Richard Verrone: Okay, Jenny could you describe your life at that first base camp, at Dong Ba Thin, what were your quarters like and what was your reception like there?

Jennifer Young: Yes, the quarters that they had for the Red Cross girls -- we were the only females on the base and that was the headquarters for the Eighteenth Engineer Brigade and a couple of helicopter companies that would fly kind off into the Highlands. [There] were two house trailers, single wide with a kitchen at one end and the bedrooms down the hall of the other end and kind of a living area. The two were parallel to each other with about a twenty-foot concrete patio between the two of them; I think there was a picnic table out in the middle. Then above both there was one tall water tower between both of these trailers. Whenever you had someone leave a unit and that creates a vacancy for a new person, than everybody gets to move up a notch when it comes to the better bedrooms or more space or a bigger closet or whatever. So I got the smallest bedroom and I could tell that they were thinking, “uh-oh,” because the smallest bedroom in that style of mobile home could just hold, maybe a double mattress, very little even walking room and it was like a room with just a bed with a mattress and then a real small closet at the foot of the bed. I don’t even think there was even a place for me to set a suitcase or to open a suitcase and they were thinking, “Oh my gosh, she’s tall, how is she even going to fit in this room?” But it was fine and you kind of take what comes. So, I think that the
trailers were air conditioned because I don’t remember having to open the window for
circulation or anything like that. Then we had our Mama-sans and baby-sans that used
the kitchen area to wash dishes for when we had snacks and things like that and a nice,
typical mobile home bathroom and that’s about all I remember.

RV: So you had local civilians there working on the base for you?
JY: Yes.

RV: Did you guys pay them or was it artel?
JY: No, we paid, we must have contributed I guess, towards a household fund that
there was always one of the girls who was usually the most senior, was the leader, called
the unit director and I think she’s the one that contracted with the Mama-sans and there
was a younger one that we called baby-san and [the unit director] she would pay them. I
guess she paid them. That’s interesting, how did we pay them? She must have
converted, the unit director must have converted, our money into Vietnamese money
because I know that we couldn’t have paid them in MPC because the locals were not
supposed to have the military payment card.

RV: How was your reception from the other girls that were there in the trailer?
JY: Oh, they were very nice, very happy to have a new person come, and you
know, “We’ll get you started and we’ll get you going on what’s unique about this place.”
They showed me around and they introduced me. I met all of the officers that they felt
like needed to know who I was, and showed me where a snack bar was that was pretty
good to eat at and an officers’ mess I think that they commonly ate at. That particular
unit had a small recreation center so we were not only mobile but we also staffed a
center.

RV: Did you feel like you had adequate supplies there?
JY: Oh, yes.

RV: And that included all the recreation supplies?
JY: Yes.

RV: What was your reception like from the men on base?
JY: I think they were very cordial, kind of yucked it up. I don’t think, I think they
were happy to see us but kind of. Some of them thought, “Well it’s important that these
girls were here, but they’re not important for me and I’ll be nice to them but they must be
important to somebody.” So it was a high level of tolerance, and cordial. They were
cordial and tolerant -- those were the higher-ups. The enlisted men that would come into
our rec center were real happy to see us and a new face. Some gravitated there all the
time. They preferred the rec center than going to the EM Club and getting drunk and
watching the Korean strippers.

RV: Describe what your basic day was like.

JY: It would depend, you’d kind of get a feel for what your week was going to be,
am I going to be mobile? Or am I going to be on center duty? Or am I going to have “a
day off of duty?” In which case that’s when I’m to be planning my program, researching,
getting the materials gathered, trying to figure out how long its going to be, how heavy its
going to be to carry. In which case you’d be in the back room kind of working on your
stuff. The day could be center duty or matching up, pairing up, we always traveled in
pairs to fly. Dong Ba Thin was quite mobile, even though we had our center, we had
some, it was a little bit on the unusual side. We had some overnight runs that were
specifically scheduled to where we’d fly somewhere and we would have to spend the
night because of the distance. So they thought well, let’s have her go on these longer runs
the first week, so my first one was in a Chinook. I had never seen a Chinook before. My
first helicopter ride was in a Chinook and I just couldn’t believe the prop wash. I could
hardly see and I thought I’m going to have to put my contacts away for the entire year,
which I did. I wasn’t all that nearsighted so it wasn’t all that critical. We flew down to
Phan Thiet and visit, down in Phan Thiet we visited elements of the 101st and a cavalry
unit that, I remember thinking isn’t this neat, these helicopters are just kind of lined up
and parked right here in this field next to a beach. Next to the beach on the ocean there
was a big ship that was actually aground. I think it was not, unintentionally [grounded], I
think it was the kind of U.S. Navy ship that somehow is big and it comes right up on,
comes up as close as it can onshore and then it offloads. There was a ship right there on
the shore, not in the harbor but on the shore. Of course, everything was just new to me,
everything.

RV: How did you like your first helicopter ride, what was it like?

JY: Oh, I thought it was great because the pilots lets us stand behind them because
in the Chinook it’s big enough you can actually stand, if I recollect, I’m pretty sure we
could stand, I’m getting my flights mixed up. Yes I’m almost sure we could stand behind
the pilots and kind of look and see what they were seeing. I just loved it.

RV: So, when you would go on these, the mobile trips, what were they like? Did
you have a list of places that you just rotated around?

JY: Yes, generally you had scheduled stops and you tried to get there the same
time, on the same day of the week so that the officers knew as they were planning their
men’s schedules, “Oh, the Red Cross girls are here” so that will allow this group of men
to have free time to play the girls’ [games]. We would have a schedule so that they could
in turn schedule their men. Some officers thought that it was important enough that they
deliberately scheduled our visit in, it wasn’t like we would arrive a place and say “yoo-
hoo, we’re here, doesn’t anybody want to come over?” It was like okay good, you’re
here, the men are waiting for you, let’s go over here to this mess hall and you can set up
there or this flight line or whatever. Some officers felt, I think, that it was good for their
men to do this, but then some of the men would say “You know,” this is true, they would
“You know, when you girls come every week our captain makes us come here and play
your games, but what’s the game going to be next week.” They didn’t want to admit that
they enjoyed it, like this week it might have been Concentration, maybe next week its
going to be some kind of word game, you know whatever.

RV: How were the men, how did they treat you?

JY: To me it was a real paradox. They were fantastic. They tried to watch their
language, once they got into the games, the competitive ones just really got enthusiastic
because a lot of times it would be Team A against Team B in Concentration, you
wouldn’t have individual against individual. They just really enjoyed it and some of
them enjoyed visiting with us before and after. Others just the game was it and that was
plenty, but then the paradox came where some of them, as much as they enjoyed that,
they just kind of made the assumption that we were making big money on our own in the
evenings by being call girls for the officers and that our real reason for being there was
that. But if the game was kind of fun in the mean time, then that was okay with them and
“rank has its privileges” and I was shocked. When I first [found out] thought that that
was just a foregone conclusion and an assumption I just, I couldn’t believe it. I thought
how could anybody think that of us? I’m here because I want to be here to build the
morale; I’m not here for anything else. That was really one of the harder things for me to
realize that it kind of came with the territory.

