

ORAL MEMOIRS
of
EDMUNDO DE LA ROSA

An interview conducted on

June 11, 2015

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 Edmundo De La Rosa are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 11, 2015.

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LAMBERSON: Okay. Let's see. Today is June 11th.

DE LA ROSA: Yes ma'am.

LAMBERSON: Twenty fifteen. And we are in Pecos. I am Christine Lamberson and I am here to do a War Stories interview. Could you tell us your name?

DE LA ROSA: My name? Edmundo De La Rosa.

LAMBERSON: Alright. And when and where did you enter the armed services?

DE LA ROSA: I entered the service in El Paso with a reserve unit. After I got to boot camp, I transferred myself, or they transferred me to regular. Now I was in regular service.

LAMBERSON: And what branch did you serve in?

DE LA ROSA: Marine Corps, ma'am.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and this was in 1960?

DE LA ROSA: Yes, ma'am.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and how old were you then?

DE LA ROSA: Eighteen.

LAMBERSON: Okay. So, you had just graduated.

DE LA ROSA: A young whippersnapper from high school, yeah.

LAMBERSON: Excellent. Very good. And how long did you stay in the Marines?

DE LA ROSA: Well, counting all the time I did in reserve, it was twenty-four years.

LAMBERSON: And during your years of service, were you primarily in the enlisted ranks, were you an officer, what sort of . . .?

DE LA ROSA: I was just enlisted. Just enlisted.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And tell me a little bit about your service, about your progression through the military? So, you went to boot camp, where were you in boot camp?

DE LA ROSA: San Diego.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And what was the training like?

DE LA ROSA: Well, I'd never been through, you know, that before, but I found it exciting. I liked it. I liked it. It was common sense and buddy Joe did it at the same time. Yeah, I liked it.

LAMBERSON: What is it what you expected it to be like?

DE LA ROSA: Well, yeah, because I knew of a couple friends that were in El Paso about it, you know, they told me, "This is what we did." And I said, "Okay." I think it shows some of the courses in there, in the book, what we did.

LAMBERSON: Okay. Great. And why did you decide to join the armed forces?

DE LA ROSA: Well, first of all, if you apply for a job, they ask you if you had military, ah, done already, and you just out of high school how can you get military done. And college was out of the question. I didn't have the money for it and my grades were not that good to go to college. [Laughs] I decided to join the Marine Corps.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And, um, so you joined the Marines, you went to San Diego, and then where did you go after that?

DE LA ROSA: After boot camp, I went to Camp Pendleton.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Which was the same thing over again except you have more liberty of using your mouth, you know, you could talk, you could make jokes and all that. But it was basically infantry sized training. Shooting before he shoots you, you know, it was the main idea.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: They train you to shoot before they shoot you. There's no such thing as self-defense.

LAMBERSON: That's right, okay. And then were you deployed?

DE LA ROSA: Well, from where we went, I asked for a . . . They asked for somebody to work with, what do you call it? The general's staff. Like, the general's got all his little puppets running around. They wanted me to go train these people that go aboard ship how to handle the command and all that, so I went to that school. They used to call it, ah, seagoing something. I don't remember what it is. But, you learned how to salute, you learned how to set a table, about what to wear, how to wear it, all that. And I went there for three months, and all of a sudden, the Marine Corps needed an O-3. My MOS, you know, my training is O-3.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Which is infantry. In all the base, I was the only O-3 in the whole base. So, guess who went.

LAMBERSON: There you were then.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah, I went to Vietnam then from there.

LAMBERSON: And when was that?

DE LA ROSA: That was approximately in '65.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah, '65. And I spent fourteen months, ah, fifteen months in Vietnam. I extended three months. I don't know, I just fell in love with it.

LAMBERSON: Really?

DE LA ROSA: Yeah, I liked it.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: I liked it. I liked it over there. Got to see a lot of strange things, eat strange foods, and learn the language. I knew how to speak Vietnamese fluently enough, you know, Spanish took over.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: But I liked it over there, yeah. We didn't have big that year, we didn't have but only one . . . Three battles, real big ones, you know. We came out on top. Well, we usually did. The whole American team comes up it first.

LAMBERSON: Did you find your service in Vietnam challenging? What were some of the . . .

DE LA ROSA: Yes, it was, ma'am. It mostly was in the rice patties. There was no jungles. There are no jungles in the South. Vietnam was divided between north and south. The jungles are up in the north area and the flatland in the South mostly was rice patties.

