

1                   **Interview of Kay Wellinger on her service in the American Red Cross**  
2                   **in 1969 during the Vietnam War**

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4

5 Virginia Emrich:       February 16, 1986. Virginia E. Emrich of the Louisville Unit Women's  
6                   Overseas Service League, interviewing Kay Wellinger, also a member of  
7                   the Louisville Unit and a former American Red Cross worker in Vietnam.

8

9 Kay Wellinger:       Well, I graduated from college in 1966. Uh, I had majored in Russian and  
10                   I was working in the, in Washington at the CIA. And like most young  
11                   people, I thought things weren't interesting enough and I was looking  
12                   around for some other work and couldn't really find anything until I had  
13                   found someone who had done, who had been in, in Vietnam with the Red  
14                   Cross, so I went over to interview hoping they would have something  
15                   maybe in France. [chuckle] Vietnam didn't sound very – or maybe that  
16                   was too exciting, uh, but I thought they might have someplace more  
17                   glamorous [inaudible 01:06]. And, uh, when I interviewed, they asked  
18                   me if I could do a number of different things like play a musical  
19                   instrument or draw. And I said no, I couldn't do any of those things. And  
20                   they said "Well, fine. Could you start in 2 weeks?" [laughter]

21

22 Virginia Emrich:     Okay. You're in. You're warm, so you're in. All right. Uh, uh, [01:33]  
23                   were you ready in 2 weeks? Did you enter a, a study period or study time?

24

25 Kay Wellinger:       Uh, a-, as a matter of fact, there was less, it seems like it was less than 2  
26                   weeks before the orientation period was supposed to start, so I had to go  
27                   give notice before they even called to tell me definitely I had the job. Uh,  
28                   but within 2 weeks I had my apartment packed up and my car sold and I  
29                   was ready to start.

30

31 Virginia Emrich:     That's amazing. [02:01] Well, what was the date that you started? Do  
32                   you remember?

33

34 Kay Wellinger:       I really can't remember.

35

36 Virginia Emrich:     [02:05] Uh, well, do you remember the month that you started your, your  
37                   – was this a, a period of training that you started?

38

39 Kay Wellinger:       We had a 2-week training period.

40

41 Virginia Emrich:     Uh-huh.

42

43 Kay Wellinger:       And it was in the spring of '69. I can't remember if it was March or April.

44

1 Virginia Emrich: Oh. Okay. Good. [02:20] And how long were you there in Washington  
2 then...?  
3  
4 Kay Wellinger: Two weeks for the training.  
5  
6 Virginia Emrich: ...before you started? [02:25] And then where were you sent?  
7  
8 Kay Wellinger: We went directly from there to Saigon [inaudible 02:31].  
9  
10 Virginia Emrich: All right. [02:32] How, how many, how many people went? Were these  
11 men and women or just...?  
12  
13 Kay Wellinger: Oh, no. Just women. The program was just for women. It was called  
14 Supplemental Recreation Activities Overseas and it was a program for  
15 women, uh, who were college graduates who were single. Uh, and we  
16 took recreation programs out to the field as opposed to the recreation  
17 [inaudible 02:56] in the hospitals, uh.  
18  
19 Virginia Emrich: [02:59] How did you get over there? What mode of transportation?  
20  
21 Kay Wellinger: Oh, we flew, uh, a very long flight. We flew from Washington to San  
22 Francisco and stayed overnight and then went from Travis Air Force Base,  
23 uh, to Saigon.  
24  
25 Virginia Emrich: [03:16] What sort of coat did they issue? Or did they issue them or did  
26 you have to pay for them?  
27  
28 Kay Wellinger: No, we had uniforms. We had a 2-piece dress uniform. It was a suit. Uh,  
29 and a 2-piece culottes outfit that nobody wore, and...  
30  
31 Virginia Emrich: [03:36] Why didn't they wear them?  
32  
33 Kay Wellinger: [laughter] Well, they were not very comfortable.  
34  
35 Virginia Emrich: Oh.  
36  
37 Kay Wellinger: Uh, and then we had a little dress. It was just an A-line dress in that blue  
38 corded material that they still use for Red Cross uniforms.  
39  
40 Virginia Emrich: Uh-huh.  
41  
42 Kay Wellinger: Uh, and that we could wear loafers or tennis shoes. And looking back at  
43 all of the boots and all the things the fellows wore and all the things with

