

## **Transcription: Ed Hark**

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*Today is Friday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009. My name is James Crabtree, and I'll be interviewing Mr. Ed Hark, and this interview is being done by phone. Mr. Hark is at his home in Georgetown, Texas, and I am at the General Land Office headquarters in Austin, Texas, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you again for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.*

**Ed Hark:** I'm happy to do it.

*Yes sir. Usually the first question I always start off with is just to ask you to maybe tell our listeners a little bit about what your boyhood was like, a little bit of what your life was like before you entered the service.*

**Ed Hark:** I was born in New Jersey in 1944, raised up in New Jersey. I went to school, high school there. I'd always made plans to join the Marine Corps after high school. I graduated in 1962. I entered the Marine Corps. I signed up in July, and I went to Paris Island, South Carolina in August of 1962.

*Tell us what Paris Island was like in 1962.*

**Ed Hark:** Paris Island was quite an experience because I'd heard so many stories as most people do before they got down to the island, and it wasn't a, it did not, how's the best way to say this? I guess it lived up to its expectations, and then some. I was trying to figure out how I wanted to say that.

*So you weren't disappointed.*

**Ed Hark:** I was not surprised. That's the word I was looking for. I was not surprised. Fortunately when I was in high school, I played in many varsity sports and I considered myself to be in pretty good shape when I left for boot camp, and when I got down there and being in the best shape I was ever in my life, I found out that I could be in a lot better shape 13 weeks later. And it was quite an experience. I was in 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Platoon 161, and my senior drill instructor was Staff Sergeant Green, and I had two junior drill instructors, Sergeant Snockles and Corporal Green.

*So you went through your 13 weeks of basic training, and were you at that point already an O3-11 in your contract?*

**Ed Hark:** No. At that time, we were just recruits. There was no contract involved. We just went down to the office in New York City and stood in front of a captain of Marines and took our oath of allegiance, waved goodbye to our family and got on the bus. We didn't get our designation until we graduated from Paris Island, and I want to say that even at that point we weren't sure, we didn't know, might've been in our service record books, but we didn't know until we got to Camp Geiger for the week whole at the time, ITR M3 training regiment.

*And what was Camp Geiger like in 1962?*

**Ed Hark:** Well, the last few weeks of my gradation at Camp Geiger were rather unique for Marines at the time because it was during the Cuban missile crisis. And a lot of people don't remember that, but that took place in that late summer, early fall of 1962, and we had got the word just before graduating that there was something going on in the outside world because we had no idea what was going on in the outside world. In those days at Paris Island, you didn't know what was happening day by day on Paris Island which was in the world, but they indicated there was some serious problems and a lot of Marines were heading south to Georgia and Florida and getting ready for whatever might happen, and that continued after we graduated from Paris Island and went up to ITR. ITR was starting to get very, very empty because they were moving a lot of Marines out of there. We had platoon sergeants that were PFC's at the time who were running the platoons through ITR and it was rather a quick down and dirty because we didn't know what was going to happen day by day up there.

*So how long did you ultimately end up spending at Geiger?*

**Ed Hark:** Four weeks at Camp Geiger for up through training regiment, and then at that point we got our first idea of what we were going to be doing next, and I got the 03-11 designation, but I was picked with about oh, maybe a dozen other folks in my platoon there to after boot leave which was 20 days, to go to Portsmouth, Virginia for sea school.

*I guess to just back up just a little bit, what was it that made you want to go into the Marine Corps coming out of high school?*

**Ed Hark:** Well, I'd always wanted to join the New Jersey state police, and at the time you had to be a minimum of 21 years of age and the timing was right for me as I graduated, I was 17 when I graduated, I signed up for four years in the Marine Corps, and timed it so I would be 21, get out and have the military experience behind me and hopefully further my career with the state police.

*OK, that makes sense.*

**Ed Hark:** The Marine Corps was always in my picture. My dad was a recruit during World War II, and before going overseas, he had perforated his ear drums and then was discharged. So it was always in our family. My brother is also a Marine.

*Wow, OK, that's great. So a Marine Corps family.*

**Ed Hark:** Yes it is.

*So after, upon graduation from Geiger, where were you sent to?*

**Ed Hark:** Boot camp, leave for 20 days, and then we went to Portsmouth Naval Base and off of Virginia, for another four or six weeks, I've forgotten now, of sea school training for sea duty.

*Explain to us in detail or a little bit of detail what that means.*

**Ed Hark:** Well, they don't have it, I think they've discontinued seagoing Marines on board the Navy clipper ships as they called them at the time, which was battleships, cruisers, and carriers, but at the time there were Marine detachments on all those ships – cruisers, battleships, they still had some, and aircraft carriers. And the detachments went anywhere from 30 men, 35 men on a

small ship to I guess sometimes on the carriers maybe 60, 65, I'm not sure. I was on a guided missile cruiser when I graduated. But you went through it with the four weeks of school at Portsmouth sea school, and they taught you everything you needed to know about living on board a ship – customs and traditions, and we went to a one-week course of 5-inch gunnery school to man the 5-inch guns on board the cruiser. The Marine detachment had that responsibility, and we also went to one week of fire control and damage control school. That was also at Portsmouth. We got a very good indoctrination into Navy life.

*And what were you thinking during all of that? Were you looking forward to being aboard a ship?*

**Ed Hark:** At that point, I was very excited about it. I was really looking forward to it. What I had heard about the different occupations that we could've received after ITUR, whenever we were going on down to Camp Lejun and going in the second Marine division as a grunt, or artillery, or going out to the air wing, and the sea school sounded like the place to be to travel around the world, and that's what we did. So it was kind of exciting for us. We were rather unique, which didn't work out too well for most of us in the long end of the story, but we were unique because for our class of about 35 or 40, about 99% of us all went to one ship, the USS Long Beach CGN9 had been in the dry docks being refueled with this nuclear power plant, had removed it's spring detachment prior to that, and then all of a sudden needed a complete detachment of Marines. Normally you'd go into what they called sea pool after sea school and waited until you were called by one's or two's to go for replacements in the fleet somewhere on a ship. But we had the entire class go to the USS Long Beach that was at the time at the Philadelphia naval yard, and I want to say it was around January of 1963.

*And that you said had been converted to nuclear. That ship was one of the cutting edge ships of the time, wasn't it?*

**Ed Hark:** It sure was. The Long Beach was a nuclear powered guided missile cruiser. It and the Enterprise and the Bainbridge were right out there in the front of the fleet. In fact, we made a world cruise once that was known as Operation Sea Orbit 1, where the three ships and a nuke sub went around the world unreplenished and did so just to show I guess the strength and the abilities of the U.S. Navy.

*And you were part of that cruise?*

**Ed Hark:** I was part of that cruise.

*And when was that?*

**Ed Hark:** That had to be in about 1964. It was called Operation Sea Orbit 1. It was the Long Beach, it was the Enterprise, it was the Bainbridge which was a frigate, and a nuclear sub who I couldn't tell you who it was.

