

Lance Corporals and their Chevrons

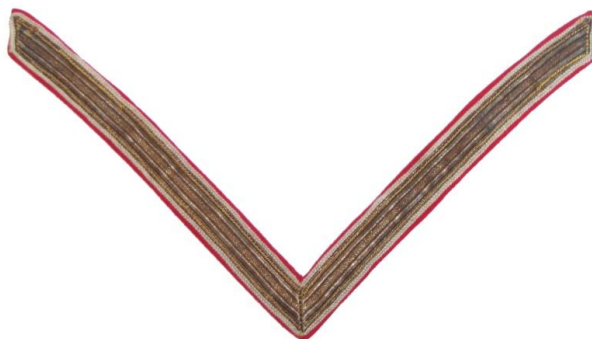
Regarding ranks, the term “lance” was used in some 18th century British army units, and in the United States Army it appears in the 1820 regulations as an acting corporal. Three officers were to meet “on the first day of every other month” to consider those soldiers who should be appointed a lance corporal. While the army provided no additional pay, regulations of 1820 did call for lance corporals to be announced in orders, demoted only by a court, and to have “a distinctive badge” although that detail was not further explained. Early in the nineteenth century such appointments were important since “As far as practicable, the selection of corporals will be made from lance-corporals.”ⁱ

Regulations of 1821 further noted that the position of lance corporal was created as a “system for encouraging good conduct.” Lance corporals assisted corporals with their duties, such as during guard tours.ⁱⁱ It would be 1891 before the army officially recognized the position of lance corporal with a chevron.

Headquarters of the Army General Order No. 46, May 1891, formally authorized lance corporals by stating:

To test the capacity of Privates for the duties of noncommissioned officer, commanders of troops, batteries, and companies, including those at recruiting depots, may appoint Lance Corporals who shall hold such appointments not to exceed three months, and while holding the appointment shall be obeyed and respected as Corporals....The appointment [may]...be renewed; but not more than one Lance Corporal at the same time for the same troop, battery, or company...(may be appointed).

A later order restricted reappointments to one 3-month term, for a total of six months as a lance corporal, although in 1897 the army modified its position and commanders could reappoint a lance corporal more than once but the restriction of one per company remained. During the first appointment a lance corporal wore a private’s uniform with lance corporal chevrons while after reappointment he changed to a corporal’s trousers that had 1/2 inch stripes. Intermittently during the 19th Century promotion to corporal first required serving as a lance corporal, but more often than not the regimental commander could simply appoint corporals based upon the recommendation of the company commander. *Shown to the right is a lance corporal’s chevron for a Corps of Engineer dress uniform, 1893-1903.*



Lance corporals were initially found in the artillery, infantry, cavalry, engineer, and Indian Scouts, and in 1893 or 1894, lance corporals of ordnance began to wear this special chevron. Other branches with lance corporals were the Signal Corps, the West Point detachment, and the Hospital Corps who called them lance acting hospital stewards.

To the left are two post 1902 lance corporal chevrons. Most men wore a plain Λ , but for a few branches such as ordnance, had their branch insignia added. Generally lance corporals disappeared in 1916 when privates first class for all branches replaced them.



ⁱ American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol II, p 207.

ⁱⁱ General Regulations of the Army. M. Carey and Sons, Philadelphia, 1821, pp 34, 35, and 83.