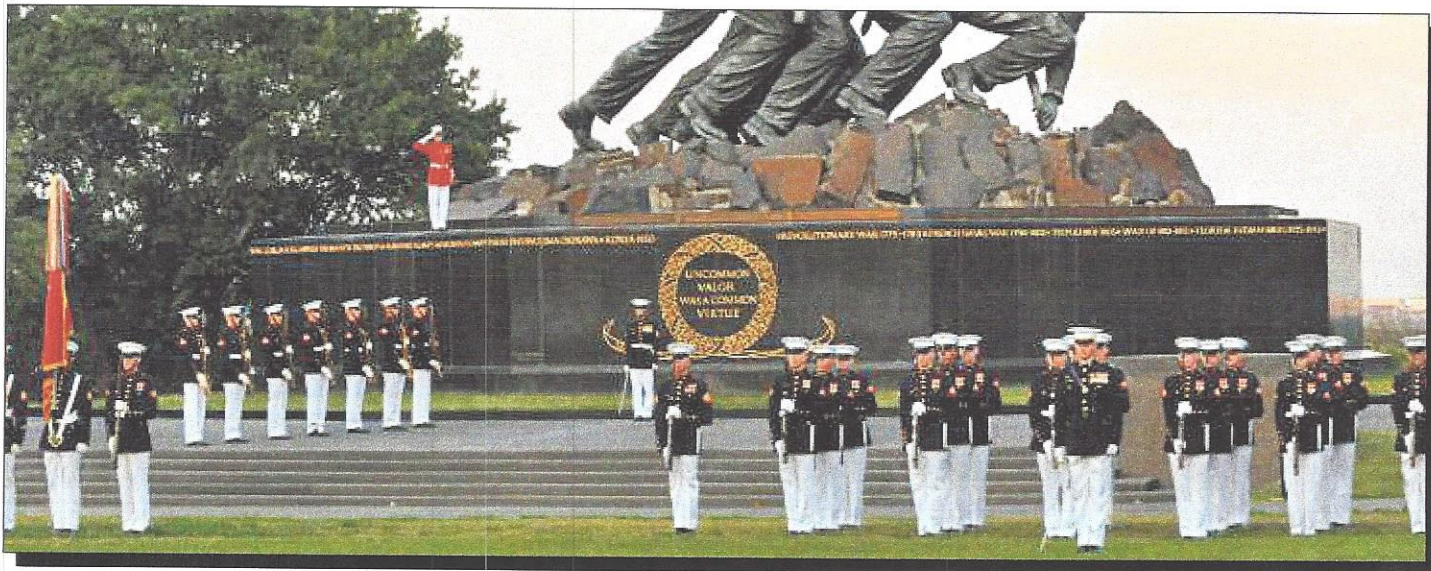


"From Battlefield to Parade Field"

The Evolution of the Marine Dress Uniform

The United States Marine Dress-blue Uniform is one of the most distinctive and recognized uniforms anywhere in the world. It reflects not only pride in our Corps and Nation, it also symbolizes nearly 250 years of honor, dedication, and sacrifice. However its ever changing function and evolution over that time has been as turbulent and challenging as the many conflicts in which the Corps has fought.



Many factors have influenced the "Dress" uniform over the years. One major element in determining the role and use of the uniform has been the advancements in weapons technology. By today's standards, and with today's arms, it would seem quite foolish to go into combat in a bright colored uniform, with white belts and polished brass. However, in the early years of the Corps, when muzzle loading muskets were the most advanced technology, the dress uniform would play a major part in the associated tactical doctrine and warfighting concepts. Because these muskets were slow to load and very ineffective individually in both range and accuracy, tactics of the era would dictate massing these weapons together with Marines standing shoulder-to-shoulder allowing for a combined volume of fire. These linear tactics, often referred to as "Napoleonic Tactics," would essentially have a human wall face a human wall. The uniform would play a vital role in the overall tactical strategy. Many of the intangibles we take for granted today as part of the Corps' ceremonies and traditions were in fact directly related to warfighting in those earlier eras. The concepts of a squared away uniform, polished brass and boots, gleaming bayonets, and "snap and pop" in drill were often essential to success in combat. Applying concepts of psychological warfare the dress uniform in those early years was as fundamental to the Marine's combat kit as his service weapon. This is a practice that the Marines have used throughout our history, and continue to use today. With both side's weapons, tactics, and numbers often being equal the game changer would be the human element and the uniform would play a large part. Having to stand in battle in very close proximity with their adversaries the uniform was intended to impress, even intimidate the enemy. A tall shako (hat) made the individual look taller and more threatening and an ornate well kept uniform projected a sense of discipline, esprit-de-corps, and professionalism. As range, accuracy, and loading methods improved it would cause a gradual change in tactics and the role the uniform would play. By the beginning of the 20th century weapons advancements would cause the dress uniform to transition from the battlefield to garrison and ceremonial use.

