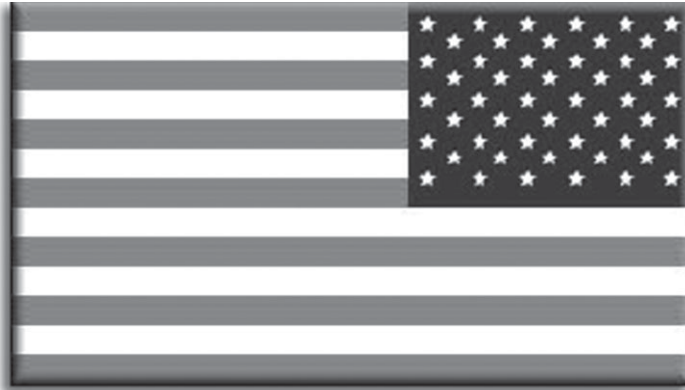


Is the Flag "Backwards" on Soldiers' Sleeves?

By Ms. Lisa Burgess

Why do American soldiers wear the U.S. flag insignia "backwards" on the right shoulder of their utility uniforms, with the canton (the rectangle with the stars) on the observer's right? It's a question that soldiers hear frequently as they travel through civilian airports or talk to members of other



services. And it does look "wrong" because U.S. federal code calls for the canton always to be positioned to the left.

The soldiers aren't wrong, however, and neither are their tailors. The Army has two authorized flag patches, one to be worn on the left shoulder, with the canton facing left, and another "reverse field" patch worn on the right shoulder, with the canton facing right. The two different orientations are mandated because Army regulations call for the flag "to be worn so that to observers, it looks as if the flag is flying against a breeze."

What does a stiff wind have to do with this custom? The rule is a nod to the U.S. Army's early history, when wars were fought as a series of carefully choreographed battles, with two armies meeting on a field, clashing head-on until one side emerged victorious. In those battles, infantry and mounted cavalry units would always designate one soldier as "standard bearer" to carry the colors into the fight. As the standard bearer charged, his rapid forward movement would cause the flag to stream back. And since the Stars and Stripes is mounted with the canton next to the pole, that section would always be forward.

So if a soldier were charging into battle, the flag would give the appearance of forward motion. When worn on the right shoulder, the flag only appears to be backwards. And that's why soldiers wear the flag patches on the right shoulder backwards. Because retreat in battle, as any soldier will tell you, is not the Army way.



Ms. Burgess began her career in journalism in 1985 after graduating from the University of Chicago. She joined the Pentagon press pool in 1989, covering national defense topics for a variety of publications before joining Stars and Stripes in 2001. Ms. Burgess has a master's in national security strategy from the National War College and has twice been named as a Freedom Forum Fellow.

(Note: A variation of this article was printed in the 28 February 2004 European edition of *Stars and Stripes*.)

(Note: A change to Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*, dated 5 September 2003, instructs all soldiers, regardless of deployment status, to permanently wear the U.S. flag insignia on utility uniforms. This includes battle dress uniforms [BDUs], desert BDUs [DBDUs], maternity BDUs, cold weather coats, air crew BDUs, and combat vehicle crewman [CVC] uniforms and jackets [cold weather]. The mandatory wear date is 1 October 2005.)

Environmental Compliance Officer Course

Twenty-five officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) of the 2d Infantry Division attended the first Environmental Compliance Officer (ECO) Course on the Korean Peninsula from 3-7 May at Camp Casey. Personnel from the Directorate of Environmental Integration at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, assisted the training management NCO with the development and instruction of this 40-hour Korea-specific course. Students learned to conduct environmental awareness training, perform self-assessments and environmental risk assessments, and coordinate with the installation environmental staff for assistance. Members of

the Area 1 Environmental Office, Camp Casey Safety Office, HAZMART (handles hazardous materials disposition), Korea Regional Office (KORO) (U.S. Army), Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (CHPPM), 8th Army, provided briefings on their respective programs that relate to the environment. Army Regulation 200-1, *Environmental Protection and Enhancement*, states that commanders will appoint and train ECOs at appropriate levels to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. The Directorate of Environmental Integration can help installations develop an ECO course or other environmental training needs. For more information, contact Mr. Mike Walker at (573) 563-4119 or <walkerm@wood.army.mil> .