

U.S. Marine Corps Marksmanship Badges from 1912 to the Present



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

U.S. Marine Corps Marksmanship Badges from 1912 to the Present

by
Michael D. Visconage



Marine Corps Museum Monograph

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Other Volumes in the Marine Corps Museum
Monograph Series

Colonel John A. Driscoll, USMCR *The Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, 1858-1969* (1971, reprinted 1977)

Jack B. Hilliard and Doris S. Maley, compilers *Making a Continental Marine Uniform.* (1975).

Foreword

The Museums Branch of the History and Museums Division has extensive collections of military artifacts which excite the interest of historians, curators, collectors, and the wide general audience of Marines and others who are fascinated by anything connected with the heritage of the United States Marine Corps. To make the fullest use of the resources of these collections of aircraft, weapons, vehicles, uniforms, insignia, etc., technical monographs are needed which draw together the information available in a concise and meaningful manner. The Museums Branch staff can occasionally put together such a publication, as *The Making of a Continental Marine Uniform*, but in general such work has to be done by concerned and knowledgeable volunteers such as Colonel John A. Driscoll, USMCR, who authored our monograph, *The Eagle, Globe, and Anchor*. Now, qualified college students, working for academic credit as interns with the Museums Branch, also have the opportunity to research and prepare such useful works.

This monograph, by Second Lieutenant Michael D. Visconage, USMC, is an excellent example of this exciting trend which finally will exploit the valuable resources of our collections. Lieutenant Visconage worked on this study in the winter-spring 1982 semester at the University of Maryland where he then was a senior majoring in history. He graduated in mid-May and, having completed the Platoon Leaders Class in 1981, was commissioned upon graduation and attended the Basic School in June. Lieutenant Visconage submitted the monograph as partial completion of course work in general studies. In addition he entered part of the marksmanship badge collection into our computer-based Marine Corps Museum Catalog and Inventory Control System employing the Historical Center's Sperry Univac BC-7 minicomputer.

The History and Museums Division welcomes any comments on the text of this monograph which could enhance its value in a future edition, as well as any donations to its collections which will increase their value as resources in Marine Corps history for the use of all interested persons.



EDWIN H. SIMMONS
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Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Preface

Vast areas of Marine Corps material history, contained in the reserve collections of the Museums Branch, remain unexploited through the sheer magnitude of the task. The curatorial resources of the staff, largely committed to recording and caring for collections, are insufficient for full exploitation. This deficiency is beginning to be overcome with the use of volunteers and student interns.

Lieutenant Visconage's monograph touches on a subject close to the Marine Corps mystique—proficiency at arms as evidenced by recognition of skills through award and mandatory wearing of marksmanship badges. The Marine Corps entered serious marksmanship training and competition late in the game, in the opening years of the 20th century. However, the Corps quickly caught up with and in many respects passed others in this field, winning more than its share of competitions and requiring higher standards—more training time, longer ranges, and higher scores—for qualification. The addition of \$5 a month to the Marine's pay—25 per cent of a private's pay—for qualification as an expert rifleman meant serious individual application on the range and in preliminary marksmanship training. The proud wearing of the badge marked a trained warrior whose skills could be counted on by his fellow Marines and his leaders. Thus we see in company photographs taken during World War I nearly every Marine with a qualification badge on his chest. In World War II as well as today the same observation can be made. The deadliness of Marine small arms fire in four major wars and numerous smaller conflicts attests to the excellence of Marine Corps marksmanship training and the emphasis placed upon it. Mike Visconage's study recounts the story of the changing patterns of Marine Corps marksmanship badges from 1912 to the present and identifies the various badges for museologists and collectors.

The Museums Branch looks forward to working with other student interns or volunteers in researching and exploiting by publication other portions of its extensive collections.



F B NIHART
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1912

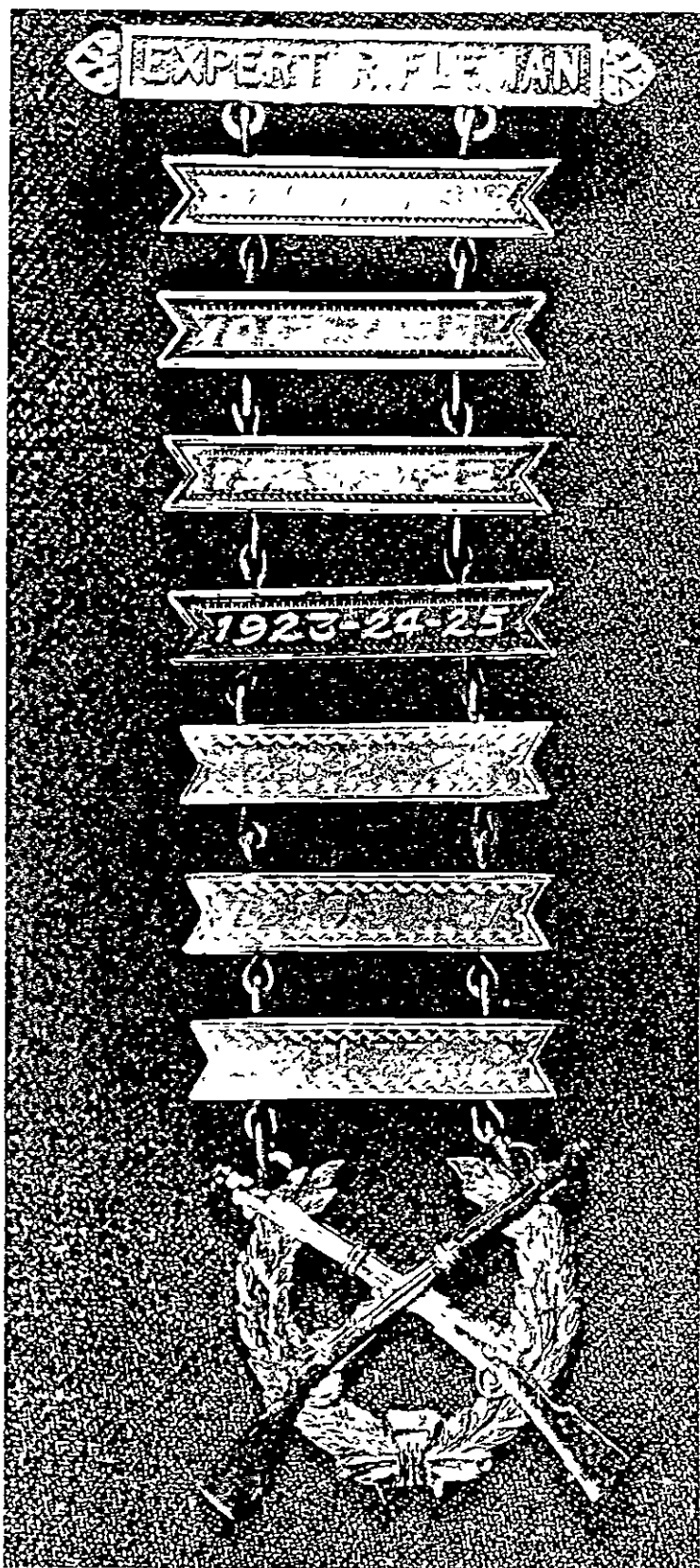
Shortly after the turn of the century, the U. S. Marine Corps began to encourage skill with the rifle by awarding different badges to Marines who qualified in one of three levels of marksmanship. Since the inception of these original badges, many changes have occurred. Awards have been instituted for marksmanship with other weapons and the basic design of these proficiency badges has changed many times in the last 75 years.

