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HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
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**MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION C  
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**FROM:** HQ USAF/A2  
1040 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330-1040

**SUBJECT:** Air Force Guidance Memorandum for Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2803, *The Air Force Military Awards and Decorations Program*.

**Releasability:** There are no releasability restrictions on this publication.

This is a Guidance Memorandum immediately implementing changes to AFI 36-2803. It adds the new forms for the Virtual Personnel Center and the criteria for the Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal and Air Force Special Duty Ribbon; changes to the Legion of Merit eligibility criteria; expansion of the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, and Air Force Achievement Medal approval authorities; and announces the closeout date for the Air Force Recruiter Ribbon and Air Force Basic Military Training Instructor Ribbon. Compliance with this memorandum is mandatory. To the extent its directions are inconsistent with other publications; the information herein prevails in accordance with AFI 33-360, Publications and Forms Management.

See attachment 2 and 3 for changes. If you have questions, please contact AFPC Contact Center at 800-525-0102/DSN 665-5000.

This memorandum becomes void after one-year has elapsed from the date of this memorandum, or upon publication of an Interim Change or rewrite of the affected publication, whichever is earlier.

**SAMUEL D. COX**  
Lieutenant General, USAF  
DCS, Manpower, Personnel and Services

**Attachments:**  
Attachment 1  
Attachment 2

**SS**—Silver Star

**SSN or SSAN**—Social Security Number

**SWASM**—Southwest Asia Service Medal

**TAFMSD**—Total Active Federal Military Service Date

**TBD**—To Be Determined

**TBI**—Traumatic Brain Injury

**TDRL**—Temporary Disability Retired List

**TDY**—Temporary Duty

**TMSD**—Total Military Service Date

**UIF**—Unfavorable Information File

**UNM**—United Nations Medal

**UNSM**—United Nations Service Medal

**USAF**—United States Air Force

**USAFR**—United States Air Force Reserve

**U.S.C.**—United States Code

**USUHS**—Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences

**VSM**—Vietnam Service Medal

### ***Terms***

**The following definitions are provided to the use, implementation, and interpretation of AFI 36-2803.** All definitions provided have been cleared and defined by both the Department of Defense and the Department of the Air Force.

**Above and Beyond the Call of Duty**—Exercise of a voluntary course of action the omission of which would not justly subject the individual to censure for failure in the performance of duty. It usually includes the acceptance of existing danger or extraordinary responsibilities with praiseworthy fortitude and exemplary courage. In its highest degrees it involves the voluntary acceptance of additional danger and risk of life.

**Appurtenances or Devices**—A term that identifies authorized subordinate parts to an award or medal (i.e. the Medal of Honor Flag is an appurtenance of the Medal of Honor). These include ribbon bars, lapel buttons, rosettes, oak leaf clusters, stars, arrowheads, service clasps, and similar appurtenances (i.e., hourglass device, ribbon borders, alphabets, and numbers).

**Area of Eligibility (AOE)**—Also known as (AKA) the Area of Responsibility, the designated area identified as theater of combat/expeditionary operations. These areas are typically defined by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or competent authority designated commander-in-chief of the operation.

**Armed Forces**—The Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.

**Armed Forces of the United States**—A term used to denote collectively all components of the US Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. (Also U.S. Armed Forces)

**Aviation**—The art and science of flying airplanes or aircraft, especially military airplanes or aircraft, collectively.

**Award**—Recognition given to members or units for certain acts or services, or badges, accolades, emblems, citations, commendations, and streamers. Also an adjectival term used to identify administrative functions relating to recognition (for example, awards boards, award recommendations, and so forth).

1. Joint/DoD Unit Awards consist of: The Joint Meritorious Unit Award

**DoD Campaign & Expeditionary Awards consist of:** The Prisoner of War Medal, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic—Pacific Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Korean Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal, Kosovo Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, and Iraq Campaign Medal.

2. DoD Service Awards consist of: The American Defense Service Medal, Medal for Humane Action, National Defense Service Medal, Antarctica Service Medal, Armed Forces Service Medal, Humanitarian Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, and Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
3. US Air Force Unit Awards consist of: The Presidential Unit Citation, Gallant Unit Citation, Meritorious Unit Award, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, and Air Force Organizational Excellence Award.

