

37 DAYS IN VIETNAM

PHOTOGRAPHS BY A MARINE CORPSMAN

When 3rd Battalion 1st Marines landed in Vietnam, on 28 January 1966, I carried a weatherproof Nikonos I camera with me. We enlisted men had been ordered to turn our cameras over to our company commanders; nuts to that – I had bought the Nikonos in Japan specifically to take with me to Vietnam. Over the next 37 days, throughout Operations Double Eagle I & II and into Operation Utah, I shot about five rolls of film. This slide show presents the best of the photographs; it also includes images taken during training, and after I was wounded and evacuated to the States.



Continued...

My tour of duty with the U.S. Marine Corps began in the summer of 1965, when I was transferred from the U.S. Naval Hospital at Yokosuka, Japan, where I served as a Hospital Corpsman, to the Field Medical Service School at Del Mar Area, a sub-camp of Camp Pendleton in southern California.

A few weeks of training in the arts of combat medicine, and a brief introduction to Marine Corps culture, combat tactics, and the care and use of the .45 automatic pistol and M-14 rifle, supposedly served to prepare me for life in a rifle company. I joined 3/1 and was assigned to Mike Company. After a short period of additional training, which included a rather silly mock battle at night, the entire battalion left California, bound for Okinawa where we would get yet more training, especially in jungle warfare, before "insertion" into South Vietnam.

Except in obvious cases, all photos in the following photo essay are mine.



Bob Ingraham

Bob Ingraham

Vancouver, British Columbia
November, 2007

BOARDING THE U.S.S. MAGOFFIN



3/1 was transported by truck overnight to Long Beach, where the attack transport U.S.S. *Magoffin* (APA-199) was waiting for us. It took the better part of a day to load the battalion's supplies and equipment, and the battalion itself.

