

**CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
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INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

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D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

D: Today is Thursday, April 17, 2008 and I am here with Armando Rodriguez to begin our third day of discussions about his life. We left off last time with events surrounding his time at the Matanzas Seminary but before we go into his graduation from Seminary as well as his first assignment and ordination. I'd like to talk a little bit about some people and events that he would like to talk about. One is a missionary by the name of Garfield Evans. Armando, can you tell us about your relationship with him?

R: Yes. Garfield Evans was a very nice and very active missionary in the *Holguín* area. He founded the *Elena Clinic* in *Holguín*. That was very nice situation because it helped the rural people from the area that were sick. They provided not only medical assistance but also free medicine and this was very good work. But, more than that, he founded and built about ten more chapels in the rural area of *Holguín* and he also helped a lot of young people from different rural areas. He helped to study human beings and in many other ways in their life. He was a very important leader in our church there in *Oriente*.

D: Do you remember the first time you met him and what kind of interaction you had with him?

R: We met him the time I visited my girlfriend in *Holguín*. I knew his work, of course, it was not only Methodist, but the clinic project was an interdenominational project. The father of my future wife was Pastor Juaquín Barríos and he was the treasurer of the clinic.

D: Was that while you were in seminary or before you decided to go to seminary?

R: No, this was during my time in the seminary.

D: So that was the first time that you met him?

R: Yes.

D: Now, there are some other people that we would like to talk about and your relationship with them also. I will name them very briefly then we can discuss them as we go: John Stroud, Eulalia Cook, Victor Rankin, Sada Fernandez, Leora Shank, and Francis Gaby.

R: We spoke a little bit about Garfield Evans, but John Stroud was another very active missionary. He was a missionary in China and when the door was closed there he came to Cuba.

D: That would have been about 1949 right?

R: Yes. He did a great job for the Cuban church. He was the founder of *Escuela Agrícola Industrial* in *Preston, Oriente*. That was very nice and a very good agricultural school where there was about forty or fifty young people, men and women, coming from the mountains in *Oriente* and many other rural areas, especially in *Oriente* but also in other provinces. They studied in a very scientific way how to work the land, how to manage a farm, and how to do everything on the farm. There was a very important professor, Van Hermann, and he was a specialist on how to graft plants and he did that for all the land owners around the school. He made a very, very important contribution to the agricultural situation in *Oriente*.

D: Were most of the teachers Americans?

R: Yes, some of the teachers were American. Dr. Richard Milk was the president and there were other American missionaries as teachers and Nicment and also Elizabeth Beal was the nurse in the place and, also, there were other Cuban professors like Humberto Diaz de Arce, a chemistry professor.

D: Was this based in *Holguín*?

R: Yes, in the northern area of *Holguín*.

D: How many teachers and students were there?

R: There were about ten or twelve teachers and the students maybe a group of more than thirty, but there were fifty or seventy that graduated from there. One very special blessing was that many of the students also became Methodist pastors because they had very good missionary work at the school and they preached there and we had different Cuban pastors that came from the agricultural school. The names of two of the pastors are Gerardo Martínez, he was here in Florida and he did a wonderful job in the Hispanic community, and Emilío Gonzalez. They were probably the best known Cuban pastors that initiated their studies in the agricultural school.

D: Did they live on campus?

R: They lived there, yes. Then also there were other very special missionaries that I had contact with. Victor Rankin was the pastor at *San Pablo* United Methodist Church in *Camagüey*. He was the superintendent and a very good leader of all the churches in Cuba and there were many other missionaries. For example, Carl B. Stuart was the treasurer of the mission board in Cuba and he was pastor of *Marianau* church in the college and he was the district superintendent in *Havana* and *Oriente*. He spent his life doing good work in Cuba. Also, there are four American women missionaries that did a great job. Every one of them founded *Central Rural Methodista*, Methodist Rural Center. Elaria Cook founded the rural center in *Baguanos*. Sada Fernandez founded the *Omaja* rural center in *Oriente*, Leora Shank founded a rural center in *Santa Rosa* in

the *Matanzas* province, and Francis Gaby founded the rural center *Herradura Pinar del Rio*. This was very, very nice work. They visited the region by horse during the rainy season and in good weather. Some of them had clinical facilities for the sick people in the place and they made a wonderful contribution to the development of the Methodist Church in Cuba.

