

Paper Medals Awarded by the Second Armored Division, Circa 1951-1954

In June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea. Following the Berlin airlift crisis Western nations saw the invasion as another stepped up attempt of communists to dominate the world. Besides sending combat troops to Korea, the U.S. sent many forces to Western Germany to counter the Soviet threat. The Second Armored Division was stationed in the French Zone of Occupation.

Between June 1950 and when the division was deployed to West Germany in 1951, the under strength unit underwent extensive training. In Germany the division was scattered to several posts, most along the Rhine River, although the division headquarters was at Bad Kreuznach, 14 air miles from the Rhine.

Between 1947 and 1950 only the 1st Infantry Division, the Constabulary, and various smaller units remained in Germany. After 1950 both National Guard and Regular Army divisions were sent to Europe including the 4th, 28th, and 43d Infantry Divisions. These joined the 1st Infantry Division and the 2d Armored Division. All of these units started large scale annual exercises. It was for these maneuvers that “paper medals” appeared.

Why were these strange awards created? The division’s G-1, Lt. Col. Robert A Martin, was a World War II veteran. He along with division commander Major General Williston B. Palmer and assistant division commander Brigadier General Charles K. Gaily, realized that one aspect of war, and thus of training, was the processing of “routine” paperwork while in the field. This included the processing of recommendations for, and the presentation of awards, down to the company level. The paperwork required to recommend, process, and ultimately present awards became a part of these large maneuvers. The “paper pushers” at all levels of the division added this job to their activities during these field exercises to more accurately replicate one more war-time activity.

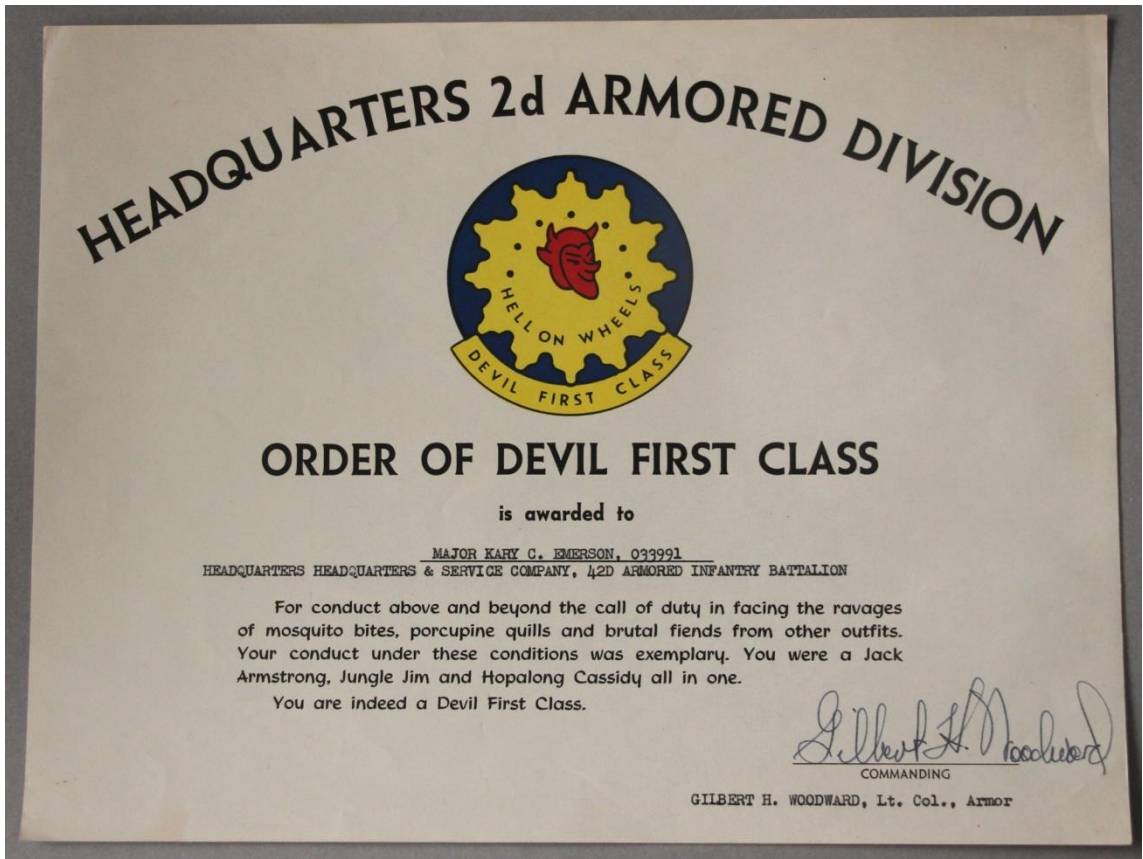
First we will look at these “medals” and accompanying certificates known to the author. This will be followed by the origins of these awards.

