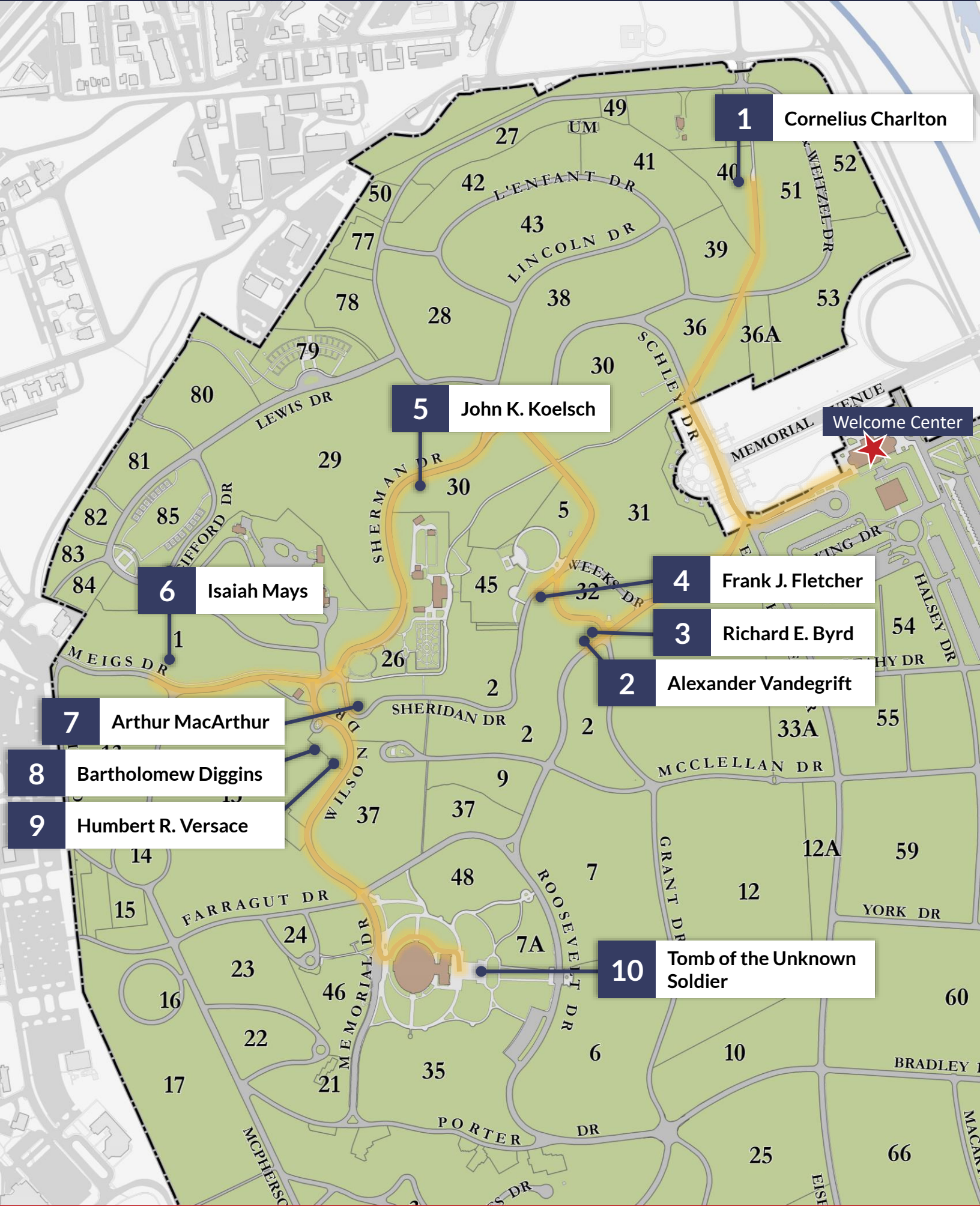


MEDAL OF HONOR

North



We love hearing about your visit! Share your pictures, questions, and favorite parts of the tour on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



@ArlingtonNatI

#ANCEducation #MedalofHonorANC



MEDAL OF HONOR

North

Length: ~2.5 miles

Starting Point: Section 40 (0.4 miles from Welcome Center)

Exertion Level: Moderate

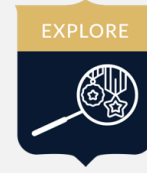
There are three types of stops on this walking tour:
















HONOR stops mark the gravesites of specific individuals.



REMEMBER stops commemorate events, ideas or groups of people.



EXPLORE stops invite you to discover what this history means to you.

1	Cornelius Charlton	Section 40, Grave 300		
2	Alexander A. Vandegrift	Section 2, Grave 4965-B		
3	Richard E. Byrd	Section 2, Grave 4969-1		
4	Frank Jack Fletcher	Section 2, Grave 4736-E		
5	John K. Koelsch	Section 30, Grave 1123-RH		
6	Isaiah Mays	Section 1, Grave 630-B		
7	Arthur MacArthur	Section 2, Grave 856-A		
8	Bartholomew Diggins	Section 13, Grave 5400-15		
9	Humbert Roque Versace	Section MG, Grave 108		
10	Tomb of the Unknown Soldier	Tomb of the Unknown Soldier		

★ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ★



Medal of Honor medals from three departments, 2021. (AEA)

THE MEDAL OF HONOR

The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor that can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the armed services of the United States. It is awarded to service members who distinguish themselves “conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of [their] life above and beyond the call of duty.” More than 400 Medal of Honor recipients are laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, from conflicts ranging from the Civil War to current operations.

On December 9, 1861, Iowa Senator James W. Grimes introduced a bill to “promote the efficiency of the Navy” by producing and distributing “medals of honor... which shall be bestowed upon such petty officers, seamen, landsmen and marines as shall distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other seaman-like qualities.” President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill on December 21, 1861, creating the Navy’s Medal of Honor.

Two months later, on February 17, 1862, Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson introduced a bill “for the presentation of ‘medals of honor’ to enlisted men of the army and volunteer forces who have or who may distinguish themselves in battle.” On July 12, 1862, the Army Medal of Honor was established. In 1863, Congress made Army officers eligible for the Medal of Honor. Naval officers were not eligible until 1915. On August 10, 1956, Congress authorized the United States Air Force (established as a separate service branch in 1947) to create its own Medal of Honor.

Throughout its history, the standards for the Medal of Honor have changed, although it has always been an award for valorous combat actions. In June 1897, Congress added three requirements for awarding the Medal: there must be witness statements, recipients must be recommended by someone other than themselves, and the recommendation must be submitted within one year of the action. In 2013, Congress extended the recommendation timeline to three years after the action. In 1916, Congress established a monthly pension for Medal of Honor recipients over 65 years old. Today, all Medal of Honor recipients receive this pension, regardless of age.

As of 2022, over 3,500 Medals of Honor have been awarded, including to nine Unknown Soldiers and 19 double recipients. This tour contains a selection of Arlington’s Medal of Honor recipients buried or memorialized in the northern section of the cemetery.



The Badge of Military Merit, created by George Washington during the Revolutionary War. It was America’s first military medal of valor and eventually became the Purple Heart, undated. (DoD)

SERGEANT CORNELIUS CHARLTON



WALKING TOUR STOP 1 Section 40, Grave 300

BIRTH: June 24, 1929, Eastgulf, WV

DEATH: June 2, 1951, Chipo-ri, Korea

Cornelius Charlton was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for displaying “indomitable courage, superb leadership and gallant self-sacrifice” in battle during the Korean War.

EARLY & PERSONAL LIFE: One of 17 children, Charlton was the son of a West Virginia coal miner. His family later moved to the Bronx in New York City.

CAREER: After graduating from high school, Charlton joined the Army in 1946. He was initially sent to West Germany to serve in the occupation army stationed there after World War II. When the Korean War began in 1950, Charlton was stationed in Japan, as part of its post-World War II U.S. occupation. Requesting combat service, he transferred to Company C, 1st Battalion of the 24th Infantry Regiment – the Army’s last segregated African American combat unit.

