



Patches, Insignia and Logos, Oh My!

Wearing or Displaying Unit Heraldry in the Corps

The 5th Marine Brigade arrived in World War I France too late for the heavy fighting, but did adopt this unit shoulder patch.

Story by Annette Amerman
Photos courtesy of the author

What is heraldry? In simple terms, it is the use of symbols, metals or colors to identify a position, organization or individual. In Marine Corps terms, heraldry refers to distinctive insignia or logos created by units for use or wear by their personnel.

The history of Marine Corps patches and insignia is diverse and often confusing due to multiple regulations on use, wear, design and approval. By knowing and using the history of unit insignia and shoulder patches of the Corps, Marines and unit commanders can better understand how the traditions and regulations evolved and how today's units are impacted and also build unit esprit.

The practice of displaying unit pride in a shoulder patch or by adopting a logo dates back to the days of George Washington. However, Marines did not wear shoulder insignia until World War I. As a part of the 2d Division, American Expeditionary Forces, 4th Brigade leathernecks were authorized to wear the famous "Indianhead" insignia. When the 5th Brigade arrived in France, too late to get into the fray, it adopted its own insignia—a red diamond, rectangle or circle, with the Corps' emblem in black and the letter "V" in various colors superimposed. With the end of the war, unit shoulder patches were discontinued.

Ground forces may have discontinued wearing insignia, but aviators were just getting started. The use of naval aviation insignia dates back to the early 1920s. Naval aviators (including Marines) continued to create and wear distinctive insignia and paint them on their aircraft throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

It wasn't until the war began on the Eu-



MajGen John A. Lejeune is wearing the famed 2d Division, AEF "Indianhead" patch on his left shoulder in this post WW I photograph at MCB Quantico, Va.

ropean continent that ground Marines wore insignia again—that time in Iceland. With the arrival of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade on 7 July 1941, the Marines were introduced to the polar bear insignia of the British 49th (West Riding) Territorial Army Infantry Division. Almost immediately, the Marines adopted the British shoulder patch, but in August 1941, the Commandant only "temporarily approved" it for wear.

Early in 1942, a board was set up at

Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps (HQMC) to consider establishing insignia by which Fleet Marine Force members easily could be identified. On 27 Sept. 1942, the Plans and Policies Division issued a recommendation, which the Commandant, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, further amplified in a letter on 5 March 1943. He wrote, "After careful consideration it has been decided to authorize a distinctive insignia for division and corps units."

Just 10 days after his letter, the Com-

mandant issued Letter of Instruction (LOI) Number 372. He made it clear that all personnel returning to the United States for duty or leave were authorized to wear their unit insignia until they were permanently reassigned to their new home station.

Feeling the need to further clarify and codify the policy on distinctive insignia for *Fleet Marine Force units*, the CMC issued Letter of Instruction Number 569 on 27 Oct. 1943, superseding the 1942 LOI.

The new instruction allowed more units to display their own unique insignia and provided specific guidance on style, type and wear of insignia. The Commandant directed that the maximum dimension be 4 inches and that the insignia "shall not be worn in the presence of enemy ground forces or on articles of uniform to be worn in advanced combat zones; shall be made of cloth and shall be worn on the left shoulder; and shall be as simple as practicable."

By the end of the war in August 1945, no less than 33 organizational shoulder patches were authorized; many more were "unauthorized." Oddly enough, the governing instructions for insignia noted, "they are intended as identifying markings and not as heraldic designs or service decorations." It may not have been the intention to bind Marines together, but simply to identify them in the field; however, the final effect was altogether different.

The higher headquarters viewed wearing distinctive insignia as a temporary measure, and Letter of Instruction Number 1499 of 23 Sept. 1947 revoked the authority for Marines to wear shoulder patches effective 1 Jan. 1948. All reference to distinctive organizational insignia was canceled by Marine Corps Memo 67-49 of 1 July 1949. The intent was clear: Marines have one insignia approved for wear—the eagle, globe and anchor. No matter the intent, some Marines—those in aviation—continued wearing shoulder patches.

Into the early 1960s, many units attempted to establish a distinctive insignia, which could be worn or displayed. The response from HQMC always was negative. The policy of 1949 remained: "To establish a policy permitting the official use of such devices [insignia] was not considered to be in the best interests of the Marine Corps."

Confusion clouded the issue of heraldic insignia due to the duplicitous nature of

allowing Marine aviation insignia (as established in OPNAVINST 5030.4B), yet disapproving all ground Marines' requests for distinctive insignia. This confusion remained until July 1963, when the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) proposed a change to the OPNAV Instruction 5030.4B to include the provision for establishment of insignia to ground units. The Marine Corps disapproved the inclusion of ground units, but allowed the provision to stand on insignia for aviation units.

