

U.S. Army Military History Institute
950 Soldiers Drive
Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5021
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Awards-Individual

LEGION OF MERIT

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

The Legion of Merit, created by act of Congress, 20 Jul 42, was intended to recognize military personnel of the U.S. and friendly nations who "distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service," excluding action against the enemy. The President of the United States made the award upon recommendation by the Secretaries of War or Navy. The new award, like the Purple Heart award that Congress had re-established in 1932, was historically linked to the Badge for Military Merit, originally established by General George Washington in 1782.

Late that year the first awards were presented. The Navy Department announced on 6 Nov 1942, that its first recipient would be Navy Nurse Anna Bernatitus, in recognition of her Philippine service during the Japanese invasion. (She had been among the last Americans evacuated by submarine from the islands before their surrender.) However, two weeks earlier, on 22 Oct 42, it had been announced by the Under Secretary of State that Brigadier General Amaro S. Bittencourt, Brazilian military attaché to the United States, would be honored with the Legion of Merit. The Army actually presented the medal to him on 7 Nov 1942, at Miami Beach, Florida. (Precisely when Nurse Bernatitus received her medal is not known, but it appears that she may have been presented with it by President Roosevelt himself--if the New York Times report of 10 Apr 1943, p. 10, is correct.)

By the end of WWII, over 12,000 Legion of Merit medals had been awarded at the recommendation of the U.S. War Department alone. About 1,800 of these went to foreign personnel. See:

Milotta, David. "Who Won the Medals?" Infantry Journal (May 1946): pp. 22-23. Per.

U.S. War Dept. AGO. Machine Records Branch. "Decorations and Awards Awarded by the War Department and Overseas Theater Commanders." Wash, DC, 1 Mar 1946. pp. 14-15 & elsewhere. UB433.A65.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES:

Army and Navy Register (7 Nov 1942): p. 1. Per.

Gleim, Albert F. US Army Awards of the Legion of Merit for WWII. Ft Myer, VA: Planchet, 1993. 166 p. D796.5.U6.U82.

Lists name & cites general order of 20,000-some awardees thru 1950.

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New York Times (23 Oct 1942): p. 37; (7 Nov 1942), p. 10; (8 Nov 1942), p. 21; and (10 Apr 1943), p. 10. Microfilm.

U.S. War Dept. Personnel, Decorations: Army Regulations 600-45, dated Sep 1943. pp. 5-6 & 16. MilPub-AR.

_____. Bulletin 40, dated 5 Aug 1942, 3 p., and Bulletin 54, dated 5 Nov 1942, p. 1. MilPub-Bulletin.

_____. General Order 5, dated 30 Jan 1943. 4 p. MilPub-GO.

Washington Post, clippings from 7 & 8 Nov 1942. BibFile-Awards-LOM.

OTHER BITS:

-During WWII, at least, each award of the LoM appeared in War Dept General Orders.

-On the design of the Legion of Merit medal, see 12 Apr 1942 report from Heraldic Section, Office of the Quartermaster General (Roll #155 of Heraldic Branch, QMG Files on microfilm).