RV: How did you deal with that, how did you down play it a little, were you vocal
about it?

JY: If it ever came up you would say, “I don’t know what you’re thinking of, but
that’s not us.” We have a curfew, we’re not here for that, but its almost like they
expected denial. It’s like, “yeah, yeah, yeah,” but why argue about it -- so it was kind of
like you were whistling in the wind. You would try to correct the thinking; you would
not go along with it, because if you went along with it then what you were doing was
acknowledging that it might be true. There was no way I was going to do that. But I
didn’t make an issue of it.

RV: I guess that would have drawn more attention to it, if you had made a big
issue about it.

JY: Yes.

RV: Did you see any of that actually happening?

JY: No, I must say that I heard that maybe one of my coworkers had a man spend
the night with her in the room and I can’t say that that didn’t happen. Or some of them
would plan to take their R & R together. I think that if I were to say to somebody, “Look
we were all vestal virgins over there and none of us ever did anything” then my
credibility would -- They would say, “boy is her head still in the clouds,” human nature
being what it was. What I will say is that the times that I think that it happened it was
because the girl cared about the one man, it wasn’t like she was doing anything for
money or turning tricks or anything like some people thought. It was because she might
have even been in love with the guy or thought she was in love with the guy or whatever.
That’s human nature and it can happen. For some reason every female, I think that every
female who was in Vietnam was thought to be Red Cross unless they were military. So if
you were a civilian nurse or if you were Special Services or if you were USO, you were
Red Cross. We had to be between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five when we went
over but I think Special Services women could be older and USO women could be older,
they didn’t have the age limit that the Red Cross did and I think some of those women
may have been around the block a couple of times. So for them maybe they didn’t care
about reputations or it was like “Well I’ve got the reputation anyway so why not enjoy.”
So their conduct somehow spilled over on those of us that were really young and naïve,
so who knows?

RV: You said you were how old, you were twenty-two?

JY: Actually I turned twenty-two about two months, let’s [see] November of ’68. ,
See I turned twenty-two in January of ’69 so that’s about two months after arriving. I
went over there as a twenty-one year old. I was a little bit on the younger side of being a
college graduate.

RV: What was the general age of the girls that you worked with there?

JY: Probably twenty-two, twenty-three.

RV: Were there any fraternization rules, what you could or could not do?

JY: No, as a matter of fact there were not any, except for, “Don’t develop a

relationship with a married man.”

RV: Okay, they specifically told you not to do that?

JY: Yes, and they said, “Beware of the geographic bachelors.” In other words, if
someone says “I’m married, but I’m separated” then they are probably speaking literally,
“I am married, but I am separated from my wife” by four thousand miles of Pacific
Ocean, not legally separated. So they said, those men, [we] should be friends with them.
A lot of them are going to be the career officers that permit you to do your work, help
you schedule your transportation, and that sort of thing but they are also going to be the
ones that probably miss female companionship because they’re married. Because they
miss the female companionship they will maybe be the ones that tend to gravitate to you
guys more. Be careful, and nip it in the bud. So that was the only big no-no that I can
think of. There was no like “spend your time only with officers.” As a matter of fact,
this is kind of jumping ahead, when I returned, my brother, the first of my two younger
brothers, was wrapping up college and he was going to be losing his student deferment
and I said “what’s your draft number?” and he said “twenty” and I said “uh-oh.” I said
“Are you looking at a National Guard,” (Now here’s my mentality and this is after having
served), “Are you looking for a Guard unit or a Reserve unit?” “No, I don’t want to
commit to any more time than I have to, I’m willing to serve but minimize the time.” I
said, “What about OCS or ROTC?” “Nope, I’m just going to go in as a draftee” and I
said “Okay.” I said, “If you wind up with infantry as your MOS we all know where
you’re likely to go, and I want you, wherever you are, to seek out the nearest unit of Red
Cross girls. They will welcome you with open arms, you’re not an officer so don’t
believe what you hear about how they only want to fraternize with the officers. Tell them
your sister was one of them and you will have an instant ‘in’ as far as friendship goes and
plus you’d be a college educated draftee and those tended to be rare.” He said “Okay.”
Now, his military experience is a whole another Cinderella story altogether but, in answer
to your question about fraternization, no we weren’t told [what to do], as a matter of fact,
not even racially and I ran into that situation.

RV: Yes, I want to ask you about that a little bit later. Did the girls tell you kind
of off the record, here’s how we do it with the guys, make sure you don’t do this or say
this, was there anything like that, I guess any spoken rules and unspoken rules, off the
record?

JY: No, not that I can remember. It’s just that we tended to cross paths with
officers more than the enlisted guys because [when] we were eating alone we were
encouraged to eat at the officers’ mess and when we were mobile we were relying on a
helicopter pilot to willingly go, maybe he had been scheduled to go to Point A but instead
his superior officer said, “Oh take these donut dollies to fire base da, da, da, da.” Maybe
that was a slight deviation for him, so we wanted to stay on the good side of the
helicopter pilots. Plus they enjoyed having girls aboard so we got to know the helicopter
pilots quite a bit. They were either warrant officers or regular officers. And then when I
was on an airbase, for sure we were just around the officer level than the enlisted level
but there wasn’t anything that I was ever told about, “whatever you do, don’t make an
enlisted man one of us, don’t bring them into our living room” or anything like that. No.

RV: What other, or were there any other memorable experience your first two and
a half months there in country in Dong Ba Thin?

JY: Oh, golly, yes.

RV: Which ones jump out at you?

