

Nadal, Tony US Army

[00:00:13.12] RAMON NADAL: I was born December 27, 1935, at Fort Benning, Georgia. My dad was-- eventually retired as an Army colonel. He was-- my family on both sides are from Puerto Rico. They were raised and lived there for significant portions of their lives. My dad was one of the first West Point-- of the first Puerto Ricans to go to West Point, which was not necessarily a pleasant experience for him because of racism and whatever.

[00:00:57.97] After I was-- after I was born, about a year and a half later he was reassigned to Puerto Rico, initially working for the CCC, if you recall what that is. And then became an officer in the ROTC units there.

[00:01:14.47] MARK FRANKLIN: What was the CCC?

[00:01:15.88] RAMON NADAL: Civilian Conservation Corps. So between 19-- let's say 37-and-a-half to 1946, I remained in Puerto Rico and Spanish was my first language. My family there is big. Both my dad and my mom were one of eight kids. Most of my family is still down there. Most of them have done quite well.

[00:01:54.83] But I came to the States in 1946, where my dad was assigned as the editor-in-chief of the Military Review, a military magazine published at Fort Leavenworth. I have great memories of growing up at Fort Leavenworth. I quickly became fluent in English to some degree.

[00:02:20.29] When-- my dad's next assignment was as the superintendent of the Military Academy of El Salvador. So he went to El Salvador, he and my mom. And I went there initially, but the schools weren't adequate in my parents' view. So I went to a boarding school in the US for my high school years. RAMON NADAL: My goal, my desire had always been-- and I don't understand, I know my dad went to West Point, and whatever. But I was really focused early on, on going to West Point and being in the Army.

[00:03:04.21] And so after the boarding school-- prep school or school called the Peddie School in New Jersey, I didn't have an appointment. So my dad-- my folks sent me to a school here in Washington that no longer exists. It was called Sullivan's. And the purpose of Sullivan's was to get kids to take the qualifying exams and get very high grades so you could compete for presidential appointment. And I did that.

[00:03:41.46] I succeeded, and I earned the-- I think 14th presidential appointment in the nation. However, the Army wanted to save its appointments to get as many Army brats into West Point. They gave me an appointment for Puerto Rico, which was fine. I had an uneventful four years at West Point. I've always been a bit of a rebel, and sort of been accused of marching to my own drum, which is true.

[00:04:23.41] So there were a lot of, initially, things at West Point that I totally disliked. The plebe system up there, the harsh shouting, and as you will learn later on in life, I had a chance to have a major role in changing it. My first assignment after West Point, Airborne and Ranger

School. I went to Germany, Munich, wonderful city and wonderful place to spend three-and-a-half years.

[00:05:02.72] MARK FRANKLIN: What year was that? When did you get commissioned?

[00:05:05.60] RAMON NADAL: I was commissioned in '58. So first, I got married shortly after doing a week back at Fort Leavenworth. It was-- coincidentally we lived in a set of quarters when I was growing up. 604 Scott Avenue at Fort Leavenworth. And my bride's parents were living in 604 Scott Avenue. She was the daughter of an Army colonel. And so when I went there to get married, I just moved into my old room in the same house.

[00:05:43.39] MARK FRANKLIN: Why do you think you were directed to go to West Point, and get a commission to become an Army officer?

[00:05:50.94] RAMON NADAL: I guess the fact that my dad was a West Point graduate and in the Army. And I really enjoyed my days at Fort Leavenworth, that was a great place for a kid to grow up in those days. And when I was a kid, I used to read a lot. I've always been a reader. I used to read books about Sir Galahad, and Lancelot and the Knights of the Round Table, and all that. So that was a, I guess, affinity for things military and the--

[00:06:38.97] MARK FRANKLIN: After commissioning, talk about the training you received.

[00:06:42.39] RAMON NADAL: Well I went to Airborne School and Ranger School. Ranger School was a real challenge. There's the easy Ranger School, and the hard Ranger School. And the hard Ranger School is in the wintertime. And when I was in Ranger School with a number of my classmates, and not only the West Point, but we had a large number of my classmates in that class. It was one of the coldest winters they'd had up in those mountains of Dahlonge.

[00:07:15.83] One of the things that I always remember and I tell people, I was a pretty good swimmer. So one of the things you have to do up on the mountain was we had to cross two rivers. And the way you did that was someone had to swing a rope across the river, then you tied it with special knots and tighten it. And then the other guys would hook up to that rope and pull themselves across.

[00:07:47.94] So then we got to a river. It's snowing. As an adult, you'd swing the rope across. So that means I have to take all my clothes off, take your poncho, put your clothes in the poncho, fold up the thing and make a poncho raft. And so I swim this rope across. Then I'm the lifeguard. So after I tighten that rope up, and I stand there naked-- it was snowing on me-- when the other guys are coming across.

[00:08:27.39] Now, there was one advantage to the fact that I had gone across. I had dry clothes. The other guys-- that rope, no matter how tight I tied it, with the weight of the people on that rope, it bowed, and they would end up about this deep in the water as they pulled themselves across. The clothes were freezing on the people, it was so cold out there. But I put my dry clothes back on after that, so that was a small reward. The snow, however, melted quickly, and I was just as wet as everyone else.

[00:09:09.70] RAMON NADAL: At Fort Benning. It didn't really make a big impression on me. I went along and whatever. Probably should have-- I had just been married a month before, and I had other things in mind other than just attending to the course. Well once I got to the unit, I went to a CBR course, chemical warfare course up at Grafenwoehr.

[00:09:44.69] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you-- and what year was this now?

[00:09:47.65] RAMON NADAL: '59.

[00:09:55.08] RAMON NADAL: Well, while in Germany, I learned somehow that we had American forces in Laos. And these were the Special Forces teams. One of my mantras was-- and was all throughout my career-- Napoleon told his marshals, the soldier's duty is to march to the sound of the guns. So when I heard there were Soldiers in Laos, I said, I want to go to Laos. I want to go there. And so I volunteered for Special Forces.

