

## John G. Rangos Sr. Keeps Medal of Honor, Heroism and History Alive

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NEW YORK – There are heroes in this country, soldiers who receive the highest honors and accolades for their bravery and valor on the battlefield. They often make the ultimate sacrifice, risking and giving their own lives under extremely dangerous, life-threatening circumstances to make sure their comrades escape or survive.

These soldiers are widely considered true patriots. They defend our country out of genuine and selfless interest in preserving our national security and freedom. They are real-life heroes, many of whom gave up their own tomorrows so that we could have today.

Staff Sergeant Salvatore A. Giunta (U.S. Army) is one such hero. He recently received the Medal of Honor from President Obama for risking his own life to save another wounded soldier from being captured in Afghanistan.

Congress passed an act establishing the Medal of Honor on December 21, 1861. The end of this calendar year will mark its 150th anniversary. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the U.S. Government. It is bestowed by the President of the United States on members of the armed forces who distinguish themselves “conspicuously by 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.” It is often awarded posthumously – more than half of the 3,471 Medals of Honor have been awarded since 1941 for conflicts dating

back to the Civil War.

There are only 85 living Medal of Honor recipients left. Sgt. Giunta is the first living recipient since the Vietnam War (ten others were awarded posthumously for their conduct and actions in the U.S.S. Liberty Incident, the Battle of Mogadishu and the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan).

But how many of us stop to think that even heroes like Sgt. Giunta have heroes? How many of us stop to consider patriotism of another order? If Medal of Honor recipients recognize patriotism in others, shouldn't we do the same?

The Congressional Medal of Honor Society recently honored one of the Greek American community's most prominent members for his unique sense of patriotism and contributions to this country: John G. Rangos Sr.

Chartered by Congress in 1958, the CMOH Society, which



AP/CHARLES DHARAPAK

**Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta of Hiawatha, Iowa watches President Obama's State of the Union address in Washington this past January 25. Giunta is the first living Medal of Honor recipient since the Vietnam War. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the United States Government.**



**The Congressional Medal of Honor Society honored Greek American magnate John G. Rangos in Dallas this past October with a special coin box collection containing the challenge coins of every Medal of Honor recipient, living and deceased, who has ever had a challenge coin struck. (L-R) Joe Foran, Alex Rangos, Mr. Rangos and Mike Thornton, a Medal of Honor recipient.**

consists exclusively of living Medal of Honor recipients, understands this basic concept, and honors distinguished and accomplished individuals with its National Patriot Award each year.

The members of the CMOH Society designed and presented their first Patriot Award in 1968. Since then, it has been presented regularly during their now-annual (formerly bi-annual) reunions to “distinguished Americans who exemplify the ideals that make our country strong... These Americans' dedication to freedom, love for their fellow man, and their allegiance to our flag with a full understanding of its demands are accepted without reservation ([www.homeofheroes.com](http://www.homeofheroes.com)).”

### PRESTIGIOUS ROSTER

The Patriot Award itself is a gold medallion bearing the seal of the CMOH Society on its face, with an inscription on the reverse side bearing the name of the recipient and brief details about the award. Its past recipients include heavyweights like Will Rogers (1979);

Presidents Ronald Reagan (1983) and George H.W. Bush (1995); General William C. Westmoreland (1986); Lee Iacocca (1989); Ross Perot (1993); Helen Robson Walton (1997); Bob and Elizabeth Dole (1998); Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf (2002); and Senator John McCain (2005). Mr. Rangos is also on that prestigious roster, having received his Patriot Award back in 1991, and was the Award's presenter for Mr. Perot in 1993.

During a special appreciation dinner in Dallas last October 25, the CMOH Society also presented Mr. Rangos with a special token of gratitude for all his support and contributions to the CMOH Society's foundation over the years the night before the 2010 National Patriot Award Gala, which honored billionaire financier T. Boone Pickens.

