

# MISSAR Color Guard Dress Code & Equipment

*Guidelines for Guardsmen*

## Summary Detail

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## Foreword

The following is taken directly from the SAR publication *The SAR Colorguardsman*, Vol. 7 No. 1, April 2018, pp. 31-34. Although every effort will be made to keep this supplementary document up to date, the reader is advised to check the NSSAR website and its documentation for accuracy.

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# Equipment & Gear

## ***Equipment***

Flags, poles, indoor flag stands, and related items are available through varied sources. Color Guard units are encouraged to purchase as much of equipment as possible from local sources.

Since events are conducted both indoors and outdoors, the Color Guard should endeavor to purchase flags that can withstand the elements when used at outdoor events such as parades and grave markings.

In addition to indoor flag stands, the Color Guard should purchase or fabricate outdoor spike stands. These ground spike type may be fabricated from local sources using Rebar and pipe lengths of a diameter to allow insertion of the flag staff. When a Color Guard is participating in an outdoor event, they are responsible for bringing outdoor ground spike stands for each flag that is brought.

At formal national events such as Congress, the Leadership Meetings, and the National Memorial Service, the National Color Guard will provide all flags and equipment necessary for the event.

At state and/or chapter sponsored events, the host society or chapter is responsible for providing the National and State flags and the related equipment. For the sake of uniformity, all chapters within a state must purchase flag poles of the same height as those used by the state society. The most common flag pole length is seven (7) feet. While flag poles can be up to nine (9) feet, this length can become too difficult to carry outside in a moderate wind.

## ***Rank Insignia***

A variety of items were used to denote rank within the Revolutionary army. Most common were sashes, gorgets, hat cockades, and epaulettes. As a matter of note, the private in the army did not have any sashes or epaulettes on his uniform coat. Epaulettes denoted rank through both color and placement on a specific shoulder.

If the guardsman wishes to include rank insignia, it is highly recommended that this be researched so that historical correctness is maintained.

## ***Gorget***



This ornamental metal device is worn suspended from the neck. This alludes back to its original purpose as the component of metal armor that protected the neck of the wearer from swords and other non-projectile weapons. By the time of the Revolution, this had become an ornamental accessory to a military uniform denoting a certain rank or as an indication of performing a certain duty.

As such, research should determine if wearing a gorget is appropriate with the type of uniform that is worn. For purposes of the SAR, the gorget is most often worn by either a Color Guard Commander or a past commander.

**Cartridge Box**

Continental soldiers used a cartridge box when in battle. The cartridge box should be made of black leather attached to a hanger.

**Powderhorns,  
Tomahawks,  
Knives**

These items are not parts of the Continental uniform. They are identified with the Militia uniform and should only be worn or carried by those guardsmen in that uniform. These items can be carried using rawhide or leather strings or other materials. They can also be inserted in belts or other woven sashes.

As a matter of personal and corporate safety, edged weapons (including swords above) must have the blades covered or secured within an appropriate scabbard.

**Sidearms**

For the most part, the majority of the color guard should not carry side arms as their primary duty will be in bearing the various colors for presentation.

**Swords (28"-38")**

Except for officers such as the Commander or Vice Commander, no guardsman should wear a sword. The wearing of a sword was a symbol of rank and social standing.

With respect to the primary duty of the SAR Color Guard, wearing a sword is impractical and a matter of personal safety. It is impractical to wear a sword since both hands are used to carry the flag during a parade and one hand is needed to secure the sword so that it does not cause the wearer to trip.

Likewise, a longer sword may be impractical when presenting colors in a smaller space such as a meeting room.

**Hangers (25")**

This is a specific type of sword that is suspended from a shoulder belt. It is a safer alternative for those guardsmen who wish to carry an edged weapon while bearing colors. Of note is that many historical belts contain carriers for both bayonets and hangers within the same belt.

**Spontoons**

Evolved from the much longer pike, the spontoon was used by sergeants or other non-commissioned officers as a both a symbol of rank as well as a signaling device to control the movements of a rank of men.

With its edged blade, it was also a means of defending the colors as well as a means of personal defense. As such, only the Commander of the unit should carry this sidearm.

**Muskets / Rifles**

When using a primarily Continental unit, the Brown Bess or French Charleville Musket is preferred to maintain historical accuracy. The musket can be either a non-functioning reproduction (usually less expensive) or a functioning reproduction. In either case, the guardsman should also have a bayonet on their person when carrying a musket as the

bayonet was an essential part of that weapon system. Reproductions of rifles can be carried but this is primarily done by those guardsmen in militia attire.

When carrying a rifle, the guardsman should not have a bayonet as these were not used with rifles (unless it was a plug bayonet). The usage of vintage heirlooms or antiques is strongly discouraged.

Whether a musket or rifle is carried, the firelock (muzzle-loader) must have the appropriate safety equipment. This means it should have a flash guard and a frizzen cover. The flash guard is brass and is sold by muzzle-loading equipment companies, although a Color Guardsman can make one. The frizzen cover is leather and also can be purchased, but most owners choose to make their own. The frizzen cover needs to be tethered to the firelock (muzzle-loader).

Color Guardsmen without this safety equipment will not be permitted to carry their firelock (muzzleloader) in any SAR event; local, state or national. It is obligation and duty of each Color Guardsman to provide a safe environment for all participants.

