

ACU 'Fashion'

The dos and don'ts for this season and every season

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This winter seems to have come with some new Army Combat Uniform fashion trends. Surely, you've seen the green microfleece cap with edges rolled, or the Gore-Tex jacket unzipped for a more casual look.

Of course, that's not how they're supposed to be worn. For that matter, ACU fashion trends should be pretty simple. After all, it's a uniform; that means we all dress alike. But some Soldiers like living on the cutting edge of ACU fashion, which means they are not following regulations.

To help those who may be confused about what's in vogue this year (e.g., what's authorized) before the "uniform police" nab them, I consulted U.S. Army Europe's subject-matter expert on this matter: Command Sgt. Major Thomas Capel, USAREUR's command sergeant major. I also did a little research, such as reading over the USAREUR Uniform and Appearance Policy Standards Memorandum, dated Dec. 9, 2010, and — of course — Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*, the absolute bible on Army uniforms. Here's the "Cliff's Notes version" of what the experts say are the dos and don'ts for today's ACU ensembles.

First we'll look at the basic uniform. It's hard to go wrong here. The ACU shirt should be zipped and Velcro fasteners closed. Sleeves should never be rolled or cuffed. All the basic items — rank insignia, nametape, unit and combat patches, etc. — are still the standard accoutrements. In the case of trousers, length is not an issue. Soldiers can go "old school," wearing the pants legs tucked into their boots, or they can blouse the pants legs using commercially procured "blousers" or the ACUs' convenient built-in drawstrings. Regardless of which method you choose, blousing the trouser legs below the third boot eyelet is definitely a fashion "don't."

From there we move onto outerwear. You'll see the Gore-Tex jacket and the Generation II and III items, such as black or green fleece jackets, everywhere this year. They are all "in style"

this winter, which means they are authorized for wear. The black fleece might be last year's fashion, but it's still authorized. Soldiers who insist on being seen in nothing but the very latest styles can stop by their local Central Issue Facility and make the change to the green fleece.

No matter which jacket you go for this season — even if you decide to mix and match — remember that the snaps are to be fastened and the zipper should be zipped up to the neck. As for accessories, Soldiers can wear either pin-on or embroidered slip-on rank in the center of the jacket. The nametape — in quarter-inch block letters — should be worn on the left sleeve pocket only. Do not have your name embroidered directly on the jacket pocket. This takes away from the style — and it's not authorized. U.S. Army tape, nametape and rank are to be worn on the fleece jacket.

Now, let's move on to headgear. The beret is the hat we will all be seeing this year, as it's the only authorized headgear for garrison wear. No matter how much you like your patrol cap, keep it on the shelf for special occasions, such as performing maintenance in the motor pool or training events. The commander can authorize the wear of the patrol cap in transit to training events, but trips to the post exchange are not considered training. Authorization to wear the PC is clearly one of those cases of, "It's better to get permission first, than to ask forgiveness later." When you wear your patrol cap, rank insignia should be affixed to the front and the nametape should be worn on the back. When it comes to the PC, less is more, specifically when it comes to adding fashion accessories like "cat eyes" reflective strips. The only Soldiers authorized to sew cat eyes on the back of the PC are observer/controllers. And even O/Cs are only authorized to wear them while they are "in the training box," Capel said.

Now we get to the most misunderstood uniform item to come along in a long time: the green microfleece cap. The green microfleece cap is a "do" when worn with the Improved Physical Fitness Uniform. It's also a great ACU accessory to wear when pulling prolonged duties, such as guard duty, in freezing temperatures. But it's not



the fashion statement for short walks, say, from your car to the PX. Like the patrol cap, it needs to stay on the shelf most of the time. When authorized to wear it, the cap should be pulled down snugly on the head. And, don't roll the ends — not authorized!

Of course, no ensemble is complete without the right accessories. We'll start with jewelry. The rule to remember is to leave the bling with your civilian wardrobe. Soldiers are authorized to wear two rings (a wedding set counts as one); a wristwatch and an identification bracelet, such as a medical alert bracelet and missing in action/prisoner of war bracelets (in black or silver only), with only one item worn on each wrist. When it comes to body piercing, the Army just says "no," at least while you're in uniform and/or on an Army installation or other facilities under Army control. That means do not "attach, affix or display objects, articles or ornamentation to or through the skin." (AR 670-1 states that the term "skin" includes "the tongue, lips, inside the mouth, and other surfaces of the body not readily visible.")

Last but not least, we'll cover eyeglasses and sunglasses.

Yes, glasses can and do make a fashion statement, but when you're in uniform, make sure you're making the right statement. Soldiers are not authorized to wear glasses that are considered trendy, like those with initials, designs or other adornments on the lenses or frames. Eyewear is not authorized for wear on top of your head. As for sunglasses, lens colors should stay on the conservative side, in gray, brown or dark green.

The big question for sunglasses is where to put them when you're not wearing them to protect your eyes. The short answer is where not to put them: Don't hang them off of your uniform, and don't hang them from chains, bands or ribbons down the front of the uniform while in garrison.

These tips take only seconds to apply, which is far less time-consuming than being the subject of an on-the-spot correction. You'll know you've achieved the look if you are dressed the exact same way as every other Soldier in your unit. Apply these simple guidelines, and you'll be sitting at the height of ACU fashion this season: a neat and Soldierly appearance.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SMA Gates molded me

Your story of SMA Gates was great!

I served under him in the early 1980s as his driver when he was division command sergeant major. I've followed his career to this day.

Boy was he a great Soldier! He taught me so much and I have applied that to both my past military and current civilian life. I have some great stories during those three years. I spent a great deal of time each day with him. My best "teachable" memories were when we'd sleep out in the rain with no tent during a field exercise because that's what the rest of the Soldiers were doing (while the officers slept in buildings and ate on china). Or inspecting an arms room guard at 1am on a Saturday morning, 30 miles away from division headquarters..

Besides my late father, SMA Gates has inspired me the most in life even though I haven't seen him in 20 years.

He was a 100 percent total warrior, and I'll never forget it. I act like him to this day.

He molded me.

Thank you.

*Rob Holtzhauer
Prince William County, Va.*

A thought on technology

I'm not certain who would be best to approach concerning this so I thought *The NCO Journal* would be the best place to start or at least get an idea I have put out to the people it concerns.

My idea encompasses the prevalence of electronic media. In particular, smartphones, and how we should start changing with the times.

We NCOs always carry a Leaders Book, some as small as a pocket notebook or so large you need a backpack to carry it. We need to create a Leaders Book app that can be uploaded onto smartphones as well as other electronic media, such as the iPad or Palm devices, that has all the information we need from our commonly reference publications: a height/weight/body fat calculator; ribbon rack builder; as well as a way to input information that changes on a regular basis such as Soldier information, phone numbers, command philosophies, and company, platoon and squad taskings. If someone can make this a reality, I know it will assist NCOs in their day-to-day duties no matter where they may be.

This is only a thought, but the Army has already created two different applications for mobile devices and put out a request for other apps. Unfortunately, I have not seen any that can do the job. There are some that do a little of what I have described but are more generic towards the military as a whole, not to the Army in particular.

*Christopher Ernst
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