



## “It’s Been a Great Ride:” Retired Navy Nurse

### By Susan Houston Klaus

She peppers her conversation with spicy language, talks with an authority that suggests a tough-as-nails demeanor—and has a reputation among her friends for having a huge heart. Officially, she’s Lieutenant Commander Carol Grice, Nurse Corps, U.S. Navy (Ret.). She’s also Carol Andersen Grice ‘53. As a Navy nurse in the ‘50s and ‘60s, the Methodist School of Nursing graduate tested gender biases and paved the way for innumerable women to serve our country in positions of leadership alongside their male counterparts.

#### Going to School, Planning a Career

Carol had no way of knowing all that was in her future when she enrolled at Methodist in 1950. But, back then, she knew she had a calling for nursing and military service.

“During the Korean War, I had just gotten out of high school and was working for Mutual Benefit Insurance Company of Omaha,” she says. “The other girls who worked there were talking about boyfriends who had gone off to Korea. It just came into my head, ‘that’s what I want to do.’”

Carol resigned her job and was accepted into the Class of 1953—nearly two dozen young women who, it’s been said, faced some of the most stringent academic standards that their group could remember.

#### A Two-Year Navy Stint Turned into More Than 20

After graduation, she signed up for a two-year stint in the Navy Nurse Corps Reserves, received a direct presidential appointment to the rank of ensign and was assigned to Portsmouth, Virginia. Her two-year commitment became a more-than-20-year military career. She served at posts that took her from Virginia to Japan, California to North Carolina, and Hawaii.

When she arrived at the chest ward in Oakland, California, the head nurse—a notoriously tough female lieutenant—asked her to wash the windows. Carol declined and suggested that the task wasn’t the best use of her time. It was a brash reply, but the lieutenant soon found that Carol was worth her salt. A few months later, she was handpicked by her predecessor to run the unit. Being asked to take over “was one heck of a compliment for me,” she says.

In the early 1960s, she served three years at Camp Pendleton, running a busy general medical ward and later setting up the medical intensive care unit. Though she didn’t have a BSN—which limited her ability to rise to a rank higher than Lieutenant Commander—the Methodist alumna earned a reputation for knowing her stuff and being capable beyond her years.

“I wasn’t always popular with other nurses because of my ‘junior’ status,” Carol notes. But her Midwestern work ethic garnered her respect of those who recognized a good solid Navy nurse.

“I led by example, not by demands.” Still, she says, “I ran a tight ship.”

The Marines at Camp Pendleton nicknamed her “Gunny”—homage to their tough gunnery sergeant and a term of honor.



## Reflects on Her Career



### An “Overachiever” Sets New Standards

She tested the traditionally male establishment during her career. An especially notable time was when she served on the board of governors of the officer’s club at the Barstow, California military base. She asked to attend the base’s Mess Night, a formal Marine Corps dinner, and one that women military weren’t invited to. She got a “no” from the commanding officer, the major general, because she was a woman. In her usual form, she pressed the matter. The next year, the doors were opened not only to her but also to her fellow nurses. During the dinner, Carol was asked if when the “smoking light” went on, would she observe the tradition and smoke a cigar. She smoked that cigar, seated next to her male contemporaries.

In the ‘60s, Carol married a Marine and continued to serve in chief nurse and senior nurse posts around the country. She retired at a ceremony in October 1974, wearing her crisp dress whites as she reviewed the troops.

She continued on to nursing jobs in Arizona and California, and for a few years, worked in Omaha. Since 1997, she’s called California her home. But she’s far from retired—even as she marked her 75th birthday in July 2007 and admits that a hip fracture gives her “some difficulty in getting from point A to point B.”

Post-surgery and faced with hospital staff who suggested she move to a nursing home, Carol gave a predictable answer: “I said, ‘I’ll go to rehab or I’ll go home. Those are your choices.’ They finally told me I needed to slow down,” she laughs. “They said I was an overachiever.”

### Accolades for Her Service

Today, Carol volunteers as the Oceanside, California area manager of Operation Interdependence, a national organization that gathers and delivers donations of C-Rats—snacks and travel-size toiletries. Last year, her office reached more than 190,000 deployed troops.

She’s received a wealth of honors for her military and volunteer service over the years, including recognition by the U.S. Department of Defense.

This summer, she was recognized by the Blue Angels and was included among a group of active duty military and veterans to attend the Ronald Reagan Golf Classic Legacy Dinner. In December, she’ll speak to the Daughters of the Revolution and accept a special award.

Looking back, Carol marvels at all she’s experienced. “It’s been a great ride, and I’ve loved every minute of it.”

She credits her alma mater with preparing her for a long, esteemed career. “At Methodist, we were given responsibility roles very early in our training,” she says. “They instilled professionalism in us and the importance of doing it right at the very beginning. We had excellent training.”

For more information about Operation Interdependence, visit [www.oidelivers.org](http://www.oidelivers.org).

