

Feature

WWII U.S. Army Officers' Field Uniforms and Accessories

Byron Connell



This final installment of a series on U.S. Army uniforms during WWII focuses on officers' field uniforms and accessories.

In this article, I'll discuss what the WWII U.S. Army officer took into the field. This includes primarily the field clothing worn, helmets, accessories, and firearms.



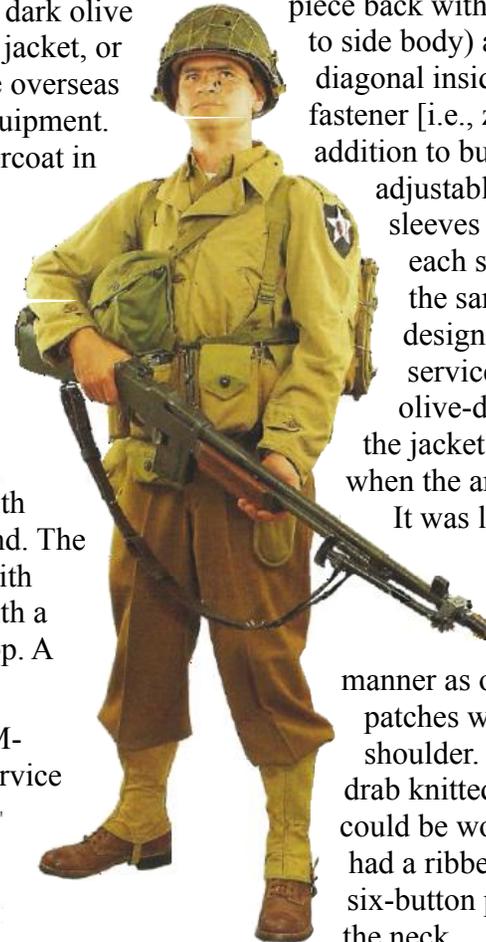
Field Clothing

In the field, an officer wore Class B uniform (including a tie), with dark olive drab (#51) trousers and a field jacket, or the Class C uniform; either the overseas cap or the helmet; and field equipment. An officer would wear the overcoat in the field as needed.

M-1938 khaki heavy cotton duck leggings (gaiters) were worn over the shoes and extended up the outside of the trousers to mid-calf. The legging had a strap that went under the sole of the shoe. The strap could be adjusted with a buckle at its upper outside end. The legging laced up the outside with nine grommeted lace holes, with a double tenth lace hole at the top. A seam ran up the front.

Introduced in 1941, the M-1941 field coat replaced the service coat in the field for both officers and enlisted men. It was olive drab (#54), a "six- or seven-button [including one at the bottom] jacket, depending on

length, with a two-piece adjustable collar with tab to button, semi-peaked lapels, one-piece back with stitched on belt (side body to side body) and side plaits [pleats]; two diagonal inside hanging pockets, slide fastener [i.e., zipper] to close front in addition to buttons and buttonholes; adjustable tabs to button at cuff of sleeves and bottom of jacket'; on each shoulder a shoulder strap of the same material in the same design and attachment as on the service coat. "All buttons to be olive-drab 24 ligne." The bottom of the jacket was slightly above its cuffs when the arms fell naturally to the side. It was lined with thin blanket wool.



Officers wore insignia of rank on the shoulder straps in the same manner as other coats. Shoulder patches were worn on the left shoulder. For cold weather, an olive drab knitted wool long-sleeved sweater could be worn under the field jacket. It had a ribbed waistband and cuffs and a six-button placket that buttoned up to the neck.

Above: Officer in M-1941 field coat and M-1938 leggings. *Left:* General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, at Verdun in 1944 with Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, then Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces, and Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, then commanding the 12th Army Group. Eisenhower became Chief of Staff in 1945, Bradley in 1948. Marshall, on the left, Eisenhower, in the center, and Bradley, on the right wear dark olive drab Ike jackets and trousers with khaki shirts. Marshall has General Staff insignia on the lapels.



Maj. Gen. Edward M. Almond, CG, 92nd Infantry ('Buffalo') Division, inspects troops wearing M-1943 Field Jackets, Italy, March 1945.

