

Feature



WW II U.S. Army Officers' Insignias Byron Connell

Some of our greatest heroes were the men and women who served during WWII. Insignias helped identify not only their rank, but also their role and qualifications. This guide will help you accurately recreate that important aspect of uniforms worn by U.S. Army officers.

One of my interests is in WWII military dress. Insignias are an important element of uniforms. They are used extensively, beyond what most people notice. This article discusses the use of insignias on U.S. Army officer uniforms during this period.

Two types of insignia were worn on U.S. Army uniforms: insignia of rank and organizational insignia. I'll discuss each type, what they were made of, how they were worn, and show illustrations to help you identify them

Insignia of Rank

Generally, rank insignia were made in metal and attached with "screw backs or similar attachments so that they will be held closely without turning or flopping."

However, rank insignia on shoulder straps could be embroidered rather than metal.

All officers (both commissioned and warrant) wore the letters, "U.S." in gold-colored metal, 7/16 inch high, centered on both ends of the collar



above the lapels of the service coat, Ike jacket, flight jacket, and summer coat. Until August 25, 1942, the letters also were worn on the right collar point in Class B or Class C uniform. Note that periods were used.

Commissioned Officers

On the service cap, all commissioned officers wore a large gold-colored metal U.S. Coat of Arms, about 75 millimeters tall by 65 wide: an eagle with spread wings,



with a shield on its chest. The shield's upper quarter has several horizontal lines; the lower three-quarters have 13 vertical stripes. The eagle holds 13 arrows in its left talon and a 13-leaf sprig of laurel in its right. The eagle's head is turned to the right and in its beak it carries a banner that spreads above the wings with the words "E Pluribus" on the right and "Unum" on the left. A 13-star glory surrounded by a circular wreath of clouds is above the eagle's head.

Commissioned officers' individual ranks were shown by insignia on the shoulder straps of the service coat, the Ike jacket, the flight jacket, the summer coat, and, for officers below the rank of Brigadier General, until August 25, 1942, the shirt in Class B or Class C uniforms. On that date, rank insignia were added to the right point of the shirt collar in Class B or Class C uniforms, replacing the "U.S." In Class B or Class C uniforms, general officers wore their rank insignia on both collar points.

In all cases, silver insignia indicate a superior rank to gold insignia.

The same December 19, 1944 Act of Congress that created the five-star rank of General of the Army promoted four generals to the rank: Henry H. Arnold, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, and George C. Marshall. They were the only five-star generals during the War.

WWII U.S. Army Commissioned Officer Insignia Shoulder Straps

Second Lieutenant



One gold bar 3/8 inch wide and 1 inch long, worn perpendicular to the shoulder straps.

Brigadier General



One silver five-pointed star 1 inch in diameter, worn point up.

First Lieutenant



One silver bar 3/8 inch wide by 1 inch long, worn perpendicular to the shoulder straps.

Major General



Two silver five-pointed stars in a row, each 1 inch in diameter, worn point up.

Captain



Two silver bars each 3/8 inch wide by 1 inch long, 3/4 inch apart, joined to one another at the top and bottom by thin silver straps, worn with the bars perpendicular to the shoulder straps.

Lieutenant General



Three silver five-pointed stars in a row, each 1 inch in diameter, worn point up.

Major



One gold seven-pointed oak leaf 1 inch high by 1 inch across worn with the stem facing the shoulder.

General



Four silver five-pointed stars in a row, each 1 inch in diameter, worn point up.

Lieutenant Colonel



One silver seven-pointed oak leaf 1 inch high by 1 inch across worn with the stem facing the shoulder.

General of the Army
(established by an Act of Congress, December 14, 1944)



Five silver five-pointed stars arranged in a pentagon about two inches across, with each star facing point up and the five touching one another. The shoulder straps also displayed at the center the same coat of arms carried on the service cap, about the same size as the pentagon.

Colonel



One silver spread eagle 3/4 inch high by 1 1/2 inches between tips of wings, worn in pairs on the shoulder straps so that the head faces the front, with the wings farthest from the shoulder.

Warrant Officers

On the service cap, warrant officers wore a gold eagle seated on two horizontal arrows, points facing right, and a laurel wreath that curves up to the top of the wings on each side and overlaps the wings.



Warrant officers' individual ranks were also shown by insignia on the shoulder straps of the service coat, the Ike jacket, the flight jacket, and the summer coat, and, until August 25, 1942, on the shoulder straps of the shirt in Class B or Class C uniform. On that date, rank insignia were moved to the right point of the shirt collar in Class B or Class C uniforms.

Warrant officers of the Army's Mine Planter Service wore different rank insignia that are not described here.

Organizational Insignia

All officers displayed insignia showing their organizational assignments within the Army. These included Arm or Service insignia for officers below Brigadier General and unit insignia for all officers.

WWII U.S. Army Warrant Officer Insignia Shoulder Straps

Warrant Officer, Junior
Grade



One gold bar, 3/8 inch wide by 1 inch long, with rounded ends, filled with Insignia Red enamel except for a 1/8 inch wide horizontal gold stripe at the center. On September 4, 1942, the enamel was changed to brown.

