

Fact Sheet on the Medal of Honor

The Medal of Honor was authorized by President Abraham Lincoln in 1861 and first presented on March 25, 1863 to Private Jacob Parrott of Company K, 33rd Ohio Infantry for a Civil War action known as "The Great Locomotive Chase," which occurred in April of 1862. Private Jacob received the Army Medal of Honor. The first Navy medals were awarded on April 3, 1863 to sailors and marines.¹ However, the first award presented was not from the first action that merited receipt of the honor. The first action for which the award was given took place at what is now called Apache Pass, Arizona, on February 13-14, 1861. U.S. Army Assistant Surgeon Bernard J. D. Irwin organized a party to rescue troops that were surrounded by Apaches under Cochise. Irwin managed to convince the Apaches that his force was greater than it appeared, which led Cochise to withdraw and allowed the troops to escape.²

Over 34 million soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have served in our Armed Forces. As of December 16, 2011, only 3,458 have received the Medal of Honor, many of them posthumously. Today, there are 84 living recipients.³

There are three versions of the Medal of Honor. The Army and Air Force Medals are awarded to recipients from their respective branches. The Navy Medal of Honor is awarded to recipients from the Navy and the Marine Corps. Each of the armed services maintains their own regulations governing the award. The Medal of Honor is the American military's highest award for valor in combat, with high standards that permit no room for doubt: "The deed of the person must be proved by incontestable evidence of at least two eyewitnesses; it must be so outstanding that it clearly distinguishes gallantry beyond the call of duty from lesser forms of bravery; it must involve risk of life; and it must be the type of deed, if he had not done it, would not subject him to any justified criticism."⁴

Only one woman has received the Medal of Honor. Dr. Mary E. Walker was given the award by President Andrew Johnson on November 11, 1865 for her work as a Contract Acting Assistant Surgeon in a series of battles from First Bull Run in 1861 to the Battle of Atlanta in 1864. Caught by Confederate troops and arrested as a spy, she also spent four months as a Prisoner of War. Although her award was rescinded along with hundreds of others in 1917, upon the passage of legislation that stated the Medal could only be given to persons who had engaged in "actual combat with an enemy", Dr. Walker's Medal of Honor was restored on June 10, 1977 by President Jimmy Carter.⁵

Important Dates Relating to the Medal of Honor

December 21, 1861 -- After a bill was introduced by Senator James Grimes of Iowa, chairman of the Senate Naval Committee, Congress, and President Lincoln authorized 200 Medals of Honor for award to enlisted men of the Navy and Marine Corps. The Navy Medal could be awarded for both combat and non-combat heroism.

July 12, 1862 -- Following the introduction of a similar bill by Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, Congress and President Lincoln authorized the production of 2,000 Medals of Honor for Army enlisted men. They were to be presented only for heroism in combat.

March 3, 1863 -- Congress amended their previous resolution to include Army officers but not for officers of the Navy and Marine Corps.

March 25, 1863 -- Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton awarded the first six Army Medals of Honor to survivors of "The Great Locomotive Chase" in Washington, D.C.

April 3, 1863 -- Secretary Stanton awarded the first Navy Medals of Honor in Washington, D.C.

March 3, 1915 -- Congress authorized the Navy Medal of Honor for award to officers of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

April 27, 1916 -- Congress authorized Medal of Honor recipients to receive a special pension of \$10 a month for life beginning at age 65 if they had been honorably discharged from service.

June 3, 1916 -- Congress directed an investigation and review of the 2,625 Medal of Honor that had been awarded up to that time.

February 17, 1917 -- 911 names were stricken from the list. Included were the 864 members of the 27th Maine Volunteer Infantry, 309 of whom had been awarded the Medal for volunteering for extended duty in the Civil War and the remainder of the regiment by clerical error. Also stricken were awards to William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, several other civilian scouts from the Indian Wars and Civil War Surgeon Mary Walker.

July 6, 1960 -- Congress authorized a separate Medal of Honor for the Air Force.

August 14, 1961 -- Congress approved raising the special pension for Medal of Honor recipients from \$10 per month to \$100 per month and made it payable at age 50 instead of age 65. They also removed the requirement that the recipient had been separated from the service.

October 13, 1964 -- Congress approved dropping the age limit to 40 for receiving the special pension for Medal of Honor recipients.

October 31, 1965 -- Congress eliminated the age requirement for payment of the special pension.

October 18, 1978 -- Congress raised the special pension for Medal of Honor recipients to \$200 per month. It was later increased to \$400 a month with no age limitations. Currently the Medal of Honor recipients are allotted a pension of \$1,000 a month for life, free transportation world-wide on government aircraft on a space available basis, the right to burial in Arlington National Cemetery and, if they qualify and quotas permit, admission for themselves or their children to U.S. military academies."⁶

Current Statistics on the Medal of Honor

- 3,458 recipients of the Medal of Honor
- Today, there are 84 living recipients of the Medal of Honor.
- 14 living recipients received the Medal for actions in World War II.
- 13 living recipients received the Medal for actions in the Korean War.
- 55 living recipients received the Medal for actions in Vietnam.
- 2 deceased recipients received the Medal for actions in the Somalia Campaign.
- 3 living recipients and 3 deceased recipients received the Medal for actions in the War in Afghanistan.
- 4 deceased recipients received the Medal for actions in the War in Iraq.⁷

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¹ *United States Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients and Their Official Citations*, p. 1-4, and Owens, p.17.

² Owens, p.17.

³ From the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's website, (<http://www.cmohs.org/medal-statistics.php> , viewed January 17, 2012.)

⁴ *United States Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients and Their Official Citations*, p. 1.

⁵ Owens, p. 22-23, Graf, p.90, Walker, p.203.

⁶ Owens, p.15-16.

⁷ From the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's website, (<http://www.cmohs.org/medal-statistics.php> , viewed January 17, 2012.)