

MILITARY UNIFORMS IN AMERICA
Volume II

YEARS OF GROWTH
1796-1851



from the Series Produced by
THE COMPANY OF MILITARY HISTORIANS

John R. Elting
Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired
Editor



San Rafael, California, 1977

Cadets, U.S. Military Academy, 1816–1817

The origin of the U.S. Military Academy's grey uniform appears in the following letter, written in 1815 by Brigadier General Joseph G. Swift, then Commanding Officer of the Corps of Engineers and Inspector General of the Military Academy, to the Secretary of War, William H. Crawford:

Concluding that the Order relative to the Uniform is not intended to prevent any Arrangement of the Dress of the Cadets at the Military Academy which might be deemed advantageous, I have the honor to enclose a description of the Uniform and Undress for the Cadets, which has been *Grey* for the last fifteen months—cloth of this colour looks well while it remains whole and of the price of the Uniform \$18 to \$20, better suits the finance of the Cadets than one of Blue would. I recommend that the Uniform be confirmed. I forward the description of the dress at this time, that the Cadets, may during Vacation, know what description of clothing to procure. I will thank You to inform me if the Dress meets your approbation.¹

The description of the uniform mentioned had been prepared by Captain Alden Partridge, Superintendent of the Military Academy.² Two interesting facts are supplied by this letter: first, that a gray uniform is stated to have been worn at the Academy since 1814; and the second, that the reason given for requesting the retention and approval of this gray uniform was purely practical, i.e., its cost and wearability.

The requested approval of the grey uniform was not given immediately, and General Swift was asked to discuss the matter with the secretary of war during Swift's planned visit to Washington. During this visit, which took place in January 1816, the secretary of war approved the gray uniform as described by Partridge, and Swift was promised that a general order, confirming the secretary's order, would follow in March. But in the activity and turmoil affecting the War Department at this time, when all were concerned with winding up the late war and trying to set up an effective peace establishment, the matter of the cadets' uniforms fell by the wayside. It was only after a reminder from General Swift that finally, on September 4, 1816, an order establishing the cadet uniform was finally issued as follows:

General Order

Adjutant and Inspector General's Office
September 4th, 1816

The following described *Uniform* will be strictly adhered to by Cadets in the service of the United States and any deviation will be considered a military offense.

A Coatee of grey sattinett, single breasted, three rows of 8 yellow gilt buttons in front, and buttonholes of black silk cord in the herring bone form, with a festoon turned at the back end; a standing collar to rise as high as the tip

of the ear; the cuffs 4 inches wide, the bottom of the breast and the hip buttons to range. On the collar one blind hole of cord, formed like that of the breast, 4 inches long, with a button on each side. Cord holes in the like form to proceed from three buttons placed lengthwise on the skirts, with three buttons down the pleats. The cuffs to be indented, with three buttons and cord holes lengthwise in each sleeve, corresponding with the indentation of the cuff, in the centre of which is to be inserted the lower button.

Vest: Grey cloth for winter, single breasted, yellow gilt bullet buttons, and trimmed with black silk lace. For Summer, white vest, single breasted, with white buttons, but without trimmings.

Pantaloons: Grey cloth for winter, trimmed down the sides with black silk lace, and the Austrian knot in front, no buttons on the sides or at the bottom, but made with understraps. Russia sheeting or white jean for summer, without trimmings, the form the same as for winter.

The Jefferson Shoe rising above the ankle joint under the pantaloons.

Black silk stock.

Common round hat.

Cockade black silk, with yellow eagle, to be worn at all times.

Sword, cut and thrust, yellow mounted, with a black gripe [sic], in a frog belt of black morocco and worn over the coat.

No dress resembling the military, without conformity to the regulations, will be worn on any occasion excepting that, when attached to corps, cadets will wear the uniform of the company officers, without epaulettes.

By order of the Secretary of War

/S/ Daniel Parker

Adj. and Insp. Genl.⁴

Neither Swift nor Partridge was pleased with this order, which omitted their proposed undress uniform and substituted the ordinary round hat for the shako. But the secretary of war proved adamant, except for allowing both white jean and Russia sheeting pantaloons, the first for summer full dress, the second for ordinary wear.

