

I have a novel about the Vietnam War era in which one character becomes an Army nurse in Vietnam. Here is the bottom line: she is a sophomore in pre-nursing at the University of Minnesota in spring of 1967 and needs to be in Vietnam by July 1, 1968 (to fit in the plot as envisioned). The way she presumably arranges this is she drops out of the U and enters an accelerated hospital-based program while getting credits for courses already taken. Is this possible?

Short answer: Yes — it is *plausible* for your character to leave the University of Minnesota in spring 1967, enter an accelerated hospital-based nursing program, and be in Vietnam as an Army nurse by July 1, 1968. It requires a realistic but tight timeline, and it aligns with how the Army Nurse Corps actually recruited and trained nurses during the Vietnam buildup.

What makes this scenario plausible?

1. Hospital-based diploma nursing programs were still common and often accelerated

In the 1960s, many U.S. hospitals ran 2–3-year diploma nursing programs. Some offered **accelerated or advanced-standing tracks** for students who already had college credits in sciences like biology, chemistry, and anatomy. Your character, as a pre-nursing sophomore, would likely have enough transferable coursework to shorten her time in the program.

2. The Army urgently needed nurses during the Vietnam buildup

By 1967–1968, the Army Nurse Corps was under intense staffing pressure. Recruitment programs were expanded, including the **Army Student Nurse Program** and other accelerated pipelines to commission new nurses.

This urgency makes it believable that a diploma-program graduate could quickly be commissioned and deployed.

3. Diploma-prepared nurses were fully eligible for Army commissioning

During the Vietnam War, the Army accepted **diploma-trained registered nurses** as commissioned officers. The requirement for a bachelor's degree did not appear until 1976.

So your character does *not* need a BSN to serve.

4. Deployment to Vietnam in 1968 fits the historical timeline

The medical buildup peaked in 1968, with roughly **900 Army nurses** serving in Vietnam that year. Newly commissioned nurses were being sent overseas continuously.

A realistic timeline for your character

Here's a workable sequence that fits your plot:

Spring 1967

- She leaves the University of Minnesota after completing ~2 years of pre-nursing coursework.
- Applies to a hospital-based diploma nursing program (common in Minneapolis/St. Paul).

Summer 1967 – Spring 1968 (12–14 months)

- Enters an **accelerated diploma program** with advanced standing.
- Completes required clinical and classroom work at an intensive pace.
- Takes RN licensure exam shortly after graduation (timing varied but could be within weeks).

Spring/Early Summer 1968

- With RN license in hand, she applies for a commission in the Army Nurse Corps.
- Commissioning and processing could take **a few weeks to a couple of months**, especially during wartime staffing surges.

By July 1, 1968

- She reports for duty in Vietnam.

This timeline is tight but historically credible.

Why this works narratively and historically

- The Army was expanding rapidly in 1967–68 and accepted diploma-trained nurses without hesitation.
- Accelerated diploma programs existed and often recruited students who already had college science credits.
- The Army's need for nurses was so acute that processing and deployment moved quickly.
- Many nurses in Vietnam were in their early 20s and had only recently completed training.

Bottom line

Your character's path — leaving college in 1967, completing an accelerated hospital-based nursing program, becoming an RN, commissioning into the Army Nurse Corps, and deploying to Vietnam by mid-1968 — is **entirely plausible** and fits well within documented historical patterns.

Build a detailed fictional hospital program based on real 1960s Minnesota institutions Map out her training experience

Absolutely — let’s build you a **fully realized, historically grounded fictional nursing school** in Minnesota circa 1967–68 and map out your character’s **accelerated training experience** in a way that feels authentic, fits your plot timeline, and mirrors how real diploma programs operated.

Below is a complete, ready-to-use institution with structure, culture, curriculum, and a believable accelerated track.

Fictional Hospital-Based Nursing School (Modeled on Real 1960s Minnesota Programs)

St. Brigid’s Hospital School of Nursing

Location: Minneapolis, Minnesota **Founded:** 1908 **Affiliation:** Catholic hospital run by the Sisters of St. Brigid (loosely inspired by St. Mary’s, St. Catherine’s, and Fairview programs of the era) **Program Type:** 3-year diploma RN program with an *advanced-standing track* for students with prior college coursework **Reputation:** Known for rigorous clinical training, strong surgical and emergency nursing rotations, and a high NCLEX (then “State Board”) pass rate.

