

Annaleigh Baggett

Oral History Transcript

Q: Okay, are you ready to get started?

Doris Cantrell: Yes, that'd be fine.

Q: Okay, can you tell me your name and a little bit about yourself?

Doris Cantrell: Yes, my name is Doris Cantrell. I'm a 70-year-old retired female. I have three grown children; six grandchildren and I am now in the third stage of retirement. Um, I live in Arab, AL. I'm close to Redstone Arsenal so my military career was associated out at Redstone Arsenal primarily, but I have had other careers also. Is that kind of equivalent to what you're looking for?

Q: Yes, so you said you obviously live close to Redstone Arsenal, so you worked there, is that correct?

Doris Cantrell: That's correct. I actually had a twenty-seven-year career with Department of Army and Department of Defense because during my career, some of the facilities that I was associated with transferred over to Department of Defense. I actually began my career at Department of Army in 1974 with military pay which covered payments for all the military that was associated with Redstone Arsenal to include those that had been assigned to Redstone and yet had been stationed at overseas locations. Um, during the time that I started my career in 1974, was at the ending of the Vietnam War. So, my involvement in that area of the military was in the portions where the soldiers were being brought home and unfortunately, for those that were not fortunate enough to come home the deaths associated with military, taking care of the payments, the families, in the event of a casualty.

Q: Okay, in 1974 how old would you have been in that year?

Doris Cantrell: I was twenty-five when I began my career with Department of Army.

Q: Okay, so was that your first job, was that, had you had jobs before that, what was your experience, how was it different if you had had a job before then?

Doris Cantrell: Well, I actually started my work career when I was sixteen years old in high school. I actually worked on a work release program through high school and worked with, um, a local bank. Then, when I graduated from high school, I graduated on like, a Monday night and went to work Tuesday morning for a large bank in Huntsville, and during that time when I was working for the bank, I also began my education out at UAH, the University of Alabama Huntsville. So, from there, um from the, during the schooling time then I did work for for government contractors- two different government contractors- before I began my career with Department of Army. So, my career up until the point I began then with Department of Army, um, was more in the financial arena and even though the military pay was in the financial arena, it took on a whole different role because everything was governed by Army regulations and this made everything have a different spin to it.

Q: Okay, so you said you had some other jobs before this, so how would those compare, like, work environment or like climate wise to the job you had during the Vietnam War? Like did the war tensions or circumstances affect how your work environment was?

Doris Cantrell: I think it definitely affected the way the work environment was because I was working with, directly with, military personnel. Um, both enlisted and um officers, and until you have been around that group of people, you just can't realize that they're a different breed. So yes, it put a different spin on the work environment plus it was different in the fact of having to have a soldier's family come in when they had received word of a casualty and they came in for

assistance and you had to put on a whole different feeling about you to be able to be sympathetic and yet be professional in your work.

Q: Okay, so you said you had to meet with people that were the family members of the soldiers, can you talk a little bit about that experience?

Doris Cantrell: Yes, according to the regulation which the military pay is governed by Army regulation 37-104 and according to that regulation, when there is a service member that is deceased, um, if it is, it's paid in a different manner based upon if they were actually killed during combat or they were just on foreign soil and were killed by accident over there but, those regulations told us what we needed in order to pay, um, the survivors from that service member. So, when a, when a family was notified of a casualty of their family member they were automatically assigned a Casualty Assistance Rep, or a CAR, as it was referred to, and that was a person that guided them in all the things that they needed to do in order to make sure that they got the entitlements that they were due, 'cause a lot of family members didn't know basically anything about that service member's, uh, position other than yes, he's in the Army and yes, he was in Vietnam but they didn't know what they were entitled to so, the CARs kinda guided the family members and sometimes those family members would be a spouse, sometimes it would be parents, it would be for those single service members that had gone in and their parents was their beneficiaries on their entitlements. So, regardless of whether or not it was, which direction it was um, we were...we had the regulations that guided us what to do and how to make sure those families received the entitlements they were due.

Q: Okay, so from what I gathered from that you, would you say that, it was a lengthy process to get the payments that the soldiers were entitled to and the family members it was probably a confusing process for them, would you say that?

