

AFEHRI File 100.044

Research Materials/Source Documents  
STUDENT PAPERS

FILE TITLE: Background Paper on the Enlisted Aircrew Member Badge

AUTHOR: MSgt John R. Campton, 12 Oct 1992

Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative G. R. Akin date 27 DEC 97

EPC Representative J. R. Campton date 6 Jan 98

Scanner Operator Suzanne date 14 Jan 98

APPROVED BY: Gary R. Akin  
GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF  
Director  
Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

File 1-6  
B

BACKGROUND PAPER

ON

THE ENLISTED AIRCREW MEMBER BADGE

To begin this research, I decided to limit myself to the following questions relative to the enlisted aircrew member badge. The first question I wanted to answer was, when the current aircrew member badge was authorized? I also was interested in who, by Air Force specialty code had been authorized to wear this badge. Finally, I was interested in the design. Specifically where the design came from and any changes that might have occurred over the years. To find out whether or not I was successful in this endeavor, you will have to judge for yourself, after reading this paper.

Before we get started, I would like to give you an idea of how this paper is organized. Basically, what I have done is a chronological history of any information that I uncovered concerning the aircrew member badge. I have tried to answer the questions of who was authorized to wear the badge, and any design changes that I am aware of that might have occurred over the years. The bibliography is also organized chronologically rather than alphabetically for ease of reading.

A note of caution that I must make at this time is that this history is by no means complete. The information contained in this paper is the only information that I could find on the subject in the Air University library, and in the Air Force Historical Research Library at Maxwell AFB Alabama. Other sources might shed more light on this interesting subject. At this time I would like to thank Mr. Dick Gamma, Research Archivist at the Historical  
Msgt John R. Campton/DOLFF/2926/jrc/12 Oct 92.

Research Agency library, whose guidance allowed me to uncover what information I did uncover in the limited time allotted to this project. My hope for this research is that it can be use as a building block for a definitive essay on this subject.

With that in mind, let's proceed backward in history to a time in the late 1930's, and try to understand the philosophy behind allowing enlisted crew members to fly. Looking through a manual on Bombardment Aviation dated 1 January, 1938, published by the Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Alabama, we find what the basic bombing team consisted of. Namely the pilot, bombardier, navigator, engineer, gunner, and radio operator. What was significant at this time is that no reference was made to whether or not any of these positions were enlisted, or officer. The importance of the bombing team training, and being able to work together is the main emphasis of this manual. The fact that crews were relatively large in comparison to fighter aircraft is why enlisted, in addition to officer crewmembers were necessary. The numbers of crew members required made it imperative that enlisted people be allowed to fly. (1:8-10)

An interesting fact is that at this time, the pilot was the only crew member authorized to wear wings. No such badge existed for any of the other crewmembers. This was probably due to the fact that in the 1930's, very few aircraft existed that required more than a pilot and copilot, and both men functioned in whatever capacity necessary to accomplish the bombing mission.

Only with the advent of large four engine bombers, came recognition in the form of wings, for crewmembers other than the pilot. According to Army Regulation 600-35, titled Prescribed Service Uniform, change 1 dated 4 Sept,

1942, the current aircrew member badge was authorized. Also authorized on the same day by the same authority was recognition for aerial gunners, bombardiers, and navigators, who all were, at one time or another during World War Two, enlisted crew members. (2:13-14)

The design for the aircrew member badge is basically the same now as it was in 1942. That design was "basic wings with a three and one eighth inch spread, displaying at the center the coat of arms of the United States, (also known as the Great Seal of the United States) within a disc" (2:13-14). The only change to this design, that I could uncover, is that they now have a three inch spread. Additionally, we are now authorized a two inch miniature set for wear on uniforms other than service dress, in accordance with AFR 35-10.

The next question that I wanted to answer, is who was authorized to wear the aircrew member badge. This has varied greatly over the years, as have changes to this authorization. Initially, according to AAF Regulation 35-30, titled Aviation Badges, dated 11 May, 1944, states "The commanding officer of any AAF activity may authorize any member of his command who is assigned as a regular member of an aircrew and has demonstrated his proficiency as such to wear the aviation badge "aircrew member" prescribed by paragraph 54n of AR 600-35, during such time as he is assigned to such duties" (3:1). As you can see the commanding officer had a great deal of latitude in assigning duties, and also designating flying status.

