

Notes for Soldiers – M203 Weapon Painting 101

Presented here are the official Project Manager Soldier Weapons' instructions for those Soldiers who have the green light to dress out their M203 with paint to reduce its visual signature on the battlefield.

Before painting your weapon, it's important that you keep several things in mind. First and foremost is to ensure that you have proper authorization from your superior to paint the weapon. Second, remember that the weapon needs to be stripped of all paint and properly cleaned before it is returned. Third, make sure the weapon is cleared before starting the painting process.

Lastly, have a plan for how you want your camouflage to look. Painting a weapon is not about personalization, but increasing its tactical capabilities without impairing its ability to function.

Step One: Gather the materials

- Chemical gloves
- Paper towels and clean rags
- Masking tape
- Clean spray bottle
- Chemical apron
- Protective eyewear
- Newspaper
- Dry cleaning solvent
- Spray Paint – Available through GSA (www.gsaadvantage.gov)
 - Black (1916830)
 - Khaki (1917830)
 - Earth Brown (1918830)
 - Deep Forest Green (1919830)
 - Army Green (1920830)

Step Two: Clean it up

For your camo job to really stick, you have to ensure that all the dirt, grime, and oil are removed from the weapon. The M203 must be in the standalone configuration and not mounted to the M4/M16. Begin by removing any attached items (i.e. quick release bracket and adapter rail) from the weapon and set aside. These components will not be painted and will not be put back on until the paint job is complete.

The trick to effectively cleaning your weapon is the dry cleaning fluid. **It's important to follow hazmat rules accordingly, as dry cleaning fluid is flammable and toxic.** TACOM instructs you to put on your protective gear and clean the down weapon twice with dry cleaning fluid. This ensures any oils that may not have been visible are completely removed from the weapon. Be sure to capture any dry cleaning fluid in a bucket or solvent tank in your work area. It's important to follow hazmat rules accordingly, as dry cleaning fluid is flammable and toxic.

Step Three: Tape it Up

As with any task, so much of success depends on good preparation. If you do not properly protect the weapon from paint, you can negatively impact its performance. As a general approach, TACOM recommends that you start masking at the rear of the weapon and move forward from top to bottom.



Tape by Numbers:

1. Mask the trigger well area including the safety.
2. Tape or plug the end of the barrel.
3. All openings must be taped so paint does not get inside the weapon.



4. Mask off all the markings, including: IUID label, serial number, cage code, model designator, and selector switch position markings.
5. Mask all moving parts: safety selector and safety detent.
6. Mask off the area where the M203 mounts to the M4/M16.





A laundry list of taping? Yes. But, every step is necessary to ensure the function or identification of the weapon is not compromised. If your weapon has a component, sight, or accessory that was not covered in this procedure, use common sense to properly mask it.

Step Four: Paint it

Some important points before you start to paint your weapon:

- Start with a plan.
- Ensure you have proper ventilation.

Remember, “pretty” is not the objective of good camouflage. The goal is to break up the visual signature of the weapon system by blending your weapon in with your environment and uniform. If your operating environment has just light sand, then just paint your weapon tan with limited black breakup. If you are operating in a woodland environment, brown and olive drab with limited black breakup may be appropriate.

Spray thin coats with a light touch. Let the coats dry between applications. Test the cans on paper first to get a feel for how much pressure to apply for a particular flow rate.

Looking for a template? Look to your local environment. One option is to layer local foliage or grasses on the weapon and paint around them to leave a natural-looking pattern.

To blend colors effectively, first coat the weapon with the lightest color you will be using. Next take a darker shade that blends with your environment and paint stripes about four inches apart at a 45 degree angle. You can do this with one or two colors. Next, you need to blend it in. Take a dark color like green or brown and from about six to eight inches away from the weapon lightly dust the gun. After that, take a lighter color (khaki, or tan) and lightly dust the gun. This will blend everything together and dull the finish. Your color palette will depend on the operational environment.

When weapon is completely dry, remove all products used during masking and lubricate weapon in accordance with TM 9-1010-221-10 AUG 2001. If you lube painted surfaces the paint will deteriorate. Wear spots or scratches can be touched up without completely stripping the weapon.

Make sure to function the weapon after the paint has dried. Ensure that all parts move, work properly and are not stuck due to paint. If paint has caused a part to stick, please follow the paint removal directions to remove the paint around the affected area.

Step 5: Restoring the Weapon

The Maintenance Instruction clearly states “Weapons that are being turned in or transferred must have all paint stripped.” You may also want to remove the paint if you decide to change the camouflage scheme. Two complete coatings are authorized before stripping is required. For this exercise, put on your protective gear and grab bottles of dry cleaning solvent and CLP: “Cleaner, Lubricant, and Preservative.”

Disassemble the weapon and remove any non-painted attached items. Thoroughly spray exterior surfaces of upper/lower receivers and handguards with CLP. For best results, wait 60 minutes to allow CLP to react with painted surfaces. Use the general purpose brush to clean all exterior painted surfaces. If paint still remains on surface of weapon, apply another coat of CLP and wait. CLP may be left on painted surface for longer than 60 minutes if needed. Once paint is fully removed, clean weapon with dry cleaning fluid, reassemble and lubricate.

For more information on weapons painting, refer to TACOM CLMC MI 10-040 on the Army Electronic Product Support (AEPS) website. You can also contact your local TACOM LCMC Logistics Assistance Representative (LAR) or your State Surface Maintenance Manager for assistance.

There is no doubt that weapons painting is about to be elevated to a fine art. Anyone who has spent time in theater knows that some units haven’t waited for a formal policy to allow troopers to camouflage their weapons with paint. Some of the results have been impressive, while some results have been mixed. The bottom line, however, is that it’s more important that a weapon be functional, than “invisible.” Before you break out the spray paint, be sure to protect your weapon so that your weapon continues to protect you.