



Transcript of Lee Sanchez Interview
Salt Lake City, Utah

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

Lee Sanchez

Lee Richard Sanchez.

Interviewer

And you were born where?

Lee Sanchez

I was born in Westcliffe, Colorado in 1945.

Interviewer

And where'd you grow up?

Lee Sanchez

I grew up in Layton, Utah.

Interviewer

Did you go to Layton High School?

Lee Sanchez

No. I went to high school at Davis High School in Kaysville.

Interviewer

What year did you graduate?

Lee Sanchez

1964.

Interviewer

And when did you go into the military?

Lee Sanchez

1967.

Interviewer

Tell us about your world in 1967 before you went into the military.

Lee Sanchez

Well, I was always on the streets. I was always getting in trouble and fighting and carrying on, chasing the chicks and that sort of stuff. And then I got to thinking well, you know what, I better do something with myself. So I thought well, I know what, I'll go to war. I'll go to Vietnam. And I volunteered in 1967, then I went to Vietnam in '68.

Interviewer

Did you have family and friends at home?

Lee Sanchez

Yes, I did. I went and told my mom and dad, I says, "Mom and Dad, I'm leaving home. I'm going in the Army and I wanna go to Vietnam." And they said, "What?" They couldn't believe it.

Interviewer

What did they say?

Lee Sanchez

Well, "Good luck to you, son." And I was never home anyway. I was kinda on my own. I left home when I was 17.

Interviewer

Did you have a girlfriend or anything like that?

Lee Sanchez

I did. But then I had to kinda break it off so I can go in the service.

Interviewer

Why did you choose the Army?

Lee Sanchez

Well, my first preference was the Marine Corps, and I went to the Marines and they said I didn't weigh enough, I was too lightweight, 115 pounds. So I says, "Oh, okay." So I went to the Army and the Army took me. And they said if I would've been five pounds lighter I wouldn't have made it.

Interviewer

What day did you go in?

Lee Sanchez

The month was May.

Interviewer

Where did you go?

Lee Sanchez

I went Fort Douglas to processing, and then after that then they shipped me off to Fort Bliss, Texas to basic for nine weeks.

Interviewer

And what was your specialty?

Lee Sanchez

In infantry. I wanted to become airborne. So then I went to Fort Benning, Georgia to airborne school. And then I got hurt and I got disqualified. And then they shipped me home for Christmas and sent me to Vietnam.

Interviewer

When did you get to Vietnam?

Lee Sanchez

In January of '68.

Interviewer

How'd you get there?

Lee Sanchez

TWA.

Interviewer

What was that flight like?

Lee Sanchez

I was thinking what am I gonna run into, what am I gonna expect? And when I got there I realized what was going on. Then when I got to Bien Hoa they put us in kinda like a holding station, and they said, "Lee Sanchez, 1st Infantry, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, Bravo Company. Lima Platoon." That's because **(Pedia?)(35:19)** wanted all the Latinos in his platoon.

Interviewer

Tell us about Pedia.

Lee Sanchez

I don't know why he did it. He just wanted all the Chicanos in his platoon. Maybe he idolized Pancho Villa. I don't know. I have no idea.

Interviewer

How many were in your platoon?

Lee Sanchez

Oh, about 29.

Interviewer

And how many people in a platoon?

Lee Sanchez

Usually there's 32 in a platoon, but at that time there was only 29.

Interviewer

So you were all Latino?

Lee Sanchez

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

What time era was this again?

Lee Sanchez

That was in 1968 in May.

Interviewer

Tell us what happens.

Lee Sanchez

Well, when I got into Lima, one of the guys there, I think it was Moreno, he went over there and he got me my gear and stuff and took me under his arm and saddled me up with all my equipment. And I says, "What are we doing?" He says, "We're gonna go on a mission." And so he said, "Okay. Here's your M-16 and your ammo and two canteens of water." And so there we go, off on a mission.

Interviewer

So this is your first mission.

Lee Sanchez

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

And you've got an older guy there.

Lee Sanchez

A guy that's been there a while. They don't let you go off on your own. They kind of put you with somebody that's been there a while to kinda show you what you gotta do.

Interviewer

What was the first mission like?

