Richard Verrone: Jenny, I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit more on
Camp Enari and how just your experiences there compared with what you experienced at
Cam Ranh and Dong Ba Thin. This was in the central Highlands and a different
atmosphere, different environment, much more dangerous missions it sounded like you
going on, that you were mobile, flying in helicopters every day.

Jennifer Young: Yes, well actually we did fly helicopters quite a bit when I was
on the coast, at Dong Ba Thin and Tuy Hoa, but with Camp Enari we were actually
assigned to the Fourth Infantry Division, versus like an area where there was a hodge
podge of units. So we were allowed to sew the patch of the Fourth Division on our
sleeves, like one of our sleeves had the Red Cross patch and then the other sleeve has the
Fourth Division patch because we mainly saw just the units of the Fourth Divisions out of
Camp Enari. Because it was such a large base camp they had the Special Services club
so we were off the hook as far as providing a recreation center. But that meant we were
one hundred percent mobile and so we would go to fire bases and LZs on a daily basis
with our programs and we didn’t have a formal way to road test our programs before
going out. [But that] was okay, because even if the programs were kind of dinky or
crummy we still did them and they still went over. We would take, in addition to our
games, we would take what we called “forward bags” and these would be items that the
people from chapters of the Red Cross back in the States would send us for distribution
out in the field and this would be candles, believe it or not, candles were in short supply as sources of light, card decks, what we call combat mirrors, which was really just an oval shaped mirror that could fit in the palm of one’s hand that allowed them to check out a part in their hair or comb their hair, and stationary and paperback books. We would give those things out before or after our game. One time we were on our way back, we thought it was the end of our day, that we had seen all the units and the pilot asked us if we wanted to stop at an LZ called LZ Ann and it was at the top of, it was at the peak of a mountain and they’d kind of shaved off, had defoliated [it] in order to put, to kind of settle in there and they were living underground but with sandbags around. The latrine was just a crate sitting on the ground with kind of lime scattered around it. The pilot must have radioed somebody down there. What they do is they would pop smoke and then they would acknowledge the color of the smoke and the color of the smoke and the acknowledgement of it would be what the helicopter pilot would use as “Hey, it’s okay to land.” It was just to make sure that they weren’t inadvertently just landing at a place that wasn’t wise for women to be. And this particular LZ, when it landed, the nose was kind of over one edge of the hill and the tail rotor was over the other, it was this narrow ridge. This was probably one of the most remote and forward areas and because it was at the end of our day, I felt so bad, all we had left in our forward bag, because we had given everything out, was little pieces of hard candy and I thought well, at least we had that but these guys could have really used something because they were up there. Now they had a great view, a beautiful view. You could actually look down across the valley to another, what I called “shaved off” area and they pointed to that and said “That’s LZ Buffalo and this over here is”-- so, you could actually see the other, but they were way far away. That was really interesting, that LZ Ann. There were probably only about fifteen guys up there.

RV: Did you ever make it back there?

JY: No, a lot of places we only got to once, and then maybe they didn’t stay long, maybe they didn’t hold that hill very long or something, I don’t know.

RV: Now, you said that in Enari you said you still had the civilians there working in the camp in certain cases, were these Montagnards?
JY: Oh, yes. No. The Montagnards I did not see come down as workers. We actually had to fly to their villages, so you didn’t see too many Montagnards down on base at all, but we used local Vietnamese. There were two things that I can remember the most about our Mama-sans there; one was pregnant and her husband was away fighting, he was an ARVN and she was expecting her third child. She asked me to write her a letter of recommendation because at the time she would be able to come back to work, maybe all of the Red Cross girls that would have known her might have been transferred away. She would just be one of hundreds wanting jobs but if she had a letter of recommendation on our letterhead, I understood exactly what she needed and wanted and was perfectly willing to give it to her, which I did. I’ve often wondered since then if she needed to destroy that. In other words, it would be a great thing to have, I mean who knows how many decades down the way to prove, hey I was a trusted employee of the Americans at one time? But then when the North came in, would that letter have been maybe not a good thing to have? I’ve often wondered about that. Her replacement was another cute little lady but one day I came back from doing something and she was in tears and I said, “What’s the matter?” She said “You di di mao” and di di mao meant “you’re leaving” and I said, “What do you mean?” I was getting short but I wasn’t that short and she said “You girls, di di mao” and I thought oh, she thinks that we’re all leaving. I thought well, how strange. She’s really upset about that. I happened to mention at dinner at the mess hall, I said, “Boy, my Mama-san is convinced we’re all leaving” and this one guy looked at me and said, “What did you say?” And I said, “Well, she was all in tears” and he said, “Well, guess what?” There’s some anticipated troop movement that is to reduce Camp Enari considerably, but that information is highly, highly confidential.” And I said, “Guess what, my Mama-san knows it.” It was nothing, the security was like “Oh my gosh. Who knows what?” MPC, the exchange when they went from one issue of MPC to a whole new series where you took your old in for the new, that was because so much MPC had gotten on the local market. It was actually becoming legal tender that wasn’t supposed to be. They would change the series on it and I think I had in my year there maybe two MPC changeover days. But those are supposed to be done swift and fast like all of a sudden what you’re holding you’ve got to go and exchange that day for the new, not “Three weeks from now
will be an MPC changeover” because what they want is to discourage the MPC from
being in the local market. They wanted the people who had been willing to take MPC as
legal tender to be caught holding worthless paper. Well, guess what? That never
worked. The MPC changeover dates were broadcast loud and clear, because the
Vietnamese, even before we knew it, they’d try to get out and exchange back, they’d
want either the dong or the greenbacks for the MPC because they knew that that money
was going to be worthless. They also had an idea of when it was going to happen, and I
didn’t even [know], none of us were supposed to know.