Doris Cantrell: Oh, it absolutely was lengthy because uh, first of all, we had to get into their military pay records in order to um determine what they were entitled to and by that regulation, the first payments to be made to that service member's beneficiary has to be processed within twenty-four hours of them having been notified of the casualty. And because of that, that's twenty-four hours regardless if it's in a calendar clock that's running on a weekend. So, having worked in the military pay area, there were several of us and I was included in that, that were set up as emergency contacts where that the CAR had those names and phone numbers and so when they were helping that service member's beneficiaries, they would contact one of us because sometimes there would be times when you weren't available, you couldn't report in and that's why there was multiple people that were uh, set up as those emergency contacts. So there had to be someone that had access to the military pay records themselves and there also had to be, access, we had to have access to the cashiers that could actually make cash payments to those beneficiaries. So, when we went into... had to go into our physical location, there at Redstone, and get into that, that service members record, that was the, the military pay records as they were referred to, and we had to determine who the beneficiaries were and what entitlements that soldier was going to be um, entitled to. Because if they were um, performing duty in a combat zone, they were getting hazardous duty pay. If they were, um, if they had family members that were back here, uh, maybe that was a spouse or some of them would have children then they were entitled to um, BAQs, SR- that was the Basic Allowance for Quarters, the Separate Rations, so we had to make sure that those family members received the money that they needed in order to keep their life going forward while we got everything taken care of.

Q: So, there were a lot of different, possible, entitlements that a soldier could have gotten, is that correct?

Doris Cantrell: Absolutely, and then once that we saw that we had the initial, um, entitlements taken care of, then based upon that soldier's, um, election and his entitlements prior to going overseas, his death gratuity, it could range different type payments like, could start out at say \$100,000 for his death gratuity payment and then if he were, say it was an officer and he had elected multiple, um, times his rank it could go up to say, \$300,000. So, those were payments that had to be generated um, at another location at a main Department of Army location. The payments that we took care of at the local facility at Redstone were those monetary benefits that were like emergency benefits. But, what we did as far as how we coded their military pay records, they were filtered forward through the system to let the Department of Army locations know that there was a death, and this was the soldier, and this is what his entitlements were. If in fact, let's say for example if he had, uh, he had gotten in a financial bind and he had borrowed money, and that is uh, that's an option and it can happen and so if he had borrowed money, we had to go through his records and make sure that if there was an outstanding amount that had to be collected back before all of the other entitlements were paid to him. Now, that didn't come out of that initial amount that was the monetary benefits that was paid within that twenty-four-hour period. The family received that amount regardless of how much he might have owed. Because, that amount was provided to the family in order for them to have income, um, to go on with what needed to be done. I mean, you know, they had to get the body back here they had to take care of, it could be used for multiple things- it could be used to get family members there and of course yes, the Army will bury them but there's other things that you want to uh, you know, apply that money and it could be flowers, it could be any number of things. So that amount they were paid in full but, the amounts that were doable after that initial monetary

benefit was paid to them, then it had to be researched and make sure that there was not any offsetting debts that would have to be deducted.

Q: So, if there were any debts that a soldier owed, they would still have to...somebody would have to pay that at some point, is that what you're saying?

Doris Cantrell: Yes, what would actually happen is um, let's say for example, that the soldier was paid say, the first and the fifteenth of each month. Well, they might have been paid the first of the month and let's say the casualty occurred on the fourteenth. Okay, they were still entitled to what they had accrued the first to the fourteenth, and that was just in regular pay. So, that regular pay that he was entitled to would be paid to a beneficiary but, anything that he owed back to the government from previous expenses would be deducted from that. Or, if there was not enough entitlement that was due to be paid to him to offset the indebtedness that he already had, then it could be deducted from that death gratuity payment that could be like I said, up to \$100,000-\$300,000. So, there was always means of collecting that debt and unfortunately, the government's going to get that. If there is an indebtedness to them, they are going to collect it one way or the other. There's many means by which they can collect an indebtedness, to include garnishing wages for, um, income tax. Like, when someone has paid income tax, um, or filed income tax and they have a refund due, that refund can be used to collect an indebtedness that was owed to the government also. So those are things that we had to research and know exactly what the soldier was entitled to before we could put in the paperwork to create that last payment.

Q: So, with this, this topic of, um., indebtedness. I hope I said that right. Did you ever deal with any family members who maybe like resented you and your position for, now they've just had a family member who just passed away and you're telling them like, in the... in this time of they're trying to grieve and the war's going on and just issues like that, did you ever deal with

anyone who had an issue with your job and the fact that you were trying to get money from them and give it back to the government?

