

## **Transcription: Rafael Gonzales**

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*Good morning. Today is Wednesday, April 30, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Rafael Gonzales. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Gonzales is at his residence in Seabrook, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for our program. The first question, sir, I always start off with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you entered the Marine Corps.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, let's see. I was born October 12, 1951. My father, Jesús Gonzales, and my mother, Margarita Trejo Gonzales. My mom was born in Houston and my dad was born in Genoa, Texas, I believe. As a little kid, I remember a lot of little strange things happened to me that might have carried on to Vietnam, but I think I was destined to be here at this very moment in time. I think God has something for me planned. So I'm going to continue on to see what that is, but for right now, I'm going to tell my story.

*Yes sir. Let me ask you, sir, when you were growing up, did you come from a large family? Did you have any brothers and sisters?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes. I'm the oldest of the boys. My sister, Rita, is older than me. She's about a year and a half, two years, older than me. The youngest of our siblings is my sister Mary Helen. So my father had two girls and six boys in between them. But I am the oldest of the boys. My brother, Alfred . . . Jesse, who passed away here about seven plus years ago. And then I have Roy, Rudolph, Ruben, and my sister Mary Helen. Then my oldest sister Rita.

*Did anybody in your family before you serve in the military? Had your father served?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes. My father served in the Army. He was a military policeman. He went to Okinawa and while he was there he became a military policeman. With him, he brought a souvenir which I have today. The surrender rifle . . . Japanese surrender rifle. Though there are parts missing. I'm missing the bayonet and I believe I'm also missing a ramrod that goes with it. But it still looks good. I have it here right behind me. Every now and then I take a look and handle it.

*That's great.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I'm taking care of that right now.

*So you entered the Marine Corps in 1969, is that right?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** That's correct. I'm looking at my DD214 and it has dates there. When I first went in and what have you. It was May 28, 1969.

*Did you volunteer to go in or were you drafted?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, I volunteered. I remember maybe about a year before that, back in those days, they used to have a Charlie Company. I think ABC News had one in the evenings. And they talked about a Marine Corps unit called Charlie Company. I remember a guy walking in from football practice and my younger brother, Alfred, was there standing next to me. And I told

him, "I'm going to be there one day." And the story, from there on, sure enough, as I look back, I actually went to Charlie Company.

*Interesting. So you enlisted during the Vietnam War when all that was going on. I assume because you're in Texas, you went to boot camp in San Diego, is that right?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes. That's what they called the Hollywood Marines.

*I went to boot camp there, so I know the nickname.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I was in boot camp and my platoon number was twenty ninety-six. Something you'll never forget. Also my serial number was 2-5-6-9-2-6-7. Now if you were to ask me to write it down, I have to actually repeat myself to get those numbers. That was kind of like grilled on me. I needed to learn that. At one time I used to know the serial number for at least three rifles, but after about the tenth rifle I stopped memorizing the long numbers.

*What was it like when you went to boot camp? Was it what you expected when you got there? Had your father given you any advice or that sort of thing?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** It's kind of like this way. I remember we went to a post office here in Houston. I don't know if it's still running as the post office, but they had a post office here in Houston. The main point at one time. And there, at that first floor, I believe, it was a recruiting station for all the services. And I remember going there one morning when I joined. And so my friend of thought just slipped me and what was the question that you asked?

*I was just wondering when you arrived in boot camp if it was kind of what you expected or was it a shock to you?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes, it was kind of a shock because what I was trying to get to is this one Marine that . . . It was just me and this one Marine that boarded that one plane heading to San Diego. Before I get to that drill instructor, I just want to make a point that when we arrived to the airport, we were supposed to report to this one sergeant, and there he was standing waiting for us to come. I guess he was waiting for a bunch of other Marines to come from other states. And the first thing he told us, "Get on that cattle truck." So we did. Yeah. And so, as soon as I arrived at boot camp, it was a totally different world for me.

*So I imagine you did, like all Marines have done, you stood in the yellow footprints and got your head shaved that first few minutes, and that sort of thing?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes. We went through that and I can remember that we weren't allowed to look to the left or to the right of us. We had to have our eyes right in front or right behind that man's head, you know. And we went through a lot of heck, you know. I always tell my sons, especially those that are going to join the Marines, that the best thing that ever happened to you is go through all the hell you can withstand in boot camp. Because that right there will help you pull through some of the tough moments when you're in battle.

