

**To:**

Air Force Personnel Center  
Directorate of Personnel Programs (Decorations & Ribbons)  
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JBSA-Randolph, TX 78150

**Date: 7 July 2025****Info:**

SAF/MRBC (AFBCMR)  
3351 Celmers Lane  
Joint Base Andrews NAF Washington, DC 20762-6435

**Subject:** Formal Request for Reconsideration and Correction: Colonel ( Ret.) Philip J. Conran's Medal of Honor Recommendation

**References:** BC-2018-01673, BC-2018-01673-2, BC-2018-01673-3, BC-2025-01694

Then Major Philip J. Conran's Medal of Honor (MoH) recommendation, submitted in 1969 and downgraded without explanation, was likely denied not due to a lack of valor but rather due to the policy suppression of U.S. operations in Laos, USAF institutional norms, and a covert context that discouraged public recognition. New comparative analysis, historical pattern evidence, and a detailed breakdown of Conran's unique combat leadership demonstrate that his case qualifies for immediate resubmission under 10 U.S.C. § 9271 and DAFMAN 36-2806 (Annexes A–C).

#### I. New Evidence Confirms a Pattern of Omission

Analysis of all 14 USAF Vietnam-era MoH recipients (Annex B) confirms:

- MoHs were overwhelmingly awarded for aerial heroism, with only two exceptions (Pitsenbarger and Wilbanks), involving ground-linked actions.
- Then Maj. Conran's heroism involved a hybrid combat role, leading ground defense after aerial insertion, under enemy fire, while wounded, unprecedented for a USAF pilot.
- His 1969 mission occurred in Laos, just months after the Nixon administration took office and immediately before a documented drop-off in MoH awards for actions in sensitive locations (Annex C).
- Like CMSgt Etchberger, whose MoH was delayed for decades due to operational secrecy, then Maj. Conran's downgrade aligns with a known policy of suppression for Laos-based missions (Annex A).

## II. Comparable Cases Were Corrected Post-Facto

Then-Major Conran's experience closely parallels a documented set of cases in which Medal of Honor recommendations were either downgraded or shelved due to political sensitivities and later corrected, often decades later, by presidential or congressional action.

### Air Force and Minority Veteran Cases

MSgt Richard Etchberger (USAF) received the Medal of Honor in 2010, 41 years after his heroic actions in Laos in 1968. His original award was downgraded because of the classified nature of the mission. Col. Conran's mission occurred in the same covert theater and received similar treatment, yet remains unresolved.

Melvin Morris (U.S. Army), Felix Conde-Falcon (U.S. Army), and Santiago Erevia (U.S. Army) were recognized decades after their actions in South Vietnam in 1969. These awards were corrected as part of the Defense Authorization Act reviews focused on racial and ethnic disparities in valor award processing.

### Army Covert Operations ~ Laos and Cambodia

Six Army soldiers who fought in Laos or Cambodia similarly had their Medal of Honor awards delayed for 30 to 45 years due to the classified or diplomatically sensitive nature of their missions:

Roy Benavidez (1968, Cambodia) ~ originally denied the Medal of Honor; awarded by President Reagan in 1981 after intense advocacy and file review.

Jon E. Swanson (1971, Cambodia) ~ awarded posthumously in 2002 by President George W. Bush.

Leslie H. Sabo Jr., Ardie R. Copas, and Dennis M. Fujii ~ all recognized in the 2010s for actions in or near Cambodia or Laos after long-term award suppression.

Gary M. Rose (1970, Laos) ~ Special Forces medic; awarded in 2017 after the declassification of his MACV-SOG mission.

These precedents illustrate a clear pattern of delayed recognition tied to geopolitical constraints, including President Nixon's official denial of U.S. ground operations in Laos and Cambodia in 1970. In Col. Conran's case, the downgrade occurred after such denials became public policy, aligning his treatment directly with this suppressed class of awards.

### III. Legal and Procedural Failures Demand Redress

The original MoH file was destroyed (per the 2013 records inquiry), and no official rationale for the downgrade exists, this violates basic administrative due process.

All three AFBCMR denials (2018, 2024, 2025) failed to consider comparative evidence, relied on speculative rationales, or improperly dismissed new testimony (see Annex E).

These failures violate the Chenery Doctrine and the Administrative Procedure Act, undermining the presumption of regularity when government records are missing (see SEC v. Chenery Corp. (1943)).

### IV. Request for Action

In light of the full record now available, I respectfully request:

That the Air Force reconstruct and resubmit Maj. Conran's Medal of Honor nomination to the appropriate USAF office;

That the case be referred to the Secretary of the Air Force and, if warranted, through the Secretary of Defense to the President;

That this submission be recognized as the final exhaustion of remedies under § 1130.

### V. Conclusion

Then-Maj. Philip J. Conran's actions in 1969 meet and exceed the standards of 10 U.S.C. § 9271. His downgrade was not a matter of merit but of policy constraints, record destruction, and institutional blind spots. As the Air Force modernizes its definition of the "complete warrior," then-Maj. Conran's heroism stands as a model of ground-air integration, leadership, and courage under fire. It is time to honor that service with the award originally recommended: the Medal of Honor.

Respectfully,



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