

Marksmanship Prizes, 1881-1902

In 1879 and 1880 the US Army empathized marksmanship training and entered teams into various national contests, and in 1881, began to host its own contests and issued large prizes to soldiers who were top marksmen. The US Mint designed and struck these large prizes that included 26 different central designs. The army replaced these large prizes with small ones of more standardized designs in 1903.

In general the prizes were gold, silver, and bronze and all had a variety of top bars (frequently called brooches) that fastened them to the winner's uniform. The army engraved the winner's name and other data including the date, on the reverse of each prize, as shown.






In general the army created and awarded one set of prizes for rifle competitions used between 1881 and 1888. Geographic divisions (usually seven in the United States) offered a gold prize to the division winner. The top shooters then went to compete in a Department contest that offered a two-inch diameter gold prize to the winner, 1-3/4 inch diameter gold second class prizes to soldiers who placed second and third, and then two-inch silver third class prizes to men who placed fourth through sixth. Every other year, starting in 1882, the army had a competition at that level and the army also awarded gold first prizes, second class prizes, and third class prizes in the same numbers as at the department level.




In 1889 through 1902 the army had a different system for prizes. Cavalrymen started their own competitions with separate prizes, one for carbines and another for revolvers, while riflemen continued their contests but with newly designed prizes. In addition, during some of these years the army did not hold competitions. Generally many of the prizes were smaller during this second period. Some prizes previously given in silver were made in bronze, and some gold prizes were struck in silver. Also in 1897 divisions disappeared, resulting in only department and army prizes being awards in the latter part of this period. Prize sizes were 1-3/4 inches, 1-5/8 inches, and 1-1/2 inches in diameter.




Overlapping these two periods are special prizes for distinguished marksmen (1887-1894) and skirmish prizes (1884-1888). These competitions resulted in five additional prizes.





The following table illustrates either the planchet or the entire prize for each of the 26 wearable prizes given. The brooches that went with each prize varied and a great many exist, but they were always of the same material as the planchet. Considerable more data and illustrations are presented in Chapter Six of *Marksmanship in the U.S. Army* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

Design Number	Years of	Use	Vignette	Notes

	Use			
D-1	1881-1888	Department first prize.		Wording differs from D-13 by having the words ARMY DEPARTMENT MARKSMANSHIP .
D-2	1881-1888	Division first prize.		Wording includes DIVISION
D-3	1882-1888	Division second class prize.		Wording differs from D-17 by including the word ARMY in the inscription SECOND CLASS PRIZE ARMY DIVISION MARKSMANSHIP . In 1881 a special rifle was the division second class prize.

<p>D-4</p>	<p>1881-1888</p>	<p>Division third class prize.</p>		
<p>D-5</p>	<p>1881-1888</p>	<p>Army first prize.</p>		<p>Gold prize similar to D-25 except this design has a star below the tip of each eagle wing.</p>
<p>D-6</p>	<p>1881-1902</p>	<p>Army second class prize.</p>		<p>Initially made in gold, then in 1897 and later, in silver. Presented with three different brooch designs at various periods.</p>

<p>D-7</p>	<p>1881-1888</p>	<p>Army third class prize.</p>		<p>Similar to D-18 except that wording differs by including the words ARMY in the inscription THIRD CLASS PRIZE ARMY MARKSMANSHIP and the lower part of the decorative base holding the soldier and tents is of a different design.</p>
<p>D-8</p>	<p>1884-1888</p>	<p>Department skirmishing first prize.</p>		<p>Brooch and planchet wording differs from D-21 that has a similar vignette.</p>
<p>D-9</p>	<p>1884-1888</p>	<p>Division skirmishing first prize.</p>		<p>Brooch and planchet wording differs from D-20 that has a similar vignette.</p>


D-10	1884-1888	Army skirmishing first prize.		Brooch and planchet wording differs from D-16 that has a similar vignette.
D-11	1887-1894	Distinguished marksmen contest, first prize.		
D-12	1887-1894	Distinguished marksmen contest, second prize.		
D-13	1889-1902	Department rifle contest, first prize.		Wording differs from D-1 by having the words FIRST PRIZE DEPARTMENT MARKSMANSHIP .

<p>D-14</p>	<p>1889-1902</p>	<p>Department rifle contest, second class prize.</p>		
<p>D-15</p>	<p>1889-1902</p>	<p>Department rifle contest, third class prize.</p>		<p>Most common of all 1881-1902 prizes.</p>
<p>D-16</p>	<p>1889-1890</p>	<p>Division first prize, rifle contest.</p>		<p>Brooch and planchet wording differs from D-10 that has a similar vignette.</p> <p>The army did away with divisions after the 1890 contests.</p>

D-17	1889-1890	Division second class prize, rifle contest.		<p>Wording differs from D-3 by having DIVISION in the inscription to include SECOND CLASS PRIZE DIVISION DIVISION MARKSMANSHIP.</p> <p>The army did away with divisions after the 1890 contests.</p>
D-18	1889-1890	Division third class prize, rifle contest.		<p>Similar to D-7 except that wording differs by including the words DIVISION in the inscription THIRD CLASS PRIZE DIVISION MARKSMANSHIP and the lower part of the decorative base holding the soldier and tents is of a different design.</p> <p>The army did away with divisions after the 1890 contests.</p>
D-19	1889-1897	Department first prize, carbine competition.		<p>Wording differs from D-2 by using the words CAVALRY COMPETITION in the inscription FIRST PRIZE CAVALRY COMPETITION.</p>

D-20	1889-1897	Department second class prize, carbine competition.		Brooch and planchet wording differs from D-9 that has a similar vignette.
D-21	1889-1897	Department third class prize, carbine competition.		Initially made in silver (1889 & 1890), then in bronze. Brooch and planchet wording differs from D-8 that has a similar vignette.
D-22	1889-1894	Department first prize, revolver competition.		Combined revolver matches were held as bi-department or tri-department matches.

D-23	1889-1894	Department second class prize, revolver competition.		Combined revolver matches were held as bi-department or tri-department matches.
D-24	1889-1894	Department third class prize, revolver competition.		Combined revolver matches were held as bi-department or tri-department matches.
D-25	1890-1902	Army first prize.		Gold prize similar to D-5 except this design does not have a star below the tip of each eagle wing.

D-26	1890-1902	Army third class prize.	 The image shows the Army Third Class Prize Medal. It consists of a circular medal with a relief of two figures, likely representing Liberty and Justice, facing each other. The medal is attached to a ribbon bar with a sunburst design at the top. The ribbon bar has the letters 'A R M Y' inscribed on it.	
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The army had no matches in 1895 and 1896 due to a change of weapons, and between 1898 and 1901 due to the Spanish-American War. Only infantry matches were held in 1902.