

## Oral History Interview with Eduardo Aguilar, Jr., April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Telephone interview conducted by Monica Brown.

Voice of Veterans Oral History Collection,  
Texas Veterans Land Board/Texas General Land Office.  
1700 Congress Avenue, Austin, TX 78701  
512-463-5001.



### AGUILAR, EDUARDO, JR.

SPC - Army  
Iraq/Afghanistan

Biography of narrator: Eduardo Aguilar Jr. served with the U.S. Army's 1/64th Armor, 3rd Infantry Division and made three deployments to Iraq. He now resides in Midland, Texas.

The transcript's corresponding audio is available in .mp3 format through Voices of Veterans at <https://voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/aguilars.html>.

The audio's length is 57 minutes and 42 seconds.

**Copyright statement: © 2019 Texas Veterans Land Board/Texas General Land Office All Rights Reserved. This interview transcript and audio file are available for all educational and non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Texas Veterans Land Board / Texas General Land Office. Commercial use requires prior written permission from the Texas Veterans Land Board / Texas General Land Office.**

**Transcription: Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.**

---

*Today is April 10, 2017. My name is Monica Brown, and this morning I'll be interviewing Eduardo Aguilar Jr. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I am at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas and Mr. Aguilar is at his home in Midland, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans oral history program. Sir, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today. It is an honor for us.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes ma'am.

*So, I usually like to start off these questions with, can you take me a little about your life before you entered the military?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, I was born in McAllen, Texas and I was raised in Pharr, Texas. I graduated in 1999 from PSJA North High School. I came from a low-income family and I was the youngest of three. My sister, my brother and myself. My parents got divorced when I was five years old. So, growing up for me, I spent most of my time on the streets on my own pretty much. My dad was in the picture not as much as I wanted him to be. He faded away as years went by. My mom worked long hours so she could put food on the table.

*Did you know that you were going to join the army?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Just watching what's happening around me - a lot of bad influence and where I could see myself, where I can end up. You know you are there doing - my brother and my sister are doing nothing with their lives. I needed change and I need start new somewhere. I need to start my life somewhere else.

*So, what made you choose the army?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I went into a recruiter's office just to go talk and find out what kind of options they had. My first person that I ran into was Sgt. Rodriguez, my recruiter. He pretty much told me, "come over here, check this out." He showed me a video of a tank. And I was impressed. I was like, wow, that's pretty awesome. Saw what tanks could do and for me, that was actually the best decision I made, to be a tanker, because it saved my life multiple times.

*What did your family think about you joining?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Well, my mom, she was proud. She was proud that I joined and that I needed to start my life and become a man. My dad wasn't really - not too sure what my dad was thinking. I can't say about my dad. But my uncles served in the military. I had two of them in the army and one in the marines. And both of them, all of them, were happy that my generation continues that tradition of joining the military.

*That is great. So, they were very proud of you?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes ma'am. I remember one of my uncles - my uncle that was in the marines - my uncle Pete. He'd tell me, you need to become a man before you become a soldier. And, at the time I really didn't understand what that meant. Until my first deployment.

*Were you living still in McAllen at the time?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, I was. I was still living in McAllen. It's Pharr, Texas. It is the city right next to McAllen, but I say McAllen because no one knows Pharr.

Ok.

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** They just ask, "How far?"

*Right [laughing], and so, what year was that that you joined the service?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I joined in 2000.

*Can you tell me where did you go to bootcamp?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Did my bootcamp and AIT.

*Can you tell me about your bootcamp experience and your first days in the service?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** You know what you see on the movies about bootcamp and the military is pretty much what you got - what I got. It was something I didn't really expect it, but I guess I kind of - it was crazy, crazy.

*How did you get through it?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** My motivation was, I don't want to fail. I don't want to be failure. I don't want to quit what I'm doing, and I don't want to end up back where I started. That was my motivation to get through bootcamp which was - for me being the youngest and leaving my mom and being with the family - it was hard, but that was my motivation. I didn't want to go back where I started from.

