

## **Army Combat Uniform (ACU) Care**

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Recently our family welcomed “daddy” back from a deployment. After all the hugs and kisses and a week of newness, reality set in. One of the first things I noticed about him being back was the laundry basket and the fact it is fuller a lot quicker. I had forgotten what it was like to do ten loads of laundry vs. the six or so I’ve done for the last fifteen months. I also forgot what it was like to wash uniforms.

I knew just what to do though. In 2005, about six months after the Army Combat Uniform (ACU) was issued I had done some research as to how to care for this new “beast”. If you remember correctly the hype was the uniform having soldier-friendly changes, such as the easy-access blouse pockets and no-shine desert boots. You, as a spouse, were going to enjoy the no dry cleaning needed. That is until you realized that although it saved you money it did add to your laundry woes. I revisited my research and added a bit for you to peruse. I hope it helps you as much as it has helped me.

### ***Army Combat Uniform (ACU) Care***

There are certain types of detergent that need to be used in order for the ACU not to fade. The care label on the ACU says to “launder in a mild detergent that does NOT contain optical brighteners.” The brighteners apparently make a stronger cleaner, so they are in most, but not all, commercial detergents. While washing the ACU in the regular detergents might fade it a bit, it does not affect the overall durability of the fabric. But, if you are like my husband, faded equals “old” and “worn,” which looks not so “squared away.”

The problem was that most detergents do not say on the label whether or not they contain an optical brightener. I was able to locate a list of detergents confirmed to be safe, and not safe, for washing ACU. If you are using a generic detergent, be sure to compare the ingredients with the detergents on these lists to determine whether or not it is safe to use.

#### **Detergents without optical brighteners:**

All Free & Clear (formulated for ACUs)

Woolite (all versions)

Country Save

Bold Powder

Cheer Liquid and Powder (all versions except True Fit liquid)

Surf Powder (all versions)

Sport Wash

#### **Refrain from using:**

Dreft

Era

Gain

Tide  
Ivory Snow  
Fab  
Ajax  
Dynamo  
Suavitel  
Wisk  
Arm and Hammer  
Surf Liquid  
All Liquid  
Purex  
Zout  
Calgon  
Spray & Wash

The ACU care label says that Soldiers should not starch the ACU under any circumstances. The use of starch, sizing, and any process that involves dry-cleaning or a steam press will adversely affect the treatments and durability of the uniform.

To dry the ACU the label recommends tumble dry at low heat (not to exceed 130 degrees fahrenheit). Remove immediately from the dryer and fold flat or place on a rustproof hanger to ensure heat from the dryer does not set wrinkles. To drip dry, remove from the washer/water and place on a rustproof hanger. Do not wring or twist.

The care label also says to “close loop fasteners to prevent snagging.” If you don’t do this, you could wind up with some pretty ugly snagged socks or snagged polyester, spandex-type undershirts that are so popular. I would say close the loop fasteners and wash the ACU inside-out to combat this problem.

While we’re on the subject, here are some other laundry helpers:

- Seal Velcro completely before washing to avoid lint balls
- Soak coffee stains with a solution of detergent and warm water for 20 minutes
- Oil stains can often be taken out with dish detergent and water
- Pen stains can be treated with rubbing alcohol or mineral spirits
- Sweat stains can usually be removed with OxiClean