**Navy Uniforms Outline**

**INFORMATION:** Importance of knowing how to wear your uniform and respecting the policies and traditions associated with its wear.

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**History Segment:** History of Navy Uniforms

The history of the development of the naval uniform traces the uniforms through significant changes from 1776-1981. These changes are related to naval history in order that the reader can match uniform development with changes in the Navy itself. The study has been compiled utilizing research data available in the Washington area. Uniform Regulations, provided by the Navy Department Library have been reviewed. The historical personal and official correspondence regarding uniforms on file at the National Archives has been researched. Information has been obtained from Navy Uniform Board historical directives and selected commercial histories of Naval uniforms. A bibliography is included at the completion of the History Section.

In any historical narrative of Navy uniforms the dichotomy between officer and enlisted dress requires separate treatment of the evolutionary developments of these traditionally distinctive modes of dress. Officer and enlisted have historically been, for the most part, comprised of individuals from separate social, educational and economic classes. Their garb has reflected these differences, as well as conforming to the type of duties each group was expected to perform.

The following index separates uniform development into cogent periods of time in which definite clothing prescriptions evolved as a result of distinct historical influences.

**Revolutionary War**

Thus, naval uniforms under these parsimonious conditions were non-descript, consisting of pantaloons often tied at the knee or knee breeches, a jumper or shirt, neckerchief, short waisted jacket and low crowned hats. The short trousers were practical so as not to interfere with a man’s work in the rigging of his ship. Most sailors went barefoot. A kerchief or bandana was worn either as a sweat band or as a simple closure for the collar. Unfortunately there are no records that support the persistent myth that the black kerchief represents a sing of mourning for Nelson’s demise. The sailor’s kerchief predates his death by hundreds of years and evolved as a functional piece of garb. Nelsonian legends had nothing to do with the accoutrements which developed out of necessity, rank identification, or fashion embellishments.

**War of 1812**

the postwar years saw a resurgence of interest in naval matters and the government began to have more of an interest in its development. Not only had the Navy earned a fine reputation but it was beginning to build a cadre of professionals, both officer and enlisted who elected to remain in service. These positive feelings resulted in the first attempt at a prescribed uniform in 1817. Through government procurement winter and summer uniforms were provided. The winter uniform consisted of a blue jacket and trousers, red vest with yellow buttons and a black hat.

As a result of wartime operations in tropical waters and spurred by increased relations with South America, the formerly cold water Navy prescribed appropriate warm weather gear consisting of a white duck outfit with a black varnished hat.

At this time bell bottoms began to appear. There is no substantive factual reason for their adoption, i.e. easier to roll up or kickoff in the water, but rather appear to be a tailored version of the pantaloon, designed for a bit of flair which set the sailor apart from his civilian counterpart. However, as federal funding began to ebb, enlisted dress was rarely standardized or enforced and sailors added their own accoutrements, such as buttons and striping as they wished.

**Early Uniform Standardization; 1841 to the Civil War**

The regulations of 1841 not only set forth the first description of an enlisted uniform, but also the first grooming regulations. The uniform was a blue woolen frock with white collars and cuffs, blue trousers, blue vests, black handkerchief and shoes. The collars and breasts of the frock coats were lined in blue. For the first time commanding officers were required to insure personnel had the prescribed clothing. The grooming regulations for all hands specified that hair and beards must be kept short, except whiskers might descend to one inch below the ear and in line with corners of the mouth. Thus the basis for “mutton chop” whiskers so prevalent in paintings of the period. The regulations of 1841 also provided another “first” for enlisted, a distinctive mark for petty officers. The device consisted of an eagle atop an anchor, which was a common theme in the early American maritime history, not more than three inches high with a star above the eagle. It also specified that the insignia was to be blue on a white uniform and white on blue uniforms. The eagle was probably chosen for several reasons. As the national symbol, the eagle first appeared on the national seal in 1782 and was displayed on officers’ buttons positioned over an anchor since 1802. It was a prevalent design on Army uniforms and was a common insignia during the 1840s. Thus it can be assumed that the frequent usage during the early years of the nation made the eagle the most logical choice in the Navy. Also the use of the eagle on officers’ buttons might have influenced its adoption on petty officer insignia. Although there were no specialty marks, distinction of ratings being accomplished by delineating on which arm the device was to be worn, and it created the “left arm,” “right arm” ratings which continued for over one hundred years. It was an important step in distinguishing between petty officers and junior enlisted, thus enhancing and recognizing the career personnel among their peers and superiors.

