Lieutenant Gray's Military Chest

£1,750

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REF: 83609

Height: 67.28 cm (26.5")

Width: 88.87 cm (35")

Depth: 52.05 cm (20.5")

Description

Lieutenant Gray's painted pine Campaign Chest is unconventional for a number of reasons.

The most obvious is its unusual folding legs that allow you to use the chest at two different heights, with the legs up or down. The chest has a pair of legs to each side, hinged to fold when not in use. A sprung wooden bar holds the legs vertically when they are unfolded, resting on a thin block set to the inside of the shaped uniting bar to each pair and pushing the legs apart. To fold the legs, the sprung bar needs to be lifted over their shaped uniting bars to allow them to rest against the underside of the base. The sprung bar then sits on top of the legs holding them down.

The second is the unusual, small size and the third is the faux oak painted decoration to the pine. This is something we have seen before but is uncommon on a campaign chest. It has metal strapwork to the top edges and the plinth base corners but they are painted and do not stand out. Another unusual feature is the lack of locks to the two drawers. The chest has a plinth base and iron carrying handles to the sides suggesting it was never meant to be used with a packing case, which would normally prevent unlocked drawers falling out during transport. So presumably the chest was covered in an oil cloth and or lashed with a rope. There is no obvious wear from a tightly bound rope bruising the soft pine but this was likely the case.

The chest has a utilitarian feel to it and was perhaps made by a cabinet maker who was not practised in making campaign furniture. The faux oak and lack of locks also suggests that it was made to a budget. The original owner, John Francis Gray, was a volunteer who might have only used the chest on his regiment's annual training camp. He was not expecting to travel overseas or for his furniture to come under too much hardship.

Gray's details of 'Lieut. J. Gray. E. Co. 2. V.B.D.L.I. Stanhope.' are painted to the back of the chest. John Gray's commission as a Second Lieutenant in E Company of the 2nd or North Durham Light Infantry Militia was announced in the London Gazette on the 14th of February 1879. It also noted that he was a Gentleman. The Durham Infantry regiments were reorganized in 1880 and by 1881, Gray's Second Volunteer Battalion became the 4th (Militia) Battalion, giving a two year period for Gray's purchase of the chest. In September 1882, Gray rose to the rank of Captain but by 1885 is no longer noted in the Army List.

This is an interesting variation on the campaign chest for its design, probably made by a workshop in the north east not used to making portable furniture. Gray had a relatively short service as a Volunteer from 1879 to 1884. His dates along with those for the reorganisation of the 2nd Battalion date it from 1879 to 1881.

Size given is with legs folded.

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