Another factor that would influence the development of our uniforms during the first 150 years of our history would be the influence of foreign military fashion. From British influence to the French, and even the Imperial German States in the latter part of the 19th century the dominant military power in Europe would influence American military dress. This would continue into the 20th century when, after World War One, the United States had become a dominant power themselves. From that point on other countries would now start to copy us.

From the American Revolution to today, from the battleground to the parade ground, the Marine Corps Dress Uniform has been an ongoing visual symbol of our Esprit-de-Corps.

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An idealistic look at a Continental Marine of the American Revolution

On 10 November 1775 the American Continental Congress authorized the raising of two battalions of Marines to serve both aboard Ships of the Continental Navy and on land. From its beginnings this Corps of Marines had to improvise and adapt. For the first 10 months of their existence the Continental Marine's cloths and equipment were made up of a combination of civilian clothing and captured British stores. It was not until September 1776 that the Continental Congress finally prescribed a uniform for the Marines. This uniform would [ideally] consist of a black felt "round hat," (for enlisted men), edged in white and turned up on the left side. This was a cut down version of the famous 'tricorn' of the period. The prescribed coat was a standard green wool "regimental" pattern being used by both the British and American forces. There have been many myths and legends as to why green was chosen, but the most plausible was that the Marines were issued captured "Loyalist" uniforms. Even then, early on, many Marines had to make do with the civilian clothing they enlisted in. The remainder of the uniform consisted of a waistcoat (vest), knee breeches, and either above the knee canvas leggings or the shorter ankle high "half gaiters" or spatter-dashes. Equipment varied from detachment to detachment and even man to man, depending on what could be procured through capture from the British, foreign import, or local manufacture, but was most often of whitened buff leather strapping. This uniform, which served



A Continental Marine Sergeant in the uniform prescribed in 1776

for both combat and dress, would see service throughout the American Revolution until, in 1784, the Continental Marines along with the other "federal" services were disbanded. This green uniform would disappear along with those Continental Marines. Except for a very short stint in the late 1830s green would not show up again as a Marine uniform color until just prior to WW1.



The Marine Prescribed Dress uniform adopted in 1798

On 11 July 1798 The United States Marine Corps as we know it today was officially established. Once again the Corps had to adapt hand-me-downs from surplus uniforms of the recently disbanded "Legion of the United States." This founded the first red trimmed blue uniform that became the basis of our current dress blues. This prescribed uniform consisted of a brimmed hat referred to as a "common hat" of black felt, turned up on the left side to accommodate the musket when at shoulder arms, and edged in yellow. The coat was modified from the Legion 'Rifleman's jacket,' made of blue wool edged and faced in red, changing only the buttons to brass Navy general service buttons. The Marine Corps had not yet adopted the now famous Eagle and Anchor button. This double breasted "short coat" could be worn open with the lapels turned back or closed. A red vest was worn underneath. The trousers, or 'overalls,' were also of dark blue wool with a red welt down the leg. By 1801 white "Russia sheeting" or linen overalls were authorized for hot weather wear. The equipment consisted of a cartridge box of black leather, with black leather strap, and a shoulder belt for carrying the bayonet. Because they were utilizing surplus equipment as well as uniforms the cross straps for this era would be of black leather, the only time during the Corps' history that white leather was not



This modern rendition by Col. Donna Neary shows Musicians and a Private, Sergeant, and officer in the modified "Legion" uniform adopted by the Marines in 1798.

used. Although its duration would be short lived, this uniform would see action throughout the 'Quasi-war' with France and the Wars with the Barbary Pirates where, in 1804 on the shores of Tripoli in North Africa, Marines would raise the American flag for the first time over foreign soil in the old world.

