

DOD Issues Purple Heart Standards for Brain Injury

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 28, 2011 – U.S. service members have long been eligible to receive the Purple Heart Medal for the signature wounds of the current wars — mild traumatic brain injuries and concussions — but now there is more clarity on how medical criteria for the award are applied, Defense Department officials said yesterday.

The criteria for the Purple Heart award state that the injury must have been caused by enemy action or in action against the enemy and has to be of a degree requiring treatment by a medical officer.

But it may be difficult to determine when a mild traumatic brain injury or a concussive injury that does not result in a loss of consciousness is severe enough to require treatment by a medical officer. “This is why we created this baseline standard,” DOD spokeswoman Eileen Lainez said.

DOD allows the award of the Purple Heart even if a service member was not treated by a medical officer, as long as a medical officer certifies that the injury would have required treatment by a medical officer had one been available.

DOD officials said that as the science of traumatic brain injuries becomes better understood, guidance for award of the medal will evolve.

“The services are not able to speculate as to how many service members may have received a mild TBI or concussion but did not seek or receive medical treatment,” Lainez said. “Therefore, each military department will establish its retroactive review procedures in the near future to ensure deserving service members are appropriately recognized.” Retroactive reviews would cover injuries suffered since Sept. 11, 2001, she added.

The Marine Corps has issued clarifying guidance to ensure commanders in the field understand when the Purple Heart is appropriate for concussions.

Army officials are preparing to issue their guidance and ask soldiers to wait until submission requirements are published through command channels and on the Human Resources Command website at <http://www.hrc.army.mil> before submitting or resubmitting nominations for the Purple Heart Medal for concussion injuries.

Once the Army publishes its requirements, officials said, soldiers should resubmit requests through their chains of command.

Army veterans should resubmit to the U.S. Army Human Resources Command at: Commander, USA HRC, ATTN: Awards and Decorations Branch (AHRC-PDP-A), 1600 Spearhead Division Ave., Fort Knox, KY 40122. Vets also can call 1-888-276-9472 or email hrc.tagd.awards@conus.army.mil.