This article has its roots in my desire to learn more about a medal that my first military unit, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 104th Infantry Regiment of the Yankee Division had earned during World War I. I also wanted to create an exhibit for the 2010 OMSA Convention that would prove to new, or potential, medal collectors that medal collecting does not require the expenditure of large sums of money to create an interesting medal collection or exhibit. For example, the five medals in the display cost under $160.50 in total with one Croix de Guerre costing only 40 Francs (or $8.00) at the Paris flea market in 1984. Finally, it is my desire to educate the reader about the background, importance and history surrounding the Croix de Guerre.

Historical Background

The Croix de Guerre was created by the Republic of France on April 8, 1915 to recognize all military personnel, units and civilians, French and foreign, for bravery if they were “mentioned in dispatches.” The term “mentioned in dispatches” means being named and commended in the official messages of a headquarters unit. The medal was in response to the need to recognize not just officers, high ranking individuals or individuals of noble birth, but the military personnel of all ranks, units, and civilians who daily faced the grotesque realities of trench warfare. The war that was supposed to be over in a short period of time, only grew in size to a world war as secret alliances dragged in more participants on each side and the mechanized death in the form of machine guns, massed artillery, barbwire and gas would create a stalemated trench war from the North Sea through France and Belgium to the Swiss border.

The Croix de Guerre was initially proposed by French Deputy Georges Bonnefous in December, 1914, and it was to be called Croix de la Valeur Militaire or Cross of the Military Valor.¹ Another Deputy named Emile Driant, who frequently served in the war zone, took up the idea of awarding a cross medal for bravery and drafted the bill that would become law, establishing the Croix de Guerre or War Cross on April 8, 1915.² Later the medal would be called Croix de Guerre 1914-1918. The belief that the war would be short is supported by the fact that the first Croix de Guerre had the dates 1914-1915 inscribed on the reverse of the cross.

The legislation for the creation of the Croix de Guerre, states that the cross would be made of Florentine bronze and be 37mm across. The Cross will have four pebbled branches and two crossed swords will be between the branches. The center of the obverse (Figure 1) reveals the effigy of the Republic in a bonnet and laurel crown.³ In a circle around the effigy, are the words REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE. The reverse (Figure 1) of the Croix de Guerre is a central circle with the dates 1914-1915. However, the war dragged on, and the result was the updating of the reverse of the medal to 1914-1916, 1914-1917 and 1914-1918 (Figure 2).⁴ Recipients of the Croix de Guerre could in 1916 and 1917 receive a cross dated 1914-1915 as the crosses with later dates were issued after a unit first exhausted the first medals that were issued. It is important to note that authorized manufacturers of the Croix de Guerre were, and still are not, restricted in picking the dates to be used on the reverse and in continuing to make new medals. Current medals will appear shiny and new despite the 1914-1915 dates.

The first model of the Croix de Guerre was made by French sculptor Paul-Andre Bartholome⁵ and from that model to the end of the war; over two million medals would be made. The ribbon of the Croix de Guerre is 37mm wide and is red with six 4 mm vertical green stripes spaced evenly across the drape/ribbon. Multiple awards of the Croix de Guerre meant that the medal drape/ribbon had to be lengthened to accommodate the attachments earned each time an additional cross was awarded. Many allied pilots earned so many crosses...
that their ribbons were extended from their chest to their waist! The arrangement of attachments on the ribbon is as follows:

1. Palms were placed across the top of the ribbon horizontally with the silver being placed above bronze palms. A silver palm took the place of five bronze palms.
2. A single star, whether gold, silver or bronze, would be centered on the ribbon.
3. Multiple stars: Gold stars with lesser stars would be located on the right of the ribbon followed by a silver star to the left and a bronze star to the left of the silver star. Thus the order of precedence of stars is gold, silver and bronze.

Many examples of the Croix de Guerre seen today have the placement of attachments in the wrong order due to a lack of knowledge, the creation of new placements with replacement of the ribbon, or the placement of attachments by recipients in any manner they wished. For example, a commonly seen error is the placement of a bronze palm under a star instead of the palm being placed horizontally across the ribbon at the top of the stars.

The Croix de Guerre was, and is, a much revered decoration as witnessed by the fact that many families would frame the medal, award diploma, or the medal with a photo of the recipient in a frame to be displayed.
in their home. Many of these frames have survived to this day. In Figure 3, we find an example of a photo of a soldier who earned a Croix de Guerre framed with the medal for display in the family home. This medal was awarded to Andre Ponlois of the 234th Regiment, Infantry who fought at the Battles of L’Oisne, Verdun and the Marne. It also states that he was cited on April 4, 1918 for a regimental level Croix de Guerre.

Award diplomas were issued from each headquarters that awarded the Croix de Guerre and each headquarters had its own award diploma format. The awarded individual would be given a medal with an attachment to signify the level of award and a diploma. Medals that are seen today without an attachment were not issued that way as all medals were issued complete with at least one attachment. Medals without an attachment are most likely due to the replacement of the ribbon and the loss of the attachments. New collectors beware: one should never find a medal without an attachment as the ribbon must have the attachment to signify the level of the award.

**Criteria for Award of the Croix de Guerre 1914-1918**

Military and civilian personnel as well as military units of France and her allies could be awarded the Croix de Guerre if they were cited for war actions against Germany and her allies. “Cited,” as stated earlier, meant to be mentioned in the dispatches of the Army, Corps, Divisional, Brigade and Regimental headquarters of the army or naval equivalents. The Minister of War was also authorized to award the Croix de Guerre. It is important to note that Article 6 of the Croix de Guerre regulations provides another criterion for award. All military personnel being awarded the Legion d’Honneur or the Medaille Militaire would automatically be awarded the Croix de Guerre. The logic here is simple. The Legion d’Honneur does not distinguish between a military or civilian award so by awarding the Croix de Guerre in addition to the Legion d’Honneur, the military distinction is made.

The importance of war actions (bravery) of the individual or unit against Germany was determined by the various commanders of military headquarters or government ministers. The higher the headquarters that made the award (mentioned in dispatches) the higher the award ribbon attachment. Ultimately, it was the headquarters generals, admirals, and commanders who decided the bravery value criteria in terms of “war action against the enemy.” A commanding general at the Army level would award a Croix de Guerre with a bronze palm attachment, the commanding general of an Army corps would award the Croix de Guerre with a gilt (gold) star attachment, a divisional commander, a silver star attachment and brigade, regimental or other unit commander would award a bronze star with the medal (Figure 4).

Once a commander wrote a Croix de Guerre approval order, a diploma and medal with attachment would be issued from that commander’s headquarters. In Figures 5 through 9, one can see examples of award certificates. All of the awarding level diplomas state the recipient’s name and a brief description of the rational for receiving the