

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion – D-Day OK

Challenge Coin



Origins

Like so many other aspects of military tradition, the origins of the challenge coin are a matter of much debate with little supporting evidence. While many organizations and services claim to have been the originators of the challenge coin, the most commonly held view is that the tradition began in the United States Army Air Service (a forerunner of the current United States Air Force).

Air warfare was a new phenomenon during World War I. When the army created flying squadrons they were manned with volunteer pilots from every walk of civilian life. While some of the early pilots came from working class or rural backgrounds, many were wealthy Ivy League students who withdrew from classes in the middle of the year, drawn by the adventure and romance of the new form of warfare.

As the legend goes, one such Ivy Leaguer, a wealthy lieutenant, ordered small, solid-bronze medallions (or coins) struck, which he then presented to the other pilots in his squadron as mementos of their service together. The coin was gold-plated, bore the squadron's insignia, and was quite valuable. One of the pilots in the squadron, who had never owned anything like the coin, placed it in a leather pouch he wore around his neck for safekeeping. A short while later, this pilot's aircraft was heavily damaged by ground fire (other sources claim it was an aerial dogfight), forcing him to land behind enemy lines and allowing him to be captured by the Germans. The Germans confiscated the personal belongings from his pockets, but they didn't catch the leather pouch around his neck. On his way to a permanent prisoner of war facility, he was held overnight in a small German-held French village near the front. During the night, the town was bombarded by the British, creating enough confusion to allow the pilot to escape.

The pilot avoided German patrols by donning civilian attire, but all of his identification had been confiscated so he had no way to prove his identity. With great difficulty, he sneaked across no-man's land and made contact with a French patrol. Unfortunately for him, the French had been on the lookout for German saboteurs dressed as civilians. The French mistook the American pilot for a German saboteur and immediately prepared to execute him.

Desperate to prove his allegiance and without any identification, the pilot pulled out the coin from his leather pouch and showed it to his French captors. One of the Frenchmen recognized the unit insignia on the coin and delayed the execution long enough to confirm the pilot's identity. Instead of shooting him, they gave him a bottle of wine.

Once the pilot safely returned to his squadron, it became a tradition for all members to carry their coin at all times. To ensure compliance, the pilots would challenge each other to produce the coin. If the challenged couldn't produce the coin, he was required to buy a drink of choice for the challenger; if the challenged could produce the coin, the challenger would purchase the drink.

Traditional challenging

The tradition of a challenge is the most common way to ensure that members are carrying their unit's coin. Unfortunately, the rules of a challenge are not always formalized for a unit, and may vary between organizations. This may lead to some controversy when challenges are initiated between members of different organizations.

The challenge, which can be made at any time, begins with the challenger drawing his/her coin and slapping or placing the coin on the table or bar. In noisy environs, continuously rapping the challenge coin on a surface may initiate the challenge. (Accidentally dropping a challenge coin is considered to be a deliberate challenge to all present.) Everyone being challenged must immediately produce the coin for their organization and anyone failing to do so must buy a round of drinks for the challenger and everyone else who has their challenge coin. However, should everyone challenged be able to produce their coin, the challenger must buy a round of drinks for the group.

While most holders of challenge coins usually carry them in their pockets or in some other readily accessible place on their persons, most versions of the rules permit a challenged person "a step and a reach" (particularly useful if one is challenged in the shower).

Variants of the rules include the following. If you are able to steal a challenge coin, everyone in the group must buy you a drink. During a challenge, everyone in the group must buy you a drink if you are the holder of the highest ranking coin. Some units provide strict time limits to respond to a challenge.

1st CAN Para Challenge Rules

In 2009 at D-Day Oklahoma, the 1st Canadian Paratrooper Battalion unit brought this tradition alive for its members and friends. Being that we are not a true military unit and not every member currently has a coin. to date our own version of the rules need apply.

1. The prize for any challenge shall be a single serving of a suitable beverage. The winners are allowed to stipulate the type of beverage (within reason) and may also choose a time and/or place to claim their reward.
2. The proper procedure for a challenge shall be to first prominently display the coin and then verbally initiate the challenge. Failure to follow this simple process does not negate the challenge but anyone who chooses not to present a coin may not be penalized. For initiating an improper challenge the initiator will be responsible to compensate anyone who produces a coin in response.
3. Once it has been determined for whatever reason that an individual is not carrying their coin, the offender is not obligated to respond to subsequent challenges unless;
 - the next initiator is truly unaware of the offenders status.
 - the offender has an opportunity to rectify their transgression and does not.
4. Producing a coin for the purpose of exhibition it is not considered a challenge.

5. Dropping a coin for whatever reason is considered an immediate challenge to all. In this circumstance the initiator is not in “care and control” of their coin and therefore will be considered as not holding one.
6. A coin holder may challenge a single individual or a group but must state their intent during the initial challenge. Group challenges with mixed results will fall upon the initiator to be responsible for shortfalls but will be eligible to reap any benefits. Example: Seven (7) coin owners are in attendance when one person challenges the group and the result is five (5) coins produced. This will mean that two (2) beverages are to be provided to two (2) of the “winners” by the individuals failing to produce their coins. Since the initiator was “trumped” by the remaining coin holders he would be responsible to provide the other two (2) beverages. If the outcome had resulted in an excess of beverages the initiator would be able to claim them.
7. Coin holders are required to carry their challenge coin with them at all times, except for the following conditions.
 - a. All coin holders shall be granted the “step and a reach” in order to produce their coin. The “step” is defined as a single unassisted lift-off from one or both feet and the landing is in an upright position, no further lateral or vertical movement by the feet is allowed. Improvisation of the reach is allowed provided there is no outside assistance.
 - b. Coin holders are exempt from keeping the coin on their person when involved in activities which have a high element of risk towards loss or do not permit carrying the coin. Possible examples; baseball, football, paintball, competitive swimming, soccer.
8. Deliberate defacing of any coin will negate its ability to participate in a challenge. Any member of 1st CAN Para discovering such a coin shall report the details to the 1st CAN Para Decorations Committee or their commander. Possible sanctions towards the coin owner may follow depending on the deliberation of the DC.
9. Loss of a coin must be reported to the 1st CAN Para Decorations Committee at the first opportunity. If a replacement is requested then the DC may deliberate on the case and provide a decision as to whether a replacement will be allowed.