

ww2 german medals guide

ww2 german medals guide offers a detailed overview of the various awards and decorations issued by Nazi Germany during World War II. This comprehensive guide explores the historical context, design, and significance of key German military medals from 1939 to 1945. Collectors, historians, and enthusiasts will find valuable information on the criteria for awarding these medals, distinctive features, and their place in the broader framework of German military honors. The article also covers the hierarchy of awards, including combat and non-combat decorations, helping readers understand the relative prestige of each medal. Additionally, this guide addresses common replicas and authenticity markers, crucial for collectors seeking genuine pieces. Dive into the world of German military decorations with this authoritative ww2 german medals guide, designed to enrich knowledge and appreciation of this complex subject.

- Overview of WW2 German Military Medals
- Combat Awards and Decorations
- Non-Combat and Merit Awards
- Identification and Authenticity
- Collecting Tips and Preservation

Overview of WW2 German Military Medals

The military awards system of Nazi Germany during World War II was extensive and highly structured, reflecting the regime's emphasis on valor, loyalty, and service. Medals and decorations served multiple purposes: recognizing bravery on the battlefield, rewarding leadership, and acknowledging long service or special achievements. The awards ranged from the widely known Iron Cross to lesser-known badges and campaign medals. This section provides a foundational understanding of the types of medals issued and their historical background.

Historical Context of German Medals

German military decorations have a long tradition dating back to the Kingdom of Prussia and the German Empire. During WW2, the awards system was expanded and adapted to fit the doctrines of the Wehrmacht and other branches such as the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine. These medals often incorporated Nazi symbols, such as the swastika and eagle, which are crucial for identification. The awards were intended to boost morale and promote ideological loyalty among soldiers and civilians alike.

Categories of WW2 German Medals

Broadly, WW2 German medals can be classified into combat awards, non-combat

merit awards, campaign and service medals, and special decorations. Combat awards recognized acts of bravery and leadership under fire, while non-combat medals rewarded exemplary service or achievements away from direct combat. Campaign medals commemorated participation in specific military operations or theaters of war.

Combat Awards and Decorations

Combat awards were among the most prestigious and sought-after German medals during WW2. These decorations highlighted personal courage, tactical skill, and leadership. They were often awarded on the battlefield or shortly after acts of valor. The following subtopics explore the most notable combat awards issued during the conflict.

Iron Cross

The Iron Cross is arguably the most iconic German military decoration of WW2. Originally established in 1813, it was revived by Adolf Hitler in 1939. The Iron Cross was awarded in several classes:

- Iron Cross 2nd Class (Eisernes Kreuz 2. Klasse)
- Iron Cross 1st Class (Eisernes Kreuz 1. Klasse)
- Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes)
- Higher grades such as Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds were awarded for exceptional valor

The medal was recognized for its distinctive black and silver design featuring a cross pattée with a swastika in the center and the year "1939" at the bottom arm. Recipients ranged from infantrymen to high-ranking officers.

Close Combat Clasp

The Close Combat Clasp (Nahkampfspange) was awarded to soldiers who engaged in hand-to-hand combat. It was issued in three grades—bronze, silver, and gold—depending on the number of close combat days served. This award recognized the brutal nature of frontline ground fighting and the tenacity of the recipients.

Wound Badge

The Wound Badge was given to soldiers wounded in action. It came in three classes:

- Black (for one or two wounds)
- Silver (for three or four wounds)
- Gold (for five or more wounds or severe injuries)

This badge was a symbol of sacrifice and endurance in combat, often worn with pride by military personnel.

Non-Combat and Merit Awards

German medals also recognized non-combat achievements, including long service, outstanding leadership, and contributions to the war effort that did not involve direct fighting. These awards fostered loyalty and acknowledged important support roles.

War Merit Cross

The War Merit Cross (Kriegsverdienstkreuz) was awarded to military personnel and civilians for meritorious service not directly related to combat. It was issued in two classes, with and without swords, indicating whether the recipient was involved in combat support activities or purely non-combat roles.

German Cross

The German Cross (Deutsches Kreuz) was a high-level decoration awarded for repeated acts of bravery or military leadership that did not quite meet the threshold for the Knight's Cross. It came in gold and silver variants, with the gold awarded for combat achievements and silver for non-combat merits.

Long Service Awards

Several medals recognized extended military service, ranging from four to 40 years. These awards reinforced the value of dedication and continuity within the armed forces. The Long Service Award featured a swastika and the number of years served on the medal face or ribbon.

Identification and Authenticity

Identifying genuine WW2 German medals is critical for collectors and historians. Many reproductions and counterfeit medals exist, making knowledge of manufacturing details and markings essential. This section outlines key indicators for authenticating these awards.

Materials and Construction

Original German medals were typically made of high-quality metals such as iron, zinc, or bronze with enamel detailing. Weight, finish, and craftsmanship are important factors. For example, early Iron Crosses were made with iron cores and silver frames, while later wartime issues sometimes used cheaper materials due to resource shortages.

Markings and Maker's Marks

Many authentic WW2 German medals bear maker's marks on the reverse or the suspension ring. These marks identify the manufacturer and can be cross-referenced with known lists of wartime producers. Absence of such marks or unusual engravings may indicate a reproduction.

Common Reproductions

Due to high collector demand, replicas of popular medals like the Iron Cross and Knight's Cross are widespread. Characteristics of reproductions include incorrect dimensions, poor detailing, and modern materials. Specialized reference guides and expert consultation are recommended for verification.

