

Early Philippine Constabulary Insignia

The United States formed the Philippine Constabulary on August 8, 1901. Officers were either U.S. Army officers or recent U.S. Volunteer officers, with “properly qualified” Filipinos soon added after “careful selection.” Initially officer had titles such as “director,” “assistant director,” “inspector,” “assistant inspector,” and the like, with military titles added in December 1902. In 1907 rank titles became completely military and the Constabulary dropped the use of “inspectors” and similar titles. In early 1903 Congress authorized the temporary appointment of some officers to higher grades while detailed to the Philippine Constabulary and at the same time formally authorized Regular Army officers to be detailed to the Constabulary. This allowed Henry T. Allan, a Regular Army captain and Philippine Constabulary chief, to become a brigadier general and have a rank appropriate to his position.

Early on the exact titles used in the Constabulary were not consistent, especially for those officers who were in the field grades. Allen’s title was Chief of Constabulary, while other senior officers had rank titles such as Second Assistant Chief (D. J. Baker, an RA captain and PC colonel) and Sixth Assistant Chief (Harry Bandholtz, also an RA captain and PC colonel). At the lower ranks, some examples cited in 1905 orders included, “inspector and captain,” “inspector and first lieutenant,” and “third class inspector.”



Philippine Constabulary officer rank insignia are scarce. While the titles varied over time in the early days, the insignia themselves changed even more. A definitive list of the rank insignia and dates use of use has not been developed, but some information is available along with a few actual insignia. A complete set of appropriate general orders and circulars may provide the answers.

General Orders 37, Bureau of Constabulary, September 13, 1906, lists several officer rank devices. It includes some puzzles since the previous ornament for majors is not known. “...The lieutenant-colonel and assistant director will be a silver lozenge. Assistant directors of the rank of major, the executive inspector, and the superintendent of the information will wear the rank insignia formerly prescribed for all majors. Senior inspectors of the rank of major will wear on each shoulder four gilt bars placed in the same manner as the four bars worn by captains, except that the bar nearest the edge will be twice the width of each of the other three.” One might deduct that the captain insignia was four bars of equal width, first lieutenants three gilt bars, second lieutenants two gilt bars, and third lieutenants one gilt bar. A white captain’s coat is at the left. Next is a photo showing a second lieutenant in the center of the first row, wearing two gold bars or stripes on his shoulder boards.



This scheme of gold stripes did not last long. Less than four months later lieutenant colonels received two silver lozenges while some majors had two gold lozenges and other majors one gold lozenge. The general order specifically called out, “the lieutenant-colonel and assistant director, two connected silver lozenges; for the majors and assistant directors, two connected gold lozenges; for the executive inspector, the superintendent of the information division, and the majors and senior inspectors, one gold lozenge.”

Still other changes occurred in late November 1907 with the simple announcement that the constabulary had adopted new rank insignia for, “colonels and assistant directors, lieutenant-colonels and assistant directors, major, captains, first lieutenants, second lieutenants, third lieutenants, and subinspectors.” This order evidently changed the captains’ insignia to a pair of silver four-pointed stars. Presumably the lieutenant rank devices continued to be gilt-colored bars since in January 1909 another order states, “The present rank insignia of first lieutenants are abolished and there are adopted in lieu thereof single silver lozenges with concave sides of the same pattern and size as the lozenges composing the captain’s insignia.”

In October 1911 the Philippine Constabulary adopted US Army officers’ standard rank insignia, with third lieutenants wearing “the same rank insignia as second lieutenants” which was simply an officer’s uniform without any rank devise. (It was World War I before army officers received a gold bar).

Actual PC rank insignia worn on the white and khaki uniforms before the adoption of standard army devices are hard to find, and when they appear, they do not meet the prescribed designs. Two biographical examples are shown.