RV: How do you think they knew this information?

JY: Oh, I don’t. Just leaks in security and people not being careful about who
knew or the infamous “Don’t tell anybody, but I want to do this favor for you because I
like the way you cut my hair,” if you’re my Vietnamese barber or something, well
“bingo.”

RV: Did you ever hear of or encounter personally at any of these bases you were
stationed at any of the Vietcong that had infiltrated and posed as the civilian workers on
base?

JY: No, I never knew of one. The nearest I got to “the enemy” was a prisoner that
was bound and blindfolded that was on a helicopter pad waiting I guess, to be taken
somewhere. He was being guarded by an MP and the MP was probably 6’4”, big brawny
blond fair-skinned guy, and here was this, he was crouched down to begin with but little,
bitty, scrawny Vietnamese with no shirt and just pants barefooted and I thought if this
isn’t a study in contrasts I don’t know what it. And then a Chieu Hoi, the Chieu Hois
were the one that defected supposedly and they would generally, if somebody was a
Chieu Hoi, I think they really treated them well because they might get some intelligence.
I was in a PX and an American came over and said we have a Chieu Hoi over here that
spotted you and he’d love to just talk to an American woman, do you mind coming over
and talking? Everything had to be translated, the guy didn’t speak English but he wanted
to know, I guess, why I was there and where I was from and if I had a family and I
complied. I thought, again when you’re six foot blonde. I don’t know if a shorter
brunette Red Cross girl would have had the same curiosity element for this Vietnamese
talking to somebody that was totally different from all the women around him. I wear a
size eleven shoe for pete’s sakes and the Oriental women are so petite and their waists are so tiny.

RV: You might have been the first American female this guy had ever seen.

JY: Yes, well I tell you, my friend June, the one that lives out in Seagraves near Lubbock that’s going to be donating her stuff, she and I are both tall and she’s brunette and we traveled in pairs and she was with me when we went to a Montagnard village. I think the Red Cross girls, the donut dollies did not get to those Montagnard villages very often and we might have been not only the first, but maybe the only ones that those people ever saw in their life. Both of us were close to six feet and they probably thought, oh in this culture the women must be bigger than the men, I don’t know, not in the culture but in the American society and race and all that.

RV: It’s possible. Did you ever carry any weapons or have need for anything?

JY: No, as a matter of fact we were cautioned against even holding one just for a lark. Because by being Red Cross we were formally classified, as civilian non-combatants. If a Red Cross person were shown holding a weapon it would have been in violation of the Geneva Convention. So we couldn’t even justify riding in a Cobra helicopter. We could be in Chinooks, LOHs, Hueys, and even is it was a Huey gunship. Huey gunships generally carried enough people to where, “Hey, they’re passengers,” but in a Cobra you can’t say, “Oh, I was just being a passenger” because it’s a two person. Riding in a Cobra was something that I would have given my eyeteeth to do, but I was--

RV: Why?

JY: Oh, they were the glamour, they were kind of like the glamour boy, kind of like the fighter pilot of the Air Force. The Cobra was like the fighter of the rotor blades, and to get a ride meant that a pilot was willing to take you up without a copilot because you were taking this copilot’s seat. You’d have a whole different view of the world because they flew kind of, when they first took off with their noses kind of down. I was even “dating” a Copra pilot at the end. I think we were always threatened with, “You’ll be sent home if you’re ever caught doing something you’re not supposed to be doing” and riding in the Cobra is one thing. I thought well, if I’m ever going to do it I ought to do it when I’m at the end of my tour because I’m going home anyway. But I could not risk the embarrassment if I were caught and it was bad propaganda for not complying
with the Geneva Convention, so I didn’t do it. Then I found out that some of my
coworkers [did] had and it was a case of “Let’s not let Jenny know we got up in a Cobra.”
Many years later I found that out and I thought “Oh, shoot.”

RV: You could have done it.

JY: I could have done it, but I would have probably been too nervous like “Oh my
gosh, what if I get photographed?” It would be bad propaganda.

RV: Did you ever encounter any wild animals or anything like that?

