

## The Highest Honor

On Veteran's Day we pay tribute to the men and women who have worn the uniform of the United States Armed Forces. We pay tribute to all levels of sacrifice—from the cook, to the soldier who gave up his/her life in defense of our freedoms. All are important to us.


As we think about the sacrifices of our armed forces we recollect the importance of the Medal of Honor and the symbolic tribute paid by the Tomb guards at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The highest military decoration awarded by the U.S. government is the Medal of Honor. It is awarded to members of the armed forces who illustrate, "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States."<sup>(1)</sup>



One soldier who exhibited such courage was Audie Murphy who at the age of 17 enlisted in the United States Army because he wanted to make something of himself. On January 26th, 1945 the company Audie commanded came under attack by six tanks and various waves of infantry. 2nd Lt. Murphy ordered his men to withdraw to the woods, while he remained in a forward position to give fire directions to the artillery by phone.

After the enemy realized his position he climbed into a burning tank, at great peril to himself. He was exposed to gunfire from 3 sides, was alone, and in a burning tank that could blow up at any moment. He employed the .50 caliber machine gun causing the attack to waiver, and in turn pushed the enemy tanks back. The Germans continued to try for an hour to kill Audie.

  
During the fire fight, he received a leg wound and continued to fight until ammunition was exhausted. He then made his way back to his company, refused medical attention, and organized his company to counterattack the Germans who withdrew their forces.

His single act of courage saved his company from possible encirclement or destruction, and allowed the company to hold the woods, which was the German's objective.<sup>(2)</sup>

By the end of World War II, he was the most decorated U.S. soldier, having earned every medal his country could give, including the Medal of Honor. If the name Audie Murphy sounds familiar, it's because after the war he also became a famous movie actor, author, and has his name on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Audie's show of gallantry was not an isolated event. The U.S. has given over 3,460 Medal of Honor awards with 19 men receiving the award twice. Fourteen of these men received two separate medals for two separate actions; five received both the Navy and the Army Medals of Honor for the same action. Over 600 received the award posthumously. The most medals earned in a single war was during the Civil War with 1,522 awarded.<sup>(3)</sup> The Medal of Honor is properly described as having been "awarded", "earned", or "received", not "given" or "won."<sup>(4)</sup>

## Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

As a country, we go to great lengths to make sure that those who lived and served, and those who died while serving are remembered and honored. At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier the Tomb Guard symbolically gives another one of the highest military honors, but to the “Unknown Soldiers.” During a Tomb Guard’s watch, the soldier marches 21 steps down the black mat, turns, faces east for 21 seconds, and turns, faces north for 21 seconds, then takes 21 steps down the mat and repeats the process. Twenty-one was chosen because it symbolizes the 21-gun salute. <sup>(5)</sup>

During Hurricane Isabel in 2003, with winds that turned over vehicles, downed trees, and turned debris into projectiles the Regimental Commander of the U.S. infantry sent word to the nighttime Tomb Guards to secure post and seek shelter. They disobeyed the order. Their important watch continued as normal. Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain, they said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment; it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person. The tomb has been patrolled continuously, 24/7, since 1930. <sup>(6)</sup>

The Medal of Honor award winners, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier represent the deep gratitude our country feels about our military service members willing to give his/her life. But, even these significant acts of gallantry don’t dampen the gratitude we have for all our military personnel willing to serve their country. Happy Veteran’s Day!

Sincerely,



Barbara B. Hudock CIMA®, CPM®  
Chief Executive Officer  
Founding Partner



Michael J. Hudock, Jr., CPM®  
President and Founding Partner  
Wealth Consultant

- (1) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congressional\\_Medal\\_of\\_Honor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congressional_Medal_of_Honor)
- (2) <http://www.cmoah.org/recipient-detail/2907/murphy-audie-1.php>
- (3) <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/mohstats.html>
- (4) <http://www.segtours.com/blog/archives/347>
- (5) <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/ceremonies/sentinelsof.htm>
- (6) <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-vetscor/1126293/posts>

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400 Market Street ● Suite 200 ● Williamsport PA 17701

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570.326.9500 ● 866.855.0569 ● fax: 570.326.9577 ● [www.hudockcapital.com](http://www.hudockcapital.com)

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