Lee Sanchez

Well, we found an area where we could do an ambush patrol, so we set up an ambush patrol right outside the wire. Not very far.

Interviewer

Was this at night?

Lee Sanchez

Yes.

Interviewer

Tell us about that night.

Lee Sanchez

Well, everybody said out their claymores, which is a claymore mine that you set out with a detonator and wire and all that stuff. And then get your ammo ready and just wait. And then listen to the radio and see what the CO has to say. The CO meaning the old man, you know. He's the captain.

Interviewer

Anything happen that night?

Lee Sanchez

Nope. It was quiet. You could hear the crickets in the background going chirp, chirp, chirp. And then when everything stops then that's when it all hits when it's quiet.

Interviewer

So how many missions did you get real combat?

Lee Sanchez

There was quite a few missions. And then after I was there six months, then they says, "Well, we're gonna have to go out on ambush patrols more often," 'cause we got more KIAs at night then we did in the daytime. Because the VC, they like to move around at night, see. They know they can't defeat us. They can't fight us and defeat us, so they try to get us at night. 'Cause if you go out on a mission in the daytime you don't see anything or you find booby-traps and different things and corpses laying out there in the sun and stuff. But they don't come out in the daytime. They're hidden. Can you imagine looking for an elusive enemy that you can't see and he's well camouflaged and you're in his own turf and he's watching you all the time? That's the Viet Cong. That's how we lost a lotta GIs over there because we can't see what we're fighting. And then when you

stumble on 'em, then that's when hell breaks loose, when you accidentally get 'em by surprise. And that's how we ended up getting in firefights.

Interviewer

Tell me about one of those firefights.

Lee Sanchez

Well, we were going into a tree line and it was pretty thick. And we sent a recon platoon in there first to kinda get 'em outta there or go in there and check it out before we move in. And then hell broke loose, and then we went in right after the recon platoon. And then that's when I saw this RPD take this gun squad out. And you could see the—shewww—and I wasn't very far from that and I seen this RPD got the gun squad leader and just cut him in half. And his body was one half here and the other half here. And his two ammo bearers were killed in the process also. That was the first time that I seen actual combat.

And then the second time I was walking point, and I captured this one Viet Cong. He hollered, "Chieu hoi," which he wanted to surrender. And he had a .45, which is an American made .45. And it was empty. And I captured him at night 'cause I was walking point. And then they called in a helicopter, a UH-1, and they shipped him off to the rear, to the headquarters, and they interrogated him.

And then the next day, we flew out to Loc Ninh and that was a time that we went on an ambush, I mean, 'cause there was a lotta VC in Loc Ninh. And we set up an ambush there, and then at 6:00 in the morning they sent out a decoy of five VC. And then I was an RTO at the time and then I radio'd to Bravo Six and told him. I says, "We got the VC in our front. They spotted us and we're gonna have to break ambush." And he said, "Go ahead and do what you have to do." So we did. We shot 'em all, killed 'em all except for one.

He was mortally wounded, but he musta had a gunnysack full of grenades or something because he kept throwing grenades at us. And this one particular grenade landed behind me, and then that's when Rudy Moreno recovered it. And I turned around to see what was going on, and it killed 'em both. It just tore 'em all up.

Interviewer

Let's get that again. Is this at night?

Lee Sanchez

No. This was in the morning. That happened when the VC spotted us.

Interviewer

Go into a little more detail so that you can tell their story. Were you in a foxhole?

Lee Sanchez

No, no. We're in the tree line.

Interviewer

What are you doing?

Lee Sanchez

Well, I had an M-79 grenade launcher, and Moreno had an M-16. If Rudy would've been where he was supposed to be, he woulda been still alive. But he was a machine gunner, and he gave his machine gun to one of his guys and he came up there with me and Moreno.

Interviewer

Is there anybody else nearby?

Lee Sanchez

No. Just the three of us.

Interviewer

What's going on?

Lee Sanchez

Well, we couldn't believe it. We just said, "We're gonna have to do something quick." And so I called Bravo Six and told them that we better just go ahead and fire because if we don't they'll kill us all.

Interviewer

Who fires first?

Lee Sanchez

Rudy did.

Interviewer

And what'd he have, an M-16?

