

Camouflage Face Paint by an unknown hand (and a bit of David Gray).

The main part of this article was written by someone only identified as 'Duncan-M' on a 'reddit' forum. I don't know whether they experienced any of the situations they had written about. However, it seems to me by just reading the text that they must have known what they were talking about. 'Duncan-M' comes across as someone who has 'been there and done that'. I accept that this person is telling the truth not only according to him, but also a universal truth, known to all U.S.



Above: A soldier with very scary camouflage face paint applied operating a flame thrower.

servicemen who have trained or served 'in the field'. This short article which I have put together talking about the rather narrow subject of face camouflage is fascinating to me as I knew nothing about the subject. I have found, since writing these articles for the website that I have learned so much about a multitude of subjects relating to warfare. I find every one of them extremely interesting which is why I put them here on this page. I feel sure that I am not the only

one to be held captive by a fascinating story which not only interests me but also educates.

I have changed a few spellings from American to English but that's my only intervention in his narrative. I have added other pieces later that relate to instructions on face painting from an American document which is explained further on and also all of the photos. The main story, written by an unknown hand, begins here (oh, I took the profanities out at first but then changed my mind and left them in. We're all grown-ups here, and they give so much more vitality to the sentiments):

"At its most basic, it's a simple and cheap way of camouflaging the exposed skin of the human body, especially of certain race and skin tones, to hide it from the human eye. It's not toxic, it's not dangerous, it requires only a little bit of effort, and while practicing other principles of camouflage, can be a very effective means of self preservation, leading to mission success.

That out of the way, when it comes to how it's done in training, it is cultural and traditional. There are quite a few regulations, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) that are followed religiously in peacetime during training by both the regular

Army and the Marine Corps that are seldom or not at all followed in a combat zone. Among many others, putting camo paint on daily is one of them.



Above: A Vietnam era soldier with camouflage face paint.

Making every individual camo up on a daily basis actually started as a post Vietnam reform. Not just in Vietnam but in past conflicts US Soldiers and Marines practiced horrible wartime camouflage practices (this is true to this day). Since a lot of lessons learned and applied as future reforms are based on those learned in the past war, which in the case of Vietnam was largely fought in jungle or woodland environments, it was no shock that they were going to emphasize the glaring weaknesses of poor

camo. It wasn't alone, patrolling was emphasized far more, noise and light discipline, to the point a conventional grunt squad in the 1980s was training closer to what a LRRP (long-range reconnaissance patrol) team in Vietnam was doing. So when discipline was fully restored in the 1980s, camo paint on faces, especially infantry, was one of the new go-to standards of professionalism.

Because we're talking about institutions, what those SOPs became was a fast and easy way for superiors to perceive and judge the discipline (and thus effectiveness) of a subordinate unit and its leaders. Because the unit SOP says camo paint goes on the second everyone enters "the field," they had better be wearing it. If not, something was wrong. Being seen as wrong in the Marine Corps or Army means bad things happen.

This is similar to the older pre-occupation with spit shined combat boots, starched and creased camouflage utility uniforms (thankfully gone), and ridiculous haircuts (still there but at least the 'high and tight' is no longer the standard), as well as being fresh shaven daily (still there, despite gas masks that can work with beards). These are all traditional standards that have since become chief optics used by senior officers and NCOs to gauge a unit's effectiveness, without actually knowing a damn thing about them. Let's be real, to know a unit and its personnel requires senior leaders leaving their offices and actually going around and inspecting everyone constantly, accompanying them in training, doing things that puts them in position to get to know them. But that takes time, and effort, and drive, and who has that? Why bother when a lazy leader can make snap and lasting decisions about someone based entirely on how they look and speak?

But that's garrison, when everyone has the opportunity to be clean and presentable. When grunt go to the field, training hard, they generally look like shit. The longer they're in the field, the worse they look. Field sanitation is barely practiced anymore (for a myriad of reasons, some good, some not).

At the very least, their uniform is often going to be frumpled, dust and dirt covered, with sweat stains. More often they're covered in dust, mud, grime, salt stains, completely soaked in water or worse. Often times their uniforms are ripped, and in many cases there is someone in your platoon walking around with their genitals exposed until that person has such time to somehow fix the blown out crotch in their trousers. Sometimes they're literally covered in actual human faeces (buddy of mine in Iraq nearly drowned to death falling into a deep cess pool). After a week or two, everyone reeks like a dead goat's asshole, and yet pride themselves on how badly they stink, because they've been too busy working to bath, so stinking is a badge of honour to how hard they trained. So the more they reek, the worse they look, the better the unit is, and even the senior leadership accepts that as okay.

So how can senior leaders know if someone is good or not based on their appearance if they look like shit already? Again, remember, most are not sticking around to actually get to know anyone, nor to actually follow them on any training. They want to show up, look around, and categorize everyone as good or bad in the length of time it takes them to look them over.

Does their primary weapon exterior look clean? (an indication they're cleaning their weapon) Are they still clean shaven despite being in the field? (they are practicing basic field sanitary hygiene) Do they have camo paint on? (the unit is following unit SOP and proper TTPs to improve tactical efficiency).

More so, all are part of regs, SOPs, and TTPs, meaning they are not optional. So if they're not being done, it means a discipline problem has occurred at some point. Either a leader has slacked off, or the troops are undisciplined (which is also a leadership problem). If so then asses will get chewed and shit rolls down hill. If things look good, individuals get compliments, maybe good evaluations, even meritorious impact awards like achievement or commendation medals.