The M-1941 field jacket was replaced by the M-1943 field jacket, as reflected in the March 31, 1944, amendment to regulations. The new jacket was a “coat type jacket, plain back, fly front with six 36-ligne buttons and with adjustable waistline drawcord, body and sleeves lined throughout, with two outside breast cargo type pockets and two lower inside hanging pockets with all straps and concealed buttonhole tabs. Made of “cotton cloth, wind resistant and water repellent, of ‘olive drab shade No, 7 [greener than the olive drab #54 of the M-1941 jacket],” it was “provided with throat tabs with two buttonholes for 30-

Editor's Note

See Byron Connell's in-dept article, “The Eisenhower Jacket and Its Influence on Fashion” in [vol. 10, issue 1](#) (Feb. 2012) of *The Virtual Costumer*.

ligne buttons and shirt type cuff with adjustable sleeve closure.” Shoulder straps of the same material were in the same design as on the service coat. Officers wore insignia of rank on the shoulder straps and shoulder patches on the left shoulder. An olive drab wool muffler, of commercial pattern, could be purchased for wear.

The year 1944 saw introduction of a new waist-length coat. Known as the M-1944, it was popularly called the “Eisenhower Jacket” or “Ike Jacket,” because General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the European Theater’s Supreme Allied Commander, admired the British Army’s battledress jacket and, in 1943, pressed for introduction of an improved version for both field and garrison use. In practice the Ike



Supreme Commander talks with men of Company E, 502d Parachute Infantry Regiment, at the 101st Airborne Division's camp at Greenham Common, England, 5 June 1944. In this famous photo, Ike is wearing the Ike jacket with dark olive drab service cap and trousers and khaki shirt. His rank insignia are visible on the shoulder strap of the coat.

jacket was largely reserved for garrison, dress, or walking-out use.

Details of custom-tailored coats could differ from the official pattern. There are images, for instance, of Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr. (Commanding General, 3rd Army in the European Theater) wearing a coat with four exposed buttons, of the same type used on the service coat.

Post-War, the color of officers’ Ike jackets was changed to a lighter olive drab (#33), the same shade as worn by enlisted men, to be worn with olive drab (#33) trousers, until phased out with the 1957 introduction of Army Green, which completely replaced it by 1961.

Army Air Force officers on flying duty were assigned A-134 or A-14 Flight Jackets (not to be confused with leather flying jackets). Otherwise similar to the M-1944 jacket, the flight jacket had inside hanging chest pockets close with a triangular flap instead of the Ike jacket’s patch pockets. Material, color, and cut otherwise were the same. Officers wore rank insignia on the collar and shoulder straps, organizational insignia on the lapels, and unit shoulder patch on the left shoulder. Commissioned officers wore braid around each cuff.

The flying jacket was the functional equivalent of the field jacket. The A1 jacket was a lined waist-length olive green leather jacket with a zipper front closure, and ribbed cloth cuffs, collar, and waistband. It had two horizontal inside hanging pockets above the waist that closed with triangular flaps by

means of a snap fastener. It did not have shoulder straps. The A2 jacket was similar, in brown leather, with a heavier lining and with shoulder straps, on which rank insignia could be worn, and a pointed leather collar. Field Coats. To replace use of the overcoat in the field, new long and short field coats were authorized for officers.

The Long Field Coat was a “utility coat” in olive drab #2 or #7 wind-resistant and water-repellant 5 ounce cotton poplin or twill. It was a double-breasted trench coat “two-ply throughout with a buttoned-up removable wool lining,” with a “convertible style roll collar and notched lapel,” four overcoat buttons on each side, the top ones about seven inches apart, and a diagonal buttonhole placed at lower corner of each front to button to side seam to facilitate marching.

A yoke for right shoulder buttoned in front with a 30-ligne button and a throat tab provided with two buttonholes for 30-ligne buttons. Back to be plain with set-in cantle piece closed with a small loop and 30-ligne button. A detachable belt same material as coat with 2 1/4 tongueless bar buckle and belt keeper held in place by two side loops and a strap keeper and belt strap. Adjustable tabs to button at ends of sleeves.” It had “two diagonal hanging pockets, cut hand opening in lining, and finished with pointed flaps buttoning to the rear.

Shoulder straps of the same design as on the service coat were closed at the collar end with 30-ligne buttons.



Pilots wearing A1 jackets, China, 1941. Famous "Flying Tiger" pilot Tex Hill is on the right



Soldiers wearing helmet M-1 (left) and M-1917A1 (right).