LAMBERSON: Right.

DE LA ROSA: Which were water up to here, and you had to travel back and forth to the . . . They got some trails but it was mostly rice patties. And that's what the North Vietnamese were fighting the South for control of, the rice. Enough said. The rice was the main object of the whole Vietnam. And, well, I had . . . Oh, I got promoted that time. I went from E-3 to E-4. And more pay. You never get to see a paycheck. They put it on the back burner like they say. When you get out of there, they give you all this money.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: You got no use of payday. In the jungle, you know. But after fourteen months, they got me out of Vietnam. No, fifteen months. They were late thirty days.

LAMBERSON: One more month's extension.

DE LA ROSA: In this part of the jungle, we were up north. We're in the jungle and this lieutenant kept running up to me, he says, "Hey, hey, hey. Yeah, bullet." He said, "Get out of here. You're going home." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, you're going home. Come on." Got me by one foot and dragged me all the way back to the rear.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

DE LA ROSA: They put in a plane, I'm all nasty, you know. I haven't shaved in thirty days and my hair down to here. Nasty. Uniform was nasty, you know. And they brought me to the rear, they put me in a helicopter, they flew me to Da Nang at the air base. And they got me out of there, put in a plane, and I go, "What's the rush?" I didn't have uniform, nothing. Everything was moving with them, not me. Lieutenant, "Come on, you gotta go." "Okay." "Okay, get over here and sit over there." "Okay." Each time was a different lieutenant but he was pushing me around, so he could get me in the plane, get me out of there. So, I finally got of there and got landed in Hawaii. You don't get off the plane, so they had one of those air stewards come by and brought me sandwich and potato chips, I think it was, and a coke. They said, "Don't waste anything. Eat all of it." I say, "Yes, ma'am." Haven't eaten in three days, I guess I ate it all, you know.

LAMBERSON: She didn't have to tell you, huh?

DE LA ROSA: No, she didn't have to say that.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: We finally left Hawaii and landed in San Diego. No, El Toro Air Station. It was a military plane, so they landed at El Toro. "Here you are." I said, "Where do you me to go?" "You live here?" I go, "No, I live in Anaheim." "You got a ride there?" "No." Now this guy, this taxi drive came by me he says, "Hey, you going home?" I said, "Yeah." "Where do you live?" And I gave him the address in Anaheim. He said, "Come on. Where's your C bag?" I said, "I don't know." So, he drove me home. I had no money. He said, "You pay me when you get it." I said, "Okay." And he left, and I got home. And then I got orders to Camp Lejeune all the way across the nation to North Carolina.

LAMBERSON: Oh, wow.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah. So, I spent three years over there and then we went on those cruises six months and then three months. I was in the middle of the six months and they took us out of the ship. They sent us back to North Carolina and they put us on a plane and back to the . . . to the land of a thousand dances, Vietnam again.

LAMBERSON: And when was that?

DE LA ROSA: That was late. No, early seventies.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Seventies.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: So, I got out of there and got over there, and I spent twelve months . . . No, eleven months. He said, "We're gonna get you out of here." 'Cause I hadn't been on vacation. No, they called it leave but they . . . I say vacation is a lot easier to understand.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: I hadn't even had one yet. I had something like two hundred days on the books of vacation time. So, they finally got me out of there, sent me to Camp Pendleton. And, ah, the first sergeant says, "You gotta a whole bunch of days on the books, would you like to take leave?" I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "How many days you want?" I said, "What's . . . What's the most I can get?" I said, "Take forty-five." So, by then I had a . . . a car then. My ex bought a car. So, we had a car. "What do you do on vacation?" I said, "I don't know, probably sleep and go eat some decent food." I had a good time at leave for forty-five and then they sent me back when I got back. He said, "You're going to Hawaii." I said, "Why can't I stay at least three more days in Pendleton?" I said, "I like California, the beach." "Well, listen, Hawaii's surrounded by beach, by water." He said, "You got all the beach you want." Sent me to Hawaii, so I went to Hawaii, spent three years over there. And then they came for volunteers to go to Vietnam again. And the first sergeant said, "No, you got two and a half tours over there. No, can't send you."

LAMBERSON: Yes . . .

