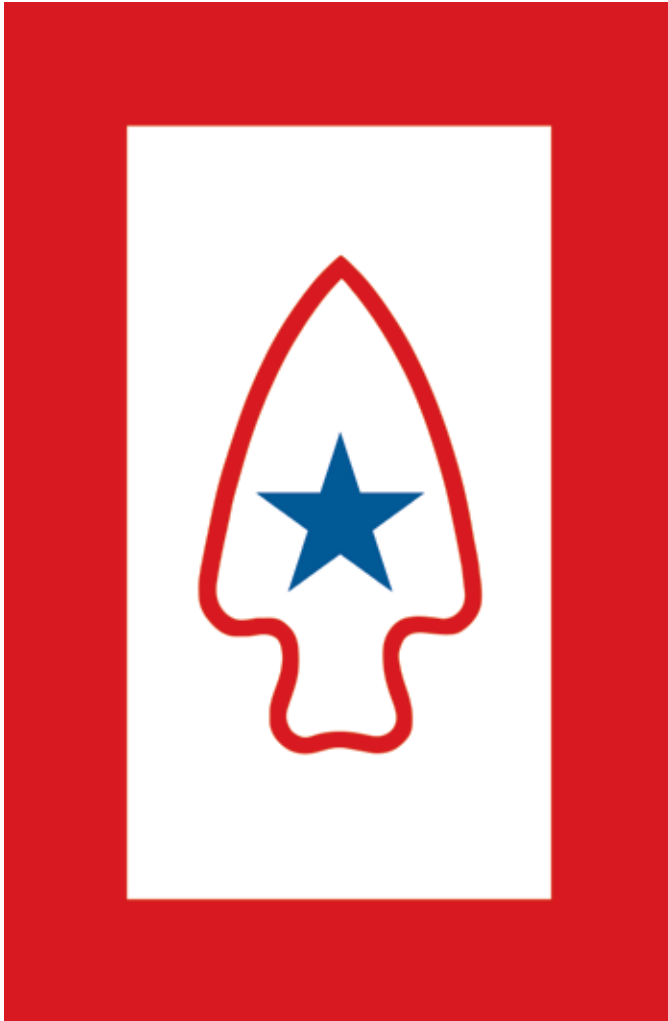


Abstract: *USASOC customized the Blue Star Service banner to instill parental and family pride in loved ones who volunteered to serve in Army Special Operations Forces during wartime. It reinforces the spirit of a united ARSOF family. The reunification of Gold Star with Blue Star Service emphasizes that it was an ARSOF soldier who made the supreme sacrifice to preserve liberty in America.*



ARSOF Blue Star Service Banner

by Charles H. Briscoe



The U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) has decided to rekindle a hundred-year-old tradition honoring wartime military service. The new Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF)-unique Blue Star Service Banner unites our families in pride of national service during conflict. It will remind all that ARSOF is ‘the tip of America’s spear.’

The Blue Star Service (BSS) banner tradition dates to World War I. Captain Robert L. Queisser, 5th Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry (State Militia), wanted to honor his two sons’ overseas military service in 1917. He created a red, white, and blue banner featuring a blue star for each son to hang in the front window to show his pride in their patriotism.¹

The Blue Star Service banner tradition originated during WWI.



The mother of a WWI serviceman hangs her Blue Star Service banner in her front window.

The Governor of Ohio, James M. Cox, had the following read into the *Congressional Record* on 24 September 1917: “The mayor of Cleveland, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Governor of Ohio have adopted this service flag. The world should know of those who give so much for liberty. The dearest thing in all the world to a father and mother—their children.”² The banner quickly became a symbol for families with children serving in the war. The practice was stimulated by articles in *National Geographic* and *Popular Mechanics* magazines.³

The original BSS banner (approximately 8.5 by 14 inches) was red with a white field to accommodate as many as five blue stars vertically (representing five in service). Expanding on the BSS banner philosophy, President Thomas Woodrow Wilson in 1918 endorsed a request from the Women’s Committee of the Council of National Defense whereby mothers who lost a child in military service during wartime could affix a gold star to their mourning armband.⁴ This led to a smaller gold star being placed on the highest blue star of the BSS banner. BSS Mothers and Gold Star Mothers (GS) formed veterans’ service organizations.⁵



1



2



3

1–3: WWI Blue Star Service window banners were handmade.



