

History of the Challenge Coin

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The Challenge Coin was likely started by a lieutenant in the Army Air Service (forerunner of the US Air Force) during WW1 (although some historians will disagree).

Air warfare was a new phenomenon during World War 1. The Army created Flying Squadrons manned by volunteer pilots from every walk of life. As legend goes, a wealthy lieutenant ordered small, solid-bronze medallions (or coins) which he presented to the other squadron pilots as mementos of their service together. The coin was gold plated and bore the squadron's insignia. One of the pilots kept it in a leather pouch around his neck for safe keeping. A short time later the pilot's aircraft was heavily damaged and he was forced to land the aircraft behind enemy lines. He was captured by the Germans and all his personal items were taken. But the Germans missed the pouch around his neck. He was held temporarily in a small German held French village. The town was bombarded by the British creating confusion and allowing the pilot to escape.

The pilot avoided German patrols by donning civilian attire, but all his identification had been taken so he had no way to prove his identity. He made contact with a French patrol. The French thought he was a German saboteur and prepared to execute him. Desperate to prove his identity, the pilot pulled the pouch from his neck and showed it to his captors. One of the Frenchman recognized the squadron's unit insignia so they delayed his execution until they could confirm his identity. Once the pilot returned to his unit, it became a tradition for all members to carry their coins at all times. To ensure compliance, the pilots would **challenge** each other to produce the coin. If the challenged could not produce the coin, he had to buy a drink of choice for the challenger; if the challenged could produce the coin, the challenger had to buy a drink for the challenged.

CHALLENGING -The tradition of challenging is the most common way to ensure that service members are carrying their unit coins. It is meant to be a source of morale in a unit.

They were used in the early 80's by the "75th Infantry Rangers". One widely used challenge coin, the "Bull Dog Challenge 2", was exclusive to the Air Force B-52 tail gunners.

Challenge coins were not very common until the First Persian Gulf War but have now become very popular.

USED AS AWARDS- Coins are used as awards or rewards for jobs well done and as a tool to build morale. Units are proud to see their coins displayed in the Bangor Maine Troop Greeter room.

The design of the coin usually changes each time a unit is redesignated or a unit receives a new commander.

OUTSIDE THE MILITARY- NASCAR, the NFL and World Series of Poker all have their own coins. Other organizations have adopted a recognizable coin as well.