

I never know what to expect when I go to the Vietnam Memorial on Memorial Day in the Spring, and Veteran's Day in the Fall. Last year, the 10th anniversary of the memorial was a week long celebration where each name was movingly read aloud by volunteers, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and fellow veterans, to include former President Bush, from the Sunday before Veterans Day to Veterans Day on Wednesday, Nov 11, 1992.

Memorial Day 1993 was day of unrest and controversy as President Clinton spoke at the Memorial. Some, like me voted with their feet, and were not present when he spoke. Others remained and tried to shout him down or enmasse turn their backs on him. It did not appear to be a place of healing and celebration of the lives of those who did not survive.

November 11, 1993 was entirely different all together. There were women everywhere, and they were our fellow Vietnam veterans. What a stark contrast! The sound of female laughter and voices could be heard everywhere. Whether you found your nurse or not was inconsequential; you would get a hug regardless.

They were very organized with many reunions in the local Northern Virginia or Washington DC hotels. Some attended the annual reunions, for example the 1st Cavalry's Ia Drang Valley reunion and dinner, and were given seats of honor and recognized to standing ovations. The Donut Dollies had a reunion at the Sheraton National, and it was great to see so many in one place.

Who were these ladies and how many were lost in Vietnam? Below is listed their names, hometowns, date of birth, date of death, and location on the Vietnam memorial:

2LT Carola E. Drazba	Dunmore, Pa	11 Dec 43 18 Feb 66	05E46
2LT Elizabeth A. Jones	Orangeburg, SC	12 Feb 43 18 Feb 66	05E47
CPT Eleanor C. Alexander	Westwood, NJ	18 Sep 40 30 Nov 67	31E08
1LT Hedwig D. Orlowski	Detroit, MI	03 Apr 44 30 Nov 67	31E15
1LT Sharon A. Lane	Zaneville, OH	02 Jul 43 08 Jun 69	23W112
1LT Pamela D. Donovan	Boston, MA	25 Mar 42 08 Jul 69	53W53
LTC Annie Ruth Graham	Durham, NC	07 Nov 16 14 Aug 69	48W12
CAPT Mary J. Klinker	Lafayette, IN	03 Oct 47 09 Apr 75	01W122

The first women killed, **2LTs Drazba and Jones**, assigned to the 51st Field Hospital in Saigon died when their helicopter had a wire strike over a river. Many of the nurses said they were discouraged from riding on helicopters except for accompanying patients to the next higher treatment facility, after this accident.

On November 30, 1967 **CPT Alexander and 1LT Orlowski** and two male nurse anesthetists died in a plane crash, possibly a C-7 Caribou. On June 8, 1969 **1LT Sharon Lane** was killed instantly during a dawn Viet Cong rocket attack on the 312th Evacuation Hospital at Chu Lai. She died in her ward while caring for her patients. The nurses remember the frustration of trying to protect the patients during mortar or rocket attacks. Many times all they could do was to put a mattress over the patient, much to the chagrin of the patient.

Two nurses died of medical problems. On July 8, 1968 **LT Donovan** died of pneumonia. On August 14, 1969 **LTC Graham** died

of an internal hemorrhage will serving as chief nurse of the 91st Evac hospital.

Air Force Capt. Klinker was the last nurse to die in Vietnam, The 27 year old flight nurse was killed on April 4, 1975 when the C-5 Galaxy aircraft, on which she was flying with 243 Vietnamese orphans, crashed shortly after taking off from Saigon. According to the USAF Southeast Asia Monograph Series, Volume IV, Monograph 6, Last Flight From Saigon, this was the C-5 that experienced a massive structural failure in the rear cargo door area at 23,000 feet during climbout and 10 miles off the Vietnamese coast near Vung Tau. The explosive decompression had blown out a huge section of the cargo ramp and door and cut all control cables to the rudder and elevator. The pilot was able to get the aircraft close to Tan Son Nhut through power changes with the throttles and the ailerons. The aircraft was forced to crash land five miles short of the Tan Son Nhut runway with 175 surviving.

On my first tour, in September 1968, I was an ambulatory evacuation to the hospital at Cu Chi. I had some small shrapnel in my wrist that the unit medic insisted must be treated because it needed stitches and I needed a tetanus shot. In the medevac helicopter, I held an IV containing saline solution for a much more seriously injured soldier. I was embarrassed to be there because of the serious injuries I was witnessing in the triage area, and what I considered to be scratches on me. I was questioned and my wounds were considered "minimal." I never knew what happened to the young soldier I accompanied, but was puzzled when he was classified, "expectant."

This year a really nice nurse, who was stationed at the 95th Evac in 1969, explained triage to me. She said triage cases were assigned a priority, so the medical professionals could do the greatest good for the greatest number. **Immediate** meant the patient could be saved, **delayed** meant he could get to the operating room later, **minimal** was for someone who was going to be fine, **expectant** for a soldier who was likely to die. I will never forget that young man from 3d Bn 187th INF, 3d Bde 101st, but his name is known to only to God and the nurses, because the hole in his chest obliterated his name tag.

The Washington Post featured a story about two nurses were on the USS Repose in 1967. The paper said there were 22 doctors, 29 nurses, and 256 medics aboard ship. There were 500 beds in 10 wards, and when those were full another 250 beds could be set up on the covered weather deck outside, which they were often were. During the nurse's year, 9,000 casualties passed through the ship, 2,000 were non-combat problems; about 100 died on ship.

Those numbers equate to about 310 patients per nurse. We owe them a lot. There were some who felt there should not have been another set of statues at the Vietnam Memorial. I doubt very seriously that those who object were treated by these fine ladies. As retired GEN Colin Powell stated at the dedication of the site, "These women represented a lot to the dying soldier. In some cases, they were the mothers they were asking for in their last moments of life."