*Do you remember any of your instructors?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I do, I do. I remember Drill Sergeant Cordell and Drill Sergeant Dickerson. I remember those two for sure, and I remember my senior drill sergeant, which was Drill Sergeant Ford. His first impression was - he looked like he was mad, like a mad dog. I mean, when I first got to Fort Knox, Kentucky, we ate chow and we came outside running. There was already a group lined up. He was just walking around them very slow and just looking at everybody. [He] looked mad, like a shark, and [laughs] we pretty much stopped and looked at him and they took off on the truck and we came up and lined up and he did the same thing to us. I guess he was just trying to see who's going to budge and what-not, but that was his first impression on me. I think for me - the last day of bootcamp - it was the last week of bootcamp actually, there was one day where it was the hardest day that I had. It was fun. We had to earn our tank boots, and we had to do a twelve-mile road march with a sixty-pound ruck and a M-16, a plastic M-16. We went through three hills: misery, agony, and heartbreak. People call it the stairway to heaven. And that, that right there was [laughs] difficult, but from there, that's where you earn your tanker boots. That is something that is earned.

*Right. So, you pushed through it, and you made it.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Oh yes, yes. Yes ma'am.

*That's got to be a good feeling. So, after bootcamp, did you stay at Fort Knox and go to AIT?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** For tankers, AIT and bootcamp was the same thing. It had both of them together at the same time.

*And so how long was all of that? Bootcamp and your tech school.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It was four months long. It was from November to March. It was the coldest. It was cold too, so, I wasn't used to cold or snow or anything like that.

*Right, being from Texas.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Oh yes.

*You don't see that kind of weather.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** No ma'am. First time I seen snow, we were doing a road march to the grenade range and I saw a snowflake, and I was like, what is this? I was telling myself, "what is this," [laughing] and I was like, oh no, and as soon as it hit me - so much snow, all of the sudden. I just got cold, like, ah! [laughs]

*And, so, after your four months of training and bootcamp, where did you go?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** They gave me two weeks leave so I went back home to try to recruit more guys from my high school. But I was given Fort Stewart Georgia as my duties station so, after those two weeks, I flew to Georgia.

*When you get to Fort Stewart, what unit did they put you with?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** They put me in the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID, second brigade, 1/64 armor, alpha company, wild bunch. And the first person I met when I got there was Staff Sergeant Booker. And apparently, he was my tank commander too, so he was kind of hard on me when I first met him and talked to him. I guess he was trying to put his first impression on me.

*I was going to ask you, how did you adapt to the military life, including the physical regimen, the barracks, the food, everything. Cause it's a whole different scene than Pharr, Texas.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Oh, it is. And from there, the bad thing was pretty smooth for me. Having three meals a day, my own room, privacy and stuff like that, so I enjoyed it. So, I adapted pretty quick. I guess the only hard part was being away from family but...

*How did you stay in touch with family?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** So, they still have little phone booths and stuff like that so, I would call my mom, my high school sweetheart. We're still together.

*And so, did you get married?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, yes, I got married to my high school sweetheart in December of 2001. I went back and picked her up and brought her back over here.

*That's great.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, it was. She was willing to come, so, I knew she was one of the really good ones.

*You were already enlisted when 911 happened. Can you tell me your thoughts? And did you know if you were going to be deployed pretty much after that happened?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** When 911 happened, I was in shock and denial and so many emotions, and at the time we were at the gunnery training already. A couple of my soldiers - a couple of

my battle buddies were talking about, "We're getting ready to go; get ready to go; where are we going to go; they are going to send us somewhere." I was still in shock. I didn't want to believe it. Couldn't believe it.

*So, when and how did you find out you were going to be going to Iraq?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I want to say May, June 2002. We'd been preparing for going over there for the training facility over there. There had been talks and then we got our orders in early September, late August. And our orders pretty much stated we're not coming home until mission complete.

*When did you head out to Iraq?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** September 2002. That was when we left and for me, that day was the hardest for me because my wife was three months pregnant. So, I did my best not to turn back and look at her, but I had to before I left on the bus ride to the airport and started crying.

*That's got to be hard on both of you.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Oh, yes.

*Did you fly straight to Iraq?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** We flew into Kuwait. We stayed there for about six months, give or take a week or two. We trained. Pretty much just train, train every day as much as we can.

