in September 1944 and January 1945.<sup>9</sup> The January 1945 order, made flashes a free issue to be maintained at public expense and directed that “except in the case of Scottish and Irish Regts, flashes will be of the same shape as the cap badge of the corps or unit concerned, and will extend ¼” beyond the cap badge on all sides. The dimensions of flashes worn by Scottish and Irish Regiments will be in accordance with regimental custom.”<sup>10</sup> A further order in September 1945 required the edges of the flash material be stitched to the beret to maintain the cut-out shape of the badge and avoid fraying of the cloth.<sup>11</sup>

The RCA was authorized a red cloth flash in April 1945 and was the last corps to receive a flash during the war.<sup>12</sup> The Ordnance catalogue number and nomenclature was “CDN/CB 0430 Flashes, Cap Badge, RCA”.<sup>13</sup> The Canadian Armour Corps, Royal Canadian Engineers, Intelligence and Canadian Women’s Army Corps were not authorized flashes.

Flashes for the post-war regular and reserve army were approved in army dress regulations issued in 1947. The corps flashes were the same colour as in the Second World War (i.e. red for the RCA) and cut

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<sup>7</sup> Canadian Army Routine Orders No 6868 dated 6 December 1946 and effective 25 October 1946.

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order 4836 dated 15 July 1944. “UK Only” was printed in the margin beside the order. Authorization to wear coloured flashes was repeated without the “UK Only” proviso in Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order No 4144 dated 31 December 1943 Appendix A, Dress Regulations 1943, Officers, Canadian Army Overseas and Supervisors, Auxiliary Service Organizations Overseas, section III, paragraph 2 (b) (v) and section IV, paragraph 3 as amended by Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order No 5956 dated 5 July 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Army Overseas Routine Orders 5090 and 5466 dated 27 September 1944 and 27 January 1945 respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order 5466 dated 27 January 1945.

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order 6136 dated 20 September 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order 5705 dated 14 April 1945. The intent of the order was for the flash to be worn behind the gun cap badge. However, many RCA officers overseas adopted the Royal Artillery practice of wearing a small gilt or bronze grenade on their berets and continued doing so with the red flash after the war. This was despite the grenade cap badge was approved for the Royal Artillery but not the RCA. The grenade ceased being worn with the issue of blue berets and publication of new dress regulations in 1953.

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order 6136 dated 20 September 1945.

to the shape of the badge extending  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch beyond the badge at all outer points.<sup>14</sup> A year later, the extension was reduced to  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch in response to complaints from some corps, notably the armour corps who felt their black beret was sufficient to distinguish them from other corps and the infantry whose different sizes and shapes of regimental badges did not lend themselves to the use of a cloth flash.<sup>15</sup> The regulations did not mention stitching the flash to the beret. The flash was also worn on the summer field cap (i.e., "bush cap") and the winter peaked cap when they were adopted in 1950 and 1951, respectively. It was not worn on the maroon beret.

The large size RCA cap badge worn before and during the war was thought too large for the beret and was replaced by a two-thirds size badge measuring  $1\frac{7}{16}$  inches high and  $1\frac{13}{16}$  inches wide in 1950.<sup>16</sup> It was in gilt and bronze for officers and brass for other ranks (i.e., non-commissioned members). The reduction in size did not alter the badge design in any way. The small cap badge and flash was worn on the beret, summer field cap and winter peaked cap. Sikh gunners in the 102<sup>nd</sup> Coast Artillery Regiment, RCA in Vancouver wore the badge and flash on their turbans in the early 1950's.<sup>17</sup>

Coloured berets replaced the khaki beret in all corps of the regular force in 1951. The priority was to equip the regular force which left the Militia wearing khaki berets until receiving the coloured ones in 1956. All corps except the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps and Royal Canadian Infantry Corps received a blue beret with a rectangular patch in corps colours sewn on its front above the sweatband. The Armoured corps kept its black beret without a flash and infantry regiments wore a scarlet, dark or rifle green beret depending on the type of unit all without flashes. Highland, Scottish, and Irish infantry regiments wore their traditional headdress with a flash if in accordance with regimental custom. Airborne and air transportable troops continued wearing the maroon beret without a flash. Officers above lieutenant-colonel had the option of wearing forage caps.

The RCA received a blue beret with a sewn on red patch.<sup>18</sup> The new beret and patch had mixed reviews from several corps mostly due to the large size of the patch. In the RCA, the CO of 79<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA remarked that the smaller badge was too small in proportion to the coloured flash and

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<sup>14</sup> Canadian Army Order 84-1, Dress Regulations for Officers and Other Ranks of the Canadian Army (Provisional) 1947, Part I, Section 11, para 4, issued 25 August 1947.

