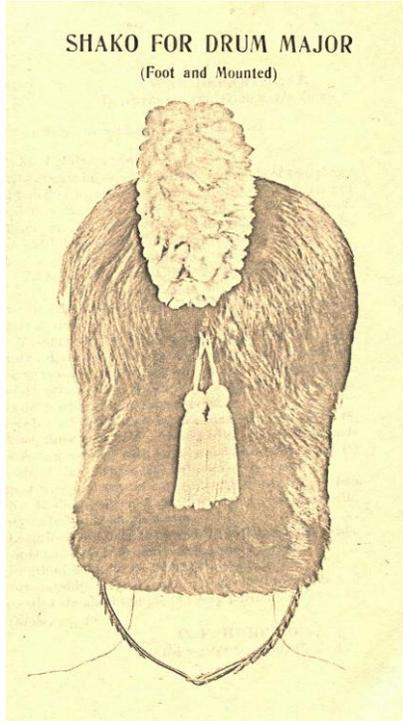


Some Army Band Insignia

Since the early days of the US Army, musicians have had special uniforms and insignia. Even today three bands have special authorized uniforms: the US Army Band, the US Military Academy Band, and the US Army Field Band.

From the nineteenth century into World War II, a regiment had its band and during this same general time frame each company sized unit in the regiment contained two field musicians. These musicians transmitted officers' orders using their bugles (or drums). At times some field musicians were members of the band, but the difference between the two types of soldiers should be noted as they served different functions.



An example of the 1903 shako issued by the War Department to drum majors. Similar headgear used before 1903 was purchased by each regiment.

Band members and musicians had coats that made them readily identifiable so that officers could readily find them on the battlefield. In the 1820s they wore red coats rather than the blue of other soldiers. Before and during the Civil War they added extra braid on their coat fronts to make them more noticeable and in the late nineteenth century regimental band members had special trim and insignia that regimental councils could select. Drum majors had tall fur busbies (left) while all band members wore special shoulder knots and shoulder cords.



A 1901 pattern cavalry drum major chevron.

While many Civil War drum majors wore unofficial chevrons with two small stars in a chevron of three arcs and three Vs, it was not until 1901 that drum majors officially received their own chevrons with crossed batons in the upper angle, as shown above. When chevrons shrank and inverted at the end of 1902, the drum major chevron followed suit. In 1916 the first sergeant of the newly formed regimental headquarters companies



were also designated as the regiment's drum major.

During the 1930s many regimental bands adopted special parade uniforms that resembled historic uniforms, while other regimental bands simply adopted out of the ordinary trim and/or uniforms.

General John J. Pershing directed the establishment of the US Army Band. Their current special uniform, initially worn in 1976, is rather well known, with a red cap and unique insignia. Uniform coats come in white for summer wear (left) as well as the more traditional dark blue. Chevrons are large, gold colored, and point down. Distinctive insignia go on the stand-up collar. Miniature medals are worn on the coats.



Cap insignia for The US Army Band have varied over the years. An original device wore from 1924 until 1927 was a large lyre bearing an eagle in a ring. This was replaced by an insignia that was based upon historic enlisted cap ornaments—a wreath containing a lyre, with the letters US on the lyre face. Officially band members wore this insignia from May 1943 until the 1976 current dress cap device came into use, which is shown last.



When US Army Band members wore their grey dress uniform with blue trim in the 1920s and 30s, they also wore a diagonal white shoulder strap with a specially made breast plate bearing a design like the cap device; it had a large lyre with a US eagle in a ring on the center. This insignia shown to the left was obtained directly from a member who served in the 1930s.

The oldest US Army band in existence is that of the US Military Academy. That band has had unique uniforms since its formation, and special insignia for nearly as long. The dress uniforms were based on the 1902 dress uniform with white trim used by the infantry

from 1903-1916, although the cap was similar to cadet headgear. Over the years other minor differences came and went. In the 1980s for a few years the band wore the same uniform but with non- standard chevrons, then switched back to the 1902 style.

		
<p>USMA Band 1913, in 1902 style uniform. The uniform was based on that of infantry bands.</p>	<p>USMA Band uniform c. 1990s in 1902 style uniform.</p>	<p>USMA Band members 1980, in 1902 style uniforms with short-lived point down chevrons.</p>



One of the unique USMA Band insignia is for the dress cap. A version made about 1920 is shown to the left. This general design was worn in all of the above three photos.

The third current band that has unique uniforms and insignia is the US Army Field Band. Formed in 1946 as the Army Ground Forces Band, the organization became the Army Field Band a couple years later. On the special blue band uniform caps prescribed for bands and ceremonial units in the early 1950s, Field Band members wore the 1904 style gilt wreath with a pentagon bearing a lyre in the center (right), and it continued for many years. In about 2000 the program manager for soldier equipment authorized a new dress uniform for the field band. Unfortunately those involved in designing the uniform and insignia had no historical background and as a result the special uniform had no historical ties.



The peculiar uniform has standard small metal chevrons on the lower cuffs rather than cloth versions on the sleeves, the soldiers wear a standard black army beret, and the collar insignia (left) is a small device somewhat similar to the earlier cap device, but with the pentagon and lyre in the wreath center, in color.

Regulations of the 1930s called for a small lyre in place of a company letter on the standard enlisted collar disk. Officially only the infantry, coast artillery, field artillery, cavalry, and engineers should have had these band disks. Some of these official disks are shown, as are other branch collar insignia with the small lyre in place of the company letter.

