

Gift and Release Agreement

We JoAnn Parke and VANCE FLEMING
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

do hereby give and grant to Dr. Suzanne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History, Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

1026 Vida Drive Anniston, AL

on the date(s) of 4/3/95
for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

JoAnn Parke
Interviewee's signature

Address 1026 Vida Dr
ANNISTON AL 36206
Phone 820-2598

Date 3 APR 95

[Signature]
Interviewer's signature

Address 6016 CLARE RD #37
ANNISTON AL 36206
Phone 820 8905

Date 3 APR 95

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: JO ANN PARKE (Maiden: KIKER) M/F FEMALE
Address: 1026 VIOA DR ANNISTON AL 36206
Phone number(s): (205) 320-8905
Approximate age or date of birth: 20 MAR 1946
Mother's Name: EDNA L. HUMPHREY KIKER
Father's Name: FLOYD H. KIKER
Places lived and when: ANNISTON, AL; FT CAMPBELL, KY;
GERMANY; FT BENNING, GA; OHIO; ALEXANDRIA, AL
Education: BUSINESS COLLEGE (GADSDEN, AL); ALEXANDER
Religion: BAPTISTS
Business, political and social memberships (past and present) UNKNOWN

Present occupation: BOOKKEEPER FOR SERVICE ROACTY
Former occupations: SEAMSTRESS, RETAIL MANAGEMENT
Special Skills: _____
Major Accomplishments: _____

National Events in which interviewee has participated: UNKNOWN

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: UNKNOWN

National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No
Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____
Country from which he/she emigrated: _____
Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee:

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral
history interview: _____
Additional information: HUSBAND RETIRED FROM MILITARY

A SOLDIER'S WIFE'S STORY

by

Vance Fleming

The Viet Nam War was a very dark period for the world. It was the first war the United States had ever lost, assuming that there is really a winner in any war. During my life, I have heard many versions of what was happening, why we were there, and the ordeals that the soldiers faced in Viet Nam. On the other hand, I do not ever recall hearing of the ordeals that the spouses of our soldiers went through back home.

In June, 1967, Jo Ann Kiker was the mother of two children, divorced from her first marriage and working as the manager of the Lenlock Restaurant. This restaurant had a lot of military patrons since it is near the Fort Mc Clellan military base.

One of these patrons asked her to go out. Perry Eugene Parke was a career military man. He also had two children from a previous marriage, but they lived with their mother in Columbus, Georgia.

After dating each other for six weeks on a regular basis, Perry asked Jo Ann to marry him. They were married on the nineteenth of February the following year.

Having little knowledge of the military lifestyle, Jo Ann was not prepared for some of the events that were going to take ^{place} shape in her life. "My husband was in under the old rule. If the Army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one." It was difficult being a military spouse since the Army is under the impression that a soldier is a soldier twenty-four hours a day, everyday. All the normal household responsibilities are placed on the spouse.

Shortly after their first child was born, Perry was sent on a tour-of-duty to Germany. His family was not allowed to go on this separation of eighteen months. When his tour was over, he came home on leave before heading to his next duty assignment.

At this time, the United States was actively and publicly involved in the war. "There were a lot of demonstrations going on. A lot of people against it. A lot of people against the soldiers over there."

"He volunteered to go to Viet Nam." This brought on feelings of fear and anger. By the end of the war more than 59,000 U.S. soldiers had died. Also, there were numerous wounded and missing-in-action soldiers. Since the public was aware of tragedies that were taking place, it was easy for Jo Ann to imagine a worst-case-scenario.

During Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, everybody was behind the military. There were many more public rallies supporting our soldiers than those opposing our involvement. There were support groups for the spouse and family. If there was a problem with finances or other issues, there was a convenient somebody to take care of it.

Compared to the military today, the military then was not very family-oriented. "I felt very isolated because it just seems like they took your husband but yet you had nothing." There were no support groups or people to quickly take care of any problems. "You were really just left out. They (the military) felt like if you got their check, that was enough."

