

# The Military Challenge Coin Blog

*Presents*

What you absolutely need  
to know before buying  
Military Challenge Coins



*A FAQ to ease the mind of first time buyers*

*This compilation of questions and answers is brought to you by the Military Challenge Coin Blog with special thanks to Bob of Minnichs Metals.*

*Minnichs Metals offers a full array of products while specializing in Challenge Coin minting. All the coin pictures from the cover were manufactured by Minnichs Metals. Check out what they offer at:*

[www.YourChallengeCoin.com](http://www.YourChallengeCoin.com)

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## What should a person have prepared before shopping for a challenge coin?

Don't go in blind!

The 3 things you should have in mind before making the call are: purpose, size and quantity. Let's talk about purpose first, then about size and quantity a little later.

As odd as it might sound, you should consider the *purpose* of your coin. What audience does it serve? When you hand it out, is it so people can remember meeting you? Or is it so they can remember a specific event. What words and images will best suit your coins purpose?

One way to approach this is by collecting multiple images that you feel are significant to the idea that you are trying to capture in the coin. Keep a folder on your desktop and drop in images over the course of a week or a month or a deployment.

Also important is the text you want displayed. Make sure you write it down from the get go, instead of as an afterthought. Examples would be unit name, dates of deployments, location served, rank, motto etc.

Lucky for the non-artists out there, just about every coin minter will have a staff artist that can bring your idea to life. You can send them multiple drawings, emblems, images and ask for things to be arranged in a certain manner.

Most people do not go to a minter with a polished idea drawn up for their coin. But you will be much more pleased if when you contact your minter for the first time, you have something to work with - instead of scrambling through Google image search to come up with coin art.

If worst case, just fall back on the beer napkin sketch and hope they have a great artist on staff!

## Does a challenge coin have to be circular?

Heck no! A challenge coin can be in any size or shape you can imagine! Don't be afraid to think outside the "traditional" circular coin - it will likely help your coin stand out from a collection.

## What shapes am I limited too?

Like I said before, your imagination is the limit, some great shape examples are:

- skull's
- Designed to open bottles
- countries
- Equipment profiles (helicopters, firearms, land mines etc)

## Do non-standard shapes cost more?

Yes and no.

When you start making non-circular coins it requires different cutting process's which require various cutting machines. Use of these machines will add to the complexity of the coin thus adding to the cost. This cost may be reflected in the one time payment of the die-mold fee (we will get to that later).

However, in some cases, the cost will be less with a special shaped coin.

This is because when you buy a coin, you are basically paying for metal. Metal is a commodity, and when your design uses less metal, your overall cost per coin goes down.

As a rule of thumb, you can expect the costs to even out - that is, you may have to pay more for complex cuts, but it will be evened out by less use of metal.

## How big can a challenge coin be? What is the typical size?

It used to be that a diameter of 1.56 Inch was standard size. More common now is 1.75 Inch. In all reality the "typical" size of a challenge coin has gone to the wind.

## **What options do I have for the surface of the coin as far as texture and depth?**

The space on your coin behind your images is called the recessed area. There are many different textures that you can have on the recessed area of your coin. This area is basically the "background" space of your image. Different companies will offer different textures, but a few examples are criss-cross, weaved, smooth, and sanded.

When it comes to depth, there are basically two kinds of molds: 2D and 3D.

In a 2-dimensional mold there are "flat" images that are cut around to give the coin a perception of depth; it makes the design stand out. Two dimensional molds are more traditional and cost less.

In a 3-dimensional mold the images will actually be higher than all the other surfaces on the coin - the design is raised off the surface. Not all of the coin has to be 3D, but specific portions can be to make them stand out.

3D molds will cost more. The price per coin will go up slightly, but the majority of the cost will be in the one time die-mold fee. The reason for the increase is the added work in making the mold. The 3D designs are hand carved in plaster by an artist. When the coins are minted, the 3D surface also adds an extra step in the processing.

The cost will increase, with a 3D mold, but the quality of the coin does also.

## **I have seen coins where a space for personal engraving is left or where the coin is numbered, who can do the engraving?**

Having an engraving bar is pretty common. Most challenge coin companies can do laser engraving. There are many uses for an engraving bar. One use is numbering the coins, say for example from 1 to 200. Many times the coin company will not even charge for this engraving, but again it depends on the company.

Another common use of engraving is to later add people's names. Even if you already have the names identified to whom you will give the coins, most coin companies would recommend you to have the coins engraved locally at an engraver (an trophy shop will do this). If the coin company does offer this service for large orders, it is always worth checking the price of a local engraver to compare costs.

The take away here is that it doesn't take a special machine to engrave the coin, so any local engraver will be able to make the personalization.

## What options for the surface of the coin do I have for finish?

There are two categories of finish, antique and shiny. Antique finish has a dull, older looking appearance. Shiny finish is, well, shiny...

Within each category are different metal types that can be selected. The most common finish is antique brass. It is also one of the least expensive. The cost is based on the difficulty of applying the finish to the coin. When we talk about costs for finish, it is a cost per coin increase in cost, and does not affect the die mold cost. Generally more expensive finishes are only adding dimes to the cost of each coin (though this can add up on big orders).

### Antique Finishes:

Antique Brass	Standard Coin Finish	Least expensive
Antique Silver	Common finish	More expensive
Antique Copper	Unique finish, not easy to apply and not done by all coin companies	Most Expensive

### Shiny Finishes:

Shiny Silver / Nickel	Common shiny finish	Least expense
Shiny Gold	Common shiny finish	More expensive
Black Nickel	Rare finish, extremely difficult, not done by many coin companies.	Most Expensive

## If I want writing on the coin to be legible, how large should it be?

You would be amazed how small the lettering can be. Legibility is no issue with smaller fonts; it is just a matter of how well you can see. The clarity will be retained in small details such as letters.

