

Lou Ellen Bell 1957 – 1977

Interview performed by Patricia Rushton

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Lou Ellen Bell was an experienced United States Navy Nurse when she went to Vietnam. Her story is a mature and detailed look at the Vietnam experience. The following are excerpts from that experience.

I was on recruiting duty when I received orders to Da Nang, Vietnam. I didn't have any qualms about going. I wanted to go. I asked to go. Whenever I asked to go, the Navy detailer said, "How many more recruiters am I going to have ask to go?" I guess we were all requesting that as our next duty station. It's hard to talk about our need for nurses in combat when you hadn't been there. I ended up with some of the people I knew, though none of those I recruited because the Navy wasn't sending them over that quickly, which was a good thing. One friend of mine, the Army nurse that was recruiting, was fresh out of a college Baccalaureate (BSN) program. She spent six months at Fort Bragg, and they sent her to Vietnam. I cannot imagine, with that little bit of nursing experience beyond a BS degree, being able to cope with the situation in Vietnam. No wonder they had emotional problems.

When we arrived, there were these very exhausted looking guys heading out. We called for someone to come get us, as our letter had instructed us to do. We were supposed to call the chief nurse. Well they wouldn't put my call through to the chief nurse because it was after bedtime. I told them who I was and why I was calling and they still were refusing. I said, "Well, let me speak to the officer of the day." I spoke to him and he assured me that he could not put a call through to the nurse's quarters. I said,

“Well, there are five Navy nurses over at the terminal. Would you arrange to have transportation pick us up and take us to the hospital? He said, “Oh, certainly.” So, he called main administration and asked them to send someone. They said they didn’t have anyone. Ultimately, the transportation came from the hospital.

I told the officer of the day that there were five women and a whole lot of luggage. Each one of us had at least two or three pieces of luggage. I told him to make sure that they brought something big enough to hold everything. The truck that came was a pickup truck with a cab large enough for the driver and five passengers. The back was closed in so that it could be used for passengers or cargo. We head out to the truck and see doctors getting into our cab. They were of course in long pants and we were in dresses, our light blue summer uniforms. It is very hard in a dress to get up in the back of a truck. The driver, bless his little heart, was a young enlisted man. He said, “Excuse me sirs, I came over here to pick up five nurses and five nurses will be in the cab before this truck will move. If you care to come with us, you can get in the back.” He called and got another truck to pick up our luggage. So we got into the cab and another truck arrived to get the luggage before we left the airport.

As we were on our way from the airport we couldn’t go beyond a certain point without showing identification. The guards were not American military. They were Vietnamese. They were the Vietnamese that we were there to support. But at that moment, all I could see was that we could not go beyond the rolls of concertina wire (similar to barbed wire) without clearance from these people who at the time were foreign nationals to me.

We didn't go directly to the hospital. We went to something called the White Elephant, which is the Administrative Offices for the whole area. We had to fill out a lot of papers. I said, "Is there any possibility we could finish this tomorrow? We are very tired. I don't know about anybody else but I'm not thinking clearly enough to fill out all this paperwork." He said, "Well, I don't know, you really need to finish this now." By this time we had been over 24 hours without sleep other than brief naps while flying. I said, "That's fine, we will do it tomorrow. Please take us to the hospital." By the time we arrived the chief nurse had heard that we were coming. A lot of the nurses were up to greet us. We got to bed about four o'clock in the morning.

This young MSC Officer had told us we needed to be up and ready at eight am to go finish checking in, which we did. By eleven or so we had done all kinds of stuff. It was so hot, at least 120 degrees. It was July in Vietnam. I said to Val Pack, who checked in the same time I did, "I'm about to pass out." She echoed the exhaustion. I asked the MSC officer "Is there some place around here that is cool that we can get something cool to drink?" He said, "No, the only place would be back at the hospital." I said, "Good, so take us back to the hospital so we can have lunch." He said, "You need to finish checking in." I said, "I'm not doing anything else until we have a chance to get something cool to drink and an opportunity to find out who we are again. We're exhausted." Nobody contested what I was saying. There was nobody really senior to me. I think everyone else was either a Lieutenant or a Lieutenant Commander, which was the rank I held. I wasn't worried about that; I was only concerned about nobody speaking up and somebody needed to say something. I had just come from recruiting duty and so I was pretty bossy anyway. He said, "Well, I'll pick you up at one o'clock and we'll go

finish checking in.” I went to get something to eat. I figured I’d be OK if I did that. The others went to the quarters. They had just had it. That may have been also why they weren’t talking. When they got to the quarters, Mary Cannon, the Chief Nurse, took one look at them and said, “Go to bed, you’re not worth anything to me until you get some rest.” When I got there she told me the same thing. She said, “Right now if I needed a nurse on duty there is not one of you that could work.” I said, “But he told us we needed to finish checking in.” She said, “And you can do that tomorrow. I’ll take care of it.” Mary Cannon was the chief nurse that was leaving. Helen Brooks came after her. Mary Cannon was an Army nurse for several years. She had gotten out of the Army and come into the Navy. Other than the Hospital Ship, I believe that she was the first Chief Nurse in Vietnam, with a large contingency of Navy Nurses. They opened the hospital there. She assigned me to Orthopedics.

The accommodations there were pretty decent. They had taken Quonset huts and divided each one into eight units. You walk through the front door and you had a narrow hallway with four small rooms on each side. My bed was five feet long. In order to turn it across the room I had to disassemble it and reassemble it. I think the room was about six feet wide and about eight feet long. It had a sink in it. Bathrooms were out of the hut and down a covered sidewalk, which was our hallway. There were four showers, but the Sea Bees had put a tub in one of the showers. They made the stainless steel tub six feet long and four feet wide. We were on water rations and so nobody could really use it. If you put an inch of water in it you would have used all the water you would have used for a shower. I used it one time and I was embarrassed I had used that much water.. They took the last shower on the end and put the tub there so it protruded out of the shower. They

were able to give it privacy by hanging the shower curtain in front of it. The adjacent small space had a deep sink and a washer and dryer. After I got there I managed to persuade the chief nurse to get a refrigerator in there so I could set up beer and soda mess. Helen Brooks said she had never seen one, that worked, and I replied that I had never ran one, that didn't. Instead of using the honor system, I asked that each nurse put a mark on a clipboard hung beside the refrigerator. I would occasionally tally the amounts due and post it. I never had any problem collecting. The nurses who stayed with us briefly while going to and from the ships were happy to find beer and colas in our quarters. They left the money with someone in the quarters to give to me. I used the money to purchase more and bought supplies with any excess. I had purchased the first supply of drinks with my own money.

In the next room there was a bank of sinks, four on each side for a total of eight. There were four or five commodes, each one partitioned off with a privacy door. Each one of the sleeping huts was air-conditioned, however the bathroom and shower hut was ventilated but not air-conditioned. Our only phone, a hospital phone, was in the open passage way.

There were four huts for the females. These were all on the four corners if you can imagine an H. Off the middle of the H on the one side was the hut containing the bathroom and showers. In the opposite direction was the fifth hut and that was our little community gathering space plus the chief nurse and the assistant chief nurse's rooms. There were three rooms there, the big one was supposed to be the chief nurse's room. She elected to move to a smaller room and saved the big one for a small living room, which

they used for VIP guests, whenever they came. One guest was the Director of the Navy Nurse Corps, Captain Bulchefski.

When I was on nights sometimes when we had some nurses leaving or a special guest leaving, Helen Brooks would ask me to come to the quarters and wake her up. I would step into that area just to wake her up. When Captain Bulshefski was leaving, I brought over some sweet rolls, by Helen's request, and woke her up. The other nurses would join them in the lounge and say their goodbyes. But, the night nurse, on that occasion, me, had to return to work.

When I first got there we had some Vietnamese girls that would clean our quarters. They did a so-so job. One day I went in and one of them was washing somebody else's shoes under running water. Ultimately one of the things that I persuaded Helen to do was to request a steward to be assigned to our quarters. I had done a little homework figuring out how many people were giving up their BAQ/BEQ or housing allowance to live there. Other than the people who had dependents, which most of us didn't, there was a lot of money being forfeited. Since the military was saving this money and providing us with such minimal quarters I thought they could provide us a Steward to make sure the quarters were maintained. She looked at that and she thought it was a good idea. She took it to the Commanding Officer and we ended up with a Steward.

There was the idea that a man couldn't be assigned to women's quarters. That was her first objection. I said, "Why not? There are workmen in here all the time. None of us come out of our rooms without being dressed, at least with a robe on. We never knew if we were going to find a guy in our passageway changing a light bulb or painting. I said, "So that's not the problem. They can be out here and they can knock on somebody's door

before going into a room. If somebody was in their room sleeping the door will be closed with a sign on it to not disturb.”

Before having a steward, a nurse was left in our quarters during the day to supervise the Vietnamese women, making sure they cleaned properly. We weren't worried about them stealing because we could lock any valuables in the lockers that served as closets for each room. They just needed to be educated on how to take care of things. Their standards of what to do are not the same as ours. It was a constant struggle with them as far as being sure to sweep, mop, and clean the sinks and bathtub. The steward was a Filipino First Class Petty Officer. The doctors had all kind of stewards over at their place. I thought they could spare one. We deserved some of that care. Then he could have on his resume that he supervised five Vietnamese Nationals. He was very nice and a little embarrassed when he first came but then he took charge. If there was maintenance work to be done, he would be there when the maintenance guy came rather than somebody on our staff having to be there.

We had about six or eight nurse anesthetists. Their quarters were separate, even though they connected with ours. The hall space in between contained a few beds. It was where they had put us when we first got there. We actually had just bed space. We had to come into the main quarters to go to the bathroom. Unless there was a vacant room because somebody had left or was out on leave, that's where the nurses stayed overnight waiting for the hospital ships. It was not air-conditioned. It was air cooled, when the wind blew!

Margaret Higgins, one of our nurses, had decided to get garbage cans and put them underneath each of the air conditioning units to collect the water. Then she used the

water to raise her farm. We called it 'Higgie's Farm.' It was a small area of sand between two of the huts. She had someone send her seeds and she had planted vegetables..

The Seabees had built us a charcoal grill. They made it so tall that we ultimately ended up digging a hole to put it down lower to the ground so we could reach it. Initially, we had to pull a stool up so we could reach the grill. If you want anything done by the Seabees, just know it's going to be grandiose. We had picnic tables out there and that is where we could entertain. We couldn't entertain in the building. We also had a banana tree, which could have been there compliments of Higgins. That was our social gathering place. Individual dating was usually done at the officers' club.

Incoming rockets were usually not too bad. One night I was at MAG16, which is our Marine Air Group, across the street from where we were. There were several of us over there and we got incoming that was hitting the Sergeants' Club. I called the Chief Nurse as soon as I got a chance, to let her know that I could see the area where the nurses were and I knew that area was not hit. She told me to get them together and bring them back as soon as possible. I said, "I'm sorry. I can't do that right now. This base is on lockdown and we can't get off of it at the present time, but as soon as we can we'll come home.

When we first got there we were working eight-hour shifts. I was in Orthopedics. A lot of the American military would come in at night and would leave by noon the next day on their way home. When they were first in Vietnam they were bringing them directly back to the stateside hospitals. Then, they found out it was not good for the patients to travel so far and so long, so they slowed the process down. Most of our patients were going to Japan and other areas. The Air Force was doing the transport.

