

Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project

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Project Abstract:

The oral history interviews in the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project were conducted by Janet Tanner, who used the interviews as primary source material for her master's thesis, "Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War." In conducting these interviews with women who joined the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) and served in the Vietnam War, Tanner sought to document their experiences as combat nurses in Vietnam, understand how women live and work in an atmosphere of war, and explore the effects of the Vietnam War on women. In this collection, women discuss their rationale for choosing nursing and joining the ANC in an atmosphere of antiwar sentiment and second-wave feminism. The information in these interviews outlines the professional responsibilities of female combat nurses in Vietnam, provides descriptions of U.S. Army evacuation and surgical hospitals in Vietnam, and explains the procedures of these medical facilities. In addition, they provide insight into the gendered nature of the military and reveal how women lived and worked in a male-dominated atmosphere, where they were exposed to the tragedy and the horrors of war. Their experiences illuminate the physical and mental strains of wartime nursing, and the moral and ethical dilemmas associated with the nursing profession and war. This project also documents the lingering physical and emotional effects of the Vietnam War on these women and their struggle for recognition, recovery, and reconciliation.

Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project

Project Oral Histories:

4530- Niggemann, Elaine
4531- Smith, Rosemary
4532- Roth, June
4533- O'Hare Palmer, Kate
4534- Ortega, Astrid
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Related Oral Histories:

4173- Rushton, Patricia (War and Society Oral History Project)
4180- Moore, Eileen (War and Society Oral History Project)

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OH 4530

Narrator: Niggemann, Elaine (b. 1948)
Interviewer: Janet Tanner
Title: “An Oral History with Elaine Niggemann”
Date: December 9, 2009
Language: English
Location: Scottsdale, Arizona
Project: Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War

Status: completed; 27 pages

This oral history spans 1948-2009. Bulk dates: 1970-1980.

An oral history with Elaine Niggemann, resident of Scottsdale, Arizona, for the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project. The interviews were conducted by Janet Tanner for her master’s thesis, “Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War.” The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Niggemann’s experience in Vietnam while serving in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in the 1970s. In this interview, Niggemann recalls her childhood in Scottsdale, Arizona; summarizes her educational background, including nursing school at Arizona State University (ASU) and medical school at the University of Arizona, Tucson; talks about her rationale for choosing a career in nursing; speaks about nurses’ training at Arizona State University, Phoenix; remembers ANC recruiter visiting ASU campus; explains her decision to join the ANC and her desire to serve in Vietnam; comments on the feminist movement and the Vietnam antiwar movement; describes ANC training at Fort Sam Houston, Camp Bullis, and Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas; remembers flight to Vietnam from Travis Air Force Base and landing in Bien Hoa, Vietnam, in 1971; describes 24th Evacuation Hospital and living conditions at U.S. Army base in Long Binh, Vietnam; discusses medical equipment available to nurses and medical personnel in Vietnam, including the use of the Hubbard tank and sulfamylon for burn patients; recalls the various injuries she witnessed as she cared for wounded U.S. soldiers, Vietnamese civilians, and Vietcong; talks about participating in MEDCAP (Medical Civic Action Program) missions; remembers flight home to the United States aboard commercial airliner and meeting her parents at Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix, Arizona; talks about the challenges of transitioning from military to civilian nursing; explains her decision to leave the ANC and apply to medical school; and finally, comments on the Vietnam War Memorial, the Vietnam War Women’s Memorial, and speaking at a Veterans Day event on the Washington, D.C., Mall.

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OH 4531

Narrator: Smith, Rosemary (b. 1945)
Interviewer: Janet Tanner
Title: “An Oral History with Rosemary Smith”
Date: February 4, 2010
Language: English
Location: Petaluma, California
Project: Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War

Status: verbatim; 55 pages

This oral history spans 1945-2010. Bulk dates: 1960-2000.

