

**Transcription: Julio Damian**

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*I am Mike McCreaken, representing the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Program. Today is September the 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009. I'm interviewing Mr. Julio Damian who lives in south Houston, and we are at the VA Regional Office Building conducting this interview today for Voices of Veterans. With that said, good morning Mr. Damian.*

**Julio Damian:** Good morning Mr. McCreaken.

*Please call me Mike.*

**Julio Damian:** OK Mike.

*Tell me Julio, when were you born?*

**Julio Damian:** I was born on April 28, 1947.

*And who were your parents?*

**Julio Damian:** I was born to Julio Damian Senior and Gloria Martinez Damian.

*Where were you born?*

**Julio Damian:** Houston, Texas.

*OK, so you're a Houstonian.*

**Julio Damian:** I'm a Houstonian.

*What branch of service were you in?*

**Julio Damian:** I was in the Army.

*When did you join?*

**Julio Damian:** In November of '67.

*Did you enlist?*

**Julio Damian:** No, Uncle Sam called.

*OK, so that's what made you want to join the service.*

**Julio Damian:** Right.

*How old were you when you went in?*

**Julio Damian:** 20.

*OK, tell me a little bit about your military experience. Well before even that, where did you go to high school?*

**Julio Damian:** I graduated from South Houston High School.

*OK, so you were a south Houstonian all the way.*

**Julio Damian:** Right, I'm a Trojan!

*Tell me about from boot camp on.*

**Julio Damian:** Well, I took my basic in Fort Poe, and then I took my AIT in North Fortpool, and then right after AIT, went home for about a week I think, and then went overseas to Vietnam. I transit through Cameron Bay, stayed there, well I got to Vietnam three days before my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, and I stayed in Cameron Bay for about two or three days and then they flew us to Playkoo, and then Playkoo that's where we got our orientation and all that on what we could do, what we couldn't do, and I just couldn't believe what they were telling us, that hey, you can't shoot until you are shot at. So I told my buddies, my brothers on each side, I said they got to be crazy. Don't shoot until you get shot at? That's too late. I said I'm sorry. But anyway, I stayed at Playkoo for a few days and then they took us, or they took me to Black Hawk Fire Base, which was, I can't remember the highway it was right off of, but it was between Playkoo and Quaynya. Quaynya was a depot and also Quaynya they had a rock quarry, so they called it Quaynya Pass. I was at Black Hawk Fire Base from May of '68 to November of '68. Then we had sniper fire here, harassment, incoming rounds and all that. There was a mechanized, first camp mechanized there, and there was an artillery unit, and like I said, we got hit and all that, but we actually didn't see much. I remember one time on LP which is listening in a patrol or point, whatever, and at dark, we snuck out and we go so many clicks this way and so many clicks that way, until we get there, but anyway, on our way to our point, we heard a bunch of racket like a whole company was coming. So we hit the ground and the grass was tall and all that, and all of a sudden my heart started beating, and I thought, I told the guys, I said man, you know, we whispered, and I said my heart is going to give us away. And they said sarge, we don't hear nothing. I said my heart is beating. So I said go ahead, lock and load. I said if they come upon us, we're not supposed to make contact, we're just supposed to be out there listening to see if there's any movement. But on the round we heard all this racket, so we hit the ground, and I told them if they come upon us, hey, you know the way back, try to go back the same way and I'll be on the rear. We're going to cut loose and then haul ass back to the compound, radio man, make sure when you get on that radio when we're running towards the compound, that we made contact, had to retreat back to the compound, we're coming in and keep talking to them until we get to the perimeter. That way we won't get shot by our own people. Anyway we stayed there and it looked like they were almost on top of us, and boy, my heart was beating, and it was a herd of water buffalo. Oh, I said, woah, let's hold on a little while. So the buffalo passed by. I said oh man, sarge, I said I thought this was it. So we continued and then we got to where we were supposed to be for the night, and then in the morning when we went in, I told everybody, we were laughing about it, and we were laughing but we weren't laughing at that moment. We

