



Lesson 3: Officers' uniforms and gear

Reference: *The Officer's Guide*, 1944 edition; AR 600-40; FM 21-15.

Study assignment: Lesson text, attached.

What the uniform signifies

“The wearing of the prescribed uniform identifies the officer or soldier as a member of the Army of the United States.”¹ It identifies the wearer as one who has sworn to defend his nation against a determined enemy, even at the risk of life; the details of the uniform inform anyone to understand the level of authority and responsibility of the Officer or soldier, and in general the kind of job he does. It also identifies all soldiers as members of a single team.

How to wear the uniform

Rationale: The uniform you wear—as a soldier or as a living historian—represents a long tradition of courage, resoluteness, selflessness, and sacrifice.

The manner in which you wear the uniform is not a trivial thing. But keep in mind that wearing it improperly cannot reflect on the soldiers who wore it under enemy fire. *But it can reflect on you.* The charge is on you to wear it in a way that would not suggest a lack of respect for those who wore it in earnest.

Manner of wearing the uniform: The uniform should be kept clean and neat and in good repair to the extent possible. Reenactors get this backwards in their fevered desire to look like seasoned field soldiers. Here's a philosophical view: A soldier is a man trying to stay clean and presentable under impossible conditions. A reenactor is a clean and comfortable man trying to look like a movie concept of a US soldier *in extremis*. The difference is obvious. Try to look the best you can, and everything else will take care of itself.

Some sore points: AR and *the Officer's Guide* inform us that clothing is not worn unbuttoned or hanging open: specifically:

“(5) *Overcoats, coats, and shirts will be worn buttoned throughout.*” (TOG, 1944: p. 116)

If you are wearing a field jacket, for example, the front is buttoned up unless you are in the process of putting it on or taking it off. Treat outer garments like the zipper of your fly.

Sometimes you will experience the heartbreak of a lost button or insignia. Replace immediately. Officers should carry spare brass or gold plate buttons against this embarrassing situation.

¹ *The Officers' Guide*, 1944, p. 115. The expression “Army of the United States” includes all three components: the Regular Army, the Army Reserve, and the National Guard.

As a matter of custom (that is, the writers of *Army Regulations* didn't want to get too far into the naughty behavior weeds to state this specifically), don't appear with pencils or pens protruding from the pockets of the service shirt or service coat.

Though the service hat was uncommon by late 1942, it's worth while to mention that this headgear is "worn in the regulation shape" [don't try to look like a cowboy and maintain the Montana peak in the crown. A Montana peak is the four depressions at the top of the hat, made by squeezing the point with the thumb and first three fingers]. The cord (gold and black for officers like the piping on the garrison cap, but thicker and with two acorns at the ends) is to be sewn on.

Metal buttons are to be kept polished. Reenactors do not seem to worry about this. Worry about it. You're on display, slackers. Make a "button boy" shield so you don't get polish on your service coat, and keep those buttons bright. The same is true for the US seal service cap insignia.

Officers and enlisted: The service uniform for officers (including warrant officers) in those days was distinctly different from that of enlisted. This is not just snootiness. There is no natural "officer class." When you become an officer, you are expected to act like an officer and serve as an example for your soldiers. Remember, new cadets at West Point came from everywhere, usually by Congressional appointment. In the beginning, many had to be taught to use a fork. Nor was the difference economic: like enlisted men, officers usually had to live on their limited pay and allowances. Officers were not "to the manner born." This relates to the differences in uniform and to the many ways an officer could "crash and burn." Officers were and are held to a higher standard.

Kinds of uniforms: We divide uniforms into functional categories: *service*, *work*, and *field*; for officers there is a fourth category—*dress*—that was rarely seen in the war because other business was at hand. This lesson will describe officer uniforms and equipment in some detail for all categories.

"Out of uniform:" The expression "out of uniform" indicates that the subject is not wearing the uniform properly, and in a significant and unacceptable way. It may mean that the soldier is not wearing the authorized uniform of the day, or wearing it in the wrong way. It also refers to cases when the soldier is wearing part of the uniform with civilian clothes (forbidden unless specifically authorized). Note that the phrase "out of uniform" means that the subject is not dressed the way everybody else is—that is "not uniform."

Procurement of uniforms

In the United States Army, officers are on a different pay, allowance, and subsistence system than that for enlisted soldiers. The reasons for this go back in history and are beyond the scope of this discussion. In general, however, an officer purchased his personal service and utility uniforms (as well as his rations!), in particular those clothing items that differed from enlisted Quartermaster issue, and he was responsible for the care and maintenance of such items, and for their replacement when they wore out. Special items of uniform and equipment were issued to officers on arrival at a unit, but belonged to the organization and were generally turned in when the officer transferred out. These issue items were those that "in general, pertain to performance of duty in combat, in field training or field duty." Nowadays we make the distinction between individual clothing and equipment and organizational clothing and equipment.

For this reason, the pay and allowances for an officer included a special *uniform allowance*. Unfortunately, this allowance was not enough to cover initial purchases out of West Point, ROTC, or Officer Candidate School.

