

NOTES ON LIFESAIVING MEDALS



VARIOUS DESIGNS OF THE TREASURY LIFE SAVING MEDALS AND BARS

by Ray A. Witnik

While the basic design of the Treasury Life Saving medals and bars have remained the same ever since their inception, there have been, throughout the years, several changes in their designs.

Official records have disclosed that there have been altogether four different medals and three different bars which have been awarded thus far:

MEDALS

1st Type - The first medals were table medals; these were the 1st Class (gold) and 2nd Class (silver) medals and since they are well known to the reader, their descriptions will not be repeated here.

2nd Type - Except for the legends, which were rearranged, these were of the same design, but reduced in size, as the table medals, but which were suspended by clasps from a red or light blue ribbon. These are the medals which have been awarded from the 1880's to the 1940's and need hardly be described any further.

A special point of interest, however, is the fact that the details of the suspender, through which the ribbons passed, may have been changed several times; i.e., the manner in which the swivel was attached to the eagle, the upper suspender may have been ornamented, etc., etc.

3rd Type - Same as the 2nd type, except that they were reduced in size (i.e., 1-7/16 inch diameter pendant and 1-3/8 inch wide ribbon) and where the colors of each ribbon were changed as currently issued. This type medal still had the legend "ACT OF CONGRESS JUNE 20, 1874".

4th Type - Same as the 3rd type, except that the legend was changed to "ACT OF CONGRESS AUGUST 4, 1949".

It is hard to say just which particular document gave authority for any of the design changes. The 1st type medals are attributed to the Act of 1874, and the 2nd type medals and 1st type bars are attributed to the Act of 1882, but this may not be entirely correct.

The 3rd type medals and 2nd type bars were suggested in Adm Farley's memorandum of March 13, 1946, and later approved by Acting Secretary of the Treasury Gardner on April 4, 1946. Finality did not come about, however, until Acting Secretary of the Treasury Foley's document of December 27, 1948, was published in the Federal Register dated December 31, 1948.

By the same token, the 4th type medals and 3rd type bars became effective on November 1, 1949, but only after Acting Secretary Foley's document of November 25, 1949, was published in the Federal Register dated December 1, 1949.

Ever wonder why the ribbon colors and size of the pendants of the U.S. Treasury Life Saving Medals were changed in 1946? The reasons were pure, simple and bordered somewhat on the obvious!

In the March 13, 1946 MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY, written by the then Commandant of the USCG, Admiral J. F. Farley, it was proposed that the ribbon of the Gold Life Saving Medal be changed because it was being confused with the ribbons of the Specially Meritorious Medal and that of the Navy Good Conduct Medal.

The memorandum further proposed that if the ribbon of the gold medal were changed, the ribbon of the Silver Life Saving Medal should also be changed to conform with the basic design of the gold medal ribbon. In addition, it was pointed out that there was a similarity between the ribbon of the silver medal and that of the Second Byrd Antarctic Expedition Medal.

Since the "old" Life Saving ribbons and pendants were not of the standard size, it was further proposed that both be reduced in size so that "they will present a more harmonious appearance when they are worn on the uniform with other medals during formal occasions".

The memorandum was approved a few weeks later, on April 4, 1946, by the then Acting Secretary of the Treasury O. Max Gardner. The ribbons of the "new" Life Saving Medal are now the standard 1-3/8" width, and the pendants are 1-7/16" in diameter and 3/32" thick. Gold medals are 99.9% pure gold, and the silver medals are 99% pure silver.

Thus far, as of April 4, 1963, the following are the total number of Life Saving medals and bars awarded:

Gold medals	549	Silver medals	1,661
Gold bars	4	Silver bars	10

Regarding the "old" or original Life Saving medals, a small prize was offered for the best design of the first class medal and many artists entered the competition. Paquet, who also designed the original Medals of Honor, won the prize and was also employed to furnish a design for the second class medal. While Paquet's name appears on the reverse of the original first class medal, his name does not appear on the second class medal.

So, it appears that Acts of Congress are not the first nor last legal words.

There are no official records to show that the Life Saving medals of the Treasury Department were ever authorized to be worn as pin-backs. Pin-backs may have been awarded by life-saving societies. For example, the Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York, which was incorporated March 29, 1849, awarded large Gold Medals, Silver Medals, and gold, silver and bronze medal pins and bars, together with cash awards for those performing life-saving services. This Association established life-saving stations on the sandy beaches of Long Island and New Jersey that flanked the entrance to the Port of New York. These stations were the forerunner of the United States Life-Saving Stations.