Doris Cantrell: That's a great question. Yes, we did because unfortunately, when there's been a death the family members...most of the time, I started to say "very often" but I'll really say most of the time, they looked at everything from the "poor pitiful me" attitude... and we were sorry for them, we were sorry for their loss, but there was a regulation that we were required to follow. So it took a lot of sympathy on our parts and yet it took professionalism to try to explain to them why you were having to collect money back and not be insulting to a family member.

Q: So, I'm sure that was probably difficult for you to have to deal with those emotions and different things.

Doris Cantrell: It was difficult in dealing with those emotions on every aspect of this. Especially, I know that one of the first I ever had to go in and pay was a parent. It was actually a father and he came in and he was just completely lost. Had it not been for that CAR that came in for him, that was representing them and trying to give him some guidance, all he was was just standing there with tears, he just couldn't speak. And that made it difficult.

Q: That just sounds...really...awful to have to deal with that. So, you said that this person, like, came into the office and was really upset. Is that correct?

Doris Cantrell: That's correct.

Q: And so, were there multiple incidents where you had to deal with family members in a face to face environment?

Doris Cantrell: Well, the ones we had to deal with there at Redstone are those that was either assigned to Redstone before being assigned to that overseas location, to that Vietnam location. Or, they were located at another military installation and upon notification that they were being

um, reassigned to Vietnam, they elected to choose Redstone as their home of record. And their families, whether it be like, you know, spouses or whatever, their families came to live in the vicinity of Redstone. So that they could use the facilities of Redstone while their spouse- or whatever the service member was to them, while they were in that overseas location.

Q: Wow, so you're saying that there were people who were not even from Huntsville who were potentially not even from the state of Alabama that had to move to Huntsville and live there and then also deal with the fact, later on, that their loved one had passed away in the Vietnam War?

Doris Cantrell: That's exactly right because you might have a soldier that Redstone was their home of record, which that's who maintains their military files when they are in an overseas location. Well if for Redstone to be their home of record, the spouse, you know, relocated there and of course in that position, you know, by being there she had access to the, like, to the Commissary or the PX, you know, to get groceries and, you know, clothing and things like that. But she also had access to the um, well I kinda went blank, to the um, Fox Army Hospital so that she had access for uh, medical and medicine. Well she may have never been to Alabama before they moved back. She might be as far away as California, well then the they're assuming the spouse is going to be overseas she has everything she's going to need while he's gone and when he gets back and relocate to the next duty station. And unfortunately, that didn't happen because the soldier was not able to return because it was a casualty and then there in that case, you have a spouse and you have possibly children that knows no one around in this vicinity and they had to get their, what their entitlements were and then they also had to start making arrangements to relocate that family back to an area that, you know, they had family members to support them or you know, something like that so, in that event we were there to support them in the next phase of the benefits they were entitled to because the government would pay to relocate them to their

next, it's called a "duty station" even though that service member was no longer with them they had to get them to a location that was, like, called a duty station. So in that event, they were paid travel pay, and they were paid relocation allowances to get everything to that next duty station that was going to be their home. So, the lengthy things that took place, it was like a bumper car effect. You might take care of Step 1 and Step 2, and only led to Step 3 and 4. You take care of Step 3 and 4 and it led you on to 5 and 6. Yes, there were lots of things that we encountered that we had to continually assist. And while I worked in military pay, I also then transferred from military pay up into travel pay. And so I saw another side of what was due to that soldier and to the allowances that that family was entitled to in relocation upon a soldier's death.

Q: So, that's just a lot of steps as I can see. So with all these different things that like these spouses or children are having to deal with. Now they've lost somebody, and they are having to deal with this in a place that's not their home, and they're having to continually think about and do things for this loved one that is now deceased, do you or have you had any experience with it, please share, but do you think personally that they probably had resentment to the war itself considering the circumstances surrounding the fact that it was in such a far away country and it was kinda hard to picture, do you think they had any resentment towards that?

Doris Cantrell: I think there was a tremendous amount of resentment because a lot of people couldn't understand why the United States was involved in it, period. And, the fact that their spouse had been sent to a far away country to serve in a conflict that was really never referred to as a war because war was never declared. And that's why even after the war was over, which of course, I was there in 1975 when the soldiers, that last group of soldiers, you know was coming back to the United States. And, you know, there was no welcome back for those soldiers. There was...it was not a good acknowledgement of a war over, because it was a war that was never

really a war. So I think there was a lot of resentment. Now, mostly, in most cases the soldiers, if they were in there they were a true buy in, in other words, they were over there because that's what they felt like they should do, but it was harder on the family when that soldier didn't come home.

