

UPDATED HISTORY OF



THE PURPLE HEART





The Badge of Military Merit is the oldest known United States military decoration still in use. However, there was one other decoration awarded to members of the Continental Army that pre-dated even the Badge of Military Merit.



The Fidelity Medallion or “Andre Capture Medal,” was created by act of the Continental Congress in 1780. It was awarded to Privates John Paulding, David Williams and Isaac Van Wart of the New York State Militia.

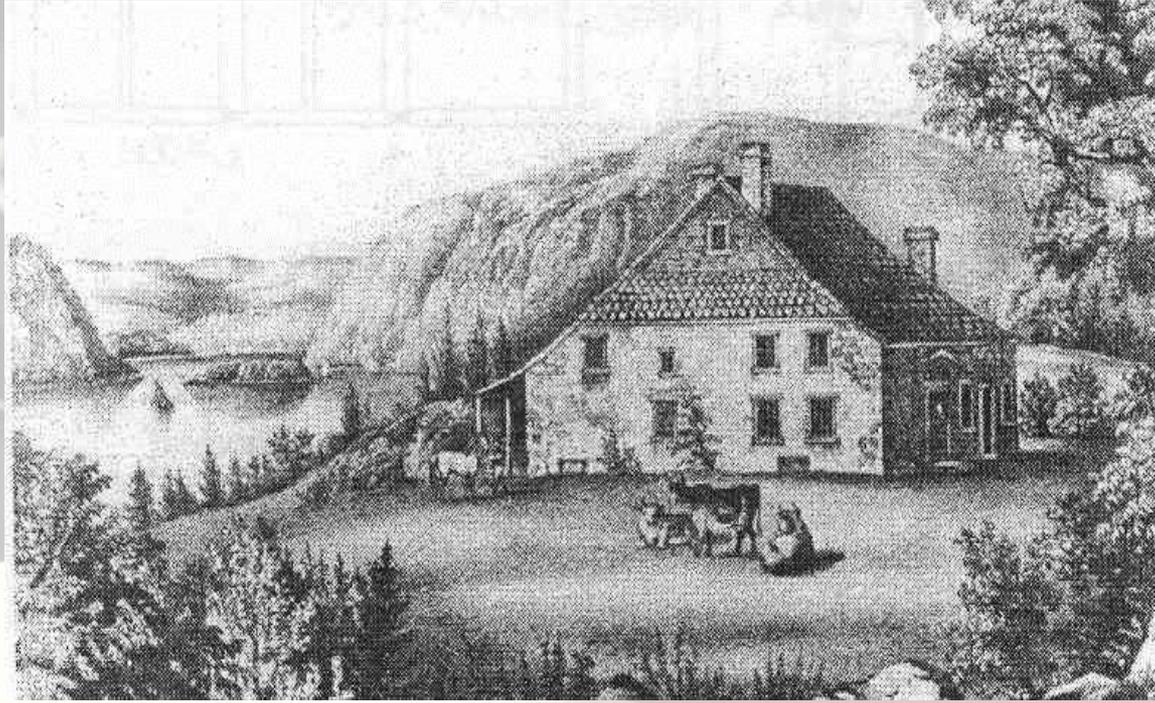
On the obverse is what appears to be a heart, flanked by leafed stalks, with “Fidelity” above. The reverse contains the Latin phrase, Amor Patriae Vincit, “Love of Country Conquers.” It never was awarded again, so the award created two years later by General George Washington is often considered the oldest.

WHY THE ANDRE CAPTURE MEDAL ?

Major John Andre was a British army officer hanged as a spy during the American Revolutionary War for assisting Benedict Arnold to surrender the fort at West Point, New York to the British Army.

On September 23, 1780, after meeting with Benedict Arnold, Andre passed near Tarrytown, New York, where three militiamen stopped and arrested him, finding plans of West Point and letters from Arnold hidden on his person. André appealed to George Washington to be executed by firing squad, but by the rules of war he was hung as a spy at Tappan, New York on October 2, 1780.

The names of André's captors were John Paulding, David Williams, and Isaac Van Wart. The United States Congress gave each of them a pension of \$200 a year and a silver medal, known as the Fidelity Medallion. All were later honored in the names of counties in Ohio, and in 1853 a monument was erected to their memory on the place where they captured André. No other soldiers were ever awarded the Fidelity Medallion.



