

Rank Recognition In A Joint-Service Environment

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Whether you've recently completed enlisted or officer technical training, you are recently arrived from a single-service environment or are either an experienced or recently hired DoD civilian, one of your first learning experiences in a joint command or agency may not be in your new mission challenges but a crash course in military culture shock—rank recognition.

What?!! HOW Many?!!!

There are 132 basic rank insignia for US military personnel. Including Navy and Coast Guard officer “sleeve-type” insignia, there are 40 basic officer rank insignia and 28 warrant officer insignia. That's not quite as bad as it seems – there is some commonality among rank insignia, particularly in the officer and warrant officer ranks. Enlisted personnel in each military service are identified by some type of chevron (Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force), rate (Navy and Coast Guard personnel), shoulder or collar insignia. All together, there are 64 enlisted chevrons and rates, including five that you will only encounter rarely, if ever, during an entire career—the top enlisted person in each service: Sergeant Major of the Army; Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy; Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force; and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard. Without those five, 59 different chevrons and rates is plenty to learn.

Purple?

The joint command or agency environment is called “purple”—the DoD slang for more than one service working together; the color purple isn't linked with any service uniform color so it indicates a blend of service expertise and capability. Personnel in five services may be assigned to a joint organization: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

There are two broad rank categories in the US military: officer and enlisted personnel. It's common to refer to those categories as the “officer corps” and the “enlisted corps.” Note the spelling: “_corps” is the military organizational term – *not* “corp.” Officer rank insignia isn't too different across the services—although the Navy and the Coast Guard offer some challenges there, as well. Enlisted rank insignia is another thing entirely: you'll commonly see at least 59 enlisted rank insignia (“stripes,” “chevrons,” or “rates”) in a joint organization—that's more than you would see in any single-service environment. If that's not bad enough, there are a plethora of different uniforms, some of which are worn only by officers and others that are worn only by officers and senior noncommissioned officers (SNCOs) or Chief Petty Officers in a particular service. Confusing? You bet! But since the US military increasingly operates in a joint environment, professional Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines or Coast Guardsmen should learn to recognize and address individuals in other services. For our civilian comrades, understanding rank insignia and uniforms may be useful to you in your dealings with the large military contingent.

Protocol

A discussion of military rank wouldn't be complete without a quick primer on protocol. In the military and within DoD, protocol is more than simple etiquette: it is recognition of both an individual's rank and their responsibility level. It is considered proper protocol to verbally

greet persons senior in rank to you, officer, warrant officer or enlisted, when you pass by each other—whether indoors or outdoors (and that person should return your greeting). If you are a military member and are outside, you should, of course, also salute when greeting an officer or warrant officer, and the junior ranking member renders the salute first. As an enlisted member, you address an officer preferably by their rank or as “sir” or “ma’am.” Warrant officers for all services may be addressed as “Warrant Officer.” It’s also acceptable to address Army warrant officers as “mister,” “ma’am,” or use the term “Chief”. Marine Corps warrant officers can be addressed as “Gunner.”

Terms of address for the enlisted corps can be uniquely different. It’s always appropriate to address an enlisted person by their full rank, i.e., “Seaman Apprentice,” “Private First Class,” “Staff Sergeant,” etc. Marine Corps personnel should always be addressed by their full rank; try the “shortened” version and you’ll be corrected. However there are myriad of service-unique differences you should be familiar with. These will be addressed in the enlisted rank insignia section.

It’s important to remember that you should never address a sergeant in any service as “sarge.” That term was acceptable in the 1940s and 1950s—and you see it in cartoons or movies all the time, but it’s considered extremely inappropriate—bordering on rude—in today’s military. It *is* appropriate to use the term “sergeant” when addressing any Army NCO from sergeant (E-5) through master sergeant (E-8) and any Air Force NCO from staff sergeant (E-5) through senior master sergeant (E-8). Again, Marine Corps NCOs should be addressed by their full rank; only use the term “sergeant” by itself when talking to a sergeant (E-5). More detail on terms of address will be covered in the rank and insignia sections below.