<sup>15</sup> DHH file 325.009 (D508), file Correspondence, reports and instructions re Army Dress in Central Command, January 1947-January 1950, GOC Central Command letter to AHQ file CC/62 DRESS GEN/1, 10 March 1948 and Dress Regulation for Officers and Other Ranks of the Canadian Army (Provisional) 1947, Part II, Section 21, paragraph 14, 29 November 1948.

<sup>16</sup> Royal Canadian Artillery Association Resolution 4-49, RCAA Annual Report 1949, page 23, and LAC R112 Vol 29,708 File 5250-0001/3 – Dress Instructions Royal Canadian Artillery, Vol 2, RCAA letter to the Deputy Minister, DND dated 5 December 1949. Approval of the smaller badge was promulgated in Canadian Army Order 84-17 Part B Supplement No 168 dated 6 March 1950. The Royal Artillery, except for the Royal Horse Artillery, adopted the smaller badge for the same reasons in 1948 as described in Army Council Instruction 179 dated 3 March 1948. RCA officers continued wearing the large bronze cap badge on the khaki service dress forage cap. The pre-war blue undress and mess dress uniforms with the blue forage cap and large gilt badge for officers and brass for other ranks (i.e., non-commissioned members) was not authorized for wear at the time pending the development of new post-war uniforms.

<sup>17</sup> The Vancouver Sun, 8 November 1952, page 9 and The Vancouver News-Herald, 29 June 1953, page 1. The latter newspaper article states that turbans are approved for wear in the army and shows a photograph of the Sikh gunner with his cap badge flash cut as a triangle as opposed to the badge outline.

<sup>18</sup> Directorate of History and Heritage, Kardex 112.052 (D1), Ref CGS 4-1 Volumes 1-5 and TD 1 – Dress etc., Volume 1, Adjutant-General Instruction No 507/1951 dated 24 October 1951. The blue beret was worn by all corps except those authorized a specific coloured beret or special regimental headdress.

recommended the large gun cap badge be re-adopted for the dark blue beret but was overruled by the Director of Artillery.<sup>19</sup> The RCAA felt the rectangular patch was too large but nevertheless thought it looked very smart on parade.<sup>20</sup> Brigadier H.A. Sparling, then Commander Western Ontario District and a future major-general and Colonel Commandant of the RCA, unequivocally supported the flashes, which he felt added to the appearance of the cap badge.<sup>21</sup> In 1954, the sewn on flashes were removed and replaced with a smaller, separate piece of cloth in the same corps colour cut to the badge outline like on the khaki beret.<sup>22</sup>

The coloured berets were the Army's garrison and ceremonial headdress but presented an unimpressive appearance on ceremonial occasions. This was particularly evident at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953 where the beret's low profile made the Canadian Army contingent appear smaller in stature compared to British regiments in their forage caps and the Australians in their slouch hats.<sup>23</sup> The Army decided to replace all coloured berets, except the black beret, in the regular force with blue forage caps with distinctive regimental or corps hatbands in 1954 but issues did not begin until 1958 after which blue berets were no longer worn by the regular force. Maroon berets were reintroduced in 1967.<sup>24</sup> The RCA forage cap was blue with a "Scarlet (Arty)" hatband.<sup>25</sup> Coloured berets and flashes continued in the Militia until 1961 when the Militia was authorized summer service dress uniforms, which included the coloured forage cap.<sup>26</sup> The remaining coloured berets were passed down to the Royal Canadian Army Cadets.

During the 1950s, the colour of the backing for artillery rank badges, flash and forage cap hatband was renamed several times even though their actual colour did not change. It went from "Red" to "Scarlet" to reflect pre-war terminology, then to "Scarlet (Artillery Red)" to differentiate it from the infantry scarlet and finally to "Scarlet (Arty)" before the Director of Artillery ended the inevitable confusion during the drafting of the RCA Standing Orders in the early 1960s. Henceforth, the RCA would have two colours: scarlet for hatbands on the blue forage cap, busby bags, trousers stripes in full dress, patrol, and

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<sup>19</sup> DHH File 72/924, File 6001 – Badges – Badges General File, DOS memorandum to D Arty, 20 August 1952 and D Arty memorandum to DOS, 9 September 1952. The Infantry thought their scarlet berets were too bright and the Armour found their brass badges were lost on their yellow patch.

<sup>20</sup> Royal Canadian Artillery Association Annual Report 1951, page 13.

