

Voces Oral History Project *Narratives*



The University of Texas at Austin School of Journalism

No. 17 & 18 Fall 2014

New Collection: Political and Civic Engagement

In January 1975, in Rosenberg, Texas, a young attorney named Paul Cedillo beseeched Congresswoman Barbara Jordan to consider the obstacles local Mexican Americans encountered at the poll. Jordan did—and became one of the three sponsors of the extension and expansion of the Voting Rights Act, which would have a tremendous effect across the Southwest, leading eventually to the elections of thousands of Latinos at the local and state levels.

The political awakening and empowerment of Rosenberg, Texas, was repeated elsewhere. It was, in a sense, a convergence of factors that led to a sense of urgency and entitlement: the Black civil rights movement shined a spotlight on inequalities that made the plight of Latinos impossible to ignore any longer; federal anti-poverty programs provided a new vantage point to those who worked within them, helping them understand what needed to be done, and helping them develop the wherewithal to tackle problems; and new organizations, such as the Southwest Voter Registration Project, based in San

Antonio, taught them the basics.

The issue of political empowerment and civic engagement have been a part of Voces since the project launched in 1999: the story of Latino civil rights is all about political empowerment and civic engagement. So it was that even before Voces began the Civic Engagement collection in the fall of 2013, there were already dozens of interviews that fit the new collection. It's an essential chapter

in the story of U.S. Latinos.

Voces, working with two other on-campus centers, will showcase the Voting Rights Act, Political Empowerment/Civic Engagement at a conference to be held at the University of Texas campus in the fall of 2015, examining the many paths to political empowerment, the factors that contributed to it, and the many men and women who have shaped it. Also at the conference, Voces will mount a photo exhibit and two short documentaries that examine stories of Latino political empowerment in Texas. We hope you'll join us for what promises to be an unforgettable event.



Photo by Miguel Gutierrez, Jr.

Lupe Uresti shows her scrapbook to Felcita and Modesto Arriaga, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez looks on.



Photo by Christian Murray

Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

A Note from the Project Director

Fifteen years and over 940 interviews later, the Voces Oral History Project (formerly the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project) keeps breaking new ground. We celebrate this 15-year milestone with this super-sized newsletter—we hope you enjoy!

Our success has been built on partnerships between the men and women we've interviewed, the students who have written stories from the interviews, and volunteers who have done everything from fact-checking to coordinating trips to interviewing.

Over the years, themes have emerged within the interviews—and we have included them in our four published books.

Today, we are poised to more fully develop those themes, dedicating new collections to some of them. In this next phase of our work, we are exploring political empowerment and civic engagement. Other topics will follow. But keep checking back and look for a **conference on the University of Texas at Austin campus in the fall of 2015 on U.S. Latinos, the Voting Rights Act and Political Empowerment.** *The best is yet to come!*

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Guillermo Ábrego

Tribute

Although he enjoyed testing B-24 Liberator planes before they flew to World War II bombing missions, something was missing for 23-year-old top sergeant Guillermo Ábrego.

“I was in the Medical Corps and, when he heard that I was in battles in Europe, he volunteered for overseas duty,” said Ábrego’s brother, Salomón.

In April 1945, Army Air Forces 1st Sgt. Ábrego got his wish and deployed to the Pacific Theater. Unfortunately, his first mission in June of that year would also be his last.

According to “The Loneliest Flight,” an article by Sgt. Bob Speer, published in *Brief*, the B-24 carrying Ábrego had four direct hits from Japanese forces. The pilot, Lt. Floyd Beanblossom, ordered his crew to abandon the plane and parachute into the sea. Beanblossom counted the parachutes and realized one man was missing. For unknown reasons, Ábrego didn’t jump. He decided to attempt to land. Ábrego flew the plane 600 miles back to Tinian Island, in the Northern Mariana Islands. As he approached Tinian, he made the mistake of choosing the shortest runway. Landing, the plane lurched on its flat right tire and veered. He attempted to pull the plane up for another attempt, but the bomber stalled and skidded off the runway into coral. Ábrego was taken to a hospital but died six hours later. According to Speer’s article, some of his crew thought he didn’t jump because he was afraid of water; others speculated that he simply could not abandon his beloved plane.

Tribute based on an article by Sgt. Bob Speer, with additional information provided by Salomón Ábrego. (Mr. G. Ábrego died in the line of duty on April 19, 1945.)



Frank Aguerrebere

Interview by Vicki Torres

Although he never talked much about his wartime experiences, Frank Aguerrebere parachuted into the Normandy invasion and fought in the Battle of the Bulge, two of the bloodiest and most decisive clashes of World War II.

As an 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper he jumped over Normandy on June 6, 1944, then into Holland in Operation Market Garden in September 1944. He recalled the bitter cold of the monthlong Battle of the Bulge, where he fought the Germans alongside British troops. Aguerrebere had been drafted into the U.S. Army at Fort MacArthur, in San Pedro, California, on Sept. 17, 1943. He was never wounded. However, he lost friends in battle.

He recalled getting lost behind enemy lines once, when he was trying to return to his command post to start a furlough. He became disoriented in crossing a river while carrying enemy arms that he hoped to sell during his furlough. He lost the guns in the water and wandered for a couple of days. He found other U.S. soldiers — not from his 505th Regiment, but from the 508th Regiment and was eventually reunited with his unit.

When WWII ended, he was serving in France. He was discharged at Fort MacArthur, in San Pedro on Jan. 19, 1946. After his discharge, he went on to work for Los Angeles County, first as a soil inspector for the Flood Control Division and then as a home and building inspector until his retirement in 1990.

Interviewed on Jan. 7, 2011, in Los Angeles.



Josephine Aguilera

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Reflecting on her life, Josephine Trujillo Aguilera remarked on how her experience growing up was different from that of her two daughters because she never had the chance to finish school.

Aguilera dropped out after eighth grade to work as a housekeeper and baby sitter because she needed things her parents couldn’t provide, such as shoes.

“I couldn’t ask for anything more because I wasn’t educated,” she said.

Aguilera, a native of Deming, New Mexico, was only 16 when she married Manuel Aguilera, a 19-year-old carpenter also from Deming.

Before Manuel left for World War II with the Army, they married and had two boys, both of whom served in the Navy during the Vietnam War.

During WWII, Manuel spent some time stationed in Germany and Czechoslovakia. After he returned home, the couple had their first daughter, Yolanda.

In the 1950s, the Aguileras moved about 100 miles away to Hurley, New Mexico, where Manuel and Josephine worked at the Kennecott Chino Mine; there, he soldered copper while she did janitorial work. After long years of hard work at the mine, Manuel and Josephine retired in 1975 and 1982, respectively. In 1995, Manuel Aguilera died of prostate cancer.

At the time of her interview, Aguilera said she enjoys visits with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, though she longs for the years when Manuel was alive and her own children were younger.

“Those were the good old days,” Aguilera said.

Interviewed on July 15, 2004, in Hurley, New Mexico.



Moses Alemán

Interview by Lynn Maguire-Walker

Moses “Moe” Alemán was born and spent much of his childhood in a wood-framed house on Austin’s East Third Street. He recalled that the family home lacked many basic necessities, such as indoor plumbing.

When he was around 12 years old, his older brothers Arthur and Samuel left for World War II after enlisting in the Navy. Two years later, his brother Daniel was inducted into the Merchant Marines. After their service, the three Alemán brothers were discharged and returned home safely in 1947 to resume their education, using the GI Bill.

Alemán himself finished high school and attended the University of Texas at Austin. Soon after graduating, he enlisted in the Air Force in 1952, during the Korean War. Because of his ability to communicate in both English and Spanish, Alemán was made a special investigator during the Korean War, serving as liaison between the U.S. military and the Panamanian police in an effort to protect the Panama Canal.

After the Korean War, he became an FBI agent. The bureau had begun actively recruiting Spanish speakers when Fidel Castro took over Cuba, Alemán said. In 1972, Alemán became a specialist on airport and airline security when he joined the Federal Aviation Administration’s Office of Civil Aviation Security. He retired from the FAA in 1995 and started doing consulting and training on related topics.

At the time of his interview, Alemán lived with Gloria Torres Alemán, his wife of 57 years, in McKinney, Texas.

Interviewed on March 27, 2004, in McKinney, Texas.



Raymond Alvarado

Interview by Taylor Peterson

It was Nov. 26, 1943. Army Pvt. Raymond Alvarado was playing poker with buddies on the British troop ship *HMT Robna* when he was dealt “a dead man’s hand: aces and queens.” Little did he know that within a few hours the reality of death would be all around him. He was assigned to the 853rd Engineering Aviation Battalion and was among the 2,193 people aboard the *Robna* in a 24-ship convoy sailing along the coast of Algeria to the Far East. As many as 30 German aircraft launched glide bombs on the convoy. The *Robna* was the only ship sunk, with 1,138 killed, including 1,015 Americans.

“There was black smoke, fire, blood everywhere,” Alvarado recalled, “and the men... were all torn into many body parts.”

Alvarado grabbed a life preserver and jumped into the water, along with fellow American Sgt. Louie Snyder. They floated on one of the ship’s loading docks for 12 hours.

Eventually they encountered another American survivor, a Capt. Johnson, who held a flashlight. The glow from the light was enough for the crew of the minesweeper *USS Pioneer* to detect and rescue them. Alvarado said when he spoke of the incident shortly after the war, no one believed him. While the U.S. government in 1944 acknowledged the attack, it suppressed details about it. In 1967, through the Freedom of Information Act and after intense campaigning by the *Robna* Survivors Memorial Association, the government formally provided details of the attack and loss of life.

Interviewed on Aug. 9, 2010, in Denver.



José Aragón

Interview by Joseph Padilla

José Aragón, who eventually served in three military branches, recalled his journey through World War II as a harrowing experience in the Pacific.

Aragón was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1944 but quickly volunteered for the Navy. Before he began training, he learned that the Marines needed volunteers.

“The sergeant told us, ‘Ok, you, you, and you—you’ll be in the Marines,’” Aragón said. “And that was that: I went to the Marines.”

Aragón grew up in Weston, Colorado, the eldest of 18 brothers and sisters.

“We would go hunting and fishing to feed the family,” Aragón said.

In August 1944, Aragón was sent to Pearl Harbor and spent over a month getting supplies ready and preparing weapons. On Sept. 20, Aragón went on a small crew ship to the Marshall Islands for two days; his crew ship arrived at Saipan and when U.S. Marines got there, Aragón experienced firsthand what combat was like.

Aragón spent his last few months in Peleliu (an island within what is now Palau), as part of the 3rd Base Headquarters Battalion, Fleet Marine Force Pacific.

On June 6, 1946, Aragón was discharged from the Marine Corps as a corporal. He moved back to Weston to work at the same coal mine as his father.

“I never did go to college. I wanted to make money, and the mine was the only place to make money,” he said.

Interviewed on Feb. 26, 2011, in Aurora, Colorado.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM VOCES: Q&A with Carlos Elizario Morales



Photo by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Carlos worked at the Voces Oral History Project for a year, from the summer of 2013 to the summer of 2014. He helped shape and edit our very first batch of Foto-Voz videos and then moved on to help in all areas of the project.

Q: What did you do at Voces?

I started off working on the Foto-Voz videos and then began taking on other roles, like helping plan and conduct the multiple individual interview sessions (MIIS).

Q: What did you learn during your time at Voces?

I learned how to work effectively in a team, and more about the importance (and process) of preserving oral histories.

Q: What are you doing now?

I'm doing contract video work for a company downtown and still looking for a journalism-related job.

Q: Any other comments?

I miss the project! My year there went by incredibly fast and it was enjoyable every day.

Visit our Vimeo page to see Carlos' work on the Foto-Voz videos – vimeo.com/vocesoralhistoryproject

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: WWII



Juan Baggio

Interview by Adolfo Domínguez

Though he was never stationed on the battle front, Juan Baggio's early life prepared him to serve his country on the homefront during World War II.

"My dad died three months before I was born, and my mom died when I was 12 years old, so [my childhood] wasn't too good," said Baggio, a Beeville, Texas, native who grew up in hard economic times with his single mother, his older brother Bob and two half-siblings. Struggling after the 1936 death of his mother, Maria Guadalupe Ramos, Juan Baggio and his brother Bob moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, where they did all kinds of work, from picking cotton to shining shoes. When the draft letter came from the Army after the United States entered WWII, Baggio leapt at the opportunity for a better life. On Jan. 20, 1943, Baggio joined the Army and traveled to Salt Lake City, Utah, for basic training. After completing the training, he was assigned to the 1159th Guard Squadron Army Air Corps training base in Great Bend, Kansas. Baggio's service to his country wasn't highlighted by fierce battles; instead, he worked behind the scenes as a guard patrolman, while his fellow countrymen at the base were equipped with the skills and training necessary to defeat the Axis powers overseas. Upon his return to Beeville after the war, Baggio took advantage of the GI Bill of Rights to finish the educational equivalent of the eighth grade, while simultaneously being self-employed doing construction, carpentry and painting.

When asked if he has any advice for the country's youth, Baggio urged them to take school seriously.

"[Formal education] is something I wish I had. I never got a chance to get it. That would be my main advice to them," Baggio said.

Interviewed on March 21, 2009, in Beeville, Texas.



Genovevo Bargas

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

During the Battle of Okinawa, Genovevo Bargas looked to the sky from the deck of *USS Comfort*. A Japanese kamikaze was headed straight for the ship.

The kamikaze missed the *Comfort's* smokestack but still managed to create a huge hole in the ship.

The attack on the vessel killed 28 Americans and wounded 48. The shock left Bargas with chronic pain in his back, a memento of war.

He was a supply clerk with the 205th Hospital Ship Complement; in that capacity, he traveled throughout the Pacific, picking up wounded soldiers for their treatment on hospital ships.

Born July 16, 1922, in Victoria, Texas, Bargas was the second of Louis and Martina Bargas' five children. His father made him leave school in eighth grade to start working full time. In the lead-up to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Bargas tried to enlist in the Marines right after President Franklin Roosevelt declared war on the Axis but was rejected due to a broken arm. Then, on Nov. 13, 1942, he was drafted.

His first Army stint ended on December 1945, but he re-enlisted in 1948. He left the Army for good right before the start of the Korean War. Upon his homecoming, Bargas settled in San Antonio, where his mother lived. There, he met Lupe Guevara, the woman who would become his wife. The couple married in 1953 and had three children, all of whom Bargas encouraged to go to college.

"If you have children, see that they get a good education so they can be good for the community," Bargas said.

Interviewed on Aug. 4, 2007, in San Antonio.



Civic
Engagement

Antonio Becerra

Interview by Martin do Nascimento

Determination marked the life of Antonio “Tony” Becerra—as a Mexican American in rural Texas in the 1920s and ’30s, then as a German prisoner of war during World War II, and as a six-time political candidate.

Becerra grew up Rosenberg, 34 miles southwest of Houston.

“In most areas around here, there’s poor people on one side [of the railroad tracks] and the ones that have a little money on the other side,” Becerra said.

When he turned 18, Becerra was drafted and assigned to the 103rd Regiment of Combat Engineers and later to the 28th Infantry Division. Becerra fought in some of the fiercest battles in the European theater.

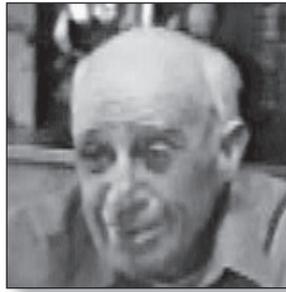
He was captured during the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes but managed to escape just days before the war’s end.

After the war, Becerra chose to stay in Rosenberg and “try to see if I could help the people by what I knew.” He dedicated his life to promoting minority rights in Rosenberg.

“My thing was to get people together and it would jump over to voting, so that’s how I used to get them,” Becerra said.

Becerra ran for public office in Rosenberg five times before being elected on his sixth attempt in 1992. His niece, Lupe Uresti, was elected the town’s first Hispanic mayor the same year.

Interviewed on March 23, 2014, in Richmond, Texas.



Adolfo Borrego

Interview by Brian Luna Lucero

While fighting in Europe during World War II, Adolfo Borrego said he felt no fear because he believed in God’s protection.

Laying a world map on a kitchen table, Borrego pointed out locations and recalled his wartime experiences in Europe, from 1943 to 1945. Before the war, he had never considered traveling to Europe.

Borrego, who was originally from New Mexico, was a construction worker in Nevada before he was drafted into the U.S. Army.

“I did not know anything about the war,” he said. “I was not even expecting to go and serve.”

He shipped out from New York to Glasgow, Scotland for combat duty, which ended after he was shot in the stomach. He remembered the German troops moving backward and the American, Canadian and English troops moving forward, slowly and cautiously. Germany surrendered in 1945.

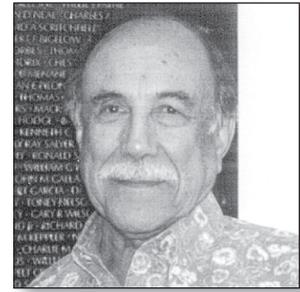
Borrego made it home after healing from his gunshot wound.

“I went and came back with God’s protection,” Borrego said. “He is my protector, as well as the Virgin Guadalupe.”

Borrego said he would not change his experiences, including his injury, for anything.

“Everything goes through God’s hand, and everything he does, he does right, because he has the power to do everything,” Borrego said.

Interviewed on June 11, 2007, in San Juan, New Mexico.



José Burruel

Interview by Delia Esparza

During the Depression, José María Burruel’s family was poor, but he was determined to succeed. He went from working in the fields and shooting wild game for food as a boy to the highest levels of academia.

A turning point in his life was his service in the Navy, starting in 1943. He went through training in San Diego and in San Francisco but was discharged after six months because of an injury.

He worked in a machine shop, rebuilding machines for the war effort but decided he wanted to change his life for the better.

“I said to myself, ‘Hey, I don’t want to be doing this for the rest of my life, and I sure as heck don’t want to go back and work in the fields like I did before,’” Burruel recalled.

Burruel earned his bachelor’s degree from Arizona State University. He taught and became principal of an elementary school in Arizona, and then became the first Mexican-American teacher in Santa Monica, California.

He returned to Arizona State for his doctorate, where he simultaneously served as assistant dean of students and an assistant professor of education. He was the first university ombudsman at a time of political unrest.

He also worked as director of the Teacher Corps at California State College, helping students find jobs.

In 1978, Burruel married Frances Ann Barnard. After retiring, both devoted their time to promoting education and human rights.

Interviewed on Jan. 4, 2003, in Phoenix.



Carmel Camacho

Interview by Liliana Rodríguez

The advice Carmel Camacho's father gave him when he was a young boy—to always be nice to others—served him well throughout his life.

Drafted at age 19, Camacho became part of a 17-man medical unit in the U.S. Army one year later. He served from 1942 to 1946 during World War II, and later in the Korean War.

Camacho was born in Goliad County, Texas, on March 1, 1922. The family lived on Powell Ranch, which belonged to a prominent family that always took special care of Camacho's family.

"Ms. Gladys gave me and my brother ponies so we could get to school ..." he recalled. "I was a good student, had good grades and wanted to learn. But I had to work, so I quit school when I was 14 or 15." Camacho was drafted shortly after Japanese forces attacked the U.S. Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii, and prompting American entry into World War II.

"I don't know why, but I got picked up for [medical] technician's school," he said, adding that he had to learn about taking care of wounded soldiers. Camacho was assigned to a 17-member medical unit. The job took him around the world, from the Pacific to Europe.

He returned to Texas after the war, but a few years later he served for a year in South Korea before retiring from the military.

After the war, he became a welder, married and had six children.

Interviewed on July 20, 2010, in Goliad, Texas.



Manuel Camarillo

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

Manuel Camarillo returned from the war a different man. Through his experiences in World War II, he developed a sense of empathy, not only for enemy soldiers, but also for the civilians caught in the fight.

One time, he kicked down the door of a German house looking for enemy combatants only to find three children living in destitution. He gave them his food rations and left.

"When you're there—18, 19 years old—you just shoot at anybody. You don't care," he said. "I never thought about it there. I didn't have time to think. Because that guy had a mother, he had a father, he had a sister, he had a brother and kids and all that."

This realization stands in stark contrast to his life before the war. Prior to his military service, Camarillo spent his youth in El Paso, Texas, getting into fights. His high school yearbook describes him as the "bad humor man" of his generation.

Once settled back in the U.S., Camarillo committed himself to his work at the Zork Hardware store, where he had been employed before the war, so his five children could attend college. He stayed with Zork for 45 years. Camarillo wanted his children to lead different lives than he and his nine siblings, who chose work over higher education. He said four of his five children had received bachelor's degrees at the time of the interview and were enjoying careers in fields like mechanical engineering and administration.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.



Antonio Campos

Interview by William Luna

When a U.S. Army officer interrupted training to ask, "Does anybody play the trumpet?" Antonio Campos stepped up.

That's how Campos ended up in one of nearly 500 Army bands that served during World War II. His band traveled to places such as Italy and Egypt, playing for the troops and Army dances.

Born on March 26, 1910, Campos was raised in Mexico and moved with his parents to Devine, Texas, in 1923. There, he worked in the fields with his father until 1929, when the family headed north to Chicago.

"I don't know why [we left Texas]," Campos said. "Probably looking for better work."

They lived in the Halsted area of Chicago, near the University of Illinois, where Campos went to work on the Ohio Railroad.

In 1941, he was drafted and, after being transferred to Oregon for additional infantry training, he joined the Army band.

