

# Foreign Medals for American Soldier Heroes

## Congress Is to Pass a Bill Removing Restrictions on Acceptance and Display of Honor Awards from Allies

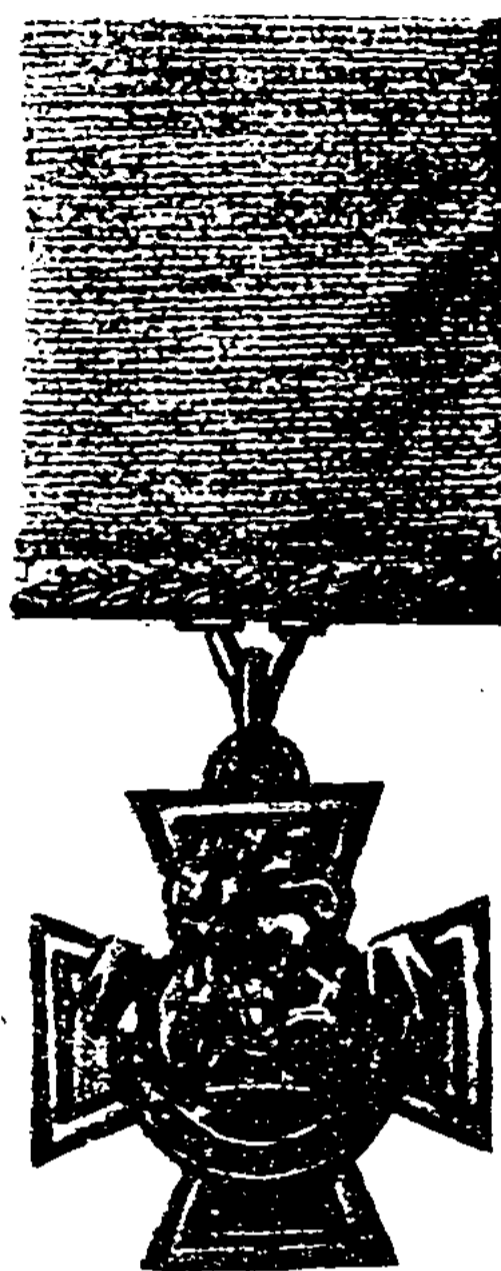
AS the law of the United States stands at the present moment, the American hero is prohibited from accepting a foreign medal. But the law is to be changed at this session of Congress. The beginning was made at the special session last Summer, when a bill to set aside the restriction, so far as soldiers and sailors are concerned, was introduced by Senator Lodge and passed by the Senate. The House will concur shortly.

The bill, as introduced by Senator Lodge, was to take care of the cases of Americans who had served since August, 1914, in the British and French Armies, and who wanted to continue to wear the decorations won with the allied troops after they entered the American Army. It read as follows:

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That American citizens who have received since August, 1914, decorations or medals for distinguished service in the armies or in connection with the field service of those nations engaged in war with the Imperial German Government, shall, on entering the military or naval service of the United States, be permitted to wear such medals or decorations.*

Senator Saulsbury of Delaware offered an amendment to that to provide for all soldiers and sailors of America who may hereafter receive medals from any Government engaged in war against Germany. The bill was passed as amended by Senator Saulsbury, and it is in that shape that it will go through the House as a matter of course. It should be noted that there is nothing in this act to remove the restrictions imposed upon our civilian citizens, the diplomats, for example. No matter what distinguished service Colonel House or Ambassador Page may render to the cause of the Allies they may not be decorated by France or England without special private law enactment by Congress.

