

# The ACU Soldiers' hot issue

STORY AND PHOTOS BY WILSON A. RIVERA

The Army Combat Uniform, meant solely for combat operations, is one of the hottest items to have in today's Army, but are Soldiers wearing the uniform as they should?

With Military Clothing and Sale Store now stocked with the ACU, Soldiers can see what they will be wearing within the next two years. By May 2007, all Soldiers in the Active Component, Reserves and National Guard must have two ACUs in their possession. On May 2008, four ACUs will be the standard; including the Reserve Officer Training Corps will have four by 2010. Each Soldier will have at least one of the Army Combat boots, temperate or hot weather, by the May 2007 mandatory possession date and both type of boots by May 2008.

"I'm impressed by the Army's transitioning period," said Lt. Col. John Cisney, ACU fielding chief and Project Manager Soldier Equipment of the Program Executive Office.

Since Oct. 2005, the ACU has been given to Soldiers deployed in Iraq as well as Afghanistan. The ACU and other PEO equipment have been issued to Soldiers as it comes available instead of waiting for stockpiles to be created.

Even though when MCSS is not stocked with the sizes needed to incorporate a loose fitting uniform other alternatives to buy the ACU are available. Commercial military clothing stores in the area also have ACUs for purchase which may cost more but are authorized brands such as Propper.

"Commands shouldn't force Soldiers to buy them but encourage them if the unit has yet to be issued them," said Cisney.

When looking into purchasing the ACU, a Soldier should keep some of the new features of the uniform in mind since the ACU is differently designed from the Battle Dress Uniform.

Because of the pockets located on the sides of the trousers, a shorter length is required in order to maintain access to the pocket and avoid it from being bloused into the boots. Elbow and knee pad pockets are on the ACU giving the Soldier the ability to insert pads to avoid common injuries in everyday training. An example would be kneeling over a hard surface or rocks while receiving instruction during training. The pads help ease the pain off the knee caps. Soldiers should ensure the pockets for these pads properly cover the elbow and knee areas. These pads are not meant to replace the hard knee pad worn in a combat situation but intended for a Soldier's comfort and safety.

The ACU are 50% nylon and 50% cotton which will eventually cause minimal shrinkage if taken care of correctly and the laundering instructions are followed by using cold water and low heat when drying. According to the ACU Use and Care Manual, permanent damage to the uniform can be caused by chlorine bleach, dry cleaning and starching. Applying heat to the ACU can permanently damage the infra-red tabs and the hook and loop Velcro fasteners.

"It is a combat uniform, so treat it as a combat uniform," said Cisney. "If pressed and dry cleaned you will have to continue to do so because the wash and wear feature will become useless."

Any of the processes including dry cleaning and steam in not authorized because it will extremely affect the treatments and durability of the uniform according to the uniform policy by the Department of the Army. Upon the publication of the new Army Regulation 670-1 will expire the DA message.

It's a practical uniform to wear with the Interceptor Body Armor which will stop chaffing and rubbing on the neck.

"Instead of the Soldier looking pretty, they can spend more time training on military skills," said Cisney.

During the May 2005 to May 2008 time period, commanders have the authority to allow the use of BDU and Desert Combat Uniform camouflage equipment with the ACU until these items are replaced.

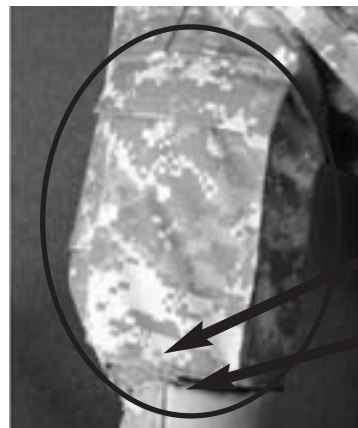


### Jacket fit Instructions

Put on the uniform, close all fasteners. Bend the arms at a 90 degree angle. The elbow must be within the elbow pad area shown in circle.

Outer edge of elbow pad area

Elbow



### Trouser fit Instructions

The bottom of the calf pocket should not be below the top of the boot.