JY: Well, my first week they said, “Let’s have her go on the run to Phan Thiet.”
Okay, went down there and I was just goo-goo eyed about everything. The Jeep driver
that was taking us to the different points decided to take us on kind of a wild ride and we
went right along the edge of the surf and he swung the Jeep around and a big wave came
in and just drenched me in salt water. I didn’t realize at the time that I wouldn’t get a
shower or bath for quite awhile. So you’ve got dried salt or in your hair and on your skin
and in your clothes and then he took us through the petroleum dump and there was this
fine mist of oil that I didn’t even know was there until I saw that it had gotten on my skin
and my uniform. This Sergeant Major used to give us his hooch. Evidently, even though
an NCO, you know you get high enough and you have your own quarters. He must have
been somebody who was willing to say, “Okay. They can have my hooch for the one
night that they’re here and I’ll just bunk in with somebody else. That way they’ve got
privacy of where they stay.” I never thought anything about it. Well, the first day that I
was in Phan Thiet I had jet lag. Even though I’d been in Saigon for a little while, I mean
I was so beat that I needed to hit the hay way, way before curfew. The Red Cross girl I
was traveling with, Jody, wanted to go watch the guys play basketball or something.
They had a rigged up, makeshift basketball court. She said, “Well, lock yourself in and
I’ll knock when I come in later.” I said “Fine.” Well I was in there by myself and it was
wooden walls but with screens all the way around the top, so to change clothes and stuff,
you needed to have the lights out because there weren’t any curtains or anything which
was fine. I was dead asleep and somebody banged on the door and said that we were on
yellow alert and he was looking for the Sergeant Major. I didn’t know what yellow alert
meant. I thought does this mean we’re uh, uuh, and so I said “The Sergeant Major isn’t
here” and he said, “Who is this?” and I thought well, I’m not letting this guy know I’m by
myself. I said, “We are the Red Cross girls.” When that guy banging on the door did not
believe me, he thought the Sergeant Major was in there with us, I mean, reality hit me in
the face. I thought “Oh, no. First of all he thinks the Sergeant Major is really in here,
he’s not, I’m by myself and what is a yellow alert?” I was really scared and finally I
heard this voice out there saying, a different voice saying, “Is everything all right?” I
said “Not really, the Sergeant Major isn’t in here, somebody’s looking for him and
there’s some kind of, what’s a yellow alert?” Well, he kind of explained through the
doors, [which] I didn’t open. He said, “I’ll sit here for awhile, make sure everything is all
right.” I said “Fine.” However, his voice was, it was comforting enough to where I could
go back to sleep. And then someone later said to me, “Well you know who’s to say the
Sergeant Major all along hasn’t made it abundantly clear that he was bunking somewhere else?” Maybe he wanted to have the illusion that once a week he gets the Red Cross girls in there with him. I thought, “Oh.” It never occurred to me. Later on the week I went to Tuy Hoa, which was a different overnight run where we took a fixed wing from Cam Ranh up to Tuy Hoa which was an Air Force base and that was a place where the only place for us to sleep was a small room off of kind of a dormitory for the female entertainers. We’re not talking Ann Margret of the USO; we’re talking Korean strippers. And there was a sign on there that said “This is for Red Cross girls on Tuesdays” or whatever. Well, the Koreans, they sleep during the day and work at night and they can’t read English. We land to put our stuff in there to go out and do our work and there’s two women sleeping in our bunk beds. The other more senior Red Cross person kicked them out. Then later on we finally went to bed after we did our work and went around the perimeter. We’d go up each one of the guard towers and take the guy’s coffee all around the perimeter of the air base. Finally our workday was over. We hit the sack and then about three o’clock in the morning the strippers come in after their night’s work and two of the women started fighting. Cathy, the other Red Cross girl had to call the AP, the Air Police.

RV: They came and broke it up?

JY: Yes, and I think that there was a knife involved, so at that point Cathy said “We’re not ever sleeping here again.” So, I think the next night we slept in the infirmary and then we were supposed to stay even longer. I think that was an extra-long run, it was either a two [or three] nighter or, but a typhoon alert came in. They said if you want to get out, you better get out now; forget your schedule unless you want to be stranded here because we’re already tying down the F-100s. So, she got us on one of the last like C-130s or Caribous or one of those to go back south to Cam Ranh. That was my first week of unusual things.

RV: Was that atypical?

JY: Yes, I think that, I think having, in Phan Thiet having someone bang on saying “We’re under yellow alert where’s the Sergeant Major” and thinking the Sergeant Major was there and then the Korean women fighting up at Tuy Hoa and then to have a typhoon alert cause us to scramble to get out of there, I think that that was unusual and it
just happened in my first week. And then, I know of another thing, it was Thanksgiving
time too because I was there, first or second week there it was Thanksgiving and Linda
and I flew to Bao Loc, B-A-O L-O-C, two words, and we wound up being weathered in,
up there. We had to sleep in a tent that a couple of pilots had vacated. It was just a two
person, but it had a wooden floor and it had two cots in it with mosquito netting and
somebody must have said well, sleep here. All of the generator power was being used for
the mess building. There was kind of a building, it wasn’t a mess tent, it was an actual
building at Bao Loc for cooking Thanksgiving dinner, so they said, “Why don’t you go
down and visit the guys who are cooking tomorrow’s meal.” We said, “Okay, fine.” So
we’re sitting there chatting with them and I remember thinking to myself, I’m watching
the guys put in the biscuits, and I’m thinking, “Boy, the gas that they’re cooking with
really burns your eyes.” Pretty soon everybody starts running out of the mess hall and
I’m looking around and [someone] said “we’ve just been CSed, go out and face the wind
and just let the, try to get the tears to flow and it will wash your eyes out.” “I said CSed,
what does that mean?” and he said, “It’s kind of like a tear gas.” And I said, “Well, why
would anybody want to do that?” And he said, “I don’t know, maybe they were just
jealous because the Red Cross girls were spending too much time in the mess hall.” But
that was the only place to be because all the generator power was being used there to help
them cook. So that was a little bit on the unusual side, to be CSed. It wasn’t enemy.
Nobody was concerned like, “Oh my gosh, this means the enemy is coming. It was like,
what jerk set off a canister of CS?”

RV: When you would visit with the guys, what would they talk to you about?
JY: A lot of them would talk about back home. One of the first [comments], you
usually would always say where are you from, because you would try to establish some
kind of commonality and then if it was anywhere remotely close, it was, “Oh, I know
somebody from there” or “My uncle used to live there” and you would talk about home.
Interestingly enough, now this is jumping way ahead, June and I were asked to go into a
prison in Dallas, and this was in the ‘80s, because some Vietnam veterans were part of an
afternoon group with the chaplain to kind of help them work out things. When the
chaplain met June and me at a veterans’ event he said “You know I think the
[incarcerated vets] would like to talk to some women that had been there, do you mind
coming into the prison?” We said, “No, we’ll come.” I said [to] June “We have to take a
program.” Even though we don’t [have a chance to do it], we wouldn’t live up to our
reputation, just in case because maybe they expect it. If we run out of things to say,
we’ve at least got the program.” So, she said okay so we whipped up something. The
conversation really was sufficient. I found it interesting, whereas in Vietnam, in country,
you would ask the men, “Where are you from back in the States?” years later, going into
a prison meeting Vietnam veterans the question was, “Where were you stationed over
there?” So it was like the flip-flop of geography. For sure we had to stay away from
“What are you in prison for?” Back in Vietnam we would talk about their girlfriends or
if we reminded them of somebody or sometimes in the centers the guys would talk about
what was on their mind, they were concerned about VD or whatever.

RV: After they had contracted it or just contracting it in general?