The one on the right belonged to James L. Cochrun who joined the Philippine Constabulary in 1906 as a third lieutenant, was promoted to second lieutenant in 1908, first lieutenant in 1909, and captain in 1913. Cochrun's rank insignia is a pair of silver colored stars with concave sides. Since the Constabulary started using standard army insignia in 1911, this piece must date from before that time, when Cochrun was a first lieutenant. This just adds to mystery since, according to the January 1909 directive, first lieutenants were to wear a single star, Cochrun rank at that time.



The second silver-colored, metal rank insignia, left, was worn by Guy W. Burr, who joined the PC as a third lieutenant in 1905, became a second lieutenant in 1906, and died of wounds in July 1908. This single star, generally similar to Cochrun's, was worn by a second lieutenant.

In August 1909 Brigadier General Harry H. Bandholtz, who had joined the Constabulary in 1903 as a colonel and became chief in 1907, established mess uniforms in two patterns. The first white duck jacket was for Regular Army officers detailed to the Constabulary. The jacket pattern was to be the same as "authorized for the Army" with some minor changes: "all the edges" were to be bordered by two parallel stripes of white braid, 1/8 inch wide and 1/4 inch apart. For all other officers the jacket was "cut like an evening dress-coat, descending to the point of the hips, the bottom edge slightly curving to a peak behind an din front, with all the edges bordered by two parallel stripes of white braid, one-eighth of an inch wide and one-fourth of an inch apart; three large size gilt regulation buttons on each side, two to three and a half inches apart, the lower button to be placed one and a half inches from the bottom."

The sleeves for these Philippine Constabulary mess jackets were ornamented with one-half inch wide white braid. Assistant directors had three bands, parallel to the jacket cuff, one-quarter inch apart, with the lowest two inches from sleeve end. Majors and staff captains wore two bands with the lower band three inches from the cuff. All other officers wore one stripe with the lower edge three inches from cuff. All officers, regardless of which type of mess jacket, wore the standard PC collar insignia on the sleeves 1/2 inch above the upper band.



On the shoulder of the mess uniform went special shoulder knots "of the pattern deposited with the Chief Supply Officer." This fleeting reference hardly helps one know anything about the design and it certainly does not answer the question whether rank was shown by the knot, and if rank was shown, what it looked like. The figure to the left shows a pair of biographical PC shoulder knots worn by Earl H. Welcome, a doctor who served in the

Constabulary as a second lieutenant only in 1908 and 1909. On the knot underside is white cotton cloth and is marked in black “ALFREDO ROENSCH & CO. MANILA, ILOILO.”

Welcome left the Constabulary in 1909 and the mess uniform came into being in August 1909, so these knots are evidently from the second half of that year. They bear two single silver-colored lozenges. The large dress knots used by Regular Army officers at the end of the 19th Century and into 1903 had two rank insignia, with the regimental number or staff device in the center, except for colonels. In a similar manner, rank shoulder straps had two insignia, one at each end, except for colonels. It is not unreasonable to assume that the PC followed this model, thus making Welcome’s knots carry two second lieutenant’s insignia. If this is the case, then in 1909 a second lieutenant was wearing a single silver-colored lozenge.

These three biographical rank insignia make it appear that between about 1907 and 1909, second lieutenants wore a single four-sided star or lozenge and first lieutenants wore two such devices, although written guidance indicates that in 1908 captains were to wear two four-sided stars with concave sides and lieutenants were to wear various gold colored bars: three for first lieutenant, two for second lieutenant, and one for third lieutenants.

Interestingly, the collar and cap devices that have come with the biographical insignia do follow regulations. Initially officer’s collar insignia were a PC monogram in a wreath (left), but in 1907 the Constabulary adopted a shield with the letters P and C near the center after the Secretary of War requested a “description of the insignia” worn by RA officers detailed to the Constabulary. An example is shown below the PC in a wreath. Since some RA officers were detailed to the Constabulary, there was a move by the Secretary of War to have the insignia included in the standard army uniform regulations. This new branch insignia became the basis for a new cap insignia the Constabulary adopted in October 1907, shown with an eagle above. A non-biographical enlisted PC monogram in bronze worn on the collar is also shown. These insignia are shown in different sizes.

