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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Enrique Victor Pujals
Conducted by Dr. John Ron Milam
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Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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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.

1 (Editor's note: Audio cuts in here)

2 Dr. John Ron Milam: This is Dr. Ron Milam with Texas Tech University and the
3 Vietnam Center, and I'm interviewing today Enrique Pujals.

4 Enrique Pujals: Yes, that's it.

5 JM: Nice to have you here. I'd like to first start by asking you if you could tell me
6 your MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) and your rank and your responsibilities on
7 November 14th, 1965.

8 EP: My MOS was 1542, that's an infantry small unit commander. I was a 2nd
9 lieutenant platoon leader of the 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion 7th Cav.

10 JM: So you were in the 2nd?

11 EP: Right.

12 JM: Okay. Let's back up. You joined the 1st Cav in Benning?

13 EP: I joined the 1st Cav in Fort Benning as a volunteer officer. I was an extra
14 officer. I was, at the time, with the infantry school of support troops Alpha Company, 1st
15 of the 29th infantry.

16 JM: Okay. When did you actually transfer over to the 1st Air Cav?

17 EP: On or about the 28th of July.

18 JM: 28th of July of—

19 EP: '65.

1 JM: Of '65? So you were not involved with their training exercises from '63 or
2 '64 on?

3 EP: No, but I had been an escort officer to the high-ranking officers, colonels,
4 generals, and foreign officers. As an escort officer doing the time, I forget the name of
5 the fort, it's the one that near Macon. As my duties, I learned a lot about my training from
6 the theoretical part, which is from the literature. Sometimes my duties took me with a
7 general colonel I was escorting to the sights and watch demonstrations and watch the
8 troops maneuvering. But that was my involvement with the training of the 11th Air
9 Assault.

10 JM: What was your source of commissioning? How did you get your—

11 EP: I was commissioned through the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps)
12 program in Pennsylvania Military College, which was in Chester, Pennsylvania.

13 JM: Okay, did you go to OBC (Officer Basic Course)? Officer Basic School, after
14 ROTC?

15 EP: No, I went through a special course they had for infantry officers at the time.

16 JM: Is this the U2 program?

17 EP: Yeah, it's the U2 program.

18 JM: Oh!

19 EP: I got in a problem with one of the professors. He wouldn't give me a make-up
20 test because I went too early, one day early to my home for Christmas. He wouldn't give
21 me a make-up test and I had been in the top ten percent in the class, I was a distinguished
22 military student. I was in line for RA (Regular Army) commission, but because of that, I
23 flunked his course and I let slide all the other courses. I ended up with a very low C, or
24 very high D. I don't remember exactly. I was about to do the same thing in the on the
25 second semester. I was a cadet officer, a cadet lieutenant, cadet platoon leader, in
26 Pennsylvania Military College. But my second semester, before the end of first semester,
27 I decided to buckle up and forget about what had happened and try to make the best
28 grades I could. They offered me the U2 program and the U2 program was considered for
29 the substandard officers. That hurt me in my career afterwards.

30 JM: You think it hurt you?

1 EP: Yeah, I think it hurt me. I think they thought I was some sort of dud because
2 the S1 officer, when I was stationed in Germany in 1969 through '71, he said, "Captain, I
3 thought you were a dud, that's what they told me to believe, but you're very sharp."
4 (Chuckles). So that's where I get the impression from.

5 JM: How long did you stay in the army?

6 EP: I stayed in the Army for five and a half years. Active duty.

7 JM: Five and a half years. Did you retire as a captain or left as a captain?

8 EP: I left as a captain.

9 JM: One tour or two tours in Vietnam?

10 EP: I did two tours in Vietnam.

11 JM: You did two tours. Well, just for your information, I have—part of my
12 research doctrinal dissertation was on junior officer leadership in training and everything
13 during the Vietnam War. I was not familiar with U2, I thought I knew most of everything
14 that happened because I know how OBC was considered for a long time, that those who
15 graduated from the US military academic didn't have to go to OBC for a short period of
16 time. Then they realized that OBC, the eight weeks of OBC was something that was
17 necessary even for West Pointers. So this U2 program somehow kind of got snuck in
18 there at a time, but I never found it in the literature, so it must have been a very short
19 period of time.

20 EP: Yes, that's what they told us. It was an experiment to see—for the West
21 Pointers, an experiment to see if we could do it, just a short—I think it was two or three
22 weeks course then OJT (On the Job Training). One of our classmates, he asked, "What's
23 the real purpose of this, because if you look around, none of us here is in the top ten
24 percent. We're the C's and B minuses."