So that is why it was done in training. It's just a traditional mode of gauging discipline in the regular Army and Marine Corps. Because it's easier than actually taking the harder steps to gauge a subordinate unit as good or bad.

So why isn't camo paint used in combat zones? It is, just not often. When some units have to send out ambushes or recon patrols in rural areas, and are legitimately trying their best to be not seen, some might order their subordinates to apply camo paint, maybe even other methods of camouflaging the body and uniform that are only taught in Basic and a few check-the-block training like Expert Infantry Badge qualification, but are rarely ever done again (like vegetation or

scrim/burlap/camo fabric attached to the helmet, equipment, around the weapon, to break up shape/outline/colour, or painting the service rifle and its accessories, which does nothing detrimental to weapon function, etc).

But camo paint stops being used in combat zones mostly because it's impractical. What missions the US Army or Marine infantry end up getting stuck doing, camo paint is not going to really help them at all. So why do it? It's a mess, it makes your face break out after a while, it's a mess, it doesn't last long, it's a mess, and if you do it often you have to supply more and more of it. Why make everyone's lives harder than it need be? Combat has its moments where it's even fun sometimes, but generally it sucks balls, mentally and physically. So common sense finally prevails often in combat.

Either that, or discipline actually has slackened. Unfortunately, it takes more than seeing someone or not wearing camo paint to know this.

*And don't even get me started that from 2004-2015 the standard US Army uniform was the UCP ACU abominations, and stood out like a sore thumb in any environment that wasn't a gravel parking lot (or certain sofas). So what would be the point of putting camo paint on your face then? Like putting lipstick on a pig..."

The official (American) Point of View

The printing code at the bottom of this 'Fact Sheet' indicates that it was published on 23rd February 1943. The sheet discusses the two colours Loam and Green and there were many other colours for which there must have been other factsheets. The sheet begins:

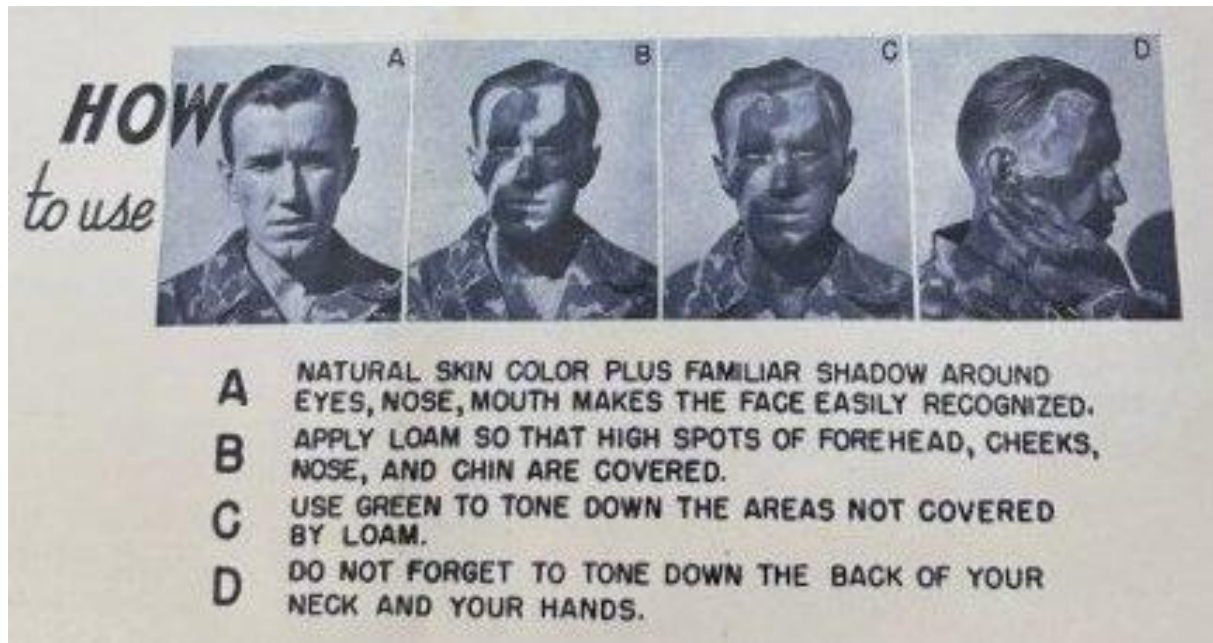


"Used by itself, face paint does not hide you from the eyes of the enemy but it helps to hide you. It is part of your battle dress. Your skin reflects light and shines, the shine makes you a bullseye for enemy gunights. With face paint you can tone down your shiny skin and blend yourself into your surroundings."

FACTS – Face paint is safe, it is easy to apply and will not hurt your skin. Rain or sweat will not wash it off, but soap and water will. It contains a substance to keep insects away from you.

REMEMBER – Color your skin to match your background. Color all exposed skin surfaces with irregular patterns of face paint. This includes the backs of your hands, your ears and back of your neck.

Below – How to use...



A few examples of face camouflage through the 20th Century:



Above: This is described as being a photograph of a British soldier during the First World War. I don't think so, I think it is WWII, but it shows early face painting patterns in the British Army.



Left: Although black and white, this shows some good examples of camouflage face paint used by American Airborne troops in WWII. To quote the Duke of Wellington – “I don’t know what the enemy think of them but they certainly frighten me!”



Left: A modern day American G.I. applying his camouflage face paint.