President's Message

I would like to begin this message by announcing an important change in the Editor's position. Beginning with the January-February 2001 issue, the editing and assembly of each issue for publication will be alternated between the current Editor, Alex Laslo, and an Associate Editor. Our newly appointed Associate Editor is John Strandberg, who is a former Journal Editor. John was brought on board because the Journal has become so ambitious that it is very difficult for a single person to produce all the issues by the printer's deadlines. John will be responsible for the January-February, May-June, and September-October 2001 issues, and Alex will produce the March-April, July-August, and November-December 2001 issues. Alex will continue to serve as the central point of contact for all Journal matters and select the articles for publication in John's issues. There are no changes to current procedures for the submission of articles, ads, changes of address, or renewals. Alex has already selected the articles that will appear in the January-February 2001 issue and has notified the authors of these articles of the change.

The appointment of an Associate Editor was proposed by Alex as a means to bring stability to the editing function, which experienced a succession of no less than seven Editors in the 1990s. At present, Alex has only about two months to edit and assemble each issue by the printer's deadline, but now Alex and John will have four months to produce each of their issues. The extra time should allow Alex and John to be more creative in laying out their issues and also result in a reduction of the current backlog of unedited articles. The bottom line is that the Journal is the Society's most important product, and every step will be taken to ensure its continued quality and timely delivery to the membership.

The 2000 convention report in the September-October issue closed with a notice that the Board had approved the formation of a Journal Committee that will prepare a new Statement of Editorial Policy, including guidelines for the color cover. I can announce at this time that the Journal Committee will consist of Director Dean Veremakis (Chairman), Director Greg Ogletree, and former Journal Editor Gary Hartman. Members with comments to the current editorial policy should write to Dean as soon as possible at P.O. Box 896, Duluth, GA 30096.

I can also announce that the appointment of Richard Flory as the new Publications Manager and Dr. Steven Watts as the new Associate Publications Manager is now in effect. Please see the inside front cover of this issue for their addresses.

Because of an increasing number of complaints from members regarding repros, copies, and outright fakes, the Board added an important new condition to the Society's Code of Ethics during its annual meeting at the 2000 convention. Specifically, the "REPRODUCTIONS, COPIES AND FAKE" section of the Code was amended to read (new condition underlined):

"It is unethical to reproduce or knowingly sell or trade reproductions, copies or fakes of orders, decorations, or medals (or associated collectible material) unless such reproductions, copies or fakes are clearly identified and permanently marked as such, and, in the case of United States decorations or medals, such reproductions are not forbidden by any law, statute, or regulation (see for example 18 USC 704)."

No changes were made to the related section "ALTERING MEDALS OR GROUPS FOR COMMERCIAL GAIN." This section still continues to read:

"A. Individual Medals: It is unethical to alter any order, decoration or medal, or to knowingly offer for sale an altered order, decoration or medal, unless the alteration is made known to all prospective purchasers or trading partners. 'Alteration' means the removal, addition or modification of names, numbers, or attachments.

B. Groups: It is unethical to knowingly offer for sale or trade any group of orders, decorations or medals which contain a medal (s) added to make the group 'complete' or otherwise more desirable without first informing all potential buyers or trading partners that the group has been thus altered. This includes the addition of otherwise legitimate medals in which the original was missing from the group, but does not include the addition of original medals named to the recipient of an incomplete group."

I urge members to read the Code of Ethics, which is published in the Membership Handbook, and become familiar with its provisions. A copy of the Membership Handbook can be obtained at no cost from the Secretary.

Any member who believes he (she) has been harmed as the consequence of a violation of the Code of Ethics can file a complaint. Complaints must be specific and contain complete details and any supporting documentation. All complaints should be sent to me first for evaluation and possible referral to the Ethics Committee for further action. In this regard, everyone should be aware that the Society will vigorously enforce all the provisions of the Code. As President, I have no reservations in recommending the expulsion of any member who knowingly violates the Code, and I will ensure that the names of individuals, dealers, and firms who are determined to have violated the Code are published in the Journal.

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The Journal of the Orders and Medals Society of America

Purple Hearts for Meritorious Achievement or Service: Army and Army Air Forces Awards During World War II

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Introduction

Most medal collectors know that the Purple Heart was created in 1932 as an award for both combat wounds and meritorious service. They also know that a number of World War I veterans were awarded the medal in the 1930s on the basis of having received a Meritorious Service Citation Certificate (MSCC) while serving in the American Expeditionary Force. A smaller group of collectors know that a few Purple Hearts were awarded for merit during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. But only a few individuals know that a total 272 Purple Hearts were awarded for meritorious achievement or service during World War II. The following is the history of this last category of awards - how they came to be awarded, who received them, and for what kind of merit. It’s a fascinating story.

Background

In 1782, Gen. Washington authorized the award of a heart-shaped, purple cloth badge for exceptional merit. This “Badge of Military Merit,” however, was awarded for only a brief time and then forgotten for nearly 150 years. In 1932, it was revived as the “Purple Heart” when the Army’s leadership wanted a “junior” Distinguished Service Medal to recognize enlisted men and junior officers for exceptional service during World War I; thus the War Department’s regulatory criteria stipulated that the new Purple Heart would be awarded for “any singularly meritorious act of extraordinary fidelity or essential service.”

In determining what qualified as a meritorious act of extraordinary fidelity or essential service, the War Department decided that any soldier who had received Gen. Pershing’s MSCC was eligible for the Purple Heart. Eligibility was further expanded by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, then Army Chief of Staff, to include combat wounds received in World War I and earlier. As provided by War Department Circular No. 6 of 23 February 1932, “[a] wound, which necessitates treatment by a medical officer, and which is received in action with an enemy of the United States,” qualified as a “singularly meritorious act of essential service.” In sum, the resurrected Purple Heart encompassed both the meritorious service aspect of Washington’s old award and MacArthur’s view that meritorious service should include a serious combat-related injury.