AAF Regulation 35-30 went on to say that "Individuals authorized to wear specific aviation badges may continue to wear such badges when no longer so assigned, provided they meet one of the following requirements subsequent to the date they were originally authorized to wear the badge:

- a. 150 hours of flying duty as an assigned aerial gunner member of an air crew, or as an assigned regular member of an air crew; or
- b. Participation as an assigned regular aerial gunner member of an air crew in not less than ten (10) combat missions during which exposure to enemy fire was probable and expected; or participation as a regular assigned member of an air crew in not less than ten (10) operational missions during which exposure to enemy fire was probable and expected; or
- c. While assigned aerial gunner member of an air crew, or an assigned member of an air crew, the individual is physically incapacitated for further duty as such because;
  - (1) Wounded as a result of enemy action; or
  - (2) Injured while discharging duties as a member of an air crew"(3:2-3).

The above provisions were the first allowing for permanent wear of the aircrew member badge.

Another publication the Official AAF Guide, dated June 1944 verifies the information contained in AAFR 35-30, listing who is authorized to wear aircrew member badges, as well as who is authorized permanent wear. (4:50-53)

Another publication The National Geographic Magazine special wartime edition, dated July 1944, shows a picture of Army aviation badges with the current air crew member badge listed as air crew member badge, verifying the design as we know it. (5:13)

The next publication that I uncovered deals with a change in who was authorized to be on flying status. According to Army Air Force Regulation

35-29, dated 11 July 1945, titled Flight Status of Enlisted Men. The following is an excerpt from this regulation:

"Principals and Standards Governing the Placing of Nonrated Enlisted Men on Flying Status. The following principals and standards will be adhered to by unit and detachment commanders in placing enlisted men on flying status:

- a. Flying pay is for those individuals performing duties which are inherent to the operation of the aircraft while in flight. It is for those individuals who must fly with the airplane when it performs its assigned mission.
- b. All enlisted members of combat crews will be placed on flying status by unit or detachment commanders. Combat crew members will be those who have been trained or are being trained, and who are required to function as members of combat crews; that is, men whose primary assignments are to duties as members of authorized combat crews, and who habitually accompany aircraft on training and operations missions, and who are so designated by unit orders. The operating crew of a transport, cargo, or photographic airplane are also combat crew personnel within the meaning of this definition.
- c. For units processing Tables of Organization, the grade and number of enlisted men placed on flying status will conform with the number of combat crew personnel authorized in the Tables of Organization. When personnel is available, commanders of units within the continental limits of the United States may place on flying status not to exceed twenty-five (25) percent additional crew members for the purpose of training replacements. In theaters of operation, commanders are

authorized to assign additional crew members to combat airplanes consistent with their missions, number of aircraft, and personnel available. For units operating under bulk allotment, the grades and number of enlisted men placed on flying status will conform with the number of combat crew personnel authorized in the Exact Manning Table.

d. Enlisted men of the following categories will also be placed on flying status:

- (1) Enlisted students while training in grade as glider pilots or as heavier-than-air pilots
- (2) Liason pilots when attached to units authorized same
- (3) Gunnery students
- (4) Tow reel operators
- (5) Radar operators when in training at regular AAF schools where flight training is a requirement, or while members of combat crews assigned to units
- (6) Bombardiers, navigators, and observers when assigned to combat crews in lieu of officers
- (7) Enlisted instructors whose duties can be performed only when the airplane is in flight, such as gunnery, photographic, bombardier, navigation, and radar instructors
- (8) Medical technicians engaged in air evacuation, when assigned as members of authorized air crews.

e. Nonrated enlisted men whose principal duties are performed on the ground and who participate in aerial flights for the purpose of transportation or who participate in infrequent aerial flights will

not be placed on flight status. No enlisted men whose primary duties are maintenance duties on the ground will be placed on flight status.

f. In unusual circumstances, commanders of air forces, training centers, and like activities may provide flight status for enlisted men in categories not specifically covered in the foregoing; provided instructions outlined in AR 35-1480, or any amendment thereof, are strictly adhered to. Such cases will be reported to this Headquarters, indicating therein reasons for the provisions of flight status" (6:1-5)

From the above we can see that as time goes on, who may participate in flying duties is getting more regulated. The commander still has a lot of latitude in determining who gets wings, but is being more restricted. An interesting note is the reference to enlisted pilots, bombardiers, navigators, and observers assigned to combat crews in lieu of officers, and may help to explain why they were allowed.

The next item uncovered comes from The Officer's Guide, dated November 1947. This guide lists aviation badges authorized, and shows the current aircrew member badge as we know it today, indicating that it had'nt changed at this point of time. (7:42-46)

Another document uncovered in this search was Air Force Regulation 35-80, dated 12 May 1954, titled simply Badges, lists the various badges authorized in 1954 for award and wear. At this point in time the criteria for award and wear is unchanged from the above references, and the badge pictured is the same as originally authorized. It's description is: The aircrew member badge consists of basic wings displaying at the center the coat of arms of the



United States within a disc(8:3).

