

IMPERIAL GERMANY ~ BRUNSWICK WAR MERIT CROSS 1914-1918

The Brunswick War Merit Cross (German – Braunschweigisches Kriegsverdienstkreuz) or the Ernst-Augustus was a military award of the Duchy of Brunswick. It was instituted on the 23rd October 1914 by Ernst Augustus, Duke of Brunswick, firstly in one class, and was awarded to all ranks for bravery in war. The 30mm bronze cross pattée has a loop for ribbon suspension. In the centre of obverse are the letters ‘EA’ for Duke Ernst Augustus. On the lateral arms of the cross are oak leaf sprays. At the top of the upper arm is the Brunswick crown and the date ‘1914’ on the lower arm.

The reverse is inscribed ‘Für’/‘Verdienst im’/‘Krieg’ (For Merit In War) on the top, lateral and lower arms of the cross respectively. For combatants the 30mm wide ribbon is dark blue, with 3mm yellow stripes inset 2mm from the edges. The award for non-combatants was instituted on the 17th November 1915 and has a yellow ribbon with dark blue stripes.

A First Class Cross was established on the 20th March 1918 in pinback form, without a ribbon, (with the former cross becoming a 2nd Class award) to reward those who had received the 2nd Class Cross and had performed further acts of gallant conduct. The Brunswick War Merit Cross then became comparable to awards of other German states, for example the Prussian Iron Cross. The 40mm First Class cross has the same design on the obverse as the 2nd Class Cross, the reverse being plain with a brooch pin.

A distinctive emblem was introduced on the 20th March 1918 for combatants awarded the 2nd Class Cross who had less than two years’ unbroken field service. Worn on the ribbon the oxidised bronze or matt silver emblem is 30mm in height x 23mm in width with two dowel pins for attachment. The emblem has the salient horse of Brunswick, facing left, within a laurel wreath with crossed swords below and the Brunswick crown above.



Combatants War Merit Cross ~ Obverse

Braunschweig or Brunswick is a city in Lower Saxony, Germany, north of the Harz mountains. The city's history can be traced back to the 9th century and was a centre of political and economic power in medieval Germany, and member of the Hanseatic League. The latter was a commercial and defensive confederation of merchant guilds and market towns in central and northern Europe.

Brunswick was the capital city of three successive states – the Principality of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel 1269-1432, 1754-1807 and 1813-1946, the Duchy of Brunswick 1814-1914 and the Free State of Brunswick 1921-1946. During the Napoleonic era it was part of the Kingdom of Westphalia. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 re-asserted Brunswick as the capital of the Duchy of Brunswick and became a state within the German Empire from 1871. At the end of the First World War, a socialist workers council coerced Duke Ernst Augustus to abandon his throne and announced that Brunswick would be a Socialist Republic. After a period of civil unrest in Germany compounded by unstable and short term governments, it was not until 1921 that a new constitution established the Free State of Brunswick, a parliamentary republic within the Weimar Republic with Brunswick as its capital.



Combatants War Merit Cross ~ Reverse

Brunswick was heavily bombed during the Second World War and after the end of the war the Free State of Brunswick was abolished by the Allied occupying powers and the city was incorporated into the new state of Lower Saxony.

Brunswick was part of West Germany during the cold war but suffered economically due to its proximity to the Iron Curtain. In the mid-1970s reforms in Lower Saxony and a gradual population increase, Brunswick regained prominence and popularity as a major city in modern Germany.

DUKE ERNST AUGUSTUS

Duke Ernst Augustus Christian Georg was born at Penzing near Vienna on the 17th November, 1887 the sixth and youngest child of the former Crown Prince Ernst Augustus of Hanover and his wife, Princess Thyra of Denmark. His great-grandfather, Prince Ernst Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, the fifth son of King George III, became King of Hanover in 1837, due to Salic Law¹ which excluded the future Queen Victoria from inheriting the Hanoverian throne. In 1878 Crown Prince Ernst Augustus succeeded as pretender to the throne of Hanover as the British Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale. Ernst his younger son, then became heir apparent to the Dukedom of Cumberland and to the Hanoverian claim upon the deaths of his two elder brothers.

In 1884 the incumbent Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel died and title would have passed to the Duke of Cumberland. However, the Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck manoeuvred the Federal Council (Bundesrat) of the German Empire to pronounce that if they allowed the Duke of Cumberland to ascend to the throne of Brunswick it would upset the peace of the Empire! As a replacement Prince Albrecht of Prussia became Regent of Brunswick. When he died in 1906 the Duke of Cumberland proposed that he and his eldest son would renounce their claims to the Duchy to allow Ernst Augustus, his



Non-Combatants War Cross ~ Obverse

other surviving son to become the Duke of Brunswick, but this was rejected by the Bundesrat who chose Duke Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg-Schwerin as Regent.

Ernst's elder brother Georg was killed in a car accident in May 1912. The Kaiser Wilhelm II conveyed his condolences to the Duke of Cumberland who in turn sent Ernst to Berlin to thank the Kaiser. Ernst and Wilhelm II were third cousins by descent through King George III. Whilst he was in Berlin, Ernst met Wilhelm's daughter Princess Victoria Louise of Prussia (1892-1980)

and the couple married May 1913. The wedding celebrations were attended by European monarchs and nobility, the last such gathering before the outbreak of the First World War. In February 1913 Ernst swore allegiance to the German Empire and was commissioned as a cavalry captain in the Prussian Zieten Hussars. At the end of that year the Duke of Cumberland renounced his claim to the Duchy of Brunswick in favour of his son Ernst Augustus. The Bundesrat gave their approval for Ernst Augustus to become the Duke of Brunswick. He was promoted to Colonel in the Zieten Hussars and with his wife moved into Brunswick Palace in the capital. There they had the first of their five children.

During the First World War the Duke of Brunswick was promoted to the rank of Major General and his titles of the United Kingdom were suspended, due to his service with the German army. The monarchy was abolished at the end of the First World War and Duke Ernst Augustus was forced to abdicate as were all other German monarchs, dukes, and princes during the turbulent period between 1918-1919 in Germany.

When his father died in 1923 Ernst Augustus did not assume the title of Duke of Cumberland. He remained as head of the House of Hanover (1923-1953) and in retirement, living on his various estates. Although he did not officially join the Nazi party, he did make donations and



Non-Combatants War Cross ~ Reverse

knew several of the leading personalities of the Nazi hierarchy. Both he and his wife were in favour of rapprochement between England and Germany in the 1930s. Aware of their sentiments Adolf Hitler asked them to try and arrange a marriage between their daughter Princess Frederica and the Prince of Wales. The Duke and Duchess refused the suggestion because of the age difference between the Prince and Princess. Princess Frederica (1917-1981) later became Queen Consort of the Hellenes from 1947 to 1964 as wife of King Paul I (1901-1964).

At the end of the Second World War the Duke and his family were living in Blankenberg, which by the end of 1945 became part of East Germany. The family decided to move into the British occupation zone and live in Marienburg Castle. Duke Ernst August died there on the 30th January 1953 and was interred, as later was his wife in the Royal Mausoleum in the Berggarten at Herrenhausen Gardens in Hanover.

¹Salic Law ~ Excluded women from inheritance of thrones, fiefs, and other properties.

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Sources

Wikipedia ~ www.wikipedia.org – Duke Ernst Augustus, Duke of Brunswick; War Merit Cross (Brunswick).

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