Lore of the Corps

Three Unique Medals to an Army Lawyer:
The Chinese Decorations Awarded to Colonel Edward H. “Ham” Young

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While it is not unusual for a judge advocate in today’s Army to be awarded a foreign badge for proficiency in parachuting, marksmanship or physical prowess, the award of foreign decorations and medals is another matter, if for no other reason than these are rarely presented to judge advocates. Additionally, because of the constitutional prohibition on any “Person holding any Office” from accepting “any present . . . or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign state,” the Army has traditionally been reticent about permitting servicemembers to accept and wear foreign medals—especially during peacetime.1

With this as background, the award of not one or two, but three foreign military decorations to Colonel Edward H. “Ham” Young is a story worth telling. Young was awarded all three decorations by the Chinese government, in recognition of his outstanding service as the senior Army lawyer in China, from 1944 to 1947.

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in June 1897, Edward Hamilton “Ham” Young entered the U.S. Military Academy in June 1917.2 Since the Army needed officers badly as it expanded during World War I, Young and his classmates graduated in November 1918, just 18 months after arriving as cadets. Commissioned in the Infantry, Second Lieutenant Young was immediately sent to Europe, where he visited the Belgian, French, and Italian battle fronts and also observed the American Army in occupation duties in Germany.3

Young’s Army career expanded during World War I, Young and his classmates graduated in November 1918, just 18 months after arriving as cadets. Commissioned in the Infantry, Second Lieutenant Young was immediately sent to Europe, where he visited the Belgian, French, and Italian battle fronts and also observed the American Army in occupation duties in Germany.4

Returning from Europe, Young served in a variety of company, battalion, and regimental assignments in the Philippines and the United States in the 1920s and early 1930s.

In 1933, Young was sent to New York University School of Law, where he took a course in law, then went to West

1 U.S. CONST., art. 1, § 9, cl. 8. After the Persian Gulf War, for example, a small number of high ranking Soldiers, including Generals Colin L. Powell and H. Norman Schwarzkopf, were awarded the Knight Commander, Order of the British Empire (KBE) by the U.K. government. List of Honorary British Knights and Dames, WIKIPEDIA, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_honorary_British_knights_and_dames#Military (last visited Dec. 14, 2015). Ordinarily, recipients of the KBE are entitled to be addressed as “Sir” (as in “Sir Colin” or “Sir Norman”), but because of the constitutional prohibition in Article I, Section 9, Generals Powell and Schwarzkopf were not permitted to accept this honorific. U.S. CONST., art. 1, § 9.


3 Id.

4 M.S. Young, Edward H. Young 1919, ASSEMBLY, Sept. 1990, at 154. For more on Young, see Borch, supra note 2.
Point to be an instructor in the academy’s law department.\(^5\) Three years later, he joined the Judge Advocate General’s Department, and in 1938, finally completed his law studies and passed the New York Bar Exam.\(^6\)

When the United States entered World War II, Young was in Washington, D.C., where he was the deputy chief of the Military Affairs Division. Then, in February 1942, Major General Myron C. Cramer, The Judge Advocate General, selected Colonel Young to be the first commandant of The Judge Advocate General’s School, United States Army (TJAGSA), then located at the National University Law School.\(^7\)

Shortly thereafter, when TJAGSA moved to the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Young went with it.\(^8\) Working with a small group of Army lawyers, Young successfully planned, organized, and administered a comprehensive course of instruction. During his tenure as commandant, TJAGSA trained more than 1700 officers and officer candidates to be judge advocates.\(^9\) As this constituted two-thirds of the active duty strength of the entire Judge Advocate General’s Department,\(^10\) it was a remarkable achievement by any measure.

In December 1944, Colonel Young was transferred to the China, Burma, India Theater where he assumed duties in China as the Theater Judge Advocate, U.S. Forces in China.\(^11\) He was also the legal advisor to the U.S. Embassy and the Far East United Nations War Crimes Commission.\(^12\) After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Colonel Young remained in China as the Staff Judge Advocate, Nanking Headquarters Command and Advisory Group.\(^13\)

When he left China in June 1947, Colonel Young’s tenure had been unique in the history of the Corps, as no other judge advocate had served as Theater Judge Advocate before him—and no one followed Young in the assignment.\(^14\) He was decorated by his boss with the Legion of Merit for his extraordinary service.\(^15\) But the Nationalist Chinese government of General Chiang Kai-shek also saw Young’s service as worthy of recognition, and decorated him with three medals: the Special Collar of the Order of the Brilliant Star, the Special Breast Order of the Cloud and Banner, and the Special Breast Order of Pao Ting. He is the only judge advocate in history to be awarded all three Chinese military decorations.\(^16\)

\(^5\) Borch, supra note 2, at 1.
\(^6\) Id. at 2.


\(^8\) JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL’S CORPS., supra note 7, at 188.

\(^9\) Id. at 187.

\(^10\) Id. at 169.

\(^11\) Borch, supra note 2, at 2.

\(^12\) Id.

\(^13\) For more on Young’s service in China, see Fred L. Borch, Contracting in China: The Judge Advocate Experience, 1944–1947, ARMY LAW., Aug. 2012, at 1.

\(^14\) Borch, supra note 2, at 2.

\(^15\) Young, supra note 4, at 154.

\(^16\) Id.

\(^17\) ROBERT WERLICH, ORDERS AND DECORATIONS OF ALL NATIONS 86 (1990).
The Order of the Cloud and Banner was created in 1935 as an award for exceptional acts of bravery by members of the Chinese armed forces. By World War II, however, its award to foreigners also was permitted. Like the Order of the Brilliant Star, the Order of the Cloud and Banner also came in nine classes or grades. Colonel Young received the Fourth Class award with its wide blue stripe edged in narrow red/orange and bordered in white.18

Finally, Colonel Young was awarded the Special Breast Order of Tao Ping or “Precious Tripod.” Created by Chiang Kai-shek in 1929, for either valor or outstanding service by a member of the Chinese armed forces or foreigners, the medal features a green and white tripod in its center. Colonel Young received the Fourth Class of the award, as evidenced by the white enamel band surrounding the tripod, and the blue and white ribbon.19

The obverse of each Chinese medal is depicted in this “Lore of the Corps,” along with Colonel Young’s original ribbon bar from his dress uniform. Note that the three Chinese decorations follow all Young’s American medal ribbons (Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, American Defense Service Medal, Army of Occupation of Germany Medal, World War I Victory Medal, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and World War II Victory Medal).20

“Ham” Young retired from active duty in 1954 and died in Florida in 1987.21 He is interred in Arlington National Cemetery.22 As for his Chinese decorations, they were donated to the Judge Advocate General’s Corps by Colonel Young’s descendants, and are part of the historical collection at the the Judge Advocate General’s Legal Center and School, United States Army.