



Martin Andrew Archuleta.

Salt Lake City, Utah

Army-101st Airborne Division, second 506th.

M-60 Gunner

Interviewer

And what year were you born?

Andrew Archuleta

I was born in 1948.

Interviewer

And where did you grow up?

Andrew Archuleta

I grew up here in Salt Lake City.

Interviewer

Tell us about your life before the military?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, I was born into a large Mexican/American family. Mostly boys. It was eight boys and two girls. And it was a staunch Catholic family. Went to parochial school most of my life. And then went into the Army in 1967.

Interviewer

What were your ambitions as a youth and what did you think you'd be?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, going to parochial school I was kind of conflicted because I felt like there was a lot of racism there. And the reality was, there was. So it was pretty difficult. Our family was ostracized. Close friends were really limited. I dated, had a fairly normal teen-age years. Played football, basketball, baseball, did all of those pretty normal things. But still, you know, you had this other thing going on where you were having to deal with it, the racism stuff; not only from the school, but the Church as well. And that was some of the conflict as I was growing up.

Interviewer

Growing up, did you have any military culture in your family background?

Andrew Archuleta

My father was in World War II, he was an infantryman. I think I had an uncle that was in the service as well. That was the extent of it.

Interviewer

When you were going to high school, what were you hearing about Vietnam and what did you think about Vietnam as you're growing up as a teen-ager?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, it wasn't really a place I wanted to go to. It was a very unpopular war. It was more political than anything else, I recall hearing. And I heard that there was different reasons for why we were there. The stamp-out communism stuff I didn't buy. And as I grew up and became more educated, I was able to see for myself what was really going on.

Interviewer

Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Andrew Archuleta

I was drafted.

Interviewer

And did you think you'd end up in Vietnam?

Andrew Archuleta

I figured that the odds were pretty good.

Interviewer

How did your family react?

Andrew Archuleta

You know, back then, in my situation, it was the roll of the dice. And so I don't think that they necessarily liked the idea that I was going to Vietnam because of the danger of it but they accepted it. There wasn't much choice.

Interviewer

Tell us about going in and what happened to you and where you went to training. You went into training what year?

Andrew Archuleta

June of 1967, just after I'd graduated.

Interviewer

Where did you go?

Andrew Archuleta

I went to Fort Bliss, Texas. Then, from there, for AIT, I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia. And then jump school, I went to Fort Benning, Georgia. And then after that I came here for a couple of weeks and they sent me to Vietnam.

Interviewer

What were those couple of weeks like?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, I had to enjoy life as much as possible before going over there. Like I said, it was the roll of the dice going over there. I didn't feel particularly sad. I wasn't elated that I was going. But like I said, it was just something I had to do. Not because I wanted to do it, something I just had to do, volunteer for the draft.

Interviewer

Tell us about arriving in-country. How did you get there?

Andrew Archuleta

We flew, I think it's Edwards Air Force Base, I think out of San Francisco. And we flew in a big commercial airliner.

And it was about a 24-hour flight, took about 24 hours to get there. And we landed at Bien Hoa Airport.

Interviewer

Why did you volunteer for airborne? Why did you volunteer for all of that? How did you get to the 101st?

Andrew Archuleta

You were more assigned to that. If you went airborne you were more assigned to it. They had the 101st Airborne Division, the 82nd, the 173rd, the 1st Cav. And so I chose to go airborne because I figured if I was gonna be in the Army I was gonna try and make as much money as I could. So that was an extra, I believe \$55 a month. And then if you took various trainings then that would increase your pay.

Interviewer

So your unit was...?

Andrew Archuleta

My unit was the 101st Airborne Division. And it was the second 506th.

Interviewer

Had you developed any friendships during basic? Any buddies you were going through with this same kind of thing?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah, there were a couple of guys from Salt Lake that went in at the same time I did. I had made friends with a couple of guys from Rocksprings, Wyoming, they were in basic training with me.

Interviewer

And you'd mentioned the racism growing up. Did you find it a different experience in the Army with the racism?

Andrew Archuleta

Not after a while. I felt like the Army was pretty racist itself. I wasn't treated the best. A lot of southern officers, officers from back east. Stupid Southern NCOs. And I thought that they were pretty racist. I was not treated well by a couple of them in particular. Especially as highly decorated as I was. The stuff I had been through, I think there should've been greater deference paid to me by them. But I think that they were just good ole' southern boys, ignorant, not educated. Lifers. And that makes the experience pretty difficult if you're a minority in the Army.

Interviewer

Can you give an example of what happened?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, I recall when I was in Vietnam, we hadn't really been out in the field yet. And my platoon leader made me burn shit; you know, you had to burn shit over there. And I didn't do anything any different than anybody else did. He just had an issue with me. And I don't know why. And I guess he was gonna consequence me heavily and so he made me burn shit for a couple of days.

Interviewer

Other guys have talked about that, can you tell us more?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, you pull out the outhouses that they had over there, you had to pull out these sawed off oil drums and you had to pour kerosene on it and light it. And it would burn. Had to dig foxholes just for the hell of it. Wouldn't have any gloves or anything and you'd be using a trenching tool and the ground was rock hard. So that was some of the stuff that I experienced over there.