*How long did that take you?*

**Ed Hark:** That was unique, too. We were on a six-month cruise to the Med which was the standard cruise. We would be on a Med cruise for that period of time. We found out at the end of the Med cruise when we came out of the Straits of Gibraltar, instead of going due west, we made a left turn and we went south and found out that we were part of Operation Sea Orbit 1 and

we were gonna continue our six-month cruise for another three and a half months. It was a surprise to everybody. No one knew about it. They kept it very close to their collars as far as who knew what we were gonna do and when, but we went through the Straits of Gibraltar and then we were advised that we were part of, dropped out of the 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet responsibility. We would've gone over to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fleet going over, back to Norfolk, but instead we became Operation Sea Orbit 1 and joined up with those other three ships and boat and started our cruise around the world.

*And what was a normal day like as a Marine aboard a naval vessel during that cruise?*

**Ed Hark:** Well, sea duty was always considered good duty because of the traveling. We were in a flag ship, the Long Beach, most of the time except on Sea Orbit 1 we had an admiral on board, and because it was a flag ship, everything was spit and polish. Even the sailors on board didn't like it because the deck hands who had to work on the decks ended up doing it in what they called their whites and not their blue jeans because there was a flag admiral on board. So we did a lot of honors and dignitaries coming on board the ship and we were on our toes quite a bit. We would always have to render special honors. I was on like a silent drill team that we had that would go ashore when we came to a port and we would go do our different drills and things when we posted our guard duty at the brow of the century for the ship. The majority of our time we spent was cleaning, polishing our gear, equipment, taking care of our spaces, rendering honors when we were in port, doing uplock, and I got very, very lucky I guess near the, it was a two-year tour of duty and on my last year I got picked to be captain and XO orderly, and that was probably one of the best times I had on board the ship.

*As an orderly.*

**Ed Hark:** RO orderly, yes. I was an orderly for, I'm trying to think of his name now, it'll come up to me, he was the first skipper of the Nautilus and he was the first skipper of the Long Beach, and I'm trying to think of his name. Maybe if it comes back to me I'll bring it up later, but he was quite a colorful guy. He was one of those they called Rickenbauer's, the admiral, the nuclear admiral.

*Yeah, Admiral Rickover.*

**Ed Hark:** Admiral Rickover. He was one of Admiral Rickover's whiz kids, this captain was, so I was an orderly to him and to his executive officer for one year. It was very exciting because you spent most of the time with those gentlemen wherever they were, on the ship or on land, as a driver.

*So you did two years sea duty on board the Long Beach, and then did you know where you were gonna go to after that?*

**Ed Hark:** Nope, didn't know that until about two weeks before my two years was up on the Long Beach.

*Tell us what happened next.*

**Ed Hark:** Then we got the orders for the one I thought I was gonna go to the first time which was to be an 03-11 at that famous place at Camp Lejun, North Carolina. I was transferred to Six

Marines, and they're the Pogy Rope Marines on the left hand shoulder, and I was assigned to a rifle platoon at B Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines.

*Tell us, I was stationed at Lejun, and Mr. Lambert was, OK, he wasn't there, but I was in Lejun for a number of years and tell us a little bit about what it was like in '62, and you've been back, but how it's changed.*

**Ed Hark:** Well, I was there actually in '64 and '65. I went in '62. I probably got there around late '64, early '65, there for my two years of sea duty. Camp Lejun was the major hub for the Marine Corps on the east coast, and to be at the infantry platoon in the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines which was a real gung ho outfit, we spent about 90% of our time in the field. So we were constantly in training on different types of platoon sides, company sides, battalion sides, operations. We did a lot of work with amphibious landings, with the old Amtraks, I remember those. Did a lot of work on the ranges for all the special weapons that we had in a rifle platoon at the time. Probably the thing that I wasn't expecting was in the latter part of 1965, we were on the alert battalion. They always had the alert battalion. I don't know if they still do that or not for the different divisions at Pendleton and Lejun at the time, but we always had an alert battalion for any crisis that would pop up in the world, and we were the alert battalion, I want to say it was in late May, mid-May of 1965, had our sea bags packed, they were out at the curb, had our packs packed, and we were on two-hour notice and weren't allowed to leave anywhere near the base, had to stay on board the base. I was a brown bagger at the time. You know the term brown bagger.

*Oh I do, yes.*

**Ed Hark:** I was a brown bagger at the time, so we were allowed to go home, but we knew that we had to be back within two hours. So we were getting near the last day of our alert status and we got an alert order came through and they said load up the trucks. It wasn't uncommon as you know in the Marine Corps to do a drill. So they loaded us up on trucks and we said this is just another drill. We got the entire battalion on the trucks and started driving out and they said oh, don't worry, we've done this a million times. We'll drive around Camp Lejun and come right back here in about a hour or so. We drove out the front gate and we knew we were in trouble when the commander of the base, a brigadier general, was waving. That was our first tip-off that he was right at the front gate when they still had Marines at the front gate, and he was waving good luck, men. Of course we had no idea what he was talking about. We went up to Cherry Point. Then we sat on a flight line at Cherry Point and said it's just a drill. Then they started bringing out all the ammunition on the skids and all the stuff that you need to lift out, loaded us on a 130 and we took off. And we went to Santa Domingo for a political uprising that took place in I want to say it was May of 1965. I could be off a little bit there, but right around that.

*In the Dominican Republic.*

**Ed Hark:** Oh, excuse me, the Dominican Republic. Santa Domingo was the city we flew into.

*What was that like?*

**Ed Hark:** That was kind of scary because we thought it was a drill until they put us on the C130, loaded us up on the C130, issued us our ammunition. We didn't load it, but we were issued the ammunition. We were told we were going to be going to the Dominican Republic, didn't have too much information. We were told we were going to be landing at the airport there

but that an Army Airborne Ranger group had already seized the airport. We landed at the airport. We sat on the airport in the middle of the night for a couple of hours. Then they took us on trucks out to the College of Santa Domingo, the university, and our company set up sort of the defensive perimeter around a good portion of the university grounds, and it turned out we were doing that because it was going to be declared the safe zone to bring the American citizens from the Dominican Republic who wanted to be removed from the country. They brought them into the university grounds, and from there they helicoptered them out to an aircraft carrier out on the ocean. So we spent about three weeks down there doing that.

*That's kind of a forgotten piece of American history.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, well it was part of American Marine Corps history, too. It was the first time the Marine Corps had a battle going in two hemispheres at the same time.

*I know they still teach a little bit, when I went through boot camp they mentioned it, but it's still not covered in much detail. It's just kind of mentioned as a policing action. But that's interesting. You're the first person I've ever spoken to that was there.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, B16 was there. We took one casualty, one death, and he was standing guard at the gate which was nothing more than barbed wire, again, and some stand-backs across the main entrance of the college, and some car just raced up in the middle of the night, just shot him one time, took off and disappeared. Before anybody could do anything, they were gone and he was dead. And that was the only casualty we took in my outfit at the time.