An oral history with Rosemary Smith, resident of Gainesville, Georgia, for the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project. The interviews were conducted by Janet Tanner for her master’s thesis, “Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War.” The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Smith’s experience in Vietnam while serving in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) from 1968 to 1969. In this interview, Smith, the daughter of a World War II veteran, talks about her childhood growing up on various military bases in the United States and overseas; discusses desire to become a nurse anesthetist and subsequent enrollment in nursing school at Saint Joseph’s Hospital, West Virginia University, and enlistment in the Army Nurse Corps; describes training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas; comments on the inexperience of nurses in Vietnam; recalls the atmosphere in the operating room at the 12th Evacuation Hospital in Cu Chi, Vietnam; speaks about the injuries she witnessed and treated; details responsibilities as a nurse anesthetist; explains the process of triage; describes medical equipment for treating the injured in Vietnam; recalls fearing for her life during mortar and sapper attacks on base; remembers R&R [rest and recuperation] in Australia; talks about leisure activities on base; comments on the political nature of the Vietnam War; explains the reasons for not developing relationships with patients; comments on dating while in Vietnam; talks about race relations in Vietnam; recalls flight home from Vietnam with casualties of war; remembers difficulty adjusting to civilian life; discusses failed marriages and anger issues postwar; comments on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and finally, expresses opinion on Lynda Van Devanter’s book, *Home Before Morning*, and the Women’s Vietnam War Memorial.

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OH 4532

Narrator: Roth, June (b. 1942)
Interviewer: Janet Tanner
Title: "An Oral History with June Roth"
Date: February 4, 2010
Language: English
Location: Petaluma, California
Project: Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War

Status: verbatim; 37 pages

This oral history spans 1942-2010. Bulk dates: 1960-1990.

An oral history with June Roth, resident of Cumberland, Maryland, for the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project. The interviews were conducted by Janet Tanner for her master's thesis, "Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War." The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Roth's experience in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) from 1967 to 1968 while serving in the Vietnam War. In this interview, Roth discusses growing up in her grandparents' home in Baltimore, Maryland; summarizes her European ancestry; explains her rationale for becoming a nurse; discusses nursing school at Sinai Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland; recalls visiting recruitment office for the purpose of joining the ANC and going to Vietnam; comments on the Vietnam antiwar movement in the United States; talks about the attitude of ANC superior officers; remembers arriving at the 90th Replacement Army Base in Long Binh, Vietnam; talks about being raped in Danang by Air Force colonel and again by a Catholic priest in Chu Lai; remembers never feeling safe while in Vietnam; describes responsibilities as a surgical nurse in Vietnam; discusses the types of injuries she treated; recalls lying to patients about their combat injuries and prognosis; comments on drug addiction in Vietnam; explains why initially she and other Vietnam veterans did not speak about their experiences in Vietnam; recalls R&R [rest and recuperation] in Hong Kong; describes living conditions in Vietnam; talks about becoming a nurse anesthetist after leaving Vietnam; details the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on her life; comments on how the United States could have won the Vietnam War; reflects on the fall of Saigon; and finally, expresses her view on war and the military.

Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project

OH 4533

Narrator: O'Hare Palmer, Kate (b. 1944)
Interviewer: Janet Tanner
Title: "An Oral History with Kate O'Hare Palmer"
Date: February 4, 2010
Language: English
Location: Petaluma, California
Project: Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War

Status: verbatim; 59 pages

This oral history spans 1944-2010. Bulk dates: 1962-1992.