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GUARDSMEN REACT QUICKLY IN POWER LINE ACCIDENT - Two Washington Army Guardsmen have been recommended for State Medals for their heroism in risking their lives in an attempted rescue of two fellow Guardsmen who were electrocuted during a weekend training assembly.

Killed were PFC Roy Emery, 24, and Sp4 Dennis Jerome Williams, 23, members of Co C, 2d Bn, 161st Inf, 41st Inf Bde (Sep). Three other men were burned seriously and were expected to remain hospitalized at Madigan Army Hospital, near Tacoma, through May. They are Sp4 William Cleveland, PFC David L. Prouse, and PFC Richard Seamens.

The SRF Infantry Company, commanded by Capt Richard Dodd, was conducting a class in tactical mine-laying on the 80-acre ground of its Bremerton Armory. More than 180 men were taking part in the exercise.

The accident occurred during a rest break when a power line broke and fell on a guy wire supporting a pole on the Armory grounds, and onto a group of resting men.

PFCs Dick L. Morey and David T. Brodigan tried to knock the wire away from the injured with a stick, but were felled themselves. PFC Lawrence Rood then tried to rescue the men, but was burned badly on his hands.

Specialists 4 Gary K. Phillips and James C. Kirk finally removed the hot wire, using cartridge belts and field jackets. They have been recommended for Washington's Guardsman Medal for their heroism.

(From April '66 "National
Guardsman" - Capt. R.J. Lehmacher)

Among the collectors and collections known to me personally or by correspondence, there seems to be lacking the category of lifesaving medals. This is not really surprising, since lifesaving medals are scarce in offerings, as is generally known to most collectors. This too is not astonishing either, since the number of actual awards given or pieces minted is never very large, thus making for a relatively rarely available piece.

In addition, there is the factor that collecting lifesaving medals has never been popular. The collecting of war medals, campaign decorations and orders stand in the forefront by comparison. Whereas, the collecting of long service and good conduct awards, Red Cross awards and lifesaving medals has less appeal. Only recently has the collecting of Red Cross (or National Red Cross Society awards) gained more importance and interest, limited however by the availability of the material.

Another consideration, which makes the collecting of lifesaving medals more difficult (or impossible), is that the pieces are not only scarce but also are expensive, being mostly of silver with a few in bronze or gold. Thus, a collector of small means would be easily discouraged in trying to form a collection. Finally, most collectors wish to obtain the greatest number of pieces for their expenditure, which is only another reason why "fakes" such as Third Reich awards, "Pour-le-Merite" etc., are created.

I would be very much interested to know if collections of lifesaving medals do exist with more than thirty pieces, not counting only the British series, which is probably the most numerous for any given single country.

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AWARDS OF THE U.S. TREASURY LIFE SAVING MEDALS - In an address made by the Honorable Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury, mention was made of three Coast Guardsmen who received gold and silver life-saving medals. The address and awards were given on May 16, 1963 during a graduation ceremony of a recruit training company at the USCG Receiving Center, Cape May, N.J.

One of the men honored was John C. Webb, BM1c, who had already distinguished himself in the past. Twice previously, in 1961, he was awarded the Coast Guard Commendation Medal for heroic action in the performance of duty. During the ceremonies at Cape May, he received his third award, the Gold Life Saving Medal, for outstanding heroism in making a most perilous rescue.

His companions, Anthony Duane Lloyd, EN3c, and Ray Dwayne Duerre, seaman, were awarded Silver Life Saving Medals for their heroic parts in the same rescue.

Needless to say, these awards are unusual and are rarely made to Coast Guardsmen in that the Coast Guard Medal and the Coast Guard Commendation Medal are the more usual medal awards made to Coast Guardsmen.

Ray A. Witnik

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2 ARMY NURSES CITED FOR YUGOSLAV LIFESAVING AID - Maj. Sara N. Lundy, former chief, nursing service of the 8th Evac. Hosp., and Capt. Leon R. Moore, its nurse anesthetist, are among the key personnel of the unit commended by the Yugoslavian Government for their life-saving assistance following the 1963 earthquake at Skopje. Engraved plaques were personally delivered to the Office of the Army Surgeon General by the Mayor of Skopje, Yugoslavia, on his recent visit to Washington.

Lundy is now chief, nursing service of the 45th Surgical Hospital, Brooke Army Medical Center, Tex. Moore is assigned as a nurse anesthetist with the 307th Med. Bn. at Fort Bragg.

Submitted by Capt. Lehmacher