Most of the patients were sent to the Air Force facility to stay overnight and fly out the next morning. Patients that were too sick to do that were left at the hospital until morning. The flight nurse would come to the hospital and get a direct report from the night nurse. The patients would be loaded and taken directly to the plane. They were called "Arrive and Fly" -- They arrived at the airport and flew out immediately.

The other end of the Orthopedic ward was other nationals including POW's, that were too sick to be over on the POW ward. They would be on whatever ward they required the care. They would require a Marine guard to sit with them for their protection. Usually they would be too sick to be a threat to anybody else but it was a two-way thing. -- The Marine was there for the protection of the prisoner. I had one North Vietnamese woman wake up to find she had no leg on one side. She probably blamed all of us. Our communications were between "Nil and None". She reached out and grabbed my arm and just about pinched a hunk out of it. I was trying to do something to help her. We had Korean nationals, Vietnamese, and Montagnards. The Montagnards were an organized fighting force. I heard that they were very good fighters.

When there was a military person injured in the field his unit would call in for a helicopter. They would say what appeared to be the nature of the injuries. They could be directed to the Army, Navy, or one of the hospital ships; wherever they felt they could best get care. For example, if the patient had an eye injury and our ophthalmologist was gone for some reason, then they would redirect the helicopter to the hospital ship. The easiest thing for us to do was to work with the hospital ships. There is something to be said for coordination.

Normally there would be only one hospital ship close to us at a time; they would alternate. One would go north while the other one was going south and then back and forth. One would go up closer to the DMZ and then they would come down to our area. When an injured patient arrived at our place, they went into Receiving. They had “Receiving 1” and “Receiving 2”. Generally, the injured came by helicopter. When the helicopters would call in ahead of time, the stretcher-bearers ran out to meet them with folding stretchers. For each patient received on a stretcher, they would give a folded-stretcher to the helicopter crews, to use for the next patient. The stretcher-bearers were primarily non-rated enlisted men, not corpsmen. People that were not corpsmen were sent to the hospital to work. They would assign them to push food carts up to the wards for about three months to build up their muscles. On the ship they might chip paint but here they were pushing chow carts to the wards; the stretcher-bearers came from that pool. You have to be strong to carry those patients. They had to run from where the plane landed to the Receiving area. Most of the patients went to “Receiving 1”, which was an open bay area. There were sawhorses already setup where stretchers could be placed.

IV's were also set up with the IV sets attached and ready to attach. I don't know how long they were kept before being broken down. These IV's hung all over the place. There were poles attached to the length of the wall or overhead and the IV's were hung by “S” hooks to the poles. We still had glass bottles in Vietnam. They started getting IV fluids in plastic bags, but I think they went to the Field Corpsmen. Glass bottles would be dangerous and hard to carry, in the field. The advantage of the plastic was you could start it and then stick it underneath the patient's shoulders. -- The pressure from their shoulder would push the fluids in.

“Receiving 1” saw the bulk of the patients. There was a cover but the outside temperature was the room temperature. “Receiving 2” is where the worst injured patients were treated; the capacity was eight patients. The patients were seen and immediate care given in an air-conditioned, cleaner, environment with considerable emergency equipment. From the receiving areas, patients were assessed, stabilized, identified, and decisions made as to the surgery required.

The first piece of identification the patient received was the blood number. The blood number was written with a felt tipped pen on their chest. They would draw blood and send it to the lab. That number was matched to whatever their blood number ID was. In an emergency, sometimes you are treating a patient before you know who they are. One rather senior corpsman had the job in the Receiving area to go through patient clothes and secure valuables. He determined the person’s identity and put everything in a bag. They would put armbands on the patients, as soon as they were able to, and then get them admitted. In the meantime, that blood number was the way of identifying each of them, their records, personal belongings, and lab samples.

From there, the most immediate adjacent facility was up the sidewalk. On the left was the X-Ray Department and on the right was the Pre-Op for the OR. Before the patient left our Receiving, they would usually slip them onto what they called hardboard. This is a piece of plywood on stretcher rails with a sheet over it. The wooden hardboard could be put directly onto the x-ray table and eliminated the need to move the patient on and off the x-ray table as x-rays could be done through the patient and the board.

From there, the patients went to pre-op. The patients were held in pre-op until they could go into the OR. We had two major Operating Rooms. They were in a framed

building and had linoleum on the walls so the walls could be washed. The floor was covered with small tiles. I did get a chance to go in their one night and I got a photo of one of the rooms. I noticed the OR table had managed to chew up a couple of tiles. I looked at the walls to see how much of it was washable. There was linoleum up about four or five feet. They had hanging overhead lights and metal cabinets. It was pretty neat for a war zone.

I saw that the other ORs were in Quonset huts; the two operating rooms, in the Quonset huts, were back to back with a dividing half wall in between the operating tables. The rooms were open on the sides so you could walk from one operating room to the other. When the female nurses first arrived, they found urinals in the operating rooms for the medical staff to use in between surgeries. I never saw them, I only heard about it. It speaks to the massive numbers of surgeries the staff were handling in those operating rooms prior to the construction of the new operating rooms. These units continued to be used as needed on a daily basis.

In addition to the new operating rooms and the Quonset hut operating rooms, the hospital also had several 'Mash Unit' operating rooms, which could be transported on the back of a truck. -- Something they could just set off and set down, a metal box type thing. One was a Dental OR; it was prefabricated out of metal and could be loaded onto the back of a plane.

Most of our wards were Quonset huts. At one time I had a Vietnamese female that was diagnosed with typhoid. We had a couple of individual rooms in some of the Quonset hut wards; she was put in one of those on isolation.

When you think about being out there in that kind of heat and the wet and the bacteria with the rashes and then you get infection, you've got a mess. Our Chief Nurse, Helen Brooks, had been in Korea and was very smart about this. She had shipped this huge box of socks to herself, in Vietnam . Anytime one of the corpsmen who had worked with her came by to say "hi" she always gave them a few pair of socks to take back to the field with them. When she was in Korea, she found that the men in the field, never had enough socks.

Prior to leaving for Vietnam, I talked to someone who had been there. They told me to have extra soles put on the bottom of my shoes because of the unevenness and the rocks. I took brand new shoes and put new soles over the existing sole. -- It made all the difference in the world in terms of comfort. The other thing that she suggested was that I buy cotton underwear, because cotton absorbs the perspiration.

After the patients have their surgery and go through recovery, they go to ICU, if they're critical. I remember the night that I stopped by ICU and heard somebody saying, "I don't know why that patient is here; they only have this and this. I don't know why they're in ICU." I said, "I know you guys are accustomed to all this, but may I just point out this person has a head wound, a chest wound, a belly wound, and would be in ICU in any state side hospital!" I had worked on the surgical unit, and I knew they had patients that were very sick in the surgical unit. They all just thought that was the biggest laugh. They had all been there so long and their patients were so critical that they had kind of gotten accustomed to a little less ill patients being considered as not critical, and not sent to ICU

ICU was staffed well with nurses, because they needed a higher patient-nurse ratio. The rest of the place had one nurse covering more than one ward. Some of the younger nurses worked in there as well. The other place that some of the younger nurses worked was the surgical unit. One side was General Surgery and the other side was Neurosurgery.

One time I was on the night shift; I had a neurosurgery patient come back from the OR without an order for an antibiotic or a steroid. I called the doctor, and that's something we didn't do because they got precious little sleep. When he came to the phone, I told him what it was and he said, "I'll be right there." I said, "Well sir, you don't really need to come over. I just wanted to know if you intentionally did not write for an antibiotic and a steroid." He came over and wrote the order and said, "I just wanted to meet the nurse that knew that there should be an order and had the guts to call me." He also wanted to know why I wasn't assigned to neurosurgery. I told him that I also had Orthopedics experience and I usually worked there.

Another person I thought was wonderful was Walt Godfrey, an MSC officer. He came over as our Supply Officer. One of his responsibilities was restocking all of our supplies. He setup automatic restocking almost as soon as he got there. It was a little bit of hassle at first because we had to decide how much of each item we wanted on the shelf at all times. The items and amount was put on the shelves and restocked daily. This was better than handwriting each stock order, every week or two. Also, stocks of supplies didn't pile up in one area needed in another area. From the time Walt came, supplies were not my problem; maybe this automatic stocking system came out of the war.

While I was in Vietnam, a patient came in with a live grenade in his eye. They brought him in with a flak jacket over his head. They wanted somebody to stabilize his head. The corpsman that did it later told me that without even thinking, he had voluntarily held the man's head; he was holding the patient's head as they moved the patient to the OR, then realized that this grenade could go off at any moment and that his hands were under the flak jacket. The only thing to do was to get it out as soon as possible. They called the explosives group to stand by. The OR staff were all volunteers. There were covered sidewalks, but not smooth, and a little bit of an incline. They took him into the OR and the doctor was able to get it out without it going off. They gave it to the bomb squad and they disposed of it. I know the whole crew must have gotten awards for bravery. Most importantly, the patient survived.

When we first arrived, we were doing eight-hour shifts. It wasn't long before the nurses decided to have a meeting with the Chief Nurse because we thought the patients needed more direct nursing care, as opposed to just having the nurses do supervision. We asked her to put us on 12-hour shifts. The Chief Nurse thought about it and came back and said, "I will put you on twelve-hour shifts for five days a week. You figure out how to make that work because I'm not going to go beyond that; that is as much as you should be doing. -- You will go off when I want you to go off. -- You can't tell me next week you've changed your mind." We liked it because it gave us two days off a week. We did that for a couple of months until the patient load dropped and she put us back on 8-hour shift, 6 days a week, as we had previously worked.

I was a Lieutenant Commander and 33 years old in Vietnam. I had been in the Navy Nurse Corps for over 12 years. I wanted to go to Vietnam because I came in the

military to be a military nurse. I had a lot of experience and I felt the patients were entitled to some of that. Most of the nurses I worked with were experienced. The majority of them were Lieutenant Commanders. There were a fair number of Lieutenants. We didn't have an Ensign on our staff and we only had one Lieutenant JG, that I remember. At NSA Hospital, Da Nang, while I was there, the corpsmen said I didn't check all their IV's every night, every hour or two. They said that when I checked one, it was always one that has failed. One of the younger nurses asked how I did that. I said, "I don't really know. One might have a sixth sense that something might be wrong. I think that it is just experience." I think maybe I would look at them but not necessarily walk over to them. As I talked with the patient I would look at the drip of the solution but I didn't stand there and count it. I expected them to check the IV's and bring it to my attention.

We were near the beach but we didn't have the opportunity to go often. To go anywhere you couldn't walk, other than on the hospital compound. There was a small exchange and a few places to go eat. There was a place to get our uniform laundry done or pay the Vietnamese to do it. It was a rather self-contained hospital compound. If you wanted to go to the Main Exchange you had to call for transportation to take you. Normally they liked you to get a group together. If you were to go to China Beach, which was named for the China Sea, there was an Exchange. You wouldn't go down there by yourself. I didn't like to go to China Beach, because that's where all the troops were. MAG 16 had a private beach across the street, and I enjoyed the privacy. That whole strip along there was beach. The Marine airstrip was between us, and the water. We were not far from it, but you couldn't walk over there, from a safety standpoint. We never left our

compound even to go to the beach, without needing to have someone to drive us. At our command, the females were not permitted to drive. When I questioned the Chief Nurse about this, she replied that I would need a Government Driving License. -- I had one! Then she said that I would need to know how to shoot a weapon, and I told her that I had been on a pistol team at a previous duty station. Her final reply was “how would it look”? I concurred that we might be viewed as easy targets.

