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Transcript of 12/20/90 Interview of  
Major Samuel Ramirez  
Chief, NBTC OPAT-ETSS  
101st Airborne, 2nd Brigade  
Ft. Campbell, KY

Interviewers:

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EDITED TRANSCRIPT

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CONGRESSMAN JOHN JOSEPH  
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MS 100

Interviewer: Major Ramirez the purpose of this interview this afternoon involves the killing of Six Jesuit Priests at El Salvador on November 16, 1989. If you would, I would like for you, at this time, to give us your name rank and current location of assignment.

Ramirez: My name is Major Samuel Ramirez, Major in the United States Army Infantry, Social Security Account Number [REDACTED] I'm currently assigned to Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. My specific duty is the Chief of Central Tasking within the G3-DPT Division or Installation.

Interviewer : If you will explain for us what is your function specifically.

Ramirez: Current function?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ramirez: As the Chief of Central Tasking, I review all requirements, requests for support from our installation, from outside agencies, be it headquarters, local and state community and so forth. We review these, evaluate them, and in turn we task our subordinate units to carry out these different requests for support.

Interviewer: How long have you been in the military?

Ramirez: Twelve and a half years.

Interviewer: And did you come in out of college?

Ramirez: Yes, I went to school at the University of Texas at Austin, and received a Bachelor of Science in Communications and a masters in management from Webster University out of St. Louis.

Interviewer: Are you regular Army?

Ramirez: Yes sir, I am.

Interviewer: You were in El Salvador, I believe, from October of 1989 to October 1990.

Ramirez: Right.

Interviewer: Could you tell us the purpose for your being transferred to El Salvador and explain to us what your role was.

Ramirez: I received notice while I was in Ft. Pope,

Louisiana, that I was going to be assigned to El Salvador as a advisor and I would be working with the Training Center for the Immediate Infantry Reaction Battalion, which is located outside the capital in San Salvador. I subsequently received my orders in August of 1989 to arrive in El Salvador on October 9, 1989. I was a part of a three man team that was designed to provide advise and assistance. Myself, my boss, Lt. Colonel Berger, and another Major, Major John Hall, were all part of the team. It was my job to advise on development training for their units to review the training that was being conducted and seek ways we could improve that.

**Interviewer:** Your role was to suggest to them the type of training by looking at ...

**Ramirez:** Yes, by looking at their mission and what they were called to do. Taking my experience and my background, apply that based on what their mission was, their resources and then come up with a assessment of what they could use. Granted, not all the time were they able to do that, they didn't have all the resources we had and they don't have a lot of the requirements that we have, its different, so all that had to be taken into context, weighed together, and then presented to them and it was up to them to accept it or not. There was not a requirement for them to accept any of my advice, they could or could not.

**Interviewer:** Describe the types of training that we were offering to them.

**Ramirez:** Their training really is a combination of several of our schools. They have basic training where they send a soldier through to change him from a civilian into the military. They show him the basic things, how to march, how to shoot and how to salute. Then they combine that with what we would call regular infantry training, how to operate as a member of the team, to take and attack an objective, or defend one. Then they have special training, that we would offer here in the United States as special schools. Their training is all combined, lasting about thirteen and a half weeks. Some of that special training that they do is for example rappelling out of helicopters, survival training, escape and evasion training, hand-to-hand combat training and survival swimming training you would see in our regular basic training. In the

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middle phase of their training they receive weapons. What is a weapon, what is a pistol, what is a rifle, how does it fire, etc. That is what I would look at. I would look at how they were doing; what they were doing; seeing if it was effective; how they could make it better; how we could cut corners, if you will, to save on time and still get the same thing accomplished in all of those areas.

Interviewer: How receptive were they to that? How did they look upon you?

Ramirez: Are you talking about at the end of the year or are you talking about in October of 1989 or when this incident happened.

Interviewer: In October or when you got there.

Ramirez: Well obviously, when I first got there I think they were trying to evaluate me. I think they were just waiting to see what I would be like. They really didn't know how to take me. I was the first full-time advisor to this battalion training center. Prior to me there were two other American Special Forces Officers who were there only on loan from the current unit until they could fill the slot with a full-time person. I was the only full-time Latin of the three of us that they could identify with and I think that might have helped to make things a little smoother in our relationship.

Interviewer: How long did this assessment go on to either accept or reject you?

Ramirez: I think by December or January, two or three months. I had only been in the country a month when the offensive occurred. At that time, a number of the units left our location and I wasn't able to really get to see them or get to know them or anything. It wasn't until around December or January that I went on leave for Christmas. Somewhere around the January time period I really started to get back and see a lot of them that had come back and were now back in the unit. So I would say by January they were able to start developing that rapport that we were going to need to work for the rest of the year.

Interviewer: How was your interaction with the Salvadorans? Did you socialize with them at all?

Ramirez: Yes, I tried to get involved in as many things as I could from playing athletics in the afternoon, to sitting around just chatting, to inspecting some type of training they were doing, to eating with them in the lunch room, and socializing in the evening at their little club.

Interviewer: Who would you say were the people you got along with the best and would depict as friends.

Ramirez: I would say Lt. Campos-Paz. He was very attentive to try to see if there was anything he could do to help me.

Interviewer: How do you spell his last name Major?

Ramirez: P-A-Z.

Interviewer: During this rapport development stage, did they interact with you in keeping you in confidence as far as what was going on, any operations that might be going on? Would they keep you advised?

Ramirez: Sometimes, in this specific case that is what's going on with the Jesuit thing, everything happened so fast that they didn't have time. No one really sat down and said this is what we are going to do, this is what we're doing. Everything was happening so fast.

