



Hierarchy of Military Medals and Awards



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Hierarchy of Medals



To honor the sacrifices and deeds of our men and women, our Military has developed a hierarchy of medals to reward all according to the heroic nature of their actions under extraordinary circumstances. At the very top is the *Medal of Honor*.

Second in precedence to the *Medal of Honor*, the Armed Services awards the *Distinguished Service Cross* (Army), the *Navy Cross* (Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard), and the *Air Force Cross* to individuals who distinguish themselves by extraordinary heroism rising to a level below that required for the Medal of Honor. Below that level are: *Presidential Unit Citation*, *Distinguished Service Medal*, *Silver Star*, *Valorous Unit Award*,

Distinguished Flying Cross, *Air Medal*, *Soldiers Medal*, *Navy and Marine Corps Medal*, *Airman's Medal*, *Coast Guard Medal*, *Bronze Star* and *Purple Heart*.

The *Defense Superior Service Medal* and *The Legion of Merit* are typically awarded to Senior Military Officers. *The Legion of Merit* is also awarded to Military and Political figures of Foreign Governments.

Medal of Honor



Army



Navy
Marine Corps
Coast Guard



Air Force

Medal of Honor Awards	
Total.....	3,471
Awarded to Individuals.....	3,452
Multiple Awards.....	19
for Separate Actions.....	14
for Same Action.....	5
Identified by Name.....	3,443
Unknowns.....	9

In total, 3,471 *Medals of Honor* have been awarded to 3,452 different individuals. Nineteen men received a second award: 14 of these received two separate medals for two separate actions, and In WW I, five Marines received both the Navy and the Army *Medals of Honor* for the same action. 3,443 recipients are identified by name and 9 medals were awarded to unknown soldiers, all Army. The remains of the "Unknowns" interred in the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* have been awarded the *Medal of Honor*.

Posthumous Awards	
Total Awards Since 1862.....	3,471
Total Posthumous Awards.....	621
Percent Posthumously.....	18%
Total Awards Since the Beginning of WW II.....	856
Posthumous Awards.....	529
Percent Posthumously.....	62%

In total, since 1862, 621 had their medals presented posthumously. Since the beginning of World War II, 856 Medals have been awarded, 529 posthumously. As you can see by the percentages, standards have been significantly tightened as a result of the 1916 review by the Military when 910 medals were rescinded; most awarded during the Civil War.

Recipients by Branch of Service	
Army	2405
Navy	746
Marines	297
Air Force	17
Coast Guard.....	1

Medals of Honor have been awarded to individuals in virtually every military action since the Civil War; from the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam, to relatively minor campaigns in Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. By Branch of Service, the figures are as shown.



Virtually every ethnic group is represented on the *Medal of Honor Recipients Rolls*.



The correct title for the award often called the "Congressional Medal of Honor" is simply "*MEDAL OF HONOR*" and the men who have received it prefer to be called "*RECIPIENTS*" (of the award), not "winners". It is the only United States Military Award that is worn from a ribbon hung around the neck, and the only award presented "By the President in the Name of the Congress".



As each recipient is honored in life the final resting place of *Medal of Honor Recipients* is also honored with distinction.

Summary: The *Medal of Honor* is the highest military decoration awarded by the United States government. It is bestowed by the President in the name of Congress on members of the United States Armed Forces who distinguish themselves through "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States." Due to the nature of its criteria, it is often awarded posthumously (more than half have been since 1941).

Members of all branches of the armed forces are eligible to receive the medal, and there are three versions (one for the Army, one for the Air Force, and one for the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard).

The *Medal of Honor* is bestowed upon an individual by the passing of a Joint Resolution in the Congress; and is then personally presented to the recipient or, in the case of posthumous awards, to next of kin, by the President of the United States, on behalf of the Congress, representing and recognizing the gratitude of the American people as a whole. Due to its honored status, the medal is afforded special protection under U.S. law.

The *Medal of Honor* is one of two military neck order awards issued by the United States and is the sole neck order awarded to members of the armed forces. (The *Commander's Degree of the Legion of Merit* is also a neck order but it is only authorized for issue to foreign dignitaries).

As the award citation includes the phrase "in the name of Congress", it is sometimes erroneously called the Congressional Medal of Honor; however, the official title is simply the *Medal of Honor*.



The great diversity you find in the ranks of *Medal of Honor Recipients* occurred only with the invisible hand of Lady Liberty; without the help of government, or diversity panels; it just happened, ordinary people exercising their free will and guided by our Founding Fathers' legacy of sacrifice, duty and honor.



Distinguished Service Cross (DSC)

The *Distinguished Service Cross (DSC)* is the second highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of the United States Army, for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force. Actions that merit the *Distinguished Service Cross* must be of such a high degree to be above those required for all other U.S. combat decorations but not meeting the criteria for the *Medal of Honor*. The *Distinguished Service Cross* is equivalent to the *Navy Cross* (Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) and the *Air Force Cross* (Air Force).

The *Distinguished Service Cross* was first awarded during World War I. In addition, a number of awards were made for actions before World War I. In many cases, these were to soldiers who had received a *Certificate of Merit* for gallantry which, at the time, was the only other honor besides the *Medal of Honor* the Army could award. Others were belated recognition of actions in the Philippines, on the Mexican Border and during the Boxer Rebellion.

The *Distinguished Service Cross* is awarded to a person who, while serving in any capacity with the Army, distinguishes himself or herself by extraordinary heroism not justifying the award of a Medal of Honor; while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing Armed Force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

Awarded for extraordinary heroism not justifying the award of a *Medal of Honor*; The act or acts of heroism must have been so notable and have involved risk of life so extraordinary as to set the individual apart from his or her comrades.



Navy Cross

The *Navy Cross* is the highest medal that can be awarded by the United States Department of the Navy and the second highest award given for valor. It is normally only awarded to members of the United States Navy, United States Marine Corps and United States Coast Guard, but could be awarded to all branches of United States military as well as members of foreign militaries. It was established by Act of Congress (Pub.L. 65-253) and approved on February 4, 1919. The *Navy Cross* is equivalent to the *Distinguished Service Cross* (Army) and the *Air Force Cross*.

Awarded for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force and going beyond the call of duty.

The *Navy Cross* was instituted in part due to the entrance of the United States into World War I. Many European nations had the custom of decorating heroes from other nations, but the *Medal of Honor* was the sole American award for valor at the time. The Army instituted the *Distinguished Service Cross* and *Distinguished Service Medal* in 1918, while the Navy followed suit in 1919, retroactive to 6 April 1917. Originally, the *Navy Cross* was lower in precedence than the *Navy Distinguished Service Medal*, because it was awarded for both combat heroism and for "other distinguished service." Congress revised this on 7 August 1942, making the *Navy Cross* a combat-only award and second only to the *Medal of Honor*. Since its creation, it has been awarded more than 6,300 times.



Air Force Cross

The *Air Force Cross* is the second highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of the United States Air Force. The *Air Force Cross* is the Air Force decoration equivalent to the *Distinguished Service Cross* (Army) and the *Navy Cross* (Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard).

The *Air Force Cross* is awarded for extraordinary heroism not justifying the award of the *Medal of Honor*. It may be awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the U.S Air Force, distinguishes him or herself by extraordinary heroism in combat.

