In 1864 the first Geneva Convention adopted a permanent relief agency for humanitarian aid in time of war. This led to the creation of the International Society of the Red Cross. Austria created its own society in 1883. The year 1914 marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Red Cross and war had broken out again. Hostilities actually began at the end of July, 1914. Within three weeks, Emperor Franz Josef promulgated the Order of the Red Cross, also called the Decoration of Honor of the Red Cross.

My interest in the Order began in the 1990s, when I acquired a bronze medal of the Order. Seeking casual information about it, resort was made to von Falkenstien’s book, *Imperial Austrian Medals and Decorations*. There it was stated: “... although the Sign of Honor of the Red Cross was not an order, it was patterned and generally accepted as one, with respect to the conditions of their award.”

That raised some questions: How could the Order of the Red Cross not be an order but be generally accepted as one? How did the Order come about, what was its purpose, and, was it an order or not? To answer those questions, we must turn the clock back to 1914. Critical needs were anticipated for the care of the sick and wounded.

However, those critical resources were dedicated to the war effort. No one knows precisely what Emperor Franz Josef’s considerations were or when the idea of the new order honoring the Red Cross was suggested, but on August 14, 1914 he proclaimed the Order of the Red Cross.

Although original documents were destroyed during World War II, the founding of the Order was publicly reported in the newspapers in August 1914, along with the statutes of the Order. They may be seen today by accessing the archives of the *Wiener Zeitung*.

We can address the first question: was the Order of the Red Cross, indeed, a true Order? To create an order, or a medal, in Imperial and Royal Austria-Hungary it must be authorized by an Imperial Decree. Next, the Order had to have statutes. Lastly, the Order had, in the 20th Century context, that is in the “modern context,” reflections of special distinctions conferred on citizens for some type of service in war or peace, civil or military. These distinctions for citizens, as well as for foreigners, were rewards for those deserving of recognition. With these points, we may conclude the Order of the Red Cross was a true Order of the Empire.

However, other than as a means to merely recognize distinguished citizens and foreigners, the Austro-Hungarian Order had another and more pragmatic purpose in time of war. It provided a vehicle to generate funds for its humanitarian efforts. To explore the Order, we shall use the Statutes, Article 1 through 9 as our guide. This will take us through the organization of the Order and deal with its insignia.

**Figure 1: Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary.**

Article 1: The Decorations for service to the Red Cross are in three classes and two medals. The classes are (1) the Star of the Red Cross, (2) the First Class of the Red Cross, and (3) the Second Class of the Red Cross. Of the medals, there are (1) the Silver Medal of the Red Cross and (2) the Bronze Medal of the Red Cross.

Article 2: The Head of the Order is His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty.

Article 3: The Order may be awarded to those who have provided outstanding contributions in the field of services to the Red Cross in war or in peace. If in the time of war, upon specific application, the war decoration is allowed to be included.
Article 4: The Emperor reserves to himself the awarding of the Star and First Class of the Order. The Second Class and the two medals may be awarded by the Chancellor of the Order. Though not personally identified by name in the statutes, the Chancellor was Archduke Franz Salvator, the Emperor’s son-in-law.

![Figure 2: Obverse of the star of the Order.](image1)

![Figure 3: Reverse of the star of the Order.](image2)

Figure 2: Obverse of the star of the Order.

Figure 3: Reverse of the star of the Order.

Article 5: This article provides for the description of the insignia of the Order. First, there was the Star, which is a silver, red-enameled cross. Between the arms of the cross are silver rays. The red enamel on the cross shall be bordered with white enamel (Figure 2). In the middle of the cross shall be a circular shield or disk with a red border on which is written *PATRIAE AC HUMANITATI* (Country and Humanity) in gold letters. In the center of the disk on a bed of white enamel is a red Geneva cross. The reverse side shall be silver with a disk centered between the arms (Figure 3). The disk bears a plain red band and in the center, on a white background, the dates 1864 and 1914, in gold. The height of the cross is 69 mm and the width is 56 mm.

![Figure 4: Obverse (left) and reverse of the First Class badge of the Order.](image3)

![Figure 5: Obverse (left) and reverse of the Second Class badge of the Order.](image4)

Figure 4: Obverse (left) and reverse of the First Class badge of the Order.

Figure 5: Obverse (left) and reverse of the Second Class badge of the Order.

The form of the First and Second Class awards shall be similar to the Star, but without the rays between the arms. They shall have similar enamel on both sides rather than on only the obverse side. As with the Star, the obverse side shall have the disk, with the motto surrounding the Geneva cross. The height of the First Class shall be 56 mm and a width of 46 mm (Figure 4). The height of the Second Class shall be 45 mm and a width of 37 mm (Figure 5).

The First Class shall hang from a 50 mm ribbon around the neck. The Second Class shall be worn on the chest by a triangular styled ribbon of 37 mm in width. Women
awarded the Second Class shall wear the award on a bow. The ribbons are white with two narrow stripes of red inset from edge.

Upon special application, the decorations and medals may be awarded with the war decoration. On the decorations, the war decoration of green wreaths were affixed directly on the insignias (Figures 6 and 7). On the medals, the war decorations of green wreaths surrounded the oval shape of the medal.

Both the silver (Figure 8) and bronze (Figure 9) medals shall be oval, 44 mm high and 36 mm wide.

On the obverse shall be two facing angels hovering on clouds bearing between them a white-enameded shield bearing a red Geneva cross. Over the shield is a beaming star. Beneath the angels is the inscription PATRIAE AC HUMANITATI. The reverse side is plain, bearing the dates 1864 and below 1914. The war decoration may be also authorized, but only upon special application.