1 that Agent Orange, it seems kind of interesting that we were running  
2 around in dresses and tennis shoes, but that's what we did.  
3  
4 Virginia Emrich: [04:09] Did you have any real civilian clothes that you could wear or, or  
5 could you fancy yourself up with hair ribbons and scarves or what have  
6 you?  
7  
8 Kay Wellinger: Uh, when we were on duty they didn't care for us to wear anything that  
9 wasn't in our uniform, but evenings and weekends on our own time we  
10 could wear civilian clothes.  
11  
12 Virginia Emrich: I see. [04:31] Well, uh, weekends you had and could do with what you  
13 wanted? Were there places you could go for your own socialization and  
14 fun?  
15  
16 Kay Wellinger: Well, no. [chuckle] I was assigned to a unit, uh, northwest of Saigon that  
17 used to be a rubber plantation and, uh, it was in a forward area so there  
18 was very little to do. Um, evenings and weekends usually we went to  
19 activities that the men were having, but it was more like work. Uh, even if  
20 you had a date and you went someplace, you were really everybody's date.  
21 On Saturday night we had to eat at the general's mess and it was rather  
22 formal and required.  
23  
24 Virginia Emrich: [05:23] Um, then how many other girls were you living with or working  
25 with?  
26  
27 Kay Wellinger: Well, when I first got to that unit, there were 6 of us altogether. Uh, later,  
28 we took on – at that time we were working just with the First Infantry  
29 Division and later we, uh, assumed responsibility for the First Air Cav also  
30 so we got 2 more people, so there were 8 of us.  
31  
32 Virginia Emrich: I see. [05:49] Had you known any of these girls before?  
33  
34 Kay Wellinger: No.  
35  
36 Virginia Emrich: No.  
37  
38 Kay Wellinger: No. None of them were in my training class.  
39  
40 Virginia Emrich: [05:55] Uh, well, tell me something about the men you worked with on  
41 your – that assignment. Were they in battle? Were they close to it or what  
42 were they doing? Did you know what their jobs were?  
43

1 Kay Wellinger: Uh, yes. Well, we did several things. The main thing that we did was to  
2 go out from Lai Khe, which was where we lived, uh, to the, uh, firebases  
3 that had been cut out of the countryside and those units had an infantry  
4 company and artillery battery. So when we would go, the men that were  
5 there were the ones that were not at, in the field during that time because  
6 they would rotate and they'd have so many platoons out and then some of  
7 the platoons in. Uh, of course, those firebases were often fired upon even  
8 when the men were there guarding that area, uh.  
9

10 Virginia Emrich: [06:59] Were you ever under fire yourself?  
11

12 Kay Wellinger: Oh, fairly often when we were in our base camp.  
13

14 Virginia Emrich: [07:07] Did you have special places to go and, and special duties at time  
15 of being fired upon or under fire?  
16

17 Kay Wellinger: Our main duty was to get out of the way and not bother [chuckle]  
18 anybody. Uh, we had a bunker of sorts outside the back door of our little  
19 house. Since it had been a, a plantation, we lived in a house, uh, and, uh,  
20 the, uh, bunker was something the girls had built. [throat clearing]  
21 Mainly we're talking about rockets and mortars. We didn't get overrun by  
22 people while I was there, although some areas did. And the bunker was so  
23 pitiful that we tried not to go to it. And our house was fairly substantial  
24 and was probably safer than the bunker, uh; however, one time our  
25 supervisor from Washington came when they, we had some rockets and  
26 she said we had to stay in the bunker and it was really awful. It was built  
27 for about 4 people and there were 7 of us.  
28

29 Virginia Emrich: Oh.  
30

31 Kay Wellinger: So we arranged to get a new one built that was more comfortable.  
32

33 Virginia Emrich: [08:13] Uh, were you under the army or were you under the Red, a Red  
34 Cross supervisor or who was your immediate supervisor while you were  
35 there?  
36

37 Kay Wellinger: Our supervisors were Red Cross people in, in Saigon.  
38

39 Virginia Emrich: I see. [08:29] Was that also the, uh, the headquarters for the Red Cross  
40 in...?  
41

42 Kay Wellinger: Yes.  
43

1 Virginia Emrich: ...Vietnam? I, I see. [08:37] Did you have rules and regulations though  
2 that you had to, uh, abide by that were set up by the army or the unit that  
3 you were working for? Was there any, ever any conflict or anything?  
4

5 Kay Wellinger: No. Our rules were pretty well set by the Red Cross. For example, we  
6 were only supposed to travel on official duty. We couldn't travel on our  
7 time off, uh, things of that sort. Some of the nurses were able to do that,  
8 and if they had a day off they could travel around the country. We were  
9 not allowed to do that. Uh, the army housed us and fed us and, uh,  
10 transported us. One of the jobs that I had when I came in from working  
11 during the day was to call all of the units that we were supposed to see the  
12 next day and set up our transportation and that kind of thing.  
13

14 Virginia Emrich: I see. So you did not have your own transportation in any way.  
15

16 Kay Wellinger: No.  
17

18 Virginia Emrich: You always had to depend on the unit that you were working with.  
19 [09:34] How did you get your supplies? Did Red Cross give you all the  
20 supplies or did the units help in any way? Or does – what, and what sort  
21 of things were they that you worked with or you needed in your work?  
22

