

## Chaplain Insignia, 1880-1920s

Until 1880 U. S. Army chaplains had no insignia peculiar to their branch and were distinguished only by their uniforms, which varied over time. Occasionally chaplains' uniforms included standard army headgear without insignia, or, after 1864, a hat or cap with the US in a wreath prescribed for staff officers.<sup>1</sup>

Chaplains' coats of 1864 were a "plain black frock coat with standing collar; one row of nine black buttons on the breast, with 'herring-bone' of black braid around the buttons and button-holes." This general description remained for several years although over time the coat length shortened and the number of buttons reduced. Regulations of 1880 specifically called for the coat to be "undress" and chaplains had no dress coat.<sup>2</sup> Although not prescribed, the coat buttons were frequently covered with black cloth.

In early 1880 the army announced a new and unique shoulder strap for chaplains. This first special insignia for chaplains was a "shoulder strap of black velvet, with a shepherd's crook of frosted silver on the center of the strap" as shown.<sup>3</sup>



In May 1888 the army issued a general order that prescribed the coat to be both "dress" and "undress" but eliminated the eight year old shoulder straps since the new concept was for chaplains to wear

plain clothing without any insignia.<sup>4</sup> Chaplains continued with plain black coats without insignia until May 1898, when the army noted that chaplains would have shoulder straps, this time "of dark blue cloth of the usual size and pattern with a plain Latin cross in the center."<sup>5</sup>



Most chaplains wore unadorned hats of the same pattern as used in the field, but in black. These hats replace the previous types of headgear that had included "a plain chapeau de bras" for ceremonies.<sup>6</sup>

By 1900 Chaplains were wearing a variety of uniforms, and with the December 1902 regulations that went into effect in 1903, several new insignia materialized. One chaplain

uniform that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century included a plain black five-button coat with cloth covered buttons as shown in the National Archives picture below.



Chaplains could still wear the Civil War style nine-button long coat or a double breasted frock coat with seven buttons to a row as dress uniforms, or the undress five button coat, to which the army added in January 1900, a dark blue single breasted coat allowed for all officers. This marked the first time chaplains wore a full standard officer's uniform. Chaplains' collar insignia were only the gilt letters "U.S." while other officers added branch insignia. The shoulder strap illustrated above went on the coat. With it chaplains wore plain black trousers without any welt, cord, or stripe.<sup>7</sup>

Finally at the end of December 1902, chaplains received collar insignia and at the same time they began to wear standard officer sack coats introduced in 1895. The collar insignia reflected their assignment: Chaplains serving with infantry and cavalry regiments wore the crossed arms with the regimental number above and a small cross below. Since that artillery underwent several reorganizations between 1901 and the start of World War I, suffice it to say that when the field artillery formed regiments in 1907, the chaplains wore that appropriate insignia with regiment number above and cross below. Otherwise chaplains assigned to the artillery between 1903 and 1914 wore the appropriate artillery insignia with only the cross below. Some examples of these insignia are shown next.<sup>8</sup>

Given the variety of officers' infantry, cavalry, and various artillery insignia used between 1901 and 1914, it is worth exploring these basic insignia. Between July 1901 and the phase out period that was the first six months of 1903, artillery officers wore crossed stubby cannons with a solid bare scarlet oval in the center—the device of the Artillery Corps that Congress had created early in 1901. Since the phase-in of the chaplains' insignia was the same as the phase-out of the Artillery Corps insignia, it is doubtful of these were worn, but that possibility cannot be ruled out.<sup>9</sup>

During the early 1903 artillery insignia phase-in, the army provided two insignia for each part of the Artillery Corps: Coast artillery officers placed a shell on the central oval and field artillery officers added a wheel. The key to identifying these 1903 insignia is that the cannons were stubby, the same design used in the late nineteenth century. Since there were no artillery regiments at this time, these insignia had no numbers in the upper angle. Each artillery unit was designated either an artillery company, a designation reserved for coast artillery units commanded by a captain, or an artillery battery, a designation reserved for field artillery units commanded by a captain. Initially the coast artillery had companies 1 through 82 and the field artillery had batteries 1 through 16 that came from redesignations of existing units, although the army almost immediately created more companies and batteries. Artillery districts, which varied

in size and controlled an assortment of company sized units, performed the previous functions of regimental headquarters.<sup>10</sup>



Since 1895 infantry officers had worn crossed club-stock muskets and during the initial part of 1903 infantry chaplains added a cross in the lower intersection, as shown. At the same time, cavalry officers had worn heavy sabers with hand guards that ran the length of the hand grip. The 1903 chaplain's insignia for the 8th Cavalry is depicted. **It should be noted that many types of metal insignia shown are very scarce and have been heavily reproduced for collectors since the 1980s.**

In December 1904 the army again announced redesigned collar insignia, so starting in 1905 many soldiers began to replace their branch insignia with more modern designs. The artillery went to long, slender cannons while officers retained a central oval with a shell for the coast artillery and with a wheel for the field artillery. A chaplain's example is above.<sup>11</sup>



The infantry and cavalry likewise went to more modern looking weapons. Rifles changed to longer, bolt action versions that lasted through World War I and cavalry sabers became thinner and longer. These newer sabers had the hand guards closer to the hilt and were usually solid, as opposed to the earlier versions that were often, but not always, pierced.



