

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ANN C. BRINK
Nurse, Air Force, Vietnam War
2011

OH
1456

**OH
1456**

Brink, Ann C. Oral History Interview, 2011.

Approximate length: 45 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Ann C. Brink, a Beloit, Wisconsin native, discusses her Vietnam War service as a nurse with the Air Force. She enlisted into service and talks about basic training in Shepherds Air Force Base (Texas), and her active duty station at Vandenberg Air Force Base. Brink explains how things were changing with the facilities she was using while working in the Air Force, such as the inclusion of ICUs in hospitals. She speaks about the relationships she had with other servicemen and women. She also explains her experiences in relation to the Anti-War movement in Madison in the late 1960s.

Biographical Sketch:

Brink served with the Air Force as a nurse from 1967-1969. After being discharged, she returned to Beloit, and eventually moved to Madison where she still lives.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Rick F. Berry, 2011.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2016.

Reviewed by Robert Brito, 2017.

Abstract written by Robert Brito, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of Brink.OH1456]

Berry: This is an interview with MC Brink, who served with the US Air Force during the Vietnam era. This interview is being conducted at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum at the following address, 30 West Mifflin Street, Madison, Wisconsin on the following date, July 27, 2011. The interviewer is Richard F. Berry. Okay, I'm ready to go here. Can you tell me briefly about your background and your life circumstances before you entered military service?

Brink: Sure, I was born in Beloit, Wisconsin and went in the military from Madison, Wisconsin, where I had just completed my nurse's training at St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing. I had worked a year before I decided that I would--possibly going to go into the service.

Berry: When did you graduate?

Brink: I graduated in 1966. And we went in--I went into the Air Force in 1967. So I'd worked a year. At that time the Air Force only took people that had already graduated--the nurses, at least. One of the reasons why I went into the service was because I loved to travel and I knew that that was a great possibility. I had a neighbor, a girl next door was career Army and she talked very positively about her experiences in the Army and I thought, "Well hmm, the Air Force really sounds to good to me," so I looked into that with a friend. When I first graduated from nurse's training my roommate and I decided that we were going to be the nurses on the Amtrak train from Chicago to Seattle. Well, then she decided to get married so there I was by myself thinking, "Okay, got to find a plan B," I lived with some girls in an apartment and one of them decided that that would be kind of fun for her to do, too, so--

Berry: This was in Madison?

Brink: In Madison, yes, uh-huh. So we went down and talked to our recruiter. Well, lo and behold, they found out she was deaf in one ear, so she went, was not acceptable for the Air Force at that time. So you know, of course, the recruiter was not going to let me change my mind. [laughs] [clears throat] I know I gave him a run for his money. He had to work very hard to get me to take my oath. I filled out the paperwork. I was very excited thinking that, "Oh boy, you know, I'm going to have this chance," but boy, what am I going to do, because I'm so darn chicken to do things by myself. So he set up a time for me to come in to take my oath of office, to be commissioned as a second Lieutenant. Well, I got halfway through the oath, I put my hand down, I said, "I can't do this. I cannot commit to this.

You know, I don't want to do it by myself," well, I'm sure that guy just thought, [laughs] "Oh boy, we have somebody here that's gonna give me a run for my money, that's for sure.

So anyway, I kept my relationship up with him, you know, talking back and forth and eventually I did go out to Truax with him and I was sworn in and got my commission and went to Sheppard Air Force Base, is where I did my basic training. There was another male nurse from Janesville that was going down as well and so the two of us rode together and from there on I found I could survive without a close friend near me, because I was able to make many more friends, so that was--

Berry: Why did you choose the Air Force over the Army or the Navy for example?

Brink: I think because the Air Force, you already had to have your degree before you went in. And I thought the Air Force--my dream at that time was to become a flight nurse. So that's why I chose the Air Force and I really didn't get--they weren't really involved in as much combat at that time. So that's why I chose the Air Force.

Berry: Okay, so you took the oath and you headed off for your basic training, essentially.