Flight Officer (Army Air Force only, from 1942 only)



One gold bar, 3/8 inch wide by 1 inch long, with rounded ends, filled with Insignia Blue enamel except for a 1/8 inch wide horizontal gold stripe at the center.

Chief Warrant Officer



One gold bar 3/8 inch wide by 1 inch long, with rounded ends, filled with Insignia Red enamel except for a 1/8 inch longitudinal vertical gold stripe at the center. On September 4, 1942, the enamel was changed to brown.

Arm or Service Insignia

General officers were not assigned to a specific arm or service and therefore usually did not wear arm or service insignia. All other officers wore such insignia on both lapels of the service coat, Ike jacket, flight jacket, and summer coat and on the left shirt collar point in Class B or Class C uniform.

Unless otherwise specified, all insignia were in gold colored metal. In all cases of

enameled insignia, red means Insignia Red, blue means Insignia Blue, and white means Insignia White. In each case of crossed items, when viewed from the front the item pointing from lower right to upper left is in front of the one pointing the other way.

Insignia of Arms could include the number of the unit in which the officer served; however, this was not universal.

WWII U.S. Army Service Insignia

General Staff



Arms of the United States, with the top quarter of the shield enameled in blue, surmounting a white star

Adjutant General Corps



Shield with three upper points, with dark blue enameled upper quarter with 13 white stars arranged as one large star centered with one small star to each side, followed by a vertical row of two small stars on each side, followed by a vertical row of three small stars on each side. The bottom three-quarters has 13 vertical red and white stripes (seven white and six red).

Band



Lyre with US surmounted

Chaplains Corps



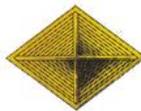
Christian Chaplains: Plain silver Latin cross. Jewish Chaplains: Silver double tables with a Star of David atop

Chemical Warfare Corps



Blue enameled benzene ring in front of crossed retorts

Finance Department



Equal-sided diamond, worn point up, with an equal-armed cross inside extending to each of the points



Lt. Gen. John E. Hull. Chief of the Operations, Division, 21 Oct. 1944 to 2 Sept. 1945. As this photo indicates, while general officers assigned to the General Staff did not wear arm or service insignia, they sometimes did wear their General Staff insignia. In addition, general officers who came from the Medical Corps often continued to wear Medical Corps insignia to indicate their special status.

WWII U.S. Army Service Insignia (cont'd)

Inspector General's Staff



Crossed swords and fasces with a wreath in front

Quartermaster Corps



Eagle atop a blue enamel wheel with crossed sword and key in front

Judge Advocate General's Corps



Crossed sword and pen in front of an open-topped wreath

Special Service Corps



Two crossed arrows, point up

Medical Corps



Caduceus (two serpents wrapped around a staff topped by spread wings and a knob). Different branches were identified by a capital letter in maroon enamel outlined in gold surmounting the badge: A = Medical Administrator, C = Contract Surgeon, D = Dentist, H over D = Hospital Dietician, N = Nurse, P = Pharmacist, P over T = Physical Therapist, S = Sanitarian, V = Veterinarian, No Letter = Physician.

Transportation Corps



Winged wheel on a shield on a ship's eight-handled wheel

U.S. Military Academy Permanent Faculty



USMA Coat of Arms

Military Intelligence



Sphinx within a circle within an eared shield

Aides de Camp to General Officers



Eagle clutching a shield with one to four white stars in a straight line in a blue top quarter and 13 vertical red and white stripes (seven white and six red) in the bottom three-quarters. From December 1944, the shield for a General of the Army's aides had a five-star pentagon in its center, against a blue background.

Military Police



Crossed flintlock pistols

National Guard Bureau



Crossed fasces on the chest of an eagle

Warrant Officers



Eagle on two horizontal arrows within a laurel wreath (like the service cap insignia). This was worn by all warrant officers without regard to Arm or Service, except Army Air Force Flight Officers, who wore the same winged propeller as commissioned officers.

Ordnance Department



Round shell with a four-level flame at top

WWII U.S. Army Arms Insignia

Army Air Force



Two horizontal wings, 1¼ inches across with a ¾ inch silver two-bladed vertical propeller at center. For wear on the shirt collar, the dimensions were ¾ inch by ½ inch.

Armored Force



Mark VIII Tank (World War I period lozenge-shaped tank)

Coast Artillery



Crossed cannon barrels with a projectile, point up, in a red oval within a gold surround

Field Artillery



Crossed cannon barrels

Cavalry



Crossed sabres

Corps of Engineers



Front of a castle with a tower at each side

Infantry



Crossed flintlock rifles

Signal Corps



Crossed square signal flags on pike-headed staffs in front of a flaming torch. The flag to the right in white enamel with a red square in the center, the flag to the left in red with a white square in the center.

Tank Destroyer Force



M3 self-propelled gun (on half-tracked truck)

Unit Insignia

All officers displayed badges identifying their assigned units (e.g. army, corps, division, regiment).