D: Would you say that all of this took place between 1950 and 1959?

R: Yes, in my opinion, the development of the United Methodist Church in Cuba had high points and low points. In the first decade from 1900 to 1910, the Methodist Church was the fastest growing church in Cuba and they had a lot of Cuban preachers. But, as I think, in the end of the decade, there was some misunderstanding between the group of missionaries and the Cuban preachers and many of them left the Methodist Church. For example, Manuel Moreno became an Episcopalian pastor in *Morón* and Nogales became a government teacher. In my opinion, at that time, the Methodist work in Cuba was low after 1910.

D: Do you think this was a disagreement or misunderstanding with the American officials that were representing the Florida Methodist Conference?

R: Yes, I would say the representatives of the mission board of the Methodist Church in New York.

D: So the missionaries were Cuban or were they American?

R: All these missionaries were American. And, of course, they liked to do the best in every way, but they did not understand at all the Cuban philosophy, the Cuban way of life.

D: So, if I understand correctly, the missionary arms were all directed out of New York, while the Florida Methodist Conference was different?

R: Yes. This was the relationship between the missionaries and the Board of Missions. At the same time, the Bishop of Florida was the Bishop of Cuba. But really, the Bishop could not do many things because it was the Board of Missions who made the decision about missionary activities.

D: So the missionary activity was out of the hands of the Florida Methodist Conference?

R: Yes. Of course, the Bishop went to Cuba for the annual conference and he made the appointment but, in my opinion, because I was not born at that time, my interpretation of the history is that the Board of Missions told the Bishop from Florida where the missionary must go and the Bishop did what they said. After that, the Church was growing little by little but at the end of the 1920s there was an economic recession in the state and the Board of Missions could not lend the same amount of support to work in Cuba and then the work of the Methodist went down. But, following the recession, they grew little by little and then in the 1940s there were many good signs in the work. For example, in 1946 the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church, and one year after the Episcopalian Church, united efforts and founded the *Seminario Evangelico de Teologia de Matanzas*, the *Matanzas* United Seminary. And this was, of course, a

very great contribution to the church in Cuba because, before that, the young people who wished to become a Methodist pastor had some seminary training in the Candler College in Havana. The missionaries there gave the training but, of course, this was not a specific seminary for that purpose only, and then the seminary *Matanzas* earned great respect. We had not only Cuban students, but we had students from *Santo Domingo, Colombia, Panama*, and many other countries in the Caribbean and South America.

Also, in that decade, the *Consejo de Iglesias Evangélica de Cuba* was founded, which was an international organization for the majority of the Protestant churches working in Cuba. It also made a great contribution to the life of, not only the Methodist Church, but all the Protestant churches in Cuba. Also, in the 1940s the work from the Women's Societies in the Board of Missions in New York began to start the *Centros Rurales Metodistas*, the task of Elalia Cook, Sara Fernandez, Leora Shank, Francis Gaby, and many other Methodist women's missionary work. They made a tremendous contribution because they not only preached the Gospel but also had clinics for sick people and established a literacy program. Frank Laubach was in Cuba in the 40s and he taught many Evangelical, Protestant leaders how to teach people who were illiterate and this contributed greatly to the culture and general life of Cuba.