Q: I could definitely see that. So, since you did work on the Arsenal where a lot of military related things go on, did you ever work with any person who survived the war and came back and worked in your same department after it was over?

Doris Cantrell: Yes, I did. Um, the military pay branch actually had several positions that was filled with military service members, um, and we had a lot of young ones in there, and they were, they were just happy to be back. You know, most of them were not married and when they came back, they were kind of a pain to deal with they were so happy to be back, they just wanted to have a ball every day. But, as a whole they came in, they did their job-they knew what to do, they knew what was going on when someone came in and that had experienced situations, they could identify with locations, they could identify with what the environment was like over there and they were the first, they would absolutely be the first to jump up and take care of another soldier coming in. And they did it volunteeringly because they had been there, and they knew what it was like.

Q: So, did any of them ever come back and tell you kind of like, what their experience was, what it was like in Vietnam, what any of the people over there were like?

Doris Cantrell: Most of the ones...most of the military that came back and worked in the immediate area where I was, was more of an administrative type personnel, but we had soldiers that would come through that, you know, we would service when they came back into the States that would tell us, you know, about um, the things that, that they experienced while they were

over there such as the little kids coming up and the little kids was always beginning them for chewing gum that was the first thing that a little child wanted was gum. And when they would write home to families and families would send them, like, goody packages over there, things that they weren't getting, like what they needed on an everyday basis...they got all of their clothing, all of their meals, any medical they needed. They got all those things. But the families would do kinda like kids away at college, they like to give goody bags. Well, the families would do that and the soldiers would tell them, "please send us lots of gum" because those little kids always come up and wanted gum. Either that, or they wanted hard candy. And that's the things the soldiers could put in their pockets and have it available to give kids. But, they had to be very careful because a lot of times those little kids were being sent out by the Vietcong military groups. And they were used as like...they kids were used as like a decoy to lure in the American soldiers. So they had to, you know like, stay on their P's and Q's to um, stay alert and not get drawn into something by the little kids.

Q: That's so interesting, so do you think the soldiers probably like...do you think it was hard for them sympathize with the kids knowing that potentially it could be a danger to them?

Doris Cantrell: I think that... I think as a general rule the soldiers loved seeing the little kids because it reminded them of home. When you stay in a barracks of nothing but guys over there and you just... I think they appreciated the fact of being able to be around the children because it reminded them of home, and they loved to give to them. But I think they were cautioned, and I think they were cautioned mainly by their um, upper ranking officers telling them "don't be lured in" you know, "don't be taken advantage of" but I think most of them just completely enjoyed um, their interactions with the children.

Q: That is interesting and I did not know any of that...so that's a good thing to know but um, back to kind of like, your day to day work environment, can you tell me a little bit about like when you came into work, like, what it typically was like during the day?

Doris Cantrell: Um...On a regular basis, when there wasn't anything that had occurred as far as injuries or casualties or something like that, we came...we would come in on a daily basis and we had soldiers that were assigned there to Redstone that had nothing to do with the war itself, that was just a duty station for them. Or, they were in there for um, what's called AIT, Advanced Individual Training, and...pardon?

Q: Oh, I didn't say anything.

Doris Cantrell: Oh, I'm sorry! So, when our...the regular, um, personnel that was assigned to Redstone...they could make any kind of... record changes to their personnel, they could do, you know, they could get married- that would change their status. They could change their income tax, they could borrow money and that would create a liability that, you know, where we had to deduct money from their pay and all those type documents came in to us literally on a daily basis or multiple times a day. So, at that time we were not as automated as the government became in... in the years ahead. But we had to go in and create transcript sheets that would tell a keypunch operator that sits down at old timey key punching machines and keyed it in and it would generate a card that would be fed into a machine that would result in changes to that soldier's pay records. And we maintained what was called a PIFR, Personnel Information...oh I have to stop and think...Financial Record. Personal...Personnel Individual Finance Records, PIFRs. And the thing that was... that was generated was done in paper form. There was no electronic that went on during that time and so all of those documents had to be filed in those folders, those PIFRs. So, once we keyed documents, once we generated the transactions sheets