## **How long will it take for my coins to be ready once I order them?**

The typical time for minting is between 18-20 days from the moment the art work is approved and the company has received your payment. With different companies the time might take longer, but you will likely not find companies that can make them any faster than 15 days. Be cautious of companies who offer turn around times of under 15 days, because in the end, you either get an unfulfilled promise, or an obviously rushed, low quality final product.

## **What factors influence the length of time it takes to mint the coins?**

For orders of more than 500 coins, you can expect the time to be extended. Also when you are working with complex 3D designs, this could add a day or two to the processing.

## **What options do I have for the sides of the coin?**

You can have a laser engraving made along the side of the coin. Sometimes the coin company will put there logo alongside the coin (with the customers permission), especially if they think it will be a popular coin among collectors.

Readed edges are what the side a quarter is like. Not all companies offer this feature.

## **How many colors can I have on a challenge coin?**

The number of colors you can have is limitless. Most companies will give you 5 colors for "free", than charge per coin for each additional color. This additional color is generally pennies per coin.

## **Are some colors better than others for long lasting application?**

Generally speaking, no. There are soft enamel and hard enamel paints that are used. Some people will argue that hard enamel will outlast soft enamel, but it's hard to say if there is a real difference.

## **Do I have a choice in what metal the coin is made from?**

Most coins are made from brass alloys. The only reason you would stray from this is if you are designing a very large coin with a cut out design. In this case, a zinc alloy would be better suited.

## **Are the cost differences between different challenge coin metals significant?**

The cost of a zinc alloy coin is cheaper per coin than a brass alloy, but the die mold fee for a zinc alloy coin is more expensive, and so the cost evens out.

## **What are some ideas for things to include on a military challenge coin?**

Unit Logo  
Dates Deployed  
Names / Rank  
Maps  
Flags  
Half clad ladies sparring with Cosmonauts...

## **If I can't draw or don't know anyone who can, is there an artist I can hire?**

Just about every reputable challenge coin company will have a staff artist able to make your designs come to life.

## **If my coin art is not politically correct, will you still make it?**

Yes. As long as your money is green.

## **If I order coins in bulk, does the cost per coin go down significantly?**

Yes. There are usually tiers of cost. For example, if you order between 100-300 coins, it will be so much per coin. If you buy 301-500 of that coin, the cost per coin might decrease 20-30 cents per coin. The more you buy the less money per coin they will cost.

## **What are typical minimum orders for coins?**

Minimum coin orders can be as low as 50 coins (not typical). Usually 100 is the minimum.

## What are the typical fees when ordering a challenge coin?

Price per coin. Pretty obvious, this is what you will end up paying per coin on a given order. Any number of things can affect the cost per coin, including the quantity of your order, the amount of metal used in the mold, the complexity of the design, the number of colors used, the type of finish applied etc.

Die Mold Fee. This is a big part of the initial cost. A die mold is what is used to make your coin; they are two heavy chunks of cylindrical metal that are used at the factory to mold your cool coins. Once you pay the die mold fee, you basically own the die mold, and the minting company has rights to use it to make your coins.

Most companies will hold on to the die mold for about 2 years after your first order, than get rid of them if you don't place a re-order within those two years. If you place your re-order within that two year window, then you are free from having to fork up the die mold fee again, and your costs can be kept low, paying only the cost per coin, plus shipping. If you pass that time with no re-orders, and you want to then mint the same coin again, well, you stuck paying to have the die mold made again.

Now if you re-order within your two year window, the two year holding time will restart.

This is where it is important to work with a reputable company. Like any industry, there are shady coin makers that have fly by night operations. They could tell you they will hold onto the die mold for 20 years, but when they close shop after 6 months, then you are back to square one.

Shipping fees. Obvious here. Most U.S. coin companies will use USPS flat rate priority mail boxes to ship your coins to you. If the shipping is "free" you can pretty much be assured it is has been rolled up into the cost per coin.

Below is a breakdown of what you might expect to pay for a 1.75 Inch 2D mold coin design at a quantity of 100 coins.

Die Mold Fee: Between \$160-\$180

Cost per Coin: \$2.85 per coin. That would be 100 coins @ \$2.85 = \$285

Shipping: \$15

Over all you are talking \$460 for a hundred coins on the initial order. If you reordered within your die mold holding window, than it would cost about \$300 for 100 coins.

## **How much do coins weigh? Is shipping a significant expense?**

Shipping is not a significant cost. Most challenge coins companies use USPS priority mail shipping box which is a flat rate fee.

## **If I order some coins now, can I order them again later without having additional fee's applied?**

Yes. One of the bigger fees associated with challenge coin minting is the die mold fee. If you know how long a company will keep your die mold, than you will save yourself the die mold fee if you order again within that window.

## **What are the biggest mistakes people make when buying a challenge coin?**

Do your research. Make sure you know about the company you are doing business with. You should expect companies to be responsive to your inquiries. If you let them know you want to order some coins, and a company doesn't respond for week, then it may be an indication of what's to come. There are lots of coin companies out there, and lots of competition, which is good for you. Demand the best customer service for your dollar.

If a coin company tells you they can get your order to you quicker than about 16 days, then you are being lied to. It will not happen.

There are also some fly-by-night coin companies out there. This is bad for you, because if you pay for a die mold, and the company goes under - then you just lost your die mold fee, and if you planned on getting more minted than you will have to pay another company all over again. Stay away from shady companies.