

IMPERIAL GERMANY ~ WOUND BADGE

The Iron Cross was a Prussian decoration awarded to military personnel for gallantry in action and also to non-combatants. Civilians could also receive the Iron Cross for exceptional work performed on the home front which benefited the German pursuit to victory. At the beginning of the war the decoration was highly valued and worn with pride by its recipients. As the course of the war progressed the soldiers of front-line battalions who had endured the rigours of trench warfare and offensive operations gradually became disillusioned at the indiscriminate way in which the Iron Cross was being awarded. For the German Army, 1917 was a difficult and costly year in materials and manpower. In the closing months of that year the attitude of combat troops hardened against those recipients of the Iron Cross who had no and probably would never have experience of battle. They considered that the Iron Cross was being devalued.



As a consequence there emerged a demand from the front line troops for a recognition which would clearly indicate that they had fought the enemy in battle and to prove to the general populace that they had sustained injuries. The result of this pressure was that the Kaiser on the 3rd March, 1918 instituted the award of the Wound Badge. Issued in three classes: black for one or two wounds, silver as in the example shown for 3 or 4 wounds, and gold for five or more wounds. It was produced in pressed steel, brass or zinc and also of a pierced cut-out pattern during the First World War. The obverse of the badge has a laurel wreath border surrounding a helmet on crossed swords with a stippled background. A pin and clip is fitted on the plain reverse for purposes of wear. The wound badge was worn on the left breast below the Iron Cross 1st Class or other pinned decorations. Although relatively plain and simple the badge, for a front line soldier who had sustained wounds it was highly valued and distinguished the recipient as a combatant. It helped to boost the morale of the front line fighting soldiers and counter-acted the negative attitudes towards the Iron Cross.

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R.G. Coleman