

C: All right, you're ready?

B: Yeah

C: Okay, now I want to go over some things with you for clarifications, okay. Your real name is

B: Eric Warren Buckland.

C: Speak a little louder.

B: Eric Warren Buckland.

C: Okay. today is Friday, January 12, 1990, and it's approximately 1 p.m. in the afternoon. This investigation concerns the death of Jesuit priests in El Salvador, November 16, 1989.

B: Right.

C: Okay. And you are making these statements voluntarily at this time?

B: Yes.

C: You and I have had discussions for the last two days/

B: Yes.

C: And you voluntarily have been very cooperative here in

presenting this factual information?

B: To the best of my ability.

C: To the best of your ability. Do you feel any strain right now. I mean, do you feel good? Do you feel healthy right now? Are you in good health?

B: Other than on the <sup>verge</sup> ~~bride~~ of a nervous breakdown. ✓

C: I know it's been stressful. Other than the signs of stress, do you feel of sound mind?

B: Good to go.

C: Okay. We've discussed these things for many, many hours and all I want to do during this discussion is to recap or review everything that we have discussed which you have SAID is the truth to the best of your recollection at this time.

B: Right.

C: Now, prior to these murders of the Jesuits, prior to the killings, let's call them, of the Jesuits, at what particular time did you become privvy to any information before this happened? About how long before the killings did you become privvy to any information or meetings?

B: No more than..

B: Approximately.

B: Okay, the end of October.

C: The end of October?

B: Yeah.

C: 1989?

B: Yeah, it would be no more than 3 weeks prior. The reason I remember like I told you before, we had a PT test coming so I know when we went to the military school. I went to the military school one day with Col. Aviles.

C: You went to the military school with Col. Aviles?

B: he said, come on, you know, come on, let's go for a ride.

C: How did you get to the school?

B: He had a Jeep Wagoneer or something. We drove. It's about 3/400 meters from the Estado Mayor.

C: Tell me briefly about that meeting and what transpired.

B: Okay, we drove over, you go in the main gate, took a right, went up just about 50 meters, 75 meters around the corner to a building, I took it to be the commander's office, I had never been over there before. I'd been to the left, never to the right. We got out of the car. He asked me to come. I figured okay, I'd tag along. You know, he asked me to come. He was specific about asking me to stay out. He only did that on a few occasions. I never busted in on meetings he had with colonels

and stuff like that, but it struck me odd that he brought me over there. If there was a problem that he had to work out, solve, or something that Col. Ponce had sent him over to do, that's why he told me the came over and he had to see Col. Benavides, the commander of the school. That's the first time I'd heard of this guy.

C: Was it common practice for him to go to that school?

B: It was the first time we'd ever gone to the school. He had come over when we had a course in June and July to see the students, but he was in and out. He'd hang around there and leave.

C: Well, then it was unusual for him to be at the school?

B: I had never gone over there with him.

C: Okay,

B: It was weird because he had been a student there, but he just didn't go over and he'd been an instructor there.

C: What observation did you make of him before he went up to this meeting?

B: Okay. I can tell when he is ill at ease, and he was ill at ease.

C: He was pretty stressed?

3: No, something was bothering him. whichever way. But he was not comfortable. He went up the stairs and at that time, at a minimum Col. Benavides was there. He rendered a hand salute to the Col.

3: Was anyone else you recognized there?

3: At that specific instance, no, there were other people around.

3: Okay.

B: Now, I went up to the track and wasn't paying much attention. I just went away. I turned around again to look or later when the meeting was over there were 4 or 5 people there on the steps.

C: okay.

B: I can't specifically tell you that when we got there they were all there. There were other people up there. To the best of my knowledge, and this is just a sort of thing in my head, Col. Leon, who's the Atlacatl commander, who I thought I had never seen before until several weeks later, when I went to the Atlacatl Battalion, but it's just gnawing at me, was there.

C: Okay.

B: Col Benavides, Col. Aviles and one or two other officers and there were some troops standing around. Now, I don't remember the rest of them coming out. They left the steps or went into the building for a few minutes. He originally told me it was about 2 minutes. I remember standing around longer, for one particular reason. Because the cadets were running around the track and they were doing more than a lap. So we're talking 3 or 4 minute milers there and I walked around the pool and then looked at the pool and thought it was a good campus and everything and he finally came back out. And it kind of broke into 4 or 5 guys. He came out and I said what's up. I normally said, you know, what's going on, sir.

C: When he came out, he went back to the vehicle?

B: He came back to the vehicle

C: - And where were you?

B: well, I was moving down, and he said come on.

C: He waved to you to come back?

B: I had moved closer to the vehicle. I was sitting down.

That's why I know it was more than a couple minutes because I was leaning against a wall or sitting on a wall.

C: To the best of your recollection, what was the conversation that ensued after that?

B: Okay, I asked him what was up. I said, who's Col. Benavides? And he said something to the affect that, as we got into the conversation, that Col. Benavides was a, not a hard charger, in the sense that he wasn't in the gang, that he wasn't in the tandon, he was sort of out of it, or whatever,

C: What exactly is a tandon? Can you explain that.

B: In El Salvador, they call each class at the Escuela Militar a "tanda," that's our equivalent to a "year group." Now, their school, up until 10 yrs. ago before the revolution that they've got going, graduated maybe 20 guys, although they would start with 150/200 cadets and they would graduate 20\25 guys. And that class was tight, real, real tight because the school used to be very, very difficult, physically, mentally, you know brass



knockers. So they call them tandas, like we call our year groups. The tandona, which is really now essentially headed by Col. Ponce, who's the Chief of Staff, was one of the biggest olden days tanda. And I was told by Col. Aviles they were so big because the students, now Col. Ponce and his peers, their fathers were coronels or ministers in the government and as a result, if, let's say you and I were students, you dad's a coronel and mine's a minister, and an instructor gives you a hard time, well, he was out on the Honduran border the next day.

C: A pretty powerful group.