It’s also appropriate for military personnel to stand when a senior military officer (O-6 and above) or a Commander enters a room or a work center, unless working a live mission. It shows respect for their rank. Always stand when a senior officer enters—whether someone calls the room to attention or not. In most services, it is also customary for enlisted personnel to stand when an enlisted member holding the highest enlisted rank (E-9) enters the office or work center, again, indicating respect for their rank. Although not a custom of the Navy, it is never inappropriate to stand to show respect for the individual.

When walking beside senior military personnel and not in formation, custom and protocol dictate that you accord them the “position of honor:” the position of honor is to the right. That means if you’re junior in rank to someone, officer or enlisted, walk on his or her left.

When referring to military members by Service, the following terms are used for enlisted or officer personnel: “Soldier,” “Marine,” “Sailor,” “Airman” and “Coast Guardsman;” note that all are capitalized. The term “Airman,” is also part of Air Force junior enlisted rank. Marines may refer to themselves as “Devil Dogs;” Coast Guardsmen are occasionally called, “Coasties.”

Commissioned and Warrant Officer Rank and Uniforms

For the junior Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine or Coast Guardsman fresh from technical training greeting an officer can be a nerve-wracking experience. They don't want to miss saluting and risk an impromptu, one-sided "discussion," but still probably haven't trained their eye to automatically scan an approaching uniformed service member to see if he or she is an officer. The joint operations environment adds to that complication, so let's discuss "officer recognition" first.

Officers in all five services use the same rank insignia on many uniform combinations.



Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps officers wear the rank insignia on their collars when wearing a camouflage uniform combination. Army officers wear the rank on their right collar and their corps insignia on the left. Air Force and Marine Corps officers (and Navy officers when they wear a camouflage uniform), wear the rank insignia on both collars.

On the military blouse (also called service coat or, by service, Army: class A; Navy or Air Force: service dress; Marine Corps: green or blue Alpha combinations), officers of all services except the Navy wear the metal rank insignia on shoulder epaulettes. Army officers also wear their unit crest on their epaulettes, along with their rank. The Navy and Coast Guard add an entirely new recognition challenge by wearing the "sleeve-type" rank insignia on some of their uniforms. This rank insignia is a combination of gold bands embroidered around the cuff of their coat sleeves. The Navy officer sleeve insignia has a star over the band(s); and the Coast Guard insignia has the National Shield over the band(s).



Army and Air Force officers have a black "commissioned" bar or stripe around their coat sleeves. As an additional identification for Army officers and warrant officers, look for the commissioned stripe on their trousers. The red stripe ("blood stripe") that Marine officers and non-commissioned officers wear on the dress blue trousers is worn in memory of the battle of Chapultepec, during the Mexican-American war. During that battle, 90% of the Marine Officers and NCOs died taking that Mexican stronghold.

When wearing a uniform shirt (not a camouflage uniform), Army and Air Force officers wear their rank insignia embroidered on a black (Army) or blue (Air Force) cloth that is worn on the uniform shirt epaulettes (shoulder boards). Marine Corps officers wear their metal rank insignia on their collars, as do Navy officers in khakis (Navy and Coast Guard chief petty officers also wear khakis). Navy and Coast Guard officers up to the rank of captain wear the officer "sleeve-type" of rank insignia on shoulder boards when wearing whites (Navy), the light blue shirt (Coast Guard) or the pullover sweater. Admirals wear stars on gold shoulder boards. Navy chief petty officers wear whites too--but wear their rank on the collar. The next section covers military rank in more detail.

**Commissioned Officers
Rank Insignia, Company Grade Officers.**



O-1 Insignia: Single gold bar (all services) or 1 gold sleeve band, (Navy and Coast Guard)



Service	Title of rank	Abbreviation	Term of address
Army	Second Lieutenant	2LT	Lieutenant
Marine Corps	Second Lieutenant	2ndLt	Lieutenant
Navy	Ensign	ENS	Ensign
Air Force	Second Lieutenant	2d Lt	Lieutenant
Coast Guard	Ensign	ENS	Ensign

O-2 Insignia: Single silver bar (all) or 1 wide & 1 narrow gold sleeve band,



(Navy and Coast Guard)

Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	First Lieutenant	1LT	Lieutenant
Marine Corps	First Lieutenant	1stLt	Lieutenant
Navy	Lieutenant Junior Grade	LTJG	Lieutenant
Air Force	First Lieutenant	1st Lt	Lieutenant
Coast Guard	Lieutenant Junior Grade	LTJG	Lieutenant



