

ORDER OF THE CROWN ~ BELGIUM

The Order of the Crown (French: Ordre de la Couronne, Dutch: Kroonorde) is a national order of the Kingdom of Belgium. The Order is one of Belgium's highest honours.

History

The Order was established on the 15th October, 1897 by King Leopold II in his capacity as ruler of the Congo Free State. The order was first intended to recognize heroic deeds and distinguished service achieved for service in the Congo Free State – many of which acts soon became highly controversial. In 1908, the Order of the Crown was made a national honour of Belgium, junior to the Order of Leopold.



Order Of The Crown With Crossed Swords ~ Belgium

Currently, the Order of the Crown is awarded for services rendered to the Belgian state, especially for meritorious service in public employment. The Order of the Crown is also awarded for distinguished artistic, literary or scientific achievements, or for commercial or industrial services in Belgium or Africa. The Order may also be bestowed to foreign nationals and is frequently awarded to military and diplomatic personnel of other countries stationed in (or providing support to) Belgium. During the Second World War, the Order of the Crown was

extensively authorized for award to Allied military personnel who had helped to liberate Belgium from the occupation forces of Nazi Germany. The Order of the Crown is awarded by royal decree.

Classes

The Order of the Crown is awarded in five classes, plus two palms and three medals:

- a) Grand Cross, which wears the badge on a sash on the right shoulder, plus the star on the left chest.
- b) Grand Officer, which wears a star on the left chest, and may also wear the neck badge.
- c) Commander, which wears the badge on a neck ribbon.
- d) Officer, which wears the badge on a ribbon with rosette on the left chest.
- e) Knight, which wears the badge on a ribbon on the left chest.
- f) Golden Palms, which wears a wreath of golden palms on a ribbon on the left chest.
- g) Silver Palms, which wears a wreath of silver palms on a ribbon on the left chest.
- h) Gold Medal, who wears the medal on the left chest.
- i) Silver Medal, who wears the medal on the left chest.
- j) Bronze Medal, who wears the medal on the left chest.

Insignia

The badge of the Order is a white-enameled Maltese cross with straight rays, in silver for the Knight class and in gold for the higher classes. The obverse disc has a gold crown on a blue enameled background; the reverse central disc has the face-to-face monogram “L” (for King Leopold II) on a blue enameled background. The badge is suspended from a green-enameled wreath of laurel and oak leaves.

The plaque for Grand Cross is a faceted silver five-pointed star with golden rays between the branches of the star. The centre shows the obverse of a commander’s cross. The plaque for Grand Officer is a faceted five-armed ‘Maltese asterisk’ with golden rays between the arms. The centre shows the obverse of an officer’s cross.

The medal is round in gold, silver and bronze versions, with a suspension in the form of a royal crown with two pendelia and a ribbon ring. The obverse shows a finely ribbed central area with bead surround, with the royal crown superimposed. The surrounding circlet carries the motto of the Belgian Congo: Travail et Progrés (work and progress) – the later issues are bilingual including the Dutch Arbeid en Voorritgang in the lower half of the circlet. The reverse is a stylized ‘double L’ crowned Leopold II monogram within a palm wreath. The ribbon of the

order is usually plain maroon. However, if the order is awarded in special circumstances, the ribbon of the Officer and Knight classes show the following variations:

- a) Crossed swords are added to the ribbon when awarded in wartime (if the order was awarded during the Second World War or during the Korean War, a small bar is added to the ribbon mentioning the name of the war).
- b) The ribbon has a vertical gold border on both sides when awarded for a special act of valour.
- c) The ribbon has a central vertical gold stripe when awarded for an exceptionally meritorious act.
- d) A gold star is added to the ribbon when the recipient has been mentioned in despatches at the national level.
- e) Silver or gold palms are added to the ribbon when awarded in wartime to military personnel.

Stars, palms, borders or stripes can be awarded together, but these deviations are currently only rarely awarded. The ribbon of the palms and medals has a vertical white border on both sides as well as a metal pin showing a reduction of the palm or medal. A ribbon bar is worn on the semi-formal dress uniform. Despite the fact that, in contrast to the Order of Leopold, no maritime division of the Order of the Crown exists, some unofficial decorations with crossed anchors under the wreath are known to exist.