thought we were gonna get overrun. But no. That was one of the incidents. Then there were some other incidents. Right before I left for Vietnam there was a little bar and there was this gentleman, and I was out drinking, and like I said, I'm not 21 yet, before I got to that bar I was coming from a neighborhood called Magnolia, the east end, and I got stopped by the law. They stopped me and all that. They asked me for my ID, and I showed them, and they said you're not 21 yet. You drinking? Yes sir. You're drinking and you're not 21. I said yes sir. Why are you drinking if you're not 21? I said well, it might be my last drink. The police officer said what do you mean? I said well sir, I'm shipping out. He said shipping out where? I said I'm going to Vietnam. Said you got your orders? I showed him my orders and all that. So he gave me my driver's license back and all that, and he said God bless you and hey, be careful. Hope you make it back. Anyway, got to the bar and this gentleman comes up to me after a while. I'd been there maybe 30 minutes and this gentleman comes up to me and he says, he talked to me in Spanish, and he said what's wrong? I said ain't nothing wrong. He said there's something wrong. I said there is? He said yeah, it shows in your face. You've got like sadness. I said oh well, I'm being shipped out. He said you're being shipped out? I said yes sir, I'm going to Vietnam. So he said OK. So we talked a little bit and I didn't even know the man, and he lived there inside of Houston but I didn't know who he was. Anyway we talked and then he asked me if he could get me something. I said sure. So he reached and took a chain and a crucifix. The crucifix was about maybe 3 inches long, it was made out of metal and wood. He said I'd like for you to have this. I said oh, I can't have that because that's something personal. That belongs to you. He said but I want to give it to you, this will bring you back. Well you know, I said OK. So he gave it to me and all that. I went to Vietnam and we were out on patrol and I lost it, somehow I lost it. So then we were still at Black Hawk Fire Base, and then somebody came to our tent and he said Sargeant Damian, where's your crucifix? I said I lost it. He said you lost it? You know where you lost it? I said nope. I said I'll probably never see it again. Sargeant Damian, let's go to the club. There's a guy over there saying he found a cross out there, and it looks just like yours. And I asked him where'd you find it? And he said out in the jungle. I said woah, so we went over there and we'll go up and talk to that brother. He said yeah, found a crucifix. You want to describe it? So I told him it's about 3 inches made out of metal, and it's got wood and it's got these little clover leaf ties on each end. Is this it? I said yeah. Where'd you find it? He said I found it out in the bush. I said well, finders keepers. He said no Sarge, it belonged to you, here. That was the first time. First time I lost it. And then I lost it again somehow and I said well, maybe somebody will find it. But no, time went on, and then we went out on patrol because I was at demolition. We went with the first camp whenever they found enemy supply camps and all that. We'd go and form a perimeter and go in there and put our explosives and all that and blow everything up. We just kept what was American made. There were American weapons in there. Anyway, we were going, we got sniper fire and we just hit the ground, and I don't know, I was there on the ground and all that, and just waiting. You had your hands like this and you're hugging the ground, and I saw my crucifix. There it was again. And I never really thought about it and I said wow, man, what are the chances? I said wow, we must've passed by here. So anyway that was the second time. So then we got shipped out of Black Hawk Fire Base and we went to Bambituit, and there was the first camp there which was, but that was Airborne, and we went out with them and all that, but we stayed at Playkoo for a few days and then we went outside Playkoo and we set up camp. We made our compound and all that, and one day the platoon sergeant says, Sergeant Damian, I want you to get a jeep. We're going downtown. I said sure, no problem sir. He said we're gonna go get a haircut, a good bath and a massage. I said OK. So we're going and then these two medics were at the gate waiting for somebody that was going to town. So they caught us and said you're going to town? Can we get a ride? So there was two medics. We go downtown, we get our shave, massage, and other things and all that, so anyway going back to the company, it was getting kind of dark and then all of a sudden

“pow”, somebody, we got sniper fire. So the platoon sergeant said Sargent Damian, hit it! So I stepped on it and we were in a three quarter ton truck, and that has a big old steering wheel, so we’re going and we’re going, and we pass a company of Armans, or a tank unit. There were some tanks and APC’s. Then I don’t know, about 100 meters past them, boom, it was like a big old blast or explosion and we were airborne. The two medics flew out. They were knocked out and my platoon sergeant, he messed out, at night, I mean I bent the hell out of that steering wheel. Anyway the truck, it landed on all four, on the wheels.

*You stayed in the truck.*

**Julio Damian:** No, I was thrown out, too. We were all thrown out. I could barely breathe but I got up. Boy I was hurting, so I went to the truck and the son of a gun was still running, but the steering wheel was all bent, so I got in it, and I started to drive where that unit that we just passed, and anyway they heard the commotion and all that. They were already on their way to see what happened because they saw us pass. So then they intercepted me, I stopped, they got me off the truck, and I can’t speak Vietnamese, but when they had me on the road, I just drew a picture of a helicopter and I put a cross on it, you know, medivac. They said yeah, we called medivac. At the same time, because of the direction that we were going, they more or less knew where we were at. So they had called over there and said hey, there was an accident on the way. And so the company commander and everybody, they came over here and they called medivac, and when they put us in the medivac, I heard one of the guys say we’re worried about this one, which was me, because I was barely breathing. They said he has internal injuries. So we got sent to Danang. So I was in Danang for a couple of weeks, and then I went back to camp. But the two medics I never saw again, the platoon sergeant I never saw again, so they must’ve got hurt pretty bad or something. But anyway I was able to come back and all that. And then we stayed there for a while, and I was always volunteering for LP.