O-3 Insignia: Double silver bars (all) or 2 wide gold sleeve bands, (Navy and Coast Guard)

Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	Captain	CPT	Captain
Marine Corps	Captain	Capt	Captain
Navy	Lieutenant	LT	Lieutenant
Air Force	Captain	Capt	Captain
Coast Guard	Lieutenant	LT	Lieutenant

Rank Insignia, Field Grade Officers



O-4 Insignia: Gold oak leaf (all) or a narrow gold band between 2 wide gold sleeve bands, (Navy and Coast Guard)

Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	Major	MAJ	Major
Marine Corps	Major	Maj	Major
Navy	Lieutenant Commander	LCDR	Commander
Air Force	Major	Maj	Major
Coast Guard	Lieutenant Commander	LCDR	Commander



O-5 Insignia: Silver oak leaf (all) or 3 wide gold sleeve bands, (Navy and Coast Guard)

Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	Lieutenant Colonel	LTC	Colonel
Marine Corps	Lieutenant Colonel	LtCol	Lieutenant Colonel
Navy	Commander	CDR	Commander
Air Force	Lieutenant Colonel	Lt Col	Colonel
Coast Guard	Commander	CDR	Commander



O-6 Insignia: Silver eagle(all) or 4 wide gold sleeve bands, (Navy and Coast Guard)

Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	Colonel	COL	Colonel
Marine Corps	Colonel	Col	Colonel
Navy	Captain	CAPT	Captain
Air Force	Colonel	Col	Colonel
Coast Guard	Captain	CAPT	Captain

Rank Insignia, Flag Officers (Generals and Admirals)



O-7 Insignia: One silver star (all) or 1 very wide gold sleeve band, (Navy and Coast Guard)



Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	Brigadier General	BG	General Marine
Corps	Brigadier General	BrigGen	General
Navy	Rear Admiral [Lower Half]	RDML	Admiral
Air Force	Brigadier General	Brig Gen	General
Coast Guard	Rear Admiral [Lower Half]	RDML	Admiral



O-8 Insignia: Two silver stars (all) or 1 gold band over a very wide gold sleeve band, (Navy and Coast Guard)



Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	Major General	MG	General
Marine Corps	Major General	MajGen	General
Navy	Rear Admiral [Upper Half]	RADM	Admiral
Air Force	Major General	Maj Gen	General
Coast Guard	Rear Admiral [Upper Half]	RADM	Admiral



O-9 Insignia: Three silver stars (all) or 2 gold bands over a very wide gold sleeve band, (Navy and Coast Guard)



Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	Lieutenant General	LTG	General
Marine Corps	Lieutenant General	LtGen	General
Navy	Vice Admiral	VADM	Admiral
Air Force	Lieutenant General	Lt Gen	General
Coast Guard	Vice Admiral	VADM	Admiral



O-10 Insignia: Four silver stars (all) or 3 gold bands over a very wide gold sleeve band, (Navy and Coast Guard)



Service	Title Of Rank	Abbreviation	Term Of Address
Army	General	GEN	General
Marine Corps	General	Gen	General
Navy	Admiral	ADM	Admiral
Air Force	General	Gen	General
Coast Guard	Admiral	ADM	Admiral

Warrant Officer and Officer Rank and Insignia Rank Insignia, Warrant Officers.

Warrant officer insignia rank bars and sleeve insignia are worn in the same location on the uniform as the officer ranks in each service (NOTE the Air Force discontinued its warrant officer program in 1959).

- **W-1:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Warrant Officer 1, WO1, Mister**
Army—one horizontal black band on a silver bar



- **Warrant Officer 1, WO1, Mister**
Marine Corps—one horizontal gold band on a red bar

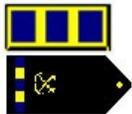
- **W-2:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Chief Warrant Officer 2, CW2, Chief Army—**
two horizontal black bands on a silver bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 2, CWO2, Gunner**
Marine Corps—two horizontal gold bands on a red bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 2, CWO2, Warrant**
Navy—two horizontal gold band on a blue bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 2, CWO2, Warrant**
Coast Guard—two horizontal gold bands on a blue bar