*Yeah, it's all done for a reason. That's exactly right. When you got to boot camp and the Vietnam War was going on, could you tell who the guys were that were drafted and who were there voluntarily? Or did all that kind of just blur away at a certain point?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** There were three kinds there. Men who volunteered. Those who got drafted. And those who had two choices, whether it was five years in prison or four years in the Corps.

*So that had to have been unique then. Did that create a lot of tension amongst the recruits and the platoon and that sort of thing?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** No, no. I only heard these fellows talking like that. That he had a choice whether to spend five years in prison or go four years in the Corps. Of course, he regretted not going to prison.

*Okay.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** But you know, I remember them telling me that.

*When you went to boot camp, did you have any idea what your specialty was going to be? Your MOS?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** When the recruiter explained to me, of course, I was quite naïve. He said, “Aviation guaranteed,” you know. And I listened to the guy. I really couldn’t believe I’d be flying a plane. But I went with a contract that said “Aviation Guaranteed.” And how the Marines took care of that is when I came back out of Vietnam, I was stationed at a helicopter station and became a military policeman for about five or six months.

*Okay.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** So they did fulfill the aviation part of it.

*But otherwise you became a radio operator, is that right?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, I didn’t train to become a radio operator. What happened when I first got to Vietnam, I was put in Alpha Company and within a month that I was with that unit, one of the fellows got, I believe, killed. The radioman. So nobody wanted to volunteer to carry that extra weight and also be a radioman in Vietnam and I’m sure it’s true today. You’re the first guy they’re going to try to knock out.

*Sure. So you were with the Marine Infantry Battalion there, right?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes, I was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines.

*So you were with Alpha Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment? Alpha 1-1?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Alpha 1-1, yes. That’s correct. But before then, after basic infantry training and what have you, I volunteered to become a battalion recon. I also trained to become battalion recon. Strange thing happened to me after arriving to Okinawa which was a staging area. My unit . . . And we were to stay there, I believe, I want to say three days. First day arrival. Second day orientation. Third day we were supposed to board a plane. And I remember in that one Quonset hut, we all went to bed. Well, I don’t want to say bed. We all hit the sack. The next morning I woke up only to find myself alone inside this Quonset hut. And so I looked around and I said, “It’s only five o’clock in the morning and we go to chow around five-thirty.” So I went over to the mess hall to see where’s my unit and I couldn’t find them. Later that morning, I saw this one

Black gunnery sergeant. I saluted him, "Good morning, sir." And by the afternoon, he saw me again. The next morning he saw me. He said, "Come here Marine. Where's your unit?" I told him what happened and before I knew it, he locked me up in the closet to spend the night. And the next morning, I went back in his office and he was kind of surprised and also a bit angry to find out that somehow, some way, they left me behind. Well, sometimes I wonder if it's divine intervention because most of the guys that left without me were either wounded or killed. Seriously wounded or killed. And so there's not very many of us that came back from that one particular recon class that I went to.

*So that was at Okinawa?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** We landed in Vietnam, that plane was loaded with battalion recon and half the plane was divided in two. My half ended up going to a \_ unit. That's how I became . . . Got into an infantry unit.

*What were your first impressions of Vietnam?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, first of all, the smells. There's diesel fuel mixed with firewood, burning firewood. Maybe the food. Maybe the flavors. Different smells in the air. The people. It was also a refreshing feeling too, because we're out kind of like out in the country type. But I can remember being on the convoy going toward Da Nang. And so I think I spent like one night there. That one night, that was next to this one Black Marine. His name was Pitchfork. His last name was Pitchfork. I remember that. We were laying on this slope there looking out and in the distance we could see tracer rounds and could hear machine gun fire after that. And then every now and then you'll see the flashes of these explosions around us. We were just looking at it and we were just talking to each other, getting to know each other, where I was from, where he's from, and maybe a little bit of homesick. And then within minutes of that, all of a sudden not known to us, we had these 175 tanks about maybe a couple of hundred yards away from us. And they cut loose two rounds. We were just laying there. I actually felt myself go up in the air for about a foot and then I said to my friend, "Welcome to Vietnam." Yeah.

*What did your family think about you volunteering to go in the Marine Corps with the good likelihood that you'd be going to Vietnam?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, my parents . . . My father basically . . . Of course, they didn't like that. They knew that was what's going on, but it was something that I wanted to do is volunteer. I remembered I was able to go home a week before I left and so on that day that my dad was going to take me to the airport, I forgot my cover, or my hat. And so I got out of the car and went back to the house during which time my mom, my aunt, my cousin, and some other person was in the living room. And right before I opened the door to go in, I heard my mom wailing. And I stopped. I didn't want to go in. So it was very hard for my mom especially. And so my drive to the airport, my dad gave me a switchblade. "You know what to do with it, right? Don't be afraid to use it." Well, that switchblade didn't last very long. After about two months, it got rusty and it started getting wobbly and I had to throw it away. It didn't last very long.

