

Military Challenge Coins



“Who, What, Why”

Definition & Why

- A challenge coin is a small coin or medallion, bearing an organization's insignia or emblem and carried by the organization's members.
- Traditionally they are given used to prove unit membership when asked.
- Also collected by service members and law enforcement personnel.
- Used to enhance moral and recognize meritorious achievement(s).

Numismatic?

- Numismatics is the study or collection of currency, including coins, tokens, paper money, medals and related objects.
- When discussing numismatics, mintages and availability are discussed.
- Traditionally personnel within the military structure are in their position for a limited time (upwards of three years).

To Challenge, Or Not To Challenge

Purpose

- Most common way used to ensure that members are carrying their unit's coin.
- Meant to be a source of morale in a unit.

The Code

- It applies to those members that have been given a coin formally by their unit.
- Improper to challenge another unit.

“How” To Challenge

Basic Rules

- The challenge can be made at any time and begins with the challenger drawing their coin and slapping or placing the coin on the table or bar in challenge of another.
- Continuously rapping the challenge coin on a surface may initiate the challenge.
- Accidentally dropping a challenge coin is considered to be a deliberate challenge to all unit members that are present.

Losing Consequences

- During a challenge, everyone in the group must buy a drink for the holder of the highest-ranking coin involved.
- If someone is able to take away the challenge coin and then challenge the owner without it, everyone in the group must buy a drink for that person.
- Various rules based upon unit traditions.

“How” To Win

Determining A Winner

- A coin's ranking power is determined by the rank of the presenter of the challenge coin presented, not at all the ranks of the individuals involved.
- Coins are also ranked in level of difficulty in obtaining them, especially in case the ranks presented are equivalent across all military branches.
 - If the challenged person cannot respond in a quick amount of time they forfeit.

Historical Origins - “When”

Roman Empire

- Given by officers to show gratitude to standout soldiers.
 - Some featured insignias from local legion.
 - Often given in form of extra pay.
 - Kept as mementos and not spent.
 - They did not “do as the Romans do” aka brothels and drinks.
- The popularity of at least one ruler (Septimius Severus) is specifically tied to challenge coins being given to soldiers as thanks to those that supported his rise to power.

Roman Examples



The Renaissance

- Known as “Portrait Medals”
- Features portrait of Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaeologus.
- Created by a 15th-century painter named Pisanello.
- Often used to commemorate specific events involving royalty and nobility and also exchanged as gifts.



The First Challenge

The Renaissance

- 17th century religious wars in France.
- Following King Louis XIV's death in 1685, the French Protestants began to suffer religious persecution by the state for their illegal religion.
 - Many Protestants fled France to find religious freedom elsewhere.
 - Protestants (Huguenots) were forced to conduct religious services in secret.
- In order to avoid infiltration by state spies, they began to carry their own méreau communion coin to gain entry into secretive Protestant church services when challenged.
- This was done in order to identify themselves as allies, to show their allegiance with the Protestant Church, and to ultimately be admitted entry.

World War I Theory

Famous Folklore

- A wealthy lieutenant pilot ordered medallions struck in solid bronze and presented them to his unit. One young pilot placed the medallion in a small leather pouch that he wore about his neck. His aircraft was severely damaged by ground fire and he was forced to land behind enemy lines and was immediately captured by a German patrol. He was searched and was left only with his identification and pouch with his coin.
- He was able to escape that night but lost his identification. Successfully avoiding German patrols by donning civilian attire, he reached the front lines and crossed no-man's land. Not recognizing the young pilot's American accent, the French thought him to be a saboteur and made ready to execute him. After he showed the medallion to one of his French captors that recognized the squadron insignia, he was set free. They delayed his execution long enough for him to confirm his identity. Instead of shooting him they gave him a bottle of wine.
- Upon his return and telling the of his survival story, it became tradition to ensure that all members of the squadron carried their medallion or coin at all times. For the duration of the war, the squadron commander instituted the modern practice of “buy me a drink” challenge to ensure his pilots always had their coin as it had already saved one life.

World War II Folklore

As The Story Goes....

