

Like many of my peers, and as a visible example to youth whom I would come in contact with today, I wore my Scout uniform instead of my normal “street clothing”.

The current Scout field uniform, created by clothing designer Oscar de la Renta, replaced a completely olive drab (we called it khaki but it was much closer to green than tan) uniform. The shirt, a light tan job with shoulder epaulets (so that we can attach cords, sashes and colorful shoulder loops to them) is complimented by a pair of pants originally with cargo pockets on the sides in that same old olive drab color. The pants I was wearing this day have no such cargo pockets; the BSA decided to remove them and then later last year, to bring them back – only smaller.

Worn correctly, with the colorful insignia (darker and brighter colors, like blacks, blues, reds and yellows show up best in this outfit!) designed by the BSA, along with a neckerchief (one of those scarf-like things traditionally worn by Boy Scouts since the start of the movement), slide (to hold the neckerchief in place) and in my personal case, the Wood Badge training award recognition, one becomes a beacon walking or riding or driving wherever I was to go.

Or in my case, a “Christmas Tree.” That’s what my wife calls my “complete decked-out” uniform.

Still, it has been more than 20 years since this new uniform first appeared and despite the red “Boy Scouts of America” strip above the breast line on the right side of the shirt, people STILL mistake me for something else OTHER than a part of the Boy Scouts of America.

My first stop on this cold morning was to the stop-and-go convenience store just around the corner from our apartment complex. After I have stood in the cold watching the numbers on the gas pump increase as my car’s gas tank was being filled, and after I have returned the nozzle to its resting position on the pump, a man comes over and starts up a conversation with me.

“Been in the service long, huh?” I thought he was joking me, so I played along for a short bit. After all, I AM “in the service,” and on my way to the “Fort” where I work at.

“Yeah, I’ve working on year 19 this year, “ I responded, looking at him first, and then at the tires on the car. My wife wanted the left front tire filled with air, so I walked over to the air hose, placed my quarter in the slot and brought the hose over to the front of my wife’s car.

“The Army’s really changed a whole lot. What rank are you? I don’t even recognize the old chevrons anymore.” That’s when I knew I had to correct him. I started to say “You old coot!! Can’t you read?? Boy Scouts of America!!” Right there!”

But I didn’t. “I’m a Major, but I’m not wearing a military uniform today, sir...this is a Boy Scout leaders’ uniform.”

“Boy Scouts!” he yelled. “That doesn’t look like the Boy Scout outfit I wore back in ’62! He walked over and I stood as he examined my uniform as a drill sergeant would examine a new recruits’ digs.

“God almighty! From a distance, it looks like one of those new Army uniforms. You must think I’m crazy or something...Boy Scout here in town?” he asked of me. I told him nope, that I was wearing it as part of a school program that I am taking part in my official role as an Army officer.

With that event over, my next stop was to a local copier firm to check on some items they are copying for me for a personal sales item. These people have seen me in the store in my military battle dress uniform – those camouflaged outfits that most Army soldiers wear as “work clothing”; in a sweater and pants; even in blue jeans and a tee shirt. All bets are off, however, once I walked in this morning wearing my Scouting best.

"Hey! Nice outfit. Getting ready to bury someone today?" the young woman on the other side of the counter asked me upon entering the store.

"Nah...I'm taking part in a program today at a school."

"That's a Boy Scout uniform, right??" I swore that I heard one of those "that's right!" bells go off in my head as I nodded. "You're kinda old to be a Boy Scout, right?? You must be a leader or something, right?"

"Yeah, something like that..." I answered. I didn't want to go into a lot of detail explaining what Advisory Board members do...

Oh and at work: one would think that ARMY people would be used to seeing uniforms; after all, we are around them for at least 50 hours a week, with some of us around uniformed soldiers even longer. But as I sat in my corner cubicle, working on back work and making sure that I finish all of my tasks before I leave for the school later in the day, one by one, my peers wanted to know about the strange uniform I was wearing.

"You look like a Russian General!" one guy said. "You've got more ribbons on that shirt then you do on your green uniform, don'tcha?" I didn't answer him.

"Are you like the Boy Scout Recruiter or something?" another workmate asked. I've heard that question before. "Nope. They have professionals to do that for them."

"At least they don't make you wear a swim suit!" one of my peers teased me when I explained my reason for wearing the uniform.

At the school, kids right off knew that I was a Scout leader..."Wow! Look at that guy!!" one of the third graders whispered while I was waiting my turn at Service to America Week activities. His friend said "Aw, that's nothing...I know this guy that has MORE stuff than he has...he has this thing with all of these round badges on it all the way down the front and half way down the back! This guy is lame!"

I laughed and then turned back to look at them. They knew I heard them and quickly quieted themselves.

I have had other Scouters – Scouting leaders – to tell me that over the years, they have been mistaken for forest rangers, state or federal park employees, and even highway patrol officers. One man loves wearing his Scout "Smokey the Bear" type hat while driving down the highway from the Scout office to his home. See, his car, he explained to me, is one of those Chevys or Fords or something that the local state police use as their "unmarked police cars." So, here he is, doing the speed limit, and watching every other car slow down or pull over so that he can pass them so they don't run the chance of getting a ticket!

It is only when they see the Scout uniform, with the colorful shoulder patches, then they relax somewhat.

My reason why people don't recognize the uniform is because they don't see it enough for them to understand that it's not a sign of early invasion by Russia (those red shoulder loops, the red hat and the red canteen do it every time!); nor is there a convention of park rangers meeting in town; it's not even an outward sign of a New World Order police department!!

It's just a guy or gal, outfitted for service to others. That's all.