

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 30, 2003

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**PURPLE HEART POSTAGE STAMP HONORS
SACRIFICES OF THOSE WHO SERVED**

WASHINGTON – The oldest military decoration in the world will be commemorated with the issuance of the new Purple Heart postage stamp issued by the United States Postal Service on May 30.

The official first day of issuance ceremony will take place at 10:30 AM at George Washington’s Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, located at the southern end of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Mt. Vernon, Va. Registration will be required at the front gate for admission to the event.

The new stamp will be available at post offices nationwide beginning May 30.

“General George Washington created the Purple Heart decoration as a way to honor and thank the brave soldiers who fought under his command,” said Postmaster General John E. Potter who will dedicate the stamp. “Now, it is our turn to do the same and continue Washington’s patriotic tradition. With the issuance of this stamp, the Postal Service, along with the rest of America, can pay tribute to the men and women whose sacrifices have given all of us a country that is truly the ‘land of the free and the home of the brave.’”

“We are thrilled to be hosting this important ceremony at Mount Vernon,” said James Rees, Executive Director of Historic Mount Vernon. “Since George Washington created the medal to recognize his brave soldiers during the Revolutionary War, his home is the perfect place to celebrate the introduction of this new stamp, and to remind all Americans of the courage and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform.”

Joining Potter will be William A. Wroolie, National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart.



With the issuance of the Purple Heart stamp, the Postal Service honors the sacrifices of the men and women who serve in the U.S. military. The Purple Heart is awarded in the name of the President of the United States to members of the U.S. military who have been wounded or killed in action. According to the Military Order of the Purple Heart, an organization for combat-wounded veterans, the medal is “the oldest military decoration in the world in present use and the first award made available to a common soldier.”

On August 7, 1782, during the Revolutionary War, General George Washington issued an order that established a badge of distinction for meritorious action. The badge, which consisted of a heart made of purple cloth, is known to have been awarded to three sergeants from Connecticut regiments: Elijah Churchill and William Brown on May 3, 1783, in Newburgh, New York, and Daniel Bissell, Jr., on June 10, 1783.

Known as the Badge of Military Merit, the award was distinctive because it was available to the lower ranks at a time when only officers were eligible for decoration in European armies. “The road to glory in a patriot army,” Washington wrote, “is thus open to all.”

The decoration was not continued after the Revolutionary War, but its reinstatement was announced by the U.S. War Department (now the Department of Defense) on February 22, 1932, the 200th anniversary of Washington’s birthday. The redesigned decoration consists of a purple heart of metal bordered by gold and suspended from a purple and white ribbon. In the center of the medal is a profile bust of George Washington beneath his family coat of arms.

Since World War II, U.S. presidents have expanded the eligibility requirements for the Purple Heart. On December 3, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order that extended the award to the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard and made the change retroactive to December 6, 1941. President Harry S. Truman later extended the date of eligibility retroactively to April 5, 1917, to include those who were injured or killed during World War I.

From 1962 to 1998, civilian personnel wounded or killed while serving under military command were also eligible for the Purple Heart, in accordance with a 1962 executive order by President John F. Kennedy. That order also prompted a policy change to include prisoners of war wounded during captivity. (A 1996 law authorized awarding the Purple Heart to POWs wounded before April 25, 1962.) Kennedy’s 1962 executive order was amended in 1984 by President Ronald Reagan to include both military personnel and civilians under military authority who were killed or wounded in an international terrorist attack after March 28, 1973.

A law that went into effect in 1998 restored the previous criteria so that now only members of the U.S. armed forces may receive the Purple Heart. The Defense of Freedom Medal, the civilian equivalent of the Purple Heart, was unveiled by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld on September 27, 2001.

Recipients of the Purple Heart may also join the Military Order of the Purple Heart, “the only congressionally chartered veterans organization exclusively for combat-wounded veterans.” Formed shortly after the 1932 reinstatement of the Purple Heart and chartered by Congress in 1958, the organization represents veterans before the federal government, offers assistance to veterans and their families, and also participates in numerous charitable programs, including volunteer efforts and scholarships.

This stamp will feature a photograph by Ira Wexler of one of two Purple Hearts awarded to James Loftus Fowler of Alexandria, Va. Fowler was a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marines and was serving as battalion commander of the Third Battalion, Fourth Marines when he received this Purple Heart in 1968, following an action close to the Ben Hai River on the border between North and South Vietnam.