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Marine Pvt. in the 1805 Dress uniform used during the War of 1812

In 1805 recommendations for a radical new design for the Marine uniform, following new fashion trends, was adopted. Congress wanted the appearance of the Marines to project America's military might to all foreign powers where American warships may put into port. This would be one of the most ornate uniforms in the United States services at that time. The cap was now a tall felt shako (originally cut down from the previous 'common hat') with a brass plate bearing the 'National' arms and the word MARINES, and a red plume to give it even greater height. The jacket was of a "tail coat" (coatee) design, of dark blue cloth, with red standing collar, cuffs, and turnbacks on the tail of the coat. The chest, collar, and cuffs were heavily adorned with yellow worsted wool taping. The buttons for the enlisted coats were still the common Naval Service button. The distinct Eagle and Anchor button that we are so familiar with today was only authorized for officer's uniforms. The Marine button would not be adopted for all ranks until the 1820's. The trousers were of a white wool, or linen ("Russia Sheeting") in warm climates, with knee high black wool leggings worn over top. The equipment belts were again the traditional whitened "buff" leather, that would be retained until the 1870's. Although "fatigue dress" had been adopted for work details and off duty wear, the Service Dress uniform was still the primary attire for both regular duty and combat. This uniform would see action through the War of 1812 and would establish the Marines as a formidable land

fighting force as well as at sea. The basic uniform design of 1805 would continue in use after the war but with various modifications. In 1818 the Army pattern leather "tombstone" shako would replace the felt hat, and the coat's trim would be modified. 1822 would see further modifications. A new leather shako, once again of army design, nick named the "tar bucket" was adopted, and trim design was again reworked following the latest fashion trends.

By this time the Marines had also adopted the practice of having "Field Musics [musicians]" (communicators of the time) wear reversed color coats to make them easily identifiable. This tradition would continue into the 21st century leading to the red coats of the President's own Marine Band, and Commandant's Own Drum & Bugle Corps worn today.



Artists renditions of the 1818 and 1822 uniforms.



Marine Sergeant, Privates, and Field Music (Drummer) during the War of 1812 era. Note the Musician's reverse color (red) coat.



Marine Pvt. in the 1834 Dress uniform

In 1834 green would again briefly reappear as part of the Marine dress uniform. However, its reintroduction was not well received by the Marines, but viewed as a political move that could lead to the Corps' demise. Being the smallest of the services the Marine Corps continually struggled to maintain its identity and existence. During Andrew Jackson's term as President the Marines would fight two Wars. A military conflict against the Creek and Seminole Indian Tribes in the Florida and Georgia swamps, and a political fight to preserve the Corps very existence. Marine Corps Colonel-Commandant Archibald Henderson would make a compelling argument to preserve the Corps leading to a workable compromise with President Jackson and the Congress. In the Reform Act of 1834 the Marines would be placed directly under the Department of the Navy, and could now be used by the President as he saw fit. The Act however, also directed that the Corps adopt a new uniform that would return to the Old Corps "traditional colors of green and [white] buff" of the Revolution. The Service Coat was green in color with light buff (off white) edging and tail turnbacks. Universally disliked by the Marines for it's "Grass Green" color which had a disagreeable tendency to rapidly fade, the uniform saw only a short term of service. The trousers were straight legged, of "salt and pepper" gray wool, or white linen during warm weather. NCO's (Sergeants) would wear a one inch "buff"



This contemporary photograph shows a Sergeant and Privates of Marines in the uniform prescribed in 1833.

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trouser stripe down each leg. By this time a white leather waist belt had been added to the white cross belts for the cartridge box and bayonet. This would be the forerunner of the belt we wear with the dress blue uniform today. During this period Commandant Henderson would be ordered to send Marines to support the war against the Seminole uprising. He would leave his headquarters at Marine Barracks, Washington, DC, to personally lead a Battalion of Marines against the Seminoles, allegedly leaving a note on his door stating *"Gone to fight the Indians, be back when the war is over."* Although these unique green uniforms have now become synonymous with this era in Marine Corps history, in 1839, once Jackson had left office, green would also once again disappear from the Marine uniform, and the Corps would return to the more traditional and practical Blue.