**The Civil War**

The Civil War, as with officer’s clothing, increased standardization in enlisted clothing and created the beginnings of rate and specialty distinction. The dramatic growth in the number of naval personnel and ships necessitated further distinctions in uniform appearance. In 1862, master-at-arms, yeomen, stewards, and paymaster stewards who were important and valuable leading petty officers, were authorized the wear of the double breasted officer type coat. This move to clothe principal petty officers in a more authoritarian garment was the first step towards the identification of future chief petty officers. Other enlisted dress was standardized into a style which was representative of the jumper/bell bottom uniform. It was practical, easy to work in, resisted soilage and provided protection against the elements. The jumper collar had changed from a roll collar to a flap and was standardized and extended to 6 ½ inches. This was probably to differentiate between the rolled collar of master and senior petty officer coats.

When peace finally came the Navy began to sort out its experiences and apply them to uniform development. The rapid growth of personnel showed that a system for rank identification was needed among all enlisteds. In the Regulations of 1866 s specialty mark was adopted for petty officers in master-at-arms, quartermaster, coxswain, gunners, carpenters, captain of the foc’sle, captain of the top and sailmaker ratings. White piping on the collar was standardized to distinguish petty officers (three rows) and landsmen and boys (one row). Corresponding rows were displayed on the cuffs. White stars were standardized on the collar. The collar was extended to 9 inches to accommodate these additions and remained that size until 1973.

The 1866 Regulations allowed a white sennet straw hat in addition to the white cover which was tied to the blue flat hat. It was found that the addition of a white cover did not provide coolness but rather added to the discomfort of the woolen hat in warm weather. This was the beginning of a distinct white hat which would evolve through canvas and eventually the white cotton hat of recent times. To provide unit identification, which was so difficult in the myriad of ships that were commissioned, a hat ribbon specified to be 1 ¼” wide with the command’s name in letters was prescribed. Commanding officers were required to insure that all lettering was the same size on all hats. Standardization was also carried through in size dimensions of the white hat and the mandate that all blue flat hats be uniform in shape and color.

A sailor was becoming more than just a body to handle lines or scramble around rigging. He was entering an age where a good level of education was needed to function in an increasingly complex Navy. Thus, as he was becoming a technician in both mechanical and logistical areas, a revision of uniform regulations in 1874 further modified the dress of principal petty officers to emulate that of commissioned officers. Senior petty officers of various ratings, now greatly increased from previous directives, were authorized to wear the sack coat with rating insignia on both sleeves.

In 1885 the first separation occurred among petty officers into principal, first, second, and third class. The Regulations of 1886 provided a set of rating badges for each group. First class had three red downward pointing chevrons, in the manner of the Royal Navy, topped by an eagle with specialty mark imposed on a red lozenge between the chevrons and eagle. Principal petty officers wore the same except an arch was added to the top chevron, the same basic design as CPO’s today. Second class had the same three chevrons as the first class but without the lozenge, and third class had two chevrons and no lozenge. Also in 1886, principal petty officers were directed to wear double breasted blue coats and a white sack coat in summer. Visored hats were worn. Other petty officers continued to wear the jumper and bell bottoms. The peacoat as we knew it came into use about the time for foul weather wear. It was warm and its shortness made it more practical for movement than a greatcoat. The white “sailor hat” appeared during this time as a low rolled brim, high domed item made of canvas to replace the white sennet straw hat. The canvas hat was easier to wear, could be washed and thus presented a neater appearance. By being built of wedges it was easy and cheap to construct, and its distinctive shape differentiated the American sailor from that period on.

