

Private 1st Class French Army France 1914

This infantry soldier during the first year of World War I illustrates items of uniform which were wholly inappropriate to the conditions of combat on the Western Front. Chief amongst these is the red collar patches (the number indicating battalion or regiment), the red rank markings on the sleeve (a single chevron indicated Private 1st Class) and, the worst offenders, the bright-red trousers. The lessons of the low visibility, however, were quickly understood, and from September 1914 most French infantrymen arrived at the front line with blue linen overalls covering these scarlet trousers. The clean appearance of this soldier indicated that he has yet to reach the combat zone. He is wearing the French-issue leather webbing with M1897 ammunition pouches and, on his back, an M1893 pack with shelter-half strapped on top of it. The rifle he has been issued with is the 8mm (0.315in) Lebel M1886/93.

Date: 1914
Unit: French Army
Rank: Private 1st Class

FRANCE



Sergeant French Infantry France 1916

This soldier is wearing the standard horizon-blue uniform adopted in 1915, in addition to the helmet issued in the same year which was based upon a design from the French fire service. The collar number indicates either his regimental or battalion number, and rank is given conventionally on the sleeve of the greatcoat. Perhaps more interesting than the uniform is the weapon, the 8mm (0.315in) Chauchat M1915. Authorities have described the Chauchat as 'the worst machine gun in history'. The accusation is justified. The bolt travel in the gun was overlong and vigorous, disturbing accuracy, wearing out the parts, and pulling in dirt. It was made from poor-quality metals, frequently jammed, was awkward to load and let down the French infantry in combat. It is unclear how many French soldiers lost their lives because of its failures, but it was almost universally hated.

Date: 1917
Unit: French Infantry
Rank: Sergeant



Captain US Marine Corps Iceland 1942 ~ similar to 1918

The uniform seen here began to be issued amongst the US Marines in 1929, finally settling the style of Marine Corps uniforms after about 17 years of redesign and adaptations. It consists of a single-breasted khaki-green jacket and matching pantaloons, here worn with the less common high lace-up boots. Insignia upon the jacket is simple: rank upon the shoulder straps (a officer's lanyard runs around the left shoulder), brass Marine Corps badges on the collar; a polar bear badge on the left sleeve to indicate the chilly Icelandic posting (guarding against any German invasion attempt), and, on a personal note, a French *Croix de Guerre* medal. This latter addition was a unit award to the 5th and 6th Marines for service in the French theatre in 1917-18. Prior to the early 1940s, webbing for the Marines tended to be leather, yet in 1942 this was changed to a cloth system. The helmet is the M1917 model.

Date: January 1942
Unit: US Marine Corps
Rank: Captain
UNITED KINGDOM

Private British Army Cambrai 1916

This British Army private offers a representative view of the British soldier who fought in the trenches of the Western Front. The UK military introduced a khaki service dress for personnel in India in 1885, but in 1902 khaki became the standard colour of military battledress throughout the British Army (it should be noted that some soldiers arrived in France in blue serge outfits because of uniform shortages; these outfits were later used to clothe British POWs in Germany). The Mk 1 steel helmet formed the basic headgear (introduced in 1916), while all ranks wore a khaki tunic with four patch pockets, matching trousers, puttees wound up to the knee, and black boots or shoes. Equipment is carried with the 1908-pattern webbing, an '08 gas-mask pack at the ready on this soldier's chest, and the rifle he carries on his left side is the .303in (7.7mm) Lee-Enfield Mk III SMLE.

Date: 1916
Unit: British Army
Rank: Private
Theatre: Western Front



Stormtrooper German Army France 1918

This stormtrooper carries little extraneous kit. The two khaki bags slung over his shoulders are actually grenade sacks made from sandbags, a plentiful supply of grenades being requisite for most stormtroopers assaulting Allied trenches. In addition he carries a gas mask case, a long-handled shovel and a 7.9mm (0.31in) Mauser carbine. The M1915 uniform is typical of the German soldier in 1918. It replaced the M1910 as the standard-issue German army blouse in 1915 and initially featured exposed buttons. These were eventually covered with a fly front, as shown here, something which gave less for enemy riflemen to draw a bead on. Note how this soldier has camouflaged his helmet. This was only done by German stormtroopers and was the first effective use of infantry camouflage. Each man would paint an individual pattern, but based around an angular disruptive-type design scheme.

Date: 1918
Unit: German Army
Rank: Stormtrooper
Theatre: Western Front



Corporal Australian Infantry Gallipoli 1915

British Commonwealth casualties at Gallipoli during the period from February 1915 to January 1916 numbered 213,980. This was a hideous cost for an operation that had little strategic effect on the development of World War I. Many of the casualties were sustained by Australian forces, and battles for Turkish positions such as Lone Pine – in which the Australians lost 1700 men alone – are legendary in Australian military history. This soldier wears the standard service dress: a single-breasted khaki tunic in a British pattern, corduroy trousers (though khaki trousers of the same material as the tunic were also worn), puttees and brown leather shoes. A leather belt around the waist supports two pouches, each with ammunition for the .303in (7.7mm) SMLE Mk III Rifle, here fitted with pattern sword bayonet with curved quillon. The distinctive Australian touch is added by the wide-brimmed slouch hat.

Date: 1915
Unit: Australian Infantry



Private Russian Army Russia 1916

The basic pattern of the World War Russian Army uniform was established in 1907 after clothing trials following the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–05. The pattern chosen was an olive-green uniform of Gimnastirka shirt (non-officer ranks) or Kitel tunic (officers) with a wooller or cloth peaked cap and Shinel greatcoat. While the double-breasted greatcoat had a large fall collar, the tunic had a stand collar. Rank was placed on the shoulder-straps, and the greatcoat collar was used to receive coloured patches which indicated arm-of-service and regiment. This pattern received some variation in 1913, particularly the tunic which was modified with a rear vent and a different button configuration, giving it the feature of being able to act as both service and dress uniform. Service dress was achieved by buttoning a coloured plastron on the front of the tunic and altering cuff and collar insignia.

Date: 1916
Unit: Russian Army
Rank: Private

Stormtrooper Michael Offensive Western Front 1918

The stormtroopers were a new breed of soldier trained and developed by Germany between 1914 and 1915. The concept, devised mainly by *Hauptmann* Erich Rohr, was for spearhead units, *Sturmtruppen*, to use speed, mobility and firepower to smash open weak points in enemy defences for mass infantry assault to widen. In December 1915 an operational unit, the *Sturm-Bataillon Rohr*, entered into the war. Here we see a soldier during the Michael Offensive, Germany's last-ditch effort to break the deadlock of the Western Front in 1918. His medieval appearance was typical of assault troops. Metal body armour, a chain-mail head-dress and non-standard steel helmet gave protection in trench battles, though at the expense of mobility. This soldier is armed with classic trench fighting tools: a Mauser Model 1914 pistol and two hand-grenades, as well as a sharpened spade.

Date: 1918
Unit: Sturmtruppen
Assault Units
Rank: Trooper