Lee Sanchez

Yes.

Interviewer

Tell us about Rudy.

Lee Sanchez

Well, he just started firing, and Moreno started firing. I had an M-79, and I couldn't do much with an M-79 'cause it has to be at a distance. And so if I would've had an M-16, I still think they'd still be alive because that way I woulda got that guy with a headshot.

Interviewer

How many enemy were there?

Lee Sanchez

Well, there was four or five. About five, more or less.

Interviewer

Were they coming right at you?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. They were kinda in a wedged position.

Interviewer

And they were advancing on you?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. They were sneaking up on us. They were real quiet.

Interviewer

How far away were they?

Lee Sanchez

Like, from here to your cameraman.

Interviewer

And who's the other fellow there with you?

Lee Sanchez

Moreno. Moreno and Rudy.

Interviewer

And tell me about what Moreno's doing.

Lee Sanchez

Moreno, he was firing, too like we were all doing. He didn't say nothing or nothing. I mean, when you're shooting you're not talking to each other 'cause, I mean, you're trying to do the best you can to kill 'em before they kill you.

Interviewer

How long does this last?

Lee Sanchez

Oh, about 25, 30 minutes.

Interviewer

That's a long time.

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. 'Cause there were still gooks on the other side of the draw there.

Interviewer

What was the noise like?

Lee Sanchez

Clackity-clack clack. Everything went crazy.

Interviewer

Could you hear each other over the battle?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. They said, "Charlie's that are up front start shooting. You're on your own." "Bang," "bang," "bang." And it's just chaos.

Interviewer

Tell me about the grenades again.

Lee Sanchez

Well, to this day I still don't know how they got that close, those gooks, or the VC. I don't know how they got that close. I really don't. Like I said, they were well camouflaged and you don't see 'em. And, well, they did anyway. But next thing I knew is ol' Rudy and Moreno went back. They heard a thud, and they went back and Rudy went to grab the hand grenade with his right hand.

Interviewer

This was a VC grenade?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. VC, or Chinese, one of the two.

Interviewer

And it was smoking?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. He went and grabbed it with his hand, and next thing I knew, Moreno went after Rudy to recover him or the hand grenade, I don't know what he was thinking. But he went after it, too.

Interviewer

So they're both grabbing for it.

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. They were struggling for the hand grenade.

Interviewer

Because they wanted to throw it back at the enemy?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. They wanted to throw it back at the enemy, but in the ensuing struggle, it went off and killed them both. Next thing I knew, I turned around 'cause I was that close and it kinda blew me up against a tree, and I got wounded in the process. And I was in shock, man. Their bodies were just mutilated. Like if you take a meat cleaver to your body. She's got pictures of it. I showed it to her. I have the medical records of their bodies and stuff.

Interviewer

So you were thrown against the tree, and you're still trying to make sense of things.

Lee Sanchez

I mean, why am I still alive? How come they died and I didn't? I still don't understand that 'cause the grenade went right behind me.

Interviewer

So what happened? Did a medic come find you?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. The medic found us.

Interviewer

Tell us more about that.

Lee Sanchez

Passmore, the medic. You know, he never carried a weapon in Vietnam. He wouldn't carry a weapon. He said it was against his religion. But he says, "If I'm gonna serve, I'll go ahead and be the medic and patch up our troops. But I will not fire a weapon." So he didn't.

Interviewer

Where are you wounded?

Lee Sanchez

Right here.

Interviewer

Was it hurting?

Lee Sanchez

I had shrapnel about that big. Yeah, it was painful. Kinda burned. A burning sensation.

Interviewer

Could you move?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah, I could walk, but not very well. And then I got all the dust off and went to the ninety—

Interviewer

So does the medic immediately start giving you aid?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. He took my first aid dressing and wrapped it around and told me to get on that chopper.

Interviewer

So how long did you wait for the helicopter?

Lee Sanchez

Not very long. Maybe three, four minutes.

Interviewer

Somebody help you into it?

Lee Sanchez

No. I went and got in it myself.

Interviewer

What did you see?

Lee Sanchez

When I got into the helicopter, I seen Bess laying on one of them stretchers with his jaw blown off. Bess was another guy that they put on the chopper, but he died. They put him on the chopper. He had half his jaw blown off. That was another grenade that idiot threw, that VC.