25 JM: To your credit, they cancelled the program after a while, obviously and the
26 only people that didn't have to go to OBC after that were OCS (Officer Candidate
27 School) because they had been six months becoming officers and that's the only way it—
28 well, that's interesting information right there. Go ahead.

29 EP: I would like to add, we called him "the shepherd", the 1st lieutenant who was
30 in charge of our group at the U2 and Fort Benning, was Joe Marm. He's the one that won
31 the Medal of Honor on the 14th, for his actions there.

1 JM: He was also in the U2 program?

2 EP: No, he was OCS. He had been—he was first lieutenant, and he was in the 9th
3 Infantry Division at the time. This was before they changed, this was September of 1964.
4 He was in charge of our group; he was the one that was in charge of our group. We called
5 him our shepherd. (Chuckles)

6 JM: Sure, well he did a good job, didn't he? So you joined the 1st Air Cav then,
7 right before they leave?

8 EP: Yes, because I was very despondent because the 1st Cav was going off to war
9 and I was bored here as support troop, playing mighty aggressive forces and
10 demonstrations that I had already done two or three times, showing how to maneuver
11 against an ambush. Fire maneuver drills, anti-ambush drills, in charge of the details of
12 our troops that were going to go over there, to show them how to use troops and how to
13 use weapons and different types of weapons. I was getting bored because in the summer
14 everybody just goes away. We had thirteen 2nd lieutenants in our company and I
15 eventually got to meet them all, but we were there at the same time, all of us.

16 JM: I see.

17 EP: I suddenly heard that the cav was still taking people. It was the last day of
18 July so I—
19 (Interviewee snaps his fingers.)

20 Off I went. They told me that they wanted mortar officers.

21 JM: Mortar?

22 EP: Yeah, mortar. That's what they were looking for. I didn't have any
23 experiences with mortar, just rifle infantry. They said, "We can't take you." And my face
24 went.

25 (Interviewee shows interviewer facial expression)

26 "But we're authorized to take an extra ten percent personnel by regulations when we are
27 about to make a landing on a hostile shore, and this qualifies as that." So I said "I'm in!"
28 So they took me as an extra officer at the time. I also told my—he was the acting
29 company commander at the time, Lieutenant Raul Taboada. He was wounded, he ended
30 up being the mortar officer in Delta company of 1st of the 7th. He went over there and
31 joined up. They wouldn't let him go because he didn't have secret clearance because he's

1 a Cuban officer, but he entered as a special program by President Kennedy. All these
2 officers and NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers) of the Cuban brigade that had been
3 liberated they entered the armed forces of the United States with the same rank that they
4 had in the brigade and they would work from that. So he had been a 2nd lieutenant as a
5 mortar officer. He was the heavy mortar officer for the brigade.

6 JM: I see.

7 EP: And he was my buddy over there.

8 JM: Now, when the S1, I guess it was the S1 you were talking to?

9 EP: Yes, the S1, it was the Captain Johnson.

10 JM: When they said that they had a clause that they can take an extra ten percent
11 when they launched an operation coming on shore, was that tongue and cheek? Or did he
12 really believe we were going to—

13 EP: No, no. We were going by ship. So we didn't know exactly what was going
14 on and what happened. When we got there, they didn't know what to do with us. Whether
15 we were going to go—I had two duffle bags and most of us had two duffle bags, whether
16 we were going to go with our duffle bags and administrative landing, that's what we
17 called it, or if we were going to leave everything behind, issue us ammunition and send
18 us in a hostile—you know, heed the beach. So they kept us a couple of hours until they
19 finally decided to be an administrative landing. Everybody was going up and I said, "Just
20 put my duffle bags down." And I sat on them and I said, "I'm waiting for the last call."
21 Since I didn't have any other troops in charge at the time, since I was an officer.

22 JM: So you are—which ship did you go on?

23 EP: The *Maurice Rose*.

24 JM: The *Rose*.

25 EP: I always forget the middle initial.

26 JM: Yeah, don't worry about it.

27 EP: You know, it was commissioned the same month I was born. It was
28 commissioned in August 1942. I was born August 6th, 1942.

29 JM: You join up, you don't really—at that moment, you don't know what your
30 duty station is going to be when you get there?

1 EP: I didn't know exactly where we were going to land, or what my actual duties
2 were going to be, but at that time, I was labeled as a liaison officer. I knew we were going
3 to Vietnam and we were going to the camp that was being set up and already we know
4 the name was the "Golf course", it had already been called the "Golf Course". All these
5 things were coming back to us, all this information, in those last few days before we left.

