

## Transcription: Sigifredo Ramirez

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*Today is Wednesday, November 3, 2010. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Sigifredo Ramirez. Mr. Ramirez is at his home in Harlingen, Texas, and I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking time today to talk to us. It's an honor anytime we can interview a veteran like yourself, and I've mentioned beforehand, this is all part of our effort to document these stories for posterity. So thank you, sir, for taking the time. I guess the first question we usually start with is just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the military.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well, I was born and raised here in Harlingen, Texas, of course, August 5<sup>th</sup> of 1949. I went through a fairly good childhood. Actually I'm, you could say a fatherless child in a sense because of the fact that my father actually abandoned us before I was born. My mother was the one that actually supported us in whatever way she could. I went to school in different elementary schools here in Harlingen simply because of the fact of having to relocate within the city because of rent problems or whatever. I did not exactly finish high school. I went up to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and after that I actually went to different labor work until I finally went into the job corps for if I'm not mistaken I think was about a year and a half or two. I don't remember exactly the dates. But one of the problems which led me to go into the Army was the fact that while I did actually graduate from the job corps, I was unable to actually find a job according to what I had educated myself. So I decided to join the Army, and even though some people or multiple people that I've talked to don't believe me, I actually did not even know there was a war going on.

*Wow, you didn't know about Vietnam at that time.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** No I did not. But I don't know if it would have made any difference, but because I needed to have some kind of a job or whatever, so I figured well I'm 18 years old already, and I'm not going to wait for the draft so I might as well go in and volunteer.

*So you knew there was a draft, but you didn't really know there was a war.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well no, actually I'm mentioning that simply because now that I know that there used to be a draft, but I had more or less an idea because in our time we would hear that the government is going to call you, but I didn't know it was actually a draft.

*Sure. Did you have any brothers or friends that had already been in the military or had been drafted?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** No, as a matter of fact I had a younger brother at the time and he actually went into the Navy Air Force way after I was out of the Army. Friends, I really didn't know any of them that had actually gone into the military. I actually went in for like in the buddy system because I met a friend in the job corps and I explained to them that my position was that in itself completely because of lack of work, and he decided he was going to follow me, so we went together. We actually got separated within the military.

*When did you go in? I think you said previously 1967?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yes, it was if I'm not mistaken, December 12<sup>th</sup> of 1967.

*So you enlisted in Harlingen. How long was it between the time you signed up to when you were actually in boot camp?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well actually it wasn't here in Harlingen. I actually traveled all the way to Toledo, Ohio, trying to find a job like I said, and that's when I went into the Army there.

*So you enlisted out of Toledo, Ohio.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Toledo, Ohio, yes, and the official that I remember was actually I think the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, and what happened was the fact that we had the week to the initiation or whatever, inauguration of going into the Army, you know, the haircut and everything, and since it was coming up, the Christmas holiday, what they did was they offered anyone of us that had a round trip ticket, we could go home, and I did come home as a matter of fact. I came to Harlingen, and I had to go back, and I think I was back if I'm not mistaken it was around the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January of 1968.

*What did your mother think about you signing up to go in the Army?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** As a matter of fact, I lived with a sister in Ohio, in \_\_\_\_\_, that I had went into the Army, so by the time I got home she already knew about it, and she wasn't really upset about it. She had to accept it anyhow, but my sister was the one that informed her about it.

*And when was it do you remember or kind of learned or became aware of Vietnam going on?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** As a matter of fact when I signed up, there was some guys that talked coming out of the recruiting place, and they said you guys going to 'Nam? And I still didn't know what they were talking about. I didn't exactly get to know officially until I was actually in advanced training. That's when we found out completely when we got into, I don't remember exactly the place, that's one of the things that really stuck in my mind, because I had most of my training, I started basic training in Fort Ord in Georgia. That's the one I remember. But then from there I went to somewhere there in Georgia, but I don't remember – I know that it was for the – they do have the WAC training also, as far as I know. When we first got there, the drill sergeant that was there said for all of you guys that are saying, or if you don't know, of course he said in a real good language you know, he said you guys better have your ears open and pay attention because each and every one of you that is here is going to go to Vietnam. And he said some of you guys may go to special training, but you will still end up going to Vietnam. So that's when actually was the time that I actually found out that I was going to go to Vietnam.

