

Summary of email interview with Joaquin “Marty” Martinez, 3 November 2009 – 4 January 2010

Marty’s father, Teodoro Martinez, was from Guadalajara, Mexico and mother, Celia Lopez, was from Albuquerque, New Mexico. His father ran to Mexico with his wife during WWII all because his relatives and friends in Mexico told him not to go to the war because it was not his war, but the same people later pointed to him as a coward. So he quickly presented himself to the American Consulate and was shipped to Fort Bliss, Texas and left his mother pregnant with his son, Joaquin Martinez-Lopez, in Guadalajara.

After the war, Tedoro returned and took his wife back to L.A. but left young Marty with his sister, Aunt Maria, so she raised him. Marty grew up thinking that Maria and her husband, Juan Gallo, were his parents. Juan loved Marty like his own son but died when Marty was only 5 years old. Since Hispanics bear the name of both their father and mother, Marty always wondered why he was Martinez-Lopez and not Gallo-Martinez.

When Marty was 21, he wanted to go to Disneyland. So he went to the American consulate to get a tourist visa and learned his real parents were Teodoro Martinez and Celia Lopez; and that he could not get a tourist visa, but needed to register as a US citizen. He had to move to the USA before he turned 22 years or he would lose his US citizenship, so he moved to California to live with his real mother in January 1967. She said she had gone every year to take him back with her (but could not locate him). As soon he arrived in Glendale, Marty registered for selective service like everybody and his draft status was 1Y (qualified for service only in time of [declared] war or national emergency).

In California, Marty attended night school to learn to speak English, but the students made fun others when the teacher had them read. Marty had made two friends, an Italian and a Portuguese and after a couple weeks, Marty told his Italian friend, “If these people make fun of me, I'm going to walk out, because I came to learn not to be a clown.” As soon as he started reading they burst out laughing, so Marty threw up the middle finger and never returned to class. To learn English, he forced himself to read newspapers, listened only to English programs on the radio and TV, and dated only girls that did not speak Spanish. One year, he even found a job that required him to speak English; and in 1969, Marty enrolled in a junior college at L.A. Trade Tech, but his English was still not that good. He, however, learned to imitate the local Mexican-Americans, so people would think he was born in East L.A.

While living in Mexico back in 1964, 19-year old Marty had met and fell in love with 15-year old Silvia. After moving to California, Marty met Cory on a blind date in December 1967 and she did not speak or understand any Spanish. She was beautiful from the top but she had a big bottom, and they almost got married; but he found out she fooled around quite a bit, so he decided to go back to his old girl friend in Mexico. He mailed her a letter asking if she wanted to marry him, and she said yes. So according to the old custom he went back to Guadalajara on August 19, 1969 and asked her parents for her

hand in marriage. All agreed and the wedding date was set for the summer of 1970. Then Marty visited the American Consulate to ask what paperwork he needed to take her to the US right after church wedding. The Consulate told him they must be legally married on paper, so Marty went back and told her parents, but according to custom he still could not have sex until after the church wedding ceremony. The next day he returned to L.A. to fix up his apartment and save money for the wedding.

Upon his return in April 1970, he received his “congratulations letter.” draft classification had changed from 1Y to 1A and he was drafted after living only three years in the United States. His father had told him, “If the draft get you, don’t do what I did. Face your destiny; don’t listen to your friends and family because they are going to point to you like my friends did to me.” Just before going into the Army, Marty returned to Guadalajara to tell his half wife he been drafted and if she did not want to wait, he would let her go free, but she told him, “I will wait for you.” Sure enough all his friends and relatives told him, “Don’t go. It is not your war. Mexico is not in the war.” His godfather even told him, “We can hide you in a small town of Cuautla Jalisco up in Sierra,” then Marty remembered what his father had told him and just ignored their advice.

By then Marty could speak and understand English much better, but when he reported to the induction center, he responded, “*No comprende*” every time he was asked a question or told something. He played that game three different times, but thanks to his short fuse he blew his act. The last guy he met in the induction center commented to another, “Another fucking Mexican,” and Marty’s face expressed his anger since he understood the comment. When the man saw Marty’s expression, “You understand enough, so keep walking on the yellow line.” Marty then went through Basic Training, Advanced Individual Training (AIT), and on-the-job-training (OJT) as a truck driver at Fort Ord, California.