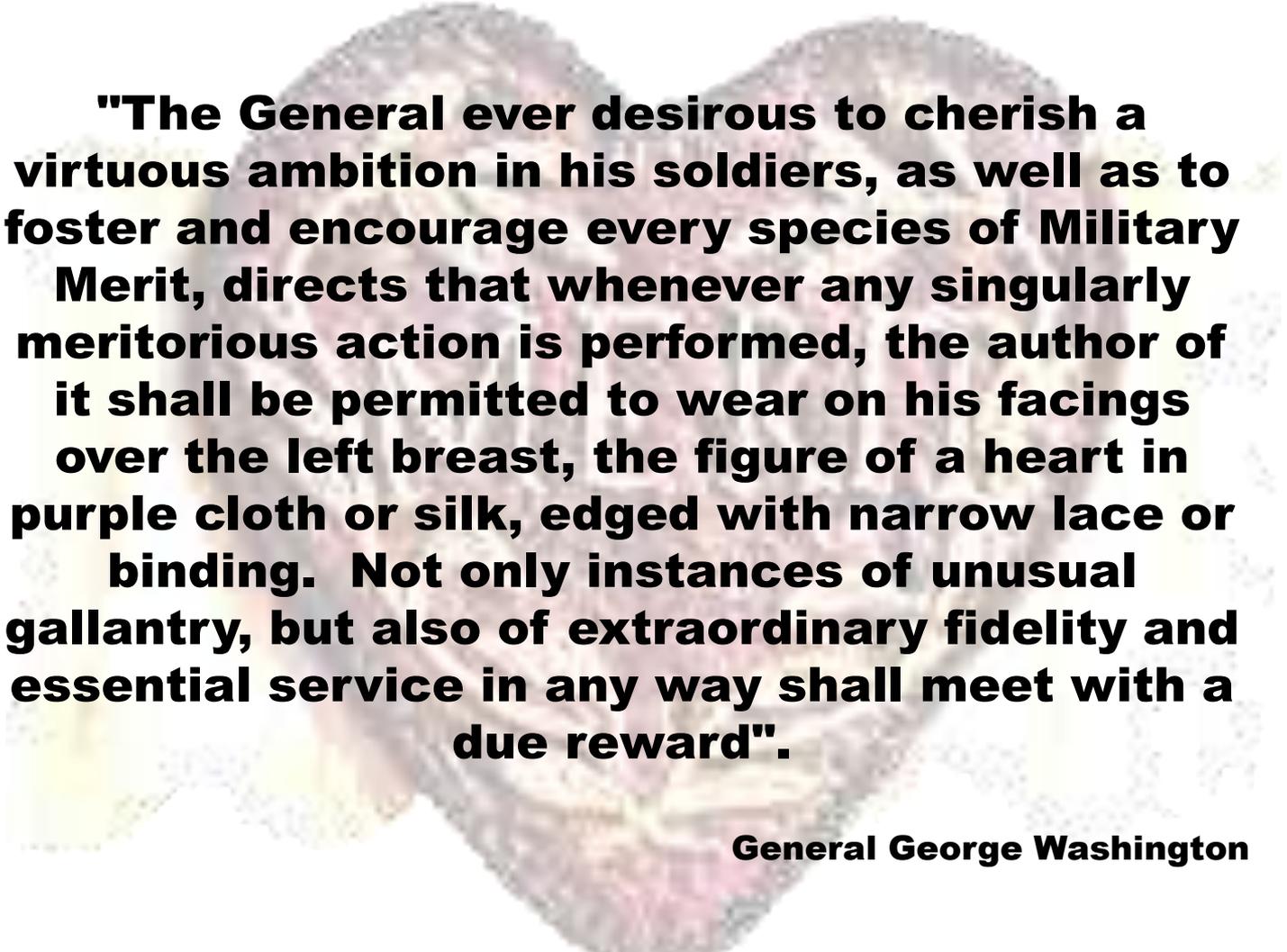
By April 1782, General Washington had established his Head Quarters at Newburgh, New York to keep watch on British forces in New York. He also needed to consolidate the 7,000 man Continental Army and quell a threatened mutiny over pay and pensions. For his soldiers, he wanted to continue efforts to improve their condition and morale.



