

Corps Badges

During the American Civil War, Union Army soldiers commonly wore corps badges. These badges were prominently displayed either on the top of their forage cap (kepi), on the left side of their hat, or over the left breast. This practice was initiated by Major General Philip Kearny. To reduce confusion during combat, Kearny instructed his division to attach a two-inch square red cloth to their hats. The square was usually tilted on end to be a diamond and some were elongated to form lozenges. This concept was later embraced by Major General Joseph Hooker when he took over the Army of the Potomac, enabling the identification of soldiers from a distance.

The responsibility of creating unique shapes for each corps badge fell to Major General Daniel Butterfield, Hooker's chief of staff. He further stipulated that each division within a corps should have a variant of the main corps badge, but in a different color. The divisional badges were assigned colors as follows:

- Red for the First division of each corps
- White for the Second division
- Blue for the Third division

These color designations were primarily used in the Army of the Potomac, and while other Union Armies adopted similar rules, there were exceptions. For instance, the XIII Corps didn't have an official badge, and the divisions within the XIX Corps used different colors: red for the first, blue for the second, and white for the third.

In corps with more than three divisions, additional colors were used:

- Green indicated the Fourth division in the II, III, VI, IX, and XX Corps
- Yellow (sometimes Orange) represented the Fourth division in the XV Corps
- Multicolor badges were used for Headquarters or artillery units in certain corps

Enlisted men's badges were typically made from colored cloth, while officers often had theirs privately manufactured to higher standards, including metallic versions crafted by jewelers. These badges, personalized for the wearer, eventually became a formal part of Army regulations and a symbol of regimental pride.



Sixth Corps badge similar to the one the officers are wearing on their uniforms. (Courtesy The Horse Soldier.)



THE CORPS THAT STOOD ALONE

“Major-General John Sedgwick [standing in the center] and Staff. Sedgwick’s Sixth Corps alone and unaided executed the most successful maneuver during the Chancellorsville battles of May 1-4, 1863. For two days Sedgwick had been keeping up a strong demonstration against Lee’s extreme right below Fredericksburg. On the night of May 2d, after Jackson had routed the entire Eleventh Corps, came the order from Hooker for Sedgwick to move forward toward Chancellorsville, “attack and destroy any forces met with on the march.” Then fall upon Lee’s rear. By midnight the Sixth Corps was in motion and at dawn advanced against Marye’s Heights. Only after a fierce uphill fight was that bloody field won from Early’s 9,000 Confederates. At night, forced back by Lee, he established communication with Hooker but could get no definite orders. Next morning word came not to attack unless Hooker did likewise. But Hooker’s inactivity encouraged Lee to send heavy forces to crush the Sixth Corps. All the afternoon, cut off from help, the corps fought off assault after assault till nightfall of May 4th. Then, upon receipt of orders, Sedgwick retired north of the Rappahannock.” (Source: *The Photographic History of the Civil War: Two years of grim war.* (1911). United States: Review of Reviews Company, page 113.) (Photograph NARA 111-B-805)



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U.S. Third Corps badge, 1st Division. This badge is the same design as the one on the soldier's jacket. (Courtesy Union Drummer Boy.)

This Union infantryman is wearing a holstered Army revolver as a photographer's prop since only enlisted cavalryman were generally issued sidearms. The US belt buckle is reversed, and his holstered pistol is also on the soldier's wrong side. He has an infantry percussion cap box on his belt. He is wearing a long chain with a pendant hanging from it and a Third Corps badge. There is also an insignia on his forage cap. The painted backdrop shows a camp with Sibley tents, one of which has been marked "...ture Tent." Liljenquist Family Collection (Library of Congress)