

The congressional medal of honor: the history, criteria, and benefits

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“ Duty, Honor, Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be.” ~General Douglas MacArthur. The history of the Congressional Medal of Honor is quite rich.

With events that led to the rescinding of over 900 medals and the creation of new criteria. The criteria of the Congressional Medal of Honor were created for the sole purpose of making sure that person was not awarded the medal for non-meritorious deeds. Along with new criteria came new benefits for recipients. The benefits for recipients are very detailed and designed to let the recipient enjoy their award to the fullest. The Congressional Medal of Honor is the highest military award in the United States and it should be treated with respect by everyone regardless of its special benefits and rich history. History The Congressional Medal of Honor is the highest military medal in the United States; however, it is not the oldest medal in the United States.

The Congressional Medal of Honor was created after the end of the Civil War. More specifically, it was created and signed into existence in 1861 (Medal of Honor History, 2013). Upon its creation, it “ was given to low ranking officers and enlisted personnel” (Medal of Honor History, 2013) for their reputable actions in battle. Over time, there were three different versions created for three branches of the United States Military (Medal of Honor History, 2013). Between 1861 and 1862, the Naval Medal of Honor and the Army Medal of Honor were created (Sterner, 2014).

It would not be for another one hundred and four years that those in the United States Air Force would have a Medal of Honor specifically for their

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branch. “ The Air Force introduced the design for their distinctive Air Force Medal of Honor” in 1965 (Stern, 2014). Two groups of people are attributed with having received the first Medals of Honor. The first is the six surviving members of Andrew’s Raiders. They received their Medals on March 25, 1863 from the Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.

While these were the first Medals of Honor presented, the first instance of a heroic act deserving the Medal of Honor occurred on February 13, 1861. This is when Bernard J. D. Irwin rescued 60 soldiers of Second Lieutenant George Bascom’s unit in Arizona (Medal of History, 2013). These sixty-six people would be just the beginning of a long list of people who will have received the Medal of Honor by the end of World War 1.

Between the Civil War and World War 1, more than three thousand Medals of Honor were awarded (Medal of Honor History, 2013). The sheer number of Medals being awarded would be just the beginning of some inconsistencies being noticed with the Medal of Honor. The large quantity of Medals being given out was just the tip of the iceberg of various inconsistencies surrounding the Congressional Medal of Honor. The largest inconsistency was that since its conception, there was no clear criteria for who could be awarded the Medal of Honor (Stern, 2010). A lack of clear criteria meant that the Medal of Honor could be given to any enlisted or officer personnel for any reason. However, this also meant that the Medal of Honor was losing its credibility as a top Military medal.

“ Subsequently, Congress authorized the War Department in June, 1916, to appoint a board of five general officers to review every Medal of Honor

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awarded. As a result of this Board, 911 names were stricken from the Honor Roll in February 1917 (Medal of Honor History, 2014).” This review of the recipients and awarded Medals prompted the Military to make new medals that could be the replacement and create criteria guidelines for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Criteria The new criteria for the Congressional Medal of Honor was decided after the committee had difficulty in deciding which of the recipients are worthy of retaining their medal. A major factor in deciding who would have to relinquish their Medal of Honor was the fact that it was often awarded for non-meritorious deeds.

This is because that “ from the end of the Civil War through World War I, the Medal of Honor was the only medal that could be earned by members of the United States Army, Navy, Marines, or Coast Guard”(Sterner, 2010). The discovery of the lack of merit led to a purge of all Medals that were not properly earned by those who received them. “ On February 5, 1917, two weeks after the board concluded its review, it announced its findings. In all the board determined 911 Medals of Honor did not fit the guidelines established for appropriate cause” (Sterner, 2009). These 911 names were permanently removed from the list of people who had received the Medal of Honor. However, six civilian recipients would eventually have their awards restored.

The committee came up with four points that are to be considered when a person is nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor. The United States Navy has published these points on their website under a page for the Frequently Asked Questions for the Congressional Medal of Honor. They say

that the first consideration should be that the person had a “ risk of his [or her] life above and beyond the call of duty” (Frequently Asked Questions, 2014). The Navy also states that the person should have been “ engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States” (Frequently Asked Questions, 2014). The third consideration is that the person should have been “ engaged in military operations involving conflict” (Frequently Asked Questions, 2014).