Awarded for Extraordinary heroism not justifying the award of a *Medal of Honor* while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.



Presidential Unit Citation

The *Presidential Unit Citation (PUC)*, originally called the *Distinguished Unit Citation*, is awarded to units of the Armed Forces of the United States and allies for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy on or after 7 December 1941 (the date of the Attack on Pearl Harbor and the start of American involvement in World War II). The unit must display such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions so as to set it apart from and above other units participating in the same campaign.

Since its inception by Executive Order on 26 February 1942, retroactive to 7 December 1941, to 2008, the *Presidential Unit Citation* has been awarded in such conflicts as World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Iraq War, Afghanistan War and the Cold War.

The degree of heroism required is the same as that which would warrant award of the *Distinguished Service Cross*, *Air Force Cross* or *Navy Cross* to an individual. In some cases, one or more individuals within the unit may have also been awarded personal recognitions for their contribution to the actions for which their entire unit was awarded a *Presidential Unit Citation*.

Army and Air Force

The Army citation was established as the *Distinguished Unit Citation* by Executive Order No. 9075 on 26 February 1942, and received its present name on 3 November 1966. As with other Army unit citations, the *PUC* is in a larger frame that is worn above the right pocket. All members of the unit may wear the decoration, whether or not they personally participated in the acts for which the unit was cited. Only those assigned to the unit at the time of the action cited may wear the decoration as a permanent award. For the Army and Air Force, the emblem itself is a solid blue ribbon enclosed in a gold frame. The Air Force *PUC* was adopted from the Army *Distinguished Unit Citation*, after they were made into a separate military branch in 1947. They also renamed the unit citation to its present name on 3 November 1966. The Air Force wears its unit citation on the left pocket below all personal awards, unlike the Army not every unit award is enclosed in a gold frame.

The Citation is carried on the unit's regimental colors in the form of a blue streamer, 4 ft (1.2 m) long and 2.75 in (7.0 cm) wide. For the Army, only on rare occasions will a unit larger than battalion qualify for award of this decoration.

Navy and Marine Corps

The Navy citation is the unit equivalent of a *Navy Cross* and was established by Executive Order No. 9050 on 6 February 1942. The Navy version has blue, yellow, and red horizontal stripes. To distinguish between the two versions of the *Presidential Unit Citation*, the Navy version is typically referred to as the *Navy and Marine Corps Presidential Unit Citation* while the Army and Air Force refer to the decoration simply as the *Presidential Unit Citation*. These are only worn by persons who meet the criteria at the time it is awarded to the unit. Unlike the Army, in the Navy and Marine Corps, those who later join the unit do not wear it on a temporary basis.

Special Clasps

USS Nautilus (SSN-571)



To commemorate the first submerged voyage under the North Pole by the nuclear-powered submarine USS Nautilus (SSN-571) in 1958, all members of her crew who made that voyage were authorized to wear their *Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon* with a special clasp in the form of a gold block letter N.

USS Triton (SSRN-586)



To commemorate the first submerged circumnavigation of the world by the nuclear-powered submarine Triton during its shakedown cruise in 1960, all members of her crew who made that voyage were authorized to wear their *Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon* with a special clasp in the form of a golden replica of the globe.

Coast Guard

United States Coast Guard units may be awarded either the Navy or Coast Guard version of the *Presidential Unit Citation*, depending on which service the Coast Guard was supporting when the citation action was performed.

Special Clasp



A Coast Guard version of the award was awarded to all U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary responding to Hurricane Katrina by President George W. Bush for rescue and relief operations. All Coast Guard members who received the award are authorized to wear the *Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon* with a special clasp in the form of the internationally recognized "hurricane symbol".



Distinguished Service Medal

The *Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)* is a military award of the United States Army that is presented to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the United States military, has distinguished himself or herself by exceptionally meritorious service to the Government in a duty of great responsibility. The performance must be such as to merit recognition for service that is clearly exceptional. Exceptional performance of normal duty will not alone justify an award of this decoration.

Separate *Distinguished Service Medals* exist for the different branches of the military as well as a fifth version of the medal which is a senior award of the United States Department of Defense. The Army version of the *Distinguished Service Medal* is typically referred to simply as the "*Distinguished Service Medal*" while the other branches of service use the service name as a prefix.

For service not related to actual war, the term "duty of a great responsibility" applies to a narrower range of positions than in time of war, and requires evidence of conspicuously significant achievement. However, justification of the award may accrue by virtue of exceptionally meritorious service in a succession of high positions of great importance.

Awards may be made to persons other than members of the Armed Forces of the United States for wartime services only, and then only under exceptional circumstances, with the express approval of the President in each case.

Awards may be made to persons other than members of the Armed Forces of the United States for wartime services only, and then only under exceptional circumstances, with the express approval of the President in each case.

It is awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the United States Army, has distinguished himself or herself by exceptionally meritorious service to the Government in a duty of great responsibility. The performance must be such as to merit recognition for service which is clearly exceptional. Exceptional performance of normal duty will not alone justify an award of this decoration. For service not related to actual war, the term "duty of a great responsibility" applies to a narrower range of positions, than in time of war, and requires evidence of conspicuously significant achievement. However, justification of the award may accrue by virtue of exceptionally meritorious service in a succession of high positions of great importance.

Awards may be made to other than members of the Armed Forces of the United States for wartime services only, and then only under exceptional circumstances, with the express approval of the President in each case.



Silver Star

The *Silver Star* is the third-highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of any branch of the United States armed forces for valor in the face of the enemy.

The *Silver Star* is awarded for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States not justifying one of the two higher awards - the service crosses (*Distinguished Service Cross*, the *Navy Cross*, or the *Air Force Cross*), the second-highest military decoration, or the *Medal of Honor*, the highest decoration. The *Silver Star* may be awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the armed forces, distinguishes himself or herself by extraordinary heroism involving one of the following actions:

- In action against an enemy of the United States
- While engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force
- While serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party

The *Silver Star* differs from the service crosses in that it requires a lesser degree of gallantry and need not be earned while in a position of great responsibility.

Air Force pilots are often considered eligible to receive a *Silver Star* upon becoming an ace (having five or more confirmed kills), which entails the pilot intentionally and successfully risking his life multiple times under combat conditions and emerging victorious.

Soldiers who received a *Citation Star* for gallantry in action during World War I were eligible to apply to have the citation converted to the *Silver Star*. The *Valorous Unit Award* is considered the unit level equivalent of a *Silver Star*.



Valorous Unit Award

The *Valorous Unit Award* is the second highest unit decoration which may be bestowed upon a U.S. Army unit (the highest being the *Presidential Unit Citation*) and is considered the unit equivalent of the *Silver Star*. It is awarded to units of the United States Army which display extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States of America

As a result of a request from the Commander, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (USMACV), to expand the scope of the *Meritorious Unit Commendation* to include acts of valor, a review of the unit awards program was conducted in 1965. The study concluded that a gap existed in the awards program. The *Distinguished Unit Citation* was awarded for gallantry in action for heroism that would warrant the *Distinguished Service Cross* to an individual. There was no lesser unit award for heroism. Based on the study, a recommendation was submitted to expand the scope of the *Meritorious Unit Commendation* to include acts of heroism. The recommendation was disapproved by the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) and in a memorandum to the Chief of Staff, Army (CSA), dated 7 January 1966, the DCSPER recommended a *Valorous Unit Award* be adopted to signify unit gallantry in combat to a degree equivalent to that required for award of a *Silver Star* to an individual. The recommendation with proposed design was approved by the Chief of Staff, Army, on 12 January 1966.