This differentiation between principal and regular petty officers of the first class rate came in the regulations of 1894 when the rank of chief petty officer was established. This new rate utilized the former principal petty officer badge with three red chevrons joined by an arch at the top and spread eagle above. The other devices were reorganized corresponding exactly to present day classifications.

With the new modern Navy, length of service was considered a source of pride among sailors and service stripes were introduced during this year, being similar to the Army in concept but distinctly nautical in appearance. They have remained basically unchanged to this day.

Since 1886 principal petty officers and then chief petty officers wore a bronze disk on their caps comprised of a spread eagle perched on a horizontal anchor. Since officers wore the same coats and utilized black braid rather than gold there was much confusion. Therefore, a need arose to provide a distinctive cap device for chief petty officers which would not utilize the eagle which was considered the symbol of officer rank.

1897 saw the Incorporation of a chief’s cap device similar to the present design, a gilt fouled anchor with U.S.N. superimposed in silver.

As the fleet increased its steaming time, a more suitable work garment was needed. Although white had been worn since 1869, sailing in tropical waters precluded the luxury of frequent laundering as a waste of precious water. Thus, the regulations of 1901 authorized the first use of denim jumpers and trousers to be utilized as a working uniform in areas which would normally soil blue or white uniforms. The 1913 regulations permitted the dungaree outfit to be used by both officers and enlisted men as a complete outfit, replete with the hat of the day. In general its use was limited to submarine, engine room, gun turret, and machinery space personnel.

**World Wars**

The mobilization of 1917 for the impending war brought about a new element into enlisted uniforms-women. Females were organized into reserve groups and a uniform which paralleled civilian fashion was designed. It is interesting to note that while the male enlisted uniform was distinctly nautical and evolved in relation to maritime needs, female enlisted clothing more closely followed civilian trends.

The first enlisted women’s uniform was a single breasted coat, blue in winter and white in summer, long gull bottomed skirts and straight-brimmed sailor hat, blue felt in winter and white straw for warm weather. Black shoes and stockings were worn with summer whites. Rating badges were the same as male yeomen. Some pictures of the period show the neckerchief being utilized to provide some identity with the men.

It was not until the advent of World War II, that a new WAVE uniform was designed and continues to the present day. Details of this uniform are the same as for women officers and are defined in the subsequent officer section.

**I. Introduction**

A. Attention (The United States Sailor’s uniform is iconic for a reason. The manner in which you wear it represents a country, an organization and it’s 240 years of history, heritage and tradition.).

B. Motivation (Junior Sailors need to understand why it is important to maintain your uniform at a high level, not just that it is “required” of you, in order to set themselves up for success while honoring those that came before them.)

C. Overview (We hear it from the very first day we pull on our smurfs during “P-days”. Haircut, boots shined, hands out of your pockets!, etc. But why? Why should you care? What’s allowed and what’s not? We’re going to tackle all of this and hopefully give new perspective on something we are NOT taking seriously fleet wide.)

**II. Body**

A. Main Point 1 (US Navy Uniform Regulations, NAVPERS 15665I)

1. Sub-point (Reference) – Start here. I will disclaim this however. The current iteration of the Uniform Regs is SORELY in need of updating. There is clarification needed, more information to be added, new and better pictures, illustrations and instructions missing. However, you should be INTIMATELY familiar with the portions that pertain to you, and I would encourage you to become extremely well versed on others as well. Knowledge is power, the more you know the more you can help yourself, train others and help maintain the standards.

2. Sub-point (Amplifying Instructions) – Sometimes, that’s not all folks. Check for any recent NAVADMINs governing uniform policy. New updates, like the tattoo policy that just came out or the new dress whites and female uniform changes come out via Naval message and may not immediately reflect on NPC. So, be informed! Go to the Navy Personnel Command website under “Reference Library” and search the NAVADMINs for the most recent guidance regarding whatever policy you need information on. Also, when in doubt, ASK. Ask your mentor or leadership to clarify something. And clarify it BEFORE YOU DO IT. Don’t shave a lightning bolt in the side of your head or fork your tongue without talking to your Chief first – and then say “it’s not specifically prohibited”. Please, I’m begging you.

