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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Guadalupe Aguilera  
Conducted by Kelly Crager  
Date: 15 May 2015  
Transcribed by Hailey Stewart**

[NOTE: Any text included in brackets \[ \] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.](#)

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1           KC: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with Mr.  
2 Guadalupe Aguilera. Today is 15 May 2015, and we are on the campus of Texas Tech  
3 University. Mr. Aguilera, I appreciate you coming in today for the interview. Let's start  
4 with the early part of your life. Can you tell me when you were born and where you were  
5 born?

6           GA: I was born here in Lubbock, Texas. Born May the 22<sup>nd</sup> 1948.

7           KC: So, you have a birthday coming up in a bit.

8           GA: Yeah, pretty soon.

9           KC: Very good. What were your parents' names?

10          GA: My father's name was Lewis Aguilera. My mother was Temotia Garcia  
11 Aguilera.

12          KC: And what did they do for a living here?

13          GA: My dad was a—well, he did a little bit of concrete work. He worked for  
14 carpenters. He built his own house here at the Guadalupe neighborhood and everything.  
15 He used to call it a barrio. Now, they call it the Guadalupe Neighborhood. He always  
16 worked in construction. My mother left. I was, I don't know, eighteen months or two  
17 years old when my mother left us, so I never knew my mom. After that, I went to school.

18          KC: Where did you go to school?

1           GA: Guadalupe. The old Guadalupe School. We had a hard time making it  
2 through the—you know, my dad could not speak one word of English. I don't know how  
3 the man could understand those he worked for, but that man could understand—I guess,  
4 they understood Spanish. He worked out here at the canyon up here that they now called  
5 Buddy Holly. Mr. Pelete—it's the one that has the stair at the lake. Adobe suite. We used  
6 to help him make adobes. Then, there was another house, Louis Maca and Magda, that  
7 was his wife. We built him a house. That's where I learned how to speak English because  
8 they always talked to me in English. It was just a white lady, real nice person. I learned  
9 how to speak the language. Well, all of us did because we worked there for her in  
10 building that house for quite a while. After that, I started going to school. I went to school  
11 from first grade. I got up there and the teacher was trying to tell the class, which sounded  
12 kind of funny to me, because she was talking in English and all the kids out there are  
13 looking at her with their mouth open. I got up and I said, "Teacher, they don't understand  
14 what you're saying." "They don't?" I said, "No." She said, "They don't speak English?"  
15 "None of them." She said, "Well, but you speak English." I said, "Yes." She said, "Well,  
16 can you interpret for them and tell them what I'm saying and what to do." I get the books  
17 and stuff like that, you know, tell them to get their books, get out their books. I started to  
18 learn how to read, how to write. How to help the kids. You know, because she couldn't  
19 make them understand what she was saying. First grade, top of the class. I was the  
20 number one student in that classroom. They used to take us there to play soccer. Oh man,  
21 I was good at that. This other teacher. She had a kid out there, I don't know if it was his  
22 son, cousin. His name was Bobby. I don't know what he looked like, but anyway her  
23 name was Bobby. That was her number one student. We'd go out there and play soccer,  
24 and I would take the ball away from Bobby and I would high score and would beat him  
25 every time. That teacher, for some reason she didn't like me, and I couldn't understand  
26 why, but she kept on hating me. They keep pushing me, tripping me, calling me names,  
27 and I never said nothing to him. And she'll laugh about it, you know. The last day of first  
28 grade, the last day of school, I was walking out of the school. Bobby, he came out there  
29 and was kicking and punching me, and I fell on the ground, and I'm all cut up and I  
30 punched him. When I got to punching him, I left his face as bloody as bloody can get.  
31 That teacher told me that she was gonna rip me. She cussed me out. When I got out of

1 that school ground, this man that lived at the corner of that house there—last name was  
2 Aguilera. He always called me cousin. Name's Aguilera and his is Aguilera, but he still  
3 called me cousin. As the teacher was going out after me, he stopped her right there in the  
4 middle of the street and told her, "Hey, you leave this young man alone." She said, "He  
5 just hit—" He said, "That boy there has been kicking and punching him every day. I'm  
6 here, I work at nights, and I see everything that kid's doing to him, and you instead of  
7 stopping that boy you're out there laughing at what he does to Lupe." He said, "Go home.  
8 Go home, Lupe." And that teacher said, "You come back, you sorry son of—you're  
9 gonna be in my class!" Kept on walking. From that day on for four years, I was in the  
10 corner of that class and every time she wanted the students to laugh at me, so put me up  
11 there to read. If I couldn't read, "Oh, get out of here you stupid." I couldn't figure out  
12 why she was doing this to me. Well, I started thinking that I had (inaudible). Well, sure  
13 enough it final clicked in my head. Her father went to my house. Went up to the house,  
14 insulted my father. They got into an argument and my father kicked him out of the house.  
15 So, she was taking what my father did to her father—she was trying to get even with me,  
16 I guess. That's all I can figure it.

17 KC: That's really unfortunate, obviously.

18 GA: Yeah.

19 KC: How was your schooling for this period on? Was it better for you? Was it  
20 worse for you?

21 GA: After they find out what this teacher was doing to me—that lasted till the  
22 fourth year. So, the school is about over. This young girl went out there and told her,  
23 "Teacher, I need to go to the restroom. I need to go to the restroom. I can't hold it no  
24 more." "Ah, you go sit down." She was just that kind of a teacher. "But I need to go  
25 now." "You don't need to go now." Right there in front of the class she did what she  
26 wanted to do in the restroom. "Ah, you nasty girl! Get out of here! Go home!" Here  
27 comes Mr. Gonzales who was the janitor and went there and cleaned all that stuff. That  
28 was an hour and a half of cleaning. The principal had his hand printed from the  
29 grandmother of that girl. She slapped the teacher, and you could see the print of the hand.  
30 He was pissed off. He came out there madder—he said, "Ms. Rett, did you do this to his  
31 daughter?" And she started to say, "Uh, she had to go to the restroom, and she just

1 couldn't make it to the restroom." She said, "No, you told me not to go to the restroom."  
2 Well, the mother and the grandmother wanted to kick the hell out of that teacher, but the  
3 principal stopped her. That girl turned around and looked at me, and then she said to the  
4 principal, "You see where Lupe is?" "Yeah." She said, "He's been there for four years."  
5 "What?" He says, "He doesn't know how to read or write." He turned around and looked  
6 at me and said, "Lupe, have you been there all the time failing four years?" Two years in  
7 the second grade and two years in the third grade. And oh man, that principal was mad.  
8 "Rett, I want you to get every damn thing off that desk. Get all your stuff out of here and  
9 get the hell out of here. You're fired. You'll never teach again." "But sir," crying and all  
10 this stuff. "Get out of here!" So, they took her out. They saw the teacher, named Wilma,  
11 came out there. She tried to teach me how to read. After that, I didn't hold no respect  
12 whatsoever for the teachers. I didn't take the crap.

13 KC: Yeah. Did you wind up finishing school here in Lubbock?

14 GA: No.

15 KC: You didn't? When was you last year of school? What grade level?

16 GA: Seventh.

17 KC: Seventh grade. And what'd you do after that?

18 GA: I went to work.

19 KC: Went to work. And where did you go to work?

20 GA: I went to work for—at first, I started working for the brick layers. Wind up  
21 in Louisiana. Breton, Louisiana, and did a lot of work over there working with the brick  
22 layers. Then, I came home. Then, after that I went to work for the Dr. Pepper Bottle  
23 Company. Driving, loading and unloading into the trucks. After that I got my draft notice.  
24 I took my physical. It was me and—a lot of the kids down the neighborhood. A lot of the  
25 kids from the neighborhood went out there with us. It was this guy named Jesse, and both  
26 of us passed. And this other guy, I don't know what his name was—I couldn't remember.  
27 It was just three of us that passed. Jesse leaned over and said, "Dide me, Lupio," because  
28 he used to call me Lupio. He said, "Lupio. Hey man, you pass man? We're gonna go to  
29 war?" I said, "Nah, man. Don't worry about it."

30 KC: Well, let me ask you this. Obviously, the draft was in play here. This is  
31 what? Probably 1967 or something like that, and you were then, I guess, eighteen-year-

1 old when this happened. You mentioned that there was this concern about going to war.  
2 Did you anything about what was going on in Southeast Asia?

3 GA: No. I didn't know diddly squat about what was going on out there. The  
4 draft is two years draft, so I said, "It's just two years. Two years go fast." That was what I  
5 was feeling. My attitude—I wasn't worried about that. I was nineteen years old. It was on  
6 April the 23<sup>rd</sup> when they called us in for the draft. I saw Jesse out there. I said, "Jess, oh  
7 man." Jesse goes, "Damn it, we're gonna go to war, man." I mean, we're not gonna be  
8 the first ones that go to war, you know. My dad was in the war in Mexico. He was one of  
9 the (inaudible) men. So, I said if my dad went to war, why can't I go to war? You know, I  
10 wasn't bothered by it. None whatsoever. I saw Jesse was kind of worried and saw a lot of  
11 guys worried about it. Anyway, we were sat there. They got this piece of paper. You've  
12 got to fill out your name and address, date of birth, and stuff like that. I had no birth  
13 certificate and I copied everything off of it. After that, this officer from the Marine Corps  
14 came up there and said, "We need a volunteer for the Marine Corps." Jesse said, "No,  
15 Lupe. Don't. Don't even pick up your hand. Those guys in the Marine Corps, they're  
16 tough. They kick you," and you know, all this other stuff. "Don't even lift up your hand."  
17 I said, "Okay," I wasn't gonna do it anyway. He said, "If nobody wants to volunteer,  
18 we're gonna trap one. We're going by the alphabetical order." He said, "Aguilera,  
19 Guadalupe Garcia." Jesse turned around and looked me and said, "Oh shit, Aguilera." I  
20 said, "It's two years, man. Two years, Jesse. Don't worry about it." I didn't know nothing  
21 about the Marine Corps. I didn't know a damn thing about the Marine Corps. I said,  
22 "Well, I'll go to the Marines, fine. I'll be drafted into the Marine Corps." So, they got us  
23 sorted. At the end they said, "And the lucky marine." Everybody started laughing, and I  
24 was like, "Yeah, laugh you assholes." Still, didn't know what I was getting into. I was  
25 thinking they'd send us—they gave us a meal to take it or whatever. Flautas or whatever  
26 it was to eat at this restaurant that they stayed on this motel. I went out there, sitting on  
27 that bench out there, thinking, "Shit, I ain't gonna be able to see my family for two  
28 years." Just thinking and thinking, and then I remember this—when we were kids, my  
29 brother, John and I, we used to play games. We used to play little soldiers. We didn't  
30 have no plastic soldiers like other kids did, but we used to get those boxes of matches—  
31 the big box of matches. We'd use that. So, he'd get on that end right over here, and we'd

1 get these little antennas—the antennas, we would cut them off, and just like that (blowing  
2 sound), you can blow on it like a straw and we’ve got a piece of paper (blowing sound).  
3 He’d blow up my soldiers, and I’d blow up his. And my brother, he would get a two by  
4 four and go out there (blowing sound) and knock all of my soldiers down. He’d say,  
5 “Atomic bomb!” And he goes around me marching, singing that Marine Corps hymn, all  
6 the way around me. I was thinking, “Well, this must be my test to be a marine.” You  
7 know, ever since my brother—he used to always play the Marine Corps hymn and march  
8 around me, so I’ll be damned.

9 KC: And they got you.

10 GA: They got me. Since I was a little kid.

11 KC: So, where was boot camp for you? Out in California, I assume?

12 GA: In California out at San Diego.

13 KC: Mm-hmm. What was Marine Corps boot camp like for you there in 1967?

14 GA: Shit total—’68.

15 KC: ‘68.

16 GA: A total nightmare.

17 KC: Why?

18 GA: Well, when we walked into there, and you know they put us all out there  
19 when they picked us up from the airport. This friend of mine named Cantun, but I met  
20 him in Odessa, but he was in the Marine Corps too. He said, “Aguilera, you better watch  
21 it, man. This Marine Corps is ugly. They’re gonna scream and holler at you.” He said,  
22 “They’re gonna treat you like hell.” I said, “God damn, Jesse told me the same damn  
23 thing.” So here, a corporal came out there, “Alright, you goddamn maggots! Get your  
24 goddamned asses in line!” And all of this and screaming right at your face and stuff like  
25 this. I said, “Oh god damn, this guy isn’t even fooling around.” So, they put us on this  
26 bus, and they took us to San Diego. We all got off of the bus. They had two or four lines,  
27 I think it was, and they had the feet.