At the start of World War II, the Purple Heart was still an award for both wounds and merit, and a number of awards in both categories were made in the early months of the war. Then, in September 1942, the War Department dramatically altered the award criteria for the Purple Heart. A new decoration called the Legion of Merit was created in May 1942 to specifically recognize meritorious achievement or service. In effect, the Legion of Merit superseded the Purple Heart as an award for exceptional merit, and consequently the War Department decided to limit the award the Purple Heart for only wounds received in action. The new Purple Heart criteria were formalized by Change 4 of 4 September 1942 to paragraph 11a(1) of AR 600-45, Personnel - Award and Supply of Decorations to Individuals.

While Change 4 to AR 600-45 removed the authority for further awards of the Purple Heart for wartime merit, the news did not always reach the field in a timely manner, and commands in the Alaskan, North African, European, China-India-Burma, and Pacific Theaters continued awarding Purple Hearts for merit until November 1942.¹

Conversion

At the end of World War II, the War Department addressed the question of whether all Purple Hearts awarded for meritorious achievement or service during the war should be involuntarily converted to a specific merit award, namely the Legion of Merit, Air Medal, or the Bronze Star Medal. Official records show that of the hundreds of thousands of Purple Hearts awarded, only 272 were for merit. Some of these awards were made

¹ For a detailed discussion of Purple Heart award criteria and the end of its use as a decoration for meritorious achievement or service, see the author’s collaboration with F.C. Brown titled The Purple Heart: A History of America’s Oldest Decoration, pages 73-80 (Borch and Westlake Publishing, Tempe, Arizona, 1996).
between the attack on Pearl Harbor and 4 September 1942, but a number of merit Purple Hearts was awarded after the War Department had eliminated merit from the criteria. Strictly speaking, these last awards were not "legal" because they were made outside of the criteria.

In determining whether involuntary conversion was appropriate, the War Department could have distinguished between awards made before and after 4 September 1942. Instead, the Department's Decorations Board examined all 272 awards and then referred the lot to the Personnel Division with the recommendation that every Purple Heart be "converted" to a more appropriate decoration. The Personnel Division, however, rejected the Board's recommendation. In a 28 March 1945 letter from Brig. Gen. R. W. Berry, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel (G-1), to the President of the Decorations Board, three reasons were given to reject involuntary conversion. In the first place, "relatively" few awards were involved. Of the more than 750,000 Purple Hearts awarded during World War II, the 272 merit awards represented less than 1/10th of 1% of the total. It simply was not worth going through an involuntary conversion process with so few awards at issue; and the small numbers also meant that if nothing was done, few would complain about a lack of uniformity in the award of the Purple Heart. Secondly, converting the World War II awards would also require a conversion of World War I merit Purple Hearts. This was certainly true because Purple Hearts awarded on the basis of the World War I MSCC fell within the same general criteria as the Purple Hearts awarded for merit during World War II. The third reason pertained to the service ribbons of campaign medals. As Brig. Gen. Berry stated in his letter, "in certain cases, conversion would operate to deprive personnel of the right to wear a service ribbon." Under regulations then in effect, any soldier awarded a combat decoration was immediately eligible for a campaign medal. Hence a soldier who was awarded a Purple Heart for meritorious achievement or service was also eligible to wear the service ribbon of the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal or the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal. As these campaign medals otherwise required between 30 to 60 days presence in theater, the substitution of a merit Purple Heart with a noncombat award, such a Legion of Honor for merit, might have deprived a soldier of a campaign medal and its service ribbon. Although it must have been a rare situation when a soldier who received a merit Purple Heart did not have sufficient time in theater to independently earn that theater's campaign medal and service ribbon, the Personnel Division nevertheless offered this possibility as a third argument against involuntary conversion.

In short, there would be no involuntary conversions of merit Purple Hearts awarded during World War II. The Personnel Division, however, eventually decided that "in the event of individual requests," it would be Army policy "to approve conversion of an award of the Purple Heart made for meritorious services to a decoration more appropriate to the services rendered." This provision was codified by Change 11 of 19 May 1947 to AR 660-45, Decorations, which stipulated in paragraph 16e that individuals "who, on or after 7 December 1941, were awarded a Purple Heart for merit, may make application to The Adjutant General for an appropriate award in lieu of the Purple Heart." As a practical matter, such applications usually resulted in the replacement of the Purple Heart with either the Air Medal or Bronze Star Medal.

Recipients of the Purple Heart for Meritorious Achievement or Service

A complete list of Army and Army Air Forces recipients of merit Purple Hearts has not been located, but the following 133 examples (49% of the total awarded) illustrate the type of achievement or service recognized. Unlike Purple Hearts awarded for wounds incurred in combat, Purple Hearts for merit were accompanied by a citation in the authorizing General Orders that stated at least some of the circumstances underlying the award. A number of these merit Purple Hearts went to officers who later became well known.

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2 The late Col. Al Gleim claimed in his Medal Letter No. 34 that there were at least 550 Hawaii Purple Heart awards for meritorious service. Unfortunately, Gleim did not support this number of awards. The author's fairly thorough examination of Army and Army Air Forces General Orders (GOs) at the National Archives and Record Administration revealed a very small number of Purple Heart merit awards. Moreover, the War Department's own review of GOs disclosed a total of only 272 awards of the Purple Heart for merit. Gleim's Medal Letter No. 34 is reprinted in OMSA Medal Notes No. 5, The Gleim Medal Letters: 1971-1997, on page 110.

3 For a thorough examination of Purple Hearts converted to a Bronze Star, see The Bronze Star Medal (OMSA Monograph No. 9, 1994) by the author.