Interviewer

You got in-country, where did you land?

Andrew Archuleta

Bien Hoa Airport.

Interviewer

Tell us about that experience.

Andrew Archuleta

I was kind of mesmerized by it because at the time it was the busiest airport in the world. There was traffic I believe every eight or nine seconds. The next busiest was O'Hare in Chicago. So it was pretty busy and you were seeing F-4 phantoms, B-52s - no, not B-52s I don't think - they were U-2s taking off from there. It was just different experience.

Interviewer

Do you remember your thoughts walking down that ramp?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, this is it, huh? This is Vietnam. I thought, wow, what a lush, beautiful country.

Interviewer

What made you think that?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, because, coming down the ramp off the airplane you're looking out and you could see to the horizon it was just lush. And beyond the airport you could see that there were rice paddies, and then the jungle. That was one of the things that I was impressed with. The other thing I was impressed with was the humidity. It was hot there and it was humid.

Interviewer

Had you felt anything like that before?

Andrew Archuleta

No, no. Just the heat of the valley here where it gets up past a hundred, but the humidity was just a different experience. The air seemed to be a little heavier because of that. It was just something that you certainly knew you were going to have to acclimate to.

Interviewer

Tell us how you got to your unit and tell us about getting into combat for the first time.

Andrew Archuleta

Well we were in Bien Hoa for a while and hadn't been called out to the field. While in Bien Hoa I was there for the Tet Offensive, the '68 Tet Offensive. And actually didn't participate in any combat at that time because they were getting ready to send us off. So I ended up going to a town called Phuoc Vinh. And there was a base there for the first 506 Airborne, 101st Airborne and the second 506 Airborne Divisions. So eventually, from there, we went out into the jungle. And just basically patrolled for the most part. And the patrols were essentially just hunting for the enemy. And the jungle was pretty dense. The canopies were 80, 90, 100 feet. The ground bush, in a lot of places

you just had to cut through. And it wasn't a good idea to take trails because they booby trapped the trails. And I recall one instance where I thought it was really stupid too, as I thought about it afterwards, that we had created this trail and we had walked this trail a couple of times. And there was a huge explosion and it was chicon claymore that was about three and a half feet in diameter. And they fire out steel - whatever they are - and it goes from an area to a point, to an area. So it's a hell of a design. And it took out about eight guys because they had set it up on this trail that they figured we were gonna use again. Because we were going back and forth. And so they set it out there and took out like eight guys.

Interviewer

Where were you when it went off?

Andrew Archuleta

I was a machine gunner so I was further back. I was probably about... 25 men back.

Interviewer

What happens in a moment like that?

Andrew Archuleta

You hit the ground. You hear something like that, I mean you hit the ground. It was huge, the noise. It was like being right next to fireworks going off. And you hit the ground. That's the idea. You hit the ground. Because if there's gunfire you're not gonna be standing and make yourself a target. Especially a machine gunner. A machine gunner, in a situation like that, puts out suppressive firepower. So you're probably the first to hit the ground. Good thing I was athletic.

Interviewer

And when you hit the ground, what do you do?

Andrew Archuleta

You hit the ground, you set up your gun. And you need to be alert and you need to scope the area thoroughly. You have to be at the ready, there's just no two ways about it. Every step you take, you had to be ready.

Interviewer

When do you know when it's time to get up and check your wounded? When do you know it's safe?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, that incident I talked about, the only thing that happened was the explosion took place and I don't recall any firing. So after a while of in your prone position over your gun, you know, after a while, got up. And then a couple of medics went by up to the front where the explosion took place and attended to the bodies. Then a little later helicopters flew in to take the dead and the wounded back to base camp or to the hospital.

Interviewer

What happened after that? Did you continue on?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah. Yeah, that was just kind of the nature of warfare in the jungle. We continued on and patrolled. Had decimations we had to go to and a certain amount of time to get to those. We certainly didn't take that trail anymore. We had to kind of pretty much make our own, trail blaze ourselves.

Interviewer

Describe an M-60 gunner; what he has to tote, what's his responsibility?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, a machine gun with a hundred-round belt is about 30 pounds. And it's long and, I don't know, it's about like that. It's got a bipod on it. And usually you carry it on your shoulder - I did, through the jungle. I'd learn how to flip it around and have it at the ready pretty quickly. And sometimes I'd wear a shoulder strap that would connect to each end of the gun. And then you had to carry rounds of belts of ammunition. So hundred-round belts, I probably carried myself, close to 30 belts. And then I had them in my pack kind of curled in a pack. So my assistant machine gunner had to carry about 30 as well - along with our gear, our own stuff; grenades. And then my ammo bearer had to carry close to 30 rounds too. So all together it was close to about 9,000 rounds. And your responsibility, when you got hit or ran into contact was to put down suppressive firepower. And they told you in six-round bursts. That never happen, not in six-round bursts, not when you're in a firefight. So that was a lot of the responsibility. The suppressive firepower has to protect your men.

