

Chapter 16

Merit Marks

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16.1 Merit Mark

A “Merit Mark” (MM) is awarded by the chief commander to a member for substantial personal effort in furthering the interest, programs, and objectives of USPS, its districts, and squadrons. It is a coveted award; it is by and large the only official recognition members receive for their efforts. Only one merit mark may be awarded in a year to a member, no matter how extensive the contribution. A certificate is issued, and a special insigne may be worn on USPS uniforms.

Recommendations for a merit mark are made by squadron, district, rear, and vice commanders to the chief commander. Active and apprentice members may be recommended.

16.2 Merit Mark Chairman

Upon assuming office, a commander should appoint a merit mark chairman, whose first task is to contact the commander who served from 1 January to the change-of-watch.

That commander provides information for any members to be recommended for a merit mark for work during that period.

A merit mark chair maintains a list during the year of those members who have performed significant work, noting the nature of the work and the result. A large number of hours involved is not in itself sufficient to earn a merit mark. In large squadrons, a merit mark committee may be required to keep track of the data.

In October, the merit mark chair shares his/her list and supporting data to the commander. After original recommendations have been sent to the area monitor by the commander (before 15 November), the merit mark chair continues to make a list of members who perform significant work up to 31 December. This data is given to the incumbent commander so that supplementary recommendations may be sent to the area monitor. A commander may not recommend himself/herself for a merit mark. His/her performance is reviewed by the district commander who, if warranted, will recommend him/her for a merit mark.

Members of other squadrons may be recommended; insert the name of the member's squadron under his or her name. If a member performs service for a squadron not his/her own, yet not enough to warrant a merit mark, it is incumbent upon the commander of that squadron to inform the commander of the member's own squadron of the work done so that it can be combined with work for the home squadron.

The area monitor can be very helpful and will be glad to answer any questions.

16.3 How Recommendations are Made

1. On or before 15 November, Commanders (or Merit Mark Chairs) compile the recommendations and input them using the USPS web URL <https://www.usps.org/meritmark>. This application is a newer development of the Information Technology Committee (ITCom) and a certain amount of time should be used to learn how to use the system. You will have to be logged into the system and have merit mark authority before you can enter and submit data.
2. Recommendations for educational work are listed in the vertical columns:
 - a. The first column is the name of the course;
 - b. The second column is the number of classes taught. This means individual class sessions or lectures given, NOT courses;
 - c. The third column, number of classes proctored, and
 - d. There is a second set of vertical columns for the same information for a different course.
3. A section titled "Valuable Service Performed" is for any and all other services performed such as:
 - Office held - a brief description of actual work done by the officer (the job title is not sufficient);
 - Committee chair - number of meetings chaired, results of meetings, results of activity, and reports given;
 - Activity chair - number of meetings held, results of meetings, results of activity, and reports given;

- Committee member - how many committee meetings attended, work performed on activities. Some activities: cooperative charting, rendezvous, cruises, predicted log contests, change-of-watch dinner, founders' day dinner, auction, and Safe Boating Week;
 - Executive committee meetings - number attended as an officer or member-at-large, contributions to meeting, and reports given;
 - Regular meetings - credit for officers' attendance and for any other members who have been requested by the commander to participate in some phase of the business meeting. No credit for general members; this is a privilege of membership;
 - District meetings - credit for members only if attending as a delegate or participating in a workshop or seminar, or exhibiting a teaching aid; or
 - Governing Board or annual meeting - credit for members only if attending as a surrogate for the commander or participating in an activity such as exhibiting a teaching aid.
4. Submitting the Recommendation:
- a. Electronic Form - using the new input system located at www.usps.org/meritmark complete data entry. When complete, use the submit button to forward to the Area Monitor; and
 - b. Printed Form - Merit Marks are no longer submitted in paper form.
5. The Area Monitor will review the recommendations to see if they meet the “substantial personal effort” requirement. If the Area Monitor does not believe that the requirement is, or has been met, the member will be deleted from the merit mark recommendation list.
6. When the Area Monitor has completed his/her, his/her recommendations are forwarded electronically to the Chief Commander and Headquarters. The results of the Area Monitor's review and the reasons for deleting any recommended members from the list are sent back to the commander.
7. The Chief Commander may reverse or change any of the recommendations, since he is the one giving the award.
8. The commander may and should resubmit any recommendations deleted by the Area Monitor, giving the additional information requested. If the Area Monitor still deletes a recommendation, the commander may go directly to the Chief Commander; and
9. After approval by the Chief Commander, Headquarters updates the member's record and sends a notification to the member with the link to download their merit mark certificate.

16.4 Service Records

It is required that every recommendation for a merit mark be supported by facts that adequately describe the work performed by the member.

