

Levels of authenticity – setting the standard and the goal:

In reenacting and living history, there is much debate about “authenticity” – what it is, how to achieve it and how to measure it. I would like to propose a standard of measurement that I believe can apply to any impression or unit across the board, and will help members improve their impression over time. For the sake of a common knowledge, I propose to use what I call the “gold standard” of authenticity.

Most of us are familiar with how gold is graded for sale. There is 10k, which is sold gold alloyed with other metals for hardness, and is used where the wear is important and cost control is needed. 14k is a better quality with more elemental gold and less alloy. Cost is up, wear is down slightly. 18k is the high end of jewelry gold. It is softer, with even more elemental gold, but wears quickly and is considered fragile. Pure gold is 99%+ pure, and too soft and fragile for most applications. Below these standards are gold alloys not found in jewelry, or gold-like materials – gold filled (meaning a covering of 10k gold over some other metal so it looks like gold) and gold washed (meaning the coating is not thick enough to really cover everything)

In reenacting and living history, just like in jewelry making, the goal is to look like pure (24k) gold, with compromises for originality (gold content), cost, wear-ability and availability. While a 10k piece may look the same from a distance, up close there is a value in the 18k item. It is up to the individual unit to define what these standards are, and what the minimally acceptable standard should be for their unit. The following is how I would propose they be identified and measured.

- 10k Minimally acceptable standard
- 14k Preferred quality standard
- 18k High quality standard
- 24k .999 pure Collector or museum grade

10k Grooming to WWII military standards, including hair, beards, jewelry, tattoos.

Clothing and gear may be 100% reproduction from vendors approved by the unit, or original items in less than perfect condition. “Combat serviceable” would be a good way to describe this level. It may make allowances for modern materials or construction methods, or the use of post-war items that appear identical to the original in color and style, but may vary in weight, material or construction, (French 2 buckle boots, etc) other areas distinguishable from distances not greater than 5’ away.

Weapons are of a WWII pattern in style and type, with variation in date produced, caliber, markings or other areas distinguishable from distances not greater than 5’ away. Propane-fired weapons are allowed at this level. Blank-firing only non guns may be acceptable only after inspection.

Female re-enactors may reenact as males at this level if they can appear and pass inspection as a male soldier from distances not greater than 5' away.

- 14k Grooming to WWII military standards, including hair, beards, jewelry, tattoos.

Clothing may be 100% high-quality reproduction and gear may be 50% reproduction from vendors approved by the unit, or original items in good condition. "Combat ready" would be a good way to describe this level. It may make allowances for modern materials or construction methods, or the use of post-war items that appear identical to the original in color and style, but may vary in weight, material or construction, other areas distinguishable from distances not greater than 2' away.

Weapons are of a WWII pattern in style and type, with variation in date produced, caliber, markings or other areas distinguishable from distances not greater than 5' away. Blank-firing only non-guns may be allowed at this level after inspection, if materials, weight and construction are indistinguishable from originals from distances not greater than 5' away.

Female re-enactors may not reenact as males at this level.

- 18k Grooming to WWII military standards, including hair, beards, jewelry, tattoos, with emphasis on distinctive WWII hair styles, moustaches and tatoos.

Clothing may be 100% reproduction or 100% original and gear should be less than 25% reproduction from vendors approved by the unit, or original items in close to perfect condition. This level is at or approaching "museum quality" in it's appearance, and should satisfy most any visual inspection at any distance. It may make few allowances for modern materials or construction methods, with undergarments of a type similar to original patterns. This is where the "stitch-nazi" usually resides.

Weapons are of a WWII pattern in style and type, with no variation in date produced, caliber, markings or other areas distinguishable on close examination. Only blank-adapted original weapons of the correct date and caliber are accepted.

Female re-enactors may not reenact as males at this level.

- 24k Grooming to WWII military standards, including hair, beards, jewelry, tattoos, with emphasis on distinctive WWII hair styles, moustaches and the like. Age and physical conditioning are correct for the time and role.

Clothing will be 100% original and gear be 100% original in close to "as issued" condition. "Museum quality" would be a good way to describe this level. It makes NO allowances for modern materials, as all items are absolutely original and correct. Pocket contents, materials dating, patterns and styles are absolutely

correct and documentable for the unit and time portrayed. Identity documents appear correct for the role, unit and time. Uniform parts are properly matched and assembled per the regulation manuals. Repairs are period originals, or indistinguishable from period originals. Undergarments are correct and original.

Weapons are of a WWII pattern in style and type, with no variation in date produced, caliber or any other feature.

Female re-enactors may not reenact as males at this level.

Inspections are done at events at several different levels, depending on the goals at the event. Most inspections will be visual, conducted from a distance of not further than 5' away, and will look for visual clues for unacceptable items. Uniforms and equipment should be consistent with items known to be used at the time and place in question, by the unit portrayed. If in doubt, a friendly and non-confrontational discussion should ensue with the inspector, unit commander and potential violator involved.

The goal of improving the impression is an ongoing process. While the use of loaner equipment may offset the initial cost of needed items, most entry level members should plan to accumulate their basic uniform and gear within their first year of participation. As better quality items are found, or original gear substituted for reproductions, the level of the impression should gradually rise towards the hypothetical goal of 24k.

Because of the increasing value of original uniforms and equipment, it is discouraged that battle reenactments take place with 18k items, unless it is quality reproduction. Public presentations may be done at all levels, but the higher quality uniforms withstand public scrutiny better than do lesser quality reproductions.

In general terms, these reproduction vendors produce material at the following level:

US GI

- ◆ What Price Glory (14k to 18k)
- ◆ WWII Impressions (14k to 18k)
- ◆ most HK vendors (10k)
- ◆ Sturm (10k to 14k)
- ◆ Sportsmans Guide (10k)
- ◆

GERMAN

- ◆ Lost Battalions
- ◆