DE LA ROSA: I said, "Why not?" He said, "No, we're not . . . You're not eligible to go. You've done your tours." I said, "Okay." So, we spent three years in Hawaii and then, after Hawaii, they sent me to MCRD, and they say . . . You've seen those guys with the little round hats. It's, it's the drill instructor. That's where they sent me to be a drill instructor

LAMBERSON: And where was that?

DE LA ROSA: San Diego.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah. So, I spent, what, a year-and-a-half there as a drill instructor. Then they say they need somebody at Camp Pendleton as a S-4, you know, with the . . . and bullets and they called it that, S-4. He's the guy supplying all the ingredients to the infantry. So, I went to Camp Pendleton to distribute bullets and lunch and all that. And finally they . . . I ask them . . . Oh, and in between that, I got promoted again. I was sergeant then and I didn't even know it. So,

one morning I walk in the captain's office he says, "Come here. These are here." And my stripes. He said, "You're getting paid for three months that we didn't give you the rank." He said, "You get the rank but we did not promote." So, I got paid three months. Not bad. I went on vacation again for thirty days. When I came back, I stayed at MCRD as a drill instructor for a little while, and then they sent me back to, uh, Camp Pendleton, S-4 again. I was enjoying life back and forth. We used to live in Anaheim and, yeah, Anaheim, and go to Camp Pendleton about ninety miles away. In the military they don't care how you get there, you better be there.

LAMBERSON: Right.

DE LA ROSA: And after that, the top of the enlisted men called a sergeant major, he said, "When do you retire, De La Rosa?" It was supposed to be next six months. They said, "We're gonna retire you in three months." They said, "We got no room for you here." 'Cause S-4, I mean the . . . The base is mostly political, you know, they . . . And I wasn't used to that, so. I get it because I knew how to do it but said, "We're gonna retire in three months." "What if I don't want to get . . .?" "You're gonna be retired." So, I retired in three months and then we went and bought a house in Anaheim. A house we rented was over here and then I bought one over here, two streets over.

LAMBERSON: And when was that?

DE LA ROSA: That was in, ah, what was it? Seventy-four.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Pretty close to '74. I don't remember too well.

LAMBERSON: Yeah, sure.

DE LA ROSA: Nineteen seventy-four.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: And we stayed there for what? Three . . . about three years. And my wife didn't like to drive all the way to Miramar from Anaheim, about a hundred and some miles. So, we went to . . . not Anaheim. We went to a place called San Marcos. You ever heard of the city Escondido? Right outside Escondido, that's where San Marcos is.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: And she was working at Miramar. So, it was a little closer. That's why we went to San Marcos in '82, we decided on it. "You want a parade, or you just want to retire?" I said, "No, just give me walking papers. I'll be alright." That's all I need.

LAMBERSON: And when was that?

DE LA ROSA: That was in '82.

LAMBERSON: In '82, okay.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah. So, I didn't know nothing. I didn't know how to use a hammer. I didn't know anything.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. So, what we're doing from . . . between '74 and '82?

DE LA ROSA: I was stationed there in both places like, ah, what do you call it? Camp Pendleton.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: I was at Camp Pendleton.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Doing S-4.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. Okay. And so, then what did you do after you retired?

DE LA ROSA: Well, I went looking for a job. And that's why I'm saying I didn't know how to do anything, ma'am.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: So, I met this master sergeant at the unemployment office. He was with me in Vietnam. He said, "Come here." I look and, "Come here. Would you like a job?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Here. Call this guy or go over there in the morning about eight o'clock, eight-thirty. And he got a job for you." "Ah, okay." So, next morning I went to that guy. His name was John Williams. And I gave him my note. He said, "Oh, you know him?" I said, "Yeah, we were together in Vietnam." "Well, you got a job now." And I'm like, "Thank you."

LAMBERSON: And what were you doing?

