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My name is Paul McKay. I'm interviewing Vietnam veteran Linda Caldwell, who served in the Army Nurse Corps and was in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968. Mrs. Caldwell, this interview will have four sections Your Life before service, Basic Training, your time in Vietnam and your Life After Service. Let's get started with your background. Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

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I grew up in the military, actually. My father was a career Air Force officer, and so we lived in a lot of different places. But I was born in Yuma, Arizona, and we moved around a lot. So I lived in Texas and Tennessee, France, England, Nevada. I would have to say that Nevada, Las Vegas is really my home where I grew up.

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And I think it goes without saying. It's the, gambling capital of the world. So it was kind of unique to go to school there, go to high school there. You know, it was a lot of fun, interesting. Can you tell me about your family growing up? My, as I said, my dad was, he was an auditor, so he was in the finance part of a base.

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My mom was a traditional, homemaker. And I have one sister who's eight and a half younger years younger than I am. And, so we were, you know, a nice, tight knit, family. My parent, my mother's parents both died when she was 17. So I grew up with just one set of grandparents. And, my parents were both from Iowa, so we used to spend summers in Iowa, visiting my grandparents, mostly.

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Do you have any memories of people around you telling war stories from World War Two? Well, both my dad and his brother, my Uncle West, were in World War two, but my dad had flat feet, and he couldn't march. So they kept him stateside, and, he became a cook. So. Which was kind of cool. He used to cook some of our meals.

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He made legendary vegetable soup and whatever. My my uncle was a pilot. But, I don't think he was overseas. I don't know exactly all the history of that, but. So I don't really remember that. Excuse me. My grandfather was in the army in France in World War one, and he definitely didn't talk about anything that happened there.

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Interesting. Did you have a favorite World War Two movie growing up? Favorite movie? I would have to say, D-Day. I think that was a movie. That was that was one. And, the one with Tom Hanks and, Saving Private Ryan. I guess that was another one that kind of spoke to me.

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A lot of Vietnam veteran memoirs mentioned John Wayne as an influence on their expectations of war. Do you remember John Wayne that way? No, no, I remember John Wayne as cowboy. Cowboy movies.

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Before Vietnam. Where did you go to college and what did you study? I went to the University of San Francisco and I studied nursing. And when were you there? I was there from September of 62 until I graduated in May of 66.

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Did you hear anything about Vietnam during your time in college? Yes. Definitely did. It was ramping up and being on the West Coast. We, I don't know. We're close. Not close proximity, but, you know, there were people filtering in and out through through the ports and through the airports and whatever. Going to Vietnam. And I had friends, USF had an, Rocky unit, ROTC.

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And so some of my friends were in, in the, the unit and they were talking about, about Vietnam as well. So whether they would go or whether they would be drafted or, you know, those kinds of things.

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Now, I'd like to move on to the start of your service and medical field service school, or MFS. Could you describe how you enlisted in the military? Sure. When I was, sophomore at USF, my two recruiters came to talk to our nursing class, and one from the Army, one from the Navy. And they described a program that was called the Army Student Nurse Program.

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And in exchange for paying for our last two years of college, complete tuition fees, books and everything, they would, require us to spend three years on active duty. Either the Navy or the Army. And so I thought about it, and I talked it over with my parents, but it was

really my decision. And I decided to, go into the Army program.

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The Navy was, I was not familiar with the Navy. The Army ranks were more, very similar, are similar. Same as the, what I was used to with Air Force. So it was a familiarity kind of thing. And, and it was just a good way to get school paid for. Plus, it sounded like, you know, something adventurous.

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I was kind of an adventurous type person, so took a chance. And and it turned out to be a great decision.

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Did you have any female or male role models that encouraged you to enlist? I guess I'd have to say my father, he didn't encourage it necessarily, but, you know, it was, it was a good option. But and my uncle, having been in the military as well. So my grandfather. And did you expect to go to Vietnam?

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Not really. It was in the back of my mind, but I wasn't, I didn't join it for that reason. Let's put it that way. I, I, you know, just joined for the entire experience of being in the army, seeing what it was like to be in there myself, having seen what my dad was doing. And, you know, it was kind of, fun moving around from place to place.

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Not, you know, always living in the same house and have same friends. You sort of you learned how to make friends, easily. And you went to several different schools before I graduated from high school. So. Did any of your friends enlist with you? There were quite a few of my classmates. Yes. We had a small group.

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Because USF was traditionally it's a Jesuit university and it was all male until I think 1962 when they admitted, females into the college, into the university as the School of nursing. So we were the only women on campus. But, I think we graduated with something like 45 in my class, and a quarter of them joined the military.

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Either did the same thing I did, either the Army or the Navy.

Interesting.

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What, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you enlisted? I knew that it had been, at war for years and years, probably a hundred years, and that the French had been there, because there was a, an, they called her the Angel of death. And being for. I don't remember her name, but, I remember reading about it, though, or hearing about it in the news.

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So that was about the sum total of what I knew. And then the, you know, the what you'd read in the newspaper, the Communist, you know, potential takeover of the country and what have you. But I knew very little about it before I went. Can you elaborate on the angel of the NBN issue? She was a nurse, as I recall, and saved a lot of people that, you know, soldiers and maybe civilians.

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But I'm not not I don't remember a lot of of that. Just that that was part of it.

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And what did you know about the Vietnam War? I guess I would say that it was not a popular war. It wasn't, something that everybody was committed to, and there were a lot of protests about Vietnam and our involvement, the U.S. involvement there. But I was actually very naive about it. To be honest, not focused on my nursing studies and, which were grueling, but, didn't really get involved a lot in politics, that kind of thing.

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Were there any protest on your campus or in San Francisco while you were there? Not that I remember. But, there there could have been. We were, the hippie movement came in right after I graduated. So because our school was very close to the Haight-Ashbury, I mean, we used to walk down the Haight Street and go to the restaurants and, what have you and, shops and then later to find out, you know, that it was the epicenter of the the so-called hippie movement was kind of interesting.

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How would you describe your time in medical field service school? It was six weeks of fun and, meeting new people and learning so much,

about the, military. I had a leg up. So I think because having grown up in the military, it wasn't as foreign for me as it was for a lot of the people that I was there with.

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Excuse me. So, we we learned how to, march and how to wear the uniform. We got our uniforms. As an officer, you had to wear there were different. Well, everybody wore, you had class uniforms, khakis, and ours was, a skirt and a blouse. They called it, so it was a two piece outfit, and, and then we had green army green uniform, which was more formal.

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And then we had the actual, very formal, they call it the miss dress. And there was a store in San Antonio called Sugarman. And that's where we got our, our uniforms from. And, and thinking back on it, they were actually tailored for us, which was kind of unusual, but, but it was it was interesting is also interesting to see the different disciplines that were there at the medical field service school.

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There were dentists and physicians and veterinarians, and optometrists. I believe. So it was a whole conglomeration. But the nurses, we were separate. We had, you know, everybody had their own training. Obviously. They you know, they got schooled in different things than we did, but we all had the common thing of, you know, learning how to be an officer and a general woman.

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I guess you'd say. Did anyone around you struggle with that transition? No, not not that I remember now. Not at that time. Maybe later. And I'm sure you'll get to that. But yeah. I'm. I'd like to move on to your time in Vietnam. Did anything stick out about your flight to Vietnam? It was a, charter aircraft.

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It was, a company called World Airways. I don't know if they're still in business or not, but. And we left from Travis Air Force Base outside of Sacramento. And it was at night, plane was packed, as I recall. It was a 707 in those days. This was in 1967, November. And we left. We arrived and in Vietnam on Thanksgiving Day.

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So because you crossed the International Date Line, we didn't leave on

Thanksgiving, obviously. But it was packed with, mostly men. And there were a couple of women, as I recall. I think I even sat next to one of them. But we had to make an emergency landing somewhere in Alaska to refuel, and then we carried on to Japan.

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And just we were on the ground not long, probably just to refuel, and take on, you know, food and whatever. But I remember eating two, Thanksgiving dinners while I was on the plane, so, that was interesting. And then, coming into lent to land in Tanzania, outside of Saigon, they warned us ahead of time that it was going to be a very steep descent because they didn't like to come in low and slow, because it made a very good target for the Vietcong, if they were so inclined.