*So when you got to Vietnam, were you able to write letters home or did you even want to write letters home?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes. I was into writing. Surprisingly enough, I wrote a letter to my mom, my sister, my brother. I would write letters to a couple of friends. The thing about those letters . . . And also my girlfriend. It took about maybe about over . . . Almost three months before I got my first stack of letters. So here they come. It was my sister, Rita, who would write the letter addressed to me, and she would ask me the standard stuff. “Dear Ralph,” or whatever. And then the second letter was my mom. It was the same exact letter other than “Dear Ralph,” it would say, “Dear Son.” So my sister Rita did all the writing. And one day, after getting that stack, there was this one letter that came. And I wished I would have saved it but in my heart I have it. So I can remember seeing this one. I said, “This is different. This one’s different, so I’m going to read that for last.” And finally I got to it. And so when I opened the letter, it had four scribbled lines on it. And of course, I couldn’t understand that. Until I saw the signature. And my dad wasn’t able to read or write, but he took pride in his signature, and I recognized that signature, Jesús Gonzales. And those four lines, all of a sudden, said to me, “Son, I miss you. We love you and I want you back home.”

*That’s great.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** That’s what it meant to me.

*Sure. That’s a great letter. I’m sure it was tough to get that being so far away and in a war zone.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yeah. Yeah. And so, let me tell you a story about . . . Everybody got a Dear John, just almost everybody got a Dear John. And I was in this one particular place that was called Dodge City. The thing about us Marines, the way I learned Vietnam, it wasn’t by the name of the town or the sector or province. I learned Vietnam by nicknames. Charlie Ridge, Monkey Mountain, Red China Beach. We had Football Island, Pig Hill, Khe Sanh, things like that. I was in . . . When I got this stack of letters, especially from my girlfriend, I went ahead and put ’em in order so that way from the latest to the maybe one that was dated about a month or so. Turned out that as I got to reading, she was telling me how lonely she is, how much she misses me. The second one she told me that her girlfriend been inviting her to go the dance but she decided not to go. The third one she decided to go and met this young man. The fourth letter came and said that she is getting engaged. That was her way of telling me that . . . That was my Dear John letter. Well that very moment in time two rockets hit our base camp. I heard the first one screeching across and I was sitting in the shitter. I know you know what that is. There were these canisters below us. And I had diesel fuel. When that bomb hit, diesel flew all over my butt. And the second one even made it worse. And as I looked down, lo and behold, there was all kinds of spiders staring up at me. All kinds of big ol’ spiders that came out of there, you know. And so I got off that shitter and you know the little roll of paper was just not enough.

*Sure.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, guess what I did? I used her letter to clean my butt. So she came in handy. Okay, enough of that, right?

*That’s a good story though.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yeah. Yeah.

*So you're over there, what was the day like, if there was a typical day? Were you on a lot of patrols? Just kind of walk us through what a normal day was like for you, if there was such a thing over there.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, of course, things changed from the first couple of months because everything was so new. I even felt like even the people around me I didn't really get to know my Marines that were with me the first couple of months because I didn't have time to be making friends or anything. I was just trying to survive. And so the first couple of months was kind of like feeling like I didn't know where I was at. I knew I was with Alpha Company, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, and my squad leader, and maybe a couple of names, but I was just learning the ropes. I was . . . I did a lot of listening and I didn't say much at all until I volunteered to become a radioman. But other than that, after much of that, the typical day in Vietnam, out in the field, was kind of like, during the day we would basically come back from patrol and we spent the time maybe preparing breakfast and mostly C-rations, of course. And we tried to catch up on some sleep. We didn't sleep very well during the night and those that did maybe for an hour or two but we were basically on alert all the time. So we'd try to catch up on some sleep. Then finally, when we were in a secured area, they wouldn't let us go to sleep. They had us go out and rebuild the bunkers, or fill up sandbags, or do some . . . Then after a little bit of that, we went back to the hooch and spent our time until later that afternoon. I would get maybe the orders since I became a squad leader too. And we would start preparing for the evening patrol. Ambush patrol. So we left when it got dark, probably around six-thirty or seven o'clock in the evening. We got off the secured area and went into our ambush patrol.

