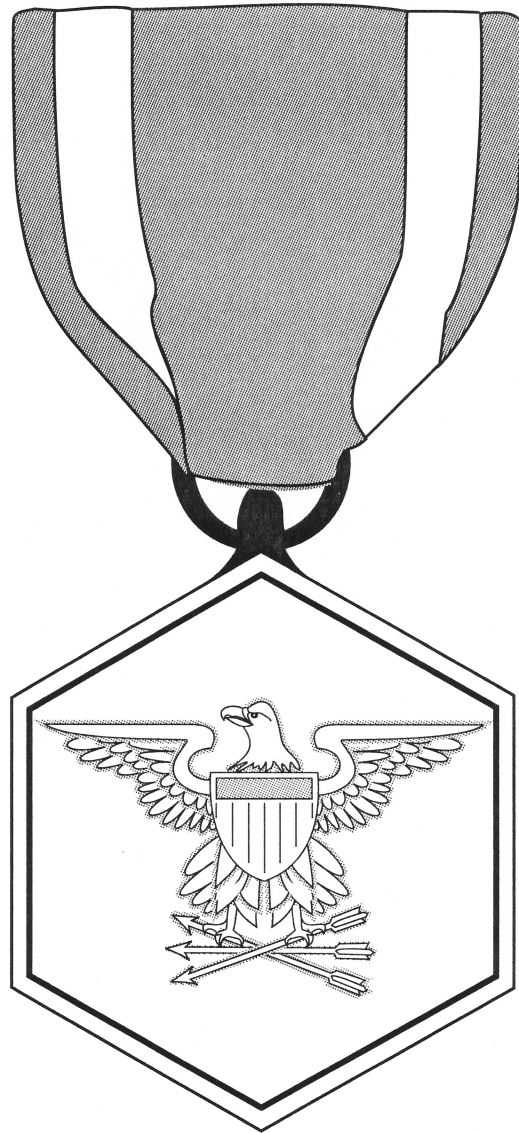


# *Detours and Potholes on the Road to Glory*

A Medallic History of Our Country



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A glance today at the dress uniform of a sailor, Marine, soldier or airman can give one a glimpse into the career and accomplishments of that man or woman, with the service ribbons often serving as a road map for tracing and interpreting years of faithful service.

On close examination, the medals themselves provide an image of a token of appreciation from a grateful nation and often are items of expert craftsmanship that are rich symbolism.

But such has not always been the case. At one time, holders of such decorations were banned from holding public office, many were beheaded during the French Revolution and in more than one instance, the careless design of a medal or service ribbon has caused national embarrassment and costly reissues.

This paper will attempt to explore the human side of the evolution of our country's decorations and service medals.

In today's military, we speak of a "pyramid of honor" with our highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor, occupying the pinnacle and decorations noting lesser valor or meritorious service falling below and in a wider spectrum beneath the Medal of Honor. But again, such has not always been the case and the present traditions and customs date back only to the early 1900s.

The Revolutionary War was fought on physical and philosophical battlegrounds, some battles against an armed enemy and some battles against the trappings of nobility. Little formal recognition went to the individual sailor and Marine of the Revolution, due in part to the loose organization of the federal forces and the predominance of state militia-type organizations. Decorations, too, were considered to be the trappings of nobility and the democratic fervor of the period had no room for royalty or anything associated with it.

Although General George Washington was sensitive to this republican mood, at his insistence, one of the country's most enduring symbols of personal valor was created. Washington's "Badge of Military Merit," a small embroidered purple heart, was awarded to three Connecticut militiamen in August 1782.

In authorizing the award, the General Order read, "The General, ever desirous to cherish a virtuous ambition in his soldiers, as well as to foster and encourage every species of Military Merit, directs that whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings, over his left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding. Not only instances of unusual gallantry but also of extraordinary fidelity and essential service in any way shall meet with a due reward."