After Nixon came into office, the amount of casualties dropped. He apparently told the military that we could only take a defensive stand. The patient load lightened up a bit. I got a chance one day to go up to Quan Tri; I wanted to see the hospital. We rode up on a Jolly Green Giant, which was an Air Force Helicopter. We flew up to QuanTri and then they took us by jeep, over to the hospital. The only nurses there were the male Nurse Anesthetists. I met the Head Nurse of ICU, which was a corpsman. One interesting thing -- this hospital had some inflatable wards. It resembled the curved shape of a Quonset hut; however, the walls were supported by the air, in chambers in the wall. The corpsman that was in Quan Tri ICU took advantage of the fact he had nurses visiting there and asked their opinions. He did a consultation about some of his patients and asked for suggestions. That must have been quite a stress to have that much responsibility. I think he was a corpsman that had gone to ‘C’ school. It is a year and a half of advanced training. These guys can be sent on a ship and be the Chief Medical Officer for the ship. These men could probably come home and take the OPN (LPN) boards or go into the PA program. A lot of the earlier PA’s were ex-corpsmen. I was in Vietnam, from July 1968 to July 1969.

Two of the four nurses who travelled that day to Quan Tri, left on the air-evac plane that took patients to Da Nang. We found later that they were unable to land in Da Nang because the ammunition dump was exploding. Val Pack and I remained in Quan Tri to return later with the same Jolly Green Giant helicopter. We were offered an opportunity to go to Dong Ha, a smaller medical facility about 6 miles from the DMZ; travel was via jeep. This facility treated a lot of children. We did not remain long, then returned to Quan Tri, only to be told that we probably could not return to Da Nang that day, because of the explosions that the ammo dump (name for ammo storage area). This was the first we had heard about it. Finally, we got the Chaplain to take us to the airport to see if the Jolly Green was returning and it was, so we boarded the plane and returned. Just as we got off the chopper, a pickup truck came out and picked us up. I got into the truck then decided to take a picture of an explosion as it was happening. The pickup driver said, "Put your fingers in your ears and open your mouth." I said, "Huh?" and he said, "Huh Hell, just do it"! Immediately following, the plume from the explosion would be a concussion wave. If you didn't plug your ears, the concussion-wave could rupture your eardrums! -- It was something that had to be done immediately. The minute that it took, passed. The corpsman took his fingers out and so did I. He said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry but you had about a second to get your fingers in your ears or you were going to have permanent ear damage. I thanked him for alerting me anyway he could. The following are excerpts from letters to my mother.

5th of January 1969 in Da Nang - Today I went to Camp Tien Sha, Da Nang, to the library. It was funny walking around in a real honest to goodness library, complete with a female civilian librarian. I picked up an Air Force book on aerobic exercising. It turns out that our old standby, running, is the best aerobic, followed by cycling, swimming, handball, and light exercise, which require a lot of energy after a sustained period of time. It builds up your reserve capabilities. Do you suppose I would create a sensation when I started running around the compound? In case I haven't given you enough information to make that decision I'll tell you that the sight would be most unusual and would not go unnoticed. I guess I'll have to talk some others into joining me." We dressed in ward whites; we didn't dress in fatigues. Off duty we were in little summer dresses. We were in a whole different environment where women were supposed to do their job and stay out of sight.

25th of January 1969 - I had been to Hong Kong and back. I did tapes as well. I did letters only when I was on duty. I said, "You know, turning a woman who hasn't been shopping in six months loose in the greatest shopping center in the world and watch out. Seriously, I had a ball and it was worth every cent of it. The greatest treat of all was talking to my family." I had just told my mother about all these things I had bought. I bought shoes and had a coat handmade and a camera. Some of this I just had shipped straight home. Some of it, I brought back to Da Nang and shipped it out from there when I came home.

4th of February 1969 – This was my pay entry base date. "Dear Mom, do you remember what we were doing twelve years ago today? We drove up to Raleigh, North

Carolina and I was sworn into the Navy Nurse Corps. I never knew then that I would still be in twelve years later. A lot has happened in those years hasn't it? I've been to Portsmouth, Cuba, Charleston, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and now Vietnam. I've gained experience that I would never have had, if I had stayed at James Walker." James Walker was my nursing school. "Not to mention getting my BSN degree (while I have been in the Navy). There have been some good years and some bad ones. Sometimes I wonder what our life would have been like, if I had not left Wilmington.

Occasionally I think seriously about getting out of the Navy. But you know how much I'm part of that and it's a part of me. That's where my friends are and so I'm a "lifer", as they say here in Da Nang. I can still think of getting out, if I should find a prince charming, though it does seem likely he has been found by somebody else." Then I asked her about my dog.

I have some news for you. I got a real surprise today. It wouldn't come as a surprise to you as you would say, "I knew that you would get it, but I really wasn't expecting it. When I got up tonight at 1800, I had a letter under my door. I have been accepted for school in Rehabilitative Nursing. There is just one problem and it makes me view this with mixed emotion. I'm going to go to the State University of New York in Buffalo. (My family lived in Florida) I'm convinced that they're trying to make a Yankee out of me. I will be going in September and I will be able to take a four month leave and maybe even assigned TAD somewhere for a couple of weeks, hopefully near home. I don't know what to say. I have been somewhat depressed at the thought of being so far from home again and in the cold weather. I know it's a lot closer than I am now. I should be very pleased that they think I'm worth sending to school.

4th of February 1969- Naturally there's a lot to do so I'm just now taking a break. I only have two active orthopedic wards. On one ward they admitted seven patients today and one we received tonight. On another ward they admitted seventeen patients today. They discharged fifteen. Those were going out air evac to Japan. We also transferred nine up to a third ward, which is a convalescent ward. With all the new patients I have more to do. I was just drawing some blood for cross match on two POW patients that will have surgery in the morning. I am at the same time starting an IV so we will have the needle in the vein to give blood for their surgery. I must run now. I have to check on my patients and go to midnight chow." This was really all before midnight or 1:00am. I work from seven at night until seven in the morning. I had added four more patients on my ward between 7:30pm and midnight.

We were mostly dependent on eating in the hospital with an occasional meal at the Officer's club. We had a small refrigerator in our quarters, but it wasn't big enough to put much in with a bunch of us were sharing it.

23rd of February 1969- "Just a note to let you know I'm safe, sound and happy. I heard on the news today that Da Nang is under attack with many casualties. I guess that story is even bigger back at home. Fact is they managed to hit an ammunition dump about four miles away at the deep-water piers and, I think, the airport. We did receive many patients but nothing worse than last August. We do anticipate more activity. However, everybody is on guard. I don't think we have anything to worry about except receiving casualties, so don't you fret.

26th of February 1969 - "Just another short note to let you know things are not so bad here. I get scared every time I listen to the news. -- More so than what is actually

happening! The Da Nang Air Base and the Republic of Vietnam storage area were attacked. That was several days ago but thus far things have been exceedingly quiet here. We've been on alert several times but they haven't even hit MAG16, across the street. Most everything has been in town or at Freedom Hill." I didn't tell her that Freedom Hill wasn't that far away. They hit the Navy Exchange storage area over there, which means they got the booze. They really didn't get it but they destroyed it. You should have heard the moans about that. But Mom, they are really hitting some of our boys in other areas. We've been receiving quite a few but it isn't any worse than I've seen before. We seem to be under a little more pressure, as I know everybody is concerned that this is the start of another offensive like last year's attack. Actually the intelligence reports are that they had been able to prevent them from having the ability to strike like they did last year. Please remember we are probably very safe here. The Marines guard this place well and I'm not just saying this to make you feel better."

14th of March, 1969 - She had asked me about picking up something at the Navy Exchange and I couldn't. I said, "I'd like to do that but I have a ration card for all of this year. The only way I could get it would be if I could get out of country on leave. We are permitted one refrigerator, one TV, one regular camera, one movie camera, one slide projector, one movie projector and a couple of watches. -- Otherwise, the small amount that does make it into the country would be purchased by the people who have the time to go to the exchange regularly. Right now all they have in stock are cassette recorders.

The only real opportunity for much buying is on R&R or leave. We only had four days in Hong Kong. We arrived about 23:30 Sunday night and left about 0600 Friday morning. Actually I feel like I did pretty well for the time I was there. You may have

heard we had some excitement here. It seems a Chinese Communist mortar fell in an open field between the cook's quarters and ward 5B. As it happens a few people picked up some slight flesh wounds. Both places were practically deserted as most everybody was at the movies. This incident could have been a real disaster. The patients and the corpsmen attend an outdoor movie in the middle of the compound. Had the mortar landed about fifty yards from where it did it could have done some real damage to approximately 200 people. It was the first incident of war damage and personnel injury on our hospital compound since I've been here. It was fortunately very mild. Everybody here said that it must have been amateur night as it was the only mortar received anywhere around in the whole area. Hitting a hospital is a "No No!" The American press eats it up. I hope you haven't been too worried. I was safely in my quarters at the time. I missed all the excitement (I didn't tell her how close my quarters were).

20th of March 1969 – "The hospital got hit again earlier tonight. Fortunately there was not one casualty, not even a scratch. It hit just the entrance to a ward sending shrapnel into the ward. It scattered more around the area. I repeat, no injuries whatsoever, just a few jangled nerves.

Now the part I was debating about. It was my ward and I was on duty. It must have landed about ten to fifteen feet from me. I was at the desk and got up to get my jacket and helmet when I heard the incoming rounds. I always bring it with me when I come on night duty. The desk is about seven feet from the door, which is where the thing hit. Fortunately my path took me away from the impact just before it hit. I wasn't in danger. I do think somebody up there likes me. Anyway, now that it's over, it's just improbable that I will ever be that close again. I know that none of this will convince you

that I'm okay and the situation here is really not that bad and only occasionally dangerous. I thought that you would want to know. If I had gotten a little scratch, I could have gotten a purple heart. That is one ribbon I never want to have. I never want to be that close again. It took about two hours for the butterflies to develop in my stomach. Before that I was just running around tending to business and escorting all the people that came over to investigate the situation. I reckon we're really in a war zone."

My mother is an extremely emotional person and she had a heart problem. I promised her I would be honest. Before I went I told her that I was probably safer in Vietnam in a war zone than I had been on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. I had been on recruiting duty in western Pennsylvania for two and a half years and frequently had to be on the turnpike.

I had requested to go to Vietnam but I never told her I had. I waited until my orders came in and then I called her and said, "Guess what? I got orders to Vietnam. I'm so excited." Take care and try not to worry, lightning never strikes twice I'm told. I'm not worried. Besides that somebody said to me, "You must have gone to church on Sunday." I really do believe that somebody up there likes me and looks out for me. With that type of care why should I worry?"

31st of March - "Life goes on as usual here in Vietnam. The hospital hasn't been that busy so we're going back on eight-hour shifts as of tomorrow. Hope that it isn't an April fool's joke. It could be that if we suddenly started getting a lot of patients and we will have to go on longer shifts again. Let's hope that our men don't get into that kind of

action, for their sakes, not ours. We never put in the kind of work that some of these men do.

