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THEY SERVED TOO:
THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE VIETNAM VETERANS

by

ARIEL NATALO-LIFTON

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

They Served Too: The Unique Experiences of Female Vietnam Veterans

Dissertation Director:
Dr. Beryl Satter

Military women have been written out of the historical record, despite the fact that they have served in the United States military since the beginning of time. This thesis seeks to place women back in their rightful place in military history by exploring the unique experiences of U.S. military women during the Vietnam War and the immediate post-war. It analyzes gender, race, sexuality, and sexual assault in the military, among military women who served in Vietnam and stateside. Furthermore, it examines the coping mechanisms utilized by servicewomen and their memories of war, looking at how history has been rewritten to exclude references to anything that may have complicated the perceptions of military women as noble pillars of American virtue. As the war drew to a close, the military began to change with the creation of the all volunteer force, and this project explores the gains made by servicewomen during the last years of the war and shortly after the war, but also the backlash that halted the fight for military equality and allowed for women's contributions to be forgotten and. In the immediate post-war period, this thesis delves into women's experiences returning to civilian life and healing from war. While veterans always face challenges reacclimating, Vietnam-era female veterans faced their own challenges, many due to their status as non-veterans and the backlash that wrote their service out of military history. By analyzing experiences specific to Vietnam-era military women, this dissertation seeks to complicate military history.

Acknowledgements/Dedication

I would like to thank my friends and family for their unconditional love and support, but especially my mother for teaching me to look at the absences of women in history and instilling in me a thirst to read the stories of these strong women. I would also like to thank the staff, students, and faculty at Rutgers University-Newark for encouraging me every step along the way, especially Dr. Beryl Satter, Dr. Susan Carruthers, and Ms. Christina Strasburger, without whom none of this would have been possible.

This thesis is dedicated to all the women who have been erased from history and everyone who has worked to tell their stories. No one should be forgotten.

Thank you.

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Introduction

Military women have been written out of the historical record, despite the fact that they have served in the United States military since the beginning of time. This thesis seeks to place women back in their rightful place in military history by exploring the unique experiences of U.S. military women during the Vietnam War and the immediate post-war. It analyzes gender, race, sexuality, and sexual assault in the military, among military women who served in Vietnam and stateside. Furthermore, it examines the coping mechanisms utilized by servicewomen and their memories of war, looking at how history has been rewritten to exclude references to anything that may have complicated the perceptions of military women as noble pillars of American virtue. As the war drew to a close, the military began to change with the creation of the all volunteer force, and this project explores the gains made by servicewomen during the last years of the war and shortly after the war, but also the backlash that halted the fight for military equality and allowed for women's contributions to be forgotten and. In the immediate post-war period, this thesis delves into women's experiences returning to civilian life and healing from war. While veterans always face challenges reacclimating, Vietnam-era female veterans faced their own challenges, many due to their status as non-veterans and the backlash that wrote their service out of military history. By analyzing experiences specific to Vietnam-era military women, this dissertation seeks to complicate military history.

As war-making is understood as a masculine enterprise, it is not surprising that the dominant narrative portrays the Vietnam conflict as a war of men, a narrative that was strengthened by official military policy banning women from combat. "Therefore," Keith Walker argues "we have never developed an image of that in our minds." He goes on to

assert that “we think of men in combat, and women safely in the rear echelon in offices and hospitals.”¹ However, there was no such thing as a safe area in Vietnam, the entire country was a combat zone. The country would rather pretend that women had not served than “admit the possibility that women were indeed in dangerous situations. If we didn’t think of them being there, then they weren’t in danger.”² Historians contributed to this problem by focusing almost exclusively on male veterans. Furthermore, military women were frequently complicit in erasing their own stories. Until they opened up about their experiences, nobody was forced to listen.

As can be assumed, most of the historical scholarship and literature regarding the Vietnam War was written about men. Those who focus on military women are mostly divided into two categories: oral histories and memoirs, without historical or theoretical evidence, and straight historical accounts, using quotes as support. This thesis seeks to focus on the stories of military women, using feminist methodologies and the work of historians and international relations theorists as support. It aims to insert the historical and theoretical into oral histories and memoirs while furthering the historical accounts with the voices of women. While *Sisterhood of War: Minnesota Women in Vietnam* by Kim Heikkila and *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Nurse Corps in the Vietnam War* by Kara Dixon Vuic make excellent use of the stories of military women, both limit their books to military nurses. Similarly, Gary Kulik’s work on servicewomen in “*War Stories*,” about the stories perpetuated by and about veterans, addresses military nurses almost exclusively. Oral histories about non-nurse military women serve to both complicate and advance these works.

¹ Keith Walker, *A Piece of My Heart: The Stories of 26 American Women Who Served in Vietnam*, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1985), 2.

² Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 2.

P. Lough O'Daly's Papers at Smith College, including thesis, "Survivors: Women in Uniform During the Vietnam War," is one of the few collections that combined historical scholarship with oral history work. However, this collection is rarely used in Vietnam War scholarship.³ Additionally, as it was finished in 1984, O'Daly's thesis does not address anything written in the last thirty years. This thesis will include parts of O'Daly's oral histories and research, as well as newspaper articles and personal correspondence. Her work and records as a Vietnam-era military woman and activist for female veterans, can be used to unveil stories were not told in other oral histories.

This project also uses historical scholarship about the pre-Vietnam War period, such as Allan Bérubé's work on gay and lesbian servicemembers during World War II and Philippa Levine's work exploring the racialization of Asian women, to understand perceptions of and stereotypes about gender, sexual orientation, and race during the Vietnam War. This scholarship serves to provide background sorely needed when exploring oral histories and memoirs. Additionally, this thesis utilizes international relations and feminist theories to analyze the military institution, especially regarding gender. In *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*, editors Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via along with their contributors, propose some theoretical devices through which to explore the role women and gender have played in the military, which they support with evidence from international conflicts, mostly within the last 30 years. On the other hand, in *War and Gender: How Gender Shaped the War System and Vice Versa*, Joshua Goldstein evidences his theories with examples that span countries and centuries. However, these theories can also be used to examine the Vietnam War.

³ I have yet to come across a citation referencing the collection.

Unlike previous scholarship, this thesis explores the lives and experiences of military women. By supporting the words of the veterans recorded in memoirs and oral histories with historical scholarship with international relations and feminist theory work. It hopes to place emphasis on allowing women to speak for themselves, about both the good and the bad, and taking them at their word. Furthermore, it seeks to reconcile military women's stories with the historical record, inserting themselves into the narrative, and therefore complicating it. Without their own testimonies, too much is left out of the history of the Vietnam War.

Gender and Race

Gender as a social construction can be seen in all facets of our society. However, it is especially prevalent when looking at the military, as war relies on gendered constructions of societal roles. We need to understand the construction of gender within the military structure to understand the impact that women had. Feminist international Relations theorists Laura Sjolberg and Sandra Via argue that “gendering is a constant feature of 21st-century militarism” and war “requires and produces gender inequality” and “generates gendered roles, ideologies, and expectation.”¹ This chapter uses Sjolberg and Via’s theories on gender, as well as the work of other international relations theorists, feminist methodologies, and historical understandings of the military institution to analyze oral histories and argue that gendering, along with the emphasis on traditional ideas of white femininity, shaped the experiences of military women.

After years of war-making being in the men’s sphere, fighting, and possibly dying, in the name of one’s country, was still very much a masculine enterprise. Women’s sacrifice was supposed to take place at home.² This was a reflection of the long-recognized private vs. public spheres, wherein men occupied space out in the world and women were relegated to the home. This divide was emphasized in the post-World War II years with the breadwinner and homemaker model of the American family and didn’t disappear at the beginning of the Vietnam War. Instead of challenging traditionally feminine roles, the military adapted these roles, and the women who fit them, to the public sphere. According to Joshua Goldstein, “men’s participation in combat requires

¹ Laura Sjolberg and Sandra Via, introduction to *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), 10-11.

² Denise M. Horn, “Boots and Bedsheets: Constructing the Military Support System in a Time of War,” in *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), 62.

the psychological construction of a nurturing ‘feminine’ domain” in order to “make the trauma tolerable.” Furthermore, women must “fulfill their feminine roles in the war system, reinforcing soldiers’ masculinity.”³ Therefore the separation of male and female emphasized the feminine domain in opposition with the masculine domain, yet was expected to reinforce masculinity. This played itself out on many stages: the caring and nurturing wife/mother/lover on the homefront during peacetime, and the military woman in theater during World War II, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War.

The military as understood during the 20th century functioned as a protective institution. The war came at the end of an era of containment and the Cold War era, a time that emphasized the nuclear “traditional” family and democracy, a time that relied on rigid gender roles. As the Vietnam War was partially framed as a way to prevent the spread of communism, and thus protect capitalism, military men were tasked with protecting “the American way of life.” Part of this “way of life” included what was considered to be traditional gender roles: women as homemakers and housewives, men as breadwinners. Framing war in terms of paternalism and protectionism allowed the servicemen and political leaders to view the military as an institution to enforce paternalism and protectionism. While this position evolved somewhat over time, the gendering of the military was essential to its very existence. Goldstein claims that duality forces categorization as a tool that creates an oppositional relationship between male and female.⁴ Ann Fausto-Sterling agrees, stating that dualisms result in an imbalanced

³ Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 301.

⁴ Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 252.

relationship of power and privilege.⁵ Creating this hierarchical and oppositional system allows the military institution to use femininity as an insult and feminized qualities to describe those that are considered to be lesser beings, characterizing femaleness as naturally inferior.⁶ Masculinity, therefore, is a constant battle against feminization. Military men are constantly fighting to be seen as the epitome of the heroic-warrior figure, framing themselves as dominant and powerful, and equating failure with weakness and femininity. This was reinforced by the idea of women as too delicate or too weak to survive a combat zone, an idea that was disproved two decades earlier, as had the belief that they would not last in Asia (women had been stationed in India and China during the World War II). In reality, women had proved their worth to the military years before. The military soon forgot this fact however, and as the Vietnam War developed, they were forced to prove themselves all over again.⁷

Allowing women to participate in a traditionally masculine enterprise such as the military required the participation of women in a dualistic gendered system. They were forced to accept, and in fact embrace, traditional gender roles, both as individuals and as a group. The Women's Army Corps (WAC) service specifically advertised itself as a gendered institution. An officer candidate brochure published in 1966 presented the question "Is military life compatible with femininity?" It claimed that women's military service "in no way interferes with the fact that she's a woman [...] Far from losing femininity, WAC officers gain the poise, self assurance, and dignity that comes from

⁵ Ann Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2000) 21.

⁶ V. Spike Peterson, "Gendered Identities, Ideologies, and Practices in the Context of War and Militarism," in *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010) 19.

⁷ Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* 2nd ed. 1992. (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), 208. (Maj. Gen. Jeanne Holm was the Director of the Women's Air Force from 1976-1973).

holding a responsible job and holding a position of respect.”⁸ While this statement does acknowledge the women’s liberation movement’s insistence on women in the public sphere and demands for respect, it also emphasizes femininity as central to the roles and jobs of female officers. Other recruitment material, especially from the 1940s through the mid to late 1960s, emphasized attractiveness and femininity, with pictures of perfectly coiffed and made up women, in tailored uniforms and heels. These ads place an emphasis on femininity, respectability, and morality.⁹ Marilyn Roth, a typist who served in Vietnam said “we were called: ladies. We weren’t called soldiers.”¹⁰

Mary, a WAC who enlisted in 1974 near the end of the war and served during and after the dissolution of the WAC service, stated, “nothing was ever said but you felt a little below them.”¹¹ She went on to explain that their titles were part of this perception: “Being a WAC... they were called ‘soldier’ and you were not a ‘soldier’ you were a WAC.”¹² Despite having chosen a nontraditional MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), she was profoundly aware of the line that was drawn between military men and women. No one needed to say it out loud, WACs knew that they were worth less than their male comrades.

Out of the approximately 7,500 deployed military women, approximately 80% were nurses from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines.¹³ Many military men felt that

⁸ “Meet Today’s WAC Officer” (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966) NARA RG 319.

⁹ Beth Bailey, *American’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009). 149-153.

¹⁰ Ron Steinman, *Women in Vietnam* (New York, New York: TV Books LLC, 2000), 229.

¹¹ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. 433.

¹² “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. 433.

¹³ This number is widely debated as records did not always track gender. While the gender of officers was recorded, enlisted personnel were frequently only labeled as “enlisted,” not as male or female. These estimates are the most common. Additionally, these numbers are specific to military women. It is estimated that about the same number of civilian women (7,500) were in Vietnam during the war. These civilian

female nurses had answered a higher calling; they were medical professionals first and service members second, which was frequently more acceptable to the military than non-medical military women.¹⁴ Furthermore, nursing, as a form of care work, has long been understood as women's work. It is an extension of women's maternal role, an extension of her place in the private sphere. Allowing women to deploy, but relegating them to roles understood to be a part of the female sphere allowed the military to get the support they needed in theater without challenging the gendering of the military.

While non-medical women were deployed, every military branch had an unofficial policy of paternalism and believed women needed protection, regardless of their military status.¹⁵ In the military, protection was framed in terms of defending the "weaker" sex from their enemies in combat, as it was commonly believed that women too delicate to be stationed in a war zone, much less in Asia.¹⁶ The possibility that military women would need protection from their fellow servicemen was left unaddressed. Additionally, many men in the military questioned the ability of women to serve in the military, not to mention their qualifications and their worth. Many military men felt that a woman could not serve in the military like a man could: she was not worth his position. The decision to assign women to Vietnam was often left up to major field commanders

women include non-profit organization volunteers, civilian nurses, "Donut Dollies," (Red Cross volunteers who ran recreation centers before the USO arrived, wrote and conducted recreation programs for men in the field, and brought cheer to the hospitals), and USO workers. (These USO workers included women who staffed recreation centers and clubs, as well as entertainers. While some entertainers were big names like Sammy Davis, Ann Margret, and Miss America who only did a handful of big shows or the "Bob Hope Follies, other USO entertainers toured Vietnam for extended periods of time, doing smaller shows in dangerous areas). While military women assumed the role of the loving, mother figure due to the limited numbers of women in theater, "Donut Dollies" and USO workers volunteered to bring a little piece of home to Vietnam.

¹⁴Ron Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 34.

¹⁵ Holm, *Women in the Military*, 212.

¹⁶ Holm, Jeanne, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*, 206.

who preferred men to women for almost any job.¹⁷ And while some officers were open to the idea of using a military woman for a desk job, many others felt that “any military woman in a combat zone would be more trouble than she was worth.”¹⁸

By 1972, the military had evolved somewhat in reaction to the women’s movement. Many military women began to demand the same opportunities afforded to men, in terms of education, occupation, and pay. Joining the military, especially the nursing corps, was a way for a lot of women to get a better education than they could have ever afforded on their own. In addition, it gave them a chance to move up economically and begin a career that they might be able to have for the rest of their lives.¹⁹ The military frequently recruited nurses at nursing colleges or even in high school using educational funding as the main draw, as the military would pay for the remainder of a nurse’s college degree if she would commit an equal amount of time to the military immediately following her graduation.²⁰ Furthermore, by joining the military instead of becoming a civilian nurse, women could take more advanced and specialized classes. The military advertised itself as being the one place that would really challenge nurses, because the military cared about its nurse’s intellectual development. By becoming a military nurse, a woman would be “a dedicated professional.”²¹

These new advertisements appealed to women using promises of educational, career, and personal advancement, claiming that it was through becoming a military nurse that women would be able to combine their inherent need to fulfill feminine roles with

¹⁷ Holm, *Women in the Military*, 211.

¹⁸ Holm, *Women in the Military*, 206.

¹⁹ Willenz, June A, *Women Veterans: America's Forgotten Heroines*, 110.

²⁰ Karen Dixon Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Corps in the Vietnam War* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 2010), 31 and 42.