3. Sub-point (Uniform Matters Office) – Any instruction in existence cannot possibly capture every single eventuality – especially as styles and trends evolve. As a result, the instructions will, in some cases, be intentionally vague by saying things like “including, but not limited to…” because they can’t list EVERYTHING. So when you are in doubt, ask. One of the final outlets for this is the Uniform Matters Office. If you want clarification on something to do with Navy uniforms and no one can seem to answer you with any kind of authority or certainty, then email the Uniform Matters Office. There is a link on NPC to the CMC’s meal address – “Ask the Master Chief” – umo\_cmc@navy.mil

B. Main Point 2 (First Impressions)

1. Sub-point (A book by its cover) – In the military we do a lot of judging by outward appearance, specifically in uniform. It’s a fact of life. Recognizing this early can have profound effects on a Sailor’s career. Early on, it can have a tremendous impact on evaluations and awards. These affect a junior Sailors motivation in a HUGELY positive way that snowballs into future advancement and professional development.

2. Sub-point (The First Impression) – Be honest, as a Chief, my outward appearance will DIRECTLY REFLECT how seriously you take me. I could be the village freaking idiot, but if I have a super squared away uniform, haircut, shoes/boots shined up like mirrors…AT LEAST INITIALLY, you’re going to take me seriously. At least until I open my mouth and demonstrate otherwise. Conversely, I could be the sharpest technical expert there is but if I look like slept in my uniform and need a haircut, I’m fighting an uphill battle just to shift your attention from your subconscious judging of my negative appearance to what is coming out of my mouth.

C. Main Point 2 (History and Heritage)

1. Sub-point (Why you should care…) – I’m not going to go back in to the details, we covered that in history segment. I’m going to talk about WHY you should care. Anytime I have ever advocated for squaring away a uniform, shining your boots, etc. it was for reasons like it will help you be taken seriously, it will help you get good evals, and on and on. And those things are true. But as a junior Sailor, I feel like you NEED MORE. Why should you actually take the time. What will make you sustain this. History. Heritage. Those that came before you. That’s the WHY. There are COUNTLESS stories. Find yours. I use the stories of my rating or of my community (submarines). You carry that responsibility to honor them by respecting the uniform you wear. By caring for it and by displaying the image of a Sailor with the respect and dignity it merits. I carry Dorrie Miller, Leonard Harmon, William Pinckney, Peter Tomich and many others with me. It’s my why.

**III. Conclusion**

A. Summary (We talked about…)

1. The policy behind the uniform – BE INFORMED…

2. Why the first impression is so important and how it’s interpreted…

3. The history and heritage behind the uniform you wear. The “why” of it all…

B. Re-motivation (Junior Sailors need to understand why it is important to maintain your uniform at a high level, not just that it is “required” of you, in order to set themselves up for success while honoring those that came before them.)

C. Closing – I’m really passionate about this. Not just because I’m an OCD uniform stickler…but because it’s IMPORTANT. There is a responsibility that comes along with pulling on this uniform every day. It wasn’t an accident that they stitched “US NAVY” on it. It’s a reminder of the weight you carry with you. Of what you represent to the American public. To the WORLD. Of the tradition you are carrying on. You’re wearing the uniform of Dorrie Miller, of Michael Murphy, of Chester Nimitz and Peter Tomich. TAKE THAT SERIOUSLY. You are NOT just punching a clock at a 9 to 5 and THAT IS A CONCIOUS, VOLUNTARY DECISION YOU MADE. No one made you do it so honor that. And if you are planning on leaving because this is too much to ask, then just do it until you do. You OWE the Navy that based on the commitment you made – whether you like it or not.

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