As I walked to work this morning, I was listening to the singing of the birds. Apparently it is spring here. We haven't heard any birds until recently. Anyway, walking along in the quietness of the early morning and listening to those birds it's hard to remember that this is a war zone. I am only reminded when I see the injured or hear the bombing. Not much longer before I leave this job for someone else. By the time you receive this letter I will have begun my last one hundred days. If all goes well it should go rather fast. I say this for many reasons, none the least of which it will probably be the last minute before I get my orders and the time will fly by while I'm trying to get everything arranged to start school.

28th of April 1969 – “Just a note to let you know that I'm fine. Charlie welcomed our boss (Captain, Bulshefski, Director of the United States Navy Nurse Corps) with a couple of attacks in the neighborhood community so we went on alert. I'm certain she didn't get much rest. All was quiet for a couple of days and then tonight we had two more alerts. They were throwing stuff at MAG16 (the base across the road). I don't know what was getting fired on the second time, but all we received, in the way of patients, were Vietnamese. On the first alert we got several sergeants that were watching the outdoor movie at their club. I was having dinner with a friend over at MAG 16. We had steaks almost ready when the incoming rounds started. Needless to say I went into a bunker and he went to work.

29th of April 1969 – “I had lots of news to tell you but because of some of it I don’t know when this letter will reach you. The ammunition storage area near Da Nang Airbase exploded yesterday as the result of a brush fire. Anyway, the resulting multiple explosions closed the air base to all fixed wing aircraft. Some helicopters were landing however. Some of these blasts were so strong that the buildings were falling from quite a distance around them because of the shocks from the blast. These buildings in some areas are not that sturdy. One of the hangers collapsed. The Freedom Hill exchange reportedly flattened. The first Marine Air Wing area had to be evacuated. You know from your map we are some distance from the air base. We only heard the blast and saw the smoke.

I understand we did receive a massive number of patients, as they had to be evacuated from the first hospital located there. We also got some of their doctors and corpsmen.” They had no female nurses there. This was a first line hospital. It was a Navy/Marine Corps facility but it was staffed by doctors and corpsmen only, unless they had a male Nurse Anesthetist, which they might have. “We also got some of their doctors and corpsmen hopefully to augment our staff. Again there were no injuries as result of explosions. Well, I think this brings me up to present. The immediate future should be interesting. I am going on the hospital ship *Repose* for a couple of weeks starting Tuesday.

7 May 1969-I am sitting in a cabin on the top bunk on the *USS Repose*. I came aboard yesterday and will only stay through Saturday or Sunday. I came out by helicopter, but I don’t know about my trip back. I am working on the neurosurgical and the plastic surgery ward plus another ward that has all medical patients. I really like the

ship. It would not have been bad to be stationed on board. But, there are some advantages to being stationed in Da Nang.

After 7 May 2011

Dear Mom and Family,

The puppies sound so cute (my dog had died and they had bought a couple of others.) It won't be long before I see them. The flight dates haven't been published yet, but there is a possibility that I may be leaving a few days before the 15th. I have been packing so I could send my gear next week. I have been anxious to leave. I am a little reluctant to go now. I have worked with these kids (nurses and other staff) for a year and it is difficult to split up.

The nurse who had been my recruiter, who had been a flight nurse during World War II, told me that the Navy nurses were extremely protected versus the Army nurses. The Army nurse wore fatigues. The Navy nurses came in a dress uniform. She said she remembered one time, and I don't know where she was, she asked for a bucket so she could wash her hair. The guy said, "Use your helmet like everybody else." She said, "I don't have a helmet. I'm a Navy nurse." "Oh I am sorry ma'am. I'll get you a bucket." Navy nurses were treated differently because of how they dressed, no helmet and a dress for a uniform. I thought wearing whites on duty in a war zone was the stupidest thing I'd ever heard of. But, Mary Cannon, the previous chief nurse had been an Army nurse and she told me that she wasn't going to be the one that put Navy nurses in fatigues. The hospital laundry had to launder our uniforms so that they were washed, pressed, and

starched. We had no other way of doing it because they had to be washed and starched. We had one washer and dryer in the quarters, but that was for other personal items.

A Vietnam woman had been raped on the Hospital Compound. So, we had to be escorted by a Marine escort, especially at night, wherever we went unless we were on a ward. I think I had the only ward assignment where you had to walk outside to go to the other wards that I covered. There was just an uncovered sidewalk through some areas that were support buildings and not occupied at night. It hadn't been worrying me at all until this incident. So, if I could I would get a corpsman to walk with me. Otherwise I had to get a Marine guard to come escort me.

So, I had this corpsman walking along with me. He was in his fatigues with his flak jacket on. I am walking in my white uniform with my white cap and my white hose and white shoes. We were walking in an area where we could be seen from the fence line. Beyond the fence line was no man's land. He said, "Excuse me ma'am. I don't mean any disrespect, but would you mind walking further ahead of me? I don't know if you realize what a great target you are." "Oh yes, I realized that right along. But look at it this way. If Charlie hits me, he will be darned sure he hit a nurse. It is probably going to be the last of him and everybody else in the area." He said he wasn't sure that would protect him. But I had been walking through this area ever since I had been there and nobody had even taken a shot at me. We also had Marines in towers in raised pillboxes on the perimeter of the hospital compound. The hospital compound was an entity unto itself. It wasn't part of a larger compound. It was a relatively small compound. I felt pretty protected. But, I never had to test that theory. The only concern was incoming

mortars, and even when that happened, they would say, “Oh that was just short-rounds. They were aiming for MAG 16 across the street.”

I left Vietnam in July 1969. I left a little early. I was scheduled to leave the 15th of July and I got out a little bit earlier than I planned. I didn't quite get to the end of my 100-day calendar. We had to leave within five days of arrival of our replacement and mine got in a little early; we couldn't wait. We had to go. At that point, because I wasn't going to school until August, I had all of June and July before I went to school. We were pretty busy at the time I left. In fact they had sent some extra nurses to supplement the staff. So, I said to Helen Brooks, “Is there any possibility that you could request that I stay a little longer, since I don't go to school until September?” She said she couldn't.

Lou Ellen came home and completed her Navy time to retirement. After retirement she worked many years as a civilian nurse in home care. She continues to active in the Navy Nurse Corps Association.

Bell, Lou Ellen 1957-1977

Letters to Mom from Da Nang 1968-1969

Friday, March 16, 2012 11:04 AM

Now you have all that had been typed. There are more, but I tried to do them in order.

The reason I was concerned for my mother's health was that she had already had an MI and she was in CHF. She was only in her mid 50's at the time, however with excellent care, she died only 4 days past her 61st birthday. Plus she was a mom and you know

how mom's worry when their offspring is in harm's way. Yes, it was active where I was and I tried to down play it when I wrote to her, so she would not be too upset. Reading them, as I did when I transcribed them, I realize that I still gave her a lot of reason to worry. I was so concerned that a report would get in the news and she would be even more upset.

Most of the letters were hand written on any type of paper; a few were typed. I bought a small, almost a toy manual typewriter, when I went to Hong Kong. It was about 12" x 12". A friend of mine still has it and uses it, occasionally. Unfortunately, she is no longer able to buy a ribbon for it.

The cast of characters were: my mom, my stepfather Philip, my sister Bettie and her family, including her mother-in-law Mrs. Thompson, who I referred to as Mrs. T, in the letters, and my dog, Kellie, who died while I was in Vietnam. She had been staying with my parents for over a year before I went to Vietnam because I travelled so much on Recruiting duty. She had been in and out of the kennel. My stepfather had said that if I loved her, I would let him keep her until I could be home more. Unfortunately my stepfather died of a stroke within a few months of my returning home from Vietnam.

I have the original letters and will send those, whenever you want them. I am now considering moving to an independent living facility and will need to clean house; when I do, I will be downsizing considerably. The primary reason for considering the move is that my neighborhood is changing from owner occupied to almost totally rental. I really do not like the trash talking and police activity on my street. I am in a townhouse, which was new, when I moved in, but the economy caused so many foreclosures and short sales, that investors are grabbing them up and converting them to rentals; they do not seem to be checking backgrounds on people. I do not care the color of one's skin, just the nature of their character. Some of these characters are argumentative -- calling the police for minor problems between neighbors. I had to go to court this week as a witness, not to a real crime, just an argument between neighbors; I want out!

Plus, I have had a lot of medical problems. Just had another stent put in my heart, in October -- I think that is 6. My kidney function has improved; for a while I thought I was headed toward dialysis.

Speaking of that, do you know what the kidney problem was that Val Pack had? I know she told me one time that she could not come to a reunion because she was having kidney problems, which seemed to be getting worse. Her photos that were with her obituary showed a lot of puffiness, so wondered if she had developed severe kidney problems, before she died. Unfortunately we did not maintain close contact over the years... just occasional.

We have lost a lot of the nurses I served with in Da Nang. There were not that many of us, and we were older. Some, I know, died of diseases now related to Agent Orange; one

was killed in an auto accident, and others, I just do not know their cause of death. I know that is a morbid discussion, but I do genealogy and often am looking at causes of death of my ancestors -- so I guess that is why I wonder. My gut feeling is that we have a high death rate within this group.

Mom, enclosed is my new official Navy Photo- your copy.







Navy Nurse stationed at NSA Da Nang 1968 with CO and XO in middle of front row. I am 4th from left in back row... I believe that is Val Pack just to my left.



NSA Hospital DaNang



NSA Hospital DaNang aerial view of entrance.





Part of Receiving 1, litters would be set on the supports and triage continues.



Two of the 8 areas in Receiving 2, set up to receiving the more critical casualties.



Photo that I captured of explosion at the airport in Da Nang when I just returned from Quan Tri via Jolly Green Giant helicopter. I had just gotten into pickup truck when the driver yelled at me to put my fingers in my ears and open my mouth. The concussion waves from the explosion could rupture one's eardrums.



CH 16

This type of plane brought most of the wounded from the field to the hospital. I believe that it will hold about 12 on litters, many more if not on litters. This photo was actually taken at MAG 16 (Marine Air Group 16), which was located across the road from the NSA Da Nang Hospital. The plane was hovering just above ground but the quickness of the camera makes it look as though the blades are still, not turning.

28 November 1968 @0335

Dear Mom,

Don't you like my fancy writing paper? Just wanted to drop you a note to let you know that I am living and doing reasonably well. I've had those mouth ulcers again like I had years ago, but I finally found something that seems to be healing them. Naturally, I sort of talk funny – so that's why no tape. I received your tape day before yesterday & one the day before that. I really enjoy listening to them, as I know you must enjoy mine. The Christmas package came yesterday (27 Nov); I really didn't expect 2 pairs of white shoes. P.S. I cheated—I am wearing a pair tonight and a pair of the hose. Those hose are nice. Please thank Bettie for me. I shouldn't need any more nurses' shoes while I'm here. Thank you both, or should I say – thank you all.

As you might guess I'm on nights. I have been so involved in writing a ward manual, checking charts, med cards, etc., that I haven't taken time for personal letter writing while on duty (nor off for that matter). I don't know what happens to the days – they just seem to fly by. Tonight I washed clothes, my hair, and me. Today, I have to get up about 1445 as I am going with 11 other girls out to dinner with a Seabee group. It should be a nice meal – thanksgiving goodies. Pat Slater's (Navy Nurse) brother, Paul, is stationed with this group.