Interviewer: Did someone give you a formal briefing or anything or did somebody say to you that this is coming up?

Ramirez: No. As a matter of fact, when the offensive had broken out the battalion had been operating in the volcano area outside of the capital. I was not at the capital when they received their orders but I know they moved out two or three days later. First some and then the rest.

Interviewer: This was part of the Atlacatl?

Ramirez: Yes, this was the Atlacatl battalion because I was co-located with them in the same compound as they were housed in. The Atlacatl battalion commander also had the overall responsibility for the CEBRI training.

Interviewer: Who was that battalion commander at that time?

Ramirez: Colonel Linares was the commander at that time and he had things done through his S3 and a commander

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that he had at the CEBRI, which was a captain. He still had overall responsibility for the training and that was how I got interfaced with him.

Interviewer: Where were you on November 11 when the offensive started?

Ramirez: I was in the battalion compound or Atlacatl/CEBRI battalion compound.

Interviewer: Which was located where?

Ramirez: It is located about 25 to 30 kilometers outside of the capital in a town called Sitio Delnino. That's where the CEBRI is at and the Atlacatl are all in the same.

Interviewer: How long were you held up out there?

Ramirez: Well, I got there that Saturday, I believe the 11th was on a Saturday. I got there that Saturday evening and stayed there for the next three weeks before I was able to go into the capital. I stayed there three weeks in November until probably after Thanksgiving. I went into the capital then. I think one of the reasons I went in then was to buy my ticket for the next month when I would go home for Christmas. That was the first time I was able to go to the capital.

Interviewer: If you will Major, tell us again the location of the Atlacatl battalion.

Ramirez: It is in a town called Sitio Delnino, which is spelled S-I-T-I-O D-E-L-N-I-N-O and literally translated it means "place of a child." That is 25 to 30 kilometers outside of the capital of San Salvador.

Interviewer: You said that they moved out, the Atlacatl? When did they move out?

Ramirez: I probably need to go back and let you know a little something about what we were doing at this particular time. In this time frame we were having a special forces team that was going to be evaluated on their ability to deploy from the United States to conduct training in a foreign country and then return. That was an ongoing mission that was happening, obviously we didn't know the offensive was going to occur. Their

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mission was to train the Salvadoran commando units on patrolling techniques and so forth, things that they would need when they deployed out into the field. That team arrived there the day before the offensive started. Their mission was, of course, changed now because there was nobody to train. Everyone took off, there was nobody to train out there. Well, a lot of the first units that were deployed were the Atlacatl battalions, probably their best unit which was the commando unit. I remember, if I am not mistaken, it was on Sunday that they left. They left first and I distinctly remember saying good-bye to their commander, Lt., I think it's Escobar...

Interviewer: Espinoza?

Ramirez: Espinoza. He was the primary point of contact that we worked with to coordinate the training for this special force. He speaks excellent English and I believe he was trained by our special forces school in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. If I am not mistaken, he is a pilot.

Interviewer: How well did you know him?

Ramirez: During the afternoons prior to the offensive when the unit was not deployed out in the field, we always played volley ball as part of our recreation. I got to know him then, playing volley ball and just chatting with him. I got to know him a little better when we started coordinating for this training. I found out he spoke English and was pretty intelligent. He had been through our pilots course and was helicopter qualified and I know he has been through the special forces course. He is the person I went through to coordinate the training, the requirements, the bedding, the food we were going to need for the special forces team that was going to come down.

Interviewer: When he was deployed, where did you understand that he was going?

Ramirez: I wasn't sure. I thought he was going to be with the unit and the rest of the battalion. Later on, a member of the special forces team, I'm not sure who it was, actually came up to me and said "hey, we need to try and get a hold of the commando unit because that unit has our PBS 5's and if we leave we need those back because those are sensitive items. Like I said, everything was in a hurry at

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first and no one thought to go back and ask those guys for the equipment. We didn't know who was actually going to deploy and the next thing we knew they were moving out. So, it was a problem for us to get them back. My natural course of action was to go back to Lt. Campos-Paz. I went back to him because by this time the rest of the battalion had already been deployed. I knew they were operating north of the capital because I would go into the operation center and I could see their map. I asked him, I said, hey, we need to get in contact with the commando unit because they have got our PBS 5's and the special forces unit needs them back because they were going to be leaving. Well, that was a problem and I really didn't understand what the problem was. I didn't understand it and for a day I let him work on it and I think the next day, I went back and asked him again.

Interviewer: Which would have been around November 13th?

Ramirez: Somewhere around that time. I asked him why there was a problem getting this equipment back and then Paz explained to me that the problem was that the commando unit wasn't with the battalion. Now I don't know if he knew earlier or not. Well, that is when I discovered that this unit was operating separately somewhere else in the capital. I believe they were operating under the control of the district commander of the capital. To finish the story on this PBS 5 thing, we eventually got them back through one of our people who worked in the Milgroup, I believe it was Major Pedroza, P-E-D-R-O-Z-A, who works in the Milgroup.

Interviewer: All right, at what point in time did you realize where the commando group has actually gone? Did you know specifically where they were located?

Ramirez: I knew it had to do something with the military academy, because Paz had said they were at the military academy.

Interviewer: So, when you're looking for these sensitive night scopes out there, you actually learned about the 13th or so of November that this group is operating at the military academy?

Ramirez: Yes, if I'm not mistaken the 13th, it would be around that time frame. After they left...

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Interviewer: Could it have been as late as the 14th or the 15th of November?

