

Army Two-Inch Wide Chevrons Introduced in 1948

In 1948 the army introduced sets of short lived chevrons that were two inches wide. For men these came in two sets: one for soldiers designated in “combat” Military Occupation Specialties (MOS) and the other for “noncombat” soldiers. Soon women began to wear their own two inch wide chevrons and for them this size persisted well beyond those worn by males. This discussion examines these chevrons, why they came about, and briefly touches on some other two-inch wide chevrons. Shown is a set of the 1948-1951 combat chevrons, L to R: First sergeant and master sergeant, both of the first grade; sergeant first class (second pay grade); sergeant (third pay grade). The shuffling of designs eliminated the historic “buck sergeant” and reserved “sergeant” for professional NCOs. The last two chevrons were for corporal (above), a soldier in the fourth pay grade, that before 1948 wore the three stripe sergeant chevron; and (below) the private first class chevron, worn by soldiers in the fifth pay grade. Soldiers in the sixth and seventh pay grades had no chevrons. These examples from various manufacturers include the SFC and corporal chevrons made in Germany.



Within a year after the end of World War II the War Department started to correct many problems that leaders had seen. This included eliminating many insignia that had been introduced piecemeal as morale builders. An integral part of the post World War II insignia redesign effort was the size reduction of sleeve devices. Some soldiers could barely fit their authorized sleeve insignia onto their coats. The problem was tackled by proposing several solutions that when totaled up, would improve uniform appearance. These included examining shoulder patches, chevron sizes, and later, moving overseas insignia from the left sleeve to the right.¹

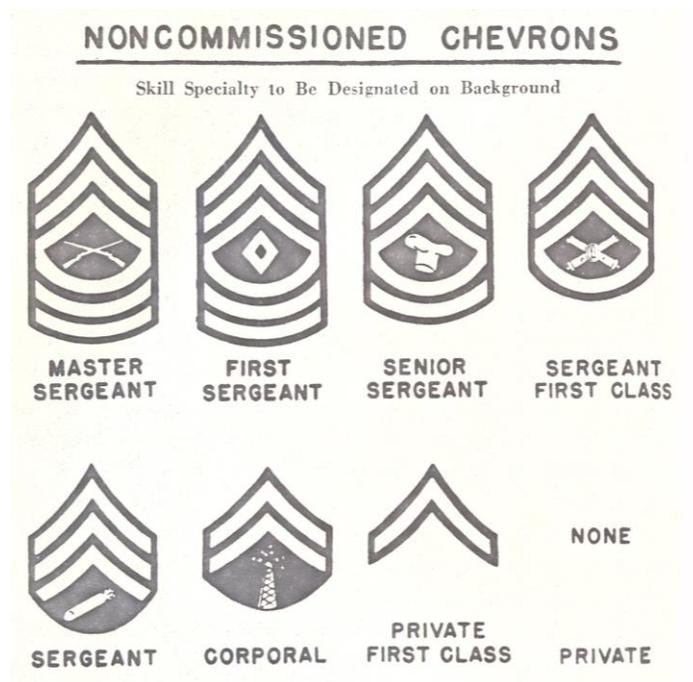
Congress created seven pay grades in June 1920 and the army designed OD stripes on dark blue backgrounds as the rank chevrons. These lasted through World War II.

In the summer of 1946 the War Department began a concerted effort to plan for everyone switching to smaller chevrons on a dark blue background, but rather than olive drab designs, the bars would be gold colored. This fit the

plan of trying to improve the appearance of the army uniform with a bit of color.² Initially the color was simply called “gold” but was soon named Goldenlite and for many years this was a well recognized uniform trim color in the army.³ It is the same color now used on army green and blue uniforms for chevrons, service bars, and other cloth trim⁴.

The army has had a problem distinguishing between soldiers who do the fighting and the specialists who support combat operations. The War Department thought it had solved the problem in 1942 when it introduced technician ranks: chevrons that included a block letter T; but in 1946 it was still not satisfied. The War Department resolved to create two sets of chevrons to solve this chronic problem of distinguishing between specialists and fighters. With World War II memories very fresh, army leadership wanted to denote technical specialists and also improve the morale of combat soldiers.

Another on-going clean-up action from the war was to reexamine army jobs and create paths forwards for all soldiers regardless of their MOS. A study team analyzed army job of all MOSs and regrouped similar occupations together to provide for logical upward progression in each area.⁵ The initial concept for the post World War II chevrons was to include in the lower angle of each chevron, an insert showing a duty insignia such as a bomb for armament, a cook’s cap for mess personnel, or a radio tower for communications personnel.⁶ While this created chevrons somewhat akin to those before 1920, it had the advantage of identifying each career path.



By early 1947 the army was ready to proceed with the new gold colored chevron designs on blue that included specialty marks, but the reality was that the Quartermaster Corps’ mountain of remaining World War II chevrons stood in the way. The army staff was reluctant to discard good, paid-for insignia, and using existing chevrons provided more time to examine alternatives.⁷

By the next year the concept of showing a career field or duty insignia had evaporated. Eventually Chief of Staff Omar Bradley

decided combat career field soldiers would wear the same two-inch wide designs, but combat troops would have dark blue designs on golden embroidery while noncombat soldiers a blue background bearing golden bars and arcs.⁸ The army earmarked the remaining World War II 3-1/8-inch

chevrons for noncombat troops' use prior to issue of the new two-inch gold on blue versions, by stating, "Noncombat chevrons will replace present chevrons for noncombat personnel as the supply situation permits."⁹ Additionally, ROTC cadets were to wear the large World War II type chevrons, as the army reserved the new smaller two-inch wide insignia for army personnel only.¹⁰

In 1948 the Pentagon realigned grades and titles so the name *sergeant* would be reserved for the top three grades and indicate a career soldier. This resulted in the elimination of the three stripes worn by sergeants since 1833. The three Λ bars and an arc became the insignia for a sergeant, retitled from the previous staff sergeant.

