

ww2 german medals guide

ww2 german medals guide offers a detailed exploration of the various awards and decorations issued by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. This comprehensive guide covers the historical context, significance, and criteria for earning these medals, providing valuable insights for collectors, historians, and enthusiasts alike. Understanding the distinctions between combat and non-combat awards, as well as recognizing the most prestigious decorations, is essential for appreciating their place in military history. The article also examines the design elements and symbolism embedded in these medals, reflecting the ideology and military culture of the era. Finally, practical tips on identifying authentic pieces and common replicas are discussed to aid collectors and researchers. This ww2 german medals guide aims to be a definitive resource that balances historical accuracy with detailed description.

- Historical Background of WW2 German Medals
- Major Categories of WW2 German Medals
- Notable Combat Medals and Decorations
- Civilian and Non-Combat Awards
- Design Features and Symbolism
- Authenticity and Collecting Tips

Historical Background of WW2 German Medals

The issuance of military decorations in Germany during World War II was deeply influenced by the political and military climate of the time. These medals served not only as recognition of bravery and service but also as tools of propaganda and morale boosting within the Wehrmacht and other branches of the armed forces. The tradition of awarding medals dates back to previous German military history, but the Nazi regime introduced new designs and categories reflecting its ideological goals. Understanding this historical background helps contextualize the significance of each medal and its role in the broader war effort.

Major Categories of WW2 German Medals

WW2 German medals can be broadly categorized into combat awards, non-combat or service medals, and special decorations. Each category had distinct criteria and purposes, addressing different aspects of military and civilian contributions during the war. These classifications assist collectors and historians in identifying the type and importance of a given medal.

Combat Awards

Combat awards recognized acts of bravery, leadership, and frontline service. These medals were highly coveted and often publicly displayed to honor valor and dedication under fire.

Service and Campaign Medals

Service medals acknowledged length of service, participation in specific campaigns, or roles supporting the war effort outside direct combat. These medals reflected the broader scope of military and civil involvement.

Special Decorations

Special decorations were often awarded for exceptional achievements, such as high command merits or political loyalty. These were sometimes exclusive and rare, carrying significant prestige.

Notable Combat Medals and Decorations

This section highlights some of the most recognizable and significant combat awards issued by Germany during WWII, many of which have become iconic symbols of the conflict.

Iron Cross

The Iron Cross (Eisernes Kreuz) was one of the most famous German military decorations. It was awarded in several classes, including the 2nd Class, 1st Class, and the Knight's Cross, the latter being the highest grade for valor. The Iron Cross was re-instituted by Hitler in 1939 and featured a swastika design in the center, reflecting the regime's emblem.

Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross

The Knight's Cross was awarded for exceptional bravery or successful military leadership. It had multiple higher grades such as Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds, each indicating further valor or achievement.

German Cross

The German Cross in Gold was awarded for repeated acts of bravery or leadership beyond the call of duty but below the level required for the Knight's Cross. It was introduced in 1941 and became a prestigious mid-level award.

Close Combat Clasp

The Close Combat Clasp recognized soldiers who had engaged in hand-to-hand fighting on multiple occasions. It was issued in three classes: Bronze, Silver, and Gold, indicating the number of combat days.

- Iron Cross 2nd and 1st Class
- Knight's Cross and its higher grades
- German Cross in Gold and Silver
- Close Combat Clasp (Bronze, Silver, Gold)

Civilian and Non-Combat Awards

Not all German medals from WWII were related to frontline combat. Many recognized civilian contributions, technical achievements, and long service within the military and state organizations.

War Merit Cross

The War Merit Cross (Kriegsverdienstkreuz) was awarded to military personnel and civilians who performed outstanding service that did not involve direct combat. It was available with and without swords, the swords variant indicating some level of combat involvement.

Occupational Medals

Occupational medals commemorated participation in campaigns such as the annexation of Austria, the Sudetenland, and other territorial expansions. These medals often featured specific dates and symbols related to the respective operations.

Long Service Awards

Long service awards recognized extended periods of duty within the Wehrmacht or other government services. These medals often came in multiple classes based on years served.

Design Features and Symbolism

The design of WW2 German medals reflected both traditional military aesthetics and Nazi symbolism. Understanding these elements is crucial for identifying and appreciating each

medal's historical context.

Common Symbols

Many medals featured the swastika, eagle, oak leaves, swords, and iron cross motifs. These symbols conveyed power, strength, and loyalty to the Nazi regime and its military ideals.

Materials and Craftsmanship

Medals were typically made from metals such as iron, zinc, or bronze, with enamel or paint used for detailing. Higher-grade awards often included silver or gold plating. Craftsmanship varied between manufacturers but generally reflected high standards for official decorations.

Ribbon Colors and Patterns

Distinctive ribbons accompanied each medal, with colors and patterns indicating the type of award and the branch of service. For example, the Iron Cross featured a black and white ribbon, while the War Merit Cross used red, white, and black stripes.

Authenticity and Collecting Tips

Collecting WW2 German medals requires careful attention to authenticity due to the prevalence of reproductions and fakes. Knowledge of design details, maker marks, and wear patterns is essential for verifying genuine pieces.

Identifying Authentic Medals

Authentic medals often bear manufacturer stamps, consistent weight and size, and quality craftsmanship. Signs of artificial aging or incorrect materials can indicate replicas.