*What’s LP?*

**Julio Damian:** Listening Point or Listening Patrol. That’s when you go out at night when it gets dark and you sneak out of the camp and you go park yourself somewhere and you listen for movement. You don’t make no contact. If there’s any movement out there, you call into the company, hey, they already know our position and we tell them hey, there’s movement over here in our area, and we’ll tell them if they’re heading towards our compound or whatever and try to see if we can see how many people or whatever and what they are carrying. And so I made a lot of money there because there were a lot of people, hey Sergeant, I got these bad vibes. I don’t want to go out on LP. So I said how much do you think it’s worth? Nobody said less than \$300. Everybody said \$300, \$400. There was one, he was short, he was ready to come home. I mean Army don’t care, they’re don’t care if you’re leaving tomorrow, you’re still going to do your part. So they would come up to me and I made some money. \$300, \$400, \$500 was the most that they paid for me to take their LP because they didn’t feel right. So anyway, and then they sent us to this village or hamlet, whatever you call it, Lacthien, and they were going to drive us there, but then that road that goes to that hamlet, that village, the road is only big enough for one vehicle, and there was cliffs and all that, and it’s a good place for an ambush, so they decided to fly us in Chinooks. They tried to knock us out of the air flying in because that’s where the Mac-V advisors were. They were with the Mountain Yard unit. So we had to be with the Mac-V advisors. So anyway, over there, and one night it was my night to pull sergeant of the guard, so I was out there, and we had this dog that we called Bitch because everywhere we go, if there was a dog, boy, she would get straddled and all that, so we nicknamed her Bitch, and she was always hanging out in the Camo shack for the sergeant of the guard and all that will stay and then go

check the centuries and all that. So when I went out to check my centuries, I came up on one and he was out, he was asleep, he was knocked out. So I woke him up, and that's a big no-no, going to sleep on guard, especially in a combat zone. So I woke him up, I said man, what are you doing? What if an officer came by here and caught you asleep? They'll hang you because you got everybody under you asleep and all that, and you got to be on guard. He was asleep, he was all, he smoked a little too much, and so anyway he says, oh man, sorry. And we're supposed to check every weapon, the 50, the 60 caliber, the 30 caliber, we check 'em during the afternoon and the evening, and we make sure that everybody in that village is nowhere close in the rice patties where we are going to test fire all the machine guns and all that, and we got up in this point right here, and when it gets dark, then we move. Well that one guard that was asleep, he must've messed with the machine gun or something. Anyway when I found him asleep, he had about maybe 15 or 20 minutes left on his shift, and he was going to be replaced by the other guard. So I told him, I said, I'm not going to say the name, I said hey, try to stay awake. I'm going to go check the rest of the centuries and I'll come back and I'll relieve you and you go in. All right Sarge. So I went, came back, he was out. So the dog is a half breed German Shepherd, one of them Hine 57's, but anyway I told him to go in and I'll take over for the rest of your shift. So I mean I'm sitting there in the dark sitting here on my right side, and I'm just sitting there just thinking, and I look up to the sky, look in the rice patty. You can't really see nothing because it's dark. Then the dog started growling, and I said stop that, Bitch. Started growling. Then she would get up and she ran up to where the M-60 was and just growling and all that because she could hear something. Then she barked and growled. So I go up and get up and I look and I listen, nothing. I say hey, what the hell. So I grab the flare and I popped it. Well you know a flare makes all this racket before it lights up, so whoever is out there, they heard the pop and they heard the flare going on, so I guess they hit the ground. So it lit up and it's lit up just like in this room. We could see and I looked around and everybody's stocking their head like gophers, you know, what's wrong? Who shot that flare? And I'm looking, and looking at the perimeter. There's grass maybe about a foot high and all that, Constantina wire and all that, and then there's the rice paddy and all that. So nothing. So the flare keeps going, keeps going, and everybody's looking and we're looking, and nothing. The flare goes out and it's dark again. So I go sit down and slap the Bitch in the head and I said you better stop that. So she stayed there. We're not supposed to smoke on guard, but if you smoke you're not going to be over there where you can be seen because they will zero in on you. So anyway I was going to take out a cigarette and I was going to go ahead and smoke, but under the sandbags and all that. But the dog she started growling and all that, and this time she went crazy. She ran to where the machine gun was and ran down the berm towards the perimeter. So I got up and I could hear it go click, click, they were already on the last strand with wire cutters, and then I looked and I saw this little silhouette running towards our berm where the bunkers and all that were. So I grabbed the M-60 and I pointed at him and click, it didn't fire. So I pulled it to try to clear it or whatever, and click, it was jammed. And then all of a sudden, boom, they started throwing center charges, that was that one. So he threw a center charge and I saw the sparks and it hit and it fell inside the bunker in the entrance and it exploded and it shook, I mean I say woah. I threw the machine gun away and I jumped down, couldn't see nothing. I mean there's dust, smoke, but I could hear two brothers inside yelling oh my ear, my head. And I couldn't see nothing, with my eyes closed I go in, right into an M-60, so I just grabbed it and I looked for the safety and I put it on full, and when I was coming up I saw some sparks and there was the zapper preparing to throw another center charge, so I just b-r-r-p, and he went down. So I ran up there to the top of the bunker and I grabbed a case of grenades, and I ran to the perimeter and I was throwing grenades like crazy. I mean I was chunking grenades all over the place. It was like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. I mean the whole compound cut loose, they called for air support and all that. You could see the choppers and all that. You couldn't see the choppers, but you could see what looked like ropes because that's

