

The Tree Tux

By: Michael Haugen

What do you think of when you think about snipers? A ghille suit-wearing individual carrying a long heavy barreled scoped rifle. Ghille suits are to snipers what black Velcro is to SWAT. You can't think about one without the other. The truth of matter is that the normal Hollywood ghille suit although works of art are not generally usable in combat. Before I begin, I must say that ghille suits are only used in specific circumstances. A ghille suit is not needed for deer hunting no matter where you hunt.

Today you can buy a custom professionally made ghille suit from one of several sources. However, for snipers, a ghille suit is a personal thing. The sniper spends hundreds of hours designing and perfecting it. Over time the ghille suit another piece of the sniper's personal equipment.

The term Ghille comes from Scottish gamekeepers of the 1800's whose renowned stealth was put to use during W.W.I as a scouts and snipers. These gamekeepers are borne into the profession and throughout their life learn to perfect their skills. Their exploits are well documented by Major H. Hesketh-Prichard D.S.O., MC in his book "Sniping In France". Although the ghillies of W.W.I obviously inspired the suits, they themselves usually relied more on natural camouflage in combat. As I said in the introduction, you cannot think of snipers without thinking of ghille suits. These suits which every sniper student normally has to construct, is very useful when stalking against a known position in training. In combat however, the sniper team must move around the battlefield and if he is worth the title he will chose to use the natural terrain and vegetation to conceal him. Route selection is the most critical aspect of sniper movement and stalking. Ghille suits have been used very successfully in most major conflicts, but these have been employed from or near a base location which only required minimal movement. Ghille suits are extremely limited in their use, however the concept and techniques of construction of ghille suits can be applied against other forms of camouflage. Before we can go into construction, we need to talk about the principles of camouflage.

Shape

Sharp distinct shapes rarely occur in nature. Manmade items however commonly have such lines and stand out sharply. Straight vertical and/or horizontal lines are easily recognizable in nature and draw immediate attention.

Surface or Texture: Vegetation has a distinct and identifiable texture. The texture of your ghille suit must match the surrounding terrain and vegetation. For example, leafy texture or short stem grasses will stand out in a field of swaying long bladed grass. Ghille suit material will appear as either a furry, fuzzy area or a pile of material without natural camouflage added.

Color

This probably the most obvious of the principles. However, it is the most misunderstood. Colors in nature change rapidly from area to area and during different times of the day. Your ghille suit camouflage must be versatile enough to blend or be changed quickly to blend. Colors that obviously contrast with the surrounding terrain are the easiest to detect, however subtle color contrasts will be detectable as well. Keep in mind that black does not occur in nature. Dark colors draw attention during daylight hours as does light during the hours of limited visibility.

Ghille suits come in two flavors, two piece and one piece. The two piece is generally the most common and most used. This suit is usually made by taking a common military uniform such as a Battle Dress Uniform in woodland or Desert pattern. Some snipers prefer solid color uniforms such as the Vietnam era OG-107 pattern, while others like exotic patterns such as tiger stripe or some of the new "high tech" patterns. Regardless of the pattern, the suit will be constructed using one or a combination of techniques.

