Bespoke: Irish Guards French battle standard



REF: 6621

Langfords
London Silver Vaults • Vaults 8 & 10 • 53-64 Chancery Lane • London • WC2A 1QS
+44 20 7242 6646 • silver@langfords.com • www.langfords.com

Description

Langfords was commissioned to make a faithful reproduction of the first French battle standard captured by the British during the Napoleonic Wars. Using traditional silversmithing skills, we cast the model in sterling silver from moulds and patterns of the original. Hand chasing added the fine detail to create a detailed and likelike model, and the statue was gold-plated it to replicate the traditional finish.

On 5 December 1804, three days after his coronation, Napoleon distributed aigles based on the eagle standards of the Roman legions. The standards represented the regiments raised by the various departments of France, and were intended to institute feelings of pride and loyalty among the troops who would be the backbone of Napoleon's new Imperial regime. Napoleon gave an emotional speech in which he insisted that troops should defend the standards with their lives

The first French eagle to be captured by the British was taken by the 87th Regiment of Foot at the Battle of Barrosa on 5 March 1811. At Barrosa, Ensign Edward Keogh and Sergeant Patrick Masterson captured the French Imperial Eagle of the 8th Régiment d'Infanterie de Ligne [fr]. Keogh only managed to get a hand on the shaft when he was shot, bayoneted and killed. Masterson took over and, after killing several men, wrenched the eagle from the dying hands of its bearer, Lieutenant Gazan.

The eagle was taken back to the United Kingdom and put on display in the Royal Hospital Chelsea. It was around 10" tall, set on a plinth marked with the numeral 8. It was made of silver, but gilded, which led many to think it was solid gold. In fact, the only golden part of the eagle was a laurel wreath which hung around its neck. This wreath was an honour conferred upon the 8th Regiment by Napoleon himself, and was not common to all eagles at the time. The gold leaves were presented to a number of regiments that were present at the Battle of Austerlitz by the city of Paris. The eagle's right claw was raised. Beneath it should have been a thunderbolt but, on the 87th's trophy it was missing. It is believed to have been dislodged during its capture.

Several years later, the eagle was stolen from the Royal Hospital. It was broken from its staff and smuggled away to an unknown fate. Many rumours abounded, the strongest being that it had been repatriated by a Frenchman. More likely it was melted down and sold. The original staff is still held in the Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum, located in the Sovereign's House on The Mall in Armagh, Northern Ireland.

The original eagle standard was never retrieved

Langfords
London Silver Vaults • Vaults 8 & 10 • 53-64 Chancery Lane • London • WC2A 1QS
+44 20 7242 6646 • silver@langfords.com • www.langfords.com