[00:05:02]

Brink: Right. Now that was something. [laughs] I had been, you know, out of the state many times. We always took family vacations. However, when I got down to Sheppard, I was just amazed at the number of people who had never been hardly out of their own hometown. And one of the activities that we had to do was a mock disaster scene. So we were taken out into a field and of course, Texas, at Sheppard there's not much around there so [laughs] it was pretty stark. They had a mock airplane crash with many injuries and we were all doctors and nurses, psychologists, dentists, so everybody was a medical person. We were sitting on bleachers in a cow pasture and a cows started walking around the instructor and [laughs] you know, to me cows were like seeing a dog. You know, Wisconsin, cows, you know. [laughs] Not a scene that is unusual.

Well, these doctors from New York were just enthralled and they were jumping out of the bleachers taking pictures and that was just, it was the most comical thing I think I saw in a long time. Just cracked me up, but it really made me think about, you know, it is amazing how different we are. We come from the United States, but every state is so different and every person has such a different background and view of life and so that was very interesting.

Berry: Did you make some lasting friendships in basic training?

Brink: You know, we did not. We did not stay together, any of us. I have a picture that I'm donating to the archives and it's got our whole class. But I don't think I could tell you the names of any of them. While we were there we had three, we were only there three weeks and I know when you talk to other people, their basic training was much longer than three weeks, but since we had already been trained and we were ready to pretty much step into our job, whereas you know, people that were just coming off the street and going to different positions in the service would need much more training that--we didn't really need training. We just needed to be trained how to assimilate into the branch of service that we were in.

Berry: What was the reaction of your family and friends to the fact that you decided to join the Air Force?

Brink: Well, I think they were all pretty proud. Another reason why I did go into the service was because at that time Vietnam was going in full force and really there was only one other person in my family, my mother's brother who served in any armed forces. Both my brother and my father had had--what the heck did you call it when they got to deferrals? Is that what it was called? So they didn't take them. Because my father was on a farm at the time and my brother had some health problems and so that's why. I thought, "Well, you know, really, somebody in this family should do something," as we do have a great country and we wanted to keep it that way, so that's why, that's why I chose the service.

Berry: What did you do for recreation sorts of things in your off time during basic?

Brink: Well, I'm going to take a new pizza [??] down there.

Berry: Oh, of course.

Brink: Well, the free time that we had I did hook up with some people and we went to Austin, we did some traveling around Texas and I got to Dallas, other places and of course, there was always the officers' club and we met a lot of pilots in there. They kept us pretty busy so we didn't really have a huge amount of free time.

Berry: Did you stay in like a BWQ sort of arrangement?

Brink: Yes, we did stay in BLQs. Mm-hmm.

Berry: How was the food?

[00:09:40]

Brink: Well, you know, being in the medical, you were pretty lucky because you always had good food. [laughs] And that--some people from other divisions would come to the hospital just for food. Let's see, what else can I tell you? Well, the basic training, I believe that was quite an eye-opener. During this mock disaster we stayed in the field, so we had--we had tents, but really they were more like canopies. Everybody had their own cot. We had to sleep in mosquito netting and you know, it was not unusual to wake up and have a cow looking at you in the face. We had the old style showers, so you know, they were like a couple of pieces of canvas hanging up with a spout and since Sheppard had a lot of pilots being trained there, there was always a helicopter around, you know. Of course, they'd come a little lower so they could see if they could see anything. [laughs] We had to do a nighttime--it wasn't a scavenger hunt, it was, I don't know what you'd call it.

But we broke up into teams and we were given a compass and a flashlight and that's about it and we were supposed to go from A to B to C and--so that was quite interesting. They had us do a mock--oh, let's see, what would I call that? What like the enemy was coming and we had to move patients. So we had to carry gurneys over swinging bridges and they were throwing grenades and things into the water. That was very realistic. We had to go through an obstacle course. I remember one of the groups got halfway up, crawling up a ladder. Well, it was not a--what do you call it? Let's see, it was then like a set of bleachers. Okay so we're carrying somebody over this, to mock a hill and we got into a bee's nest and so bees were flying all over. Well, [laughs]--

Berry: That probably wasn't planned but it was realistic.