JY: No, I got bitten by a monkey. That was horrible, because there was a pet
monkey on a firebase and the guys loved it. He was trained and he’d hop around
someone’s shoulder and they said, “Oh, pet him. He’s really friendly.” Well, I put my
hand out and he took my index finger as if it were a corn on the cob and just chomped
into it. It was almost like in slow motion, I’ll never forget it, I thought “That monkey just
bit me” and I don’t know whether it was because like, “Oh, what is this other creature?
I’m used to males.” I don’t know if it was my perfume, who knows? But I said to the
guy, I said, “Please tell me that this monkey has been vaccinated” and of course they
could tell I was white as a sheet, and I think they said “Oh, yes. Sure.” I was scared so I
would call [up this one] the guy. I said, “Will you watch this monkey, [and if] this
monkey starts acting crazy you’ve got to let me know because I’ve got to get rabies
shots.” Fortunately, I lucked out, and I think that maybe the veterinarian, that’s why I
really appreciated the veterinary corps, because I thought maybe they took the time to
inoculate the pets that people had around. Then a snake, I saw a dead snake, it was one
of these big constrictors that somebody had caught but it was dead, thank goodness. I
didn’t see it so I can’t say, “Oh, I saw…” but I went to a pig roast and it was a wild boar
that somebody supposedly had shot from a helicopter. One of the Red Cross girls got to
ride a elephant to, part of, “Oh, we’ve got to go visit these troops, we go by road and then
we get to a river and we cross the river on elephant and then we go on and visit the troops
over on the other side of the river.” They go to, part of their daily transportation on their
job was to ride an elephant. When I heard that, I just thought, “Oh, why couldn’t that
have been me?” I would have loved it, but not me. I can’t lay claim to that.

RV: How able were you to keep up with news in the United States while you were
over there?
JY: Not well at all. You had the *Stars and Stripes*, but the *Stars and Stripes* I don’t think came out daily, I didn’t read it daily and I’ll tell you, one of the things that happened was the landing on the moon, and I missed that. There is a difference in time zone. What was going on, I don’t think things were broadcast onto, I still can’t remember acronym for the news service, I want to say ARVN but that’s not it, ARVN’s were the army. Anyway, I don’t think it was live news coverage from the States, it was maybe after the fact, news reels and we didn’t have TVs where we were, so I just heard in passing that someone landed on the moon. So I’m always glad when an anniversary of that event comes around because then when they broadcast it I can say “Oh, this is what I missed hearing so I’m going to listen to it again.”

RV: So you really didn’t have a lot of media outlets where you could access?

JY: No.

RV: Speaking of the media, did you ever encounter any of the media personnel in country?

JY: I don’t think--There was one, there was one Major at Cam Ranh that turned out to be from St. Louis and he was doing something for the *Post Dispatch* which is our newspaper here. He said “I want to do a feature on you Jennifer because the hometown folks will be interested.” And he did and then that same article appeared in the *Stars and Stripes* with a picture and everything but I don’t count him as being like a war correspondent because he was actually military. He was in the public information area. No, I don’t remember any correspondents.

RV: Okay. What do you think of the media coverage of the war?

JY: I never have understood it and its hard for me to judge because I think my view of it, because I didn’t see them over there, when I see movies, like the movie, what’s the one that just came out?

RV: *We Were Soldiers*.

JY: Yes, that one where the guy, I’ve always thought that, “Gee, here they are to report it but they’re actually in the way sometimes” or they’re not able to [fight] and then I have to stop and say, “Wait a minute Jennifer. You might have been considered in the way or superfluous to what was going on, so how can you in good faith criticize what a war correspondent was trying to do when you were out there having to spend the night on
a place that you shouldn’t have because of weather and they were on alert and they had to
worry about where you were going to be and what bunker you’d be able to run to. Too
bad they had to stop and think about you.” But I would say, I don’t know, I think the
ones that are back in the base listening to what the press releases are that the military puts
out, I’m thinking why are they there? I mean the press release could probably go all the
way to Los Angeles without somebody being in that room in Saigon. Why are they there
listening, what role do they play? Then you’ve got the ones that are all the way out in the
forward areas and I’m thinking what can they say about the overall picture when they’re
hunkered behind a tree trying not to get shot? I don’t know. I don’t know what to think
of them. I guess I need to reserve judgment on that. Say, “I guess if they’ve been helpful
in the past, then they’ll do it but please don’t get in the way.”

RV: What did you think of Vietnam the country, physically?

JY: Beautiful, beautiful countryside. As a matter of fact I remember thinking,
especially when I saw the, I never got to Vung Tao, I’ve heard Vung Tao was pretty but
Cam Ranh to me, Cam Ranh Air with the white sand, I thought was just gorgeous. I
remember thinking at the time, “Boy when this war is over this is going to be a tourist
destination, first class and I was right,” it was. It just happened to be Russian tourists
that were able to enjoy the white sands of Cam Ranh, not American tourists.

RV: Where would you say was the most beautiful place that you were, that you
saw?

JY: I would probably say the beaches of Cam Ranh and the Highlands, two
totally different, it’s almost like a rainforest environment in the Highlands but I flew so
much in the Highlands that you were looking down on it. Then the beaches were just, I
thought the beaches were beautiful.

RV: Is there anything else you want to say about Camp Enari, this is your last
posting where you were before you left?