[00:10:30.40] I was on orders to come back to the States to an ROTC detachment. And I wrote DA and said, not no, but hell no. And they were building up the Special Forces. I was there when John Kennedy came. And we had a parade, and he authorized us to wear the green beret. So I joined Special Forces, and seven months later, I think, I was in Vietnam with a-- commanding an A detachment.

[00:11:00.92] The place that became famous because-- the name is Nam Dong. And Nam Dong is where Roger Donlon won the first Medal of Honor given in the Vietnam War. Roger didn't follow me. Roger followed the team that followed me. We were--

[00:11:18.89] MARK FRANKLIN: Where is Nam Dong?

[00:11:20.42] RAMON NADAL: It's in I Corps in the northern part of South Vietnam. And it's just South of the A Shau Valley a little bit. And it's about--

[00:11:31.75] MARK FRANKLIN: So your first tour in Vietnam was as a Special Forces--

[00:11:34.88] RAMON NADAL: My first tour was with Special Forces, right. And it was a very useful tour to prepare me for my second tour with the 1st Cav. And there's a story about that too.

[00:11:56.42] RAMON NADAL: The Air Force had an aircraft called the C-123. It was a cargo plane built on the frame of a B-29. It flew maybe 200 knots. It took us four days or something like that, or five days to fly from Fort Bragg to Nha Trang because it flew slowly, and it had to stop for refueling. So we stopped at-- we flew from Fort Bragg. I don't think we went nonstop to San Francisco, we had to stop somewhere.

[00:12:40.43] Then we flew from there to San Fran-- to the Air Force base near Frisco. Then we flew to Hawaii. Then we flew to Guam. Then we flew to I forget, oh, the Philippines. And then we finally made it to the Nha Trang.

[00:12:59.27] There was nothing that I found overwhelming. I mean people were shorter, but I knew that going in. And I had spent my summers in El Salvador. And I was raised in Puerto Rico from when I was a kid, so I'm used to seeing poverty, and whatever.

[00:13:22.87] And to some degree, when I was a kid, a high school kid at the prep school, I'd come home for the summers. And my dad would take me hunting. And we would go to Nicaragua. There's a peninsula in Nicaragua called Cosiguina. And there's a Gulf. When you look at the map,

[00:13:47.74] there's a gulf between El Salvador, and Nicaragua, and the peninsula. And that peninsula was jungle, and we used to go there hunting. They had jaguars, they had wild pigs. They had an unusual turkey that roosted on trees, a lot of deer, et cetera. So that was my first introduction to what jungles looked like.

[00:14:14.65] MARK FRANKLIN: When did you get to Vietnam that first tour?

[00:14:16.66] RAMON NADAL: I'd say maybe August of '64. No, that's not right.

[00:14:22.03] MARK FRANKLIN: That would have been your second tour.

[00:14:24.04] RAMON NADAL: Yeah. No, second tour was '65. So it had to be '63. I came back in '63 to '64, six months over. We spent Thanksgiving and Christmas in Vietnam, then came back, and I was sent to the Armored Officer's Career Course. I was an infantryman, but they sent me to AOBC where I was one of the distinguished graduates.

[00:15:01.75] Then I received orders to go to Korea. And this was sort of my first act of rebellion. I called DA and said, I don't want to go to Korea. They said, well, you have to go to Korea because you haven't commanded a rifle company yet, and we can get one in Korea. By that time, their 173rd was in Vietnam. And the 1st Infantry was just arriving.

[00:15:29.02] And I said, look there's rifle companies in Vietnam. Oh, yeah, but we have you assigned to Korea. I said, I don't want to go to Korea. And they argued with me. And it was about five days before I was due to get on the airplane to go to Korea.

[00:15:47.60] At 4:00 AM I got a phone call. It's the assignment officer at the Pentagon. We want you in Fort Benning in two days. Fort Benning? Why the hell do I want to be at Fort Benning? Shut up, and go to Fort Benning! So I got to Fort Benning.

[00:16:11.96] The day I got there, LBJ comes on the radio and says, today, I have decided to assign the 1st Cavalry Air Mobile Division to Vietnam. The 11th Air Assault, which was not a full division had been made the 1st Cav. They changed flags, and patches, and whatever. So it was an under-strength-- significantly under-strength-- division. So in a period of a month, they were dumping all sorts of people in it from all throughout the Army.

[00:16:42.63] There were a couple of factors that enter into this, and I'll take a minute to tell you. The 1st Cav that went to Vietnam was unusual in that the officers, the lieutenant colonels and

above, had been personally selected. And there was a missive from the Army that said-- Army chief of staff-- that said, they will have priority on officer selection.

[00:17:14.71] Now, going back a couple of years, the Army and the Air Force were in a big fight in '62 and '63 about controlling helicopters and close air support. McNamara decided he wanted a big examination of this. So the Army created something called the "Howze Board," named after General Howze. And he assembled a group of people. And then he came-- his conclusions were that the Army needed these aircraft, helicopters, whatever. But we have to develop a concept of how to use them.

[00:17:54.84] So then they created the 11th Air Assault Division to test all this. And there were big for a year and a half, or two years. The 11th Air Assault at Fort Benning was running up and down the Carolina countryside doing maneuvers, and things, and so forth.

[00:18:14.68] If you look at the roster-- and I have-- of the lieutenant colonels and colonels who were in the 11th Air Assault, to include Hal Moore, there's like 13 of them who were three- and four-star generals when they retired. One chief of staff, Sam Myers, who's a friend of mine. Hal Shoemaker was a four-star. These guys were on the road to stardom before they got involved.

[00:18:57.01] But one of the reasons we did so well in our first year over there was because we had these guys. I mean, Kinnard, our division commander was West Point class of '39. In 1940-- the winter of 1944, he was a full colonel. He was the G-3 of the 101st Airborne. And so at age 27 or 28, he was a O-6 colonel being in the division G-3 in one of the most savage battles of World War II. And the other guys were just as exemplary.

[00:19:41.13] MARK FRANKLIN: So you had the cream of the crop?

[00:19:42.63] RAMON NADAL: Yeah, that was the cream of the crop.