Arrival in Vietnam

Marty Martinez arrived at Bien Hoa, Viet Nam around 14 September 1970, and was assigned to the 512th Transportation Company at Camp Addison, near Qui Nhon. The headquarters was on the middle of a hill and you could see the motor stables from there. Marty and another soldier, named Sinerman, reported in. Marty only weighed 90 pounds and Sinerman was more or less about the same weight. The clerk asked if they wanted to drive a 10-ton. Both looked down the hill and saw the 5-ton trucks. Both had just driven deuce-and-halves back in Fort Ord during AIT but had never seen a 5-ton before, so they both mistook them for 10-tons and said yes.

That afternoon they were sitting outside their barracks on the side of the QL-19, just across from the Ponderosa (marshalling yard) when about 1800 hours, the Heavy Lift Platoon rolled in. Upon seeing the huge tractors and trailers, Marty exclaimed, “Ooooo shit, what I got into, those suckers are big,” In spite of the intimidating size of the trucks, he did not ask to be transferred to the 5-tons.

Both soldiers walked to the motor stables with Sergeant Wolf, their platoon leader who was also a small guy. When Marty approached the 10-tons, the tires were almost as high as his shoulder. The tractor was a M-123 10-ton 6X6 tractor with V8 engine, 10-gear transmission, with two sticks, one for low and high gear and the other for five-speed. The Dragon Wagon was a big trailer with 16 wheels designed to haul heavy loads. The Low Boy trailer carried only light cargo and could also be pulled by a 5-ton tractor.

Marty's Dragon Wagon once hauled a 56.6-ton M60A1 AVLB (bridge tank) complete with all sections. It was so heavy that his engine died every time the rig tried to move, so the Charlie Charlie ordered two 10-ton bobtails to push on each ramp of his Dragon Wagon, just to get his truck moving. He was then ordered to kick out ahead of the convoy and the two bobtails followed him. Just before he reached the An Khe Pass, the convoy finally caught up, so they drove down the Pass and Marty's tachometer kept going up on low first, so he had to play with the Johnny bar and brakes to slow the speed to about 5 miles per hour. He told his shot gun, "If I tell you jump, you jump and don't ask any questions and jump, because if I lose this F..... Nobody is going to stop it." Fortunately they made it safely to the bottom of the Pass, but the wheels of the Dragon became so hot and they started to blow up. The load was so heavy the trailer needed three heavy duty jacks to change the tires. He left a little damage in the road but made it all the way to Qui Nhon port.

The 10-tons ran slower on areas where the highway was straight down or straight up, going uphill and also at the bottom of the passes; but going downhill from the top of the passes, the drivers could kick it out of gear and none of the other trucks could catch them. They called it "Chinese Overdrive." Even the gun trucks called them to complain the 10-tons were going too fast down the hill. Marty loved driving the 10-tons and named his first tractor, "Tijuana Taxi."

Marty had two accidents while driving the 10-ton. Marty was driving the lead truck with the MPs following in the rear of the convoy. The convoy had kicked out after the Mang Giang Pass and was going downhill fast because it was a small hill with up a curve to the left and then a bridge. When Marty made the turn to the left at the bottom of the hill he saw troops with tanks traveling down the middle of the road. One tank was just on the way and the APC was sitting like always on the right side of the road with little room between the two, so Marty took the chance between them. His truck stopped when the Dragon Wagon hit the sides of the tank and APC. His tractor looked like hot rod with no fenders and crushed mirrors. He fortunately was not charged for the damage because convoys always had the right of the way and the officer in charge of the troops had not warned them. The funny part was the officer came running to tell the MPs, "I saw everything." One of the MPs asked him, "Yes sir, what did you see?" He said, "Well this truck hit the APC," and the MP replied, "NO SHIT!" It was a very scary moment.

The second accident occurred at a base just before Camp Addison. Marty was driving about five miles hauling a very heavy load, so he was ordered to move where he was going to unload his cargo. The place was a little steep and slippery coming down and oily, so Marty turned very slow to the right. His tractor turned, but his Dragon Wagon did

not, and jack knifed like an “L.” It slid into four parked Korean trucks. No one was injured, but when the MPs came they wrote an accident report that it was caused by slippery ground. Marty was not charged but his company sent him to driver school. After he finished, he had to take a driving test. The test took place with a deuce-and-a-half in the Ponderosa, so he asked the instructor, “Sergeant, can I take the test with my truck?” He asked, “Have you been driving in Nam?” to which Marty replied, “Yes, I drive a 10-ton.” He was so surprised and told Marty to go and get it. The funny part was Marty then taught his driving instructor how to drive a 10-ton.