Lastly, the person must be “ serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict” (Frequently Asked Questions, 2014). The Air Force clarifies says that the Congressional Medal of Honor “ is given in the name of Congress to officers and enlisted members who distinguished themselves by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their lives, above and beyond the call of duty, in action involving actual combat with an armed enemy of the United States ” (Medal of Honor, 2012). These requirements do not all have to be met at the same time, but the service performed must be above and beyond the call of duty. Benefits The recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor receive certain special benefits with their medal. The veterans have nine special entitlements that they receive.

They usually apply to those who receive it humously. These entitlements are listed as follows by the United States Navy on their website. “[The recipients are to receive] A monthly \$1, 000 pension from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). [The recipients are to receive] A 10-percent increase in retired pay, not to exceed the 75 percent maximum, for enlisted recipients who retire with 20 or more years of Military Service. [The recipients are to

receive] A special MOH Travel and Identification Card signed by the Secretary of the Army.

This entitles recipients who are not on active duty and not military retirees to utilize space-available military air transportation. [The recipients have the option of] Wearing their uniforms at any time or place they choose, unlike other military personnel or retirees. [The recipients are to receive] An issued DOD identification card, as are their family members, for recipients who are not on active duty and military retirees. It authorizes them military commissary, Post Exchange, and theater privileges. [The recipients are to receive] All of the services, consistent with DOD policy, authorize use of morale, welfare, and recreation activities, including honorary club membership without dues.

Children of Medal of Honor recipients are not subject to quotas if they are qualified and desire to attend the U. S. military academies. [The recipients are able to receive] invitations to attend Presidential inaugurations and accompanying festivities. Military recipients and those who are civil servants have traditionally been authorized administrative absence instead of chargeable leave to attend. [The recipients are to receive] A special engraved headstone for deceased recipients of the Medal of Honor provided by VA.

Should be accorded on base billeting commensurate with the prestige associated with the Medal of Honor” (Frequently Asked Questions, 2014).

While the Medal of Honor recipients receive these many entitlements, they also have ten other benefits that go along with the preceding nine. The

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following list of benefits has been published by Military. com. The recipients receive a special Medal of Honor pension of \$1, 194 per month over any military pensions or other benefits for which they may be eligible to receive.

The Medal of Honor pension is subject to cost-of-living increases. The recipients have special entitlements to Space “ A” air transportation. Enlisted recipients are entitled to a supplemental uniform allowance and Commissary/exchange privileges (includes eligible dependents). Admission to the United States military academies for qualified children of recipients is also allowed. This admission is without nomination and quota requirements. A ten percent increase in retired pay is also allotted for recipients.

The Medal of Honor Flag is presented to the recipient for them to fly with honor. The recipients are allowed to wear the uniform at any time, as long as the standard restrictions are observed. Many states offer Medal of Honor automobile license plates that recipients are eligible to receive. The recipients can be interned at Arlington National Cemetery if not otherwise eligible (The Medal of Honor, 2014). While the Congressional Medal of Honor recipients put their lives and well-being in grave danger, they receive a plethora of entitlements and benefits as compensation for their actions.

Method For my primary research, I conducted a survey of one hundred and one people. The survey was aimed at the general knowledge of the Congressional Medal of Honor that the people may have. I asked one hundred and one different people in different areas of the country, ten different questions related to the Congressional Medal of Honor. The questions I asked are as follows. How familiar are you with the Congressional

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Medal of Honor? This question was asked so I could get a general feel for how the rest of the survey would go. Do you agree that the Medal of Honor recipients are worthy of such an honor? This was so I could see if the person feels the recipients are deserving of such a high honor.

How would you rank the Congressional Medal of Honor with other nations' top military medals? This question was asked to see if the person felt that other medals could be equal to or higher than the Congressional Medal of Honor. Without researching it, how many Congressional Medal of Honor recipients do you think are still living? How many people do you think have been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor twice (more than once)? The last two questions were asked as general research information topics. How likely are you to research the Congressional Medal of Honor for any reason? This was asked to see if the person would be likely to look the Congressional Medal of Honor up for any reason after the survey. Do you know of anyone at all in your family who has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor? Would you, personally, do something that warrants being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor? Assuming you have been awarded the Medal of Honor, would you accept the award and display it or take it and put it away somewhere? Would you prefer to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor humously or post-humously? This is assuming you are eligible to receive it and are still alive when it is decided you are able to receive it. These last several questions were designed to be specifically about the person taking the survey.