Speaking of goodies – I received 3 lb. of Claxton Fruit Cake with the return address of Blocker's Furniture Co. Did you send it? The address was identical to the one used on the Project Vietnam Box. (They put MC instead of NC). So it could be part of that gift if you didn't send. Anyway, it's delicious as usual!

I didn't jot down notes from your tapes so I don't remember any questions you may have asked. I'll catch up on those later incidentally, as of now I have Christmas day off. I'll probably be busy in the hospital anyway, as I am on the Christmas committee. I'd rather be with the patients, if I can't be home.

I have my request in for R & R. I plan to go to Hong Kong on 18 January, if it is approved. Actually, it's approved except for the flight and that isn't done until December. I'm beginning to really look forward to it. I should be able to get some nice purchases there. One reason I have waited was so that I would not be short of cash. (I'm not). Is there anything special that you have a fancy for? I know that you would like to fly over to meet me, but that isn't feasible. That 24-hour (almost) ride is hard on a healthy person. I don't think I was ever so tired – and that's by jet. The world really isn't as small as I thought!

(Just got interrupted—had to give a patient a shot)

Getting back to your travelling. As much as I would like to see you – I wouldn't want you to try to make the trip. The time is going by rapidly.

I didn't get the Medical wards; however, I do think that I will be fairly permanent for a while. I am now "Senior Charge Nurse" of 4B, 5A & B, and 6A & B. Usually one nurse covers all five of these wards. 4B is fairly active –it has Eye, ENT, Dental, and some Medical patients. 5A is Urology and Minor Surgery. 5B is Convalescent Orthopedics. 6A is Dermatology & 6B General Convalescent (surgical, medical, or any service). While not as active as ICU, 2A&B or 1A & B, there is a lot that needs to be done to improve the organization of these wards. Now, you know why I have been so busy. In addition, I have taken on the job of helping to improve the special diets here at the hospital, since we do not have a dietician. (I wonder what I'll do in my spare time).

This is all a tall order for someone who is as poorly organized as I am. However, I should be able to pass the time effectively until July sneaks right in on us.

Hate to cut this short again, but duty calls! It's about wake up time for patients; I just got the message that another patient needs medication – so take care & give my love to my Pop, my darling Kellie, and to Bettie and family.

And don't believe everything you read in the paper! The hospital still stands uninjured.

Love as ever,
Lou

2 December 1968 @2040

Dear Mom,

I'm working PM duty—Thought I'd take a "coffee break" and drop you a note. I had a very relaxing weekend off—didn't get anything accomplished but I did relax. I slept until 1000 on Saturday (after sleeping Friday during the day, then going out Friday night). Saturday, I helped to get all of the Christmas cards for the Nurses ready to send out (haven't done mine, however). Our card this year is not much -- a Vietnamese card with a mimeographed list of names, no picture. You should be getting mine soon; I have started on sending my cards.

If everything goes right, I'll be talking to you before you get this letter. I am scheduled to call tomorrow night, 3 Dec @ 2340 -- should be close to noon Tuesday, where you are. I sure hope you are there—if not I'll try again next week on Monday night or Tuesday (your time). They are doing this through Saigon, so it will cost \$12 for 3 mins plus 10% tax. Since our last call was such a poor connection, I did want to talk with you. We may be restricted as to subject matter. I know they are on the MARS calls—such as: I would not be able to answer questions about when I'm coming home, etc. (I think this is primarily because they would find out that certain military units were moving—doesn't really apply to us). So, if I have talked with you and I didn't sound too clear on some matters this might be the reason; we'll see how it goes -- Now take the money out of our account for these calls & anything you get for me. It must need a boost by now. Gee, I am getting excited about calling. I certainly hope it goes through. You see I'm going to think real strong about it, so you will get the message and be at home. If I don't get through, try to be home next week and I'll try again—if I can get on the schedule. They call from 0200 Tuesday to 0200 Wednesday on the 3rd & 10th of Dec here... That's roughly Monday at 3 pm to Tuesday at 3 pm at home... if my timing is correct. It should be about 1230, shortly after noon tomorrow, when I call you and I will have just finished working 3 – 11 pm. Crazy world isn't it. I almost lost a day coming over. We left at noon on the 15th and it was nearly midnight on the 16th of July when we arrived. We have one person here who left on the day before his birthday in the evening and it was the morning after his birthday when he arrived, so he vows that since he didn't have a birthday,

he wasn't a year older. I told him that maybe he could have two next year, to make up!

I went on the boat to a beach yesterday. It was beautiful swimming, sunbathing, exploring (climbing through the rocks on one end of the beach looking for shells and unusual rocks). I didn't try water skiing—I think I'm chicken. I always plan to, but don't quite get around to it; maybe one day -- Anyway, it was a beautiful day. Overcast sky but bright, maybe 80 – 85 degrees. Don't worry, no sunburn. By the by, it's cold weather here now. Really, it is brisk some mornings and I find myself wearing sweaters with sleeveless dresses (which most of mine are, I always think of Cuba) -- But this is not a request for clothes, I'm fine. I just wanted to tell you about local conditions. I do wish that I had brought my electric blanket over. I think I'll order one from Sears (then they'll package & mail it and save you that problem). Now that it is cool at night, that air conditioner really works well & tries to freeze us. If we raise the thermostat too high it doesn't work at all and it gets stuffy—and if it works, I get cold -- Can't win!

I've really needed to get hot working on some of my correspondence and business. My room's a mess -- my desk is stacked with things to do. My Christmas cards are waiting for me. I have to finish the manual for 4 B, I have to do something about the thermometer technique here—devise a workable improved system and I also have to do some more work on the special diet system. I am to teach a class about diets on 20 Dec and, I think, 31 January to the HM2 who are studying for the 1st class exam next April. I am also teaching a class to the HN & HM3 about isolation. I'm on the Christmas committee, chairman of “thank-you letters” of all things. I told them how poor a correspondent I was, but they didn't believe. Thank goodness a corpsman offered today to type those for me. Last, but not least, I am on the Nursing Service Committee (out of which some of these jobs grow). Oh, I forgot- I also run the beer and soft drink mess—as I did in Cuba. Gee, I don't know what I'll do with all my spare time. I have finally completely recovered from that bug and have my energies back and I'm ready to tackle this mess of jobs. Oh yes, I work 8-hrs a day, 6 days a week and occasionally go to parties! I do believe that what is left of this year is going to be gone before I can get all my work done.

I have R& R in January; E & M leave in April (I think). I'm going to Hong Kong for R& R (watch Nixon block travel to there, to stop gold flow—just before I get to go). Then I don't know where I might go in April. I just wait & see.

Listen, kid, I've taken a rather long break, so I'd better move out & see what's happening on the wards.

Take care of yourself & our family.
Love, Lou

29 December 1968 @ 0300

Dear Mom,

You guessed it (or did you)? I'm on night duty again. That's not too remarkable as we do one week out of four. By now you should have received two tapes from me—both on the same day perhaps as I mailed them together. I've still been on the go. Friday night I went up to the Army hospital – 95th Evac for their cocktail party, returned to our club for a special spaghetti dinner. Also, I started nights that night. Saturday night (last night now) I went next door to the 1st Engineer Battalion—a small Marine group—for a Korean floorshow. --- Now, I'm at work.

Not too much new to tell you, since completing the tapes; however, there are a few things I would appreciate your sending to me. I would like to have my black knit suit with both tops... on second thought, make it my green knit suit. I love that black one too much to risk loosing it in the mail. I'd appreciate your sending it PAL, as I would like to have it to take to Hong Kong on the 19th. You know I don't remember what I have there by now. The reason I was concerned about mailing anything is that we received no mail today in Da Nang. Reportedly our mail plane crashed over Alaska & burned with all contents. Guess I'll never know what letters may have been on board—probably none—but one can always guess.

Another thing I would like – but mailed separately, is my nutrition book. It's a small green book. I would also like (if you can find them without much difficulty) my notes from Rehabilitative Nursing. Also, I think they are there, if so, they should be in a brown envelope. It also contains several pamphlets, such as, "After a Mastectomy," but you can take those out. I just want the notes and mimeographed sheets from class. Don't fret about it if unable to locate them, OK? The reason I suggest a separate package is to take advantage of book postage rates.

By the by, I weigh 145 pounds—I'm holding steady, plan to lose a little more, but gradually. I'm beginning to look better in my clothes.

I can't really think of anything else I really need at present.

Would like some recent pictures of my Mom, Dad, sister, and & my little girl if you've made any recently. I enjoyed the kid's school pictures that Bettie sent. I've taken more photos, but don't know how they will turn out as I was using a different film. I'll forward them if they come out. I've just mailed them to be developed so it will be a couple of weeks. Hope to make more pictures in Hong Kong.

Listen-- guess I'd better do some work. Take care-- Hug my Pop and squeeze my puppy for me. If you have space, throw in the microbiology book if it is there. I really don't know if it is. Love, Lou

5 January 1969

Dear Mom,

Guess what, I found a vacant typewriter. I was sitting at the supervisor's desk while on night duty and decided to look into the typewriter-well, and of all things—there was a typewriter!

I started making a tape to you, but don't know when I'll get it finished. This is my last night on night duty, so I have some time off now. Hope to get caught up on my chores and my correspondence. I would also like to visit some of the other hospitals in the area. I still have not been to the local civilian hospital, so I think I'll take them up on their invitation. Today, I went to Camp Tien Sha to the library with Dee Staudenraus to pick up some books about Australia (she plans to go there the end of this month). It was funny walking around in a real honest-to-goodness library complete with a female civilian librarian.

I really haven't been doing anything exciting to talk about, guess that is why I have a hard time getting a tape finished. I've just been working and sleeping and working and sleeping! I'm down to 142 ½ pounds and losing. I checked out a new book on exercises from the library. I have to get these pounds in the right places and, of course, in the healthiest condition possible. This book I got is on aerobics. It is the result of considerable study in the Air Force concerning the best conditioning exercise. Seems that our old standby running is best, followed by cycling, swimming, handball, and the like. Exercises that require a sustained amount of energy over a period of time builds up the body's reserve capabilities. Do you suppose that I'll create a sensation when I start running around the compound? In case I haven't given you enough information to make that decision---I will tell you that the sight will be most unusual and will not go unnoticed. Guess I'll have to talk some others into joining me.

It seems odd to be typing; I don't think that I have done any since May or June. I'm horribly out of practice—as you can tell. Of Course, Betty, my secretary on Recruiting Duty, is partially responsible for that. One of the nurses from here just got back from Japan, seems that Shirley Peace said, if I didn't write, that she would disown me -- she and Robbie are stationed at Yokosuka. They were selected for LT this year. Shirley Frawley, who is at Beaufort, was selected for LCDR. Gee, we are all getting up into this world. Remember when Shirley Peace was an OCHN? That wasn't too very long ago -- when Kellie was a pup.

I'm sending you a book about the Naval Support Activity, Da Nang. The hospital didn't get in for much publicity, but I thought that you would like to have the cruise book anyway. It will probably be a couple of weeks before you get it. I sent it book rate, so it goes slow; otherwise the postage would cost almost as much as the book did.

Look, Mom, I'm going to cut out for a few minutes to make rounds -- Be back, soon.

Sorry, I didn't get back in time to type more. Will close for now & get this in today's mail. My love to the family especially my Pop & my Kellie (Think I ought to get my name on the list for a puppy? How do you think Kellie would react)?