28 KC: The yellow footprints.

29 GA: Yeah. The footprints. They told us, “This is how you stand every day. Now,  
30 stand to attention!” They said, “Ladies, maggots,” and as I recall, every damn ugly word I  
31 can think of, “today you’re in the Marine Corps. You are in a world of shit.” He said, “I

1 am your father, your mother, your grandfather, your whole motherfucking kin full.” I was  
2 like, “What? These guys are talking things like this to us?” No one ever talked to me like  
3 that. I was like, “Wow.” And then he said, “Anyone of you who thinks your tough. You  
4 think you can jump and kick my ass, then jump over. If not,” he said, “but that’s where  
5 you’re gonna hang up.” And everybody stood there at attention, and then these guys with  
6 the long hair, you know the hippy style things. He said, “Who the fuck are you? Are you  
7 Jesus? Are you Jesus?” “No, sir!” “Damn right you aren’t Jesus!” They put us inside this  
8 building, and they cut our hair just as short as yours are. Then, we started walking into  
9 this hallway. They started throwing us the clothes. We took all our clothes off and put  
10 them in a bag, and then they shipped it home. They gave us our sea bag. We put all the  
11 stuff in there. Then, we go into the barracks. Oh man, drill instructors. Just as worse as  
12 the first man we saw that staff sergeant or whatever he was. And they put us in there and  
13 it was just cussing us and pushing us and kicking us. There was one sergeant, Nelson,  
14 he’s a black guy. And another who was Latino who was a platoon commander, I went up  
15 to Hernandez and I said, “Sir.” He said, “What you want? What you want maggot?” and  
16 stuff like that. I said, “Sir. I don’t know how to read and write, sir.” He said, “What?” I  
17 said, “I don’t know how to read or write, sir.” He said, “How come?” “Well, they never  
18 taught me how to read and write, sir.” He said, “Hey, Espido, come here! This goddamn  
19 private here, Aguilera, don’t know how to read or write.” He looked at me and said,  
20 “Well, I guess we’re gonna have to pill him like all muscle pounds. If he doesn’t know  
21 how to read and write, he’s gonna have hard trouble with these.” I looked at him and said,  
22 “Sir, I’ll do your best.” “Well, you better do your best or you’re not going to graduate.  
23 You’re going to stay here forever.” You know they give me all this—inside I’m like,  
24 “Okay, you son of a bitch. I’m gonna show you. I’m gonna show you who I am.” So, the  
25 next morning we got into boot camp, and they started telling us all this—how to stand at  
26 attention, how to salute, how to march, and stuff. I was with this other guy named  
27 Harkman. He’s a real good buddy of mine. We made good friends right there. So, they  
28 started taking us to classes. I didn’t know how to read or write, man, you know. And they  
29 show us the M-14 rifle. He’s taking it apart. He took it apart and put it together. “Sir.  
30 Mission accomplished.” “Aye, aye, sir.” Anyway, they checked my rifle, and I was doing  
31 great. And Harkman, some of the others couldn’t put it back together. Man, these guys

1 are real high school graduates and some of them had college. They couldn't put an M14  
2 back in there and I did all by myself—I mean, I did it fast. You know, I didn't know, but  
3 that was my gift. I could take things apart and put them back together just as easily as  
4 taking it apart. I told Harkman, "Hey Harkman," took my rifle apart, "Look at me." So,  
5 we started working on that, and he started putting his rifle together." And broke it up  
6 again. And then, the sergeant. He would always look at me. He always stood right next to  
7 me since day one. He looked at me and would put it together. They moved through the  
8 M60 machine gun, so we had to take it—the M60 machine gun has a pistol. If you don't  
9 put it right, it will just fire one time. You gotta cock it again. So, I took it all apart, and I  
10 saw a pistol in pieces everywhere. So, I put it back together again and I cocked it, and I  
11 said, "Sir, Private Guadalupe Aguilera, mission accomplished. Aye, aye, sir." Hernandez  
12 took pistol out, cock it, and pull. "Yeah, that sounds right. Now, it's okay." "What?" He  
13 called me a mess of things. "Aguilera don't know how to read and write. No, he can't do  
14 that. He took it all apart, got the blanket, and went like that on the gun. "Put it together!"  
15 And I say, "Sir, Private Aguilera, mission accomplished, aye, aye sir." He went out  
16 there—Hernandez went out to get the pistol, cocked it, and popped it and things. "He got  
17 it together," and the officer looked at me in the eyes and said, "God damn it." Kept on  
18 cussing, and he kept on walking. That man didn't like me for worth that day. This staff  
19 sergeant, Nelson, hated me because I didn't know how to read and write, and I could put  
20 weapon every they put in front of me—I'd tear it apart and put it all together faster than  
21 any man in there. He didn't like that. And Harkman, well you know, he learned how to  
22 do it too. I taught him how to do it. So, we're gonna have this written test.

23 KC: That's where they're gonna get you.

24 GA: Yeah. "Damn it," I said. "That bastard." I said, "Harkman, damn it, I'm  
25 gonna have a problem with this test. I ain't gonna pass it." He said, "You know what,  
26 Aguilera? You helped me, now I'm gonna help you." Okay, so I started to study. It was  
27 like twenty questions or whatever. How was a bullet wound—a head wound, you know, a  
28 chest wound, all this other stuff. A lot of the stuff we had there that we were studying. I  
29 went to the classes. Anyway, the day came. I studied with Harkman and he taught me. I  
30 went up there and they had the question, right? And then, they had the answers. I'm not  
31 sure if it numbers or letters. Multiple questions in there. The answers. And I'm looking at

1 them, and I read that thing as good as I could, and I had to read it twice and I marked.  
2 Then, I marked it up. There was about twenty of them, I think. Fifteen or twenty of them.  
3 Hochman put his and I put mine right behind him. Hernandez looked at me and said,  
4 “You’re done, Aguilera?” “Yes, sir.” They went to check, you know, how good we did.  
5 Hernandez came around, “What the hell is going on with you Aguilera. Don’t you know  
6 what I had—” and all of this and stuff. I said, “No, sir. That ain’t what I marked.” “Well,  
7 that’s what’s in here.” “No, sir.” I told him, I said, “I can tell you every answer that I  
8 marked.” He said, “What?” I said, “I can tell you every answer that I marked.” He had  
9 the paper like this, and I pulled the paper like that, and I said, “The first one was so and  
10 so. I remember every one of them I marked.” And he looked at me and said, “Well, you  
11 passed.” “Yes, sir.” “Well, who in the god damn hell did this?” I said, “I don’t know, sir.”  
12 He looked at me and said, “Yeah, I know who did it.” He went out there and he and  
13 Nelson got into it.

14 KC: So, Sergeant Nelson had changed your answers.

15 GA: Changed all of my answers, the bastard. And I passed. Oh, he was pissed off  
16 with my ass. Oh my god. He’d be watching out there one day, and I put my rifle on the  
17 left shoulder arms, and he ran up there and shot that rifle in my god damn ear. “You get  
18 that god damn rifle on your right. Are you stupid? God dammit you son of a bitch!”  
19 Ignorant or liferent or whatever the hell. He’d go out there and, “Give me god damn  
20 pushups,” and I was doing pushups and squats and all that. And he’d go, “Next time I tell  
21 your god damn port off you do it right!” And stuff like that. He’d punch me in the  
22 stomach or punch me in my jaw. Just pummeling me. One day, I don’t know, he hit this  
23 other private, and he went down on his knees. “No shit,” that was his word, “No shit, you  
24 god damn pisser.” I looked and I said, “Son of a bitch,” and he kept on. We were doing  
25 some kind of a drill—the drill that we were putting our weapons in together or  
26 something, and I heard like a little ring. You had to do everything perfect, right? So, we  
27 were doing it. Well, “You’re not doing it right, Aguilera!” “Yes, sir. I did.” “No, you  
28 didn’t! You’re going to question my goddamn word!” And shit like that. “You stupid son  
29 of a bitch,” and pow, hit me in the stomach. “You think you’re tough, don’t you,  
30 Aguilera?” I didn’t go down to my knees, and he punched me again, and I stood there,  
31 and he punched me again, I stood there. And the guy said, “Go down to your knees!”

1 Some of the guys in the back said, “Go down to your knees, Aguilera!” I didn’t go down  
2 on my knees. He punched me again, and again. “You think you’re tough?” I said, “Yes,  
3 sir.” “Oh yeah?” he grabbed me from the head and punching me on my jaw. “You think  
4 you’re tough?” “Yes, sir!” Pow, pow in my stomach. I don’t know how many times he hit  
5 me. It had to be as high as forty or fifty times in my stomach and my jaw. Out of the  
6 corner of my eye, I saw the platoon commander, Espido was his name. He was a gun  
7 sergeant, and he started walking toward us. He was going to hit me, and Espido grabbed  
8 him on that one and he said, “What the fuck are you doing to this man?” He said, “You’re  
9 here to train him, not to beat him up. Not to kill him, which is what you were trying to do.  
10 You stupid son of a—” you know. “Ah, Espido.” “Don’t you Espido me, you son of a  
11 bitch. Stand at attention. I ought to bust you down to a private, you son of a bitch.” Oh,  
12 he cussed him out in front of all of us. He said, “You get the hell out of here, now!”  
13 “Yes, sir.” He did. Came up to me and poked me in my stomach. He said, “Hurt,  
14 Aguilera?” I said, “No, sir.” Poked my jaw like that and said, “Hurts?” I said, “No, sir.”  
15 He says, “Aguilera, you’re not a very good liar.” I said, “No, sir. It doesn’t hurt,” and it  
16 didn’t hurt. I was so damn mad that it didn’t hurt. Now, the next day, well, it’s another  
17 different story. Next day my jaw was a little bit swollen. Purple. My stomach was purple.  
18 He said, “Do you want to go up to the doctors?” And I said, “No, sir. I’m okay, sir. I’m  
19 not hurt.” And I was. The next day I was. But anyway, we kept on going like that. So,  
20 every day he would make me do pushups. Slap me, kick me, shot that rifle in my ears.  
21 Doing all this other stuff. You know, he never stopped doing that to me. Not just only to  
22 me, but the other privates. I’m not the only one. Danzy was another guy that—in class he  
23 would fall asleep, and he was always jumping on him too. And then, they caught him  
24 smoking behind the restrooms. And oh man, they gave that guy all kinds of hell after that.  
25 I mean, I looked at him and I looked at myself and I said, “Man, they’re treating this guy  
26 the same way they treated me.” But what he did—Danzy was the kind of the guy that  
27 always did something wrong. He knew that it was wrong, but he’d go out and do it.  
28 That’s the one that we—everybody would take the blanket. You know, put the blanket on  
29 top of everybody.

30 KC: Oh right. Real blanket party, yeah.

1 GA: Yeah, blanket, there you go. Blanket party. So, I hit him. I hit him; I didn't  
2 him hard, but I still hit him. Anyway, at the end of boot camp on the rifle range just  
3 before they ended. I was shooting my M14 rifle at the targets perfectly. Nelson didn't like  
4 that. Like somebody kicked him in the ass or something; he didn't like to see that, to see  
5 what I was doing. The day after, we had to graduate. We had to qualify on the M14. I  
6 went up there and I, pow, fired my first round, pierced the target, that thing was about  
7 that far off the target. So, I reload, and pow, I got closer. Reload, and then I had to go  
8 down. This bastard went and—

9 KC: Changed your sights.

10 GA: My sights on that goddamn rifle to make me suck that bad because I didn't  
11 usually—it was him, the bastard. I got it all set, and then I qualified. I was not a  
12 sharpshooter. I could have qualified sharpshooter. Hernandez said, "What the hell is  
13 wrong with you, Aguilera?" I said, "Somebody changed my sights, sir. They're off." I  
14 shot four rounds before I got a round in the target. You know, I qualified. Oh, that pissed  
15 him off. God damn, that pissed me off. The last day of the quarter when we were going to  
16 graduate, we had to make a run. It's called the hike to the range, the rifle range, and this  
17 is an all-day event. I didn't know what it was, you know, what the hell is it. I'm gonna do  
18 it anyway. So, they took us out to eat. Went to the mess where we ate chow; we at  
19 breakfast and stuff, like really in the morning. We're talking about like 5 o'clock in the  
20 morning. Then we came back; we all got our backpacks and our full backpack, and  
21 everything. The rifle and everything. That's how the hike was gonna be. So, when I came  
22 back, everybody started putting their—the truck stopped, and we were gonna jump on the  
23 truck. I put my backpack, and the god damn thing was heavy. I mean, this backpack was  
24 heavy. "Put it on!" I said, "God damn, man." And I looked around and I said, "Well, I  
25 guess this is part of the training. If mine is heavy, so is everyone else's." So, we got in the  
26 truck and stuff like that, and we took off and we got out there. The whole division—the  
27 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Corps division was there. The first platoon took off, the second one, the third  
28 one, until they got to us. We were the last ones. SSG Hernandez came up and said,  
29 "Aguilera, don't let no one fall back. If they fall back, you go get them. Bring them back  
30 to the platoon. I don't care what you do. You kicked those bastards, you shove a rifle up  
31 their asses, I don't care, just bring them back." "Yes, sir." That was my orders. Okay,

1 here I am, with my backpack all running. Well, about an hour or a half or two, one guy  
2 fell back. Got my rifle and hit him here. Got him, pushed him, and got him back to the  
3 platoon. This other guy fell back, and I go up there and get them. Then, two fell back. I  
4 said, "Oh shit." Here I am, grabbing both of them and I'm pushing them and pushing  
5 them. "Aguilera! God damn it. Get your asses up there. God damn it!" And I put them  
6 back to the platoon. All day. That went on all day. What's his name? Washington. Black  
7 guy. He fell down two, maybe three times, and I went and got him. Pushed him out,  
8 cussed him out, and he was like, "I'm gonna kick your ass." And I said, "What the hell?  
9 Get up there, you son of a bitch." Anyway, one guy fell off and he passed out. I got him,  
10 picked him up, and put him on my shoulder, and here I am running with him. "Don't do  
11 that! Let him go!" So, I threw him, and pow, he fell down right on the ground, and I took  
12 off running. So, here I am running again, and these guys fell off. Pushed him. All day,  
13 man, that went on. And we had about, I would say, maybe a quarter of a mile or less than  
14 a quarter of a mile from the finish line. Ladder of the platoons—of all the platoons, the  
15 most they had in their platoon was about maybe eight or ten at the most. All the other  
16 ones had three, four, five, two. I was like, "God damn, all these guys are falling back."  
17 And you could see all these marines laying on the side of the road, sweating. They  
18 couldn't handle it. And here we are, of all the platoons out there. Hernandez saw that I  
19 finished with them. "Okay everybody, let's gather on the stairs." And we started singing  
20 the Marine Corps hymn. You know, all the way up to the finishing line. We passed the  
21 finishing line, and he said, "Platoon halt. Right face." And we right faced. He said,  
22 "Okay, at ease. Okay, men go out and yourself something to drink." At that moment, my  
23 legs started trembling, and my body was going like wobbly. Hernandez, he ran out and  
24 grabbed me by my shirt right here and my backpack. Put me down on the ground and my  
25 legs started cramping. "My legs hurt! My legs hurt!" A lot of the guys came out there,  
26 rubbing my legs. Massaging my legs, you know. And I was trembling. He said, "Bring  
27 me some water!" And they said, "I've got water here, sir!" He gave me some water. I  
28 took a drink and left me with my mouth open. I wanted more water, and he put it all over  
29 my body. He didn't have to put it all over my body. Hell, I was soaking wet with sweat.  
30 "I want me more water!" I said, "I've got more here." He opened the other canteen, and it  
31 was full. He said, "God damn it, Aguilera. Didn't you drink any water?" I said, "I didn't

1 have time, sir.” And I didn’t. I didn’t have no time to take a drink of water. I was pulling  
2 these guys back up there. Anyway, he sat there. In fact, finally, my legs start feeling  
3 better. The guys brought me—they were glasses as big—drinking water.

