

1 **Interview of retired U.S. Army Colonel Lola Olsmith on her service in the**  
2 **Army Nurse Corps during the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm**

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5Ruth Stewart: [00:05] Lola Olsmith is being interviewed today as a member of the  
6 Women's Overseas Service League, uh, San Antonio, Texas Unit. Today  
7 is January 15, 2004. We are recording at the Army Residence Community  
8 in San Antonio, Texas. Ruth Stewart is interviewer, assisted by Carol  
9 Habgood.

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[00:30] Lola, start in by telling us a little bit about your early life.

13Lola Olsmith:

Well, I was born in Bee Branch, Arkansas in 1935. Uh, we were poor  
14 farmers and, um, my folks moved after a year, when I was 1 year old, they  
15 moved to California where we stayed for about 8 y-, 'til I was 8 years old,  
16 then we came back to Arkansas and that's where I went to school and, uh,  
17 graduated from high school, at Bee Branch. And from there, I had decided,  
18 uh, that I wanted to be a nurse and follow in the footsteps of an aunt who  
19 had previously graduated. And so I went to the same school she did in  
20 Little Rock, Arkansas. I went to St. Vincent Infirmiry. It was a 3-year  
21 diploma school.

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Following that, I, uh, worked for the VA Hospital in Little Rock and later  
I transferred to Atlanta, Georgia, looking for more excitement, of course.  
And, uh, I worked there for the VA Hospital. And then, uh, just looking  
for more excitement, I decided that, uh, after seeing an ad on TV one day  
about the army needing nurses, I decided to myself, "Well, I could do  
that!" But I went to the air force recruiter and asked for, um, if, if they sent  
nurses to Vietnam. And he says, "No, but I think the army does." So I then  
went to the army and they asked me if I had 10 friends who wanted to go  
with me.

33Ruth Stewart:

[2:30] They were eager!

34

35Lola Olsmith:

So that's how, how I got to the, to the army.

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37Ruth Stewart:

[2:39] Okay. And how did you get started then in the army?

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39Lola Olsmith:

Well...

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41Ruth Stewart:

[02:44] Was it difficult for you?

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43Lola Olsmith:

No, I was a little older than most, uh, most of the other women who joined  
44 at that time, 'cause so many of'm were out of nursing school, directly out

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1 of nursing school, and then some were coming out of the army's, uh,  
2 RAIN Program so they were all – I had a little more experience than most  
3 of 'm – and, uh, came here, uh, to San Antonio to, for my, uh, basic  
4 orientation with a, with a, supposed to have an assignment, interim  
5 assignment. I had a guaranteed assignment to Vietnam, [how naïve 3:30],  
6 and, uh, I was supposed to go to Fort Ord, California for the interim and,  
7 uh, but 2 weeks before we graduated from basic, uh, they called 13 of us  
8 nurses aside and told us we were going directly to Vietnam. And that's  
9 when I started [laughter] getting chills [laughter] up and down my spine  
10 [laughter]. But, um, we, we had, um, we stuck together.

11  
12 So, uh, we had our assignment to, to, uh, travel to Vietnam. The 13 of us  
13 were, uh, together. And, uh, we went out of, um, what was the air force  
14 base you told me a while ago, out of San Francisco, um, I don't know.  
15 Anyway, uh, we got on the plane and we were traveling by commercial  
16 plane, of course, and, uh, there the 13 of us were on a plane full of men, all  
17 going to Vietnam. That was sort of a weird feeling. And, uh, it was a long  
18 trip. We stopped once in Japan. We weren't allowed to get off the plane.  
19 Then we stopped in Okinawa and we were, we were able to get off the  
20 plane at that point for a short time. And then when we landed in, uh,  
21 Saigon it was like midnight and, uh, you'd look out the window – you  
22 could just imagine all kinds of things going on. But we landed at Tan Son  
23 Nhut and we went into this little building where we were treated to canned  
24 Cokes and canned Cokes were very unusual in 1967. [laughter] It was my  
25 first time to see that! [laughter]

26  
27 So then we stayed there through New Year's Eve, 'cause it was New  
28 Year's Day that we traveled upcountry to our new, uh, assignment.  
29

30Ruth Stewart: [5:53] And when you hit your new assignment, what was, what was it like  
31 and what was your reaction?

