

The Tricorn Hat



At the height of its popularity in the 18th century, the tricorn hat was worn across all levels of society—from aristocrats and everyday civilians to soldiers in the military. While it may appear to be a purely fashionable accessory, the way a tricorn was worn often reflected a person's role and practical needs.

Among civilians and military officers who did not carry muskets, the tricorn was typically worn with one point facing forward, centered on the head. This orientation emphasized symmetry and style, aligning with contemporary civilian fashion. Soldiers who carried muskets, however, often wore their hats quite differently.

Infantrymen commonly rested their musket or rifle on the left shoulder. In other situations, the weapon might be grounded at the soldier's side, often with a fixed bayonet extending upward. Either way, a standard forward-facing tricorn could interfere with the musket, limiting head movement or causing the brim to strike the weapon. To solve this problem, soldiers adjusted how they wore their hats.

Instead of placing a point directly at the front, musket-bearing soldiers often positioned the tricorn so that the front corner sat above the left eyebrow. This effectively turned the hat so that the left side faced forward. By doing so, the soldier gained extra clearance on the left side of the head, allowing for easier movement while carrying or resting a firearm. This subtle adjustment improved comfort and functionality without altering the hat itself. The importance of this orientation can be

seen in period illustrations and demonstrations, such as the video referenced below.

Military tricorns also differed slightly in construction from many civilian examples. The most common military style was taller in the back than in the front, typically measuring about five inches high at the rear and four inches high at the front. This shape helped the hat sit securely while maintaining a sharp, uniform appearance.

Another practical feature of many tricorns was their laced edges. These laces were not purely decorative; they could be loosened to allow one or more sides of the hat to be dropped down. This provided additional protection from sun, rain, and harsh weather—an important advantage for soldiers spending long hours outdoors.

Altogether, the tricorn was far more than a fashionable symbol of its era. Its design and the way it was worn reflected the daily realities of civilian life and military service alike, blending style with practical innovation.