# THE MILITARY PURPLE HEART AWARD

Presented by WB Paul Weathers

The Purple Heart is an American decoration and is the oldest known American Military decoration. Its use was as the first American award decoration to be granted to the common soldier

Nearing the end of the American Revolution, Brother George Washington, then best known as General Washington, wanted to reward merit for the brave enlisted and Non-commissioned Officers who had demonstrated praise worthy qualities and actions with promotions. The Continental Congress had forbidden commissions and promotions to recognize merit. General Washington then chose to honor them with a silk fabric purple heart with the word “MERIT” in its center and trimmed with fine lace. This was to be worn on his “facing over his left breast.”

Guards and officials were instructed to recognize men with this award as being a distinguished serviceman and afforded the same respect as a Commissioned Military Officer, allowing the wearer to pass without a challenge. There were three Non-Commissioned Officers (sergeants) who were first honored with this special honor on May 3, 1783.

By the time the war was victorious for our new free country, the original Purple Heart Badge of Honor wasn’t used and basically forgotten until in the 20th century when General “Blackjack” Pershing in 1918 recognized and proposed a need for such an award for merits beyond normal expectations in war. On October 10, 1927, General Charles P. Summerall, Army Chief of Staff ordered that a bill be drafted and sent to Congress with strong recommendations to “revive the Badge of Military Merit.”

In 1932 the new Purple Heart Award was re-created and in honor of General Washington’s ideals and in celebration of the bicentennial of his birth, General Order #3 was issued to announce the establishment of the award;

It was worded thusly:

“By order of the President of the United States, the Purple Heart, established by General George Washington at Newburgh, August 7, 1782, during the War of Revolution is hereby revived out of respect to his memory and military achievements.

By order of the Secretary of War:

*Douglas MacArthur*

General, Chief of Staff

For some unclear reasons the bill was withdrawn. But on January 3, 1928 the Office of The Adjutant General received instructions to collect and hold in file for possible future. The rough sketched designs showed a circular disk with a heart being centered thereon.

It was rewarded to 138 WW1 veterans on May 28, 1932 at the site of the New Windsor Cantonment at Temple Hill in New Windsor, New York. This location was the place where the Continental Army camped during the winter of 1782-1783.

General Summerall’s successor, General Douglas A. MacArthur restarted work on the design by involving the Washington Commission of Fine Arts with hopes of having a metal issued on the bicentennial of George Washington’s date of birth.

Named to design the revived medal was Ms. Elizabeth Will, a well-respected Coat of Arms Army Specialist in the Office of the Quartermaster General. The name of Purple Heart Medal has thereafter been used for this award badge.

Army Regulation 600-35 of November 10, 1941 described the badge as a purple enameled heart with a bronze quarter inch border and with a profile of George Washington in his continual uniform and the enameled Washington’s family coat of arms surmounting it, and within the heart the wording, “For Military Merit,” and a space below for the recipient’s name. The badge measured 1 and 1/16th inches long and 1 and 3/8th inches wide, suspended by a purple ¼ inch ribbon with white borders.

 For this honor to be awarded, criteria for issuing the award have been changed several times over the years. Early on it was only awarded to members of the Army and Army Air Corps and could not be awarded posthumously to a surviving family member. But President Franklin Roosevelt signed an executive order in 1942, allowing worthy Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard personnel to be honored with the Purple Heart Award. Today it is normally awarded to personnel who in bravery of actions in war battles being wounded or for attempted acts to save others. Further changes allowed posthumous presentation to a family member.

On April 25, 1962, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 11016 extending eligibility of the Purple Heart to “any civilian national of the United States, who while serving under competent authority in any capacity with the armed forces, has been or may hereafter be wounded.”

When we meet a military veteran we should show him respect; but when we learn that a man has been honored with the Purple Heart Award we should show special respect for his especially honored service for us and to our country.

**May God continue to bless America**.

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