and then they key that into, um, punch cards to be put through an automated system. Once we did that, then those hard copy document records came back to us and they had to be filed into those PIFRs. And then, the first and the fifteenth of the month, once again, there was no automation, so there was um... there was actual hard copy pay stubs that was generated by Department of Army System that was sent in to us that came in, in alphabetical order, and those had to be filed in those records. Some of those records might not have, you know, eight or ten documents in it. Some would be so much that if you dropped them in the floor, you'd never get them all picked up and back in order. But we um, we actually maintained those records, everything that related to that soldier was in that folder. And when that soldier relocated and went on to another installation, then we had to forward those records with them. Or, we had to assign them out to the soldier and there were cases when they would actually carry them with them to the next installation and then when they processed their personnel, the personnel would take the personnel records and financial records and forward them to the military pay group at that installation and once again, the circle of events would take place just the same.

Q: So, I'm sure your job was ten times harder than it needed to be had you had a computer or some type of technology to help you.

Doris Cantrell: ABSOLUTELY! Once automation started coming into place, everybody was in absolute awe. It um... we couldn't believe how easy things could have been had we had had that years before. And it's to the point today that there is not a... there's not a folder like I referred to, that PIFR that I referred to. All of that's in a system and there's not even documents. Now, there's things that get scanned in and you know, scanned in, copy attached to their records but there is no hard copy records anymore. Everything is automated and what started out, um, there at Redstone, there was probably...oh my goodness... there was probably sixty to seventy of us

that worked in that area and the military pay... there is still small groups attached to Redstone but with the realignment, the base realignment closure... the BRAC and a lot of things changed to different installations. The...I went blank...um...Oh, the automation that occurred with that... that group that stays with Redstone, that stayed at Redstone, there's probably not more than ten there now.

Q: Oh goodness. So, with everything being on paper and having all these files, like what you were saying, did you ever experience like, let's say... I'm sure paperwork took longer to get from one place to the other and down the chain of command and stuff... did you ever have a family member come and try to start the process that you were talking about before and they maybe had to come back multiple times and it be an inconvenience for them because of all the different information that you had to gather?

Doris Cantrell: Are you referring to um, family members where there was a casualty or just in general?

Q: Either.

Doris Cantrell: Well, if it was a casualty, we had ways where we could call to different locations and get the information and we didn't have to wait on hard copy documents. It went to every extreme to take care of that family member without creating more of an inconvenience to them. So, in that case, I think they went above and beyond to take care of the family members. But, there were some instances with... family members coming in and the soldiers having told them that they did something... they created documents and they had put it through the system and that PIFR I referred to had no documents there and then we would have to start tracing back to anybody that would have signed off on that document, anybody that might have a photostatic copy of that document to try to run down what...what was missing. Um, some of the most

comical things that took place was that PIFR and I referred to and those documents, that you know, some would have such a few that, it would get lost because there was hardly anything there. And when I refer to this, it was kinda like... it was kinda like a, um, kinda like a manila folder except it was thicker and it was maintained in these hanging files. You know, it was filed alphabetical and maintained in the hanging files. Well, when those monthly or bi-monthly pay stubs came in that we had to file, there...everybody in the office, because we had to have hundreds that we had to do and everybody in the office would take a stack of those, uh, those documents because they pull the records out of those hanging files and because we would purge the records... clear out everything that shouldn't be in there, make sure you had the latest up front, etc. And they would take them to their desk where they could sit down and work the records and not have to stand in front of those hanging files. Well the comical, if you can look for anything comical in this work environment, is when you see someone's got one of those records that's got uh, three inches thick that would fill up one entire hanging file and they're trying to purge it and get it cleaned out and they drop the whole file.

Q: Oh no!

Doris Cantrell: Those records had to be kept in a specific order and it would literally... you drop something that uh, an extremely active file it would take forever to get that thing back in order, and purged, and ready to be put back in the files. Those are the days that was just comical, and we needed that compared to some of the days we had encountered.

Q: So, you did have some days that were more lighthearted when you worked in such a... not

Doris Cantrell: Yes...

Q: ...fun environment.