The coat lining was made of olive-drab wool “with inside yoke extending down 5 inches below armhole, and facing of olive-drab rayon fabric, 14 buttonholes for buttoning into overcoat body. Four buttons are positioned on right front for using as a separate garment. Two large patch pockets with diagonal slash above each pocket in front with openings through coat.”

The Short Field Coat was an olive drab #51 double-breasted coat made of 26 to 32 ounce beaver, doeskin, jersey, or melton cloth. It could be lined or unlined. The skirt extended to six inches above the knee and had a slit in back extending up about 15 inches from the bottom. The coat had a notched lapel roll collar about 5 inches wide with a double row of three large regulation buttons down the front below the roll of the collar and a button and loop at the neck so that the collar could be buttoned closed. It had a patch pocket on each side and shoulder straps in the same design as on the service coat.

Helmets

Two helmets were in use during the War: the M-1917 and the M-1.

In 1941, the M-1917 steel helmet was still in use in the field. Similar to the British Army helmet, it was an inverted “basin” or “cream soup plate” painted olive drab (#51) with a russet brown buckled chinstrap. The paint was mixed with cork to provide a rough, non-reflective surface. The helmet was made of a single piece of 13 percent manganese steel, .036 inch thick. The rim

was spot welded to the bowl, with the ends butted, not lapped. Two flexible guiding loops for the chinstrap were riveted to the bowl.

The helmet lining “woven of cotton twine in meshes three-eighths of an inch square,” was built into the helmet. In 1940, a new “head pad assembly” appeared in M-1917A1 helmets. It consisted of a central leather pad and a circular lining made of four laced-together leather flaps. The M-1917A1 helmet also substituted for the leather chin strap a two-piece olive drab (#3) cotton webbing chin strap with a brass buckle on the longer right side and a brass hook on the shorter left side.

The Army adopted the new M-1 helmet in June 1941 and began distributing it in September, although the new helmet did not completely replace the M-1917 until some

time in 1942. Like the M-1917, each helmet was made of a single piece of manganese steel, about .037 inch thick, to which a stainless steel rim was spot-welded, with the ends butted at the front. In October 1944, stainless steel was replaced by manganese steel for the rim, butted at the rear. A stainless steel rectangular loop for a chinstrap was welded to each side. Initially, the loops were rigid; beginning in October 1943, they were hinged.

The new helmet was pot-shaped, measured 11 inches long, 9.4 inches wide, and 6.9 inches deep, and weighed 2¼ pounds. It was painted olive drab inside and out. Like the M1917A1, the paint for the exterior initially was mixed with cork. Subsequently, sand replaced cork. To the loops was affixed a two-piece olive drab (#3) cotton web chin strap with a steel or

brass arrowhead tongue and a steel or brass buckle and release hook on the right side, usually painted black. In November 1944, the color of the webbing was changed to olive drab (#7).

A major difference from the M1917 or M1917A1 helmet was the use of a separate helmet liner. Initially fiber and subsequently plastic, the liner followed closely the shape of the helmet body and was designed to slip into it. The fiber liner was made of two rigid shells, each “impregnated with varnish or other water insoluble and water repellent materials, securely cemented together with a suitable thermoplastic or thermosetting material which shall be insoluble in water.”

Once formed, the liner had an olive drab gabardine or twill cover cemented to it. It had rayon webbing suspension and neck straps, which were attached by



Earlier M-1917 liner and strap (left), M1917A1 (center) has aluminum framework with adjustable band under the old leather lining, close-up (right) of web chin straps & hardware.

perpendicular-sided metal washers, and an adjustable leather chin strap with a square metal double-slit buckle. The chin strap was attached by strap holders riveted to the liner.

The suspension was made of six lengths of webbing, arranged hexagonally. A rayon webbing head band was attached to it with snap fasteners. The head band came in 13 sizes; the suspension itself could be adjusted with a shoelace. The front half had a piece of leather attached to it. A rayon webbing neck band, in three sizes, was attached to the neck strap with snap fasteners.

A plastic liner replaced the fiber one in 1942. Like the fiber liner, the plastic one was a slip fit into the helmet. It was approximately .082 inch thick, 10.6 inches long and 8.6 inches wide, and weighed about 12 ounces. Like the helmet itself, its exterior was painted smooth dark olive drab (#3); the interior was unpainted brown plastic.