General Washington's personal writings indicate that three badges, two Honorary Badges of Distinction and a Badge of Military Merit, were created on August 7, 1782.

The practice in Europe was to honor high-ranking officers who had achieved victory, rather than common soldiers. But in America, as General Washington said, the "road to glory in a patriot army and a free country is...open to all.

Of the Badge of Military Merit, Washington wrote:



"The General ever desirous to cherish a virtuous ambition in his soldiers, as well as to foster and encourage every species of Military Merit, directs that whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings over the left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding. Not only instances of unusual gallantry, but also of extraordinary fidelity and essential service in any way shall meet with a due reward".

General George Washington



On August 31, 1782 the *Providence Gazette & Country Journal* made the first public reporting of George Washington's General Order creating the "Honorary Badge of Distinction and the Badge of Military Merit."

One of only two known surviving original and complete historical heirloom newspapers is in the possession of James Klug, MOPH Department Commander and Stephanie Klug, Ladies Auxiliary Unit 147, Medford, Oregon.

RECIPIENTS

Most historians indicate that only three people received the Badge of Military Merit during the American Revolutionary War, all of them noncommissioned officers, and the only ones who received the award from General Washington himself. Those soldiers are as follows:

On May 3, 1783

**Sergeant William Brown
5th Connecticut Regiment of the Connecticut Line**

**Sergeant Elijah Churchill
2nd Continental Light Dragoons**

On June 10, 1783

**Sergeant Daniel Bissell
2nd Connecticut Regiment of the Connecticut Line**

OTHER RECIPIENTS

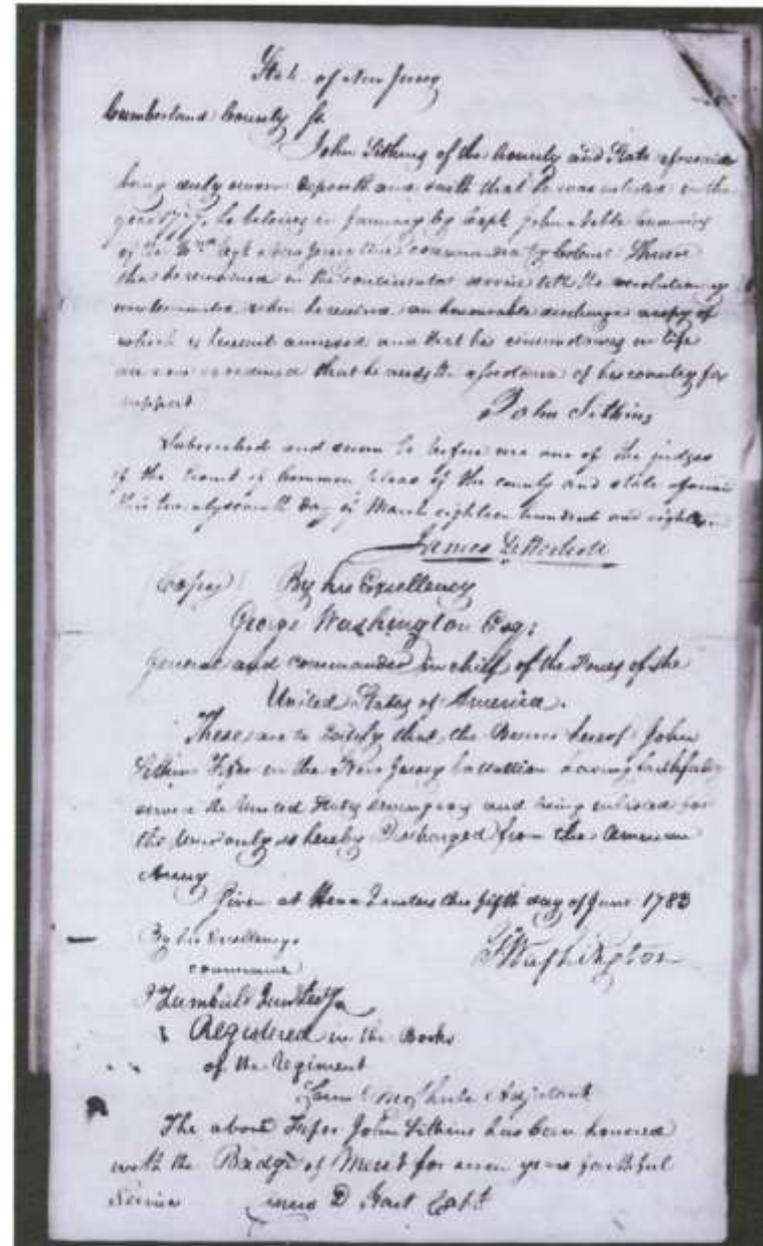
While researching the Purple Heart Medal at the National Archives, National Americanism Officer Ron Siebels discovered that while these three soldiers were most likely the first to receive the Badge of Military Merit, discharge certificates of other Revolutionary War soldiers indicate that they also received the "Badge of Merit" for their years of faithful service.