[00:19:50.36] RAMON NADAL: The mission was to-- the Army, with the Vietnamese, had developed a program to build border posts along the Vietnam-Laotian border. Not the Ruff Puffs. We weren't-- this was separate because we were pretty well in command, not titularly, but factually. And the Special Forces recruited Vietnamese peasants, kids, in some cases out of the cities, which made it fairly-- in that bunch of young soldiers.

[00:20:42.99] The best camps had the Montagnards And the-- unfortunately, I did not have-- I was not in a region where there were a lot of Montagnards. So my guys tended to come from Da Nang and Hue. But I had a group-- this was unusual-- I had a group of 20 Chinese. They came from a tribe called "Nungs," N-U-N-G-S. And these guys had been fighting the communists in China, where they got their butts whipped.

[00:21:16.72] Then they came down, and they fought for the French. And most of my Nungs spoke French, as well as Vietnamese, and Chinese. And they were the guys that I counted on, those 20 Nungs. They had a boss, the chief Nung was named Lee Ze Dong. And every time I went on patrol there were at least four or five Nung in the patrol. There might be 30 Vietnamese, but there were four or five Nungs that stuck around me.

[00:21:50.05] And the task was to-- there was a village there. And our task was to help defend the village, and to go out and find the Viet Minh or North Vietnamese. We weren't fighting North Vietnamese in those days. We were fighting the Viet Cong, and trying to locate their camps, and whatever and engage them in combat, which we did.

[00:22:28.59] RAMON NADAL: I'm reporting to Fort Benning, Georgia. They had a big gymnasium out in Smoke Bomb Hill, and they have the G-1 section there. And people lined up, reporting for duty, Sir. So it's my turn, and I come up to the desk. And the colonel there, lieutenant colonel, making the assignments says, OK. I see your paperwork here, good. What do you want to do? I said, I want to be a rifle company commander.

[00:22:59.89] He says, well, they're all taken already. Tell you what, I'm going to make you the signal officer of the 1st Brigade. I said, what? I don't know squat about being a signal officer, but I do know how to fight in these jungles. I've been there. I had a Bronze Star, and a CIB, and a Purple Heart. And you want to make me a signal officer? And he said, well, they're all taken, whatever. Just go where you're told. And I said to myself, oh, bullshit.

[00:23:32.23] So my classmate John Herren, he was in 1/7th Cav, and he had told me about what a great outfit it was. And what a superb battalion commander Hal Moore was. And I said, well, that's where I want to be. So the following day I went over to see Hal Moore, and the-- he had a vacancy for a S-2 battalion staff intelligence officer.

[00:24:00.59] So I talked to him. He said, what are you doing here? I said, well, Sir, I'm looking for a job. He said, didn't they assign you? I said, yes Sir, but I don't want to do that. So he says-- he interviews me and says, well, I'd like to have you. And I'll give you a company when one becomes open, and whatever, but I can't change the G-1 thing. So I'll tell you what, go up and talk to the brigade commander.

[00:24:27.08] So the brigade commander-- I go up there and Tim Brown was his name. And Colonel Brown interviews me, and he likes what I'm saying. And he said, well, I'll call the G-1. So he calls the G-1, and he gets them on the phone, but he has it on speaker.

[00:24:45.26] And the conversation goes something like, hello, Jim. This is Tim Brown, 1st Brigade-- or 3rd Brigade. I've got this officer here named Nadal. Where is that son of a bitch? He said, well, he doesn't want to be a signal officer, and I've got a vacancy for him here. And it makes more sense for me to keep him and, whatever, and so forth. So the guy said, oh well, OK. So that's how I became a member of the 1st/7th CAV.

[00:25:19.01] I was the S-2 for about two months, but 30 of those were at sea. It took us 30-- 33 days from the time we loaded aboard the ships in Charleston, to go around the canal, back up to Long Beach in California because we had to refuel. Then we started across the Pacific, and then had to divert to Hawaii because a kid had appendicitis. We dropped him off, then on to-- we got around the Philippines, and a typhoon came up so we had to turn around and run away from that for a couple of days.

[00:25:59.49] So eventually, we got to Qui Nhon, came down an old landing net into a landing craft. You know, like the pictures of invade-- like the Sands of Iwo Jima or D-Day at Normandy, coming down that rope thing. But then on the beach was a CH-54 with a people pod on it. And so this was-- we were going up to An Khe. I didn't know An Khe from anything. But the first time I rode that I was thinking, I hope no one pickles this thing. There were like 30 of us aboard that--

[00:26:40.83] MARK FRANKLIN: So a helicopter had something suspended below it. And that's what you rode in?

[00:26:44.13] RAMON NADAL: Yeah, CH-54 is basically a cab frame in which you hook things to. So we landed in An Khe. And when we landed at An Khe, An Khe was basically a bunch of rice paddies. It was halfway between Pleiku and Qui Nhon, which is a good place to be if go either way.

[00:27:14.73] There was a paved highway from Qui Nhon through An Khe to Pleiku. And there was a hard paved airstrip there, which I think was a big attraction because we needed to get resupplied. And a lot of stuff came by Air Force transports, and they used the big airstrip. But there was no place for the helicopters. There had been an advance party that was sent out about three or four weeks ahead of us.

[00:27:48.59] And they spent a lot of time-- they hired a lot of Vietnamese to cut the-- these were rice fields. And they had to flatten that out, and they had to cut all the weeds down because-- no, you couldn't-- you had to cut the weeds so they wouldn't interfere with the chopper's movement. But you couldn't pull them out because you couldn't have dust because you didn't want dust being ingested by the engines. So it was being done by hand by the GIs with bayonets, clearing this huge area for 300 or 400 helicopters to land at. So it took a while.

[00:28:36.56] MARK FRANKLIN: They used bayonets to clear that?

[00:28:37.94] RAMON NADAL: Yeah, bayonets and entrenching tools. We had no tools.