The first mention of the three basic marksmanship badges does not appear clearly until the 1912 *Marine Corps Uniform Regulations*.¹ In the 1912 regulations, the first illustrations of the new awards provide the most information on the design and size of the badges. Some marksmanship badges were apparently retroactively awarded for dates prior to 1912, but there is little evidence available to clarify the exact date that Marine Corps marksmanship badges were first conceived, authorized, and awarded.

Those who fired in the highest category of score with the rifle received the Expert Rifleman badge. The badge consisted of a bar (1 3/4" x 1/4") with decorated ends and the words, "Expert Rifleman," from which a wreath on which two crossed M1903 Springfield rifles were superimposed and hung by means of two small rings. The next rating for marksmanship consisted of a four-branched Maltese cross with a three-ringed target in the center, hung below by a single small ring from a rounded end bar which read, "Sharpshooter." Lowest on the scale of marksmanship skill was a single somewhat larger bar (2" x 1/2") with rounded edges and the word, "Marksman" bracketed by two small, ringed targets.

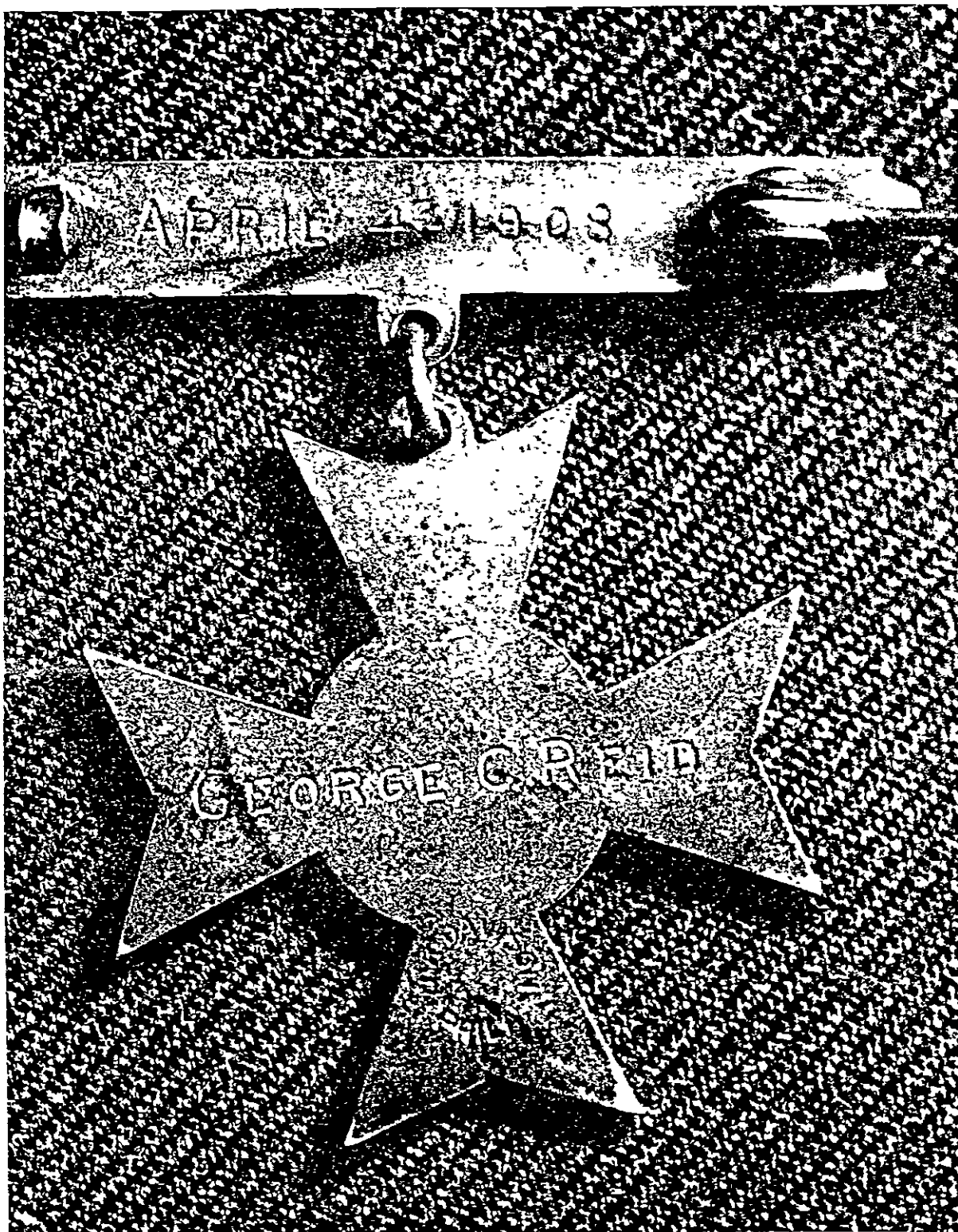
Although there is little evidence, it is believed that these badges were officially sanctioned in 1912 and retroactively awarded to those who had qualified since 1905-1906. Requalifications were also awarded and attached to the Expert Rifleman badge between the bar and the wreath via a bar with fishtail type ends. On the Sharpshooter badge a rounded end bar was attached between the bar and the cross. These requalification bars were engraved with the full date of requalification, or more often with just the year, or years, of requalification (i.e., "1916" or "1919-20-21").