*Were you worried while you were there about rebels?*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, there was always lots of action at night, lots of gun firing you'd see flying around. We were in a static position most of the time at night, but during the day we would run out with small convoys on what we called six-by's at the time, you know, regular trucks, and we would go out to different parts of the city in the surrounding area to pick up any Americans that wanted to return, leave the country. And those were kind of crazy times. We never had a problem, never had an incident. I mean we were really loaded up for it. I mean we had helicopters overhead, we had aircraft overhead, we were well armed, we were in solid convoy, and I don't think this was as big of an insurrection that it really could've been. I mean certainly some people, it was terrible, but for us it wasn't too bad.

*I'm sure that the Americans you helped get out of there were grateful to see you though.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah. I was surprised. A lot of them once they got to the university grounds didn't want to go any further. I guess they had ties there and they felt they were safe where they were at, on the university grounds and they just didn't want to go any further but they didn't have any choice. They had to either go back to their home, we would keep them there for 24 hours, but you couldn't very well keep them there. We weren't really set up for it. We didn't take any of the buildings over. We set up outside perimeters all the way around the university rims.

*So you lived there for three weeks?*

**Ed Hark:** About three weeks.

*And then you went back to Camp Lejun?*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, I came back a little early. I came back a week ahead of my unit. We had a fellow who was in our unit who it turns out he shouldn't have been there. I'll leave his name out, but he had been in the base brig and they let him out to join our unit to go overseas, and it turns out that they shouldn't have done that so they needed somebody to do a prisoner chaser run, and I brought him back. So it was a rather unique trip because I had to hit two spots on the way home and go through quite a ruckus of checking him in and out of the base brig at let me think, where was that, oh, Guantanamo Bay, I think I was at, and then I spent another day somewhere else. I don't know where it was, but we spent two nights before we finally got back to Camp Lejun.

*Were you the only chaser?*

**Ed Hark:** I was the only chaser with him, yeah.

*What was that like?*

**Ed Hark:** I had done that before and I clearly remember the gunnery sergeant had told me, he said Hark, either he gets back or you do his time. And I told that to the young man who was quite a bit larger than me, I said this could be a great trip for both of us, but trust me on this, I'm not doing your time. And I didn't have any problem getting him back.

*That's good.*

**Ed Hark:** He got back and he was just as happy to get back as I was.

*So you get back, you get him put into the brig, and about a week or so later I guess -*

**Ed Hark:** The unit started coming and straggling back, yes. Then I was about nine months away from my discharge, let's see, it was around November, middle of November I got orders for Vietnam. And at the time it was in the early fall of '65. We just started to hear about this problem in southeast Asia, but we really didn't know much about it, and all of a sudden they said we're going to be starting to send large numbers over there. I'm trying to think the exact month. I want to say it was some time around October or November in the company officer where the first sergeant and the office clerks were, they had what we used to call a waiting room where you would check in and out on liberty call, and in there was a huge chalk board on the wall and that chalk board became like the board that you didn't want to see your name on. Each Monday morning they would put a list of names of people that got orders that week to go over to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division on their way over to Vietnam, and they were literally out of our company, just out of our company there would be anywhere from 8 to 10 people going up on that board every Monday morning. And when you saw your name up there, it was like ah, I don't believe this.

*So that's how you learned was you saw your name on that board.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, and actually I would think I was going to see them in the airport because I only had about nine months to do, but they needed bodies.

*So you saw your name on the board. How much longer did you have before you were shipping out?*

**Ed Hark:** They wanted me to ship out that week. My wife was 9 months pregnant at the time. The Marine Corps was very good about that. They gave me a two-week leave of absence to add onto my travel time, they gave us travel time to get to Camp Pendleton, we traveled individually, and they gave me two extra weeks of leave to get my wife back home and hopefully to deliver our child. And my daughter was delivered in November 7<sup>th</sup> of 1965, and about three or four days later I took off from Newark airport for Camp Pendleton. It was tough on my wife.

*I imagine. I'm sure it wasn't easy for you either.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, but I think it always is, probably always will be, it's tougher on the family you leave behind because I always knew who I was, where I was, and I could take care of myself.

*I agree with that. It's hardest on the families.*

**Ed Hark:** The family suffers the most. So I left for Camp Pendleton around the middle of November of 1965.

*When you got to Pendleton, was that just kind of a way station for you?*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, there was like a pipeline moving east to west at that time. I got to Pendleton. We were in a staging battalion there. We were there for maybe four or five days. Then we got shipped to Okinawa. I think it was Camp Butler.

*I think that's probably right.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, got to Camp Butler and that was the staging battalion there. There we got hooked into a platoon sized unit and we were there strictly to get paperwork in order, a lot more shots, inoculations, medical history brought up to date, dental update, and staged all of our equipment except our utilities and skivvies, which by the way to this day I still 45 years later, I still haven't seen my two sea bags worth of equipment. Somebody made out like a champ because we had to leave all of our equipment behind and I was on sea duty, so I had like four sets of dress blues and dress whites, I had all my greens, my khaki's, my trops. They all stayed in Camp Butler somewhere in a warehouse.

*So you got to Okinawa, did anybody have any idea at that point where Vietnam was or what Vietnam was?*

**Ed Hark:** The further west we went, the more information we got, the fewer rumors, the better the information, and we started running into more people coming the other direction. There was a fellow who joined B Company the week I got my orders who had just got back from Vietnam, and we all started to look at this guy, and he just had that long ago stare that was just like he had just been through a tough time and just wanted to have some peace and quiet now. So we knew that there was something over the hill for us and we saw more of those folks at Okinawa than we did at Pendleton. Of course that was the last place we saw the folks. We were pretty much segregated. They would come in on returns on another part of the base and we were outgoing on a different section.

*Describe for us what it was like the first time you flew into Vietnam. What were your first thoughts?*

**Ed Hark:** I kept notes, and my wife kept all my letters from my time in Vietnam and I created a diary for myself and I put it into a journal and I ended up with about 200 pages. My wife got it printed for me so that my family would always have it. I mention that only because the very first feelings I had when we were flying in on this aircraft to Danang where we flew into was I thought I was in the Caribbean somewhere, just beautiful bluish-green water, nice looking beaches, beautiful skies. I said boy, this is going to be a lot better than what everybody's talking about. And then keep in mind I had left the eastern seaboard a few weeks before and it was coming on winter time, I'm landing at Danang, they pop open the door, and it's like 99 degrees with 100% humidity. That was a stark reality there. And it's funny what you think about, what goes through your mind, even though I had been in the Marine Corps for almost three years and trained, you're coming off that plane and you're wondering when are they gonna start shooting? We landed at Danang Air Base, we didn't know that there was rings of Marines already out from Danang Air Base. We got off the plane, put us into a staging area on the tarmac, and then it just went up to about 100 degrees. It was brutal. Another fact, I went over there about 220 pounds; I came back at 150. I'd lost about 83 pounds over there. That's the heat and the humping in the bush. But we sat on our ditty bags with our utility bags, and the little things we had with our utility uniforms in it waiting for them to call out, and the truck pulls up in front of us and a guy jumps out covered with red clay and dirt and dust, and he runs over to the office, comes out and says finally, people, get on the truck, and he just called out the names and I was one of those names and about 20 of us jumped on a truck and we were on our way to Hotel Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines. And then we were out of the truck, do you want me to continue?