B: Yeah. from their fathers. So that group that's called the tandona, and it's called the "sinfonia", the symphony, I think, it's 48 or 50 guys or something, it's big. Benavides you know, everybody talks about the tandona being this big juggernaut. I had since learned later that there is factionalism. Okay.

C: Within?

B: Yeah, and even though Ponce's the Chief of Staff, they don't ultimately respect him. I mean, he's the boss, okay. But they're peers, to the fact that Col. Aviles has said stuff that guys would come up and take cigarettes and say " Ponce, give me a cigarette". No, where really he's the boss and he shoulder's the biggest load. The tandona has factualism and its some factions. And Col. Aviles spoke about Benavides being of the old school, hadn't changed, kind of a hard charger.

C: He's a member of the tandona?

B: Col. Benavides is of the tandona. Col. Aviles is 2 years behind. Both coronels, but in their army, date of rank means as much as ———, Yeah, so you would render a hand salute, for instance, if I was down there, a major, and you were ahead of me I would call him "sir". I'm pretty sure that's what I thought I saw, was the tanda. In your year group are your buds and then below you are your subordinates. So he just talked about Benavides being sort of rammer, plateo, old style. Now, you got to remember before the revolution, before the civil war, when you

made col., this is all Aviles telling me, but this seems to be pretty true, when you made coronel, you got a phone call from the oligarchy and somebody basically bought you. You made good bucks and you looked out for that guy or whatever it was that was going on. And they also played pretty hardball. Human rights was not a discussion. It's not an issue. Some of us (? can't understand if he's saying "us" or what) would probably kill 'em, you know, not any millions of people, but I mean they

C: Is this what they called death squads?

B: Well, back in the old days, I don't think so. You know, to a great extent the death squads exist, there were things, but it was, it's a good thing, I believe, for the liberals and stuff to grab onto to, okay. You know, I think it was organized going around and killing people. There probably still is, obviously. But I mean in an organized way everyday, but in the old days, let's say 15 years ago because these guys are in their 20 something years, it's just that if there was a problem, the guy was killed. You know, in some cases or whatever, he was moved out of the way. He just didn't have to worry about anybody, about what anybody thought. The military still to a great extent now, but for sure before, before America got involved in this civil war, was above the law and, for instance, driving with my body guard, I know I'm digressing here, but to give you an idea, the whole idea of the old school, as an officer, you don't get tickets. When the police stop you, they don't ticket you. You carry a pistol wherever you want to, you can do pretty much whatever you want to, you're above prosecution. My bodyguard asked me in the States could I run red lights. I said no, I'd

get a ticket. well, you carry your pistol around with you. I  
said no. Can you beat women up? I said no. -----  
here in the United States the military is almost, has less rights  
because people look at us so much harder. He was of that gang  
that took...

C: Who's he?

B: Col. Benavides. Not made to changes that there...

C: He was old school?

B: Yeah, that from what Col. Aviles was telling me he didn't play human rights. You know, he was hard, you would still beat up your soldiers, or whatever, whatever that would mean. But he had not made the changes, he could not understand what the United States was trying to get them to do.

C: Did he connect him to these death squads?

B: Yeah. He... eventually this came around in younger days, but probably like the early 80's, that he had been involved somehow in the death squads. And I feel reasonably competent, although when I told you this story, I read this I think in a New York Times, that death squads at one time or another had been run in and out of the Escuela Militar. Whether or not it was right then, I don't know only because there didn't seem to be any deaths going on. But that Benavides at one time or another had been involved in that. And I even,... although I know that was that discussion. I think somebody else like my bodyguard, I think, corroborated that somewhere, that Benavides was dirty. He then went on to say and I said well what's going on?

C: He went on to say, who?

B: Col. Aviles. somewhere in the conversation told me about Col.

Benavides.

C: Okay.

B: Maybe a little bit, and then I said well, what is the problem? And then he said to the extent that Benavides wanted to do something stupid. And to the best of my knowledge, it involved getting into the UCA.

C: The UCA. And what is the UCA?

B: It's the University of Central America. There's 2 major universities in the city - the National University, which has been the hot bed of revolutionaries and all that kind of stuff for years, they can't go in there, but it's in the city. The UCA. Some of the terrorist activities or whatever have been coming out of there, rockets being fired, mortars and some of that stuff. During the months I've been there, I was there in June and July and came back in October, and there was more stuff coming out of the UCA. Demonstrations and stuff were coming out of the National University, but out of UCA, the University of Central America, there were other problems. Then Benavides supposedly had been making noise about going in and, Father, I guess it was Father Ellacuria, a Jesuit priest and instructor, basically well respected in the world, was the most outspoken against the government. Now, and at that time he was an enemy figure, if you will. That goes back to the old school that the enemy is not necessarily the guy carrying a weapon, it's the mouthpiece, too. And that an action was going to be taken against him.

C: What action did you think that meant?

B: To <sup>k</sup>ill him.

C: To kill him?

B: Yeah, to kill him, Yeah, to go in at Ellacuria. I understood this conversation that UCA and Ellacuria and Ellacuria the specific target and UCA the general target. The feeling being that all these places were cache sights, you know weapons, ----- hospitals, and all that kind of stuff. I can honestly say that I had no love for any of the leftists people. okay. I loved El Salvador. and I can honestly say I knew the ramifications of any of those kind of murders to the country, but I didn't think a whole lot about somebody getting killed. Only that it would hurt the country.

C: Did you feel a loyalty to El Salvador?

B: Yeah. I did not feel disloyal to the United States, but I felt for a long time that I loved the ideals of my country, but I don't much like the people here. And I really loved the Salvadorans and I like their military. Not the old boy, but I just like the latinos.

C: Did you consider yourself a Salvadoran?

