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Duplicate Congressional Gold Medals: Frequently Asked Questions

Congressional Gold Medals are awarded by acts of Congress to express public gratitude for distinguished contributions, dramatize the virtues of patriotism, and perpetuate the remembrance of great events. First issued by the Continental Congress to General George Washington, the medal is considered one of the highest honors bestowed on behalf of the nation.

“The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions that the Congress can bestow upon one of our fellow citizens.”

—Rep. Randy Hultgren,
Congressional Record, September 5, 2017

Congressional Gold Medals can be awarded to either individuals or groups. When gold medals are awarded to individuals, the individual recipient, or his or her family, receives the gold medal. For instances in which a group is honored, a single gold medal is generally minted that is either awarded to the group or placed in a museum for future exhibition. The awarding of a gold medal to a group has historically raised questions about duplicate Congressional Gold Medals, which Congress generally authorizes the U.S. Mint to produce and sell to the public. This In Focus answers several frequently asked questions about duplicate gold medals.

How Are Congressional Gold Medals Authorized?

An act of Congress is required to award a Congressional Gold Medal. Each gold medal has historically been authorized through stand-alone legislation. For more information on Congressional Gold Medals and the authorization process, see CRS Report R45101, *Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

How Many Congressional Gold Medals Are Made?

Unless otherwise specified in law, a single gold medal is struck. For individual recipients, they receive the gold medal. For groups, the statutory authorization often specifies where the gold medal will be housed after being awarded. In many cases, the Smithsonian Institution receives the medal.

When Are Congressional Gold Medals Presented?

Once the medal has been struck, Congress will often schedule a ceremony to formally award the medal. Most gold medal ceremonies take place in the U.S. Capitol, but some have historically taken place in other relevant

locations. For individual recipients, the gold medal is given to them at the ceremony. For group recipients, the medal is often presented to the group at the ceremony and then delivered to a statutorily designated entity. Most often, the medal goes to the Smithsonian Institution, but legislation can designate another location. For example, the Merchant Mariners of World War II Congressional Gold Medal was statutorily given to the American Merchant Marine Museum following the presentation ceremony [P.L. 116-125, §3(c)].

What Are Duplicate Congressional Gold Medals?

Duplicate Congressional Gold Medals are bronze replicas of the awarded Congressional Gold Medal. Bronze duplicates are statutorily authorized in the same legislation as the gold medal. For example, the legislation authorizing the Congressional Gold Medal for Senator Bob Dole stated:

The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses, and the cost of the gold medal [P.L. 115-60, §4].

Figure 1 shows scale-size images of the 3 inch duplicate for the Women Airforce Service Pilots Congressional Gold Medal (P.L. 111-40) and the 1.5 inch duplicate for the First Special Service Force Congressional Gold Medal (P.L. 113-16).

Figure 1. Scale Size Congressional Gold Medal Bronze Duplicates



Source: United States Mint.

Where Can I Buy a Duplicate Congressional Gold Medal?

Pursuant to statute, the U.S. Mint will strike and sell duplicate bronze medals through its retail stores and its website (<https://catalog.usmint.gov/>). Bronze duplicates are available in two sizes: a 3 inch duplicate (the same size as the gold medal) and a 1.5 inch duplicate. As of February 1, 2022, 3 inch duplicate medals are sold by the U.S. Mint for \$160 and 1.5 inch duplicates for \$20.

How Many Bronze Duplicates Are Typically Sold?

Sale of particular duplicate medals can depend on the gold medal recipient's popularity and the design chosen by the U.S. Mint. **Table 1** provides selected sales and revenue for recent Congressional Gold Medal duplicates.

Table 1. Selected Congressional Gold Medal Duplicate Sales and Revenue

Through December 31, 2021

| Gold Medal | Size | Units Sold | Revenue |
|---|------|------------|--------------|
| Individuals | | | |
| Bob Dole [P.L. 115-60] <i>Awarded January 2018</i> | 3" | 200 | \$8,230.10 |
| | 1.5" | 481 | \$3,603.12 |
| Steve Gleason [P.L. 115-415] <i>Awarded January 2020</i> | 3" | 291 | \$11,865.55 |
| | 1.5" | 491 | \$3,725.65 |
| Groups | | | |
| Filipino Veterans of World War II [P.L. 114-265] <i>Awarded October 2017</i> | 3" | 5,205 | \$211,141.15 |
| | 1.5" | 3,411 | \$26,688.80 |
| Chinese American Veterans of World War II [P.L. 115-337] <i>Awarded December 2020</i> | 3" | 7,516 | \$320,832.70 |
| | 1.5" | 2,678 | \$28,804.15 |
| Office of Strategic Services [P.L. 114-269] <i>Awarded March 2018</i> | 3" | 1,576 | \$65,467.88 |
| | 1.5" | 2,141 | \$17,276.25 |
| USS <i>Indianapolis</i> [P.L. 115-338] <i>Awarded July 2020</i> | 3" | 827 | \$37,960.70 |
| | 1.5" | 2,004 | \$19,559.30 |

Source: Data provided by the U.S. Mint Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, February 1, 2022.

Notes: Unit prices of bronze medal duplicates may have changed over time. Therefore, revenue may not equal the number of units sold times the current bronze medal duplicate pricing.

What Happens to the Proceeds from the Sale of Duplicate Congressional Gold Medals?

Expenses for the design and striking of the Congressional Gold Medal are paid from the U.S. Mint's Public Enterprise

Fund (31 U.S.C. §5136). Proceeds from the sale of duplicate medals are redeposited in the fund.

I Am a Member of a Group Awarded a Congressional Gold Medal. How Can I Get My Medal?

Since Congressional Gold Medals awarded to groups are not an individual honor, group members do not receive their own gold medal. Rather, they can purchase a bronze duplicate through the U.S. Mint.

Has Congress Ever Provided Individual Gold Medals for Each Member of an Honored Group?

In limited instances, Congress authorized the striking of more than one gold medal for a group. For example, in 2003, Congress awarded gold medals to Rev. Joseph A. DeLaine, Harry and Eliza Briggs, and Levi Pearson "in recognition of their contributions to the Nation as pioneers in the effort to desegregate public schools that led directly to the landmark desegregation case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*" (P.L. 108-180). The law required that the Secretary of the Treasury "strike 3 gold medals" one each for Rev. DeLaine, Harry and Eliza Briggs, and Levi Pearson.

Similarly, in 2000, Congress awarded "each of the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers ... a gold medal of appropriate design" (P.L. 106-554). The Code Talkers gold medals were further updated in 2008 (P.L. 110-420), to include each Native American Tribe that had a military code talker.

These additional medals were awarded to each tribe, not to individual code talkers. Instead, the 2008 law specified that silver duplicate medals were to be struck and "a Native American shall be eligible to be awarded a silver duplicate medal ... if the Native American served in the Armed Forces as a code talker in any foreign conflict in which the United States was involved during the 20th century (§7(a)(2)(A)). Like with other gold medal authorizations, bronze duplicates were authorized for public sale (§7(b)).

Are There Restrictions on Who Can Buy Duplicate Congressional Gold Medals or How Many Can Be Bought?

Congress generally authorizes the sale of duplicate Congressional Gold Medals by the U.S. Mint without any limitation on who may purchase the medals or how many may be purchased. Many collectors consider the bronze duplicates as a memento or souvenir of the actual Congressional Gold Medal, not a separate award unto itself.

For more information on Congressional Gold Medals, see CRS Report R45101, *Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

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