*As a radio operator then, were you always with the platoon? Commander, is that kind of how it worked?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** No. Well, I was with the first squad. My sergeant's name was Gary Meir. M-E-I-R. He is from Phoenix, Arizona. I became a radioman and I remember him one day telling me that, "When we get back to the hill, I'm going to teach you how to pronounce certain words." Because I had a heck of a time with the vocabulary. My vocabulary consists of a little bit of Spanish and a little bit of English, Tex-Mex. And I had a heck of a time pronouncing this one particular word. We were not allowed to say "yes," over the radio. And to say "yes," we'd have to say "affirmative." And to say "no," we'd have to say "negative." And we also had a sacred word, the word "repeat." And that had something to do with friendly fire. The artillery guy in charge would just think he heard "repeat," he would shoot another volley, so we . . .

*You never want to say "repeat," that's for sure.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Not until it's needed. So instead of saying that, we would say "say again."

*Sure.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, to save my life, I just couldn't pronounce the word "affirmative." And every time I said it, it caused a lot of Marines to sort of laugh, not so much at me because of what I said, and I was the only one that got away with it, because I actually tried my darndest to be able to pronounce that word back then. And it sounded more like "firmatitty." And so it caused a lot of Marines to smile and laugh at that. One day we were crossing this one open area one at a time, a company of Marines. I don't know what part of the column I was in, but it was my turn to

cross over. The sergeant was waiting for me on the other side. And so I came up. Halfway there I spotted a trip line that was a booby trap and it caught my attention. And so over the radio, I didn't want to say "firmatitty." I wanted to keep it at a very serious mode. And so when they asked if I received the last message, I came out and said "Roger that." I still hear the laughter. They said, "What did you say?" "Roger that." And that happened around late March, early April of 1970. And to this day, I've been noticing that expression used about 10 plus years ago. And I said, "Wait a minute. I had something to do with that." And so here lately, I've been telling my story that I'm the guy who came out with that radio expression.

*Yeah. It's definitely used a lot now. That's true.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Some people ask me, "How come you don't coin it?" I said, "If I try coining it, then people will say I'm in it for the money." So just me, God, and those that believe me. That's all that matters.

*That's a great story. It's definitely something that people in the Marine Corps hear all the time. And it's one of those things that started somewhere. But people never think about where it started or how it started. Do you get many people that try to say, "Oh no, I've said that before." "I've heard that before," or that sort of thing?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I even had a person call me and tell me that this one Marine veteran that was in Vietnam, "Oh, we've been using that since World War I." And actually get upset that I'm saying those things. So my answer to that, if you were to watch these old war movies from World War I, World War II, and Korea, you will never hear that expression. You started hearing that expression like maybe in the early to late '80s. And it started picking up. And then the movies, even the modern movies about Vietnam, until the later ones, you start seeing the "Roger that" expression. But I actually believe I was the one who first said it.

*That's great. That's a neat story.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** And a lot of people ask me, "Why 'Roger that'?" Back in those days were a lot that'd say, "Roger," "Roger over and out," and "Roger Wilco." And so I figured since I cannot say "yes," I'll say "Roger" and I added "that."

*That's great. I love that. That's a neat story. So when you're over there, how long, ultimately, did you end up spending in Vietnam? When they sent you over, were you there for a year? A yearlong tour?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Back in the day, it was supposed to be a 13-month tour. And as I look at my records, I was there for about 11 months and so many days. And so I didn't spend the whole 13-month tour. And also, around April of 1970, they stopped sending troops over there. And I think a lot of people here in the States eventually didn't get drafted because of that. And so a lot of things happened around April, May of 1970 that kept sending troops over there.

*And the way it worked, you didn't go as a unit, you went as an individual, right? You would join a unit and you would do your time and you would go back home individually too, is that right?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** You know, like I told you, that there in Okinawa, I was left behind. And it troubled me because having met a lot of those fellows because lot of 'em got killed and wounded

seriously. So I hadn't met and asked them, "What happened? How come y'all left me behind?" It's like you've been in a team and everybody knows that you're part of that team, and then all of a sudden someone says, "Where's Rafael?" And no one said anything. To this day, I wonder why no one said anything, you know?

*Yeah, exactly.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** And so, I sometimes feel like it was maybe divine intervention, I don't know.

