

## AUTHENTICATION AND APPRAISAL

September 13, 2018

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### **Preussen, Orden "pour le mérite" mit Eichenlaub (Prussia, Order of the "pour le mérite" with oak leaves, Blue Max)**

Historical Background:



Prince Elector Friedrich of Brandenburg, the later King Friedrich I. of Prussia, created on May 8, 1667, the order "de la Générosité". After Friedrich II. claimed the prussian throne in 1740 the order was transformed into the order "pour le mérite". He did so while striving to elevate Prussia to a major player in Europe needing a true award for merit. Only during the second half of the 18th century the order was mostly awarded to active military personnel. At that time the Prussian army was 150.000 men strong. Friedrich Wilhelm III. changed the regulations of the "pour le mérite" on January 18, 1810, honoring military personnel for merit during combat only, thus it became a true military order. The "pour le mérite" for merit in Science and Arts was consecutively established

in 1842. In 1813 however the oak leaf was added as a sign of repetitive or superseded qualification for winning a "pour le mérite".

The order consisted initially of a blue enameled golden maltese cross with golden eagles in between each cross arm. The avers showed the crown and cypher "F" for Friedrich on the top cross arm and the name Pour le Mé-, rite starting from the left cross arm to the right ending on the bottom.

In its existence a total of approximately 5750 decorations were awarded in all it's models and variations. Out of the total number of awards about 900 go back to its founder Friedrich II. or "the Great" over a timespan of 46 years, his successor Friedrich Wilhelm II. however managed

to award a similar number during a reign of only 11 years. The highest number of awarded “pour le mérite’s” came under the reign of Friedrich Wilhelm III. from 1797 to 1840.

Friedrich Wilhelm IV. added a golden crown for those recipients wearing the esteemed order for 50 years in 1844. He also re-established the value of the order “pour le mérite” by adding the swords to the Red Eagle Order, resulting in only 28 awards during the war of 1848/49. He awarded only 32 during his reign. Wilhelm I. added the grand cross in 1866 and the oak leaf to the grand cross in 1873. He awarded about 300 decorations in his lifetime. Friedrich III. as bearer of the grand cross saw no reason to award the “pour le mérite”. Wilhelm II. changed the practice of awarding orders and medals in general, including those of the order “pour le mérite”. He found only about 850 reasons to honor citizens and foreigners alike.

With the First World War degenerating into a long and costly trench warfare, precious raw materials grew scarce. Even the materials used for medals and decorations became subject to strict scrutiny. Following similar proclamations in other German states, Prussia mandated that medals and decorations should be made from replacement materials. The General Orders Commission ordered on October 10, 1916, that gold-based decorations should be crafted only from gilt silver with a silver content of 938/1000. By Prussian law those decorations had to marked with the content mark 938 and the manufacturers control mark.

The order “pour le mérite” takes a special place amongst all awards for bravery within the German states and is well known worldwide as “Blue Max” as a homage to Max Immelmann, the first recipient of a “pour le mérite” within the German air force.

#### Technical Data:

##### Cross:

Weight (gram):	17.74
Height (mm):	52.87
Width (mm):	52.75

##### Oak Leaf:

Height (mm):	17.71
Width (mm):	20.19



Neck cross in the style used until the end of the 1st World War. This golden cross complies with the characteristics of all those from right before 1916. Two half were coined hollow from thin gold sheet metal and soldered together lentsides. Holes in the sides of the right and left cross arms allowed the

hot gases to escape during the soldering process. The suspension ring carrying the oak leaf is affixed loose in the so called baroque eyelet. This particular "Pour le Mérite" shows no makers mark, but can be attributed to the manufacturer Wagner in Berlin, known for most of these decorations during the beginning of WWI.

The oak leaf is also made from gold. It is highlighted on the middle as well as on the right vein, letting the red golden color to bleed through.



Two images on the left from avers, to the right from the reverse.



The Cross shows a minor chip in the center of its avers as well as another chip in the reverse center. The cross is otherwise in very fine condition despite sure signs of it being worn. The set comes with an original piece of 3 striped ribbon of about 20 cm length.