Officer purchase of uniforms: Individual items required for purchase by infantry officers include:

TABLE 1
INFANTRY OFFICERS' UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT TO BE PURCHASED.

Item	Re- quired	Op- tional	Remarks
Watch, 7 jewel or better.		1 —	(Issued in some instances)
Belt, cloth, (Officers')		—	[This is the cloth belt with brass buckle on the service coat.]
Belt, web, waist.	ea	1 —	[This is the khaki web belt with brass buckle for the service trousers.]
Cap, garrison (Officers')	ea	1 —	[All company and field grade officer garrison caps are piped in gold and black.]
Cap, service (Officers')	ea	1 —	
Coat, wool service (Officers')	ea	1 —	
Cord, hat, (Officers')	ea	1 —	(When the service hat is worn.)
Drawers, cotton or woolen	ea	3 2	
Gloves, leather, dress (Officers')	pr	1 —	
Gloves, white, cotton or lisle (Officers')	pr	1 1	
Gloves, woolen, od, (Officers')	pr	1 1	
Handkerchief, cotton, white	ea	6 —	
Hat, service, od. Officers'	ea	1 —	When prescribed.
Insignia, cap, Officers'	ea	1 —	
Insignia, collar, Officers' "US" and branch.	ea	1 —	Two of each. Additional sets of rank insignia for raincoat and overcoat.
Insignia, grade.	pr	2 —	
Insignia, shoulder sleeve.	ea	1 —	As per AR 600-40.
Jacket, field	ea	— 1	
Laces, shoe, 40" extra	pr	1 1	
Leggins, canvas, dismt'd	pr	1 —	
Neckties, cotton, khaki	ea	1 —	
Overcoat, od, Officers'	ea	1 —	[The long wool overcoat was obsolete by 1943, replaced by two options: the trench coat with liner and the short overcoat.]
Overshoes, arctic, cloth or all rubber.	pr	1 —	[Buckle-type rubber galoshes]
Pajamas	pr	1 —	
Raincoat, officers'	ea	1 —	[This is complicated. The officer may use the outer shell of the trench coat/overcoat or purchase a similar OD 7 shell from the Quartermaster—or have one made in the trench coat pattern in OD 7.]
Shirt, cotton, khaki.	ea	1 2	[This is the khaki cotton shirt, but with officer epaulets sewn on.]
Shirt, wool, OD	ea	2 1	[This is the officers' dark OD shirt; in the field, officers may choose to buy officers'

Shoes, russet (Officers')	pr	1 1	shirts in the standard od or have epaulets sewn on the enlisted shirt.] [These are low-quarter russet (red-brown) oxford dress shoes to be worn with the service uniform.]
Slippers of gymnasium shoes	pr	— 1	
Socks, woolen, heavy, light or medium, or socks, cotton	pr	6 —	[These are khaki or tan.]
Trousers, cotton or woolen	pr	2 1	
Undershirts, cotton or woolen.	ea	4 —	
Books, blank, memorandum, pocket w/pencil	ea	1 —	[An officer <i>always</i> has something to write with and something to write on.]
Brush, clothes	ea	— 1	
Brush, hair, military.	ea	— 1	
Brush, shaving.	ea	1 —	
Brush, shoe	ea	1 —	
Brush, tooth.	ea	1 —	
Bucket, canvas, folding 8-qt. 6-qt. or 10-qt.	ea	— 1	[These are for washing, shaving, and other personal hygiene requirements.]
Combs	ea	1 —	
Locker, trunk.	ea	1 —	[For an officer, since it is a purchase item, it would probably be a steamer trunk of modest size, painted od.]
Mattress.	ea	— 1	[I am uncertain what this means. A mattress is usually unit property in garrison, and we don't carry them into the field.]
Mirror, trench	ea	— 1	[For shaving and personal grooming.]
Pillows, cotton or feather	ea	— 1	
Pillow cases.	ea	— 2	
Razor	ea	1 —	[This can be a straight razor for the Old Army types, or a "safety razor". The latter is like a modern holder for a two-edged blade, but the blades were not stainless steel, and so were good for only one shave each.]
Soap, hand	ea	1 —	[Better being more; the PX isn't always close to the battlefield. Also buy a soap dish.]
Soap or cream, shaving, cake or tube.	ea	1 —	[Pressurized shaving soap dispensers were years away.]
Towels, face, 19" x 36".	ea	— 2	
Knife, pocket.	ea	— 1	

Officers' issued uniforms and equipment (Infantry):

TABLE 2
INFANTRY OFFICERS' EQUIPMENT OBTAINED BY ISSUE.