By 1840 the Marines had returned to a blue and red Service / Dress uniform. The new uniforms were very similar in design to their predecessor, with the blue dress coat being of a tailed pattern with red trimmed collar, and yellow cloth epaulets. The sleeve cuffs of the enlisted coat had a scallop edged in red with yellow worsted loops with small Marine buttons. Two of these loops on each cuff would indicate a private or corporal, and three a sergeant. The new trouser was now of sky blue used for both service and fatigue. Sergeants would wear 1 1/4 inch trouser stripes of dark blue edged in red.

Left: The Marine Dress uniform introduced in 1839.

Right: The updated 1852 Marine Dress uniform.

Far Right: A Sergeant in the sky blue fatigue dress adopted in 1840.

The white leather waist belt, first prescribed in 1821, with plain rectangular brass buckle, along with white cross belts, would continue in use. This uniform, along with its sky blue fatigue counterpart, would see action from Veracruz to Chapultepec Castle outside Mexico City, and in



California during the War with Mexico. New Marine Corps uniform Regulations were posted in 1852, but for the most part the dress uniform remained unchanged, with the exception of a modification in the dress cap (shako) which now followed French design, and incorporated the eagle and anchor device as the cap plate. This uniform would continue to see service up to the eve of the Civil War.

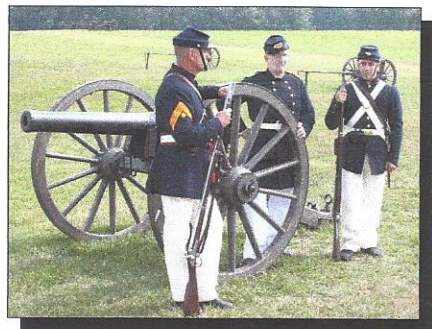
For the first 75 years of the Corps existence the standard service weapon, in various forms, was a smooth bore muzzle loading flintlock musket. This primitive technology would continue to guide tactical doctrine and the use of the dress uniform. However, by the beginning of the American Civil War new innovations in weapons design and technology would start to have a direct effect on warfighting and view on the use of the uniform in battle.



In 1859, just prior to the American Civil War, Commandant Henderson would die in office after service for 39 years as the Corps' senior officer. The new Commandant, John Harris, wanted to modernize the appearance of the Marine Corps and implemented a major uniform design change which would closely follow European trends. American military fashion of the 1860s would now be dominated by French Army styles, which was a historic departure from the British patterns that had governed American uniforms from the time of the Revolution. The Marine 1859 designs would embrace these new fashion ideas while still incorporating a number of the Corps' earlier English influences. These new Marine uniforms would have a unique mix of the old and the new combining together to create a hybrid "look" that was characteristically American and has become distinctive to the era.

The 1859 Full Dress uniform was modeled after the French Light Infantry uniform of the era.

The new uniform regulations would prescribe variations of the dark blue wool coat, and sky blue wool trousers for all



The Undress uniform newly introduced in 1859 was a simplified version of the Full Dress that would now fill the role of the field/combat uniform. However, it still utilized the colors and white cross belts of its formal counterpart.

levels of uniform. This included fatigue, undress, and full dress uniforms. The undress uniform, a new level of dress for the enlisted ranks, would fill the gap for

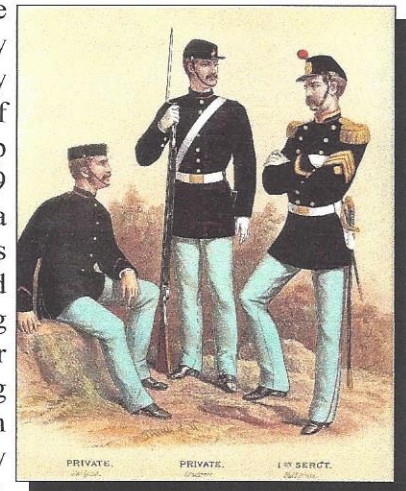
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general service and combat duty. The “dress” uniform would now be reserved for more formal occasions. The Dress Cap is a fur felt and leather shako of French Light infantry pattern with a front plate consisting of a brass United States Shield within a half wreath. In the center of the shield is a hunting horn with a white metal “M” fitted into the bugle ring. The full dress coat is a double-breasted frock coat, of dark blue cloth (wool), with a skirt that extends to just above the knee, with two rows of large Marine buttons down the breast. The collar is trimmed with two loops of yellow worsted lace on each side. The collar is further edged all around with scarlet. Each sleeve cuff has a slash edged in scarlet with two loops of one-half inch yellow worsted lace on each sleeve. The shoulders of the enlisted dress coat are adorned with brass epaulettes (shoulder scales) with yellow wool worsted fringe. This uniform would see service throughout the Civil War and into the 1870s.