Ramirez: Yes, it could have been. The Atlacatl battalion was operating north of the capital with most of its units, minus the commando platoon which was in the military school and we had CEBRI units operating in the southern part of the capital.

Interviewer: What type of units?

Ramirez: They were CEBRI training units. In other words the people who were going through training...

Interviewer: How do you spell that?

Ramirez: C-E-B-R-I, it is a acronym for the training center. They were working at least two or three companies of them in the southern sector.

Interviewer: OK, let me take you back to these glasses. They belonged to a United States special forces group?

Ramirez: Yes.

Interviewer: That's how they got there? With this training group?

Ramirez: Yes.

Interviewer: Who requested them or how did the Salvadorans get a hold of the glasses?

Ramirez: I think the special forces group were breaking down the teams that they were going to train during this training. Each team leader was loaned the equipment temporarily to show them how to use it.

Interviewer: How long did the commando group have the PBS 5's?

Ramirez: It would have to have been, I would say, I'm not sure when they got them, but if they got them as early as when the team arrived, it could have been as early as the 11th up until the 22nd.

Interviewer: They pulled out on the 12th, right?

Ramirez: Right.

Interviewer: So, they had them about 10 days.

Ramirez: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your knowledge of who was in charge of the commando unit at the time they were at the military school?

Ramirez: Well, I knew that the Atlacatl Colonel, the battalion commander wasn't because of what I just said about running into the problem of getting the equipment back. If he had been in charge I knew we would have gotten the equipment back with no problem.

Interviewer: Did you know who was in charge?

Ramirez: No, I knew of his name but I didn't know him personally.

Interviewer: Which was?

Ramirez: The commander of the academy at that time?

Interviewer: Colonel Benavides?

Ramirez: Yes. Benavides.

Interviewer: Did anyone there hint to you or did you get any drift of anything as to what that commando group was doing at the Esquala Militar?

Ramirez: No, I thought they were there to provide security for the complex. I don't know if you have ever been there but there is the military school, next to it is the commander, I mean the headquarters of the Army. That whole area is always getting attacked by mortars and the only reason that I could think of, was that they were sent there to beef up the security around the area.

Interviewer: How close was the University of Central America to that area? To the military school and to the military headquarters?

Ramirez: I think it is about 5 to 6 miles.

Interviewer: From the UCA to the Esquala Militar?

Ramirez: Yes.

Interviewer: When the offensive went down, how far away from the military school and the military headquarters, and

the UCA were you?

Ramirez: Well, I was 25 kilometers away from the capital and add another 5 kilometers from where the military school was and about the same distance to where the UCA was.

Interviewer: So, you're 30 kilometers away.

Ramirez: 30 to 35 kilometers away nothing further than that.

Interviewer: During your short time there, how did the Salvadorans view and depict the Jesuits at the UCA? What did you understand the UCA to be? What did you understand about the situation?

Ramirez: It was a nest or a subversive activity.

Interviewer: Leftist?

Ramirez: Leftist, and I think they viewed the Jesuits as instigators of...

Interviewer: Troublemakers?

Ramirez: Well a little bit more than that. I believe they were actively involved in soliciting the people to take up arms against the government. That's what they would say.

Interviewer: How did you learn this? Was it mostly through word-of-mouth? Was it through officers, Salvadorians?

Ramirez: Sure. Talking with them, reading articles in newspapers, and that type of thing.

Interviewer: Would Espinosa talk about the Jesuits?

Ramirez: To me, he never did.

Interviewer: Can you recall specifically anyone at the time of the offensive who was talking specifically about the Jesuits?

Ramirez: No, no one was talking about Jesuits at that point. Most of the conversation was about the foreigners that were being discovered fighting along side the FMLN. There were a lot of Americans, a lot of black people. Most of the talk at this time was about that. I even wrote down in my notebook that the FMLN was making a lot of mistakes in bringing

the war to the capital and a lot of innocent people were harmed and I even wrote down in my notes here, the military must be very careful to not make the same mistakes in their zeal to drive them out of El Salvador.

Interviewer: Wasn't there any talk though about something had to be done? If they are viewed as such a troublesome group, such a leftist organization, wasn't there talk of a plan or that something had to be done about them or what a pain they were or what they were doing to the country? Wasn't there talk like that?

Ramirez: Not at our level. At our level, I'm talking about the younger guys and different people that I mainly associated with, their main concerns were the press, the foreign press, and how they were one sidedly reporting what was going on, and like I said foreign people.

Interviewer: What were the names of the key figures or leaders of the Jesuits?

Ramirez: I can't remember their names but it would be the Spaniard's that worked there at the UCA.

Interviewer: Do you recall Ellacuria?

Ramirez: Well, I think he was one of the primary ones that everybody points to or more or less the spokesperson, whatever, for the group. I really didn't know much about the Jesuits myself. I learned a lot afterwards but I really didn't know much about them. To me a Jesuit was a Catholic priest. I never thought of them being different or even looked upon being different in the Catholic church.

Interviewer: Between the 11th and the 15th are you listening to the radio about what is going on in the offensive?

Ramirez: Mainly I'm watching the television.

Interviewer: O.k.

Ramirez: Well, I'm watching the news.

Interviewer: Are you picking up or are you hearing on either media a calling for something to be done about the

Jesuits?

Ramirez: I don't recall.

Interviewer: When did you first find out about the operation at the UCA? How did you find out?

Ramirez: I found out about that, I guess it was in January when I got back after Christmas.

Interviewer: No, I mean the killings. When did you actually find that out?

