

May 29, 2023

Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Kendall,

On 6 October 1969, our dad, USAF Major Philip J. Conran piloted his CH-3 helicopter (Call Sign Knife 62) in combat action in Savannakhet Province, Laos for which his commanding officer recommended that he be awarded the Medal of Honor. The USAF personnel, based in Thailand, were attempting to infiltrate the CIA-sponsored irregular Red Battalion into Muong Phine, Savannakhet Province, Laos. As a result of Major Conran's actions, the lives of 8 USAF personnel and 46 Lao soldiers were saved that day.

On September 15, 2014, President Obama awarded two upgraded Vietnam-era Medals of Honor. The President noted in his opening remarks, "Sometimes even the most extraordinary stories can get lost in the fog of war or the passage of time. Yet when new evidence comes to light, certain actions can be reconsidered for this honor, and it is entirely right and proper that we have done so." The following is a justification for just the reconsideration President Obama had suggested.

At a ceremony to present an award to Major Conran on 20 May 1970, Lt. Gen. Lucius D. Gray Jr. stated to the audience that the original Medal of Honor recommendation was initially approved, but then downgraded to the Air Force Cross by higher headquarters because the mission was in Laos, which was in violation of the existing Southeast Asia Treaty and President Nixon was on record stating the United States had no troops in Laos.

Major Conran had no reason to complain about receiving the Air Force Cross and took no further action until 2010 after he read where Richard Etchberger's Air Force Cross was upgraded to the Medal of Honor, which was initially recommended in 1968 for his heroic action in Laos. We believe this 2010 presentation by President Obama was the first Medal of Honor awarded for action in Laos and it encouraged him to petition the Air Force to reinstate his 1969 Medal of Honor recommendation. The Air Force informed him in 2013, through a request for his official Medal of Honor folder by Maj. Gen. Philip J. Conley, that his original Medal of Honor paperwork had been lost or destroyed. He was told he would have to submit new documents and when he did the Air Force declared that the new information did not justify a Medal of Honor and he had waited too long to make his request.

First, the review board based its decision in part on its conclusion that the new information was not enough to overturn a decision in 1970 rejecting the prior MoH recommendation. However, since the review board did not have access to the full record of the prior decision, it could not know what information supplemented the prior submission, or what additional information was available in that prior review. Accordingly, the review board applied an improper standard of review, because it was opining on a record that no longer existed. Major Conran should not be prejudiced by the Air Force's own action in losing information that was previously available to it. Nor should he be subject to a standard of review in which the Air Force assumes that he has not adequately supplemented the prior record, when it failed to preserve that record and can no longer assess its contents. At the very least, Major Conran is entitled to de novo review of his petition. He is also entitled - where evidence was known to exist but is no longer preserved - to favorable inferences concerning those facts in light of the Air Force's responsibility for the passage of time and loss of material.

Second, consideration of this Petition should not have been prejudiced by the passage of time, including any delay in seeking reconsideration. Congress recognized that many acts of heroism during the Vietnam War had not been adequately considered and, for that reason, the National Defense

Authorization Act for FY 1996 specifically waived all time limitations for any award or decoration for acts of valor during the Vietnam era for actions in the Southeast Asia theater of operation.

Third, Congress waived the laws and regulations for awarding any decoration (including the Medal of Honor) for those so deserving who were serving in intelligence activities during the period January 1, 1940, to December 31, 1990. These actions were taken in consideration of the fact that the records regarding intelligence activities are sealed for many years. Protecting this information for intelligence reasons means that those involved in intelligence activities are often ineligible to receive the Medal of Honor. In other words, should a person serving in intelligence perform an act of heroism worthy of the MoH, it is unlikely that the information could be publicly acknowledged. If the information is ever declassified, it is usually years after the fact. This delay could well mean that the individual who performed the act of heroism would be ineligible for the medal because of time limits on making recommendations. The fact is Major Conran was working in support of the CIA in advancing their clandestine operations in Laos. This new information, which has only recently come to light about these operations makes the request for reconsideration timely and worthy of consideration.

Fourth, the Air Force failed to give any weight to an analysis of the enemy order of battle at the site of the attempted helicopter landing, as extracted from North Vietnamese documents and historical publications, describing the overwhelming enemy order of battle and armament that Major Conran encountered at the infiltration landing zone.

Fifth, and most importantly, there is ample evidence now that Major Conran could not have received the MoH at the time it was first recommended because at that time the President, who would need to approve the award of a Medal of Honor for combat action in Laos and host a public White House ceremony, had publicly declared that there were no American troops in Laos from early 1969 to well past 14 March 1971. Accordingly, it is not correct to assume that the review board's decision not to award Major Conran the MoH, was based on merits. Rather, as a matter of political circumstances at that time, the reviewing panel was not able to award the MoH to Major Conran regardless of the worthiness of the recommendation.

For Congress to ensure the integrity of the MoH awards process, it needs to provide a full and fair review of the record submitted along with appropriate inferences based on what was known of the prior record submitted and recently de-classified information which was not available in 1970 as a basis for granting the MoH then. The restored MoH awards to Richard Etchberger, Roy Benavidez, Leslie Sabo, Ardie Copas, Gary Rose, Dennis Fujii, and Jon Swanson all reflect the legitimate interest of the U.S. Congress in doing so. Philip Conran's case remains worthy of proper reconsideration. We respectfully request action to rectify deficiencies in the prior process and to grant appropriate honors reflecting the extraordinary bravery and heroism of Philip Conran in service of his nation.

Claret Taylor
Colonel, USAF (Ret)
(Eyewitness)

Peter Costa
Major, USAF (Ret)
(Eyewitness)

C. Wesley Cossiboom
SSGT, USAF (Ret)
(Eyewitness)

Stephen P. Condon
Maj. Gen. USAF (Ret)

Thomas Leo Briggs
CIA Operations Officer (Ret)

F. Michael Rogers
General, USAF (Ret)

Michael Cook
Cmdr. 750 Purple Heart

Gary Simpson
National Ace Store 2021

Dennis A. Peterson
Captain, USMCR (Fmr)

Edward J. Dewey
Colonel, USA (Ret)

Bruce "Orville" Wright
President, Air &Space Forces Assoc.

Doug LaMalfa
Congress – CA 2019

Thomas C. Reed
Sec. AF, 1976-77

Salud Carbajal
Congress – CA 2023

Lois Capps
Congress – CA 2014

James Mitchel
SES, USAF (Ret)

Donald G. Hard
Lt. Gen. USAF (Ret)

Fred L. Borch III
Colonel, USAF (Ret)

Wayne Messner
Colonel, USAF (Ret)

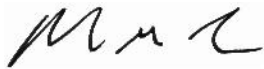
Jeff Bleich
U.S. Ambassador (Ret)

Ken S. Hessel
CIA Air Operations Officer

The above list constitutes a small collage of the many military, CIA, and civilian personnel who have supported this Medal of Honor Recommendation. In 1970, the political policy was to prevent congress and the media from hearing about any combat activity taking place in Laos. Now, in 2023, we ask the Air Force to support and urge Congress to pass a resolution allowing President Biden to present the Medal of Honor to Philip J. Conran, an honor he justly deserves.

We would greatly appreciate your support in these efforts.

Best Regards,



Michael W. Conran
3337 Crane Way
Oakland, CA 94602
510 918-4677
Mike_Conran@yahoo.com

Patrick M. Conran
127 Maple Street
Needham, MA 02492
617-775-9319
Pmconran1982@gmail.com

Kelly Conran Berlo
4706 Calle Reina
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
Berlo5@live.com