

THE AIR FORCE FLAG

Description and Significance

The flag which represents The Department of the Air Force is officially known as the "Ceremonial Departmental Flag." It consists of The Air Force Coat of Arms and the encircling thirteen stars of the Air Force Seal, centered on an ultramarine blue field; beneath the coat of arms shield is a scroll inscribed with the words "United States Air Force." The flag, which measures 4 feet 4 inches by 5 feet 6 inches, is trimmed on three edges with 2 1/2 inch yellow silk fringe. The two colors which predominate in the flag--ultramarine blue and golden yellow--are the official Air Force colors.

The flag takes its significance from the 13 encircling stars, which represent the 13 original colonies, and from the Crest and Shield which make up the Coat of Arms:

The Crest is made up of the eagle, wreath, and cloud form. The American bald eagle symbolizes the United States and its airpower and is depicted in its natural colors. The Wreath under the eagle is made up of six alternate folds of metal (white, representing silver) and light blue. This repeats the metal and color used in the shield. The white clouds behind the eagle show the start of a new sky -- The Department of the Air Force.

The Shield, right below the eagle and wreath, is divided horizontally into two parts by a nebuly line representing clouds. The top part of the Shield bears a golden yellow thunderbolt with flames in natural color which shows striking power through the use of aerospace. (The thunderbolt consists of a golden yellow vertical twist with three natural color flames on each end crossing a pair of horizontal wings with eight lightning bolts radiating saltirewise.) The background of the top part of the Shield is a light blue (representing the sky). The lower part of the Shield is white (representing metal silver).

Development

The National Security Act of 1947, Section 207(g), called for the design of an official seal for the Department of the Air Force. Arthur E. Dubois (Chief of the Heraldic Branch, Office of the Quartermaster General, Department of the Army) designed the Air Force Seal that was submitted by Secretary of the Air Force W. Stuart Symington to James E. Webb, Director, Bureau of the Budget. President Truman officially approved the new seal with Executive Order No. 9902, dated 1 November 1947.

By 1949 a project was underway at USAF Headquarters to develop an Air Force counterpart to the Army regulation on flags (AR 260-10) and was under the supervision of Robert D. Ewin (Awards Branch, Personnel Services Division, Director of Military Personnel, Deputy Chief of Staff Personnel, HQ USAF). Throughout 1949 and 1950 work on the project continued and eventually resulted in a comprehensive Air Force organizational flag program based on the motif of organizational coats of arms. The Department of the Air Force was to be represented by a flag bearing the shield and coat of arms from the Air Force Seal. Subordinate organizations would use a similar, but smaller, flag in which the shield would contain the organizational emblem and the scroll the name of the organization

or unit. Thus the Air Force flag provides the pattern for all Air Force organizational flags. Responsibility for the flag project was subsequently shifted to Major Wells in early 1950 and then to Miss Dorothy G. Gatchell, who is credited with the design of the Air Force flag.

By the end of March 1951, General Hoyt S. Vandenburg formally approved Miss Gatchell's design and the flag appeared publicly for the first time on 31 March 1951. The occasion was a parade in Washington honoring visiting French President Vincent Auriol. The following October AFM 900-2, Use and Display of Air Force Flags, Guidons, Streamers, and Automobile and Aircraft Plates (1 October 1951) was issued and provided the first officially published description of the Air Force flag. The design of the flag has not been changed since its introduction in 1951.