

Regimental Pioneers

Pioneers have formed an essential part of armies since at least the time of the Roman Legions. The Pioneers were normally employed to march in front of the advancing army, clearing the route as necessary. They could also construct field defences and bivouac facilities. Until recently (1990s)



Assault Pioneers

formed a platoon in infantry battalions. Soldiers serving in the Assault Pioneer Platoon could be identified by a specialist skill badge of two crossed felling axes sewn on their uniforms. These felling axes have traditionally been iconic of the Pioneer in various armies throughout history.

The wearing of beards by Pioneers has also been a traditional practice at various times in Infantry Battalions of British and Commonwealth Armies. This tradition began in the French Army (possibly in Napoleonic times) and was one of the dress practices adopted by the British after their defeat of Napoleon in 1815 (along with the Foot Guards bearskin headdress).

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles still parade a ceremonial detachment of Pioneers in ceremonial uniforms wearing leather aprons, gauntlets and gaiters, and carrying the various tools of their trade such as felling axes, brush cutters and picks. On Regimental parade, the Pioneers “clear” the parade ground before the Regiment marches on, removing any obstacles that may impede the Regiment’s progress. After reporting to the RSM that the ground is clear, the Pioneers take post beside the band to protect the Regimental Drums for the remainder of the parade.

The Regiment also employs the Pioneers to guard the entrance at Regimental Mess Dinners, executing a Present Arms for officers of field rank.