

Insider NARRATIVES



Presented by the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project * Issue No. 6, Spring/Summer 2007

The Project Goes Digital

About 700 hours' worth of interviews are being digitized by the UT Libraries, as part of a grant that is also producing a new Web site and editing a training video for interviewers.

"This is an excellent and very necessary part of the preservation of our wonderful archives," Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez said. "Now we just need to worry about the rest of it – it will be about half of our interviews."

The process takes the interviews, which were recorded on various forms of video tape, such as Hi-8s and mini-DVs, and convert them into digital file form. But, perhaps more importantly, that digital information is also housed on two of the university's servers.

This gives the Project an additional level of security as it prevents the recorded interviews from being lost or damaged.

"The Project does not end by simply converting the tapes," said Uri Kolodney, digitization manager for the Libraries, who is overseeing the digitization. "The UT Libraries are committed to maintain the digital files and make sure they will be accessible by future applications and operating systems."

The Project began digitizing the interviews in October 2006.

Each week, Sara Hernando, a sophomore government major who works part-time for the Project, carries a batch of tapes to Joey Marez, a library assistant, who inventories the tapes and inspects their condition.

Conversion may take from one to three hours for each hour of tape, including producing a copy on DVD.

From Joey's desk, the tapes are delivered to the Audio Visual Lab, Kolodney said. There, Tim Kerr and Alex Addison convert the original tape into digital files.

The files are very big – one hour of digital video is about 13 gigabytes. The Project will have approximately 9 terabytes worth of space – equivalent to storing a copy of "Moby Dick" nine million times.

The original tapes are returned to the Project along with a new DVD copy of the interview. The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection and the Center for American History will each receive a copy of the DVD.

"It's great to be a part of a process that's going to impact the accessibility of information on Latinos in World War II," Hernando said.

Digitizing the Project's interviews was an obvious choice, since one of the driving forces behind the Project is preserving the Greatest Generation's legacy.

"Digitization is being more and more established as a form of preservation," Kolodney said. "The Digitization Center at the UT Libraries, in cooperation with the School of Journalism, is performing the project exactly for this purpose – preserving the analog re-

sources by converting them to a digital format, and archiving the digital output for next generations."

The Project's digital expansion is not limited to our interview tapes. We are also launching a new Web site (for more details, see page 3).

The Project had received a grant to produce an instructional video for those interested in creating their own oral histories. The feature is titled "Oral History Step By Step" and will be posted on our new Web site.

"In 2000, we did the first training video and it was time for a new, updated look," said Rivas-Rodriguez. "Having it on the Web will make it available to people around the world who want to understand how to start a project."

Oral History Step by Step will be narrated by Eliana Maruri, a journalism senior, in both English and Spanish. The script was translated by Elvia O. Perez, of San Antonio, an elementary school principal who freelances as a professional translator. Perez donated her time to the Project.



Photo by Valentino Mauricio

Bringing the 1940s into the 21st Century

Surfing the web will be much more interesting when the Project launches its new web site.

“This is really a dream come true for us,” said project director Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez. “We have awesome interviews and they get a little bit lost on our site now. With this new design, the richness of the Latino WWII experience will come alive.”

The Project has been working with UT Library staff to redesign the web site since June 2004. The new site, almost three years in the making, is a definite upgrade to the current site.

Users will be able to search the site – something they are not currently able to do – and there will also be more photos and more stories as the Project has conducted several more interviews. The site will be searchable by several variables, including: name, year of birth, place of birth, military branch (where applicable), interviewer.

Most of the stories on the current web site were first published in “Narratives,” the newspaper published by the Project; eight issues of the newspaper were published over six years. Because of space limitations, the stories in “Narratives” were often shortened versions of those originally turned in.

Since space on the internet is practically limitless, the site can now include longer, more detailed stories.

The site was designed by the staff the UT Libraries, under a grant that also has led to the digitization of 700 hours of interviews, as well as the production of the video Oral History Step by Step. But in the summer of 2006, it was announced that the granting group within the Libraries, Utopia, would be discontinued.