The emblem is worn by all members of a cited organization and is considered an individual decoration for persons in connection with the cited acts and may be worn whether or not they continue as members of the organization. Other personnel may wear this decoration while serving with an organization to indicate the unit has been awarded the *Valorous Unit Award*.

The *Valorous Unit Award* is to be awarded to units of the Armed Forces of the United States for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent part for actions occurring on or after 3 August 1963.

The *Valorous Unit Award* requires a lesser degree of gallantry, determination, and *esprit de corps* than that required for the *Presidential Unit Citation*. Nevertheless, the unit must have performed with marked distinction under difficult and hazardous conditions in accomplishing its mission so as to set it apart from the other units participating in the same conflict.

The degree of heroism required is the same as that which would warrant award of the *Silver Star* to an individual. Extended periods of combat duty or participation in a large number of operational missions, either ground or air, is not sufficient. This award will normally be earned by units that have participated in single or successive actions covering relatively brief time spans. It is not reasonable to presume that entire units can sustain *Silver Star* performance for extended time periods under the most unusual circumstances. Only on rare occasions will a unit larger than a battalion qualify for this award.



Distinguished Flying Cross

The *Distinguished Flying Cross* (DFC) is given for single acts of heroism or extraordinary achievement during aerial flight in combat.

The *Air Medal* is given to persons performing exceptionally while in aerial flight, which does not measure up to the level of the *Distinguished Flying Cross*, or is not during combat. For example, the *Air Medal* may be given for "sustained distinction in the performance of duties involving regular and frequent participation in aerial flight for a period of at least 6 months."

The *Distinguished Flying Cross* is a medal awarded to any officer or enlisted member of the United States armed forces who distinguishes himself or herself in support of operations by "heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight, subsequent to November 11, 1918." The decoration may also be given for an act performed prior to that date when the

individual has been recommended for, but has not received the *Medal of Honor*, *Distinguished Service Cross*, *Navy Cross*, *Air Force Cross* or *Distinguished Service Medal*.

The *Distinguished Flying Cross* was authorized by Section 12 of the Air Corps Act enacted by the United States Congress on July 2, 1926, as amended by Executive Order 7786 on January 8, 1938.

The first award of the *Distinguished Flying Cross* was made by President Calvin Coolidge on May 2, 1927, to ten aviators of the Air Corps who had participated in the Pan American Good Will Flight, which took place from December 21, 1926 to May 2, 1927. Two of the airmen died in a mid-air collision trying to land at Buenos Aires in March 1927, and received their awards posthumously. Since the award had only been authorized by Congress the previous year, no medals had yet been struck, and the Pan American airmen initially received only certificates. Among the ten airmen were Major Herbert A. Dargue, Captains Ira C. Eaker and Muir S. Fairchild, and 1st Lt. Ennis C. Whitehead.

Charles Lindbergh received the first presentation of the medal little more than a month later, from Coolidge during the Washington, DC homecoming reception on June 11, 1927, from his trans-Atlantic flight. The medal had hurriedly been struck and readied just for that occasion. Interestingly, the 1927 War Department General Order (G.O. 8), authorizing Lindbergh's *DFC* states that it was awarded by the President, while the General Order (G.O. 6) for the Pan American Flyers' *DFC* citation notes that the War Department awarded it "by direction of the President." The first *Distinguished Flying Cross* to be awarded to a Naval Aviator was received by then-Commander Richard E. Byrd, for his flight on May 9, 1926, to and from the North Pole. Both Lindbergh and Byrd also received the *Medal of Honor* for their feats.

Numerous military recipients of the medal would later earn greater fame in other occupations—several astronauts, actors and politicians (including former President George H. W. Bush) are *Distinguished Flying Cross* holders.

DFC awards could be retroactive to cover notable achievements back until the beginning of World War I. On February 23, 1929, Congress passed special legislation to allow the award of the *DFC* to the Wright brothers for their December 17, 1903 flight. Other civilians who have received the award include Wiley Post, Jacqueline Cochran, Roscoe Turner, Amelia Earhart, and Eugene Ely. Eventually, it was limited to military personnel by an Executive Order issued by President Coolidge.

During World War II the medal's award criteria varied widely depending on the theater of operations, aerial combat, and the missions accomplished. In Europe some bomber crewmembers received it for completing a tour of duty of twenty-five sorties; elsewhere much higher criteria were used.

During wartime, members of the Armed Forces of friendly foreign nations serving with the United States are eligible for the *Distinguished Flying Cross*. It is also given to those who display heroism while working as instructors or students at flying schools.



Air Medal

The *Air Medal* is a military decoration of the United States. The award was created in 1942, and is awarded for meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight.

The *Air Medal* was established by Executive Order 9158, signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, on 11 May 1942. The *Air Medal* was awarded retroactive to 8 September 1939. The medal is awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the Armed Forces of the United States, shall have distinguished himself/herself by meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight.

During World War II the medal's award criteria varied widely depending on the theater of operations, the aircraft flown, and the missions accomplished. In Europe some bomber *crewmembers* received it for five sorties; elsewhere much higher criteria were used.

Awards may be made to recognize single acts of merit or heroism, or for meritorious service. Award of the *Air Medal* is primarily intended to recognize those personnel who are on current crew member or non-crew member flying status which requires them to participate in aerial flight on a regular and frequent basis in the performance of their primary duties. However, it may also be awarded to certain other individuals whose combat duties require regular and frequent flying in other than a passenger status, or individuals who perform a particularly noteworthy act while performing the function of a crew member but who are not on flying status. These individuals must make a discernible contribution to the operational land combat mission or to the mission of the aircraft in flight.

Examples of personnel whose combat duties require them to fly include those in the attack elements of units involved in air-land assaults against an armed enemy and those directly involved in airborne command and control of combat operations. Awards will not be made to individuals who use air transportation solely for the purpose of moving from point to point in a combat zone. Subsequent decorations of the *Air Medal* are denoted in the U.S. Army by *Award Numerals* displayed on the medal and ribbon. The Army originally used *Oak Leaf Clusters*, however changed to numerals during the Vietnam War when the number of *Air Medals* awarded became too large to be annotated on a single ribbon. The Army and the Air Force also awards the *Air Medal* with a *Valor Device* for acts of heroism.

The Secretary of the Air Force approved the award of the "*V*" *Device* for valor to *Air Medals* awarded for heroism effective 21 Oct 2004. It applies to all Air Force members (Active Duty, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard), retirees and veterans, but this change is not retroactive to any earlier date; only decorations approved on or after 21 Oct 2004 are affected by this policy change.

The Air Force does not utilize numerals on the *Air Medal*. Subsequent awards are annotated with the traditional *Oak Leaf Clusters*. Enlisted members are also awarded three points toward promotion.