*What were the living conditions like over there?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It was rough. It was kind of rough. We started in a ten-man tent. Our AC sometimes worked, and it didn't. When you sleep, you wake up you see a salt just pretty much form around your body, just sweating when you sleep. It was pretty hot out there. Chow wasn't bad. Could've been better, but it wasn't bad. There was a lot of people. So, the lines took forever. Communication was the worst for me cause it was hard for me to talk to my wife. I would try to plan to wake up early in the morning to call my wife, but there would be a long line. So, I have to plan to stay up late as I can and call my wife and there'd still be a long line.

*Communication was a little bit different. I mean, cell phones were coming out but not everyone had one back then.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Oh, no. We had rotary phones and they'd give you ten minutes to try to call your family. It would take five to get connected and sometimes it would drop three minutes in. So, it was frustrating. Just try to get a say hello and how is she doing.

*And let everybody know that you're doing okay, too, as well.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Uh-hm, it was frustrating.

*Did you have anyone tell you about what to expect or did they say much about anything when you got there?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** No, no. As far as living quarters, no, we didn't know.

*Can you tell me a little about what were your day to day duties?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** We were guarding this camp called, I want to say Pennsylvania. We were pretty much guard duty. We would rotate out. We would be there for about a good two weeks, three weeks of just guard. Once you get out of guard, probably go and just work on tanks. Training classes. That was pretty much the rotation. Guard, tanks, training, classes, yeah.

*Now how many guys were in your platoon?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** There was, let's see, we were short going in. There should be four personnel to a tank. And our platoon, we had five tanks, including the commanders' tanks, so, we had four, twelve, sixteen. We came in with eighteen personnel, so we were short. We had people leaving going to ETS and other people in ETS in Kuwait. We were short. My tank, we had started off with three. Yes, we started off with three and I got moved to another tank, to my lieutenant's tank, and then we had four personnel in that tank.

*So, can you talk to me about the first time you went out in the field for a mission or on patrol?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** We started doing the brigade task force. So, pretty much the whole brigade, we went into the desert and just started driving and maneuvering. We went into different maneuvers like stagger columns or the flying V or slant, slant column, slant left, slant right, heavy left, heavy right. We'd practice those, just in case, cause our mission through ID. We were supposed to go the long way into Baghdad to the left-hand side through the whole desert of Iraq. There's a part which was like 300 miles of just driving into Baghdad, so we'd practice that maneuvers just in case we did have tank-on-tank. We didn't really know if we were going to have tank-on-tank battles. But we practiced for that.

*Did you ever meet up with the enemy at some point on your deployment there?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** We did. Before we went into Iraq, they had us stay out in the desert for thirty days. Thirty days, so we had no communication with our families to let them know we are going to Iraq. This was in early February [2003]. The beginning of February they put us out in the desert, and we stayed out there for thirty days, training again, guard, maneuvers, and when, the day before we were going to go over, Kuwait City got hit with a scud missile and then another scud missile got hit right above us. A patriot missile hit that scud missile and it blew up. And so, we called. I remember somebody jumping on top on the tank and saying "Gas! Gas! Gas!" And so, it was pretty much time to mop up to level 4. And we did; everybody mopped up. I could see panic, fear. People scrambling around, getting tank getting ready for a fight. And as that happened, we got word to go over the border. Go over the berm. Our engineers made a path through the berm. You went through that berm and as we were rolling, I saw a bunch of old junkyard tanks. A boneyard, they called it. I guess from Desert Storm. We rode for a couple of hours. And my tank ended up having issues, so we had to stop pretty much. We stopped and everybody else kept rolling. They had to continue mission, so we stopped, and we had to wait for our mechanic to show up. He showed up early the next day. We were already about ten to twelve hours behind from our platoon, from our company. He fixed us up and we left. We rode. I remember just driving for about a good twenty, twenty hours straight nonstop. We passed by a couple of supply units and they had a little bit of fire fights. We helped them out. We aided them. Man, they were happy that we got there. Once we got there, we did see. We shot a couple of rounds and then we continued on. We stopped with another unit, I can't remember what unit. We stopped to fill up and get some food, do maintenance on the tank. By then we were, I want to say, about eight hours short from where our company was at. The entire time, I mean, we

were pretty much on our own. We picked up a couple of stragglers, stranded tanks - two other tanks. They were from our same unit too though, from a different company. And we caught up to our company. We were all happy that we got to get together again. From there we had a mission to go to, the next day. We had a mission to go to Sadr city.

