

## US Army Artillery Qualification Badges, 1891-1913

While a captain, Tasker H. Bliss, later Chief of Staff, created the first artillery qualification badges in 1891. These silver badges lasted through 1896 when they were replaced by another series of badges. The army only made 250 first class badges and 500 of the second class badges.



The 1891-1896 first class badge is shown above. The second class badge was a silver bar with a triangle at each end and the wording 2<sup>nd</sup> CLASS GUNNER.



In 1896 the army replaced the two badges described above with four specialist badges that were first made in 1897. By far the most common is the bronze first class gunner's badge. Like all of the 1897-1903 specialist badges, the brooch that suspends the planchet is in the shape of a cannon tube. The circular planchet shows an M-1 gunner's quadrant.

The other three specialist badges were silver but of a similar design except for the central image. One was called a Class A badge that was really for communications specialists. It had an image of a telegraph key in the center with the same wording and stars around the edge as the first class gunner's badge. The

silver specialist Class B badge displayed wind cups and an anemometer. Shown below is the silver “full specialist” badge, the last of the four in the series. It contains the devices for both the other specialist badges and could be worn by a soldier who had qualified as a Class A and a Class B specialist.



Between 1903 and 1909 the artillery had a master gunner badge, shown above. This replaced all three of the silver specialist badges just described. To qualify an artilleryman had to show proficiency in surveying and triangulations, orienting guns and determining gun trunnion heights above mean sea level, construction of various harbor charts, use of plotting boards, construction of topographical maps, and use of photographs and blueprints.

In the same year a new gunner’s badge replaced the bronze circular one. These were individually marked and are relatively common since the artillery greatly expanded as a result of the Spanish American War. The design consists of two brass cannons crossed at right angles with a German silver square engraved with a coast artillery target at the center. Like the master gunner badge, the brooch is simply a rectangle with an engraved black edge. The US Army stamped the back of each first class gunner’s badge with the unit designation and the soldier’s company/battery number.



Unlike the early unmarked artillery badges, when a soldier won one of the 1903 badges, Rock Island Arsenal stamped the reverse of the top bar with two rows: the first line had the company designation and either “COAST ART” or “FIELD ART” and the second line had the soldier’s number. An example is shown.



To understand the markings it is necessary to briefly discuss some of the artillery reorganizations and expansions. These frequent designation changes accompanied unit location transfers caused by the Philippine Insurrection, the turmoil in the Caribbean, and troop unit consolidation at larger posts.

In 1901 an artillery reorganization did away with the old artillery regimental organization that in 1899 had each regiment add N and O batteries so each regiment contained 14 batteries. The 1901 organization made coast artillery unit a “company” and a field artillery unit a “battery.” The army then numbered each coast artillery company separately, one through 126 (later expanded to 170 companies in 1907). At the same time the army numbered each field artillery battery 1 through 30. This defined, for example, the “6th Artillery Company” as coastal artillery, and the “6th Artillery Battery” as a field artillery unit. The back marks of the 1903 badges reflect this naming system.

Initially the army allowed field artillery soldiers to earn the coast artillery looking first class gunner’s badges, but soldiers complained and soon the army provided a distinctive field artillery test and field artillery badges.

In the fall of 1904 field artillerymen received a badge that better reflected their weapon—a field gun on a bar bearing the words 1<sup>st</sup> CLASS GUNNER. While the army eliminated the coast artillery badges in 1909, the field artillery badge lasted until 1913. These badges were also back marked. Since the field artillery reorganized in 1907 and for the first time, formed field artillery regiments (before 1901 artillery regiments had contained both field and heavy company sized units), the marks on the reverse of field artillery badges changed.



Rock Island Arsenal marked the reverse of these new-style field artillery badges: before early 1907 with the battery number (above left) and after the July 1907 reorganization, with the battery letter and regimental number (above right). Behind both are “No.” and a number—the soldier’s number in the battery.



Rock Island Arsenal marked the reverse of these new-style field artillery badges: before early 1907 with the battery number (above left) and after the July 1907 reorganization, with the battery letter and regimental number (above right). Behind both are “No.” and a number—the soldier’s number in the battery.