

Real Spanish American War Corps Badges

In the last ten or so years a plethora of false Spanish American War corps badges have come onto the market. Many collectors are only generally familiar with these badges. The shapes and colors have been described in various articles, but in the last few years, some dealers have even started to offer colors that were never authorized or worn. The most obvious means to distinguish between the fake and actual badges are by examining the reverse of these badges.

This article shows some actual badges, both the face and the reverse, since the back is often the easiest means to distinguish genuine badges. However, first it is worth examining the various ways veterans wore these badges. Most Spanish-American War veterans were not professional soldiers and thus some badges come with ribbons. These were worn like medals. In summary, badges could be worn either on a ribbon or pinned to a coat.



Many veterans wore their badges like medals. The above three examples are typical. Often badges were suspended from plain tri-color ribbons, as at the left. Less frequently they had other ribbons and (or) exposed brooches such as the eagle or a unit designation. The right and left enameled badges have suspension rings while the center badge has a bar running between the points at the 10 and 2 o'clock position that holds the ribbon.



The front and back of a badge with a suspension ring typically used to create a medal type badge. A hinge for a pin and a catch were on the reverse of this badge as seen at the 3 and 9 o'clock positions. A maker's mark is below the ring base.



The above left First Corps headquarters badge is another example of a badge made so it could be suspended from a ribbon or pinned directly to a garment. It is also marked STERLING. The pin is typical of that used on most corps badges made at the turn of the century. On the right is a Third Corps badge suspended from a typical tri-colored ribbon. Made by Bailey, Banks, and Biddle of Philadelphia, it is marked B.B.&B. on the top line, PHILA. on the center line, then STERLING. This is an unusual example of use of a T-hinge for the pin. Many of the recent fake badges point out this style T-hinge and use it as evidence of its authenticity, which is not always the case.

The Eighth Corps served in the Philippines and due to the length of the insurrection Eighth Corps badges became a popular insignia worn by many men.



The front and back of an Eighth Corps badge made by the Pasquale & Sons Company of San Francisco. Pasquale supplied many insignia for units in the Philippines. This direct suspension using a gilt colored brooch is typical of many Eighth Corps badges. Another style of brooch is shown below.



Many original badges have a range of makers marks on the reverse, while the recently reproduced badges do not. Also the pins on the fake badges are infrequently of a T-hinge or more often, made from a single piece of looped wire like a safety pin.



Second Corps badges with the left version made in Covington, Kentucky, across from Cincinnati. The right badge is simply marked STERLING. Both have conventional hinged pins.



Two additional Second Corps badges that are back-marked and that also have hinged pins. The pendant (above on the right) containing a Second Corps badge and was made by C. E. Vokes, of Covington, like the left hand badge in the row above the pendant.



To the left is a painted Second Corps headquarters badge. This is one of the very few original badges shown that has a safety pin type fastener. This is the type of fastener the recent fake badges have tried to imitate. Next is a small Second Corps badge intended for wear on a suit coat.



On the next page is a series of Third Corps badges, both front and reverse. The purpose of showing that set is to reinforce the style of pins. They are all hinged with the pins themselves made of thin wire. The catches are open catches made from a separate piece of metal strap. The one T-hinge (lower row, left) has a catch that has a semi-circular cross section. Following that are similar pictures of four Fourth Corps badges front and back.

Like the other badges shown, they are delicately made and show high quality craftsmanship.





Like the American flag, the divisions were designated by colors: Red (first division), White (second division), and Blue (third division). Personnel assigned or attached to the corps headquarters wore badges with concentric red, white, and blue, from the inside out.

Similar to the Third and Fourth Corps badges, above, the following set of the Seventh Corps badges have interesting pins. To the right is an enlarged picture of the reverse of the headquarters badges. Another badge for the Second Division, Seventh Corps, is back-marked JOHN FRICK in an arc above -NY-.





Some corps badges contain a number in the center; the number representing the brigade. Army regulations called for the corps badge to be colored according to the division, making a brigade designation not authorized. Nevertheless, such numbers are common on some badges, especially those for the Third Corps.

Some of the fake badges made in the early 21st Century have been made in strange colors, such as green, supposedly for the medical personnel, but there is no proof such hues were ever made originally. When the corps badges were authorized on July 15, 1898, both an Artillery Corps and a Cavalry Corps badge were authorized. The cavalry badge design was a winged horseshoe, but this was not implemented as the Secretary of War later decided that the cavalry division of each corps would wear a yellow badge of the numbered corps and not the cavalry corps badge. The Joe Wheeler home near Decatur, Alabama, has both Fifth and Fourth Corps badges in yellow. Wheeler was a cavalry commander during the Spanish American War. The Fourth Corps badge in cavalry yellow is shown.



The Artillery Corps badge was made and worn, but given the small number of the artillery batteries, these badges are not common. Those who have made the fake badges had stamped out artillery badges in a range of colors. An original artillery badge is shown on the next page.



This Artillery Corps Badge is one of the few originals with a safety-pin type fastener. The reverse has the raised letters H. V. ALLIEN & CO. and N.Y., showing it was made by a major military accoutrement firm that was headquartered on Broadway in New York City.

The least common badge of the numbered Spanish American War corps was for the Sixth Corps. Major General James H. Wilson, U. S. Volunteers, 1855 West Point Graduate, and Civil War general who had left the army in 1871, was assigned to command the 6th Corps that was to be assembled at Chickamauga. The corps was never formed and Wilson ended up commanding the 1st Division of the 1st Corps. A contemporary Sixth Corps badge is shown. It is back marked B.B.&B. PHILA. and SILVER. Makers of the fake badges and most of the buyers do not know the real history of the 6th Corps, thus creating a market for spurious Sixth Corps Badges.



In summary, real Spanish American War Corps badges are available and collectible, but many non-marked badges with safety-pin fasteners that have been spot welded to the basic badge, are recent fakes. Hopefully by examining the backs of badges collectors will be able to better judge which badges are original.