The Order of Devil First Class has as the central design on its “planchet” a devil’s head wearing a smiling mask, all superimposed on a tank’s drive sprocket (the large toothed wheel that drives a tank’s track.) Like all of the paper “medals” it is suspended by a solid colored ribbon, affixed to the planchet by a staple and with a safety pin at the other end. An example is shown at the right.

Each award was accompanied by a certificate. To complete the certificate a clerk had to enter the recipient’s name, his service number, and his organization. This was a major part of the training—clerks had to look up and type this essential data. The certificate and recommending paperwork then had to go to the appropriate commander for his signature. The next figure shows an example of an Order of Devil First Class certificate. In this case the certificate was awarded to Major Kary C. Emerson, the 42d Armored Infantry Battalion executive officer. It was signed by the 42d Armored Infantry Battalion commander, Gilbert Woodward. Lt. Colonel Woodward ultimately became a lieutenant general and the inspector general of the army.

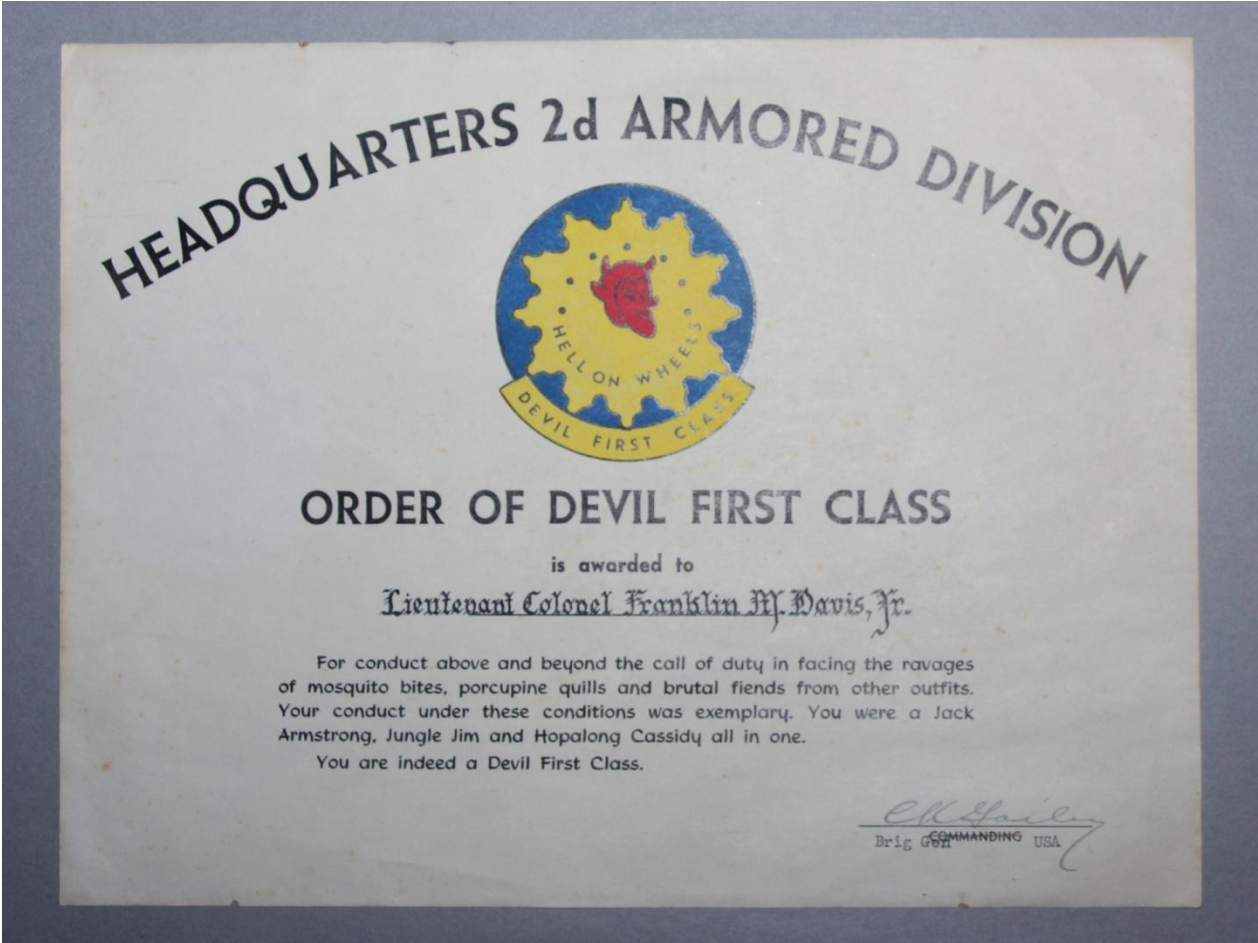
This is an award that shows why these paper medals and certificates were instituted. In field situations commanders were often away from their headquarters, yet they had to be tracked down so they could first approve the award, then after the paperwork was complete, signatures had to be obtained again.