They are just to get a feel for their opinion about the Congressional Medal of Honor and how they view it when it is associated with themselves. Results

The results of the survey were very widespread in responses. What people were willing to say was also a factor in the responses I received. In response to the first question, “ How familiar are you with the Congressional Medal of Honor?” seventeen of one hundred and one people said that they are very familiar with the Congressional Medal of Honor. This equates to about 16. 8% of the people surveyed.

In response to the second question, “ Do you agree that the Medal of Honor recipients are worthy of such an honor?” thirty six out of one hundred and one people said that they agree with the statement. This equates to roughly 35. 6% of the respondents. In response to the third question, “ How would you rank the Congressional Medal of Honor with other nations’ top military medals?” twenty one of one hundred and one people said the medal ranks higher. This equates to roughly 20. 8% of respondents.

In response to the fourth question, “ Without researching it, how many Congressional Medal of Honor recipients do you think are still living?” nineteen of the one hundred and one respondents said that seventy five recipients are still alive. This equates to roughly 18. 8% of respondents. In response to the fifth question, “ How many people do you think have been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor twice (more than once)?” fourteen of the one hundred and one people said the correct figure was nineteen. This equates to roughly 13. 8% of the people surveyed.

In response to the sixth question, “ How likely are you to research the Congressional Medal of Honor for any reason?” thirteen out of one hundred and one people said they were very likely to do so. This equates to roughly 12. 8% of people. In response to the seventh question, “ Do you know of anyone at all in your family who has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor?” sixty-six of one hundred and one people said “ no.” This equates to roughly 65. 3% of people.

In response to the eighth question, “ Would you, personally, do something that warrants being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor?” thirty-four of one hundred and one people said that they would if they had the chance. This equates to roughly 33. 6% of people. In response to the ninth question, “ Assuming you’ve been awarded the Medal of Honor, would you accept the award and display it or take it and put it away somewhere?” fifty-five of one hundred and one people said that they would display it. This equates to roughly 54. 4% of people.

In response to the tenth question, “ Would you prefer to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor humously or post-humously?” sixty-four of one hundred and one people said humously. This equates to roughly 63. 3% of people. These results show that some people know some information about the Congressional Medal of Honor, and that some do not. It is also worth noting that the people surveyed were not sure if they would do something to warrant receiving the medal, but that they would indeed be proud of it

Discussion From the secondary research, I learned many interesting facts about the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Such as, that it was created after the Civil War as a way for people to be honored for deeds more deserving than other medals. This led to the need for a purge of medals to occur for those that were awarded for deeds that were less meritorious. In order to do a purge, a set of new criteria was needed to establish guidelines for what warranted being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Nevertheless, with new criteria there came new benefits and special bonuses for recipients so they could have more than just a ribbon and medal. However, the benefits were not new to the medal, but they were revamped to be current with the modern age. I connected my primary research to the secondary research through using data from different sources as a base for the questions in the survey.

While some questions are opinion based, others are based on facts. Those had the correct numbers included in the options available on their respective questions. For instance, I used data from the Army at their Medal of Honor Recipients – Statistics web page and from the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's website to construct the fourth and fifth questions. The Army states, " Nineteen (19) men received a second award" (Medal of Honor Recipients – Statistics, 2013). This was the basis for the fifth question. The fifth question says verbatim, " How many people do you think have been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor twice (more than once)?" The fourth question was based on the fact that the Congressional Medal of Honor society says on their website that 79 recipients are still living (Stern, 2014).

The two forms of research were intertwined because of specific data points that some people may find interesting to learn. However, most people did not know the correct figures and I hope that they are now able to walk away from the survey knowing something that they might like to look into to get more information. General Douglas MacArthur had a great thought when it came to the Congressional Medal of Honor and what it means. “ Duty, Honor, Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be.” ~General Douglas MacArthur