

## LTC Bagin's Story

LTC-R Isabelle Bagin was interviewed by LTC-R Linda Hoge-Pattison this summer at LTC Bagin's home in Sierra Vista, AZ.

"I had my fatigue pants on backwards!" she admitted when I asked her about her most embarrassing moment. It was during a field exercise and her roommate laughed when LTC Isabelle Bagin complained that her fatigue pants just did not seem to fit right. Having myself worn those silly old fatigues with the side buttons (who designed those?), I think many of us retirees can relate. However, I guess that was a tame secondary to her near-death experience in Korea when she was rescued from her quonset hut after passing out from carbon monoxide poisoning. Apparently someone refilled the gas heaters incorrectly. During that same assignment, the old hospital burned down! Having also served at the 121st some twenty years later, I can appreciate LTC Bagin's time in Korea.

Isabelle Bagin left home in Kingston, PA at the age of 17, starting her nursing career after WWII. She attended cadet nurse training at Bayonne Hospital Dispensary in New Jersey between 1944 and 1947. She lived in a dormitory-style room and her starting paycheck of \$9 a month advanced to \$35 by graduation time. But she also had to buy parts of her uniform with that money; her nursing cape alone was \$26! Once she graduated, the war was over and she was allowed to decline an active duty assignment, even though her

schooling was funded by a military scholarship. The first four years after training, Isabelle worked in Brooklyn, NY. She remembers being a head nurse at age 23. In 1951, she felt an obligation to serve her country, so she joined the ANC, for a career that would span from 1951 to 1973.

LTC Bagin requested Hawaii as a first assignment and – lo and behold – she got it! Her best memory of Hawaii is that her BOQ was right across the street from the Officer's Club with "cute Army, Navy and Air Force officers," she said as she smiled (I believe there is a story there we are not hearing).

Her following assignments were more work than play, at Ft. Chafee, Brooke Army Medical Center, and Okinawa. LTC Bagin said her focus was basic, generic nursing: medical/surgical and supervisory assignments. However, she makes an interesting claim – that she can still recall names of many of her patients! She was head nurse at the Fort Huachuca hospital in 1963. Following Arizona, she loved her Stuttgart, Germany tour and some of



her favorite treasures are from her travels to England, Ireland and Scandinavia. Isabelle recalls her traveling friend, another Army Nurse, Hazel Maxwell, with fondness.

Her best overall assignment, she says, was Valley Forge, where she spent four years with good co-workers,

family nearby, and enjoyable off-duty time. From Pennsylvania, she went to Korea where she worked in Taegu first, and then the 121<sup>st</sup> CSH in Seoul. Her Korea stint was a rough one with the poisoning and the hospital fire, so it was possibly her least favorite assignment. LTC Bagin then retired at Edgewood Arsenal, MD in 1973.

After retirement, LTC Bagin volunteered at the hospital on Fort Huachuca until around 1988, when she fully retired. In early retirement Isabelle did quite a bit of traveling. She also received a post-retirement Associate's Degree and did some tutoring at a nearby elementary school. At 85, she is now enjoying her home in Sierra Vista and has a good friend nearby, Jerry Dow, who helps her with shopping and chores and doctor appointments.

One impact the Army had on LTC Bagin was the scholarship that helped her complete her nursing education. In that light, she felt she wanted to encourage future nursing students to pursue Army Nurse careers. She recently made a substantial bequest to the Army Nurse Corps Scholarship fund. Thank you, LTC Bagin, for keeping the dream alive for future nurses!

It was my pleasure to meet LTC Bagin and to get to know her and share "old war stories." I think all Army Nurses have stories within stories, perhaps not always from the war trenches - but often the Army hospital "trenches," field duty, TDY's and schools - which can be stressful in a different way. Connecting with other Army Nurses through ANCA and sharing the good old times is certainly a fun way to deal with stress.