

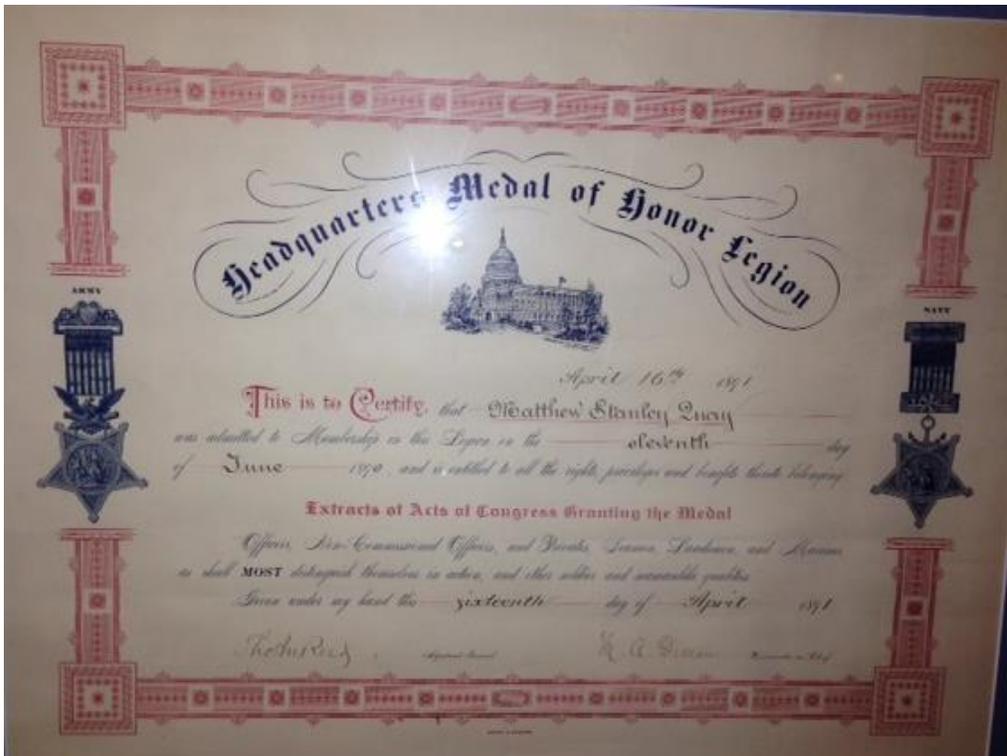
A BRIEF HISTORY OF
THE MEDAL OF HONOR LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES
By Ronald E. Fischer

The Medal of Honor Legion was formed on April 24, 1890 at Washington, D.C., as both a Veteran, and Hereditary Society based on preservation of the Union and the Constitution. This was typical of the period as large numbers of Civil War Veteran's as well as Hereditary Societies were being established during this period. It was the custom of these societies to create and wear membership badges. Membership was based on those who received either the Army or the Navy Medal of Honor. The constitution provided for two classes of membership: 1st and 2nd Class. All original recipients of the Medal of Honor were 1st Class members and wore their medal as membership badge. Upon the recipient's death, the eldest son, after reaching the age of 21, or daughter if there were no sons, could qualify as a 1st Class member and wear the Medal on Honor on a bar marked "Inheritance". 2nd Class members were made up of from the eldest son, or daughter if there was no son. In the event of no children as heirs, next of kin could be elected to the 2nd Class. All of these individuals could wear the 2nd Class Membership medal. Admission to the order cost \$2.00 the cost of a membership certificate (There were certificates for both Classes), and \$1.00 annual dues. Major General Paul St. Clair A. Mulholand authored a book that illustrated the badges, the Inheritance bar, rosettes for Medal of Honor recipients, as well as separate rosettes for the hereditary 1st and 2nd Class Members. This book gave detailed biographies of the recipients, a photo and inheritance instructions.

Admission to the Legion was controlled by the Executive Committee of Officers of the society who determined who could be admitted. Members of the 27th Maine and New Jersey regiments who stayed beyond their enlistments were not admitted. The officers had problems with Navy "in line of profession" peace time awards, but decided to admit them and not question the wisdom of the Navy's award policy.

