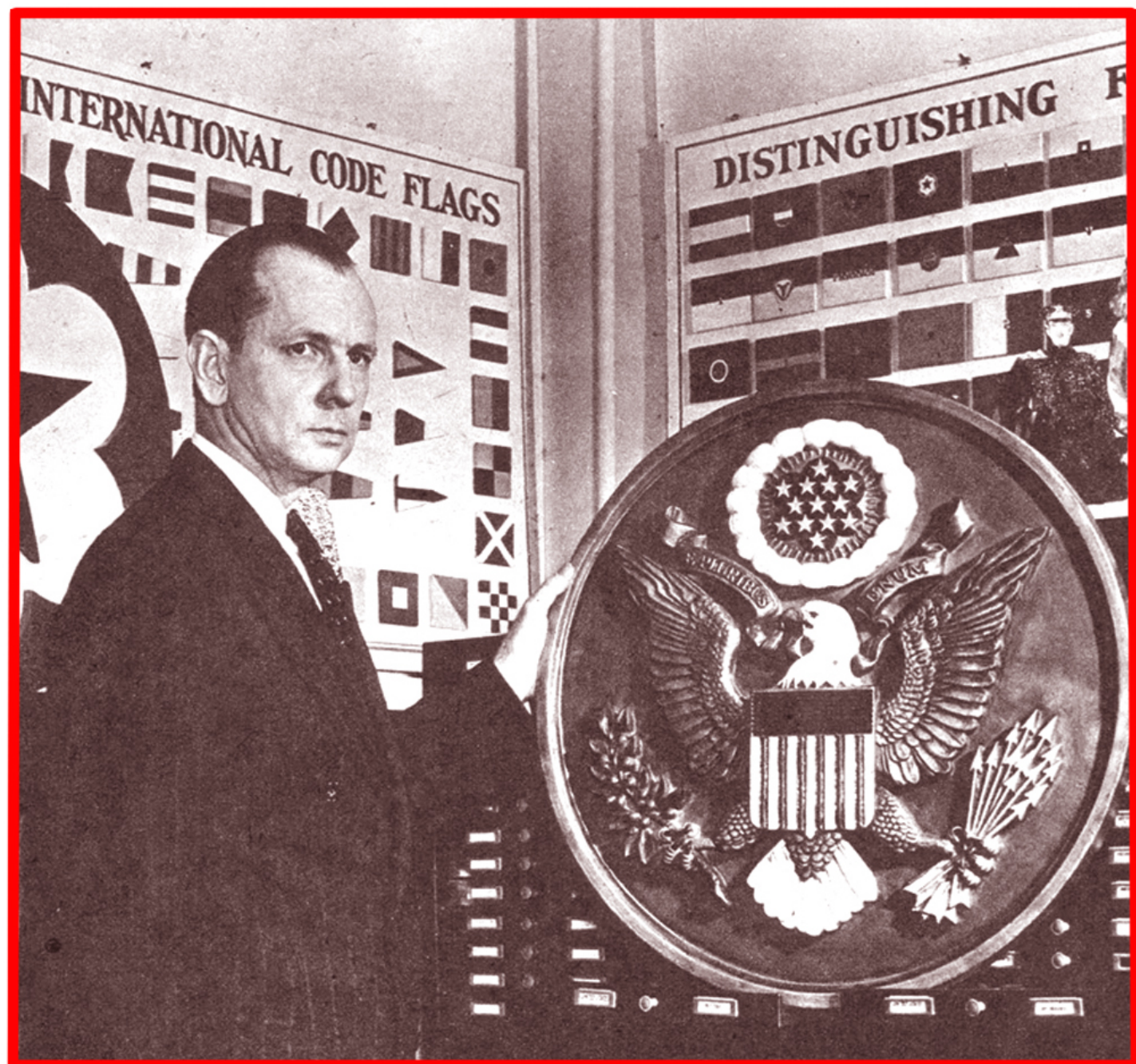




By Sgt. **BARRETT McGURN**
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WASHINGTON—The man in the gray suit with the purple pencil-stripes looked up from his desk and eyed my campaign ribbon with apparent distaste.

"Excuse me," he said, "but do you know that you have your theater ribbon on upside down?"

I said I didn't know you could wear a Pacific-Asiatic ribbon upside down. I said I didn't know it was designed to have a right side up. The man at the War Department desk sighed heavily and pointed out that the ribbon has three narrow stripes of red, white and blue.

"The blue is supposed to be on the right," he said. "You have it on the left."

The blue stripe, he added, must also be worn on the right on American Defense and European Theater ribbons. And the reason all three of the ribbons include red, white and blue stripes, he went on without pausing for breath, is to show that the presence of U. S. troops overseas was merely a continuation of their pre-Pearl Harbor service. In addition to red, white and blue, the pre-Pearl Harbor ribbon has a field of gold. And the reason for *that*, he concluded triumphantly, is to show that prewar duty in the armed forces was a "golden opportunity for the youth of America to serve the national colors."