16.5 Supplementary Recommendation

Supplementary recommendations may be submitted after original submittal up to 1 April of the succeeding year. These are for those members who have been overlooked or who have managed by the end of the calendar year (31 December) to perform sufficient work to qualify for recommendation.

In the case of a member whose contribution may not completely justify recommendation as of the date of original submittal, it is proper that he be told that by performing additional work during the remainder of the year, a recommendation may be possible.

16.6 Posthumous Award

A posthumous award may be made for a member who made substantial contribution during the calendar year of death as defined. The award will be sent by USPS headquarters to the squadron commander even though the recommendation may have originated elsewhere. The squadron commander presents the merit mark certificate to appropriate survivors.

16.7 Resubmittal Recommendations

Resubmittal recommendations may be necessary to clarify or augment earlier submittals in cases where the area monitor or chief commander has denied an award pending receipt of additional information.

16.8 Retroactive Recommendations

Retroactive recommendations may be made by the recommending officer in office during the period services were performed, or by their successor should death or other incapacity intervene. This is allowed for any of the three calendar years prior to the year in which the recommendation is made.

If recommendation relates to a period longer than the three years, it should be sent directly to the chief commander. In this case, the Area Monitor's endorsement is not required as the award is at the sole discretion of the chief commander.

This is another reason that a record of services performed should be kept by the commander or his designee.

16.9 Notice of Award

Names of members recommended for a merit mark must not be made public until the USPS headquarters notifies the recommending officer that the chief commander has approved the awards.

16.10 Procedure for District Commanders

The district commander follows the same procedure and observes the same deadlines as squadron commanders. He considers for recommendation members of the district staff and members active in district affairs.

The district commander reviews the services and work of each squadron commander of the district and, where warranted, recommends each for a merit mark.

The district commander is responsible for obtaining and considering recommendations made by the D/C in office during that part of the calendar year prior to his installation, and also for preparing a service record for the succeeding D/C outlining services contributed by members from the following January to his retirement.

16.11 Chairs of National Committees

Chairs of national committees submit recommendations for their committee members, observing the same deadlines and procedures that are outlined for squadron and district commanders. Recommendations are sent to their respective vice commanders.

16.12 Vice Commanders and National Chairs

Vice commanders and national chairs of general and standing committees also make recommendations for merit mark awards for their subordinates. The recommendations are sent directly to the chief commander. The national executive officer reviews the services and work of each district commander and, where warranted, recommends each for a merit mark.

Efforts of General Members of the Governing Board are reviewed by the chief commander and, if deemed sufficient, the members are awarded a merit mark.

16.13 Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons- Escadrilles Canadiennes de Plaisance

Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons- Escadrilles Canadiennes de Plaisance members who contribute service to USPS that would justify recommendation for a USPS merit mark award if they were members of USPS should be recommended to the chief commander of CPS-ECP. Such recommendations, well documented and detailed, are sent in letter form to the submitter's USPS area monitor who forwards them to the chief commander of CPS-ECP. Recommendations may include statements of continued cooperation with USPS beyond those justified in the recommendation. This does not apply to those who hold dual membership in USPS and CPS-ECP.

16.14 Area Monitors

The chief commander appoints area monitors to assist in reviewing merit mark recommendations. Their names, assignments, and addresses appear in the *USPS Directory of National, District and Squadron Officers*. Area monitors perform the following functions:

- a. **Review** recommendations from squadron and district commanders;
- b. **Indicate** to the submitting officer (form AM-1) those recommendations which are not sufficiently documented to qualify for award; and
- c. **Forward** to the chief commander both those recommendations considered acceptable and those considered not acceptable.

The decision of an area monitor to question and return a recommendation is not final. If the recommending officer disagrees with a decision, a recommendation may be resubmitted to the area monitor with the original and any additional information which may justify a change in his decision. Irreconcilable conflicts will be settled by the chief commander.

16.15 Points to Consider

Detailed descriptions of services performed by members are the best means to insure approval of recommendations. It is the commander's responsibility to clearly present the facts. The following suggestions are offered as guides:

- a. **The title of a job is not sufficient.** Some members accept responsibility and do very little to carry it out. It is important to describe what was done;
- b. **Avoid vague phrases**, such as the following, which make it impossible to tell how much effort was expended:
 - Worked actively on...
 - Graded papers evenings...
 - Spent many hours on...
 - A very dedicated member...
 - Always willing to help when called upon....
 - Effective as...
 - Has put in more than the required hours...
- c. **One-time effort.** Ordinarily a one-time contribution/service does not meet the standards for an award of a merit mark, yet there are instances in which a very special service to USPS can be compared to a year-round effort. For example, an award is not usually given for a single lecture, but an exception might be made when a great deal of unusual research and preparation of slides or aids resulted in an exceptional lecture. To obtain recognition, all the facts must be given;
- d. **Work for civic projects or other organizations.** Any project which is done with a specific benefit to USPS (national, district, or squadron) may be considered for a recommendation for a merit mark, but the activity must be approved by the commander with the support of the executive committee. If a squadron's or district's interests are benefited to a substantial degree, such as bringing more students into the boating course, credit may be given towards a merit mark. Simply participating in a civic event or project, land or water parade, or other non-USPS-sponsored activity does not qualify for a merit mark. If public relations from such participation has a direct benefit to USPS, credit may be considered in a recommendation. It is important in these cases, as always, to clearly explain what was done and what was specifically accomplished to the benefit of USPS. For any special civic event or sponsored activity, the commander must enclose a covering letter explaining the event and how it benefits USPS.

Recommendations based on work performed while teaching state safe-boating courses must meet certain requirements to qualify. In order to qualify, the instruction must have been undertaken at the request of the commander and must be an approved squadron project. A covering letter explaining the circumstances must accompany the recommendations; and
- e. **Work for district.** It is correct for the *district* commander to make such recommendations. A squadron that acts as host to a district activity may recommend its members who have helped but be sure to explain what work was actually performed.

16.16 Examples of Recommendations

Examples of recommendations:

- *Unacceptable:* "A very efficient squadron commander and a fine leader." *Better.* "An aggressive leader; the squadron has increased its membership 8% this year; actively participated in four district council meetings and two district conferences."

- *Unacceptable*: “A good person to have on the bridge.” *Better*: “As squadron administrative officer, attended all ten executive committee meetings and eight regular squadron meetings; was in constant touch with committees under his jurisdiction, and gave written progress reports.”
- *Unacceptable*: “Served actively as treasurer.” *Better*: “Maintained up to date records and gave written reports to the squadron at all ten meetings. Prepared and timely filed all state and federal tax returns. Commended by the auditing committee for the excellence of all records.”
- *Unacceptable*: “A dedicated and very efficient SEO.” *Better*: “As squadron educational officer, supervised the organization and conduct of 31 classes during the year in all USPS subjects. Wrote six motivating articles for our squadron publication which helped to produce a 15% increase in the number of members holding an AP grade. Attended two district conferences.”
- *Unacceptable*. “Outstanding work as *The Ensign* correspondent.” *Better*: “As *The Ensign* correspondent, sent in seven articles, of which three were published.”
- *Unacceptable*. “Worked hard as refreshment chair.” *Better*. “As refreshment chair, prepared and served coffee and sandwiches for an average of eighty members at 12 regular squadron meetings. Cleaned up after each meeting.”

16.17 Examples of Unacceptable Recommendations

Examples of recommendations which are unacceptable:

- a. “Members have rendered services of great value to the squadron.” This may be undeniably true, but unless the area monitor and the chief commander know *what* services, there will be no award;
- b. “Acted as host to the mayor of...” It is usually considered an honor and privilege to be a host, rather than a service. If the “hosting” was part of a year-long activity as PRO, or as an aide to the commander, it would be better to mention the duration and scope of the activity. A “one-shot” event will not qualify for a merit mark;
- c. “Served as flotilla commander, Coast Guard Auxiliary.” A merit mark is never awarded for service performed for another organization, regardless of how closely related or meritorious;
- d. “Assisted with duties on the squadron cruise.” Just what did this member do apart from enjoying his vacation?
- e. “Worked with local sea scouts.” Same as “*Worked for USCGAux*” To qualify for merit mark consideration, the work performed for other organizations must be directly involved with USPS projects and activities;
- f. “Performed dry-dock repair.” Whose dry dock? Does the dry dock belong to the squadron? What is its function with regard to the squadron? Is there some educational aspect?; and
- g. “Served as radio technician.” For whom? What specific duties were performed?

16.18 Electronic Merit Mark (EMM)

In the past, merit marks were created manually by using a four-part form which could be filled out either by printing neatly or by typewriter. The submissions were signed and mailed to the appropriate area

monitor for approval processing. Any communication between the submitter and the area monitor was performed either by postal mail, telephone, or email. When the approved submissions arrived at headquarters as a four-foot-high pile of paper, they were entered into the respective member records manually; a costly and tedious process.

In the late nineties, DB2000, an application conceived to be a Squadron Management tool capable of handling the necessary record keeping and reporting requirements for a squadron was designed and written by P/D/C Ken Guscott. Many versions, numerous additions and enhancements have been made over the years. To date, it has served its purpose and the capabilities it provided are currently being provided by other USPS applications, some still under development.