This Expert Rifleman badge M1912, with its impressive display of seven requalification bars, provides a sampling of the several styles of construction and engraving used for the bars through 1942.

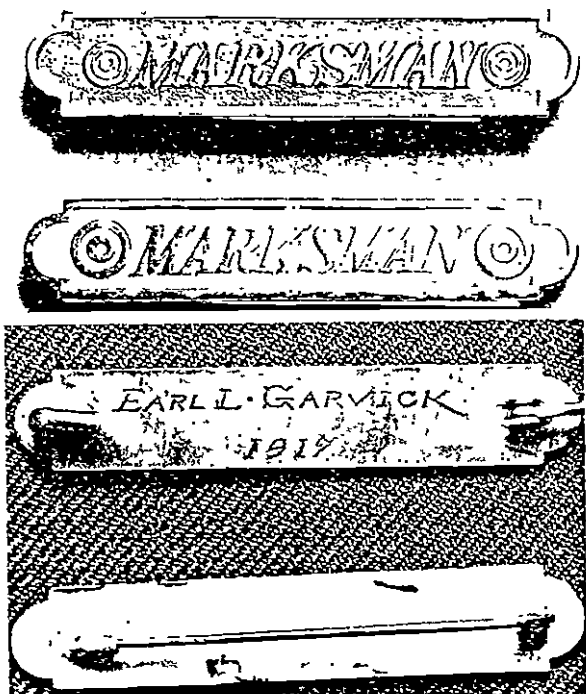




Once an award belonging to Major General Littleton W T. Waller, Jr , this Expert Rifleman badge with the engraved date 1907, illustrates the two-piece casting and-construction of such early badges, as well as an unusual contrivance for attaching the re-qualification bars



The reverse of a Sharpshooter badge awarded to Brigadier General George C Reid displays both a date in 1908 and the owner's name, and is notable for including the mark of its Philadelphia maker

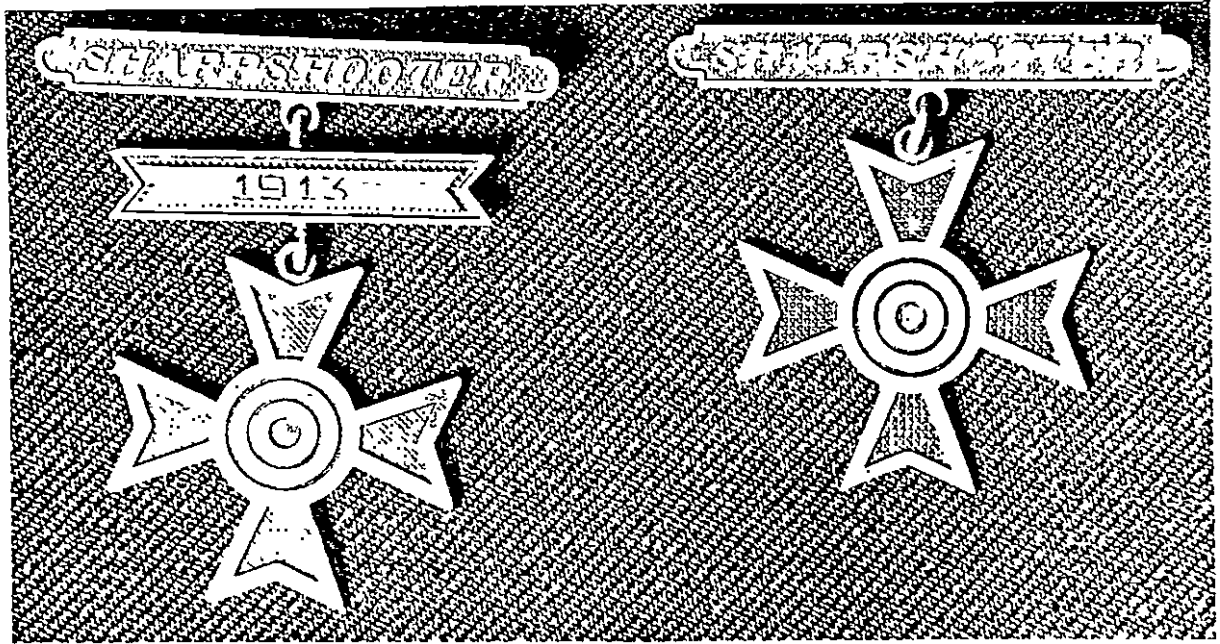


Marksman badges, top picture, underwent minute changes in design from the M1912, above, to the M1922, below, note the height of letters and number of rings. Bottom picture shows that some badges were engraved and that all had pin clasps.

Among the badges in the collection of the Marine Corps Museum there are several Expert Rifleman badges with requalification bars of interest. One such badge is dated December 13, 1907.² Another badge which seems to prove the existence of the qualification badges before 1912 is a Sharpshooter badge dated April 4, 1908.³ Since the *Marine Corps Uniform Regulations* and the *Marine Corps Orders* make no mention of the badges before 1912, there is virtually no way to tell whether these two badges were originally awarded in 1907 and 1908 or whether they were simply engraved with the date of qualification retroactively.

At the same time that the Marine Corps began issuing its badges, the U.S. Army awarded a similar set of qualification badges and bars. There were a great variety of badges and they were often of various metals, silver, gold, or bronze, depending on the status of the individual awarded the badge (usually a distinction was made between active and reserve elements).⁴ The Marine Corps, however, continued with only the three basic designs, all "of silver metal,"⁵ until 1922. It is interesting to note that some Marine Corps uniforms from World War I reflect the wartime disregard of regulations and the use of whatever were available, including some Army bronze Marksman badges.

Two examples of the M1912 Sharpshooter badge illustrate a first award, right, and the contemporary method of attaching the requalification bar above the badge itself, left.