²¹ Vuic, Kara Dixon, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Corps in the Vietnam War*, 32.

their demand for equality.²² Soon, restrictions regarding motherhood and career were lifted, which appealed to many women who wished to be more than their mothers but did not want to give up the dream of having a family after their service.²³ It gave them a way of demanding respect while young and still embracing the most traditional of the feminine roles: that of being a mother. Additionally, while military nurses were commissioned as officers, and therefore frequently equal in rank, or sometimes outranking the servicemen, the military found a way to avoid completely eliminating the gendered idea of nursing by linking nursing to traditional gender norms: a military nurse was “an officer, a nurse, *and* a woman.” Kara Dixon Vuic argued that a nurse was “still needed for her touch, smile, and reassuring beauty. She was still needed to restore a sense of domesticity to the troops.”²⁴

However, meeting the demands of women regarding the limitations of their careers had more to do with the need for more nurses than to do with feminist ideology, due to a nationwide shortage of nurses.²⁵ The removal of rules regarding marriage and children also allowed the military to embrace the ideals of femininity within nursing as a mother and wife displayed the traditional domesticity the nursing corps wished to portray. By eliminating these regulations, the military was able to portray itself as accepting of equal rights without actually challenging traditional gender roles, so it “both advanced and constrained the position and image of women in the military.”²⁶

²² Vuic, Kara Dixon, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Corps in the Vietnam War*, 25.

²³ Vuic, Kara Dixon, *Officer, Nurse, Woman: The Army Corps in the Vietnam War*, 134.

²⁴ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 41-42.

²⁵ Evelyn Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women: America's Military Women from World War I to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York, New York: Knopf, 2010). 60.

²⁶ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 135.

The service of wives and mothers also counteracted the common stereotypes of military women as lesbians or promiscuous, stereotypes that had existed since at least World War II, when the first non-nurse military women could officially serve in the Army. The first was due partially to the perception of military women as “masculine,” and the belief that a woman who embraced the masculinity of the military was automatically gay. Feminine women would not want to join the military. Furthermore, a late 1942 study of motivations to joining the WAC service, revealed what the military referred to as “masculine or lesbian motives” such as loving a uniform, seeking female companionship/friendship, or having always had a desire to join the military.²⁷ While many would argue today that these motivations do not really reveal any questionable motives, at the time they were taken as proof of homosexuality. Additionally, a 1944 scandal at the WAC Training Center in Georgia added to the stereotype that was becoming prominent when the mother of a young female private found some love letters from a WAC sergeant to her daughter. She claimed that the Women’s Army Corps was “full of homosexuals and sex maniacs” and threatened to go public. The War Department’s investigation claimed that there were many lesbians in the service, especially as they were hard to identify.²⁸ These stereotypes lived on for decades. However, as nursing was traditionally a feminine role, even in a masculine sphere such as the military, the recruitment and deployment of military nurses over non-medical women served partly to counteract the idea of a military woman who was trying to be a man. The nurse was a woman who was happy to be one.

²⁷ Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York, New York: The Free Press, 1990), 30.

²⁸ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 31-32.

Frequently, when a soldier was injured and arrived at a hospital, his nurse was the first woman he had seen since his deployment. This gave his nurse responsibility for more than just his physical health. Judy Hartline Elbring recalled “I was their mother, their sister, their girlfriend.”²⁹ Even for the men who were stationed in the hospital or nearby, women were few and far enough between that being female made you a representative of all the women that had been left at stateside: “I would be the familiar girl,” Elbring reminisced. “I’d be somebody they could look at and I would look like home. Nothing else did. But *I* would look like home,”³⁰ where home not only referred to her gender, but also her race. Jeanne Rivera recalled her role similarly: “I think sometimes a woman’s touch really came to the aid of a lot of these severely wounded GIs. Sometimes all they needed was just someone to talk to them. I think talking to them... sometimes they thought I was their mother.”³¹ Men who had spent so much time in the company of other men, saw military women (known as “round-eyes” in country, a racialized term) as not only objects of desire, but as every woman they ever loved. And in many ways, this gave the nurses as responsibility to balance on the pedestal the men had placed them on.

The emphasis servicemen placed on military women as the object of their love, and the association they placed on servicewomen (both enlisted and commissioned) as a reminder of “home” reinforced military women as white women first and foremost, separating them from the enemy in terms of gender as well as race. Nurses took on figurative roles of both mother and lover and allowed these roles to define themselves

²⁹ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 147.

³⁰ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 148.

³¹ Dan Freedman and Jacqueline Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam: The Forgotten Veterans* (Austin, Texas: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 64.

and their job, reflecting the post-World War II and containment era ideas of gender.

While nursing was understood as an extension of the woman's role as a caretaker in the private sphere and therefore a reflection of the military's reticence in challenging gender roles, when military women allowed themselves to be defined by the roles they have been relegated to, they emphasized their own femininity.

The description of military women as "round-eyes" was a racial characterization. Not only did these military men place an emphasis on a nurse's gender, they also stressed her whiteness, drawing a deep divide between American women and Vietnamese women. In this way, they defined beauty by terms of skin color, reinforcing American ideals of femininity and purity.³² Lily, interviewed by P. Lough O'Daly, briefly discussed the challenges she faced as an Asian-American in Vietnam: "we would be walking along the compound in civilian clothes and guys would assume we were whores. And they would say a lot of obscene things to us."³³ Reminiscent of historical trends of "othering" native women and positioning them as promiscuous opposed to the pure white women, Lily's experience highlights the racialization and sexualization of Vietnamese women, as well as non-white women in the United States military.

Simone de Beauvoir's work defined men as the "One," those who are the active subject, and women as the "Other," those who embody the traits rejected by the subject

³² While women of color did serve in the military during the Vietnam War, they were few and far between. Additionally, many historical accounts and oral histories do not describe race and there are few records of women discussing the impact of racism. Chief Warrant Officer Doris "Lucki" Allen speaks partially toward the challenges faced by black women, but lumps her race and gender together. Both Lilly Jean Adams and a woman identified only as "Lily" speak briefly about the challenges of being partially Asian-American, but do not elaborate. There is no way to verify whether or not they are the same person, especially as Lily's interviewer, P. Lough O'Daly, frequently used pseudonyms and there was at least one other Lily (Lee Adams) who was interviewed by Kathryn Marshall in her oral history *In the Combat Zone*. While this spelling is more consistent with O'Daly's, she was described as a lifer, where as O'Daly's 'Lily' spoke extensively on her experiences nursing in a civilian hospital.

³³ "P. Lough O'Daly" Papers. Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. 195.

and is viewed as a secondary figure that exists partially to define the “One,” creating a gendered hierarchy.³⁴ This theory can be applied to race as well, as it was historically a tool of empire used to justify colonial projects and warmaking. Philippa Levine argued that the military the sexualization of “native” (or non-white) women was necessary to the politics of colonialism, or, as the case may be, occupation, as “native” women “had trouble containing their natural and destructive impulses.”³⁵ This theory served to both create and perpetuate a military sanctioned (or simply ignored) system of Asian prostitution during the U.S. occupation of Japan after World War II and the Korean War.³⁶ Therefore, while the “othering” of Asian women as sexualized objects, or “whores,” had begun long years earlier, this form of racism that was tied directly to gender was alive and well during the Vietnam War.

The native woman as an “other” was portrayed as anatomically female, but not a “woman” as she lacked femininity.³⁷ Denying that Asian women were women served to dehumanize the enemy the same way feminized terms were used to emasculate the enemy, serving also to portray the Vietnamese as subordinate and inferior. Therefore, seeing white women as feminine and “womanly” played a role in the larger context of fighting the Vietnam War. The term “round-eyes” was used as a part of American military men’s definition of “home,” by describing white women.

Like Lily, Chief Warrant Officer Doris “Lucki” Allen, spoke of the discrimination she faced as a black woman in theater. CWO Allen, who worked in Vietnam

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex: The Classic Manifesto of the Liberated Woman.*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York, New York: Knopf Books, 1952.), XIX-XXV.

³⁵ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, New York: Rutledge, 2003), 161.

³⁶ See: Katharine H.S. Moon. *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) and Yoshimi Yoshiaki. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, trans. Suzanne O’Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

³⁷ Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*, 198.

interrogating prisoners of war and then as an intelligence analyst, was in the military for seventeen years before she was deployed.³⁸ She readily admits that she faced problems for much of her military career, recounting her attempt to join the Women's Army Corps band in 1950, after basic training, as a trumpet player and her rejection because "they couldn't have any Negroes in the band."³⁹ CWO Allen said of the experience: "that was my real touch with how they want you but they don't want you."⁴⁰ She insinuates that black women were allowed into the WAC service to meet their quotas, especially after the number dwindling post-World War II. However, they were needed, not necessarily wanted, and therefore they had less opportunities than their white counterparts.

Despite this early confrontation with the restrictions and prejudice against black women, CWO Allen was not prepared for the discrimination she faced once deployed and stationed with mostly white men:

What they did made me feel ignored. Being black. Being a woman. Being a WAC. Being in intelligence. Black. Woman. Very tough. And at the time I was a specialist. These prejudices, I know they're going around in my brain, black, woman-got no business here. WAC, you're not supposed to be in the army-this is a man's job. Intelligence, ah. Oxymoron. Specialist. You're a specialist, you're not a sergeant, you're not a master sergeant, you're not an NCO, but that's what I was. I was all of

³⁸ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 244. CWO Allen does not mention her work as an interrogator in *Piece of My Heart* by Keith Walker. Additionally, she only mentions work with male prisoners of war (POWs) and states that she asked them "where they came from and where they were going" (Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 244). CWO Allen makes no mention of any other methods of interrogation, especially not more extreme methods that were commonly used. About her reassignment to intelligence analyst, she only said that her superior officers "decided those interrogations were not expeditious." (Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 244). CWO Allen does not attribute this reassignment to racial or gendered motives.

³⁹ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 247. CWO Allen makes no further reference of this early racist policy, or even whether it was an official or unofficial or if it still existed during the Vietnam War.

⁴⁰ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 247. It is important to note that CWO Allen was not promoted to this rank until years after her return to the United States. I used the title that she retired with after about 30 years of military service. Also, this is an excerpt from her first published interview with Keith Walker for *A Piece of My Heart* (1985). In that interview, this is the only instance of racism mentioned, although she attributed other discrimination and prejudice she based to sexism. Either she barely spoke of such experiences, or Walker edited out all other references.

those things. They would look at me and try not to show disdain for who I was. I was all those things. But I could tell how they felt. I could see it in their eyes.⁴¹

CWO Allen's statements show an awareness that she was considered to be worth less than the men she served with because she was both female and black. She understood that her gender and her race counted against her, but together they worked to position her as worth less than both military men and white women. While there is no doubt that racism existed throughout the entire military, Lily and CWO Allen linked the racial discrimination they faced to their gender. They portrayed the racism they faced as gendered; they did not divorce racism from sexism. Calling an Asian-American woman a whore or believing that an African-American woman could not be tough or serve as an NCO was not only racial; it was a reminder of her otherness.

Lieutenant Lily Jean Adams only spoke of her race in relation to the way she was treated by the Vietnamese people. The only distinction she made about United States military men was about their inference that she was an interpreter. More often, Vietnamese citizens assumed that she was an upper class Saigon woman who did not respect the Cu Chi peasants.⁴² Others were impressed by her Chinese lineage, viewing

⁴¹ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*. 244. This is an excerpt from a later interview (book published in 2000), where CWO Allen goes much more into depth about the two kinds of discrimination she faced: both for her gender and her race. In this interview, she explicitly ties together racial and gender-based discrimination.

⁴² Cu Chi is a suburban district of Ho Chi Minh City, then known as Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam. Cu Chi was best known for the caves and tunnels that extended through most of the country. Despite being a major headquarters for the U.S. Army, and home to the 12th Evacuation Hospital, where Lt. Adams was stationed, the tunnels were controlled by the Viet Cong and the center of operations for the Tet Offensive. The Cu Chi civilians were peasants, despite being only thirty miles northwest of Saigon. Before the France was conquered by the Axis in 1940, Saigon had been home to wealthy Vietnamese civilians and French colonialists. During most of World War II, Saigon, along with the rest of Vietnam, was controlled by Japan and all Vietnamese citizens were subject to famine. After the war, France, with the help of foreign allies including the United States, attempted to regain power from Ho Chi Minh and the communist party known

her paternity as “honorable.”⁴³ However, Lt. Adams’ reflections on her treatment by the Vietnamese are indicative of attitudes of regarding rich women; she paints characterization as “snobbish” as reflective of views of upper-class women, as opposed to the upper-class as a whole. Furthermore, the limited respect she was given was not earned, but rather prescribed by her father’s lineage, a traditional Vietnamese understanding of identity.

During the Vietnam War, the military institution relied on the societal construction of gender and femininity being tied directly to white femaleness. This focus helped write the existence of military women who did not conform to such ideals out of the historical record and erase their heroism. The military allowed some women to advance their careers and education, but did so by forcing most women to adhere to traditional gender roles. While the talents of some, such as CWO Allen were recognized, Vietnam-era military women were remembered as white nurses. When the dominant narrative of the Vietnam War includes servicewomen, it highlights their roles as caretakers: as mothers, wives, sisters, and lovers. Traditional ideas of femininity have so perverted the truth as to rewrite it completely.

as the Viet Minh who had declared Vietnam’s independence. The first Indochina War ended in a peace accord splitting Vietnam into two countries, to communist North Vietnam and South Vietnam, led by a U.S. created puppet government. (“The City: Saigon,” Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/vietnampassage/City/index.html>.) Despite the fact that the city had barely begun to rebuild by the time the United States invaded Vietnam, there were remnants of ill feelings between Saigon residents and Cu Chi peasants.

⁴³ Steinman. *Women in Vietnam*. 58-59.

Coping With War: Numbing the Pain

Just like the male soldiers in Vietnam, nurses experienced a lot of difficulties, not only in adjusting to military life in a war zone, but also dealing with the death day after day. Shirley Mernard “you’ll explode if you keep them inside long enough. And there was a lot inside me.”¹ Some turned to their faith or disconnected from their experiences by using humor and avoidance, while others attempted to numb the pain in any way possible, usually with drinking, sex, or drugs. Lorraine Boudreau remembered this vividly, “the alcohol served as anesthetic for me. I’d just phase out so I didn’t think about Vietnam.”² Karen Bush recalled that “there was a group of girls in one hooch who seemed to be a little more lax in their moral standards” but she was quick to point out that “if this is a way they found that they could cope and maintain their sanity or their feelings that someone cared for them, well heck, it was all right by me. It was lonely. I don’t care who you were, it was lonely.”³ This chapter explores oral histories and memoirs to analyze the coping mechanisms used by military women during deployment in order to distance themselves from the harsh realities of war.

Lynda Van Devanter wrote the first female veteran’s memoir in 1983 and refused to shy away from the dark parts of her experiences, speaking about drugs and drinking among soldiers, nurses, and doctors, as well as consensual and nonconsensual sexual relationships. Her memoir created a deep divide among veterans between those who thought she exaggerated and others who claimed it was a truthful story. Nora Kinzer, who served as special assistant on women’s veterans for the Veteran Administration and members of Nurses Against Misrepresentation (NAM) accused Van Devanter of painting

¹ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 117.

² Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 32.

³ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 89.

“the entire Army Nurse Corps in a disparaging light.” Others, such as Winnie Smith and P. Lough O’Daly rushed to her defense. “It seems to me that Miss Van Devanter was only discussing real-life events that can be found anywhere in civilian life, with the possibly exception of a Girl Scout Camp or convent,” O’Daly argued in a letter to the editor regarding Kinzer’s comments. “If the events Miss Van Devanter describes had been written by a male Vietnam veteran,” she went on to write, “there would have been no suggestion that his relationships, his use of drugs and alcohol or his profanity reflected in any way on the proud traditions of the service.”⁴

Van Devanter’s memoir reflected many of the stories told by female Vietnam veterans about their own experiences coping with war. Lily remembered that “for most people it was either dope or it was alcohol, but we all needed some kind of crutch.”⁵ Lorraine Boudreau said “my answer to all this was that I drank myself silly; everyone had their way of coping. You used those things to survive. You had booze, you had drugs, you had sex.”⁶ Nurses, who spent their deployments dealing with the horrors of war, the blood and death, needed an outlet and solace. They searched for it constantly, and frequently found it in the bottom of a bottle or marijuana. While they had been trained, however insufficiently, to handle the work in the hospital, they were ill prepared to handle the traumatic effects of their jobs. “There are people in the military who do function well for 40, 50 or however many hours a week but quitting time means to me to have a drink or two Joan Waradzyn Thomas recalled. [Fellow nurse Rita] “was one of those alcoholics who can work efficiently, but can’t handle it outside of work.”⁷ They

⁴ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College.

