

Warrant Officers

Before the US Army had warrant officers, it had field clerks, and before field clerks it had headquarters and pay clerks, even before the Spanish-American War. These early clerks did not wear uniforms. It was not until 1917 that field clerks began to wear uniforms.

Congress authorized “clerks and messengers” by act of August 6, 1894. War Department General Orders 61, 1894, published the change to army regulations that gave the Secretary of War the authority to determine which posts and units received these clerks. These personnel came in two flavors—those who worked for the Adjutant General’s Department and were known as headquarters clerks, and pay clerks. With the consolidation of the Commissary, Pay, and Quartermaster General’s Departments into the then new Quartermaster Corps in 1912, the pay clerks became part of the Quartermaster Corps. When Congress passed the National Defense Act of 1916, it made pay clerks second lieutenants in the Quartermaster Corps, which left headquarters clerks. Details are in WD Bulletin 16, 1916.

The 1917 army appropriations act for 1917, passed in the summer of 1916, noted the Chief of Staff’s office had 71 headquarters clerks and that the “headquarters of several territorial departments, districts, divisions, and brigades” had a total of 160 clerks. This same bill provided that “hereafter headquarters clerks shall be known as Army field clerks.” The bill further authorized an additional 200 Army field clerks for the Quartermaster Corps. This in effect created two types of army field clerks—the 160 that worked for the Adjutant General’s Department and the new 200 clerks for the QMC. Details are in WD Bulletin 33, 1916.

Initially in July 1917 the army put field clerks going overseas in enlisted uniforms and gave them one inch diameter collar disks as their insignia. Clerks objected and in October 1917 the AEF authorized them to wear officer uniforms with officer type crossed quill pens. These uniforms had no cuff braid and no rank insignia. Army field clerk insignia added a small shield below their pens and field clerks of the Quartermaster Corps added a miniature QMC insignia below the pens. These collar



insignia come in a great many variations and just one for each type of field clerk is shown left. In 1924 the army moved the QMC or AG insignia to be centered on the quill pens (below is a pair for field clerks, QMC).

In mid 1919 Congress created the Army Mine Planter Service (AMPS) as part of the Coast Artillery Corps. Integral to this new service Congress created army warrant officers in various grades. The army did not specify



insignia for warrant officers until January 1920 when it prescribed commissioned officer Coast Artillery Corps style insignia with a sea mine in the lower angle. These lasted only until November 1920 when the army directed that warrant officers dispense with all branch insignia. They then wore the officer-type “U.S.” only. An example of the 1920 AMPS warrant officer branch insignia is to the left.

In 1926 all field clerks were transferred to the recently formed Warrant Officer ranks. This change moved two women into the position of Warrant Officers and they were the first female warrant officers – Olive Hoskins who was then at VII Corps headquarters in Omaha, and Jean Doble, IX Corps headquarters in San Francisco. With this action field clerks disappeared from the army.

AMPS warrant officers came in several grades although until late 1921 they wore no rank insignia. These grades and their associated pay were:

- Masters - \$1,800
- First mates - \$1,320
- Second mates - \$972
- Chief engineers - \$1,700
- Assistant Engineers - \$1,200.



In March 1921 the army created a branch insignia for warrant officers (above) and in November of that year the army prescribed ways to show their rank. The March 1921 branch-type insignia was a rising eagle, grasping two arrows, in a wreath. Warrant officers wore this design until 2004, when they changed to commissioned officers' branch insignia such as aviation, ordnance, and finance. The "rising eagle" insignia is now worn only by warrant officer candidates during their senior training phase.



November 1921 AMPS rank went on coat sleeves similar to navy rank, but with the bands of olive drab or white, depending on the uniform. Above the 2, 3, or 4 bands of braids that showed rank, were either a fouled anchor for deck officers (master, first mate, and second mate) or a three-bladed propeller anchor for the engineers (left).



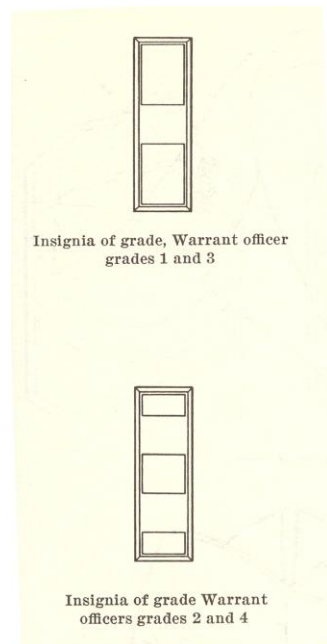
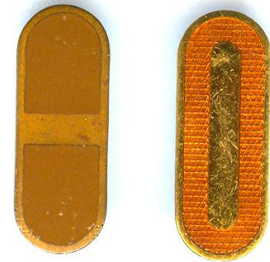
Masters wore four brown stripes on their coat cuff, first mates had three, and second mates had two. Chief engineers wore four stripes and assistant engineers three stripes. Congress added the rank of second assistant engineer in 1941 and these men wore two cuff stripes. AMPS warrant officers continued to use cuff ranks until 1951. A World War II OD uniform is at the left and a close up of a sleeve is right.



