

to be able to have managed care but still protect the quality of health care, if you want high-class education and you want the National Government to do its part, if you don't want us to squander this balanced budget until we have fixed Social Security, in short, if you want us to build the country for the 21st century and put progress ahead of partisanship, then you have made a very good investment here tonight.

And when people ask you tomorrow morning or a month from now or 2 months from now, why you did it, tell them you did it because you wanted the schools to be better, because you wanted health care to be better, because you wanted the environment to be protected, because you wanted to build your country for the 21st century. And if you prevail, and if they

prevail, I promise you this country will be a better, stronger place.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay, candidate for Governor of Florida, and former State Senator Rick Dantzler, candidate for Lieutenant Governor; Mayor Alex Penelas of Metro-Dade County; State Attorney General Bob Butterworth; State Agriculture Commissioner Bob Crawford; Mayor Donald L. Plusquellic of Akron, OH, and his wife, Mary; and dinner cohosts Lowell (Bud) Paxson, chairman, Paxson Communications Corp., his wife, Marla, and actor Sylvester Stallone.

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Medal of Honor to Hospital Corpsman Third Class Robert R. Ingram, USN

July 10, 1998

Welcome. Thank you, Admiral, for your invocation. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the White House. I thank Secretary Cohen and Secretary West, Secretary Guber, Deputy Secretary Hamre, Secretary Dalton, Secretary Caldera, Acting Air Force Secretary Peters, General Shelton, and other members of the Joint Chiefs, and general officers here present today. I thank the Members of the Congress from the Florida delegation who are here, and other Members of Congress, including Senator Thurmond, Senator Graham, Senator Mack, Senator Glenn, Senator Cleland, Representative Brown, Representative McHale, and all those in Congress whose action helped to make this day possible.

Today we present the Medal of Honor, our Nation's highest military honor, to Robert R. Ingram for extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty on March 28, 1966, in Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnam.

Today, more than 30 years later, Bob Ingram is manager of a medical service practice in Jacksonville, a registered nurse, a man who loves to work on cars. His wife, Doris, his children, and his close friends are here with us today, and we welcome them.

His story spans decades and continents, but across these divides, friendship and loyalty have

endured and have brought us to this moment. Mr. Ingram enlisted in the Navy in 1963 and joined the Hospital Corps. He went to Vietnam with Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, in July 1965.

One day in February of 1966, the company came under heavy fire, and Petty Officer Ingram rushed forward to treat the wounded. Enemy bullets punctured both his canteens. When the unit's machine gunner was hit, he manned the gun. And for his bravery on that day, he received the Silver Star.

On March 28, 1966, Petty Officer Ingram accompanied the point platoon of his company as it was suddenly attacked by 100 North Vietnamese in a hail of automatic rifle fire. In moments, the platoon was decimated. Oblivious to the danger, he crawled across the terrain to reach a wounded marine. While administering aid, a bullet went through his hand. After administering aid there, he heard more calls for a corpsman. Still bleeding, he edged across the fire-swept landscape, collecting ammunition from the dead and attending to the wounded, receiving two additional wounds from rifle fire.

Though severely wounded, he continued administering aid to the wounded and the dying

marines while gathering ammunition and encouraging others capable of doing so to return fire. While dressing the head wound of another corpsman, he sustained his fourth wound. Enduring extreme pain from his own wounds and disregarding the probability of his own death, Petty Officer Ingram pushed, pulled, cajoled, and doctored his marines for hours more. Losing strength and almost unrecognizable from his injuries, finally he was pulled to safety, where he tried to refuse evacuation, saying that others should go first. His vital signs dropped to the point that he was tagged "killed in action" and placed in a dead pile.

But, as you can see, he did not die. Eleven members of Charlie Company, however, were killed that day, and 53 more were wounded. Some are alive today because of the extraordinary selflessness and bravery of Robert Ingram.

Harvey Kappeler, a corporal in the lead platoon, wrote last year, "I observed Robert Ingram perform acts of heroism I have never seen before, during, or after my tour of Vietnam." Mr. Ingram later recalled, "I was just doing my job; my job was to take care of the men."

Three weeks after the attack, he wrote his platoon from his hospital bed: "I've got a tube in my throat, leg elevated, arm elevated, can't move, but I wanted you all to know I'm still alive." After 8 months recovering, he went back to sea on another deployment.

Other members of the company were honored for their bravery on that day in March of 1966, but no one doubted that Robert Ingram deserved the highest honor. We don't know how his citation got lost all those years ago, but we do know why he is here today: Because his friends never forgot what he did for them.

Jim Fulkerson commanded the 3d Platoon of Charlie Company. In 1995 he organized a reunion of members of the battalion, including Bob Ingram. They remembered the war, the endless cold soaking rains, the terrible firefights. And Ingram's friends resolved to do everything possible to ensure that America finally gave him appropriate recognition.

Charlie Company's commander, Ben Goodwyn, wrote to General Krulak, "I saw my fair share of combat in Vietnam. Of all the men I brought with me, Doc Ingram was undoubtedly the most courageous."

Mr. Ingram is the 22d Navy corpsman to receive the Medal of Honor, and his reward comes appropriately as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Navy Hospital Corps. Through all our conflicts, they have been there on ships at sea, on the front lines, performing foxhole surgery, saving thousands of lives while risking and sometimes sacrificing their own. I salute their courageous service to our Nation.

The last troops left Vietnam almost 25 years ago now. But we do not and we must not forget their sacrifices and bravery. As Mr. Kappeler recently wrote of the firefight in Quang Ngai that day, "As I grow old, I look back to that day and the heroism of the marines and our Navy corpsman, and I understand what is meant by the highest traditions of service. I am extremely proud to call Robert Ingram a friend."

On that battlefield so many years ago, Robert Ingram performed truly heroic deeds and asked for nothing in return. At long last, it is time to honor him.

Mr. Ingram, on behalf of all Americans, we thank you for your service, for your courage, for your determination, for your loyalty to comrades and country. We are all proud to call you an American. Hillary and I are proud that you are in the White House with us today, and I am very proud to award you the Medal of Honor.

Major Everhart, read the citation.

[At this point, Maj. Carlton Everhart, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President, read the citation, and Lt. Comdr. Wesley Huey, USN, Naval Aide to the President, assisted the President in presenting the medal.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:18 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rear Adm. A. Byron Holderby, USN, Chief of Chaplains, U.S. Navy, who offered the invocation.