

Marksman Buttons

In the 1880s the Regular Army and many militias authorized many different styles of marksman buttons for wear on coat collars. First to be shown are buttons used by regular troops, then some from New York, and finally a few small awards for shooting from other states.



The US Army introduced marksman buttons, shown at the left, in 1881. Before 1881 the army had no standard weapons qualification program. When the army created the term “marksman,” with its standard criteria and standard insignia, this was the army’s first step that leads directly to today’s badges. Exact qualification to become a marksman varied during 1881-1897, the period when the Regular Army issued marksman buttons, but generally soldiers shot at 200, 300, and 500 or 600 yards, with the closest targets fired standing, the intermediate range fired sitting and or kneeling, and the longest range “lying down,” which was not the current prone position. Shooters fired lying on their backs. Sharpshooter qualification was at longer ranges, out to 1,000 yards, for soldiers who had already qualified as a marksman.



A soldier who qualified as a marksman could wear a button on each collar tip during the year he qualified, as shown at the left. If the soldier failed to qualify in a given year, he had to remove the buttons. Starting in 1883 men who qualified for two consecutive years wore two pairs of buttons in their second year. Initially the Regular Army buttons were square with black trim and with a button shank on the reverse.

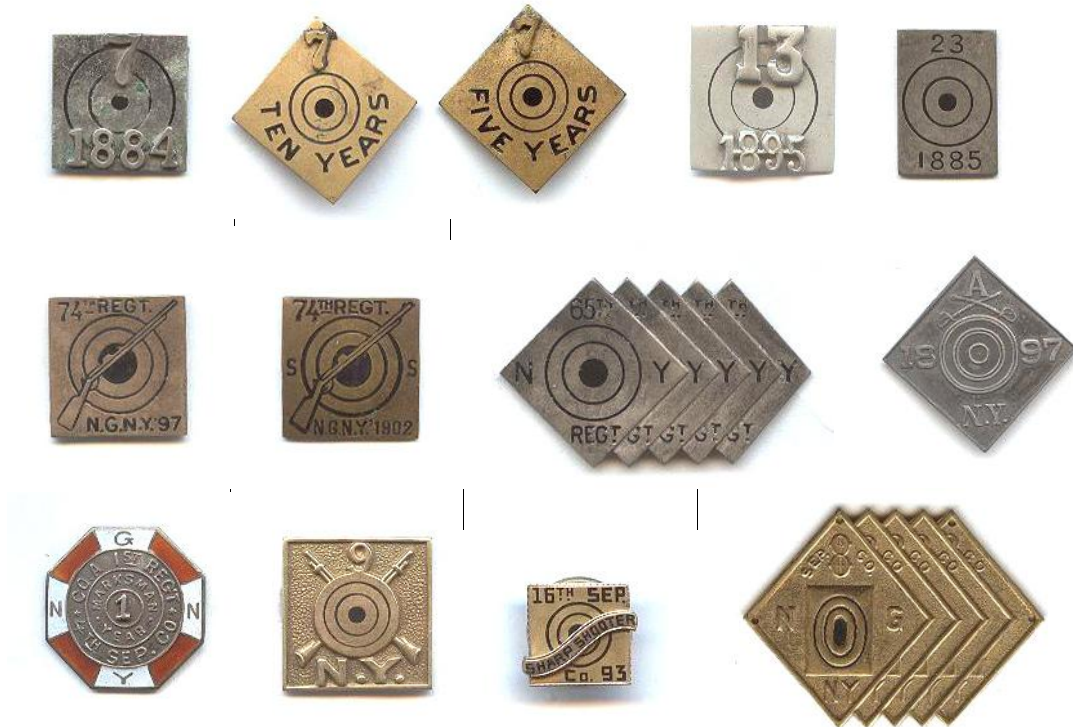
Rules for the buttons, and for the marksman bar, changed every few years and these points are covered in *Marksmanship in the U.S. Army* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

In general, most state militias had marksman buttons that were different from those of the Regular Army. Some state militia buttons were similar to the Federal award, but militia awards were colored differently from the US Army awards. Most militia buttons have two tines (prongs) that soldiers inserted through the collar and then bent over, as shown below. The Regular Army buttons never had tines on the reverse. In addition Rock Island Arsenal made rectangular buttons with button shanks, after 1897 for militias who wanted to buy them. One is shown to the below right.



The National Guard of New York allowed each regiment or separate battalion or company to design their shooting awards. As a result a great many New York marksman buttons exist. New York was the first state to recognize rifle and carbine qualification. Even before the US Army, New York's militia introduced a marksman qualification in 1875, although the New York's 7th Regiment gave shooting prizes in the form of pistols and muskets as early as 1826.

One of the most famous New York units is the 7th New York (the federal designation was the 107th Infantry from 1917 until 2001, when it became the 107th Support Group). Different styles of buttons for the 7th New York exist, and like many other New York units, these have a regimental numbers and often qualification years on the buttons. Several New York buttons are shown:



A pin-back, 14 karat gold badge made to resemble a marksman button, but evidently made for wear on the chest, is shown next. The target is black and white enamel.



“A” Troop of the New York Cavalry marksman buttons started to have enamel targets in 1898. An A Troop 1897 button at the end of the second row with a plain target, while the next year (left) have an enamel target, as does the gold badge, indicating the one year expert badge was probably made in 1898 or later.

Many states did not use marksman buttons. Pennsylvania is an example, but National Guard men from the Keystone State did have a very few select awards that went on soldiers' collars in the same manner as marksman buttons. Examples with rubies and diamonds are shown in *Marksmanship Awards of the National Guard of Pennsylvania, 1878-1921*, by Peter Eisert and Charles Oellig (Orders and Medals Society of America, 2008).

State marksman buttons have not been well studied and many exist that cannot be firmly identified. A few are shown. The first is an unknown bronze marksman button with tines on the reverse, made in Chicago. Other "buttons" have unusual marks or are not rectangular in shape.

