

17TH ANNUAL FREEDOM FIGHTERS OPEN

10 NOV 2023

BRIDGEMILL ATHLETIC CLUB (CANTON, GEORGIA)

THIS YEAR'S GUEST OF HONOR

CPT Donna C. Rowe (USANC)



Donna in Triage

Donna entered the US Army in 1964 through the Army Student Nurse Program and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Nursing Corps in February, 1966. After Basic Training at Fort Sam Houston, she received medical training at Brooke Army Medical Center, Womack Army Hospital at Fort Bragg, DeWitt Army Hospital at Fort Belvoir, and Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington. She served in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969 at the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon, and was promoted to Captain during that time. Her military awards include the Vietnam Service Ribbon, the National Defense Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal.

Donna is best known, however, for decision that she made while serving as the Head Nurse of the Emergency Room and Triage Area at the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon. On May 15, 1969, she overheard a radio call from a "Dust-Off" chopper from the 1st Infantry Division. The pilot reported that he had one casualty, the sole survivor of a Montagnard village that had been wiped out by the NVA.

"Can you receive a Vietnamese civilian casualty", the pilot asked. Knowing that, due to low supplies of IV fluids and blood, host country civilians were the **lowest** of the five casualty priorities, Donna grabbed the microphone and replied "3rd Field Hospital will receive"! A Captain told Rowe she would "catch hell for this". Her reply was "I'm already in hell, what else can they do to me?"



Donna with "Baby Kathleen"

At the helipad, the hospital staff discovered that the "the civilian casualty" was an infant baby locked in her dead mother's arms; they had to break the mother's arms to free the baby. The mother had unknowingly saved the baby's life by clutching the infant to her chest – as soon as the pressure was released, the baby began to hemorrhage severely. As the baby was rushed to X-Ray, Donna had the Chaplain on duty, Father Luke Sullivan, baptize the baby (using water from a water fountain). When he needed a name in order to perform the ceremony, she replied "Kathleen", then she and two Army corpsmen agreed to be the child's Godparents.

After surviving hours of surgery, Kathleen was cared for in the hospital by her two Godfathers, then eventually released to the St. Elizabeth Orphanage near Saigon. After hearing the story from Father Sullivan, Navy Lt. Marvin Cords, a member of his congregation, arranged to visit the baby. After several months, he received permission to adopt the baby and take her to America. Unfortunately, after about three years, Donna lost touch with the Cords.

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Donna and Al Rowe in 1968

Then, on March 8, 2003, after Donna and her husband Col. (Ret) Al Rowe (now deceased) were interviewed for the film *The Shadow of the Blade*, they received a call from one of the Directors. Kathleen, now 50 years old, was married, and had three daughters of her own. She had learned of the film from the Internet and had called them to ask for assistance in contacting Donna. That contact occurred the next day; Kathleen and Donna talked for hours. Afterwards, the film's producer, Arrowhead Films, arranged for Kathleen to be reunited with the "Dust-Off" co-pilot, the corpsmen, Father Sullivan's assistant, and Donna. The reunion, held on April 14, at the Army Medical Center at Ft. Sam Houston, included Kathleen's husband, her three daughters, and the Cords.

The story of "Baby Kathleen" was immediately reported by the AP, and Donna and Kathleen were quickly invited to be on the *CBS Early Show*. Later, *Women's World Magazine* published an interview with Donna in their September issue. Donna was subsequently deluged with requests to speak to organizations throughout the country. On November 7, 2003, Donna and Al attended a special premiere of *The Shadow of the Blade* in Austin. The film debuted in 2004, was picked as the top Documentary at the World Film Festival, and was released to both the History Channel and the Military Channel. The video can be purchased online at [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

Donna has been very busy after her discharge from the Army in 1969. In addition to being a wife and mother, she served as a volunteer Registered Nurse with the Red Cross from 1969-1999, a volunteer with the Georgia Nurse Alert System (part of Homeland Security) from 2001-2009, worked as a Real Estate Broker from 1983 to 2016, and is currently with Coldwell Banker. She has also been Vice President of Buckhead Brokers Realtors, President of the Cobb County Association of Realtors, was selected as Realtor-of-the-Year in Cobb County three times, and received the Cobb Association of Realtors President's Award in 2009.

She has served her community in other organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, the Atlanta Regional Commission, Fannie Mae's Executive Board, the Cobb County Development Authority, the PTAs of various schools, the Georgia Vietnam Veterans Alliance, the Cobb County Republican Women's Club, the Georgia Association of Realtors, and the National Association of Realtors, and has been a Court Appointed Special Advocate for abused children. She is a member of the First United Methodist Church in Marietta.

In November, 2016, Donna became the *first* woman to be inducted into the *Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame*. She is currently the President & CEO of the Cobb Veterans Memorial Foundation