

Navy Shoulder Sleeve Insignia

During World War II, with the ranks swelling to all-time highs, obviously necessary due to the manning requirements of a nearly 6,100-ship fleet, the specialized nature of certain functions had emerged into the spotlight, drawing significant attention from the rest of the armed forces and American public. The need to set these services apart arose, somewhat organically, as units began to adopt uniform concepts from the other branches.

Shoulder sleeve insignia (SSI) had been in use across the U.S. Army as a means for identifying which units soldiers belonged to, the Navy had never previously authorized similar markings for their uniforms (other than hat tallies for the blue flat or “Donald Duck” hats).

The uniform shirt bore only rate and rating as well as distinguishing marks at the onset of World War II. However, by 1943, sailors in the minesweeper community had begun affixing an embroidered red, white and blue circular-designed patch (representing a painted device seen aboard mine sweeper vessels) to their left shoulders, directly above the rate badge. The commanding officer of the minesweeper, USS Zeal (AM-131) seeking to determine if such a patch was authorized for wear, sent a letter to navy brass. The Chief of Naval Personnel responded on June 24, 1943 that the patch was not permitted for wear. Despite the rejection, sailors continued to wear the SSI.

As the war progressed, other naval components began to adopt shoulder patches and approval from the higher-ups for these patches began to trickle down.

Officially Approved U.S. Navy Shoulder Sleeve Insignia (with approval date)

- Amphibious Forces Personnel – January 1944
- Motor Torpedo Boat Personnel (PT Boat) – September 1944
- Naval Construction Battalion (Sea Bees) – October 1944
- Minecraft Personnel – December 1944