6 JM: But you carried the designated title of liaison officer. So while you are
7 onboard the ship, are you trying to find a job?

8 EP: No, they gave me a job.

9 JM: Oh, they did. What they give you?

10 EP: They made me work. They put me under the orders of Captain Koga. He
11 looked like the captain in *Beetle Bailey*, you know. Fairly overweight. He was a Japanese
12 American from Hawaii, at least he had some Japanese ancestors, his name was Koga. He
13 made me deck police officer.

14 JM: Deck police officer?

15 EP: Yeah, he told me I had to go out there and make sure they picked up all the
16 papers and all the little bits and pieces of whatever, cigarettes buds. I had to do that. I
17 went there the third time because he came down—if he caught me in the cabin, he'd put
18 me up again. So after the third time I did it, I met up with these two guys who were there,
19 sitting there on top of the hull, on top of the edge of the hull, I don't know how you call
20 it. One of them was Corporal John Setelin and the other one was not wearing a shirt, only
21 a t-shirt. These two guys were wearing hats. The only ones that were wearing hats in the
22 whole ship. So he calls me over and says, "Lieutenant, what are you doing?" I told him
23 and he says, "That's not your job." I told him, "That's my job. Captain Koga put me in
24 charge of doing that." He says, "That's not your job, lieutenant. Men will get ill will
25 against you because it's considered harassment and if you go to combat with any of those
26 guys, they'll shoot you in the back. That's our job. Next time they tell you to come up
27 here and make sure the deck is policed, look for us and we'll handle it." And he did from
28 then on. I asked him why he was wearing a hat and both of them took their hats off. John
29 Setelin had one of those mohawk cuts, shaved head and just the mohawk. His buddy had
30 two tufts and the other all shaved except for these two. Not the V but—and he said that
31 Colonel White, the battalion commander, didn't like that so he made them wear hats. I

1 said, "These guys, I wish I had them in my platoon, when I get my platoon because these
2 are the guys you can really rely on in combat. They are not garrison troopers." I knew
3 they weren't—in the infantry, you had corporals at that time, they were only for the
4 artillery. So long afterwards I asked him, in the first reunion when I met him again in '91,
5 I asked him why was he a corporal at the time. He said he got busted for E6 for swinging
6 at an officer.

7 JM: Oh, gosh. So they were out of regulation. Colonel didn't like it; they were
8 almost regulation probably because they had buzz cuts on the sides, right?

9 EP: Oh no, they were very effusive young men. Loaded with piss and puck as we
10 used to say, you know?

11 JM: Yeah.

12 EP: That was their everyday core. They showed it that way, they weren't the only
13 ones. You know, you see in World War II movies, the paratroopers when you see
14 Eisenhower is interviewing them before they go. The ones that are not wearing helmets
15 or anything? They got the mohawk cuts, most of them.

16 JM: So let's talk about how you finally get a job!

17 EP: Well I finally got a job several weeks after we arrived. I was made assistant
18 S2. I was placed by the, I forget the captain's name, Captain Lawrence, I think. No, no
19 not Lawrence. He was the S2 and he was a new S2 because the previous S2 was captain
20 Pritko. He was overweight and shipped off to some other place, I don't know what
21 happened to him. I think his name was Lawrence, Captain Lawrence, I'm pretty sure. He
22 told me to work on the order of battle. I had to learn everything I could about the
23 enemies. The designation of the units, the TOE (Table of Organization and Equipment),
24 the weapons, the organization—the TOE, the table of organization and equipment. I
25 remember a lot of that. One of the important things that I had not known was that the
26 enemy used different designations for the same units, in order to confuse us. To confuse
27 their enemy.

28 JM: You were looking at both PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) and the Viet
29 Cong?

30 EP: Both PAVN and Vietcong, but mostly PAVN because that's the one we were
31 hunting for.

1 JM: When did you—when were you made assistant S2?

2 EP: I don't remember the exact date, it was something about three weeks,
3 something like late September or maybe—

4 JM: Three weeks after you got in country?

5 EP: Yeah, about three weeks after I got in county.

6 JM: Okay, and the first three weeks, what did you do?

7 EP: Go back and forth and pick up messages and whatever they were ready for in
8 the distribution list for the 2nd Battalion, go there and poof around. Basically nothing. I'd
9 get up early in the morning, work out and I did dynamic tension exercises and then I was
10 free all day, except when I had to go and pick up the mail two or three times a day.