Item	Quantity	Remarks
Mask, gas, service	ea 1	
Ointment, protective.	ea 1	
Compass, lensatic, w/case	ea 1	
Binoculars, M3.	ea 1	
Foot powder.	ea 2	Expendable.
Packet, first-aid	ea 2	
Helmet, steel, M1.	ea 1	

Pistol, automatic, cal. .45	ea	1	For officers shown armed with the pistol. [That is, shown by table of organization and equipment.]
(rifle or carbine)			
Arctic clothing	set	—	See AR 615-40. [Hint: not issued in SOPAC.]
Bag, field, od, M1936 w/strap.	ea	1	[The musette bag.]
Belt, pistol	ea	1	Per officer armed with pistol.
Blankets, wool, od	ea	2	
Can, meat	ea	1	[This does not mean “a can of meat”; the term refers to the mess kit.]
Canteen, M1910.	ea	1	
Cover, canteen	ea	1	
Cup, M1910	ea	1	[The canteen cup]
Fork	ea	1	
Knife	ea	1	
Spoon	ea	1	
Pins, tent, shelter	ea	5	Per tent shelter half.
Pockets, web, magazine, double	ea	1	Per officer armed with pistol.
Poles, tent, shelter		1	Per tent shelter half.
Pouches, first-aid, packet	ea	1	
Roll, bedding, waterproofed	ea	1	
Tags, identification	ea	2	
Tape for identification tags	yd	1	[This is used for marking personal items.]
Tents, shelter half	ea	2	
Bars, mosquito	ea	1	When authorized by CO.
Case, canvas, dispatch	ea	1	[This is the map case.]
Headnet, mosquito	ea	1	When authorized by CO.
Tent, wall, small w/pins and poles	ea	1	Per field officer. [That is, majors and above.]
Whistle, Thunderer	ea	1	
Flashlight	ea	1	

Commercial (tailored or bespoke) uniforms: During the war, many tailors made up for the loss of civilian sales due to rationing of fabric and dyes by doing a land office business supplying officers with uniforms made to Army specifications. A few (like the venerable Marlow White) have been around for over a century and are still going strong. These could be bespoke (tailor made, not off the rack!) or pre-made uniforms altered to fit the customer.

It was a good idea to deal with reputable tailors; not all were, as you can imagine. The acceptable fabric type and weight—usually wool elastique for the service coat and trousers—and color had to meet rigid specs. In particular, if you *really* wanted dark OD trousers to match your dark OD service coat, you were going to have to visit a custom tailor. Why? The technology of fabric dyeing did not permit perfect matches from lot to lot. A bolt of cloth might look just like another on casual inspection, but when you held them together in daylight, even the slightest difference was obvious. (We still have this problem today.) An all-OD service uniform literally had to be made from one bolt of cloth!

Purchases from the Quartermaster: As the war progressed, officer uniforms were also available through the larger post exchanges, particularly those at major Army posts where officers trained—Fort Benning, or Benning’s School for Wayward Boys, the font of freshly trained Infantry lieutenants, is a good example. These uniforms were labeled “Regulation Army Officer’s Uniform” by the Quartermaster Corps.

For some time during and after the war, posts maintained a facility called “Quartermaster Clothing Sales” which was separate from the post exchange and open to all active duty servicemen. In recent years, the QM Sales was simply shifted to the AAFES (Army and Air

Force Exchange Service), and is a section in the main PX. Of course, the PX has changed in recent years into something like a big box store with wide aisles and huge inventories of tax-free goods, a great convenience to service members but a constant affront to local businesses.

Service and dress uniforms

Class A: summer and winter. This expression refers to the combination of the service coat and trousers. In the winter (a local designation depending on where the officer is assigned), this is the dark green (“chocolate green”) service coat and the light “drab” or gray taupe trousers, generally made of wool elastique (the famous “pinks and greens”), but not of the flannel material



Plate 1. Uniform, Wool, With Coat and Cloth Belt, and Drab Trousers. (Illustrations, Courtesy, The Associated Military Stores.)

used for enlisted uniforms. As noted above, dark green trousers are authorised in lieu of the drab trousers, but they must match the color of the service coat—which given textile engineering limitations at the time means “cut from the same bolt of cloth.”

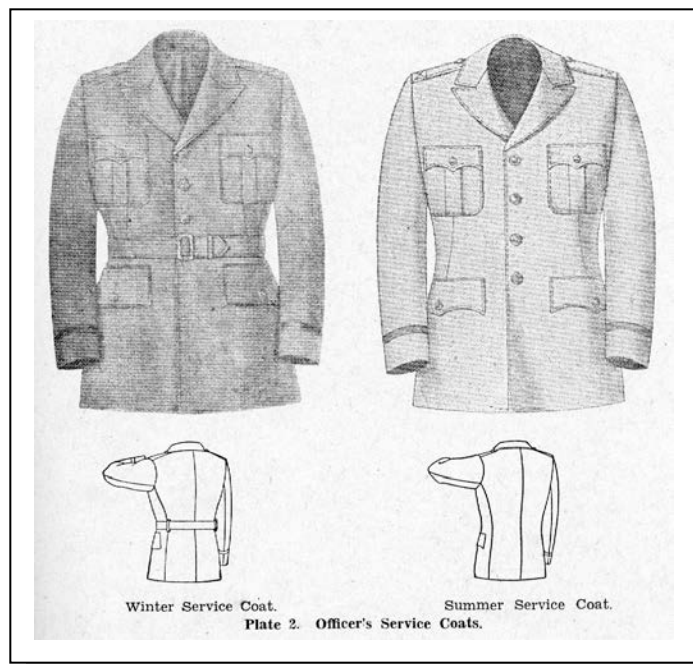
The shirt worn under the service coat may be of the dark green color or drab or khaki (light cotton khaki was prevalent later in the war because of its comfort). Insignia or rank and branch are not generally worn on the shirt when the service coat is the outer garment. Four tie variants were available: prewar black, drab, dark green, and khaki (for wear with the summer uniform, below). The general rule appears to have been that the tie should contrast with the shirt, but this was dictated by local policy; in addition, officers had some leeway in choosing the ensemble.