37 DAYS IN VIETNAM
PHOTOS BY A MARINE CORPSMAN

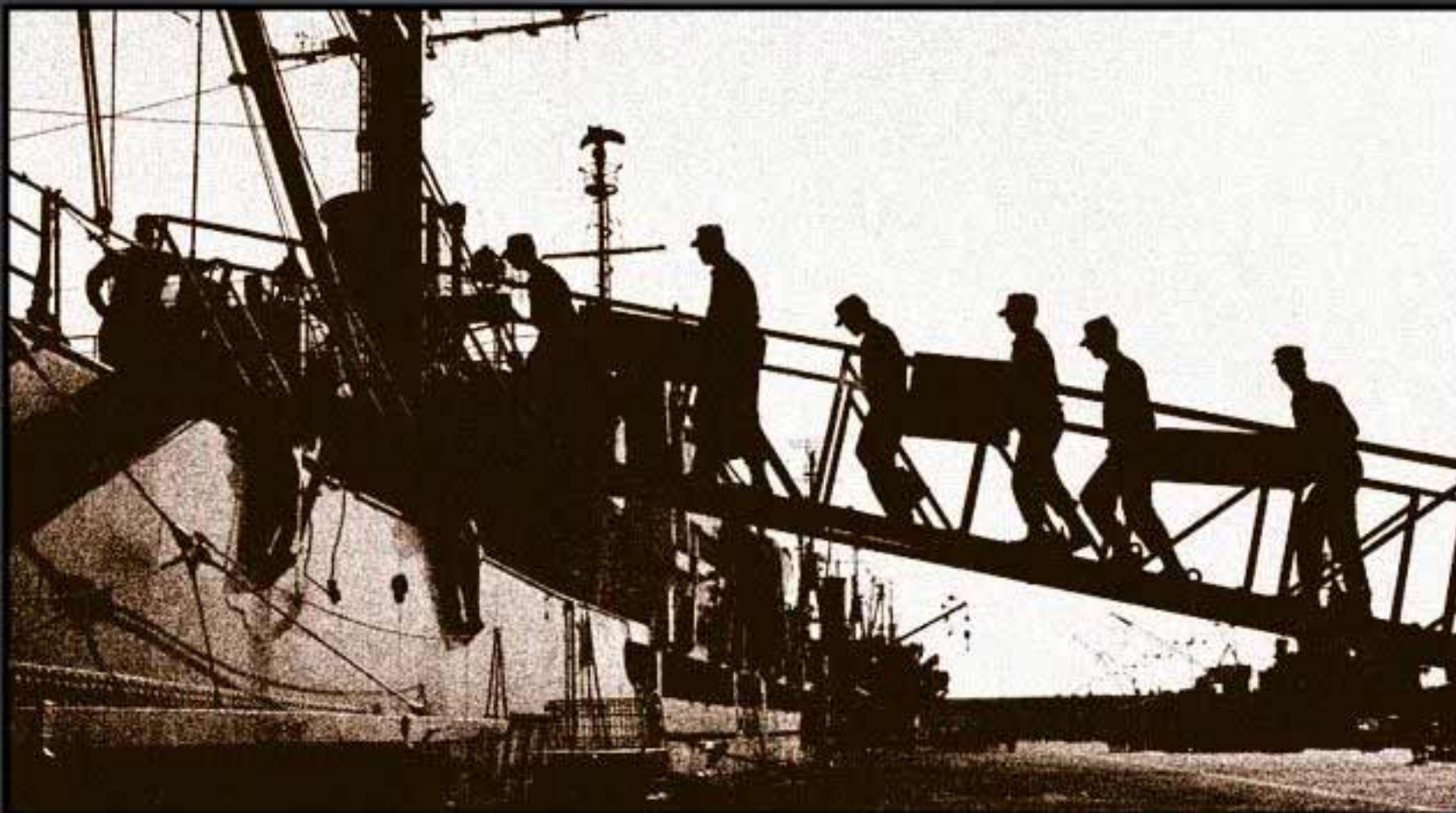


BOARDING THE U.S.S. MAGOFFIN



Still waiting: 3/1 Marines cool their heels, waiting to board the *Magoffin* at Long Beach. Docked just ahead of the *Magoffin* is the attack cargo ship U.S.S. *Seminole* (AKA-104).

BOARDING THE U.S.S. MAGOFFIN



My favorite "Vietnam" photo: 3/1 Marines carry gear aboard the *Magoffin* prior to embarking for our voyage to Okinawa. We finally got under way about 2 p.m.

BOUND FOR OKINAWA



3/1 Marines and some of the crew of the *Magoffin* gather on the ship's fantail for a last glimpse of the United States. For some Marines, it would literally be their last look at their homeland.

3/1 ENJOYS A PACIFIC CRUISE

3/1's voyage across the Pacific from Long Beach to Okinawa may have been routine for the crew of the Magoffin and perhaps for some of the Marines, but for me, I had joined the Navy so I could be on a ship, and after almost three years, I finally was on one!



Neither the corpsmen nor the Marines had many duties, and I spent most of my time relaxing on the fantail, watching the endless wake, and enjoying my first sight of flying fish and albatross. We read a lot, too, sometimes sharing books page by page: "Hey, I've finished page 44, who's got 45?"

3/1 ENJOYS A PACIFIC CRUISE

Most days were sunny and warm but as we approached the northern portion of our Great Circle route, south of the Aleutian Islands, we encountered one storm, really just a short squall. We Marines were ordered below decks, presumably for our safety. However, I had never experienced a Pacific squall and wasn't about to miss one. I found a dry nook near the bow and rode out the brief but exhilarating storm.