Angled avers



Avers



Revers

Assessment of rarity: The order "pour le mérite" with oak leaf was only given 122 times during World War I. and makes this example quite rare.

Condition: mint, extremely fine, very fine, good, fair, poor

Conclusion: Uncleaned original badge showing wear and some aging from the early years of World War I with matching oak leaf.

Estimated Market Value: US \$ 50.000.- (including cufflinks and cigarette-box, featured below)

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Sewickley, Pennsylvania  
August 08, 2018

Bernd Kruse  
Rothenhausen, Germany  
August 12, 2018



Set of cufflinks that accompanied the "Pour le Mérite". Both links are made from gold and have stones affixed to them. Possibly diamonds and rubies. A similar pair featured under 7.570 in Hüsken volume III. ISBN 3-89757-138-2



The reverse shows in both cases the number: "465696", which in one case is not perfectly engraved and leaves the 5th number hard to read.



Together with the order and the two cufflinks a silver cigarette case came along. The case was made by Sy & Wagner in Berlin in 937 silver. The interior is gilt and shows just the maker and silver content on the inner rim. The push button to open the case is made from a light blue sapphire. The avers of the case shows an embedded ruby and the blue enameled signature of Crown Prince Wilhelm. The case comes in a maker mared suede leather casing inside a lilac colored velvet case by Sy & Wagner featuring the prince's crown.



A similar piece featured under 7.576 and following in Hüsken volume III. ISBN 3-89757-138-2

#### Valuations References:

- a) Kuenker, Auction March 2015, Lot Number 95: Kingdom of Prussia: Orden pour le mérite. Ordenskrenz mit Eichenlaub, Silber vergoldet, "FR", Hammer Price Euro 33,000.-
- b) Hermann-Historica, Auction 71m, pos.no.: 4151, Order Pour le Mérite - a Cross with Oak Leaves 1870/71, Hammer Price Euro 33,000.-
- c) Andreas Thies, Auction 59. Auktion, October 31, 2015, 26 Orden Pour le Mérite mit Eichenlaub. Persönliches Exemplar des Generals der Infanterie Bruno von Mudra, Hammer Price Euro 22,000.-
- d) "Hüsken - Katalog der Orden und Auszeichnungen des Kurfürstentums Brandenburg, der Markgrafschaften Brandenburg-Ansbach und Brandenburg Bayreuth, des Königreiches Preußen unter der Berücksichtigung des Deutschen Reiches - Band I,II und III", André Hüsken, 2001, ISBN 3-89757-136-6
- e) "Reference Catalogue Orders, Medals and Decorations of the World instituted until 1945", Part II, Borna Barac, 2010, ISBN 978-953-6388

#### General References:

- a) Lehmann, Gustaf: Die Ritter des Ordens pour le mérite. Auf Allerhöchsten Befehl Seiner Majestät des Kaisers und Königs, bearbeitet im Königlichen Kriegsministerium durch Gustav Lehmann, wirklichen geheimen Kriegsrat und vortragenden Rat im Kriegs-Ministerium, Erster Band: 1740-1811, Berlin 1913; Zweiter Band: 1812-1913, Berlin 1913
- b) "Die altpreussischen Orden, Ehrenzeichen, Ehrenmedaillen, sonstige Auszeichnungen und ihre Brandenburger Vorläufer (1701 - 1809)". Friedhelm Heyde, Osnabrück, 1979, ISBN 3-7648-1030-0
- c) "Orden 1700-2000 - Band 3", Karsten Klingbeil und Andreas Thies, 2011, ISBN 978-3-925589-55-3
- d) "Prussian Blue - A History of the Order of the Pour le Merite", Stephen Thomas Previtara, Winidore Publications (2005), ISBN 10: 0967307023 ISBN 13: 9780967307022
- e) "Deutsche Orden und Ehrenzeichen bis 1945", Jörg Nimmergut, Band II, 1999, ISBN 3-00-00-1396-2
- f) "Prussian and other Imperial German Award Statistics - Baden to Württemberg", Eric Case Ludvigsen, 2009, PGCJ Publication