[00:28:47.79] RAMON NADAL: Again, I sort of marched to my own drummer, so-- There was a Special Forces camp nearby, so I went to see them. I was trying to create my own intelligence now because we weren't getting anything from anyone. So I went over to the Special Forces camp. And I talked to them and said, what the hell is in this area? And they looked at me. I was wearing a Special Forces patch so they had a little bit of a bond. And they said, well, we think so and so, and so and so, and whatever.

[00:29:19.60] And so I came back and I told Hal Moore. And that made a big hit with him, the fact that I had gone out there was sort of my own intelligence source. And then-- initially, like I said, for the first month, we basically worked on building the camp and so forth. And then we started patrolling out from the camp.

[00:29:46.09] And then there was-- in one of those patrols, A Company lost a Soldier to drowning while crossing a river. And that really upset Hal Moore. And eventually, he relieved

the-- there was a lieutenant commanding that company, so he relieved that lieutenant, put me in command. And that's how I became CO of A Company.

[00:30:15.24] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you have any specific memories of the popular culture, for instance movies, books, or if you hear a song today, it takes you back to that time when you were in Vietnam?

[00:30:23.88] RAMON NADAL: I mean there are certain songs that come up, which I like. I like the music of the '60s and '70's. I like the people who sang those songs. It took me a while to get into the Beatles, but eventually, I grew to like the Beatles. I remember, I was a lieutenant in Germany when this new lieutenant arrived, and he started doing the twist. And I thought, what the hell is that? But I accommodated to all that.

[00:31:01.73] No time to myself. I had a girlfriend who eventually became my wife. I had met her-- her dad was an Army officer, I met her in Puerto Rico where he was assigned. And in those days when you were a plebe, you couldn't go home at Christmas. So the girlfriends of the Cadets who were willing to do so would come up to West Point for Christmas. And they'd stay at the Hotel Thayer, where there was-- at the Thayer there was like a dormitory for girls. And they would have dances, and all that.

[00:31:47.34] This is-- I tell you this because I admired her for it so much. As a 17-year-old girl, her parents let her fly to New York. She gets there, she has to catch a train that goes up to West Point. She gets to the airport, she catches a bus into the Port Authority building in New York City. Then it's getting late, she walks from the Port Authority building, down Manhattan, carrying her bag in the snow,

[00:32:33.85] where she catches a ferry to go across the Hudson to catch a train. The train comes and drops her at the West Point train station, which is the bottom of a steep hill at about 10:30 at night. There's nothing there. There's a telephone. She calls, and gets hold of a cabby who comes out, and picks her up, and takes her to the Thayer. Now, that's got to be a measure of true love.

[00:33:10.52] MARK FRANKLIN: It's a very--

[00:33:12.52] RAMON NADAL: It was just amazing that she did that.

[00:33:23.78] RAMON NADAL: We had great relationships. First of all, we had the best battalion commander in the Army. He is my paramount Soldier. Hal Moore is the best Soldier I ever met. He was honest, he was forthright, he was smart, and he cared for his Soldiers, and he led by example. I sort of tried to model myself after him.

[00:33:57.06] We all got along. We eventually built a little officer's club, just a tent or something. The troops were in pup tents. One of the first things we had to do was-- there was a ridge. The boundaries of-- we had put in this triple apron concertina fence all around this huge area. I mean, think of a division-sized post with a huge airfield in the center of it for 400 helicopters.

[00:34:32.66] And around that were 12 battalions of various types, and it's division CP, and all that and then there's this big reel of concertina. On the far edge, there was a big mountain. And it has a name, I forget it, but the first guy up, being the 1st Cav, pretty soon we had a huge 1st Cav patch strung on that mountain that could be seen for 50 miles.

[00:35:11.84] RAMON NADAL: Well, the unit was somewhat under strength company because not only did they fill it up just before we left, but they also-- the Army decided that it would not take anyone who had less than 60 days left in the Army. Considering that it took us 30 days to get there, that's probably a wise move. But that took out a lot of experienced NCOs and Soldiers who had been all through air assault training, et cetera.

[00:35:46.44] And then all of a sudden, we get these brand newbies, newby second lieutenants, and newbies that are GIs. So it was a mixture of some guys, good NCOs, some of whom had Korean War experience. Some new NCOs. And again, PFCs that had been there for a year or two. And then, an influx of maybe 30% of the company was new GIs.

[00:36:24.67] Our initial missions were-- the first real mission we went on, I was still the S-2. And the Cav came up with this grandiose plan, we loaded like 400 choppers. Probably 150 of them went on this one mission to pick up two battalions at one time, and deposit them in these big rice paddies right next to where there was a range of mountains.

[00:37:01.77] And as the S-2 I told Colonel Moore, Sir, this isn't going to work. And he said, what do you mean? I said, well, the moment those helicopters land, the bad guys are in those mountains, they're going to leave. I mean, they know that you're coming after him, and why the hell would they still be there? He said, well, you know, this is the way we do it.

[00:37:33.17] So I was right, we didn't find anything. I said, the way you find them, and I have learned this in my first tour. In the mountains, you look for where there's water flowing. People have to have water. So if you have a junction of two mountain ridges, there's going to be a stream. Go there. And we started doing that, and then we started finding them. I had done that in my Special Forces tour, a little war story.

[00:38:11.66] During that time, I managed to get an L-19, little Army light aircraft-- reconnaissance aircraft. And flew over my area, and I saw smoke coming out of the jungle at a juncture of two mountains. I said, well, there's smoke there, there's people. So I led a big-- sort of sizable patrol. It took us two days going through the jungle to get there because one of the things to teach you in Ranger School is you don't walk on hilltops because there's a trail there. But that's where the people-- guards are, and you don't walk in the streambeds because there's people there, also.

[00:38:50.36] So it's hard to walk halfway on the mountain because you twist your ankles, and all that. But anyway, the second day we started getting close to that spot, and all of a sudden a shot goes off. So they'd had outposts and the guy warned them. And by the time we got to the camp, there was a camp, and there were a couple of long houses, and all this. And they'd fled. So I knew they'd have to come back.

