

GENERAL OF THE ARMY — ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET

by
Stephen M. Henry

With the passing of General of the Army Omar N. Bradley in April of 1981, the five-star rank passed into American history. And, it is that passing which seems to make a brief survey of the five-star insignia of the General of the Army and the Admiral of the Fleet appropriate.

It was World War II which precipitated the creation of this rank. The enormity of the war and the fact that several American commanders found themselves in the awkward position of commanding Allied officers of higher rank necessitated its creation.

The original title for the grade was to have been Field Marshal (after the British title) but the Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, refused to be known as "Field Marshal Marshall!" The rank was finally approved by Congress in December of 1944, almost too late to achieve its purpose. Generals Marshall, Eisenhower, MacArthur and Arnold, and Admirals Leahy, King and Nimitz were named at that time. Admiral Halsey was promoted to Fleet Admiral in December 1945, and General Bradley to General of the Army in September 1950 — the last to be promoted to this rank. Thus a total of nine men in America's history ever attained this elevated rank.

The following figures represent, as far as the author is aware, all patterns of the five-star insignia which were manufactured in metal. All are from the author's collection. In each figure, the background grid is set up in one inch squares.

Figure 1 shows an insignia attributed to General of the Army Eisenhower. The unique features of this particular insignia are that it is cut from one piece of silver stock, it incorporates a circular background device into the design, and the pin and safety catch on the reverse are typically British. It is not marked in any way. These features would tend to indicate that this is not only a theater made piece, but probably a prototype piece made up for General Eisenhower. This seems very probably when one considers that at the time of his promotion he was at his headquarters in France the day before the Germans were to launch their winter offensive in the Ardennes — the eve of the Battle of the Bulge!

Figure 2 is unattributed, but is considered to be of the type first manufactured as it is both pinbacked and of sterling silver. It is of a size which per the regulations would have been worn on the overseas cap or on the shirt collar. The only mark which appears on this insignia is, "sterling." Note that there is no circular background device as in figure 1 and that where the points of the stars join, a pentagon is formed. This pentagon form is common in each of the figures to follow.

Figure 3 is attributed to Fleet Admiral Nimitz. It too is of regulation size for the collar or overseas hat, is marked only "sterling," and is clutch backed.

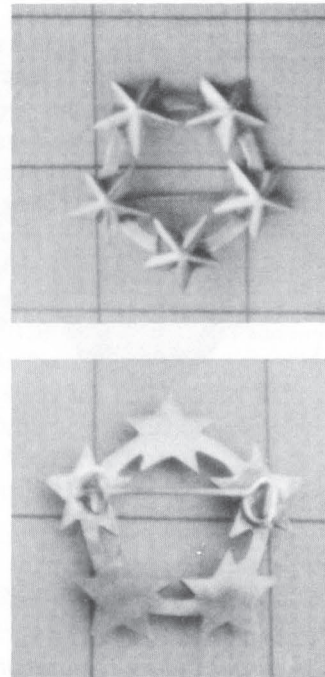


Figure 1
Front and back view of General Eisenhower's five-star insignia; theater made.

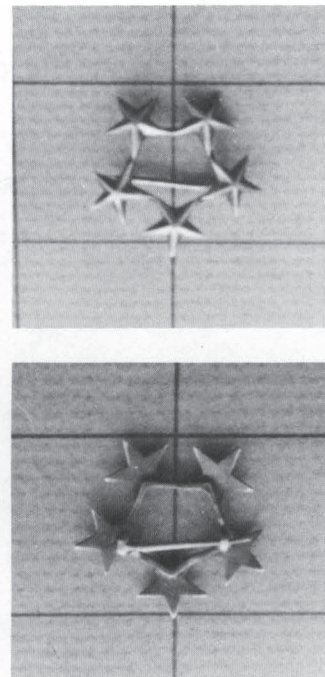


Figure 2
First type, American manufactured; unattributed.

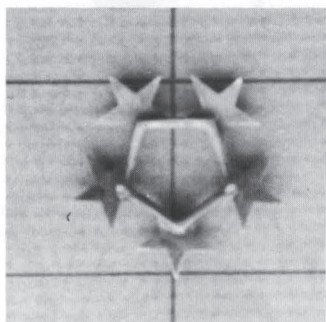
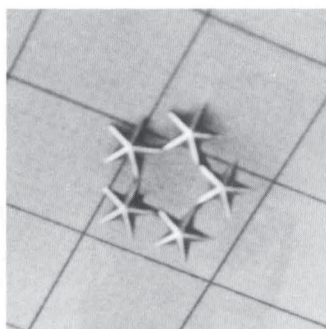


Figure 3

Second type, American manufactured; attributed to Admiral Nimitz.

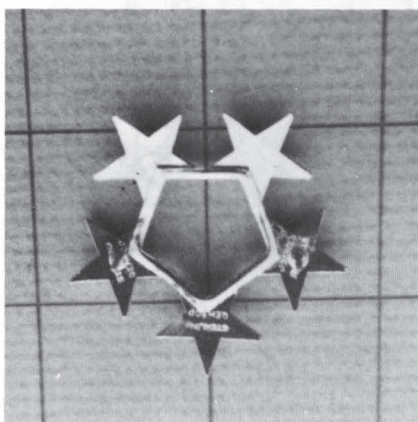
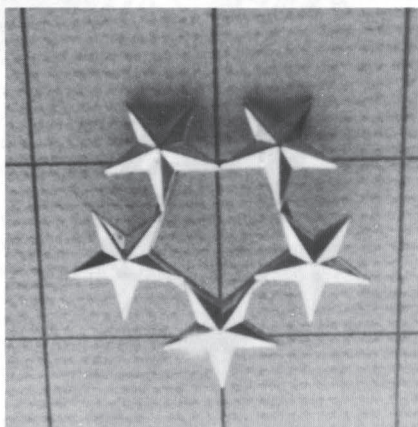


Figure 4

Third type, American manufactured; unattributed; full size.

Figure 4 is unattributed. It is of the regulation size to be worn on the shoulder of the uniform coat and thus was intended for General of the Army, (Fleet Admiral would have worn either shoulder boards with five stars embroidered into them or the appropriate cuff designation). This piece too is clutched back and is marked in two lines, "sterling" and "GEMSCO."

Figure 5 are a pair which is attributed to General of the Army Omar Bradley. They are of the regulation size to be worn on the shoulder and are clutched back. They are marked in two lines, "silver filled," "220." This is quite appropriate as General of the Army Bradley remained on active duty until his death in 1981.

REFERENCES

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Figure 5

Fourth type, American manufactured; attributed to General Bradley; full size.