

PRESENTING THE MEDAL FOR MERIT: MARCH 28, 1944
A SUPPLEMENT TO *EXPLORING THE MEDAL FOR MERIT: ONLINE EDITION*
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As the United States entered the Second World War, it would have been difficult to identify two *civilians* whose work had a more immediate impact on the war effort than John C. Garand and Dr. Albert Hoyt Taylor. On March 28, 1944, Garand and Taylor became the first recipients of the Medal for Merit, recognizing their “exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services” to the nation.

In the years following the First World War, Garand developed, and then improved, the M1 “Garand” rifle at the Springfield [Massachusetts] Armory. An incredibly deadly and dependable semiautomatic weapon, the M1 rifle was venerated by American ground troops in all theaters. The rifle that General George S. Patton famously characterized as “the greatest battle implement ever devised” would become the standard infantry weapon for over two decades.¹

It is no surprise that John C. Garand was among the first recipients of the civilian Medal for Merit. When the War Department sought congressional approval for a new decoration in April 1942, Garand and his M1 rifle were already legendary. During an exchange between Alabama Senator Lister Hill and Colonel R. Townsend Heard (one of two War Department witnesses), Colonel Heard invoked Garand and his rifle as an obvious example as to why a *civilian* decoration was essential:

Colonel Heard. Take the case of the man who invented the Garand rifle in the Ordnance Department. The Ordnance Department has many people who have devoted their lives to the Government, have given the product of their invention, their whole lives have been devoted to the service of the Government, just the same as the soldier’s life. . . . Then, we have men like Garand, whose work is certainly entitled to some reward.

Senator Hill. So far as Mr. Garand is concerned, I would like to give him any medal he would want, but he does not need any medal. Every time his

¹ “Springfield Armory’s Building 104: The M1 ‘Garand’ Rifle Production Facility,” National Park Service, accessed June 14, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/spar/learn/historyculture/upload/Springfield-Armory-s-Bldg-104-4.pdf>. Thomas A. Bruscino Jr., “M1 Garand Rifle,” in *A History of Innovation: U. S. Army Adaptation in War and Peace*, ed. Jon T. Hoffman (Washington, DC: United States Army, Center of Military History, 2009), 5-14, http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/innovation/History_of_Innovation.pdf.

gun speaks it is a medal for Mr. Garand. His name will go through the centuries.²

Since the early 1920's, Dr. Albert Hoyt Taylor and his colleagues at the United States Naval Research Laboratory had achieved pioneering results on the theory and application of radar technology. The scientists had continued their work despite substantial technical challenges, periods of limited funding and administrative indifference, and inter-service rivalries. As war again loomed, the urgency of research activity, the development of functional radar systems, and their deployment, intensified markedly. Thanks in large part to Taylor and his colleagues, radar had gained an important and growing significance in American weapons technology.³

A cursory internet search of John C. Garand and Dr. Albert Hoyt Taylor will yield an abundance of photographs of both Garand and Taylor in a variety of settings. With respect to the Medal for Merit, one particular Associated Press photograph stands out. The photo provides an excellent view of the new decoration while capturing the consequence of the moment. With the outcome of the war still far from certain, the Medal for Merit awards to Garand and Taylor recognized their profoundly significant *civilian* contributions to the war effort that were having an immediate, real-world impact. That is, a superior rifle was in the hands of American ground troops who were in the throes of fighting dangerous and determined enemies; and increasingly effective radar, to identify and engage enemy targets, was providing important tactical advantages to American and Allied forces on the ground, in the air, and at sea.

² Committee on Military Affairs, A bill to authorize officers and enlisted men of the armed forces of the United States to accept decorations, orders, medals, and emblems tendered by governments of cobelligerent nations or the other American republics, S. 77-2404, at 11, (1942).

³ A. Hoyt Taylor, *Radio Reminiscences: A Half Century*, republished 1960 (Washington, DC: U. S. Naval Research Laboratory, 1948), http://dsearch.dtic.mil/search?site=default_collection&q=radio+reminiscences&client=dticol_frontend&proxystylesheet=dticol_frontend&filter=0&tlen=200&getfields=*&btnG=Google+search. A. Hoyt Taylor, *The first twenty-five years of the Naval Research Laboratory Navexos P-549* (Washington, DC: Navy Department, 1948), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015008977657;view=1up;seq=3>.



