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King High Remembers

On March 16th, 2018 Destanie and I interviewed Staff Sergeant Jose L. Gonzalez. SSgt Gonzalez was born July 12th, 1967 in Esfuerzos Unidos, Durango, Mexico. He was adopted when he was 3 or 4 years old and lived in Tracy, California. He graduated Tracy High School in 1985 when he was a junior. After he graduated, he joined the United States Marine Corps. Because he graduated early, SSgt Gonzalez had to go into the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) for about 11 months. It worked out good because the program counted as the first year for pay purposes. It worked out so when he graduated Boot Camp he got a years pay.

SSgt Gonzalez went to Boot Camp at Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) on July 29th, 1985. Once they got off the bus and stood on those yellow footprints it all began. Everyone was given a box to put their civilian clothes in that wouldn't be touched until the end of boot camp. They all had their heads shaved, uniforms tailored, and checked by the doctor. The vaccine shots weren't with needles like at the doctors. The shots were pushed in your arm with air. If you didn't stay still the you would get cut because of how powerful the air pressure was. After everyone had their uniform issued to them, they were ready to start the physical but mostly mental part of boot camp. If you thought you couldn't do it, you were going to fail. "Its 90% mental and 10% physical." He was in platoon 1082. They did A LOT of exercise. One thing they did everyday was the "Daily Seven." It was seven different exercises they did every single day as a warm up. They had many different obstacle courses they went through including "The

Confidence Course.” This course was to boost your self confidence. For example, the Stairway to Heaven is a 30 foot ladder made out of logs. Recruits are supposed to climb to the top and go over the top log and climb back down. This obstacle helps get over the fear of heights. SSgt Gonzalez was doing the Slide for Life obstacle which is a rope that starts at a tower and ends at a shorter post. As you slide down the rope at an angle you switch techniques for sliding. Everyone fell into the water below but SSgt Gonzalez. The Drill Instructors wanted everyone to fall to get over the fear of falling but SSgt Gonzalez was too good at it. As he was going down the rope his Drill Instructor said “Are you having fun Lowrider?” Lowrider was a nickname the Drill Instructors gave him. He would do push ups and the Drill Instructor would say, “Do the noise.” He would do his push ups and make the noise, “zzzt zzzt,” just like the car. When the Drill Instructor asked him that question he responded, “Sir yes sir,” then his Drill Instructor said, “I don’t believe your not talking to me at the position of attention.” SSgt Gonzalez went to the position of attention to answer but when he stood at attention he let go of the rope and fell into the water. From the obstacle courses they went to Edson Range to learn how to shoot. They shot at 6 foot targets from 250 yards (2.5 football fields), 300 yards (3 football fields), and 500 yards (5 football fields). They even shot with gas masks on. Shooting at 500 yards there is no luck, it’s all technique. At Edson Range there was a row of 84 targets on one side with 2 or 3 recruits marking the targets when they get shot. There is another 2 or 3 recruits shooting at the target and when they’re done shooting they would get their stuff and rotate around the range so that the shooters are now handling the targets and the people that were at the targets are now shooting. When they received their marksmanship badges they received Marksman, Sharpshooter, or Expert Rifleman. SSgt Gonzalez received Expert Rifleman. After the shooting

part of Boot Camp they moved on to swim qual. Every Marine must pass swim qualifications. SSgt Gonzalez graduated boot camp in October and because of his good grades he got a bonus and guaranteed into Avionics School.

From boot camp he went to Memphis, Tennessee for Avionics School. The whole school was self taught. You get a stack of modules which are text books you learn everything from. Once you finished reading the module you would go in to take the test. You fill out the bubble sheet and when you finish you go to this machine that grades the test. After awhile you would figure if you passed or not depending on the noise the machine made while grading your test. If you didn't get 100% you would be kicked out and sent to a review board to decide what your next MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) will be. Some people would go to get their test graded at the machine and once it made that noise meaning you failed you would see the expression on their face instantly change. While SSgt Gonzalez was in school some people would give him pointers. One of them was if you go in earlier than your supposed to then the time your learning won't count against you. You end up having more time than you were given. He had class from 11am to 5pm but he would go in before 11am to get ahead. SSgt Gonzalez graduated Avionics School with 100.9%.

