

# The Grand Cross of the Iron Cross

## Großkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes

### Instituted by Adolf Hitler on September 1, 1939

The Grand Cross of the Iron Cross was "approximately double the size of the Iron Cross 1<sup>st</sup> Class." It was originally planned to issue this decoration with a gold, instead of silver, rim but this did not receive final approval from Hitler. The Grand Cross was presented to Hermann Göring on July 19, 1940 and the same time of his promotion from *Generalfeldmarschall* to *Reichsmarschall*.

The Grand Cross was 63.3 mm wide, height with the ring was 71 mm and the width of the silver rim was 5.5 mm. The weight of the original presentation piece was 57 grams. The ribbon was 57 mm in width, un-watered silk with a cinnobar red center, two each white side stripes of 8mm width with black outer stripes of 6.5mm width.

This Cross was manufactured only by the Berlin medal firm of C,E, Juncker and carried the silver hallmark of '800' and the LDO number of 'L/12' on the upper rim. Göring also had a private-purchase piece made up by his favorite jeweler, a special copy with a black onyx center and a platinum rim.

Initially, it was planned to issue the Grand Cross with a gold instead of silver rim and at the same time, issue it with a Star (often called the Blücher Stern after its first recipient in 1812) such as the one issued to GFM von Hindenburg during the First World War.

One star only was manufactured by the Juncker firm as a pattern and shown to Hitler who rejected it, as well as the concept of a gold rim. This unique sample unauthorized Star measured 3½ inches (87 mm) across and the Iron Cross was 1 ¾ inches (44 mm) across. The sole original piece has no markings of any kind on it. There are trade stories that the Berlin jewelers firm of Godet manufactured this but as the one period piece extant has no markings of any kind on it, attribution is mere guesswork. Since the end of the Second World War, this Star has been

manufactured in Prag, the United States and England. It has been offered to the militaria dealers, as a reproduction, by Reddick Enterprises in Texas for less than \$200!

The star to the Grand Cross, the three German Crosses with Diamonds and the jeweled cased Social Welfare Special Grade with diamonds are now in the U.S. Army museum at West Point, New York. These were all confiscated by the Secret Service in 1953 from the home of the US serviceman who found them in Schloss Kleissheim in 1945.

The Juncker firm made up twelve samples of the Grand Cross of which one was presented but this decoration was never issued further during the progress of the war.

Göring only had his neck grade Grand Cross when captured. His original, issue, decoration ended up in the hands of an American soldier and was destroyed in a house fire. The platinum and onyx private purchase cross is in a private collection.

#### References:

- *Reichsgestezblatt*, Teil I-Berlin, den 2. September, 1939-Nr. 159 Pages 1573-1576 with 3 illustrations
- Doehle, Dr. Heinrich, 4<sup>th</sup> edition '*Die Auszeichnungen des Grossdeutschen Reiches*' Pages 17-23 with 9 color plates
- v. Hessenthal und Schreiber, Georg, *Die tragbaren Ehrenzeichen des Deutschen Reiches*, Berlin, 1940 Pages 119-120 with No.407 a through f, 3 illustrations.

Comment: If a medal, or a coin, were manufactured during the period in question and intended for circulation or issuance, they would be considered original. If such an object, a decoration specifically, had been in the period possession of the person to whom it had been issued, it would be more valuable and if a coin had been in limited circulation, it, too, would have more value.

For example, the 1804 silver U.S. dollar never existed in 1804. It was made up, officially, some years later, by the U.S. mint to be included in a presentation set for the King of Siam. In fact, the 1804 dollar is only a curiosity piece and not an issued coin. It is worth exactly what a collector wishes to pay for it.

In the case of the Star for the Grand Cross, it would fall into the same category as the 1804 dollar. Since only one example was made during the period, this would have a value but as it was never issued nor intended to be issued, again, it is worth what a collector is willing to pay for it. A fake, of course, is worthless.

In the collecting world, be it objects of art, coins or, in the present case, militaria, there are those who collect and those who merchandise. They are rarely the same in outlook.

Aside from such technical matters as size, markings, weight, etc. the most important issue is provenance. Where, specifically, did the piece come from and what is the line of ownership? It is very easy for a dealer to buy a bad fake from the trade and offer it for sale with such stories as "From a veteran" or "From a European collection" attached to it.

Provenance is very important if a piece is extremely expensive. Vague but impressive stories about a mythical "veteran" may sound pleasing to the ear but mean nothing. One should request written provenance on any expensive item and not purchase it merely because the seller has an expensive car or place of business. After all, one buys an item, not the seller.

Another merchandising method is the auction scam. In this case, I am thinking about a really awful and recently made fake German *Luftwaffe* Field Marshal's baton, purporting to belong to Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, was run through an auction house, ballyhooed to

the media and then allegedly purchased by a dealer for a huge sum of money. This is done to impress potential purchasers about the origin of a piece which could never be sold other than as an example of very poor quality recent manufacture.

Unfortunately, the capacity of some people to believe such transparent mendacity is matched only by the greed of those who merchandise. The best antidote for fraud is knowledge. The more accurate information that is available to collectors, the greater the chance that a poor fake would never find a willing market

Again, provenance is very important and it ought to exist in the form of receipts, documents, and, most important, provable ownership back to its origin.

And by allowing greed to conquer reason, a collector only ends up with laughable fakes that can never be resold later.

A.D. Royster

The obverse of a period Juncker-made Grand Cross.



The reverse of a period Juncker-made Grand Cross.



Detail of maker mark and silver content of a period Juncker-made Grand Cross.



The obverse of the only known display piece of the Star.



The reverse of the only known display piece of the Star. (In the **U.S. Army Museum at West Point, New York**)



Picture 6. Obverse of a recent recreation of the Star.



Reverse of a recent recreation of the Star.



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