where the M-60 machine guns, every fifth run is a tracer so when they are shooting, and I think somebody had said they had called in Puff the Magic Dragon, and I said wow, I mean it looked like a firework display. My heart was beating and all that, and I got all the way to perimeter chunking grenades and all that. I could've gotten killed from my own men. They didn't know who, but anyway, after a while they said cease fire, cease fire. There were supposed to be some others to come in, but only one made it in. That one I took out because I started chunking grenades all over the place and the rest of them couldn't get in. So in the morning, here comes the platoon leader, an LT, second lieutenant butterball, and he said who started all that shooting last night? Damian over there. Sergeant Damian. I said yes sir. He said what were you doing at that guard point? I said it was a change of guard. I didn't tell him that the man was asleep. I said I was waiting for the other one, I sent him in since I was right there. He said well what happened? I said we got infiltrated. Yes sir, we got infiltrated. Where through? I said right there where I was at. He said let's go over there. And it was just barely getting to be daylight and all that, so we go up there and get on top of the bunker and all that, and there's the berm, there's the Mekong, the \_\_\_\_\_ on his back, brains all over the place, I mean you know. And the LT, he goes berserk. Shoot him, shoot him. I said sir, he's dead. Shoot him. I said damn, shoot the man. So b-r-r-p. I said he's dead now, sir. And anyway, and then all of a sudden somebody yelled, and there was another zapper right outside the perimeter, the wire. There was a pile of logs. Anyway, the other zapper that was supposed to come in, he came up and all that, and so everybody, they didn't shoot but they wanted to get him so they could interrogate him and all that. But anyway, there was a trail of blood. We found some legs, body parts, and we saw the trail of blood leading us to the jungle.

*This was from your grenade tossing.*

**Julio Damian:** I guess. But not only me, but after the whole compound, that's how come I said I could've got shot. I mean they were shooting all over the place into the rice paddy and all that, the choppers when we got for air support, they were shooting all over the place, I mean I could've gotten killed. I guess it wasn't my time to go. Maybe that's why I was there at that time because if I hadn't been there, all of them would've gotten in because that century that was there, he was asleep.

*Is this the action that earned you the Bronze Star?*

**Julio Damian:** That's the action. So anyway all this time it bothers me, why did I have to make it back? And I keep asking myself, because I wasn't thinking. All I was thinking was about my men. And it says here I was credited for sure, saving their lives, 8 men or 7 men or something, but see we had orders. The main compound with the Mac-Vee advisors were with the Mountain Yards, that was the main compound and we were right outside of their compound. We formed the perimeter and all that, and there was an armed artillery unit there, and anyway they hit us every morning. Like I said from day one, they tried to knock us out from there. Every day they hit us. They hit us like at 6 o'clock in the morning. We were like gophers, groundhogs, whatever they call 'em. We would get up in the morning and they would be right there at the entrance of the bunker. They would be there listening, you know, smoking cigarette, we'd be up, and then you could hear it go b-r-r-p, b-r-r-p, several times, and everybody says get ready, and then you heard shk-shk-shk, and incoming, and everybody like groundhogs into the bunker. Then they would hit us for a few minutes and all that, but that happened in the morning, noon, and in the evening, you know, just to harass us. We were right there by, we were surrounded by mountains and the other side of the mountains was supposed to be the Ho Chi Minh trail. We were in Black Hawk on the other side of those mountains and all that they said was VC valley.