*At Sadr City?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Um-hm.

*Ok.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It's not our main mission, it was a small mission. We went to Sadr City to maintain a bridge; to hold this bridge. A couple of us got off our tanks and setup a check point for this bridge, to maybe catch some bad guy or something like that or just slow down traffic. People crossing over. And about seconds later after we set that checkpoint, we started walking back to our tanks. Our RPG team showed up and shot an RPG to that check point and blew it all up. And then we saw two vans full of people and in black robes with AK's and that was our first fire fight. They went into a building so, that was our first fire fight right there.

*How did you guys handle that?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I know we were nervous, but we took control of it. It was a situation and we couldn't go over. Cause I was afraid with our tanks - cause we would have broken[sic] that tank. That bridge wouldn't hold that tank.

*So, you had to turn and go the other direction? Or go back?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** We stayed on the, I want to say, on the south side of the bridge, and they were on the north side of the bridge, so we stayed there and pretty much just laid fire where they were at. We stayed there for twenty-four and then 37 CAV came and relieved us. We took a breather, filled up, food; took a little rest and we went back and the next twenty-four hours and everything calmed down. I briefly could hear screams from inside the city. You could hear people screaming, yelling. I don't know if they were in danger or what. We couldn't go in cause in Sadr City there's a lot of buildings, and we couldn't maneuver our tanks inside there. So, that happened and once forty-eight hours we were there, we left. They had us keep going north. They told us our main mission was to set up a checkpoint south of Baghdad and prevent any kind of aid going into Baghdad, to help the enemy. So that was our main mission to do that. And then it changed. It changed. We heard that first brigade took over their airport, Baghdad airport, and they needed supplies. So, then our mission was to actually clear highway 8; that's what they called the Thunder Run. The Thunder Run. They say our mission was to clear highway 8, that was the highway into the airport, and try go into give them food and supplies cause they were running low. And I remember that it was about six-thirty. I was talking to Sgt. Booker and he was hard on me; before then he was really hard on me. But this time, I could see he was kind of serious; he was telling me, "Hey, Aguilar. Man, I like you. You take care of yourself, alright, watch yourself," and I could see that he was serious, and I guess to me that it meant something that we grew together, bonded together, and we started at seven in the morning. We started rolling down highway 8. Sergeant Lowbrow[sic] was my gunner. I was in the platoon leader's tank; we're in the lead tank in this task force. As we were rolling about ten minutes in, he called it. He saw about seven personnel just hanging out by a building with AK's and an RPG. My lieutenant told him to fire. He laid 'em. He shot a burst and laid about six of them

down. I saw one of them take off running across the road and took off. We rolled, we continued, and about three minutes later, we saw another group of people, another group of guys, also with AK's and RPG's, and again my gunner shot another burst and took 'em all down. And then from there, I guess these guys realized that we are right behind them in their backyard and from there I just remember AK pops, RPG's going off. I remember this one guy, this dude, he jumped in the middle of the road with an RPG and he was about a good thirty feet from my tank. I could see him, and he had an RPG and he shot an RPG at my wingman's tank, which was Sgt. Booker's tank. He was right behind us. I just started calling. And, nothing happening. He cut him in half. To me, that's just, wow. That was kind of crazy for me.

