

M2136

RECORD OF LIFE SAVING MEDALS AWARDED,  
1876–1944

Compiled by Claire Prechtel-Klusens

National Archives and Records Administration  
Washington, DC  
2011

## INTRODUCTION

On the single roll of this microfilm publication, M2136, is reproduced a three-volume register of lifesaving medals awarded by the Life Saving Service, 1876–1915, and its successor, the U.S. Coast Guard, 1915–1944, that constitutes the entire series identified as “Record of Medals Awarded, 1876–1944” (ARC Identifier 2217630).<sup>\*</sup> These records are part of Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group (RG) 26.

## BACKGROUND

Life-Saving Medals were first authorized by an act of June 20, 1874 (18 Stat. 127), which established a first- and second-class lifesaving medal to be bestowed “upon any persons who shall hereafter endanger their own lives in saving, or endeavouring to save lives from perils of the sea, within the United States, or upon any American vessel.” The medal of the first class was confined to cases of “extreme and heroic daring,” and the medal of the second class was to be awarded “in cases not sufficiently distinguished to deserve the medal of the first class.” In 1878, Congress added authorization for bestowing the medal of the second class to “persons making such signal exertions in rescuing and succoring the shipwrecked, and saving persons from drowning,” (act of June 18, 1878, 20 Stat. 165). In 1882, Congress renamed the first class medal the Gold Life-Saving Medal, and the second class medal the Silver Life-Saving Medal (Act of May 4, 1882, 22 Stat. 57).

The 1874 and 1878 acts were construed by the Attorney General to limit bestowal of the medal to members of lifesaving crews *and* apply only to the rescue of persons who were subjected to the perils of the sea in any waters of the United States in the vicinity of any lifeboat station, lifesaving station, or house of refuge (1895, Op. Att. Gen. 124). Thus, in 1897, Congress clarified that the two earlier acts should “be construed so as to empower the Secretary of the Treasury to bestow such medals upon persons making signal exertions in rescuing and succoring the shipwrecked and saving persons from drowning in waters over which the United States has jurisdiction, whether the said persons making such exertions were or were not members of the life-saving crew, or whether or not such exertions were made in the vicinity of a life-saving station,” (act of Jan. 21, 1897, 29 Stat. 494).

In 1949, the statutes were rewritten to clarify and harmonize inconsistent portions of previous acts. Lifesaving medals could be awarded to “any person, including personnel of the Coast Guard, who rescues or endeavors to rescue any other person from drowning, shipwreck, or other peril of the water.” Gold medals were authorized for rescues or attempted rescues “made at the risk of one’s own life and evidences extreme and heroic daring,” while silver was authorized for those less “sufficiently distinguished” ones that evidence “the exercise of such signal exertion as to merit recognition.” The event had to

---

<sup>\*</sup> The Archival Research Catalog (ARC) is available for research online at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov).

take place within U.S. waters or those subject to U.S. jurisdiction, or, if outside U.S. jurisdiction, one of the parties must be a U.S. citizen or from a vessel or aircraft owned or operated by U.S. citizens. No person may receive more than one gold and one silver medal, but may subsequently receive a gold or silver bar to wear with the original medal. Posthumous awards are permitted. (Aug. 4, 1949, ch. 393, 63 Stat. 536; Pub. L. 94-546, §1(31), Oct. 18, 1976, 90 Stat. 2521).

Since 1874, more than 600 gold and 1,900 silver lifesaving medals have been awarded. Both were designed by Anthony Paquet and were first struck at the Philadelphia Mint. The gold lifesaving medal is 99.9 percent gold, and the silver Medal is 99 percent silver.

Recordkeeping concerning the awarding of lifesaving medals was first established in the Life-Saving Service (LSS) in the Department of the Treasury. The LSS and the Revenue Cutter Service were merged to become the U.S. Coast Guard within the Treasury Department by an act of January 28, 1915 (38 Stat. 800). The U.S. Coast Guard was transferred to the Department of Transportation, effective April 1, 1967, by the Department of Transportation Act (80 Stat. 931), and to the Department of Homeland Security, established January 24, 2003, by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (Pub. L. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135).

## **RECORDS DESCRIPTION**

The records reproduced in this microfilm publication consist of three oversize bound volumes. Each volume begins with an index section (unpaginated) followed by a register section (paginated).

The index sections are arranged in rough alphabetical order by the surname of the applicant and provides the page number upon which further information is located. There may also be clippings of public laws and notes on the number of gold and silver medals in stock, ordered, or distributed by certain dates, and related costs.

The register sections are arranged in rough chronological order by date of the award of the medal, but there is some inconsistency in arrangement. In volume III, at page 68, is inserted a chronological list of awards made during Fiscal Year 1933. Comments at the top of the list note that the cases were inserted into the volume "indiscriminately" instead of "chronologically with the date of award." The date spans noted in the table of contents should therefore be considered approximate.

Each application is recorded on a two-page spread with these 11 columns:

*Name of Applicant.* The name of the person for whom a medal is requested. The person making the request is not specified.

*Residence.* City and state

*Nature of Service Performed and Abstract of Evidence.* Provides a synopsis of the heroic event and identifies those who provided testimony.

*Date of Service.* The date of the heroic event  
*Date of Application*  
*Reference to Commission*  
*Report of Commission*  
*Date of Award*  
*Nature of Award.* First- or second-class, or gold or silver  
*Medal Ordered.* Date the engraving on the medal was ordered  
*Medal Sent.* Date sent to recipient. May also include notes on how it was transmitted to the recipient, such as through a Member of Congress, a collector of customs, and so forth.

These volumes were filmed by National Archives in 1976, probably for reference purposes. This film was assigned the number M2136 in 2009 in order to issue it as a National Archives Microfilm Publication.

### RELATED RECORDS

Related records include “Lifesaving Medal Award Case Files, 1944–67” (ARC identifier 583665), and “Correspondence Concerning Life Saving Medals, 1894–1924” (ARC identifier 2212208).

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOL.	DATE SPAN	CONTENTS
I	Dec. 7, 1875 – June, 1903	Index, unpaginated Register, pages 1–79 and 82–172**
II	Aug. 1903 – May 1927	Index, unpaginated Register, pages 1–234
III	Sept. 1927 – Oct. 1944	Index, unpaginated Register, pages 1–200

---

\*\* A note written at the top of page 82 explains the missing pages: “Pages 80 and 81 taken out[.] entry was made here of case of John A. Scheuing properly entered on page 70 of this book.” Therefore, no information is missing.