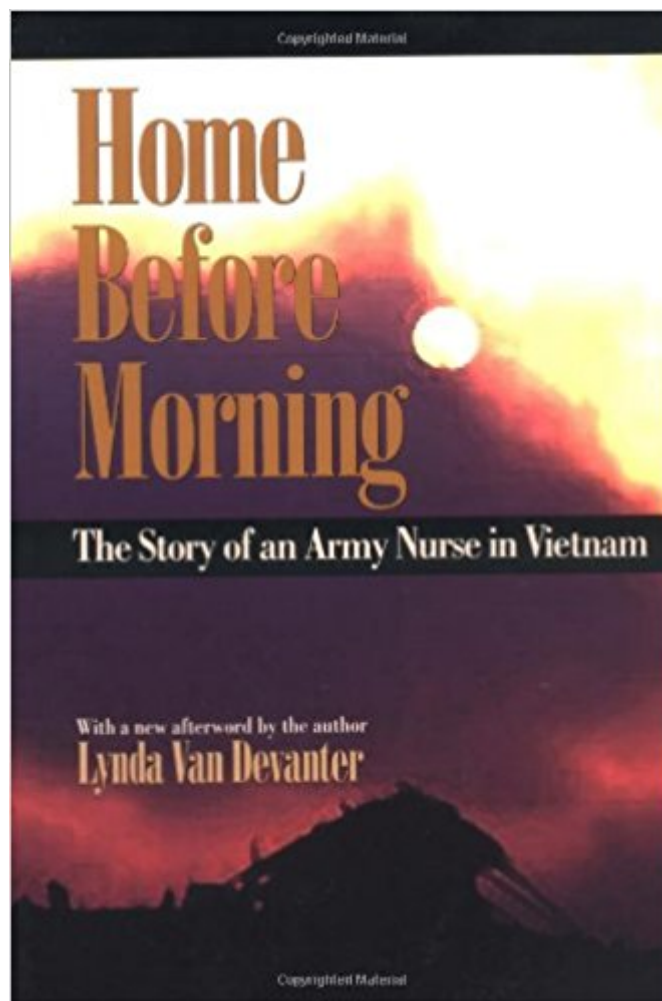


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# Home Before Morning: The Story Of An Army Nurse In Vietnam



## Synopsis

Lynda Van Devanter was the girl next door, the cheerleader who went to Catholic schools, enjoyed sports, and got along well with her four sisters and parents. After high school she attended nursing school and then did something that would shatter her secure world for the rest of her life: in 1969, she joined the army and was shipped to Vietnam. When she arrived in Vietnam her idealistic view of the war vanished quickly. She worked long and arduous hours in cramped, ill-equipped, understaffed operating rooms. She saw friends die. Witnessing a war close-up, operating on soldiers and civilians whose injuries were catastrophic, she found the very foundations of her thinking changing daily. After one traumatic year, she came home, a Vietnam veteran. Coming home was nearly as devastating as the time she spent in Asia. Nothing was the same — including Lynda herself. Viewed by many as a murderer instead of a healer, she felt isolated and angry. The anger turned to depression; like many other Vietnam veterans she suffered from delayed stress syndrome. Working in hospitals brought back chilling scenes of hopelessly wounded soldiers. A marriage ended in divorce. The war that was fought physically halfway around the world had become a personal, internal battle. Home before Morning is the story of a woman whose courage, stamina, and personal history make this a compelling autobiography. It is also the saga of others who went to war to aid the wounded and came back wounded — physically and emotionally — themselves. And, it is the true story of one person's triumphs: her understanding of, and coming to terms with, her destiny.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This incredible story, which plunges us immediately into the bloodiest aspects of the war, is also a suspenseful autobiography that will keep you chewing your fingernails to see if Van Devanter survives any of it at all. She proves herself a natural storyteller. . . . The most extraordinary part in this book is Van Devanter's plight after the war—her attempt to retrieve the love of her family, only to realize they don't want to see her slides, hear her stories; her assignment to menial duties at Walter Reed Army Hospital. . . . How Van Devanter survives all of this to become, incredibly, a stronger person for it is what makes her book so riveting."—San Francisco Chronicle

"An awesome, painfully honest look at war through a woman's eyes. Her letters home and startling images of life in a combat zone—surgeons fighting to save a Vietnamese baby wounded in utero, the ever-present stench of napalm-charred flesh, a beloved priest's gentle humor and appalling death, the casual heroism of her colleagues, a Vietnamese 'Papa-san' trying to talk his dead child back to life, a haunting snapshot dropped by a dying soldier with no face—tell the story of a young American's rude initiation to the best and the worst of humanity."—Washington Post

"Moving, powerful . . . a healing book."—Ms. Magazine

"This book reads like a diary: unguarded, heartfelt. . . . [It] is both moving and valuable, for reminding us so vividly that war is indeed hell . . . and that its most tested heroes are the doctors and nurses who doggedly labor not just to save life, but also to keep their respect for it, even as their surviving patients are sent out, once more, unto the breach."—Harper's Magazine

