

# **New Updates in the Latest Instruction for Uniform Wear**

By CAPT Bruce Tierney

In January 2016, the most recent Uniform Instruction update (CC421.01 for Male Officers, CC421.02 for Female Officers), with an effective date of 15 December 2015, was released by the Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). This update included a number of uniform changes that affect Commissioned Officers. Changes affect both male and female officers as noted below, but there were some changes that affect female officers exclusively. But before we get to those changes, there were a couple of things that did not change, one of which was an error in the update that caused some confusion for a number of officers.

## **Daily Wear of the ODU: Can You or Can't You?**

Initially, the new December 2015 uniform update included the same statement about wear of the ODU as the prior Instruction, namely that "an officer may wear the ODUs one day per week as defined by the NUA [National Uniform Authority] or LUA [Local Uniform Authority]." This statement did not reflect the change made to this policy in the interim; as a result, it caused some confusion among officers about whether the ODU could still be worn as an alternative uniform daily. OSG clarified and updated the new Uniform Instructions; 6-1.e now states that "an officer may wear the ODUs daily as defined by the NUA or LUA". So rest easy in the knowledge that you can once again wear your "Blueberries" on a daily basis!

## **Like Generalissimo Francisco Franco, the Salt and Pepper Uniform is still dead...**

Since its much-mourned passing in August 2009, the uniform commonly known as the "Salt and Pepper," has had a number of rumored revivals, all of which have failed to come to pass. This was the case again in the past several months, but unfortunately, this uniform, which had been a very well-liked and useful General Purpose Service Uniform (and the only uniform combination entirely unique to the Commissioned Corps) was once again not authorized for wear. Where is Chevy Chase when you need him? Younger officers may need to "Google" that reference...

## **Changes Affecting both Male and Female Officers**

As previously noted there are a number of changes in the new uniform instruction update that affect all officers:

### **The Khaki Windbreaker is no longer authorized for wear with the uniform**

That's it, full stop, no phase-out date, end of sentence. For those of us who owned this windbreaker, it is sad to see another bit of the traditional uniform components disappear.



### **Overshoes are no longer authorized for wear with the uniform**

Much like the khaki windbreaker, there is no phase-out period for this item either. Dress shoes aren't particularly good for inclement weather, so your best bet during inclement weather is probably to wear the ODU with combat boots, especially since you now know that the ODU can be worn on a daily basis!

### **Moisture wicking t-shirts are no longer authorized for wear with the ODU uniform**

As above this change occurs with no phase out period. In addition, it occurs with no explanation for the change and there does not appear to be a particularly good reason for it as far as I can tell. It has become essentially impossible to acquire these shirts since the Officers' Device Supply Center was closed (a most unfortunate loss) but that wouldn't make the shirts officers currently own any less serviceable. They may also be considered a fire hazard (they tend to melt!) when on board a ship but that doesn't happen often and it would be easy enough to exclude wear when in that kind of environment. This one is kind of a head scratcher.

### **Authorization for wear of the ODU blue parka with Service Dress Uniforms and Service Uniforms**

This is a big one for officers in general. (Note: if you are unsure what Service Dress Uniforms and Service Uniforms are, you can find information in the new uniform Instructions.). The blue parka, with or without the available liners, may now be worn over a number of uniforms to provide additional protection in foul or inclement weather. Although not specifically stated, this change also applies to the blue coveralls, a working uniform, on the rare occasions when that uniform is permitted for wear. It has always been authorized with the ODU, of course. This change is in concert with a similar move by the Navy, although the Navy is creating a new uniform item that is similar to our blue parka but is black in color. This is a very positive and welcome change, particularly for those officers in areas with severe cold or wet weather, but it will be of benefit to all officers. Officers will have more opportunities to get more use out of the parka and hopefully those officers who have inappropriately worn civilian jackets over their uniform will stop doing so.



While this change is an important improvement in current uniform policy no mention is made of the blue foul weather ODU trousers. In inclement weather they would provide more complete protection for those officers who own them. In addition anyone who has worn the parka with the hood up but without a ball cap has quickly realized that the hood is specifically designed for wear with a ball cap to keep the hood from covering most of your face! The combination cover is too big for the hood and the garrison cover is not large enough to keep the hood out of your face. The best solution would be to authorize wear of the blue ball cap as an option when wearing the parka. The ball cap is already authorized with most of these uniforms anyway. Authorizing the wear of the parka is a good thing but

the current limitations unfortunately does not allow officers to take full advantage of the protection the ODU foul weather gear can offer from inclement weather.