On June 2, 1951, the 24th Infantry Regiment was ordered to take control of a hill near Chipo-ri, South Korea. When the platoon’s white commanding officer was wounded during the first assault, 21-year-old Charlton took command. During the failed second attempt to take the hill, Charlton killed six enemy soldiers and destroyed two machine-gun nests. Suffering from a severe chest wound, he led his men in a third attempt to take control of the hill. This time, the men gained control of the crest of the ridge, and Charlton charged the remaining enemy fortifications alone. He destroyed the enemy encampment, and saved the lives of his men, before dying from his wounds. Charlton posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions.

Because of an administrative error, Charlton’s family was not notified that he was eligible for burial at Arlington National Cemetery, and he was buried in a small cemetery in West Virginia. In 1989, a group of Medal of Honor recipients found Charlton’s gravesite in poor condition. They assisted in an effort to have Charlton reinterred in a West Virginia cemetery maintained by the American Legion (a veterans’ organization). In 2008, one of Charlton’s nieces began advocating that he be reinterred in Arlington National Cemetery, and on November 12, 2008, he was laid to rest for a final time in a ceremony attended by family members, Korean War veterans, and members of Congress.

LEGACY: In addition to his Medal of Honor, Charlton was also awarded the Purple Heart. His actions and sacrifice on June 2, 1951, saved the lives of the men in his platoon. In 1990, Colonel John Cash, the Army’s acting chief of military history, said, “Charlton showed the stuff that great soldiers are made of.”¹ Charlton was one of only two African American men awarded the Medal of Honor for actions performed during the Korean War.



*Sergeant Cornelius Charlton, undated.
(U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command)*



Men of the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea, 1950. (NARA)

MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR



From the Welcome Center, turn right on Eisenhower Dr and pass through both sets of gates. Turn right on Custis Walk. Turn left into Section 40 as the road bulges. Charlton’s grave is six rows back.



Charlton’s family meets with Secretary of the Army Frank Pace in 1952, as Charlton is recognized with the Medal of Honor. (Truman Presidential Library)

WHO IS AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR?



The Medal of Honor has not always held the prestige that it holds today, and it is not the oldest medal of valor. General George Washington created the first American military medal of valor, the Badge of Military Merit, during the Revolutionary War. This medal was one of the first awards for common soldiers and Washington awarded the medal to three sergeants in the Continental Army. The medal then disappeared from use for 150 years, seemingly forgotten.

When the Medal of Honor was created during the Civil War, it was the only military medal of valor in use and was distributed widely. It remained the only military medal for exemplary service until World War I, when the U.S. military introduced the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal and the Silver Star. The Purple Heart was created in 1932, when U.S. Army Chief of Staff Douglas MacArthur revived, and renamed, the former Badge of Military Merit. Reflecting the Medal of Honor's changing significance, Congress has updated the award criteria throughout its history. At times, this has resulted in the military rescinding Medals of Honor; more often, it results in previously overlooked individuals finally getting the recognition they deserve.

In 1916, Congress directed the Army to review all Medals of Honor awarded since the Civil War to determine if any medals were wrongly awarded — mainly due to clerical error or failing to meet the “standard established by the authorities at the time of the award.” After reviewing all 2,625 medals, the board rescinded 911, including the only medal ever awarded to a woman. In 1977, Congress restored Mary Edwards Walker's medal, and she remains the only female Medal of Honor recipient.

In the 1990s, Congress began ordering the Army and Navy to review honorary medals given to minority service members during World Wars I and II to determine if any awards should have been Medals of Honor. On January 13, 1997, President Bill Clinton presented the Medal of Honor to seven Black World War II veterans and their families. At the time of the ceremony, Vernon Baker (Section 59, Grave 4408) was the only one of the seven still alive. In 2000, 22 Asian-Pacific Americans' Distinguished Service Crosses were upgraded to Medals of Honor.

In 2002, Congress ordered the Department of Defense to perform a systematic review of Jewish, Hispanic, and African American war records from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War to ensure no Medals of Honor were denied because of prejudice. On March 18, 2014, President Barack Obama awarded 24 new Medals of Honor.

Systematic reviews of minority service members' war records are ongoing. As of 2022, the Department of Defense is reviewing World War I Medals of Honor, which have not been included in any previous reviews. Although more than 350,000 Black Americans served in World War I, only white service members received this highest honor. Speaking about this effort, Missouri Senator Roy Blunt said, “We cannot erase the discrimination minority service members faced, but we can make sure their heroic deeds are acknowledged and honored.”²



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Morris, Master Sgt. Jose Rodela, and Sgt. Santiago J. Erevia, after receiving the Medal of Honor, March 18, 2014. (Mikki L. Sprenkle)

Army Sgt. Ashley Randall accepts the Medal of Honor on behalf of her grandfather, Army Pvt. Demensio Rivera, for his actions in Korea in 1951, March 18, 2014. (DoD)

REFLECT

- Why is it important to retroactively, and usually posthumously, award the Medal of Honor to minority service members?
- What is the value in medals of valor?
- What are the benefits of restricting a medal to only enlisted servicemembers? The drawbacks?

MAJOR GENERAL ALEXANDER VANDEGRIFT



WALKING TOUR STOP 2 Section 2, Grave 4965

BIRTH: March 13, 1887, Charlottesville, VA

DEATH: MAY 8, 1973, Bethesda, MD

During World War II, Vandegrift earned the Medal of Honor for his "tenacity, courage and resourcefulness" during the Guadalcanal campaign, the Allies' first large-scale offensive, and first victory, in the Pacific Theater.

EARLY & PERSONAL LIFE: Vandegrift was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, where his father worked as a successful architect and contractor. From a young age, Vandegrift was fascinated by the military – both his grandfathers served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, and one of his older cousins fought in the Spanish-American War. After graduating high school, Vandegrift was not accepted to the Military Academy at West Point as he had hoped; instead, he attended the University of Virginia in his hometown.

When Vandegrift attempted to secure an Army commission in 1908, there were no vacancies. However, he did secure a commission as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps. He remained in the Marine Corps for the remainder of his military career. Vandegrift's only son, Alexander Archer Vandegrift Jr., is also buried at Arlington (Section 2, Grave 4872-5).

CAREER: On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Days later, the United States declared war on Japan and officially entered World War II. Soon after Pearl Harbor, Japan began occupying nations in the Pacific to form a defensive barrier around itself; these included the Philippines, Guam, and the Solomon Islands (Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Florida Island). At the Battle of Midway in June 1942, the United States won its first victory against Japan, defending the island from Japanese occupation. With this victory in hand, the United States turned its attention from defensive actions to offensive actions.

On August 7, 1942, the U.S. Marines made the first amphibious landings on the Solomon Islands. Over the next five months, Major General Vandegrift led the 1st Marine Division and the Allies to victory, capturing Japan's partially-constructed air field on Guadalcanal and forcing Japan to withdraw from the islands. Vandegrift's previous service in Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and China prepared him well for the challenges of jungle warfare. For his leadership during the campaign, the Navy awarded Vandegrift the Medal of Honor. His citation stated:

"With the adverse factors of weather, terrain, and disease making his task a difficult and hazardous undertaking, and hazardous undertaking, and with his command eventually including sea, land, and air forces of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, Maj. Gen. Vandegrift achieved marked success in commanding the initial landings of the U.S. forces in the Solomon Islands and in their subsequent occupation. His tenacity, courage, and resourcefulness prevailed against a strong, determined, and experienced enemy, and the gallant fighting spirit of the men under his inspiring leadership enabled them to withstand aerial, land, and sea bombardment, to surmount all obstacles, and leave a disorganized and ravaged enemy."