"In Vietnam, reality hit fast: Van Devanter's plane was fired on when it landed in Saigon; and after three days of adjustment, she was assigned to the 71st Evacuation Hospital, a 'MASH-type facility' near the Cambodian border. There, the casualties, . . . the personal danger, the fatigue, the heat, rain, and mud, the harassment of officers enforcing petty regulations, and above all the meaninglessness of American involvement rapidly put an end to Van Devanter's blind patriotism, her innocence, and her youth. . . . Van Devanter brings us face to face with the toll that undeclared war took on its combatants."—Kirkus Reviews

"If you read only one work about Vietnam, make this the one. . . . This is the way it was, as seen through the eyes of an army second lieutenant when she was twenty-two. I believe her completely, because this reviewer remembers Vietnam the same way, when he was a nineteen-year-old Marine PFC."—Deseret Sentinel

Lynda Van Devanter served as the National Women's Director of the Vietnam Veterans of America. She counseled other Vietnam veterans and conducted seminars around the country. Coping with ill health since her tour of duty in Vietnam, she died in November 2002 at age fifty-five.

That's the question Lynda Van Devanter asks over and over in the course of this memoir, the

centerpiece of which is her year (June 1969 to June 1970) as a surgical nurse in Vietnam, principally at the 71st Evacuation Hospital, Pleiku. She went to Vietnam a relatively carefree, healthy twenty-two-year-old. She returned damaged on the inside, both psychologically and physically. She died in 2002 at age fifty-five from an autoimmune, collagen-vascular disorder caused by exposure to toxic chemicals in Vietnam. Yet one more casualty of America's adventure in Vietnam. And for what? Outside the personal realm of family and friends, Van Devanter had three notable accomplishments in her life about which she could be proud. The first consists of her work as an extremely dedicated nurse, both in Vietnam (where in addition to American soldiers her patients also included Vietnamese soldiers and citizens) and back home in the U.S. over a two-decade nursing career. For some of those patients she was the person most responsible for saving their life. Her second notable achievement was as National Women's Director of the Vietnam Veterans of America, where she was instrumental in raising recognition of the contributions of women Vietnam veterans and in securing benefits for them. Third, there is *HOME BEFORE MORNING*, which deserves a place in any collection of Vietnam memoirs, especially because it is from a relatively unknown and unappreciated perspective. Van Devanter went to war as a gung-ho believer in the United States and its war in Vietnam. Disillusionment came gradually, but it had enveloped her midway through her year in-country. It was due largely to repeated encounters with devastating, gruesome wounds, some of which are horrifically detailed in the book. The hardest to deal with were the crispy critters - those charred by napalm, surely one of humankind's most insidious inventions. One can easily understand a surgeon muttering, after operating non-stop amidst blood and moans and screams for forty-eight hours, "I'd like to have Richard Nixon here for one week." Compounding the surreal hellishness of Van Devanter's year in Nam was the bureaucratic ineptitude, stupidity, and callousness so pervasive in the U.S. military. *HOME BEFORE MORNING* was first published in 1983, qualifying it, to quote another reviewer, as "the grandmother of female Viet Nam accounts". This 2001 edition from the University of Massachusetts Press includes an eight-page afterword by Van Devanter, written shortly before she died. The book is very easy to read, although the writing is somewhat slick and conventional, often using rather stock formulations (e.g., "I'd be lying if I said there aren't still difficult times"). Much of the dialogue obviously was reconstructed or re-imagined, and there are internal indications that some of the events themselves may to some extent have been fabricated. I see that several other reviews or the comments to them claim that some of the incidents in the book are either exaggerated or happened to someone else. Still, I tend to believe that on the whole *HOME BEFORE MORNING* is a realistic portrayal of a surgical nurse in a field hospital in Vietnam, and as such it is worth reading.

I know Lynda personally and miss her. She did a great job of writing her story in a way that holds the readers interest and the details of the story are excellent. Wish she was still here to see this.

Very enlightening and educating from perspective of what the Vietnam War was like for a nurse in trauma setting. Fast read as I wanted to know more. Blessed and grateful for this and other wartime nurses dedication and contribution. Those nurses were healing balm to those soldiers who experienced much devastation and pain and were not received properly by the American people.

The beginning is very boring in the beginning but was so interesting once she went across seas. Don't judge it by the beginning it's definitely worth the read.

I read this as an undergraduate and recently bought a copy for a friend. It is a gritty, earthy look into what it means to be a nurse/ doctor on the front lines in any combat situation. Van Devanter takes a searing look at herself and all that she did--good, bad, and other- to make it back the best she could from hell.

Home Before Morning is a heart-breaking account of what it was like to be a nurse in Vietnam. Raw and gut-wrenching, it takes you through both the physical strain and the emotional toll endured by the participants of that war. It will make you angry, and it will make you weep. It will make you proud of the strength of the human spirit. A read well worth one's time.

I've read this book before and it is a keeper. Great voice from a Vietnam nurse who is also the author. Wish it were available on Kindle but so far, it is not.

Very good. Not many books keep my interest. this one did

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