An oral history with Kate O'Hare Palmer, resident of Petaluma, California, for the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project. The interviews were conducted by Janet Tanner for her master's thesis, "Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War." The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Palmer's experience in the Vietnam War while serving in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) from 1968 to 1969. In this interview, Palmer recalls her childhood in Long Beach, California; speaks about her parents experience in the Army Air Corps during World War II; summarizes her educational background; explains her decision to enter a diploma program in nursing; describes nursing school at Los Angeles County General Hospital in Los Angeles, California; explains rationale for joining the ANC; remembers ANC training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas; comments on feeling professionally unprepared for nursing in Vietnam; recalls being one of two women on airplane flight to Vietnam; remembers being left in the jungle by a crew of U.S. helicopter pilots; describes first surgical case in Vietnam at 2nd Surgical Hospital in Chu Lai; discusses disappointment in being separated from her original surgical unit; describes the facilities at 2nd Surgical Hospital in Chu Lai; speaks about going on MEDCAP [Medical Civic Action Program] missions; recalls the birth defects she witnessed within the native Vietnamese people; discusses trauma care in Vietnam and the availability of medical supplies, including whole blood; describes the MUST [Medical Unit, Self-Contained, Transportable] unit she worked in when at Lai Khe; remembers sleeping in the surgical unit for safety reasons; recalls treating Vietnamese civilians; talks about noncombat injuries; remembers the night the surgical unit in Lai Khe was overrun by Vietcong; expresses guilt for lying to patients; discusses use of alcohol and drugs by U.S. military nurses and soldiers; recalls visiting Saigon; remembers care packages her mother sent; talks about dating in Vietnam; discusses being sexually harassed by U.S. soldiers in Vietnam; comments on the Vietnam antiwar movement; expresses opinion of the feminist movement; explains the difficulties associated with adjusting to life in the U.S post-Vietnam; remembers being harassed by Vietnam antiwar protesters after landing at Travis Air Force base; recalls being disillusioned with civilian nursing; speaks about her two failed marriages; discusses her symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder; explains reaction to the fall of Saigon; shares views on war; comments on Lynda Van Devanter's book, *Home Before Morning*, the Vietnam War Memorial, and the Women's Vietnam War Memorial; describes flashbacks and dreams; talks about her family; and finally, discusses her work with local veterans' groups.

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OH 4534

Narrator: Ortega, Astrid (b. 1945)
Interviewer: Janet Tanner
Title: “An Oral History with Astrid Ortega”
Date: February 5, 2010
Language: English
Location: Petaluma, California
Project: Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War
Status: verbatim; 59 pages

This oral history spans 1944-2010. Bulk dates: 1960-1980.

An oral history with Astrid Ortega, resident of Santa Rosa, California, for the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project. The interviews were conducted by Janet Tanner for her master’s thesis, “Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War.” The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Ortega’s experience in the Vietnam War while serving in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) from 1967 to 1968. In this interview, Ortega talks about her birth in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, and the family move to Providence, Rhode Island; remembers being the only Mexican family in Providence; discusses overbearing father; summarizes educational background, including various scholarships; describes nursing school at Rhode Island Hospital School of Nursing; speaks about decision to join the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in 1966 and parents’ reaction; explains ANC training at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas; discusses confusion at being ordered to Vietnam; recalls flight from Travis Air Force Base to Vietnam and first impressions; describes living conditions at the 36th Evacuation Hospital in Vung Tao; talks about being reprimanded for not wearing her uniform correctly and talking to Vietnamese women; discusses free time and fraternizing with enlisted U.S. soldiers; comments on sexual nature of entertainment at Officers’ Club; talks about sexual harassment in Vietnam by U.S. soldiers; describes the 36th Evacuation Hospital; remembers caring for Vietnamese children, civilians, and prostitutes; comments on prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases in Vietnam; recalls being on duty during the Tet Offensive; talks about contradictions of nursing in a war zone; remembers questioning her faith in God and the rationale for the war; recalls R&R [rest and recuperation] in Hong Kong; discusses her departure from Vietnam and the ANC; speaks about antiwar movement in the United States; comments on racial discrimination in the ANC; talks about her involvement in the feminist movement; recalls questioning her sexual identity; discusses gays and lesbians in the military; speaks about the guilt she felt because of the United States’ mistreatment of the Vietnamese people; talks about her work with the Vietnamese community in San Jose; expresses resentment over lack of care by Veterans Administration; comments on the Vietnam War Memorial and the Women’s Vietnam War Memorial; and finally, discusses current career as a nurse practitioner in Santa Rosa.

