

Clark, Michael US Army

[00:00:14.14] MICHAEL CLARK: I was born in Concord, Michigan in 1950. And we were living in Jackson at the time. I lived there until halfway through kindergarten. And at that time we moved to Marshall, Michigan. I finished my schooling in Marshall, Michigan. Graduated in 1968 from high school. I got married shortly afterwards.

[00:00:36.63] I grew up in a family of-- I have one older sister, one older brother, and one younger sister. My father was a police officer most of his life. Marshall is a small town of 7800 people.

[00:00:56.85] MICHAEL CLARK: I was drafted. I was the last man drafted from our county before they started the lottery program in 1970. They were going to draft two people in November and two in December. And I kept checking with the draft board, and I was six down. And I thought I might make it to the lottery.

[00:01:15.75] MARK FRANKLIN: And this is 1969 now?

[00:01:17.04] MICHAEL CLARK: This is 1969, yeah. And they changed it. And they took six in October, nobody in November, nobody in December. So I was the last man drafted from our county before they started the lottery. My number for the lottery the next year was like 228. And they drafted up to like 175. I would not have had to have gone.

[00:01:37.92] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[00:01:39.12] MICHAEL CLARK: This is an interesting twist because when I was in high school, I actually wanted the Army to be my career. I was working with teachers trying to get an appointment to West Point, writing congressmen and drafting a letter at that time. With the events of Vietnam as they were at the time, it was something that I didn't want to participate in.

[00:02:02.56] Not just because of public opinion, but because I didn't feel that it was worth risking my life for. My sense of the war was that it was not winnable, and that it was not fought correctly. I did not want to risk my life at that time. Again, not because I didn't want to fight for my country, but because the way the war was going, the way it was being run, the way things were. Tet in 1968, that seemed to be the turning point where people thought that the war is no longer winnable. We're losing this.

[00:02:32.91] And I didn't want to go. And I tried everything I could to stay out. I was diagnosed with ulcers in high school, in and out of track and football with ulcers. I had barium studies trying to get a deferment, and they couldn't find ulcers. So I wrote my congressman.

[00:02:51.23] In the meantime, I got drafted. In my second week of basic training, I was put in a hospital overnight for a new procedure at that time called an endoscopy, where they pass the camera into the stomach and look for ulcers. They didn't find ulcers. At that time I knew that I was in the Army, and I've always believed that if you're going to do something you do it to the best of your ability. And that's what I did.

[00:03:19.66] MICHAEL CLARK: Basic training was in Fort Knox, Kentucky. That training-- eight weeks long. I was drafted at Fort Wayne in Detroit, October 29, 1969. We flew to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Got there late at night. First three or four days was processing in, a lot of testing, pictures were taken. And they asked me what I wanted to do with my military career. And I told them that I wanted to be a light vehicle mechanic because I'd worked in my dad's garage. And they said, well, you want to be an MP or a cook? No.

[00:03:56.62] So I went through basic training. We went through like six weeks of basic. And then we had a one week leave for Christmas. Came back, finished my last two weeks of basic.

[00:04:05.70] The day I graduated from basic training, we got our orders. We were called out into formation in front of the barracks. They read to everyone where they were going, what their MOS would be, in other words, Military Occupational Specialty. And they read mine off as an 91D20. What in the world is in 91D20?

[00:04:28.92] So when the formation broke, I asked a couple of sergeants, what's 91D20? Well, a 91A10's a medic. I think that might be an ambulance driver. I thought, I can do that. I can do that. I'm all right with that.

[00:04:43.91] The training was at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. The plane was a very turbulent ride, the worst turbulence I've ever experienced on an airplane. I remember that. We stopped at Fort Sill, dropped off some guys who were going to artillery training, on to Fort Sam Houston.

[00:04:59.21] It was late at night when we finally got to Fort Sam Houston, got bused onto the base. And we had to hurry up and wait. And we stood in line. And there was a sergeant at the head of the line. And I got to the head of the line. And, in a military voice, it was, Private Clark you will go to Medical Training Center and you will complete 10 weeks of training to be a medic, whereupon you will go up on the hill to Medical Field Service school, and you will become an operating room technician.

[00:05:25.79] I looked at him and I said, Sarge, I said, I got no problem with blood. I got no problem with that. But I can't stand to even look at a picture of a needle in a book. I think you've got the wrong guy. He said, that's fine. Sign this waiver. You will be in Louisiana tomorrow. And 6 weeks from now, you will be in Vietnam carrying a rifle. And I said, wait a minute. I can do this. I can do-- [LAUGHING]. So that's how my training went at AIT, 10 weeks to be a medic, and then 12 weeks to become an operating room technician.

[00:05:53.60] MARK FRANKLIN: But you hadn't asked to be a medic. You hadn't asked to go in the medical field.

[00:05:56.60] MICHAEL CLARK: I had not. No, and I think what happened is I scored well, when I went in, on the initial testing. And most of the guys I was with were college grads. I was one of the few that had not gone to college, didn't have any schooling beyond high school at all. But I think it was probably because of the testing when I first went in that they got me into the MOS.

