

Trousers, Pants or Overalls?

by Gene Hickman

Researching what we regard as trousers can be confusing, both in modern and period literature. Some authors say 'pants' or 'pantaloon' 'trousers' and often 'leggings.' Trousers, pants, and leggings, if interpreted more strictly than they were probably intended, mean three different things. Trousers are what we wear today; pants or pantaloons had straps that passed under the wearer's insteps [and were tight legged]; leggings were just the legs alone, worn with...or without...a breechclout (Rickman, date unknown).

There were four different issue "pants" for the military on the expedition. For fatigue duties the men were issued plain, loose-fitting, narrow fall, coarse white linen trousers. The regular Army men ...In the summer, [wore] linen overalls with blue edging along the outseams ...and...In the winter, white wool overalls with blue edging along the outseams... The recruits were issued blue woolen overalls edged along the outseam in white. These were drawn from quartermaster stocks and had previously been issued to troops for wearing in winter but were currently non-regulation (Allie, 2001). The regular army members were issued 5 pairs of pants per year. There were a lot of changes and variations in the overalls and trousers found in the documents in the 1800-1803 period. The linen dress pants can be found as both trousers and overalls (Moore 2003b), which may indicate that there were mixed contracts for both and/or this is the transitional period from overalls to trousers.

The linen overalls for summer wear were worn underneath the gaiters. They were to be cut to reach only to the top of the shoe, and the part below the calf of the leg left unfinished, that they might be fitted to each man at the respective posts (Secretary of War 1802).