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So that was exciting.

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Could you describe your first 24 to 48 hours and country? What I remember of it was, landing and getting off the plane and walking over into the terminal, and then getting our bags and, the smells were just very interesting, and they're hard to describe. It was like different foods that you you could kind of think that it was a food or whatever, but.

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And it was so hot. So this November was, end of November and, humid. A lot of activity around. And I remember the bus ride to get to, Long Bean, which was the in processing center for the military. There. And it took a while, but the bus had, wire over the windows, so which was, you know, something that you weren't really used to doing.

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And obviously it was done for safety reasons, but I remember getting there and being tired. Tired, you know, after a long flight over, I guess it was probably about 12 hours. And, excuse me. So sleeping and, you know, just trying to acclimate to the time change was, for one thing. And then, getting processed in, because when you went to Vietnam, you didn't really know where you were going to be stationed, so I couldn't tell my family or my friends.

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Oh, yeah. This is where I'm going to be. You didn't know until you got

there. And then they, assigned you according to what the need was, where the need was greatest. And, so I was in, in long, long been for a couple of days and, got uniforms, got fatigues and combat boots. Not much else.

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And this was November, and it gets cold in Vietnam and in November. That's the rainy season, part of the monsoon season. So it wasn't until I got to my, my where I was going to be stationed that I actually got a jacket and that kind of thing. And the Army, in its infinite wisdom, because they didn't know where they were going to put us.

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We all had to bring eight white uniforms to a war zone, and complete with your nursing cap and shoes and nylons and, so all of that had to be sent back home. And I think that's where I sent it home was when I was at, long been. So I sent it home to my family, because there was one hospital in Vietnam that had a laundry that could do the uniforms.

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So. And that was the third field hospital in Saigon. So I was not selected to stay there, which is fine. Actually turned out to be better where I was. Anyway. So those those had to be sent back. But were you relieved to be rid of the white uniforms? Yes, yes, they were nice. But they were, they're definitely not something.

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You could do it yourself. They had to go to a laundry because they were starched and, you know, they came back folded when I was at Walter Reed, my first duty station after I went to the, medical field service school. We we just took them to the laundry every week, and, you know, they would issue you a new set and that was that was the way that worked.

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So, what did you expect when you arrived based on TV or stories you had heard? I expected to be hot and busy and a lot of military. And I had the, the, advantage of having been in the Army for at least, you know, a year, a little over a year, and had worked in the hospital and worked, you know, knew what the routines were.

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And, you know, the because every hospital is different and every

system, has its own quirks and, and what have you. So I knew that. So it was, not unexpected necessarily, but there were a lot of things that had to change. And because we obviously didn't have as many, supplies and we didn't have all of the same equipment that we did stateside, it was a war zone.

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So it was pared down to what we needed were the basics. I would say to back up a little bit, what hospital did you work at before deploying at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC? That's where I was first assigned when I went into the Army, when I signed all the papers and whatever and knew that I was, you know, you had to I had to pass my state boards.

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So I graduated in May of 66. And then I, took the state boards in June, and it took a couple of months before I got my results back. So it was August. By the time I went to San Antonio, to assess. And, they tried to give you your first choice of where you wanted to go.

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And because I'd gone to school in the on the West Coast, and I grew up in Las Vegas. Well, I went to high school in Las Vegas. I decided I'd like to go to the East Coast just to see what it was like, because we had my dad had never been stationed on the East coast. Furthest east we were was East Tennessee.

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And, so I thought Walter Reed would be good. And it was it was wonderful. In fact, that was the nickname that we gave. It was Walter. Wonderful. Well, would you describe yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? Everybody was in combat when you were in Vietnam. There were no front lines. There was no, demarcation other than, you know, Hanoi, and the DMZ, but, but, demilitarized zone.

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So you were not a sitting duck, but you were, in a dangerous situation, regardless of where you were. So that was a misconception that, you know, oh, the nurses were all behind enemy lines. No, we were right there in fact, there were several nurses that were killed in Vietnam, so not many. But there are about, I think, eight names on the wall and in Washington DC and, they were killed for different, different reasons.

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So.

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What base were you stationed at in Vietnam? I was in, Kenyan, on the coast of the South China Sea. It's south of Danang and north of. Not Trang. The town is called Kenyan, and I was at the 67th evac hospital in Kenyan. And there are actually two hospitals, two army hospitals there, which was kind of unusual.

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The 85th was across the, the way they were closer to the mountains. We were closer to the, ocean, the South China Sea, rather. And we were right next to the airfield. So, it was very convenient in many ways to be that close to the airfield. So what kind of work specifically did you do? Well, when I arrived, I was assigned to a 72 bed surgical unit, and, there was a head nurse there, so I was one of the staff nurses, and we worked, 12 hours a day, six days a week.

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You had one day off a week. If you worked the day shift. The day shift was considered 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and nights were 7 p.m. to seven a. If you worked a string of nights, when you got off, that's like, say, 5 or 6 in a row, then you got two days off. We called it a sleep day and a day off so that you actually had two days off, which was nice.

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So. And you rotated everybody. But the head nurse rotated between days and nights.

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Were you in danger? Often? It's hard to say. I was there for the Tet Offensive of 68, which I'm sure you've heard about. That's when the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong staged a huge, offensive against the Americans. And in every part of Vietnam, it wasn't just limited to, you know, the north of the south or the the Highlands.

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So, there though there were two nights I can remember, where we had to sleep under our bunks and in, with a flak jacket on and a steel pot helmet. And, that was a little scary. We also had to, because we were right on the airfield. The, hospital was, we had to admit patients by candlelight.

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We had to turn off all the lights, because, airfields were a prime target for them. And, we, you know, wanted to minimize the risk, especially to the patients who, you know, were in our care. So. But that went on for about two, maybe three days, I guess, quinine was hit heavily. So, after it was all over, we went down.

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A couple of us went down into the city and you could see, you know, craters where there had been, you know, and a lot of, hand-to-hand combat. So a lot of mortar fire, that kind of thing did a lot of damage.

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Do you remember men in the war zone being an additional danger? They were all. Well, our patients would tell us, you know, what happened to them. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Definitely. It was. It was a war. It was, you know, not a romp in the park. It was, was serious, and it hit you once. You're, you know, when you're there for a couple of weeks and you sort of get up at acclimatized, you know, get used to it.

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But, in the more this the stories that they heard and or that I heard from them, it's they were they were definitely in danger. Obviously, they'd been wounded. So. Yeah. For you as a woman, were American men obnoxious or inappropriate? Ever? Never never, never, never. Quite the opposite. They were gentlemen. They were, so appreciative. It sounds, racist, but they used to say you're the first round eyed woman I've seen in months, and they were always appreciative of any nursing care we did, it just to have somebody to listen to their stories and to talk to them and ask them about their home.

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You know what it was like. Where'd you grow up? What? You know, what did you do before you went in the Army? Were you in school? Were you working? You know, those kinds of things. And we did what we could to lift their spirits as well. And, the Army had a lot of regulations about how you wore the uniform.

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And for nurses and women in the military, you couldn't have your hair on your collar, so you had to have shorter hair or pin it up. You could only wear, earrings that were, you know, I had my ears pierced, and, you could only wear little stud earrings. Nothing dangly

anything. You know that would detract from the uniform or from your person.

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They were said to be neat and clean, and, you know, in the morning, you get ready and just dab a little perfume on behind your ear and, go out to work and try and try and be a smiling face for somebody who wasn't happy to be where they were.

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Did you learn any Vietnamese words or phrases during your tours? We learned what we call pidgin Vietnamese, and at one point, they hired the hospital, had hired a, Vietnamese, language expert, somebody who was Vietnamese, who spoke English to come and give us classes in the mess hall at night. When it was closed down.

