

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Constance L. Edwards

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VRV-V-L-2017-066

Constance (Connie) Edwards, an African-American who grew up in Birmingham during the Civil Rights movement and then became an army nurse who served for a year in Vietnam, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember - Vietnam* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Jul 26 & Jul 27, 2017 Location: WILL studio on University of Illinois campus,
Champaign, IL

Date: Aug 14, 2017 Location: IIS, Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support: Videographers – Billy Hatfield, Audio – Dan Panno & Kimberlie
Kranich, Illinois Public Media

Session 3 – Illinois Information Service videographers Mark Suszko and Tony
Bateman

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 2:22 + 2:29 + 2:14 / 2.37 + 2.48 + 2.23 = 7.05 hrs.

Session 1: Growing up in Birmingham, Alabama during the height of the civil rights
movement

Session 2: Army nursing training, and year with the 24th Evac Hospital in S. Vietnam

Session 3: More experiences in Vietnam, and postwar period and Vietnam memorials

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on October 31,
2017.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield,
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Abstract

Constance Edwards, *Veterans Remember*, VRV-V-L-2017-066

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Constance (Connie) Edwards was born on July 14, 1944 in Birmingham, Alabama, and grew up there as part of a large and vibrant African-American family. Her father worked in the steel mill, and her mother was a housewife. By the late 1950s Connie was following the events of the civil rights movement closely, and became involved with that movement when Martin Luther King, Jr. came to town. She participated in non-violent resistance classes, as well as protest marches. On one occasion when she and a friend took the bus to downtown Birmingham one day, they were corralled by the police who were rounding up protesters. The girls were able to escape and keep the incident secret from their parents for many years. On another occasion, Connie fled when attacked by KKK members. Following her graduation from high school in 1962, she attended Tuskegee University with the intent of becoming a nurse. Connie joined an Army nurse training program to help pay for college. She continued to follow the civil rights movement, especially the developments in Birmingham and the civil rights march across Selma, Alabama's Edmund Pettus Bridge in March, 1965, but the school's administrators did not allow the students to participate.

In December, 1965 Second Lieutenant Edwards was commissioned, and then graduated in 1966. She passed her nursing exam after the first try, and was ordered to report for her basic officer training in June, 1966 at Ft. Sam Houston, Texas. Following a year at the William Beaumont Hospital at Ft. Bliss, Texas, she was sent to Vietnam. Edwards arrived in South Vietnam in July, 1967 and was assigned to the 24th Evacuation Hospital, stationed north of Saigon at Long Binh. She spent the next year working at the hospital, and only occasionally leaving the compound. Connie describes her working and living conditions, the nature of the injuries the patients had, and shares stories about several of her more memorable patients. She also discusses the Tet Offensive of 1968, and race relations she observed and experienced. Captain Edwards returned to the U.S. in August, 1968 and continued her nursing career, both as a civilian and in the U.S. Army Reserves. She was involved in a Chicago Welcome Home event in 1986, and the creation of the Woman's Vietnam Memorial, which was dedicated in November, 1993. She returned to Vietnam as a tourist in 2012.

Subject Headings/Key Words: nursing in Vietnam; Birmingham Alabama during civil rights movement; 24th Evacuation Hospital during Vietnam War; Martin Luther King; Tuskegee University; nursing school at Tuskegee; U.S. Army nursing training; race relations in Vietnam; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; William Beaumont Hospital, Ft. Bliss, Texas; Selma, Alabama and Edmund Pettus Bridge; Vietnam Women's Memorial; Chicago Welcome Home event-1986; Tet Offensive of 1968

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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