And I said man, you're over by VC valley and I'm over here by Ho Chi Minh trail. That's where we were and the Mac-Vee advisors, we would go out with them and all that. But anyway, this incident right here, I mean you know, I'd been coming over here, the first time I came over here to VA was in '90 something, '97, they denied me PTSD, even though I showed them this letter. And everywhere the VA got some people that they contract called QTC, outside doctors. And when they send you to see the psychiatrist downtown, I showed them this letter and he says this happened to you, you were awarded the Bronze Star, that's all they awarded you, the Bronze Star? They should've gave you something else, a higher medal. I said sir, I didn't want no medal. I just wanted to get the hell out of there.

*How long did you stay in the country after that action?*

**Julio Damian:** We only go, we do on hits 12 months, OK. When we were there, when somebody new came in, we'd ask them how is it back in the world? They would say sorry man, ya'll got it bad. I said what do you mean we got it bad? Well they turned me on, I see it. Calling you baby killers, women killers. I say what? Not one veteran that I know of just point blank killed a child or killed a woman. I mean that's a war, and when they try to hit us and we cut loose, yeah, some people are gonna die, but we did not intentionally point blank kill a baby.

*I know that.*

**Julio Damian:** And so anyway, that's it, what, civilians? You know, post. Said you're shitting. He said came on post, these assholes that incoming, oh we didn't know that, the people that live on post and all that. I said ah hell, no. So you know, before they had a deal that if you had 90 days or less and you were in a combat zone, instead of serving those 90 days stateside duty, you could come straight home. But then they changed that. They said if you had 150 days, five months. If you have 150 days or less coming from a combat zone, you didn't have to spend what you had left stateside duty or reserves. So after this and all that, and after hearing all that, I said hey, I went to the company commander and all that and I asked them you know, well I asked the clerk at the CP, command post, and I said hey, can you check on my regulars? How much time do I have left after I leave Vietnam? So he come back and tell me how much. I said I don't want to do stateside duty. How long do I have to extend so I could have 150 days and just go straight home? So he did it and all that, did the paperwork and I signed it. He said are you sure? I said I can't go back home with all this bullshit that's going on. I said I'll hurt somebody or I'll wind up in the stockade. So I served 15 months over there just so I could come home. Woah, at Penod, we saw some stuff, sniper fire and all that, nothing real serious hand-to-hand combat and all that. This was the most serious of all, where they infiltrated our compound, and if I wasn't sergeant on guard that night, and I hadn't caught that individual or soldier asleep, I probably wouldn't be talking to you right now because when I pulled bar, I took it serious, and I always told everybody hey, I need you to take care of my back, all right? There's two things I don't want you to do. I don't want you to panic or go AWOL. I said if you go AWOL because you get a Dear John letter, how are you gonna cross this ocean to go back home? You don't even know where you're going, so don't pull that shit on me, all right? What you want to do is survive, get home, go kick some ass. I said but if you panic... And I smoked over there, Mr. Mike, I smoked. I'm not gonna deny, I'm not gonna hide. I'll be a trooper. I smoked over there and I smoked with my men. I mean you know, and I told 'em, I said hey, look, I'm not gonna turn nobody in. Mr. Mike, that's one thing you don't do. You don't tell somebody well I'm going to turn you in, because if we go out on patrol, you ain't gonna make it back if you're gonna snitch on somebody. So I said hey, I'll even smoke with ya'll. I said but don't smoke to

the point where you're gonna pass out, all right? Just smoke to where you're relaxed and all that, but don't lose reality because we need you to take care of us.

*So you spent 15 months in Vietnam and you came home. What did you do when you got home?*

**Julio Damian:** Well, I had a nice homecoming and all that. I was a changed person, Mr. Mike. I wasn't the same individual.

*In what ways did you change?*

**Julio Damian:** I started going out by myself and hanging out with other veterans. I would take off on a Friday and not come back until Sunday, Monday morning to go to work. My family went through hell with me, not physically because I never laid a hand on them, but mentally and all that, and then my wife would get scared because of the nightmares that I would have and all that, and sometimes I'd try to choke her and I'd get up yelling and all that, hitting the nightstand and kicking and everything, and where I'd get up 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and just go outside and check all the backyard and everything. I did that for the longest, even my neighbor said hey, Julio, man, we don't want to scare you but we saw somebody the other night. I said that was me, I was just checking out the perimeter.