The man with all the information about theater ribbons was Arthur E. DuBois, whose official title is Chief of the Heraldic Section in the Quartermaster Corps. The WD has all sorts of experts in odd and unlikely fields, but none would seem to have a more specialized line than DuBois.

but, according to DuBois, you'd be wrong. He says he has been a student of these matters since the last war and he still doesn't know all there is to know. But it irritates him, he says, to find that most people seem to know even less than he does. Take me and my upside-down ribbon.

To change this embarrassing subject, I told him I'd been sent over to ask a few questions about shoulder patches.

"They are not shoulder patches," DuBois retorted. "They are shoulder-sleeve insignia. A patch is a piece of cloth to cover up a hole. We put insignia on brand-new uniforms."

He emphasized that you won't find the word "patches" anywhere in the ARs. DuBois makes it clear that he thinks a great deal of the ARs,

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although he is currently a bit put out because the people in charge of them have so far refused to change the word "dismounted" to "unmounted" in cases where it is used in reference to the Infantry. "Dismounted" seems to be too deeply imbedded in the ARs ever to be removed, but the word makes DuBois mad practically every time he thinks about it in connection with doughs. How, he asks, can you dismount from a steed you never mounted in the first place?

AGREEING cordially with this display of logic, I tried to steer the conversation, if that's the right word for it, back to shoulder patches. "I'll always call them 'insignias,'" I promised.

"Insignia—not insignias," DuBois said tartly. "The word is used for both singular and plural. That's the way we have it in the ARs. I don't care what the dictionary says."

It turns out, though, that he does care. He has several times written the dictionary people to break themselves of their nasty habit of giving the singular as "insigne." My advice to the dictionary crowd is to give the hell in.

DuBois' expression softened a little after he had finished telling me about the insubordinate ways of dictionaries. "What do you call that thing you have on?" he asked.

I hemmed and hawed, knowing I'd be wrong.

"Do you call it a blouse? Well, it's not a blouse. It's a coat! A service coat!"

It seems that a blouse was a "standing-collar garment" of the kind worn by 1918 doughs and that it went out of Army style in 1924. I said I'd been calling a coat a blouse ever since the GIs at the induction center had told me to call it that many long years ago. DuBois indicated that he didn't have much of an opinion of induction-center GIs.

DuBois should not be mistaken for one who has a low opinion only of GIs. A colonel from Fort George G. Meade called twice while I was in the office, and DuBois wouldn't speak to him either time. "Tell him I've got to finish this interview," DuBois told his secretary. "Just one thing at a time." There is a story around the Pentagon that DuBois even turned down a Secretary of War once on the ground that he was not at liberty to divulge the military information the Secretary wanted.

DuBois has been collecting information about insignia, ribbons and such for the Quartermaster Corps for the past quarter of a century, and it's estimated that it will take him at least a year and a half to write down all the facts he has stored away in his head and hasn't bothered to file anywhere else.

under way to get people to distinguish among medals, decorations, badges and insignia. "Some soldiers talk about the 'Purple Heart Medal,'" he commented hotly. "Well, it's not a medal. Invariably, they get the medal and the decoration mixed up. A decoration is an award beyond the call of duty. A medal is for a campaign or service. A badge is for a qualification. An insignia is an identification. They'll invariably call all of them insignia or medals. They ignore the fine distinction."

Fine distinctions in these things are DuBois'

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meat. One of his jobs is to collect facts about symbols that may later be used on new sleeve insignia. Some symbols seem to be practically timeless and common to nearly all countries. The acorn, for example, has been the symbol of strength or growth since time out of mind.

In his quest for symbols, DuBois spends many hours reading ancient books on heraldry. He is an authority on the knighthood business and can tell you all about torteaus, hurts, pellets, golpes, bezants, dexter bases, sinister chiefs and crosses coupé and voided. He often puts this curious lore to contemporary use when an outfit writes in and says it wants a new patch designed.

"But don't call them patches," DuBois warned. "It gripes me."

At the end of our talk, DuBois conceded quite pleasantly that I am not the only one who wears his theater ribbon upside down.

"I don't know what's causing them to be upside down," he said in a puzzled tone. "In individual cases, when soldiers come into my office, I call their attention to their mistake so they can correct it."

On the street, however, DuBois does not interfere with returned overseas men wearing their ribbons upside down.

"If I stuck my neck out," he explained, "I'd be apt to get a punch in the nose some time."

Despite his knowledge of decorations, ribbons and medals, DuBois has none of these himself. He was 18 at the end of the first World War and was 41 at the start of the second and has always been a civilian. The only insignia he personally displays is a service flag outside his office door. It has a "10" on it, symbolizing the number of War Department civilian employees who have left DuBois' section for a more intimate part in the military trade. God help them if they come back talking about the shoulder patches they wore as GIs.

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