ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

JOE ARZATE

An interview conducted on

June 16, 2016

Interviewer: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

"War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present"

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Joe Arzate are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 16, 2016.

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WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay, alright. This is Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai and today is June 16th, 2016, and we're at Angelo State University for a *War Stories* interview. Could you please state your name?

ARZATE: Yes. My name is Joe Flores Arzate, and I'm a major.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Um, United States Army?

ARZATE: United States Army and National Guard.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And where and when were you born?

ARZATE: I was born on September the 14th, 1942, in Sweetwater, Texas. I never lived there.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you moved immediately?

ARZATE: Yes. What happened to me is, when I was 9 months old, my father was killed and my mother moved back with her parents, which were living in San Angelo.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay.

ARZATE: Later on, my mother remarried and I stayed living with my grandparents and my grandparents raised me. So, I'm from San Angelo.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And, did you have any siblings?

ARZATE: Yes, I've got, uh, I was married once before, uh, and divorced and I had two sons and two daughters.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But do you have any brothers and sisters?

ARZATE: I have half brothers and sisters, and I have eight half-brothers and sisters.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay, so what did you grandparents do in San Angelo?

ARZATE: My grandmother was a . . . She was just a homemaker. It's funny, because she was born in Del Rio, Texas, and she never stepped in a classroom in her life, and she never learned how to speak English. My grandfather had two years of education and spoke broken English, and what he did, he was a yard maintenance person and he did it all his life, uh, that, from my life

forward. Prior to that, I think he worked in the cotton fields but then he became a maintenance yard worker.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What are your memories about San Angelo as you were growing up?

ARZATE: Wow. Great memories. I had a lot of fun. I was raised on 14th Street. Fourteenth and Chadbourne, right in that area. Back in my era, racial discrimination was very, very high. Mostly against the blacks but also against the Hispanics. We lived on the West side of Chadbourne Street in San Angelo. Everything east of Chadbourne was predominantly white. You didn't dare go to these by yourself. You'd get stoned to death. Anyway, yes, I had great friends. I learned, like I said, my grandparents did not know how to speak English very well. I learned how to speak English because I used to run around with all my neighbors around my neighborhood, and the majority of them were black, neighbors, families. So, I didn't have any choice but to learn. They all spoke English and that's how I learned how to speak English, through my black friends. I grew up with them. Of course, I had a few Hispanic friends too but that's how I learned to speak. Growing up, I really enjoyed it, because I was an athlete and I played football and basketball, and that . . . It's good, because participating in sports in school kept me out of trouble, kept me out of the little gangs that were in my era, which they're still around but, in my era, they had the gangs, like they do now. Probably, I'd guess about 50 percent of the students or friends that I ran around with, Hispanic kids and some black kids, drugs and prison, jail, but I took the athletic route and that right there kept me. . . I don't have time to go do drugs. I don't have time to go do this, to go rob a store or anything. Mine was. . . I gotta go practice football, I gotta go practice basketball, I gotta go play baseball. That kept me out of trouble and I had a great time. And other than the time that I was gone because of my career, uh, San Angelo has always been a good town to me and my kids, and that's why I returned to San Angelo.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Where was your school?

ARZATE: Uh, believe it or not, I'm one of the few students left that went to a school called Guadalupe School Elementary. Unless you go to historical books, you probably won't find it. It's on Martin Luther King Drive and it's on. . . between 12th and 13th Streets. No, it's between 11th and 12th Streets. and it's on Martin Luther King Drive. And I think it's a boys club building now, and they have the little kiddos city, where they ride bicycles, learn how to stop signs, cross roads, I don't know what they call that little area right next to it but it's a little kiddo city and they ride bicycles, er, tricycles and they have stop signs like a little town and they teach them how to observe city signs, that kind of thing. Well, the brick building next to it, that used to be Guadalupe Elementary School, and, uh, I was in the 5th grade when they transferred us all. They closed it down as a school and they transferred us all to different schools and I went to Reagan Elementary School.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Where's that?

ARZATE: Its on, uh, on Volney Street. On 16th or 17th, it's on the east part of town, east part of Chadbourne.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What positions did you play in these sports, on these sports teams?

ARZATE: Oh, yeah, yeah. Uh, of course, I was like the other kids. We kinda moved around but, uh, if I was kinda just in general, for, uh, I went to Edison Jr. High. I played quarterback. My coach gave me a quarterback. I went to Central, the year it first opened up. I went to Central and like I said, it was very racist, very discriminating back then. And, uh, I, of course, you know, I was playing quarterback. I was practicing. During practice I would practice butting heads, shoulder pads and everything, quarterback. Well, they had a little special white kid, his parents were well off and he practiced with shoulder pads and shorts, and he practiced in the center, running plays. Well, come Friday night games, I'd sit on the bench and he would run the team. Monday morning, he was doing the same thing. Friday, it was like that. Monday, we were back. And one day, I was sitting there after about five games, one of my coaches came up, and he says, "Joe, I really don't know what you're doing trying to play quarterback." He says, "You will never play at quarterback on our team." He says, "The best thing for you to do, if that's what you wanna do, you're gonna have to find another school, because you're not gonna play. We're gonna use you as a little dummy to practice with. We don't want the quarterback to get hurt." So, I went and talked to the coach at Lake View. He says, "Joe . . ." Back then it wasn't hard to get transferred if you were in area of school, you know, a district. He says, "I'll give you a chance. Just come on up here. I'll give you a try. I'll give you a chance. I'm not gonna promise you anything but I'll give you a chance." And I did go to Lake View. And there were like four or five quarterbacks that we competed and he made me the starting quarterback and he made another guy secondary quarterback. And we did the same job but we rotated. Certain plays he'd run, certain plays I'd run. In sports, that was probably the highlight of my sports. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And did you travel with the team? Did the team travel?

ARZATE: Just local, locally, like we do here. We used to play Midland, Odessa, Ballinger. Of course, back then Lake View was a 3A school, it was a small school. And we played Big Spring, Abilene, the 3A schools. Yes, we did travel. And, I traveled with them. I played. They did give me a chance and it's funny because Lake View was an all white school back then, and it was an independent school. It wasn't part of the San Angelo school system like it is now. My first day that I went to school, the first day, I was riding in my dad's car, because I didn't have a car. I came out of the school and when I was walking to my car there was like 30 white guys around my car and they were waiting for me because I was Hispanic and they were gonna beat me up. Because it was very racial back then. Of course, I walked out, and I saw the 30 guys around my

car. I knew what they were gonna do. I turned around and went back. Hey, I'm not stupid, you know. So, I went to the coach. He had a classroom. I said, "Coach, I gotta problem." He said, "Well, what kinda problem you got?" I said, "Well, come with me." So we came out and, of course, as soon as we came out and all the students saw the coach, they all ran. But, by that time, a couple students had taken a hammer or something and broken all the glass on my car, the lights. And I told my dad, you know. But the next day, I didn't have to come in anymore because our fourth period was out at the football fields. School wasn't out yet. I didn't have to come and face them anymore. That's life.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did that go away after a time?

ARZATE: Y'know, what took place, there was a time it happened again but by that time I was a football player and, of course, I had all the football players on my side. Well, one time there was a white girl that was trying to make a play for me and a bunch of white students found out that she wanted to go with me and they surrounded me in the school, like lunch hour, they kinda surrounded me, and started heckling me and it wasn't me chasing the white girl. She's the one kinda making a play. Well, the football players found out about it and they went up there to where I was at and they said, "Arzate, is anybody giving you problems?" I said, "Well, some of these guys, because this girl wants to go with me." They said, "Don't you worry about them. We'll take care of them." And as soon as they realized that I had the football players on my side, that ended. No more. I never had any problem anymore.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, most of the football players were white?

ARZATE: They were all white. No blacks. I was the only Hispanic.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Huh. But they welcomed you?

ARZATE: Yes, the football players, oh yeah. They all. . . I didn't have any football players want to hurt me or anything like that. They, uh, other students did but football players, we, they became like, real close. They accepted me real good and they. . . They protected me too, on top of that. So, never had any problem. But that's the way it was back then.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Now, you said that you didn't, that you should not cross the east side of Chadbourne. That was off limits?

ARZATE: Yes, sir, that was all whites. It was the white part of town, west of Chadbourne. And I lived on like 14th, you know. Starting from the railroad tracks, if you go north, starting on the railroad tracks, all the way to 19th Street, because San Angelo wasn't that big of course and everything west was the black part of town, and the Mexican part of town, because you know,

Martin Luther King was. . . That was the last street. There were a few streets where the freeway is now. Bryant, there wasn't anything out there. It was all pasture. So that was the predominantly black and white and whites over here. South part of town was Hispanic. The Barrio. Called it the Barrio. And yeah, you had to be careful where you went to. I seen on TV, like Chicago, Baltimore, and Kansas. It's kinda like that. You know, you don't wanna cross a certain part of town. You ain't gonna make it. San Angelo wasn't that big back then but, still, it was. . . The east part of Chadbourne was predominantly white. From Chadbourne to Main Street it was all white. From Main Street, that was all pasture back north and that was it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, were there movie theaters that you could go to, or parks?

ARZATE: You know what, I was never. . . The racial discrimination in the movie theaters was only against the blacks, not against the Hispanics. Only against the blacks. Blacks had seating areas up in the balcony or somewhere else. They weren't allowed to associate with the . . .And we were. Hispanics were. And all the theaters were like that. They had their own discrimination seats. But it was only for the blacks. Drive-in theaters, I never had any problems going to drive-in theaters like that. But, uh, blacks did have a problem. We didn't, but blacks did.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you grew up in West Texas . . .

ARZATE: San Angelo.

WONGSRICHANALAI: San Angelo. Is that not West Texas?

ARZATE: You know, when people ask me, I say, you know what, uh, West Texas kinda starts in San Angelo but we're kinda inside the line. You get to the other side, west and you're in West Texas. I say, we have trees and water. You go a little, 25, 30 miles west and you don't find any trees or water. But, I would consider San Angelo West Texas.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Is that how you would define West Texas? The Geography?

ARZATE: I would, I would. You know, where the greenery starts and it ends, that's West Texas and this is not West Texas, you know. Central Texas maybe. And I feel that San Angelo, we have a water hole here.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Fair enough: Do you think that there's anything different to characterize people who live in Central and West Texas versus those who live in other parts of Texas?

