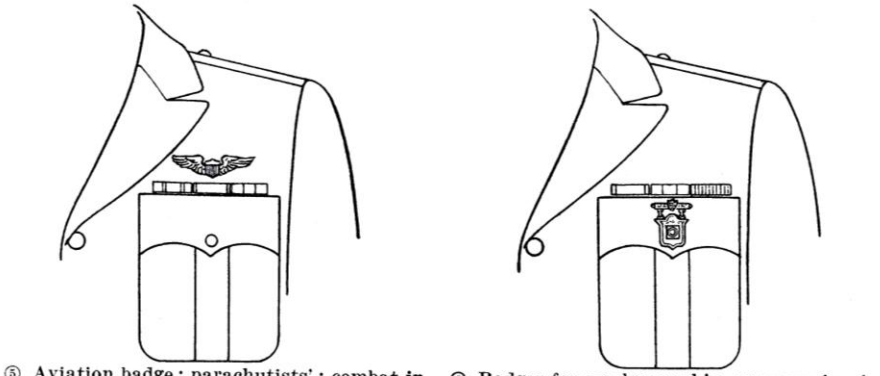
Aviation Badges, Army Air Force

The National Defense Act of 1920 established the Air Service as a permanent branch of the army. This title remained until 1926 when the aviation branch changed to Air Corps. While officers remained commissioned in the Air Corps branch, War Department Circular 130, 1 May 1942, established the Army Air Force and members of the Air Corps thereafter served in the Army Air Force. Effective May 1942, then, organizations, activities, and personnel became part of the Army Air Force. The World War II growth of the Army Air Force resulted in many new badges. The 1939 Air Corps consisted of 26,500 men and 2,200 aircraft while by 1945 the AAF had 2,253,000 men and women and 63,715 aircraft. When Congress established the US Air Force in 1947 the then AAF badges became US Air Force badges and army regulations quit referring to them. The first army regulation on badges after the creations of the US Air Force, Army Regulation 600-70, April 1948, did not mention any of the old Army Air Force related badges. The Army Air Force had 130,000 pilots in June 1944 and over 159,600 by April 1945.



⑤ Aviation badge; parachutists'; combat infantryman and expert infantryman badge.

⑥ Badges for marksmanship, gunnery, bombing, Army Air Forces technicians, driver and mechanic award, etc.

FIGURE 8.—Decorations, service medals, badges, etc.

Most badges were silver and 3-1/8 inches long. Changes 1, dated 29 July 1944, to AR 600-35, authorized two-inch badges for wear on shirt at the aviator's option. Commissioned officers wore some aviation badges and enlisted men others, while both could wear a few of the badges. In July 1942 Congress created flight officers, the pilots having pay of warrant officers, junior grade, and these aviators could qualify for any officer badge. Above is an illustration from a 1944 army regulation showing two simple illustrations regarding badge wear. The captions told soldiers which badges went where.

Pilot

During and immediately after World War I the army frequently changed pilot badges and titles, but after the 1920s a man who wore this badge was known as an "Airplane Pilot." War Department Circular 21, 1940 retitled the position and badge "Pilot." While most pilots were officers, some were enlisted men. As Circular 257, July 1942 noted, enlisted pilots were to be at least staff sergeants. Shown is a Pilot badge, worn by Army Air Corps airplane pilots and made by Gemsco. US Air Force pilots still use this design.

While the initial pilot badges were silver metal, AR 600-35, 31 December 1926 called for pilot wings on the wool service coat to be embroidered on dark blue cloth while pilot badges for

all other uniforms remained metal. This provision disappeared in the November 1941 edition of AR 600-35.

During World War II the army has a series of schools to qualify pilots. These schools were: The Elementary Flying School where students learned the technique of piloting military aircraft and in the technical subjects connected to a degree of proficiency that enabled them to pursue satisfactorily the course of training at the basic flying schools. This was followed by the Basic Flying School, which enabled the student to undertake the work of the advanced flying schools. Student pilots then went to an Advanced Flying School. This course of instruction qualified them in the technique of piloting military aircraft and in other associated subjects. It includes the duties of members of aircraft combat crews. Upon completion the student could pilot combat aircraft.