4 KC: About a quart of water, probably.

5 GA: Probably. Big glasses, man. And it was kool aid. Green kool aid. I  
6 swallowed one like it was nothing. I swallowed another, and another. I don’t know how  
7 many I drank. Four or five, maybe even more. I started feeling better. I said, “I feel okay,  
8 sir. I feel okay now.” He went up there. He took a sandbag out of my backpack. It was  
9 like maybe half a sandbag or three quarters of a little sandbag. Then, he went out there  
10 and pulled out another one. Two sandbags in my backpack. He asked, “Aguilera, who put  
11 these in there?” I said, “I don’t know, sir.” “Who put it in your backpack?” “I don’t  
12 know, sir.” I said, “It was like that when I came back from chow.” He said, “Well, I know  
13 who did it.” And by that time, here comes Nelson. Saw me laying down on the ground.  
14 He said, “Hah, no shit, Aguilera.” Oh man, I wanted to get up and jump on that bastard,  
15 and Hernandez got one of the sandbags and turned around and hit him right in the chest.  
16 His damned legs swing up in the air and pow, he fell down. Hernandez pulled a bayonet  
17 off my cartridge belt, jumped on him, and went, “You son of a bitch, you almost killed  
18 this man!” And he went like that with that guy’s grip. He was like three to four inches to  
19 stick this bayonet in his chest. And he’s going, “Son of a bitch, I’m going to kill you!” He  
20 was mad because of what he did to me. And Nelson’s going, “Stop. Stop.” Crying like a  
21 like girl, and it’s just like what? He got up and, “Get the hell out of here, you son of a  
22 bitch! I’ll kill you!” He got up and left. He didn’t even stop to take a shower. He went out  
23 to his car and took off and left. So, I finally got up and I said, “Sir, I can walk.” He  
24 looked at me and said, “You sure, Aguilera?” I said, “Yes, sir. I can walk, sir. Just let me  
25 walk around here a little bit and get my legs together, sir, and I can make it back.” About  
26 ten or twelve guys stayed right behind me and saw to it that I made it back. And they’re  
27 all laughing, “Did you see Nelson crying like a baby bitch?” And all of this, you know,  
28 they were making fun of him. So, finally I got up to the barracks. Took a shower, went  
29 out to eat. Came back. I was cleaning all of my brass and getting ready because we were  
30 gonna graduate the next day, and I finally made it. Man, everything. My head, my boots,  
31 all of my person, and you could see like a mirror. I got everything so perfect, and it was

1 like, “Yeah, man. I got it done. Got it done just right. I’m gonna graduate.” And my paco  
2 was cleaning it out—Espido our platoon commander hollered, “Aguilera, front and  
3 center!” So, I come out running, “Sir, Private Aguilera, front and center. Aye, aye, sir,”  
4 and I stood at attention. I was in my t-shirt and my drawers. He said, “How do you feel  
5 Aguilera?” “Feel okay, sir.” “Are you sure?” “Yes, sir.” “Do me ninety.” I used to do  
6 ninety push ups in one minute. That drill instructor loved to see that. I did ninety-one, and  
7 got up and said, “Sir, Private Aguilera, mission accomplished. Aye, aye, sir.” He looked  
8 at me and said, “You did ninety-one, Aguilera.” I said, “Yes, sir.” “So, I guess you’re  
9 feeling good?” “Yes, sir.” “Well, then get the hell out of here.” I ran about-face and took  
10 off. Next day, in the morning, again got up real early in the morning. They sent us out to  
11 eat chow again. Came back and when I got there everybody’s like, “Yeah, we’re gonna  
12 graduate! Aguilera, you made it! We’re all gonna graduate!” I went out there and my  
13 shirt was not there. It was that bastard.

14 KC: Nelson again?

15 GA: Nelson again. I told them guys, “You know what, man? If Nelson comes up  
16 to me and tells me ‘No shit, Aguilera’ I’m gonna jump on him and I’m not going to stop  
17 until the man ain’t breathing.” My intention was to fight him, not just to beat the hell out  
18 of him, but to kill him. That is how I hated that man at that moment, so much I hate him.  
19 I said, “Okay.” So, here we go. I was pissed off. My t-shirt, all of my clothes on, and I  
20 had my tie, and I stood at attention because they call us. They say, “2183 on the row!”  
21 We all hollered, “2183 on the row. Aye, aye sir!” They’d go out there in front of me.  
22 Hernandez went out there and looked at me and said, “What the hell is this shit,  
23 Aguilera? Where’s your shirt?” I said, “I don’t know, sir. Somebody stole it.” He said,  
24 “Nobody steals from the Marine Corps.” I said, “Well, they did to me, sir.” “So, I guess  
25 you ain’t gonna graduate?” I said, “I guess not, sir.” I was pissed off. I was mad and I  
26 don’t hide my anger. And here comes Nelson, came out of there, and he said, “No shit,  
27 Aguilera.” And I was gonna run for him, but right in front of me, “Stand back. Stand  
28 back, Aguilera. Get back in formation.” Oh man, I was pissed off. Oh man, I was so god  
29 damn angry. I wanted to kill this bastard. He came out there, “Well, no shit, Aguilera.”  
30 When he said that, I just wanted to—and Hernandez is out there looking at me like, “You  
31 better not.” Anyway, he pulled out this backpack a shirt. First rank. Graduated PFC out of

1 boot camp. "Yeah, Aguilera!" I get all the shit. I looked at him and I said, "You bastard."  
2 My anger went all the way down to my toes.

3 KC: Take your time.

4 GA: His punishment was to dress me in front of the whole platoon. Put my shirt  
5 on. Tied it up. Put it all perfectly. My tie. My hat. Salute me. Then he said,  
6 "Congratulations, Aguilera." I said, "Thank you, sir." "Now, get back in formation." And  
7 they called Huerst out to the front of the platoon, and he said, "The only reason that  
8 Aguilera will not dress up with the dress blues and be the honor man of the platoon is  
9 because we don't have the time to do that." Huerst was the last man that fell back in the  
10 brunt on the way to the back. They let him fall back. He was the honor man of the  
11 platoon, so he graduated as the honor man of the platoon. Now, if they would have had  
12 the time to do the dress blues, I would have wound up being the honor man of the  
13 platoon, but they didn't have the time. It's alright. I graduated. I proved to them son of a  
14 bitches that I could make it in the Marine Corps, not knowing how to read, but I could go  
15 through all the crap that they gave me, and I did it. I showed them.

16 KC: How'd you feel about that? Pretty good, huh?

17 GA: Feel damn good. Then they send me to Infantry Training Corps. More  
18 classes and climbing those hills out there. They called the one the smokey. Real high hill.

19 KC: Is that at Camp Pendleton?

20 GA: Camp Pendleton. Then, they send me to the machine gun range because in  
21 boot camp you fire all the weapons all the way up to bazookas. When they put me on the  
22 M60 machine gun, they had these targets on the other side of the hill and I was firing at  
23 them. Fifty-five gallon barrels that look like an inch or maybe half an inch tall. They gave  
24 me the M60 machine gun, and I said, "Wow." I looked at it and I picked up the rear. I'm  
25 trying to put it on. I aim and I hit every one of them twice with a hundred round barrel,  
26 and them guys out there are going, "Ahh! Did you see that guy?" Hernandez said, "What  
27 the hell is going on?" They said, "He hit every damn thing!" And there was, I think, it  
28 was a major and a colonel. They went out there too and they said, "What happened?" "He  
29 hit everything, sir. He didn't miss one round." "What?" "He hit all the targets." Target  
30 was set up like in a T. Upside down T. And then, they had three in like a triangle. On the  
31 right and the left of the triangle. Three barrels up there on each side. And then, that

1 officer, either the major or the colonel said, “Well, give him another hundred rounds.”  
2 So, I get another hundred rounds. Hernandez went out there and said, “Aguilera, can you  
3 hit everything? Can you do it again?” I said, “Yeah, I can. Yes, sir.” Went out there and  
4 cocked my M60 machine gun. Pop, pop, pop; I hit all of them again, and there they are—  
5 the two officers are out there screaming and hollering, “Damn this guy’s good!” They  
6 said, “God damn, marine, you’re good out there!” I shot all of them again twice again.  
7 That officer came out there and came up to me and said, “What’s your name?” And I  
8 salute him and everything and I said, “Private Aguilera, sir.” “Well, Aguilera, you’re  
9 going to machine gun school. Hernandez, you better make god damn sure that this marine  
10 goes off to machine gun school.” Okay, so I went out there. In infantry corps, they send  
11 me to the machine gun school. I did all the infantry training out there, and then I went out  
12 there to the machine gun school. Heurst, that went—

13 KC: The honors graduate, yeah.

14 GA: He went to boot camp through, and he was there too. Aldorado was my A  
15 gunner. We were a team, right? Just me and him. Aldorado, first he was gonna try to  
16 qualify with an M60. They took him and they put this other guy out there that had  
17 flunked four times. They put him out there and they said, “You flunk one more time,  
18 you’re not gonna graduate.” So, they put him out there, and I said, “What’s wrong man?”  
19 He said, “Hey, Aguilera, I don’t know shit about this damn M60 machine gun.” When  
20 you qualified for the M60 machine guns, they got little squares. Different directions, you  
21 know? Left and right, up and down, and all this stuff. Then they put this—I can’t  
22 remember the name of it, like a pin. This put this on the machine gun, and you can cock  
23 it. You can go up, down, left, right on that thing. I knew how to run that thing. I learned it  
24 real quick. I told him, “All you gotta do is just the pull the trigger, okay?” He said,  
25 “Okay,” and he went out there, and that did everything. Everywhere he hit it. So, he  
26 qualified. Broke the record in machine gun school. I said, “Well, I did it, he can do it  
27 too.” I went out there, and pow pow, and he missed. He moved it up and down and shoot  
28 three rounds. I got it back to work. I qualified myself. Had to do it all by myself, and you  
29 only got certain time to do it. At the end of it I’d lift that thing up and I’d just shoot. I  
30 qualified. This guy was—they told, “Well, you broke the record.” They brought him up  
31 there and the officers, I think it was a colonel or a major or something like that. It was a

1 lieutenant colonel or something. Anyway, they told him, “Marine, you have just broken  
2 the record at machine gun school that has not been broken since 1945.” He stood there  
3 and said, “Sir, I don’t deserve that, sir.” He said, “What do you mean? You just broke the  
4 record.” He said, “No, sir. I didn’t break the record. Aguilera did because I didn’t do  
5 nothing, sir. I just pulled the trigger.” And he told him, “I don’t know nothing about these  
6 machine guns. Aguilera did everything.” “Well, somebody deserves this.” “It’s Aguilera,  
7 sir.” “You’re turning this down?” “Yes, sir because I don’t deserve it, and I refuse to  
8 have it. It’s Aguilera.” So, they brought me back over. The officer said, “You said you  
9 broke the record, Aguilera?” “Yes, sir.” “You qualified?” “Yes, sir. I did. He said when  
10 he came to be my A gunner, he didn’t know what to do.” He said, “How can you prove  
11 that?” There’s a corporal and he said, “Okay, Corporal, is that right?” The corporal said,  
12 “Yeah.” I told him, “Corporal knows how to do all this. He saw everything, he knows  
13 what I did and everything.” Corporal said, “Yes, sir. He qualified himself. If it hadn’t  
14 been for Aguilera—for him, out there, Aguilera would have been the one breaking the  
15 record.” He looked at me and said—and I told him, “I can you take you out there to  
16 machine gun school, so you can break the record too, sir.” He looked at me and said,  
17 “You that good?” I said, “Yes, sir.” So, I get this man here and have him promote him as  
18 lance corporal. He had broken the record at machine gun school. After that my records  
19 were lost. I don’t know whether they did have me as the number one machine gunner or  
20 not in the Marine Corps. After that they sent me home for twenty days, and I went back  
21 to Camp Pendleton. They told me, “You can’t go nowhere. We’re going out Vietnam.”  
22 “Okay, sir.”

23 KC: You didn’t have any idea that this was coming?

24 GA: No. I knew I was going to Vietnam, but I didn’t know I was gonna go to  
25 Vietnam right there and then.

26 KC: Yeah. What did it make you feel like? What kind of effect does this have on  
27 you? Knowing that you’re going to be going to war?

28 GA: You know what, like I told you earlier, I was not afraid. I didn’t know  
29 nothing about war. It was like people get killed; you’re gonna kill people, but at the  
30 moment—I didn’t feel nothing. It was just, “Alright, I’m gonna go to war. I’ll be back in

1 a year. I'll get out of there." I didn't feel no fear. Nothing. It just felt like going back to  
2 boot camp.

3 KC: What about your family? What was their reaction?

4 GA: Well, they were sad. They saw on the news how many marines were killed  
5 or how many of the guys from the Army were killed. They were real sad. You know, my  
6 sister, and my dad, and my brothers. They all said, "Hey, man, take care of yourself."  
7 "Ah, don't worry, man. I'll make it." They were worried about that. So, the day that they  
8 took us out—like this evening, and then in the morning they put us on a bus, and they  
9 took us out to Harlem. And then, from Harlem they put us in this airplane. Continental, I  
10 think it was.

11 KC: Had you ever been on an airplane before?

12 GA: The only time I had been in an airplane was when the service went up and I  
13 got drafted. First time I got in an airplane. So, from there they took us out to Alaska.