When Marty arrived, the gun truck escorts for the Heavy Lift Platoon were “Glory Stompers” and “Vengeance is Mine;” but when they lost the Glory Stompers, “The Bad Hombre” was assigned to the platoon. The 10-tons ran in separate convoys from the stake and platform, and cargo truck convoys. The 10-ton convoys had only about ten trailers: five dragon wagons and five low boys, only the Bad Hombre and also the “Charlie Charlie” (convoy commander) in the gun jeep, Little Bad Hombre, with two M-60s, and a maintenance truck with a M-60 a bunch of tires and spared parts. The maintenance truck was not armed like the gun trucks, but was just a 5-ton cargo truck with an M-60 machinegun. The gunner named Harris was a very good friend of Marty.

1st Ambush

Marty’s first ambush was in the An Khe Pass driving a 10-ton tractor with the gun truck The Match Box as his load. This gun truck broke down in Pleiku, so the gunners were riding shotgun in the other trucks. The convoy stopped at top of the An Khe Pass just before the Hair Pin, because there was an ambush down below. The Charlie Charlie was in the lead like always, but after the complete stop, he came and told Marty there was contact down there and they may have to go back to the An Khe base. Someone ordered the convoy to go through it, and a few minutes later the Charlie Charlie came back and told the gunners to jump in the Match Box and get ready, they are going through the ambush. The convoy commander then came to Marty and told him, since Marty had the gun truck on his low boy, he was ordered to take lead and, “Don’t stop till you reach Bridge 19.”

The gunners jumped on the gun truck and they headed down the hill. Heading up the Pass, they encountered part of the convoy with one gun truck, and the drivers looked kind of worried. Almost three or four curves before the bottom of the pass, Marty took the curve to the left and there was the ambush on the next wide curve. When Marty was came around the curve, he saw to the right a burning truck loaded with ammo and tracers flying everywhere. Four gun trucks (he didn’t remember their names) were in the kill zone and the gunners of the first gun truck were waving for him to stop, but his orders were to reach Bridge 19. So he just kept going until he reached the bridge at the bottom of the pass. When he reached Bridge 19, jumped out of the cab and realized no one else drove through the kill zone. It was just him and his cargo, The Match Box and its crew. The bridge was protected by the Tiger Division of the Korean army. So the NCOIC of the Matchbox, Leo Parks, told him, “We have to go back and help.” So Marty backed his rig up the hill into the kill zone, but this time some Korean forces walked along side his

truck. When they arrived the fighting was still going, so he stopped, took a position and engaged the enemy. The Koreans wanted to go after Charlie, for a few minutes we hold them but then they just jump into the jungle still in the right side of us, so the NCOIC started yelling on the radio, "Cease fire, friendly forces in the area." He repeated it and the firing stopped and the only shots could be heard were the small arms from Charlie. The Americans ducked, heard more shots and then just silence. Later the Koreans came back with a dead VC. Since that incident, everybody thought Marty was nuts, because he drove back into the kill zone.

2nd Ambush

Another ambush was on the way to LZ English, when the Glory Stompers was hit. Marty was driving his 10-ton in a 5-ton convoy. He did not remember how many other trucks or 10-tons were in the convoy and how many gun trucks much less their names. He only remembered when the Glory Stompers was hit by a B40 rocket and all hell broke loose. Tracers came all over from the left. Marty and his shotgun, SP5 Cecilio Longoria from Falfurrias, Texas, opened fire from the cab. Longoria was on his second tour in Nam opened fire on the right side. Marty tried to shoot out the left with his M-16 on his lap at times and driving at the same time. The convoy did not stop, just kept going. Marty did not remember seeing any enemy, since he was a driver and his orders were to shoot and get the hell out of the kill zone to the nearest base A.S.A.P. The only thing he did remember was the tracers going all over, the big explosions, smoke and especially the road. A gun truck followed him and once they were secure at the fire base, the gun truck returned to the kill zone. Marty was the one who took back the rest of the Glory Stompers.

One time in 1971 after hauling a load of projos to Pleiku. Before they rolled into camp, somebody began separating trucks to keep going. Those trucks turned left and headed south to the border of either Laos or Cambodia. They crossed a small river. The bridge was so narrow and Marty's outside tires were hanging in the air. He could only cross with inside tires. They went to a Green Beret camp.