JY: Well, this one guy, he came into the center and he was really despondent
because he had caught it from his wife. He had met her in Hawaii for R & R and that
meant that she was playing around on him back in the States. He said, “I listened to those
training films and I’ve been extra careful over here and I wind up getting it from my
wife.” He was so down in the dumps about that, and what do you say? Later on I do
remember talking to the guys about where they had been that day and some of them had
been into Laos and Cambodia and they were having to go in without any IDs, with no
insignias, no IDs, no nothing, and the LRRPs, Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, would
kind of tell us about how close they got to somebody on the trail. Some of the things that
were, oh and then when I eventually wound up with an infantry division, the mechanized
armor group would tell us about the mechanical problems that they had with the
mechanized armor and how the guy, the Lieutenant Colonel, didn’t know beans about
mechanized armor so they were having equipment break down in the middle of the
jungle, being really vulnerable and they didn’t feel like they were being led by
competence. So it varied all over the board, what we talked about.

RV: Did you ever hear them talking about fragging?

JY: Oh, well yes, [and] actually, no. They would talk about incidents of fragging
but there was a time when I was glad they didn’t talk about it. One of our assignments
out of Dong Ba Thin was down the road; we went there by truck, I think. It was a regular
stop and we came there one day just prepared to do our usual thing and the captain said,
“I don’t think we can do your game today girls we’ve just had a fragging incident that did
not work” and somebody had popped a grenade under the bunk of a sleeping lieutenant or
captain. I can’t remember the rank of the officer and it was. It failed but it was definitely
an attempt and he said, what did they call that military intelligence group that would, not
CIA, CID, [and it was] is on its way. “The guys are really tense and, do you mind just
foregoing your game?” We said, “Well, no problem. Who wants to say okay, time for a
game?” And he said, “But in the meantime I do want you to chit chat with the guys and
talk with them and see if you can learn anything about this incident from them and if you
can let me know.” I was thinking, oh my gosh, because it was like okay, I’ll talk and if its
good for the guys to just chit chat then that’s fine, but I don’t want to hear anything that
would put me in a quandary between, this is what I heard and I just kept my fingers
crossed the whole time. It was like I didn’t want to bring up the incident because I did
not want to hear anything about it that I would in good conscience have to report. So,
man, I think then we were talking about things at home, popular songs, who knows.
Anything but what had just happened. Then you would hear about fragging threats. One
of the women that contributed a tape for my book, my attempt at a book mentioned that
she felt responsible for a fragging. She was talking to a guy in the center. I think she
didn’t like this one particular officer and said something about, “That guy doesn’t know
what he’s doing” or something and within a couple of days the guy [officer] had been, I
think, killed, but I’m not real sure. She immediately thought, “Did I make comments that
fell within earshot of somebody to where that pushed them over and gave them enough
impetus to – “Well, I don’t like him either and if she doesn’t like him, then let’s get him
out of the picture.” She said that she’s always had that kind of weighing on her mind a
little bit. But that was not me, that was not my experience, except for that one actual
attempt where I was asked to listen.

RV: You mentioned you would take coffee around at some of the watchtowers on
the base; tell me about those kind of duties besides doing the games.

JY: That’s true. We would. Actually, in addition to the games we would look for
any kind of means by which to interact with the guys that was okay with the military. In
other words, sometimes the helicopter that we were in would fly in with a hot meal,
maybe it was an LZ or a firebase that had no mess tent or mess hall or anything, and the
chow would be on the helicopter. Well, we would serve the chow, because number one it
was time to eat. Why do you want to play a game when there’s hot chow and people are
hungry? So it’s like okay, we’ll serve the chow. So, at Tuy Hoa they, and I know, it
seemed to me this was more on air bases, at Tuy Hoa at night we were driven around the
perimeter in a truck. We would get to the bottom and they would do the, the driver and
the guy up in the tower, would do the interchange, the password or whatever, and then we
would actually climb up the ladder carrying a cup of coffee to the guy and then look
through their starlight scopes and kind of chit chat with them for a little while. So that
was like a means by which to see more people, maybe even go to people who otherwise,
maybe wouldn’t seek us out [otherwise], wouldn’t go to our games. At the flight line at
Cam Ranh air base we would go around in the back of a pickup truck with a huge vat of
Kool-Aid during the day, and the guys pulling maintenance on the airplanes would [come
over], we’d stop and serve them Kool-Aid and talk with them briefly. So we did stuff
like that too.

RV: Did you ever come under fire at any time?
JY: There were times where I was in my quarters where they said go to the
bunker, there’s incoming, but the incoming was usually at the perimeter and our quarters
were obviously not on the perimeter. Now, there was another time that’s almost funny
that I did not know about until years later. That was when I was on a Chinook with Julie
and we had had to unexpectedly remain overnight at Ban Me Thuot. Let me think a
minute how this worked. I think that we were hoping to get out, the weather looked bad
we were on the Chinook. We were actually the only passengers on the Chinook. It
seems funny to have a crew and two passengers on this huge Chinook, but somehow we
thought we were getting out, we thought we were going to beat the weather. The
Chinook pilot was told turn around, there’s some troops that you need to extract from a
hot area and the pilot said “I’ve got donut dollies aboard” and they said “You’re the only
bird available, put steel pots and flak jackets on the girls and go down and pick up the
troops.” I didn’t know about this interchange obviously because, I found out about that
later. What I was told by the crew chief who was walking back and forth the length of the
Chinook, who handed me the flak and steel pot, “Put these on.” “Why?” “Well, the pilot
has been asked to go in, we’ve got to go take some troops out of the hot area. We told them we have you guys on board but they said go anyway, so you need to put these on.”

“Fine.” Well, I was so entranced in this whole thing. Julie, in the meantime somehow was on a microphone with the pilot. I wasn’t, so I thought it [would be] was Americans [troops], so I thought oh, goll we’re going to go in and rescue. Well, they were ARVN that we pulled out. It’s like kind of a disappointment, I mean, in other words “Oh gee we go in and I can’t really converse with the guys that are coming on board because they’re South Vietnamese not Americans, but they still needed the help.” Okay, that was the end of the event, we then went to Ban Me Thuot, it was too late to fly out and then Julie and I had to spend the night. They closed down the NCO club and set up cots in the middle of the bar area, among the tables and chairs, they gave us cots to sleep on and just said, “We’re on an alert, so the club can’t be open anyway and you girls sleep in here.” Well, in talking with Julie [in 1995], Julie and I went back to Vietnam, signed on for the same trip in 1995. It was a trip especially marketed to women who had been there before, whether they were military, nurses, orphanage workers or what. In this little mini-bus we’re talking about each one of our experiences from twenty-eight years before or whatever. Julie and I are relating the story about this Chinook and she said, “Yes, that’s when we took small arms fire” and I said “what?” And she said “You didn’t know?” she said “I kept hearing this pinging sounds and I asked the pilot what it was and he said, ‘well, we’re taking small arms fire, it’s nothing to really be worried about, but that’s the noise that you hear.’” I said, “I didn’t know that we, that we were.” She said, “No, you were too busy talking with the crew chief that was walking back and forth.” Actually I think he was heating up some C-rations for me on the manifold of the engine, so I had no idea. So, going to the bunker when incoming came in on the perimeter, and then that one little tiny incident which is hardly worth talking about because I didn’t even know about it at the time, is it for me, nothing more major than that.