23 Kay Wellinger: That's a good question. [chuckle] Uh, we did have an office and I guess  
24 the Red Cross sent us some supplies. We, our recreation programs were  
25 primarily things that we made. And we made a lot of visual aids,  
26 flashcards, and game boards that were modeled after TV shows, things of  
27 that type. Uh, but I do remember that the fellows didn't have very much  
28 when we would go out to see them. We carried a big canvas bag with our  
29 program in it and, uh, they didn't have things. We'd say "Did you write  
30 home, you know, today?" "Well, I don't have any paper. I don't have any  
31 pencils." So I wrote back to our, uh, the Red Cross chapter in, where my  
32 mother lived and asked them to send things like paperback books and pens  
33 and stationary and that kind of thing for the fellows.  
34

35 Virginia Emrich: You got some private help then. [10:45] Were these men close to rec  
36 halls in any way or?  
37

38 Kay Wellinger: No.  
39

40 Virginia Emrich: No halls. No places set up for them to have their recreation.  
41

42 Kay Wellinger: No. That was really the point of our being there. Uh, we took the  
43 recreation to them. And even at our base camp there was no rec hall or  
44 anything like that. Now some of the units, uh, in the bigger areas to the

1 rear did have big rec halls and USO clubs and service clubs and Red Cross  
2 clubs, but our forward units did not have anything like that.  
3

4Virginia Emrich: I see. [11:18] Can you give me a typical day in your working, uh, in your  
5 job, what time you would start out and how far you might have to drive?  
6 And, um, did any of the fellows help you set up when you got there?  
7 Were they glad to see you? I'd just like to know what the whole feeling  
8 was about it.  
9

10Kay Wellinger: Well, it usually started pretty early. We were usually, uh, trying to get  
11 out, out to the field by about 7, but we didn't drive anyplace. We weren't  
12 allowed to drive on the road, uh, except for one area, and even to get to  
13 that area we had to fly. So we went by helicopter most all of the time,  
14 occasionally in an airplane. Um, ideally we might go to 2 or 3 firebases a  
15 day, uh, seeing, spending a couple of hours at each place, getting  
16 transportation to the next place. Most of the time it didn't work that way  
17 because there wasn't enough transportation to take us and so usually, uh,  
18 we spent most of the day at 1 base, uh, firebase or maybe 2. We also  
19 visited the base camps for the different divisions and we might go and do  
20 some programs maybe in somebody's mess hall or we might take some  
21 Kool-Aid or other things around maybe to the flight line where the  
22 mechanics were working, things like that. Uh, so some – it depended on  
23 what your run was going to be that day. We had base camps, firebases,  
24 and then we had a place where there was I guess it was a water  
25 purification plant and that kind of thing, so, uh, it varied quite a lot  
26 depending on what your assignment was.  
27

28Virginia Emrich: [13:08] Were the men who, uh, for whom this program was available,  
29 were they given time off from their jobs to do it? They knew you were  
30 coming and were waiting?  
31

32Kay Wellinger: Most of the time they did. Yes. Uh, when they're at the firebase, there  
33 really wasn't anything to do during the day. Most of the fighting took  
34 place at night. During the day they loaded ammunition, they filled sand  
35 bags for fortification. It was very boring, so they either were doing  
36 something that was very tedious or they were terrified in the midst of  
37 fighting, so. Uh, they usually knew what day we came to their particular  
38 firebase. We had a fairly routine schedule. And, uh, they seemed to really  
39 look forward to it, although there were always some unexpected surprises.  
40 Sometimes we didn't always arrive at the most opportune moment. Uh,  
41 but they were certainly allowed to come to our program. We got varying  
42 amounts of support from the commanding officers, some of them were  
43 very supportive and others were neutral.  
44

1 Virginia Emrich: [14:16] Did you have the usual thing, a, a chance to talk with them like  
2 where are you from and, and you know the boys wanted to know where  
3 and try to find somebody close to home.  
4

5 Kay Wellinger: Usually more time than we wanted because after we do our program when  
6 we couldn't get out, that's how we'd spend the rest of the day, uh, just  
7 visiting with them in small groups, uh, serving lunch, which was always  
8 kind of fun because they didn't expect us to be standing there serving the  
9 vegetables. Um, so we got quite a lot of time to talk to them and, of  
10 course, in the evening, uh, on our "free time" we did a lot of visiting either  
11 at our house or, uh, at the various units around our base camp.  
12

13 Virginia Emrich: [15:00] Uh, when you traveled around to the different bases, did you wear  
14 a dress uniform? Uh, you didn't have slacks? You didn't have...?  
15

16 Kay Wellinger: No, we wore a dress. [chuckle]  
17

18 Virginia Emrich: You did always. That...  
19

20 Kay Wellinger: We climbed in and out of helicopters in our dresses and in and out of, uh,  
21 huge trucks and everything else.  
22

23 Virginia Emrich: No boots and, and...  
24

25 Kay Wellinger: No.  
26

27 Virginia Emrich: Well.  
28

29 Kay Wellinger: One person [inaudible 15:22].  
30

31 Virginia Emrich: [15:21] Did you ever wish you had something sturdier? Were there times  
32 you might have been in mud or you might have been in, in [chuckle] a  
33 situation where a sturdier type of clothes would have done better?  
34