14 KC: Okay, so you took the northern route up there.

15 GA: Yeah. Took us to Alaska and refueled there. Then they told us it's warm  
16 here in Alaska. It was warm and stuff like that. It was thirty-five degrees. "Y'all wanna  
17 go out?" I went outside and then I said I'm going right back in the airplane. Hell, it's cold  
18 out there. I didn't have no jacket or nothing. Some of the guys went out there and drank a  
19 beer and came back. You know, Sergeants and you know, guys who had already gone to  
20 Vietnam once. But we went back in there and I was sitting there with Segan. He's another  
21 guy that went to boot camp with me. Segan was sad, you know. Didn't want to talk. I  
22 said, "What's wrong, Segan?" He said, "Man, we're going to war. We might get killed." I  
23 looked at him and said, "Man, don't worry about that, man." "How come you're not  
24 worried about that, Aguilera? Are you coldhearted or what?" I said, "No, man. I just put  
25 that behind me. Whatever I'm gonna see out there, I'm gonna see. If I get my leg blown  
26 off or my head blown off or an arm or whatever, it's what's going to happen." He got up  
27 and left. He didn't want to sit with me no more after I said this. Oh my god, this guy. I  
28 mean, this guy was nervous. And then, from there they took us to Okinawa. We got there.  
29 They called it the rock. We got out there and they put us all in a line and started giving  
30 charts. There's a chart that says GGA, and those are my initials. You know, Guadalupe  
31 Garcia Aguilera. He says, "GGA." "Yes, sir." "Well, I guess you're gonna get your GGA

1 shot.” Those arms—they put something liquid in my mouth and up my butt. They put  
2 everything. Got little goons. They told us if one of the guys would start going down like  
3 convulsions or cramping or whatever, to grab him and put his head between his legs and  
4 he’ll breath and get over it. So, okay, some of the guys did that, but a lot of the guys  
5 didn’t do it. So, here I am out there, and they said, “If you want a drink or beer, go to that  
6 club. There were two Chinese girls out there dancing with the guys. I got a beer, and I  
7 only drank one drink, and I said, “Hey, do you want this beer?” He said, “No, I don’t feel  
8 like drinking.” I said, “I’m gonna go out there and go to sleep. Take a nap.” He said,  
9 “Okay, Aguilera. I’ll be out there in a little while.” So, I went out there and I got in my  
10 sleeping bag out there and I slept maybe ten minutes, and they started calling names. The  
11 first one they called was mine. They said, “Aguilera!” “Yes, sir.” “Let’s go.” I got up.  
12 “Get all your stuff.” I get all my stuff. We got on the airplane again. Here we go, going to  
13 Vietnam. We landed. Got there in that camp—it’s called Anwar. I got there and they  
14 landed. We got off the airplane running. Got them their fuel fast and as soon as we all go  
15 off that, it took off.

16 KC: What were your first impressions of Vietnam? What was the atmosphere  
17 like? What was the climate like?

18 GA: Well, when I first got in there it looked real nice. I didn’t think too much  
19 about it. I walked in there and they told us—we went to get our rifles and my weapons  
20 and all these grenades, all the stuff. Went to supply and got all of that stuff. Tell us to go  
21 out and eat chow, so we go out and eat chow. The mess hall was out there and it’s a big  
22 mess hall. You know, everything. The tents and all the stuff in there. Kind of strange, but  
23 not really that bad. You didn’t look for a bed in that place there. Everybody is talking  
24 around out there. You know, joking around. The guys were in there, and we’re eating hot  
25 chow out there. There’s this Mexican guy there who’s a cook. He sat down at the table I  
26 was in. He said, “Where you come from, man?” I said, “Texas.” He said, “What part?”  
27 He’s talking in Spanish. And I told him, “Lubbock, Texas.” He said, “Lubbock, Texas?”  
28 “Yes.” “You know Jerry Lucero?” I said, “Yes, he’s a good friend of mine.” He said,  
29 “Oh man, he got sent over here. He was stationed here too.” I said, “No kidding?” He  
30 said, “Yeah.” And he said, “What company you in, man?” And I said, “Echo 2-5.” And  
31 he said, “Oh shit.” And I looked him and said alright god damn it—you know, I’ve been

1 hearing this bull crap in boot camp, before I went into boot camp and stuff like that. I  
2 said, “You pulling my leg?” He said, “Nah, man, I’m not pulling your leg. That company  
3 you’re in is the worst company you can ever get in here.” I said, “Ah, man.” He said,  
4 “Yeah. Every month one guy or two guys are getting hit by napalm.” I said, “Napalm?”  
5 He said, “Yeah, they’re getting hit by napalm. You’re gonna see the enemy like I’m  
6 looking at you.” You know, I didn’t quite believe him, but at the same time I said,  
7 “Maybe this guy is right.” I said, “Well, if I’m here, I’m here. What the hell am I gonna  
8 do?” So, I ate my chow and they brought me a steak. Oh man, that was a good steak. So,  
9 I went out there back to my barracks and they said, “Okay, all of you men. Aguilera,” and  
10 started calling names. “Echo 2-5, come and get over here,” and all that stuff. They took  
11 us on these helicopters. Took us to Da Nang, and when I got off in Da Nang, now that is  
12 when it hit.

13 KC: Tell me about that. What were your initial impressions about Da Nang?

14 GA: When I walked in there in Da Nang there were tanks. Every man that was in  
15 there, you couldn’t see not one man smiling or nothing. They’re all full of mud and dirty.  
16 Everybody was mad. It looked like I walked into another world. I said, “What the hell?  
17 Oh shit. What the hell have we gotten into here now?” Now, that was when I realized  
18 how bad that place was. I mean, Vietnam was not a joyful little place to be like it was in  
19 like Anglo. Oh man, I looked at all these guys and they’re all dirty. Grunts, you know,  
20 infantry guys. Some are sitting there with a long sad face. Tired and worn down. I said,  
21 “God damn.” You know, it put the scare in you. I mean, I don’t care how pissed off or  
22 how mad you are or how mean you are or how good looking you are, you’re going to get  
23 scared. I don’t give a damn what anybody says, you get scared. I mean, the fears gonna  
24 come for you. I said, “Oh man,” and then they holler, “How many of you guys are  
25 machine gunners.” “What’s your name?” “Aguilera.” He looked at me and said, “You’re  
26 the one.” I said, “I’m the one what?” He said, “You’re the one that broke the record?” I  
27 said, “Yes.” “I want you in my truck.” I jump out there and go on the M60 machine gun  
28 and looking at all this stuff. All the supplies that they had. They had about three or four  
29 trucks. I picked up that damn gun out there, explosives, and you know, supplies. So, they  
30 took us from there—from Da Nang straight to Khe Sanh.

1 KC: What's the timeframe here? This is what? The spring of 1968? Of March?  
2 April?

3 GA: 1968, yeah. It was either the end of August or the first of September.

4 KC: Okay, so it's a little later then.

5 GA: Yeah. And I said, "Oh God." When they sent me to Khe Sanh, I got off of  
6 there and all these guys were in backpacks. I asked some of the guys, "What the hell is  
7 this shit on their backs? What is written?" And the guys say, "Oh, it says caution." Living  
8 in Khe Sanh (inaudible). You know, everyone of the guys had that stuff written on their  
9 back. You know, I learned how to read that part. And them guys were dirty, and here I  
10 am all cleaned up and stuff like that. One of the guys said, "Just got out of boot?" I said,  
11 "Yeah." He said, "Well, take a good look at all these guys. In a week, you're gonna be  
12 like them." And he laughed and started walking away. I laughed too, and inside of me I  
13 said, "Yeah, you sorry asshole." We unloaded all the stuff there at Khe Sanh, and then  
14 they said, "This is where you're gonna go." I looked over at that hill. Khe Sanh is right  
15 here, and that hill is right there. Hill 181 south, they called it. I looked at it and I said,  
16 "Oh shit." So, they took us out there, and this damn hill didn't look that bad. I put my  
17 M16 rifle like this and I kept two boxes of ammo and I walked all the way up to the hill.  
18 Man, I was in good shape. Got up there and unloaded. That idiot, that Yankee—who I  
19 called Yankee, Larson. He set up his bunker and he came out and walked up to me and  
20 looked at me. I put the boxes down and the captain said, "Private, what's your rank?" I  
21 said, "PFC, sir." "What's your name?" "Aguilera, sir." That idiot, you know that  
22 goddamn Yankee, he came out there and said, "I want that son of a bitch on my fire  
23 team." He said, "God damn it. He looks like he's a tough son of a bitch. Let me tell you  
24 something, you son of a bitch." I said, "I came here either to kill or get killed. You better  
25 not fuck with me, man." That's the way I talked to him. I talked the same way he talked  
26 to me. He said, "My name is Larson." I said, "My name is Aguilera." He said, "Well,  
27 you're going to be here with me." I put my rifle on fully automatic—my M16, and the  
28 captain said to Larson, "Don't give shit to this man. He's got his rifle on fully automatic  
29 and he's gonna blow your ass away." "Really?" "Oh no, no, no. Hey man, I'm just joking  
30 around, man. No, no, no." I said, "Hold on," I put my rifle back in lock, and I was going  
31 to go back to the hill and go back and get some more ammo. The captain said, "Where

1 are you going, Aguilera?” “To go get some more supplies.” He said, “No, no, no. You’ve  
2 got your check done already.” He put all the guys on the hill like in a chain, you know,  
3 put all the stuff up there, and stayed on the hill for about two weeks. When the enemy hit  
4 that hill there were nineteen marines killed out. Twenty-eight—and I’m one of them.

5 KC: This was before you got there?

6 GA: Just before. The day before I got there. That night. When they flew me into  
7 Vietnam, they hit them. I got there, and sure enough the enemy will come in at night. Not  
8 too much action after that, but you could see the blood and this stuff up there still. Body  
9 bags.

10 KC: What kind of effect does that have on you? You’re new in-country, what  
11 was it like for you to see these things?

12 GA: It put the scare in me. Right there, I knew that day, this is serious, man. This  
13 is the real thing. This is how people get killed. You look at one guy and you say, “Well,  
14 this is how I’m gonna get shot. This is how I’m gonna get killed.” The fuse in my head  
15 just bloop, lighted up, and I said, “Oh man, hell.” After that, after what I saw, you  
16 couldn’t sneak up on me. I don’t give a damn if I’m asleep, don’t sneak up on me like  
17 that because I can sense you. You change. You change from being a kid from the  
18 neighborhood up here on the block, messing around with your friends, or going to school  
19 or whatever. From that you change completely around to the different or the opposite.  
20 You’re no longer going to stand there and take crap from no one. You know your  
21 officers, you know your captains and lieutenants, and all these people you know. If they  
22 jump on your ass for something that is stupid, you’re going to jump back on them and tell  
23 them, “Hey, you know what? We’re the better people now. I’m not going to salute you  
24 because I know damn well if I salute you, it’s not going to blow your head off. I’m not  
25 going to disobey you, but I’m not going to take your crap. I respect every officer, but up  
26 to a certain point, we’re in the battlefield. We need to treat each other like humans. You  
27 know, we all had respect—we all joke around, but then you jump on a man in the  
28 battlefield and chew his ass out because you wind up with a bullet behind your head. But  
29 anyhow, I changed. I changed from that kid into a man; into a man that didn’t take no  
30 crap. Into a man that like it or not, you’re going to have to kill. And when you killed your  
31 first man, it’s like you don’t want to do it. Guilty of killing; of taking a life. And you

1 know what? After that, the next one is easier, and easier, and easier. Pretty soon just,  
2 pow, pow, pow. It's like going out to the deer hunt and shooting a deer. It got to the point  
3 where I didn't really have no more feelings for that man in front of me because he was  
4 doing the same thing to me. He's trying to kill me, and I'm going to kill him first. And  
5 pretty soon, it gets easier. It gets to the point where I'm not as anxious to go out and meet  
6 the enemy and kill them. Once you start fighting, all bets are off and you start killing  
7 them, and killing them, and killing them. All the captain once told me is—holler at me  
8 shooting at the enemy, "Cease fire," and they turn around and start running. Pow, pow,  
9 pow. "Cease fire! God damn it, Aguilera. Cease fire! Don't you know what cease fire is?"  
10 "Yes, sir." "You were supposed to stop!" I looked at him and said, "Captain, you can kill  
11 them son of a bitches a whole lot better if you shoot them in the back than if you shoot  
12 them in the front." He looked at me and said, "How's that?" "Because when they turn  
13 their back to you, they're not shooting at you." It's war. Why let that man get away so he  
14 can come back tomorrow and shoot you and kill you? You know, to me it was war. Kill  
15 him before he kills you. They told us, "Don't fire upon the enemy until you're fired  
16 upon." To hell with it. If I see that bastard with an AK-47 pointed at me, I'm going to  
17 blow him away. I was not going to fight with the law book in one hand and my rifle in  
18 the other. No, no, no, I didn't believe in that. I'll shoot you before you shoot me and  
19 that's it. This is the kind of man you turn into in war. You know, no sympathy for none of  
20 them. The enemy, no. Anyway, we went out there and after experiencing hill 181 south,  
21 they took us out of there.

22 KC: How long were you up there?

23 GA: I was wounded on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968. About two months.

24 KC: Okay, about two months. Well, tell me about this first two months. What are  
25 you doing to get acclimated? What are you doing to get used to what's going on there?  
26 Are you guys going out on patrols? Search and destroy? What are you doing when you  
27 get there?

28 GA: After the hill, you know 181, they start taking us into Ho Chi Minh Trail  
29 inside of Laos.

30 KC: Before we get there, I'd like for you to talk to me about your early  
31 experiences there outside of Khe Sanh. Again, are you going out on patrols?

