

Camouflage Through Time Video

Transcript

(Emily is stood in front of a green camouflage background.)

Hello, I'm Emily and I'm the Family Learning producer here at the National Army Museum. Today I'm going to be bringing the museum to you, using our fantastic handling collection. Together we are going to explore the weird and wonderful world of camouflage.

camouflage- that is quite a strange sounding word isn't it.

Can we say it all together really loudly- 1,2,3 CAMOUFLAGE

Can we say it all together really quietly- 1,2,3 Camouflage

Can we say it all together one more time, just for luck- 1,2,3 Camouflage

But what is camouflage? Camouflage is all about hiding, making something or someone difficult to spot. Animals are the masters of camouflage because in the wild they need to be wary of predators and blend in with their environment- whether that be the jungle, the desert or even the arctic.

Camouflage is also really important for the Army- making their troops difficult for the enemy to spot. You might have seen soldiers wearing camouflage patterns, you might even have something camouflaged at home!

Lets use our handling collection to find out a bit more

(Emily is stood behind the table, holding the red crimean coatee)

This red jacket was part of the traditional Army uniform over 200 years ago and our example dates from around the time of the Crimean war. I know what you're thinking, this is bright red ! Anyone wearing this would really stand out and that is the opposite of camouflage. British soldiers even had the nickname 'red coats' because this uniform was so distinctive.

We have to remember that the Army actually wanted soldiers to stand out. Battles were noisy, smelly, smokey. You couldn't always see the enemy, let alone the person stood next to you. The uniform needed to be spotted from far away.

However, as technology developed and gunpowder became smokeless, it became more important to be able to conceal yourself during times of attack.

Now, although this red jacket might look smart, it wasn't the most practical.

During the Victorian times, the Army was based in places such as Africa and India, where it was really really hot and in some places quite dry and sandy.

This is a foreign service helmet and it would have been worn by soldiers based overseas.

(Emily holds up a white foreign service helmet)

As we can see, it would have been really difficult to keep this looking clean and pristine.

Infact some soldiers began to dye their helmets using tea, which made them appear more of a beigey colour and helped them to blend in better with the desert environment. This is the start of camouflage used by the Army as we know it today.

(Emily is holding a khaki First World War tunic)

The Red jacket that we just looked at is very different to this khaki tunic worn during the First World War.

Khaki is a Hindustani word meaning soil coloured and that is a really good way to describe the colour of this uniform.

Khaki is much more practical choice. When you are wearing Khaki you can blend in better and disguise yourself in the landscape and also, it doesn't show dirt as easily as the previous uniform did.

The British Army started wearing khaki in the nineteenth century but it wasn't until the Second Boer War in 1899 that Khaki was worn by all troops.

(Emily is holding a Second World War Denison smock)

Now, this object is a bit closer to the kind of camouflage we tend to see today. This is a Denison smock from the Second World War and it was designed by Major Mervyn Denison. Mervyn designed this especially for Airborne troops. These were soldiers who would parachute behind enemy lines, so it was really important that they could disguise themselves and make sure they were not spotted.

The camouflage pattern on this is kind of like big brushstrokes of colour. I want you to imagine someone splodging on strokes of brown, dark green and khaki. The idea was these big brushstrokes of colour would create a blended appearance and help the wearer hide seamlessly amongst the trees in the countryside.

Some Denison smocks were even designed to 'wash out' meaning the colours would disappear and it would look like a normal jacket. Instead of camouflaging with the natural world, the wearer would be able to hide in plain sight, amongst workers and people going about their daily business.

This type of camouflage became known as Disruptive Pattern Camouflage because it is designed to disrupt or alter what the eye can see. Instead of seeing the shape of a human, you would see a blended mix of patterns and colours.

(Emily is holding Multi-Terrain Pattern Body Armour)

By 2010, the Army was looking at ways to improve the camouflage patterns it was using. This is Multi-Terrain Pattern and uses four distinct colours, instead of the three we saw earlier with the Denison smock. Multi Terrain Pattern can be worn in lots of different landscapes, whether that be the desert, the mountains, even urban environments like cities and towns.

Multi Terrain Pattern is the most common kind of camouflage you see today. You might even have something at home with this pattern on. Today, men and women in the Army wear the same uniform, but this wasn't always the case. From the First World War all the way to 1992, men and women actually had different uniforms.

(Emily is stood behind the table, the Ghillie hood is on raised box, upon a glass display head)

The final thing I am going to show you is this Ghillie hood. It is designed to be covered in material which replicates twigs, leaves, moss- all the things you find in the forest, and it dangles down and this means it would blow in the wind. The same way a normal bush or tree would, adding an extra level of camouflage.

Now, can you imagine what a full suit of this would like. It would be camouflage to the extreme! It would be nearly impossible to spot the wearer.

Ghillie hoods and suits are most often worn by snipers. Snipers are expert marksmen, meaning they can accurately hit their target without giving away their location. You can have Ghillie hoods and suits made for all different locations- the desert for example. We often think of camouflage being greens and browns but it can actually be any colour it needs to be to help you blend in with your environment.

(Emily is stood in front of a camouflage background)

That's been our very brief history of camouflage. If you've enjoyed this video today, why not check out some of our other family activities over on our website.

Thanks for watching and I hope to see you in the museum soon!

(Emily waves to camera and the video ends)

Images from the National Army Museum Collection used in this video

- The Charge of the Heavy Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava, 25 October 1854
<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1994-05-57-1>
- 'Good Bye! The 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards Leaving Waterloo Station, October 21st 1899'
<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1998-04-45-1>
- A Second Lieutenant of the Middlesex Regiment, 1918
<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1999-04-19-1>
- Members of 9th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, 1944
<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=2000-12-583-19>
- Soldier Gallery, National Army Museum
- ATS despatch rider, 1943
<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1994-07-277-129>
- A sniper team of 2nd Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, Stanford Training Area, Norfolk, 2015 (Crown Copyright)
<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=2018-01-77-967>