**US Air Force/Army Air Corps Service Awards consist of:** The Combat Readiness Medal, Good Conduct Medal (Army), Air Force Good Conduct Medal, Air Reserve Force Meritorious Service Medal, Outstanding Airmen of the Year Ribbon, Air Force Recognition Ribbon, Women's Army Corps Service Medal, Air and Space Campaign Medal, Air Force Expeditionary Service Ribbons with/without Gold Border, Air Force Overseas Ribbons—Long & Short, Air Force Longevity Service Award, NCO Professional Military Education Graduate Ribbon, USAF Basic Military Training Honor Graduate Ribbon, Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon, and Air Force Training Ribbon

**Battle Casualty**—See Killed in Action and Wounded in Action.

**Associated USAF Units**—Units consisting of more than one USAF Total Force component (Active Duty, ANG or AFR).

**Bravery**—Quality or state showing courage; level of conduct which is expected of professional Air Force Airmen.

**Campaign**—A series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a strategic or operational objective within a given time and space.

**Campaign Medal**—A subcategory of DoD Service Awards, campaign medals are used to recognize active participation in a war or significant military combat operation, of long duration and significant scope. Award is typically limited to those who have physically participated in the campaign from within the actual area of operations. Historically, all of the following factors are

present before a campaign medal is created: (1) A declared war, state of emergency or legislative resolution; (2) The presence of sustained hostilities by an opposing force within a defined geographic area; and (3) The assumption of significant risk (proximity to the enemy), personal hardship, or extended family separation by the Service member.

**Campaign Star**—Also known as a Battle Star, is a bronze or silver five-pointed star, 3/16 inch in diameter worn on the suspension ribbon to denote subsequent awards. See also “Service Star”.

**Combat Area**—A restricted area (air, land, or sea) that is established to prevent or minimize mutual interference between friendly forces engaged in combat operations. See also combat zone.

**Combat Heroism**—An act or acts of heroism by an individual above what is normally expected while engaged in direct combat with an enemy with exposure to enemy hostilities and personal risk.

**Combat Support**—Fire support and operational assistance provided to combat elements.

**Combat Zone**—1) That area required by combat forces for the conduct of operations. 2) The territory forward of the Army rear area boundary. See also combat area.

**Combatant Command**—A unified or specified command with a broad continuing mission under a single commander established and so designated by the President, through the SECDEF and with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Combatant commands typically have geographic or functional responsibilities. See also unified command (Source: DoD Joint Publication 1-02).

**Combatant Commander**—A commander of one of the unified or specified combatant commands established by the President.

**Component**—One of the subordinate organizations that constitute a joint force. Normally a joint force is organized with a combination of Service and functional components.

**Conspicuous**—Attracting attention by being unexpected, unusual, outstanding, remarkable, striking.

**Conflict**—An armed struggle or clash between organized groups within a nation or between nations in order to achieve limited political or military objectives. Although regular forces are often involved, irregular forces frequently predominate. Conflict often is protracted, confined to a restricted geographic area, and constrained in weaponry and level of violence. Within this state, military power in response to threats may be exercised in an indirect manner while supportive of other instruments of national power. Limited objectives may be achieved by the short, focused, and direct application of force.

**Courage, Act of**—Act or actions performed were dangerous, difficult, and required a level of courage. Level of courage is the ability to continue to function effectively when there is physical danger present. These actions usually do not involve risk of life to the individual performing the act or actions.

**Death or Wounding by Friendly Fire**—Service member(s) killed in action or wounded in action mistakenly or accidentally by friendly forces who are directly engaged with the enemy and directing fire at a hostile force or what is thought to be a hostile force.

**Decoration**—Distinctively designed mark of honor denoting heroism or meritorious/outstanding service/achievement for members and units. Individual U.S. Air Force decorations are the Medal of Honor, Air Force Cross, Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Airmen's Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, and the Air Force Achievement Medal. DoD/Joint decorations include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, and the Joint Service Achievement Medal. Each of the other US Service Branches (i.e., US Army, US Navy, US Marine Corps, and US Marine Corps) have their own distinct decorations named after their Service (*Note:* US Navy and US Marine Corps share the same Service decorations). There are also decorations from non-DoD organizations (i.e., National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Air and Space Administration (NASA), US Public Health Services, etc.), and foreign decorations from other countries that may or may not be credible for update in an Airman's military record.