The Legion's immediate goals were to provide funds for general and specific charities and promote the best interests of its comrades and worthy soldiers and sailors. The legion began to promote the status of the Medal of Honor from something that was just put in the mail by the Navy and War Departments, to an award with some status actually presented by the President. That quest also ultimately would also provide a pension for

awardees of both services. Indeed when the US Army Certificate of Merit, an award for enlisted men was reinstated in 1878 it provided a Presidential signed and a \$2.00 Monthly pay increase to holder for the duration of his service career. The first recipients of the newly reinstated Certificate were Medal of Honor Awardees who had carried dispatches through Indian infested territory during the Little Big Horn Campaign. Original Civil War Naval recipients were given the Navy Medal of Honor, a promotion to Petty Officer and \$200.00. In 1901 congress voted a pension for Navy and Marine recipients, but it took until 1916 for the Army to get theirs. The Board reviewed all of the Medals and struck those from the 27th Maine Infantry and the 27th New Jersey Infantry recipients as well as others including the Civilian Scouts and Dr. Mary Walker. The legion got the army ribbon changed to a Red White and Blue bunting pattern that was worn by both Army and Navy Legion members and improved the quality and quantity of the engraving on the medals reverse. They also promoted the eventual redesign of both the Army and Navy Medals of Honor.



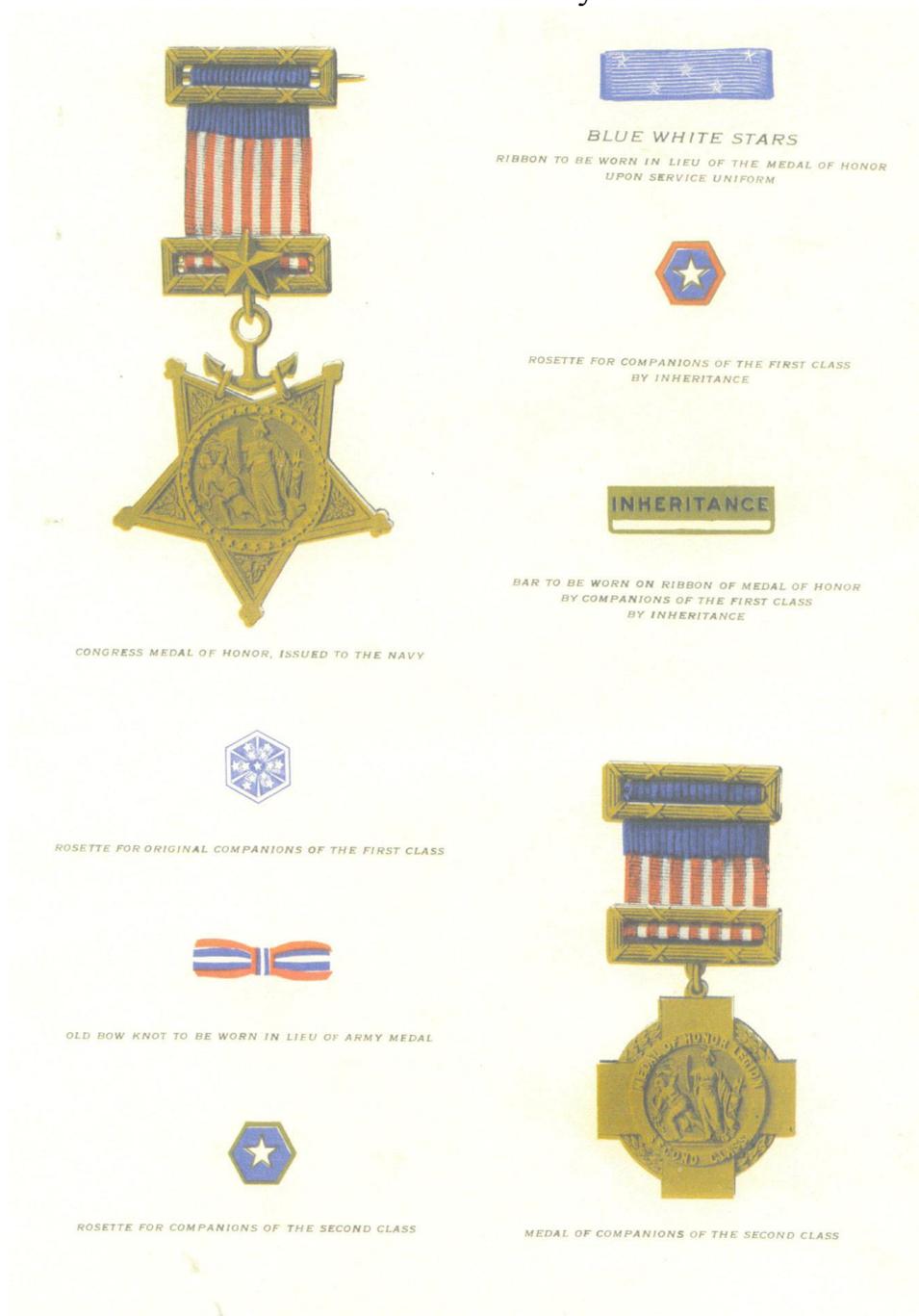
Membership document from one of the original members of the Medal of Honor Legion



