You’ve finally gone to visit your cousin after her parents died. She leads you up the steep stairs to the attic to show you some cool stuff and you spot a dusty old trunk that once belonged to Great Uncle Frank. You think “Ah ha!” You dash across the creaking floor, open the clasp and slowly squeak it open. Inside, you spot a folded uniform on the left and some strange medals protruding from a yellowed envelope on the right. You’ve never seen these before so you hold them up to the light and think, “What’s this all about?”

In the late 19th and early 20th century, a combination of US patriotism, civic pride, social need and increasing leisure time created an environment ripe for fraternal organizations. The Western frontier closed and Americans settled into more stable lives. Acts of valor, previously felt to be an ordinary part of life, became extraordinary, rare and elevated to heights above more mundane accomplishments of modern civilization.

Many organizations and societies came into existence and fulfilled the needs of many Americans to associate with others of similar interests and experiences. Some were simply social such as Elks, or civic such as Rotary, while others centered around patriotism and military service such as the DAR and VFW. Some of these organizations arose out of the Civil War but many more arose out of the Spanish War era (1898-1902).

Many of these organizations were self-aggrandizing and bestowed esoteric titles, roles, honors, prizes and awards. The organizations for military men presented medals (often referred to as membership badges) to commemorate participation in various campaigns as well as to prove eligibility for entry into their hallowed halls.

My grandfather, Emer Adelbert “Bob” Robbins (1877-1947), a veteran of the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), had two such medals among his possessions and I was always confused about their purpose as I reported in the 2014 Researcher. They were not official U. S. military decorations but were from other sources. I recently uncovered their origins as coming from fraternal societies and it turned out to be a bit complicated.

**Official U. S. Military Decorations**

Today, there are scores of awards and decorations that are presented by the Government, or were previously presented, to members of the armed forces of the United States. Personal decorations, as opposed to unit decorations, are medals, ribbons, badges or other devices. Medals are usually of greater significance than ribbons or other forms of recognition. Medals for heroism are generally of higher precedence than for service. All medals have corresponding ribbons associated with them but not all ribbons are associated with medals. Medals are of
two sizes; large ones are for formal presentation and display (official) while miniature medals are usually worn on dress uniforms (unofficial). Ribbons, whether or not associated with medals, can be worn on any everyday office-type uniform but not on utility uniforms worn in combat or other specialized duty.

Medal of Honor
Army; (1862-1896)

Medal of Honor
Navy; (1862-1913)

Medal of Honor
Army; (1896-1904)

Medal of Honor
Army; (1904-1944)

Brevet Medal
(1863-1900)

Certificate of Merit
Medal (1846-1918)

Distinguished Service
Cross (1846-Current)

Purple Heart
(1861-Current)

IMAGE-1: Official U S Medals for Heroism (1898-1917); all images in public domain

Today’s U. S. Army lists 42 medals for heroism, achievement or service and 50 more for participation in various campaigns. There are many additional ribbons, badges and other devices that can be earned. These totals increase when including the United States Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard as well as decorations awarded by other branches of the U. S. Government or foreign governments. But, medals and ribbons from before World War I are considered obsolete and not included in these numbers.

Only a few medals were awarded by the United States military before the Spanish-American War in 1898. Up to then, there were only the Medal of Honor (MH), Certificate of Merit (CM)
and the Purple Heart (PH) plus a handful of campaign medals. After 1898, many official awards and decorations were created as our military became involved in more and more operations around the world. Between 1898 and 1917, nineteen medals were created by the U.S. military for service in various campaigns. Retroactively in the early 1900s, three medals were created and awarded for heroism (Brevet Medal (BM); Certificate of Merit Medal (CMM) which replaced CM; both CMM and CM were later replaced by Distinguished Service Cross (DSC)). One medal was created for service (Army Distinguished Service Medal (ADSM)), two medals for good conduct (Navy and Marine Corps), one medal for commemorative service (Specially (sic) Meritorious Service Medal (SMSM)) and two for foreign expeditionary campaigns.