Although Washington specified that the award was to be a permanent one, it quietly fell into obscurity and disuse after the Revolutionary War. Although that badge and the 1780s equivalent of service stripes or hashmarks were the only uniform items linked today to the Revolutionary War, an unofficial movement is worth noting.

The Continental Congress was to renege on payments to officers in the Continental Army and Navy, taking many to the brink of bankruptcy and making paupers of their many widows and orphans. Thus, with the dissolution of the Army and Navy in 1783, the former officers banded together to support one another and formed the Society of the Cincinnati, our country's oldest patriotic military organization. Their membership badge was the American eagle suspended from a powder blue-and-white ribbon symbolizing the American-French alliance that had wrought victory in the war, and the design was undertaken by Maj. Pierre L'Enfant, the temperamental French engineer who designed the layout of the city of Washington.

The insistence that membership in the Society also extend on a hereditary basis to members' heirs and the relatively exclusiveness of membership drew the ire of the more liberal elements in the former colonies — and chiefly among those who had not served in the military — who viewed the group as suspect, harking back to empire and to orders of nobility. Consequently, membership was outlawed in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and in North Carolina, members were threatened with

disenfranchisement. An even more drastic fate awaited those members of the French Army and Navy who wore the distinctive eagle of the Cincinnati. During the French Revolution, many literally lost their heads in the violent move against monarchy.

For most of the next century, military tunics were to be bare of decorations and service medals and any mention in Congress of authorizing such tokens of service would fail, although unrestricted striking of medals by veterans organizations and some states would yield colorful though inconsistent recognition of service.

It took brother turning against brother in the American Civil War and the nationwide mobilization of men to provide the atmosphere where recognition through medals was deemed appropriate.

The Navy and Marine Corps' Medal of Honor is our country's oldest continuously awarded decoration even though its appearance and award criteria has changed markedly since it was created for enlisted men by Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles on Dec. 16, 1861.

The timeless design is one firmly rooted in the War Between the States. Crafted by artist Christian Schussel, the central motif is that of an allegory in which Columbia, in the form of goddess Minerva uses the shield of the republic to put down the figure of discord, plainly a reference to the unfolding split in our nation. The design is encircled by 38 stars, representing the states of the Union at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War. The medal originally was to be struck from the bronze of captured Confederate cannons.

Curiously, the medal originally was authorized only for enlisted men and was authorized only for the duration of the Civil War, provisions which were to change by a Congress moving towards a war footing.

Army regulations were changed in 1862 to permit commissioned officers to earn the medal. The Navy and Marine Corps, however, waited until 1915 to change its eligibility requirements.

The Indian Wars from the late 1860s to the 1890s produced no new medals, although

award of the Medal of Honor was extended through this period sporting a distinctively redesigned ribbon.

The Spanish-American War proved to be a pivotal age for this country as overseas possessions and influence, a powerful, well-equipped Army and Navy and a newfound industrial might made the country a power with which to be reckoned.

When Admiral George Dewey's cruisers destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay, an adoring nation showered his gun crews with honors, presented him with a jeweled sword and ordered a commemorative medal struck for every officer, seaman and Marine who participated in the battle.

And although Congress clearly labeled these as commemorative medals, they were not your customary tokens struck by the Mint between shifts of stamping out quarters and half dollars. Instead, they were crafted by the New York jewelry firm of Tiffany and Co. and were designed by the renowned sculptor Daniel Chester French who later would achieve fame as sculptor of the statue of the seated Lincoln in Washington's Lincoln Memorial. Expeditions in the Caribbean under Admiral William Sampson also were noted with the issuance of the Naval West Indies Campaign Medal.

The medals of the Spanish-American War perhaps served as a stimulus for consideration of servicewide medals honoring other campaigns of the military but the curious resistance of Congress proved a barrier that the top military staffs were not interested in broaching. It was then-president Theodore Roosevelt, a great booster of the military, who had a go-around in mind, though.