JY: Well, I think that’s the place where I became aware of, for example someone
was pretty good, I get my, let’s see G-1 is like personnel, G-2 is supply, and G-3, G-4,
whichever one is intelligence, which I think is G-4, I get them mixed up, but anyway,
someone was doing a decent job heading up at the division level the intelligence arm, G-1
maybe, and then all of a sudden you hear about that person being out in the [field] six
months there doing a good job, decent job, and then all of a sudden they’re in the field. You think, “Oh, I didn’t know they were --I knew they were pretty good at intelligence but I didn’t know they were good at such and such?” Well they’re not. They just need the experience, that’s where I first became aware of that.

RV: At Enari?

JY: Yes. Maybe it was, because it was an infantry division so it had, you had your mechanized armor, your regular ground troops and then you had the air support. All aspects were kind of encapsulated there. Whereas my other assignments were a little bit more fragmented. You had units of this, this and this, all kinds of at Cam Ranh and then Dong Ba Thin was winding down anyway so it was kind of a skeleton of its former self, and Tuy Hoa was pretty much just an air base but we did visit the 173rd. Which evidently, they would have Army kind of surrounding an area where an air base was, which makes [sense] because you wouldn’t want to have an air base just kind of hanging out there by itself. So the 173rd we would go see as well and they would come onto base sometimes when they’d have their days off.

RV: How long did you stay at Enari?

JY: I was there about four months, from about late June to mid-November, is that about, about four and a half months I guess.

RV: Now, how did you find out you were leaving, you knew that your one year was up and was that it?

JY: Yes, you kind of, you’re always aware of when your year is and then Red Cross in Saigon starts talking to you about who might. See at Enari I was the unit director, so I was what they called Donut Six, have you heard the term Six do you know what that means in the military, I’m sorry you said yes.

RV: Yes.

JY: Well, if you have a six, which often times is a captain out with a patrol, that’s “six actual,” well I was considered Donut Six because I was the “six” of the group of Red Cross girls, I was the unit director. Well, when a unit director is about to leave country because her tour is over, you start talking about who will take your place and who of the rest that are there might step up or should someone new be brought in. Or this person has been viewed as a replacement and we’re going to send her there, so you’ll have a week’s
overlap of time to train and have her meet the people she needs to meet. I really can’t remember now. This is another thing where I just wasn’t worried about perception of things. I enjoyed volleyball so much and the general at Enari enjoyed volleyball -- pretty soon I kind of became his favorite in a way because I enjoyed the same sport he did. So when he would ask us over to General Messes, usually I’d wind up at his table and I always thought it was neat, never mind that it looked kind of suspicious. So his DEROS was the same time mine was, so when he found this out he said, “Oh do you need a ride down to Saigon because I’ll be taking my plane,” Generals flew in their own private and I said “Oh, great,” I’m thinking, oh man, I get to ride in the private plane of a General. Well, how’s it going to look, I mean how did it look to the troops to have a donut dolly and the Commanding General leave at the same time in his private plane? Once again I didn’t help my image any when the rumors were already bad to begin with about the whole group of Red Cross girls. But I was too interested in riding in a private plane, I’d never done that.

RV: So, that’s how you left Enari.
JY: That’s how I left Enari. [laughing]
RV: Took off first class.
JY: Right. [laughing]
RV: So you went down to Saigon and you went to Tan Son Nhut and flew out?
JY: I guess, I don’t even remember much about being out-processed, I don’t think there was much to do other than just get your papers in order and make sure you have your flight manifest for the Freedom Bird and if you want a delay en route, then you’ve got to arrange for it, which I did. I wanted a delay in route through Hong Kong and you could do the delay en route and still fly home courtesy of Uncle Sam, so it was like a free vacation in Hong Kong.

RV: So how long did you stay in Hong Kong?
JY: Only maybe three days or so, not very long.
RV: How did you feel when you left Vietnam, where you ready to go or?
JY: Oh, that is such a mixed bag feeling. I did have a certain sense that what I had experienced was so incredibly unique that it would probably never come my way again as far as the adventure, the camaraderie, the concern, the wanting to do a good job,
working with people who wanted the same end result, sweet guys. Yet you were tired,
you were ready to go, you felt like you had smiled plenty and if you hang around, [not
good]. When I was brand new in country I met somebody who was real short and on his
way out and at the time he said, “You know, I’m ready to go but in some ways it’s kind
of a bummer.” I always remember thinking at the time, “Well how can that be?” You’re
either happy to go or you’re not happy to go and then after my year I suddenly
remembered, I thought, “Oh. Now I know what he meant.” I felt like I was leaving an
environment where you knew everybody. I don’t know how to explain it, even though
there were five hundred thousand Americans in Vietnam, you felt like as an American
you knew everybody else and that you were in this unusual foreign, alien culture in a real
remote section of the world. Because you were all Americans you therefore knew each
other. I got a sense that as I was going to fly back, I was going to fly back into this huge,
huge void, where I may never cross paths again with the people that I had known. It was
like “Hey, we’re all going to go back, but when we all go back the geographic distances
are going to be so great, we’ll never bump into each other.” That was kind of tough, like
oh golly I’m going back into this void but I was ready, because you see everybody else
go when their year is up so pretty soon you know that your year is up too.