![Image](image_url)

**Official U.S. Military Medals of the Spanish / Philippine War Era until World War I (1898 - 1917)**

These decorations were awarded for campaign service in the Spanish-American War, The Philippine-American War, The Moro Rebellion (Philippines), The Boxer Rebellion (China), The
Border War (Mexico), The “Banana Wars” (Caribbean), and some expeditions; to any US military service member except as noted. Images are depicted in Image-3 and Image-4:

1. Spanish Campaign Medal (SCM); versions for USA, USN and USMC; for service ashore, at sea, or en-route to Cuba, Puerto Rico, or Philippine Islands; May 1898 - August, 1898.
2. Spanish War Service Medal (SWSM)(USA); for homeland service as above; April 1898-April 1899.
3. West Indies Campaign Medal (WICM)(USN); for deployed service in West Indies; May-August 1898.
4. Dewey Medal (DM)(USN) (*); for service aboard fleet during the Battle of Manilla Bay; 1 May 1898.
5. Sampson Medal (SM)(USN) (*); similar to No. 3; cannot have both.
6. Army of Cuban Occupation Medal (ACOM); for occupation service in Cuba; July 1898 – May 1902.
8. Army of Puerto Rico Occupation (APROM); for occupation service in Puerto Rico; August 1898 – December 1898.
9. Philippine Campaign Medal (PCM); served ashore in Philippines February 1899 to July 1902 or until 1907 for certain campaigns.
10. Philippine Congressional Medal (PCgM) (USA); entered Army April 1898 – October 1898; served ashore February 1899 – July 1902; served after enlistment expired.
11. China Campaign Medal (CCM)(USA); for Peking Relief service ashore in China; Boxer Rebellion; June 1900 – May 1901.
12. China Relief Expedition Medal (CREM)(USN); China relief service; Boxer Rebellion; May 1900 – May 1901.
13. Army of Cuban Pacification Medal (ACPM); for withdrawal of troops service in Cuba; October 1906 – April 1909.
14. Peary Polar Expedition Medal (PPEM)(civilians included) (*); North Pole expedition service; 1908-1909
15. Mexican Service Medal (MSM); for service in several expeditions against Mexico; April 1911 – June 1919.
16. Mexican Border Service Medal (MBSM); for border service; January 1916 – March 1917.
17. 1st Nicaraguan Campaign Medal (1NCM) (USN); “Banana Wars”; July 1912 – November 1912.
18. 1st Haitian Campaign Medal (1HCM) (USN); “Banana Wars”; 1915
19. Dominican Campaign Medal (DCM) (USN); “Banana Wars”; May 1916 – December 1916.
20. Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal (MCEM); Landing on foreign soil; Retro to 1873 (Panama) in 1919.
21. Navy Expeditionary Medal (NEM); Landing on foreign soil; Retro to 1874 (Hawaii) in 1936.

Notes:  (*) Commemorative service medals.
Except for # 20 and #21, all these medals are obsolete.
No. 1: SCM  No. 2: SWSM  No. 3: WICM  No. 4: DM

No. 5: SM  No. 6: ACOM  No. 7: CM  No. 8: APROM

No. 9: PCM  No. 10: PCgM  No. 11: CCM  No. 12: CREM

**IMAGE-3:** Official U. S. Campaign Medals (1898-1902); SWSM, ACOM, and APROM used with permission (WC-25); PCM used with permission (WC-20); All others in public domain.
Fraternal Societies originating from Spanish and Philippine War era to WW I (1898–1917)

Proud Fighting men and women (usually nurses) wanted recognition for their honorable patriotic service so many fraternal societies came into existence and created their own medals and membership badges. If someone wasn't honored by the military with an official decoration, they could be honored with a decoration by one of these societies and their many thousands of members. Often, these societies would promote patriotism, not just with monthly meetings but, they also organized bands and marched in home town parades, each man or woman wearing some kind of uniform with his various medals plainly visible.

This is where it gets complicated. Many societies were created but either merged with others or ceased to exist after the passage of time. Below are two examples of this societal merger process.
Formation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

1899: American Veterans of Foreign Service (Columbus, OH).
1899: Colorado Society of Army of Philippines (Denver, CO); name changed- 1900 (SAP); 1905.
1901: Philippine War Veterans (Altoona, PA)
1901: Philippine War Veterans (Pittsburgh, PA); changed name in 1902.
1903: Merger of the three Pennsylvania groups into American Veterans of Foreign Service.
1905: Merger of Ohio and Pennsylvania groups into American Veterans of Foreign Service.
1905: Denver group changed name to National Society of the Army of the Philippines (NSAP).
(Medal: Image-6)
1913: Denver group (NSAP) merged into other and named Army of the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico, based in Denver.
1914: Name changed to Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) based in Pittsburgh. Initially, eligibility to join the VFW was limited to Philippine-America War veterans but now includes all service in foreign areas and anyplace subject to hostile fire at nearly any time. Membership has extended even beyond the grave to 1798! Now based in Kansas City, MO with 1.7 million members. (Medal: Image-5)

IMAGE-5: VFW Medal; public domain
IMAGE-6 NSAP Medal; merged into VFW in 1913; used with permission (WC-26)
IMAGE-7: USWV Medal; used with permission (WC-24)

Formation of the United Spanish War Veterans (USWV)

