

Awards and Decorations

by

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The practice bestowing of awards and decorations can be traced back at least a thousand years. History records the use of wreaths and other devices by the Greeks and Romans for the recognition of military achievement. The Greeks referred to them as “*tá fálára*”, the Romans as “*phalara*”. A four to five inch Phalere, in the form of a crescent or round shaped plaque could be found on warriors’ horses and their armor. In addition to the phalare, there were other decorations in the form of wreaths (corona), rings (torques) and batons (vitas).

The crusades of the eleventh century saw the formation of several Orders, or affiliations of the participating knights; and with them, identifying uniforms and insignias based on the holy cross. Originally these insignias were not connected to military achievement or heroism; they were primarily part of a ranking system among members of an Order. One of the earliest known orders is the Order of the Holy Sepulcher, founded after storming Jerusalem in 1099. With the passage of time and the ever changing social needs, the functions of the Orders changed. Knight's Societies no longer existed, but the awarding of decorations continued. The wars of the 17th and 18th centuries saw an increase in the use of military awards and decorations.

Among the earliest of these were the Military Order of St. Henry, founded in Saxony in 1736 and the founded by Friedrich II in 1740. One of the better known German awards is the Iron Cross founded in 1813 by Friedrich Wilhelm. By the mid to late 19th century much of the world had adopted the European practice of awards and decorations in the form of medals and badges. Their basic designs incorporated crosses, stars, wreaths and other symbolic insignias with colored ribbons and other devices. The use of different metals, gold, silver and bronze, were used to signify classes of the awards. Commemorative and Victory medals have been struck from melted down enemy canons.

The use of awards and decorations has been a part of the American military since our nation was formed. While the use of medals and other devices is generally associated with the military to recognize individuals for outstanding achievement, they are often used as rewards for sports events,

science, civil service and other purposes. Medals are most often displayed by being pinned on uniforms, or worn suspended by a ribbon around the neck of the recipient.

United States individual military awards for recognition of heroism, meritorious achievement and meritorious service range in type from decorations, service medals and ribbons, to badges and other devices. They are primarily awarded to military personnel for services performed while in active Federal military service; however, some decorations may be awarded to personnel in other categories. These include members of the Reserve not in active Federal service, U.S. civilians serving with a military unit in a combat zone, foreign military personnel for acts or services deemed beneficial to the U.S. Government and to deceased personnel.

In addition to military decorations there are Service (campaign) Medals and Service Ribbons. They denote honorable performance of military duty within specified limited dates in specified geographical areas and are awarded only for active Federal military service. Service medals of interest to most members of the 460th Bomb Group (H) include the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal for service within the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater between 7 December 1941 and 8 November 1945. Many are also eligible for the American Campaign Medal and all will qualify for the World War II Victory Medal. Those members who meet certain, specified requirements are eligible for the Army of Occupation Italy Medal.

In addition to individual awards there are Unit awards. Most familiar to those who served with the 460th Bomb Group (H) is the Distinguished Unit Citation (Army), awarded to the Group for the 26 July 1944 mission to the Zwolfaxing Airdrome. This citation was re-designated the Presidential Unit Citation in November 1966. While this citation ranks at the highest level, there are other decorations awarded to units for other purposes. Included with these are Campaign and other streamers awarded to units for display on the guidon staff.

There is a very well defined order of precedence for the wearing and display of all Awards and Decorations.

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