She did receive support from her family, though, especially from her younger brother Ralph. "He stayed with me a lot so I talked to him."

She was fearful for her husband's safety. She, like many families across America, watched the nightly newsreels of the fighting and wounded soldiers in Viet Nam. "I can

always indicate name of a quite soldier

He remembered

Jo Ann needed

she said

remember the children sitting on the couch just crying. They were totally afraid because of what they had seen. And they knew 'That's where my Daddy is'. They were really afraid."

Jo Ann
She found herself watching a lot of television news and reading any information that came out. "They wouldn't give out a lot of information. I can remember sitting at night just waiting. It was like you were waiting for something to happen, for that telegram to come or someone to come knocking on the door."

While in Viet Nam, Perry was wounded. A tank which he was in was on fire and he was pulling people out. The hatch fell and hit him on the back, severing a nerve. He still has medical problems from this injury. He was Medi-vaced to Cameroon Bay and then to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC. Once he was back in the states, he was able to call his wife and let her know his condition. The letter from the military arrived at her house six weeks after Perry was taken to Washington, DC. That also was the day that she was picking him up from the airport. *(a little later!)*

The military was slow in other ways, also. "Letters were very sporadic. You might get two letters this week, and it might be three weeks before you would get another. It always seemed like there were letters missing." She was never ~~for~~ sure that they received all of their letters.

"At that point there were no telephone calls back (to the states)." But they found a way to still ~~get~~ hear each other's voice. Before he left, they purchased two tape recorders. "We sent tapes and that really helped. You could hear them speaking. You could read a lot in a letter, but when you hear it in a person's voice you can also get feelings from it. It

was just like Christmas" when she received tapes from Perry. The tapes were less frequent than the letters due to the lack of them in Viet Nam. *? unless*

"You kept everything. And you tried to keep things that the children had done while he was gone so that he could share in that when he got back."

A good and bad time for the Parke family was when Perry took mid-tour leave while Jo Ann was visiting his family in Ohio. "I was really surprised. It was really something else." He was home for thirty days. But then he had to go back to Viet Nam to do the last six months of his tour. "It was worse...because then you knew what he was going into. His nerves were so bad and mine were so bad. I can remember driving home from Ohio." What was normally a thirteen hour trip took over twenty-one hours.

When he returned from Walter Reed Hospital, Jo Ann was happy. She was "glad that it was finally over with, knowing that he wouldn't have to go back to Viet Nam."

a little out of Chrono. confusing.

The Viet Nam War lasted for about six months after Perry's return home. He stayed in the military for a total of twenty-three years. "Had he not invested that much time in the military (when he returned from Viet Nam) and with his physical handicaps, he probably would have gotten out (after his return)."

It has now been over twenty years since our soldiers withdrew from Viet Nam. Jo Ann could not pin point a specific vivid memory. "I guess it would be a collage of them. We're looking back now ... and we see the horrors that the men had to go through. And how they were treated back in the United States, the people that they went over there to defend. I guess that really makes me angry. Because these guys went over and a lot of them ... were only eighteen or nineteen years old. They took them in (the military) and six

good quote

weeks later they were in Viet Nam. They were no more prepared than anything. To look back to the day that Saigon fell, and see all of the things that went on that day. The U.S. was just able to snatch the last ones out in the nick of time."

After watching some of the Viet Nam War movies with her husband, she asked if that was really how it was. There are some that are realistic. It gives you some insight as to what went on. "The cruelty and not that many supplies, the terrains" were difficult. "To think a child is carrying a bomb that is going to blow up everything. Americans pride themselves on protecting children. Over there, they (the Vietamese) used that same thing back on" us as a weapon. "A good many of them (U.S. soldiers) used drugs over there. Looking back you can almost see why."

When we first started sending troops over, *Jo Ann recalls* "We had just ended World War II, and we felt like we had won it. We're going over there and we're going to change something. We're going to make this country a little U.S.A. Somewhere along the way something went wrong."

