

## **Obtaining Military Awards and Decorations, or Records**

More than 20 years ago, when I was Director of Records Management at VA in Washington, I routinely received sometimes very hostile complaints from Veterans who were unable to obtain the awards and decorations they had received for their past military service even when properly requested.

I found that in WWII most soldiers received only ribbons, and many never knew or did not remember that there were medals associated with almost every one. Some awards were not authorized until after the period of service but Veterans entitled to them were never informed. For example, every Army infantryman who earned a Combat Infantryman's Badge was later (in 1947) awarded a Bronze Star Medal but no one told them; if you served in Korea after 28 July 1954, you are entitled to the Korean Defense Service Medal – which wasn't even authorized until December 2002. Further, military personnel leaving the service after WWII, or service in Korea, Vietnam, or any other periods generally wanted just to go home. The thought of their awards and decorations often didn't come up for years afterwards. However, perhaps the most disheartening thing I found was that the military departments often gave low or zero priority to requests for awards from former service personnel or from their families, and many requests were simply discarded without response.

Through some intensive work I helped get overall management of the awards program transferred from the military departments to the National Archives of the United States (NARA). To request a set for yourself or a deceased relative (including replacements), go to: [www.archives.gov/veterans/replace-medals.html](http://www.archives.gov/veterans/replace-medals.html) and follow the instructions.

The Archives process is efficient and fast and a request can be submitted on line by serving or former members of the Army or Air Force in about five minutes. Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and surviving family members must use a Standard Form 180 rather than the on-line procedure (the form is at the website), but it is still very easy and efficient.

When properly submitted, a Veteran or his or her surviving family members can expect to receive a package in the mail in about 90 days. Personal decorations (such as for heroism, wounds or meritorious service) arrive engraved with the name of the recipient.

**[If you are seeking copies of military records, go to [www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/](http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/).]**

I strongly recommend that the signature sheet mailed in for Army and Air Force requests, and the SF180 mailed in for all others, be accompanied by a copy of a discharge (DD 214 or WD AGO Form) and such additional information that may be useful to verify awards if there is no discharge or it is incomplete, such as a list of assignments, dates and places of service, and so forth. You may request a full set of awards and decorations even if you know or believe they were previously issued. No explanation for a "replacement set" is required. You may be surprised by what you receive. Even today many personnel discover they received awards and decorations they knew nothing about.

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