[00:06:18.83] MARK FRANKLIN: Describe your training at Fort Sam Houston in Texas.

[00:06:21.68] MICHAEL CLARK: Fort Sam Houston, 10 weeks training to be a medic. We were issued several medical books, different-- how to treat patients, how to purify the water, keep things clean, and then the hygiene and things that we would need to know in the field. The classes were probably, I'm going to say, 80 guys in a class. We all slept in one barracks, one open room. There were no dividers. The latrines were the same. There were no dividers. It was just one room with--

[00:06:50.09] MARK FRANKLIN: No privacy.

[00:06:50.57] MICHAEL CLARK: No privacy, absolutely none. And the bunks were just wide enough to walk in between, with foot lockers at the end. And that was your space, everything bunked.

[00:07:01.86] Classes were from about 8:00 in the morning until about 5:00 in the afternoon, sometimes in a classroom, sometimes in the field, depending on what we were doing. Marching to class, we did not call cadence. They had drummers.

[00:07:16.74] MARK FRANKLIN: Drummers?

[00:07:17.59] MICHAEL CLARK: We had drummers. Yeah, everybody, they had drummers. So we marched to the drummers. Cadence was never called.

[00:07:25.30] MARK FRANKLIN: What were some of the skills they taught you as a combat medic?

[00:07:27.70] MICHAEL CLARK: Skills as a combat medic were medications that we would need to be able to use in the field, dressing, cricothyrotomy for airway preparation, maintenance. Again, personal hygiene was a concern. We had to learn how to use needles. We did.

[00:07:46.27] And we started IVs. We would partner off. And my partner would start an IV on me, then I would start an IV on them. And we did the same with injections. And we did that for a week to two weeks. And I'm sure people thought I was a junkie by the time I got done because we were all track marked. I worked through my fear of needles. I did.

[00:08:12.08] MICHAEL CLARK: I graduated in the end of June.

[00:08:15.49] MARK FRANKLIN: Nineteen--

[00:08:16.30] MICHAEL CLARK: 1970.

[00:08:17.80] MARK FRANKLIN: 1970.

[00:08:19.84] MICHAEL CLARK: I had a one-month leave. My reporting date was August 9. Our second anniversary, wedding anniversary, was August 10. So I reported to Fort Lewis,

Washington. And I was very happy to go out of Fort Lewis. People who had to go through San Francisco, they had to be escorted by guards because people would spit on them and throw stones and throw bottles at them and injure them when they were going on and off the plane coming to and from Vietnam.

[00:08:53.61] MARK FRANKLIN: So it was at the height of the antiwar protests.

[00:08:55.63] MICHAEL CLARK: This was at the height of the war protests. Yes it was. And I was very happy to go through Fort Lewis and not have to go through that. And it was about two days in Fort Lewis for processing, then a 16-hour flight to Vietnam, Flying Tiger Airlines, one-hour stop in Alaska, five hours in Japan, and then on to Vietnam.

[00:09:16.18] It would have been August 12 when I arrived. We arrived in the evening, about, I want to say, probably 9 or 10 o'clock. And my first impression stepping off the plane was that I was walking into an oven. It was in the mid-80s. Humidity was always 100% that time of year. And so even that late at night, it was that hot.

[00:09:42.18] And going to the orderly room to check in-- it was just a formality. Of course, there's just a skeleton crew there at night. Sergeant of the guard kind of checked a blank on the page, and said, OK, this is where you're going.

[00:09:54.74] And I remember walking down the sidewalk to the Quonset hut-- and this was in Cam Ranh Bay-- that there was a big pile of vomit that I didn't understand at the time. But on that pile of vomit there were probably a hundred cockroaches. And they made a clicking sound as they were on there. And the cockroaches were up to four inches long there. And as I approached and walked past it-- it was just a few feet off the sidewalk-- well, they scattered. But they didn't go very far, and I wasn't very far beyond, and they re congregated there.

[00:10:27.35] I went to the Quonset hut. There's no air conditioning. And it's, again, very warm, stagnant in the Quonset hut. And I unrolled the mattress with the pillow inside. And we did not get sheets or pillowcases. And I tried to get the dust off-- or the sand off the mattress. And there was no such thing. It was like sleeping on a sandy beach without having a towel under you, and at 85 degrees and 100% humidity. There was no sleep.

[00:10:58.01] And I think it was the next day that we flew out to Phu Bai. We flew a C-130. And they had the woven strap seats that was actually cargo covers that they would fashion into a seat, like a hammock seat. And we were shoulder-to-shoulder with gear, no air conditioning on the plane, and 100-plus degrees outside. And it was about a three-hour flight to Phu Bai

[00:11:23.28] Getting off the plane-- the baseball cap was a standard issue at that time, when we first got in country, if you weren't going out into the field. And I had a baseball cap on. But I remember that we were called out into formation. And the sun was so bright coming off the sand that I couldn't open my eyes to look up. I had to wear sunglasses, even with the shade of the hat, because it was so bright. And it took me a while to acclimate just to the bright sun coming off the sand. And the temperature would be anywhere upwards of 118 degrees during the day.

