

92nd Birthday of the Army Warrant Officer

By David P. Welsh, Chief Warrant Officer Five, U.S. Army Retired

July 9, 2010 marked the 92nd Anniversary of the Army Warrant Officer Corps. An act of the U. S. Congress in 1918 established the Army Mine Planter Service as part of the 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, 1st mates, 2nd 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 emanated from the brown strands from burlap bags that the Mine Planter Service personnel wore as their insignia of rank. Also, in 1918 the Army opened a school to train their mariners at Fort Monroe, VA, commanded by an officer who had graduated for the Naval Academy.

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 ocean-going ships were used to lay and maintain minefields. Conflict between soldiers and civilian employees who manned these vessels revealed the need to ensure that the vessels were manned by military personnel.

What follows are selected highlights portraying 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 May 12, 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 Tank Corps were the first to wear this new insignia.

(Eagle Rising 1921-2004)

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 and the Corps as a reward for former commissioned officers who no longer met the officer educational requirements, and as a reward for outstanding enlisted personnel who were too old to be commissioned and who otherwise 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 a significant number being transferred to active duty as regular commissioned officers.

In 1941, Public Law 230 authorized appointments up to one percent of the total Regular Army enlisted strength. This law also established two pay rates for Warrant Officers, Warrant Officer Junior Grade (W-1) and Chief Warrant Officer (W-2). One other benefit of Public Law 230 was the authorization of flight pay for those involved in aerial duties.

In November of 1942, the position of Warrant Officer was defined by the War Department in the rank order as being above all enlisted personnel and immediately below all commissioned officers. January 1944 saw the authorization of appointment of women as Warrant Officers and by the end of WW II, forty-two 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.

In January 1944, the appointment of women as Warrant Officers was authorized.

In 1949, the Career Compensation Act brought about two new pay rates for Warrant Officers. The designations of Warrant Officer Junior Grade (WOJG) and Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) were retained; the grade of Chief Warrant Officer was expanded with the addition of pay grades of W3 and W4.

In 1953, the inception of the Warrant Officer Flight Program led to the training of thousands who later became helicopter pilots during the Vietnam War.

In 1954, The Warrant Officer Personnel Act of that year established Warrant Officer 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:

1. The need for Warrant Officers
2. The Warrant Officer category would not be considered a reward or incentive.
3. The first published definition for Warrant Officers was established in AR 611-112 and defined the Warrant Officer as follows:

"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, where one black square signified WO1 and two through four black squares signified CW2 through CW4. Also in 1972, a tri-level education system had been established and provided formal training at the basic or entry level for Warrant Officers in fifty nine occupational specialties. The educational system further provided intermediate level formal training in fifty-three specialties and formal training for twenty-seven specialties at the advanced level.

In 1978, Army National Guard and Army Reserve Warrant Officers were integrated into the Army Professional Development System. This satisfied the need for qualified, highly trained Warrant Officers to access to the active Army rapidly in times of emergency.

In 1982, the Warrant Officer Training System (WOTS) was established by the U. S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). WOTS 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 Mc Coy, WI. This course evolved into Warrant Officer Candidate School-Reserve Components and it was conducted until September 1994 when all Warrant Officer Candidate School courses were consolidated and transferred to the Warrant Officer Career Center, Fort Rucker, AL.

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 Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1986 amended Title 10 of the United States Code (U.S.C.) 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 Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard had been commissioned for many years. Contrary to popular belief, the commissioning legislation was not a TWOS 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 U.S.C. authorizes the commissioning of Warrant Officers (WO1) upon promotion to chief Warrant Officer (CW2). 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 a 1988 message, the Army established that, pending submission and approval of the new rank of CW5 that 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 grade of CW4. The MW4 continued to be paid at the W-4 pay grade. In December 1988 the first Master Warrant Officer Training Course graduated and the first thirty CW4s were designated as Master Warrant Officers.