RV: What was your impression of the ARVN?

JY:  Well, once again, I was always just amazed at the smallness of the people so to see an Army come in and they’re much smaller men than the Army I was used to which was the American Army. I don’t think I had an impression of them. If anything, my thoughts or whatever would have been influenced too much by the observations made
by the American soldiers who were trying to teach them and help them. Their opinion
was pretty biased, and not real positive but I can’t say that I’m a testament to how they
really were.

RV: Okay. Did you feel like, well, how was the morale of the American troops in
general, overall looking at it?

JY: Pretty crummy. Some of them [didn’t get] I don’t think got supplied like they
should have and they were going without and some of their uniforms looked pretty
threadbare and worn. Those are the guys that were kind of forward. The guys in the rear
were bored and then they were seeing the waste. You can’t help but when you see just
crates and crates and crates of things brought in and like, “Look at all this Mateus wine.”
and you’re thinking, “Look at all these crate of Mateus wine, wait a minute, what about
dry socks for the infantry guy?” You can get a little bit disillusioned with the
misallocation of assets, let’s put it that way.

RV: Did you see a lot of that?

JY: Yes, and kind of a loosey, goosey attitude towards keeping track of things and
the bartering was unbelievable.

RV: Between whom?

JY: Well, with the military too. In other words, “I’ve got a Jeep, I’ve got an extra
Jeep but I sure could use some –“ What do we call them, those plates that they made the
runways out of? I’ll think of in a minute. It’s the metal plates that you put down to make
a runway; it’s got holes in it. Shoot, I can’t remember the name of it, in other words,
back and forth. It’s major stuff, like, wait a minute wouldn’t somebody be looking for a
Jeep pretty soon? And had found out it was traded for this stuff that they use or sandbags
for this? You just think holy moley. Then while I was there, there was the scandal of, I
think the PX and some Sergeants. There was some graft going on related to PX supplies
that didn’t help matters. Then the morale, I think that you just saw the same thing over
and over again, the guys were, all they were wanting to do was put in their time and get
out of there. Not really, are we moving towards an end that has been defined and how is
our progress occurring? Its like, “I just want out of here when my twelve months are up.”

RV: How aware were you of American policy in general in Vietnam, while you
were there?
JY: Probably not too awfully aware although, well let me say this, I was aware a little bit, for example, the policy of letting a village know that an air strike was imminent because that’s what the agreement was. There was an F-100 pilot at Tuy Hoa that had been shot down and rescued by the Koreans, the Republic of Korea, the ROKs and he was so grateful for having been rescued that he wanted to, and there was a ROK compound not far from Tuy Hoa he wanted to know if Linda, that was one of my coworkers and I, wanted to accompany him to the ROK compound so that he could take the commander his squadron patch and some mementos of his squadron as a thanks. It’s like “Wow, sure I’ll go over there.” Well, come to find out that the village, that his air strike had been delayed to begin with because the right Vietnamese, the mayors of the villages hadn’t been informed. Then when he finally got off the ground he was shot down. It’s like, “What’s wrong with this picture?” So I kind of was aware of the notification policy was jeopardizing I think the life of some of our people. Permission to fire was sometimes not granted. I did not like the policy of “career Army,” my exposure was Army where you get your ticket punched with a combat leadership role for promotional purposes even though you didn’t know beans about you were being asked to command. I really, that I was very much aware of there, did not care for. To have the government say we have no troops in Laos, yet I would have dinner with the guys that had just come back from Laos. They were the ones that went over with no IDs and I thought, “Well, I wonder what the definition of troops is?” I heard someone refer to a “mechanized ambush” and I said “What do you mean by mechanized ambush?” and he said “Well, it’s pretty much the same as a booby trap, only booby traps are not permitted by the Geneva Convention so we do *mechanized ambushes* or we’re not allowed to mistreat POWs so we just turn them over to the ROKs and then we find out what we really want to know.” I was very aware of those policies and if anything, I’m thinking I’d much rather the policy be to call a spade a spade than to dance around the issue but maybe dancing around the issue is life, I don’t know.

RV: What was your impression of the ROK troops?

JY: Oh, man! Disciplined, clean, their compound was as clean as a whistle. I could not believe how neat it was. Every sandbag was lined up. I think they had like large stones holding down the corrugated tin of some of the roofs of some of their
buildings and the space between the spots and stones were exact. I couldn’t believe how
they were. If anything, you think, “Oh I’m glad these [guys],” and I knew they were
tough, I knew they had a reputation for being very, very tough. I remember thinking
wow, not only are they tough, they’re a disciplined tough, and it’s a good thing that
they’re on our side.

RV: When you went up to their base that time, did you get to interact with them at
all?

JY: Well, just the commander that was getting the insignia from the pilot and he
had us to tea or something and I looked around the room and he had very carefully, prior
to our entering the room, had turned to maps to the inside. And I thought well, I don’t
blame him, he’s got these strangers coming in and to me, I respected that, but other than
the ROK commander and the Korean strippers who fought in our dormitory, that was my
exposure to the Koreans.

RV: So, you were eventually moved to Cam Ranh, is that right?

JY: Right. We moved the unit from Dong Ba Thin to Tuy Hoa and were the first
women to go into Tuy Hoa and I was only there four weeks and then was transferred to
Cam Ranh.

RV: What was it like at Cam Ranh?

JY: Oh, totally, much bigger, everything was in multiples. In other words, more
women, more nurses. Always before I was with three or four other girls and we were it
on the entire base, suddenly you had Air Force nurses and USO and on the Army side.
They had I think, for sure, USO and a lot more socials. Those squadrons, once they
finished with their rotation of being on alert, they “partied hardy” and there were dance
bands. There was a beach run, where’d you go to the beach and swim, so it was almost
like a Club Med.

RV: Okay. How long were you at Cam Ranh?

JY: About three and a half months I think.

RV: And did you have basically the same duties as you did at Dong Ba Thin?

JY: No, Cam Ranh was a lot more center oriented. Now, why on earth USO and
Special Services couldn’t have done something; why the Red Cross had the centers at a
place like Cam Ranh I will never know because it was so big and so fixed and so
established. Army and Air Force were side by side, but there was a world of difference, I mean even the sand was a different color. The sand on the Army side was kind of a red sand; the sand on the Air Force side was a white sand. The buildings were different and everything. I was on the Air Force side and we had two centers, one real close to kind of the hub area of the base where you had a lot of activities and one way out on the other side where we had to travel by truck just to get to the other side of the base where there was a much smaller center. I think that was the area where, that west side center, I think catered to men that were just passing through, they were going through Cam Ranh on their way somewhere else and they could be Army, or Marines whereas the center that was closer to the Hub served the people who were actually stationed and living at Cam Ranh. So you had transient clientele at one end of the base and ongoing fixed personnel at the main area, the main center. But then we did have one mobile run and that was back to Bao Loc, because when Dong Ba Thin closed, its runs to Phan Thiet had to be turned over to another unit. The run to Bao Loc was given to Cam Ranh Air, so I once again was going to Bao Loc.

