



## The Medal of Honor

The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States. It is generally presented to its recipient by the President of the United States in the name of Congress.



**Navy**



**Army**



**Air Force**

There are three different types of Medals of Honor today: the original, simple five-pointed star, established in 1861, which the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard have retained; a wreath version designed in 1904 for the Army; and an altered wreath version for the Air Force, designed in 1963 and adopted in 1965.

### **HISTORY**

Prior to 1861, the United States did not have a system to award medals for valor. On December 9, 1861, Iowa Senator James W. Grimes introduced S. No. 82 in the United States Senate, a bill designed to “promote the efficiency of the Navy” by authorizing the production and distribution of “medals of honor.” On December 21, 1861, the bill was passed, authorizing 200 such medals to be produced, “which shall be bestowed upon such petty officers, seamen, landsmen and marines as shall distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other seamanlike qualities during the present war” (the Civil War). President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill, creating the (Navy) Medal of Honor.



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Two months later, on February 17, 1862, Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson introduced a similar bill to authorize the President “to distribute medals to privates in the Army of the United States who shall distinguish themselves in battle.” Over the following months, wording changed slightly as the bill made its way through Congress. When President Lincoln signed S.J.R. No. 82 on July 12, 1862, the Army Medal of Honor was created. In March 1863, Congress extended the Army Medal of Honor to include officers and non-commissioned officers. The Navy medal continued to be reserved for enlisted personnel only until 1915.

On July 25, 1963, Public Law 88-77 standardized the requirements for the Medal of Honor among all the services, requiring that a recipient had “distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.” The law also clarified that the act of valor must occur during one of three circumstances:

- 1) While engaged in action against an enemy of the United States;
- 2) While engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force;
- 3) While serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

In 1990, Congress designated March 25 annually as National Medal of Honor Day. The date of March 25 was chosen because the first Medals of Honor were awarded to members of “Andrews’ Raiders” on March 25, 1863, for their actions during the “Great Locomotive Chase” – a raid conducted by a volunteer group of Union soldiers in 1862.

There have been 3,507 recipients of the Medal of Honor, including nineteen double recipients.

### MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS AT ARLINGTON

More than 400 Medal of Honor recipients are buried or memorialized at Arlington National Cemetery – the largest number among all national cemeteries. They fought in every major U.S. conflict from the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century to recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Medal of Honor was also awarded to the Unknown Soldiers from World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. These medals are on display in Memorial Amphitheater.

For names and gravesite locations of Medal of Honor recipients, see: [www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore/Notable-Graves/Medal-of-Honor-Recipients](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore/Notable-Graves/Medal-of-Honor-Recipients).