Associated Press/Herbert K. White

John C. Garand, center, of Springfield, Mass., inventor of the Garand Rifle, and Dr. Albert Hoyt Taylor, right, of the Naval Research Laboratory, who helped develop radar, wear Medals for Merit after the presentation of the awards by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, left, in Washington, D.C., March 28, 1944. © 2017 The Associated Press. Reproduced by permission from the Associated Press, AP Images.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull presented the Medals for Merit to Garand and Taylor in his capacity as chairman of the Medal for Merit Board. The Medal for Merit Board was established by executive order to receive and evaluate award recommendations. The executive order that was in effect at the time that Garand and Taylor received their medals stipulated that the Secretary of State serve as chairman.⁴ The March 28, 1944, award ceremony pictured in the AP photograph was widely reported in the press.⁵

⁴ “Exploring the Medal for Merit: Online Edition,” Philip J. Schlegel, January 16, 2012, 20-21, <http://www.topicsinhistory.com>.

⁵ “Two get Medals of [sic] Merit,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 1944. Similar stories were also found in other major newspapers.

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE MEDAL FOR MERIT
TO
JOHN C. GARAND

JOHN C. GARAND, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services in designing and perfecting the United States Rifle Caliber .30 M1. Mr. Garand has devoted more than sixteen years, i.e., from 1919 to 1936, at the Springfield Armory, Springfield, Massachusetts, developing this rifle with great initiative, ceaseless patience, skill and technological brilliance. Mr. Garand's devotion to his work has been complete and his attitude towards his accomplishments one of modesty and patriotic unselfishness. The United States Rifle Caliber .30, M1, popularly known as the Garand, capable of 100 rounds a minute, gives a single M1 rifle platoon today more fire power than an entire company had in 1918. The father of this rifle has rendered an exceptional service to his country and contributed conspicuously to the common war effort.

(Signed) Franklin D. Roosevelt

3/28/44 presentation by Secretary of State, as Chairman
of Medal for Merit Board

Citation to accompany the award of the Medal for Merit to John C. Garand, n.d.; File 2, Medal for Merit Case Files, 1942-1948; Entry 26, Record Group 130; National Archives at College Park, MD. (Cropped and enhanced.)

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE
MEDAL FOR MERIT
TO
DOCTOR ALBERT HOYT TAYLOR

DOCTOR ALBERT HOYT TAYLOR, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services in the line of his profession as member of the staff of the Naval Research Laboratory. Undiscouraged by frequent handicaps, Doctor Taylor labored tirelessly in a course of intensive research and experimentation which eventually resulted in the discovery and development of radar. His foresight, technical skill, and steadfast perseverance contributed in large measure to the timely introduction of a scientific device which has yielded the United States Navy a definite advantage over her enemies during the present war.

3/28/44 presented by Secretary of State as Chairman
of Medal for Merit Board.

Citation to accompany the award of the Medal for Merit to Doctor Albert Hoyt Taylor, n.d.; File 75, Medal for Merit Case Files, 1942-1948; Entry 26, Record Group 130; National Archives at College Park, MD. (Cropped and enhanced.)

EPILOGUE

Three years after Garand and Taylor received their medals, President Truman awarded Cordell Hull the Medal for Merit with a bronze oak leaf cluster, indicating a second award. The two awards recognized Hull's service as the Secretary of State during separate periods, September 9, 1939 – December 6, 1941, and December 7, 1941 – November 30, 1944.⁶ Secretary Hull was one of three recipients to receive two Medal for Merit awards.

Dr. Albert Hoyt Taylor was the first of many Medal for Merit recipients who were recognized for contributions related to radar. At least twenty-four Medals for Merit would be awarded for scientific and administrative work associated with the research, development, and deployment of radar technology.⁷ Several of the recipients were British. Later reflecting on the work of the Naval Research Laboratory (1948), Dr. Taylor acknowledged that the British had made important early advancements in radar which, in some respects, had put them ahead of their American counterparts.⁸

⁶ Citation[s] to accompany the award[s] of the Medal for Merit to Cordell Hull, n.d.; Files 3015 and 3015a, Medal for Merit Case Files, 1942–1948; Entry 26, Record Group 130; National Archives at College Park, MD.

⁷ See Medal for Merit Case Files, 1942–1948; Entry 26, Record Group 130; National Archives at College Park, MD.

⁸ A. Hoyt Taylor, *Radio Reminiscences: A Half Century*, republished 1960 (Washington, DC: U. S. Naval Research Laboratory, 1948), 208-209, http://dsearch.dtic.mil/search?site=default_collection&q=radio+reminiscences&client=dticol_frontend&proxystylesheet=dticol_frontend&filter=0&tlen=200&getfields=*&btnG=Google+search.