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And, it was primarily medical terms. And, you know, what have you Vietnamese is a very difficult language to learn. And, I wouldn't say that we were very successful, but we picked up a few phrases and, you know, mostly and I did have Vietnamese patients, but, so mostly communicated just by sign language or whatever. We also had, where the nurses quarters was, we had, a they called mama sons, young Vietnamese women who came to the base every day and they were assigned to, you know, different nurses, like, I think there was one mama son for every 2 or 3 nurses, and they would clean our rooms, wash our

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clothes in cold water every day. And, iron they come in in the morning and start that, you know, very quickly that that process when it was hot, it was I mean, the clothes would be dry and they just hung them up. We didn't have a dryer. They hung them up on hangers. But they would press your uniforms and shine your boots.

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And everything was done by the time they left in the afternoon. So. And for that, we paid \$10 a month, and they thought that that was a good, good wage in those days. So. Wow.

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Unknown

To back up just a little bit, can you give us a sample of any of the Vietnamese you might have learned? Oh, Boxee was. Doctor. Oh. We learned how to. Oh, if you see the doctor or captain, I honestly don't remember a half of what what I learned, which is sad, but, when you

get older, you forget these kinds of things.

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That's. I really. That's a good question. I should have researched that before I came. Sorry about that. That's okay. What proportion of your patients would you say were Vietnamese? A small portion, when I was, when I first got to to Kenyon, to the 67th, and I was on the the, surgical wards, we had the only neurosurgeon in the area, American doctor.

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So we got all of the head injuries and quadriplegic, prisoner patients. So at the end of my ward, one side, so closest to the door, we had either 2 or 4 beds, depending upon how many patients we had for those, prisoners who had either a spinal cord injury or a head injury. And they were under 24, our armed guard.

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So the MPs would sit there, they had chairs and what have you. What was interesting about that situation was the prisoners were very, amicable. They weren't hostile. They, they tried to communicate with us and we tried the same. Obviously, there were certain things we had to do for them, like change dressings and, and, give medications and, you know, injections and that kind of thing.

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But they were very compliant and very, grateful you would, you would say, what also was interesting was the patients that I had, the American GIS that were ambulatory would come over to their beds and try and talk to them in, you know, what Vietnamese they knew or had picked up. And, of course, in those days you could smoke in any hospital bed anywhere in the country, probably, and especially in Vietnam.

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And so they would offer them cigarets and, which I thought was very you know, nice of them and and try to try to communicate with them. And after a while I started thinking, you in that bed are the one who may have shot that one, who's being nice to you, and you're all being very nice to each other.

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So isn't war wonderful? So it was it was kind of a kind of a head game, actually. But it didn't seem to bother, you know, the GIS, there

were some that I think probably stayed away from them because they didn't have such good feelings about them. But for the most part, you know, it was an amicable situation.

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And then you ask about Vietnamese patients. So I became head nurse to that, that unit when the, head nurse, we had a term and you've probably heard this post, a date of return to, the U.S.. And so when he did roast, I took over as head nurse, and I was head nurse for about eight months.

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And then the head nurse of the orthopedic unit also went home. So I, asked for and did that because I wanted to change of scenery. I was I wouldn't say I was bored, but I needed something different to learn. And I was, you know, eager to learn more about orthopedics, which I hadn't had much experience with that.

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So when I went down to the, orthopedic and I say down because we had a two story hospital, there was, it had originally been built as a barracks for the Air Force, and they didn't need it. So they gave it to the Army, and it was ideal because we had a helicopter landing pad right outside of the emergency room and what they made into an emergency room.

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So the stretcher bearers, the little guys, could bring them right into the emergency room and then triage them as to where they needed to go. But my ward was upstairs and they had built a ramp to get up to the top levels and, orthopedics because of casts and, you know, heavier patients, they were downstairs. So when I went downstairs, I became head nurse of, of orthopedics.

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But we had at one time I had about four children, who were patients, Vietnamese children. None of them were war wounds. I had one little girl who had such bad, strabismus, meaning her eyes were crossed that she didn't see a train that was coming. And so she lost contralateral limbs. She lost an arm on one side and a leg on another.

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She was delightful little girl. Just very compliant. She never cried. She never whimpered. Didn't she was. Always had a smile on her face. I

had, one little girl who had. She was 18 months old. She had pulled an oil lantern over on herself and was horribly burned. Starting with her mouth, and, all the way down her body.

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Unknown

She actually lost one of her legs at the hip. She had been treated at the Catholic hospital in Kenyon by the nuns, the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese doctors. But they they got her to a certain point, and then they couldn't do much more for her. So they brought her to us, asking if we could help with that.

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Unknown

Her, one of her arms was badly contracted because she'd been burned right around her elbow and sore arm was like this. So we put casts on it. And the theory is that if you continue, changing the cast and move under anesthesia and move her arm down, that eventually that will release some of the contractures so that she would have more of a range of motion and function with her arm.

00:32:45:14 – 00:33:08:29

Unknown

But, she was a pet. She was absolutely a pet. Somebody found a, shopping cart and put a pillow in it, and she was just big enough. And so she would sit in this shopping cart and we'd feeler around to the different, guys beds, and they would entertain her. So, which gave us a lot of, freer time to do other things that we needed to be doing.

00:33:08:29 – 00:33:34:22

Unknown

So, it really looked like pediatrics at one point with these kids. But, you know, the guys that were there that were in their beds, they they enjoyed seeing we called her Cindy, which is terrible because she had been burned to a cinder. Her real name was Nguyen Tan Thye Hua, which is a mouthful. But she was just a delightful little girl, and her parents used to come every Sunday and visit her.

00:33:34:24 – 00:33:58:27

Unknown

She had a mom and dad and a brother and sister, and they would come on a Sunday afternoon and sit with her and take her outside and play with her and whatever. So it was nice. I also wrote back to my mom and her church lady friends sent me clothing for these kids because they didn't have any clothes, and they didn't obviously fit into the pajamas that, you know, the Army issued to the GI's.

00:33:59:00 – 00:34:19:09

Unknown

So we had a box of, clothes, which was nice, you know, had had some we

had one little boy, however, who didn't have a wound. He had a draining ear infection that just would not clear up. And, he was a mountain yard child because he had the traditional, haircut of mountain yard, the mountain people from the Highlands.

00:34:19:09 – 00:34:43:18

Unknown

And, he refused to wear any clothes. He was he ran around buck naked. But we got used to it, and he he clearly was. That was the way he was raised. He didn't wear clothes. So, every now and then, I used to take him over to the 85th hospital in an ambulance. We'd get an ambulance driver to take us over there because he had to see the ear, nose and throat physician, the EMT.

00:34:43:25 – 00:34:56:12

Unknown

And he was at that hospital, orthopedics or, the, neurosurgeon was at the 67th. So we traded services back and forth.

00:34:56:15 – 00:35:29:11

Unknown

Did you have any conflicting feelings about treating enemy prisoners of war? No. Once a nurse, always a nurse. It's, you know, whoever's in need. It it got to me after a while that, you know, like I said, this one could have shot that one. And vice versa and whatever, but, yeah, it was. That's war. You know, you you try to be as compassionate as you can and understand that they have families and roles other than, you know, trying to kill Americans and vice versa.

00:35:29:13 – 00:36:02:18

Unknown

Yeah. How would you describe the people you served with in terms of economic background, race or religion? Oh, we had all all sorts of, all of the above. We had people from every walk of life. I had a corpsman from East L.A., his, Aguilar, Tony Aguilar, I think his name was. And, he used to call me RFA the chief, and we had a great relationship with him.

00:36:02:18 – 00:36:29:05

Unknown

We had, one who was, a conscientious objector. So he was he had to go into the military, but he came in as a corpsman. So, you know, he didn't carry a gun. I had one, there was a, a group in or a, in the military, your your job is considered an MOS. It's military occupational specialty.

00:36:29:08 – 00:36:48:24

Unknown

And so when you met somebody was like, what's your MOS? And so mine was, I forget what it was, but I was a med surg nurse, so if I had

four numbers, but I had one guy who was, what we called a 91 C, and that meant that he was equivalent to an LVN or an LPN.

00:36:48:26 – 00:37:17:02

Unknown

You know, somebody who's had a year of nursing school who can do medicines and whatever. He was phenomenal. And I would like to think that he went on to become either a nurse or a doctor. What some people don't know is that the PA prod project, the physician's assistant came out of Vietnam because there were so many corpsman who were in the operating room and as assistants who became so specialized and so good at what they did that they wanted to further their treatment.