[00:11:59.84] And being at Phu Bai, there was an air base there. So there was never a time during the day that there wasn't a helicopter in the air. Well, that means that there's sand constantly in the air. And the air-- the sky oftentimes looked a little yellow. Made for some beautiful sunsets. But there was always just a tinge of color in the air from the helicopters.

[00:12:20.61] I was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. So I flew-- after going to Phu Bai, there was a transient barracks there. It was just a night or two there before we were sent by convoy, probably 30 miles north of there, somewhere in that area to Camp Evans, which was the in-country training center. And they went over the different things to be aware of in Vietnam. We had booby trap training, where we would go through the different parts of the woods, and they would have booby traps set up so that you could recognize them.

[00:12:56.18] Punji sticks. Punji sticks were sharpened bamboo sticks. They would dig a hole in the ground and put the sticks in the ground and cover them, so when you stepped on them, they would go through the sole of the boot and into your foot. Well, the boots were fairly new when we got there, and they had steel plates in the bottom, which would stop the Punji sticks. So they went to ammo cartridges. They put rifle cartridges in a little piece of wood with nails in the bottom, so when you stepped on it, it would fire, and the bullet would shoot up through you. And the hand grenades with trip wires.

[00:13:26.35] So we went through the booby trap training. We did have to go out into the field to make sweeps. That was kind of almost mock sweeps. But at the same time, we were outside to the wire, and there's no such thing as mock. It could happen at any time.

[00:13:45.16] Guard duty, there were foxholes, probably every-- probably 20 to 30 yards, all the way around the compound, all the way around the perimeter. And every other foxhole had an M79 grenade launcher. And the ones in between had an M60 machine gun. So we had to qualify with both to pull guard duty. And the foxhole I was assigned to, we had an M60 machine gun.

[00:14:14.15] And my first night on guard duty, which is probably my second night at Camp Evans, maybe my fourth or fifth day in-country, we had NVA outside the wire. And so they had-

[00:14:28.23] MARK FRANKLIN: NVA is the North Vietnamese Army.

[00:14:29.43] MICHAEL CLARK: North Vietnamese Army, correct. We had regulars and they spotted some of them. And they had a newfangled gadget at that time called the Starlight Scope. They could see at night, the night vision scopes. And they had guard towers periodically. And they picked up enemy activity outside the wire. And so, they would fire volleys of M79s and the 60s to spray the outside. But they called in Cobras, the Cobra gunships, that night.

[00:14:54.66] And it was very impressive. Being at night, obviously, they flew lights out. So you couldn't see them, but you could hear the rotors. And you could hear the whooshing of the rotors as they would climb to the peak. And it would sound like they almost stopped. You'd expect them to fall out of the sky. And it would rapidly increase as they went into the dive. And they

could reach 209 miles an hour in the dive. And they had two rocket pods on each side of the helicopter. The helicopter itself is only 36 inches wide.

[00:15:28.56] And they had a Minigun which fired 1,200 rounds a minute, with a grenade launcher on the front. And when they would fire the rockets, the back blast with the eddy currents, with the sparks going down, it was just a "shwew, shwew, shwew." And with a Minigun, every fifth round was a tracer. But it looked like a laser beam, and sounded like a buzz saw when it fired. And it was like watching a fireworks display at night. I mean, it was just incredible to watch. But I remember sitting in the foxhole, watching this going on, and I'm thinking, holy shit, I'm glad they're on my side. It was impressive.

[00:16:12.09] MICHAEL CLARK: I was at a battalion aid station, 326th Medical Battalion at the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Eagle. When I got there, I found out that there were slots for two operating room technicians. And I was the third. They did not have a slot for me. It was a critical MOS, meaning that they did not have enough of them. They needed more than what they could train. So I put in for a transfer immediately.

[00:16:35.16] It happened to be that the inspector general came through for an annual visit just like about a week later. And the company commander had done nothing with it. And the clerk said, it's in his drawer and he's not doing anything with it. So he recommended I see the inspector general, which I did. And it passed company and battalion that day and went to division.

[00:16:54.99] Well, I had six other visits before my transfer finally did go through. But not having a slot for me, they would use me. But there would be day patrols, and I'd go out as a medic on day patrol. And we would sweep the areas around the compound, looking for any enemy activity.

[00:17:13.48] MARK FRANKLIN: So you accompanied the infantry companies--

[00:17:15.25] MICHAEL CLARK: I was out a couple of times with infantry, yeah. And I remember one time we didn't get back until well after dark. And actually, that was at Camp Evans, because when we were coming back after dark, I was very-- there's no way you can have 60 guys marching with equipment and not make any noise.

[00:17:36.39] And we were going through the area where the enemy activity was the night before. And we had something like about a mile to march back after dark and-- pretty nerve-racking. Very happy to get inside the wire again. We did not see any action that night. But I did get out in sweeps with the 101st. And when I was not working with them, a couple of times I had to ride as a medic on a convoy. But most of the time, they put me to work in the motor pool.