Collar pins, used to hold the collar tabs in place, were popular in civilian use, and were permissible with the uniform

shirt.

The summer service uniform for officers could be khaki shirt, trousers, and service coat, made of midweight cotton chino cloth. The preferred summer service uniform for officers, however, was the TW version (wool tropic worsted). The TW uniform—which was still around when I entered the Army in 65, though soon to be replaced with a synthetic blend—had a better appearance and was more comfortable. If you have ever worn the old heavy khakis, you will understand: they are hot, scratchy, and wrinkle easily. They also fade with exposure to the sun and repeated washings.

NOTE: the cap worn with the Army service uniform, officer or



enlisted, is to be “summer with summer and winter with winter.” Yes, we have all seen photos of soldiers wearing mismatched hats; but we have also seen soldiers wearing rags. Exceptions are due to shortages and loss overseas. Go with what is *prescribed* by the AR and you will *never* be wrong. Yes, Douglas MacArthur wore his khaki Philippines field marshal service cap with the winter service coat. But he was Douglas MacArthur. No one else is or was Douglas MacArthur (for which we thank God in His wisdom). In any case, general officers are granted latitude in designing their uniform specifics. The rest of us are not.

Class B: This is a work uniform for other than the field—the garrison or office uniform when it is not necessary to wear the service coat. For officers, this means the shirt is the outer garment; and as such the insignia of rank and branch are worn on the collar. (No, they did not wear name plates. An officer was supposed to know the names of his men.) Service ribbons and decorations were not generally worn on the shirt. However, the tie is worn with Class B; and it is tucked into the shirt front between the second and third buttons. (NOTE: when worn with Class A, the tie is not tucked in, but hangs under the service coat as with a business suit.)

NOTE: general officers do not wear insignia of branch on their uniforms.

There is a question about wear of the DUI on the epaulets of the officer’s dark green shirt. I have seen examples in photos, but the practice is prohibited by regulation: officers will not wear DUI on the service shirt or on the garrison cap.

There was one problem with the officers’ Class B service uniform: it had no specified light outer garment for wear when the weather was cool but not cool enough for an overcoat. The old M41 field jacket was authorized for enlisted Class B, but not for the officers’ service uniform; and the M43 field jacket was too obviously a work uniform.

This problem was still around in the Sixties, and it was particularly troublesome with the summer uniform, which was by then a synthetic blend short-sleeve shirt and trousers. If it was khaki season and there was a late (or early) cold snap, you had to make do with a field jacket (by then the M65, a slight modification of the M43). The Army came up with a simple windbreaker jacket in mid-green, called popularly the “Ralph Cramden jacket” (a reference to the old Jackie Gleason TV comedy, where the star was a bus driver and wore a short jacket). It was replaced by a black jacket in the same style.

What did the Army do about this in garrison? I suspect that they locally (VOCO: “verbal orders of the commanding officer”) authorized the field jacket if they had to, or simply changed the uniform of the day to Class A.

Class C: This is the khaki garrison uniform for summer or tropical wear. Rules are the same as for Class B, except that local commanders have discretion to dispense with the tie if the temperature and temper suggest.

Note on shirts: *Officer shirts, whether field or garrison, have cloth epaulets.* Yes, there will be photo records of exceptions, due to lack of availability of tailoring services. Go with the regulation and you will always be right.

Dress uniforms: Officers pre- and post-war were required to purchase the dress blue uniform. This practice was suspended during the war years for practical reasons: you could impress the ladies in DC or Mayfair, but there were few opportunities to strut one’s stuff on Funafuti atoll or while waltzing around Belgium in a tank, which was about the best most officers could hope for. The blue uniform consisted of a dark blue coat and light blue trousers

(with a gold stripe), branch facings, and rank shoulder straps. Use and requirement for the blues resumed after the War and so it remained until just a few years ago when the Army Uniform Board in its dubious wisdom decided to replace the Class A green uniform with a modification of the blues. This initiative quickly became unpopular (for one thing, Class B now demanded a white shirt as an outer garment!).

Optional uniform variations included the white tropical uniform, cut like the summer service uniform, but in sparkling white, and the mess uniform. The latter consisted of high-rise trousers, black cummerbund, and a short mess jacket with gold shoulder knots, branch color facings, and gold braid on the sleeves reflecting the officer's rank. Oh, and a formal shirt with studs and a bow tie. This came in winter and summer versions. You had to be a serious, serious clothes horse to buy all this stuff—though many of us did, very reasonably priced from the James S. Lee company of Hong Kong!

