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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Gordon Paul Rozanski
Conducted by Richard Verrone
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Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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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Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I'm conducting a video oral history with Gordon Paul Rozanski, better known as Rozy. Today is 11/10/05 and we are in Washington, DC, at the Crystal City Hilton and we're here for the 40th anniversary reunion of the Pleiku-Ia Drang Valley campaign. Sir, what I would like for you to do is we can concentrate and look at these days in November and I like to get you to describe maybe that weekend before Sunday the 14th. What were you doing, what was your position, then what were you doing to prepare for this?

Gordon Paul Rozanski: The battalion at the time had been working in the Plei Me area there because of the attack of the on the Special Forces camp. When the battalion had moved up in there, I was the S4 for 1st and the 7th and in charge of supplies. So I set up a supply agency there or attempted. Then, a couple of people at Pleiku, Holloway and then also put some other people up on the tea plantation to help and supply. We—at the time we've been supplying daily rations for the troops as they been on their other operations and then it was just a matter of support all the way through for—we had some guys who were troops ready to head on home and in a lot of cases decided to stick it out until they came back in from the field. So it was a matter of supply and taking care of the troops, making sure they had what they needed.

1 RV: How difficult of a job was that in that terrain? In that atmosphere and its—
2 you're right at the crux of what the public saw as the real first time the Americans were
3 on the ground, which we know is not true. But tell me about working supply there in
4 1965.

5 GPR: Well, really the weapons we had were basically new. They were the M16s.
6 Getting the people used to the M16s and the problems of maintenance and trying to keep
7 them from wrapping them around a tree after their little frustration. We had the rations,
8 you know, were no problem. Still eating C-rations at the time, but we tried if possible, to
9 make sure they got a hot meal or hot something. Usually every day or whatever if you're
10 not in contact. It wasn't bad. The one problem we had from the get-go over there was the
11 water. What we had for brining water out to the troops besides their own canteens, were
12 plastic—they looked like collapsible milk jugs. Probably four and five gallons. They
13 worked fine. They'd fold up, but when they were full of water and sloshed around, the
14 first stick punctured them. So you always had a problem with water. I think that was
15 probably one of the biggest headaches. Ammunition, we had a great supply of
16 ammunition. Rations. Anything we need was right stone's throw from the tent. The
17 medical unit was supporting me and the Pleiku operation was right in my backdoor.

18 RV: Sounded like you had what you needed.

19 GPR: We had everything we needed right there.

20 RV: Sunday the 14th. Tell me about that day.

21 GPR: The troops had moved basically back into the Plei Me area. The old Special
22 Forces camp there, at Plei Me. They had trouble—they had all come in from the
23 operations they'd been running. We served them I think a hot meal that day. And as we're
24 sitting there, the general says, "Let's go for a ride." I'd say it was General Moore, Matt
25 Dillon, myself, Crandall, and Freeman. As I recall.

26 RV: Crandall, Freeman had already left?

27 GPR: They're pilot and co-pilot. We took off, flew out. I guess you could call it
28 an aerial reconnaissance. It was—I think we figured it was going to be a walk in the park.
29 We had no real, I think, intel of anything being in that area. Even though the Special
30 Forces camp had been hit, they had run an operation at the camp to go back a little bit
31 before that. The team that had been out on the ground came back in from the south to the