*What were most of the other guys in your boot camp like? Were a lot of them draftees or had they signed up voluntarily like you had?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** It was mixed. As far as I remember in basic training, none of us actually mentioned anything about that.

*So you go through all this training and you become an infantryman. Where is it that they send you to first after you get out of boot camp?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** I actually was sent straight to Vietnam. Well actually from boot camp I went to advanced training and I also went to the gym school.

*And that's at Fort Benning?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** It's at Fort Benning. I finally ended up in Fort Benning, and that took me actually until the end of May somewhere around there of 1968. I had a furlough of about 30-45 days somewhere in there, and from there I went straight to Vietnam. I landed in Bien Hoa in Vietnam for another orientation, I got the word now, for orientation which was about a week of orientation, and also like I said, at that time I was a little bit naïve in a sense and I didn't even know the different kind of divisions and everything, which I know now, you know, and I finally ended up somewhere around, because I landed in Bien Hoa on July 13<sup>th</sup>, '58, so given about a week I think was around the 20<sup>th</sup> or so of July that I ended up going into the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne.

*What were your first impressions of Vietnam?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well by that time I already knew since I went through training towards it, and when we got there, the first thing that you notice, it's very hot, dusty and everything. Your mind, or at least my mind was actually thinking the fact that I know I'm already in a war zone in a conflict of country. As a matter of fact when we got there, someone was taking over in the airport, that we heard a chopper that was going over, and there's a certain time when the helicopter does a funny sound sort of like when what they called it since I used to be a truck driver, a downshifting, and it made sort of like a popping sound like a weapon. We all reacted. As a matter of fact I reacted, too, we're already in combat. That was really the first impression that we were knowledgeable of the fact that we were in a conflict country in other words.

*And you were with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yes.

*Did you do a lot of patrolling? What was a typical mission or typical day or week like for you?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** We had quite a few patrol days, whatever, when we first started that I got there with them, like I said, the name was \_\_\_ Shelly that was a little bit north of Quaid (?). That was actually base camp, but my company at the time when I got there was pulling back you could say in the place where I remember there was a bridge that I didn't find out until after I was out of the Army because of Army buddies that have called me and stuff, and now I know that that place there, that bridge was called the En Lo Bridge at the time. The same bridge is the one that in a sense it's like in the movie Hamburger Hill, because I was in a part of the battalion that was involved in that later on. Like I said, at the time all of us didn't even know, and I don't know who came up with names of certain battles and stuff, whatever, but I was sent over to that place there. It was practically every day, you know, that we'd go out on patrols around that area. At the time we were patrolling for what was actually Charlie, the Viet Cong, and around I'd say a little after Christmas time was when we started going further north into the mountains what is actually what's called at the time the A Chau Valley. But we started trying to I guess seek out the Viet Cong group or was Charlie. Over there we were actually fighting the regular North Vietnamese army.

*Do you remember what your first patrol was like?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** The first patrol was actually, like I said we were trying to seek out Charlie and there wasn't really too much action. There was some fire fights. We had practically one wounded person at least, once a day, because like I said, now that I'm more knowledgeable about this, I found out also that I got there when it was actually the very core of Telefensis. And all that I didn't even have knowledge about until after I was back here. As a matter of fact I got there if I'm not mistaken I think was about a month or two after they had that newsreel when the guy that shot the other person, the Vietnamese in the middle of the street. That's about the time that I got there.

*Did you realize at that time, too, what was going on back home in the United States with a lot of the assassinations and the riots and things of that sort, were you aware of any of that?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** No, as a matter of fact, I was miscommunicated in that. Some of the guys that were there with me, I don't know, maybe they had better information than I did, I don't know what it was, but I really didn't ever have any knowledge of riots and all that stuff, you know, when I was over there. I found out about that also when I got back and I started to see more and more of the news and stuff.