35 Kay Wellinger: Well, it was very hot, uh, in the area that I was in. Now, up north it may  
36 get cooler, but we stayed around 100 degrees a lot of the times, so even  
37 when it rained during monsoon, uh, usually you were just satisfied to have  
38 on the dress because it was cooler.  
39

40 Virginia Emrich: I see. [15:54] Uh, what time of the year did the monsoons come? Were  
41 you there when the season for monsoons?  
42

43 Kay Wellinger: Yes.  
44

1 Virginia Emrich: Oh.  
2  
3 Kay Wellinger: It came in the late summer.  
4  
5 Virginia Emrich: Late summer.  
6  
7 Kay Wellinger: Mm-hm.  
8  
9 Virginia Emrich: Um, let me recoup. [16:07] You arrived over there in summer?  
10  
11 Kay Wellinger: In the spring.  
12  
13 Virginia Emrich: In the spring.  
14  
15 Kay Wellinger: Mm-hm.  
16  
17 Virginia Emrich: [16:13] And how long totally were you in service in Vietnam?  
18  
19 Kay Wellinger: Six months.  
20  
21 Virginia Emrich: For 6 months.  
22  
23 Kay Wellinger: Mm-hm. I came back in October.  
24  
25 Virginia Emrich: [16:21] Was this the usual period that you would sign, a person would sign  
26 up for?  
27  
28 Kay Wellinger: No. They usually signed up for a year, but if you, they would let you  
29 come home early. And I came home early to get married.  
30  
31 Virginia Emrich: Oh, I see. [16:34] To someone you met over there?  
32  
33 Kay Wellinger: Mm-hm.  
34  
35 Virginia Emrich: I see. [16:37] Um, what was his position in the army or in the setup that  
36 he was working in?  
37  
38 Kay Wellinger: Well, he was the executive officer for his battalion and he lived in the one  
39 area where we could ride on the road and he was assigned against his will  
40 as our escort because we had to have a driver and an officer escort and he  
41 hated it. [chuckle]  
42  
43 Virginia Emrich: [17:03] Did they...?  
44



1Kay Wellinger: That's how I met him.  
2

3Virginia Emrich: I see. Um, all right. Let me, um, [17:13] Kay, tell me something, tell me  
4 what you remember about your pay [chuckle] if you know or remember  
5 anything.  
6

7Kay Wellinger: I don't remember very much of that. I, I remember that I had to take a  
8 significant pay cut from my job, but I think it was only about \$4000,  
9 \$4000 or \$5000. We did, however, get hazardous duty pay of \$60 a  
10 month and that's primarily what we lived on. Most of the girls sent their  
11 regular pay home. It cost us \$10 to pay the girl who cleaned and took care  
12 of our uniforms for us and clean the house, and then we had \$50 to spend,  
13 but there wasn't anything to spend it on.  
14

15Virginia Emrich: Hm.  
16

17Kay Wellinger: So that was more than enough money.  
18

19Virginia Emrich: You had no chance to buy souvenirs and such things as that [inaudible  
20 17:59].  
21

22Kay Wellinger: No. They had a little PX and we could get some of the necessities and  
23 some soft drinks, but other than that, there really wasn't much...  
24

25Virginia Emrich: All right.  
26

27Kay Wellinger: ...of a place to spend it on. Once we went to Long Binh where they had a  
28 big PX and nail polish and perfume and that was really quite a treat.  
29

30Virginia Emrich: Oh. You did get that sometime while you were there.  
31

32Kay Wellinger: Yeah.  
33

34Virginia Emrich: [18:20] What type of housing did you have? Were they good substantial  
35 places or, or just things put up for you temporarily?  
36

37Kay Wellinger: Well, I understand when they first went that they went in tents. I've  
38 heard, I've heard that. Now we had a regular house, uh, that had a kitchen  
39 and a bath and 2 bedrooms and a living room. Uh, I did take a trip to  
40 cover for someone who was ill and I stopped in Cam Ranh Bay. Those  
41 girls lived in trailers and had hot water and air conditioning, which we  
42 thought was marvelous. And then in An Khe where I worked for the girl  
43 who was sick, they lived in the nurses' barracks and they were very much  
44 like a typical barrack building, but they had individual rooms built in a

1 quadrangle. So the, the accommodations were quite different depending  
2 on where you were assigned and what is available.  
3

4 Virginia Emrich: [19:24] Were all assignments, uh, given to the women the same? There  
5 weren't...  
6

7 Kay Wellinger: Well, when we arrived in, in Saigon, they interviewed us and spent about  
8 2 days with us before they assigned us. Apparently, that was the time to  
9 assess whether you would have an assignment in a, in a combat area in  
10 the, in the front or whether you would go to the rear. Uh, and some people  
11 I gathered never really got any of those smaller assignments in, in the front  
12 areas. Uh, some stayed primarily to the rear in the larger groups that had  
13 service clubs and that kind of thing. Probably they thought some people  
14 were more suited to that and some people more suited to the other. Most  
15 of us who were in the forward areas did, however, rotate back to the rear  
16 to what they would consider a safer assignment toward the end of the tour.  
17