- **W-3:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Chief Warrant Officer 3, CW3, Chief**
Army— Three horizontal black bands on a silver bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 3, CWO3, Gunner**
Marine Corps—one horizontal silver band on a red bar

(W-3 cont)



- **Chief Warrant Officer 3, CWO3, Warrant**
Navy—one horizontal silver band on a blue bar

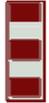


- **Chief Warrant Officer 3, CWO3, Warrant**
Coast Guard—one horizontal silver band on a blue bar

- **W-4:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Chief Warrant Officer 4, CW4, Chief**
Army— four horizontal black bands on a silver bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 4, CWO4, Gunner**
Marine Corps—two horizontal silver bands on a red bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 4, CWO4, Warrant**
Navy—two horizontal silver bands on a blue bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 4, CWO4, Warrant**
Coast Guard—two horizontal silver bands on a blue bar

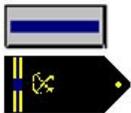
- **W5:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Chief Warrant Officer 5, CW5, Chief**
Army— one vertical black band on a silver bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 5, CWO5, Gunner**
Marine Corps—one vertical red band on a silver bar



- **Chief Warrant Officer 5, CWO5, Warrant or Mister**
Navy—one vertical blue band on a silver bar

Enlisted Rank and Insignia

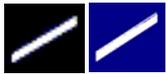
Enlisted ranks are divided into the junior enlisted; noncommissioned officers (NCO) (Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps) or Navy and Coast Guard petty officers (PO); and senior NCOs (SNCO) (Army, Air Force), staff NCOs (Marine Corps), or Navy and Coast Guard chief petty officers (CPO). Army, Air Force and Marine Corps rank are also called by the slang term, “stripes.”

Junior Enlisted Rank and Insignia

Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard junior enlisted are the grades E-1 to E-3; E-4 and below in the Air Force and E-4 (Specialist) and below in the Army.

- **E-1** There is no E-1 rank insignia in the Army, Marine Corps or Air Force—so they’re sometimes called “slick sleeve.”

- **Private, PVT, Private**
Army—no insignia



- **Seaman Recruit, SR, Seaman**
Navy and Coast Guard—E-1s wear one diagonal stripe

- **Airman Basic (Air Force) AB, Airman**
Air Force—no insignia

- **E-2:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address:



- **Private, PV2, Private**
Army—one chevron



- **Private First Class, PFC, Private First Class**
Marine Corps—one chevron



- **Seaman Apprentice, SA, Seaman**
Navy and Coast Guard—two diagonal stripes



- **Airman, Amn, Airman**
Air Force—one inverted chevron

- **E-3:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Private First Class, PFC, Private**
Army—one chevron with one “rocker” beneath it



- **Lance Corporal, LCpl, Lance Corporal**
Marine Corps—one chevron with crossed rifles beneath it



- **Seaman, SN, Seaman**
Navy and Coast Guard—three diagonal stripes



- **Airman First Class, A1C, Airman** colloquially referred to as “A1C.”
Air Force—two inverted chevrons

- E-4 ranks differ among the Services; in both the Army and the Air Force, there is an E-4 junior enlisted rank:

- **E-4 Junior Enlisted.** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address:



- **Specialist, SPC, Specialist**
Army—the Great Seal of the United States on a solid-color field in the shape of an inverted chevron and rocker



- **Senior Airman, SrA,**
Airman Air Force—three chevrons

- Only the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Coast Guard have E-4 Noncommissioned Officer ranks.

Noncommissioned Officer Rank and Petty Officer Rate Insignia

The most commonly recognized NCO rank is “Sergeant”. But the term sergeant carries more differences than similarities—and depending on the service, NCO status doesn’t begin with the rank of sergeant. NCO rank begins at paygrade E-4 (Corporal) in the Army and Marine Corps or Petty Officer in the Navy and Coast Guard. Air Force NCO rank begins at paygrade E-5 (Staff Sergeant).

- **E-4 NCO/PO:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address:



- **Corporal, CPL, Corporal**
Army—two chevrons



- **Corporal, Cpl, Corporal**
Marine Corps—two chevrons with crossed rifles below



- **Petty Officer Third Class, PO3, Petty Officer**
Navy and Coast Guard—an eagle, sometimes called a “crow,” over the rate symbol and one red chevron. (NOTE: see “Service/Good Conduct Recognition” section below. Also see Rate Section below).

- The Air Force discontinued using the rank of E-4 Sergeant in 1992.

- **E-5:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Sergeant, SGT, Sergeant**
Army—three chevrons



- **Sergeant, Sgt, Sergeant**
Marine Corps—three chevrons with crossed rifles underneath them



- **Petty Officer Second Class, PO2, Petty Officer**
Navy and Coast Guard—an eagle over the rate symbol and two red chevrons



- **Staff Sergeant, SSgt, Sergeant**
Air Force—three inverted chevrons is the first Air Force rank with a “rocker” beneath the chevrons

- **E-6:** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address



- **Staff Sergeant, SSG, Sergeant**
Army—three chevrons with one rocker beneath them



- **Staff Sergeant, SSgt, Staff Sergeant.** Considered a “Staff NCO” (see below)
Marine Corps—three chevrons with one rocker beneath them and crossed rifles in the center



- **Petty Officer First Class, PO1, Petty Officer**
Navy and Coast Guard—an eagle over the rate symbol and three chevrons



- **Technical Sergeant, TSgt, Sergeant**
Air Force, often called “Tech Sergeant”—three inverted chevrons and two rockers beneath them

Senior Noncommissioned Officer, Staff Noncommissioned Officer, and Chief Petty Officer Rank and Insignia

The grade E-7 through E-9 are important as the folks in these ranks are senior enlisted personnel, called Senior NCOs (SNCO) in the Army and Air Force, Chief Petty Officers (CPO) in the Navy and Coast Guard, and Staff NCOs (SNCO) in the Marine Corps (E6-E9). In unified commands, joint agencies or in joint operations, SNCOs and CPOs are increasingly being referred to as Senior Enlisted Leaders (SEL). Navy personnel at these grades wear uniforms reserved for officers (khakis and officer “whites”); Navy and Coast Guard CPOs gain other rights and privileges due to their rank. SNCOs are accorded the respect of being in an elite group of NCOs

- **E-7.** Roughly the top 10% of Service enlisted personnel. Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address:



- **Sergeant First Class, SFC, Sergeant**
Army—three chevrons and two rockers



- **Gunnery Sergeant, GySgt, Gunnery Sergeant, often called “Gunny”**
USMC - three chevrons and two rockers with crossed rifles in the center



- **Chief Petty Officer, CPO, Chief**
Navy (left) and Coast Guard(right)—an eagle over an inverted rocker, the rate symbol and three chevrons);



Navy collar insignia (left): “USN” imposed on a fouled anchor
Coast Guard collar insignia (right): The national shield imposed on a fouled anchor



- **Master Sergeant, MSgt, Sergeant**
Air Force—one chevron over three inverted chevrons with two rockers below them

- **E-8s** are the top 2% of Service enlisted personnel, by Federal law. The E-8 grade gets more complex because of the difference in how the Services use and designate First Sergeant responsibilities.

Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address:



- **Master Sergeant**, MSG, Sergeant or Top
Army—three chevrons with three rockers beneath them



- **Master Sergeant**, MSgt, Master Sergeant or Top
Marine Corps—three chevrons with three rockers beneath them and crossed rifles in the center



- **Senior Chief Petty Officer**, SCPO, Senior Chief
Navy (left) and Coast Guard (right)—a single star over an eagle (“crow”) over an inverted rocker, the rate symbol and three chevrons



Collar insignia, Navy: A star over “USN” imposed on a fouled anchor
collar insignia, Coast Guard: A star over the National shield imposed on a fouled anchor



- **Senior Master Sergeant**, SMSgt, Sergeant
Air Force—two chevrons over three inverted chevrons with two rockers below them

First Sergeant is a senior enlisted leader in a Army, Marine Corps and Air Force organization. They report directly to the commander and deal with enlisted, recognition, family support and discipline issues. All Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps first sergeants are identified by a diamond in the center of the chevrons and rockers (chevron and inverted chevron for Air Force first sergeants). In the Army and Marine Corps, first sergeant is an E-8 *rank*. In the Air Force, first sergeant is a special duty *position* for SNCOs E-7 to E-9, *not a rank*, so any Air Force Master Sergeant or Senior Master Sergeant first sergeant may be addressed as “Sergeant,” as well as “First Shirt” or “Shirt.” Chief Master Sergeant first sergeants can be addressed as “Chief”, First Shirt” or “Shirt.”

- **First Sergeant** Title of rank, abbreviation, term of address:



- Army - First Sergeant, 1SG, First Sergeant



- Marine Corps – First Sergeant, 1Sgt, First Sergeant

- Air Force first sergeants may be called “first sergeant”, “first shirt”, or “shirt” as well as their full rank title or term of address



Master Sergeant, MSgt, Sergeant



Senior Master Sergeant, SMSgt, Sergeant



Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt, Chief

- **E-9** is the senior enlisted grade in each service—E-9s are the top 1% of Service enlisted personnel, by Federal law. These ranks are complicated as well in how the Services designate different E-9 responsibilities.



- **Sergeant Major, SGM, Sergeant Major**
Army – Three chevrons with three rockers beneath them and a star in the center



- **Master Gunnery Sergeant, MGySgt, Master Gunnery Sergeant**
Marine Corps—look for the bomb in the center of three chevrons with four rockers beneath them
A Marine Corps E-9 promoted from master sergeant in the technical career field path is called a Master Gunnery Sergeant and often called “Master Guns,” or “master gunny” in their technical specialty.



- **Master Chief Petty Officer, MCPO, Master Chief**
Navy and Coast Guard—two stars over an eagle over an inverted rocker, the rate symbol and three chevrons



Collar insignia, Navy: Two star over “USN” imposed on a fouled anchor
collar insignia, Coast Guard: Two stars over the National shield imposed on a fouled anchor



- **Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt, Chief**
Air Force—three chevron over three inverted chevrons with two rockers below them. A Chief Master Sergeant is the only Air Force NCO who is *not* addressed as “Sergeant;” the proper term of address is “Chief Master Sergeant” or “Chief”.

- **Command Senior Enlisted Leader (CSEL)** positions. Each service has unique E-9 positions designating the senior enlisted position in a unit, command, major command, fleet or agency. They report directly to the commander and are responsible for any enlisted issue, including those affecting the mission and the readiness, utilization, health, morale, welfare, professional and technical development and quality of life of the enlisted force.



- **Command Sergeant Major, CSM, Sergeant Major**
Army—signified by a wreath around the star in the center of the chevrons
Serves at battalion, brigade, and major command levels



- **Sergeant Major, SgtMaj, Sergeant Major**
Marine Corps—signified by a star in the center of the chevrons
Serves at battalion levels and higher, promoted from the career path for first sergeants



- **Command Master Chief Petty Officer, CMDPCM or CMC, Master Chief CNO-Directed Command Master Chief Petty Officer, CNOCM, Master Chief Force Master Chief Petty Officer, FORCM, Master Chief Fleet Master Chief Petty Officer, FLTCM, Master Chief**
Navy—Command and CNO-Directed Command Master Chiefs wear a silver star in the center of the chevrons (instead of the rate designation) Fleet and Force Master Chiefs wear a gold star instead of the rate. All wear a badge above the right uniform pocket. Precedence from lowest to highest is: CMDPCM, CNOCM, FORCM, FLTCM.
Serves at units with 300 or more Sailors, Fleet/Force and CNO-directed levels



- **Command Chief Master Sergeant** is a special duty *position* not a *rank*. The title of rank, abbreviation, term of address for the individual is:
Chief Master Sergeant, CMSgt, Chief
The title of rank, abbreviation, term of address for the position is:
Command Chief Master Sergeant, CCM or CCC, Command Chief
Although there are a few CCMs at Special Operations and Intelligence Groups, most CCMs serve at wing, numbered air force, major command or unified command/joint agency levels. The CCM chevron has a solid star positioned between the upper and lower chevrons.



- **Command Master Chief, MCPO, Master Chief**
Coast Guard—denoted by the Coast Guard shield in the center of the chevrons (instead of the rate) and a badge worn above the right uniform pocket
Serves at Commandant-directed and Atlantic and Pacific Area Command levels.

- **Service Senior Enlisted Leaders.** Each Service has a rank for the senior enlisted member of that Military Service. Only one Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airman or Coast Guardsman can hold this rank at any one time.

Sergeant Major of the Army, SMA, Sergeant Major



The SMA insignia contains the Great Seal of the United States of America and two stars in the center of the chevrons. The SMA serves as the Army Chief of Staff's personal adviser on all enlisted-related matters, particularly in areas affecting Soldier training and quality of life. The SMA devotes the majority of his time to traveling throughout the Army observing training, and talking to Soldiers and their families. The SMA sits on a wide variety of councils and boards that make decisions affecting enlisted Soldiers and their families and is routinely invited to testify before Congress.

Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, SMMC, Sergeant Major



The SMMC is signified by a the Eagle-Globe-Anchor symbol with two stars in the center of the chevrons. The SMMC is the senior enlisted Marine in the Marine Corps. He advises the Commandant of the Marine Corps on matters pertaining to enlisted Marines and accompanies the Commandant on all major command visits and other official trips. The Sergeant Major also serves on the Enlisted Performance Board, and the Uniform Board. The SMMC is selected by the Commandant from nominees submitted by a board of Marine Generals. The duration of his appointment is determined by the Commandant. Although all U.S. Military services now have a similar senior enlisted billet, the Marine Corps was the first service to adopt it.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, MCPON, Master Chief



The MCPON insignia is denoted by three stars over an eagle over an inverted rocker, a gold star and three chevrons. The MCPON is the senior enlisted person in the Navy. The MCPON serves as the senior enlisted leader of the Navy, and as an advisor to the Chief of Naval Operations and to the Chief of Naval Personnel in matters dealing with enlisted personnel and their families. The MCPON is also an advisor to the many boards dealing with enlisted personnel issues; is the enlisted representative of the Department of the Navy at special events; may be called upon to testify on enlisted personnel issues before Congress; and, maintains a liaison with enlisted spouse organizations

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, CMSAF, Chief



The CMSAF insignia contains the Great Seal of the United States of America and two stars in the upper blue field. The Airmen's star is surrounded by a laurel wreath in the lower blue field. The CMSAF serves as the personal adviser to the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization and progress of the enlisted force.



Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, MCPOCG, Master Chief

The MCPOCG insignia is denoted by three stars over an eagle over an inverted rocker, a gold national shield and three chevrons. The MCPOCG is the principal advisor to the Commandant of the Coast Guard on quality of life, career development, work environment and, personnel matters affecting enlisted personnel, both active and reserve, and their families. The MCPOCG must be a living example of the Coast Guard's core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty. Individuals who are selected to serve in this prestigious position must possess the highest standards of professionalism and personal integrity.

Additional Military Uniform Information

Service/Good Conduct Recognition

Longevity/Service Recognition. Soldiers earn a small horizontal service stripe “hash mark,” worn on the lower left sleeve of the dress uniform for every three years of service. Marines earn a diagonal service stripe “hash mark,” worn on the lower left sleeve of the dress uniform for every four years of service. Sailors and Coast Guardsmen earn a diagonal service stripe, worn on the lower left sleeve of the dress uniform, for every four years of service. Airmen earn an Air Force Longevity Service Award ribbon for every four years of service.

Honorable Service. All enlisted personnel earn a Service-unique Good Conduct Medal for every three years of honorable service—service without any official record of bad conduct. Navy and Coast Guard petty officers wear gold chevrons instead of red, if they have completed 12 years or more of honorable service without any official record of bad conduct.

Navy and Coast Guard “Rates”

The Navy and Coast Guard enlisted members are unique by having a rate designation linked to their rank. In fact, the use of the word "rank" for Navy and Coast Guard enlisted personnel is incorrect. The correct term is "rate" and the insignia is called a “rating badge.” The rating badges for Seamen (E-1 through E-3) are color coded based upon their occupational field. The rating badges for Petty Officers (E-4 through E-6) have two parts: the “rate”—chevrons indicating pay grade, and the “rating”—a symbol above the chevrons indicating occupational specialty. Chief Petty Officers (E-7 through E-9) wear collar devices on their white and khaki uniforms and rate badges on their service dress blues.