Brink: That was not planned, but it was very realistic because who knows what the world you're going to be coming up with, so. We had to go into a tent and put on the, the masks and then they pulled the plug on some of the gasses so that we had to practice, you know, how to get the gas mask on correctly. They made us sing a couple songs. And that was very intense.

Berry: So your basic training lasted about three weeks?

Brink: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Berry: And there was indoctrination there with respect to the culture of the Air Force and that sort of thing?

Brink: Right.

Berry: Did you have further advanced training after that? Or you reported to your first active duty station?

Brink: We just reported to our first active duty station, yeah.

Berry: Mm-hmm. Where was that located?

Brink: I went to Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. That was one thing that they did let me choose where I wanted to go. And I chose California and so Vandenberg was where I was assigned.

Berry: What was your first impression when you showed up at Vandenberg?

Brink: Well, I was very lucky because they had just moved into a new hospital. Up until 1967 that, the hospital was nothing but a Quonset hut and they didn't have a lot of equipment and it was different than, you know, when I got there it was just a very, very modern hospital. We had pumped in oxygen. We didn't have to grab tanks and pull, you know, pull that out. We had suction on the walls. We didn't have to haul suction machines around and the hospital itself was set up very well. It had a clinic. There were two, three, two floors, but we had every service. There was medical, surgical, OB, an emergency room. We had a recovery room, operating room and they had an area that was also set up as an intensive care unit. Intensive care units were just coming into vogue at that time. I had worked at St. Mary's for that year, the year in Madison and was involved in the first ICU setup there. We had a medical and a surgical intensive care unit when they built one of their new wings.

[00:15:03]

Berry: Did you have a choice with respect to which area of the hospital you worked in?

Brink: No, I was assigned to surgical because that's what I had been working in and then after--I think it was maybe about six, eight months, they moved me over to the intensive care unit because they knew I had that background, so.

Berry: Was that something you had a say in and they were trying to give you a broad based experience as a nurse? Or--

Brink: Well, I think they decided that--that probably would be a good fit for them to have me over there because I had experience in that whereas some of the nurses didn't have that. We also had some civilian nurses working with us and I must say, the hospital was very well staffed. It wasn't like two

people to a unit or anything like that. We were very well staffed.

Berry: How about equipment? Did you have everything you needed to get the job done and so forth?

Brink: We did. We did. We had every piece of equipment we could have needed.

Berry: So did the hospital serve as a receiving area for people coming back from Vietnam at all? Or was it just general Air Force hospital? What was the--

Brink: It was a general Air Force hospital. We--occasionally we got some people back that had contracted malaria, but we didn't get anybody for, vets from --wounded Vietnam veterans. We did send quite a few people from our base to Vietnam. One of the first things I did when I got on base was put my name in for a volunteering to go to Vietnam. There were like three of us that went over. Many more had gone but for some strange reason, the only nurses that were sent over to Vietnam while I was there never requested it. [laughs] I don't know if they thought we were nuts and they didn't want [inaudible] [laughs] because we were volunteering or what. But--

Berry: Did you pursue your kind of thought about being a flight nurse while you were there?

Brink: I did. I talked to my superiors and you know, they were in agreement. But then about a year into my service I got married. So that kind of changed a lot of things.

Berry: Your enlistment period was for how long?

Brink: Two years.

Berry: Two years.

Brink: Mm-hmm. Two years. If I were just--I'd made First Lieutenant--if I had stayed three more weeks I would have been Captain. The major that I had for my supervisor, you know, really wanted me to stay in and I got rave reviews and every--review that I had with her, she, you know, advocated for me to stay in and we moved over there and I would have gone if I hadn't been married.

Berry: Sounds like you had a pleasant relationship with your superior there [inaudible] in Vandenberg?

Brink: Very.

Berry: How about your coworkers? The other nurses?

Brink: The other nurses, we all got along. We--I lived in a BLQ that had--well no, mine was an officer's quarters. I had--these were all new as well, so I mean, I really came in at a time when things were plush. We had beautiful brick buildings. We each had our own bathroom and bedroom and then we shared a common area with the washer and dryer, kitchen and living room. We had a nice patio out the back. It was very nice. I did not have any nurses living with me. There were three other girls and you know, I was trying to think what they were--they were all officers. They were not nurses. And I'm not sure what they worked in, but there were nurses and many, many engineers living in our area. But they were only four to a house.

