

No Medals for Confederate Soldiers - They Were All Heroes

There were no Confederate medals issued during the War for Southern Independence despite countless number of heroic deeds committed by numerous Confederate soldiers. The Confederate Congress voted and passed a law approved by an act of the Congress of the Confederate States on October 13, 1862, establishing medals for bravery but they were never issued. Some individual states sought to issue medals to their soldiers but the practice was never consummated by action. There is no indication that any medals were ever awarded. The Confederate Congress did at times pass resolutions bestowing the "special thanks of Congress" for successful military operations. Because all Confederates proudly served the Cause they loved so dear without thought of reward both Confederate officers and enlisted men shared the same distinct classification: they were "Confederate Soldiers"; and all shared the same distinct title and all were considered "Heroes."

For the Confederate soldier just fighting for the South was honor enough. Confederate soldiers endured hunger, privations and overwhelming odds to beat back an enemy better equipped and supplied and on nearly every occasion in superior numbers. The Confederate soldier often marched over hardened roads barefoot, went without sustenance for days, drank unclean water and still overcame a more powerful Northern army. Confederate soldiers did not enjoy the same logistical advantage in individual supplies enjoyed in the Northern army. The Confederate soldier often slept on the damp ground without benefit of a rubber blanket or even a stout wool blanket to keep off the chill during winter months. Such protracted exposure to the elements boded ill for the average life expectancy.

Rations for the Confederate soldier went from plentiful to scarce as the war progressed. While the Union army enjoyed the best rations of any army in history the Confederate soldier went from full rations to half to quarter rations and reverted to foraging for food along their line of march. Fresh meat and coffee were scarce. For daily rations Confederate soldiers were reduced to boiling everything from polk, potato tops, vines and many kinds of weeds. As fresh fruits and vegetables disappeared from the Southern diet soldiers' immune systems deteriorated and vitamin deficiency diseases such as scurvy, dysentery and malaria proliferated. As a result disease resulted in a 2:1 rate of death over combat related deaths. Twice as many Civil War soldiers succumbed to death from disease as from bullets, shells and bayonets.

Threadbare Southern patriots added to their uniform requirements mostly through "battlefield requisition." Nearly all equipment in the Confederate Army were articles captured from the Yankees. The Confederate soldier was allowed to wear Federal pants, underclothing, overcoats and shoes. And despite their privations and supreme sacrifice the individual bravery of the Confederate soldier exhibited on the battlefield far exceeded all other accounts in the annals of history.

A high level of morale pervaded the Southern army because the common soldier expressed overwhelming enthusiasm for the Cause. Religious fervor added to their individual bravery. After the reversal at Gettysburg during the summer of 1863 a religious revival broke out in the Southern army and an estimated 160,000 Confederate soldiers gave their lives to Christ and accepted Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

In contrast the Union army issued 1,522 Medals of Honor, the nation's top award for bravery in combat. The first Medals of Honor were given to many of the participants of the Andrews' Raid, aka the Locomotive Raid. Andrews himself was a civilian and thus ineligible at the time. Mary Edwards Walker, a surgeon, became the only woman (and one of only eight civilians) awarded a Medal of Honor; however, it was later revoked, and then reinstated. Twenty-five were awarded to African Americans, including seven sailors of the Union Navy, fifteen soldiers of the United States Colored Troops, and three soldiers of other Army units. Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton promised a Medal of Honor to every man in the 27th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment who extended his enlistment. 311 accepted, but because there was no official list of their names, the War Department issued 864, one for each man in the unit. After a review many names were stricken from the list.

During a reunion of Confederate veterans the idea of awarding a Southern Cross of Honor to Confederate veterans was conceived in Atlanta in July 1898. The medal was at this point authorized by the United Daughters of the Confederacy to be awarded to any Confederate Veteran who had provided "loyal, honorable service to the South and given in recognition of this devotion." A metal cross with the representation of a Confederate battle flag placed on the center and surrounded by a wreath, with the inscription "The Southern Cross of Honor. On the back of the medal is the motto of the Confederate States of America, "Deo Vindice" (With God As Our Vindicator), and the dates 1861-1865. Initially the Southern Cross of Honor could only be bestowed through the United Daughters of

the Confederacy. It could not be purchased; it was given in recognition of loyal, honorable service to the South and only a Confederate veteran could wear it.

So when you see the chest of a uniformed Confederate soldier devoid of medals or decorations what you are seeing through Southern eyes, is a true Confederate hero.

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