

Return of the In-betweener?

By: Jack Waid



Paths to the Present FLASHBACK

“To best optimize itself for Great Power Competition, the Air Force plans to, among other things, bring back warrant officers within the cyber and information technology professions,” said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David W. Allvin during a presentation on 12 February 2024 at the Air Force Association's Warfare Symposium.¹ The fulfillment of this announcement remains to be seen; however, it has not been uncommon for Air Force leaders on multiple occasions to change rank insignia, add new pay grades, and eliminate grades.

FIRST GRADE		MASTER SERGEANT AND FIRST SERGEANT
SECOND GRADE		TECHNICAL SERGEANT
THIRD GRADE		STAFF SERGEANT AND TECHNICIAN THIRD GRADE
FOURTH GRADE		SERGEANT AND TECHNICIAN FOURTH GRADE
FIFTH GRADE		CORPORAL AND TECHNICIAN FIFTH GRADE
SIXTH GRADE		PRIVATE, FIRST CLASS
SEVENTH GRADE		PRIVATE

Chevrons (Insignia of Grade) for Army Enlisted Men.

Army/ Air Force grades and titles pre and post 1947.

To understand what a warrant officer may look like today, we must take a look back at the 1950s – 1960s USAF Warrant Officer (WO) Program (never considered a corps, like Officer Corps or Enlisted Corps). If the Air Force introduces the old WO insignia it will be the first time AF leaders have “reactivated” an inactive AF rank insignia. If the introduction of new WO insignia occurs, it will not be a first, as the Air Force has on multiple occasions changed or eliminated rank insignia. Not only do we need to look at the WO Program we must understand how Air Force Enlisted heritage is interwoven into the USAF WO Program story.



Army/Transition Air Force uniform.

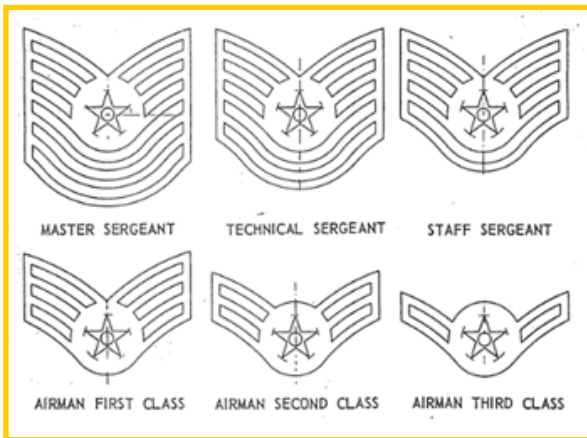


Army/Transition Air Force uniform.

In the early transition years of the Air Force the enlisted rank structure remained the same as the Army Air Forces. The Army had Private, Private First Class, Corporal, Segeant, Staff Sergeant, Technical Sergeant, and Master Sergeant. Airmen retained the same titles to their rank. Not only was rank insignia the same, but the uniforms were also the same.

Not long after, a distinctive Air Force chevron was being sewn onto Air Force but not Army uniforms. The chevrons sported a blue background with silver chevrons or stripes (pictured right).





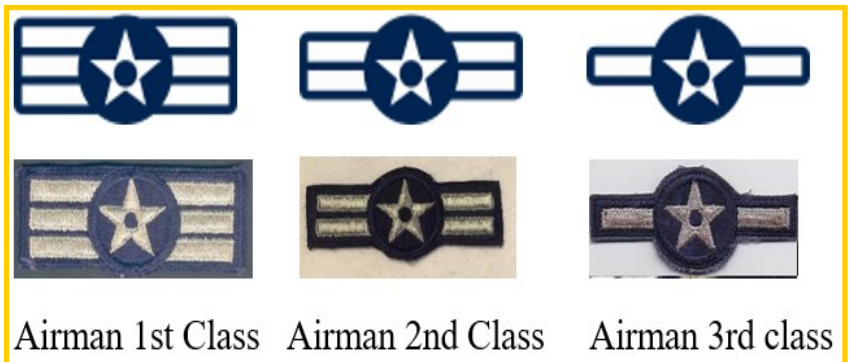
AF grades and designations after 1948.

In 1952, “Private became “Basic Airmen,” Private First Class became “Airman Third Class,” Corporal became “Airman Second Class,” and Sergeant became “Airman First Class.” This change of address or title was significant also in the fact it moved the rank of Sergeant from the noncommissioned officer ranks to the Airman ranks. A demotion in the eyes of many enlisted personnel.

As can be seen, enhancing the enlisted corps was not a new concept for Air Force leaders, it was a fluid situation. Air Force enlisted rank would change many times over the years. One surprising change occurred when leaders opted to create new insignia for the three lower grades of the USAF enlisted corps.

