

THE UNION ARMY OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Peter Berry

General

The general image of ACW armies is of long lines of blue clad Union forces clashing with long lines of grey-clad Confederates. This holds true for the Northerners, but the southern forces offer a more challenging task than reaching for a can of grey spray paint.

What is apparant is that the forces of both sides strayed considerably from the regulation uniforms adapting their dress and equipment to the conditions that faced them on campaign. Confederate forces in particular could often suffer from lack of regular supply. The rank and file of both armies too liberties with official headgear, and the only rules for officers were that the dress regulations didn't seem to apply to them.

The Union forces in particular can break up their uniform ranks by adding the odd splash of colour with the inclusion of a Zouave unit, although this is far less of an option for the Confederates.

This section is aimed directly at enabling someone to paint their 6mm army and get it on the table. It does not go into the minutiae of the subject, as this would be a huge work in itself, rather than a quick and handy reference. As we are also primarily concerned with painting small scale armies it does not consider those details that cannot easily be depicted on 6mm wargaming figures. The exact spacing of buttons, piping and variations on official practice are not considered.

Infantry

In theory all Union troops in the ACW were issued with regulation uniform items. In practice a large amount of variation was evident. This is a large subject and the following notes are very general, but certainly good enough for the beginner.

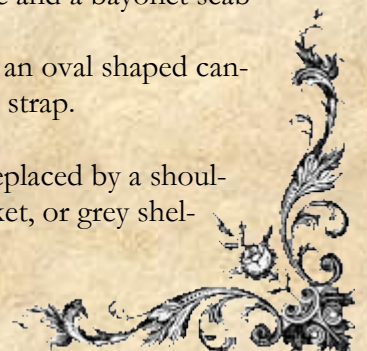
Units were issued with dark blue frock coats reaching to the knee. These were often reserved as dress items and were replaced by the four button fatigue or 'sack' coat reaching to mid thigh. All jackets were of dark blue wool. Trousers were sky blue.

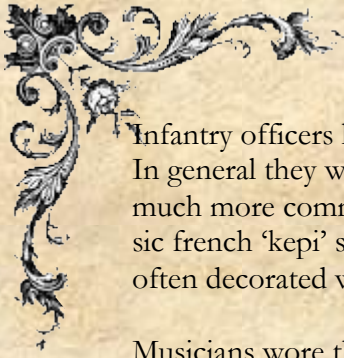
Headgear could vary enormously. Eastern troops tended to favour the forage cap. This was made of dark blue wool with a stiffened crown. It was lower at the front than the back giving it a distinctive appearance and was completed with a black leather peak. It could be embellished with unit and corps badges but these were not common. Many soldiers replaced the cap with a hat. These came from a variety of sources, mostly civilian, but Western troops tended to favour the use of the official issue tall crowned black hat with all decorations removed and worn without the turnback.

The cartridge box and shoulder strap were of black leather. An oval brass plate was mounted on the front of the cartridge box and a circular plate on the shoulder strap. A black leather belt with an oval brass buckle supported a black percussion cap box to the right of the buckle and a bayonet scabbard.

A black painted cotton haversack was slung from the right shoulder, as was an oval shaped canteen, covered with grey, tan, dark blue or light blue wool secured by a white strap.