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33Lola Olsmith: Well, we had met with the chief nurse at the Replacement Center and, um,  
34 of course, she let us know that we were needed and, uh, everybody was  
35 looking forward to [coughing] being there, coming in. And when we, um,  
36 walked into the Replacement Center, um, the hospital – I guess I, I didn't  
37 have any idea what to expect. When I first thought about it, I didn't expect  
38 to have flushed toilets or hot, running water 'cause we thought people  
39 were, the nurses were living in tents and, but, at this particular place they  
40 had built, uh, built the hooches. It was built in a triangle, you know, I  
41 mean a quadrangle.

42  
43Ruth Stewart: [6:58] Mm-hm.

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1Lola Olsmith: And, uh, [throat clearing] and there were 2, 2 people to a room. Um, and  
2 we did have hot and cold running water and we did have flushed johns so I  
3 was very surprised to, at the accommodations that we had that much.  
4 Now, the hospital was Quonset huts, you know, rows of Quonset huts  
5 with, with covered, uh, walkways between'm. And, uh, found out there's,  
6 there were 2 hospitals in this particular village where, where I went and it  
7 was in Quy Nhon, which was about, it was on the coast, about halfway in  
8 mid-country, halfway up the coast. And, uh, one of the nurses in this  
9 group was, had been my roommate in basic and we thought we were going  
10 to the same hospital, well, we'd asked to go to the same hospital. Well, we  
11 were put in the 2 hospitals in the same village and it turned out, uh, the  
12 whole year I was there, I think I saw her one time that whole time. Of  
13 course, you, you'd soon meet up with, with the people you work with and,  
14 and that becomes your family.

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16Ruth Stewart: [8:25] Mm-hm.

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18Lola Olsmith: The, the chief nurse was very nice. She told us that her policy was to, that  
19 every nurse that came in, since our hospital had a prisoner ward, that we  
20 worked in the prisoner ward for 2 weeks to begin with. And, which I did.  
21 And it was at that point, um, that I became disenchanted with the war, I  
22 guess. Before that, I was very dovish, I mean hawkish on the whole thing  
23 but once I saw the prisoners and, you know, found out they were just  
24 people like us and they were just, uh, serving whoever fed them, that was  
25 my impression. That whoever brought the food in, that was who they  
26 would serve. Of course, that's, that's a long way from politics [laughter].  
27 That was just down at the very basic level.

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29Ruth Stewart: [9:34] Mm-hm.

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31Lola Olsmith: But then I, uh, following that, I went to the, um, recovery and, uh, surgical  
32 intensive care ward, which was combined and we took care of all the post-  
33 surgery patients and kept the, the sicker ones. And that was GIs and  
34 prisoners alike. We took care of everybody. Um, lots of different  
35 experiences there. We worked 12-hour shifts. It, we would work, uh, 7 to  
36 7 at night for a while and then we'd switch and work the day shift for a  
37 while. And, most of the time, we were able to get 2 days off a week, even  
38 though we were working these 12-hour shifts, 'til it got to a crunch time  
39 and then we had to, we were lucky to get a day off then. I was there during  
40 Tet in 1968. And, uh, that was rather exciting. There was no, not any active  
41 fighting in this village where we were. It was mostly out in what we called  
42 the valley from us. And, also the ROK, the, uh, the Korean Army was  
43 stationed out in the, in the valley and the, the scuttlebutt was that the  
44 Vietnamese were so afraid of the Koreans that, that we were safe, you

