

MACV Army "A" Photo Team Films Donut Dollies

For thousands of years, including our own colonial days and military skirmishes there after it was a customary practice for families of the militiamen to follow their husbands and dads into battle. The children dispensed water and carried ammo. The wives dressed wounds and provided solacement to the injured. When the war spread further from home turf, the families stayed behind to tend the farming chores or commercial interests in town, leaving the warriors on their own.

The advent of Clara Barton establishing the American Red Cross in 1881, generated close ties with the War Department, recommencing and upholding the practice our colonial forefathers had known. Soon trained Red Cross women were in theaters of combat. During WWI, WWII, and Korea Red Cross women served overseas, passing out coffee and doughnuts, smiles and words of hope, encouragement and comfort to battle weary soldiers coming off the front lines. Hence the name Donut Dolly, but the G.I.s coined a more detrimental title of Biscuit Bitches.

I first encountered the Donut Dollies in Korea in 1963, where they made weekly visits to the troops. Arriving at Long Binh Post, in 1967, the tradition prevailed and had expanded to another overseas outpost without family members; Vietnam.

Much of the time I dealt with the Donut Dollies, the draft was in effect, with soldiers having a wide spectrum of educational backgrounds. In one unit that I was assigned with men had Master Degrees, while other troops were given a choice by a county judge. Join the military or a year in jail. With the draft ending during the Vietnam Era, many draftees still had commitment time to the military and served in Vietnam.

The games the ARC Donut Dollies engineered had to appeal to the masses of male audience. They couldn't be scanty nor prestigious in nature, but closer to household board games a family played. Many games were honed toward auto facts, race car trivia, sports figures and records by various leagues. At the same time the games couldn't be unpolished, trifling or silly in nature.

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The Red Cross Girls performed a diversional action the U.S. Military indorsed from a non-govermental agency, allowing many troops to see home grown American round eye girls. The Donut Dollies would be the only American women many troops would see since arriving in Nam. The visitation gave a brief brake from the mundane, routine and work related mental tension of war activities. The ARC Donut Dollies, themselves signed-up and volunteered to serve overseas, far away from their own homes, family, friends and relatives, in a concorted effort to bring fellowship, morale boosting and inspiration to the troops displaced from their familiar surrounding.

At the U.S. Library in Saigon I frequently saw women wearing Red Cross Uniforms there. Little did I realize that instead of scanning Red Book or Vogue for articles of their own wants and likes; they were probably researching subjects of little interest, loathed and had disdrain for, that of sports. These girls subverted themselves in facts, figures and title holders from the pages of Sports Illustrated and other sporting periodicals. Acculminating material for the weekly challange, the Donut Dollies provided when visiting the troops. The criteria changed weekly, but clung to the predominate audience appeal, totally opposite of their own desires.

Such trivia included, How many baseball pitchers won 20 games last year? Which running back broke the league record last year? What major race has Al Unser never won? Other weeks the games centered on current events, history or other topics of general interest.

Base camp commanders encouraged subordinate units to allow as many soldiers as possible to par-take of the Donut Dolly visitation,,so long as mission essencial work wasn't compromised. Between meal hours, the Red Cross girls went from mess hall to mess hall putting on their skits, in a regimented time frame. The cooks provided donuts, coffee or juice, while the Donut Dollies challenged half the assembled group against the rest with questions for nearly an hour.

When MACV handed Army "A" Photo Team the Doughnut Dolly story very little was known of their activities. I knew what day and hour they came to the 500 man mess hall that fed the HQS 18th MP BDE, the 221st Signal Company (Pictorial) the parent unit for both Army Photo Teams and many other units surrounding the one central mess hall.

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Greeting the arriving girls, we identified ourselves and helped carry in the easel with a large pad of paper. They carried the 3X5 cards containing the questions and an assortment of large magic markers. Inside the mess hall we condensed the 75 or so troops scattered all over the place. We scooted several G.I.'s yards from the action up front. We consolidated tables and chairs closer to each other forming a close knit group. This allowed the photo team's portable light source, the Sun Gun to effectively illuminate the action. The girls divided the troops into team "A" and "B" alternating questions between the teams. We filmed the Donut Dollies asking questions. The troops calling out answers, while other Donut Dollies kept tally of the scores on the large paper pad.

Time expired the Donut Dollies had to depart. We had our story. Carrying their items to the Red Cross Vehicle, we could hear cat calls and several troops barking like dogs in the distance. Granted the Donut Dollies weren't Miss America nor Playboy Bunnies. They were your next door neighbor. Women that came half way around the world to provide these jerks with some entertainment. Those cowards didn't have enough guts to make the cat calls to the Donut Dollies faces. They did it behind their backs. The Donut Dollies never showed their vanity, nor hurt feelings.

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