

Bouchard, James US Navy.mp4

[00:00:13.47] MARC HENDERSON: When and where were you born?

[00:00:15.09] JAMES BOUCHARD: Fort Kent, Maine. October 20, 1947.

[00:00:19.29] MARC HENDERSON: Where do you consider your home town?

[00:00:21.96] JAMES BOUCHARD: Right now it's Granby, Massachusetts, 4 Darrel Ave.

[00:00:25.98] MARC HENDERSON: Would you like to share a little bit about your family growing up?

[00:00:29.96] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, I had three sisters, a younger brother, my mother and father. I had a grandfather who lived with us from 76 until he passed away at 93. My brother died young. He was 36 years old. My sisters are still around. They're in the-- one in New Hampshire and two in Connecticut.

[00:00:55.32] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, I was actually on a 120 day delayed program in '66. I was like 18, but I went in when I was 19, February 15, '67. I lived in a rural community. So I was more interested-- we had a marina, and I was more interested in working with my dad and my brother. We kept the marina going. And so I wasn't paying attention with the draft at all. I don't even-- I may have had a draft card. I don't even remember.

[00:01:28.14] I did enlist in the Navy. My brother-in-law, who married my sister, was in the Navy. And he seemed that-- he had been on the Cuban Missile Crisis. He was on a ship and he did board a Russian cruiser, and-- when he had been-- and so that kind of like got me interested in joining the Navy, because I was close to making the decision to go to college. It was either that or the Navy.

[00:01:55.75] And being raised-- the summer-- in the summer, we had our marina on Eagle Lake in northern Maine. So I was used to boats and I loved the water. So when I made a decision to join the Navy, it was made for me because I love being next to the water.

[00:02:14.38] My dad was a master electrician. So I wanted to go into electronics. And they said, go ahead and put it down for your choice. Because the recruiter said, when you get to boot camp, they're going to make a decision where to put you. And so I put down electronics. They asked a few others. I said, well, like carpentry, masonry, something like that. And they said, well, you could put down corpsman. It's a choice. And I put down corpsman.

[00:02:41.59] I had no clue what a corpsman was. But I guess in my-- them interviewing me at the time, I had some experience a little bit with medical. My brother was a diabetic. I'd helped my mom with his syringes, giving needles and stuff like that. I don't know if that may-- had a decision for them, or they just were in need of corpsmen. I had no idea at the time. So I ended up becoming a corpsman. JAMES BOUCHARD: At Great Lakes, Illinois.

[00:03:14.47] MARC HENDERSON: Is there anything that you remember or was memorable about boot camp?

[00:03:18.07] JAMES BOUCHARD: That we became color company. And I really enjoyed it. Well, it was a little rough at first getting used to it, like learning to shave, and we had to wash our own clothes and fold our towels. And I liked the physical part of it when we had some training. A color company is close to being Hall of Fame. We tried to be the best company at that time in boot camp. And you have a flag. You were in the Navy. So I don't know if you remember boot camp. But color company, you got a flag that says that you're the best company at the time.

[00:03:57.88] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah, I remember there was a number of competitions, academics and marching.

[00:04:04.33] JAMES BOUCHARD: All of that.

[00:04:05.26] MARC HENDERSON: You had to score a certain number of points in each event in order to be considered a color company or an honor company. Yeah.

[00:04:14.24] JAMES BOUCHARD: We did good. We had-- like 66 of our class were from Chicago, Illinois. It was a big, huge recruiting thing at that time. So there was a lot of guys that were wanting to do good. And I'm from northern Maine, so Frenchie as they called me there in boot camp. I wanted to do good with them. And I kind of got the camaraderie of being in the Navy and learning to work with other people.

[00:04:42.65] MARC HENDERSON: So the Navy decided that you were going to be a corpsman?

[00:04:46.34] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah. I got-- my orders got-- I had to go to a Navy corps school in Great Lakes. I did pretty good. I was so surprised. I really enjoyed it.

[00:04:57.14] MARC HENDERSON: What made it enjoyable?

[00:04:59.22] JAMES BOUCHARD: Helping other people. For some reason, I have that in me. I have that thing.

[00:05:04.41] MARC HENDERSON: What was some of the training curriculum like at corps school?

[00:05:06.81] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, corps school, you get into pharmacology, first aid, a lot of nursing training, isolation. We did some isolation wards, a sterile technique. So I got some basic training. I got most of my training when I was on board ship though, a lot of on-hand training when I finished corps school.

[00:05:28.06] MARC HENDERSON: What year was that?

[00:05:30.01] JAMES BOUCHARD: '67.

[00:05:30.94] MARC HENDERSON: Still '67?

[00:05:31.99] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah. I went in February '67, boot camp, corps school. And then I went on the USS Randolph.

[00:05:38.83] MARC HENDERSON: And how long were you on the Randolph?

[00:05:41.44] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, until they needed me in Vietnam. I was there. I was able to go through each department. We had training in every department, in the pharmacy, in the lab, in the treatment room, x-ray, on the ward, in the emergency room.

[00:05:58.63] MARC HENDERSON: What type of ship was it?

[00:05:59.71] JAMES BOUCHARD: It was an aircraft carrier. We had a small hospital. So going through that, I got a lot of upfront experience in working with different parts of-- in the medical field, even though I did suturing, which I guess in civilian life, you either have to be a doctor or an RN. But we were taught how to suture on hands. And I also did flight deck corpsman. On the 0-7 level, if they have any injuries on board the flight deck, they would call corpsman up.

