The Close Combat Uniform (CCU/CU) was a limited-issue, US Army trials uniform (circa 2003-2004) that heralded a new generation of US Army combat clothing, the first significant change to the US Army soldier’s combat attire since the introduction of the Battle Dress Uniform in the early 1980s.

The Army’s search for a new combat uniform began as part of the Objective Force Warrior Program (later Future Force Warrior) at Natick Laboratories, an effort to bring the US Army combat soldier into greater combat readiness for the 21st century. Following a period of theoretical and developmental analysis, during which six different camouflage patterns were evaluated, developers at Natick focused on three primary patterns: All Over Brush, Shadow Line, and Track. Four different colors schemes were developed for each primary pattern, appropriate to woodland, desert, urban and a combination urban/desert environment. A multi-environment pattern (originally known as Scorpion pattern) was also considered, making for a total of 13 different prototype camouflage schemes being examined during the preliminary stages of evaluation in May of 2002. (See Fig. 2)
Testing and evaluation of the patterns was conducted in four different phases between August 2002 and March 2004, at five different US Army facilities in the continental US: Fort Benning (GA), Fort Irwin (CA), Fort Lewis (WA), Fort Polk (LA) and the Yakima Training Center (WA). Initial evaluations by military personnel concentrated on rating the patterns based on performance using the following criteria: blending, brightness, contrast and detection.

![Figure 2: The 13 patterns being tested](image)

Natick developers also worked on improvements to the combat uniform design itself, addressing the needs of a modern infantry soldier carrying a combat load and equipment significantly different from that of his predecessor 20-30 years ago. By phase four of the evaluation process, the results of preliminary tests resulted in what eventually came to be known as the “Close Combat Uniform” (or CCU), referred to by designers at the US Army Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center as a “concept uniform.” The first CCU (Prototype 1) was produced in January 2003 and evaluated by a test team of Stryker soldiers at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California. The comments, suggestions, and observations of the training team were then incorporated into
the development of a second uniform (Prototype 2) that was evaluated by a different team of Stryker soldiers at the Joint Training and Readiness Center in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

By the third stage of testing, the concept uniform had been officially named the Close Combat Uniform (CCU), and was produced in larger numbers for evaluation at the unit level using at least four different camouflage patterns: standard US m/81 woodland, standard US tri-colour desert, the Urban Tracks pattern (developed by Natick), and the aforementioned Scorpion multi-terrain camouflage (developed in conjunction with Crye Industries). (NB: the Scorpion camouflage pattern was later modified, and is now commercially produced as “Multicam.” Although not adopted, it was universally popular during evaluations and has seen limited use as private purchase combat clothing by US Special Operations personnel in both Afghanistan and the Iraqi theaters of operation.)

Fourth Stage CCU evaluations were conducted with the 3rd (Stryker) Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division and the 1st (Stryker) Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, WA. It is also rumored that some uniforms were evaluated by elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, as well as unnamed personnel at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and at Fort Bliss, Texas. Members of the Stryker Brigades interviewed for this article indicated each battalion of the SBCT (Stryker Brigade Combat Team) was issued a certain type of camouflage concept uniform for testing. So, for example, 1st Battalion might have
received the woodland version, 2nd Battalion the Scorpion version, and 3rd Battalion the Urban Tracks version.

Beginning in 2003, the “tricolour desert” version of the CCU was produced on a larger scale and fielded by elements of the (Fort Lewis-based) 3rd Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division - the first Stryker Brigade or 1 SBCT - during their original deployments to the Iraqi combat theater (Operation Iraqi Freedom). These first production run uniforms are labeled Close Combat Uniform (CCU), and have the contract number SPO106-03-D-0351. Approximately 8,000 first run sets were produced by American Power Source for the DOD. A subsequent, or second, contract run was distributed to elements of the 1st Brigade of 25th Infantry Division (second Stryker Brigade, or 2 SBCT) during their initial deployment to OIF. These second series uniform are labeled Combat Uniform (CU) and employed minor structural changes or improvements over the first run. Approximately 8,800 sets of the second run were produced with contract number SPM100-04-D-0367, also by American Power Source.

Figur 4: CCU labels
Contrary to rumors and misinformation floating around certain internet circles, the CCU/CU was never employed by units in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom), nor were the uniforms utilized on any large scale by US Special Operations Forces.