The Army Air Force also had various Specialized Flying Schools. These schools were for both pilots and non-pilots. These specialized flying schools qualified students as members of aircraft combat crews or for specialized flying duties with tactical units of the Army Air Forces. There were diversified courses in the piloting of special types of aircraft, including gliders, and in aerial gunnery, bombing, aerial observation, and in technical and tactical subjects associated with flying.

Senior Pilot

To the left is a Senior Pilot badge, formally created in September 1937. War Department Circular 62, dated September 23, 1937, established this badge under the title of "Military Airplane Pilot." Sixty-three men initially received this badge that some pilots had previously worn unofficially. War Department Circular 21, 1940, retitled the badge "Senior Pilot."

During World War I the army had created a very similar badge with a star above for "Military Aviators" while less experienced pilots (Junior and Reserve Military Aviators) wore the badge without a star. Having worn a pilot's badge with a star, those experienced pilots were loathed to relinquish this symbol of expertise and so some continued to wear the star in the 1920s and 1930s until regulations caught up with the actual practice. No less than the Air Corps chief, 1931-1935, General Benjamin Foulois, wore a star above his badge in the early 1930s. Foulois had been chief of the AEF Air Service, 1917-1919, and at that time had received his Military Aviator's badge with star. If the Chief wore an unauthorized star above his badge before it was authorized, why not other senior pilots?

As with other pilots, enlisted men could be senior pilots. The army reminded the field of this fact in WD Circular 35, 1942. The general World War II qualifications for a senior pilot included 5 years as a pilot and 1,500 flying hours.

Command Pilot

War Department Circular 31, 23 March 1940 established the Command Pilot badge. This was (and in the US Air Force still is) the highest pilot badge authorized. Changes Number 1, 29 July 1944, to Army Regulation 600-35, established a two-inch optional version for wear on shirts, shown at the left. The primary badge is 3-1/8 inches long.

Initial qualifications for command pilots were to have 10 years of flying experience and 5,000 flying hours. War Department Circular 35, 1942, reminded those in the field that command pilots could be enlisted men.

This 1942 photo shows these veterans wear only one badge each, and very few ribbons. Major General H. H. Arnold is in the center; to his left is Brigadier General Carl Spaatz. Both wear Command Pilot badges. The right-most person is Brigadier General Martin Scanlon.
US Air Force photo

Technical Observer

The army announced the Technical Observer badge in War Department Circular 31, 1940, more than 1-1/2 years before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Only officers could be technical observers – this was one of the few Army Air Force badges for which enlisted men could not qualify. As with other AAF wings, a two-inch version for shirt wear came about in July 1944. Shown is an embroidered Technical Observer badge, used by the army from 1940 through 1947. A few personnel wore such embroidered badges but most preferred the metal versions.

Aircraft Observer

The previous badge for observers has the letters US in the center of the **O**. October 14, 1921, saw the omission of the letters, which resulted in the design used through World War II. The 31 December 1926 edition of AR 600-35 called for this badge to be embroidered on dark blue cloth, for wear on the wool service coat. On all other uniforms observers were to wear silver metal wings. The requirement for cloth badges on wool service coats disappeared in the August 1941 edition of AR 600-40. By November 1941, AR 600-35 clearly stated the badges would be metal only although many aviators continued to wear the older cloth version.

Initially the title of the badge was Airplane Observer. War Department Circular 21, 1940, changed the title to Combat Observer. Circular 265, 19 December 1941, again changed the title to Aircraft Observer. Only officers could be observers and wear this badge, the War Department declaring enlisted men not being able to hold this rating. The badge lasted until the creation of the US Air Force although the Army Air Force ended formal observer training in 1943.