Initially, the suspension system was the same as for the fiber liner. In June 1942, it was changed to a system made of olive drab (#3) herringbone twill cotton webbing in the



WWII M1 Helmet & Liner Interior

Source: [Wikipedia: M1_Helmet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M1_Helmet)

same design as the rayon suspension. This webbing was secured to the liner with new A-frame washers. The head band was made of single olive drab (#3) herringbone twill cotton webbing and was adjustable by means of a two-piece bar buckle, made of stamped steel painted olive drab. Except at the ends, it was covered on one side with calfskin. It was secured to the suspension by a spring clip. The neck band also was single herringbone twill of the same fabric in the same color. The leather chin strap buckle was changed and the chin strap attached to the liner by a garter stud and hook, which made it removable.

In the spring of 1943, the paint for the exterior of the liner was changed to olive drab (#7) mixed with small particles of phenolic resin, resulting in a textured finish. A new chin strap buckle was made of a single piece of steel, with two slits, one of

which had rounded teeth on one side. That fall, it was modified with a roller, rather than a straight side. In June 1944, brass was adopted for all hardware in place of steel and double or triple herringbone twill weave used for the webbing.

A wool knit cap, known as a beanie or jeep cap, was provided for wear under the

helmet liner. It had a curtain flap at the back and sides that could be lowered for additional protection against cold, and a small visor in front. By itself, the helmet liner was widely worn for parade, omitting the actual helmet.

In the European Theater of Operations (ETO), officers were required to affix their rank badge to the front of the helmet; this did not apply in the Pacific or other theaters. In the ETO, when not hooked under the chin, the chin strap normally was tucked up on the helmet's rim. In some ETO commands, the rear of an officer's helmet was marked by a broad vertical white stripe. In the Pacific Theater of Operations, rank insignia frequently were painted on the rear of the helmet.

Field Equipment

An officer's field equipment consisted of the M-1912 khaki web pistol belt (below), the M-1936 khaki suspenders, and the M-1936 khaki canvas field (or "musette") bag. All web equipment was visibly stamped "U.S." in black block letters. The pistol belt had nine horizontal ribs and about twelve sets of three grommeted lace holes, set vertically, for adjustment of length. It had a metal single-prong buckle and keeper.



WWII M-1 Carbine.



long, to be slung from the shoulder by its carrying strap. This weapon was smaller and lighter than the M1 Garand rifle,

with shorter range. It was an alternative to the pistol, not the rifle.

Byron Connell is a historian by training. He likes to help at masquerades rather than entering them. Since being part of the Torcon best-in-show entry, he enters in the Master division when he does so. Byron has run masquerades at several Costume-Cons and Philcons, and directed the Anticipation and Chicon 7 masquerades. He belongs to the Sick Pups (the New Jersey-New York Costumers' Guild), the SLUTs, (St. Louis Ubiquitous Tailoring Society), and the Armed Costumers' Guild. Byron is a past President of the International Costumers' Guild, which honored him with its 1996 Lifetime Achievement Award. He likes hard sci-fi,, alternate history, alternate worlds, and fantasy.

The musette bag (below) was a flapped canvas bag with a strap that could pass over the shoulder, keeping the bag at about waist level. The flap was secured by two short buckled straps. In late 1944, all web equipment was changed to olive drab (#7).



Soldier with M-1936 canvas field bag (musette) worn as backpack.

Firearms

The Colt-pattern M-1911A1 .45 caliber automatic pistol (right), 8.62 inches long, was carried in a russet leather flapped holster slung on the right hip from the pistol belt and tied to the right thigh with a thong from its bottom. The holster had U.S. within an oval stamped into its flap. An ammunition pouch looped over the belt's left front held two clips of the pistol's ammunition. Further description of the pistol is outside the scope of this article.

M-1 Carbine. As an alternative to the pistol, an officer could carry an M-1 .30 caliber carbine rifle (above), 35.6 inches



WWII Colt M-1911A1 sidearm with original holster.

About Colors

Most WWII photos are black & white, so identifying colors by number is challenging. [Fabric swatch books](#) from the time exist but are very hard to find.

The best bet may be vintage clothing from the period. Here are a few samples from several online photo sources for some colors mentioned in this series of articles. Colors will vary based on lighting and fabric, so check several sources.

	Khaki #1
	Khaki #5
	Olive Drab #7
	Olive Drab #33
	Dark Olive Drab #50
	Dark Olive Drab #51
	Light Drab #54 (pink)