

High Collar Olive Drab Enlisted Coats

The army initially prescribed OD in 1902 after testing various uniform colors during all four seasons at West Point between 1900 and 1902. The goal was to have a single color that would provide some camouflage, as opposed to traditional blue uniforms. Several styles of early OD coats exist and some collectors ascribe them to the First World War. While the scratchy, olive drab (OD) wool high collar U. S. Army coat is associated with World War I, various government issue standing collar coats exist. Over a relatively short time, 1902-1924, many different coats appeared in regulations. Some versions lasted only a couple of years. These many coats can be distinguished by collar style, pocket and cuff designs, material, and other features.

Making a coat and wearing it often occur several years apart for many reasons. In addition, even after later versions were made and issued, many men continued to wear earlier examples of the OD high collar coats. Initially this will briefly describe the many high-collar wool coats used between 1903 and the late 1920s. After this introduction a table will list in more detail the year prescribed, distinguishing features in more detail, and the specification number for each version. During this time the army also issued olive drab cotton uniforms that for a while replaced khaki summer uniforms. These will also be discussed.

During the Spanish American War the army brought out a khaki uniform for wear in the hot climates of the Caribbean and the Philippines. This was the army's first attempt to provide less conspicuous field clothing. Early versions of the 1898 khaki coat came with colored pocket flaps and colored shoulder straps, then with just removable colored shoulder straps (later with removable khaki colored straps), and finally with attached khaki shoulder straps. These coats had shiny brass buttons and a standing-falling collar. In practice these coats came in many versions. Use of these khaki coats continued past the introduction of the 1902 style uniforms. An example of such a khaki coat is shown. Clearly this coat was worn at the earliest in 1903 and probably in 1904 or 1905. This is because generally point-up chevrons were not widely issued until 1905. It took the QM General's Department that long to build up



stocks to general issue, although some units received these chevrons in 1903 and 1904, but when this happened they also received the new 1902 pattern uniforms.

The Spanish-American War khaki coats are distinguished by bright brass buttons and flat patch pockets. They also have a standing-falling collar. In 1902 the army started to use black colored buttons on field clothing, as part of its attempt to have less conspicuous garments.

The 1902 uniform regulations called for enlisted men to wear branch related collar insignia on their service uniforms. Below an engineer soldier is wearing one of the Spanish American War khaki coat with the removable colored shoulder straps. He is also wearing the large size collar insignia issued between 1902 and 1905, although men wore these large devices for several years well past 1905. Slightly smaller insignia were made in early 1905. These insignia pinned to the collar and occasionally snagged on brush. They lasted into 1910.



The photo showing this engineer soldier also clearly depicts his buttons. Modern buttons, introduced in 1902, display the eagle for the Great Seal. The first versions did not have a rim, as shown.