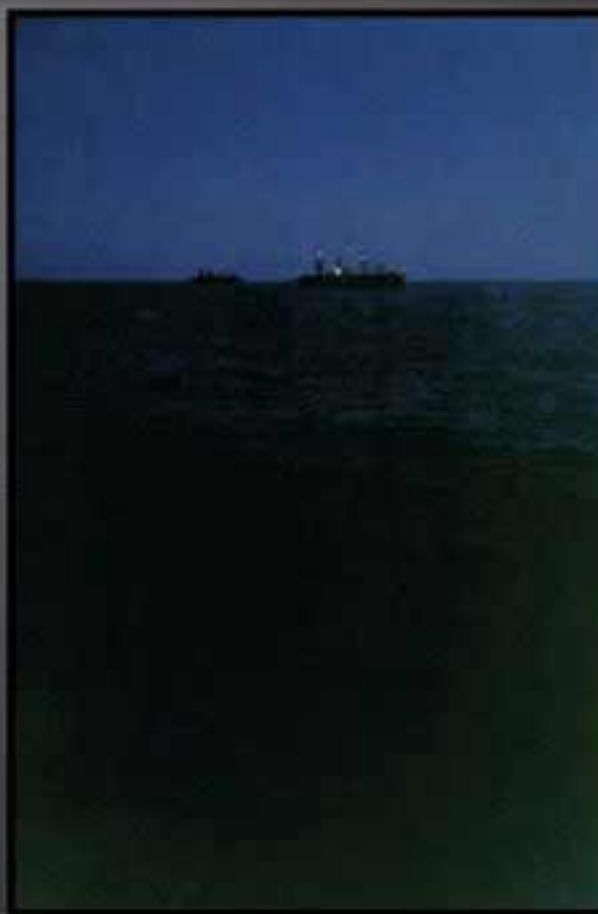


3/1 ENJOYS A PACIFIC CRUISE



Our bunks, stacked four high, were in the *Magoffin's* hold about 12 feet below waterline — hardly luxurious but not a hardship, either.

3/1 ENJOYS A PACIFIC CRUISE



Sunsets and nights in the middle of the Pacific were spectacular. I remember the great bowl of brilliantly shining stars overhead in an inky sky, rolling to and fro over us, while the ship itself seemed stationary.

3/1 ARRIVES IN OKINAWA



3/1 arrived at Okinawa on 11 September 1965 for what would be five months of training and waiting, and waiting, for the inevitable word that we were heading for Vietnam. The photographs above show the *Magoffin* being maneuvered into the pier at Naha by its own LCM-8 "Mike Boats."

VIEW FROM CAMP SCHWAB



Marines of Mike Company, 3/1 may well remember this view from their barracks at Camp Schwab. The photo shows Oura Bay and the mountains of the Northern Training Area.

AT CAMP SCHWAB, OKINAWA



I took the photo at the left at Camp Schwab. My company was embarking by helicopter for the Northern Training Area (the NTA) for several days' training in jungle warfare.

Below, another view to the north from Camp Schwab, across Oura Bay. The NTA was located in the mountains on the horizon.



HEADING FOR VIETNAM

In late January, 1966, after weeks of rumours, 3/1 embarked for Vietnam on the U.S.S. *Paul Revere** (APA-248), an attack transport. By this time, I had been assigned to Headquarters & Service Company so I could recuperate from surgery for a hernia.



* The *Paul Revere* was affectionately known by its crew as the "Peter Rabbit." Inlaid in the linoleum at the entrance to the mess deck was a Playboy Bunny logo.

3/1 EMBARKS ON THE U.S.S. PAUL REVERE



The *Paul Revere* was not completely new to me in 1966, although I didn't realize it until several decades later. When I was in Hospital Corps School in 1963, I snapped a photo of three U.S. Navy ships at piers in San Diego Harbor. Decades later I scanned the slide, enlarged it on my computer, and was surprised to learn that the middle of the three ships was the *Paul Revere*.

AMPHIBIOUS TRAINING AT SUBIC BAY



3/1 did not sail straight for Vietnam, but instead stopped by the Philippine Islands for provisioning and additional training. In Subic Bay, we had a practice amphibious landing, a preview of the much larger practice landing a few days later on the island of Mindoro and our eventual landing in Vietnam.

SUNSET OFF SOUTH VIETNAM



Following our sojourn in the Philippines, the *Paul Revere* and 3/1 sailed for South Vietnam. I took this photo on the evening of 27 January, off the Vietnam coast, just hours from the beginning of our landing in Quang Ngai Province in Operation Double Eagle. On the horizon are other ships of the Double Eagle task force.

28 JANUARY 1966: OPERATION DOUBLE EAGLE



Marines of Headquarters & Services Company, 3/1, march inland in the first moments after our landing in Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnam. We had no idea whether communists were waiting to ambush us from the trees ahead.

OPERATION DOUBLE EAGLE



H&S Company moved only to the western edge of the broad, white beach we had landed on. The dunes overlooked a lush plain of farmland and rice paddies. Above at the left, a Marine rifleman on perimeter watch; at the right, me with my oversize flak jacket and my Unit One medical bag.

