

Hints and Tips -

Colour Guide - Early War French

By Michael Farnworth

February 2010

Early War French Forces in Europe



Crusader figures painted by Mick Farnworth

Introduction

This guide will help you to quickly paint units of soldiers to look good on a war games table. Uniform notes, paint references and painting tips are included.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Colour</u>	<u>Vallejo Model Colour</u>
Helmet	Dark Green	Russian Green 70.894, Bronze Green 70.897 (see notes)
Officers Dress Kepi	Black	Black 70.950 mixed with a little blue
Officers Kepi Top	Red with Gold Trim	(refer to a book as each rank is different)
Officers Trousers	Beige	German Camo Beige 70.821
Greatcoat, Trousers	Khaki Green	Brown Violet 70.887, (or mix using recipe in Painting Tips)
Greatcoat (alternative)	Khaki Grey	Khaki Grey 70.880
Backpack & Blanket	Khaki Green	Brown Violet 70.887, (or mix using recipe in Painting Tips)
Gasmask bag	Khaki Green	Brown Violet 70.887, (or mix using recipe in Painting Tips)
Water Bottle	Khaki Green	Brown Violet 70.887, (or mix using recipe in Painting Tips)
Webbing & Pouches	Brown	Mahogany Brown 70.846, Flat Brown 70.984 or GW Bestial Brown
Small Pack	Beige	German Camo Beige 70.821 (see notes)
Canteen	Steel	Natural Steel 70.863 or GW Chainmail 61.56
Puttees / Gaiters	Khaki Green	Brown Violet 70.887, (or mix using recipe in Painting Tips)
Boots	Brown	Mahogany Brown 70.846, Flat Brown 70.984 or GW Bestial Brown

Historical Notes

Uniform

At the start of the war, the French Army wore a distinctive uniform with an Adrian helmet and a greatcoat with the button back triangles.

There have been several debates about the colour of French Early War Uniforms. Some say they were khaki green others say khaki brown. As I prepared the guide, I consulted several uniform books. All of the uniform books show helmet, uniform and luggage in matching khaki green. However, members of TMP (The Miniatures Page) point out that the uniforms faded to brownish khaki. Similarly, blankets vary from khaki green to khaki brown.

Yokes, ammunition pouches and bag straps were brown leather in most cases. The small pack and its strap were a pale beige or pale green colour. Regulation infantry boots were brown.



Adrian Helmet from Panzermuseum, Munster.
Photo by Mick Farnworth



Re-enactors of 92nd Regiment d'Infanterie (1940 French Infantry) - Photo by kind permission of Brett Johnson
<http://8bcp.tripod.com/92ri/index.html>



Crusader figures painted by Mick Farnworth

Squad Organisation and Equipment

The books, that I have, do not give detailed breakdowns of squad equipment but I found this on-line.

http://www.mchome.net/dirk/weirdwars/organization/france_organization.htm

An early war Infantry Squad consisted of:

- Squad Leader (Sergeant; rifle),
- Assistant Squad Leader (Caporal; rifle),
- LMG gunner (Chatellerault M24/29 LMG).
- LMG loader (pistol),
- 3 ammo carriers (carbine),
- First rifleman (Soldat 1re Classe, rifle),
- 3 riflemen (rifle),
- Rifle grenadier (Lebel 86M93 rifle with 8 VB Grenades).

Insignia

Unit numbers were marked on both sides of the greatcoat collar. For infantry, this was black on the khaki cloth.

Rank insignia was worn on the sleeves, near to the cuff of the greatcoat. Soldat 1re Classe had one diagonal black bar, Caporal had two and a Sergeant had three.

For officers and soldiers, kepis were for dress uniforms only. Officers wore a khaki side cap instead of a kepi in the field uniform. Generals wore field kepis in plain khaki green with subdued markings.

Officers' dress uniform kepis had gold and red braid on the very dark blue kepi. Officer insignia, including kepi braids, are described in Mollo's book "The Armed Forces of World War 2".



Officers Kepi (Wikipedia)

Painting Tips

As I prepared the guide, I searched the posts on The Miniatures Page. These comments are based my own research backed by posts on TMP by Bill McHarg, KevanG, Crunchy Fro, Eric Larkin and Allen Curtis

Many people have suggested recipes for the correct French Khaki uniform colour. Mostly, they recommend two parts Vallejo Russian Uniform 70.924 to one part English Uniform 70.921. This colour mix is almost exactly Vallejo Brown Violet 70.887. One painting guide suggests Vallejo 70.879 Green Brown.

