

Wearing Army Traditions



Today's soldier, wearing an Army uniform of modern cut, is carrying on traditions of more than 200 years. Early in an enlistment, most learn about their uniform by listening to the folklore passed on by their seniors. Each year historical inquiries to museum curators and history offices, usually before promotion boards, demonstrate that there is an interest in and a need for a reliable and accessible uniform reference, based on official documents. Assembled on these pages are soldiers of today and historical images and artifacts of yesterday, from the Central Army Museum Collection, to provide testament and, we hope, some answers to the proud heritage we wear.



1. SERVICE CAP

A cloth forage cap with visor appeared in the clothing allowance of 1821, to save the expensive uniform cap from fatigue duty. By 1902 a bell-crown version had earned its modern name when it joined the olive drab and khaki service uniform introduced that year.

2. OFFICERS CHIN STRAP

The Officer's caps gained a gold bullion cord in 1883, replacing the black chin strap, and established an officer distinction. A gold chin strap was part of the blue dress uniform in 1902 and continued with the new Army Green uniform of 1954.

3. SERVICE CAP INSIGNIA

The Army is privileged to wear the U.S. coat of arms. In 1895 officers

added it to their forage caps when they moved their branch insignia to the standing collar of a new sack coat. In 1917 enlisted personnel followed with the arms on a disk.



4. SHOULDER STRAP

After 1829 officers could wear a frock coat. This introduced the shoulder strap by 1835, as a grade insignia from the bridle used on the fringed epauletts of the uniform coat. In 1851 its field became a branch color, and company officer insignia silver by 1872.

5. BRANCH COLOR ORNAMENTATION

In 1851 the French frock coat arrived for all and introduced the system of branch colors. The 1902 dress uniform retained this on officer cap and cuff ornamentation, but in 1953 enlisted personnel changed to gold for all branches to avoid supply problems.

6. TROUSER STRIPE

Officers and noncommissioned officers have worn stripes since 1832, and in branch colors after 1851. General officer double stripes arrived in 1902, but gold replaced all colors by 1953, and male enlisted Army blue uniforms even gained stripes after 1955.



7. LIGHT BLUE TROUSERS

Winter mud on early white wool changed the pantaloons to a more practical gray by 1821, and to sky-blue in 1832. Contrasting with the blue coat, this traditional color scheme avoided the difficult match of coat and trousers worn by generals and staff officers.



8. ENLISTED COLLAR INSIGNIA

Complaints in 1907 about the loss or snagging of officer cut-out collar insignia led to the adoption of bronze circular disks for enlisted personnel. Die struck with the branch, US and unit designation, the collar ornaments changed to gilt after 1924.

9. CHEVRON GRADE INSIGNIA

Chevrons first appeared in 1821 when shoulder wings replaced the epaulettes, and in 1847 for wear on the wool jacket. But after 1851 large chevrons worn point down in branch color or smaller chevrons (worn point up after 1902) became the standard.



10. U.S. GREAT SEAL BUTTON

With the adoption of the Great Seal in 1783, Army buttons begin to reflect it. By 1854 all enlisted personnel wore — and after 1902 all personnel had — the Great Seal button, except engineer officers, who retained their distinctive branch button.



11. SERVICE STRIPE

After the 1782 Badge of Distinction, the service stripe reappeared in 1832. By 1851 a diagonal half chevron in branch color indicated an enlistment. With the absence of the dress uniform in 1920, a smaller service stripe appeared for the service coat.

12. ARMY BLUE

In 1779 GEN George Washington specified blue for the uniform coat. Regulations of 1821 reiterated that the Army would wear the national blue. With the 1902 adoption of the servicedress in khaki and olive drab, Army blue became a dress uniform.