Doris Cantrell: Yes, we did, and it depended too on... there was always um... it was senior enlisted personnel, but it would be like a... command sergeant major, which is the upper level of the enlisted personnel that was physically assigned to our office. And depending on what the personality of that person was, would have a lot to do with the “air” in the office. Some of them... we had one that was there in particular and... he wasn't fat because they weren't allowed to be fat but they were tested very often so he wasn't fat, but he was big, very muscular, but he had jaws that looked like a bulldog, and that's what we called him. And... he was grumpy and when he was in the office, everybody was on edge. And you could always tell when he wasn't going to be in the office when you went in in the mornings because military usually got to the office before civilians did because they went and did their PT tests and then they came straight on in to the office. And when you got in the office and they were in there laughing and cutting up, you knew he wasn't going to be in the office that day. There were good days, there was comical days, um, I'm not sure that it completely offset those days when you were dealing with, like I said, the casualties and the heartbroken family members and things like that but I did get to see a lot come back from Vietnam and you know they were welcomed back... on Redstone, they were given a warm welcome, the welcome that I think they were all searching for was United States wide and it didn't happen. Unfortunately, you had people that objected to the war and they didn't hold their...mmm... anger at the people that had us over there instead of the soldiers. They looked at it just in general that everybody associated with that war was bad. And that wasn't true.

Q: Mhmm... I could see that. So, on... I'm trying to create a scenario that I was thinking about while you were talking... so, um, over in Vietnam, if there was like, a major number of casualties at one certain time, did you deal with anything in the office like, kind of like what I

was saying, a very large number of casualties or was it more like, because you were in Huntsville, that's a smaller area so it wasn't as... frequent.

Doris Cantrell: That's exactly what it was. Redstone did not have that many that were assigned to, um, Redstone either prior to going overseas or had Redstone as their home of record. Now, when you started looking at locations like, say, oh Fort Jackson, South Carolina where it was... Fort Pike, Louisiana, it was a location that was a training facility for those that were going directly from there to Vietnam. Um, my husband was stationed down there when he was doing his basic training and when I went down there to see him, I saw a sign that just kinda ate at my heart when I saw it. And it was a sign that came all the way across the road, you know, it was attached like a banner across the road and it... it said "Tigerland: Combat Infantry for Vietnam". So, the soldiers that went down there and entered that post knew where they were going directly from their training. They were heading to Vietnam so, I'm sure a lot of locations like that had to deal with multiple casualties on a regular basis, we did not. I know, you know, maybe twice that we had more than one at a time. And when we... you know, that occurred, everybody pitched in and put that soldier, that family, first in everything.

Q: So, I'm sure with you only dealing with a small number at a time, that probably gave you more of an emotional connection to family member, would you say? Maybe?

Doris Cantrell: Oh, I definitely think it did because we became, um, more connected, um, and especially, you know, if you worked in those emergency payments where you had to look at them face to face, you couldn't help but get attached.

Q: Mm. I just couldn't even imagine that.

Doris Cantrell: Well, and they would come in and say for example, a spouse would come in and, you know, it's human nature to say "I am so sorry for your loss", and if you ever opened the door

like that to give them an opportunity, they would start telling you like, a history of, we were married on this and such date and we've got this child and, you know, and it's only two years old, you know, you would get more... it wasn't just as simple as a name and a social security number on a paper that says "this soldier has passed away", you then saw a true family.

Q: Mhmm. You saw the people that were connected to them and what they were having to deal with.

Doris Cantrell: Exactly.

Q: That's just... awful ugh. Well, in summary... I'm going to try to summarize your job to make sure I understand. So, you dealt directly with the spouses or the family members, whatever it may be of the soldiers who were deceased, made sure they got the proper payments that they were deserved and... dealt with anything else they needed... relocating wise or financially... am I correct on that?

Doris Cantrell: That is... you're exactly correct. We assumed that we were still treating that soldier because we were treating his next of kin and when you deal with a... when you treat a soldier and you service a soldier, they get the upmost respect, and that's one of the first things we were taught in our jobs. So, we were dealing with his next of kin and we took care of every need. If it was something we didn't or couldn't handle, we didn't just say, you know, "that's not something we can take care of", we searched to find out how to take care of it- got them names, got them phone numbers, got them forms. We did whatever we could to take care of those families.

Q: So it sounded like Huntsville, AL and the Redstone Arsenal were definitely more, um, concerned like, emotionally and things like that about the soldiers and their well-being than maybe other parts of the country?

