World War One

Campaign Medals

Defence Honours & Awards
From Australia’s earliest involvement in war-like campaign service, medals were awarded under the Imperial system until the introduction of the Australian system of honours and awards in 1975.

Australia at war!

Britain declared war on Germany and its allies on 4 August 1914 and called on its Dominions and Colonies for assistance. Australia responded to the call within days. As early as 18 August 1914 Australia’s first overseas military force, the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force was dispatched from Sydney to capture German New Guinea. On 1 November 1914, the first contingent of Australia’s expeditionary force, the Australian Imperial Force sailed from Albany, Western Australia.

Australians served mainly in Europe and the Middle East; also in China, Salonika, German South West Africa, German East Africa, Italy and Russia.

Australia continued to support the British Empire until armistice was declared on 11 November 1918.

Portrait of Lieutenant J. Hamilton, VC wearing the Victoria Cross, the 1914–15 Star, the British War Medal 1914–1920 and the Victory Medal.

John Hamilton enlisted on 15 September 1914. He took part in the original landing in Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

It was during the fierce fighting at Lone Pine on 9 August that Hamilton earned his Victoria Cross. Hamilton was a Private at the time of his Victoria Cross action and was later commissioned.

John Patrick Hamilton, the last survivor of the seven Victoria Cross recipients from the battle of Lone Pine, died on 27 February 1961. On 9 August 1985, the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Lone Pine, Hamilton’s son donated his father’s medals to the Australian War Memorial.
The Medals

The 1914 Star

The 1914 Star was created in 1917 and awarded to those who served in France or Belgium with a unit or who served in either of those two countries between 5 August 1914 and midnight on 22/23 November 1914. Those who had actually been under fire in France or Belgium between those dates were also entitled to wear a clasp with the inscription ‘5TH AUGUST – 22ND NOVEMBER 1914’ on the ribbon of the 1914 Star.

The colours of the ribbon are representative of the British Empire.

A very small number of Australians received this medal.

A recipient of the 1914 Star could not also be awarded the 1914-15 Star.

The 1914 – 15 Star

The 1914–15 Star, which uses the same ribbon as the 1914 Star, was established in 1918. It was retrospectively awarded for service in a prescribed theatre of war between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915, where a prior entitlement to the 1914 Star did not exist.

Australians who took part in the capture of German New Guinea in September 1914 and Australians who served in the Gallipoli campaign were entitled to the 1914 – 15 Star.

The British War Medal 1914 – 1920

The British War Medal was instituted by George V in 1919 to mark the end of the Great War. It was awarded to Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and Mercantile Marine personnel for service in a theatre of war or overseas between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918. Under certain circumstances, the medal could be awarded for service in Australia.

The British War Medal has a wide central watered stripe of orange, bordered by stripes of white, black and blue. The colours have no particular significance.
The Mercantile Marine Medal

The Mercantile Marine Medal was awarded to those who qualified for the British War Medal and who could provide evidence of having served at sea on at least one voyage through a danger zone as merchant seamen.

The Mercantile Marine Medal ribbon has a narrow central white stripe, bordered by two wide green and red stripes. The fitting design represents the starboard (green), steaming (white) and port (red) lights of a vessel.

The Victory Medal

The Victory Medal was authorised in 1919 to commemorate the victory of the Allied Forces over the Central Powers and was awarded to Navy, Army and Royal Air Force personnel.

Each of the Allied Nations issued a ‘Victory Medal’ with all of these having the figure of Victory, or an equivalent figure from their national mythology, on the obverse as a common feature. Australians received the medal issued by Great Britain.

A member mentioned in despatches for service during World War 1 wears a bronze oak leaf emblem on the Victory Medal ribbon.

Only one emblem is worn, no matter how many times a member was mentioned in despatches.
How do I apply for my relative’s medals?

Whilst Defence Honours and Awards cannot provide replacement medals to the next of kin of a deceased recipient if they are lost or damaged, it may issue any unclaimed medals to the executor of the will (only at the time the will is being executed), or beneficiary of the will. If, however, after the estate is settled, there are any (future) unclaimed medals due to the member, please contact Defence Honours and Awards toll-free on 1800 111 321.

If you would like further information on eligibility or to ascertain what medals have been awarded or remain outstanding, please contact Defence Honours and Awards or, alternatively, complete an application form ‘Application for the Posthumous Issue of Medals and/or Clasps’, which can be found on the Defence Honours and Awards’ website at www.defence.gov.au/medals.

Can I wear my relative’s medals?

Although not officially sanctioned, a protocol has been accepted that family members of a deceased recipient may wear that person’s medals on commemorative occasions such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. In these circumstances, the medals should be worn on the right side to show that the wearer is not the original recipient.

The Order of Wearing Australian Honours and Awards

The Queen determines the placement of each element in the order of wearing Australian honours and awards, and a consolidation is notified by the Governor-General from time to time.

The most recent order was published on 25 September 2007 and is available from www.itsanhonour.gov.au or the DH&A website www.defence.gov.au/medals.
Defence Honours and Awards

Website:  www.defence.gov.au/medals
Phone:  1800 111 321 (toll free)
Address: Defence Honours and Awards
PO Box 7952
CANBERRA BC ACT 2610

Are you researching your family’s military history? These links may assist you.

www.itshonour.gov.au
(medal information including Order of Wear)

www.gg.gov.au
(Office of the Governor-General)

www.naa.gov.au
(National Archives of Australia)

www.awm.gov.au
(Australian War Memorial)

www.dva.gov.au
(Department of Veterans’ Affairs)

www.rsl.org.au
(Returned and Services League of Australia)

www.mod.uk
(UK Ministry of Defence)

www.veterans-uk.info
(UK Service Personnel & Veterans Agency)