1922

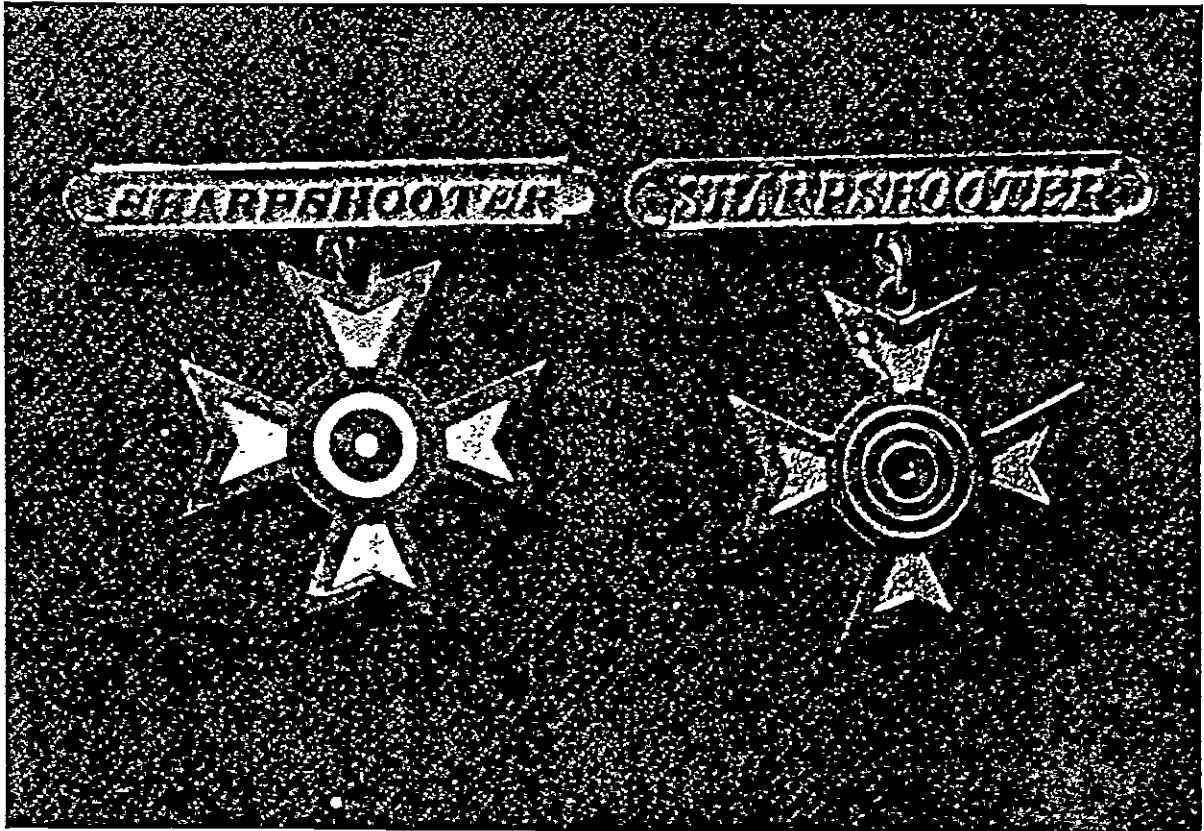
The 1922 *Uniform Regulations* show several changes useful in dating badges of this period. Marines wore two slightly varied types of expert badges during this time. On one type, the crossed M1903 Springfield rifles are more defined and the rifles are separately attached on top of the wreath to present a three dimensional look, while the second type was a badge of single construction which contains wreath and rifle cast in a single flat piece.

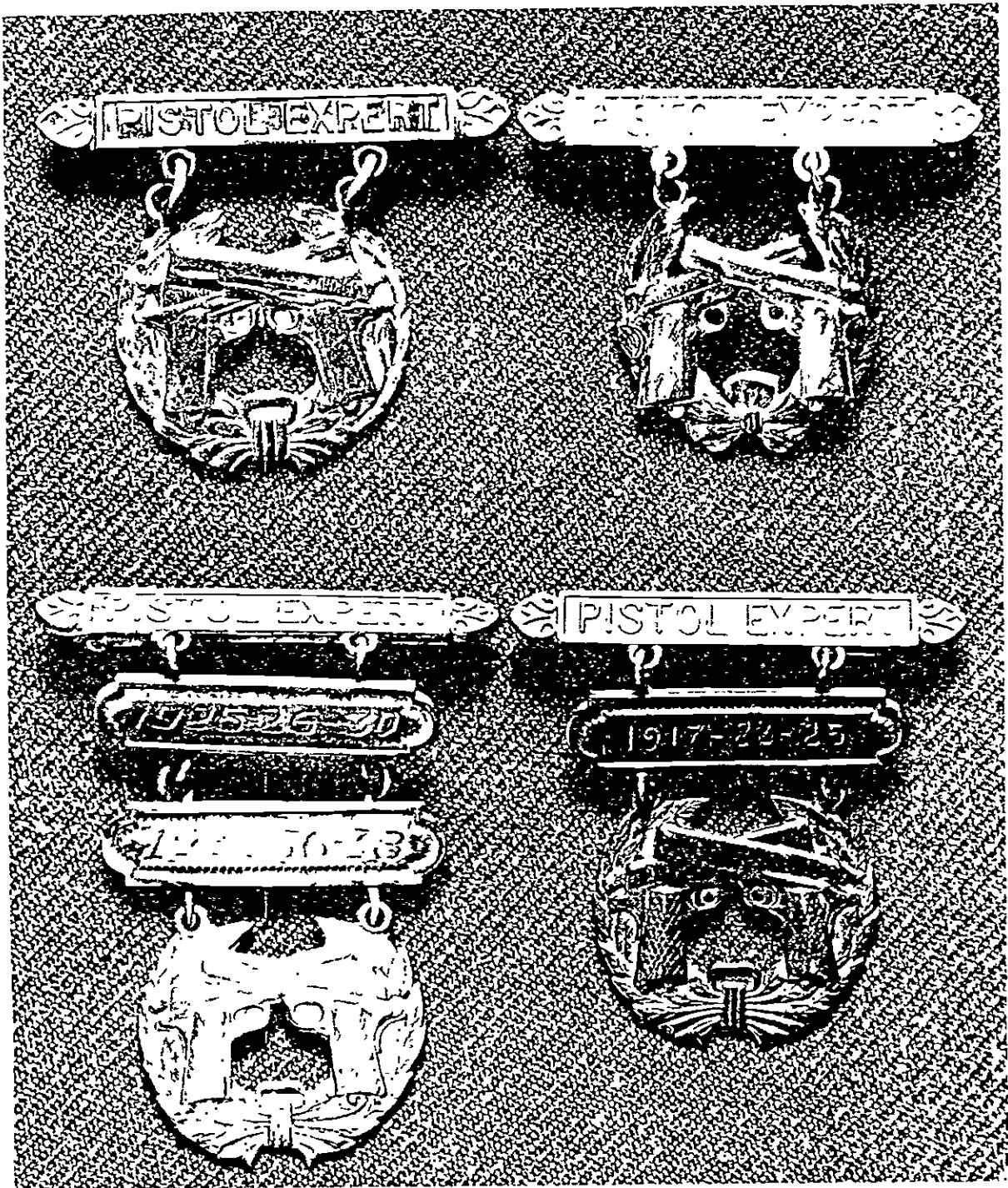
On the Sharpshooter badge, the most obvious change is the deletion of rings on the target. What had formerly been three raised rings and a small dot changed to two broad raised rings. Changes to the Marksman badge involved reducing the number of rings on the two small targets on the ends of the badge to two broader rings, instead of the previous badge with three rings and a small dot in the center.