1 GA: No, on that hill we just stood there and took it. We did not let the enemy  
2 take that hill.

3 KC: So, your job is to stay there and maintain possession of the hill.

4 GA: Stay there and hold possession of that hill.

5 KC: Okay, so you're not moving around.

6 GA: You were there taking care of that hill and killing the enemy if they came to  
7 us.

8 KC: What was the first time you saw the enemy in combat?

9 GA: Well, there at that hill. Not one that came at me to shoot me, but I saw the  
10 enemy crawling closer to the hill, and it was in the evening. I would say about two  
11 o'clock or three o'clock in the morning. I saw him, and I said, "Captain! It's the enemy!"  
12 I holler, "Enemy!" And everybody went down to the bunkers. He said, "What  
13 happened?" I said, "There he is." He said, "I don't see nothing." He got the binoculars  
14 and said, "I can't see him." I went like that, moving his binoculars a little bit down and he  
15 said, "God damn, I saw him. What the hell do I need this shit for? I've got Aguilera god  
16 damn it." I could see them, crawling out there. Like an insect crawling on the ground.  
17 They called an air strike. 500-pound bomb they dropped on that—on the people out there  
18 down there. I was standing there, and I was watching that, and I saw these pieces of scrap  
19 metal. Black spots coming toward us, and I said, "Incoming! Captain, get down!" As  
20 soon as the captain jumped that piece of metal went (makes rolling sound), and I went out  
21 there and said, "Are you okay, Captain?" "Did you hear that?" "Yes, sir, I heard it and I  
22 saw it." He said, "How the hell did you see it like that, Aguilera?" I can see good. Back  
23 then I could see real well. I mean, hey, I could see the enemy a mile away. Anything out  
24 there that moved, I knew it was an enemy, a north Viet Cong. Anyway, after that I stood  
25 there just waiting for the enemy. We threw grenades at night and fired a couple of rounds.  
26 Then finally, the other platoon—the other company that was gonna take over that hill  
27 came. We got out of there just as they went out there. And as we were getting into the  
28 helicopters, they started shooting at us. We got out and left, and all started laughing. We  
29 shot back and we started laughing. Went back to the base. Took a shower. Met my  
30 friends. My buddies, Morales, Hernandez, Castiera, Heurst, Sagon, Chonce; you know,  
31 all these other guys. They said, "Aguilera, I heard that you got into a fight." I said,

1 “Yeah, they hit us.” They said, “How many men got killed?” I said, “Nineteen.” Twenty-  
2 three of them were wounded up there. “No shit.” I said, “Yeah.” So, they call us in into a  
3 barrel ceremony. The company commander out there started—first we had a prayer, and  
4 then he started talking—saying the names. He started with—there was five of them, just  
5 wait. The other guy said, “Hey, Aguilera, there’s nineteen.” Nineteen men got killed on  
6 that hill. Nineteen men. We did the ceremony and another prayer twenty-one gun salute,  
7 and they play the trumpet. Every man walked out of there with a long sad face. I stood  
8 there and I was thinking, “God damn, next time it will be me. It will be them calling my  
9 name.” So, they told us we’re gonna stay here for the next three days. Don’t ever believe  
10 that because the next day in the morning at four o’clock they woke us up. We had hot  
11 chow. They sent us up to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We got up there at the Ho Chi Minh  
12 Trail and we saw that river. That’s when I first heard that saying, “Don’t ask, and don’t  
13 tell.” Don’t ask where you’re at, and don’t tell where you’re at. I saw that river. Went  
14 into Laos. Plugging holes into the chopper. I saw the enemy. Choppers went out there in  
15 the air and you could see the enemy. It looked like they were dropping us in the middle of  
16 an ant pack. You know how ants crawl up in an ant pack? It looked like this. All out there  
17 shooting. Jumped out of the chopper and started fighting the enemy. You hear the  
18 chopper fighting back at the enemy. He knocked two or three of them down, and then all  
19 of a sudden, they stop, and they start running. Here comes an airstrike. Napalm. When I  
20 first saw that napalm drop out there, what that guy at the mess hall told me came back to  
21 my head. I saw the napalm for the first time and covered up the terrain. Man, it’s  
22 unbelievable. Burning the guys, shoot them and kill them. Started going into the enemy,  
23 and pretty soon the enemy took off and left. Eighteen guys were killed. Fifteen are Viet  
24 Cong. They pick us up and drop us on another ant pile and got into it again. We spend  
25 thirty days on the Ho Chi Minh Trail inside of Laos, then they pick us up and brought us  
26 back home. Back to the base. Take a shower, eat hot chow. They said, “Mail call! Y’all  
27 guys can relax. You’ve got four days.” “Really? Yeah, okay.” General Lewis—I don’t  
28 know if Walker was his last name. Two star. They call us in, and they told us, “Go out to  
29 the rifle range out there. Everybody goes out and shoot the rifles.” They said, “We’ve got  
30 a general,” and they called his name and stuff like that. “We need to put on a show for the  
31 general.” The general was there to find out who—he knew that I was there. Wanted to put

1 on a show. So, Larson said, “Okay, which one of you two is good on the machine gun?”  
2 So, he said, “Aguilera.” He said, “Aguilera broke the record in machine gun school.”  
3 “You broke the record?” “Yeah.” “Well, shit, you damn man. God damn.” God damn  
4 Yankee—we always called them like that. Got on that tripod and everything, and we put  
5 that thing for the elevation and range and stuff like that. “Do you know how to work  
6 this?” I said, “Yeah.” “Put everything in there.” So, they had those targets where there  
7 were artillery shelves—the boxes where the artillery goes. They put four of them, and I  
8 got mine. Cut it in half and I took that thing off here. On both of my targets, I got a little  
9 creek out there. Then, I turned back, and the other guys were cheering and making all this  
10 god damn noise. I turned around and started shooting a round burst, and I kiss it out there.  
11 Knock the other one, and then I knock the other one. I told what we call the hit round.  
12 “Hit round! Tell him something!” And hit round used to imitate cartoonist. He got up and  
13 imitated that Porky Pig, where he says, “That’s all folks,” and everybody started  
14 laughing. And here comes the general. He’s a little bit taller than me, like maybe five-  
15 eight, if I had to guess. He’s not a very tall man. Came out there, and I said, “Good  
16 morning, General.” He looked at me and said, “Marine, that weapon’s as big as you.” I  
17 said, “Just about sir. Just about.” He said, “How would you like to be my personal  
18 machine gunner?” And I’m thinking, “How can I tell this general no?” He said, “There’s  
19 a future for you in the Marine Corps with me.” And I looked at him and I said, “General,  
20 how will I be serving my country better, sir? Being with you or the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines?” And he  
21 smiled and said, “Well, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines.” I said, “Wow, I got him.” And I said, “Well, I  
22 guess I’ll stay with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, sir.” And the captain looked at me and he just  
23 laughed. He knew that I had tricked the general. He said, “You’re a hell of a man,  
24 Aguilera. I wish we had more marines like you because we could win this war in one  
25 week or one day.” And I smiled and I said, “Well, sir, we’re doing a good job.” He said,  
26 “You want to be in this hell hole that you’re in?” I said, “Sir, look at all of Da Nang.” He  
27 turned and looked at all of Da Nang and said—I was not about to betray my men. Turn a  
28 coward and walk away from what they were walking into. They were my brothers, I was  
29 not gonna leave them. That’s war. I was gonna stay there. Wherever they fell, I was  
30 gonna fight. Wherever they got trapped or wounded, I was gonna do the same thing.  
31 Wherever they got killed, I was gonna get killed. I was not the man that I was when we

1 first went into those battlefields. I changed. So, that general turned around, I salute him,  
2 turn around. I think that that gave him, I don't know if it did or not, the title of being the  
3 number one machine gunner in the Marine Corps. I don't know if that—he looked at him,  
4 that's the one he went with the general. The pilots in the helicopters, they didn't want me  
5 to go with him. They wanted me to be with them; be their guard. But they sat there with  
6 their M60 machine gun in those helicopters, and they all witness it. It was something that  
7 they had never seen before. When it was time, they took us up to the battlefields. To these  
8 embeds. There was one time when we were on our way to Vietnam, and there were, I  
9 don't know, eight, nine, or ten guys. The officers had all these guys kneeling down  
10 aiming at the chopper. They were waiting for us to land, and they were going to hit us,  
11 and they were far from us. I saw them, and I got that M60 machine gun, and I fired on  
12 them. Right at the target. When I got through firing, all that target—all the dirt jumps up  
13 when you're unloading all those rounds out there, and there was not one man standing,  
14 not even the officer. I shot all of them. I don't know if I killed them or wounded them or  
15 whatever. And that gunner of the helicopter said, "Did y'all see that? Did you see that?"  
16 He said, "Who the hell is that man out there?" They were loving this. "That's Aguilera."  
17 "Hey, Aguilera, you got them good!" I said, "Yeah, I got them good." He said, "I want  
18 you in my chopper!" Every time they put us in those choppers, "Come here, man, get in  
19 my chopper." This is what I did. Other times when they were going at the chopper and  
20 they'd get close, guys are there shooting at us. I saw them. Hollering, "You got them,  
21 Aguilera! You got that motherfucker!" I was doing things in that chopper that those guys  
22 wanted me to be their gunner, and I told them, "Hey man, I can't do that, man." All the  
23 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, man, that's part of my family. God damn, I got hit. I'll never forget that  
24 wound because the day before—oh there's another thing. I keep forgetting. There was a  
25 captain, and it was out there close to Cambodia. The borderlines of Cambodia, and there  
26 was a hill out there and all the guys laying down. And I looked at him and I said, "Oh  
27 man, these guys, man." We're hearing the North Viet Cong are real happy in there, and  
28 their army had a lot of problems. So, I got up to the hill and looking around. I said,  
29 "Enemy, I'm going to be the first one to holler enemy. I turn around to my left and here's  
30 this man walking. Larson nearly hit all talking up there, and he went right through them.  
31 Didn't even see him. I mean, it felt kind of strange here that this man was walking and

1 started climbing that hill. When a man climbs a hill your kind of like make a little—this  
2 guy was making no strength or whatever. He just walked there, like it was nothing. I  
3 looked out there and he walked out to my—the wall was heavy, and he was about that  
4 close to me, and I noticed he had that thing that—the catholic priests.

5 KC: Now, where was this by the way?

6 GA: That was close to Cambodia down south. Somewhere close to Cambodia.

7 KC: And when was this?

8 GA: Don't tell me that. I don't know whether it was Saturday, or Sunday, or  
9 Monday.

10 KC: No, that's fine.

11 GA: Because I didn't know what day it was or what time it was. All I know is  
12 that I was out there. When he climbed up, I looked at him. He didn't have no, what you  
13 may call it, no bulletproof—I mean, no—

14 KC: Flap jacket?

15 GA: No. He had no backpack. No cartridge belt. No backpack, no nothing. He  
16 didn't have no material that you needed in the battlefields. None whatsoever. Not even  
17 canteens or nothing. He was just walking out there. And I looked at him and said, "Good  
18 morning, sir." We're in heavy enemy territory, and I wanted to know where his weapon  
19 was. He looked at me, stopped, and went like this.

20 KC: Reached inside of his—

21 GA: Reached inside his sack right there and he pulled out the bible, and he said,  
22 "This is my weapon." And we were like, "Wow, this has got to be the bravest man in the  
23 Marine Corps in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps." And he went like this and started walking. Now,  
24 you can not get a bible, put it in there like this, and walk. I said to myself, "Well, this  
25 man is a catholic priest, but I'm gonna keep my eye on him because bullets don't care  
26 who you are." Them bullets, they come at you and they're gonna hit you period. Kept on  
27 looking at this man and started walking down the hill on the other side of the hill. Kept  
28 on looking at him like that, and he was no farther than maybe to that wall; fifteen to  
29 twenty feet from me when he started going down. Larson called me, "Hey wetback!" You  
30 know that stuff. Those damn Yankees. He said something, and I answered back, and I  
31 turned around. I went like that. Disappeared. And I kept on looking trying to find him.