Berry: Four bedrooms in kind of each house?

Brink: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And we spent a lot of time together, the whole neighborhood of all of us because everybody was in the predicament that their families were very far away. So we had a lot of get-togethers, parties, meals. We celebrated holidays together.

Berry: Did you make any lasting friendships there or?

Brink: I did not. There were some of us that were really close and we always thought we'd stay together but everybody went back to the--somewhere else and we never got together.

Berry: You have memorable stories about your time at Vandenberg?

[00:19:59]

Brink: Yeah. We just--we had a great time, I'm telling you. [laughs] We had--I think it was like once a month, we had the parade review, you know, where we had to get dressed up in our blues and then we had to stand at attention and they came and did an inspection on--how we were put together. And I remember one time I was, I thought, "Oh my gosh, my shoes don't look as shiny as they should," so I'm standing in the back row rubbing my toes of my shoes on my nylons, trying to get them shined up. [laughs] Well, the colonel came by and looked at me like he could--because the backs of my legs then were all black because [laughs] the shoe polish had come off. I'm sure he thought, "Oh my goodness," [laughs] but I didn't get any detention or whatever, so [laughs] just a good laugh. There was a lot of camaraderie. The doctors lived off base. Most of them were married and had families. But we all got along very well in the hospital. And most of our social activities were with the engineers that lived in our neighborhood.

Berry: Did you have opportunities to get off base and--

Brink: Yes. We had--our rotation that when we worked nights, we always worked seven in a row and then we would get four days off. So when we-- whenever we did that, four days, we were gone. We went to Calif--San Francisco or San Diego or over to Las Vegas, down to LA. A lot of times, if I had a day off and I didn't have anything major that I had to do, I would just call up the flight guys and ask if anybody was going on a day trip and there were quite a few times that I took a helicopter ride with them. I just rode along with them because they had business to do up north or down south and so I got to ride along with them, have lunch and then come back, so that was quite interesting. And I did take a few hops. I remember one time I was going to Boston and I took a cargo plane from Vandenberg to Omaha, Nebraska and I'm going to tell you, riding in one of those is hilarious because it's all gutted. You know, you sit--[laughs] you might sit on a box if you're lucky. [laughs] And then I got a plane from there out to Boston to visit friends. So yes, I did a fair amount of traveling when I was there.

I can't say anything bad about my experience. I was very, very fortunate. I met a lot of great people, although we didn't stay in touch, it sure was a great experience to be with them at the time. And let's see, what else?

Berry: What about a year--go ahead.

Brink: Well, I was just going to say, back to the hospital--we would get kids that had either done a tour of Vietnam, been somewhere else and then got assigned to us or were--started out at our base, got some training like either work as a corpsman or you know, with the engineers in the silos or--the veterinary department, whatever-- and they were going to be shipped to Vietnam. We had so many car accidents because the roads there were very windy. Most of them weren't used to mountain driving. Of course, back then there were hardly any lights on the roads. But we had some pretty horrific traffic accidents with kids that we dealt with and I always call them "kids," probably most of them were older than me but--[laughs] and that--I guess this is another little story that tells you how different areas of the country are so different.

I had this one gentleman who had been in a terrible crash. He was in a coma. He was coming out of a coma, slashing around, he was just so aggressive and he just kept yelling that he wanted some Gatorade. I thought, "What in the world is Gatorade?" all I could think of was an alligator, you know, what the heck. [laughs] You milk an alligator? I don't know what they're talking about. So I did get a hold of his father and he said, "Oh," he says, "We were a test area for Gatorade. It's a vitamin drink

type thing, you know, electrolytes,” so when he came down to visit he brought some for him. But that was so strange, you know, hearing some of these things like [laughs] you think they’re, oh, they must have a really bad head injury, talking about Gatorade, but --

So I guess that shows my age that all those things were new back then. [laughs] Okay, you were going to ask me a question.

[00:25:11]

Berry: Well, the question was just going to be about a year into your stay at Vandenberg you had a life-changing event with your marriage and so forth--

Brink: Very much so.