*Sure.*

**Ed Hark:** Traveling outside the Y of Danang. Now we're a nervous wreck because now we're in the country and the only thing we have for a weapon is our shaving kit and toothbrush. We're waiting for something to happen because you hear all the stories. So we're going down dirt roads and all we saw all along each one of these stops on the villages were people trying to sell us things, Coca Cola and different snacks and things that the little kids were selling, local Vietnamese kids, and we're just going further and further out. We cross these bridges where there's Marines on century duty at either end of the bridges, protecting these bridges, \_\_\_\_ needs a repair, and we get further and further out, and the further out we got, the less we saw villagers, and we saw the countryside and we pulled up to the sill and we were at the base for Hotel Company, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, on top of the hill, out in the middle of nowhere. Got off the truck and told us to sit there. We sat there for 20 minutes and another star comes along and says Hark, Johnson, Gonzales, follow me. We walk out of the Hotel Company headquarters and we go over to 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and Weapons Platoon, and one guy goes to 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and Gonzales and Bugsy and Ed, myself, we end up going over to Weapons Platoon of H Company.

*And were you greeted by the platoon sergeant?*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, that's another interesting part of the book. The platoon headquarters for our whole platoon was I don't know what you call it today, but it was like a plywood deck with a tent on top of it, and it had sandbags about chin high all the way around the outside, but it was basically a tent on top of a wooden floor and no windows in it. You open up the tent and it was as dark as could be, went inside, nobody there, and the guy who dropped us off said just sit down and put your gear away and your platoon is coming in out of the field in a couple of hours and tell them you're in Weapons Platoon. And sat down in that tent and didn't know what else to do except sit there and we finally got outside and sat down to get out of the heat and all of a sudden

here comes Weapons Platoon of H Company and 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and they drop off their men at the different tents and here comes probably three or four of the dirtiest, biggest, angriest looking squad leaders for a weapons platoon I ever saw in my life who had been in country for quite a while and walked right by us like we weren't even there, got inside. We followed them in, told them we were the new replacements and the basically told us OK, you're in guns, you're in rockets, at the time they had the 3 5-inch rocket launchers, you're in guns, you're in rockets, I'll come back to you in a minute. We went to look for our gear that we put on the little cots and it was thrown on the floor because there's only so many cots and that went by seniority, and next thing I know the squad leader came over and gives one of us a machine gun, the M-60, and the other, myself and another guy got the two rocket tubes and they said clean 'em up. We'll look at 'em in half an hour. And that was our introduction to weapons platoon.

*Was there any sort of orientation when you got there like as to what to expect? Or to do or not do?*

**Ed Hark:** That would come in the next couple of days. They were in camp to get replacements, which was ourselves, to get equipment replaced and ammunition, and get new rifles that were like rusted or couldn't be used anymore from being in the bush too long, and they spent about two days, three days at the headquarters, and during that time period, our squad leader turned us over to a fire team leader and then it was the fire team leader's job to give us a quick indoctrination as to what we were doing and what our job was and it didn't matter what your rank was, when you got there, in my case I was assigned first to the machine gun squad. You're an ammo humper, and when you were rockets, you were an ammo humper. You had to learn the job before they would put the gun or the tube in your hand. So you basically were carrying about 60 pounds worth of equipment besides your own equipment, and then the flap jacket and the helmet and all the other gear you had to put on in 120 degree heat, and you learned each day as you went out in the field. It was on the job training.

*Describe for us sir what your first day in the field was like there.*

**Ed Hark:** A day in the field was actually the bad times. We were still at the base camp, we hadn't gone out, and I was in a machine gun squad, and we were out one night, we were on ambush. Every night whether you were in the bush or around the perimeter, they would send out either listing posts or set up ambushes, or avenues of approach by the enemy, and I went out on the ambush on I guess that was my second day there, and we went out to this little village, passed through the village and got to the place where we were going to set up the ambush and went right past it, and I was told ahead of time we'll let you know where it's going to be at, but we're not going to stop there now. And we saw the spot we were going to be that night. We went beyond it until it got dark and then we came back to the ambush site that night and we sat in ambush on 50% alert, one on, one asleep, and sat there all night long, and it was the longest night of my life. And I'll never forget it, it was probably around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, and I was alert status for the guy next to me who was catching some sleep, and my squad leader was behind me a little ways, and I didn't know at the time but he had heard some noise out down the trail and he fired one of his hand flares. He punched that hand flare and it whooshed from behind me, and keep in mind you're in the jungle, at night, dark, quiet. Everything you see, you think is the enemy crawling towards you – every bush, every little tree stump looks like somebody, so you're sitting there on your second night in Vietnam and all of a sudden this whoosh goes off behind me. I think I came like 12 inches off the ground. To this day, I have never had a problem with hemorrhoids. Everything sucked into my body. It was the scariest, I think that was probably the second scariest time of my life in Vietnam that one night. So that was my indoctrination there on

my second night. We got back to the battalion area, assigned our permanent platoons we were gonna work with, went this platoon when it was back at base camp was an individual unit by itself. It was guns and rockets. But when you went to the field, first squad, second squad went with first and second platoon. We were attached to the platoon. You got to know the people in my case in the second platoon more than I knew the guys in weapons platoon. You became part of the second platoon. And you were their support weapons, either rockets or guns.

*Tell us a little bit sir about what your leadership was like in terms of your platoon commander, platoon sergeant, company first sergeant, that sort of thing.*

**Ed Hark:** Probably in fairness as a grunt, the majority of the time the leadership to me probably ended about the second lieutenant. First sergeant didn't go to the field on most of our operations. We were out on operations I would say 20 days out of every month we were in the field, I mean in the bush. We would come back strictly as I said for either replacements or equipment or if we took major casualties we'd have to come back until we'd get the replacements for them. But I would say the leadership there was the squad leaders. Most of the time, the platoon sergeant was just a sergeant E5, and a platoon commander was a second lieutenant, and sometimes it was a sergeant or a staff sergeant, depending on how we went through the people. I mean I had a second lieutenant that came to us on April the 15<sup>th</sup> 1966. I was wounded the third time on April the 16<sup>th</sup>, and he came to us on April the 15<sup>th</sup>, the night before. He'd been in country about two days, and he was killed that night. The senior NCO's and first and second lieutenants had it rough. To be a platoon leader in Vietnam was an extremely hazardous job.

*How did you and your fellow Marines deal with that sort of thing going on?*

**Ed Hark:** With what?

*I mean did you feel like after a while you became almost sort of numb to the losses that you were taking?*

**Ed Hark:** We were a front-lined, rifle platoon. We were in the bush 20 days out of 30, probably 25 out of 30, and it wasn't unusual for us to be out three weeks or four weeks at a time. When you're getting about two hours of sleep a night and it's not very restful sleep, when you're eating in most cases one C-ration a day, as opposed to three, when you're living under a lot of stress, probably the major casualties that we saw were either from snipers or from booby traps. The biggest battle that I was ever in in an all-out gunfight was the last one I was in. Most of them were very quick fire fights that didn't last very long. They'd hit you when they want to hit you at night. They'd hit you one side, they'd ambush a platoon, they'd ambush a squad, they would do what they had to do and then they would disappear into the night. It was just bad moments and it made for I guess hypersensitivity and it takes something out of you I guess, and that's where you get that sort of numbness I think I heard you say that word.