[00:39:26.22] So myself, and six-- two Americans, and four Nungs, and a couple of Vietnamese, maybe eight, we stayed in the camp. Spent the night in the camp, and I set up a bunch of Claymore mines. And the following morning, they came back in. And we blasted the Claymores, and then ran like hell because there was still going to be a lot more of them than there were me.

[00:39:55.44] There were really two major battles that I was involved in the 1/7th Cav. The first of course is the Ia Drang. Now, we had learned-- we being the 1st Cav Division-- had learned that there was an enemy moving into the area south of Pleiku. Flat country there, big ridgeline that starts in Vietnam and goes into Cambodia. Flat country, then Pleiku, then mountainous terrain. And in that flat country, there was a Special Forces camp called Plei Me.

[00:40:41.26] So we knew that something was happening, didn't know what. Then the Special Forces camp Plei Me gets assaulted. And for two days, they're under real siege by the Vietnamese. Well, that was an old Viet Minh ploy that they use against the French over, and over again. You attack an outpost, but you squeeze it, but don't capture it because what you really want is the relief force. And this played out to a tee.

[00:41:16.65] They squeezed the Vietnamese-- our Vietnamese took a battalion in 113s starting them down the path, but what the Viet Minh didn't know-- those Vietnamese-- was that we, the 1st Cav, could move artillery by helicopter. And so before that relief column started down, we placed a battery of artillery about eight kilometers away. They never saw them coming because they came in at low altitude, and found a clearing to set up the cannons, and they were prepared.

[00:41:56.49] And then we had the Air Force on standby. And the moment they launched the ambush, we clobbered them. So that also left them-- they withdrew, and they had to take some casualties with them. So then the Cav started looking for them. And for two weeks, the 1st Brigade had the mission of going out, and seeing if they can find those units. They didn't find them. They did find a hospital. Captured some wounded people and so forth.

[00:42:34.59] So two weeks, they relieved the 1st Brigade with his 3rd Brigade. And we went out there with the mission of finding them. We had an area to cover, and we broke it down into company zones, three company zones. And then within that company zone, into platoon zones. So the platoons were running around, and we didn't find anything to speak of.

[00:43:06.49] Then we were just about due to rotate to let the other brigade in when Hal Moore called and said, well, we have some belief that there may be something along this ridgeline. We picked up some radio signals, or whatever. Not sure what is there if anything, but we want you go look in that area. So that's the start of the Battle of LZ X-ray.

[00:43:35.25] That afternoon, Hal Moore got the company commanders together in a chopper, and we flew over the area looking for a landing zone. And we were very careful. We flew one direction, found what became LZ X-ray. But we came back a different way, so they wouldn't think we were scouting that area. So then we had-- the following day, we went into the assault, into X-ray.

[00:44:07.10] And the mission was to land, secure the landing zone. And then the companies were going to break out in different directions. So I had to search over there, and B Company was going this way, and C Company was going that way. And that was the plan at the time we landed. It took us a long time. We only had eight choppers that could carry six guys. And so just for my company, it took three trips for those eight choppers. And I was the second company, and B Company was the first company.

[00:44:47.25] One of the salient things that saved us all was that B Company, when they landed-- shortly after they landed, they captured this North Vietnamese soldier who was meandering around lost. And we had a Vietnamese interpreter with us.

[00:45:07.81] And we queried him. And he said, what are you doing? He said, well, I'm lost. I got separated from my unit. He said, oh yeah, well, where's your unit? And he said, it's right up there. What's your unit? He pointed to the ridgeline. We're at the base of the ridgeline. He says, I'm from such and such regiment. And he says, oh yeah, well, and where are they? Well, there's are little way up there on the side of that mountain. And he said, well, what else is there? He said, well, there's another regiment over that way.

[00:45:42.11] And Hal Moore instantly realized the survival of this battalion depends on us holding this landing zone. The whole thing about going out, finding them, we just found them. We've got to hang on to this landing zone because this is where we're going to get resupplied, and whatever, and our wounded. And we've got a big time fight coming on. It took the NVA maybe two hours to finally start coming off that hill. By that time, my company had landed. And I was holding the section closest to the ridge initially.

[00:46:30.27] And the enemy came down in strength. And the first big fights were on the left flank of my company. B Company had landed already, they were here. And my company was here to the left, and the ridge was here. And the enemy was coming down, and they were crossing my company. And we were killing a lot of them and then going over in front of B Company. And initially, it was like they were trying to get to over here somewhere. They seemed to not pay us a lot of attention even though we were shooting them up.

[00:47:15.51] That changed. Then they started coming at us. The first day-- I'll tell you about my actions. And as the platoons came in, because it took three lifts, the one platoon came in. I was with the first platoon to come in, I led the platoon. I reported to Hal Moore, he told me where to go. I led the platoon down to that area close to the mountain. I said, you guys deploy here. Then I ran back to the landing zone, waited for the next platoon. Took them, put them to the left of that.

[00:47:59.39] And then my third platoon, which was the 2nd Platoon, Joe Marm's platoon. And the fight started. C Company hadn't arrived yet when the fight started. By the time I got to the third platoon, and got them-- the third platoon to land, and got them in place, I ran back to what I thought was the center of the company, and John Herren is lying on the ground with his command group.

[00:48:33.57] And John looks at me and says, hey, you better get down. You're going to get shot. I said, good idea. So I got down. But then I saw a platoon sergeant of a platoon, and I said,

where's Lieutenant Taft? Who is the platoon leader? He says, Sir, the platoon leader is dead. I said, dead? Where is he? Well, Sir, I think he's in the creek bed, which was about 30 meters in front of us. But this time, the guys had stopped running across, and they were coming at us.

[00:49:10.42] And I told my Soldiers as Hal Moore had, that we aren't going to leave anyone behind. Now, as I told you my mantra is move to the sound of the guns. But it's also-- my feeling was, I have to establish my credentials with these Soldiers. I've been there a month as company commander, we hadn't had any fights. I think they were glad that I became the company commander because they knew I'd been there before, and had some experience, but they had-- I had to prove myself.