Balloon Pilot

Balloon pilots had a wide range of titles while the army had manned balloons. Although the men who wore this badge were really balloon pilots, the title, starting in October 1921, was balloon observer. This made the distinction between airship pilots, who had that title and a different set of wings. The previous title was "aeronaut" and the badge was like the above version, but with the letters "U.S." on the balloon. By WD Circular 21, 1940, the position became known as a "balloon pilot" and shortly true balloon observers came into being and they received their own wings.

Like other aviators, army regulations called for balloon pilots (then called balloon observers) to have bullion embroidered wings on dark blue cloth for wool service uniforms after 31

December 1926. Wings for other uniforms were in silver metal. These metal wings remained, including the two-inch optional, 1944 shirt wings.

As noted in Circular 35, 1942, enlisted men could be balloon pilots. The badge remained in regulations until the formation of the US Air Force.

Senior Balloon Pilot

War Department Circular 31, 1940 established the badge. The subsequent badge history is parallel to that of the balloon pilot badge.

Balloon Observer

War Department Circular 31, 1940, established the balloon observer badge that lasted until 1944. Balloon observers had been in the army since the Civil War and during World War I these men adjusted artillery fire. In the inter-war years the army assumed that some portions of a front might still use such observers and with the build-up of pre World War II personnel the Army Air Corps created this badge for soldiers who would hold that position.

In 1932 the Air Corps had two balloon squadrons. Most pre World War II balloon observers were rated in other positions and it is very likely very few men actually wore this badge. The dynamics of the war such as the use of light aircraft to call in artillery fire, and the danger of observers in tethered balloons, caused the army to eliminate balloon observers. The badge is not listed in AR 600-35, 31 March 1944. Since the 1960s these badges, like most other World War II aviator badges, have been reproduced for collectors since original badges are hard to locate. Since nearly all balloon observers were also rated in other positions very few men actually wore this badge.

Airship Pilot

After World War I many aviators thought dirigibles would be a major aviation form and the War Department created the airship pilot rating. Pilots of free floating balloons received a different rating since airships, with engines and a rigid form, required true pilots, at least as viewed by the Air Service. With the well-publicized crashes of the US Navy airships and the commercial Germany *Hindenburg*, by the late 1930's it was clear airships would not compete with heavier-than-air machines.

The War Department established this badge on 14 October 1921. As with other pilot badges AR 600-35, of 31 December 1926 called for wings worn on the wool service coat to be embroidered on dark blue cloth, while metal wings went on all other uniforms. The army abolished the airship pilot badge in circular 21, 1940. Airship pilots had other ratings and the elimination of this insignia left no one without a badge. Major General Oscar Westover, Chief of the Air Corps from December 1935 until his death in a crash in September 1938, was an airship pilot besides being rated as a balloon observer (really a balloon pilot), airplane pilot, and an airplane observer. Airship Pilot badges, authorized from 1921 to 1940, have been heavily reproduced for collectors.

Flight Engineer

The flight engineers filled an essential crew position in bombers. Initially these were enlisted men. The B-29, which the Army Air Force classed as a very heavy bomber and unlike other bombers, had a separate compartment containing most of the gages. The large 2,200 horse-power engines required special care and the flight engineer provided that. The Army Air Force took delivery of slightly over 2,500 of the enormous plane. The B-29 finally resulted in recognition of the skills required of a flight engineer. Change 4, AR 600-35, dated 4 July 1945, announced the Flight Engineer badge.

Commissioned officers, flight officers, and enlisted men qualified as flight engineers. In the case of the *Enola Gay*, which dropped the first atomic bomb in combat, the flight engineer was Technical Sergeant Wayne Duzenberry, a continuation of the earlier practice of having enlisted personnel in many crew positions.

Service Pilot

The Army Air Corps created service pilots in February 1942 but prescribed no badge at that time. Right is the design of the World War II Service Pilot badge, as shown in the establishing April 1942 circular.