To strengthen the stature of the NCO Corps, Chief of Staff USAF, General Hoyt Vandenberg, approved the development of a new grade insignia for junior airmen. After multiple test locations reported on the new insignia, General Vandenberg on 22 December 1952, authorized a new “Horizontal” chevron (below) for grades E-2 through E-4.²

The approved stripes were ready for the Air Force uniform, however, due to large quantities of current grade chevrons already in the supply system the new design was not to be released until existing stocks were depleted. The Director of Supply and Services estimated the stock of old chevrons would be exhausted by June 1955. As a result of this report, General Vandenberg delayed the announcement of the new design until that time. Thus, ensuring existing stocks would continue to be purchased. The idea was, if airmen knew of the “New Chevron,” they would stop purchasing the old-style chevrons and uniforms would begin to look “shabby.”³



Airman 1st Class Airman 2nd Class Airman 3rd class

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In mid-1955, the stock was still not depleted, and the announcement was once again delayed. By 1956, the old chevrons were depleted and the new Chief of Staff, General Nathan Twining, when asked about the new design stated in a short informal memo, “No change is to be made in insignia.” The transition ended before it started and the “Horizontal” designed chevrons were never to be more than an approved rank insignia, not making it to the uniform, but remains a rich addition to our Air Force uniform heritage.⁴

Change was a constant in the late 40s through the 60s within the USAF and the DoD as a whole. The enlisted corps throughout the DoD was losing its upper echelon E-6 and E-7 personnel. Retention issues were elevated to President Dwight Eisenhower and on 20 May 1958, Eisenhower took steps to enhance the prestige of the enlisted rank structure across the DoD, calling for the creation of new E-8 and E-9 pay grades.

Prior to Eisenhower’s announcement, Mr. Ralph Cordiner, president of General Electric Company, and Committee Chair of the Defense Advisory Committee on Professional and Technical Compensation at the behest of the Eisenhower Administration began to look at retention and new pay grades. The “Cordiner Committee,” advised the Eisenhower administration on several issues leading to changes within the DoD including the introduction of the “Super Grades,” known in the Air Force as Senior Master Sergeant and Chief Master Sergeant. One of the interesting notes from the committee stated, “Consideration must be given to the existing system for recompensing officer and enlisted technicians. The present practice of rewarding technical ability with rank in order to provide adequate pay, depreciates military authority and responsibility.”⁵

The committee went on to consider, “... technological change means a change of weapons in the combat units, change in the techniques in weapons maintenance and use, and change in the level of skill and judgment of the user. The day has passed when large portions of the military workforce performed relatively unskilled tasks and major measure of their competence was based upon discipline and physical fitness only.”⁶ The Committee also found (in 1957) the wages received by military personnel could not compete with civilian employment, promotional opportunities were greater in the civilian sector for those in the enlisted force, and benefits found in the military were outweighed by found in the civilian world (except 20 year retirement options).⁷

During January of 1958, legislation based on the findings of the Cordiner Committee were submitted to Congress and the legislation created a push for more meaningful incentives offered to the DoD Enlisted Corps. Interestingly, the Cordiner proposals projected a savings of up to \$5 billion annually at a cost of only \$650 million for the first year with funding coming from the existing budgets within the services. At the time these proposed savings did not include the elimination of the WO Program.⁸

Table: Monthly Basic Pay and Allowances, 1955, condensed version.

Grade	2 Years	8 Years	10 Years	18 Years	22 years
WO-4	354.90	386.10	401.70	483.60	499.20
WO-3	323.70	339.30	347.10	405.60	428.00
WO-2	280.80	304.20	319.80	373.40	389.40
WO-1	251.20	286.30	294.10	337.00	352.60
E-7	222.30	253.50	261.30	304.20	319.80
E-6	187.20	222.30	234.00	257.40	288.30

For cost comparisons, please see the monthly pay scales for Warrant Officers, E-7, and E-6 (prior to E-8 and E-9) and after E-8 and E-9 introduction (left and below left).

Table: Monthly Basic Pay and Allowances, 1959, condensed version.

Grade	2	8	10	18	22	24
W-4	376.00	416.00	435.00	516.00	543.00	575.00
W-3	343.00	380.00	398.00	458.00	487.00	506.00
W-2	298.00	342.00	355.00	406.00	440.00	440.00
W-1	266.00	313.00	334.00	375.00	390.00	390.00
E-9	0.00	0.00	380.00	420.00	440.00	440.00
E-8	0.00	310.00	320.00	360.00	380.00	380.00
E-7	236.00	270.00	285.00	340.00	350.00	350.00
E-6	200.00	245.00	255.00	290.00	290.00	290.00

Note: at 22 years, W-2s and E-9s catch up on pay.