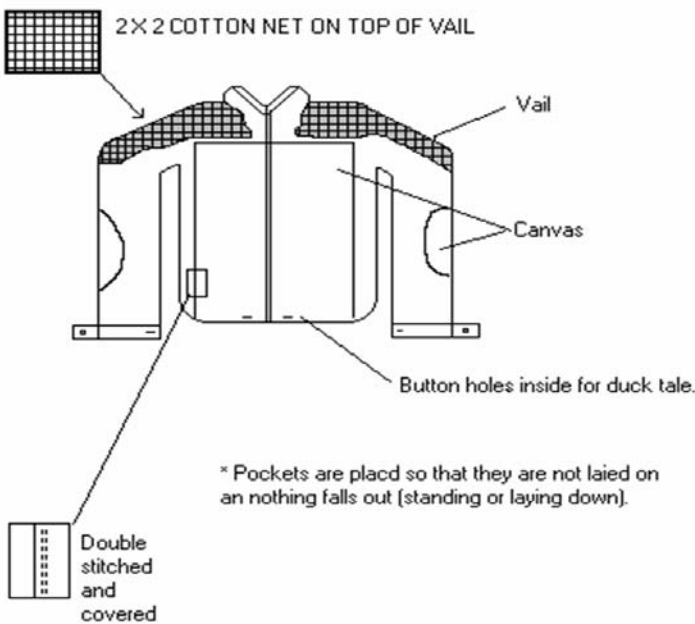
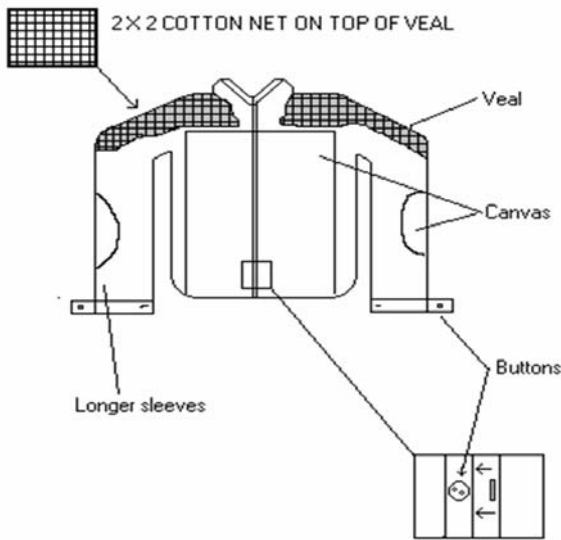
Basic Suit Construction (Tie on Technique)

First, you find a netting material with large holes such as that found on military camouflage nets. Then it is cut roughly to the shape of the jacket and sewn onto it either by hand or by machine. Then the camouflage material is cut into strips and hand tied to the loops of the net. This technique has the advantage of being quickly changed or replaced. When you are tying the material on, insure that you alternate the colors in order to develop than camouflage pattern you desire.

As you can see from the below figures, the netting is placed on the shoulders down the front slightly. This is to provide camouflage when you rise up. You should not place the camo netting or material on the extreme front, it will make crawl-

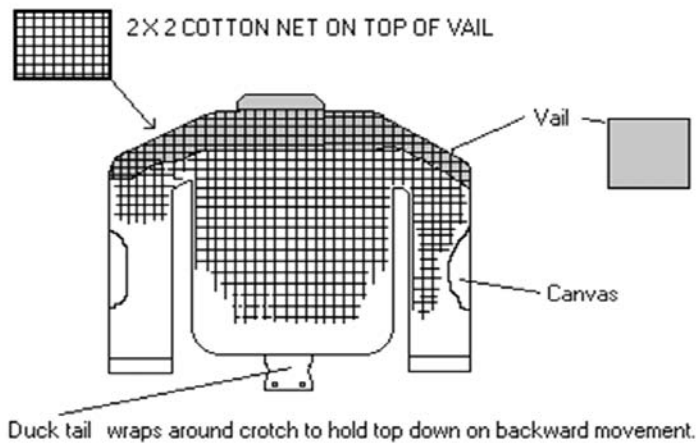
ing very hard. On the extreme front, you sew heavy canvas to keep from tearing up the ghillie suit and to help you slide as you crawl.

You should pick a uniform that is large on you to allow for wearing other clothes under it and so that as you crawl, the sleeve, jacket and pants don't slide up exposing uncamouflaged areas. Canvas is also applied to the elbow areas for obvious reasons. Some snipers will put thin foam under the canvas on the elbows for padding. I personally don't like this technique because it seems my shooting elbow slips around too much when shooting. On the bottom is a crotch flap, which goes between the legs and buttons onto the front to keep the shirt from sliding up when backing up or turning around.



* Pockets are placd so that they are not laied on an nothing falls out (standing or laying down).