In 1922 the authorization of two pistol badges increased the scope of basic marksmanship qualification in the Marine Corps. The Pistol Expert badge consisted of a smaller bar (1 1/3" x 1/4") reading, "Pistol Expert," from which hung, from two small rings, a wreath with two M1911 .45 caliber pistols crossed over it. The Pistol Expert badge may have been informally approved before 1922, judging from some badges dated prior to that year. There are also examples of Pistol Expert badges with requalification bars (with rounded rather than fishtail style ends) dating as far back as 1917⁶ which may have been retroactively added.

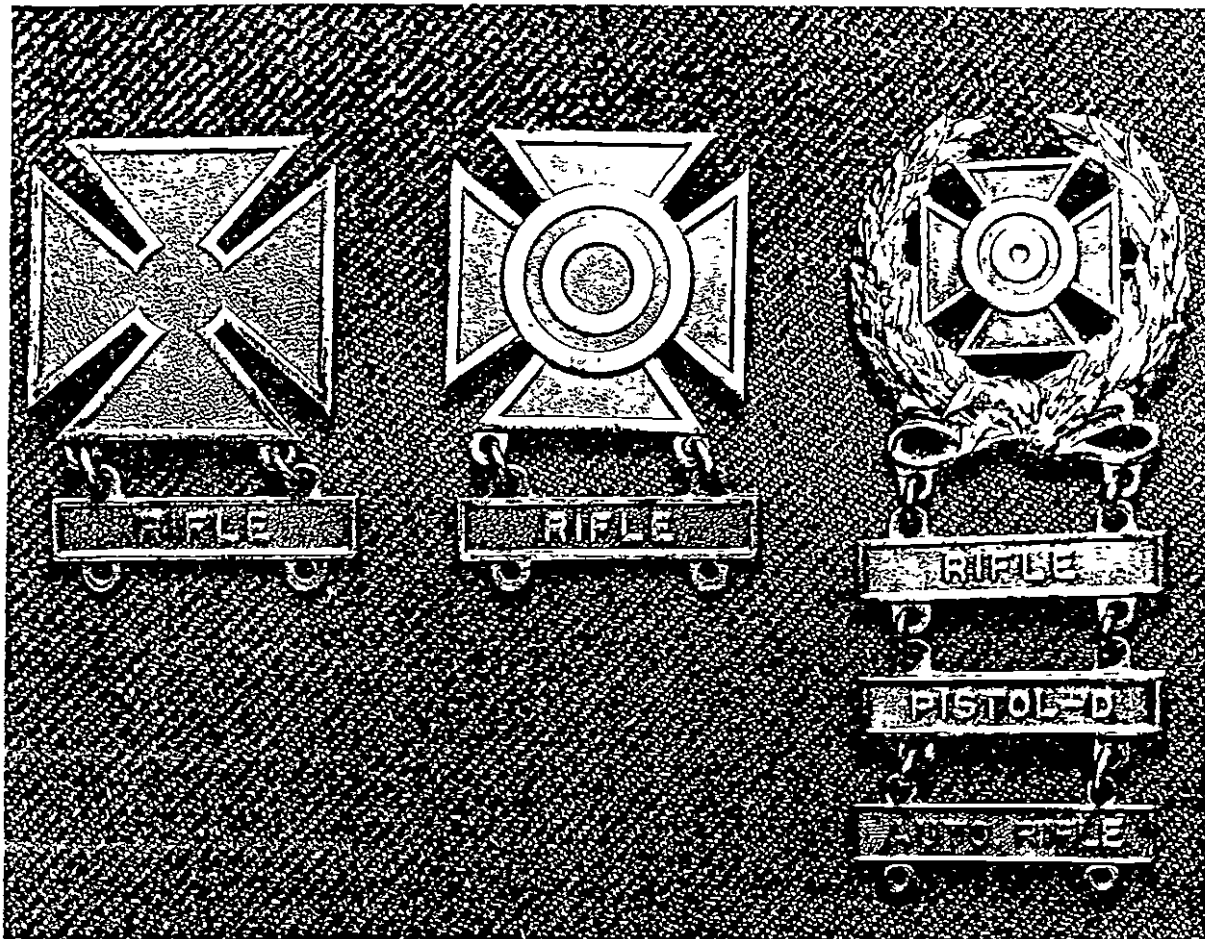
The second badge, and only other rating for pistol marksmanship, consisted of a bar (1 1/2" x 1/4") with the words, "Pistol Shot First Class" printed in two lines. This was similar to the Marksman badge and also had cut and indented corners. The pistol badges were also of silver metal.

The Sharpshooter badge with two broad rings at left is the M1922, officially in use until replaced by Army-style badges in 1924. Many Marines continued to wear it, however, until it was replaced by the badge with four rings at right, adopted in 1937 and continued until 1958.





While all of these Pistol Expert badges are made to M1922 design features, the badge in the upper right is of two-piece construction. Badges below include the authorized requalification bars, indicating varying amounts of time between requalifications.



M1924 Marksmanship badges in use by the Marine Corps from 1924 to 1937 were made to a U.S Army design and often worn concurrently with earlier models. From left, the badges are Marksman, Sharpshooter, and Expert. The Expert badge includes qualification bars for pistol and automatic rifle as well rifle.