Doris Cantrell: I think that is true. We, uh, we had, uh, that was kind of a, you know, follow the leader type thing. Uh, we had management that... that was one of the first things they told us when we went to work there is these are the things that you encounter and we are in a time of war and these are the things that we will do. So, it was from the, you know, first date all the way through the end of the war that, you know, we were we... we acted by leadership guidance, our leaders did that... and as a matter of fact, um, the position... the leader of that position, which was military pay and... then when I went over and worked with travel pay, um, I started out on the bottom in my career, and I climbed my way up the ladder, literally, one step at a time, and in the course of my twenty-seven year career, I ended up replacing as closely as I could the lady that hired me that was Chief of Pay and Entitlements and I ended up in that position before I retired. So, we maintained that same level of concern, sincerity, loyalty to the soldier that I started out with in my career.

Q: Wow, so it really came like, literally full circle.

Doris Cantrell: It came full circle. Absolutely did.

Q: And so, I'm sure with your experience, like how, it was made a priority how you were going to treat the people that you encountered every day, I'm sure it made an impact on you enough that you wanted to do the same, even years later when the war wasn't going on.

Doris Cantrell: Yes, because that soldier is what makes America today.

Q: Mhmm.

Doris Cantrell: So, we maintained that same attitude, that same support, whether we were in war or not. Because, there were a lot of other things that took place during the course of my career because, you know, we went through others like Desert Storm, like uh, Afghanistan, like um, Iraq and we still had soldiers. Now, like I said, automation has come about 'til it didn't take as

many to support the number of soldiers that's left at Redstone and with that Base Realignment Enclosure that I referred to, Redstone doesn't have as many soldiers assigned there as it did back in the 1970's. It relocated to other facilities and the ones that are located at Redstone are mostly officer ranks, so a lot of things has changed at Redstone but, the respect for the soldiers is one thing that's never changed.

Q: Well, that is good to hear and to know that like, even of course now it's so important but back then with people not understanding exactly what these soldiers were going through that they were able to come back- if they were lucky enough to come back- if not, their family would unfortunately would have to deal with that but, they would know that they were going to be treated with the upmost respect. So, I think that's really good.

Doris Cantrell: That was our goal.

Q: Well, you have given me a lot of great information, is there anything else that maybe, impacted your mindset about the war or your experience in your job or anything that you would like to share?

Doris Cantrell: Well there, it's... it's interesting when you, um, I know we've talked about different things that, you know, how you... that you could address this associated with the war. And we've got people here in town, we've got a gentlemen who works at one of the local businesses right here above our house that was... he was literally a combat infantry person, and he has joked about, you know we were talking about um, some of the weapons that was used during the wartime and he has joked about, with us, about you know a weapon they were using and he said if the American soldier pulled out that weapon, he said those Vietcong's would just come right on, it just didn't deter them at all. And he said but if you let them pull out the big arms, and he said you would see those Vietcong, he said they would stop right where they are

and dig a hole in the ground. And I thought that was comical, I mean you know that says good things about our soldiers. I'm not sure what that says about our, um, soldiers being over there with weapons that didn't deter them quite so well. But, um, having talked with him, it was interesting we have another gentlemen who his mother lives almost directly across the road from that business that I was referring to, and he was, he was shot. He was hit with shrapnel while he was over there and he is retired, disability retirement from Vietnam. So, you just can't help but have a sympathetic feeling toward them. So, I know there was a lot of things that those soldiers did that was a lot more important in the Vietnam war. Other than maintaining pay, when you look at that soldier and he's got family back here and he's counting on somebody to make sure his pay goes in every month to where he has it designated and make sure there's money for his wife and his kids, or his parents, or knowing his family is going to be taken care of in the event that he's not fortunate enough to come back home, it really was an important role in that military pay area. So, I have uh, I have deep sympathetic feelings.

Q: Definitely, I can agree with that and I'm sure it's one thing to be, you know, dealing with people like you said earlier that's just a name and a social security number on paper. And it's one thing to deal with that at work but to also be able to connect that with somebody you do know that literally lives down the street from you, so...I'm sure that was something that really impacted you.

Doris Cantrell: That let me see another aspect of what the Vietnam War was.

Q: Mhmm. Well... I do not have any other questions for you so thank you for letting me pick at your brain and hear your experience.

Doris Cantrell: Thank you for giving me an opportunity to tell you a little bit about it and maybe it will be a little bit helpful and let you see the part of the...circle that I filled in from the job that I did for Department of Army.

Q: Well, thank you very much and if you have any questions for me of course you can ask them and you already gave me the consent form, so we are good to go with that, so if you don't have anything else, I think we're good.

Doris Cantrell: Well that sounds good, let me know if you need anything further.

Q: I will, thank you.

Doris Cantrell: Thank you.