

The US Army's Officers' Reserve Corps Badge



In August 1935 the War Department introduced a badge for Reserve Corps officers. It was 1-3/4 inches high in the shape of a “modernistic silver eagle” and it bore a colored enamel illustration of the Minute Man. At the badge bottom the black enamel words “Officers’ Reserve Corps” appeared. The enameled Minute Man on the badge has gray breeches, orange leggings, pink arms and legs, black shoes and weapon,

brown hair, a white shirt with sleeves rolled up, and a red vest. Captain John Parker, depicted as the minute man in the well known statue by Daniel Chester French, is standing on a gray rock. The badge lasted until 1941.

The purpose of the badge was to recognize officers who had served for several years in the Organized Reserves, and to show if they were qualified for promotion. At the bottom of the badge officers added a pendant bar “...marked ‘5 Years,’ ‘10 Years,’ ‘15 Years,’ etc., in five-year periods.” The bar was silver or was of red enamel for those officers with a certificate of capacity.¹ A badge is 1-3/4 inches high, including the 1/8 inch high pendant.

The army issued certificates of capacity stating the officer was qualified for promotion to the next grade. Officers earned certificates of capacity by passing various tests and qualifications that showed they had mastered skills the army deemed essential for a particular grade and branch. In addition, officers had to personally appear before a board of officers and receive their recommendation. Corps commanders issued certificates of capacity once an officer satisfactorily completed his training.² The army also required reserve officers transferring between branches to have certificates of capacity for the branch to which they transferred, except when such transfers were in the interest of the War Department.³ Requirements for certificate of capacity are in AR 140-5, June 1936 and June 1941. While the badge disappeared before World War II, reserve officers had to work towards certificates of capacity until early 1942.

The U S Army Reserves trace their history back to the Medical Reserve Corps, which Congress established in April 1908.⁴ After World War I Congress expanded the reserves to all branches to take advantage of the many citizen soldiers who were not members of the National Guard. The new reserves were composed of National Army units established during World War I for drafted troops.⁵ Typically these were divisions numbered 76 and above. Similarly high numbered units for various branches composed the reserves, such as infantry regiments above 300. Congress defined details of the Officers Reserve Corps’ in the National Defense Act of 1920.⁶

The War Department found it challenging to keep reserve officers' qualified. In 1931, for example, the War Department published an extensive reading list and expected reserve officers to be well read so they could qualify for promotion. Out of this and similar efforts spelled out in a series of regulations, came the certificates of capacity and the badge.⁷ Since many officers became members of the reserves in 1920, by 1940 a few had been in long enough to qualify for a badge with a 20 Years bar.

¹ WD, Circular 48, August 14, 1935.

² *The Officers' Guide*, 4th Edition, Military Service Publishing Company, 1941, p 239; WD Circular 77, December 15, 1938.

³ WD, Circular 76, November 23, 1936, Section VI.

⁴ WD, *Annual Reports of the Secretary of War, 1909*, vol 2, p 174.

⁵ WD, Bulletin 25, June 9, 1920, Sec 3a.

⁶ WD, Bulletin 25, June 9, 1920, Sec 37.

⁷ WD, Bulletin 46, December 12, 1931 and WD Regulations 140-22 to 140-39, inclusive.