

# **A CHRONOLOGY OF THE AIR FORCE ENLISTED CHEVRONS**

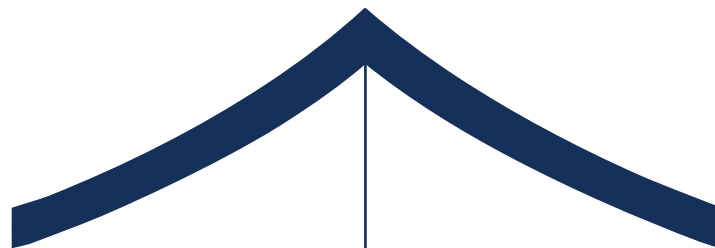
The following chronology is primarily derived from the research of TSgt Barry L. Spink, outlined in the document A Chronology of the Enlisted Rank Chevron of the United States Air Force, and published by the Air Force Historical Research Agency on 19 February 1992.<sup>1</sup>



1. The document is available online at <http://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/AFD-090611-103.pdf>

# A CHRONOLOGY OF THE AIR FORCE ENLISTED CHEVRONS

18 SEPTEMBER  
**1947**



When the Air Force became a separate service, it retained the enlisted ranks and chevrons used in the Army Air Forces (AAF) and continued to refer to the enlisted members as Soldiers.

9 MARCH  
**1948**



Air Force leaders, including Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), gather to approve new enlisted chevrons for the US Air Force. New chevrons had been tested at Bolling AFB, Washington, DC, and were selected by 55 percent of the Airmen who were polled to determine the preferred style of the new stripes.

Gen. Vandenberg approved the choice, and the Air Force implemented the new chevrons. There is no documentation that discusses the rationale behind the design, although some believe the stripes represent a combination between the shoulder patch worn by members of the AAF during World War II and the insignia used on aircraft. The size of the chevrons was four inches wide for men and three inches wide for women.

20 FEBRUARY  
**1950**

24 APRIL  
**1952**

22 SEPTEMBER  
**1954**

SAILORS  
**AIRMEN**  
SOLDIERS

Gen. Vandenberg directs that enlisted personnel be referred to as “Airman” (singular) and Airmen (plural) to distinguish them from Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors.

The Air Force publishes Air Force Regulation 39-36, changing the names of the lower ranks and formalizing the restriction of noncommissioned officer (NCO) status to staff sergeant, technical sergeant, and master sergeant. The chevrons remained the same; however, discussion began to change the chevrons for the classes of Airmen (first, second, and third). A design was proposed with horizontal stripes, reserving the angled stripes we know today for NCOs. Gen. Vandenberg approved the new stripes in December of 1952 but ordered them not to be procured until the stock of existing chevrons was depleted. Four years later, in March 1956, the stock was depleted and the proposal to change the stripes was again submitted to the new CSAF, Gen. Nathan F. Twining. Gen. Twining disapproved the change, stating simply “No change to be made in insignia.”

Gen. Twining approves a distinctive chevron for first sergeants, adding the traditional diamond in the V above the master sergeant chevron. At that time, master sergeant was the only approved rank for first sergeants.



20 MAY  
**1958**

Congress passes the Military Pay Act of 1958 (Public Law 85-422), authorizing two additional enlisted grades of E-8 and E-9. The primary reasons for establishing the two grades were to clarify responsibilities and authorities among the many master sergeants and to resolve enlisted retention issues due to a lack of promotion opportunities. Air Force leaders developed titles and chevrons for the new grades. Their main intent in the process was to build on the existing structure and chevrons but differentiate between the junior Airmen, the skilled sergeants, and the supervisory level ranks. Major commands provided their input,



and senior master sergeant (E8) and chief master sergeant (E9) were the most popular. There were a number of ideas for the new chevrons, including adding additional stars or diamonds to the current chevron, but the final choice was to add two additional stripes pointing in the opposite direction and superimposed on top of the current chevron. The first senior master sergeants were promoted on 1 September 1958, and the first chief master sergeants were promoted a year later.