Gold Star Mothers rally to support their organization after WWI.

This banner with the Gold Star above the other two Blue Stars reflects the loss of a serving family member during WWI.

During World War II, the practice of displaying Blue Star banners started anew. The War Department issued banner dimensions (most were handmade) and display guidelines.⁶ The most famous banner commemorated the five Sullivan brothers who died when their light cruiser USS *Juneau* (CL-52) was sunk in the naval Battle of Guadalcanal at night on 13 November 1942. The Sullivan family BSS with five stars and a photo of the five sailors became a 'Support the War Effort' poster.⁷

Although the tradition of BSS banners was not embraced during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Department of Defense (DoD) authorized a service flag and a lapel pin in 1969 (DoD Directive 1348.1) as specified in U.S. Code 179-182. The American Legion tried to rekindle pride in those serving military men and women after 11 September 2001 by freely distributing BSS banners to families nationwide (the Queisser patent [6 November 1917] had long expired).⁸ Numerous cities across America demonstrated pride in those serving by installing personalized Blue Star Banners along main thoroughfares.⁹ In 2010, the 111th Congress declared

that home owner associations could not restrict GS or BSS banner display by members (Blue Star/Gold Star Act of 2010 [S.3477]).¹⁰

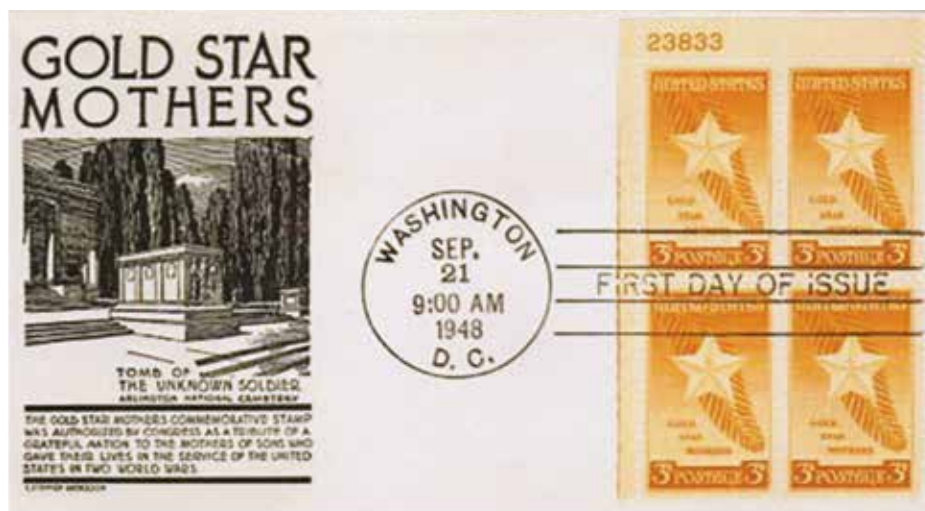
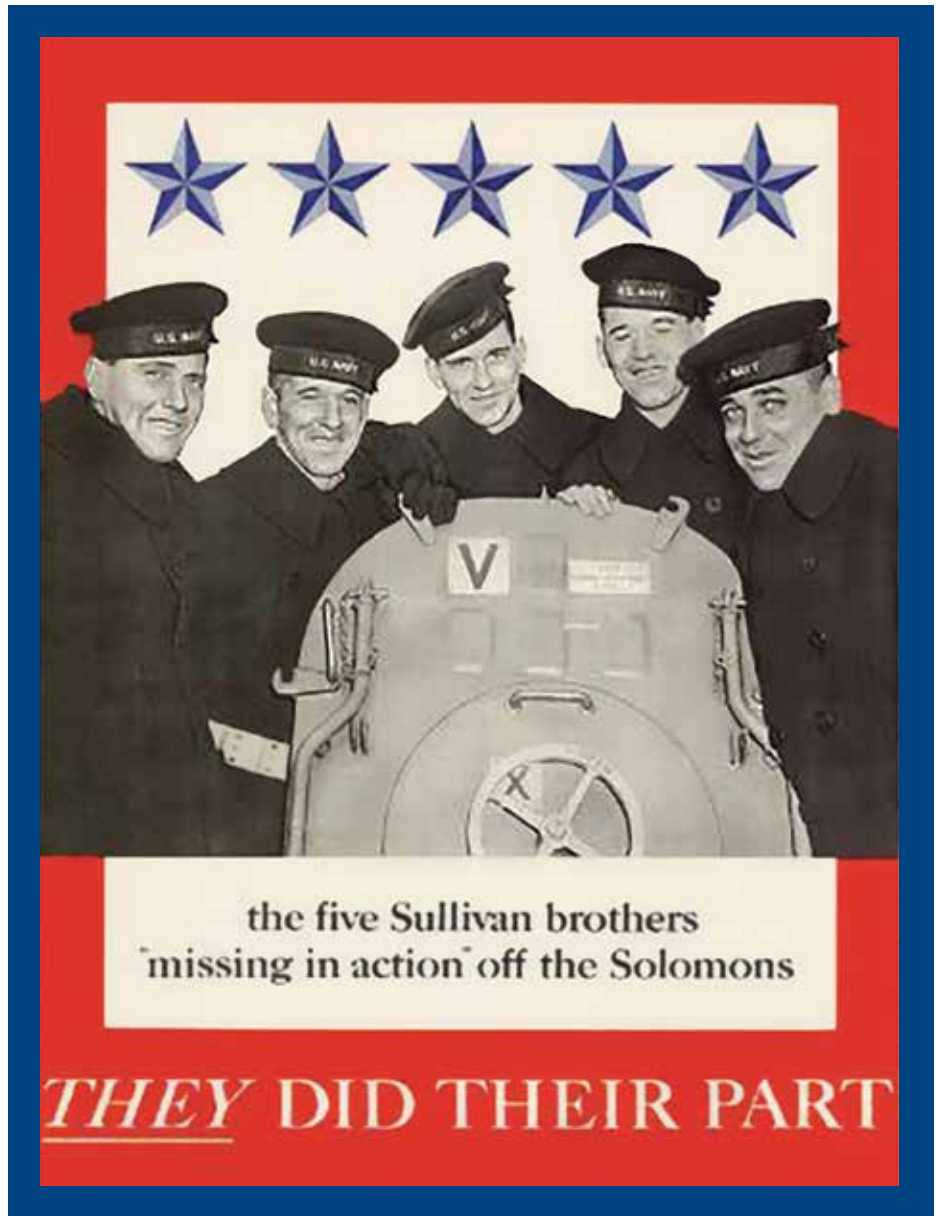
The Army resumed the GS banner tradition during the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Now by presenting the ARSOF BSS banner stickers to parents and families of soldiers graduating from the Special Forces, Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs courses, and ARSOF assessment programs, USASOC will instill parental pride. And, this practice allows parents and families to demonstrate support for sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and loved ones who volunteered to serve in ARSOF units.

These banner stickers wordlessly convey sacrifice, pride, service to country, and signify that a loved one is away at war.¹¹ ARSOF BSS banner decal/stickers containing a blue-bordered Gold Star connect the Gold and Blue Star families. It reminds all that a Blue Star 'begat' the Gold Star. Both programs will be bolstered. The two banners remind all that the current conflicts continue to touch every neighborhood in America.¹² 🇺🇸