Interviewer

Does it also make you a target?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah, before the brass they go after the machine gunner. They take him out, then they've accomplished something.

Because that machine gun fires 880 rounds a minute. So if you can imagine - and you're not on the trigger constantly, but you're not just putting out six-round bursts either. They train you to do that but you knew that in jungle fighting against Viet Cong and NVA, you had to be on that trigger longer than that.

Interviewer

How do you keep your concentration? Talk about the noise and the confusion.

Andrew Archuleta

Well, you know, anyway, for me, I was just able to focus. I was able to focus and do what I needed to do. And sometimes in all the confusion - I mean you just had to keep a cool head about you and not worry about getting shot. Yeah, it was difficult. I remember I think we were in Cambodia at the time and we weren't supposed to be there but that's where the 101st NVA were and basically we were bait. And we were walking through the jungle and what ended up happening, we were trying to look for the NVA that were protecting this five-story underground hospital that was over the border of Vietnam. And I think it was in Cambodia. And we had contact. We'd gone for a while. And see, I was backed by my CO which was CP, Control Point or something like that, that was the initials. And he actually favored me, he was a great guy, just a real good dude. And he was sharp. But he wanted me by the CP because he trusted me as a machine gunner. And I think he had some admiration for me. And I as well, with him, it was reciprocal. He was a sharp dude, so I felt comfortable with him. So I could hear over the radio as we were going through the jungle and he said we haven't run into any contact yet. So I could hear him say, "Well, go 900 more meters." Vaguely that's the number that I recall. So we had done that. And I could hear on the other side that you've got to be really close. "Go so many degrees -" whatever the terminology was - "300 more meters." So before that happened, before we got there, we ran into an L-shaped ambush and immediately, inside of seconds, took out 27-,30 men. And he said, "Arch, stay right here." So my platoon leader, he was a pretty sharp guy too, and I asked him, "Do you want me to go up there? Put down the firepower?" He says, "No, it's not gonna do you any good. You're best off right here." And so that ended up lasting like three and a half days, that battle. And we were fighting night and day because at that point I had heard that there were something like three or five regiments of NVA in that area. And that night, we had formed a quadragon, it was kind of interesting. We were bait, so boom, we get hit, L-shaped ambush. I believe it was our company and then inside of minutes - it wasn't even 15 minutes - all these sorties of helicopters come flying in. So I knew then what the deal was, that we were bait. And so all those helicopters landed around the hospital and formed a quadragon. The quadragon hadn't been completely connected between B Company which was me, our company, and C Company. So I think about 21 men went off to connect it. And it was twilight. Then they got fired on. So instead of having to have my gun pointed out, I had to point it in and engage them. And then it had become dark. Anyway, they all came back to the original location, all 21 of them. And mainly because my gun was there putting out the firepower. So at one point I was in a crossfire, they were firing

from my right and firing from my left. And as they come out of the barrel, they kind of rise. So these guys had to be like on the ground coming back to the point that they were at originally. So the quadragon never got connected. And that fight lasted all night long.

Interviewer

So much of it is keying on you?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah, they want the machine gunner out of there. They wanted the machine gunner out of there. And that night I remember that there were flares being dropped in little parachutes. Lights so you could see. Like when you saw "Platoon," they show 'em overrunning U.S. forces by hundreds. Now we were being overrun by really thousands. And my gun was out there. And so some men had pulled back; the CO had called men to pull back. And I really couldn't because I needed to put out the firepower to protect these guys. And I can remember me and Cruise, this Cuban assistant machine gunner, he and I were out there and I told my ammo bearer to leave the barrels; we had extra barrels. Because once you're putting out that kind of firepower your barrel ends up turning white hot. And so when it gets that hot the nose of it starts to drop. So I think that night we went through three barrels. I was stationary and I was there for a while. And I recall the flairs coming in and the enemy was so heavy that I told my CO, "You gotta call in the artillery, you got to call in the artillery." And then he yelled to me, "I can't call it in that close to you." I said, "Don't worry about it, call it in, call it in!" Because the closest they would call in the artillery was 75 yards away. And he needed to call it in to about 40 yards because I was out there about 30 yards away from the CP. So they started walking the artillery out and that's the term that they use - walking the artillery out - and I mean you could just see bodies flying all over. The flairs and stuff were still coming down, there were planes up above. It was a huge, huge battle. Then across the rice paddies, out on the horizon, the 25th infantry wolf pack was in a battle too. And you could see the tracers and the explosions and the light of that battle. Yeah, once the artillery started coming in and they were walking it out, they'd done that for a while because we were really in danger of just being overrun. I mean they were as close as ten yards from me. And at one point, there was an RPG that came. And see, rice paddies connect like this, the dikes and stuff. So I was on the other side of a dike. Well in front of the dike an RPG hit, so they were trying to take out my position. So luckily it hit into the dike and the explosion just kicked up dirt. I mean if it was another foot and a half high I'm gone. But because that was such a strategic position that I had, you know, keeping them back, firing, putting out the firepower that I was putting out, they had to take that out. But they weren't able to. And so as a result, when the artillery started walking out, then that slowed things down considerably. So we had a little more control of our situation at that point. And then it continued throughout the day, small little firefights. And then trying to kind of sniper us off.