B: Yeah, I, you know, a long time ago when I worked in Honduras, I'd become, my "nom-de-guerre" was Antonio Luis (?) Bravo. And I

would just goof around with the guys on my team, and I decided  
that in El Salvador I wanted to be "Cheli" Buckland, and "Cheli"  
is what they call like ----- and I wanted to be Major  
"Cheli" or "Chelito" or "Mayor Eric" and I didn't wanted to be



the advisor, I wanted to be part of Col. Aviles', he was the C-5, I wanted to be part of his staff. I thought I knew the answers; you know I thought I could help. But I realized I had a struggle. You know he talked about them being killed. Col. Aviles said that Col. Benavides was looking at doing some sort of hit. I really had the impression, I think we cleared this up, that Benavides either realized that that was stupid or that it wasn't going to happen that day or something. I felt confident, but I don't know for sure. I can honestly say that if, I probably wouldn't have been too upset that they were going to do it other than the fact..

C: You would have accepted it?

B: Yeah.

C: yeah, if you knew it was going to be done?

b: yeah,

C: Why would you have done that? Because you felt it was for the good of the country or?

B: Well, up until that time, I didn't really realize that Ellacuria had been actually starting to talk for Cristiani, but I wasn't convinced either way which side the guy was going, I just knew he was dirty. And I struggled, you know I've been struggling with .

this for a while, how do you win these kinds of wars. If you're nice all the time, you're going to get your butt kicked, you know. So when he said that, I either accepted that it was he that was talking about it, but I, in retrospect, Aviles told me that he was talking about doing it and I took that to mean that that was the problem, that Ponce had sent him over to just smooth it out. And I think I had faith in Aviles that everything was fine. and when he said that everything was fine, not that it wasn't going to happen.

C: Right

B: But not that it was going to happen, but I talked to him about it and he gave me a heads up, that this is what Benavides was looking at doing and that Benavides had been dirty, so

C: Was that all that was said? After that meeting?

B: Well, when we left that day, that was pretty much...

C: Okay. Was there occasion of any other meetings? Or visits to the school?

B: Yeah, he went over a day or two later.

C: Who's he?

B: Col. Aviles went over, he took me again back.

C: To the Escuela Militar?

B: Back to the Escuela Militar and instead of going to the right, we went to the main lobby. He asked me to stay there. I met a guy who was his cousin or something. I was talking to him, he wanted to speak in English, so we spoke in English. I looked around at the plaques and stuff and Aviles left. He was in the Escuela, I don't know where he went.

C: How long was he gone?

B: The other meeting was maybe 15 minutes. This was again 10 or 15 minutes, maybe a little bit longer because I talked to this guy and I wondered around. And then he came back. I don't remember who we saw or who we talked to.

C: Did you believe that first meeting to be any kind of planning for what might have happened at the UCA? Based on what Col. Aviles said.

B: Well, if there wasn't planning, there were some key players there.

C: Okay.

B: Again, I think Col. Leon was there.

C: Who is he?

B: He's the Atlacatl Battalion commander, but that one, you know, that sticks, but even more ----- I can't

swear to it, but I would say that he was there. There were two other guys and there was LtCol Major ----- . Okay, they were not young officers. And then I would take and Col. Aviles may even have mentioned that they were even part of Benavides' staff.

C: At the second meeting?

B: At the second meeting I don't know what he did. I don't know where he went. He was not comfortable again when we went over there, and I think that was the time we ran over a sign. He wasn't paying attention to what he was doing. So we went in and walked around. After we came back from, and I don't know who he saw, I would very much strongly assume that if he didn't even tell me so he saw Benavides because there's nobody else to see. If we had anything to do, all the other times we went there which were only to a classroom, which is to the left and down at the end of another track on the soccer field. He went out and went out the lobby the front way and went to the right as you look at the building which is back over to Benavides' area. We then walked around the school. He showed me a bunch of stuff, you know, nostalgic type things. We walked over to the range, there's a little range, then we got back. In retrospect he was not with me. We were talking, but he was different.

C: In what way? What do you mean?

B: He had something on his mind. You know, even though he didn't say so. He was thinking. He didn't tell me anything. And the one thing now, in retrospect to everything he didn't —have— before when we talked, I don't think, he was not placing himself as a player. Okay, you know he was going over there to patch it up, but I would say the people who were there, I mean he got in with the main mugs, if that's who did this thing, okay, if it was Leon that I saw and the other two, because

there were 4 or 5 officers. He had that meeting with them and he came back and told me about Col. Benavides and those were the only guys, that was the only guy he talked about. That was the first trip to UCA.

C: What did this mean to you that they were going to go in and clean out the UCA? How did you interpret that?

B: To find out, you know, to get the dirty people in there.

C: And to do what?

B: Well, or kill people, you know, to take stuff, whatever it was. I don't remember at that time thinking they were going to kill the priests. There wasn't much else in there. The students I don't think were in school. I don't know who was in there. I don't know what was going on but they were going in. There was going to be an op and there were ops already going on around there.

C: So he specifically told you there was going to be an operation to clear the UCA?

B: Yeah, and that maybe stuff was already going on.

C: Have you ever been to the UCA?

B: No, I did not realize that the UCA's like 8/600 meters from where I live.. I knew the general area, but I couldn't see it. It sits down on the autopista to the south of where I live where I lived. Actually, to the south cardinally from my house.

C: what else did he say to you during that afternoon meeting?

B: there were just too many problems, that I think there was a

then again that Benavides had a dirty past. As to other officers, but that was just about the only one he'd ever mentioned to me that did not have a real good past. On the second meeting, I don't know who he saw and I don't know what he did. He was gone for 10/15 minutes, maybe a little bit longer. Came back and then we walked around the school and went back.

C: Then did Col. Aviles leave the area. I mean leave the country for a period of time?

B: Very shortly after that, if I remember, you know I may have my dates all screwed up, but he went on leave. He took 13, 14, 15 days leave.

C: Where did he go?