Why not, it was proposed, simply call them "badges" rather than "medals." Officials in each service had the authority to approve and issue uniform items such as badges but it would take, literally, an act of congress to authorize a medal.

Consequently, the U.S. Army in 1905 announced its first five campaign badges, available to active duty and Regular Army retirees for service in the Civil War, Indian Wars, Boxer Rebellion, the Spanish-American

War and the Philippine Insurrection. Three years later, the Navy and Marine Corps followed suit, issuing an equal number. The fly in the ointment in this arrangement was that even though the services fought side-by-side in the same campaign, but interservice coordination was such that entirely different medals were issued for the same service, depending on the service to which one belonged.

Not only that, but the Spanish government — once again on good terms with the United States eight years after their humiliating defeat in the Spanish American War — took great offense at the Navy's choice of colors for the Spanish and West Indies campaign medals, the colors chosen being those of the Spanish flag.

The admirals beat a hasty retreat, soliciting the return of the red-and-yellow ribboned medals from retirees and active duty seamen and Marines, replacing the politically incorrect medallions with a more sanitary blue-and-gold version. Hundreds, though, never were exchanged and the appearance of those ribbons in a collection today causes students of military history to shake their heads.

The Medals of Honor of the Army and Navy began at separate times, have separate designs and their award criteria was markedly different through their first half-century of award — so different that they almost could have been considered separate awards. The Navy Medal of Honor as often as not was given for non-combat heroism and award of the Army Medal of Honor was so abused that a review board in 1916 rescinded the award of 911 Army Medals of Honor.

The nation's entry into World War I presented America's military with another "first" — this being the close association on the battlefield with allied armies, most from European powers with long-standing traditions in the wearing and granting of orders and medals and the common custom of bestowing awards on members of allied forces.

Gen. John J. Pershing was quick to identify the dilemma of not having a comparable award to grant allied soldiers on the level of, say, the French Croix de Guerre and cabled Washington

advising them to consider the creation of a war cross-type decoration that was of a stature less than the Medal of Honor. The Camouflage Section in Washington was quickly put to work designing a Distinguished Service Cross and 100 copies were shipped by sea to Pershing for his personal presentation.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the nation's National Sculpture Society, tasked at that time with approving designs of military insignia and badges, blew the whistle and said that the design of the Distinguished Service medal, with its four arms encrusted with oak leaves, was without artistic merit and would have to be redrawn to receive the panel's endorsement. The Army complied, but the 100 original designs shipped to Pershing already adorned the breasts of deserving soldiers and no attempt was made to exchange them with the new simplified design.

At the same time, the War Department developed a Distinguished Service Medal for exceptional non-combat meritorious service. This, then, was the defining moment in the creation of our "pyramid of honor." Until this date, we had the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Cross. With the development of the Distinguished Service Medal, the Medal of Honor occupies the pinnacle of the pyramid and decorations noting lesser valor or meritorious service fall below and in a wider span beneath the Medal of Honor.

The Navy was somewhat more conservative and slower in initiating its own awards system. The Navy Cross was developed in the closing days of World War I along with a Navy Distinguished Service Medal.

Interestingly, the precedence of the two medals was opposite that which we know today, with the Navy Distinguished Service Medal ranking directly beneath the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross ranking two pegs below the same medal. It was not until 1942 that this order was reversed and stands today.

The Navy's tardiness in adopting a number-two ranking medal for heroism created the awkward situation where World War I Marines serving under Army command received the

Army's Distinguished Service Cross and often automatically received the Navy Cross as well.

The Navy Cross was designed by James Earl Frasier, the same artist who created the buffalo nickel. Frasier also designed the original Distinguished Service Medal and, like the earlier Army incident, its design was changed after a production run of 100 or so medals and the prototype of competing sculptor Paul Manship substituted.