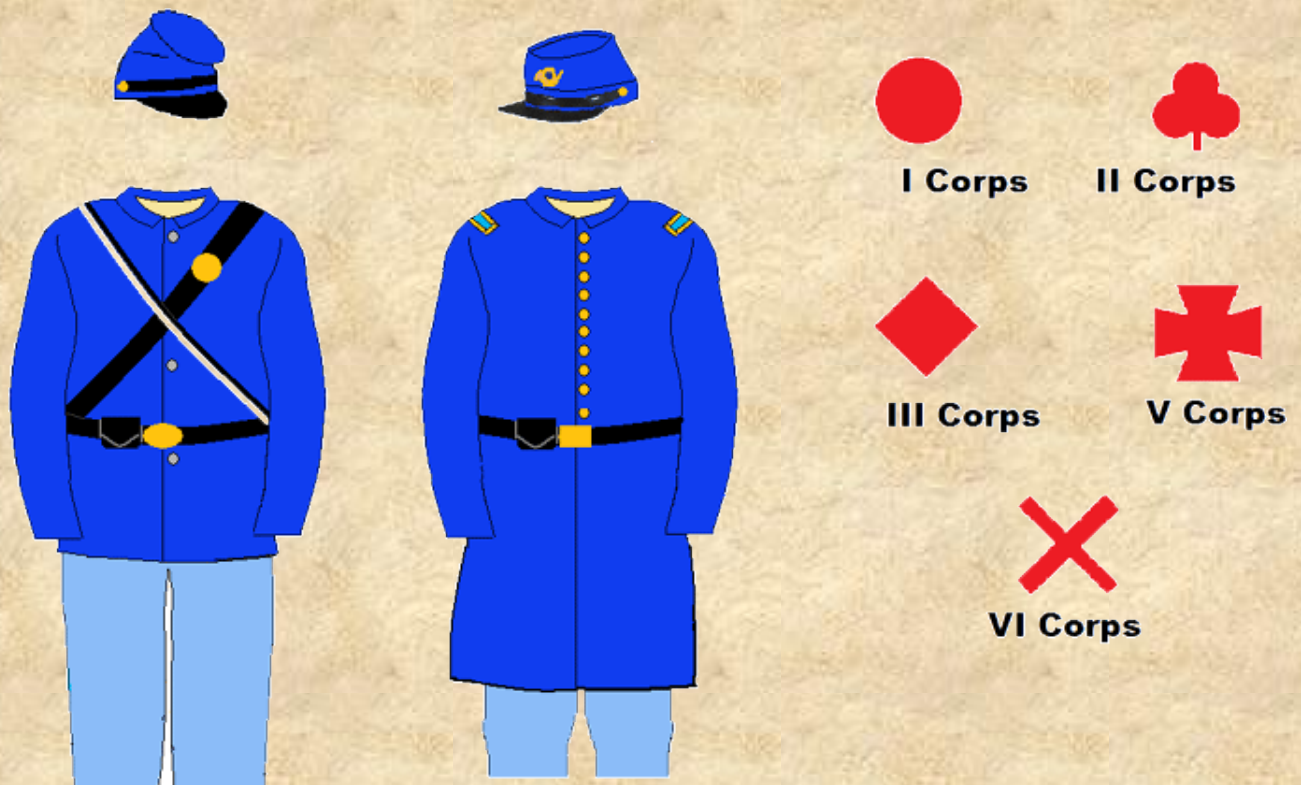
Backpacks were issued but often discarded on campaign. These would be replaced by a shoulder roll made from issue grey or brown wool blankets, or a black gum blanket, or grey shelter half.





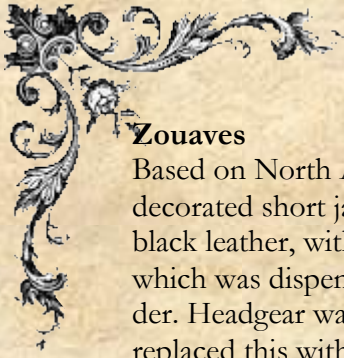
Infantry officers had a wide latitude in dress often replacing official items with privately made items. In general they wore a frock coat with rank markings placed on shoulder straps. Either dress hats or much more commonly, 'McLellan Caps' replaced were worn. The latter followed more closely the classic french 'kepi' style, being lower sided and smarter than the enlisted man's forage cap. These were often decorated with gold braid. When worn, sashes were crimson.

Musicians wore the same basic uniforms as the ordinary soldier decorated with a 'frame' of blue lace across the chest. Drum straps were of white leather. The rims were red with a blue body painted with the eagle design seen on regimental colours.



Each division in the corps had a different coloured badge; 1st - Red, 2nd- White, 3rd - Blue, 4th - Green, 5th Yellow.