B: He went to New Orleans and brought his wife and his two children. The offensive here on the 11th. My roommate and I, because it was Saturday night, and we could not get out of our house. We were restricted. On Sunday, one or two days, and then over the radio I heard people were starting to come in, other American advisors, so I called and asked "well, can we come in?" because we were like 500 meters away and Col. Hunter said yes, Capt. Puentes, Carlos Puentes, my roommate, and the guy I worked with, we came in together and then started working at the C-5 to see what was going on with SYOP, and all the propaganda stuff. Col. Aviles was not back. He got back on Wednesday,



C: What date would that have been?

B: I think the 15th. There was a lot of bad stuff going on. It was almost a disaster in the city. And I can remember different days feeling doom and gloom and Thursday, and it was probably

C: Doom and gloom for what?

B: I don't know, I just felt like this was the end. Yeah, I felt like, oh, my God, this is it, we're going to fall. I can remember talking to somebody in the MILGP over in the Embassy and the last thing I said was "I'll see you on the roof of the Embassy - a la Saigon." It was bad. That Thursday I was in Col. Aviles' office.

C: Thursday, November 16?

B: Yeah, I guess so. He got back on Wednesday, I remember and I believe the priests were killed that night.

C: About what time that afternoon would you be in?

B: 2 or 3. Normally I'd go in, he'd been running around with the government people that morning. I went in and had a briefing, a brief talk with him, and there was, and he made a statement that the military was going to go in and clean out the UCA. Again because I was staff (?) and there was a lot of fighting going around around there,

feeling of vengeance,

C: Too many problems.

B: He reminded me of the fact that the guerrillas were working out of there. I think at that time there was a lot of discussion about

the guerrillas coming up out of the sewers, they were coming through the UCA and coming through the water mains, they were coming through all the quebrados or creeks, around the UCA, and that it was a real problem area. And I think by that time they had already taken down the National University. That was a real, that was a major battle and the UCA was dirty too, and that was sort of the key place in the southwestern part of town.

That's were a lot of stuff, like I said, was coming back and forth through it. It was kind of like a lynch pin (?) in that area for the guerrillas.

C: Did you connect this clearing out the UCA with the plan you had heard before. In other words, you felt this was going to be the killing of Ellacuria? Was that your understanding?

B: I didn't know. I didn't match that. I didn't match that. You know in our talking. I'd even forgot about the Col. going over to see Benavides. Those times, you know, I think just came up in the last day or two. I didn't match that. I thought more in terms, I think, I think I thought more in terms of they were going to go do a military operation than people were going to get killed.

C: Okay

B: And quite honestly at that time, I didn't really care. I wasn't thinking in terms of going in assassinating, murdering and slaughtering people, if that's what they were going to do because I was real concerned that they wouldn't kill civilians up in the colonias. But the problem was I guess I got too cold because I

didn't want them to kill people, the civilians, you know, bombing  
and stuff, because I wanted to maintain , I wanted them to  
maintain, oh I almost became a Salvador, I wanted them to  
maintain the support of the people.

C: So you say you became a Salvadoran. What do you mean,  
supporting their cause?

B: Yeah, I understood, I thought. Again I hadn't gone through 10 years, but I mean they had. So all the pain and stuff and I know they're big on vengeance and I kind of understood, I mean that everybody had had friends killed and stuff.

C: So if those killings that were to occur, you would have accepted that as a necessary thing, for the country?

B: I either accepted as necessary and I really understood it, okay. You know, even though it might have been superfluous isn't the word, you know it might even have been stupid. And I understand, I understood the blood, the blood feeling, but it was their war and it was their country. But I don't, ... no alarms were sent to me, you know, when he said they were going to go in and clear the UCA. Even when I knew they had problems at the National University and I thought that they should go in. It wasn't in terms of killing people. It was to go in and shut it down. And the National University is almost like a church because of its sanctity. The UCA not so much, but I always thought they should just go in and shut it down and check it out.

C: Was there anything else said at this afternoon meeting with Col. Aviles?

B: No, other than they were getting ready to do this soon.

C: They were getting ready to do it soon?

B: But there were problems, you know. It's just that the army's

mad. You know that there's people who want to do things,

C: Did he mention to you at that time anything about the Atlacatl was going to, I think you alluded to

B: Yeah, yeah, he The Atlacatl was working the area and I believe he mentioned something that the Atlacatl was still working the area and they were probably going to do it. Now I didn't know where the units were. In retrospect, and from what I know there was a company of Atlacatl in the area, I believe, and the rest of the battalion was out of the city and I think he mentioned the both things. And then that night...

C: How late that night? Can you take any kind of guess about how late?

B: It could be anywhere from midnight to one.

*(Handwritten mark)*

C: After you had been to sleep?

B: Yeah, when we stayed down in what we called the "mangito", which is a separate complex away from the Estado Mayor about 150 meters. That's where the radio station is, the print plant, loud speakers, the video stuff and all that things. Now, on one side was a series of offices where the propaganda development things work. There were, at that time, the government had sent a bunch of communications people and they had formed CIN, the Centro de Informacion Nacional, and they were staying, they had fax machines and all that kind of stuff, and they were staying and people were, all other officers were staying and I felt obligated to stay and I know that night, that night carlos and I, Carlos Puentes, had taken, I forget what they call them, their mattress and that was a Spanish word for them and we were sleeping on the floor, I can remember moving everything so the door wouldn't hit me when people opened, laying that down, getting inside my poncho liner and M-16 and stuff laid down on the floor next to me. After we'd gone to sleep, it was dark, but there was a fireflight going on and when I drew a map a little while ago it was in the vicinity of the UCA, the fireflight. It was going on, it had gone on sporadically. I think we'd fallen asleep. It was dark and I would say it was around midnight.

C: You said the direction of the UCA fireflight. I think before you told me before that it was only in one direction, there was no return. Was that..

B: There was nothing coming out.

C: okay.

B: Now, there were some other little firefights around, but so once in a while. Now from the UCA rounds were not going to come through the way we were. So in between there was some running around. But where we were and out several 100 meters it was secure. The UCA from where we were was max, as the crow flies, 800 meters.