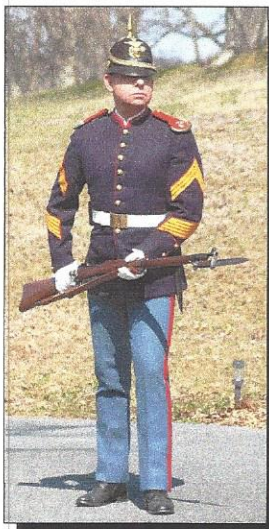
Private 1875 Full Dress uniform

After the American Civil War the Marine Corps resumed one of its primary missions carrying out foreign policy for the State Department and protecting American interests overseas. In 1875 the Corps would once again update its uniforms. Still influenced by European (mostly French) fashion, the new uniform regulations would refine and simplify the dress uniform. Now primarily prescribed for parade and ceremony and as a formal duty uniform this Dress uniform would ultimately see service around the world throughout most of the last quarter of the 19th century. This uniform consisted of a stiffened felt cap (shako) covered in dark blue wool. Much simplified from its 1859 predecessor the 1875 shako had a small brass national shield with a nickel Eagle, Globe, and Anchor (first adopted as the Corps official emblem in 1868) at its center. The Dress coat was a fitted double-breasted frock of dark indigo blue wool. It had a standing collar, one and one-half inches high, rounded in front. The collar was edged around the top and at the base with red piping. Along the top, just under the red, the collar was bound with one-half inch yellow worsted tape. The pointed cuffs of the coat were also now bound with yellow tap edged in red. A white leather waist belt was worn with the uniform. During this period the previous white cross



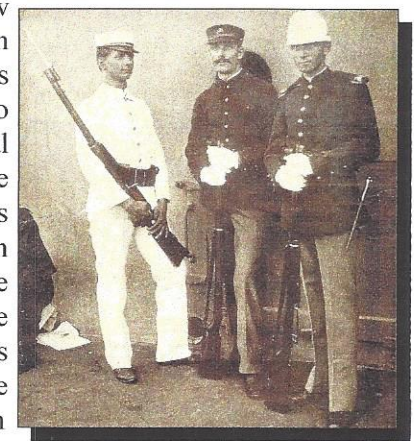
From left to right are Privates in Fatigue and Undress and a First Sergeant in Full Dress in this original print from the original 1875 Uniform Regulations.

belts would be discontinued and equipment would now be carried on the waist belt. Although filling an obscure era in Marine history this uniform non-the-less would become part of the Corps' heritage as it projected America's military power around the world.



The 1892 Dress uniform was strongly influenced by Prussian military fashion.

The end of the century would see the United States enter the world stage as a major colonial power, and as usual the Marines were on the sharp end. In 1892 new Marine Corps uniform regulations had the Leathernecks in uniforms that now reflected influences by both Imperial Germany and our own American West. These new uniforms would carry the Marines into the 20th century. By this time the Corps was starting to distinguish between dress uniforms for garrison and ceremonial use and more practical wear for service / field, although blue uniforms trimmed in red were still used for both. The dress uniform introduced in 1892 now took on a distinctive Prussian look. The cover was a black felt spiked helmet with a large Eagle, Globe, & Anchor on its front. The coat was a single breasted fitted garment with shortened shirts. The collar was edged around the top and at the base with red piping. Along the top, just under the red edging, the collar was bound with one-half inch red worsted tape. Red braided cord and brass crescent with a nickel EGA in its center would adorn the shoulders of the dress uniform. NCOs would continue to wear the yellow on red silk chevrons established in 1859 and length



This period photograph shows (from left to right) the 1896 white summer fatigue dress, the undress, and the dress uniform. Note the white helmet being worn for

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of service 'hash marks.' This era would also see the addition of the famous "blood stripe" to the trousers. A one inch stripe was prescribed for sergeants (corporals would be added in 1896) and one & one quarter inch for officers. This unique uniform would become the symbol of the Corps around the world from actions against Spain, to the Philippine Insurrection, and against the boxers in China.