1 know, [laughter] because they were between us and the enemy. [laughter]  
2 But during Tet, um, there was a, an assault made on the radio, local radio  
3 station.  
4  
5Ruth Stewart: [11:33] Which was American military?  
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7Lola Olsmith: Not, um, I, no, I had the impression it was a Vietnamese radio station.  
8 Now, the Americans', uh, um, communication equipment and everything  
9 was on a big, high mountain right behind us and that was one of the things  
10 that they were trying to do is get up the mountain and, uh, destroy the  
11 communication. But we, we had helicopters coming right over the  
12 quadrangle where we lived, shooting into the mountain [inaudible 12:10]  
13 during Tet.  
14  
15Ruth Stewart: [12:18] But that was the closest from, as far as...  
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17Lola Olsmith: As far, as far as my experience, yes.  
18  
19Ruth Stewart: [12:25] Mm-hm. Mm-hm. But you got casualties from all of that.  
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21Lola Olsmith: Mm-hm. We did. And, um, I never had to work in the emergency room. I  
22 don't know if I could've handled that very well or not. At least when I got  
23 the patients they were, they had gone through surgery and that was – of  
24 course, that was traumatic, too, 'cause a lot of young men waking up with  
25 lost limbs, uh, it was pretty traumatic. And, um, things were quiet during  
26 that year, you know, it wasn't always real intense. We, we would do what  
27 we called med caps. We'd go out to the village and just do like a sick call  
28 for any, anybody who wanted to come in.  
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30Ruth Stewart: [13:25] What'd you call it?  
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32Lola Olsmith: Med cap.  
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34Ruth Stewart: [13:28] Mid, M-I-D?  
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36Lola Olsmith: Med, M-E-D. Medical civilian, I'm not sure what it means. Medical  
37 civilian aid or...  
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39Ruth Stewart: [13:35] Assistance?  
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41Lola Olsmith: ...assistance, or something like that.  
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43Ruth Stewart: [13:37] Okay. Sorta like a clinic...  
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1Lola Olsmith: Mm-hm.  
2  
3Ruth Stewart: [13:41] ...an on-the-spot clinic.  
4  
5Lola Olsmith: Right. And we also visited the orphanages and, uh, [inaudible 13:50].  
6  
7Ruth Stewart: [13:50] Tell me more about this med cap experience. Think of one day  
8 that you went out there and what it was like and the people that you saw.  
9  
10Lola Olsmith: Well, and we also visited the, the, the leprosarium but, which was, you  
11 know, not too far away. But one med cap that I remember, we went into a  
12 fishing village and we walked, it was very close to the water. We walked  
13 through all these little huts, you know, and we finally, it seemed like there  
14 was a porch there and that's where we set up, um, we had our, our  
15 equipment and, um, all set up on this porch, uncovered, and the doctor was  
16 there and if he wanted to listen to somebody's chest, you know, he would,  
17 it was just no table or chairs or anything. It was just the porch.  
18  
19Ruth Stewart: [14:50] Mm-hm.  
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21Lola Olsmith: And it, it was very, uh, superficial coverage, as far as what we could do.  
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23Ruth Stewart: [15:01] What kind of conditions were you looking at there? Or that  
24 appeared before you.  
25  
26Lola Olsmith: Yeah. It seems to me like it was mostly, um, skin conditions and things  
27 like that. I really don't remember much else.  
28  
29Ruth Stewart: [15:22] Mm-hm.  
30  
31Lola Olsmith: I don't remember taking any patients back with us or, uh, I'm not sure  
32 exact-, how extensive that was. I just don't remember if there was follow-  
33 up or not. And then when we went to the, uh, leprosarium, the highlight of  
34 that was lunch. [laughter]  
35  
36Ruth Stewart: [15:47] [laughter] They fed you well?  
37  
38Lola Olsmith: Oh, yes! The French nuns were very good to us. [laughter] And, um, and I  
39 don't remember – I'm sure the, they, the nuns were asking for, for, uh,  
40 certain things for their certain patients but I don't remember anything  
41 about that.  
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43Ruth Stewart: [16:14] Did you do something while you were there or were you just  
44 observing?

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2Lola Olsmith: Mostly observing and looking around. But they had just like a village, you  
3 know, everybody with their separate little houses and everything and it  
4 was very beautiful because it was right on the beach and there were  
5 bougainvilleas, you know, and beautiful, uh, shrubbery and trees. It was, it  
6 was just beautiful.  
7  
8Ruth Stewart: [16:42] So, as part of your Army Nurse Corps duties in Vietnam, you were  
9 being a diplomat, too.  
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11Lola Olsmith: She would say that. Yes, because, another incident, we took care civilians  
12 and we got this young man in, uh, who had been a victim of an attempted  
13 assassination-, assassination. And he had been shot into the mouth, uh,  
14 through the mouth somehow, and he was bleeding. Well, the Vietnamese  
15 didn't have the capacity to, to give, uh, collect blood and give it so, uh, he  
16 required several, uh, blood transfusions because of the bleeding in his  
17 mouth. And I became friends with his sister and I sort of got the feeling  
18 they were fairly well-to-do people, um, because of his intention to be a,  
19 um, like a mayor of a village.  
20  
21Ruth Stewart: [17:46] Mm-hm.  
22  
23Lola Olsmith: He was being groomed for that. And, uh, I was invited to their, to their  
24 home, uh, on one occasion for a, for a dinner. And that was quite, uh...  
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26Ruth Stewart: [18:06] Very interesting.  
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28Lola Olsmith: ...interesting to, to do that.  
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30Ruth Stewart: [18:09] What did they feed you?  
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32Lola Olsmith: I can remember, uh, shrimp, um, boiled eggs, I remember, and vegetables,  
33 but I don't remember what kind. Fruit was always, always very good  
34 there. Pineapple was delicious. But the shrimp is the main thing I  
35 remember.  
36  
37Ruth Stewart: [18:36] Mm-hm.  
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39Lola Olsmith: And, uh, and I, we tried to correspond a little bit after I left the country but  
40 it was almost impossible to get mail back and forth at that time.  
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42Ruth Stewart: [18:53] Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
43  
44Lola Olsmith: And, um, I'm trying to think of...