While both Mr. Perot, who ran for President as an Independent back in 1992, and Mr. Pickens have been key contributors to the CMOH Foundation in recent

years, the Rangos Family Foundation was the CMOH Foundation's main source of funding during the first three years of its inception in 1999, providing hundreds of thousands to help it get off the ground.

In recognition of this singular lifeline of funding in the CMOH Foundation's early years, as well as his ongoing support since then, the CMOH Society gave Mr. Rangos a special coin box containing challenge coins from all Medal of Honor recipients (living and deceased) since they started having their individual challenge coins struck.

Mr. Rangos, who made a fortune in the environmental management industry, is well known for his philanthropy, having given millions to hospitals and various institutions of higher learning to help finance and advance healthcare and education. He also founded International Orthodox Christian Charities in 1992, and remains a driving force behind IOCC, which has since become a successful and well-respected humanitarian agency that works with other major charitable organizations on a regular basis all over the world.

“Even heroes have heroes, and Medal of Honor recipients are no different from the rest of us when it comes to admiring the patriotism, courage and noble actions of others,” according to General Nick Kehoe (U.S. Air Force, retired), president of the CMOH Foundation, which Mr. Rangos founded to support the activities of the CMOH Society through outreach and collaborative efforts.

“John Rangos deserves the honor because of everything

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he's done for the Medal of Honor Society through the Medal of Honor Foundation. Years ago, he met a Medal of Honor recipient who was traveling to speak somewhere on his own dime, and John Rangos learned that many recipients were doing that without getting reimbursed. They do so because they think it's important, and they're in the limelight because of what they achieved in combat to receive this very prestigious Medal. And John Rangos thought, 'Medal of Honor Recipients shouldn't have to dig into their own pockets for that. We ought to help them do that.' So he started the Medal of Honor Foundation," Gen. Kehoe told the National Herald.

The coin box the CMOH Society presented to Mr. Rangos at the end of last October was also "very prestigious and very personal," Gen. Kehoe pointed out.

"The Appreciation Dinner was a little out of the ordinary. Typically, the Society hosts the annual Patriot Award Gala, but they decided to also honor John Rangos the night before giving Boone Pickens the Patriot Award last fall. They issued a coin box specifically in John Rangos' honor the night before the 2010 Patriot Award dinner. There are now more than 100 individual coins from both living and deceased Medal of Honor recipients, and John Rangos received a full set of those coins, which is collectively invaluable because it's so rare. It's only been done three times (including Mr. Rangos)," he said.

#### CHALLENGE COINS

Challenge coins have become a military tradition within the last couple of decades,



**(L-R) Medal of Honor Recipient Mike Thornton, John G. Rangos and Joe Foran, sponsor of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's annual Patriot Award Gala, during the Society's annual Patriot Award Gala last fall. Texas billionaire T. Boone Pickens was the 2010 honoree.**

according to Colonel Jack Jacobs (U.S. Army, retired), the daytime military and national security analyst for MSNBC who also received the Medal of Honor for directing air strikes on enemy positions in Vietnam and saving several allied lives in the process, with complete disregard for his own safety.

The CMOH Society adopted the tradition of challenge coins, which are considered very prestigious in military circles, Col. Jacobs told the National Herald. The coins are personalized for outstanding service and extraordinary courage, and create a tangible link between a person who is in a command position and someone who works under that particular command.

"It started sometime after I retired from the Army in 1987. General officers would have these special coins struck, and they would carry the coins out onto the field. If they thought a deserving soldier was doing a particularly good job, they would give him a coin as a matter of recognition. That started to spread, and every

unit now has its own unique challenge coin. So the idea eventually came up that Medal of Honor recipients should have challenge coins, too, so each recipient has his own challenge coin," said Col. Jacobs, who is also of Greek-Jewish ancestry.

Unlike other challenge coins which are specific to entire units, Col. Jacobs explained, each Medal of Honor recipient has a challenge coin with a design that's unique to him or her.

