

Some Officers' Shoulder Ornamentation, 1903-Present

For ordinary wear on blue service uniforms, officers showed their rank with shoulder straps, as had been the practice since 1829. Shoulder straps continued into the 21st century. For dress uniforms, officers had more ornate shoulder ornamentations.



The army prescribed new dress uniforms in 1902 and with these regulations came officers' shoulder knots of the design still used today. These were originally described as "Of gold-wire cord ¼ inch in diameter, formed of three cords in four plaits and rounded top, finished with small gilt regulation button; about 5-1/2 inches long...." These shoulder knots initially went on full dress coats for company and field grade officers, and on Evening coats. The knots shown, which were made by the Pasquale Company of San Francisco, are typical of the early 20th century shoulder knots. The threaded screwpost has holes at the base so it could be sewn to the coat and held in place.

Mess uniform design details varied by regiment and staff corps and departments until 1911, although the general cuts were similar. In that year the army adopted standard mess uniform jackets. On these, officers wore the same design shoulder knots. Backing for these knots were either navy blue or white, depending on the coat color.

Insignia on shoulder knots varied over time and by grade. Regulations of 1902 called for field grade officers to add in the knot center, a gold coat of arms of the United States, but this provision disappeared in 1904 and for several years officers wore the knot plain as shown in the above photo.

In February 1913, paragraph 45 of *Specifications for the Uniform of the United States Army*, added rank insignia on the knots "in the same relative position" as on service coat shoulder loops. Two examples on the



right help date these knots.

While company and field grade officers used shoulder knots on mess and some dress uniforms, generals often wore epaulettes rather than shoulder knots. A 1913 brigadier general's uniform with an epaulette that belonged to Charles Bailey, now in the Gil Sanow collection, is shown at the left. General Bailey

commanded the 81st Division during WW I and is credited with inventing the shoulder patch. Generals' epaulettes had an eagle in a circle between 1903 and 1917.



Major General Squier, left, in a post WW I dress uniform with epaulettes. Between the world wars officers were not required to have mess jackets or dress uniforms.

After John Pershing retired, dress blue and dress white uniforms were allowed on an optional basis and in 1936 and again in 1938, dress uniforms came back into use, but these had either ranks shoulder straps or between 1936 and 1938, stiff branch colored

ornamentation without rank, as shown to the right of engineer officers. These were without rank.

The army prescribed long tailed Evening Uniforms in 1902. Various versions these lasted until 1975. On the Evening coats, officers wore 1902 pattern gold-wire cord shoulder knots identical to those for the mess uniform.

In 1952 the army again authorized officers mess uniforms. Both white and blue mess jackets included 1902 pattern shoulder knots without rank. These 1902 style knots continue in use today.