Award Conditions – Current Award Conditions of Belgian National Orders

National orders are awarded by royal decree at fixed dates: 8th April (birthday of King Albert I), 15th November (King's Feast), and in some cases on the 21st July (Belgian national holiday) to reward meritorious services to the Kingdom of Belgium based on the career path and age of the recipient. A number of different regulations rule the award of national orders for the various ministries. In addition, the national orders may be awarded by the king for especially meritorious deeds.

The royal decrees are published in the Belgian official journal, *Moniteur Belge*. For people who are not Belgian, honours are not published in the *Moniteur* and bestowed all year round by the foreign office. The ministry responsible for foreign affairs, currently the Federal Public Service (SPF/FOD) Foreign Affairs, administers the national orders and the minister has the role of adviser in cases not fitting within a regulation. For the award of national orders for persons to whom no regulation applies or has been adopted, the number of awards is limited every year by decision of the Council of Ministers.

The classes of the national orders are integrated in a combined hierarchy defined by law, whereby within one class the Order of Leopold is senior to the Order of the Crown, which is senior to the Order of Leopold II. Except in some specific cases, one cannot be awarded a national order at a level below the highest that the recipient has already received (e.g. a commissioned officer who become a Commander of the Order of Leopold II because of meritorious personal service to the king before he became a Knight of the Order of Leopold may not be awarded the latter decoration or that of Officer of the Order of Leopold). Persons who are subject of criminal proceedings will usually not be awarded a national order until they are declared not guilty.

Award Conditions To Military Personnel

The Order of the Crown is awarded to military personnel on the basis of their length of service, with the years of training counting for half and the first twelve years of service as member of the flying personnel counting double:

- a) Grand Officer: Awarded after 38 years of meritorious service to a general officer with minimum rank of lieutenant-general.
- b) Commander: Awarded after 32 years of meritorious service to a field officer with minimum rank of colonel.
- c) Officer: Awarded after 25 years of meritorious service to a commissioned officer with minimum rank of captain.
- d) Knight: Awarded after 15 years of meritorious service to a commissioned officer and after 35 years of meritorious service for a non-commissioned officer.
- e) Golden Palms: Awarded after 25 years of meritorious service to a non-commissioned officer, and after 35 years of service for a private or corporal.
- f) Silver Palms: Awarded after 30 years of meritorious service for a private or corporal.

For awards to military personnel there is no minimum age requirement.

Award Conditions For Long Civilian Service

The palms and the medals of the Order of the Crown may be awarded to workers in the private sector or contractual employees of the public sector, as well as some public sector employees such as prison supervisors, ushers, burgomasters, police commissioners, local police officers or members of town councils.

- a) Golden Palms: Awarded after 45 years of professional activity or at the time of retirement after having worked for a minimum of 40 years.

b) Gold Medal: Awarded after 35 years of professional activity.

In addition, the Gold Medal, the Silver Palms and the Golden Palms are awarded to the presidents, secretaries and members of the board of directors of representative trade organisations such as trade unions on the basis of the number of members of the organisation, of the length of their membership of the board and on the length of their tenure on the board. The Knight's Cross of the Order of the Crown is also awarded to the members of the national and provincial committees for the promotion of labour who have reached the age of 42 after a tenure of 10 years (national committee) or 20 years (provincial committee) and after 30 years of service to the secretaries of the provincial committees for the promotion of labour who have reached the age of 62. The medal could also be awarded without the rigid 'time in service' criteria to administrators, directors, department heads, artisans, architects, chemists, specialist craftsmen etc, each case for an award assessed on an individual basis. The bronze medal appears to have been confined mainly to the Caucasian workers of the Belgian Congo or Congo Free State for 11 year service, apart from a period – duration unknown – when it was used in Belgium to reward firemen and rural guards for 40 years' service.

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Sources

Wikipedia Web-Site ~ Belgian Military Decorations & Medals; Belgian Civic Decorations & Medals – www.wikipedia.com.uk

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