"Medal of Honor recipients have a number of copies they can give out to whomsoever they choose, and they hand them out to deserving individuals individually from time to time. They're individually struck, and John Rangos got one from each of us. He got a collection of all of them. He received coins not only from all the living recipients, but also from the families of all recipients who were still alive when this tradition of striking challenge coins for Medal of Honor recipients started, and have since passed away," he said.

Mr. Rangos received the coin box because of what he has done for the CMOH Society, according to Gen. Kehoe: He has concretely and consistently supported the Society's public outreach activities for which, in many cases, recipients had received no compensation – or even had their expenses covered.

While Congress chartered the CMOH Society to include all the living Medal of Honor recipients, he said, federal funding has never been appropriated for it. As a result, he explained, while the Society existed as a chartered institution, it basically functioned as a sort of club – until Mr. Rangos got involved.

"There was a time when recipients would be invited to speak, and they would go – they almost never say no – but they would pay for it out of their own pockets. That led John Rangos to help the Society start a Foundation that would support the Society's activities and programs which, in turn, are important to getting its message out to the country and its citizens, particularly our youth," he said.

#### GENESIS AND SYNERGY

"John Rangos is the genesis of the Foundation, which has evolved to support a number of programs at the Society's behest to help people embrace the ideals of courage, sacrifice and selflessness – all of which are embodied in the Medal of Honor – so that they can develop character and be better citizens. We're downstream from that point a little over ten years now, and people are getting on in years, so the Society wanted to honor Mr. Rangos and thank him for everything he's done over the years," Gen. Kehoe added.

Col. Jacobs echoed and expanded

upon Gen. Kehoe's sentiments, emphasizing that the CMOH Foundation would not even exist without Mr. Rangos' staunch support.

Mr. Rangos made it a top priority to establish the Medal of Honor Foundation, Col. Jacobs explained. Mr. Rangos recognized that, because no federal funds were allocated to the CMOH Society, the Medal of Honor's message of courage, service and sacrifice, which are vital to the country and its history, would never reach the public in a substantive way.

"John Rangos is the man who founded the Medal of Honor Foundation, which can now carry the values of the Medal of Honor Society in perpetuity. If it wasn't for his vision to support Medal of Honor recipients, the Foundation wouldn't exist, and sustaining the ideals of service and sacrifice that are part of the Society's legacy would be a much more difficult task," he said.

"The bottom line is, if it weren't for John Rangos, there wouldn't be a Medal of Honor Foundation, which does a lot more now than merely supporting the activities of the Medal of Honor Society and helping recipients go out there and give speeches from time to time," he added.

For example, Col. Jacobs said, the CMOH Society has helped develop a civics curriculum in conjunction with the school district in Erie, Pennsylvania which has already been adopted by the Pennsylvania State Senate as the archetype for all 490-plus school districts in Pennsylvania (similar legislation is currently being considered in California, Texas and Florida).

The proposed legislation, initiated by the CMOH Society, has been brought before several state legislatures through the support of the CMOH Foundation, with additional support from the General Electric Foundation.

"Other states are getting ready to do the same thing. It's all for teaching the things we should have learned about patriotism, civic

*"Freedom is not free. It comes at a great cost, and the blood of our heroes has paid for it on every continent. We must preserve our historical records for succeeding generations. People need to know why these people received the Medal of Honor, and what their contributions and sacrifices were.*

*A country's greatness is measured by how much it honors, respects and cherishes its heroes. If we fail to honor our heroes properly – if we don't keep a proper archive about their actions and achievements – this important part of American history could be lost to future generations."*

*– John G. Rangos Sr.*

responsibility, service, sacrifice and commitment that have not been taught as much as they should have been. This all sprang from John Rangos' original idea," Col. Jacobs said.

"If it wasn't for the Medal of Honor Foundation, which exists because of John Rangos, there wouldn't be this curriculum, and there wouldn't be a Foundation to help school districts develop this curriculum. Because of John Rangos' efforts to establish a viable foundation, teachers and school districts everywhere will be able to use it as a formula, and it's actually going to spread from state to state," he said.