*Did you get many letters or care packages from your family while you were in Vietnam?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** No, as a matter of fact I didn't because my mother was still struggling, whatever, and as a matter of fact all during the one year exactly I was there, I think I received only one package that she attempted to, in other words send it to me correctly accepting or whatever, but by the time I got it, because what she had sent was actually some tamales, so it got all rotten.

*Yeah, I'm sure it took a while to get something to you there.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Oh yeah, so that's why I mean, letters, yes, with my mother. As a matter of fact, I should have at the time thought about it to prepare them, and I really don't know what happened to them.

*Tell us sir, a little bit about your individual platoon, maybe what your platoon commander or platoon sergeant were like, or any of the soldiers you served with that stand out in your memory.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well, I've got quite a few of them. I remembered them when I was there until about maybe I'd say five or six years ago, I actually had communication because I started getting letters. I finally got one letter of one of my Army buddies, and from there I went on to actually get in touch with quite a few of them. I've been to two reunions. Yes, I remember one that I call every so often, Felix Perda from Puerto Rico, and I remember that I also call from over here in California, I think the name is Baderdo, it's a little town outside of Oakland, somewhere around there. I remember him also. I remember also the ones that didn't make it back, and that's the ones that -

*Are you there, sir? Yes sir.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** I'm a little bit sentimental.

*I understand completely. I know exactly what you're talking about. I guess tell us a little bit maybe about, because you were there in Vietnam, you were there in '68 and '69, right? And you were in the same unit the entire time?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** With the same one, yes.

*During that time did you have the same platoon sergeant?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** No, that would change. Also that's another one that I was later on informed or at least that's what I was told, that captains or lieutenants would only serve I think it was about six months. I don't remember if it was true or not. So we did change company commander. We changed a couple of times lieutenants, there was a squad leader, a platoon leader.

*I know from having done interviews and done a lot of reading that in Vietnam especially on patrols that the platoon commanders, the second lieutenants didn't, they were kind of a top target as well as the radio operators that were next to them. Did you find that to be true?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Oh yes, that was real true. As a matter of fact, I still remember and if I get off the air again, you know -

*Well let me know, too sir, if you need to pause it. I completely understand.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** My very first experience is the one I think was about practically two weeks after I got there, if I'm not mistaken was around the end of July, around that time or about the 1<sup>st</sup> of August of '68, in the same area, of the En Lo Bridge, we had gone out on patrol and like I said, I don't remember the names of the little villages or whatever just because they had their names, but we went out and I was lucky enough to be, or our platoon was actually the one that was picking up the rear in a sense, and we went up on company patrol, in other words not on squad patrol or platoon patrol, apparently they had some information, and it just so happened that

I would say I was pretty close to the rear of the column, and all of a sudden this big bang, and the cloud of dust that I saw from way over here, and we started running over there, of course, the term double time, you know, and by the time I got there, the first sergeant was killed, the radio man also. I remember coming up to one – at the time I didn't know any one of them, I didn't know them by name or anything – and I remember this one that I went straight to, his bottom half of his legs were gone completely. Right away I started thinking about what they teach us, especially what they taught us when we first got there, Bien Hoa, and I remember trying to get him out of shock in a sense, because that's what they train you to do, at least because sometimes it could be just a flesh wound and if he goes into shock he could die. So the only thing I remember about this guy besides seeing him without legs, he was knowledgeable about it I think because he looked up and he said "don't worry, man, I don't need my legs to make love" or whatever. And the reason I remember that is because like I said the first sergeant got killed and one of the, I don't remember if the company commander got killed also, but I do know that we changed company commanders after that, and of course that same guy, I saw him about three or four years ago in the first reunion that I went to. And just out of the fact that I don't want to come back to the thing if maybe he might be very sentimental like I am, whatever, I never did mention to him, because he's in a wheelchair now.

