

Bowles, Joyce US Army

[00:00:12.38] JOYCE BOWLES: Born right here in Washington, DC, at what used to be the Columbia Women's Hospital, believe it or not. It's no longer there. It's changed with the rest of the city.

[00:00:31.41] JOYCE BOWLES: I was on the Army Student Nurse Program. When I completed high school-- and just to give a plug for my high school, I graduated out of Eastern High School and wanted, I guess like most people at that time, to spread my wings and fly away. So I went to the University of Evansville in Indiana to study nursing. And what helped me to do that was they offered a small scholarship. And it was a chance for adventure and travel, and that was just what I was looking for.

[00:01:12.27] After my first two years at the University of Evansville, I became a part of what was then called the Army Student Nurse Program. And in the Army Student Nurse Program, the Army paid for the last two years of college. And my obligation was that I would come on active duty for three years. And that's how I got started.

[00:01:38.07] I'm an only child. I have an uncle. In fact, I have two uncles. One was in the Coast Guard, and one was in the Army. But they lived in Virginia, far away from us living in Washington, DC.

[00:01:54.93] So I didn't really know a lot about the military or what they did or where they did it or any of those things. But the Army provided me an opportunity, and I took advantage of it. So that was the impetus for moving into that direction.

[00:02:16.71] Graduated in May of '64. Of course, you had to take state board exams, and until you got the results of state boards, you didn't move or go anywhere. But, fortunately, I certainly passed the first time around. And I had a recruiter who said to me-- knowing that I knew nothing about the military-- she says, no matter what, don't do anything unless you have orders.

[00:02:43.29] And I said, OK, because I knew I could follow simple directions. And, sure enough, I didn't get orders. So for the summer-- part of the summer, anyway-- I stayed in Evansville and worked in the hospital. And then it seemed reasonable that I should be on my way back to DC.

[00:03:04.92] And I came home and called downtown and said, I don't know what I'm supposed to do just yet. Haven't gotten my orders. And they said, don't worry, they're coming. And so I was home from probably the end of July until October, when I finally went to basic at Fort Sam, got my orders, and I was on my way.

[00:03:33.02] SARAH BARKSDALE: And this is October 1964?

[00:03:35.11] JOYCE BOWLES: 1964.

[00:03:38.09] SARAH BARKSDALE: What was your sense of the Vietnam War at that point?

[00:03:42.09] JOYCE BOWLES: What war? Coming out of college in Evansville, Indiana, Kennedy had been assassinated. That was probably the big-- between Kennedy's assassination and the Bay of Pigs Invasion, those are probably the two traumas of the United States, I guess-- at that point in my life, anyway.

[00:04:10.87] So the thought of the war-- I didn't take it serious. I was young and foolish, and I knew nobody could kill me or whatever because I was invincible, as are most people who are 21, 22 years old. And it was something that belonged to somebody else. It didn't belong to me. Plus, nurses don't get shot, so why would I worry about that?

[00:04:40.28] In the meantime, when I left basic, I came back to Walter Reed. And I enrolled and completed the psychiatric nursing course because that's the clinical specialty that I wanted to be a part of. And at that point, I'm like, OK, well, they don't need nurses over there to take care of crazy people because there are no crazy people in the war.

[00:05:03.04] It's not as though I had learned the history of the Korean War or the history of World War II other than what you saw in the movie. And, of course, in the movie, everybody ended up happy, and all was well. So it just, I guess, really didn't faze me about my going or being a part of that. And being very much involved in what I was doing and learning my clinical specialty, I don't remember spending a lot of time either thinking or worrying about that.

[00:05:39.32] On the other hand, my mother was about to go bonkers because, of course, she was more into what happens in wartime and what happened-- da da da da. And so she was like, well, do you think you're going to go? And I'm like, no, they're not going to send me over there. What am I going to do over there?

[00:05:58.09] Well, one day I got orders. And being a good Soldier, I knew how to follow orders. So I was able to pack up and get ready to go.

[00:06:14.40] JOYCE BOWLES: Had nothing to do with going to Vietnam. I was in what they used to call OJT, a course for psychiatric nursing. And that was how you went from being a generalist to a specialty to get your-- what we then called your

MOS. And so once I finished the course, then I became a psychiatric nurse, as opposed to a med-surg nurse or one of the other specialty areas.

