

# GIVE THE JOBS A BREAK!



*By Joseph B. Breed*

ALTHOUGH THE UNITED STATES NOW has the greatest navy in the world, the long-suffering American sailor still wears a uniform that wouldn't pass muster in the bumboat fleet of a banana republic. That isn't just rhetorical; it is literally true. During World War II, the U. S. gob became a favorite target of his own country's cartoonists. The inadequacy of his uniform kept him from social acceptance by headwaiters who wouldn't bat an eye at a Marine or a buck private. Even when he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the bluejacket had to appear in a "dress" uniform that left a large measure of his undershirt exposed.

In the years since the war, the U. S. Navy has replaced Britannia as ruler of the waves, but the American sailor is still forced to dress like a cafeteria busboy, in cheap cotton cap and undershirt. A man who may wear half a dozen battle stars deserves something better. The plainness and discomfort of the oversnug, underpocketed attire have long since led most gobs to make certain adaptations of their own — when on liberty. But still the Navy does nothing about it.

Why? As the taxpayer might suspect, Uncle Sam pays considerably more to clothe his sailors than does any other government, and the quality of the uniform is undoubtedly the best — of its kind. As anyone who knows the Navy might suspect, the reason given for not changing the uniform is "tradition." Inherent in this, the Brass usually goes on to explain, is the fact that at least some uniform items acquired their sentimental value only after their practical value had clearly made them indispensable. The sailor's ragged, shapeless canvas cap, for example, is said to be far superior to any other type of headgear as an emergency bailing bucket! But the Navy doesn't push the practical argument too far. Tradition is tradition, and that is that.

This has usually been enough to quiet the occasional curious taxpayer; yet the records show that most of the uniform's objectionable features are a *departure* from tradition. Pictures of the "wooden ships and iron men" era show the Yankee sailors in the tarred sennits which gave the modern civilian "sailor" hat its name. And where the modern gob wears nothing but undershirt

between his neckerchief and his skin, the "iron men" in the lithographs wore striped jerseys that look as though they were *intended* to show.

AS THINGS STAND NOW, the American sailor can't help looking sloppy. His cheap cotton cap has no lining, no ornamentation, no sweatband, no crown ring, and consequently no shape. An attempt at the latter is made unofficially by most sailors, through a folding and pressing process designed to give a "salty" touch but usually resulting in a look of hopeless improvisation.

His jumper, much tighter-fitting than the loose blouse of the Old Navy, retains the traditional and seamanlike square collar across the shoulders. But, whereas the Navy doesn't seem to care what the individual sailor does with his cap, it insists that this collar be creased thrice into four vertical scallops. And so it looks like any other flatwork that went through the wringer the wrong way.

The jumper's only pocket, inside or out, is a small one over the left breast. And since this is the only place where the sailor can carry his pack of cigarettes, a blue revenue stamp on a rectangle of tin foil generally appears among his campaign ribbons. If the man is given to habitual hairdressing, his comb emerges alongside.

While most sailors grumble about

the discomfort of the jumper, the dudes among them, reckless in their desperation, make a bad matter worse by saving their money for "tailormades," custom-built jumpers that are so tight they require a zipper down the side. But almost every sailor, tailormade or government-issue, sacrifices looks for comfort at his wrists. Almost invariably, the sailor on shore leave unbuttons his tight cuffs and folds them back. The practice is so common that enterprising outfitters now sell brightly-colored patches, embroidered with dragons and like designs, to mask the ugly inside of the turned-back cuff.

The V-neck of the jumper can be only partly closed by the sailor's silk neckerchief (variously explained as a collar shield against the tarred pigtailed of the Old Navy, and as an imitation of the black kerchief British seamen adopted on the death of Lord Nelson). But this serves only to make the anything-but-dressy undershirt it fails to conceal all the more incongruous.

The sailor's trousers are more seamanlike and traditional. The bell bottoms have been narrowed, however, and the hips are probably snugger than any the iron men of the wooden ships ever suffered. Also, sailors' trousers carried real pockets once upon a time. Your modern gob hasn't even got room for his wallet, which he must wear straddled across his waist seam. It's an easy mark for pickpockets.

