

Illustrated History of BSA Square Knot Evolution

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Part 1 – 1934-1979, Ribbons and Khaki Knots

[Changes since V13.0 annotated in blue.](#)



Honor Medal



Silver Buffalo



Silver Antelope?



Silver Beaver



Eagle Scout '34-40



Eagle Scout '40-46



Quartermaster



Scouter's Key '41-46



Scouter's Training Award 1934-41



Scouter's Training Award 1941-46

Starting in 1934, the Boy Scouts issued 35mm x 6 mm ribbon bars to represent medals¹, so that adults and boys would not have to wear their medal(s) to all functions. In 1946, after World War II, these ribbons were discontinued in favor of embroidered square knots.² The awards which had ribbons were: **Honor Medal, Silver Buffalo, Silver Antelope (1943-46), Silver Beaver, Eagle Scout, Quartermaster, Scoutmaster's Key, and Scouter's Training Award.** As you can see, these came in different sizes over the time period. The Eagle Scout, Scoutmaster's Key (SK) and Scouter's Training Award (STA) changed in 1940-41. The Eagle ribbon was made 13mm high, and an Eagle device added to it, illustrated by comparing the two Eagle ribbons at left. Similarly, the Scouter's Training Award started with the 35 x 6 ribbons, but changed to 22mm wide because the actual SK and STA ribbons were that wide.³ The narrow and wide STA are illustrated at left. (See Part 5 for footnotes.)

It is Mitch Reis' belief that "all of the ribbon bar pins had either a spin wheel type of locking clasp or a flat hook that was parallel to the pin. These clasps are different than the crude bent medal hooks (that is perpendicular to the pin) that were used on the much more common 'contest' ribbon bars. It is unknown if the Scoutmaster's Key and Scouters Training Award ribbon bars were actually ever produced in the 35mm (1 3/8") size. Equipment catalogs between 1934 and 1939 did list the pins as 1 3/8" long and 1/4" wide, *bearing a section of the decoration ribbon of the Scoutmaster's Key or Scouter's Training Award.* The 1941 Equipment catalog lists it as 7/8" long. Unlike the other ribbon awards that were on 35mm wide ribbons, these two awards had ribbons that were only 22mm wide. To make a ribbon bar pin 35mm long, the BSA would have to make special ribbon just for these pins. No 35mm Scoutmaster's Key ribbon bars are known to exist." It is Mitch Reis' belief that "it was just a typographical error in the equipment catalogs and what some believe to be a 35mm long Scouter Training Award ribbon bar is just a generic green contest bar."^{3a}

In 1946, square knots were introduced and ribbons phased out. All the awards above had square knots, illustrated in order below. The March 1946 announcement left out the Honor Medal, Eagle and Quartermaster knots because they had other embroidered badges, but they were available shortly. The January 1, 1947 price list still had the Eagle ribbon bar, but the October 1947 catalog had the square knot.⁴



Honor Medal, Silver Buffalo
Silver Antelope, Silver Beaver, Eagle Scout
Quartermaster, Scouter's Key, Scouter's Training Award

See Mitch Reis, *A Guide to Dating and Identifying Boy Scouts of America Badges, Uniforms & Insignia*, 4th ed. I used it for some of the early information, and we have since cooperated to coordinate our material. I have many other sources listed at the back of this section.



Skipper's Key



Ranger (green)



Silver Award I



Ace



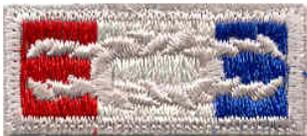
Silver Beaver
(on blue)



Quartermaster
(blue on blue)



Medal of Merit



Silver Award II

Some knots had a limited lifetime. The **Skipper's Key** (dark blue and white) was issued by October 1947, but was discontinued after December 31st, 1948.⁵ It came out with a khaki background. Some think there is a blue background, but I do not for two reasons: 1) The khaki knot was the only knot in the October 1947 catalog, probably approved about September 1st for printing. By January 1st 1948 the Skipper's Key had been marked for phase-out, so a blue knot was highly unlikely to be approved. 2) This particular knot came off an outdated display at the North Brunswick, NJ headquarters when they packed up to go to Irving, TX. Two reliable witnesses, including the individual who got the knot off the display, say it was the only color knot on the comprehensive historical display. We have seen blue felt Silver Beaver knots modified by dyeing the light blue rope a dark blue.