C: And later on that evening, you had a visitor?

B: Yeah, later on, Carlos and I, I believe, were asleep and the door opened and there was some shuffling around, <sup>and</sup> It was Col. Aviles. When we started to get up, he said no, just stay down. there's fighting going on, just stay down. It's not here, but be careful, whatever. Then Carlos and I got up and moved against the wall and we were sitting next to the wall, talked to him for about 5 or 10 minutes, he was, seemed pretty calm, you know, no big deal, he just came to check, how you doing, didn't say much..

C: Why do you think he was really there?

B: My feeling now is so we saw him.



C: As an alibi?

B: Yeah, I guess because I never felt even when I talked to him about the other stuff that he was involved. He always told me little things. Different, you know, his impressions, and stuff and I never thought he was involved in anything. I guess maybe that's one of the things that hurt so bad is that I always got the impression that things had been handled. You know, I knew he wasn't going to be doing anything. So he'd go over and check it out and then tell me. You know, the meeting with Benávides, there's going to be a hit, looks like they want to go, well not a hit, but looks like they're going to clear the UCA. He didn't seem to be very agitated. And then that night he came in just to check on us.

C: While the killings were going on?

B: Well, that was the timeframe. There was certainly shooting. I can't say when, I don't know when the priests were

C: Wasn't the shooting coming from the UCA?

B: It was that area. It was pretty intense, it wasn't bang, bang, bang. It sounded to me like someone was getting it on. You know, there was, at least for a while and then he left and I guess it was the next morning, it would've been Friday, the word got out, it was rumor, and kinda' denied, and finally sometime late that morning or whatever the word was out the Ellacuria, 5 other priests, a woman and her child had been ~~had been~~ and murdered.

C: Before this occurred, before the killings of the Jesuit priests, to the best of your recollection, and you say you had knowledge that it was going to happen beforehand?

B: I would say I was told that there's, that people were looking at going into to the UCA, that the military was looking to go into the UCA and something was going to be done. I can't honestly tell you whether I believed it or if i put it down, if Aviles told me in such a way but... Yeah, i knew, I knew

C: And did you accept that as a necessary thing for the country?

B: My state of mind was such, I think, that I may not have saw it as a necessary thing, but I understood it, so, okay I know why they want to do this. They want to get these bastards, you know, I'm sure they were thinking that. Whether or not I was going to save the country, whether it was a good thing, I don't know if I bought that, but I understood that they were going to go in, you know, if they went in to do this. ✓

C: Okay, earlier we discussed not telling the United States. Why did you not tell the United States authorities?

B: At that time, I don't remember knowing it to be perfectly true. Okay, there were two times when I really, when I really knew something. After it had happened and in my earlier statements. I had several feelings. One, whenever Aviles told me anything, I felt an intense loyalty to him.

C: To Col. Aviles?

B: Yes, a key thing in Special Forces anyway and it's engrained from the start is that you build a rapport. And I got close with him. you know, we had personal talks, we had professional talks and I implicitly trusted him. I truly felt, even after just working with him for only a few weeks in June and July, that he was the finest colonel I had ever served under or worked with. I never felt like his advisor, I just felt like part of his staff. And I could say things and he'd take my ideas and was real good about it and he would tell me other things. He would try, at different times, to talk to me about leisure shit and all that kind of stuff.

C: You had a great deal of respect and loyalty to him?

B: At that time, I thought my feeling was that this is the guy who will leave this job, get the First Brigade, command, that's what I wanted him to have because that was the brigade in the city, he was nearer the heart of everything, he would come out of that brigade, this was my plan for him, although I couldn't have affected it, he was going to take the First Brigade and then come back and be Chief of Staff and then be the Minister of Defense because I figured this was the guy. You know, he knew how to treat the troops, he was hard at charging, he was ambitious and that would bubble up at different times, I didn't like it, but he seemed to keep it in check, but I knew not only was he professional, but he wanted to go places. So I kind of ignored that portion of his personality.

C: so you felt this loyalty, why else did you not tell US officials?

B: I felt, in this case, I guess I was really trying to protect El Salvador because I had knowledge, at least the rumor, that this thing people were talking about doing<sup>it</sup> and I didn't say anything with it. And when I was told later who did it, by Col. Aviles, I felt that if that was past, I didn't trust the American government. I thought they'd pull the rug out from under the country.

C: You thought the American government would mess it up?

B: I thought they'd pull the rug out. I thought they'd do wrong by the country. So by the simple fact that really some matter (?) the ————— I didn't see this, I don't, I truly don't believe or that I knew that this was going to happen. The fact that I sat there and let it go. You know even when he said that they were going in, I guess I had an idea but I never felt, maybe I just didn't understand, recognize, I mean again if I knew, I can sit here now and say I would've told, okay.

C: Told who?

B: I would've told the government, but then I don't think I would've<sup>it</sup> okay. I mean I was kind of lost. I wanted to kill everybody, too. you know, I wanted to go out and fight, but we couldn't go out and fight? You know, I didn't, but I understood

C: You felt a member of the Salvadoran ... And a loyalty there?

(examiner's questions garbled and mixed with Buckland's statement)

B: I felt like I was a Salvadoran and so I didn't say anything because I figured the government would pull the rug out from under them, I got caught up between what was the right thing to do and the loyalty. You know, down<sup>h</sup>ere loyalty is number one, here integrity's number one. And I switched. I got into a loyalty to Aviles and I didn't see damage. You know, later when I found out it then went down.... And Col. Aviles told me later, a few weeks later, who had done it and I still sat on it because I knew the people had to be punished, I knew there was no way around it, that they had to chop a coronel.

C: When did Col. Aviles tell you? When did you have another meeting after the killings with him?