*Yeah, that's tough. How did you cope with that sort of thing being in that situation mentally? Do you remember what your thoughts were, how you stayed focused?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** I really don't have any knowledge as far as how I went through it. Many times I questioned my wife, I talked to her about it, within myself I was really scared. I had a really deep fear in a sense, but at the same time I don't know I came up with this courage. Every time there was some rifle fire going on, whatever, or something went on, even though I knew I had the fear, I still drove on, and I would remember the fact of having seen, for example, that third person, and many others during the time that I was there, that I had to pick her up and some of them I would carry them out of the same battlefield where we were at. I always got the courage anyhow for some reason. I don't know why.

*I know a lot of people talk about fear being a bad thing, or don't be afraid of things, but did you find in your experience that your sense of fear, you didn't let it paralyze you, but the sense of fear kind of heightened your awareness and made you focus and be sharper than if you had not had any fear?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Oh that's for sure, because I got to where, I mean as time went on, more and more I got more nervous, and I noticed I was nervous, but at the same time I was more aware of everything that was around me, everything. As a matter of fact I remember further on, often around the rice paddies, there was this other guy, Juan Flores from San Antonio, I remember him, that's the only one that I have not been able to locate because we went through some different things, and we had captured some prisoners and I was guarding one of them. As a matter of fact we were in the field, out in the village walking, and I had this Vietnamese, a Charlie, the \_\_\_ was a Charlie that was in front of me, and I was so nervous because of what happened before and other times and everything, that I put that M16 in automatic. At the time I was using the M16 because I went into, I came back from Bien Hoa to get a refresher course and I upgraded myself to being a sniper, but at the time I had an M16 and I put it in automatic, and my mind was going, the fact that if anything moves, I'm gonna first kill that guy in front of me, and then see what happens. But Juan had gone out there, and he stopped calm because at the time he was the squad leader, so he stopped, I guess he noticed something, I don't know what it was, and he went off into some bushes, and I was waiting, and then I saw the bushes move, and

I was so nervous, and I remember I started pulling that trigger, as a matter of fact, even I unstuck the little coil, and all of a sudden he came out of the brush and I stopped, and oh man, but I didn't tell him though. I didn't tell him I almost killed you, man. But yeah, it got me in that sense, it got me kind of nervous and everything. But I still go with it though.

*I know too that in Vietnam, I guess you had a time or pretty much knew kind of an assigned time of when you were going to be going home, is that right?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah, as a matter of fact, that was another one that mainly I talked to like my wife or some other people that I talked to that ever since I got to Vietnam, I started seeing different people they had these little papers. Some had 365 days on it or some of them had 180 days, or 90 days, whatever, and I never did have any one of those papers at all because I don't know, I'm not really suspicious in the sense of being superstitious, but to me I felt well, there's going to come the day that I leave here, and having a good sense of the thing, I will get out of here. But I didn't want to think as time went on also that I was going to be one of the ones that wouldn't leave there walking. And I finally did decide one day because that day, or actually the day after that was going to be when I was going to have three months \_\_\_\_, which was in 90 days, and some guy was going to mention there that he had a paper for the 90 days, and whether it be superstitious for the bad luck or not, I said OK, let me have that one because I know I have exactly 90 days. I was aware at the time because I was conscious of days going by and I knew what day we were at, and I knew what day I was going to have my time to leave. But that day it was actually, in a sense my bad luck day, I could say, because as a matter of fact the day after that was the day that I got wounded. I got wounded exactly 90 days before I was going to return home.

*Tell us if you would, sir, a little bit about that, about being wounded in action.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well, let me try to hold onto myself and I'll tell you. It's one of those that you never forget. As a matter of fact, I also get sometimes upset or whatever because I talk to different veterans because I'm also a member of the Purple Heart organization, and one time I was talking to one of them, because kind of recruiting, and he said, I don't remember when I got wounded, and I said man, that doesn't sound right because you never forget that.