1 Walked that hill, and I asked some of the guys out there on the other side of the hill.  
2 “Have you seen a Catholic priest pass through here?” And they said, “There’s no  
3 Catholic priest in here.” And I went like, “Wow. No, that’s alright.” And I kept on still  
4 wondering where did this man go. I just saw him, he just talked to me, showed me the  
5 bible, and disappeared. Nowhere to be found. Another came out to me and said, “What’s  
6 wrong Aguilera? Did you see something? What’s wrong Aguilera?” He said, “You look  
7 like you’re afraid or are you scared? What’s wrong?” I said, “No, I’m just trying to find  
8 this Catholic priest, but they’re saying there’s no Catholic priest, but that’s alright.”  
9 “Aguilera, what’s wrong?” I said, “That’s alright. Forget it.” Just you know, drop off  
10 asking what’s wrong with me. I said to myself, “What the hell is going on? What did I  
11 just—” You know, it hit me in a way that it changed me a lot too. I stood there, I don’t  
12 give a damn about the enemy, I’m not afraid of the enemy killing me, all of that got in a  
13 way that I was not afraid of the enemy. Didn’t care about the enemy, but I respect the  
14 enemy. I started changing. In the battlefields at night when we stayed out there at the Ho  
15 Chi Minh Trail, I could sense the enemy coming close to us. Go out there and pull a  
16 grenade and throw a grenade. “Fire in the hole!” Pow. Next day in the morning, Larson is  
17 throwing a grenade too. Get out there, one or two more fatalities of Viet Cong. He sensed  
18 that. You know, all of this sensing the enemy; I could sense the enemy coming while they  
19 were there. Every time I told Larson, “Larson, hey man, be careful. They’re here. I can  
20 sense the enemy.” And Larson looks at me and said, “God damn it, Aguilera, I hate it  
21 when you say that. I hate it when you say that.” And sure, enough they were there, or  
22 they were there, and they left. I remember this young little boy, Vietnamese boy. Came  
23 over—Shen or something like that. Anyway, that little kid, everywhere I went, every  
24 village, he was there. Always looked at me and he ran up to me and he’d say, “Hey,  
25 Marine number one! Marine number one!” He’d come up to me and give me a big ole’  
26 hug. “You got cigarettes?” “Yeah, I got cigarettes.” I didn’t smoke, so I had a lot of  
27 cigarettes. They were cigarettes from the C-rations. Little packs of four, so I gave him  
28 one. He stands there smoking, short and crosses his legs like a big ole’ man, you know.  
29 Kind of making me laugh at him. And I ask him, “Is the enemy around?” “Yeah.” Are  
30 they here?” And he goes, “No. They’re out there looking at you.” I said, “Okay.” I gave  
31 him a can of fruit, and go out there and tell the captain, “hey, the enemy is out there in the

1 jungles looking at us.” “Okay, how do you know that?” I said, “My informer right here.  
2 My number one informer.” And I asked him, “How come you don’t like the Viet Cong?”  
3 “They killed my mama and my daddy.” It was him, his sister, and his grandmother. I  
4 said, “Okay.” He hated the Viet Cong and what they did to his family. So, he was my  
5 informer. And that son of a gun was in every village. I went out there and he was there.  
6 And that little boy could see me from a mile away; he recognized me and went, “Hey,  
7 marine number one!” One day he went out there and hugged me and all of a sudden, pow  
8 pow pow. I ran over and put him in a ditch and started firing. The Viet Cong got up and  
9 started shooting at us and they took off running. They didn’t stay to fight. They would  
10 shoot you and run. If they wounded you or killed you, fine. I said, “Oh shit.” Constantly,  
11 that was happening to us. One day we went into this village, and there was a little boy.  
12 All the kids are running around, scared. We went into this village and started checking  
13 the village for any Viet Cong there. You know, check for weapons. I saw this little baby.  
14 He was laying down on one of the tables made out of bamboo, and this little baby had his  
15 head back like that. Eyes were rolled back—you could see the white of his eyes. Mouth  
16 open. Skinny. His legs, I could put these two fingers together and they were bigger than  
17 his legs. Thicker than his legs, I mean that. Skin and bones. And his stomach was bloated  
18 up. I saw him, and said this little baby is dead. His stomach was bloated up and I picked  
19 him up like this and the baby went—I got scared. This baby is still alive. And I thought  
20 he was dead. I mean, the condition this baby was in, man, was a kind I had never seen in  
21 my life. I had never seen a baby like that. This little mama-san came out there, came out  
22 and said, “Baby-san, baby-san,” so I gave him the little baby, and that little boy grabbed  
23 that little girl by the neck and put his legs around her waist. And I said, “God,” and here  
24 comes this idiot out there. I won’t say his name. “You leave those two.” And boy, I could  
25 just pick up my anger from the tip of my toes all the way to the top of my hair. I turned  
26 around and put the rifle in his mouth. I told him, I said, “Man, if you ever say another  
27 word about this baby, I will blow your fucking head off.” He said, “What’s wrong,  
28 Aguilera? Okay, man, okay.” I told him, “This baby doesn’t have nothing to do with the  
29 war.” This baby was already fighting a war of his own to survive. I said, “Talk to him  
30 like that.” “Okay, okay.” “Aguilera, we need to move out.” “Okay, just say let’s move  
31 out and I’m ready to move out, but you don’t have to insult this little baby.” Ever since

1 then I started changing. You know, the enemy I hated. I mean, I fought them, and I killed  
2 them. I climbed a hill one day and killed two more Viet Cong right in front of my captain  
3 and my lieutenant. They had us pinned down and there was about like four guys or five  
4 guys that were already wounded. He got up and just fired down, everybody went down. A  
5 few guys fired back, but still he had the advantage. I rushed straight to him, and he  
6 missed me twice, so I started crawling up the hill. He threw a grenade. Exploded from  
7 here to that chair. About three feet, and all I could smell was that gunpowder. This other  
8 Mexican guy came out there and said, “Aguilera! I’ll pick you up, Aguilera!” You know,  
9 talking Spanish. “Let’s go out there and let’s kick this asshole! Vamos!” He didn’t go  
10 out there. Here comes another grenade. “Grenade!” and I pushed him. Grenade went right  
11 through him and exploded right next to his leg. He went rolling down that hill. He said,  
12 “Live or die, Aguilera. Live or die.” I was a few steps forward and the hill was like—the  
13 hill and then it had a little spout right there where he put some dirt in there. So, I couldn’t  
14 hardly see him in that position where I was. I lift up my rifle, my M16 rifle, and I empty  
15 the—well, I left one round in the magazine. Larson got up. His M16 machine gun  
16 jammed. He never cleaned the damn thing, and that pissed me off. He said, ‘He’s still  
17 moving!’ I said, “All I got is one round!” “That’s all I need!” I threw him the rifle. He  
18 shot him. Grenade thrown in there. Boom. I went out there and I grabbed that man like  
19 that. I took him out. And there was another one behind him, and I didn’t see him, and his  
20 rifle fell right in front of me like right there. And I could see the barrel open. I looked at  
21 the barrel and it had exploded again. I said, “Wait a minute, these three or four times and  
22 I’m still here.” My mind was working too damn fast. I turned this guy lose and I went  
23 like this, and I moved the rifle out of the way. I grabbed him, I pull him out, and then I  
24 went back to the other one and pulled him out. The other one had a bullet on his eye and  
25 face and ear, you know, where I shot him. I was going through the things they had. We  
26 called them half assed backpacks. You know, they’re just a blanket, maybe as big or  
27 smaller than this table. They fold it up and they put it in the backpack. The captain came  
28 by and said, “God damn it, Aguilera! Next time I tell you to get your ass back, you get  
29 your ass back, god damn you! You’re going to get killed.” I looked at him and I said,  
30 “You ignorant stupid son of a bitch. That man was shooting our men. Knocking guys  
31 down. He got pretty close to knocking me down. Hell, if I was gonna get shot and killed,

1 hell, I'd rather just go up there, face to face and kill him." That's what I did. And he  
2 chewed my ear off because I went up there and killed these two guys. That pissed me off.  
3 So, I was going through their things. I found a map, and that map looked exactly like  
4 (inaudible). The place that we were stationed. It had the village here, the bridge, and the  
5 camp. I showed him, and said, "Sir, there's a map here, sir, that looks familiar." He  
6 grabbed the map—he chewed my ass and he grabbed it like that. He went, "Ah, uh," he  
7 didn't know what else to say, you know. He put it in his bullet proof vest, and he said,  
8 "Well, uh, Aguilera, uh, keep up the good work, Aguilera." Everybody started laughing.  
9 It was funny, you know, but it wasn't funny to me. I risked my life going out there and  
10 shooting the bastards and killing them and brought them down so that we could take over  
11 the hill, and we did. We took over the hill. We went inside the village, and we burned the  
12 village because there was the North Viet Cong center. The lieutenant went out there and  
13 told Larson, "You got wounded, Larson?" He had a little scratch. He said, "I think you  
14 can get a purple heart, Larson." Larson said, "What the hell are you talking about? Get  
15 your god damn stupid ass out here. I don't want no god damn purple heart. Why don't  
16 you go out there and talk to Aguilera?" You know, about what I did. He didn't even  
17 bother talking to me about anything of what I did. In other words, never recognized for  
18 what I did.

19 KC: Why do you think that was?

20 GA: Discrimination. A lot of us Mexican and black guys never got their—I  
21 mean, never were recognized for what they did. I was never recognized. My purple heart,  
22 I got it last year. I brought it here. This is when they finally approved my purple heart.  
23 One week before Thanksgiving, they gave it to me, last year. Ain't that something?

24 KC: And you're giving me the form that your received?

25 GA: That's the form I received. And the medals. I got it at the house.

26 KC: Yeah, the day here is October 29, 2014.

27 GA: Yeah, that's when they finally recognized it and they approved it, and then  
28 they sent it to me. I received it a week before Thanksgiving in November of last year.  
29 Ain't that something? Then, there was another—we went to—again, they took us out to  
30 Ho Chi Minh Trail, but this time they took us right to the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). We  
31 passed Khe Sanh, and then there was a DMZ. I saw the DMZ and there was a railroad

1 track in there, and right here was the bridge. The United States mounted that bridge so  
2 they could stop—but right next to that, before you get to that, you could see through—the  
3 water was kind of low that day, you could see that a bridge was built under the water. I  
4 told Larson, “Hey, Larson, look. There’s a bridge under the water.” You could see the  
5 tracks. So, they put us into this hill because they saw a bunch of North Viet Cong’s  
6 taking weapons. So, we sat on this hill and we’re gonna ambush them. Had the low M60  
7 machine guns ready. Just wipe them out. We stood there thirty minutes. Forty-five  
8 minutes. An hour. An hour and a half. I said, “Larson, tell the captain to put some guys  
9 up there behind that hill. We might be hit from the back.” And Larson said, “God damn  
10 it, Aguilera, you’re right.” He ran out there. He said, “Captain, Aguilera said to put some  
11 guys out there in the back.” I said, “They might hit us from the back, sir.” The captain  
12 went out and said, “Okay, you, and you, and you, go out there in the back.” He turned  
13 around and looked at me and I was looking back at him. Here is the most illiteracy man  
14 in the whole damn 5<sup>th</sup> Marines and I could figure out what the hell north Viet Cong—you  
15 know, what they did or wanted to do. They went out there in the back and they didn’t see  
16 nothing, but they stood there waiting in case they climbed that hill from behind us. That  
17 hill was all dried up. There was one spot on that hill that you could see grass. I took a  
18 picture there, this one. But way into that hill, that mountain, some guys out there, and  
19 sure enough, they came back. “Sir, there’s a big ole’ tunnel.” The demolition guys went  
20 in there, inside that place, and put some timed bombs in there. You know, at a certain  
21 time they told us, “Look out there at twelve o’clock.” From there, they sent us back to  
22 base, and we were watching a movie there. At twelve we turned around to the northwest  
23 standing there, and sure enough I could hear them twice. We failed to see the explosion.  
24 After about twenty or thirty seconds we heard boom and boom. Well, half of that hill  
25 went down. I said, “Wow, man. It took that long to get the damn north to get off the hill.”  
26 Okay, good. Back to close to Cambodia. They sent us, they sent lima, fox trot, and  
27 Charlie Company. They lay guns from my sides. All of them huey choppers and stuff, a  
28 bunch of them. One of them was a beautiful, shiniest damn helicopter you could ever see.  
29 All the guys and all the guys on that, they just, man.

30 KC: Looking sharp.

1           GA: Oh man, you talking about looking pretty? They were not going to war.  
2 They were going to a god damn reunion or a damn party or something. Anyway, the  
3 captain came out there and he said, “Aguilera.” “Yes, sir.” “Don’t go close to him.” I  
4 looked at him and said, “Why not, sir?” “Because they look pretty.” Asshole. We all  
5 started laughing. He was standing out there, and I was looking out there at that hill.  
6 Everybody’s just—there was nobody there. No Viet Cong were going back inside of  
7 Cambodia. Standing there, all the guys are standing there, and I said, “What?” I saw a  
8 north Viet Cong. There was a bunker there. It had a big wall. He got up like that and went  
9 like this. I said, “Enemy! Get down!” I wanted a sniper that I called—I called him. He  
10 was a hillbilly. A true breed hillbilly. The most wonderful and beautiful person you could  
11 ever meet. I went to find him so he could shoot those bastards, but he was further down. I  
12 can tell you a story about him, the day I killed those two north Viet Cong. The guys, the  
13 north Viet Cong, got up and they all started looking around. They all started running to  
14 this hill. I opened up and couldn’t hit them because they had that little trail that they  
15 could escape. They took off and everybody started shooting. They send guys from fox  
16 trot or lima company, they’re sent out there, and that’s a radio station. They go right into  
17 that, get into contact with the North. So, they went in there and they destroyed everything  
18 in there. Blow it up. And just took off and left. We all got up and Charlie company stayed  
19 there. C company stayed there. Then, they made a big ole’ fuss about that. I saw that spot,  
20 the same thing, in a movie, but I can’t remember what movie it was. Anyway, I saw that  
21 on TV. I looked and said, “Hey, I was there! I was there. I was the man that saw those  
22 Viet Cong get up and looking at us and they took off running.” Anyway, they call in an  
23 airstrike. Another incident, another place back out there close to Cambodia. They had  
24 leveled down that place out there, it looked like it was burned by napalm or the agent  
25 orange or whatever. It was over. Nothing but just dirt, man. Everything was destroyed.  
26 All the jungle was destroyed. They took us out there and they had those—the media was  
27 there. Cameras and stuff like that, and they told us to walk into this place, climbing up the  
28 hill and they were gonna take pictures. I’m out there with my M16 machine gun, well  
29 they caught me. Me took a picture of me walking up that hill. When I was in the hospital,  
30 I saw that, I saw myself on the TV. They made a big fuss over that, and you know what?  
31 It was over nothing.