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2Ruth Stewart: [18:59] Were you at that same location throughout your Vietnamese tour?  
3  
4Lola Olsmith: Yes. Our hospital was moving right as I was leaving, it was going, uh,  
5 going to go upcountry from there.  
6  
7Ruth Stewart: [19:14] How long were you there then?  
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9Lola Olsmith: Uh, almost a full year. Just a half a month short of a year. I went on R&R  
10 twice. And, uh, that was sort of, uh, a difference experience, too. Um,  
11 went to Australia the first time and, uh, the nurse that went with me we  
12 were, got there on a Sunday and nothing was open. We finally wound up  
13 going to a movie but it wasn't near where our hotel was. And we went  
14 downtown for a movie and coming back we, uh, caught a taxi. Well, as  
15 soon as we got in the taxi and started talking to the driver, he knew  
16 instantly that we were American and he said, "Oh! R&R girls!" [laughter]  
17 He says, "We're used to R&R boys, but we don't get R&R girls."  
18 [laughter] And, uh, so he insisted when we got back to the hotel, he turned  
19 the motor off and we sat there and talked for a good length of time and  
20 then he insisted that his family take us sightseeing. And he and his wife  
21 and, uh, 1 or 2 children, I can't remember, came the next day and took us,  
22 uh, sightseeing up the coast and went and took us to the zoo. It was just  
23 unbelievable and they kept wanting to do more and more for us and they  
24 finally, we were trying to get out [laughter], you know, and they insisted,  
25 "Well, come have tea with us." Well, we thought tea and that would be it.  
26 [laughter] We learned our lesson! Turned out tea was, of course, dinner.  
27  
28Ruth Stewart: [21:15] Mm-hm.  
29  
30Lola Olsmith: Yeah. But they were very nice to us. Very gracious.  
31  
32Ruth Stewart: [21:22] Where was your other R&R, then?  
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34Lola Olsmith: It was to Hong Kong, which was a very exciting city! Lots of shopping.  
35 [laughter] That was fun, too.  
36  
37Ruth Stewart: [21:37] Did you have any of the kind of experiences with local people that  
38 you did in Australia?  
39  
40Lola Olsmith: No. No, I did not. They were just hustling to, to make you anything you  
41 wanted made. [laughter]  
42  
43Ruth Stewart: [21:54] Yeah.  
44

1Lola Olsmith: Suits, shoes, anything – dresses. [laughter]  
2

3Ruth Stewart: [22:01] So actually, overall, in your experience in Vietnam, um, you said  
4 you really virtually turned from being a hawk to a dove there. Did that  
5 remain with you throughout that?  
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7Lola Olsmith: Um, I felt that we were fighting a losing war. That’s just what I felt like, in  
8 that we were not giving it what we needed to to win the war.  
9

10Ruth Stewart: [22:33] Mm-hm.  
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12Lola Olsmith: One thing about it, though, coming back, I’ve heard so many people talk  
13 about the bad experiences they had on coming back to the States from  
14 Vietnam. I never had that. Uh, I was always cautious, of course, but, um,  
15 when I got back, uh, I was at Letterman and I, uh, worked there in thoracic  
16 surgery and cardiovascular surgery. I did that for a short time and it was  
17 another thrilling experience for me and I kept thinking, “What am I gonna  
18 do after this?” I just felt like the, the freedom in nursing that we had in, uh,  
19 Vietnam and then, then the experience at Letterman, I just, I felt like that,  
20 uh, anything from there would just, would just be a letdown. And, uh, so I  
21 went on recruiting at that point. And I was visiting, uh, mostly visiting, uh,  
22 nursing schools in, uh, northern California. And I, I had, uh, fi-, I showed  
23 films about nursing in Vietnam and generally it was well-accepted. I know  
24 one time, in particular, that one student got very upset over the, the film. It  
25 bothered her because of some of the surgery that was being done.  
26