The 1940s was a very important period of growth for the church and the youth work began also at that time in the Methodist Church. There was one missionary, S. A. Neblett, that worked in Cuba for many years, from maybe 1905 until 1946, and he was a good educator and he worked very hard with the Christian education program training Sunday school teachers and leaders from the local church. He was one of the more important leaders in the foundation of the *Matanzas* seminary and the Cuban Council of Churches. Luís día DeArce, my first pastor in *Cienfuegos* was the successor of Mr. Neblett in Christian education for the United Methodist Church in Cuba and he, with some ladies did great youth work and organized the youth work in Cuba in the local churches. Reverend John Stroud founded in the area of *Manicaragua*, in the central *Las Villa* Province, a large youth camp and it was a very, very good place to train young people. In the beginning of the 1950s decade I was converted in *Cienfuegos*. My conversion was very interesting because there was not an evangelical service and there was no special calling for people to accept Christ as the Savior. There was a very informal youth service that I participated in and this had a great impact on my life because the young people spoke about their own experience, how they struggled with temptation in their daily life, and I felt, in a very special way, that God was working in my heart and changing all my life. Nobody made a calling, but I decided to go in front of the group and say to them what I was experiencing at that moment. This was a very, very experience for me because God changed my life completely from this moment.

D: This was 1950 and you were 20 years old?

R: Yes, 1950 and I was 20 years old.

D: At this point, maybe we can go back to your last few days of seminary and then your expectations about graduation. You were married?

R: Yes.

D: What was graduation from seminary like? Did you have a graduation ceremony?

R: I remember that this was a very special occasion in my life and I finished my studies, I learned a lot in my seminary life, but, especially, I had a lot of dreams and ideas for my ministry and my humble contribution to the future of Cuba. Then, this was at the end of May 1957, the next month in June we had the annual conference and Bishop John Branscomb, the Bishop from Florida, he appointed me to *Báguano* churches. That was a very challenging appointment because *Báguano* was, as I thought, one of the rural centers for the Methodists. Elalia Cook did a great job there in that area and founded *Parroquia Mayor*. I don't know how we say this in English, Big Parrish. There were two organized congregations and more than ten missionary points around *Báguano*. And, in that year, she was appointed as a professor in the *Matanzas* seminary to teach rural work.

D: Where was your Parrish?

R: My Parrish was here in the *Oriente* in the North of *Holguín*.

D: So the way I understand it you had a regular Parrish with people who came to church every Sunday but you also had responsibility for outlying districts as well, would that be correct?

R: Not at that time. At that time I was appointed as Pastor and we had a large Parrish with two other women missionaries that were responsible for the outlying areas. Their names were Virginia Chapman from Sanford, Florida and Betty Campbell from Texas. This was a very difficult time for me because there was very complex and heavy work in that congregation and missionary community work. And, of course, my problem was that I was a humble national Pastor and I was working with two American women missionaries. They had cars to move from one place to another, they had a lot of resources from the Board of Missions, and the humble pastor was alone and with not many resources. (laughter) We had, at that time, our first child, Alidita. She was four months old when we went to *Báguano* and we didn't have a home to live in. From July to September, my wife, my daughter, and I lived in one room in the school that we had in *Báguano*. But, in September, when the class began, we moved to a little room in the *Casa de la Amístad*, where the missionaries and two teachers lived.

After that I was moved to *Tácajo*, the other location where I was pastor. In *Tácajo*, in the same year when I lived in *Báguanos* in the room of the school, I lived in three other places, very humble, in *Tácajo*. My district superintendent was Dr. Carl D. Stuart and he had the offering to build my parsonage that I built in *Tácajo*, together with the sanctuary. This was a very personal, difficult year for my wife and myself. And, more than that, of course, there was the political situation in *Oriente*, where there was the main struggle against the Batista government and, even when we were a little far from the *Sierra Maestra* mountains where Fidel was. Of course, there were some political problems in all these areas and there were some of the members of my congregation that united with the guerillas and I tried to minister to them. I went to the camp where they were and there were other very, very hard times. On one occasion, I and the other pastor in *Alcalá*, Antonio Ruiz, were having a service in a guerilla camp and in the middle of the service came the news that a very big army force from the Batista government was coming to the

place. This was a very hard moment. The rebels told us, “Well, sorry we need to finish the service and we need to go to our places.” And then, the other pastor, Antonio Ruiz, and I we began to walk to the Methodist Church in *Alcalá*, waiting for the Batista army to come any moment and kill us but, thanks be to God, when this big army, the Chief was Sosa Blanco, a person with a bad reputation because he killed a lot of innocent people in *Oriente*, he took the way to *Mayarí* and not the way to *Banes* and *Antilla*, in the west where we were. God used this reality for our salvation.

