

Lessons from the Past



‘Follow Me!’

A Brief History of the Infantry School Shoulder Patch

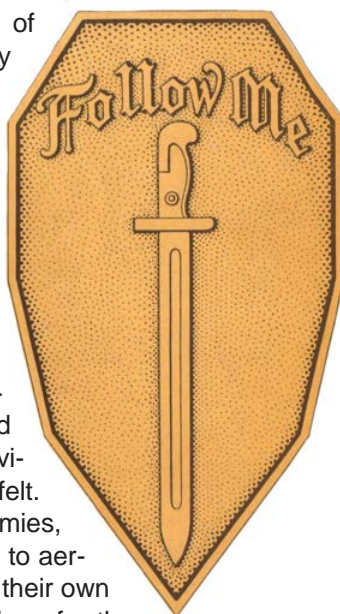
DAVID SCOTT STIEGHAN

The shoulder patch of the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning dates back to just after World War I. There have been subtle changes over the years, but the basic elements and meaning are the same.

Army Soldiers began wearing theater-produced shoulder patches on their uniforms during the last few weeks of World War I. The first was the 1st Division's "Big Red One" of red felt. The other divisions, corps, armies, and a few specialty units down to aerial squadron created and wore their own patches. It was considered unique for the new Camp Benning to create a shoulder patch for a school rather than a unit.

The elements are the shield of a foot Soldier, the U.S. Model 1905 Rifle Bayonet, the background color of Infantry blue, and the motto "Follow Me!" While there are a number of legends regarding BG Henry L. Benning using the order at the Battle Chickamauga, etc., the motto is adopted from a command in the 1918 Infantry Drill Regulations for a leader to get a group of Infantry Soldiers to move at their direction in the field.

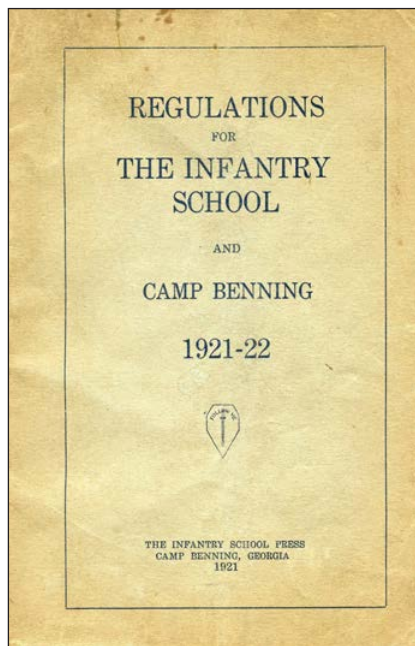
In 1922 to 1923, the U.S. Army officially recognized the Infantry School as a branch school and authorized the post name change to "Fort Benning" as a permanent installation. At the same time, the tip of the bayonet was reversed from



the attitude of honoring the dead to the position of combat at the end of a rifle. The motto then was changed to block letters to make it easier to machine embroider.

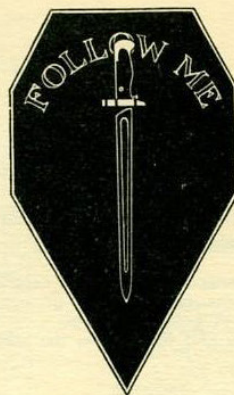
During the Vietnam War, a subdued green and black version of the "Follow Me" patch was created for wear on fatigue uniforms in garrison just as the troops would wear in combat. The patch was last "sealed" in 1967 and the official sample is with The Institute of Heraldry files in Washington, D.C.

Since the original form of the Camp Benning Infantry School patch was only in use for a little over four years, the appearance of the symbol with the bayonet pointing downwards helps date early documents or booklets. Pictured are some of the favorite examples of the early Infantry School symbol.



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At left, one of a few items preserved printed items from Camp Benning shows the original form of the crest with the bayonet pointing downward. The following page shows a page from the original 1920-21 Infantry School Company Officers and Basic Officers Course class book, *The Doughboy*. (Many of these old publications can be accessed on the Donovan Research Library's website at <https://www.benning.army.mil/Library/Doughboy/index.html>.)



Our Emblem.

The device of the Infantry School is thoroughly symbolic of the ideals and the role of the institution it represents. A shield azure bears a bayonet argent surmounted by the motto, "FOLLOW ME." The shield itself is of a type borne by the foot soldiers of old. The color is the distinctive infantry blue. The bayonet is the paramount Infantry weapon.

By the bayonet, or the threat of the bayonet, is ground captured, the line advanced, the battle won. The cavalryman with his saber and his vaunted "shock action," the artilleryman with his big guns, the aviator with his far-seeing eyes and deadly bombs, are well-nigh indispensable, but after all they exist only to aid the Infantryman, who with his cold steel meets the enemy face to face and must conquer him hand to hand. In all conflicts the primary tactical principle of the offensive, which alone is decisive, is to go forward with the fixed determination of driving home the bayonets of the Infantry. The staff is in command, but the man behind the bayonet is at the head of the army. He is the first to pierce the enemy line, and his final position marks the limits of the ground actually taken. Infantry determines the victory; Infantry pays the greatest price in casualties, and Infantry has the place of honor. Infantry leads, the others follow. All the supporting arms exist only for the assistance of the Infantry, exist so that the man power of the Nation may push on and close with the bayonet. If the bayonet could speak, what could it say but "FOLLOW ME."

Our motto is appropriate, for it breathes the very spirit of the bayonet and of those who wield it—the Infantry. "FOLLOW ME" is the prescribed command by which the corporal leads his squad, the basic Infantry unit. It is distinctively American, found in no other army, and is typical of the manner in which American troops are *led*, not driven, into action.

What more significant emblem could have been devised for the Infantry School? As the Infantry leads the other arms on the field, so does the Infantry School lead the Infantry. Amid the woods and hills and plains of Camp Benning the School is developing and training officers and non-commissioned officers to be leaders of men. The School is teaching the best modern applications of tactical principles. The School is preparing for our Army a better Infantry. The School says with confidence to our sixty-five regiments of Infantry, as the Infantry itself says to the Army as a whole: "FOLLOW ME."

—Capt. Elbridge Colby, Inf.