In April 1907 the field artillery officers again changed their insignia by eliminating the wheel at the cannons' intersection (left), which left the field artillery with the basic insignia used until the 1950s, while the coast artillery kept its crossed cannons with a shell

until its demise after World War II.<sup>12</sup> This change coincided with the establishment of the army's initial six regiments of field artillery, although the regiments were smaller than those of the infantry and cavalry.<sup>13</sup> The army added eight chaplains to support this reorganization, two more for the coast artillery and one for each new field artillery regiment. This gave the army 67 chaplains, a level retained until the 1916 army expansion.<sup>14</sup>

Previous to 1904 chaplains ranked as captains, but in that year they began to hold commissions in grades of first lieutenant through major. Among chaplains debates took place whether chaplains should wear rank insignia or not. Chaplain A. A. Pruden lead the charge to establish the wear of rank insignia by chaplains and after ten years, on April 9, 1914, the War Department directed that chaplains to begin wearing a plain silver Latin cross as their sole branch insignia, replacing the crossed arms shown thus far, and rank insignia.<sup>15</sup>

Coat collar insignia were the "U. S." letters in gold and behind that, a silver, one inch high cross. While other officers wore bronze colored insignia on their service coat collar, chaplains retained the silver cross. Like other officers, their rank went on the shoulder loops or on the sleeve of the overcoat, full dress coat, mess jacket, and special evening coat. After the start of World War I, chaplains began to wear bronze colored crosses that are more common than the other insignia shown thus far.

*Examples of chaplains' insignia from 1914 and later are below.* Left to right: Although biographical, it is not known how this 1-3/4 inches high cross was worn. It is known some chaplains wore large crosses on their overcoat sleeve, where other officers showed their rank through special decorative knots. The cross with the engraved edge was made in France and is 1-1/4 inches high. Center is a one inch high cross. The silver cross is very slightly over 3/4 inch high. The last cross was intended for the shirt collar and is 9/16 inch high.



During World War I General Pershing arranged for Bishop Charles H. Brent of the Protestant Episcopal Church to be appointed as the Headquarters A.E.F. Chaplain. Brent was an old friend who had baptized Pershing and his family. On February 27, 1918, Brent and Pershing concluded that it would be better if chaplains did not wear their rank insignia as such insignia made them "less free" and somewhat militaristic. The two men agreed that if chaplains did not wear rank insignia, they would have better rapport with enlisted men. After consulting with other bishops and other advisors, Pershing recommended to the War Department that chaplains remove their rank insignia.<sup>16</sup>



Two World War I chaplains. Left is an unidentified chaplain wearing rank on his shoulder and branch insignia on collar, as prescribed in early 1918. Right is G. C. Shurtz, chaplain of the 308th Engineer Regiment. The picture was taken in France on November 15, 1918. Shurtz wears only U. S. insignia on his collar and crosses on his shoulder loops and cap, where other officers wore their rank insignia. Both photos are from the National Archives. From May 1918 until March 1926 the army's policy was that chaplains wore the cross as their rank insignia.<sup>17</sup>

After the Civil War Jewish chaplains did not serve in the army until World War I. Joining the army during World War I, they objected to the cross. Initially the Secretary of War allowed them to go without a branch insignia and in August 1918 Jewish chaplains received as their insignia the law tablets and Star of David. After World War I rabbis who were chaplains served only in the National Guard and Organized Reserves until 1940.<sup>18</sup>



Left is an early silver insignia for a Jewish chaplain of the type established in 1918.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> War Department, Adjutant General's Office, General Orders 102, November 25, 1861; WD, AGO, GO 247, August 25, 1864.
- <sup>2</sup> WD, AGO, GO 247, August 25, 1864; WD, AGO, GO 92, October 26, 1872.
- <sup>3</sup> Headquarters of the Army, General Orders Number 10, dated February 13, 1880.
- <sup>4</sup> Earl F. Stover, *Up From Handyman: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1895-1920*, Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1977, p. 204.
- <sup>5</sup> HQA, AGO, GO 59, May 31, 1898.
- <sup>6</sup> WD, AGO, GO 102, op cit.
- <sup>7</sup> HQA, AGO, GO 2, Jan 6, 1900.
- <sup>8</sup> HQA, AGO, GO 132, December 31, 1902.
- <sup>9</sup> HQA, AGO, GO 98, July 25, 1901; HQA, AGO, GO 132, December 31, 1902; HQA, AGO, GO 9, February 6, 1901.
- <sup>10</sup> HQA, AGO, GO 15, Feb 13, 1901.
- <sup>11</sup> WD, GO 197, December 31, 1904, p. 24; Army and Navy Register, March 11, 1905, p. 5.
- <sup>12</sup> WD, GO 94, Apr 20, 1907.
- <sup>13</sup> WD, GO 118, May 31, 1907.
- <sup>14</sup> Stover, Op. Cit., p. 150.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p 204-05; WD, Office of the Quartermaster General, Circular No. 5, April 9, 1914.
- <sup>16</sup> Stover, op. cit., pp 189, 205.
- <sup>17</sup> WD, Changes 4 to Special Regulations No. 41, May 22, 1918; WD, Circular No. 33, June 2, 1926, sec III.
- <sup>18</sup> William K. Emerson, *Encyclopedia of United States Army Insignia and Uniforms*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996, p. 268; Roy J. Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army*, Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1958, p 179.