SOVIET HONOR BADGES FOR MILITARY SPECIALISTS, 1942-1957

Vitaly Manzurenko

The initial stage of the Great Patriotic War (the Soviet name for World War II) highlighted the necessity of introducing additional honor insignia in addition to the three orders and two medals that existed at the time to decorate Soviet soldiers. The award of prewar honor insignia, other than orders and medals, stopped at the beginning of the war. It was necessary, therefore, to seek ways of encouraging soldiers when the award of orders and medals was not appropriate.

Honor Badge History

The Logistics Chief of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (WPRA), Lieutenant-General A. V. Khrulev, briefed the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the USSR, I. V. Stalin, on April 18, 1942. This discussion centered on a project to award a decoration for military valor, that later became the Order of the Patriotic War. Among the designs presented, there was one produced by an artist of the Main Commissary Department Technical Committee of the USSR People's Commissariat of Defense, S. I. Dmitriev. He had previously had a hand in the design of the Medal for the 20th Anniversary of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, The Medal for Courage, The Medal for Meritorious Service in Battle, and had been co-designer of the Order of Lenin. At this time Dmitriev submitted a design for an award that was in the shape of a shield superimposed on an oak-leaf wreath, with a medallion in the center. There was a representation of the USSR's coat of arms inside the medallion and the Cyrillic inscription THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR around it. A bare sword and a ribbon inscribed FOR MILITARY VALOR were at the bottom of the shield. Stalin ordered the creation of a new series of honor insignia based on that design to reward soldiers of the main specialties of the army and navy. He had previously had a hand in the design of the Medal for the 20th Anniversary of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, The Medal for Courage, The Medal for Meritorious Service in Battle, and had been co-designer of the Order of Lenin. At this time Dmitriev submitted a design for an award that was in the shape of a shield superimposed on an oak-leaf wreath, with a medallion in the center. There was a representation of the USSR's coat of arms inside the medallion and the Cyrillic inscription THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR around it. A bare sword and a ribbon inscribed FOR MILITARY VALOR were at the bottom of the shield. Stalin ordered the creation of a new series of honor insignia based on that design to reward soldiers of the main specialties of the army and navy. In addition, he stipulated that the state hammer-and-sickle symbol on the award should be simpler.

The Supreme Commander's order was discussed at the Headquarters of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army Rear Services and some proposed the initiation of a series of new orders or new medals, but A.V. Khrulev and Main Commissary Department Chief of the WPRA Major General P. I. Drachev, Commissary Service, decided to fulfill Stalin's order by instituting an honor badge to award outstanding NCOs and enlisted ranks serving in vital specialties in the army and navy. S. I. Dmitriev was selected to design the honor badges.

At the same time, the main departments of the various troops of the Army and the Navy Peoples' Commissariat began to develop the regulations for the honor badges. All suggestions were summarized and compiled into six extensive paragraphs to define the concrete deeds of combat and support activities necessary to make a soldier or sailor eligible for an honor badge. The Order of the USSR Supreme Soviet of May 21, 1942 instituted the following honor badges: Outstanding Sniper (Figure 1), Outstanding Machine Gunner (Figures 2 to 4), Outstanding Mortar Man (Figure 5), Outstanding Artilleryman (Figure 6), Outstanding Tanker (Figure 7), Outstanding Submariner (Figure 8), and Outstanding Torpedo Artificer (Figure 9). The order stated that the badges were introduced "...to encourage the outstanding riflemen, machine gunners, mortar and artillery men, tankers, submariners, and torpedo artificers among NCOs and enlisted ranks of the Red Army, Navy, and NKVD (Ministry of the Interior) forces." Order Number 166 of the USSR Defense People's Commissar dated May 28, 1942 and Order Number 110, of the USSR Navy People's Commissar dated May 25, 1942 announced the introduction of the honor badges to Armed Forces personnel. As one could see, it took only a little more than a month to design the honor badges and make them available to the troops, indicating that those in power felt an urgent need to establish honor insignia for soldiers during the early stages of the war.

The commander of a brigade, division, corps or army, or their equivalent was entitled to award the honor badges. The November 10, 1942, Order of the USSR Supreme Soviet authorized the commanders of a regiments to award the badges. According to the regulations, commanders were not to issue a certificate with the badges; they were only to record the number of the badge on the Red Army or Red Navy identity card of the recipient. However, officers at all levels usually disregarded this rule and issued the soldiers/sailors a certificate. The certificates were issued from 1942 to 1945 when a frontline environment allowed the taking of some liberties, and the certificates therefore take various forms (see Figures 10 to 13).

The soldiers usually kept the award certificates on their person, so many certificates were lost in combat and many vanished when the recipient was killed. Today these certificates are rarely found. For example, the author's own collection includes only seven certificates; two of
Figure 1: Sniper
Figure 2: Machine Gunner, Type 1
Figure 3: Machine Gunner, Type 2
Figure 4: Machine Gunner, Type 3
Figure 5: Mortarman

Figure 6: Artilleryman
Figure 7: Tanker
Figure 8: Submariner
Figure 9: Torpedo Artificer

Figure 10: August 27, 1943 certificate for the Outstanding Scout Badge to Sergeant I. A. Pustovolov.
Figure 11: October 15, 1944 certificate for the Outstanding Machine Gunner Badge to PFC V. M. Pobivko.

Figure 12: May 9, 1946 certificate for the Outstanding Driver Badge to V. I. Lochkhin.