*Sure. When you got to leave, when your time in Vietnam was completed, tell us about what that was like? Coming back to the United States, seeing your family again, but also maybe talk a little bit about how the war was seen, or how as a veteran of the war, how you were treated by the average person here in the United States.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, let me kind of go back on the very day that I left Vietnam, we were next to this one river. And of course, I wanted to go back somewhat clean and I asked if I could get some clean clothes. And all that time I was wearing the camouflage fatigues. You probably have an idea how they looked. So they finally gave me a clean set and it turned out to be Army green. So I ended up wearing the same outfit that our memorial veterans are wearing. That memorial they had there in Austin. I saw those fatigues and those are the same fatigues I wore when I left Vietnam. And so when I got . . . When I ended up going back to the States, of course, I found that people didn't really care to know about Vietnam. And I also noticed that I was kind of looked down at. No one spit at me or anything like that, but even when I started working, you would think that someone would ask me about Vietnam, and no one did. And so I didn't start talking about Vietnam until many years later.

*Yeah, I think that happened to a lot of our Vietnam veterans, unfortunately. So when you got back, I know, the email you sent me, you got out in 1973, so I guess at that point your tour was complete and you were ready to, I guess, go back to the "first civ div," as they say? Ready to become a civilian again at that point?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Oh, become a civilian, yeah. It was around June of 1973 and when I came back, of course I needed to find employment. Actually, six months before your termination, when you get out of the Corps . . . They had a program in the Marine Corps and I think it was probably true with the other services. It was called Project Transition. They were supposed to . . . I was supposed to receive some kind of vocational training in camp. And they had a school there in Mainside, there at Camp Pendleton. And of course I applied for it, and my commanding officer never signed the papers until the last month. So when I reported to become a carpenter, the instructor who was a civilian fellow, he looked at me and he saw great potential, but he wasn't able to teach all I needed to know in one month. I remember seeing this man, kind man, and he had tears in his eyes knowing that I lost an opportunity to become a carpenter. And so what he let me do was basically run the machines. And I ended up making a chest, and I made a couple of utensils, just to play around. And he gave me all kinds of manuals. "I want you to read these manuals. They'll be good." To this day, I wish I would have saved those manuals and taken care of them. They're really good manuals. They showed everything in detail how to do it. But yeah, I remember that instructor. He had tears in his eyes that I wasn't given that opportunity the last six months to actually make that transition back to civilian life. So when I come back, I ended up finding a job as an electrician's helper. Then after about two or three months, I became



an apprentice. So I was an electrician for about almost two years until somebody asked me, "Rafael, why don't you become a draftsman?" I said, "I remember taking drafting on my last year in high school." "Well, just tell 'em that." "Yeah, but I plumb forgot, you know?" "Well, can you draw a straight line?" "Yes." "Well, tell 'em that." Well, sure enough, I was so naïve that I remember getting my first interview to become a draftsman. They asked, "What do you know about drafting?" And I looked at him and I just said, "I know how to draw a straight line." And I got the job. And since then it was kind of like my specialty. So I'm one of the last ones that can actually manually draft. Today we have computer-aided drafting. And back in my time I was one of the last ones . . . We didn't have calculators back then. We had this one little bible that was called the Smoley and we used that book to figure out the different angles and put 'em in fractions and more calculated. But we used that book a whole lot to figure those things out. And so back in the day we didn't have calculators. Today, everything's figured out for you.

*That's great. Did you get involved with any veterans organizations or go to any reunions or that sort of thing?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I tried that but I found myself not . . . Not that I wasn't interested, I was dealing with a couple of veterans that kind of made me a little nervous. There were some that mean well but they were a little bit too pushy. And I said, "No, to keep the peace, I'm just going to have to come when they need me," you know? I tried to join but I didn't particularly like being ordered around. So I kind of kept away from that. But if they were to call me and they wanted me to help 'em, I'd be more than happy. Yeah.

*Do you keep in touch with any of the guys that your served with in your unit?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I'm the guy, matter of fact, I even wrote one in memory of Stephen Robert Ott. Now, to make a long story short, Stephen Ott is from Black River Falls, Wisconsin, and he was the Marine that I killed with what we call friendly fire. I had the misfortune of killing one of my own. To my credit I have what they call 48 nonconfirmed kills. Three confirmed and that one Marine that I killed. And so his name is Stephen Robert Ott. And so, as far as making contact, lot of the Marines were also from California. Every now and then I'll make a phone call about every two or three years. Just kind of touch bases with one fellow that seems to have his phone number still listed. Especially on the Internet. All the other ones have private numbers. But there's this one guy that wants me to meet him come June, and he's going to take me to fulfill a bucket list. I want to climb a mountain, so we're going to Wyoming in the Tetons.