11 JM: At what point in, after you joined the cav, were you given a M16?

12 EP: As soon as I got there.

13 JM: As soon as you got there, so you—

14 EP: Not actually as soon as I got there. When I finished the interview with
15 Captain Johnson, he passed on and I was accepted, and I had an interview with Colonel
16 White.

17 JM: Yes.

18 EP: And in the middle I had an interview with a sergeant major, which I didn't
19 remember. I never remembered seeing this sergeant major and he knew me. He
20 remembered, he said a couple of reunions ago he says, "Of course, I had an interview
21 with you, I talked to you." And I didn't remember, I said, "Sorry, sergeant major." Well
22 Captain Johnson said, "Take the time off, go take care of your personal business, get
23 ready to leave and come back." I took off five-six days. I finally came back. I came back
24 and everything was closed down except for this sergeant there, he had a whole bunch of
25 keys. He said, "Lieutenant Pujals!" I said, "That's right, sergeant." He said, "Come over
26 here." He opened up the armory, he gave me an M16 rifle, fifteen magazines, the
27 cleaning kit and a bipod. He issued me a weapons card right there, I signed it and left it
28 with him. He said, "You have to go now to qualification fire." He gave me the address to
29 where the rifle range was and I took off, he locked up and took off too. I was the only one
30 he was waiting for. (Chuckles) So I had it from the very beginning.

1 JM: Okay. So when you get to Vietnam, within three weeks or so they make you
2 the battalion assistant S2 and they put you on this project to figure out what it is you're
3 there to do. Learn about this enemy.

4 EP: You're right.

5 JM: Did you participate in any of the operations? I think there was one called
6 "Silver Bayonet"—

7 EP: There was one we called that, they had these weird names for it, mostly it was
8 bayonet. Silver Bayonet, Shiny Bayonet, Sticky Bayonet, something like that. It was in a
9 place we called Happy Valley. Captain Lawrence, he went to the advanced CP
10 (Command Post) and I stayed behind. With, as we used to say, the clerks and jerks, just
11 dividing stuff. I had to stay behind. After several days, about two or three days after that,
12 they move me forward to the advanced CP. When I got there, I was placed in charge—I
13 was placed under supervision, a 2nd lieutenant, a whole bunch of—under supervision of a
14 NCO. I think, a sergeant 1st class E7 rank, Sergeant Bass. He was the assistant S3, the
15 operation sergeant. I was the assistant S2 and there I was operations something, whatever.
16 He said I had to dig my own foxhole and I dug a two-mile foxhole; you know a six foot
17 by six feet by three feet wide. I did it. I only went as far as about five feet, just enough so
18 it could cover, my head was up here not all the way down. I did it perfect, except I didn't
19 do the last foot. I decided not to sleep in it that night. I stayed up, it rained a little bit, not
20 much and the next morning there was this huge scorpion there on the edge, just inside.
21 (Chuckles) I was lucky not to sleep there. One of the things that they told me, as the
22 assistant S2, look around and see if anybody left any trash that has value for the enemy.
23 There was this huge wrapper from a care package from home with a name, rank, service
24 number, address of the person, the whole unit designation, and the home address of the
25 person that sent it to him. I picked it up and gave it to the S2. I said, "Look at this. What
26 happened with it, I don't know."

27 JM: Interesting. Let's talk a little bit about November 14th.

28 EP: November 14th. November 14th, my battalion and my company was still
29 running through the woods looking for the enemy, going up and down hills, crossing little
30 streams, that's what we were doing.

31 JM: And 1st battalion had taken off to X-Ray that day?

1 EP: We were slightly isolated. There was little information given to us. I tried to
2 pick up as much information as I could in these orders and officer's calls when we had—
3 when the company commander had them. I took as many notes as I could and gave my
4 men as much information because I learned that during summer camp. There was very
5 little information that was given to us, who played the enlistment in ROTC summer
6 camp. So I got as much as possible because I wanted to have my men—and that's one of
7 the things they tell you, always. Keep your men informed with all the information that
8 you can. So that's what I did. What information we had about what was going outside,
9 we received mostly from the RTOs (Radio Telephone Operator) because you know, they
10 heard half of the conversation and knew most of what was going on.

11 JM: Now on the 14th, at least just using that day, you had a platoon by then?

12 EP: I had a platoon. I became a platoon leader just about two, maybe three days at
13 the most before we set out on an operation. We set out on that operation on or about the
14 8th or 9th of November, my company, Charlie Company 2nd of the 7th.