Variants

The U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps have two types of *Air Medal* awards: "individual" for singular meritorious acts and "strike/flight" for participation in sustained aerial flight operations. *Bronze Strike/Flight Numerals* denote *Strike/Flight Awards*. As of September 27, 2006, *Gold Award Numerals* are used to denote "individual" *Air Medals*. This is a return to the standard used before November 22, 1989. In the interval between November 22, 1989 and September 27, 2006, *Gold* and *Silver Award Stars* denoted subsequent "individual" *Air Medals*. *Gold Stars* were used for the second through the fifth, seventh through tenth awards, and so on. *Silver Stars* were used in lieu of five *Gold Stars*, and denote the sixth and eleventh (and so on) awards. For "individual" *Air Medals*, the *Valor Device* may be authorized.

The United States Coast Guard issues the *Air Medal* with subsequent awards denoted by *Gold* and *Silver Stars*. There are no additional devices authorized on the *Coast Guard Air Medal*.

During World War II, the *Air Medal* was also awarded to members of the Civil Air Patrol that had been participants in that organization's anti-submarine patrol program.



Soldier's Medal

The *Soldier's Medal* is a military award of the United States Army. It was introduced as Section 11 of the Air Corps Act, passed by the Congress of the United States on July 2, 1926. The criteria for the medal are: "The *Soldier's Medal* is awarded to any person of the Armed Forces of the United States or of a friendly foreign nation who, while serving in any capacity with the Army of the United States, distinguished himself or herself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy." (Army Regulation 600-8-22).

The distinguishing criteria for the award of the *Soldier's Medal* as per Army Regulation 600-8-22 states that "The performance must have involved personal hazard or danger and the voluntary risk of life under conditions not involving conflict with an armed enemy. Awards will not be made solely on the basis of having saved a life." It is the highest honor a soldier can receive for an act of valor in a non-combat situation, held to be equal to or greater than the level which would have justified an award of the *Distinguished Flying Cross* had the act occurred in combat. Any American service member who is eligible for retirement pay will receive an increase of 10 percent in retirement pay, if the level of valor was equal to that which would earn the *Distinguished Service Cross*.

The first medals were awarded on October 17, 1927 to John F. Burns and James P. Martin, for heroism during a fire and to James K. Wilson and Cleophas C. Burnett for saving people from drowning.

Notable recipients of the *Soldier's Medal* include Colin Powell, who was awarded the decoration during his second tour in Vietnam (1968-69) when he was injured in a helicopter crash and, despite his wounds, rescued two comrades from the burning wreckage. In 1998 three soldiers were awarded with this medal for their intervention in the My Lai Massacre (1968). They were Hugh Thompson, Jr., Lawrence Colburn and Glenn Andreotta; Andreotta was awarded the decoration posthumously. In 2001, following the terrorist attack on the Pentagon, the U.S. Army issued an unprecedented number of these awards (28), to personnel who risked their own lives to assist their fellow comrades in the wake of the attack.

At least one hundred *Soldier's Medals* have been issued since the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The *Soldier's Medal* is considered to be equivalent to the *Navy and Marine Corps Medal*, the *Airman's Medal*, and the *Coast Guard Medal*.



Navy and Marine Corps Medal

The *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* is the second highest non-combatant medal awarded by the United States Department of the Navy to members of the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps. The decoration was established by an act of Congress on August 7, 1942.

The *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* may be awarded to service members who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy or Marine Corps, distinguish themselves by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy.

Typically, it is awarded for actions involving the risk of one's own life.

During the mid 20th century, the *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* has been awarded instead of the *Silver* or *Gold Lifesaving Medal*, for sea rescues involving risk of life. This is due primarily to the creation of a variety of additional military decorations that are often considered more prestigious than the *Lifesaving Medal*.

The *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* was first bestowed during the Second World War, although the first recipient is unknown. A famous recipient of the *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* was President John F. Kennedy who was awarded the *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* for service as Commanding Officer of a World War II Motor Torpedo Boat PT-109.

The *Navy and Marine Corps Medal* is generally considered the equivalent of the U.S. Army *Soldier's Medal*, the U.S. Air Force *Airman's Medal*, and the *Coast Guard Medal*.

The recipients of the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and the text of the citations issued to each recipient, to the extent of available records, are listed in a Naval database.

Awarded for distinguishing oneself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy. For acts of lifesaving, or attempted lifesaving, it is required that the action be performed at the risk of one's own life.



Airman's Medal

The *Airman's Medal* is a military decoration of the United States Air Force and is awarded to those service members or those of a friendly nation who, while serving in any capacity with the United States Air Force, distinguish themselves by heroic actions, usually at the voluntary risk of life, but not involving actual combat. The saving of a life or the success of the voluntary heroic act is not essential.

The *Airman's Medal* was first created in 1960 and the first recipient of the decoration was Captain John Burger, USAF, who was retroactively awarded the *Airman's Medal* for actions performed in 1959.

According to Air Force Instruction 36-2803, The Secretary of the Air Force, Personnel Council (AFPC) approves or disapproves recommendations for *Airman's Medals* (AmnM) requiring SAF approval and determines upon approval, entitlement to 10 percent increase in retirement pay for the *Airman's Medal* (AmnM) when awarded to enlisted members for extraordinary heroism.

The U.S. Army equivalent of the Airman's Medal is the Soldier's Medal. Between 1947 and 1959, U.S. Air Force members were eligible for the Soldier's Medal since the separate Airman's Medal had not yet been established. The Navy and Marine Corps Medal and the Coast Guard Medal are also considered to be the equivalent decorations for those services.

Awarded for a heroic act, usually at the voluntary risk of his or her life but not involving actual combat



Coast Guard Medal

The *Coast Guard Medal* is a decoration of the United States military that is awarded to any service member who, while serving in any capacity with the United States Coast Guard, distinguishes themselves by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy. For the decoration to be awarded, an individual must have

performed a voluntary act of heroism in the face of great personal danger or of such a magnitude that it stands out distinctly above normal expectations.

The *Coast Guard Medal* was first authorized in 1949, but it was not until 1958 that the medal was actually bestowed. The first recipients of the *Coast Guard Medal* were Petty Officers Third Class Earl Leyda and Raymond Johnson who were awarded the decoration in June 1958. The citation for the *Coast Guard Medal* was for actions performed in August 1957 while attempting to rescue trapped workers from the Oswego Water Works Tunnel, under Lake Ontario, in Oswego, New York.

Additional awards of the *Coast Guard Medal* are annotated by gold award stars. The *Coast Guard Medal* is the equivalent to the Soldier's Medal, Airman's Medal and the *Navy and Marine Corps Medal*.

Awarded for distinguishing oneself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy.



Bronze Star

The *Bronze Star Medal* (or *BSM*) is a United States Armed Forces individual military decoration that may be awarded for bravery, acts of merit, or meritorious service. When awarded for bravery, it is the fourth-highest combat award of the U.S. Armed Forces and the ninth highest military award (including both combat and non-combat awards) in the order of precedence of U.S. military decorations. Officers from the other federal uniformed services are also eligible to receive the award if they are militarized or detailed to serve with a service branch of the armed forces.

The *Bronze Star Medal* was established by Executive Order 9419, 4 February 1944 (superseded by Executive Order 11046, 24 August 1962, as amended by Executive Order 13286, 28 February 2003).