Love, Lou

25 January 1969

Dear Mom,

How do you like this typewriter? I bought this in Hong Kong so that I can write more letters! I don't know if it will help, but I thought that it was worth a try— besides it was very inexpensive. You know I left my good typewriter in storage and this thing can't spell. You should see it -- only about 12 inches square and about 3 inches thick. It is really a big toy!

I hope that the packages that I sent arrive without any difficulty. I sent Johnnie the Uke, and you, the Army-Navy cloth. I have the other stuff here and will mail it as soon as possible. I have embroidered blouses for you, Bettie, and Kathy. I have a sweater for Larry, a watch for Steve, jewelry cases for all the girls in the family, bedroom slippers for Mrs. Thompson, a billfold for my Pop, also a belt (alligator – from Home Kong for a Floridian). Anyway, I will try to get them all in the mail soon. I told you some of the things that I got, but I'll risk the chance of repeating myself and tell you again. I had a pink cashmere coat made and bought a mink collar and pillbox hat for it (all total under \$100). Also had a dress made and bought another one. Also bought a knit suit similar to my black one—only this one cost \$20. I also had a couple pair of black shoes made (paid less than I pay for ready-made ones in the states). I bought a new camera, so do you want mine? And, last, but not least, I got a permanent and got my hair frosted again—this time it looks blonde instead of grey this far, anyway! You know, turning a woman that hasn't been shopping in 6 months loose in the greatest shopping city in the world, then, watch out? Seriously, I had a ball –it was worth every cent of it. The greatest treat of all was talking to my family.

I had a letter today from Dollie. Matthew Scoggins is coming over here for duty. Apparently his outfit will be stationed here in the Da Nang area. He is with MCB 5 and I inquired tonight and found that the group is already arriving, so I should be hearing from him in a few days. Dollie says that they are doing well, but that she hadn't heard from Bettie since Christmas -- guess she doesn't know that Bettie has been working so many hours. She said that Bonnie gave her a Mother's ring for Christmas—really made her feel good that Bonnie thought enough of her to buy her

a ring, especially a Mother's ring. (*Dollie is Bonnie's Aunt but had been like a mother to her in many ways*).

Listen, kid, I'm making such a mess of this letter --also I must get ready for bed. Take Care.

Love, Lou

4 February 1969

Dear Mom,

Well, I'm back at work; however, I'm waiting for report so I'll have to cut out any minute now. But, I thought that I would start this letter to you, -- it will probably be several hours before I get it finished. I received your letters today. I'm sorry that Kellie is doing so poorly; I was feeling that surgery was the only answer that is why I put the money in the bank. I'll send more next payday, if needed. I would like for him to try, if he thinks he can do her any good. She is like people and I just don't think that we would feel right not to even try if he believes that he can help her. If he can't help her, we can't let her go on like that—trying to live with all those problems. What I am trying to say is that I want anything done that can be done to help her get better and I'll pay for it, because we all love her so much and she is so much a part of our lives. Anyone that thinks that's silly and a waste of money, can just be told that it is my money and I'll spend it as I see fit. She may only be a little dog, but she is my 'baby.' But Mom, as I said before, if she can't get better, don't let her be in agony—let the vet put her to sleep. Again, I could cry as I say this, because I want so much for her to recover, but we have to be reasonable. I wish I could be there to give you two some support, as I know how much more difficult that it is for you being with her every day. So, use your own judgment... You have my permission if that is necessary, and you have my financial support for anything that you deem helpful. I never knew that we could be so attached to one little black baby dog. Peppie, the puppy that Bev adopted from the same litter, had calcium deposits on her spine also. A Vet didn't operate on her, a Navy surgeon did. Also she had her weight against her. You will remember that she died about three days after the operation, but Bev felt that she had tried. She was beside herself with grief as Peppie was her whole life at that point. She has since gotten two more dogs and is apparently doing fine. I haven't written to her so she doesn't know about Kellie. I love that little Kellie, as she was my constant companion for three years as she has been yours for the past two years. She has been a problem at times, but a love. Please see if he can help her; she is our baby.

2245....

Well, my relief came in, or rather the nurse that I am to relieve, so I had to stop mid-stream and get report. Naturally, there was work to do, so I am just now getting a

break. I only have the two active Orthopedic wards; since we are working 12-hour shifts, I cover less wards. On 1A they admitted 7 patients today plus one that we received tonight, and on 1B they admitted 17 patients today, discharged 15 (most are going air-evac to Japan) and also transferred 9 up to ward 5B Convalescence. So, a little busy and with all the new patients, I have more to do. I was just drawing some blood for cross-match on two POW patients that are scheduled for surgery in the morning. I also started an IV so that we will already have a needle in the vein for the blood that we need to give tonight, so that they will be in condition for the surgery. I really didn't make that mess in the previous line while I was typing. One of the corpsmen came and I was showing him the typewriter and accidentally typed over what I had already typed.

I must run now -- need to check my patients and then go to mid-night chow.

Mom, I was real busy and didn't have time to finish this. I'm dropping it in the mail and will try to write more tonight.

Lots of love to the three of you,
Lou

23 February 1969

Dear Mom,

Just a note, to let you know that I am safe, sound, & happy! I heard on the news today that Da Nang is under attack, with many casualties. Guess the story is even bigger back home! Fact is, they managed to hit an ammunition dump about 4 miles away, the deep-water piers & I think, the airport. We didn't receive many patients—but nothing worse than last August, as yet. We do anticipate more activity; however, everyone is on guard. I don't think we have anything to worry about except receiving casualties—so don't you fret—OK?

I heard from Emory University today – I would have to take Chemistry & College Math before I could go there, also Educational Psychology. Naturally, I've had a lot of courses those kids don't get, but this may be why I wasn't ordered to there. I still haven't heard anything from Buffalo -- I'm getting anxious.

Listen, love--I must get back to work—Just wanted to let you hear from me. Hope Kellie is doing better. Give my love to her, my Pop, Bettie, & all.

Take care,
Love, Lou

In the envelope, added by my Mom, was a tract with this poem by Annie Johnson Flint:

ONE DAY AT A TIME

ONE DAY at a time, with its failure and fears,
With its hurts and mistakes, with its weakness and tears,
With its portion of pain and its burden of care:
One day at a time we must meet and must bear

One day at a time to be patient and strong;
To be calm under trial and sweet under wrong;
Then its toiling shall pass and its sorrow shall cease;
It shall darken and die, and the night shall bring peace.

One day at a time---but the day is so long,
And the heart is not brave, and the soul is not strong,
O Thou pitiful Christ, be Thou near all the way;
Give courage and patience and strength for the day.

Swift cometh His answer, so clear and so sweet;
"Yea, I will be with thee, thy troubles to meet."
I will not forget thee, nor fail thee, nor grieve;
I will not forsake thee; I never will leave."

Not yesterday's load we are called on to bear,
Nor the morrow's uncertain and shadowy care;
Why should we look forward or back with dismay?
Our needs, as our mercies, are but for the day.

One day at a time, and the day is His day'
He hath numbered its hours, though they haste or delay.
His grace is sufficient; we walk not alone'
As the day, so the strength, that He giveth His own.

ANNIE JOHNSON FLINT

26 February 1969 @ 0435

Dear Mom,

Just another short note, to let you know that things aren't so bad here! I get scared every time that I listen to the news, more so than what is actually happening. Sounds like we are really getting it. They have managed to hit the Da Nang Air Base, FLC, an ARV (Army of the republic of Vietnam), & the ammunition storage area, but that was all several days ago. Thus far, things have been exceedingly quiet here. We have been on alert several times, but they haven't even hit the MAG (16 - across the street). Most everything has been in town or at Freedom Hill. Seems they hit the Mess storage area over there, which means they got the booze. They didn't really get it, but they destroyed it! You should have heard the moans about that. But, Mom, they are really hitting some of our boys in other areas. We have been receiving quite a few, but it is no worse than we have had before, since I have been here. We seem to be under a little more pressure, as everyone is concerned that this is the start of another offensive like last year at TET. Actually, the best intelligence reports are that we have been able to prevent them from having the ability to strike like they did last year. I do hope so. Please remember that we are probably very safe here. The Marines guard this place well. And I am not just saying this to make you feel better.

I am happy to hear that you have Kellie home. I know that you two are happy. I guess that my Pop thought that she would come home all well, and he was upset and disappointed. But she will get better, if good nursing care will do it; sounds like she is getting it.

You know that I love all three of you. I never knew when you married Phil that I would think so much of him. I could not think more, if he had been there when I was born. I'm just lucky, I guess, having two Fathers to love.

Please give my love to Bettie and the kids, also Garland and Mrs. T (I have a gift for her in Bettie's package). I must run and get my morning work done. If you haven't sent the second package, you could include some Tang. (That orange juice substitute that came out a few years ago). If you have, please don't bother to send another package at the present time.

Take care and give my Pop and my girl a squeeze for me -- and my love, but keep a big supply for yourself.

Love, Lou

14 March 1969 @ 0215 Fri morning

Dear Mom,

Seems I only write to you in the middle of the night or early morning. It concerns me when I realize that it has been a week since I corresponded. Between working and some partying, I have been busy. Unfortunately, I can't write while on duty in the daytime. I start nights again tonight (Friday, that is). I just had Wednesday & Thursday off—did my wash, cleaned my room, my locker (closet), and looked through some magazines, etc. that I had just thrown in my chair. Today, I walked down to the post office to mail another letter to Buffalo. For some reason, I still haven't received information from them. Of course, there is the possibility they sent it 2nd class mail & it's on a slow boat. I requested that they send me information via airmail, as soon as possible, and stated my reasons. Now, that I have sent this tracer, their letter will probably arrive tomorrow.

(Please excuse this scribbling, as I'm getting sleepy sitting under this dryer).

Mom I would like to buy a tape recorder for Hazel, but I have a ration card for all of this gear. The only way I could get it would be if I do get out of country on leave. We are permitted 1 refer, 1 TV, 1 regular camera, 1 movie camera, 1 slide projector, 1 movie projector, & a couple of watches. Otherwise, the small amount of gear that does come into country would be purchased by the people who have the time to go to the exchange regularly. Right now, all they have are cassette recorders anyway. So the only real opportunity for much buying is on R&R or leave. We only had 4 days in Hong Kong. We arrived about 2330 Sunday night and left about 0600 Friday morning. Actually, I feel that I did pretty well for the time that I had.

I asked at the post office today about the Uke. I now remember that its dimensions were too large for PAL so I don't know how long it takes to come by the slow train (boat) Anyway, I'll try to locate the receipt & enclose it. He said the tracer could be initiated at either end. Since you would know when it arrives, I would like for you to handle it, if you don't mind.

You may have heard that we had some excitement here. Seems a "Chicom" (Chinese Communist) mortar landed in an open field between the cook's quarters and ward 5B. As it happens, a few people picked up some slight flesh wounds. Both places were practically deserted, as most everyone was at the movie—which incidentally could have been a real disaster. The patients and corpsmen attend an outdoor movie that is nestled in the middle of the hospital compound. Had this mortar landed about 50 yards from where it did—it could have done real damage to approximately 200 people sitting at the movie. This is the first incident of actual ward damage & personnel injury since I have been here—and it was fortunately very mild. Everyone here said that it must have been amateur night as only one

mortar was received anywhere in the whole area. Having seen what they did to the story in the Stars & stripes, I hate to think of the play it must have had in the states. Well, you know hitting a hospital is a “No -No” so the American press eats it up. I hope you haven’t been too worried. – I was safely in my quarters at the time— missed all the excitement.