[00:06:32.15] And I remember one experience where we had a gentleman that was a-- it was a night operation. He got blown into a prop of a plane. And the ship was going about like 22 knots, and it was windy that day, like maybe 40, maybe 23 knots. So it was about like 40 mile an hour wind. And he got caught in the draft. He got chopped on the shoulder. So they said, corpsman up. And I remember going up to the flight deck. And I couldn't really see that well. And I kept going. And I didn't want to fall off the bow. I kept on running. They said, further up, further up.

[00:07:04.89] When I got there, he was-- horrendous bleeding. So I threw my Unit 1 down. And I asked the airdales that were near me to help me rip out some battle dressings, and just packed him up. And then wrapped him up, put him in the Stokes stretcher and brought him down. And I remember calling up the ward and calling the doctors. And I said, this is Corpsman Bouchard. And we have an injured man here.

[00:07:29.31] And I remember Dr. Wilkes saying, after everything was done with, we had to do a cutaway IV. I did help out with that. And he tells me-- he says, Doc, you are one of the coolest guys here. You called on the phone. We didn't realize how bad it is. You just said, we had-- they didn't realize how serious it was until they got there. So they recommended me for being calm. So that's one of the experiences I remember.

[00:08:01.77] MARC HENDERSON: So you mentioned the Unit 1. What's a Unit 1?

[00:08:05.13] JAMES BOUCHARD: It's like a first aid kit that you have sterile equipment to do some minor surgery, or a tracheostomy, or thyroidectomy. I can't pronounce it right now. And you have that little instrument pack. And then you have battle dressings and some ice wraps and whatever you might need. And if you were like in actual-- an area where you needed to sedate someone, they would allow you to put morphine in it. You'd have to get it out of the pharmacy.

[00:08:38.31] MARC HENDERSON: OK. And that was on the carrier?

[00:08:40.23] JAMES BOUCHARD: That was on the carrier and also when I was in Vietnam, too. Yeah. The Unit 1 was actually on the flight deck level.

[00:08:47.05] MARC HENDERSON: And so I'm guessing you probably spent at least a year on the carrier?

[00:08:52.62] JAMES BOUCHARD: Close to it. Yeah.

[00:08:55.05] MARC HENDERSON: And any other memorable experiences at sea?

[00:08:59.16] JAMES BOUCHARD: We made a Mediterranean cruise.

[00:09:01.56] MARC HENDERSON: How was that?

[00:09:02.13] JAMES BOUCHARD: That was great. I had a good time. I went to Rome. Well, I went to Naples, Italy. I wanted to see Rome, but I didn't-- I got off the liberty launch, and we went in town and just hung out at the bars, so-- . They had tours. Guys, enlisted or officers, could go to Rome or Pompeii. Some of the guys went. I never did that. But I just enjoyed hanging out with-- at bars. That's what I did anyway. Same thing in Rota, Spain, same thing in the other ports that we had.

[00:09:39.90] MARC HENDERSON: Gibraltar?

[00:09:40.98] JAMES BOUCHARD: Gibraltar. Yeah, that was another one.

[00:09:42.96] MARC HENDERSON: So you got orders to Vietnam?

[00:09:44.64] JAMES BOUCHARD: No, I didn't get orders to Vietnam. I got orders to Fleet Marine Force, Camp Lejeune.

[00:09:49.59] MARC HENDERSON: And is that because it was time to go or because you requested it?

[00:09:54.41] JAMES BOUCHARD: It was time to go. Fleet Marine Force was-- at the time for us, was counter-guerrilla warfare training, advanced weaponry, and advanced first aid, how to do IVs, make sure you knew. Because we learned how to draw blood on board ship. So I already knew how to do that. But they taught you more first aid and tourniquets, how to use tourniquets, and stabilizing a fracture, and stopping a wound, a chest wound especially. Things like that.

[00:10:29.78] During all this time, I wasn't even-- until I got there, I didn't know about how Vietnam was going. When I was up in Maine, I always thought it was like a conflict. I had no idea that eventually over the years, they'd called it the Vietnam War. But there was a conflict in Southeast Asia. So when I got to Fleet Marine Force, they were talking about, it looks like you're going to Vietnam. And that's when I started questioning. What are you talking about?

[00:10:57.91] MARC HENDERSON: And how much time did you spend at Camp Lejeune before you were sent over?

[00:11:01.71] JAMES BOUCHARD: I don't really recall. We did a lot of quick training. Well, I spent a good year there. We did different-- Operation HEAT STRESS. We went to Guantanamo Bay. We went out there. We trained with Marines. They were the landing force. We were the first aid battalion. We treat for heat stress, like heat exhaustion. It was like crazy. The first wave of guys with just nothing on. And another wave came with-- they had their biological masks. The other guys had biological impermeable clothing. And they came in. And we had a lot of guys' temperatures 106. And we were also experimenting with new type of thermometers.

[00:11:48.81] So we had like an electronic thermometer. They were trying all sorts of weird things, different mercury, non-mercury thermometers. That was OK. But then we got really serious when we had the last wave coming in. Guys were really not making it. They had like a-- pallets of beer was the destination. But then some of these guys got seriously injured. We had to immerse them in ice and try to-- the best way to treat them. So I guess that was some training for what was to come when I went overseas.

[00:12:24.87] MARC HENDERSON: Do you think all of that training adequately prepared you for Vietnam?

[00:12:28.74] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, I thought they had because they also put me on Operation RIVERINE. So we went on the intercoastal waterways in South Carolina. And I was trained on these-- I don't remember the type of ships, but we were on a ship out to sea. And then we got on these launches. And we went out into the intercoastal waterways. And we were learning how to be working with the boats that they used in the Mekong Delta. So I figured maybe if I go, that's where I'm going to go, but that never happened. So was I prepared? I thought I was. I was sure of myself.