D: When you went to these places did you have to stay overnight sometimes?

R: No. We went within three or four kilometers to work and then we came back.

D: So when you did your services, where did you do your services? Did you have a church specifically that you went to or did you go to various places?

R: No, we went to the places where there were guerilla camps.

D: O.K., but normally, for your normal Sunday service, did you have a normal Sunday church?

R: Of course, we had four or five services every Sunday in different places. I was the pastor of the *Báguanos* congregation where the missionaries lived, but they were in charge of the missionary places around *Báguanos* and I was pastor of the *Tácajo* congregation, *La Trocha*, and two or three other missions. The missionaries had the services in the other missions.

D: Just so we get our context correct here, Castro returned in '56 is that correct?

R: Yes, in December of '56 and escaped into the *Sierra Maestra*.

D: And then by 1957, he built his movement into a real threat to the Batista regime and you were always worried that the regime may think that you were support that process at the time?

R: Of course; and in my work region we had other special situations. In *Báguano*, there was an army barracks for the Batista army. In *Tácajo*, we did not have army barracks because they left for other places. In *Tácajo*, where I was living at the time, we had easy communication and go and come with the guerillas, but in *Báguano* it was different because there were Batista barracks there. Then in *Báguano*, we had two Batista soldiers with their arms that came every Sunday to the service.

D: I'm sure you would have obviously had soldiers and that would have been a very, very difficult situation. How were sermons affected by the situation? Did you ever think about subject matter, because you can't always escape those issues in sermons?

R: Well, God was very nice to me and he guided me in every step of my life and every sermon and Bible story in my ministry. I was focused on the salvation and spiritual help that all Cubans needed no matter what political side they were on. And also, we preached about the love of God, the need to work for a better future for Cuba, and peace and understanding between all the

people. Maybe, since I had the experience during the time I was a member of the Orthodox Party, God was preparing me at that time for the beginning of this time. But, of course, it is a very, very difficult situation. For example, not all of the people understood us. There was a very difficult occasion in my life when I was very close to death. For example, at that time there was no normal communication between these places and the city of *Holguín* where my father-in-law lived and there was not much food in my town. I needed to go to *Holguín* to buy food for my wife and daughter and on one occasion, the bad people from the Batista military in *Holguín* went to my father-in-law's house looking for me because they knew that I was in contact with the guerillas. Then, on that occasion, this visit was made for one special soldier that the people called *Mano Negra*, Black Hand. Because the people said that when they had a person in jail he put his hand, with one black glove, and he strangled the person and this person was looking for me. Thanks be to God I was not there. I was surprised by that and I never went to *Holguín*.

I had another very hard experience during the moment when my father-in-law was moving from one house to another house in *Holguín* and I went to *Holguín* with my jeep to help him move. Then I made a different trip from one house to the other house but it was necessary for me to go through one street where the chief of police for Batista was living. I made two or three trips without problems. The guards for the chief of police were there but there was not a problem. But, on one other trip, I suppose that the leader of the Batista police was there and the guards thought that I would kill him and they stopped me with guns in their hands. I was very nervous and they asked me questions and looked in my jeep.

D: Do you think they knew who you were? Did they have any idea who you were?

R: No.

D: They just recognized your jeep?

R: Yes, they saw the same person passing back and forth many times down the street and when they saw that I was a good person they told me, "Well, you can go. We will not kill you."

