

Ginny Kirsch, 'Donut Dollie' murdered in Vietnam War, to be honored Sunday

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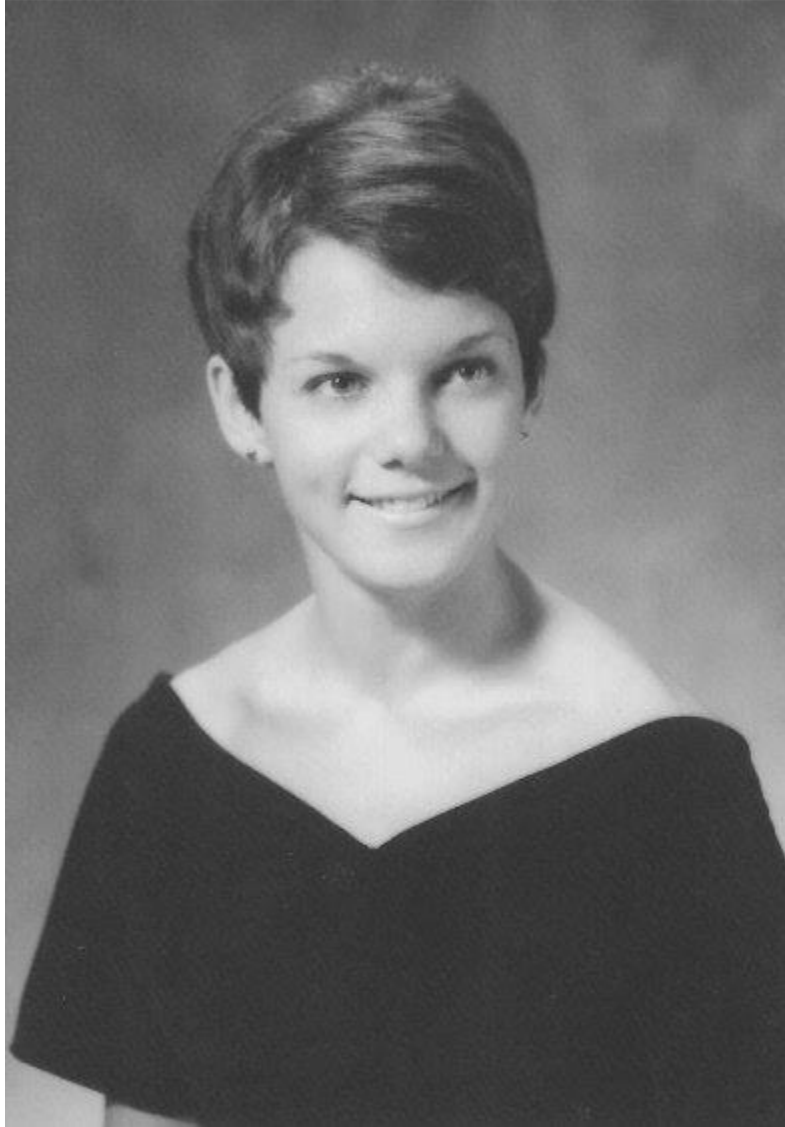


Ginny Kirsch, pictured at left shortly after her arrival in Vietnam in August 1970, was one of three Vietnam War "Donut Dollie" Red Cross workers to die in Vietnam. Kirsch will be honored in her Trumbull County hometown of Brookfield Township Sunday with dedication of a memorial highway. Kirsch, who had just graduated from Miami of Ohio the prior spring, was murdered in her room while assigned to Cu Chi, Vietnam; no one was ever convicted in the killing. *(Photo courtesy of the Kirsch family)*

CLEVELAND -- Ginny Kirsch, one of only three Vietnam War Red Cross workers known as Donut Dollies to die during the war, is not forgotten, even though no one was ever convicted for her Vietnam murder. On Sunday, at 1 p.m., Kirsch, a 1966 graduate of Brookfield High School in Trumbull County, will be honored in Brookfield's Village Green by surviving family, friends, service members and politicians with dedication of the Virginia E. "Ginny" Kirsch Memorial Highway.