[00:13:11.85] JAMES BOUCHARD: June '69. By myself. Yeah. My friend, we met up though, in Da Nang. He was Dean Johnson. He was on board ship with me. And he ended up-- we followed each other. MARC HENDERSON: Coincidentally. JAMES BOUCHARD: Coincidentally. We ended up in the same battalion. He was in Golf Company. I was in Fox Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division.

[00:13:39.92] MARC HENDERSON: Did you know which unit you were going to end up in before you got there?

[00:13:42.92] JAMES BOUCHARD: No. I landed down in Da Nang in a civilian plane, walked out and said, holy fuck is it hot here. Excuse me for swearing, but it was. That's what I said. I said, what do we-- I says, man, this-- it just didn't seem right. We get down there. They put us in these barracks. And they said, we're going to assign you to a different outfit. And that's what they did.

[00:14:07.73] I got assigned to Dai Loc Pass 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Division 1st-- 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division outside Dai Loc Pass, about five miles from Da Nang. I was at

Fox level, Fox Company. Yeah. There were-- I didn't see Dean. He was in Golf Company. So they were-- they were there, but I didn't see him that much. I worked like in the first aid station, then we did the guard duty with the Marines and things like that. And then we did some shooting, training, more advanced.

[00:14:47.23] JAMES BOUCHARD: I was attached to a squad. And we did night ambushes. I'll tell you, I was petrified the first time I went out. I had no clue. But the squad leader was pretty good, Newman, Sergeant Newman. We went out and we'd set up in the daytime where we were going to ambush at night. And then we'd go out in the villages and would have a few civilians or whoever, they needed some first aid that I could help out and things like that. We did a lot of humping around and I guess just hiding our tracks. And we ended up going in back at nighttime just before dusk and set up our ambush site.

[00:15:32.77] MARC HENDERSON: So they put you right into a platoon when you got there?

[00:15:36.34] JAMES BOUCHARD: Right. Just about, yeah. I was at the battalion aid station one day. Golf Company, about a week or two before, had walked by a detonated 500 pound bomb. It was booby trapped and a lot of guys were dead. So I remember getting in the battalion aid station. And one of the corpsman spit on a battle dressing and put it on the-- we had an NVA in the wire the night before I arrived.

[00:15:58.38] So that day when I get there I said, what the heck is this guy doing? But then one of the corpsmen says he was with Golf Company. And they had a bad-- they were ambushed. So there was some stuff going on. It was not-- it was horrible. War is horrible. It started right off. And I said, my God, this is horrible.

[00:16:24.01] JAMES BOUCHARD: In a hooch. I lived in a little hooch. It was more like a bunker. And we were just a couple of guys, two or three guys at first. Then we were the whole platoon, but we were outside, the whole squad. Nine to eleven guys, depending on how many we had at the time. But we were outside sleeping on a rubber mattress. We called it a-- it had a different name. I hate to say that. Then we had a poncho. Yeah, we had that-- what is it called, pad, a rolled up pad. And then we'd unroll it. And then we'd lay down.

[00:16:58.15] MARC HENDERSON: So not a mattress, not a bunk?

[00:17:00.82] JAMES BOUCHARD: No, no, no. We were out in the open. Yes, sir. The only thing we were-- we got invaded with rock apes over there at Dai Loc Pass, when I was there, first couple of days. Yeah, they were monkeys. We called them rock apes. They would come around. They would bang the cans. We were all freaking-- trying to get some sleep.

[00:17:19.72] MARC HENDERSON: So those are actual creatures?

[00:17:21.10] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yes.

[00:17:21.61] MARC HENDERSON: What was your first experience with a rock ape?

[00:17:25.49] JAMES BOUCHARD: The noise. And I couldn't figure out what it was. And one of the guys says, those are rock apes. Don't worry about it, Doc. You'll be all set. So that's-- finally saw them.

[00:17:37.82] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. How about the food?

[00:17:41.60] JAMES BOUCHARD: We may have been eating at the mess hall. When I was out going on a night ambush, it was all C-rats. That's all. I tried some Vietnamese food, but it was-- I couldn't deal with it.

[00:18:00.27] JAMES BOUCHARD: I had a couple friends like Dean. The Marines seemed to be a little aloof, but they did-- if I would go to the inn, come get drunk, they would protect me. So it didn't matter. We had a little place where we could go for booze over there at the Dai Loc Pass. So we'd have-- go to the club at night a little bit. Well, it's not a club. It was a place to have a few beers.

[00:18:25.51] MARC HENDERSON: The beer was provided for you? Did you have to buy it?

[00:18:28.17] JAMES BOUCHARD: No. It was provided. They did-- we did go through different villages and areas where little guys would have the styrofoam containers with either beer or soda. I don't know where they got them all, but they had them, USA on them, of course. So how they got it? Probably through the black market. I'm sure of that.

[00:18:49.65] I did a first aid class on doing IVs with an Army outfit. I had a Marine uniform, but we were at LZ Baldy. We went down to LZ Baldy to help them out. And that's where I ended up eventually after Dai Loc Pass, I went to LZ Ross, LZ Baldy. There was a nine-mile stretch. And that was-- when we do night ambushes, that's where we were checking to see who in the heck is booby trapping the road that goes from that to a landing zone. LZ Ross is the landing zone. LZ stands for landing zone, where the helicopters come in and go.

[00:19:30.11] MARC HENDERSON: Did you form friendships with men or women from different racial or social backgrounds?

[00:19:36.83] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yes. One of my best friends was Paul Baytop. I'll never forget him. He sang like an angel. He's a black guy. And northern Maine, there was really no black families that I knew of. So I had nothing-- no problems with race, with the blacks. Some people did, but I just enjoyed everybody.