The synergy between the CMOH Foundation and other groups make these things possible, Col. Jacobs added, and that synergy grew out of Mr. Rangos' notion and vision to support the Medal of Honor Society.

#### **PRESERVING THE LEGACY**

Mr. Rangos himself said he felt very humbly honored when he received the coin box a couple of months ago, and said the gesture caught him by complete surprise.

"I was very surprised that Medal of Honor recipients also wanted to thank me the same weekend they were giving Boone Pickens the 2010 Patriot Award. I was just so touched by that. It was a very emotional moment for me. I wasn't expecting it, at all, and I was honestly just dumbfounded when they did that. I felt so honored and humbled that our heroes thought of me," he told the National Herald with clear emotion in his voice.

Asked why he has had such a keen interest in the CMOH Society and Foundation, Mr. Rangos emphasized his desire to help preserve the Medal of Honor's legacy and keep the stories of recipients alive for succeeding generations.

The history of valor and patriotism that the CMOH Society endeavors to preserve for future generations is essentially the stories of the recipients themselves, he told the Herald.



**(L-R) Medal of Honor Recipient Mike Thornton, John G. Rangos and Gen. Tommy Franks (U.S. Army), retired commander of the United States Central Command, during the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's 2010 Patriot Award Gala in Dallas this past October. Mr. Rangos received the prestigious award in 1991.**

"This isn't just mythology. We have real heroes who made a real difference on the battlefield to help this country preserve freedom everywhere. There are so many stories that deserve to be heralded for posterity, and we must let the American people know how important that is. That's why preserving our historical records for succeeding generations is imperative. People need to know why these people received the Medal of Honor, and what their contributions and sacrifices were," Mr. Rangos said.

"These men are real heroes. They are the stars and stripes on the American flag. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be able to enjoy the freedom we enjoy today. We have liberty because of their selfless service and sacrifice. It's imperative that we keep a record of their stories. It's vital to our country's interests to keep future generations informed about this," he said.

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contributions and sacrifices were. A country's greatness is measured by how much it honors, respects and cherishes its heroes. If we fail to honor our heroes properly – if we don't keep a proper archive about their actions and achievements – this important part of American history could be lost to future generations," he added.

Mr. Rangos' interest in the CMOH Society evolved as a result of contact with people like the late James Elliott Williams (1930-99), the most decorated sailor in U.S. Navy history; the late Captain Michael J. Estocin (1931-67), a boyhood friend in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania who received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions in Vietnam; and the late Gen. Westmoreland (1914-2005 – though not a Medal of Honor recipient himself, Gen. Westmoreland was commander of American military operations in Vietnam in 1964-68).

But the main backdrop of Mr. Rangos' keen interest in preserving and perpetuating the Medal of Honor's historical legacy is the towering figure of Elliott Williams, who received the Medal of Honor for his actions on Vietnam's Mekong River in 1966. His Medal of Honor

citation states that, "Under the leadership of BM1 Williams, who demonstrated unusual professional skill and indomitable courage throughout the 3-hour battle, the patrol accounted for the destruction or loss of 65 enemy boats, and inflicted numerous casualties on enemy personnel. His extraordinary heroism and exemplary fighting spirit in the face of grave risks inspired the efforts of his men to defeat a larger enemy force, and are in keeping with the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service."

Williams, who also had an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer named after him posthumously in 2002, invited Mr. Rangos to attend the 1986 Patriot Award Gala in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

"I knew all about the Medal of Honor, but I might never have known about the Medal of Honor Society if it wasn't for Elliott Williams. He invited me to South Carolina when Gen. Westmoreland was honored with the Patriot Award," Mr. Rangos said.

"Elliott stayed with me in Florida for a couple of days, and he was genuinely distressed about where the records on Medal of Honor recipients were all being

kept. He told me those records were scattered all over the place, and said if that situation wasn't corrected, then all the history behind the Medal of Honor wouldn't be intact for America's future," he said.

