

## 6. ALL GLORY IS FLEETING

The colored award ribbons, sometimes jokingly called “fruit salad”, worn by military men and women on their uniforms have specific significance. They may only be worn by those who have earned them; and in the prescribed order with the most important on the upper left when facing them, then going to the right and down as if reading a page of text.

Summarized below, in order of precedence, are selected key Navy combat ribbons.



Medal of Honor



Navy Cross



Silver Star



Bronze Star

The Medal of Honor, shown above in Navy and Marine version, is the highest US award given to an individual of the military services for extraordinary heroism in combat, “above and beyond the call of duty.” For example, it was awarded posthumously to Commander Ernest Evans, captain of the destroyer Johnston in the Battle off Samar. Less than 900 of these have been awarded in all the military branches in the last 85 years. A majority were awarded posthumously. Next is the Navy Cross, given to an individual for extraordinary heroism in action not justifying an award of the Medal of Honor. Next in line for heroism in action are the Silver Star and Bronze Star.



Purple Heart



Presidential Unit Citation



Navy Unit Commendation

The Purple Heart is an individual award for being wounded or killed in combat. To qualify, a wound requires treatment by a doctor.

The Presidential Unit Citation is the highest award for heroism given to an entire combat unit. Awarded for extraordinary heroism in action, accomplishing unit mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions setting it apart and above other units participating in the same battle campaign. The degree of heroism is the same as required for a Navy Cross to be awarded to an individual. We tend to think today of heroes or survivors being sole individuals. But the people in WWII understood that the best chance of survival came from being part of a successful team effort—when your shipmates survived. And combat missions could almost always only be accomplished by a strong team, working together, not by one person. A few notable WWII recipients of the Presidential Unit Citation were:

- the flight crews of Torpedo Squadron 8 from the USS Hornet (CV 12) in the Battle of Midway that turned the tide of war in the Pacific in 1942;
- Task Unit 77.4.3, call sign “Taffy 3”, the men of the ships that fought the large enemy surface force off Samar in the Battle of Leyte Gulf; and
- the paratroopers of the 506th Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division for action in Normandy after D-Day—more famously known now as “The Band of Brothers.”

Through May 1945, despite all the amphibious landings that had taken place, no minesweepers had been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation.

Next, the Navy Unit Commendation is awarded to units of the naval service who distinguished themselves by outstanding heroism in action, but not sufficient to justify award of the Presidential Unit Citation. The unit must have performed at the same level as that required for the award of a Silver Star. As we have seen, YMS 339 earned a Navy Unit Commendation as part of Task Unit 78.3.6 for the action in February, 1945, sweeping mines near Corregidor and in Mariveles Harbor, Bataan. 339 was one of only 17 YMS's to earn this Commendation in WWII.

Beyond these ribbons are others to indicate involvement in battle campaigns and other key events, and for non-combat awards. Each battle star awarded is represented by a small star placed on top of the ribbon of the campaign of which the battle was a part.

Here is a photo of Maurice's ribbons, faded by the years:



In order from top left to right bottom are:

- Presidential Unit Citation, earned at Borneo as related in the following chapter;
- Navy Unit Commendation, with 2 stars indicating awarded two times; although no official record details were found of the 2nd incidence, it is possible that it was awarded for the action at Borneo, before the Presidential Unit Citation was given;
- Naval Reserve ribbon;
- WWII American Campaign for at sea duty off the east coast and in the Caribbean;
- WWII Europe Africa Middle East Campaign—not known how this was earned, since wartime deck logs from the Hawk and YMS 308 were not reviewed—perhaps one of them did convoy duty with Maurice onboard far enough to the east in the Atlantic Ocean to qualify;
- WWII Asia Pacific Campaign, with 4 battle stars—3 from the Philippines and 1 from Borneo.
- Naval Occupation WWII ribbon;
- Defense Service ribbon, given for Maurice's cold war service after 1950;
- Philippine Liberation, with 2 stars;
- Finally, not shown above as it wasn't with Maurice's ribbons, is the WWII Victory ribbon. He was qualified to wear it. Shown here:



“For over a thousand years Roman conquerors returning from the wars enjoyed the honor of triumph, a tumultuous parade. In the procession came trumpeteers, musicians and strange animals from conquered territories, together with carts laden with treasure and captured armaments. The conqueror rode in a triumphal chariot, the dazed prisoners walking in chains before him. Sometimes his children robed in white stood with him in the chariot or rode the trace horses. A slave stood behind the conqueror holding a golden crown and whispering in his ear a warning: that all glory is fleeting.”

- General George C. Patton