Service pilots were those men who were overage for combat flying and this allowed them to support the war effort as part of the army. The regulation noted that service pilots could not command flying units and that enlisted men could be service pilots. AAF Regulation 35-23, dated January 20, 1943, limited service pilots to:

-Flying instructor
-Ferry Pilot
-Transport and cargo pilot
-Messenger and courier service pilot
-Testing pilot
-Tow target and utility pilot

Two months after creating the position, the War Department established the service pilot badge (April 10, 1942) and showed the lined shield with a large S in War Department Circular Number 106, in a small sketch (shown above). As with other wings, Change 1 to AR 600-35, 29 July 1944 provided optional two-inch wings for shirts and the service pilot badge was not in AR 600-70, April 1948.

Senior Service Pilot

As noted above, the army created service pilots early in World War II. No doubt many service pilots qualified for rating as a senior pilot, but the Army Air Force never officially established this badge that is commonly found. It does not appear in any World War II uniform and insignia regulation. Shown above are Senior Service Pilot wings. The 3-1/8 inch version is on the left; the 2-inch version on the right.

Glider Pilot

War Department Circular 35 of 1942 established an aeronautical rating of glider pilot as an interim change to AR 95-60 (April 24, 1941 edition). Enlisted men could be rated as glider pilots and most gilder pilots were enlisted personnel. Initially these pilots had no special badge, but in June 13, 1942, War Department Circular 188 announced the gilder pilot badge. Changes 1, dated 29 July 1944, to AR 600-35, established a two-inch optional version for the shirt. Although the US Army maintained glider units after 1948, the badge was not in the April 1948 edition of AR 600-70.

Approximately 5,000 men became gilder pilots during World War II. The particular silver badge shown is engraved on the reverse to the outstanding student in his class. The other photo (National Archives SC 199803) shows Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe addressing glider pilots in the fall 1944.

Liaison Pilot

War Department circular 102, April 7, 1942 established an aeronautical rating of liaison pilot as an interim change to AR 95-60, April 1941. War Department circular 188, June 1942, authorized the badge. Changes 1, dated 29 July 1944, to AR 600-35, established a two-inch optional version for the shirt. While the badge did not appear in the April 1948 edition of AR 600-70, Special Regulation 605-95-1, Changes 1, dated September 1950, allowed army aviators to wear the badge until the new army aviator badges were available.

Initially the AAF and the Army Ground Forces clashed over use of the L-4 Piper Cub aircraft for spotting artillery fire but eventually a compromise arose where all such pilots would be officers. By 1944 L-5 aircraft were in use and many liaison pilots were enlisted men. By war's end each division was authorized several liaison aircraft and liaison pilots.

Bombardier

Training Regulations 440-40, dated June 30, 1926, replaced an earlier *Tentative Machine and Bombing Course …* pamphlet. The 1926 publication had waited until the Air Corps clearly established it official roles and missions. TR 440-15, dated January 1926, spelled out the roles of army aerial bombardment: attack of enemy land forces, attack of enemy zone of interior centers and depots, and attack of naval forces. During the 1920s and 1930s two-man bombing crews were composed of pilots, although all pilots were not officers. The Air Corps did not have members who were only bombardiers.

War Department Circular 11, 1940, noted that enlisted men could be trained as bombardiers and from then on, both officers and enlisted personnel filled this niche. The Air Corps established two bombardier schools in 1941 and by the end of 1943 nine schools were in operation. To the right is a bombardier badge made in England during World War II. As had been the earlier practice, no special insignia marked bombardiers, until War Department Circular 188, June 13, 1942, established the bombardier badge. In 1943 the army had 19,000 graduates. The maximum number of officer bombardiers in World War II was nearly 29,000.

Navigator

War Department Circular 188, June 13, 1942, established the 3-1/8 inches wide badge for navigators. The design is an armillary sphere, a skeletal celestial sphere with a model of the earth or of the sun in the center. Ancient Greeks developed armillary spheres for use as teaching tools. In larger and more precise forms armillary spheres were also used as observational instruments. Armillary spheres were popular in the late middle ages.

The War Department authorized a two-inch size in July 1944 for optional wear on shirts through Changes 1 to AR 600-35. Like other AAF wings, it is not in AR 600-70, April 1948.