[00:19:57.53] MARC HENDERSON: In 1969, there was a lot of social tension in the United States, racial tensions. Did any of that make its way to you?

[00:20:06.21] JAMES BOUCHARD: I think it did. But because of the way I am, I was OK with whatever they did. They did the bumping and all that stuff. That didn't bother me. I had no problem with the blacks.

[00:20:20.04] MARC HENDERSON: How much time did you have to yourself?

[00:20:24.15] JAMES BOUCHARD: Seemed like I was always by myself. Even though I'm around everybody, I kind of isolate. I was just so full of fear all the time. I knew at any time a sniper could get you. So I did crazy things to protect myself at night.

[00:20:39.48] MARC HENDERSON: Like what?

[00:20:40.62] JAMES BOUCHARD: I ripped off a flak from my flak jacket and put it over my groin area, stuff like that. I just wanted to not get blown away completely.

[00:20:54.87] MARC HENDERSON: What did you do for off duty recreation time?

[00:20:57.84] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, not at first. There was no off duty. We did have-- one time downtime, we went to China Beach. So we're over there to relax and well-deserved. I mean, being out all the time, we were out every day up and down that road, and very rarely we went back to the landing zone to where they had at least a mess hall. So that came in real helpful. And we went different places that they had for you for relaxation, massages.

[00:21:31.26] MARC HENDERSON: And so your squad got to go?

[00:21:33.19] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, we got to go together. We had a great time.

[00:21:36.24] MARC HENDERSON: And was that just once or did they--

[00:21:38.07] JAMES BOUCHARD: That was the only time I remember before we got into some hot stuff. Yeah.

[00:21:45.93] MARC HENDERSON: How about pop culture? Do you remember any specific movies, books, or songs from that era?

[00:21:55.26] JAMES BOUCHARD: A lot of CCR songs and some songs that-- I'm Leaving on a Jet Plane. Going back home, couldn't wait. Because at the time I was there in June, July, August at first, they had said that they were withdrawing the troops from Vietnam. And my squad leader, I'll never forget him, he said, Doc, we're pulling a few phantom patrols. We did phantom night ambushes. We'd go set up for our night ambush. I mean, I hope they know about it. I'm sure they do know about it. Then we go to the village and hang out there.

[00:22:45.50] And then one time when we were going to the village, Golf Company saw some movement. And they thought it was NVA. And we heard it over the radio. And they were going to send artillery where we were and our coordinates. So we just beat back. I mean, you never saw nine guys running so fast in all their life, man, to get out of there because they were going to drop rounds right where we were. So we made it. We didn't get hit by friendly fire, but boy was it close. I'll never forget that night. Yeah. So it was scary out there. It was hell.

[00:23:24.19] MARC HENDERSON: That whole time, though, several months before you got medevacked, did you spent that whole time in the same area?

[00:23:31.61] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, between LZ Ross and LZ Baldy. It's like a nine-mile distance. We'd be constantly patrolling that. We'd live on hills and valleys, mostly on hills though.

[00:23:42.61] MARC HENDERSON: What were your impressions of your leadership from your squad leader all the way up to your company men?

[00:23:46.36] JAMES BOUCHARD: He was watching our butt. He was watching our butt. He really was. He was a short timer. Anybody had short time there, he would-- he knew-- I didn't know that they had-- I didn't know that the reason he was doing that, because the troops were being withdrawn from Vietnam. That's the time that we thought we were going to win the war. And then when I got over there, I said, I can do the best I can do. The next thing I know, these guys are-- I thought they were slacking off, but they were trying to protect-- he was trying to protect his men from the leadership, from the officers who were in charge. I totally believe that today.

[00:24:25.67] MARC HENDERSON: How about your Marine NCOs? Do any of those stand out?

[00:24:29.36] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, you look-- Sergeant Newman. Yeah. I've just found him the other day, a picture of him. And they're having a reunion in San Antonio in July. And I hadn't seen him since Vietnam. So I saw a picture of him.

[00:24:50.06] MARC HENDERSON: You consider him a good leader?

[00:24:52.52] JAMES BOUCHARD: He was a good leader. He cared for his men. And he cared that-- if he's going to be in a bad situation for us, we wouldn't go. So I think he was top of-- he should have been a sergeant major instead of a sergeant. But he was a squad leader.

[00:25:19.55] MARC HENDERSON: Was your Kit 1 different in combat than the one-- than the Kit 1 you had on the flight deck back there?

[00:25:25.82] JAMES BOUCHARD: My Unit 1?

[00:25:26.54] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah, your Unit 1.

[00:25:27.65] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, I changed it often. I was hearing stories that the corpsman were number one, the radio op-- well, corpsman, radio operator, squad leader. That's the number on the sniper's list. That's what I was told. So you got to camouflage your Unit 1. So I did. Instead of-- I would look like I'd be carrying a whole bandolier of weapons, bullets, rounds with the clips, but I would-- all battle dressings. I emptied out my Unit 1 and made it not visible. So I did kind of-- knew to do that. I was told by another corpsman.

[00:26:05.91] MARC HENDERSON: And you were given the liberty to change things out in your bag as you saw fit?

[00:26:11.12] JAMES BOUCHARD: No, I wasn't. Who would know? No one said anything. The only thing I had one time was my morphine disappeared on me. I think I left my-- half ass kit, I called it. And I went to go take a leak, came back, and then the morphine was gone. We ended up medevacking two guys for overdose. Some guys did that. But drinking out of the bottles, no, or doing stuff like that, no. That's to save a guy's life. You never know.