I include this for information, since these are described in the *Officers' Guide*. Don't bother trying to buy formal uniforms. You could get blues, but they are now made in a lightweight blend instead of the fine wool of the old days.

General officer service uniforms

There are a few differences in uniforms for general officers, but they are rather subtle until you get up to the dress blues level. In any case, I'm not inclined to encourage reenactors to rock a GO impression unless they are interpreting a particular personality for the public.

Overcoats and trench coats: At the beginning of the war, the officers' overcoat was of similar design to that of enlisted soldiers, though of slightly finer wool and with horn rather than brass buttons. By 1944, the old wool overcoat was no longer issued, and was replaced by a trench coat made of poplin or twill wind resistant and water repellent in a lighter shade of OD (No. 2 and No. 7). The trench coat is supplemented as an option by a short overcoat made of wool (doeskin or kersey) 26-32 oz weight, cut in a mackinaw style in OD No. 52. (Note that the cotton twill "jeep coat" mackinaw is not a substitute.) Reminder: in any post camp or station stateside, mixing service uniform and field uniform items is *strictly* "out of uniform."

Raincoats: The specification of the officers' raincoat is a revealing look at the special customs regarding officer uniforms. By 1944, an officer had two options for his raincoat. The first was to use the shell of the OD 52 trench coat/overcoat (above). It looked stylish, but in a period of warm rain the officer would probably be dryer walking around with no coat at all. The other option was to have a raincoat specially made using the same specifications as the overcoat shell, but in lighter waterproof (not water repellent) fabric. A living historian's best bet is to buy a reproduction overcoat/trench coat and remove the liner in warm weather.



Field uniforms

The field (Class D) uniform was originally the seasonal service uniform with field load carrying equipment and helmet. Though it seems odd in retrospect, it was assumed that the soldier (and officer) would fight the war in service coat and trousers, tie, leggings and field boots, with web gear and packs strapped over the fancy suit. That's how it worked in WWI.

However, it soon became obvious that this was impractical. The field uniform became the Class D, essentially the Class B service uniform with field gear for enlisted. Officers generally wore Class B, but with issue wool trousers (or private purchase equivalent) and either the dark OD service shirt or a wool service shirt similar to the enlisted version but with epaulets sewn on. Private purchase shirts for officers had to hew to the Quartermaster spec, but some fanciness was permitted (e. g., pointed pocket flaps, reinforced shirt front plaquet (where the buttons are). Sometimes the private purchase shirts were of a slightly darker OD than the standard issue shirt, but there was no official specification of a "darker" OD shirt for officers in the field. Officers at company grade learned after a while that, things being equal, it is more important to be inconspicuous than to be stylish.

In cooler weather, officers wore the issue field jacket.

In hot or tropical areas, the khaki Class C uniform could be used as the field uniform, but its camouflage properties were questionable. Many units switched immediately to the HBT work ("fatigue") uniform, either as a warm weather outer garment or to cover the wool core uniform.

Field shoes: For field service, forget about private purchase. Officers bought their shoes from Quartermaster sales. The standard field shoe was formed on what was called the "Munson last" (a *last* is the wooden form of a shoe around which the leather is shaped). This design is thoroughly proven in field and combat use, and is easy to maintain if kept clean and treated with dubbing or saddle soap. Most officers who served in the field would acquire two pair, which allowed one to dry out while the other was being worn.

Underwear: Lore of the 1930's and 40's consigned the use of long woolen underwear to hillbillies and film comedians. War made them popular again. They are more comfortable than cotton undershirts and drawers, more durable, and warmer. Unless you're heading to lead a platoon in New Guinea, think about getting a couple of "longies" from the Quartermaster.

Bedding roll: The Quartermaster also supplies bedding rolls, canvas waterproof containers for blankets and other accessories for comfort in the field ("snivel gear").

Shelter tent: Company grade officers of the Infantry were authorized a whole shelter tent: two shelter halves, two poles and pegs. Field grade officers were technically authorized a small wall tent, though I doubt the war stopped after Captain Irons got promoted to major while the US Army Service Forces found a wall tent for his comfort and convenience.

Musette bag: the "Bag, field, od, M1936 w/strap" listed under officers' field gear is the musette bag. This is your personal "stuff" container, to carry the things enlisted doughfeet carried in their pack/haversack, minus bedding (your bedding comes with the bedding roll): personal articles, rations, spare socks and underwear, your mess kit, shaving gear, foot powder, whatever else can be stuffed in without overloading the bag. You should have your name tape sewn under the flap. *Do not lose your musette bag.* Attach it to the top of your suspenders like a shoulder pack.

[Airborne troops carry the musette bag as well, because the standard M28 infantry pack system interferes with the parachute and harness.]

Work uniforms

The “work uniform” was used when the soldier’s activity (working on the grease rack, digging, and other “fatigue” tasks) would damage the service uniform. In such cases, the HBT cotton twill uniform, coverall or two-piece, could be worn, either alone or over the service uniform.