1924

On 12 November 1924, the Marine Corps made the following change by adopting the three marksmanship badges which the Army originated in 1921⁷ and still uses today. "The Expert Rifleman, Sharpshooter, Marksman, and Expert Pistol-Shot badges have been superseded by new badges. The new badges, in three basic designs—Expert, Sharpshooter, and Marksman—are prescribed for both rifle and pistol, the arm with which qualification is made being denoted by the appropriate bar suspended from the basic design . . ."⁸

These changes to the 1922 *Uniform Regulations* authorized the issue of the former badges until no longer available. Those who had been originally awarded the 1912-1924 badges continued to be

authorized to wear them for the next 11 years. Due to this continued sanction of the old marksmanship awards, the next decade saw continued attempts to obtain the old marksmanship badges through private purchase, and the old type Rifle Expert award was especially popular due to the dated re-qualification bars which were often accumulated in long "laddered" strings. The only old award which seems to have been definitely terminated was the Pistol Shot First Class badge; the 1924 changes to the 1922 *Uniform Regulations* stated that it was "no longer issued."⁹

1929

In 1929, the Marine Corps adopted a large number of specialty bars to denoting skill with the

following weapons, Rifle-A, Rifle-D, Rifle, Small Bore, Pistol-D, Auto Rifle, Machine Gun, Bayonet, and Inf Howitzer. Each qualification indicated expert, sharpshooter, or marksman levels of skill, except the bayonet bar which was awarded as an expert rating only. The letters following rifle and pistol qualification bars denote the type of course on which the Marine earned his qualification rating (i.e., "Pistol-D" is the pistol course dismounted, while "Rifle-A" was the full course to 600 yards). Regulations in 1929 describe the badges as being of "white metal" and also continue to authorize the wear and issue of the former badges "until no longer available."¹⁰

1935-1937

Between 1935 and 1937 the Marine Corps issued a series of orders which readopted the old type badges and phased out the Army-type badges.¹¹ A June 1935 order first announced the change for qualification awards with the rifle only and the issue of the old type badges to all men whose original enlistment was subsequent to 1 August 1935.¹²

Bars suspended from a reissued version of the Army-style Expert badge indicated qualification as an expert or sharpshooter with weapons other than the rifle. The new special weapons qualification bars carried "EX" or "SS" to determine the level of qualification, followed by the name of the weapon with which qualified. Only one qualification bar was to be worn for any one weapon. A new list of weapon qualifications (and bars) appeared in the regulations at this time, for expert automatic rifle ("Auto Rifle"), Thompson submachine gun ("T S M G"), pistol, and bayonet. Sharpshooter qualifications for the same weapons, with the exception of the pistol and bayonet, received approval.

In February 1937, the reissued Army-style Expert badge, being used as the device from which qualification bars other than for the rifle were hung, became the "Basic Badge."¹³ Officers and men who originally had been issued the Army-style badges for marksmanship, with their various combinations of qualification bars, could still wear them, provided they wore only one bar for any one weapon. Those who received the Pistol Expert badge prior to 1924 could continue wearing them.

Eight months later, Headquarters, Marine Corps clarified this series of rather confusing changes by adopting a newly designed Marine Corps "Basic

Badge."¹⁴ To help eliminate the confusion of individuals wearing the old Army type badges, the order discontinued them and directed the Quartermaster to exchange them for the new Basic Badge. The Basic Badge soon became an easily recognizable award for those Marines who had shown skill as experts or sharpshooters with the pistol and special weapons. The Basic Badge survived for over 30 years, until declared obsolete in December 1968.¹⁵

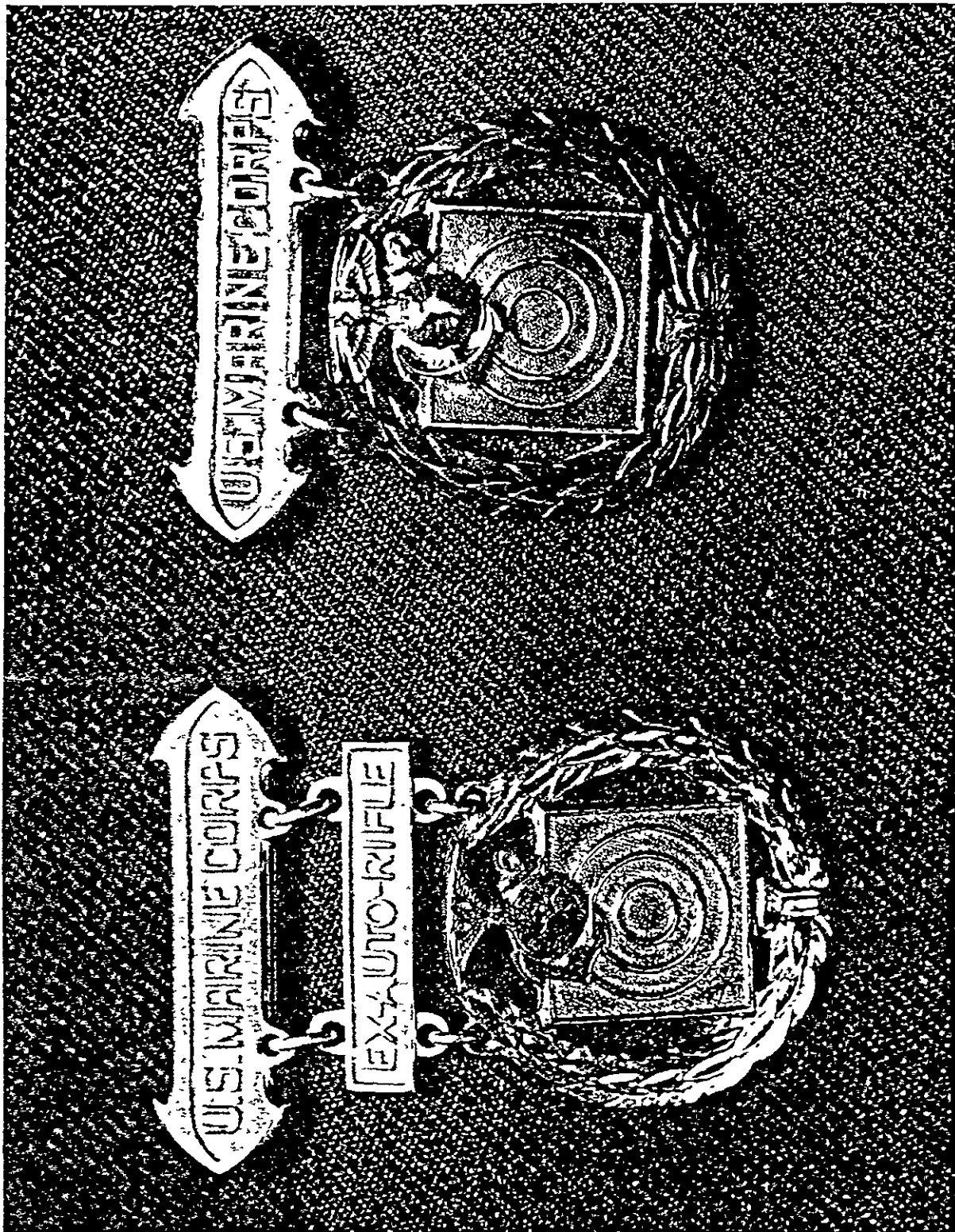
The design of the Basic Badge was in keeping with the style similar to the Expert Rifleman badge. The badge consisted of a bar with arrowhead ends reading, "U S Marine Corps" and a two ring hanger device from which hung a wreath centered under a square, three ring target with an eagle, globe, and anchor centered in the upper third of the target. Qualification bars continued to have the "EX" and "SS" preceding the weapon name, as ordered in 1935. The only change to the list of authorized qualification bars was the addition of a pistol sharpshooter rating ("SS-Pistol") augmenting the previously authorized pistol expert rating ("EX-Pistol").