*I couldn't imagine.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** So, about an hour and half in into the mission, we shot about at least a good six thousand rounds of 240, so we stopped about an hour and a half in before we get to the first overpass to reload our ammunition, change out boxes. Our 50 cal. wasn't working; Sgt. Booker's tank 50 cal. was working, so we give 'em our 50 cal. He gave us some 240. We were reloading, and I saw this one truck pull up to my right-hand side. There was three guys in there, two guys in the truck, in the cab, and two of 'em in the back; four guys excuse me. One had an RPG and I called it out, and I saw a tank right behind us, I think it was Sgt. Gaines. He started to - he mowed them down. He got back and everybody got back in the tank. Communication was up, and we rolled. As we were rolling, we saw on the overpass civilian traffic still going. And then they told us, "don't shoot don't shoot; these people don't know that we're here or they're still doing, their regular business routine." Either going home, going to work, whatever they have to do. We were watching them and still getting shot at, so we kept rolling and we're going slow. We're going about two kilometers, that's about, I want to say about three or four miles per hour. We come up to a second overpass and that's when we saw some guys up there with grenades, RPG's, AK's, and civilian trucks still rolling through. So, they told us, "don't use your main gun rounds on these overpasses. Cause if you do, as things fall, you are going to kill a lot of people and you don't want to do that." And smoke was heavy. We shot a couple of main gun rounds on bunkers, vehicles, so it was it was getting harder for me to see because also we had AK rounds shooting. My vision blocked. It was harder for me to see, so we kept rolling, moved passed the second overpass, and we're still getting shot at. We were shooting back. Man, I saw a bunch of just tracer rounds flying across my tank, hitting my tank; RPG's flying, hitting tanks behind us, hitting us. I mean, I saw them; I didn't feel them. My adrenaline was just going. My eyes were just glued to that vision block just to maintain that speed and just leading the way. We came up to the third overpass then I made a wrong turn. I made a wrong turn. I was supposed to go left to follow Highway 8, but I went right, and the right will take you to the city center Baghdad. And as I was making the right, my platoon sergeant tells me, "Hey, ya'll makin' a wrong turn. Ya'll need to come back around and come back left; come back west." And traffic stopped. They saw our tanks, so traffic stopped, and civilian traffic stopped. We went over the overpass onto the next road. I was starting to make another right turn, I don't know, I couldn't see anything. It was hard for me to see. So, Booker was right behind me and I had to back up and realign myself to go further west, and as I was backing up, I backed up really fast and I hit 'em hard. I hit 'em hard cause I felt the jerk. I jerked, hit my head, and my lieutenant comes on the radio and asks, "Sgt. Booker, are you okay?" He's like, "No, no, yeah, I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm with you to the end." About five minutes later, Sergeant Givens[sic], his gunner, calls on the radio and he says, "Sgt. Booker's dead," and Sergeant Gaines said, "What?" He started yelling, "Sergeant Booker is dead! Sergeant Booker is dead!" and everybody was quiet on the radio. Everybody was quiet.



Nobody said anything for about five minutes probably, just took a minute or two and Sergeant Gaines come back and tells him, "Sergeant Givens, you need to take over the tank, you need to keep moving; can't stop." So, we continued on, still getting shot at, and as we got to the fourth overpass, there is still people shooting from above us and they had a concrete barrier right after you pass that overpass. There's a four-foot concrete barrier and my lieutenant Tommy, he goes, "we can't stop, we need to hit that. Find a weak spot and hit it hard." And, I hit it hard and we went over that concrete barrier and landed really hard - my knees, I hit my head. Everybody got shaken up, but we made it through and as we're continuing to roll to the airport, everybody is making it through. Nobody called to anybody got down or anything like that. My gunner saw two vehicles about, it was good - far. You can't identify vehicles at five thousand feet; you can't identify if they're friendly or enemy. He saw two of them and he called. He told my lieutenant, "I got two vehicles down here, I don't know if they are enemy or foe, can we confirm?" I guess we lost communication with first brigade, and my gunner, he shot a tank round and luckily nothing happened. It was our first brigade; two tanks out there. Nothing happened. He highered his gun tube. As we were getting closer, he highered his gun tubes so both those tanks were looking at us. He said, he was scared, like, "man, they're going to shoot us. They're going to shoot us." So, he highered his gun tube. He elevated sky high. And then, when we linked up with the first brigade, they took us into their ward. We parked our tanks and they air-lifted Sgt. Booker. We cleaned the tank from his blood. We reloaded our guns and checked our tanks and we had a couple of seconds to actually think about Sgt. Booker. And then we had to keep moving. We had to go back to, I guess you'd call it an area to...what do you call it? Get together back again and just talk about our next mission. That happened April 5<sup>th</sup>, the Thunder Run. The following day, we had a ceremony for Sgt. Booker; April 6<sup>th</sup>. We went back to our tanks, did more maintenance and then they told us, April 7<sup>th</sup>, we are going to city center Baghdad and we are going to lead the way again. I guess they called that the second part of the Thunder Run and same scenario; we started at seven in the morning on April 7<sup>th</sup>, seven in the morning. This time, they layered about a bunch of minefields, a bunch of rolls of mines, on the road. Our engineers cleared that for us. This time Sgt. Barrel[sic], he was the lead tank and my team leader's tank I was in as his wingman, right behind him. As we were going through, once we passed the mine field, we passed the first overpass. That's when we started getting hit by small rounds, small arms. And I remember what seeing a tracer round going into their fuel cell. It was close to the rear wheel and when it went in, a big fireball lit up right where the engine's at, in their exhaust. I saw that and I honestly thought the tank was going to blow up. I screamed. I said a bad word, I said, "holy crap!" Luckily nothing happened. The halon bottomed the engine; the engine compartment stopped that, and they were a mobile kill. They couldn't move; they had no more power to the tank, so we had to leave them behind and keep rolling. And where I made that wrong turn the first time we left the town, we made the second time to go in to city center Baghdad. I remember coming up and we stopped right next to the conference palace and there were still people as we were coming in, like moms and kids and stuff in the parks on the slides in the little playground. As soon as they saw us, everybody just took off running. We started getting hit. They told us, "Don't, wait. Wait, let everybody clear out. It needs to be cleared out; and whoever stays back and shoots, shoot 'em back." We stayed in that spot for three days. We stayed there for three days on that road, until we got the clear, that it's okay - safe to get out of the tanks. And they gave us the conference palace to stay in. It was right next to this hotel called Al Rasheed Hotel and in that hotel was a lot of reporters. That's where a lot of reporters stay at and stuff like that. I remember we were right next to them, we stayed at the conference