"It was pretty good duty," he said.

He recalled when the band spent a month on a ship traveling to Italy.

"I enjoyed it, but it was too long," he said. "That was 30 days sitting on the ocean."

After he was discharged from the military, he returned to Chicago and worked at the stockyards until retirement.

At the time of his interview, Campos lived at the Ashbury Court Retirement Home in Des Plaines, Illinois, with a few mementos from his trumpet-playing days in World War II.

Interviewed on Nov. 5, 2002, in Des Plaines, Illinois.



Ramiro Castro

Interview by Cheryl Brownstein-Santiago

After dropping out of high school, Ramiro Castro was working as an electrician when he was drafted in 1943 into the U.S. Army during World War II.

After basic training in Fort Ord, California, Castro was assigned to the 7th Infantry Division, 104th Engineer Battalion, and was transferred to the Aleutian Islands, where he took part in the Battle of Kiska.

His main duty there was to use a flamethrower and grenades to force Japanese snipers out of hiding places.

“Well, I knew I had to do it. In the war it was either going to be them or me. I’d rather it be them,” Castro said.

Castro later was sent to the Philippines, serving most of his time at Leyte, where he got to meet Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

Castro said MacArthur did not talk much, but he was a good listener and was extremely well-liked.

While Castro was away at war, his father died and he was unable to make it for the funeral because a captain would not allow him to travel home.

Castro was discharged from the Army on Oct. 12, 1945, at the rank of private first class.

When asked about the United States’ involvement in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, Castro said he did not like to see people go off to war but that he had much respect for the troops.

“Somebody has to go,” he said.

Interviewed on Jan. 7, 2011, in Los Angeles.



Elías Chapa

Interview by Denise Morales

As a child watching war movies about battleships, Elías Chapa developed a yearning in to enlist in the Navy. The Beeville, Texas, native waited for his 18th birthday, and on Feb. 5, 1943, enlisted in the Navy.

Chapa went to San Diego, California, for 13 weeks of basic training and then Group III machinist mate school.

After graduating, he went aboard *USS Rathburne*, a World War I-era destroyer that served as a reconnaissance vessel in the Pacific Theater. The ship sailed from island to island in the Northwest and South Pacific.

The last mission of the *Rathburne* was to the Philippines as part of a main task force of about 800 ships, Chapa said. Its mission was to break Japanese defenses in the Central Philippines and ultimately provide access to Tokyo.

After approaching the islands behind a typhoon, the American ships were off the coast of the Philippines when confronted by Japanese kamikaze planes that filled the sky.

During battle, Chapa operated a 20 mm gun as a sight-setter, along with two other men, the weapon’s gunner and loader. He recalled that his team shot down four Japanese planes in a single day.

After his discharge in February 1946, Chapa worked as a mechanic at the garage of his older brother Nick and years later acquired his own restaurant and gas station in Beeville, where he lived with his wife Teresa O. Chapa.

Interviewed on March 21, 2009, in Beeville, Texas.



John Chávez

Interview by Samantha Salazar

John Chávez grew up as an orphan, moving from house to house, and later survived the bloodiest Pacific battle of World War II. After the war, he settled in Tucson, Arizona, and raised a family. “My life turned out good,” he said.

When Chávez, who was born on June 7, 1927, was 6 years old, his mother died. He and his four siblings were sent to the Arizona Children’s Home orphanage. His maternal grandmother later adopted them over concerns that they were mistreated in the orphanage.

“That time was hard. It was difficult for my grandmother because, after we got out of the orphanage, we never spoke anything but English,” Chávez said. “My grandmother didn’t know English, so it was pretty difficult for her to communicate with us.”

Chávez enlisted in the Navy on June 9, 1944, and was assigned to the troop transport ship *USS Okanogan*, which took part in the April-June 1945 Battle of Okinawa. The battle left more casualties than any other in the Pacific Theater.

“Our ship was full of the wounded. We would give them our bunks. We tried to take as many as we could. Then we had to sleep on the deck outside,” he said. “It wasn’t that bad.”

After the war Chávez married Reynalda Félix, used the GI Bill to study to be an electrician apprentice, and later joined the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. The couple raised two children and at the time of the interview had been married 64 years.

Interviewed on Aug. 17, 2010, in Tucson, Arizona.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM VOCES: Q&A with Vinicio Sinta

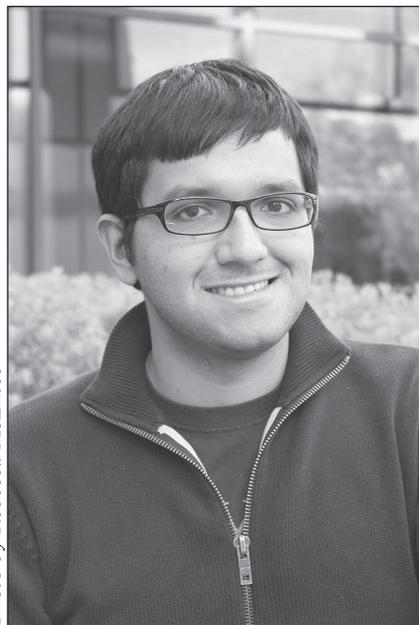


Photo by Rebecca McEntee

Vinicio, a native of Monterrey, Mexico, spent the summer of 2014 helping Voces get organized and prepare for our biggest newsletter to date. He continues to volunteer with the project on a regular basis.

Q: What did you do at Voces?

I collaborated with Voces in putting together the 15th anniversary newsletter in a variety of capacities: writing and editing stories, updating the project's database, contacting subjects for corrections, etc.

Q: What did you learn during your time at Voces?

My involvement in this year's extra-large newsletter allowed me to see first-hand the hard work that many different people, staff and volunteers, put into the Voces project. On the way, I learned about oral history as a journalistic and social science technique and got to know the story of 120 great people who have striven to make a difference for their country and community.

Q: What are you doing now?

I'm starting my second year in the doctoral program at UT's School of Journalism.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: WWII



Arnold Córdova

Interview by Cheryl Brownstein-Santiago

He was only a junior in high school, working a part-time job on Sept. 10, 1941, when Arnold Córdova received his draft notice.

He was an Army tech sergeant when he was sent from New York to Le Havre, France, with the 65th Infantry Division on Jan. 10, 1945.

As a surgical technician, Córdova spent most of his time in hospital buildings rather than battlefield tents.

He recalled that he looked after many seriously wounded soldiers.

"There was a second lieutenant that stepped on a foot mine. It was terrible," Córdova said. "It had busted his whole foot."

While in Europe, Córdova also traveled to Germany and Austria.

Leaving Europe on Dec. 13, 1945, Córdova arrived back on U.S. soil on New Year's Day and was discharged 10 days later at the rank of tech sergeant, as a technician 4th grade. During his service, Córdova received six medals.

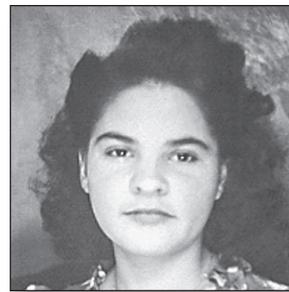
After returning to Los Angeles, Córdova earned his high school diploma while working part time at a gas station.

He married his pre-war fiancée, Esperanza, on May 19, 1946.

He said he is not sure how he feels about military service and war, although he is happy that the draft has been discontinued.

"You shouldn't go to war, but you have to go serve your country," he said.

Interviewed on Jan. 7, 2011, in Los Angeles.



Lita De Los Santos

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

Like millions of American women, Lita De Los Santos spent 1942–45 writing letters, worrying, and praying. She prayed that her eight brothers would return from some of the bloodiest battlefields in the world.

De Los Santos and her mother, Angelita Guajardo, who at the time lived in Eastland County, Texas, relied on the family radio and weekly newsreels to keep up with the latest updates from the war; occasional mail from their loved ones kept their hope alive.

One day in the summer of 1944, the women received a telegram saying that Charlie, one of the De Los Santos brothers, had been killed on Omaha Beach in the invasion of Normandy.

Other telegrams came, each one shedding light on a brother's whereabouts: In Europe, Ernie was a prisoner of war in Germany, and Cano and Ray were wounded; in the Pacific, Jesse and Pete faced injury and sickness, respectively. For Nick and Al, no news was good news. After the war, the seven surviving De Los Santos brothers came back to Texas.

"Seven boys (returned) home as seven men," De Los Santos said. "Some were not wounded, but they came home with horrible, horrible memories."

In 1945, an 18-year-old Lita De Los Santos married Alejandro Santos of Laredo, Texas, another returning veteran. The couple had six children, one of whom served in the Navy during the Vietnam War.

Interviewed on Feb. 20, 2008, in Austin, Texas.



Luis Díaz de León

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

“War is horrible, but it helps you grow,” Navy veteran Luis Díaz de León said of witnessing the brutality of conflict firsthand. Díaz de León spent 19 months in the Pacific Theater during World War II, serving aboard *USS Conner*, a destroyer. He recalls kamikaze attacks, the death of his captain and promotion to the rank of quartermaster third class, an accomplishment of which he is very proud.

During Díaz de León’s service, the *Conner* bombarded Nauru Island; screened for air strikes on Kavieng, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea; and made assaults on the Marshall Islands. He also saw battle on Palau, Yap, Ulithi and Woleai in the Caroline Islands. In February 1945, the *Conner* was part of the battle group at Iwo Jima, one of the bloodiest and best-known of the WWII battlegrounds.

Upon his return to the U.S. in 1946, he finished his high school studies and later earned degrees in sociology and psychology at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. In 1954, he received a master’s degree in social work at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. Díaz de León, his wife Josefina Villarreal, and their children eventually moved to Brownsville, Texas, where he got a job as senior child welfare worker.

Then the family moved to nearby Kingsville, where Díaz de León witnessed the poverty and discrimination that inspired him to become an activist.

The Navy veteran became involved in the American Indian Movement, serving as Laredo’s first Community Action Agency director in 1965 and working with the Colorado Migrant Council.

He also became active in the Chicano Movement, running for the U.S. Senate in 1978 on the La Raza Unida ticket.

Interviewed on April 5, 2008, in Round Rock, Texas.



Jerónimo Domínguez

Interview by Lynn Maguire-Walker

As he picked crops in Texas during his youth, Jerónimo Domínguez never imagined that one day he’d be taking shelter in a German foxhole while his comrades died around him.

Domínguez, who was born in March 1913 in Medina County, Texas, only had an eighth-grade missionary school education and worked as a farm worker before the war. After he enlisted, his unit landed on an Allied-secured Normandy beach. Then, on the way to the front, German forces spotted Domínguez’s unit and unleashed an artillery barrage.

Domínguez dove into a nearby foxhole. When he emerged, covered in sand, he was unprepared for the carnage around him. His entire unit had been wiped out.

“They didn’t have a chance ... they were all dead, blown away,” Domínguez said, recalling the scene with great sadness.

He was reassigned to the 2nd Armored Division and later served in a tank.

While he was rolling through an open tract of land, a German fighter plane attacked his tank. A slug shattered a bone in his right arm.

“I could not move; I was frozen in pain,” said Domínguez.

He recovered in England during a year of surgeries and convalescence.

After he returned to the United States, Domínguez married his sweetheart and moved his family to Elgin, Texas.

Interviewed on Jan. 29, 2006, in Elgin, Texas.



Ysaac Elizalde

Interview by David Silva

During World War II, Ysaac Elizalde helped provide U.S. troops with food they needed to give them the energy for the rigors of combat. Little did he know he would spend the rest of his working years delivering food to people in South Texas.

Elizalde at age 9 already was working full-time in the agriculture fields near his native home in Bee County, Texas. If history repeated itself, as with so many young men in the area at that time, he was destined to work there for the rest of his life. But the war broke out and he was drafted into the Army at age 19.

He was sent to Fresno, California, where he received the first formal education in his life. For three weeks, he went to classes as part of his basic training.

After that, he was transferred to Oregon as a cook’s assistant. He peeled potatoes and dished out food in lines.

For the last year of his military career, Elizalde was stationed at the Army Air Corps’ 306th Training Group at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas. There, he assisted the cooks. Elizalde never saw combat and says he feels fortunate for that. Elizalde was honorably discharged Nov. 5, 1943, at the rank of private. The first thing he did when he got home was ask his girlfriend Elumina Pérez Delgado to marry him.

Within 18 months of his homecoming, he got a job delivering milk in Corpus Christi. He would spend more than 40 years working as the iconic milkman, now gone from America’s scene.

At the time of his interview, the Elizaldes had been married 65 years. They have three children: sons Iszac and Eloy and daughter Nelda.

Interviewed on March 27, 2009, in Beeville, Texas.



Rudy Elizondo

Interview by Markel Rojas

From his time in the Boy Scouts to his service in the United States Navy, Rudy Elizondo proved that one could support the war effort without going overseas.

A Tenderfoot Boy Scout in what was then Troop 114 of Floresville, Texas, he and fellow Scouts walked around town, collecting newspapers and scrap metal in pull wagons.

Elizondo also aided in conducting air-raid practices for the residents of Floresville and grew a victory garden in a lot next to his home.

When he wasn't in school, he was among a group of students who helped local farmers harvest peanuts, cucumbers and other crops.

"The war was still on, and since all the men were away in the service, they would bus us into surrounding farms to bring in the crops," Elizondo said.

Elizondo and his family moved to San Antonio while he was still in high school.

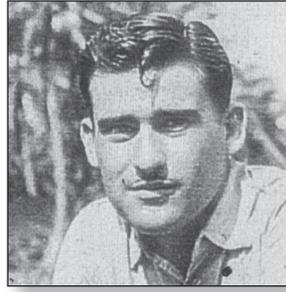
He joined the Junior ROTC and, at age 16, the Texas State Guard 36th Infantry Division.

He was a member of the Guard on V-J Day, patrolling downtown to prevent rioting.

Although Elizondo never fought in a war, he served 11 years in the Naval Reserve before being discharged in 1959.

He worked in accounting at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio until his retirement in 1990.

Interviewed on Aug. 4, 2007, in San Antonio.



Raúl Escobar

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

"I used to get so many flashbacks," said 82-year-old Raúl M. Escobar, breaking the silence after he recounted the story of a fellow Marine who died from a shot to the head. In 1945, Escobar, a machine gunner and flamethrower with the Third Marine Division, set off to the island of Iwo Jima, south of the Japanese archipelago. U.S. forces expected the battle to be brief, hoping to take the island from the Japanese in a matter of days.

But the well-fortified enemy "fought like hell," Escobar recalled.

For him, though, devastation was already a familiar sight. Before setting off for Iwo Jima, his division had landed on Guam, which U.S. Marines spent weeks trying to reclaim from the Japanese.

"The hardest part was seeing some of your friends get killed," Escobar said.

Born Oct. 23, 1925, in Ben Bolt, Texas, Escobar was the oldest of eight children. In 1942, while working as a dishwasher, he enlisted in the Marines without his mother's permission. He was the first in his immediate family to enlist in the armed services.

During the war, he received the nickname "Crazy Escobar" for his reckless behavior on the battlefield, which he attributed to a letter he received from his wife. She had written to say she was divorcing him because she didn't think he would survive the war.

After that, "I didn't fear danger," Escobar said.

He looks back with fondness on happier experiences from the era, like getting together with other Marines to make their own alcohol by mixing raisins, apples and apricots, and hiding the concoction in the ground to keep it out of sight of officers. They would remove the mixture, called Raisin Jack, at night and enjoy one another's company.

"We had our bad days and our good days," Escobar said.

Interviewed on Nov. 21, 2007, in Austin, Texas.



Mary Espíritu

Interview by Stephen Casanova

In more than 40 years of federal and community service, Mary Espíritu, received more than 45 awards and honors.

"I always wanted better for myself than just being a mother and a housewife," Espíritu said. "I wanted a good job, to move ahead and improve myself, regardless of whether I was a Latina."

The United States' involvement in World War II created a need for workers at San Antonio's Kelly Field, where Espíritu was hired as a civilian federal employee. She was 18 when she went to work as a stenographer at the base and began working her way up the ladder, taking advantage of every opportunity, from training to overtime. She said that she rose to be an F-106 inventory manager for the C-5A transports, which were then the base's biggest planes. She also began to shift her personal focus toward the empowerment of Latinas. She formed women's clubs, such as Federally Employed Women, was president of the San Antonio chapter of IMAGE, a national rights group originally started to help Latino federal employees, and chaired the San Antonio board of SER Jobs for Progress.

She worked to help promote Hispanics at Kelly, earning the nickname *la madrina de Kelly* (the Kelly godmother). She also led efforts to increase representation of Latinas in Federally Employed Women at the national level.

"I wanted to show everyone that Mexican-American women are out there and working," Espíritu said.

"There are so many things that we can do to improve the lives of those around us, and I really believe that there is room at the top for us all!" Espíritu said.

According to a San Antonio Express-News obituary, Espíritu passed away on Jan. 15, 2011. *La madrina de Kelly* was 88.

Interviewed on Oct. 14, 2008, in San Antonio.



Antonio Esquivel

Interview by Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez

For Antonio “Tony” Esquivel, any romanticized remembrances of youth are tempered with memories of pre-war segregation and his service in World War II.

Esquivel was born April 27, 1925, in Colton, California, where his father worked for a railroad. His mother died when he was 6 months old, so he was reared mostly by Ester, his older sister.

At 17, Esquivel quit high school to work full time. Soon afterward, he married Rosy Romo in Colton. The couple moved to a house in nearby Riverside, California, and had a son.

Esquivel was working harvesting crops when he learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Eventually, he was drafted by the Army and sent to Camp Roberts in Salinas, California.

After training, he was sent with the 25th Infantry Division to Osaka, Japan, and later to Chiryu, near Nagoya City. The last stop in his tour of duty was Tokyo before he returned home in 1946.

While Esquivel was overseas, his sister Ester died of a heart attack. His older brother Michael died two weeks later. Though he witnessed death every day in combat, these personal losses were devastating.

Back home, Esquivel used his GI Bill benefits to study carpentry. He later worked for Woodson Construction Co. for 18 years, eventually being promoted to general superintendent.

Meanwhile, his family continued to grow with the birth of a girl, Marian. In 1970, the Esquivels adopted two girls, Theresa and Angela.

Interviewed on July 26, 2001.



Estela Fernández

Interview by Delia Esparza

Estela Bárcena Fernández was a young woman in El Paso, Texas, when World War II began, so the battlegrounds seemed distant. While her husband, John, and three of her brothers served overseas, she learned how to care for her family, hold a job and value education and family.

She married John Fernández on Nov. 26, 1944. He already had been drafted into the Army and was stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, as an amphibious engineer. Soon after, John transferred to the Air Corps and was sent off to the Pacific.

Back in El Paso, Fernández recalled dealing with the wartime rationing of products such as gasoline, sugar and meat, although buying these items in Juarez, on the other side of the U.S.-Mexico border, was relatively easy.

In August of 1946, John was discharged and came home. Two and a half years later, Fernández gave birth to the second of their six children. Fernández was born Nov. 27, 1923, in El Paso, where her parents, José Bárcena and María Gutierrez Bárcena, had moved in 1903 from Puebla, Mexico. Her father owned a shoe shop and a grocery store. Fortunately for Estela Fernández, her husband and three brothers returned safely from overseas, and the family was able to stay united.

Despite her family’s good fortune, she’s humbled by the significant part Latinos played in the war.

“What other contribution could we give to this country but the lives of those poor young men?” said Fernández.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.



John Fernández

Interview by Robert Rivas

A simple announcement about aviation cadet training while at an Army camp in Washburn Island, Massachusetts, piqued John Fernández’s interest. He applied, never expecting to make it.

But he was accepted and assigned to the Army Air Corps.

Fernández, a native of El Paso, Texas, was drafted into the Army after graduating from Bowie High School. He was then assigned to Fort Devens in Massachusetts.

After he was accepted into the aviation program, he trained for six months at Lafayette College, in Pennsylvania. At advanced flight school, he was one of 50 cadets chosen to fly B-25 bombers on a trial basis.

“At that time, flying those planes had never been heard of. We were the nucleus, the example of future training,” Fernández said.

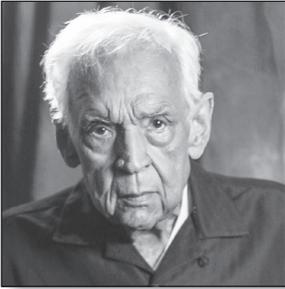
Fernández went on to fly B-25 bombers with the 345th Bomb Group of the Fifth Air Force. He flew reconnaissance missions and bombed and strafed Japanese airfields and destroyers in the Philippines, Okinawa and New Guinea.

At the end of the war, Fernández was discharged. He returned home to his wife, Estela Bárcena Fernández, in August of 1946.

Fernández and Estela raised six children in El Paso, where he worked for 21 years for the U.S. Postal Service, and then for U.S. Customs on the Texas-Mexico border. He also was a part-time loan officer at the Government Employees Credit Union.

“Technically, I never had a day off in 35 years,” he said.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.



Alfred Flores

Interview by Jenny Achilles

When Alfred Flores was 16, his brother Robert was lost in a guided missile attack that sank his ship, the *Rohna*, three miles off the coast of Italy.

The sinking in the Mediterranean on Nov. 26, 1943, killed more than 1,000 U.S. troops in one of the worst losses of U.S. maritime history. It was shrouded in military secrecy. Flores wanted to help find his brother. When he turned 17, Flores enlisted and joined the 17th Airborne Division. He was part of a massive air drop in March 1945, along the Rhine River.