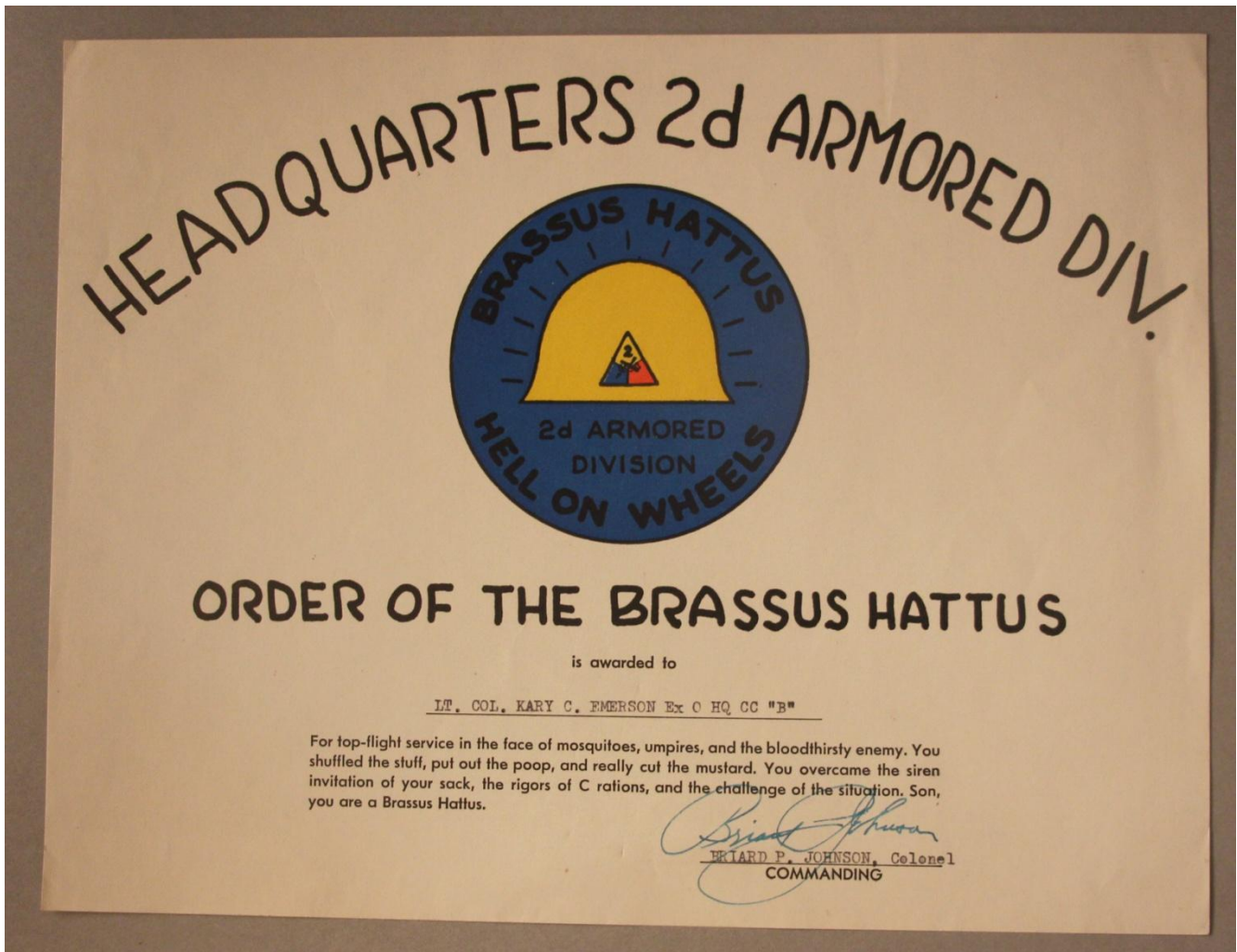


The figure to the left was for Major Emerson. The next example, below, is another Order of Devil First Class certificate. For this award the service number and organization were listed on the recommending paper-work, but was not included on the certificate given to Lt Col Franklin Davis. This was awarded by division headquarters in 1952 when Gaily was the acting division commander. Davis was on division staff at the time. It is

interesting to note Davis' name was hand lettered on his certificate. No doubt this was because a clerk at division headquarters filled