

The award of the single British War Medal to the Army in the First World War

A brief study of the circumstances under which soldiers could be awarded a single British War Medal in the First World War; some statistical analysis of numbers awarded as well as some examples for my collection.

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Interesting facts...

The medal was first conceived in September 1917

It was designed by William McMillan – himself a First World War soldier

The medal was originally intended to have clasps but this proved too costly. The suggested clasps might have included;

- Date clasps
- Battle clasps
- Service clasps (1 year, 2 years...)

There was to be a maximum of 10 clasps awarded per claim. It was estimated issue of 2.5 million Battle clasps and 6 million others



Army entitlement...

The British War Medal was awarded to Officers, Warrant Officers, men of British, Dominion, Colonial and Indian Forces who...

Entered duty in a theatre of war

or...

who left their place of residence and rendered approved service overseas between 5 Aug 1914 and 11 Nov 1918, both dates inclusive



So, how single medals were issued. To try and work this out I have looked at the total number of medals issued...

British War Medal

6,595,352

Victory Medal

5,750,000

So, single awards....?

845,000



So, how many awarded to the Army...

The following figures are taken from *The Great War Medal Collectors Companion* by Howard Williamson. By looking at the total number of awards to each arm of the forces, it has been possible to calculate the number of single awards.

	BWM	VM	Single BWM
Army	5,340,972	5,344,552	-3,610
RN	502,250	276,829	225,421
RAF	102,131	100,137	1,994
MN	149,999		149,999
	6,095,352 (+500,000)	5,721,488 (+40,000)	377,414
	6,595,352	5,761,488	833,865

It will be noted the figures were based on the initial returns from the Royal Mint. As can be seen from the total an estimated additional 500,000 BWMs were minted after the initial figures were given. With these additional returns taken into account the estimated number of awards are...

Army – c.450,000



How could a single BWM be earned...

BWM was awarded to Officers, Warrant Officers, men of British, Dominion, Colonial and Indian Forces who...

Entered duty in a theatre of war

... but not the on strength of unit (else they would have been entitled to the Victory Medal)

or...

who left their place of residence and rendered approved service overseas between 5 Aug 1914 and 11 Nov 1918, both dates inclusive

... garrison duty across the Empire



Where could a single BWM be earned...

Entry into a theatre of war, not on the strength of a unit
eg inspection visits, escort etc

Left place of residence (Garrison service including...)

India (excluding NW Frontier)	Singapore
South Africa	Bermuda
Aden	Hong Kong
Malta	Jamaica
Gibraltar	Sierra Leone
China	Ceylon
Japan	USA



Some examples...





Service in India

Battery Sergeant Major J Dowsett RA

Was a merchant seaman prior to enlisting into the Royal Artillery in 1912

Served in India with 79 Bty RFA during the First World War

Went back to sea for 6 months before re-enlisting in 1919

By 1930 he was BSM, 25th Field Battery RA for service on the North West Frontier

He was awarded the LSGC in 1932 and discharged 1933

Dowsett died in London 1936

Service at Gibraltar

Frank Albert Clegg was born in Bacup, Lancs in 1895

He served at Gibraltar with No.7 Coy, Royal Garrison Artillery

He was a member of the St John Ambulance

He was awarded the St John Service Medal in 1942

He was awarded the RN Auxiliary Sick Berth Reserve Long Service Medal in 1943 while serving at RN Sick Berth, Liverpool





Service in Malta

Harry Brookshaw enlisted in 1913 and spent the entire war on garrison duties in Malta with No.65 Coy RGA

He was discharged in 1942 on age grounds.

Service in Singapore

William Hamilton served as a bombardier with the Royal Garrison Artillery

He enlisted 1905 and served in Peking and Hong Kong before the war

He was posted to Singapore in March 1915 and then to the Malay state of Kelantan to suppress the uprising

He served with 13th Medium Bty in Waziristan in the early 1920s

He was awarded the LSGC in 1923 and was discharged in 1927

He later he served in the War Department Constabulary in Portsmouth



Service unknown...

Sergeant Major Thomas Seaton enlisted in 1874 and earned IGS 1854 with clasp 'N E Frontier 1891' as a sergeant with No.2 Mountain Bty RA

He was awarded the LSGC in 1896 and discharged in 1901

He rejoined the RA in September 1914 and served as a battery sergeant major. It is not clear how he earned the BWM

He was discharged in 1917 while serving with No.10 Coy, RGA in Ireland, aged 59

He was awarded the MSM in 1929