27Ruth Stewart: [24:20] It showed the actual surgery?  
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29Lola Olsmith: Yes. Mm-hm. It was the removal of a bullet from an eye. Um, but we were  
30 very proud of military medicine in Vietnam. The word at that time was, if  
31 a soldier made it back to the hospital, less than 1% died and we really  
32 thought that was – we were proud of, of what we were doing, medically  
33 speaking.  
34

35Ruth Stewart: [25:10] And you still feel like it was very well done? What you were  
36 doing there?  
37

38Lola Olsmith: Oh yeah, oh yeah.  
39

40Ruth Stewart: [25:16] Overall, it was very good.  
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42Lola Olsmith: Um, I thought the medical care was terrific! And, and the people who  
43 really fought under, under, uh, duress and bombing conditions, you know,  
44 the people who were fired upon...



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2Ruth Stewart: [25:36] Mm-hm.  
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4Lola Olsmith: ...um, really, they were all just outstanding. One, one experience going  
5 back to my early, uh, days in-country during Tet, um, one night I was, I  
6 was on night duty and, uh, there came a great explosion and it was just  
7 rocked everything and it blew the, the, uh, electrical outlets, uh, cords out  
8 of the outlets in the wall. It was so tremendous. Well, we, of course,  
9 thought we were under attack. We later found out though it was a,  
10 somebody got into the ammunition, uh, dump and blew it up. And it was  
11 several miles away but it was a horrendous...  
12  
13Ruth Stewart: [26:31] It was an enemy action?  
14  
15Lola Olsmith: Yes. Uh, and I was so scared I, uh, we had to throw thin mattresses under  
16 the beds. You know, we had the tall beds. We threw thin mattresses under  
17 the bed and would put the patient under the bed for protection. I lifted a, a  
18 Vietnamese lady, pregnant lady. Of course, she wasn't a big lady but I  
19 lifted her by myself. I went down on one knee and stuck her under the bed.  
20 I was [laughter], my adrenaline was so high [laughter]. The next day, my  
21 legs were so sore I couldn't bel-, [laughter], I could hardly walk [laughter]  
22 from, just from that action.  
23  
24Ruth Stewart: [27:23] But your back survived.  
25  
26Lola Olsmith: Yes, I did. My back did survive, yes. Another thing, at the time I was, um,  
27 I was, uh, suctioning a patient, I think, in the recovery room. A patient had  
28 a trach and, of course, those things came out of the wall and, uh, we had to  
29 makeshift there. [laughter] Um, that was about the biggest experience  
30 from, during Tet. From that...So where would you like me to go to now?  
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32Ruth Stewart: [28:07] Well then, you were in Vietnam about a year...  
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34Lola Olsmith: Mm-hm.  
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36Ruth Stewart: [28:11] ...and then you went back to Letterman...  
37  
38Lola Olsmith: Mm-hm.  
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40Ruth Stewart: [28:13] ...and, um, how long were you there?  
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42Lola Olsmith: I was there a little over a year. And then I...  
43

1Ruth Stewart:

[28:19] Was that the extent of your tour in, or your air f-, army experience? Or did you stay in the army?

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3  
4Lola Olsmith:

I stayed. Uh, then I went on recruiting from there and I was assigned in the San Francisco area and I stayed, I stayed there on recruit, recruiting for, army nurse recruiting, for a little less than a year and then, um, a position opened up in Atlanta, Georgia, which is where I was living when I joined the army. And, uh, uh, to be the coordinator of the nurse recruiting for 9 southern states and Puerto Rico, so that's where I went next. And that, of course, was at the draw down and, and eventually the, the end of the war in Vietnam, 'cause we were getting out of that country. And, of course, it was the cut down on, in military, um, personnel, too.

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14Ruth Stewart:

[29:27] Mm-hm.