DOC INGRAHAM'S HOOCH



During the first several days of Operation Double Eagle I, this was my home, shared with another corpsman.

SEARCH & DESTROY



On "Search and Destroy" missions, the entire battalion snaked in long lines through valleys and up hill and down dale. We were usually hot, tired, dirty, wet, and miserable or cold, tired, wet, dirty and miserable. VC often sniped at us from surrounding hills and forests, and usually missed. We rarely saw them.

QUANG NGAI REFUGEE VILLAGE



This is just a portion of a refugee "village" which seemed to stretch for miles north and south from the Operation Double Eagle landing zone.

A BOMB SHELTER



The South Vietnamese had been warned of our landing and the danger of bombing. This bomb shelter on the beach was one response. It looks flimsy but could probably have withstood considerable force.

DR. CLAUDE DESHAZO

Lt. Claude V. DeShazo, 3/1's Battalion Surgeon, examines a patient at an impromptu sick call at the refugee village. We had few resources, and could offer little more than Band-aids and Aspirin to treat serious diseases.*



Claude DeShazo
in 2007

* I had a reunion with Dr. DeShazo in Seattle in January, 2007. At the time of this writing, he is the only one of my fellow Vietnam veterans I have seen in 41 years. He told me over lunch that, later in his tour of duty, he had succeeded in getting medical help for some Vietnamese civilians through military channels.

SICK CALL



Children watch Dr. DeShazo at work during a sick call in their refugee village. The little girl on the left took a liking to me, and would run to hold my hand whenever we went into her village.

REFUGEE FAMILY, QUANG NGAI PROVINCE



A refugee family on the beach in Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnam.

FARMERS & FISHERMEN



The families we first encountered in Quang Ngai Province survived by fishing and farming. The men, mostly too old for the military, fished during the day while women and children worked their farms inland, returning to their refugee village on the beach at night to avoid combat between the Marines and the Viet Cong.



SEARCHING FOR VIET CONG

Our visits to the village were not necessarily benign, or safe. We were always on the lookout for signs of VC; Searching "hooches" became routine. Shortly after I took the photo at the right, an elderly man approached us with a "gift" — an ammunition belt for an American M-60 machine gun. He probably reasoned — correctly — that it was safer to give it to us than to let us find it.

Partly because of these searches, I soon came to feel that I was part of an occupying rather than a liberating army. To the civilians, we seemed to represent just another army bent on destruction in a country that had endured centuries of such armies.



PRISONERS OF WAR



Soon after our landing in Vietnam, we started taking Viet Cong prisoners, but never very many. In the 37 days that I was in Vietnam, I myself saw only one armed VC. Usually, they sniped at us from well-hidden positions, and immediately withdrew.

WITH THE FORCE POPULAIRE

The *Force Populaire* was a Vietnamese civilian militia that had been integrated into the Army of Republic of South Vietnam in 1964. We saw them as little more than ill-trained and poorly equipped vigilantes.



I once accompanied a squad of Marines supporting a *Force Populaire* unit which arrested four suspected VC. In the background of the photo at the left are the wife and baby of the man being arrested; a militiaman threatened her with a rifle when she protested his arrest.

WITH THE FORCE POPULAIRE

We Marines and the *Force Populaire* militiamen took a break at noon, under some trees beside a cool stream. The prisoners sat in the sun for about an hour, without food or water. This was clearly a violation of rules regarding the treatment of prisoners, but the Geneva Convention had little currency in Vietnam.



WITH THE FORCE POPULAIRE



We took the prisoners in tow back to our bivouac area, but their future looked grim: Scuttlebutt said that the ARVN would question them, then murder them.

AN INFILTRATOR FROM NORTH VIETNAM?

On a search and destroy operation, we arrested this man, suspecting that he was a North Vietnamese infiltrator. Thick calluses on his feet and even shoulders made it evident that he was used to carrying heavy loads for long distances, probably on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Throughout the war, the trail — actually a series of interwoven paths — was used to move both soldiers and war matériel into South Vietnam.



