

HISTORY OF THE CIRCLED COLLAR BRASS INSIGNIA FOR ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Army regulations published in December 1902, established that Army officers had to wear the national coat of arms on both sides of the collar front and the branch insignia behind the coat of arms; enlisted men had the initials US followed by the branch badge. Later, the national coat of arms was relegated to the head-dress, and replaced on the collar by the initials U.S. for officers, and the initials U.S. in the centre of a disc for enlisted men. (1:140)

The circled collar insignia worn on the lapel of Air Force members has a lasting heritage that can be traced back to 27 April 1918, when General Pershing approved a request to establish a distinct collar insignia for Air Service personnel. The first insignia was short lived, for on 17 July 1918 changes #5 and #41 prescribed a “vertical silver propeller with bronze wings on either side, one and three quarters inches tip to tip.” A one inch bronze disc with ring and propeller was prescribed for enlisted men in the Air Service. (2:35)

When the Air Force separated from the Army Air Corps in 1947, the enlisted personnel kept the circled collar brass, adapting it to the Air Force by changing the brass finish to a silver/pewter appearance. The design, with a propeller and wings on the left lapel and U.S. on the right, continued until the mid 50s at this point we discontinued the propeller and wing design, opting for the U.S. to be worn on both lapels. (3:1) This design remained until the introduction of the new Air Force service coat, shade 1620. Larger, brighter chevrons were added and the collar insignia was removed. These changes were introduced to create a uniform that would give members a more modern professional appearance. (4:165) Effective 1 June 1995, the U.S. collar brass insignia was re-introduced and all Air Force personnel were instructed to wear the U.S. insignia without the circle. (5:4) There was no difference between the enlisted and officers in regards to the collar brass with the exception of the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, who retained the U.S. insignia with wreath design as previously worn. Cost savings was cited as justification to eliminate the circled collar brass insignia. Although the circled collar brass insignia was eliminated, enlisted personnel were still authorized to wear the circled insignia on the service cap.

Most changes to the Air Force uniform have been accepted quietly. However, since the decision to eliminate the circled collar brass in 1991, every Air Force uniform board has received a number of requests to return the circled collar brass to the enlisted force. (6:52) This persistence is a strong indication of their desire to restore and preserve a lasting heritage. Therefore, we strongly recommend the Air Force uniform Board authorize the return of the circled collar brass for all enlisted personnel.

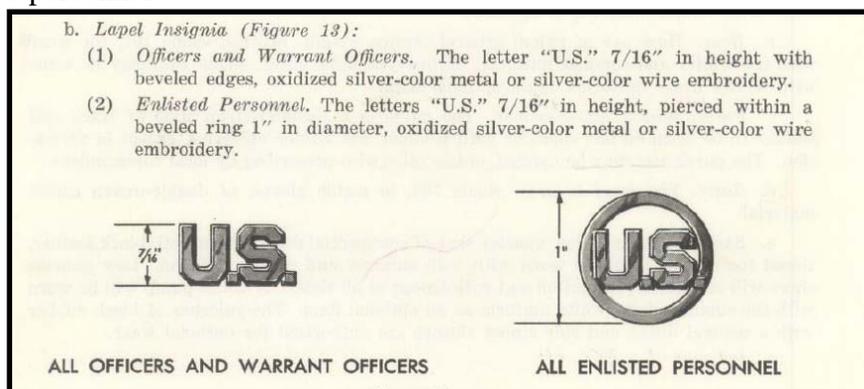


Figure 1 Air Force Lapel Insignias (7)

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5. Headquarters, AFMPC. Message, Uniform Changes – Implementation Guidance, 081910Z May 95.
6. 94th Air Force Uniform Board meeting minutes, 24 January 1995, p52-64.
7. Air Force Regulation 35-14, Military Personnel, Service and Dress Uniforms, 15 November 1950, fig. 13.