Prior to November 1940 the Air Corps had no navigation specialists trained in schools. Pilots were expected to do all navigation and pilots received all of the navigation training. From 1933 tactical units did conduct specialized navigator training. For a while in 1943 the army had a combined bombardier-navigator training program. Tactical units continued to provide navigator training for men in other specialists, but by January 1944 all this had ended and all navigators were products of tactical schools. By mid 1944 the Army Air Force had 24,000 officer navigators and 32,000 by the end of World War II.

Aircrew Member

In the 1920s and 1930s when the Air Corps was making many historic and record setting flights such as around-the-world trips, mechanics flew on the planes. Mechanical problems might delay a flight and so the mechanics fixed the oil leak or other problem, while the pilots had a day off. Those enlisted men who flew on aircraft during flights had no special insignia until mid 1942.

Circular 226, July 11, 1942, finally established a badge for air crew members. Initially crewmembers had to be on flight status and actively participating in aerial flights to wear the badge. AAF Regulation 35-30A, dated December 23, 1943, allowed continued wear of the badge by those former aircrew members who were wounded by enemy action or injured while discharging duties as an aircrew member. The US Air Force continued to use the same basic design.

Aerial Gunner

Starting in World War I, many two-seat airplanes included a place for an enlisted gunner. This soldier, in an open cockpit, had a flexible, ring-mounted gun he could use to fire at enemy aircraft throughout the rear 180˚. These types of aircraft with a flexible gunner continued during World War II. Various editions of Training Regulations 440-40, issued in 1926 and 1935, with changes, and the earlier *Tentative Machine and Bombing Course …* had courses for the flexible gunners. These between the world wars personnel had no special insignia, although they could qualify as an aerial gunner expert, sharpshooter, and marksman.

The War Department established the Aerial Gunner badge with Changes 18 to AR 600-35, on 29 April 1943. The central design of a winged bullet came from the distinguished aerial gunner badge, awarded for 1926-1932 gunnery competitions. Initially only airmen assigned and performing duties as aerial gunners could wear the badge. When a soldier was no longer assigned as an aerial gunner, he gave up his badge. This changed in December 1943 with AAF Regulation 35-30A allowed gunners to continue to wear their badges if either wounded by enemy action or injured while discharging duties as a member of an air crew. Changes 1 to AR 600-35, December 11, 1943, provided for an optional two-inch badge for wear on shirts.

Many bombers had several gunners. The AAF had 127,000 aerial gunners in June 1944 and 169,000 in February 1945. Training normally consisted of a 6-week course.

Flight Surgeon

Shown are World War II Flight Surgeon badges, left in gold, used from mid-1942 through mid-1944, and in silver, right, post-September 1944. The War Department official drawing for the gold colored badge is dated July 10, 1942, well before the issuance of Changes 13, AR 600-35, dated February 11, 1943. Changes 1 to AR 600-35, July 1944, provided for a two-inch shirt badge. Very shortly after this War Department Circular 431, dated September 6, 1944, changed the flight surgeon badges to silver. This color change was to make the medical personnel on flight status feel more a part of the AAF team and was evidently approved on August 19, 1944. These short-lived two-inch gold wings were replaced by small silver badges, just like the larger size. The flight surgeon badge shown is not in AR 600-70, April 1948, and the army had no flight surgeon insignia between the creation of the US Air Force in 1947 the US Army Flight Surgeon badge in 1957.

The Air Corps had flight surgeons during the interwar period but these officers had no special insignia. The buildup of forces between 1939 and 1941 brought many doctors into the aviation community and per circular 72, 1940, those doctors who completed a special course at the School of Aviation Medicine became Aviation Medical Examiners, and the after one year in the army, including time is school, they became qualified as flight surgeons. Neither level of aviation medical officer had a badge at this time. With the growth of badges for many other aviation specialists, flight surgeons received badges in 1942.

