



The Italian War Merit Cross

Time Period: The Great War

Institution: 19 January 1918

Country: Italy

The War Merit Cross (Italian: Croce al Merito di Guerra) is an Italian military decoration instituted by King Victor Emmanuel III during World War I on 19 January 1918.

The Cross was awarded to members of the armed forces with a minimum of one year's service who had been in contact with an enemy, those who received the Medal of the Wounded, or to those who, when mentioned for war merit, received a promotion. Also, if an act of valour was deemed insufficient for the Medal of Military Valor, the War Merit Cross could be awarded instead; from 1922 onwards a bronze sword on the ribbon showed this class of award.

From its institution until 30 May 1927, 1,034,924 Crosses were issued and the award received major changes during World War II and is currently awarded by the Italian Republic.

The War Merit Cross was in bronze, 38mm wide (1-1/2 inches). The reverse side bears a 5-pointed star on a background of rays. The obverse has the royal cypher ("VE III" under a crown) in the upper arm, "MERITO DI GVERRA" (War Merit) on the horizontal arms and a Roman sword point upwards, on oak leaves, in the lower arm. The ribbon is blue with white stripes. While the later originally were five within months they were reduced to two white stripes. Successive awards, three awards being the maximum, were indicated by one or two bronze royal crowns. During World War II, the War Merit Cross underwent several significant changes. The number of awards was limited to ten, indicated by a combination of bronze, silver and gold crowns. The medal received another change under the Italian Republic in 1947, the Royal cypher being replaced by the intertwined letters "RI" for Repubblica Italiana. Limited to three awards once again, with one cross or bar for every war allowed, multiple awards were shown by bronze stars. In the current form multiple awards are shown by silver stars.