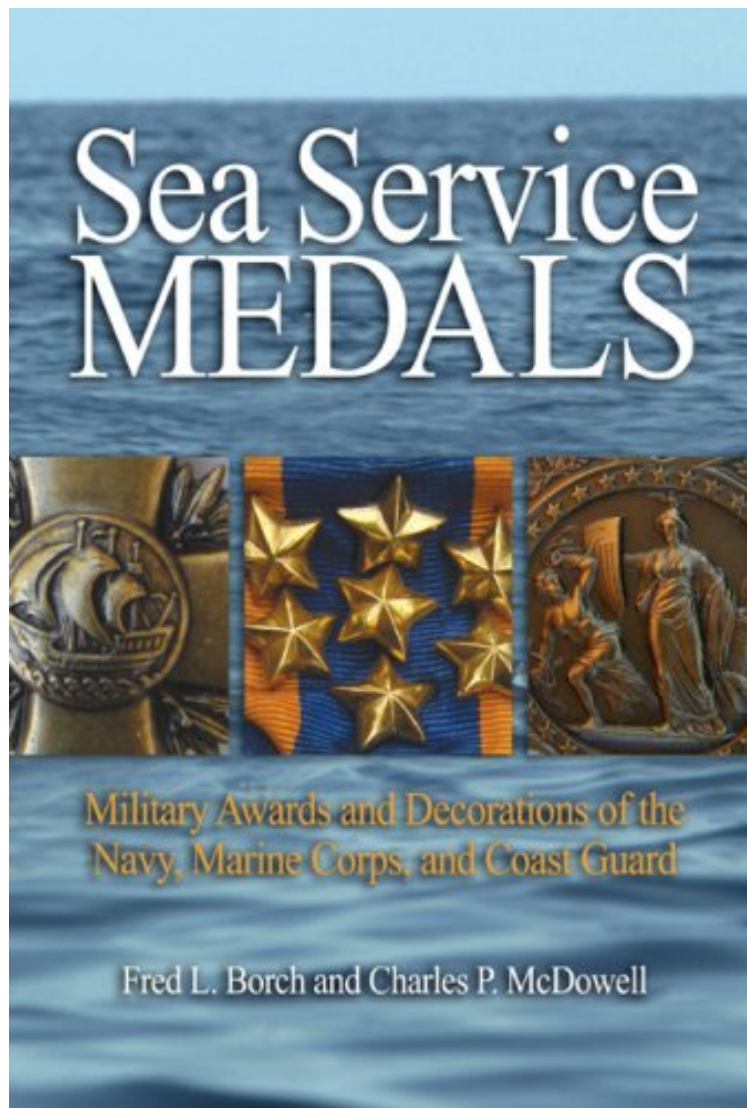


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SEA SERVICE MEDALS: MILITARY AWARDS AND DECORATIONS OF THE NAVY, MARINE CORPS, AND COAST GUARDBy Robert A. LynnSEA SERVICE MEDALS: MILITARY AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

OF THE NAVY, MARINE CORPS, AND COAST GUARD COLONEL FRED L. BORCH, U.S. ARMY (RETIRED) AND CHARLES P. MCDOWELL, U.S. AIR FORCE RESERVE (RETIRED) U.S. NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS, 2009 HARDCOVER, \$34.95, 288 PAGES, PHOTOGRAPHS, ILLUSTRATIONS, APPENDICES, NOTES, INDEX, BIBLIOGRAPHY

The terms, "Decoration" and "Medal" are used almost interchangeably today, but there was once a recognizable distinction between them. Decorations, were awarded for valor and meritorious service, while medals were awarded for participation in specific engagements or campaigns. The fact that some very prestigious awards have the word "medal" in their titles (e.g. Medal of Honor, Marine Corps Brevet Medal, Distinguished Service Medal, etc.) can cause some confusion. There are two general categories of medals awarded by the United States to its military personnel, namely, decorations and service medals. Since the establishment of our first awards, decorations for valorous or meritorious actions have traditionally been in the shape of a star, cross, hexagon, or similar heraldic configuration. Although a small number of decorations are round, (e.g., Navy Distinguished Service Medal, Airman's Medal, Coast Guard Achievement Medal, etc.) the circular shape has been used almost exclusively for service medals. These can be awarded for good conduct, participation in a particular campaign or expedition or service on foreign soil.

The topic of military decorations and awards can be arcane. To most non-military people, they represent confusing symbols understood only by the insiders of the insular military society. Far too many people don't know the differences among the multi-colored ribbons, nor do they care. This is unfortunate, because every one of those ribbons has a specific meaning and tells a story of achievement, meritorious service, or heroism. The exact position of the ribbon in relation to the others around it is also important. Together they present a graphical testimony of the wearer's military record.