DE LA ROSA: It was a, what do you call it, retail store. Sold rain suits, Levis, boots. Boy scout stuff. All kinds of, you know. Monday was a hard day because they delivered a foam, polyfoam. You know what that is right? And we had to unload it and stack it up. And so, ah, surplus items, you know, like the military canteen covers, hats. And I'd do was, they put me work as a cashier. I was doing cashier jobs. Before I left there, they made me assistant manager, so. They didn't pay much. I think something like nine dollars. In those days, you know, you don't need ten dollars an hour. So, after that it was just, ah, we decided to leave from Miramar, I mean Pendleton . . . San Marcos to Pecos. We went to Tennessee. I left the job and we went to Tennessee, because she was from Tennessee.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: We were looking for a house, and there was sign “For Sale,” And you go there and nobody’d answer the door. We couldn’t talk to nobody about a house. And the day before, this lady called me, called us from California and says, “We got a house in Pecos for you.” I said, “Pecos! That’s my town.” Said, “Yeah, we got a house that we want you to go see.” We came to Pecos and went to that house where I live at now. And she always wanted a big kitchen. You know, space where she can move around. And that’s what sold the house, big kitchen.

LAMBERSON: Very good.

DE LA ROSA: And I’ve been here since.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah. Well, she died. You know, my wife died in 2000.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: So, I ran around for nothing, you know. Go to my sister’s house, to my friend’s house.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: Some better cooking. I ate some bologna sandwiches, you know . . .

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: And then I met this woman now that my wife now. And she’s a good . . . She’s a caterer and cooking.

LAMBERSON: Very good.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: Good cooking then. During your time, um, in Vietnam, during either of your tours of Vietnam, what did you think of the war, of the people that you met?

DE LA ROSA: Well, mostly you are looking for, keep your people safe. And that’s what your main concern is. But it was my thing, just trying to keep these people to understand that bullets kill, you know. And they think have a bunch of kids from everywhere. They say, “Oh man, my time’s coming up.” And they were talking about going home and all that. I said, “If you don’t be quiet, you’re not going home walking. You’re going home in a pine box.”

LAMBERSON: Ah. Did you see active combat while you were there?

DE LA ROSA: Oh, yeah. We had a quite a few battles out there. I've got little bullet burn.

LAMBERSON: Oh, uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: And that's all I got all over my body, bullet burns.

LAMBERSON: Oh, wow.

DE LA ROSA: I was very lucky.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: But other than that, war is hell.

LAMBERSON: Yes.

DE LA ROSA: You know, you don't play it safe, you're not gonna be safe.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh. What were some of the biggest either challenges or rewarding parts of being in Vietnam for you?

DE LA ROSA: Well, I think the rewarding part was getting back here again. I didn't see no big challenges. I took day-by-day that came, you know. I was not a hero. I was an everyday guy.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah, that was my thing. Be safe.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: Challenge . . . I didn't see no challenge actually.

LAMBERSON: Did you get very much contact with the South Vietnamese?

DE LA ROSA: Yes.

LAMBERSON: Meanwhile, you said you learned some Vietnamese as well, right?

DE LA ROSA: Yeah, that's what I mean. We were in a village.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: I think the whole village about this size.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: And we had to guard the village, so we sat there.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: And there were some kids there and some old men, and I asked them, "How do you spell this or how you say water and cat." And that taught me Vietnamese.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

DE LA ROSA: You know, but after ten years you forget all that stuff.

LAMBERSON: Right.

DE LA ROSA: I know a few words but not that important.

LAMBERSON: Yeah. Yeah. What did you think of why you were there? Of the sort of the American mission in Vietnam?

DE LA ROSA: Well, our president said, "Go over there and help the North . . . the South Vietnamese." You know.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: Control the rice.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: The North come over and pick up the rice and leave or they kill whoever was around it. So, all we did was walk in and tell the guy, "No. No more rice for you. You plant your own rice."

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: That was basically that's what it was.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: "No, you will not rice . . ."

LAMBERSON: Very good. And when did you get married during your service?

DE LA ROSA: Oh, I didn't get through that, did I? Well, I was married to this girl that I met way back then, out of high school. And after, what was . . . I can't remember. I found out she was a gold digger. You know what that is?

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: I hope so. But I had blinders, I didn't see that. So, she finally drew the papers in the divorce. So, I said, "Hell, yeah."

LAMBERSON: So, you were married to her for most of the time you were in the Marines.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah, I was in the service.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: Then I met this one that was from Tennessee.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: And she's a good cook. That's why I like them.

LAMBERSON: I see, I see. It's good quality.

DE LA ROSA: Yes, ma'am.

LAMBERSON: Okay, how did your service affect your family? Affect your parents or, you know, relationship with your wife?