"Elliott pointed out that, pretty soon, Medal of Honor recipients are all going to pass away, and no one is going to know about the history behind the heavy price America paid for our freedom after these heroes are gone. And as I learned more from Elliott, I naturally became more interested," he said.

"When I learned that Medal of Honor recipients had to pay their own expenses to attend functions they were invited to, it really bothered me. A lot of these heroes are just average Americans in the sense that they can't afford to fly all over the country; stay at hotels; and pay their own way to make speeches others are asking them to make," he said.

"Whenever a Medal of Honor recipient visits a school, he changes many young lives. With all of the sacrifices these heroes have made, they can't be expected to have to pay for their own expenses. I just couldn't believe they had to pay their own way. That's why I asked to attend the Society's next general meeting in Indianapolis. I told Elliott my solution, which I eventually brought before the board," he added.

Mr. Rangos' solution was to form the CMOH Foundation in order to help the CMOH Society perpetuate Medal of Honor recipients' collective legacy. In that regard, the John G. Rangos Sr. Family Charitable Foundation has been a tremendous reservoir of support for the CMOH Foundation. No one knows exactly how much funding the Rangos Foundation has provided the CMOH Foundation over the years – Mr. Rangos declined to disclose a specific amount – but conservative estimates run in the millions, and Rangos Foundation funds

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definitely helped the CMOH Foundation become more firmly established as a self-sustaining organization, particularly in its early years.

Mr. Rangos also served as the first chairman of the CMOH Foundation's board of directors – CMOH Society members unanimously elected him from the start – and he helped turn it into one of the most vibrant foundations in the country.

### LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Mr. Rangos noted that the CMOH Foundation now boasts one of the finest boards in the country, replete with Fortune 500 company leaders, and includes his son Alex, who is himself a recipient of the CMOH Society's prestigious Distinguished Citizen Award (received by New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly last year).

"One person alone can not build an organization, and I'm so happy that my son Alex followed in my footsteps with the Medal of Honor Foundation. There are three particular ways a person can help – himself, his time and his financial resources – and Alex has offered all three of those," Mr. Rangos said.

"I'm extremely proud of him because he helped other leaders make the Medal of Honor Foundation a highly successful organization. Alex proved to



**Col. Jack H. Jacobs (U.S. Army, retired) aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt in December 2005. Jacobs received the Medal of Honor for his gallantry and actions in Vietnam. Currently a military analyst for MSNBC News, he is also of Greek-Jewish heritage, and says the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation "wouldn't exist" without the efforts of prominent Greek American businessman John G. Rangos.**

be a major player during some critical times," he said.

"And once the country's corporate leaders became aware of the Medal of Honor Foundation and its mission, they joined in and helped it achieve solid financial footing," Mr. Rangos added.

Among the 35 board members serving on the CMOH Foundation are Dick Grasso, former chairman of the New York Stock Exchange; W. Thomas Matthews, former president & CEO of Citi Smith Barney; Steven R. Loranger, chairman & CEO of ITT Industries; Robert Stevens, chairman & CEO of Lockheed Martin; and Brian Williams, anchor and managing editor of NBC Nightly News; as well as a number of Medal of Honor

recipients, who constitute almost half the board membership (to view the entire list of board members, visit the web at [www.CMOHfoundation.org](http://www.CMOHfoundation.org)).

Alex Rangos was very reticent about accepting or receiving any credit. He simply considers himself just one of many people involved, he said, noting that in addition to the annual Patriot Award Gala each fall, the CMOH Society now enjoys several major fundraising events annually, such as its Closing Bell & Circle of Honor Dinner each spring in New York at NYSE, underscoring that the Stock Exchange has been very generous to the Foundation over an extended period of time.

Col. Jacobs said the Rangos family's steadfast support

has been vital to the CMOH Society's continued existence and increasing success.

"The Medal of Honor Foundation has grown dramatically, and it's all because of their perseverance and support. It is what it is today: an organization established to perpetuate the lofty notions of the Medal of Honor in an environment where we're not going to have any Medal of Honor recipients after a while. Statistically, except for Sergeant Giunta, there won't be any living Medal of Honor recipients in another dozen years or so. Everyone else is a little too old right now," he said.

