

COLOR GUIDE, USMC UNIFORM

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Introduction: I have often seen on The Miniatures Page and elsewhere questions pertaining on how to paint WWII US Marines. I can understand this because the Marine Corps uniforms of this period are difficult to replicate properly with paints. For the dungarees and twill, I believe it is a combination of the rough texture of the cloth, and the way in which the very dark cloth becomes very light on the wear points.

This is a guide on the colors I use to paint my Marines. I am using what I consider to be the best WWII US Marine miniatures available in 28mm, from the Pac War range of Brigade Games. I have other Marine miniatures, none of the rest have same level of detail as these do. The equipment is spot on... down to the bandoliers, the BAR pouches (does anyone else really get these correct?), even the weapons. Not only are the weapons scaled better than most ranges, you even get nice details like an actual separation between the barrel and the gas port on the BAR.

The paints I am using are relatively new to me. I normally—this is going to sound like heresy—use Ceramcoat paints for the bulk of my painting. For this guide, I did want to use a miniatures specific paint set that wargamers can also employ. I am using the new Reaper Master Series paints. They have good color quality, and a bottle agitator which helps mix the paint for more even flow.

I am not a master painter. This guide is primarily to help you choose the right paint colors, but I will describe the techniques I use. One thing I don't do is give you exact measurements for mixes. Your Marines will look much more like a mix of veterans and replacements if there are slight variations in your colors anyway. For some armies that may not be what you expect, but this works well for the USMC.



Finished Brigade Games 28mm Marines in front of the Reaper Master Paints used.

The Paint Colors Used: The following is a list of the 11 Reaper Master Series paints I used.

Jungle Moss	09082	Palomino Gold	09074
Desert Khaki	09155	Chestnut Gold	09073
Golden Blonde	09033	Pure Black	09037
Chestnut Brown	09071	Pure White	09039
Muddy Brown	09028	Honed Steel	09053
Tanned Skin	09044		

For certain areas like the flesh or the weapons, you may decide to substitute other Reaper Master Paints to create the colors that match your painting style.

First Steps: As usual, you need to prepare your miniatures for painting. I simply flash them. These particular miniatures had very little flash. I normally do not wash my miniatures, but some recommend it. I then commit my second act of heresy. I primer my miniatures by spraying them with Krylon semi-flat black... though most of your fellow gamers will advise using a miniature specific primer. They are probably right to do so, but I have never had any problems with the Krylon I use.

I then base the miniatures on steel washers (that I previously painted with Krylon brown primer) with a mixture of sand and white glue. I buy a 50lb bag of sand at the hardware store for a few bucks, it lasts for about a decade of use. I buy the Elmers in a gallon, it lasts about 5 years. Let this dry and allow the miniature to set prior to starting. Paint the exposed base of the miniature either Desert Khaki or Palomino Gold, whichever more closely matches the color sand you are using.

Painting Your Marine Uniforms: You will begin with a coat of Jungle Moss on the Marine trousers and blouse, and soft caps if models have them. You should not worry about leaving black showing, you can use a fairly solid layer of paint on the uniform. Allow this to completely before proceeding. If you try to dry brush when it is not quite dry, you will get a "wet" reflective look to the uniform. **Please note, the actual paint will look much, much darker than on the left-most figure in the image below.**

You will now begin to "dry brush" the uniform with a mix of Jungle Moss with some Golden Blonde mixed in. This is a different kind of dry brushing than you may be used to. Make broad loose sweeps. Don't sop it on thickly, but its okay to be sloppy and to have large areas of uniform affected. Models with uniforms left at this stage look most like new replacements. This is the center model below.



Left-most is base coat of Jungle Moss (it will be darker in real life), center is first "dry brush", right-most is first real dry brush.

Once that stage is dried, you will use a mix of Jungle Moss mixed with lots of Golden Blonde. Apply this with a traditional dry brushing technique, working paint in the brush and lightly applying it to the

uniform. Do not think of it as a “highlight”, what you are doing is adding depth to the uniform look to represent the unique texture of the cloth. Dry brush all of the uniform. The figure on the right above displays this stage. It should look “rough” not smooth.

I recommend you take some of your Marines, but not all, and hit them with a very light dry brushing of pure Golden Blonde. You want this to be very light so you do not leave solid streaks of yellow on your miniatures. Apply this as a highlight to areas like the shoulders, top of the arms, knees, or wherever it looks good to you. They may look odd to you at this stage, too light, but it will be ok.

Applying the Browns: Paint the boots Chestnut Brown. Paint the rifle stocks (including the stock and fore grip of the BARs), bayonet and E-Tool handles Muddy Brown. Paint the webbing including canteen and ammo pouches Desert Khaki. Paint the skin Chestnut Brown mixed with some Tanned Skin, leaving it fairly dark.



Picture of the applied browns before highlighting from the front and from the back

Use a mix of Chestnut Brown with Desert Khaki to highlight (not dry brush) the wood surfaces. I use a different base brown here because it does a better job at looking like the reflection of a finish.

Mix Desert Khaki with Golden Blonde to highlight the webbing, including canteen and ammo pouches. Hit all parts of the webbing.

Highlight (not dry brush) the skin with a mix of Tanned Skin with a little bit of Chestnut Brown. Make sure to get the nose, the cheeks, the chin, across the knuckles and the fingers. Don't leave too much of the darker color underneath showing, you want the skin to be mostly the highlight color.

