Painting US Army UCP (ACU) camouflage – the easy way.
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The US Army currently uses a digital grey camouflage commonly called ACU (Army Combat Uniform) , though it is actually called UCP (Universal Combat Pattern).

The real UCP is made up of three main colours Tan, Foliage Green and Urban Grey. In the past I have painted a few figures using these colours, but the overall effect is not very satisfying at 1/72 scale. Instead I have developed the following based on how the UCP looks at distance.

As with all camouflage, there are variations in colour and clarity based on age, lighting, fading and dirt. A quick look on the net will give you many variations of UCP, so feel free to experiment.

1, Already primed with a white undercoat, this figure has been painted Vallejo Deck Tan 986 as the base colour. Early on I found that it is beneficial to also paint in the other colours before finishing the UCP other wise it just wont look right. So, I have also painted the M4 black, the flesh Medium Brown, the boots Beige brown and then Desert Yellow and finally I have added the first layer of the UCP print in Vallejo Light Rubber 305 in irregular blobs and dashes.

As you can see, this is roughly painted in, mistakes are plain to see.

2, Next I like to paint in the details, I find this makes the final painting of the camo easier as the colours balance better when contrasted against others.

a. the flesh tones:

b. the gloves – I have painted them pale tan, but black, green, grey etc are also used:
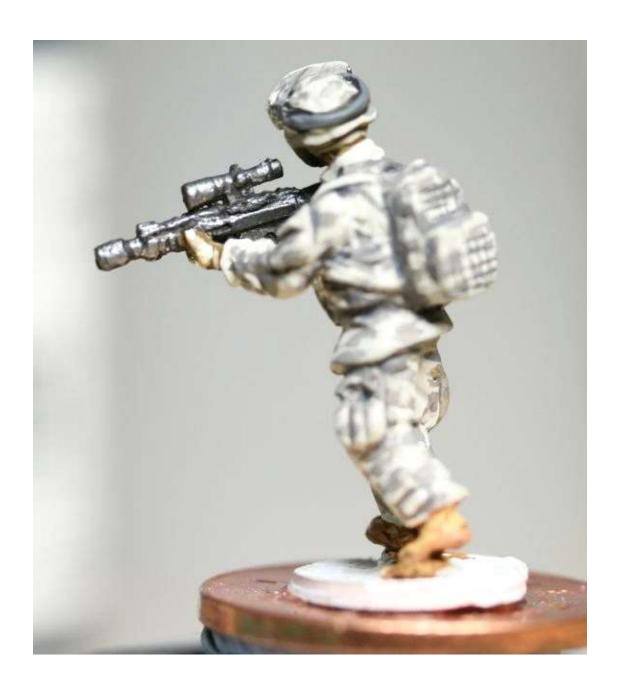
c. the rifle:

4

3, Now that the basics are done, I like to add the depth and shadow to pick out the figures detail. I water down Vallejo Grey Green 866 until it has the consistency of milk and then 'pin' wash where the shadows should be such as under uniform folds, between equipment etc. I also will add some cross hatching over the molle strips if they need to be defined. You don't have to be tidy with this, as the paint is very watery it should be fairly transparent when dry which adds to the over all camouflage.

4, Now it is time to add the dark layer to the UCP. There are two ways of doing this. 1, Use a very watered down Vallejo Grey Green 866 which will give a faded washed out look to the uniform or 2, Use a not so watered down version of Grey Green which will look like a new crisp uniform. Please experiment with your paint to get a version which looks better for you. (Note, I have found that the Vallejo Light Rubber 305 on its own if more is used looks pretty good as faded UCP, or sometimes a 305 with a bit of 866 mixed also looks like faded UCP).

Paint this layer over (but not covering) the pale grey in dots and lines to simulate the digital effect. It is not easy to do, but when seen from a distance the effect does look like a digital uniform (which is the opposite of what the real UCP does, however, we are painting an impression of the camo to be recognizable, not replicate it).

I have chosen a newer looking uniform in the pictures below:

8

5, Tidy up time. Now I will go over the figure and just repair any areas of the camo with Deck Tan that look too grey, repaint any detail that has been missed such as glasses etc. Pieces of equipment such as pouches, knee pads etc can be painted Tan Brown or Green to show where a soldier has added his own private kit to personalize the figure. If you want, you can try and paint uniform badges on the Velcro arm pockets (though I tend not too).

The Final Figure waiting to be based:

Same figure shown a little smaller (the figure is 25mm tall)