When coats are located with buttons that have distinctive rims on the edge,

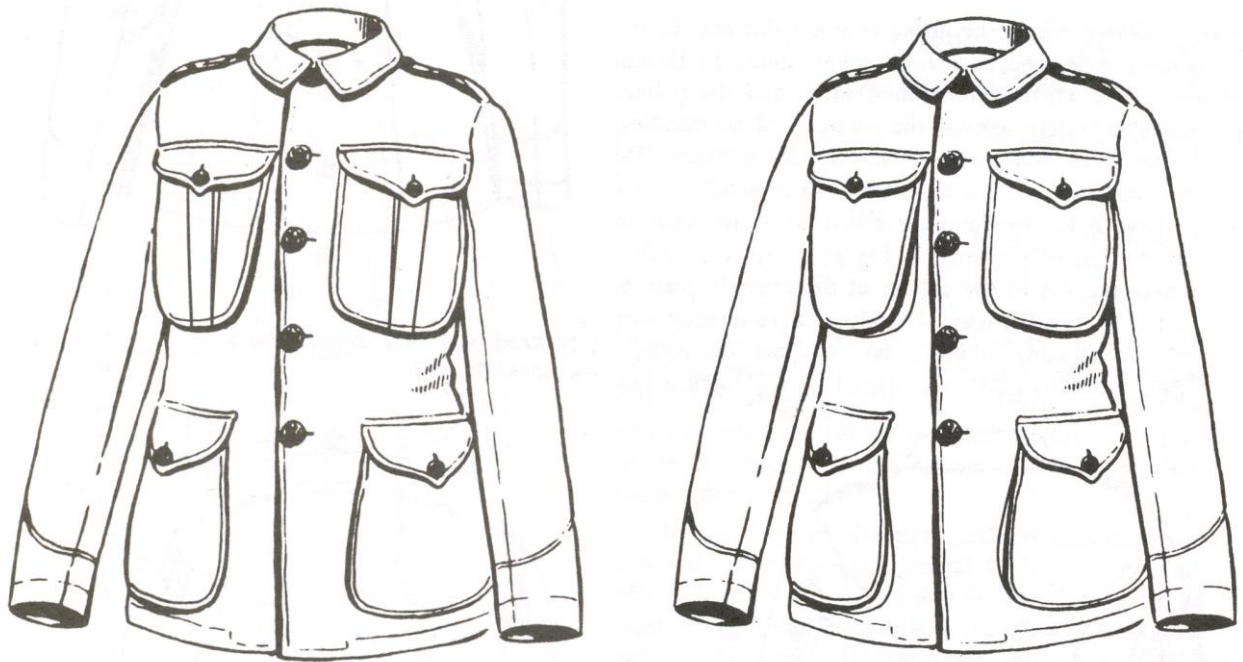


this indicates the buttons were made after 1907. This is the same style as worn today. The engineer's coat has these rimless buttons, so they were put on before 1907.

The first style of OD coats was made in 1903, then another version was defined in 1904. These two early coats both have rolling collars and the two are distinguished by pockets. The 1903 coat has pockets with vertical pleats (shown at left on next page)

while the 1904-1907 coat (right-hand, next page) simply has choke bellows pockets.

The Quartermaster General's Department had problems supplying the new OD uniforms to troops returning from the Philippines and some units received the old uniforms simply to deplete the stocks on old clothing in stock. It was 1906 until all units were eligible to receive the new olive drab clothing. For this reason the early pattern coats were not widely worn.



In 1907 model coat collars were changed to stand straighter. These were the first OD coats widely issued. These had material that lay next to the neck, then turned downward 180 degrees so the material that showed on the outside of the collar was simply doubled over the inner vertical portion. On all of these coats soldiers wore pairs of cut out "U.S." and branch insignia, generally similar to officer collar ornaments. Larger size insignia went on early enlisted coats but in January 1905 the army started to introduce smaller insignia that were generally similar in size to officers' insignia. A drawing of the 1907 style coat is below.



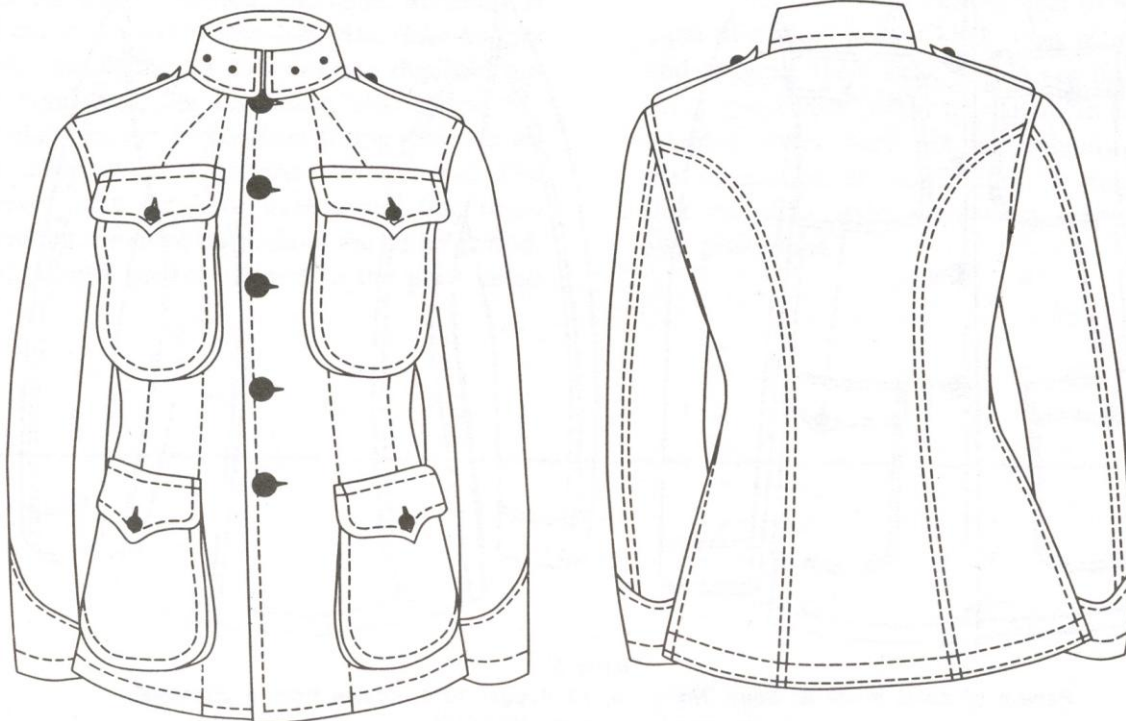


To the left is a photo of an NCO wearing one of these 1907 style coats. While this man has his shirt collar out over the coat collar, the standing collar that then rolls over is still apparent. These are often called “standing-falling” collars. Below his folded hands the bottom of his bellows pockets are clearly shown.

