



416th BOMB GROUP 2015 REUNION ALBUQUERQUE, NM



416th FACT SHEET — THE 416th CHALLENGE COIN —

What's a Challenge Coin?

Members of the U.S. Armed Forces have a longstanding tradition of carrying coins that symbolize unit identity and brotherhood. Each coin usually bears unique unit symbols or mottos to identify the group they represent and the coins are often traded, presented, and collected between unit members. Challenge coins are not merely tokens, though, but are a tangible source of pride for America's warriors at every level in the chain of command. In fact, the U.S. Air Force holds a coin ceremony for its cadets upon graduation, and, for many Airmen, this is the first of many coins they will hold dear during their military service. Commanders use them as on-the-spot awards. Senior military leaders often give their coins as gifts to foreign dignitaries or civilian VIPs. The coins are special to those who earned them, and it is often said that only those who have served and received a coin for certain accomplishments will truly appreciate their meaning.



Challenge Coins –Brief History and Tradition

The issuance of coins to award soldiers for their gallantry and valor dates back to ancient Roman times. In the United States, the use of military coins dates back to at least 1824. Coins were also used during the Civil War not only to replace hoarded U.S. currency but also were issued for commemorative purposes. Today, the 17th Infantry Coin of Korea is one of the oldest challenge coins known to still exist. Col "Buffalo Bill" Quinn, 17th Infantry Regiment, had them made during the Korean War (1950-1952). The Buffalo is from Quinn's nickname. The unit was formed in 1812, thus the date on the coin. The Fort is a representation of the 5th Army Corps badge in Cuba in 1898. The Cross is from the 5th Army Corps badge during the Civil War. While many military organizations and services claim to have been the originators of the military challenge coin, the most commonly held view is that the tradition began in the Army Air Corps. Below are a few of the most common legends concerning the origins of challenge coins.



Oldest known Challenge Coin today – the 17th Infantry coin of Korea

Boer War Legend. During the Boer War, British Army officers were the only ones authorized to receive medals. Whenever an enlisted person did a good job, typically the officer he was assigned to would receive the award. The regimental sergeant major would sneak into the officer's tent and cut the medal from the ribbon. He would then call an all-hands meeting to formally "shake the hand" of the exceptional soldier and would 'palm the medal' in the soldier's hand without anyone knowing. The officers, of course, generally would know what was going on and typically condoned the action, as many often felt ill at ease in accepting the medal in the first place. Whenever that would happen, other officers would cover for the enlisted men by blaming it on the nearby civilians, who often stole goods from the army camps. As time passed, the coin recognition was

eventually extended to the American forces in World War I. By then, the British Army began recognizing their own enlisted soldiers. The coin turned into a recognition piece with the unit's crest struck into it. Senior NCOs presented them as their form of recognition, since they were not authorized to present any medals or awards.

World War I Legend. Air warfare was a new phenomenon during WWI. When the Army created flying squadrons, they were manned with volunteer pilots from every walk of civilian life. While some of the early pilots came from working class or rural backgrounds, many were wealthy college students who withdrew from classes in the middle of the year, drawn by the adventure and romance of the new form of warfare. As the legend goes, one such student, a wealthy lieutenant, ordered small, solid-bronze medallions (or coins) struck, which he then presented to the other pilots in his squadron as mementos of their service together. The coin was gold-plated, bore the squadron's insignia, and was quite valuable. One of the pilots in the squadron, who had never owned anything like the coin, placed it in a leather pouch he wore around his neck for safekeeping. A short while later, this pilot's aircraft was heavily damaged by ground fire (other sources claim it was an aerial dogfight), forcing him to land behind enemy lines, resulting in his capture by the Germans. The Germans confiscated the personal belongings from his pockets, but they didn't catch the leather pouch around his neck. On his way to a permanent prisoner of war facility, he was held overnight in a small German-held French village near the front. During the night, the town was bombarded by the British, creating enough confusion to allow the pilot to escape.



**Example WWI
Challenge Coin**

The pilot avoided German patrols by donning civilian attire, but all of his identification had been confiscated so he had no way to prove his identity. With great difficulty, he crept across no-man's land and made contact with a French patrol. Unfortunately for him, the French had been on the lookout for German saboteurs dressed as civilians. The French mistook the American pilot for a German saboteur and immediately prepared to execute him. Desperate to prove his allegiance and without any identification, the pilot pulled out the coin from his leather pouch and showed it to his French captors. One of the Frenchmen recognized the unit insignia on the coin and delayed the execution long enough to confirm the pilot's identity. Once the pilot safely returned to his squadron, it became a tradition for all members to carry their coin at all times. To ensure compliance, the pilots would challenge each other to produce the coin. If the challenged couldn't produce the coin, he was required to buy a drink of choice for the challenger; if the challenged could produce the coin, the challenger would purchase the drink.