Now, here’s an obscure twist: there were two authorized items of headgear: the cap, HBT and the suit, HBT (that’s the twill coverall and the mechanic’s cap) were authorized ONLY for mechanics and for members of the armored force (who might as well be &*%#\$ mechanics). Everybody else was supposed to wear the hat, HBT (the lovably ugly Daisy Mae) and the HBT jacket and trousers. As with everything else, there was some sloppiness in this rule.

Headgear

Reenactors have endless problems with headgear. This is unnecessary. Go to the regulation or, if you are doing an officer impression, to the *Officer’s Guide*. The hat or cap is not prescribed as a tool for showing your individuality: it is to be worn the correct way by all soldiers. That is, “uniformly.”

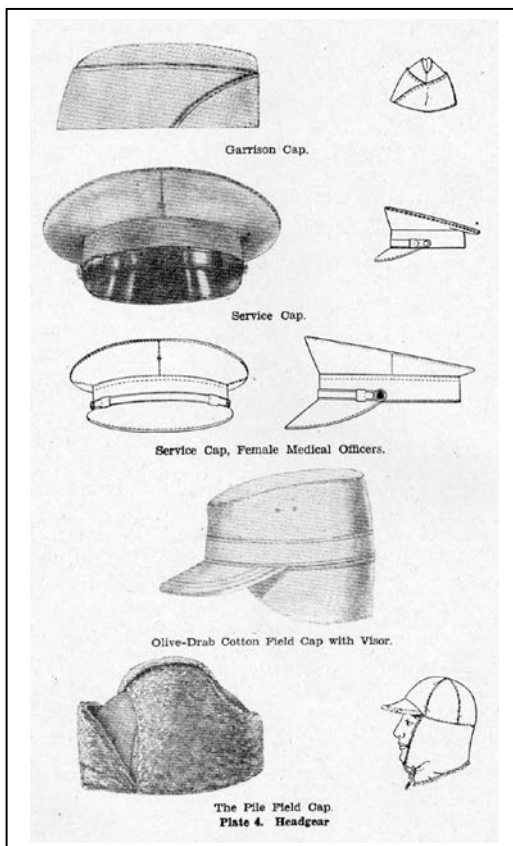
Important note: officers wear whatever style headgear is specified at a given time (in garrison, this is usually the published “uniform of the day”) for enlisted. If the soldiers are wearing the garrison cap, so should the officers.

The **service hat** for officers as well as enlisted was at the beginning of the war a wide-brimmed hat made of blocked felt with a chin strap, styled with a “Montana peak”—what we

now call a “smokey” (after National Parks mascot Smokey the Bear). It is now worn only by drill sergeants, and was restricted to special uses after the war began: most importantly, for mounted cavalry units and for service in Alaska. In the latter region, head nets were provided that fit over the service hat to delay the inevitable torments of Alaska mosquitoes. The mosquito is Alaska’s unofficial state bird, and it flies on four engines.

The **service cap** is the common visored saucer cap, officially called a “peaked cap.” The officer’s version is dark green to match the service coat; it is also available in cotton khaki or wool tropic worsted for wear with the summer uniform.

Important note on the service cap: there is no such thing as a “crusher cap.” This is a style adopted informally by the AAF air crews in which the stiffening band of a regulation service cap is removed by the wearer to allow earphones to fit over the crown. Many non-aviation impressions affect this style, called the “fifty mission crush”, but they should *not*. Unless you are an air crewman, wear the service cap *as issued*.



The **garrison cap**, often called the “overseas cap” (or other names beyond the scope of this lesson) is a small flat, soft cap, fore-and aft style, descended from the forage cap of the Napoleonic era (and ultimately from the cap worn by Scandinavian fishermen in the Viking age through a bizarre process I will not bother to recount). The main value of the garrison cap, and its almost exclusive use overseas, is that it will fit in the barracks bag or duffel bag without damage.

The **field cap** is a simple, comfortable cotton cap with ear flaps that tuck inside the crown. It was authorized for wear in cold climates, and was still around when I was young. We wore these in Ranger training. They were available, but not used widely. Now they are the standard cap for field wear (but made of a synthetic blend, minus the flaps and printed in the camouflage pattern *du jour*). They did, however, inspire the postwar “Ridgeway cap”, which was rigid like the French kepi and looked very very sharp. However, they were impractical because they could not be folded into a pocket and would not survive being packed in a duffel bag, and early in the 1960's were replaced by an even uglier baseball cap (with a cute little button on top) that was off-shade brown and quickly acquired sweat stains that could not be removed; a worse cap could not have been designed by orangutans. It was so bad—“how bad *was* it?—that backyard shed industries in Viet Nam quickly began producing cheap, simple baseball caps in OD that could be laundered to remove stains and looked as good, I guess, as any baseball cap. The Army quietly started making expensive knockoffs of the cheap Viet knockoffs as the official “fatigue cap.” These lasted until the Army shifted to the camouflage battle dress uniform around 1980. I include this sad tale so the reader can understand the baleful influence of the bureaucratic Bright Idea Fairy in uniform decisions.