Pictures of French Greatcoats on the internet appear to vary from Vallejo Brown Violet 70.887 to Vallejo Khaki Grey 70.880. Greatcoats had matching khaki buttons.

The actual colour of the helmet was khaki green to match the uniform. However, I find that miniatures look better with a stronger green so I recommended Russian Green 70.894 or Bronze Green 70.897 in the Artizan Goumiers guide. Other painting guides recommend Olive Grey 70.888.

Regulation infantry boots were brown. However, other painting guides suggest black boots.

Bases

It is worth deciding on the rules that you are going to use before you start to base and paint the figures. For WW2 skirmish games, most rules suggest individual bases. Some rules suggest 25mm diameter bases and some suggest 20mm diameter bases. Mass battle games often specify multiple bases to represent regiments.

Plastic bases (e.g. Slottabases), wooden bases, washers or coins are all suitable. 20mm steel washers can be used with magnetic bases so that the figures can be adapted to many different sets of rules.

Bases for Heavy Weapons

With heavy weapons, it is nice to make the base into a small diorama. Dependant on the size and shape of the weapon, you can use circular bases, rectangles or irregularly shaped bases. Large plastic and wooden base are available from many wargame suppliers. For circles, you can use such as mini CDs and CDs. With CDs, the flat side is the one with writing. Build some ground onto the base using epoxy putty, and then cover with sand and grass.

To make casualty removal during game play easy, this base has a removable figure. The loader is mounted on a 20mm steel washer. The base has a 19mm self adhesive magnet from Litko. When the large base was made, the washer was held in place on the magnet whilst the putty was built up to the edge. Then the washer was “wiggled” and removed before the putty set, leaving a circular hole. Similarly, the gunner was “wiggled” and removed for painting.



Painting Step by Step

There are many ways to paint 28mm figures. Many people paint the clothing with a dark shade then the main colour and then a highlight colour. For wargaming, where you want to get reasonably good results quickly, it is easier to paint only the main colours and then add shade with a wash of dark transparent stain.

Here is a basic assembly and painting sequence for typical world war 2 soldiers. This method is designed for painting about 20 figures at a time. It is always a good idea to do a practice run on 5 figures first. The painting sequence is designed so that minor mistakes can be corrected at the highlight stage. There is no need to correct minor mistakes as you go along.

1. Remove mould risers, mismatch, and flash. Mould risers are typically found on hands, elbows, feet and weapons. Sometimes they can be flicked off with a fingernail but usually tweezers or needle nosed pliers are needed. Occasionally they must be filed away with a needle file.

TIP - With Crusader French, check the area between the left arm and torso for flash.

2. Sand the base flat. Easiest way is to place a sheet of coarse sandpaper on a workbench. Hold the figure firmly and vertically in your right hand and push it over the sand paper. Two or three strokes should be enough to give a flat base. The base is flat when the underside is covered in scratches from the sandpaper.
3. Glue the figure to a base. If you are going to use individual bases, this will be the final base. Use cyanacrylate adhesive (superglue) for a permanent bond. If you are going to use multiple bases, use a coin as temporary base so that you can hold the figure for painting. For temporary bases, use PVA glue, as it is easy to remove later.
4. If you are using slotted bases, glue on some small squares of thin plastic card to cover the slot.
5. Using epoxy putty (e.g. Milliput), blend the figure base into the base.
6. Prime and undercoat the figure. This can be done with brush on enamel paint (e.g. Humbrol Matt Black) or with a spray paint (e.g. GW Chaos Black Spray). For plastic figures spray undercoat usually works well. Metal figures often need touching up afterwards as the spray rarely reaches into the recesses. A black undercoat is usually easiest as it also acts as the darkest shade. I used GW Chaos Black Spray.



TIP - It can be difficult to get the spray paint on the under surfaces of the figure. A simple method is to lay the figures on their side on a paper and spray. When the paper has dried to matt black, turn the figures over and spray again. Then stand the figures upright and spray from all sides.

7. To get a good base to work from, I damp brushed (i.e. a heavy dry-brush using damp paint) the figures with khaki green mixed with black. Next, I did this again with the khaki green. This gives a very quick shading effect. For the last coat, vary the shade by adding light brown or yellow beige so that some are more brownish and others greenish.