The **Ranger Award** knot (green and tan) was only issued in 1950 and 1951, as the Ranger program (1946-50+) was winding down. It has khaki and green backgrounds. This green knot came from the same display. A khaki knot came directly off the shirt of an old Ranger.⁶ Again, only the green knot was on the display, and no one has seen a mint tan knot, so we believe the tan variety is likely to be a faded green.

The **Type I Silver Award** (red and yellow knot and ribbon colors) was announced in December 1949 and phased out December 31st 1954.⁷ The **Air Scout Ace Award** knot (blue and red) came out in 1950 and was phased out December 31, 1954. The Ace also came from North Brunswick, the Silver I is mine.

While Len Michaud says there is a **Silver Fawn** knot, my sources indicate that Fawns were to use the Silver Beaver knot on blue background.⁸ The 1973 *Official Uniforms and Insignia* specified the Silver Beaver knot on blue, since at that time most were in Cub Scouting. He lists a Silver Fawn knot for 1971-74, the years the Silver Fawn was issued.

A companion to this article (Part 4) is an Excel chart showing the various catalog or insignia guide dates and associated catalog numbers for square knots and devices as listed in the catalog or insignia guide.

In 1947 all the cataloged knots were in khaki. The catalog listed **Silver Buffalo**, **Silver Antelope**, **Silver Beaver**, **Honor Medal**, **Eagle Scout**, **Quartermaster**, **Scouter's Key**, **Skipper's Key**, and **Scouter's Training Award**. These knots remained until the color was changed to tan. The **Skipper's Key** in khaki is listed in the 1947 catalog, but not in blue. Those are all the knots listed in the catalog.⁹

By 1951, the **Silver Beaver** had a blue felt background knot. The **Quartermaster** had a blue knot on a blue felt background.¹⁰

In 1952, the **Medal of Merit** on khaki was approved, and exists today in tan.¹¹

In 1954, the **Eagle** knot in khaki is the only one listed. The **Quartermaster** knot had khaki, blue and now white backgrounds.¹² The knot on the blue background was changed from blue to white. There is a perhaps unique pattern knot, produced by over sewing a Silver Award I knot with white thread, consistent with the change.

1954 saw the ending of the **Ace** and **Silver Award I** knots on December 31st, and the inauguration of the **Silver Award II** knot by June 1954.¹³ While this knot is not listed from 1966-1975, it was available throughout the period as a knot for either Silver Award. By 1978 it was specifically authorized for the Ranger and Ace.¹⁴ I tried to buy some Silver Award I knots in 1962 or 1963, and only got some by accident, nine years

after they were discontinued. Silver Award II knots were readily available, since Air Explorers earned them through 1966.

The Den Mother's Training Award was authorized in May 1956 and announced in *Scouting* in October 1956. Prior to that the "Scouter's Award" is specifically mentioned for Den Mothers.^{14a} A friend of mine earned the Scouter's Training Award under the old Five Year Training Program (solid ribbon, FDL on V) as a Den Mother, but she started in the late 30s.

Cub device



Scout device



CAW device



Commissioner



Circle V



Air Explorer



Sea Explorer



Four Background Colors

In January 1956 the Scouter's Key (SK) knot in green and white and the Scouter's Training Award (STA) knot in solid green still exist on khaki backgrounds.¹⁵ The October 1956 *Boy Scout Uniforms and Insignia Guide* specifies only the green and white knot for the Scouter's Key and Training Award. The accompanying price list still shows both knots. The price list also shows the Den Mother's Training Award, so it was available by then.¹⁶

In 1957 miniature devices were introduced to put on the Scouter's Key ribbon and the green and white knot. Devices were apparently introduced to identify the programs in which the Scouter's Key was earned, and to distinguish on the now single training award knot those who earned the Key from those who earned the Training Award or Den Mother's Training Award. The first four devices were a diamond-shaped **Cub Scout** emblem, the Tenderfoot badge **Scout** emblem, the universal **Explorer CAW** (Compass, Anchor, Wings) emblem, and the **commissioner** emblem (first class badge within a wreath, similar to the commissioner badge of the time). These devices were produced with a short post on the back and a small frog to clutch the post.¹⁷

