

Former POWs May Qualify for Purple Heart

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12, 2000 -- Former American prisoners of war may be eligible to receive the Purple Heart medal due to a little-publicized four-year-old change in the award rules.

President John F. Kennedy started the change by signing Executive Order 11-1016 on April 25, 1962. Until that time, service members could receive the Purple Heart only during a formally declared state of war. Kennedy's order made it possible to award the medal even without a formal declaration of war.

The 1962 order didn't specifically mention POWs or their eligibility because of wounds and injuries suffered in captivity. An Army policy change dated Sept. 27, 1962, allowed Purple Heart awards henceforth to members who might become prisoners of war and be wounded or injured by their captors.

Neither Kennedy's executive order nor the Army change was retroactive. No former prisoners of war of any service, living and dead, who were wounded or injured during captivity before April 25, 1962, were eligible until Congress passed legislation as part of the 1996 National Defense Authorization Act.

Prior to the 1996 legislation, for instance, none of the 140,000 U.S. service members who surrendered to the Japanese in the Philippines in May 1942 could qualify for a Purple Heart. Also ineligible were the thousands of former POWs who came later in World War II and in the Korean War.

Since 1996, a number of World War II and Korean War vets have applied for Purple Hearts on the basis of wounds and injuries received while they were POWs, officials of the Army's Military Awards Branch said. Supporting documentation is required and may include copies of repatriation medical exams, or a witness statement from a cellmate, for example, stating their buddy was abused at hands of captors.

The injuries or wounds must be deliberately inflicted by captors, they said. Injuries received while on work detail, for example, probably would not qualify -- but if in doubt, apply.

A recent example of troops earning the Purple Heart while held captive occurred more than a year ago in the Balkans. Serb forces captured three U.S. soldiers on March 31, 1999. The Americans endured frequent beatings until their May 2 release. All three received Purple Heart medals.

Assistants at the Military Order of the Purple Heart headquarters in Springfield, Va., said veterans applying for the medal should use Standard Form 180, "Request Pertaining to Military Records," readily available at Department of Veterans Affairs service and medical centers; [online](#) at <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html>.

The back of the form includes instructions and mailing addresses, which differ by the applicant's service and rank.

For more on the Purple Heart's history, eligibility and information on the [Military Order of the Purple Heart](#), visit the organization's Web site at <http://www.purpleheart.org/>.

Related Site of Interest:

AFPS News Article: [VA Boosts Healthcare Priority for Purple Heart Vets](#)