Vandegrift military portrait, 1947. (NHHC)



Vandegrift (right) scanning the horizon on Guadalcanal, 1943. (NHHC)

MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR



Retrace your steps and turn right onto Roosevelt Dr. Immediately after Grant Dr, Vandegrift's grave is on the right, four rows from the intersection and the fourth plot from the left.

CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE

MAJOR GENERAL ALEXANDER VANDEGRIFT

The Allied victory at Guadalcanal ended Japanese expansion in the Pacific, and Japan remained on the defensive for the remainder of the war. The victory also boosted the morale of the Allied forces, proving that they could defeat Japan.

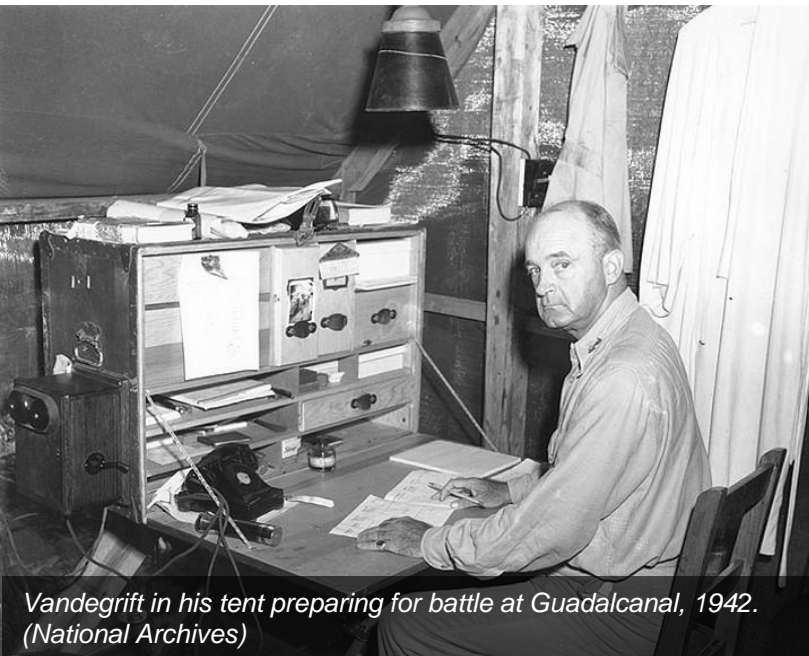
As a preface for the U.S. Marine Corps' history of the campaign, Vandegrift wrote:

"We struck at Guadalcanal to halt the advance of the Japanese. We did not know how strong he was, nor did we know his plans. We knew only that he was moving down the island chain and that he had to be stopped.

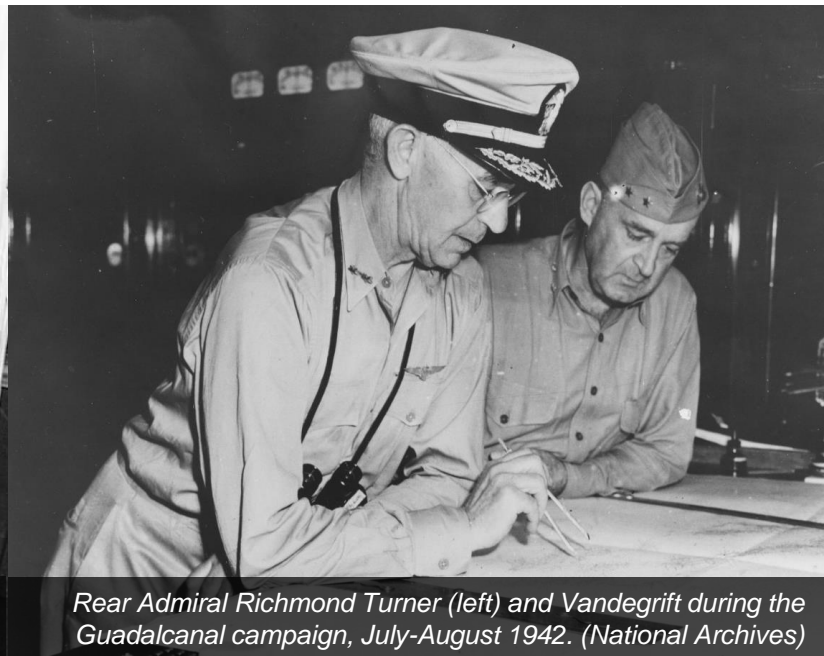
We were as well trained and as well armed as time and our peacetime experience allowed us to be. We needed combat to tell us how effective our training, our doctrines, and our weapons had been.

We tested them against the enemy, and we found that they worked. From that moment in 1942, the tide turned, and the Japanese never again advanced."³

LEGACY: Major General Vandegrift was one of the first Marines to earn both the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross in World War II, and the first Marine to hold a four-star rank while on active duty. He served as commandant of the Marine Corps from 1944 to 1948, overseeing the Corps' expansion through the end of the war and ensuring its continued postwar significance. Known for his leadership, Vandegrift wrote that "loyalty down [the chain of command] must occur simultaneously with loyalty up."⁴



Vandegrift in his tent preparing for battle at Guadalcanal, 1942. (National Archives)



Rear Admiral Richmond Turner (left) and Vandegrift during the Guadalcanal campaign, July-August 1942. (National Archives)



Guadalcanal's beaches during the invasion of D-Day, 1942. (National Archives)

REAR ADMIRAL RICHARD BYRD



WALKING TOUR STOP 3

Section 2, Grave 4969-1

BIRTH: October 25, 1888, Winchester, VA

DEATH: March 11, 1957, Boston, MA

Navy officer and explorer Rear Admiral Richard Byrd received a peacetime Medal of Honor for his pioneering flight over the North Pole on May 9, 1926.

EARLY AND PERSONAL LIFE: A descendent of the wealthy and politically powerful Virginia Byrd family, Richard Evelyn Byrd was born into privilege. As a teenager, he traveled to visit family friends in the Philippines. That trip reportedly sparked his love for adventure, ships, and the sea. After attending the Virginia Military Institute and the University of Virginia, Byrd entered the United States Naval Academy at age 20. He graduated in 1912. Byrd married Marie Donaldson Ames in 1915. They had four children.

CAREER: After graduating, Byrd served with distinction on the USS Wyoming and the USS Dolphin; however, his career on the sea was soon cut short. While at the Naval Academy, Byrd fractured his ankle during a gymnastics routine. His ankle never healed properly, and after reinjuring it in 1916, he was forced to retire from sea commands for the remainder of his career. Yet Byrd did not allow this setback to stop him. When he returned to active duty in 1917 after the United States' entry into World War I, he began aviation training at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. He qualified as a naval aviator in June 1918.

Byrd quickly embraced aviation. While at Pensacola, he began flying experimental solo flights out of sight of land, with only a compass to guide him. He also developed an indicator to calculate wind drift at sea for when the horizon was not visible, and helped solve navigation issues for the Navy's first transatlantic flight in 1919. As a Congressional liaison officer for the Navy, Byrd helped defend naval aviation (many in the Army, Navy, and Congress thought the Navy, a sea-based service, had no reason to use airplanes) and advocated for the creation of the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics. For this work, he was promoted to lieutenant commander in June 1924 via special legislation (at the time, the only way for retired officers to advance).

Byrd next turned his attention to Arctic aviation. After the Navy denied Byrd support for an Arctic expedition, Byrd secured private funding. In 1926, he and Floyd Bennett (Section 3, Grave 1852-B) attempted the first flight over the North Pole. On May 9, 1926, in a Fokker Trimotor piloted by Bennett, he traversed the North Pole in a 16-hour flight. Although some have contended that Byrd and Bennett did not make it all the way to the North Pole, the flight — 1,545 miles amid extremely strong winds — was nonetheless a significant accomplishment. Along with Bennett, Byrd received the Medal of Honor for the flight.

Byrd led five Antarctic expeditions during his lifetime and helped popularize Antarctic exploration. On November 28, 1929, he achieved the first flight to and from the South Pole. The following month, Congress promoted him to rear admiral (retired). Byrd was 67 years old at the time of his last expedition, in 1955.