[00:26:59.75] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, right off, I can say August 25, 1969. Yeah, my squad got ambushed. I was with Newman and the radio operator Heinz, and the rest of the squad had gone ahead. And all of a sudden, machine gun fire, AK, whatever. They were all getting hit. That was the worst day there. Heinz went out. And he's the radio operator.

[00:27:31.55] So he was telling us, they want us to move forward. And Newman said, no. Because we were-- it was like the first operation, the summer operation they called it since the troops were told they're going back home. So Newman didn't want to move out. And he was right. We shouldn't have moved out, but they did.

[00:27:54.32] MARC HENDERSON: Do you remember the name of the operation?

[00:27:57.11] JAMES BOUCHARD: The summer operation of August 25, 1969. That's what it was called. It's the first operation.

[00:28:04.73] MARC HENDERSON: And Newman didn't want to move out?

[00:28:06.30] JAMES BOUCHARD: No. And then the guys-- then the radio operator went. And Newman says, no, we're not supposed to be moving. And he was right. We weren't, but there was an upper echelon. One colonel wanted us to be at a certain coordinates at a certain time. And the other officer wanted us to go at all costs. And we didn't want to go, but it was too late. So Newman-- guys I could hear yelling, Doc, corpsman up, in different areas. And I wanted to go so bad. Newman said, Doc, I'm going to go and I'll bring them to you.

[00:28:42.45] So I stayed where I was because I was hidden and I wasn't getting shot at. And then he didn't come back because I don't know what happened at the time to him. So I was scooped down, and I said, fuck it. And I ran right out and then bang right away. I got hit right in my flak jacket under my arm. I was right in-- flying over Heinz. And I got hit. That was-- and I didn't go, whoa, I can deal with this. I cried. I said, Mom. I was like-- it was just horrible time, horrible time.

[00:29:18.75] I tried to help Heinz out. I tried to give him morphine syrette. I took care of myself. I put a battle dressing with a plastic right over my wound. I went over and I opened up some-- what I had left, my Unit 1 with the morphine. I tried giving some to Heinz, but he had succumbed. And he was a radio operator. So I rolled him over me, and I grabbed the radio. And I started yelling, this is Doc 2/7. I'm hit. Help, help. And whoever was at the end of the line said, Doc, calm down. We'll come over and get you.

[00:29:53.42] So that was really horrible for me. They came in there. I could see the guy. Somebody moving around out there. And I knew it was one of the Army guys, and one of the

corpsmen. I can't think of his name right now. But they went and they grabbed a couple of the guys, and they came over for me and Heinz, the two of us. He was dead, but they drug him and me. I walked with the corpsman. He looked at my wound. He says, yeah, you've got to get medevacked out, Doc, right now.

[00:30:25.37] So we got into a helicopter. And I tried to help one of the Marines there. And I tried doing mouth-to-mouth and stuff. The co-pilot or whoever was in back with us said-- he said, Doc, they're all dead. There's no sense in doing anything. I just burst in tears. Next thing I know we landed at 95th Evac. They put me in the operating room. I wake up with a pan, with a bullet in the middle of the pan. And doctor said-- it was all dented, and it didn't go through, and it came close to my aorta-- but he says, you're OK. You'll be all right. You survived this.

[00:31:09.50] MARC HENDERSON: And so from the 95th evac, where did you go?

[00:31:13.24] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yokosuka Naval Hospital, Japan. Yeah. I was on the surgical ward for a while. And they said anybody-- because I didn't go to Guam or wherever the other hospital they had. Because they said, if you go there, you're going to go back to Vietnam. If you go to Yokosuka, you're going to go back to the States. So I thought I was going to head back to the States.

[00:31:36.00] And a couple of times, he asked me to get up and to talk to a couple of the patients that they had that were with my company, Fox Company. I try to talk to them. Some had head wounds and that. I try to get-- just to help them out and say, hey, talk with them. And there was no response. Nothing was going on. He was alive, but he was dead in his brain. It's so sad. Yeah. So that was a bad experience there. Then they had me help out in the isolation ward where they had a couple amputees. Well, I worked one ward, one room.

[00:32:13.07] MARC HENDERSON: So they had put you to work while you were recovering?

[00:32:17.84] JAMES BOUCHARD: Recovering, yeah. And then I got orders back to Vietnam. And I said, I ain't signing these. And I never did, damn it. But I ended up going back to Vietnam. But they didn't send me to Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines. They sent me to 1st Medical Battalion outside of Da Nang.

[00:32:37.70] MARC HENDERSON: And so you were working at the battalion aid station or something different?

[00:32:42.05] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, it was the first aid station, battalion aid station, at the beginning. So I didn't tell you that Dean also got wounded. He was with Golf Company and got wounded. And he was at the hospital in Yokosuka with me. So we hung around. We worked together and we hung around. We went all over Japan, Tokyo, went to the Tokyo Tower. We did a lot of-- all over, got friendly. I had a friend of mine who was in the Navy, Phil Brown. And he married a Japanese lady right off the base and their family had a restaurant. So I went to visit them. So I had it pretty good once I got out of the hospital, I went to visit them and hung out there.

[00:33:17.28] MARC HENDERSON: Sounds like you made the most of it.

[00:33:19.56] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah. And Dean and I came along. But one day, we were at the Stars and Stripes building up there in Yokosuka outside. And they have these little nickel slot machines. We're playing slots. And we're walking over one day, over, and the next thing-- I guess, it was a backfire. Both Dean and I are head to head on the deck. I never expected that I would ever be-- I had nerves that were shot. I did not know that it was going to bother me for the rest of my life so far.

[00:33:49.95] MARC HENDERSON: And when you went back to Vietnam, what month and year was that?