1 KC: It was the radio relay station.

2 GA: There you go. Making a little show, trying to show the people, I guess, that  
3 were doing good out there. Anyway, talking about that hillbilly, Wild Bill. Before I  
4 climbed that hill and I killed those two Viet Cong, I saw a sniper. Ran out there and got  
5 behind a bush, and I said, "Wild Bill!" I was gonna shoot him with an M16 machine gun,  
6 and I said, "Nah, I'm gonna wait." I said, "Wild Bill, come here!" He talked real funny.  
7 You know, how hillbillies talked. God damn, we all would laugh at him because of the  
8 way he talked. I told him, "Right behind that bush out there." He said, "Yeah, okay."  
9 "There's a sniper in there, man. It's your privilege to kill him." "Yeah, man." "Kill the  
10 other sniper." He said, "Yeah. He's there, Aguilera?" "Yeah, man he's there." He got up  
11 and went like this. "See him?" "Yes." He got the rifle and said, "He make a move one  
12 more time and I'll get him, okay?" Everybody starts laughing. He went like this, and he  
13 went pow. "Did you get him?" "No, I don't know." I said, "Did you feel anything in your  
14 hand? Your fingers?" He said, "No." So, we move into that hill, into that, and we had to  
15 climb that hill and I killed those two more Viet Cong, and we took over that hill. That  
16 sniper was there laying on his back. Right back laying on top of his right leg. Eyes open.  
17 That man hit him right there, right between his eyes. All the back of his head was blown  
18 off. We took the rifle. He had a sword—a samurai sword. I took that sword and I kept it  
19 and took it away from him. Anyway, went out there and we took the north Viet Cong out  
20 of their village. Some were killed and some were—you know, stuff like that. We got out  
21 of there. Went out to eat chow with Wild Bill. "Hey, Wild Bill." He said, "What? Did I  
22 hit him?" I told him, "You hit him right there." "No shit." "Yeah." That guy, when we  
23 graduated, he was in a platoon. He broke the record in that rifle range, and he became a  
24 sniper, and the number one sniper in that class. Okay, so we both got together and he's  
25 talking about—he said, "Are you the one that broke the record in machine gun school?"  
26 "Yeah." "God damn it, Aguilera, I did the same thing in the rifle range." So, we became  
27 good buddies. That was my number one sniper. They had a guy from Hawaii, and he was  
28 good, but he was not as good as this guy was. He could get that rifle—you could be  
29 running, and he'd blow you away as quickly as day. Anyway, so then they took us out to  
30 that place where I told you they took a picture, and it was nothing but a purple gun that  
31 day. That's what I call it, purple gun, you know that term? Trying to show that we've

1 done something good out there and there was nothing there. I mean, it was just a joke.  
2 Finally, I came up to that point when I got wounded. I'll never forget that. I'll never  
3 forget that. I'll keep it with me for the rest of my life.

4 KC: Take me through this story. We won't be able to go too long today, but I  
5 would like for you to tell me about this. This episode where you were severely wounded.

6 GA: Okay. Well, just before—the day before we fought the enemy, and then we  
7 jumped. The next day in the morning the captain told us, “Come on, Aguilera, we need to  
8 get the enemy out of that village.” Search and destroy, that was our mission in Vietnam.  
9 Search and destroy. So, we went into this village. Just before we got close to the village, I  
10 heard a voice and it came out of nowhere, but it was like right here in front of me. It said,  
11 “Aguilera, mira arriba,” which is, “Aguilera, look up.” And I went like—you know, it  
12 startled me. You know, who said that? Looked back and all around me. It wasn't  
13 Albarada, and it wasn't hit round. Hit round don't speak one damn word of Spanish. I  
14 kept on walking, and I heard it again, “Aguilera, mira arriba. Aguilera, look up.” And I  
15 went like this. 250-pound bombs coming right straight at me. It looked like it would hit  
16 me right on the head. That's when I hollered, “Incoming! Get the so and so out of the  
17 way! Incoming! Airstrike! Get the hell out of the way man!” They kept on looking at the  
18 bombs. Then, they went over my head I would about, I would as be high as a telephone  
19 pole, maybe a little bit higher. It went like that about 200 feet maybe from me, and they  
20 buried themselves on the ground, and I threw myself on the ground and they exploded.  
21 This side of my left ear, I couldn't hear nothing. And I got up and I saw what—I said,  
22 “Run, run!” I started running. Man, we were running full blast, and all of a sudden, it's  
23 like why did I stop? I didn't want to stop; I want to continue going. I stopped and I turned  
24 around. Anderson was behind me. I could see him calling me out like, “Where do I go?” I  
25 looked at him and I hollered back to him, “Go to your right!” I was pointing with my left  
26 hand like that, you know, pointing for him to go to his right. The other men were out  
27 there on the right side of him, and I kept on pointing at him and hollering at him. I said,  
28 “(inaudible).” And he froze on me. God, boy it pissed me off. I took off running. Got him  
29 and I told him, “Run you son of a—” you know, I called him all kinds of dirty words, and  
30 I stepped on this barbed wire fences that wasn't there and pushed him. He took off  
31 running and I took off running took. Well, as I was running, I could feel the vibration of

1 the fighter jet in my jet. I couldn't hear nothing, but I could feel the vibrations in my  
2 chest. I fell down, and as soon as I hit that ground that ball of fire fell on top of me. Oh  
3 man, so got up. I started running and tried to take everything off of me. As I was running,  
4 I had my bulletproof vest like that, and I felt like somebody had shot me or somebody hit  
5 me in the chest, or something hit me in the chest. I guess the bullets out of my bandolier  
6 had because I had 200 rounds for the M60 guns. Two bandoliers of the M16 rifle.  
7 Seventeen magazines. A hundred rounds for the 45. Two smoke bombs. Claymore mine.  
8 Two sticks of C4 dynamite. And I had two grenades in my bulletproof vest and two in my  
9 cartridge belt. If one of them would have exploded, especially my claymore mine, I  
10 wouldn't be here. They wouldn't find me nowhere around there. Anyway, I ran, and I  
11 saw Albarada, and I threw myself on the ground. I said, "Amigo! Put me out, Albarada!"  
12 I started throwing the dirt on me like crazy, man.

13 KC: Because you're on fire.

14 GA: I was in a ball of fire. Throwing all the stuff all over me. We finally got the  
15 napalm out. I turn around and I saw the M60 machine guns. "Get the M60 machine gun,  
16 man. They're hitting us. They're shooting at us, man. Get it!" He ran out there and got it.  
17 We ran to the village, and they were already exchanging fire out there. I said, "Give me  
18 that M60 machine gun, god damn it, I'm gonna shoot this son of a so and so airplane  
19 down. I'm gonna kill that bastard."

20 KC: You mentioned that this napalm. A round of napalm too close.

21 GA: Too damn close that it covered me up with it, and I ran through that fire  
22 about forty feet maybe. I don't know. I ran through it for quite a while when I finally got  
23 out of the fire, you know, because you can't breathe inside that fire. I got out, and I  
24 breathed, and I was running like crazy. When I finally got into that village, I wanted to  
25 shoot that airplane. Ah man, I tried to grab that M60 machine gun, and I couldn't grab it.  
26 What the hell is going on? I looked at my hand. All the skin on my right hand was at the  
27 tip of my fingers, and it was drying up and it was like tightening up my hand. I couldn't  
28 move it; it was like that. I couldn't open my hand or move my fingers because all the skin  
29 was gone. And then, I started looking at my arms. Looked at this one. Looked at my right  
30 arm and it's black and white. Look at my left one, the same thing, black and white

1 colored. I looked at my chest and legs, all burned too. There were water bags in my chest  
2 and my legs. That's when I finally figured out that I was in bad shape.

3 KC: Was there pain at this point?

4 GA: Huh?

5 KC: Was there any pain at this point?

6 GA: No. It's funny, I didn't feel no pain. I had too much anger. I was so damn  
7 mad. I really didn't give a damn no more. I didn't know if I was gonna die, I was just  
8 pissed off. And everything was getting black. Albarada grabbed me by the few hairs I had  
9 on my head, checked them out like that. He said, "Aguilera, don't go to sleep, Aguilera,  
10 because you're gonna die." I looked at him and I said, "Ha, they got me. Albarada, they  
11 got me," and I again I started getting—everything's getting black again. I saw tears in his  
12 eyes, and he said, "Aguilera, don't go to sleep, Aguilera, because you're gonna die, man.  
13 I need you here with me, man. What am I gonna do without you?" I looked at him and I  
14 said, "They got me, Albarada. They got me." Anderson came. "Ayy Aguilera, oh man—"   
15 he looked at me, Albarada looked at him and said, "Get the hell out of here, you son of a  
16 bitch, this is your fault!" And I looked at Albarada and I said, "No man, that wasn't his  
17 fault. It's my fault." I'm the one who went and got him. You know, I would have done  
18 that for Albarada or any man, I don't care who it was. That lieutenant came by there,  
19 talking his bullshit and he looked at me and said, "Oh no." You know, he said, "Medic!"  
20 By the time, Albarada was already coming in there. He gave me a shot and laid me down  
21 on the ground. Put that poncho on there and laid me down on there. And I still wasn't  
22 hurt; the pain wasn't there. I don't know five or ten minutes later, I heard that .50 caliber  
23 bullets. The .50-caliber machine gun. They stopped out there and they got me and put me  
24 in there. George went in there and sat next to me. He got hit in the leg. The gunner said,  
25 "Who's this guy?" "It's Aguilera." "What? This is Aguilera? Them son of a bitches just  
26 shot the best machine gunner we've got in the damn Marine Corps!" He got on that—  
27 "Hey you shitbirds—" you know, the guys who were the pilots. Cussed them out. I took a  
28 nap in the helicopter. I could see all my men out there. They're all looking at me; they're  
29 all standing out there, so many thousands of feet or hundreds of feet out there in the air. It  
30 was real cold out there. It was getting kind of cool, and it felt real good. Then, they  
31 dropped me down in Da Nang. Once they threw me out of that helicopter, set me in that

1 jeep, that pain was terrible. I hollered, I screamed, I cussed. I remember there was a  
2 Catholic priest out there praying for me and everybody in there. They started putting like  
3 a white cream. It was kind of cold. And I told them—I said, “What happened?” “Ah,  
4 those sons of a bitches dropped the napalm—” no, not the napalm, “the heat taps on their  
5 asses.” He said, “Heat taps?” And George told him, “Napalm, we nicknamed it heat  
6 taps.” He said, “Okay.” I told him, “God damn it, take me back to the battlefields, god  
7 damn it. I don’t want to die here. I want to die in the battlefields, god damn it. Take me  
8 back you son of a bitch.” Cussing him out. I mean, I’m talking in Spanish. I cussed him  
9 out. They started putting on that stuff, and then they put the IVs in my feet.

10 KC: And why did they put that the IV in your feet?

11 GA: Because that was the only place that wasn’t burned. All the rest of my body  
12 was burned. They couldn’t do nothing about it. It’s first, second, and third-degree burns.  
13 This nurse came out there and brought a syringe. Man, I don’t know how—put this  
14 medicine in that syringe. I was cussing and hollering and all this bull crap, and all of a  
15 sudden, I started feeling—you know, all that stuff that she’s putting in my body, was  
16 going into my body. And all of a sudden everything went black. I woke up in the morning  
17 the next day, and out of a little crack, a little hole like this, I could see through it, and I  
18 said, “Damn, I’m in a body bag.” I said, “God damn it, they got me for dead already.”  
19 Then, out comes these two Vietnamese. I said, “Oh shit, I’m a prisoner. I am a prisoner.”  
20 I made a note that I would never be a prisoner. That I was gonna die fighting. They’d  
21 have to kill me because I was gonna fight all the way through my death. All of a sudden,  
22 I saw these two white guys coming out there and I looked at them. One was blonde and  
23 the other one had kind of like brownish-reddish hair or something like that, and they were  
24 talking. “Is he dead?” “I don’t know because he ain’t moving either. He ain’t hollering or  
25 screaming no more.” They look at the IV and said, “Well, the IV is working.” They other  
26 said, “No, he could be dead and the IV could still be working.” So, they got this little  
27 mirror and put it in my mouth, and I didn’t breathe. I didn’t breathe and he said, “Man,  
28 this man is dead.” The other said, “Well, let me look at his pupils.” He went to that little  
29 crack, that little beady hole that I was looking—that I could see through. He went in there  
30 like this, and I said, “HEY!” “AHH!” This guy jumped back and said, “That son of a  
31 bitch is alive!” And the other guy was laughing. He was on his knees laughing.

1 KC: You talk about being able to see out of a hole, I assume that you're  
2 bandaged?

3 GA: Yeah, I was.

4 KC: Gauze.

5 GA: I was bandaged all the way from the head to my feet, and it was bandaged  
6 up to here like that. I looked like a damn burrito, or a damn taco, or tamale, or whatever. I  
7 was all bandaged up. He said, "Aguilera, you hollered and screamed all night. Till one  
8 o'clock in the morning," but I don't remember that. I got there around somewhere  
9 between nine or ten o'clock in the morning, and he said that I hollered until one o'clock  
10 in the morning. I don't remember that. I don't remember—when they put that shot in  
11 there—when they put that medicine in that IV, after it hit me, I don't remember nothing.  
12 He said, "You cussed in, I don't know how many languages, but you cussed." I said,  
13 "Yeah, I have a feeling I'd be doing some of that cussing." They're all laughing. He said,  
14 "Well, today you're gonna go to Yokohama, Japan."

15 KC: How much time did you spend at the hospital in Da Nang?

16 GA: Just overnight. The day that I was there, overnight, and the next day. When I  
17 woke up, about in an hour or two hours they took me.

18 KC: So, obviously the burns were so bad they had to get you out of country and  
19 get you into a stable hospital.

20 GA: To take care of me.

21 KC: To deal with the burns. To deal with the burns here at Okinawa, yeah.

22 GA: Yokohama.

23 KC: Yokohama, I'm sorry. Yes.

24 GA: And then, they took me out there and they put me in the choppers, and I'm  
25 looking at the choppers and I went like this. It reminded me of that movie *M.A.S.H.* You  
26 know, how they put those guys on the helicopter with like a mirror or a glass.