B: Sometime after, within a week or so, he said he had gone out to the scene of the crime. And then gone to the SIU. And up until that point, we had both been convinced the FMLN had done it. I thought. Maybe this is what I was thinking. This is what I remember thinking. And he said he felt at that time that it was 50-50 that the military had done it. He felt the military had responsibility. He may even have gone, he felt that he was pretty sure that the military had done it. And then a few weeks later is when he told me, it was on or about the 20th of December, is when he told me that Col. Benavides had gone to Col. Rivas and then that entire chain of events...

C: Which was?

B: Col. Benavides told Col. Rivas, the head of SIU, that "I did it, what are you going to do to help me?" Col. Rivas didn't do

anything that I know of. Col. Lopez y Lopez, the C-1 at the Estado Mayor, who had earlier been the SIU commander, I believe, as well, went down to see Rivas for whatever reason. Rivas told Col. Lopez y Lopez what Benavides had told him. Lopez y Lopez told Aviles. Same stuff. Benavides had told Rivas "I did it. what are you going to do to help me?" And Aviles told me. My initial question was why don't they arrest him. And he told me because they can't. We can't arrest him until the investigation is completed. I bought it. I trusted the guy and I said who else knows and he said just them and just us, just the guys he had mentioned and myself. A prelude to this information was to break just in case of emergency. Please don't say anything. Please don't say anything. This is not a Salvadoran officer coronel to an American major, it's Carlos to Eric.

C: Excuse me, what does "break in case of emergency" mean?

B: He liked to use American expressions and sometimes he doesn't use them very correctly, but he tried to put them into his talk and during that conversation either right then or later it was very evident to me that the "break in case of emergency" was two things. If the people who did it, who said they had done it, Benavides, the family was not brought to justice, then I needed to say something or at least corroborate with Aviles, somehow get that truth out. And number two, if Aviles was killed, dead for knowing this, then the story wouldn't go, that I should step in and say something. He also told me, not that Col. Benavides had said this, but just told me, I guess I didn't understand how Benavides could've done the killings, you know who was with him they must've have asked him, you know, how did he do this.

You're telling me that the members



of the Grupo Operaciones Especiales, GOE, out of the Immediate Reaction Battalion called the Atlacatl led by Lt. members of that platoon had done the actual killing. And they had been there because they had been during the offensive there were different areas where troops had stayed and the Escuela Militar was one of the areas where the troops had been billeted. Different units were in there and the GOE was working out of the Escuela Militar and those were the guys that pulled the trigger. Whoever this lieutenant was.

C: You explained why your prior knowledge of the event or what was going to happen, why you did not advise US military personnel, why, after you again were told after the fact who did it, why did you not then tell who did it or why did you not then advise US military personnel?

B: What he told me. Okay I asked and it seemed pretty clear cut after we got the information and now its just a matter of putting the facts together, We got these guys okay. That was my general impression. And I said, does Col. Ponce know and he said I don't know. I think so. I would think Col. Rivas or Col. Lopez y Lopez would tell him. It's not my place, but he needs to know. Okay, and I figured he'd tell him. So he'd know. Now we know the stuff, the SIU knows the stuff, Rivas is had to have been shown (shown or shoved ?) by Lopez y Lopez because now he's told Lopez y Lopez, who I think actually at that time working in support, now he moved down to work with Rivas and I was, and this is, I know this probably doesn't make sense, but although I understood why they go in and kill people, I also knew that justice had to be served and they had to go and take care of it. And I also

knew psychologically, public relations or whatever, somebody up the chain had to take a fall. Benavides had already said that he had done it. I mean I would hope that anybody at the head the SIU would know where to start looking, so I felt confident, number 1, justice will be served and, number 2, Col. Aviles all but begged me not to say anything before he told me.

C: So out of your loyalty to Col. Aviles and the fact that you felt that they would do the right thing, that you did not tell US military personnel?

B: Absolutely. I also have a fear that now that the military was responsible it would be damning. You know, the congress would cut off aid or something because it was...

C: So who were you trying to protect El Salvador?

B: Yeah, not because he'd done... Not to let them get away with it.

C: But to save the country.

B: Right. I can honestly say that you can take the top five classes of officers and just give them some money and send them somewhere. I mean I don't want them to stay. More than I want the people there to live okay. You know, I don't want the country to fall.

C: Now, this killing was November 16, 1989. How many days after was it before Col. Aviles told you this or confirmed things again

for you?

B: When he told me actually was a month.

C: A month. When was that?

B: 20 december.

C: 20 december?

B: Is when he told me what I just told you.

C: After this, did you have occasion to write your sister?

B: Yeah.

C: What did you write in a letter to your sister?

Who is your sister by the way?

B: My sister's name is Carol.

C: Carol?

B: Carol Buckland.

C: Who does she work for?

B: CNN.

C: CNN news?

B: Yeah, she writes the news. So on the 20th, he told me and

within a day I think I called her and said listen, I've been told this. This is brother to sister. It wasn't

C: It was within a day after the fact when Aviles told you?

B: Yeah, I called her.

C: You called her? From where?

B: From my house. Which in retrospect was probably stupid. I really started getting paranoid that everything was bugged, not by the government or something, but by the shooters. I don't know. I didn't even know who all was in there.

C: What did you tell her?

B: Well, I said that I was told by reliable sources or whatever, that Col. Benavides was the head, you know, guy and guys from the GOE, from the Atlacatl lead by a lieutenant. I said that's all I really know. Then I said don't tell any of this in case the guy that told me or I said Col. Aviles, one or the other, she knew who is was, dies and I die. That I want truth to come out, I want justice to be served. I said this doesn't mean take this and go to the press. Actually, don't say anything now, but don't go the to press. Just sit on this If I die...I think I said at that time you'll know the right thing to do. She said well I don't know who Benavides is. What's his whole name. I said I don't know and I said I'll write you a letter and sort it out for you specifically.

C: What day did you write this letter?

B: I wrote the letter on Christmas day.

C: Christmas, 1989?