Uniform Traditions



1. SERVICE CAP
1825

2. OFFICER'S CHIN STRAP
1883

4. SHOULDER STRAP
1835

5. BRANCH COLORS
1851

6. TROUSER STRIPE
1832

7. LIGHT BLUE TROUSERS
1821

3. SERVICE CAP INSIGNIA
1895

8. ENLISTED COLLAR INSIGNIA
1907

9. CHEVRON GRADE INSIGNIA
1832

10. U.S. GREAT SEAL BUTTON
1854

11. SERVICE STRIPES
1832

12. ARMY BLUE
1779

13. GRADE INSIGNIA
1899

14. US COLLAR INSIGNIA
1895

15. BRANCH INSIGNIA
1832

16. SHOULDER INSIGNIA
1918

17. SLEEVE ORNAMENTATION
1907

18. OVERSEAS SERVICE BAR
1918

20. OFFICER CAP BRAID
1858

19. GARRISON CAP
1918

21. DISTINCTIVE UNIT INSIGNIA
1921

22. SHOULDER LOOP
1924

23. SERVICE RIBBON
1905

24. WAIST BELT
1899

25. ARMY GREEN
1954

[See pages 23 and 26 for explanation of numbers.]

Army Blue

Army Green



13. OFFICER GRADE INSIGNIA

Officer grade insignia evolved from devices added to the gold- or silver-fringed epaulettes. By 1898 the use of cotton khaki for tropical field clothing and the wear of insignia on the wool shirt (in 1899) required removable metal insignia.

14. U.S. COLLAR INSIGNIA

In 1892 officers changed to an undress blue coat trimmed in black mohair braid. By

1902 the collar featured a national cipher on each side. This was added to distinguish regular from volunteer or militia units, now wearing a similar uniform.

15. BRANCH OF SERVICE INSIGNIA

The 1834 regulation uniform cap of black felt introduced branch insignia in either yellow (artillery) or white (infantry) metal on the front. By 1895 branch insignia had moved to the collar of the officer's blouse, with those on the enlisted uniform following in 1902.



16. SHOULDER SLEEVE INSIGNIA

American vehicle and baggage markings in France, reflecting regional symbolism such as the South Carolina wildcat, became shoulder patches in 1918. After 1945 they could recognize former wartime service when worn on the right shoulder.

17. OFFICERS SLEEVE ORNAMENTATION

To provide recognition after 1907, officers had mohair braid of like shade on the cuffs of their cotton khaki and olive drab wool service uniforms. With the Army green uniform in 1954, this distinction continued with black braid.



18. OVERSEAS SERVICE BAR



Created in 1918, the gold War Service Chevron indicated each six months overseas. In 1944 the Overseas Service Bar revived this practice for World War II. In 1951 the bars were moved to the right cuff.

19. GARRISON CAP

In 1918 American "Doughboys" serving in France needed headgear that was comfortable to wear, yet could be stored in the pocket when the helmet was donned. To replace the service hat, the Army copied the French *Bonnet de Police*, an envelope-style fatigue headgear, and created the overseas cap, the predecessor to the garrison cap.



20. OFFICERS CAP BRAID

The 1858 uniform hat had branch-colored cords for enlisted personnel, black and metallic gold for commissioned officers, and gold for general officers. In 1940 the garrison cap converted the hat-cord scheme to cord-edge braid to trim the curtain of the caps.



21. DISTINCTIVE UNIT INSIGNIA

In 1921, following our experience with the regimental badges of the British, the chief of staff authorized our Army to adopt distinctive trim to the uniform. This distinctive

unit insignia transferred from the service hat to the garrison cap after 1939.

22. SHIRT SHOULDER LOOPS

The M-1921 or "Sam Browne" belt was responsible for shoulderloops. To retain falling straps, officer's shirts gained loops as a distinction in 1924. Not until after 1946 did all enlisted personnel have a common uniform and shirts with shoulder loops.



23. SERVICE RIBBON

In 1905 orders prescribed campaign badge ribbons to be sewn onto the olive drab wool service coat.



A removable bar was secured to the khaki cotton uniform by shanks passing through

eyelets. Authority for wearing ribbons on the shirt came by 1941.

24. WAIST BELT

The Philippines khaki uniform added trouser loops and a leather belt in 1899. By 1910 the olive drab cotton web belt had a frame buckle. Officers bought the solid buckle, of gold-colored metal, by 1944, and by 1958 enlistees had the same and a belt in black.

25. ARMY GREEN

The chief of staff approved the Army green winter uniform in 1954, and it was phased in during 1956-1961. This replaced the olive drab wool service uniform, discarded because its camouflage color was no longer necessary and its uniqueness had been compromised by veteran wear.

