

BREVET RANK

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

A brevet promoted an officer to a higher rank but without commensurate pay, authority, and insignia. Brevet commissions functioned as honorary titles to reward gallant action or meritorious service. The American practice of brevetting is traceable to the continental Army in 1775. A proliferation of brevets occurred during the Civil War and thereafter, accompanied by a lessening of the usefulness and significance of the honor. The Distinguished Service Cross and medal of World War I replaced, in effect, the brevet as a military award. See:

Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles. Vol. I. Chicago: U Chicago, 1938. p. 313.
PE2835.D52v1.

Etymology of term.

Farrow, Edward S. Farrow's Military Encyclopedia. 2d ed. Vol. I. NY: Mil-Naval Pub, 1895. p. 235.
U24.A5.F24.

More descriptive of British practice than American.

Fry, James B. The History and Legal Effect of Brevets in the Armies of Great Britain and the United States.... NY: Van Nostrand, 1877. 576 p. UB430.F79.

Standard authority on the subject including detailed historical account and list of all brevets conferred, 1776-1877.

Memorial to the Congress of the United States, from Officers of the United States Army, on the Subject of Brevet and Staff Rank. Corpus Christi, TX, 12 Dec 1845. 23 p. UB413.M45RareBook.

Povlovich, Charles A. "What Was Brevet Rank?" Trading Post (Jul/Sep 1987): pp. 48-50. Per.
Nice explanation & survey.

U.S. Code. Vol. 1. Sections 521-28 (1952).

Cites statutory basis of brevet rank.

U.S. Dept of Army. Office, Chief of Military History. "The Significance of Brevet Rank." Fact Sheet, 27 Mar 1959. 3 p. UB413.S538.

_____. Rank and Precedence: Army Regulations 600-15, dated Aug 1951. Para 2. MilPub-Reg.

Indicates brevet rank still authorized, but 8 Aug 1955 edition does not.

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W.W.M. A Brief Dissertation on Military Titles and Brevet Rank by an Ex-Army Officer. Boston, Aug 1886. 7 p. UB413.1.E92.
Filed under "Military Titles..."

Wiener, Frederick B. "Mex Rank through the Ages." 2 pts. Infantry Journal (Sep 1943): pp. 26-30 & (Oct 1943): pp. 57-64. Per.
Historical survey of temporary rank, notably brevets. ("Mex"=Army slang term denoting such practices.)

Wood, Henry Clay. A Plea for the Recognition of the Legal Rights of the Army Officers Confirmed to Brevet Rank, March Third, 1869. NY: Rankin, 1894. 15 p. UB433.W6.

Note: "Brevetting" an NCO to officer rank first authorized in 1847. Such action could be taken by the President upon recommendation of the individual regimental commander when an NCO had "distinguished himself in the service." (See War Department General Order 9, 10 Mar 1847).

Incidentally, Tasker H. Bliss was the last officer to be brevetted. He retired at the end of 1917 as Chief of Staff and was then commissioned by brevet to full general. He served thereafter as US representative to the Allied Supreme War Council. Peyton March, as the new Chief of Staff, filled Bliss's former position of full general rank. See: Wiener, cited above, Oct, p. 62.

See also:

-Section on Frocking in Officers Overview.