Interviewer

Is he giving you morphine?

Lee Sanchez

No. He didn't give me no morphine. No. But he just told me to get on the chopper. I don't know. He mighta not had any, I guess. I don't know. But anyway, those two buddies of mine, they put 'em on a different chopper, I guess.

Interviewer

Tell us more about them.

Lee Sanchez

Well, we were drinking buddies. I don't know. We were just good friends. We were just close. I mean, I don't know. It was just like brothers, you know. You had to take care of each other. You had to watch each other's back, you know. And, of course, I didn't do my job. If I woulda took care of 'em, maybe they'd still be alive. So that's the guilt that I have.

Interviewer

So you think this was your fault?

Lee Sanchez

Coulda been. It coulda been my fault. I don't know.

Interviewer

Tell us something personal about those two guys that you remember.

Lee Sanchez

Well, Rudy was married. Moreno wasn't. But I found out that Moreno's girlfriend had a baby that he didn't know about. Yeah. We just found him here not too long ago. And Rudy was married. He wasn't married too long after he went to Vietnam.

Interviewer

Where were they from?

Lee Sanchez

Rudy was from San Jose, California, and Moreno, he was from Artesia, California.

Interviewer

And how old were they?

Lee Sanchez

Moreno was 19 and I think Rudy was 20. About that old.

Interviewer

What do you think you could've done that would've made it different?

Lee Sanchez

If I had an M-16. If I woulda had one they would still be alive. But I didn't have an M-16. I had that M-79. They call it a thumb gun. It has to go out so far. It's used as a grenade launcher. It's where you could shoot it at a buncha people together. Yeah. If I woulda had an M-16 they'd still be alive. I still believe that.

Interviewer

That wasn't your fault.

Lee Sanchez

Well, I kinda feel it was because I coulda done something better. I get a lotta PTSD from it.

Interviewer

But you were doing what they told you to do. You were supposed to have that grenade launcher.

Lee Sanchez

Because the LT didn't have nobody else to give it to. Just because I was carrying the radio, which is a PRC-25, he thought that I ought to have the M-79. Incidentally, my squad leader was Moreno. After Tom Otterson left, the one I was telling you about, then Moreno took the squad after him.

Interviewer

But you didn't do anything wrong.

Lee Sanchez

Well, maybe I didn't. I don't know. Things just happened too fast. But they deserve the Medal of Honor, and I'm gonna do everything I can to get it to 'em. And I hope somebody can help me with it. This having two witnesses is beyond me. I don't believe in that. Why would I lie? I have the records right there. And I have the records of their bodies being blown up to threads. I'm not lying. It's the truth. I swear to God.

Interviewer

Do you think about this every day?

Lee Sanchez

I do. I do. And some of the guys think I'm losing my mind, but I don't think so. I can't help the way I feel.

Interviewer

If you could see those guys again, what would you say to 'em?

Lee Sanchez

That's a hard one. I don't know. Hug em, I guess.

Interviewer

They saved your life, right?

Lee Sanchez

They sure did. Yep. And then after Vietnam, I joined the National Guard in 1973 and I went to another war in '91. As if Vietnam wasn't enough, I still served. I don't know. Maybe I'm crazy.

Interviewer

How were those wars different?

Lee Sanchez

Well, the war in Desert Storm, the only thing that worried me the most was the mines and the SCUD missiles. And in fact, when that one hit on that Pennsylvania Guard that was in those barracks made outta tin or something, they were a water purification unit, that killed quite a few of 'em. I was only three miles away from that. And that hit there in Saudi Arabia.

Interviewer

After you were wounded in Vietnam, did you go back to duty?

Lee Sanchez

I did. They patched me up and sent me back out.

Interviewer

Were you different after that?

Lee Sanchez

I hated the gooks, the VC. I despised them. I hated them. After I killed my first two it got easier after that. It's like you get happy that you killed 'em and you're happy. That could be dangerous to you in your mind, you know. That's the way you get sometimes. You get where you just don't care, you know. The more you get, the better off it is. I had pictures of corpses and dead bodies and stuff like that, and they took 'em away from me because they said that that was propaganda. You ain't taking that to the States. And they took 'em away from me. So I've only got a couple that they let me keep, but that's about it.