[00:06:46.02] What can I say about basic training? It was a learning experience. We had classes. We learned to march. Probably the most exciting thing that happened in basic was when we spent a day at Camp Bullis learning how to do map reading and learning how well we can't follow simple instructions.

[00:07:07.83] And things would happen. For example, the sergeant would say, whatever you do, you'll see these trucks parked. Don't walk toward the trucks because they'll be going the wrong way. So the group that I was in, what did we do? We started walking toward the trucks because we were tired, and it was hot. And it just seemed like the logical thing to do.

[00:07:31.93] Of course, all of us were green as grass and didn't know what we were doing anyway. And of course, the more we walked toward the trucks, the further we got away from the trucks. It's-- I don't know. And I guess it was the horizon or the ground or whatever that just gave you this misperception of what you were really moving toward.

[00:07:53.40] But it was classes. You learned the social etiquette and just how to make it from Monday to Friday, so to speak. Yeah. I don't remember it being anything exciting or nerve-wracking.

[00:08:16.14] Got my orders, I think, around-- must have been June-July time frame. I was assigned to the 24th Evac. When I got my orders, the 24th Evac was in San Antonio, but packing to leave to go to Vietnam. My orders had me leaving out of Travis and joining the unit in Vietnam so that once I signed out of Walter Reed, I traveled out to Travis Air Force Base to join up with the rest of the folks who were going that way at that time.

[00:09:06.08] JOYCE BOWLES: I arrived in Vietnam in August of '66. I was one of those lucky people that when I left Travis Air Force Base, for whatever reason, I had gotten separated from my shot record and/or medical records. And in order for me to depart country, I had to have had all of those, whatever they were.

[00:09:34.52] So before I got on the plane, I got all the shots that I had already had but didn't have it documented. And they filled me with all of them before I departed. What I remember about being on the plane-- I was hot, and I was cold. I was miserable, and I was tired. I hurt, and I didn't hurt.

[00:09:58.34] If you could just imagine getting about four or five different shots-- and some of them, when you get inoculations, they spread them out over time because there's some that make your arms sore. There are some that make you have a little fever. But when you put all that in a person at one time, you just got a mixture of emotions and feelings and all kinds of things.

[00:10:22.25] And I mentioned the other day someone said, well, do you remember, where did your plane stop on the way over? And I'm like, I don't remember the plane stopping except when we got to Saigon or Tan Son Nhut Air Base. And then you got off, and they had a special area set up for the nurses because we were the first military females over there.

[00:10:49.32] And we stayed there, unlike the GIs who went to replacement battalions or whatever. They had this one place right there at the airport. And we stayed there until we went to the designated unit that we were-- wherever we were going to be going.

[00:11:10.46] And the problem with-- or the challenge with that is a better word-- is that when we arrived in country, the 24th Evac, which is the hospital to which I was assigned, was not completed. They were still building it. So we were sent TDY to different places throughout the country. And I went to the 85th Evac in Qui Nhon and stayed there until January of '67.

[00:11:47.60] SARAH BARKSDALE: So being the first military females in Vietnam, did you find that to be a particularly challenging experience?

[00:11:55.04] JOYCE BOWLES: No, I don't think so because we were very well taken care of, so to speak. We had places to sleep, places to eat. When we went up to Qui Nhon, they already-- because that hospital was already there, so those nurses were already in a place to stay.

[00:12:21.35] And we had running water and showers and indoor toilets. And who could ask for anything more? You can't miss what you never had, I guess, is the real thing.

[00:12:37.55] JOYCE BOWLES: The food was very good. It was mess hall food. All the-- Christmas is celebrated. Easter's celebrated. The cooks make sure you have a good meal. The food's very good.

[00:12:53.68] And Qui Nhon was very beautiful, totally unexpected. Qui Nhon by the Sea, we used to call it because it was. And we used to go to the beach and swim in the Red China Sea that they don't call it that anymore.

[00:13:13.18] There was relaxation, but there was work. And when you were there, we did 12-hour shifts six days a week. But on the seventh day, whatever day that was, if you had it off, if you heard the choppers come in, you were back at work anyway because you didn't know what they were bringing or how many people they were bringing or what.