DE LA ROSA: You know, I didn't see any changes, ma'am. I didn't see any changes in my family, you know. Well, you know, parents worry about their kids, you know. Ah, but I used to call them from Vietnam. "Hey, everybody over." "Yeah." "Are you sure? Over." "Yeah." I used to call them from . . . I'd send my mother, for Mother's Day, I'd send her a bouquet of roses from Vietnam, so. But I didn't see any changes in them. I did, you know, maybe I saw them but I didn't know the difference in them.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

DE LA ROSA: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: What did they think of you being in the Marines?

DE LA ROSA: My father didn't like it. My father did not like it whatsoever.

LAMBERSON: Why didn't he like it?

DE LA ROSA: I don't know. He had other thoughts about you growing up and, you know, everybody would go to work at the railroad or pick cotton or whatever. And I was not made for picking cotton. Uh-uh. See, my hands are nice and smooth? No, uh-uh. No, he didn't like me being in the service, you know. It was dangerous.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: Well, heck, you walk across the street, somebody's gonna come by hit you, so, what's the difference?

LAMBERSON: Right.

DE LA ROSA: A bullet's a bullet and a car's a car, so. No, he just didn't enjoy having me in the service. And I used to tell him, "I'm gonna re-enlist next month." And he wouldn't answer my question. He'll hang up on me. But, you know, that was his thing, he didn't like the military. My mother, she cared, but she said, "Well, he's making a good living out of it." Like I said myself, you know, three meals a day, a place to stay, and they pay you on top of that, so what?

LAMBERSON: Good deal that way.

DE LA ROSA: I thought it was pretty good.

LAMBERSON: And, ah, what did you . . . When you were in Hawaii, what were you doing there? When you were stationed in Hawaii?

DE LA ROSA: I was at the air station in Hawaii.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DE LA ROSA: And I was a training NCO. I conducted PT, conducted EST, which is the military subjects. And all of it was just a year thing because you had different people taking the EST, you know, general subjects. You have about sixty of them. You grade them and you give them to your superiors. And then in PT, we used to call it, they'd run three miles under a certain time, every group had an age group, like 18-22, 22-30. By age group, you run it that way. You have three miles, ten pull-ups, and sixty sit-ups. You gotta watch them and make sure they make ten. And then the next one. Oh, and the rifle range. I had to send them to the rifle range and make sure they qualify. That was all in Hawaii, all of it. At almost age fifty, I could do three miles in under twenty-two minutes. Now, I can barely walk to the bathroom because it hurts. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: How did you like your time in Hawaii?

DE LA ROSA: I loved it. Five days a week, Monday through Friday. And Friday, we got off early and went to the club. We got memberships, and our cards would be loaded every payday. Not bad.

LAMBERSON: Not bad, that's right! How about in North Carolina?

DE LA ROSA: Well, that was a little different over there. It was mostly training up in the, well, not the hills, flood lands of North Carolina. They give you a case of rations . . . I liked it. Lots of, ah, what do they call them, rednecks. [Laughs] It was nice. It was one of them neighborly places. They depend on each other to help each other. It was nice.

LAMBERSON: And were you also doing a similar type of training there? Yeah?

DE LA ROSA: Yeah. Same thing. But by that time, I was an E6 already.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DE LA ROSA: It was more of a supervisor thing. "I'm not coming in today, I don't feel too good." It was okay. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: Right. Advantages of moving up the ranks!

DE LA ROSA: Rank has privileges.

LAMBERSON: Right. And were you an E6 when you retired?

DE LA ROSA: Yes. I retired before the due date for another promotion to E7. I missed out.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And where, ah . . . You said you went to a couple different places when we were talking before, short distance, right? You were in Spain, a few other places too, right?

DE LA ROSA: What other . . .

LAMBERSON: Did you say you had just a couple months where you were deployed?

DE LA ROSA: Oh, there was a three-month deployment.

LAMBERSON: Did you have any favorite places, or places that stuck out?

DE LA ROSA: No, you don't get to adjust. You spend two weeks somewhere, then you swing over and move.

LAMBERSON: And what did you do on those deployments?

DE LA ROSA: What do men usually do on those?

LAMBERSON: [Laughs] I don't know!

DE LA ROSA: Oh, that's right. I'm sorry ma'am. Hang out bars. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: What were you being assigned to do? What were you being deployed to do?

DE LA ROSA: Yeah . . . After a certain time, we went on liberty.

LAMBERSON: Gotcha, you were having fun.

DE LA ROSA: Yes ma'am.