D: That brings me to another question to follow up from your incident. Do you think the Batista people knew you or that you were part of the Orthodox Party and that you were likely to be a collaborator with the guerillas or sympathetic with the guerillas? Would they have known about your activity with Chibbas?

R: Maybe they had some information about my life but, of course, I was only in my pastoral duty and the problem was they knew that there were some Methodist members of my church that were guerillas. Why? Because, in *Tácajo* the difficult situation was there was not any food in any store. Then, some mother with little children came to our home asking us if we could give them some food, but we had little food at that time for my wife, my first child, and myself, and I prayed to God, "Oh God what can we do in this situation." And then God guided me to a new adventure. I met another person in the community, he was not Methodist he was a friend, but he had a truck and I spoke with him and asked him to go with me to visit the land owners of the area because there were many agricultural products that they could not sell because there was not any communication at that time. And then, he and I went to every land owner and explained to them

that they cannot sell their product and that the people in the area were hungry and we asked them to give us their product, the agricultural product, and we would distribute it in the church. That way the people would not go to take their products by themselves. This was a very, very great experience.

D: Were the big land owners cooperative?

R: All of them were very cooperative and not only bananas and plantains and other agricultural products. I went to the one *lechería*, farm for milk, and they had six or seven hundred liters of milk every day that they could not send to the town to sell and they agreed to give me four or five hundred liters of milk every day to distribute to the families with children. This was for many months at that time. But, we had a surprise on one occasion. One day, in the evening, a big army of Batista came in front of my home with tanks and guns, and they stayed in *Tácajo*. This was made at maybe five or six in the evening. Of course, this had a great impact on the community because there were many people that were in contact with the guerilla camps. Immediately after that occasion, all the men in the community left their homes and went to the mountains out of fear of the Batista army. What happened, more or less, around nine o'clock that night, I received a telephone call asking me to go to the chief of this army and this was not a good invitation.

D: He wanted to interrogate you about what you had been doing?

R: Interrogate me and nothing more. I asked if . . .

D: They thought you were supplying the guerillas?

R: No, they asked me only to come and see them and I was thinking why. Then I asked some questions by telephone:

“Oh, when can we go, right now or maybe tomorrow?”

“No, no, no, right now.”

“Can I go with my own jeep?”

And they said, “Yes, yes we can go.”

“Where will I park?”

“You can park here in any place”

And this made me a little more confident. Then I went to the house of a family in the where they met. But, what happened? The father of this house was the chief of the revolutionary people of the town, but they did not know that.

D: I don't understand, the call you received to go to a certain place to speak to the Batista police officer, when you went to that house, in actuality, it was a guerilla leader?

R: Not the leader of the people who were in the mountains in the guerilla camps, but the leader of the people who were cooperating in the community, in Tacajo.

D: So this person was actually sympathetic with the guerillas and the Captain of the Batista was visiting in his home.

R: Of course, the Captain, the commander of this Batista army they did not know that and they had their meeting, the Captain, the Lieutenants, and all the groups. Then I went and I was surprised about how we were having this meeting in this house, but the atmosphere was very happy and they were speaking freely. I asked, "What do you want with me?" Then the Captain told me,

"Oh Pastor, I was educated in Candler College of the Methodist Church in *Havana* and I am the commander of this army corps, but we want to know how we can finish this struggle. This is not good for any body because, you can see, I am very far from my family in *Havana*."

"Ok, but what do you want with me?"

And he explained to me,

"Well, I knew that the food situation here is very bad. The people do not have anything to eat. And I asked who will be the best person to put in charge of large distribution of food here and all the people told me that you were the person."

And I said, "Oh yes, I am doing my best in a very little way in my church and I will agree to help you in some way, but I have some conditions."

And asked, surprised, "What conditions?"

And I told him,

"Well, as you know, we are in a very difficult struggle here and I am a pastor and I go all around this place with people from one side or the other, but I normally go in with white dresses and my jeep has a white flag, telling all people that I am pastor and I am not in connection with one side or the other and I would like to do the same in the future."

