

United States Navy Master-at-Arms Rating Badges and Distinguishing Marks

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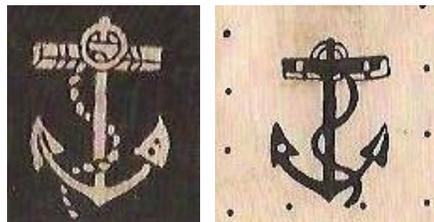
When the federal government was organized in 1789 there were no men-of-war and no pressing need for a navy. On March 27, 1794 a bill to "provide a Naval Armament" was signed into law.¹

In addition to commissioned officers and warrant officers, the following list of enlisted petty officers, appointed by commanding officers, was provided in the legislation:

Master's Mate, Captain's Mate, Boatswain's Mate, Coxswain, Sailmaker's Mate, Gunner's Mate, Gunner of the Gun room, Quarter Gunner's Mate, Carpenter's Mate, Armorer, Steward, Cook, Master at Arms and Cooper.

While there were several variations of a typical summer working uniform and winter working uniform for enlisted personnel starting around 1812; the working uniform for enlisted men was not published in any navy-wide regulation.

Naval officer's standardized uniforms were regulated from the early 1800s; however, the enlisted man did not fall under any navy standard mode of dress until the navy regulations of **1833**. In those regulations, a petty officer's uniform mark of distinction appeared for the first time. Depending on a sailor's work specialty, the mark, a two to three inch anchor, was worn on the right sleeve or the left sleeve of both summer and winter uniforms. During this period, enlisted personnel sewed their own uniform and marks, or they paid a shipmate to sew one for them. While civilian merchants in some U.S. ports did tailor and sale enlisted uniforms, the enlisted personnel continued to be responsible for their uniform production or procurement. This practice continued through the early 1900s. The navy did provide sewing "templates" for early USN marks, in both summer white and winter blue backgrounds.



1833 petty officer mark template for winter working blue and summer white uniforms

In the **1841** uniform regulations, petty officers were prescribed to wear an eagle and anchor badge of distinction, not to be more than three inches in length. At that time, line petty officers, including the Master-at-Arms, wore the badge halfway between the uniform's elbow and shoulder.



H.H. Booker illustration

In the **1866** uniform regulations, petty officers still wore the eagle and anchor badge, but with a slight variation. Now line petty officers, including Master-at-Arms, wore the badge on the upper right sleeve with a star above it. Also, in 1866, the role of petty officer in the U.S. Navy was changed by the distinction of line petty officers and all other petty officers. Line Petty Officer's were designated as (Master-at-Arms, Coxswains, Quartermasters, Boatswain's Mates, Gunner's Mates, Captains of the Forecastle and the Tops,) to wear the badge on their right sleeve. All other petty officers wore the eagle without the star, on their left sleeve.ⁱⁱ



To further distinguish a sailor's specialty, a new set of marks were introduced, including Master-at-Arms.



worn on both lower sleeves, *Master-at-Arms mark* *Sewing templates for MAA white/blue*

In **1886**, the USN Master-at-arms, though a first class petty officer by grade, was given a special rating badge with an arc above the chevrons.



(Justin Broderick illustration)

1886 Master-at-Arms first class petty officer badge utilizing the star as a specialty mark



(Justin Broderick illustration)

For the **1886** uniform regulation change, other USN first class petty officers wore this style rating badge for their specific specialty. The diamond background differentiated first class from second class petty officers. (Yeoman specialty mark shown, not the Storekeeper Mark until 1916)

In **1893** the grade of chief petty officer was established and chief petty officers wore a badge like the previous Master-at-Arms first class petty officer, but utilizing their specialty mark in the center of the badge.



1893 Boatswain's Mate chief petty officer
(H.H. Booker illustration)

Only one year later, in **1894**, a new design rating badge was implemented. This badge is basically unchanged from what is worn by today's petty officers. The eagle's wing position was modified and more specialty marks were introduced. The uniform regulations of 1897 showed the 1894 design change.



1897 uniform regulations Master-at-Arms rating badge

In the *1905* uniform regulations the rating badge eagle showed a slight change to the eagle's tail feathers and stance atop the rating badge.



1905-1913 Master-at-Arms CPO on white with red chevrons



1913-1921 Master-at-Arms white rating badge
(Indigo blue eagle and star, these were bad to fade to grey coloring from sun and washing)

The Master-at-Arms rating specialty was discontinued in *1921*. At that time master at arms duties were assigned as collateral duty, or temporary duty, to those sailors in other rating specialties. Many USN units, both at sea and ashore, chose to purchase law enforcement style badges for their master-at-arms and police petty officer personnel. These were either purchased from the same vendors as the local police used or were custom made by sailors on tenders or shore repair shops. Badges fell into three general categories: MAA shore establishment, MAA afloat, MAA generic (not denoting a specific command.)



Early chief MAA badge, possibly jeweler madeⁱⁱⁱ



Command produced Duty MAA badge, WWII era



Chief Master-at-Arms badge, circa 1936^{iv}
(note: no center mount for hat device)



During WWII, some commands utilized quickly produced badges to designate collateral duty MAAs. These badges also facilitated saving metal that could be used in assisting the war effort.



In 1943 W.A.V.E.S. serving as Master-at-Arms, mostly in barracks areas, wore the Specialist S (V-10) Master at Arms designation rating badge. Other designations wearing the Specialist S rating badge during this period were Entertainer (1942); Shore Patrol (1942-43); Shore Patrol and Security (1943-48).

While the “MA” rating represented the USN *Machine Accountant* rating from 1947-1967, **Master-at-Arms (Shore)** was a specialty represented by the USN *Specialist Series* of rating badges from 1948-1954, specifically the **Specialist B** designation.



Master at Arms (Shore) 1948-1954

The Master-at-Arms rating specialty was reestablished on August 1, 1973, utilizing a new specialty mark incorporating the iconic civilian law enforcement shield and the previously utilized star symbol.



Master-at-Arms rating badge as found in 1973



The late-*1980s* redesign of the rating badge eagle resulted in this badge for Master-at-Arms CPO

Cloth badges worn by USN Master-at-Arms

Chief
Master-at-Arms



Navy Security
Forces





Camo uniform badges worn by MAAs



Recent Command Master At Arms badge design

Other resources:

Rankin, Robert H., Col., USMC, *Uniforms of the Sea Services, 1962*, U.S. Naval Institute
www.NavyCollector.com
www.USMilitariaForum.com

ⁱ Tily, James C., *The Uniforms of the United States Navy, 1964*, Thomas Yoseloff, Publisher, NYC, New York

ⁱⁱ Stacey, John A., *United States Navy Rating Badges and Marks, (1833-2008)*, 2008, self-published

ⁱⁱⁱ Smith, Daniel D., *An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy's Usage of Law Enforcement Style Badges*, 2016, self-published (NavyCollector.com)

^{iv} Our Navy Magazine cover, August 1936