The National Defense Act of June 1920 (Section 4a), provided for 1,120 warrant officers, in addition to those for the AMPS. All were of a single grade and received \$1,320 per year. In October 1920 the army allocated 156 warrant officers as band leaders, the largest single group of warrant officers. Some other kinds of warrant officers included those in division headquarters, in brigade headquarters, and in various air service headquarters. The preliminary allocation is in WD general orders 65, 1920. These warrant officers wore the eagle branch insignia on officer uniforms, but no rank insignia.

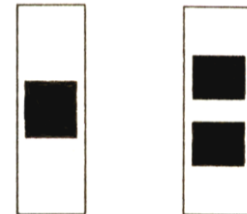
In August 1941 Congress established two grades of army warrant officers for those not in the AMPS: chief warrant officers and warrant officers (junior grade). By this law WO(JG) had to have served at least 1 year in the army prior to their appointment, and to be a chief warrant officer the soldier had to have served 10 years in the army. Total strength of army warrant officers was limited less than 1% of the numbers of enlisted men, with the further limitation that no more than 40% of warrant officers could be chief warrant officers. In wartime the President of the US could exceed these limits as “temporary appointments.”

In June 1942 WD Circular 200 spelled out the new warrant officer rank insignia. While AMPS warrant officers continued to wear only the cuff braid, chief warrant officers received a gold bar 3/8 inch wide and 1 inch long, “with rounded ends, having a brown enamel top and a longitudinal center of gold, 1/8 inch in width.” WO (JG) had a 3/8 by 1 inch gold bar with rounded ends and a brown enamel top and a “latitudinal center of gold, 1/8 inch in width.” These went on coat shoulder loops like lieutenant bars.



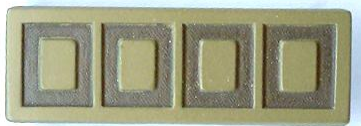
These rank insignia lasted until 1956 when the army authorized four different rank devices, one for each grade created under the provisions of the 1949 Career Compensation Act. In the time between 1949 and 1956, W-1s wore the insignia of a WO(JG) and the three higher grades wore the rank devices for chief warrant officers. As late as April 1953 Special Regulation 600-60-1 still listed the old rank insignia. The new insignia appear in AR 670-5, dated 20 September 1956. Warrant officers of this time had these insignia: W-1 a gold bar with two brown bands; W-2 a gold bar with three brown bands; W-3 a silver bar with two brown bands, and W-4, a silver bar with three brown enamel bands.

In April 1972 the *Army Times* ran a story that new warrant officer rank insignia approved nearly two years before by the then Chief of Staff Westmoreland would go in effect 1 December. Regulations soon announced the rank devices still worn: a silver bar with one to four black squares.



The lowest two rank insignia are at the right.

In 1988 the army created the position of Master Warrant Officer 4 (MW4). The position would be senior to other W-4s but as the name implies, would still be at the W-4 pay grade. The army made this rank insignia similar to the W-4 bars, but with the four squares just in outline (subdued insignia left). Congress approved an added warrant pay grade in 1991, that of W-5. The next year when the army began to promote soldiers to the new grade, the new senior warrants used the new MW4 insignia for W-5s also.



The army introduced a new W-5 insignia in 2004 – a bar with a thin black line down the center. This rank insignia (right) is for the highest warrant officers.



Since the eagle in the wreath survives only as an insignia as senior phase of warrant officer candidates, and for cap devices with dress uniforms, this begs the



question, “What do warrant officer candidates wear before they wear the eagle?” Candidates wear the block letters W.O.C. (for warrant officer candidates). This has been worn since the Vietnam War.

During the Vietnam War many warrant officers were pilots. By the time of the 1972 rank insignia change, the army had nearly 20,000 warrant officers. Many were pilots, but this was not new. During World War II Congress authorized warrant officers (junior grade) as pilots. In response the army provided the rank of flight officer. The rank insignia was a WO(JG) bar with blue enamel rather than brown. Unlike other warrant officers, however, flight officers wore the Air Corps branch insignia on their coat lapels, but they did wear the standard warrant officer cap device. This was a precursor to the 2004 army decision to have warrant officers were a branch insignia associated with their specialty.



In the army, for years warrant officers received warrants rather than commissions. This continued until 1986 when Congress changed this so that army chief warrant officers were thereafter commissioned. This was done to avoid legal issues involving responsibilities where Congress had passed laws stating commissioned officers could perform various actions.

The marine corps, the navy, and the air force all have had warrant officers. The navy and marine corps had them for over a century, but through law, these warrant officers were commissioned, unlike the army. The US Air Force discontinued warrant officers in 1958 with the creation of E-8 and E-9 enlisted grades. The air force believed the need for senior specialists would be answered by these two grades.