

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nearly 60 Years Later, Reno Marine Shares the Last Moments of Fallen Vietnam Hero

Documentary filmmaker travels to Reno to preserve the last known eyewitness account of Cpl. Rodolfo M. Gonzalez's final mission

RENO, Nev. — July 22, 2026 — Nearly sixty years after a U.S. Marine helicopter was shot down in Vietnam, a Reno Marine who witnessed the mission will share his memories on camera as part of a documentary and historical-preservation effort.

On Sunday, July 26, documentary producer Gerardo “Gerry” Gonzalez will travel from Southern California to Reno to spend several days with Leonard Martinez, believed to be the last known living Marine to see Corporal Rodolfo M. “Rudy” Gonzalez, USMC, alive before his helicopter was shot down on November 14, 1966.

Martinez’s interview is a crucial component of The Uncle Rudy Legacy Project™, a family-led initiative preserving the life, service and sacrifice of a young Marine whose final chapter remains unfinished. Martinez served with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (HMM-263) and witnessed the events surrounding Rudy’s last mission.

“Every year, we lose more members of the Vietnam generation. Leonard’s memories cannot be replaced. If we do not preserve them now, that piece of American history disappears forever.”

Only days remained before Cpl. Gonzalez was expected to complete his tour and return home. A legal Mexican immigrant raised in Harlingen, Texas, he had volunteered for the Marine Corps and served as a door gunner aboard a Vietnam-era Bell UH-1E Iroquois “Huey” with VMO-6. On his final mission, the helicopter came under enemy fire while supporting an extraction operation. Gonzalez was killed in action at age 22.

His body was recovered. His story—and one final promise—remained unfinished.

Because his grieving parents missed the statutory two-year filing window for posthumous citizenship, the recognition was never completed. Nearly six decades later, the Gonzalez family continues to advocate for the citizenship Rudy earned through service while preserving the testimony of the Marines, friends and relatives who knew him.

“This is no longer only our family’s story. It belongs to every Marine who served, every family who waited for someone to come home, and every American who believes these stories deserve to be remembered.”

While in Reno, Gonzalez will follow Martinez at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention, capturing documentary footage and introducing the Legacy Project to veterans from across the country. The production will record their interactions, memories and the quiet bonds shared by those who served.

Gonzalez and Martinez have also been invited by Commander Greg Montalvo to present The Uncle Rudy Legacy Project™ at the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Reno Chapter 719 monthly meeting on Tuesday, July 28, at 6:30 p.m. The presentation will introduce members to the film, the posthumous-citizenship effort and the broader mission to preserve immigrant military service and Vietnam veterans' oral histories.

Five hundred newly printed 5-by-7-inch Legacy Project postcards will be distributed during the week's events. The family-funded production is supported in part by individual GoFundMe donors whose contributions are helping cover ground travel, lodging, interview production and outreach materials.

Gonzalez is a former network television cameraman, producer and editor with more than three decades of long-form news experience. He founded the project with his brother, Rodolfo "Rudy" Gonzalez, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist and the fallen Marine's namesake nephew.

More information, interviews, archival materials and original tribute music are available at www.UncleRudy.net.

ASSIGNMENT DESK QUICK GUIDE

A Reno Feature Story Ready to Report

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

Television, radio, newspaper and podcast interviews are available in Reno July 27–29, 2026. Exact locations and times can be coordinated with the media contact.

- One-on-one interview with Leonard Martinez, Reno resident, Vietnam veteran and last known living witness to Cpl. Gonzalez's final mission
- Interview with Gerardo "Gerry" Gonzalez, founder, executive producer and creative director of The Uncle Rudy Legacy Project™
- Coverage opportunities at the VFW National Convention, subject to convention access and approval
- Coverage of the July 28 presentation to Military Order of the Purple Heart, Reno Chapter 719, subject to chapter approval
- Access to archival photographs, military documents, tribute music and selected documentary material upon request

STORY IDEAS

- The Last Marine: a Reno veteran carries the memory of a fallen Marine's final mission for nearly sixty years
- Preserving the last known eyewitness account before it is lost to history
- A family's decades-long effort to complete a Marine's unfinished story
- A legal Mexican immigrant who volunteered, served and died for the United States—yet never received posthumous citizenship
- The aging Vietnam generation and the urgency of recording firsthand oral histories
- Two professional storytellers turn their cameras toward their own family history
- How one Reno interview could become the emotional cornerstone of a documentary film

VISUALS AVAILABLE

- Leonard Martinez on camera and interacting with fellow veterans
- VFW National Convention activity, veteran reunions, insignia, memorabilia and quiet moments of remembrance
- Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter 719 presentation and member interviews, subject to approval
- Historic photographs of Cpl. Rodolfo M. Gonzalez in uniform and with family
- Vietnam-era VMO-6 imagery and Bell UH-1E Iroquois "Huey" reference material
- Military records, newspaper clippings, family photographs and campaign correspondence
- The Uncle Rudy Legacy Project postcards, website, petition and original tribute songs

KEY FACTS

Fallen Marine	Cpl. Rodolfo M. “Rudy” Gonzalez, USMC
Killed in action	November 14, 1966, Vietnam
Unit / aircraft	Marine Observation Squadron Six (VMO-6); Bell UH-1E Iroquois “Huey”
Reno witness	Leonard Martinez, last known living witness to Rudy’s final mission
Reno dates	July 27–29, 2026
Purple Heart meeting	Tuesday, July 28, 2026, 6:30 p.m.; MOPH Reno Chapter 719

ABOUT THE UNCLE RUDY LEGACY PROJECT™

The Uncle Rudy Legacy Project™ is a historical-preservation initiative dedicated to documenting the life and legacy of Cpl. Rodolfo M. Gonzalez, USMC, while preserving the voices of Vietnam veterans and honoring immigrant military service. Through documentary filmmaking, oral history, photography, original music, education and public advocacy, the project is building a living archive for future generations.

MEDIA CONTACT

Gerardo “Gerry” Gonzalez

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The Uncle Rudy Legacy Project™

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