Why this institution works for your story

- Minneapolis had several hospital diploma programs in the 1960s, so this fits the landscape.
- Catholic hospitals often offered **accelerated or advanced-standing options** for students with prior science credits.
- The Sisters running the program give you built-in structure, discipline, and character dynamics.
- The hospital can be as large or small as your plot needs — from a bustling urban trauma center to a more intimate community hospital.

Program Structure (Realistic for 1967–68)

Standard Diploma Program (3 years)

- Heavy clinical hours (1,800–2,200 hours)

- Rotations in:
 - Medical-surgical nursing
 - Pediatrics
 - Obstetrics
 - Psychiatry
 - Operating room
 - Emergency
 - Public health
- Classroom instruction in:
 - Anatomy & physiology
 - Microbiology
 - Pharmacology
 - Nutrition
 - Nursing theory & ethics
 - Pathophysiology

Advanced Standing / Accelerated Track (12–15 months)

Designed for students who already completed:

- Intro biology
- Chemistry
- Anatomy & physiology
- Psychology
- English composition
- Sociology

Your character, as a pre-nursing sophomore at the University of Minnesota, would likely have all of these.

This allows her to skip:

- Most first-year classroom courses
- Some early clinical fundamentals
- General education requirements

She still must complete:

- Core nursing theory
- All major clinical rotations
- Pharmacology
- State Board exam preparation

This makes a 12–14 month completion timeline believable.

Your Character's Training Timeline **(Spring 1967 → July 1968)**

Spring 1967

- She withdraws from the University of Minnesota.
- Applies to St. Brigid's accelerated diploma program.
- Admissions interview with:
 - A stern but fair Sister-administrator
 - A civilian RN instructor
- She is accepted for the **Summer 1967 accelerated cohort**.

Summer 1967 (June–August) — “Boot Camp Nursing”

Intensive 10–12 week crash course:

- Fundamentals of nursing
- Basic skills labs (bed baths, wound care, injections, sterile technique)
- Intro to pharmacology
- Hospital orientation
- First supervised patient care on medical wards

This is where she learns the emotional shock of real patient care.

Fall 1967 — Core Clinical Rotations Begin

She rotates through:

- **Medical-surgical nursing** (the backbone of all diploma programs)
- **Operating room** (scrubbing, instrument handling, assisting surgeons)
- **Emergency department** (fast-paced, chaotic, great for character development)

She begins to show aptitude for trauma care — a foreshadowing of Vietnam.

Winter 1967–68 — Advanced Coursework

- Pathophysiology
- Advanced pharmacology
- Psychiatric nursing rotation
- Night shifts (a rite of passage)

This is where she experiences:

- First patient death
- First code
- First moment of “I can do this”

Spring 1968 — Final Rotations

- Pediatrics
- Obstetrics
- Public health nursing
- Leadership/charge nurse training (common in diploma programs)

She also begins:

- Army Nurse Corps recruitment paperwork
- Physical exam and background checks
- Letters of recommendation from instructors

May 1968 — Graduation

She completes the accelerated diploma program.

June 1968 — RN Licensure Exam

The State Board exam (precursor to NCLEX) was offered only a few times per year. She takes it in early June and receives results within weeks.

Late June 1968 — Commissioning

Once she has her RN license:

- She is commissioned as a **Second Lieutenant** in the Army Nurse Corps.
- Attends a short orientation (not full basic training — nurses did not go through standard boot camp).
- Receives orders for Vietnam.

By July 1, 1968 — Arrival in Vietnam

She reports to:

- The 12th Evacuation Hospital
- The 95th Evacuation Hospital
- The 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon
- Or any other unit that fits your plot

Atmosphere & Culture of St. Brigid's (for storytelling)

The Sisters

- Strict curfews
- No men in dorms
- Mandatory chapel on Sundays
- Uniform inspections
- Compassion emphasized as a moral duty

The Students

- Mostly women aged 18–22
- Fierce camaraderie
- Gallows humor
- Exhaustion and pride in equal measure

The Hospital

- Long corridors with terrazzo floors
- The smell of antiseptic and cigarette smoke (yes, nurses smoked in break rooms)
- Surgeons who bark orders
- Nurses who run the place quietly but decisively