THE CROSSED MUSKETS

When asked to identify their branch insignia, most Infantrymen will quickly reply, "crossed rifles." Even though that answer is "in the ballpark," it is technically incorrect. The answer should be "crossed muskets!" Take a close look at your insignia. Any shoulder weapon with twisted bore is a rifle; if it is not rifled (bore twisted), it is a musket.

Ask any Infantryman to tell you the history of the "crossed musket" insignia—that piece of brass he continually wears on his uniform—and you'll usually get a shrug of the shoulders and a hesitant "I don't know" in reply.

Admittedly, knowing the history of his insignia is not mission-essential knowledge to any Infantryman. It is, however, interesting information that should be passed along.

The current insignia came into being in 1922, but the story doesn't begin there. The old badge of the Infantry was the military bugle. Its identification with the Infantry began with the days of Robin Hood and his band of foresters, who were equipped with bugles to summon comrades when help was needed. In later years, the bugle insignia was derived from the fact that all rifle and light Infantry troops in the late 18th and 19th centuries were used chiefly as scouts. The bugle, or hunting horn, was used to sound orders in the field or in garrison.

On November 19, 1875, General Orders No. 96 made several changes in the uniform and dress of the Army. One of these changes was that badges for all Infantry officers and enlisted men—except field and band musicians—were changed to "two gold-embroidered rifles without bayonets, barrels upward, on dark blue background. . ." Officers' badges displayed the number of the regiment in silver in the upper angle; enlisted men's badges showed the letter of the company in brass over the number of the regiment. Then in 1892, following the equipping of the Infantry with the Krag-Jorgensen .30 caliber, magazine, bolt-action rifle, the Infantry collar insignia was changed to show that weapon. In 1903, the new .30 caliber Springfield replaced the Krag-Jorgensen in the inventory and on the collar. In effect, when Ordnance changed the Infantry's weapons, Quartermaster changed its insignia.

In early 1922, such action prompted General Farnsworth, the first Chief of Infantry, to remark: "Do you think the cross muskets which our grandsons will wear on their collars will show some sort of rapid fire pin wheel breech action?" Subsequently, action was taken to standardize the insignia. The chosen weapon was the 1795 model Springfield Arsenal musket, the first official U.S. shoulder arm made in a government arsenal. It is a .69 caliber muzzle loader featuring interchangeable parts, a smooth bore, and a flint lock.

General Pershing, Chief of Staff, approved the collar insignia in the spring of 1922; it was authorized by AR 600-35 on 25 November 1924. Thus the origin of the crossed rifles—I mean crossed muskets—insignia proudly worn by all Infantrymen.

(Written by Second Lieutenant J. Clark Kaskie, this piece is reprinted from INFANTRY, November-December 1971, page 49.)