**Direct Support**—Services being supplied to participating forces in the area of eligibility by ground units, ships, and aircraft provided it involves actually entering the designated area of eligibility. This includes units, ships, and aircraft providing logistic, patrol, guard, reconnaissance, or other military support within the designated area of eligibility.

**Directly Impacting**—"hands-on" employment of a weapons system, including remote employment, or other activities in any domain, that had direct, immediate, and on-site effects on the outcome of an engagement or other operation intended to have an effect upon the target.

**Distinguished Himself or Herself By**—A person to have distinguished himself or herself must, by praiseworthy accomplishment, be set apart from other persons in the same or similar circumstances. Determination of this distinction requires careful consideration of exactly what is or was expected as the ordinary, routine, or customary behavior and accomplishment for members of like rank and experience for the circumstance involved.

**DoD Components**—A term used to refer collectively to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Military Departments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), and the DoD Field Activities supported by OSD or CJCS.

**DoD Decorations and Awards**—AKA, DoD-Wide decorations and awards, includes the medals and ribbons that are common to the Military Departments. Appendix 3 lists the DoD Decorations and Awards.

**DoD Defense/Joint Decorations**—The subset of the DoD-Wide decorations and awards that are awarded by the SECDEF to recognize the accomplishments of Service members permanently assigned to a qualifying joint activity. Appendix 1 in DoD 1348-33-M lists the DoD Defense/Joint Decorations.

**DoD-Wide Decorations and Awards**—See DoD Decorations and Awards.

**Domain**—Described as air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains (Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms). While domains are useful constructs for visualizing and characterizing the physical environment in which operations are conducted (the operational area), the use of the term "domain" is not meant to imply or mandate exclusivity, primacy, or command and control of any domain.

**Dual Recognition**—The recognition of an act, achievement, or period of service that occurred during an award inclusive period, and utilizing the same act, achievement, or period of service in a subsequent award submission. This applies to both individual decorations and unit awards, and is prohibited.

**Employing Component**—The DoD Component in which the recipient is appointed, employed, or enlisted. If a recipient is not so serving, but is a spouse or dependent of a serving individual, then the employing DoD Component is that in which the serving individual is appointed, employed, or enlisted.

**Employment**—The strategic, operational, or tactical use of forces (Joint Publication 1-02).

**Engage**—1) In air defense, a fire control order used to direct or authorize units and/or weapon systems to fire on a designated target. See also cease engagement; hold fire. 2) (DoD only) To bring the enemy under fire.

**Engagement**—1) In air defense, an attack with guns or air-to-air missiles by an interceptor aircraft, or the launch of an air defense missile by air defense artillery and the missile's subsequent travel to intercept. 2) A tactical conflict, usually between opposing lower echelons maneuver forces. See also battle; campaign.

**Entitlement Award**—The subset of DoD-Wide decorations that Service members are entitled to based on meeting eligibility requirements. The current entitlement awards are the Prisoner of War Medal and the Purple Heart.

**Expedition**—A military operation conducted by an armed force to accomplish a specific objective in a foreign country.

**Expeditionary Medal**—A subcategory of DoD Service Awards, expeditionary medals are used to recognize direct participation: 1) In military operations against an armed opposing force; or, 2) In limited hostilities against an opposing force; or, 3) In military operations where Service members are exposed to the imminent threat of hostilities. Award it typically limited to those who have physically participated in the military expedition from within the area of operations.

Expeditionary operations are typically shorter in duration and more limited in scope than operations that qualify for creation of Campaign medals.

**Foreign Government**—Includes any unit of foreign governmental authority (including any foreign national, state, local, and municipal government) or any international or multinational organization whose membership is composed of the agents or representatives of any of these foreign governments.

**Friendly Fire**—In casualty reporting, a casualty circumstance applicable to persons killed in action or wounded in action mistakenly or accidentally by friendly forces while actively engaged with the enemy, who are directing fire at a hostile force or what is thought to be a hostile force.