Common Reproductions

Certain high-demand medals, especially the Knight's Cross and Iron Cross, are frequently reproduced. Collectors should be cautious and seek expert advice when acquiring these items.

Storage and Preservation

Proper storage in a dry, controlled environment helps preserve the condition of medals. Avoiding exposure to moisture, excessive handling, and harsh chemicals is recommended to maintain value and appearance.

1. Verify manufacturer markings and stamps.
2. Examine materials and weight consistency.
3. Research known reproductions and common fakes.
4. Consult reputable references or experts.
5. Store medals in protective cases away from humidity.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the most common World War II German medals?

Some of the most common World War II German medals include the Iron Cross (Eisernes Kreuz), the War Merit Cross (Kriegsverdienstkreuz), the Eastern Front Medal (Ostmedaille), and the German Cross (Deutsches Kreuz).

How can I identify authentic World War II German medals?

Authentic WW2 German medals typically have high-quality craftsmanship, specific maker marks, and wear consistent with age. Researching known manufacturers and comparing details such as fonts, materials, and stamps can help distinguish originals from reproductions.

What is the significance of the Iron Cross during World War II?

The Iron Cross was a prestigious German military decoration awarded for bravery and leadership. It was reinstated by Hitler in 1939 with different classes, including the 2nd Class, 1st Class, and the Knight's Cross.

What materials were used to make WW2 German medals?

WW2 German medals were commonly made from metals like iron, zinc, aluminum, and sometimes bronze. For example, the Iron Cross was often made of iron with a silver frame, while other medals might use zinc due to wartime material shortages.

How were German medals typically worn during World War II?

Medals such as the Iron Cross 2nd Class were worn suspended from a ribbon on the tunic, while the Iron Cross 1st Class was a pin-on medal worn on the left breast pocket. Higher awards like the Knight's Cross were worn around the neck.

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 harsh Eastern Front during the winter of 1941-42, recognizing their endurance in difficult conditions.

Are there guides or catalogs that list all World War II German medals?

Yes, several reference books and guides catalog World War II German medals, such as "Orders, Decorations, and Medals of the Third Reich" by Robin Lumsden and online databases specialized in militaria collecting.

What is the difference between the War Merit Cross and the Iron Cross?

The Iron Cross was awarded for bravery in combat, whereas the War Merit Cross was awarded for meritorious service behind the front lines or non-combat achievements. The War Merit Cross often featured swords if awarded for military merit.

How valuable are World War II German medals today?

The value varies depending on rarity, condition, and historical significance. Common medals like the Iron Cross 2nd Class may be relatively affordable, while rare awards like the Knight's Cross can be worth thousands of dollars.

Can I legally buy and sell World War II German medals?

In many countries, buying and selling World War II German medals is legal, but some restrictions apply regarding Nazi symbols. It's important to check local laws and regulations before trading or displaying these items.

Additional Resources

1. German Medals and Decorations of World War II

This comprehensive guide covers the vast array of German awards issued during World War II. It includes detailed photographs, descriptions, and historical context for each medal and decoration. Collectors and historians will find this book invaluable for identifying authentic pieces.

2. A Collector's Guide to Third Reich Medals

Focusing on the Third Reich period, this book provides an in-depth look at the medals awarded by Nazi Germany. The clear categorization and high-quality images help readers understand the significance and rarity of each medal. It also offers tips on spotting fakes and reproductions.

3. WWII German Military Awards: Identification and Value

This book serves as a practical manual for identifying and appraising German military awards from WWII. It includes market values, manufacturing details, and variations within specific medal types. Ideal for both new collectors and seasoned experts.

4. Medals of the Wehrmacht: A Visual Reference

Featuring hundreds of color plates, this visual reference book showcases the medals and badges awarded to Wehrmacht personnel. It highlights design changes over the war years and provides background on the criteria for each award. The book is a must-have for visual learners and collectors.

5. Third Reich Awards: History and Authenticity

This book delves into the historical background of Germany's WWII awards, exploring the political and military significance behind each medal. It also addresses common counterfeit issues and provides guidance on verifying authenticity. Readers gain a holistic view of the medals' place in history.

6. German WWII Combat Medals and Their Stories

Beyond identification, this book shares the personal stories attached to various combat medals awarded during the war. It combines historical facts with anecdotal narratives to bring the medals to life. A great read for those interested in the human side of military awards.

7. The Complete Guide to German WWII Badge and Medal Makers

Detailing the manufacturers behind German WWII awards, this guide provides information on maker marks, production methods, and quality distinctions. Collectors can use this book to trace the origins of specific medals and understand differences in craftsmanship.

8. Fakes and Forgeries: German WWII Medals Exposed

Specializing in counterfeit detection, this book educates readers on common fakes and reproductions in the German WWII medal market. It offers side-by-side comparisons, expert tips, and advice on safe purchasing. Essential for collectors who want to avoid costly mistakes.

9. Decorations of the Third Reich: An Illustrated Catalog

This illustrated catalog presents a thorough listing of all known decorations issued by Nazi Germany during WWII. Each entry includes detailed images, descriptions, and context for the award's creation and use. The book is a definitive resource for academic study and collection reference.

Ww2 German Medals Guide

Related Articles

- [worlds together worlds apart volume 1](#)
- [world history worksheets high school](#)
- [youth gangs in american society](#)

[Back to Home](#)