There was an organized effort to recognize the several million men and women who served the Allied cause during World War I with the creation of an Interallied Victory Commission which established guidelines for each country's victory medal, but left critical design elements up to the 14 Allied countries.

[NOTE: Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, France, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Japan, Philippines, Portugal, Rumania, Siam, U.S. were the Allied and Associated Nations.]

The medal itself was to have a ribbon representing a double rainbow. The medal was to be bronze, 36 mm in diameter with an image of winged victory or an angel on its face and the names or coats of arms of the various allied nations on its reverse. Beyond that, the awarding criteria and finished design was the responsibility of the participating nation.

What fertile ground these regulations plowed for the various allied nations. Neither Great Britain nor France were about to share the victory with other nations and simply inscribed the phrase "the Great War for Civilization" on the back. Neither Japan nor Siam's religion's embraced the concept of an angel and instead they substituted a Samurai warrior and Buddhist goddess, respectively, on the front of their medals. Italy had the image of a female riding a chariot pulled by a pride of lions on its medal and I'm still not quite sure what Greece had in mind in its design.

In ensuing years, acting on the precedent of Cuba's request for U.S. aid, as well as the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary, several Latin American countries sought our assistance in quelling internal strife and insurrection. The Navy and Marines were

the force invariably called upon due to their ability to respond quickly and land forces in critical areas. For such actions, the Nicaraguan Campaign Medal was authorized in 1913 as well as the two Haitian Campaign Medals in 1915 and 1919-20. Our landing forces in the Dominican Republic received the Dominican Campaign Medal for their services in 1916.

When trouble in Nicaragua once again flared in 1926, Marines once more were sent to protect American interests and they received the Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal for service between 1926 and 1933.

Our "China Sailors" and "Horse Marines" serving in Peking, Shanghai and aboard gunboats in the Valley of the Yangtze River in the late 1920s and 30s were afforded recognition in what was envisioned to be the Yangtze Campaign Medal, which was to feature in its design a Chinese temple. The Navy's unveiling of the rough sketch and name, however, touched off a whirlwind of diplomatic scorn about the very idea of portraying a sacred temple on a military medal and the nerve of the U.S. describing the Chinese incursion as a military "campaign."

Bowing to a State Department request, the Navy changed the proposed medal's nomenclature to the "Yangtze Service Medal," and replaced the temple design with that of a typical Chinese junk.

Scores of other expeditions were sent as far as Egypt, Hawaii and Argentina during this era as American influence and its citizenry spread worldwide. Because of the frequency of these forays, the Marines developed their Expeditionary Ribbon in 1919 to recognize an individual's participation in such expeditions when the action did not have a corresponding campaign medal. The Expeditionary Ribbon evolved into the Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal 10 years later and the Navy created its equivalent, the Navy Expeditionary Medal, in 1936.

Several decorations in use today have their roots in the years between the world wars and this period saw a maturing of the armed forces' system of awards.

The Silver Star Medal began as a silver star

but not as a medal!

On 09 July 1918, Congress approved a small silver "Citation Star" to be worn on the ribbon of the World War I Victory Medal for soldiers cited in official orders for gallantry in action.

For 14 years, the award was represented by nothing more than the 3/16-inch star on the Victory Medal ribbon. However, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, then-Army Chief of Staff, pushed to have a separate medal created for those whose gallantry resulted in award of the Citation Star. The Secretary of War approved the medal on 16 July 1932.

When it was created, it was made retroactive, so that those cited for gallantry as far back as the Spanish-American War of 1898 became eligible. However, for 10 years, the medal was awarded to Army personnel only. Only with legislation in 1942, did Sailors and Marines become eligible to earn the medal.

The actual medal — our third highest for combat valor — was designed by the Philadelphia jewelry firm of Bailey, Banks and Biddle and the simplicity and boldness of the ribbon is among the most striking of American awards.

Our distinctive and beloved Purple Heart Medal also was created in 1932 by MacArthur, coinciding with the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. The medal is symbolically linked to Washington's "Badge of Military Merit" that fell into obscurity after the Revolutionary War.