I think I’m getting all of your letters & packages. I just neglect to answer, I guess. I did receive the Lake Placid papers, shortly after you mailed them. I just forget to tell you. I have also received the fruit (in excellent condition, the pizza mix – one case, the box of pepperoni & cheese, also the earlier box of cheese pizza and pepperoni.) I’ve been enjoying it. We’ve had two small pizza parties already. First one, we make two. The second on just Wednesday night, we made three. Amazing the amount of help one gets when the pizza gets started. Everyone helps so they can have some. Both times we offered to make more, but the groups have been small, as we seem to get started about suppertime. We have some people who have gone to eat.

I am happy that everyone is pleased with their gifts. Also pleased that you are doing OK. I know that everything would be happy at home, if we hadn’t lost Kellie. I guess I’ll be expecting to have her to run out to meet me when I come home, although I know she is gone. If you do change your mind, I would still like for you to buy a new little baby. She’ll never replace Kellie, I know, but she would be good company. But that’s up to you two, however I wish you would give the idea serious consideration. I would feel better if you did have a little watchdog & companion. But, as I said, that is for you two to decide. I’ll not be getting one until I can see that I can care for her. The only time I couldn’t, would be overseas again which shouldn’t come anytime soon.

Look, Mom I’m going to get these curlers out of my hair and go to sleep -- will continue this in the am.

Love, Lou
Love to my Pop!

15 March 2330

Dear Mom

I’ll just add a short chapter to this continued story and get it in the mail. I still haven’t heard from Buffalo, but I’m certain the 2nd letter will get immediate results. Could be that my first one, never reached them, for some reason.

I'm on duty now, but everything is quiet. Fact is, last night we split the watch and I went home early. That's why I didn't get your letter mailed. Please forgive me. I received your letters of the 10th & 11th today. Sorry to hear that Bettie & Mrs. T. have not been feeling well. Hope they are both better by now. When did Mrs. T. get a "roommate"? It's not a bad idea, if they get along well together. She needs the company.

The sun finally came out today after hiding behind the clouds (no rain) on my days off. I did go out on the patio for a couple of hours & got a little pink. I was there too early for the hot sun. No other news comes into mind so guess I will close for now.

Please give my love to the family.
Love, Lou

I'm enclosing two receipts I think it is the one dated 20 Jan (608786). The other one would be the tablecloth, which I think I bought later. I'm fairly certain that I did get the Uke, when I first got there – since it was on my list of planned purchases.

Hope you can locate it.

Love, Lou

I don't know why the package stamp says N.Y. but it was mailed at the Fleet Post Office in Hong Kong. Should say San Fran, I should think. Lou

20 March 1969 @ 0410

Dear Mom,

Received your letter of the 14th on the 18th, also Mrs. Thompson's. I'm sorry that I don't have them with me so I can't answer anything that might be in there. Sorry to hear that Johnnie is sick. Seems that someone is, all the time, doesn't it? Hope he is feeling better by now.

Well, I only have one more night on night duty, then three glorious days off. I am going to a luncheon on Friday for General Cushman, who is leaving. Four of us are going. Saturday, I hope to do some sightseeing, with camera, if "Charlie" is willing. Sunday and Monday I plan to soak up some sun, if the heavens are willing. There seems to be a high incidence of cloudy days, on my time off, recently. I did get out onto the patio, but got up too late to go to the beach, when I told you that I had planned to.

O K, dear, I've been debating, and the pros are about equal to the cons. I know that the papers will have a field day with this story, so I'd better give you the straight scoop...

The hospital got hit again earlier tonight; fortunately, not one casualty, not even a scratch. It hit just outside of a ward, at the entrance to the ward, sending shrapnel into the ward (a minor amount) and scattering more around the area. I repeat, no injuries what so ever! I know that I have promised to be honest with you, so here goes... It was my ward and I was on duty. It must have landed about 10 to 15 feet from me. I was at the desk and got up to get my jacket and helmet, when I heard the incoming rounds (we always bring them over for night duty). The desk is about 7 feet from the door. Fortunately, my path took me away from the impact, just before it hit. It's really amazing that we didn't get any damage in the ward, so you see I really wasn't in danger. I do think someone up there likes me. So, now that, that is over, it is just improbable that I would ever be that close again. I know that none of this will convince you that I am OK, and that the situation here is really not bad and only occasionally dangerous. But, I thought that you would want to know. Gee, if I had gotten a little scratch, I could get a purple heart—but that is one ribbon that I never desire to have. I was as close tonight as I ever want to be again. It took about two hours for the butterflies to develop in my stomach, before that, I was just running around tending to business and escorting all of the people who came to investigate the situation. Recon, we are really in a war zone. Have to earn my combat pay somehow, other than at parties!

The tapes haven't come as yet, neither has the letter from Buffalo, but it is a little soon, I guess.

Listen, dear, one of my corpsmen came in and we talked for a while and we talked about his future college plans. It is now time to get started with the morning work. So I'll close for now. Take care and try not to worry. Lightning seldom strikes twice, I'm told; I'm not worried. Besides that, someone said to me, "you must have gone to church on Sunday." I said that I did, and on Monday too – St. Patrick's Day (our Irish heritage, you know). So I do really believe that someone up there likes me and looks out for me. And with that type of care, I should worry?

Love,
Lou

27 March 1969 @0055

Dear Mom,

By now, you must know that it is feast of famine with my letter writing and mostly famine! I know that you have probably been worried with me not writing after the last letter that I sent you. Perhaps, I should not have told you but I had sort of promised not to lie to you, and so, I did not. We were very fortunate that there were no casualties at all. Did that incident hit the news in the papers? They had the hole patched by 0800 that morning, so there wasn't much of a chance of the papers getting much of a story! Incidentally, the girl that you thought resembled me was a Vietnamese girl. You would not see me dressed like that, here. It is very unlikely that I would be in any photograph, but if I were, there is a 99% chance that I would be in either my white ward uniform or my LT Blues since I wear them 99% of the time, that I am out of the quarters.

Well, I really don't know where I will be going to school this fall. Buffalo cancelled that program for this year and will not have it until 1970, so I am in the process of writing to all the other schools that I could possibly go to. Captain Bulshefski (Chief of the Navy Nurse Corps) will be here on a visit in a couple of weeks, so I can talk with her about it, then. Another girl from here – Val Pack was supposed to go to the University Of Washington and she must make up statistics, before she can go there, so I am not the only one having troubles, unfortunately. So, I'll let you know when I know anything, but don't expect anything soon. Don't fret about it as I can always take orders back to a hospital until something can be worked out. But it is all up in the air, at present.

I have received all of the packages that you have sent and your letter of the 21st arrived today. I do hope that Johnnie will be better by the time this letter arrives. I am pleased that everyone liked their presents. You can tell Bettie that I have a watch like the one she got and I really like it. If Kathy does want one, I'll try to get someone to pick up one for her. Thank you for all the buying and mailing that you have done for me. I will not need any more shoes, thanks anyway. Do you need any money in the checking account—you know that I intend for you to be using it.

I am sitting under that dryer again, seems that I am always washing my hair. Oh, we are supposed to go back on 8-hour shifts on the first of the month, if nothing happens. The place has been quiet so we shouldn't have any problem. Boy, am I getting sleepy under this warm air of the dryer; sorry if I don't make sense.

If you do decide to get a puppy, try to get a young one about three-months old, before they have learned bad habits or unusual fears. That's how old Kellie was and she certainly did well, other than being slightly, spoiled! Guess, I had better close and go to bed. Morning comes so soon.

Love to all, Lou

31 March 1969

Dear Mom,

Guess you must think that I am never going to write again, but here I am. I received your letter of 27 March today, not bad! Sorry to hear about your Mother's brother, also about Aunt Annie's illness; hope that she is better by now. It does seem that someone is sick at all time, doesn't it! I guess that comes for being from a big family and for the fact that we are not getting any younger, especially some of the older ones. I pray that she is better by now.

Life goes on as usual here in Vietnam. The hospital hasn't been that busy so we are going back to 8-hour shifts, as of tomorrow. Hope that it isn't an April fool joke. It could be if we suddenly start getting a lot of patients and we would have to go onto the longer shifts again. Let's hope that our men don't get into that kind of action for their sake, not ours -- we never put in the kind of work that some of these men have to.

Walking to work this morning, listening to the singing of the birds (apparently it is spring here as we haven't had any birds until recently) -- anyway, walking along in the still quietness of the early morning and listening to those birds, it was hard to remember that this is a war zone. I am only reminded when I see the injured or hear the booming. Not much longer, before I'll leave this job for someone else. By the time you receive this letter I will have begun my last 100 days, if all goes well. That should go rather fast. I say this for many reasons, none the least of which is that it will probably be the last minute getting my orders and the time will just fly by while I try to get everything arranged to go to school. I have enrolled in a Math course that will be taught across the street at MAG 16 on Monday and Thursday nights. It is like the courses that I took at Charleston except these are through the University of Maryland. I will pick up 3 credits, if I am lucky, but more important, I will get back into the habit of studying. The math is very important on the Master's, as much of your work deals with the study that you have to make and math is needed in evaluating the results of your study; so, I'll be a student again. Still it won't be as bad as the 12-hour shifts and I don't have to commute 30 miles as I did in Charleston. Did I ever tell you that one of the men that I used to ride to school with there is stationed here at the 1st Medical battalion, on the other side of Da Nang; his name is Ellis Riser, an MSC officer.

You take good care of that Pop of mine, because you know how much I think of him. I know that he didn't like that last hospitalization, but if it is really necessary, I hope that he will consent. He knows how he feels when you will not take care of yourself, so you just tell him that, that is how we feel about him. If I was there I might just

'hog-tie' him and make him to care of himself even if it included going to see the Doctor.

I will tell you this probably against my better judgment, since it will make you anxious if it doesn't go through. But here goes – I am going to try to call you tomorrow evening -- it should be Tuesday morning there when my call comes in. Naturally, I may have difficulty and not be able to get the call through. Last week they were able to run 40 calls, however the week before only 5 calls were completed before the connections were broken off. So by this time, you will have already been surprised by an Easter call from me, or disappointed that I couldn't get through. In the latter case, I will try again, but it may not be anytime soon; don't stay home on my account!

I can't really think of anything exciting to tell you about, as I have been working and doing little else since my last letter. I guess in the future, I'll be telling you how much studying that I have been doing and complaining about that -- but, at least, it will be a change of scenery.

I am really getting sleepy, so I guess that I had better close for now. Take care and write soon.

If you would like to do something, you might write a letter, a short note will do, to LCDR Gloria Orofino. She came over on the flight with me. She has complained so much that everyone gets more mail than she does, that one of the other girls whose Mother writes regularly, as you do -- well she asked her mother to write to Gloria and Gloria received a letter today. She didn't say who she was until near the end of the letter, told her that she had received her name from the Chaplain, then finally said how she happened to be writing. If you would like to, write it anyway that you like. She happens to live in the same hut even. Of the five of us that came together, she and Nadean Swoboda are going to Long Beach, Calif, Louise Grey is going to Recruiting in Dallas, Texas, Val Pack is going to school, supposedly at the University of Washington, but that is up in the air like mine. Lacey Foley is going to the job that Mary Cannon had in Washington -- arranging for the short course, conferences, etc. CDR Brooks is going to Charleston SC for duty as Chief Nurse. Casey Meehan, who came after me, and who was on Recruiting with me, is going to teach Corps School at San Diego; Kirby Ferrell is going to San Diego Hospital, for duty. So, we will be scattered over the continent again.