Interviewer

This lasted three days?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah, uh-hmm.

Interviewer

What kind of support were you getting?

Andrew Archuleta

Well at the time we were getting air support, they were calling it air support, artillery. I can remember F-4 Phantoms flying over, dropping bombs, dropping napalm.

Interviewer

So much is depending on you. How are you even getting sleep?

Andrew Archuleta

You don't sleep much. You capture moments but you don't sleep much. And they bring in coffee for you at mealtimes. They fly in your meals by helicopter to your location. Yeah, you don't get a lot of sleep. And sometimes in order to survive, you take amphetamines. In order to stay awake, in order to survive. That was a survival skill, taking drugs in the Vietnam War.

Interviewer

So did you get any sleep in those three days?

Andrew Archuleta

I got some, you usually got it during the day because at night is most of the time when fighting would take place.

Interviewer

Were you given these amphetamines? What were you given?

Andrew Archuleta

The medics, most of the time. You had your ways to access it. When it becomes a survival skill you know how to

get it. Where they got it from, we weren't really concerned with.

Interviewer

What kind of drugs?

Andrew Archuleta

Some guys were shooting up morphine, smoking marijuana - good-quality marijuana - we used to call it "One-hit-Disneyland." And you know, for the most part, it's a survival skill to help you cope.

Interviewer

During this battle you're given amphetamines to stand up to the tension and the pressure. What are you and your guys talking about during that kind of battle?

Andrew Archuleta

You're talking about what you need to do at the moment, what needs to happen. And then you're saying, "God, we need more air support. God, we need more artillery support. We need to be aware of this over here, we need to be aware of that over there." So you're talking strategy, you know? It's not a lot of talk personally unless somebody's saying, "God, this scares the shit out of me. This is fucked up, using us as bait to come into here, you know? What is it that we're here for?" And then we found out that they were protecting a five-story underground hospital.

Interviewer

Did you ever get to go into that hospital and see it?

Andrew Archuleta

No, no, no. No, the air support, the bombs and the napalm, all that stuff, after three days they'd figured that - I mean intelligence lets you know where you're at in terms of the damage that you caused to it. And two weeks later we had to go back and patrol that area again. And that was the time through all of my contact experience - contact meaning running into the enemy - through all of my fighting with the enemy, this was the time I was the most scared walking through there. There was just a feeling that just came over me. And so we went in and we looked behind these bamboo hedgerows. So you'd get through those and on the other side I could see mounds - 15, 20 feet high - with arms and legs sticking out of them. And you could just smell it. That's how they buried their dead.

Interviewer

You were bait? Explain that.

Andrew Archuleta

We're on patrol, okay? They have information that there is this situation over here.

Interviewer

Talk about who is "they."

Andrew Archuleta

Headquarters and intelligence, they have this information from their informants or their intelligence work. And so they directed us towards that. And the objective was to make contact with the enemy. That's the terms that they use. Make contact with the enemy and destroy that hospital because it was such a pivotal point. And that's why I say I think it was in Cambodia. I'm positive. I'm sure that that was the case. They're not gonna bullshit me. You know, we were there, we were there to destroy it because that's where they took their wounded, that's where they kind of regenerated, so to speak. And they had to protect that place. And being that there was three or five regiments. I mean what's a regiment? I think it's 50,000-men plus, I think. I don't know the exact numbers. But it was such a key location, such a strategic location for them. And it had to be on the other side of the border because it couldn't be very accessible to us to take it apart.

Interviewer

So what time of year was this?

Andrew Archuleta

Like about the 25th of August, 1968.

Interviewer

And how far were you into your tour?

Andrew Archuleta

Seven months, eight months.

Interviewer

So you knew what was going on.

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah. If you stay alert and you're sharp which I consider myself pretty sharp, you know what's going on. You know what's going on. And then you have to deal with other troops that are fresh there, "cherries" as we used to call 'em. And stupid arrogant Ivy League lieutenants who don't know their ass from a hole in the ground. And you had to deal with them. And sometimes you had to tell them flat out how it had to be.

Interviewer

Can you give me an example of that?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah. We were going through the jungle again and we came upon this Catholic Church, just away from this village. And this was down in that area again. And we saw this NVA soldier and he was protecting the entrance from the back. And we saw him having some lunch. He didn't hear us come up on him. And this second lieutenant - and I mean, geez, it's crazy because they're dangerous, they're dangerous for you. After you've been there for a while you know the ongoings and you have these guys come in who think that they know what the hell they're doing. And he draws out his .9 millimeter. And he's gonna point at this NVA - and those guys were trained. The NVA, North Vietnamese Army, these guys were trained all as well or better than us and it's their country. And he's gonna put it on him and say something to him. And so I just put my hand over his mouth, took and dropped his gun and I said, "That's not the way we're gonna do it, sir." And so he was quiet. And I said, "Let me take three guys around the front and then do something from here. Because they'll be coming out that front door." So we went up and set up about 30 yards in front of that front door and that's exactly what happened. And I said, "Then go ahead. Give me enough time to get around there to set up." And you just kind of have the feeling as to what enough time is. And so then I kind of delegated something to some other troops that knew what was going on and when to do it. So then that happened, we had contact and there they came out the front door. And they were just pigeons.

