

HOW TO MAINTAIN AND WEAR MEDALS AND WHAT DO THEY REPRESENT?

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Medals represent service, commitment, and often bravery and gallantry. They require hard work and exposure to danger to earn them, so here is some advice on keeping them in top condition.

As the recipient who has delivered the service or as the family member who has inherited a medal group - you have the responsibility to look after your medals.

Orders, Decorations and Medals are a visual display of a person's community and service history, and may highlight meritorious service as well as acts of gallantry and bravery. Medals are awarded for meritorious acts or service, operational and non-operational service, Long Service and Good Conduct medals, and a number of foreign awards' that have been approved by the New Zealand Government for acceptance and wear on New Zealand official uniforms.

MOUNTING OF MEDALS

This is an area of some complexity and we suggest you do not rush into decisions as once made, some decisions cannot easily be reversed.

Medals can be court mounted to the NZDF Medal Mounting Standard by a professionally competent medal mounter. This is one area where you do need to use a professional. Ask for references and to see some examples of the work done before you select a provider.

Modern medals are one of three types – silver (mainly Long Service awards); Rhodium plated (most modern campaign medals) and bronze (e.g. the NZGSM non-warlike awards, NZ Defence Service Medal). Never use abrasive cleaner or polish on these medals. To return your medals to original condition, polish them gently with a soft dry cloth. A silver polishing cloth can be used on sterling silver medals but do not get black 'rub off' onto the medal ribbons. Always ensure your medals are wiped clean with tissues or a soft dry cloth so they are dry before being stowed away.

STORAGE

NZDF advice is to store your medals securely inside a drawer in a lined box. Use an NZDSM presentation case (you can strip out the inner to store smaller mounted medal sets), or a strong wood or cardboard box – good quality cigar and chocolate boxes are great. You can line the box with tissue paper or bubble wrap if you wish. Commercial medal storage cases are also available.

If your medals are mounted professionally, they will last for many years if stored correctly. If your medals or ribbons are showing signs of wear or are damaged, report it early to your medal mounter so they can be fixed – do not try and repair them yourself using tape, wire or super glue to hold the group together. Simple repairs fixed early are the most economical solution and will quickly get you on parade looking smart.



WEARING OF MEDALS

The recipient is entitled to wear their medals whenever ordered to do so. Generally this will mean full size medals during the day and miniature medals after sunset for Mess or other official evening events.

The recipient is entitled to wear these medals on their left chest at any official function for their lifetime. This also applies after they retire when they may wear the medals on their civilian suit, jacket or coat in the same way as if they were wearing them in uniform.

After their death, the family may wear these medals on their right chest. This convention allows family members to wear a deceased persons' full size or miniature medal/s in their memory. The convention is a matter for personal discretion and is limited to the official days of remembrance and military functions where the host or organiser advises that "medals may be worn".

It is recommended that only one group of medals is worn by a relative. If the family has more than one group of medals to wear – ask another family member to wear the second or third groups. Spread the mana amongst the family. Medals do not have to be worn by the eldest son – each family can make their own decisions on who should wear family medals.

The convention applies to both male and female relatives of the deceased including children and grandchildren. It does not apply to non-family members, or to the wearing of neck stars, sash badges, breast stars, ribbon bars, rosettes, and lapel badges awarded to the deceased. They are only current for his or her lifetime.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Can the family wear more than one set of miniatures for a deceased relative e.g. one set for each of our three grandchildren?

Yes, on the right chest at official commemorative functions and events. This is far preferable to splitting up an original group of medals so each child receives one medal. This causes the 'mana of the group' to be lost as they no longer tell the whole story of the military service delivered for their medal entitlement.

Where can family members obtain miniature medals from?

Any competent medal mounter will have access to a source of miniature medals.

How do we clean old medals that are inherited within the family?

First, you have to decide if the medals are physically in good enough condition that they can be worn. If so, our advice is to leave them as they are and wear them. Their condition tells the story of that medal group. Ribbons do not have to be replaced simply because they are a little faded or worn on the edges. If the medals are not currently mounted as a group, or have additional medals to be added, take them to a reputable medal mounter and they will be cleaned as part of the medal mounting service. They may also be lacquered to stop corrosion.



Second, if the medals are fit to wear but need to be cleaned to remove finger prints and minor marks, follow the advice below:

- ♥ Clean any marks off with a soft cloth, a silver polishing cloth or a spectacle lens cleaner cloth. Be gentle and do not use any abrasive cleaners as they can permanently damage the medal surface and engraving.
- ♥ Silver dip products can be used for sterling silver awards such as long service awards, WW1 medals and some WW2 awards. This dip solution should be rinsed off in cold water and the medal dried with a soft dry cloth.

Third, consider what the family intends to do with these original medals. If they are to be mounted for framing in a box mount with a photo of the deceased, tell your medal mounter as this information will change how the medals are mounted compared to being 'mounted ready to wear'. Conservators will tell you to retain the original ribbons as far as are practical for any displayed medals – after all this is how your deceased family member wore them.

Many families now mount older medal groups e.g. WW2 and WW1 medals in a good quality photo or box frame with a photograph and then wear replica full size or miniature medals on Anzac Day. This retains the original set in a safe manner for posterity, while allowing the family to commemorate the service of their family member in public. The NZ Defence Force and RNZRSA view is that the act of family wearing these medals at events is “getting these old service men and women back on parade”.

What do we do if our medal group gets wet on an ANZAC Day parade?

Pat the ribbons and medals dry with a soft cloth or tissues. Allow the medals to dry naturally at room temperature. Do not use a hair dryer or any artificial heat source or leave them in direct sunlight on a window sill as this may cause the mounting board to warp and the ribbons to shrink or fade.

Can family members wear Dad's old RSA badge and his other military badges showing membership entitlement?

No. To do so can give the impression that you are personally entitled to that membership. We suggest that families display these items in a medal display with a photo of the deceased. If you are a member of the RSA, you can wear your father's RSA badge.

I found my father's Second World War medals in an old box in his attic. He has never worn them. They are not mounted, and the ribbons, stars and round medals are all mixed together in a random pile. I cannot figure out which ribbon belongs to which star or medal. Can you tell me which go together?

You should be able to match the ribbons and medals using the thumbnail images of Second World War medals on the NZDF Medals website at <http://medals.nzdf.mil.nz>. If there are still some mystery medals please feel free to contact NZDF by one of the options listed in the General Enquiries section of this website. A photo will assist to answer your question and can be sent by email when asked for.