During the four decades following the Civil War small arms technology would increase exponentially. The practical introduction of rifling increasing accuracy, the self contained cartridge, and breach loading would all have a major influence on how we fought wars. A blue "Undress" uniform would replace the full dress for field use and at the end of the century we would start delving into the use of drab colors in combat.

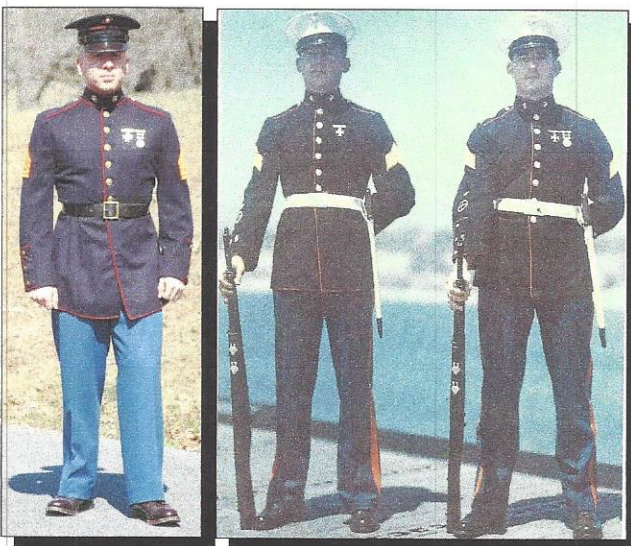
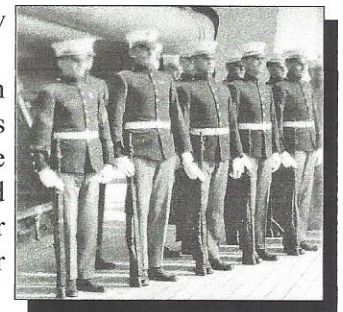


The 1912 Full Dress uniform was upgraded from its Undress 1904 designation.

The 1904 uniform Regulations would see the introduction of a "Special Full Dress" and an Undress uniform for field service. The Special Full Dress, consisting of a coat with solid red collar, epaulets, and, cuffs, and a red band around the cap, was only to be used on special ceremonial occasions. It proved impractical and unpopular with the Marines and was eliminated in 1912 for all but the Marine Band, raising the Undress blue Uniform to the level of Full Dress that would evolve into today's Dress Blues. For the first time a subdued "forest green" Service Uniform would replace blue as the Service/combat uniform. The dress shakos and helmets of previous eras would now be replaced with a cap that came to be nicknamed the "bell crown." The coat was single breasted, piped in red. Ironically the now famous collar Eagle, Globe, and Anchor insignia would not be added to the Enlisted Marine uniform collars until after World War One. The trousers were now a mid-blue color, with white cotton being authorized for hot weather. The white waist belt, now of cotton webbing instead of leather, continued in use but was augmented with a dark brown leather service belt (or no belt) for liberty and off duty.

With the rapid advancement in weapons technology, including such innovations as magazine fed rifles with accurate ranges up to 800 yards and the widespread introduction of the machine-gun, drab color "Service" uniforms would be introduced for field use, and the blue dress uniform would finally be relegated to garrison and ceremonial use. However, there would be one exception. Although now listed as full dress for most of the Marine Corps the Marine Dress-blues would stay the primary working uniform for seagoing Marines assigned to US Navy capital ships for the next 85 years.

Because of advancements in weapons technology 1912 would see the introduction of a subdued Service/field uniform that would lead to our current forest green Service uniform.



In 1926 the Marine Corps would once again refine the look of the dress uniform. The dress cap would take on the shape we most recognize today, but would continue to be of dark blue as the principle color with a white cover added for undress/working use. A tradition that dates back to the Civil War era. In 1937 a cap frame with changeable covers would be introduced allowing the same frame to be used for both the dress and service uniform. In 1921 Collar emblems were added to the enlisted uniforms. NCO chevrons and length of service strips on the dress uniform would be reduced from the eight inch wide chevrons first introduced at the beginning of the Civil War to the narrower 4 inch size being worn on the service uniform. A cordovan brown leather 'garrison' belt would continue to augment

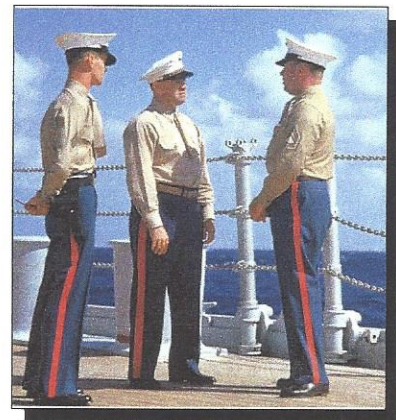
Left: The 1937 Dress uniform worn with a garrison belt on liberty.