ARZATE: I do. Uh, I really feel, especially being in the military all these years, that people from. . . You reach a certain line in the state, uh, if you're going from east to west and you get close to the San Angelo area—Brownwood, Coleman—you know, and for some reason or other, people are friendly. They treat you as a human being. They respect you . . . Uh, they say hi to you. They flip their hat to you as a courtesy. They've always been friendly. Of course, we've got the bad side too but, I mean overall, people in this area are always friendly. You go to the rural areas and people are real friendly. I have . . . I've . . . There's more friendly people than unfriendly. Courtesy. It's not rare for . . . If you're driving down the road, someone just waves at you as you go by, they wave at you, you know. People from New York, they were just shocked. They thought maybe they were getting flipped but, you know, they were just saying hi as a courtesy and they never did that, experienced that. And, I feel that West Texas is a courtesy area. Generous. They'll stop to help you if you're in trouble. You know, and not naming cities, but New York City, I've seen them where people have heart attacks on the concrete and people just step over them or go around them. People don't stop to help, they don't stop to call 911. They just keep going. They're just too busy. Here, you can be on the side of the road and you'll have two or three cars pull over and say, "You need any help?" Or, "Y'all okay? Jump start?" Or, "Do you need water or something," you know? I've done that. I've stopped many times and, you know, you don't find that in big cities at all.

WONGSRICHANALAI: When I first moved here, someone told me . . . Someone who used to be in this department told me that that change takes place west of I-35.

ARZATE: Okay, mine is a little bit further west.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Little bit further west, okay. That's fine. So, how would you characterize people that live in this area, their relationship with the military?

ARZATE Uh, again, it's something . . . It falls under the same category as courtesy. They, uh, the people here are highly, highly respectful and grateful of the military personnel that it has. I think a lot of the . . . A majority of the people of this part, they realize that one percent of the country's national census serves in the military, protects. That's how we keep our freedom, our peace. One percent, you know. Five hundred thousand soldiers, over 350 million in population. I think people in this area are very grateful of that, for people. You know, I have had so many people . . . You hear all these talks about, well, when Vietnam soldiers came back, they were spit at, throwin' rocks at, etc. I was never spit at and there were several times that I could sense the negativism towards the military. I didn't have a problem wearing my uniform. If they want to spit on me, that's fine because that's the character that I had. I had already experienced discrimination here as a kid, so, you know, I don't let discrimination bother me. Hey, I'm doing what I'm doing and the military has given me an opportunity to do it, get out of this rut, you know, of life. And the people here, everywhere that I've met around here, has been grateful. I

have never had . . . I have had so many people, and I think it's maybe not so much . . .I think it's all over now. There are so any people that walk up to me now when I wear my vest-—I don't wear it that often or my hat (I have a hat that says Vietnam Cobra Pilot)—that come up to me and say, you know, "Thank you for your service." I think it's a tradition now, of thanking the military. I think people are realizing now that, "Hey, these soldiers are really not that bad," you know? And, hey, we were claimed as baby killers, family killers in Vietnam and all that. But we were doing our . . . what we were supposed to do, our jobs, to protect our country. Bottom line was to protect our country, communism. And . . . But the people here are great. I have . . . I have, you know, there's several functions that I've gone to, veterans' functions and I'll wear my vest, my fatigue with all my patches and it'll just so happen that we'll, after we get through, we'll go to Henry's or Rosa's or something to go eat. And when I get up to the—and its happened to me a few times—when I get up to the cash register, "Sir, your food has already been paid for." And I say, "Well, who paid for it?" They say, "Well, there was a gentleman who told us how much your food was and the gentleman paid for it." So I quit wearing my jacket. I don't do it because I want gratuities, I wear it because I'm proud of the service. But that's how courteous people are. And it, you know, I get good retirement from the military, and that's courtesy and so, I don't wear my jacket. I just try not to because I'm not there for people to pay for my lunch. I know they do it out of the goodness of their heart. They're not doing it because I'm in need or anything like that. But that's how grateful courtesy these people are around here. Great. Yes, sir.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, what year did you graduate from high school?

ARZATE Actually, what happened to me, like my wife was telling you, I got married when I was a junior in high school, so I quit school and I got married and I had 4 kids. And I have 4 great, wonderful kids by my ex-wife. And, uh, I quit in the 11th grade. And what I did, of course, I went to work different places. But when I was 18, I joined the Guard, the National Guard, and that triggered my military career. The National Guard, by me joining the National Guard, it opened career doors for me, not that I knew they were going to, they just happened to open career doors for me. When I went through basic training, I graduated from basic training and then I went through artillery training, and when I went through artillery school, they gave us GED classes and I got my GED and that's, that's one of the career steps that the military opened for me. When I was going through basic training in Louisiana, of course, basic training was kinda difficult. I was an athlete, so . . . I had a . . . my commanding officer, he was a captain, he was a Puerto Rican. His name was Romero, Captain Romero. And one day, we were getting ready to finish basic training and he calls me to his office. And that private picture that my wife showed you, that's where I'm at. I'm wearing a jacket. I'm wearing fatigues in the bottom and Romero called me to his office and he says, "Arzate." I say, "Yes, sir." He says, "I been watching you through this basic training period." It was like three months. He said, "I've been watching you, and you're a pretty good athlete. I've been watching. You're always ahead of everybody. You always run the miles and the training and the physical training ad everything and

all your military training, I've been watching you. I'm very proud of the way that you've accomplished yourself." Says, "Have you ever thought about going to OCS?" I said, "No sir, I sure haven't." He says, "Well, you need to think about it, young man." And I said, "Well, thank you very much, sir." And I got up and saluted him and I started walking out, right? So, I turned around and said, "Sir, what exactly is OCS?" That's what I had, how much I knew, right? I said, "What exactly is OCS?" He says, "That's school training so that you can be an officer. And I really feel that you have the aptitude to be a officer." I said, "Oh." Said, "Okay, thank you." He says, "I'm gonna put it in your records," and he did. So, when I got done—all of my National Guard training, which is 6 months—when I came back to my unit, of course, they read the write-up that Captain Romero wrote on there and they said, "Arzate, we need you to go to OCS. We're gonna get a select committee and we're gonna review your records and see if we can't nominate you, select you to go to OCS." And, uh, a few months later, they called me into the office, and says, "We've promoted you to sergeant." I was a private. They said, "We've promoted you to a sergeant because you have to be a sergeant to go to OCS and we're gonna send you to OCS. I said, okay. Forty years later, I'm a major, plus everything in between.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right, okay. So, you went to basic. You went to the National Guard at 18.

ARZATE: Yes, sir.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Why was that? I mean, why did you join the National Guard?

ARZATE: Well, you know, I was married and young, didn't know any better, had no counseling whatsoever when I was young.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, none of your family members were in the armed forces.

ARZATE: Well, they had been. My uncles had been. Remember, my father was killed when I was . . . then I moved in with my grandparents and I did. I had two . . . I had two or, actually, three uncles who served in the military. As a matter of fact, one of them was still serving in the military, one of my uncles. It was . . . They were like brothers because I was raised by my grandparents Older brothers and, yeah, all three of them, my uncles, served in the military. Uh, one Marine, no, two Army, two Army and one Air Force. Yeah. I really don't think that because they served drew me to serve. They, uh . . . I really wasn't really around them that much whenever they were in the military but it wasn't because of them that I joined the National Guard. I joined the National Guard because I liked the military, what I could see. And then, when I was recruited to go to the National Guard and talk to them, I felt that it was what I wanted to do. It wasn't because of my uncles that served. It had nothing to do with that. I did all that on my own, and, uh, of course, there were, the main reason was, I was thinking of a career. Here I

was, a high school dropout, people were telling me, "Well, all you're gonna be is a laborer." You didn't graduate from school, no college, you got married young, you got kids. You can go pour concrete, whatever, you know, pick cotton or whatever. Of course, the cotton thing's slowly fading away. It was still there in my era, but not as much, you know. The equipment came into play. But no, I looked at it as, well, you know, I got a career, you know. I wasn't expecting to be an officer, never. Because like I said, I didn't even know what OCS was. So, uh, I said, I'll be a soldier. I've got a career and I can take care of my family and, anyway, that's how I ended up going Guard.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was the most challenging aspect of basic training?

ARZATE: Basic training?

WONGSRICHANALAI: This was in Louisiana?

ARZATE: Louisiana? Yes, sir. Yeah, knew that already. I didn't tell you that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You did.

ARZATE: Oh, I did? I didn't think I did. Yeah. Fort Polk, Louisiana, to be exact. Yeah, uh, probably the hardest part is the . . . You had to live under certain rules and guidelines and there's a lot of people that can't do that. They don't like people shouting at them or telling them what to do. The physical part of it, it was stringent but, to me, I didn't find it that stringent. But what I observed—and I'm one of the guys, I'm the type of person that if I'm working for you, I'm working for you—you tell me to go do an administrative job, I'm gonna do the best I can to administrate there. If you tell me to go clean the restroom, I'm gonna try to be the best restroom cleaner that you ever had because I'm working for you. Well, I was working for Uncle Sam. I was working for the military. And whatever they . . . When I had to mop floors, I didn't have a problem. Other people griped and complained. So, I feel that the basic training part was following orders for some people. Not for me but for some people. I, uh, I never had any major problems going through basic training. Yeah, they were the same old things, fights and that kinda stuff in the bathrooms and what not but, uh, I never did. I said, "Hey guys, I don't have time to fight or argue or anything, you know." We gotta get up at 5 o'clock in the morning, you know. But, uh, following orders I think, and the rules and guidelines of following the military, they're very strict, very strict, and that's what I found. I didn't have any problem.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, when did you show up for OCS? And where is OCS?

ARZATE: Yeah, I don't . . . I haven't looked to see if they have it anymore, State OCS. I'm sure they probably do but now they may send you— because they've consolidated so much— they

may send State OCS candidates maybe to the regular Army OCS but, in my era, it was in Austin, Texas. It's a place called Camp Mabry. That's where their headquarters is, the State National Guard headquarters. They had an OCS program there and that's where I went. Because I was reserve, National Guard, my OCS consisted of a year, instead of like three months like on active duty. Ours was spread out, because, you know, we were workers and family members. Uh, we'd go like three weeks during the summer and then every weekend for training and then you would graduate the following year. But it was just as hard, just as stringent as going through the regular Army OCS, oh yeah. It was kinda like . . . OCS to me was like a dream, like a nightmare. It's like, I close my eyes, went to sleep, dreamed I was going through all this there, woke up the next morning, and I said, "It's over?" You know, did I really go through that? It was like a nightmare, it was like a dream nightmare, that's how stringent it was. There was . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, what was most challenging about that?

ARZATE: Jeez, it was . . . I was an athlete again and physical training was probably three times harder than basic training. Oh yes, very difficult. Uh, the rules and guidelines were ten times harder than basic training, oh yeah. The tactical officers, they were training you to be an officer. And, of course, you had other classes too. It wasn't just training. It was classes. It was so demanding that I don't remember how many of us started . . . 175, and maybe 75 graduated. And, it, uh . . . It was all stringent from the time you got there to the time you left. It was stress, stringent. OCS is not easy. That's the reason there's not that many officers or else everybody would be an officer. I really felt, down in my mind and in my heart that the drill instructors, or tactical officers they're called in OCS, their job was to break you and make you quit. And the more candidates they kicked out, forced for you to quit, it was better for them. They enjoyed it. That was their . . . But when you graduated, they were on your side because, hey, you endured, "So our hats go off to you, because you endured while we were trying to make you not endure." But then their attitude changed when you graduated. But before that, their job was to kick you out . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, this was . . .

