

Fb2 Round Eyes: An American Nurse in Vietnam: New Illustrated Edition by Diane Klutz

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By: Diane Klutz


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It was 1969 and Diane was itching to escape small town life in Southwestern Pennsylvania after her graduation from nursing school. Since her dad had been an Army medic in WWII, two of her three brothers were currently in the Army, and the War in Vietnam was raging, she decided the Army was for her. So, she joined and nine months later she was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps and in a plane along with at least fifty other newly commissioned nurses heading for Medical Officer Training in Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. From spending her past twenty-one years being in what she called dating isolation, the vast number of eligible single men all vying for her attention was overwhelming. Diane was determined to make up for lost time. Unfortunately, she also had to do military stuff like marching in formation, learning to shoot a rifle, boring class lectures on military strategies, field training, and of course the ever-popular gas chamber experience. None-the-less, she completed her six-week training and along with another fellow nurse, Ginny, was off for her first duty assignment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Washington in 1970 was an experience neither Ginny nor Diane expected. Anti-war rallies occurred frequently and often spontaneously, which both women discovered when they found themselves in the middle of a protest rally that erupted during a kite festival on the National Mall. Low-crawling through a line of armed riot guards, they both escaped the full blast of tear gas and the probability of being court-martialed if arrested. At the end of September in 1970, Ginny and Diane received re-assignment letters to Vietnam and were to leave in November. Trepidation mixed with excitement about going to a war zone made their departure date approach quickly and as scheduled they boarded a Tiger Airlines flight and headed west to the jungles of Southeast Asia. It was near midnight when the full flight of soldiers and three nurses, including Diane, exited the plane at Bien Hoa AFB. Humidity and heat formed a brick wall that made walking almost impossible, despite the gauntlet of heavily armed soldiers urging them to hurry. More soldiers stood as sentinels on top of the metal structure that served as a gathering spot until ground transport arrived. Going from Bien Hoa to the Army in-processing at Long Binh was terrifying, with soldiers inside and on-top of the buses that seemed to be in no-hurry as they lumbered through village after village. It was the middle of the night, yet the dusty roads were jammed with soldiers in jeeps, people on bikes, and others just walking around hawking their wares. Skeletal dogs skittered around, avoiding vehicles. This was not what Diane had imagined and she felt totally unprepared. As she gazed out the dirty windows seeing nothing but filth, sad faces, sewage in the streets, hovels crowded with children and adults, and more filth, questions formed in Diane's mind. "Why aren't these people happy to see us; after all, we are their liberators Aren't we?" Diane was shocked as the truth hit her. They had lied: her government, her teachers, the Army, and God knows who else. The people she viewed through that window didn't care if they were communist, democratic, or socialist. They only wanted to exist as best they could. This epiphany created the turning point in her beliefs. Diane now understood the truth and knew she would always remember. From that point, Diane's stories become a little more cynical, but still humorous as she describes in-processing, getting outfitted, and Ginny and her assignment to the 67th Evacuation hospital in Qui Nhon. From nursing

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