⁵ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith College. 181.

⁶ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 32.

⁷ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 157.

didn't need alcohol or drugs to get through their work shifts, but to forget what they had witnessed and fall asleep without seeing the faces of the men they had tried to save.

"When you're together in a situation where you could be dead soon, it's like you live every minute to the fullest. We loved," Shirley Mernard said. "We really lived in Vietnam when we were off duty. Oh yea, there was gambling, partying, drinking, eating, loving."⁸ In their memoirs, former Army nurses Winnie Smith and Lynda Van Devanter recalled finding comfort in intimacy. Sometimes this was sexual in nature, but it was about intimate friendships and bonding just as much as sex. The military life and deployment created a comradeship that was a necessary part of keeping sane. The partying and sex servicewomen described was about taking comfort in the warmth and friendship of other military men and women who understood the trials of being deployed and living surrounded by death. Lynda Van Devanter spoke of many affairs, but when describing the first she said "we were just tired and lonely and sick to death of trying to fix the mutilated bodies of boys [...] all you want to do is lean against somebody and cry so they can hold you and love you and remind you that, after it's finished, you're still human."⁹

Despite craving closeness with their comrades, many servicewomen, especially nurses, embraced avoidance, believing it was easier to cope with the situation by ignoring it. "We never talked about what was going on," Lorraine Boudreau remembered, "nobody ever did."¹⁰ Winnie Smith explained: "we don't speak of such things. In this

⁸ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 120.

⁹ Lynda Van Devanter, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (Amherst, Massachusetts: Sheridan Books, 1983), 105.

¹⁰ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 33.

land we don't need to."¹¹ For many, it was easier to pretend that they were not in the middle of a warzone. In order to avoid being haunted by what they witnessed, they chose to pretend it was not happening. This compartmentalization allowed nurses to separate themselves from their jobs. In a way, it was a necessary part of nursing in Vietnam. If nurses allowed themselves to become consumed with guilt over the men who died, depression would have left them unable to save the many who lived.

While many female veterans turned to religion or faith in reconciling their war experiences after they left the military, Jeanne Rivera spoke about turning to her faith while stationed in Vietnam: "if God wants this young man to live, there's a purpose for it [...] I believe that if God sees fit to take you, he'll take you. If God doesn't, then you're going to live [...] it's not in our hands."¹² Rivera used her religion as a shield against the guilt many nurses felt regarding the men who died under their care. By leaving their fate up to God, she removed herself from the equation, as she believed that with even the best medical care, men would die when God decided. However, most women questioned their faith in country; they were unable to reconcile ideas of God and faith with the death that surrounded them.

In a post-war interview, P. Lough O'Daly spoke to a veteran identified only as Terry and claimed that she was "fairly typical of many veterans and military people in that humor is a way of encapsulating pain and anger." This response was a "survivor mechanism."¹³ Both enlisted and commissioned men and women used humor, however dark, as a way to distance themselves from the carnage. "There were GIs exposed to

¹¹ Winnie Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War: On the front lines with an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (New York, New York: Simon Books, 1992), 238.

¹² Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 63.

¹³ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers" *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College, 294.

flame throwers or gas explosions. We used to call them ‘crispy critters’ to keep from getting depressed,” Jacqueline Navarro Rhoads remembered.¹⁴ She wasn’t the only one. Oral histories and interviews are littered with such references: jokes about a man who was scalped or a soldier whose genitals were destroyed by a “Bouncing Betty.”¹⁵ Crushed legs were called “squash meat,” death referred to as a man buying his “ticket,” and nurses laughed at a story of a drunken soldier getting shot in the chest during a mortar attack while attempting to protect a nurse on her way to the hospital from the bar/restaurant they had been drinking at.¹⁶ This dark humor allowed military women to distance themselves from their patients and their work.

Drugs, sex, companionship, avoidance, religion and humor are typical coping mechanisms for civilian and military men and women. Others chose unconventional methods: “flying? Flying was a way out,” Judy Hartling Elbring reminisced. “I went riding around the country, anytime, anywhere I could.”¹⁷ Far above the war, Elbring could pretend she was someplace else. She could just take in the scenery and the beauty and pretend there was not a war below her. Additionally, it was an adventure. A risk. In a country when no one knew what would happen the next day, choosing the risks you took was a form of control. “I was on high adventure, doing things I would never have a chance to do anywhere else,” Elbring said.¹⁸

¹⁴ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 13. The term “crispy critter” in particular, was used by many female Vietnam veterans (specifically nurses) when they described the remains of any soldier who had seriously burned, whether severely injured but still alive or dead on arrival.

¹⁵ First example: Devanter, *Home Before Morning*, 135. Second example: Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War*, 150.

¹⁶ Many women used dark humor in their interviews and memoirs. These specific examples come from: Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War*. 150, 130, 111, and 72.

¹⁷ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 149.

¹⁸ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 13.

“When people laughed, they did it with a roar; when they cried, it was usually in private”¹⁹ Lynda Van Devanter wrote. Nurses were expected to be pillars for the men they helped. They needed to be strong. “Nurses didn’t cry. We just didn’t. You had all of yourself together. You couldn’t allow that,” said Joan Garvet.²⁰ But being strong meant shutting down emotionally. Military women were forced to put up a wall to protect themselves from caring about every hospitalized soldier and the guilt they felt when one died. When this wall was broken down, and a nurse was left vulnerable, she no longer felt safe or insulated from the war. “I loved that woman and her baby because they had broken me out of my protective shell and made me feel again,” remembered Lynda Van Devanter when writing about her experience delivering a Vietnamese baby. “But I also hated them for that same reason.”²¹ Being strong, being tough, meant being able to do your job without the distractions of emotions.

By creating a wall around herself, Van Devanter and other nurses were able to hold themselves together. Being affected too much would simply get in the way. Using common coping mechanisms, as well as inventing ones of their own, allowed military women to distance themselves from their surroundings, and nurses to distance themselves from their patients, especially the men they could not save. Being a medical professional came with a certain feeling of responsibility for the lives of the men they treated and guilt for those who they died. This responsibility and guilt could destroy a person if they do not find a way to distance themselves, to forget themselves, in any way, shape, or form.

¹⁹ Devanter, *Home Before Morning*, 108.

²⁰ Steinman. *Women in Vietnam*, 110.

²¹ Devanter, *Home Before Morning*, 153.

Sex, Sexuality, and Sexual Assault

Female Vietnam veterans were often reticent to speak of their experiences with sex, sexuality, and sexual assault. Using mostly oral histories and memoirs, this chapter seeks to uncover the sexual relationships of Vietnam-era military women and explore perceptions of sex and sexual orientation, as well as their experiences with sexual harassment and assault. More than any other stories, these narratives have been unexplored by historians and theorists, and, in fact, rarely even chronicled in oral histories and interviews. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the memoirs of Lynda Van Devanter and Winnie Smith, P. Lough O'Daly's papers, and Kara Dixon Vuic's book, with support from other interviews and books. It is important to allow these women to speak for themselves.

During the Vietnam era, many people believed that "good girls" didn't join the military; they stayed at home and had a family.¹ Society portrayed military women, both military nurses and enlisted women in less gender-traditional professions, as mannish lesbians or promiscuous women who had joined the military for the sexual opportunities.² "There's no two ways about it," Lynda Van Devanter remembered of the common perception, "because there's nothing else a woman would be doing in a place with five hundred thousand men."³ This was typical of the Army's double standard in their treatment of men versus women, as military men were expected, and sometimes encouraged, to have sex with Vietnamese prostitutes. Devanter wrote:

¹ Kim Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War: Minnesota Women in Vietnam* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society, 2011), 30.

² Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 8.

³ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers" *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith College. 279.

If we wanted to have a relationship, or to occasionally be with a man we cared deeply about, we were not conducting ourselves as “ladies” should. And if we might be unladylike enough to want birth control pills, which were kept in a safe and rarely dispensed, we could expect the wrath of God, or our commander, to descend upon us.⁴

Ignoring the sexual experiences and sexuality of servicewomen writes this part of their lives out of their history and forced military women to pretend to conform to the military’s ideas of “ladylike” behavior. Sweeping reports and the stories of sexual harassment and assault experienced by some military women leaves them as powerless as they had been to protect themselves by allowing their stories to be dismissed when they are finally told. Including these stories tells a more complete story of the military women who served during the Vietnam War.⁵

Devanter’s memoir was the first book that discussed the sex and sexuality of female Vietnam veterans, speaking specifically of her own experiences. Winnie Smith’s memoir and P. Lough O’Daly’s oral history interviews corroborated Devanter’s account. Their work revealed that sex was more than a coping mechanism for Vietnam-era military women. Sometimes it was a search for love or an exercise in freedom during the sexual revolution. And while not all servicewomen were lesbians, some were, and they were no better or worse at their jobs or less of a military woman because of their sexual orientation.

⁴ Devanter, *Home Before Morning*, 122.

⁵ Ret. Air Force Major General Jeanne Holm claimed that promiscuity was not a serious problem, but many women’s memoirs and oral histories say otherwise, although these stories came to light long after Maj. Gen. Holm’s book was originally published. This assertion is made in reference to World War II, but is the only reference to promiscuity in her book. While Maj. Gen. Holm makes no allusion to anything regarding promiscuity in her discussion of the Vietnam War, reports of promiscuity in memoirs and oral histories are always, as far as I have seen, rejected by commanding officers, especially military women who reached flag rank (general). See: Holm, *Women in the Military*, 70. For further explanation, see [footnote 13](#) in this chapter.

Many military became “geographic bachelors” when deployed and began love affairs with nurses that would never last. In her interview, Jeanne Rivera acknowledged the fraternization between doctors and nurses and claimed not to care as long as she couldn’t see it and the affair did not affect their work performance, but these relationships could not exist in a vacuum. There were frequently very real consequences: “there were broken love affairs [...] they were promised the world,” Rivera explained. “There were a certain number of them who contemplated suicide. I had one close call, but she was not successful.”⁶

However, not all in-country relationships ended on such a negative note, nor were all military women naïve enough to expect more than a fleeting affair. Winnie Smith wrote affectionately of her first affair with a married doctor in Vietnam: “I choose to have and lose true love rather than risk never having it at all. It is my first season of love, so long awaited.”⁷ While she admits to having her heart broken when the doctor returned to his wife and family in the United States, Smith was happy to have found love in Vietnam, however briefly. This was the first of her affairs, none of which she painted as simply a form of intimacy and a coping mechanism. Instead, Smith wrote of love and attraction as her reasoning: “I long for the strength of a man’s body under a scorched sun.”⁸

During deployment, many women embraced a sexual freedom reminiscent of the sexual revolution in women’s liberation. They were on their own, sometimes for the first time, and out of the watchful eyes of their fathers. The societal mores that constrained women’s sexuality were not always applicable in-country. By embracing this freedom,

⁶ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 70-71.

⁷ Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War*, 36.

⁸ Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War*, 204.

many military women participated in their own sexual revolution, nine thousand miles away from home.⁹ Judy Hartline Elbring said “sure I had romance, hand-picked, and some very special men. Yeah, I did. And I enjoyed it.” She explained that “there was something about the danger, about the send-off, about the wondering if we had tomorrow, that I didn’t want to wait [...] I was running away from home and doing all the stuff I wasn’t supposed to.”¹⁰ These love affairs were about romance, sex, risk, reward, and freedom.

Some women, at least according to Winnie Smith, had very different motives for embracing sexual freedom. At least one first lieutenant, thought to be a physical therapist, approached her deployment as a way to support herself in a rather enterprising way: “[i]t’s said she is making a fortune as a prostitute” Smith explains. Her lavish decorations and additional privacy “are rumored to be provided by male officers-not friends but customers.”¹¹ This suspicion was thought to be confirmed when a pit viper slithered into the lieutenants room, and the door opened to find her scantily clad with a rear echelon officer (described by Smith as “a very rear echelon mother fucker colonel”).¹² Smith passed little judgment on the lieutenant’s activities, except for her choice in clients. This does not necessarily reflect acceptance, but rather a sense of understanding about the choices that women make while deployed. Smith’s, and her hoochmate’s, lack of reaction

⁹ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 142.

¹⁰ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 158.

¹¹ Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War*, 217-218.

¹² Smith, *American Daughter Gone To War*, 218. A “Rear Echelon Mother Fucker” or REMF is a term of derision given by frontline soldiers to refer to soldiers, almost exclusively officers, who are stationed to the rear. They call the shots without having any idea as to what is really happening on the frontline and with little regard to the soldiers coming home in body bags. REMFs have no combat experience, and probably never will. While “rear echelon” was used to describe those in the rear, “REMF” was popularized as a derogatory term during the Vietnam War, possibly because of the high death count and the common feelings of abandonment felt by frontline soldiers, especially enlisted personnel and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). The term is still used today, but is not quite as common. (Information obtained during multiple informal conversations with Vietnam-era and Gulf War veterans).

toward the lieutenant's promiscuity and perceived occupation, spoke volumes about the nonchalant attitude about sex held by many Vietnam-era military women.

In her book, former Major General Jeanne Holm said that the record shows that female promiscuity and homosexuality in the military was simply a stereotype. She wrote that "the incidences [of homosexuality and promiscuity] were probably much less than in the general population."¹³ However, many scholars and memoirs claimed that, like heterosexual love affairs, homosexuality was a fact of military life: most military women expected that they would serve with at least one lesbian. Despite this, homosexuality was an incredibly taboo subject both during and after the war.¹⁴ This section will mostly discuss straight women's perceptions of lesbians who served in Vietnam as recounted in memoirs and oral histories, looking at fear, hatred, and acceptance.

Some women spoke of gay women with fear or hatred, at least at the beginning of their deployment: "more out of fear than loathing, I've kept a safe distance between us," Winnie Smith said of a fellow nurse that was thought to be gay.¹⁵ Smith does not describe what she means by "fear," leaving readers to infer that this fear was due to either

¹³ Holm, *Women in the Military*, 70. This quote is from Holm's chapter on World War II, although she insinuates this throughout the book. She never said what record she was referring to, nor did she cite her claim. It is possible she truly believed this, but also possible that she was protecting the reputations of military women, or herself as Women's Air Force Director (1965-1973), especially as the book first came out in 1982 when women were in the middle of their fight toward gender equality in the military. Even after the publication of the revised edition in 1992, military women were nowhere close to equal with their male comrades. (Many would argue they still are not). Any proof supporting the stereotype of military women as promiscuous or homosexual would serve to hurt their cause, as well as their and Maj. Gen. Holm's reputation.

¹⁴ Both Lynda Van Devanter and Winnie Smith mention gay servicewomen in their memoirs and P. Lough O'Daly's interviews delve more deeply into the subject. However, other oral history books make little to no mention of sexual orientation.

¹⁵ Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War*, 65. It is important to note that Smith seemed to abandon this fear after the woman, who was short (about to go home), asked her to take over working at a nearby orphanage. The servicewoman's work with Vietnamese orphans perhaps served to comfort Smith's fears about her "moral character," reassuring Smith that while she was gay, she was still the mothering, caring figure. (Homosexual servicemembers were accused of "questionable moral character," a designation that was used by the military to investigate suspected homosexual activities in order to confer a dishonorable discharge).

common beliefs that lesbian women were angry and/or looking to “recruit” straight women or fear of being associated with someone thought to be have poor moral character.¹⁶ Other women demonstrated understanding and acceptance: “there were far more important things than that to offend our sensibilities,” Lynda Van Devanter explained. “Who could really care about two women finding comfort with each other when there were hundreds of boys dying every week?”¹⁷ While this comment may have demonstrated Devanter’s sympathy toward military women’s methods of coping, any understanding is a step on the path to full acceptance.