**Gallantry**—Nobility of behavior or spirit; Heroic courage.

**General Support**—1) That support which is given to the supported force as a whole and not to any particular subdivision thereof. See also close support; direct support; mutual support; support. 2) (DOD only) A tactical artillery mission. See also direct support; general support-reinforcing; reinforcing.

**General War**—Armed conflict between major powers in which the total resources of the belligerents are employed, and the national survival of a major belligerent is in jeopardy.

**Heroism**—Heroic conduct especially as exhibited in fulfilling a high purpose or attaining a noble end involving the voluntary risk of life. Varying levels of documented heroic actions are necessary to substantiate recommendations for the Distinguished Flying Cross with “V”, Bronze Star Medal with “V,” Air Medal with “V,” and the Air Force Commendation Medal with “V.” See combat heroism.

**Hostile**—In combat and combat support operations, an identity applied to a track declared to belong to any opposing nation, party, group, or entity, which by virtue of its behavior or information collected on it, such as characteristics, origin, or nationality, contributes to the threat to friendly forces.

**Hostile Act**—1) A hostile act is an attack or other use of force by any civilian, paramilitary, or military force or terrorist(s) (with or without national designation) against the U.S., U.S. forces and, in certain circumstances, U.S. nationals, their property, U.S. commercial assets, or other designated non-U.S. forces, foreign nationals, and their property. 2) Force used directly to preclude or impede the mission and/or duties of U.S. forces, including the recovery of U.S. personnel and vital U.S. Government property. When a hostile act is in progress the right exists to use proportional force, including armed force, in self-defense by all necessary means available to deter or neutralize the potential attacker or, if necessary, to destroy the threat.

**Humanitarian Operation**—Military support solely dedicated to the performance of relief operations in the aftermath of a natural or manmade disaster where a large number of civilian personnel have been displaced or are in want of the basic necessities for survival.

**Impact Award**—See Outstanding Achievement Award/Decoration.

**Insurgency**—An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict.

**Insurgent**—Member of a political party who rebels against established leadership. See also antiterrorism; counterinsurgency; insurgency.

**Intrepid**—Not afraid, bold, fearless, dauntless, very brave.

**Joint Activity**—For the purpose of this Manual and the eligibility for DoD Defense/Joint decorations, the term "joint" connotes activities, operations or organizations in which elements of more than one Military Service of the U.S., as reflected in joint manpower documents or the Joint Duty Assignment List, perform joint missions under the auspices of the OSD; the CJCS; or the commander of a Unified or Combined Command.

**Killed in Action**—A battle casualty killed in action against the enemy or as a result of enemy action.

**Limited War**—Armed conflict short of general war, exclusive of incidents, involving the overt engagement of the military forces of two or more nations.

**Military Decoration and Award**—The DoD and Military Department medals and ribbons authorized.

**Medal**—A term used to include the three categories of awards, namely: decorations, Air Force Good Conduct Medal, and service medals. Also refers to the distinctive physical device made of metal and ribbon, which constitutes the tangible evidence of an award.

**Medical Officer**—A physician with officer rank. An officer of the Medical Corps of the Army, an officer of the Medical Corps of the Navy, or an officer in the Air Force designated as a medical officer, as defined in section 101 of title 10 U.S.C.

**Medical Professional**—Means a civilian physician or a physician extender. Physician extenders include nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and other medical professionals qualified to provide independent treatment (e.g., Independent Duty Corpsman and Special Forces Medic). Basic Corpsmen and medics are not physician extenders.

**Meritorious Service**—Individual performance that exceeds that expected by virtue of grade and experience, based on accomplishments during an entire tour of duty. Awards given for meritorious service must cover the period of the controlled duty tour, plus any extensions. Award for meritorious service are typically awarded for a period of service greater than 12 months.

**Mutual Support**—That support which units render each other against an enemy, because of their assigned tasks, their position relative to each other and to the enemy, and their inherent capabilities.

**Next of Kin (NOK)**—Defined in descending order as the surviving spouse; natural or adopted children in order of seniority; parents in order of seniority, unless legal exclusive (sole) custody was granted to a person by reason of a court decree or statutory provision; blood or adoptive relative who was granted legal custody of the person by a court decree or statutory provision; brothers or sisters in order of seniority; grandparents in order of seniority; and persons standing in loco parentis to the member.

