

History of Letter Carriers' Uniforms

Topping Things Off: Uniform Hats

In 1868 the Postmaster General listed a cap as the letter carrier's uniform headgear. It was to be made of the same material as the coat, bound round with a black cloth band 1 1/2 inches wide, and have small buttons at the sides. In 1873, panama hats were authorized for summer. In 1887, numbered badges were added to the carriers' headwear, and helmets were approved for use. Helmets were short-brimmed with a tall crown, similar to British bobby helmets. In 1893, the more general straw hat replaced the panama hat as allowable summer headgear. By 1901, a western-style hat appeared, with a stiff crown and wide brim. Though never described in the *Postal Laws and Regulations*, photographs indicate this cowboy-style hat was standard wear at some Post Offices.

From 1902 through 1948, postal regulations listed the hat, cap or helmet as acceptable carrier headwear. Uniform manufacturers advertised many variations in headgear style. The bobby-style helmet was last advertised in *The Postal Record* in 1907; in 1949, the safari-style helmet was first pictured. Although carriers at each Post Office were to dress uniformly, photographs indicate that this was not always enforced.

In 1955, only the helmet and cap were listed as acceptable headgear. The helmet was specified for summer; it was made of molded fiber in a blue-gray cadet shade and had a maroon chinstrap. The cap was a blue-gray eight-point style cap with braid the same color as the cap and a maroon chin strap.

Beginning in 1960, the *Postal Manual* lists the following additions to the line-up: detachable parka hood (1960), fur cap (1962), cap for women (1962), mesh cap (1964), beret (1966), and pillbox cap (1969). In 1970, a face mask in cold weather was permitted. The WAVE cap for female carriers was introduced in 1979.

As of December 1972, headgear no longer was mandatory. Since 1982, numbered badges have not been required on headgear.

In 1982, a baseball style cap became available to letter carriers. The helmet color changed from blue to white in 1984. A knit watch cap with an attached face mask was introduced to the letter carrier uniform in 1986, and the sun visor was added in 1991. A mesh helmet followed in 1995 – the last headwear item to be added as of 2002.

Note: See Wreaths & Eagles: Uniform Badges for badge variations, and Postal Patchwork: Uniform Patches for patch variations.