Chris’ interview revealed a fear of some lesbians, but not all. She differentiated by referring to some as “dykes” and others as “gay” or “lesbian.” Her fears, however, were not unfounded. “Young girls would get there and their first or second night get beat up by “dykes,” ribs smashed in,” Chris remembered. Her commanding officer was a part of this “scene” and “one of the rougher lesbians on the base which is why the information stopped with her.”¹⁸ While Chris did not say that she was victim of assault or harassment by fellow servicewomen, this story reveals a credible fear. Her fear was not that she would be propositioned by a lesbian, nor that homosexuality was particularly deviant, but fear of physical harm.

Chris was careful to separate the violent women from other gay women: “there were a lot of lesbians on that base as well as the girls who were gay and didn’t want to be

¹⁶ Both stereotypes are obviously false, although have carried on today. Military-specific fear of association is possibly left over from World War II policies regarding homosexuality that found people with gay friends were more likely to be investigated by psychiatrists and found to be guilty of homosexuality, although some civilians have similar fears. See: Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York, New York: The Free Press, 1990).

¹⁷ Devanter, *Home Before Morning*, 122.

¹⁸ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College. 443. This is the only account of assault and harassment by gay women that I have found. While I did not find any court or military records that prove its veracity, I am choosing to take Chris at her word.

a part of the ‘dyke’ scene.” Unlike the “dykes,” “they weren’t bothering anyone and would still be friends with you. You know they were gay but they didn’t try to push their feelings on to you.” Unfortunately, the actions of the violent women, especially participation of their commanding officer, affected the perceptions of lesbians by many of the women Chris served with: “it was uncomfortable for those who had gay friends like I did because they figured if they were gay they were ‘dykes.’”¹⁹

Most female Vietnam veterans who mention the presence of homosexuality are factual and nonplused. In her interview, Terry simply stated: “there was a lot of homosexuality going on in the barracks at the time... real blatant.”²⁰ Other women, such as Lynda Van Devanter, viewed sexual orientation as completely unimportant considering the real nightmares that surrounded them. Loreen spoke candidly about her friendships with a lesbian who was not discharged, although she did know of two career military men who had been discharged for homosexual behavior.²¹ She implied that while homosexuality was not particularly widespread, it was acknowledged and accepted by most military women.

Despite this relative acceptance, homosexuality was still against military regulations and being found guilty of “homosexual behavior” could result in a dishonorable discharge. Terry spoke of a woman from boot camp that turned in almost two dozen women for homosexual activity, including mostly women who were heterosexual. Terry was one of these women investigated by the Office of Naval

¹⁹ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College. 443.

²⁰ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 301.

²¹ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 380-381.

Intelligence, but received no official reprimand.²² She implied that reporting homosexuality was sometimes used as a tool of revenge, a witch-hunt typical of the military as it was used in World War II and the Korean War, although gay men were usually the targets.²³ Unlike other women interviewed, Morgan was an admitted lesbian for much of her time in the military. Her sexual orientation was a non-issue until she joined the National Organization of Women and was investigated as a “radical” by the Naval Investigative Service. After challenging the wrong superior officer, she was brought up on charges of homosexual activities when an ex-lover agreed to testify against her out of revenge for a failed relationship. Fortunately, Morgan’s commanding officer was sympathetic, and processed her honorable discharge papers before she could be officially charged with homosexuality.²⁴ Her sexual orientation was used against her as a tactic to discredit her “radical” activities and tendency to speak up about harassment and sexual assault.

Even more taboo, and much more painful for military women, was the ongoing issue of sexual harassment, attempted sexual assault, and sexual assault. These instances were rarely prosecuted or even acknowledged, but were a definite part of the lives of

²² “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 306-307. Terry was discharged for medical reasons shortly after the investigation began. She did not elaborate on whether she was cleared or discharged before she could be brought up on charges.

²³ Until 1940, homosexuals had not been excluded or discharged from the military. After the Revolutionary War, the Army and Navy criminalized sodomy (defined as anal sex and sometimes oral sex between two men), but not homosexuality. However, due to the increased authority of psychiatrists and the large number of men registered for the draft, in 1940 the Selective Service was able to exclude certain people, namely blacks in the Marines and Army Air Corps, women, and homosexuals. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, many homosexuals joined enlisted, passing psychiatric evaluations that were used to keep gay men out of the military, but almost always had to keep their sexuality quiet, as to avoid receiving an “undesirable” discharge. Women rarely went through the same intense psychiatric exam, partially due to the invisibility in criminal law and partially to fill quotas. It wasn’t until 1944 that any uniform psychiatric evaluation for lesbians was created and it was rarely used before the end of the war. Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 2-7 and 28-32.

²⁴ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 476. Morgan claims she was the first enlisted woman to join NOW, but there is no way to verify this claim.

many military women.²⁵ The military's unofficial policy was that women needed to protect themselves from sexual harassment or rape, and frequently did little or nothing to stop it or punish the perpetrators. Some women found their own strength as forced by this code of silence. Jane Hodge, an Army nurse, spoke of her own strength when she was groped by a colonel: "Sir, they spent the last six weeks teaching me that I'm an officer first, a nurse second, and a lady third" she informed him. "The officer has asked you to remove your hand, the nurse has told you to move it, and the lady is about to slap the hell out of you."²⁶

Other female veterans report similar instances of harassment, although many did not find the strength Hodge had to talk back. Sometimes the harassment was more severe, sometimes less. P. Lough O'Daly wrote of this from her own experiences, as well as those of women she had spoken to and interviewed. Her work demonstrated the thin line between assumed friendship and sexual assault. Many of the women who were victims of assault or attempted assault were acquainted socially with their assailants. Lily spoke of the attempts of the nurses she was stationed with to get hot water. When they found GIs who could help them out, "these guys wanted us to go to Long Binh for a party, for them to provide the means to make hot water, and (I) realized they wanted a little bit more than

²⁵ Sexual harassment was mentioned by Winnie Smith and Lynda Van Devanter in their memoirs, as well as touched briefly upon in a few oral history accounts. P. Lough O'Daly's interviews are the only ones that really tell the stories of women who were harassed or assaulted. There are a few possible explanations. First of all, oral history books were highly edited. Therefore, any examples of sexual harassment or assault could have been removed from the record or perhaps the interviewers did not ask questions that would lead to descriptions of sexual assault and harassment. It is also possible that female veterans were more likely to be open about their experiences when speaking to another woman, but also likely that O'Daly's status as a Vietnam-era veteran made other female veterans feel more comfortable. However, Jacqueline Navarra Rhoads was also a Vietnam-era veteran who, unlike O'Daly, was deployed during the war and her oral history collection reveals no evidence of sexual harassment or assault (possibly because she had a male partner. The book does not say whether or not Rhoads conducted any interviews on her own, or if they conducted interviews together.)

²⁶ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 143. The colonel threatened Hodge with a court-martial for assaulting a senior officer, to which she responded that his wife and kids would be present at the hearing and find out exactly what happened.

a party, I just told them to fuck off and we never got the hot water.”²⁷ They saved themselves from possible sexual assault, by embracing their protective instincts before they were in true danger. Other women were not so lucky, barely escaping from their fellow servicemembers:

Pilots came down from IZ English and they wanted nurses to come up for a party. I thought that would be great- -just to get away for awhile [...] I stumbled into this room full of mattresses, wall to wall. Right away my antennae go up. I thought, ‘Uh-oh, I better warn the girls.’ I go back and I say, ‘Hey, you know there’s a room full of mattresses back there and some of the guys are getting the girls pretty drunk.’ There was also a lot of opium and a lot of dope. ‘We got to get out of here.’ ... Those of us who were reasonably sober practically carried the drunk ones to the chopper pad and tried to get someone to give us a ride home. The guys were furious. We thought it was a gang rape, that’s how bad it was. I didn’t think we’d make it out alive.²⁸

Sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape violated feelings of safety and security and affected military careers, as well as physical and mental health.²⁹ “The GI’s called nurses round-eye tail, and suddenly that’s exactly what we were,” quoted P. Lough O’Daly. “This was the enemy camp.”³⁰ The term round-eye, as previously discussed, referred to both the racial and gender identity of military women as white females. The use of the word “tail,” on the other hand, reduced servicewomen to their genitalia and sexuality: they were simply vehicles for a man’s pleasure, removed of their own agency and defenseless against a military man’s advances, consensual or otherwise.³¹ With such feelings of vulnerability, it is no wonder that some deployed women reported to be more afraid of sexual harassment and assault than the actual war that surrounded them, one

²⁷ P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 171.

²⁸ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 132.

²⁹ Sexual assault and rape are frequently used interchangeably, but are not actually synonymous. Rape is a form of sexual assault that includes forced penetration while the term sexual assault covers all nonconsensual sexual contact and behavior. This section covers both, and tries to use the terms that each woman used to describe her own attack.

³⁰ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 132.

³¹ “Tail” is crude slang for a woman’s buttocks and/or vagina, while referring to being attracted to her overall body. The term is used to reduce a woman to a sexual object available for conquest.

nurse went as far as to keep a pistol in her room for protection from her own soldiers.³²

Even Major General Jeanne Holm (Ret.), who served as the Director of the Women's Air Force from 1965-1973, touched on the issue multiple times in her book. She quoted a corporal who stated that complaining to your commanding officer was useless because "he just shrugs it off as a joke." Furthermore, "you can't complain to the women officers because they are powerless to do anything about it, besides they get the same hassle from the guys-sometimes worse."³³

While Lily said "I did think of the fact that I could have been gang-raped and murdered and that would have been the end of me," most military women never imagined that their male comrades would take advantage of them; they believed that military men would be protective and supportive.³⁴ Even after experiencing sexual harassment, many military women thought that there was a line that none of their "brothers" would cross. Sexual harassment could be written off as teasing, or a simply a part of men and women working closely together, especially as the issue sexual harassment was only recently addressed by the civilian United States. Unfortunately, some women found out too late that the line between harassment and assault was not respected by all of their comrades.

Terry was beaten and raped by a male comrade while in Corpsman school in the Great Lakes. Unlike many other military women, she reported the assault to her CO after being treated at the hospital. He responded:

'Terry, I'll give you your options. You can pursue this but you're going to get screwed.' So he went into the hospital and took the records that said I had stitches and possibility of rape. And I really believe to this day that it was for my protection. He said they would have crucified me and I believe him... to this day I believe him [...] All they had to do, he said, was get

³² Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 144.

³³ Holm, *Women in the Military*, 70.

³⁴ P. Lough O'Daly Papers." *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 186.

seven guys to say they had been to bed with me. He said it just wouldn't be worth it... even if the guy did get thrown out. The other thing that was said to me was 'Why ruin his (rapist) life?'³⁵

While Terry believed that her commanding officer was protecting her, he was also protecting himself. A commander who was unable to prevent rape, was often considered unable to fulfill his office.³⁶ He was also protecting the rapist, as evidenced by the last line of the statement. As common at the time, as now, part of this protection involved the dismissal of sexual assault complaints as false and/or superficial, as well as unimportant to the mental and physical safety of the troops, despite the threat of having a rapist deployed with military women. This attitude was partially due to the previously stated widely held opinion that military men were more important and useful to the war effort than women, and contributed to the belief that "any military woman in a combat zone would be more trouble than she was worth."³⁷ Furthermore, any argument against prosecution by bringing up the life and future of the rapist is not only sexist, but serves to trivialize sexual assault. Such a statement embodies the "boys will be boys" sentiment and decriminalizes rape.

During her interview, Morgan, a Vietnam-era veteran, spoke of not only her own experience with sexual assault, but also the stories she had been told of young women who had been raped and abused by recruiters, including one young woman from Puerto Rico who cut a deal with her recruiter: "she would act as a prostitute for a while and give him some income and he'd get her in the service. I mean he lived up to his end of the

³⁵ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 304-305.

³⁶ This is still common today. Often times when a military woman reports sexual assault to her commanding officer, he will sweep the accusation under the rug to protect his own job. [See: *Invisible War*, directed by Kirby Dick (2012; Los Angeles, California: Cinedigm Corp, 2013), DVD.]

³⁷ Holm, *Women in the Military*, 211 and 206. This belief, also quoted in "Gender and Race" (footnote 18) was part of Holm's explanation for the reticence the military displayed toward deploying women. However, it can be further understood as a part of the justification commanding officers used for not reporting sexual harassment or assault, as they would rather transfer or discharge a woman than lose a man.

deal, but so did she.”³⁸ While Morgan did not say whether or not this acquaintance had been raped by her recruiter, this was certainly a case of sexual abuse and abuse of authority. The recruiter leveraged his position of power to coerce a young woman into a dangerous job. She had the “choice” to work as a prostitute for a short time and get the chance to achieve her military dreams, or give up on the military all together. That is not an actual choice.

Later in her military career, Morgan was sexually/physically assaulted by a German soldier at an enlisted men’s club. She fought back and was tackled by a Marine who worked as a bouncer. Instead of sending her assailant to jail, the military brought Morgan up in front of her Captain for fighting back. Although the incident took place in a full view of multiple enlisted men, no one took her side and she was reprimanded for simply defending herself.³⁹ Her experience further proves the futility of reporting sexual assault, as well as the ambivalent attitude many military men, and the military institution, had about rape and sexual assault. Despite having witnesses, Morgan’s allegation went no further than her commanding officer who stonewalled her, as was common when military women reported harassment or assault.

Not all commanding officers, however, were more worried about their reputation and those of their officers than the enlisted women. A Captain who had a reputation as a fixer eventually replaced Morgan’s original commanding officer. He was specifically sent to crack down on sexual harassment and assault. “We went from a lot of women being sexually harassed.... Openly sexually harassed... by their supervisors and the base

³⁸ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 466.

³⁹ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 485-486. Morgan spoke earlier of her experiences with sexual harassment while working at the club. She went on to describe her assault as both “physical” and “sexual.” Even though she was not raped, her assault and experience with her commanding officer is just as important to acknowledge as the story of a rape victim.

Captain, to just... it was like night and day,” Morgan recalled. He refused to tolerate harassment and developed a maintenance security team to prevent assault.⁴⁰ However, Morgan’s captain was the exception, not the rule. Military women who reported their harassment or assault found that most commanding officers ignored these issues. As reports rarely reached top brass, they were often unrecorded and sexual harassment and assault was left out of the historical record.

The two veterans who described their experiences with sexual assault to P. Lough O’Daly were in the United States or U.S. territories at the time of their respective attacks: Terry was raped shortly after her enlistment during training at the Naval Hospital Corps School in Illinois and Morgan was attacked at least ten years later while stationed at the U.S. Naval Base in Guam.⁴¹ Vuic’s book, on the other hand, makes mention of three women who were sexually assaulted while deployed to Vietnam, two of whom were raped, highlighting the story of a nurse lieutenant stationed at the 93rd Evacuation Hospital who was raped by a captain. The lieutenant reported her attack to the hospital chief nurse, but did not want to file a formal report because she believed nothing would come of the allegations and she didn’t want it publicized. After several conversations with the lieutenant about the incident, the hospital chief nurse reported the assault to the hospital commander. At the first meeting, the commander told the victim that a psychiatrist believed that the nurse, as a homosexual, had made up the story to figuratively castrate men and went on to say that the nurse was just upset that she had not

⁴⁰ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 487-488.

⁴¹ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” *Sophia Smith Collection*. Smith Library. 304, 485. While both women were Navy, I do not believe that it can be inferred that the Navy had any more problems with sexual assault than any other branch. Terry enlisted in 1963 and medically discharged without ever being deployed (year of discharge is unknown). She did not say whether her medical discharge was a result of injuries sustained during her assault. Morgan enlisted in 1973, filling a quota after the draft ended, and was attacked at some point during her four year enlistment. While the year is unclear, it can be assumed that the attack occurred early in her tour, before the “fixer” Captain took command.

been paid for her services. Both statements were blatant lies. The hospital commander then called a second meeting, where he invited the alleged perpetrator in order to clear the air and resolve the issue, as if rape can just be talked out.⁴²

Army officials later called the commander's lies "of questionable taste" and abrupt, but also claimed that the victim did not protest enough during the assault and did not end up ruling on whether or not the assault had occurred.⁴³ The report's summary went on to say that the lieutenant's refusal to bring charges against her assailant and "her subsequent actions leave 1LT____'s veracity and integrity open to question."⁴⁴ Despite the testimonies of multiple nurses who stated that the captain had previously entered their quarters uninvited and made inappropriate sexual advances, investigators found the accused perpetrator was a "normal" man who "would not resort to forcing himself sexually on this women."⁴⁵

The Army's response in this case serves as an example of why so few women reported sexual assault. The report's discussion of the lieutenant's integrity, and other character based opinions, was a reflection of the trend of blaming the victim for the attack. The investigators' insinuations that the lieutenant's response was inappropriate and the questioning of her allegations veracity were part of an attitude toward doubting reports of sexual assault and dismissing allegations. On the other hand, the captain was considered to be a "normal" man whose repeated sexual harassment was understood as

⁴² Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 144-145.

