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Betty Ann Olsen

Christian Missionary Nurse: Betty Ann Olsen

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## Introduction

Betty Ann Olsen was a remarkable missionary nurse. Throughout her life she faced many obstacles that not only challenged her life but also her faith. Although she faced unimaginable hurdles she continued to be selfless and often put other's well-being before her own. Her life story is one worth knowing not only because it is relatable but because it shines a light on the tremendous work and sacrifice that goes into being a nurse.

## The Early Years

Betty Ann Olsen was born October 22, 1934, in Bouake, Cote d'Ivoire, Africa. Unlike most children Betty did not have a normal upbringing. Her parents, Walter and Elizabeth Olsen served with The Christian and Missionary Alliance. The standard procedure for missionary kids at the time was to attend missionary- kid boarding school and for Betty it was 800 miles away from home. She spent most of her childhood away from her parents.

During her high school years, Betty decided she wanted to follow in her parents' footsteps and become a missionary. During her senior year of college Betty began to have doubts in her calling because she felt distanced from God, she says to Him "If this is all there is to Christian life then I don't want it.". It was not until many failed counseling sessions that she decided she would let go of the problem that was consuming her and leave it up to the Lord. Betty acknowledged that in order for the Lord to really help her she had to completely want the Lord's will for her life and mission. Betty reconnected with God and her missionary purpose after attending a church missionary conference. She received training in nursing and then graduated with a major in missions from Nyack Missionary College in 1962. Shortly after Betty became a nurse and began fulfilling her purpose by taking on a missionary assignment in a Vietnamese leprosarium.

### Vietnam

In the early 1960's Vietnam was a very dangerous place to be, only but a few people knew the name of Jesus. Betty joined The Alliance which was a missionary organization active in Vietnam since the early 1900's. She arrived in Banmethout, Vietnam on December 13, 1964 right in the middle of the ongoing 10-year Vietnam war. In Vietnam there was no such thing as bystanders, everyone ran the risk of being involved in conflict with or without choice. It was 1965 when Betty spoke to an interviewer and said that Vietnam reminded her of Africa and she was happy being a single woman serving in a war zone. In her testimony she spoke about knowing the concerns behind her decision but acknowledged that she was not fearful but at peace with her decision because it was God's will and her purpose to serve. Working at the leprosarium was a great risk, prior to Betty's arrival three missionaries were abducted by Viet Cong (a communist political revolutionary organization in South Vietnam). Betty was aware of this happening but still she had no doubt in her mind that this is where she would minister for as long as she was allowed to.

Betty Ann continued to work with her patients in the leprosarium despite of the ongoing war . In January of 1968, three years after Betty's arrival the leprosarium was ambushed again by the Viet Cong . Many missionaries were killed; Betty and a Wycliffe translator by the name of Henry ( Hank) Blood were captured on February while attempting to escape. Both of them in addition to a humanitarian named Michael D Bengé were imprisoned in cages for a month at a POW camp; they were only given boiled cassava which is very low in nutritional value. The Viet Cong feared rescue attempts and air strikes by Americans so they chose to move around a lot, Betty and the other prisoners were chained together and forced to spend 12-14 hours a day hiking through mountain jungles where they faced sickness due to malnutrition, exhaustion and

infection. Betty Ann was beaten repeatedly by the Viet Cong members as a way to force her to keep walking. Betty Ann Olsen died on February 1, 1969 on a hammock surrounded by her own feces due to her inability to get up. Michael Bengé was the only survivor, he spoke of Betty Ann's bravery and good heart during her time with them. He mentioned how she constantly tried to keep up their spirits, especially those of the Vietnamese Christians; she would pretend to not be hungry so that the others would eat her portion in addition to nursing the best way she could under such circumstances. Mike Bengé stated " She never showed any bitterness or resentment. To the end, she loved the ones who mistreated her."

#### The Gospel, Healthcare and Life

Betty Ann Olsen is remembered amongst the Christian community for her bravery and faith in times of desperation. She made it her mission to spread the Gospel and left an imprint on those she helped by leading in the image of God. Michael Bengé spoke about how Betty would pray twice a day for him, he acknowledges that if it wasn't for spiritual strength he would not have survived . Her nursing practice helped patients in the leprosarium in addition to those who she was imprisoned with. She saved Michael from dying and he recalls her being the most unselfish person he had ever met. In regards to her life Betty Ann Olsen lived according to God's will, she acted in the image of Christ by fulfilling her calling and by putting others before her until the end. Betty held no resentment towards her captor as Jesus did when he was crucified.

#### Conclusion

Reflecting on my life I understand and relate to different parts of Betty Ann's life. I understand when she felt confused and distanced from God and her choice to confide and trust completely in His guidance when nothing else eases your mind. I also relate to her desire to put others before herself as we often do as nurses. I found Betty Ann's story to be extremely sad but

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inspiring. I learned a great deal from her; her strength and resilience motivates me to be the best nurse I can be to those that need me most. I learned that you cannot fight hate with more hate and love of God and others makes all the difference.

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## References

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<https://therestfulhome.com/betty-olsen/>