[00:33:54.19] JAMES BOUCHARD: That was like December of '69 until July '70.

[00:33:57.87] MARC HENDERSON: So you spent mostly August to December in Japan?

[00:34:01.44] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, in the hospital.

[00:34:02.91] MARC HENDERSON: And then when you went back to Da Nang, how long did you have left to finish your tour there in Vietnam?

[00:34:11.28] JAMES BOUCHARD: I think I had like eight months. And I did it. Thirteen months about. Yeah.

[00:34:18.18] MARC HENDERSON: So it sounds like you may have been in Vietnam for New Year's.

[00:34:22.68] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah. I shot my first machine gun, .60 caliber, at the flag, celebrating. We were at the N club having a good time. Yeah. I worked treatment. Dean and I would bring-- my wife and I had pictures he sent us. I finally hooked up with him after 50 years, just about. I hooked up with Dean and he had pictures.

[00:34:44.49] Because my pictures were lost, all my uniforms, my photos, because I was like-- I told you earlier, I was a photographer. I took a lot of pictures. They all got lost. Somehow in transit, they disappeared. So he had some pictures. And he had some pictures of us in Vietnam. Some were taken-- and we went in the Stars and Stripes, front page, of Dean and me hauling patients off a helicopter. We worked a treatment together.

[00:35:14.25] But then after that, they wanted me to work in triage and that. I did one instance, and then I asked to get out of there. I said, for some reason, it was bothering me too much. We were helicoptered to a village that had incoming. And there was a bunch of injuries. I went there with the first class.

[00:35:30.87] I was the second class petty officer at the time. And there was a first class petty Officer. And we were in charge of triage. And I triaged a nine-year-old boy with a small wound in his chest. And I said, well, he's not high priority. I put him in the hooch, and he ended up

dying. And I remember putting him in the helicopter, a dead kid. That affected me when I got home three months later. Someone called me a baby killer.

[00:35:59.40] MARC HENDERSON: So did Dean go to Da Nang with you as well? Is that right?

[00:36:04.50] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah. We were different planes, but we landed in the same place. It was like--

[00:36:08.58] MARC HENDERSON: So working together.

[00:36:09.51] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, we worked together. We worked together on board ship. Different departments, but we hung together. I remember coming back from Vietnam together, we left about the same time. He lived in Riverside, California, because that's where I knew he lived. So we hung out together. His dad had turned a Greyhound bus into a travel party thing. And we did some partying and traveling while I was there until I got discharged a couple of weeks later.

[00:36:39.81] Another thing that's up and I get asked this a lot, and you didn't ask me, have you ever killed anyone in Vietnam? I was a non-combatant. But whenever we had-- Sergeant-- if there was a point where we had open fire, Sergeant Newman made sure that all of us Marines fired. You know what I'm saying. If we killed anybody accidentally, we're in this together.

[00:37:11.43] We were at this place called-- the name of the place where I got ambushed was called Death Valley. There was a guy named Keith Nolan who wrote a book about it and telling about how the commanders and the major and the lieutenant colonels. One was looking to reach an area. The other one was looking for prestige. As soon as 25th to 26th of August was over with, he lost his command. So that's something that I live with forever. JAMES BOUCHARD: Any good times, really fun times.

[00:37:54.23] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah. Tell me about a fun time.

[00:37:56.48] JAMES BOUCHARD: Fishing with grenades. I thought that was cool.

[00:38:00.11] MARC HENDERSON: In a lake or ocean?

[00:38:01.28] JAMES BOUCHARD: It was a river. It was in a river. We're on a patrol. A couple of guys started throwing grenades. And we'd see fish coming up.

[00:38:11.80] MARC HENDERSON: Did you eat them, or was it just for fun?

[00:38:13.85] JAMES BOUCHARD: They were doing it for fun, the guys. Yeah. JAMES BOUCHARD: No, I had no contact. I was with the Marines. That's it, 24/7. JAMES BOUCHARD: I felt that they were in need of help. They were having a hard time living. That's why I tried to do what I could-- I thought I could help out.

[00:38:46.10] One day when I was in 1st Med Battalion, I'm laying down there, and that afternoon I had gone-- we went down to Dogpatch. Dogpatch is part of an area in Da Nang where there's a lot of little-- it's kind of a rough territory. You can buy stuff, buy women, buy watches, whatever. And the guys called it Dogpatch. And we went by the dump. There was a dump there. And I seen all these people in the dump just scavenging. They're scavenging, looking for food or whatever.

[00:39:18.69] To me-- before I left Vietnam, I had seen an article in the paper about this walking catfish in California. So I wrote to the food-- wrote to the government and say, can you help these people out? To get these walking catfish, send them out to Vietnam. So I was hoping that-- and then I got a reply. They werere saying that it was an invasive species. You can't bring them to the country. So I went-- that sticks out that I wanted to help, no matter. Even though I got hit, I lost buddies, I still wanted to help the civilians, because seeing the way they were living. So tragic. That war was so bad.

[00:40:07.62] JAMES BOUCHARD: Just what I saw in the Stars and Stripes. I mean, I was on board an aircraft carrier. I saw the USS Forrestal blow up. My friend Keith Hart was on it. So he memorialized that the whole of his life until he died this year. So like with me, I only-- he didn't even see the Stars and Stripes with Dean and I. He's the one that sent the picture. So I wasn't paying that much attention.

[00:40:36.60] MARC HENDERSON: How about news about the politics or the civil unrest going on in the United States?

[00:40:44.49] JAMES BOUCHARD: Or the Apollo landing, or Woodstock?

[00:40:47.43] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah.

