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British War Medal 1914–1920

History

This medal was approved by King George V in 1919 to commemorate the services rendered by His Majesty's Forces and to record the bringing of the war to a successful conclusion. Eligibility for the award was later extended to cover the years 1919–1920, while post-war mine clearance at sea continued, as did service in North and South Russia, the Eastern Baltic, Siberia, Black Sea and Caspian Sea.

Description

The medal, which is silver, hangs from its ribbon by a straight suspender bar without swivel. The obverse bears the coinage effigy of His Majesty the King with the legend *GEORGIVS V:BRITT: OMN:REX ET IND:IMP:*. The reverse depicts a male figure mounted on horseback, trampling underfoot the eagle shield of the Central Powers and the emblems of death, a skull and cross-bones. Above is the risen sun of victory. The male figure was chosen because men had borne the brunt of the fighting.

The design symbolised the mechanical and scientific advances which helped to win the war. The silk ribbon has a central vertical stripe of gold with stripes of white and black at each side and borders of royal blue. It is not thought that the colours have any particular significance. The medal was designed was W McMillan, and struck by the Royal Mint. The recipient's name, rank, service number and unit are stamped on the bottom edge of the medal. Those awarded to Army officers, with the exception of the Royal Artillery, omit the name of the regiment or corps.



Obverse



Reverse

Eligibility

ROYAL NAVY

The medal was granted to the following classes of personnel who performed twenty-eight day's mobilised service between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918 both dates inclusive. The next-of-kin of those killed on active service received the medal whether or not the casualty completed the requisite period of service.

- Officers, warrant officers, petty officers, and ratings of the RN, RM (RMLI and RMA), RNAS, RIM, RNR (including Trawler and Fishery Sections), RNVF and Dominion and Colonial Naval Forces.
- Mercantile Marine officers and men serving in His Majesty's commissioned ships and auxiliaries on Special Naval Engagements.
- Officers and enrolled members of the Women's Royal Naval Service who served overseas.
- Members of Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service and Royal Naval Nursing Service Reserve, and recognised official nursing organisations, who served in hospital ships at sea or overseas in a naval hospital.
- Canteen staffs who served in ships of war at sea.

- Non-nursing members of medical units, eg dispensers, storekeepers, clerks, wardmaids etc. who served in hospital ships at sea or in Naval hospitals abroad.

THE ARMY

The medal was issued to the following classes who either entered a theatre of war on duty, or who left places of residence and rendered approved service overseas, other than the waters dividing the different parts of the United Kingdom, between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918 inclusive. The next-of-kin of those killed on active service received the medal whether or not the casualty completed the requisite period of service.

- Officers, warrant officers, attested NCO's and men of British, Dominion, Colonial and Indian military forces.
- Members of women's formations who had been enrolled under a direct contract for service with His Majesty's Imperial forces.
- All those who served on the staff of military hospitals and all members of recognised organisations, for example the British Red Cross and the Order of St John, who actually tended the sick and wounded.
- Members of duly recognised or authorised organisations.
- Enrolled and attested followers on the establishment of units of the Indian Army.

ROYAL AIR FORCE

The medal was granted to the following classes who either entered a theatre of war on duty, or who left their places of residence and rendered approved service overseas, other than the waters dividing different part of the United Kingdom, between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918, both dates inclusive. The next-of-kin of those killed on active service received the medal whether or not the casualty completed the requisite period of service.

- Officers, warrant officers, attested NCO's and men of the RNAS, RFC or RAF.
- Members of women's formations employed under a direct contract of service with the Royal Air Force Medical Service.
- Members of duly recognised or authorised organisations.

The medal was also granted to all officers, warrant officers, attested and enrolled NCO's and men of the RNAS, RFC and RAF who:

- Had been actively engaged in the air against the enemy whilst borne on the strength of an operational unit in Great Britain.
- Had been employed in flying new aircraft to France.
- Had formed part of the complement of an aircraft-carrying ship.

It will be noted that officers and members of the Women's Royal Air Force are not specifically referred to above. However, there were members of the WRAF who qualified for the medal by reason of their service with other womens formations. No member of the WRAF served overseas during the qualification period for the medal.

Medals issued to non-Europeans serving in units of the Labour Corps were struck in bronze.

Consideration was given to the issuing of clasps to commemorate certain battles and theatres of operations. Some 68 were proposed for Naval recipients, and 79 for the Army. The Naval clasps were authorised in August 1920 but not issued. It is not known which clasps were under consideration for the Army. No

further action was taken and the idea was dropped in 1923 largely due to the costs involved. Very occasionally, examples of the clasps authorised for the Navy can be seen on miniature medals.

The total number of medals awarded is as follows:

- British War Medals (silver) *6,500,000*
- British War Medals (bronze) *110,000*

Further Information

The Imperial War Museum does not hold the Medal Rolls for the First World War

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or the personal Service Records of members of HM Forces. For the availability of this material, you are advised to consult the information contained on the [Public Record Office](#) website.

See also the [Family History Research at the Imperial War Museum](#).