ARZATE: Make you leave, make you leave, yes sir. It was hard, yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, this is state OCS. So there were folks from all over Texas?

ARZATE: Yes, sir.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was there an ethnic mix?

ARZATE: Yes, sir. There were blacks and there were whites and there were Hispanics, and Orientals. We had, uh, it was all mixed. Good, obviously good people, if they made it or not, all good people. If they made it through the selection process to make it to the program, you were above the normal soldier, above a little bit. And then when you finished, you were up here, you know. No, there was a mix, and of course, as an OCS candidate, you worked as a team because you had to. You were not gonna graduate if you didn't work together. If you had a negative against another soldier or your bunkmates or whatever, you're not gonna make it. Yeah, you had to be brothers, totally brothers, dedicated to each other. Oh, you left your boot over here, [smacking noise] fix your boot. You know, that kinda stuff. Oh, your closet's not made right, you hung your uniform on the wrong side, put it on this side. You know, that's the way we were. OCS, it was like this. It was . . . You never walked anywhere, you always run, you always. . . . That's the way it was. That's the way it's gotta be, you know, because they put you under extreme pressure that after I've experienced what I've experienced, it really helped me because, when you're in combat, an officer has so much pressure in combat, that you have to endure. You don't have any choice, you got people under you that depend on you. You're saving their lives or whatever, and, uh, an officer is above and beyond. That's good I did and I continue with my story because I had other . . . I commanded combat units.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, 1969, you got done in 1969?

ARZATE: No, sir. I graduated from OCS in June of 1966.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Oh, '66.

ARZATE: Yes, sir. Yes, sir, June of 1966. Got a second lieutenant.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then what happened next?

ARZATE: I went back to my unit and I became an armor officer. Back then, I started out as artillery but then it became armor. I was a tank platoon leader. I commanded a tank platoon, 7 tanks in my platoon. So, we trained, '66 and '67. And '67 officers had to take certain training to upgrade their status, so I went to Officer Basic Training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, for armor. And I was still a second lieutenant. While I was in Officer Basic, they teach you advanced armor training. It was an armor training center. When you're in the military, going to different classes, you never know what's going to happen. They say, "Sir, sir, sir, Arzate and so and so, ten of you report to room so and so." You reported. They didn't tell you what or why you were reporting. You just did. So, you go over there and you might have had to take a test for this or a test for that or whatever it was, you know. And it was constantly, stuff like that going on. So, one day I was there taking training, and they call ten or twelve, fifteen names, and they say, you're gonna take a test. So, we went and took a test. And I remember that test because it . . . I reflect back on what

it was. At the time, I didn't know what it was, so I just took the test. It was a test to be a pilot, which I did not know but I did notice that it had a lot of aviation questions in it. I mean, you know, and I had never flown before, and out of the fifteen or twenty of us that took the test and I didn't know what it was. I thought it was just armor with aviation protection and that kinda stuff, surveillance and combat assistance, so what I did was, a few weeks later they called a bunch of names again. And you gotta report to, uh, for a physical. And they told us to report to the airfield, not the hospital, so we all reported to the airfield and we all thought, "just another physical." Because they were always giving us physicals, you know, constantly. I went to the airfield, and it was the flight surgeons. They had three or four flight surgeons out there at the airfield and they started putting us through a physical, medical physical. And I had hurt my little finger. Remember I had told you I was in artillery? Well, at Fort Sill, as an enlisted, I broke my little finger, right here. And, I mean, you can see it. Right in there, they did surgery. Anyway, uh, I had . . . It was in my records that I had broken my little finger. So, when my doctor was doing all the physical and he was standing right next to me, "No, Arzate, you know, you're gonna flunk." But I had no idea what it was for. He said, "You flunked the physical." And, uh, I said, "Oh, well, what's wrong?" And he said, "Well, your finger's broke". I said, "Well, it's not broke anymore. Look, it's okay." He said, "Nah, nah, nah, it's broke. I see in your records here when you broke it in school and everything." Well, it just so happened . . . It was luck, like I'm saying, career luck. Right next. . . . On the other side of the table out there was the chief surgeon, flight surgeon, and he overheard this doctor telling me, and he was gonna reject me. And the flight surgeon says, "Wait, what did you say?" He said, "I'm not gonna pass him because he's got his broken finger. He can't do maneuvers and stuff like that with his finger." And the doctor says, "Let me see." He reaches over and grabs my hand. "Move that finger." And he said, "You're gonna flunk him for that?" And the surgeon says, "Well, he's got a broken finger. Look, there's still swelling in his finger. And he says, "Alright, well, I'll pass him." That would have been a difference of yes and no. One guy overheard one surgeon telling . . . If that surgeon had been over there, I wouldn't have passed the physical. I was accepted into the flight school and that triggered my flight school program. So I went to . . . In September 1969, I got orders to go to flight school. I graduated in June of 19 . . . Well, I started in '68. I'm sorry. I started flight school September '68, graduated in June of 1969, and then in August I went to Copperas Cove, transitioned to Copperas Cove. And there was another career luck, career thing that happened to me. See, the Cobra had just come out. They used Hueys for gunships. When Bell made this Cobra and it was nothing but a gunship platform, not troop carrier. It was a battleship close support combat aircraft. It had just come out. It was like an Air Force pilot who had graduated from Air Force flight school, he was saying, "Oh, you're gonna go to transport, you're gonna go fly this, you're gonna fly that." All the pilots wanted to be a fighter pilot, you know, F-16s. Well, they had a couple of static displays they had flown in from Bell Helicopter, and we all went to go see the Cobra and it was like. Oh man, it was like *Star Wars* for us, you know? And anyway, we, uh, it was a great aircraft. Anyway, right as we graduated from flight school, like a week before I graduated, my commander, he was a major, he called me in. He says, "You're getting ready to

graduate, Arzate. Congratulations. You did everything great and we really appreciate you. What do you think about them Cobras?" And I said, "Oh, sir." I said, "Sir, Cobras, every one of us in this flight program would give anything to be a Cobra pilot." "Well, would you like to be a Cobra pilot?" And I said, "Well, sir, everybody would like to be a Cobra pilot." He says, "Well." He says, "We can only send the top ten students of our graduating class to Cobra school and you were one of them." He says, "Would you like to go to Cobra school?" I say, "Yes, sir. Where do I sign?" Of course, you didn't have to sign. And, uh, he says, "We missed your class by one week." The first class of the Cobra school transition. He said, uh, "You're gonna go to the next one, Savannah, Georgia." So, that's where I went to Cobra school.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And where was the flight school?

ARZATE: The flight school started off at Mineral Wells, Texas. It was called Primary Helicopter Training and you went there 6 months and then the advanced. If you survived that, then the advanced was at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Now, of course, they've consolidated now and closed all of that and it's all at Fort Rucker now. The whole program is Fort Rucker. And then you had to survive over there. And, uh, then Cobra was at Savannah, Georgia. I graduated from Fort Rucker, Alabama. It was good. Enjoyed it. It was great. It was an experience. Especially going, you know, especially going from, you know, a few years prior to that, I was a high school dropout. I was a concrete laborer. That was gonna be my career supposedly. Everybody thought, right? And then, only in America. Well, I shouldn't say that. I'm sure other countries have their, their career. But, I went from a high school dropout with a GED, I had made first lieutenant.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Now, at what point were you promoted to first lieutenant?

ARZATE: Oh, uh . . . It took about two years. I made first lieutenant. And then it took a year for me to make captain. Then it took ten years to make major. I had those captain's bars tattooed on my shoulder. But I went through a lot before I got promoted.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay, so during this time, where was your family? Still in San Angelo? Or . . .?

ARZATE: Yes, sir. I got divorced in 1969, uh, when I was going through flight school. My wife and I, we got married so young, and, uh, I had just, I had just turned 18, no counseling, no education, no marriage counseling. The reason I got married maybe, is that okay? The reason I got married with my first wife, is that, uh, the Hispanics back then, and not so much now, but back then, in Hispanic culture, they had, uh, their culture was that, "Hey, you took my daughter out and you kept her after a certain hour." Their culture was that, "You're hurting our pride, our respect to my family, you kept my daughter, you know, you dishonored my family. You're gonna have to marry her." That was, that's the way it was back then. And, my wife, my

girlfriend, she was my girlfriend then, and I had only dated her like, three times. Yeah, I knew her in school, but I had only gone out with her three times and we had gone to a drive-in theater and it was one of those nights, where the full moon, it's like daylight, right? And when we got out of the theater, we went to the park and we were just talking and it was like daylight, you know. To me it was daylight. So, when I took her home, it was like one o'clock in the morningand her dad and mother come out and said, "No, you cannot leave her here. You kept her. You cannot ruin our pride. You ruin our heritage." And they were old fashioned. They said, "No, she belongs to you." Said, "Oh my god . . ." So, I took her home to my grandparents. I told my mother and dad. I said, "Dad, what do I do? I couldn't leave her there. I couldn't leave her out in the middle of the night." I told my grandmother, "Fix her a bed over there and, you know, she's gonna spend the night and tomorrow we'll take care of business." Well, anyway, long story short, what happened is, I ended up getting married to her. My dad wanted to send me to California because he had a son that lived in California, my uncle. He said, "Here, son. Here's a bus fare and everything. You go to California and you don't ruin your life, you know." That was my only education part of marriage. He said, "Don't ruin your life. You're too young. And I'll take care of this." And I said, "I can't do that. I cannot leave her to face . . . I don't know what's gonna happen to her. They kick her out. I really don't know, you know." Bottom line, we ended up getting married. And, out of those, we were married for 9 years, and out of those 9 years of getting, of marriage, we had four kids. But those kids happened to develop . . . We'd break up for 6 months, come back together for 2 months, then we'd break up for 3 months, 6 months, and then we'd go back together for 2 months and then we'd break up. It would just break and go, break and go, break and go. And, whenever we got together was when the kids came about. Well, the end result was we both agreed that, hey, we were too young and "You're going through flight school and you're gonna go off and best thing for us to do is get a divorce. I go on with my life and you go on with yours." So, I ended up getting a divorce, and, uh, during that time period, when we were breaking up and everything was when I met Paulette. And then when I got divorce, she and I got married. We've been married for 47 years, so, here I am, 3 kids later.

WONGSRICHANALAI: She says she's from Fort Worth?