Interviewer

So how much longer did you serve after that day?

Lee Sanchez

Oh, August the 27th, 1968 when I got wounded, when my two buddies died. Let's see, like, August, September, October, November, December. About five months, six months.

Interviewer

Talk about when you were getting short.

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. The last month that I was there, my first sergeant, we used to call him frog eyes 'cause, I don't know, it was just a nickname. But anyway, he put me in supply with Taborn, and he said, "You're too short. I wanna see you go home." So he put me in supply. And so that was my last month there. I was in supply. That's when I had that phone on the Jeep.

Lee Sanchez

So I was on the Jeep with the telephone directing the supplies into our CP. And I got a picture of that and I was showing Sally that. And so that was the last month that I was there. And I was there with Sergeant Taborn, and him and I were doing the supply stuff.

Interviewer

Tell us about coming home.

Lee Sanchez

Well, I got into Oakland, California. Well, we flew on a TWA. There was a lotta GIs. There was us and the Marines and so forth on the TWA. And we got into Oakland, California on the 31st of December. And I called home and I told Mom, "Hey, Mom, I'm gonna be in on the 1st of January. I wanna stay here in Oakland. I wanna go to San Francisco and celebrate New Year's." And I did. I had a good time, too. I was in uniform and everything, but that didn't matter. And so she said, "Oh, okay, Son. Be careful. We'll see you when you get here." So then the next day on New Year's, I flew into Salt Lake City and got with the family. And it was an exciting day.

Interviewer

Did your parents write you a lot?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah, she did. That's why I don't write very much anymore because oh, man, I used to get mail after mail and you just get tired of it after a while, you know.

Interviewer

You got out what day?

Lee Sanchez

I was still in the service. Yeah. I just came home for 30 days, and then I went to Fort Carson. That's where my duty station was. And I stayed there for the rest of my time 'til I got my discharge in 1970. And then I got married to my wife in '72. And then I joined the National Guard in '73.

Lee Sanchez

Well, we went into this NCO Club and we got kicked outta there because we weren't ranked high enough to be drinking in there. That was one thing we did. And so we went to the enlisted club where they had people that were less than sergeant ranked to drink and stuff.

Interviewer

Did you ever go on leave while you were in Vietnam?

Lee Sanchez

I did. I went to Vong Tao.

Interviewer

Talk about your girlfriend.

Lee Sanchez

She was from a rich family, and she wanted to get married. And I didn't really wanna get married 'cause I wasn't ready for that. And besides that, you'd have to go through a lotta red tape to bring them to the States anyway.

Interviewer

What was her name?

Lee Sanchez

Nancy Chong.

Interviewer

Tell us about her.

Lee Sanchez

Some of that stuff is pretty hard to remember. She was funny, she was laughable. I don't know. There ain't too much to tell other than I didn't see her that much. The only way I could correspond was by mail because I was out in the jungles all the time fighting the war. That's the only way I could correspond with her was by mail. I didn't see her very much.

Interviewer

Where did you meet her?

Lee Sanchez

In Vong Tao.

Interviewer

What were you doing?

Lee Sanchez

I was on R&R for three days.

Interviewer

Talk about the first time you saw her.

Lee Sanchez

We went into a bar and there was all these women sitting at the bar waiting for an American soldier to come in. And they picked whoever they wanted and I got picked by her. You guys are getting too personal.

Interviewer

How did you feel watching the events of Saigon on TV?

Lee Sanchez

Well, I thought it was over. I thought everything was finished and all the money and lives and wounded and all the equipment and everything was lost. And then look at what we spent over there, and I didn't think that was right. I think that we should of just annihilated that place instead of pull out the way we did. That's the way I feel about it. To be honest with you, the North Vietnamese and the VC waited us out. They waited us out because they knew that sooner or later we were gonna pull out anyway 'cause of the money we spent over there, and the support we were getting was little to nothing. And, and so they waited us out and it was just a matter of time before we pulled out of there. They knew they couldn't defeat us, and that's why they did it.

Interviewer

What'd you think of the Vietnamese people?