**B**UT IT IS THE CHEAP CAP and the exposed undershirt that represent the real and terrible difference between the seamanlike uniforms of other navies and the makeshift monkey suits our sailors wear. And it would cost little or nothing to correct this situation. Curiously, our sailors are somewhat better dressed in cold weather than in hot. (Indeed, "tradition-minded" Annapolis discarded the sailor's summer dress uniform altogether in the years between the two world wars.) Our men are issued a perfectly respectable blue winter-uniform cap, which, however, they are usually not allowed to wear except in really cold weather. By the simple process of making the blue cap cover replaceable and furnishing one or two white covers, as other navies do, "the greatest fleet in the world" could at least distinguish its men's summer headgear from that of busboys and soda jerks.

As for the undershirt, surely it wouldn't cost much to cover it with a bib, as the English Navy does, or to replace it with a sailor's striped jersey, as the French, Dutch, Norwegian, Japanese, Russian, and other navies do. But the improvement would be worth *any* cost.

A few other simple and inexpensive uniform changes would help the bluejacket's appearance and morale a great deal. He has a cold-weather pea jacket that looks essentially seamanlike, but it lacks the

brass buttons the sailors of other fleets wear. It lacks also the eagle-crested petty officer's badge which is the only distinguished uniform item in the U. S. Navy. If a man is entitled to the eagle and chevrons — or service ribbons too, for that matter — why not let him wear them on his pea jacket?

These recommendations all represent a return to, and not a departure from, the tradition of our own Navy and the universal seafaring tradition still respected by virtually all navies save our own. It's not tradition that keeps the Navy from giving its seamen attractive or even adequate uniforms. It's not a lack of shipboard clothing-locker space, as is sometimes suggested and easily countered (every other navy does a decent job). And it isn't a lack of money. Possibly it is the brass-bound pride of socially ambitious Annapolis that keeps the humble seaman's uniform so painfully distinct from the officer's, while the uniform gulf between officers and enlisted men in the other services — Army, Air Force, and Marines — has all but disappeared.

But whatever the real reason for the poor sailor's uniform, something should certainly be done about it, to give the seagoing fighting man the respect, comfort, and efficiency he deserves. If the Navy insists on maintaining the gulf between officers and men, it could still do so without dressing its men like dishwashers.

# ASIAN WARS

## *Need* ASIAN SOLDIERS

By GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

NO WESTERN ARMY has ever fought a successful war in Asia without using Asian soldiers. This was true in the time of Alexander the Great, 2,300 years ago, and it is true today in Korea.

The reason is simple: More than half the world's people live in Asia. Wherever a Western army has come into Asia, it has found itself opposed by vastly superior numbers. Always it has sought to overcome this numerical superiority by superior techniques and superior armament. This works all right at first; but after a while numbers begin to tell. However superior the Western techniques and armaments may be, they still require *some* soldiers on the battlefield. The Asians keep on throwing in the bodies, regardless of losses. The Western force cannot replace its losses from the original source; its manpower supply is not inexhaustible.

The inevitable result has always been that the Western force has had to make up for a shortage of

Western bodies by using Asian bodies — by hiring or inducing Asians to fight Asians.

In the end, you get the result described by Sir Colin Campbell, who was Britain's commander-in-chief in India a century ago: "You can't use a spearhead without a shaft; you can't kill anybody with a shaft that has no point on it. You need both and you need them in combination. In this country, your European troops are your steel spearhead; your native troops are the shaft. Separately they are useless. Together they are formidable."

This has always been so.

Alexander conquered vast regions of Asia by his invincible combination of the solid infantry phalanx, sixteen files deep, and mobile wings of heavy cavalry to deliver the decisive blow when the enemy assaults had broken against the phalanx. In his first campaigns, the phalanx was a solid mass of Macedonians — the boys from home. After ten years' fighting in Asia,