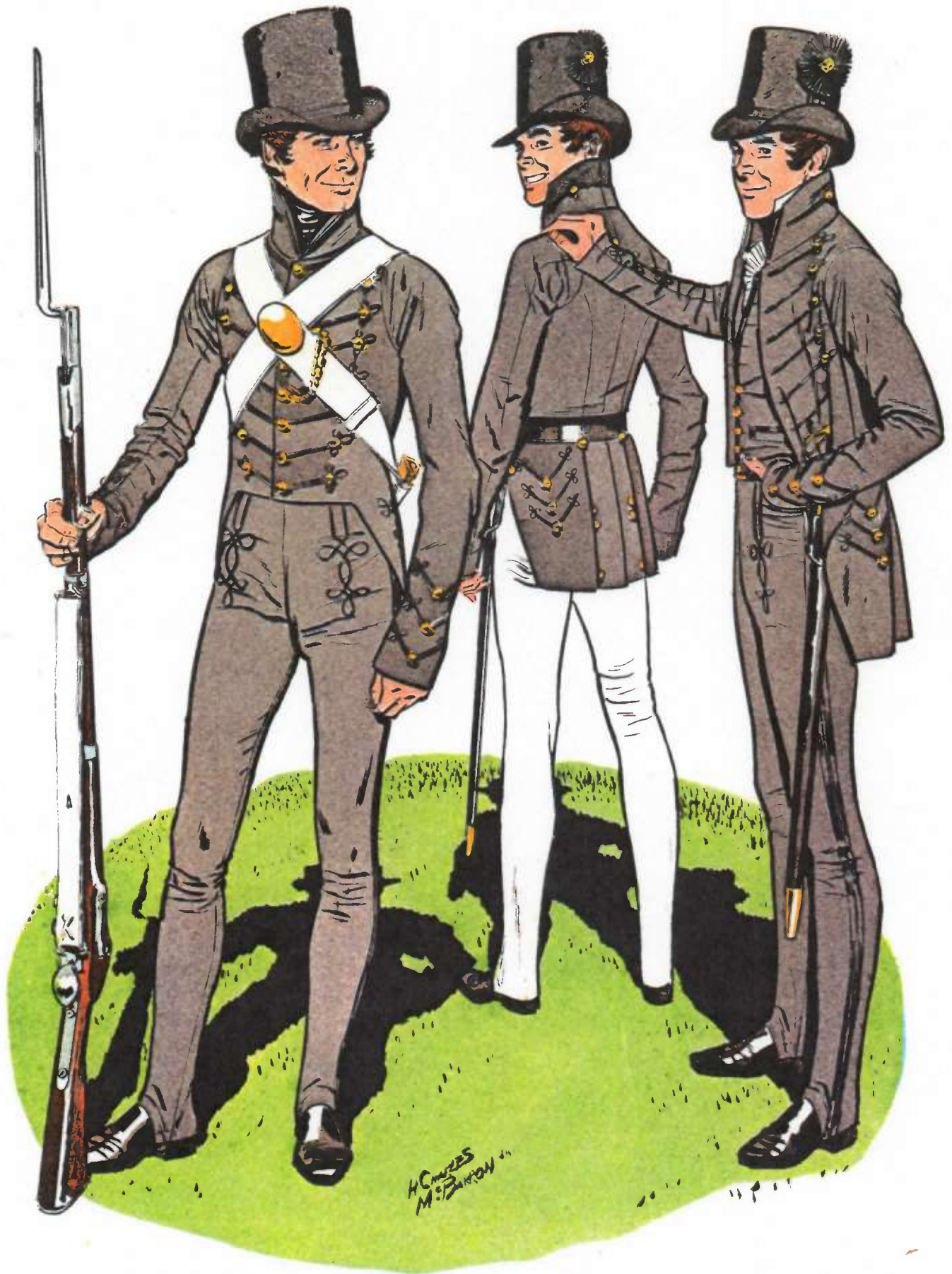
H. Charles McBarron, Jr.
Detmar H. Finke

¹Letter, 28 Nov. 1815, in *Letters Sent Relating to Military Academy* (hereinafter referred to as LMA). Vol. 1, (RG 94), National Archives.

²Letter, 10 Apr. 1816, Swift to Partridge. LMA, Vol. 1 (RG 94).

³Letter, 5 Dec. 1815, George Graham, Chief Clerk, War Department, to Swift, in Secretary of War (hereinafter referred to as S.W.), Military Book No. 8, 27 Dec. 1814—29 Apr. 1816 (RG 107), National Archives. Letter, 13 Aug. 1816, Swift to Brigadier General Daniel Parker, Adj. and Insp. Gen. In Adj. and Insp. Gen. Office (hereinafter referred to as A.I.G.), Letters Received File, 1816. (RG 94) National Archives.

⁴General Order, 4 Sept. 1816, in *Military Academy Orders, 1814–1817* (RG 94), National Archives. Letter, 5 Sept. 1816, Parker to Swift, in A.I.G., Letters Sent Book No. 4, 1 Mar. 1816—29 May 1818, (RG 94) National Archives.



Winter Parade

Summer Dress

Winter Undress

Cadets, U.S. Military Academy, 1816-1817