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ARMY (ISSN 0004-2455), published monthly. Vol. 58, No. 12. Subscription \$33 a year. Publication offices: Association of the United States Army, 2425 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201-3326, (703) 841-4300, FAX: (703) 841-3505, e-mail: armymag@ausa.org. Visit AUSA's web page on the Internet at [www.ausa.org](http://www.ausa.org). Periodicals postage paid at Arlington, Va., and at additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ARMY Magazine, Box 101560, Arlington, VA 22210-0860.

# Letters

## The Army Uniform

■ The Army needs to call a time-out and rethink making the Army blue uniform its dual-purpose service and dress uniform. Recent Army announcements detailing the blue uniform have triggered a flood of adverse comments, showing strong disapproval of many aspects of the hybrid approach. Many disagree with eliminating the venerable green uniform that has more than a half-century of tradition.

How did the Army get to this point? Per the October 2006 *AUSA Special Report: In With the Blue*, then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker initiated the present uniform project in 2005. He tasked SMA Kenneth Preston “with looking at the Army’s three dress uniforms—the dress greens, the dress whites and the dress blues—and selecting a single uniform for all occasions at the lowest possible cost to soldiers.”

Note the guidance was not to evaluate the Army’s present uniform ensemble nor to seek suggestions. The decision was already made to go to a single uniform. Not surprisingly, the Army reported that subsequent surveys showed the Army green service uniform was often criticized in favor of the blue uniform. There was no interest in a surprising number of soldier suggestions to consider the WWII-era officers’ “pinks and greens” service uniform in preference to a blue service uniform.

In sharp contrast was the rigorous 5-year process that led to adoption of the Army green uniform in 1954, described in a 1968 U.S. Army Natick Laboratories report, “The Army Green Uniform.” The Army Uniform Board was assisted by the National Academy for Sciences-National Research Council in this deliberate research effort to develop a new service uniform. Interestingly, the Uniform Board almost chose the “pinks and greens” for all ranks based on high survey acceptance, but decided the taupe (pink) trousers would be impractical because of frequent cleaning needs. Other colors were evaluated, with the present gray-green shade receiving very high acceptance.

The Army officially wore the blue service uniform from 1779 to 1898—a period of 119 years. The earth tones—khaki, olive drab and green—have been the Army tradition ever since—a period of 110 years. As to resurrecting the Army tradition of a blue uniform, it is very much alive—appropriately so—in the blue *dress* uniform.

Changing the Army’s service uniform is a momentous act by its very nature and impact. As such, the need for a change and the final product of the change should be supported with findings and conclusions that result from a rigorous and scientific process. This has been the Army’s approach in the past, and it should continue to be

## This Month’s Cover



Gen. David H. Petraeus delivers a briefing on conditions in Iraq and the impact of the surge and other initiatives that helped bring sectarian violence under control during his tenure as commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I). Having relinquished command of MNF-I, Gen. Petraeus presented an after action review during the 2008 AUSA Annual Meeting before taking command of U.S. Central Command, which has overall responsibility for the geographical area that includes Iraq and Afghanistan. He cited significant progress in Iraq using a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy, the development of which he had headed before taking command of MNF-I. Although the situation in Iraq has greatly improved, Gen. Petraeus warned that the strategy employed there may not work in Afghanistan. (Cover photograph by Dennis Steele)

the Army's approach. To do less is a disservice to the soldiers of today's U.S. Army and those of its past. It makes no sense to provide a service uniform that a significant portion of the Army does not like and will not willingly and proudly wear.

COL. WILLIAM E. FLORENCE, AUS RET.  
Springfield, Va.

■ If the Army leadership is determined to do away with Army green as a service uniform, I'd like to offer a suggestion to help preserve some of our unit tradition, which will be lost when Army blue becomes both the service and dress uniform. I refer to the full color unit patch or, more correctly, the shoulder sleeve insignia.

Since all insignia on the battle dress uniform are attached via Velcro, why not use the full color patch when not actually in a combat environment? This could also apply to rank and skill badges. When ordered to a combat zone or to the field for exercises, the colored patches, rank and skill badges could be removed quickly and

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the subdued ones added.

Our current military personnel, from Chief of Staff to private, are now wearing the combat uniform in public as if it were a Class A uniform, so at least let's add a little class to it and, at the same time, preserve one of our valued Army traditions.

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