

What's News

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(U) Where Did the CIA Seal Come From?

Posted By On September 20, 2017 @ 1:17 pm

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The final approved seal, signed by President Truman.

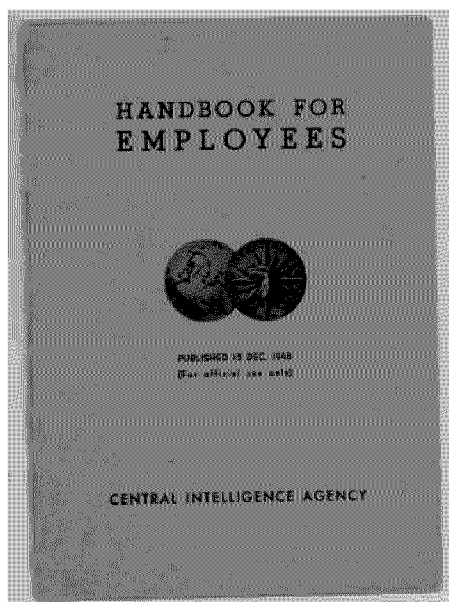
CIA celebrated its 70th birthday on 18 September. 2017 also marks 67 years since the Agency got its seal.

As World War II wound down, General William Donovan of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) proposed a post-war centralized intelligence organization, but President Truman and members of his administration opposed the idea. Instead, in September 1945, just after the war ended, Truman ordered Donovan to disband the OSS, giving him just 10 days to do so. Effective 1 October 1945, the OSS ceased to exist, leaving an intelligence vacuum.

An unofficial seal appeared on this handbook cover.

A few months later, in January 1946, Truman, by presidential directive, established the Central Intelligence Group to operate under a Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). A year later, on 26 July 1947, he signed the National Security Act of 1947 which mandated a major restructuring of US foreign policy and military institutions. It established CIA, as well as the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the US Air Force. The provisions of the act took effect on 18 September.

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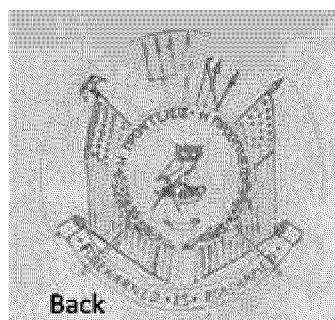
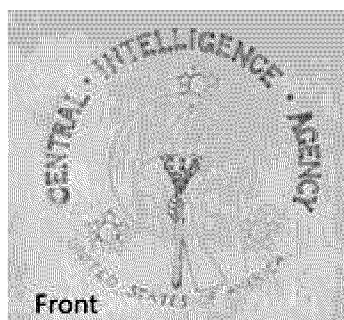


One of the things the 1947 act did not do was establish a seal for CIA, and that caused consternation in some parts of the Agency. A seal, such as the one pictured here on a 1948 employee handbook, was used, but there was concern that people outside CIA would question the authenticity of documents bearing an unofficial seal.

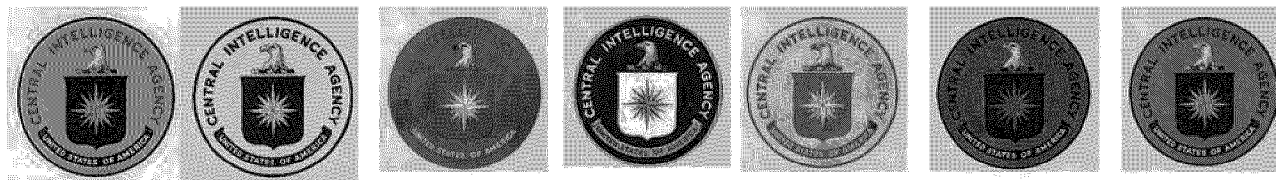
Two years later, on 20 June 1949, Truman signed the CIA Act of 1949 which gave the Agency more latitude to operate without the financial and legal constraints that applied to other US Government entities. The act also provided for the creation of an official seal for the Agency.

How was the seal selected? It started with a contest. On 1 July 1949, Captain (USN) C.L. Winecoff, CIA Executive, issued a notice to all Agency employees inviting them to submit suggestions for a "suitable design" for the seal. Originality and appropriateness, rather than artistic talent, were the criteria for judging. As an incentive to participate, the Agency dangled the possibility of a cash award for the winning employee design. According to the notice, the panel of judges would also consider the seal currently being used by the Agency.

Employees had two weeks to submit their designs. Although 12 or more were offered, none was acceptable to the judges. CIA then turned to the US Army Heraldic Branch (today's US Army Institute of Heraldry). Three to four months of meetings and discussions ensued where both employee designs and the existing seal were considered. The museum does not know for certain what the employee suggestions looked like, but one possibility is the following design which was included in a package of information recently provided by the Institute of Heraldry:



The Heraldic Branch completed its work by mid-December 1949. It presented CIA with several designs (see below) from which the DCI selected the seal we know today. The Heraldic Branch finalized the design and its description, then the Agency submitted the design through the Bureau of the Budget to the President for final approval. Truman approved the seal on 17 February 1950 and signed several copies, one of which is pictured at the beginning of this article. This framed copy is on display near the director's office in the Office of Medical Services in OHB. The museum holds additional copies in its collection.



Each part of the CIA seal has meaning. The American eagle is our national bird and a symbol of strength and alertness. The shield symbolizes defense and the role intelligence plays in that defense. Finally, the compass rose in the center of the shield signifies the collection of intelligence information from all areas of the world and its convergence at a central location.

As for the employee contest, there was no winning design. On 7 March 1950, Captain Winecoff announced, "In view of the fact that the approved seal included ideas of a number of the suggestions submitted, no cash award could be made under the Employees Suggestion Program." However, "The director extends his appreciation to all participating employees for their generous response to his request for suggestions."

To learn more about [CIA history](#) and the [CIA museum](#), check out the recently published '[Defending the Republic: Stories from CIA History and Heritage](#)' and '[Notes from Our Attic: A Pocket History of CIA](#)'.

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