<sup>21</sup> DHH file 325.009 (D508), file Correspondence, reports and instructions re Army Dress in Central Command, January 1947-January 1950, Commander, Western Ontario Area message A423, 4 March 1948.

<sup>22</sup> LAC RG 24 1997-98/599, Box 10, File 5250-14, Part 1, Service Personnel – Headdress, Extract of Minutes of 167<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Army Council, 16 September 1953.

<sup>23</sup> LAC RG 24 1997-98/599, Box 10, File 5250-14, Part 1, Service Personnel – Headdress, Extract from Minutes of 167<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Army Council, 16 September 1953.

<sup>24</sup> LAC RG 24 1997-98/599, Box 10, File 5250-27 – Service Personnel – Dress Instructions – Headdress, Part 3, CFHQ Director General Administration letter to Commander Mobile Command, file P5250-14 (DC) dated 16 May 1967.

<sup>25</sup> LAC RG 24 1997-98/599, Box 10, File 5250-27 – Service Personnel – Dress Instructions – Headdress, Part 1, Army HQ letter file HQ 1730-11 dated 22 January 1959, Headdress for the Canadian Army, Article 201.14 of OI Dress.

<sup>26</sup> LAC RG 24 1997-98/599, Box 10, File 5250-14, Part 1, Service Personnel – Dress Instructions – Headdress, D Adm letter to AG HQ 1730-11 (Adm 1B) 18 December 1956, and RG 24 1997-98/599 Box 14, File 5250-27 – Dress Instructions – Officers Dress, Vol , Adjutant General letter to Commands, HQ 1730-11 (Adm 1B), 24 March 1958. Authority for the Militia to wear the blue forage cap at LAC RG 24 1983-84/048, Box 2335, File 6001-Uniforms/6 – Service Dress Uniforms – Winter and Summer – General, Part 3, MND approval minute dated 21 March 1961 to CGS memorandum file HQ 6001-Uniforms/6 TD 1061 (ORD 7) over HQ 6001-Caps/F1 TD 1061 dated 17 March 1961.

mess dress uniforms and red for the backing colour of officer rank badges and the flash worn behind cap badges on berets, bush and winter caps, lettering on cloth shoulder titles, flags, pennants, and signs.<sup>27</sup>

By 1965, the bush and winter caps were the last two headdresses with the flash, but they soon ceased being worn as units were issued the new combat clothing with its olive drab cap and embroidered cap badge. By the time, the CF green service dress uniform was introduced in 1969, the RCA flash was no longer worn in the regular force or in the Militia if the unit was issued with combats. Although a CF green beret was authorized, the new CF dress regulations did not allow distinctive corps or regimental insignia other than cap badges for combat arms regiments and collar badges for the regular force regiments who wore them before Unification. The RCA red flash was gone.

### **Summary**

The Canadian Army (Overseas) authorized a red flash to be worn behind the RCA cap badge on the khaki beret in April 1945. All artillery units other than the airborne were authorized the flash in the post war army for wear on the khaki and blue berets and the bush and winter peaked caps. Except for the period when blue berets were issued with the sewn on rectangular patch in corps colours, the flash was a separate piece of red cloth cut to the outline of the cap badge. The flash disappeared gradually from wear in the late 1950s and 1960s as the Army changed its garrison and ceremonial headdress. During its twenty or so years of wear, the red flash added colour to otherwise drab khaki uniforms, improved the appearance and visibility of the RCA cap badge and enhanced Regimental esprit de corps.

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<sup>27</sup> LAC RG 24 1983-84/232 Volume 260, File 5250-0001/3 – Dress Instructions Royal Canadian Artillery, Volume 3, Adjutant General approval minute dated 7 May 1962 to D Adm memorandum to DAG, file 1730-1/3 Volume 6 (Adm 1B) dated 26 March 1962. This decision was included in Amendment No 8 to Orders and Instructions for Dress of the Canadian Army (insofar as the blue forage cap hatband was concerned) that was published under HQ 1730-1 (Adm 1B) dated 18 February 1963 and published in Standing Orders for the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery 1963, articles 306 to 309. The Canadian Government Cataloguing Systems lists the NATO Stock Number and name for The RCA colour as 8305-21-103-3660, red Melton cloth. The sealed pattern is identified as DOS 1-3341. DOS is the abbreviation for the Director of Ordnance Services that was a pre-Unification Army Headquarters directorate. Article 309 of the 1963 Standing Orders describes the Regimental colour with the same NATO Stock Number but calls it Cloth Melton, Scarlet, T27.