*Now when did you get married? Were you married before you went to Vietnam?*

**Julio Damian:** Yes, I got married June of '67, and I graduated in '67.

*What is your wife's name?*

**Julio Damian:** My wife's name is Janie.

*Are you still married to her?*

**Julio Damian:** Yes sir. We had two kids. We had two kids – my son is adopted because something was wrong. We weren't hitting it right, the moon wasn't right or something, but my wife just couldn't get pregnant. So this baby, we were babysitting and all that, and the mother didn't come back to get the baby. My wife was getting attached to it and I was, too. The mother got in trouble with the law. She called me and said do you want to adopt him? I said yeah, we'll adopt him. She was scared that they would take the baby away from her because she was into drugs and all that.

*What is your son's name?*

**Julio Damian:** My son's name is Jaime, James Edward Damian, and everybody calls him Jaime. He's a white boy. Oh God, everybody says that he was a blessing. He was three weeks old when we got him. The Harris County sheriff's department, they called my house I think it was about maybe 2 o'clock in the morning, because they had arrested his mother, and they said that she told them that we had the baby, and that they were going to come and pick up the baby. I said you ain't picking no baby up. The baby belongs to us, officer. I said I'll tell you what, by the time you get here, my lawyer will be here. So I called a lawyer and I told him you draw up the papers. Well they never came by, they took me serious. But anyway, then my lawyer took the papers to her, she signed, we went to court and all that, and they said I think we had 30 days to change our mind. So we got out of town where they couldn't get a hold of us. Everybody

said, the whole family said that he was a blessing. Five years after we adopted my son, my daughter came. My wife got pregnant.

*What is your daughter's name?*

**Julio Damian:** My daughter's name is Laurie, Laurie Ann. Everybody says my son was a blessing, my daughter was a miracle.

*What are they doing now?*

**Julio Damian:** My daughter, she's at home now. She lives with me and my wife and my grandkids and my son-in-law because where I live, it's a two-story home. That's too much house for just me and my wife, and so when I had my first heart attack in 2001, I asked her to sell her home to move in with us, and she did. And of course my daughter, she had my first granddaughter while she was still living at home going to school, but hey, things happen. But the father, he didn't try to run off or anything. He came up to me and he said I want to marry her. I said well good, no problem, and he's a good man. My son-in-law's name is Jessie Rivas, and anyway I got three grandkids from my daughter, and I had two grandkids from my son. My son, he's 6'2". My daughter is Hispanic, OK, and my son is white because we adopted him, but I played a lot of ball in the Latin American league, and there's nothing but Mexicans and all that. There's white and there's black playing in our league, too, you know, even though it's called Latin American league. But anyway, my son, blond headed, and every time we go to the game and we'll be sitting on our benches waiting for our time to play, and they would come out and go hey, how's it going, Julio, or they call me Juice. That's my street name, bar name, whatever, Juice. They say hi to my wife. Where your little boy at? Everybody, because he's white, everybody goes wow, you got a white boy. I say yea. They say where's he at? And hey, we just turned around. If we saw a group of kids, boom, he stood out like a sore thumb – black headed kids and one blond headed, so I said there he is.

*Taller than everybody else.*

**Julio Damian:** Yeah, and he was tall, too. He's 6'2". My son was something else. But anyway, back in '73, they had kidnapped a little boy and they had him on the news and in the paper. I swear to God, he looked just like my son. Anyway, my wife was out shopping and all that and somebody saw a Hispanic lady with a little white boy, and my son looked just like the one they had kidnapped. And so they called the police. And so the police they just automatically come and snatch him and all that. They watched her while she finished shopping and all that, watched her when she went to the car, followed her until she got home, and when she got home, that's when they moved in. They scared the hell out of my wife. I said woah, that's my son. Everything was straightened out. But anyway, Mr. Mike, when I came back, I went back to work at the post office and all that. In 1973, I quit the post office and I went to work for Hughes Tool Company, you know that Howard Hughes and all that? Went to work for Hughes tool company. At the post office, they don't pay social security because it was civil service. But anyway, and I had gotten home from work and I was drinking a beer and we were in the living room, my son was in the front yard playing and all that, and my wife was sitting in the living room, and then a car drives up and my wife says who's that? I said I don't know. And there was a man like this on the window on the passenger side, he was talking to my son while my son was squatting down playing with some rocks. I guess they were asking them hey, where's your daddy? And my son would turn around and point, he's inside. So anyway my wife says maybe you better go over there. They're going to try to get him. I said they're not that

stupid. But then when they opened the door and got out, and they looked like scroungy, hippie type, long hair with beard. That's how a lot of Vietnam veterans came back looking like the hippies and all that. And so when he got out and I saw the way he looked, I said oh, I went to my bedroom and I got my .38, and so I came back to the living room and my wife said honey, go out there. I said hold on. So the man walks up to my son and he squats down and he's talking to him and like that, so I started walking towards the door and he stands up, starts walking to the house. So I'm just there looking at him and oh, Mr. Mike, I had chills, I said I know that guy. I know that man. And as he got closer, I said oh God, he was one of the ones that got wounded when this happened. He got wounded and he was sent home. But he got my address and everything, and I had moved three times by the time – we came back in '69. I came back in June of '69 and he was sent home like this happened in February and I guess he came home in February, March, whatever. He came home before I did. But anyway, I knew that I wasn't going to go to Flint, Michigan.