*Yeah, I just was curious.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, you're alert to what's going on, but you're going through the motions a lot of times because you're saving your energy and your adrenalin for when you know you're going to use it. I found myself having my adrenalin pumped too often in the beginning, and then it comes down and then you go up and down like that and it emotionally is tough on you. Probably the hardest part is when you lose the guys next to you because you only get close to the guys on your team. At the most, you get close to the guys in your squad, but normally it's your fire team.

They're the ones that you're living with and they're keeping you alive and you're keeping them alive. When you lose them, it's really, really tough. It's very, very difficult. My first operation, do I have time?

*Oh yes sir, we've got, it's your interview, we've got plenty of time.*

**Ed Hark:** My first operation after that night ambush we went out on, at the time we were calling them because it was politically incorrect, they were called Search and Destroy, and what we would do is go out to a given area, either be trucked out or hump out or helicopter out, drop us in an area and we'd go through a valley on line looking for the enemy, searching villages, looking through puddles, looking for ammunition, weapons, anything you could find, and we were doing that on my I want to say my third or fourth day with H Company, and we were on line go through the area, my platoon had gone through many, many times. They were very familiar with every nook and cranny, and it was a very calm, peaceful morning, and we were going through this rice paddy. It was about 1,000 yards wide, which is always kind of hairy because you're out there in the middle of nowhere and you just don't know what's going to happen until you get to the other side, and in between these rice paddies, however large they were, they had like a rice paddy dike and then about a 10-foot section that was like a tree line, and it was brush and bamboo and then the rice paddy would start on the other side. That was a favorite spot for the enemy to hide and to put booby traps I was to find out that day. And we were on line going through the rice paddy which was dry as a bone, got to the other side, we're going through the tree line and the bamboo, and I was taught back at Lejun and at Pendleton which was very good information, stay off the pads, regardless of how easy it looks, just go through the brush. And I'm going through the brush and a fellow who had been in country about six or seven months already and he was just see, two over, so he was about 20 yards away, stepped on a bouncing Betty mine on the tree line, and are you familiar with bouncing Betty?

*A little bit, but go ahead and tell us.*

**Ed Hark:** World War II they had 'em, most of 'em, it's an explosive device that's buried in the ground, has little three prongs that stick up out of the ground that you either step on or have a trip wire to it, and what a bouncing Betty does is when you trip it, and an explosion takes place, it fires this explosive device up anywhere from 2 feet to 3 feet in the air and then it explodes. Well this fellow had stepped on either the Betty itself or the wire, had tripped the bouncing Betty, and everybody within 30 feet, 35 feet, 40 feet, just got knocked on their ass. The explosion was just terrific. That's all I remember just like a hot wave hit you and knocked you down. The next thing I knew I got up and I smelled for the very first time and I'll never forget it, the smell of human body that had just been burned. And as soon as I realized I'm OK and the squad leader's grabbing me saying come on, we got to check these guys out, he grabs me, we go over and I found this one guy who was all tangled up in the brush who had stepped on it, and it actually had blown up right in front of him, and he had a hole in his groin area where his groin used to be. He had lost a big chunk out of the inside of his right thigh. He had holes in his chin, his face, and his arms. He had his flap jacket on, and he was the worst hit. There were several other that got shrapnel but they were taken care of. So the Sergeant Maddy, I'll use that name, he was the guy who'd been there quite a while, he just grabs him and he says here, hold this, and I was holding a battle dressing on the wound that was in his thigh because it was just pumping blood out of that, and he was trying to find out where else he was wounded. Then he took one look down and saw, I don't want to go into a lot of detail, but saw part of the man's organs that were coming out of the area in his groin, and the guy was conscious still, and he had a large hole in his chin that came out under his ear, but he was still conscious and all he kept saying was that straighten my

leg out, my leg's not straight, straighten it out, and his leg was straight but because of I guess the massive damage that was done, his brain was telling him there was something wrong with your leg. He was just all chewed up and we gave him as much first aid as we could at that time. A helicopter came in immediately. I say immediately, it was probably about 6 or 7 minutes, after they were called in. We slid him on a poncho. He was still talking. We put him on the helicopter with two other folks that got hit that were on either side of me, and he never made it back to Charley Med. He had died on the helicopter just from massive loss of blood. And then I got back and we were picking up the loose gear, and this is a guy fresh out of the States now, my thought was OK now we're done now, we're going to go back to base camp, right? All I hear next is the squad leader saying pick up the loose gear, saddle up, we're moving out. And I just said to myself at that point, I knew I had one more year to do there, I said how am I gonna do this for 363 more days? It was a tough day. That was the first day and we had lost three guys that were WIA and one KIA, and it was my three days into the operation and it was very traumatic.

*When all this was going on, were you able to get mail at some point?*

**Ed Hark:** There it was not like it is these days, of course then we didn't have email, we got mail, you only got mail when you got back to your base camp, back to Hotel Company 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion area, and that was like I said every two to three weeks, and then you would get mail, but the mail was always about I'm gonna guess between two to four weeks old. By the time it would get to the APO timely, but by the time it got to Danang and then got to regiment and then got to battalion and then if we just missed it, we'd be out in the field for two more weeks, then I would get mail. My wife mailed me letters about every day, so yeah, you'd get 13 or 14 letters.

*Would you ever write letters back to her?*

**Ed Hark:** Oh, every day.

*Actually I guess you said she kept all your letters.*

**Ed Hark:** Yeah, she kept all my letters. I'd try to write a letter every day. When we were in country, because we were in country, you could write a letter on anything and put the address on the back of a C-ration carton piece of cardboard. In fact I've got one my buddy sent me while I was in the hospital ship repose, a C-ration carton and you just write free stamp up in the right hand corner, and put the address on the front, write on the back of the card and I've got – that's the way it goes out. So if I could drop a few of them, what I used to do is write my wife notes each day and I kept them in my wallet wrapped in plastic in my breast pocket and when I got back to battalion area I would put them all together and mail them to her.

*When you would write to her, did you kind of spare her the things that you were dealing with?*

**Ed Hark:** Never mentioned any of the things I was dealing with, was no need to. That was all in the news every single day. She didn't need to hear that from me.

*How did she cope with your absence?*

**Ed Hark:** Like I said, it was tough for her, it was tougher on her because she watches the news, at the time they would roll the role of honor on the news at 6 o'clock with Walter Cronkite and these are the following men that were killed in Vietnam today. So it was kind of tough because

she had to watch that sort of thing in the news. But I kept telling her look, I'm with a good outfit with good people, I'm gonna get back, don't worry. Everything's gonna be OK. And I tried to tell her all the lighter side of the things that were happening while I was there. And there were the lighter side of things that you try to, just to keep yourself going, you know?