And he said, "What more?"

I stated, "I suppose that your army will be traveling by foot around this region and maybe they will see me in the jeep and they will ask me to bring them somewhere and I do not like that, Captain, because I like to be alone with my white dresses"

And he stated, “Oh yes, I agree. Nobody in my army will stop and disturb you with your distribution.”

“I have other conditions”

“What more?”

“I am sure that you will go to the administrator in the sugar mill here and ask him for food, but I would prefer that you do this by yourself and, after that, you will tell me where I need to go to find the food and I will do it.”

“Oh yes, we can work in that way.”

And then they offered me coffee and we were talking in a very free way and not of the political situation, but many happy things. But, at the time, my poor wife was alone in my home and this went on until 11:00 or 11:30 at night and she and the neighbor thought that I was in prison and she was very nervous. Then, the neighbor there and the leader of the church was thinking about what they could do, if they could call the Methodist leader in *Havana*, and what they could do in my favor. But, at that moment, I came in my jeep with a very happy face and they said, “Oh Armando, what happened?” And I explained to them everything and they were relieved.

D: So do you think this was unusual in all of the outlying areas? Do you think Batista’s military had crossed over, similar to this situation? Do you think that there was so much disenchantment in the military that many of the leaders and the officers were already beginning to go the other direction, to favor the guerillas?

R: I would not say favor the guerillas, but they wanted to have an agreement and solution for the big problems. And, of course, thanks be to God, this was not Sosa Blanco or another of the bad commanders in the Batista army. He studied in a Methodist school . . .

D: So you can’t really say that he was in favor of the guerillas, he was just trying in good faith to ameliorate the problems of the people and was sophisticated enough to understand that the poverty might result in more and more people becoming disaffected from the government and joining the guerillas? He was trying to prevent that in other words?

R: Yes, and he said to me that he did not like to be involved in any of that kind of work and, for that reason, he asked for somebody to do it.

D: I see. So, what other duties, besides what you were already doing, did this add for you? Did he just give you more supplies, make it possible for you to get even more food?

R: Yes, more and more food. Even in the end, before January 1, 1959, when the war finished. The week before that, the land owner gave me two cows every week for distribution. We distributed not only food and milk, but also meat and this was a very good thing.

D: Did you have a butcher that you worked with?

R: Of course, almost all the people made contributions and they also received some provisions that they needed. We had pretty good cooperation from everyone.

D: Now were you at these two different churches simultaneously or one and then another?

R: Simultaneously. We had the main service at different times on Sunday and during the week.

D: Can you name those two congregations again?

R: The first one was *Báguano*, the biggest congregation, and the other was *Tácajo*, where I was living. The idea was that the two American missionaries lived in *Báguano* and I lived in *Tácajo*.

D: I see. So you were at both places at least one time a week probably?

R: Yes.

D: Ok, how many people were in each or both congregations would you say?

R: Well, I had these two congregations and three other missions and we had more than four hundred people in the services every week and in the Sunday school.

D: So four hundred in *Tácajo*?

R: All together. Then I had another experience and I admire my wife a lot because she paid a big price in the ministry. For example, another day I was visiting the land owners asking for food and, at that time, an *avioneta*, a little plane, came from the Batista army with guns. I needed to leave my jeep and go to the forest or they would have killed me because they knew that, in that area in that community, there were not modern cars. My jeep was ruined because they thought it was a guerilla car. The other very great, great experience was the 1st of January 1959. At this moment we knew that Batista and his military left *Havana*. But, also at that moment, the guerilla attacked the *Báguano* barracks. I was, of course, in *Tácajo* at my home. I built my own parsonage.

D: How many miles was it between the two?