⁴³ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 145.

⁴⁴ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 146. The names of the accuser and the accused were redacted from the report. (The full file and investigation records are in *Report of Investigation Concerning Alleged Rape and Other Matters in the 93rd Evacuation Hospital*).

⁴⁵ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 146.

natural behavior. With this kind of outcome, it is no wonder that military women were reticent to report sexual harassment or assault.⁴⁶

Furthermore, it is important to note that sexual assault is about power, not sexual desire. Therefore, the captain's "natural" sexual behaviors and attractiveness should have played no part in the investigation or his defense. As there is no direct link between sexual arousal and assault, it can be understood that rape helped to reinforce the patriarchy and gender-based hierarchy within the military, as sexual assault is almost always accompanied by misogyny. The lack of discussion related to the issue, along with sexual orientation and sexual relationships, served to protect military men from negative perceptions and the court of law and furthered the feminine and ladylike image of military women as the lack of reporting kept their reputations safe from accusations of promiscuity.⁴⁷

It is imperative to address the sexuality and sexual experiences of military women, both the good and the bad. As it has been written out of military history, and much of women's history, scholars must look to interviews and memoirs to reinsert sex and sexuality into the story that is told about the Vietnam War. Unlike issues of gender, issues surround sex, sexuality, and sexual assault did not change much over the course of the war, during the draft and after the creation of the all-volunteer military force. In fact,

⁴⁶ However, while the military's response to sexual assault certainly suggests a sexist climate that was hostile toward victims, the civilian world was not much different. The women's movement of the 1960s and 70s pushed toward new laws and investigations of sexual harassment and assault. During the beginning of the Vietnam War, few laws about assault existed, allowing reports to get easily swept under the rug. As the war progressed, so did legislation regarding sex crimes, but these regulations rarely made a difference in the military, as is evidenced by Morgan's assault sometime after 1973.

⁴⁷ Much of common perceptions regarding sexual assault were similar to the lies told by the hospital commander discussed in Vuic: allegations of rape were (and still are) frequently viewed to be the result of a woman changing her mind about sex. Furthermore, it is commonly claimed that a victim of assault was "asking for it" or "deserved it" because of her clothing or behavior. Therefore, when a woman reported sexual assault, she was frequently thought to be a promiscuous woman who didn't want to get a bad reputation.

many of the problems that existed during the war took years to resolve and some still have yet to truly been addressed.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Sexual relationships still exist in today's military, despite the enforcement of fraternization laws. In terms of sexual orientation, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy was implemented in 1994, which outlawed discrimination against and harassment of closeted lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) servicemembers while barring openly LGB men and women from serving and ordered the discharge of any LGB military personnel who revealed his or her sexual orientation. Before the policy, the sexual orientation of many openly LGB military men and women was simply ignored, although it was grounds for discharge. After DADT was implemented, this was not possible. The policy was finally repealed in 2011. The problems involving sexual harassment and assault, however, have yet to be resolved. In fact, it is believed that more military women were assaulted during the Iraq War than ever before and rape is still incredibly underreported and unprosecuted. [For more information, see *Invisible War*, directed by Kirby Dick (2012; Los Angeles, California: Cinedigm Corp, 2013), DVD.]

The Changing Military and the Beginning of the All-Volunteer Force

As the war began to draw to a close, there were some huge steps made by the military for women, especially as it began its transition to an all-volunteer force. This chapter explores the changes in the military towards servicewomen during the end of the Vietnam War and into the formation of the all-volunteer force, using the work of Beth Bailey, Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee and the P. Lough O'Daly papers to that the military made progress towards gender equality from the late sixties into the seventies, partially due to the need to make quotas left unfulfilled after the draft ended. This fight for equality, however, was not without criticism, and ended in a backlash against military women that contributed to their erasure from the history of the Vietnam War.

The first of steps toward transforming the military began long before the Selective Service Act, referred to colloquially as the draft, expired in 1973.¹ In fact, efforts began before the Vietnam War to transform the roles and views of women in the military, starting perhaps with the creation of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) in 1960, which played key roles in all issues involving women in the military over the next few decades. The committee had its first success in 1967 when Public Law 91-30 removed restrictions on the number and ranks of military women.²

¹ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 310.

² Bailey. *American's Army*, 140-141. The removal of restrictions on the number of women in the military was partially due to the increased need for nurses (similar to the removal of restrictions related to marriage or children discussed earlier), but the removal of restrictions on rank was the result of the lobbying of DACOWITS and other groups. The possibilities of promotion to the highest level was an attempt convince women that the military was open to gender equality, and therefore was a successful tool in convincing women to enlist or accept commissions by opening up the dream of serving at (what the military considers) the highest level. However, without Public Law 91-30, women would not have had the same opportunities. While it did take a few years after the law was passed for women to reach flag rank (who must be nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate, also known as "flag officers," in reference to

In 1969, the Office of Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and the Directorate of Personnel Studies and Research for the United States Department of the Army published *The Army 75 Personnel Concept Study* which argued that the long held belief that women were the inferior sex was false and, as women would make up just over half of the American population by 1975, they were an “essential... part of our manpower resources.”³ Despite underlying its argument with gendered ideas about the positive implications of a woman’s touch, and the way feminine “charms and virtues” could benefit the Army, the study argued that women were capable of doing some jobs “even better than men” and made a progressive, and controversial, argument “championing women’s expanded roles in the army of the future.”⁴ However, the study was published at the same time as General William Westmoreland’s PROVIDE (Project Volunteer In Defense of the Nation) task force to study the transformation to an all-volunteer force, which argued that women’s “true value to the service is not that they are capable of replacing men” as *Army 75* argued, as this was “an unfeminine connotation.” Instead, the task force argued, “the feminine touch is required to do the job better,” a reference specifically toward gender-specific military jobs, such as nursing.⁵ Unfortunately, the report compiled by PROVIDE was the one that influenced military plans, not *Army 75*, either because of the shared assumptions of the top brass and the Department of Defense, or because of any actual/direct influence.

In 1970, three years after the passing of Public Law 91-30, Colonel Anna Mae Hays (Army Nurse Corps) and Colonel Elizabeth P. Hoisington (Women’s Army Corps)

officers permitted to fly their own command flags), one can assume that the longer it took for the law to pass, the longer it would be before women were promoted to brigadier general or rear admiral.

³ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 141.

⁴ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 142.

⁵ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 142.

were promoted to the rank of brigadier general. They were the first women service members to attain flag rank.⁶ The following year, Colonel Jean Holm (Director of the Women's Air Force) was promoted to brigadier general and in 1972 Captain Alene Duerck (Chief of Navy Nurse Corps) made rear admiral.⁷ In 1973, Brigadier General Holm was promoted to major general, becoming the first military woman in any branch of service to earn a second star.⁸ Before the end of the war, at least one white woman in each of the armed services had attained flag rank, although black women military women still had a ways to go, as Lieutenant Colonel Margaret Bailey was the first black female to be promoted to colonel in 1970.⁹ It wasn't until 1979 with the promotion of Colonel Hazel W. Johnson, Director of the Nursing Corps, to brigadier general that a black woman achieved flag rank, despite the fact that by 1978, over a quarter of Army women were African American.¹⁰ Such unofficial restrictions on the rank of black military women meant that many of the strides being made in the military toward equality were about white women being equal to white men, at least in term of promotions.

However, through the 1970s, legislation on behalf of military women was passed in rapid succession. In 1971, the Joint Armed Forces Staff College opened its doors to women and the Air Force, Navy, and Army ROTC (Reserved Officers Training Corps) also admitted women for the first time, while the Navy also opened the chaplain corps, civil engineering, and Naval War College to servicewomen.¹¹ That same year, due to

⁶ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 294.

⁷ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College.

⁸ See: Holm, *Women in the Military*.

⁹ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 294.

¹⁰ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 332 and Bailey, *America's Army*, 135. General Johnson was also the first Army Nurse Corps Chief to earn a doctorate, making her a pioneer in more than one way.

¹¹ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 310. The Joint Armed Forces Staff College, part of the National Defense University, is an interagency and multinational program for men and women in

concerns about discrimination, General Westmoreland began an affirmative action program and created the Army Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO). While both programs focused on race discrimination among servicemen, they also handled complaints in reference to sex discrimination.¹² By 1972, all but directly combat related MOS were opened to women by General Mildred C. Bailey (WAC Director).¹³ When the Selective Service Act finally expired in 1973, the Coast Guard opened regular active duty positions to women, the Navy opened aviation jobs on noncombat aircraft, and recruiting quotas for women were increased based on need.¹⁴

Despite these advancements, the military itself remained rather conservative. After General Bailey opened more jobs for women, the Army designated individual slots by gender: M, F, or I (interchangeable).¹⁵ In fact, some slots were designated “M” specifically to allow for the promoting of men. Furthermore, commanders had last say in the assigned designation and the filling of those positions.¹⁶ However, because of the pressures of Congress, the Supreme Court, and other civilian sources, the military’s evolution continued. For instance, in 1973, the Supreme Court ended the military’s policy on dependent benefits, ruling that the practice of awarding men benefits for their wives and children, but requiring women to prove that they were solely financially responsible

national security that focuses on the operational aspects of joint forces. ROTC is a college-based program that trains future officers for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In addition to their regular coursework, ROTC members receive basic military and officer training during the school year and over the summer. Many attend college on a part or full scholarship in exchange for military service after they graduate. The Naval War College allows students from all branches of military, as well as civilian military and government employees, to work toward a Masters of Arts.

¹² Bailey, *America’s Army*, 154.

¹³ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 155.

¹⁴ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 310.

¹⁵ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 155.

¹⁶ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 156.

for their families, was unconstitutional.¹⁷ Even Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird (1969-1973) and Secretary of the Army Robert Froehlke (1971-1973) supported legislation regarding equality within the military and the full integration of women into the Army, although it was years before that came to pass.¹⁸

A significant number of slots became available to women across the Armed Forces as the Vietnam War drew to a close and the military began to prepare for a post-war all-volunteer force. Recruiters were instructed to enlist women for nontraditional MOS and the number of spaces available to women in traditional fields was cut to enforce this change. Between 1972 and 1978, the percentage of women in nontraditional MOS rose from 1.8% to 22.4% and defensive weapons added to women's training.¹⁹ In 1976, Public Law 84-106 opened all federal military academies to women and in 1978, after a three year struggle, the approximately 52,900 women of the Women's Army Corps were integrated into the regular army.²⁰

Secretary of the Army Clifford Alexander worked with Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin to introduce the legislation to dissolve the WACs. In his introduction to the proposed legislation, Sen. Proxmire said "the Women's Army Corps is the last vestige of a segregated Military Establishment," echoing earlier statements claiming that the very existence of the WAC was a "cover to provide the opportunity for continued discrimination."²¹ In their book on the history of America's military women, Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee claimed that the women of the newly integrated Army became a part of pilot programs and studies, where they were once again required

¹⁷ Bailey, *America's Army*, 158-159.

¹⁸ Bailey, *America's Army*, 157.

¹⁹ Bailey, *America's Army*, 160.

²⁰ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 309-310.

²¹ Bailey, *America's Army*, 158; Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 309-310.

to prove their worth to the military.²² However, some military women disagreed with this characterization of their post-WAC role: “Finally I was being recognized for doing that job as an equal, not as a WAC,” recalled Mary. Before the integration, “it was always like you were below them.”²³

Some scholars, civilians, and military women argued that the feminist movement of the time had some impact on the progress of women’s status in the military. While P. Lough O’Daly, who served in the Air Force before, through, and after integration (1974-1980), understood that women were partially recruited because the all-volunteer military was unable meet recruitment needs with men, she also claimed that despite the feminist movement’s anti-military stance “women’s rights activists in groups such as NOW [National Organization of Women] and WEAL [Women’s Equity Action League] took equal opportunity to the Armed Forces and applied pressure to open up traditionally male jobs to women.”²⁴ In fact, NOW’s Committee for Women in the Military’s motto was “On land, on sea, and in the air- a woman’s place is everywhere,” a rallying cry that WEAL also threw its weight behind when pushing to end the combat barrier.²⁵ Additionally, both O’Daly and Beth Bailey, author of *America’s Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force*, credit the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) with forcing the nation to acknowledge the roles of military women. Despite the controversy that surrounded the bill in the later years, the ERA opened doors to military women and signaled a progressive outlook in the early 1970s.²⁶

²² Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 310.

²³ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College. 433.

²⁴ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College. 63-64.

²⁵ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 163.

²⁶ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College. 291 and Bailey, *America’s Army*, 131-134.

The feminist movement as a whole, however, did not have a cohesive position on the status of military women, nor did all military women agree about the feminist movement, even when it came to what exactly was meant by equal opportunities in the military or the ERA's military implications.²⁷ For one, many military women, like their civilian counterparts, were hesitant to call themselves feminists as they did not want to be labeled as "man-haters" or masculine women. Other women, such as Terry, felt alienated by the movement's anti-military leanings because of their status as veterans.²⁸ However, some military women reconciled themselves with the movement either during or after the war. Chris stated that during the beginning of her service, "I found myself angry at women's lib for putting all these pressures on me." She did not want to be the poster girl for the feminist movement or the military and believed that the movement sometimes made it worse for military women, as it gave male soldiers one more thing to harass military women about. However, Chris went on to say "I finally realized that the women on the outside who were doing what they were doing weren't doing it to affect me. They were just trying to right the system."²⁹ Using Chris' words to look at the motivations of the feminist movement, that they were "trying to right the system," allows a broader understanding of the roles of both NOW and WEAL in the fight on behalf of military women as a part of the larger war on behalf of all women.

However, despite the positive impact the ERA had on the status of military women, some would argue that it was also the beginning of the end of their progress. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter proposed that with the reinstitution of selective service

²⁷ This statement is made apparent by comparing and contrasting oral histories that touch on the women's movement, but it laid out best in Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 155.

²⁸ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers" *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College. 326.

²⁹ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers" *Sophia Smith Collection*, Smith College. 451.

registration the ERA would make it impossible for the draft to only apply to men; women would also need to be registered for non-combat service, as “there is no distinction possible,” specifically “on the basis of ability or performance, that would allow me to exclude women from an obligation to register.”³⁰ President Carter knew there was no hope that the proposal would make it to the floor, as conservatives such as Phyllis Schlafly had been fighting against the ERA for years.³¹ The draft gave opponents of the amendment their strongest weapon as they painted vivid images of wives, mothers, and daughters “drafted and dehumanized, sent into combat, brutalized, maimed, raped, and killed.”³² Conservatives played on this fear of motherless children and broken families, as the conversation turned to debates about women’s proper roles in society and sexist arguments about women’s inferiority and inability to lead.

Throughout the 1970s, much debate about the roles of military women was surrounded by misogynistic rhetoric. During the House debate regarding allowing women into national military academies, Representative Larry McDonald from Georgia, relying on the argument that these academies trained officers for combat, asked if his colleagues could “seriously imagine an officer giving a lecture or leading a tank column but requiring a pause to breast-feed her infant?”³³ While the measure was passed, the sexist comments had just begun. Even recently retired General Westmoreland said “maybe you could find one woman in 10,000 who could lead in combat,” when interviewed the

³⁰ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 131.

³¹ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 132. Phyllis Schlafly is a constitutional lawyer, best known as a far-right conservative activist and anti-feminist who campaigned against the ERA from 1972 until it was narrowly defeated in 1982. She has also spoken out against abortion, same-sex marriage, globalization, and immigration reform while embracing what she refers to as “traditional values.” Schlafly infamously said that marriage means that a wife must submit to sex whenever her husband demands it, and therefore marital rape cannot exist.

³² Bailey, *America’s Army*, 134.

³³ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 159.