*So he came from Flint, Michigan, to find you?*

**Julio Damian:** Well he came looking for work because at that time, in the 70's, Houston was known as boomtown USA. So him and his friend came down. So he was coming to Houston, hey, I'll look up old Sergeant Damian, saved my life. And so when I saw him coming to the door, I said Willie, Sergeant Damian, and we hugged, we cried and all that, and just like that we lost contact again. I don't know what happened to him. That was it. And like I said, because I quit the post office and went to work for Hughes Tool, I was paid social security, so that was a plus. Everybody said I was stupid quitting the post office, but I said why? I don't like getting paid every two weeks. I'm getting paid every week. I work 7 days a week, sometimes 12 hours, sometimes 16 hours, double shoot, and I didn't do nothing. I wasn't respected. 7 days a week, holidays, all that time. But anyway a good thing that came about me quitting the post office, I qualified for social security. Anyway I got into the Army National Guard because they were Airborne, so I became a paratrooper and all that.

*When was this?*

**Julio Damian:** I got in it in '78.

*So you went in the Air National Guard in 1978.*

**Julio Damian:** Well, in '78 I went to Texas Army National Guard, because they were the 143<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, 36<sup>th</sup> Airborne, sister unit of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. So I told my wife I'm going Airborne. She didn't like that idea, but I went. So I did 6 years with the Texas Army National Guard and then I got out because they converted to engineers. I think it was the 386<sup>th</sup> or something. I tried to get into the 147<sup>th</sup> Texas Air National Guard. When I was in the Texas Army Guard, headquarters is in Austin, Camp Mabry, and we went out there to jump one weekend and we were in the mess hall eating lunch when this officer comes up to me, he says, and it was just me and a friend, he says do you mind if I join you? I said, I looked up, I saw a star, I said sir, you're asking permission to sit at this table? This table belongs to you. I said it would be an honor to have a general sit with us. So he sat down, and he was the Texas Adjutant General of the Texas Guard, the whole state of Texas, Brasidio Dominguez. So we were talking and all that, and he says, so you all are paratroopers. You jump out of good flying airplane. Yes sir. He said I never could understand that, why anybody would be that dumb to jump out of a fine working plane. I said sir, until you jump, don't knock it. So then he says you ever thought of getting into the Air Force? I said sir, can we talk without no rank? He said hey, there's no rank, you go ahead. I

said sir, I was Army when I was in Vietnam, and I always hated the Air Force because ya'll had everything. Ya'll had bunks to sleep on, mattresses, air conditioned, you had the best club, the best food, and we didn't have all that, and ya'll didn't do nothing. The pilots were the only ones. I was stupid at that time. I always thought the Air Force were pussies. He says what? That's what I thought, sir. He said OK. Well anyway, he got through eating and he says well, it was nice having a chat with ya'll. You ever decide to get into the Air Guard and the Air Force and there's a problem, contact me. So he gave us a card. Well I got a DWI in '83, and that's when they started the DWI tests here in Houston, and just because I backed out of a beer joint, and I only drank like half a beer, but anyway they said even he just take one swab, you blow, it'll register you're drunk. So anyway I got a DWI. It wasn't a big deal. So when I tried to get into the Texas Air National Guard, the 147, I passed everything. At that time you didn't have to go to Lackland to become a technician. You could do OJT. That's what I did and I became a crew chief. I caught real quick.