In 1989, A Warrant Officer Management Act (WOMA) proposal was submitted by the U.S. 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 National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1992. Six key provisions were enacted based on the Warrant Officer Management Act as signed by the President in December of 1991, these were as follows:

- A single promotion system for Warrant Officers.
- Tenure requirements based on years of Warrant Officer Service.
- Establishment of the grade of Chief Warrant Officer Five (CW5) with a 5% 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, the Warrant Officer Management Act (WOMA) provisions went into effect.

On October 1, 1992, the appointment of Army Warrant Officer Candidates (WOC) to WO1 was established as the graduation date from Warrant Officer Candidate School (WOCS). Prior to that date, WOC were not appointed until completion of the then Warrant Officer Technical and Tactical Certification Course (WOTTCC) for their military occupation specialty (MOS). Since WOTTCC for various MOS were of various lengths, the length of time spent as a WOC varied greatly.

On 9 July 2004, new Chief Warrant Officer Five (CW5) insignia and wear of Army Officer Branch insignia and branch colors were announced as uniform changes for Army Warrant Officers. The new Chief Warrant Officer Five insignia was a silver-colored bar, 3/8 inches in width and 1-1/8 inches in length, with a black line in the center of the bar. This aligned the Army CW5 Insignia with that of the Navy and the Marine Corps; particularly it makes 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 in effect relegated the brass Eagle Rising insignia into Warrant Officer Corps history.

On 14 October 2005, new Army Warrant Officer Definitions were published in Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3. This Pamphlet includes the career development of Warrant Officers, The new official definition of an Army Warrant Officer is:

“The Army Warrant Officer is a self-aware and adaptive technical expert, combat leader, trainer, and advisor. Through progressive levels of expertise in assignments, training, and education, the Warrant Officer 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 war fighters, and developers of specialized teams of soldiers. They support a wide range of Army missions throughout their career. Warrant officers in the Army are accessed with specific levels of technical ability. They refine their technical expertise and develop their leadership and management skills through tiered progressive assignment and education.

The Department of the Army Pamphlet follows the above general definition with additional definitions for each Warrant Officer grade, WO1 through CW5.

On January 11, 2008 - The Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower & Reserve Affairs) issued a memorandum authorizing 30 years of active service for all Regular Army Warrant Officers of any grade. Previously only Regular Army Chief Warrant Officer's Five (CW5) were allowed 30 years of active Warrant Officer service.

On April 26, 2010, H.R. 5136, National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2011, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Section 507 of the bill would amend Section 571(b) of Title 10, United States Code to provide that appointments in the grade of regular warrant officer, W-1, 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 June 2010.

As of 30 September 2010, the Army Warrant Officer Cohort is comprised of about 24,550 men and women.

- Active Army - 62%
- Army National Guard - 32%
- Army Reserve - 12% (not counting members of the Individual Ready Reserve also available for mobilization)
- Technical Branch Warrant Officers - 65.4%
- Aviation Warrant Officers - 34.6%
- Percentage of the Army - 2%
- Percent of the Officer Corps - 14%
- Branches with Warrant Officers assigned - 17
- Number of Warrant Officer Military Occupation Specialties - some 70

The above information is extracted from the online Warrant Officer History maintained and frequently updated by the non-profit Warrant Officers Heritage Foundation. A more detailed History can be found on the Foundations website at www.usawoa.org/WOHERITAGE/ and click on the Warrant Officer History link at the top. The online history contains many pictures, links to copies of original documents, and information about Warrant Officers with historical significance.

About the author: CW5 (Ret) David P. Welsh served in the Reserve and on active duty culminating in his assignment as the Reserve Warrant Officer Policy Integrator in the Office of the Chief Army Reserve in the Pentagon. He retired from active duty 1998 with some 42 years of combined Reserve and active duty service. He was National President of the U.S. Army Warrant Officers Association from 1988 to 1992 and was a member of their full-time staff from 1998 to 2003. CW5 (Ret) Welsh founded the Warrant Officers Heritage Foundation in the summer of 2003 and currently serves as President and member of the Board of Directors.