

## Medical Branch Insignia 1872-1917

U. S. Army officers did not wear collar insignia on uniforms until the introduction of a high collar sack coat in 1892. In the late 19th century medical officers wore epaulettes on dress uniforms. These epaulettes had embroidered old English initials MS (for Medical Service) in the crescent. Shown on the left is an epaulette for a medical captain, 1851-1872. A similar epaulette with the letters MD (Medical Department) is at the right.



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Between 1872 and 1902, officers showed their branch and rank on dress uniforms by large knots trimmed with gold cord that also displayed a large, branch colored cloth oval. The branch device on the knots varied over time and

will be covered next. A few examples are shown. These include on the left a pair of 1901 knots for a Regular Army major, in the center a 1890-1896 pattern knot for a major, and then in the



large photo at the right, a physician's dress uniform shoulder knot for a state militia's 1st infantry regiment. The Regular Army did not assign doctors to regiments as some state militias did. In the Regular Army, only officers in the cavalry, infantry, artillery, and engineers had branch colored knots. Staff knots, including those for physicians, were navy blue.

On the collar of the 1892 high-collar coat, doctors wore an embroidered gold colored shield. It lasted until 1896. One such collar insignia is shown next.



The 1890 pattern gold colored shield was replaced in 1896 by a gilt Maltese cross. They were made both in gold embroidery and in metal in imitation embroidery style and less frequently, in a smooth finish. By the Spanish American War this insignia was well established, even to the point that in the New York militia, and other states, doctors were assigned to a regiment where they wore their regimental insignia with a small medical insignia below. This was the same manner regimental adjutants and other staff officers showed their assignment.



Before 1902 officers had a variety of devices to show their arm or staff position but in that year, for the first time, medical officers began to use the caduceus as their emblem. One such collar insignia for a service uniform is depicted.



In 1902 the army created a special uniform board to design a set of totally new uniforms and use of a caduceus came out of that board. The medical board member was Colonel John Van Rensselaer Hoff. Hoff joined the army in November 1874 as an assistant surgeon and was a colonel by 1905.

Colonel Hoff recommended the caduceus as the medical insignia since it was the emblem flown on ancient merchant ships. At that time merchants were considered noncombatants and Hoff's rationale was that at times of piracy in the Mediterranean vessels proclaimed their nature by flying a flag which bore the emblem of Mercury, the God of the Merchant and symbol of commerce. In this context the caduceus indicated neutrality. Hoff had ruled out using the Geneva cross as the medical insignia since it was also the emblem of Switzerland and he considered it inappropriate to use a national symbol. He considered the red cross brassard a symbol of neutrality in wartime rather than a medical device.

Enlisted men of the Hospital Corps used a wide range of emblems to show their assignment to medical duties. At times such devices included the caduceus, but it came and went as did other designs.



Hospital stewards wore a silver wreath with US in the center, then with a Geneva cross, but these early insignia were two separate pieces of metal. In 1896 the silver wreath made as one piece and with a screw-post was made as the cap insignia for medical hospital stewards. Lower rank enlisted men wore the cross without the wreath.



In 1901 the center became a Maltese cross in a wreath for hospital stewards, or just the Maltese cross for lower ranks. Finally in 1902 enlisted personnel also adopted the caduceus as their insignia. These 1902 insignia had gilt wreaths but the central



insignia was still silver. Between 1902 and 1904 the army made large gilt wreaths (above, right) that were smaller in early 1905 (lower right).

Colonel Hoff evidently did not bring up the point that enlisted men had intermittently used the caduceus as their emblem since 1851. Hospital Stewards used it on their chevrons between 1851 and 1887. Between 1881 and 1887 a German silver caduceus was an overlay on hospital stewards' dress helmet eagles, and a similar device in a wreath went on their forage caps



between 1882 and 1887. Starting in 1887 enlisted medical personnel used a silver Geneva cross on caps and as overlays on helmet eagles.



While early twentieth century doctors and enlisted medical personnel used the gold colored caduceus on their dress uniforms

and subdued (called bronze) on field uniforms, other medical officers added letters on their caduceus. The first was for the Medical Reserve Corps that started in 1908. Today's US Army Reserves trace their history to this Medical Reserve Corps. Officers in the Medical Reserve Corps adopted an RC monogram on a caduceus as their insignia (right). This insignia became obsolete in June 1917 when congress eliminated the Medical Reserve Corps, but in the meantime, other reserves had been



founded.

Contract surgeons began to use a silver caduceus in 1902. The letters "U.S." or similar national insignia were worn only by Regular Army officers, so contract surgeons wore also silver "C.S." letters with their silver caduceus before the First World War



Congress first provided for contract dental surgeons in April 1901. The army gave them large block silver letters



D.S. for their coat collar. In 1911 these men became acting dental surgeons and replaced the block letters with a caduceus that carried a DS monogram, which in 1916, was replaced by a DC (Dental Corps) monogram. The current

single D on a caduceus replaced the DC monogram in December 1917.



Veterinarians used a winged horseshoe in the lower angle of either cavalry (shown) or field artillery insignia from 1902 until 1916 when congress formed the Veterinarian Corps. With that change officers' insignia



switched to a VC monograph on a caduceus, which lasted until December 1917 when a lone V replaced the two letters.

Civilian nurses served under contract during the Spanish American War. Congress authorized permanent nurses on February 2, 1901. These nurses placed a single green Maltese cross on their white

ward uniform collar as their insignia (right). This was replaced in 1907 by a gilt caduceus that bore a white ANC monogram. When nurses went overseas in World War I on their outdoor uniforms they wore a similar insignia but in dark metal with a gilt ANC monogram.



In May 1918 the Secretary of War approved the establishment of the Army School of Nursing. Through the fall of 1918 the army established 33 schools across the United States.

Students at these schools wore blue nurse uniforms and in September 1918 an insignia for the Army School of Nursing was created—a caduceus bearing a lamp of knowledge. The two remaining post-war schools were consolidated at Walter



Reed in the fall of 1923. In 1931 the War Department decided to close that one school, which occurred in 1932.

A few other insignia with comments follow. An 1872-1902 pattern knot for the doctor in the 2d New York Infantry has both the regimental number and an embroidered medical insignia on a white background. Also shown is a

metal collar insignia that combines the US letters and the Maltese cross. This was to be pinned to the standing collar.



Below is a side button for the 1881 helmet when used by medical enlisted men. In 1896 the War Department withdrew dress uniforms for medical personnel, ending use of this side button.



The imitation embroidered silver metal cross in the center (immediately above) was for acting assistant surgeons and for contract surgeons. These men did not wear the U.S. letters.