



United States,
Medal of Honor

MILITARY DECORATIONS

Military decorations and medals were used to honor those who performed countless acts of valor, sacrifice and dedication during World War II. Decorations of one form or another for civil and military bravery have been awarded for thousands of years and took on their present form within the last 200 years. The United States has issued decorations in every major conflict in its history and began to do so regularly with the Medal of Honor during the U.S. Civil War. During World War II, decorations were awarded for everything from military service to the most heroic acts of bravery.

WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL

At the end of World War II the United States Congress authorized the creation of a medal commemorating military service in the war. Issued beginning in 1946, the medal is an excellent example of the symbolism found on many military decorations. On the obverse, the female allegorical figure Liberation rests her foot on the helmet of Mars, the Roman God of War, signifying victory. The reverse is inscribed with the Four Freedoms promoted by President Franklin Roosevelt at the beginning of the war. The red on the ribbon is the color of Mars, and the rainbows echo those on the World War I victory medal.



United States, World War II
Victory Medal



An American cemetery, 1945.



United States, European-
African-Middle Eastern
Campaign Medal



United States, Asiatic-Pacific
Campaign Medal



United States, American
Campaign Medal



United States, Army
of Occupation Medal



U.S. Marines raise the flag on Iwo Jima February 23, 1945.

WORLD WAR II CAMPAIGN MEDALS

Three campaign medals were awarded by the United States during World War II for service in the three defined theaters of war. The American Campaign Medal was awarded for one year service within in the United States or 30 consecutive days of service outside the U.S. but within the Western Hemisphere. The European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal was awarded for 30 consecutive days of service in the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater. The Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal was awarded for 30 consecutive days of service in the Asiatic-Pacific Theater. Each medal's ribbon includes colors associated with the theater and the colors of the United States flag and its combatants in each region.

Germany issued medals for valor, participation and wounds, just as other nations did. A major difference from American medals was that these medals incorporated a political element as well – all featured the swastika, the symbol of the Nazi party.



Germany, 25-Year
Service Award



Germany, West Wall Medal
Hundreds of thousands of these medals were
awarded to Germans who helped build up the
country's western defenses prior to World War II.