Marine units now are governed by two separate orders regarding insignia and unit logos. The aviation side still is regulated by OPNAVINST 5030.4F, and the other elements of the Corps fall under MCO 5750.1H, the Manual for the Marine Corps Historical Program, which is managed by the History Division (HD) on behalf of the Commandant.

Aviation units still are required to submit their request for approval via their chain of command to the CNO, ensuring that the HD director (Code HDR) is the last "via" addressee prior to the Navy.

The History Division does not, as a general policy, interfere in the adoption of a new insignia

or a change so long as the design is within good taste and not already approved for another unit. However, the design must be within the established guidelines set forth in the OPNAV Instruction.

Those designs that have been established for a significant period should not be capriciously altered; prior

thought and careful consideration should be made. Often, an unaltered insignia, such as that of Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron 232, has been in use so long that the design is "grandfathered" and allowed to remain outside the firm guidelines of the OPNAV Instruction. Should the "Red Devils" change the design, the squadron would not be allowed to revert to the nonconforming version.

Additionally, redesignated units may alter their insignia to reflect a change in name. For example, some Marine medium helicopter squadrons currently are being redesignated as Marine medium tiltrotor squadrons. The "Fighting Griffins" of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 266 were allowed to make the simple change of "HMM" to "VMM" on their insignia when the proper paperwork was submitted and approved.

Marine Corps units that are not affected by the OPNAV Instruction are not required



Nazi Germany overran Denmark in 1940, placing Iceland at risk. The 1st Marine Provisional Brigade was sent to Iceland in July 1941, and the polar bear patch (above) became the unit patch.



This approved unit insignia belongs to the "Red Devils" of VMFA-232. The squadron claims the title of oldest active fighter squadron.



Above: The shoulder patch of the 4th Marine Brigade, WW I.

Below: The "Fighting Griffins" shoulder patch was only slightly modified when the helicopter squadron traded its CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters for the tiltrotor MV-22 Osprey.





The First Marine Division's WW II shoulder patch is visible on the right shoulders of the division commander, MajGen A. A. Vandegrift, and Col Merritt A. "Red Mike" Edson, standing in an awards formation alongside newly promoted 2dLt Mitchell Paige and Platoon Sergeant John "Manila John" Basilone at Balcombe, Australia, in May 1943.

to request approval from HQMC or the History Division for adoption of a unit insignia. Any adoption is considered "unofficial" and, therefore, does not require approval. Per MCO 5750.1H, the Manual for the Marine Corps Historical Program, units are required, however, to submit to HD a color image and brief description of the adopted insignia and its symbolism. The images and descriptions will go on file within HD's Historical Reference Branch for future reference and research. Units affected only by the Historical Manual are recommended to obtain their commanding general's approval prior to submitting the design and description to HD.

An excellent example of a long-stand-

ing non-aviation insignia is that of Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) Quantico, Va., which was adopted in 1968 and has had only slight modifications to reflect the redesignations. While the Marines within the command are not allowed to wear a shoulder patch of MCCDC's insignia, the command is allowed to display it upon signs, decals and other items where its heraldry is appropriate.

A new and recent twist in the insignia arena is the newly created Trademark and Licensing Office (TMO) at HQMC. TMO exists to protect and preserve historic Marine Corps trademarks such as the U.S. Marine Corps name, initials and

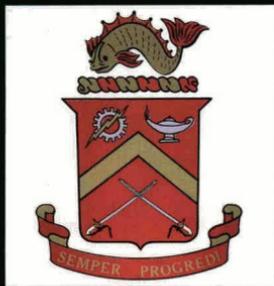
eagle, globe and anchor. The objective is to promote a positive USMC public image via a program for reviewing and the commercial licensing of these Marine Corps marks. The use of Marine Corps trademarks for commercial purposes, including reproduction on merchandise, is expressly prohibited unless the producer completes a license agreement with the TMO.

Department of Defense employees and their immediate families have an implied license to use the eagle, globe and anchor on personal products such as printed materials, literature, briefings, coins and Web sites. Those items must be intended for internal use and not for sale, advertising or potential endorsements.

The Marine Corps initially approved wearing distinctive insignia as shoulder patches only as a means of identification. However, patches and insignia are steeped in the heraldic traditions and history of each unit and of the Marine Corps. Units wishing to adopt or alter an insignia may read the detailed instructions at www.history.usmc.mil or www.history.navy.mil.

If units are considering using the eagle, globe and anchor in developing a new unit patch or insignia, it is important to review the guidelines and policies of the Trademark and Licensing Office at www.marines.mil/trademark. Patches and insignia build unit pride, spirit and individual camaraderie, which, without question, lift combat effectiveness.

Editor's note: Annette Amerman is a historian in the Marine Corps History Division's Historical Reference Branch where she answers unit-related questions and manages the Corps' Lineage and Honors Program.



The Marine Corps Combat Development Command insignia



The current insignia of 3d Battalion, Fourth Marine Regiment



One of the newest unit logos is Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command, which was stood up in 2010 at MCB Quantico.