

Distinctive Beret Uniform History of U.S. Armed Services

Wear of beret with a U.S. military department's service uniform was a rarity prior to the Army adopting the black beret as standard wear with its service uniform effective 14 June 2001. However, other than the U.S. Army standard wear black beret, a beret is considered a distinctive uniform not intended as recognition of individual accomplishment, but to provide recognition that all members wearing it are highly trained specialists who perform extremely hazardous duties demanding of the very highest mental and physical discipline.

It is also important to note that some groups the public has awareness of being elite such as the U.S. Navy SEALs and U.S. Marine Force Reconnaissance have never been authorized wear of a distinctive beret uniform. The distinctive beret uniform is limited to the Army and the Air Force and even then there was initially great hesitation and reluctance to authorize distinctive uniforms.

Prior to 1973 only the Army's Special Forces and Air Force's Pararescue had official military department (HQ Army/HQ USAF) approval to wear a distinctive beret service uniform on and off base, both while on duty and off duty.

Army leaders were so hesitant of giving distinctive uniform concessions that it took President Executive Order in 1961 to for U.S Army Special Forces authorization to wear the Green Beret. The Department of the Army made its second distinctive beret uniform concession in 1975 when the U.S Army Rangers were authorized wear of the black beret (Tan effective 15 June 2001).

Until 1966 the majority of Air Force leaders were hesitant of giving distinctive uniform concessions to groups as authorizing such was not consistent with Air Force's one team one force policy and believed such concessions would result in confusing the public with concerns such distinctions would be meaningless without constant public reminder of why exceptions are made. The Air Force began making other distinctive beret uniform concessions in 1973.

Regardless of specialty/MOS the approval of distinctive uniform for wear it is not intended as recognition of individual accomplishment, but to provide recognition to highly trained and capable military teams whose members voluntarily bring with them into performing their duties a reasonable balance between pursuing one's own self interests and being there doing military duties as expected.

Distinctive Beret Uniform Chronological History

Prior to 1961 no military department of the United States had an authorized distinctive beret service uniform to distinguish members of the military services having unique military skills and qualifications and also performing military duties demanding the highest mental and physical discipline. A distinctive beret service uniform distinguishing both on and off duty differs from the ceremonial uniform worn by honor guard and drill teams.

1961: The Department of Army approved distinctive official head gear uniform of green beret for members of its Special Forces on 25 September 1961 (DA Message 578636). The first official wearing of the newly authorized Green Beret was at a Special Forces demonstration staged for President John F. Kennedy at Fort Bragg on 12 October 1961.

President Kennedy was instrumental in the approval by DA of the Green Beret for US Special Forces. Currently, all Special Forces-qualified soldiers wear the Green Beret with the authorized flash of their Special Forces Group.

- 1966: The Air Force approved the distinctive uniform of maroon beret and USAF Pararescue flash and crest on 1 June 1966. The Chief of Staff on approval noted Pararescue personnel are highly trained specialists who perform extremely hazardous duties demanding of the very highest mental and physical discipline and thus deserve to wear the distinctive attire consisting of maroon beret, bloused trousers with combat boots, and special badge both on and off base.
- 1975: U.S. Army Rangers received authorization through AR 670-5, Uniform and Insignia, 30 January 1975, to wear black berets. Previously, locally authorized black berets had been worn briefly by the 10th Ranger Company (Airborne), 45th Infantry Division, during the Korean War before their movement to Korea; Company F (LRP), 52d Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, in 1967 in the Republic of Vietnam; Company H (Ranger), 75th Infantry, 1st Cavalry Division, in 1970 in the Republic of Vietnam; and Company N (Ranger), 75th Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade, in 1971 in the Republic of Vietnam. The Army changed the Ranger's Black Beret to the Tan Beret on March 15, 2001. This change resulted from the announcement in 2000 that the Army would issue black berets to all soldiers effective on the Army's June 14, 2001 birthday.
- 1976: USAF CCT had adopted the Navy Blue Beret as a distinctive duty uniform during the SEA conflicts; however the Scarlet Beret was adopted in 1976 with the flash and crest being approved sometime in the 1980s. Source document not found documenting when the CCT beret became an approved AF distinctive uniform, but it happened at the time USAF Security Forces were authorized Navy Blue Beret as a duty uniform.
- 1976: Combat Weather (AFSC "C" Shred out, J-coded positions)--after 1976 but before 1998. Members of the specialty sustaining airborne parachutist qualifications adopted wear of Pewter Gray beret in early 1970s and a Blue beret was subsequently used until Gray was adopted again in 1986 at which time no distinctive flash was authorized. The Air Force approved the Combat Weather Team Airborne crest in 2004. Source document not found identifying when Combat Weather beret became an Air Force approved distinctive uniform. SOWTs rarely, if ever, are assigned to conventional Army units. Not all SOWT members will go to HALO or SCUBA, the SOWT approach to these schools is similar to Army Special Forces Teams (ODAs). The Combat Weather assigned to conventional units are typically embedded in support units "collocate" with smaller direct ground combat battalions or in brigade level support positions, many of the conventional positions are coded "P2" and are open to women.
- 1979: TACP-The Black Beret was adopted for wear. TACP crest and Flash was proposed in 1983 and approved July 1985. Source document not found identifying when TACP's beret became an Air Force approved distinctive uniform.
- 1980: The 82nd Airborne first petitioned the Department of Army for approval of wear of the red (maroon) beret in 1955, they presented the argument that Special Forces was wearing

