

LARGE PRINT GUIDE



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RAF Stories: Headgear

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RAF Stories:

Headgear

The headdresses displayed here represent a snapshot of those worn by members of the Royal Air Force and its associated organisations over the first 100 years of its history.

They can have a practical purpose, protecting the wearer from physical or environmental threats and they can also identify and define the organisation, status, role and even religion of the wearer.

In the RAF a head covering is worn at all times apart from when indoors and in aircraft operating areas. A headdress is also always worn when saluting.



Officer's Service Dress Cap

1954 Pattern

An officer's Service Dress cap of 2018 is very similar to the cap introduced with the blue grey uniform in the closing months of 1919. This 1954 Pattern cap displays the St Edward's Crown which marked the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II the year before.

77/U/1413





Other Ranks' Field Service Cap

1943 Pattern

As an economy measure in 1943, black plastic buttons and badges replaced the brass examples previously found on the 1936 Pattern cap.

77/U/870



Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service, Service Dress Hat

1950s

In the 1950s, in tropical countries, the blue grey service dress and black hat of the Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service was replaced with an all-white uniform including a white felt hat.

68/U/634





Other Ranks' Service Dress Cap

1996 Pattern

In 1996 the Other Ranks uniform underwent a number of subtle changes which included the replacement of the metal cap badge with an embroidered version.

X003-9396



Flying Helmet Type B

About 1936

Similar in shape to the 1930 Pattern flying helmet, the most recognisable feature of the Type B was the large zipped covers housing the telephone receivers. This was the standard flying helmet worn in the early stages of the Second World War, including during the Battle of Britain.

77/U/636





Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service Other Ranks' Service Dress Hat

1956 Pattern

Other Ranks were introduced to the Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service during 1956. Their service dress hat resembles the tricorne initially issued to the RAF Nursing Service in 1918 but is fashioned out of RAF blue grey material rather than the black felt of the older design.

X003-9406





Other Ranks' Solar Pith Helmet

Around 1941

Originally worn as an alternative to the unpopular Wolseley Helmet, the Solar Pith Helmet became the standard tropical helmet for use in India during the 1930s. It is sometimes referred to as the Bombay Bowler.

66/U/188





Aircrew Helmet Mk 1A

1950s–2000s

The Mk 1A helmet introduced an attached visor and could still be found in second-line roles into the early 2000s. This example has been fitted with a boom microphone.

1996/0414/U





Women's Royal Air Force Cook's Cap Around 1950

In 1949 the Women's Auxiliary Air Force became the Women's Royal Air Force. About 80% of RAF trades were open to women including driving, ground signalling, clerical work and, in the case of the wearer of this item, catering.

76/U/1838





Male Member's Air Transport Auxiliary Field Service Cap

1939 Pattern

The Air Transport Auxiliary was made up of both male and female members who ferried aircraft to wherever they were needed. Their uniform was designed in a similar style to the RAF but in a dark navy blue.

78/U/981



Steel Helmet Mk II

1938

This helmet was the standard 'Tommy' issue used by British and Commonwealth troops during the First and Second World Wars. The Mk II helmet was introduced in 1938 and was the RAF's main protective combat helmet during the Second World War and for many years after.

78/U/848





Mountain Climbing Helmet

1960s

The RAF Mountain Rescue Service can trace its origins back to a unit established during 1942 which was trained and equipped to reach crash sites in the Welsh mountains. While its original purpose was to recover military personnel, the Mountain Rescue Service has spent most of its operational life providing aid to civilians. This climbing helmet is the style issued during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

73/U/463



Other Ranks' RAF Police Service Dress Cap 1952 Pattern

The white cloth cover on this Service Dress cap identifies the wearer as a member of the RAF Police. This white covering gives the RAF Police their nickname of Snowdrops.

X003-9398





Vehicle Crewman's Combat Helmet 1983–2010s

The RAF has operated armoured fighting vehicles in a number of roles and conflicts. This helmet, introduced in 1983, offers good ballistic protection combined with an easily removable headset.

1996/0437/U



Women's Royal Air Force Warrant Officer's Service Dress Cap

1954 Pattern

Although it is almost identical to the officer's pattern of hat, the Warrant Officer's cap can be distinguished by the patent peak and the cap badge unique to that rank.