15 JM: And in your operation, somewhere between the 8th and 14th, did you make
16 enemy contact?

17 EP: No, not us.

18 JM: Not your unit. Okay. Then you come back, and on the 14th, you are still out
19 on the boonies conducting operations, and is it the generally vicinity of X-Ray? I'm trying
20 to think of where.

21 EP: I don't know exactly where we were. We were in the general vicinity of
22 Pleiku. That's what I knew. We had our own maps, we had our maps taken around, I had
23 a map, and I don't remember very well but we were going up there. Actually, we were
24 just going fast because I was at first a point platoon. Part of me wasn't fast enough
25 because I was doing what I learned from the book and what I learned in the U2 program.
26 We're out to contact the enemy, so we're out searching, and we had to go not too fast,
27 you know? Look, really look for them. Be careful for an ambush. I had out flanker
28 people, the rear of security, I had the whole works in my platoon up front. I had a pacer; I
29 double check the pace and I was the one—I had another man with a compass, who was a
30 steer man and I also double checked with my compass. But they claimed I was too slow,
31 and we were drifting slightly to the left. So when we stopped on the first day, that was the

1 8th or the 9th, when we stopped for one of the breaks—the last break in the afternoon, it
2 was 4:30, when we stopped, the company commander said “Outside of the point, we’re
3 going to stay there the night.” And I was out on the rear. So he put me back on the rear
4 and the rear the next day, he was like a race. He would go up epsilon as we call it, you
5 know you close up your coordinating effect. We were going up fast, I had to pull in my
6 flankers, I didn’t want to lose anybody. I don’t know where the hell we were going
7 because we didn’t know where the enemy was. I mean, if we knew where the enemy was
8 and we were trying to get there as fast as possible I had no problem, you know. But if we
9 were looking for the enemy, he could of just as easily be ready to ambush us at any point
10 there because nobody was looking around the pacing.

11 JM: So around the 14th, you hear what’s going on at X-Ray but only through
12 RTOs who have been monitoring the radios?

13 EP: As I remember it was on the 15th. Apparently, this information didn’t get
14 disseminated, at least in my platoon, in my company. On the 15th, all of the sudden we
15 were told to halt and to move to a small hill where it was fairly clear and clear it. They
16 had some saplings, some of them three and a half inches thick, and to clear it and make a
17 landing zone to be picked up. Where we were going, they didn’t tell us, the RTOs. This
18 information I had, that’s what I got from the company commander. That’s when
19 information started dribbling in. The first battalion is in deep doo-doo. You know, a deep
20 one. They had been fighting since yesterday and there’s a lot of casualties and we are
21 going to reinforce them. But actually, what we did, we cleared it, and the first Chinook
22 came in, two Chinooks. They just grabbed them, without any organizations, they just
23 grabbed people and throw them out there and throw them back. You know, facing
24 forward.

25 JM: On the Chinook?

26 EP: Yeah, spread eagle, like that. (Interviewee demonstrates to the interviewer)
27 The next one came here, all the way down. Two or three lines until we covered the hole
28 and filled in the Chinook and took us off.

29 JM: How many people did you put on that Chinook, do have any idea?

30 EP: I think you could put at least thirty, at least. I think it was forty you could put
31 in a Chinook, I don’t remember right now, it was so long ago. We fill up completely and

1 we got to the tea plantation and they had an air strip over there in a first mission after we
2 got there, set up security with whatever people that were there on that ship. Some of them
3 were in my platoon, some of them from other platoons. When the other Chinook came in,
4 we got completely reorganized, set the people up divided by the platoon and set up the
5 perimeter. Before that, I was amazed. Is this the way things are supposed to work?
6 (Chuckles) Then we got our orders, I was told what we were going to do. We were going
7 to stay there, set up security for the night because they had attacked that same place the
8 night before. We were not going to reinforce the other battalion. The next morning, that's
9 when they told us come over and pick up the order, and that's what the rumor was, you
10 know the RTO started coming and said, "That's where we are going. The information is
11 ours. Here captain and lieutenant, were going to reinforce the first battalion." But this
12 came up the next day.

13 JM: So now were about the 16th?

14 EP: This is the 15th and now the 16th.

15 JM: Now the 16th?

16 EP: Yeah. We were going to go at dawn. They were going to pick us up at first
17 daylight, but they kept postponing it, postponing it, and finally the information kept
18 trickling down through them themselves, nothing from back channels. There was a heavy
19 firefight going on in the early morning and that's why we were being postponed. All of
20 the sudden, I don't remember what time it was, but it was already fairly early in the
21 morning. They said, "Alright, saddle up, we're going." They picked us up, we went to the
22 helicopters and we went to—we landed away from the LZ. We landed; I think it must've
23 been in the other LZ that they cleared with the explosives. Must've been because we—
24 they dropped us off there and we walked in. As we were walking into X-Ray, we were
25 zapped by two helicopters.

