

# Donald D. Rowland '57

No. 21297 ★ Jun 29, 1934 – Nov 21, 2025 ★ Died in Lompoc, CA
Inurned at West Point Cemetery, NY

*Donald Dean Rowland* was born in Canton, OH. His parents, Paul I. Rowland and Helen (Shisler) Rowland, were also born and raised in Canton. However, at an early age, Don's family moved from Ohio to Wyandotte, MI. Don completed his primary and secondary education in Wyandotte, graduating from Roosevelt High School in 1952. Along the way, he was also a dedicated member of the Boy Scouts and the International Order of DeMolay. Following high school, Don attended Wayne State University in Detroit for a year before receiving an appointment to USMA. He joined the incoming Class of 1957 on July 7, 1953.

After "Beast Barracks," Don was assigned to Company I-2. He breezed through academics and is best remembered by his companymates as outgoing, quick-witted, and someone who was always on the move with his ever-present smile and "joke of the day." His roommates vouched for the fact that he wrote a letter to his "one and only" every single day during the first 15 minutes of evening Call-to-Quarters. His OAO was Catherine "Kay" Griffith, his high school sweetheart—and she accordingly responded daily to him. Woe to the plebe mail carrier who arrived with that day's mail without a letter from Kay. However, all was usually forgotten when multiple letters showed up in the next delivery. One needs only to contemplate the number of 3-cent Liberty stamps it took for Don to make it to graduation! But the U.S. Mail system was finally unburdened on June 22, 1957 when Don and Kay were married in Wyandotte, with a half-dozen I-2 companymates as groomsmen. The newlyweds then embarked on a 66-year marriage, with many U.S. Air Force (USAF) assignments along the way.

First, it was off to flight school. Don received his pilot's wings at Vance Air Force Base (AFB), OK in September 1958 and was assigned to the 384th Bomb Wing at Little Rock AFB, AR, flying the B-47 bomber. While there, he and Kay expanded their family to include son Douglas and daughter Susan. By 1964, it was time for graduate school at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Don received a master's degree in mathematics as a precursor to becoming an instructor in the Department of Mathematics at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA). During their four years at USAFA, daughter Sarah was born. Then it was time for combat duty in the Republic of Vietnam.

Don received combat crew qualification in the F-4D fighter at George AFB, CA and departed for Southeast Asia, with assignment to the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) at Phu Cat, Republic of Vietnam in April 1971. He flew close air support missions for U.S. and South Vietnamese ground units until the 12th TFW was directed to stand down in October 1971. He was given the responsibility for planning and supervising the redeployment from Republic of Vietnam of the wing's aircraft assets, a task acknowledged as a great success. He then was transferred to Thailand, with assignment to Task Force Alpha at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Base. At that time, this was a very sensitive intelligence-gathering assignment involving several hundred USAF personnel working in a secluded, heavily fortified enclave at NKP in what later was described as the largest single building in Southeast Asia. Their mission was to operate the Infiltration Surveillance Center, the central data processing hub for the multi-faceted surveillance network monitoring ground traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Their strategic analysis provided much of the vital intelligence necessary to support allied ground forces still fighting in South Vietnam.

On his return, Don was assigned to the 100th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Davis-Monthan AFB, Tucson, AZ, where he was engaged in testing, evaluation, and analysis of a newly developed photo reconnaissance drone aircraft. Two years later, Don was appointed commandant of Strategic Air Command's Noncommissioned Officer Academy at Barksdale AFB, Shreveport, LA. During his tenure, the school was recognized as one of the best in the Air Force and received the USAF Outstanding Unit Award.

Don was subsequently assigned to Headquarters 5th Air Force, Yokota AFB, Japan from 1977 to 1980. There he was responsible for the integration of tri-service reconnaissance operations in the Western Pacific and became director of Support Operations his final year. That was followed by his posting to Vandenburg AFB, Lompoc, CA. His assignments there included serving as the chief of programs and plans, Western Test Range, and later as acting director, Vandenburg Range Systems. Don retired as a lieutenant colonel at Vandenburg, January 1, 1982. He and the family decided Lompoc would be their permanent retirement home.

Following retirement, Don was immediately employed as an engineer for Rockwell International, serving in a component of the U.S. space program. Several years later, as he eased further into the retirement lifestyle, he also found time to lower his golf handicap and tend to his already well-honed fly-fishing skills. At the same time, he was busy serving in various civic organizations such as the Rotary, where he served a term as president, and participating in community service positions with Santa Barbara County, as well as being an active member of his Lutheran church in nearby Orcutt, CA.

Don unquestionably made the world a better place, leaving a lasting impact on his family, classmates, and all who were fortunate enough to know him. He will be remembered as the embodiment of hard work, always greeted with a smile, and a loyal, cherished friend to all.

*— A Classmate and His Family*