00:37:17:03 – 00:37:26:03

Unknown

So I believe it was Duke University that started the first PA program in the country. But that grew out of Vietnam.

00:37:26:06 – 00:37:58:18

Unknown

What was the breakdown of the nurses you served with in terms of gender? Oh, I'd say 95, 98% of them were women. We had, at our hospital, there were two nurse anesthetists that were men. When I was at Walter Reed, I worked with, there were two men that I worked with on the neurosurgery unit. But the vast majority were women.

00:37:58:21 – 00:38:27:07

Unknown

What were your interactions like with doctors? Very collegial. They saw us as junior doctors, as interns, because we didn't have interns in the Army. And so they relied on us to do a lot of the work that freed them up to do surgery for the most part. And in fact, the surgeons that I worked with that I took care of their patients, taught me how to do suturing.

00:38:27:09 – 00:38:53:09

Unknown

So, in Vietnam, all war wounds were considered contaminated, and they had to drain for five days, to presumably rid the body and the wound of infection. Of course, we, you know, put antibiotic, ointment and, you know, all kinds of and I gave them oral antibiotics as well, but you couldn't close a wound for five days for fear that it would set up an infectious process.

00:38:53:09 – 00:39:13:29

Unknown

And you get into a lot of trouble with that. So I kept a book, as head nurse and with everybody's name that was, you know, admitted that had a wound that wasn't closed. And on the fifth day I would, this corpsman who called me RFA would get the dressing cart and we'd go bed

to bed and he would be my assistant.

00:39:14:01 - 00:39:39:22

Unknown

He'd, we'd both glove, obviously, and use, local anesthetic. And I would, you know, suture the wounds together and, bandage them up. And then they were ready to go out of either out of country or they went to an in-country, R&R center. Really, like, Cameron Bay. Had a big R&R center and you could send, we call them the Walking Wounded.

00:39:39:26 - 00:40:02:03

Unknown

So if they had a frag wound on their arm or their chest or, you know, wherever that wasn't super serious, they could be after they were sutured, they would be sent to that hospital to recover completely until the wound was completely healed before they would go back out into the field, out the boonies, as they said, if it was a more serious wound.

00:40:02:03 - 00:40:28:25

Unknown

And obviously the the guys from ICU, our job as an evacuation hospital was to get them ready to be evacuated out of country. So, when the doctors deemed that they were ready, we would, there was always a flight. There were flights that left, I think three times a week. And, we had to get all their paperwork ready and they would be on the manifest to go either to the Philippines or to Japan.

00:40:28:28 - 00:40:50:25

Unknown

And most of, I'd say probably 99% of ours all went to Japan. I think maybe some of the, the hospitals further south of us may have gone to the Philippines, but the preferred one for us was to go to Japan, and then they would recover more or go for more extensive surgery if they had to, before they were sent back to the States.

00:40:50:27 - 00:40:59:21

Unknown

And they always tried to send them to a hospital closest to where they were from, where their hometown was.

00:40:59:24 - 00:41:07:18

Unknown

To circle back for a second, what was the breakdown of your fellow nurses in terms of race?

00:41:07:21 - 00:41:41:18

Unknown

They were all white. Now that I think about it. Yeah, that's an interesting question. I don't think I ever worked with. Even when I

was stateside, I have corpsman that were black, but nurses. Yeah. Were they from all regions? Oh, yeah. All regions and, all different walks of life. All different schools of nursing. Some were 3 or 4 because in those days they still had three year schools of nursing.

00:41:41:18 – 00:42:05:03

Unknown

They called them hospitals, schools of nursing. They came in as warrant officers. If you'd gone to a baccalaureate program like I did, you came in as a second lieutenant. So. And I actually got my commission in December of my senior year in college. So, which was nice. Because then that meant that I had in the military, it's called time in grade.

00:42:05:06 – 00:42:27:02

Unknown

So I had been a second lieutenant for a year when I had only been at Walter Reed for a couple of months. So I got promoted to first lieutenant in December of 67. And, then I got promoted to captain while I was in Vietnam. So that was usually about two years. You had to be a first lieutenant for two years.

00:42:27:05 – 00:42:58:08

Unknown

How did living in Vietnam and meeting Vietnamese people affect you? Well, that's an interesting question. It really shapes a lot of, it I think the question also is, how is being in the military in Vietnam? How did that shape you? It it made you appreciate what we have in this country. It also made you realize that you could do most anything and suffer through most anything.

00:42:58:11 – 00:43:16:09

Unknown

And, excuse me. We used to have a saying, when, I was there and also when I came back, you know, what are they going to do to me? Send me to Vietnam. I've already been there. That was considered, like, the worst of the worst to have to go to Vietnam because it was far away from home.

00:43:16:09 – 00:43:42:16

Unknown

It was hot. It was, backward. The country itself was very backward. We used to say that it was probably in the sounds terrible, but that it would probably be better if the communists took over the country because they would probably improve it. And that proved to be prophetic. And, but being away from home for a year, it was it was a hardship.

00:43:42:16 – 00:44:04:23

Unknown

And you counted down the days, especially as you got closer to the time when you were going to go home. But when you look back on it, it was, it was an experience that I would not ever. I don't regret going there. I don't regret volunteering to go there. And a lot of people, a lot of nurses did not volunteer to go there, I have to tell you that.

00:44:04:23 – 00:44:26:27

Unknown

And there were some that had a lot of problems with being there. Fortunately, I wasn't one of those, and I think it had to do a lot with the fact that I grew up in the military. So I knew what to expect. I knew about the rules and the regulations, and you had to do it this way, and this was the Army way to do it, and so on and so forth, which, you know, it really didn't bother me.

00:44:26:29 – 00:44:54:04

Unknown

What do you remember about non patient Vietnamese children? They were sweet. They were they they would always swarm around you and want you to give them candy or money or whatever. But actually I don't remember seeing a lot of other than when I went downtown to Kenyon, which was not very often. I was too busy, you know, when I had a day off, you we had a beach.

00:44:54:07 – 00:45:15:26

Unknown

Red beach, that was part of an country R&R center. And so we go to the beach or you go to the, and but but as far as seeing Vietnamese children, I don't remember seeing a lot of them anywhere other than the patients that I took care.

00:45:15:28 – 00:45:43:03

Unknown

How would you describe Vietnamese women and what did you think of them at the time? Most of them were very beautiful. They wore these elegant, outfits called an Audi, which was a long, long sleeve, but thin material because it was so hot, for the most part. And they wore them over, black slacks, and they were slit up the side.

00:45:43:05 – 00:46:11:05

Unknown

And they wore conical shaped hats. Very pretty. And the mama sign that I had was lovely. She was able to communicate with me that she had children. So when my mom sent the clothes for the kids, I gave her some of them for her children. I had to write a note, though, because when they came into the compound, they had to pass through an armed guard, and if they tried to take anything out with them, they were stopped immediately.

00:46:11:05 – 00:46:45:22

Unknown

And so I had to write a note and say, you know, I'm giving this woman, you know, clothing for her children and sign my name. So, so then they knew that it was legitimate and that she could keep them. So did you buy an Audi? No, no, I didn't buy anything. And the only things I bought in Vietnam, I bought at the, and they had very little of anything for women to, to buy, at the, they had every now and then they would have jewelry.

00:46:45:24 - 00:47:08:00

Unknown

So I'm very nice. Miki motorsport, Pearl ring that I got there. That's also where we would go to buy liquor. They had a, they call it class store and it was very cheap. And when you, when you wear fatigues, you don't exactly where a purse or carry a purse, but you had to have something to put your, lipstick in your Kleenex and whatever.

00:47:08:00 - 00:47:27:26

Unknown

So, I didn't drink this. Still don't. But Crown Royal, the purple bag that was way back when. That goes back to Vietnam days. And, so when they were, whoever was drinking, it was finished with it. They give them to us to use as a, column ditty bags and, you know, whatever. The Red cross also had them.