26 JM: Two what?

27 EP: We were attacked by two of our gunships.

28 JM: Two of our own?

29 EP: Two of our own. Two men from the 1st platoon got wounded. What they did
30 is they held the 1st platoon, take care of the wounded, and set up a perimeter around them
31 and the 2nd and 3rd platoon, us, we moved in. We moved into X-Ray, it was quiet, there

1 was an air strike going on. All of the sudden, a firefight broke out that lasted very few
2 minutes. But most of the fire was ours, it was going out.

3 JM: So the attack that happened by our own helicopters, our own gunships, what
4 was your—What did you think was going on there?

5 EP: They thought we were coming in from the rear! We came in from the rear and
6 when we came out, we were flanking. We hit right on the left flank.

7 JM: Did the attack by the gunships—were you able to call it off, or did it just
8 stop?

9 EP: Yeah, it was called off. Apparently, the people who were getting hit were the
10 1st platoon and they made several passes at us, several passes.

11 JM: Yeah, the reason I'm asking that is that I've talked to, over the last couple
12 days, I've talked to several helicopter pilots and one of the questions that I ask is—I
13 know later in the war, tactical support by helicopters with Cobra gunships became very
14 ordinary. That's how you got tactical air support when you were on the ground. But you
15 didn't have it then?

16 EP: We didn't have Cobras then. No, we had the Hueys.

17 JM: That's what I'm wondering. No one called that in.

18 EP: No, no, no.

19 JM: They had to have seen something and you think it was initiated on their own?

20 EP: It must've been an air strike going on because they must've been circling
21 around waiting for the F-100s, were the ones that were doing the airstrike from the Air
22 Force. They were flying very slow, firing the Gatling gun, the 30 mm and dropping
23 bombs.

24 JM: But you are sure it was helicopter fire rather than the A-1Es?

25 EP: The thing is and the weird thing was, this is one of those things that they say
26 was so confusing and disconcerting, the attack by the helicopter, because when they cut
27 away, they go like this.

28 (Makes helicopter dubs noises)

29 Sounded like a machine gun! So everything time they made a pass, it sounded like they
30 were strafing us, but they probably made one or two shooting passes. But they made
31 several passes and these passes when they cut away, they sounded like machine gun.

1 (Repeats helicopter noises)

2 That's why when I was looking around and finally, I saw the helicopter. Somebody said,
3 "It's the helicopter that's shooting at us." Because you know, we were deployed to both
4 sides of the trail because we thought it was maybe an enemy coming in but it was
5 actually a helicopter. I looked up and finally saw one of them coming around.

6 JM: And you said we had a couple of guys wounded?

7 EP: Two guys wounded from the 1st platoon.

8 JM: Okay. So you're out there working your way toward X-Ray and this is the 3rd
9 day of X-Ray, so then what happens? Continue that day for me.

10 EP: Well, we moved in. There was this cameraman, and he was dressed in
11 fatigues, it turned out to be the two-man team from the army signal core. They were
12 filming us. So I am walking in, they are filming us and my platoon and he started filming
13 me for the close up and I was getting up close and all of the sudden that's when the
14 firefight broke out. He broke out like this, this way.

15 (Interviewee demonstrates to the interviewer what direction the cameraman moved)
16 He nearly smashed me in the face with the camera. He started running, he ran over a
17 couple of boxes, C-rations, a couple boxes of ammunition and threw himself, landed on
18 one knee and started panning. After a few more minutes, fire died out. We just kept on
19 going. I heard all the fire, most of it going on our side, going over a few meters to our
20 left. So, it's going. I said, "It's not going to hurt us." We just kept on going. We finally
21 ended, we cut to a place over there and the company commander halted us and told us
22 where we were going to go, this is your platoon area. My platoon area took over for one
23 of the platoons for Alpha company, Captain Tony Nadal's company had been, inside the
24 dried creek bed, partly outside. So I had two squads inside. One of them partly inside the
25 dry creek, but the other completely inside. The third squad which was only about five
26 men, on the outside. That's how we broke out.

27 JM: Yeah, his company was decimated. They were down to forty-three killed or
28 wounded so he was about less than fifty percent of what he started with which is already
29 about sixty percent of TOE.