18 Virginia Emrich: I see. [20:23] Did you have any experiences that were unusual or  
19 memorable or, uh, funny or, or sad, or anything that you remember that  
20 crossed your mind?  
21

22 Kay Wellinger: Well, I guess the most, the thing that I remember most was the first day  
23 that we arrived and went directly to the Red Cross office. Of course, we  
24 all, our dresses were obviously new and hadn't been worn and we all  
25 looked very frightened. And so we, we went through about half a day of  
26 orientation and they said that we could have the rest of the day off to look  
27 around Saigon and do what we wanted to do, but they told us not to eat in  
28 any of the native restaurants and not to ride in the little pedicabs and not to  
29 ride in a regular cab and not to walk in small groups and not to walk in  
30 large groups and never go anyplace by yourself. [chuckle] And then they  
31 deposited us at a hotel and we were hungry [chuckle] and all we'd heard  
32 about was what we couldn't do and we didn't know how to go about  
33 getting anything to eat or where we should go. And finally, another girl  
34 and I went downstairs and stood out in the sidewalk and we must have just  
35 really looked I don't know if exhausted, scared, or confused, but anyway  
36 some fellow came up and asked us if he could help us. And we said we  
37 were looking for someplace we could eat, so he told us about a place that  
38 had a, a nice – the American Village Hotel had a restaurant. And we said  
39 "We don't know how to get there." And so he pointed out that there was  
40 an army bus that would stop across the street, which made a lot of sense,  
41 but they hadn't told us about the army bus.  
42

43 Virginia Emrich: Oh.  
44

1Kay Wellinger: They had just told us how not to get anyplace.  
2

3Virginia Emrich: So the army really took care of its people and the Americans took care of  
4 each other. They, at least they made things available if you knew how to  
5 go about getting them. I see.  
6

7Kay Wellinger: So we ended up going to that restaurant for lunch and then we were  
8 frightened to go anyplace, so we stayed there all afternoon and through  
9 dinner until curfew time [chuckle] because we didn't, we just knew we  
10 would get hurt if we went out on the street.  
11

12Virginia Emrich: Curfew time interests me. [22:41] What was curfew time?  
13

14Kay Wellinger: 10:00 [inaudible 22:44] and that was in Saigon and in our unit too.  
15

16Virginia Emrich: [22:47] Until what time in the morning then?  
17

18Kay Wellinger: Well, they didn't really have a morning time, but at nighttime you just had  
19 to be in by 10.  
20

21Virginia Emrich: I see. [22:54] Was that for all the – citywide for all people or just the  
22 service people?  
23

24Kay Wellinger: As far as I know, well...  
25

26Virginia Emrich: [23:02] Or just the, the girls?  
27

28Kay Wellinger: No. The fellows had to be in too, and I don't know if that applied to the  
29 civilian population. It did in our, our base camp. Everybody had to be in  
30 by 10:00.  
31

32Virginia Emrich: [23:13] How much contact did you have with the natives?  
33

34Kay Wellinger: Uh, not very much. We had a girl who came and cleaned for us and she  
35 was very pleasant until they came and arrested her and said she was a spy.  
36 And then they sent us a...  
37

38Virginia Emrich: [23:28] Had you had any suspicions of this?  
39

40Kay Wellinger: Oh, no.  
41

42Virginia Emrich: No. Mm-hm.  
43

1 Kay Wellinger: I was surprised. If she was, it really wasn't very evident, and there  
2 certainly wasn't anything in our house to spy about. Uh, so they sent us  
3 someone else who didn't speak English and that was also rather  
4 interesting. We'd try and teach her how to iron and clean a bathroom  
5 because she'd never seen a bathroom or an iron before. Uh, we did go  
6 into the village a few times to buy ice and charcoal, that kind of thing, but  
7 it was, it was really not safe to go in there. We did not go very often, so  
8 we really didn't have very much contact with them.  
9

10 Virginia Emrich: [24:06] What – were your living, uh, conditions for the most part  
11 comfortable or, or, um, you got enough, got your rest, the needed rest and  
12 you got enough food and you got the things that you needed in that way?  
13

14 Kay Wellinger: Oh yes.  
15

16 Virginia Emrich: You never wanted for any of that.  
17

18 Kay Wellinger: No.  
19

20 Virginia Emrich: You were taken care of.  
21

22 Kay Wellinger: No, in fact, my mother would send me care packages and I was eating  
23 steak and champagne and because if there was a party we got invited since  
24 there were only 6 or 8 of us, we were always included.  
25

26 Virginia Emrich: You all went. I can imagine. [24:43] Um, well, was there anything, any  
27 regulation that was unpopular? I mean, uh, there were so many no's you  
28 said, but was there any regulation that really gave you a hardship over  
29 there?  
30