[00:18:09.04] MICHAEL CLARK: Living conditions at Camp Evans was pretty much the same as anything in the northern part of Vietnam where we lived in hooches. And they're approximately 16 feet wide and approximately 30 feet long, probably 6, 10, 12 pitch corrugated steel roof. Everything was on stilts about two feet off the ground because of monsoon season. There's no way to hold a foundation on that soil with all the water falling during monsoon

season. So as you walked up, you had steps coming into the front. And on the back side, there was a grill going out with steps going down.

[00:18:42.74] And there were six guys in the hooch. And there were bunks, three bunks on each side. And again, there were no rooms. There was no privacy. No plumbing, no air conditioning. When I got to Camp Eagle with the 101st, they had some of the beds were bunked. You'd have two guys living in a spot. And being the new guy, I wound up getting one of the bunked beds.

[00:19:13.89] I was at the 101st until the end of September. And then they sent me temporary duty, anticipating that my transfer was probably going to go through. And I worked for two months at the 85th. In November, they called me back to the 101st because my transfer had not gone through yet. The next day, my transfer went through.

[00:19:38.84] It was that time-- it was, I can tell you, it was November 13, Friday, November 13-- I got a MARS call from my wife. A MARS call-- other than letters, the only communication you had was what's called a MARS call. Ham radio operators around the world opening their mics so you could talk back and forth. And when you finished a statement you had to say "over" so they knew to reverse the mics so that the other person could talk.

[00:20:08.58] And this was set up by the Red Cross because my father-in-law had died. And not being a blood relative, I was not allowed to go home. But I did get a MARS call so I could talk with my wife and make sure that she was OK.

[00:20:22.45] The next day, I flew to Da Nang to transfer out of the 101st and transfer to the 85th. I was there for probably three or four days before I got back to the 85th.

[00:20:32.47] MARK FRANKLIN: And what were those living conditions like at Phu Bai, at the 85th?

[00:20:37.13] MICHAEL CLARK: The same type of a hooch. It was the same 16-foot wide, 30-foot long, open hooch.

[00:20:43.97] MARK FRANKLIN: So it didn't get any better for you.

[00:20:45.20] MICHAEL CLARK: It did not. No, it did not. The sides were screened, so you'd get a little bit of ventilation. And they had shutters that you could fold down during the summer to try to get some air through there, but would fold up during monsoon season to keep the water out.

[00:21:05.73] MICHAEL CLARK: I had very little interaction with the Vietnamese people. I seldom went off base, went off compound. A lot of guys did. One of the things I did do when I was with 101st is I went on a Medical Civilian Action Patrol, MEDCAP, where we would go into different places and pull sick call and provide medical care for people in the area. And I enjoyed that enough so that, even when I was with the 85th, I'd hitchhike back to Camp Eagle and go on the MEDCAP program into the different places for a few months to go in to see that. And I found that quite interesting.

[00:21:44.80] Everybody would be in line to be seen, sick or not. And we gave away a lot of medication that you'd only have to take once a day, which was a vitamin. But everybody got something. But you'd see a lot of pathology. I saw a man with a hernia who, his skin was not broken, but he actually carried his intestines in a bag, because the hernia was so bad. Large cancers on the face.

[00:22:09.07] We saw a baby with an ear infection that was just draining thick pus. And we gave the child-- it was less than a year old, probably around nine months old-- and gave the child antibiotics, amoxicillin, for the ear infection. And the doctor made sure that he tried to impress upon the mother that the child needs this medication or the child might die.

[00:22:37.15] And the concern was any medication that you would get would be prescription, it could be sold on the black market. So if she had six other kids at home, if they were starving, she might sell that medication to put food on the table for all the other kids. It's like sacrificing one child so the others could live. And so that's the kind of thing you dealt with when you went on that type of a patrol.

[00:23:11.37] MICHAEL CLARK: There are a few that I remember. The one that sticks with me and haunts me the most was Richard. Richard-- it was probably 11 or 12 o'clock one day, early '71, maybe April, maybe somewhere around there. And I went in to relieve Dennis, who was another OR tech, on a case that had just started.

[00:23:43.17] And the surgeons were looking for some viable tissue. Amputations were an everyday thing. There was never a day go by that we didn't cut off arms and legs. I mean, that was every day. And you'd just get bloody stumps for extremities, unrecognizable as extremities most of the time. They kept working their way up.

[00:24:07.70] And they wound up having to sever this gentleman, the Soldier, at the pelvis. So he had nothing from the belly button down. And we did a colostomy so the feces could drain. And we did ureterostomies so the kidneys could drain. And he also had an amputation of the right arm.

[00:24:38.24] And I remember when we moved him from the operating room to the intensive care unit, there's a hallway between the two. And we found out that the commanding officer and the sergeant and his patrol leader were waiting to see Richard when he came from the OR, going to the ICU. And we took pillows and put them under the sheet to make it look like he had a full body as we wheeled him through. He lived for about three days before he died of sepsis.

[00:25:10.35] MARK FRANKLIN: The doctors did everything they could, but that was just too catastrophic.