*While you were there and you were dealing with such a horrible place, did you ever become fatalistic about your circumstances? I mean at some you just have to stop worrying about certain things and just carry out your mission and if it happens it happens?*

**Ed Hark:** After about two or three weeks of doing what I just told you, that's sort of, I hate to say it but that's a run of the mill thing to happen with a rifle platoon. You're out on a sweep, you're gonna trip booby traps. Most of the time they don't get killed, they just get wounded or get shrapnel into them. I got hit by shrapnel twice doing that. You expect that. They always say you don't have to worry about the one that hit you. It's the truth. The one that really gets you, you never know about it. I was shot in the face the last time. You never hear the one that gets you, and it's just that quick. You don't have to worry about it. I'm not sure the word is fatalistic, it's more like I got a job to do, I know how to do my job, I've trained my squad to do the job, we're gonna do the best we can to keep each other alive, we're gonna get through each operation, get together again, the operations that we made it through another one, how many days do we have left? We really, we were there to win the battle each operation to keep each of us alive. That's what we really were doing.

*You mentioned having been wounded there, the first time you were wounded, what went through your mind?*

**Ed Hark:** Almost always shrapnel, literally. I was in a night position around a burial ground that we'd set up. We were on a sweep, burial ground, they bury above ground over there, we were myself and Bugsy, that was his nickname, I'll leave his name out. He was my partner. I was a squad leader, he was a fire team leader, and we were in a position at night which was nothing more than a rice paddy around this graveyard that we just dug up chunks of earth to make a little parapet in front of us. You couldn't dig down. It was just too dry. So we made this little parapet, we sat behind it and that was our position for that night for company perimeter, and we were set up there for the night and some NBA or whoever it was got up close to our lines, just way up, and threw a grenade in front of our parapet and just blew up in the dirt right between the two of us. It turned out it was a concussion grenade and not a frag grenade. It gave both of us a ride. We thought we were about 8 feet in the air. We were probably about 12 inches, but we both got blown backwards out of that position and we both thought we were dead. It was deafening. We had fragmentation from the skin I guess of the grenade in our face and our hands, but after the ringing stopped and the shooting stopped, they came over and checked on us and we were just fine. We got patched up, corps men took care of us and filled out the paperwork and we went back to work. That was the first time. The second time was from a 57 Ricoris rifle, which was a weapon of choice that the VC used over there. It was probably their biggest piece of I guess you would call artillery they had. It was a weapon they used very accurately, and we were set up again in a night time position and we were hit and the machine gun fire was very accurate and was grazing off the ground and kept us down, and the 57 Ricoris was popping all around us and one blew up in a paddy dike right behind us that we were set up by and sprayed the back of me and Bugsy and Blue with shrapnel. At the time we didn't think too much about it because we had a flap jacket on and our helmets, and we knew we got hit with the shrapnel, but we were too busy keeping the people coming from the other side to get into our holes. It was an ongoing fire fight. When it all died down, we had some shrapnel on us. But when it happens,

you don't really think about it. It's like what you got to worry about is them getting too close when they do the follow work, so as long as everything is still moving, you kept going.

*What the basic morale or basic feel of the men in your unit? Did you have a sense for how the war was going? You were there so early on, I think a lot of people when they think of Vietnam, they think of '68-'69 -*

**Ed Hark:** That and everything, yeah.

*Did you kind of feel like people back in America maybe weren't paying attention to it?*

**Ed Hark:** You're exactly right. We sort of had the feelings we weren't that far off from being back in the country, you know. We felt like they have no idea what's going on over here. They have no idea that my partners, my buddies are being killed and maimed. They really were starting, the anti war movement was going on pretty good in the spring of '66, and Jane Fonda was up north, we knew that. We got that from the Allied radio we had, whatever it was down there, and we knew that there wasn't a lot of support for the war, but we knew that we were there to do a job, we were still trained Marines, we had discipline, we had focus. There was no nonsense, and I want to make something clear, everybody always asks me about, '65 and '66 was still early – there was never, never one instance of any drugs or alcohol problems in my unit at that time. First of all, we wouldn't have tolerated it. You can't go out in the bush with somebody who's high. The movies just killed that. That was just terrible. Never saw that.

*That's Hollywood.*

**Ed Hark:** Absolutely, and this nonsense about fragging your staff NCO's, forget about it. We were there to keep our platoon, our squad, our company, do our job, be professional at it, keep each other alive. We were the only thing that could keep each other alive, and if you weren't good at it, you weren't going to get home. That's the feelings we had at the time. We didn't really know what was going on in the big picture. I would have to say we knew what was going on with different operations. We would know when Harvest Moon just finished, or we'd know when Operation Hastings is coming up, and someone would say oh, I was on Harvest Moon, this is not as bad as Harvest Moon or this was nothing like Harvest Moon. That's all we would know. The last operation or the next operation.

*How much interaction did you have with the local civilians there in Vietnam?*

**Ed Hark:** With the exception of the local villager that you would run into, none. The only time I had any interaction with the local villagers, local Vietnamese, was when we were back at battalion headquarters for an extended stay, it was about a week or so, and they put us out on bridge security. Some of us stayed back at battalion; some went out on bridge security which was some of these roll over bridges that ran across the rivers going back to Danang, and when you were on bridge security it was a good job because you'd get to sleep in a bunker at night on 50% alert, and you were in one spot, and the local villagers would come up and sell you things. You could get a Coca Cola. You could get some C-ration meat turned into some steamed rice for breakfast in the morning. So it was kind of interesting. I have a couple of pictures of a couple of little kids that would do that for us each morning. And you never know what they or their father did at night, but during the day that was our only interaction really. I have to tell you a funny story about Vietnam.

*Please do.*

**Ed Hark:** Bugsy, my partner, who incidentally he did not get wounded physically in his entire year there. He spent a year there, I didn't. But he came back and had immediate PTST problems, was diagnosed 100% disabled, has been totally disabled and hasn't worked nor has he functioned mentally for 44 years. That's the real tragedy of that war, not just the physical injuries that people like I have, but the ones that you don't see. Anyhow, Bugsy and I were at this bridge security, and I had just gotten a package from home. Battalion dropped it off to me at my sign back bunker there on the bridge, and Bugsy and I were there and I get the box, open it up, and it was an institutional can, 64 servings of baked beans. You have to keep in mind I lost 80 pounds. I've eaten one C-ration a day for many weeks. So I get a 64 serving can of baked beans, and as a truck goes by, we give the guy some money so he'd give us some soda on the way back. He brought us a case of Hires root beer, and that night we ate 64 servings of baked beans and one case of root beer. And all I can tell you is it's a good thing we had four more days at that bridge, because Bugsy and I spent 50% alert, 50% over a cat hole. It was the funniest story. It was a really, really funny story. That was just a funny story that to this day we talk about it, remember that day we got that can of 64 servings of baked beans and we sat there and we thought we were the richest men in Vietnam. We had baked beans and Hires root beer.