Washington Post, “but she would be a freak and we’re not running the military academy for freaks.”³⁴

The conservative backlash against women in the military reached its full potential after the integration of the WAC into the regular Army. It was especially evident in November 1979 at hearings on military women’s equality, where supporters used fact, law and logic and called for rational investigations, while opponents used personal experiences, “God’s will” and the threat that women’s military service would mean the “destruction of the God-given American way of life.”³⁵ These opponents included James H. Webb, a 1968 Annapolis graduate and Marine Corps combat veteran of Vietnam, who argued vehemently against women in military academies and the Armed Forces in a 1979 article in the *Washingtonian* entitled “Jim Webb: Women Can’t Fight.”³⁶ Webb argued that:

The mission of the U.S. Armed Forces to fight was being corrupted by women in the military and that the corruption resulted in grave consequences to the national defense [and military academies] prepare men for leadership positions where they may someday exercise that command which perpetuates violence on command [creating] combat leaders who can carry this country on their backs. [...] No benefit can come from women serving in combat.³⁷

Webb went on to claim that not only do “men fight better than women,” but men also “fight better without women present,” despite lack of factual support.³⁸ These

³⁴ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 135.

³⁵ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 167-168.

³⁶ Jim Webb worked on the staff of the House Committee on Veteran’s Affairs (1977-1981) while representing veterans pro-bono and teaching at the Naval Academy before becoming the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs (1984-1987). He was then appointed Secretary of the Navy (1987-1988) under former President Ronald Reagan and became a Democratic senator from Virginia during part of former President George W. Bush second term and President Barack Obama’s presidency (2006-2013).

³⁷ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 317.

³⁸ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 321. Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee attempted to contact then-Senator Webb about his past and current stance on women in the military, how it has changed (or not) and why, but were not granted an interview or submit a written statement addressing these issues (318). Webb is also quoted in Bailey, *America’s Army*, 165-166.

statements echoed previous claims laced with sexism and cloaked in terms of “inherent differences,” “God’s will,” and the “American way of life.”

Despite their best efforts, opponents of women’s military equality could not stop the wheels that had been put in motion. In 1980, 229 women became the first to graduate from national military academies and receive commissions by the service: 14 women from the Coast Guard Academy, 55 from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, 62 from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and 98 from the Air Force Academy. They made up eight percent of graduates, same as male to female proportion in the military, and had a slightly higher attrition rate than male classmates.³⁹ Unfortunately, they would enter a military that was increasingly hostile toward women in an era that did not value women’s military service.

For the remainder of President Carter’s time in office, plans to increase the number of women in the military continued with the eventual goal of about 250,000 women by 1985 (a jump from eight to twelve percent) and the more immediate goal of an increase from 65,000 to 100,000 in the early 1980s. These goals were not realized. Instead, when President Ronald Reagan took office on January 20, 1981, the pro-woman era officially ended, and with it, the support for military women’s equality. Soon the military, with the assumed backing of the new conservative Commander-in-Chief, began a “womanpause” and stopped the recruitment of women.⁴⁰

While military women eventually gained relative equality to their male comrades, the backlash had a lasting impact on the women who served and was part of the reason

³⁹ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women*, 316.

⁴⁰ Bailey, *America’s Army*, 170-171. While Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* does not specifically mention servicewomen, the backlash against military women’s equality can be read as a part of the larger reaction Faludi described, as the advances were not only part of a liberal equality based agenda, but also a feminist one.

women were written out of the history of the Vietnam War. If they were not “soldiers,” if they were instead non-combat support, they did not need to be a part of the story.

However, the changes had begun. Eventually women were considered equal soldiers, with the recently removal of the ban on women in combat, over three decades after the end of the Vietnam War and the inception of the all-volunteer military.

Memory vs. Reality: What Really Happened?

As time passes, the memory of any event change as people forget details or create new ones to embellish their stories. Other times, the memory of an event is changed depending on who is speaking. The collective memory, however, is formed and adapted by choosing which stories to remember and pass on and frequently ends up being a rewriting of events. The stories that have been about military women during the Vietnam War are about the graceful, nurturing, feminine nurse. She is remembered as an example of the good that can exist even in the middle of a war. Sometimes she is changed by that war, and sometimes she remains exactly the same. However, these stories are idealistic, uncomplicated, rarely true, and certainly not representative of all Vietnam-era military women.

Kulik, a former medic who served during the Vietnam War, argued that there were certain expectations of Vietnam veterans when they returned, certain lies they were expected to tell; not only to protect the military and themselves, but also because these lies had been propagated by other veterans. He claimed that the most common of these lies among female veterans, and indeed forming the view of female servicewomen by the rest of the country, had to do with the “noble and innocent nurse betrayed by her country and its leaders, traumatized by her experience, saved by therapy.”¹ Kulik argued that this interpretation was due specifically first set of military women’s oral histories emerging during and after the Vietnam War and was challenged by literature to come, women who were proud of their service and would have repeated it. However, the stereotype would live on.

¹ Gary Kulik, *“War Stories” False Atrocity Tales, Swift Boaters, and Winter Soldiers- What Really Happened in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009), 73.

Kulik may be correct in his claim that the first generation of memoirs and oral histories built off the theme of “innocence lost and betrayed” explored in *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain, adding only therapy as a savior.² However, his argument can be both evidenced and complicated by using more of the oral histories he so often dismissed, especially as most of Kulik’s argument focused on nurses. This chapter seeks to analyze Kulik’s work by using the words of Vietnam-era military women in order to find out the facts that were left out of the story of the “noble and innocent nurse” and challenging this narrative, partially by restoring the pride with which many women spoke of their service, as it has so often been forgotten.

As P. Lough O’Daly wrote, the feeling of betrayal was common: “The pain, the confusion, the anger and the disillusionment are the legacy of military service for women of the Vietnam generation.”³ However, the idea of therapy as a savior was not. Other military others complicate the ideas of the noble nurse, as it refers sympathy and humanity. Also, it is important to note that the characterization of military women as “noble and innocent” played into their inherent femininity. The women had sacrificed their safety and security to save the lives of men. The propagation of such claims emphasized the feminization of the innocent, portraying women as the victims of the “country and its leaders.”

Jeanne Rivera said: “you’re in the Army because eventually there is going to be a war. Let’s face it, that’s what you are there for. It’s not to have it easy. It’s to be where you’re needed the most in a time of conflict.”⁴ Rivera is an example of the “noble,

² Kulik, “*War Stories*,” 53.

³ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 521.

⁴ Freedman and Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 67.

innocent nurse betrayed by her country and its leaders.”⁵ She was the perfect nurse, feminine and loving, playing the role of the mother/lover who believed in her country and the war effort. However, after she returned stateside and left the military, Rivera had lost her faith. “Our people were lying to us and lying to everybody [...and] all those people had died, and died for nothing” she stated. “I question everything now.”⁶ Other women told very similar stories: “largely I went to nursing school so I could go to Vietnam,” Judy Hartline Elbring recalled. “I needed the job that would get me into the war [...] It was a chance to contribute, it was very patriotic, it was an American thing to do, and it was something I could do now. I couldn’t do it as a soldier but I could do it as a nurse.”⁷ However, after her return she reflected on her experience, remembering both the good and the bad, recalling a sense of betrayal: “I always thought we were the good guys. We weren’t always the good guys.”⁸

The accounts told by both Elbring and Rivera both complicate and evidence Kulik’s interpretation, as they both understood themselves as the “noble, innocent nurse betrayed by her country and its leaders,”⁹ but did not speak of being traumatized by war or saved by therapy. Instead, they express the same sentiment of doubt that plagued the entire country. No one could understand how the government could even lie to people who were risking their own lives and nurses had come face to face with their own naiveté, frequently finding that they had placed their trust in a government that did not deserve it. Despite the betrayal, they were unceasingly proud of their service.

⁵ Kulik, “*War Stories*,” 73.

⁶ Freedman and Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 68.

⁷ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 140.

⁸ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 152.

⁹ Kulik, “*War Stories*,” 73.

While the majority of servicewomen deployed during the Vietnam War were nurses, there were also WACs, Women Marines, and other non-medical military women in country. Oral histories and memoirs that perpetuated the myth of the noble, feminine nurse erased the contributions and heroism of other women. While many servicewomen chose or allowed themselves to be portrayed as innocent and feminine, others rejected the stereotype, focusing instead on their own pride and courage. For the most part, their stories were left unrecorded until after the war had ended. While the military may have defined them by their gender, they refused to let it define them. They may have not verbally rejected gendered stereotypes and roles of military women, but their service speaks for them.

Lt. Colonel Judith Bennett, a WAC who packed a .38 caliber pistol,¹⁰ served as senior advisor to the Vietnamese Women's Armed Forces Services for nine months during the war. "On one flight into Quang Ngai Province in a Caribou transport loaded with ammunition, her plane was riddled by Viet Cong ground fire. We were hit five times, says Judith coolly, 'but those Caribou can take it.' Then after a long puff on her cigarette, she adds, 'I think I have the best job in the corps.'"¹¹ In her papers, P. Lough O'Daly recalls a conversation she once had with a WAC who served as an intelligence officer for three years at Long Binh. "She wore a chain with three spent bullet casings on

¹⁰ Very, very few women in the Vietnam War carried weapons of any kind. Officially speaking, neither did medics. However, some such as Lt. Col. Bennett chose to carry, as did Chief Warrant Officer Doris "Lucky" Allen (Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 249). This information was confirmed by a discussion with Sergeant Harvey Jules Lifton, U.S. Army Retired. [Sgt. Lifton was a medic during the Vietnam War. He enlisted in 1962 and worked stateside while on active duty. His reserve unit was briefly activated in 1967 (he estimates they were deployed for only a few weeks). On his arrival in country, one of the medics boarding his "Freedom Bird" (plane home) handed him a pistol, claiming that the rules of civilized warfare did not apply "here." Interestingly, Sgt. Lifton's unit's location has been kept confidential, even to the unit. He believes they were in Cambodia or Laos, as the military did not officially enter either of these countries until 1969].

¹¹ "P. Lough O'Daly" Papers. Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 106-107.

it and matching earrings with a single bullet each,” wrote O’Daly. Each spent casing was from a failed assassination attempt.¹² Chief Warrant Officer Allen also spoke of intelligence reports naming her as a suspected target for assassination during her third tour.¹³ Both women were recalled from duty to save their lives but neither regretted having risked their lives for their country and their fellow soldiers. These women were certainly noble, but they weren’t naïve, nor did they portray themselves as innocent or victimized. They were exceedingly proud of having done their jobs well. While they may not have epitomized the ideal nurse, defined by her femininity, they certainly can be understood as an ideal soldier, willing to lay down her life to protect her comrades.

Kulik takes women’s oral histories on the Vietnam War to task for allowing false stories about women’s service to become a part of the collective memory of the war. He specifically discusses the common depiction of military nurses remaining with the dying soldier, holding his hand, and comforting him in the last moments of his death. While Kulik does admit that there were likely a small number of nurses, chaplains, and medics who occasionally remained with an “expectant” patient (the name given to those who would not survive), the “invocation of that deeply false and sentimental image [...] was a lie, and gave false comfort to those who desperately wanted to believe that their sons, their husbands, their fathers did not die alone.”¹⁴

This claim has been regurgitated throughout the years by former military nurses and has become so much a part of the collective memory that it has been featured in television shows such as “M*A*S*H” and “China Beach” and understood to be fact.

¹² “P. Lough O’Daly” Papers. Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 106.

¹³ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 258.

¹⁴ Kulik, “*War Stories*,” 250.

Recently, this was disputed by veterans, in particular by former medics.¹⁵ However, few women have specifically addressed the validity of this depiction. Lynn compared her work in a civilian hospital to her military service: “but it was like Nam [...] they’d put people aside and let them die” she remembered.¹⁶ She did not elaborate on “expectant” patients, rather she moved on to her experiences with PTSD. Sue Rowe mentioned these patients, as they had always stayed with her. They were the hardest to forget, she noted, as there was nothing anyone could do but wait for them to die. However, she did not claim to stay with these young men until they passed.¹⁷ These stories have persisted anyway. Part of it, as Kulik suggests, was to comfort the family that had been left behind and it certainly was reminiscent of the loving and devoted nurse who acted as every soldier’s wife and/or mother. But perhaps this white lie also helped the nurses. If they could remember the face of one man who they stayed with until the very last minute, it may have given them some comfort about all the men who died alone and made remembering the worst part of the war, the death and dying, a little easier.

Both the idea of the “innocent and noble nurse” and the nurse who had comforted men as they died, insert military women into the story as to the voice of humanity in an otherwise senseless war, contradictory to the men who perpetrated atrocities that had recently come to light.¹⁸ By no means were all servicemen and women without

¹⁵ For stereotype see: Steinman. *Women in Vietnam*; Freedman and Rhoades. *Nurses in Vietnam*; Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*. For medic accounts: Kulik, “*War Stories*.” Interview with Sergeant Harvey Jules Lifton, U.S. Army Retired

¹⁶ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 229.

¹⁷ “Dedication of the Memorial” Vietnam Women’s Memorial Foundation, accessed March 2014, <http://www.vietnamwomensmemorial.org/dedicat.php>

¹⁸ There are many theories concerning war atrocities. In his book, Kulik claims massacres such as My Lai were few and far between despite the fact that these stories of had become a part of the dominant narrative near the end of the war and post-war. On the other had, in *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*, Nick Turse claims that crimes committed against Vietnamese civilians were common and

compassion, although many civilians viewed military men as violent “baby-killers.” While military women were not immune to this abuse, the stereotypes were not as prevalent nor as long-lasting. Furthermore, stories of military nurses going out of their way to comfort the injured and the dying highlighted the tenderness and empathy with which nurses treated their patients, positioning nurses opposite to the military men who were capable of horror. However, military women were not necessarily immune from the situational hatred that led to war crimes.

Some nurses, such as Laura Radnor, portrayed themselves as the selfless figure, willing to help any and all wounded men, including POWs: “they were people just like us and I felt no hatred, nothing, toward them. They were just doing what they were told to do. And it made me feel sorry for them. They had a belief in their country. They were fighting for their country, just like we were there working for our country too.”¹⁹ Radnor claimed to have recognized the humanity of every soldier, viewing some honor in sacrifice and commitment. This portrayal situated Radnor outside of the systemic rage and hatred toward the enemy. Lilly Jean Adams claimed to remember the reaction of the GIs to the harsh treatment a POW had received at the hands of a doctor: “instead of seeing him as the enemy, they now saw him as a fellow soldier with the same injury, and they had compassion.”²⁰ Whether or not this story is true, it functioned as testimony to civilians that not all servicemen had lost their humanity.

Other nurses, such as Lily, felt sympathetic to the Vietnamese: “because I was Asian looking, I didn’t seem like an oppressive person to them. I realized later that the

systematic. Either way, it is important to discuss how these stories created a divide between the military women and their male comrades.

¹⁹ Freedman and Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 132.

²⁰ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 57.

way they were treated by our G.I.'s, men and women, they had every right to feel oppressed."²¹ However, she did not speak specifically about the POWs, but rather the Vietnamese citizens who worked on base and in the hospital and showed no indication of the same compassion toward POWs or the Viet Cong. Lily's statement, however, evidenced the racism that was prevalent during the war, toward both America's allies and enemies. This racism was partially due to the realities of fighting a jungle war, where one could not always see the enemy, and a war where the enemy could not be differentiated from his neighbor. Furthermore, it was a reflection of the anti-Asian sentiment in the United States. In many ways, racism both caused situational hatred and was created by it.

Military women were a part of the situation, and thus, were likely to absorb the hatred and act out in rage. Diana Dwane Poole admitted that she could not always remain calm when dealing with the POWs: "I just couldn't believe that I had to take care of this guy and the kid next to him, whose legs he blew off [...] I got on the bed and I tried to kill him [...] I had my hands around his throat."²² They weren't just bystanders, they were a part of the atmosphere of hatred and disgust. Even some lifers who had served during the Korean War were affected by the war they experienced. "I had been taught in nursing school to save everybody regardless of race, creed, color, ethnic background, whatever. Life is life. But suddenly I wasn't thinking that anymore. I was thinking, 'I'm American and they're the enemy. Kill the enemy and save the American,'" recalled

²¹ "P. Lough O'Daly" Papers. Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 197.

²² Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 39.

Jacqueline Navarra Rhoads when she spoke of treating Vietnamese POWs, a sentiment she did not express about her Korean War experience.²³

P. Lough O'Daly wrote about the about the futility and experience of war and the effect it had on military women. Understanding war “meant realizing that there were no ‘good’ guys and ‘bad’ guys; in every boy/man ‘true violence resided.’ For some, in moments of frustration and rage, they realized it resided in them, too.”²⁴ There has been no evidence that military women participated in wartime atrocities, but not because they necessarily incapable. Military women were caught up in rage against the perceived enemy, whether they be military or civilian. The language and atmosphere of hate and disgust can be a precursor to violence, whether that be choking one man, or burning down an entire village.

Kulik is correct in insinuating that thus is not the war people want to remember. Instead, the noble nurse was immortalized in bronze, in the figures of three women known as “Hope,” “Faith,” and “Charity.” The story of the nurse who stayed with her patient until he died is told over and over. The compassionate nurse who tried to save every man, enemy or comrade, was remembered. But military women were more than just gentle, loving nurses. These stories may be a small piece of one woman’s truth, but they crowd out the other stories that complicated the collective memory of women’s roles in the Vietnam War. Furthermore, they allow the experiences and stories of the military women to be forgotten.

²³ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 16.

²⁴ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 134-135.

Where Do I Go From Here?

After the returned to the United States, many women were left feeling angry and resentful. However, their resent ran deeper than the classic Vietnam-era syndrome of betrayal of the government and country. They had gone into the military to serve their country, spent years honing skills in their assigned MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) or field, and left the military to find that they were supposed to just forget what they had learned and obey orders. This betrayal of their own worth bled across military fields, but nurses such as Lily spoke about the bitterness they felt: “I had those problems when I came back from Vietnam and started working in civilian hospitals and having doctors order me about, I couldn’t put up with that because I knew that they couldn’t do this to me anymore, I knew who I was as a woman and as a nurse and I knew that I didn’t have to put up with the bullshit, and I didn’t.”¹

Much like their male comrades, military women returning from Vietnam were had to reacclimate to life in the United States, into a world that had changed and a place where they were safe from bullets and explosions. However, military nurses also had to readjust to the role of a nurse stateside. When they returned to work as a civilian nurses, women who had been in the military became nothing more than glorified orderlies, expected to blindly follow doctor’s orders. The responsibilities and authority they had during their time in the military was dismissed as a fluke by civilian hospitals, and they had to start from scratch. Jacqueline Navarra Rhoads put it simply: “how do you prevent

¹ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 222.

yourself from doing things that came automatically to you for 18 months? How do you stop the wheels, and become the kind of nurse you were before you left?”²

Loreen understood the differences between nursing in theater and stateside very simply: “there was probably more (gender) equality in the military than outside.”³ In Vietnam, nurses had been trained as physician’s assistants, helped during surgery, and were sometimes expected to be wholly responsible for a number of patients at a time. Their work was necessary to the war effort, and it empowered them and helped them feel strong and capable. Moreover, as they were commissioned officers, their word was respected and followed by the corpsmen stationed with them. As many deployed nurses had been commissioned at the very beginning of their careers, or while still in nursing school, they did not know any other way to nurse. They had spent the first, and best, part of their careers in Vietnam.

Returning stateside, however, was a wake-up call for many military nurses. They found out exactly what it meant to be a civilian nurse. “You come out of the service or even back to the states and your I.V. teams, you have dietary teams. You don’t touch anybody. And it was, like, but I know how to do this. Why shouldn’t I be allowed to do this? But you don’t. [...] I had a capability for a responsibility that I wasn’t being given at that hospital,” stated Mary Ellen about her separation from the Army in 1971.⁴ Nurses had no authority in civilian hospitals and were expected to immediately adapt to the rules they had never had before. This abrupt change in job description left many women floundering, looking for anything to make them feel as fulfilled as they had while serving overseas, or even just in the military. Mary Ellen moved from civilian hospital to civilian

² Freedman and Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 22.

³ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 383.

⁴ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 264.

hospital for years before deciding to return to the Army. In 1981, she decided to return to the Army life, believing that her skills were used best in the military.

Jeanne Rivera said “I have lived with that all my life... situations where I had no power. Vietnam was just about the only exception.”⁵ Rivera was an operating room supervisor during her deployment, an officer with power over other nurses, corpsmen, and even doctors. By her own admission, she would never reach this level of power before or after her deployment. The military gave Rivera an opportunity that civilian women would never have, an opportunity to be in control.

This feeling of uselessness in civilian life was not exclusive to women who served overseas, nor was it exclusive to military nurses. Many Vietnam-era military women felt the same. Mary enlisted in 1974, just before the war ended, and served for two years in the Army, MOS 31b. Field Radio Repair. She was a pioneer, one of the first women to finish the class and enter an MOS that had just been opened to women and was trained at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, one of four women on a post of about 600 men. When Mary was stationed in Miseau, Germany, she was the first woman on a post with no female barracks or bathrooms and was bused in from Landstuhl.⁶

Mary only spent one year as a civilian before deciding to reenlist. Despite the fact that she was unable to re-enter her previous MOS due to restrictions on number of women and became a cook, she believed that the military would offer her more opportunities than she would find as a civilian. The Army gave Mary a chance to gain independence, financial security, maturity, education and job experience and allowed her to make the most out of her life. Mary decided to be career military, put in her 20 years,

⁵ Freedman and Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 73.

⁶ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. 408-423.

spend 20 years in civil service, and retire at 59 with two pensions, with plenty of her life ahead of her.⁷ From the kitchen, she moved up in the service, especially when “rumours circulated that females just couldn’t recruit.” Mary went on to say “naturally... I had to show them that we could!” At the time of her interview, she was the only female recruiter in western Massachusetts and incredibly successful, thus proving the naysayers wrong.⁸ In civilian life, women were simply expected to live with the assumptions and generalizations made about them because of their gender. The glass ceiling was set very low, keeping women from moving up anywhere. In the military, women could push the ceiling higher and higher, and reject the rumors and stereotypes that kept them down. If they fought for it, women like Mary had the chance to work jobs that were restricted to men, starting with an MOS that was only recently made available to women, and moving on to positions like recruiter. Mary may have been the first in western Massachusetts, but she certainly wasn’t the last. The military offered options for advancement and careers that civilian life could not provide.

Other career women spoke less of the opportunities the military afforded them during their service, but more of the possibilities their service gave them after they left the military and the dreams they believed they could achieve because of their military experiences. Captain Elizabeth Allen had earned her M.A. in psychiatric nursing before she received her commission. Unlike other nurses, her prior education gave her more choices after she left the military. She became South Carolina’s State Director of Psychiatric Nursing and yet was unfulfilled. Capt. Allen’s experience in Vietnam had not only given her a taste of her potential, but also a thirst to fulfill that potential. She went

⁷ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. 427-429.

⁸ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. 428.

on to receive a Ph.D. in elementary guidance, becoming the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. from University of South Carolina and worked as a consultant to the Veteran's Administration and an advisor to the Congressional Black Caucus on African-American Veterans.⁹ Without her military experience, Capt. Allen would have likely been limited by both her gender and race. While she does briefly discuss the ways she was limited during the beginning of her service, the civilian world was in many ways more conservative than the military. Commissioned officers were given responsibility and ranked higher than some of the men they served with. As a black woman in the civilian United States, Captain Allen would not have gained the confidence that allowed her to reach for her dreams, a confidence she achieved partially because of her role as a commissioned officer.

Capt. Allen was one of many women who found herself working for the federal government on the status of veterans. Some nurses, such as 1st Lt. Garvet, worked for veterans groups and the Veteran Administration to change the status of women as veterans and to force an acknowledgement of their service. However, many of them emphasize this work as a way to reach their potential in a way that civilian hospitals did not.¹⁰ Working to further the recognition of female veterans allowed women who were not able to adjust to life in a civilian hospital push to further their own roles in many ways. By challenging the system that wrote women out of the Vietnam War, female veterans forced changes within the Veterans Administration, regaining some of the power they lost when returning to civilian life.

⁹ Steinman, *Women Veterans*, 98-100.

¹⁰ Steinman, *Women Veterans*, 113-114.

Women in nontraditional MOS that chose to leave the military were severely limited in their choices. While their male counterparts were frequently recruited into the private sector by security firms or defense contractors, female veterans were not given the same opportunities. Their technical training did not translate into a job in the civilian world and there was little to no help for transition.¹¹ They returned from the military to find that they were expected to assimilate into civilian life without a support system. While their training gave them skills they would not have learned outside of the military, it did not prepare them to start over again.

Lieutenant Colonel Nancy Jurgevich enlisted in the Army in 1958. After two tours in Europe and stateside assignments, she was selected to go to Officer Candidate School (OCS), deploying to Vietnam as a captain in a command position. Her 26 years in the U.S. Army allowed Lt. Col. Jurgevich to go to college and graduate school and travel the world in a command position.¹² Such opportunities were not open to civilian women or most women who chose not to spend their career in the military. They would end up spending most of their postwar time in positions that would not fulfill their potential, and commissioned officers who had been given a degree of freedom and responsibility, would return to a world where they were not offered job security, fair pay, or any equality to their male counterparts.

Returning from war has never been easy for servicemen or servicewomen. Women returning from the Vietnam War experienced the same hatred as their male comrades and frequently the same disillusionments as United States civilians. Many female Vietnam-era veterans chose to stay in the military or re-enlist so that they could achieve

¹¹ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College. 520.

¹² Steinman. *Women Veterans*, 239-240.

their full potential. Others left the military and tried to make their way in a civilian world, sometimes by challenging the very ideas of what a veteran was thought to be. Some were unsuccessful and others found that their military experiences pushed them to see their full potential and achieve more than they thought was going to be possible pre-military.

However, no matter what path they chose, female veterans were forced to confront their wartime experiences and begin to heal from the war, whether in the military or in the civilian world.

Healing Process and Reconciling War: Coming Home

In November of 1982, the Vietnam War Memorial was dedicated to the people who had died in service to their country and the veterans who survived. The ceremony included a reading of the names of those who had died, including eight women. P. Lough O'Daly attended the ceremony with other female veterans. Her memories later came out disjointed: "occasionally, a woman would walk by in jungle fatigues or wearing a Vietnam campaign ribbon and be hugged by a sobbing male veteran" a woman who represented the nurse who had treated him.¹ During the ceremony, she recalled, "Dolores and I stood in the back. I studied her face for a moment as she listened with the controlled impassivity of a survivor."² O'Daly came to the Vietnam War Memorial to support the veterans, but also to hear the reading of the names. More specifically, the name of Sharon Ann Lane: "that name, the only one we knew then of the eight women who had died in Vietnam, had come to symbolize the existence and sacrifice of the women in uniform in the Vietnam War."³

O'Daly enlisted in the Air Force in 1974 and was trained as a Jet Mechanic. She served six years before being honorably discharged and began working as an activist, co-founding ATHENA: Organization for Women's Veterans in 1981, which merged with W.V.I.N. (Women Veterans Information Network) in 1982. Her activist work and experience at the Vietnam War Memorial helped open her eyes to the number of women who served during the war. According to the 1980 census, there were 1.2 million women

¹ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 7.

² "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 9.

³ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 9-10.

veterans in the United States.⁴ She wanted to explore these stories and tell the history of women in war. Between 1982 and 1984, she compiled the oral histories of ten women who served in the Vietnam War in conjunction with the Smith Scholars Project, as a way to educate the world about the service of military women and help some female veterans heal from their wartime experience.

However, every military woman had a different wartime experience. They did not all need to heal or reconcile their wartime experiences. According to oral histories, some women transitioned from the military to civilian life without needing to confront what they had seen in country. Other women took years to recover, and some would say that they never completely did. Healing and reconciliation took many different forms and paths, from psychiatric therapy and veterans groups (both female-only and mixed sex), to faith, to forgiveness of themselves and their comrades, to simple acknowledgement of the roles they had played. Each woman had a different story.

Upon their return, many veterans, both male and female, avoided speaking of their experiences, for their own sake and for their families. “People didn’t want to hear about it when I came home” Diana Dwane Poole recalled. “They didn’t even know anything about it. My mother won’t even listen.”⁵ The world had changed, and many women who had answered their nation’s call were now hated for doing so.⁶ While Gary Kulik argued that the number of veterans who experienced verbal or physical abuse because of their service, “I learned not to wear my uniform anywhere off base and to

⁴ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 12. This number of veterans includes women who served overseas, but also women who served stateside.

⁵ Freedman and Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 45.

⁶ While Gary Kulik argued that the number of veterans who experienced verbal or physical abuse because of their service, the prevalence of such tales in oral histories means they must be mentioned and analyzed. (See: Kulik, “*War Stories*,” 79-97.)

have clothes over it when driving to and from work off base,” Jackie Knoll remembered about her time stationed in Northern California. “One evening coming off duty I went out to my car to find the headlights knocked out. Other nurses had missing batteries.”⁷

Frequently the anger started the minute the nurses returned. Elbring remembers traveling home from Vietnam in uniform and arriving in the United States only to have “people [come] over to us and spit on me and [push] me and called me baby killer and called me names.”⁸ Other forms of discrimination were less criminal: in a letter to a friend, P. Lough O’Daly spoke of the reactions during her time at Smith “people’s reactions to women veterans and the kind of work I do have ranged from intimidation to political rhetoric about women ‘who defend the patriarchy.’”⁹ These women avoided discussing their military service, sometimes for years, to avoid the judgments that came with being a Vietnam War veteran. They attempted to assimilate into civilian life without acknowledging how the war may have affected their lives.

When they returned from war, military women found out that only men could be veterans. Female veterans found that they were not welcome in any veterans group, nor was their service recognized by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Even when Vietnam Veterans of American (VVA) included women in 1978, after being prodded for years to do so, female veterans received little to no help.¹⁰ There was no data from the Bureau of Census on female veterans; no statistics from Veterans Affairs based on gender/sex until 1977, a report that was invalidated by the 1980 census; and little to no

⁷ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 79.

⁸ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 152.

⁹ P. Lough O’Daly to Elizabeth Harden. January 26, 1984. “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College.

¹⁰ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 158.

information available from the Department of Defense.¹¹ Female veterans were left abandoned by all but each other, and occasionally a sympathetic doctor, but sometimes that wasn't enough.

Judy Marron had served eight years in the Army during the Vietnam War, someplace in the Pacific (possibly Hawaii) treating severely injured soldiers. During her tour, she experienced serious sexual harassment from at least one of the doctors. A manic-depressive, she turned to alcohol to cope after she left the military. Marron had been involved in the W.V.I.N. for a few months before she committed suicide. In an unsigned letter to O'Daly, a member of W.V.I.N. West wrote "there's no doubt that what she was going through around dealing with her military experiences was a very big part of her life and no doubt a contributing factor in her decision."¹² While Marron had gotten some therapy for manic-depressive disorder, the designation of women as noncombatant/nonveteran had left her without the help she needed to recover from her wartime experience. She was a casualty of war.

Many female Vietnam veterans attempted to forget, explain, or run away their experiences, and found themselves unable to do so. Lynn spoke of a search for "the truth" that turned her onto the occult. After failing to find that truth, she became a missionary in Haiti, far away from Vietnam, but unable to escape the war due to flashbacks.¹³ Terry turned to painkillers to dull physical and mental pain. The first time she went for help, the doctors at the VA told her she wasn't addicted, and she became more self-destructive: "I

¹¹ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 512-514.

¹² "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, Letter dated Saturday October 9, 1982. (Unsigned, possibly sent by Debra DeBont who seemed to be O'Daly's West Coast contact)

¹³ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 229-231.

lived on beer and coke, maybe a piece of bread.”¹⁴ It took years for these women to find there way back to a regular civilian life.