Additional Blue Star Products

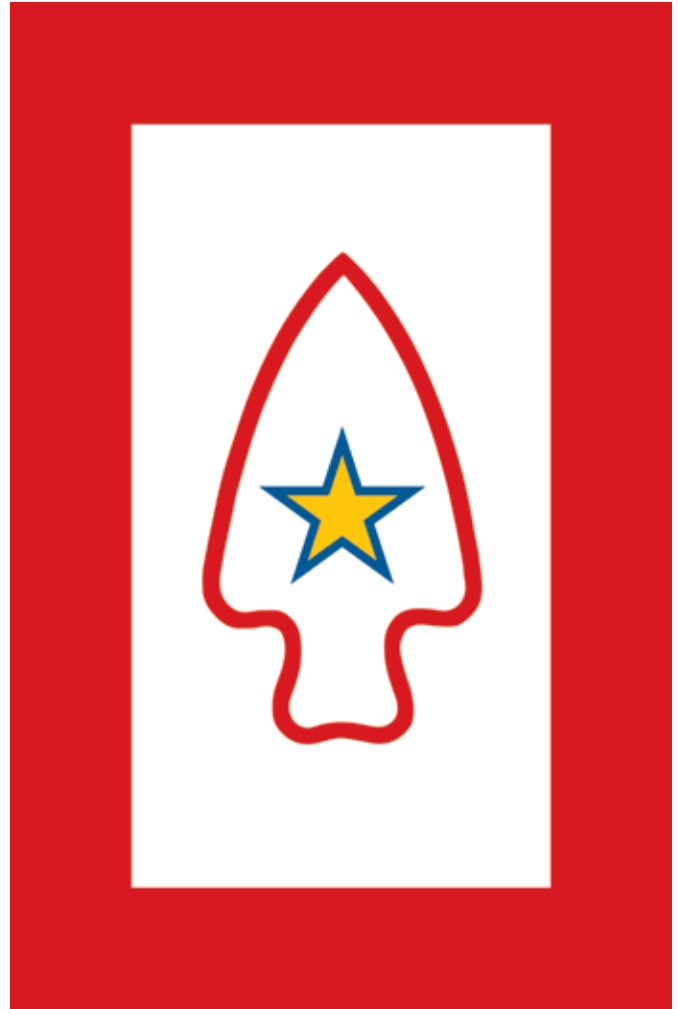
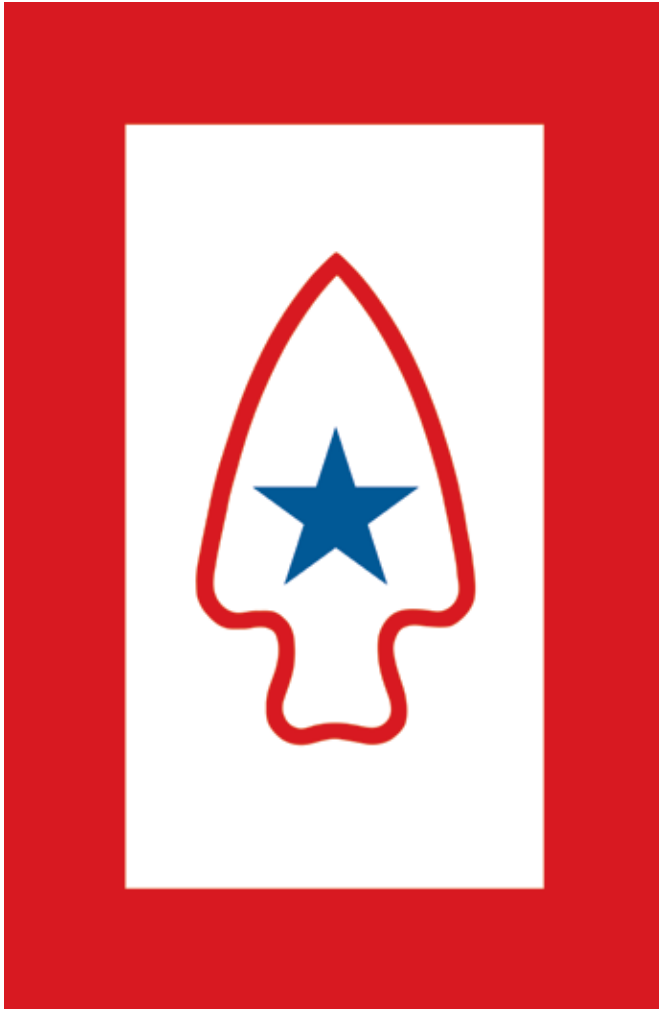
The Office of War Information (OWI) combined the Blue Star Banner tradition with the photo of the 'Five Sullivans' to make Poster No. 42 in 1943. The five Sullivan brothers from Waterloo, Iowa, who died when the light cruiser USS *Juneau* was sunk on 13 November 1942 were: (L to R) George Thomas, Francis Henry 'Frank,' Joseph Eugene 'Joe,' Madison Abel 'Matt,' and Albert Leo 'Al' Sullivan.

