UNITED STATES POWER SQUADRONS®

Dear District Commander:

A merit mark is the only pay we members get for the contributions we make to USPS. Of all the awards conveyed by the organization, the merit mark is the most prestigious. It may be only a small gold bar to adorn our uniform but its significance is greatly coveted. Indeed, five merit marks bring senior member status and 25 merit marks accord a member life membership, exempt from national dues.

A merit mark for work at the district level is awarded to a member by the Chief Commander based upon a recommendation by the member's district commander. *You, as that commander, have the responsibility of assuring that every member who has contributed substantially to your district's mission is rewarded with a merit mark.*

This imposes a great obligation on you to decide impartially who on your staff, including your squadron commanders, has truly earned this award. You must be sure that each recommendation is factual and worthy.

That process begins in October as you prepare to send your merit mark recommendations. It's done electronically through a proprietary computer program called "DB2000". That's covered in tutorials under "Working with DB2000" in the Guidance matrix you clicked on earlier. Caution: You must use a computer with Windows 7 or later or a Mac with PC emulation software. Questions regarding problems encountered while installing DB2000 or MQSeries should be e-mailed to DB2000@usps.org, not to your Area Monitor..

By 15 November, your first set of recommendations must have been submitted. This could be your only submission, but if efforts by other members come to light at a later date one or more "supplemental" submissions may be made. There can be only one "original" submission; all subsequent new recommendations must be "supplemental".

Your recommendations are not sent directly to the Chief but are routed by DB2000 through a reviewer known as an "area monitor". He or she evaluates each recommendation to ensure that it rises to a level worthy of a merit mark. A recommendation which falls short will be sent back to you with an explanation of its deficiency, with the hope that inclusion of additional information will allow it to be returned as a "resubmission".

All recommendations favorably reviewed by the area monitor are passed to the Chief Commander for his or her final review. In most cases, a merit mark will be awarded. Except for a first merit mark, which is mailed, a certificate is sent to a member as a PDF attachment to a congratulatory e-mail from the Chief.

You should make yourself aware of any members who, if awarded a merit mark this year, will attain life membership in USPS (25 merit marks) or become a member emeritus of the Governing Board (50 merit marks). These members should be encouraged to attend the ensuing national annual meeting, where they will be personally recognized by the Chief Commander and presented a plaque at a special ceremony. A list of those eligible can be found at https://www.usps.org/dues/reports/mms.php.

Although it's your responsibility to make merit mark recommendations, many D/Cs find it helpful to appoint a merit mark chairman to compile data on members' activities throughout the year and compose the actual DB2000 submission for your okay. *You should share this letter with that individual.* It's most helpful if this person remain in that position for multiple years.

Your predecessor should have given you the passcode you'll need for accessing the merit mark system on DB2000. If you don't have it, you must contact Lynnda Stevens at Headquarters to get it (888-367-8777). The passcode should be disclosed to your merit mark chairman to facilitate his/her formulating your recommendations.

You must not recommend yourself; that's the prerogative of your own boss, the National Executive Officer.

Furthermore, you must not recommend a squadron commander until you are assured that he or she has submitted an original recommendation for his or her squadron's members. There are several ways to gain that assurance:

(1) Ask your area monitor.

(2) Withhold all recommendations for commanders until 15 December, then submit a special "supplemental" recommendation just for commanders. If any commander listed has not yet submitted an original, your recommendation for him or her will be rejected by the area monitor, which will require you to see that a recommendation is forthcoming.

(3) Rely on your area monitor to advise you when each commander has submitted an original. He'll let you know if that's his or her way of handling the matter. (ITCom, managers of DB2000, are currently evaluating the possibility of informing you directly when originals from your commanders are received.)

Your original submission and any supplemental submissions or resubmissions are for work performed over the period of the current calendar year, although supplemental recommendations may be submitted through 15 April of the ensuing year. If it becomes known that a member's contributions for up to three years earlier were not suitably recognized at the time, a separate "retroactive" submission may be made. That's covered in the article on working with DB2000.

Finally, you should review the provisions of Operations Manual chapter 16, Merit Marks, accessible on the national website at
http://www.usps.org/images/secretary/opman/opsman16.pdf.

The concept of merit marks was conceived by Chief Commander A. B. Bennett, who presented the first awards in 1920. His vision has proved to be one of the most revered customs of USPS. It's up to you to preserve and perpetuate this longstanding tradition.

All the best,

P/V/C Spencer P. Anderson, SN
Chairman, Area Monitors