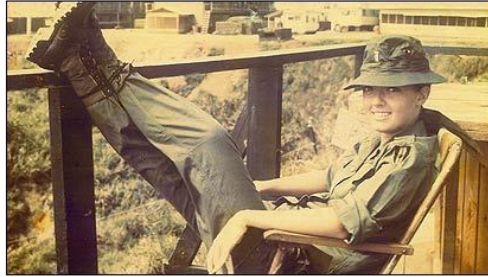


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In war, a healing touch

The Boston Globe

Documentary honors nurses who served in Vietnam



Army nurse Maureen Adduci in 1970, outside the hospital at Chu Lai in Vietnam on the day she made first lieutenant, and last week (at left), with her dog tags.

By Nadia Salomon, Globe Correspondent | October 25, 2007

It was January of 1970; Maureen Adduci was only 21 years old, the eldest of seven, and in dire need of money to pay for nursing school. So she enlisted in the Army, and, not long after, she was shipped off to Vietnam.

"Recruiters promised someplace wonderful - Hawaii, Colorado, or Europe," she said. "You asked not to be sent to this place called Vietnam. I wanted someplace in Europe. I definitely didn't want to go to a war zone."

Now in her late 50s, Adduci, a Dover resident and the mother of two grown children, has shared her wartime experiences as one of eight women interviewed for a television documentary, "Vietnam Nurses with Dana Delany." First aired last year on the Women's Entertainment cable network, the award-winning program will be rebroadcast next month on Veterans Day weekend.

Delany, who served as host in the documentary, is best known for her role as Colleen McMurphy, a Vietnam War nurse in the 1988-1991 ABC television series "China Beach" - a fictionalized version of a role very much like the one in which Adduci served at the height of the war. When her daughter saw the documentary, Adduci said, "She was blown away that I was the same age" that she is now.

The stress is obvious even today as Adduci discusses her memories of Vietnam. "It's a place nobody should have to go," she said. She reiterated the same sentence, this time with emphasis, "It's a place nobody should have to go, particularly young people."

Adduci remembered everything about the day she arrived in Chu Lai, Vietnam. She was stationed at the 91st Evacuation Hospital, a specialty medical unit with about 180 beds. She'll never forget riding a school bus with metal grates covering the windows to keep grenades and rockets out.

After arriving and getting processed, she headed to a picnic table where she saw a nurse covered in blood and smoking a cigarette. As she walked by, the nurse called out her name: "Adduci? Oh my God! You're here?"

It was a woman Adduci had known in nursing school. The next sentence out of the nurse's mouth: "Shoot yourself in the foot or get pregnant!"

Adduci said within minutes, she was thrust into an operating room for a shift that lasted 24 hours. "In the operating room, we just moved them in and moved them out," she said. "We never knew anybody's name."

In Vietnam, the average nurse was 22 years old, and the average soldier was 19, Adduci said. She equates her experiences with what she imagines is the experience of the men and women now serving in Iraq. "I can't think about it," she said, closing her eyes. "I only read the list of names, where they're from, how old are they? It's killing me. It's just killing me."

Adduci got out of Vietnam just before Christmas in 1970. After getting off a plane in Seattle, she threw her uniform away and traveled in civilian clothes. "I just wanted to be out of that country," she said. "I just wanted to be in the US. I didn't have to be in the Army anymore."

Still, Adduci believes she and her colleagues made a real contribution during their time in Vietnam, providing care to injured soldiers. With tears in her eyes, she said, "We did our best. They were cared for and . . . someone was with them before they died."

The documentary on Adduci and her fellow nurses was the brainchild of

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Margaret Carson, a nursing professor at St. Anselm College in New Hampshire. Carson came up with the idea as she was conducting a clinical study on post-traumatic stress disorder in Vietnam War nurses.

The documentary was nominated for two News and Documentary Emmy Awards, and won in the editing category. On Sept. 24, Adduci and two other women interviewed for the documentary attended the awards show in New York.

"It was an honor," she said. "From a tiny, little New Hampshire psych lab to New York, sitting next to Ted Koppel."

Adduci said the editor, Dan Meadows of Creative Street Entertainment, was born in a Saigon field hospital during the war, when his parents were missionaries in Vietnam. "I was thrilled for this company, because they were so dedicated to the project," she said. "They really believed these were stories that should be heard."

"Vietnam Nurses with Dana Delany" is scheduled for rebroadcast on the WE network over Veterans Day weekend, at 1 a.m. and 10 a.m. on Nov. 10.

Adduci, meanwhile, can be found on the stage at the Boston Center for the Arts through the middle of next month, doing one of her favorite things - acting. She is ecstatic about playing two characters, Mother Jones, a union organizer, and Margaret Rowan, wife of a union official, in Robert Schenckan's play, "The Kentucky Cycle." ■

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