30 EP: Yeah, that's right. We were about fifty-five, sixty percent TOE. My platoon
31 and I had twenty-five men, my platoon sergeant and myself. When we left, I had to leave

1 two at the tea plantation, with fever of unknown origin which usually turned out to be
2 Malaria.

3 JM: Yeah, I know.

4 EP: When I went to check on them, they told me my friend Taboada, Raul
5 Taboada, who had been a mortarman, he had been wounded on the 14th. There was this—
6 and I hope this sergeant, I hope somebody can find him. There was this sergeant and I
7 thought he was with the 1st of the 7th, he was from Ponce, Puerto Rico and I've never
8 been able to find out. I forgot his name. They gave him two different names. First
9 something, Santiago. I couldn't find any Santiago doctors. The other name they gave him
10 was Ortiz-Suarez, those were the two last names. Ortiz-Suarez Humberto. I was never
11 able to find anybody with those names either, nobody knows about him. I tried asking,
12 the only—the 1st of the 7th, the battalion surgeon was Italian descent. I forget his name
13 now. He said he had been there from before the battle. But this captain from Puerto Rico
14 was onboard the ship, that's where I met him. My name Pujals, there's several Pujals
15 families in Ponce where he lived. So he saw my name and came over and said, "Are you
16 from Puerto Rico?" then we started chatting around.

17 JM: I see. So you're there reinforcing Alpha Company of 1st of the 7th.

18 EP: Well, we started to reinforce them, but the battle was practically over. What
19 we ended up doing was replacing them. The order was changed to "You will take over
20 their positions instead of augmenting them."

21 JM: And they pull out?

22 EP: They pulled out. I met up with John Setelin, he was a sergeant then and his
23 friend, Lamont. I forgot his first name—James Lamont. I met up with them, talked to
24 them, they told me to pick up as much ammunition as I could. They had several people
25 that got killed because they ran out of ammunition. So they tell me, "Pick up as much
26 ammo, forget about food, forget about water. Ammunition, you need it."

27 JM: Absolutely.

28 EP: That's what I did.

29 JM: Take me through the next couple of days, did you stay at X-Ray?

30 EP: We stayed at X-Ray over the night, nothing had happened. There's some
31 firing and some of my men claimed that Drew McKinney, he was one of my fireteam

1 leaders, he claims that he fired some snipers and he knocked out one. There's some
2 others that, I forget who he was, from another platoon, who claimed he shot with a M39
3 and wiped out a sniper in a tree. But as far as I remember, there's nothing. Firing, check
4 the line. That was it.

5 JM: Yeah, and you stayed for how many more days?

6 EP: All the night. The next morning, on the 17th, we were supposed to move out
7 as soon as possible because the B-52s were going to blast the place. That kept being
8 postponed and postponed until we finally left. We left, I forget what time, but it was very
9 well into the morning also.

10 JM: They extracted you by chopper?

11 EP: Oh no sir, we walked out. Not to a short space like when we came in, this was
12 a long walk. We were to go to an LZ but before we got there, we were going to split. We
13 were marching out with companies from two of the battalions of the 5th Cav. From the 1st
14 of the 5th, and the 2nd of the 5th. The order I received from Captain Fesmire, he passed
15 away a few years ago, the order was—we were marching out and our company was going
16 to be the rear most company in the battalion, and I was going to be the rear most platoon.
17 Nobody behind me. We were not going to have any artillery after we split out. The 2nd of
18 the 5th I think it was, one of 5th battalions, they would move out to LZ Columbus and we
19 would keep on going onto another LZ. I don't remember if we had the name given at the
20 time.

21 JM: Falcon? Columbus?

22 EP: No, it turned out to be Albany. But at the time I don't remember that they
23 gave it a name. They had different letters for some of them. I don't remember which one,
24 but I remember distinctly LZ Albany I only learned that later as far as I am concerned.
25 From that point on, we would have no artillery support and I was scared for that. You
26 know, no more artillery. I had read several other books, at least two different books by
27 Bernard.

28 JM: Bernard Fall?

29 EP: Bernard Fall. One of the things that they had, that the French learned was to
30 take their artillery with them. Halt, set up artillery and move.

31 JM: Hell in a very small place.

1 EP: Yeah.

2 JM: So you're on the march to this place that we know now will be—

3 EP: Turned out to be Albany. We weren't told what was going to happen after.

4 Some people say, some others have claimed in the book that we were going to be

5 extracted. But from what I remember when they issued the order was, be prepared to

6 continue the march. So we might have been extracted, we were going there to maybe be

7 extradited, maybe to continue the operation, maybe to continue the march so—

8 JM: It wasn't—you were going somewhere. You were not on operation to engage

9 the enemy.

