

Uniforms that Supported U.S. Troops in World War I

As a result of 1916 Mexican border activities the army learned soldiers had to have some recreational activities to help with their free time. Within a week of the declaration of war in April 1917, Secretary of War Baker appointed the Commission on Training Camp Activities to coordinate plans to support soldiers in the leisure activities. Several organizations wanted to help with the war effort. These included the YMCA, Knights of Columbus, Jewish Welfare Board, American Library Association, the Salvation Army, and other groups.

The Young Men's Christian Association made the first application to work with troops, and on April 26, 1917, President Wilson issued an executive order ordering military officers to render full support and assistance to the YMCA. The next month the Knights of Columbus asked to also join this support activity. In August 1917 the Jewish Welfare Board asked to represent the Jewish faith in recreational work with soldiers, which up to that time was being attempted by two or three other Jewish bodies, and soon the American Library Association became a major player.



During World War I each of these organizations sent representatives to many training camps and overseas. Initially these organizations had no set uniform. It was some time before standardized clothing within each organization became the norm, and it was at the war's close that the War Department finally described a standard set of clothing for members of these many organizations.

YMCA and other male representatives wore officer type uniforms with a range of insignia that typically included block letters on their coat collars. In the early days many men wore campaign hats as their headgear although some had caps. Women also were uniformed representatives, even overseas.

One example of a male YMCA uniform is shown at the left. Headgear varied over time and by location. A cap is shown, but only some men wore these overseas. In the early days of World War I the YMCA often used a medium blue, sometimes called "steel blue," as its color. Numerous YMCA men wore hat cords of that color on their campaign hats. Other men wore black cords. Coats varied between the newer lapel style and the traditional high collar.

The next figure (right) show typical male YMCA insignia: various block letters for collars and caps, and a red triangle with YMCA letters on the cap. The white triangle on the sleeve shows the man's rank.

Women who supported the YMCA often wore a long coat or jacket with brown buttons and with a blue collar. Another World War I women's YMCA uniform is shown next. The uniform is a dress with a blouse underneath.



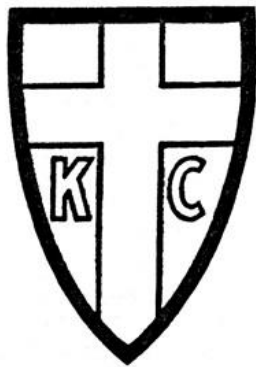


On her lower left sleeve are service chevrons indicating she had already been overseas at least a year and a half. In addition she wears the shoulder patch of the First Division, which did not return to the United States until August 1919. She also wears a Victory Medal ribbon with two campaign stars. While in 1919 the use of campaign stars was certainly not consistent, the last two major operations were for Meuse-Argonne (October 1 to November 11), preceded by St. Mihiel (September). Judging by the service chevrons and the campaign stars, she had probably served in Europe during all of 1918 and into the summer of 1919.

Another organization that included women was the American Library Association (right). From the end of March through the end of June 1918, the ALA issued a flurry of papers describing uniforms and insignia. The upshot was that for summer wear men were to have a four pocket, forest green cotton lapel coat with plain buttons and

matching breeches. Shirts were flannel in forest green, although later gray or white cotton were specified. Standard service hats were the headgear, and black cords were optional. Winter uniforms were simply described as olive drab serge and “is that worn by war correspondents.” Men

wore letters A.L.A. on the lapel style coat, and similar smaller letters went on the shirt at the same time. The Robert Riker & Company of New York City provided tailor made uniforms, although men could also have them made locally.



Another organization that placed men and women in France with the AEF was the Knights of Columbus. In 1918 and 1919 the Knights of Columbus had a total of 100 huts in France, four in Italy, and 37 in Germany. These uniforms were



usually noted by the Knights of Columbus patch and metal letters “K.C.” or “K. of C.”

At the war’s close the Commission on Training Camp Activities finally established a standard set of uniforms and insignia for support personnel, which were published in two editions of Special Regulations Number 105. These uniforms and insignia are shown in a section titled “Special Regulations 105.”