GHILLIE JACKET BACK

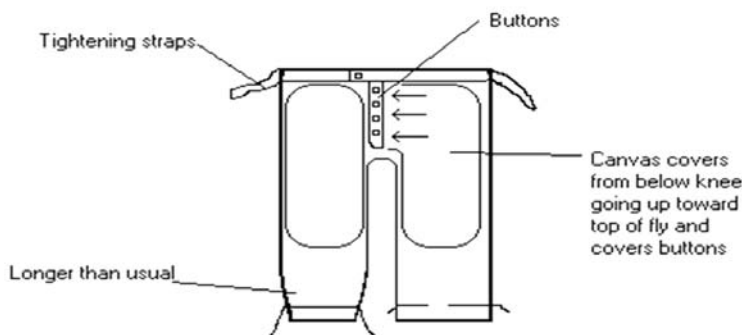


* Veal is to give the suit depth . The net is to tie natural camouflage into.

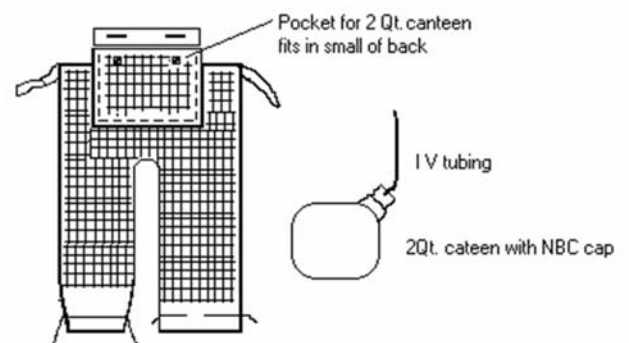
* Canvas- placement of canvas- This is done by putting the suit on and low crawling to high crawling on a floor covered with dust or flour. Then the spots covered with the dust or flour are the spots that need the reinforcement with canvas.

The front of the pants are also covered in canvas as is the front of the front of the shirt. Here again, some snipers place thin foam under the knees of the pants. This is a good technique because your knees really take a beating during stalks. You can see in the drawing that there is a small pouch built into the back of the pants. This pouch can also be placed in the small of the back on the shirt. It is designed to hold either a US military 2-quart canteen or other useful items. I like this pouch for holding things like a hedge clipper or even small binoculars, more on that later. You will notice that the pants have ties on the sides to allow for tightening them around your waist.

FRONT VIEW OF PANTS



BACK VIEW OF PANTS



Belts are not usually used or worn because they catch on things you are sliding over. Suspenders are used by many military snipers because they are versatile and easily obtained. You must insure that the netting goes over the sides of the legs at least 2/3 of the way. The netting should lie on the ground when you are crawling.

Sew on Technique

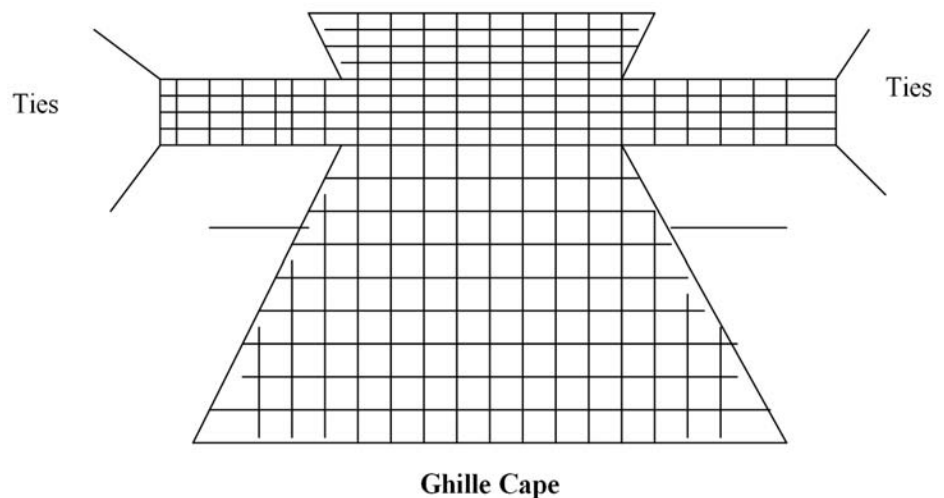
This looks just like the tie on technique except the camouflage material sewn directly to the base uniform wherever the netting is depicted starting at the bottom first. The best stitch to use is a zigzag to obtain maximum retention on the uniform. The advantage of this technique is that you do not have the netting getting caught on vegetation (usually results in getting busted).