B: Yeah, I was in the Estado Mayor. This was really weighing on me. My family was in the United States and I had duty and I wrote her a letter and said here is the information I told you I'd send you. Then I gave her Benavides full name, I explained what the GOE was, what the Atlacatl was and that some number of soldiers who were led by a lieutenant whose name I still don't know, had done it. Remember that I really care for this country, I think I wrote,

C: You mean El Salvador?

B: Yeah, and that I wanted the right thing done, you know. Go to the MILGP. see, what I didn't want to happen was to watch these guys cover it up and try to get away with it. Which I didn't want them to. And then have the press get in in such a way that the congress reacts and the guys had lied and they screwed themselves. So, what I was hoping, if I died and Col. Aviles died and nothing was done, and this time I didn't think, Col. Aviles wasn't doing anything other than just talking to me something in confidence and that I wanted her to call MILGP and, I think I wrote this, to call MILGP and to talk to MILGP about the information.

C: What's MILGP?

B: That's the military group, that's the central office of

advisors basically down there It's a permanent assignment. They handle all the money, the accounts, and stuff like that and then they coordinate with the Salvadoran staff. It's a part of the Embassy. it's part of what they call the Country Team essentially. and, I think, if I didn't write this, I told her to go MILGP, force them, and pass it that way and make sure that justice was served and lets not screw the country because some people do what was essentially a stupid thing. You know, good or bad, in anybody's eyes, even good or bad in my eyes, whatever, get rid of these guys that ~~really screwed~~ really screwed themselves. And then she said okay, I also told her that I cared a lot for her and she's a good person and stuff, and we're not very affectionate , but I told her that because we were starting to worry that I was going to get hurt..

C: At what point in time did you come forward to US military personnel?

B: Somewhere after that I had asked Col. Aviles what was up. He had told me that a lieutenant was being polygraphed and was flunking. He had flunked 2 or 3 times. Nothing had happened with Benavides. I asked him if Col. Ponce knew. Col Ponce, he said, I don't know, I don't think so. I don't know who knows and what if the highers up ordered it. So there was a twist there, a change. He was was worried, it seemed. He didn't want to tell anybody. Everything just kept eating and eating and eating at me because I knew I had an obligation as a U.S. Army officer and as an American to pass this and I sat on it. And I failed to do my duty, in any case. So on the 2nd of January, Col. Hunter, for some reason, God, had the occasion to walk up into my office and I



asked my secretary to leave. I knew this was sensitive. He shut the door. He was kind of like what's going on and I told him. I was really worried. See, this is why it's, this really hurts because I don't feel comfortable with this part, with this stuff, — of the things I've said before, you know, so I told him, I told him exactly what I've told you although for those first 2 meetings, because I just didn't remember and I didn't want him to tell anybody. I just wanted to tell him, I didn't want to betray my loyalty. I didn't want to betray Col. Aviles' trust.

C: So you're still obviously loyal to the El Salvadorans?

B: It's killing me. It's killing me. I felt, I can't stand it but - it's was true emotion. And I was really struggling and once I told him, I felt as if I had really betrayed Col. Aviles. I said, are you going to tell anyone. He said I have to tell Col. Menjivar. And I felt bad, but I understood and I knew that that was the right thing to do. He told Col. Menjivar. Not too much else happened. Of course, as the day went on I felt bad, I felt like I had betrayed Col. Aviles. And then I had gone home, I had changed, I was in my civilian clothes in the house and the phone rang. It was Steve Donahoo, who is a major and works in the Defense Attache Office. He spends a lot of time in the Estado Mayor. He was in, I think, Col. Ponce's office and said you need to report to Col. Ponce's office right now and I knew what it was. And I was an instant basket case. I felt, I

didn't know, then I didn't know what I had opened, I didn't know what was up. So I came in and rather than going right into there. Before I left, Col. Hunter called and said be advised Col. Menjivar is talking to Col. Ponce, Col. Menjivar is the MILGP commander, American, Col. Ponce was Chief of Staff of their army, Salvador. He said Col. Menjivar is talking to Col. Ponce and you're probably going to be called in. I said I know, I just got called and I'm on my way. I got into his office, he called me from home, I got into his office, walked in, said what's up to Col. Giandoni, who was the duty officer that night, 'Col. Hunter said stay here, he's on his way in. He came in within 30 minutes or so. Col. Hunter and I went into Col. Ponce's office. We were told to sit down and as we sat down to my left front was Col. Aviles, directly to my front across the coffee table was Col. Ponce and to my right on the sofa was Janice Elmore, who is an American political officer, Col. Menjivar and Col. Hunter. Col. Ponce doesn't speak loud and he speaks kind of a weird Spanish, so he said something and we began. Basically, it was what's going on, who said what. The first guy to speak was Col. Aviles. I was shook at this point. This guy was the last guy I wanted to see and I just felt terrible, About that more than anything else.

C: You felt terrible about the betrayal to Col. Aviles?

B: Because I thought everything was still ... and I still thought that justice was still going to be served somehow. Col. Aviles said that we had spoken about the Jesuits in general terms, but the basic feeling still was that the FMLN, the army or some extreme right-winged group had done it, but that's all anybody knew. You know, even that was way off from what we had talked about. ....on that one occasion, and then all the other stuff about the... he told me who did it.