RV: So while at the base you would use the center there and put on your games?
JY: Yes, the centers were places where we would test our mobile programs but then we also had real center based activities like Jell-o eating contests and then there were the pool tables and the ping pong tables and music library and reading material and card games and chess boards and all of that stuff.

RV: What would you say was the most popular game that you guys put on?
JY: It probably had something to do with flash cards and music. It seemed to me that having people remember some of the popular hits of the day and relating it to the artists or something matching it up, I really can’t remember because we were doing a different one every week, so that’s a lot of different ones. Now, in the center you had things like To Tell The Truth or a fashion show or a talent contest, those were always fun.

RV: Did you guys ever partake in any kind of civic action?
JY: My unit had orphanage kids to our center for a Christmas party and we had a piñata and entertained them, but other Red Cross units I think -- I think one even showed some of the local women how to sew or something, but I didn’t do that, it was mainly orphanage, having the orphanage come to us.
RV: Did you ever develop any relationships with any of the Vietnamese civilians?

JY: Oh, yes the ones that worked for us, we got very close to. We would tease
them and we would speak pidgin English with them in pidgin we had the codes, number
one, number ten and then if we ever gave them something of ours we had to write a letter
or write something so that if they were inspected at the checkpoint to get off base, if they
were carrying something that obviously wasn’t theirs, we had to show that here’s a letter
that says we gave this, like a blouse, or if something didn’t fit anymore or whatever, or
sometimes we’d give them soap to take to their homes, that sort of thing.

RV: Did you ever go off base with them?

JY: Yes, our Mama-san in Pleiku in the Highlands wanted us to meet her family
and I don’t know, somehow I just remember going in a Jeep. Now, did we check with
the military? Did we find out ahead of time it was okay? I don’t know, I can’t
remember. But I remember somehow getting a driver and at that particular unit we had a
driver and a Jeep assigned to us and I guess he just thought, well if the girls want to go,
I’ll figure out a way to get them there. Somehow we had directions and we got to the hut
that belonged to this [Mama-san]. Her name was Gaio, and we met her family and went
inside their home. Then the Montagnards -- we got into their village because when we go
into Montagnard villages we were visiting the civilian affairs team that the Army had
placed in the village to help, and they consolidated villages together and then put up
perimeter wire around the village. There’d be some Americans there, I guess prepared to
defend them or teaching them how to defend themselves. I don’t know which, because
there were only a handful at each village. We went into some of the huts there and drank
their rice wine and were honored as guests.

RV: That must have been some experience.

JY: Yes. I mean looking back on it now; I’m thinking I could have gotten
ptomaine poisoning or something. But no, it was like “Oh rice wine, sure I’ll take a sip.”

RV: How did you find the rice wine?

JY: It tasted like bacon rinds to me. There was some kind of straw, it was like a
reed of some kind that went down into this big pottery thing and the pottery thing looked
like it was stuffed with straw, in other words, the rice wine looked like there were straws
at the top of this jug and then this reed thing came out and the reed thing went down into
the jar and I took a sip and it tasted -- I didn’t care for it. I didn’t continue drinking it, I just took one sip.

RV: So at Cam Ranh, is this where you experienced your birthday?
JY: No, that was Dong Ba Thin, before we actually moved to Tuy Hoa.

RV: Now, what did you do for your birthday?
JY: Actually, my birthday almost snuck up on me. I didn’t even think about it and Linda, one of my coworkers who was somewhat my mentor felt like we need to acknowledge it somehow, but what do you do? So she got a loaf of bread from the kitchen and found some icing so I had a loaf of bread with chocolate icing on it. She said, “Here’s your birthday cake” and it was just a small --, maybe the others might have wished me happy birthday, but it was, our birthdays were not big things, our own personal birthdays were not big things that I can ever remember, but the birthdays of the guys were. At the Fourth Division we would get printouts.

RV: This is up at Camp Enari?
JY: Yes. We would get printouts of here are the upcoming month’s birthdays and we would hand make a birthday card for that month and then of course, photocopy it a jillion times over. We must have had a ditto machine or something. Then we would each hand sign, so the signatures were original, a birthday card and somehow distribute them. I don’t know whether we did it through the mail system on the base or what because there were hundreds of them so there was no way we could have-- we might have taken them to the individual units as a batch saying “Could you distribute these to the guys who [have] birthdays,” these were their birthday cards. Now we did that, no I’ve got to tell you, in 1993, I was in Washington DC and someone said “Jenny, I think there’s a GI looking for you, Linda, Linda, June.” There were several names and I said “well that was our unit at Camp Enari” and they said, “He’s got a birthday card that he’s kept.” Oh, that broke me up. He had kept it.

RV: So that meant a lot to those guys that you took the time to do that.
JY: Yes, I guess. And some of them now are writing. They’re finding websites or they’re hearing about donut dollies and they’re writing now about what it really meant to them. But they weren’t real vocal then, some of them were, but not very many. But now, after the fact, they’re saying to us, “Thanks.” But, anyway, to have that birthday
RV: Okay, what were your experiences with the USO shows, did you ever get to go to one?

JY: Oh, yes I went to one and that was when I was still at Dong Ba Thin and I was so excited about seeing Bob Hope. I had heard that sometimes the stars would actually have the Red Cross girls help them in the dressing room and I just thought that would be the neatest thing and so I thought that would be part of the deal. I was out on a run and got back late. The show had been scheduled at Cam Ranh and of course we were over at Dong Ba Thin, and it was kind of a long ride. I thought I had totally missed the show and somebody said, “No. It’s been delayed. Bob Hope was running late. It hasn’t even started yet, so come on, jump in and go over.” So I thought oh, that’s great. So I go over and there’s like a sea of OD, a sea of uniforms on the side of a sand dune and the guy who gave us a ride said, “I think our guys are up this way.” Of course, by this time I thought, well we haven’t been asked to help with the stars and chances are, if anybody gets to do it, it’s going to be the Red Cross girls of the Cam Ranh units, not little Dong Ba Thin, so I’ll go with these guys. So I sat right in the [middle], kind of back in the middle, so far from the stage you couldn’t even make out who might be coming on the stage. But the guys that we kind of knew from Dong Ba Thin were around there and they were real protective. Because of the delay the guys who had been sitting on that hill all day long had been drinking beer and getting rowdy and pretty soon beer cans started being lobbed here and there.