Berry: How did that affect your living conditions and your work at the hospital and so forth?

Brink: Well actually, it really didn’t change much except that I lived in a different place. My husband and I got an apartment in Lompoc, which was about maybe twenty, thirty miles from the base. And we lived there--I had my same schedule. Really nothing that much changed except that, you know, I was married. Kept the same friends. We did, you know--he and I did things. We went back to see his folks a couple times an --

Berry: You were still working in the ICU?

Brink: Mm-hmm.

Berry: Mm-hmm.

Brink: Mm-hmm. And my--our parents came out to visit a couple times. I had some girlfriends from high school come and visit me. They had quite an experience on the base, too, because you have the decal on the fender of your car, so they don’t know who’s in the car, coming in the gate, you know, they got a kick out of all the salutes that they were getting and-- [laughs] yeah, that was funny. But yeah, it did change my life insofar as I was married, but it didn’t really change my Air Force experience because really nothing changed. I kept my same position.

Berry: So you completed your Air Force service then at Vandenberg? Is that correct?

Brink: Yes, uh-huh. You know, I had--had I not gotten married I would have extended and stayed. About three weeks before my discharge date was

coming up, orders for Vietnam did come through, but at that point I was able to decline because I would have had to extend to go and do the service there, so I did not go.

Berry: It sounds like your supervisor was lobbying you to stay in the Air Force.

Brink: Yes, yes. In fact, both she and the colonel, who was the head of the hospital, talked to both my husband and I and really didn't want us to get married. [laughs] But we did.

Berry: Okay, anything else you'd like to relate about experience at Vandenberg and I guess your experience in the Air Force? What--

Brink: Yeah, there's a couple things. First of all, the space lab was just being developed and so that was going on, on the base. The Minuteman Missile and the Saturn Missiles were also being developed and constructed there. At one point I was able to go into one of the silos and see a Saturn that was being built. And because we knew the engineers, we would find out when a launch was going to take place and be able to go out to the silos and see them and that is the most spectacular sight anyone can ever see is to see those missiles go up in the air without turbo blasters or whatever they have. I guess going out to Cape Canaveral later in life, it was really inspiring to see how far we've come.

Berry: Okay. Just quickly, could you describe a typical day in the ICU?

Brink: In the ICU? Oh, sure. Let's see. We would have--the ICU and the recovery room were in one big room, half and half. So we'd have like maybe three nurses and we'd either be assigned to the recovery room or the ICU unit. The ICU unit had usually about four patients. Anything could happen just like here, you know, in civilian hospitals where you know, you get your admission, you do, you follow the orders, you get things set up, you do as much as you can for them. I guess it's really no different. There was really no difference between the ICU there and the ones that I worked at at St. Mary's at the time.

Berry: Did the admissions normally come from the emergency room?

[00:29:54]

Brink: Yes, yes. Yes. Or if they had been in the hospital and had a setback of some kind, then they would come from a unit. But you know, we had, we did everything like even upstairs in the OB department, we'd have preemie babies born and we would have to take care of them just like they do here now, you know, with the IVs and the incubators and parents could come in and see them and after they got to be a certain weight and a

certain strength and they could hold them--that they could touch them through the incubators, just like they do now here.

Berry: It sounds like you had adequate staff and adequate equipment and materials and time to do a satisfactory job as a nurse and so forth. Sounds like you had a, kind of a pleasant experience to--

Brink: It was very pleasant. It was, yes, we had very extraordinary--

Berry: Excellent. Okay, are there any other items you'd like to relate about, your experience at Vandenberg?

[break in recording] [00:31:04 to 31:11]

Berry: Live here again, and we were talking about your discharge from the military and how that came about and where and so forth. Would you continue with that?

Brink: Sure. I was married, of course, at that time and my husband had just gotten orders for Taiwan. So I decided, well, I decided that I would get out then, because I couldn't really go with him. I stayed in California for--it must have been, six, eight months after I was discharged. I did--I think at that time we had to--it was just automatic for two years, you were kind of still on paper that you could be called back if they needed you. I never got called back. I did join the Legion at Lompoc. My husband and I both did, actually and--but I didn't keep it up. When I moved out of California I did not sign up at any other veteran's legion. Probably because we were moving quite a bit.