[00:13:39.56] And so you were back to make sure that if there were more people needed to get the work done, you were there to get it done. Plus there wasn't anything else to do. So it was just a way of being, I guess-- a way of putting it.

[00:13:55.49] The nice thing about going as early as I did right after coming out of school, I was still basically a general practitioner. General med-surg is something that anybody coming out of school should be able to do. And, certainly, I could do that.

[00:14:13.15] I was assigned to an orthopedic ward. And on the orthopedic ward, we had two Quonsets. One was an air-conditioned Quonset in which we took care of any patient that came through that had a cast of whatever size because those casts had to be hard so that we could move them on.

[00:14:37.81] And the important thing was that we knew our job was to make sure that these kids-- and most of them were kids-- were ready to travel back to the States, Okinawa, Japan, wherever they were going to send them to. And that was the focus. On the other Quonset were kids who had sprains, strains, muscle injuries, whatever, and probably would return to their unit within 30 days.

[00:15:16.42] And we had a complementary staff. We had certainly enough people. And you didn't mind working more hours or more days because once you were there and into it, it was what you did. And it was a way of life.

[00:15:35.32] Shifts, I think, were probably 7:00 to 7:00. So you were up about 5:30, 6 o'clock. By the time you're showered and dressed, went to the mess hall, had breakfast, and then you were on your unit. Like I said, on the units that-- in a orthopedic ward, it's the morning care with the Soldiers to make sure they have hygiene care, back rubs, or whatever it was they needed they couldn't do for themselves. And you would feed them if they needed that.

[00:16:12.22] And then you'd spend time talking to them about what happened to them, trying to reassure them that we would do all the things that we could to make sure that they'll be ready to go home or wherever they-- and, I think, if I remember, we probably talked more about them going home as opposed to talking about them going to Japan or-- even though that might be where they were going next. But home made sense to them, and it made sense to us.

[00:16:48.25] And a routine day, you pass meds, and you read. If anything particular comes down through headquarters that needs to be done, you do that. And then it was time to go home, back to your hooch.

[00:17:09.13] JOYCE BOWLES: We had a mama-san-- we used to call them mama-sans-- who did our laundry, cleaned our cabins where we stayed. We had a beauty shop. They did hair, nails, and things like that. But not really forming friendships or any of that. I don't remember doing any of that.

[00:17:35.44] JOYCE BOWLES: Nurses-- oh, gosh. They were great. The esprit de corps was automatic. We were there. We were all there for the same reasons. No matter where or what part of the country we had come from, we had the same goal.

[00:17:57.85] And you didn't have to talk about it. You knew why you were there. You knew what had to be done, and you could do it. The nice thing is that you formed some friendships that lasted over the years, and some didn't. But that would happen wherever you are.

[00:18:20.62] But, most recently, for example, from the 24th Evac, we had, last year, a reunion, and I had an opportunity to go to that. And it was as though, for some of the girls, we picked up right where we left off 40 years ago just in terms of what we've been doing, how life has taken care of us or challenges that we've had or how other people are doing that we remembered and shared time with.

[00:19:01.36] And it was really interesting. Some of the people who served at the 24th Evac are people that I had worked with later on in the military. And I didn't even know that they had been there, and they didn't know I had been there. And it was like, oh, you were here? Yeah. When were you here?

[00:19:20.68] But we were there so early. And I didn't realize how early I was there until, most recently, I was on a trip. I just came back from Vietnam. And I was in a group of 12 people. And other than the one gentleman who had been in an adviser role in 1962, 1966, I was the next person who had been there so early.

[00:19:46.78] And I had no idea. Just it never even entered my mind because when I pulled the roster to look at the Army hospitals, I think the 45th Surg was there in October '65. And they were building the 24th Evac in July, August of '66. I didn't realize how early it had been that I was actually there. That was some definite new insight.

[00:20:20.87] SARAH BARKSDALE: So would you say you formed friendships with women from different racial or social backgrounds during your time there that you might not have back in the United States?

[00:20:29.26] JOYCE BOWLES: Oh, yeah, probably. Well, yes and no. Yes because of the situation that we found ourselves. No because in the military, I would have encountered that kind of diversity anyway. And if it hadn't been that group of women, it would have been a group of women or men someplace else, so, yeah.