The changes to the Marine Corps marksmanship badges in 1937 also applied to reserve units. Members of the Marine Corps Reserve units wore a series of special rifle qualification bars. Qualification as an expert or sharpshooter with the .22 caliber rifle warranted a bar reading, "EX-" or "SS-Small Bore." Expert, sharpshooter, and marksman qualification with the .30 caliber rifle course D also earned the reservist a bar reading, "EX-," "SS-," or "MM-Rifle-D."

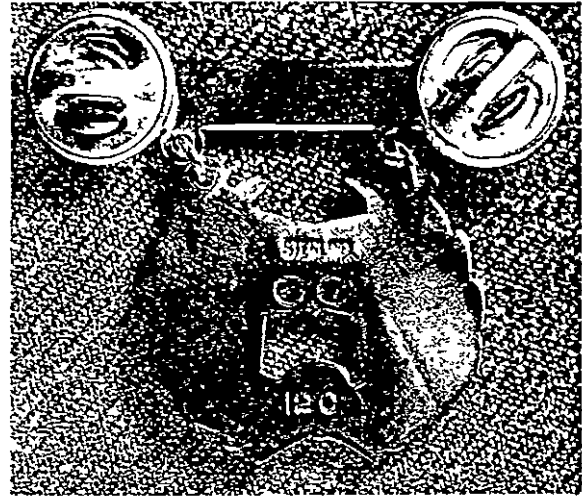
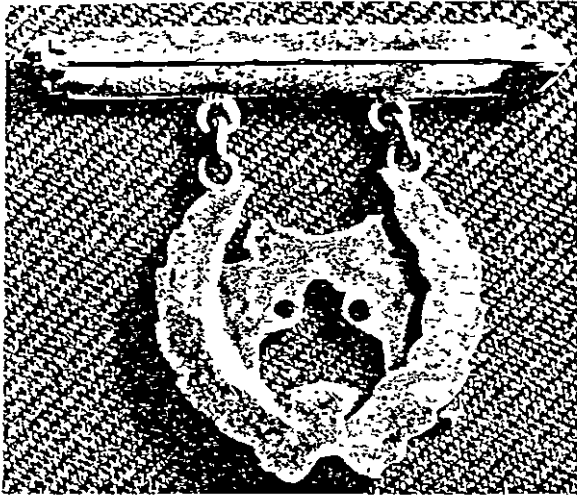
With the changes of 1937, the Marine Corps instituted a more consistent and distinct series of badges recognizing proficiency in marksmanship. The Rifle Expert, Sharpshooter, and Marksman badges recognized skill with the rifle while the Basic badge with appropriate bars recognized skills with the pistol and other weapons. Requalification bars (still of the fish tail design with the years of requalification engraved on them) came only for the grade of expert, and no longer for requalification as a sharpshooter. Still authorized, but not issued during this era, was the Pistol Expert badge which appeared originally in 1922.

1937-Present

The series of marksmanship badges adopted in 1937 remained essentially unchanged until July



The Marine Corps basic marksmanship badge, M1937, was authorized until 1968. These two examples illustrate the vast differences in quality and appearance which can be found among badges produced by different manufacturers over the period.



As seen in these two reversed badges. Marksmanship awards have been attached to Marines' uniforms at least two different ways: at left, the M1922 Pistol Expert badge, and at right, the M1958 version of the same badge. Both are silver and the older badge of two-piece construction

1958 Several additions and deletions to the special weapons bars of the Basic Badge came in 1949 and 1954. The 1949 *Uniform Regulations* also picture a Sharpshooter badge with four rings, and a Marksman badge bordered with three ring targets.

Variations in the construction of the badges became prevalent during this time, especially during World War II. Some Basic Badge designs consisted of a three dimensional structure, with a raised Marine Corps emblem and separately soldered wreath and target square, while others were of a single, flat die cast style. Pin backings also varied, some were simple safety-type pins and with others having actual locking clasps. During the 1950s the pin back began to be replaced by the two "frog clips" prevalent today.

Private purchase of the Pistol Expert badge, and other non-issue badges, also continued. This is especially noticeable in examining unit photographs of World War II. In these photos, young officers appear wearing Pistol Expert badges while others wear what appear to be Pistol Sharpshooter badges¹⁶ (a smaller version of the rifle Sharpshooter badge) which were apparently privately purchased from outside sources.