If you are used to using straight flesh tones, this skin color will look odd. I like this muted brown look of flesh, it seems more accurate for tired, dirty, numbed combat veterans. You can use straight flesh tones instead if you wish.

Gun Metal and Helmet Covers: Paint all of the gun metal parts Pure Black. Make sure to not paint shut the space between the barrel and gas port of the BARs. Do not forget the Garand slide and the rifle bands, or the rifle butt plates. Paint the canteen caps, and bayonet guard and pommel. Mix a little Pure Black with water, like a heavy wash. Use this to dab at the pouch snaps. I use this heavy wash to create shadow lines between the webbing components.

Paint all of the helmet cover Palomino Gold. Make sure to paint the under lip of the helmet that shows above the eyes, but you should try to leave a black line.



The pictures above and below show the front and back of the brown highlights, and the first stages of the metal and helmet covers



Dry brush the helmet covers with Golden Blonde. It can be a splotchy dry brushing.



Image shows the helmet dry brushed with Golden Blonde. Note the bayonet and pouch snaps from previous step.

Mix a little Palomino Gold with Chestnut Gold for the first series of camouflage splotches. They are not stripes, not dots, and not regular. Basically, apply a shaky circle, drag and shake your brush a little, and lift the brush. Spread over the cover regularly. Once dry, use Chestnut Brown for the second series of camouflage splotches. Apply each in slight contact with the first splotches, without covering it.

Alternatively, do not dry brush the cover Golden Blonde. Put a series of first Chestnut Gold, then Chestnut Brown splotches for a darker, brighter helmet cover.



Two figures on left show my standard helmet method, the right figure shows the alternate method. Note the Honed Steel.

You will now use Honed Steel to accent the metal parts. You should dry brush the muzzles of the Garands, and the receiver group and barrel and gas port of the BARs. You then need to highlight

specifically trigger guards, Garand slide, Garand receiver groups, rifle bands, butt plates, bayonet guards and pommels, and canteen caps. You may try your hand at hitting a few of the pouch snaps with honed steel too, but only with a few models. These typically did not shine.

Eyes and the Last Paint: You may need to go back and hit the hollows of the eyes with Muddy Brown. You may not need to do this if you left dark hollows when highlighting. You may run a thin line of Muddy Brown along the helmet edge, where it meets the forehead. Marines did one of four things with their helmet straps: they clasped them under their chins, left them dangling by their ears, tucked them up inside of their helmets, or clasped them over the brim of their helmets. Run Muddy Brown along any helmet straps that are clasped above the helmet brim. The other helmet straps should not require Muddy Brown to be applied.

Paint the eyes Pure White. When that is dry, paint the pupils Pure Black. Try to put the pupils towards the top of the white paint, but make a few models looking to the left or right. Just make sure to have them both located on the same edge of the whites.

Paint all of the helmet straps Desert Khaki. You may highlight these with a mix of Desert Khaki and Pure White.

The Last Paint items are really about what you think of your finished paintjobs. You can use Tanned Flesh and Pure White for a bright (scared) flesh highlight on a few models.

If you are a little sloppy, you might need to run Muddy Brown, or a Muddy Brown mix with a little water, along the sleeve edges and neck lines of the blouses. I do not highlight the boots (though if I did, I would mix a little Palomino Gold with Chestnut Brown to do so) because I apply a thin wash of water and Muddy Brown across the sand base and boots. If you are sure this is thin enough (be cautious) you can run this up to the knees of the miniatures. It will look as if their lower legs are dirty. A darker, heavier wash will make the legs look wet.

Also... believe it or not, you might notice at this point that some of your models might need another round of dry brushing with Golden Blonde. **Be careful**, you do not want to ruin your work, but you might apply a little here and there.

I will be adding a special page showing how to paint a simple USMC Eagle Globe and Anchor on the left breast pocket of your models. The early Brigade Marines are all in appropriately hunched poses with weapons at the ready or being employed, and the left breast pockets are not exposed. However, later Brigade Marine miniature releases include poses where you will be able to paint the symbol.



Close up of the eye details. Note the "rough" look of the uniform blouse, it is not smooth looking.

Finishing Your Miniatures: This is about flocking your bases. If you have done a very good job on the bases, you might have something that is appropriate for beaches. However, I want versatility, I want my Marines to look appropriate for more than one battle. So, after all of the paint, including the Muddy Brown wash on the sand, is dry, I flock my bases.

I mix several colors of static grass together. For the Pacific, I want the static grass to end up a light green-brown color.

I apply a small area of glue to each base, in different places. I apply only one spot of glue for each base. I press the static grass into the glue of each and shake off the excess grass. I then dab about one third to one half of the models (randomly selected) with another single spot of glue. I take some flock, usually light green, and apply a small piece to each of the dabs of glue.

Once the glue is all dry, I proceed to matte coat the miniatures.

You could alternatively used a heavy wash of water and Pure Black to create basing suitable for Iwo Jima. If you did so, you probably should not apply any vegetation at all. I like the look of the black sand, but my desire for versatility keeps me from painting my Marines this way. That does not mean that you can not do it though!



The finished models once again.

Conclusion: We hope to be able to introduce some more paint and/or color guides in the future, including guides for painting Japanese. More importantly, I hope that my efforts will prove useful to some of the war gamers out there who have struggled, as I did, with creating a realistic looking USMC uniform on their miniatures.

Thank you!

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