



## *The History Behind the Congressional Medal of Honor*

### **VA Medical Center's 2003 Veterans Day Parade**

The Medal of Honor, sometimes called the Congressional Medal of Honor, is presented personally by the President of the United States for "individual gallantry at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty". "Recipients" are just that and should not be referred to as "winners" since there is no competition or contest to obtain this award. All recipients are saluted by anyone in uniform including the Commander in Chief, the President of the United States.

Early in the Civil War, a medal for individual valor was proposed to General-in-Chief of the Army, Winfield Scott. But Scott felt medals followed the fashion of European affectation and killed the idea.

The medal found support in the Navy, however, where it was felt recognition of courage in strife was needed. Public Resolution 82, containing a provision for a Navy medal of valor, was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on December 21, 1861. The medal was "to be bestowed upon such petty officers, seamen, landsmen and marines who shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry and other seamanlike qualities during the present war".

Shortly after this, a resolution similar in wording, was introduced on behalf of the Army. Signed into law July 12, 1862, the measure provided for awarding a Medal of Honor "to such noncommissioned officers and privates who shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldier like qualities, during the present insurrection."

Although it was created for the Civil War, Congress made the Medal of Honor a permanent decoration in 1863.

Almost 3,400 men and one woman have received the award for heroic actions in the nation's battles since that time. They have been honored above all others because of their acts of heroism which were performed in the face of mortal danger, often when surrounded by enemies, and always without expecting any reward.