

92d Birthday of the Army Warrant Officer



By Chief Warrant Officer Five David P. Welsh (Retired)

The United States Army Warrant Officer Corps marked its 92d anniversary on 9 July 2010. An Act of the United States Congress in 1918 established the United States Army Mine Planter Service as part of the United States Army Coast Artillery Corps. Implementation of the Act by the Army was published in War Department Bulletin 43, dated 22 July 1918. A total of 40 warrant officers were authorized to serve as masters, mates, chief engineers, and assistant engineers on each mine-planting vessel. Although only one rank of warrant officer was authorized by Congress, in effect, three grades were created because of the varying levels of pay authorized for masters, first mates, second mates, and corresponding levels of marine engineer personnel. This is also when the official color of the Army Warrant Officer Corps came to be brown. It originated from the brown strands from burlap bags that the Army Mine Planter Service personnel wore as their insignia of rank.

Also in 1918, the Army opened a school, commanded by an officer who had graduated from the United States Naval Academy, to train its mariners at Fort Monroe, Virginia. In World War I, the Coast Artillery Corps was responsible for mine defenses in major ports. Vessels ranging in size from small motor boats to 1,000-ton oceangoing ships were used to lay and maintain minefields. Conflicts between Soldiers and civilian employees who manned these vessels revealed the need to ensure that the vessels were manned by military personnel.

The following selected highlights portray the rich history of the Army Warrant Officer Corps:

- The National Defense Act of 1920 provided for warrant officers to serve in clerical, administrative, and bandleader positions. This act also authorized 1,120 warrant officers to be on active duty. During this time, warrant officers were excluded from performing duties from which enlisted personnel were also excluded.
- On 12 May 1921, a distinctive insignia was approved for warrant officers. It consisted of an eagle rising with wings displayed, adapted from the Great Seal of the United States. The eagle is standing on two arrows, which symbolize the military arts and sciences. The eagle rising is enclosed within a wreath. Warrant officers of the United States Tank Corps were the first to wear this new insignia.
- In 1936, the Army was uncertain about what an Army warrant officer was and whether there was a place for warrant officers in the Army's personnel structure. Although it had given the rank to such specialties as band leaders, marine engineers, field clerks, and pay clerks, it had also used the rank as a reward for former commissioned officers who no longer met the officer educational requirements and for outstanding enlisted personnel who were too old to be commissioned and could look to no further advancement.
- In 1940, warrant officers began serving as disbursing agents. Warrant officer appointments began to occur in larger numbers for the first time since 1922. However, overall strength declined due to the significant number transferred to active duty as regular commissioned officers.
- In 1941, Public Law 230 authorized appointments of up to one percent of the total Regular Army enlisted strength. This law also established two pay grades for warrant officers—W1 for warrant officers junior grade and W2 for chief warrant officers. One other benefit of Public Law 230 was the authorization of flight pay for those involved in aerial duties.
- In November 1942, the position of warrant officer was defined by the United States War Department in the rank order as being above all enlisted personnel and immediately below all commissioned officers. January 1944 saw the authorization of the appointment of women as warrant officers, and by the end of World War II, 42 female warrant officers were serving on active duty. Warrant officers were filling 40 different occupational specialties by early 1946 and approximately 60 specialties by 1951.