In 1958 the CAW device for Exploring was changed to the **Circle V** device, to follow the change in the Exploring universal symbol.¹⁸

After March but by November 1958 two additional devices were added, the **Air Explorer** wings (1958-65) (Mitch Reis scan) and **Sea Explorer** device (anchor and First Class badge).¹⁹

In 1966 the knot fabric was changed from coarse twill to fine twill. Green background knots were introduced for the Exploring uniform, blue background knots for Sea Scouting and Cub Scouts, and white background knots for Sea Scouts. The color of the background did not mean anything, it just matched the uniform shirts. Thus, there were **four colors** available for the Silver Beaver, Eagle Scout, and Scouter's Key (including STA/DLTA/DLCTA). The 1966 *Guide* said Eagle came in green for Sea Explorers! Quartermaster came in blue, white and khaki in the *Uniforms and Equipment*. Khaki was not shown in the 1966 or 1967 *Guide*. The 1966 and 1967 *Guide* actually lists the Scouter's Key knot only in khaki, but the *Uniforms and Equipment* catalog shows blue and white. Because the green Eagle knot was available, one must assume the green Key knot was also. The Air Explorer device was phased out in 1966.²⁰

In 1967 the Den Mother's Training Award became the Den Leader's Training Award and the Den Leader Coach's Training Award was introduced (but could not be earned until September 1969). The 1967 *Official Uniforms and Insignia* still directs using the green and white knot for SK, STA, the Den Leader's Training Award, and the Den Leader Coach's Training Award. The only way to distinguish the Scouter's Key was to wear the miniature device on the knot. The miniature device was not worn on the STA medal ribbon at that time. Since the requirements were written broadly, you only earned the STA once. No distinction was made which program you earned it in. I earned mine as an Explorer Associate Advisor and Committee Chairman.²¹



Circle V and Big E



Distinguished Eagle device



District Award of Merit



Youth and Adult Religious Awards



Ad Altare Dei ribbon



Den Leader Training Award



Den Leader Coach Training Award

In 1969 I observed that many people who had Scouter’s Keys were not wearing their devices, and found out that they had trouble keeping their devices because the shank was too short. I made a suggestion to National that they lengthen the shank as the knot is the primary place the device is used. They adopted the suggestion, and sent me one of the new lengthened commissioner devices, which I still have and wear.

In March 1969 the Explorer universal emblem changed again, from Circle V to **Big E**. The Explorer device was also changed to a very small Big E.²⁵

Also in 1969, a small golden eagle device was introduced to identify the recipients of the **Distinguished Eagle Scout Award**.³⁰

In 1969, the solid green **Scouter’s Training Award** knot was reinstated, with all four background colors.²² Now, Scouters wore two knots if they had earned the SK and STA. The STA knot now represented the DLTA and DLCTA, in whichever background color the person chose.

In 1971 the **District Award of Merit** overhand knot was introduced.²³ It is unusual in that it represents a plaque, not a medal or badge. It is the only badge for the uniform.

On January 1, 1971, the **Silver Fawn** was introduced. My 1973 catalog does not list a separate Silver Fawn knot. It does say, “Embroidered square knot in blue and white, No. 5010B” (the blue Silver Beaver knot on page 2). The award was discontinued June 30, 1974, and later instructions directed the use of the Silver Beaver knot.²⁴

The **youth religious award** knot was available by October, 1971. The **adult religious award** knot was introduced by 1973. These knots represented all religious awards from many different denominations. Initially, they were plain Mylar knots. Only Scouts, Explorers and adults wore the youth knot, initially. Former Cub Scouts wore the bar of their badge on their Scout uniform until 1983.²⁶

NOTE: When the Ad Altare Dei Catholic religious award for Boy Scouts was established in 1939, only a medal was authorized. As boys will, they wore it to all activities. In 1944 a ribbon bar was also authorized and made, until 1961. In 1961 the bar pin was redesigned to allow the bar pin to be removed and worn alone on the uniform. We don't know if that pattern was followed by other religions. So, remnants of the ribbon system lasted about 15 years following the change to square knots. It took another 10 years for the religious award knot to come out.^{26a}

In the errata sheet (3065A) to the 1973 *Official Uniforms and Insignia* guide, the background color of the Scouter’s Training Award is associated with a specific program. “**Add the following at the end of the paragraph:** Background colors: khaki—Scout program, blue—Cub Scout program, white—Sea Explorer program, green—Explorer program” This was not previously specified. In 1973, you only earned the STA once. By 1975, see paragraph below, there were separate requirements for the STA in each program, and you could earn it more than once.

