

## A Brief History of Challenge Coins

There are several stories detailing the origins of the challenge coin, the oldest of which dates back to the Roman Empire who rewarded soldiers by presenting them with coins to recognize their achievements.



Challenge coins were also known as "Portrait Medals" during the Renaissance and were often used to commemorate specific events involving royalty, nobility, or other types of well-to-do individuals. The medals would be given as gifts or awards, and people also exchanged them with friends and associates.

According to the most common story, challenge coins originated during World War I. Before the entry of the United States into the war, American volunteers from all parts of the country filled the newly formed flying squadrons. Some volunteers were wealthy, attending colleges such as Yale and Harvard and then quitting mid-term to join the war.

In one squadron, a wealthy lieutenant ordered medallions struck in solid bronze and presented them to his unit. One young pilot placed the medallion in a small leather pouch that he wore around his neck. Shortly after acquiring the medallion, the pilot's aircraft was severely damaged by ground fire. He was forced to land behind enemy lines and was immediately captured by a German patrol. In order to discourage his escape, the Germans took all of his personal identification except for the small leather pouch around his neck. In the meantime, he was taken to a small French town near the front. Taking advantage of a bombardment one night, he escaped. However, he was without personal identification. He succeeded in avoiding German patrols by wearing civilian clothes and eventually reached the front lines. With great difficulty, he crossed no-man's land. Eventually, he stumbled onto a French outpost. Saboteurs had plagued the French in the sector. They sometimes masqueraded as civilians and wore civilian clothes. Not recognizing the young pilot's American accent, the French thought him to be a saboteur and made ready to execute him. He had no identification to prove his allegiance, but he did have his leather pouch containing the medallion. He showed the medallion to his would-be executioners and one of his French captors recognized the squadron insignia on the medallion. They delayed his execution long enough for him to confirm his identity. Instead of shooting him they gave him a bottle of wine.

Back at his squadron, it became tradition to ensure that all members carried their medallion or coin at all times. This was accomplished through a challenge in the following manner: a challenger would ask to see the medallion, if the challenged could not produce a medallion, they were required to buy a drink of choice for the member who challenged them. If the challenged member produced a medallion, then the challenging member was required to pay for the drink. This tradition continued throughout the war and for many years after the war while surviving members of the squadron were still alive.

Unions around the world have recently embraced the concept and found the coins to be an excellent means of team building and creating a sense of brotherhood and belonging. The IBEW LU 86 coin continues the tradition, building a strong bond between its members.

# Challenge Coin Rules

1. Rules of the coin game must be given or explained to all new coin holders.
2. The coin **MUST** be carried at all times. You can be challenged for it anywhere, any time. You must produce the coin without taking more than one step, or an arm's length, to produce it.
3. When challenging, the challenger must state whether it is for a single drink or a round of drinks.
4. Failure to produce a coin, for whatever reason, results in a bought round or single drink (whatever the challenger stated). This type of transaction could be expensive, so hold onto your coin. Once the offender (coinless challenger) has bought the drink or round, they can't be challenged again.
5. If all the challenged produce their coins, the challenger loses and must buy the drinks for all respondents. This too can be expensive, so challenge wisely.
6. Under no circumstances can a coin be handed to another in response to a challenge. If a person gives their coin to another, that person can keep the coin - it's theirs!!! However, if a person places the coin down and another person picks it up to examine it that is not considered giving, and the examiner are honor-bound to place the coin back. The examiner can't challenge while they hold another Members coin. After negotiating a "reasonable" ransom, the examiner must return the Member's coin.
7. If a coin is lost, replacement is up to the individual. A new coin should be acquired at the earliest opportunity. Losing a coin and not replacing it doesn't relieve a Member of his/her responsibilities. This is especially true if your fellow Members know that you traditionally carry a coin.
8. The coin should be controlled at all times. Giving a coin to just anyone is like opening a fraternity to just anyone. It is an honor to be given a coin, let's keep it that way. A given or awarded coin is of more personal value than a purchased coin.
9. No holes may be drilled in a coin.
10. The above rules apply to anyone who is worthy to be given/awarded a coin, has a purchased coin, or who is known to be a previous coin holder.

**EXCEPTIONS:** There are no exceptions to the rules. They apply to those clothed or unclothed. At the time of the challenge, you are permitted one step or an arm's reach to locate your coin. If you still cannot reach it - SORRY ABOUT THAT.