Next style of membership document with the new ribbon in use

The design of the Medal of Honor 2nd Class was based on the same center design of the original Medal of Honor inverted star of Minerva repelling discord with "Medal of Honor 2nd Class" around the center scene in lieu of stars. This was placed on a simple bronze cross and worn from two Navy style pierced bronze bars with out a bottom star, and on an Army Civil War flag style medal Ribbon. Most of the known badges are blank on the reverse. A few appear to have been engraved in the following format with the name of the 1st and 2nd Class Member. An example in a recent auction: "James M Schoonmaker, Jr / Pittsburg, Pa. / Son of James M Schoonmaker". James M. Schoonmaker was born on 30 June 1842 at Pittsburgh, Pa. He entered service from that city at age 18 in 1861 and rose through the ranks from Private to Sergeant Major in the 1st Maryland Cavalry. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieut. in Company A in August of 1862. Shortly afterward he was commissioned as Colonel Commanding the newly formed 14th Pennsylvania Cavalry. On January 1st 1864 he commanded the 1st Brigade of the Army of the Shenandoah. He was issued his medal for an

action at Ft Starr, Winchester, Va., on 19 September 1864. His medal was issued on 19 May 1899. The medal was issued for: "At a critical period, gallantly led a cavalry charge against the left of the enemy's line of battle, drove the enemy out of his works, and captured many prisoners." This charge resulted in his unit winning the battle. He later served in the Indian Wars. Schoomaker went on to become the National Commander the Legion of Valor from 1925-26. His son's history is unknown.





Post WWI membership document for DSC recipient.

In 1901 the Roster of the of the Medal of Honor Legion consisted of 513 1st Class members of which 2 had resigned and 36 had died leaving 475 active. 2nd Class members were listed as 74 of which 2 resigned, 5 were transferred to 1st Class, and 2 died for active total of 65. Grand Total in the 1901 Roster was 535. The report of the 1907 gives a greater break out. Members: Civil War Army 305, Civil War Navy 18, Indian Wars, Rescues, etc 56, Spanish American War 45, 1st Class Members by Inheritance 23, 2nd Class Members 64, for a grand total 511.

The Medal of Honor Legion name was changed to the Legion of Valor on 25 November 1918 to admit recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross. By 1927 the membership of the Legion of Valor had changed to: MOH Civil War 41, China 1900 3, Vera Cruz 9, Navy 1869-1917 8, Indian Wars 1867-1882 8, Cuba-1898 14, Samoa 1899 1, Philippines 11, World War 17, Medal of Honor Total 112. DSC Cuba 2, DSC Philippines 4, DSC Men World War 171, DSC Women World War 2, DSC Siberia 1, Total DSC 182. Inheritance Membership appeared to have changed to Associate membership 63 for a grand total membership of 357. In 1933, members of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, who were recipients of the Navy Cross, the

second ranking Navy decoration for extraordinary heroism, were invited to join the membership and the name of this prestigious organization was changed to "The Army and Navy Legion of Valor". On August 4, 1955, Public Law 224, 84th Congress, incorporated The Army and Navy Legion of Valor of the United States. With the creation of the Air Force Medal of Honor and the Air Force Cross, the membership invited the recipients of these medals to become members and on June 21, 1961, with P.L. 87-56, the name became the "Legion of Valor of the United States.



Membership Document belonging to a DSC replacement for the Certificate of Merit Document and medal

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