Interviewer

Give me an example of how dangerous cherries were. He was a cherry also?

Andrew Archuleta

Oh, yeah. They're dangerous for your own side because they're thrown in there expected to do something. Because they've got the brass on their shoulder they think they know what needs to be done and they don't pay attention to the guys who are there and who have been there for months and know what's going on. So you have to forcefully assert yourself sometimes. Officers got killed over there by their own men.

Interviewer

Did you ever see anything like that?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah. Yeah, I did.

Interviewer

Did you witness fragging?

Andrew Archuleta

What do you mean by fragging?

Interviewer

What did you see?

Andrew Archuleta

No, I saw officers get shot by their own men. I know of two. Two instances where that took place.

Interviewer

Can you recall the circumstances? What would drive a soldier to do that?

Andrew Archuleta

Self-preservation, protection of other men. When you had a gung-ho officer who didn't know what the hell he was doing. You would do that for self-preservation. Get him out of there and get somebody in there that knows what's going on. These officers weren't killed, they were wounded. Wounded bad enough to get 'em out of there.

Interviewer

Was there a consensus? Did you talk about it before it happened or was it just a spontaneous moment?

Andrew Archuleta

We would talk about, among one another. Say, "This guy's gonna get us killed, man, something's gotta happen." And through that kind of a discussion you knew something was gonna take place. 'Cause that officer was too dangerous.

Interviewer

This is one of the things we've discovered, when the men go, they need to go as a group, not checker board. This is a terrible way to do it.

Andrew Archuleta

And that's pretty much how they fought that war. I mean you would be in-country for while, you would know how to survive in the jungle and they would send you new troops that hadn't been in contact. They could jeopardize your wellbeing too. And you had to give them input and feedback constantly on what they needed to do.

Interviewer

Were you considered a leader in this group? This one man relied upon you tremendously, this one officer you were telling us about.

Andrew Archuleta

I think so because of my experience. As I look back on it, I had a different kind of personality. I wasn't easily shaken. I never have been easily shaken. And a lot of it is I think due to what happened over there, that I learned quickly how I needed to be. Many of the encounters - well all of them - I was never scared. I needed to keep myself alive more than, you know, indulge myself with an emotion such as fear. And my responsibility - and I knew that because I am an M-60 machine gun, I knew how important of a role that was in that infantry situation. And like I said, the most scared I ever was when we went back through that area where we fought that three-day battle.

Interviewer

That's seven months into your tour, so you're halfway by then. Are you keeping a calendar or anything like that?

Andrew Archuleta

No. Up here. But I didn't journal anything or chronicle anything.

Interviewer

Are you hearing anything from home at that time?

Andrew Archuleta

We're getting letters, yeah. We're getting letters. I'm getting letters with my brother's - he was a running back for South High School and I'd get letters with articles about him in there. And so I'd get letters from my mom, from my dad, from my other brothers and sisters.

Interviewer

Are you writing them home?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah, but at times it wasn't - you know, looking for this picture for Sally, I was going through some other things and there was a letter there that I wrote to my grandmother. And I said, "Dearest Grandma, I'm sorry I haven't written you in such a while, but it's not because I haven't wanted to." You really didn't have the time and you don't get the luxury of base camp very often. And so sometimes you would write out in the field when your stuff wasn't all wet, your stationary wasn't all wet. And then when you went back to base camp that's usually when you would do your writing. And that wasn't often.

Interviewer

When you came back from a three-day battle like that, what were the conversations? I mean how did you decompress? Did you talk about it with your buddies? How did you process that?

Andrew Archuleta

You processed it mainly individually. I don't recall a lot of discussion afterwards about the battle. Maybe something to the effect, "God, it's great to get out of that fucking hole," you know? "Geez, let's go to the bar, have something to drink. Get messed up on some beer. We've got a few days back here, let's take advantage of it." So we would talk about something to the effect like how quick 27 men, 30 men went down. How much they had their shit together in putting together that L-shaped ambush. How we would recall something like that just in case in the future. Because it wouldn't be the first time we'd see something like that. That month of August, is there 31 days in August, I believe? We had contact 28. So I knew we weren't in Vietnam. We were operating that Cu Chi area west of Cu Chi, and we were operating it heavily.

Interviewer

Were you asking people where are we? Did you know?

Andrew Archuleta

You don't do that, they're not gonna tell ya. We'd fly out of Cu Chi in choppers, we were air mobile so we would fly out from place to place. They're not gonna tell ya. And all the country looks the same. Just because there's a border between Vietnam and Cambodia doesn't mean the country changes. It's all the same.

Interviewer

How long were you in that area total?

