

Camouflage Uniforms of the Wehrmacht & Waffen-SS



Special camouflage clothing prior to 1939 consisted only of winter clothing for mountain troops and the shelter quarter issued to all personnel. The former consisted of a white parka, and white hooded surcoats, the surcoats being worn over the overcoat if necessary. The shelter quarter was designed to serve as a shelter section (four needed to form a tent), as a poncho, ground sheet, or as a camouflage garment. (See fig. 3) Of tightly woven cotton duck, the shelter quarter originally had obverse and reverse sides in different styles of camouflage, both based on green-grey-brown color combinations. When worn as a garment, the shelter quarter could be arranged in a variety of ways to make it a windproof, waterproof garment. (See similar Waffen-SS shelter quarter, fig. 1.)

. Well-developed camouflaged clothing for general service was first used with combat troops when the Waffen-SS took the field against the Lowlands and France in the spring of 1940. At that time Waffen-SS troops were issued what was to be, for some time, a characteristic SS garment - a pullover camouflage jacket or jumper with waist and sleeve elastics and laced neck closure. (See fig. 2)

It generally consisted of very closely woven cotton duck of finer grade than that used in the Army shelter quarter. The obverse was colored in spotted tans and browns, as though for autumn. The reverse was in spotted greens and browns of several shades. A visored cap and a reversable helmet cover of the same material were often worn with the jackets. Once exclusive with Waffen-SS troops, these Tarnjacken were later issued to the Army and to Luftwaffe Felddivisionen (field divisions) on a limited scale and with different color patterns.

Decision to enter the Italian campaign in Africa caused the German Army to issue an entirely new set of uniforms for its Afrika Korps.

These followed standard German procedure. They attempted to combine protective coloration and serviceability with smart appearance and morale-raising insignia. The color shades were chosen after continued experimentation. Generally the uniform was made of cotton twill in a fairly dark olive drab color, with the overcoat of wool. Braid and chevrons were golden-brown and bases for shoulder boards in enlisted and NCO grades were of brown. Collar patches were grey and golden-brown and the machine-woven breast eagle was light bluish-grey on a golden-brown background.

The black leather boots, belts and similar gear of continental uniforms were replaced by OD webbing. Simultaneously there appeared a shelter quarter with one side modified to suit desert colors, even to a pinkish hue.

After the opening of the Eastern front in June 1941, activities of Soviet snipers caused the Germans to take stricter views regarding camouflage discipline. The national emblem and national colors worn on the helmet were ordered abolished, while the service color (Waffenfarbe) was dropped from the field cap. Shelter quarters also appeared which had one side suited to blend with autumnal coloring. While various types of camouflage nets were provided to hold natural materials, units and individuals began the improvisation of helmet covers on a wide scale, usually by cutting up standard shelter quarters.

The winter of 1941-42 revealed a great lack of suitable winter camouflage clothing. Clothing worn on the Westwall two years before was of improvised "bedsheet" variety. Various experimental uniforms were tried out, and by the next summer there was ready a hooded winter uniform with a white side for snow and a green side for use in

country partly clear of snow or ice. In some instances it was found better to smear dirt onto the white side of the uniform in patches to form a kind of mottle.

It should be noted here that there were two basic patterns of camouflage used throughout the war by Army and Luftwaffe units. The first was a greenish-grey background with geometrical figures in green and dark brown. The second pattern which came out in 1943 had a light brown background with mottlings in dark green and red brown. By 1943-44 this latter pattern had been made standard for winter uniforms and Army pullover camouflage jackets. (For winter uniforms in the first pattern, see fig. 4) The new mountain parka and trousers used in the Caucasus campaign of 1942 were light brown on one side, and white on the other. Wind-proof, and of special rayon, the material was porous for ventilation until wet. The fabric then swelled and became waterproof. Porosity was restored on drying. (See fig. 5.)

Prior to the war, the Luftwaffe equipped its antiaircraft and parachute troops with the standard bluish-grey field uniforms. NCO's braid remained silver-grey, as did chevrons and officers' shoulder straps. Parachute jump coveralls were of greenish windproof duck but, at the time of Crete, jump suits began to appear in the geometric pattern.