John Sithins Fife

2nd New Jersey Regiment
discharged June 5, 1783

John Sithins discharge document was signed by George Washington on June 5, 1783. Additional documents at the National Archives support the authenticity of George Washington's signature.

The last three lines at the bottom of the page read "The above Fifer John Sithins has been honored with the Badge of Merit for seven years faithful service."



Peter Shumway
Soldier
4th Massachusetts
Regiment
discharged June 9, 1783

In a pension claim by his heirs following his death on June 7, 1832, The Honorable W.P. Waldo, Commissioner of Pensions, certified that Peter Shumway, a soldier in the 4th Massachusetts Regiment, was discharged with the Badge of Merit for six years faithful service on June 9, 1783.

Walden Town Co Pa Dec 11 1834

Dear Sir
I have the honor to receive from you a copy of a letter from the Hon. W. P. Waldo, Commissioner of Pensions, in relation to the pension claim of Peter Shumway, a soldier in the 4th Mass. Regt. after six years & three months service, was discharged with the Badge of Merit for six years faithful service from 9 1783. He was a prisoner under the act of Mar 15th 1818, and I believe under the act of 15th Aug 1828. He died from 7th 1832. His heirs think the records from 1783 to 1832 were not drawn back that he never received any land they have his discharge and the proposition of Genl Washington and also a quantity of shop accounts & other bills covering that period of time.

They think the honor of Peter Shumway is entitled to something of some importance that has never been received, as they are repeatedly being written to by speculators to buy up all claims of the heirs of Peter Shumway. They have accordingly applied to me to ascertain the truth in this case.

His certificate of honor in the Pension list, Rule of the Pennsylvania Agency is dated June 30th 1818 and I find in the Pension standing alone the figures (1803) which is probably true.

Your will please furnish me the necessary information, if consistent.

Respectfully yours
J. H. ...

William Dutton Sergeant

7th Massachusetts Regiment
discharged June 10, 1783

The actual discharge
certificate of Sergeant William
Dutton certifies his faithful
service for seven years and
five months and discharge on
June 10, 1783.

On the document, Lt. Col. J.
Brooks, Commander of the 7th
Massachusetts Regiment,
certifies that Sergeant William
Dutton has been honored with
the Badge of Merit for seven
years faithful service.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY
GEORGE WASHINGTON, ESQ;
General and Commander in Chief of the Forces of the
United States of America.

