

U.S. Military Awards and Honors

1. Medal of Honor

Criteria: Awarded for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty.

History: Established during the Civil War in 1861, it's the highest military decoration.

Branches: Army, Navy, and Air Force have distinct versions.

2. Distinguished Service Cross (Army), Navy Cross (Navy/Marine Corps), Air Force Cross (Air Force)

Criteria: Recognizes extraordinary heroism not justifying the Medal of Honor.

History: Established in the early 20th century, these are the second-highest military decorations.

3. Defense Distinguished Service Medal

Criteria: Awarded for exceptional service in a duty of great responsibility with the Department of Defense.

History: Created in 1970, it's the highest non-combat defense decoration.

4. Silver Star

Criteria: Recognizes gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States.

History: Established in 1918 during WWI, it's the third-highest military combat decoration.

5. Defense Superior Service Medal

Criteria: Awarded for superior service in a position of significant responsibility.

History: Created in 1976, this medal recognizes exceptional service within the Department of Defense.

6. Purple Heart

Criteria: Awarded to those wounded or killed while serving with the U.S. military.

History: Originating from the Badge of Military Merit in 1782, the modern Purple Heart was established in 1932.

7. Legion of Merit

Criteria: Recognizes exceptional conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements.

History: Created in 1942, this decoration can also be awarded to foreign military personnel.

8. Distinguished Flying Cross

Criteria: Awarded for heroism or extraordinary achievement during aerial flight.

History: Established in 1926, it recognizes both military and civilian recipients.

9. Gold Star Families

Criteria: Recognition for families who have lost a loved one in military service.

History: The tradition began in WWI, with the Gold Star signifying a family member killed in service.

10. Blue Star Mothers/Families

Criteria: Recognizes families with a member currently serving in the military.

History: The Blue Star symbol became prominent during WWII as a sign of a family member in service.

11. Meritorious Service Medal

Criteria: Awarded for outstanding meritorious achievement or service to the United States.

History: Established in 1969, this medal recognizes non-combat meritorious achievement.

12. Air Medal

Criteria: Recognizes single acts of heroism or meritorious achievements during aerial flight.

History: Created in 1942, awarded for both combat and non-combat actions.

13. Joint Service Commendation Medal

Criteria: Awarded for meritorious service in joint, multi-branch missions.

History: Established in 1963 to recognize achievements in joint military operations.

14. Service Branch Commendation Medals (e.g., Army, Navy & Marine Corps, Air Force)

Criteria: Recognize sustained acts of heroism or meritorious service.

History: These medals are specific to each branch and reward exceptional service or achievement.

15. Combat Action Ribbon (Navy/Marine Corps) & Combat Action Badge (Army)

Criteria: Recognize active participation in ground or surface combat.

History: Reflect combat experience, with different variations by branch.

16. Presidential Unit Citation

Criteria: Awarded to units for extraordinary heroism in action.

History: Established in 1941, this is one of the highest unit awards.

17. Joint Meritorious Unit Award

Criteria: Recognizes joint units for meritorious achievement or service.

History: Created in 1981 to honor achievements in joint military activities.

18. Service Branch Unit Awards (e.g., Valorous Unit Award, Navy Unit Commendation)

Criteria: Various awards recognize units for gallantry, meritorious service, or outstanding achievement.

History: Specific to each branch, these awards honor collective accomplishments.

19. Prisoner of War Medal

Criteria: Awarded to those taken prisoner and held captive while engaged in action.

History: Established in 1985 to honor those who endured captivity.

20. Military Service Awards (e.g., Army Service Ribbon, Navy "E" Ribbon)

Criteria: Recognize various aspects of service, including training, readiness, and excellence.

History: These ribbons and medals celebrate different achievements and milestones within each branch.

21. Campaign Medals (e.g., Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal)

Criteria: Awarded for service in specific military campaigns or operations.

History: These medals commemorate participation in particular conflicts, acknowledging service and sacrifice.