*So you were in the Air National Guard. When did that start?*

**Julio Damian:** In '84.

*And when did you complete your service in the Air National Guard?*

**Julio Damian:** Well, they retired me in '98 because I had arthritis because I couldn't lift the missiles. I became a crew chief and I was proud, you know. But anyway when they said Sergeant Damian, you passed the test, you passed everything, but you got one thing that we can't take. I said what? They said you got a DWI. I said oh. I said but it was nothing. Well it was still a DWI. I said oh well. I tried. She says if you only knew somebody that was up there. I said what do you mean? Yeah, if you knew a high ranking officer, they could probably waiver the DWI. Like a general you say? Yeah. You know a general? Yeah, I know a general. He said what general do you know? I said I know the Adjutant General of the Guard. And she says who's that? I said Brasidio Ramirez. Said you know him? Yeah, I got his card. So I pulled out his card and I said I met him in Mabry and we talked and all that. He said that if we ever thought of getting into the Air Guard and we had any problem to give him a call. So you know, she gets on the phone and calls Austin. Can I speak to General Ramirez? So OK. Yes sir, this is Debbie Salinger, the top recruiter over here, blah-blah, the whole thing. The reason I'm calling you sir is that there's a sergeant here from the Army that wants to get into the Air Guard but he has a DWI. And I asked him if he knew somebody that would probably waiver this and he said yeah and he got his card out and said he knew you. He said that you had lunch with him one time at Camp Mabry. So I guess General says oh, ask him if he's the one that thinks that the Air Force are pussies. And she says what? And I guess he repeated it. And she kind of blushed, and I'm watching her and all that, and then just a moment, so she puts the phone, said Sergeant Damian, are you, do you think that the Air Force are pussies? I said yes ma'am. Yes sir, that's him. OK sir. Same to you, yeah, blah-blah. They hung up. Sergeant Damian, you're in. I said for real? I said that's work, knowing somebody, it worked. But anyway I loved the military. But I don't think I would've been able to do it full time going through all that BS, but I love putting on my uniform and I still wear it and all that.

*So looking back on your whole military career right back to the time you went into Vietnam, what would you tell young men and women today about military service that they might take away from this from your experience as a positive or a negative?*

**Julio Damian:** It's always positive. I mean I think, I guess that's why God didn't make me, didn't let me be president, because if I would've been president, I wouldn't let nobody into the United States. The only way they could come into the United States and become a citizen, same from you, you're from Mexico, whatever, and you want to become a citizen, you give me 10 years of your life in the military, serve honorably. At the end of those 10 years, you're a citizen, you and your immediate family. But that's just it. And that's the same thing if somebody from Africa or from China or from whatever, you want to become a citizen? No problem. But you pay your dues just like everybody else, OK? You just can't come over here and hey, after so long, you start receiving all the benefits that you haven't really earned. This is the way I see it. I'm not a cold-hearted person, but this is the way I see it.

*That's a reasonable way to see things.*

**Julio Damian:** And I would tell hey, I think everybody should serve their country, but it's noted, Mr. Mike, on my records, on my medical records, it shows because I've gone through PTSD, too, trauma recovery program and all that, for PTSD, and this individual, this veteran has a lot of anger towards the government. Mr. Mike, why did we go to Vietnam if we weren't going to finish it? Why did we have to lose 60,000 veterans for nothing, just pull us out? That was a slap in the face to us. I mean Vietnam is the size of Rhode Island, we could've wiped 'em out quick, but why? Why did we have to lose all those young people and that hurts? I mean I don't know. But I will say that I'll fight for my flag and I'll fight for my country. And I hope I could tell a president to his face, I will not fight for this government, but for my country, yes. I mean my government is going to say hey, pick up, and I will obey. I'm not going to say no. But I'm not fighting for the government. I'm fighting for my country.

*Well, on that, this is a good place to end this interview and on behalf of the Commissioner Jerry Patterson and the Veterans Land Board, and me personally, we'd like to thank you for your service to your country.*

**Julio Damian:** Thank you Mr. Mike. I wish a lot of people would say that to a Vietnam vet because we were the only ones that got treated like shit, big time. You know, what hurt, whenever a Vietnam veteran would go and try to get a loan to start a business or do something, do you have any collateral? No. Sorry. And then what happens after the war in the Vietnam ended? They brought all these Vietnamese. At first I had a lot of hatred for Vietnamese because of what this government did, gave them everything to start a business and all that. And the American veteran that served his time fighting for his country, he couldn't get nothing, but they gave it to those people. How many times do we have to get slapped in the face and then come back and get treated like shit? Baby killer, woman killer. We were the only veterans that got treated like that. I'm just glad that the Iraqi Freedom Fighters, they are being treated because when we came back they just threw us into society just like that. Hey. You are on your own. And that was it. Nothing. I have opinion that the majority of the whole of veterans are Vietnam vets because they gave up too quit. They get frustrated, they get all depressed when they come over here and they try to get something, and they are denied. It's very depressing. But anyway I appreciate this interview and I'm just glad that I didn't get emotional to where I wouldn't be able to talk.

*I appreciate your time. We all appreciate your time coming in. I'm going to turn off the recorder.*

*[End of recording]*