C: Okay

B: I wasn't really listening to the Spanish that well, didn't understand it that well, but I knew I'd just been called a liar. so I asked Col. Menjivar, I said, sir, can I speak to you privately for a minute. I wanted to make sure I'd just been called a liar. He said no, we're here, this is open, go. Speak. I said okay, I'm going to speak English. I want to make sure that nobody misunderstands what I'm saying and I took it from the meeting when we were in his office and he said Col. Benavides "da da da da." I did everything in the world I could to cover Col. Aviles. The fact that he believed that Col. Ponce knew and we both knew justice would be served, we were so proud of the SIU and all that kind of stuff. I sat there like there were some thousand buffalos sitting on me, I just felt like shit. I was

agitated and I told him it looked like a thunder cloud has hit. You know, his eyes were bulging, he was agitated, he was jumping around in his chair. I couldn't even look at him. I'm still feeling bad. Col. Ponce said something, I don't know what it was, I remember, maybe Col. Menjivar talked, I don't know. Then he looked at me and he said "donde y cuando?", "where and when?" and that quickly (he snapped his finger) I said "en su oficina", "in his office" "hace dos semanas", "about 2 weeks ago." And that was it, that was my answer, I didn't even have to think. I remember pretty clearly. And then he looked at me. He's got these real soft eyes. It's hard to explain but he's almost kind of a teddy bear in a way when you look at him. He's normally a very soft and kind of a gentle looking guy. And we sat there and looked at each other, like I'm looking at you, with no blinking, no breaking contact, like this, not hard, 15 to 30 seconds, just like this. Because somewhere in there I wanted to say "right now, I know I can say 2 things, I'm lying or I'm telling the truth." And I was angry, then I was angry because Aviles had given me this information, it was critical and then he denied it and I was flapping in the wind. I wanted to say one of those two things and then just keep my mouth shut and just looked at Ponce. And then I backed off looking at him, and I wasn't attacking him, I was just wanted to say "look, look, look inside, look inside, look inside" and he said okay, you know, and Col. Hunter, myself and Janice left. And Janice said "you did the right thing, don't worry about it."

C: Did you feel betrayed by Col. Aviles?

B: I felt completely betrayed. At that time, it was all... I

still, I felt worse. I have to turn my emotions after a while, I  
felt bad. That's when I felt the worse. You know, that I'd  
betrayed him.

C: Did you make a lot of sacrifices to go to El Salvador and help that government?

B: Yeah, I mean the major one was the fact that I've got 3 small sons and I miss them. I miss them today. You know, I came home. I was there in June and July. And I came back in July and I stopped at my parents. They live in Miami. I stopped for the night. and they showed me a picture. There was a child in a stroller and 2 bigger boys. The two bigger boys were Andrew and Brian, they're my 3 and 5 year olds. I didn't know who the third boy was. It was my own youngest son. Because he had grown up that much in two months and I wasn't there. I went down this time. I was gone for 3 months and he's blossomed that much more. I'm a father and I'm not there. I thought I could save the world. Thought I had all the answers.

C: You thought you could save El Salvador?

B: Sure, I was going to be Lawrence of Arabia, you know, Eric of El Salvador.

C: That's why you made those sacrifices, to help that country?

B: I thought I could go down and by saving, by helping El Salvador I could keep this stuff from ever getting to our country. And when my boys were old enough they could join the army if they wanted to, but they wouldn't have to.

C: It really bothered you that you were betrayed by them after you were trying to help them?

B: It breaks my heart because I realize that I don't know how deep or how wide this things goes, I don't know how deep or how wide this goes, but somebody's dirty. You know, I knew they hinted, at a minimum to me, I had knowledge that they were going to go in. I think that we've determined that.

C: Yes.

B: But they did it. He told me. You know, like I said. And then denied it. Something else was going on. I knew it was a political thing, too. They're playing games, they not only had to go kill people, then they have to do something with it. Then they just had to throw me in the middle. You know, to tell me, I don't know what he wanted me to do, I don't know what he expected me to do, I don't know why he was jerking me around. You know, like I said, he threw me little things. But I was used. I don't know how. There was a plot in there somewhere and I was in there somewhere. and I was somebody's card. I was Aviles' card, I think. He had an alibi that night because we saw him. and he also told me I was there on Benavides - I had doubt about Benavides. And I think had I not spoken it would have broken another way and I somehow would been in there doing the same stuff again as I'm doing now which he could probably give a shit less about. And they either would've swept the tandola away or something. They would've opened up some doors for Aviles and his boys. That's all that I can think that it was. And in the end, they killed six priests, you know, I don't even care what their political preferences where, but they killed them, they were tools. He wasn't even that I don't think on vengeance. I can

understand somebody going nuts, but I can't understand just  
killing them to do something with them.



C: Does it bother you that it didn't bother you at the time that you knew they were going to kill them?

B: I don't know why, I'm humane. priests (?). people laugh at me now, but 3 years ago or something in Special Warfare Center, guys will verify this story, I called the Pentagon, I wanted to be a chaplain.

C: Do you feel that I was because of your loyalty to El Salvador that made you overlook those killings or to accept those killings? Do you feel your loyalty got in the way and that's why you accepted them when you normally would not?

B: I got caught up in the country, you know. We're at war, who understands better than us, we're here, we're at the front, you know, at the cutting edge. So I know I can see, I can look into their hearts. That's bullshit. There I was, I was out there, I was out there.

C: You were prepared to anything you had to for El Salvador? To help that country?

B: It was more to the point that I wasn't physically going to do stuff, you know. We had our weapons to protect ourselves, but I wasn't about to go out and run ops.

C: No, I understand.

B: But I mean in the talking sense, I'd probably would've kept my mouth shut if I thought it was reasonable and apparently from

what I knew about this and didn't go running to tell anybody either before when it was inuendos at the worse if not more and after what I was told, I didn't say squat. And it's because I guess I thought I knew, you know, I knew better.

C: For the record, my name is Special Agent Paul H. Cully and I conducted this interview as a summary of the facts that have been presented by Major Buckland during our interviews in the last two days. Major Buckland, have you voluntarily provided this information out of your cooperation in the last 2 days?

B: Yes.

C: Is this information and these facts true to the best of your recollection at this time?

B: yes.

C: Is there anything else that you want to say?

B: Yeah, I'm real sorry if anything I've done has caused something worse to happen. I mean, if I could have stopped, if I'd said something before, had I taken it seriously or if I'd been off or whatever my problem was, if I'd run right away the day I was told and said something and had the guts at that point or whatever or I hadn't been so naive. Now maybe trying not to hurt the country, I've hurt the country.

C: Anything else?

B: no.

C: . The time now is approximately 2:11 p.m. and this is the termination of this summary interview. Thank you.