The next document uncovered shows that with modernization of the Air Force also comes more regulation of who can be authorized to wear wings. Air Force Manual 35-13, dated 3 April 1961, titled Flying Status of Airmen, defines:

- a. "Flight Airmen. A general term describing both crew and noncrew member airmen who are placed on flying status.
- b. Crew Member. Any airman whose orders to fly frequently and regularly specify that his duties are essential to the mission of the aircraft, and who is among first priority personnel (see paragraph 6a). Also, any member who is appointed an aviation cadet and is placed on flying status because he is undergoing flight training.
- c. Noncrew Member. Any airman, not included in b above, who flies frequently and regularly under orders of competent authority and is assigned to duty in an Air Force Speciality other than those listed in paragraph 6a".

This regulation further goes on to state that Airmen will be placed on flying status only:

- a. "When required to perform duties necessary to the operation of the aircraft in flight, or
- b. When required to fly with the aircraft on its assigned mission (excluding passengers)".

Paragraph 6a referred to above lists all the specific Air Force Specialities authorized to be placed on flying status and be awarded the aircrew member badges. This is in direct contrast with the days when the commander could

authorize whomever he wanted to be placed on status. This regulation also changes the criteria for permanent award of the badge to the following:

"The commander of any Air Force activity may authorize, by orders, enlisted members of his command to wear the aircrew member badge, provided that the individual:

1. Has qualified for and holds a principal duty assignment in one of the AFSC's listed in paragraph 6a. The badge to be worn only so long as the individual remains in this status, except that:
  - a. An individual who has held a required AFSC as a principal duty assignment for not less than 36 months (not necessarily consecutive) will be authorized to wear the badge permanently. Such permanent award will be entered in the service records of individuals so entitled.
2. An individual who has been incapacitated for further aircrew duty by reason of being wounded as a result of enemy action, or injured as the result of an aircraft accident while an aircrew member, or has participated in at least ten combat missions as a crew member under probable exposure to enemy fire, is permanently authorized to wear the aircrew badge. Such award will be entered in the service records of individuals so entitled." (9:65-67)

The above is the sum of the research that I was able to complete, and brings us right up to today. The current regulation only differs from the 1961 regulation in that there are now Senior Aircrew Member, and Chief Aircrew Member badges that are authorized for aircrew members. I could not find out exactly when these badges were authorized. The requirement for permanent

award of the badges is now two years in the AFSC for the basic badge; five years in the AFSC, and seven years in the Air Force for the Senior badge; and ten years in the AFSC, and 15 years in the Air Force for the Chief badge(10:89). The design is still the same as it was over 50 years ago when it was initially authorized. The criteria for wear is more restrictive, as the Air Forces needs have changed over the years, and the need for enlisted aircrew members has declined.

Now that I have outlined a history of the aircrew member badge, I would like to editorialize my views of the future of the enlisted aircrew member. Over the years the contributions of enlisted aircrew members have been noteworthy. Without their participation, we (the nation) would not have been able to accomplish the Air Force mission without them. The current trend is to have officers flying the airplanes, as evidenced by the last few major weapons systems acquisitions. If that trend continues, the enlisted crewmember will cease to be. I hope that I am wrong, because I feel that enlisted people still have a lot to contribute in the operation of aircraft, and in the capacity of aircrew members. Only time will tell.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1.) Air Corps Tactical School. Bombardment Aviation. 1 January, 1938. Maxwell Field, Alabama. pp 8-10. Call No. 248.101-9 (HRA)
- 2.) Army Regulation 600-35. Prescribed Service Uniform. Change 1, 1 September, 1942. War Department, Washington D. C. pp 13-14.
- 3.) Army Air Forces Regulation 35-30. Aviation Badges. 11 May, 1944. Headquarters, Army Air Forces, Washington D. C. pp 2-3.
- 4.) The Official Guide to the Army Air Forces. Who We Are. June, 1944. pp 50-53.
- 5.) The National Geographic Magazine. Special wartime edition Army Aviation Badges. July, 1944. pp 13-14.
- 6.) Army Air Forces Regulation 35-29. Flight Status of Enlisted Men. 11 July 1945. Headquarters, Army Air Forces, Washington D. C. pp 1-5.
- 7.) The Officer's Guide. Aviation Badges. November, 1947 edition. pp 42-46.
- 8.) Air Force Regulation 35-80. Badges. 12 May, 1954. Department of the Air Force, Washington D. C. p 3.
- 9.) Air Force Manual 35-13. Flying Status of Airmen. 3 April, 1961. Department of the Air Force, Washington D. C. pp 65-67.
- 10.) Air Force Regulation 60-13. Aviation Service, Aeronautical Ratings, and Badges. Change 1 18 May, 1987. Headquarters, US Air Force, Washington D. C. pp 83-89.