

War -- by Betty Kreinik

This is a real story; it is not a lament. The story starts in the early Viet Nam War, 1967. It was a time when the phrase "waiting wife" was used to describe the Army wife whose husband was deployed to serve in Viet Nam. She (I) would be waiting in a little cottage in Brooklyn, New York, our home town with our two daughters, ages 3 and 1-1/2. And there was the challenge of maintaining the checkbook and the little Volkswagen Beetle. Learning to master a stick shift car without grinding gears. Finally - success. I became a proficient driver, enough to drive to Staten Island to see my sister. And keeping the checkbook balanced. (I returned checkbook control to my husband last year.)

We wrote to each other as often as we could. We co-wrote limericks and Haiku, and traded audio tapes.

There was a ham radio operator system called MARS. These volunteers made it possible for us to speak to each other through one-way radio transmissions, like a walkie-talkie. The ham operator would listen to our conversation. We would say "OVER" when one finished talking. That signaled the operator to hit a switch to reverse the transmission so that the other could talk. It was better than not hearing his voice, and I was grateful for it.

1968 The world turned topsy-turvy on January 28, 1967. The Vietnamese launched a coordinated bombing offensive on the country. We followed the news on TV and radio. There was no contact with my husband. No word

from the Army, but frightening news in the media.

Our families were frantic. They called daily. I had to remain calm. My biggest fear was that my doorbell would ring one day and standing on the other side of the door, there would be two Army officers. Their mission was to tell me that my husband was gone. Being frantic was not going to be helpful. Four or five days later, the phone rang, and a very distant voice said, "hi honey, I'm all right. Tell the families. OVER". At that point, my composure left me and I sat down, shaking and crying. I thought of the waiting wives who were as grateful as I was. Sadly, there were so many wives who would be widowed.

My husband came home in July 1968, but the war did not end for us. We were later stationed in Hawaii. When the military needed my husband's intelligence expertise, he would be called back to Viet Nam for short periods of time.

The war ended after Nixon won re-election. Watergate would follow with no love for Nixon, but relief that there would be no more military people dying.

I am very aware of the plight of veterans and their families, and proud to be part of the U.S. Army Family.