RV: Empty or full?

JY: Empty. No, beer was too precious to throw a full one. This one guy gave me his, not his steel pot, but the liner, a kind of a thinner thing and he said “Put this on, don’t want you to get hit by any of these beer cans.” And then finally Bob Hope came on and then Ann Margret. But I couldn’t see them and I didn’t want to stand up because I didn’t want to block the view of the people behind me.

RV: Could you hear them okay?

JY: Yes, I vaguely remember being able to hear them and then the show did start and there was a lot of banter back and forth but it was nothing like I thought it was going
to be. I thought I would be really close to the stage, kind of like the way you would see
Bob Hope on TV, but I was so far back and then it started pouring down rain. I think the
show actually had to end early, and that was his Christmas show for ’68, December of
’68 at Cam Ranh. So we went back home, went back to Dong Ba Thin.
RV: What else would you guys do for entertainment, the Red Cross girls?
JY: Well, it depended. At Cam Ranh there were so many women and there were
so many parties you’d accept invitations to go to a dance or to a steak [cook] -- there
were steaks, a lot of steaks, a lot of barbequing. Then going to the beach and playing
beach volleyball. At Camp Enari I played a lot of volleyball with the general, he was a
real volleyball player and I liked volleyball so we were always joining his game. He had
a court, I think behind his quarters. Then at Enari occasionally there would be a new
movie arrive and they’d put up a bed sheet in the officers’ mess and we’d go watch those.
RV: Do you remember any of the movies you saw?
JY: Camelot and the other one I remember seeing was the one with Steve
McQueen and Allie McGraw and I’ve forgotten the name of it.
RV: I know which one you’re talking about.
JY: Yes, those two kind of stick out. Those are the only two I remember.
RV: Tell me about Camp Enari, what was your experience like there; this is a
totally different setting for you.
JY: Oh, yes this was Army Infantry and it was at the base of an old defunct
volcano cone that had been kind of overgrown with jungle. It was a big base and our
quarters were kind of in the middle in an open field next to the road. There was a big
field behind us and there were three Quonset huts inside this compound that was
surrounded by tall gray picket fence. We lived in Quonset huts and the Red Cross had a
Quonset hut. Special Services did have the center there, so we were one hundred percent
mobile. The Special Services women were in the Quonset hut just across the sidewalk
and the sidewalks were covered by -- there were beams that held up and cross boards that
held up corrugated tin so that you could get to and from a non-flush latrine and the
shower was at one end of the sidewalk. It was all non-flush, no plumbing, but during
monsoon you could come and go from your Quonset hut to the latrine without getting
soaked. The guys called that whole area Fort Apache. It had its own MP shack and an
MP was inside the compound standing in his MP shack pretty much all night long. I think they had shifts and stuff. The Quonset hut had the cement floor and somebody found some tile and they put tile down so we had linoleum tile in our kind of the area you first walk into. Then you go down kind of the center and our individual sleeping quarters were little cubicles off the main hall. We had a rat problem there; we had a lot of rats running around.

RV: Tell me about the rat problem.

JY: Well the rats were just there all the time.

RV: This is in the Central Highlands.

JY: Yes. And they would set traps. The first night I ever slept there they set a trap just outside of my door. No, my doorway didn’t have a door; it just had these long plastic strips for a little bit of privacy that ended about six inches off the floor. This trap was set right outside my door and it went off and I heard it rattling as if the animal were trying to shake it off. I had seen a rat in Singapore when I was on leave, a huge, big wharf rat and I thought. Oh my gosh this rat’s so big the trap hasn’t even affected it, what if it jumps in my room. I was really nervous. Well, finally it stopped and then next morning I saw it. had finally died and it was a big rat but it wasn’t as big as the wharf rat that I had seen in Singapore. We’d have to set traps for them all the time and because we had curfew, we would all generally turn in at the same time which meant the lights went off all at the same time as we all kind of settled in for the night and that’s when we’d start hearing the traps go off.

RV: So did you get pretty used to it?

JY: Yes [laughs]. One of the girls had been a biology major so we nominated her to be the one to empty the trap out in the trash barrel and that was next to the MP hut. So every twenty minutes she’d come out with a different rat and one time she went out and the MPs were changing out, the shift had changed and the two were there and she said “Oh, hi, we got another one” and one MP said “Yes, I’m briefing my replacement about what’s going on.” That was the worst night, we got about five of them all at once, but the other times they’d be just onesies and twosies.

RV: Well, first did you ever have any pets over there?
JY: Sometimes the units had dogs, it would be a stray dog that the unit would just adopt and feed. I’m assuming that the Veterinary Corps, because the military did have a Veterinary Corps over there because of the canine units. I’m hoping, I never thought to ask, did these animals get the right inoculations so that we could feel good about having them as pets, I don’t know. We had a pet at Dong Ba Thin and a pet at Enari, but no other places.

RV: You mentioned that you went to Singapore, was this one of your R & Rs?

JY: We were given one R & R and then [one] leave, like a week’s leave, which was kind of like a vacation. Now, if you went on vacation, you paid for your own airfare to go somewhere and if you were using your R & R orders, then the flight was courtesy of the military. So everybody planned for their leave to be places that were quick and close to get to, because the airfare would be cheaper so I went to Singapore and Bangkok on leave and went to Sydney, Australia on R & R.

RV: How was the trip to Singapore?

JY: Oh, it was fantastic. It was typical tourist time and we stayed in the Raffles Hotel and shopped and saw the sights and took a tour, it was great.

RV: How long were you there?

JY: Probably only, it seemed to me I that I had a week’s time and I think I split the week between Bangkok and Singapore so it would have been three or four days, maybe.

RV: How was Australia?

JY: Australia was fantastic because the Australian people, and I tell this to every Australian that I meet, opened their homes to the American military saying if you come and you want to interact with an Australian family and have home cooked meals and [want to] get to know us as a people for some of the days that you are here, or all of the days that you are here then sign up with this little match-up service right there in the airport or whatever, and we’ll be happy to accommodate you. I remember thinking that really sounds neat but I wonder if the people would be disappointed because we’re not soldiers. So we asked and they said, “Oh, heavens no, they wouldn’t mind that it would be women.” So, I think it was three of us, three of us signed up and were hoping that we could all three go together. A rancher, but it was really called a station, a sheep station,
about 450 miles north of Sydney was part of the program. They must have called him
and said “How about three American girls” and they said “Fine.” So we flew up and
stayed on a sheep station in the family home for three or four days. It was really nice,
they were very personable people. We went horseback riding and drove around their
property and saw how their operation ran and relaxed and it was really nice.

RV: Have you ever been back to Australia?
JY: No, I’d like to go sometime, I haven’t been back.