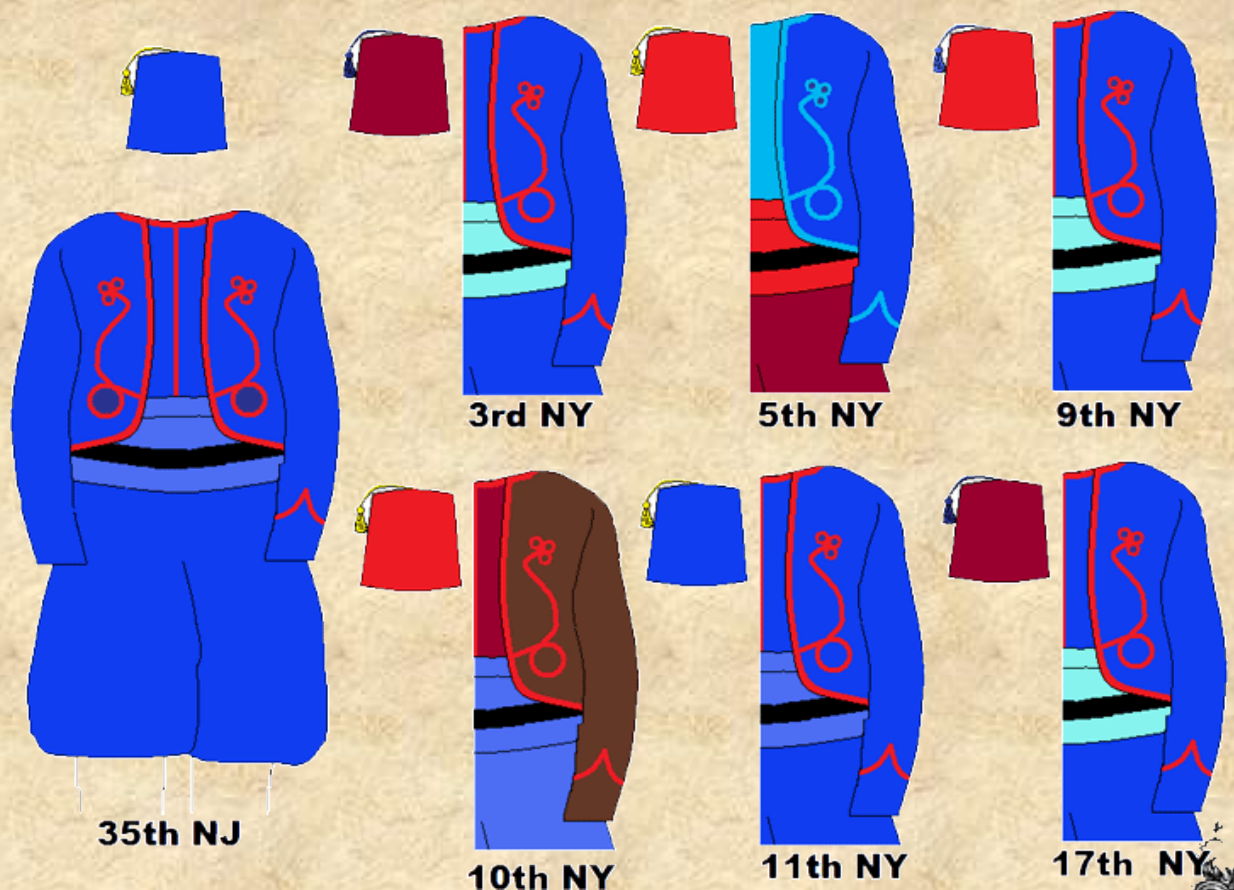


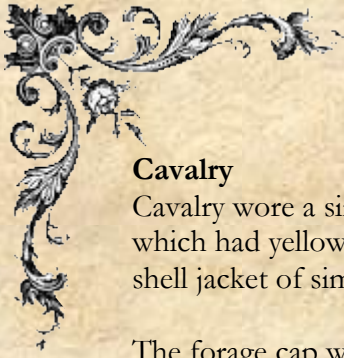
Zouaves

Based on North African dress, the Zouave uniform was flamboyant and distinctive. They wore a decorated short jacket. Trousers were baggy and often tucked into white gaiters. All belting was of black leather, with the cartridge box suspended from the waist belt rather than the shoulder strap which was dispensed with. An off white 'bread bag' was slung by a white strap across the right shoulder. Headgear was a red fez which could have a white turban wrapped around it, although some units replaced this with a kepi. A waist sash completed the colourful outfit. Officers wore standard uniforms and equipment.