- The 1949 Career Compensation Act brought two new pay rates for warrant officers. The designations of warrant officer junior grade and chief warrant officer were retained, and the grade of chief warrant officer was expanded with the addition of pay grades of W3 and W4.
- In 1953, the Warrant Officer Flight Program led to the training of thousands who later became helicopter pilots during the Vietnam War.
- The 1954 Warrant Officer Personnel Act established warrant officer pay grades W1 through W4 and officially eliminated the Mine Planter Service.
- On 21 January 1957, a new warrant officer concept, resulting from a Department of the Army study, was announced and provided the following guidelines:
 - There was a need for warrant officers.
 - The warrant officer category would not be considered a reward or incentive.
 - The first published definition for warrant officers was established in Army Regulation 611-112: “The warrant officer is a highly skilled technician who is provided to fill those positions above the enlisted level which are too specialized in scope to permit effective development and continued utilization of broadly trained, branch-qualified commissioned officers.”
- In July 1972, Army warrant officers began wearing newly designed silver rank insignia with black squares, in which one black square signified warrant officer one (WO1) and two, three, and four black squares signified chief warrant officer two (CW2) through chief warrant officer four (CW4). Also in 1972, a trilevel education system was established and provided formal training at the basic or entry level for warrant officers in 59 occupational specialties. The educational system further provided intermediate level formal training in 53 specialties and formal training for 27 specialties at the advanced level.
- In 1978, United States Army National Guard and United States Army Reserve warrant officers were integrated into the Army Professional Development System. This satisfied the need for qualified, highly trained warrant officers that could be accessed for the Active Army rapidly in times of emergency.
- In 1982, the Warrant Officer Training System was established by the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. The training system consisted of three levels: *Entry*, *Advanced*, and *Senior*.
- On 1 October 1984, all direct appointments of Army warrant officers ceased by direction of the Army Vice Chief of Staff. A Warrant Officer Entry Course was established at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. In the mid-1980s, a Warrant Officer Entry Course–Reserve Components was established in the Warrant Officer Training Branch at the Army Reserve Readiness Training Center at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. This course evolved into Warrant Officer Candidate School–Reserve Components and was conducted until September 1994, when all warrant officer candidate school courses were consolidated and transferred to the Warrant Officer Career Center, Fort Rucker, Alabama.
- In 1985, the Army developed a new definition of the warrant officer that encompassed all warrant officer specialties: “An officer appointed by warrant by the Secretary of the Army, based upon a sound level of technical and tactical competence. The warrant officer is the highly specialized expert and trainer who, by gaining progressive levels of expertise and leadership, operates, maintains, administers, and manages the Army’s equipment, support activities, or technical systems for an entire career.”
- The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 1986 amended Title 10 of the United States Code (USC) to provide that “Army chief warrant officers shall be appointed by commission.” The primary purpose of the legislation was to equalize appointment procedures among the services. Chief warrant officers of the United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, and United States Coast Guard had been commissioned for many years. Contrary to popular belief, the commissioning legislation was not a Total Warrant Officer Study recommendation but a separate Army proposal. Further clarification of the role of an Army warrant officer, including the commissioned aspect, was found in Army Field Manual 22-100: “Warrant officers are highly specialized, single-track specialty officers who receive their authority from the Secretary of the Army upon their initial appointment. However, Title 10 USC authorizes the commissioning of warrant officers upon promotion to chief warrant officer rank. These commissioned warrant officers are direct representatives of the president of the United States. They derive their authority from the same source as commissioned officers but remain specialists, in contrast to commissioned officers, who are generalists. Warrant officers can and do command detachments, units, activities, and vessels, as well as lead, coach, train, and counsel subordinates. As leaders and technical experts, they provide valuable skills, guidance, and expertise to commanders and organizations in their particular field.”
- In 1988, the Army established that—pending submission and approval of the new rank of CW5—warrant officers selected by a Department of the Army board and designated as master warrant officer (MW4) would be senior to all warrant officers in the rank of CW4. The MW4 continued to be paid at the W4 pay grade. In December 1988, the first class from the MW4 training course graduated and the first 30 CW4s were designated as master warrant officers.
- In 1989, a Warrant Officer Management Act (WOMA) proposal was submitted by the United States Army Warrant Officers Association on behalf of the Army to the Congress. In 1991, the WOMA proposal was considered by the Congress, and it was incorporated into the NDAA for Fiscal Year 1992. Six key provisions were

enacted based on WOMA as signed by the President in December 1991:

- A single promotion system for warrant officers.
- Tenure requirements based on years of warrant officer service.
- Establishment of the rank of CW5 with a five-percent cap on the number of warrant officers on each Service's active duty list at any one time.
- Selective mandatory retirement boards for retirement-eligible warrant officers.
- In February 1992, WOMA's provisions went into effect. On 1 October 1992, the appointment of Army warrant officer candidates to WO1 was established as the graduation date from Warrant Officer Candidate School. Prior to that date, candidates were not appointed until completion of the then Warrant Officer Technical and Tactical Certification Course for their military occupation specialty (MOS). Since certification courses for various MOSs were of various lengths, the length of time spent as a warrant officer candidate varied greatly.
- On 9 July 2004, new CW5 rank insignia and standards for wearing Army officer branch insignia and branch colors were announced as uniform changes for Army warrant officers. The CW5 insignia was a silver-colored bar, 3/8 inch wide and 1 1/8 inches long, with a black line down the center of the bar. This aligned the Army CW5 insignia with those of the Navy and Marine Corps, making the rank more readily recognizable in joint operations. Ceremonial warrant officer insignia change and flag ceremonies were held at various locations on 9 July and other dates. This change relegated the brass "eagle rising" insignia to Warrant Officer Corps history.
- On 14 October 2005, new Army warrant officer definitions were published in Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*. This pamphlet, which includes the career development of warrant officers, contains the new official definition of an Army warrant officer: "The Army warrant officer (WO) is a self-aware and adaptive technical expert, combat leader, trainer, and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training, and education, the WO administers, manages, maintains, operates, and integrates Army systems and equipment across the full spectrum of Army operations. Warrant officers are innovative integrators of emerging technologies, dynamic teachers, confident warfighters, and developers of specialized teams of Soldiers. They support a wide range of Army missions throughout their career. Warrant officers in the Army are assessed with specific levels of technical ability. They refine their technical expertise and develop their leadership and management skills through tiered progressive assignment and education."

Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 follows these general definitions with additional definitions for each warrant officer rank, WO1 through CW5.

- On 11 January 2008, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs issued a memorandum authorizing 30 years of active service for all Regular Army warrant officers of any grade. Previously, only Regular Army CW5s were allowed 30 years of active warrant officer service.
- On 26 April 2010, the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2011 was introduced in the United States House of Representatives. Section 507 of the bill amended Section 571(b) of Title 10 USC, to provide that appointments in the rank of regular warrant officer—WO1—be made by the regulation issued by the secretary of the military department and that these appointments shall be made by the President, except that appointments in that grade in the Coast Guard shall be made by the secretary concerned. The bill was pending in Congress as of September 2010.
- As of 30 September 2010, the Army warrant officer cohort will be composed of about 24,550 men and women, as follows:
 - Active Army—62 percent
 - Army National Guard—32 percent
 - Army Reserve—12 percent (not counting members of the Individual Ready Reserve also available for mobilization)
 - Technical branch warrant officers—65.4 percent
 - Aviation warrant officers—34.6 percent
 - Percentage of the Army—2 percent
 - Percentage of the Officer Corps—14 percent
 - Branches with warrant officers assigned—17
 - Number of warrant officer MOSs—approximately 70

The above information is extracted from the online warrant officer history maintained and frequently updated by the nonprofit Warrant Officers Heritage Foundation. A more detailed history can be found on the foundation's website at <www.usawoa.org/WOHERITAGE>. Click on "Warrant Officer History." The online history contains many pictures, links to copies of original documents, and information about warrant officers with historical significance. 

Chief Warrant Officer Five Welsh (Retired) served in the United States Army Reserve and on active duty that culminated in his assignment as the Army Reserve warrant officer policy integrator in the Office of the Chief, Army Reserve, in the Pentagon. He retired from active duty in 1998 with 42 years of combined Reserve Component and Active Army service. He was National President of the United States Army Warrant Officers Association from 1988 to 1992 and was a member of its full-time staff from 1998 to 2003. He founded the Warrant Officers Heritage Foundation in 2003 and currently serves as president and member of the board of directors.