Flores recalled landing in front of a small house near three German tanks as bullets hit the ground around him. He saw a sniper and took aim.

“He was coming out of the house in front of us ... He must have aimed at me at the same time, because his bullet hit me in the hand, right finger, and into my mouth and into my chest. That was the end of my war,” Flores said.

He was able to make his way to a small shack, where he found two medics and a chaplain. While he was in a hospital in Bristol, England, his brother George visited him. Flores put on his uniform, and the two took a picture together.

Flores was discharged on Jan. 11, 1946. Among the commendations he received were the Purple Heart, a Bronze Star and a Combat Infantryman’s badge.

After the war, Flores married and had three children. He worked at San Antonio’s Kelly Air Force Base, which closed in 2001. He spent 20 years as a wing/fuselage repairman, then the next 15 years investigating plane crashes.

Interviewed on Aug. 4, 2007, in San Antonio.



Bertha Flores

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

For Guadalupe “Bertha” Flores, World War II had little to do with fighting or death; instead, it was an exciting and valuable learning experience.

“What little experience I got, I thought it was worth it,” she said, “both to my country and especially to myself.”

During WWII, many women like Flores enlisted in the Navy through Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. Flores served in WAVES as a teletype operator, transcribing messages from around the U.S. at the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Born Guadalupe Berta Rodríguez on March 16, 1921, the San Antonio native was the youngest of nine children. In 1940 she became the second in her family to finish high school.

Flores’ father, Enrique Rodríguez, was a strait-laced laborer who didn’t believe women should work outside of the home, so when Flores left San Antonio for training in 1944, only her mother, Rosa Espinoza, went to the train station to say goodbye. After the war, Flores returned to her hometown, where she married Filbert Díaz Flores. He too was in the Navy during WWII; he served with the Seabees in the Pacific Theater.

After marrying, Flores focused on raising her two kids, serving as a Girl Scout and Cub Scout leader, among other activities. At the time of the interview, she was still volunteering at St. Ann Catholic Church.

Interviewed on Aug. 4, 2007, in San Antonio.



Olga Flores

Interview by Edna Amador

When her husband Ramón set off to serve in the Philippines during World War II, Olga Delgado Flores was pregnant back home in El Paso, Texas.

Not knowing his condition or location was difficult, but not being aware of when or if he would come home and see his infant son was especially hard.

“It was a very sad period, even if I had my child. You’re happy when you have your children and enjoy them, but still their father’s not there, so it was kind of lonely and sad, looking forward to him coming back,” she said. “You know, I was never pessimistic about not seeing him again.”

To take her mind off the war, Flores volunteered at a local clinic and helped teachers grade papers. She also was a heavy listener of Spanish-language radio and an avid reader.

When first married, Ramón and Olga could not find an apartment, so they moved in with Ramón’s parents, Leonila Contreras Flores and Jesús Flores. Flores continued to live with her in-laws for two months after Ramón deployed in 1944. When her mother, María Urquiza, became ill, Flores moved a couple of blocks to be with her. One day in 1946, while cleaning the house, Flores sensed something behind her. She turned and there was Ramón, looking at her through the window.

She was shocked because he had not told her when he was coming back.

“It was such a wonderful day,” she said.

The couple had two sons and four daughters: Ramón, Elena, Ruth, Elvia, Sandra and David. Ramón and Elena served in the Navy.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.



Hortense Gallardo

Interview by Joanne Rao Sanchez

Raised in Depression-era San Antonio, Hortense Gallardo recalled that her father, Bartolo Mota, a custodian in a hotel, supported his family and also helped strangers in need. Guided by her family's love and support, Gallardo excelled in her studies. After graduating from high school in 1939, she studied nursing at Robert B. Green Memorial Hospital.

As Gallardo advanced through her program, the U.S. entered World War II. She then joined the Army, working at Brooke General Hospital (now Brooke Army Medical Center.) She worked alongside Army doctors, wrapping bandages and administering medication. Her sense of responsibility was tested in 1943, when German prisoners of war held in Texas were taken to Brooke for medical attention.

"They called me *schwester*, which is sister [in German]. And they called me 'the proud one.' I had to be stern because I was scared to death of them," Gallardo recalled.

In 1945, Gallardo was sent to the station hospital at Laredo Flexible Gunnery School. A year later, she returned to San Antonio and worked at Lackland Air Force Base until her discharge as first lieutenant in 1947.

She married José Gallardo in San Antonio on Oct. 20, 1946. The couple raised two children, José Rogelio and Rocxsandra.

Gallardo said her time in the service made her a better person.

"God has been good to me. I am happy that I was able to do some good at that time," she wrote after the interview.

Interviewed on June 25, 2007, in San Antonio.



Arnold García

Tribute

Arnold Feliu García was born in San Germán, Puerto Rico, on Oct. 19, 1911, to Andrés García López and Celia Feliu Servera. In his youth, he met and fell in love with Tomasita Ribas, of Ponce. They soon parted, however, as he, his mother and three brothers—Benjamin, Gilbert and Isaac—followed their father's work to Cuba, Florida and finally New York.

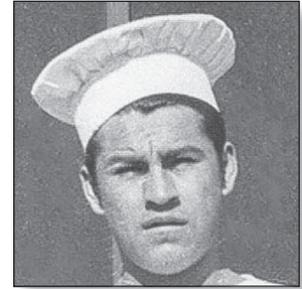
In New York, García's father passed away in the late 1920s. Unbeknownst to the Garcías, the Ribas family, including Tomasita, had also moved to New York.

After Pearl Harbor, all four García brothers enlisted in the Army. Arnold entered active duty on June 12, 1943, as an electrician. García served with the 141st Ordnance Base Automotive Maintenance Battalion, first in Jackson, Mississippi, and then in New Guinea. After the war's end, Staff Sgt. García was transported back to the United States aboard *USS General John Pope* and discharged at Fort Dix, New Jersey, on Feb. 1, 1946.

He and Tomasita moved to Miami, following the rest of the family. García became a father on Dec. 5, 1947, with the birth of his daughter Rosa Lee. García used the skills he had acquired in the Army in his civilian work as an automotive adjuster at various insurance companies.

García was an avid user of technology. Through the years, he shot some of the first 8mm home movies, and he built and operated a ham radio station with the call letters K4SEF, which provided emergency communication networks during natural disasters.

(Mr. García passed away on Dec. 22, 1976, at the age of 65. Tribute by Ted Bridis, Mr. García's godson.)



Willie García

Interview by Katie Wood

Like many World War II veterans, Willie García married his bride just before shipping out to prepare for combat overseas.

In 1944, García, a Marfa, Texas, native, met Elizabeth Ruiz while stationed at Camp Swift, in Bastrop County, Texas. Two days before he was to be sent overseas for military duty, he asked her to marry him.

After the wedding, García returned to Camp Swift and soon was on his way to New York, where he would stay until he was shipped overseas. He was stationed in North Africa and Italy before he returning to Austin.

The war took its toll on García: only six months after he was sent overseas, he returned from the war "100 percent disabled," suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, which at that time was called "shell shock."

When García was discharged, doctors advised his wife not to live by herself with him. They feared he could become violent, so the two lived with her parents for five years. Fortunately, García never had a violent attack.

After five years, the two built a home and García began working as a tailor at Joseph's Men's Wear in Austin.

The couple eventually moved to south Austin, where they were involved with San José Church, and fostered four children who needed a home.

The couple adopted two girls and dedicated their lives to raising them.

"We have been lucky that God has given us a long life," Elizabeth García said.

Interviewed in Austin, Texas.



Encarnación González

Interview by Jennifer Sinco Kelleher

Encarnación Armando González felt his body getting weaker. Lying in a cold stream with a bullet wound to his chest, he thought his life was over. He was surrounded by the enemy in the Aleutian Islands when a sniper shot him. He dropped his rifle and rolled down a hill into a gully.

With all the strength he had left, González forced himself to his feet and made his way back up the hill before he collapsed. Fellow soldiers quickly came to his aid, firing at the enemy while dragging him to safety.

González was inducted into the Army in 1941 and was stationed in California when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

In June 1943, lying in the medic's tent after he was shot, his first thoughts were to send a personal message to his wife, Soledad Seanez, so she would not be scared by a telegram she might receive from the government.

González was sent stateside to recover and eventually was sent to Europe, where most of his days, he said, consisted of taking villages, sleeping in foxholes and braving cold weather.

"It was survival," he said. "You get used to misery inside and drink more when the day is over."

González was discharged Oct. 11, 1945. He continued to fight the alcoholism that began during the war. He credited his wife with his eventual recovery.

"Nowadays people get a lot of help after traumatic situations, but we didn't have that back then," he recalled.

Interviewed on March 23, 2002, in Los Angeles.



Joe Guajardo

Tribute

After two years of separation during World War II, U.S. Army soldier Joe Medina Guajardo was reunited by chance in Australia with his cousin, Juan Sánchez. They embraced and made plans to eat at Sánchez's camp, but when Guajardo arrived at Sánchez's campsite, there was no trace of Sánchez or his men.

The discovery was disconcerting, but Guajardo was no stranger to adversity. As a boy of divorced parents in Corpus Christi, Texas, he lived mainly with his grandparents. He saw the Army as a ticket out of a broken home and enlisted at age 17. On Nov. 24, 1943, less than three months after he married Edith Pérez, he departed to the Asian Pacific Theater, where he worked as a construction machine operator. According to Guajardo's daughter, Grace Charles, Guajardo said, "Our job was to come from behind, after the Marines were done fighting. We would do the cleaning up and pave roads for vehicles, tanks, [and] landing airplanes."

Guajardo returned to U.S. soil on Sept. 21, 1945. He received an Asiatic-Pacific Theater Campaign Medal with one bronze star, a Philippine Liberation Medal, an American Defense Service Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal.

Back home, Guajardo learned that Sánchez's camp was vacated in Australia because the Japanese planned to attack the area, and Sánchez had received orders to leave. Guajardo and Pérez had five children. He worked in construction, played baseball, and sang and played with local musicians. In 1964, Guajardo moved to Freer, Texas, and built a home.

Tribute by Joe Guajardo's daughter, Grace Charles. (Mr. Guajardo died on Oct. 24, 1984.)



Henry Guerra

Interview by Brenda Sendejo

From the fields of Texas to the beaches of Normandy, Henry Martínez Guerra fought adverse conditions to succeed. A native of the town of Kenedy (about 60 miles southeast of San Antonio), Guerra spent much of his youth picking cotton, spinach and radishes under the scorching sun and later participated in some of the most gruesome battles of World War II.

One year after leaving school to work to support his family, Guerra was drafted into the Army. In November 1940, he was inducted as an infantry soldier.

After training at Texas' Camp Bullis and Fort Sam Houston and Wisconsin's Camp McCoy, Guerra was deployed to Europe, landing near Belfast, Ireland. He landed on Omaha Beach on June 7, 1944, the day after D-Day.

Guerra remembers getting the order from President Dwight Eisenhower over the radio and preparing to invade France. As he approached the shore, he recalls a soldier, Jesse Hill, disobeying orders to keep his head down and gazing out toward the shore.

He saw explosions and carnage everywhere as he approached the beach.

Guerra continued fighting with the 38th Infantry Regiment until the war's end.

He kept a journal detailing his service. Though it is filled with graphic images of death and destruction, a Bible passage urging faith and love is on the cover.

He was discharged in June 1945, having earned the Purple Heart, three Bronze Stars and a host of other medals.

Guerra returned to Texas and earned his GED. He then began a career in civil service. He worked as a storekeeper and later as an industrial engineer.

Interviewed on Nov. 6, 2004, in San Antonio.



Andrew Guzmán

Interview by Jessica Marie Thomas

When Andrew E. Guzmán tried to enlist in the Marines at 18, he was turned away and told to wait for the draft.

He said he is fortunate he didn't enlist that day in 1944, because he believes he would have been sent to Iwo Jima, Japan, the site of one of World War II's bloodiest battles.

Guzmán was born Dec. 12, 1925, in San Antonio. He attended school with his siblings, and his parents' laundry service allowed the family to live without significant financial struggle.

After graduating from high school in 1944, he was set to attend Texas A&M University to study petroleum engineering, but being drafted and inducted into the Army cut those plans short.

Guzmán was trained as a medic at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. From there, he traveled with the 96th Infantry Division to Okinawa in April 1945.

On the island, Japanese forces fought ruthlessly, said Guzmán, who worked there as a surgical tech. He said that enemy soldiers would target American infantry medics. Fighting raged until June 1945, when Allied forces claimed victory. Guzmán was eventually discharged from the 68th Medical Company, 96th Infantry Division on May 1, 1946.

Back in San Antonio, Guzmán studied to become an electrical technician. In 1951, he married Helen Ramírez, with whom he had a son and a daughter.

Guzmán reflected on his past with gratitude for his present-day life, his wife and his children.

He was content even while thinking back on the war, in which he learned that "life is very important," he said.

Interviewed on May 3, 2008, in San Antonio.



Estella Hernández

Interview by Valerie Martínez

Whatever she did — as sister, wife or teacher's aide — Estella Zaragoza Hernández always looked forward to serving her country and helping her community. A native of Los Angeles, Hernández was in elementary school when she began helping her family by picking peas in the fields of southern California. Hardships soon arrived. When Hernández was 14 and in middle school, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and her three brothers left to fight in World War II.

She recalled how her mother was depressed during the war, concerned about her three sons. Her father kept all the letters the boys sent home. When the war ended, Hernández's brothers returned home safely.

During the war, Hernández worked. For recreation, she sometimes attended dances with her sisters and girlfriends, including the Sunday dances, or *tardeadas*. Many servicemen would also attend the Sunday dances. In 1946, Hernández met her future husband, Carlos C. Hernández, at one such gathering. She laughed as she remembered when she met Carlos in the *placita*. Hernández has two sons and three daughters, and at the time of the interview, was the grandmother of 14. Besides being a housewife and mother, she also worked as teacher's aide, helping bilingual children. Through good times and bad times, Hernández said she was pleased with everything she did in her life.

"I am so happy I was able to enjoy life that way," she said.

Interviewed on June 9, 2010, in Los Angeles.



Ernesto Hernando

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Ernesto Hernando was born in 1923 in Cloudcroft, New Mexico, but was a resident of El Paso, Texas, when he entered the military. Although he was drafted into the Army in 1943, he chose to enlist in the Navy with two neighborhood friends. Hernando was trained as a lookout and a fighter-plane mechanic. His first post was serving as a lookout on a troop ship headed for New Caledonia, an island east of Australia.

After the ship reached its destination, Hernando was assigned to an aircraft repair unit on an aircraft carrier.

Hernando was no stranger to hard work. Before enlisting in the Navy, he had dropped out of high school at 17 to join the Civilian Conservation Corps to help support his family.

Even after his military service, Hernando and his family — his wife, Elisa Fernández, and their seven children — couldn't rely solely on his government paychecks, so he found work at a clothing factory and later at the Harry Mitchell Brewery. The closing of Harry Mitchell in 1967 caused the family to move to San Francisco. There, Hernando expected to get a job at another brewing company but ended up working in the warehouse of the Safeway grocery store chain.

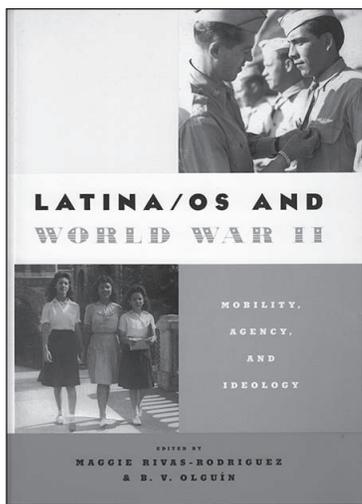
After about a year and a half, the whole family moved back to El Paso, where Hernando continued to work for Safeway.

By day, Hernando drove a forklift; by night, he attended classes at El Paso Tech, studying bookkeeping and accounting.

"If you have a little more education, you do a lot better," Hernando said. He said he has passed that philosophy on to his children.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.

Voces' Latest Book



In World War II, the five Botello brothers of San Saba, Texas, served their country. But in their discharge papers, three were listed as “white” and two as “Mexican.”

This book delves into the aspects of racial and ethnic identification, including the arbitrary issue of race.

Among the identities and ethnicities studied are Cuban American, Spanish American, Mexican American, and Afro-Latino.

Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, and Ideology considers broad issues of gender and masculinity.

And it drills down to specifics of the Bataan Death March and what it has come to signify, as well as a profile of the trail-blazing academic, Carlos E. Castañeda

Available via the website of the University of Texas Press (<http://utpress.utexas.edu>)

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: WWII



Alfredo Hurtado

Interview by Joseph Padilla

If anyone deserves to be called an American war hero, it's Alfred Hurtado.

He survived the Normandy Invasion as well as the Battle of the Bulge and received 11 medals, including the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart with three Oak Leaf clusters and the Distinguished Unit Citation with three Oak Leaf clusters, just to name a few.

Hurtado's unit, the 82nd Airborne Division 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion Company H, participated north of Anzio, Italy, in Operation Shingle, an amphibious landing by Allied troops against German forces. Hurtado struggled to remember the Normandy Invasion, but he did recall that his unit had landed behind enemy lines in Normandy and that he lost many of his friends.

He also served in North Africa.

After the Normandy landing, Hurtado and his unit moved to several other locations, including Nijmegen, Holland, for Operation Market Garden and Ardennes, Belgium. Hurtado was wounded and ended up in Veterans Hospital in New York, with injuries to his thumb, mouth and teeth. He was discharged on May 17, 1945.

Hurtado returned to his hometown in Denver, Colorado, and went into business by starting Al's Trucking.

Hurtado said the war greatly affected him, but he also learned how to better appreciate life.

"You know the Big Man up there? You ask and you shall receive," he said.

Interviewed on March 4, 2011, in Denver, Colorado.



Antonio Jasso

Interview by John Jasso

Antonio Jasso made it clear from the get-go that he was no war hero.

"I didn't see no war ... I'm not gonna take credit or say that I saw action. I didn't. I was, thanks to God, a cook in the Navy. I had it made in the Navy," Jasso said as he shared stories about his years in the service. A native of El Paso, Texas, he was born on April 7, 1928, one of 10 children of Paula Jasso.

After his mother died of pneumonia in 1942, Jasso dropped out of school to work to support his family, although he said they never had economic problems.

Jasso said he remembers "clear as day" the moment he learned the United States had entered World War II. He wanted to enlist right then but was too young.

When he turned 18 in 1945, Jasso joined the Navy, shortly after brother Trinidad finished his tour of duty.

After boot camp in San Diego, the Navy designated him as ship cook. Even though that was not the position he originally wanted, he appreciated the opportunity.

Jasso spoke highly of the ship in which he had his longest assignment, the *USS Princeton*, described as a "light aircraft carrier." He said the *Princeton* "had everything but a swimming pool." He assignments also included the *USS Mindanao*, a repair ship.

During his time in the military, 1945 until April 1949, Jasso went to China, Guam, Panama, Japan and Hawaii.

Shortly after leaving the military, he moved to Newton, Kansas, where he married Fifi Sifuentes in 1950. His wife died in 2011. In the years since, Jasso has lived in a smaller home in Newton, where he grows peppers and tomatoes in his garden.

Interviewed on June 16, 2010, in Topeka, Kansas.



Quirino Longoria

Interview by Elizabeth Fisanick

USS General E.T. Collins, accompanied by a British destroyer, zigzagged its way from Fremantle, Australia, to the Indian port of Calcutta. The original mission of the ship, on which Quirino Longoria served during World War II, was to return war-weary soldiers to California. The end of the war, however, brought a change of plans.

“We took ’em to Japan to invade Japan. They were mad, of course, because they wanted to come home, but they had to go and do their job in Japan,” Longoria said.

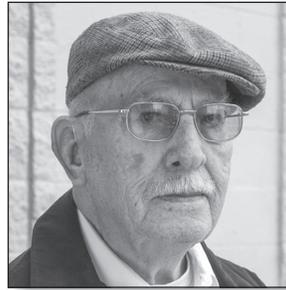
Longoria was born the middle child of five on Jan. 29, 1927, in Mission, Texas, and joined the Navy at age 17. His parents, Procopio and Sofia, gave permission for Quirino to join the Navy at the insistence of his older brother Juan, or “Johnny.”

Longoria considers his Navy service a source of pride and a positive experience, one that opened his eyes to the wider world outside of the Rio Grande Valley.

Upon his July 13, 1946, discharge at the rank of seaman first class, he finished high school in Brownsville, Texas, and used the GI Bill to study business administration at a college in nearby Harlingen. After a short stint working for the Hidalgo County Clerk’s office in Edinburg, Texas, Longoria left the area to become a mechanic at the naval air base in Corpus Christi. Longoria went on to spend the next eight years as a mechanic for Pan American airlines in Brownsville and San Francisco, and then moved to the Dallas area to work for Braniff Airlines. In 1992, he retired from Dalfort Corp. after 42 years as an aircraft mechanic.

Longoria married Gloria Waterbury on July 20, 1951; the Longorias have two sons and two daughters.

Interviewed on Oct. 15, 2007, in Lewisville, Texas.



Severo López

Interview by Frank O. Sotomayor

One night in the early 1940s, after watching Frank Sinatra perform at the Palladium in Los Angeles, Severo López arrived home to find FBI agents waiting for him.

He was informed that he had failed to report for duty when his World War II draft notice arrived.

López had been working at the shipyards in nearby San Pedro, but his draft notice had gone to his Los Angeles home.