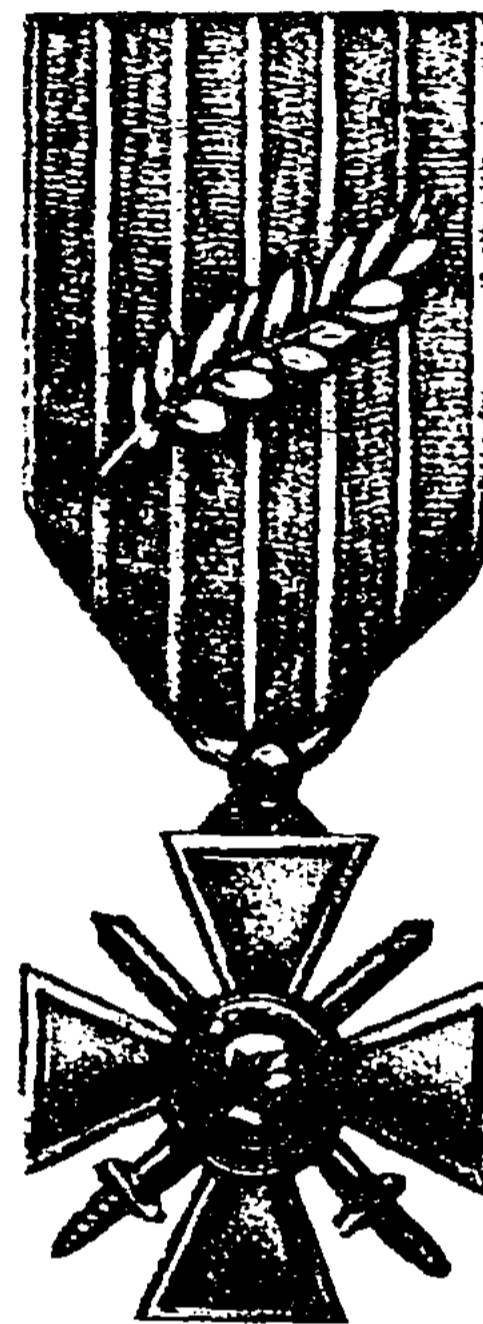
This restriction is embodied in the Constitution itself and is an expression of the fear of those days that the Government might deteriorate into an autocracy or even a monarchy if any select number of citizens were permitted to become too distinguished by receiving titles



Victoria Cross.  
(British.)



Congressional  
Medal of Honor.  
(American.)



Croix de Guerre  
(French.)

and honors not enjoyed by the common run of Americans. A clause in Article I of the Constitution reads as follows:

*No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States; and no person holding any office of profit or trust under them, shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, emolument, office or title of any kind whatever from any King, Prince, or foreign State.*

But the wisdom of awarding special honors to soldiers for distinguished bravery under fire was recognized in the course of the civil war and the Congressional Medal of Honor was provided for in 1863. In spirit and purpose this medal is the same as the famous Victoria Cross which was established by the British Queen on Jan. 29, 1856, for both officers and men of the army and navy. Up to that time England had had no fixed reward for bravery by private soldiers and sailors. In remedying that defect and in creating what has become by far the greatest of the British honors, the Queen

insisted that no distinction whatever be made between officers and men, and that in bestowing it no regard be paid to wealth or rank or title of the recipients. If England sees fit later on to give this Victoria Cross to an American soldier the latter's own Government will not stand in the way. The legend on the cross is "For Valour."

At the time of the French Revolution all the orders and decorations which had been accumulating in that country for centuries were abolished. It was "Citizen This" and "Citizen That" for a while. But Napoleon, as First Consul, established the Legion of Honor, with its cross, primarily as a reward for brave soldiers. The order has lasted ever since, and, as every one knows, the Legion of Honor has become much more comprehensive than a mere military body. An American soldier will soon be able to receive this high honor from France if deemed worthy of it. He may also re-

ceive the Order of Leopold of Belgium, and similar decorations from Italy, Rumania, Portugal, Japan, Russia, and so on all through the list of Allies. In other words, the prospect is that it will take only about five minutes of the time of the House of Representatives to put the American soldier in the running for about any award there is in Europe except the Iron Cross of Germany.

There will be no such restrictions on the privileges granted to American fighters in this war as were imposed on a group of Americans allowed to receive foreign decorations by a special act of Congress in 1881. The first section of that act named the recipients and the countries which wished to honor them. But Section 2 declared that they must never wear or expose upon their persons any of the medals and other awards which Congress graciously allowed them to take and hide. Section 3 said that thereafter all such gifts must be made through the State Department, and not direct to the persons concerned, and then only with special permission of Congress.

The act of 1863 providing for Congressional Medals of Honor has been frequently modified, and there have been various interpretations in Congress and by the War Department as to what constitutes sufficiently distinguished action to deserve the medal. These changes were made necessary by the lack of precision in the language of the law as originally enacted and by the abuses that crept in after the civil war. For many years after that war was over the Government was called to issue the medal to claimants upon the strength of their own memory of their own valor, supplemented by affidavits from their friends who had been with them in the fight, the affidavits also being based on memory.

Now the law provides that the act for which the medal is awarded must be a part of the official records of the War Department filed by the proper military authorities at the time of or very soon after the performance of the act rewarded.