70/U/1045



Women's Royal Air Force Motor Transport Driver's Cap

1918 Pattern

One of the major roles undertaken by the Women's Royal Air Force was that of Motor Transport Driver. This fur-trimmed cap would offer drivers, in their open cab vehicles, some protection from the weather.

66/U/314





Warrant Officer's Service Dress Cap

1985 Pattern

Bearing a striking resemblance to the cap worn by Other Ranks, the Warrant Officer's cap can be distinguished by the metal eagle, crown and laurel leaf badge which echoes the embroidered badge worn by commissioned officers.

X004-7286

Image coming
soon

Flying Helmet Type D

Around 1944

The Type D was the standard helmet issued in tropical climates during the 1940s. It followed the pattern of the Type C helmet but substituted cotton drill for leather and added a neck flap.

79/U/448



Female Officer's No. 2 Dress Hat
1994 Pattern

In 1994 the Women's Royal Air Force ceased being a separate service and integrated fully into the Royal Air Force. This Working Dress cap is the same pattern as the Service Dress hat worn by Other Ranks but displays the embroidered cap badge of an officer.

X003-0992



Air Force Department Fire Service Helmet

1960s

The Air Force Department Fire Service was formed in 1959, merging into the joint military Defence Fire Service in 1990. This white helmet identified the wearer as bearing an officer's rank.

83/U/1342



Civil Air Guard Member's Field Service Cap 1938 Pattern

Open to both men and women, the Civil Air Guard was an organisation which offered members subsidised flying training on the understanding that, in a national emergency, they would serve in an auxiliary role.

84/U/340



Air Training Corps Field Service Cap

1941 Pattern

The Air Training Corps is a cadet organisation open to anyone between the ages of 12 and 20 years with an interest in aviation and the Royal Air Force. The original 1941 uniform included a high-necked tunic, similar to the 1919 RAF Other Ranks uniform, and this Field Service cap.

1990/1182/U





Tactical Aircraft Refueller's Helmet

2000s

This close-fitting helmet enables the wearing of ear defenders, essential during tactical refuelling which involves keeping an aircraft's engines running.

X004-1088



Balaclava, RAF Comforts Committee

Around 1941

Working in the open during winter, RAF ground crew welcomed any warm clothing that was available. Fortunately the volunteers of the RAF Comforts Committee were ready to supply RAF personnel with a range of hand-knitted garments.

69/U/1130



DPM Cap
1968 Pattern

Disruptive Pattern Material (DPM) was a form of camouflage. It became standard issue to military personnel in 1968. This cap was worn as part of the No. 3 Combat Dress uniform and was known by a number of unprintable insulting names.

X007-8690





Women's Auxiliary Air Force Other Ranks' Service Dress Hat

1939 Pattern

At its formation in 1939, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force adopted a cap which was reminiscent of the Women's Royal Air Force cap from the First World War. They added a patent leather peak and a black mohair band. It was fashioned out of blue grey barathea material.

X003-3619



Aerial Erector's Helmet

1960s

Aerial Erectors construct and maintain communication infrastructure. This can involve climbing towers as high as 100 metres (328 feet). This safety helmet is in a standard civilian style.

72/U/924



Other Ranks' Beret 1950 Pattern

In 1948 the beret replaced the Field Service cap as the standard headgear for No. 2 Working Dress uniform. This example displays the Other Ranks' cap badge which was in use until 1954.

80/U/1399





Flying Helmet

1930 Pattern

As communications devices became more common in aircraft, the 1930 Pattern helmet was introduced offering a range of fittings which could be added to the basic leather cap. This example has been fitted with Gosport Tubes.

1993/0408/U



Field Officer's Service Dress Cap

1918 Pattern

The first blue RAF uniforms were supposedly made from fabric which was ordered by the Imperial Russian government but never delivered due to the revolution of 1917. The light blue shade was unpopular and was replaced towards the end of 1919 with the blue grey shade still in use in 2018.

75/U/734



Aircrew Helmet Mk 4A

1980s

Introduced during the early 1980s, the Mk 4 series is still used in 2018. This helmet is fitted with a Silec boom microphone which is used in the RAF exclusively by Chinook crew.

1996/0427/U





Cranwell Boys' Wing Sports Cap

Around 1924

At the age of 15 or 16, apprentices would undertake three years technical training, passing out as highly-qualified mechanics. Sports were a feature of a Boy Apprentice's life, with regular afternoon sessions being devoted to games.