A letter dated March 10, 1975, written by Walter Wenzel, Secretary of the Insignia and Uniform Committee, authorized the wear of the miniature devices (Cub, Scout, Explorer) on the STA knot. The DLTA and DLCTA were still represented by the green STA knot.²⁷

In late 1975, the **Den Leader Training Award** knot now was introduced with a yellow knot on blue, and the **Den Leader Coach Training Award** knot had a blue and yellow knot on blue.²⁸ (The old DLCTA and new Cub Scouter Award have sometimes caused some confusion because the Medal of Merit is also blue and yellow, on khaki. The blue is darker for the Medal of Merit. In this case, background is significant.)



Silver World



OA Distinguished Service



Arrow of Light

By 1976, the **Silver World** and **OA Distinguished Service Award** knots were introduced. In 1978, the **Silver Award II** knot was back in the insignia book, with instructions that it could be used for the older awards.²⁹

In 1979 the white, blue, and green backgrounds for the Silver Beaver, Eagle, Scouter's Key and Scouter's Training Awards were discontinued, though current stocks were sold.³¹ Some were still available several years later. Quartermaster was reduced to a white background only. The white, blue and green background knots may still be worn, since insignia does not go out of date. There is a market for reproductions of these knots for Sea Scouters and Venturers today. See my monograph on Private Issue knots at www.Crowl.org/George.

In 1979 the **Arrow of Light** knot for adult wear was introduced, in khaki.³²

I am indebted for help with sources to Nancy Cramer of Las Vegas, who took peer review to new heights. She provided me many additional references after she looked at an earlier version of this monograph. Hal Yocum, who initially acquired some of the earliest knots, was kind enough to give me some of their history. Craig Murray provided some ribbon illustrations. I hope this exposition has been of interest. As you can see, there are still some gaps to fill in. If you have information that would help, please contact me at George@Crowl.org or 832-467-1998 or 16213 Congo Ln, Jersey Village, TX 77040-2011.

My other sources are:

Uniforms, Badges and Insignia 1933

Local Council Exchange – Equipment Number catalogs 1934, 1935, 1937, 1938, November 1939, 1941; *The Scout Executive* Vol. 12, No. 7, October 1947; *Price List, Official Boy Scout Uniforms and Equipment* April 1944, January 1945, January 1947; *Official Uniforms and Equipment of the Boy Scouts of America* March 1951, June 1951, January 1953, June 1954, March 1955, January 1956, April 1957, September 1957, March 1958, November 1958, March 1961, January 1962, September 1962, March 1963, March 1965, September 1966, March 1968, January 1969, January 1970, March 1970, March 1971, March 1972, September 1972, March 1973, September 1973, March 1974, March 1975, August 1975, March 1976.

Official Uniforms and Insignia BSA 5/53 (CS, BS, Exp), 3/54 (BS), 9/55 (CS, BS, Exp), 10/56 (BS, Exp), 8/57 (CS), 11/57 (BS), 1/59 (BS), 9/59 (CS), 4/60 (BS), 1/61 (CS), 1/62 (BS), 12/62 (CS, BS), 1/66, 8/66, 1/67, 9/67, 1/69, 5/73.

Insignia Control Guide 1/78, 1/79, 10/80, 2/82, 10/83, 1986, 1986 second printing

Insignia Guide 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006.

Scouting magazine, February 1940, January 1946, March 1946, October 1956, September 1977, Mar-Apr 1978, September 1979, November-December 1979, May-June 1980, September 1980, October 1982, September 1983, May-June 1985, Jan-Feb 1987, September 1987, November-December 1987, September 1988, October 1989, November-December 1989, September 1991, October 1992, September 1997, September 2000, November-December 2000, January-February 2005, January-February 2009.

Arapaho I, A History of Scouting Through Insignia, Albertus Hoogeveen and Richard Breithaupt, Jr., 1976

Trading Tent magazine, August/September 1981

These are not comprehensive, and additional years are needed to fill in gaps.

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