RV: Tell me about what you saw of alcohol and drug use in Vietnam?
JY: I saw there was a lot of drinking. I drank too and it seemed like, you didn’t
feel it. I don’t know whether we were sweating it off or whether it was three-two beer or
what; I didn’t see anybody that was excessively overdoing it. I guess because we had
curfew, we worked real hard, if anything, we only had one day off a week, so partaking
to the extent that any of us became out of our senses, I did not see. One of the things that
I remember being said about the men, especially in the forward areas, believe it or not
was, that the potheads would refrain from pot if the helicopter came in with beer or
alcohol because that would be the opportunity for the guys who enjoyed alcohol to get
stewed. Somebody needed to keep watch, so it would the potheads. Then, if somehow
the potheads got a hold of some good grass, then the beer drinkers and the alcohol
drinkers would refrain so that the ones on drugs could go ahead and get stoned and the
drinkers would be alert for watch. I was told that that’s how it was done. I was talking
with a Red Cross girl who had gone back, who had two different tours, she was over
there a little bit on the early side and then went back on the older end of the [age]
qualifications and I remember asking her what were some of the differences and she said
“Oh, man, first of all, the morale was a lot worse the second time around. “ She said, “ I
couldn’t believe the number of amnesty boxes” and I said “ What do you mean amnesty
box.” She said, “Where you’re to turn your drugs in, no questions asked, and just turn it
in, get rid of the stuff.” I think while I was there if I recollect, vaguely recollect, the
radio, Radio Vietnam, what did they call it, it had call letters.

RV: Based out of Saigon?
JY: Yes, Air Vietnam but that’s not it. I’ll think of it in a minute, I can’t
remember the acronym. Anyway, some of their radio broadcasts were telling people
beware of the -- I think it was beware of the cocaine -- because what it is, is pure heroin.

So you think you’re about to do cocaine, but you’re about to, and they were warning people about how, not like “Please don’t do it, don’t do drugs,” but they were actually saying “You guys have to know that what is being marketed and sold as cocaine is really pure heroin and watch it.” I do remember that. That’s going to bug me about the call letters of the radio.

RV: How much contact did you have with your parents? Did you write letters frequently?

JY: I think I wrote them once a week. I think I told them that I’d always write on such and such a day and I think I maybe had one MARS call, but when you have a MARS call it’s not a whole lot. “How are you doing? Over.” “Fine. Over.” You don’t get a whole lot. The one time we had a MARS call lined up I spent so much time laughing at my coworker that I can’t even remember the conversation I had with my parents. She would forget to say “over.” That was for the MARS operator to flip it back and forth and she would go, when it was her turn, “Hi, how are y’all doing?” and then someone would say “You’ve got to say over.” She said “Oh, okay. How are you doing over there?” She put the “over” in the wrong, I just laughed so hard because she didn’t get it. She would just [use] the word “over” in the sentence, not as the signal at the end. So I would say maybe one phone call [the entire year] and weekly letters, that was it.

RV: Obviously, I guess they wrote you.

JY: Yes.

RV: What were those letters like for you, over there?

JY: It was always great to get mail, no doubt about it. It was just kind of interesting things of what was going on, description of daily life, it wasn’t anything that I was hanging on with bated breath or anything like that, it was nice to hear from them.

RV: How long would it take for the letters to get to you?

JY: I don’t think it was too long, actually.

RV: Like a week, maybe?

JY: Yes, it wasn’t bad.

RV: Did you ever experience any racial tensions, race issues?
JY: Yes, I did personally. There was a guy behind the bar in the officers’ bar of Cam Ranh Air who was a really nice guy, very educated, very articulate and I just struck up a nice friendship with him, never really thinking much of it. Then he asked me out to what I guess you could say would be a date but how can you date in an environment like that? But it was an invitation to join him in something. I’ll never forget how that kind of surprised me, but at the same time it was in a split second of time you could say, I’m surprised, but wait a minute I’m really not, because given the way our conversations have gone I could see how he would do this. Now that I’m faced with this invitation if I say “no” will it be because I just have no interest in doing that with him, or if I say no will it be because he’s black and I thought, no I like the guy’s company. I would have no reason not to enjoy his company and if I were to say “no” it would be because of his race and I don’t want to live with myself having done that. So I’m going to accept and I mean all of this analysis was done in ten seconds of time, and so I did join him, I think maybe it was a unit party or something of his where I was his guest. I found out later that a lot of people thought that was just terrible and it wasn’t a good thing, but I remember thinking well, I enjoyed it, I like his company and I can live with myself from here on out for the rest of my life being glad that I did it this way, and that’s the case.

RV: Did you ever see anything else besides that one incident?

JY: No, I really, I didn’t. I would say that the black soldiers tended to gravitate to their fellow black people but you see that in factories today, so I don’t remember any incidents or any blatant things that were just awful to see. No.

RV: Did you, yourself get involved in any kind of personal relationships with the men while you were there? You don’t have to answer that if you don’t want to.

JY: I would say, yes I had guys that I thought were just really neat and I liked their company and it would be tantamount to meeting someone at college thinking gee, I like him, it would be fun to go out with him, but nothing ever happened that was against the rules to where I was being a hypocrite about any conduct. In some cases I cared for some, there was a huge amount of mutual admiration, but because of the person being married it was like, if things were different, things would really be different but because of the way they are all we can do is be really good friends. I had those situations. There were a couple of pilots that I really enjoyed, I guess you could say I was “a twosome”
with some of them, but nothing, I knew that that was not the place to fall in love. Some
of my fellow Red Cross girls did fall in love and some are in the marriages still, they’ve
lasted to where it clicked and it was obviously the right thing for them but I remember
thinking this isn’t the place to assess anything long term.
RV: I’d like to ask you about what kind of experiences you had with wounded
soldiers, were you ever around them that much?
JY: Yes, just a little bit, thankfully. I think the worst situation was, there was this
one firebase called St. George in the Highlands and we would go there pretty regularly
and it was a real good stop because the guys there seemed to look forward to our games
and it was just a good, solid one. We tended to be able to get there at predictable times
every week and if you got on the assignment with the St. George run it was like “Oh,
good. I get to go to St. George because the guys out there are really fun and great.”
Well, one time it was like “Well, can’t go to St. George.” “Why?” “They were nearly
overrun last night and instead of going to St. George to see the guys, how about going to
visit them in the hospital?” Whoa! And so we went into the evacuation hospital in
Pleiku, I think it was the 71st. To see the guys that we used to see, able-bodied playing
our games, but now they were injured and hurt -- that was tough. I remember one guy
must have had to have a tracheotomy or something because he had to press on something
to kind of rasp out anything and he wanted to say hello and talk and I was standing next
to his bed and he pressing on this thing. I don’t have the best intestinal fortitude in a
medical environment anyway and to try to carry on a conversation there, my head almost
got a little bit lightheaded. I didn’t want to just ignore him or run off. I would say that
was the worst. I didn’t see anybody that was wounded before the wound was treated.