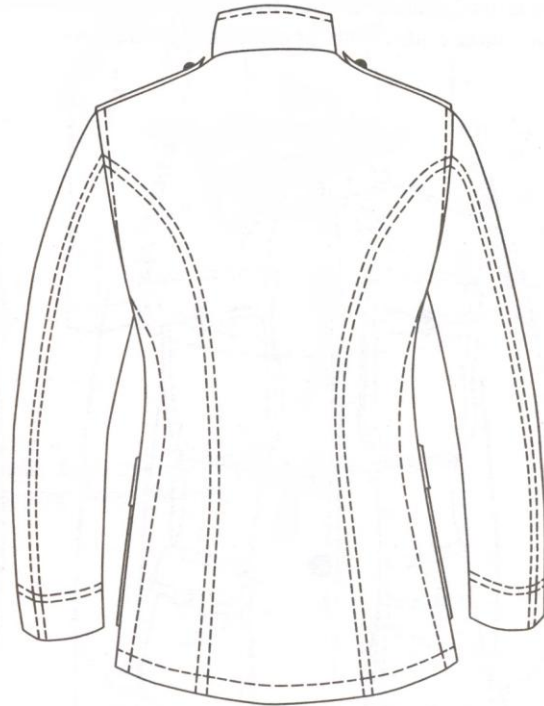
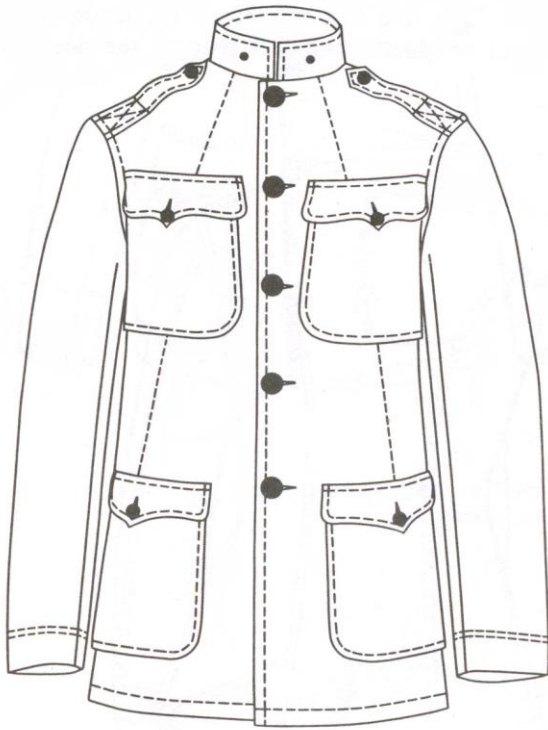
In 1910 the army adopted so-called “button insignia” for enlisted coat collars. These are the familiar one-inch diameter collar disks still used today. Early versions, made in a dark bronze color, were fastened to coat collars with a short screw-post and large, flat nut. These lasted until 1924 when the insignia became bright brass. At first men wore two on each collar but in late 1911 men were to switch to one on each collar: a U.S. and a branch disk.

As a result of the adoption of these collar insignia, coat collars changed in 1909 and 1911.

The first coat made for two pairs of collar disks is shown immediately below.



The **general** 1911 style coat was made and worn into World War I. A drawing of that is below. It had embroidered grommets for only one “button insignia” on each end of the collar. Note also the lower sleeve changed from a pointed cuff used since 1903, to one with two rows of stitching. Additionally the pockets went from choked bellows to plain patch style.



At the left is a typical World War I enlisted coat. It has patch pockets and unadorned cuffs, while allowing for one collar insignia on each side of the neck. A different high collar coat was introduced in mid 1918. While generally the same as the earlier version, the 1918 coat had lower pockets inside hung. This was done to save material. Looking at a post mid 1918 coat the pocket flap is present but there is no “patch pocket” since the pocket itself is under the flap. During the world war both styles were made and issued.

Finally in 1923 the scratchy wool was replaced by coats made from a smoother material, olive drab 20 ounce serge, and with bright brass buttons. Skirts were longer than the earlier coats. These were described in a specification published in March 1924. The 1923 coat lasted until the lapel coat came into use in the late 1920s. The specification for the late 1920s lapel coat with four buttons was 8-31A.