Berets. It was not until 28 November 1980, that HQDA authorize airborne organizations to wear the maroon beret.

2004: USAF SERE - The 96th AF Uniform Board authorized Survival Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) Specialist the wear of a Pewter Green Beret.

2005: Security Forces - The Navy Blue beret was adopted in 1976 as a "worn only by personnel assigned to SP group level and below" while performing Security/Law Enforcement duties. For a period of time augmenters from other AFSCs were also allowed to wear while performing SF duties. The 97th Uniform Board in 2005 approved-"wear of the security forces duty badge and beret is authorized while an individual is assigned a 3PXXX duty Air Force Specialty Code position and is also their primary AFSC, including PME attendance and staff tours above group level."

Wear of the distinctive uniform beret does brings with it responsibility of knowing performance, behavior, and conduct while wearing it reflects on all others who wore the beret in the past, those currently wearing it, and those who wear it in the future. Consequently, there is attitude of confidence (self-direction, self-efficacy, self-mastery, self-control, and self-discipline) and, honor, and duty (willingness to endure obstacle and suffering in order to accomplish some military goal, objective or mission). The distinctive uniform beret should not be worn with attitude of arrogance, vanity, superiority.

**No Beret, but a Special Warfare Insignia
(otherwise more popularly known as the SEAL Trident)**

1962: The first U.S Navy Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) Teams were "activated January 1962."¹ Historical record traces origins to World War II wartime amphibious support tasks of the Navy's underwater demolition teams (UDT). The change from UDT to SEAL expanded primary mission from clearing underwater obstacles to include conducting unconventional warfare using covert and clandestine methods and tactics in maritime and inland waterway environments. SEAL operational capabilities and tasking has continued to expand since 1962 to include special operations, unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense hundreds of miles from any ocean or inland waterway.

Special Warfare/Special Operations

Military tactical response capability expanded in 1962 from conventional warfare to include stronger specialized capability to participate in unconventional warfare. The military departments (services) made deliberate effort to strengthen and improve existing response capabilities. Emphasis was put on ensuring the military responders are qualified, capable and ready to respond. Although all the units and teams considered to be special operations forces have heritage connected to combat operations conducted during WWII and specifically Office of the Strategic Services (OSS) guerrilla warfare operations, some units and teams have a longer sustained operational existence than others after WW II.

It should be noted a **1992 Presidential Commission** recommended that Special Operations Forces remain closed to women, and that the DoD Risk Rule be retained. Currently Special

Operation forces (units and teams) are male only. The DoD Risk Rule is directly connected to the DIRECT LAND COMBAT EXCLUSIONS policy.

- 1947: The USAF activated its first Pararescue Teams 1 July 1947² and the first USAF Pararescue teams were ready for field assignment in November 1947. However US Army Air Forces conducts parachute rescue activities beginning in 1940 and several rescue by parachute were accomplished in the China Burma India Theater of combat operations during WWII.
- 1952: The U.S. Army Special Forces had its “first unit activated 10 June 1952”³. However the Army had units doing Special Forces activities and combat operations during WWII.
- 1953: The first USAF Combat Control Teams activated 15 January 1953 at Donaldson AFB South Carolina.⁴
- 1954: Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance was first conceived in 1954, at Marine Base Camp Pendleton, outside of San Diego, California, when an experimental recon team was formed. Three years later, that team merged with an existing amphibious reconnaissance company to form the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. After US withdrawal from Vietnam, 1st Force and 2nd Force were both deactivated in 1974, and the existing Force Marines were rolled into the non-Force 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion in order to maintain Marine Corps deep recon capabilities. However, the roll-in was never completed to a satisfactory condition, and 1st Force Reconnaissance was reactivated as an individual unit in 1986, and was later deployed in the Gulf War.⁵ The U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command was activated February 24, 2006. Subsequently on October 26, 2006 the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion was activated. The 1st MSOB drew upon the ranks of Force Recon Marines to form Marine Special Operations Companies that deploy with MEUs and ESGs as a forward presence and maritime SOF capability to enhance the efforts of Theater Combatant Commanders in the Global War on Terrorism.⁶
- 1962: The first U.S Navy Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) Teams were activated January 1962.
- 1963: USAF Special Operations Combat Weather Teams (SOWT) were established January 1963.⁷ SOWTs rarely, if ever, are assigned to conventional Army units.
- 1969: The US Army disbanded its Ranger units at the end of WW II and the Korean War. In 1969 the rangers were reformed in Vietnam as the 75th Infantry Regiment. The current Ranger Battalions were not actually formed until 1974. This coincides with the 1975 Department of the Army authorization to wear a distinctive beret uniform. The U.S Army Rangers have units and combat operations that predate WW II. The intent of the date used is indicating when current combat capabilities were formed sustained without being disbanded. It should be noted the Department of the Army as of February 9, 2005 no longer requires Army members to be assigned against a Ranger authorization as a prerequisite to attend the Ranger school. Opening attendance to the Ranger School