Andrew Archuleta

I remember in June we were up in Dak To, we had dug in at Dak To. We were there, and we were told we were gonna be there for a while. And then we were airlifted ten days later down to Cu Chi, the base there in Cu Chi. And then from there, we operated down there for about... all the way into the first of October. From about the two-thirds of the way through June to the end of October.

Interviewer

Are you getting close to any of these guys?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah, but you just develop a sense of camaraderie. But something kind of tells ya, you kind of don't get too close. The nature of the situation, you know, was not to get so close. Anyway, for me, you know? A couple of these guys were really good friends over there. They never died. And then a lot of these other guys were soldiers you'd interact with all the time, you'd go drink with them, but just somehow you didn't worry about it. You didn't know whether they were gonna be there the next day or not. And so I think in a sense, that kind of becomes a survival skill too, how you handle your friendships over there. It's just natural to have, in a situation like that - I think - I don't know, maybe I'm real different - but to be somewhat distant.

Interviewer

Can you describe an L-shaped ambush?

Andrew Archuleta

The L-shaped ambush. An L-this way, and an L-this way. So the L's are connected, okay? At the corners I think they had .81 millimeter mortars. And so then they have machine guns at the ends. And it's a pretty effective ambush. So it's like two L's connected and the longer legs of the L's in the back corner. So when you walk into that, you're almost in a sense trapped because you've got the mortars firing more into the middle of what the L is designed to do and you're getting intersecting fire from the machine guns. Does that help describe it?

Interviewer

Tell us about the villages and tell us about the civilians and what you were seeing and thinking about that?

Andrew Archuleta

It was a combination of a lot of things. A lot of times we'd run into villages where there were Viet Cong and you couldn't tell them apart from any of the other villagers. I remember one day we were on our way into this village and we saw these two Viet Cong running out into the field and one was carrying the base plate of a mortar and the other one was carrying a tube. And my CO called me up and had me set up my gun to eliminate 'em. And they were some few hundred yards out or so. So I dealt with that. And then we walked into the village. But it was like you couldn't discern who was who, what was what. And sometimes they were gracious and sometimes the ones who could speak English would, you know, "Oh, GI number one," something like that. For the most part, they were distant and cold. We were in their country, not by their want. So it's not like they were really friendly. In Saigon, they depended on all of the troops who were over there to basically make a living so they were a little more welcoming of you but it was more monetarily based because it was good for their economy, it was good for their businesses.

Interviewer

Did you personally ever talk to any of the civilians?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah. I was in Saigon and this is when I came back from R&R, and what I did essentially is took a 33-day R&R. I spent some time in Malaysia, came back, flew into Saigon, said basically, I don't want to go back up north. So I did go back up there. My friends were gold bricks which we called guys in the rear that worked for majors and colonels and they did a lot of the paperwork. So they would manipulate things so I could be down in Saigon just having a good time. So yeah, I had a couple of relationships there with females. It was a good experience. I had some fun doing that. The food there was great. I just wasn't ready to go back out in the field, I didn't want to go back out in the field. I figured, you know, hell with it. I've put in my time. It's somebody else's turn. So in a sense I felt entitled to do this because I'd gone through all that.

Interviewer

How long had you been in-country when you took your R&R?

Andrew Archuleta

Ten months.

Interviewer

So you were way short?

Andrew Archuleta

Well, I extended in order to get an early out. I extended. I had to fill out paperwork and I did this through my gold brick friends down in Bien Hoa division headquarters. And they worked it out so that I could extend like for another 45 days, 48 days so I could get an early out of the Army. I'd had enough of it. Enough of the kind of treatment I'd received and enough of the BS that they were feeding me.

Interviewer

So did you go back into battle after that?

Andrew Archuleta

I went back. This one asshole platoon leader - the second time he had threatened me with a court-martial, he says, "I'm gonna court-martial ya. You were A-wall." And I said, "Well, go ahead and court-martial me. Do what you need to do." And after being there for the time that I was and going through the experience that I had and having to deal with certain officers, I didn't have much deference for him, so I told him, "You just go ahead and do what you need to do, sir. Be careful when you're out in the field." And so then I went and talked to my CO, we'd got that same CO that I had a lot of respect for and we got along really well. And I had told him so-and-so's gonna put me up for court-martial and he kind of laughs and he goes, "You know, Arch, that's probably not gonna happen." And I said, "How will that be stopped?" And he said, "Once it gets to the battalion commander, you'll probably have to go in and meet with him, but he's not gonna let that happen, not to you." He said, "The Army doesn't court-martial their heroes."

Interviewer

How did you feel about him saying that to you?

Andrew Archuleta

I knew what I had done, you know? To what extent I'd put in. And the things that I had done. It was nice that he had recognized that in that manner.

Interviewer

Were you wounded ever?

Andrew Archuleta

No. No. The closest I ever came to being wounded was stepping up on a rice paddy dike and around, going through my fatigues. And it hit a guy in back of me, it hit him up here, and it killed him. And it came from a sniper about several hundred yards out. I saw the muzzle flashes. I came up on a rice paddy dike. And it was in a hedgerow six-, eight hundred yards away.

Interviewer

Were you awarded any medals?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah.