1898-1901: various societies organized for Spanish-American War veterans.
1900: Veteran Army of the Philippines (Denver, CO) organized.
1904: Spanish War Veterans, Spanish-American War Veterans and Servicemen of the Spanish War merged into United Spanish War Veterans.
1906: Legion of Spanish War Veterans merged with United Spanish War Veterans.
1908: Veteran Army of the Philippines merged with United Spanish War Veterans. Eligibility included all veterans of Spanish-American, Philippine-American, and Boxer Rebellion wars; 1898-1902. Ceased to exist in 1992 when the last member died. (Note-6) (Medal: Image-7)
Fraternal Society Medals or Badges of Spanish and Philippine War Era to WW I (1898 – 1917)

Here is a list of the more notable military fraternal organizations which organized following the Spanish-American War in 1898; (war; years; other) (Image number for medals or badges):

1. Imperial Order of the Dragon (IOD); (China relief; 1900-1901). (Image-8)
2. Military Order of the Dragon (MOD); (China relief; 1900-1901; officers only; ceased after WW I). (Image-8)
3. Military (and Naval [1894-95]) Order of Foreign Wars of the United States (MOFWUS); (Revolution to Spanish wars; eventually expanded to all foreign wars; 1776-present; officers only; still exists). (Image-8)
4. Military Order of Moro Campaigns (MOMC); (Moro campaigns in Philippines; 1899-1903). (Image-8)
5. Military Order of Carabao (MOC) (water buffalo); (Philippines; 1898-1902; lampoon social club; officers and war correspondents only; still exists). (Image-8)
6. Military Order of the Serpent (MOS); (must be current member of USWV; 1898-1902). (Image-8)
7. National Society of the Army of the Philippines (SAP, then NSAP); (Spanish, Philippine, Moro wars; 1898-1906); merged into VFW. (Image-6)
8. Society of the Army of Santiago de Cuba (SASCD); (Cuba; June-July 1898). (Image-8)
9. Society of the Porto Rican (sic) Expedition (SPRE); (Puerto Rico; 1898). (Image-8)
10. The Naval and Military Order of the Spanish-American War (NMOSAW); (Spanish and Philippine wars; 1898-1901; officers only; no longer exists). (Image-8)
11. United Spanish War Veterans (USWV); (Spanish, Philippine and China wars; 1898-1902; ceased in 1992). (Note-6) (Image-7)
12. Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW); (all wars; 1798-present). (Image-5)

Military fraternal organization membership generally peaked following each war and gradually declined until the next war. The American Legion, one of the most prominent such organizations, was organized in 1919 following World War I and is not included in the above list. The American Legion currently has about 2.4 million members.

Researching Records

Researching records for soldiers and sailors of the Spanish-American War and Philippine-American War is not always easy because so few records have been digitized. There are plenty of records, but they are mostly in the National Archives, Veterans Administration or in various other archives. One must either go to Washington, D. C., or to where other archives are located, or else hire a researcher if you want to find documents about military service of that era. Details about finding such records at the National Archives can be found online at archives.gov or by reviewing # 3 in Works Consulted at the end of this article.

Records that have been digitized are readily available on Fold3.com, Ancestry.com, and many other websites; all of which are excellent resources. An especially useful free website is The
Spanish-American War Centennial website (Works Consulted No. 20) which has enormous amounts of information on everything related to the Spanish war era, including links to many websites with additional information which can be searched. Military pension records may be ordered through the National Archives (NARA) for a fee that varies.

No. 1: IOD
No. 2: MOD
No. 3: MOFWUS
No. 4: MOMC
No. 5: MOC
No. 6: MOS
No. 8: SASCD
No. 9: SPRE
No. 10: NMOSAW

IMAGE-8: Medals or Membership Badges of Some Fraternal Organizations (1898-1917)
(All images are from American Orders & Societies and their Decorations, pub. 1917; public domain)
Conclusion

Image-9: Emer A. Robbins, Musician, US Army, 1900-1903

Image-10: United Spanish War Veterans Medal (USWV), found in possessions of Emer A. Robbins

My grandfather, Emer Adelbert Robbins, received one official U. S. Army medal (Philippine Campaign Medal (Philippine Campaign Medal, Image-3, No. 9) as a result of his service in the Philippine-American War. He also had two medals from fraternal societies, one of which (United Spanish War Veterans, Image-10) is in my cherished possession while the other, Veteran Army of the Philippines (another precursor of the USWV), seems to be lost. But just knowing he had these medals adds flavor and context to his fascinating life. Grandpa Robbins held the rank of Musician while serving from 1900 to 1903. He was a bugler and trumpet player, and he marched in parades and played in band concerts in small towns for years after he left the Army.