BOREDOM, THEN SUDDEN TERROR



I learned the lesson that war is comprised of long periods of boredom punctuated by sheer terror. To alleviate the boredom, I once volunteered to carry my platoon's walkie talkie. It didn't work very well, but at least I felt useful. During a break at noon I asked a Marine to take my picture.

Moments later, a sniper in a nearby stand of trees shot a Marine who was sitting in the open only a few metres from me. I ran over to him, not stopping to think that if a sniper had shot the Marine he could shoot me! The bullet shattered the Marine's upper arm and mangled his biceps. Bits of his bone littered the ground, but he still had feeling and movement in his lower arm and hand. While I gave him first aid, the other Marines were firing into the trees in retaliation, and we received some more incoming fire — I could hear bullets whistling overhead.

A VERY STRANGE OPERATION

At one point during my tour of duty, I was ordered to join a group of Marines on what turned out to be a bizarre mission. We left from Chu Lai and headed down the coast. This photo, taken shortly after take-off, shows the base at Chu Lai. The smoke on the horizon is apparently from white-phosphorous incendiary artillery shells; in the hatchway of the helicopter is an M-60 machine gun.



Our destination was a hill several kilometres south of Chu Lai and a few kilometres inland. Scuttlebutt said that we would hold the hill briefly, then climb down, meet a Marine Corps band on Highway 1, march down the highway to the coast to show that we controlled it, then board ships to return to Chu Lai.

A VERY STRANGE OPERATION



We flew over the sea in order to avoid sniper fire, and within 20 minutes had landed on the hill. That's me, in the photo at the right, right after arrival; the helicopter is carrying more Marines.



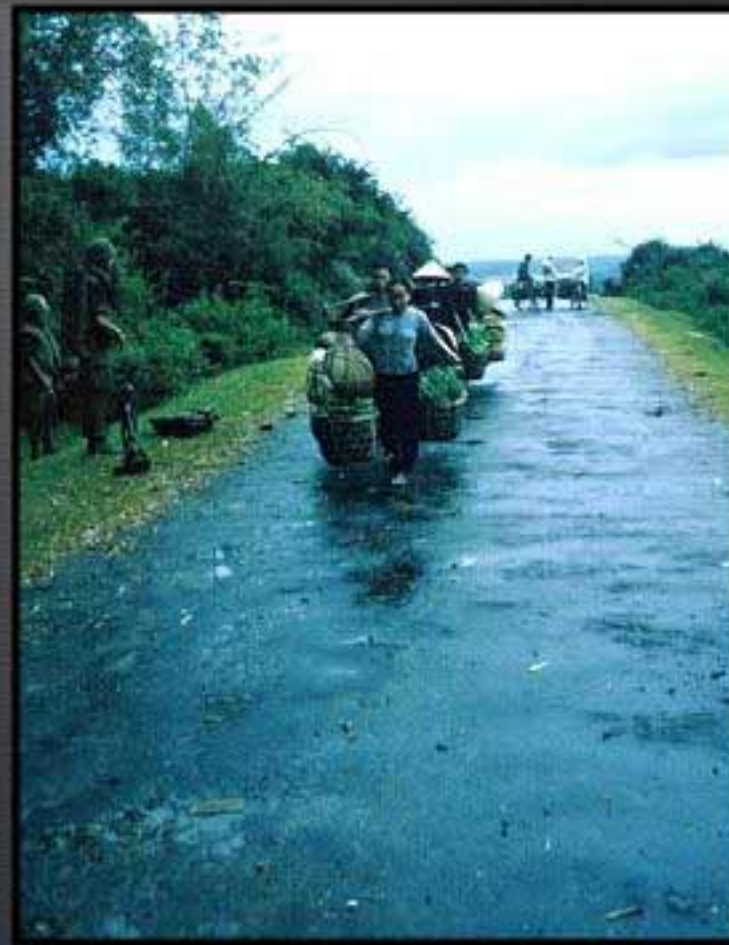
A VERY STRANGE OPERATION



On our arrival at the hill, the Marines established a perimeter and sighted in their 60mm mortar. And then we waited. In the broad valley to the west were burned-out villages and collapsed bridges. South Vietnamese Air Force T-28 Trojans bombed a village; a pall of smoke from the village drifted across the valley for hours. That night we watched an attack on an ARVN convoy; we could see tracers and hear explosions and shouts.