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16Lola Olsmith:

And, uh, so I told you earlier I graduated from a, uh, diploma school. I had been going to night school because I had the time there and, uh, catching up on some, uh, required courses before and then I applied to go full time to, uh, to get my undergraduate degree and I was accepted at Medical College of Georgia so...

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22Ruth Stewart:

[30:01] Was this with the army?

23

24Lola Olsmith:

I was still in the army, mm-hm. And I was able to go there and, within a year, I got my degree.

25

26

27Ruth Stewart:

[30:16] Bachelor of Science in nursing?

28

29Lola Olsmith:

Mm-hm. BSS.

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31Ruth Stewart:

[30:23] Okay. So then did you stay in the army a little while longer after that?

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34Lola Olsmith:

I did. From there, uh, I came back to San Antonio for the, for the advanced course and, um, which was, was a 6-month course. That was 1975, the beginning – January through June – and it was one of those very mild winters in San Antonio and I just thought this was the most wonderful place in the world. [laughter] And I said, "This is where I want to live!" [laughter] And, uh, from there, then, after completing the course, I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I stayed at Fort Leonard Wood for, um, 2 years and I was the head nurse on a general surgery ward for part of it and head nurse in the, uh, emergency room for part of it. And I was still, um, undecided about what I really wanted to do and, uh, and looking for the next assignment; they offered me recruiting again. I went to, uh, to Fort

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1 Meade, Maryland, uh, where I stayed for 2 years and I was, again, the  
2 coordinator of nurse recruiting. And, at that point, I decided that I wanted  
3 to get back to San Antonio. So I resigned my commission – I resigned  
4 from active duty, I did not resign my commission. Resigned from active  
5 duty and transferred into a, uh, the, to the 94<sup>th</sup> General Hospital here in  
6 San Antonio.  
7  
8Ruth Stewart: [32:37] In the reserve?  
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10Lola Olsmith: In the reserve.  
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12Ruth Stewart: [32:40] And what year was that?  
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14Lola Olsmith: 1979. '79, yes. It's unbelievable! [laughter]  
15  
16Ruth Stewart: [32:52] So how, how many years were you in the active duty?  
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18Lola Olsmith: I was, I was on active duty for 12 years and, uh, I went into the reserves as  
19 a major, by that time. And I stayed with the reserves and, and, um, retired  
20 as a full colonel.  
21  
22Ruth Stewart: [33:19] So how many years were you in the reserves then?  
23  
24Lola Olsmith: 12 years.  
25  
26Ruth Stewart: [33:22] Oh, 12 in active and 12 in...  
27  
28Lola Olsmith: Mm-hm. Yeah.  
29  
30Ruth Stewart: [33:24] Okay.  
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32Lola Olsmith: And then that's when, um, Desert Storm came along and our hospital was  
33 active, uh, activated and we were sent to Germany. Our whole, uh, the  
34 whole hospital personnel, where we were just scattered throughout the  
35 country, you know, just assigned to different hospitals throughout because  
36 we were expecting the, the injured out of, uh, out of Saudi Arabia to come  
37 back through Germany.  
38  
39Ruth Stewart: [34:03] Mm-hm.  
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41Lola Olsmith: And that's what we were expecting. And then we were very [meaningful  
42 34:08] in, in the Germany because they had depleted the hospitals there  
43 with, from military personnel. Medical personnel, they sent them to the

1 desert, ahead, before we got there. And, uh, so they were really needing,  
2 uh, more personnel there.  
3  
4Ruth Stewart: [34:31] And your experience in Germany then was how long?  
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6Lola Olsmith: We stayed there 4 months. Uh, it was January to April. It was very cold.  
7 [laughter] I just...  
8  
9Ruth Stewart: [34:44] And what year was that?  
10  
11Lola Olsmith: '91.  
12  
13Ruth Stewart: [34:47] Of what year?  
14  
15Lola Olsmith: 1991.  
16  
17Ruth Stewart: [34:49] '91.  
18  
19Lola Olsmith: Uh-huh.  
20  
21Ruth Stewart: [34:53] Okay. And your experience in that kind of a situation, in the Gulf  
22 War, um, how did that compare to Vietnam, in terms of your own feelings  
23 about it or your own response to it?  
24  
25Lola Olsmith: Well, I think it was totally different. Of course, the country, it was totally  
26 different for the country, too. And we were just very thankful that, that we  
27 didn't see the casualties that we were, could've seen.  
28  
29Ruth Stewart: [35:30] You didn't get many of the casualties then at all?  
30  
31Lola Olsmith: Mm-hm. I think I saw one.  
32  
33Ruth Stewart: [35:35] You were really just staffing the routine things.  
34  
35Lola Olsmith: That's right. We, we just were there. We, uh, I think the civilian personnel  
36 were very happy to see us – dependents, I'm talking about, not personnel.  
37 Civilian dependents were very grateful that we were there because their  
38 care had been cut down drastically.  
39  
40Ruth Stewart: [36:01] Mm-hm. Mm-hm.  
41  
42Lola Olsmith: So, I re-, we returned back home and, um, I had planned on retiring before  
43 we ever knew we were gonna be activated. That, we got back in, uh, May,