Listen, kid, I'd better close the peepers, as morning comes early. Someone has taken advantage of the April Fools to post a sign "Sorry, girls, it's back to the 12-hour shift, the Management." I checked with Lacey, it is not true. Someone is joking. I wonder what else to expect in the morning. Who knows?

Take care and give my love to my Pop, and to Bettie and family. Tell Jonnie that I expect to hear a concert when I come home, if not before, via tape.
Love, Lou

21 April 1969 @ 0400

Dear Mom,

Just a note to let you know, that I am fine. 'Charlie' welcomed our Boss with a couple of attacks in the neighboring communities, so that we went on alert. I am certain that she didn't get too much rest. Then all was quiet for a couple of days, Then tonight we had two more alerts – they were throwing stuff at the MAG (16) the first time – I don't know what was getting fire on the second, but all we received in the way of patients were Vietnamese. On the first, we got several Sgts, who were watching the outdoor movie, at their club. I was having dinner with a friend, had the steaks almost ready when the incoming rounds started. Needless to say, I went into a bunker, but he went to work. (He's Commanding officer of MAG 16 a very nice guy that I've been seeing frequently, of late. (But no hearts & flowers, OK)? Sure does make the time go by faster.

I sure would like to quit this math course; I'm in over my head! I thought that it would be an introductory course, but I'm in way over my head. I think I will see about dropping it. I just don't have the time to study it properly (unless I discontinue all my social life).

I'm on nights at present, as you may have guessed; not too bad as yet. I'm getting a little sleepy now.

Mom, I sure hope that you will take it easy going up to North Carolina. I really wish you could see your way clear to wait until I am home. I just have a feeling that you will try to do too much – of the driving & the fussing around at people's homes. I know how you were at Aunt Rachel's-- the only place that I consented to stay at. You were anxious to wash the dishes, clear the table, clean, etc. Mom – you just can't do it!

But I know that you want to go; I just wish you could wait for me. I had a feeling that you would plan one trip while I was gone. I have no say in what you do, as you are an adult. Also, I wouldn't want to be responsible for your not seeing your family (our family) but I am going on record as being against the trip. I will, however, help you in any way that I can, if you insist upon going.

Captain Bulshefski (Director of the Navy Nurse Corps) says that she will have orders cut on me, sending me to a stateside hospital, just so I can get a flight date and get myself & my gear out of Vietnam in July. I will probably never report to the hospital for duty, as the orders will be changed, when I am accepted by a university.

I may be as close as Chapel Hill (University of North Carolina) or Gainesville (University of Florida); I have applied to both. This, of course, would not be rehab. I

hesitate to mention the possibility of my being that close as I know how disappointed you will be if I go elsewhere. Should I not get accepted in time for the fall term somewhere, then I will probably go the USNH Jacksonville, FL, for duty.

Well that's how things stand at present. I certainly hope that I get accepted – but it is nice of her to have orders cut so that I can make arrangements to be transferred.

This crazy old pen is leaking -- I left my better one in my room. I received two letters from you today. Certainly did enjoy them -- thought that I had better get an answer off.

By the way – “weight” I weigh 142 lbs now – hope to loose a little more before I come home. CAPT B. complimented me on my appearance in my light blue uniform, as I was going out to dinner.

I had better close & do my morning work. Take Care. Give my love to my Pop, Bettie & family.

Love,
Lou

Mom, I am still going on record as being against the trip.

28 April 1969

Dear Mom,

How do you like my beautiful stationery? Seems I don't have any with me. I am sitting in the lounge under a hairdryer (what else). I just had my hair cut & set by the Vietnamese hairdressers, that come in on Mondays. I don't usually have them do mine, but I did need a cut.

I have lots of news to tell you, but because of some of it, I don't know when this letter will reach you. The ammunition storage area near the Da Nang Air Base exploded yesterday (? as a result of a brushfire). Anyway, the resulting multiple explosions closed the Air Base to all fixed wing aircraft. Some helicopters are landing, however. Some of those blasts are so strong that buildings are falling for quite a distance around, from the shock of the blast. These buildings in some areas are not very sturdy. One of the hangers collapsed. The Freedom Hill exchange is reportedly flattened. 1st Marine Air Wing area had to be evacuated. As you know from your map, we are some distance from the Air Base, thus have only heard the blast & saw the smoke. Matthew Scoggins' unit is located near the area but I

understand that they are all safe. Actually, we have received very few injuries. We, I understand, did receive a massive number of patients, as they had to evacuate the 1st Hospital that is located there. We also got some of their doctors & corpsmen (hopefully to augment our staff); again, no injuries as a result of the explosions, that I know of.

I go to work at 1500 today; I just had the weekend off following night duty. This reminds me of my other news -- I wasn't even here in Da Nang yesterday when all of this started. Four of us flew up to Quang Tri via Jolly Green Giant (an Air Force Helicopter group). We visited the 3rd Medical Battalion hospital, then two girls left to return to Da Nang via the Medical Air Evac. Unfortunately, unknown to us the explosions had started so their plane, a C-130 was unable to land and was sent south to Chu Lai. So they ended up spending the night there with the Army. The other two of us (Val Pack & I) were unable to catch that plane because it was loaded, so we elected to go via jeep up to Dong Ha to see the 3rd Med Bat (Delta Co) Children's Hospital. Actually the area around there is apparently quieter as far as enemy action, than is this place. (But it is about 8 miles to the DMZ). We almost had to stay over at Quang Tri & return today, however the Jolly Greens received a message to return after all, and we bummed a ride back with them. We were permitted to land at the airport, then the fuel storage area blew up and the other copters were sent to MAG 16. I think I may have gotten some pictures. Anyway, we are back, safe & sound. Had a very good visit—and would do it again. I hope that Jean & Jan get back today; they spent the night with the Army nurses in Chu Lai.

I know that I must have painted a rather grim picture, but it really isn't Life goes on here as usual. They finished putting the new tile on the deck in my room (to get rid of the red paint that keeps oozing up through the old tile). I moved back into it last night. I've been living in the TOQ (Transient Officers Quarters--- actually just another hut in our quarters). I've quit the Math course—it wasn't what I wanted. I have a fairly steady friend now but don't get out the hearts & roses—he is just a friend. Anyway, we go out for dinner a lot, so I really haven't been home much. CAPT Bulshefski just left on Friday—I had to go to a few functions because she was here. Nights were a little busy on duty, so I didn't get much writing done.

Well, I think this brings me up to the present -- the immediate future should be interesting also. I am going on board the Hospital Ship Repose for two weeks, beginning Thursday, I think. The address would be
USS Repose AH 16
FPO San Francisco 96602

I should return here on the 13th.

3 May 1969 0300

Dear Mom,

I should be ashamed for not mailing at least what I had written -- this has been a crazy week. Jane & Jean returned safely. Da Nang Airport opened on Monday. The extra patients & staff left -- so everything returned to normal, as far as that goes. The retiling process continues in my hut (in other rooms) so I was awakened each morning prior to 0800. Unfortunately I don't seem to get much done. Bud came over & we had lunch at the club on Tuesday before I went to work. Wednesday, I learned that I would not be going to the ship after all, so I was rather glum, thus I didn't want to write or else you would know that I was sad. As it happened the situation changed anyway. Thursday morning Miss Brooks said that I could go out to the *Repose* for a few days, even without a replacement. She also said I could go on leave the second week of June, so I'll be trying for Japan. Thursday night, Bud came over after I got off PMs. Today I slept until 1100 and he came over again tonight. Still -- no hearts & roses please, but I am enjoying his company. (I expect you'll be hearing more of him). I guess you would like to know something about this guy. He is a Marine LTCOL Aviator, who is stationed at MAG 16 (now you know why I happen to be over there, frequently. There's no future to our friendship, so you need not get out the blue lace dress OK?

About school -- I still haven't heard anything from the U. of NC but it is a little soon yet. (I should be in the states in about 10 weeks).

Work goes on as usual. I'm a little busier, as they have moved some of the patients from one ward to another. 5 A, which was Minor Surgery & Urology is now Minor Surgery and EENT (which means I have to go up there much more frequently on PMs and nights).

Listen, dear, I really much need some sleep; I'll continue in another letter. Give my love to all.

Love, Lou

7 May 1969

Dear Mom,

I 'm sitting in the top bunk in a cabin on the USS Repose. I just came aboard yesterday and will only stay through Saturday or Sunday. I managed to come out via Helicopter. I don't know yet about my trip back.

I'm working on a Neuro-Surgical & Plastic Surgical wad plus another ward that has all Medical patients -- I really like the ship. It really would not have been bad to be stationed on board. But there are some advantages at Da Nang.

I went sailing Monday & really had a good time. That's the first time since GTMO. Speaking of advantages -- I went out to dinner with Bud Monday night, then he brought me to the ship on Tuesday.

I know that I'll have a few letters from you waiting for me by the time I get back. Right now we are sitting off Wunder Beach, not too far from Quan Tri, the place I visited a week or so ago.

Don't have much news to tell you. Will write again soon.

Take care,
Love, Lou

21 June 1969 0030

Dear Mom and Family,

It's official! I have been accepted by the University of Florida and have received orders from the Navy! Actually, the orders came by message prior to my receiving the acceptance. So I will be near home for the next year. Of course, I'll be studying, as I was in Boston, but I know I'll get to see you more than I have in years.

I received your tape today. The puppies sound so cute. It will not be long before I see them. The flight dates haven't been published as yet, but there is a possibility that I may be leaving a few days before the 15th. Anyway, I've been packing so I can send out my gear next week. Then I'll only need to pack my suitcases and GO! Actually, as much as I have been anxious to leave, I'm a little reluctant to go now. I've worked with these kids for a year & it's difficult to split up. Also, I've thoroughly enjoyed my association with Bud and I hate to leave him also. I didn't understand

the mix up in names on the phone the other night. The only thing that it might have been was that Bud had placed the call for me much earlier & we had to wait an hour or so for it to go through. They might have been using his name. Anyway, I'm getting spoiled because like that, he does so much for me that I'm accustomed to doing for myself. He just couldn't see me going to Japan alone—travelling in a strange country by myself. That's why he took his R & R to show Japan to me. It is beautiful. He's right; there are many places I would not have known to go to see. I hope my pictures turn out.

We had MAG 16 night at our club tonight and since he is boss over there, I was seated at the head table with our boss and Helen & Bud. Our hospital presented them with a plaque for their continued cooperation. (They transport most of our incoming med evac patients).

Enough of that---

Do they sell the Gainesville paper in Ocala? If so, I'd like to have the section of houses or apartments for rent; you need not send the rest. I just want an idea of what is available. I plan to go up there & do some house hunting shortly after I come home. I'd like to be able to get my gear out of storage plus my stuff from here, so I can be settled prior to starting school.

Listen, dear, I've rambled long enough. Guess I should bring this to a close & get to my work - I've just started my last tour of nights, here in Vietnam.

Take care—give all the family my love. Hope my Pop received his Father's day card by now.

Love, Lou