In addition to the stamp, a special Purple Heart Matted Keepsake for \$21.95 and a Purple Heart Cancellation Keepsake for \$8.15 will be available at Postal Retail Stores, by calling 1-800-STAMP 24 or by visiting www.usps.com/shop.

To see the Purple Heart stamp, locate the online version of this press release at www.usps.com/communications/news/stamps/welcome.htm. Current U.S. stamps and philatelic products, as well as the free USA Philatelic catalog, are available by calling toll free 1 800 STAMP-24. A selection of U.S. stamps and gift items are also available online at the Postal Store at www.usps.com/shop. Images of many current, past and future stamp issues can be found in the Stamp Issues section of the Collector’s Corner.

Since 1775, the U.S. Postal Service has connected friends, families, neighbors and businesses by mail. It is an independent federal agency that visits 140 million homes and businesses every day and is the only service provider to deliver to every address in the nation. The Postal Service receives no taxpayer dollars for routine operations, but derives its operating revenues solely from the sale of postage, products and services. With annual revenues of more than \$67 billion, it is the world’s leading provider of mailing and delivery services, offering some of the most affordable postage rates in the world. The U.S. Postal Service delivers more than 43 percent of the world’s mail volume—some 203 billion letters, advertisements, periodicals and packages a year—and serves 7 million customers each day at its 38,000 retail locations nationwide.

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TECHNICAL DETAILS

Issue:	<i>Purple Heart</i>
Item Number:	108900
Denomination & Type of Issue:	37-cent definitive
Format:	Pane of 20 (1 design)
Series:	N/A
Issue Date & City:	May 30, 2003, Mount Vernon, VA 22121
Designer:	Carl T. Herrman, Carlsbad, CA
Engraver:	N/A
Photographer:	Ira Wexler, Bethesda, MD
Art Director:	Carl T. Herrman, Carlsbad, CA
Typographer:	Carl T. Herrman, Carlsbad, CA
Modeler:	Banknote Corporation of America, Inc. (BCA)
Manufacturing Process:	Offset/Microprint "USA"
Printer:	Banknote Corporation of America, Inc. (BCA)
Printed at:	Browns Summit, NC
Press Type:	Man-Roland, 300
Stamps per Pane:	20
Print Quantity:	120 million stamps
Paper Type:	Phosphor tagged, block
Adhesive Type:	Pressure-sensitive
Processed at:	Banknote Corporation of America, Inc. (BCA)
Colors:	Yellow, Magenta, Cyan, Black
Stamp Orientation:	Vertical
Image Area (w x h):	0.73 x 0.86 in./18.54 x 21.84mm
Overall Size (w x h):	0.87 x 0.98 in./22.10 x 24.89 mm
Full Pane Size (w x h):	5.29 x 4.90 in./134.37 x 124.46 mm
Plate Size:	200 stamps per revolution
Plate Numbers:	"B" followed by four (4) single digits
Marginal Markings:	© 2003 USPS • Price • Plate numbers in four corners • Plate position diagram • Selvage Text • Barcodes on back
Catalog Item Number(s):	108920 Block of 4 — \$1.48 108930 Block of 10 — \$3.70 108940 Full Pane of 20 — \$7.40 108961 First Day Cover — \$0.75 108982 Matted Keepsake — \$21.95 108993 Full Pane w/FDC — \$8.15

HOW TO ORDER THE FIRST DAY OF ISSUE POSTMARK

Customers have 30 days to obtain the first day of issue postmark by mail. They may purchase the new stamps at their local post office, affix the stamps to envelopes of their choice, address the envelopes (to themselves or others), and place them in a larger envelope addressed to: PURPLE HEART COMMEMORATIVE POSTAGE STAMP, POSTMASTER, PO BOX 9998 MOUNT VERNON VIRGINIA 22121-9991. After applying the first day of issue postmark, the Postal Service will return the envelopes through the mail. There is no charge for the postmark. All orders must be postmarked by June 30, 2003.

Stamp Fulfillment Services also offers first day covers for new stamp issues and postal stationery items postmarked with the official first day of issue cancellation. Each item has an individual catalog number and is offered in the quarterly *USA Philatelic* catalog. Customers may request a free catalog by writing to: INFORMATION FULFILLMENT, DEPT 6270, US POSTAL SERVICE, PO BOX 219014, KANSAS CITY MO 64121-9014, or by calling 1 800 STAMP-24.

First day covers remain on sale for at least one year after the stamp's issuance.