*Oh yeah, I think you're right.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** But we got up, actually we had had our regular rations drop in that day in the valley, around the A Chau Valley. That was a beautiful valley with a whole bunch of banana plants and stuff, and we actually went up this hill to a ridge when we got up. And I would say it was around about this time more or less, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1969, because that's the day I never forget, and our squad was the one who was going to take points. As a matter of fact I remember real clearly because the sergeant at the time, which I don't remember his name, for some reason I wanted to take point. I don't know why I volunteered, I wanted to take a point, you know. And I was starting off, and there was this sort of like a snake cove and all the wood area was real thick. You could hardly see in there. And I was going to start out, and we had already discussed the flanking. We're not going to stay on the trail because at that time they told us they would hit us. So the sergeant said wait, because he got a call. He said we got to wait because we have a scout coming, scout dog. So we waited, and then we were up again, and the scout dog was there. As a matter of fact the dog started barking and stuff, and now that I'm thinking about it, maybe he was trying to warn us or something, I think, I'm not really sure. But anyhow the scout dog took off on the trail and I don't know if he understood, or they mentioned to him to go on the

flanking side, so he took off and I wanted to go the second man. In other words, I was still stubborn enough that I wanted to be in a sense like points, you know, but still again, the sergeant held me up and there was this big black guy that was the one that took, right after the scout dog, the second man. Still I was, like I said, my mind was still and I remember distinctly the sergeant were hold me back, no, wait you know. Like I said, and something sort of like was actually chopping me up, stirred something up, also because -

*Take your time -*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Then after that, on the third man, was this guy that I remember that he used to talk, you know, that he was some kind of a college guy that had about seven years of college. He had studied to be, his major was being a lawyer or something, I don't remember too well. And when I go to reunion, they still remember him. He was the third man. So finally, even though sergeant was holding back, I decided on my own, I broke 'em off and I took off because there was, the other guy was going to go after that was what at the time we used to call was a cherry.

*Yeah, brand new guy.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah, brand new guy, and he was coming up the hill, up the bridge, and he was one of those guys that didn't know how to pack his things and he was making all kinds of noise and stuff, sticking out stuff, you know, because he still hadn't learned. So I decided I'm going to take off and I went after him, so I was actually the fourth guy in that column. I took about three steps or maybe four at the most, and I heard the bang, boom! And I just felt my legs go under and stuff, and I also heard, sort of like a screaming as I was going down. I think I fainted for a while also. I don't remember too well because I know I didn't notice too much. By the time up ahead I heard the rifle fire going on and stuff. The scout dog passed by me yapping and stuff, and I saw in front of me the lawyer was already just shaking, he was dying, he was dead. For some reason, the black guy made it back, and I understood that his ear drums had been blown off because of the thing and the scout dog, that thing hit him right in the face.

*And what was it, do you know?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** I was in the hospital or when I got back, I don't remember when it was, I was told by some of the guys that it actually was a Claymore mine that the enemy had somehow picked up some rucksack or whatever and they found it there and they actually had put it up in the trees and it was pointing down and probably that's what saved me, I don't know. But I was the fourth one. I actually got hit in both my legs. I had shrapnel in both my knees, and it knocked my rifle out of my hands. Luckily I didn't have anything in my chest. The rookie, the guy that was clinking and stuff, the air itself picked him up and threw him back about 50 meters, and we actually had three killed that day, myself wounded, and the black guy was wounded also. I remember that I was trying to make it to where the rest of the company would not be in danger, so I crawled back myself from within the fire fight and everything. I crawled back and they finally got to me when I crawled back, and I remember distinctly one of the guys said, \_\_\_\_ the plan I have for the shock and stuff, he said "don't worry, man, you got the million dollar wolf." At the time, I didn't know what they meant. The other guy said, well actually the medic told me, he said "do you want me to give you some morphine?" He says, "I'll give you some morphine. It's going to take" – I think he said about "three to seven hours," I don't know what it was – "before they operate on you." I said no, I'll take it man, just don't clean up, do me that way.

And my kind of shock that I feel, most of the kind of shock was the fact that I was laughing. I couldn't quit laughing.