*Oh, that's beautiful up there.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I programmed for 10 days. He's going to be there for over a month. But I'm going to climb a mountain up there. So he's going to hold me to that.

*The Tetons are beautiful. That's a beautiful, beautiful area, especially that time of year.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yeah, he came over to visit with me last year. I was really happy to have him. He spent about four days with me. His name is John Latin. He came into my unit maybe the last three months I was in Vietnam. He got transferred over. He had fond memories of me. He remembers that my guys were always giving me a heck of a time. And for that reason, having said that . . . Lot of my guys thought that I volunteered for dangerous missions. Not really, being a Marine they gave me an order and I tried my very best to fulfill that. I didn't know that there

were Marines over there that turned down missions because they were afraid to go. But I managed to do and fulfill those missions. I'm going back to Vietnam again. But anyway, continue.

*I think you mentioned earlier, you said you have some children. Do they ask you much about your time in the service?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yes, I have, like I said to you, I have six boys and a girl. No, I was talking about the siblings, but my wife blessed me with six boys and a girl. My daughter, she's not, she suffers from Down syndrome but she is very, very active and very functional. She is now 25 years old. My oldest, Rafael Jesús, he is a registered engineer. He works at the nuclear plant over in Bay City, really great. And my other sons, one works for TXDOT, and my third son, he's kind of like, his wife and him decided that he is going to stay home and take care of the two grandchildren. They gave me identical twins so he's a stay-at-home mom/dad, whatever you want to call him, so I tip my hat for him.

*That's great.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** And so all the other ones are going to school or not working, yes.

*Did any of them go into the military or ever ask you about that, or do you think that . . . ?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Only one. One was going here about seven years ago. He was gonna join the Army, and the week before he was supposed to be enlisted, someone rear-ended the truck he was driving and he managed to hurt his back. And the way my wife looked at it, it was kind of like an answer to her prayers because she didn't want him to do that. Back in the day I think they were offering soldiers a huge bonus, and I think he wanted to give that money to us so he could go to war, and I said, "No, son, you don't have to do that." But, my wife, the way she looked at it, it was answer to her prayers so he didn't get to go. None of my boys served, no. Also something about me, back in the day after coming out of Vietnam and coming back civilian, married to my wife. My wife that I have now is my second wife. The first one lasted about seven years. A year and a half later I married my second wife, but shortly after our marriage, I'm also an Ironman. I did the triathlon in Hawaii.

*Wow, that's great.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** And so I think a lot has to do with me being a Marine and also maybe a lot has to do with me also but, yeah, I did the Ironman back in 19, I wanna say, '81. That was the year when they changed it from February to October so they held it twice.

*That's great. I know that's a grueling endeavor.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Yeah, I did it. I did it.

*What was harder, that or boot camp?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Boot camp.

*Maybe just for the length of time or the psychological aspect maybe of the boot camp part.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** No, there's a lot of details about that triathlon but I can only want to share that much.

*That's great. Well, sir, I really appreciate you taking the time today to share your story with us. We here at the Land Office have archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the original land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo, and we have the registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas. We have all sort of maps and so our goal is to take these interviews, your interview, and add them to that archive so that hopefully hundreds of years from now people can listen to them, study them, learn from them, and with that in mind, is there anything you'd would want to say to somebody listening to this interview potentially a hundred years from now?*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I just want to say that I served my country, and I don't get to use the word "proud" because that's kind of like a selfish term. And there are two things that I'm very proud of, and one of them being an Ironman, but the first one is me being a United States Marine.

*That's great. I don't know if I mentioned to you before but we're going to send you in a few weeks after we get copies made, we're going to send you copies of this interview on CD so you'll be able to give it to your family or friends or whomever along with a letter and a certificate signed by Commissioner Patterson who is also a Marine, Vietnam veteran. And it's just kind of a small, very small way for the State of Texas to say thank you to you for your service to our nation. So be looking for that in a few weeks as well.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** I appreciate that. Thank you.

*Yes sir. Well, again, sir, we appreciate you and your service, and as a fellow Marine, I definitely want to say Semper Fidelis to you for what you did and continue to do. You've got my number, sir, so if there's ever anything you need, just give us a call. Like I said too, we're going to be sending all this stuff to you hopefully in a couple weeks or so.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Well, you can Roger that. Thank you.

*Yes sir. All right, sir. It was a pleasure. We'll talk to you again soon.*

**Rafael Gonzales:** Okay, thanks.

*Take care. Bye bye.*