Bottom of calf pocket

Not to be bloused in the boot



### Trouser fit Instructions

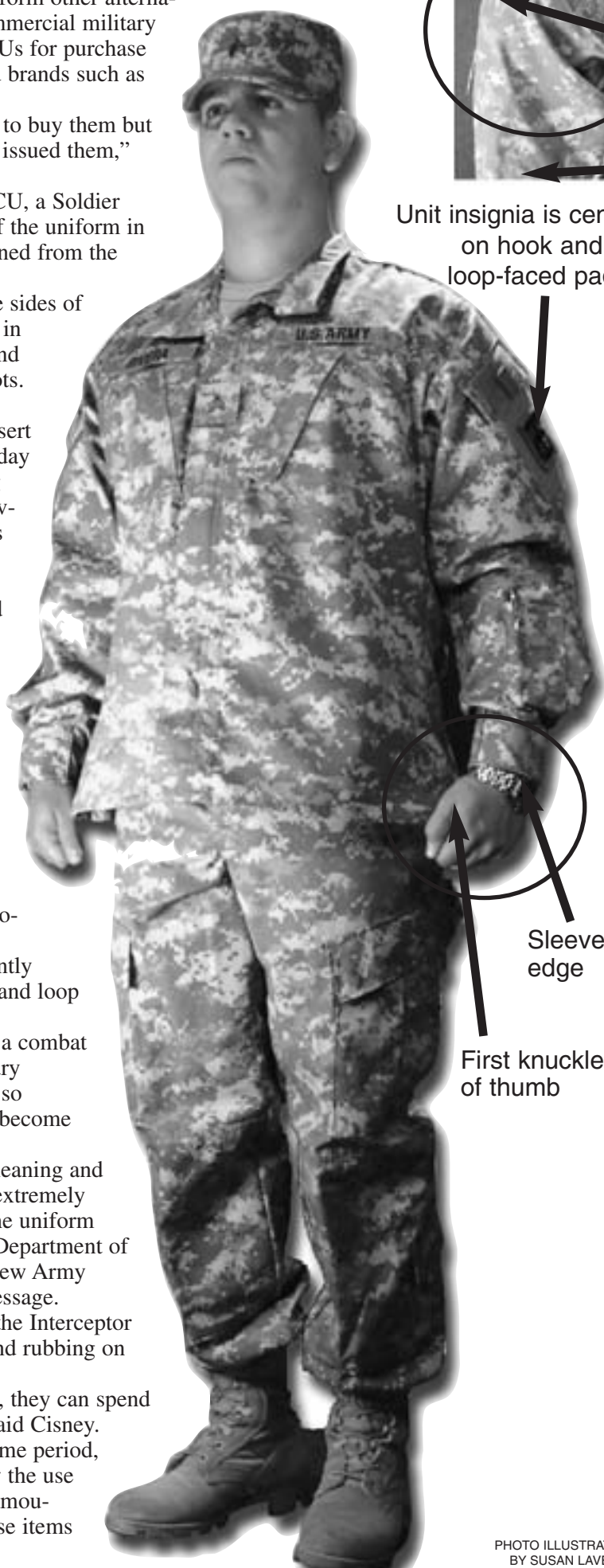
With the uniform on, bend the knee to a 90° angle. The knee cap must be within the knee pad area shown in circle.

Top of pocket

Knee cap

Bottom of pocket

Unit insignia is centered on hook and loop-faced pad



Sleeve edge

First knuckle of thumb

## ACUs need special care

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The days of heavy starch, sharp creases and dropping uniforms off at the cleaners are nearing an end.

The Army Combat Uniform is designed to be wash and wear, but Soldiers should exercise caution when caring for the new uniforms, officials say.

The new uniforms come with washing instructions in the care manual. The manual instructs Soldiers to wash the uniform in a mild detergent that does not contain optical brighteners or bleach. However, detergents do not list optical brighteners on their labels. According to a document received from the Program Executive Office, the following detergents do not contain optic brighteners:

- Bold powder
- All versions of Cheer liquid
- All versions of Cheer powder
- All versions of All powder
- All versions of Surf powder
- All versions of Woolite

The ACU care manual and Army Regulation 670-1 state that starching and pressing the ACU is not authorized. AR 670-1 also states dry cleaning or steam-pressing ACUs will damage the treatments and durability of the uniform.

According to Alecia McKinney, factory manager for the Fort Bliss Federal Prison Industries cleaners – also known as Unicor, the chemicals they currently use to launder the uniforms work for the ACU, and they have already seen some ACUs come through their doors.

"We ran a sample through the washer and dryer and they came out fine," McKinney added.

McKinney said her facility must follow the care label on the uniform and will only wash, dry and hang ACUs. Soldiers requesting to have ACUs starched or pressed must sign a waiver releasing UNICOR from liability because those processes violate AR 670-1. Officials from Del Camino Cleaners, the contractor for the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, were unavailable for comment.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SUSAN LAVEN