Determining paygrade from rate abbreviations can be challenging at first. Here are some keys. Seamen (E-1 through E-3) are usually non-rated and use the same abbreviations: SR, SA, SN, respectively. For petty officers, the first 2 letters are the abbreviation for the rating (occupation specialty—there are many different ratings). Example: For CTI3, “CT” is the rating and stands for Cryptologic Technician. The third letter (if present), “I” is for the branch and stands for Interpretive (linguist). The final part of the abbreviation determines pay grade. For E-4 through E-6, there is a number at the end of the rating which indicates the petty officer class,

i.e.: 3=third class (E-4), 2=second class (E-5), 1=first class (E-6). Example: CTI3 equals Petty Officer Third Class (PO3) which is an E-4. For E-7 through E-9, their rate ends with “C” for chief petty officer, “CS” for senior chief, and “CM” for master chief (yes the letters are reversed) Example: CTICS is a senior chief petty officer (SCPO) which is an E-8.

Seamen can be addressed as “Seaman [Name]” Example: “Seaman Jones”. Petty Officers can be addressed generically as "Petty Officer Jones" or by their rate "Cryptologic Technician Third Class Jones". Chief Petty Officers are always referred to as "Chief", "Senior Chief", or "Master Chief" as appropriate. As examples: "Chief Jones" or "Chief," “Master Chief Smith” or “Master Chief.”

Headgear

When outside, headgear—hats—known as “covers” in the Navy and Marine Corps, provide a ready method to determine officers from enlisted personnel.

Garrison caps or **flight hats** (“flat hats”). Quick recognition hint for Army, Marine Corps and Naval officers: —there are two metal insignia on the front of this cap—military personnel should salute when outside!

- **Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.** Officer and warrant officer garrison hats have the rank on the front right side of the cover (left side when you’re facing them) and the service insignia (Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard) on the other side. Enlisted Navy personnel wear either a “USN” over the Navy eagle symbol on the front right side of the cap (left side, when you’re facing them) (E-1 to E-3) or the enlisted rank chevron (E-4 to E-6); Chief Petty Officers wear the fouled anchor rank insignia on the front left of their cover.
- **Army.** Garrison caps are only worn until Army personnel complete initial training. Soldiers are issued the black beret at their first duty assignment after completing enlisted initial training, officer or warrant officer basic courses (see next section). On the garrison cap, officers and warrant officers wear their rank on the right side (left side, facing you) and their unit crest on the other; enlisted personnel wear their unit crest on the left side (right side, facing you). Army officer and warrant officer garrison caps have gold piping.
- **Air Force.** Officers wear their rank insignia on the left front of the flight hat (right side, as you face them). Enlisted do not have insignia on the flight cap. The Air Force officer flight hat also has silver piping to differentiate it from the enlisted version which has black piping.

Berets.

- **Army.** Army personnel wear the black beret, once they’ve completed initial training. Officers wear their rank on the Army “flash” (colored patch) on the front of the beret; enlisted personnel wear their unit crest on the flash. Army personnel earn the right to wear other beret colors, depending on which units they are assigned to: Maroon - Airborne units (Paratroopers), Tan - Ranger Battalions and Green - Special Forces units.

- **Air Force.** Air Force berets are linked to specific career fields: Blue - Security Forces; Black - Tactical Air Control Party (TACP), Air Liaison Officers (ALO), and Air Mobility Liaison Officers (AMLO); Maroon – Pararescue-Jumper (“PJ”); Red (scarlet) - Combat Controllers; and Grey - Combat Weather.

Service Cap; Dress Cap; Combination Cover or Barracks Cover. Service cap (Air Force), dress blue or dress white caps (Army), combination cover (Navy and Coast Guard) or green or white dress barracks cover (Marine Corps)—also referred to as “round hat,” “platter hat” or “bus driver” hat.

Camouflage Uniform Caps (Battle Dress Uniform (BDU); Desert Camouflage Uniform/Desert BDU; or other camouflage uniform caps). All service members wear their rank on this hat, except Air Force enlisted personnel.

As this article shows, military rank can be confusing—with or without a rank chart. And it should be clear that a joint or “purple” environment offers tremendous challenges in identifying individuals’ rank. But when working “purple,” the sharpest, most professional Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, or civilian from E-1 on up, learns to recognize and appropriately address military personnel in each service. How do you stack up in that regard?