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# The Croix de Guerre des Théâtres d'Opérations Extérieures

Soldiers of France n° 17

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On November 11, 1918, on the Western Front, the "cease-fire" was sounded, marking the entry into force of the armistice... But the fighting did not stop! French troops were still engaged in Eastern Europe, the East and Africa. Since the Croix de Guerre with the 1914-1918 date could no longer be awarded to show the citations obtained, it was decided in 1921 to create a new one, called the "Croix de Guerre des Théâtres d'Opérations Extérieures" (TOE).

Using the system of stars and palms indicating the level of the citation obtained<sup>1</sup>This new Croix de Guerre is based on the same model as the 1914-1918 one: a four-pointed bronze cross with two crossed swords. It differs from it by a specific reverse and a sky blue ribbon (symbol of the overseas) surrounded by red stripes (color of blood). In addition, a fourragère with the colors of its ribbon was also instituted, to be worn on the uniforms of units having obtained at least two collective commendations in the army order during the same conflict.

From then on, this Cross became the symbol of many operations conducted by the French army outside of France. First of all, there were those carried out during the interwar period: in Poland (1919-1920), in Indochina from 1918 to 1920, in the Levant (Lebanon and Syria) and in Morocco (the Rif war from 1925 to 1926 and then the Atlas war from 1932 to 1934), as well as those carried out in French West and East Africa until the 1930s.

After the Second World War, the award still rewards the bravery and sacrifices of many French soldiers engaged overseas: in Indochina from 1945 to 1954, where 40,000 French soldiers died; in Madagascar from 1947 to 1949; in Korea from 1950 to 1953, where the

French battalion was cited four times in the army order; during the Franco-British intervention in Suez in 1956; during the Gulf War from 1990 to 1991, when the Daguet division distinguished itself against Iraqi forces as part of the international coalition.

The last operation in which the TOE War Cross was awarded was the entry of NATO forces into Kosovo in 1999. On this occasion, the<sup>3rd</sup> Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment (RPIMa) added a citation to the order of the brigade, on the Croix de Guerre des TOE of its flag, thus completing those obtained in Indochina.

However, a question is often asked: while any military intervention opens the possibility of obtaining citations, why are they materialized either on the Gold Medal of National Defense, or on the Military Valor Cross, or on a War Cross? There are three cases:

- On the national territory within the framework of domestic operations (Harpie in Guyana or Sentinel for example) or during external operations when the level of the citation does not justify the award of a Cross (of War or Military Valor), citations are awarded with the gold medal of national defense.
- During a military intervention outside the national territory without France having officially declared war (UN or NATO peacekeeping operations, military assistance missions such as in the Sahel), citations can be awarded with the Military Valor Cross.
- Finally, during an intervention outside the national territory but where France is officially in a war situation (against Iraq in 1990 or Serbia in 1999), citations are awarded with the Croix de Guerre des Théâtres d'Opérations Extérieures.

## For more information

- Collective work The Mark of Courage, d. LBM 2005 ;
- Museum of the Legion of Honor and Orders of Chivalry, 2 rue de la Légion d'Honneur, 75007 PARIS;
- [www.croixdeguerre-valeurmilitaire.fr](http://www.croixdeguerre-valeurmilitaire.fr), site of the national association of the Croix de Guerre and Military Valor;
- [www.france-phaleristique.com](http://www.france-phaleristique.com), site of general information on the French orders and decorations

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1 - Bronze star: regiment or brigade; silver star: division; vermeil star: army corps; bronze palm: army; silver palm: to replace 5 bronze

palms.

2 - Beyond four or more commendations, the fourragères in the colors of the Military Medal or the Legion of Honor are worn, but with an "olive" in the colors of the Overseas Operations War Cross ribbon. A soldier who has participated in the fighting, having justified the award of this fourragère, may be awarded it as an individual, and continue to wear it even if he no longer belongs to the unit concerned.

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