Interviewer

What were they?

Andrew Archuleta

I received a Silver Star. Two or three Bronze Stars, and several Vietnamese citations. And I was told that I was gonna be receiving another Bronze Star and that I was put up for the Distinguished Service Cross. And I never saw that other Bronze Star or the Distinguished Service Cross.

Interviewer

The picture where you're decorated, what is that?

Andrew Archuleta

They had flown in General Williamson who was a three-star general out into the field. And there was like four of us that were gonna be decorated; another Mexican and I were receiving Silver Stars. That was my first one. And that's when General Williamson came in and decorated us. They flew him in. And boy he looked strake as hell. He just comes out in the field, pins it on ya and he's out of here. But something about that that was just kind of a not real obvious kind of respect and recognition. I'm sure they provide all of the details for why you're up for the Silver Star. And I could just feel an element of respect from him towards me.

Interviewer

When did you start seriously turning your opinion of the war and wanting to get out of there? Can you describe that?

Andrew Archuleta

I had to go to Vietnam because I got in trouble with the law. So I had a choice to either do so many years of probation or volunteer for the draft, that's how I did it. So I figured I'd roll the dice. I really didn't want to do that because it was such an unpopular war and I didn't believe in it. But I figured I'd roll the dice which I guess was more

of self preservation, I guess, to deal with that situation I'd gotten myself into. So I went ahead and went over there. I saw it as a different experience. I saw it as kind of being able to see another part of the world and I guess in a sense, that was kind of how I rationalized my discontent with the war. I'd heard how political it was, I'd heard what the reasons were. So I was never in favor of that war from the beginning. But gradually I developed a disdain for what we were doing over there. And for what reason and why close to 50,000 men had to lose their lives.

Interviewer

Aside from the political aspects, but inside you're changing. What were those changes?

Andrew Archuleta

I guess becoming mature means to place more of a value on your life and others' lives. You weren't as self-centered any longer. It wasn't all flash and dance any more. You had more of an appreciation for things, for everything that's involved in life.

Interviewer

Talk about coming home, after leaving Vietnam.

Andrew Archuleta

You know, I had some mixed feelings about leaving there. I had been there close to 13 and a half months. My experiences I think were a lot more varied than other soldiers. I wasn't just - boom - go to Vietnam, go to jungle school - boom - go fight and then come back and come home. I had some in-country R&R's that I was able to work out. I had several intense days, an intense period of time where I had contact, ran into the enemy. I had experiences by being in a world-class oriental city, Saigon, that I was just fascinated by. Fascinated by the people, the beautiful women. So my experiences varied a lot. I went to Malaysia, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur for an R&R. So I had a little bit more appreciation for my experience over there. I mean it becomes your home for 13 months. The lifestyle was a lifestyle. So, you know, with any change like that comes small or large depressions. I was looking forward to coming back home, being with my family. How you decompress, as Sally says, I guess everybody has a different experience with it. I recall my adjustment here, it wasn't really too difficult, but I recall being here and missing some of the things back there.

Interviewer

How did you actually leave Vietnam?

Andrew Archuleta

I extended for an early out. They offered me an opportunity to - I guess they looked at it as an opportunity - to re-up for six years, come back to the United States and go to OCS. Try to get into West Point. And so the battalion commander gave me like seven day R&R, special leave. They wanted to keep me in the Army. I was highly decorated, they wanted to keep me in there. And that was another one of their efforts. They want to keep their heroes in the Army. So I went ahead, ended up flying down to Bien Hoa from Camp Evans, at that point we were up in Camp Evans and that was our base camp up there. It was a big camp, huge camp just south of the DMZ, south of Quang Tri. So flew out of there, went down to Bien Hoa and that's where I worked it out with my friends to go ahead and extend. And I'd go on my special leave and they worked it out so that orders were written and stuff for me to extend and come back to the United States and I'd ETS as soon as I touched ground here. I'd be out of the Army after you go through this process. So anyway, what I did, instead of going on this special leave, I spent my time back down in Saigon because I was getting familiar with that city. And made some friends down there and knew some other military down there that I'd get together with.

Interviewer

So did you actually leave by airliner or boat?

Andrew Archuleta

We left by airliner out of Tan Son Nhut Airport which is in Saigon.

Interviewer

What did you think when they closed that door?

Andrew Archuleta

I just thought, well, good-bye Vietnam. There's a process you go through before leaving, you know, what you recall, what you're gonna miss, what you're not gonna miss. So you go through a process just as you went through a process when you came here to the United States.

Interviewer

And how were you treated when you got home? You're a decorated Vietnam vet. What was that like?

Andrew Archuleta

I didn't feel welcomed. I didn't feel welcomed at all. It was almost like because it was such an unpopular war that you didn't want to be identified as a Vietnam veteran. It was much different than I think the experience my father went through coming back from the Second World War. And then you kind of had to suppress certain attitudes you

developed over there and certain ways of being that helped you with the situation over there. You didn't want to have that same appearance as a military man because immediately they'd connect you with being in favor of the war and that you might have been a veteran over there. It was a period of time where we were unpopular over there in Vietnam and then we're unpopular here in the United States. It was almost like you couldn't win for losing. It was hard to get a job, it was real hard to get a job, thanks to Walter Cronkite who projected this image of us as just warmongers. And basically were put into a situation where we have to survive.