00:47:27:28 - 00:47:50:12

Unknown

They made them and gave them to us. We had a we had a Red cross worker at our hospital, and she was invaluable. She, was one that would get in touch with the GI's and tell them they had a message from home or, if they had a, birth of a child or a niece or nephew born while they were there at the hospital, she would inform them of that.

00:47:50:19 - 00:48:00:07

Unknown

Or unfortunately, if there was a death in the family, they they also made all of those arrangements to get them back, back stateside.

00:48:00:09 - 00:48:24:22

Unknown

Do you remember any distinct animals during your time in Vietnam? Yes. There was, a dog that a stray dog that had, somebody on the airfield. One of the pilots had it. I don't know how he found it, but the poor thing had a broken leg, so. And I don't remember who did this, but they kind of set his leg and, and put a some kind of a cast on it.

00:48:24:22 - 00:48:54:12

Unknown

They probably took it over to the orthopedic guys and said, hey, cast this dog's leg. So I remember him. But other than that, not too many

animals that I saw. Were there any rats I didn't see any. I was very and I was, I am and was terrified of snakes. And of course when they when you went through the, pre all of the education about, you know, before you went through, they gave us a book and there were pictures of different snakes.

00:48:54:12 – 00:49:00:12

Unknown

It was like, oh, God. But fortunately I never saw any of those.

00:49:00:15 – 00:49:29:16

Unknown

Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam? Oh, yeah. It's, you know, like I said, it's very it's a it was in those days. Now it's a highly industrialized, very successful country, obviously. But in those days it was you know, more, I mean, there were oxen pulling wagons and people out in the fields, you know, gathering, doing rice, gathering the rice in the paddies.

00:49:29:16 – 00:49:49:22

Unknown

And, so it was not something that you would see in the US, the whole the whole thing. And, they had these little scooters that they would pile a zillion people, it seemed like, on the back of them. And, Jitney, they called them Jitney. That was it. I hadn't thought of that word in a long time.

00:49:49:24 – 00:50:01:20

Unknown

And that was how they transferred, you know, went from place to place, like we would do a taxi. That's that was their mode of transportation. So.

00:50:01:22 – 00:50:25:29

Unknown

Did you get sick at all in your time in country? No, unfortunately, I was I was fine. There were, you know, some people that developed malaria, we had to take every Monday evening when you went to the mess hall for dinner, they had bowls and a spoon at two bowls. One was chloroquine, one was one, and that was the malaria prophylaxis.

00:50:26:01 – 00:50:54:10

Unknown

And you had to take them. Unfortunately, they had side effects. And so people would take them and then throw them away. But I tried to be compliant, because I didn't want to come down with malaria. But but no, I was not on what I was. I was healthy. What was the most interesting food you ate in Vietnam?

00:50:54:13 – 00:51:19:28

Unknown

I guess one time we went down to the, to a restaurant in Vietnam, Irene Kenyon. But I think it was actually a Korean restaurant, and, we had kimchi, which I guess was probably the most interesting thing I had while I was there. What I didn't have was in the mess hall. We didn't have salad. We didn't have real milk.

00:51:20:00 – 00:51:41:08

Unknown

We didn't have ice cream, but the Navy did. And there was a Navy base in the bay outside because quinine being right on the water, there were there was a Navy base there. And so, a couple of times the Navy officers invited some of the nurses to come over and join them for, for, Sunday dinner, during the day.

00:51:41:10 – 00:52:14:28

Unknown

And it was like, wow, ice cream. And we hadn't seen that. So that was that was about the most interesting thing I had. Did you ever see Vietnamese civilians collecting or using American trash? They used to make things with American trash. They used beer cans and made, signs, and, they used, rubber tires, old rubber tires to make, sandals and.

00:52:15:00 – 00:52:39:04

Unknown

Oh, excuse me, what have you. But I don't know that I saw anything them picking up any trash, per se. We didn't have a lot of contact in a hospital. You're very isolated. I was thinking about that a while ago. That we didn't really know what was going on in other parts of Vietnam. We didn't know how the war was going.

00:52:39:04 – 00:53:08:26

Unknown

We had, you know, the radio station, but, you know, you weren't glued to it. You were too busy, taking care of 72 patients at a time. So we didn't really know what, you know, where they were. I we do remember hearing that, Lyndon Johnson's speech, and I don't know where I would have heard this, that he would not, accept the nomination for president to be reelected.

00:53:08:28 – 00:53:28:03

Unknown

And people were like, wow, I wonder who's going to do that and how's that going to go? But that was about it. I also do remember, the first when I was there in December, I had just been in country for a couple of weeks, and it was the Army-Navy football game only we listened to it at night because at the time change the time difference.

00:53:28:03 – 00:53:34:24

Unknown

And, somebody had a radio, so we listened to it that night. It was kind of fun.

00:53:34:27 - 00:53:58:02

Unknown

To back up a little bit, do you remember what the nurse patient ratio was during the time? Well, I do know that we didn't have enough nurses to have three shifts, so we tried that at one time. But at any given time, because the way the ward was situated and keeping in mind that it was supposed to have been a barracks, so it was built in an H.

00:53:58:04 - 00:54:30:07

Unknown

So there were two long rows on each side of this, structure, the where my ward was connected by a hallway. So you had 32 beds on one side, 32 on the other. So 74 all together or no. Anyway, there was 72 beds. I do remember that. So you do the math. But, on any given time, we would probably have two nurses on one side and two on the other, and maybe somebody floating in between.

00:54:30:09 - 00:55:04:28

Unknown

So it was a high patient to nurse to patient ratio. But also keeping in mind that a lot of them were walking wounded so they weren't as seriously injured. Now down in ICU, which was downstairs from us, the the ratio was, I think, one nurse for two patients, something like that. They tried to keep a lot more nurses down there, which meant that because they only had a certain number and I don't remember how many total nurses there were, because we also had, on the other side of the street because there was a dirt road in between these two structures.

00:55:04:28 - 00:55:32:08

Unknown

That was the medical side. So guys that had, dysentery or malaria or, a nonsurgical condition, they would be on that side. So those, those, nurses, they had to staff that area as well. So and the O.R., of course, the operating room had a high, a large number of, of nurses staffing that.

00:55:32:10 - 00:55:57:19

Unknown

Do you remember seeing Agent Orange being sprayed? No, but we were in the area where it was sprayed, so I'm quite sure that, it came in on the clothes of the guys when they were admitted to our, our wards. And the protocol there was you always, if they were walking and could go in, they would go into the latrine and take a shower if they didn't have huge gaping wounds.

00:55:57:22 - 00:56:15:17

Unknown

Sometimes, even if they did, because the, the theory being that the soap and water would help wash away the bacteria, but then they would put their clothes in a plastic bag and it would have their name on it. So all that, if they were sprayed, it was all right there. And we were exposed to it too.

00:56:15:19 – 00:56:41:01

Unknown

Yeah. Were you concerned at the time? No. How about Agent Orange? Probably didn't really know that it was being done. Wasn't until afterwards that wasn't something that was widely known. I mean, it was, you know, if you read the newspapers or, you know, whatever. Saw the pictures. Yeah. But like I said, we were too busy focused on what our job was.

00:56:41:03 – 00:57:09:02

Unknown

What were some of the ways you coped with the war? We had parties when you weren't working, when you had your 12 hours off? We had, some the supply sergeants were wonderful. We don't we never knew where they came from, but they would get cases of steaks from someone. They'd trade back and forth. There was like a a network of sergeants and supply people, and they'd make friends with the pilots.

00:57:09:02 – 00:57:33:06

Unknown

And so the pilots coming in would bring in a case of steaks or a couple of cases or whatever. And, there was a barbecue area where we would have, you know, and it was all comers. It was not, you know, just, limited to the officers. And so we would, you know, party and whatever. Although there were were parties that that the nurses quarters that were strictly just for the nurses and for the doctors and whatever.

00:57:33:08 – 00:58:00:06

Unknown

But, as I said, I would go during the day, I would go on my off time down to the and just mainly just to get out of the compound, you know, see another, you know, face or another part of the, the area of canyon. Sometimes we would go downtown, not very often, but they had, flea markets and you could see Sunkist oranges and, Kotex nail polish.