Not until after the Army began issue of Afrika Korps uniforms was the Luftwaffe ready with suitable clothing for tropical wear, and issue commenced with uniforms of a light khaki with white national emblems on shirt and coats. Proper camouflage clothing was not provided until the issue of the long Tarnjacken, or camouflage coats, in late 1942 and early 1943. These were worn by Felddivisionen of the Luftwaffe, by the Hermann Goering Panzer Division, and by the parachute divisions, particularly the 1st Parachute Division around Cassino. The coats were identical in pattern to the Army

shelter quarters and had the Luftwaffe emblem on the right breast. They were of a material similar to U.S. herringbone twill, and were not reversable. (See fig. 6.)

Need for camouflage clothing was made particularly apparent in the Italian campaign, for German troops in Italy set about an extensive program of manufacturing protective colored clothing from whatever material was locally available. Usually it was either German or Italian shelter sections. The Italian shelter section was more delicate in color than the German, and had two sides in pastel colors. Tans and browns appeared on one side for autumn; greys, browns, and purples appeared on the other. Of inferior cotton duck, Italian shelter section material was not very waterproof. In many cases the Germans sewed nylon gas-cape material under the shoulders to repel water seepage. Clothing improvised from such material included coveralls, jackets made like Army coats, entire two-piece suits, pull-over jackets, and other types as invented by the maker. This clothing varied in type, cut and quality of tailoring according to the unit which made it, or had it made. (See figs. 6 and 7.)

In the same area, as well as in France, Waffen-SS units were issued factory-made two-piece camouflage uniforms in two different types of coloring. These suits all employed the Waffen-SS Tarnjacke system of mottled colors, except that the colors were more delicate in shade and ran to a greater range of browns and neutral earth colors. The material itself was a poor quality, rough cotton twill like that of the Luftwaffe fatigue uniforms. The cotton twill was not waterproof (see figure 7).

By mid-1944, an issue army pull-over jacket appeared. (See fig. 8). This somewhat resembled the Waffen-SS jacket in that it had a waist

drawstring and a laced neck closure, but the material was similar to that used in the late-issue mountain parka, and was colored in the second Wehrmacht pattern. Also, unlike the SS jackets, this issue came with an attached hood.

German helmet camouflage was considerably varied. Some men were issued nets, some received cloth covers, and some improvised one or the other. The men frequently wore these with a camouflage band, intended primarily for attaching vegetation, but used also to keep the net or cover on evenly when it was not attached carefully to the bottom edge of the helmet. The Germans found that it was essential to break up the line of the bottom of the helmet, and frequently they permitted the net or cover to hang unevenly.

Static warfare on the East front and in Italy called forth a multiplicity of minor equipment to aid snipers and observers. Face masks of various types were tried out. (See figs. 9, 10, and 11.) These could be worn with a helmet cover and, if so, could consist of a heavy fringe covering the face. Gauze was used for a similar purpose in winter. In the latter case, the cap received a white cover, unless the winter uniform hood was worn, or else the helmet was covered with whitewash.

Complete snipers' suits included hooded green parkas with loops for attachment of natural camouflage, and ran to a wide variety of styles. In the Luftwaffe, additional emphasis on protective coloration caused the issue of parachutist bandoliers in camouflage instead of the usual blue-grey or khaki.



Figure 1. German Waffen-SS shelter quarter worn as a poncho.



Figure 2. German SS camouflaged jumper (Tarnjack).

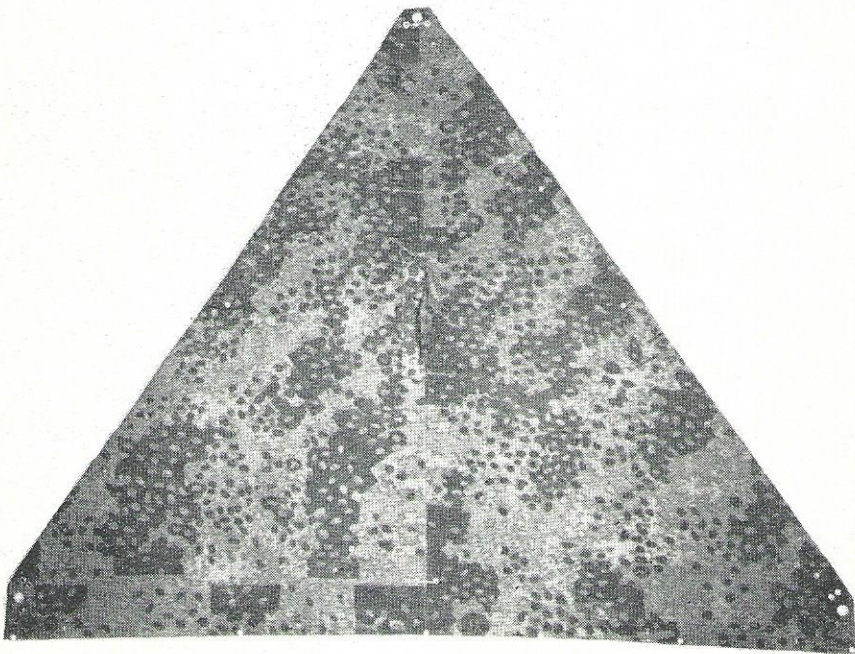


Figure 3. German Waffen-SS shelter quarter, showing shape and coloration.
Four of these make a tent.