The first award of the Purple Heart medal was made to — guess who — Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

The medal was designed by sculptors at the U.S. Mint and one of them, John Ray Sinnock, also designed current Washington quarter.

Initial criteria was a little fuzzy and not directly related to combat wounds. In fact, four 1934 Purple Hearts were awarded to winners of an Army track meet!

The Navy and Marine Corps did not award the Purple Heart Medal until 1942 — prior to that it was strictly an Army decoration.

With Pearl Harbor and our entry into World War II, the horrors of far flung conflict on

every continent became a reality. Those men participating in these campaigns received the American Campaign Medal for stateside duty and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal or Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, depending upon their theater of service.

No longer were individual battles commemorated in the form of a separate service medal. Instead, a small bronze star for each major engagement was added to the suspension ribbon of the appropriate area campaign medal. However, as late as 1943, the intention was to issue clasps emblazoned with a battle campaign's name which would be mounted on a campaign medal's suspension ribbon.

The creation of the Army Good Conduct Medal occurred just when metal had become precious for use in the war effort. Innovative — and penny-pinching — U.S. Mint officials simply used a vast supply of unclaimed World War I Victory Medals and used their stamping presses to create the new medal design.

A dramatic increase in the number and criteria for decorations occurred between 1941 and 1945 due, most like, to the unprecedented numbers of men and women in uniform during the war and the new roles that the naval forces were called upon to perform.

The Presidential Unit Citation, the Air Medal, Legion of Merit, Navy and Marine Corps Medal, Commendation Ribbon, Bronze Star Medal, Navy Unit Commendation and World War II Victory Medal all were developed during World War II. Some, such as the Silver Star, Purple Heart and Bronze Star medals, simply were adopted from versions already in use by the U.S. Army.

Efforts still were being made to utilize the best of America's artistic community in the design effort. Commercial artist Walker K. Hancock, for instance, won \$1,500 for designing the new Air Medal — and shortly thereafter received his draft notice for World War II Army service.

Gen. George C. Marshall championed the cause of the combat infantryman, prompting President Roosevelt to issue an executive order creating the Bronze Star Medal on 04 Feb.

1944.

“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,” he wrote. Marshall cited a similar morale boost within the Army Air Corps with its liberal award of the Air Medal.

World War II proved to be a watershed period for all the services — a period from which their structure and their traditions never fully recovered — because of the rapid, unprecedented expansion of each service and the emphasis on interservice unity during and certainly after the war.

In 1948, American aviators and crewmen flew countless missions in support of the Berlin Airlift, providing foods and basic necessities to the city of Berlin which had become isolated with Communist East Germany. The Medal for Humane Action was authorized for these pilots, aircrewmen and support personnel.

The 1950 outbreak of hostilities in Korea once again drew U.S. forces into distant battles in lands whose manner of fighting we were not accustomed. A truce signed in mid-1953 ended the fighting and except for peacekeeping forces, our troops were withdrawn and returned home.

The Korean Service Medal, one of the most handsome postwar designs, was awarded the participants of the Korean War. Authorized for the same period, the National Defense Service Medal recognized active duty service, whether or not the individual was engaged in foreign duty. The period of authorization was from 27 June 1950 to 27 July 1959. This medal later was reauthorized for service in the Vietnam era, starting in 1965 and continuing until 1975. It was again authorized for service in Southwest Asia in the early 1990s.

Military activity in the early 1960s usually was of a short duration expeditionary nature. Once more, actions to protect American citizens and interests in Lebanon and the Dominican Republic relied almost exclusively on the Navy-Marine Corps team. The quarantine of Cuba during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis fell squarely on the shoulders of the Navy, once

more utilizing the time-proven blockade techniques.

Our country’s allegiance to treaties and pledges obliged us to send military advisors and gradual military support to various countries in Southeast Asia to help stem Communist expansion.