Takeaway: The Army Uniform Board has its share of idiots, like any other group, and everybody has a vote. Believe me.

The **pile cap** was another cold weather development that was in use for decades after WWII. It was cotton with a wool-based furry “pile” on the front visor and ear flaps (which could be worn down or up). The basic problem with this otherwise excellent design was that troops were reluctant to wear it with the flaps down, no matter how cold, because it made them look like Elmer Fudd hunting wabbits. The pile cap returned in the 80's for a brief time, but was designed to be worn with the service uniform; it was “emerald black” (that is, “black”) and boasted a much deeper pile; the US Seal insignia (eagle and starburst) was pinned to the visor, which meant it was in front of your nose if you wore the visor down. It was a brief hit on the faculty at West Point when it first came out (in winter), but you still looked like a dork.

The **cap, wool-knit** is the popular OD watch cap. It is best used under the helmet to keep the head warm and reduce irritation. Worn by itself, it makes the soldier look like a hobo and causes the blood pressure of senior NCOs to spike.

Miscellaneous

Muffler: Mufflers may be worn with the overcoat or field jacket. These are generally fairly loose knit in OD wool. I have found a few shorter mufflers in a fine knit (that is smaller weave) in a color closely matching the moleskin short overcoats (see above).

Gloves: Gloves prescribed for wear with the officer's service uniform were of “chamois” (pronounced “shammy”). The chamois is a mountain goat native to the Alps, whose hide produced an exceptionally soft, supple leather of a pale tan color that was popularly used to make upscale gloves. By the mid-20th century, “chamois” was made from sheepskin. However,

formal gloves went out of style after the 1950's, and were replaced by cheaper utility leather gloves.

I have not found a precise match to these gloves. The closest is probably suede leather in pale yellowish tan.

Field jackets: By 1944, the older prewar field jacket was being replaced by the M43 design, an improvement in many ways. The important point to remember, however, is that its use in US posts, camps, or stations is limited to supplement the work or field uniforms; it is *not* to be worn with the service uniform. In maneuver areas, exceptions may be made by the commander.

Belt buckles: The officers' web belt was supplied with a brass buckle unlike the issue buckle which was an anodized black frame. The issue buckle had two advantages not to be despised: (a) it did not have to be polished, and (b) it could serve as a beer bottle opener. I don't doubt many officers used the issue buckle in the field, but it would not have worked with the service uniform.

Insignia

Living historians make quite a few mistakes with choice and placement of insignia. Some of this is due to failure to check the correct use and placement (copying others who are doing it wrong instead of finding out how to do it right) or, in the case of recent veterans, presuming that current regulations were used in WW II.

Changes in display of insignia: The pre- and early-war placement of insignia on the service shirt—branch insignia on the left collar tab, "US" device on the right collar tab, and rank pinned on the epaulets—yielded in 1942 to replacement of the "US" with the insignia of rank and nothing on the epaulets.

Insignia of rank: Rank insignia on the service uniform may be of metal or embroidered metal thread. The advantage of embroidered rank is clear if you've ever tried to pin it on the epaulets of a service coat.

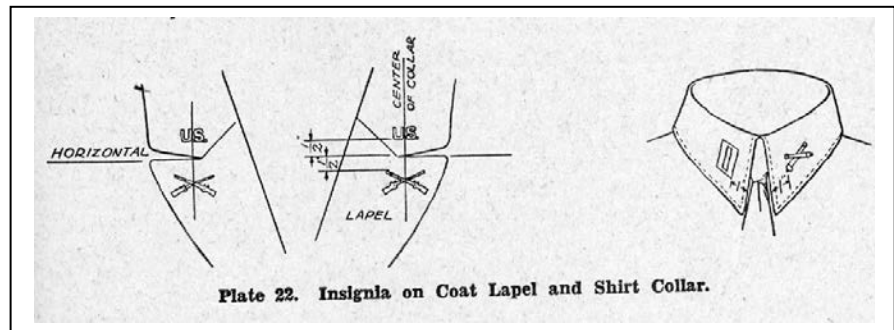
Placement of pinned insignia:

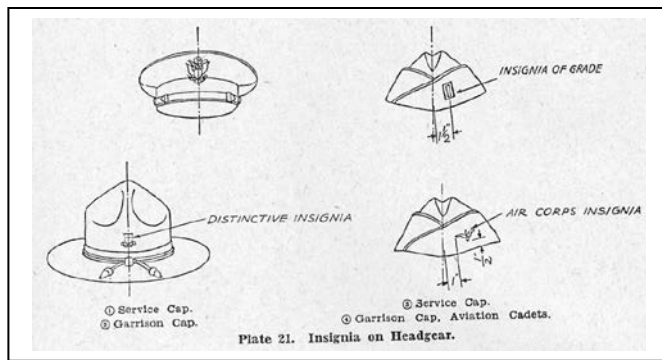
—*On the garrison cap:* insignia of rank is pinned on the (wearer's) left, 1½ inches from the front crease and centered. Officers do not wear the DUI on the garrison cap.