*That's great. Well sir, you had mentioned that you were wounded three times, you said you were shot -*

**Ed Hark:** That was last time, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1966.

*Do you want to tell us a bit about it?*

**Ed Hark:** Sure, that's what got me to be able to talk to you today, and I'm very happy about that. That was the first day of the rest of my life. It was 4:20 a.m., April the 16<sup>th</sup>, 1966, I had a Bulova watch on that my dad bought me when I went to sea school as a gift. It stopped running the morning I got hit that day. We got hit by mortars and I got either fragmentation from an AK47 or from a mortar that just tore into me. But we were out, we went out on April the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966. There was some sort of a political coup attempt in Danang. It's in the military books that I've gotten over the years I've got, it's a Marine Corps history of Vietnam, and there was some sort of a military political coup tried to take place in Danang. What happened was, there was an Arvin fort out west of us, out in the badlands, that was an ammunition fort for the Arvin's, Army Republic of Vietnam. They abandoned that fort during this coup. When they abandoned the fort, we got word of that and our company was called to fly out immediately, land there, secure the fort, and hold it until we get relieved because we had gotten word that a local NVA outfit was operating in the area. It turned out they were. They started to empty the fort before we got there. We flew in, landed about a mile from the fort. The pilots, you'd hear them talking on the helicopters that they were carrying stuff out right now, and the gun ships were trying to work the area over a little bit, and we landed, went on, got all of our units on the ground, went over to the fort. Some units went in to secure the fort. Some local Arvin's came with us. The majority of the company went across the street. The street is a dirt road, by the way. It was Highway 4. We set up a perimeter out in a rice paddy out there in front of the fort to secure the area for the night. That was the night when that second lieutenant came in, he was a replacement. I'll never forget that. He was walking the lines, checking the lines before it got dark, and on the tree line he saw this guy walking along the tree line. Late at night, the villagers had to get back to their hutches before dark. After dark at that time it was considered free fire zones out there, and this guy was trying to get back and we didn't know whether he was friend or foe. But the second lieutenant

grabbed one of the guy's rifles and started shooting at this guy, so it was getting everybody all nervous and jerky, and we said he was probably just a villager going back to his hut. We didn't really know whether to shoot him or not. But he was going to shoot this guy at about 600 yards. Needless to say, he didn't shoot the guy. He scared a lot of people in our line and got everybody all upset. So that, dark took place, we took our positions, we were set up around the perimeter, it was a company-sized perimeter, we were in NTO, we were down maybe 60% of TO for the whole company and the platoon. 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon attachments which was my squad of weapons were attached to the Highway 4 side facing the Arvin fort in the jungle, and we sent out listing posts and we sent out ambushes. At about 4 o'clock in the morning, all hell broke loose. You could see the tree line, actually the tree line lit up. We thought it was the villagers just lighting up their morning cook stoves because it was the whole tree line just lit up. It turned out that was just automatic fire, machine gun fire. They had .50 caliber, .30 caliber. They had the 57 Ricoris, they had 1680 mortars. They had lots of ammunition because they just hauled it out of the fort. And they opened up and we couldn't return fire yet because we still had our ambushes and our LP's coming in, and just like in the movies this happened. We had the ambush came in between the 5 position and the next position down where they were supposed to come in, and there were 12 of them, and the guy who was supposed to be responsible for counting them counted 12 and then got to 13. Number 13 was just like in the movies, it was the bad guy trying to come in right behind him, and it was a young kid in black shorts with a satchel charge. And he dropped him right there. As soon as we got them in and got the LP's in, then at that point they had just had absolutely everything was locked in by the enemy. They were just sending grazing fire. They had us pinned down to our nose in the ground. The mortars were walking up and down our lines. The 57's were all over the place. We just took a shellacking and we were doing our best to keep 'em back. Bugsy and I were at the point of sort of a triangle position of where our weapons were and the guns kept getting knocked out. They were knocking the rockets and the machine guns out left and right. I mean they just knocked them out. They knew what they were doing. And we had casualties going on constantly. We were just trying to keep the line steady. And then all of a sudden, they tried to come in and overrun our position, and we were just firing at people who probably weren't more than 30 yards away from us, and we're firing at them, they're firing at us, we're throwing grenades at them. Bugsy and I had used all of our M14 ammo. That's all we had at the time. We had used that up completely. I had a pistol. I was saving that as a last resort. We used the last of our grenades. We had no more M14 ammo. They were getting closer. We had two or three rounds left in a rocket tube that was dropped by our position because the gun team was knocked out. So Bugsy picks up the rocket, he fires a rocket when he saw a flash of light at a guy running right at us, hits the guy in the chest with a 35 rocket round, never explodes. The guy was inside of the, I guess like a fail safe area, it was a blow riding safety on the 35 rocket so it won't fire prematurely, but he took this guy, hit him right in the chest with a 35. I swear that guy went for another 50 feet back. That was the last we saw of him. We couldn't fire that anymore. They were too close. We used the last of our grenades. We got hit real heavy with the 57 Ricoris on our sides. We lost our machine gunners. Our machine guns were destroyed. They were up as close as they could get to us. Last thing I remember doing, we got hit with some shrapnel from a mortar. A round hit right between my position and Blue's, the fellow to my right. He lost both of his legs on that round. We dragged him into our position and Bugsy and I tied off his legs to try to keep him from bleeding to death. He was conscious. It's amazing what the body can take. We got him, one leg was almost gone, just hanging on some ligaments, but the other leg was shattered but still there. So we used our belts to tie off his legs. Bugsy and I were out of everything. Finally we could hear them getting closer and closer. Bugsy grabbed the empty M14 magazines we had and started throwing them over, hoping these guys would think they were grenades coming out. And then all of a sudden the artillery came in. We called in a fire support, danger was close, and they just