[00:20:55.04] SARAH BARKSDALE: Now, it sounds like you didn't have a whole lot of extra time for recreation or off-duty activities. But if you did get that time off, what did you do for fun?

[00:21:02.98] JOYCE BOWLES: [LAUGHS] For fun. At the 24th-- well, in both of them-- in Qui Nhon, we had what they called the 93rd Compound Club. And it was a club where you could dance and get snacks. And there was liquor, and we were smoking in those days.

[00:21:26.57] That was also a place where people really let off their hair-- let their hair down. And, especially, you encountered the GIs, the officers who were out in the field doing things like flying helicopters or flying reconnaissance airplanes or those kinds of activities that just always kept them on the edge.

[00:21:51.95] And so you learned a lot about other things that were going on besides what was happening in the hospital because in the hospital, it was a safe environment. I truly never thought about getting shot at in the hospital. And maybe that was naive. Probably was. But I didn't. I don't think most of us did.

[00:22:13.24] At the 24th Evac, we had a small club. Again, it was a place where people could just come and dance and have snacks and just chit chat or whatever. We had movies.

[00:22:27.19] And, of course, then there was R&R that you were eligible for. Sometimes some people did R&R in country at Vung Tau. I never did that. I did my R&R outside of country. So that change of seven days-- five, seven days-- gave you a breath of fresh air so you could come back and go at it some more.

[00:22:54.96] SARAH BARKSDALE: So you were with-- while they were finishing building the 24th, you were with the 85th? And then when did you move back to the 24th?

[00:23:02.41] JOYCE BOWLES: January of '67 I moved back to the 24th Evac. And they were still building. It was interesting. As I was getting ready for my recent trip, I went online, and there was a picture of the 24th Evac in 1968 when it was finally completed. And I'm looking at this picture, and I'm thinking, gee, it didn't look like that when I was there.

[00:23:30.10] But I guess it's amazing to me because I never really looked for it. But the information that's on the internet about the hospitals and the people and just a ton of information about things that happened in Vietnam that-- I started looking at it because I was getting ready to go on this trip. That's why I started looking at it because, otherwise, it was something you just-- never really was interested in doing.

[00:24:13.18] JOYCE BOWLES: Significant actions. Everything we did was significant. There were some interesting things that happened. For example, at both hospitals, we often took care of either the ARVN soldiers, or we took care of Vietnamese children.

[00:24:36.59] One of the things that I really was not prepared for-- I remember at the 85th, we had a couple young kids. I don't remember, at this point, why they were on my ward, but they were. And they would often be very restless at night.

[00:24:58.78] And you'd go back, and you wake them up. And they would have to vomit. And when they did, and you looked at your emesis basin, you had a basin full of worms. And it was like, what is going on with these kids?

[00:25:16.22] Well, part of it-- a lot of it had to do with the kind of foods that they ate, which it was nothing that we would eat, and the fact that they didn't have enough to eat-- kind of a double-edged sword. So that's one thing that stands out in my mind because even in the States taking care of kids, at least you wouldn't-- even an adult, you would not expect them to regurgitate a pile of worms in an emesis basin.

[00:25:47.02] On the light side, when I was at the 24th Evac, we had an ARVN soldier. And he became acquainted with television because we had a television on our ward. And even though he did not speak English, and we certainly didn't speak Vietnamese, he learned enough from us, and we learned enough from him that he knew when certain shows came on television. He would ask us to turn the TV on. It's little things like that just added levity to a day.

[00:26:24.52] But, no, the gory details-- I didn't work in the emergency room. I didn't work in the OR. And that's the blood and guts of what was going on. Where I was, it was help people put it back together and get them ready to go home.

[00:26:48.86] JOYCE BOWLES: I'm not sure I have a most vivid memory. When I look back on it-- some people have said, would you do it again? The answer to that is yes. And the reason is that I think it was the right thing for me to be doing at that point in time with whatever was going on in our country. And that's about as close as I can get to answer your question, I think.

[00:27:24.02] JOYCE BOWLES: Probably. But the thing that I've learned-- the mind takes care of you. And on those days that were probably pretty lousy, you don't have to remember those. The closest I can come to that is I had a young guy-- and when I say young, they were all young, even though I was young at that time too. But they were all young, young.