00:58:00:06 – 00:58:25:13

Unknown

That was a brand that was popular back in the 60s. You could see that in being sold in the black market, meaning that had been originally destined to come to the military but had been diverted with the black market, which was angering, you know, enough to, annoy everybody. The army and speaking of that, the army was ill equipped to have women in

a combat zone.

00:58:25:15 - 00:58:48:09

Unknown

We had no, like like I said, jackets that were appropriate, you know, sized for women. So we had to, you know, take what we could. This and supply sergeants did a great job with that. We had no sanitary supplies for women. And you were at the mercy of your family or friends, to send that to you in the mail.

00:58:48:12 - 00:59:09:27

Unknown

We used the Sears catalog a lot. Because when you weren't wearing fatigues and combat boots, you didn't want to wear them 24 over seven. So we did have clothing. And, I buy something out of the the Sears catalog and order it. It was a long process because as I recall, it wasn't a credit card situation. It was right out of check.

00:59:09:27 - 00:59:34:15

Unknown

And mail it. And then, you know, a month later you might get something in the mail. But but it was interesting. Did the not stock nothing nothing. As I said, I think the sum total of what I bought there was, a pearl ring, and I don't even remember, just maybe the liquor. That was it.

00:59:34:17 - 00:59:39:09

Unknown

I don't remember what I drank in those days. Wow.

00:59:39:12 - 01:00:01:29

Unknown

Do you remember humor or slang or jokes being a part of life in Vietnam? Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And when? When somebody was within 30 days of going home, you. If you saw them walking on the compound, you'd yell out, sure. And that was fun. You know, it was like, I'm short. I have a short time left in this country, and I'm leaving.

01:00:02:01 - 01:00:35:24

Unknown

But, and and. Yeah, there were, you know, you tried to make the best of a bad situation, that that people asked me if mash the show mash if that was akin to what we went through, and I said yes, in in the sense that you did what you could to make it, fun. And, you know, war is not fun, but, to take your mind off of things, you know, to forget that there are people dying and, you know, I was fortunate in what I did that my patients didn't die.

01:00:36:01 - 01:00:50:17

Unknown

They walked out, or they rode out in a stretcher and went home. But that wasn't the case with others. And there were a lot of nurses who were affected badly by that.

01:00:50:19 – 01:01:07:14

Unknown

Did you or anyone you served with change in terms of faith in Vietnam? That's an interesting question. I don't think so. No.

01:01:07:16 – 01:01:15:09

Unknown

Were you aware of active duty nurses or other military personnel who opposed the war?

01:01:15:12 – 01:01:40:05

Unknown

If they did, they didn't didn't broadcast it. I mean, like I said, when we were, you know, one night or, you know, sitting around being philosophical and saying, you know, these people are backward. They need, you know, as far as sanitation and medication and, just, you know, how to earn a living and those kinds of things needed to be brought into the 20th century.

01:01:40:07 – 01:01:51:17

Unknown

But I don't think it, you know, no, that was not something that we really waxed philosophic about.

01:01:51:19 – 01:02:21:04

Unknown

What was the most memorable friendship you had during your time in Vietnam? Well, there was a patient that I took care of, on the orthopedic unit, and he was 19 years old. He had been married five months to the day that his leg was blown off. And, we were getting him ready to go, you know, to be evacuated to Japan.

01:02:21:06 – 01:02:45:26

Unknown

And I had a rule as the head nurse that, you had to write a letter home to your family, your wife, your spouse, your girlfriend, whatever. And let them know that you were okay because there was no other way to communicate. We didn't have cell phones. We didn't have computers. The phones were, the military system, and you were only to be used in an emergency.

01:02:45:28 – 01:03:03:09

Unknown

So anyway, he was struggling with writing this letter, and I said to him, would it make you feel better if I wrote a letter to your wife? And he said, yes. So I sat down, and I remember this because he was on

my left and I was here, and it was hard for me to do this because I thought, what is she going to say?

01:03:03:09 – 01:03:24:18

Unknown

He was 19. She was 18, I think 18 or 19. How is she going to cope with somebody? And in those days, I mean, losing a limb was a big deal. Now with Iraq and Afghanistan and everything that went on over there, it's, you know, small potatoes compared to what some of them went through. And the traumatic brain injuries and whatever.

01:03:24:21 – 01:03:51:28

Unknown

But it was still, you know, a trauma that she was going to have to deal with. So I wrote this letter and, it was hard to do, but I put it in an envelope and we put it with his letter. And Polaroid cameras had just come into being the little swingers. And so one of the corpsman took a picture of us, of me and we put that in there, and he wanted to do that and sent it off and forgot about it in 1990.

01:03:52:01 – 01:04:12:12

Unknown

In March of 1990, I was watching the show Unsolved Mysteries, and Robert Stack came on and said, next week we'll show the story of a young Vietnam veteran who, for 30 years or 20 years, has been looking for the nurse who saved him physically and mentally. And her name is Linda Sharpe. And that was my maiden name.

01:04:12:15 – 01:04:32:27

Unknown

So I looked at my husband and I said, hey, it must be somebody else. Sharp's a common name. A lot of Linda Sharp's out there. So, we lived in new Jersey at the time, and the show went off the air. So, I called my sister, who lived in Las Vegas, and I said, watch the show when it comes on and call me back and give me the 800 number.

01:04:32:29 – 01:04:58:09

Unknown

So I called and they said, you're who we're looking for. They asked me a couple of questions. Did I remember this name? And I said, absolutely, I remember this name. And it was Jim Borkowski. And so long story short, we were reunited. He was living in Grand Junction, Colorado, and NBC flew me out there, from new Jersey, and we filmed an episode of Unsolved Mysteries.

01:04:58:16 – 01:05:31:09

Unknown

And, so they showed it in May of that year, and, it's it's now on YouTube. It's called thanks, Captain Sharp. And, it shows a different side of Vietnam in the war. And, you know, the, the aftermath of it.

And, he suffered from PTSD. He at one point after he got out of Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver is the, Amputee Center.

01:05:31:09 – 01:05:50:06

Unknown

It was Ben, and he was from Denver. So ironically, that's where he got sent after he got back from Vietnam and out of Japan. And we got a picture. He sent us a picture back to the ward of him on skis. So we knew that he made it and that he was doing well, which was so heartwarming.

01:05:50:09 – 01:06:15:05

Unknown

But then to see this show and to hear his perceptions of what it was like to be a patient of ours was just amazing. Absolutely amazing. Unfortunately, he died in 1999, but we kept in touch and I got to go to his graduation from college. He went to, Mesa College in Grand Junction and got a degree in counseling, and he wanted to be a counselor for other veterans.

01:06:15:05 – 01:06:39:25

Unknown

But at the time he graduated, there were no positions available. So he sort of stagnated and he began drinking. And, at one point he, you know, was off the booze and but he went back to it. And, they had told him when he was wounded that he would probably never have children because in addition to his right leg, he lost his right testicle.

01:06:39:27 – 01:07:01:00

Unknown

But he went on to have two children, two boys. And he had three grandsons. And two, 2 or 3 grandsons anyway. But I still keep in touch with his widow. And, so that's a lasting friendship from Vietnam. Thank you for sharing that story. Sure.

01:07:01:03 – 01:07:11:12

Unknown

What was the most beautiful thing you saw in Vietnam?

01:07:11:15 – 01:07:33:09

Unknown

Well, another experience I had that, I guess I would say was beautiful was I got to go to the Bob Hope Christmas show, and, it was highly illegal because it was out in the valley from our hospital, and it was known to be a hangout for the VC. But, this other nurse and I went, there was a colonel who had a jeep and a driver, and he didn't go, but the driver took us out there.

01:07:33:11 – 01:07:51:15

Unknown

And when we got there, there were probably at least a thousand GIS in this area. Everybody sitting on the ground, and there was a stage way up in the distance. And so, Jerry and I sat down, her name was Jerilyn, and we sat down and the guy said to us, no, keep go on, go on up, go on up.

01:07:51:15 – 01:08:14:29

Unknown

And so every time we would sit down, they would, keep saying, go on up, go further. So we ended up sitting ringside. We sat right below the stage and actually, you know, the Bob Hope used to do a montage of all of his shows and he'd put it on TV in January. And so my parents actually saw me in the in one of the clips.