10 EP: Right.

11 JM: Because you had a whole lot of administrative types that you were escorting,

12 correct? The whole battalion.

13 EP: Right. As far as—the attitude was that the battle was over. That was the

14 attitude. It was not exactly said, the attitude was the power was forward, we beat the heck

15 out of them, the other battalion did and we were moving out because—I tried to get

16 information of why we weren't getting extracted and all we got was some other people

17 that the helicopters were down for maintenance because they had used them so much

18 during the three days of battle. That was it. There's no battle, there's no search. Larry

19 Gwin remembers it differently. He wrote a small monograph when he was in college. He

20 says we were going to be extracted and continue in the operation and search for the

21 enemy and they were going to move in a tactical formation, epsilon right I think it was.

22 We were just moving in a column and we were moving as fast as possible.

23 JM: What was Larry Gwin's—

24 EP: Larry Gwin was the 1st lieutenant. He was the executive officer of Alpha

25 Company, 2nd of the 7th.

26 JM: XO of Alpha Company?

27 EP: Yeah, XO Alpha.

28 JM: Okay. So tell me what happens when the firing starts. What was your

29 platoon's position?

30 EP: Where we halted, at that time just before that, one of my men told me that we

31 had people behind us. I was worried, I said, "Oh shit." Because I was supposed to be the

1 rear most. It turned out to be Captain Forrest's Company. 1st of the 5th, I think it was the
2 1st. He was Alpha Company, Captain George Forrest's Company. So there was no
3 problem there. That got me wondering, if I'm supposed to the last guy here, how come we
4 got more people behind? Then we stopped—from the RTO, the information I got was
5 that the conference for all company commanders has been called, our company
6 commanders are going up forward. We're halted, they found two enemy soldiers and they
7 captured two enemy allegedly deserters, who say that there's more deserters around but
8 there's a lot more who didn't want to desert, waiting for us someplace and they were
9 eager to kill Americans. What else? That's basically what they said about the enemy.
10 There were snipers also in the trees. After a while, the shooting started. You know, like a
11 rifle range, you know? Not everybody starts at the same time, you hear,
12 (Interviewee makes automatic gun noises)
13 and it starts growing. In between it grows up, it grows down, and when it slows down,
14 you get the explosions. Four, five, six, seven.
15 (Interviewee makes gun noises and explosion noises)
16 Then it picks up. Then goes up again and the explosion and it goes,
17 (Interviewee repeats explosion noises)
18 this is lasting a bit longer; I'm trying to get information of what's going on. Nobody
19 knows, so I say to my men, my squad leaders, "Get the men deployed. Be prepared for
20 something here." After a while of this going on, my RTO calls me, CO1-CO. I ask him
21 what's going on. He said, "Forget that. Get your men in line and maneuver right." The
22 classic anti-ambush. So that's what I did. I'd done that in Fort Benning three or four
23 times. So I tried to get my men in line, I am using hand and arm signals.
24 (Interviewee shows interviewer hand and arm signals)
25 Like this is get in line, nobody knew what the hell is going on. I'm moving forward, and I
26 turn around and everybody is back there scratching themselves asking, "What's going
27 on? What, what, what?" I said, "Get on line! Get on line! Everybody get on line!" The
28 RTO says, "CO wants you!" I call him and he says, "Hold your platoon where you are.
29 Prepare to defend." And that's it. He didn't say anything. He didn't say, "Prepare to
30 defend, defensive position." Nothing. "Hold your platoon where you are." That's it.
31 "Stop the maneuver." So I try to get my men in a defensive position and the fighting just

1 kept on going. Way up front. Then some of my men started firing at the trees. So I said,
2 “Stop firing because our fire is going to get over there.” Some rounds started coming over
3 this way. I tried to get the whole company commander to tell them, you know, “They’re
4 shooting at us.” I couldn’t get him, I couldn’t get anybody on the horn and then I tried to
5 get my squad leaders on the PRC6s, they didn’t work. I said, “Maybe it’s off.” So I turn it
6 off, turn it on, turn it off. Doesn’t work. So I said, “Can I get somebody to turn the radios
7 on?” Wait a couple of minutes, make sure the radios are on. Couldn’t work anything, no
8 information I couldn’t
9
10 (Editor’s Note: Audio file cuts here.)