

Medal of Honor

Col. Roger H. C. Donlon



Then Capt. Roger Donlon as a Green Beret serving in Vietnam in 1964. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Col. Roger H. C. Donlon, recipient of the Nation's highest award for valor, died 25 January 2024 in Leavenworth, Kansas, at the age of eighty-nine. Donlon was the first service member awarded the Medal of Honor for actions during the Vietnam War as well as the first Special Forces soldier to receive the award.

Donlon was presented with the Medal of Honor for his actions on 6 July 1964 near Nam Dong in the Republic of Vietnam. At that time, then Capt. Donlon was the commander of a U.S. Special Forces detachment operating a base for South Vietnamese indigenous troops training to conduct irregular warfare against the North Vietnamese. Early that morning, the twelve Americans, one Australian, and 360 trainees on the base were attacked by a large force of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers using mortars, grenades, and heavy small arms fire. Donlon immediately organized his men to move ammunition from the burning buildings, established a defensive perimeter, and redistributed the ammunition where his

force needed it most. He killed a three-man team attempting to breach the main gate, then moved to a nearby 60 mm mortar position, sustaining a stomach wound en route. He discovered that the mortar crew was also wounded, and despite his own wounds, he directed their displacement to a new position thirty meters away while he provided cover fire. He had to drag one soldier out and received a shoulder wound in the process. He

then retrieved the mortar, administered first aid to the wounded, and moved to a second position to recover a 57 mm recoilless rifle. He returned to the gun pit to gather ammunition for the two weapons and was again wounded, this time in the leg. Despite his critical condition, Donlon continued to fight his way around the perimeter while under heavy fire to direct friendly fire and inspire his men to keep fighting. He was wounded a fourth time on his face and body by a mortar round, but at daylight, the enemy ceased their attack, and Donlon again reorganized his defenses and administered first aid to the casualties. After the five-hour fight, medevac helicopters were finally able to begin casualty evacuation, but Donlon refused to leave until all the other wounded men had been evacuated.

Donlon was presented with the Medal of Honor by President Lyndon B. Johnson in a 5 December 1964 White House ceremony. He retired in 1988 after serving for more than thirty years. He is the author of two books about his experiences in Vietnam: *Outpost of Freedom* and *Beyond Nam Dong*. ■