

Vietnam Women's Memorial Speech 2013
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As we commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Vietnam Women's Memorial, we acknowledge the service of at least 30,000 civilian and military women who served in Vietnam.

Civilian women lived and worked throughout Vietnam, in the villages as well as on American bases.

***59 civilian women died; of these
8 died in hostile action.***

There were also 7,000 military women who served on bases, posts and ships.

***8 military women died; of these
1 died in hostile action,***

The 8 are remembered on this Wall.

All the American women, whether civilian or military, who served in Vietnam were volunteers and many of us here were among them .

We were young, naïve, idealistic, patriotic, and humanitarian.

90% of the women in military were nurses.

We cared for over 300,000 hospitalized casualties, during those 11 years.

Nearly 70,000 of these casualties occurred during '68-'69.

Simultaneously, the civilian nurses cared for the thousands of Vietnamese victims, who euphemistically were called "collateral damage."

Nurses performed far beyond expectation and civilian legal boundaries.

Yesterday we amputated limbs, sutured wounds, cared for the sick, held the hands of the dying: whose names are on The Wall.

Even our successes in returning a casualty to duty came with the guilt that perhaps the next time he would be killed.

And memories of the carnage still haunt us.

Returning home we knew we were good! Really good. And angry.

***At home, Vietnam was like an afterthought, yet we had left comrades behind.
Our combat nursing experience was not considered a symbol of excellence but a
burden of reintegration to “lawful” practice.***

We had to get an order to give an aspirin.

What mattered was how well we wore our uniform but not the content of our expertise.

***Just like the men, when we returned home we were subject to ridicule, obscenities,
rejection and revulsion.***

We took off our uniforms, denied our service.

We bottled up the experiences.

And the festering memories affected our lives and relationships.

***Even the results of exposure to trauma and chemicals, were presumed to be hysterical
and malingering responses.***

However, the Vietnam nursing experience also created an adrenaline high.

Many sought to recreate that thrill and challenge upon returning home.

I would venture that because of Vietnam the nursing profession changed profoundly.

Specialties evolved creating trauma units, intensive care units, and specialty wards.

Nurses also became part of med evac systems, and mass casualty teams.

Male and female Vietnam medics returned to enter the nursing profession.

Today we have advanced practice nurses, nurses have PhD's and other doctorates.

We practice in every specialty, because we can be and the need is there.

***If you ever wonder what our legacy has been, think about what has transpired within the
military since we left Vietnam.***

Treatment of post traumatic stress after psychological trauma is now standard of care.

Illness and birth defects from chemical exposure is cared for.

***The Woman's Army Corps is no more. Women are integrated into occupational
specialties side by side with men.***

The draft no longer exists;

Women can have dependents and be in the military;

***Sexual orientation is no longer a consideration to service,
The combat exclusion has been lifted.
Department of Defense is taking sexual assault and harassment seriously.
The woman sitting beside you may be a General or a Command Sergeant Major.***

Today the country appreciates the sacrifice and dedication of service members and their families.

We no longer have to remove our uniforms, coming home.

We made a difference having served in silence after Vietnam.

The Wall of the Vietnam Memorial , the Three Servicemen and the Vietnam Women's Memorial are reflections of sacrifices and continued duty.

The Memorial acts as a reminder of our interconnectedness in Life and Death.

I salute you who served in Vietnam, your families and loved ones who still hold us in their hearts and memories.

We will not forget and will not be forgotten.