World War II Legend. During WWII, challenge coins again proved their worth in identifying friendly personnel from "Nazi Infiltrators." Members of the Office of Strategic Services who were deployed in Nazi-held France were issued coins known as "Bona Fides" during meetings to verify a person's identity. Certain aspects of the coin in the meeting were inspected such as the type of coin and the date on the coin to ensure the meetings were not compromised. Using the coins ensured that no spy that had knowledge of the meeting times and place could infiltrate the group and report their findings back to Germany.

During the Pacific campaign, an American Army officer that was to make contact with a Philippine guerilla group was given a special silver coin that was stamped with their unit insignia to ensure proper verification. After the guerilla group verified he was their valid contact, they went on a daring raid of a Japanese supply depot with success.

Another tradition dates to U.S. military personnel assigned to occupy post-WWII Germany. With the exchange rate, the West German one pfennig coin was worth only a fraction of a U.S. cent and they were generally considered not having enough value to be worth keeping – unless one was broke. At any place where servicemen would gather for a beer, if a soldier called out "pfennig check," everyone had to empty their pockets to show if they were saving any West German pfennigs. If a soldier could produce a

pfennig, it meant that he was nearly broke. However, if a soldier could not produce a pfennig, it meant that he had enough money to not bother saving them and thus had enough money to buy the next round.

Vietnam Legend. During the Vietnam War, soldiers would often carry a piece of “lucky” ordnance that had helped them or narrowly missed them. At first, what they carried was small arms ammunition, but this practice grew to much bigger and more dangerous ordnance as time wound on. It actually became a dangerous practice because of the size and power of the ordnance being carried, so commanders banned it and instead gave away metal coins emblazoned with the unit crest or something similar. The main purpose of the ordnance had been when going into a bar, you had to have your lucky piece or you had to buy drinks for all who did have it. The challenge coins worked far better in this regard as they were smaller and not as lethal.



WWII vintage one pfennig coin

416th Bomb Group Challenge Coin and the 2015 Reunion

After an exhaustive search of military archives, WWII war records, WWII collectibles and memorabilia, and other websites and locations, we never found a challenge coin designed specifically for WWII 416th Bomb Group members. So, in honor of the 70th year anniversary following the 416th Bomb Group inactivation, we commissioned and produced a unique coin celebrating the 416th as a special tribute to their selfless and patriotic service to the nation:



**416th Challenge Coin –
Obverse Side**



**416th Challenge Coin –
Reverse Side**

The blue background on both sides is the official AF blue, a color associated with the sky, the operational theater where the 416th conducted their WWII missions. The obverse side contains four images commemorating the service of the 416th: profiles of the A-20 and A-26 aircraft they flew so honorably and effectively, the 416th insignia representing their ability to project their power and might swiftly in battle, and the WWII victory medallion remembering their important contribution to that victory. A gold banner was added – gold is the traditional color to signify integrity and valor – to show the dates of service for 416th Bomb Group during WWII.

The reverse side shows the 9th Air Force emblem signifying the 416th as an important part of the major tactical air force in the WWII European Theater of Operations. The emblem is surrounded by the four insignia of the individual 416th bomb squadrons. The sunburst rays behind the emblem and insignia refer to the projection of 416th air power and superiority from the sky against our enemies anytime, anywhere.

Traditional Challenge Rules

1. The challenge is initiated by drawing your coin, holding it in the air by whatever means possible and state, scream, shout or otherwise verbally acknowledge that you are initiating a coin check. Another, but less vocal method is to firmly place it on the bar, table, or floor (this should produce an audible noise which can be easily heard by those being challenged, but try not to leave a permanent imprint.) If you accidentally drop your coin and it makes an audible sound upon impact, then you have just “accidentally” initiated a coin check. (This is called paying the price for improper care of your coin.)
2. The response consists of all those persons being challenged drawing their coin in a like manner.
3. If you are challenged and are unable to properly respond, you must buy a round of drinks for the challenger and the group being challenged.
4. If everyone being challenged responds in the correct manner, the challenger must buy a round of drinks for all those people they challenged.
5. Failure to buy a round of drinks is a despicable crime and will require that you turn-in your Coin.
6. Coin checks are permitted, ANY TIME, ANY PLACE.
7. There are no exceptions to the rules. They apply to those clothed or unclothed. At the time of the challenge you are permitted one step and an arm’s reach to locate your coin. If you still cannot reach it — reach for your wallet . . . it’s your turn to buy!