palace and that was it right there. We saw a lot of people. A lot of people were happy everywhere there.

*Did you get to interact with the locals?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** We did. We talked to the people that worked at the conference palace; they cleaned that area. These were the people that worked there. They knew English and they went to college. They were part of the Ba'ath party, so, they have to go to college for free cause Saddam paid for it or let them do it. And they knew English, so, we talked to them and they told us that a lot of these people are really happy that y'all here, but they want you all to leave too though. They're ready for y'all to go.

*That's got to be hard; so how long were you in Iraq your first time?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** The first deployment is like eleven months long. It was from September 2002 to August 8<sup>th</sup>. Before then, my wife had my son on April 1<sup>st</sup>. I didn't know. I didn't find out until April 15<sup>th</sup>. I talked to a reporter there; he was with 315 and he told me he had a satellite phone and I asked him if I could use his phone so I could call and find out about my son. He let me use it to call my wife and she told me he's fine and he has a heart murmur, but he'll make it through. It was happy, but at the same time I was sad too, and angry, cause I couldn't be there.

*Pretty emotional.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It was very emotional that day. That day was emotional for me.

*You came back in August 2003.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes. Before they let us go, we had one more mission to take control of Fallujah; supposedly that's where Saddam's holding up; that is where his forces was coming from. They sent us to Fallujah in, I want to say, about June. They told us this is the last mission before y'all go home. And then we went over there; we stayed from June to July, end of July.

*What was your mission during that part?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Fallujah - just to drive the enemies out or pretty much take care of the enemy that was holding up there. I guess we succeeded. They let us go home.

*So, did you come back to Fort Stewart?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, yes, we came back to Fort Stewart, Georgia, and they had a big ceremony for us and all. We came in on our bus, a lot of us, and our families were in the stands waiting for us.

*Now it's the day you got to see your son for the first time.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, yes, that was a feeling was unbelievable. Hard to explain that feeling. Seeing my son; he was four months old. Seeing my wife as well.

*And possibly just some relief that you're home and, like you said, you got to be with your wife and your son. You ended up going back to Iraq two more times, right?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes ma'am. After we got back from this deployment, I was put in a S3 shop for the brigade. I was Commander [indistinct] driver. That time we deployed in January 2005, so I wasn't in my tank no more. I was in a Humvee and then we didn't get back until

January 2006. Now our mission there - we went to this place called Musaffah. That area, around that area, that is where we stayed at. Our mission was to pretty much make sure these Iraqi police and the military are taking care of what they need to take care of; learning from us, teaching them - pretty much just trying to rebuild back their city and their forces. Our mission was driving to different IP stations and making sure they had the right equipment, and everything was good for them to go.