[00:25:13.80] MICHAEL CLARK: We always did.

[00:25:14.73] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah.

[00:25:17.57] MICHAEL CLARK: We had outstanding results for anything we did. We always did the best we could with what we had.

[00:25:25.58] I had a lot of worst days. I never had one day where I could say this is the best day I've had here, but I had a lot of worst days. There were things that we would see or things that would happen. And one of the things that sticks with me the most is the screams in the ER, the cries for help.

[00:25:45.64] Doc, don't cut off my leg. Doc, you got to get this to my wife. Doc, am I going to live? Doc-- and it just was screams. These guys were wounded. They didn't know if they were going to live or die. They were scared. They had full-blown adrenaline rush.

[00:26:01.82] MARK FRANKLIN: So they're still conscious.

[00:26:02.95] MICHAEL CLARK: They're conscious. And you're talking to them. And you're trying to be reassuring, and you're trying to communicate with them at some level. But at the same time, you've got to concentrate on what you're doing because you've got lines and tubes, and you've got everything in place. And you've got to get it done so that you can get them to the X-ray and eventually to the OR and where you needed to be.

[00:26:27.40] And then once you finished with this guy, then there's going to be a guy next to him. And when mass casualties-- sometimes we could take 10, 12 or more casualties at a time. And it was organized chaos. I mean, you would walk in, it would just seem like things were flying everywhere. And everybody was-- there was a lot of shouting. But it wasn't shouting at each other. It was shouting because the noise-- you had to speak loud in order to be heard, in order to get things done.

[00:27:04.33] Every once in a while, something would just hit home. And it would send me into the depths of depression. I mean, it was-- I would just be almost incapacitated. And there are three other guys that I came home with that-- we met there. We still call each other brothers. We became connected at the soul. We knew each other unconditionally like you could never know anybody here. You can't open yourself up to anybody like I could them, not even my wife, not family, nobody.

[00:27:44.55] And they would be there, and they would help pick me up and get me back on my feet. And it was like, the next week, it would happen to somebody else. And the next week, somebody else. And it was just constant trying to get somebody through that time, making sure that they weren't alone, that they had somebody there that we were talking with them, each other, and working through the nightmare that they'd just experienced.

[00:28:16.65] MARK FRANKLIN: And those are the friendships that you made in Vietnam that have stayed with you through the years.

[00:28:20.96] MICHAEL CLARK: Absolutely.

[00:28:21.53] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have any time for recreational activities or any downtime to--

[00:28:25.94] MICHAEL CLARK: We did.

[00:28:26.51] MARK FRANKLIN: --decompress a little bit? What kind of things did you do?

[00:28:28.85] MICHAEL CLARK: Yeah, uh-huh. During the summer months, we had a softball league, slow-pitch softball. And each part of the hospital had their own team. And we were one of the better teams. The ORCMS was one of the better teams.

[00:28:46.13] And the docs were one of the poorer teams. And one day we bet a case of beer on a softball game. And they cleaned our clock. They just whooped-- I'd tell them, I'd say, if I'd have bet you \$20, we'd have beat you. But a case of beer, no chance. We bet the wrong thing.

[00:29:04.20] But we also had a fast-pitch softball league. We had a team for the 85th. And there were three other teams, and we would play each other. Warrant Officer Smith from the mess hall was the pitcher. I was the catcher. But we played slow-pitch softball, or fast-pitch softball as well. During the winter months, they cleaned out one warehouse and then put up basketball hoops. And we had a basketball league on Wednesday night.

[00:29:33.09] There was a movie theater of sorts, which consisted of ammo boxes spread out with a plywood wall. And they would show movies as they came through. But the movies, when they had been shown so many times, they would break, and they'd throw pieces out. But we could take beer. So we'd go and have a beer and maybe watch part of the movie and maybe not, who knows? But we'd be in the theater. But there were a few things that we could do in our off time.

[00:30:04.50] MICHAEL CLARK: No, I had a couple of good days. When I went to R&R and the day I went home. But even the day I went home, a couple of guys who went with me to the airport, and that was an emotional day. There's nothing I wanted more than to come home. My wife and I at that time had been married for three years and we'd been together for just over a year. But I knew that I was losing the camaraderie, that relationship. And that was difficult. That was a difficult thing to leave.

[00:30:43.88] MICHAEL CLARK: Really not. I don't know if I ever saw anybody from another country, another soldier from another country, when I was there. ARVNs, very little. There was an ARVN compound just to our north, but we didn't have any contact with them.

[00:31:06.96] MICHAEL CLARK: I wrote my wife every day. And she wrote me every day. During--

[00:31:12.56] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you save those letters?

[00:31:13.76] MICHAEL CLARK: I'm sorry?

[00:31:14.15] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you save those letters?

[00:31:15.29] MICHAEL CLARK: I have some of them.

[00:31:16.37] MARK FRANKLIN: OK.