ARZATE: She . . . I met her in Fort Worth.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay, what were you doing in Fort Worth?

ARZATE: I was . . . I left here and went to work for General Dynamics, there in Fort Worth. It's a Lockheed plant now but it used to be General Dynamics. They used to build an F-111 and I used to work on the line as an inspector. When guys did their jobs, I would go and inspect their jobs and make sure they're done right and then give them the inspection sticker that you put on there, you know. But anyway I worked there, and it was during that time when I was called on active duty to go to flight school. But I had met her and, then I started flight school and I started

flight school in September ’68. Well, I had already met her before that and when I graduate from Primary Helicopter School, before I went to Rucker, she and I got married and then we both went to Rucker. She lived in Fort Worth. And, because I was going to Fort Rucker, we wanted to be together and, you know, we had agreed to . . . We were gonna get married and we got married. Been good. It’s been real good. And I’ve got real good rapport with my other kids, with my prior marriage’s kids. They’re great. I’ve got 4 great kids that just . . . They’re real good. I’ve got good rapport with them. It’s kinda difficult when you’re divorced and my ex-wife, she kinda talks to me every once in a while but not really. She’s been married, you know, uh, but that’s life. I endured.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Uh, did you ever come back and visit your grandparents?

ARZATE: Yes. Yes, sir, yes. When I was, you know, whenever I graduated from flight school and I was ordered to go to Vietnam. I had orders . . . All of us had orders. Well, I say all of us . . . Most of us had orders to go to Vietnam because the war was going. Report to Vietnam in September of 1969 and I was assigned to the 11th Armored Cav. This unit right here. It’s the 11th Armored Cav. And, uh, and I was . . . We lived out in the jungle. We lived out in the middle of the jungle. It was a little dirt strip. It was like a rubber plantation but it was like a dirt strip. That’s what the 11th Armored Cav. was fighting the war out of. Matter of fact, when I got there, the squadron commander, which is a colonel, a full bird colonel, was Patton. Patton III, the son of the mean old Patton. Well, he was my squadron commander, not my troop commander but my squadron commander. My troop commander was a major and, uh, I served under Patton for four months because they would only . . . Combat . . . Combat, uh, command time was, was only a year. They gave you a year. They turned them around because there were stepping stones for promotion, you know. If you commanded a combat unit, you were . . .you’re good enough. Well, he made general. Well, but, he had already . . . .I got in there the last four months of his command time. And then there was a . . . .My commanding officer after that was a colonel named Starry. He also made general later on. Commanders that came out of 11th Armored Cav., they all made general because it’s a . . . The 11th Armored Cav. was kinda like an elite unit, an elite combat unit in the military, kinda like the 101st Airborne Division. And I served under them and I came back. I served my tour with all my battles and all the grind and everything. It wasn’t good, but, uh, I was one of the few that made it back. I went to flight school. I got orders to be an instructor pilot and I became an instructor pilot in the Army flight school program at and, uh . . . I had gotten orders to go to Savannah, Georgia to be a Cobra instructor pilot. But I wanted to be close to home because my kids were here, so I asked to go to Mineral Wells, to be an instructor pilot there and they gave me orders to be there even though I was also an instructor pilot in Cobra. I mean, I went through the training. And I stayed there for about a year and a half, then I got orders to go back to Vietnam again and they needed Cobra pilots again, so I went back to Vietnam and I was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division and there was an air cavalry unit that belonged to the 101st Airborne Division and I served under them. I, uh, uh, I came back and, uh, .

. . When I came back there was . . . They were . . . It was during the Carter Administration. I don't know, you may be too young, but, uh, you remember they had a fuel crisis back in the 80s. Not in the 80s. It was back in the 70s. It was in like '72-'73, they had a fuel crisis here where convenience stores didn't have any gas to sell. People were pushing their cars to get gas cause Carter—I think it was Carter—the Carter Administration. I wanna say the Carter Administration. Had to be. He was one of the worst presidents. And, uh, during that time period, because of the fuel shortage, they downgraded all the pilots. You could still draw your flight pay and all you had to do was get your physical. But they reassigned 99% of the pilots because of the fuel shortages. And what they did, because I was a commissioned officer in armor, they sent me to Fort Hood and I became a tank company commander. I was the commanding officer of a tank company there with the 2nd Armored Division. And I kept that for about a year and then . . . Or a year and a half and then they put everybody back onto flight status. Well, about that time, when they started putting everything back, putting everyone back into flight status . . . What happened is, the Vietnam '74 . . . The Vietnam War was closing. We were putting our tails between our butts and running, you know, which was not good. You know, I went over there to finish the job. Anyway, the military started reducing the military and I was one of the guys that was reduced, so I went back to the Guard. I got out and went back to the Guard, and, uh . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: '74, so that would have been Mr. Ford.

ARZATE: '74, yes, sir. Mr. Ford? Well, I got out in '74 and . . . But it was reduced, the military was greatly reduced. I mean, thousands of soldiers were being, you know, reduced and I was one of them. And I was a captain but when I got out I was still a pilot. So, when I got out, I decided . . . I told my wife, "I'm gonna go back to college." So, I went to . . . I enrolled. We moved back to Fort Worth to be close to my kids. The kids were here but it was close. And I enrolled at Texas Wesleyan University and I went there one year, then I went to, because of the cost factor, I went to Tarrant County Junior College, Fort Worth, which is now a four-year college. Back then it was a two-year school but it was only $50 a semester hour. Texas Wesleyan was a Methodist school and it was like $95, so I . . . .Me going to school, it was pretty tough. So, I went to Tarrant County Junior College, got an associate degree, then I went back to Texas Wesleyan and I went two years there. And I was a junior and, uh, I finished my junior year. I was gonna be a senior, right? They sent me a letter, uh, from the Internal Revenue Service, from the Department of the Treasury, if I wanted a job to go to work with them. But they wanted me to go to work. I was enrolled at school. I was almost finished with my year semester and they sent me a letter. So, I went in for an interview because, hey, you know, it's a civil service job. It's a career. But I was still in the Guard, though. So, I went over there and interviewed with them and they wanted me to quit right now, right then and be one of the revenue employees. So, what I did, I told them, "I can't go to work with you. I got . . . I got two more months left. I already paid for everything. I can't. Now, if you guys still want me after December, then we can talk about it." They said, "Well, we got your records here. You come back in December when you finish, come back." So,

I went back and, uh, they hired me. I started in the office working, training, then I became a revenue officer. My career was, I was an officer, a compromise officer, basically a settlement officer, and I worked bankruptcies, a lot of bankruptcies. But I didn't get to finish my senior year because I went to work with them full time. But anyway, I retired with them. But I was also in the Guard and, in the Guard I was a Cobra pilot, I was in charge of the Cobra platoon and that . . . I was in an air cavalry unit and they don't have it anymore but, back then, they had it out of Austin, Texas, and later on, I became the commanding officer of the air cavalry unit. That's how I made major. They made me major and I became the commanding officer of the air cavalry unit, uh, in Texas and I kept it for 3 years. You know, you're only supposed to keep it for two years and they let me have it for 3 years and after I got my command time there, I went to work for the division staff. I was the division staff officer as a major and I worked for a lieutenant colonel. Of course, I worked for the general and it was the division commander and he had his staff and they were all lieutenant colonels and colonels and I was one of their major assistants, which was probably the worst job I ever had but it's still a career, you know. So, I worked on division staff for about four years, then, uh, I still had my flight status, even though I was on the division, and, uh, after about 4 years. Uh, we have a unit in Texas that's called State Aviation Division and they're in charge of all the aviation in the Guard of Texas. Wherever there's aviation, they're in charge of it. And, it's uh, a full bird colonel position. Well, he needed an operations officer, he says, "Arzate, I need for you"—because I had all the credentials, you know, I had instructor pilots and I had taught, you know, flight school and active military, and I was a Cobra instructor pilot, standardization pilot, all that. And I got my commercial fixed wings ratings. So he says, "Joe, I need you as my state operations officer." I said, "I'm ready to go. You go and convince that star, that guy with a star over there. You convince him." So, he went and talked to him and he brought me in. So, I was the State Aviation Operations officer for about 4 or 5 years until I retired. I finally . . . I had 25 and a half years by then and I said, "Well, it's time for me to go."

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, when did you retire?

ARZATE: I retired in June of 1988 as a major, 25 and a half years. And then I retired in '92 from the Department of the Treasury. Yes,sir.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, now, when you said you commanded the Cobra platoon, the air cavalry unit . . .

ARZATE: The air cavalry unit has . . . We had . . . I had 240 people under my command. It's like your own little army. An air cavalry unit's like your own little army. We had 7 Cobras, we had Hueys, and we had 7 observation helicopters, OH-58s. They called them Loaches, low observation helicopters. And, uh, we have an infantry platoon, and that's what the Hueys were for. We had our own little fighting infantry platoon commanded by a captain. You know, and that's the same kinda unit that I served in in both my tours of Vietnam. And anytime the

squadron people on the ground, the armored people on the ground get into contact, get into battle, which they did many times, well, we would insert the infantry platoon, cover with the Cobras and Loaches and Hueys and stuff like that. That's how it works. Uh, but it was 240 people under my command. Now, at the tank company, I had 17 tanks at Fort Hood. And I had 150 soldiers. But that was a captain slot. And the armored unit, I was out there in the mud and the rain, training, you know, that stuff. And a Cobra, still, you were out in the field training and stuff but you were a little more elite, little more cleaner. At least you could shower at night. And yeah, 240 . . . We had our own . . . It was made up of our own maintenance and our own mess section for food. We had our own little army. It was all our own little army. Probably a couple of billion dollars worth of equipment, that's what I would sign for. All the aircraft, uh, machine guns, armor, and, you know, a Cobra was like $7 million, $6 million, something like that, a Cobra. But anyway, that's the . . . I commanded. And when I retired I was the State Operations Officer. I retired. . . Yeah, he offered me lieutenant colonel, uh, Air Field commander. There were 2 slots or 3 slots. There were 3 slots for lieutenant colonel for Air Field commander. He says, "Joe," he says, "if you give me five more years, I'll promote you to lieutenant colonel and I'll make you my Air Field commander," and he was gonna give me the one in Houston. They have an airfield in Houston. Out there where NASA is. Its integrated with the National Guard and he wanted to make me an Air Field commander and I thought about it but I said, "I gotta go play golf." I got a son that plays golf and I gotta learn how to play golf again. So, that was my military career.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay, going back a little bit. Uh, so, Cobra school was in Georgia?

ARZATE: Savannah, Georgia, yes, sir. Paula Deen's town. I know that because of my wife. She's a Paula Deen . . . She made me take her to the Paula Deen kitchen.

WONGSRICHANALAI: There are some very good ingredients in her cookbook.