RV: Right. How much problems did you have transitioning back into your
civilian life?

JY: I don’t think I really had the problems that some people do. I came back, my
family was glad to see me, they were proud of me, the Rotary Club of Webster Groves
gave me an award and I made a speech and I would show slides. What I had done was so
unusual, so I wasn’t told “You were an idiot for going over there,” but it was more along
the lines of I can’t believe you did this or some even said, “Well, shoot, if I had known
about that kind of program I would have wanted to go.” I stayed home for while and then
January 3, I’ll never forget the date, I took a train up to Chicago to live there for six
months in an all female environment. I was going to go to like a business school to learn
shorthand. My father had said to me when I got back he said, “Okay, you now have a
four year college degree, you didn’t get certified to teach. You went to Vietnam for a
year which is great, now I suggest you do something practical.” And he said “Since you
already know how to type you might as well learn shorthand to make yourself
marketable” I said, “Okay, fine I already have the place picked out” because my friend Jill, with whom I had traveled Europe [but back then] was not out of school, had already scoped out a place and I said to her “I’ll join you there as soon as I got out of Vietnam.” She had majored in a language, French. I had majored in a language, Spanish. Neither one of us were certified to teach. And we both were products of the ’60s, where as women, you started out somewhere as a secretary. So I went up to Chicago and lived in a cross between a Barbizon and a YWCA where you had a room and a closet and ate in the dining room and then went to this business school, which was all female, and in twenty degree below freezing weather in an urban environment. Just two months before I had been in the tropics, a queen bee among men and doing something highly, highly unusual and suddenly I was in the real world surrounded by females and that was a little bit difficult. I missed the adventure terribly but I got through my six months, moved south to get out of the bad winters.

RV: Did you take part in or support or how did you feel about the anti-war movements that were going on when you got back?

JY: I didn’t do anything visible, I don’t even think, I mean I didn’t do anything. I felt certain ways but in April of ’70, I think that was when Kent State occurred and then Nixon announced that the troops were going into Cambodia I was like saying, “What do you mean going into Cambodia? We’ve been going into Cambodia all along” and that was my first indication of don’t take what you read in the paper or what the government says at face value. There are things that are going behind the scenes, that’s the real truth, and then you hear about. I just thought oh, my gosh we’re expanding. We’re expanding something that wasn’t really right to begin with because we weren’t winning the way I thought we should win and now we’re broadening the geographic area where we’re going to further not win. But I didn’t do anything about it.

RV: Looking back at the whole war in general and American policy and what we were trying to accomplish in Vietnam what are your feelings on that, your thoughts on that?

JY: I think if somebody were to look at our military installations, and I have some aerial shots of like Cam Ranh Bay, and you would look at our air power, just my slides, I’m not even an official person, my slides show the immensity of our installations,
our Cobras, gunships, Chinooks, cranes, F-100s, F-4s, bombers and you say,
And with this we couldn’t win?” and we were against an enemy that had no air power
and ran into tunnels. It’s like if we couldn’t accomplish the job then. Why? Why not?
what happened? So I am of the feeling now that if Vietnam is nothing else for our
society and for our country, it will for sure be a litmus test of anything that we do in the
future. Now I’m worried that the litmus paper has lived out its shelf life and will no
longer be a good test. Because I think we Americans have a tendency to over inflate our
power and underestimate our enemies. We also tend to overstate our righteousness and
when I would hear someone talk about an automated ambush because the term booby
trap, it’s the same [as a] booby trap, but you can’t say “booby trap,” it’s like we need to
recognize that we can be as hypocritical as the next nation. Let’s level with ourselves on
the situation, not pussy foot around and make it look like we’re “holier than thou.” So I
guess from that standpoint I thought, for a long time I felt like Vietnam has taught us well
and we’ll be real careful in the future. But now I’m worried.

RV: So, you’re saying that perhaps we’ve learned some lessons but now these
lessons are fading?

JY: Yes, I think so.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?

JY: Its an untapped [part of the world], I think the potential is incredible. The
beauty, they probably had some decent natural resources that could be, not exploited, but
could help the country. I know that some of the Vietnamese that I met when I went back
at ’95, I don’t know if you’ve found this, but they in some ways are waiting for the
Americans to realize the error of what they did in ’75 and will come back and say “Oh,
we should have never left you on your own, we’re now back.” Some of the wounded
veterans there think that they should have some kind of compensation for being crippled
for life or whatever. I was saying, “Listen our own veterans are feeling the same way
within the United States.” I think that it’s a market that, I think its got potential, but, I
know the Australians moved in, they’re jumping on some of the bandwagons and maybe
it has a chance of getting some industry put in there. It was so funny, I went to, I got
involved in international human resources in my later work and I went to a conference. I
had read in my tour book in ’95 that Vietnam was the number one exporter of scrap metal
and I remember thinking that makes sense. Well, I went to this conference on
international personnel and this speaker was saying now, we’re going to have a quiz for
the audience and if any of you know the answer, shout it out and you’ll get a door prize.
He said we’re first going to talk about the Orient and let’s talk about Vietnam. He said,
what is their number one export and I go, I’m like twelve rows back I go “Scrap metal.”
and he keeps talking and he keeps talking. He says “some people thinks it might be fish”
and I go “Scrap metal.” and he stops and he said, “I think I may have heard the answer.”
And so sure enough, he says, “she’s right.” Well, everybody at the conference after that
came up and said, “How did you know that?” and I said “Oh man, it’s a long story.” A
real long story.