Someday, you might discover similar old medals and associated ribbons that once belonged to an ancestor of old. You can easily discover the owner’s participation in various wars and associated fraternal organizations by using the references in this article. The origin of each medal presented by the Government and these old fraternal societies is based upon service in battle or, at least, that they were in a battle zone. Now, you will know where they served and learn something of their accomplishments, character and beliefs. You will be proud.
Images:

1. Official U.S. Medals for Heroism (1898-1917); Works Consulted 4, 8, 17. Public domain.
2. Official U.S. Medals for Achievement (1898-1917); Works Consulted 4, 8, 17. Public domain.
3. Official U.S. Campaign Medals (1898-1902); Works Consulted 17, 18, 20, 25, 26. Some images used with permission (WC-20: No. 9; and WC-25: No. 2, 6 and 8); others in public domain.
4. Official U.S. Campaign Medals (1906-1917); Works Consulted 17, 18, 20, 25, 26. One image (No. 16) used with permission (WC-25); others in public domain.
5. Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Medal; Works Consulted 13. Public domain.
6. National Society of the Army of the Philippines (NSAP) Medal; This rare gold version was awarded to Lt. Dwight B. Lawton in 1900. Works Consulted 26. Some images used with permission (WC-25); others in public domain.
7. United Spanish War Veterans (USWV) Medal; Works Consulted 24. Used with permission.
8. Medals of some Fraternal Organizations (1898-1917); Works Consulted 13. Public domain.

Works Consulted:

5. Belden, Bauman Lowe, “Insignia of American Military Societies Since the War Of 1812”; Proceedings of the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society of New York, 43rd Annual Meeting; New York, 1901; pp 40-60; copy from Cornell University by Google Books; Accessed 13 May 2016; <http://books.googleusercontent.com/books/content?req=AKW5QafOZ7fFHKDdp-PZITJy9gsnUOCjjpreehw4X_D95nsmMjEdapYA71VAG4B9m1LysG12MOGzjAOrErwGKfhwPps2_03xMS-G85Cz_x_QE50FUzAubahqiy9y9xUtg07onzxIEG6DP3eFdxGy_21X3mZcQEPpgDzeK6F6gFSt_a4S8HHCD0Pw31D5Wkr4JK7-ylo0yelS7oD10YMcQr0-9GIMh70W62vqmgst-1jetum4eT1pHowXOBtb2xWbCumREi3kEwZFcbOCX3iygDl5v_kn_9DHlhrwyBvh7Ol73y0 >.
27. United States Navy, Office of Naval Research, Office of Counsel (Trademarks); permission granted to use images of USN/USMC medals by Hassan L. Sudler.

End Notes:
1. The current name of each decoration is used in this article although some decorations had different names over the course of many years. In some cases, each branch of the U.S. military had variations of the same decoration and some are omitted. In addition, stated dates refer to eligibility requirements, not to when the medal was authorized by Congress which, in some cases, was decades later.
2. All the requirements, caveats and exact dates for each decoration mentioned and for society memberships are mostly omitted for brevity.
3. Some medals were only awarded to officers or only to enlisted people. Some fraternal organizations only accepted officers.
4. The Philippine-American War, as currently called, was formerly known as the Philippine Insurrection as well as other names. Many archives will have records under “Philippine Insurrection”.
5. Correction: In the 2014 Researcher article cited above (1) on page 84, the medal on the left should be labeled Philippine Campaign Medal, not Army of the Philippines Medal. The medal on the right should be labeled United Spanish War Veterans Medal, not Spanish War Veterans Medal.
6. Regarding United Spanish War Veterans (USWV): Most sources state this organization ceased to exist in 1992 when the last member died. A few other sources state the last living veteran of Spanish and Philippine Wars died in 1998 and the organization still exists for honorary members. I was unable to find evidence that it currently exists. I believe sources claiming USWV exists today actually refer to the Sons of Spanish American War Veterans (SSAWV), chartered in 1937 for veteran’s descendants, which does still exist.
7. Abbreviations: Lt. is Lieutenant; USA is US Army; USN is US Navy; USMC is US Marine Corps; USCG is US Coast Guard.
8. Permission to use images of military medals given by trademark offices of USA (WC-8) and USN (WC-27).

About the Author: Gary Robbins is a retired Air Force Reserve officer, pilot and engineer. He has been researching genealogy since 1985. Originally from California, Gary has resided in the Puget Sound area since 1970, has been a member of the TPGCS since 1996, and was the society treasurer for two years. He is a regular contributor to The Researcher. Gary and his wife, Sloan, live in Gig Harbor, WA. He may be contacted at garyrr@comcast.net