"After-the-fact, Viet Nam was a waste of time, money, a lot of it was political. A lot of people made a lot of money off it, that's the reason it went on for so long. I feel like nothing was gained. The ones that came back were persecuted and I don't think the government has supported them." *she explain*

When all was said and done, Jo Ann and I were discussing this project and other matters. Perry, knowing that we were finished with our interview, came upstairs and summed up the whole thing in just a few words. "Do you want my opinion on Viet Nam? It **SUCKED!**"

Great ending!

95

**TAPE RECORDING
HISTORY PROJECT
VANCE FLEMING
HY 202 TUES-THURS**

This is an oral history interview with Jo Ann (Kiker) Parke conducted by Vance Fleming on the 3rd of April, 1995, at 1026 Vida Dr., Anniston, AL. The subject of this interview describes the life of a military-spouse during and after the Viet Nam Conflict.

TABLE OF CONTENTS
for
TAPE RECORDING
HISTORY PROJECT
VANCE FLEMING
HY 202 TUES-THURS

- 3/20/36
1. Background/Personal information. (Date and Place of Birth; names of parents, grandparents, and children; education; religion; and current/previous jobs).
 2. Information on meeting and marriage to husband.
 3. Husband volunteers to go to Viet Nam.
 4. Personal opinions of the military--Parts One and Two.
 5. Public opinion of military at that time.
 6. Personal opinions of the military--Part Three.
 7. Local opinion of the military and Fort McClellan (Then and Now).
 8. Lack of support for the military.
 9. Newsreels during Viet Nam Conflict.
 10. Personal opinions of the military--Part Four (While husband was in Viet Nam).
 11. Husband wounded in Viet Nam (Lack of information from the military).
 12. Mail to and from husband.
 13. Husband's mission in Viet Nam.
 14. Support from her family.
 15. How husband was wounded and medical condition.
 16. Husband's Mid-Tour Leave.
 17. Husband's medical treatment and final return home.
 18. Personal opinions of the military--Parts five and Six.
 19. Different Duty Stations.
 20. Most vivid memory during the Viet Nam timespan.
 21. Personal opinions of the military--Part Seven.
 22. Support for Viet Nam soldiers versus Desert Shield/Storm soldiers.
 23. Viet Nam War Movies (Real-like versus Made-up).
 24. Reaction to tactics used by the Viet-Cong against U.S. soldiers.
 25. Opinions of current relations with Viet Nam.
 26. Opinion of Viet Nam After-the-Fact.
 27. Opinion of Viet Nam when the U.S. involvement first became public knowledge.

1. General Information: Full name- ✓
Birth place- ✓

Date of Birth- ✓

Mother's name (Maiden)- ✓

Her father- ✓

Her mother (Maiden)- ✓

Father name- ✓

His mother (Maiden)-

His father- ✓

Your children (DOB)- ✓

Education Level-High School Attended- ✓

Universities Attended- ✓

Religion- ✓

Previous jobs- ✓

2. How, when, where did you meet your husband? ✓

3. When did he ask you to marry him? ✓ 64ks

4. Was there a public awareness of the situation in Viet Nam
at the time? ✓

5. How much of an advance warning did your family have that
your husband was going to Viet Nam? ✓ was in Germany

6. What were your feelings for the military at that time? ✓

7. How long was he in Viet Nam? ✓

8. What did you do while he was over there? (e.g. work; ✓
public rallies; ect...)

9. What were things like where you lived? ✓
10. How was public support in your area? ✓
11. I have seen television shows of news broadcast from the war. Do you remember these broadcast? If so, tell me about watching them. ✓
12. How often did you hear from your husband? ✓
13. Tell me what YOU were doing when your husband FIRST came home. ✓
14. Tell me your feelings for the military at that time. ✓
15. Your husband retired from the military. Tell me something about the military. ✓
16. It is now over 20 years since American soldiers withdrew from Siagon. Looking back, tell me your most vivid memory of Vietnam. ✓
17. Tell me how you feel about the Viet Nam Conflict today. ✓

Wounded