LEGACY: Byrd pushed the boundaries of aviation and exploration by pioneering new navigation techniques and undertaking risky flights to the poles of the Earth. He is one of 193 men awarded the Medal of Honor for non-combat actions.



Byrd with his dog "Igloo" on his first Antarctic mission on April 12, 1930. (National Archives)



Lt. Cdr. Byrd before his 1927 transatlantic flight. (LOC)



MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR

Richard Byrd's grave is two rows in front of Vandegrift, six plots from the left.



HEADSTONE SYMBOLS



Medal of Honor recipients' headstones are often engraved with a Medal of Honor symbol. This is the only symbol allowed on government-provided headstones, aside from religious emblems and the Southern Cross for Confederate graves.

The symbols are based on the Medal of Honor's medal design. As each branch has a unique medal, some with multiple redesigns, you'll notice a few different symbols on Medal of Honor recipients' headstones.

Timeline of Medal and Symbol Designs



1862

Navy Medal of Honor design adopted. The design shows Minerva, the Roman goddess of war, dispelling discord. She holds a shield decorated with the US coat of arms.

1904

Army Medal of Honor redesigned to distinguish it from more common medals. A wreath of oak leaves surround a simplified portrait of Minerva.

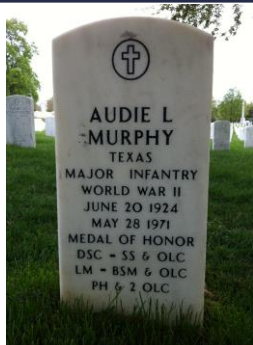


1919

Navy establishes the Tiffany Cross to distinguish between combat and non-combat Medal of Honor recipients. Designed by Tiffany and Co., the medal was highly unpopular and was retired in 1942.

1965

Air Force Medal of Honor established. While similar to the Army medal, Lady Liberty replaces Minerva in the center.



Many people assume that since the Medal of Honor is so prestigious, its recipients have the most ornate headstones in the cemetery. In reality, some of the most well-known figures buried at Arlington have the simplest headstones. World War II hero and Medal of Honor recipient, Audie Murphy is one of the most decorated soldiers in United States history but has a simple government-provided headstone with no Medal of Honor Symbol or gold lettering.

REFLECTION

- Some Medal of Honor recipients do not have the symbol on their headstone. Why might someone not want to include the image?
- What are the similarities between each symbol? How are they different?

REAR ADMIRAL FRANK JACK FLETCHER



WALKING TOUR STOP 4 Section 2, Grave 4736-E

BIRTH: April 29, 1885, Marshalltown, IA

DEATH: April 25, 1973, Bethesda, MD

Frank Jack Fletcher earned the Medal of Honor for rescuing refugees during the United States occupation of Veracruz, Mexico in 1914.

EARLY AND PERSONAL LIFE: Fletcher was born into a naval family; two of his uncles were naval officers. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1906.

CAREER: After graduating, Fletcher served aboard various battleships and destroyers. He earned his first command in March 1912. In April 1914, he was serving aboard the USS Florida as an aide to his uncle, Rear Admiral Frank Friday Fletcher (Section 3 Grave 1933).

On April 9, 1914, Mexican officials detained nine American sailors for entering an off-limits area in the port city of Tampico, setting off a diplomatic crisis between Mexico and the United States. Although the Mexican officers released the sailors within an hour, Rear Admiral Henry T. Mayo demanded that General Ignacios Morelos Zaragoza apologize, which he did, and publicly fire a 21-gun salute to the American flag, which he refused.

President Woodrow Wilson then ordered the U.S. Navy to occupy the nearby port of Veracruz. He gave the order not only because General Zaragoza refused to salute the American flag, but also because he knew that an arms shipment for Mexican President Victoriano Huerta was scheduled to arrive at the port within the month. Since General Huerta had seized power the previous year, tensions had been increasing between Mexico and the United States, and the Tampico affair proved to be the breaking point.

On April 21, 1914, Fletcher's uncle, Frank Friday Fletcher, directed the occupation of Veracruz port. The American sailors and marines invading the port encountered resistance from the Mexican army, as well as from armed civilians and prisoners released from the city jail. On April 22, Frank Friday Fletcher commanded his troops to occupy the entire city of Veracruz, rather than just the port. The United States occupied Veracruz until November 1914. During the initial battle, Americans suffered fewer than 100 casualties, while the Mexican army and citizenry suffered at least 550 casualties.

Then-Lt. Frank Jack Fletcher was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions evacuating refugees during the battle on April 21 and 22. His citation stated, "Under fire, Lt. Fletcher was eminent and conspicuous in performance of his duties. He was in charge of the [transport ship] Esperanza and succeeded in getting on board over 350 refugees, many of them after the conflict had commenced. Although the ship was under fire, being struck more than 30 times, he succeeded in getting all the refugees placed in safety." Later in the battle, Fletcher "establish[ed] friendly relations with the Mexican soldiers" while "in charge of the train conveying refugees under a flag of truce"; this "was hazardous duty, as it was believed that the track was mined, and a small error in dealing with the Mexican guard of soldiers might readily have caused a conflict."

During World War II, Fletcher, now promoted to rear admiral, commanded the U.S. Navy Task Forces during pivotal Pacific Theater battles in the spring and summer of 1942, including the Battles of Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal, and Eastern Solomon Islands. This series of battles, and Midway in particular, proved decisive in turning the tide of the Pacific War in the Allies' favor. Fletcher retired from the Navy in 1947.

LEGACY: Fletcher was one of 56 service members to receive the Medal of Honor for actions during the Veracruz occupation. Some Americans, including some of the medal recipients, argued that too many medals were awarded for this campaign, thus reducing its significance. Regardless, Admiral Fletcher served with distinction during the occupation of Veracruz and throughout his Navy career.



Fletcher stands aboard ship, September 1942. (U.S. Navy)



MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR

Leaving Byrd's gravesite, walk to the right and turn left on Grant Dr. At the benches, cut into Section 2 near the bushes. Under the tree in the corner, Fletcher is the first headstone in the fourth row from the benches.

LIEUTENANT (JUNIOR GRADE) JOHN KELVIN KOELSCH



WALKING TOUR STOP 5 Section 30, Grave 1123-RH

BIRTH: December 22, 1925, London, England

DEATH: October 16, 1951, prison camp, North Korea

Lt. (j.g.) Koelsch was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor after voluntarily conducting a risky helicopter rescue in North Korea during the Korean War, and for his courageous actions as a prisoner of war. He died while imprisoned.

EARLY AND PERSONAL LIFE: Koelsch spent much of his early life in London and Switzerland, where his father worked as a banking executive. When Koelsch's father died in 1937, the family permanently returned to the United States. After graduating from Princeton University in 1942, he joined the Naval Reserve as an aviation cadet.

CAREER: Koelsch joined Helicopter Squadron 1 at the start of the Korean War in 1950. In June 1951, he was transferred to pilot rescue duty on board the USS Princeton, stationed outside Wonsan, North Korea. On July 3, 1951, Koelsch and Aviation Machinist's Mate Third Class George M. Neal (Section 76, Grave 1082) volunteered to fly into North Korea to rescue Captain James V. Wilkins, who had been shot down while conducting a reconnaissance mission southwest of Wonsan.

Lt. (j.g.) Koelsch's Medal of Honor citation stated:

"Although darkness was rapidly approaching when information was received that a marine aviator had been shot down and was trapped by the enemy in mountainous terrain deep in hostile territory, Lt. (J.G.) Koelsch voluntarily flew a helicopter to the reported position of the downed airman in an attempt to effect a rescue.

With an almost solid overcast concealing everything below the mountain peaks, he descended in his unarmed and vulnerable aircraft without the accompanying fighter escort to an extremely low altitude beneath the cloud level and began a systematic search. Despite the increasingly intense enemy fire, which struck his helicopter on one occasion, he persisted in his mission until he succeeded in locating the downed pilot, who was suffering from serious burns on the arms and legs.