[00:27:59.03] This guy came in. He was casted. He had one leg amputated, one arm gone, an eye gone, and full body cast. And they were getting ready to take him out. I was not pleased with the way that they came with the stretcher to move him. So I ended up going to the chief nurse's saying, you've got to come do something about this because he can't be treated this way.

[00:28:29.16] And she did, and we got it straight. And he's the one GI I remember. And I often think, did he ever get beyond the staging area at the next place? Because the other part of not holding on to things is that you don't know what happened to these kids.

[00:28:58.34] A couple of times when I was at Walter Reed, I would run into a few guys. They would say, hey, Lieutenant Johnson, remember you took care of me and da da da da. And I'm like, OK. I probably didn't remember them. But they remembered me, and I guess I had done something that made them want to remember.

[00:29:19.79] But it's better not to remember some things. At least for me, it has been better not to remember. When I came home, people would say, well, what did you do over there? And I'm like, took care of patients-- as though there was just something dramatic and gory.

[00:29:39.41] And I didn't have any gory stories to tell. I still don't have any gory stories to tell. And if I did, I don't know that I would even tell them because that's not what's important anymore.

[00:29:55.22] JOYCE BOWLES: Oh, the day I came home, the day I was packed up to ship out. Although arriving in the United States wasn't particularly happy. It was a time when everybody was angry about the war and didn't think we should be there and didn't like people in uniform and all of the negatives that were going on.

[00:30:18.81] So homecoming-- home-going was good. Homecoming was just-- I got off the plane and was like, OK, so you just go on to the next thing. And then that led-- not far after that, we were into the assassinations and the riots and all the other negative things that happened through that period of time. So it's, yeah.

[00:30:53.15] JOYCE BOWLES: Koreans had a hospital not far from where we were. And we had a couple of Army nurses that got married-- we had a gorgeous chapel-- and the Korean nurses had on their traditional Korean dress. So it made for a festive-type event, which was nice.

[00:31:21.17] JOYCE BOWLES: Oh, just letters in the mail. But when I went to Long Binh down to the 24th, I would do phone calls home every now and then. And I can't remember what they called it, but you went through a series of operators who were-- you'd get connected. And you'd say, over, and that person would connect you to somebody else.

[00:31:50.87] And by the time you got to the person that you were calling, you probably forgot what you were going to say. But it was a neat way to call back home. We certainly didn't have cell phones and all the things that people have had in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it was interesting.

[00:32:14.60] SARAH BARKSDALE: How much news did you receive about the political or social movements that were going on back home while you were in Vietnam?

[00:32:23.46] JOYCE BOWLES: If it was on-- what was it, the Armed Forces Television? I can't remember if that's what they called it. That's the place we got it. Nobody wrote to me to tell me how things were, and I didn't need that. It was whatever was on the Armed Forces station, and that was it.

[00:32:55.78] JOYCE BOWLES: August of '67. I don't know what I expected, actually. But what I remember is the plane was loaded with military folk. And when we landed, it was like, OK, we landed, and we're back. And I don't know whether I expected some rah rah or glad you're home or whatever, but there was none of that.

[00:33:24.65] It was kind of we landed-- I guess we were back at Travis-- and headed to wherever we had to go to catch the next plane to get back to where we were going to. And so that when people still say to me-- and I appreciate it-- welcome home, it feels good. And this is, like I said, 40 years later, so, yeah.

[00:33:52.41] SARAH BARKSDALE: When did your three-year commitment end? Because I remember you saying--

[00:33:56.18] JOYCE BOWLES: It kind of never did.

[00:33:57.67] SARAH BARKSDALE: Right, right. So how did you make the decision to stay in the Army?

[00:34:00.59] JOYCE BOWLES: Oh, that's interesting. I finished the psych nursing course, came back from Vietnam, and applied to go to graduate school. And, of course, in order to go to graduate school, I had to be RA. And, of course, since I had not planned to make the military a career, I was not RA. And I'm like, oh, no, that's not for me.

[00:34:27.42] And then the more I thought about it, I thought, well, you know what? So what, I'll just owe them three more years. And I can do that and still get out. So I became regular Army, and they sent me to graduate school at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. And I owed them three more years.