R: About fifteen to twenty miles. Not very far. But, at that moment, I felt very, very bad. I was the pastor of the *Báguano* congregation and the guerillas attacked the barracks. There was fighting and my people, my congregation, in *Báguano* was in very great danger and I was very safe in *Tácajo*. This reality felt to me, very, very, very bad. I thought about what I would be preaching to this congregation the next Sunday when maybe some of them were dead and I am here without any problem. Then I went to my room, I knelt before my bed and I asked, "Oh God, guide me in what I can do at this moment." And immediately God put one idea in my mind. Of course, gas was very rare at that time, and for that reason, I rented a bicycle for one peso a month so I could visit the people without using my gas. And I took my bicycle and said to my wife, "I will go in the way of *Báguano*" without any explanation and then I left my home

for *Báguano*. But, halfway there, I saw one truck coming from the other side and I said, “Oh here is a bad situation,” because we didn’t have any communication at that time. But, maybe two hundred meters before we encountered, the truck took another way because the highway was destroyed. Then I followed the truck with my bicycle and, in about one kilometer, the truck went off the road and was stuck in the river. I stopped and asked, “What happened and what are you doing here?” Then, the driver, with a lady from my congregation, told me that his twelve-year-old brother was hit by a bullet in his shoulder and they were taking him to the little hospital in *Tácajo* without the presence of the army. And I said, “Wait here. I will go back to my house and get my jeep and we will come to bring your brother to the hospital.” It did not take me much time and I took them to the hospital in *Tácajo* and this was a great experience because all the people knew what had happened. They knew that there was a child that was hit by a bullet and that I brought him to the hospital. When I left the hospital, many people in the street stopped me and said, “Oh pastor, I have a little gas. Please take it.” This was a great experience. But, I thought, “Well, I will go back to the truck and ask the driver to go back to *Báguano* and bring the injured people and I will do the best I can do to bring them to the hospital without complications.” But, when I talked to the driver he told me, “Oh no pastor, you must go to *Báguano* because you are in the jeep and this will be better.” This was hard for me because I knew that this was a very dangerous situation. But I said, “Well God, I go in your name.” And then I went to *Báguano*, not through the main entrance, but through the rural area and I put my jeep behind some trees and walked to the church. On the way to the church, the leader of guerrillas, *El Teniente Roca*, the chief in the attack, he asked somebody to call me to him . . .

D: Did he know you?

R: No, but he asked and the people said, “Oh, the Methodist pastor is here,” and he said, “Please ask him to come here.” And then I went there and he told me, “Father,” he thought I was Catholic, “Father, I heard that you are the Methodist Father . . .” This was maybe 11:00 in the morning and all the Cubans knew that Batista left, but the struggle continued there. And he told me, “You know, Batista left the power and this army here does not want to finish the battle here and we would like to ask the Catholic priest in *Báguano* and you to go to the barracks and explain to the army there to finish this struggle.” I said, “Ok, I am not ready to take up any arms and be a part of the struggle, but anything I can do for peace I am ready to do it.” And he said, “Ok, wait here.”

But the Chief of the army in the *Holguín* barracks took a B-26 airplane to go to *Santo Domingo* with Trujillo and Batista. The army in *Báguano* asked for help in the struggle and they came first to *Báguano* and attacked the place before going to *Santo Domingo*.

D: Did they drop bombs?

R: Yes, and then . . .

D: Was this before you got there or after?

R: No, no, when I was speaking with the *Teniente*. And then, at that moment the airplane came and we were in a very, very little house and the *Teniente* told me, “Oh father, I have been in the

guerillas for many years, but I need to confess to you that I have a great fear of the airplane.” And he asked me, “Please, as you are dressed in white, go out of the house and tell me airplane’s flight.” And then I went outside and I saw that the airplane came, of course the pilot was in contact with the barracks there, and they came with guns and when the plane was near the tower of the sugar mill, they went up and turned around. At that moment, when I said the airplane was coming, we went to the house and we were on the floor and heard the pop pop pop pop pop, and thought at what moment the bullets would kill us. But when the plane went out, I went out and saw that they went and came back the same way three or four times.

