



Roger J. Oldham

Served in Vietnam, 1971 to 1972

Roger J. Oldham, M.D. began his two year military service in the Navy in July, 1971, at the Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, California, home to the SEAL team. Following a month of orientation, he was assigned as the Medical Officer to the Marine Advisory Unit in Saigon, an elite cadre of Marine Corps officers on their second or third tours to Vietnam. For nine months, Oldham served as the advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Corps physicians and surgeons at their hospital in Tu Duc, just outside of Saigon, performing surgery and procuring supplies from U.S. facilities as they were closing.

Vietnamese Marines were engaged in ongoing conflict with the North Vietnamese Army in I Corps along the DMZ and, as their advisor, Oldham traveled to fire bases to investigate medevac procedures for improving the transporting of combat casualties. During his tour in Vietnam, he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander and was awarded a Bronze Star with Combat V.

Saigon was home to the Barsky Clinic, a civilian hospital established by USAID to provide reconstructive plastic surgery for children with war injuries, congenital facial defects or synergistic bacterial infection deformities. Oldham volunteered his surgical skills there to work with the staff plastic surgeons on these challenging cases.

During Oldham's final weeks in Vietnam, he teamed up with a Canadian businessman friend who helped his wife, Susan, obtain a visitor's visa to spend some time with him in Saigon. Unbeknownst to Oldham and to the world, just after Susan arrived, the North Vietnamese launched the Spring Offensive -- which eventually led to the final assault on Saigon. Susan's arrival had long been planned to coincide with Oldham's scheduled R & R to Bangkok and Hong Kong just prior to the end of his tour. They returned to a very different Saigon, suddenly in great turmoil. Three weeks after their return, Oldham safely traveled back to the United States to his second duty station at the Long Beach Naval Hospital and the Repose Hospital Ship where he served for the next 12 months.

After leaving Long Beach, Oldham returned to civilian life and resumed his general surgery residency at George Washington University, followed by a two year plastic surgery residency in Chicago. With his training completed, he established his private practice of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in Bethesda in 1979 and Susan soon attended Georgetown Law. They have lived in Montgomery County, Maryland ever since.

The Oldhams have been married for 52 years and have three children and four grandchildren. In August, 2021, Oldham retired from his 40 year practice of plastic surgery. He continues to get together with his Marine Corps buddies at periodic reunions.