

## HISTORY OF THE SLEEVE SERVICE STRIPES

Overseas chevrons and bars were worn by Officers, Warrant Officers and Airmen to indicate their overseas service during times of war. Service stripes and overseas service bars were worn centered outward on the left sleeve of the coat, jacket, or shirt, four inches from the end of the sleeve. Overseas service bars were positioned above service stripes.

### World War I Chevrons

One overseas chevron was authorized for each six months of service in a theater of operation from 6 April 1917 to 4 October 1919; with American Expeditionary force in Siberia to include 1 April 1920; or the Army of Occupation in Germany and Austria-Hungary to include 1 August 1920. (1:210)

### World War II Service Bars

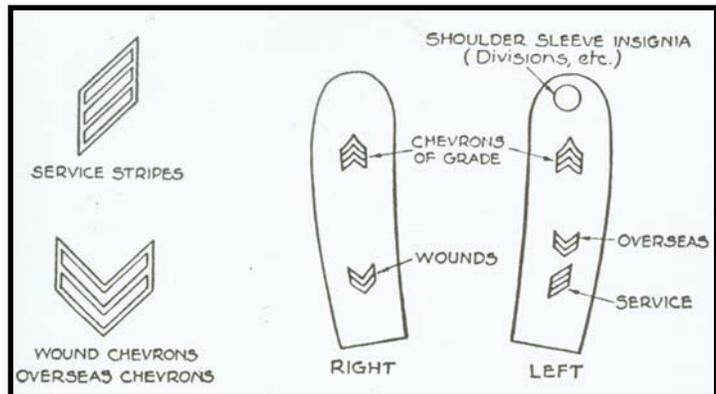
This overseas chevron was authorized for each six months of service as a member of the US Army outside of the continental United States from 7 December 1941 to 2 September 1946. (1:210)

### Service Stripes (diagonal)

These were awarded to enlisted for each three year period of service. (1:215)



MSgt Horst W. Tittel  
WW I, and WW II Overseas Bars,  
Enlisted Service Stripes (2)



Shoulder Sleeve as Worn During World War I,  
Overseas Service Bars, Enlisted Service Stripes,  
and Wound Chevrons (1:215)

All overseas chevrons, service bars, and service stripes worn on the Air Force blue uniform (winter) were silver embroidered 1" by 3/16", separated by 1/8" of blue shade number 84 background. Those worn on the kaki uniform (summer) were silver embroidered 1" by 3/16", separated by 1/8" of kaki background. (1:215) Each was centered outward on the left sleeve of the coat, jacket, or shirt, four inches from the end of the sleeve.

An Air Force uniform conference was held on 16 December 1949. During this conference the board was presented several items for consideration concerning the new Air Force uniform. There was a proposal to simplify the new Air Force uniform and enhance its appearance. (3:1) Several proposals and studies were conducted leading up to the boards meeting in December. During the second meeting of the Air Force Uniform Board in August of 1949, the results of a questionnaire were presented concerning the new Air Force uniform appearance. The questionnaire polled 3,550 personnel at Bolling AFB, Andrews AFB and the USAF Special Activities Wing. (4:3) The questions and results are listed below as written in the report. (4:2)

1. Do you feel that it is necessary to retain the combat unit patch on the right shoulder as part of the new Air Force uniform?  
52.5% No 36.0% Yes 11.5% no opinion
2. Do you feel that it is a good idea to indicate to what major command an airman is assigned by requiring him to wear the patch on his left shoulder?  
52.3% No 41.0% Yes 6.7% No opinion
3. Do you feel airmen should continue to be required to wear hash marks on the new uniform?  
52.7% No 39.3% Yes 8.0% No opinion
4. Do you feel it necessary to indicate that an airman has served overseas by requiring the wearing of overseas bars when theater ribbons serve a similar purpose?  
57.0% No 36.0% Yes 7.0% No opinion
5. Are you anxious to wear a uniform which would show only the U.S. insignia, your rating and whatever ribbons you are authorized?  
25.5% No 58.5% Yes 16.0% No opinion

In addition to the questionnaire results presented from the second Air Force Uniform Board, a memorandum was presented to Maj Gen D.C. Strother by Col Earley E. W. Duncan, Director of Military Personnel, titled "Certain Recommendations of the Uniform Board Meeting" 12 December 1949. His memo spoke to the morale factor of the troops. He explained morale is paramount as it is a natural desire to advertise one's service as to combat, merit and longevity. His recommendation was in favor of retaining present devices on the new Air Force uniform.

"It is extremely important to individuals who have the right to wear patches, stripes, and ribbons, whether they exercise the right or not. The current Air Force patch on the left shoulder is a stimulant of pride in the present organization. It is a convenient notification that the wearer "belongs"... Overseas stripes are very much akin to the combat patches and are probably the most prized of any sleeve device. The Navy does not use overseas stripes, but there are some grounds for saying that many Navy personnel would like to have them. Federal service stripes are now a duplication of the Good Conduct Medal, which itself is under study for revision." (5:2)

The letter and results of the questionnaire differed and thus may have driven the decision to remove all shoulder sleeve devices from the new Air Force uniform. Air Force Uniform Board

minutes written after 1950 make no mention to these devices until the nineties when the field submitted recommendations to bring back the Combat Patch.

Although the Air Force uses the Air Force Longevity Service Award to recognize the length of service for its members, the remaining services still utilize the Service Stripes. The Army awards a stripe for every three years of service while the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard award each stripe for four years of service. The Service stripe does not represent a period of good conduct, it is presented upon completion of a specified term of service, regardless of the service member's disciplinary history. (6:1)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *The Airman's Handbook*. The Military Service Publishing Company, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1950.
2. Air Force Forums, <http://www.afforums.com>
3. Report of Uniform Conference, 16 December 1949.
4. Air Force Letter. *Second Meeting, Air Force Uniform Board*, 26 August 1949.
5. Air Force Letter. AFMP-12-C, *Memorandum for Major General D. C. Strother*, 12 December 1949
6. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, Service Stripe, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service\\_stripe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_stripe)