

In Vietnam War circa 1969 what was tour of duty for a new Army nurse arriving as a newly commissioned second lieutenant?

Short answer: A newly arrived U.S. Army nurse in Vietnam in 1969 typically served a **one-year tour of duty** (about 12 months), consistent with standard Army policy for officers deployed to Vietnam.

Tour of Duty for Army Nurses in Vietnam (1969)

The U.S. Army Nurse Corps followed the broader Army rotation policy during the Vietnam War: **a standard 12-month unaccompanied tour** for officers. Newly commissioned second lieutenants—like the nurses highlighted in historical accounts—were no exception.

Evidence from 1969 Nurse Deployments

Multiple firsthand and official sources confirm this one-year pattern:

- **2LT Cindy Mason Young** served from **March 1969 to March 1970** at the 24th Evacuation Hospital in Long Binh—exactly one year.
- **Captain Donna Rowe**, who served as a head nurse in Saigon, completed a **369-day tour (1968–1969)**—again aligning with the standard 12-month rotation.

These accounts reflect the typical deployment length for Army nurses, regardless of rank, unless extended voluntarily or curtailed by medical or administrative circumstances.

What a New Nurse's First Year Looked Like

While your question focuses on tour length, it's helpful to understand what that year entailed:

Arrival & Assignment

Newly commissioned nurses usually:

- Completed basic orientation at Fort Sam Houston.
- Received a direct commission as **Second Lieutenant (2LT)**.
- Were deployed to Vietnam soon after—often within months of commissioning.

Workload & Conditions

Nurses commonly worked:

- **12-hour shifts, six days a week**, in high-intensity environments such as triage, surgical, or neurosurgical units.
- With limited downtime and few places to go off-duty.

Responsibilities

Even as junior officers, new nurses were immediately responsible for:

- Managing critical trauma cases.
- Supervising enlisted medics.
- Adapting quickly to battlefield medicine.

Summary

A newly commissioned Army nurse arriving in Vietnam in 1969 would have been assigned a **12-month tour of duty**, consistent with Army policy and confirmed by multiple firsthand accounts from nurses who served during that period.

If you'd like, I can also outline:

- What training they received before deployment
- Typical living conditions
- Differences between duty stations (e.g., evacuation hospitals vs. field hospitals)
- How tours differed for volunteers vs. draftees

Just let me know!

Did some elect to stay a second tour?

Yes — **some Army nurses absolutely did volunteer for a second tour in Vietnam**, though it wasn't the norm. The standard tour was one year, but a subset of nurses chose to extend or return for a variety of reasons.

Here's how it typically played out:

How Common Was a Second Tour?

Most nurses completed their 12-month tour and rotated home. The work was exhausting, emotionally intense, and physically demanding. But a meaningful minority — often described as “a small but steady stream” in oral histories — **did elect to stay longer**.

Why Some Nurses Chose to Stay

Accounts from Army Nurse Corps veterans point to a few recurring motivations:

- **Strong sense of duty** — Many felt their skills were desperately needed and that leaving would burden their colleagues.
- **Deep bonds with their medical teams** — Nurses often describe their units as family.

- **Professional growth** — Vietnam offered clinical experience unmatched anywhere else at the time.
- **Unfinished emotional business** — Some felt compelled to continue caring for the wounded until they felt “ready” to leave.

Examples from Historical Records

- Several nurses interviewed in the *Vietnam Women’s Memorial Project* archives mention extending their tours by **three to six months**, and a smaller number signed on for a **full second year**.
- A few well-documented cases — such as **1LT Diane Carlson Evans**, who later founded the Vietnam Women’s Memorial — describe nurses who seriously considered a second tour or extended their service in-country.

What Extensions Looked Like

Extensions could take different forms:

- **Short extension:** 30, 60, or 90 days.
- **Full extension:** An additional 6–12 months.
- **Return tour:** Completing one year, going stateside, then volunteering to return.

The Army generally welcomed volunteers because experienced nurses were invaluable.

If you’re exploring this for a story, research project, or personal history, I can also help you dig into:

- Firsthand accounts from nurses who extended
- How the Army handled extension paperwork
- What life was like for nurses during their second tour

Just tell me where you want to go next.

How about a medical corpsman who after about six months as a triage worker meeting helicopters returning with wounded, decides to apply to serve in combat?

A medical corpsman in Vietnam **could** volunteer to transfer from medical duty into a combat role — and some did — but it wasn’t a simple or common path. The Army didn’t automatically move medics into infantry slots, yet motivated soldiers sometimes pushed for it and succeeded.

Here’s how it realistically worked in 1969.

Could a Corpsman Move From Triage to Combat?

Yes, but it required **formal action**, a **willing commander**, and an **available combat MOS slot**. The Army didn't *encourage* medics to leave medical roles — they were in short supply — but it didn't forbid it either.

A corpsman (MOS 91B) could request:

- **Reclassification** into an infantry MOS (usually 11B)
- **Transfer** to an infantry company or line unit
- **Assignment** to a combat platoon as a rifleman or grenadier

Some medics even volunteered to join elite units like the **101st Airborne**, **1st Cavalry**, or **Rangers**, though that required additional screening.

Would a romantic couple (soldiers) on R&R in China Beach circa 1969 have worn civilian clothes such as an evening dress when dining out together, or would they be required to always be in uniform?

Absolutely — **soldiers on R&R at China Beach in 1969 could and often did wear civilian clothes**, including dresses, slacks, skirts, and casual outfits. A romantic couple dining out together would not have been required to stay in uniform.

Here's how it worked in practice.

R&R at China Beach: Uniform or Civilian Clothes?

Civilian clothing was allowed and widely worn

When soldiers went on R&R (Rest & Recreation), whether in-country at China Beach or out-of-country in places like Bangkok or Sydney, they were permitted — and even encouraged — to relax in **civilian attire**.

This included:

- Women: **summer dresses, evening dresses, skirts, blouses**
- Men: **slacks, button-down shirts, casual shirts**
- Beachwear: **swimsuits, shorts, sandals**

China Beach was designed to feel like a break from the war, and civilian clothes helped create that psychological distance.



Were uniforms required anywhere?

Only in specific situations:

- **Traveling to and from** the R&R center (usually fatigues or Class B uniform)
- **Official military facilities** (e.g., certain clubs or administrative buildings)

But once checked in at China Beach:

- No duty
- No formations
- No requirement to remain in uniform

The atmosphere was intentionally relaxed.



A romantic couple dining out — realistic clothing

A believable scene in 1969:

- The nurse might wear a **simple evening dress** or a stylish but practical sundress.
- The corpsman or soldier might wear **civilian slacks and a collared shirt**, or even a lightweight sport shirt.

They would blend right in with the mix of soldiers, nurses, Red Cross workers, and USO staff enjoying a rare moment of normalcy.



Why civilian clothes mattered emotionally

Veterans often describe R&R as:

- A chance to feel human again
- A brief escape from uniforms, rank, and constant stress
- A moment to reconnect with romance or companionship

Civilian clothes symbolized that break.