Anyway, so I lived in our apartment and I got a job at a little hospital in Solvang, California. It was another great experience. [laughs] It was a very small hospital built around a courtyard. It was up in the hills around Santa Maria, between Santa Maria and Lompoc in Solvang, California. It was a little Danish village. But all the hospital rooms were two beds. They all had patio doors that opened onto the courtyard. They had bird feeders and things in [inaudible]--every kind of bird you can think of would be out there. Deer would come down and feed. I mean it was very tranquil. It was really very, very nice. There they only had a couple nurses and you kind of just ran from one department to the other. You'd pass your meds, you know, if somebody came in the E.R. you'd have to go down there, check them out and somebody came in in labor, you'd have go and check them out and stay with them, so it wasn't as well staffed as the Air Force hospital I had been in, but still it was pretty nice and a pretty plushy place.

People would come in there for chemotherapy, so they would be just there for like eight to ten hours, get their IVs and go. We did the inhalation

therapy with--oh, those special machines--you know, right now my mind is blank but--so it actually furthered my nursing skills because we had to do everything. So that was quite interesting but then I found out I was pregnant and of course, my husband was going to be leaving, so we contemplated what to do and because I was--I could have gone with my husband over to Taiwan, but two weeks before the baby was due I would have to go to another, to the opposite end of the island and wait for the birth of the baby and he wouldn't be able to come. So then I chose to go home and he went over by himself. And that was probably the most trying time.

[00:35:01]

Berry: So when you say "go home," you mean you returned to Madison?

Brink: I returned to Beloit.

Berry: Beloit.

Brink: Where my family was. And he went to Taiwan. So then I worked in Beloit at the hospital there. And again, I was involved in a switchover because they had just built a new hospital and I helped move from the old hospital to the new hospital and again, worked in intensive care and that was very well equipped, starting out there. So I had the baby without my husband around and eventually was able to contact him through the Red Cross, but by that time he--I think the baby was like probably three weeks old before we finally got a hold of him and he didn't see her until she was six months old, when he was discharged and came home. So we lived in Beloit for just a very short time. He was able to enroll in Madison Business College and use his G.I. Bill, so he went to school and we moved to Madison and we've been in Madison ever since.

Berry: Go ahead.

Brink: I don't know what I was going to say, so go ahead. [laughs]

Berry: Well, I was going to ask you about the uniforms you were issued. We have a few items here that kind of relates specifically to women.

Brink: Mm-hmm.

Berry: You've already covered many of those in your discussion. I'm wondering about uniforms and military-issued clothing and gear. Did you find them adequate?

Brink: Yes. We--military issued uniforms for work. They--of course, back then

they were in a starched model, you know, where you kind of [laughs] wash from home. Like a robot. But they did the laundry for us and we, we were issued like maybe four or five and they would wash them and take them, you know, once a week we'd get them back. So yeah, they were very much similar to the student nurse's uniforms that we had to wear at St. Mary's that were starched and [laughs] the white nylons and the whole gear but, no, so they fit fine, they were fine. I did not have any trouble with any other clothing that they were--we had quite a few outfits. We had a light blue striped, kind of everyday skirt and blouse. We had for travel or those parades or anything kind of formal, we had what was called the "dress blues" and that was like a gabardine or something, they were like a suit with a jacket and top and a skirt and let's see. And then for extremely formal get-togethers we had a black skirt and a white--I don't know what kind of, what you would call it, but it's a short jacket that came to the waist. So no, everything was fit fine and we chose our own shoes, they didn't give us shoes and because I wasn't in combat I really didn't have to have boots and you know, those kinds of things. So.

Berry: Could you comment on your interactions with male service members and officers, maybe as in comparison to civilian life?