out the blank form. Initially Davis was a battalion commander in Germany and later retired as a major general after commanding the Army War College.



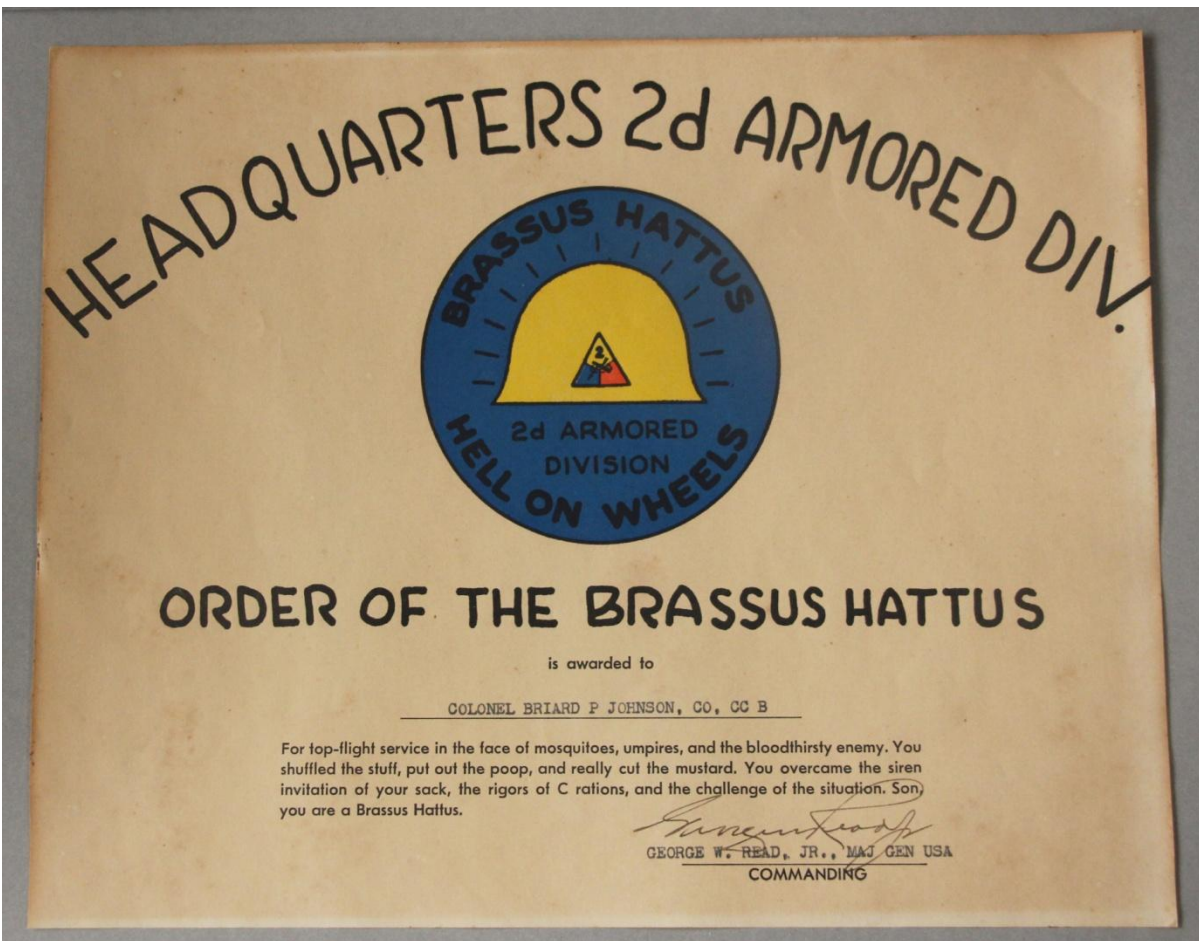
Another award was the “Order of the Brassus Hattus.” A certificate awarded to Kary Emerson in 1952 or 1953 is shown below. At this point Emerson was the executive officer of Combat Command B, so the award was signed by the CCB commander, Briard Johnson. Johnson had served with the 2d Armored Division during World War II and late in the war commanded the 67th Armored Regiment. He retired as a major general in 1963.