[00:31:18.65] MICHAEL CLARK: I think those are the ones that my wife sent to me. I have some of them. We did not have to pay for postage. We could write the letter and put it in. Just write "free" in the upper right hand corner, and it would be mailed. During monsoon season, there were times when the mail would not go through for a week. And I was busy. I never gave it too much thought when I was there. I knew at the end of the week, I'd get seven letters or however many letters. And I'd put them in order and I would read them.

[00:31:47.88] And it took me a long time after I got home to think about that. The letters couldn't get to them either. And what happens, when you have somebody, a family member in a war zone, and you don't hear from them for a week, and you know they write every day, what's going through their mind? What hell did they have to go through?

[00:32:07.19] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[00:32:09.71] MICHAEL CLARK: I did send some cassettes. About once a month, I would send a one-hour cassette, sit down and kind of go over things. Never put down anything that described any kind of danger, any-- when we got hit with rockets or mortars. I got caught up in automatic weapons fire one time in the back of a pickup truck. And I never sent any information of that home. Didn't want them to worry any more than what they already were. So that information never got home.

[00:32:41.19] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you get a lot of news about the war from home?

[00:32:45.21] MICHAEL CLARK: Did not. No. Nothing came from home. We had Armed Forces Vietnam Radio, AFVN, which was the one station that we had that we could listen to. Played contemporary music, reruns of Chickenman. And they would have some news on there every so often, daily. What they'd do was they did body counts.

[00:33:10.16] You know, everybody always thought that it was always skewed. You didn't pay any attention to it anyway. We would know through the grapevine when somebody got hit in the area. Of course, when anybody was in trouble in our area, we knew it because we got choppers. But no, we didn't get any information from home. They did have a newspaper there as well.

[00:33:35.53] MARK FRANKLIN: You had a sense before you left, though, because it was at the height of the antiwar movement, so you had a sense of what was going on back home.

[00:33:41.05] MICHAEL CLARK: I knew what was going on. We knew. We knew what was going on.

[00:33:43.39] MARK FRANKLIN: Did that affect you at all on the job?

[00:33:46.13] MICHAEL CLARK: On the job? No. No. There was a goal to be achieved. And whatever it took, that's what we did.

[00:33:59.93] MICHAEL CLARK: We had some outstanding surgeons there. And we didn't really operate within true military protocol. We were on a first-name basis, and that drove the lifers nuts. They would come through, and they would admonish everybody. And then we would attach labels to each other like, maybe, Dr. Major Roger Sir, or we'd put a bunch of names in front of it. But it would always be a name and a rank and then "sir" at the end. And it became kind of a joke to us.

[00:34:32.78] But the surgeons-- we were medical. And they were not military, they were medical. And that's what we were there for, and that's what we did. And sometimes I feel that we did an excellent job in spite of the Army, because they were always trying to come down and impose certain things on them. And there was always a lot of blowback from that.

[00:34:58.78] MARK FRANKLIN: The career guys just didn't understand that, did they?

[00:35:01.23] MICHAEL CLARK: Didn't understand it, no.

[00:35:08.55] MICHAEL CLARK: Returned home August 11, 1971, about a 16-hour plane ride back again. There was a stopover somewhere but I don't remember where. But I remember when the plane was touching down in Washington, going through my mind was, I've just been through a year of hell, please get us down safe. Got off the plane and several of us actually just dropped to our knees and kissed the tarmac. So happy to be home.

[00:35:38.27] I started processing out. They told us that we could make one long day of it and get processed out and get home that night, or we could take a couple of days and take our time and do what we needed to do before we got out. Well, there was no question in my mind what I was going to do. I wanted to get out.

[00:35:56.06] And there were several stations that you had to go through. And it was a day-long process to process out. There was no debriefing. There wasn't anything like that. Some of the stations were hired out to civilian companies to help with the processing.

[00:36:15.64] And while on Fort Lewis, processing out, I walked into one of the warehouses, and there were antiwar, anti-Vietnam war protest signs on the wall. And it's like somebody stabbed me in the heart. It just was beyond disappointing. I was so upset with that.

[00:36:37.86] When I was there in the warehouse, a full-bird colonel came in, and he just absolutely tore the place apart. I mean, he was screaming obscenities and tearing up the posters. I mean, he went ballistic. But it was still there and I still saw it.

[00:36:55.80] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[00:36:56.46] MICHAEL CLARK: And that just-- I mean, that just seemed to be the way that the Vietnam veterans were accepted home, or weren't accepted anyway.

[00:37:06.84] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you-- was it difficult readjusting to life after Vietnam? Because you got out, you left the Army.

[00:37:12.30] MICHAEL CLARK: I left the Army. I did. When I flew home, I was in Chicago, in O'Hare Airport. And, walking through the airport, we had to travel in uniform. And I tried to stay out of the mainstream, where the people were, because we would get spit on, called names. "Baby killers" was a favorite.

[00:37:34.59] MARK FRANKLIN: You actually heard that?

[00:37:36.18] MICHAEL CLARK: I did hear that. Not at O'Hare. I tried to stay out of the mainstream so I didn't have to deal with that, because I was in uniform. So I tried to stay in the shadows, more or less, going through the airport, because I didn't want to be confronted. And I was not.