He was told to report to the draft center the next morning.

Because of his experience in the shipyards, López was trained as a combat engineer, assigned to the 155th Engineer Combat Battalion.

He saw his first combat at Guadalcanal in the South Pacific.

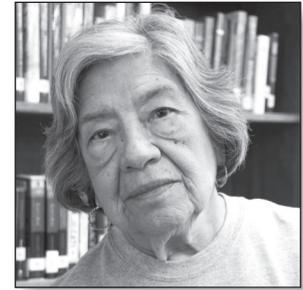
“You know lots of men had died when the waves started to look red,” he said.

Despite the horrors of war, López said he fully enjoys his life; relying on his motto: “*Vive tu vida lo mejor que puedas, de día a día siempre.*” (Live your life the best you can, always day by day.)

On April 20, 1945, Pfc. López was honorably discharged at Menlo Park, California.

After returning to civilian life, López worked in a variety of fields — movies, construction, as a mechanic, and as a salesman. He was also a businessman — having owned at different times a print shop, a restaurant and a gas station.

Interviewed on June 9, 2010, in Los Angeles.



Vicenta López

Interview by Taylor Peterson

In the 1930s, education opportunities for Mexican Americans were hard to come by. But in 1938, Vicenta Sánchez López made history in her hometown of Sonora, Texas.

She was the first Latina to graduate from her high school.

In a life characterized by hard work and a love for learning, she would become a successful business owner and an active contributor to Sonora.

López’s father, Enrique Sánchez, owned El Phoenix Café, the only place in town that served Mexican Americans and Anglos. All other eating places were “white only.”

At 19, she married José Santos López, a Mexico-born sheep shearer. Soon after the birth of a daughter, Diana, in 1941, the U.S. entered World War II. José was drafted into the Army. He was wounded during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 and awarded the Purple Heart. In 1946, Lopez and her husband were handed management of El Phoenix Café, which they renamed the Commercial Restaurant. Under their direction, the establishment prospered and employed many residents of the community.

López had two other children: Lemuel and Eliel. While managing the restaurant, Vicenta took great care to ensure that all three of her children got a college education.

In 1973, López turned over management of the Commercial Restaurant to son Lemuel. That same year, López’s husband José passed away after suffering an aneurysm.

Some years later, López went to San Angelo Business School to learn business management. In 1975 she married Leopoldo Cervantes, a ranch foreman. The couple owned several businesses in Sonora, including a convenience store and a trailer park.

Interviewed on Aug. 2, 2010, in Sonora, Texas.



Plácido Lozano

Interview by Mike Zambrano

On Dec. 7, 1941, Plácido Jose Lozano was at a movie theater when the film suddenly stopped and the theater manager came out and placed a large radio on the stage.

That was how Lozano learned that Japan had attacked the United States by bombing the Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor. Lozano, a 16-year-old high school student, did not realize that the bombings would lead him into a military career that he said “helped me grow into the man I have become today.”

A native of Monterrey, Mexico, Lozano grew up in San Antonio. In 1943, he was drafted into military service, even though he was not an American citizen.

“I didn’t know that I wasn’t supposed to register because I wasn’t a citizen,” he said.

Lozano was sent to Navy boot camp in San Diego and then learned communications skills, including Morse code. He was a radio gunner who served on the carrier *USS Kadashan Bay*. After the war, Lozano was sent to Japan where he recalled being upset that the U.S. military treated Japanese citizens disrespectfully.

Lozano was discharged with a radioman 3rd class rating in May 1946 at Camp Wallace, Texas. He returned to San Antonio and eventually returned to military work, getting a job as an aircraft electrician in the U.S. Air Force. He and his wife had three children.

His service during the war also gave him the right to U.S. citizenship. In 1947, he said, he became a citizen and registered as a Democrat.

Interviewed on June 2, 2010, in San Antonio.



Eladio Martínez

Tribute

When Eladio Martínez was growing up in Dallas, education was a priority. His father, who worked as a laborer, inspired his children to learn.

Like his three younger siblings, Martínez graduated from Dallas Technical High School, where he was in the ROTC program and involved in sports. An aspiring chemist, he also took correspondence courses.

After World War II broke out, Martínez was drafted into the Army. Martínez’s brother Enrique remembered the day Eladio left for the Army.

“I remember getting up early that morning to gather his personal belongings. We were greatly saddened by this,” he said.

His younger brother Filiberto, who often followed in Martínez’s footsteps, also enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was sent with the 13th Air Force to the Pacific where he helped to build an airstrip in New Guinea.

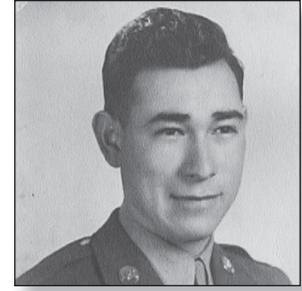
After 18 months overseas, Filiberto found Eladio, and they had a happy but short-lived reunion in the midst of war.

Filiberto was the last member of the family to see Eladio Martínez alive. He was killed by a sniper in the Philippines on March 23, 1945.

His family, especially his surviving brothers, Filiberto and Enrique, grieved the loss of Martínez.

Since his own educational aspirations were cut short, his brothers honored him in 1990 with the opening of a new school, the Eladio R. Martínez Learning Center, in west Dallas, the part of the city where Martínez grew up.

Based on information provided by the Martínez family. (Mr. Martínez was killed in action on March 23, 1945.)



Raul Martínez

Interview by José Figueroa

Raul B. Martínez spent four years in the Army’s Combat Corps of Engineers in the Pacific Theater during World War II. The Corps’ job: to keep the Army moving. Martínez’s unit built and upgraded roads, bridges and airstrips, as well as other needed infrastructure, like field hospitals. Martínez was 19 and living in his hometown of El Paso, Texas, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He remembered that from the moment he learned of the attack, he knew he would eventually participate in the war.

In November 1942, Martínez was drafted and reported to basic training at Fort Belvoir, in Virginia, before being sent overseas. Part of the Guadalcanal Campaign, the first large attack by Allied troops on Japanese forces, Martínez fought in battles that embodied the ferocity of the Pacific war, like Bougainville and Luzon.

After the war ended, he was discharged from the Army in November 1945, at the rank of private first class.

Martinez married Elena Figueroa in 1949 in El Paso and had one daughter, Sylvia Martínez. Thanks in part to the GI Bill, he was able to attend college after his service, earning a degree in electrical engineering from California State University, Los Angeles.

For a long time, Martínez worked at Douglas Aircraft (later McDonnell Douglas), eventually becoming principal design engineer. After 36 years of continuous service, he retired in 1991.

“[H]aving an education and being able to hold onto continuous employment with Douglas, when others were being laid off, gave my family a measure of security that they would otherwise not have had,” Martínez wrote after his interview.

Interviewed on June 25, 2007, in Costa Mesa, California.



Juan Mejía

Interview by Laura Barberena

From childhood poverty in South Texas through the Battle of the Bulge, Juan Mejía proved to be a survivor.

It never occurred to him that he might die.

“The closest I got was when a piece of shrapnel fell on me here on my coat,” he said. “I just did this, brushed it off.”

Born on Sept. 13, 1925, in San Antonio, Mejía became a farmworker, traveling to West Texas and the Midwest. He was drafted in November 1943.

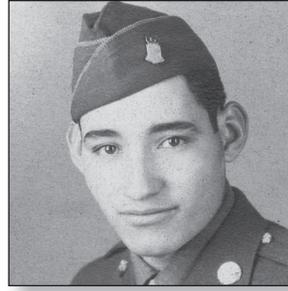
“I wanted to go into the Army to be able to get to know other people and get to know everything. I was very happy. We all wanted to serve our country, all of us,” he said.

He initially was in the 65th Infantry Division but was transferred to the 106th Infantry Division. He said he was told it was going to be much like guard duty.

“But the Germans came with all their artillery and with everything they had. Airplanes and everything,” Mejía said. At one point, he got separated from his unit and wandered lost for less than a day. Mejía’s mother received two telegrams: One said he was missing in action and the other, almost a month later, said he was OK but hospitalized somewhere in Europe. He received treatment for a painful foot condition. After the war he married, had seven children and worked for 34 years at the now-closed Kelly Air Force Base.

“World War II opened doors for me to be able to work for the government because I didn’t have enough schooling, even though I didn’t have experience,” he said.

Interviewed on May 11, 2011, in San Antonio.



Nemesio Mena

Interview by Luis A. Saenz

As the B-24 Liberator bomber turned to begin a bombing run, radio operator Nemesio Mena’s job would take on a lot more risk. The El Paso, Texas, native’s added duty was to stand on the catwalk over the open bomb bay and shoot photos of the damage below. But his dangerous work was not done with the end of the bombing run. Mena had to make sure no bombs had been left hanging in the bomb bay of “Irishman’s Shanty,” the name the crew gave this B-24. If bombs were still there, Mena had to kick them off and out before the plane could land back at its base in England. Mena and his crewmates were members of the legendary 492nd Bomb Group, a part of the 8th Air Force. His specific bomber crew, the 713th, completed 30 missions between the summer of 1942 and the end of the war.

“We were the first crew of the group to finish the European Theater,” he said.

Among the decorations Mena earned during World War II were the Distinguished Flying Cross, an Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal and an American Campaign Medal.

Mena returned to El Paso after the war and earned a teaching degree at El Paso Community College. He again would serve in the Air Force during the Korean and Vietnam wars. During Vietnam, Mena was in an airborne command post operating electronic counter missions. After retiring from the Air Force in 1968, Mena taught electronics and communication in El Paso until 1987.

At the time of his interview, Mena lived in El Paso with his family, including his longtime wife, Domitila Jaramillo Mena.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.



Joel Mojica

Interview by Jesse Herrera

Before he was 20 years old, Joel C. Mojica had fought in one of the bloodiest battles of World War II and had a Purple Heart medal to prove it.

Mojica was drafted at 18 years old. After he was called up on Oct. 29, 1943, he was sent to Hampton, England, where he trained to become a replacement soldier. Mojica’s job led him to the beaches of Normandy, France, after D-Day, to reinforce the dwindling troops. After fighting there, he traveled through France, battling the Germans.

In northern France, Mojica got shot in the knee while on a scouting assignment with four other GIs. Out of the group, he was the only survivor. After his discharge on Dec. 31, 1945, Sgt. Mojica returned to his hometown of Uvalde, Texas. He went back to work as a carpenter with his father, eventually getting a job building cabinets in a cabinet shop. Enlightened by the war, he had trouble accepting Uvalde’s discrimination against Latinos. For example, many eateries refused to serve Hispanics, and the ones that did had a separate area for them to sit, he recalls.

“It was very disillusioning that I went and fought for liberty,” Mojica said, “but at the same time, I didn’t have the liberty to go into a restaurant where Anglos were eating.”

Mojica says he is happy with the changes the country has gone through over the years. His children and grandchildren now have opportunities he never had, and they can go anywhere they please.

“They’re accepted now, anywhere,” Mojica said.

Interviewed on July 5, 2007, in Austin, Texas.



Willie Moreno

Interview by Erika Martinez de Rizo

Life in the military wasn't easy, Willie Luna Moreno said, particularly when he had to crawl through barbed wire loaded down with a heavy pack.

Or when he was a patrol policeman in France, even though "there was not much to see, and the place [was] a mess."

Moreno entered the U.S. armed forces in April 1943, when he was 19. He underwent basic training at Camp Robinson in Arkansas and received additional drills in Massachusetts and Maryland. In Europe, he was involved in the infantry and military police, as well as the 1st Infantry Division. As a part of the "Big Red One," Moreno was at Omaha Beach in Normandy, France, on D-Day.

After the war, Moreno earned several honors, including a *diplôme* of recognition from France, hand-delivered and signed by the country's consul and secretary of defense.

Moreno was born in San Antonio, Texas, on April 21, 1924, to Santos Moreno and Felipa Luna Moreno. He had two older brothers and four sisters.

Throughout his life, Moreno worked many jobs, including grocery deliveryman, cleaner at a sugar-beet factory, and mill helper for a lumber company. Although he had to quit school during seventh grade, he resumed his education by earning a GED certificate in 1982.

He married Frances Fernández in 1945 in San Antonio; the couple had five children. Frances passed away in 1976, and Moreno married a second time in 1987, to Alejandra Sánchez.

Interviewed on Aug. 4, 2007, in San Antonio.



Jesus Muñoz

Interview by Henry Mendoza

Jesus "Jess" Esparza Muñoz emerged from a difficult childhood to live a version of the American Dream, including a stint in the U.S. Navy.

"I saw a lot of the world. I had a good time in the service," Muñoz said, adding that he "didn't encounter anything bad about it," except for occasional rough seas. His ship, the *USS Brush*, was a small destroyer that "bounced around like a cork."

Muñoz was born in Globe, Arizona, in 1928. His mother died in childbirth when he was a year old. He and his siblings were raised by their maternal grandmother and their Aunt Jenny.

Because of the Great Depression, times were difficult and there were no jobs. "We were on welfare, like everybody else," he said.

When he was about 15, he worked in the asbestos, quicksilver and copper mills of the 3M Co., and the Globe foundry. He joined the Navy on Oct. 24, 1945, after finishing 10th grade. He was able to earn his high school equivalency diploma after serving in the Navy.

In the Navy, Muñoz visited places like Hong Kong, China and the Philippines.

After leaving the Navy in 1949 as a petty officer third class, Muñoz moved to Southern California and worked at Sears, first in a warehouse and later as a salesman in Buena Park.

Muñoz was married in 1950 to Elisa Olivas. They had three daughters. He said he did well as a salesman and was able to provide for his family and send his daughters to college.

Interviewed on June 9, 2010, in Los Angeles.



Albert Nieto

Interview by Ben Olguin

Rummaging through old keepsakes from his days in the Army, Albert Nieto pulled out a sightseeing guide of the "Playground of the Orient" in the Philippines. While on active duty at the 14th Anti-Aircraft Command headquarters in the Philippines, Nieto fell into a "little depression," which led him, along with a few others, to be taken to a recreation center to distract them from the routine.

"They had great food, and we could go golfing and just get away from everything, so we were in pretty good shape after we came back," Nieto said.

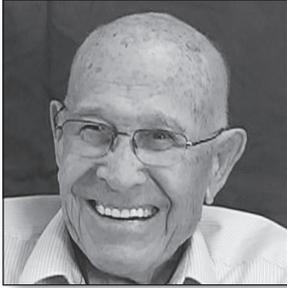
Nieto grew up in Tampa, Florida, and graduated from Hillsborough High School. His parents, who were originally from Spain, came to the U.S. from Cuba in 1922. He was drafted into World War II in October 1943. He jumped into his initial training at Texas' Camp Barkley, getting prepared for active duty in the supply section of the 14th Anti-Aircraft headquarters overseas.

After the war ended, Nieto left the Philippines in January 1946. He was officially discharged the next month at the rank of sergeant.

Back home, he enrolled in the University of Florida, where he received his degree in business administration and accounting in 1949. A year later, he married Josephine Spoto, with whom he had two daughters.

After the war, Nieto worked as a certified public accountant and established his own company. At the time of his interview, he was a member of a WWII veterans group that met every Wednesday and Friday to discuss contemporary politics.

Interviewed on Nov. 11, 2007, in Tampa, Florida.



Edmundo Nieto

Interview by Liliana V. Rodríguez

Through his service during World War II, Edmundo Nieto learned about the hardships and horrors of war but was able to participate in events that ultimately become a part of history.

Nieto recalled that he drove a truck as part of the Army's 933rd Field Artillery Battalion.

His wartime experience was light years away from life in his hometown of Presidio, Texas, where Nieto was born on March 29, 1919.

His mother was Maria Vásquez, from El Paso, Texas, and his father was Miguel Nieto, a Mexican citizen. Spanish was Nieto's first language, and he learned English in grade school.

He earned a business degree from St. Edward's University and worked at AB Frank Co. in San Antonio for about a year before being drafted.

After basic training at Camp Gruber in Oklahoma, he was sent to Louisiana and then boarded a troop carrier to Africa.

In Italy, Nieto saw Pope Pius XII at St. Peter's Basilica. With the help of a Canadian comrade who spoke French, Nieto courted a pretty French girl. And in Germany he saw Jewish prisoners who had just been released from a concentration camp.

When the war in Europe ended, Nieto spent three months with occupation forces. He was discharged in San Antonio with the rank of sergeant, and he returned to Presidio.

Soon after returning home, Nieto married Socorro Herrera.

Nieto said he was proud of his military service. "We were fighting for something."

Interviewed on Aug. 3, 2010, in Presidio, Texas.



Virginia Gallardo Núñez

Interview by Jennifer Lindgren

There are some things Virginia Gallardo Núñez remembers about growing up in South Texas during World War II:

- Curling her hair with string ties from coffee bags instead of bobby pins because metal was rationed.
- Listening to news about the war and songs by Glenn Miller on the radio.
- Attending midnight Mass on Christmas Eve to pray for her three brothers at war.

Núñez, born May 21, 1930, in Brownsville, Texas, was a child at the outbreak of World War II in 1941. By then, her family had moved to nearby San Benito. She remembers the joy the family felt whenever one of her brothers wrote home.

"Whenever we got a letter, we got so happy!" Núñez said. "We'd all cheer and Mama would pass the letter around to everybody."

Núñez, her mother and her sisters worked to support the household while the men were at war. She worked in a dime store, as a baby sitter and as a waitress. Besides corresponding with her brothers, Núñez exchanged letters with Rudolfo "Rudy" Núñez, a friend from San Benito who was fighting in Germany. Rudy began courting her and eventually proposed marriage through his missives. When he came home in 1945, Núñez married him.

Growing up during WWII taught her to have faith in the people who always looked out for her, Núñez said.

"War is awful. Sometimes we have to remember so we can appreciate our country and soldiers, and our freedom. Sometimes we think we know it all. We don't."

Interviewed on Sept. 13, 2003, in Brownsville, Texas.



Leo Ortega

Interview by Delia Esparza

Leo Ortega Jr. was working with the Civilian Conservation Corps in Denver, digging holes for fence posts, when one day a buzz filled the camp: The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

"I didn't know what Pearl Harbor was," he said. "I didn't know what Hawaii was, but I had a vague idea from geography lessons. I enlisted right there at the CC[C] camp."

Back in his hometown of Raton, New Mexico, his mother Rose Valdez found out via a military letter she received Dec. 31, 1941, that he had joined the Marine Corps.

Ortega was initially assigned to kitchen duty. When he earned his second stripe, he was assigned other noncombat tasks, such as supervising the cleaning of facilities. Later, he taught new recruits how to handle .45-caliber pistols.

Ortega's last assignment was to guard a naval radio station in Northern Ireland.

"I wasn't privileged to serve in combat," he said. "I think I would have liked that."

After Ortega was discharged from the Marines on Feb. 9, 1946, he returned to Raton and became a painter, and later a Postal Service worker. In 1950, Ortega married Dulcie Nemecia in Raton. The Ortegases had two sons and a daughter.

After the family resettled in El Paso, Texas, in the mid-1950s, Leo switched careers again, becoming an insurance adjuster. While the insurance job paid well, it took him away from his family, so in 1964 Ortega and his wife opened a pest-control business. At the time of his interview, Dulcie had passed away and Ortega had retired. He said he enjoys spending his time reading, and was hoping to get back to going to the library.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.

CONFERENCE: Latinos, The Voting Rights Act, and Political Empowerment

Courtesy of John Treviño



Voces is teaming up with two other organizations on campus to hold a conference on the Voting Rights Act and Political Empowerment and Latinos.

The Irma Rangel Public Policy Institute and the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life are both helping to organize the conference, to be held in 2015, 40 years after the extension and expansion of the Voting Rights Act. This major conference will explore both historic and contemporary issues related to Latino political empowerment. It will also be a meeting of academics and other experts, as well as individuals who have worked on various aspects of Latino political empowerment. Besides formal research presentations, there will also be informal round-tables on specific areas to be discussed. *Voces* is particularly encouraging research that incorporates oral history interviews, for possible publication at a later date.

The public is especially welcome.

Attendance is free, with meals available for purchase.

**LOOK FOR MORE INFO AT:
latinosandpoliticalengagement.org**

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: WWII



Felipe de Ortego y Gasca

Interview by Mario Barrera

Felipe de Ortego y Gasca was a high school dropout in 1943, but after joining the Marine Corps and serving in the Pacific Theater, he awakened a new passion: writing.

Ortego was born in Blue Island, Illinois, as his parents were traveling between San Antonio, Texas, and the sugar beet fields of Minnesota.

Ortego started basic training at Parris Island in South Carolina, becoming a machinist in Marine Air Group 24. MAG 24 was stationed in Efate, New Hebrides, and assigned to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. The group participated in the Bougainville and Philippine campaigns.

After the war, Ortego used his GI Bill benefits to enroll at the University of Pittsburgh, majoring in English.

He returned to the Air Force and spent four years serving in Europe, and then finished out his career at Biggs Air Force Base in El Paso, Texas.

After leaving the Air Force in 1962, Ortego earned a master's degree in English at Texas Western College in El Paso and a Ph.D. in English at the University of New Mexico.

"I never got my GED or high school diploma, but I ended up getting a Ph.D. in English," Ortego said. "Pretty good for a kid who never graduated high school."

While working on his degree in New Mexico, Ortego became fascinated with the work of Mexican-American writers. He switched topics halfway through writing his dissertation and started what would become a pioneering career in the research and teaching of Chicano literature.