Brink: Well, the male officers, most of the ones that we had contact with were, were doctors and they were all very pleasant. There weren't any luses. [laughs] Most of them had families and they were just glad to have nurses available to work with them. Many of them had just graduated and some of them I don't even think had gone through all their internship, so they were in the process of learning and they were very accommodating and they would, they were very open in teaching us things that we, you know, they would like us to learn and listening to us, because they were also learning from us. So yeah, I didn't have any problems with the officers. Of course, being on a base that has so many non-officers--if you had your uniform on they were mandated to salute you. Well, I felt like such a fool, I would cross the street, I would do anything possible [laughs] to avoid them having to salute me. I did get a kick out of the officers in the, at the gate because you know of course, they had to salute you through and we had a lot of jokes going on with them so.

[00:40:27]

Berry: Were you injured at all while you were in your service?

Brink: Mm, no, not really. I had--I had a bad back at one again and almost didn't make it into nursing school, but somebody pulled a barstool out from under me and that aggravated it but no, I had absolutely no combat, no wounds, no nothing, no.

Berry: Okay and did you join any other veterans' organizations besides the Legion?

Brink: No, I did not. However, a couple of years ago when they opened the Women's Memorial in Washington, DC--

Berry: That's a powerful place, isn't it?

Brink: Very powerful. I've been there. We go to DC quite a bit. I have--my cousin lives there and he wanted to make sure that I saw it, so I did see it the very first year that it was open. And then looked for some of my records to see if they were in there, but apparently there had been a fire and a lot of the records--my era that were destroyed in a fire. So I did join there and I get information from them every couple months. So, that's kind of where I'm at, keeping up with them.

Berry: Have you become involved in any reunions at all that were associated with your military service?

Brink: No, I haven't because I haven't seen any. If I would ever see one I would definitely go. I think it's wonderful what the honor flights are doing to get the World War II veterans to DC to see the monuments. The first time I saw the Vietnam Wall I thought that was--my heart stopped. That is just extremely powerful and especially if you go at dusk.

Berry: It sure is.

Brink: I did know some people that passed away because of that. Some of my high school friends but I know kids that went in from Vandenberg that I had worked with as corpsmen, but you know, I never, I don't know what ever happened to them. But my favorite program was "M*A*S*H*." [laughs]

Berry: Well, "M*A*S*H*" is kind of even more antiwar program than anything else.

Brink: Exactly.

Berry: Well done.

Brink: Exactly.

Berry: Could you make a general comment on what your military service has meant to you personally?

Brink: Oh, let's see. Well, sure. I'm very proud of my service. I think that--I think

it's a really great experience for anybody. I did not use my GI Bill and I went back to school later and got my BS degree in nursing, but I did not use my GI Bill. However, I have used--they paid for my books when I went to Edgewood and that was part of my service benefits. Also when we bought our first house we got a VA loan and that was wonderful, so there are so many things out there that are available to people of faith. Look, every experience I've had with people through the Veterans Administration has been very, very positive. And I've--I worked with a couple nurses who did serve in Vietnam and have experienced things that I think probably were related to Agent Orange so I made sure they got over there, into that. I see they're going to be closing Walter Reed, which is--it's kind of the saddest thing to see that close. So many people have gone through there, although I know it's deteriorating. I hope they come up with something else because I think veterans deserve praise and good care.

Berry: Well, it almost appears that our country realizes that now also.

Brink: Yes.

Berry: We seem to be taking quite good care of our present veterans.

[00:44:58]

Brink: It's amazing. You know, when I first was in the service, people that would have injuries like they have now would never have lived. And I'm so glad that they're finally addressing the post-traumatic stress because I think there's so many--especially the Vietnam veterans that have that that were not treated and it's, it's really sickening to see homeless people that have served in our country.

Berry: Now you left the Air Force just about when the demonstrations in our country against the Vietnam War were kind of peaking.

Brink: Yes.

Berry: Did you feel any of that? Were you involved in that at all?

Brink: I didn't. I was in Madison actually when the bombing of Sterling Hall occurred and that was, that was very intense. But no, you know, it's probably because I was a female, because at that time females--it was kind of rare for them to be considered a veteran.

Berry: That's for sure. Okay, is there anything else you'd like to say, M?

Brink: I think we've covered quite a bit.

Berry: And we sure thank you for your willingness to do this. It's very helpful for our archives.

Brink: Great.

[End of Brink.OH1456][End of interview]