

CHAPTER 1

UNIT COLOUR PATCH SYSTEM

OUTLINE HISTORY

Original 1915–49 pattern patches

1.1 Colour patches were worn on uniform by the Australian Army in the period 1915–49 through two world wars and the periods of peace between and after. In their shape and colour combinations they are believed to be a uniquely Australian innovation.

1.2 Whilst the majority of units within divisions wore patches unique to each unit, outside divisions many patches were worn collectively by units of the same corps within the same higher formation or by non-corps units commanded by a higher headquarters. In this sense, the 1915–49 colour patches were not truly 'unit' colour patches.

1.3 The wearing of the 1915–49 colour patches was reintroduced in 1987 primarily on the basis of fostering the Army's heritage, through unit lineage and similarity of roles to units of 1915–49 which had approved colour patches. Those patches authorised since 1987 are, with the exception of some divisional troops units, are specifically 'unit' colour patches, being unique to each unit authorised to wear one.

1.4 The record of the Army colour patch system employed in the period 1915–49 is 'The Army Colour Patch Register 1915–49' (ACPR). This was issued by Assistant Chief of the General Staff—Materiel in 1993 down to and including brigade headquarters and equivalent level, to Head of Corps (HOC) and Army school level. The Register contains copies of all authorities for colour patches issued in the period 1915–49. It is the authoritative base for the granting of entitlements for the wearing of Series I colour patches.

Introduction of new patches

1.5 The nature of the order of battle in the early 1990s was such that only about 25 per cent of units, regular and reserve, had lineage and similarity of role to 1915–49 units and were able to claim those patches. At the same time only a relatively small number of units had unique unit badges by which to be identified.

1.6 Because of these circumstances, the number of units unsuccessfully seeking approval for colour patches and the apparent need for a system of unit identification particularly in case of expansion, a second 'series' of colour patches was designed. These would complement the 1915–49 series to provide every unit of the Army with its own unit colour patch regardless of the size of the order of battle. The Chief of the General Staff Advisory Committee approved the concept in 1994 and introduction was effected in 1995.

Two series of Unit Colour Patches

1.7 Two series of Unit Colour Patches (UCP) are approved for the Australian Army:

- a. Series I are the patches of units of the 1st AIF and the whole Army from 1921 to 1949. These are worn by units which have established their lineage and similarity of role to those earlier units. A small number of these patches have been used as a base for Series II patches for organisational reasons, others as a basis of completing pattern gaps to provide continuing heritage; these patches are referred to as Series I (Extended).
- b. Series II, introduced in 1995, is based largely on the colour combinations of Series I which indicated headquarters, corps and some functions. These are arranged as square base patches identifying Headquarters Australian Defence Force (Air Commander), Army Headquarters and the functional command headquarters (all five hereinafter referred to as 'Headquarters'), as well as all HOC staff. Smaller overlaid shapes in various colours identify uniquely non-corps units under command of those headquarters, and corps units respectively. These patches are worn by units which have not established lineage and similarity of role for a Series I patch.

CONCEPT OF THE UNIT COLOUR PATCH SYSTEM

General

1.8 The concept of the unit colour patch system is based on the following themes:

- a. The heritage for the Australian Army in maintaining and developing the colour patch system introduced and worn by the 1st AIF in World War I and the whole Army from 1921, through World War II to 1949. The origins of the colours used for the Series II base patches are given in [annex A](#).
- b. The importance of the identification of each unit of the Army (headquarters, unit and independent minor unit commanded by a field-grade officer) for unit morale as well as control purposes.
- c. The capability of the Series I system including logical but limited extensions, with Series II to provide for a major expansion in the event of a defence emergency. This theme acknowledges the precedent of Australian Army strength and the number of divisions raised in World War II from a population of seven million.

1.9 Unit colour patches identify units; for corps units the colours used with their geometrical arrangement will also identify corps. However, they do not replace corps or regimental badges which give corps identity to individuals in non-corps units and to elements or individuals of other corps within corps units.

Series I colour patches

1.10 Defunct grouping indication. Series I colour patches for light horse (and later armoured) and infantry units were conceived on the basis of identifying, as well as the unit, its tactical grouping ie brigade and division. With territorial locations of the CMF between the wars, and changes in organisation and relatively frequent regrouping during the earlier years of World War II, it proved impracticable generally to continue to identify such grouping. Thus unit identity became the enduring feature of the colour patches of light horse/armoured and infantry units. This experience has been applied to the design of the Series II system which, with the Series I system as it is now applied, does not show grouping.

1.11 Divisional troops patches. In the case of divisional troops units which wore one colour patch for each arm or Service within each division, their Series I colour patches are not unique in current application, being worn by for example, Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) units with Headquarters Divisional Royal Australian Artillery and each regiment of the original divisional artillery wearing the same patch regardless of location in Australia. This emphasises the heritage aspect of the Series I RAA colour patch as worn in World War I.

1.12 Generic patches. Further emphasis on heritage has been placed by the authorisation of Series I branch or generic-type patches, such as a number of RAA 1945 pattern, for wear by the first-approved unit only.

Series II colour patches

1.13 Series II patches, as indicated in paragraph 1.7 [b.](#), identify the specified 'Headquarters' and the HOC staff by distinctively coloured square base patches. The spectrum of twenty different colours applied through sixty different superimposed shapes gives a capability to identify up to 1200 non-corps units under each specified headquarters and one thousand in each corps. For design specifications see [annex B](#).

