



A U.S. Army Soldier assigned to 2nd Cavalry Regiment waits inside a Stryker armored vehicle after conducting a live-fire exercise (LFX) at 7th Army Training Command's Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, May 7, 2019. The LFX was conducted in order to increase the 2nd Squadron's readiness prior to Saber Guardian 19 and Dragoon Ready 20. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Rolyn Kropf)

# Master Gunner Identification Badge

## A history of mastery in gunnery

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**O**n May 8, 2019, the U.S. Army finalized the Master Gunner Identification Badge (MGIB) authorizing another individual skill to be worn on uniforms with new apparatuses and identifiers (Office of the Chief of Infantry, 2019). Described as a heraldic item (an item that symbolizes heritage and achievement), *Army Regulation 670-1: Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia* discusses the wear of badges as "awarded to an individual for identification purposes or for attaining a special skill or proficiency" (Department of the Army, 2014, p. 42).

The MGIB is authorized for wear on Army Combat Uniforms and Army Service Uniforms for those that

have met the requirements of a master gunner (Myers, 2018). While many noncommissioned officers (NCOs) need to be experts on their weapon systems, there is a great need for master gunners to ensure the highest quality of training and weapon employment.

### The Original Master Gunner

The MGIB acknowledges specific weapon system mastery and expertise that has been crucial to American combat success historically. Roughly 390 years ago, Samuel Sharpe was appointed master gunner in the Massachusetts Bay Colony becoming the first master gunner on the continent. His duties were to "deliver powder and



U.S. Army Spc. Brett Kelly, an artillery cannon gunner assigned to Delta Battery, 1st Battalion, 5th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, hefts a 155mm artillery round into an ammo rack during a live-fire field artillery table-12 certification, March 14, 2019. The battery artillery certifications take place at each unit level to ensure the battalion remains a lethal fighting force able to respond to any situation in support of the NATO effort in Atlantic Resolve. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jeremiah Woods, 358th Public Affairs Detachment)

ammunition to select towns, recover weapons from militia members, receive payment from those who lost weapons, and provide periodic reports to government officials to guide the purchase of firearms, powder, and shot" (Rubis, 2019, para. 2).

A decade later, Sharpe's Massachusetts cohort was formally established as the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Boston, one of the oldest military units in North America ("Early Days," 2006).

When the Continental Army was developing its image, many characteristics from European militaries were used to create American formations – including the value of having a master gunner with the expertise to maintain and employ an arsenal.

During the American Revolution, many of these master gunners proved to be combat multipliers enabling military success. In April of 1775, Benoni Sanders enlisted as a private with the Connecticut Regiment and saw combat at the Battle of Bunker Hill. The following year, Sanders became a sergeant in Col. Henry Knox's Massachusetts Regiment just as the historic leader secured 60-tons of cannons that had traveled 300 miles following the capture of Fort Ticonderoga. That arsenal

helped fortify Gen. Washington's camps after the Siege of Boston (Drake, 2015).

When several British naval vessels amassed in Canada for an expected attack, Sanders transferred up north and became a master gunner (Simmons & Con-cannon, n.d.). Later, serving under Gen. Benedict Arnold's command, Sanders' expertise helped several American ships maneuver around the largest British fleet to ever sail Lake Champlain ("Arnold's Flagship," 1935), a valuable body of water located between modern day New York, Vermont, and Canada.

While the colonists were successful in stalling the British advancement until the harsh winter passed, Sanders lost an arm on October 11, 1776, at the Battle of Valcour Bay when the larger British fleet took control of the lake (Seelinger, 2014). Sanders became one of the first master gunners wounded in



An M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) assigned to 1st Battalion, 14th Field Artillery Brigade, 75th Field Artillery Brigade fires the first of six rockets during Operation Phantom Flight at Fort Chaffee, Ariz., April 12, 2019. Operation Phantom Flight is a joint service operation where Soldiers and Airmen work alongside one another to mobilize and transport Steel Warrior Battalions HIMARS from Henry Post Army Airfield, Okla., to Fort Chaffee, Ark., in order to successfully conduct an air/land raid. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dustin D. Biven, 75th Field Artillery Brigade)



combat in America, but did so while stopping a planned enemy attack on New York and Boston. Sanders recovered and demonstrated the expertise a master gunner could provide, despite having only one arm. He continued to serve until 1781 when the victory at the Battle of Yorktown proved American independence was imminent leading to the end of the Revolutionary War.

## The Evolution of Modern Master Gunner Courses

Two centuries after that Battle of Yorktown, the value of a master gunner was still at the forefront of training and employing weapon systems. In 1981, the first Bradley Master Gunner Course was being designed at Fort Benning, Ga., to bolster mechanized infantry tactics. Named after former General of the Army Omar Bradley, the M1 Bradley was fielded in 1981 and within two years the need for specific training to establish gunnery and weapon system mastery was amplified (Hinkley, Terpak, & Cerjan, 2006).

The infantry's Master Gunner Course was modeled after the successful Armor Master Gunner Course. Former Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams famously served during World War II with the 37th Armored Regiment, victorious at the Battle of the Bulge (Howard, 2017). During the height of the Vietnam War, Abrams ordered the Armor School to study the best ways to improve proficiency and readiness within the Armor branch. The response from commanders in the field was that they needed someone with consummate knowledge of their weapons to develop proper training and employment (Sorley, 2013).

A commander's need for a direct advisor with gunnery mastery and expertise was identified. Because of that need, the first Armor Master Gunner Course graduated 15 NCOs on December 18, 1975. The Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning now hosts the Master Gunner-M1/M1A1 Tank Course, M1A2 System Enhancement Package Master Gunner Course, Stryker Master Gunner Course, and the Infantry Fighting Vehicle Master Gunner Course (Cooper, 2015).

The lessons learned from Operation Iraqi Freedom established a clear need for tactical mastery, the Air Defense Artillery (ADA) branch implemented the Patriot Master Gunner Course in 2004 to train mastery on its largest weapon system. According to Command Sgt. Maj. Robert S. Rodgers:



An Avenger Weapon System fires at a live-fire short-range missile range near White Sands Missile Range, N.M., Oct. 14, 2018. The system was operated by Soldiers with Battery C, 1st Battalion, 174th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, Ohio Army National Guard. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jarred Woods, 157th Infantry Brigade Public Affairs)

*The complex and highly fluid Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) battlefield, with its crowded airspace and high risk of ground-to-air fratricide, illuminated the requirement for increased Patriot system and tactical expertise as well as greater situational awareness. The Air Defense Artillery (ADA) School responded by creating the Patriot Master Gunner Course. (2008, p. 2)*

Joining the Avenger Master Gunner Course that had been modeled after the maneuver courses like the Bradley Master Gunner a decade earlier, these Air Defense master gunner courses are the offshoot of the Army's original School for Master Gunners from the early 1900s, along with the Field Artillery Master Gunner Course, all offered at the Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill, Okla.

In June of 2011, the Army's first female NCO graduated the master gunner course (Heusdens, 2011). Staff Sgt. Jessica Ray of the Florida National Guard successfully completed the Avenger Master Gunner Course. Ray's Guard unit employs air defense weapon systems to the National Capital Region. After the terrorist attack on the Pentagon during the events of 9/11, the National Guard was tasked with defending our country's most historic landmarks and strategic headquarters in Washington, D.C.

## The New Identification Badge

In order to qualify, NCOs must complete one of eight master gunner courses offered through combat arms branches that train weapon system mastery. The MGIB's design recognizes the schools and their branch's histories:



Paratroopers assigned to "Chaos Battery," 4th Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade prepare their M777 howitzer while responding to an emergency fire mission in Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, on Feb. 12, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Henry Villarama)

- A laurel wreath will represent victory of the maneuver force, a symbol of victory since ancient Greek mythology featured the god Apollo wearing a laurel wreath around his head.
- Inside the wreath, a sabre will highlight the Armor Branch, a symbol since 1851 adopted after the American Civil War when the mounted cavalry had great success on the battlefield swinging the curved, 36-inch-long, single-edged blade.
- The 1795 model Springfield musket will honor the Infantry Branch, a symbol of the first official model of musket originally built at the Springfield Armory in Massachusetts.
- The crossed 19th-century-style cannon will continue to symbolize the Field Artillery Branch just as it has since 1834, when individual field artilleryman wore the insignia on their cap.
- The missile in the center will represent the Air Defense Artillery Branch, just as it has for 50 years when they adopted the Field Artillery cross-cannons and added a missile, evolving from the Coast Artillery Corps whose insignia featured cross-cannons with a projectile in the center.

By implementing the MGIB, the Army is recognizing the heavy responsibility that master gunners bear. They provide their units with an evolving mastery level of gunnery and tactics steeped in rich tradition significant throughout the Army's history. ■



Establishment of the Master Gunner Identification Badge is published in *MILPER Message 19-44*. Master Gunner Badge image is an original concept released by the Army.

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