27 KC: Mm-hmm.

28 GA: Yep. Same thing that they're doing there. Same helicopter situation. So, they  
29 took me out there, and they unloaded me out there and took me inside that ward. And I  
30 got in there, and man, they were sitting like those seats are. That's the way the guys—

31 KC: There's a lot of them in a row.

1           GA: Yeah. Like a can of sardines, man. So, they put me in there. I don't know  
2 how many days I stayed there. Fifteen days, eighteen days, I don't know how many days.  
3 All I know is that one day I woke up and the sun was like this. I woke up and I looked  
4 around and it was just me and this other guy across the hall. I looked around and the guy,  
5 and I said, "We're all going, man." I said, "Man, all these guys are all going home." It's  
6 either the loved ones of your family, your wife, or brothers, or whatever. It's just me and  
7 this guy, and we're gonna leave pretty soon. As soon as I said that to myself, just talking  
8 to myself, this guy started going into convulsions. I said, "Doc! Doc!" He said, "What?"  
9 They went out there and they saw this guy. The nurses start giving—pumping his heart,  
10 CPR, and all of this stuff. Got this little thing, you know, to blow air. As this happened, I  
11 said to myself—well, when they did all of that, pumping his heart, and then they gave  
12 him a shot. I'd never seen that before. It goes down like this. It didn't work. They brought  
13 this thing that gave him electric shocks. Came back, left, shocked him again. And  
14 shocked him again. About the third or fourth time, he didn't respond. Put the blanket on  
15 him and walked away. I said to myself, "Oh my god, this guy is dead. All these other  
16 guys didn't go home, they all died." I said, "My god, if this is my destiny, this is what  
17 god put in front of me, I'm gonna face my death the same way I faced life." I leave  
18 everything at the hands of God. Okay, so it went on, as the day went on and on. I don't  
19 know how many days after that. Two, three, four days. It was early in the morning  
20 because I could hear the creek for your meal. You always see them making noise like  
21 (inaudible). And the nurse, this Mexican guy, said, "Hey, Aguilera," talking in Spanish  
22 said, "Breakfast, man." I said, "Hey, man. Yeah, come bring me some burritos, churros,  
23 and tortillas," and all of that, you know. He said, "Nah, but they're gonna bring you  
24 something else." And all of a sudden, I wanted to throw up. I told him, "Hey, man. Bring  
25 me something. I'm gonna throw up." Put this little pan or whatever in there, and I threw  
26 up. Not very much, but I threw up in there. I didn't have very much in my stomach inside  
27 of me. He came and took it away, and I felt good. I felt relaxed and everything, and all of  
28 a sudden, I started going like—you feel the pain. Pain in your body, like trembling. Like  
29 when you've got a fever trembling. And all of a sudden, that nurse saw me, and he called  
30 the doctors, and all of a sudden, the pain went away and the last thing I said—I don't  
31 know if I said it out loud, but the last thing I remember saying was, "I feel great. Leave

1 me alone. I feel great.” And then all of a sudden, I couldn’t talk. I couldn’t hear nothing,  
2 but I could see. So, here all these nurses and doctors came out there working on me, and  
3 everything started getting blurry, blurry, blurry, and then it got dark. Just as dark as  
4 nightfall. Real black dark, and here I am inside that darkness looking to my left and to my  
5 right. I couldn’t see nothing. I said, “You know, what? This ain’t for me. This ain’t for  
6 me. There’s something out there better than this and I’m gonna wait until it comes and  
7 picks me up.” And sure enough, it did. This little light came from a far away distance and  
8 it stopped, and it luminated one of the brightest—one of the most beautiful lights you  
9 could ever see, and he grabbed me. He grabbed me in, and I went inside this light. I felt  
10 like a newborn child and God had come and picked me up and taken me into his  
11 kingdom. That was the light of life. The light of the—the everlasting light of life. After  
12 that, who I saw in that, what I said, what was said to me, I don’t have no knowledge of  
13 that. All I know is that when I woke up, I saw that nurse, that Mexican nurse up there.  
14 That poor man, he was up there fixing the medicine for the other patients, and I hollered  
15 at him, “Hey! Where’s my breakfast?” And this man jumped up, peels going everywhere,  
16 and I said, “What the hell is wrong with this guy?” You know, I didn’t what was going  
17 on. I hollered at him again. I said, “Hey, where’s my breakfast?” And he just stood there.  
18 He just stood there looking at me. I’ve never seen a man that scared in the battlefields  
19 like I saw this man. I don’t know how many times I hollered at him, “Hey, I want my  
20 breakfast.” Finally, he decided to come towards me, and he looked like somebody was  
21 pushing him and he didn’t want to get close to me. He finally reached me, and he talked  
22 to me in Spanish, he said, “Aguilera, (Spanish).” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “(Spanish).”

23 KC: And what does that mean?

24 GA: I wanted my breakfast. You didn’t bring me my breakfast. And he said,  
25 “Aguilera, you don’t know what I’m saying to you. You don’t what you’re talking about,  
26 Aguilera. (Spanish).” I said, “(Spanish).” “I don’t know if I want to tell you this or not,  
27 but you died, Aguilera.” And he said, “You had convulsions, Aguilera. (Spanish),” which  
28 is, “You had many convulsions. Your heart completely stopped.” And he said,  
29 “(Spanish).” He said, “Your brain. Your brain had barely come back.” He said, “If you  
30 believe in God, Aguilera, and you believe in miracles, this is one.” He said, “I don’t how  
31 or why you came back on the third day.” And that is right there, when he said, that’s

1 where I didn't believe this man. Then he said, "I'm gonna call the doctor." Punched this  
2 button up there and said, "Hey, Doc, Aguilera needs to talk to you." Doctor answers and  
3 says, "Yeah, right. Think I'm gonna fall for that?" He said, "No, Aguilera wants to talk to  
4 you." He said, "Yeah, that will be a good one for the day." Then I answered and I said,  
5 "Hey, where's my breakfast? God damn it, I want my breakfast." I had a big mouth, I  
6 ain't gonna lie to you. And he said, "What!" He came out there with a clipboard and this  
7 pen and a pen in the other one and looked at me the same way that Mexican nurse looked  
8 at me. He came back real scared. He got the clipboard like that, and he reached out and  
9 touched me and he smiled. He said, "Aguilera, you know what you're saying?" He said,  
10 "You know what you're talking about?" I said, "Yeah. They won't bring me my  
11 breakfast, and you're not bringing me my breakfast." I said, "I want my breakfast." He  
12 said, "Aguilera, I don't think you know what you're talking about. I don't know if they  
13 told you this, Aguilera, but you went into convulsions and your heart stopped.  
14 Completely stopped. The only reason you're hearing this is because your brain had barely  
15 been alive. Could barely detect it. But we checked you and checked you, but there was no  
16 more life in you." Then he said, "Do you believe in God? Do you believe in miracles,  
17 Aguilera?" He said, "I don't know how or why you came back on the third day," and  
18 again I hear that. Then I said, "No, these guys are pulling my leg." You know, I didn't  
19 believe them. He said, "Obviously, Aguilera, somebody upstairs doesn't need you right  
20 now." And I just said, "Nah," I still did not believe this man. He got this clipboard, and  
21 he had a paper in there, and he had letters like in them. I didn't want to tell him that I  
22 didn't know how to read. I couldn't read a sentence, much less write one. I didn't know  
23 how to read period. Showed me this thing right there, and I looked at it and he said,  
24 "Death certificate." I said, "Wow," and I read that. And then it said, "On this day of the  
25 lord, of 1968," and remember the day. It said, "Private First-Class Guadalupe Garcia  
26 Aguilera, 24486073, of the United States Marine Corps died for serving his country in  
27 Southeast Asia. I read all of it, and I was like wow. He said, "Aguilera, this place, where  
28 you're at, ever since the war started, every man that came here came here for one thing  
29 and one thing only, to die." He said, "You're the first man to come back—to make it out  
30 of this place alive, Aguilera." He said, "You just broke the record." And he showed me  
31 this—when he had the death certificate and he said, "What do you want me to do with

1 your death certificate, Aguilera? Do you want me to send it home?" I said, "No." If he  
2 sent this to my house, and somebody out there might die. And he said, "Well, is it alright  
3 if I keep it?" He said, "My father is a preacher and I'm gonna send him this to show him  
4 that I have just witnessed a miracle from God." I looked at him and I said, "Okay." He  
5 said, "Aguilera, you're gonna go to the states." I left that day in the evening from  
6 Yokohama, Japan. And this young lady—this young Mexican girl that was, very  
7 beautiful girl, and I'll never forget her. She worked for the Red Cross. I called her  
8 (Spanish) boat—I mean, this plane that took us. Noisiest damn thing that could ever be  
9 invented. It was so damn noisy. They crank up the propellers, and you could hear that it  
10 was trembling and stuff like that. Once we got in the air, we kind of leveled up real good.  
11 I told this nurse, this young lady, I said, "Hey, would you get me some ice? I feel kind of  
12 hot. My throat is dry." She went and touched me, and checked my temperature and it  
13 was a 103, close to a 104 or somewhere like that. She said, "Oh my god, you've got high  
14 fever." I said, "Well, bring me some ice." She went up there and she brought plastic bags  
15 and put them around my arms, and my chest here, and my legs, and sides, and put ice in  
16 them. She gave me some ice, and I'm eating ice. I got into California. They took me into  
17 a naval hospital. I don't know what the place was. Took me in there and they checked  
18 me, and I was—temperature was good and everything. They sent me to San Antonio.  
19 Port Sam Houston General Hospital. From there from that Air Force base in there they  
20 took me in a helicopter and put me on top of that building. Took me off and went in there  
21 and my fever went up again. So, in there they gave me medicine and I don't know what  
22 they gave me and stuff like that, but the next day my fever went down. And the pain  
23 started again, and again, and again. I said, "God." They started taking real slow. I said,  
24 "Give me a four by four." I said, "I want you to take that pussy foot around, man, just  
25 take them off." He said, "Are you sure?" "Damn right I'm sure, and when you take them  
26 off let me rest for a while and I'll motion you to get the other," and that's what they did  
27 from that day on. Man, I just grinded my teeth. Both of my legs, my ear was the one that  
28 hurt more, but I took the pain. I never screamed or hollered; I just took it. I went on like  
29 that. Pain after pain after pain after pain. Finally, I said, "You know what? I'm gonna die.  
30 I'm gonna die and that's it. I ain't taking this pain no more. I'm gonna die." "Ah, come  
31 on, Aguilera." Took me into the burn ward and I just stood there, didn't say nothing. I

1 took the pain that this gauze caused, and I grinded my teeth. Didn't want to eat. I just  
2 wanted to die. Doctor came, Doctor D. They called him D; his name was Davy Dancing.  
3 Talked funny. Red headed. Came up there and said, "Aguilera, why do you want to die,  
4 Aguilera?" He said, "I've done everything I could, Aguilera, I can't do no more." He  
5 said, "Aguilera, in two days you'll be dead." I didn't say a damn word. I wanted to die,  
6 period. So, he left and that night—I think it was at night. Anyway, I started going into a  
7 sleep, a kind of sleep that you don't come back from. What's funny about that sleep is  
8 you go into it and the sleep gets so heavy, and that's the kind of sleep that you're not  
9 gonna come back. I would go into that deep sleep and here it comes, this north Viet  
10 Cong. This north Viet Cong I didn't kill in Vietnam. We set up an ambush, and I saw him  
11 coming and I was ready to kill him, but I was waiting to see another man behind him. All  
12 I could see was half of his face, his rifle. Anyway, I didn't kill him, but then the stupid  
13 lieutenant got up and messed it all up. Tripped and fell, and they scattered away. Fifteen  
14 or twenty of them scattered. I got up and I left. "Let's go, let's get the hell out of here."  
15 Because of that lieutenant, that stupid lieutenant. After that I kept on seeing him again,  
16 and again.

17 KC: Having the same nightmare.

18 GA: Man, I got so damned pissed off. I said, "Damn, you know what? I'm not a  
19 coward. God didn't raise me to be a coward, and I'm gonna get up and I'm gonna kill this  
20 bastard and I'm gonna take him with me." I'll take that son of a bitch with me. He's still  
21 there waiting for me to come, waiting for me to come, and he was getting closer, and  
22 closer, and closer. All of a sudden, I felt a hand touch me, and I jumped up like that, and  
23 it was my sister. She was there in the lights, and the noise starts—all this other noise.  
24 Here comes this nurse, and tries to tell her, "No, you can't be here, ma'am." She said,  
25 "But this is my brother." I tried to get up like that and I said, "Leave her alone, you son of  
26 a bitch." She said, "Come on, you gotta work this in her mouth." and covers her up so I  
27 don't get any infect from her. And I told her again, "Leave her alone, you son of a bitch."  
28 Took my sister out. This nurse came back around, and got right in my face, "What'd you  
29 call me?" I said, "Leave her alone, you son of a bitch." She looked at me and said, "Well,  
30 you can talk, Aguilera," and left me with my mouth open. God, she let me feel the way I  
31 was taught, like an ass, you know what I mean? She said, "She's gonna come back. She's

1 gonna have to wear this mask.” I said, “Okay.” She came back and we talked for quite a  
2 while. Thirty minutes, I guess. Then, she left, and he comes the doctor. He said, “Well,  
3 Aguilera, you’re looking great.” “Do I look great?” I said, “I’m all burned up and I look  
4 great?” He said, “Well, at least you’re talking.” “Well, of course I’m talking, god damn  
5 it. I ain’t dead yet.” He said, “Well, is there anything you want me to do for you.” I  
6 looked at him and I said, “Yeah, get the hell out of here and bring me something to eat.”  
7 “Yeah. Okay!” and they got me up and put me back in my bed and everything. Brought  
8 me something to eat and I was sat there eating. He said, “Aguilera, thirty minutes ago you  
9 were dying. Now, you’re here eating like nothing happened.” I looked at him and said,  
10 “You think this is something? Why don’t you call Yokohama, Japan and talk to that  
11 doctor?” And I guess he did because as soon as I ate whatever that meal, they gave me,  
12 this catholic priest came out there. Communion, confession, to give the whole nine  
13 works. I never told him nothing about what happened to me or nothing like that. I didn’t  
14 feel that they should know at that time. I didn’t feel like they ought to know.

15 KC: Why is that do you think?

16 GA: Well, I feel like what God did to me—if I told him, were they gonna believe  
17 me? I felt that I had been blessed by God. It was not the time for me to open up and say  
18 something. What I’ve just said here, ten, fifteen, or maybe twenty years, I kept away.  
19 When I was like in my middle forties, I started talking about this. I went through hell and  
20 back. I saw a world of darkness, and then I saw the world of light. I hope that one day  
21 you see that.

22 KC: I think this is a good place to stop for today, Mr. Aguilera.