In *SEA SERVICE MEDALS: MILITARY AWARDS AND DECORATIONS OF THE NAVY, MARINE CORPS, AND COAST GUARD*, authors Fred Borch and Charles McDowell present a lively overview and history of the current awards of the United States Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. Why a book focusing only on the three military sea services? It is commonly assumed that all American military decorations are pretty much the same, but that isn't quite the case. Some decorations, such as the Silver Star, are awarded by all of the three services under the Department of Defense. Other decorations, such as the Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, and the Distinguished Service Cross, are equivalent in the order of precedence but have distinct names and designs. Some, such as the Medal of Honor, have the same name, but the design varies from service to service. The Medal of Honor for each of the services has a different medal but the same ribbon. The Medal of Honor is an especially interesting case: until 1942, the Army and Navy Medals of Honor were quite different. Both were established during the War Between the States, but officers and enlisted soldiers were eligible for the Army's Medal of Honor right from the start. Navy and Marine Corps officers only became eligible for the Medal of Honor in 1915. The Army Medal of Honor was awarded for combat valor only. The Navy Medal of Honor was awarded for combat valor or, until 1942, for extraordinary heroism in the line of the naval profession. In other words, for acts of heroism at sea, such as lifesaving. Between 1917 and 1942, the Navy actually had two completely different Medal of Honor designs, one for combat valor and one for non-combat heroism; both, however, had the same ribbon. The only thing that might have improved this book would have been the inclusion of the decorations of the U.S. Merchant Marine, which performs critical missions in wartime and whose mariners are often in harm's way. The U.S. Merchant Marine has its own system of decorations, and those awards are authorized for wear on the military uniforms of any former merchant mariners who later serve in a military service. Clearly and concisely written, it is loaded with fascinating details and insights and is a book that is well worth adding to your library.

Lt. Colonel Robert A. Lynn, Florida Guard Orlando, Florida

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The authoritative book on the history of the medals for US Naval Service By Joel R. To book's dust jacket, claims the book is "the first and only complete historical examination of all the personal awards, decorations and medals that may be awarded to Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard personnel for heroism, achievement, and service." Borch and McDowell brilliantly succeed in meeting the claims on the dust jacket. The book is broken up into four sections: "Decorations for Valor in Combat"; "Decorations and Medals for Noncombat Valor"; "Dual-Purpose Decorations for Performance or Valor"; and "Awards and Decorations for Outstanding achievement of Meritorious Service." Readers should note that the "I was there" medals (Liberation of Kuwait; Southwest Asia Service; Global War on Terror") are not included in this book, as these decorations are awarded for contributions of military units - not for the actions of an individual. Each chapter follows the order of precedence, beginning with the medal awarded for the highest achievement. Each section then explains the establishing authority for the medal; the date it was established; the designer of the medal; the heraldic symbolism of the medal; the medal's first recipient; and the historical background on the medal. Each section also includes an illustrative citation or two for recipients of the medal. There is no better reference book on how these medals came to be. I found the historic analysis to be fascinating, especially the theory of how the Purple Heart got its name. The book includes 50 color photographs of the obverse and reverse of these medals (including the infamous "Tiffany Cross"). The authors should be commended for including the reverses of unique medals -- for example, hand-engraved Medals of Honor. However, these photos are also the source of a significant editing error - the list of illustrations at the beginning of the book incorrectly lists the first twelve illustrations. In spite of this minor flaw, the photos are excellent. "Sea Service Medals" lives up to the claim of being the authoritative book for this topic. It was a great read, and I highly recommend the book.

The first and only comprehensive examination of all decorations and medals that may be awarded to Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard personnel for heroism, achievement and service. Features never-before-published historical information on the background and development of each medal, while also providing in-depth discussion of award criteria, design and recipients. Decorations examined include combat heroism awards such as the Navy Medal of Honor, Navy Cross, and Silver Star. Non-combat heroism awards such as the Navy-Marine Corps Medal and Coast Guard Medal are also discussed. All decorations and medals for achievement and service also are examined, ranging from the Navy and Coast Guard Distinguished Service Medals, Legion of Merit, and Meritorious Service Medal to the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation and Achievement Medals and the Combat Action Ribbon. Fifty full color photographs of sea service awards, many of which have never been published, provide context for this unique history. The authors, both of whom retired from the Armed Forces, are experts in the history of U.S. awards and decorations.

About the Author Fred L. Borch served 25 years active duty as an Army lawyer and retired in 2005. A professionally trained historian (M.A., Univ. of Virginia), he now serves as the Regimental Historian and Archivist for the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps. He is the author and co-author of many books and articles on military medals, including *The Air Force Cross*, *The Purple Heart*, *The Silver Star and Kimmel*, *Short and Pearl Harbor*. He lives in Charlottesville, VA. Charles P. McDowell has written numerous articles and books on medals and decorations and has served as a resource to several Federal organizations, including the Navy Memorial Museum, the Army's Institute of Heraldry, and to the awards branches of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. McDowell is a retired Air Force Reserve officer and is also retired from the Department of Defense