Lee Sanchez

I felt sorry for 'em. They wanted our money, they wanted our food, and especially the kids, they wanted our candy. And they would take anything you'd give 'em. There was one time that my first sergeant told me this, that I was ordered to shoot an M-79 at the kids, but don't hit the kids. And I says, "Why?" Well, he says, "I want you to scare 'em away." And so I fired one 79 round away from the kids. And he says, "No, I don't mean there." So I fired another round at the kids. He says, "Oh, I didn't mean for you to kill 'em." I didn't kill 'em, though. I just kinda missed 'em. But those kids would follow us and they would report to the Viet Cong what we were doing and stuff like that. And so that's why we had to get rid of 'em. That's why we didn't want them to follow us.

Interviewer

That must've been confusing.

Lee Sanchez

Yes, it was. Mm-hmm. Have you ever been through snake and leech-infested swamps with mosquitoes and that filth? I've been through it up to my neck. In fact, I almost got drowned in one of them swamps because I stepped in a hole that was pretty deep. Especially with 75 pounds on your back.

Interviewer

What was it like in the jungle?

Lee Sanchez

Well, they have these beetles that make this clackity sound all night, and the smells, it smelled like swamp, sewer, stuff like that. Dead corpses, I guess. The

fish hatchery wasn't very far. It was close by. You know how stinky fish smells. Kinda like that. Pretty bad.

Interviewer

Were you there for a rainy season?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah, monsoon. Six months outta the year. In fact, I got jungle rot from it. My feet were jungle rot. We never wore any shorts 'cause you get a rash between your legs from the heat and the wet. So we just didn't wear no shorts all the time we were there.

Interviewer

Did you listen to any music while you were there?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah, we did in the CP. The CP meaning command post where you have all this wire around and you have the headquarters. Yeah, we had access to the radio.

Interviewer

What was the kinda music you wanted to hear?

Lee Sanchez

Well, it was usually the '60s music that was there. And they had some good music. You know, the one music that used to make me feel lonesome was a song by Campbell.

Interviewer

Glen Campbell?

Lee Sanchez

San Francisco. It's about home. Damn it. I'll think about it here after awhile. I don't know.

Interviewer

Were you guys living in a hooch?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. We had to dig our own holes and we had to fill sandbags. And we had ponchos that we used to put 'em together and then put sandbags around 'em. That's how we tried to stay dry and get in there. We used to send three platoons out to do the ambush, and we'd keep one platoon inside the wire to guard the wire and send out the guard duty people. That's the way we used to do it. And we were known as the ambush battalion. Yeah.

Interviewer

What was a search and destroy mission?

Lee Sanchez

We'd send out a platoon to go out on a search and destroy mission outside the wire, the CP. And they'd go out ten clicks, maybe, and they'd search out caves, spider holes, they'd go through villages searching out the Viet Cong. Sometimes they'd have kind of like a clay lid that they could push up and they live underground. But they're like rats. They live in the ground like rats. That's why you never can see 'em, and that's why they come out at night and that's when they think they can do the most damage is at night because they're wearing their black pajamas and hey, they'd try to hit you when they have the advantage.

Interviewer

So you went on several search and destroy missions?

Lee Sanchez

Yes. And I used to walk point. Sometimes I was the left flank, sometimes I was the right flank, sometimes I took up the rear.

Interviewer

When you were walking point, tell us about your senses.

Lee Sanchez

Yes. You have to look out for everything and anything that's in your way. You had to look left and right and down. You know how these Indians, they walk real slow and tippy-toe. 'Cause there's a lotta jungle there, man. It's pretty hard to not make any noise. You'd have to do it real slow. Fighting the enemy is bad enough, but you're fighting the monsoons, you're fighting the swamps and the mud and the snakes, the leeches, the spiders, the mosquitoes. We had mosquito repellent galore. We had to put it on our body so that way it'd keep the mosquitoes away 'cause they were just crazy. They were all over ya. And they liked to hang out in the swamps and where there's water all the time. And malaria was dormant over there. In fact, we had one guy die of malaria.

Interviewer

Did you ever go down into a tunnel?

Lee Sanchez

Yes. Couple of times I did.

Interviewer

Tell us about going down into a tunnel.

