Spanish American War Shirt Chevrons

The hot climates encountered during the Spanish-American War resulted in soldiers going without their coats so in July 1898 the War Department officially recognized what was already occurring and authorized chevrons on shirt sleeves. Since the large cloth coat chevrons did not fit well on the shirts, troops in the Caribbean and the Philippines adopted small locally made chevrons or cut down issue chevrons, one of which is shown below. Officers sent various samples of these locally made small chevrons to the Quartermaster General, urging adoption. One company commander in the 2nd Infantry even sent a sample with applied bars and a base made from white moleskin, "specially recommended for durability and non-raveling." He had chosen the background color since dark blue would not show up well against the shirt. The regimental commander noted, "This chevron or one like it, has been pretty generally been adopted, unofficially, as a result of the War and tropical service and its formal authorization is, in my opinion, desirable."

Other recommendations poured in. Second Lieutenant W. L. Reed, 10th Infantry, wrote from Fort Reno, Oklahoma Territory in April 1901 that he had seen in many instances where company tailors would cut and decrease the size and shape of issued



proposed chevrons are most desirable."



chevrons. The results, according to Reed, were very neat and "will-appearing" chevrons. Other officers, including the great marksman Captain Farrand Sayre, 8th Cavalry, found that when soldiers washed their shirts the chevron colors ran, discoloring the garment so that soon the NCOs quit wearing chevrons. First Lieutenant Dixon of the 8th Cavalry at Fort Gibson, noted that navy rates, similar in size to shirt chevrons, were neat and had great utility while Brigadier General Samuel M. Whitside stated, "the

Of the several alternatives available, the most obvious was simply to make a smaller chevron of the same style and design as then worn. Some manufacturers made and sold small chevrons of the first type briefly at the turn of the century. A 5-1/4 inch wide version for a 1901 hospital steward is at the left.

The other manufacturing option was to cut the bars out and apply them as was done before 1872. And some firms that supplied the army with uniforms and insignia proposed this style. A hospital steward chevron made in this fashion is on the next page. To the right are two styles of shirt chevrons, both for hospital stewards and each about 3-1/4 inches wide made with the green bars cut out and sewn to the blue background.

The Secretary of War authorized smaller chevrons in July 1900 and the Quartermaster General wanted "a limited supply" of the "neat and suitable samples (that) have...been adopted." This allowed the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot to develop a working stock of the shirt chevrons "whenever called for." As result Quartermaster Captain a George Williamson of the Schuylkill Arsenal, Philadelphia, ordered enough shirt chevrons to completely



equip five infantry regiments, two cavalry regiments, one artillery regiment, and 10 pairs for ordnance sergeants, post staffs, and the various ranks in the hospital corps. The depot was instructed in January 1901 to immediately order replacements as soon as they issued any of the shirt chevrons. By August 1901 the Quartermaster General stated he would have a substantial supply ready for issue and had them listed in the army clothing price list. Some examples of such chevrons are shown: left for a first sergeant of engineers, then a sergeant and corporal of ordnance, and two pairs for infantry NCOs. The pair of regimental commissary sergeant's chevrons (lower right) have the crescents in gray, the color for post commissary sergeants, rather than the proper white.



Specification No. 567, February 1902, described the first official shirt chevrons, which Philadelphia Depot personnel called dark blue shirt chevrons throughout 1902. These new shirt chevrons had the bars die cut from branch-colored facing cloth and the pieces sewn to a dark blue wool backing. Even though these 1902 small chevrons differed considerably from the large chain stitched versions, Quartermaster

Department staff officers decided the regulations did not have to be changed because the basic designs and colors remained intact. Shirt chevrons were generally 3-1/2 inches wide, as shown by 8 sealed standard sample sets, with the bars 7/16 inch wide and 1/8 inch apart.

In December 1902 a board consisting of Major General S. B. M. Young, Brigadier Generals Leonard Wood and W. H. Carter, Colonel Theodore Bingham, and Lieutenant Colonel W. S. Patten (who as Deputy Quartermaster General approved several contracts for the shirt chevrons) considered uniforms changes. They recommended removing chevrons for the blue flannel shirts. While many of the shirt chevrons were later used on the 1902 dress uniforms, some chevrons became obsolete due to color or design changes.

For several years Francis Bannerman and Sons, a large surplus store in New York City, and the Stokes-Kirk Store in Philadelphia, sold these leftover small shirt chevrons originally made in 1901 and early 1902 by the J.H. Wilson Company and the William Horstmann Company. Dealers and collectors bought them all, usually without knowing the original purpose of the small stripes. These 1900-1902 chevrons are identical to the chevrons adopted for blue uniforms after 1902, except that the center devices were placed so they would be upright when the chevron pointed down (V shape).

Other shirt chevrons are shown:



