

THE GOOD CONDUCT BADGE OF THE BRITISH ARMED SERVICES

by DE Langley

This article, arranged primarily in date sequence, describes what is possibly the least collectable but in many ways the most interesting British badge, used in all three armed services. The authority for the army badge (for all except the most recent period) is the successive editions of *The Royal Warrant for the Pay etc of the Army (RW)*. These were amended from time to time, the amendments appearing in *General Orders (GO)*, *Army Orders (AO)*, or *Army Council Instructions (ACI)*. Most of this article is based on the *RWs*, because not all the intermediate amendments can be reliably traced. Where a source used is not a Warrant this is stated. The treatment of the badges worn by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force is briefly sketched for completeness, but others, more knowledgeable, can probably contribute more.

According to DA Campbell in his *Dress of the Royal Artillery*, the Army badge was probably originally authorised by *RW* and *GO 526 of 1836* and was a simple heraldic chevron in the correct sense, in that the angle was worn uppermost (with the exception, in modern times, of Guards drummers and time beaters). The design of the badge has never changed substantially, although materials have varied widely. Both Dawnay *Badges of Warrant and Non-Commissioned rank in the British Army* and Carman *Badges and Insignia of the British Armed Services* point to the original introduction by the French Army of 'galons d'anciennité' from 16th April 1771, as a sign worn on the left arm that a soldier had re-engaged for service once (one chevron) or twice (two chevrons) after eight or sixteen years respectively. Whether this pre-dates or post-dates the occasional use of similar badges for various purposes, including rank, by some British regiments is a moot point, but they were introduced systematically (but with point downwards) as non-commissioned officer badges by *AO* of 1st July 1802 in lieu of the shoulder knots and epaulettes hitherto used to distinguish rank. Meanwhile the French use had lapsed and subsequently been reintroduced, this time one chevron each for 10, 15 and 20 years. The chevron (described as a narrow piece of cloth of an angular form, to be worn on the left sleeve) was also introduced by General George Washington on 7th August 1782 for the Continental Army of the United States, as an 'Honorary Badge of Distinction' to be conferred on veteran non-commissioned officers and soldiers who served more than three years with 'bravery, fidelity and good conduct'. Campbell (*op cit*) writes that the initial authorisation by Horse Guards in 1836 was for up to five good conduct badges, and that they were to be worn on the right arm. He does not state the periods for qualification.

The next piece of information is to be found in the *MHS Bulletin VII Number 26*, where a soldier's *Account Book*, predecessor to the *Small Book*, is quoted and makes clear that, in the 3rd Light Dragoons at least, the awards were for 7, 14, 21 and 28 years, each attracting 1d per day. The soldier enlisted in 1844.

RW of 1848 described an award of additional pay and 'distinguishing marks' for good conduct for eligible corporals and below (except corporals of the Household Cavalry) who enlisted or re-enlisted on or after 1st September 1836. A distinguishing mark was issued for each completed period of five years enlisted service without entry



Fig 1

in the Regimental Defaulters Book during the last two years of those five. Up to six marks could be gained after a total of 30 years, each worth 1d, so that such service was worth half as much as the daily rate of pay for a private soldier. This was achieved after a sequence 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 years. Continuous good conduct (as opposed to undetected crime in the last two years before a mark) enabled the last three badges to be accelerated to 18, 23, and 28 years. Service over 18 years of age was to count, with a bonus for the Battle of Waterloo (an additional two years credit) and three years for every two of actual service in the East or West Indies if enlistment was before 1st December 1829.

Two sources suggest a variation in the qualifying periods by 1860; *The Victorian Army at Home* by JR Skelley and the *MHS Bulletin* quoted above, but they disagree in the number of badges possible: the former says that badges could be awarded at 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33 and 38 years, whereas the latter (quoting an *Account Book* printed in 1865) stops at 28 years. The *RW 1866* published the shorter list and also confirmed acceleration by two years for the last three badges for continuous good conduct. Again, soldiers under sergeant were eligible, and those junior to corporal of the Household Cavalry were added. In subsequent editions, this latter rank became corporal of horse. There is no note of the method of wearing of the badges, and such a note does not appear until 1881. The next *RW* (1870) makes yet another change, to 2, 6, 12, 18, 23 and 28, with acceleration by two years for the last three badges. These periods remained virtually unchanged until near-modern times, but there are suggestions that the left sleeve became the preferred one c. 1875. Around this time, there was certainly some confusion as to the correct mode of wearing, culminating in the positioning of the badges on both sleeves for good measure, as shown in Carman's *Dictionary of Military Uniform* on a 3-badge Northumberland Fusilier. In 1878 the Warrant leaves the eligible ranks and the periods unchanged, and also grants an extra year's credit to the garrisons of the Indian Mutiny sieges at Lucknow and the Alumbagh. There was in 1881 (as in so many other subjects under the Cardwell reforms) a major rewrite of the Warrant with regard to Good Conduct Badges and Pay. Beginning with Paragraph 914, it noted that the badge is a high distinction conferred under the rank of corporal, 2nd corporal or bombardier as a token of 'Our Royal approbation of good conduct', to be marked by a chevron worn on the left arm (upper or lower not specified, but photographic evidence since the Crimean War confirms the lower sleeve). Placing Good Conduct badges on the left sleeve had been made essential by the moving of rank badges of four chevrons to the lower right sleeve, point up (GO 29 of 1881). The periods, each associated with an increment of 1d, were 2, 6, 12, 18, 23 and 28 years, again with the possibility of two years acceleration for the last three.

Here it should be noted that there are some differences in the qualification periods taken from the official source and Skelley, *op cit*. He writes that the awards date from 1832, not 1836, and this meticulous book goes on to quote several sources at odds with the warrants and gives full references for these documents. There is little point in listing the differences here: either these sources are wrong, or they describe small variations occurring between successive warrants. Similarly, EM Spiers lists in *The Late Victorian Army* the qualifying periods for 1870 and 1876 but in this case, because they are at variance with virtually simultaneous warrants, they have been discounted. Spiers does add a most interesting tabulation of the percentages of soldiers holding one or more badges at different times from 1870 to 1898. In summary, about 10 to 20 men in 100 held one badge, rather fewer held two, about five in 100 held three, and the number with six badges was vanishingly small, never many more than 100 soldiers in the entire army. The *Victorian Army at Home* also notes that consideration of shortening the qualifying periods was given in 1892, but not proceeded with, and the next eleven warrants, up to and including 1900, make no material changes. It is, however, beyond doubt that soldiers have been photographed wearing more than the six badges authorised, including one photograph that can be dated 1903 (these veterans of the Green Howards are wearing the short-lived Brodrick cap) where two old soldiers have eight badges each.

From 1889 at the latest, *Regulations for the Militia* prescribe badges, 're-enlistment stripes' to be worn on the left arm below the elbow, point upwards. By the regulations of 1893 their use had been extended to re-engagement, which implied continuity of service, four years at a time. This arrangement was continued in 1896 but ended in 1901 when the ledgers of the Royal Army Clothing Department recorded that this use was to be superseded by the use of a four-pointed white star to be worn on the right arm, hitherto a mark of a proficient sergeant of the Volunteer Force. At the same time, 1901, militiamen came under the Regular Army rules for good conduct badges and the extra pay that went with them, but this probably did not last long after the regulars lost their own extra pay in 1903.

To return to the regulars, the warrant of 1898 made an important provision for those rejoining the colours from the Reserve (as, for example, in war): for the first time 'regard shall be had to the entries in his regimental defaulter sheet during his service in the reserve'. The meaning is not clear, but it can be read as counting good conduct during reserve service in full. In 1914 those soldiers recalled to the colours retained (at least) their substantive rank and conduct badges accrued with the colours.

In 1903 there was a major and unpopular change in the way soldiers were rewarded and paid. Various AOs of that year removed the association of extra pay with good conduct, and also for most skill-at-arms badges. Thus the next Warrant, of 1906, continued to call the badge 'a high distinction' for those under the rank of corporal or equivalent, but removed the 1d per day per badge from all except non-Europeans. The periods for Europeans were 2, 5 (a change), 12, 18, 23 and 28 years, with the usual proviso for earlier qualification for later badges. The loss of pay was not uniformly bad news, as 'Service Pay' found a way of rewarding longer service at the same time. Within a few years, Proficiency Pay replaced Service Pay except for those with reserved rights, but monetary rewards for good conduct were not renewed, and were retained only by non-Europeans. Were it not for this, it would have been logical to remove considerations of rewards for good conduct from the *Pay Warrant*, and place them in *King's Regulations*, but this change did not occur for many years. The next warrant, 1907, stated that service in the Reserve would not count, but changed little else, as did those of 1913 and 1914.

The Great War involved the Colonies, whose soldiers served in very similar uniforms to the parent country. Canada in its own *Canadian Militia Pay and Allowance Regulations 1914* followed the British system regarding qualification and awards. The Australian usage is complicated, in that the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) (which fought overseas) and the Australian Military Forces (who were the permanent force based in Australia) followed different criteria. Taking the latter first, the badge was the same and the criteria were very similar to the British, and for good conduct *per se*. *Standing Orders for Dress and Clothing, Citizen Forces* MO 424/1912 and 58/1919 refer. The AIF badge, a chevron as in the British service, was for 'long service and good conduct' and appears to have been introduced on 24th January 1917 by AIF *Order 470, Long Service Badges*. Qualification was from date of embarkation, one badge for each completed year overseas, all ranks up to and including Warrant Officer, with no additional pay. These latter badges may well have become obsolete when the 'chevrons for overseas service' (AIF *Order 1089* of 29th January 1918) were introduced, identical to the British issue, small chevrons, point up, worn lower right sleeve, one for each year overseas and manufactured in blue with the exception of that

for 1914 which was red.

It is appropriate here to touch on the Royal Air Force, because its founding was during the Great War. With its antecedents of the Royal Engineers and the Royal Flying Corps, both of them army formations, it seems inevitable that long-serving soldiers who made the full transition to the Royal Air Force in 1918 would have brought with them some Good Conduct badges. The formal introduction was by *Air Ministry Order* 720 of 12th August 1920, with up to three available. The badges were to be worn in the same manner as the army, but it was not until two years later that they were confined to ranks below substantive corporal. No less a character than TE Lawrence, under the pseudonym of Aircraftsman TE Shaw, qualified for his first badge on 12th March 1925, and his second on 12th March 1931. Unless his previous army service counted, we might deduce that these were awarded for two and eight years. To complete this digression, *King's Regulations* and *Air Council Instructions 1940* gave the periods as three, eight and thirteen years, and the awards were still being made through the Second World War.

After the Great War, the army Warrant (much amended piecemeal in the interim) was republished in 1922 with one interesting addition, that further badges above six could be earned for each additional five years service. The consideration of good conduct during Reserve service for those rejoining the colours was restored. Non-Europeans continued to receive monetary reward. The warrant of 1926 promptly removed consideration for Reserve service, but specifically included soldiers going from Regular to Special Reserve (or Militia) and back to the Regular Army, and a similar sequence for Territorial Army or Territorial Force. *ACI 1007* and *1008* supplementary to the warrant of 1931 made clear that 'boys' (under 18 years) might count service since enlistment.

At some time between 1931 and 1940, the Army introduced 'Long Service and Good-Conduct Pay', linking it to good conduct but not (inexplicably) to the possession of good conduct badges. It was paid at 3d per day after 8 years man service, with an additional 3d after 13 years. Meanwhile, the badges themselves, according to *RW 1940*, were awarded without pay and under the same rules as 1931. The 1945 amended version of *RW 1940* changed nothing in these respects. It is not certain when the qualifying periods next changed, but it was no later than the *Queen's Regulations of 1961* (KR 1951 have no reference to the badges), when they became 2½ years, a further 2½, a further five, and then each five. Periods of good conduct included periods of service with the Colours on any engagement; Regular Reserve and Army Emergency Reserve when called out for active service; Territorial Army when embodied or called out for on home defence service; whole-time National Service; equivalent service in the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force. Boys were eligible after the age of 18 years on total service since enlistment.

By contrast with the armfuls of badges that a soldier could gain, the Royal Navy has always had a maximum of three. The current official RN web site says this: "Good Conduct Badges (worn on the left arm) were first authorised in 1849 for award after 5, 10 and 15 years satisfactory service. These periods were changed to 3, 8 and 13 years in 1861, and to 4, 8 and 12 years in 1946. Since 1956 the extra pay given for them is 4d per badge per day".

A little supplementary information can be added: the Royal Navy scheme was introduced by an Order in Council on 15th January 1849, attached a penny per day for



Fig 2

each of three badges, called Good Conduct Stripes, to be awarded to ratings of Leading Seaman and below for 5, 10 and 15 years of very good character and conduct. Boy service was not to count, and 'sobriety, activity and attention' were required at all times. In 1857 Petty Officers were allowed to benefit. The badges were in gold lace on the frock, blue for deck frocks, worn on the upper left arm, with point down. They appear to have been held in higher esteem in the navy than by the army if anecdotal evidence is accepted. The Royal Marines appear to have always worn the badges army-style but under the RN qualification rules.

It would have been superficially attractive to use rank badges for good conduct badges, as they are of essentially the same geometrical design but inverted. This would have been economical for good conduct badges up to two (corporals and lance-corporals ranking was usually cheap white worsted lace), but thereafter the use of senior non-commissioned officer chevrons, made of gold or silver lace or other expensive materials, was clearly not an option except possibly for bandsmen, so, in general the good conduct badge has been the poor relation. In modern times, only those regiments retaining full dress for some occasions (eg Guards Division and King's Troop RHA) have a need for good conduct badges of a design different from those of senior non-commissioned officers. In almost every other circumstance, rank chevrons in drab worsted (with regimental variations) can be used for good conduct badges. There were some periods when the badges were only issued in pieces up to four chevrons (eg India 1879) but usually there has been provision for pieces of up to six.

Current *Material Regulations* for the army continue to specify the badges for wear as hitherto, the periods being 2¹/₂ years for the first, a total of 5 for the second, 10 for the third, and then every five years. Ranks below full corporal or equivalent remain eligible; as do juniors, junior leaders, apprentice soldiers and soldiers under 18 years of age. Badges are not worn on 'combats' or working dress, but are supplied in 'gold, silver or black lace on a backing of the same colour as the jacket on which they are worn'. This clearly omits the Guards, who wear badges of white braid somewhat narrower than their ranking for lance corporals and lance serjeants, and, in the case of Guards drummers and time beaters, the badge is worn point down to contrast it with the *fleur-de-lys* lace sleeve lace.

Acknowledgements

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