Bad Hombre

December 1970 or January 1971 when an AIT buddy of his was killed, Marty became very upset and volunteered to go on the gun truck. Taco, a guy from Tortugas, New Mexico, father had died and since he was the only man left of the family, he was sent home for good and Marty jumped in The Bad Hombre later renamed just Bad Hombre. The difference from The Bad Hombre and Bad Hombre was the set up. The Bad Hombre had three 50's and two M60's. Bad Hombre had four .50's mounted and two handheld M60's, one in the cab for the driver and the other in the back, and also four M79s.

Since the gun trucks always run loaded, the engines wore out before the other trucks. The engine of The Bad Hombre was worn out and the crew had to get a new one, because The Bad Hombre could not keep up with the convoys. Two tow trucks lifted the box of The Bad Hombre and transferred it onto the chassis of a new truck. It took a 10-ton to keep it

from flipping, move the old chassis and put the new one under. After that we took The Bad Hombre to get a new paint job and the crew asked the painter to go easy painting over the art work, so they could repaint it, but he went very heavy and there was no trace of the old artwork, so me and Archuleta a driver from Colorado helped me to paint the new sign Bad Hombre and also we change the set up and we went from 3 50's to 4, the date I don't remember.

An Italian guy was the NCOIC of The Bad Hombre but was short with maybe a month left in Vietnam. Bob was a very nice guy from North Carolina, and Tex became the new NCOIC. He later left the gun truck, and Leo Parks, the NCOIC from the Match Box, came to be the new NCOIC of Bad Hombre. The Match Box was from the 523 Trans, which was inactivated.¹ All the men were transferred to the other units. Leo Parks came to the 512 Trans, there was another guy, John Lemos, from San Fernando Valley, CA had been a gunner of Steppin Wolf then became a gunner on The Bad Hombre. John and Marty served together basic training. They took the same bus at the induction center, and together at basic, AIT, OJT, and the same company and platoon in Vietnam.

The crews did not receive any training just volunteered and jumped in the gun truck. The three gunners or two rotated as drivers, one drove a section of the road first, second or third, so nobody drove all the way. Marty was assigned to the right rear machinegun; but once the crew was reduced to only three, the NCOIC would man the right front machinegun close to the radio, and then Marty would take any of the ones in the left on the driver's side.

One night, The Bad Hombre moved to the perimeter and the camp was attacked. A small tank with two small barrels responded with fire along with the gun trucks. Marty later learned the VC attacked the village and killed the French priest and two or three nuns.

In July 1971, Marty went on R&R to Sidney, Australia thinking he was going to see topless girls on the beaches, but it was winter down there. After he returned, Marty was engaged in three ambushes.

3rd Ambush

In August or early September, Bad Hombre was rearguard of a convoy which was heading up An Khe Pass and just about the same place of the other one. Small arms fire started, so the convoy tried to get the hell out of the kill zone, but a Champaign² stopped his truck and got out to open fire on the left side of the road. He changed a couple of magazines and then tried to get back in his truck when a B40 hit his truck. He was also hit so part of the convoy was stopped in the kill zone engaging the enemy. After a while, troops from the Korean Tiger Division arrived. Somebody picked up the driver and went up hill to dust off the wounded. Leo Parks, NCOIC of the Bad Hombre, was also slightly wounded on his right side.

¹ The 523rd was sent north to I Corps Tactical Zone in January 1971 but the 669th TC was inactivated in March 1971.

² Marty was not certain of the name.

Days later Marty and others went to see Champaign. He lost one leg and when he saw the gun truck crew, he start crying and said, "I fucked up, I did exactly what I wasn't suppose to do, but I guess I'm not going to play foot ball again."

4th Ambush

His next ambush was on the way to Tuy Hoa. The cargo trucks hauled troops. That ambush was a very bad one and was very hard for Marty to remember. The reason was a lot of pain, many, many wounded. Fire came very fast from the right side along with homemade mines detonating on the cargo, so a lots of confusion. Troops tried to get out of the trucks, take cover and respond fire. Bad Hombre opened fire, it was bad. Marty doesn't like to think about it. After it was over Bad Hombre covered the area and set a LZ for the dust off. Troops from the Korean White Horse Division came to help but the damage was done. Many infantry guys were very badly wounded and some killed. And like a ghost Charlie vanished. It was hit and run. Marty did not like to remember this ambush.