The Brassus Hattus “medal” is suspended by a solid red ribbon. An example, given to Kary Emerson, is shown. Emerson survived the Bataan death march and 3-1/2 years of prison camp. He had a Ph. D., rose to colonel working in research and development, then served in the Department of the Army as the Research Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Research, Development, and Acquisition. On several occasions he was the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army, including one stint of nearly one year.



Johnson’s certificate for this same award is shown next. It was signed by General George Read, the division commander in the fall of 1952. This certificate was trimmed slightly so it would fit into a frame. After General Johnson retired he moved to Williamsburg, Virginia. In his study he had several framed certificates, including this one. Johnson did not save his paper “medal” but during his life he was reluctant to give up his certificate. It was obtained in 1980 from his wife after his death.



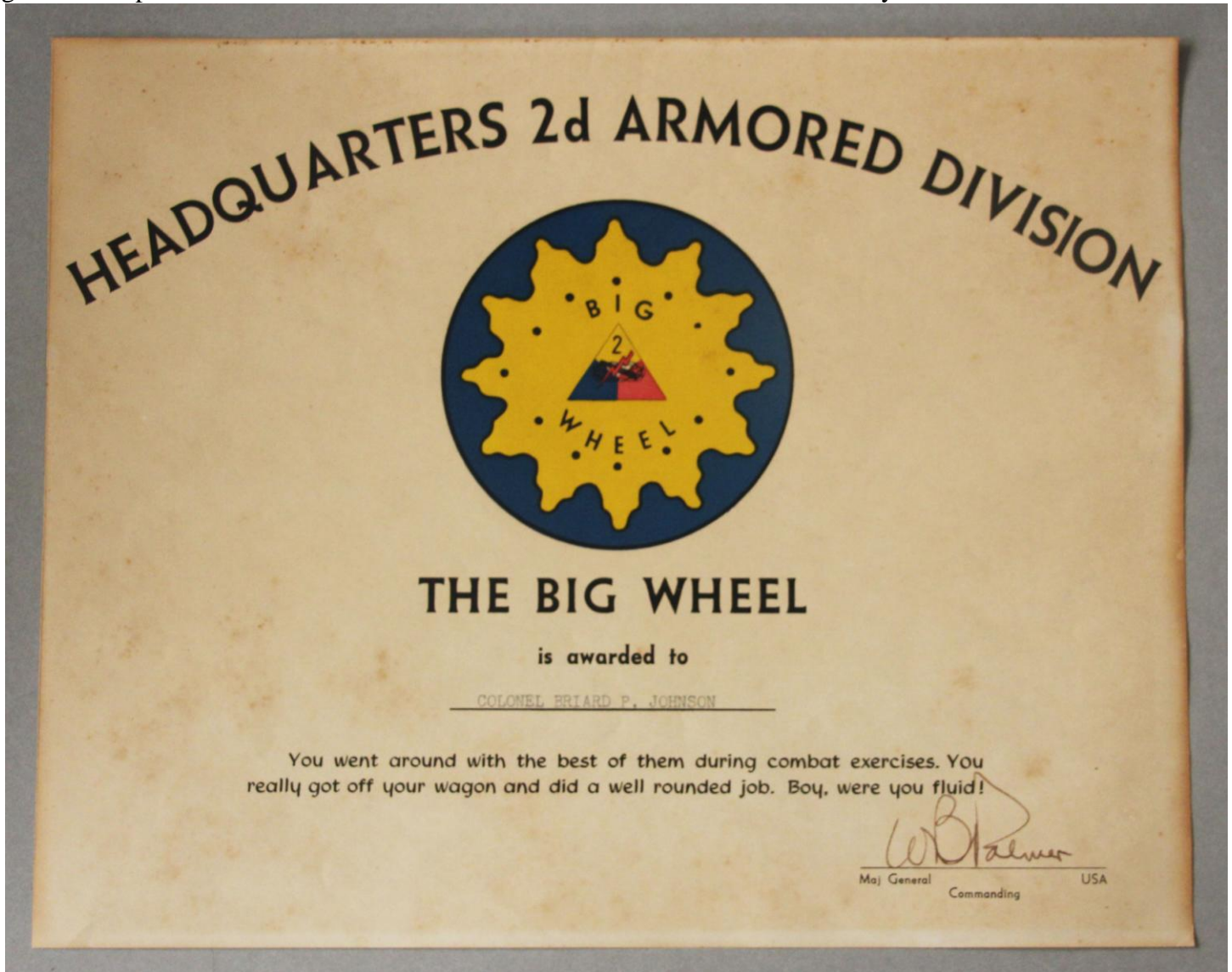
On the right is an Outstanding Armored Warrior “medal.” For artistic balance its red planchet requires a ribbon other than red. The yellow ribbon matches the central design of a soldier wearing a similarly colored plumed armored helmet. His spiked “dog collar” around his neck is yellow also. Lonnie Davidson received this award as the commander of Company D, 12th Armored Infantry Battalion.” By the end of his army career Davidson served a total of 13 years with the division.