Ramirez: Immediately, that was on the news. I would guess I would have found out about it right after it happened. The first thing that came to my mind when it happened, was what I thought, and I know I have talked about this to other people, that it had to be rebels to do this because the military wouldn't be so stupid to do something like this. I recall that is the first time I heard about it.

Interviewer: So, who were you talking to?

Ramirez: Fellow Salvadorians, because I was there and I couldn't talk to any other Americans because I was isolated and the only people I could talk to were other Salvadorians that stayed behind like me.

Interviewer: Do you remember specifically who was there with you?

Ramirez: Major Carranza would have been back with me...

Interviewer: Major who?

Ramirez: Carranza, C-A-R-R-A-N-Z-A. Lt. Campos-Paz, who I mentioned earlier, would have been back.

Interviewer: When does Espinoza arrive back?

Ramirez: Espinoza arrived back right before I went on Christmas leave because I saw him and all I did was say hi to him. It had to have been around the 15th or 20th of December when I saw him. That doesn't mean that was when he arrived because he could have arrived earlier but when I saw him it was between the 15th and 20th of December.

Interviewer: In other words, he left there approximately, I

think on the 12th of November and you didn't see him again until December.

Ramirez: Around the middle of December.

Interviewer: Do you again strike up a rapport with him.

Ramirez: Not immediately. As a matter of fact, when I recall seeing him, I was video taping a formation that they were having there. I guess one unit was coming in and one unit was getting ready to go back out on another mission and he happened to pass by. I remember stopping my camera and then I recognized him, I shook hands with him, I said, "How are you doing?" he said, "fine." I wished him a Merry Christmas and that was the extent of it and I didn't see him again. That was the last time I saw him because when I came back off of Christmas I think that was when...

Interviewer: He makes no comments about where he had been?

Ramirez: No, it was a very casual conversation.

Interviewer: Did you ever understand from, apparently not from him, but from anyone, do you get information at this time frame of what happened to that commando unit? Where they went after the time frame of the killings? Where did that commando unit go after it left the militar? Are you aware of that?

Ramirez: No sir. No I'm not.

Interviewer: From a command stand point, did you ever understand why they went to the militar or why they were moved subsequently from the militar?

Ramirez: No, not as far as an official, this is their mission type of thing. No.

Interviewer: But from anyone?

Ramirez: No, I thought they were sent there to beef up the security of the capital area. No one ever confirmed that. I at that time wasn't even interested in that because I was concerned with where the bulk of the battalion was at and what they were doing. That was my focus at that time.

Interviewer: At what point in time is it now that you realize or you've got some indication that the military is responsible for these killings?

Ramirez: You know, I don't remember if that was released while I was on leave or shortly after I came back off of leave. I don't remember. But I remember that I was surprised and that it was the commando unit. I knew it had to have been after I was on leave because I was telling everybody about the unit I was supporting. I wouldn't have even done that if there had been any glitch or thing associated with it, but I think it had to have been in January. January is the earliest time that I think that I found out that this was attributed to the military. In my mind at that time, when I heard about it after the incident, I always thought it was the guerillas. Until sometime in January when it was confirmed that it was military and that it was from our battalion, the Atlacatl battalion. At least that was what the press said. I was flabbergasted. I couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: Let's go back to late November early December before you go on leave. Did you know anything? Was anybody talking to you from the Salvadorian military? You were not in contact with the Americans or the Milgroup? You were isolated out there?

Ramirez: I could talk to them on the phone.

Interviewer: Where was Berger?

Ramirez: Berger is all the way on the other end in La Union.

Interviewer: Spell that.

Ramirez: I'm sorry, it's L-A new word U-N-I-O-N. It's about a five hour driving time but we can't drive it, we have to fly out there. So, he is on the other side.

Interviewer: So you are literally isolated out there. OK, let's focus on Berger for a minute. You don't have any contact with him during this time except by phone?

Ramirez: Yes sir, except by phone and also, he wasn't even in the country, if I recall correctly. As a matter of fact, the reason I went to the capital on the 10th of November was for me and Major Hall to drop him off so he could catch a flight out of here. He was sent to Panama and he went to Panama.

Interviewer: How long was he gone?

Ramirez: He was gone the whole time the offensive was going. He didn't get back until after it was over.

Interviewer: How long after?

Ramirez: 1st of December.

Interviewer: O.K., he may have been back by the 1st of December. Is there any physical contact between the two of you? Or is he still out there five hours away?

Ramirez: No. I think I may have seen him that week he got back. Matter of fact, I may have gone to pick him up, I'm not sure. I may have seen him when he got back immediately from Panama.

Interviewer: So, in early December, maybe around December 1st, Lt. Col. Berger was back from Panama and you see him where?

Ramirez: The only place I could have seen him would have been at the airport. Usually what he had me do was when he came in from a trip like that, since I was close to the capital, I would go in and pick him up from the airport and take him to the embassy and from there he would get a helicopter and go out to La Union. I think that is what happened when he came back.

Interviewer: Now, focusing in on that period of time, has anybody been discussing with you, at that point in time, the possibility that one of the Atlacatl units was responsible for the killing of the Jesuits?

Ramirez: Never. That wasn't even entertained, discussed, or anything. Like I said, I was surprised. No one was more surprised than I was when I came back and heard this. If I heard something, probably when I heard something I would have put two-and-two together but it was never, never even thought of to have happened.

Interviewer: Did you know any people personally in that unit?

Ramirez: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you talk to any of them personally after the fact?

Ramirez: Oh, you mean of the commando unit that is involved in this?



Interviewer: Yes.

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: Obviously, you have seen enough in the papers, but did you know Major Buckland at all?