1 the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, and by the, by November, I had re-, retired from a reserve  
2 unit.

3  
4Ruth Stewart: [36:34] Mm-hm. In reflecting on your military career, do y-, what do you  
5 feel that you gave to the military and that the military gave to you?  
6

7Lola Olsmith: Well, uh, I'd like to talk about what the military gave to me. Uh, I was, uh,  
8 being a diploma graduate, I was very unsure of my, uh, capabilities and  
9 what I could do. I felt like I, I was just a nurse, you know, that's the way I  
10 felt. But, after being in the military and having so many different  
11 experiences, I just, it, it was, uh, gave me more confidence and assurance,  
12 uh, than I could ever, ever dream about. It was really good for me. And I,  
13 in turn, I think I gave, uh, all I could to, uh, to my duties and, uh,  
14 responsibilities. But I was, I was very grateful for, for what it did for me.  
15

16Ruth Stewart: [37:57] Mm-hm. What were the specific highlights, not necessarily  
17 dramatic ones, but what stands out in your memory when somebody asks  
18 you about your experience in the military? It might have been Vietnam or  
19 it might not.  
20

21Lola Olsmith: Um, hm. I'm not sure. I, I really, uh, don't know how to answer that. I'm  
22 just, uh, very proud to be part of it and, uh, but as far as any one incident, I  
23 can't, I really can't think of anything.  
24

25Ruth Stewart: [39:02] Okay. Since you left the reserves, have you joined any veterans'  
26 organizations?  
27

28Lola Olsmith: Well, [laughter] I think the, the, uh, Overseas Service League is my first  
29 experience with, uh, with joining another organization. And, um, I'm  
30 finding that very interesting, that, uh, being able to, to work with  
31 wonderful ladies that I'm meeting there.  
32

33Ruth Stewart: [39:40] And what do you do besides, then, um, with your life now that  
34 you're out of the military, out of the reserves?  
35

36Lola Olsmith: Mm-hm. I probably spent most of my time, um, with my community, with  
37 my neighborhood. I, um, joined the, uh, our homes association and I  
38 served as president on it for 4 years and I'm still active with it as the  
39 secretary and, uh, uh, doing different things with it. And that's probably  
40 my biggest, more time consuming than anything else I do. Trying, trying,  
41 promoting membership in that and...  
42

1Ruth Stewart: [40:30] Mm-hm. Is there anything else that you would like to say about  
2 your experience or your feelings or your, um, contacts in the military or  
3 since then that you'd like to add in now?  
4

5Lola Olsmith: Well, once you've been in the military, uh, there's a ver-, there's a  
6 closeness there that, uh, you don't experience anywhere else and, uh, even  
7 when I was in Vietnam, and, uh, the feelings that, that, that the whole  
8 group had, we knew that it wouldn't last, you know, that once we got back  
9 to the real world that, uh, that we wouldn't, uh, experience that anymore.  
10 And, uh, but likewise, uh, you have that on a similar way with the people  
11 that you work with or assigned with in the military. And I think it's even  
12 more so now that, when you meet up with people that, that you've, uh,  
13 shared common interests with.  
14

15Ruth Stewart: [41:44] The bond is still there.

16

17Lola Olsmith: Yeah. Mm-hm.

18

19Ruth Stewart: [41:47] Mm-hm. Well, we really appreciate you taking time to do this with  
20 us, Lola, and to add this bit of history to that of our country, the military,  
21 the women in the military, and nursing.  
22

23Lola Olsmith: Well, I hope it will be useful.

24

25Ruth Stewart: [42:05] Thank you.

26

27

28/ab