Flight Nurse

World War II Flight Nurse badges, in gold left, used from December 1943 through September 1944, and in silver, right, post-September 1944. These came in two-inch size only. The army established the first flight nurse badges in gold color, by Change 1 to AR 600-37, December 15, 1943. War Department Circular 431, September 6, 1944, changed the badge to silver at the same time the flight surgeon badge changed color.

The army had flight nurses who accompanied air evacuation patients well before it established the flight nurse badge. Air evacuation of patients in the North-African European Theater began in February 1943 in North Africa. This was followed by air evacuation from Sicily, Salerno, and other European battle sites. The January 1943 participation of Army nurse Elise Ott in a trip with five patients from Karachi, India (now Pakistan), to Bolling Field, Washington, D.C., proved the feasibility of global aeromedical evacuation. When European hospitals filled to capacity during the Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944–45, flight nurses accompanied patients who flew directly to Mitchell Field, New York, just three days after being wounded.

These flight nurses received special training before assignment to the Air Forces Surgeon General's Office. Generally the AAF used C-47, C-47, and C-54 aircraft for medical evacuation. Usually one nurse and one medical corpsman went on each flight after a doctor briefed the nurse on each patient's condition. The flight nurse was responsible for up to twenty-five patients during flights.

Evacuation by plane lowered the battle casualty fatality rate, but it cost the lives of 17 flight nurses including 13 who died in crashes while on duty

Women's Air Force Service Pilot (and Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron)

The initial wing design for Women Airforce Service Pilots, used until the end of 1943, is at the left. The first two classes had W-1 and W-2, their class number, with 319th on the scroll, for the 319th Flying Training Detachment. Later classes had W-3 through W-7 and 318th on the scroll, since the flying training detachment changed. Miss Jacqueline Cochran, WASP director, paid for this style of wings, since as the Air Corps did not issue them. All of the WASP wings have been heavily reproduced.

Class W-8 had wings with a diamond in the center (right), although the initial issue of wings had the diamond added over a standard wing. The one-piece wings with diamond started with Class W-9. These 2-7/8 inches wide wings were issued to the 1944 classes. Like the shield pattern, these have been reproduced for collectors.

When World War II started the Air Corps was totally unprepared. The army needed pilots desperately. Some experienced civilian pilots had gone to Canada and Britain to sign-up and fly for freedom. The Air Corp was frantic for pilots, both for combat and more mundane duties such as ferrying aircraft from factories, towing targets for anti-aircraft gunners, and other non-combat duties. Various lobbing efforts took place trying to bring in women pilots so women could help fill the needs. In 1942 the army allowed Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron (WAFS) pilots and then Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) so females could fly support duties and release male pilots for combat.

During World War II the army clearly declared that the women pilots were civilians – there would not be female military pilots. The WAFS consisted of 28 women pilots with an average of over 1,000 flying hours. Ages twenty-one to thirty-five they had to have at least 500 hours

flying time and a commercial flying license with a 200 horse power rating. On August 5, 1943 these women were absorbed into the WASPs, which eventually numbered approximately 1,070 women. After considerable lobbying, in 1977 Congress recognized the WAFS/WASP pilots as military veterans. After all, they wore uniforms, were subject to military discipline, and some received military medals such as the Air Medal.

AAF Regulation 40-8, 21 December 1943 delineated WASP duties as ferrying aircraft, tracking, performing target missions, and piloting transports. The 3 April 1944 edition listed the duties as ferry aircraft, tracking, target missions, personnel transports, or "other duties for which they are deemed qualified by commanding officers." This included training and two women even taught men how to fly the B-29. Flying was limited to US and Canada.

AAF Regulation 40-9, 14 February 1944, is the only military regulation that shows WASP wings, which, like other wings, went above left pocket on both dress jackets and on shirts. The badge in the regulations shows the diamond, which is the traditional shape for women who have a coat-of-arms in their own right, since men had their coat-of-arms on a shield. When sufficient male pilots were trained and many has started to returned to the United States, the AAF ended the WASPs on December 20, 1944, as documented in AAF Regulation 40-8, 30 December 1944 and in a December 19, 1944 press release.