

Why is the Official Sea Scout Uniform the way it is?



In the late 1990's, after a long period of optional uniforms in Venturing and Sea Scouts (Sea Scouts was part of Venturing at that time), the national Sea Scout leadership re-certified several official Sea Scout uniforms and described them in the 2002 printing of the Sea Scout Manual, No. 33239.

These uniforms had been in use for decades and were adapted from converted US Navy garments--modified to distinguish them from military uniforms by removing some navy-specific features and adding Sea Scout insignia.

Depending on how you counted, there were about eight official uniforms--youth dress white crackerjacks, adult dress white, youth dress blue crackerjacks (male), youth dress blue (female), adult dress blue (male), adult dress blue (female), youth work chambray, adult work khaki, and some women's versions with skirts; plus special rules for youth Quartermasters who chose to wear an adult uniform.

After the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks, access to US Navy garments became more difficult due to increased security at military bases and uniform sources.

In about 2010, the national Sea Scout leadership became concerned that lack of a readily available Sea Scout uniform had actually become an impediment to the start-up of new Ships (units) and an unnecessary constraint on membership growth. The National Commodore and the National Director were charged by the National Sea Scout Support Committee with a project to address this concern. There were other factors to consider. To look more like Scouts and to avoid imitation of a military uniform, which is prohibited by BSA regulations. That ruled out fatigue-style uniforms like the US Navy battle dress uniform (blueberries) or the US Coast Guard operational dress uniform (ODU). There were many ideas, including one to produce a two-tone blue Sea Scout uniform using the existing pattern for Venturing uniforms. Unfortunately, this and other promising ideas fizzled out because the Sea Scout program had insufficient membership to overcome the significant costs of stocking all the sizes of even a single uniform in the ScoutShop.org system.

By that time, a number of Sea Scouts and Sea Scouters had begun to adopt Dickies brand garments for use as Sea Scout work uniforms. Khaki for adults; and chambray colored shirts and dark navy pants for youth. This provided an inexpensive non-military source for those uniforms; and made up for the fact that the Navy had discontinued the chambray work uniform years before.

Looking for a new simpler uniform, something similar to Dickies seemed like the way to go. The garments were readily available online or in popular stores, inexpensive, and already familiar to Sea Scouts and Sea Scouters.

Color was a big consideration; a medium blue shirt and dark blue pants would have been ideal. However there were some other constraints. The garments had to be available in the full range of sizes for men and women. And it was imperative that there be a stable garment source. Even the US Navy garments had changed from time to time over the years. Discontinuation of the chambray work uniform, and the elimination of epaulettes on white shirts being just two examples that affected traditional Sea Scout uniforms. It turned out the best colors to meet those two requirements were khaki and dark navy. Dark navy was selected over khaki to produce a universal uniform that was distinct from the existing Sea Scout uniforms and distinct from "land" Scout uniforms. Universal meaning a uniform that would be worn by youth and adults, male and female, and serve as the equivalent of the BSA field uniform, useful as both a dress and work uniform.

The dark navy color had other benefits. Dickies had stocked that garment style and color since the company was founded over 90 years ago; so it was likely to be a stable source in the future. And the garments were available in the full range of sizes. By happenstance, the dark navy color selected didn't match US Navy black (yes, the Navy fabric is black not blue) or US Coast Guard blue (a lighter blue); moving the proposed new Sea Scout uniform even farther away from a long-standing similarity to military uniforms.

At the fall 2011 meeting of the National Sea Scout Support Committee, the key three--National Boatswain, National Director, and National Commodore--all appeared wearing prototypes of the proposed uniform. It was called the New Century Universal Uniform to coincide with the Sea Scout Centennial. (The name Second Century Universal Uniform was also considered; but Sea Scouts is second to none.)

The prototypes made use of existing insignia and a new optional neckerchief and an optional tar-flap, all sewn by a volunteer. The existing Sea Scouts BSA strip, universal Sea Scout emblem, youth rank insignia, and (temporarily) the badges-of-office, all on black background, looked good on the garments and have continued to be used.

In the Sea Scout literature and media, the garments for the new uniform were called out as "similar to Dickies dark navy, stock number..." in fairness to other vendors such as Sears, 511, or other brands. Since there was a potential for some slight variation in the fabric color, black was retained for the insignia background, belt, neckerchief, and tar-flap going forward; rather than convert to dark navy. There may be more than one color called "dark navy" but there is only one black.

Along the way, and in keeping with the desire to have a Sea Scout uniform that looked like a Scout uniform, round badges-of-office were developed, to replace the heraldry badges, for use on the new uniform. Blue, rather than black, was selected for the background color. With nine uniforms then in use, the idea was to pick a color that could be used on any of the uniforms (the new dark navy, black, white, or khaki); but that actually never became necessary.

The optional tar-flap and optional "dixie cup" hat honored some of the tradition from the youth crackerjack uniforms. At the Fall 2011 meeting of the National Sea Scout Support Committee,

the New Century Universal Uniform was adopted as an official Sea Scout uniform, in addition to the other eight uniforms that already existed.

At the time, some saw the new uniform as a starter uniform for new units, until they could transition to the traditional uniforms. Others may have thought the new uniform would fade away. Some thought the organization would slowly migrate to the new uniform after at least a decade. No one foresaw that the popularity of the new uniform would substantially supplant the traditional uniforms in only five years. Recognizing this transition, the National Sea Scout Support Committee designated the new uniform as The Official Sea Scout Uniform at their Fall 2017 meeting.

So, that's why The Official Sea Scout Uniform is the way it is. Are the garments as perfect as a custom-designed ScoutShop.org garments would be? Probably not, but when the Dickies garments (or similar) are combined with the ScoutShop.org accessories and insignia, the result is a solid compromise that provides a readily available, affordable, functional uniform. One day, when Sea Scout membership numbers grow, perhaps ScoutShop.org will be able to carry the Sea Scout uniform.

In the meantime, a BSA licensed vendor, [SG Trading](#), is helping to fill the need for The Official Sea Scout Uniform by providing uniform garments with some of the badges already sewn on (American Flag, World Crest, and Sea Scout BSA strip).

The bottom line: Uniforms are a method of Scouting, but only one of the many methods. To quote the Guide to Awards and Insignia, No. 33066; uniforms "... symbolize character development, leadership, citizenship training, and personal fitness. Wearing a uniform gives youth and adult members a sense of identification and commitment." The uniform is not an end in itself; but by definition "uniform" means "the same." To wear a Sea Scout uniform properly, you should match the uniform standards and wear your uniform as neatly and proudly as you possibly can.

If you have questions about the Sea Scout uniform, check the Guide to Awards and Insignia, No. 33066; the Sea Scout Manual, No. 33239; and SeaScout.org for back issues of the Commodore's Corner and the Uniform Fact Sheet at seascout.org/uniforming.