ARZATE: She's a Paula Deen fan. Not me. When we went to her restaurant to eat, it's a tourist trap. I would have gone to Luby's. I would've enjoyed it more. She is good though.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Savannah. So, okay, what was Cobra training like?

ARZATE: Cobra training was my first experience. When you get into a Huey, you know, take off from Point A, you fly, you climb, you fly, and you get to Point B and you go down and you land. You take off, fly, land, okay. When I got to Cobra school, my instructor, he was a warrant officer, and he was on his way out, he was getting ready to get out of the military. Not retired. He was putting his 5 whatever years he was putting in. And, uh, I'll never forget my first introductory flight in a Cobra. It was just an orientation flight. We went . . . You go through the post-flight and the aerodynamics of the aircraft. You go through all of that, you know. But the

flying part, where he says, “Okay, Joe” . . . You know a Cobra, one sits in the front, one sits in the back. The commander sits in the back, the pilot navigator sits in front, tandem seating. And, uh, he as an instructor pilot He was sitting in the front and me, as a student, I was in the back seat. We were. . . We took off no problem, you know, you learn how to start it and we already knew that with the Hueys. And everything is kind of the same, a little bit, but you still have to learn a few things and, yeah, he brought it up to a hover and flew it around for a little bit, hovered here and there, training. Then he let me take it, and you know, I already knew how to fly right? And I flew for a little bit. Different design, different aerodynamics, different everything, you know. And then he says, “Okay, do this, do that, we’re gonna take off.” We’d got the clearances and everything. We did a little bit about 45 an hour transition flying just to see what the aircraft was like, air speed and that kinda stuff. Then he says, “Okay, Joe”—this is what I’ll never forget—he says, “Okay, Joe,” he says, “I’m gonna take you out to the firing range. It’s gonna be dry runs.” You know, do some dry runs. Just to get the feel of the aircraft, right? Because it’s a combat, close support aircraft. So, here, he says, “Come up to about 7,000 feet.” And I said okay, “No problem.” I climbed up to about 7,000 feet and he gave me he vectors and headings. We get out there, he points it out to me. He says, “There’s a tank over there on the ground.” They were targets, old targets. There was a tank here, an armored personnel carrier there, there’s 11 kinds of targets. And he says, “You see one over there?” I say, “Yes, sir.” He says, “Take it to that one there. I’m gonna give you your first gun run experience.” I’m not kidding, I will never forget that experience. We were at 8,000 feet, you know, we’re flying, I can see the tank coming, you know, it only looked this big on the ground. Little black spot. And he says, “Do you see it?” I said, “Yes, sir, I see it.” He says, “Do you see it now?” I say, “Well, no, sir.” He says, “Well, start diving at it.” And I nosed it over, cuz I was like easing it. He says, “No, you dive it. Dive it, dive it, dive it. You’re gonna pass your target.” And here I was, like, here’s the target, here I was like this. And because I was moving forward, you know, the target’s here and by the time, my target was behind me. He says, “Alright, I’m gonna do it one time, and then you do it.” And he climbs up again. He gets out here and he goes like this, like straight down. You’re in your seat like this and you’re like this. That was our first experience. Oh, it was, oh, my god, I’m not gonna survive this. And he said, you see that target, right? I said, “Yes sir, I see it.” He says, “Alright, at about 3,000 feet you’ve already punched off your rockets, your ammunition to hit your target.” So now you start climbing, at about 3,000 feet, because, when you’re going straight down like that, you go straight down, you’re falling like this and then you go up, right? Well, you don’t wanna start making your climb at 1,000 feet because you aren’t going to make it. When I did my first one like that, it was an experience, flying straight at the target, straight down. I mean, straight vertical, straight down like that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: I didn’t know they were so maneuverable.

ARZATE: Oh, yeah, oh yeah, straight down. I was going straight down, like that. And we did, you know. It’s like anything else, once you do eight or nine or ten of those, then you say, oh,

ain't nothing to it, you know. It's like your first roller coaster ride and then the next ten are okay. And, of course, we did a lot of dry runs here and dry runs there and then it came to where we actually put the ammo into the rocket pods and machine guns and I didn't have any problems after that. I spent a lot of tax money in Vietnam. Yeah, I bet you, if I was guessing, I bet you I expended three or four million dollars worth of just ammunition in my two tours, because we used to fight just about every day. Every day we'd get into a fight. But anyway, that was my experience as a Cobra pilot.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow.

ARZATE It was quite an experience but it was good.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How roomy is the cockpit?

ARZATE: The cockpit is, you see this chair right here? The seat is maybe two inches on each side wider and the aircraft is three feet, maybe four feet, not even four feet, it's three feet right here. The cockpit is this wide, right here, inside. You got all your instrumentation here. You got radios and commo equipment on the side, and you got all kinds of equipment in the back. And on the top side, behind you, you got your circuit breakers and on the front side, you have all you instrumentation, your pedals, your controls, and you have your firing ammo sight right above your console. And, that's it. You got your rotor, of course, behind you. And it kind of sits, you know, tapered, the cockpit, tapered, and your copilot, you can see the back of his head. He's not level with you. He's kinda down a little bit, and he has controls, a few instruments, not full instruments. All the full instruments are in the back. He has just enough instruments to fly the aircraft if you can't. And then he has his sights, and then he has a turret control, and the nose of the aircraft has a turret and you control it, and he's got a sight and he can fire the machine gun from the front or whatever you have up there. Grenade launcher, they had different types of ammunition that you could put in the front or whatever, in the nose. And on the wing stores, you had little wings, and on the wing stores, you had rocket pods or machine guns, whatever. I had, I flew a Cobra we had, each pod carries 72 rockets, we had 4 pods, and, there was, we had one aircraft that they had put a 20 mm Gatling gun and it was pretty effective.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Wow.

ARZATE: But, uh . . . And you could stay on station for about two and a half, three hours. But that's all, you had to go back, rearm or refuel. Uh, they're unlike those fighter planes. I was surprised. They get there quicker than we do but they can only stay on station for a few hours then they have to refuel. Normally, when we used to call in F-4 Phantoms and the Air Force jets and fighter planes, when we had gotten real, real, we had gotten in many, real, real heavy, firefights with the enemy. We got to where we called in . . . We, our unit, the 11th Armored

Cav—we had assigned to the armored cav—we had four pilots, Air Force pilots, and they were called F.A.Cs, F.A.C.s. And they're Forward Air Control pilots, and they're ex . . . in order to be a F.A.C. pilot, you had to be an ex-fighter pilot. And they were assigned to us. They were out there flying with us too, observation. And any time we got into a big, big heavy firefight, I'd just call him and say, hey, bring your fighters, drop some bombs, or napalm, or whatever we needed and they'd call them and, the Air Force, they prioritize their missions, I guess. Because they can go anywhere in Vietnam, you know, and, uh, there was many, many times when we'd call and they could only stay in station maybe an hour, drop their bombs and take off. They were more of a fixed target type aircraft. I mean, we could chase you down the road. You know, we see you running, the Cobra can chase you down, shoot you down. And, uh, we used them as fixed targets, but, uh, we'd stay on station for between two and a half and three hours, and then we would rotate another team. We used to fly in teams. They used to call us hunter-killer teams, Cobra and a Loach. The Loach flew above the trees, looking for the enemy, and as soon as he found them, we would go in and shoot.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Huh.

ARZATE: Flew a lot of missions.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, after graduating from Cobra school, then you were deployed to Vietnam.

ARZATE: I graduated in August, the last of August.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And you were there in September.

ARZATE: Soon as I graduated, I went to Vietnam.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did they give you any training about Vietnam? Vietnamese culture, Vietnamese history, or any language?

ARZATE: No sir, they had a program at Fort Rucker when you were a pilot going through training. What they did have, they had an Escape and Evasion—E and E—Escape and Evasion class that you had to go through. Well, we all had to go through it. What the did is . . . There at Fort Rucker. Of course, Fort Rucker is Alabama. There's some areas that are pretty thick jungle type stuff. Well, what they did was, they created some bamboo hooches and, like, what the NVA had over there, or the Viet Cong, in the jungle. And what they did, is . . . It was an Escape and Evasion class and what they did is, they dropped us off over here at night and you had to go from here and you needed . . . They'd give you a map and a compass and certain navigational aids, and you had to go from here to here, but you had to get past these people here. And these people

were acting like Viet Cong, or North Vietnamese Army soldiers. Here you grouped together, make teams, so that you could try to survive. They had a bunch of guys over here, they were all active duty people, you know. And they were camouflaged and stuff. And their job was to capture you. And they capture you and they bring you to that hooch, in the bamboo prison and they would treat you like a prisoner. They were gonna orientate you to what's gonna happen to you if you get caught, get shot down. Get caught, this is what's gonna happen to you. And I tell you what, those guys was, they were pretty mean. I know they were trying to do their jobs but sometimes I'd look back and I think back and I think they overdid it. There were several pilots that got hurt, you know, got cut, got punched. You know, you don't have to do that. They kinda went overboard, with their duties. Yeah, no, that, where they put the burlap sack over you, uh, water-boarding, that was the first thing they'd do. Put you down, put you in the tunnel. The water up to here. Put a burlap sack over you and start pouring water over you, and asking questions, and pouring water over you. You can't breath, you know. And they'd kick you and hit you and beat you up. Not seriously but they'd hit you upside the head. Not like this, I'm talking about. Yeah, I learned. I'll put it that way not to get caught, you know. They did give us some classes on culture in our training as a pilot and . . . But that was classroom type. Yeah, that was good, you know, dos and don'ts, that type of thing. And respect. You know, they're still human beings, you know, not all of them are our enemy, you know. They gave us good classes.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, how did they teach you how to distinguish between a civilian and a combatant?

ARZATE: The way . . . Funny you ask. It was because, if they were shooting at you, they were an enemy. And, they . . . If you weren't getting shot, it wasn't. Now, there were areas in the jungle, now, away from civilization, uh, combat zones, they were all combat zones. And the only difference was, if you were out there flying and you saw some people, they didn't always shoot at you. Sometimes they'd hide and then they'd shoot at you. But these were areas of combat and if anybody was on the ground out there, it was because they were an enemy. Now, there's a culture in Vietnam called Montagnards. I don't know how you spell it but its Montagnards? If you look at it, it was kinda like those aborigines in Australia, you know, those Aborigine tribes, but these were Montagnards and they were basically not as dark complexioned as the aborigines. Uh, they were a lot lighter but they were still a little darker than the normal Vietnamese and . . . But they were, they were villagers. They were like still . . . Like you see in the movies, they were still in the loincloths, bows and arrows, that type of stuff, but you could pretty easily tell the Montagnards villages. And once you . . . Once we were in the area for a certain period of time, you knew where they were at. We knew where they were at. You flew so much. We knew where the enemy was at. We knew where the Montagnards were at, so, if we found certain people in the jungle out there, running around, well, we knew they were the enemy, and, yeah, we would shoot but they'd start shooting. I guarantee you they'd start shooting back. Uh, the, uh, Saigon River, we flew close to Cambodia on the Saigon River. There were a lot of sampans. But you could

distinguish the civilian sampans. Yeah, and I, I destroyed quite a few sampans, quite a few Viet Cong battles. Uh, but that's basically it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, what did you understand about what the United States was doing in Vietnam?

