



PRESS RELEASE

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VVA Urges Congress to Award Posthumous Medal of Honor to “The Most Decorated Puerto Rican Veteran” Jorge Otero-Barreto

(Washington, D.C) – “Vietnam Veterans of America urges Congress to pass a resolution to recommend the President posthumously award U.S. Army veteran Jorge Otero-Barreto the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions during the Vietnam War,” said Tom Burke, VVA National President.

“Otero-Barreto has been called ‘the most decorated soldier of the Vietnam War’ and his hometown has dubbed him ‘the Puerto Rican Rambo,’ ” noted Burke. “During his long service he more than fulfilled the criteria of “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty” for recognition as a Medal of Honor awardee and that recognition is long overdue.”

Otero-Barreto left medical school after three years of study in 1959 to volunteer for the US Army. After basic training at Fort Jackson and Jump School at Fort Bragg, he was the first Puerto Rican to attend and graduate from the Army Air Assault School. Over the next 10 years, he completed five tours as well as 200 missions in Vietnam. During that time, he served in the 82nd Airborne Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 25th Infantry, and the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. For his service, he earned 38 decorations, which included three Silver Stars, five Air Medals, four Army Commendation Medals, five Purple Hearts, and five Bronze Star Medals with Valor.

Despite being injured on five separate occasions while in Vietnam, Otero-Barreto always returned to the battlefield. He held himself and his soldiers to a high standard, once saying, “A warrior is somebody who is beyond himself ... who is willing to give his life for his people.”

His platoon leader, retired Lieutenant Colonel John Hay, said of him, “I trusted him with my life, I guarantee you that.” After 31 years of service, Hay described Otero-Barreto as unparalleled on the battlefield. “No one was a better platoon sergeant than Jorge – no one,” Hay declared.

Burke said, “Otero-Barreto continued his service after retiring from the military, providing youth boxing lessons and mentoring students, as well as actively serving in the American Legion until his death in 2024. He was and will always remain legendary, and he deserves to be recognized with the US military’s highest and most prestigious decoration.”