[00:49:49.59] So when they told me that the lieutenant was dead out there, I thought, I'm going to go get him. And myself, and my commo sergeant, under fire, went out to the creek bed. We got to the creek bed, found the lieutenant. But then there was another Soldier in the creek bed that had been left behind, and he was wounded and alive. Now, if I had been rational, I'd have picked up that Soldier and brought him back. But I didn't do it that way.

[00:50:25.93] In my mind, I had time to pick up the lieutenant, so I brought the lieutenant's body back. And then I went back out to get the guy that was alive. While I was out there the second time, they were throwing hand grenades at me, and they were going off. The creek bed is here, and there was black powder explosions. The hand grenades were filled with black powder, and these black puffs were going off on the edge of the creek bed as I was low-crawling out with this wounded Soldier.

[00:50:58.66] The wounded soldier lived. We got him back, got him to the station. And he survived. Then in the meantime, the platoon from B Company that became the separated platoon-- had become separated. And it was like four o'clock in the afternoon. Hal Moore order us to assault-- my company and B Company-- to try and get the platoon back. Well, the biggest glitch of the battle, as far as I was concerned, was that there was one frequency for artillery support.

[00:51:52.60] We each had FOs, each of the rifle companies, but there was only one radio frequency. So the B Company forward observer had captured that frequency. He was calling fire missions. When my guy tried to call fire missions, they said, get off the air. We've got-- So when I launched my assault, I'd had no artillery prep.

[00:52:20.52] And before the assault, I got my company together-- parts of them, the parts that could make it, in the creek bed. And I gave him a pep talk about these are your friends out there, your buddies. You guys have been together for two years now, you and the B Company guys, and et cetera. And we've going to go get them. You guys ready for that? Garryowen! Let's go! and all this. And I personally led the assault. I got up with my command group said, follow me. And I was the first guy out.

[00:52:59.93] I have lifelong regrets about that. I went about 50 meters when a machine gun opened up. It killed my FO, his radio operator, and my commo sergeant. All died. Boom, boom, boom. Myself and my other radio operator who was standing behind me, named John Clark

survived. I had to roll the-- this guy had become a friend of mine, Jack Gell. I had rolled him over to take the radio off his back, looked around, grabbed a PFC said, come over here. You're my radio operator. Put the radio on him.

[00:53:59.79] And then I called Moore and said, we can't go. We're not going to make it. We're losing Soldiers and I haven't had any artillery support. He said, OK, we're going to pull back to the creek bed. I decided that to come back I need a cover or concealment. Concealment. Those are technical terms in the military. I called for a smoke mission to fire. To get artillery fire eventually, I had to go on the battalion command net, and call the battalion S-3, and say I'm the king. Get artillery fire. You guys have got to fix this.

[00:54:45.56] And he had a fire support coordinator with him, and they did fix it. And so I called for smoke to conceal our movement back. Well, they called back to the battalion and said, we don't have smoke. All we have is WP, white phosphorus. I don't know how much you know about white phosphorus, but white phosphorus is a most volatile chemical. The chemical formula of white phosphorus is four molecules of oxygen, and one of phosphorus. It burns without oxygen, it burns by itself. If you put on your skin is going to keep on burning all the way through. If you put it in water, it's going to burn in the water.

[00:55:34.91] Anyway, Hal Moore, says fire, but he didn't know where I'd call that. And I had called it right as-- the smoke it's not casualty producing. The white phosphorus-- it came out, and I thought I'd killed my Soldiers. I was like, Christ what have I done? And not a single Soldier was hurt. But then I said-- I told them to pull back. I stayed out there. I stayed out with my radio operator. I was going to be out there until the last GI got back to the trench. And then I came back.

[00:56:21.62] One of the things-- I have a lecture I give on combat leadership, you know. I taught leadership at West Point for three years. I have a graduate degree in social psych. The study of leadership, and whatever, has been a major part of my life. But the-- if my intent was to prove to the Soldier that I was worthy, that battle did it. And to this day-- this jacket was given to me by the Soldiers. I have more stuff that has been given to me 20 years later. I have a plaque like this that says, Tony Nadal whatever, brave commander, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, that they gave me.

[00:57:06.56] I have a gold and gray bayonet. The guy sends me-- Mexican-American from LA-- sends me these sweet rolls. Every winter I get a pack of pecans from another guy. But for 35 years, I've been running a reunion. As far as I know, this is the only-- the guys who fought at LZ X-ray in the 1/7th Cav, we get together every year. And I run it, I organize it. And we have a really tight relationship. I mean I get phone calls about marriages, and whatever. And if you go on the internet, there's always pictures of my Soldiers, et cetera.

[00:57:59.07] RAMON NADAL: Well, you know, let me rephrase that. In terms of-- it was both a worst day, and the best day. It was a best day because I established a reputation with my Soldiers. I never had a problem with Soldiers in A Company thereafter. They trusted me or I wouldn't have this jacket. They still do to this day.

[00:58:39.56] RAMON NADAL: The worst day probably was when I was the-- after six months, I became the S-3 of the 2nd of the 7th Cav. And we had big battles in Bong Son. That's the second major battle area that I was in. I went there for about two months. And we had a company that was in the middle of a cemetery, and they were stuck. And we couldn't-- they were under fire, and whatever. And we got artillery and their support to come in after them, but eventually another company had to come in from the other side and help them. But they took a lot of casualties.

[00:59:32.83] And that probably was my worst day, when I was the S-3 of 2/7th Cav.

[00:59:45.62] RAMON NADAL: I told you I march to my own drummer. So I'm on the faculty at West Point. We came back from Vietnam, went to graduate school, got a degree in social psych, and went to the faculty at West Point. The summer-- I decided that between my-- before the start of my third year, I wanted to go

[01:00:15.46] back to Vietnam. And so I went to see my boss, the department-- the commander-- the professor-in-chief. And he said, you want to do what? I said, I want to go back to Vietnam. He said, well, how are you going to get there? I said, well, Sir, we could do a study group. He said, we don't have any money for that. I said, oh well, Sir, if I get the money, can I go back to Vietnam?