Other veterans lived comfortably for years before they were triggered by something that brought them right back to the Vietnam War. While some women were trigged by something as simple as a helicopter or an emergency room, others found their memories arising because of military conflicts. CWO Allen served in the military for many years after the war. It wasn’t until images of the first Gulf War appeared in newspapers and on television that she began to have flashbacks.¹⁵ Maureen Walsh also remained in the military after the war had ended, coping well until her service during the Iran Hostage Crisis.¹⁶ Sara McVicker was triggered by the invasion of Grenada.¹⁷

Today, this type of anxiety and flashback are usually understood as symptomatic of PTSD. However, PTSD wasn’t recognized by the VA for ten years after the Vietnam War ended. In research surveys on the prevalence of PTSD and other anxiety-related disorders, female veterans were not included. When the VA began to treat PTSD among male veterans, women found that “even after the public and Congress finally recognized the toll of that war upon the shattered lives of veterans, women were not included among the group considered to need help.”¹⁸ PTSD was associated with combat, and as the military believed that women had not served in combat, they were not covered under the counseling programs.¹⁹

¹⁴ “P. Lough O’Daly Papers.” Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 320.

¹⁵ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 250.

¹⁶ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 216.

¹⁷ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 121.

¹⁸ June A Willenz, *Women Veterans: America's Forgotten Heroines* (New York, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1983), 192.

¹⁹ Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 125.

Female veterans sought help long before the military was forced to acknowledge them as veterans. Rebecca McCauley spent a year in a VA hospital that lacked a woman's ward, where she was harassed daily by male patients and became afraid to even shower or go to the bathroom alone.²⁰ Chris was warned by a female nurse not to go into the VA treatment center alone and recalled the dirty looks she and other female veterans received because as women they could not have been injured in a war, and therefore had no right to medical care through the VA.²¹ Veteran's treatment centers were inhospitable to military women.

It wasn't until the mid-1980s that Vet Centers began to focus some attention on female veterans with PTSD. In September of 1982, a Working Group on Women Vietnam Veterans was developed by the Vet Centers that confronted some of the assumptions about PTSD and male veterans. Gender specific programs had begun to develop and the definition of PTSD expanded to include women as veterans. However, it was until women began to demand their right to be viewed as veterans that anything changed.²² In 1982, female veterans sued the Department of Veterans Affairs and forced a congressional hearing that explored discriminatory practices against women, resulting in the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.²³ Technically, VA hospitals began treating women the next year.²⁴ Allowing female veterans to receive this help gave them the chance to receive psychiatric counseling and join veteran's support groups, a necessary step to recovery for many.

²⁰ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College

²¹ "P. Lough O'Daly Papers." Sophia Smith Collection. Smith College, 458-460.

²² Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 129.

²³ Freedman and Rhoades, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 5.

²⁴ Vuic, *Officer, Nurse, Woman*, 158.

In her memoir, *American Daughter Gone to War*, Winnie Smith spoke of the courage she found to tell her story and to begin reconciling her deployment experience with her stateside military and civilian life, crediting reading Lynda Van Devanter's memoir as the first time she began to allow her emotions to take over and really cry about her own experiences. It was the catalyst that forced her to contact Rose Sandeck at the Concord Vet Center, a Vietnam veteran who was willing to talk about her own experiences, admit her own feelings, and therefore allow other female veterans to open up about theirs.²⁵ Despite sinking into a depression fueled by alcohol and marijuana, it was Devanter and Sandeck's candidness that allowed Smith to open up to her friends and family and, in a sense, come out as a Vietnam veteran. With the help of veterans groups, both female only and co-ed, she began to reconcile her civilian life with her military experience,

Linda J. McClenahan, a WAC communications officer, was another woman who was able to get help through the camaraderie she found among other veterans. In the early 1980s, when she called the vet center she found that it had been set up exclusively for male veterans. For another year or so, she continued to experience PTSD symptoms before giving the center another chance. After getting help for alcoholism, McClenahan

²⁵ Smith, *American Daughter Gone to War*, 296-302. Army Captain Rose Sandeck, served as a head nurse at the 12th Evac Hospital at Cu Chi beginning, shortly after receiving her commission in 1968. Sandeck was appointed team leader of the Concord Veteran Center outside of San Francisco in 1981, becoming the first woman who served in-country to be named director of a veteran center. She also served on the Advisory Committee of the Readjustment Counseling Program of the Veterans Administration. Sandeck was mentioned in multiple oral histories and interviews and is acknowledged by veterans and civilians as an authority and advocate for female Vietnam veterans and has spoken at college campus and other events. She was previously interviewed in Keith Walker's *A Piece of My Heart*. In his introduction, Walker credits a February 1983 interview with her as the catalyst that shifted his interest from Vietnam veterans as a whole to female Vietnam veterans. After pondering his initial interview for a few months, including her efforts to find other female veterans who were suffering from the effects of their wartime experience, Walker decided to conduct an oral history project that would become *A Piece of My Heart*. Sandeck agreed to helping with the project, as she believed that Walker's work would allow the experiences of female Vietnam veterans to be heard.

got involved with a women's Vietnam veterans group. It was because of this group and the vet center that she began to heal:

“now that I'm able to look at things again and allow myself to feel and re-experience some of them, I feel like I've made it home. I have finally accepted the fact that things that happened in the Vietnam War were not my fault. I couldn't have done anything more than what I did to help those people that I was able to help. I couldn't have done anything to change the fact that people died... people that I knew and cared about and loved, and strangers too... and for such a long time I kept thinking that I should have been able to do more.”²⁶

Many female Vietnam War veterans found that, upon their return, what helped them recover more than anything else was talking to other women veterans. Most veterans, when recalling their post-war experiences, spoke of the importance of having a support system of women who had been through similar situations.²⁷ Walker acknowledged this: “once aware of the need-ten, twelve, fifteen years later-in an echo of their camaraderie in Vietnam, they take care of their own.”²⁸ Female veterans had no one else to turn to, so they helped each other heal. “This is a very real process, these women reaching out to one another,” he wrote, “and one that will take years before each will have made her own peace with the Vietnam War.”²⁹

These “rap” groups/support groups were similar to the consciousness-raising groups that were popular among feminists. Consciousness-raising groups were a place where women “uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds” according to bell hooks. She argued this “this confessional aspect served as healing

²⁶ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 27.

²⁷ For examples see: Steinman, *Women in Vietnam* and Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 330.

²⁸ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 6.

²⁹ Walker, *A Piece of My Heart*, 6.

ritual.”³⁰ While the purposes behind consciousness-raising groups (to confront patriarchy) and veteran support groups were different, creating a space for separate space for women worked in the same way. It gave them a chance to share their pain and find others who understood. Both groups were about safety.³¹

It was through one of these support groups, based out of Minnesota, that the idea of Women’s Vietnam Memorial was born. In 1982, male and female veterans from all over the world came to see the dedication of the Vietnam Wall.³² The creation of the Vietnam Wall Memorial was highly contested even among veterans, sometimes because of its physical appearance, but also because it could be viewed as highly impersonal.^{2nd} Lt. Judy Hartline Elbring was one of these veterans:

“It was seeing all the names so carefully carved out. So much neater and cleaner than any of them died [...] It was almost too neat, almost too precise, almost too lined up. It somehow can’t reflect the horror of holding a young man while he dies. [...] It’s just a giant tombstone, with all the names on it, and there are too many.”³³

Other veterans, both male and female, found comfort in the Vietnam Wall Memorial. It’s very existence provided an acknowledgement of their military service. But moreover, many found greater reassurance that their service had mattered when they visited the wall, both during the dedication and later. Lt. Col. Deanna McGookin believed that the building of the monument changed the way the country viewed veterans: “it’s almost as though the country is saying it’s sorry that the whole situation occurred.”³⁴

³⁰ bell hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2000), 8.

³¹ hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody*, 8. and Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 133.

³² Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 4.

³³ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 153.

³⁴ Freedman and Rhoads, *Nurses in Vietnam*, 102-103. At the time the oral histories in *Nurses in Vietnam* were recorded, Lt. Col. McGookin had been in the military for 19 years and served as the Chief of the Department of Nursing at Kenner Army Community Hospital in Fort Lee, Virginia.

Female veterans also saw the Wall, and the warm reception they received from male veterans, as necessary to their reconciling of their service with their non-veteran status after the war. “Maybe this country didn’t appreciate us, but the people that were the most important to me were the Vietnam vets,” Lt. Lily Jean Adams remembered. “They appreciated what we did, and that’s what was so significant.”³⁵ Furthermore, she believed that the tactile Wall allowed for a different kind of reflection than traditional statues. “Everybody was touching the Wall. The names were so significant,” Lt. Adams explained. “It wasn’t a big statue where you’re diverted from what it’s all about, you’re honing in on what this memorial is all about. It’s about names, it’s about people who lost their lives, or people who are missing in action.”³⁶ The Vietnam Wall, she believed, was about the names on the wall. It wasn’t just about the men who led teenagers into battle, the ones that were more often memorialized in statues, but about each man and woman who served and lost their lives. It was a form of remembrance that touched the heart of every veteran who wanted to believe that their service and sacrifices were important.

In 1983, the military decided to erect a statue depicting three male soldiers next to the wall, a statue that female veterans worried would depict the Vietnam War as a man’s war, and erase the contributions of women. That same year, a group of women in the Minneapolis area created the Vietnam Nurses Memorial Project Inc. (VWNP) and worked with a sculptor to design a statue specifically to commemorate the service of women in the Vietnam War.³⁷ The VWNP incorporated and set out to educate the public about female veterans, find as many women who had served as possible, and create a memorial for military women next to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington,

³⁵ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 66.

³⁶ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 65.

³⁷ Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 138.

D.C. After reaching out to veterans, and finding more than just nurses, the project was renamed the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project (VWMP).³⁸

Unlike either the Vietnam Wall or the men's statue, which each took about two years from proposal to dedication, the building of the Vietnam Women's Memorial took about ten years. The fight for this memorial spanned three presidential elections and required the approval of two federal commissions as well as two acts of Congress to be built. The movement to build a memorial specifically for female veterans was a grassroots campaign that involved hundreds of women across the country and forced heavy debates about gender and the military service.³⁹

This campaign was soon bolstered by the support of the larger veteran community. At the end of 1985, the VWMP had the support of five major veterans organizations: the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled Veterans of America, and Vietnam Veterans of America. By this point, male Vietnam veterans played a large part in the efforts, especially those who had been hospitalized while deployed.⁴⁰ Despite the disrespect and inequality women had experienced in the military, some servicemen acknowledged that military women had been a part of the war, and were willing to fight for their right to be remembered. In 1988, the memorial achieved official recommendation when Ronald Reagan approved the project and recommended that the women's memorial be built on the grounds of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In 1989, George H.W. Bush signed a bill guaranteeing the

³⁸ Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 141.

³⁹ Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 141.

⁴⁰ Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 145.

memorial a spot on the Mall and final approval was granted in 1990. From this point, it took three more years before any statue was actually erected.⁴¹

In November of 1993, female veterans came from all over the country to witness the unveiling and dedication of the Vietnam Women's Memorial. The three day event was planned around a march down Constitution Avenue toward the new memorial. The street was lined with supporters: male Vietnam veterans, families, friends, and other admirers who had come to cheer, thank, and hug the women. Many women found the parade to be very emotional. These women had never really been welcomed home or thanked for their service and the parade helped them heal. "I didn't realize until then that I hadn't been welcomed home. I didn't think I needed a parade [...] and if that's important to me, it's got to be important for other women too," Lt. Judy Hartline Elbring remembered. "I had no idea this was still affecting me. I had no idea that not saying anything could carry this long a toll on me, on anyone, and I'm not the only one."⁴²

Lilly Jean Adams had her own memories: "The men had put flowers around it," she said. "Men were crying. We were crying, because again, you forget how much you're appreciated by these men and then you see they wanted this statue to be erected for us."⁴³ Therefore, in many ways this memorial was as much of a reconciliation between male and female veterans as it was between female veterans and U.S. civilians. This memorial meant more the female veterans than any statue, memorial, or story ever could. Kim Heikkila claimed that this memorial "opened doors that had long been shut and signaled an important step in their recovery from war."⁴⁴ However, it meant more than that; for the

⁴¹ Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 151.

⁴² Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 154.

⁴³ Steinman, *Women in Vietnam*, 66.

⁴⁴ Heikkila, *Sisterhood of War*, 154.

first time ever, women were recognized specifically for their military service and welcomed home by their male comrades and civilians.

The true legacy of the statue perhaps remains in the way it still forces people to acknowledge pre-Gulf War military women. People do not read every name on The Wall, so they may never notice the eight servicewomen who were killed in the Vietnam War. The women's memorial serves to remind everyone who walks past it that they served too. And they will not be forgotten any longer.

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Appendix of Army Ranks

E-1	Private
E-2	Private 2
E-3	Private First Class
E-4	Specialist
E-4	Corporal
E-5	Sergeant
E-6	Staff Sergeant
E-7	Sergeant First Class
E-8	Master Sergeant
E-8	First Sergeant
E-9	Sergeant Major
E-9	Command Sergeant Major
E-9 (special)	Sergeant Major of the Army
W-1	Warrant Officer
W-2	Chief Warrant Officer 2
W-3	Chief Warrant Officer 3
W-4	Chief Warrant Officer 4
W-5	Chief Warrant Officer 5
O-1	Second Lieutenant
O-2	First Lieutenant
O-3	Captain
O-4	Major
O-5	Lieutenant Colonel
O-6	Colonel
O-7	Brigadier General
O-8	Major General
O-9	Lieutenant General
O-10	General
special	General of the Army

“US Army Military Ranks.” Military Factory, accessed December 14 2012,
http://www.militaryfactory.com/ranks/army_ranks.asp

Appendix of Air Force Ranks

E-1	Airman Basic
E-2	Airman
E-3	Airman First Class
E-4	Senior Airman
E-5	Staff Sergeant
E-6	Technical Sergeant
E-7	Master Sergeant
E-8	Senior Master Sergeant
E-9	Chief Master Sergeant
E-9	Command Chief Master Sergeant
E-9 (special)	Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force
O-1	Second Lieutenant
O-2	First Lieutenant
O-3	Captain
O-4	Major
O-5	Lieutenant Colonel
O-6	Colonel
O-7	Brigadier General
O-8	Major General
O-9	Lieutenant General
O-10	General Air Force Chief of Staff
special	General of the Air Force

“US Army Military Ranks.” Military Factory, accessed December 14 2012,
http://www.militaryfactory.com/ranks/air_force_ranks.asp

Appendix of Navy Ranks

E-1	Seaman Recruit
E-2	Seaman Apprentice
E-3	Seaman
E-4	Petty Officer Third Class
E-5	Petty Officer Second Class
E-6	Petty Officer First Class
E-7	Chief Petty Officer
E-8	Senior Chief Petty Officer
E-9	Master Chief Petty Officer
E-9	Fleet/Command Master Chief Petty Officer
E-9 (special)	Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy
W-1	Warrant Officer 1 (no longer in use)
W-2	Chief Warrant Officer 2
W-3	Chief Warrant Officer 3
W-4	Chief Warrant Officer 4
W-5	Chief Warrant Officer 5
O-1	Ensign
O-2	Lieutenant Junior Grade
O-3	Lieutenant
O-4	Lieutenant Commander
O-5	Commander
O-6	Captain
O-7	Rear Admiral (lower half)
O-8	Rear Admiral (upper half)
O-9	Vice Admiral
O-10	Admiral Chief of Naval Operations/ Commandant of the Coast Guard
O-11 special	Fleet Admiral

“US Army Military Ranks.” Military Factory, accessed December 14 2012,
http://www.militaryfactory.com/ranks/navy_ranks.asp

Curriculum Vitae

Born June 16, 1990 in Englewood, NJ.

Education:

Hunterdon Central Regional High School	Sep. 2004-Jan. 2008
The Evergreen State College	Sep. 2008- Jul. 2011
Bachelor of Arts: Women's Studies Major/Women's History Minor	
Rutgers University-Newark	Sep. 2012- May 2014
Masters of Arts: History Major/Women's Studies Concentration	

Employment :

Tutoring Club of Flemington, NJ Tutor Part-Time	Sep. 2011- present
Private Tutor	Sep. 2011- Dec. 2011
Hunterdon Central Regional High School Substitute Teacher	Dec. 2011- Jun 2012
Rutgers University Teaching Assistant	Sep. 2012- May 2013
Hunterdon Central Regional High School Substitute Teacher	Dec. 2011- Jun 2012