

ARMOR

Introduction

Armor can be made of wood, leather, horn, chain mail, or metal plate. Although the term “armor” brings visions of medieval knights, armor is still in use today. Men in VietNam wore armor flack vests made of metal plate and canvas. The modern soldier’s helmet is a form of armor. Armor chest plates were worn by American sappers and miners during the American Revolution and the Civil War.

Armor must be treated with care as it is difficult to handle. If it is heavy or awkward, be sure to have help. If dropped, it can be damaged as well as do damage. The following rules should be followed when working with armor. For additional information, check the sections on metal, wood, leather, etc.

General Care

1. Armor that is heavy or clumsy should be handled by more than one person. If a piece has leather straps, treat the leather carefully as it may be quite dry and brittle. Never carry the piece by its harness. When placing it on the work table, be sure the straps are not folded under and being crushed by the piece.
2. Be sure that the work table is clean, strong, and well padded to prevent scratching.
3. It is wise to handle armor with gloves as many pieces have sharp edges and sharp points projecting. Gloves will also prevent perspiration from rusting the piece.
4. Examine armor carefully for markings and for damages.
5. If any of the leather on a piece is damaged and dry, make a careful sketch of it. How a harness on a piece of armor holds it together is important information and should be written down before the harness is lost through decay or carelessness.
6. Armor should not be cleaned or repaired by anyone other than a conservator appointed by the Division Staff.
7. Armor may be given a careful dusting with a soft-bristle brush or a vacuum with a soft brush attachment. A cloth should not be used as it can scratch by rubbing the dirt and particles into the piece.
8. Armor that has been painted must be treated like a painting and should only be treated by an

expert.

9. Never under any circumstances use a wire wheel or a buffing wheel on armor. This can destroy the value of a piece. If you feel a piece needs cleaning call in an approved conservator.

10. Armor should be stored at a relative humidity level of about 50%.

11. Metal armor in good condition can be waxed with a neutral shoe polish before being stored. Generally, it is not a good idea to oil pieces since the oil will turn gummy and sticky.

12. Armor suits for men or horses should be stored on specially constructed manikins designed individually for each suit. The suits should then be covered with muslin to keep out dust and dirt.

13. Accessories such as helmets may be stored on padded wooden shelves and covered with muslin.

14. Objects that are extremely fragile should be stored in cabinets or specially constructed plywood boxes lined with felt.

15. Chain mail should always be stored on a manikin. Never pile it up or lay it flat since the individual links may bend or break. It should be covered with muslin to keep it clean.

16. For additional information on care, see sections on leather, metal, etc.