While the victim was being hoisted into the aircraft, it was struck again by an accurate burst of hostile fire and crashed on the side of the mountain. Quickly extricating [AD3 Neal and Capt. Wilkins] from the wreckage, Lt. (J.G.) Koelsch led them from the vicinity in an effort to escape from hostile troops, evading the enemy forces for nine days and rendering such medical attention as possible to [the] severely burned [Wilkins] until all were captured.

Up to the time of his death while still a captive of the enemy, Lt. (J.G.) Koelsch steadfastly refused to aid his captors in any manner and served to inspire his fellow prisoners by his fortitude and consideration for others. His great personal valor and heroic spirit of self-sacrifice throughout sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service."

While imprisoned, Koelsch did not cooperate with his captors. He was tortured and held in isolation. Still, other POWs described him as kind and helpful, and reported that his courage and self-sacrifice inspired them to keep fighting to survive. After three months in the prison camp, Koelsch died of malnutrition and dysentery on October 16, 1951. Both Neal and Wilkins survived imprisonment and the war.

LEGACY: Lt. (j.g.) Koelsch was the first helicopter pilot to be awarded the Medal of Honor. His actions saved Captain Wilkins' life, and his courage and sacrifice inspired other POWs. Koelsch was interred at Arlington National Cemetery on October 14, 1955, after North Korea returned his remains following the Korean Armistice Agreement.



Koelsch military portrait, 1950 (U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command)



MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR

Return to Sheridan Dr and turn right. Turn left on Sherman Dr. After the road curves, turn left into Section 30. Koelsch's grave is in the middle of the first row that parallels Sherman Dr.

CORPORAL ISAIAH MAYS



WALKING TOUR STOP 6 Section 1, Grave 630-B

BIRTH: February 16, 1858, Carters Bridge, VA

DEATH: May 2, 1925, Phoenix, AZ

Isaiah Mays was one of only two African American soldiers to receive the Medal of Honor during the Indian Wars (as the Army called these conflicts on the western frontier) of the late 19th century.

EARLY & PERSONAL LIFE: Isaiah Mays was born into slavery in Carters Bridge, Virginia. He moved with his family to Ohio after he was emancipated in 1865.

CAREER: Mays joined the Army in September 1881. By May 1889, he was a corporal in Company B of the 24th Infantry Regiment, one of the famous “Buffalo Soldier” all-Black regiments, stationed in the Arizona Territory.

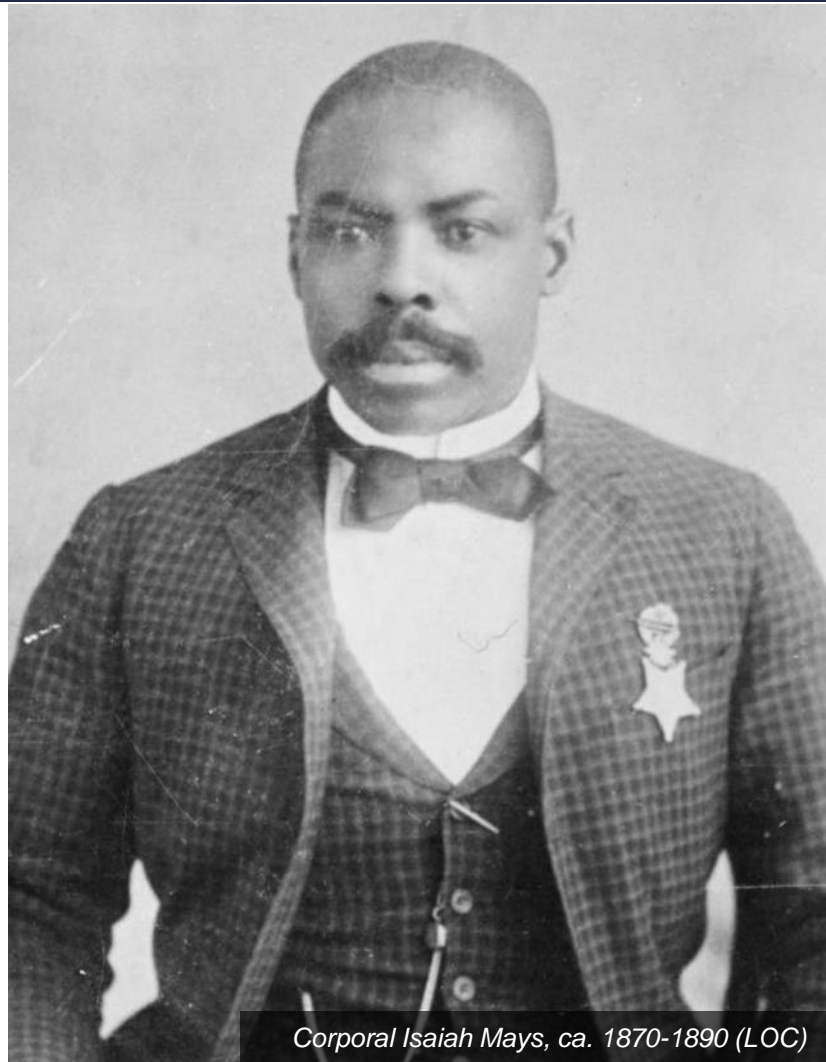
On May 11, 1889, Mays and nine other men from his regiment were escorting the Army paymaster and over \$28,000 (almost \$800,000 today) in gold and silver coins from Fort Grant to Fort Thomas when they were ambushed by bandits.

After his commander, Sergeant Benjamin Brown, was wounded, Mays assumed command of the regiment and ordered his men to defend the gold and silver. When the fighting ended, however, almost every man in the regiment was wounded and the bandits had escaped with the money. Despite having been shot in both legs, Mays walked and crawled two miles to a nearby ranch for help.

Although local authorities arrested suspects days after the so-called “Wham Paymaster Robbery,” and Mays and his men testified against them in court, the jury acquitted every suspect. No one was ever held accountable for the robbery, and the money was never recovered. On February 18, 1890, Mays was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Mays served in the Army until 1893, and then worked as a laborer in Arizona and New Mexico. He died in 1925 at an Arizona state hospital that housed tuberculosis patients, the mentally ill and those living in poverty.

LEGACY: For over 75 years after his death, Mays’ gravesite in Arizona was simply marked by a brick with a number etched onto it. In 2001, a group of veterans worked with hospital staff to locate the grave and replace the marker with a Medal of Honor headstone from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. A few years later, another veterans group advocated that Mays be reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery and in 2009 a motorcycle escort of veterans followed his remains as they were transported across the country. Mays was reburied at Arlington National Cemetery on May 29, 2009.



Corporal Isaiah Mays, ca. 1870-1890 (LOC)



MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR

Return to Sherman Dr and turn left. After passing the James Tanner Amphitheater, make a slight right and follow the walking path adjacent to Meigs Dr. Mays's grave is to the left of the water fountain, seven rows back from the path.

The “Indian Wars,” as the U.S. government called them, were a series of 19th-century military conflicts between the United States and various American Indian tribes or nations, including the Lakota, Comanche, Sioux, and Cheyenne. These wars started with the Dakota War of 1862 and ended with the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. The United States waged these wars to promote and protect American westward expansion, to the detriment of Native communities throughout the west. During the Indian Wars, the United States massacred American Indians and forced them onto reservations or to assimilate into American culture and society.

LT. GENERAL ARTHUR MACARTHUR JR.



WALKING TOUR STOP 7 Section 2, Grave 856-A

BIRTH: June 2, 1845, Springfield, MA

DEATH: September 5, 1912, Milwaukee, WI

Known by some as “The Boy Colonel,” Arthur MacArthur Jr. earned the Medal of Honor at age 18 for his bravery during the Civil War Battle of Missionary Ridge.