within the combat arms exclusion policy has purpose and goal of increasing Ranger qualified soldiers throughout the Army.⁸

1977: Tactical Air Control Party Team (TACP) was established as an enlisted specialty 30 April 1977⁹. TACP is assigned to both conventional direct ground combat Army units and special operations units.

The demarcation that results in a mission being conventional or special operations is a very blurred line. Since 1986 USSOCOM has had direct control of Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine (2006) assets and capabilities doing special operations missions and is directly involved in the daily managing of these units and highly trained combatants too. Special operations is nothing more than a purposefully means to respond to a low intensity threat using a small specialized military capability. A special operations capability is the military means to respond that lowers the risk of active military involvement at levels that are both politically unacceptable and tactically inappropriate. The distinction between special operations and conventional operations is the deterrence is not a conventional one of pitting army against army to seize, control and occupy territory by defeating a hi-threat conventional army or by being the primary peace keeping force in a region.

A special operations or mission response depends on ready and willing human performance that contributes to some outcome while facing difficulty and danger. Special Forces members are highly trained combatants having mastery proficiency in a wide range of unique military skills. This type of competent response cannot be created the moment a crisis or incident happens and it is both difficult and expensive to mass produce. Screening, assessment, and selection standards ensure individuals have the functional fitness the duty performance requires before time and money is committed to train and qualify to perform required duties. How rigorous the screening, assessment and selection standards are is directly determined by the typical hardships and hazards encountered while participating and contributing to accomplishing the missions or conducting operations. "Quality before Quantity" establishes lack of functional fitness is an unacceptable risk. The human performance standards to include functional fitness exist to ensure ability to act is existing when the situation is truly dangerous and physically demanding.

¹ U.S. Navy SEAL History, NavySEALs.com, <http://navyseals.com/navy-seal-history>, (accessed 20 September 2007)

² Historical Report: Air Rescue Service, 1 January 1947 to 30 June 1947, pp. 30-34, 42. Historical Report: Air Rescue Service, 1 July 1947 to 31 December 1947. pp. 14-16, 20-28.

³ U.S. Army Special Forces History and Origins, Special Operations.com, http://www.specialoperations.com/Army/Special_Forces/SF_Info/Detailed_History.htm#early, (accessed 20 September 2007).

⁴ U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet, Combat Controller, July 2006, http://www.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=174&page=1 (accessed 20 September 2007). A History of Combat Control through the Years, CCT/online, 21 September 2007, <http://www.usafcc.com/history.htm>, (accessed 20 September 2007). Air Force Combat Controllers, CombatControlTeamsweblog.wordpress.com., 22 September 2007, <http://combatcontrolteam.wordpress.com/>, (accessed 22 September 2007).

⁵ U.S. Marine Force Recon History, <http://www.usmarinerecon.com/history.html> (accessed 10 June 2008)

⁶ U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations, <http://www.marsoc.usmc.mil/stories.html> (accessed 11 June 2008)

⁷ The Origins of Air Force Weather's Army Support, Air Force Weather Historian, winter 2004, Volume 2, Issue 1. Colonel Golding recall Special Operations Weather, Air Force Weather Historian, winter 2004, Volume 2, Issue 1.

⁸ R091738Z Feb 05 PSN 667894K40, DA Washington DC, Selection and Scheduling of Soldiers For United States Army Ranger School

⁹ Tactical Air Control Party-Death on Call, Globalsecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/usaf/tacp.htm> (accessed 20 September 2007). ROMAD History, roma.com, <http://www.romad.com/history/history.htm>, (accessed 20 September 2007)