[01:00:47.97] He said, well, we have you assigned to Camp Buckner, you're going to train Cadets this summer. I said, but if I get the money, can I go? He said, I guess. So I recruited another guy. Then I wrote up a proposal that goes back to something you asked earlier about the allies. My proposal was to go to Vietnam, and visit the four allied units, Koreans, Australians, New Zealanders, Thais, and Filipinos-- five-- and sort of describe what they were doing.

[01:01:24.08] And so I wrote that up. And then I recruited another guy, as I said. And then I went to the Pentagon. I had never been there. I walked in the Pentagon, I'm walking down the hallway, and I see a door that says AARPA, A-A-R-P-A. Well, I knew what that stood for. So I knock on the door, walk in, there's a major sitting behind a desk, gruff major-- or a lieutenant colonel, I guess he was.

[01:01:53.96] He looks up and says, what do you want? I said, well, Sir, I'm from the West Point faculty. I teach leadership up there, and I have a-- so, I used to teach in that department. I said, well, I have a proposal. I'd like to see if I could-- if you guys would fund it, to send a group of us to Vietnam to look at the allied forces. He said, that's interesting, no one's ever offered that before. He said, let me talk to my boss.

[01:02:20.69] So we're sitting outside. He comes back about an hour later, we have our travel orders. I go back to West Point. Sir, these are our travel orders. You said, if I had the money, I could go. What? So then West Point gets all excited, and they say, oh, you can't-- first of all, you're too junior. So they assign a lieutenant colonel to go with me. And then they put two other people in our group, which didn't bother us. But we did go.

[01:02:51.89] I spent about a week with the Aussies, a week with the Koreans, a few days with the Filipinos, a few days with the Thais. And with the Aussies I went out on a combat patrol with them. That was fun because it was just like being with an American rifle company. I visited all those units in Vietnam.

[01:03:18.72] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you write a report?

[01:03:20.13] RAMON NADAL: Oh, yeah. Big report.

[01:03:27.18] RAMON NADAL: Letters. The story of LZ X-ray became a big story in the US. And my wife knew I was in the 1/7th Cav. It was in the news. Joe Galloway was in the news. So I wrote her about what it was like, and what was going on.

[01:03:55.45] RAMON NADAL: June, I think it was. '66. No, there's nothing to talk about. I mean, this was early in the war. There weren't any people out there parading in the streets. I came home to go to graduate school. My father-in-law had become the professor of military science at Oklahoma State University. And because of that, when I went to Vietnam I settled my wife next to her family, which was Stillwater, Oklahoma.

[01:04:28.37] Now, I would have preferred to go to Duke or other more prestigious schools. I could have done it academically, but I'd already had my wife settled down there at Stillwater. There was a university there. So rather than moving again, I just decided to go to school there. But I became a presidential scholar, and inducted into Phi Kappa Phi, and whatever. So I did well in school there.

[01:04:55.94] I have to tell you another story. I came back, taught at West Point, then I was sent to Marine Corps Staff College. This is important story. While in the Marine Corps Staff College, on the schedule it showed that the chief of staff of the Army, General Westmoreland, was going to come speak to the Marine Corps officers at the staff college, which happens every year. All the service chiefs go around.

[01:05:29.74] I figured he would want to talk to the Army. There were five of us there, and I thought he'll probably want to talk to us in private. Sure enough, I wrote him a paper. A three-page paper that said the Army's leadership, its teaching, and practices are all screwed up. That was the basic message. And there are things we can do to make them better. Three days later, I got a phone call. The chief of staff of the Army wants to have lunch with you in his office.

[01:05:58.68] And present will be the assistant vice chief, the deputy chief of staff for personnel, the lieutenant general head of research and development, and one other guy. I forget who he was, and his exec. The exec by the way, had been a former teacher at the leadership department at West Point. And Westmoreland had gone to the Harvard Advanced Management Program. And I was writing about stuff I'd learned in school and I'd taught. And the study of leadership had become a sort of passion of mine.

[01:06:42.12] So I go to lunch with all these guys. As we discussed the various issues, finally General Westmoreland says, well Major, we just can't-- I agree with some of the stuff you have.

But we just can't operate on a three-piece-- piece of paper. This is your program, so if we want to make this happen, you're going to have to flesh this out, and whatever. He turns to General Forsyth, a peach of a man.

[01:07:14.26] In those days, there was a special little cell at the Pentagon called SAMVA, the Special Assistant for a Modern Volunteer Army. The reason for our little cell was that a few months earlier, the president, Nixon had said the Army's going to become a volunteer force. This little cell was to figure it out. Included in that the little cell was three Rhodes scholars: Pete Dawkins, John Sewell, and another one; Barry McCaffrey, myself, the drill sergeant of the year. I mean, this was about as good a group as the Army could put together, me excluded.

[01:07:56.99] And my job became to create-- you said we should do this, this, and this, tell us how to do it. I'm a major. I have a boss who I loved dearly, but he says-- he didn't know what the hell I was talking about either. He said go do it. I have blanket travel orders. I send myself to MIT for a two-week seminar. I send myself to Harvard for a two-week seminar, University of Michigan for a seminar. I visited leading professors in behavioral sciences all over the US.

[01:08:37.88] I went to a seminar-- lovely spot out in California, part of the USC system. Then I went to industry, I went to IBM, I went to whatever. What are you guys doing? And I learned, and I wrote this report. And it said several things. It said our leadership and structure in service schools sucks. There are things we can do to improve communications, and knowledge in the chain of command. There is something called organizational development in industry that we are not taking advantage of or know anything about, et cetera.

[01:09:29.79] And we need to update the Army in its leadership practice. Well, in addition to the fact that we're going to volunteer, the Army War College had just published a report called the Army Professionalism Study, where they interviewed chain of command. And they asked the captains, what do you think of the majors? And the captains said, the majors suck. And they asked the majors, what do you think of the captains? They said, well, they're too frivolous and-- So the chain of command did not like each other.

[01:10:12.02] The morale was not good, and Westmoreland heard this. And I think that was what made him receptive to my entreaties. I developed this series of seminars. At one of those meetings with all those generals, Westmoreland said, you know, you're too junior. However, so-- and we talked about the seminar. And he said, well, I need a guy who's a good war hero, well recognized to lead this effort. You do the work, but we have to have someone else.