Lee Sanchez

It's pretty scary. They give you a .45 and a bayonet to down into a tunnel 'cause it's pretty small.

Interviewer

Flashlight?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. And you go in head first because if you go feet first, you won't be able to turn around. And in fact, we found a hospital down there, a VC hospital down there in one of them tunnels.

Interviewer

So you had a .45, right?

Lee Sanchez

And a bayonet.

Interviewer

Did you have a flashlight or anything like that?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah, we did. We had a flashlight, yes.

Interviewer

Tell us again how it's like to go down to that tunnel.

Lee Sanchez

Well, you've gotta watch out for the snakes 'cause sometimes they put snakes down in there 'cause they know that the American GI will go in there. And they'll set up a poisonous snake down there in case they do come down there. So you've gotta watch out for that and the poisonous spiders and stuff like that when you get down there. And sometimes they got 'em booby-trapped.

Interviewer

How far would you have to crawl?

Lee Sanchez

Maybe about five feet, and then you'd get into a bigger area.

Interviewer

Did you ever run into the enemy down there?

Lee Sanchez

No. But they'd set up booby-traps if you're not careful.

Interviewer

Tell us about the booby-traps.

Lee Sanchez

Punji sticks. They're made out of bamboo that are pretty sharp and they usually put poison on 'em. They usually poison those things. And sometimes they have these grenades. And they have this twine. I don't know where they get this twine, but it's twine that you can't see, it's really transparent. The next thing you know, you trip it and "boom." I don't know where they get that kind of twine, but if you're not careful, you'll trip it real easy.

Interviewer

Were you treated any differently because you were Latino?

Lee Sanchez

Yes. There was a lotta prejudice.

Interviewer

Tell us about that.

Lee Sanchez

Well, there was Tom Otterson. He was my squad leader before Moreno. And he called me a spic. Well, I'd just gotten back from LP, that's the listening post outside the wire. They'd send you out maybe a couple of clicks out there to kinda set your claymores out. Four guys go out there with their claymores and set 'em out for LP and stuff, and a radio. And I'd just come in and I was real tired and I wanted to get a couple hours sleep.

So Tom Otterson says, "You're going back out on LP." And he was a rank higher than me. He was my squad leader. And I says, "No, I'm not. I just got back. I gotta get some sleep, man. I haven't slept in a couple of days. I need to get some sleep." And he says, "You're going out on LP." And then he says, "Come here, you little spic." And he grabbed me by the shirt and broke my buttons on my blouse. We call 'em blouse. And so I grabbed him and I hit him and knocked his tooth out.

He had to have seven stitches in his gums, and I ended up in the hospital with blood poisoning in my arm for two weeks. Evidently, he must have had some bad teeth because I got blood poisoning from it. I did. And, you know, he's from Orange, California.

Interviewer

Were there any other things about being Latino that made it different for you than other soldiers?

Lee Sanchez

Well, there was DeFore. He didn't like me very well. We used to fight all the time. And there was Tooney. We used to call him cherry boy. We didn't get along too well. I don't know. I guess it all depends.

Interviewer

When you celebrated in uniform for New Year's in San Francisco did anyone hassle you?

Lee Sanchez

Yeah. There was this one black girl. She was real cute for being black, and she sat next to me. And she says, "Hey, soldier boy." I says, "Hi." And she had her hand on my wallet. I said, "Hey, what are you doing?" And so I got rid of her. She was after my money.

Interviewer

But did you experience an un-warm homecoming?

Lee Sanchez

Oh, un-warm feeling?

Interviewer

Yeah.

Lee Sanchez

No, I really didn't. No. I really didn't get that un-warm feeling. Not that I remember.

Interviewer

Did the Latino community treat soldiers differently?

Lee Sanchez

You know what, the LDS church did. I used to get letters from the LDS church in Vietnam. Well, I was a Mormon when I went to Vietnam. And they used to tell me, "We got a job waiting for you when you get back," and so forth. And I just get warm feelings from the LDS church. I did.

Interviewer

Wasn't the purpose over there to help secure and build up the South Vietnamese so they could hold their own against the North?

Lee Sanchez

Yes, you're right. But the reason they started sending troops over there from the beginning was because they were starting to kill our soldiers over there.

