Sgt. Bob Vandewalker: From the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station this is Marine
Staff Sergeant Bob Vandewalker interviewing Sergeant Ramon Gomez, who just
returned from Vietnam in July 1965. Ramon, what organization were you with in
Vietnam?

Sgt. Ramon Gomez: I was with Maintenance Company, 3rd Service Battalion,
FLSG.

BV: Now what did this company consist of?

RG: Mostly maintenance, a logistics group. It consisted of ordnance, engineers,
electronics, and motor team maintenance.

BV: What were the other jobs, for example what was their job in the
organization?

RG: To maintain support of the other units around or in Vietnam.

BV: Now we’re talking about ordnance, we’re not talking about bombs. We’re
talking about people who repair ordnance, or what?

RG: People who repair ordnance, people that repair engineer equipment, people
who repair radios and telephones.

BV: In others words, these particular people in these other organizations, along
with you, would fly out of there by helicopter, repair different pieces of equipment, at
other organizations?
RG: Right. They would be requested and we would furnish people, personnel, to go and repair.

BV: Now what outfits were you supporting? Do you know?

RG: All the Marines. The Marines around Vietnam.

BV: Infantry?


BV: For example, what were some of the outfits?

RG: Well, the 9th Marines, 3rd Marines. We had engineers, 7th Engineers, 3rd Engineers. We had then a brigade come in from Hawaii, and we supported them.

BV: Now how far were some of these away from your organization, some of these other units?

RG: Well, the units that were from Phu Bai were about approximately forty miles, and Chu Lai was approximately forty five miles.

BV: And you were station at where?

RG: At Da Nang.

BV: Now how did you go on a repair? Say they called on somebody in maintenance, truck maintenance, how did they get those people up there?

RG: By helicopters.

BV: They flew them up there by helicopter?

RG: Right. Either the Army or the Marines’ helicopters.

BV: On a day-to-day basis, about what was an average day? What did you do in an average day? What was your job?

RG: I was auto mechanic. I repaired trucks, and we had quite a few trucks come in for repair. And I drove a wrecker and picked up disabled vehicles around Da Nang.

BV: Now you also unloaded ships, too?

RG: When they needed my assistance I would go and help them out.

BV: I should say with the organization? Your organization was involved, is that right?

RG: Right.

BV: Now how did this work? Where did you have to go, and how long was it, and so forth, Ramon?
RG: Well, we had to go from Da Nang to the ramp where it was in Monkey Mountain, and we would help them unload, and well, furnish whatever they would use, whatever they needed, we would furnish.

BV: Well now, what difficulties if any, were involved in... How many miles are we talking about now?

RG: I would say about twelve miles.

BV: Now is there any difficulties as far as crossing roads or...?

RG: There was a river that we had to cross, and they used a ferry and this ferry was at all times overloaded. We had two ferries and they carried four trucks empty, and coming back loaded. Depends on the load, if it was ammunition or whatever it was, it was overloaded, I mean it was a heavy load, they would put three on a ferry.

BV: Now this ferry was operated by who?

RG: By the Army of the Vietnamese.

BV: Now what would be the longest time you have to wait? Say maybe eight trucks came up. How long would you have to wait to get on?

RG: Oh, I say about half an hour to forty-five minutes.

BV: Is this the longest you have to wait?

RG: No, we had more trucks. We had at times, we had about forty trucks in line, and we would have to wait. Depends on where about you were parked in the line.

BV: Now this is the only way getting from?

RG: We had a bridge, but the only vehicles that could go across that bridge were from quarter-ton pick-ups down to small.

BV: Now we we’re talking about forty trucks backed up. Now how long would this involve? Say the minimum is about thirty trucks back. How many hours are we talking about, trying to use this ferry?

RG: Oh, I would say it would take about an hour or so for the last truck to get.

BV: In other words, if they can get forty trucks to cross this ferry in about two hours?

RG: Yes, with both ferries operating. I would say two hours, forty trucks.

BV: All right. Now what kind of port did we have down there where, when these trucks come down to pick up the supplies?
RG: It was just a ramp. It was a cement built ramp, and they had the LST comes all the way into the ramp and unload. Where the APAs and AKAs they would be unloaded by LCUs.

BV: Then they would bring them in and put them on your truck?

RG: Right. Unload them by forklift from a shore party. I mean with shore party personnel. Shore party would unload and do all this.

BV: Now this particular shore party stayed right in this area?

RG: They stayed right there.

BV: What kind of quarters were they in? Or how did they live down there?

