

**A breed apart:  
Warrant officers mark 90 years with Army**

By Fred L. Borch and Robert F. Dorr - Special to the Times  
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Although the Army has had commissioned and noncommissioned officers since the American Revolution, warrant officers are relative newcomers. They celebrate their 90th birthday this year.

Congress authorized warrant officers in the Army on July 9, 1918, when it established the Army Mine Planter Service as part of the Coast Artillery Corps. Warrant officers in that service served on vessels that laid and maintained defenses along America's coast.

Two years later, in June 1920, Congress authorized an increase in the number of warrant officers to 1,120 and decreed that they could be appointed outside the Coast Artillery Corps.

During this period, however, there was no comprehensive warrant officer program. As a result, the Army sometimes used warrant appointments to reward enlisted personnel for their long service. Additionally, as the Army downsized in the 1920s, some commissioned officers who would have been demobilized were offered warrant appointments to permit them to remain in uniform.

According to William K. Emerson, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and expert in military insignia, it was also in the 1920s that warrant officers in the Army's Tank Corps were "the first to wear the unique 'Eagle Rising' badge, which was approved for war in May 1921."

This badge — an eagle seated in a wreath and grasping two arrows — served as a unifying symbol in the warrant officer community until 2004, when the Army required warrant officers to wear the insignia of their appropriate branch.

The Army received its first two female warrant officers during this period. Jean Doble, at IX Corps area headquarters in San Francisco, and Olive Hoskins, at the VII Corps area in Omaha, Neb., apparently were the only female warrants until World War II.

In August 1941, the Army created two warrant grades — chief warrant officer and warrant officer junior grade. It also authorized warrant officers in the Army Air Forces to serve as pilots.

In early 1942, warrant officers began wearing distinctive gold-and-brown rank insignia; in September of that year, warrant officers in flying assignments began wearing a blue-and-gold rank insignia.

By the end of World War II, more than 55,000 warrant officers were on active duty, serving in some 40 military occupational specialties.

From the 1950s to the end of the century, the Warrant Officer Corps underwent a number of changes. Chief among these was the creation of a Warrant Officer Career Program, and the addition of the chief warrant officer 3, 4 and 5 grades.

The role of the warrant officer was defined during this period. As the 1985 Chief of Staff Warrant Officer Study Group explained, a warrant officer "is a 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 services."

Today, warrant officers serve in a variety of positions ranging from legal administrator and helicopter pilot to bandleader and network management technician.

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