- Another story claims that it was the Office of Strategic Service personnel who were deployed in Nazi held France that first used challenge coins the the modern era. They proposed using a specific sixpence coin with their junior officers of the 107th Infantry.
- The coins were simply a local coin used as a "bona fides" during a personal meeting to help verify a person's identity. There would be specific aspects such as type of coin, date of the coin, etc. that were examined by each party. This helped prevent any possible infiltration into the meetings by a spy who would've not had advance knowledge of the meeting time and place as well as what coin was to be presented.
- Another story is about an American soldier scheduled to rendezvous with Philippine guerrillas during WWII. As the story goes, he carried a Philippine solid silver coin that was stamped on one side with the unit insignia. The coin was used to verify to the guerrillas that the soldier was their valid contact for the mission against the Japanese.

Korean War Theory

The 17th Infantry Regiment "Buffalo" Coin

- Colonel William "Buffalo Bill" Quinn had coins made for those who served in his 17th Infantry Regiment during 1950 to 1958. This is considered by many as the oldest challenge coin known in existence in United States military history.
- On one side of the coin is a picture of a buffalo with the date 1812, which signified the year the unit was formed. On the other side was the 17th Infantry patch with dates 1950 – 1952 and the word Korea to signify the tour. The cross and fort icon represent the units heritage which started in Cuba during the civil war. This challenge coin is recognized as one of the oldest and most valuable. Very few remain and most are thought to be in private collections.

17th Infantry Regiment "Buffalo" Coin



The Vietnam War Theory

It Happened At A Bar

- Others argue the tradition started in Vietnam when an Army infantry-run bar tried to keep non-infantrymen away by forcing “outsiders” to buy drinks for the whole bar if they could not prove they had been in combat. The “proof” started with enemy bullets, and as do most infantry unit things, they got out of control with grenades, rockets, and unexploded ordnance. So a coin-sized item emblazoned with the unit’s insignia became the accepted form of proof.
- Colonel Verne Green, commander of the 10th Special Forces Group-A, embraced the idea. He had a special coin struck with the unit's badge and motto in 1969. Until the 1980s, his unit was the only unit with an active challenge coin tradition.

The Modern Tradition

First Modern Presentation

- In the context as they are used by the modern U.S. Military for recognition and not simply identification purposes, the tradition is believed to have began among special forces units during the Vietnam War. The tradition spread through the Airborne community, and later by the early 1980s in the 75th Ranger Regiment.
- As officers were reassigned as their careers progressed, they carried with them the tradition of awarding a unit coin for acts that were worthy of recognition but yet lacked enough merit to submit the members act for an official medal. Unit officers and later senior enlisted leaders would purchase and design the coins themselves and feature the unit name one one side and their rank insignia on the other side. Designs features beyond this vary greatly.

My Examples Commanders & Staff



Embassy Military & Staff Officers



United States Secret Service



Military Deployments



Military Schools & Special Events



Marine Embassy Guard



Military Bases



Marine Corps Ball



And If You're Really Cool Chuck Norris!



Secondary Market



Sold Jun 1, 2024
National Security Agency NSA
Nuclear Command & Control Military
Challenge Coin

\$1,750.00
+\$1.25 shipping



Sold Apr 29, 2024
4x B-21 Raider USAF Bomber 2.25"
Military Challenge Coins Serialized
B151-B154
Brand New

\$300.00
Best offer accepted
+\$6.15 shipping



Sold May 19, 2024
CIA / GRA / OMA OFFICE OF
MILITARY AFFAIRS CHALLENGE
COIN WITH CASE
Pre-Owned

\$259.99
~~\$399.99~~ · 35% off
+\$6.99 shipping



Sold Mar 24, 2024
Secretary of Defense Robert M.
Gates Challenge Coin Military
Collectables
Pre-Owned

\$200.00
or Best Offer
Free shipping



Sold Apr 4, 2024
Seal Team 10 NSW ST10 NAVY
SQUADRON CHALLENGE COIN
TROOP MILITARY HARD TO...
Pre-Owned

\$189.50
6 bids
+\$5.50 shipping



Sold Apr 8, 2024
Authentic U.S. Army 16th SMA
Michael A. Grinston Rare Military
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned

\$175.00
or Best Offer
+\$3.99 shipping
Free returns



Sold May 17, 2024
CIA Challenge Coin Office of
Military Affairs
Brand New

\$150.00
+\$5.00 shipping



Sold Jun 3, 2024
Rare Blackwater Security Solutions
Special Operations Military
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned

\$149.99
+\$5.00 shipping

Secondary Market Continued



Sold Jun 1, 2024
HMX-1 Military Police USMC
PRESIDENTIAL HELICOPTER
SQUADRON CHALLENGE COIN
Brand New
\$129.99
Best offer accepted
+\$4.49 shipping
Free returns



Sold May 22, 2024
VINTAGE 4 Star General Krulak 31st
Commandant of the Marine Corps
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned · CIA Challenge Coin
\$126.52
13 bids
+\$5.25 shipping



Sold Mar 29, 2024
Ashton B Carter Secretary of Defense
SECDEF Military Challenge Coin
\$119.99
~~\$149.99~~ · 20% off
or Best Offer
+\$4.49 shipping
Free returns



Sold Jun 7, 2024
White House Military Office Airlift
HMX AFI WHMO PEOC White House
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned
\$99.99
or Best Offer
+\$4.49 shipping
Free returns



Sold Jun 10, 2024
Presidential Helicopter Squadron
HMX-1 Military Police Security
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned
\$99.99
or Best Offer
+\$4.49 shipping
Free returns



Sold Mar 26, 2024
Rare 3rd Battalion 10th Special
Forces Group CDR & CSM Military
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned
\$99.95
or Best Offer
+\$4.25 shipping
Free returns



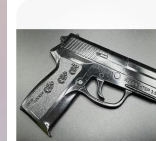
Sold Apr 14, 2024
206th Military Intelligence Battalion
AE Task Force ODIN OIF OEF
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned
\$104.99
or Best Offer
+\$4.00 shipping
Free returns



Sold Mar 31, 2024
VERY RARE RC-135 AIRBORNE
SPECIAL SIGNALS ANALYST RSTA
MILITARY CHALLENGE COIN
Pre-Owned
\$94.99
or Best Offer
+\$8.99 shipping



Sold May 20, 2024
RARE LEON PANETTA SECRETARY OF
DEFENSE UNITED STATES DOD
MILITARY CHALLENGE COIN
Pre-Owned
\$94.99
Best offer accepted
+\$8.99 shipping



Sold May 19, 2024
U.S. Navy USN CPO Chief's Mess
Pistol War Fighter 3:5 LG Military
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned
\$99.95
or Best Offer
+\$3.99 shipping
Free returns

Secondary Market Continued



Sold May 3, 2024
RARE Special Forces 509th Infantry
Regiment PIR Airborne SOCOM US
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned · CIA Challenge Coin

\$98.00

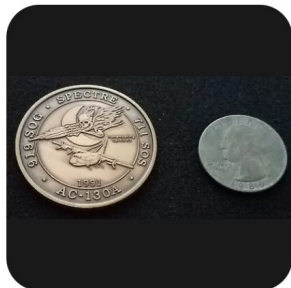
3 bids
+\$5.25 shipping



Sold May 2, 2024
FVEY Five Eyes Intel FELEG CIA NSA
DNI MI6 GCHQ DIA NRO SIS FBI
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned · CIA Challenge Coin

\$95.00

Best offer accepted
+\$5.75 shipping



Sold Apr 16, 2024
DESERT STORM 919th 711th Special
Operations Group Spectre AC-130
Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned · CIA Challenge Coin

\$95.00

1 bid
+\$5.25 shipping



Sold May 28, 2024
MIRROR FINISH ADP PROD OPS
Lockheed Martin Skunk Works Black
Ops Challenge Coin
Pre-Owned · CIA Challenge Coin

\$95.00

1 bid
+\$5.25 shipping



Sold Mar 29, 2024
NYPD New York City Police
Commissioner Dermot Shea Military
Appreciation Coin
Pre-Owned

\$99.99

Free shipping

To Those Who Served They Are Priceless

There are some things money can't buy. For everything else there's
MasterCard.



References

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- The Challenge Coin Legacy: <https://www.pinprosplus.com/post/when-challenge-coins-start#toc-the-legend-of-world-war-i>
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