Eliminating the name *sergeant* from the four lower pay grades required a new plan. The lowest grade was no longer a private but a *recruit*, although this did not last long since soldiers could be reduced to the seventh pay grade for misconduct and it soon became simply private. The army retitled the sixth pay grade *private* and provided no chevron. This meant the lowest two pay grades had no rank insignia. The fifth pay grade became PFC with a single Λ . This changed the title used for fifth grade soldiers since 1920, to privates first class. Those personnel in the fourth grade, previously sergeants, were to wear corporal chevrons and have that title.¹¹ Thus established, the new chevrons were finally issued with the titles shown.



Despite the fact that the historic three bars of a sergeant were rescinded, the small combat and noncombat chevrons for that grade were manufactured in limited quantities (shown left for a non combat soldier) before the grade restructure and consequently became surplus.¹² It would be June 1958 before Congress created two new enlisted grades and inverted numbering of pay grades, making E-1 the lowest enlisted pay grade and E-9 the highest.¹³ It was with this 1958 change that brought back the three stripes for a sergeant.

During wartime some noncombat soldiers deployed forward of "combat" soldier. No soldier wanted to advertise that he did not fight and this created difficulties. In February 1951, after less than three years, the army decided to withdraw the small chevrons, replacing both combat and noncombat chevrons with olive drab designs on dark blue twill backgrounds although the 1948 titles associated with each pay grade with the absence of three stripes for a sergeant remained.¹⁴ Combat leaders were designated only by the green tabs but other distinctions between combat soldiers and specialists disappeared, at least for a short time.

Soldiers did not want to wear obsolete the two-inch wide insignia. The wear-out plan for the combat and noncombat chevrons was to place them on field jackets, although few men did so and in 1956 the army finally withdrew the authorization for their wear.¹⁵

Large-size chevrons for men returned in 1951 but women continued to wear two inch chevrons. When women first joined the army during World War II they wore standard sized chevrons, and this lasted until the WACs taupe-colored uniforms in 1950.¹⁶ The women's two-inch side chevrons had golden designs on brown that matched the new WAC taupe ensemble, shown at the right. From



1959 to 1961 the army phased out brown chevrons, replacing them with 2-inch-wide goldenlite on green chevrons, which women wore into the 1990s.



The army authorized a new optional WAC white uniform in July 1951, including golden two-inch wide chevrons (one is shown left) and matching service stripes on a white background.¹⁷ In the summer of 1957 the army allowed another optional uniform for enlisted women, this one blue, on which women wore chevrons with goldenlite bars and arcs on a blue background.

As a part of the continual desire to distinguish between combat leaders and soldiers with administrative and technical skills, the army implemented specialist ranks in 1955. Initially these chevrons were two inches wide with an eagle as the central design. Higher rank chevrons added arcs above the eagle. In 1959 males began to switch to three-inch wide specialist chevrons but the two-inch specialist chevrons continued for women into the 1990s.

¹ QMGRD 421.4 Memo to the Director of Personnel and Administration, War Department and Director of Service, Supply, and Procurement, from the Quartermaster General, 8 July 1946, The Institute of Heraldry (hereafter TIOH) files.

² WDGPA 421 Insignia (3 July 46) Subject: Reduction of size of Sleeve Insignia and Badges, to QMG, from D/PA, dated 5 September 1946, paragraph 1, TIOH files.

³ DA, Army Regulations No. 670-30, 20 October 1959, para 112 and subsequent uniform and insignia regulations.

⁴ DA, Army Regulation 670-1, 3 February 2005, para 28-7, a, and throughout para 21.

⁵ *Army Information Digest*, July 1947, pp 6-7.

⁶ WD Circ 118, 9 May 1947; *Army Information Digest*, July 1947, p 10.

⁷ Comment 2 to file WDSUP/B4, from D/SSP, to D/P&A, Subject: Procurement of Technician Insignia, dated 18 Feb 47, TIOH files

⁸ DF from BG J. J. O'Hare to TQMG, CSGPA421.INSIGNIA(17 Feb 48), 11 May 1948; Dept of the Army drawing 5-2-56, dated 15 April 1948

⁹ DA, Circular No. 202, dated 7 July 1948, para 8, g, (2).

¹⁰ Comment 2, DF from Chief, Mil. Pers Mgmt GP to QMG, Subject: Insignia, 11 May 1948, copy on file Military History Research Collection; DA, Changes 14, dated 1 September 1949, to AR 145-10.

¹¹ *Army Information Digest*, August 1948, p 24; DA, Circular No. 202, dated 7 July 1948, paras 8 d & e.

¹² *Army Information Digest*, July 1948, pp 70-71 and August 1948, p 24.

¹³ Military Pay Act of 1958, (Public Law 85-422).

¹⁴ DA, Special Regulations 600-60-1, 26 October 1951, para 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid*; DA, Circular 725-15, 7 June 1956.

¹⁶ Emerson, William K., *Encyclopedia of United States Army Insignia and Uniforms*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, 1996, pp 586-87.

¹⁷ DA, Special Regulations 600-37-2, dated 17 July 1951.