Collecting Tips and Preservation

Collecting WW2 German medals requires careful consideration of provenance, condition, and historical significance. Proper preservation ensures the longevity of these artifacts and maintains their value.

Assessing Condition

Medals should be examined for corrosion, wear, and damage. Original ribbons are especially valuable and should be preserved intact. Cleaning should be minimal and performed only by professionals to avoid reducing the medal's historical integrity.

Storage Recommendations

Medals should be stored in a dry, temperature-controlled environment away from direct sunlight. Acid-free materials and padded cases help prevent deterioration. Proper labeling and documentation of each piece's history enhance the collection's educational value.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

Collectors should be aware of the legal regulations concerning the possession and display of Nazi-era memorabilia, as these vary by country. Ethical collecting practices discourage the glorification of the regime and focus on historical preservation and education.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the most common WW2 German medals collected today?

The most common WW2 German medals collected today include the Iron Cross (Eisernes Kreuz), the War Merit Cross, the Wound Badge, and the Eastern Front

Medal.

How can I identify authentic WW2 German medals?

Authentic WW2 German medals can be identified by examining the quality of the metal, markings such as maker stamps, patina, and wear consistent with age. Consulting reputable guides and experts is recommended to avoid reproductions.

What is the significance of the Iron Cross in WW2 German medals?

The Iron Cross was one of the highest military decorations in Nazi Germany, awarded for bravery in battle and leadership. It came in several classes, including the 2nd Class, 1st Class, and Knight's Cross.

Are there different classes or grades of the Iron Cross in WW2?

Yes, the Iron Cross had several grades: the 2nd Class, 1st Class, Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, and higher grades like Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds added to the Knight's Cross.

What does the Eastern Front Medal represent?

The Eastern Front Medal, also known as the 'Frozen Meat Medal,' was awarded to German and Axis personnel who served on the Eastern Front during the harsh winter of 1941-1942.

How were WW2 German medals typically worn?

WW2 German medals were typically worn on the left side of the uniform. The Iron Cross 2nd Class was worn suspended from a ribbon in the buttonhole or on a ribbon bar, while the 1st Class was a pin attached directly to the uniform.

What materials were WW2 German medals made from?

WW2 German medals were commonly made from metals such as iron, zinc, aluminum, and sometimes bronze or silver, depending on the medal and its class.

What is the War Merit Cross and who received it?

The War Merit Cross was awarded to military personnel and civilians for exceptional service not involving direct combat, including contributions to the war effort, logistics, and administration.

Can WW2 German medals be legally bought and sold today?

In many countries, WW2 German medals can be legally bought and sold, provided they do not bear prohibited symbols like the swastika in certain jurisdictions. It is important to check local laws regarding militaria trade.

Where can I find a comprehensive guide to WW2 German medals?

Comprehensive guides to WW2 German medals can be found in specialized reference books, military history websites, collectors' forums, and museums dedicated to military history.

Additional Resources

1. *German Medals and Decorations of World War II: A Collector's Guide*

This comprehensive guide provides detailed information on the various German medals and decorations awarded during World War II. It includes high-quality photographs, descriptions, and historical contexts for each medal. Collectors and historians alike will find it an invaluable resource for identifying and understanding these artifacts.

2. *The Complete Guide to Third Reich Awards and Decorations*

Covering all the major awards and decorations issued by Nazi Germany, this book offers an in-depth look at their origins, criteria, and variations. It features detailed illustrations and tips for collectors on distinguishing authentic pieces from reproductions. The author also explores the symbolism behind the designs and their significance during the war.

3. *WWII German Medals: Identification and Value Guide*

Designed specifically for collectors, this guide helps identify authentic World War II German medals and provides current market values. It includes detailed descriptions of ribbons, makers' marks, and manufacturing methods. The book also offers historical background to better appreciate the importance of each award.

4. *Orders, Decorations, and Medals of the Third Reich*

This authoritative volume covers the full range of orders, decorations, and medals issued in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945. Each entry includes a history of the award, criteria for issuance, and variations found in the field. The book is richly illustrated with period photographs and collector images.

5. *Medals and Decorations of Hitler's Germany*

Focusing on the military and civilian awards of the Third Reich, this book provides detailed descriptions and historical context. It covers well-known medals like the Iron Cross as well as lesser-known awards. The author also discusses the manufacturing techniques and the impact these decorations had on recipients.

6. *The Iron Cross of World War II: History and Collectibility*

This specialized book delves into the history of the Iron Cross, Germany's most famous military decoration during World War II. It explores its origins, evolution, and various classes awarded throughout the conflict. Collectors will appreciate the detailed photos and advice on spotting genuine Iron Cross medals.

7. *German Military Awards 1939-1945: A Photographic Reference*

Featuring hundreds of color photographs, this reference book is ideal for visual identification of German military awards from World War II. Each medal and decoration is shown with close-up images and detailed captions. The book also explains the significance of each award within the wartime German military structure.

8. *Third Reich Medals and Badges: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*

An encyclopedic resource, this book catalogs the diverse range of Nazi-era medals and badges. It provides historical descriptions, award criteria, and manufacturing details for each item. The comprehensive illustrations make it a valuable tool for collectors and historians interested in Third Reich memorabilia.

9. *German WWII Awards and Decorations: A Collector's Handbook*

This handbook offers practical advice for collectors, including tips on authentication, preservation, and display of German World War II awards. It covers a wide array of medals, badges, and insignia with historical notes on their awarding. The clear layout and detailed photographs make it accessible for both beginners and experienced collectors.

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