

Officers' Dress Uniform Shoulder Knots, 1872-1903

Between 1872 and mid 1903 the Regular Army prescribed shoulder knots for officer's dress uniforms. These knots, made from gold cord, had cloth backgrounds whose color varied with the branch. In the center pad bullion embroidery showed the wearer's rank and regiment or for staff assignments, the department. Various state militias and national guards adopted similar insignia and frequently the knots for state organizations deviated from the federal designs. Several of these knots are shown.



A pair of 1872-1903 shoulder knots for a first lieutenant, 1st Infantry, and the original Japanned tin box that contained the knots. In the mid-1880s, infantry officers switched to knots with white cloth.



Left, an early knot for a 4th Infantry 1st Lieutenant. The gold cord used to make this knot had a pattern in it, unlike many later knots. Below is a white knot for a captain, 2d Infantry.



A pair of 21st Infantry knots showing a typical fastening device. Usually the manufacturer's name was on the brass fastening strap. This was made by Leopold Magnus, New York.



Colonels of Regular Army units had their regimental number above their two-inch wide eagle, as shown for this for the 3d Cavalry. For staff departments the pads were dark and for colonels the staff insignia was on the upper bullion knots. In many states the staff colonels simply wore a staff knot without a department related device (below). The eagles were made in pairs, as shown.



The knots to the right (above) were evidently for a state militia unit as there was no regimental number even though the buttons at the top were for staff officers. The cloth pad is bright blue.

The 1st lieutenant artillery knot (left) has a Rhode Island button and is thus attributed to that state.



A pair of artillery knots with federal artillery buttons but no regimental number. Presumably these were for a militia artillery colonel. Under the knots is the box showing they were made by Ridabock & Company. Knots for an Ohio infantry adjutant are shown at the right. In the Regular Army regimental adjutants wore standard regimental knots but were distinguished by gold aiguillettes.

Other standard knots are shown below. After these are more knots for militia and staff officers.





Left is a pair of knots for a Medical Department major. A Maltese cross became the medical insignia in 1896 and it lasted until 1902. Right are militia knots for an Inspector of Rifle Practice, a staff position that sometimes was in the regiment and sometimes at higher headquarters.



Left, knots made for the regimental commissary officer, 12th Kentucky Infantry, from the Mike Bruun Collection.

The next several photos are from the Robb Kay Collection. Most are from state militias.



QD stands for the Quartermaster's Dept; SD for Subsistence Dept, and MD for Medical Dept.



The 22d Engineer knots were for the engineer regiment from New York State.

The West Point Museum has a pair of 1872 pattern knots worn by Antoine Lorentz who was Master of the Sword from 1858 to 1885. They have the only the letters MA to show they were for by a professor at the Military Academy.