**Operation**—1) A military action or the carrying out of a strategic, operational, tactical, service, training, or administrative military mission. 2) The process of carrying on combat, including movement, supply, attack, defense, and maneuvers needed to gain the objectives of any battle or campaign.

**Outstanding Achievement Award/Decoration**—Also known as an impact award, is rare, and is intended to recognize a single specific act or accomplishment, separate and distinct from regularly assigned duties, such as a special project that covers a short period of time with definite beginning and ending dates.

**Performance Award**—A non-valorous award presented to members in recognition of their performance, outstanding achievement, or meritorious service (e.g. Meritorious Service Medal, Commendation Medal).

**Permanently Assigned**—Assigned to an authorized billet on an organizations permanent manning document and under the UCMJ authority of the organizations commander.

**Personal Award**—A military decoration which is bestowed on an individual for valor, heroism, outstanding achievement, or meritorious service.

**Physician**—A person possessing a degree in medicine (MD) or osteopathy (DO).



**Posthumous**—Occurring or coming into existence after a person's death (e.g. promotion, award, etc.)

**Prisoner of War**—A detained person as defined in Articles 4 and 5 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of August 12, 1949. In particular, one who, while engaged in combat under orders of his or her government, is captured by the armed forces of the enemy. As such, he or she is entitled to the combatant's privilege of immunity from the municipal law of the capturing state for warlike acts which do not amount to breaches of the law of armed conflict. For example, a prisoner of war may be, but is not limited to, any person belonging to one of the following categories who has fallen into the power of the enemy: a member of the armed forces, organized militia or volunteer corps; a person who accompanies the armed forces without actually being a member thereof; a member of a merchant marine or civilian aircraft crew not qualifying for more favorable treatment; or individuals who, on the approach of the enemy, spontaneously take up arms to resist the invading forces. Also called POW or PW.

**Service Medal**—A subcategory of DoD Service Awards, Service medals denote: 1) Participation in military operations that do not involve conflict with an armed enemy; or, 2) Military service meeting specific criteria (e.g., honorable service while a Prisoner of War). Prolonged military presence, peacekeeping, and humanitarian relief are examples of military actions that warrant consideration for a service medal.

**Service Star**—Also known as a Battle Star, is a bronze or silver five-pointed star, 3/16 inch in diameter worn on the suspension ribbon to denote subsequent awards. See also "Campaign Star".

**Secretary Concerned**—The Secretaries of the Military Departments.

**Specified Combatant Command**—Means a military command which has broad, continuing missions and which is normally composed of forces from a single military department.

**Support**—1) The action of a force that aids, protects, complements, or sustains another force in accordance with a directive requiring such action. 2) A unit that helps another unit in battle. 3) An element of a command that assists, protects, or supplies other forces in combat.

**Team**—An organized, developed component of members composed for a specific purpose (i.e., Tiger Team) or an operation (i.e., bomber crew, security forces contingent, etc.) that is not constituted as a USAF organization by a DAF letter. As such, a team is not entitled to a lineage and honors history or an emblem.

**Theater**—The geographical area for which a commander or combatant command has been assigned responsibility.

**Unified Combatant Command**—Means a military command which has broad, continuing missions and which is composed of forces from two or more military departments.

**Uniformed Services**—(A) The US Armed Forces; (B) the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and (C) the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service. The uniformed services are the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Public Health Services.

**Valor**—An act of heroism above what is normally expected while engaged in direct combat with an enemy with exposure to enemy hostilities and personal risk.

**Weapon system**—A combination of one or more weapons with all related equipment, materials, services, personnel, and means of delivery and deployment (if applicable) required for self-sufficiency (Joint Publication 1-02).

**Wound**—An injury to any part of the body from an outside force or agent. The term encompasses all kinds of wounds and other injuries caused by an outsider force or agent, whether there is a piercing of the body, as in a penetrating or perforating wound, or none, as in a contused wound; all fractures, burns, blast concussions, all effects of gases and like chemical and biological warfare agents; and the effect of exposure to radioactive substances.

**Wounded in Action**—Except for those killed in action, a battle casualty who incurs a wound (see Wound) in action against the enemy or as a result of enemy action; and the wound requires the treatment of a physician. Civilian battle casualties are not classified as wounded in action.