1 camp. Crossed the airstrip. Saw nothing all the while they were out there. They got into
2 back into the camp, they had just barley put their gear down. The whole south-side of the
3 airstrip rose up and moved on. They got hit pretty good. So us not being able to see
4 anything in there I think was just—we knew there were troops there. I don't—I really
5 don't know if we had any idea there were North Vietnamese troops there. In my own
6 mind. But we decided after making the fly by that we would go in and I would get two
7 ships for supplying the first, because the first group going in, they would take just a very
8 small amount of ammunition for their mortars and machine guns, and cruiser weapons.
9 So the deal in what we had done in the past was that after the first lift goes in, I get two
10 ships, they're mine. I'd learned through all the training that when you get them, you keep
11 a foot on them or they have a tendency to run all away like children. So the first lift went
12 in, when they came back, I got my two ships loaded the crew served extra ammunition
13 and parts for the mortars of the gear that they needed. We followed the second lift in and
14 I always, while I was ES4, did the supplies so I could see what was going on down on the
15 ground. As we went in and kind of trailing the second lift in, first bunch had already been
16 pretty well towed. I'm sitting in the door of the chopper and the one that I was in had
17 gotten—I didn't find out until we were out on the ground, supposedly had been dinged
18 going in. But as we went over going into the Ia Drang, there was the ridge line here. As I
19 looked down, I could see them shooting at us and I figured, not a walk in the park. So we
20 got in, I unloaded the ammunition close to the—there were a couple of First Sergeants
21 there and they had a bunch of wounded already. I'm carrying stuff for Crawston and
22 taking fire. The First Sergeant and the troops that were there helping load the wounded
23 and offload the stuff, while the pilot decided the ship couldn't fly for what reason. I guess
24 it had been hit, but it's his decision. So we loaded on to the second and just as we lifted
25 off, it either got hit again, or it had been hit before. So we started to smoke, went a short
26 ways away heading down and the crew bailed. They had already called, and I don't
27 know—Winkel says he was the one that came in, I don't know for sure. At that time, I
28 wasn't looking at name tags or asking for resumes it was, you know, "Give me some
29 support!" We had the troops that needed to get some of these guys out. I had one part of
30 the side of his face, his ear was gone. Another one through the neck, one in the chest, one
31 in the stomach, several others. The ship came in and I peeled everybody off that I could

1 and stuffed them in the back of the chopper. We went on back into Pleiku instead of
2 going into any of others because the guys who were wounded at that time, they had battle
3 bandages on, but they hadn't been treated by Sergeant Keating, the medical sergeant or
4 the doc hadn't been at them yet. These guys had just been—they were fresh.

5 RV: Right. They didn't get—

6 GPR: That's it, so I took them right back there, we landed. The guys met us, I
7 mean, they were there in a heartbeat. They refueled, we reloaded. I had my S4 Sergeant, I
8 think Sergeant Freiburger at the time, called my two NCOs (Non-Commissioned
9 Officers) who were out at the tea plantation and told them to give them whatever
10 assistance they could.

11 RV: Are you calling Moore and asking, "What do you want now?" Or are you
12 kind of just following your instinct?

13 GPR: The thing there is, I dealt with the people who needed it and what I figured
14 they were needing. One of the things that did happen during this time, and just kind of a
15 sideline here is that Crandall and them did haul a lot of ammunition in. Problem being, it
16 was a good idea to a point. But you don't need a lot of machine gun ammunition. We
17 destroyed a lot of ammunition when we left. We had ammunition, but it wasn't what we
18 needed. In fact, in some of the cases, instead of the ammunition, five gallons of water
19 would've been better. It's neither here nor there, it happened and it's just the way it is. I
20 talked to the people on the ground and—

21 RV: You told the company commander?

22 GPR: The company commanders and also the troops. The mortar people, the first
23 sergeants they were there, they knew what they needed. I didn't think that going to
24 Moore, I talked with the General and at that time, we were getting into the things that we
25 figured we needed. We needed water, and we really didn't get any large amounts of water
26 and supplies. The water came—got in the next day. They had brought in—we had tried to
27 make a deal to bring in a couple of big bladders. However, when supplies they like to
28 keep a foot on things, they took them in and they forgot the pumps. So there's trouble
29 getting water out of those things. Those two Chinooks they were there, they were the
30 ones that Moore and I walked around and reloaded with the dead that we had. But other
31 than—I haven't really thought that much about, you know, the things that happened. I

1 just know that I kept moving as much as I could, in bringing things in that they needed
2 and taking people out, trying to treat people. When I did take the dead back into Pleiku, I
3 took the dead and one wounded NVA (North Vietnamese Army).

4 RV: What do you do with that, in the midst of this day? How do you handle the
5 dead and the wounded? Do you put that aside so you can go forward?

