A Brief History of Medals

An Emperor of China, in the First Century, A. D., gave his military commanders medals that appear to have been the first on record. From then until the time of Good Queen Bess medals must have been their own reward, for they rarely got their recipients into history books.

In 1588, Queen Elizabeth had three medals struck and issued to commemorate Britain's victory in the war with Spain. Again in 1650 medals were awarded to officers and men alike following the Battle of Dunbar and in 1816 the British returned to the precedent with the Waterloo Medal for "every officer, non-commissioned officer and soldier..."

George Washington received the first medal from our government to commemorate the evacuation of the British from Boston in 1776. This medal is dramatically shown on the front page of this folder.

It was also George Washington who instituted in 1782 the first American decoration for individual meritorious service. It was for him to emphasize the democratic note in his order by recording "to cherish a virtuous ambition in his soldiers... whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings, over the left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth or silk". This was the original Purple Heart.

The Purple Heart soon fell into disuse, not to be revived in its present form until 1932, on the 200th anniversary of Washington's birth. In 1847, the Certificate of Merit was conceived and awarded, but no medal was struck until 1905. In 1861 the United States established the Medal of Honor, which for some 40 years was the only American military decoration. With the Spanish American War and ensuing events came new rank-and-file medals for wars and campaigns.

Today, wartime America has a well-developed system of medals, decorations, and ribbons. It is the purpose of this folder to show them and to explain their significance.
Decorations of the Armed Forces

These emblems of recognition are called "decorations" since they are most frequently bestowed in recognition of some signal act of personal heroism and differ from "medals" in that they do not commemorate a particular event. They are divided into three groups for easy identification in the (1) Army, (2) Navy and (3) Combined service decorations, the latter composed of emblems which may be issued to any member of the armed forces.

Army Decorations

MEDAL OF HONOR
Awarded by Congress for gallantry in action involving actual conflict with an enemy. This is the nation's highest award.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS
For extraordinary heroism in operations against an armed enemy.

SILVER STAR
For gallantry in action not involving actual conflict with an enemy. This is a maina peace-time medal.

OAK LEAF CLUSTER
Indicating a second award of the same decoration; to be worn on the original or service ribbon.

Soldier's Medal
For heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy. This is a maina peace-time medal.

Good Conduct Medal
Awarded to enlisted men after one year of honorable service.

Navy Decorations

MEDAL OF HONOR
Awarded by Congress for gallantry in action involving actual conflict with an enemy. This is the nation's highest award.

BREVET MEDAL (U.S. M.C.)
Indicates a Marine's Commission from the President for distinguished conduct against the enemy.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL
For extraordinary service to the Government of the United States.

SILVER STAR
Given for distinguished service in combat duty since December 1, 1941.

NAVY AND MARINE CORPS MEDAL
Awarded to anyone who has distinguished himself or herself by heroism not involving combat with the enemy.

Good Conduct Medals

NAVY
Presented to enlisted men on completion of a period of enlistment showing good conduct.

MARINE CORPS
Given enlisted men on completion of enlistment period showing good conduct.

COAST GUARD
Given enlisted men on completion of enlistment period showing good conduct.
Service Ribbons of the Armed Forces

Since actual decorations and medals are worn only on dress occasions, strips of duplicate ribbon as attached to the original emblem are worn at other times to show that the wearer has received such recognition. These ribbons illustrated here are divided into three groups, and in each the most frequently seen ribbons have been highlighted for quick identification.

**Army Ribbons**
- Medal of Honor
- Distinguished Service Cross
- Silver Star
- Soldier's Medal
- Good Conduct

**Civil War Campaign**
- Indian Campaign
- Spanish War Service
- Cuban Occupation
- Philippine Campaign
- Mexican Service
- Mexican Border
- Organization Citation
- Spanish Campaign
- Puerto Rico Occupation
- China Campaign

**Navy Ribbons**
- Medal of Honor
- Distinguished Service Medal
- Silver Star
- Good Conduct
- Coast Guard Good Conduct
- Marine Corps Expeditionary
- Yungto Service
- Marine Corps Reserve
- Marine Corps Brevet
- Silver Star
- Good Conduct
- Marine Corps Good Conduct
- Navy Expeditionary
- 2nd Nicaraguan Campaign
- Novel Reserve
- China Service
- Navy Cross
- Navy and Marine Corps Medal
- Presidential Unit Citation
- Campaign Participation
- Action in Engagements
- Defense of Wake Island
- Combat Area
- NC-4
- Civil War
- Sampson Medal
- Philippine Campaign
- China Relief Expeditionary
- Nicaragua Campaign
- Dominican Campaign
- Byrd Antarctic Expeditionary
- Byrd Antarctic Expeditionary
- Manila Bay
- Spanish Campaign
- Haitian Campaign
- Mexican Service

**Combined service ribbons**
- Distinguished Flying Cross
- Gold Life Saving
- Air Medal
- Medal for Merit
- Purple Heart
- Silver Life Saving Medal
- American Defense Service
- Asiatic Pacific Theater
- American Theater
- Legion of Merit
- Area of Occupation of Germany

**MERCHANT SEAMEN’S AWARDS**
- Distinguished Service Medal
- Torpedoed Seaman
Campaign Medals of the Armed Forces of the United States of America

These emblems most often stand for participation in a specific campaign or theatre of endeavor. They are shown here divided into three groups: "Navy Medals", "Army Medals" and "Combined service medals". The approximate area of activity commemorated by the individual medal is graphically illustrated.
THE GORGAS MEDAL, for distinguished service in preventive medicine for our Armed Forces whose recipients are selected by the Association of Military Surgeons of the U. S. It is endowed by John Wyeth & Brother, Inc., and carries honorarium of $500. The medal was conceived in honor of General William Crawford Gorgas, who applied the discoveries of Major Walter Reed and freed the Isthmus of Panama of yellow fever.

THE MALTESE CROSS, a coveted clasp worn with the Victory Medal by members of the Navy Medical Corps and the Marine Corps who served in France with the A. E. F. during World War I.

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