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# VOICES OF THE PAST

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BG ANNA MAE HAYS ORAL HISTORY

VIETNAM WAR

1983

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*The following excerpt is from the oral history of Brigadier General Anna Mae Hays, collected for the US Army Senior Officer Oral History Program in 1983. Interview conducted by Col. Amelia J. Carson. The complete oral history is housed as part of the Anna Mae Hays collection at the US Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA.*

INTERVIEWER: During the time that you were Assistant Chief, Vietnam was going strong. Did you or Colonel Clark visit Vietnam during this period?

BG HAYS: Well, I was assigned to represent Colonel Clark in December of 1965 and January of 1966, and I visited as Chief in 1968 and 1971. It was very difficult to enter Vietnam in 1965. After much justification, the Department of the Army gave permission for the Chief of the Army Nurse Corps to visit the medical installations and the nurses assigned in Vietnam. As you'll recall, in 1962 we had one hospital, the 8th Field in Nha Trang. Only 12 nurses were assigned, and then later that number increased to 20. By the time I was there in 1965, there were 25 nurses. In 1965 a Chief Nurse was authorized for the United States Army Vietnam, a Lieutenant Colonel Margaret Clarke. Even in those early days, I was impressed with our nurses for their magnificent contributions in the care of those who were wounded or ill with disease, because at that time there was a high incidence of malaria, diarrhea infestations, typhus, and so forth. Upon my return home, after a very short time in Vietnam, I don't think it was any longer than two weeks at the most, I suddenly became "the" expert on Vietnam. And I, as a young lieutenant colonel, had to meet the Washington press corps in the Pentagon in early 1966. That was a very traumatic experience. You can now see the press corps in action on television so you can imagine what they are like when they aren't on television. It was, at times, a little excruciating. I remember giving them all the information that I had on the events going on in Vietnam, as much I was allowed to. I talked about the contribution of our nurses, the types of patients we had, the conditions in which they lived, etc. I remember one newsman kept asking me questions about venereal disease. I very politely kept reminding him that I didn't know very much about the rate of venereal disease in Vietnam. But, he insisted that I should know. And so, it went on for quite sometime. Finally, thank goodness, the conference was over. Upon my return, I also was to prepared an in-depth report on the conditions of our hospitals; effectiveness of our personnel, not only the Army Nurse Corps officers, but other officers of the Army Medical team; on the evacuation procedures; on supplies, whether they were in short supply; on the dire need of dieticians, physical therapists, and psychiatrists to be assigned in Vietnam, etc. There was a materiel shortage at first, but that was corrected later on when medical materiel was placed in medical channels with the depot in Okinawa. That report certainly would be on file somewhere and probably could be included. I can't remember all the specifics. I had nothing but the greatest of admiration for the Army nurses who were serving in Vietnam and thought that their great monuments will certainly lie in the hearts of their grateful patients. Shortly after my return from Vietnam, I traveled to Europe with The Surgeon General to attend a Medical Conference. Again, I was supposed to be an expert on Vietnam after having been there only two

weeks. But, as always, I did my best and tried to convey to the doctors and nurses in the European theater that Vietnam was certainly a very busy place and that the nurses were working under extreme hardships but still giving exceptional care to their patients.