5 FEBRUARY  
**1959**

The Air Force releases a new governing regulation for enlisted ranks, changing the name of “basic airman” to “airman basic.”

A diagram showing the transition of the rank name. The words "BASIC AIRMAN" are written in a light blue, sans-serif font. A curved arrow points from the word "BASIC" down to the word "AIRMAN" in the second line. Below "AIRMAN" is the word "BASIC" in a larger, bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

**AIRMAN BASIC**

3 APRIL  
**1967**

CMSgt. Paul Airey becomes the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF) and dons the new CMSAF chevron. Several designs were proposed for the new chevron, including an additional stripe on top of the existing chief master sergeant chevron (6 down, 3 up). However, after CMSgt. Donald Harlow modeled the proposed chevron, Air Force leaders determined it was simply “too much.” Harlow, who at the time was working in the Executive Services Division,



Office of the Vice Chief of Staff, modeled an additional design that added a surrounding wreath around the star in the existing chief master sergeant chevron. When Air Force leaders asked Harlow which chevron he preferred, he chose the chevron with the wreath due to its simplicity.

19 OCTOBER  
**1967**

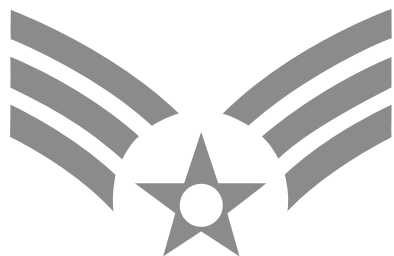
The Air Force changes the titles and terms of address for the first four grades, restoring the NCO status to the E-4 grade. The change aligned the NCO ranks in the Air Force with those of the other services and allowed many Airmen to reach the NCO “sergeant” rank during their first enlistment, which was thought to be a factor in retention.



**AIRMAN**



**AIRMAN FIRST CLASS**



**SERGEANT**

1 JUNE  
**1976**

Air Force leaders change the E-2 through E-4 grade structure to further establish a three-tier enlisted force structure (Airman, NCO, and senior NCO). The change included an additional E-4 rank of “senior Airman.” New criteria was established for senior Airman to advance to the NCO “sergeant” rank (also E-4 and often referred to as “buck sergeant”), including 12 months’ time-in-grade and completion of the NCO Preparatory Course. Additionally, the change included new chevrons for senior airman and below. The chevrons replaced the silver star in the chevron with a subdued blue star, which was often difficult to see from a distance.



**SENIOR AIRMAN**

12 MONTHS TIME  
IN GRADE | COMPLETION OF NCO  
PREPARATORY COURSE

**BUCK SERGEANT**

19 MARCH  
**1991**

Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, CSAF, announces the termination of the E-4 NCO “sergeant” rank with the intent to improve the ratio of NCOs to Airmen. E-4 sergeants were allowed to continue with the rank until they were promoted to E-5 “staff sergeant” or separated from the Air Force.



**SERGEANT**

OCTOBER  
**1991**



Gen. McPeak and CMSAF Gary Pfingston reveal proposed changes to the enlisted chevrons. The proposal returned the silver star to all chevrons and moved one of the stripes from the bottom of



the master sergeant, senior master sergeant, chief master sergeant, and CMSAF chevrons and placed it at the top. After a long test and transition period, the new chevrons became mandatory on 1 October 1997.

1 NOVEMBER  
**1998**

CSAF Gen. Michael Ryan and CMSAF Eric Benken implement the new insignia and title chief master sergeants serving in senior enlisted advisor positions. The new title was command chief master sergeant, which included a chevron with an additional star located in the blue field.



1 NOVEMBER  
**2004**



CMSAF Gerald Murray introduces a new chevron for the CMSAF. The process to establish a new chevron began in October 2002 and included a number of design proposals. One such proposal simply moved the wreath and star to the center blue field; however, Air Force leaders felt it did not capture the spirit of the position. The Air Force needed a chevron that clearly identified its top enlisted leader but maintained the heritage of the position and chevrons. The approved chevron left the wreath and star in the lower portion of the chevron and in the middle added the U.S. American eagle insignia with two stars on either side.