

# DOUGHNUT *Dollies*



**By Nancy Smoyer**  
**Red Cross Donut Dollies**

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The Red Cross Recreation Workers (a.k.a. Donut Dollies) played games. It was our mission, our job and what we were sent to Vietnam to do. We played games in mess halls, on flight lines, in recreation centers, on LZ's, firebases, along the road; Basically, wherever there were GIs. The games were usually a cross between a TV quiz show and a board game. We made them up with themes like sports, cars, the States, travel, and best of all, women. We'd gather the guys together, divide them into teams and then pit them against each other, asking the teams questions as they tried to advance from points A to Z.

You have to suspend your disbelief when you read some of these stories. It really was unbelievable that we could get these hardened warriors to do certain things. For one game we used children's alphabet blocks with which the men spelled out the answer by standing in line holding a block. My favorite part was at the end when I would say, "Do you guys realize that you've just spent the last hour playing with kiddies' blocks?" The moans could be heard for miles (oops, I mean to say "clicks"). In another game we had a board out front and gave the teams the answers on cards. They were supposed to run up and hang the answers on the nails on the board. One guy got so enthusiastic that he impaled himself on the nail, but happily went right on playing. Another time a guy fell and hurt his knee so badly in the run that he had to go to the infirmary.

My favorite game was based on Concentration. We cut out the faces of the Playmates of the Month and put them on a big board, then had teams try to match the pairs. The reaction when the first card was turned over and they realized what they were seeing was great. We girls eventually learned which month each of the playmates was from. But the best part was the "wildcard." Do you remember that picture of the grizzly old man with no teeth? Well, he was behind one of the cards and when the guys saw him, the hoots that greeted the playmates was nothing compared to what he got!

This game playing took place wherever we could gather a crowd. However, at firebases it wasn't always possible or advisable to get a group together, so we didn't use our "organized" games. Our time there was spent visiting in bunkers, artillery gun pits, serving in the chow lines, wherever there were GIs. If the opportunity arose, we had an informal program with our "bag of tricks." This consisted of string, rubber bands, flashcards and ourselves with which we could amaze and mystify the men. This impromptu program, which we called "Women Are Superior To Men", consisted of a variety of feats of strength, coordination and mental abilities which demonstrated unequivocally the superiority of women. Here's a demonstration of women's superior coordination. Kneel on the ground, put your elbow against your knee and stretch your forearm out straight on the



ground. Put a cigarette pack at the end of your fingertips. Move your hands behind your back and then try to knock over the pack with your nose. We ladies can do this with ease. Guys, on the other hand, will fall on their faces.

I had some favorite groups that I went to as frequently as possible. One was the R&R (Radio Research) unit at Cu Chi. They were helpful in correcting us when the answers we'd made up were wrong. Another was the LRRPs of the 25th Infantry Division who had great team spirit. We hardly had to do anything other than present the game because they entered into it with such enthusiasm, egging each other on, harassing, tricking, criticizing and generally raising Cain with each other. However, one day when we were there we just couldn't get them interested in any part of the game. It was about "Famous People," so finally, in order to get their interest, I asked, "Who's the most famous person in your unit." There was a pause, then a name was said. I said, "I don't remember him, is he here?" They said, no, he'd been killed a few days earlier. The game was over. We sat and talked with them until it was time to leave.

The war was never far away. I remember being on an LZ with the 1st Cav where we were playing and talking to the guys while they waited to be airlifted out to the bush. Within an hour of their departure, before we had left the LZ, we received word that they had made contact and several had been killed.

Another time we were doing a quick informal program with a unit before they went out on a convoy from an LZ. The CO interrupted us, saying it was time to saddle up. As we were still gathering our game together, we heard him telling the men that if a vehicle hit a mine to go on around it and keep on going because it might be an ambush. They were told that someone else would be along to pick them up. The transition between playing games with Donut Dollies in blue dresses to a possible ambush was surreal.

We also visited in hospitals regularly. Whenever we went into a ward, we wouldn't leave until we had talked individually with every man in there. We quickly learned that it was easier to talk with them if we looked only at their eyes and nowhere else. The opening questions were



usually the same: "What unit are you with?" or "Where are you from?"

This was usually enough to start a conversation which could lead away from their wounds and the war. Visiting in hospitals was hard, really hard, but also the most rewarding.

But the best times of all were when we were just ourselves, when we'd just stop at an LZ or in the hospital or a stand down or eating a meal. We'd talk to one or two lonely guys and believe that we had, in fact, made a difference. ♀