*Wow.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** And then they were trying to figure out how to get me out of there, and they asked for a basket, but the Medivac came in and they asked for a basket, and instead of a basket they sent the chair. So what they did, they put the black guy and me on top of him and him holding me, my legs, and I was screaming all the way up the cable because of the fact that he had to hold me. And once we were up there in the chopper, they saw me and I was patched up in my legs and my arms and stuff, and they were trying to find out what happened to the black guy, and with the noise of the chopper and stuff, and I finally stopped one of the guys and signaled to him, his ears are gone, you know. He said OK, they realized that his ears had been blown off, in other words the ear drums actually, not the ears. So and that's how they got me out of there.

*When all that was happening, sir, were you praying, were you worried, or were you even thinking about - ?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well the only thing that was going through my mind, I don't know, laughing, whatever, and maybe the reason I was laughing was the fact that maybe I was thinking I'm finally going to get out of here. But it really wasn't clear that I was going to get out of there. I didn't have mortal wounds. I did get not too bad of wounds, it could have been worse. I still have problems with my legs, my knees, but I had rehabilitation in what I feel, I'm not really sure, I think it was in Kerman Base, and I was actually thinking I was going to come back.

*Yeah, back to your unit.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** No, back here. I was thinking I was going to come back home, but no, I got reasonably through stuff and they sent me back. I was going back to the unit.

*Wow.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** I was in the hospital for about a month and a half or so. I don't remember exactly the date that I got out of the hospital. But when I got back, the unit had already changed areas. They had a real battle when they got to where they had changed, and that was around June of '69. I don't remember exactly the name of that place either, but they had just recently cleared the area to make runways and stuff, and that's where I went back to when I went back. And I didn't even know, as a matter of fact I found out until I got back over here, because the guys didn't tell me or whatever, that the gunner, one of the gunners had gotten killed there, one of the ones that I often knew, Johnson. As a matter of fact I didn't find out until about 30 years later that he had gotten killed in Nam. I got back and then it really got to me, my nerves, my worry, my fear, and I started actually figuring a plan that I could figure out where I wouldn't have to go back out in the field. But like I said again, it just happens that the day that I got back again to the unit, I walked into the headquarters office in a tent, and the first sergeant, as soon as he saw me, he says, "we got your weapon there waiting for you, on the next chopper you're going out," and it was late in the afternoon. And it just happened that the XO was coming in and he heard him and he said, "no, he's not going nowhere. This guy just got out of the hospital, he's going to stay here for while." That was part of the luck, but the day after that, I went to sick hall because I was still out of the hospital, and I had one of my knees, the wound was still fresh and it had

scabbed, or the scab was falling off and it was kind of pink. So I made it, walked or whatever you might call it, because I was already walking fairly good, and I told the medic that saw me, the doc, and he said well I'm going to give you profile of 30 days. And I had about, by that time I had about a month and a half left, more or less. So when I had about 10 days more or less, or 10-15 days left, he saw me again and he said you know what, I think you're faking it. I said well, whether I'm faking it or not, you can't, it doesn't matter no more because I've got about 10 days left. "Is that right?" I said, "yes." He said well I'll give you another profile. So that's what saved me. But still I was so nervous that what they did, they actually sent me to pull guard. They had a hill, I remember that big hill where the colonel was at. So I was pulling guard over there with the colonel, and for the last 30 days actually since I got out of the hospital, by the time I got there it was about 30 days before I got out, those 30 days I would not sleep. I had \_\_\_ and even though it's unbelievable, at around 8 o'clock at night we had to set up our guard hours, and there was at least 12 of us, but the lieutenant says you guys go to sleep, and I'll wake you up if I need you. And I just would not go to sleep. I was so nervous and everything I would not go to sleep at night. I would hear every little noise, any little animal, I would hear everything until around 6 o'clock in the morning more or less, and then I would wake up and sleep for about an hour, every day, until finally they told me that I was coming back to the States, I'm going home.