74/U/512



Combat Helmet Mk 4

1945–1990s

Improvised camouflage was common on Mk 4 helmets. This example uses a hessian sandbag with scrim netting over the top.

X004-1187



Women's Royal Air Force Other Ranks' Service Dress Hat

1988 Pattern

This peaked hat replaced the pill box style Service Dress hat which had been in use from the late 1950s. It was retained when the Women's Royal Air Force merged with the RAF. In 1996 the metal badge was replaced with an embroidered version.

1998/0253/U





Other Rank's Wolseley Helmet

1926 Pattern

Although it was only widely issued to British Forces during the Second Boer War, the Wolseley Helmet was the standard tropical pith helmet dating from when the RAF was formed in 1918. It continued to be in use until 1945. The Wolseley Helmet was unpopular – it was heavy and made you sweat. It was not uncommon for personnel returning from overseas postings to throw their Wolseleys into the sea the moment the troop ship had left port in Egypt.

75/U/1051





Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service, Service
Dress Hat

1954 Pattern

The RAF Nursing Service adopted a distinctive four-cornered black felt hat in September 1918. It continues in use as part of the Officer's Service Dress for the Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service.

77/U/815





Flying Helmet Type A

1930s

This cork and cotton drill flying helmet was introduced in an effort to offer aircrews some protection from the effects of the intense heat they encountered in tropical areas.

73/U/629





Other Ranks' Field Service Cap

1936 Pattern

A major change to the Other Ranks uniform took place in 1936. Shirts, ties and open necked jackets replaced tunics that closed to the neck. The Field Service cap replaced the Service Dress cap for everyday wear although the latter was retained for dress occasions.

70/U/1244



Aircrew Helmet Mk 1

1950s

The first of the RAF's resin-bonded protective helmets which quickly gained the nickname 'Bone-Dome'. Flying goggles or a flip-up visor could be fitted and the helmet would be worn with a cloth inner helmet which carried the communications equipment and oxygen mask.

66/U/1166



RAF Bomb Disposal Helmet

1940s

Bombs can bury themselves deep in the ground, needing a shaft to be dug to reach them. When this was required, members of RAF bomb disposal teams would wear protective mining equipment like this helmet.

1992/0818/U



Aircrew Helmet Mk 3A

1960s–1980s

The Mk 3A and 3B helmets used the helmet shell of the Mk 2 and the visor track of the Mk 1A. They were originally supposed to be worn on aircraft without ejection seats but this restriction appears to have been overturned or widely ignored.

1992/0180/U



Air Force Department Fire Service Helmet

1960s

The Air Force Department Fire Service provided fire protection on RAF sites. It used both Air Force and civilian personnel. The black colour identified the wearer as a standard Firefighter.

73/U/535



RAF Central Band Full Dress Helmet 1977 Pattern

This busby-style of headdress replaced the peaked caps of the RAF Central Band in 1977. The blue plume denotes a musician while a red plume was reserved for officers and warrant officers.

X003-6842





Women's Junior Air Corps Field Service Cap

1950 Pattern

Until the 1980s the Air Training Corps was only open to male cadets. Girls with an interest in aviation could join the Women's Junior Air Corps which, during the 1960s, became the Girls Venture Corps Air Cadets, and is still active in 2018.

1992/0348/U



Ground Crew's Cap

1960s

Ski-style caps have been used by the RAF for a number of roles. This example was issued to ground personnel deployed in the field. Soft caps are not worn in aircraft operating areas as they risk being sucked into aircraft engines.

74/U/143



Group Captain's Service Dress Cap –
the Polish Air Force in UK
1941 Pattern

During the Second World War people from many occupied countries served with the RAF. In 1941 Polish personnel, who made up the largest Allied contingent, negotiated a level of independence which saw them adopt a variation of existing RAF uniform. This Group Captain's cap displays a Polish officer's badge depicting an eagle on top of an Amazonian shield.

1986/0217/U



Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service Tropical Helmet

1922 Pattern

In the 1920s the majority of the RAF Squadrons were deployed overseas. 1922 saw the first overseas posting by the RAF Nursing Service when ten Sisters, suitably equipped with Tropical Helmets were posted to Bagdad. Wherever the RAF deploys, the members of the Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service offer vital medical support.

66/U/185



RAF Cricket Cap, India

Around 1930

Sporting activities, especially team games, have always been encouraged in the Royal Air Force. This cap would have been worn with a colourful vertically striped blazer and white slacks.