[00:37:51.09] I flew to Detroit. Karen and Leo, a couple of good friends, married couple, drove my wife to the airport, 100 miles to Detroit. I gave my wife a hug and a kiss. I greeted Karen and Leo. And, as we had arranged, I grabbed the bag of clothing, and I went into the bathroom in the airport in Detroit and changed into civilian clothing. Put my military uniform in the bag and never put it on again. I still have it, but it still hangs in the closet. Never put it on again.

[00:38:23.51] First stop was, after the 100-mile drive home, was at the A&W for a cheeseburger and onion rings. Then it was home. And we lived with my parents for three weeks until we found a place of our own. There was no celebration. There was no greeting of people, there was no party, there was nothing. I just came home. And here I am. My family members would come in and say, hi, how are you doing? And say, glad you're home, what have you.

[00:38:55.73] Best friends were distant. I knew before I went that the buzz was that Vietnam veterans are crazy, and you don't mess with a Vietnam veteran. You leave them alone. And I got that when I got home. Without hearing it, I knew that that's what was happening because even best friends were distant.

[00:39:15.37] Leo, the guy that met me at the airport, he was a Vietnam veteran, so he was a great support. We were best friends and did a lot of things together for a long time. But there was no accolades. There was no party. There was no welcome home. It was just-- and I-- I may have been a part of that. I may have requested that. I don't remember. But I may have requested that nothing-- that I didn't want anything done. I came home. I wanted to forget. I want it to be done. I wanted it over. It's in the past.

[00:39:48.31] MARK FRANKLIN: You wanted to move on.

[00:39:49.27] MICHAEL CLARK: No, my life-- this is day one of the rest of my life. And I just kind of moved into life as it was before, the best I could. And tried to make a new life and get acquainted with my wife, who had been my wife for three years, but we'd hardly known each other at that point.

[00:40:15.01] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you stay in touch with other veterans throughout the years?

[00:40:17.80] MICHAEL CLARK: I did not, loose contact. Duane, one of my Vietnam brothers, and I remained in contact. I did see Tree and Deej, who were a couple other of the guys that I considered my brothers when I came home. When Deej got married, we were at their wedding. We did have contact. We saw each other for a little bit. And again, Duane and I had letters now and then. But it was a few years apart, and almost lost contact with each other.

[00:40:53.79] And I asked myself why. And the answer, I think, is very easy. And it was, it was a reminder. And I needed to forget. I needed-- when I got home, I took Vietnam and put it in this little capsule, and put it somewhere back in the back of my mind, and closed the door and threw away the key. And I was done. I couldn't open that door. And I didn't open that door for a number of years. And I think, probably, there's enough forgetting and enough healing over the years that, finally, I was able to confront that.

[00:41:28.19] We do have reunions with our unit now. And we've had five of them now, and they've been very healing. And it's brought it out to where you can talk about it and face things a little bit now. After our last reunion, I went home and thought that there was a story that needed to be told that nobody can talk about. But I can get it down in the privacy of my own home. I could struggle through and get this down on paper and tell that story. And I think it's a very important story that people need to know, that needed to be told. I just felt that it had to be told.

[00:42:06.76] I never set about, at any point in my life, to write a book. But I felt compelled. I felt that I needed to write this book and get this down. And not for me, just for me, but for everybody in the unit and for all vets. I'm hoping that vets who read it understand that they are not alone and that other people have the same feelings too. And that they can get some sense of association with it, and maybe it will help other people as well.

[00:42:34.22] It has been beneficial. While I was writing it, and not too long, for a while afterward, I was quite emotional for some time. But it feels like it's getting better. And it hasn't been out that long, but it does feel like it's getting better already.

[00:42:57.56] MICHAEL CLARK: When I got home from Vietnam, the last thing I ever wanted to do was see the inside of a hospital. Again, that was a reminder. I wanted nothing to do with my experience. And I had a shop job working for a company making car parts. And, Michigan being Michigan, they were in a recession, and I didn't have a job when I got home. And unemployment benefits were starting to run out. And I had to do something.

[00:43:25.93] And the only job I could find was as an orderly in a hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan. And I took that job. And I think it was like \$2.25 an hour. And I went and got patients and brought them to and from the operating room, cleaned the operating room, pretty much whatever needed to be done. And hadn't been there but about three months when a Naval corpsman who was an operating room technician decided he was going back to school. Well, I moved into his position as an operating room technician. And, that fall, I decided to start taking courses and wound up in pre-med.

[00:43:59.87] So the effect of Vietnam on my life is I never would have chosen medicine as a course of my life. I never would have done that. I wouldn't have stayed in a machine shop my whole life either, but I could have seen myself as a carpenter or a builder or something like that. But that's the biggest effect it's had on my life overall.

[00:44:24.98] MARK FRANKLIN: Is there one memory or experience from your service that stayed with you and had a lasting influence on your life or changed you in some way?

[00:44:33.17] MICHAEL CLARK: That-- again, I would go back to Richard. Richard's always been on my mind. And that's the only name I remember anymore. I to remember several names. But he's the only name I remember anymore. But there are a few things that happened in the OR and in the ER that are with me still today.