Figure 4. German winter uniform, with coat and trousers in different shades and types of coloring.



Figure 5. German reversible parka with matching trousers—light green (Feldgrau) side out.



Figure 6. Above—German air force camouflaged coat (Tarnjacke). Below—German camouflaged coat, improvised in Italy. Cut in the style of the army coat from an Italian army shelter section.



Figure 7. Above—German camouflaged jacket, improvised in Italy, cut from a German shelter quarter. Below—The new Waffen-SS camouflaged suit; detail of coat, showing insignia and ordinary field cap.



Figure 8. German army issue camouflage pull-over.

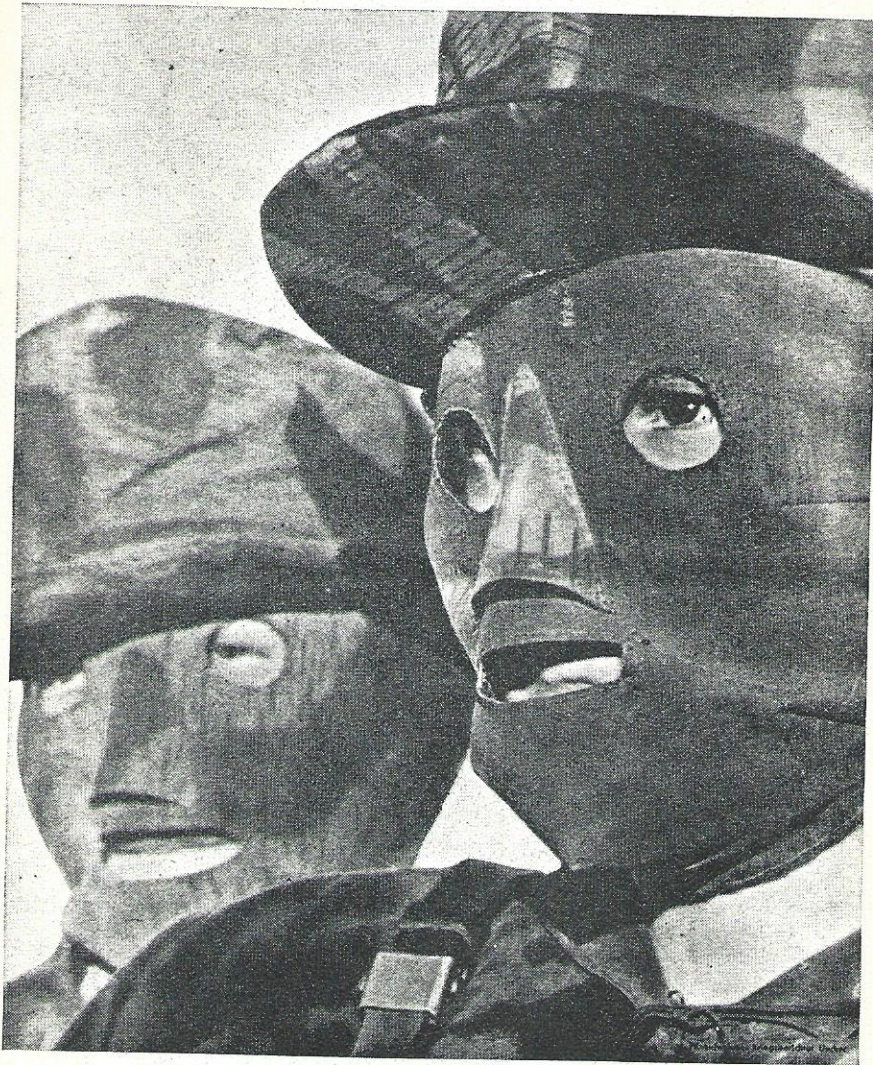


Figure 9. German camouflage cloth face masks.



Figure 10. German sentry or sniper wearing a winter-type face mask of gauze.



Figure 11. German camouflage face mask, summer type, of string fringe.