Another OWI poster linked poor security to the death of a U.S. Navy sailor that led to a Gold Star Service banner.



The Gold Star Mothers postage stamp was issued 21 September 1948.

Gold Star Mothers were recognized after WWI and WWII by the U.S. Postal Service.



The current Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF)-unique Blue Star Service banner reminds all that Army SOF is “the tip of America’s spear.”

Endnotes

- 1 “The Tradition Continues,” online at <https://www.legion.org/troops/bluestar>, accessed 3 December 2019.
- 2 “The Tradition Continues,” online at <https://www.legion.org/troops/bluestar>, accessed 3 December 2019.
- 3 “The United Service Flag Company,” *National Geographic* (October 1917): 186; “For Those Who Carry On: The Service Flag Still Waves and Makers of Novelties Find Many Ways to Display It,” *Popular Mechanics* (February 1919): 29.
- 4 “About the Service Flag,” online at <https://www.bluestarmothers.org/service-flag>, accessed 10 December 2019. President Woodrow Wilson used the term ‘Gold Star Mother’ in that letter to the Women’s Committee of the Council of National Defense. Mrs. Grace C. Siebold was recognized as the first ‘Gold Star’ mother. Her son, 1LT George V. Siebold, a Sopwith Camel pilot in the 148th Aero Squadron, U.S. Army Air Service, was shot down over France in August 1918 while the unit was attached to the British Royal Air Force. Mrs. Siebold organized the American Gold Star Mothers, Incorporated, on 5 January 1929. “Gold Star Service Banner History,” online at <http://floridalegionpost13.org/p13goldstarhistory.html>, accessed 18 February 2020.
- 5 “Gold Star Service Banner History,” online at <http://floridalegionpost13.org/p13goldstarhistory.html>, accessed 18 February 2020; “About the Service Flag,” online at <https://www.bluestarmothers.org/service-flag>, accessed 10 December 2019.
- 6 “The Tradition Continues,” online at <https://www.legion.org/troops/bluestar>, accessed 3 December 2019.
- 7 “The Five Sullivan Brothers, ‘Missing in Action’ off the Solomons: They Did Their Part,” Office of War Information poster No. 42, 1943, online at <https://digital.library.unt.edu/rk:/67531/metadc532/>, accessed 18 February 2020; “About the Service Flag,” online at <https://www.bluestarmothers.org/service-flag>, accessed 10 December 2019; Hugh Conrad, “War Mother,” *America in WWII*, December 2007, online at <https://www.americainwwii.com/articles/war-mother>, accessed 24 February 2020.
- 8 “The Tradition Continues,” online at <https://www.legion.org/troops/bluestar>, accessed 3 December 2019.
- 9 “Blue Star Banner Program,” online at <https://www.bluestarbanner.org/about.php>, accessed 6 January 2020.
- 10 “S-3477 – Blue Star/Gold Star Flag Act of 2010,” online at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/senate-bill/3477>, accessed 10 December 2019.
- 11 Meg Jones, “Blue Star Flags Convey Sacrifice for Service Members,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 5 March 2017, online at <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2017/03/05/100-years-old-blue-star-flags-convey-sacrifice-service>, accessed 18 February 2020.
- 12 “History of the Blue Star Service Banner,” online at <http://www.bluestarsforasafeturn.com/history.htm>, accessed 18 February 2020.