Ramirez: I've met him on a couple of occasions and one time he visited us at Atlacatl and he brought some other counterpart down to watch one of my training units graduate. I talked to him briefly.

Interviewer: Can you remember the time frame of that? Is this prior to the offensive?

Ramirez: No, it is after the offensive and I would say prior to my going on leave. Probably the early part of December.

Interviewer: Did Buckland discuss the Jesuit murders?

Ramirez: Not to me. No sir.

Interviewer: You did not discuss it with him.

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: Did you know what his assignment was there?

Ramirez: He was the S5 Civil Affairs Advisor to the Salvadorian staff.

Interviewer: Could you explain that a little?

Ramirez: His job is to advise ways of how they can win the hearts and minds of the community of the people. That type of thing.

Interviewer: Were you aware of an order put out by the ambassador after the killings go down that any military personnel that have information on this should come forward with that information?

Ramirez: Yes, I remember that.

Interviewer: What time frame does that come out? Right after the killings?

Ramirez: No sir, I think, I can't remember, I think it would be after the whole thing, after Buckland makes known what he knows. I think it is then that I recall that. Up until that point, to me there is

no idea at all that this could remotely involve the military or that Americans would have any knowledge of this. I think that statement came after Buckland to see if anyone else had information.

Interviewer: Prior to the killings, let's go back to November. The commando unit was headed by Espinoza. Tell me who else was in that unit. Would you have been exposed to any of the lower ranking personnel? The Sergeants?

Ramirez: I would have seen them.

Interviewer: But not have known them first hand?

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: The only person you recall knowing from that unit who you interacted with was Espinoza.

Ramirez: Right.

Interviewer: Do you recall hearing of a search, a clearing of the UCA on or about November 13th? This is before the killings.

Ramirez: I think so. I think I remember seeing that or at least talked about it.

Interviewer: What do you remember about it?

Ramirez: Other than it was an area of concern. There is another area east of that towards the airport that was also a problem. There were pockets of problem areas, in other words. My recollection is that was a problem area and that was an area that was being cleared out or brought back.

Interviewer: Did you understand who was doing that.

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: You didn't know what unit?

Ramirez: No, I wasn't sure what unit. I knew that the majority of the Atlacatl was focused up here in the North because I knew that was where my focus was.

Interviewer: Did it seem strange to you that this commando unit was split off like that? Again, what were your thoughts?

Ramirez: O.K., I'm going back in my frame of reference. Recall I have only been there about a month. So, I really do not understand the way they operate. Going back in my frame of reference, in an American army it is not unusual to be attached and unattached, and chop units here and there. That is very common. So I didn't even think that they would be, I said, well they are chopped here they must be doing something, some kind of special maneuver whatever. But, as far as special unit, to me they were not really that much more special than one of the normal units. Not in sense that they have received an inordinant amount of extra training like our Rangers or our Seals would receive. What they do is they put them through some harder training. They do a little bit longer, like if you can run five miles they will run seven miles. That type of thing. But as far as training wise there is not that much to set them off as to be something special.

Interviewer: Were they considered tough?

Ramirez: Yes, they are considered that by their own unit and mainly because they are more motivated. That way makes them elite.

Interviewer: More experienced?

Ramirez: Yes, they are more senior, more experienced in that regard, but as far as special in the true sense of the word special, as being some special skills, no.

Interviewer: Major I would like to just clarify one particular area. What are you doing after this commando raid occurs on the UCA? The very next day. Are you still training? What are you doing for the next couple of weeks immediately following?

Ramirez: When the offensive started?

Interviewer: When the assault on the UCA occurs. Where are you that night?

Ramirez: OK, I'm there at the battalion and what I'm actually doing or what we are doing, is the U.S. special forces team that was down there, now had to change its mission. They really couldn't do what they came down there to do but they still needed to do something. So, what we did was offer any assistance we could to the battalion that stayed

back, the rear elements that didn't deploy. To help train them and fire their weapons, get the clerks and the cooks prepared in the event that they would have to defend the base camp. We helped them to put in a mortar position, which they didn't have, that was much needed. That was the extent of it. In the evenings and afternoons and in the mornings I'd go by the Operations Center and try to determine what was happening in the battle and what was going on, trying to learn from it. It was more of a learning phase for me, the battle wasn't being directed from there the battle was being directed from the units, battalions, elements, that were deployed, but we were still getting reports and could follow along a little bit about what was going on. As far as the training which I'm specifically designed to do, there was nothing more I could do because the units, the soldiers that we were training got sent out as well, so there were no soldiers to train other than the people that stayed behind.

Interviewer: But you were still in contact with members of the Atlacatl battalion?

Ramirez: Yes, the people that stayed back. Those people that I mentioned to you earlier.

Interviewer: Which specific people would you be in contact with?

Ramirez: I would be in contact with Lt. Campos-Paz who stayed back, Major Carranza who stayed back who is the S4, who is the Senior Officer by the way. I can't recall the other ones, they were in and out. Those two come to light.

Interviewer: Now it seems to me, again, just a totally objective view, I was not there, that what happened was rather sensitive. Obviously the killing of the Jesuit Priests and attack on the UCA was a sensitive issue. It seems to me that these people, Major Carranza, Lt. Paz, would be discussing some kind of scuttlebutt, voicing opinions or some type of feelings. Do you mean to tell me that they never even intimated something about their feelings, about this incident, possibly speculation of when it occurred. Was anything at all mentioned to you about that?