6 GPR: My wife says that I'm probably the most together person about this. It was
7 bad, however, in later times in my tour over there I saw things that were a little, I think,
8 worse than what had gone there. The dead bothered me to the point—these young guys, I
9 was commanding headquarters coming in, the 2nd of the 23rd, which later became the 1st.
10 When a lot of these shiny faces got off the buses in front, they came right to me for
11 mama.

12 RV: And you saw these faces?

13 GPR: I did, and I watched them throughout their training at Benning, at Carolinas.
14 My first Sergeant didn't go over with us because he had a medical problem. But I'd go
15 and bail them out of jail! It happened more than once. I could talk to them; I wasn't an
16 enlisted man to begin with. When these guys, a lot of them that did get killed, that didn't
17 have to be there. But they went through the training. Everybody that was there, they were
18 a family. You knew what the next guy was going and that's really what turned the tide
19 there. You knew you could rely on the guy next to you because you knew what he was up
20 to.

21 RV: Tell me about General Moore. What kind of man is he? Who was he to you
22 then? And who is he to you now?

23 GPR: Well, we haven't talked that much in recent years, but when he reported and
24 took over the battalion, I was very close to General Moore's wife. It was sort of like,
25 "Rozy you're the old dude around here." You know, we were going to have a party,
26 "Rozy, you set this up." I was Harold Moore's dog robber. If there was something that
27 was needed, I could get it.

28 RV: It's a great skill.

29 GPR: When we went over, I had moved units overseas before, I knew that you're
30 not going to have what you need. You order a bunch of extra CONEX containers and
31 then you go, they issue you plywood, so you could box off these containers. Well, no. I

1 keep the plywood and all of this, and put it in one because you're going to need it later.
2 Then I go and Fort Benning was a great place that had a lot research and development.
3 They were doing at that time the dehydrated rations and our friend said, "Gosh, I had this
4 stuff." I said, "Fine, I'll have it pick up." So I took many containers, dehydrated rations.
5 We ate porkchops when the division headquarters was eating C-rations.

6 RV: So tell me about your time there at X-Ray. That first day you were busy
7 loading, unloading.

8 GPR: Loading, unloading. Usually, to get the supplies, the guys who were in the
9 choppers, they wouldn't budge. If they did anything, they'd push something off, but that
10 was about it. It was a matter of getting over to the supplies to who need it and taking out
11 the wounded as according to Sergeant Keating. They all had worked for me when I had
12 commanded headquarters company. They really made sure that these guys need out of
13 here. They need attention right now and I did what I could.

14 RV: Did you stay at X-Ray in any of those nights? Or did you—

15 GPR: I didn't. I was usually in the back trying to make sure—because first of all,
16 I'm not knowing just exactly how long we're going to be on because the amount of
17 supply that had been at Holloway was actually we were about running out time. So I
18 wanted to make sure we had enough mortar, ammunition, any of the ration that we
19 needed or if I needed to have stuff brought up from An Khê. Then try to deal with and
20 coordinate with the people out at the Tea Plantation. Which several people, I think, tried
21 to get involved more than—they may have slowed things down. We were able to
22 supply—my section was able to supply anything my battalion could do and had the best
23 team, and as far as the helicopters saying, "Well, we had to do this, we had to do that."
24 It's a helicopter, they were attached to us. Taking ammunition back into the landing zone
25 was their job. You know, you can't fight a war on sailboat fuel. Empty helicopters don't
26 do anything. Same way coming out, you have wounded, they got to be out. Bringing in
27 the medevac choppers, I think would've been a mistake. The medevac choppers at that
28 time I think the, as I recall, the policy was for that to come in as a slick, they had to have
29 gunships to support it. The troops, they didn't have gunners on them then. The troops that
30 did have guns, they were in the back were also the medics. It would've been, in my
31 opinion, and at that time I was a captain and my opinion, it may have been listened to but

1 probably not, it would've been a waste of a great asset that the division needed. Coming
2 in and hauling a couple of people off and possibly losing because of not having the
3 gunners.