RV: Do you remember how you felt, April 1975 when you saw Saigon fall and
South Vietnam fall?
JY: One of the things that I remember seeing on the newsreels was they tore down
this statue that I remembered on Tu Do street and it was a statue of something that I
remembered seeing when I was there. They were tearing it down in ’75 when the North
marched in and I remember thinking “Well, what did we leave behind, and who did we
leave behind that are really jeopardized?” I really felt bad. But then again, sometimes
the form of government that you have needs to be, maybe the form of government that
winds up where it does is because that’s what’s needed by the culture and the people at
that time. We were trying to force democracy in and keep it but it didn’t work, so it’s
like okay, if the Communists somehow can help and pull this country up and out of its.
But see, they’ve had a long time to do it now and I don’t think they’ve succeeded, not
[that] democracy would have done twenty times better, but I just remember thinking I
hope the people who helped us are not hurt and that they can assimilate into the new
society and some of them I don’t think were allowed to do that. And I heard, now did
you hear when you went back that, let’s see, there’s a black balling on descendants, like
if you were an ARVN forget getting a decent job and your next generation forget letting
them get a decent job. I think it takes like a third generation before somebody stands a
chance of being educated for something other than being a street sweeper.

RV: I have heard that, that ARVN, former government officials; former South
Vietnamese military are discriminated against.
JY: Yes, but then not only they but its almost like a formula, you, the next
generation and then I think it’s the next generation after that that they’re willing then to
say “Okay. What your grandfather did –“ I’ve forgotten now how many steps down, but
a couple of steps you were doomed just based on what your parents had done.
RV: I haven’t heard that but it might be possible. How do you feel about your
service in Vietnam today, overall?
JY: I’m proud. I think that if someone can serve their country in some capacity--
civilian, military, Peace Corps then they’re the better for it and they also carry with them
a sense of, “Okay, I did what I could and I want to continue to do it but at least I’m not
somebody who stayed on the side line.”
RV: Do you feel like the Donut Dollies made a difference?
JY: Boy, that’s a good question. In the grand scheme of things, no, but I know
that from some of the letters that we got from the individuals who said “You made my
day,” “I appreciated our conversation in that rec center” or “I really appreciated your
smile” that maybe we made a difference in his outlook for that day or made him feel
better about something, then okay, I’ll take that.
RV: Yes, I guess I should have rephrased the question to say that maybe you guys
didn’t affect the overall American policy but you feel like you made a difference.
JY: Well, some of the guys that are now writing to some of the websites and if
there’s something that’s particularly nice it winds up on the grapevine, the email
grapevine. Some of them are saying, “I never said anything to you back then but I really
appreciated the fact that you were willing to go when you didn’t have to. We were there
because we had to, we really didn’t want to be there, but you chose to go and you chose
to experience, in some cases lousy conditions, to kind of remind us of what our values
were or what we were fighting for in the way of, “Hey, she reminds me of my sister or
my girlfriend, my neighbor, or whatever” then they said we made a difference. I don’t
know. I think that, who knows, if we were never there, would they have been worse off?
I really don’t know. I really don’t know.
RV: It sounds like from what you’ve said and what I know, that you did make a
difference in individuals that you were around.
JY: Yes.
RV: Are there any songs that take you back to Vietnam that you hear on the radio today?

JY: Absolutely.

RV: Such as?

JY: *We got to get out of this place if it's the last thing we ever do*, for sure that does. Then there was one, *Wichita Lineman*, it must have been playing on the radio a lot somewhere. Tuy Hoa had a radio station and the DJ said that somebody had called in wanting to dedicate a song to the new Donut Dollies at Tuy Hoa and, oh, shoot what was the song that, I can’t remember now, I thought I remembered what song it was. When we responded right back by saying “We dedicate a song to the guys” and it was *Watch those American Boys* or something like that, I don’t even remember. There was a song that I danced to a lot at Cam Ranh that was done by a local band and it was *My Girl* by The Temptations. So those are the songs that will specifically put me there because I can almost feel the dance floor when its *My Girl*. I can see the beach when its, oh I know it was *Groovin’ on a Sunday Afternoon* was what the men dedicated to us because it was a Sunday afternoon, *Groovin’ on a Sunday Afternoon* and then we dedicated Petula Clark’s *Watch those American Boys* back to them, so those two and *Wichita Lineman* for some oddball reason and then definitely *We’ve got to Get our of this Place*. Oh, my gosh! All the Korean bands and the strippers would do that at some time during their set and the entire audience would stand up and join in, “We’ve got to get out of this place, if it’s the last thing we ever do.”

RV: *Wichita Lineman*, was that Glen Campbell?

JY: Yes.

RV: How about books on Vietnam, have you read any books on Vietnam that you feel are worthy of what you saw on the ground there?