31 Kay Wellinger: I don't, I can't think of any that was really a hardship.  
32

33 Virginia Emrich: [25:01] Your rights weren't taken away from you in any way?  
34

35 Kay Wellinger: No, I think probably it would have been nice to travel some because there  
36 were some areas of the country that we would have liked to have seen.  
37 Uh, there was an in-country R & R center for the fellows at Vung Tau  
38 which was supposed to be very beautiful on the beach. And then there  
39 was the old city of Da Lat, uh, which I think some of the girls got to see  
40 who were assigned near there, but the rest of us who were, who were not,  
41 did not get to see that. And I think that would have been, uh, something  
42 we would have liked, but at the same we realize it was probably not a very  
43 good idea.  
44

1 Virginia Emrich: [inaudible 25:36]. Yeah. [25:38] The 6 months that you were there, were  
2 you in the one place?  
3

4 Kay Wellinger: I was in one place and then I just did a TDY at the second place.  
5

6 Virginia Emrich: All right. [25:49] Explain a TDY, please.  
7

8 Kay Wellinger: Oh, temporary tour of duty. Uh, one of the girls up in An Khe had  
9 appendicitis and had to have her appendix out there at the military  
10 hospital, so they needed somebody to fill in for her and they just call and  
11 say you're going. You're not asked, they just say you're going. And they  
12 don't tell you how to get there, which was also kind of interesting because  
13 I didn't know where it was so I had to pack a suitcase and go out on the  
14 flight line and just hitchhike and it took me 2 days and I went quite a few  
15 places...[chuckle]  
16

17 Virginia Emrich: Hm.  
18

19 Kay Wellinger: ...before I could get there.  
20

21 Virginia Emrich: [26:30] Um, if you can, tell me something about the people that you ran  
22 across over there or the visitors or some of the celebrities who came over  
23 to entertain you all. Did you have any like that?  
24

25 Kay Wellinger: Well, yes. The most important person who came was President Nixon, but  
26 he managed to come to the area where I was when I was up on TDY, so I  
27 didn't get to see him. Uh, Ms. America and her group came through and  
28 they called us to ask if the girls could stay with us because they were all  
29 sick and, uh, we didn't have any room for them. Uh, nor was I sure that  
30 we really needed all that competition, but anyway. [chuckle] We didn't  
31 feel very glamorous at that time. But I think one of the most interesting  
32 things that happened while I was there was they landed on the moon and  
33 we did have a, a friend who had a TV who brought it over to our house  
34 and we got to watch the landing on the moon while we were in Vietnam.  
35

36 Virginia Emrich: That is interesting. In other words, you were able to keep up with  
37 worldwide affairs while you were there. [27:39] How, uh, through  
38 newspapers, through your, your radio, or how did the information come to  
39 you?  
40

41 Kay Wellinger: Well, the Armed Forces Radio Network and there was a TV program out  
42 of Saigon. And I can't remember all of the, how that came about, but  
43 there was, we did not have a TV, but there was a TV station and people in  
44 Saigon and anybody who had a TV could get that and they had the local

1 news, they had, uh, shows from America. Uh, the, uh, we had a little  
2 pirate radio station there in Lai Khe that played music and we had our own  
3 radio show. The Red Cross girls went 1 night a week and we took  
4 requests, uh...  
5  
6Virginia Emrich: [28:26] You played, spun the records?  
7  
8Kay Wellinger: We had a disc jockey who played the records.  
9  
10Virginia Emrich: Uh-huh.  
11  
12Kay Wellinger: And, uh, while we were out in the field, the fellows would give us a little  
13 piece of paper with dedications so they could call in on the field phone...  
14  
15Virginia Emrich: Oh.  
16  
17Kay Wellinger: ...and, uh, while we were down there and we talked with them and  
18 dedicate songs to them. That was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed that.  
19  
20Virginia Emrich: [28:45] What about your mail from home and your correspondence, did it  
21 come through pretty regularly?  
22  
23Kay Wellinger: It came through, you know, quite well. I can't remember exactly how  
24 long, but I would say it probably didn't take more than a week.  
25  
26Virginia Emrich: Hm.  
27  
28Kay Wellinger: Uh, we had an APO address just like the fellows did and I think [inaudible  
29 29:01].  
30  
31Virginia Emrich: [29:01] Did you, was your mail censored? Was there ever any evidence  
32 of anything cut out? Did anybody receive...?  
33  
34Kay Wellinger: No.  
35  
36Virginia Emrich: ...that they talked about?  
37  
38Kay Wellinger: No. They had told us not to write down, [ringing] they had just told us not  
39 to write anything about exactly where we were, but that was the only, uh,  
40 indication about cen-, censorship. And, of course, everybody knew where  
41 we were. [chuckle] Uh, the American troops were fairly obvious and so  
42 that, there really wasn't, uh, [inaudible 29:31].  
43

1 Virginia Emrich: [29:31] Was there much coming and going among the troops,  
2 replacements, and that sort of thing or did the sa-, same men seem to be  
3 around? Did you get back to the same places often?  
4