EARLY & PERSONAL LIFE: Arthur MacArthur Jr. is one of only two fathers to share the distinction of being awarded the Medal of Honor with his son, General Douglas MacArthur. (The other father and son pair is Theodore Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt Jr.)

MacArthur grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where his father practiced law and held political office. When the Civil War erupted in 1861, MacArthur was only 16 years old. Despite his age, he was determined to enlist in the Army. He joined the 24th Wisconsin Volunteers, where he quickly made a name for himself. MacArthur married Mary Pinkney “Pinky” Hardy in 1875. They had three sons.

CAREER: MacArthur earned his Medal of Honor on November 25, 1863, during the Battle of Missionary Ridge in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Before the battle, the Confederate Army had defeated the U.S. Army at the Battle of Chickamauga, near the border of Tennessee and Georgia, forcing the U.S. Army to retreat to Chattanooga. Confederate General Braxton Bragg followed the Army to Chattanooga and besieged the city, cutting off U.S. Army supply lines.

On the third day of the battle, November 25, MacArthur and the 24th Wisconsin regiment advanced on the Confederate Army under heavy fire. Morale was draining and the line began to waver. Then, the 24th's standard bearer was killed and the regiment's flag, which they had carried since leaving Milwaukee, fell to the ground. Without hesitation, 18-year-old first lieutenant MacArthur ran forward to pick up the flag. He raised the flag high, cried, “On, Wisconsin!” and ran toward the Confederate line. Behind him, the 24th regiment and the rest of the U.S. Army rallied to his cry and broke the Confederate line, securing a U.S. victory.

For his actions during the battle, MacArthur was promoted to colonel and, on June 30, 1890, awarded the Medal of Honor. As his citation states, MacArthur “[s]eized the colors of his regiment at a critical moment and planted them on the captured works on the crest of Missionary Ridge.” This win was a major victory for the U.S. Army and set the stage for General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea the following year.

MacArthur left the military after the Civil War to practice law but returned a few months later. After the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), President William McKinley appointed him as military governor of the occupied Philippines.

LEGACY: On September 5, 1912, MacArthur attended a reunion of the 24th Wisconsin. While speaking, he suffered a stroke. He died moments later. According to his wishes, MacArthur was buried at a cemetery in Milwaukee with little fanfare and no military honors. He remains were reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery in 1926.



*Lt. General Arthur MacArthur Jr., undated.
(State Historical Society of Wisconsin)*

MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR



Retrace your steps back to the James Tanner Amphitheater and turn right on Sheridan Dr. As the road bends, MacArthur's grave stands alone in the first row.

General Douglas MacArthur is not buried at Arlington National Cemetery. He is buried at the MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia (his mother's hometown), with his wife, Jean.



*MacArthur Jr. in his Civil War uniform, 1865.
(State Historical Society of Wisconsin)*

ORDINARY SEAMAN BARTHOLOMEW DIGGINS



WALKING TOUR STOP 8 Section 13, Grave 5400-15

BIRTH: October 9, 1843, Ireland

DEATH: February 24, 1917, Key West, FL

Bartholomew Diggins was one of approximately 100 service members awarded the Medal of Honor for actions during the Civil War Battle of Mobile Bay on August 5, 1864. The U.S. military awarded a total of 1,523 Medals of Honor during the Civil War – the most of any conflict.

EARLY & PERSONAL LIFE: Born in Ireland, Bartholomew Diggins immigrated to the United States at age five in 1848. He enlisted in the Navy in January 1862, claiming Baltimore, Maryland as his birthplace. He married Mary H. Wallace in 1870, and they had four children. After the war, Diggins served for nearly 25 years as captain of the watch for the State, War and Navy Department Building in Washington, D.C.

CAREER: During the Civil War, Bartholomew Diggins served aboard the USS Hartford under Rear Admiral David G. Farragut. He earned the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Mobile Bay.

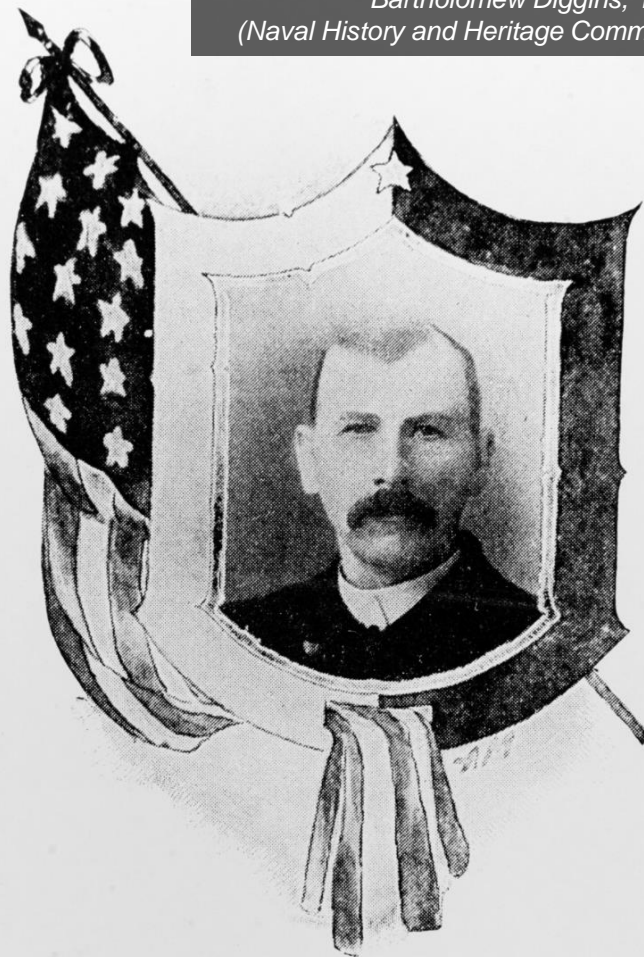
By August 1864, Mobile Bay was one of only two remaining operational ports in the Confederacy. On August 5, Rear Admiral Farragut led a fleet of ships into the harbor to take the port. Upon entering the bay, the USS Tecumseh struck a torpedo mine and sank.

The remaining ships, including the USS Hartford, which carried both Admiral Farragut and Ordinary Seaman Diggins, navigated through the minefield to battle the Confederate ships. After a few hours of point-blank firing, Confederate Admiral Franklin Buchanan, commander of the CSS Tennessee, surrendered. The nearby Fort Gaines and Fort Morgan, which guarded the bay's entrance, fell later that month. The city of Mobile did not fall until the following year.

Diggins' Medal of Honor citation stated that, "[d]espite damage to [the USS Hartford] and the loss of several men on board as enemy fire raked her decks, Diggins, as loader of a gun, remained steadfast at his post throughout the furious two-hour battle which resulted in the surrender of the rebel ram Tennessee and in the damaging and destruction of batteries at Fort Morgan." A newspaper report later claimed that Diggins "was shot down three times [and] [h]e continued to fight until he fell to the deck from exhaustion and loss of blood."

LEGACY: The U.S. victory at Mobile Bay cut off the last Confederate port in the Gulf of Mexico east of the Mississippi, which effectively blockaded the entire region. The victory, along with the U.S. Army capture of Atlanta, Georgia on September 2, 1864, helped secure President Abraham Lincoln's reelection in November.

Bartholomew Diggins, 1906.
(Naval History and Heritage Command)



BARTHOLOMEW DIGGINS,
Captain of the Watch, U. S. S. Hartford.

MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR



Return to the James Tanner Amphitheater and make a left onto Wilson Dr. On your right, there will be a small loop. From the center, walk straight into Section 13. In the first row, Diggins's grave is three plots to the left of three large headstones.



Artist's depiction of the Battle of Mobile Bay, 1864. (LOC)

CAPTAIN HUMBERT ROQUE "ROCKY" VERSACE



WALKING TOUR STOP 9

Section MG, Site 108

BIRTH: July 2, 1937, Honolulu, HI

DEATH: September 1965, Vietnam

During the Vietnam War, Versace was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for resisting capture by the Viet Cong and his "unyielding courage and bravery while a prisoner of war."

