

Basic Detail Report



Title Man's Uniform Coat

Date 1812-1814

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Primary Maker Commodore Thomas MacDonough

Medium Hand-stitched of deep blue fine wool broadcloth, with white or pale buff fine wool broadcloth facing, silk taffeta sleeve lining, glazed linen pocket bags, linen buckram collar stiffener, metallic gold lace edging, iron wire hooks, and gilt buttons. The epaulets are gold lace straps with gold boullion fringe, silk lining, steele stiffener, wool attachment straps, silk satin bolsters, cotton tape, and buttons.

Description United States Navy officer's coat. The single stripe on the collar denotes the rank of captain. (Thomas MacDonough's subsequent rank of Commodore added a silver star; this coat does not have that.) Entirely hand-stitched of deep blue fine wool broadcloth throughout. The skirts are faced with white or pale buff fine wool broadcloth. Under the 1802 Navy regulations, the lining should be blue, but this coat has white lining in the skirt facing. The coat is faced along the center front and collar in the same cloth as the shell. The breast and back are unlined. There is a yoke of dark blue cloth across the shoulders, for support and stability, to keep the shoulders from stretching out, and to minimize wear in the shoulders, because the shoulders are also unlined. The sleeves are lined with buff-colored silk taffeta. The collar is stiffened with linen buckram, held in place by a single row of stitching through the collar facing. The collar, cuffs, lapel, pocket flaps, and the front and rear edges of skirt are all edged in 1/2-inch-wide, metallic gold vellum lace, also called "Navy lace". (This lace is still used today.) The lapels are edged on the outer and under surfaces with this same gold lace, so that when the lapel was fastened across the body,

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the lapel would be outlined in 1/2-inch lace all around. The cut and construction of this coat is consistent with 1802 Navy regulations. The coat is double-breasted, with lapels that could be worn either fastened back or buttoned across. When the coat was worn with the lapels fastened back, the coat closed with a row of ten iron wire hooks and eyes fixed into the breast facing at the center front edge of the coat. Otherwise, the lapels fastened with nine 7/8-inch-diameter, United States Navy buttons on each lapel. Nine buttonholes extend for the width of the lapels (five inches wide at the top, 3 1/4 at bottom), defined by 1/4-inch-wide, metallic gold vellum lace formed into buttonhole loops. The buttonholes are functional for 1 1/4 inch. Consistent with War of 1812 uniforms, this coat has a high (four inch) collar. This collar is also close fitting, to prevent wind and rain blowing in. The collar has a single, 1/4-inch-wide, metallic gold lace loop on either side of the center front, which terminates with a 7/8-inch, gilt United States Navy button. The face of the button has the motif of an eagle on a fouled anchor, encircled by thirteen five-pointed stars. This type of coat would be worn with cloak/cape over it to protect it. A feature typical of the 1812 era, this coat's front panel is cut as one piece, consisting of an upper body and skirt all in one. By 1820, coats had separate upper body and skirt panels. The sleeve is a narrow, shaped sleeve, with a defined elbow point. The sleeve cap is cut very full, but eased, not gathered, into the shoulder, so it is not puckered. This is typical of 1812 to 1820 styling. Also typical of this period, the shoulder is extremely narrow, only three inches wide over the top of the shoulder; this is typical of War of 1812 military coats in general. The cuff is attached to the

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bottom of the sleeve, rolled back, and tacked in several places to the sleeve. It is

four inches deep and is edged along the top with 1/2-inch-wide, metallic gold

vellum lace. It has four false buttonholes defined with 1/4-inch-wide, metallic

gold vellum lace, with 7/8-inch-diameter gilt Navy buttons at the top of each

loop. Most of the coat's buttons are shanked through to the inside of the coat

and fastened in place with a heavy, waxed, dark blue cord or thread. This

excludes the lapel buttons, which are sewn to the front body of the coat, and to

support them, a layer of buckram was sewn along the center front edge of the

coat, extending back about five inches to serve as a button stand. Horizontal

pocket flaps are set at waist level on the front panels of the coat, divided by

loops of 1/4-inch-wide, gold vellum lace. The pocket flaps are oblong in shape,

edged with 1/2-inch-wide, metallic gold vellum lace. Below the flaps are 4 7/8-

inch-diameter, United States Navy buttons. While the pocket flaps are not sewn

down, there is no pocket bag in the shell of the coat (making them false

pockets). Instead, a pocket bag is set into the top of the side pleat of the skirts.