Summary of Enlisted Wool Service Coats as
Defined in Army Specifications and some regulations

Date	Collar	Pockets & other notes	Sleeves	Spec #	Material
Apr 1903	Rolling collar with ¾ inch stand.	Breast pocket has 1-1/4 inch vertical pleat	Pointed cuff sewn with double row stitching.	609	Std OD serge
Sep 1904	Rolling collar with ¾ inch stand.	Choked bellows	Pointed cuff sewn with double row stitching.	700	13 oz serge
Jun 1907	Standing rolling collar. Height not specified.	Choked bellows. Neck tab for first time. Label inside lining rt skirt.	Pointed cuff sewn with double row stitching.	879	Std OD serge
Nov 1909	Standing rolling collar. Height not specified.	Choked bellows. Label inside lining rt skirt.	Pointed cuff sewn with double row stitching.	1049	13 oz serge
Aug 1911	Standing: stouts 1-1/2; regulars 1-5/8; long 1-3/4	Patch pockets. Label inside lower rt pocket	Two rows of stitching; ¼ inch apart. Lower row 3 inches from sleeve end.	1125	13 oz serge
Jul 1912	Same as above. Previous material 13 oz; this material 13-1/2 oz.			1160	13-1/2 Melton
Aug 1917	Standing: stouts 1-1/2; regulars 1-5/8; long 1-3/4	Patch pockets. "slightly rounded" at lower corners, per SR 42	Plain	1268	
Dec 1917	Same as above. Difference is mercerized cotton replaced silk sewing thread.			1285	
Aug 1918	1-3/4 inches high	Inside hung	Plain	1356	20 oz Melton
Mar 1919	Same as above. Difference is all seams, now ¼ inch. Some were previously 1/8 inch.		"Emergency" edition.		20 oz Melton
Apr 1920*	WD Circ 161 authorizes E.M. to wear articles not issued, "provided (they) conform in quality, design and color" of official patterns or descriptions.				
Apr 1921*	AR 600-35: No slit in skirt.				
Mar 1924*	2 inches high. Old pattern authorized as long as serviceable.	Patch pockets. Gilt buttons introduced Oct 1923. Brass hooks for leather belt at waist.	Plain	8-31	20 oz. serge.

* Forest green sleeve braid for WO and EM commissioned during the world war.



To the right is a member of the Third Infantry Regiment after late 1923. He wears brass buttons that were reauthorized in October 1923. The 1923 pocket flaps are generally straight across the bottom with points at each corner and in the center, while pocket flaps on earlier coats, from 1903 through World War I, went to a single central point by the button.

For summer field wear the army had introduced khaki uniforms during the Spanish American War. With the high collar coats of 1902, the army included a khaki version for summer use. Dyes had been a problem since introduction of khaki in 1898 and various versions continued in parallel with the wool winter coats until 1910 when the Quartermaster General concluded that the problem of fugitive dyes required elimination of khaki. In addition the cotton material was deemed softer, more comfortable, and more pliable. As a result the army introduced olive drab cotton uniforms cut like the wool versions. The OD cotton coat specification, number 1059, replaced specification 850 that was for a khaki coat.

Olive drab cotton coats became part of the summer uniforms in place of the khaki. These cotton OD coats were made using both green and brown threads, which are seen only by turning the coat inside out. These new coats were of similar design to the wool versions except they lacked the lining. General issue of these was not until early 1912 as before this they were tested extensively.

Khaki coats in stock were sent to Hawaii in 1912 for use there. Starting in 1915 the dyes and materials changed due to the war in Europe, but the specifications themselves never changed. These coats are much coarser and have a greener tint than before. These same materials and dies continued into World War I. The army's price list (Special Regulations No. 40, dated 1917) provided for sale of those khaki coats still in stock. The price was 87¢ while that for OD cotton coats was nearly twice, at \$1.65. By 1918 none of the khaki coats were being offered. OD cotton coats were still listed in the December 1920 price list.

Summary of Enlisted Olive Drab Cotton Service Coats as Defined in Army Specifications

Date	Collar	Pockets & Notes	Sleeves	Spec #
March 1910	Standing: two pairs of eyelets at each collar end.	Choked bellows. Limited # made. Mainly issued for tests	Pointed with double rows of stitching.	1059
August 1911	Standing with one pair of eyelets: stouts 1-1/2; regulars 1-5/8; long 1-3/4	Patch pockets. "Slightly rounded" at lower corners, per SR 42. First issued early 1912.	Plain. Double row of stitching 1/4 inch apart. Lower row 3 inches from bottom.	1126
June 25, 1919	Standing with one pair of eyelets: stouts 1-1/2;	Patch pockets. Lower pockets 1/2 inch below the	Plain. Double row of stitching 1/4 inch apart.	415-3-1126

	regulars 1-5/8; long 1-3/4	lower coat buttons.	Lower row 3 inches from bottom.	
March 1924*	2 inches high	Patch pockets. Belt hooks in seam at waist line.	Plain. Double row of stitching 1/4 inch apart. Lower row 3 inches from bottom.	6-66
* Forest green sleeve braid for WO and EM commissioned during war.				