*Tell us, sir, what that was like when you got back home after all you'd been through.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Before that, before I got home, what happened also was the fact that besides what I've heard from people that saved me, because they would \_\_\_ and everything, and I never did have that experience but I don't doubt it, it's just the fact that before I got here, another thing that I had, because I got back to Bien Hoa to the \_\_\_ and everything, got the paperwork to get back, I already had my commercial ticket in my hand about three days before I left. As a matter of fact I left exactly the 13<sup>th</sup>, the same way that I got from here going over there, and they were direct tickets for the commercial airlines, because just so happens that we were the ones or part of the group that at the time Nixon was saying he was going to withdraw troops. So instead of coming back on a commercial airline, I came back in a C-141. There were three C-141's that went over to pick us up, and I left in the first airplane on the air field there at Bien Hoa, and as soon as it went off the bounds, we all started screaming and everything. That's another one I remember. Hey, you're out of there.

*Yeah, you're a freedom bird.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah, the freedom bird, and then the captain, he called on the radio and he says, "well you guys are really lucky, you're already out of the Airborne" – but we almost didn't make it. He said the other two planes got held up. When we were coming out, they started bombarding the place.

*Wow, yeah.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** But then when we got back and they sent me over here to the state of Washington, which I also don't remember the air base over there, but we arrived there actually on the 13<sup>th</sup> because of the gain of time, whatever, and what it was, they had a reception, they had people there. It was, I'm not saying that I felt real good, but it was kind of surprising. I didn't know it was going to be that way.

*Where was this again?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** In the state of Washington.

*OK.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah, and then they took us in there and gave us our orientation. They set it up for a new uniform, and they gave us an orientation as far as what had been happening within the year, and then there was waiting for the uniform, and they would advise that they had a bus up there in front that as soon as it got loaded to go to the airport, there was the bus station over on the corner, whatever. I came back home by plane and I remember that I had to stop in San Antonio for about three or four hours because the drop-off plane, the other one coming over here was going to be delayed, or actually the time of the arrival, and that was another one that I also remember that I told my wife, and it \_\_\_ to me in my sense because it just happens that I got to meet, again, remember I told you about Juan Flores? Got almost killed? It just happens that I was waiting for my plane to come on over here, and all of a sudden I was surprised again. I see him, he had arrived there to take either some cousin or somebody that was also going off. We had a good time, we grabbed each other and we even had beer. But I never did even come up to my mind to get his address or telephone number, something, and that was the last time that I saw him.

*Have you tried to locate him since then through the Internet or using any searches?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** We've tried different things. We even tried maybe he had gone to San Antonio to get some medical treatment or whatever in the VA, and I can't find that guy.

*I guess keep looking and he'll turn up eventually.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah, but I got here and it was pretty dreadful, really when I got home, because of course I didn't have any one of my real good welcome deal, because they didn't even know I was coming home, because my mother, tearful and everything.

*I'm sure she was very proud of you and proud that you were back home finally.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Oh yeah, I mean the other experience that I could say was a bad experience as far as the fact that I was over there, was because when I got wounded, because that was the other part of my life during the time over there because what happened, you know what they do \_\_\_, and then they asked me, they said if I wanted to have any family member informed if I got wounded, if I was mortally wounded, whatever, and I decided, I said no. If I get killed, don't tell nobody. And what happened was the fact that I made the silly mistake when I got wounded, I got my Purple Heart in the hospital. There was a colonel went over there and gave it to me in the bed, and I didn't know what to do with it, to carry this thing with me, and I'm still in the hospital here. So I asked for a big envelope and just stuck it in there without any explanation, and my mother, she got it, she got all -

*So you mailed it to your mom?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah, and she was all worried and stuff. She thought I was really badly wounded and it made a deal for her moving and everything, and had the Red Cross going over there, and having a talk to me about it. So when I got home that she found me, of course I wasn't really, like I said I'm very thankful to the man up there that I made it through, and I call 'em my scratches, you know, that I have, and I still have trembles in my legs because of that.

But all in all, it was experience that I had that I've also been asked if I would go back. I think I have enough pride with myself that I could say no, it was a bad experience, even though it was a bad experience, I'm not saying it was a good one, but I think if it would happen again, I'd have the courage to go back.