RG: They live just the same as us, in tents, and they, at times they ate C-rations, and sometimes they had hot meals.

BV: Now how about up in DaNang were you were? How was the set up there as far as meals and kitchens stuff?

RG: Well we had mess halls. We had mess halls built with tents, and we had hot meals everyday. When we got set up, but at first we had C-rations until we set up the mess hall.

BV: Did you have any problems at all of the roads? The roads being bombed out that you traveled?

RG: No, the roads were pretty rough, but they were, they could be moveable. I mean a vehicle could move on them.

BV: But at no time they were, to your knowledge, they were never bombed to where...

RG: No, not to my knowledge.

BV: How about the weather-wise? How did they stand up?

RG: The weather when we first got there it was pretty hot. We weren’t used to the weather, well it wasn’t the same as Okinawa, it was a little different. And we had quite a bit of rain at times, and then at times it was dry. We had to water our roads in order to see, the truck and fire brigade.

BV: Because of dust?

RG: Because of the dust, right.

BV: Now how did the truck stand up?
RG: Well, the truck had at say twenty miles an hour they would stand pretty good. But other than twenty miles an hour they would tear up.

BV: How about the heat affecting, heating them up?

RG: No, the heat wouldn’t affect them. There was just…

BV: Was there any particular vehicles we had over there in the Marine Corps that were, you got more problems with than with other vehicles?

RG: No, all the problems we had was the torque rods would come off. The torque rod holds the axle together, both rear axles. Keep them on line, and then they would, they’ve got rubber bushings, and this rubber bushing would come, and the impact of the road on a wheel would pop them out. And they would go.

BV: How hard a job is it to repair this particular…

RG: Well, it’s a matter of a half-an-hour job or an hour, if we had the parts.

BV: How about difficulty on getting parts for the trucks?

RG: We had difficultly at first, and then after that, parts started coming in. When I left Vietnam, we were getting in supplies pretty regularly.

BV: Ramon, what other companies, truck companies did you support down there?

RG: We supported the 9th Motor.

BV: Where is this at?

RG: At DaNang. We supported 3rd Engineers. We supported Service Battalion, 3rd Motor, Recon, and the air wing at times, but they did their own maintenance. But when they couldn’t, they would send it out to us.

BV: Now how about the gasoline for the trucks?

RG: We had plenty of fuel. We had plenty of oil, plenty.

BV: How was it stored?

RG: On rubber tanks on the ground.

BV: How much fuel do you usually have? On an average day in there, what would be that amount? Say a minimum or maximum amounts usually kept in there.

RG: I couldn’t tell you because we had quite few fuel dumps around.

BV: How was this controlled? When your trucks went up to be filled up with gas was it signed out or what?
RG: Right. Each truck would fill up and sign a name and the amount of gallons that it had used.

BV: Now when the trucks went out on a trip, did they have to have other people besides drivers to protect them?

RG: Yes. We had an A-driver, which was qualified as shotgun.

BV: He’d ride shotgun. He could drive. Both, in other words, besides the driver?

RG: No just the driver, and an A-driver, which was acting as shotgun, and qualified as a driver and shotgun also.

BV: How about any weapons mounted on the backs of these trucks? Did you have any?

RG: Truck company did. We didn’t. We barely went out of the perimeter. We were maintenance.

BV: Did you have any problems delivering these supplies where you might have pilferage along the way, or anything like this?

RG: No. Around Da Nang, we would load the trucks up and drive them up to the hill, and, where the unit was, unload them, come back. We didn’t have no trouble there. Where trouble was, to getting from Phu Bai to Chu Lai. We had to have air transportation to get there.

BV: No roads?

RG: No roads. Now there were roads, but they were all out of construction. I mean, there were bridges out that had been bombed.

BV: This particular route was bombed out, is this right? These particular roads? How far would be the furthest you could drive with your truck in another direction, different direction from the base?

RG: We could go up to this hill, I don’t remember was it 230 or 227 and all around there back up to this Monkey Mountain where this boat ramp was, and around town that’s all.

BV: Now while you were in Da Nang, were you ever under fire there at any particular time?

RG: Well no, not actually under fire. We were hit by Viet Cong on July 1st at the airfield.
BV: Can you explain what happened. Did this happen at night, day, or when did it happen?

RG: It happened on at 11 o’clock at night. And I didn’t know what was going on until I was wide awake, and it didn’t take long for these fighter planes to get up in the air and start throwing illumination so we see could what’s going on. They destroyed two C-130s, I mean three C-130s, and about three or four F-103 fighters.