LAMBERSON: What was your favorite short deployment?

DE LA ROSA: I gotta say Puerto Rico. We both speak the same language. I understand it. One thing was, in the six-month thing, we went to Argentina, in South America. These girls, you would not believe it. Blonde hair. Blue eyes. They looked like Americans. Didn't know a word of English. Beautiful women down there. You start talking to them in English and they walk away from you. We didn't understand their culture, I guess. They don't speak English and they weren't taught it. Maybe now they do but that was thirty or forty years ago. Argentina girls. The men were the same way. Blonde hair, you know, big and strong. But their language is Spanish. We went on a cruise and they assigned me to be the captain's aid. He went off the ship, I went with him. He went to the bathroom, I went too. Their captain didn't know English.

LAMBERSON: Ah. Right, so you were like an interpreter.

DE LA ROSA: It was nice. I liked it. Captain went to the fields but I stayed on board ship. Whatever they were doing. I liked it. Captain was pretty good on me.

LAMBERSON: Did you grow up speaking Spanish?

DE LA ROSA: Yes ma'am.

LAMBERSON: And were there other times when the military had you use those language skills?

DE LA ROSA: In Pendleton, there were four Spanish speakers in the whole company. Two were black. So, anytime they saw us speaking Spanish, they told us to break it up.

LAMBERSON: They didn't like you speaking Spanish?

DE LA ROSA: No. Talk English.

LAMBERSON: Ah.

DE LA ROSA: That's why I stayed with English. It's not going to hurt me. And my daughter, she was born in North Carolina. We got to California and every time she would see me talking, she'd say, "It's your fault." I asked what. "I didn't learn Spanish." We didn't have any use for it. School, there were three kids that were Spanish in her classes. Three kids. And they talk in English most of the time. It was my fault I didn't teach her Spanish. [Laughs] Right now, she calls me and talks to me in English. I say something in Spanish and she'll say she doesn't understand. We don't talk Spanish to her. We talk in English. She's, ah, what do you call it, a nurse supervisor. She dropped out of school. A friend did, so she did too. But I took her to continue it and she came out with a two-year scholarship. A nurse never runs out of work, so I told her to take nursing. She did. And now she's a supervisor. She told me she was making 65 dollars per hour.

LAMBERSON: Wow, great.

DE LA ROSA: She has six people working for her. I said, “Aren’t you going to say thank you, girl?” [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: Did you have children while you were deployed overseas at all?

DE LA ROSA: Yes.

LAMBERSON: Was that difficult?

DE LA ROSA: No, they were too little. They didn’t understand. My boy, he was like, three or four. Too little.

LAMBERSON: And that’s when you were deployed where?

DE LA ROSA: At Vietnam. Now he understands, my wife used to tell him, “Daddy’s not coming home yet.” And when I came home he would ask, “You didn’t drown yet?” “Well, Mom said you went across the sea!” I said yeah. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: What about for your wife? Was it challenging, staying here with the kids while you were deployed, being apart, that sort of thing?

DE LA ROSA: I mean, military people sort of get adopted into the military. Some don’t. So, we had no problem with it.

LAMBERSON: Let’s see, you already told me a little bit about, ah. Did you ever become a prisoner of war? Anything of that nature?

DE LA ROSA: No ma’am.

LAMBERSON: What were some of your most vivid memories of your time in service? Any particular stories that stood out? Or moments that stood out?

DE LA ROSA: Well, I got pretty close to getting killed. And I don’t want to remember that. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: I cannot imagine . . .

DE LA ROSA: We had a company of about 200 at the most. I burned my machine gun barrel. I didn’t have time to reload and there was a group running over us. You know what I did? You ever see the movie . . . *Full Metal Jacket*?

LAMBERSON: It’s been a long time. But yes.

DE LA ROSA: I played that. They were jumping us. Shot in the holes. Make sure that no one was alive. That’s one thing I don’t want to remember. But I bring it up. I will not volunteer to tell you. It was one of my days. It happened to me twice. One about fifty miles this way, north. Hill

55. And they used to do the same thing. They check you out beforehand. What time do you eat, what time do you go to the bathroom but, you know? Everything. They got it down. So, when they finally decide, "Oh, how many guys will be on guard tonight?" They check everything. It didn't click to us that they were doing that.

LAMBERSON: Yeah . . .