*So, on this mission you didn't see a lot of combat like you did in the first one?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** No, no. The rules changed by the end. We were more of a, I guess you'd call it police than anything else.

*So, that mission was for a year, correct?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes ma'am.

*And then you come back to Fort Stewart again because Fort Stewart was your duty station the entire time you were in the service.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes ma'am, the first and the last duty station. I've tried to move but every time was stop movement. We had a stop movement in effect, so...

*So, you came back in January of 2006?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes ma'am.

*Then you get deployed again?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, and this time, I asked to go back to my tank company.

*Which was the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID right?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes ma'am. It still the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID; it's still in the 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade. I wanted to go back into Wildbunch and this time they were Charlie company. They took me in; this time I was a gunner on a tank. And we left back to Iraq in end of April 2007. This one was about fifteen months long. We didn't get back until July, early July, or mid-July of 2008.

*Can you talk to me about some of your missions and experiences that you had over there on this last tour that you had?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, when we first got there, we got attached to a CAV company for rock clearance and they had a lot of issues. They got hit quite a bit by IED's so as we were doing a ricey[sic] ride. It was me and my other sergeant of mine, sergeant - I can't remember his last name, but we rode with this CAV company and they found an IED. The platoon sergeant said I had to walk to this IED with two other guys. He asked us to come with them and he pulled the IED out of the ground and there were two mortar rounds and I was like holy, this could blow up at any time. Luckily the mortar rounds were full of concrete. It looked like concrete and that was the first day - that wasn't the first day, it was the first time we went out to that area where we're going to take over. After that, they gave us our area and we started doing rock clearance in our tanks going through every street, make sure, and we got hit a couple of time in our tanks. I remember, I hit a pressure plate; my tank hit a pressure plate, and it lift that tank up about an inch or two and it shook us. I hit my head a couple of time in there. I don't know if I passed out; I might have passed out. I honestly don't remember passing out. That was in, I want to say, late

2007 when that happened. About September 2007 around there, give or take a month. We got attached to a 315 infantry company to help them out. Once we cleared that, we got attached to our infantry company. We were staying in Liberty and when they attached to us, we stayed on a compound IP station that was left by the IPs. So, we took that over and that's where we did our missions from. We did our road marches; knock and search; route clearance; so, there was a lot of infantry guys there and I started talking to them, getting to know new people and stuff like that. I remember this one guy. We talked the night before. We were just laughing and joking about stuff and he had a mission the next day. He had a mission to go do a route clearance in their Humvees and this, a Major from our company I guess, he was in charge of logistics, I think, where they come out. And he rode with him, and they hit a 55-gallon IED; blew their Humvee up. It was a catastrophic kill; killed four of them. One of them survived. We were at the QRX, so we had to go out there and help out. We got there, surrounded the area where he got hit, and we had to pick up body parts. We had to pick up their body parts and put them in body bags. We found some on top of the roof; we found some a couple feet from the blast area. From there, we started getting MRAP's, different vehicles; and they had us come out in our tanks after that and we searched that area. We found another IED 55-gallon drum, we found another one leading to this house and we pretty much brought that house down with our tanks. And we turned around and ran over every car around it and everything.

*And so, this time you were over there for 15 months. That's a long time to be away from your family, and not much communication.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It was. The communication part was little bit better, but I didn't have the time to try to call every day. So, we just...missions, mission, missions. That's all we pretty much did.

*When did you finally get to come back to the states?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It was mid-July, about the second week of July or the third week of July - around that timeframe - that's when we got out, we got back [indistinct]. That blast [indistinct] pretty much broke me. I mean, I was broke. My back. My knees. I hurt, hurt every day. Every day after road marches I had to lay down because my back was killing me. I was broke. I was broke. I was tired. I think that was the last for me. I wanted to retire, but I just couldn't. My body couldn't do it no more. Mentally I could, but not physically.

*When did you end up getting out of the service?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** My ETS was November. November 2008. I still wanted to stay in, so I joined the National Guard, the Georgia National Guard, and did that for two years and that was it. That was the last ounce that I had of me.

