

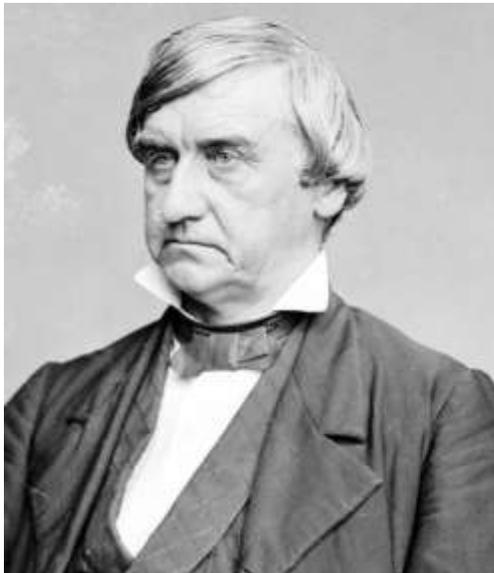
Lore of the Corps

Epaulettes and Shoulder Knots for Judge Advocates: A History of Branch Insignia for Army Lawyers in the 19th Century

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While Army officers today wear their branch insignia on the lapels of their service uniforms, in the 19th century they wore this insignia (along with their insignia of rank) on their “epaulettes” and “shoulder knots.” What follows is a brief history of epaulettes and shoulder knots for judge advocates in the 19th century.

On July 29, 1775, the Continental Congress selected William Tudor as “Judge Advocate of the Army;” slightly more than a year later, the Congress changed Tudor’s title to “Judge Advocate General.” But neither Tudor nor any military lawyer who followed him in the late 18th century or early years of the 19th century wore any insignia identifying him as a judge advocate, much less as the Judge Advocate General. In fact, Army Regulations published in 1825 provided that “chaplains, judge advocates, commissaries of purchases and storekeepers have no uniform.”¹ This meant, of course, they wore civilian clothes.



Brigadier General Joseph Holt, TJAG from 1862 to 1875, never wore a uniform despite his status as the top lawyer in the Army.

Not until 1851 did judge advocates have a device that set them apart from other staff officers: a white pompon that they wore on their caps. But the wear of an Army uniform, much less the white pompon, does not seem to have been particularly important: witness the civilian attire of Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt. Then Brigadier General

Holt, who served from 1862 to 1875, never wore a uniform while on active duty.

Sometime between 1861 and 1865, judge advocates who did wear Union uniforms were authorized epaulettes that distinguished them by the use of the old English letters “JA.”² The photograph below illustrates epaulettes for a judge advocate captain. These were a graduation gift to the Corps from the members of the 62d Graduate Course in 2014, and are now on display at The Judge Advocate General’s Legal Center and School.



Epaulettes worn by Bureau of Military Justice captain (Civil War period to 1872).

In 1872, the shoulder knot replaced the epaulette on the full dress uniform, and those prescribed for judge advocates had the letters “JA” in Old English characters embroidered on them.³

¹ JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL’S CORPS, *THE ARMY LAWYER* 140 (1975).

² Other branches also adopted this style of letters to designate their officers. For example, officers in the Inspector General’s Department wore shoulder insignia with the letters “ID” and those in the Adjutant General’s Department wore the letters “AD.” WILLIAM K. EMERSON, *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF UNITED STATES ARMY INSIGNIA AND UNIFORMS* 167 (1996).

³ War Department, Adjutant General’s Office, Gen. Orders No. 92 (26 October 1872).



Shoulder knot on left worn by Bureau of Military Justice colonel or JAGD colonel (1872-1890); shoulder knot on right worn by JAGD colonel from 1890 to 1903.

In 1890, the Judge Advocate General's Department (JAGD), which had been established six years earlier, adopted a new insignia for Army lawyers. General Orders No. 53 described it as "a sword and pen crossed and wreathed ... embroidered in silver on the cloth of the pad (except for a Colonel ... who will wear the device made of solid silver on the knot midway between the upper fastening and the pad)."⁴

Shoulder knots with the sword-and-quill insignia (worn 1890-1903) were no longer permitted after that date, because the Army revised its uniform regulations and changed the style of shoulder knots to the pattern worn on dress uniforms today. As a result, judge advocates now wore the crossed sword and pen insignia on the collars of their service coats—a practice that continues to this day.

*More historical information can be found at
The Judge Advocate General's Corps
Regimental History Website
<https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/8525736A005BE1BE>*

*Dedicated to the brave men and women who have served
our Corps with honor, dedication, and distinction.*

⁴ EMERSON, *supra* note 2, at 250; Headquarters, U.S. Dep't of Army, Gen. Order No. 53 (23 May 1890).