"So if anyone is deserving of recognition by the Medal of Honor Society – and by the nation – it's John Rangos. The Medal of Honor Foundation was his idea," Col. Jacobs added.

Gen. Kehoe agreed, stressing that Mr. Rangos' commitment to enhancing the Medal of Honor's legacy is consistent with the humility of recipients themselves, and is key to helping ordinary citizens realize that they, too, can be heroes in their own ways.

"John Rangos is a humble man. He developed his passion for the Medal of Honor Foundation because of what these men had done to fight for and preserve our freedoms, even though the recipients themselves – who are all very

humble – would tell you they were just doing their job, and aren't chasing any glory for themselves," he said.

"John Rangos' tangible concern was to help recipients make an impact on the American people's consciousness, particularly on our youth, so that people realize at some point in their lives when they're facing a critical situation – and it doesn't have to be in combat – we all have the ability to reach deep down inside and find the courage we need to deal with something very difficult, or to think of others ahead of ourselves," he said.

"Those are the characteristics that embody and are associated with the Medal of Honor, which we all must cherish. Recipients just happen to do it under the most extraordinary circumstances. Most of us don't face life-and-death circumstances like they did, where they reached deep down inside and found the ability to contend with incredible adversity to make a difference on the battlefield," he said.

"But in principle, if you can get people to actually think about things in those terms once in a while, they might realize that, if recipients could do it under the most horrific of circumstances, others ought to be able to deal with something less adverse. It just takes the courage to try," Gen. Kehoe added. ■

*His involvement with the CMOH Society and Foundation aside, Mr. Rangos' patriotism and contributions to American society have not been lost on the country's military establishment. He was invited to be the main speaker at the Reserve Officers Association's national convention in Pittsburgh a few years after he received the Patriot Award.*

*Addressing the convention, Mr. Rangos sympathized with the military establishment's plight with respect to the way the press typically portrayed the Vietnam War.*

*"There was a lot of press that was very critical of the war in Vietnam in those days – and there's still a lot of media hostility toward it – but I think history will show that it wasn't a complete waste of time. I told Gen. Westmoreland, 'I know the media is just tearing you apart, General, but I don't think they fully understand the significance of this war. We didn't go there to conquer any country. We went there to stop communism from spreading all over the Pacific basin,' "* he said.

*Mr. Rangos spoke to more than 400 senior military officers (mostly generals and majors) that weekend. Several generals asked him for a copy of his speech afterwards, and told him they felt his views and patriotism ought to be presented at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.*

*"After the Beijing Insurrection and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, communists finally understood that America is going to keep resisting communism tenaciously. When a country galvanizes the way America did against communism, that's when governments solidify themselves," Mr. Rangos pointed out.*

*"We had trouble in South Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan. Indonesia was once run by a communist leader (Sukarno), and for various reasons, it flipped. Democracy works better there now than it does in most predominantly Muslim countries today. Thailand and even India were also threatened by communism at the time, so we accomplished a great deal in Vietnam that people don't realize or have forgotten, or otherwise*

*never had a chance to learn about from a military perspective," he added.*

*Mr. Rangos' patriotism, integrity and contributions to American society brought him additional attention from the country's military establishment. Gen. James H. Doolittle (1896-1993), who received the Medal of Honor for heroic actions against the Japanese in World War II, asked Mr. Rangos to march in the Desert Storm Victory Parade in New York after operations were successfully concluded in the First Gulf War of 1991.*

*Mr. Rangos initially declined the invitation to march with the country's military heroes, but Gen. Doolittle insisted because he valued Mr. Rangos' dedication to environmental management and interest in preserving of military history, so Mr. Rangos relented.*

*"It's still too much for me to talk about. I really didn't feel I deserved to be there, but Gen. Doolittle was very firm about it, and in the end, I just couldn't say no to him," Mr. Rangos said.*