

The A-2: King of the Cockpit

A blank canvas for stunning wartime folk art, the A-2 has gone down in history as one of America's true airborne aces.



A-2 Pilot Jacket

Though it may be tinged with nostalgia, the combat-ready A-2 is as imperishable and commanding today as when it first appeared. It refuses to fade away. World War II prompted the military to outfit its fighting personnel in highly functional, durable, and well-proportioned outerwear. Understanding the power of an elegant uniform to bolster pride and self-confidence, designers were also aware of an increasingly image-conscious

public that could be enticed, through pictures of smartly-dressed soldiers, to drive up enlistment. One of the most memorable, as well as sturdy garments they produced was the A-2.

When the American military began working on leather jackets for their flight crews in World War I, the Red Baron and other German aces were menacing the skies. In addition to training expert pilots, the German military had outfitted them in thigh-length, double-breasted, belted leather jackets, giving them an edge in



Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape* (1963): Airforce Captain Virgil "Cooler King" Hiltz raises his arms, flashing the satin lining of his A-2. The red lining is significant. Only aces were allowed to upgrade their jackets, which came with a standard brown lining, to the red satin. The right would be granted only after the pilot had five confirmed aerial kills on his record.