The *Bronze Star Medal* may be awarded by the Secretary of a military department or the Secretary of Homeland Security with regard to the Coast Guard when not operating as a service in the Navy, or by such military commanders, or other appropriate officers as the Secretary concerned may designate, to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, or Coast Guard of the United States, after December 6, 1941, distinguishes, or has distinguished, himself by heroic or meritorious achievement or service, not involving participation in aerial flight:

1. While engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
2. While engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or
3. While serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

The acts of heroism are of a lesser degree than required for the award of the *Silver Star*. The acts of merit or acts of valor must be less than that required for the *Legion of Merit* but must nevertheless have been meritorious and accomplished with distinction. The *Bronze Star Medal* is awarded only to service members in combat who are receiving imminent danger pay.

The award may be made to each member of the Armed Forces of the United States who, after 6 December 1941, was cited in orders or awarded a certificate for exemplary conduct in ground combat against an armed enemy after 7 December 1941. For this purpose, an award of the *Combat Infantryman Badge* or *Combat Medical Badge* is considered as a citation in orders. Documents executed since 4 August 1944 in connection with recommendations for the award of decorations of higher degree than the *Bronze Star Medal* cannot be used as the basis for an award under this paragraph.

The award that eventually became the *Bronze Star Medal* was conceived by Colonel Russell P. "Red" Reeder in 1943, who believed it would aid morale if there was a medal which could be awarded by captains of companies or batteries to deserving people serving under them. Reeder felt the medal should be a ground equivalent of the *Air Medal*, and proposed that the new award be called the "Ground Medal."

The idea eventually rose through the military bureaucracy and gained supporters. General George C. Marshall, in a memorandum to President Franklin D. Roosevelt dated 3 February 1944, wrote:

The fact that the ground troops, Infantry in particular, lead miserable lives of extreme discomfort and are the ones who must close in personal combat with the enemy, makes the maintenance of their morale of great importance. The award of the Air Medal has had an adverse reaction on the ground troops, particularly the Infantry Riflemen who are now suffering the heaviest losses, air or ground, in the Army, and enduring the greatest hardships.

The *Air Medal* had been adopted two years earlier to raise airmen's morale. President Roosevelt authorized the *Bronze Star Medal* by Executive Order 9419 dated 4 February 1944, retroactive to 7 December 1941. This authorization was announced in War Department Bulletin No. 3, dated 10 February 1944.

The Executive Order was amended by President John F. Kennedy, per Executive Order 11046 dated 24 August 1962, to expand the authorization to include those serving with friendly forces. This allowed for awards where U.S. service members might be involved in an armed conflict where the United States was not a belligerent. At the time of the Executive Order, for example, the U.S. was not a belligerent in Vietnam, so U.S. advisers serving with the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces would not have been eligible for the award.

Since the award criteria state that the *Bronze Star Medal* may be awarded to "any person...while serving in any capacity in or with" the U.S. Armed Forces, awards to members of foreign armed services serving with the United States are permitted. Thus, a number of Allied soldiers received the *Bronze Star Medal* in World War II, as well as U.N. soldiers in the Korean War, Vietnamese and allied forces in the Vietnam War, and coalition forces in recent military operations such as the Gulf War, Operation Enduring Freedom and the Iraq War.

A number of *Bronze Stars* with *Valor Device* were awarded to veterans of the Battle of Mogadishu.



Purple Heart

The *Purple Heart* is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those who have been wounded or killed while serving on or after April 5, 1917 with the U.S. military. *The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor* is located in New Windsor, New York. With its forerunner, the *Badge of Military Merit*, which took the form of a heart made of purple cloth, the *Purple Heart* is the oldest award that is still given to members of the U.S. military, the only earlier award being the obsolete *Fidelity Medallion*.

The original *Purple Heart*, designated as the *Badge of Military Merit*, was established by George Washington, then the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, by order from his Newburgh, New York headquarters on August 7, 1782. The actual order includes the phrase, "Let it be known that he who wears the *Military Order of the Purple Heart* has given of his blood in the defense of his homeland and shall forever be revered by his fellow countrymen." *The Badge of Military Merit* was only awarded to three Revolutionary

War soldiers and from then on as its legend grew, so did its appearance. Although never abolished, the award of the badge was not proposed again officially until after World War I.

On October 10, 1927, Army Chief of Staff General Charles Pelot Summerall directed that a draft bill be sent to Congress "to revive the *Badge of Military Merit*". The bill was withdrawn and action on the case ceased on January 3, 1928, but the office of the Adjutant General was instructed to file all materials collected for possible future use. A number of private interests sought to have the medal reinstated in the Army. One of these was the board of directors of the Fort Ticonderoga Museum in Ticonderoga, New York.

On January 7, 1931, Summerall's successor, General Douglas MacArthur, confidentially reopened work on a new design, involving the Washington Commission of Fine Arts. This new design was issued on the bicentennial of George Washington's birth. Elizabeth Will, an Army heraldic specialist in the Office of the Quartermaster General, was named to redesign the newly revived medal, which became known as the *Purple Heart*. Using general specifications provided to her, Will created the design sketch for the present medal of the *Purple Heart*. Her obituary, in the February 8, 1975 edition of the *Washington Post* newspaper, reflects her many contributions to military heraldry.



Sign on Interstate 35 designating *the Purple Heart Trail*.

The Commission of Fine Arts solicited plaster models from three leading sculptors for the medal, selecting that of John R. Sinnock of the Philadelphia Mint in May 1931. By Executive Order of the President of the United States, the *Purple Heart* was revived on the 200th Anniversary of George Washington's birth, out of respect to his memory and military achievements, by War Department General Orders No. 3, dated February 22, 1932. The *Purple Heart* award is a heart-shaped medal within a gold border, 1 3/8 inches (35 mm) wide, containing a profile of General George Washington. Above the heart appears a shield of the coat of arms of George Washington (a white shield with two red bars and three red stars in chief) between sprays of green leaves. The reverse consists of a raised bronze heart with the words FOR MILITARY MERIT below the coat of

arms and leaves. The ribbon is 1 and 3/8 inches (35 mm) wide and consists of the following stripes: 1/8 inch (3 mm) white 67101; 1 1/8 inches (29 mm) purple 67115; and 1/8 inch (3 mm) white 67101. As with other combat medals, multiple awards are denoted by *Award Stars* for the Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard, or *Oak Leaf Clusters* for the Army and Air Force.

The criteria were announced in a War Department circular dated February 22, 1932 and authorized award to soldiers, upon their request, who had been awarded the *Meritorious Service Citation Certificate*, *Army Wound Ribbon*, or were authorized to wear *Wound Chevrons* subsequent to April 5, 1917, the day before the United States entered World War I. The first *Purple Heart* was awarded to MacArthur. During the early period of American involvement in World War II (December 7, 1941 – September 22, 1943), the *Purple Heart* was awarded both for wounds received in action against the enemy and for meritorious performance of duty. With the establishment of the *Legion of Merit*, by an Act of Congress, the practice of awarding the *Purple Heart* for meritorious service was discontinued. By Executive Order 9277, dated December 3, 1942, the decoration was extended to be applicable to all services and the order required that regulations of the Services be uniform in application as far as practicable. This executive order also authorized the award only for wounds received. AR 600-45, dated September 22, 1943, and May 3, 1944 identify circumstances required to meet in order to be eligible for the *Purple Heart* for military and civilian personnel during World War II era.