4 RV: Tell me about Bruce Crandall. He plays such a significant role in the book
5 and in the movie. Tell me about Crandall in those three days.

6 GPR: I wasn't that close with—in touch with him at that time because it seemed
7 that every time, he may have been flying some of the time I was there. He always
8 (Imitates Crandall's voice) "If I'd known you'd be there, you'd have had a helmet." Well,
9 we always had a flight helmet, so we'd have contact. Whenever I went, I had a war flight
10 helmet, so I had contact and I could tell them where I wanted to land. After forty years of
11 the story being told and retold, sanitized or whatever, I think he did a great job. If anyone
12 could do a video game, I'd like to see that they for those three days to see how the
13 helicopters didn't eat themselves up based on you're hearing of this. I didn't see as many
14 helicopters as I've heard they were but.

15 RV: Tell me about Ed Freeman.

16 GPR: Top notch. Top notch. Not much to say. He's business, professional.
17 Deserves what he got.

18 RV: Tell me about yourself, and what you took away from those three days. Your
19 busyness, your lessons learned. Where are you now?

20 GPR: I learned a lot, I learned that everything is going to change and you're
21 training people, it doesn't make a difference how well you train them. They're going to
22 get killed. War is not a pleasant thing and we don't do it just for the fun of it. I really
23 support all the troops. To me, that's it. Like I tell all the young guys that I see today, that
24 really us old dudes, we can't hold a candle to them. They're so far above us and what
25 they can do. The guys that we had, I think, were the finest trained people. Most settled
26 bunch that I have ever had the privilege of working with.

27 RV: Would you attribute that to Plumley and Moore?

28 GPR: General Moore was a SOB. He was a stickler. Now Moore, it was from the
29 reveille calls, to the retreat ceremonies, he was a stickler for detail. And I like to cut
30 corners, so right there I'm usually on the hot seat somewhere along the line.

1 RV: What's it like being here forty years later and seeing the men? There'd been
2 reunions in the past, but this is a special 40th commemorative reunion for you all.

3 GPR: This one here and just looking at the people I've seen today, I could run
4 into Matt Dillon on the street like I did today. Matt and I live sixty miles apart and I've
5 seen him once.

6 RV: Since Ia Drang?

7 GPR: Since Ia Drang. (Laughs) We're both the same. It's like so-so. In June, we
8 had a reunion down in Fort Hood. A bunch of the guys—I took over B Company as we
9 came out of the Ia Drang. And all of these guys were there, they wanted me there so I
10 went down. They all had the pictures. Really that was the hardest thing for me. I'm
11 looking at these guys, they're all grown and you've had good careers or not. Then when
12 you look at the picture, you think, "You know, you really treated these young dudes
13 wrong." There's one Frenchy, he looked just like he's ought to be with a peachcello out
14 on the beach and now he's an old grizzled. But at time I'm thinking, this kid, he held off
15 people and he helped a couple of the guys who were wounded. That was his baptism. Not
16 so much do the fire thing, into life. For all of us, we had kind of wondered around in the
17 An Khê area. You get shot at once and while.

18 RV: You were wounded, a little bit, four times. Is that correct?

19 GPR: Yeah.

20 RV: When was this?

21 GPR: In Bồng Sơn.

22 RV: Next year? In '66?

23 GPR: Yes. I have mechanical elbows.

24 GPR: Let me ask this, we need to wrap this up. When you picture LZ (Landing
25 Zone) X-Ray, when you picture those three days in November 1965, what do you see in
26 your mind? What stands out? What is it that you remember?

27 GPR: I'll tell you, that's one thing that I really thought about when I was back
28 there, I was in Special Forces because that was my area. I went in with several operations
29 and I walked. Like I told Moore, "I heard the guys talk." It was just like walking through
30 the cemetery. Not a sound, not a bird, nothing. But as it got dark, in your mind you could
31 hear the voices. That's about as closest I've got to, really.

- 1 RV: Well, why don't we go ahead end the interview now? Thank you very much
- 2 Mr. Rozanski, appreciate it.