*And I think too, sir, it's obviously a defining moment in your life and you wouldn't be the same person you are today if you hadn't gone through the experiences that you had. You can't imagine what it would be like if you hadn't done what you had done and gone through.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah, and whatever happens else, just because of the fact that I got wounded in a sense, I got wounded about actually nearly a month before Hamburger Hill, and I went through one big battle also before I got wounded, one that afterwards I found out that they called it Bloody Ridge, before Hamburger Hill. I don't know who made those names. I don't remember the name of the hill but it was a couple of clicks from that one that was Hamburger Hill. I found out it was a place called Dagatage, something like that, and that one there, the one that we went through, Bloody Ridge, that one actually was started March 17 or 18, somewhere in there. We actually lost about 35 guys there.

*Out of your company?*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Yeah. As a matter of fact that was the other one that never had to erase in my mind because I still say that I was the one that started that one, even though maybe it's written different, I don't know, because in the reunion I was talking to the guys, my actual squad leader, the lieutenant that's in \_\_\_ now, I started explaining to him and he says we don't have it written down that way because I remember that one distinctly that we had just arrived in that place, and they had dropped the fighter bomb there. When I saw the one at Hamburger Hill, the actual \_\_\_ one, when I saw it 30 something years afterwards then I thought, I said man, that's the one that I was in. But if not, you're so real or so alike as to think it's the one at Hamburger Hill, but it's not. I remember exactly the logs and stuff for where I was at, and we had just gotten there. We set up the perimeter, and since by the time I did have my sniper weapon, I was laying down or actually I sat down next to a tree just leaned over there. I was resting because we had just arrived there and we were tired, and I remember also that we had a National Guard TET chief from Hawaii, they were Hawaiians, you know, and they had a little bit of distinction sort of like a Vietnamese. So I was laying there and then all of a sudden effectively just leaning at the tree, sitting down, and the caller that says you got to watch it because we're going to send out a patrol, and I was down on a hill, sort of like the down side, and it went down and then it went up to a ridge, that left a little lump in there. It surprised me, it really surprised me that I'm seeing this guy crawling. I'm saying he was maybe 50 meters away maybe less, I don't know, I couldn't really distinguish the distance, and he had this big smile on his face, and I'm thinking it was the Hawaiian. And I kept looking at him, and his eyes, they were not straight at me. His eyes were straight at Nick, or the one that I communicate with in California, and man, it really surprised me real bad to the point that I couldn't react too much, and I finally know that it wasn't a Hawaiian because I noticed the weapon, a \_\_\_ K47, I said that's not the Hawaiian, and I saw that his eyes, head was straight at Nickles, he was going to kill Nickles. I went through a whisper and also sort of like shouting so he wouldn't hear, and I called Nickles because Nickles was turned around making cocoa, and I just pointed back to Nickles like that, and Nickles right away turned around and flipped his weapon and started firing, and that's when I reacted. If not, I would have reacted. But as soon as I reacted, there was this other Vietnamese who jumped up out of a bush there and he just straight at me, hey, that was a close one. That was another one that was so close I said oh man. By that time they heard the fire by Nickles and the whole

company came down the hill, and that was the one that started the actual Bloody Ridge. That took us about five days of battle there.

*Yes sir. Well sir, I have to wrap up the interview now because the conference room that I've reserved for this interview, my time is up so there is another group of people unfortunately waiting to come in and use it, but I want to thank you again, sir, for letting us interview you. It means a great deal for our program to have your memories recorded, and Commissioner Patterson is a Vietnam veteran, myself, I'm a veteran, and there's a lot of us here that are veterans, but even those of us that aren't, we want to thank you for your service to our country, and we're going to send you in a few weeks copies of this interview on CD's that you can give to your friends and family. And then a little after that we're going to send you a nice commemorative binder with a certificate and a letter from the Commissioner as just a small token of thanks for your service to our nation.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** Well thank you for giving me the opportunity anyhow. It took me quite a while, it took me more than 20 years to at least talk about, and so far I have about 10 or 15 years that I've been talking to people it's helped a whole lot.

*Yes sir, well it was a great interview and we'll be talking again soon. Thank you very much sir, have a good day.*

**Sigifredo Ramirez:** OK, thank you.

*[End of recording]*