Executive Order 10409, dated February 12, 1952, revised authorizations to include the Service Secretaries subject to approval of the Secretary of Defense. Executive Order 11016, dated April 25, 1962, included provisions for posthumous award of the *Purple Heart*. Executive Order 12464, dated February 23, 1984, authorized award of the *Purple Heart* as a result of terrorist attacks or while serving as part of a peacekeeping force subsequent to March 28, 1973.

The Senate approved an amendment to the 1985 Defense Authorization Bill on June 13, 1985 which changed the precedence from immediately above the *Good Conduct Medal* to immediately above the *Meritorious Service Medals*. Public Law 99-145 authorized the award for wounds received as a result of friendly fire. Public Law 104-106 expanded the eligibility date, authorizing award of the *Purple Heart* to a former prisoner of war who was wounded before April 25, 1962. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998 (Public Law 105-85) changed the criteria to delete authorization for award of the *Purple Heart Medal* to any civilian national of the United States while serving under competent authority in any capacity with the Armed Forces. This change was effective May 18, 1998.

During World War II, nearly 500,000 *Purple Heart Medals* were manufactured in anticipation of the estimated casualties resulting from the planned Allied invasion of Japan. To the present date, total combined American military casualties of the sixty-five years following the end of World War II, including the Korean and Vietnam Wars, have not exceeded that number. In 2003, there were still 120,000 of these *Purple Heart Medals* in stock. There are so many in surplus that combat units in Iraq and Afghanistan are able to keep *Purple Heart Medals* on-hand for immediate award to wounded soldiers in the field.

The "History" section of the November 2009 edition of *National Geographic* estimated the number of *Purple Heart Medals* given as below. Above the estimates, the text reads, "Any tally of *Purple Heart Medals* is an estimate. Awards are often given during conflict; records aren't always exact."

- World War I: 320,518
- World War II: 1,076,245
- Korean War: 118,650
- Vietnam War: 351,794
- Persian Gulf War: 607
- Afghanistan War: 7,027 (as of 5 June 2010)
- Iraq War: 35,321 (as of 5 June 2010)

Per United States Army regulations, the *Purple Heart* is awarded in the name of the President of the United States to any member of the Armed Forces of the United States who, while serving under competent authority in any capacity with one of the U.S. Armed Services after April 5, 1917, has been wounded or killed, or who has died after being wounded. Specific examples of services which warrant the *Purple Heart* include any action against an enemy of the United States; any action with an opposing armed force of a foreign country in which the Armed Forces of the United States are or have been engaged; while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party; as a result of an act of any such enemy of opposing armed forces; or as the result of an act of any hostile foreign force. After 28 March 1973, as a result of an international terrorist attack against the United States or a foreign nation friendly to the United States, recognized as such an attack by the Secretary of the Army, or jointly by the Secretaries of the separate armed services concerned if persons from more than one service are wounded in the attack. After 28 March 1973, as a result of military operations while serving outside the territory of the United States as part of a peacekeeping force.

The *Purple Heart* differs from all other decorations in that an individual is not "recommended" for the decoration; rather he or she is entitled to it upon meeting specific criteria. A *Purple Heart* is authorized for the first wound suffered under conditions indicated

above, but for each subsequent award an *Oak Leaf Cluster* is awarded. Not more than one award will be made for more than one wound or injury received at the same instant. A "wound" is defined as an injury to any part of the body from an outside force or agent sustained under one or more of the conditions listed above. A physical lesion is not required; however, the wound for which the award is made must have required treatment by a medical officer and records of medical treatment for wounds or injuries received in action must have been made a matter of official record. When contemplating an award of this decoration, the key issue that commanders must take into consideration is the degree to which the enemy caused the injury. The fact that the proposed recipient was participating in direct or indirect combat operations is a necessary prerequisite, but is not sole justification for award. The Purple Heart is not awarded for non-combatative injuries.

Enemy-related injuries which justify the award of the *Purple Heart* include injury caused by enemy bullet, shrapnel, or other projectile created by enemy action; injury caused by enemy placed land mine, naval mine, or trap; injury caused by enemy released chemical, biological, or nuclear agent; injury caused by vehicle or aircraft accident resulting from enemy fire; concussion injuries caused as a result of enemy generated explosions.

Injuries or wounds which do not qualify for award of the *Purple Heart* include frostbite or trench foot injuries; heat stroke; food poisoning not caused by enemy agents; chemical, biological, or nuclear agents not released by the enemy; battle fatigue; disease not directly caused by enemy agents; accidents, to include explosive, aircraft, vehicular, and other accidental wounding not related to or caused by enemy action; self-inflicted wounds (e.g., a soldier accidentally fires their own gun and the bullet strikes their leg), except when in the heat of battle, and not involving gross negligence; post-traumatic stress disorders; and jump injuries not caused by enemy action.

It is not intended that such a strict interpretation of the requirement for the wound or injury to be caused by direct result of hostile action be taken that it would preclude the award being made to deserving personnel. Commanders must also take into consideration the circumstances surrounding an injury, even if it appears to meet the criteria. In the case of an individual injured while making a parachute landing from an aircraft that had been brought down by enemy fire; or, an individual injured as a result of a vehicle accident caused by enemy fire, the decision will be made in favor of the individual and the award will be made. As well, individuals wounded or killed as a result of "friendly fire" in the "heat of battle" will be awarded the *Purple Heart* as long as the "friendly" projectile or agent was released with the full intent of inflicting damage or destroying enemy troops or equipment. Individuals injured as a result of their own negligence, such as by driving or walking through an unauthorized area known to have been mined or placed off limits or searching for or picking up unexploded munitions as war souvenirs, will not be awarded the *Purple Heart* as they clearly were not injured as a result of enemy action, but rather by their own negligence.

From 1942 to 1997, civilians serving or closely affiliated with the armed forces, as government employees, Red Cross workers, war correspondents and the like, were eligible to receive the *Purple Heart*. About 100 men and women received the award, the most famous being newspaperman Ernie Pyle, who was awarded a posthumous *Army Purple Heart* after being killed by Japanese machine gun fire in 1945.

The most recent *Purple Heart Medals* presented to civilians occurred after the terrorist attacks at Khobar Towers, Saudi Arabia, in 1996, about 40 U.S. civil service employees received the award for their injuries.

In 1997, however, at the urging of the *Military Order of the Purple Heart*, Congress passed legislation prohibiting future awards of the Purple Heart to civilians. Today, the *Purple Heart* is only for those men and women in uniform. Civilians who are killed or wounded as a result of hostile action now receive the new *Defense of Freedom Medal*, created shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The Defense Superior Service Medal and The Legion of Merit are typically awarded to Senior Military Officers. The Legion of Merit is also awarded to Military and Political figures of Foreign Governments.



Defense Superior Service Medal

The **Defense Superior Service Medal** is a senior United States military decoration of the Department of Defense, awarded to members of the United States armed forces who perform "superior meritorious service in a position of significant responsibility."

The decoration is most often presented to senior officers in the flag and general officer grades. The medal is presented in the name of the Secretary of Defense and was established by President Gerald R. Ford on February 6, 1976 in Executive Order 11904. It is somewhat analogous to the *Legion of Merit*, albeit awarded for service in a "joint" duty capacity.