The last award, shown below, is a certificate for “The Big Wheel Medal.” Like the certificate shown immediately above, it was awarded to Colonel Briard Johnson. He received it in the fall of 1951 while he was CCB commander. This certificate was one of those awarded in the initial maneuvers shortly after the division arrived in Germany. It is interesting to note that when the division initially went to Germany soldiers did not wear a tab below their shoulder patch. In 1952 the tab embroidered with HELL ON WHEELS was added to the patch. The Big Wheel certificate does not include this motto, supporting the belief the certificate and medal were first made in 1951.

General Davis, a battalion commander when the awards were created in 1951, reported the response was very interesting. Initially the awards were considered silly among many of the officers, but shortly the “medals” and certificates became popular and were highly prized. After the initial use of



some awards in 1951, Brigadier General Gailey became acting division commander (November 24, 1951 to April 3, 1952). Under him these awards expanded. Major General George Read became the commanding general in April 1952 and he continued the awards. Use of these awards ended by 1954.



From the records reviewed thus far it is not clear of the hierarchy for these awards. Based upon the recollections of officers contacted between 1975 and 1990, perhaps the highest was The Big Wheel, followed by the Order of the Brassus Hattus, the order of the Devil First Class, and finally the Outstanding Armored Warrior. One officer believed the award system included an Order of the Devil Second Class and an Order of the Devil Third Class. The late Briard P. Johnson believed The Big Wheel award lasted only into 1952.

The "medals" themselves have many similar physical characteristics. The Brassus Hattus planchet is 3.20 inches in diameter. The pale red ribbon is nominally 1.7 inches wide with a German style safety pin affixed near the top. With the ribbon folded double so both ends are then folded to make a point, the overall

length of the “medal” is 5.5 inches long. Two examples of awards’ reverses are shown.



The Outstanding Armored Warrior “medal” is also 3.20 inches in diameter. Using a yellow ribbon that is 1.6 inches wide, the ribbon is also folded in the same manner as with the Brassus Hattus. Total length of the “medal” is 5.15 inches.

The Devil First Class “medal” has as its main design a circle 2.40 inches in diameter, but at the bottom is a circular tab. This makes the overall height of the paper planchet 2.50 inches. Its ribbon is a darker red than that used on the Brassus Hattus “medal” and is of a heavier material. At 2.13 inches width, it is wider than the other red ribbon. Overall height of the entire award is 5.35 inches.

Certificates were 8 by 10.5 inches. The two obtained from Briard Johnson were framed and as a result are darker in color after being exposed to light for many years. Both were slightly trimmed on the sides to fit into frames. As a result these are 8 by 10 inches.

I obtained these medals by corresponding with officers who had served in the Second Armored Division in Germany, 1951-1954. I wrote various officers and in some cases, wives, during 1974-1976 and again in 1989-1990. Obviously some gave me their awards. Others reported that they and others simply threw the awards away. In many cases those who answered me provided their recollections on these unique training certificates and “medals.”