JACKET
The CCU (first contract run) jacket features a full zipper frontal closure (with narrow Velcro patches to secure a flap over the zipper), a Mandarin-type collar secured with a Velcro tab, cuffs with 2" Velcro securing straps instead of buttons, two chest pockets (with Velcro-closing flaps aligned vertically), and forward-angled upper sleeve bellows pockets (covered by "loop" Velcro in desert tan). The elbow region is designed to accept pad inserts (made from grey close-celled foam), that are secured in Velcro-
closing "pockets," although in practice these foam pads were generally considered restricting and were usually removed and discarded. Velcro-backed insignia are worn on the sleeve pockets (including unit sleeve patches, reflective or non-reflective USA flag patches, and any qualification tabs such as RANGER or SAPPER). Name and US ARMY tapes are in practice sewn directly above the pockets, with both NCO and officer rank insignia being centered over the right chest name tape (limited use of metal pin-on ranks in this position have also been observed). Qualification and combat awards (Parachutist, Air Assault & Combat Infantryman Badge) have been observed on some jackets, sewn over the US ARMY tape at the left chest – this practice was, however, by no means universal. Another uncommon modification was the adding of 1” wide Velcro strips above the chest pockets, for attachment and easy removal of the name & US ARMY tapes.

Figur 5: CU

The CU (second contract run) jacket is essentially of the same construction as the first, with several minor alterations. These include a reinforced area running around the collar and down the front zipper line of the jacket, a slightly wider flap opening (running the full length) on the chest pockets, a lengthening of the Velcro to the full length of the sleeve pockets, and a slight modification to the size and structure of the foam pad pockets.
TROUSERS

The CCU (first contract run) trousers feature standard type belt loops plus a nylon drawcord adjustment system at the waist, two slash waist pockets at the front, and large, bellowed thigh cargo pockets with a diagonally aligned flap that secures with Velcro. The opening to the thigh pocket can be "cinched" by means of an internal cord of black elastic with a Cordura nylon push-button adjuster. Like the elbows on the jacket, the knee region is designed to accept foam pad inserts, which are secured in a Velcro-closing "pocket" at each knee. There are also smaller pockets at each calf that will accept a single M16/M4 30 round rifle magazine or equivalent sized object. The bottom cuffs are adjustable with ribbed nylon cords, and the seat of the trousers is reinforced in typical BDU-fashion.

Figur 6: CU

The CU (second contract run) trousers are essentially of the same construction as the first, with only a single alteration. This was a more liberal usage of Velcro on the calf pockets.
FOAM PADS
A feature often overlooked were the removable foam pads issued with each set of the CCU/CU. The pads were sized for either Short, Regular or Long uniforms and could not be easily interchanged as the pockets on each jacket or trousers were specifically sized to contain only that version. The issue pads were made of a high-density close-celled foam, slate grey in color. Unfortunately, the type of foam chosen was prone to tearing and the pads themselves are rumored to have been universally disliked as cumbersome, being generally discarded by troops on operational deployment.

Figur 7: CU labels
HEAD DRESS

There was no special headgear developed for use with the CCU. On operational deployment, most Stryker soldiers wore the standard PASGT Kevlar helmet or the ACH ballistic helmet with a tricolor desert camouflage cover. When not under direct threat of contact with hostile forces, a patrol cap or boonie hat was most commonly worn.
Figur 10: Pant pocket

Figur 11: Pocket
CONCLUSION

The CCU proved universally popular with soldiers of the Stryker Brigades, and in the subsequent months following their deployment it was not unheard of for soldiers in other units to seek sources of the uniform for their own use during combat deployment. Certain features of the CCU design (particularly the sleeve pockets and Velcro patches for insignia) were so well-liked that many soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan chose to have their standard issue Desert Combat Uniforms (DCUs) modified by professional tailor shops to include these features. Such modifications have been common within the special operations community since the Vietnam War, but it was largely thanks to the research and development that went into the CCU that they became more commonly known.

The CCU was never officially issued to any other elements of the US Army, and production ceased in 2004 to make way for the new Army Combat Uniform (ACU). By early 2006, CCUs had pretty well disappeared from the operational theater in which they were initially employed. Their place in US military uniform history, however, is acknowledged as a significant chapter, and will hopefully be remembered by American uniform historians in the years to come.

My thanks to Jim Speraw for additional information shared for this article.
Figur 13: USA Urban Tracks CCU

Figur 14: USA Scorpion CCU
Figur 15: USA Scorpion CCU label