Ramirez: I can't think of those particular incidents

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specifically. I remember talking to them about what was happening and what the battalion was doing as a whole. That was the larger element and that is where my focus was and not on the isolated units. To me, I thought those were minor missions that they were going to be doing, you know, static guard, just sitting here guarding a place. That is what they used our trainees for. They weren't out, actually going out, trying to take building by building.

Interviewer: Well, after this incident happened you have to realize it is no longer that. You have to realize that there are some operations going on with these other...

Ramirez: Yes, I wasn't sure at that time the commando unit was involved in that. I really didn't think they were involved.

Interviewer: Do you recall any of these people, again from the Atlacatl battalion, saying anything about that issue after it happened?

Ramirez: Not until January, at that time I recall that there were a lot of people who were just as surprised as I was at least that was the feeling that I got, and a lot of disappointment as well. Again, that was the feeling that I perceived. I felt that they were torn between loyalty to a fellow member of their unit and what had happened and after that they really never talked about it once it became known that it was the Atlacatl battalion. We really didn't talk about it and I didn't push because already one American has been identified as being the key person to provide information. I was kind of sensitive to that saying hey, if I go in here and start trying to...

Interviewer: Well that was two months later. Are you talking about Buckland?

Ramirez: Yes, I'm talking about after everything became known. But in the time you are referring to, in the November time frame while this was going on, I really can't recall any conversation of any substance about the UCA or let alone one of their units was involved in that.

Interviewer: There was a Lt. Hector Ocampo, a member of the Salvadorian Military Intelligence Group. Did you

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have any contact with the Salvadorian Military Intelligence?

Ramirez: No sir. I don't even know who he is.

Interviewer: Let's go back and focus on a few things just so we can make sure we are on target with what we are talking about pertaining to your knowledge of this. Do you have any recollection of a discussion with your superior in late November, early December, of the possible involvement of the Atlacatl in the killing of the Jesuits? No recollection of that whatsoever?

Ramirez: No sir.

Interviewer: Let me run a few names by you. Members of the armed forces. How much did you know about the hierarchy in the Salvadorian Military. For instance, the Minister of Defense who is Raphael Lopez. Were you familiar with this gentleman? Did you have any contact with the high ranking military of El Salvador? Zepeda? Did you know Zepeda?

Ramirez: I knew who he was but I've never met him.

Interviewer: Orlando Zepeda. How about the Chief of Staff Colonel Ponce.

Ramirez: No, he is to me the head man there and Zepeda and Larios to me were like some place up in the distance or on the edge so to speak. I've always heard, that everything was talked about with Colonel Ponce.

Interviewer: Chief of Personnel was Colonel Nelson Lopez y Lopez. Did you know him?

Ramirez: No sir.

Interviewer: Chief of Psychological Operations would have been Carlos Aviles. Did you know him?

Ramirez: No sir.

Interviewer: How about the Deputy Defense Minister Zepeda? Would you have had any contact with him?

Ramirez: No sir.

Interviewer: Or the Chief of Operations which was Colonel Flores?

Ramirez: No sir.

Interviewer: There is a series of photographs here that I would like you to look at and if you will flip it over and read out the name of the individual that you are looking at. See if you can tell me if you know any of these gentlemen.

Ramirez: I don't know this individual.

Interviewer: Who is that individual that you are looking at?

Ramirez: O.K. This individual is Juan Carlos Carillo Schlenker, 1983, I don't know him. Next, Raphael Bustillo Toleda, and I...

Interviewer: Did you ever hear of Bustillo?

Ramirez: Bustillo, I believe he is an Air Force officer and if it is the Bustillo that I am thinking of he was the Commander of the Air Force possibly at sometime.

This I believe from looking at it is Colonel Zepeda. No it's Inocento Montano, but I don't know. It looks kind of like Colonel Zepeda.

Next individual is Joaquin Arnaldo Cerna Flores. The name sounds familiar, Cerna Flores, and I believe he is the operation officer you are talking about but I don't know him.

Roberto Mauricio Staben. I've met Colonel Staben once and that is the extent of my knowledge of him.

Interviewer: Where?

Ramirez: I met him at, I think it was at a Hotel, a Sheraton, and I believe at that time he was going to be assigned to the embassy in Honduras.

Interviewer: Why were you meeting him there? What was the purpose of the meeting or how did you run into him?

Ramirez: He was with a friend of mine, an American from Honduras, who had another employee of theirs from the Honduras Embassy who knew Colonel Staben.

Interviewer: What time frame?

Ramirez: We are talking probably April or May of 1990.

Interviewer: 1990, not during the offensive.

Ramirez: No sir. It was sometime afterwards. I met him through these people from Honduras. They were from the Honduras Embassy.

Interviewer: Let's go back now and we'll focus again during that pertinent time frame when the offensive is going on. Are you aware at all in your contact with the Atlacatl, is there anything being said about meetings of the high command of the El Salvadorian military at that time? Specifically, on the night of the 15th of November or any night during that offensive. Are you hearing anything to do about the plans being formulated?

Ramirez: No sir. I know there was a lot of meetings, and from the very beginning on the 11th and 12th once they figured what they were up against there were a lot of meetings.

Interviewer: How did you know this?

Ramirez: Well, I knew because the commander would be going. I would be asking where the commander was going and he was going to a meeting.

Interviewer: Linares. How do you spell his last name?

Ramirez: Leon-Linares, right? His last name is spelled L-I--N-A-R-E-S. He would be involved in meetings to get his mission as to what he was going to do during this upcoming offensive. Afterwards, after the battalion left, I really didn't get any feel for that because the people who were left wouldn't have been called up to those meetings.

Interviewer: When did Linares leave?