The USAF Warrant Officer Program was a “holdover,” from the Army, specifically a holdover from the Army Air Forces. Warrant Officers retain their rank based on a warrant and not a commission; the rank insignia of the WO reflects this. The USAF WO Program consisted of four ranks, Warrant Officer 1, Chief Warrant Officer 2, Chief Warrant Officer 3, and Chief Warrant Officer 4. All obviously had varying skill levels and pay scales as can be seen in the pay tables above. The Air Force changed the Army Warrant Officer insignia in color and design late 1947 (pictured below).

In late 1958, as a result of the new “Super Grades,” General Curtis E. Lemay, USAF Vice Chief of Staff, initiated a review of the WO Program. An Ad Hoc Committee studied the WO Program recommending the discontinuance of procuring WOs and to utilize and reclassify current WOs as company grade commissioned officers for Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) authorizations.¹



General Lemay approved their recommendations in July 1959. The approval was also economical, using E-8 and E-9s to fill superintendent positions was significantly less expensive than utilizing warrant officers to perform similar duties, the introduction did not Eliminate WOs, just their procurement.⁹

The Air Force “Super Grades” entered their new responsibilities, “...anchoring their roots in the personnel management system at the superintendent level. Consequently, the new SMSgt and CMSgt achieved the Cordiner Committee’s vision as they gained increased responsibilities performing duties previously held by warrant officers.”¹⁰

The time of the AF WO saw them being, “... considered, essentially, a technical specialist acting in a supervisory capacity over a technical activity.”¹¹ CSAF General Allvin seems to be looking for the same thing by attracting and developing, “...cutting-edge talent, specifically within information technology and cyber fields. The service plans to expand technical tracks for officers and create technical tracks for enlisted, and to also reintroduce the rank of warrant officer within the information technology and cyber fields as a way to maintain technical leadership with those skills.”¹²

¹ Note: According to AFR 36-72, Officer Personnel, 2 June 1953, Warrant Officer grades were utilized to fill superintendent Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) and positions which require qualifications beyond those of master sergeants but were too narrowly specialized to provide for the most effective officer development. However, when warrant officers were not available to fill these superintendent positions, master sergeants were assigned the duties. In fact, master sergeants had been filling positions designated for warrant officers even before congressional action authorized the creation of the warrant officer program on 29 May 1954. Thie per, Johnston, R.E., SMSgt, “Background Paper on Establishment of Ranks E-8 and E-9 Vs Warrant Officer,” 10 Oct 1992.

Will the WO program return as just a program with previous rank insignia, or will WOs be considered part of a corps with new insignia? This remains to be seen but, "...developing that warrant officer track for this narrow career field, we anticipate will drive that talent in and help us to keep that talent. There's something specific about this career field, why it's attractive and it's a nice match for a warrant officer program. The pace of change of the cyber world, the coding world, the software world — it is so rapidly advancing, we need those airmen to be on the cutting edge and stay on the cutting edge."¹³

Endnotes

- 1 Lopez, C. Todd (14 February 2024). "Air Force to re-introduce warrant officer rank..." <https://www.12ftw.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3678347/air-force-to-re-introduce-warrant-officer-rank-other-major-changes/>. Accessed 2 April 2024.
- 2 Waid, Jack, SrA, "The Stripes that Never Were," March 1995.
- 3 Waid, Jack, SrA, "The Stripes that Never Were," March 1995.
- 4 Waid, Jack, SrA, "The Stripes that Never Were," March 1995.
- 5 Cordiner, Ralph L., et al. Report of the Defense Advisory Committee on Professional and Technical Compensation, Military Personnel, Volume 1. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, May 1957.
- 6 Cordiner, Ralph L., et al. Report of the Defense Advisory Committee on Professional and Technical Compensation, Military Personnel, Volume 1. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, May 1957.
- 7 Cordiner, Ralph L., et al. Report of the Defense Advisory Committee on Professional and Technical Compensation, Military Personnel, Volume 1. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, May 1957.
- 8 Continental Air Command, History of Volume II. Information Fact Sheet on the Cordiner Committee. January 1957 – June 1957.
- 9 History of Directorate of Personnel Planning, Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel. Washington DC: Headquarters, USAF, 1 July 1958 – 31 December 1958.
- 10 Madden, C.C., SMSgt, "Establishment of Ranks E-8 and E-9 and Effect on the USAF Warrant Officer Program," 6 Dec 1994.
- 11 Madden, C.C., SMSgt, "Establishment of Ranks E-8 and E-9 and Effect on the USAF Warrant Officer Program," 6 Dec 1994.
- 12 Lopez, C. Todd (14 February 2024). "Air Force to re-introduce warrant officer rank..." <https://www.12ftw.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3678347/air-force-to-re-introduce-warrant-officer-rank-other-major-changes/>. Accessed 2 April 2024.
- 13 Lopez, C. Todd (14 February 2024). "Air Force to re-introduce warrant officer rank..." <https://www.12ftw.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3678347/air-force-to-re-introduce-warrant-officer-rank-other-major-changes/>. Accessed 2 April 2024.



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5 April 2024