01:08:15:01 – 01:08:39:16

Unknown

But the most beautiful thing of that was at the end of his show, he always closed with White Christmas and to here, there had to have been 2000 people watching him and singing, White Christmas. It's something I'll never forget. It was just an amazing, amazing. It was beautiful. Wow.

01:08:39:18 – 01:08:45:00

Unknown

What was the worst thing you saw in Vietnam?

01:08:45:02 – 01:09:17:06

Unknown

One day I was walking through the O.R. corridor to go to ICU. For some reason, and I happened to look into one of the windows of the O.R.. And there was a patient there who was as black as that door over there. He had been burned. He was obviously anesthetized, but, that brings it home. Because especially when you're used to dealing with people who can walk and talk to you as patients, and some of them could walk.

01:09:17:06 – 01:09:39:19

Unknown

I'm not saying that they were all ambulatory, but anyway. But to see something like that, it just really brought it home. The other thing that brought it home to me was after I got home from Vietnam, and after I got out of the Army, I saw the movie platoon, and that was a huge eye opener for me. I never realized, like I said, we were very isolated.

01:09:39:22 – 01:10:12:16

Unknown

When you're in a war zone like that and you're in a fixed position, you don't move around. All you know is what you see. You don't know what anybody else is going through or what it was like out in the

field. I mean, the guys would tell you, but that movie was incredibly done. Well done. And, it really made me realize how much when the guys would come in and talk to me, how important that was for them to unload and talk about that, how important it was for them to take a shower.

01:10:12:18 – 01:10:28:23

Unknown

I mean, that was just, you know, a huge luxury. Did you expect to survive the war? Yes. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

01:10:28:25 – 01:11:00:00

Unknown

Who did you write to or receive letters from when you were in Vietnam? My parents, my grandmother, a family that I had lived with when I was going to college. My, for my last two years, I didn't live in the dorm I lived with. It's actually my boyfriend's family, and, his aunt and uncle and, so I heard from them,

01:11:00:03 – 01:11:05:06

Unknown

That was about it.

01:11:05:09 – 01:11:24:21

Unknown

Do you remember any American TV shows or songs from your time in Vietnam? Oh, yeah. Oh, we got to get out of this place. I think I forget who sings at the doors. Maybe, The animals. Thank you. Thank you.

01:11:24:24 – 01:11:46:07

Unknown

Oh. There were some others, too. If you see the movie, with Robin Williams. Good morning, Vietnam. Those songs were all in the heat of the jungle, and, Well, that was we got to get out of this place. Any of those songs? That was some of the Creedence Clearwater songs I think were popular then.

01:11:46:10 – 01:12:15:00

Unknown

But yeah, there are things like that that when I hear that, that brings me back. There's also and I'm sure in other interviews you've done with the Vietnam veterans, the sound of a helicopter with the blades that just takes me right back. And about the only, negative thing that I have from, my time over there is if I hear a loud, unexpected noise that bothers me.

01:12:15:02 – 01:12:45:10

Unknown

Like, if somebody were to slam a door right now, I'd probably jump.

But, I mean, that could be just anybody, too. That's not necessarily a war, sequela. But I know that's that's what I remember. What was R&R like and where did you go? R&R. I went to, Bangkok, but for leave, you could, you could take a five day leave and you were entitled to an R&R.

01:12:45:10 – 01:13:05:06

Unknown

So the theory was and people would say to you, well, take your leave first because they have to give you R&R, but they don't have to give you leave. So I took leave first and I went to Hong Kong and, that was amazing. And, I, I thought I had a tan. And when I took a shower in hot water, it kind of came off.

01:13:05:06 – 01:13:29:27

Unknown

So it was dirt because in the nurses quarters at our hospital, we didn't have any hot water. We had cold water. So picture taking a cold shower every day and washing your hair in cold water. We had hot water on the, on the, in the hospital. And the doctors used to come up, every night, they, you know, come up if you're working nights or whatever, and they'd say, hey, Linda, how are you?

01:13:29:29 – 01:13:49:24

Unknown

Hi, herb. How are you? And they would go in and use the latrines, and take hot showers. It never once occurred to us, as nurses that we should shut down the latrines one night a week. Just one night would be nice to take a hot shower. We never did that. That's the end of my service. Questions.

01:13:49:26 – 01:14:12:12

Unknown

Is there another story we haven't talked about from your time in Vietnam that you'd like to share? One of the things that, if you've ever watched the show China Beach, the, TV show was popular in the 80s and 90s, I guess. There's a story about a young, the donut dolly, and, she dies.

01:14:12:12 – 01:14:31:14

Unknown

And when they take her out, they put her on a plane. And, you know, there are caskets there. When I went home from, Vietnam, when you went home from Vietnam, if you left out of Danang, you went on a commercial flight and you flew into Seattle Tacoma. I didn't want to do that because I wanted to go back to San Francisco.

01:14:31:16 – 01:14:49:05

Unknown

Mainly because I was going home in December, and I wanted to see some

of my friends that still lived in in the Bay area, before I went home to Las Vegas to go to for Christmas. So I finagled a way to go out of, of Cameron Bay, but it was on a military flight on an Air Force plane.

01:14:49:07 – 01:15:26:03

Unknown

So when I walked out the morning that I was leaving and because it was a, military flight, I was dressed in my combat boots and my fatigues, and I looked at this, huge plane. Just see, 141 I think, and it was filled from top to bottom with caskets. So when I saw years later that scene from China Beach, I thought, wow, they must have been inside my head because it was me and about 5 or 6 other GI's, going home on this commercial flight or a military flight and excuse me.

01:15:26:03 – 01:15:53:10

Unknown

And then all of these caskets and and the pilots used to have a phrase that they said bullets in and bodies out. So it really brought home that unfortunately, we didn't get to save everybody else. So, but, that's, that's probably about what I remember. I mean, we had good times, but, you know, you can't say that war was good, but it was, it was an interesting time.

01:15:53:18 – 01:16:00:07

Unknown

And had I had the opportunity to do it again, I would have done it in a heartbeat.

01:16:00:09 – 01:16:17:02

Unknown

Let's talk about your postal service life. What relationship in your life was most changed by your service?

01:16:17:04 – 01:16:34:00

Unknown

I guess with my parents. Excuse me. Sorry. The, I don't know that it was really changed, though, because I was in the military before I ever went to Vietnam. I don't.

01:16:34:03 – 01:17:01:16

Unknown

How did your service change your career trajectory or expectations? Well, because we did things in Vietnam that, nurses in the U.S. weren't allowed to or, you know, licensed to do, it it was it was sometimes difficult, because I'd been here, I'd been doing suturing and, assessing a patient and ordering my own lab tests and X-rays.

01:17:01:16 – 01:17:20:08

Unknown

There was one patient who came in who, didn't really look good, and

his blood pressure was a little wonky, so I ordered, a, complete blood count and an X-ray of his abdomen. And it turns out he had a ruptured spleen. So when I called the doctor and said to him, hey, herb, go over and look at this kid's X-ray, and he called me back.

01:17:20:08 – 01:17:41:27

Unknown

He said, prep him for surgery. He's got a ruptured spleen. Those were not things that you would do as a nurse. You know, it was very much more restricted. Hanging a unit blood. I mean, I ordered blood. It was like. Yeah, this kid is low, is a bit slow. It is a unit of blood. So you had that collegial relationship with the doctors that you knew that they would cover you.

01:17:42:02 – 01:18:19:21

Unknown

They would write the order and say, yeah, you know, this is what I ordered. So when I came back, I was I was ever so much more confident as a nurse. Now, I had only been I came back in 1968 and I graduated in 66. So I'd been a nurse for two and a half years. And, so it, it gave me a lot of, like I said, confidence and, and, being able to look at a situation and assess, not only the situation, but the patient and, you know, kind of figure out what treatment path they should take.

01:18:19:21 – 01:18:43:20

Unknown

That was that was a huge plus. And I, as I said, I was, had the luxury that I had another nine months left in the Army. So I was at, Letterman, Army Medical Center in San Francisco, and I was head nurse of a neurosurgery unit. And, probably about 90% of my patients had either, head injuries or, spinal cord injuries.