Right: A period photo, circa 1940, showing two ship's detachment Marine Sergeants in 1937 dress uniform prepared for guard duty.

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the white dress belt for "walking out" or liberty use. The enlisted uniform would continue without exterior pockets. This basic image of the dress uniform would continue through World War Two, with only subtle changes to the cut of the coat in 1937 (following fashion changes of the time). During World War Two due to shortages the general issue of the dress uniform was temporarily discontinued for most Marines. However, because of the popularity and striking image of the Marine Dress uniform many Marines would privately purchase their own dress-blue uniform.

Right: This original photo taken in 1941 shows members of a ship's detachment in the Dress "C" uniform. From before World War One ship's detachments of "Seagoing Marines" would continue to use various levels of the dress-blue uniform as their principle working attire. This would continue until near the end of the twentieth century when seagoing Marine detachments were finally discontinued.



In 1947 chest and lower pockets, of the same design already being used on officer's coats, were added to the enlisted dress coat for the first time. The dark blue cover would continue in use, along with the swagger stick, as part of the dress uniform until 1959 when they started to be phased out. In that year crossed rifles would be added to the Marine chevrons and black leather would officially replace cordovan brown.

A Gunnery Sergeant in the 1947 Dress Blue uniform.

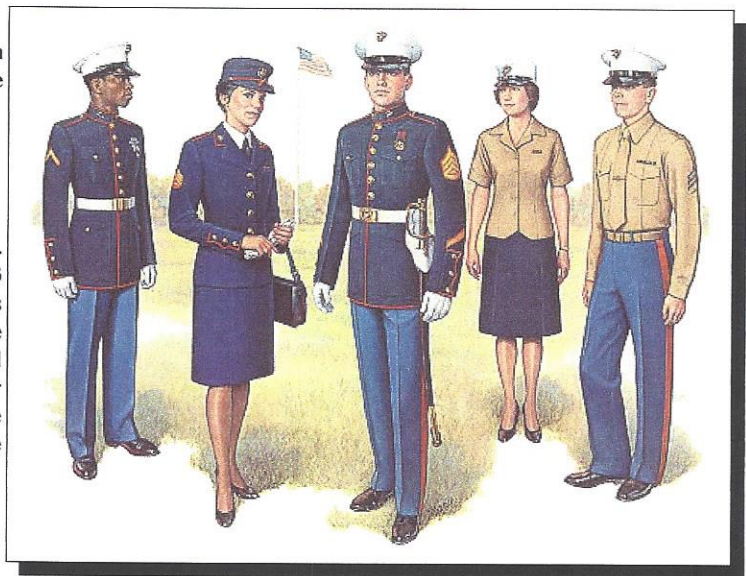
Although there would be refinements in materials in the 1960's, and the elimination of the dark blue cover leaving white as the only dress cover, by the Vietnam War the Marines Dress Blues had evolved into the basic appearance of our modern dress uniform. The official drawings and regulations posted in 1983 reflect the various levels of the modern Marine Dress Uniform that have carried us into the 21st century.

Today, from parades at Marine Barracks, Washington, and providing escort to the President of the United States, to American Embassies around the world, the Marine Corps Dress uniform has become the iconic symbol of the military might of the United States. From the American Revolution to today, from the battleground to the parade ground, the Marine Corps Dress Uniform has been an ongoing visual symbol of our *Espirit-de-Corps*. It reflects nearly 250 years of the Honor, Courage, and Commitment of the Marines who have worn the dress uniform in its many forms. Although the Marine Dress uniform continues to evolve even today, it will remain an iconic emblem of the United States Marine Corps as one of the greatest fighting forces in the world.



Left; Officer and Staff NCO in variations of the modern Marine Dress Blue uniform.

Right: A Plate painted by Col. Donna Neary from the 1983 Marine Uniform Regulations show the various levels of the Dress uniform for enlisted personnel. With only minor changes these still reflect the Marine Dress uniform in use today.



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