5 Kay Wellinger: We went to the same places. Um, of course, the, the company that was  
6 there last week might not be there this week or the platoon. Uh, and that's  
7 I think one of the hardest things for us when I talked with the other girls is  
8 that we saw so many men and we didn't get to know them, uh, very well.  
9 And so we would go out and see them, but if they weren't there the next  
10 week we really didn't know that. And, uh, that's I think one of the  
11 problems when I've talked to girls who had problems when they got  
12 home, that's one of the things that they point out was that they really don't  
13 know what the effects of, of what we did are...  
14

15 Virginia Emrich: Mm-hm.  
16

17 Kay Wellinger: ...in many ways.  
18

19 Virginia Emrich: They didn't have a chance to. [30:32] Um, what about sickness? Was  
20 there much sickness among, well, the men but, but particularly among the  
21 girls who went over there to work?  
22

23 Kay Wellinger: We didn't have any sickness in our unit, um, while I was there. Uh,  
24 apparently the girls who died there all died of illness, not of any kind of  
25 combat injury, uh.  
26

27 Virginia Emrich: [31:04] Illnesses picked up there, uh?  
28

29 Kay Wellinger: Apparently so. Uh-huh.  
30

31 Virginia Emrich: I see. [31:09] Were there many of those?  
32

33 Kay Wellinger: I think there were just 3.  
34

35 Virginia Emrich: I see. [31:14] Do you have an idea how many Red Cross women were  
36 sent to Viet... [dictation clipped]  
37

38 Kay Wellinger: Eight hundred, but I don't know if that was just for the SRAO program.  
39 There were Red Cross people as field directors at each of the base camps  
40 who did the, uh, emergency leaves, birth notifications, that kind of thing,  
41 which they were separate from us. Then at the major hospitals they had  
42 Red Cross recreation workers, uh, who worked with the men who had  
43 been injured, so I'm not sure how many Red Cross people totally were  
44 assigned over there.

1  
2Virginia Emrich: I see. [31:55] Uh, how many different branches of, of, uh, men did you  
3 come across over there? I, I mean like did you see navy, did you see air  
4 force, did you see infantry? You know, what units like that.  
5  
6Kay Wellinger: There were units assigned all over the country and through that we  
7 covered every branch of service.  
8  
9Virginia Emrich: [32:18] You reached all, uh, reached men in all...  
10  
11Kay Wellinger: Yes.  
12  
13Virginia Emrich: ...the services? I see. [32:25] Um, Kay, is there anything else you  
14 remember about your service while you were there in Vietnam or anything  
15 that you think might be interesting to put on this recording? If not, we'll  
16 go into wh-, when you left there approximately the date, where you came  
17 when you came back, what happened, and if you want to bring us up to  
18 date, well, we'd like to hear it.  
19  
20Kay Wellinger: Uh, well, I left in October. Uh, I had really not planned to leave, but my  
21 fiancé wanted to get married and he didn't want to wait until after we had  
22 finished our tours so, uh, I came home. And, uh, since he arranged the  
23 leaves in his unit, he followed me shortly thereafter and, um, we got  
24 married in November of that year.  
25  
26Virginia Emrich: [33:25] Where?  
27  
28Kay Wellinger: In Anderson, Indiana. That was where my parents lived.  
29  
30Virginia Emrich: [33:29] In your home.  
31  
32Kay Wellinger: Uh, then he went back to Vietnam and, for about 3 months, and came  
33 home and then we were assigned, uh, to Chattanooga, Tennessee.  
34  
35Virginia Emrich: [33:42] You were still in Red Cross?  
36  
37Kay Wellinger: No, I had resigned.  
38  
39Virginia Emrich: Oh.  
40  
41Kay Wellinger: But he was a career army officer, so we, he was assigned to teach ROTC  
42 at the university in Chattanooga.  
43



1 Virginia Emrich: Kay, um, all right, we've got you as far as, as Chattanooga. [34:04] Um,  
2 if you want to go on along that line about your [inaudible 4:09]. Or before  
3 we, you get into that, uh, if you look back in retrospect and tell us the  
4 feeling the men had or you had about the men or they had about  
5 themselves or just what was going on over there.  
6

7 Kay Wellinger: Of course, that was a very controversial time. Uh, I don't think that I had  
8 ever had any question about being there or about the fact that we should  
9 have been there. At the time, I had not. I've had a lot of thoughts about it  
10 since that I'm not sure are the same. But the, uh, the men, uh, often asked  
11 us why we were there and we were told to say something like "well,  
12 because you're here" or something nice like that. I usually told them I  
13 didn't know at all, uh, which they seemed to like because they didn't seem  
14 to know either why they were there.  
15

