

A Present from Uncle Sam by Simon Wilson



I don't generally collect sweethearts from the USA (*left*), because, to be honest, many of them are horrible. There is a tendency for them to be big, bright and plastic, and an affront to good taste. The nation that gave us Tiffany, for instance, really could have done better. They may even be the nation that originated sweetheart brooches because I saw a

reference, whilst researching this piece, to the first sweetheart brooches being based on badges and given out to camp followers during the American Civil War. This would pre-date our first sweetheart by about 25 years. On the other hand, it could just be that they were signs of regimental identity, much as the ATS wore in WW2. More research is clearly needed. Despite that, I have collected a few over

the years, but compared to the ones I have just mentioned, these are quite dull and well made. Many seem to be made in the UK.



The first one (*left*), is a Mizpah brooch, as described in an earlier article and is probably British made, being identical in dimensions, design and pin fixings, to the ones featuring British badges. This example has the Seal of the United States and is stamped "SILVER" on the reverse.



The second brooch illustrated (*left*), is a pendant design. The pendant has a blue band round the outside bearing the wording "UNITED STATES FORCES★IN ENGLAND★". The words "IN ENGLAND" are slightly smaller than the rest. I will make no comment. The centre of the medallion has a Caduceus, the winged staff of the Greek god Hermes, featuring two snakes. It is the symbol of the US Army medical services. It hangs from a brooch bar in the form of a side cap and again is probably British made. The details on the back of the cap show the maker as "SS Ltd" and the registered design number as 837997. These are identical to the markings on the similar RASC sweetheart shown in the previous article.

It is typical that the American medical symbol has two snakes whilst the British and rest of the world have only one. That's easily explained, and it's nothing to do with Americans needing to be bigger and better. We use the Rod of Asclepius, a Greek god associated with healing and medicine. It is used by the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, the American Air Force, The French Army Medical Services and the RAMC.

The Caduceus, which is now used by the American Army and a number of commercial organisations that adopted it after the Army, is similar, but Hermes was the messenger god who included trickery, alchemy and parcel delivery in his remit. Alchemy and medicine were quite similar until a few hundred years ago and so the Caduceus became linked to medicine by default.



In 1902, an American officer, Captain Frederick Reynolds, wrote to the Surgeon General proposing the Caduceus as the new collar badge of the army medical branch. He was turned down, but tried the next Surgeon General, who took over shortly afterwards, and the new man agreed.

Part of his argument for adopting the symbol was that "several foreign powers, notably the English" used it too, revealing that he didn't know the difference between the two. And that is why the American Army uses the Caduceus, because Captain Reynolds didn't know the difference. Why the RAF decided to use it, I don't know.

The next brooch (*left*), is in silver (marked STERLING SILVER on the reverse). It is similar in concept to the previous badge but with the flaming grenade of the Ordnance Corps in the centre.

The Air Force appears in only one brooch (*below*), but it's a good one, weighing almost a third of an ounce and being 2 1/2" wide. It is marked STERLING on the reverse and is modelled in the form of a two-bladed propellor. The central blue enamelled roundel has a US Army Air Force badge on it. Not only is it big and weighty, but the enamel is well done and the pin and clasp are well made. It's a shame that the maker hasn't marked it.



Finally, two Navy sweethearts (*below*). They feature identical figures, saluting, and with loops for safety chains. They are not marked but they look silver and the pins and clasps are good quality work, as are the pins and clasps on the secondary brooches. One of these has a loop on, to chain it to the loop on the brooch, one doesn't. However, both are actually secured by pinning them through the end link of the chain. One of the secondary brooches is in the form of the rank insignia of a Petty Officer with two red chevrons. The other is in the form of the medal ribbon of the European–African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal. This medal was instituted on 6 November 1942 and was awarded for service



between 7 December 1941 and 2 March 1946. The ribbon design was approved in December 1942, pointing towards a date of 1943 onwards for his brooch.



(Left): Photograph of a member of the ATS with the badge of the Royal Army Pay Corps above her left tunic pocket. I suggest that the early American "sweethearts" were, like these, more of a sign of regimental affiliation than an actual sweetheart brooch.



(Left): Crest of the RAF Medical Branch. The Caduceus is also used as their collar insignia. The original RAF Medical Service badge used a different staff - a snake coiled round an Egyptian ankh. The ankh badge was designed in the summer of 1918 by the 13-year-old daughter of the Director of Medical Services. The ankh and snake were contained within a crowned wreath and the motto "Nec Aspera Terrent" appeared at the bottom. This was replaced quite quickly with the Caduceus badge as it was felt to be "of somewhat phallic origin" (Journal of the Military Historical Society Issue 167, Vol. 42, February 1992). Why two snakes are less phallic than one, is not recorded.