Little could we guess in the early 1960s of the levels of involvement that we would have in that theater of operations only years later or the traumatic, dividing nature of our involvement in South Vietnam.

During this period, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal was created by President Kennedy and later the Vietnam Service Medal. Several new decorations sprang from the Vietnam era, including the Joint Service Commendation Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal and the Navy Achievement Medal. Both the Combat Action Ribbon and the Meritorious Unit Commendation were designed, recognizing service during the period.

Two awards were created after our involvement in Southeast Asia. The Navy “E” ribbon was worn by crewmen of ships and aircraft squadrons winning the fleetwide Battle Efficiency competitions. The Humanitarian Service Medal was authorized for service extended in the wake of natural disaster, rescues and the resettlement of refugees.

America's large-scale foray into the Saudi Arabian, Iraqi and Kuwaiti deserts during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the early 1990s led to the creation of the Southwest Asia Service Medal and the reissue of the National Defense Service Medal. For the second time in two decades, the Department of Defense authorized servicemen and women to accept and wear the campaign medals offered by foreign countries — those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Since World War II, a trend to wards increased unification of the various branches of the services has been apparent. The intentional trend in military awards logically has been toward Armed Forces-wide decorations and service medals rather than those specifically for Navy or Marine Corps actions. Hence, the creation of the Defense Distinguished Service

Medal, the Defense Superior Service Medal and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal.

Prior to World War II, the individual services conducted competitions among and contracted with the nation's premiere sculptors for the design of their decorations and service medals. All designs had to pass the scrutiny of the Fine Arts Commission. During the heyday of American military medal design, such artists as Daniel Chester French, A.A. Weinman, Charles E. Barber, James Earle Frazier, Paul Manship, Walker Hancock and others were represented on our uniforms.

Since World War II and the establishment of the Department of Defense, design responsibilities largely have been turned over to the Army Heraldic Service, a move critics blame for a "blandness," a "sameness," a lack of imagination and the artistic strength of a junior high school art class. Some students of medal design generally say that since 1941, only one medal (the Korean Service Medal) is of any enduring design excellence. All of this is at a time when our nation's sculptors and medalists are at a peak of design, technological talent and creativity. These criticisms, mind you, are coming from some of the more intense purists. And it isn't to say that the services don't have a healthy amount of input into the final design and part of the blame rightly rests with them.

I'm probably sounding pretty anti-DoD, which I'm not, but I think most students of the trappings of military tradition would agree that the DoD concept led to a certain "homogenization" of customs and traditions. Hence, many collectors specialize only in pre-World War II medals and decorations.

With few exceptions, the colors present in a medal's suspension ribbon have SOME symbolism, either to the event represented or to the service involved. The Navy Expeditionary Medal has the service's blue and gold; the Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal likewise is scarlet and gold. The Purple Heart Medal harks back to the purple in the Badge of Military Merit in 1783. The first arctic expeditionary medal had a stark white ribbon. If you look closely at the WWII European-African-Middle

Eastern Medal ribbon, you will see our own red-white-and-blue as well as the black and red of the Germans and the red, white and green of the Italian flag along with the desert brown and forest green. Likewise, the Navy Occupation Service Medal has the white and black colors of the German conflict and red and white colors representing the Japanese side of the war.

The Vietnam Service Medal featured the South Vietnamese flag edged with jungle green; the Korean Service Medal incorporated United Nations blue. The Armed Forces Reserve Medal has buff and blue, colors associated with the Continental Army and our "minutemen."

And on and on and on. The ribbon design apparently is part and parcel of the medal design for planning and approval purposes as it winds its way from the services to the Heraldic Service to the Fine Arts Commission and some symbolism is attempted to be attached to the color selection.

The direction which the decorations, badges and service medals for our nation's sailors, marines, soldiers and airmen take will continue to be as varied and as distinguished as the role which the services are called upon to fulfill.