DE LA ROSA: It was at night. We did the same thing. Another guy. I had to play dead again.

LAMBERSON: And it worked?

DE LA ROSA: I'm here.

LAMBERSON: You talked a little bit about returning to civilian life, did you face any challenges besides finding a job when you returned to civilian life?

DE LA ROSA: If I would have gone to look for work, I don't think I'd get a denial, get rejected. I can't stand denial.

LAMBERSON: Aw.

DE LA ROSA: I am not used to that. But, I don't think I would be able to find a job. I'm kind of shy, afraid. Right now, I'm not. But when I first got out of the service, I thought, "What am I going to do?" Good thing I knew that guy from Vietnam. He offered me a job. Then I got more confident in myself. It's hard to come out of the military with no skills. I don't have any skills. I don't have any. You tell me to do something, I ask how you do it. Like the computers.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

DE LA ROSA: I don't know how to handle computers. I got one at home. But I'm not a skilled person.

LAMBERSON: Sure. You didn't sort of learn skills in the military that you could transfer?

DE LA ROSA: No. I knew we would go from one base to another and, basically, the whole thing, it's infantry, they are gonna put you where you can accomplish. They're not gonna send you to, like, a clerk job. They're not gonna put me there.

LAMBERSON: Gotcha. Let's see. After your time in the military, how did your conception of the United States, or the Cold War, or the war in Vietnam or any of those conflicts, were they influenced by your service? Did they change over time?

DE LA ROSA: Well, yeah, and no. Actually, I don't pay too much attention. I don't pay too much attention. What you watch on television, that's bad. I just don't . . . It doesn't click in my head about that. I don't get bothered. Like this one right now. As they take our troops out, they have been fighting each other since day one. So, what's the purpose now? They're killing each

other for nothing now. Get the troops out, help them back here, let them fill themselves up. I wouldn't go there now. I wouldn't. It's useless. To me, it's useless.

LAMBERSON: Do you feel like the United States had more of a worthy mission, so to speak, in Vietnam?

DE LA ROSA: Well, it was that way. It was that way. But then he changed. It became a political war. It started with the rice thing. People fighting over a cup of rice with not that much rice in it. They were fighting over it. We got all that back but, later, it was a political war. We went months without firing our rifles. Months! And, at first, every other day was, ah, all of a sudden you'd cool down. And then here we are again, another war.

LAMBERSON: Did you notice a big difference between your first tour in Vietnam and your second?

DE LA ROSA: No ma'am. It was the same thing. Definitely the same thing. Same places that we were before. But more, ah, there were more civilized . . .

LAMBERSON: Yes. How do you feel about your military service looking back at it?

DE LA ROSA: Right now?

LAMBERSON: Yeah!

DE LA ROSA: I'm proud to have been in the military. I like it. I'm very proud of my services. You know, they were my accomplishments when I went in . . . I mean, that's what I went in for. To accomplish my military service. I am gonna say, yep, I'm gonna retire. There it is, yep, I'm retired. [Laughs]

LAMBERSON: That's great. Do you have any advice for young men and women who are just entering the service?

DE LA ROSA: Mouth shut and eyes open.

LAMBERSON: That's it?

DE LA ROSA: Most people don't know that. Most people think they know everything but they don't know their head from a hole in the ground. You see the kids out there in the street? They see a car coming, they drag across. Don't they? Look at yourself. What do you think about yourself?

LAMBERSON: I'm sorry?

DE LA ROSA: What do you think about yourself?

LAMBERSON: About myself? [Laughs] I don't know, in what sense?

DE LA ROSA: Do you like yourself?

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DE LA ROSA: See? I do too. That's why I play safe all the time. I play safe all the time. If I have to walk across the street, I make sure I look that way, and that way six times before I cross the street. Make sure there's no traffic.

LAMBERSON: Right. Want to be careful. I'm with you there.

DE LA ROSA: Yes. Gotta be careful.

LAMBERSON: Is there anything else that I haven't asked about that you'd like to share about your service?

DE LA ROSA: What you haven't asked, let me see. You know something, I don't . . . You did pretty good there. I liked it. I liked it!

LAMBERSON: Good! Well, I have a list, so, that helps. Okay. Well thank you so much for sharing your story.

DE LA ROSA: Well thank you for your company, ma'am. I couldn't have chosen a better lady.

LAMBERSON: Good. I'm glad.