



With Pride & Distinction

Junior Officer Advisory Group

Vol. 18 May 2017: Ribbon Attachments and Devices

Distinguished service awards are among the highest honors an officer can receive representing outstanding achievement or service above and beyond an officer's duty. The honor and prestige associated with awards are clearly evident when proudly presented on the uniforms of every officer.

History of Ribbon Wear

The origin of modern awards, commonly seen as ribbons and medals, is credited to Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon recognized the positive effects of comradery, encouragement, and pride among his soldiers when presented with awards in the form of ribbons and medals. Napoleon is famously quoted as saying, "A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon."

As ribbons became increasingly common, ribbon devices or attachments (terms often used interchangeably) were used to denote extraordinary honor or represent multiple recognitions of the same award. The 3/16" bronze star is an example of a ribbon attachment that was introduced by the United States Navy after World War I to symbolize multiple awards.

Similar to other uniformed services, the USPHS permits officers to display ribbons and medals that represent recognition for distinguished service. This outward display of achievement fosters an environment of pride, fellowship, and esprit de corps among officers. Each officer must properly present his or her awards with pride to honor achievement, service, and the Corps.

All authorized ribbons and/or appropriate sized medals as annotated in an officer's Official Personnel Folder (OPF) are required to be worn when wearing Dinner Dress, Ceremonial Dress or Service Dress uniforms. When wearing service uniforms, an officer has the option to wear all authorized ribbons or wear the top 3 highest awards, as annotated in an officer's OPF.

Figure 1. Multiple Stars



The complete rules for the proper wear of USPHS awards and decorations can be found in regulation [CC26.3.3 "Wear of Ribbons and Medals."](#)

[Continued on next page](#)

Did you know outstanding acts of heroism can be awarded?

The Distinguished Service Medal (DSM), Meritorious Service Medal (MSM), and Outstanding Service Medal (OSM) may be authorized to include a bronze letter "V" attachment to represent an act of valor or heroism. More specifically, this award attachment represents "a positive and particular act, or actions, of bravery, and courage, and/or heroism."

Used across the uniformed services (gold "V" in the Navy and Marines, bronze "V" in the Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard) this device denotes acts of heroism involving conflict with an armed enemy or exposure to personal hazard during a combat operation. For USPHS officers, the criteria to receive an award "with Valor" requires a heroic action "resulting in the saving or preserving of the life or health of others." The most recent presentation of an award with valor occurred in 2016, when an OSM "with Valor" was awarded to a junior officer for courage, heroism, and leadership during a historic storm and flood and the aftermath during the Corps response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

Historically, the first "V" attachment to an award occurred in 1944 by the Army as a brass "V" attachment to the Bronze Star Medal. The Bronze Star Medal is the fourth highest individual military award and may be awarded for acts of heroism, merit, or meritorious service in a combat zone. An officer awarded the DSM, MSM, or OSM with a bronze "V" attachment should wear the ribbons and medals proudly as they are in limited company across all uniformed services. When a bronze "V" is attached, always place it centered on the ribbon. Stars are applied horizontal to the "V", with the first beginning on the left, then symmetrically on the right of the "V".

Outstanding Service Medal with "V" and Star Attachments



[Continued on next page](#)

What is the significance of 5/16” and 3/16” stars?

- 5/16” stars appear in Gold and Silver and are worn on Individual awards. Gold stars represent a single extra award, whereas Silver stars represent 5 additional awards.
- 3/16” stars appear in Bronze and Silver, and are worn on Unit and Service Awards. Similar to 5/16” stars, the Bronze stars represent a single extra award, whereas Silver stars represent 5 additional awards.
- Each ribbon has a maximum of 4 attachments.

What is the Expeditionary Attachment (EA)? The EA is an attachment worn on campaign medals or service awards that recognizes service in a specific location or theater of operation in direct support of the mission. Ultimately, the Surgeon General will determine which assignments qualify for the EA.



What is the proper orientation of the stars?

A single star or an odd number of stars is worn centered on the ribbon. When an even number of stars (2 or 4) are displayed, place stars in a horizontal line and symmetrically about the center of the ribbon. Stars are always placed on the ribbon with two rays pointing down. If a Silver star is placed next to a Gold or Bronze star, the Silver star is placed in the center of an odd number of stars, and right of center for an even number of stars. (see Figure 2)

Figure 2. Star Orientation



Trivia:

Q. Can an Officer wear two of the same service ribbons?

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. How do you apply stars to Medals that overlap?

When medals overlap, all attachments should be worn to the wearer’s left and centered on the visible portion of suspension ribbons. If all attachments are not visible after moving to the left, they may be worn vertically. Stars are placed on the ribbon with two rays pointing down. (see Figure 3)

Q. Can I place multiples of the single stars, or is the multiple star device required?

When wearing multiple stars of the same type, officers shall use the multiple star device corresponding to the required number of stars when possible to ensure proper orientation of stars and the most uniform appearance possible. (see Figure 1)

Q. Where can I obtain ribbons and their attachments?

USPHS ribbons may be purchased through the U.S. Navy Uniform Support Center –“Navy Nex” via <http://www.mynavyexchange.com/>. In addition, pre-assembled ribbon bars can be obtained from independent retailers, such as UltraThin, via online ordering at <http://www.ultrathin.com/>.

References

- <https://dep.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CC512.01.pdf>
- <https://www.usarmymilitarymedals.com/collections/devices-attachments>
- https://www.vanguardmil.com/pages/search-results?q=attachments&page_num=3
- <https://dep.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/PAM67.pdf>
- https://dep.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CC511_01.pdf
- https://dep.psc.gov/CCMIS/COAP/COAP_award_criteria_m.aspx
- https://dep.psc.gov/ccmis/PDF_docs/Awards%20Poster%20May%202015.pdf
- https://dep.psc.gov/ccmis/bulletin/awards_poster_m.aspx
- <http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/uniforms/uniformregulations/chapter5/Pages/5301.aspx>

Contributors [LCDR James Lee](#) and [LCDR Erin Evans](#) are members of the [JOAG Communications and Publications Committee Uniform Subcommittee](#)

Figure 3. Wear of Stars with Medals

