

Uniform Specifications - Late American #202

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DATE:

Washington sent a plan for clothing the Army to the Continental Congress in January of 1779. On 29 March, Congress empowered Washington to prescribe the uniforms of the troops. In late May 1779, the Board of War sent to Washington an estimate of clothing to be ordered. On 11 June, the Board submitted an estimate of all the articles needed to wage war. This estimate included a slightly altered version of the uniform specifications. In General Orders on 2 October, Washington published a condensed version of the uniform regulation, recommending that the officers change their uniforms to match those ordered for the men. On 5 January 1781, Massachusetts, in General Orders, prescribed that the officers wear the 2 October 1779 uniform. In July 1780 rank distinctions were specified in General Orders (K p. 23). The uniforms for the men did not actually arrive from France until late 1780 or early 1781. (FM)

NOTE: Footnotes which appear inside the period at the end of a sentence refer to that sentence only. Footnotes outside the period refer to the previous paragraph or group of sentences.

TAILORING:

Uniforms were tailored to fit the individual (BW p. 38).

BUTTONS:

Buttons were white metal, with the exception of NY, NJ, artillery, and some non-state units, which were yellow (FM p. 40). Infantry and cavalry clothing buttons were marked USA (BW, FM p. 38). Artillery coat buttons were marked with a field piece mounted (FM p. 38).

BREECHES:

Breeches were made of white or buff wool (depending on facing color), with one pocket and a falling flap. There were 15 small [5/8"] buttons: 4 on each leg, 1 on each knee band, 3 on the waist band, and 1 on each corner of the fall. A piece of the breeches material was sewn on the outside between the thighs, a spot more likely to wear out. [This patch was probably similar to the one found on modern riding breeches.] (BW, FM p. 38)

Breeches are worn low, with the waistband on the hips. They are laced at the rear of the waistband for fitting. The seat is cut FULL and gathered on the waistband to allow bending and sitting comfortably. The front should fit smoothly without any extra fullness. The legs should fit as closely as possible without being tight. (Simes, Cuth p. 53) The legs are cut so that the knee band rides below the knee in front, but rises to the top of the calf in back (Cuth p. 53).

OVERALLS:

Linen overalls were ordered for soldiers in summer (FM p. 35-36, K p. 23).

Thick white woolen cloth was ordered for soldiers overalls in the winter (BW).

WAISTCOAT:

Waistcoats were of white or buff wool [depending on the facing color] (BW, FM p. 38).

The officers in Massachusetts were ordered to have 12 small [5/8"] buttons down the fronts of their waistcoats, and pocket flaps with closed worked buttonholes and 4 buttons beneath (ML). In the period, waistcoats were generally closed with 10, 11 or 12 buttons, spaced evenly (Simes). The pockets should be even with the bottom button.

The waistcoat should fit snugly across the stomach and chest. The neck opening should fit smoothly, and come up to the shirt collar seam. The bottom waistcoat button should be located directly over the lowest of the three waistband buttons on the breeches (Simes).

The triangular opening formed by the "skirt" falling away from the bottom button should be about seven or eight inches on each side. The back vent should be left open to the bottom of the breeches waistband. The tops of the side vents should be even with the top of the back vent. The bottom of the waistcoat should be parallel to the ground (Simes).

If the waistcoat is not snug enough after construction, twill tape ties may be sewn to the side seams and tied at the center back to pull the waistcoat tighter across the chest and waist areas.

COAT:

The coat color was a strong, dark blue. Except for artillery, all buttons were marked USA. Unless otherwise specified, all buttons were large [7/8"]. Facing and lining colors were as follows:

1. New England States - white facings with white buttons. White linings. Music reversed.
2. NY and NJ - buff facings with yellow buttons. Buff linings. Music reversed.
3. Pennsylvania, Delaware, Massachusetts, Virginia - red facings with white buttons. White linings. Music reversed.
4. NC, SC, Georgia - dark blue facings with white lace around white buttons. White linings. Music wore the same uniform with blue linings.
5. Artillery - red facings and linings, yellow lace on edges and around button holes. Buttons were yellow with a field piece mounted. Music reversed.
6. Cavalry - white facings with white buttons. White linings. Music reversed coat colors, lined blue. (BW, FM p. 36-40)

The coat skirt was ordered to reach no more than half way down the thighs (BW). The skirts were turned back with hooks and eyes on the corners (BW), covered with coat color hearts (ML). The skirts were cut full with two pleats behind. There were four buttons on each pleat - 1 at the hip, 1 at the bottom, and 2 in the center. The two center buttons had opposing closed worked buttonholes and were spaced as the buttons on the lapels. (ML)

The bottom of the coat was cut square [parallel to the ground] (ML). Lapels were 3" wide at the top and 2 3/10" wide at the bottom. They extended to the bottom edge of the waistcoat. There were 10 sets of working buttons and buttonholes on each lapel at equal distance apart. (ML) The bottom buttonhole should be 1" up from the bottom of the lapel. The lapels were made loose to turn over and button down to the level of the waistband (BW) in bad weather. Ordinarily, the coat was closed with 4 sets of heavy duty iron hooks and eyes (BW), under the top 4 sets of buttons (ML). The Massachusetts Line Order describes a winged lappet at

the top of the lapel, but this may have been for officers only. Some researchers feel that the winged lappet coats were more often used by New England units, and those without lappets by other states.