8. Paint the hands and face with a basic flesh colour (GW Tallarn Flesh or a mix of GW Dwarf Flesh and Elf Flesh is a good base coat for flesh). Highlight with a quick damp brush of a lighter flesh tone (e.g. GW Elf Flesh).



9. Paint the base in brown

10. Paint the boots, rifle stock, boots, ammo pouches and belt in brown. I found it easiest to also paint the backpack, gasmask bag and small pack brown and then pick out the canvas.

11. Paint the backpack, canteen and gasmask bag in khaki green. The gasmask bag is square with two small side pockets. Leave the straps brown. Here, you can vary the shade (lighter) so that it stands out from the uniform. Russian Uniform 70.924 would give a highlight shade.

12. Paint the small pack (same size as the gasmask bag but with two front pockets) a paler colour than the other items, so I suggest a beige khaki tone. Note - the diagonal strap on the infantry in the picture below should be beige rather than brown.



13. Paint the metal parts of the weapons and the canteen with a mix of black and steel.

14. Shade the whole figure a dark wash applied with a brush (Army Painter Strong Tone or Vallejo Transparent Smoke 70.939 or GW Devlan Mud Wash).



TIP - Army Painter Strong Tone worked very well. Be careful not to let it pool too much. I prefer the result from a brush as the results from a dip is rather dark. Dipping is also very messy. Note that Army Painter is also an oil based gloss varnish and needs at least 24 hours to dry.

15. Using a fine brush and dilute paint, paint the eyes as a horizontal white dash.
16. Dot the eyes with black or dark blue. A cocktail stick can be used instead of a brush. You can also do this with a fine gel pen.
17. Varnish with a spray of gloss varnish to protect the figure. This is not necessary if you have used Army Painter Strong Tone. After this has dried overspray with matt varnish.
18. Decorate the base. The easiest way is to paint on PVA glue and dip the base in sand. I glued on the sand in two stages. The first time, I covered the upper surface of the base with PVA and dipped it in sand. Once the first stage was dry, I added more glue and sand to make sure that the step left by the plastic base was hidden. Once the glue is dry, shade the base with a brown wash mixed with a little PVA glue. This also fixes the sand.
19. Highlight with a pale sand colour (GW Bleached Bone 61.17) lightly dry-brushed onto the sand. Painting sand will destroy an artist's brush in minutes, so use a cheap pig bristle brush.
20. Touch up any mistakes and add highlights as desired. The officer's kepi was painted in blue mixed with black. The top was painted red and details added in gold.
21. Add static grass if you want to.





Crusader figures painted by Mick Farnworth



Crusader figures painted by Mick Farnworth



Re-enactors of 92nd Regiment d'Infanterie (1940 French Infantry)
Photo by kind permission of Brett Johnson



Further Reading

Books

General

Andrew Mollo: **The Armed Forces of World War 2** (Little, Brown and Company)

This book is a very useful overview of uniforms and insignia. There are 250 colour drawings and 100 photographs which cover every nation involved in WW2. The original 1981 version is a large format book. There is an A5 reprint that does not include the Eastern front.

Andrew Mollo et al: **Army Uniforms of World War 2** (Blandford)

This book is similar to the one above but with a completely different set of illustrations. This was originally published by Blandford in 1973. This one is also available as a combined 1981 volume called "**World Army Uniforms Since 1939**". It is worth investing in both Mollo books.

Chris McNab: **20th Century Military Uniforms: 300 Uniforms from Around the World** (Grange Books PLC)

This book is similar in style to Andrew Mollo's books and has many of the same illustrations.

Osprey books are also very good and one is particularly appropriate -

Osprey Men at Arms 315 - The French Army 1939 - 1945

Websites

TMP The Miniatures Page

<http://theminaturespage.com>

TMP is a news forum and discussion site for miniature wargaming of all types. It has a large and active membership and good trade support. It is probably the first site with industry news and new product releases. The forums (Message Boards) are superb and most questions will get useful answers within an hour or two. The Message Boards can also be searched so that you can look up previous threads on a subject.

92nd Regiment d'Infanterie (1940 French Infantry)

<http://8bcp.tripod.com/92ri/index.html>

The 92nd is a re-enactment group specialising in recreating the French Infantry of the 1940 period. The site has comprehensive galleries. Webmaster, Brett Johnson kindly gave permission to use the photographs.