

## US Army Epaulettes and Wings, pre 1872

From the Revolutionary War until 1872, with some breaks especially from 1821 until about 1829, US Army officers wore a wide range of epaulettes. During 1821-1829 some officers wore wings and others wore epaulettes. After 1872 general officers wore epaulettes and then again officers wore them after 1903 until just before World War I. Shown below are a few examples of pre 1872 epaulettes. Before 1851 the infantry officers wore silver colored epaulettes.

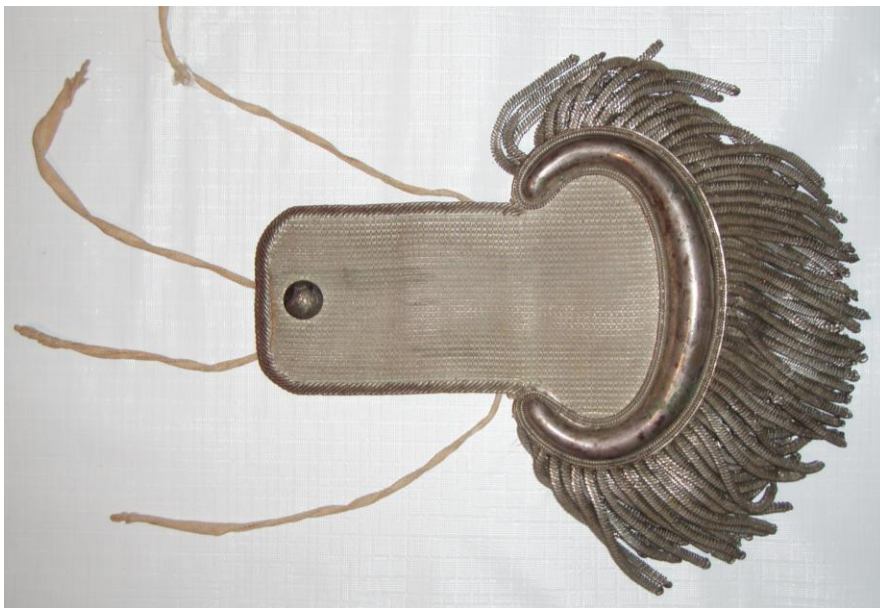
Enlisted epaulettes are shown after those of officers.



Above are two illustrations of a pair of officer militia wings. Regular Army officers wore wings from 1821 through 1829, when epaulettes began to be phased in.



Regulations of 1832 prescribe epaulettes with metal crescents. The fringe, called bullions, varied by diameter and length to show rank although early regulations did not clearly state these sizes. A captain's infantry epaulette is above and the infantry button on the epaulette is enlarged. Officers of other branches wore gilt colored epaulettes.



The epaulette at the left has smaller bullions as compared to the first one shown. This was typically worn by a lieutenant, 1832-1847.

Gilt colored epaulettes came into use in 1851 and were the standard color thereafter. The strings or cloth straps initially used to hold the epaulette to coats were replaced by metal fittings on the underside of the epaulette.



A pair of colonel's epaulettes, probably for a militia rifleman's unit, as the buttons are those for a rifleman.

John T. Sprague served in the Second Seminole War in Florida and wrote the only first person history of that conflict, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*, which the University of Florida reprinted in 1964. Sprague retired from the army in 1870 and died on September 6, 1878. A pair of his epaulettes and their cardboard container that contains his name are shown below.



Officers used the 1851 pattern epaulettes through the Civil War. Some biographical epaulettes from the Civil War follow.



Top view of the epaulettes and cap insignia worn by Junius W. MacMurray. He served in the 1st Missouri Artillery from June 1861 until March 1865, then in the 1st US Artillery from February 1866 until being promoted to major in the 5th Artillery in March 1898. He died while on duty with of the 5th Artillery on May 14, 1898.



A pair of Medical Department epaulettes and their case that is marked "Ridabock & Co. formerly Baker & McKenney."



Shown are the epaulettes and container and a coat button that belonged to Frederick E. Prime. Prime graduated from West Point in 1850, first in his class, and joined the Corps of Engineers. These are the epaulettes he purchased in 1851. Promoted to captain in May 1861 at the start of the Civil War, Prime was the chief engineer of the siege at Vicksburg and became a major on August 6, 1863. Medically retired on September 5, 1871, he died on August 12, 1900. He received brevet promotions to major on October 4, 1862, for gallantry in the battle of Corinth, MS; to Lt Col for gallantry and meritorious service during the siege at Vicksburg; and to colonel and then brigadier general on March 13, 1865, for service during the war.

Evidently after the Civil War Prime simply added the major leaves to his lieutenant epaulettes and continued to use them. The Corps of Engineers cap insignia shown is an original from the Civil War but is not attributed to Frederick Prime.

## Enlisted Epaulettes and Straps

From 1832 until 1851, regulations prescribed worsted (woolen) epaulettes for enlisted men and those for privates had no fringe. Examples of these for infantry privates and, after 1846, for engineer soldiers, are shown.