Ramirez: I would say two or three days later. He didn't leave until probably the 13th or 14th, somewhere around there give or take a day or two.

Interviewer: But prior to the killings he's gone?

Ramirez: I'm not sure. I couldn't say. I don't remember if he left before or about the same time or shortly after, but I know it was around that time period.

Interviewer: Right about that time frame of the killings are you aware of him being involved in any meetings of the high command?



Ramirez: No sir.

Interviewer: You did not know Colonel Benavides? Is that correct?

Ramirez: No sir.

Interviewer: You get down there in October of 1989. Are you physically living with the battalion, is that where you're at?

Ramirez: Yes sir, when I arrived there on October 9th I had about three or four days of in processing which kept me at the capital and La Union where Colonel Berger was at, more or less the first five days. It wasn't until about the 16th or 17th of October that I actually got to the Atlacatl battalion. I literally lived there with them. The same type of barracks they had and rooms they had I had. I lived in the camp itself.

Interviewer: Did you room with one particular officer?

Ramirez: No sir. I had my own room and they all had their own rooms and that is where I was at all times during this time, during the offensive, except for in the morning or a day or two before when I dropped Colonel Berger off to take him to the airport.

Interviewer: Have you ever been to Esquala Militar?

Ramirez: Yes.

Interviewer: What does that look like? Can you describe it?

Ramirez: Well, it is a walled area like all the other buildings or most of the other buildings around there. You go in and there is a guard and you go in and there is a hallway and once you go in the hallway on either side left or right are the class rooms. One of my ex-cadettes that I trained in the United States back in 1982 was there and I went there once to visit him and afterward I made a couple of visits to the military academy because that is also where we would take our helicopters out.

Interviewer: Were you aware of any meetings that ever occurred there?

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: Did you ever hear the terminology "old school?"

Ramirez: "Old school?" In Spanish that should be esquala?

Interviewer: Or someone said somebody was from the "old school?"

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: What history do you know about death squads there in El Salvador?

Ramirez: Not very much. The history that I know is that I believe both sides utilized this once in some degree. Beyond that I never really talked to anybody that could tell me details about how they operated or what went on. I don't know the inner workings. I know from what I've read and what I've heard that both sides employed these back in the early 70's or whatever.

Interviewer: Do you know where they were operating from?

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: Did you ever hear of the death squads being tied to the Atlacatl or the Esquala Militar?

Ramirez: No sir. I've never heard that.

Interviewer: Have you ever heard the names of anyone who used to be connected to the death squads?

Ramirez: The only name that I've heard is Col. D'Aubuisson who is old and sick and most of the people are familiar with him. That is the only person that I actually knew when I was there being associated with him.

Interviewer: How did you learn of Colonel D'Aubuisson's possible association? Who was talking about him in that respect?

Ramirez: Well it wasn't from the Salvadorians. What I heard was from my knowledge that I had already had when I went down, of him being associated with it.

Interviewer: Intelligence briefings that were given to you or you got that from your own military people?

Ramirez: I don't know if I got it from our military people as far as him being associated with that. I possibly did, but I know I got it from reading

reports and stuff on the press or whatever about his association. I don't remember if it was from our military. They didn't specifically talk about him and intelligence that we got prior to going to El Salvador was very limited. They more or less said these are the twelve leaders from different regions. It wasn't anything detailed or elaborate.

Interviewer: Did you ever hear statements that the Jesuits were the advisors to the FMLN? Or anything that indicated that they were.

Ramirez: I think that is what they felt. They would have said that. I think that is what they really felt. They are advisors, well maybe not necessarily advisors to the FMLN, but rather instigators of the common people through the platforms that they utilize in their schools or in their churches.

Interviewer: What does the term Tandona mean to you?

Ramirez: Tandona means clique, a brotherhood, year group.

Interviewer: How does that apply to the Salvadorians?

Ramirez: I think it is stronger in the senior ranking officers than it is in the junior ranking.

Interviewer: Do you know any history behind that? What it means?

Ramirez: Well, I know that every year a class graduates and that is the Tandona for that year group and they stick together and they visit each other afterwards and they help each other, this type of thing. Assignments, that type of thing.

Interviewer: Is it true, if I understand correctly, in the Salvadorian Army, that actually there is status within rank, such that, if a person was graduated years earlier that they would be superior to another person in the same rank.

Ramirez: Yes sir, most definitely. Even within the same year, if I'm not mistaken, they're all the same grade or whatever, they have seniority.

Interviewer: Does the Tandona as a group possess more power or more connections or more clout than maybe others, any particular ones?

Ramirez: Well, obviously the one that is in power with

Colonel Ponce's Tandonas would be one because they definitely have most of the commanders and so forth. I think there is another Tandonas, maybe two or three years below that is also a pretty strong Tandonas too. I believe that is one of the Tandonas that Col. Linares is in. There are some younger Tandonas that will be strong too in the future. The Tandonas of the 1983 year group will be strong because there is so many of them who graduated.

**Interviewer:** The American Green Beret group that was training the commando unit at the time the offensive, how did they get barricaded up in the San Salvador Sheraton? Where is that in relationship to where you were?

**Ramirez:** What happened was once things stabilized and it was determined that they would redeploy, the day before they were to leave, they went to the hotel. Matter of fact, they invited me to go down there too but I said no I would stay at the unit. The following day, early that morning, is when the hotel was over run. The hotel itself is about 35 kilometers into the city more towards the northern part of the city. The guerillas were trying to take it over because there was somebody from the U.N., an under secretary, they wanted to capture. Anyway, the American group got caught up in this as they just happened to be there.