1.14 The sixty smaller superimposed shapes are to be progressively applied, in each colour nominated by the specified Headquarters or HOC, where necessary in up to the twenty different colours. The shapes are not intended to coincide by sequential shape number with unit number. This would be impossible in any case for units numbered above '60'. The shapes in sequence are selected on whatever basis is deemed appropriate by the 'Headquarters' and HOC, seniority being one criteria which might be applied, for initial allocation only.

1.15 Series II patches are not intended to indicate grouping, which is subject to unforeseeable change. The use of ‘headquarters’ base patches superimposed with the smaller patches to identify non-corps units is an appropriate expedient for this type of unit, which is least likely to be allotted to another command.

PRINCIPLES OF THE SYSTEM

Experience base

1.16 The ACPR reflects, in part 1, sections 1—History and General Description and section 7—Anomalies in the Colour Patch System, the experience of the development and administration of the Series I colour patch system.

1.17 This experience has formed the basis for the principles which are applied for the development and the administration of the total colour patch system—Series I and its extensions, and Series II.

Principles

1.18 Unit identity. With the exception of units authorised Series I patches worn originally by divisional troops, each colour patches is to be unique to a unit, ‘unit’ being defined as a headquarters, unit and independent minor unit commanded by a field-grade officer.

1.19 Identification of units for Series I patches. The priority in selecting a colour patch for a unit on raising is an appropriate Series I patch, subject to relevance of lineage and similarity of role, before allocation of a Series II patch. In seeking an identity for a unit about to be raised, Headquarters, for non-corps units, and HOC for corps units, are advised to consult the ACPR part 2, Index in order to identify possible Series I units with which lineage and role could be related. In this way the unit’s sense of heritage will be developed from raising, and later application to change a Series II for an appropriate Series I patch avoided.

1.20 Heritage within Series I patches. In the selection of a Series I patch for authorisation, with a choice between, for example a World War I and World War II patch for the same infantry battalion, the older patch should be sought because of its heritage value. In some cases, however, the first unit of a particular type may have been raised only for World War II service and been authorised a 2nd AIF patch.

1.21 2nd AIF Grey Background Patches. Series I colour patches were authorised during World War II for 2nd AIF brigade headquarters and infantry battalions identical to those of some militia infantry brigade headquarters and battalions except for the 2nd AIF grey background. Except as provided for in [paragraph 1.20](#), 2nd AIF grey background patches are not to be authorised. In particular:

- a. Series I infantry brigade headquarters colour patches for HQs 16, 17 and 18 Bdes when raised are to be authorised the patches of those headquarters in 6 Aust Div 1st AIF (ACPR part 2, section 2—HQS 0084, HQS 0086 and HQS 0088). More junior brigade headquarters, on raising, are to be authorised colour patches following the Series II patterns; and
- b. in the unlikely event of a ‘third AIF’ being raised, its units are to be authorised either Series I patches as indicated in [paragraphs 1.19](#) and [1.20](#), or as provided for in part 6, [chapter 3—‘Unit Colour Patch Register’](#).

1.22 Changes in Series II patches—Corps units. Units are to retain the originally approved patch regardless of change in role or seniority within the corps.

1.23 Identifying functions in Series II non-Corps patches. The following superimposed colours are to be applied to identify particular functions in:

- a. **all non-Corps units:**
 - White—Intermediate headquarters
 - Mid green—Training units other than Trg Comd establishments
 - Dark grey—Miscellaneous units
- b. **Land Comd units:**
 - Mid blue—CSSB, Log Bns
 - Dark grey—Operational support units
 - Mid green—Intelligence units
- c. **Spt Comd units:**
 - Black—Log Gps, Bns, Coys
 - Gold—P&EE
 - Scarlet—Area support units
- d. **Trg Comd units:**
 - CSC colours—RMC less CSC
 - Dark green—Non-Corps training establishments
 - Scarlet—Recruit training units
 - Corps colours—Corps schools
 - Mid-Blue—University Regiments
- e. **ADF units:**
 - Gold—Defence Centres
 - Mid Green—Training establishments
 - Light brown—Recruiting Units
 - Dark Grey—operational units

Variations to and developments of these identifying colours may be required with major reorganisations.

1.24 Changes in Series II patches—non-Corps units. Changes from one role to another role represented by a different superimposed colour will necessitate a change in colour patch to conform to the new role. The colour patch from the previous role is to be reserved for allocation to the next unit raised with that role regardless of the initial basis of allocation (eg seniority).

1.25 Change of Corps and non-Corps status. Units allocated to another corps, or from corps to non-corps or non-corps to corps status are to be authorised the appropriate change in Series I or II colour patch.

1.26 Linking and unlinking of units. Following the precedent established in World War I, units on linking are to wear the colour patch of the unit first-named in the linking. The colour patch of the second-named unit is to be reserved for re-authorisation on unlinking of those units.

1.27 Amalgamation. On amalgamation, the identity to be established by unit colour patch is that of the newly-named unit. The principles addressed in [paragraphs 1.19](#) and [1.20](#) should be followed in seeking colour patch authorisation.

1.28 Disbanding. On disbanding, a unit's colour patch should normally be reserved in case of its re-raising, in order to retain the lineage and enhance the heritage value. This principle applies equally to Series I and Series II patches, with Series II patches developing heritage value when worn by the one unit over a period of years.

Annexes:

- A. [Design specifications and classification of Series I and Series I Extended Unit Colour Patches](#)
- B. [Design specifications and classification of Series II Unit Colour Patches](#)
- C. [Colour spectrum for Unit Colour Patches](#)