Interviewed on March 21, 2008, in Austin, Texas.



Manuel Pérez

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

Like many other Americans, Manuel P. Pérez put his own life on hold to serve his country during World War II, even though he never stepped on the battlefield.

Pérez was born in Uvalde, Texas, on April 26, 1923. Before the war, he lived with his parents, Andrea and Rico Pérez, and his sister Micaela.

Growing up, he learned English with his friends, while his parents kept him in touch with his Mexican roots. But all of that came to a halt when he was drafted.

"I didn't graduate because I went to the service," Pérez said. "And when I came back from the service, I went to help my dad. So that was it."

Pérez was sent to Camp Roberts in San Luis Obispo County, California, for basic training. On Sept. 18, 1943, he was assigned to Camp Callan in the La Jolla area—where he remained until his release from the service.

Since Pérez was never sent to fight, life at the base allowed some time for leisure activities, like attending baseball games with other soldiers. Pérez was also able to make additional income by shining shoes and cleaning guns for other soldiers.

After his service, Pérez returned to Uvalde, where he met and dated Sara Olvera. The couple married on Feb. 10, 1952, and had 10 children.

Pérez said there is one value he has tried to instill in his children: doing their utmost to get along with others, as he did through his life.

Interviewed on April 7, 2007, in Uvalde, Texas.



Manuel Pérez Jr.

Tribute

A month before being killed in action in the Philippines, Pfc. Manuel Pérez Jr. qualified for the Medal of Honor, the United States' highest military honor.

Pérez, also known as "Toots" by family and friends, was born March 3, 1923, in Oklahoma City. When he was very young, his family moved to Chicago, where he was raised by his father, Manuel Pérez Sr., and his paternal grandmother, Tiburcia Moncada Pérez.

Before getting drafted in January 1943, Pérez was employed by Best Foods Inc., where his uncle Jesse also worked.

Pérez volunteered for parachute duty and was sent to the Pacific Theater, where he served as a paratrooper in the 11th Airborne Infantry Division and as lead scout for Company A of the 511th Parachute Infantry, until a sniper bullet took his life March 14, 1945, on the road to Santo Tomas in southern Luzon.

In 1946, on Washington's Birthday, the Medal of Honor was presented to Pérez's father on the International Bridge between Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico. And that same year, shortly after the war ended, returning Mexican-American veterans formed Chicago's American Legion Manuel Pérez Jr. Post 1017 in Pérez's memory.

Pérez's Medal of Honor citation provides an account of his heroic actions: "He was lead scout for Company A, which had destroyed 11 of 12 pillboxes in a strongly fortified sector defending the approach to enemy-held Fort William McKinley on Luzon, Philippine Islands..."

Manuel Pérez Jr. Plaza in Chicago's Little Village was dedicated April 25, 1981, by Mayor Jane Byrne, and a new elementary school named after Pérez was dedicated in Chicago's Pilsen Community on May 30, 1990.

(Mr. Perez was killed in action on March 14, 1945.) Tribute by Angela Pérez Miller, a cousin of Mr. Pérez.



Emilio Portales

Interview by Patricia Portales

"All those bullets and none of them had my name on it."

Emilio Portales could laugh when he made the statement because he had withstood enemy fire during World War II combat on two continents.

Portales saw front-line action with the Army during campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, France and Germany. He took part in the 1944 Normandy invasion, fought in much of the European campaign, and witnessed the liberation of a concentration camp in Germany. Portales, a native of Medina County, Texas, was drafted in early 1942 at the age of 21. He left behind his mother, Macedonia, and six siblings.

At Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, he was trained as a combat engineer and assigned to the 17th Armored Engineer Battalion, a part of the decorated "Hell on Wheels" 2nd Armored Division.

After D-Day, Portales said, his division kept fighting the Germans until they were at the border of Germany and Belgium. During this campaign, he recalls spending at least 28 days in his foxhole. His most vivid memory from the war, however, was the liberation of POW camps in Germany.

"It did bother me. The smell of the dead people was terrible. And all the prisoners, when they would open the gates, would just run out, the ones that could run out," Portales said.

Portales was awarded the Purple Heart Medal in 1944 after being hit in the leg with shrapnel. When the wound healed, he opted to return to his outfit rather than returning home. When the war ended in 1945, Portales returned to Texas. Two years later, he married Gloria Lopez, and they lived in San Antonio. In 1966 they moved to Sunnyvale, Calif.

Interviewed on May 13, 2008, in San Antonio.



Bernarda Quintana

Interview by Yazmin Lazcano

As a young girl, Bernarda Quintana and her brothers and sister carried heavy buckets of water to their father as he mixed straw and adobe to create their home in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

When Quintana was 12, her father was shot to death after publicly opposing the 1940 presidential winner.

Quintana quit school to help support her family, first by doing odd jobs, then as a seamstress making uniforms for soldiers.

In 1942, Quintana was reunited with former sweetheart Roberto Perea, and they soon married. Their son, Manuel, was born in 1943.

Perea's infidelity prompted her to seek a divorce in 1944, she says. Not long after, she learned Perea had died in a hunting accident. She was devastated and swore never to marry again.

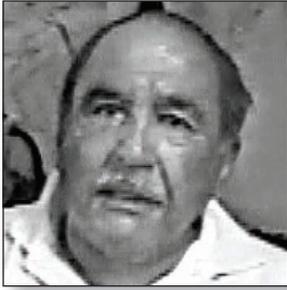
In 1945, Quintana took a job as kitchen assistant, and then as a teacher at Casa Hogar, a government-funded kindergarten in Ciudad Juarez. Despite loving her job, she quit a few years later because of a co-worker's hostility.

Then she met Fortino S. Quintana, a former Air Force staff sergeant, who was working at El Paso International Airport as a mechanic. In 1954, they married in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The couple had three daughters, Carolina, Edna and Rosa María.

Quintana says her goal has always been to provide a loving home with the same dignity as her father did.

"It was a lot of work," said Quintana of her childhood home. "A lot of effort, a lot of love, primarily."

Interviewed on Feb. 6, 2005, in Austin, Texas.



Ernie Quiroga

Interview by William Luna

As an Army entertainer, Ernie Quiroga had a very special audience during World War II – people liberated from concentration camps. He played his accordion trying to aid their recovery.

“I was playing my accordion, and one number that I played was a typical Mexican song — *Bésame Mucho*,” Quiroga said. “They were still in a daze.” Quiroga was born in Dallas, Texas, on March 2, 1927. His family, which included six children, went from Dallas to Chicago, winding up in San Antonio, Texas. He was drafted by the Army on April 19, 1945.

He went to Little Rock, Arkansas, for basic infantry training. His records indicated he was a musician, so he was placed in the Third Army’s 2nd Special Services Company — a unit of entertainers.

Quiroga was assigned to Germany along with occupation services. He traveled the country entertaining troops and concentration camp survivors with an Army band. Upon returning to the U.S. in 1946, Quiroga was discharged at the rank of Technician 5th Class.

He continued his musical career after the war, attending the Chicago Musical Conservatory for two years and playing with different groups on weekends.

Quiroga worked in his father’s printing shop, Monterrey Press, while doing musical gigs on the side. He eventually took over the family business.

In 1947, he married Beatrice Larios, and the couple had four sons. Beatrice passed away on March 29, 2000.

Interviewed on Aug. 1, 2002, in Chicago.



Conrado Ramírez

Interview by Joanne R. Sanchez

Conrado P. Ramírez said that having served in World War II opened many doors for him and other Latinos.

“We had the opportunity to go to college,” Ramírez said. “We saw other parts of the world than just Alpine, Texas. To me, our opportunities expanded considerably. It was up to you to take advantage of it.”

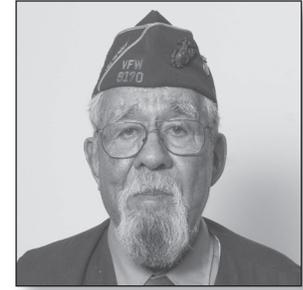
“I was always working after school,” Ramírez said. “I contributed to the family, with whatever I could from my earnings, to buy shoes and clothing for my brothers and sisters.”

Ramírez was drafted into the Army and inducted at Texas’ Fort Bliss in 1944, eventually being assigned to Argentina, Newfoundland, where he was stationed in an intelligence office for the remainder of the war. He was discharged in May 1946. In 1957, he helped to elect Raymond L. Telles Jr., as the first Mexican-American mayor of El Paso. Ramírez went on to serve in a variety of nonprofit leadership roles, including on the board of Girl Scouts of America USA.

He earned his degree in accounting from The Texas College of Mines (now the University of Texas at El Paso) and then worked for Reynolds Electrical & Engineering Co. He later became a longtime sales agent for The Prudential Insurance Company of America. Ramírez said he has witnessed many changes in how Hispanics are treated.

“I did not have the possibility of talking to department heads or business owners that are Anglo. It was very difficult to get beyond the receptionist,” Ramírez said. “My sons, they don’t have that problem anymore, which is great.”

Interviewed on July 30, 2007, in Austin, Texas.



Clemente Ramón

Interview by Jesse De Russe

The skills and education that Clemente Ramón received over three years as a Marine Corps fireman shortly after World War II enhanced his family, finances and education.

One of six children, Ramón was born in Refugio, Texas, on Jan. 27, 1929, to Ysidro Ramón, a cowboy, and Inacia Lara Ramón, a homemaker.

All six children had to quit their education before high school, forced to go to work to help support the family.

On Oct. 10, 1946, 17-year-old Ramón enlisted in the Marine Corps. He was assigned to the 14th Recon Rifle Company and sent to San Diego, California for basic training. Ramón was then assigned to Camp Catlin on Oahu, Hawaii.

Because he enlisted more than a year after WWII ended, Ramón never faced combat as a Marine. But training and experience in logistical support gave him vital skills that he would apply after his return to Texas, where he would do another kind of fighting: firefighting.

A year after being discharged from the military, Ramón settled in Beeville, where he married Lillie Guzmán on Dec. 10, 1950.

Thanks to his military experience, Ramón was hired as a Beeville firefighter, a job that allowed him to support all four of his children. They did not need to drop out of school to work as he did, he said, and all four completed high school.

Interviewed on Jan. 10, 2009, in Beeville, Texas.



Solomen Rangel

Interview by Rudy Padilla

He may have had only an eighth-grade education, but Solomen Rangel knew how to stand up for his beliefs and how to get ahead. He not only enlisted and became a sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II; he later fought employment discrimination on the home front.

When Rangel returned to Argentine, Kansas, after the war, he was among a group of men who fought against employment discrimination at a railway company. He was one of four men who filed a formal government complaint and endured years of waiting for a resolution. “We did it. After that, after we took over [the union], we made the first Mexican foreman,” Rangel said.

Rangel credited his three years in the military for his persistence.

He became a toxic handler specialist for the Army during World War II with the 771st Chemical, Rangel said.

“We had nerve gas, we had mustard . . . we had it all,” he recalled, adding that he was hospitalized twice for exposure to mustard gas.

Rangel said he continued to have medical issues after the war because of his exposure to toxins during the war.

He married Elvira Rangel on April 16, 1955. They had four children.

Interviewed on June 17, 2010, in Kansas City, Kansas.



José Rivera

Interview by Doralis Pérez Soto

When the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, destroying that Japanese city and ending World War II, José Rivera was stationed in the Galapagos Islands as a driver with U.S. Special Services.

The youngest of three sons, Rivera was born in Lares, in the mountainous central western region of Puerto Rico, on March 1, 1920. Rivera had left school at eight years of age, after his father was murdered; he had to find work to support his family.

For seven years, he worked in the scorching heat and humidity that blanketed the rice fields of Las Minas, in Lares.

“I was paid six cents weekly,” he said. “I would cut the rice stalk and the person behind would pick up the stalks and tie them up.”

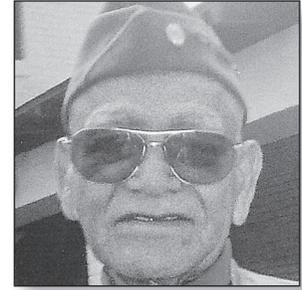
When he was 24 years old, he was drafted and eventually sent to Panama.

“From Panama, I went to the Galapagos, because the Japanese had attacked near the islands. So we went and stayed for six months, to make sure they would not station there.”

With a bed of sand, a tent shared with six other soldiers and a single canteen of water for 24 hours, the islands proved to be “very different,” especially, as he recalled, with iguanas “the size of dogs” sunbathing everywhere.

After the war, Rivera soon married and resumed his education in Puerto Rico, using the GI Bill to study mechanics. The couple had four girls and a boy.

Interviewed on March 28, 2003, in Arecibo, Puerto Rico.



Manuel Robles

Interview by José Figueroa

Before the war erupted, Manuel Robles was a firefighter for the Civilian Conservation Corps in Cucamonga Camp, in San Bernardino, California.

Robles, who grew up in Cudahy, in the Los Angeles area, enlisted in the Army on Nov. 30, 1942, and was sent to Camp Gruber near Muskogee, Oklahoma, for training.

“I was not drafted; I joined,” Robles said. “I wanted to be with my brother, who was here in California. Ended up there in Oklahoma.”

Robles’ participation in World War II was marked by his heroic rescue of a fellow soldier wounded by shrapnel during a surprise attack by the Germans—an event later remembered as “Bloody Ridge.”

Robles, a scout with sniper training, recalled throwing down his M1 rifle, combat pack and grenades, and hoisting Quentin Hasse onto his back. Robles said he lurched 50 yards amid machine gun and mortar fire to reach a shelter.

After getting discharged from the Army in December 1945, Robles re-enlisted in 1949 and served in the Korean War, his wife, Margaret Vásquez Robles, said in a telephone interview.

Robles married Margaret in September 1962 in Los Angeles. The couple had two children: Anthony and Cindy Elizabeth.

According to his wife, after his military service Robles had a hard time finding work because his eyes and ears had been damaged by being exposed to multiple explosions during combat.

Robles eventually landed a full-time job working on helicopters with Advanced Structures and worked there for 27 years, Margaret said.

Interviewed on June 8, 2007, in Pomona, California.



Cruz Rodríguez

Interview by William Luna

One day Cruz Rodríguez was picking corn and tomatoes on a farm outside Chicago; the next day, the undocumented Mexican immigrant was preparing to go to war.

“They [the U.S. Army] didn’t care if you were legal or not,” Rodríguez said during his interview. “They just needed soldiers. They took Mexicans off the field and they [were sent] ... to war.”

Rodríguez was born on May 3, 1914, in San Francisco del Rincón, Guanajuato, Mexico and came to the U.S. when he was seven. By the time he was old enough for high school, he quit formal education and joined the migrant stream through the Midwest.

Rodríguez entered the Army on Oct. 15, 1942, and arrived in Burma on Dec. 26, 1943.

“We were there, camping. We never camped close to a city or close to a village. Nothing but jungle,” Rodríguez said.

On Aug. 8, 1945, less than a month before the surrender of Japan, he was wounded in the right shoulder.

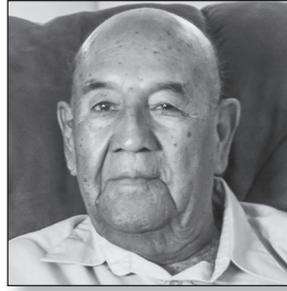
At the hospital, he encountered discrimination as white soldiers were put on beds and he was on the floor on a bamboo mat.

“I thought: ‘If I survive and come back, there will not be so much discrimination anymore. I served my country now,’” Rodríguez recalled.

He received an honorable discharge on Dec. 7, 1945, at the rank of private first class. He became a U.S. citizen. Twice married, he fathered six children.

Rodríguez died on March 29, 2013, in Chicago.

Interviewed on Sept. 21, 2005, in Chicago.



Antonio Rojo

Interview by Lilliana Rodríguez

Antonio Rojo faced financial struggles brought by the Great Depression as well as discrimination growing up in Alpine, Texas.

“It was pretty hard,” Rojo said. “Sometimes we couldn’t even go to the picture show because we couldn’t cross the railroad. Every time we tried to cross over, there was a fight.”

He dropped out of school in the eighth grade and lied about his age to join the Civilian Conservation Corps. He worked at Big Bend National Park in 1939, earning \$30 a month, \$25 of which he sent back home.

In 1942, Rojo and two of his brothers received draft notices. One of them chose to enlist instead.

Rojo and his third brother joined the Army Air Forces, where he was trained as a medical technician for its 10th Rescue Squadron in Alaska.

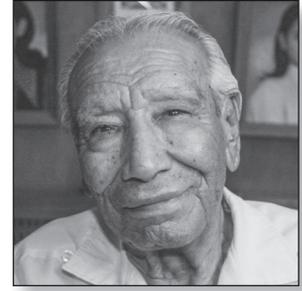
Rojo said he never saw any serious injuries.

But he said that getting used to Alaskan seasons took some time. He also had to get used to serving alongside Anglos for the first time.

“I felt all right,” he said, favoring the memories of military service over life in pre-war Alpine. “Everything changed to me. It was different the way I was treated here, and the way I was treated there.” Rojo was proud of his service.

“I thought I did my duty,” he said. “That I was able to defend my country for my people and their people to live ... I am proud.”

Interviewed on Aug. 3, 2010, in Alpine, Texas.



Felipe Roybal

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

Felipe T. Roybal decided in June 1940 to help his family financially and unwittingly began a military career that spanned more than 30 years.

A son of one of the founding families of Las Cruces, New Mexico, Roybal enlisted in the Army because his family was struggling through the Great Depression. Because he was still too young to join at 17, he lied about his age.

He was sent to Fort MacArthur, in San Pedro, California, and then to Alaska in 1941. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Roybal volunteered for the 82nd Airborne Division and eventually was sent to Europe, where he parachuted into German-occupied villages.

“Men landed in villages and so forth. And we couldn’t find them, so we started looking for them until we started finding 20 men here, 20 men there and 30 men there,” Roybal said.

He also recalled passing by German prisoner camps. “It was awful. I saw them [corpses] hanging by the trees. There were skeletons,” he said. “We were young. We didn’t want to see those things,” he said.

Roybal was discharged in 1945. He re-enlisted in 1948 and was sent to South Korea in 1950, where he was held for several months as a prisoner of war by the Chinese but managed to escape. In 1969, Roybal found himself serving in the Vietnam War, in a Special Forces unit.

“We had a lot of trouble with our own soldiers in Vietnam. I stayed a week in Da Nang. It was filthy, drunks. Colonels all doped up,” Roybal said.

Roybal ended his military career in 1975 at the rank of first sergeant.

Interviewed on May 9, 2008, in El Paso, Texas.



Gilbert Sánchez

Interview by Beverly Sánchez-Padilla

Gilbert Sanchez not only survived the Pacific typhoon of 1944 that capsized three U.S. Navy destroyers and killed 790 people; he also took part in nine battles during his time as a Navy radioman aboard the *USS Macdonough* during World War II.

But instead of violent war stories, he focused on the friendships he formed during his time at sea.

Sánchez grew up in Albuquerque and joined the Navy at 17.

“I didn’t have my parents over me, and I learned to be on my own,” he said.

The younger Sánchez followed in the footsteps of his father, who served in France during World War I.

Enlisting also was a way for Sánchez to leave home and see the world. As he stood on the deck of the *Macdonough* while steaming out of San Francisco Bay en route to the Pacific Theater in July 1943, he realized that his life was changing.

“We were going under the Golden Gate Bridge and I just thought, ‘What did I get myself into? Where am I going?’,” Sánchez recalled.

Sánchez worked deciphering and transcribing messages transmitted in Morse code.

He trained in radio-communications for the Navy at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

He was discharged on Jan. 29, 1946, at the rank of radioman third class, having earned nine battle stars.

Time, however, never weakened Sánchez’s loyalty toward his shipmates and the military.

Interviewed on Aug. 2, 2002, in Albuquerque.



Juan Sánchez

Tribute

Juan Sánchez rarely talked about World War II experiences. Now, dementia clouds some of the decorated World War II veteran’s memories.

However, when his cousin’s daughter, Grace Charles, asked what he remembers, Sánchez simply responded: “He said he’d come back, and he did.”

Sánchez was referring to Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s vow, “I shall return,” which the commander of American forces had made upon escaping from the Philippines to Australia under the onslaught of the Japanese in March 1942. Although Sánchez wasn’t in the Asian-Pacific Theater when MacArthur made his famous promise, he was traveling to the Philippines when MacArthur returned in October 1944 to lead the Allies in liberating the archipelago. A native of Corpus Christi, Texas, Sánchez enlisted in the Army shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack prompted U.S. entry into World War II. He shipped out with the 2nd Battalion, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division of the Michigan National Guard, in April 1942 and arrived in Australia on May 14.

According to his unit’s history, Sánchez participated in the Buna-Sanananda operation in New Guinea and had the grueling task of crossing the Owen Stanley Mountains on foot. Sánchez also took part in the attack on Saidor and the Battle of Leyte. Sánchez returned to the United States in 1945 and was discharged in June of that year. He received the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with four bronze stars, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with one bronze star, a Distinguished Unit Citation, and the Purple Heart.

Tribute provided by Grace Charles, daughter of Mr. Sánchez’s cousin & Voces subject Joe Guajardo.



Rose Sandoval

Interview by Julio Trujillo

Thousands of miles away from the battlefields, Rose Sandoval experienced the war from the confines of her family’s ranch in Colorado when her oldest brother, Leo Vallejos, was deployed overseas as a member of the Army.