ARZATE: Well, you know, before I went, uh, and started looking at what exactly was transpiring, soldiers getting killed and everything. Uh, I said, we are . . . We as the United States country, we are trying to help, uh, South Vietnam become a democracy, a self-sustaining government, you know, not communism. And I didn't find anything wrong with that. I mean, I volunteered. I wasn't drafted. So, I can't say, well, I was sent over there against my will, because I volunteered to go. Uh, and, I felt that the cause that the United States was fighting was a good cause, for the Vietnamese. If another country was to take over, I think that we should help them, protect them, fight for them. I felt like I was fighting for my country too, you know. So, I didn't have any trouble with protesting or anything like that. I volunteered, uh, I did what I had to do. I didn't, uh . . . Vietnam had been such a war-torn country for years. French Indochina, I think it was called before, and they beat the French out of there, and then we came in and took over. So, there was a lot of, well, poor people, starving people. Where I lived, in the jungle, there were kids—I guess their families were killed or whatever—orphans and they . . . We had a trash job—you'll see some pictures in there—and our cooks were . . . were Americans. Our cooks were like, instead of putting all of the extra food, dumping it in the trash like they do here, they put all the edibles here and all the other stuff here, and they feed all this to the pigs, and they do this. Well, over there in Vietnam, the soldiers—at least ours did—they would not throw it in the barrel. They would sort it in and put it over here. What was leftover food was over here and, you know, bread and stuff like that, and drinks. And, yeah, they would take it to the dump but they would give it to the kids, because the kids would love it. The kids lived in the dump. It was how they survived. I mean, they were . . . It was survival. Survive or you die. And it was heartbreaking for us, you know, but they were waiting for those mess trucks to show up, cuz it's food. And, of course, a lot of soldiers gave them clothing and stuff like that. But, me, uh, as far as Vietnam is concerned, the only thing that I regret, of course, and I'm sure that all of us that served in Vietnam, you know, they didn't turn us loose to win. I really, really, really . . . It hurt me when Nixon said, we're all coming back and you've seen it on TV, the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese invaded, came in, brought with them tanks and everything. That was not good for us. You know, everybody says, "Well, you didn't win the war." Well, you know, "Y'all lost" and all that stuff. It's all political. I accept the political part, you know. I . . . That's the way they were but, as a soldier, you know, I regret not winning the war. I . . . When they say, "You didn't get the parades, the hooplah, when you came back from Vietnam," me, as a person, it didn't bother me. It didn't bother me that my family welcomed me back, my wife and kids, that was good enough for me. I didn't have to have a parade and all the stuff: music, flags flying. It just . . . It's just bad that we didn't win the war. And its not that we didn't win the war. Its' that they didn't

turn us loose. You know, politics. You know, they were afraid of China, Russia, Korea, you know, backing up North Vietnam. I really doubt . . . I feel, really down deep that Kennedy started the war and Kennedy was not gonna allow it to last ten years. Kennedy was a fisted man. He started it and he was gonna finish it and he was gonna finish it in a year, two years. He was not gonna back down from nobody. But, of course, he was assassinated and we didn't win the war. But no, no, I didn't feel bad. I did what I had to do. I've already confessed to my good Lord what I went through. I've already made my peace with the good Lord everything that I did down there. You know what? I highly, highly respect Vietnamese people, the enemy. They used to fight us with, you know, sandals on. We had equipment, C-rations. They fought us with sandals, a little hat. One guy carried the rifle, the other three guys carried the ammunition and they . . . They carried their two bowls of rice for the day and they fought us hard. So, I give them all the credit. They gotta be tough, you know. Our soldiers wouldn't have done that. Eat a bowl of rice, fight all day and all night, hide in the tunnels, you know. MEDEVAC. People got hurt, sick, killed, wounded, you know, we . . . We had MEDEVACs. They didn't. They carried you on their backs or whatever. The jungle . . . Cut your leg off or whatever. So, I highly respect the Viet Cong and the NVA. I don't believe in their beliefs but as a fellow soldier, I highly respect them. I give them all the credit. Politics won.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you interact with any Vietnamese civilians while you were over there?

ARZATE: You know what, yes. Um, what I did was, we had hoochmates. They used to come in, when we lived out in the jungle and they used to come in and wash our clothes, clean our tents, stuff like that. And we would pay them. Uh, I got to . . . A couple of times, I got to go to Saigon and, of course, Saigon wasn't, you know, war country, you know. I got to go to Saigon and call my wife a couple of times. And I integrated with civilians, you know. I rode the little scooters and all that kinda stuff and went to their shops. Very little. But as far as associating, yes. We lived in a compound and it was guarded and, uh, as a matter of fact, both my tours . . . The second tour was a little different but I really, really didn't associate that much with civilians. You couldn't. You lived in a compound. But, when I went to Saigon and a couple other places I went to, I did.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did they ever engage you in a conversation about what the United States was doing?

ARZATE: No, sir, I never got into, you know, I was just another soldier and I'm sure those people, for hundreds of years, they'd been fighting for all their lives and I was just another soldier and, uh, probably wishing that the war was over but it wasn't. No, I never did, never did. Talked politically, or, or, or, about combat or wars or anything like that. I never talked to a Vietnamese about it, I just did my job.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And how did you service affect your family here in the United States?

ARZATE: Uh, my grandfather was . . . My grandfather was . . . He grew up in an era where it was . . . Whenever the stock market went down and, the depression years . . . Yeah, he was real hardcore. He, uh . . . He . . . My grandmother put his arms around me, made him kiss me, but my grandfather never did but it was just the person he was. His job was go to work, come back, go to work, come back, you know, do this, do that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What were their names?

ARZATE: My grandfather's name was Willie Flores. Well, actually his name was Guillermo but, uh, Willie. And my grandma's name was Berna Flores. And my middle name is Flores, yeah. My grandfather was hardcore. He was real, real hardcore. And, uh, as far as the war, he was, of course, he . . . Very seldomly he'd ever say anything. He'd just . . . "I don't understand why we're going to war," that was his comment. And his comment when I was going to Vietnam was like, uh, you know, "Be careful." One time . . . One time, I guess, it was my second tour . . . It was my second tour, I was getting ready to leave and I heard him tell my grandmother—he didn't know I was listening, I was in the next room, and I did hear him, I did hear him tell my grandmother—"I feel really, really bad that our son is going to war again." And he says to my grandma, "You know, I wish I was young and I wish I could go in his place." And that kinda said, my dad really does have a little compassion. He's not as hardcore as I thought he was. He still had a little love and care for me and I appreciated that. But uh, as far as my married family, I think my kids, they were young when I got divorced, and, uh, my kids, I think their mother was kinda financially struggling a little bit. And they were making it because I had my child support coming out of my pay for me but its never enough for financial in that era. Uh, and she raised my kids. My ex-wife raised my kids and I give her a lot of credit for that. But, uh, since I've talked to my kids and everything. They were little and they didn't really fully understand the war. They thought it was just another job, you know, "Dad's off in the Army. He's in the Army and he's doing whatever he has to do." And our kids, they, uh, same way. They were young and they said, "Well, who's he gonna go fight today?" you know. Uh, later on, they realized what I'd gone through, they went through it. Now, my middle son, he went through combat, he was in the Air Force. He served, I think, three tours in Afghanistan. His first combat tour was, I think, Kosovo, Bosnia. He served a year there then but that was mostly a civil war but he was in on it. It was mostly civil but he was right in the middle of it. Then he went to, uh, I said Afghanistan. He went three times to Iraq and then once to Afghanistan. So, he knows what basically I went through. And he and I sit down and we discuss things that he went through and that I went through. My other son, he served. He went to Spain. He wasn't in combat but he still realizes what I went through. And they give me a lot of credit. They all do. And they understand now, you know, and my wife, she endures. She, uh, you gotta do what you gotta do and she's my wife. Take care of

the kids and she did. She did everything that she had to do and the kids grew up. They call her "General," all my kids, our kids, not my other kids. Our kids, they call her "General." "Dad, you were a major, you weren't nothing." She's . . . She's my wife of 47 years. Done good.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Now, you said you called her from time to time when you went to Saigon.

ARZATE: I did, that's the only way I could call. It's not what it's like now. Now, you get a computer laptop. No, back then, we had that, uh, trans cable lines and they had a . . . They had a couple lines in Saigon at the USO. They had a couple lines but they . . . You had to go in there . . . a couple phones, I should say 5 or 6 phones. You'd go in there and stand in line and wait and then you would get on the phone and you would call the operator and it was Oakland, California—that's where the main switchboards were at. And from there, you would tell them the information. They would ring wherever you wanted. And I called her, I think, twice/ I talked to her twice. That was it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you write letters?

ARZATE: Oh yeah, yeah. Now, as a matter of fact, she still has them. she has every one of them. And I didn't but she kept all of those, and, uh, it used to take about a month and a half, two months to get over there. But yeah, she wrote to me. My kids, they were too little. I guess their mother didn't let them or whatever. They didn't write to me. Now that they're older, they regret that they didn't contact me while I was in the military but that's the way it is. But, yeah, my wife, she wrote, she sent pictures. Uh, back then, the cassettes were real popular, the little ones, the little audio one. Yeah, and she used to send them. Every once in awhile she'd send me a cassette and I had a cassette recorder. Everyone had a cassette recorder out there. And we had two of them in a tent and if you needed one you just got it, you know. And you'd sit there and listen and you could hear the kids, you know. "Hey, Dad," and "How's things going" and . . .and, yeah, that was good, yeah. It was good to receive one of those every once in awhile.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So how long were your tours?

ARZATE: I'm sorry?

WONGSRICHANALAI: How long was each tour?

