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Behind me today, stands the sculpture of a Military Nurse and the World she attends to. As long as there have been conflicts, there have been nurses at the battlefields, offering comfort and care. In the Civil War, 2,000 nurses were called the “angels of the battlefield”. Available evidence indicates that their activities often had important ramifications in both an immediate and broader social sense, and that as a group they deserve attention as full participants in the civil conflict rather than as mere helpers. In fact, these women often had notable impact upon the men they tended and served under; and, further, the introduction of female personnel into responsible roles in a traditionally male military environment was one significant step in the progress of women toward a fuller involvement in American Society.

In 1901 and 1908 the establishment of the Army and Navy Nurse Corps opened the door for women in the military but ever so slightly. Nearly 13,000 women enlisted in the Navy and the Marine Corps on the same status as men and wore a uniform blouse with insignia. By the end of WW1, over thirty thousand women had served in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, the Navy as Yeoman (F), the Marines, and the Coast Guard. They served their country before they could vote!! In fact, it was the service of women in the military and the defense works that gave a huge push to the passing of the 19th Amendment, giving women that right.

More than 59,000 American nurses served in the Army Nurse Corps during World War II. Nurses worked closer to the front lines than they ever had before. Within the "chain of evacuation" established by the Army Medical Department during the war, nurses served under fire in field hospitals and evacuation hospitals, on hospital trains and hospital ships, and as flight nurses on medical transport planes. The skill and dedication of these nurses contributed to the extremely low post-injury mortality rate among American military forces in every theater of the war. Overall, fewer than 4 percent of the American soldiers who received medical care in the field or underwent evacuation died from wounds or disease.

As we now look at the statue, our bronze sculptor, Neil Brodin, describes that behind the two soldiers, we see what has been accomplished through battles waged and wars won. A bronze globe that we can reach through shows us how close we are to people everywhere. Our world desires peace. A combat nurse stands very near the globe. She is dressed in fatigues and is in the middle of combat. While she helps save lives, she has seen the injury and death that war produces. Her period dress is representative of the Vietnam War Era. The Vietnam Women’s Memorial Foundation describes the service given by these brave women best.

“Approximately 11,000 American military women were stationed in Vietnam during the war. Close to ninety percent were nurses in the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Nearly all of them volunteered.

By 1967, almost all military nurses who volunteered to go to Vietnam did so shortly after graduation. These women were the youngest group of medical personnel ever to serve in war time.

Because of the guerilla tactics of Vietnam, many women were in the midst of the conflict. There was no front, no such thing as "safe behind our lines." Many were wounded; most spent time in bunkers during attacks. The names of the eight military women who died in Vietnam are listed on the "Wall."

Medical personnel dealt with extraordinary injuries inflicted by enemy weapons specifically designed to mutilate and maim. During massive casualty situations, nurses often worked around the clock, conducted triage, assisted with emergency tracheotomies and amputations, debrided wounds and inserted chest tubes so surgeons could get to the next critical patient. Over 58,000 soldiers died in Vietnam; 350,000 were wounded.

It is estimated that approximately 265,000 military women served their country during the Vietnam War all over the world in a variety of occupations. Thousands of women served in Japan, Guam, the Philippines, Hawaii, and other stateside hospitals caring for the wounded and dying who had been stabilized and flown out of the war zone. Many Navy women were stationed aboard the USS *Repose* and the USS *Sanctuary*, hospital ships stationed off the coast of South Vietnam. Air Force nurses served both "in country" and on air evacuation missions.

Today, military nurses in Iraq and Afghanistan are a critical link in a chain of medical care that has enabled more soldiers to survive injury than ever before in the nation's history of warfare. In World War II, about 30 percent of soldiers died from wounds, a rate that fell to 24 percent in the Vietnam War. Since the start of combat seven years ago in Afghanistan, and since 2003 in Iraq, more than 32,000 service members have been wounded in action. Statistics recently released by the Department of Defense show that 4,579 have been killed in action or died under non-hostile conditions during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, 2 of them pictured on our Wall.

As this nurse gazes toward the rescue taking place in front of her, with what Vietnam Veterans describe as "the thousand yard stare," she reaches out and touches a tiny part of the globe, content in the knowledge that she has done her part to help win this war. The Nurse stands with her helmet at the ready, because she knows, as we all do, that peace is a tentative and fleeting thing. But, today at least, Peace is being sought after, and we realize that we are all in debt to our soldiers, who have fought our country's wars, and earned us the freedom we enjoy. Veterans, We Thank you for all that you have done, as we take a moment today to imagine world peace.