### **Authorization for wear of the new flame retardant blue coveralls being put into service by the Navy**

The Navy has recently moved to replace the blue coverall poly-cotton material with a new flame resistant material to improve safety on board ships and other hazardous environments. The USPHS Commissioned Corps has added them as an additional authorized item as well, though wear of the coveralls is limited in terms of when and where they can be worn. As of now the current poly-cotton material version is also still an authorized uniform items and no specific phase out date for the current coverall material is provided. That said it is unlikely that officers will be able to purchase coveralls from the Navy uniform website that aren't flame resistant going forward.

### **Changes Affecting Female Officers**

There are several additional changes that specifically affect female officers and, other than the wear of the parka with Service Uniforms, these changes are the most notable in this update. As it happens they all impact the headgear available for women to wear with their uniform.

#### **The black beret will be phased out of the uniform inventory**

I have long talked about how the semi rigid black beret (which is much different than the beret worn by the Army) is the single most flexible available headgear for female Commissioned Officers. It has the ability to be worn with every single General Purpose Service Uniform. But that all changes on 1 January 2020 when it will no longer be authorized. Also of note is that the beret is no longer sold on the Navy uniform website. It is time to start making that transition to a different style of headgear. But what will it be?



#### **The current female combination cover will be phased out of the uniform inventory**

Well, it won't be the current female combination cover, at least not for long, because this one is being phased out of the uniform inventory as well. Effective 1 January 2020, it will no longer be authorized for Commissioned Officers. Current serviceable covers may still be worn until that time. The Navy is less clear about the phase out date of this cover although the replacement cover is currently required by 31 October 2016 in the Navy so it seems reasonable to conclude that the current combination cover will no longer sold soon afterwards. For now this cover is still available on the Navy uniform catalog website but unless you expect to leave the PHS service before 2020 it may not be a wise investment, especially when its replacement is currently \$50 cheaper! But what exactly is replacing it?



### **Authorization for wear of the new Alternate Combination Cover**

Referred to as the Alternate Combination “Cap” in our uniform Instructions, this is the newly designed cover that will replace the current combination cover/cap for female Commissioned Officers. This cover, more similar in appearance to the current male combination cover, was developed for use in the Navy to create a more “gender-neutral” appearance among all officers. Reportedly it is also designed to provide a better fit to the head and while similar in general appearance to the male cover the crown (top) of the cover is not quite as wide as male combination cover (see Figure 1). It will replace the current female combination cover in the Navy which presumably will be phased out and no longer available for purchase at some point in the near future.

The alternate combination cover may be worn effective immediately by female Commissioned Officers. On 1 January 2020, when the beret and the current female combination cover are phased out, it will become the primary cover for female officers.

Interestingly, in the Navy both male and female officers are currently permitted to wear either the current male combination cover or the new alternate combination cover. This not the case for PHS officers based on this uniform Instruction update. Only female officers may wear the new alternate combination cover but they are not authorized to wear the current male combination cover. Newly commissioned female officers should definitely consider starting with the new alternate combination cover. But it will certainly be a significant transition for female officers who have been already been in the Commissioned Corps for a while but still expect to remain on active duty beyond January 2020.



Figure 1: Alternate Combination Cover on left. Current male style combination cover on the right.  
(Both are shown with Navy insignia)



Figure 2: The Alternate Combination Cover as worn by a female Navy Officer

### **Gazing Into the Crystal Ball...**

Or “what the heck else is up with uniform changes???” Well, there is one more change that seems highly likely for the near future, and it also affects only female Commissioned Corps officers. As part of the trend toward a gender-neutral appearance among all officers, the Navy has announced that the current female Service Dress White uniform will be changed to a new choker style coat that more closely matches the current male Service Dress White uniform. This uniform is not expected to be available on the Navy uniform website until January 2017, but the Navy has already announced that the mandatory wear/possession date will be, you guessed it, 1 January 2020. Presumably, the current shirt and jacket version of the female Service Dress White will no longer be sold by the Navy uniform website, and it may be that the Commissioned Corps will follow suit and adopt the new choker-style female Service Dress White at a later date (Figure 3). Note that as of this writing, however, this uniform is not required for PHS officers.

**June 2016 Update:** Congress is looking to slow down the transition to more “gender neutral” uniform components, citing complaints from female Navy personnel that the changes have not undergone adequate evaluation and testing consistent with past uniform changes or demonstrated any operational necessity for them. In addition officers have complained about the out of pocket expense for what amounts to “style” changes (like a PHS Officer should be so fortunate as to get supplemental uniform allowances!). At a minimum that may delay the mandatory wear/possession date for some of these new uniform items.



Figure 3: Current PHS Service Dress White on left. New Navy “choker style” Service Dress White on right.