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Cavalry

Cavalry wore a single breasted jacket reaching to waist length. This could either be the 'dress' version which had yellow lacing on the collars, cuffs, front seams and back seams, or a more serviceable plain shell jacket of similar length. Trousers were the same sky blue garments worn by the infantry.

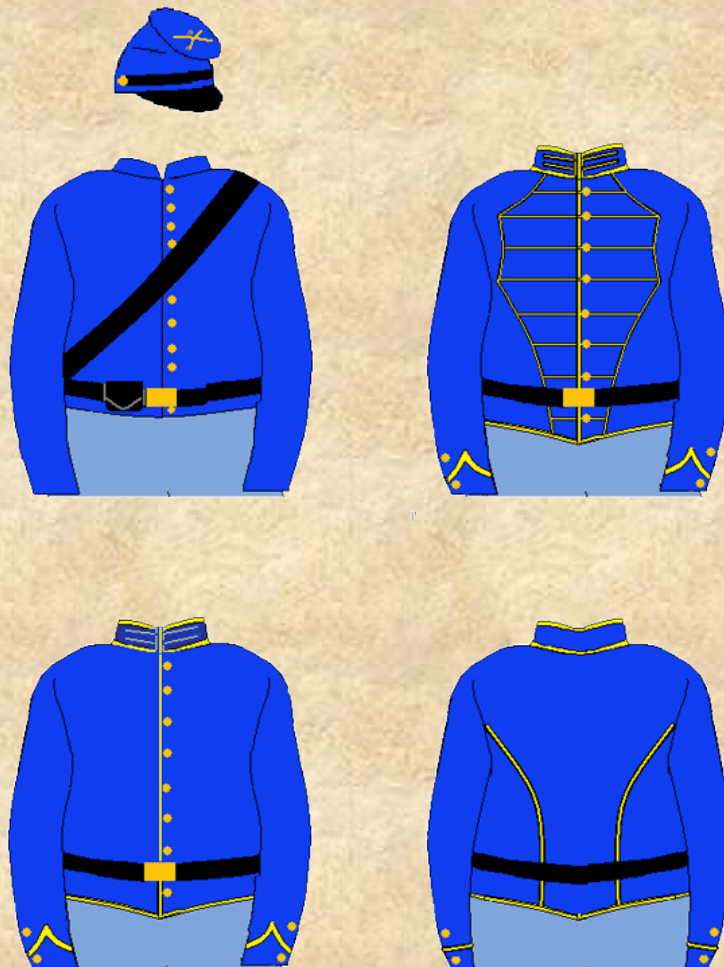
The forage cap was far more widely used by cavalry than infantry, and was also far more likely to bear arm of service and unit distinctions.

The waist belt was of black leather and supported the cap box on the right hip followed by a pistol holster, pistol cartridge box and a carbine cartridge box. The steel scabbard was slung from the left hip with two black leather straps.

The carbine was carried on a swivel attachment from a broad black leather belt slung over the left shoulder.

Officers wore similar uniforms with rank indicated by shoulder straps as with the infantry.

Musicians wore dress coats decorated with a lace 'frame' in yellow





Artillery

Artillery was divided into Field and Heavy artillery. The latter wore the frock coat and the former a variant of the cavalry short jacket laced in red. In practice both arms adopted the sack coat as more practical, although the shell jacket remained popular with the light artillery. Trousers were sky blue.

Forage caps were worn with the crossed cannon badge of the arm of service.

Officers were clothed and equipped as their counterparts in the infantry and the cavalry.

Gun carriages and limbers were an olive drab colour.