Interviewer

So you get home when?

Andrew Archuleta

Oh, this is interesting. I ETS' d out of Vietnam - I got here to the United States on my birthday, January 30th.

Interviewer

What went through your head?

Andrew Archuleta

Happy birthday. It was a nice birthday present. How I was gonna reintegrate, I didn't know.

Interviewer

What year was that?

Andrew Archuleta

That was January 30th of 1969.

Interviewer

1975, April 28th. You love Saigon and yet on that day we're watching Saigon fall on television. Do you remember that day?

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah. I'm experiencing goose bumps right now because of the feeling that I had that day. All that effort for this? All those lives for this? And then it was the same feeling I experienced when I heard that we were withdrawing from Vietnam. I didn't like that either even though I had my feelings about such an unpopular war. I mean my feelings varied. I don't know if this is typical of other Vietnam veterans. I would imagine it is because I don't think I'm so

different from them. And it's kind of, you know, what was it all worth when you hear that stuff? And when you hear the fall of Saigon, I didn't know if they would be any better off or not. They're all the same people. So it shouldn't be that much of a problem. I don't think the people there in South Vietnam bought into all of the stuff, the propaganda that the U.S. was putting out there. Yeah, it was a feeling, once I had heard that we were coming out of Vietnam, what was it all worth? And then hearing about the fall of Saigon in April of '75.

Interviewer

When you hear a helicopter today, do those feelings come back?

Andrew Archuleta

No. You recall. I don't know if it's necessarily feelings. But you recall. And some of the memories are good and some of the memories are terrible. I know my brother teases me sometimes because I love to watch fireworks, 4th of July fireworks. And I loved watching the Olympic fireworks. They were just all the way across the valley. I mean I was out in freezing cold watching them. But when I go to places, my brother and I have in common to watch the fireworks, he says, "Hey Droid," that's what he calls me - Andrew, Android. "Hey Droid, does this remind you of Vietnam?" So it's kind of like a teasing but not really, you know? It's just kind of like some interplay between brothers - it's his way of kind of recognizing my time over in Vietnam.

Interviewer

You were in Bien Hoa Airport during the Tet?

Andrew Archuleta

No, before that. I was there before that.

Interviewer

What were you doing during Tet?

Andrew Archuleta

I didn't get to fight in Tet, no.

Interviewer

Did you see it?

Andrew Archuleta

Yes. It was very close to me.

Interviewer

Describe that and where you were.

Andrew Archuleta

I was in Bien Hoa. And I remember we were like in a holding area before you went out, before they sent you out to - I said Phuoc Vinh. So I was in Bien Hoa for - I remember - I got in-country like the 6th of January, and I recall the Tet Offensive becoming pretty heavy around the 8th. We had our weapons and everything and we had our lockers. And that was what we were gonna go to our eventual home base, I guess. Bien Hoa, it's a big area. It's protecting an air base. And so I mean all the fireworks were taking place there. I mean you could see 'em, you could hear 'em, they were right there. I didn't actually come in contact with anybody at that time, with enemy, at that time.

Interviewer

Welcome to Vietnam.

Andrew Archuleta

Yeah, it was a different welcoming. It certainly was.

Interviewer

Did everyone know what it was about?

Andrew Archuleta

Oh, no, it was an offensive and they knew it was gonna take place. It was the Tet Offensive of 1968. Some of the most battle-intense times of the war.

Interviewer

If you could talk to some kids who don't even know what the Vietnam War is, what would you say?

Andrew Archuleta

You know, when I came back my brother was still in high school.

Anyway, when I came back, I guess I'd been here, back in-country - that's interesting that term "back in-country" which is a term we used to use all the time back then. Anyway, when I came back to the United States I was here in

Salt Lake for a while. My brother had asked me to attend one of his classes and present on Vietnam. I told them about my experiences; something similar to the manner I'm telling you. But in my experience when I worked for Valley Mental Health, talking with my clients there - I used to work with chronically mentally ill, I never shared much with them there. I have never really shared that much about my experiences in Vietnam with anybody.

Interviewer

What would you like people to know?

Andrew Archuleta

That I lived through a time of turmoil and survived it. That it wasn't anything that was a pleasure but I wouldn't live it any other way. Even though, with all of those feelings, I think the experiences that I went through during that period of time, I wouldn't do it any differently.

Interviewer

Have you been to The Wall?

Andrew Archuleta

No.

Interviewer

Do you want to go to The Wall?

Andrew Archuleta

Someday.

Interviewer

Do you want to say anything about the servicemen who died during the war?

Andrew Archuleta

We were courageous. They were courageous. I'm sure I'm not the only one that felt about that war the way I did. And yet fighting in the same manner that I did, and them having to die for it, it was... I can only say that they were courageous. With the contradiction that they felt about being over there, and then ultimately dying.

Interviewer

Thank you.