BV: Did they get in your immediate area?

RG: No. We were about, I’d say about two hundred or three hundred yards away from where they hit.

BV: Did they use any of your people to go over there?

RG: We had, they used the LVTs, the amtracks. They used them to go across the river to catch up with them. And, of course, the artillery opened up when these spotter planes spotted the Viet Cong, and called in artillery, and the artillery was the one that accomplished that mission.

BV: Did you have any Vietnamese people working around the base?

RG: Yes. We were among the Vietnamese inside the base in Da Nang. They had their own armored company, and their recon company and their army.

BV: Well, how about civilian workers? Did you have any?

RG: We started having civilian workers in the mess hall, and washing our clothes, and they were doing pretty good job of it.

BV: Do you feel that if you wanted to go back to Vietnam, on your own, would you like to go back?

RG: Yes, in some respect.

BV: Do you feel that you learned a lot in Vietnam?

RG: I did learn about the personnel, and learned a little about the people. I wasn’t there long enough to learn too much about the people.

BV: Do you think the morale was good over there?

RG: Yes, the morale was pretty good. At first we had the morale pretty high, and then you know, like any other place, it started dropping and going up. It deviates.

BV: Up and down, right?

RG: Up and down, right.
BV: Being a sergeant and having young troopers under you, do you feel that they felt they had a job to do over there and were doing it?

RG: Yes. We were always concerned about the vehicles that would come in, and tried to put them out as soon as we possibly could. And they were really putting out those vehicles.

BV: Did you get a chance to talk to people on the ordnance and in the other organizations there?

RG: Oh, yes.

BV: And what was the feeling there? The same?

RG: The same. Our mission was to get things ready for the units around us, and we did the best we could, and it was great, it was working fine.

BV: Sergeant Gomez, what did you have for recreation in the area?

RG: Well, we built a club. Our own people put in, and we built… We’d pick up lumber here and there, and we start building a club there. We built the club, and we’d open it after working hours until ten o’clock at night, and then closed it up. We had a record player, you know, and we had sandwich board that we had there.

BV: Did you have to pay for your chow?

RG: Yes. Ten cents a hamburger, and fifteen cents a soda, like that. We got our supplies from the Army, and the meat we got from the Army, the cheese and all that. The buns was made for us from the Vietnamese in town. We had a family that was making buns for us.

BV: Was this an approved… in other words, these were clean people that you ate their food.

RG: Right. Right.

BV: Now when you went out to probably visit the troops in the field, with your truck and so forth, while you were out there, was there any particular thing that you had at Da Nang that they didn’t have in the field that they would have liked.

RG: Yes. Our club especially, because our club, we had everything in it. We used bamboo, and we had it fixed real nice. We had chow, which other clubs didn’t have. We were always supplied. When we ran out of things, we would go in town and buy it and get it for the troops. The troops were real happy about that club.
BV: Now this particular club, who could go there? PFC’s? Corporals? Lance corporals? Staff? Everybody, or what?
RG: No, staff had their own. This was for E-5s and down.
BV: This was built all by yourselves?
RG: All by the company, by the company itself.
BV: This is the maintenance company’s. Ordnance people didn’t come over or anything?
RG: No, ordnance was maintenance, and electronics was maintenance, the engineers was maintenance. All the maintenance, it was all in one area, all one command. In other words, the electronic was commanded by, motorcade commanded by, it was all commanded by one commanding officer.
BV: I see. What type of security did you have around the area?
RG: We had listening posts. WE had walking posts. We had all-around security. Plus, we had the infantry around on the outer perimeter.
BV: The outer perimeter. How did the duty work out? The men who would drive the truck would stand duty at night, too?
RG: No, we had only a few truck drivers. We had, let’s say, maybe about ten truck drivers, that’s all. The rest of them were maintenance personnel, and they would stand their number of duties.
BV: Was there a shortage of personnel there you think, in the job, in the amount of job you had to do?
RG: Well, when we first started, yes, after that, no. We started getting personnel in, and I thought we were real good.
BV: Well thank you very much, Sergeant Gomez. Where is your hometown at, Sergeant Gomez?
RG: I live in Raymondville, Texas.
BV: And who are your folks, where do they live there?
RG: My mother is Maria C. Gomez, and she lives in Raymondville.
BV: Is there an address?
RG: She just lives there in town.
BV: This is just a small town?
RG: Right.

BV: Well, thank you very much, Sergeant Gomez.