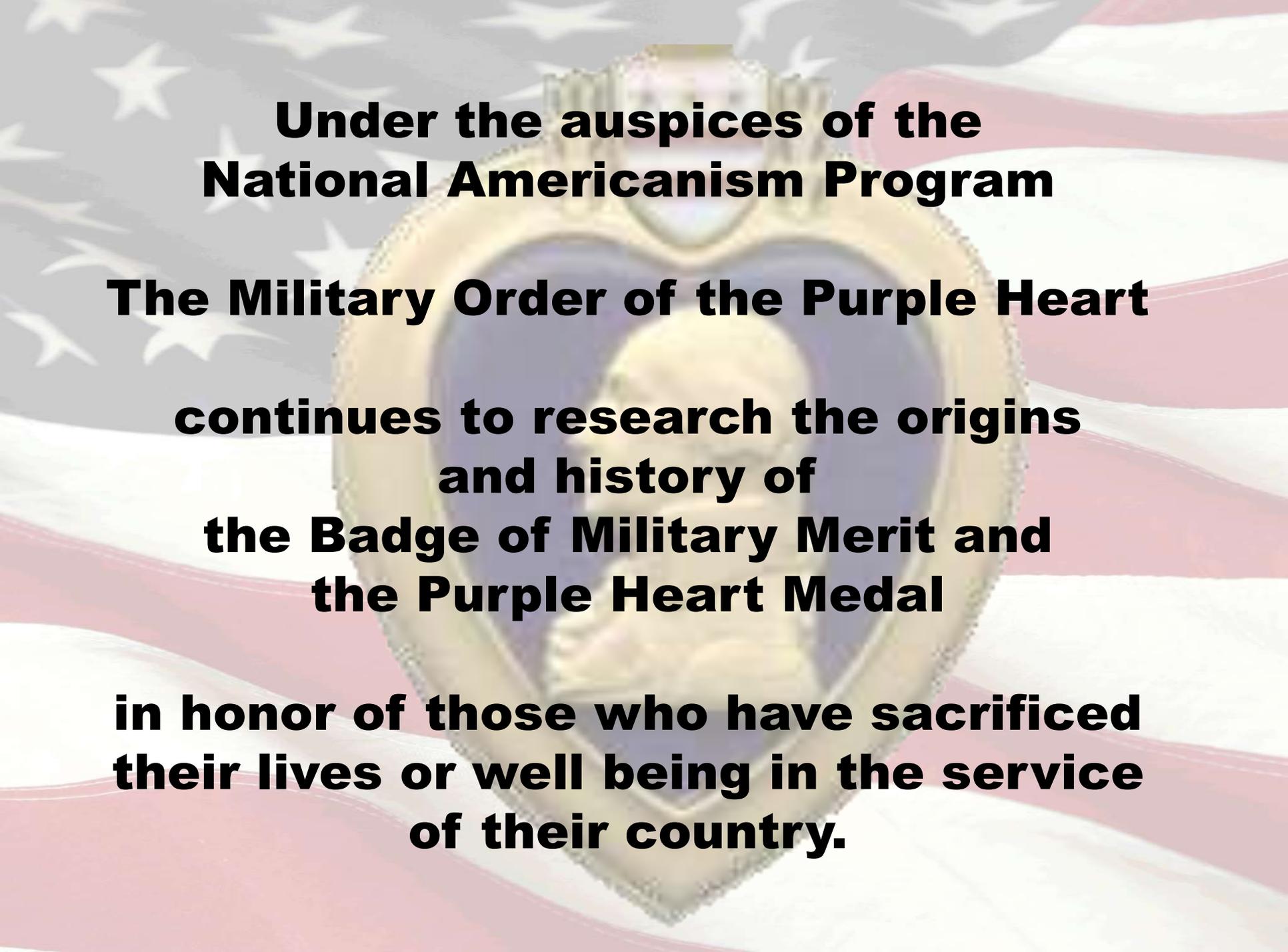
THESE are to CERTIFY that the Bearer hereof
William Dutton
in the *Seventh Massachusetts* Regiment, having faithfully served the United States *seven years and five months*
and being enlisted for the War only, is hereby DISCHARGED from the American Army.

GIVEN at HEAD-QUARTERS the *10* of *June*
1783

By HIS EXCELLENCY'S
Command
J. Bullard

REGISTERED in the Books
of the Regiment,
J. Brooks Adjutant

THE *above* *William Dutton* Sergeant
has been honored with the BADGE OF MERIT for *seven*
Years faithful Service. *J. Brooks* Lt. Col. Comd.
J. Brooks Adjutant



**Under the auspices of the
National Americanism Program**

The Military Order of the Purple Heart

**continues to research the origins
and history of
the Badge of Military Merit and
the Purple Heart Medal**

**in honor of those who have sacrificed
their lives or well being in the service
of their country.**

MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART



ALL GAVE SOME – SOME GAVE ALL