

SERVICE/AS AN AIR MAIL PILOT/AUTHORIZED/BY CONGRESS/
FEBRUARY XIV/MCMXXXI (see photos). The ribbon is made
up of the air mail colors--red, white, and blue.



Obverse



Reverse

THE RECIPIENTS

Only ten of these medals were awarded. The first was presented on December 13, 1933, and the last in 1948 (for an action that took place in 1938). The recipients of the Air Mail Flyer's Medal of Honor, in the order they were received were:

MAL B. FREEBURG. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on December 13, 1933. Freeburg was a pilot for Northwest Air Lines. On April 12, 1932, he landed his plane after the loss of an engine without injury to his passengers.

EDWARD A. BELLANDE. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 29, 1935. Bellande landed a burning Trans World Air Lines aircraft on February 10, 1933, with such skill that none of the seven passengers on board were seriously injured.

JAMES H. CARMICHAEL, JR. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 29, 1935. For flying and landing a Central Air Lines plane on April 21, 1935 which had lost an engine without injury to his passengers.

GORDON DARNELL. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 29, 1935. A pilot for U.S. Airways, Darnell landed his burning plane on June 28, 1933 without injury to his passengers or damage to his mail.

WELLINGTON P. McFAIL. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 29, 1935. A pilot for American Airlines, McFail landed an airplane on December 6, 1933, after it lost a motor, without damage to either the airplane or the mail.

LEWIS S. TURNER. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 29, 1935. Turner was a pilot for American Airlines who landed a burning airplane on March 16, 1933 with such skill that either of his passengers was injured.

GROVER TYLER. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 29, 1935. Tyler was a pilot for Pacific Air Transport who landed a burning airplane on March 2, 1931 with such skill that his passengers were only slightly injured and his mail recovered.

ROY H. WARNER. Medal presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 29, 1935. Warner was a pilot for Varney Air Lines who landed a burning plane on August 22, 1930, and in so doing saved his mail at the risk of his own life.

TED N. KINCANNON. Medal posthumously presented to his widow by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12, 1937. A pilot for American Airlines, on January 29, 1936, Kincannon landed his plane after engine failure in such a manner that five passengers escaped injury and the mail was not damaged, although he lost his own life in the effort.

JOHN DAVID HISSONG. Medal awarded by Postmaster General Jesse M. Donaldson on behalf of President Truman on October 4, 1948. On October 18, 1938, Captain Hissong, a pilot with Eastern Air Lines, evacuated the eleven passengers from his burning airplane a few seconds before the aircraft was completely consumed by flames.

THE DEMISE OF THE AIR MAIL FLYER'S MEDAL OF HONOR

This unique decoration ceased to exist for an almost pointless reason. When the Post Office was reorganized by law in 1970, and became the current United States Postal Service, the enabling legislation did not carry forward the authority to award the Air Mail Flyer's Medal of Honor over into the new organization. It was therefore considered repealed and that authority to award the medal simply no longer exists. Since so few of these medals were awarded, it has passed from the scene largely unnoticed. However, the Air Mail Flyer's Medal of Honor is part of a rich medallic legacy growing out of advances in transportation in the United States.



ROMMEL DECORATED

Manfred Rommel, son of the "Desert Fox" Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel, has been honored by Britain in recognition of his services to Anglo-German relations. Herr Rommel, 60, Lord Mayor of Stuttgart, has been made an honorary Commander of the Order of the British Empire. --Adelaide's Advertiser, January 6, 1990
submitted by Garry von Stanke

"DOC" WILLIAMS, NAVAL GUNNER

IAN A. MILLAR, OMSA #3495

Readers will no doubt be well aware of my rather tenacious penchant for writing on various aspects of merchant seamen at war. This time, however, I would like to salute, through the experiences of one naval gunner, the Naval Armed Guard. To these gallant sailors fell the assignments of manning the guns aboard merchant ships. Assignment aboard a merchant ship carried only one main guarantee, and that was that you were going to be the main target of the enemy's destructive might. Indeed, often merchant seamen augmented the gun crews, but the story of the Naval Armed Guard is one that has been forgotten over the passing years. At this point in time, serious historians are more than well aware of the long-standing policy of the government to eradicate the merchant seamen from the pages of our history. Sadly for the men of the Naval Armed Guard, their assignments aboard merchant ships have also caused them to be left out as well. Obviously, the assignments of the sailors in the Armed Guard were not the envy of the Naval Service. Their lot was not the sleek tin cans nor battle wagons that many perceived as the "real" Navy. They arrived at piers and went up the gangways of merchant ships. They sailed quietly, no brass bands playing "ANCHORS AWEIGH", and for some 1810 of them the voyage was one to eternity. Of the 27 of them who were POWs, 13 paid the full measure. Their's was unselfish service and more often than not, seemingly thankless service.

The only award of the United States Merchant Marine that was extended to the men of the U.S. Navy was the Gallant Ship Citation Bar. With only 207 of these awards to men of the U.S. Navy, it must rank as a very scarce award to that service. "Doc" Williams, Bosun USNR was one of those brave 207 men.

Doctor Franklin Williams, "Doc" to his friends went up the gangway of the brand new liberty ship VIRGINIA DARE in June of 1942. He was to make a passage that would be so etched in his mind that he clearly remembers the cold cruel sea and the blistering enemy fire to this day. "Doc" was going on what was regarded as a suicide run, the bloody run to North Russia.

While en route from Philadelphia to Hoboken, the DARE went aground. She was put into drydock to repair any damages. Her cargo was unloaded and then later re-loaded upon leaving drydock. Then the Russian agents came aboard and ordered all the cargo off-loaded again. All the food and other miscellaneous cargo came off. The Soviets were against the boards and, although short of food, they did not want a square foot of cargo space used for anything but tanks, guns, and ammunition. The DARE was loaded with crated aircraft, tanks, trucks, small arms ammunition, smokeless powder, and 1200 tons of TNT. The only consolation for the crew was that if she went up, the end would be quick as a blinding flash of light vaporized the ship. If there was any doubt in anyone's mind where they were bound, the girls in a local gin mill told them not only their destination, but also the route they would take. The use of copper nails was a give-away that the cargo was to include munitions. The local bar was later closed, but so much for wartime security.