According to John F. Kennedy, our president, he sent advisors over there and that's where your Special Forces came in 'cause they sent Special Forces team down there to train the South Vietnamese Soldiers to fight their war. And then they started killing Americans over there. And then after that was taking place, they started sending troops over there after that. But yeah, we were down there to help 'em build and get strong and train 'em to defend themselves. And when they started killing us, then that's how we ended up getting involved the way we did.

Interviewer

So when you say "annihilate them," do you mean the North Vietnamese?

Lee Sanchez

The North and the Viet Cong that wanted to take over the south. All they wanted was their rice. That's all they wanted was their rice 'cause they were enriched in rice and that's all they wanted. But the South didn't wanna give it to 'em. And then being a communist, they wanted to take it all.

Interviewer

Did you understand and know this when you were young?

Lee Sanchez

No. I learned this when I got back.

Interviewer

So when you went over there, what did you believe you were there for?

Lee Sanchez

I believed I was there to defend my country to the best of my ability because my country wanted me there to fight for America. And I joined to do that. I volunteered. I wasn't drafted. I wanna be a volunteer because I think being a volunteer is better than being drafted. And I'd do it again in a heartbeat if they'd let me, but they say I'm kinda old.

Interviewer

Talk about your feelings towards Bill Clinton.

Lee Sanchez

I cannot believe that Bill Clinton became our president twice when he turned his back on America back during the Vietnam War. Now, what's wrong with our Americans? Don't they understand what he did to us? And the reason Bill didn't go because he didn't agree with it. Well, you know what, America's asking you to go. Whether you agree with it or not, you should've went. And he didn't. And the same thing with Mohammed Ali, as tough as he is, and Sylvester Stallone making these "Rambo" movies. You know why he makes these "Rambo" movies? 'Cause he has guilt. He has guilt because he didn't defend America back during the Vietnam War. Have you seen all his movies?

Interviewer

Yeah.

Lee Sanchez

They're pretty good, aren't they? But he's a draft dodger. So is Mohammed Ali, that tough guy. And then Bill Clinton. Man, I tell you, I got no respect for those

guys, and I tell you what, I'll never forgive 'em. And we live in the best country in the world, and I love America and I'll stand by her. And then they turn around and they mock us, all these foreigners.

And if I was Obama, I would never, never apologize to any third-world countries for anything. And he did. And I don't care much for him either. The only one I really cared about was John F. Kennedy. Remember when he told the Russians, "If you don't move those missiles," when they were gonna put the missiles in Cuba? And they backed off, didn't they? But we don't have anybody like that no more.

Interviewer

Tell me about your friend's families.

Lee Sanchez

When I met Moreno's parents, his mom was already dead. And Felix Moreno, his dad, was 92. I got pictures of him there. They were pretty excited, and they thought that that Medal of Honor was gonna come out to be like I had told them it would, but it didn't happen. Like I said, I have to have two witnesses. Well, I'm one, but I need one more. And they adopted me, the nephew and the niece adopted me because they says, "You're my uncle." I'm their uncle now because they lost the one in Vietnam. So I'm adopted. Yeah. They were pretty excited. They're family now.

Interviewer

Where did you meet them?

Lee Sanchez

Israel called me, and I made arrangements to fly to Los Angeles. And they picked me up and they took me down to Mrs. Bock, she was a newspaper correspondent. And she got my story, I got it written. It's all in there. And she wrote a story about me finding the families and all. And so they treated me to dinner and everything, and they treated me really well.

Interviewer

Did you see any resemblance between them and your friends?

Lee Sanchez

Maybe the dad. Maybe the dad, yeah. And the sister, Sally, she was really nice to me, too. She's kinda paraplegic. She can't walk no more. And Rachel, she was gonna be the recipient of the Medal of Honor for Rudy, but she lives in Las Vegas, and she's a niece and she's the only one that I met. The rest of 'em I didn't see 'cause they live in San Jose. And what happened was Israel picked up Rachel in Las Vegas and they came to my house and that's how I got to meet Rachel.

Interviewer

That must've been quite a moment.

Lee Sanchez

It was. Yes, it was. A crying moment, yep.