D: Just one plane?

R: One plane. But they used all the bullets.

D: Were they shooting or were they bombing?

R: They were shooting, not bombing. But some bullets were being fired in the commercial center and there was a big explosion because they used gas for cooking.

D: How far was this from your church?

R: This was four blocks from the church.

D: Wow, not far.

R: Not far, no. And then, when the airplane left because they did not have more bullets, the . . .

D: Were the guerillas shooting at the plane?

R: No, they didn’t, I suppose because they did not want to let them know where they were. They shot in the place where the army told them they were receiving fire from. But, when the plane left after one hour or so, the *Teniente* told me, “Well father, I think that these people do not understand the situation. I appreciate your disposition, but we will see what we will do.” Then I went to my church, but not directly. I made a circle and then went. When I was circling there was a member of my church that belonged to the guerillas and he was in charge of the telephone communication with the guerilla leaders in *Tácajo* and other places. I greeted him and said,

“Oh Enrique, I came from my house and I am going to the church to be with my people and I ask you please, if you have communication with the telephone in *Tácajo*, send a message to my wife that I am alive after the airplane attack and the explosion and let her know that I am going to the church to be with the congregation.”

Then I went to the church. The church was cement building and the school was a cement building and it was completely full of families; children, women, and so. I went there and I prayed with them, read the Bible, and so. After that I went to the *Casa de la Amistad* where the missionaries lived. They were there doing very good work with the people in the school and the

church and I told them, "I will go around here to see what has happened." There were very unhappy with me because I was doing that. But I liked to be with the people you know.

D: So, did it ever work out that you met with the other side and help negotiate an armistice?

R: No, at that moment the negation was out. I liked to visit with the people. But I went to the place where there were some guerilla soldiers that were fighting against the barracks. The moment before that, the chief of the guerillas took a bazooka and fired into the barracks and some army soldiers were injured. They knew at that moment that Batista was out of the country and, at this moment, when I was with a guerilla soldier, we saw the barracks and some soldiers come out with a *bandela blanca*, a white flag to surrender. At some moment after that, *El Teniente Roca*, came there and I told the soldier "I will go to the barracks." And he asked me, "May I go with you?" And I said, "Oh yes, you can come." But when we were very near to the barracks *Teniente Roca* saw him and said, "Do not come, you must go to the place," because he did not know what would happen. But I went to the barracks at that moment with the chief of the guerillas. And then, when I went to the barracks, one of the soldiers that was in our service was crying and he came to me and hugged me and said, "Oh pastor, what a bad moment this is for me. I promised the army that I would be faithful until death and you know we are surrounded. What will happen?" He did not know that Batista left and I told him that Batista left the country and that the fighting was over. I said, "Listen, would you like to come to my home with me?" And he said, "Oh yes." Then I went to *Teniente Roca* and asked him, "This soldier is one of my friends, may I take him to my house?" And he said, "Oh yes. We only need him and the other soldiers to give up their weapons." And from that . . . You can leave your arms here and if you have no place to go you can remain here in the barracks. You will not have a problem."

I was so happy at that special moment when the struggle was finished and I was at this important moment and I was speaking with the soldiers and giving them some hope and talking with the guerilla leaders.

D: So how many surrendered in all?

R: I suppose about twenty-five or thirty. I was there until 9:00 at night and then I took my soldier and we went to *Tácajo*. But my wife did not have any notice from me in the morning and they thought that all the town of *Báguano* was on fire and that the airplane had destroyed the town. She was at a very, very disappointed moment. I felt sorry for her because I was thinking that in afternoon that she had received the notice that I was alive, but she did not. In my house, which was made of cement, there were a lot of families, women and children, because they thought that after the airplane attacked *Báguano* they would come to *Tácajo* also. We had many other experiences, some very bad and others not very bad, but that finished my experience in the guerilla struggle of January 1, 1959.