After Avionics School he received his MOS and went to Camp Pendleton, San Diego. At Camp Pendleton, he specialized in specifically Cobras and Hueys helicopters. Cobras are two-blade, dual engine attack helicopter and it seats two people. A gunner in the front and the pilot behind the gunner. The maximum speed is 149 knots (171 mph). The Bell UH-1 Iroquois, nicknamed Huey, is the other helicopter SSgt Gonzalez specialized in. The Huey is a utility

helicopter with two-blades and a maximum speed of 117.312 knots (135 mph). It has a crew of 1 to 4 and a capacity of 14 troops.

From Camp Pendleton, SSgt Gonzalez went to Okinawa, Japan from 1986 to 1988. He was sent over there to work on helicopters. While he was there he didn't just work on helicopters everyday for 2 years, he went out and had fun. He bought a van while he was there and him and some friends would drive around the island. He also went scuba diving while he was there.

Korea was the next destination he went to in 1987 and in 1988 for Team Spirit. Over in Korea they have their own Marine Corps called Republic of Korea Marine Corps (ROKMC) and their flag is almost identical as the USMC flag. They occasionally fought alongside the United States Marine Corps. While SSgt Gonzalez was over there, they would train with the ROK Marines as if they were being attacked.

After training with the ROK Marines, he went to the Philippines and then to New Orleans toward the end of 1989. In New Orleans, he was an instructor for working on helicopters. After all the training he had from his instructor he was now instructing other people.

In 1990, Desert Shield/ Desert Storm was happening. He flew out of Dover Air Force Base in Delaware to Spain for a few days then landed in Al Jubail airport in Saudi Arabia on December 31, 1990. They carried 60 to 90 pounds around in 135° weather while in Saudi Arabia. The U.S. kept bombing Iraq every 3 hours so they would lack food and sleep. That prevented them from fighting with all of their energy and supplies. SSgt Gonzalez was one of the people that stayed at Lonesome Dove which was a spot picked in the middle of the desert and made into a runway. Lonesome Dove was close to the border of Kuwait but still in Saudi Arabia. Iraq would launch cannons about 25 miles away but what they didn't know is that Lonesome Dove

was only about 14 miles away. From there they flew out about 90 helicopters into the middle of Kuwait. Helicopters were landing where ever there was room. The next morning, there was helicopters for every 3 square mile waiting for the fuel trucks so they could fly back. That was the biggest helicopter attack. Their task was to take back Kuwait in 7 days and they did it in 3 and a half days. When the Iraqi people realized there was no way out they started burning the oil wells. So much burning oil was in the air that when the wind changed the smoke covered the sky and made it look like night. Everyone was breathing in oil. Even, after they took back Kuwait, they set up camp at Kuwait International Airport. SSgt Gonzalez volunteered to go to airport because he knew a lot of the marines had families back home and he would stay a little longer in Kuwait so someone else can go home to their family.. During the whole thing, he was incharge of the codes for the helicopters. He would hand them out to the pilots before they took off. If the pilots were out in the field and didn't respond with the correct code they would be shot down. At the end of the day or week, depending on the code, SSgt Gonzalez would get the codes back from the pilots and burn them and the next morning handout the new codes. The people of Kuwait were so thankful. They had American flags everywhere and some of them were even kissing their boots. SSgt Gonzalez in his head was thinking, "Where did they get all these American flags?"

When it was all over and they were getting ready to go back home Saudi Arabia made them vacuum out the helicopters to remove all of their sand. They believed their sand is holy and can never leave Saudi Arabia. Once again SSgt Gonzalez volunteered to stay back an extra week, so when they did fly home, him and about 8 other people had the C5 plane to themselves. When they landed in Dover Air Force Base, there was a red carpet rolled out. They thought the red

carpet was for someone important, so they walked around it but then all of these people were saying the red carpet was for them. They were welcomed by the Air Force General and many other civilians. There was kids going up to the Marines asking for their autograph. When SSgt Gonzalez left Dover Air Force Base, he went back to New Orleans. New Orleans had a parade for all of the Desert Storm Veterans.

From there, SSgt Gonzalez went to Marine Corps Air Station El Toro in Orange County for Search and Rescue. He was there for 5 years, rescuing in the ocean and in canyons. While he was there he also did Honor Guard for 3 years. He has buried over 300 service men at the Riverside National Cemetery and a few cemeteries in Orange County. He also did the MCAS Colorguard there at El Toro.

SSgt Jose L. Gonzalez spend 22 years in the United States Marine Corps and is now Retired Reserves until 2027. He joined the military because Tracy, California was a city where they grew a lot of crops and he didn't want to do that. The Marine Corps was his way of getting out of that city. SSgt Gonzalez says, "I believe I have the worst luck in the world, so I work twice as hard."