83/U/409



Aircrew Helmet Mk 2A

1960s–1970s

The first protective helmet to have integrated communications, the Mk 2 series had a weighted bar which would force the visor down to protect the face in the event of a cockpit ejection.

1988/1347/U





Women's Royal Air Force Service Dress Cap 1954 Pattern

The establishment of the Women's Royal Air Force saw a slight change in the appearance of female officer's caps. The rear flap was removed and the side panels were stiffened giving the cap a much more rigid shape.

84/U/564



Flying Helmet Mk I

1918

The original RAF flying helmet. This pattern of helmet was first issued to the Royal Flying Corps in 1916 and continued in service with the RAF into the 1930s.

X002-6497





Officer's Full and Mess Dress Cap

1920 Pattern

Although it was replaced by the Full Dress helmet in 1921, this style of cap was retained for mess dress until 1934 when the standard officer's cap was substituted in its place.

67/U/255



Women's Royal Air Force Working Cap,
Domestic Staff

Around 1919

The Women's Royal Air Force of 1918 offered a wide variety of jobs from domestic service to clerical and technical roles. Perhaps the most obscure role was that of the Pigeon Women who looked after the RAF's messenger pigeons.

77/U/244



Women's Royal Air Force Other Ranks' Service Dress Cap

1918 Pattern

Cut to the same pattern as the cap issued with the initial khaki uniform, WRAF personnel were issued with a pale blue uniform for home dress.

66/U/305



Officer's Beret

1943 Pattern

Berets were introduced into service by the RAF Regiment in 1943. They were produced in this knitted form and in barathea fabric. This example has an Air Officer's cap badge which was worn by an officer with the rank of Air Commodore or above.

85/U/712



Other Ranks' Service Dress Cap

1952 Pattern

The year after Service Dress caps were reinstated, the wearing of coloured bands to distinguish Apprentices and Boy Entrants was reintroduced.

1993/0191/U





Aircrew Helmet Mk 10

1990s

The Aircrew Lightweight Protective Helmet Assembly (ALPHA) is made by Helmet Integrated Systems Ltd. This version was adopted as the standard RAF flying helmet for fast jet use during the late 1980s. It never fully replaced the Mk 4 which was retained for the use of night vision equipment.

1996/0412/U





Officer's Field Service Cap

1972 Pattern

After major uniform reforms in 1972, the Field Service cap was retained as an alternative to the Beret or Service Dress cap that was worn with No. 2 Working Dress Uniform.

1990/1135/U



Aircrew Helmet Mk 3C

1970s–1990s

Problems with the visor on the Mk 2 helmets led to the adoption of the Mk 3C, introducing a twin visor system to an earlier helmet shell. The clear visor was always worn in the down position. This example has the markings of the RAF Aerobatic Display Team, better known as the Red Arrows.

1996/0436/U



Flying Helmet Type E

Around 1945

Originally issued as a lightweight helmet for the crews of Coastal Command, the Type E later replaced the Type D helmet as the standard headgear for crews operating in tropical areas.

81/U/622



Flying Helmet Type C

1944

The Type C first appeared in 1941 and became the standard RAF flying helmet for most of the Second World War. In 1944 the design was altered slightly with the addition of an elasticated chin strap and by channelling the headphone leads to the rear of the helmet.

1996/0433/U





RAF Falcons Parachute Display Team Helmet

Around 1970

Since 1965 the RAF Falcons have been stunning crowds with their combination of free-fall and close-formation parachute displays. This standard Parachute Instructor's helmet of the late 1960s has been given a makeover with the addition of bright orange tape to represent the team colours of the day.

71/U/996





Women's Royal Air Force Other Ranks' Service Dress Cap

1918 Pattern

On its formation in April 1918, the Women's Royal Air Force adopted a soft cap similar in design to those issued to drivers serving with the Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps. The cap badge is the same design as those issued to male personnel but in white rather than red.

72/U/792



Trucial Omani Scout's Headdress

1960s

The Trucial Omani Scouts was a security force established in 1951 to defend the seven emirates of Trucial Oman which now form the United Arab Emirates. Headquartered at RAF Sharjah, the Scouts were made up of both British military and local personnel.

1995/0201/U Headdress, 1995/0202/U Cords,
1995/0203/U Badge





Field Officer's Service Dress Cap

1918 Pattern

When the RAF formed in 1918 the field uniform closely followed those used by the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service. The leather peak (the gold oak leaves denote the rank of Colonel) and black mohair band closely resemble the style previously worn by the Royal Naval Air Service.