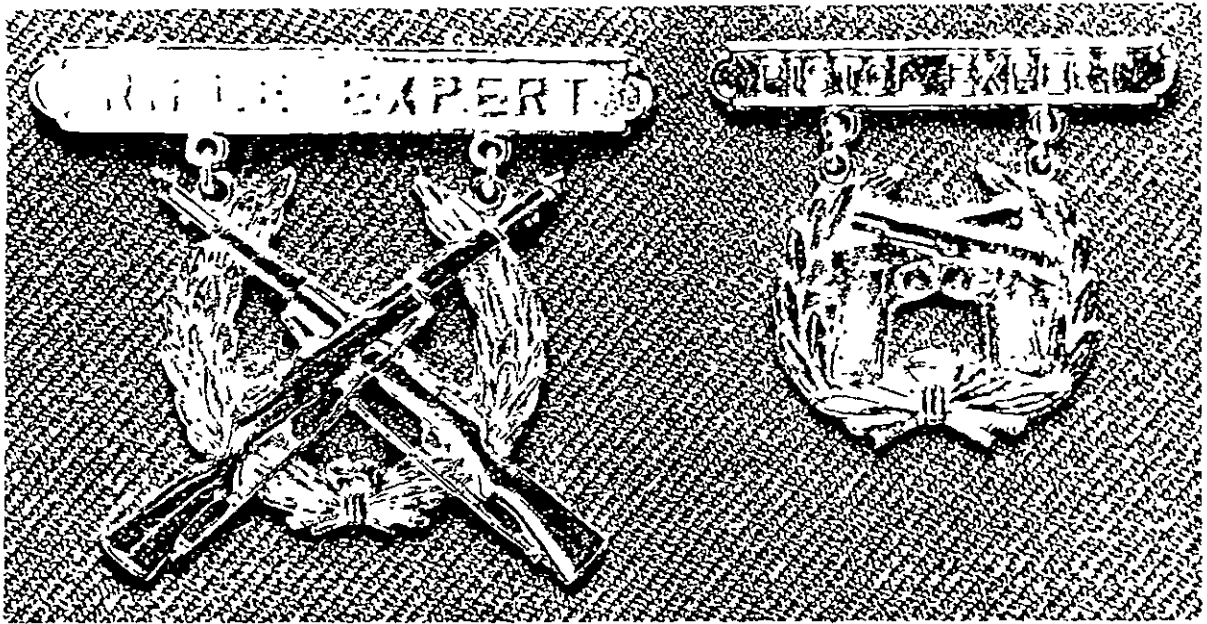
Weapons bars for the Basic badge authorized in the 1949 *Uniform Regulations* dropped the Inf Howitzer bar (from 1929) in favor of a bar which read simply, "Howitzer." The regulations further recognize Artillery qualifications by the addition of

expert and sharpshooter ratings for "D-" and "L-Atty."

The 1954 changes to the regulations, eliminated several bars, including those for artillery, the machine gun, Thompson submachine gun, and bayonet. Bars authorized for the Marine Corps Reserve for "Rifle-D" and "Small Bore" changed to "EX," "SS," and "MM" rating for the "Rifle-B" course, and "EX" and "SS" rating for the "Auto Rifle-B" course. In the regular Marine Corps, an expert and sharpshooter bar for the "Carbine" and "S M G" (submachine gun) served to replace some of the weapons ratings that were eliminated.

In July 1958, changes to the 1949 regulations brought the Marine Corps into the current series of marksmanship badges. The Basic Badge continued on, despite the deletion of expert and sharpshooter rating for "Pistol" and "Carbine" and the marksman rating for the "Rifle-B" course. The Corps adopted a series of three awards for both pistol and rifle, in addition to new rounded end requalification bars for both rifle and pistol badges of all qualification grades.

Wording changed from "Expert Rifleman" to "Rifle Expert," and simple rounded edges were added to the expert rifle badge. Crossed M-1 rifles with slings replaced the M1903 Springfield rifles. The Sharpshooter badge was slightly modified also. The new bar now reads, "Rifle Sharpshooter," and the target was eliminated in favor of a raised Marine



Officially adopted in 1958, these are the badges currently authorized by the U S Marine Corps for Rifle Expert and Pistol Expert qualifications

Corps emblem centered on the cross. A dual ring hanger replaced the single ring hanger. A square with a three ring target, hanging by two rings from a rounded end bar reading, "Rifle Marksman," replaced the old Marksman badge. The original design Pistol Expert badge of 1922-1924 reappeared in 1958, in addition to Pistol Sharpshooter and Pistol Marksman badges which are simply smaller versions of their rifle award counterparts and read "Pistol" instead of "Rifle."

The United States Marine Corps historically has continued to recognize and encourage proficiency with small arms and infantry weapons. During the course of this century, this encouragement has taken the form of many badges and bars which provided Marines with tangible recognition for their skill. The evolution of these badges reflects the pride in, and encouragement of, excellence in marksmanship for which the Marine Corps is famous.

Notes

1 U S Marine Corps, *Uniform Regulations, United States Marine Corps, 1912* (Washington Government Printing Office, 1913), photo plate 45

2 U S Marine Corps Museum Activities (Quantico, Virginia), "Expert Rifleman" badge, Artifact No. 771967-OR

3 Ibid, "Sharpshooter" badge, Artifact No 771858-OR

4 William K Emerson, "Basic Army Marksmanship Badges," *Man At Arms* 2 (Jan/Feb 1980), pp 48-51

5 U S Marine Corps, *Uniform Regulations, United States Marine Corps, 1922*, (Washington Government Printing Office, 1922), p 59

6 U S Marine Corps Museum Activities (Quantico, Virginia), "Pistol Expert" badge, Artifact No 771374

7 Emerson, op cit, pp 48-51

8 U S Marine Corps, "Changes in Uniform Regulations, U S Marine Corps, 1922" (changes No 3), 12 November 1924, p 59, with *Uniform Regulations, U S Marine Corps, 1922*,

(Washington Government Printing Office, 1922), p 59

9 Ibid, p 60

10 U S Marine Corps, *Uniform Regulations, United States Marine Corps, 1929*, (Washington Government Printing Office, 1929), p 48

11 U S Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order No 88, 11 June 1935, No 99, 19 November 1935, No 120, 12 February 1937, No 130, 8 October 1937, in *Marine Corps Orders 1932-1948*, (Library, MCHC, Washington, D C)

12 Ibid, No 88, 11 June 1935

13 Ibid, No 120, 12 February 1937

14 Ibid, No 130, 8 October 1937

15 U S Marine Corps, *Uniform Regulations, U S Marine Corps, 1937* (Washington Government Printing Office, 1937), p 54

16 U S Marine Corps, *Twenty-Fourth Marines, U S M C .* (Camp Pendleton, California, 1943), p 68 (Library, MCHC, Washington, D C)

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