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OH 4535

Narrator: Clutter, Leanna (b. 1933)
Interviewer: Janet Tanner
Title: “An Oral History with Leanna Clutter”
Date: March 3, 2010
Language: English
Location: Apache Junction, Arizona
Project: Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War

Status: verbatim; 37 pages

This oral history spans 1933-2010. Bulk dates: 1962-1968.

An oral history with Leanna Clutter, resident of Apache Junction, Arizona, for the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project. The interviews were conducted by Janet Tanner for her master’s thesis, “Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War.” The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Clutter’s experience in the Vietnam War while serving in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) from 1967 to 1968. In this interview, Clutter discusses her childhood in Newcomerstown, Ohio; summarizes her educational background; talks about decision to become a nurse; explains rationale for joining the Army Nurse Corps (ANC); speaks about nurses training at Massillon City Hospital in Massillon, Ohio; describes basic training at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas; remembers flight to Vietnam from Travis Air Force Base; recalls first impression of Vietnam; discusses living conditions at 7th Surgical Hospital in Cu Chi, Vietnam; describes care packages from home; comments on nursing experience of fellow nurses; explains her responsibilities as captain in the ANC; recalls conversations with patients; discusses relationships with Army physicians; comments on sexual harassment in the military; remembers R&R [rest and recuperation] in Australia; speaks about MEDCAP [Medical Civic Action Program] missions; recalls interactions with Vietnamese people; discusses challenges and advantages to being an older and more mature nurse in Vietnam; expresses view of Vietnam antiwar movement; talks about military career after Vietnam; comments on Lynda Van Devanter’s book, *Home Before Morning*; and finally, shares her family’s reaction to her career in the ANC.

Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project

OH 4536

Narrator: Albee, Donna (b. 1943)
Interviewer: Janet Tanner
Title: “An Oral History with Donna Albee”
Date: March 3, 2010
Language: English
Location: Apache Junction, Arizona
Project: Vietnam War Nurses

Status: verbatim; 56 pages

This oral history spans 1943-2010. Bulk dates: 1960-1980.

An oral history with Donna Albee, resident of Apache Junction, Arizona, for the Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War Oral History Project. The interviews were conducted by Janet Tanner for her master’s thesis, “Nurses in Fatigues: The Army Nurse Corps and the Vietnam War.” The purpose of this interview was to gather information about Albee’s experience in Vietnam while serving in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) in the 1960s and 1970s. In this interview Albee discusses early life as a self-described “Army brat”; talks about the various places she lived; comments on her parents’ divorce and challenging relationship with stepmother; recalls nursing school at Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland, Oregon; describes basic training at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas; speaks about gender discrimination in the military; explains rationale for volunteering to go to Vietnam; remembers talking to wounded Vietnam veterans at Fort Devens Army Hospital in Massachusetts; recalls arriving in Chu Lai, Vietnam; describes 2nd Surgical Hospital (later became 312th Surgical) in Chu Lai; talks about the death of Sharon Lane, a nurse killed in 1969 by shrapnel while on duty at 312th; compares nursing in Vietnam to civilian nursing; recalls seeing Army corpsman mistreating Vietnamese soldiers; expresses guilt over not remembering patients’ names; remembers being frightened and lonely while in Vietnam; comments on the small percentage of male nurses in the military; discusses dating and sexual harassment in Vietnam and in the military; describes living conditions in Vietnam; remembers free time and R&R [rest and recuperation] in Hong Kong; speaks about the use of drugs and alcohol by nurses; comments on the Vietnam antiwar movement in the United States; remembers her family’s reaction when she returned home from Vietnam; expresses opinion of the draft; comments on the feminist movement; discusses the benefits of a career in the Army; remembers the difficult transition to civilian life; explains views on war; and finally, discusses her inability to personally reconcile her experiences in the Vietnam War.