Regimental Badge

On the shoulder straps of the service coat, Ike jacket, flight jacket, and summer coat, officers assigned to regiments, or Army Air Force equivalent units, wore the regiment's badge in metal, usually enameled, about 1 inch high. The badge was centered on the shoulder strap. Their production was discontinued in 1942 to conserve materials. Officers not assigned to regiments did not have such badges. Their details are beyond the scope of this article.

Shoulder Patch

All officers wore a cloth patch ½ inch below the left shoulder seam of the service coat, Ike jacket, flight jacket, summer coat, field jacket, shirt (in Class B or Class C uniforms) and, after April 3, 1943, the overcoat, to identify the smallest

About Designs and Images

The designs of the U.S. Army insignia and badges were created by the United States Government, and are in the public domain. The images used in this article were compiled from government and military sources, including those listed in the bibliography.

organization to which his immediate unit belonged. Most often this was a division; however, it could be a higher organizational element (e.g., an officer whose unit is part of a corps headquarters would display the corps patch). Organizational changes resulted in breaking up some units while establishing others, so it is difficult to even list Army divisions, except at specific points of time.

While there was no standard shape, size, or color, most cavalry patches had a yellow background (the cavalry's distinctive color). Most armored division patches were triangular, point up. Most Army Air Force patches were circular, about 2½ inches across, favored the Air Force's colors of ultramarine blue and orange, plus red, white, and blue, and included somewhere a white five-pointed star with a red circular center.

Until 1943, the Army Air Force had only one authorized shoulder patch. Initially, it was circular, about 2½ inches in diameter, with an ultramarine blue trefoil curving to the left (as if a spinning propeller) on an orange background. On March 21, 1942, it was replaced by a circular one in the same size, showing the white star and red center with gold wings to either side on an ultramarine blue background (above, right). Beginning in 1943, separate patches for different commands were authorized.

On the right shoulder, ½ inch below the shoulder seam, an officer was authorized to wear the patch of a former unit with which he served in combat.



Shoulder patch on Major officer's tunic of early WWII US Army Air Force pilot. Ribbons are: Air Medal Ribbon, Distinguished Flying Cross, and Bronze Star.

Qualification Badges

The largest number of Army officers' qualification badges was for the Army Air Force. A few existed for other arms and services. The principal ones are described in the illustration on the next page.

From February 20, 1943, in combat zones, wings were to be pinned to a Combat Flying Duty Patch on the breast. This was a dark blue cloth rectangle, 1½ inches high by ¾ inches long. The requirement was widely ignored.

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Byron Connell a long-time SF fan, is a historian by training. He likes to help at masquerades rather than entering them – entering once a decade is about right! However, since being part of the Torcon best-in-show entry, when he does enter, he does so in the Master division. Byron has run masquerades at several Costume-Cons and Philcons, and directed the Anticipation masquerade. He is a member of the Sick Pups (the New Jersey-New York Costumers' Guild), the SLUTs, (St. Louis Ubiquitous Tailoring Society), and the Armed Costumers' Guild. Byron is a past President of the International Costumers' Guild, which honored him with its [1996 Lifetime Achievement Award](#). He likes hard SF, alternate history, alternate worlds, and fantasy (not necessarily in that order).

Editors Note

Byron Connell will conclude his coverage of WWII U.S. Army officers' uniforms with an article on field uniforms and accessories. in an upcoming issues of VC.

WWII U.S. Army Qualification Badges

General Staff



Army coat of arms in gold on a black enameled five-pointed star (point upright) on a green enameled circular wreath, worn on the right breast pocket of the coat. The Chief of Staff's badge was 3 inches in diameter; all other badges were 2 inches. (est. 8/23/33)

Pilot



Silver shield with three-pointed top, top quarter with horizontal lines, bottom three-quarters with vertical lines, with silver wings spread horizontally to each side from the base of the shield, feathers indicated by horizontal lines, 3 1/8 inches across, worn in the same place as the Infantryman badge. (est. 11/10/1941)

Paratrooper



A silver open parachute with silver wings curving up from the bottom and curling to just below the top worn in the same place as the Infantryman badge. It also was worn on the field jacket in a colored horizontal oval patch. (est. 1941)

Senior Pilot



Same as Pilot with a silver five-pointed star, point up, the same width as the shield, atop the shield. (est. 11/10/1941)

Command Pilot



Same as Senior Pilot with a silver circular wreath surrounding the star. (est. 11/10/1941)

Expert Infantryman



Silver flintlock rifle in profile pointed to the right on an Insignia Blue enamel rectangle surrounded by a thin silver frame, worn on the left breast above the coat pocket and any medal ribbons. (est. 11/11/1943)

Balloon Pilot



Same as Pilot with a silver free balloon replacing the shield. (est. 11/10/1941)

Senior Balloon Pilot



Same as Balloon Pilot with Senior Pilot star atop the balloon. (est. 11/10/1941)

Combat Infantryman



Same as Expert Infantryman with a silver open top horizontal oval wreath centered on the badge. Worn in same place. (est. 11/15/1943)

Technical Observer



Same as Pilot with an open circle in front of a taller capital "T" replacing the shield. (est. 11/10/1941)