Legion of Merit

The *Legion of Merit* is a military decoration of the United States armed forces that is awarded for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements. The decoration is issued both to United States military personnel and to military and political figures of foreign governments. The *Legion of Merit (Commander Degree)* is one of only two United States military decorations to be issued as a neck order (the other being the *Medal of Honor*) and the only United States decoration which may be issued in award degrees (much like an order of chivalry or certain *Orders of Merit*).

The *Legion of Merit* is sixth in the order of precedence of U.S. military decorations, and is worn after the *Defense Superior Service Medal* and before the *Distinguished Flying Cross*. In contemporary use in the U.S. armed forces, the *Legion of Merit* is typically awarded to Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force General Officers and Colonels, and Navy and Coast Guard Flag Officers and Captains occupying command or very senior staff positions in their respective services. It may also be awarded to officers of lesser rank and senior enlisted personnel, but these instances are less frequent and circumstances vary by service. The medal can be considered as "points" in some promotion systems, such as the Air Force, where it is counted as 7 points (out of a possible 25 points for decorations).

The *Degrees of Chief Commander, Commander, Officer, and Legionnaire* are awarded only to members of armed forces of foreign nations under the criteria outlined in US Army Regulation 672-7 and is based on the relative rank or position of the recipient as follows:

- *Chief Commander*: Chief of State or Head of Government. However this degree was awarded by President Roosevelt to some Allied World War II theater commanders usually for joint amphibious landings or invasions. The President had this power under Executive Order 9260 of 29 October 1942 paragraph 3b.[\[3\]](#)
- *Commander*: Equivalent of a U.S. military Chief of Staff or higher position but not to Chief of State.
- *Officer*: General or Flag Officer below the equivalent of a U.S. military Chief of Staff; Colonel or equivalent rank for service in assignments equivalent to those normally held by a General or Flag Officer in U.S. military service; or Military Attaches.
- *Legionnaire*: All recipients not included above.
- When the *Legion of Merit* is awarded to members of the Armed Forces of the United States it is awarded without reference to degree. The criteria are "for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements". Additional awards of the *Legion of Merit* are denoted by *Oak Leaf Clusters*, in the Army and Air Force, and by *Award Stars* in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The sea services also permit the wearing of the *Valor Device* on the *Legion of Merit*, while the Army and Air Force do not.
- The performance must have been such as to merit recognition of key individuals for service rendered in a clearly exceptional manner.
- Performance of duties normal to the grade, branch, specialty or assignment, and experience of an individual is not an adequate basis for this award.
- For service not related to actual war the term "key individual" applies to a narrower range of positions than in time of war and requires evidence of significant achievement.
- In peacetime, service should be in the nature of a special requirement or of an extremely difficult duty performed in an unprecedented and clearly exceptional manner.
- However, justification of the award may accrue by virtue of exceptionally meritorious service in a succession of important positions.
- The degrees and the design of the decoration were clearly influenced by the French Légion d'honneur.

Appearance



- The *Chief Commander Degree* of the *Legion of Merit Medal* is, on a wreath of green laurel joined at the bottom by a gold bow-knot (rosette), a domed five-pointed white star bordered crimson, points reversed with v-shaped extremities tipped with a gold ball. In the center, a blue disk encircled by gold clouds, with 13 white stars arranged in the pattern that appears on the *United States Coat of Arms*. Between each point, within the wreath are crossed arrows pointing outwards. The overall width is 2 15/16 inches (75 mm). The words "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" are engraved in the center of the reverse. A miniature of the decoration in gold on a horizontal gold bar is worn on the service ribbon.
- The *Commander Degree* of the *Legion of Merit Medal* is, on a wreath of green laurel joined at the bottom by a gold bow-knot (rosette), a five-pointed white star bordered crimson, points reversed with v-shaped extremities tipped with a gold ball. In the center, a blue disk encircled by gold clouds, with 13 white stars arranged in the pattern that appears on the *United States Coat of Arms*. Between each star point, within the wreath, are crossed arrows pointing outwards. The overall width is 2 1/4 inches (57 mm). A gold laurel wreath in the v-shaped angle at the top connects an oval suspension ring to the neck ribbon that is 1 15/16 inches (49 mm) in width. The reverse of the five-pointed star is enameled in white, and the border is crimson. In the center, a disk for engraving the name of the recipient surrounded by the words "ANNUIT COEPTIS MDCCLXXXII." An outer scroll contains the words "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA." A miniature of the decoration in silver on a horizontal silver bar is worn on the service ribbon.
- The neck ribbon for the *Degree of Commander* is 1 15/16 inches (49 mm) wide and consists of the following stripes: 1/16 inch (2 mm) white 67101; center 1 13/16 inches (46 mm) crimson and 1/16 inch (2 mm) white.
- The *Officer Degree* of the *Legion of Merit Medal* is similar to the *Degree of Commander* except the overall width is 1 7/8 inches (48 mm) and the pendant has a suspension ring instead of the wreath for attaching the ribbon. A gold replica of the medal, 3/4 inch (19 mm) wide, is centered on the suspension ribbon.
- The *Legionnaire Degree* of the *Legion of Merit Medal* and the *Legion of Merit Medal* issued to U.S. personnel is the same as the degree of *Officer*, except the suspension ribbon does not have the medal replica.
- The ribbon for all of the decorations is 1 3/8 inches (35 mm) wide and consists of the following stripes: 1/16 inch (2 mm) white; center 1/4 inches (32 mm) crimson; and 1/16 inch (2 mm) white. The reverse of all of the medals has the motto taken from the Great Seal of the United States "ANNUIT COEPTIS" (He (God) Has Favored Our Undertakings) and the date "MDCCLXXXII" (1782), which is the date of America's first decoration, the Badge of Military Merit, now known as the Purple Heart. The ribbon design also follows the pattern of the Purple Heart ribbon.



Valor Device

The **Valor Device** (also known as a *Combat Distinguishing Device*, "*V*" *Device*, and *Combat "V"*) is an award of the United States military which is a bronze attachment to certain medals to indicate that it was **received for valor**. The *Device* serves as a clarification for medals that are awarded for both **Valor** (bravery in the face of the enemy), and **Merit** (an extraordinary job under non-combat conditions).

The *Valor Device* denotes those individuals who were awarded a decoration in recognition of a valorous act performed during direct combat with an enemy force. It may also denote an accomplishment of a heroic nature in direct support of operations against an enemy force. Generally, the *Valor Device* is for specific heroic acts during or supporting direct combat with the enemy. The award must also be personally recommended by a superior and is not an automatic decoration or upgrade.

An example of medals which are authorized the *Valor Device* are the *Bronze Star*, *Commendation Medals*, the *Air Medal*, and certain unit awards. The "*V*" *Device* is also awarded under certain circumstances to the *Legion of Merit* and the military *Achievement Medals* depending on the branch of military service making the award.

Awards which are regularly bestowed for valor, such as the *Medal of Honor*, *Distinguished Service Cross*, *Navy Cross*, *Air Force Cross* and *Silver Star* are never awarded with the *Valor Device* since valor is indicated by the award itself.

The *Valor Device* is worn as a single, one-time decoration only. While a service member may be cited for valor several times in a career, and be awarded numerous citations authorizing the *Valor Device*, no more than one valor device may be worn on the same decoration at any one time. *Valor Devices* awarded for different decorations may be worn simultaneously so long as no more than one device is displayed on each particular award.