boxed us in with artillery. And the artillery was exploding right I mean dead in front of us. The folks who were closest to us weren't getting hit, but there were no more people coming in to replace them. Then at that point, Bugsy and I stood up, fired the last of my .45 ammunition. He threw the last 35 round out and the lights went out. Something exploded right in front of me or in the parapet, and that's when I got hit in the face. Bugsy got some shrapnel. It spun me around. It felt like someone threw hot sand in my face and I took a piece of metal fragmentation about 2 or 3 inches long but about 1/8<sup>th</sup> of an inch wide, went in through the eye and came out through my upper jaw, and spun me around. Bugsy put a patch on me. I was trying to still help Blue. I got hit in the right eye also. My left eye, I didn't know it but my left eye was gone, and just the socket was hanging. My right eye was hit with the same piece of shrapnel, and they patched me up. The platoon sergeant was sitting behind us. I just remember seeing him. He was just sitting there not saying a thing, and they put a patch on his head, and he had got hit in the head with either a rifle round or something, and he had lost like a quarter of the top of his head, was just blown right out, and he survived. And he and I and Blue were dragged over to the center of our area and we were still under fire, and it was about 5:00 in the morning and they tried to get some Medivacs in. They had to delay them until they had some more close air support to push these guys back. They put the Medivacs in while, I mean we would not have survived if it wasn't for the Medivac. In fact, I've got a picture of the Medivac that took us out. Somebody took a picture of the helicopter as it was loading us up. They originally put me in a pile with the fellows who had died because I had such massive blood loss from the head wounds, and the front of me was just covered with blood and it was dried up, and they had laid me down there and the corps man came over and checked on these fellows and he said this one's still alive, and I said no shit, doc. And they dragged me over to the other wounded and they put three of us on that helicopter. It was the gunnery sergeant, 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant, and a platoon sergeant who was a gunny, Blue who was the machine gun squad leader, and myself on the helicopter. At that point I was vomiting blood all over the place because I was swallowing it from the head wound and my stomach would fill up and I would throw it up so they thought I had serious internal injuries which I did have some. Then I think that, I think I mentioned the second scariest time in my life. The first one was that first ambush I went through the tree line. The second scariest time was when I was on that helicopter. I knew I was alive. I knew I was in bad shape, but I was alive, and the helicopter hadn't lifted off yet, and we could hear the gun shots going through the skin of the helicopter. You could still hear the bang noise, and I thought this thing's just got to get up, give me 1,000 feet and I'm home free. Got off the ground. We landed at Charley Med down at Danang. They took the three of us in and did a quick triage there, and put us right back on the helicopter. The three of us were flown right out on the same helicopter to the USS Repose that was offshore. They took us right to surgery. Last thing I saw was Blue on the table next to me. I was on a table. They were cutting our clothes off and a priest came up to give me special prayers, and asked if there was anything he could do. I said do I have to go back? Because I had already been whacked twice and I didn't want to go back a third time. He said son, you're not going back, you're going home. And I said that's all I needed to hear. And the last thing I saw was going to sleep looking at Blue as they were cutting the clothes off of him and then about four days later I woke up and I was in the I ward and he was on the other side of the passageway and he lost both of his legs and he had lost his groin and had some other injuries but he survived. And I flew back to the States on a C140 Medivac. Blue went to California and I went with the sergeant and this sergeant was the most boisterous guy I ever met in my life. On the way back, he never said one word, not on that long flight back with just not a word out of him. He was really severely injured. It was major brain trauma.

*When did your wife and your family learn that you had been wounded?*

**Ed Hark:** Not until probably about the third day I was on Repose, I guess when they knew my status, and then two Marine Corps officers and a Navy chaplain came to the house in Sumner, New Jersey, and said that I was wounded. The extent of the injuries was not determined yet, and that I was on my way home. As soon as I was ready to travel I'd be on my way home to the naval hospital at St. Alban's in Long Island. And all she wanted to know was was I gonna make it. It was difficult for her when she saw those three officers coming up to the door. And but they did a really good job and I was very thankful for that, and probably once I had left the Philippines, I was there for a day or two, and then I spoke to her in the Philippines and that was a reassurance for her that I was OK. That was the first time I spoke to her after being in Vietnam, and then I got to California for a day and then to St. Alban's, and then I was in St. Alban's for surgical procedures for the next oh gosh, five months until they finally discharged me. And that's all she wrote. To this day, I keep in touch with two people – Bussy who unfortunately has still not recovered. He is on his second wife. The other fellow, his nickname was Gonzy, he was in my squad, he was the only fellow I kept in touch with. He is on his third wife and has had a lot of issues with PTSD, and he lives in Louisiana and the other fellow is in Ohio. We speak once in a while, but not a whole lot.

*So you've never gone to any unit reunion?*

**Ed Hark:** I did go to one. I went to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion F Marines has a reunion every year up at Washington DC on the Marine Corps birthday. They have it over at, I'm trying to think of the name, it's over in Arlington somewhere in a hotel there, and it's all Vice Marines, the walking dead unit, and we meet there and then we do the trip to the tomb and all the different sites and we do a Marine Corps birthday and I've only been to one. But never have gotten really too involved with it afterwards. I guess it's just I've been sort of thankful that I got back. Two of the closest guys that I had a good personal relationship over there, I have kept in touch with, but they have not wanted to go much beyond what they have. So it's kind of sad, but that's just the way it is. But they were my closest friends in the world at the time.

*Well sir, I tell you, we're very thankful that you are back and it's an honor just to be able to interview you and talk to you about your experiences and I know Mr. Lambert and I and every Marine that's ever gone to boot camp, we learn about Marine Corps history and learn about the things that our predecessors have done, so it's an extreme honor to be able to talk to you and appreciate you sharing this with us. Our goal with these interviews, we have documents here that go back hundreds of years and our goal is that we can keep these interviews and hopefully hundreds of years from now somebody might listen to this as well if they wanted to learn a little bit more about Vietnam or the Marine Corps or just our veterans in general.*

**Ed Hark:** I guess one thing I would like to go on the record saying I guess for those guys that served with me over there is that the hardest part we had was coming back. I had a tough 5 or 6 years during the terrible times that our country was torn apart. It wasn't a very popular thing to be a Vietnam vet, and we all had a tough time, but we really did. But that's OK. We moved on. But I guess if I would leave one message for those who weren't there that you could remember for those who are doing it for us today is you may not agree with the war or the politics, but you got to support the guys who are doing it. The guys and the gals who are doing it have taken an oath of allegiance to do what they are doing. They don't have a choice each day of saying I agree or I disagree. They are sworn to their duty and they are going to do it, so I wish that we would really honor the veteran if not the war.

*Absolutely. Well sir, it's been an honor and I'm amazed at the amount of detail that you recall from your time over there. I've done quite a few of these interviews now with veterans from WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and even present conflicts, and I think you probably have more detail than almost any of them I talked to and so that to me, I'm sure Mr. Lambert feels the same way, he's sitting across the table from me listening to this on headphones, really feel like we are in your footsteps listening to your interview, the details is amazing.*

**Ed Hark:** Well I'm glad. Well I gave it to you as it happened. I just relived it for you.

*Well I feel like we lived a little touch of that and I think anyone that listens to this will feel the same way. I want to thank you as well on behalf of everybody here at the General Land Office. Commissioner Patterson was a Marine, we've got a lot of veterans and a lot of Marines that work here. It's kind of a joke that it's a bit of a Marine Corps mafia.*

**Ed Hark:** That's OK.

*There's a lot of Marines, a lot of veterans, but even those that work at the Land Office that aren't veterans, they all understand and appreciate the service and sacrifice of our veterans, so a big thank you for what you've done.*

**Ed Hark:** Thanks for getting me the time to do it. I'm happy to do it, Captain.

*Yes sir. Well and what we'll do sir like I mentioned before is we'll make copies of this and get it to you soon so you can have them to give to family or friends or just keep or whatever, and we'll get that to you as soon as we get 'em burned.*

**Ed Hark:** Thank you so much. It was a pleasure doing it.

*Yes sir, well have a great weekend and you've got my number as well, so call me if you ever need anything, sir.*

**Ed Hark:** Semper fi to all the Marines in that room.

*Hoo-rah, take care.*

**Ed Hark:** Hoo-rah, bye bye.

*[End of recording]*