ARZATE: Yeah. My first tour, I went from September of '68 and I came back in the last part of August, almost a year, not quite a year. I was short thirty days, maybe? Something like that. And the reason I didn't stay the full twelve months—they were supposed to be twelve month tours—what happened, uh, we had gone . . . My first tour, we had gone to R and R to Hawaii and I guess

my wife caught hepatitis and she feels that she caught hepatitis at the Don Ho show. She says, because we ate, and she ate something, or whatever. But yeah, anyway, she ended up getting hepatitis and when she came back to Fort Worth—she was living in Fort Worth—and yeah, the Red Cross, through her doctor . . . Her doctor requested through the Red Cross that I be sent back because she had hepatitis and she was real sick and that it was best for me to come home and they . . . The Red Cross made me come back home. And I only had like 30 days left, maybe 25 days left and I came back. My second tour, again, I got there in September. It was September of 1971, September 1971, and I went up North, up by the DMZ with the 101st Airborne Division. I was up there from September to December. In December . . . It was before that but I was there to the end of December '71. Nixon ordered the 101st Airborne to come home. The whole division, pack up, come back home. Well, you know, we only had . . . I only had four months and they reassigned us—all the pilots—to different units, you know. They sent me down from North to the coast of Saigon and I went to, uh, a unit, a Cobra unit. It wasn't a cav unit. It was a Cobra unit. And it was called an ARA unit: Aerial Rocket Artillery. I didn't like it because I was cav and I was so used to cav I couldn't. When I went there, my commanding officer, he was a captain, West Point graduate, you know, and, anyway, I stayed with him for about 20 days, 25 days. I found an air cav unit close to Saigon. I think it was north of Saigon. It was 4th Cav. I went over there, I turned to the commanding officer, I said, "Hey, I'm a Cobra pilot with ARA and I'm a cav pilot." He said, "Give me your name and social security number." Called it in verbally and headquarters told him, "Okay, you got it. We'll go get some orders for you." So, they typed up some orders. I went and gave them to my West Point captain and said "I'm gone, you know. I can't fly your kinda Cobras." And so I went to the cav unit. While I was there, and mind you, the 101st had already evacuated up north, by the DMZ, they left, came back to the United States. And I was with this unit down by Benhoa.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How do you spell that?

ARZATE: B-E-N-H-O-A, Benhoa, yeah. What happened was, the troop that I was in, that air cav unit, when the 101st pulled out, North Vietnam invaded North . . . Well, they were already there but when the 101st wasn't there, there was nothing to stop them. They started coming across, tanks, soldiers, trucks, deuce-and-a-halfs, artillery, they had it all. And they started coming across and they ordered my unit that I was with to go where I had just left. They ordered the unit to go. So, this was . . . December, January, February, March, April . . . It was April of '72, yes, sir. And, the unit was . . . They gave them a week to pack up, load up the ammunition and everything, and fly to where I just came from. I know what it was like over there. I knew the dangers over there. So, what happened is, they packed everybody up . . . Well, our CO . . . There were two captains in our unit, Cobra pilots, and he called us in, and . . . I can't remember the other captain's name. He was a white guy. He says, "Joe" . . . And the captain, he says, uh, "We got orders to go up North. Now, I know the other captain hadn't been up there, but I had . . ." Said, "I know you just came from there, right Arzate?" I said, "yes, sir. I was up there. It's not

good. It's pretty bad." He says, "However, I've got orders that I'm taking everybody up there but I've got a directive that if I have any second tour pilots, they can either go with us or y'all can go back home." And that other captain looked at me and he was second tour. He says . . . Turn around and looked at the major and says, "Major, where do we get our tickets to go back home?" I told him, "You know what, sir, I just came from up there. I don't really need any more medals. I already got all the medals I want or I need or I had." He says, "Well, it's up to y'all. You don't have to go if you don't want to." So, no, I came back home. I came back in April, so it was September through April.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was that unit?

ARZATE: The unit I was in? It was F Troop, 4th Cav. And, uh, and, that's . . . I flew quite a few combat missions with them too. Because Air Cav. was a unique unit. Air Cav. unit, it was a unique unit and I'm very proud to have served in the Air Cav. You know, you see John Wayne movies, you see Custer movies, you see, you know, those kinds of movies and you always see them wearing cavalry kinda hats. It's always cavalry. I'm proud that I served in cavalry. And, most of it's because I wasn't asking to be born Hispanic. I just got lucky, you know. So being a Hispanic and serving the unit I served in was good. The battles that we fought in . . . Too many battles, yes, sir. But I'm here. And I'm grateful for ASU. I love ASU. Yes, sir, I love ASU, and what you and Shannon are doing, I think it's . . . Well, all have a purpose in life, you know, we don't know what it is but we have our purpose in life and I think this is part of my purpose, in my military life. Y'all completed my purpose by having my name here, somewhere. And Shannon has my name, pictures, somewhere. And they'll always be here. You know, I'll always be grateful. I was telling you earlier that when I wore my vest and people would pay for your food and stuff and they'd always say "Thank you for your service"? Well, my big thing is, whenever they tell me "Thank you for your service," I always tell them "Thank you for letting me serve." So, now, you know, we've kinda covered quite a bit. High school dropout to major, retiree, and what I've gone through. When I was 18 years old and a high school dropout, you know, you can probably guess, your conception of a person like that is, oh, shoot. Eh, "Let him go pour concrete. He's gonna be a laborer all his life. Can't even finish high school," you know. But it didn't work out . . . It didn't work out that way for me. Doors opened for me. Yeah, I went through some hard times but, you know, I guess I could have been a concrete laborer for my whole life or an hourly wage employee somewhere.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But the military gave you this opportunity?

ARZATE: The military opened doors. The military and the United States, part of the United States, the military. And, uh, whenever the government took away from me somewhere, he gave me something else somewhere else. You know, it . . . They downsized, and they ripped out all these officers, military personnel. Well, that gave me an opportunity to go to school. High school

dropout to junior in college. And, uh, I got an associate's degree. But then doors opened with the Guard again, where I first started, and, you know, the rest of that story.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, has your service changed at all your conception of the United States and its role in the world?

ARZATE: Uh, the . . . You know, it has, uh . . . They didn't learn from the Vietnam War . . . . I don't think . . . You know, Afghanistan, that's just another Vietnam War. Worse maybe. We had 58,000 killed in Vietnam, course, and it lasted about the same time, ten years, twelve years. I don't know how many soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan but not anywhere near 58,000 like that. They didn't learn, the politicians. Trump, you know, Trump is . . . He's gonna change all that. But I feel that, you know, I feel like I like a lot of things that Trump says, you know. We're Americans. We're gonna expand the military. We're gonna do this, do that, and we're gonna win. And, what he says, "We're gonna win." It kinda spruces me up about the military. I'm a military guy. You know, I'll back, anything that has to do with the military. I'm for it. But, you know, Obama's downsizing, that hurt me, because I was downsized. I wanted to make it a career. They . . . Trump says he's gonna make it big. And I feel myself that if a person goes in and you are doing a good job, you go into the military, and your mindset is that you're gonna make it a career, I think you should be given the chance to make it a career and if you're not doing your job, then you need to be kicked out, right like anything else. But I think if a person goes into the military, they wanna make it a career but they wanna give it all I got . . . Because I know I gotta do it to protect my country. Whether it's sweeping the floors at a gym or the barracks, whatever it is, that's what I chose and you should be given that opportunity instead of reducing and saying, "You gave us all these years in combat. We gave you these awards but we don't need you anymore." So, you're gone. And I'll admit that the VA has gotten better . . . The VA, the benefits supporting the soldiers. They support me. I'm not gonna say they don't, because I was involved in Agent Orange. I used to escort Agent Orange aircraft when they were spraying the Agent Orange. But as far as the military, if you're asking me, personally, I think they need to make the military . . . Since it's only one percent of the census . . . Why, if a soldier wants to make it a career, why not let him make it a career? Give him everything that person needs, he or she. Give him that opportunity whatever he needs to make it a career because it's gonna help that person and it's also gonna help us. And when they don't promote certain people that don't do this, don't do that . . . I think they should have a chance, give them what they need. And maybe Trump will do that if he wins. I don't know. Whatever takes place, you gotta live by the politicians. Still a free country though, almost. It's getting pretty tough but it's still a free country.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you have any advice for young men and women who are joining the service now?

ARZATE: Uh, as a matter of fact, I have a young man that's getting ready to go into the army. You know Ray Zapata, don't you? You ever heard of him?

WONGSRICHANALAI: I don't.

ARZATE: You never heard of Ray Zapata? Uh, okay, uh, he used to own a Mexican restaurant, it was called Mejor Que Nada.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Sure, I've been there.

ARZATE: Okay, well, the owner is Ray Zapata. If you go down to the clothing store down here, as you're walking out the door, there's a big old brass plate. It's got something about directors, board of directors, state board, college board of directors. Well, he's one of them. His name is down there. Ray Zapata. It's one of his nephews. He's 18-years-old. He's getting ready to go over. Ray and I are good friends because he was also one of the owners of the radio station. As a matter of fact, he's the one that got me into manager. He calls me the other day, says, "My nephew wants to talk to you. No, I want him to talk to you because he's getting ready to join the military, army, and I want him to talk to you so you can tell him the dos and don'ts, the pros and cons as much." And I said, "I'd love to." I don't have anything negative to say about the military because of what it's done for me and if a kid comes over to me, I'm gonna give him all the positives. No negatives. I'm gonna give him all the positives because, the military, there's so many things it does for a person, especially a young kid who, he might be going the wrong direction and before you know it . . . I didn't know how good the world looks here. I think it's a good career in the military. I've got a son that's career and, uh, he spent . . . He wanted to stay in longer and he was, uh, he stayed in 21 years and retired as a major but he was on the lieutenant colonel list to be promoted to lieutenant colonel. He made the promotional list and he was gonna get promoted to lieutenant colonel but Obama came down with a reduction and so all these promotable lieutenant colonel slots, they could be promotable to lieutenant colonel, if they had more than 20 years, then he said, "No, it's time to let them go." He's reducing. And that, instead of letting these active duty people go, that's been here ten years, twelve years, he's already had 20, so he's letting all these people go through attrition. So, uh, but I know for a fact that my son, he expected to be a lieutenant colonel. And he was gonna stay in 25, 30 years, because I know that's what he wanted but, because of the downsizing, he didn't make lieutenant colonel. He retired as a major and he retired, so he's got all his benefits and everything but I know in his heart he wanted to make lieutenant colonel. I think the idea that he wanted to beat me. Part of it but no, really, deep down, he really wanted to make lieutenant colonel. Uh, and I, as far as military, they should allow, a career person they should allow, he was a great commander, he was a good person, not because he's my son but he was, really. He was a good commander. He's dedicated to his job but that's the way he is.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But, you told Ray's son, er, nephew . . .

ARZATE: Oh, no. I haven't met with him yet. That was the day before yesterday.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Oh, okay.