16 Virginia Emrich: Mm-hm.

17

18 Kay Wellinger: Uh, but when we talked to them about their work and, and how they felt  
19 about it, uh, I can't remember a single person who didn't tell us that they  
20 were there because that was their assignment, uh, they were supposed to  
21 be there, they had a job to do, and that and they were going to do that job  
22 for their year and then go home. Uh, we didn't hear a lot of griping and  
23 complaining. Uh, we heard people talking wistfully about being home or  
24 back in the world they called it, uh, about their girlfriends or their wives or  
25 whatever. But, um, no one seemed to question, you know, the need for his  
26 being there or, uh, that he was not going to do the best he could while he  
27 was there.  
28

29 Virginia Emrich: Mm-hm. [35:59] Uh, what about the girls who went over there? Uh, did  
30 they, most of them stay out their regular length of assignment and did any  
31 of them ever take, uh, a double assignment or, or did they go back after  
32 their time was up?  
33

34 Kay Wellinger: Um, most of the girls completed their assignment. I know a couple of  
35 people who came home early. Uh, when I first arrived, the unit director  
36 that we had had been there for 18 months. They had asked her to extend  
37 because of her experience and her expertise in running the unit. Uh, none  
38 of the people I knew personally stayed over, but I did hear of 1 young  
39 woman who came home after her tour and then returned and she worked  
40 with orphans in Saigon as a civilian, I'm not sure under whose auspices,  
41 and, uh, was on the plane carrying the orphans out in 1975 that was shot  
42 down.  
43

44 Virginia Emrich: Oh no.

1  
2Kay Wellinger: And she died.  
3  
4Virginia Emrich: [37:12] Um, what about after you got home, were there problems among  
5 the girls, among the fellows, or among the civilians who were left back  
6 here? Just what was the general feeling?  
7  
8Kay Wellinger: I was surprised later to find people had experienced all kinds of problems,  
9 uh, particularly when they arrived in Travis or at San Francisco at the  
10 airport. Apparently, some people were, uh, treated very poorly and spat  
11 upon. And even some of the nurses who came back in their uniforms had  
12 things thrown at them and they were cursed. Uh, I did not have any  
13 experience like that, and I don't know anyone who did. Now maybe they  
14 didn't recognize our uniform and what, where we might have been, but,  
15 uh, even after getting home and, uh, settling down and getting married, we  
16 didn't ever have any problem. Of course, we associated mostly with  
17 military people, but we never experienced any of the harassment...  
18  
19Virginia Emrich: Hm.  
20  
21Kay Wellinger: ...that some of the other people [inaudible 38:24].  
22  
23Virginia Emrich: Uh, Kay, I happen to know that in your, in the position that you have now,  
24 you come in contact with veterans. [38:34] Are you, what do you think  
25 about the Vietnam veterans that, that you as a social worker, uh, well, you  
26 might tell us what your work is and see if there is any relationship between  
27 your time over there and you're working with the patients now.  
28  
29Kay Wellinger: Well, I'm a social worker at the VA Medical Center and worked at several  
30 other medical centers before coming to Louisville. Uh, I suppose,  
31 although I didn't plan to when I joined the Red Cross, I imagine that my  
32 interest in, in working with the veterans arose from that and that's why I  
33 stayed with the VA. Uh, we find, uh, I guess at our hospital the Vietnam  
34 veterans who have the most difficulties. Only 4% of all veterans use the  
35 VA facilities, uh, medical facilities, and so I have to assume that 96% of  
36 the Vietnam veterans are doing well or are managing fairly well. Uh, but  
37 the ones that we see are those that, that are not managing well. And we do  
38 see quite a few problems, a lot of depression, uh, a lot of nightmares and  
39 problems with putting Vietnam behind them.  
40  
41Virginia Emrich: [39:57] Uh, do you have that or have you seen that among women  
42 veterans of, that is, army women who were in Vietnam also?  
43

1 Kay Wellinger: The army women I know haven't reported that, although the nurses that I  
2 know say that they can't get other Vietnam nurses to identify themselves.  
3 This is quite a problem, and they assume that there are some women out  
4 there who are experiencing quite a few difficulties. Uh, among the Red  
5 Cross women I know, yes, there are quite a few people who have had, uh,  
6 what they call posttraumatic stress and a few women who really never  
7 have been able to work since they got back.  
8

9 Virginia Emrich: [40:43] Has Red Cross recognized this problem among their workers and  
10 are they doing anything about it for the, the girls?  
11

12 Kay Wellinger: Not that I know of. Uh, most of the VA vet centers will see civilians,  
13 although they are not authorized to do so. Uh, but as far as the Red Cross,  
14 I have no inclination that they've checked with anyone or have any  
15 provisions for helping people.  
16

17 Virginia Emrich: I see. Well, uh, it's certainly been a revelation to me to hear your side of  
18 the story. This is the first Vietnam member of, of any service that we've  
19 interviewed so far. [41:26] If there is nothing else you want to say, is  
20 there anything...?  
21

22 Kay Wellinger: [inaudible 41:30].  
23

24 Virginia Emrich: ...that you would like to add to it? All right. Thank you very much.  
25  
26  
27/mlc