

## CROIX DE GUERRE – BELGIUM

The Croix de Guerre (French) or Oorlogskruis (Dutch), both literally translating as “War Cross”, is a military decoration of the Kingdom of Belgium established by royal decree on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1915. It was primarily awarded for bravery or other military virtue on the battlefield. The award was re-established on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1940 by the Belgian government in exile for recognition of bravery and military virtue during the Second World War. The post-1940 decoration could also be awarded to units that were cited. The decoration was again re-established by royal decree on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1954 for award during future conflicts.



Belgian Croix de Guerre With Two Palms

### First World War ~ Award Statute

The First World War Croix de Guerre was established by royal decree on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1915 as an award for bravery or other military virtue on the battlefield. It was only awarded to individuals. The Croix de Guerre was not only awarded for bravery but also for three years or more of service on the front line, or for good conduct on the battlefield. It was also awarded to volunteers older than 40 or younger than 16 after a minimum of 18 months of service, to escaped prisoners of war rejoining the armed forces, and to military personnel who were placed on inactive duty because of injury.

### Award Description

The First World War Croix de Guerre is a 40mm wide bronze Maltese cross with 3mm in diameter balls at its eight points. It had a 14mm in diameter central medallion bearing the relief image of a “lion rampant” on its obverse and the royal cypher of King Albert I on its reverse. Two 37mm long crossed swords point upwards between its arms. A 14mm high inverted “V” between the two points of the top cross arm is secured to the inside of a 25mm wide by 25mm high royal crown, the ribbon’s suspension ring passes through the top orb of the crown giving the cross a total height of 65mm. The First World War Croix de Guerre ribbon is red with five 2mm wide light green longitudinal stripes, three at the centre separated by 3mm and one each side 3mm for the edges.

A Royal Decree of the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917 authorised the addition of a bronze lion emblem 5mm high, to the ribbon for each mentioned in an Army Order of the Day, and five bronze lions were to be replaced by a silver lion. A further decree of the 26<sup>th</sup> February 1919 amended this to a more complicated system according to the grade of the Order of the Day, using lions or palms in bronze, silver or silver-gilt:

- a) For a Mention in Regimental Order – a bronze lion;
- b) For a Divisional Order – silver;
- c) For Division d’Armée – silver-gilt;
- d) For a Mention in an Army Order – a bronze palm;
- e) Five bronze palms were replaced by a silver palm;
- f) Five silver Palms were replaced by one in silver-gilt;

The same decree of 26<sup>th</sup> February 1919 also granted the Croix de Guerre avec Palme to recipients of Belgian or foreign orders of decorations awarded as a result of an Army Order of the Day citation. Other decrees authorized the award to various other categories, such as those who died of wounds, those who escaped from German prisons and rejoined the Belgium army, volunteers over the age of forty or under sixteen, etc. As late as September 1950, the Prince Regent authorized the award of a supplementary palm leaf to the ribbon of the 1914-1918 Croix de Guerre for ex-prisoners of war, honourably captured, who had escaped and rejoined. When awarded posthumously, the ribbon of the Croix de Guerre was adorned with a narrow black enamel bar.

## Sources

Wikipedia Web-Site ~ Belgian Military Decorations & Medals; Belgian Civic Decorations & Medals – [www.wikipedia.com.uk](http://www.wikipedia.com.uk)

© Text & Photographs ~ Roger Coleman 2019

++++++