

World War I Provost Marshal Insignia

In May 1917 the War Department activated the position of Provost Marshal General for the first time since 1866. The Provost Marshal General's Department had the job of inducting men into the army, from registration to their initial arrival at their first camp. Most of the staffing was by civilians, but some commissioned officers supervised these activities.

At first all of the officers in the Provost Marshal General's Department were lawyers. They wore the Judge Advocate General's Department insignia, as shown at the right. Just two weeks before the armistice, only 192 officers were assigned to the department. Induction stopped on November 11, 1918 and men who had reported to an induction center but had not yet started training were directed to return to their homes. The primary job of Provost Marshal General's Department was essentially complete, except it would take months to complete paperwork and close out a myriad of pending actions.



Despite the war's end and the small number of officers involved, in January 1919 the War Department prescribed a special insignia for members of the Provost Marshal General's Department: the silver letters PM enclosed in a bronze wreath. The Provost Marshal General's Department closed its doors on July 15, 1919, its work done. Certainly very few of these insignia were ever made or worn. One of these scarce collar devices, made by Bailey, Banks, and Biddle of Philadelphia, is shown.

The same January 1919 regulation change that created the officer's insignia, also created a collar disk for enlisted men assigned to the Provost Marshal General's Department. That one inch diameter insignia contained the plain letters PM with serifs.

In the AEF headquarters in France, the Provost Marshal, first appointed in July 1917, had a totally different function. This Provost Marshal was responsible for traffic control, prisoners, and enforcement of army and AEF regulations. Over time his duties grew so that by late 1918 all AEF military police units were under the technical supervision of the Provost Marshal General, and some MP units were under his direct control. The AEF Provost Marshal and his department had no authorized special insignia, although MPs had a variety of insignia.

Many divisions had an officer designated as the Provost Marshal, along with more junior officers who were assistant provost marshals. These men, often assigned to division trains, supervised military police in their division. Many of these officers wore unofficial insignia in the form of a red armband with the black letters PM or APM. The two armbands shown are biographical and came from an officer who, during World War II became a brigadier general.