A VERY STRANGE OPERATION

The next morning we hiked down the hill in the fog to Highway 1. No band showed up, and we marched to the coast without incident, boarded an LST, and returned to Chu Lai. If there was a purpose to this operation, I have no idea what it was.



OPERATION UTAH BEGINS



After setting a record for the Vietnam War for the number of days in continuous combat operations, 3/1 was granted some R&R at Chu Lai. Within a couple of days, however, we awoke to the news that we were going out on another operation. Choppers would pick us up at noon. This was the beginning of the operation against North Vietnamese troops that would enter the record books as Operation Utah, one of the bloodier ones in the history of the Marine Corps.

OPERATION UTAH ~ END OF DAY 1



Lima, Mike and India companies were helilifted due south from Chu Lai to an area north of Quang Ngai City. We spent the afternoon marching another few kilometres south. I took this photograph shortly before we bivouacked on a hill near Hill 50; in the distance are the foothills of the Annamese Cordillera, separating Vietnam and Laos.

OPERATION UTAH ~ AIR STRIKE ON HILL 50



That night, we witnessed a heavy aerial and artillery bombardment of an area a couple of kilometres to the south, and the next morning we were ordered to march directly into that area, and to link up with ARVN troops who had secured Hill 50.

Marine F4 Phantoms dropped napalm near Hill 50 as we approached it. It turned out that the ARVN had *not* secured the hill, and my platoon took the full force of a surprise attack by entrenched, well-armed North Vietnamese troops.



OPERATION UTAH ~ I BECOME A CASUALTY

The attack decimated my company. Within moments of coming under heavy, plunging cross-fire from machine guns and rifles, we had suffered several casualties, including my platoon leader. In the next hour — two hours? — Lima Company suffered 10 KIA and 20 WIA. I was shot through my right thigh, only a few minutes into the battle, when I started to help a wounded Marine.



In the photo at the left, I am waiting to be evacuated; below, Corpsman Larry Skonetski, who gave me first aid when bullets were still flying.



OPERATION UTAH ~ I BECOME A CASUALTY

I was operated on late in the day on the hospital ship U.S.S. *Repose*. My femur had been shattered and the muscles of my inner thigh mangled, but I was lucky: Operation Utah cost the Marines at least 96 dead and more than 275 wounded. One Lima Co. Marine, last seen as we approached Hill 50, was never found.



At the left, a U.S. Navy photo shows a Marine Corps helicopter approaching the *Repose* during the Vietnam War. Above, an x-ray taken on the *Repose* shows my broken femur.

HOSPITALIZATION AT BALBOA NAVAL HOSPITAL



After two or three days on the *Repose*, I was evacuated back to the States via Da Nang, the Philippine Islands, Hawaii, and San Francisco, finally arriving at Balboa Navy Hospital in San Diego. I recall little of the flight from the Philippines, and nothing at all of the last leg from San Francisco to San Diego.

I was in traction for 111 days, and hospitalized for almost nine months, fighting infections almost the entire time.

I was one of a handful of Vietnam veterans at Balboa, and we were treated like heroes. In this photograph, I'm enjoying a visit with actor Jackie Cooper, star of the television program *McHale's Navy*. In real life he was a U.S. Navy Reserve officer.

HOME AT LAST

In August, 1966, after five months in hospital, I got medical leave and drove home to Silver City, New Mexico with my fiancée, Susan Overturf, who had moved to San Diego to be with me. The photo at the right shows me with my paternal grandmother, Ratie Ingraham, and my maternal grandmother, Grace Herrick. By this time I had "graduated" to a full-leg cast.

I was finally discharged from the hospital just before Christmas, 1966. Susan and I married on 27 December, and I began studies at the University of Missouri in Kansas City.





I hope you found this slide show to be worthwhile. You can learn more about my experiences in Vietnam, or about the role of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines in Vietnam, through my web site, www.ingraham.ca/bob/vietnam_home.html. Feel free to e-mail me at b.ingraham@shaw.ca.