JY: Well, I’ve mainly read like *A Piece of My Heart* and then the book that I’m in, *A Time Remembered* and then poetry, books of poems that were written by the guys and I don’t think I’ve really read that many others. I’ve got them on my shelf to get to.

RV: How about movies on Vietnam, what have they done for you, have you seen any or a lot of them?
JY: Yes, I saw, I remember watching *Apocalypse Now* thinking, “What is this? That’s out in the middle of the jungle?” It was like a surreal scene of go-go girls, I can’t even remember and I remember thinking, “What is it? I don’t get it, I just don’t get it.” I recently saw *We Were Soldiers*. I saw John Wayne’s *Green Berets* but I didn’t like it because I thought the trees are wrong. There’s too many deciduous trees in this set, that looks like it was shot in Ohio, not the tropics. I only recently saw the *Deer Hunter* but that really wasn’t all that much about Vietnam. Oh, *Platoon*, I did see *Platoon* and there were some scenes that I said, “That is good,” just looking, depiction. There was one firebase scene where there was a lot of [sand], they were shoveling or something and it was pretty barren, a lot of dust and stuff and then underground, living underground and then there was one scene, I’ve forgotten now, there was one other scene where I thought now that’s pretty realistic. I used to watch *China Beach* on TV, which we almost had to laugh at in some ways, because did you ever see *China Beach*?

RV: I did see it.

JY: Well, first of all, they had Red Cross girl by the name of Cherry, which I couldn’t believe. I thought of all the names that they had to give a character, why did they pick Cherry and she wasn’t even legit, she was almost like a stowaway donut dolly, only nineteen looking for her brother or something and I thought well, so much for realism there. Then the hooker, the kind of redheaded hooker used the term donut dolly with Cherry in one scene and Cherry said, “What do you mean?” And she said, “Oh, you haven’t that term, yeah, you’re called a donut dolly.” And then Cherry says to the hooker, “Were you a donut dolly?” And the answer was, “I graduated.” And I thought what does that mean? And from then on, I thought I can’t take this show. I may look at it out of curiosity. Then they brought in when that Cherry character was killed off I think and they brought in Rikki Lake as a donut dolly and I thought she’s probably the most realistic looking because we came in all shapes and sizes and she at the time was a little on the hefty side. I thought well, at least they didn’t make her real glamorous. They did one episode where they actually interviewed real people and then did vignettes of what somebody recollected and then a Hollywood scene of what it must have been like, of the *China Beach*, I think it was an episode called “Veterans.” There was one scene of a couple of Red Cross girls going into [a camp], they came in on the road in like a deuce
and a half or something and I thought that’s pretty realistic, the way they’re kind of
looking around and chatting and talking with the guys, that’s pretty realistic. I don’t even
know what other movies have been out there, that much about Vietnam.
RV: There haven’t been that many actually made.
JY: No. But I thought Platoon was pretty good.
RV: Now, if a young person today, say on a college campus or a high school
were to ask you about Vietnam, or you could tell a group of young people about Vietnam,
what would you tell them?
JY: I would say it was a time in our country’s history where something called the
draft existed and that a lot of people went that didn’t want to go and you had a real mixed
bag of social strata and education level but largely lower -- most of the soldiers were of
the lower socioeconomic strata of our society because of the deferments, the student
dererments and everything. That all of the armor, bombs, gunships and everything
cannot beat out a determined people and we found out the hard way. It’s a beautiful
country and maybe some day it will get itself squared away so that business can go in,
tourism can go in and bygones can be bygones and we can move on.
RV: How much had it changed when you went back in 1995?
JY: Well, mainly the TV antennas. The kind of the abodes looked largely the
same except man, those tall bamboo TV antennas. When I was there in ’68, ’69, there
were a lot more four wheel traffic because you had buses and trucks and Jeeps courtesy
of the U.S. and then of course the motorcycles. But going back, the four-wheel traffic to
me had diminished and you had a lot more two and three wheel traffic, a lot of bicycles
and motorcycles. It’s almost like that made more sense and I think some of the four-
wheeled vehicles from the ‘60s were left over from the French being there in the ‘50s.
Well, all of that was gone and so it seemed like there were just more masses on the street.
The streets were crowded in ’68 and’69 and noisy, noisy but here it was a little bit quieter
in a way because a lot of it was bicycle traffic. I never got to ride in a cyclo until 1995
because that was a no-no for us in ’69 because it would have not been secure enough.
RV: Now, have you been to the Wall in Washington?
JY: Yes.
RV: Tell me about your experiences there?
JY: The first time, I went for the dedication in ’82. If anyone were to say to me have you ever been in an environment where the air was filled with emotion? I would say the dedication of the Wall in ’82. You could feel the emotion in the air and a lot of the guys were finding each other and you’d go and you’d wear a remnant of your old uniform and some of them had the name of their unit written across the back so that maybe they could run across somebody that they might have known. The number of articles that were placed along the Wall, that first weekend of the dedication, boots and baseball hats and letter-sweaters and actual articles of things. Now over the years it has become flowers and flags and maybe a few artifacts but then it was, “This is what belonged to the name that was on the Wall” and it was very, very moving. There was a parade and everything that weekend. Then two years later they dedicated the statue and I went back for that and because of what I had remembered, oh the first weekend of ’82. You didn’t meet a stranger and I wore my uniform and some of my fellow Red Cross didn’t even think to bring theirs or they said “Ooh, I wouldn’t fit in it any more.” Luckily like a sausage I could still fit in mine and it was recognized in a lot of cases and guys would yell across “Hey, Donut Dolly” and we’d all wave back. And I had one woman come up and say, “Were you over there?” and I said “Yes.” and she hugged me like “Thank you for representing us.” So then, in ’84 when I went back I thought wow, I wonder if the same wonderful things are still put at the Wall. I decided to really look it over, I had in ’82 but decided to do again in ’84 and that’s when I saw the note. A lot of people think the Wall is in alphabetical order, it’s not. It starts at the vortex, ’59 then it goes off to the right and then picks up way to the left and then meets again in the middle. So, the order is in more or less the order of death. So finding a name on the panel is tricky because you can’t go by the alphabet. So I’m looking at each thing, thinking, “Boy, somebody had to look real hard to make sure that this special note or letter or poem or whatever is in the right spot. Some really beautiful poetry I thought and very touching things because I was reading each and every one. I came across this one panel where there was a piece of red construction paper on the grass at the bottom and it was kind of staked into the grass at the bottom of this panel and it said “Gilbert Wall, F.O., 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, Khe Sanh, contact Bruce Jones, T-Bone, and it gave a Wisconsin address and phone number.” I hadn’t been anywhere near Khe Sanh and my exposure to
the Marines was really slim, I was mainly around the Army but I remember thinking “Oh, great!” The living are using the Wall to find each other. Then I thought, Whoa! I knew a Gilbert Wall back in Dallas and he was somebody that I had interviewed at a place where I’d worked, at Mobil Oil. I thought well, on the off chance this is the Gilbert Wall I’m going to copy the information down. I didn’t want to take the note because the note needed to stay there. So I copied the information down and got back to Dallas and called Mobil. They still had a Gilbert there and I got him on the phone and I said, “Were you a forward observer at Khe Sanh?” He said “Yes” and I said “I think there’s a guy named T-Bone looking for you” and it clicked. I said “When did you start with Mobil?” and it had been twelve years before in ’72 and this was ’84 and so T-Bone and Gilbert got together as a result of that note at the Wall. Gilbert hadn’t even wanted to have anything to do with the Wall or anything and T-Bone, Bruce, had gone with a group from Wisconsin, a group of veterans. That’s the story that wound up on Beyond Chance, on Lifetime channel’s Beyond Chance.