[00:40:47.88] JAMES BOUCHARD: Nothing. We never heard it. Only after, when I got home. I didn't even know they landed on the moon. Some people were celebrating. I had no clue. I didn't know that-- because in '69 is when they landed on the moon, and then they had Woodstock, just after-- before my ambush in the 25th of August. Woodstock was like around the 16th of August. I didn't even know about it, that all these people were getting together in peace and love and harmony. And we're up there fighting.

[00:41:18.12] MARC HENDERSON: How about contact with your family at home?

[00:41:21.54] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, the thing is when I got wounded, the American Red Cross was there. And they had me fill out a telegram that was sent to my-- I sent it to my parents. They never received it. So I was in transit for about a week before I got to Yokosuka. I got there and they said, well, you can call your folks back home. And I called my dad up. They had never heard that I had gotten wounded.

[00:41:49.29] So they didn't know that I was in the hospital. So they were freaking out. And the guys that I hung around with, the corpsman up in Camp Lejeune, had heard I had been killed. They actually sent flowers to my parents for my grave. Imagine that. So yeah, it was-- I wrote a

letter to my parents when I was in Yokosuka. I got it right here. And you can have that. You can check it out.

[00:42:28.96] JAMES BOUCHARD: Oh, I knew I was leaving. I had a little calendar like a bunch of us did, corpsman, because I was with the 1st Med. I was around a lot of corpsman. And being an E-5, I was like-- I outranked a few of the guys. And a lot of them would come up to me, like John Dingess would come up to me and says, Jim, what am I going to do when I get back home? What am I going to do? I said, well, you can go into a nursing. He says, I don't want to do that. These guys, they were like afraid of what was going to happen when they got back home. It didn't dawn on me that stuff was going on that I wasn't paying attention to.

[00:43:04.06] MARC HENDERSON: Your homecoming.

[00:43:05.39] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, I landed in Oakland, California. Hung out on the base there with Dean and a bunch of other corpsman waiting until a flight back to Presque Isle, Maine. The airport was open then. I flew in to Presque Isle and I started hitchhiking home. I had my sea bag, hitchhiked home. And the taxi cab guy went by, and he was a friend of my buddy Tony Sosi. He was in the Navy too. He was my brother's age, but we were good friends. And he knew him and he knew-- and he gave me a ride to my house.

[00:43:38.75] And when I got home, my grandfather was there. And he couldn't speak because he had surgery in his eye, and he had-- the anesthesia gave him a stroke. But when he saw me, he just started bawling even though he couldn't cry-- talk. We hugged each other. My mom was teaching. My dad was at work at the university. They were building a college then. So that was my homecoming. And then that night, Mom and Dad came home. And about an hour later, I got arrested.

[00:44:10.07] So it was a big mistake with my brother. So there was something that had went on in high school. And it had to do with marijuana, which is legal now, but then it wasn't. But they arrested me. But they were thinking I was him. He was in Connecticut working with my brother-in-law, and they were doing-- the national inventory service they worked for so. He was down in Connecticut. And I'm home. And the next thing I know, I'm in handcuffs. My father went berserk. He was-- so, welcome home.

[00:44:40.24] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have or did you experience many antiwar demonstrations or protests?

[00:44:49.09] JAMES BOUCHARD: The only protest, the one that hit me was when I was in Japan, and there were-- these Japanese people all in unison marching back and forth-- well, running back and forth, we're protesting Okinawa to get it back to their country. And that's all, I remember that. Then I came back home. And they just said, just wear civilians and come home, wear civvies. Don't wear your uniform. And I said, well--

[00:45:14.47] well, there's all this stuff going on. That's when I started realizing when I got home that I couldn't get a job. I really couldn't at first. They did pass a law you have to give Vietnam

veterans a first choice of work. But at the time, no, that wasn't-- So I went to college instead. I used to-- I was getting 52 for 52. You know, 52 dollars?

[00:45:42.07] MARC HENDERSON: No, I never heard that. What is that?

[00:45:44.69] JAMES BOUCHARD: At 52 weeks, I was getting 52 dollars a week for unemployment from being in the service. That's what they gave you per week, 52 bucks

[00:45:54.91] MARC HENDERSON: Was it enough to live on?

[00:45:57.52] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, I was staying at my parents. I stayed with Mom and Dad.

[00:46:01.26] MARC HENDERSON: And what did you end up doing after? Did you go to college?

[00:46:03.73] JAMES BOUCHARD: Yeah, I went a couple of years. I did really good. I tried. I did good for a while. And then I was having trouble. Like the first day I got home after being arrested. Well, actually before I got arrested for nothing, I ran home up the hill and I jumped-- my dad had this-- it's a ski tow. I did the easement years ago. They built the Fort Kent ski slope. It was on my dad's land. I ran up the hill. And I jumped right down on the grass on my side. And I rolled over on my back. And I go, what the frig is wrong with me?

[00:46:38.36] I just didn't feel right. I couldn't talk to people. I just didn't want to talk about nothing. And if I started to talk about what happened in Vietnam, they had-- people had no clue what I was talking about. I guess I wasn't-- because I didn't want nothing to do with the military when I got out, I didn't want nothing to do with anybody. And that's why I didn't see Dean for 50 years or anybody or anybody in my company that survived with Fox. I didn't--

[00:47:07.46] MARC HENDERSON: How about now? How do you feel about meeting with your fellow veterans?

[00:47:12.05] JAMES BOUCHARD: In 1992, things changed. I came down here. I went through a PTSD program. And I've been helping veterans ever since. They know where to go. If they want to know somebody who knows everything about all the benefits and all the help you can get, they come to see me.

