

Linda Greenfield

**First Lieutenant
U.S. Air Force**

**Incirlik Air Force Base
Adana, Turkey**

I was in the Air Force. I joined in 1972 when I was twenty-two after graduating from nursing school in Marshalltown, Iowa. In those days, a four-year nurse was pretty rare. That three-year hospital base nursing was more common. That's what got me in the service.

I started in Westover Air Force Base in Springfield, Massachusetts. I got temporary duty at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. I graduated from Flight School there, not to be a pilot, but a flight nurse. This was before ICUs existed, so it was quite a thing to get that kind of special education. Then back to Westover. I was in love at the time and I didn't want to change my base. I didn't know that the person who graduated with top honors got an overseas assignment. And I graduated at the top of the class. So they sent me. They needed nurses really badly. I was a "Butter Bar"—a 2LT, and it was just incredibly rare to see a Second Lieutenant assigned overseas. I stood out because I had that rank.

By the time I finished Flight School I only had a year left. It was insane to send a person with one year overseas, but I got an assignment to Incirlik, Turkey for that last year.

I was very happy in Massachusetts. Coming from Blairsburg, Iowa, where I grew up in a town with a hundred people, to being in a bachelor officers' quarters, with young, eligible bachelors in every direction, I was at that point living a party life and I really didn't want to leave it. At the time, my housemates in the quarters were B-52 and KC-9 pilots. They were beginning to bomb with B-52s very, very low, which made it very dangerous because these were huge, lumbering planes. The young man I was in love with was a B-52 pilot. Every day I didn't know if he was alive or not. He

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was in Guam, and I got sent to Turkey. Between Turkey and Guam is India, and India would not allow any activity over their air space. So in order for this guy to visit, he had to travel around the world.

The base at Incirlik, Turkey, was a base that received incoming flights with casualties. If they were really serious, they went first to Germany. In Germany they got stabilized, then they would come to the Incirlik base. We would keep them there until they got well and got sent back to their assignment or got sent home. The patients I remember the most were actually the doctors, doctors that were patients, that had tried to commit suicide. They were drafted, and these very young men, fresh out of medical school, found it very difficult. We had a big psych unit.

We had two major kinds of patients, the psychiatric patients, and the infectious patients. There was so much shigella and salmonella, hepatitis, really quite serious infectious diseases. I had ten people in a ward, all of them with hepatitis, all of them yellow, with horrible liver conditions. Then right across the hall would be those who were depressed and mentally ill. I had no women patients. I had young, young men. We saw all kinds of nasty cases that I try really hard not to remember. The infectious diseases were mostly GI (gastro intestinal) based, so these were young men who were in constant diarrhea scenarios. Temperatures of a hundred and four, a hundred and six for hours and hours and hours. I saw conditions there that really helped prepare me for life. We started using drugs, very harsh antibiotics that were not common in the civilian world, on these people. When I got out of the service, I saw a casual attitude to these drugs as they emerged into the civilian world, and it was alarming to me. They didn't know how dangerous these drugs were. I am still finding that problem.

That category of drugs still exists, and people just use the antibiotics like they're NOT destroying the liver, NOT destroying the kidneys, NOT destroying their health.

The public impression of Vietnam was already very, very negative. All of the early '70s was, "Just get out of there, get out of the war." Everyone was saying, "What are we doing here?" All of my patients had their lives at risk. Those were serious, serious infections that killed people. And there were people very seriously mentally ill struggling with their existence. Men, all that had incredible potential, to live a life that wasn't going to be this life.

Hashish was the problem in Turkey, not marijuana. Hashish was the way that people managed their lives. Brad, my future husband, was the commander of the Office of Special Investigations, kind of the FBI of the Air Force. He was very involved in trying to keep the base clean of hashish because the base was also Turkish property, and having hashish meant imprisonment. And imprisonment in Turkey was brutal. He was constantly trying to keep hashish kind of localized. I remember being in his office one day when everything was piled high with hashish because they'd just had a big drug bust.

At the time he retired, he was a captain, but he was one of those guys who didn't have to reveal their rank because of their work. An example of one of the things he handled, the base psychiatrist, the *only* psychiatrist, the one we needed for all of these very sick people, was being charged with embezzlement by my future husband because he was sending stuff home.

Coming from Iowa, I kind of knew what poverty was, but I didn't really know what poverty was in a third world country, where the people are sending cripples with limbs missing out to the corners to ask for a dime. And, oh my God, I can't even meet one person's need, let alone the whole country. I found myself frozen. I had a very wise person say to me, "Do what you can at the moment." I've taken that piece of wisdom with me for my entire life.

I can imagine that the young men coming from battle, that ended up on my ward, were going through more horrendous shock than mine. I was, number one, a woman. I could cry. I could scream and yell, be a little disrespectful because I was an officer. They were in a box and had no way to get out except the drugs. I recognized that I had very little control over my life in the military and I did what

they said I had to do. I have a very strong, independent streak so I found that quite difficult to live with. I fought the system.

When I was in Massachusetts, I was seriously considering a career, and Bradley was careered. So I stayed in the military, but as a military spouse. We moved back to Iowa and I went to work at Broadlawn, and then went to Mary Greeley. The hospitals in those days were just setting up intensive care units. This whole concept was brand new. I was in the Boone hospital while they were setting up their ICU where I worked. The military had no ICUs. In Massachusetts my job was to set up their ICU even though I was a novice. I was not prepared for that job but I was the only one who knew anything about it.

I didn't get any awards or medals, but I got to First Lieutenant.

Public opinion about the war affected my patients in Turkey, but it wasn't a big deal in Iowa. Iowa was not carrying posters and throwing mud. Except at the University of Iowa. They protested. I'm back in Slater, Iowa. Do you think I had anybody saying anything to me? No! Everybody treated me just fine.

I think that the third world experience in Turkey really prepared me for the life I'm living right now. I am very, very grateful that I saw that side of life.

In the military, I was constantly wanting to rebel against being commanded to do things I did not think right. I just didn't approve of so many things. The comradery between the doctors and nurses was very like MASH, in that there was a different relationship between doctors and nurses. Aside from the psychiatrist that tried to kill me. Another story! The doctors were very much open to what the nurses told them. To them, this wasn't their real work. They were there to put in their time, and then they were going to get serious as soon as they got out. There are only a couple of doctors I remember, a couple of the nurses. The people I remember were the people in the quarters, the bachelor officers' quarters.

**Linda
Greenfield
(first on left)
Graduation
From Sheppard AFB**