The Board of War ordered the cape [collar] to button to the lapel. The collar was made so that it could be pulled up around the neck and closed in front with 2 sets of hooks and eyes in bad weather. (BW) The width of the collar conformed to that of the lapel and there was a peak [point] at the back. The sides of the collar narrowed somewhat to form a continuous line with the lapel.

The sleeves were ordered to have a piece of coat wool sewn on each elbow (BW). There was a small round cuff, 3 inches wide, with 4 closed worked buttonholes and four buttons (ML). The cuffs did not turn down.

Scalloped pocket flaps were set on in a line between the bottom of the facing and the hip button. There were 4 button holes on each flap - the center 2 closed worked and the outer 2 open worked. Four buttons were used: 2 buttoned through the outer buttonholes and the other 2 were sewn half under the flap beneath each of the 2 closed button holes. The bottom lapel button, the 4 pocket buttons, and the hip button create a half circle. (ML) Working pockets were dropped into the coat behind the pocket flap, between the lining and the skirt (BW, ML).

The shoulder straps are constructed of two layers of coat wool with raw edges and are 1 1/2" wide. They should run in a straight line between the outside edge of the shoulder and the ear. They are fastened by a 5/8" button just under the collar.

All edges, including buttonholes, are left raw [unfinished].

The tops of the back and side vents should be the same distance from the floor as the bottom lapel button. The sleeve, when finished, should extend to the joint of the wrist (Cuth p. 51). The width of the sleeve opening should be just wide enough to admit the hand (Cuth p. 52). The coat should fit smoothly over the breast, without restraint (Cuth p. 51).

The skirt lining is sewed in on a line with the bottoms of the lapels and the tops of the vents.

SHIRT AND NECK STOCK:

Shirts were to have two buttons on the collar and one on each cuff (BW). Stocks were black velvet lined with linen and fastened with a white metal buckle (BW). 1/2" of the shirt collar should hang out over the neck stock (Cuth p. 59).

COCKED HAT:

The cocked hat was of black felt, the crown measuring 4" (BW). The hats were cocked up in the same manner as the French Infantry officers (BW). The leaves were held up with black iron hooks and eyes; with a very small front cock (MH).

Hats were laced with white linen tape of a doubled thread (BW).

The left side had a black cockade and a small button with the initials of the state rather than USA (FM p. 40, ML, BW). Non-state units used USA buttons. There was probably a white loop around the button (ML says officers had a silver loop). In May of 1780 the white "Alliance" cockade was added (WW XIX p. 27 and p. 172, Pet p. 244, K p. 23).

Inside the crown there should probably be a sweat band, with a draw string for fitting.

GAITERS OR SPATTERDASHES:

The order from the Board of War for shoe buckles states that the edges be rounded so as not to wear out the tongues of the "gaiters" (BW).

Gaiters and spatterdashes should fit smooth and without wrinkles. The tongue should be cut so that it ends at the first bend in the shoe at the base of the toes, thus covering the buckle [shoe lace area] completely (Cuth p. 61). The bottom of the gaiter in the back should come to the point where the heel of the shoe meets the body of the shoe. There is a black leather strap under the foot. (Cuth p. 61)

Gaiters end 2" above the knee. Spatterdashes are 11' tall in front and end at the swell of the calf in back (Cuth p. 61).

They were blackened and polished in the period (Cuth p. 80, 81). [A good 20th century substitute is 3 coats of black acrylic latex high gloss paint.]

STOCKINGS AND GARTERS:

White long, strong woolen hose; white strong woolen socks; white or grey strong thread hose all appear to have been ordered (BW, FM p. 40). Garters were also ordered (BW, FM p. 40).

Garters have brass buckles and the loose ends point inward, with the same amount of excess leather for each man.

SHOES:

Shoe buckles were uniformly styled with rounded[edges so as not to tear the gaiter tongues (BW).

Shoes must be of black leather with a smooth toe. This means no seam on the front of the shoe.

HAVERSACK AND CANTEEN:

The haversack strap goes worn over the right shoulder on top of any other accoutrements other than the canteen. The top of the haversack is worn even with the bottom rib and the canteen sits on the haversack so that their tops are even.

CARTRIDGE POUCH:

If it is carried on a shoulder carriage, the top of the pouch should be even with the bottom of the hip vent button (Cuth p. 69).

MUSKET SLING:

They were worn tight (Cuth p. 71).

RANK:

Captain - epaulette on the right shoulder. All were silver except for artillery and buff faced units, which were gold. (WW XVII p. 18 and XIX p. 21, Pet p. 243-245, FM p. 38) A side arm was also worn (WW, K p. 23).

Subaltern - epaulette on the left shoulder (WWXVII p. 18 and XIX p. 21); the colors and side arms as the Captains.

Serjeant - silk [or worsted Pet p. 242] epaulette on each shoulder. All were white except for the following:

yellow - coats faced buff and artillery

blue - cavalry (FM p. 38)

Corporal - worsted epaulette on the right shoulder. Colors the same as for serjeants (FM p. 38)

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