[01:10:45.39] They called Hank Emerson who was known as a gunfighter, and whatever. He was head of Special Forces at the time. And I'm in General Forsythe's office when he calls him and says, Hank, this is George Forsythe. I just want to tell you the chief of staff is going to assign you a new mission, whatever. And I'm sending this major down to tell you what it is. Emerson says, OK. I go down there, and I'm reporting to Emerson.

[01:11:16.77] And I explained to him of the seminar teams I've got going to go all over the world. And I'm going to write this seminar, and whatever. And he says-- he looks at me and says, if you think I'm going to go-- this is a quote, if you think I'm going to go and tell generals how to

lead, you're full of shit. I said, well, Sir, I'll go back, and tell the chief of staff you don't want to participate. Sit down! And by the end of it, I had 12 teams.

[01:11:53.38] I write the seminar, and we get really good folks. The teams go out, and these letters of congratulations are coming in to Emerson. You've created this great program, all this stuff, and so forth. And at the end of it, I got a Meritorious Service Medal from him, then I leave there. That was-- in terms of doing it my own way or stirring up the Army, that probably was the most significant thing I did.

[01:12:32.63] We changed the leadership instruction of the Army. We created several new programs, but the most important of the programs was something called organizational effectiveness. I am the father, I wrote the manual. If it wasn't for me, they wouldn't have created a school of Fort Ord. Fort Ord because Hal Moore, then major general, was commanding Fort Ord, and I went to see him using my personal credentials with him.

[01:13:02.95] I said, Sir, we need to have a school to train people in organizational development, which we called OE in the Army, organizational effectiveness. He agreed. He said, OK, we can do it here. And I told him the chief of staff was very interested in this, and it'd be a good-- you'll get a lot of credit for it. And so we created that school.

[01:13:27.57] We trained over 400, I think-- maybe not quite that-- it's too high, maybe 300. The school lasted for 15 years, the program lasted through four chiefs of staff. Then the fifth chief of staff, a guy named Wickham, was a dumbass, canceled it. So it no longer exists.

[01:13:50.91] MARK FRANKLIN: But that did a lot to change the culture of the Army.

[01:13:53.19] RAMON NADAL: It did help change the culture of the Army. And those kids who were trained at Fort Ord, most of them got out of the Army and made a lot of money in corporations. After that I went to Germany, commanded a battalion. General Rogers-- I got one more story to tell.

[01:14:17.31] When I was teaching at West Point, the commandant was Bernie Rogers. Rhodes scholar, super smart guy. He told my boss, the department chair, I want a study done on the plebe system. Well, as a cadet, I'd hated the plebe system. And fortuitously, I was the chief of research in the department. And so I got tasked to do a thorough study of the plebe system.

[01:14:53.16] So I was the boss for the faculty members of the department, all of us trained in behavioral science. We wrote a report that demolished the plebe system. It said, first of all, there's nothing that we do with plebes that you could replicate in the Army without getting court martialed. You're not going to yell at people like that. We're not going to do the kind of abusive behavior. You're not going to put people under the table. You're not going to deprive them of food. Those are all things we do here that are not acceptable.

[01:15:30.09] Secondly, the department of physical education had data that shows that bracing, which we had to do, walk around with our necks in, is affecting the necks of some cadets who are getting something called brace palsy. And it went on like that.

[01:15:50.31] Rogers took the report, got all the people the plebe tactical department together in the auditorium, and said, OK, here's a report written by BS&L. If you guys-- I want each of you to read it. And this is where we're going to go. And if you guys don't like it, get out. And that was the birth of the changes. There is no plebe system akin--

[01:16:20.64] MARK FRANKLIN: To what you went through?

[01:16:22.75] RAMON NADAL: Now it's a positive leadership model. There's two things I'm proudest of-- well, there's three things. I'm very proud of my service at X-ray, I'm very proud of the changes I made to leadership, and the creation of the OE, and then the plebe system at West Point.

[01:16:52.05] RAMON NADAL: One lesson is I went back with ABC News. Hal Moore, and I, and John Herron, and George--

[01:17:04.77] MARK FRANKLIN: --Forsythe.

[01:17:06.24] RAMON NADAL: Yeah. We went back and we met with the guys who we fought against. And I spent 10 days there and I made a friend of Colonel Coo, I think is his name. Anyway, he was tall for a Vietnamese, big guy. He'd been down there four years. Left Saigon, walked down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He had fought at Dien Bien Phu as a sergeant.

[01:17:35.06] He was now a captain. Never went home. Occasional letter from his wife, the letters had to be walked up the trail and back down, whatever. Wounded four times. And he didn't give a rat's ass about communism or Marxism. He was there to unite his country.

[01:18:03.43] The Vietnamese have been divided historically at least four times. The Chinese had invaded them three times. The French came and took them over. The Japanese came and took them over. Then the Americans came and tried to take them over. And if we'd just left them alone, they would have reunited. They would have been under the Communist regime.

[01:18:31.02] But one of the prices of empire is historically empires always fight along the periphery of their border. The British Empire was in India, China, and all those places trying to maintain that line. We took over the British empire's role. So now we fight in all those places trying to maintain our influence. But people, they've got a choice. And you saw at the end of the war, much as you saw in-- and we're seeing just now in Afghanistan-- they don't necessarily want to be under our flag.

[01:19:23.21] RAMON NADAL: Initially, I didn't like it because I saw it as a sort of a gash in the side of the mountain-- or of the place there. And I liked it a little better once they put the statue up. But I've been there numerous times and I always go to panel E-3. And there's all my guys, and I cry. And I think it probably has a more emotional pull than any other monument in Washington, D.C.

[01:20:09.31] I don't cry at the Washington Memorial, or the Lincoln Memorial. I cry at that memorial because I see Jack Gell's name up there and another forward observer, FO, that was

killed later on in Bong Son. I was expensive for FOs because I was always in the middle of the fight, and they were always right next to me.