[00:47:29.33] I was commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, commander of the VFW, commander of the DAV. And I help out veterans to this day. My son is seriously wounded in Vietnam-- in Afghanistan by an IED, paralyzed, amputation. And I help him out every day, many times as I can to see that he can stay alive and he has a will to live. And I help out other veterans. I let myself go for over 20 years getting help.

[00:48:03.38] Well, the thing was up in Fort Kent, the nearest VA place was Togus, Maine. As the road goes, that's 322 miles. Who wants to go for appointment, travel 322 miles one way, and then go back? It's like 250 miles as the crow flies. But you go down the road, Route 11 or even

Route 1, you're going all the way down Maine. It takes hours. And they kept calling, oh, you've got to come, you've got a physical and this and that. And I says, I ain't going down there. It's too frigging far.

[00:48:33.68] So at one point, I got-- I had given-- they gave me a little disability when I got out. They dropped it. They stopped my disability for gunshot wound. And then when I came here in 1992 up into North Hampton, I got that started again. I applied for disability and I got it. It wasn't big at first, but finally went from like 30% to 50% to 100%.

[00:49:00.43] And finally, now they have built chutes to help out other Vietnam veterans. Because we were the guys after World War II-- Korea and World War II, that needed help. And there just wasn't enough locations for us. That's why some guys either committed suicide. And in 1992, when I got here and realized by-- since the war ended, my friend here, we did a thing in 1992 about Vietnam. And there was like-- by that time, there was over 200,000 Vietnam veterans that committed suicide. And it's going on with Iraq and Afghanistan now.

[00:49:50.59] MARC HENDERSON: It certainly sounds like you've made a difference for veterans.

[00:49:56.58] JAMES BOUCHARD: I hope so. I hope so. God saw fit to keep me alive. Yeah. The maker upstairs kept me there because we were in the Death Valley, which is-- Hiep Duc Valley became known as Death Valley. I mean, they were putting Marines in back of six-bys and bringing their dead bodies over to LZ Ross and LZ Baldy. That's how bad it was then.

[00:50:25.99] From the start of-- I can remember the 25th, but I got wounded early. And then it kept on going. And these guys kept saying, we got to reach our zone. And they kept losing their-- they lost their job. They lost their command days after that happened.

[00:50:50.66] MARC HENDERSON: What do you think the war means to your generation?

[00:50:53.53] JAMES BOUCHARD: It's horrible. War is bad. I have a good friend of mine who's been a war history professor. He just retired, Don D'Amato. And he told me, Jim, you make sure and tell them that war is horrible, that war is hell. I said, OK, Don. I will-- sitting there under his gazebo the other day saying, hey, I'm coming up here to talk with your historian who's going to archive this. He said, well, you make sure you let him know-- because he studied all the wars. That was his-- he's a doctor, Dr. D'Amato, war history professor.

[00:51:30.57] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the war is remembered today?

[00:51:34.68] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, I see a lot of people that have been thanking me and thanking other veterans, but there are still some that the word hasn't gotten through, that I've known, that I can see. If I talk to them and say, well, I'm a Vietnam veteran. And they still get that look, but not disrespect. It's just that look. You can see it. I know. I can feel it. They just don't want to know anything. Yeah.

[00:52:09.24] MARC HENDERSON: Is there a lesson that you learned in Vietnam that you'd like to share with future generations?

[00:52:15.15] JAMES BOUCHARD: Well, like I said, war is hell. That's what I learned in Vietnam. No matter how much you try to do good, there are too many people to deal with in a war. There's so many commanders, so many upper and lower echelon, and there's people trying to make money because I know I felt it when-- because we were out a lot. We'd be low on water or even low on C rations.

[00:52:35.70] And we knew some of that stuff was being taken and diverted other where-- otherwise, so-- other places. So I know you've got to be careful. There's just too much going on. You can't have war anymore. It has to be diplomacy. And it isn't happening to even today.

[00:52:55.24] SUE BOUCHARD: Whenever I'm in a store and I talk to someone-- I talk to everybody that wears veterans, caps, and stuff and thank them. And they'll say, Oh, do you have someone that served? And I have a brother that served in the Army. And then I said, and my husband was a Navy corpsman. I get hugged. I get saluted. Especially the Marines, they adore them, their docs. They'll do anything. They're like, they were our gold. And I always thank them that my husband took good care of them. And I know what you did.

[00:53:42.85] JAMES BOUCHARD: Sue and I went together, my wife and I. Yeah. And she cried more than I did. Yeah, I got all my buddies here that died. I took their names out and I put them right here. I scratched them out and said goodbye. And I said, doing the best I can today. It took a while.

[00:54:15.39] I go every day-- every week and see a therapist. I have a Vietnam veteran support group. Every two weeks, I go to it. And I've been doing that for years. And if I don't go, the boss tells me, you got to go.

[00:54:32.01] Because she sleeps with me. I still do have some nightmares. And it can be kind of violent. Some of them is when I still see the NVA with their freaking brown hats popping up, and they're shooting at us. That's a horrible scene that you don't want your child or grandchildren or great grandchildren to ever have to witness, being shot at. But even today, it's happening.

[00:55:06.97] JAMES BOUCHARD: I'm totally impressed. We went to first base over there in the Red Sox. We went to Gillette Stadium. We met you. I met you. You were with some general for crying out loud. And I think you guys are doing a wonderful job. The story has to be told. Even though I'm like a rural guy who didn't have no clue about what was going on, and you asked me to come up here and share my story.

[00:55:38.44] MARC HENDERSON: Yes, sir.

[00:55:39.19] JAMES BOUCHARD: I never would have thought. I want to thank you so much, Marc.