“It was scary,” Sandoval said. “My mother used to scare us all. She was always very worried about Leo.”

In 1940, Vallejos entered the Army, leaving the family’s next-oldest son, Gilbert, to stay and work on the Vallejos family ranch in Torres, Colorado, in Las Animas County.

Vallejos was first stationed in California in 1942.

From there, he went to training, followed by a stay at Fort Polk in Louisiana. He made his way to England, Belgium and Germany, eventually fighting in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and January 1945. After his time on the battlefield, Vallejos took care of supplies for the soldiers. The job took him out of direct combat but not before he got wounded by a shot in the face.

Vallejos returned home in 1945. Upon his homecoming, he moved to Denver, obtained a business degree and got married in 1946.

Sandoval and her younger sister, Ida, also moved to Denver after high school. There, Sandoval worked at Gates Rubber Co., where she met her future husband, Ernest. The two married in 1948 and had two children. Sandoval later worked with her brother Leo, who bought a clothing store in Denver after Ernest died of an aneurysm in 1972.

“I was very close to [Leo],” Sandoval said. “He helped me an awful lot.”

Interviewed on March 11, 2008, in Denver.



Antonia Santana

Interview by Manuel Aviles-Santiago

Women also served in the military alongside men, and one of them was Antonia Santana.

Santana, who grew up in Gurabo, Puerto Rico, enlisted in the Women Army Corps on Nov. 14, 1944.

“At the time I guess I just wanted a change, an adventure,” she said.

She was assigned into the 9201st Technical Service Unit of the Women’s Army Corps — the WAC.

“It’s like if we were family. We were all from Puerto Rico. We talked English because we were not allowed to talk Spanish, but we spoke it among us anyway when nobody was around,” she said.

Santana eventually assigned to a New York City postal unit, where she worked as a clerk for over a year. She finished her stint with the Army in February 1946 and returned to Puerto Rico.

“I suffered more discrimination in Puerto Rico, when I arrived (back home), than when I was in the United States. ... People in the U.S. admired us yet here in Puerto Rico, people thought that we (women) had gone to the U.S. to entertain men or that we were lesbians,” she said.

Because of her experience in World War II, Santana said she gained more security and she learned to defend herself. The only problem she had with her participation in the war was the discrimination she suffered back home.

Interviewed on Feb. 11, 2011, in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



Flora Gutiérrez Shank

Interview by Vanessa R. Torres

To Flora Alicia Gutiérrez Shank, the war seemed like what we see in the movies today—a medley of sacrifice, tragedy, celebration, shock, heroes and fright.

Shank was a teenager in El Paso, Texas, when World War II broke out. She recalls many evenings spent dancing at the local USO, which she says soldiers still visit for recreation today. Movies were also a favorite pastime for young people living at home during the war.

“We never missed a monster movie in our lives,” Shank said.

Everyday life, however, wasn’t as much fun as the theaters and dance halls. One sacrifice she clearly remembered, was having to use books of coupons to make purchases.

“It wasn’t a great big sacrifice,” Shank said, “but there was a lot of trading going on between the families.” It was the norm for families to trade coupons for what they needed. Shank married her first husband, Mario Peña, in 1943 in Waco, Texas. Soon after, Peña was drafted and attended cadet school before becoming a pilot in the military, stationed at Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin.

Although Shank has fond wartime memories, she notes that the period was also a time of immense tragedy.

“A world war, it’s something nobody ever forgets. The kids that lived through it, even me, at 16, 17, didn’t realize how many people were being killed everywhere,” she said.

Interviewed on March 28, 2004, in San Antonio.



Ruben Suárez

Interview by Enrique Vega

Throughout his service in the U.S. Navy during World War II and the rest of his life, Ruben Suárez had a strong understanding of diversity and perseverance.

“I wanted to be in the Navy so bad that I could taste it,” Suárez said. “I envisioned myself being a part of those beautiful ships.”

Suárez, the son of Mexican immigrants, grew up in Tucson during the Great Depression.

“We didn’t have very much money; what we had was love and enthusiasm for life,” Suárez said. “We didn’t know any different. We made our own fun.”

Suárez enlisted in the Navy in 1943, just days after graduating from high school. He was assigned to the U.S. Fleet flagship *USS Pennsylvania* (BB-38), as a signalman third class, and was the only Latino in his company.

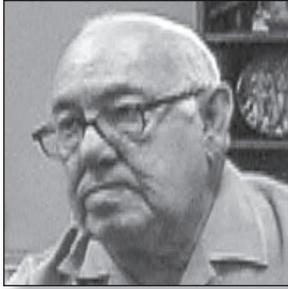
“I enjoyed living on the ship and liked my job as a signalman,” Suárez said. “I was scared the first time we saw action. But I got used to it.”

The crew of the *USS Pennsylvania* battleship became so adept at shooting down enemy planes and gunboats that it received a Navy Unit Commendation for service in the South Pacific.

Suárez was discharged on Feb. 21, 1946 as a signalman third class.

He used the GI Bill to go to college and eventually earn a degree in business administration from the University of Arizona. He worked for the City of Tucson and, according to the Pima County library, served as interim city manager from April 1992 to July 1993. He retired in 1993.

Interviewed on Aug. 17, 2010, in Tucson, Arizona.



Óscar Torres

Interview by Virgilio G. Roel

In June of 2002, Óscar Torres finally received the Purple Heart for wounds he suffered during the September 1944 assault on the South Pacific island of Peleliu.

After being drafted and joining the Marines in 1943, Torres left his native Laredo, Texas, in February 1944 to receive basic training in San Diego, California. He was later sent to Camp Pendleton in nearby Oceanside.

Torres was assigned to the 8th Amphibious Tractor Battalion of the 1st Marine Division. The unit took part in the operation to retake the islands of Peleliu and Angaur from the Japanese.

During a search for injured soldiers in Peleliu, Torres was hit in the thigh by Japanese machine-gun fire. Two soldiers from his group of six were killed, and another was wounded.

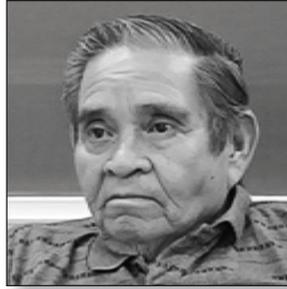
After recovering, Torres was assigned light duty within his division. He did not see combat again because the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, abruptly ending the war.

Torres did occupational duty in Japan and China for a while, and in 1946, he returned to San Diego for his discharge from the military. He went home to Laredo on May 10, 1946.

Back in civilian life, Torres finished high school and started college before being called back to active duty for the Korean War. Due to his previous injury, he worked as an office clerk at Camp Pendleton for a year, then once again returned to Laredo in 1951.

In 1952, he married Elsa Gómez, with whom he had six children: three boys and three girls.

Interviewed on Sept. 28, 2002, in Laredo, Texas.



Roberto Tovar

Interview by Robert Rivas

Fresh from finishing high school in El Paso, Texas, Roberto Tovar volunteered for military service, something he had wanted to do since he was 13, after the Pearl Harbor bombing.

“I was very well-motivated. ... I was real proud of the country and real proud of everybody,” Tovar said.

Tovar started boot camp in San Diego in 1945, after the end of World War II. He was involved in the restoration of war-damaged areas and assorted projects and remained on active duty until 1954. During the Korean War, he was assigned to the submarine *USS Blackfin* as a torpedoman. Among other duties, the *Blackfin* crew performed many missions to save Marines trapped by North Korean forces. On one such mission, Tovar’s leg was grazed by enemy gunfire. Tovar said he and the men he was rescuing were taken by helicopter to the Japanese port of Yokosuka for medical attention.

Being wounded, in addition to watching food supplies dwindle in the submerged submarine, were his direst military experiences.

Following his discharge from naval duty, Tovar returned to his prewar job as a Postal Service clerk in El Paso. There, he met and dated Ofelia Estrada, and the couple eventually married on Sept. 22, 1952. The Tovars had six children, one of whom, Herbert, followed in his father’s footsteps by joining the Navy for about three years.

Looking back on his life after growing up in a low-income ward barrio, Tovar is proud of his achievements and above all of serving his country.

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.



Bennie Trujillo

Interview by Joseph Padilla

“You could hear the tanks coming. You could hear the squeak, the tracks squeaking and the motors running. You could hear them coming. The Americans and the infantry were aware that they were no match for that kind of assault.”

That was Bennie Trujillo’s recollection of one moment in the Battle of the Bulge, one of World War II’s bloodiest and most crucial battles.

A native of Watrous, New Mexico, Trujillo lied about his age and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1943; he was 17.

Trujillo, who wanted to become a medic, was initially assigned as a litter bearer to the 99th Infantry Division, 393rd Regiment, 1st Battalion Medical Detachment, and in 1944 was sent to France.

“The night before the Battle of the Bulge started, we heard artillery coming in a lot,” Trujillo said. “Like a lot of artillery—boom, boom, boom, boom.”

He tended many battle wounds in his unit, which at one point spent two days behind German lines and was mistakenly attacked when the soldiers sought to rejoin the Allies.

Trujillo’s second battle was at Remagen, where a tank shell exploded and shrapnel struck him. The lower part of one of his legs had to be amputated.

Trujillo received several medals and awards, including the Purple Heart. But the one that meant the most to him was his Combat Medical Badge, awarded for service while in the thick of battle.

Interviewed on Feb. 19, 2011, in Denver.



Joe Vargas

Interview by Jesse Herrera

Joe Vargas' early life was characterized by constant movement between two Texas cities: Austin, where he was born on March 18, 1926, and Fort Worth, where he grew up.

Despite the hard work of his father, Gavino Vargas, the family struggled to make ends meet. The elder Vargas worked as a greenskeeper at a golf course while Joe's mother, Agustina Briseño Vargas, stayed at home with the six children.

By the time he was 10, Vargas was already working at the same golf course as his father. He continued to work to help support his family until the war broke out and he was drafted into the U.S. Army.

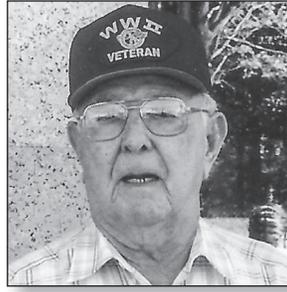
Vargas underwent basic training in Fort Bliss, Texas, and was assigned to the 28th Infantry Battalion, 8th Infantry Division. His unit was then sent to Europe on a British ship in January 1945.

After crossing Belgium, which had already been liberated by the Allies, Vargas fought on the front lines in the Rhineland, on German soil. His service was cut short when he was wounded March 3, 1945, in the Hercynian Forest. A blast blew Vargas' body under a boxcar. Upon returning to the United States, he was discharged Nov. 27, 1945, at the rank of private. Back in Fort Worth, Vargas was confronted with growing tensions between Hispanics and Anglos.

Looking to get an education, he enrolled at Texas Christian University through his Veterans Administration officer but quit the program after feeling mistreated by other students.

In 1947, Vargas married Hope Saldaña, a native of Eastland, Texas. Together, they had six daughters, all born and raised in Fort Worth.

Interviewed on Sept. 15, 2007, in Austin, Texas.



Fidel Vásquez

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

At least once in his life, Fidel Vásquez considered himself lucky; his U.S. Army construction unit shipped out ahead of its supply ship, which was attacked and sunk by the Japanese.

Vásquez who grew up in Marfa, Texas, was born on Oct. 31, 1923, in Casa Piedra, Texas. He was drafted on Jan. 1, 1943, at the age of 19.

His father, Natividad, had served in World War I in the Army's 90th Infantry Division and received a Purple Heart.

There were 60 Latinos in Vásquez's company of 200 soldiers, and they stuck together and formed a big family. That was "how it's supposed to be," Vasquez said.

After basic training at Camp Livingston, Louisiana, he went to Oakland, California, and then sailed to Australia before heading to New Guinea. For 16 months he worked as a crane operator.

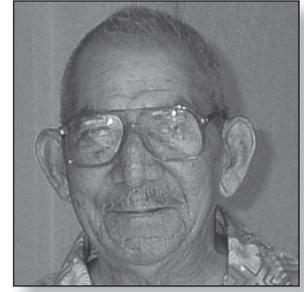
He was then sent to Manila, Philippines, until the war ended. Vásquez returned to Marfa on Jan. 7, 1946.

After the war, Vásquez worked in maintenance construction for the Texas Highway Department for 38 years.

Vásquez married María Dolores Gonzales Vásquez on April 5, 1959. They had two children, Fidel G. Vásquez Jr. and Diana Valdés.

Vásquez said his children were able to lead better lives than he had.

Interviewed on Aug. 3, 2010, in Presidio, Texas.



Marshall Vásquez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Marshall Vásquez did not let his disability keep him from serving his country in World War II.

Vasquez was born Feb. 5, 1921, and raised in the Los Angeles area. When he was 10 years old, his sister accidentally poked him in the right eye, permanently blinding him on that side. Because of his visual impairment, it took the Army two years to accept him into its ranks as a limited serviceman in 1941. In that capacity, Vásquez performed a variety of noncombat duties until his services were no longer needed and he was discharged.

But he didn't accept his dismissal.

"I wanted to go to combat, to war... so I told them [the lieutenants] that I could learn to fight because I could use my left eye instead of my right eye and I could fire; I could kill," he said.

After Vásquez insisted on going to fight, the Army tested his shooting skills. He earned high marks and went to Virginia to train. On Oct. 14, 1944, Vasquez and the rest of the 310th Infantry Regiment left for continental Europe. The unit fought in Germany and also took part in the Battle of the Bulge, where Vásquez was shot. He also recalled that other members of his unit were severely afflicted with frostbite.

After recovering at an English hospital, he was sent back to France as a limited serviceman, once again performing noncombat duties, including a stint guarding prisoners of war.

Vásquez returned to the United States in March 1946 and was formally discharged at Fort MacArthur in California.

Interviewed on June 15, 2007, in San Jose, California.



Mike Villa

Interview by Samantha Salazar

Despite the hardships they faced during World War II, Mike Villa and his brothers, Raymond and Joe, felt grateful they returned home safely to Yorktown, Texas.

Their mother died when Villa was about 8 years old. His older brother, Raymond, dropped out of school and enlisted in the Army to help his family financially. While serving in the Philippines, Raymond was captured by the Japanese.

“My father took it pretty bad, knowing that my brother Raymond had been captured,” Villa said.

In 1943, Villa, then 21, was drafted into the Army. He was assigned as a cryptographic technician to the First Radio Squadron Mobile Army Post Office 710 in the Philippines.

Thanks to the International Red Cross, Villa and his brother Raymond were able to celebrate in the Philippines when the latter was released from a Japanese prison camp short time before Raymond was sent back to the United States.

“They loaded the trucks and [Raymond] bid me good-bye and said, ‘With God’s help, we’ll meet in our hometown,’ ” Villa said. “And, sure enough, God helped us.”

After he returned home, he used the GI Bill to get his high school diploma and then studied at Draughon Business College in San Antonio.

“Hispanics didn’t get much of a chance. We had to struggle [to find] a good job,” Villa said.

Eventually, Villa landed a job as a typist at Kelly Air Force Base, on the southwestern edge of San Antonio. He worked there for 34 years.

Interviewed on July 20, 2010, in Hallettsville, Texas.



Frank Yturalde

Interview by Joseph Villescás

Frank Yturalde grew up in a bilingual household in El Paso, Texas, where the importance of learning both English and Spanish was stressed.

“The more languages you know, the better off you are,” he said.

During World War II, Yturalde, a yeoman third class in the Navy serving in the Pacific on *USS Collingsworth*, used his bilingual education on at least one occasion to help allies in the Mexican military.

He was called up on the deck of his ship to translate orders to a plane from Mexico’s 201st Fighter Squadron that needed to land. (*Escuadrón 201*’s members flew 59 missions from the island of Luzon in the Philippines.)

After his discharge from the Navy on May 1946, Yturalde could find only low-paying menial labor and had a family to support. So he decided he would go back to school and get a college degree.

Yturalde studied accounting at the Texas State School of Mines and Metallurgy, now University of Texas at El Paso. He worked for some time as an accountant for the government, but after realizing he wouldn’t be promoted quickly, he decided in 1954 to switch careers and become a teacher.

After his first teaching stint in California, he moved back to El Paso, where he developed his career in education. At the time of his interview, Yturalde was still teaching, offering English as a second language, GED and citizenship classes to adults. As he put it, “I cannot lie around. I have to keep busy.”

Interviewed on Sept. 1, 2007, in El Paso, Texas.

Voces as a Resource



Over the years, Voces has contributed to several documentaries, exhibits, news articles, and scholarly articles—becoming a national treasure of stories, photos and documentation. Below are just a few recent requests:

8-23-2013 email:

My name is Alex Ott and I am producing a WW2 film called FURY. It's about a 5-man Sherman Tank crew pushing through Germany towards the end of the war in April 1945. It ... stars Brad Pitt, Shia LaBeouf and Michael Peña, who plays a Latino-American tanker in the film. ...

During our extensive research, we have discovered that the Latino/a-American contribution to this war was far greater than reported in the history books ... I am hoping you may have access to a few surviving Latino/a-American veterans that would be willing to speak with our director and cast about their wartime experiences.

8-21-13 National History Associates, Rockville, MD:

My company is working with the Trust for the National Mall to develop an educational smartphone app for visitors to the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. In addition to memorial and World War II history, the app will include personal stories [to] bring the war to life and highlight the sacrifices made by all Americans.

I saw the profiles of Mr. Richard Candelaria and Mr. Dennis Baca on your website, and we would like to feature both of them in the personal stories segment of the app. I would like to obtain permission to display photographs of both veterans in the app.

2-9-2012 Producers of the Latino Americans, a PBS documentary:

I am working on a six-hour PBS series on the history of Latinos in the United States, and hour three will cover WWII-1950s. We are ... interested in what visual materials you might have, and the breadth and diversity of stories and experiences your project would bring to our show.



Raul Gutiérrez

Interview by Diana Maldonado
and Mike Zambrano, Jr.

In December 1952, Raul Gutiérrez reported to his local draft board and was inducted into the U.S. Army. After basic training at Fort Hood, Texas, he was sent to the West Coast and then shipped to Japan and the Korean War.

Born in New Braunfels, Texas, on Sept. 14, 1930, he was the oldest of five children. His father, Alphonso, was a bookkeeper and his mother, María, was a homemaker.

He reached Hokkaido, Japan, in mid-1953, where he joined the 1st Cavalry Division, 8th Regiment.

The war was almost over, but the North Korean threat remained; training against another invasion became a large part of Gutiérrez's experience.

Gutiérrez recalls reinforced training with small arms, under live fire conditions, as well as training with hand grenades and bazookas. He also learned how to plant and remove various types of land mines, but his newest training included amphibious landings along the coast of Japan. "Training was tough, but it was good," he recalls.

Fortunately, he never had to fight in Korea. In November 1954, he was honorably discharged and returned to civilian life in San Antonio. In 1957, he married Amparo Gaytán and raised four children. He worked for a meatpacking firm and later retired from Boise Cascade in 1995.

Interviewed in September 2013, in Austin, Texas, and on Feb. 11, 2014, in Eagle Pass, Texas.



Luis Landín

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

"When you get ambushed, you're supposed to get killed."

That's what the Army tells every soldier during training, Luis Landín said.

"But for me," he added, "my life consisted of events that weren't normal, so I knew what I had to do when the chips were down."

Landín grew up in Laredo, Texas, with five brothers and a sister.

He dropped out of high school after ninth grade and held several jobs to help his family.

"I used to shine shoes and sell newspapers, but I never felt comfortable doing those jobs," Landín said. "It wasn't for me, so I joined the Army."

Two of his brothers were already in Korea when he volunteered for the Army in 1948. By 1950, he was in South Korea with the 45th Infantry Division.

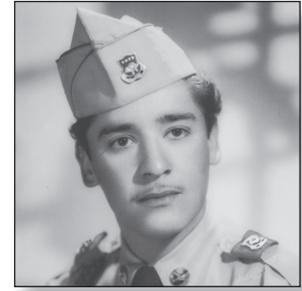
After his tour in Korea, Landín went to Fort Dix, New Jersey. But in 1960, he volunteered to be a military advisor to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

After his initial tour in South Vietnam, Landín returned to the U.S. in 1962 but soon went back to South Vietnam as a light weapons infantry advisor to the 1st Battalion, 33rd Regiment of the 21st Infantry Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

On Dec. 28, 1964, Landín's regiment was ambushed by the Viet Cong, leaving 27 dead.

As a result of his actions during the attack, Landín was promoted and awarded the Silver Star.

Interviewed on Oct. 3, 2009, in Laredo, Texas.



Jesús Ramírez

Interview by Valerie Martinez

Jesús "Chuy" Ramírez believes serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War taught him responsibility. As the oldest of four siblings growing up in Baja California, Mexico, Ramírez had many obligations. As a child, after his parents split up, he had to move from Mexicali to Guadalajara, back to Mexicali and then to Tijuana. As a result, he had to repeat the first grade at least twice, and he did not become fluent in English during his school days.

When Ramírez was 17, he moved to the United States and tried to enlist in the Army but was rejected because of his age and because he did not understand enough English. As soon as he turned 18, he dropped out of school. Soon after that, he was drafted into the Army.

"I wanted the adventure," Ramírez said, adding that he also wanted to serve. He was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, 8th Army.

After training, he was sent to Japan on a vessel known as "General Wiggles," the transport ship *USS Gen. William Weigel*. He never forgot the look on his mother's face when he said goodbye.