ARZATE: He called me, wants to bring him over to my house and I . . . Now, I've got all my memorabilia. I've got a wall of all kinds of military stuff that I kept. This is just a little bit of it right there that I brought. And I want him to come over and let . . . I got military stuff that I want him to look at, kinda give him a conception of here's where you're gonna start, what it's like, because I experienced it. And if I know his nephew, his nephew's gotta be a real good kid because his family is real, real good kids, real good family. And then tell him, here's what you gotta do to endure, you know, when you get kicked in the butt, you just get up, you keep going. Yeah, I never . . . I'm never negative about the military. Kids wanna go in? I think it's a great career. Now, I do emphasize college first. I do emphasize education. And I . . . He's only 18. And I am gonna explain to him ROTC. The program we have here is one of the best programs that I . . . anywhere. My son graduated from here. And I am gonna talk to them, "If you go in, you're gonna be enlisted. Go to ASU. Four years, you're enrolled in ROTC, you're a lieutenant. You become a lieutenant and then you go into the military because this is the Air Force." I said, "You go into the military, so then there's a difference between officer and enlisted and the military needs both. But, if you got the ability and compassion, you know, you probably already should get four years of college, ROTC, then you go." That's my first preaching. The military is an okay career, but to me, that's what I did with my son. Uh, my son was . . . My son, when he graduated from here, there was a professor here named Dr. Devereaux. He was, I think my wife said something to you, a Spanish professor and uh, his wife was a history teacher, or, I think she was a history teacher at Lee. She . . . He was French and she was Hispanic. He had a daughter named Christina, gorgeous girl. Oh, she was pretty. My son was going with her and he fell in. . . deeply in love with her. Well, she went to Alpine, Sul Ross. So, he followed her. He was in love. And she left there and went to UTEP[1] and he left there and went to UTEP. And then, I think they broke up for a little bit. He came home, enrolled here, started one semester here, and then he went back. Fell in love, so he went back to UTEP. My wife moved him and everything, and, uh, he left here. He withdrew from his classes and I had . . . I had paid seven, eight hundred dollars, that's what . . . It wasn't a whole lot compared to what it is now. I had to pay seven, eight hundred dollars for a semester here. When you went to . . . When he went to UTEP, I told him, I said, "You go get a job. All you have to do is pay for your tuition. That's all you gotta do, pay for your tuition and I'll pay everything else. I'll pay all your expenses, your rent, your car, whatever, but you're gonna learn to . . . that money doesn't come by easy." Well, he called up before school started, before the semester started, and he said, "Dad," he says, "I couldn't come up with the money to go to school, so I joined the Air Force." I said, "What?" Because I got

[1] University of Texas at El Paso.

upset. I said, “Son, all I was trying to do was teach you a lesson. If you’d have called me and told me you needed the money for tuition, I would have paid it for you, you know.” Well, there was two sides to that story. One was that he broke up with his girlfriend. His girlfriend kinda, uh, said that she didn’t want to get that serious and he was kinda brokenhearted right? And, uh, he says, “So, I joined the Air Force, Dad.” I said, “Son, you’ve seen the movies. When you get brokenhearted like that, and your girlfriend leaves you, your honey leaves you, you join the French Foreign Legion! You don’t join the Air Force.” Anyway, I said, “well . . .” He stayed in four years as an Air Force enlisted. He got out, came back home, he wasn’t married or anything. He came back home, and he said, dad, I should have listened to you from the beginning. You know, you were right and I should have listened to you from the beginning. I’ll be at ASU and I’m gonna finish . . .

[Begin second part of recording.]

ARZATE: “And I’m gonna go into ROTC and I’m gonna go back and I’m gonna finish my career,” and that’s what he did. Then, of course, he met his wife there, and now he’s retired. But your question is, yeah, I prioritize education first. ASU and, uh, like I said, I love ASU, and, uh, I may come back some day and finish my last year, as a matter of fact.

WONGSRICHANALAI: By all means.

ARZATE: As a matter of fact, that has entered my mind several times but, you know, there’s so many things I’ve got going on right now. But, anyway, uh, yeah, I’m gonna preach school first and then tell him the facts of life. That’ll do it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Very good.

ARZATE: Yes, sir.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Thank you very much for your time.

ARZATE: I appreciate it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Thank you so much, yes.

ARZATE: Quite a story.

[Additional recording.]

ARZATE: We used to have the tanks because you, know, it’s an armored cav. Unit. We have tanks and armored cavs. and all kinds of equipment out in the jungle fighting the war and they move . . . They moved in the jungle. And at night, what they’d do . . . And just like the old Army times, the old cav times, the John Wayne movies. At night, when it starts getting dark—before it gets dark—they have all the equipment. They have tanks with these big blades on them like

bulldozers but they're tanks. And what they do is, they set up a perimeter at night. They'll plow an opening and they'll set up a perimeter and they'll set rows of concertina wire, three or four rows around the edge, around the compound in the jungle. And they set up all their machine guns and all their tanks and all that, because they know they're gonna get hit. We, as a cav. pilot, had hunter killer teams. We used to do what they called "Last Line Visual Reconnaissance." And the squadrons that were out there, well, Cobras would go and do the left side. I'd do this unit and they'd do that one. So, I went and did the second squadron one night, it was in the evening. And I went out there and we did the visual recon all the way around. What we'd try to do is catch the Viet Cong, maybe moving in equipment, something to attack, because they'd always attack at night. Because they knew in daytime they didn't have a chance. I did a VR[2] and the last night of VR, it took me about thirty minutes and, of course, they, those guys were heavily camouflaged unless you just happened to accidentally find one that's moving but, when they're camouflaged, you can't find them. But, anyway, I did a Last Line VR, so, I gave the clearance to the ground unit commander, a lieutenant colonel and I gave him the clearance of, "Hey, I can't find anything coming around your area. We did a 360, all sides and everything, can't find any kind of enemy." Because it was all jungle and . . . And he gave me the green so, we took off to go back. Not even twenty minutes into my flight, I had to come back. It was about from where our dirt strip was, our operating area, it was about, like, a 45-minute flight, you know. As soon as I climbed up, maybe not even that far, ten minutes into the flight, they were behind us and we were flying, my operations officer calls me, he says—my call sign was Red 8—and he says, "Red 8."

WONGSRICHANALAI: "Red 8"?

ARZATE: Red. The color, red. He says, "Red 8," he says, "turn your butt around and we're scrambling two more Cobra teams. Second Squadron is getting hit." I want you to know, I made a turn, took a 180, it looked like July 4th. I mean, they had completely surrounded that camp that evening and they attacked. And, of course, I called the ground commander and said, "Red 8, I'm on my way back. What side are you getting hit heavy on?" We were having a discussion on where they're getting hit and everything. And I went to the area where they were getting the heaviest, supposedly, and I could tell from up there. And they started shooting at me, because they always sent out .51 caliber positions, because they know the Cobras are coming, or any other aircraft. So, anyway, they started shooting at me, I attacked 3 of them, I mean, I made 3, 4, 5 gun runs, and I completely destroyed that .51 caliber but the whole area, it's like July the Fourth. It's flares going and tracers, you know, tracers. And, uh, whenever my other two Cobras came in, got on station, we started rotating. Fighting, rotating, fighting. We'd expend, go back, rearm, hot rearm, we never cold rearmed. A hot rearmed is you open the canopy, you see it, the loaders are loading, they give you water, a couple of crackers, you shut it down, you head over to refuel and you take off again.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How long would that take?

ARZATE: That would take . . . Refueling would take about ten minutes and rearming would take about fifteen minutes. That's how fast they were.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, everything would be up in fifteen minutes, wherever you go.

[2] Visual Reconnaissance.

ARZATE: Yeah. Twenty-five minutes for everything. And they give you your water. The crew chiefs and the armorers and, uh, all the rockets and everything was there already and, like you see on the race cars, everybody is doing their jobs and they , , ,Then they . . . In the . . . When it's all said and done and the lead crew chief would get up there, because you were in a revetment, and the lead crew chief would give you a green light, a thumbs up, and go up and you take off again and here comes the other Cobra, same thing, back and forth, all night long, just firing rockets. About five o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning, we had to call in, it was so heavy fighting, that at five o'clock in the morning, four o'clock, we had to call what they call "Puff the Magic Dragon." You've heard that phrase before? It's called "Puff the Magic Dragon." What is was, you've seen that plane in the headquarters at Goodfellow?[3] It's a taildragger in front of the headquarters building, it's a taildragger with two props like you see in the old movies?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Right.

ARZATE: Well, it was one of those, a C-843, 47, something like that. What they did is, on one side, their opening, they put like six Gatling guns, machine guns on one side of the aircraft and the whole inside is nothing but ammo and what they did is, they would come in, they would fly around the target on the gun sight and just open up with the machine guns and just cover the whole area with the machine guns, just firing and all you could see was the tracers coming out. Because there's four bullets between each tracer and they called it "Puff the Magic Dragon" because it looked like fire coming out of the side of the aircraft and they called it "Puff the Magic Dragon." Anyway, the enemy broke off about five o'clock in the morning, six o'clock, they ate lunch, started coming at them. I want you to know that it was a lot of them, three hundred, four hundred, maybe more, Viet Cong, North Vietnamese and the wire, they were trying to get through the concertina wire. There were bodies, just covered in bodies where we had been firing on them. Just one mention but that was a major battle, uh, but there was several that I went to but just to give you an idea what one of my major battles that I went through was, uh, and that's where I got hit with that .51 caliber round. And that was just one battle that I went through. There was like, uh, if I was guessing, 500 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. They must have attacked with two or three thousand Viet Cong, but we never saw them, with our visual, we never saw them, because, I mean, they were experts at camouflage. And they killed, destroyed several tanks, several APCs[4], they killed, uh, the, uh, executive officer and they, uh, they had, uh, right in the middle of the compound, they had several vehicles, trailers with the ammo dump, they hit it and then the ammo dump blew up, blew all night long. It was a great, big, major battle. But just to give you an example. But we did. I survived, we survived. Little old Hispanic, uh, high school dropout from San Angelo, Texas. Right in the middle of something like that, you know. It's, uh . . . It's an experience. Kinda, when I first went, I didn't expect the war to be like this. Uh, whenever, uh, we flew into the big commercial aircraft on my first tour. We flew in on the commercial aircraft, and, uh, whenever we were coming in close—because it was all soldiers, it must have been two hundred soldiers on the aircraft—coming in for a landing in Saigon, Tan Son Nhut, in, uh Air Force Base, coming in for landing, we were still quite a ways out, the pilot . . . It was at night, September when I went, monsoon season and it was pouring down rain,

[3] Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas.
[4] Armored Personnel Carrier.

lightning and such. We were in the aircraft coming in and the pilot comes over the radio and he says, “Gentlemen, we’re entering a war zone country. We’re gonna turn out on the lights. They’ll be turned off. There will be no lights on, and, uh, just to let y’all know that we’re entering a serious war country and there’s a strong possibility that we could possibly be shot down.” Now, mind you, this is my first tour. I said, “What did I get into? What in the world did I get into?” I was 26-years-old, 25, I think. That was the beginning. I appreciate it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: I appreciate it. Thank you, sir.