EARLY & PERSONAL LIFE: Humbert "Rocky" Versace was the first son of Colonel Humbert J. Versace (Section 13, Grave 494-2) and writer Marie Teresa Ríos, whose father immigrated to the United States from Puerto Rico. As the son of an Army officer, Versace grew up around the nation and world, including in Hawaii, Virginia, and Germany. Like his father, he attended West Point Military Academy, graduating in 1959.

CAREER: Commissioned as a second lieutenant, Versace earned a Ranger Tab and a Parachutist Badge. He volunteered to go to Vietnam, enrolling in Vietnamese language and military intelligence courses. In May 1962, he arrived in the Republic of Vietnam as an intelligence advisor. His Medal of Honor citation described his actions on October 29, 1963, less than two weeks before the end of his tour:

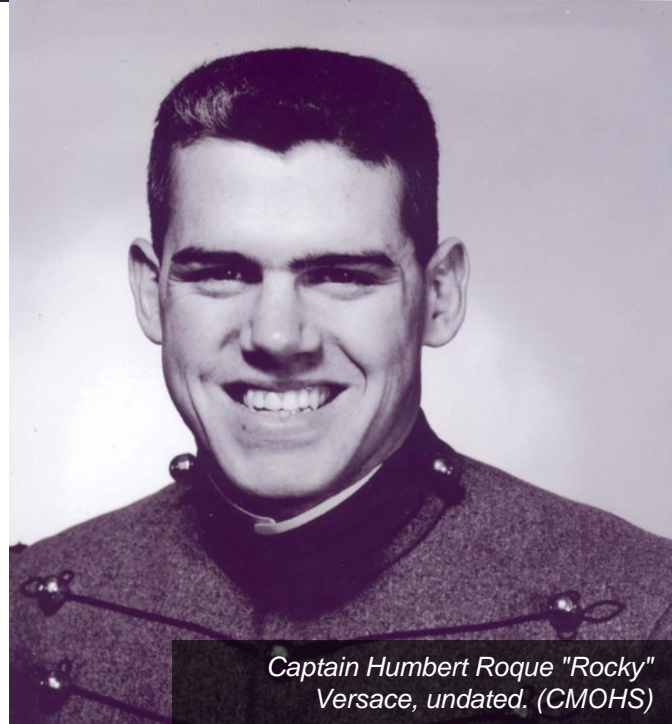
"Captain Versace and the patrol came under sudden and intense mortar, automatic weapons, and small arms fire from elements of a heavily armed enemy battalion. As the battle raged, Captain Versace, although severely wounded in the knee and back by hostile fire, fought valiantly and continued to engaged enemy targets. Weakened by his wounds and fatigued by the fierce firefight, Captain Versace stubbornly resisted capture by the over-powering Viet Cong force with the last full measure of his strength and ammunition."

"Taken prisoner by the Viet Cong, [Versace] exemplified the tenets of the Code of Conduct from the time he entered into Prisoner of War status." According to the DoD Prisoner and Missing Personnel Office, "Versace demonstrated exceptional leadership by communicating positively to his fellow prisoners. He lifted morale when he passed messages by singing them into the popular songs of the day. When he used his Vietnamese language skills to protest improper treatment to the guards, CPT Versace was again put into leg irons and gagged. Unyielding, he steadfastly continued to berate the guards for their inhuman treatment. The Communist guards simply elected harsher treatment by placing him in an isolation box, to put him out of earshot and to keep him away from the other US POWs for the remainder of his stay in camp. However, CPT Versace continued to leave notes in the latrine for his fellow inmates, and continued to sing even louder."

"During his captivity, Captain Versace was segregated in an isolated prisoner of war cage, manacled in irons for prolonged periods of time, and placed on extremely reduced ration. The enemy was unable to break his indomitable will, his faith in God, and his trust in the United States of America." Versace tried to escape four times, and his captors ultimately chained him in an isolation cell. Still, he tried to boost fellow prisoners' morale by singing popular songs; his fellow prisoners reported that he was last heard loudly singing "God Bless America." On September 26, 1965, North Vietnamese radio announced that he had been executed.

Before his death, Versace had told his family that he planned to study divinity to become a Catholic priest. He had hoped to return to Vietnam to preach Catholicism. Capt. Versace posthumously received a Silver Star, which was upgraded, on July 8, 2002, to the Medal of Honor. His remains have never been recovered.

LEGACY: Sergeant Dan Pitzer, who was captured and imprisoned along with Versace, said of him, "He was the finest example of an officer I have known.... Once, Rocky told our captors that as long as he was true to God and true to himself, what was waiting for him after this life was far better than anything that could happen now. So he told them that they might as well kill him then and there if the price of his life was getting more from him than name, rank, and serial number."⁵



Captain Humbert Roque "Rocky" Versace, undated. (CMOHS)



MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR

Facing Diggins's headstone, turn left and walk along the first row of Section 13 and into Section MG. Versace's headstone is in the bottom corner of the section, the second to last plot from the road and the end of the row.

The Code of Conduct was created in 1955 in response to POW treatment during the Korean War. It requires servicemembers to resist capture until resistance is fruitless; continue to resist after capture; provide their name, rank, service number and date of birth as outlined in the Geneva Convention; provide no information that could be harmful to the United States or fellow POWs; and take command of fellow prisoners if of senior rank.

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER



WALKING TOUR STOP 12 Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

This walking tour has introduced you to service members whose names will forever be linked to their heroic actions. Here at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, however, the highest military honors have been bestowed on service members whose names and actions are unknown.

Who Is Buried at the Tomb?

World War I resulted in thousands of service members' remains that could not be identified. To honor these "unknown soldiers," in 1920, Great Britain and France each selected one set of unidentified remains to be buried in a place of honor. The British and French unknowns received elaborate funerals that honored all of their nation's war dead. Inspired by these events, in 1921 the U.S. Congress approved a resolution that allowed a single unknown soldier to be brought back to the United States and buried at a tomb to be constructed in Arlington National Cemetery. This unknown soldier would represent all of the unknown soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the United States in World War I. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier would serve as a central place for Americans to mourn the war dead.

Although the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was built to honor an unknown soldier from World War I, it eventually became a national place to honor military service and sacrifice more broadly. Following World War II, many Americans supported the idea of interring and honoring an Unknown from that war. However, the start of the Korean War in 1950 delayed those plans. In August 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved the selection and interment of Unknowns from both World War II and the Korean War, and they were buried at the Tomb on Memorial Day in 1958.

Before the Vietnam War ended, Arlington National Cemetery began making preparations to add a third crypt to the Tomb. However, advances in technology meant that most recovered remains could be identified. On Memorial Day 1984, an Unknown from the Vietnam War, selected from a very limited group of candidates, was buried at the Tomb, despite the possibility that all American remains from that war might eventually be identifiable.