"It killed me ... seeing her cry and how sad she was," Ramírez said, admitting that he cried too.

After three months in Japan, Ramírez and his company received emergency orders to leave for South Korea.

"One good thing I learned in the Army was to be responsible for things and also to do what I'm supposed to do," he said.

Interviewed on June 7, 2010, in National City, California.



John Alemán

Interview by Haley Dawson

John Alemán became one of the few Latinos to graduate from Sam Houston State University in 1963 and went on to succeed in his subsequent military service and post-Vietnam War community service. Alemán was born in Waco, Texas, on June 23, 1940, to Pedro and Dolores Alemán, and grew up in nearby Bellmead. Discrimination was a daily part of Alemán's life. Hispanics were often excluded from activities and opportunities. He did not feel angry about his situation, however, because he knew no other way of life.

He enlisted in the Air Force to avoid being drafted into the Army. He went to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, where he became the only Latino in his group to complete the basic training. He then went on to graduate from the Officer Training School. Alemán was stationed in Wichita Falls, Texas, for three years before he was deployed as a courier to Clark Air Base in the Philippines. He received planes full of classified documents and equipment at the base, directed a team of men in unloading it, and then guarded the items until they were picked up again.

Alemán was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis a few years after his return. After the service, he worked for 30 years as a state employment counselor and was active in Latino organizations, including The American G.I. Forum and the League of United Latin American Citizens, among others.

"My return to the U.S.A. and civilian life was quite a contrast," Alemán said. "The reception for our troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, I applaud."

Interviewed on April 9, 2011, in Houston.



Daniel Archuleta

Interview by Henry Velez

At a time of racial tension in the U.S., Daniel Archuleta struggled to find direction.

Archuleta, who grew up in Denver, enlisted in the U.S. Army on July 30, 1967. His uncle, who was killed in the Korean War, had been a medic.

"I grew up with his memory. I have a little green jacket with his Army patches," he said. "I wore it when I was little, and my son wore it when he was small."

Archuleta became a medic in the 2nd Medical Battalion, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, then transferred to Company D in the 1st Medical Battalion. His unit arrived at Di An, South Vietnam, just after Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army launched the surprise Tet Offensive against South Vietnamese and U.S. forces. One of his best friends lost both legs.

He transferred to the infantry and, Archuleta said, got even for his friend and his uncle.

He was discharged on July 30, 1970, with the rank of specialist. He was awarded the Bronze Star, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, Combat Medical Badge, Army Commendation Medal and a Sharpshooter Badge.

After returning home, he became active in Vietnam Veterans Against the War, the American Red Cross and the Paramedic Association of Colorado.

"If you love life then you need to love people. And when they take that away from you, you have to get it back, or you end up with nothing," Archuleta said.

Interviewed on Aug. 9, 2010, in Denver.



Bobby Biers

Interview by Marc Hamel

U.S. Marine Corps veteran Robert "Bobby" Biers said he felt more distress as a drill instructor dodging comments from mothers than when he was on the front lines of Vietnam.

"I had these mothers calling me up, asking me, 'What did you do to my baby? He has manners and he's polite. He lost 100 pounds. He's lean, mean and tough,'" Biers said.

Born in Pittsburgh in 1937, Biers moved to Phoenix with his mother and brother when his parents divorced.

"For a time we lived in a cabin and slept on the floor," Biers said. "The bad times taught us to appreciate the good."

In 1954, Biers joined the Marines. He married Mary Ellen Greenwood in June 1956.

He served as a clerk in Arizona and then went to Okinawa before heading to Vietnam as a logistician with the 12th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division.

It was 1965 and Biers said U.S. forces in Vietnam had to request permission to fire back when fired upon.

He returned to San Diego as a drill instructor. In 1969 he went back to Vietnam with the 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division. Biers' final Marine assignment was as base logistics chief from 1976 to 1979 at Kaneohe in Hawaii. He returned to San Diego as depot logistics chief, retiring in 1981.

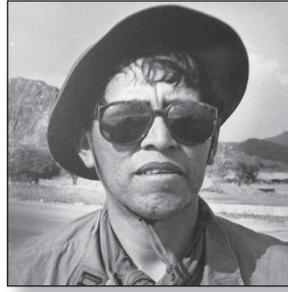
Biers struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder and for years rode his motorcycle to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall.

Interviewed on Aug. 15, 2010, in Tucson, Arizona.



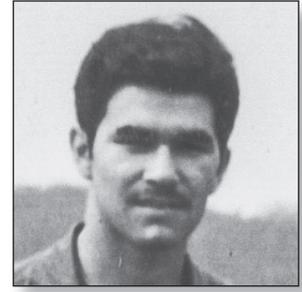
Jim Estrada

Interview by Lindsey Craun



Arnold García Jr.

Interview by Jonathan Woo



Raymond García

Interview by Andres Salinas

Jim Estrada was a 17-year-old high school dropout at Air Force technical training in Biloxi, Mississippi, surrounded by college students. But Estrada consistently placed in the top 10 percent of his class.

The Air Force was a turning point.

“It sort of sparked a fire that, ‘Gee, education might be something I want to pursue,’” he recalled.

As a child in San Pedro, California, Estrada had a passion for learning. He read anything he could get his hands on — even food labels. After joining the Air Force in 1961, he trained and taught Air Force enlisted personnel to be radar technicians at Keesler Air Force Base near Biloxi. He later was stationed in Finland, Minnesota, and briefly traveled to Southeast Asia in 1964. After his service, Estrada enrolled at Mesa Community College and then at San Diego State University.

“That spark that was ignited in the Air Force, the military, finally came to fruition,” he said.

In 1971, Estrada went to work at KGTV-TV and then went to McGraw-Hill in New York to work on documentary films, including the award-winning “La Raza”. Estrada returned to San Diego in 1975 and formed his own advertising agency, Imagery. He then worked for the McDonald Corporation and in Houston with Anheuser-Busch.

“God has put me in different places at different times of my life, and I think I’m here right now to see how to help my community develop a voice,” he said.

Estrada eventually opened his own public relations firm in San Antonio, Estrada Communications Group.

Interviewed on April 20, 2011, in Austin, Texas.

Arnold García Jr. had never felt more powerful in his life.

The West Texas native was in Illesheim, Germany, when a fellow soldier named Horton, who never hid his disdain toward García, asked him to read a letter he received from his girlfriend. Horton was illiterate.

“I realized that I could’ve told him anything, and evil thoughts crossed my mind,” García said. “Since then, I have thought that never again in my life will I ever be as powerful as I was at that moment. I was the center of his universe.”

He was drafted on Oct. 19, 1969, while attending Angelo State University and working at the San Angelo Standard-Times. In Germany during the Cold War, he performed a variety of jobs, including artillery crew member, motor pool clerk, and infantry squad member.

“[Service] made me a better person, made me a more compassionate person,” García said. “It gave me a broader understanding of a lot of things.”

He ended his active duty days at A Company, 2nd Battalion of the 51st Infantry, 1st Armored Division. At the time of his interview, García lived with his wife, Vida Marcet, in Austin, Texas. He worked as editorial page editor of the Austin American-Statesman.

His advice for younger Latinos: “Don’t swallow insults, take advantage of opportunities, get an education, and vote. The more education you get, the fewer insults you have to swallow,” he said, adding: “Don’t be Horton.”

Interviewed on April 23, 2011, in Austin, Texas.

Raymond García, a proud Mexican American from a small Texas town and a Vietnam War veteran, enlisted in the U.S. Army to help support his family and to help his country. García was born in 1951 in El Campo, Texas, which was still segregated when he was growing up. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in August 1969 and was sent to basic training at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. He then received specialized training to operate quad .50 caliber guns. That was his job in Vietnam, with the 24th Corps, Battery G, 65th Artillery.

“The war was real to me the first day I got there,” García said. “I hadn’t even been processed or given a weapon before I witnessed my first attack.”

Sometimes soldiers went out on patrol and didn’t come back; it meant they had been ambushed. A few days later new soldiers moved into their barracks.

“Those kinds of things always broke my heart,” García said. “They were young kids.”

García served a year in the Vietnam War. When he returned home, he felt like an outsider. He was seen as a baby killer and vilified.

“No one understood me,” he said. “They hadn’t been to war. They hadn’t seen what I’ve seen. I came back a changed man.”

García couldn’t find a job in his hometown, but eventually he was able to find work as an oilfield worker.

Interviewed on Nov. 6, 2010, in Castroville, Texas.



Servando García

Interview by Moseetee Lorenz

Servando “Gus” García’s 20-year military career allowed him to travel extensively and live in France, Germany, Japan and Vietnam.

Before joining the U.S. Army in 1959, García had left the United States only to visit relatives in Mexico. He grew up in the town of Charlotte, Texas, where his family ran a pool hall and barbershop. After college, he had a hard time finding a job. So he decided to enlist.

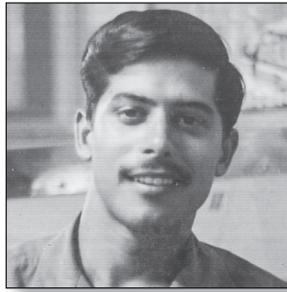
His first assignment was in Paris, where he met his future wife, Berthe Holst Madsen, a flight attendant from Denmark. After Europe, García was stationed in New Jersey and then Georgia. After a year in the United States, García was sent to Stuttgart, in what was then West Germany.

In 1966, he was assigned to Okinawa, Japan. And then García volunteered for a tour in the Vietnam War. He joined the 57th Signal Company (Communications, Security and Logistical Support) in South Vietnam. In Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City, Spanish-speaking soldiers from all over the United States gathered at a local hotel. It was a rare moment for García to be surrounded by so many Spanish-speaking soldiers overseas.

“Everyone who was Spanish-speaking was there,” García said. “...And I was surprised to see so many of them.”

After Vietnam, he was posted to Germany and then to Fairfax, Virginia. After he left the military, he worked at Computer Sciences Corp. near Washington, D.C., until he retired in 2007. The Garcías, who had two daughters, then moved back to San Antonio.

Interviewed on Nov. 6, 2010, in Castroville, Texas.



Eduardo Garza

Interview by Emily Macrander

In the summer of 1969 Eduardo Garza was a combat engineer with the U.S. Army in Vietnam, trained to detonate explosives, help the infantry and kill the enemy.

Garza, who grew up in the small Texas town of El Indio, said the land and the people of Vietnam reminded him of his family and home.

“I realized once I was there that this was a people struggling to survive under domination from another people, who were their own people,” Garza said.

He also saw soldiers change.

“Those who had suffered losses to the Viet Cong took on a hard, vicious feeling towards the Vietnamese people, whether they were [from the] south or north,” Garza said.

Garza chose to not extend his tour beyond one year in Vietnam. He was married for the first of three times before leaving military service. His first wife lived with him in West Germany, before they returned to the U.S. and civilian life. After they divorced, he lived for a time with his parents. Garza’s parents were surprised to see how much he had changed overseas. He was angry and edgy and had trouble settling down. He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder 15 years after his return. He became active in the Chicano rights movement and the San Antonio arts scene. Garza worked for the Veterans Administration for 23 years and then retired. He also started San Antonio’s Jazz Poets Society in 2006.

Interviewed on April 20, 2011, in San Antonio.



Juan Guajardo

Interview by Anna Kavich

Life for Juan Guajardo seemed just as traumatic before and after Vietnam, as it was while he was there.

Guajardo, who was born in San Antonio on Dec. 18, 1947, often witnessed violence on the streets and in his own house.

“We all thought it was normal,” Guajardo said. “Until we grew up and we said, ‘Hey man, this wasn’t right.’”

He was drafted in August 1968 and trained at Fort Bliss, Texas, before going to Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Ord, California. He arrived in Vietnam in January 1969.

He was assigned to the 9th Infantry but was sent to the 86th Combat Engineer Battalion at Camp Viking, in South Vietnam. He then went to the 4th Battalion, 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division.

On May 14, 1969, Guajardo was seriously injured by a land mine. He was flown to Camp Drake, in Tokyo, and then to Fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio.

He spent his last eight months of military service at Heilbraun, Germany.

He was discharged with the rank of Specialist 4. He received the Purple Heart, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Medal of Gallantry Unit Citation with Palm, and the Combat Infantry Badge.

He sought to serve his San Antonio community as a Volunteers in Service to America volunteer before the war, and went on to become prime minister of the San Antonio Brown Berets and a civil rights advocate after his discharge.

Interviewed on Nov. 6, 2010, in Castroville, Texas.



Herlinda Gutiérrez

Interview by Laura Barberena

What began as a harmless bet led to the opportunity of a lifetime for Herlinda Gutiérrez.

“I enlisted on a dare,” she said about the start of her 20-year career in the U.S. Air Force.

Gutiérrez remembered that a group of nurses at work dared one another to apply to different armed forces branches. As it happened, most, except Gutiérrez, were married and had children. And that’s how Gutiérrez joined the Air Force in 1961, and her initial assignment was particularly close to home.

“I joined the military to see the world, and I got stationed here in San Antonio,” Gutiérrez said with a laugh.

But in January 1964 she was assigned to North Africa. While in Libya, she tended to the soldiers and those working for the United States abroad.

She became part of the medical corps, which picked up wounded soldiers during the Vietnam War and transported them to larger U.S. facilities.

For Gutiérrez, discrimination was only a minor issue growing up in San Antonio. It wasn’t until she was in the military that she realized she was the only Latina nurse during her assignments in the early 1960s. But she was more shocked, after she was discharged, to realize how servicemen and women were treated by many civilians. Nonetheless, she was proud to have served in the military and would recommend the experience to other women.

Interviewed on May 6, 2010, in San Antonio.



Dan Hinojosa

Interview by Amy Bingham

As an infantryman on patrol in 1969 during the Vietnam War, Daniel Hinojosa suffered through swarms of mosquitoes and many blood-sucking leeches on a nightly basis.

“It was very hard,” Hinojosa said. “We’d be out in the jungle days at a time. [It was] rainy most of the time and miserable, but it was a job that had to be done. You were trying to stay alive and taking care of each other.”

Hinojosa, who was from San Antonio, was drafted in 1968 and went through basic training at Fort Bliss, in Texas. He was assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division in South Vietnam from July 1969 until the summer of 1970.

Hinojosa was discharged on Nov. 17, 1970, at the rank of sergeant. He received a Combat Infantry Badge, an Air Medal, a National Defense Service Medal, and a Vietnam Service Medal with two bronze service stars.

“For the longest time, I never told anybody I was there [in Vietnam], because people would look down on you,” Hinojosa said. “You didn’t even want to say you were in the Army.”

Despite suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, Hinojosa said he did not hold a grudge about having been sent to war.

“I was ordered to do something, and I followed orders, completed my time, and got out,” he said.

Interviewed on Nov. 6, 2010, in Castroville, Texas.



Ricardo León Martínez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez

Although he returned from Vietnam uninjured, Ricardo León Martínez carried invisible scars; his struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder put a strain on his family relationships.

Still, the native of Newton, Kansas, was able to turn his life around and launch a successful career.

Martínez was born on June 28, 1943, to Ignacio Martínez and María Neri. Of his 13 siblings, seven served in the military.

After quitting high school in 11th grade, Martínez married a former schoolmate and had four children. A propensity for heavy drinking and getting into fights got him in trouble with the law. Fearing such a lifestyle would lead to jail, he enlisted in the Army in 1965.

After basic training, Martínez volunteered to go to Vietnam and was deployed with the 9th Division. He served with several units during his stint at the military. When he returned to the U.S. in 1967, Martínez’s PTSD put a rift between him and his family.

In 1970, Martínez divorced and moved to Kansas City. Soon after, he was laid off from his job and faced financial problems. At some point, he became homeless and lived in a park.

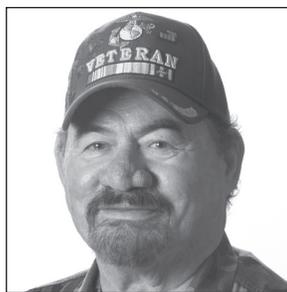
Eventually, Martínez found a steady job at a mental clinic. While he was working, he used the GI Bill and attended Penn Valley Community College, where he earned an associate’s degree in criminal justice administration. His education led to positions with different federal agencies for the next 34 years. After going through two more divorces, Martínez married Mary F. Callahan, who had been his wife for 22 years at the time of the interview.

Interviewed on June 17, 2010, in Kansas City, Kansas.



Camilo Medrano

Interview by Ali Vise



Óscar Muñoz

Interview by Élida Chávez



Richard Pérez

Interview by Alexandra Loucel

Camilo Medrano's job as a U.S. Navy corpsman took him from his hometown of San Antonio, to the horrors of the Vietnam war.

Medrano, born in 1943, said his family's tradition of military service inspired him to join the Navy Reserve while in high school.

He enlisted in the Navy in July 1962, and while attending Hospital Corps School in Great Lakes, Illinois, he married his wife, Esther, on Nov. 23, 1962.

Before being sent to South Vietnam, he trained at Camp Pendleton, California, and transferred to the 3rd Marine Division of Field Medical School.

In Vietnam, he was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division.

The most difficult part, Medrano said, was "treating the dead and wounded. Holding a dying Marine in my arms in an attempt to comfort him. Hearing the cries of wounded Marines that I was unable to attend to because I was told by a Marine officer, 'I've already lost four corpsmen. Don't go out there.'"

He was discharged in August 1966 at the rank of hospitalman E-5. For his service, he received the National Defense Service Medal; Navy Good Conduct Medal; Vietnam Service Medal with three bronze stars; Naval Unit Commendation, and the Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation.

Interviewed on Nov. 6, 2010, in Castroville, Texas.

When Óscar C. Muñoz returned to the United States after serving in Vietnam, he thought he had seen his last dying Marine and would never again hear another man scream in agony.

He didn't know those sights and sounds would haunt him the rest of his life.

"You don't just say goodbye to war," he said. "You take it with you."

Muñoz enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on April 15, 1968, without telling his parents. One of 12 children born to Manual and Abigail Muñoz, Arizona farm laborers, he knew the military was his only way to an education.

He served in the 5th Marine Regiment of the 1st Marine Division as a lance corporal. Muñoz returned to Arizona after being discharged in February 1970. Upon his return, he said he started showing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as a strong fear of darkness. At night he kept a knife under his pillow and a gun in his drawer.

Soon after his discharge, he met Marie Moreno, and in 1971 they married in Mesa, Arizona. They had four children: Gabe, Patty, Steven and Marie. That marriage ended in 1992.

Three years later, Muñoz met Norma Trujillo, and they started dating after she divorced. The couple later married in 2000. They have no children.

Muñoz said he never turned to drugs or alcohol to cope with his disorder. Instead, he turned to Norma, who helps him maintain a positive attitude.

"You can never change life. It gives you what it gives you, and you have to make the best of it," he said. "I live with what it has dealt me and I move on."

Interviewed on June 9, 2010, in National City, California.

U.S. Marine Corps veteran Richard Pérez, the son of a World War II veteran, was in Vietnam for three months, but that was enough to alter his life forever.

Pérez, who was part of Delta Company, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, was seriously wounded in February 1967. After spending a year and a half recovering, Pérez decided to help fellow veterans.

"I dedicated my life to help veterans get their benefits," he said, adding that he also became involved in politics and education.

Pérez, a native of Houston, enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1966, and went to South Vietnam in December of that year.

Pérez was wounded when Viet Cong soldiers attacked his unit. A bullet struck him in the upper right hip and exited through his stomach.

"My buddy, Kenneth Deavers . . . caught four rounds across the chest; another round hit his wrist. . . One of those bullets that hit him, one [hit him] as he was giving me cover," Pérez said. His friend died next to him.

Pérez's hip hurt a lot even after he left the hospital. He underwent two hip replacements before doctors amputated his right leg above the knee.

Pérez founded or co-founded various veteran organizations around the city of Houston, including the City of Houston Veterans Memorial Park. He also was co-founder of Gathering of Eagles, which promotes patriotism among young people.

Interviewed on April 9, 2011, in Houston.



**Civic
Engagement**

Gregory Ríos

Interview by Miguel Gutiérrez Jr.

The first time Gregory Ríos voted in a presidential election was 1960, and he cast his ballot for John F. Kennedy. It made an impression on him. So did having to pay the \$1.50 poll tax.

At the time he picked cotton for a living. "If you picked a hundred pounds [of cotton]... you got \$1.50 for it," he said. "The first time I voted, I had to pick a hundred pounds to buy a poll tax."

Ríos said the poll tax was "just another way by the Anglos to keep minorities from voting." (Poll taxes in federal elections were banned by the U.S. Constitution's 24th Amendment in 1964, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1966 that poll taxes violated the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause.) When he was growing up, school students were not allowed to speak Spanish, and his hometown of Rosenberg, like many other Texas communities, was segregated.

"But we didn't know what discrimination was," Ríos said. "My mother would just say, 'We can't go in there,' and we wouldn't, though we never really knew why." Ríos enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1965, and he recalled heated racial discussions between black and white soldiers. These conversations helped shape Ríos' consciousness about the segregation and discrimination he faced in Rosenberg. Ríos left for Vietnam in 1966. After his return to the U.S. a year later, he was discharged, got married and had two sons. He never forgot the lessons his mother taught him.

"I tell my grandson, 'You need to go register to vote,'" Ríos said. "You have to get involved; you have to know what's going on around you."

Interviewed on March 22, 2014, in Richmond, Texas.