82/U/464





Desert DPM Combat Hat
1990 Pattern

Desert Disruptive Pattern Material was quickly rushed into production when British forces were sent to the Arabian Gulf ahead of the 1991 Gulf War. This example dates from 2004 when a removable neck curtain was added.

X004-1135



Officer's Full Dress Helmet 1921 Pattern

Worn on ceremonial occasions, the Full Dress helmet was expensive, uncomfortable to wear and likened by some to a baboon's bottom. The end of its use, in 1939, was welcomed by many officers.

In 1923 Prince Albert, the future King George VI, wore Full Dress for his marriage to Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. So far he is the only Royal to have worn an RAF uniform for their wedding.

71/U/1185





General Service Combat Helmet Mk 6A 2006–2010s

During 2006, while UK forces were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, an improved version of the Mk 6 helmet was introduced. This offered better ballistic protection and was recognisable by the change from a green to a black helmet shell.

X005-6263



Warrant Officer's Beret 1950 Pattern

In 1948 the knitted beret replaced the Field Service cap as the standard headgear for the No. 2 Working Dress uniform. This example displays an eagle and crown, and was worn before the introduction of the Warrant Officer's beret badge.

X003-9402



General Service Combat Helmet Mk 6 1987–2010s

During the late 1980s, UK forces replaced the Mk 4 steel combat helmet with the Mk 6 helmet made of resin-bonded nylon. This helmet has the standard disruptive pattern cloth cover with elasticated loops to attach additional camouflage. It displays name, rank and blood group.

X004-1113





Officer's Beret
1950 Pattern

In 1948 the beret replaced the Field Service cap as the standard headgear for No. 2 Working Dress uniform. This example has the pre-1954 officer's cap badge sewn in place.

72/U/1122



Chaplain's Service Dress Cap

1954 Pattern

Chaplains wear the same blue grey service dress cap as other RAF officers but the eagle and laurel badge is replaced by the winged cross of the RAF Chaplaincy.

68/U/131



Gecko Marine Safety Helmet Mk 10

2010s

This safety helmet was worn by individuals taking part in search and rescue drills. This involves putting on an immersion suit and lifejacket, stepping off a launch and floating around in the sea waiting for the rescue helicopter to winch you aboard.

X008-4494



Slouch Hat

1943 Pattern

Although the Iraqi Levies had been wearing a similar hat since the 1920s, it was 1942 before the slouch hat became a standard issue item in the British military. This example is fitted with a five-fold muslin puggaree.

85/U/333



Women's Royal Air Force Air Officer's Service Dress Cap

1948 Pattern

In 1949 the gold embroidered badge, patent peak and two rows of embroidered oak leaves identifies the wearer of the newly-formed Women's Royal Air Force as an officer holding the rank of Air Commandant.

X002-8362





Police Motorcyclist's Helmet

1957 Pattern

The RAF has employed motorbikes, mainly in a dispatch role, since it was formed in 1918. The red and black stripe round this helmet identifies this individual as a member of the RAF Police.

70/U/859



Aircrew Helmet Mk 4B

1980s

Using the same helmet shell as the MK 4A, the Mk 4B introduced a universally adjustable cradle harness to the interior. This helmet has bayonet-style oxygen mask connectors which suggests that it may have been issued to No. 74 Squadron while they operated the Phantom F3.

1996/0423/U



Combat Helmet Mk 4

1945–1990s

Introduced in the closing stages of the Second World War, the Mk 4 helmet continued to serve as the standard British combat helmet for over 40 years. This example belonged to Warrant Officer Roy Barber who went on to work at the RAF Museum's Restoration Facility at RAF Cardington during the 1990s.

1986/1108/U





Iraq Levies Klaw

1930 Pattern

In 1921 the RAF took over control of all military forces in Iraq which included the Iraqi Levies. They initially replaced British and Indian troops stationed in the country but, as the newly-formed Iraqi Army expanded, the Levies were redeployed to defend RAF Stations.

65/U/704





Other Ranks' Service Dress Cap

1952 Pattern

The wearing of Other Ranks' Service Dress caps was suspended in 1939 for the duration of the Second World War. They were only reintroduced in 1952. This example is fitted with a post-1954 RAF cap badge.

80/U/1357