Let's talk about the camouflage material itself. The most commonly used is burlap, which can be acquired in numerous places. It is available from better fabric stores in a variety of colors. You can also pick up a number of actual burlap bags from a surplus store or hardware store and cut them to the desired size and length. A note here about the material. Stay away from the camouflage material found on military camouflage nets. A little is ok to break up the texture of the suit but too much will give you away because if it gets wet it shines. Once you have all of the burlap or garnish tied or sewn on you must "fray" it out. This is very time consuming and entails removing the horizontal threads by hand. Once you have done this, you will see how the different colors blend together. While we are on this subject, I feel that it is a good time to discuss color. I tell students to first, determine the area in which they will be using the suit. Second, find material lighter in color than the area. It is always better to go lighter and use paint or natural camouflage to darken it. If you should make it too dark, you cannot lighten it without removing material. Now is a good time to mention inclusion of natural vegetation. Natural vegetation should always be used in conjunction with man made camouflage materials. Neither material should be used excessively. You must look at the terrain and see how it is growing. You should just enough to blend in, not so much that you look like a bush yourself which will draw attention due to the same bush appearing in different locations.

The one-piece ghillie suit is usually made using either a mechanic style coverall or an aviators flight suit. I would have to say that using this type of ghillie suit is purely personal and usually only seen being worn by students. The two-piece is more versatile because you can wear it over other clothes, wear only the piece that you need and it can be separated for transportation. However, if you like the one-piece better, then it should be constructed just as the two-piece with canvas in the same places.

Another form of camouflage that goes with the ghillie suit is the ghillie cape. This is just a ghillie blanket of sorts that the sniper and spotter use to cover them in a hide or during a stalk. The obvious shortcoming of this technique is that it can be difficult to move and remain camouflaged. The ghillie cape must be secured to the sniper/spotter so it will not fall off unexpectedly. The Germans during W.W.II and Soviets used these with great success.

The last item of the ghillie suit is the hood or veil. A hood is merely an extension of the ghillie suit. Normally it is just a large piece of material (usually the same type and pattern as the ghillie suit) which has netting or garnish sewed directly to it. The hood is used to cover the head and/or weapon. Some snipers like to sew this hood to a hat so that it remains on the head. However, I prefer to just have it attached to the shoulders (removable) so that I can just lay it over my head and shoulders. The hood is very useful and can be used by itself. Most people have seen pictures of snipers with veils around their head or neck. This veil is a netting of sorts which can be placed over the head and or weapon to break up the outline. Snipers usually have several in different colors and patterns to use in different locations. The veil is also useful for keeping bugs and debris from falling down the shirt during movement and can quickly be brought into play when needed.



Ghillie Cape

This brings us to ghillie suit and/or stalking accessories. There are certain necessities that a sniper on a stalk must have. The first is mission essential items. Things like ammunition, compass, a map, data book, etc. must be carried by the sniper.



On a stalk, a rucksack cannot be worn in the conventional way. The ruck must be either left at the mission support site (MSS) or dragged along. I personally prefer to leave it cached at the MSS, however there are times when this is not possible. In this case the ruck must be camouflaged just as the ghille suit and dragged by the sniper and/or spotter. Usually one ruck per team will suffice for a mission unless it is going to be protracted in duration. The next is sustainment, food and water. Food will probably be in the form of Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), broken down to the essential elements. Water needs to be carried both in the rucksack (5 quarts) and on the body (2 quarts minimum). Water carried on the sniper/spotter can be carried in normal Military canteens or by using a commercial method such as a Camel Back. I prefer the camel back due to its ease of use. However, it is not very durable especially when crawling.

As I said in the beginning, ghille suits generally are not suitable for combat missions, however if needed they are indispensable. With all of this said, you must understand that a ghille suit by itself will not make you invisible. Proper field craft will pay much higher dividends than a \$300 commercial made ghille suit.