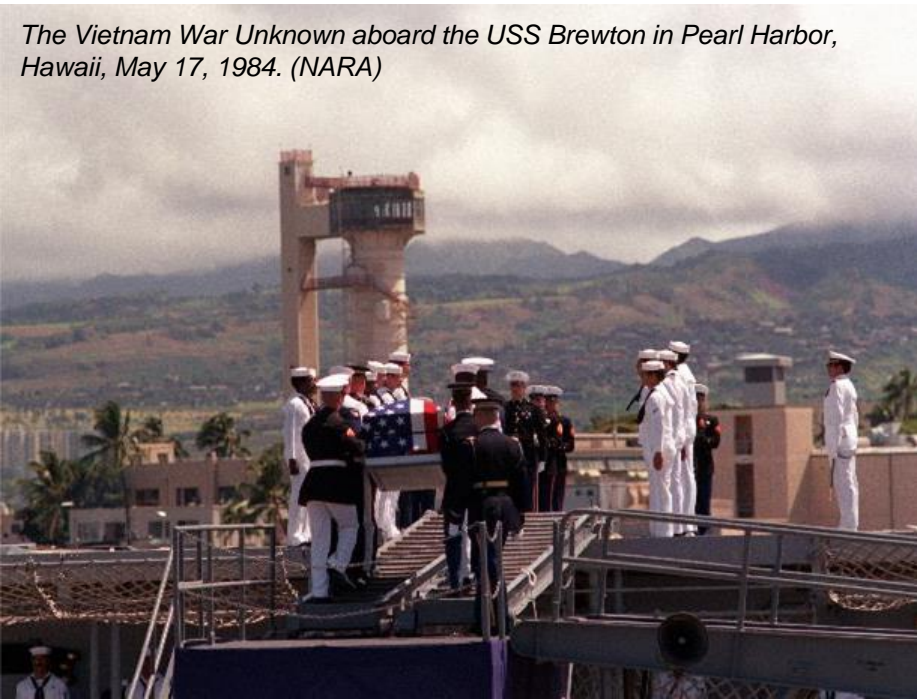
The high likelihood of positive identification, and advances in DNA technology, later led the Department of Defense (DoD) to decide to disinter the Vietnam War Unknown in 1998. Using DNA analysis, the DoD subsequently identified him as Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Joseph Blassie. In accordance with the wishes of his family, Blassie was reinterred at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis, Missouri. The crypt designated for the Vietnam War Unknown remains vacant. On September 17, 1999 – National POW/MIA Recognition Day – it was rededicated to honor all missing and unknown U.S. service members from the Vietnam War.



Disinterment ceremony for the Vietnam War Unknown, May 14, 1998. (DoD/Alicia K. Borlik)

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The Vietnam War Unknown aboard the USS Brewton in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, May 17, 1984. (NARA)



MEDAL OF HONOR WALKING TOUR

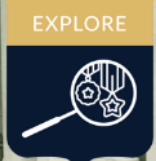
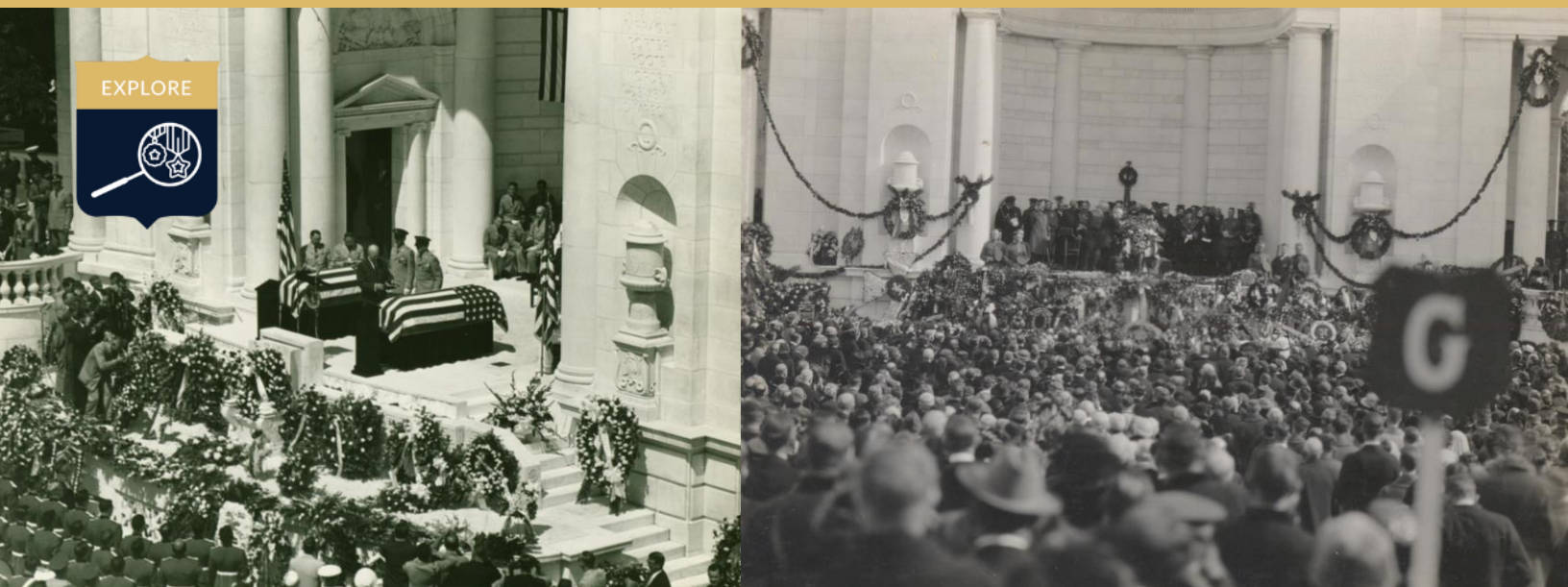


Return to Wilson Dr and turn right. Continue straight on Memorial Dr. You may observe the Tomb of Unknown Soldier from the steps on the back of Memorial Amphitheater.

Maintain an attitude of silence and respect and do not attempt to cross the railings or barriers around the Tomb.

During the changing of the guard, you will be asked to stand, but otherwise you may sit.

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER



What Honors Have They Been Given?

Before burial, all four Unknown Soldiers lay in state in the U.S. Capitol rotunda prior to being escorted to Arlington National Cemetery in a large military procession. Each received a state funeral, at which the president of the United States presented the Medal of Honor – in recognition of the fact that the Unknowns could have performed actions that merited this award. You can see these Medals of Honor, along with other honors bestowed upon the Unknown Soldiers, in the Memorial Amphitheater Display Room (at the top of the amphitheater stairs).

After World War I, the United States also awarded the Medal of Honor to unknown soldiers from Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Romania. They are the only Medal of Honor recipients from foreign militaries.

To protect the Tomb and to honor the service of the Unknown Soldiers, the Tomb is guarded 24/7 by soldiers of the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment, “The Old Guard.” The Tomb Guard marches 21 steps down the black mat behind the Tomb, turns and faces east for 21 seconds, turns and faces north for 21 seconds, and then takes 21 steps down the mat. Next, the Guard executes a sharp “shoulder-arms” movement to place his/her weapon on the shoulder closest to the visitors, signifying that he or she stands between the Tomb and any possible threat. The number 21 symbolizes the highest military honor that can be bestowed: the 21-gun salute.



Left: President Ronald Reagan presents the Medal of Honor to the Vietnam Unknown Soldier, May 28, 1984. (NARA)

Top, left to right: President Dwight D. Eisenhower presents the Medal of Honor to the Korean War Unknown Soldier, May 30, 1958. (U.S. Army); President Warren G. Harding presents the Medal of Honor to the World War I Unknown Soldier, November 11, 1921. (NARA)

REFLECT

The Medal of Honor has traditionally been awarded for individual acts of valor, and there is now a thorough process to confirm the details of an action nominated for the medal.

- What is the significance of awarding the Medal of Honor to the Unknown Soldiers?
- Why do you think such high honors have been bestowed upon these unknown or unidentified service members?

MEDAL OF HONOR – NORTH WALKING TOUR

NOTES

1. Quoted in Shawn Pogatchnik, "After 39 Years, a Town Honors Its Black Hero," Los Angeles Times, May 28, 1990.
2. Quoted in Bryan Bender, "Medal of Honor review sought for minority World War I heroes," Politico, April 18, 2019.
3. John L. Zimmerman, *The Guadalcanal Campaign* (Quantico, VA: U.S. Marine Corps History Division, 1949), iv.
4. Quoted in Jon T. Hoffman, "Alexander A. Vandegrift: 1944-1948," in *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, Allan R. Millett and Jack Shulimson, eds. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 285.
5. Quoted in U.S. Army, "Captain Humbert Roque Versace," accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.ikn.army.mil/apps/MIHOF/biographies/Versace,%20Humbert.pdf>.

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