### ***Pistols***

Since these were primarily a weapon used exclusively by cavalry or mounted units, pistols should never be carried. Holsters for pistols were attached to the saddle and there are no known examples of belts or other devices for carrying a pistol related to foot soldiers.

## Clothing & Accessories

### ***Continental or Militia Uniform***

There are two types of Color Guard units that can be formed based on the type of uniform that the unit primarily uses. The first and most recognizable is the *Continental Unit*. This unit is comprised of men who are uniformed in the familiar tricorn hat, blue coat and knee breeches or fall-front trousers identified with the soldiers of the regular army during the Revolution.

The second type of unit is the *Militia Unit*. There is no set uniform associated with the Militia. As in the time of the Revolution, the Militia consisted of everyday men who wore the clothes that they wore in normal everyday activity when called to service. As such, there is more leeway in the type of clothing that the Militia Color Guard wears.

Please note, that while the above references separate units based on the type of uniform, this does not preclude having a mixture of uniform types in a single unit. As a matter of fact, most national events will have color guard members in a variety of uniforms – both continental and militia. The common practice in this situation is that those wearing continental uniforms will be towards the front of the unit while those wearing militia attire will be toward the rear.

With respect to the uniform that is worn, many Color Guardsmen choose to wear a uniform similar to that worn by their patriot ancestor(s). However, this requires that the Color Guard member have performed the necessary research to determine the details of the uniform. This is necessary since, while the blue coat was predominate, the coat could have a different facing color on the cuffs and collar, depending where the soldier was from and the hat could vary from unit to unit.

With respect to the Continental uniform, the basic uniform consists of the following:

- A tricorn hat
- A blue coat with either a buff, red or white facing and trim
- White shirt and waistcoat
- White or buff knee britches or fall-front trousers
- Buckle shoes
- A pair of white gloves

With respect to the Militia uniform, the basic uniform consists of the following:

- A hat – either tricorn or round
- A hunting shirt
- A white or checkered shirt
- Long britches or fall-front trousers
- Shoes (not necessarily buckle since the long pants leg will cover the buckle area).

In 2016, a uniform based on Scottish attire was approved by the National Color Guard Committee. This type of uniform is considered a militia uniform. The basic uniform consists of the following:

- A hat – either tricorn or round
- A white or checkered shirt with neck stock
- A waistcoat
- A kilt (may be of a modern pattern since the actual tartans at the time are unknown)
- Knee socks with buckle shoes or knee socks with boot/moccasins

In addition to the items above, the following items were expressly excluded from the Scottish uniform:

- Modern hats
- Modern shirts
- Modern neck wear – long or bow tie
- Modern shoes
- Modern outer wear such as a sports coat or Prince Charlie Coat
- Continental blue coat
- Sporran (a haversack is allowed)

While these are the basics for each uniform, variations will exist and participation will not be discouraged based on these variations. Another important consideration of the uniform is the type of fabric used in making the uniform and the accessories that accompany the uniform. A discussion of these fabric and accessories will follow below.

Due to the time and expense of obtaining an uniform made from natural and more authentic material, many color guard members chose to obtain a less expensive uniform made from modern fabric, most often polyester or gabardine. These uniforms made from modern fabric are acceptable for all events except where the guardsman will fire a musket. For safety reasons, the SAR does not allow guardsmen in modern fabric uniforms to fire a weapon due the danger of melting fabric causing severe burns.

For those guardsmen who wish to fire a musket, the uniform should be made out of natural fiber material such as wool and linen. If a spark from a fired musket lands on uniforms made of these materials, the fibers will smolder and can be easily extinguished before causing injury instead of melting quickly.

### ***Headwear***

While many in the general public identify the tricorn hat as the exclusive headwear of the Revolutionary era, this was not the case. Many different types of headwear were worn including helmets (predominately cavalry units), woven caps, and flat round hats. If wearing a specific unit's uniform, the correct headwear must be worn. For purposes of the SAR Color Guard, a simple black tricorn will suffice.

### ***Footwear***

During the Revolution, most shoes were made to fit either foot with the determination of right and left coming only after long wear where the shoe molded to the foot. Obtaining period, buckled shoes can be expensive. As such, many guardsmen elect to purchase buckles that can slide over modern shoes and give the appearance of buckle shoes.

Another option is to have the either gaiters made (secured with buttons and garters just above the calf) that cover the lower leg and tops of the shoes thus hiding the fact the shoes have no buckles or by having long pants made as part of the uniform that have facings that extend over the face of the shoe and are secured using either elastic or leather straps below the shoe that also obscure the lack of a buckle of the shoe.

An important consideration is both the comfort and safety of the guardsmen in walking or marching in a parade since period correct footwear can cause blisters or may not provide appropriate traction on modern surfaces.

### ***Belts and Straps***

When in the Continental uniform, all belts and straps used for carrying other equipment should be made of white leather or heavy white canvas. Equipment that was supported by a belt or strap included the cartridge box, the haversack, bayonets and canteens.

### ***Haversack***

The haversack carried the basic necessities of the soldier including rations, smaller mess kit items, wallet, etc. Today, it is an ideal place for the guardsman to carry his wallet, cell phone, glasses or other necessary items. It should be made of linen or some similar material. It should be worn on the left of the uniform.

### ***Canteen***

Authentic Revolution-era canteens can be made of metal or wood.

### ***Knapsacks***

These should be made of linen, canvas or similar material and worn using white leather or canvas straps. While part of the Continental uniform, these are not commonly worn by members of the National Society SAR Color Guard.