[00:34:44.16] Well, by then I had, what, six? because the two years in undergraduate school counted toward retirement plus the three years that I owed them for the first course and then three more years on top of that. So it kept adding up. And after a while I just stopped counting because I finished my master's degree in psychiatric nursing, taught at WRAIN, the Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing, for I think two years or two and a half years.

[00:35:14.80] And then I went back to school to finish my doctorate. Well, by the time I finished my doctorate, it was almost time to retire. So, like I said, the three years kept adding up so that ultimately I ended up at 20, 22.

[00:35:35.28] SARAH BARKSDALE: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to being back in the United States after the war?

[00:35:43.86] JOYCE BOWLES: I don't remember that I did, but that doesn't mean that I didn't. I came back. I was assigned back to Walter Reed again and back in my clinical specialty, which was psychiatry.

[00:36:01.43] And I guess what made it comfortable-- because I've always lived in Washington, I didn't have to adjust to the environment. I knew where things were and how to get there. And family was here, and so I didn't have to really deal with that.

[00:36:21.75] And then it became a matter of going to work. You get up, and you go to work like the rest of the people do. So, no, I don't remember that it was anything out of the ordinary.

[00:36:34.44] SARAH BARKSDALE: You mentioned that you sometimes attend reunions. How much contact have you kept with your fellow veterans over the years?

[00:36:41.98] JOYCE BOWLES: Actually, I have one friend that we just have been-- she lives in Florida. And we've just been back and forth over the years. But as of last September, the 24th Evac had a reunion.

[00:36:59.94] And we're in the process of planning a second reunion to commemorate the 50 year anniversary. I guess it's what most groups are doing. So we'll be meeting in Branson, Missouri, in September of 2016, and we'll be there for about four days, four or five days.

[00:37:24.70] JOYCE BOWLES: I grew up, recognized the importance of life, recognized the importance of having respect for myself as well as other people, and really internalized the importance of taking care of yourself.

[00:37:54.92] And I think that was-- a lot had to do with, again, when you see these young guys who-- some made it, and some didn't. But just knowing that, for whatever reason, they-- because, well, at that time, we still had the draft. So some of them came because they wanted to. Some of them came because they didn't have a choice.

[00:38:21.31] But the nurses were all volunteers. So we had nurses who left their civilian jobs because they wanted to do a tour in Vietnam for whatever their reasons were. And you learn from other people. Some of them were older than I was. Some of them were my same age. But you learn from other people.

[00:38:44.81] And so when people share their story of their life, what it was like, you look at and you learn that the options are not there for everybody all the time. So I think it really helps you to make some different decisions. And you don't just haphazardly go through life thinking, oh, well, I'll do this today, and maybe tomorrow I'll do that. You have a sense of purpose, which is probably why I ended up focusing on school and education because it was very clear that I needed to pay attention to that.

[00:39:25.78] Because even though I was at the University of Maryland for those two degrees, in the meantime, I was also doing the Advanced Officer course by correspondence and Command General Staff College by correspondence. You wanted to be competitive. You wanted to make sure that you were going to get promoted. And so you learned to do the things that put you in a good place.

[00:39:54.10] SARAH BARKSDALE: How did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans returning from combat today?

[00:39:59.31] JOYCE BOWLES: I see them, and some of them, I say to myself, the good Lord has blessed us because some of these kids that I see today would have never left Vietnam alive. So many advances in medicine and nursing practice, in combat medicine, has made such a difference for these young people to be able to just be up breathing and walking around. It's a miracle. It's truly a miracle and a blessing from the good Lord. It really is.

[00:40:41.25] SARAH BARKSDALE: Is there any memory or experience from your service in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had a lasting influence on your life or changed you in some way?

[00:40:50.10] JOYCE BOWLES: Probably other than what I've already shared with you, I don't think there's anything that has moved me. It's that sense of purpose, I think, that has probably made the biggest difference overall in things that I've done or things that I haven't done, in learning to give back, which I find is very important-- to be able to give back.

[00:41:29.81] SARAH BARKSDALE: How do you think our society remembers the Vietnam conflict today?

[00:41:33.82] JOYCE BOWLES: [LAUGHS] Not very well. What's interesting is I think in our society-- obviously, I don't think it's something that the kids learn about in school. But then, I'm not sure if they learn about any of the struggles of war in school anymore.