01:18:43:22 – 01:19:05:14

Unknown

And so I could talk with them. And, you know, we all spoke the same language, so to speak. But it gave me confidence when I got out of the military to go into, I started working first in an ICU, and, then I finally decided, once I got married and moved to New Jersey, that I really needed to use my GI Bill.

01:19:05:17 – 01:19:31:21

Unknown

So that was the real trajectory my career took. And I got my master's at Rutgers University in New Jersey and started working as a clinical specialist in oncology, which was another kind of similar to, military nursing in that you're fighting a war, a war against cancer. And, so it it just gave you a lot more, cancer.

01:19:31:21 – 01:19:57:04

Unknown

I treasure my time in the military, and not just because I grew up in the military, too. But I think being there and being a nurse, it's a totally different kind of, experience to do as far as nursing goes. To circle back, did you know any antiwar veterans? No.

01:19:57:06 – 01:20:23:02

Unknown

Did you participate in any veterans groups or Agent Orange studies or use the GI Bill? I did use the GI Bill is said to got my masters in that, there was at Rutgers, there was a, the veterans office, you know, so we're all veterans. Students would go and there were a couple of other nurses, and that's probably the first time I ever met anybody else that, you know, had been in Vietnam.

01:20:23:04 – 01:20:46:10

Unknown

Or was, you know, in the military, as far as women go, there wasn't really anything very organized. And the, veterans service organizations really weren't. They would look at you like you were in the military. Really? I never I didn't have time. I was too busy. I was married, and I had three kids, and I was going to school, so I didn't have time to join me.

01:20:46:10 – 01:21:00:04

Unknown

Anything like that. But I often said it. My husband teased me and he said, you know, we should just go to the VFW and see what they would say. But, we did later on. But anyway, we'll get to that.

01:21:00:06 – 01:21:24:09

Unknown

Who since the war have you talked to about Vietnam? Yeah. In 1993, the. We were living in new Jersey and the Vietnam Women's Memorial was being dedicated in Washington, D.C. so my husband and I and two of our three children decided that we would go down and, you know, spend a couple of days there and see, you know, be there for the dedication.

01:21:24:12 – 01:21:42:09

Unknown

Our oldest daughter was, freshman at Syracuse. So she couldn't go. But, it was amazing. We got there and we didn't know what to expect. Didn't know how many people were going to be there. The, Constitution Avenue was packed with people. We had parked our car and we were walking. And so I said, well, let's just walk up here in a little ways.

01:21:42:11 – 01:22:07:29

Unknown

And all of a sudden I saw a banner and it said 67th Evac Hospital,

Quincy, Vietnam. And I thought, oh, my goodness. So I saw nurses that I hadn't seen since 1968. And this was in 93. So it was really, really, a heartwarming experience. That night, they had a dance, at a big area in somewhere in Washington, D.C..

01:22:07:29 – 01:22:28:16

Unknown

I can't remember exactly where it was. It was called the Delta to the DMZ. And those were two areas. So the Delta was down in the south of Vietnam, and the DMZ was up north. And, it was a lot of fun to see people and their what was really heartwarming was a lot of the audience and the people, participate because we did a parade then and they were all like, oh, come on, let's, you know, come with us.

01:22:28:19 – 01:22:52:10

Unknown

And with this banner and everything. So we marched down Constitution Avenue and, but there were people, guys that would come up to you and thank you and say, you know, thank you for saving our lives. And, you know, for being there for us and whatever. It was just very, very heartwarming. That was a tremendous experience. I'm so glad I went.

01:22:52:12 – 01:23:26:08

Unknown

Have your views on the war changed since 1968? Oh, yeah. You know, when I went over there, I thought, oh, yeah, this is great. We're, you know, we're going to save this country from communism and we're doing a good thing and whatever. And I realized later on, having read books like The Bright Shining Light and, different things like that, how futile it was and how misled the military was by the politicians in Washington, as often is the case, that we never should have been there in the first place.

01:23:26:10 – 01:24:00:02

Unknown

They had been at war for hundreds of years, and our, efforts were not going to stem the tide of communism. And as I said before, a couple of times, you know, they it turned out that they were better off, becoming a communist country, in my view. I'm sure you know, there are plenty of them that don't feel that way, but, they've at least become an industrialized nation and, you know, have, jobs for their people and, you know, are bringing them out of poverty and teaching them things like hygiene and medicines and, you know, how to take care of children.

01:24:00:02 – 01:24:04:11

Unknown

And, what have you.

01:24:04:13 – 01:24:09:14

Unknown

Having been to the wall in DC.

01:24:09:16 – 01:24:34:15

Unknown

What did you think of it? That's was awesome. Absolutely awe inspiring. Monument and I remember at the time when they were having the contest, to decide who was going to design it, and when this design was chosen, it was universally people were just, adamantly opposed to it. They thought it was awful, that it was a scar on the landscape and whatever.

01:24:34:17 – 01:24:52:16

Unknown

When you actually saw, I didn't feel that way. But when I saw it, I thought, this is so fitting, and it's so beautifully done and beautifully thought out that that young woman who designed it was genius.

01:24:52:19 – 01:25:19:15

Unknown

And what did you think of the nursing memorial again? Very, very well done. It it's it's beautifully done. And it's in a nice setting and, couldn't be prouder of it. The woman who really got that going was Diane Carlson Evans, who was a nurse in Vietnam, an Army nurse, and she's the one who came up with the idea that there should be a monument to the nurses.

01:25:19:17 – 01:25:25:15

Unknown

So I give her all credit for doing that.

01:25:25:18 – 01:25:31:28

Unknown

Have you been back to Vietnam? No, but I would love to.

01:25:32:00 – 01:25:50:24

Unknown

Why? I'd like to see the changes that have have come about and, see how the people are. I've heard, in fact, I have a good friend who just was there a couple of weeks ago. She's on her way home now, but, I'm anxious to hear what her interpretations are of it and how it how it looks.

01:25:50:24 – 01:26:21:23

Unknown

And whatever we used to say when we were there, that this is a beautiful country to be a great place to come if there wasn't a war going on. And, it because it is, it's gorgeous, absolutely lush and beautiful flowers and, you know, just just a beautiful, beautiful

landscape. This is my last question. Do you have a favorite book, poem or movie about Vietnam?

01:26:21:25 - 01:26:43:20

Unknown

I guess platoon would have to be my favorite movie. A lot of people ask me about the book, the women that came out about two years ago by Kristin Hannah, and I've done probably no less than eight book clubs here in this area. People ask me, you know, to come and talk to them after they've read the book and, and discuss my time there.

01:26:43:22 - 01:27:10:27

Unknown

And I always say it's part soap opera and it's part true. And it's part, you know, romance novel. But, I think what it did was it put a spotlight on the fact that there were women in combat back in Vietnam. And, you know, that what we did was important. And, had meaning and really, shaped the way things were done going forward.

01:27:10:27 - 01:27:45:26

Unknown

I mean, each from each war, you you learn unfortunately, you learn lessons, at the expense of others and people who die. But one of the things in Vietnam that that came out was the use of helicopters to ferry the wounded in a very quick from the battlefield to a hospital, and that came out of Korea. So, pardon me, because the Vietnam veterans and not myself, but weren't treated very well, I think the experience in Iraq was much better for them than it was for us.

01:27:45:26 - 01:27:50:07

Unknown

And as as it should be.

01:27:50:09 - 01:28:21:02

Unknown

Have you ever been home before morning? Yes, I did, and, I didn't enjoy it because, I think it was. Yeah. I don't know how to say this in a nice way, but I think she clearly had psychiatric issues probably before she ever went to Vietnam. Linda van Deventer, and I don't think it gave a very accurate, description of a lot of things that were there.

01:28:21:05 - 01:28:37:14

Unknown

I remember reading it and saying no and and think I really should write something, but I haven't gotten around to that yet. Maybe one of these days I will. Well, Mrs. Caldwell, thank you so, so much for talking with us. And you're welcome. Thank you. Palmer, it was a joy.