State Sen. Sean O'Brien of Bazetta Township in Trumbull County led the legislative effort to memorialize Kirsch because "he needed to do something to honor her sacrifice," but many Vietnam veterans also will be in attendance.

We will honor and recognize the dedication to nation and service of Kirsch, a Miami of Ohio cheerleader and member of the Alpha Chi Omega sorority, who had many opportunities when she graduated college in 1970 but elected to join the American Red Cross to serve with the SRAO (Supplemental Recreational Activities Overseas) program -- more affectionately known as Donut Dollies.



Virginia "Ginny" Kirsch's 1970 graduation picture.
(Photo courtesy of the Kirsch family)

Following Red Cross training, Kirsch received orders to Vietnam, arriving on Aug. 2, 1970. She was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division's base camp at Cu Chi, 16 miles northwest of Saigon.

Kirsch hit the ground running, embracing the activities that she and her colleagues conducted to perk up the morale of troops at fire support bases and outposts reachable only by helicopters. She learned quickly that settling in meant adjusting to the torrid heat, malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and enemy mortars and rockets.

But barely two weeks after her arrival, she was murdered in her own room.

According to records I obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, in the early morning hours of Sunday morning, Aug. 16, 1970, Kirsch retired to her room about 1:45 a.m. after chatting with two other Donut Dollies.

One of the others couldn't sleep, so was rinsing glasses at about 3:30 am when she heard a noise that she described as a "dog fight." Stepping out into the hall, she observed a man come out of Kirsch's room, run toward her and rush out the end door. The man was dressed in civilian clothes -- whitish or beige pants and a dark jacket to the waist. The woman went to Kirsch's room and found her on the floor covered in blood; a bloody knife was found in the room.

Screams from the women in the hooch brought MPs and medical personnel, who attended to Kirsch until the ambulance arrived, but she was pronounced dead at the base hospital from hemorrhage secondary to stab wounds. She had not been sexually assaulted.

The Red Cross evacuated the other Cu Chi Donut Dollies following the homicide and they would not return for two months.

Military police on duty that night had observed a man, dressed in civilian clothes, running from the Red Cross hooch around 3:40 a.m. but were unable to apprehend him. Cu Chi was placed on lockdown and a composite drawing and description of the fleeing man issued.

A camera and a cassette recorder taken from the room of another Donut Dollie around the time of Ginny's murder were found that morning in the possession of one soldier, a private first class, who claimed that he found them in a waterproof bag and who denied stealing the items or killing Kirsch.

A second soldier who showed deception during a polygraph admitted that he stabbed a person in a darkened room while strung out on heroin, according to U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command (CID) reports. There had been no other reports of a stabbing on Aug. 16.

The second soldier, also a private first class, was charged Nov. 9 with unpremeditated murder under the Uniform Code of Military Justice and returned to the United States, but charges were dismissed for insufficient evidence in early 1971 after the eyewitness failed to identify this soldier from a lineup as the man she'd observed in civilian clothes coming out of Kirsch's room.

The first soldier, meanwhile, although investigated on a possible larceny charge, was eventually placed on mental disability and discharged. Within a year of returning to Wisconsin, he was charged with murdering a man. While detained for that crime, he asked to speak with Dodge County Sheriff Edwin Nehls and confessed to killing a "Donut Dollie in Vietnam," according to Dodge County Sheriff's records.

A U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command agent took the discharged soldier's statement of confession on June 22, 1972, but on Sept. 6, Sheriff Nehls was told the Army had closed the case since the individual "had been released from military service," The Plain Dealer reported at the time.

The discharged soldier was later found not guilty by reason of insanity for the murder of the Wisconsin man and remains in a Wisconsin mental institution. No one has been convicted for the senseless murder of Ginny Kirsch.

Kirsch's name may not be on The Wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington -- none of the three "Donut Dollies" who died during the war is memorialized there -- but she died in Vietnam serving the men in uniform and her country and she is memorialized by the Vietnam Women's Memorial. She will be honored in Ohio Sunday.



A Vietnam veteran and lawyer who formerly served as the U.S. Attorney for Northern Ohio, Patrick M. McLaughlin is president of the Greater Cleveland Veterans Memorial Inc.