Fernando Rodríguez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Unlike many U.S. military veterans who served in Southeast Asia during the 1960s, Fernando Rodríguez did not see battle. The soldier, who was assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency, said that the closest he came to the war that raged between North and South Vietnam during his 26-year Air Force career was when he was in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand.

"I did really want to go," said Rodríguez of the Vietnam War, "to see what it was all about."

Rodríguez, a native of El Paso, Texas, recalled that his family had been poorer than those of his friends.

Rodríguez and his brothers did whatever they could to help, from picking cotton in the fields to collecting scrap iron and doing yard work and other odd jobs. "Every penny we earned, it was a hard-earned penny," Rodríguez said.

He enlisted in the Air Force on Feb. 4, 1957. As a member of the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing (TAC), Rodríguez traveled to South Carolina, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, Thailand, California and New Mexico.

Up until his time in Nakhon Phanom, near Laos, Rodríguez worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency. Rodríguez was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, the highest recognition awarded for military personnel involved in a non-combat area.

Rodríguez retired from the Air Force as a master sergeant on Feb. 28, 1985.

Rodríguez said he would tell young people: "Education first. Graduate from high school, then join the Air Force. There's a lot of opportunities in the Air Force."

Interviewed on Nov. 29, 2009, in Austin, Texas.



Vidal Rubio

Interview by Elizabeth Blancas

Vidal Rubio graduated from Goliad High School in June 1963. After two weeks of unsuccessfully looking for a job, he met an Army recruiter and signed up.

When Rubio enlisted, he said, he had never heard of Vietnam. He soon found himself on a ship in the Pacific, heading west.

Rubio underwent basic training at Pearl Harbor and in 1964 was sent to Okinawa. There, men were stationed for rapid deployment to any trouble spot in the region. He was there for almost two years, as the Vietnam civil war mounted.

Finally, in 1966, Rubio's time came to tour Vietnam. After being promoted to corporal and reassigned to the 25th Infantry Division, his unit boarded the *USS Missouri* on Jan. 5. Fifteen days later he landed at Cam Ranh Bay.

Rubio's last operation was in May 1966, after four months in the country. He returned to the United States and was discharged from the military.

Initially, Rubio went back to Goliad, but he had trouble finding employment. So he moved to Houston and found work first as a store clerk and later as a shipyard welder.

After welding for years, Rubio decided to use his GI Bill education benefits and ultimately was accepted by the Houston Police Academy in January 1975. That was the start of a 30-year law enforcement career. He retired in 2005 because of heart disease attributed to exposure to Agent Orange.

On June 22, 1968, Rubio married Edulia Sanchez. At the time of the interview, Rubio and his wife lived in Needville, Texas, with their two horses.

Interviewed on July 20, 2010, in Goliad, Texas.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: VIETNAM



Ben Saenz

Interview by Gilbert Song



Ernesto Torres

Interview by Ricardo LaForé

Bernardino “Ben” Saenz Jr. arrived in Vietnam to the sound of sirens and pitch-black darkness in May 1969, just five months after he was drafted.

“I knew I was in the real stuff when I saw the bodies,” Saenz said. “That’s the worst smell, seeing a dead body that had been there months decaying. I remember pulling the arm of one and I got maggots all over me.”

He was assigned to the storied 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

“Day to day, you didn’t know if you were going to live or die,” he said. “You hardly ever saw any of the enemy. You knew they were there because they were shooting at you. After the firefight, we would go out there and see blood trails.”

When Saenz eventually left South Vietnam and returned to Houston, he was greeted by anti-war protesters, who called him “baby killer” and threw eggs at him.

To cope, he drank just as he had after losing buddies in South Vietnam.

“I was just miserable because I was thinking about guys that I left behind,” he said.

His struggle with his personal demons continued for well over a decade.

At the time of his interview the twice-divorced Saenz had been sober for seven years.

“I’m living my life day by day,” he said.

Interviewed on April 9, 2011, in Houston.

After graduating from Abraham Lincoln High School in Denver in 1969, Ernesto Torres had trouble finding steady work.

“A lot of people wouldn’t hire you because they were afraid you’d get drafted. It was a hard time finding a decent job,” he said.

Torres enlisted in the U.S. Army on June 5, 1970. After basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, he went to Fort Rucker, Alaska, for special helicopter training.

Torres arrived in Vietnam in December 1970 and spent 12 months in an assault helicopter, completing missions throughout South Vietnam and on the borders of Laos and Cambodia. He was assigned to the 61st Aviation Company (Assault Support Helicopter), 1st Aviation Brigade. He returned to the U.S. in December 1971, arriving at Fort Lewis, Washington.

“At the airport, while I was washing my hands, an older gentlemen came up to me and started poking me in the chest and asked, ‘Did you get these for killing babies?’” Torres said, recalling that the man had been pointing to his ribbons. “It shocked me. I just walked away, said nothing.”

As Torres realized how deeply his own friends opposed the war, he hid the fact that he had served in the war.

“I wasn’t sure of the validity [of the war]. Just know that my number was called. It was time to serve my country,” Torres said.

Interviewed on Aug. 9, 2010, in Denver.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM VOCES: Kristian Stewart



Kristian Stewart, a database manager from 2003 to 2005, remembers the Voces team as a family united by the leadership of Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez. The years that Kristian spent with the Project provided her with the opportunity to advance her professional skills while empowering her to learn about the Latino experience in the United States.

“I am so grateful for the time I spent with the Project. It allowed me to develop the confidence I needed for going out into the real world,” said Kristian. “I also got to learn many amazing stories about very heroic people who served their country.”

Kristian’s role included the maintenance of the contact information for interview subjects, an essential component of the Project. In addition, she took on miscellaneous responsibilities that contributed to the work of the Voces group. Kristian cites collaboration with other staff members, volunteers, and interns as an integral part of her learning experience.

“I learned how to work as a team. This was the most cohesive team I have worked with. I came to rely on them both inside and outside of work,” said Kristian.

The Voces Oral History Project team has conducted over 930 interviews with Latino military veterans and maintains a comprehensive archive of stories written by student journalists.



Gonzalo Barrientos

Interview by Ashley Mastervich

Gonzalo Barrientos has devoted his career as public official to challenging the inequalities he witnessed and endured in his youth.

When he was growing up in Bastrop, Texas, discrimination against minorities was commonplace. For example, Mexican Americans were not allowed to eat inside most restaurants.

He said John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson were his role models.

“When you heard John Kennedy speeches and talking about equality and justice, it was almost religious about doing for your brothers and sisters across the board. ... He made you feel like you were part of this country,” he said.

In 1972, Barrientos ran against an incumbent for the Texas House and lost. But two years later he won the seat.

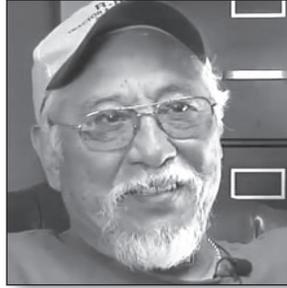
Among the bills he is most proud of is HB 588, which gives the top 10 percent of Texas high school graduates automatic admission to any public state university.

Barrientos also became known for conducting two lengthy filibusters while in the Senate. In one case he spoke for 21 hours.

“Unfortunately, I don’t think enough young people realize some of the trials and tribulations that certain people in our country went through,” he said.

“And we seem to be walking backwards in a way, if you look at the Texas Senate.”

Interviewed on Oct. 9, 2013, in Austin, Texas.



Paul Cedillo

Interview by Miguel Gutiérrez, Jr.

One evening in the early 1970s, a large crowd of Latino activists met at A.W. Jackson Elementary School in Rosenberg, Texas, to hear Congresswoman Barbara Jordan.

Paul Cedillo, the attorney and activist who first contacted Jordan, recalled the moment as a milestone in the history of minority communities in the then-segregated Texas town. Jordan’s oratory was electrifying.

The first time Cedillo recalled being denied service was at a Rosenberg hamburger restaurant in 1954, when he was around 12 or 13.

“It left a lasting impression on me,” Cedillo said.

Cedillo graduated from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, interrupted by a stint in the Army that took him to an American base in Vicenza, Italy.

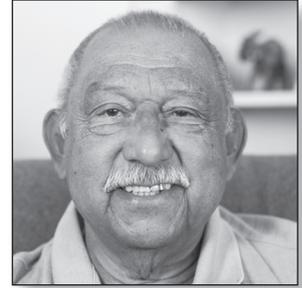
“It opened up my eyes,” Cedillo said of his post-high school years.

Back in Texas, Cedillo decided to become a lawyer, and became active in civil rights activism and politics. At one meeting it was decided to contact Jordan to pressure local Rosenberg officials. Jordan responded quickly, visiting twice.

Cedillo recalled her saying, “All those people that think we’re not going to do anything about changing the system, they’d better think twice.”

After that influx of energy, “things just could not go back to how they were,” Cedillo said. Mexican Americans in Rosenberg gradually increased their political participation, even running for and winning elected office; culminating in Lupe Uresti’s victory in the 1992 mayoral election.

Interviewed on April 26, 2014, in Rosenberg, Texas.



Rosalio Durán

Interview by Katy Lutz

It may have been a small, dimly lit East Austin bar, but Rabbit’s Lounge served as the hub of Chicano politics in the early 1970s with owner Rosalio Durán at its center. Durán, a native of Austin, gained the nickname “Rabbit” as an adolescent because of his running speed in youth sports.

When he was 19, Durán joined the U.S. Navy and served in the Korean War, working in supplies on the *USS Oriskany* (CVA-34). After his service, Durán began working full-time at his family’s service station.

As the 1950s faded into the 1960s, Durán noticed a surge in Mexican Americans intent on achieving social and political equality.

“I never thought about [segregation], why it was segregated,” he said. “It was just a black thing and a Brown thing... We didn’t know any better.”

Durán began going to Cisco’s Bakery, “a big political place,” in Austin in 1967. And when the owner decided to give up his business, Durán rented the place, and Rabbit’s Lounge was born. It became the political center for young Mexican-American activists in Austin, even after moving to a larger building in East Austin in 1969.

“Everyone was welcome, and everyone was treated right,” said Durán.

Rabbit’s Lounge was a place where politicians would “ask for help, bring their friends, bring their supporters” and promote their campaigns. In the summer of 2011, after 40 years of running Rabbit’s Lounge, Durán decided to lease his space.

Interviewed on March 17, 2014, in Austin, Texas.



Iris Galván

Interview by Rebecca Chavoya

Iris Galván was a 17-year-old high school student when she approached an elderly Hispanic man who was pushing a tamale cart down the streets of Rosenberg, Texas, in 1974.

“Have you ever thought about voting?” She said. “You have a right to vote. You are a citizen of this country.”

The man shrugged off her suggestion, saying that he knew his voice didn’t matter. “I don’t speak very good English,” he said.

“Can you read or write a little bit?” Galván said. “If not, someone can help you. We can help you.”

Galván was part of *Juventud Unida*, United Youth, a group that encouraged Mexican Americans to vote in Rosenberg. Growing up in Sinton, Texas, Galván said she never recognized any prejudices against Mexican Americans or African Americans. That changed when she moved to Rosenberg in the fourth grade. Galván said Mexican students were always meant to be “seen and not heard.”

In 1974, Galván and other young students formed *Juventud Unida*.

Not only did the group educate citizens about their right to vote, but also about individual candidates.

“You need to research and study about your candidate. It was an education process about who you are voting for,” Galván said.

Galván recognized that her efforts over the years were not in vain.

“There is a more diverse group of candidates now, so it’s good to know that our work wasn’t for nothing,” she said.

Interviewed on March 23, 2014, in Richmond, Texas.



Lawrence Hernández

Interview by Paige More

Lawrence “Lencho” Hernández is still haunted by his elementary school principal’s big green disciplinary paddle. One afternoon in the eighth grade, when the principal drew his arm back to hit Hernandez, the youngster snatched the paddle away.

That got him kicked out of school.

In 10th grade he quit school altogether, although he later earned an equivalent diploma.

Since his early years, Hernández was outspoken and stood up for his beliefs. He went on to have a career in collective bargaining, leading boycotts and strikes—including the Economy Furniture strike of 1968-1970—which led to major improvements in the political representation of Hispanics in Austin, Texas.

He worked as a sander at the Economy Furniture Company in East Austin.

“Most of the supervisors were white, and they would say the word ‘Mexican’ in a derogatory manner,” Hernández said. Ninety percent of the company’s 400 workers were Mexican American. During the successful strike that he led with the Upholsterers’ International Union against Economy Furniture, Hernandez became friends with United Farm Workers President César Chávez and later went to work for the upholsterers union in Chicago, where he married Josefina Villaseñor.

“I’m not loud like I used to be on the picket line and at the rallies,” Hernández said.

“You have to get the people to believe,” he added. “*‘Sí se puede, creyendo,’* meaning, ‘Yes you can, if you believe’ is my motto.”

Interviewed on April 16, 2014, in Bastrop, Texas.



Richard Moya

Interview by Alsha Khan

Over a lunch of burgers, fries and Dr Peppers in the late 1960s, Richard Moya and two of his best friends tossed around the idea of getting “to the other side of the table” to help their community.

That discussion eventually led Moya to run for a seat on the Travis County Commissioners Court, making him the first Mexican American to be elected to a Travis County office and paving the way for others.

Moya, who served as Travis County commissioner from 1970 to 1986, recalled growing up in a segregated community. In 1953, he was drafted into the armed services and served as a sergeant first class in the Korean War, where he was in charge of ration breakdowns.

“Best job in Korea,” Moya said. “Everybody loves you ’cause you have the rations, their food!”

Moya returned to Austin after Korea, and in 1965 he took a job with the Travis County Legal Aid Defenders Society and worked with the Office of Economic Opportunity. Through his work, he became aware of how much the poor, Mexican Americans in particular, needed help.

In 1970, Moya ran for a seat on the Travis County Commissioners Court.

“We weren’t used to having Hispanics run for anything. There were a lot of confrontations. It was really sad. In fact, one of the guys who supported me got killed,” Moya said.

Moya’s victory gave other Hispanics in Austin the hope that winning elected office was possible.

Interviewed on Nov. 2, 2013, in Austin, Texas.



Harriet Murphy

Interview by Autumn Caviness

As a civil rights trailblazer, Judge Harriet Louise Murphy helped usher in the application of the then newly adopted Voting Rights Act in East Texas. She won removal of the “Whites” and “Colored” signs from water fountains at her local courthouse and went on to become the first black woman to be named to a permanent judgeship in Texas. Growing up in Willistown, Georgia, which was then a small black community on the outskirts of Atlanta, she attended Booker T. Washington High School; another student at the school was a preacher’s son, Martin Luther King Jr., who everyone knew as M.L.

Murphy graduated from Spelman College in Atlanta and earned her master’s in political science from Atlanta University, as well as a teaching certificate from Columbia University in New York. After marrying O.J. Moore, a physician, in 1959, she settled in Longview, Texas. There, she found African Americans had little political power, so she became active in voter registration and other civil rights work.

Murphy was widowed in 1964 after her husband passed away from leukemia. She later married Patrick Henry Murphy, a U.S. Post Office supervisor, in 1968. Two years after losing her first husband, Murphy enrolled in the University of Texas School of Law, from which she graduated in 1969. Four years later, she became the first African American woman appointed to a judgeship in Texas when she was named relief judge. In 1976, she was appointed a permanent municipal court judge.

Interviewed on Oct. 24, 2013, in Austin, Texas.



Wilfred Navarro Jr.

Interview by Paul Zepeda and Ernest Eguía

Navy veteran Wilfred Navarro Jr. challenged institutional discrimination and had a long and fruitful career in the Houston Police Department.

He tried several times to get hired before he finally landed a job with the department. He was only the third Latino officer hired by HPD.

The first obstacle was height. He was half an inch too short to meet the department’s requirements. After several tries, he followed the advice of an officer he had befriended and applied in the morning hours, when he was taller.

Once Navarro finally became an active officer, he then had to deal with the prejudice of some of his colleagues.

“There was one occasion when I had one officer that just flat wouldn’t ride patrol with me,” he recalled.

In spite of those attitudes, Navarro persevered and became active in the Police Officers Association, eventually making it onto the board of directors.

He reached assistant chief of police for the HPD before he retired after almost five decades of service. Following his example, his wife, Armandina de Hoyos, and two of his three children also had careers in law enforcement.

While Navarro was too young to have served in World War II, he joined the Navy in 1946 at the age of 17 with his father’s reluctant approval.

As a deckhand, Navarro boarded *USS Huntington*, a heavy cruiser for 18 months. Navarro also spent some time on another heavy cruiser, *USS Albany*, before his honorable discharge from the Navy in February 1948.

Interviewed on Feb. 10, 2004, in Houston.



Bob Perkins

Interview by José Andrés Araiza

Bob Perkins, who spent 36 years as an elected district court judge in Travis County, Texas, attributed his victory in his first run for office to support from the Mexican-American community. Perkins presided over numerous high profile cases against prominent elected officials. Born in Laredo, Texas, he grew up in Eagle Pass, a town with a large Mexican-American community. Perkins started speaking Spanish as a child. Returning to Eagle Pass during his freshman year at the University of Texas, he took notice of his hometown’s substandard housing stock and realized how prevalent poverty was in his hometown.

“Once I came back with different eyes, I realized ... that conservative philosophy ... in practical aspects didn’t work,” Perkins said.

Perkins’ political beliefs were being transformed at the same time that he was becoming more involved with Austin’s Mexican-American community.

In 1974, Perkins ran for justice of the peace in Travis County.

Despite having to go into a runoff, he won the race and took office in 1975. In 1982, he was elected to 331st Criminal District Court and served there until 2010.

In 1991, Perkins made national headlines for jailing Texas House Speaker Gib Lewis, a Democrat, for not showing up in court to face misdemeanor ethics charges.

“It was a question: Was I going to run my court? Or was he going to run it?” Perkins said.

Interviewed on March 31 and May 2, 2014, in Austin, Texas.



James Ramírez

Interview by Britini Shaw

James Ramírez remembers that Mexican-American communities once held dances to raise money for the poll tax in Austin, Texas.

He would ask himself, “Why do people have to pay to vote when it’s their constitutional right?” By the time he was eligible to vote, at 21, the poll tax had been eliminated. But hurdles for Mexican-American voters remained, and that is why he took part in efforts to organize the Austin Hispanic community.

Ramírez joined the Marine Reserves after graduating from high school. That summer, he went to boot camp and had a chance to travel throughout the country.

When he returned home from boot camp and training in December 1965, he said it was difficult to find a job. But eventually he got a job at Volt Technical Corp., a workplace consulting firm, in the 1970s.

When Ramírez started working for the East Austin Neighborhood Center, he learned to organize from the ground up. He said you have to organize around common concerns. He then became involved in several electoral campaigns, which showcased his organizational skills.

He later worked on campaigns for a variety of local and state politicians.

After his years working on campaigns and in the community, Ramírez said his biggest regret was not developing young people to follow in the steps of the leaders whose campaigns he managed.

Interviewed on April 13, 2014, in Austin, Texas.



Velia Sánchez-Ruiz

Interview by Rachel Hill

Voter participation has always been a priority for Velia Sánchez-Ruiz, who grew up in the town of Lockhart, Texas, 30 miles southeast of Austin.

She was born in 1942 to Cruz García Sánchez and Adela Mayo Sánchez, who had seven children.

“We were fighting just to be seen as human beings here in Central Texas, just because it was so segregated and bigoted,” Sánchez-Ruiz said.

Sánchez-Ruiz said she went home after school every day “disheveled” because she was “ready to fight,” and constantly felt humiliated. She recalled that, as a child, she attended “Poll Tax Dances” with her family, where communities raised the \$1.75 poll tax people had to pay in order to be allowed to vote. (Such taxes were later banned as unconstitutional.) Sánchez-Ruiz learned about financial assistance that was available after high school and jumped at the chance to further her education. She studied health and physical education at Texas Woman’s University in Denton, north of Dallas. After graduating from the university in 1964, she began to participate in demonstrations.

“It was a very exciting time; we protested, and I loved it,” Sánchez-Ruiz said. “The squeaky wheel is the one that’s going to get listened to. So we squeaked a lot.”

Sánchez-Ruiz and her then-husband, Santo J. Ruiz, were active during the 1968-1970 Economy Furniture strike in Austin.

“My generation opened doors,” she said. “The voting and the activism still continue, and voting is where we can make a difference.”

Interviewed on Oct. 29, 2013, in Austin, Texas.



Lupe Uresti

Interview by Shelby Custer

After speaking at a rally for the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project in her hometown of Rosenberg, Texas, Guadalupe Arredondo Uresti was approached by local attorney Paul Cedillo, who encouraged her to run for city council.

That was in December 1975, and Uresti was 31 years old at the time.

“I remember thinking, ‘There’s no way I would consider that,’” she recalled. “But it always takes someone to put it in your mind.”

She eventually did run for council and served for several years. Later, in 1992, she was elected mayor.

“After I was elected, older ladies would come to me and cry because... it was a reality that they thought they were never going to see,” Uresti said.

Her election was especially significant because of the history of discrimination and segregation in her hometown. She lost her first election in 1976, she said, because Anglos came out in record numbers to vote against Mexican Americans.

It was not an easy road, but when she did take office, Uresti said she used her position to empower the Mexican-American community.

But she said further action is required.

“More Hispanics are coming out to vote, but there’s still a lot lacking in motivating and goals for the community,” Uresti said. “The key to keeping the community moving in the right direction is education.”

Interviewed on March 23, 2014, in Richmond, Texas.



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Photo by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

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