*So that's got to take a toll on you, you know, three tours to Iraq and everything that you saw.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It was. It was really hard. I mean, I don't regret it though. If Uncle Sam calls me back, I'll do it again, if I had to. For my family; my country.

*Did you come back to Texas?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, I stayed in Georgia until 2012. I had a job as a gate guard for Fort Stewart Georgia. I was private security. And I was going to college too. I was using my GI bill to go to college. We got laid off. They started cutting off civilian jobs. From there, I met a recruiter.

He was recruiting for the oil field in Texas. He told my wife, "You know this is the only chance to go back to Texas if you want to go back to Texas," and we did. We wanted to go back closer to our families. And I took the job. Schlumberger took me in, sent me over there. Sent me here to Midland, Texas, and I've been here ever since 2012.

*How did you adjust to civilian life?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Tell you the truth, I don't think I'm fully adjusted to civilian life. Stuff that I see or smell or see certain people that remind me of people I seen over there; it just it brings me back. I'm still adjusting. I haven't adjusted, fully adjusted, yet.

*But you're getting help through the VA and the Texas Veterans Commission, right?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, yes, I am. They're helping me out.

*Cause the Texas Veterans Commission; they'll be your advocates; so, if you have an issue with the VA make sure you reach out to them.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Okay, yes ma'am.

*Because we are very fortunate because Texas; lots of other states don't have advocates for veterans like we do here.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** That's good to know. Yes, ma'am.

*You said you made a lot of friendship when you were in the service; do you keep in touch with any of the soldiers that you served with?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I have one, one in particular. His name is Gregory Street. Actually, I helped him out to get a job out here in Midland, and he moved out here. We worked for the same company, and once the oil field went down, he decided to get a job as a police officer in the same area that we live in.

*Nice!*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** So, I reach out to him every once in a while. We talk and hang out a little bit; have barbecues and then we reminisce about the times that we had in Iraq, back home, stuff like that.

*That's good to have somebody that has experienced the same things that you have and so, my next question was, did you join a veterans organization?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Yes, I was part of the American legion in south Texas and I wanted to do the same thing here in Midland. I go to the VFW once in a while and talk to people there; talk to the older other veterans. I'm going to college in Midland, and I was part of the veterans association at Midland College. There are good people there too, and I talk to some of the veterans there.

*Good. Were you helping other veterans?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Actually, they were helping me as I was helping them with advice - what route to go or who is helping or what kind of help they have; what kind of help I have, stuff like that.

*Great. I just have a few more questions. What were some of the life lessons that you learned from being in the military?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Time is something that you don't want to take granted for. Time and being with the family; cause you never know when your time is up. Also, another thing actually, I have been listening to a lot of stories that you got on the website, Voices of Veterans.

*Yes, sir.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** And it's so remarkable what you all are doing. Just listening to other veterans telling their stories, especially World War II vets and Vietnam vets. It's awesome and it touches - I shed a tear just to hear their stories. It is pretty awesome that you all are doing what you are doing. Their stories - you don't want their stories to die with them. You want people to know what they felt; what they went through.

*That is really important, you know, for my children, for your son, and your grandchildren to know what you went through and everything you did for us. We just want to try to get that story so that, you know, when you are no longer here, others can hear about it.*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** Most definitely. That's awesome that y'all are doing this.

*Is there anything you feel like we haven't discussed or that you want to be added to this interview that I might not have asked?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** I did have the opportunity to go do a flag detail. At the time, I was young and, I think about it, I was young. I could've talked to other veterans we did our flag detail for and I didn't do it and I regret; that's the only thing I regret. I didn't get the chance to talk to the veterans; the families that were there as we were doing the flag detail and I hate that.

*What message would you like to leave for future generations who will hear this interview?*

**Eduardo Aguilar, Jr.:** It takes a special person to enlist into the military. And once you're in, you'll know the real people; who they really are once they - hopefully not, but if you go to war, you'll find out who is who and you'll also know who you are inside. This country that we live in is the greatest country in the world. Our freedom is not free. A lot of brothers and sisters of ours paid the ultimate sacrifice to give us what we have, and always thank a veteran. A thank you can do so much for that veteran.

*It has been an honor to speak to you today, and on behalf of Commissioner Bush and the VLB, we appreciate you taking the time and telling us your story.*