



From Military Valor to Armed Forces Valor: how Medals are awarded to Italian military personnel

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A medal for valor does not simply arise from a commander's decision to reward a soldier. Behind an Italian decoration there is a **formal procedure**, regulated by the Code of Military Organization and its regulations, in which the facts are reconstructed, the behavior of the interested party is evaluated, and it is determined whether what was accomplished truly possesses the requirements for a reward.

It is also necessary to distinguish categories often confused in common language: **Military Valor**, **Armed Force Valor**, and **Armed Force Merit** are not the same thing.

Military Valor: the highest reward for a military action

Rewards for **Military Valor** represent the pinnacle of the reward system for military actions characterized by exceptional courage, daring, and sense of duty.

The rewards provided are:

- Gold Medal for Military Valor;
- Silver Medal for Military Valor;
- Bronze Medal for Military Valor;
- Cross for Military Valor.

At the top is the **Gold Medal for Military Valor**, the highest reward provided within the scope of Military Valor. It is intended for acts of valor of exceptional importance and represents one of the most prestigious recognitions that the State can bestow for a military action.

Italian law allows for Military Valor to be recognized even for actions carried out in peacetime, provided that the feat is strictly connected to the institutional purposes of the Armed Forces.

The fundamental point is precisely this: **it is not enough to have performed one's service very well.**

To reach Military Valor, there must be **behavior that clearly stands out from the ordinary and in which elements such as courage, risk faced, initiative, operational circumstances, and the result achieved take on particular importance.**

For this reason, a Medal for Military Valor is profoundly different from a commendation or a normal merit certificate.

Medals "in memoriam"

A reward for Military Valor can also be granted **in memoriam**, when the recipient is deceased. This is the case, in particular, of many military personnel who fell in combat or died as a consequence of the action for which the demonstrated valor is recognized.

The term "**in memoriam**" therefore indicates that the State formally bestows the decoration after the death of the decorated, entrusting his name and the action accomplished to national memory. This is not an inferior category of reward: a Gold Medal for Military Valor in memoriam remains in all respects a Gold Medal for Military Valor.

Throughout Italian history, numerous Gold Medals have been conferred in memoriam precisely because the act of valor coincided with the sacrifice of the soldier's life.

Who can propose a medal?

The procedure normally begins with military authorities who, due to their responsibilities, **are directly aware of the facts**.

Essentially, following an episode deemed worthy of particular recognition, a proposal is prepared in which the action must be reconstructed: what happened, what were the operational conditions, what behavior the soldier displayed, and why such behavior would be worthy of a particular reward.

It is therefore not the decorated person who "asks for a medal".

The military administration must gather and verify the elements necessary to demonstrate what actually occurred.

The proposal subsequently follows the prescribed chain of command and is submitted to the competent bodies for evaluation.

For rewards for Military Valor, the regulations also provide for a specific **unified military advisory commission**, tasked with examining proposals according to the discipline established by the Code of Military Organization and its regulations.

This means that an initial proposal **does not automatically equate to the granting of the medal**.

During the review, the level of the reward can be evaluated in light of the actual gravity and extraordinariness of the action described.

Medal for Military Valor and Medal for Army Valor are not the same thing

This is probably one of the most frequent confusions.

Alongside Military Valor, there are in fact **valor rewards of the individual Armed Forces**.

For the Army, for example, there are:

- **Gold Medal for Army Valor**
- **Silver Medal for Army Valor**

- **Bronze Medal for Army Valor**

The Quirinal specifies that rewards for Army Valor and Merit are regulated by the Code of Military Organization and its regulations.

The **Medal for Valor of the Army** can reward behaviors demonstrated during military activities in which particular courage and capability have emerged.

For higher-level awards, the regulations consider situations of extreme difficulty in which the protagonist has demonstrated marked courage and singular skill, even going so far as to expose their own life to manifest risk in order to save people in grave danger or to prevent or limit the consequences of a serious disaster.

It is therefore a prestigious award, but **legally distinct from Military Valor**.

Each Armed Force has its own rewards

The same principle is applied to the other components.

There are specific rewards for valor and merit linked to the **Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Carabinieri Corps**, each with characteristics defined by the regulations.

For the Navy, for example, rewards for **Naval Valor** and merit are provided. Similarly, the **Medal for Aeronautical Valor** exists, while for the Corps specific rewards for valor and merit of the Carabinieri are provided.

And "merit"?

Also **valor and merit are not synonyms**.

In the case of the Army, alongside the Medal for Valor there is the **Cross for Merit of the Army**, articulated in gold, silver and bronze grades.

The purpose is different.

The Cross for Merit of the Army rewards a particularly intelligent, bold and effective contribution to enterprises and studies of particular importance for the development and progress of the Army, from which marked prestige and honor to the Armed Force have resulted.

In other words, **valor** mainly looks at the exceptional action performed in specific circumstances; **merit** can instead reward an extraordinary contribution produced through activities, results, studies or enterprises of exceptional relevance to the Institution.

Who decides in the end?

Also for Armed Force rewards there is a formal procedure.

The Code of Military Organization provides that the opinion on the granting of rewards for valor or merit of the Armed Force is expressed by the **respective Chief of the General Staff** or, for the Corps, by the **Commander General of the Carabinieri**, according to the procedures provided.

The decision, therefore, comes at the end of a chain in which the original proposal is examined at higher levels.

It is an important guarantee: a decoration of this level does not depend on the sole evaluation of the commander immediately superior to the military concerned.

Why a proposal may not become a medal

A behavior can be extremely positive and deserve recognition without necessarily reaching the requirements provided for a Medal for Military Valor or for Armed Force Valor.

In the military award system there are indeed different levels of recognition.

The evaluation must take into account the nature of the action, the responsibilities of the author, the circumstances in which they operated, the risks faced, the actual exceptionality of the conduct and the results obtained.

It is precisely this selectivity that gives meaning to the most important decorations.

A Medal for Military Valor does not simply represent "excellent service", but **an exceptional fact worthy of being publicly indicated as an example**.

Where you can consult the Medals for Military Valor

Decorations and recipients can also be searched through the **portal of Honors of the Office of the President of the Republic**. The Quirinal Palace website makes available the records of

the recipients and, for the Medals for Military Valor listed in the portal, allows you to consult data such as the type of decoration, the date of the award and the motivation.

In the records of the fallen the wording "**In memory**" appears expressly. The portal thus allows you to read directly many of the motivations with which the State has entrusted to history acts of courage and sacrifice performed by Italian military personnel.

They are not just pieces of metal

Military decorations are materially represented through medals, crosses and ribbons, while on uniforms the relative **ribbons** can be worn, which reproduce the colors of the decoration granted.

But the true value of the award is in the official motivation that accompanies the granting.

It is that motivation that entrusts to the history of the Institution what the military person did, indicating the reasons why the State considered that behavior worthy of public recognition.

And this is precisely what distinguishes a decoration for valor from a simple award: **it does not only certify that a military officer has done their duty well, but that under specific circumstances they have done something that the Institution considers extraordinary.**

Sources

Presidency of the Republic - Military Value and Merit Awards

Italian Army - Medal of Military Valor

Ministry of Defence - Military Valor Decorations

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Normattiva - Presidential Decree of 15 March 2010, No. 90, Consolidated Regulatory Text of Military Order

Presidency of the Republic - Honors of the Italian Republic