The *Valor Device* may be worn on a decoration alongside other devices, particularly *Oak Leaf Clusters* or *Stars* indicating multiple awards. As an example, a serviceman who earns *Bronze Star Medal* for service on two different occasions, and a *Bronze Star Medal (BSM)* with *Valor Device* on a third occasion, would wear the *BSM* with two *Oak Leaf Clusters* and a "*V*." In such a case, the "*V*" is in the position of honor, on the viewer's left, its own right. (That is, inboard for awards on the left breast)

The first *Valor Devices* were authorized in 1944 as an attachment to the *Bronze Star*. Since then, the *Valor device* is authorized to medals which are awarded both for combat and non-combat actions. This is to distinguish those who were awarded a decoration through combat, compared to those who were awarded a medal for support roles or meritorious service.

In 1996, the *Valor Device* gained public attention after Admiral Jeremy Boorda committed suicide, media reports stated that the suicide was caused by an investigation into whether he had worn the *Valor device* without authority. Boorda had placed the *Valor Device* on his *Navy Commendation* and *Navy Achievement Medal* for services rendered during the Vietnam War as an afloat Commanding Officer. Although some indications were that Boorda was authorized to wear them, the *Board for Correction of Naval Records* ultimately determined that he was not.



An **Oak Leaf Cluster** is a common device which is placed on U.S. military awards and decorations (and those of some other nations) to denote those who have received more than one bestowal of a particular decoration. The number of *Oak Leaf Clusters* typically indicates the number of subsequent awards of the decoration.



A **Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster** is worn to denote award of the second and subsequent awards of the same decoration. A **Silver Oak Leaf Cluster** is worn instead of five *Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters*.

Both *Oak Leaf Clusters*, regardless of medal material, come in two sizes: 0.41 inch (1.03 cm) long for the full size suspension ribbon, and 0.31 inch (0.79 cm) long for the service ribbon bar. The design for each size and material is the same, a twig of four oak leaves with three acorns on the stem



Award Numerals are decorations of the United States military which are attachments to certain ribbons and awards. *Award Numerals* denote repeated decorations of the

same award and appear as Arabic numerals on a medal or ribbon. *Award Numerals* are very similar to the *Strike/Flight Numerals* of the U.S. Navy and United States Marines.

The decorations that use award numerals are as follows:

- *Air Medal*
- *NCO Professional Development Ribbon*
- *Army Overseas Service Ribbon*
- *Army Reserve Components Overseas Training Ribbon*
- *Armed Forces Reserve Medal* (not pictured)

With the exception of the *Air Medal* and *Armed Forces Reserve Medal*, the United States Army is the only branch of service to currently use *Award Numerals* on decorations. During World War II, some construction battalions issued the *Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal* with *Award Numerals* instead of *Service Stars*.



Strike/Flight Numerals

Air Medal ribbon with 2 *Award Stars*, *Valor Device* and *Strike/Flight Numeral 3*.

Strike/Flight Numerals are decorations of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps which are displayed on the *Air Medal* to denote the total number of *Strike/Flight Awards*. *Strike/Flight Numerals* are Arabic numerals five-sixteenths of an inch in height.

Only personnel under flight orders are eligible to receive the *Strike/Flight Award* of an *Air Medal*. Officers in the rank of Captain (or Colonel in the Marine Corps) are not eligible for award of the *Air Medal* on a strike/flight basis unless the sorties they fly are required in the performance of their regular duties.

Strikes are sorties that deliver ordnance against the enemy, land or evacuate personnel in an assault, or in which personnel are engaged in search and rescue operations. The distinguishing feature of a strike is that it encounters enemy opposition. Flights are sorties that deliver ordnance against the enemy, land or evacuate personnel in an assault, or in which personnel are engaged in search and rescue operations. The distinguishing feature of a flight is that although it takes place in a nominally hostile environment, it does not encounter enemy opposition.

Strike/Flight Numerals are very similar to *Award Numerals*, used by the U.S. Army.



An **Award Star** is a decoration issued to personnel of the United States Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard in lieu of multiple awards of the same award. An *Award Star* is very similar to an *Oak Leaf Cluster*, which serves the same purpose in the United States Army and United States Air Force. *Award Stars* are sometimes referred to as *Gold Stars* and *Silver Stars* (not to be confused with the *Silver Star Medal*).

Award Stars are issued in two degrees, gold and silver, with silver considered the higher degree as is the tradition in the U.S. military. An *Award Star* is issued in lieu of multiple awards of the same decoration with the first award star issued for the second award of the decoration. For instance, if a service member received three *Achievement Medals*, their service record would reflect the *Achievement Medal* with two **Gold Award Stars**.

Silver Award Stars are issued in lieu of five gold, meaning that a *Silver Star* is provided for the 6th, 11th, 16th and so on, for subsequent awards of a decoration. There are no higher degrees of *Award Stars* authorized in lieu of five *Silver Award Stars*.

It is a common misunderstanding to mistake the *Silver Award Star* for the *Silver Star Medal*, which is an entirely different decoration.

Award Stars are only issued for individual medals which are awarded for combat or meritorious actions. They are not issued for *Service Medals*, which receive *Service Stars*.



A **Service Star**, also referred to as a battle star, campaign star, or engagement star, is an attachment to a United States military decoration which denotes participation in military campaigns or multiple bestowals of the same award. *Service Stars* are typically issued for campaign medals, service medals, ribbon awards, and certain military badges. *Service Stars* are different from award stars, which are issued for multiple awards of meritorious and combat decorations.

The United States military issues *Bronze* and *Silver Service Stars*, with a *Silver Service Star* issued in lieu of five bronze. Use as a Campaign star: For instance, six campaigns, served on a campaign medal, would be annotated by one *Silver* and one *Bronze Service Star*. In some situations (e.g., the *Southwest Asia Service Medal*, which is a campaign medal/ribbon), each recipient is entitled to at least one campaign star. Thus, a *Southwest Asia Service Medal* without at least one *Bronze Star* would be inappropriate.

Use as a Service star: For instance, three awards of a *Sea Service Ribbon* would be annotated by the ribbon with two *Bronze Service Stars*. In some situations, *Service Stars* are only issued after the second award of a decoration.

The United States Army also occasionally issues *Award Numerals* or *Oak Leaf Clusters*, instead of *Service Stars*, to denote multiple awards of certain ribbon decorations. In addition to *Award Numerals*, the United States Army uses the same *Gold Award Star* that is worn on many Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard decorations to denote the tenth and final award of the *Army Sea Duty Ribbon*. *Bronze Service Stars* are also used to denote combat jumps on the *Jump Wings*.

Service Stars issued for actions in which a United States Navy vessel participated are also placed on *Campaign Streamers*, which are affixed to the U.S. Navy Flag. The regulations for this originated in 1942, which defined naval campaign areas and designated engagements. Participation in such engagements, by ships and by individuals, was then denoted by *Service Stars*. The United States Army followed a very similar practice with ground campaigns and battle engagements.

A common point of confusion is to confuse *Bronze* and *Silver Service Stars* with the *Silver Star* and *Bronze Star*. The main difference between the two is that the *Bronze* and *Silver Star Medals* are individual decorations while *Service Stars* are worn on awards and are not individual decorations or medals.