**Interviewer:** Being 35 kilometers away with all that is going on, on the night of 15th and 16th, could you have told the direction of fire? Would you know something was happening at the UCA or is that just too many miles away from you?

**Ramirez:** From my location?

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Ramirez:** No sir, that would be too far away.

**Interviewer:** Just too far away? You wouldn't hear something from the stand point of anti-rocket fire? AK 47's? Small arms fire?

**Ramirez:** No.

**Interviewer:** Can I just take you back for a minute, I'd just like to get an opinion of yours. How do you think you would react if a couple of days after you were talking to Espinoza, Campos-Paz, or Carranza or one

of those, they told you they suspected strongly that this armed group of the Atlacatl, this one particular special forces group or whatever you want to call them, commandos, had executed a mission on the UCA and effectively killed these people? How would you react to that, do you think?

Ramirez: I would be pretty stunned, upset that they would allow something like that to happen.

Interviewer: What would you do?

Ramirez: I would like to think I would report that to my commander, the Milgroup commander. As much as the same way as Major Buckland would have done.

Interviewer: Could you justify it in your own mind, do you think, that the Salvadorian government or the Atlacatl knew what they were doing and they had a purpose as part of the war effort there?

Ramirez: No. As far as going into there, well you hear of these people searching and confiscating and bringing them to some area where they could be interviewed or whatever for their knowledge or either justify or negate what they are accused of. I think that is probably something they could have done and should have done. In fact it seemed to be a threat but to the extent that it happened, no.

Interviewer: Were you aware of the Jesuits that were killed by name? Did you know of them?

Ramirez: Only afterwards when they named the names of them. I heard these names mentioned before on radio broadcasts or television broadcast but it is not something that if you would have asked me then and I would have said yes that is a Jesuit Priest.

Interviewer: Do you recall what you were hearing on the radio and television?

Ramirez: Well, mainly reports about what was happening in the city and the battles and so forth that was going on and warning people to stay in and abide by the curfew. I just can't recall someone coming in there and telling me this.

Interviewer: Do you recall any knowledge at all that may have been given to you during late November or earlier December concerning military involvement in the killing of the Jesuits?

Ramirez: Negative. None whatsoever.

Interviewer: Again, I'm trying to get answers as to how somebody may have heard something and construed that. You do not remember getting information of that type during late November or December and then turning around and furnishing it to Berger?

Ramirez: No.

Interviewer: You don't recall ever discussing with Berger, even if suspicion that you had heard from somebody, hearsay-type of thing, or anything unofficial or just like I said opinionated-type stuff to him, about the Atlacatl being involved in the killings.

Ramirez: No. I don't think so. I don't recall talking to him about that.

Interviewer: Alright, let's switch to January and move toward a close. You go on Christmas leave and you come back when, January what?

Ramirez: I'd say it would have to be January 5th.

Interviewer: Now, tell us what are you hearing?

Ramirez: Now, I can't recall if it is right after I get back or shortly after I get back. I don't remember the exact time. Now, word is coming to me or the word is or it is out officially that the Atlacatl battalion or that the military is involved first of all and then the unit that is involved is the Atlacatl and then I think later on it was pin pointed to actually being the commando platoon but that is kind of not brought out in the very beginning. As far as the press is concerned

Interviewer: Who are you getting this from?

Ramirez: I didn't get it from the Atlacatl people there of the unit. I got this from reading what came through in the press. When it was released to the press, I'm talking about Salvadorian press, and then followed up by our newspaper, television agencies that I actually find out that it is military that is involved first of all and secondly the Atlacatl. I was still confused even then because I didn't think it could be the Atlacatl because they weren't even in that area. But then after hearing more of the facts of what supposedly happened and then I said I could see how it could

be the commando platoon because they had been detached from the battalion during the offensive, they could very well have done what they were accused of.

Interviewer: You said, just a few minutes ago, that if someone told you that or insinuated the military did it you would have said they wouldn't have been that stupid to do it. How do you feel now?

Ramirez: I still feel that it is stupid. I think it is a dumb move.

Interviewer: From what knowledge you have now do you think they did it?

Ramirez: I think everything points to the fact that they did it.

Interviewer: What type of weapons were they carrying? The commando unit, what type of weapons would they have been carrying?

Ramirez: They could carry M 16's, M 16 machine guns, pistols. They have been known to carry from time to time AK 47's. Sometimes they would appear as G's and we have had units call back intelligence assets, call back, and say we have spotted forty G's at this location.

Interviewer: Forty guerillas?

Ramirez: Forty guerillas at this location and it turns out when it gets back to us or to the Atlacatl people, they know that is their commando unit and they are operating like that trying to get undercover, mix-in with the guerillas.

Interviewer: They have spotted them carrying AK 47's or...

Ramirez: Right. In other words it is not unusual for them to adopt those type of tactics to try and get behind their lines, their area, infiltrate to do that so they have access to AK 47's as well.

Interviewer: Do they also carry rockets?

Ramirez: LAWS. If any, they would carry LAWS.

Interviewer: Those are the ones we had trained them on and furnished them with. They would have acquired or purchased through us?

Ramirez: Yes sir.

Interviewer: Have you ever heard from anyone of the idea of a high command knowledge of a plot to kill the Jesuits?

Ramirez: The only place I have heard that is from the newspaper. I've never heard any Salvadorian officer talking about that.

Interviewer: And, never did you hear the Salvadorans, anyone in Salvador that you talked to, discussing meetings of the high command pertaining to operations against the UCA?

Ramirez: No sir.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)