—*On the service hat:* The DUI is worn on the front of the crown, midway between the cord and the center eyelet. Rank is not displayed on the service hat.

—*On the service cap:* The US Seal (eagle and starburst) is displayed on the front of the cap, aligned with the center eyelet; insignia may be brass or gilded silver.

—*On the service coat:* "US" and insignia of branch are affixed on the service coat parallel to the ground and ½" above and below the apex of the lapel gap.





—*On the collar of the service shirt:*
 On the collar tab, 1” from the leading edge and perpendicular to it, branch insignia on the wearer’s left and insignia of rank on the right.

NOTE: There is one obscure trick involved here, and it concerns the rank insignia of a colonel (eagle clutching arrows and laurel). There are two versions, and you need both. In one, the eagle’s head faces left, the other has it facing

right. Why? Because such insignia must always be placed so that they are “advanced”, or facing to the front. The eagle of a colonel is the only case in which this matters.

Placement of DUI: Distinguishing unit insignia (crests) are worn on the dark OD and summer service coat epaulets, centered between the insignia of rank and the button.

—*On the work uniform:* Officers wearing the work uniform (HBT jacket and trousers) wear branch and rank insignia as on the service shirt. At the discretion of the commander, these may be removed or placed otherwise to prevent identification by snipers.

Placement of sewn/embroidered insignia:

In general, the only sewn insignia or patches worn by officers on the service coat are unit patches (centered ½” below the left shoulder seam) and overseas service bars, one for each six months overseas in a combat theater. Veterans of WW I serving in WWII who have received overseas service chevrons may wear them below the overseas service bars. on the left sleeve. Those who received wound chevrons may wear them on the right sleeve if they were earned in WW I, but they may not be substituted for subsequent purple heart awards.

Above all: Officers are not enlisted soldiers, so they do not enlist. Do *not* wear enlistment hash marks on the sleeve of the officers’ service coat.

Note also that when the service coat is worn as an outer garment, insignia of rank and branch are *not* worn on the shirt beneath.

Awards and decorations

Now *here* is a sensitive topic.

We’re really talking about three related subjects: *decorations* for valorous or meritorious service; *campaign ribbons*; and *badges* for special qualification or service.

Campaign or service ribbons are easy to manage: simply research a back story for your impression and identify the service ribbons you would wear. There are some tricks here (like battle stars on a campaign ribbon like the ETO service medal) or what you would or would not be likely to wear or what would have been available at a given time in your selected theater of operations. Most individuals and units handle this effectively.

Special qualification badges—most specifically the parachutist wings—are a mixed bag. The jump wings are appropriate for an airborne impression, since no one would be in a jump unit without qualification. Yes, the original cast earned the wings with a lot of work and no small helping of guts, but it’s demonstrably necessary for the impression.

But some badges are beyond the pale to most reenactors. The most important is the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB). This is a very specific award, and many were and are earned posthumously. This is probably not a good accessory for most reenactors (those who have actually earned it in infantry combat excepted).

Decorations for valor and meritorious service and the purple heart also fall in this category. My home unit's policy is that no award or decoration will be worn unless the member actually earned it in military service. The policy also prohibits wearing decorations not authorized in WW II (Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation and Army Achievement medals in particular).

It's a matter of judgment and self-respect. I will leave it at that, and will personally stay tolerant of those who disagree.



LESSON SUMMARY

1. The uniform of an officer in the United States Army symbolizes (a) membership in a body devoted to the defense of the nation and (b) a select, small part of that greater organization entrusted with special leadership responsibilities.
2. The officer is responsible for maintaining his uniform in a manner that reflects favorably on his army and his profession. His appearance should be beyond reproach under the special circumstances of his place and job, should be well maintained, and should stand out by neatness and pride, not by special, nonregulation, changes.
3. Officers purchase their service uniforms, which may be tailor-made to Army specifications or purchased through the Quartermaster sales or post exchange. The officer's Army service uniform is distinguishable from the uniforms issued to enlisted soldiers, generally of different materials and different shades. However, when enlisted soldiers are wearing a prescribed uniform (for example, Class B), the officer wears the corresponding style.
4. In addition to uniforms, an officer is expected to provide for his personal use, grooming, and hygiene and convenience.
5. Officers are issued certain items from the Quartermaster when he arrives at his assigned unit: weapon, helmet, field gear, shelters, flashlight, and other items. Many of these are turned in when the officer transfers to another unit; others accompany him.

6. Some officer items (for example the blue dress uniform) were not mandated during most of the war.
7. Some items unique to officers could be purchased or modified from Quartermaster issue or commercial purchase. These include the trench coat/overcoat, raincoat (modified by removal of the overcoat lining), short wool overcoat.
8. Placement of officer rank and branch insignia changed early in the war.
9. Common reenactor errors include: improper placement of insignia; ill-fitted uniforms; use of inappropriate items (e.g., enlisted hash marks on officer service coat; wearing the service cap with a “fifty mission crush” when not portraying an AAF officer; failure to polish buttons on the service coat of other brass insignia; wearing improper awards and decorations and qualification badges.