5th Ambush

On the way to Pleiku, the convoy entered the "VC Valley" between Mang Giang and the An Khe Passes. The convoy drove up a slope and headed for a curve. The convoy curved to the right and then went down into ravine at the bottom a curve to the left and went up at small hill then curved back to the right. Entering the first curve one could see the other two curves, but the bottom of the next curve was like a horseshoe with the two ends higher than the center. Bad Hombre was the rear of the convoy at the top of the curve. There may have been a gun truck behind the convoy. Marty could not see the VC but sure could feel them. When the enemy opened fire from up the small hills to the left, it seemed like the convoy was hit from every direction. More enemy fire came from the left away from QL19 at the right very close about 7 to 10 meters at the left deeper down about other 10 meters and then up about 100 meters. Lemos was driving, Parks, the NCOIC, got his .50 and Marty jumped onto the left side of the truck to get the .50 on the back and see up on that curve but they kept moving. The enemy hit a couple trucks but not much damage, so Bad Hombre open fire in both directions because we were only three in the truck. As usual, the Hueys flew in and opened fire. So much hot brass fell on Bad Hombre and its crew filling the bed of the truck. Lemos was burnt when he had to change the barrel of the .50. It was too hot and the .50 was not working right. There was not much damage to the convoy except a couple holes in the trucks.

Return to Heavy Lift

In early September 1971, the Heavy Lift Platoon was running convoys with the 5-ton convoys since there were only about two or three 10-ton left, and then the new 10-ton tractors arrived. When the new ones arrived, Marty was reassigned back to driving in the Heavy Lift Platoon to teach the new drivers. First the new drivers rode shotgun with

Marty, then they drove a bobtail and then since they were convoying with lightweights, Marty let the replacement drivers drive after the Mang Giang.

6th Ambush

Around September or early October, there was another ambush, he thinks on the way to Tuy Hoa. Marty did not participate, but knew the Cold Sweet was hit by a homemade mine like claymore and all the crew was either killed or wounded. One of the guys went on sick call and missed the run. At this time, the 512th TC was ready move to Phu Tai from the Cha Rang Valley.

The second time Marty drove to the border, he was a gunner on The Bad Hombre. Some officer was in front of Pleiku and formed a new convoy like before. They drove over a floating bridge and past a village with kids running out of the mission school. They passed a warning sign with a skull, "NO AMERICANS ALLOW BEYOND THIS POINT." The crew just threw up their middle fingers at the sign. The camp was protected only on one side with bamboo. That night they received contact with the tracers going and the projectiles of the small tanks going and exploding on the hill in front of them.

One day Marty and his buddy, Lemos, were talking and both agree to extend in Vietnam for three months, so they were free when they got back to the world. They were supposed to fly home in November, but Santa Clause operation let them off 30 days early.

Going Home

Both rode in the same convoy, Lemos in the BAD HOMBRE and Marty driving a 10-ton. The BAD HOMBRE pulled up close to Marty's truck and said, "You are going home," to which Marty replied, "Yes, next month, I'm short." Lemos corrected, "NO MAN, WE ARE GOING HOME NOW!" Marty stopped his truck in the middle of the VC Valley and they asked on the radio for the names of the personnel going home. Marty heard, "Mike, Alfa, Romeo, Tango, India, November, Echo, Zulu," and then, Tango, Echo, Oscar, Delta, etc etc. Marty jumped back in the cab of his truck and was very happy. He told his shotgun, "When we get to the base this truck is yours." Marty Martinez and John Lemos processed out and flew home on the same plane.

Marty was very proud to serve his new country, the country of his birth mother, the country where all his relatives on his mother's side had served. Uncle Johnny served in the Marines during WWII and Korea, his Uncle Erick was an Air Force pilot during WWII and Korea too, and the rest served in the Army. He had a grandfather, Joaquin, was also drafted in the Mexican army when he was only 13 years old and fought against the French with the Juaristas during the Mexican-French War. So Marty was a warrior like them, proud of everything that he did, with no remorse. Right after Marty's return from Vietnam, he married Silvia in a religious wedding on December 25, 1971, and he was so proud of been a veteran that he was married in his Class A uniform.

Marty worked for McDonnell-Douglas in Long Beach, California as liaison engineer and retired during the military downsizing in 1993, and decided to move back to Mexico.