[00:45:03.03] MARK FRANKLIN: How about, with your experience in Vietnam, how has that affected the way you think about veterans today and the young men and women coming off the battlefields today?

[00:45:09.72] MICHAEL CLARK: I have tremendous respect for veterans. I see them in the airports, and I see them applauded, and I'm very happy for them. But I got to tell you that there's a hollow spot here, that sometimes I almost wish that I could experience that. Because we didn't. The first recognition I ever had of being a Vietnam vet-- and it was something that I didn't deny, but I would never admit unless it came out somehow in conversation that it was appropriate. We couldn't be proud as Vietnam vets.

[00:45:54.44] I was actually sitting at a blackjack table in Las Vegas in 1992, 21 years after I came home. And there was a veteran came home from Desert Storm. And people were congratulating him and thanking him for his service and what have you. And his comment to them was, thank a Vietnam vet, they didn't get any thanks.

[00:46:21.38] And that's the first time I had ever heard anyone say thank you for your service. And it wasn't directed at me, but it was still enough so that I actually broke down in tears as I was sitting at that blackjack table in Las Vegas. But 21 years--

[00:46:39.69] MARK FRANKLIN: Someone finally acknowledged--

[00:46:40.62] MICHAEL CLARK: --somebody finally said thank you.

[00:46:42.18] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah. How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[00:46:47.09] MICHAEL CLARK: I don't think it is, especially by the younger people. In relationship to my book, I've had people ask me, what was Vietnam? They don't even understand that there was a war there, some of them don't. And some of them do. I had a guy the other day say, oh, I understand that was a pretty scary place to be. Well, yeah, yeah, it was. But I don't think it's remembered well at all, today.

[00:47:13.59] It was-- I think, for the most part, it was pretty much an embarrassment for this country, that time period, the way veterans were treated. And because of that, it was swept under the carpet. It's been kind of downplayed so that people don't know that went on. A number of people in their 30s say, I had no idea that the veterans were mistreated the way they were when they came home.

[00:47:40.77] And so, that part of it, it's lost. They don't understand that part of it. And, again, that's one of the reasons that I felt I needed to put it down on paper. Because it has been forgotten.

[00:47:51.66] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, in the end, what do you think the war meant to you and your generation?

[00:47:56.58] MICHAEL CLARK: I'm not sure that it had a huge impact on my generation. Because, again, it was not really addressed. At a high school reunion, the last high school reunion I went to, last year, was the first time they ever recognized the veterans. And it was my 45th high school reunion. And we lost two classmates in Vietnam. And I'm from a small town and we had a small class. I think it was about 175 students in my class. And we lost two, and we had about a half dozen Vietnam veterans there.

[00:48:38.74] But even my class, it was the first time that we had been recognized. And, quite honestly, it was because I prompted the class president, maybe we should honor the guys that were killed. I didn't even say the vets. I said, the guys that died. They need some recognition. They've never had that. And so they recognized the vets.

[00:49:02.23] MARK FRANKLIN: Are there any lessons that you took away from Vietnam that you'd like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:49:08.05] MICHAEL CLARK: Yeah, I think lessons learned for me personally was that teamwork goes a long way. You can be in terribly adverse circumstances, and if you pull together and give it your best effort, you can be amazed at what you can do and what you can get through.

[00:49:29.52] I think, lessons learned, I think some have already been forgotten, the way the hands of the military was tied. Even if we saw the enemy, we would have to call in and get permission to fire. If we were not fired upon, if we did not have direct fire, we couldn't open fire. We had to have permission to shoot.

[00:49:51.33] The Ho Chi Minh Trail, where the North would bring the supplies into Laos and Cambodia, and Laos for us, and they could come over with tanks and artillery, and attack, and set up their fortified positions. And if they got attacked, they could pull back into Laos. And we couldn't follow them. The hands of the military was tied. If you're going to fight a war, if you're going to make guys die for a war, damn it, fight the war. And I think-- I still think that the military operates under that today.

[00:50:30.62] MICHAEL CLARK: Very emotional. I do know-- obviously, I do know some of the names that are on the Wall. Difficult to go and visit, but I do have the picture of the Wall where the one, the older fellow's got his hand on the Wall. And the younger Soldiers are on the other side, still in their military garb, putting their hand on the other side of the Wall. I have that picture in my house. I see that every day as a reminder. But the Wall, difficult to go to, but, again, healing and appreciated.

[00:51:18.83] MICHAEL CLARK: Earlier this year, like March, April, somewhere in there, that's the first time I had ever heard of it. And that was in association with the guys from my reunion. I'm very happy for it. I would do whatever I could to support it. I can give information to try and get the word out so that people do understand Vietnam.

[00:51:38.70] MARK FRANKLIN: Mike, thank you very, very much.

[00:51:40.31] MICHAEL CLARK: I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

[00:51:41.69] MARK FRANKLIN: Thank you for your service.

[00:51:43.12] MICHAEL CLARK: Thank you.