RV: Now, have they stayed in touch?

JY: Yes. Actually that, Beyond Chance is a series on Lifetime about unusual coincidences or long shots or unbelievable happenings that, again coincidence probably, beyond chance. Someone said, “You know, that story about what you did at the Wall, you ought to send it in and I said, “Wait a minute, this is the year 2000, the year of the Internet. This happened sixteen years before this. But people don’t understand that in 1984 you didn’t have the Internet to help you track down somebody. You had to use phone books and whatever.” And they said, “Well, you know you might try it,” so I thought okay. And I was about to leave, I lived in California, I lived in California at the time and I was about ready to move and I thought, well I’ll do this just before I leave, a couple months before I leave. Well, they jumped on it and I said well, one thing that will probably put the kibosh on the story is if in the sixteen years they’ve lost touch again, but they hadn’t. They flew the two veterans to the Wall, so their segment showed them at the Wall, Gilbert going for the first time in the year 2000 and T-Bone taking him. I was explaining how it all happened sixteen years before. They’d been in touch all that time [since]. Gilbert in the meantime left Texas just as I did, so I’d even said to the Beyond Chance producers, I said, “I don’t even know if you can find these guys.” I said, “Now,
Bruce Jones was pretty stable, he had worked at the same place for a long time but I don’t
know about Gilbert.” Gilbert was a Blackfoot Indian and had joined the Marines from
the reservation. Bruce had been writing the reservation and didn’t know that Gilbert was
down in Texas. Gilbert has since moved back to the reservation. I think the Marines
used Native Americans were used as forward observers quite a bit because of their ability
to track and observe and be quiet, you know, go on through the jungle or whatever, so he
was, I think Gilbert got the Bronze Star, either the Bronze Star of the Silver Star because
he carried a Lieutenant out, that was part of the thing, the note was there at that panel
because the two of them had been out in a platoon and got in a firefight and almost
twenty-eight names from that platoon were on that Wall because most of them were
killed that day. Bruce knew that if Gilbert ever got to the Wall he’d probably look up
some of those names at that panel, that’s why he put that note there.

RV: What a story.
JY: Oh, yeah. That was incredible.
RV: Well, Jenny is there anything else that you’d like to add to our interview?
JY: I can’t think of anything. It’s probably one of your longer ones.
RV: Well, I certainly appreciate your time and we’ll end the interview now, okay.
JY: Okay, thank you.
RV: Thank you very much.