[00:41:59.26] I think we're almost into a generation of folks who-- it's so far removed from them that they don't focus on it or talk about it anymore. And then we have a whole 'nother set of generations that don't even know what we're talking about. And I'm not sure if you ask them, in comparison to what they've learned or what they've seen happen in Iraq and Afghanistan, if in their minds, there's even a mesh of, oh yeah, that happened, and that happened,

[00:42:45.09] but they were totally different. And what I mean by that is, for example, in Vietnam the war was everywhere. In World War II it seemed like, at least in the movies, there was a front. There was a place where the troops could land on Omaha Beach, and they would fight, da da da da. In Korea, there was a demarcation between us and them, so to speak.

[00:43:17.28] In Vietnam, us and them were everywhere. And the one thing that the Viet Cong had that we didn't have were those underground tunnels. And I guess what makes that so vivid in my mind is because when I was there the other week, I saw those tunnels. And those tunnels were all the things that people had said they were.

[00:43:47.55] They were large enough so that they had a hospital. They had machine factories. They had-- you name it. They had those tunnels well hidden underground. And they used them to the advantage of an advantage that we did not have.

[00:44:04.92] And I'm not a tactician. But as I understand it, we certainly were not used to fighting people all over the place. We were used to a front here and there kind of thing.

[00:44:16.80] So the kids who were in Iraq went for whatever their reasons were. But just the opportunity or the percentage of those who came home was greater. And the chances of coming back were greater than, I think, when we were in Vietnam.

[00:44:49.38] On the other hand, because we changed the way that people serve in the military, the idea that some of these people, kids, even the seasoned Soldiers, had to go back two, three, four times was just incredible and is just unheard of. And that to me is just not good.

[00:45:21.72] But people do things for different reasons. My husband was there twice in Vietnam. And the second time he went back, he more or less volunteered to go back.

[00:45:35.54] SARAH BARKSDALE: What do you think it meant to you and your generation then-- the war?

[00:45:38.91] JOYCE BOWLES: When I think about my friends and colleagues, they're still asking the question, why were we there? What did we accomplish? And I don't know. I don't know the answer to that question, and some of them don't either.

[00:46:02.28] SARAH BARKSDALE: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:46:07.28] JOYCE BOWLES: Make every day count for something. Appreciate what you have, no matter how little or how big, because it's not promised. And appreciate your friends and your family. And just as they all say, never go to bed angry.

[00:46:40.95] My husband and I were in two different Vietnam wars. He was there twice. During the two tours that he was there, he was in 14 different places throughout the country, always in a combat situation. I was real safe in a hospital, either Qui Nhon or Long Binh, taking care of patients, having decent meals, a good bed to sleep in, not out in the rice paddies and worried about the terrain or animals or any of that kind of stuff.

[00:47:19.78] And so when we talk about it, we talk about the fact that we were in two different wars. He has-- well, for example, when I had an opportunity to go on the trip that I just went on, and I asked him, don't you want to go with me, no, I don't ever want to see that place again.

[00:47:40.69] And I keep saying to him, it would be good for you to do that, to get some closure, to get some of whatever that emotion is out so that you can move on because when you hold on to things like that, there are parts of you that can't move on. And in order to move on, sometimes you need to get rid of things.

[00:48:07.30] So I'm still working on him. He says that the reason I keep talking about it is because I'm a psychiatric nurse. And I keep telling him, yeah, he's correct. So once I get him to deal with some issues, then he'll be ready to move on too.

[00:48:28.53] JOYCE BOWLES: Once. Probably one or two years when it was first put up. And I'm still amazed at the young lady who had the insight to put such a monument together. It really brings home the message.

[00:48:53.55] My husband and I went once. We've never been back. We keep saying we're going to go back. But we did not do well when we were there. And so I think we've been avoiding the emotional upset.

[00:49:14.56] JOYCE BOWLES: I think it's a great idea. There's a lot more I'd like to know about it, but I think it's a great idea. It reminds me of the commemorations that have been going on with the World War II veterans. And it's nice that it's happening before I get 90, [LAUGHS] you know? Yeah. Yeah.

[00:49:38.96] SARAH BARKSDALE: Well, ma'am, thank you so much for speaking with us today.

[00:49:42.11] JOYCE BOWLES: Absolutely. Yeah.