The pocket bag is a dark brown, glazed linen fabric. On the back of the coat, a

hole in the back collar reveals that the collar is also stiffened and padded with

an indigo blue, coarse, plain-woven (tabby) wool interfacing. Most wool

interfacing in American coats from 1820s onward is a pinkish-red color (right up

through the Civil War). The back of the coat is cut narrow, at both the shoulders

and the waist. Each back panel at the waist is 1 1/2 inches wide. The skirts of the

coats are comparatively long, extending 22 inches from the waist. This is typical

of Navy and Marine officer's coats from the War of 1812 period. The front skirt

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of the coat folds back into two pleats, which are fastened to the rear skirt panel by means of two 7/8-inch-diameter, gilt Navy buttons placed midway along the length of the pleat, and a single 7/8-inch-diameter, gilt Navy button placed near the bottom of the pleat. The lowermost buttons are fastened to the coat by means of a self-fabric strip of the wool broadcloth sewn through the eyelet of the button and sewn down. The front skirt pleat is edged with a strip of 1/2-inch-wide, metallic gold vellum lace, of a slightly different pattern than that found on the rest of the coat (this has two side ribs, rather than one center rib). The skirt pleat lace is of slightly lower quality. The back waist of the coat is defined by a strip of 1/2-inch-wide, metallic gold vellum lace which extends from the rear corners of each pocket flap across the back of the coat, forming the bottom edge of three triangles of 1/2-inch-wide gold lace, one at the top of each side pleat and one at the center back seam. Each triangle is 1 3/4 inches high. There is a large, gilt, Navy button in the center of the two triangles at the top of each side pleat. The epaulets are consistent with 1802 Navy regulations for a captain. They consist of a gold lace strap, edged with two types of gold boullion. The outer edge of the strap has gold boullion and gold sequins arranged in a crescent. The crescent is edged with gold boullion loops. In the middle of each epaulet strap is a pair of crossed, silver-embroidered anchors. At the shoulder end of each epaulet are two rows of gold boullion fringe; the fringe on the lower layer is 1/4 inch in diameter, and the outer layer is 1/2 inch diameter. The epaulets are lined in yellow silk satin and stiffened with a piece of steele on the underside of the gold lace strap. The shoulder edge of the underside has a gold, silk satin bolster

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where it goes over the shoulder. The bolster is padded one inch thick. The

epaulets fasten to the coat by a blue wool strap attached to the underside,

which fastens through a strip of 1/2-inch-wide, metallic gold vellum lace sewn to

the shoulder of the coat. The neck edge of the strap terminates in a rounded

point and is attached to the coat through two eyelets sewn at the base of the

collar and held in place by a small, 5/8-inch-diameter United States Navy button

on a cotton tape, which threads through the eyelets and is fastened inside the

coat. These small buttons appear to be a slightly later pattern than those on the

rest of the coat and are more consistent with 1815-1820; they may be

replacements. Each epaulet has paper label on the underside (see Marks).

Dimensions Primary Dimensions (center back length x width across shoulders):

41 3/4 x 13 1/2 in. (106 x 34.3 cm) Other (sleeve length): 26 in. (66 cm) Other (chest

circumference x front length): 36 1/2 x 18 in. (92.7 x 45.7 cm) Storage (height x

width x depth of archival box): 6 3/8 x 39 7/8 x 18 in. (16.2 x 101.3 x 45.7 cm)