“We had already started meeting with the Utopia staff in March 2006,” said Rivas-Rodriguez. “And even before then – in the summer of 2004 - we had met with two of the principals to look into the idea of indexing our site. Based on their suggestions, we had put together a fairly elaborate database that was necessary to index the stories.”

The site was originally scheduled to be completed in June 2007; the project looks to be on schedule. “As a result of staffing shortages, we have had to reassess project priorities. Many projects have been postponed indefinitely,” said Carolee Mitchell, who manages the web site project. “We are delighted to continue work on this project, which has been a long time in the making. We have enjoyed going through the process with Maggie and her group and are excited to see the end result and hear about the impact the site will undoubtedly make.”

The web masters working on our new site were determined to see it through to the end. The following people have worked long hours to ensure the site is not only functional, but beautiful: Jennifer Kern, information architecture; Rene Flores, design; Audrey Templeton, build and programming; Sara Gauchat, text editor; Mason Jones, video; Tim Kerr, video and audio reformatting; Uri Kolodney, digitization lead; Jill Lieberman, current site support; Meredith Taylor and Carolee Mitchell, project management; Rue Ramirez, administrative support.

And just a gleam in the project staff eyes: perhaps interview excerpts, audio and/or video, once another grant can be secured.

Save the Date!

On May 11, the Project will host a preview party for our new web site.

We would love for you and your family to join us and see the progress we've made and the amazing changes made by the web team. We will also be announcing the winners of our annual essay contest. This year, Barnes & Noble graciously donated \$225 in gift cards for the winners.

We hope to see you there!

What: Web Site Preview Party

Where: The Texas Exes Alumni Center, located across the street from the Darrell K Royal - Texas Memorial Stadium at 2110 San Jacinto Boulevard,
Austin, TX 78712.

When: Friday, May 11 (4:00-6:00 p.m.)

"THE WAR"

The Project meets with PBS officials about documentary.

On September 23, PBS will begin their broadcast of "THE WAR," a seven-part documentary that "...explores the history and horror of the Second World War from an American perspective ... of so-called ordinary men and women...."

Unfortunately, the American experience the documentary presents is not a complete one: the Latino experience is apparently omitted from the documentary. In keeping with our project's central mission -- to preserve the stories of the WWII generation of Latinos and to promote a greater awareness of that history-- the project is seeking to remedy the problem.

Project Manager Raquel C. Garza had previewed an hour of the documentary at the International Conference on WWII, on November 16, 2006. The conference was hosted by The National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

The "epic 14-hour film," which was directed and produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, focused on people in four towns: Waterbury, Conn.; Mobile, Ala.; Sacramento, Calif.; and Luverne, Minn.

The conference audience raised questions about who was included in the documentary and was told by Burns and Novick that women in the military were not included, nor were Native Americans. Later, Garza approached Novick and asked if Hispanics were a part of the film and was told that they were not.

Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez was informed and contacted WETA, the Washington, DC, PBS affiliate that is sponsoring the production and was told it appeared that there were no Latinos. She also emailed a Burns' publicist, Joe DePlasco, to ask the question again.

DePlasco responded via email: "...the film is not structured around the experience of individual groups, with the exception, to some extent, of the experience of Japanese Americans, given their experience, and also African Americans, given theirs."

The Latino experience must also be included, as the release of the documentary will impact not only on the viewing public, but also those who choose to buy the accompanying book. The book, which will be released in August by Alfred A. Knopf, was written by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns. There will also be educational materials. One WETA representative has said that it should be no problem to include Latinos in the educational materials, but that it appears the documentary is locked in.

"We not only want Latinos included in this documentary, we want the Latino experience included," Rivas Rodriguez said. "The Latino experience was immensely rich and unique: for thousands of Mexican American troops, it was the first time to socialize away from the segregated institutions they grew up in. We have thousands of Mexican citizens

... serving in the military; some were naturalized overseas; others were made U.S. citizens after their discharge. And still others died without becoming American citizens.

"It was the beginning of the Mexican American civil rights movement, really, as the veterans used the GI Bill to get the tools to fight the segregation in many parts of the Southwest and the Midwest," she said.

"If this airs as is, there will be many very disappointed people across the country."

In the press release for the documentary, Burns was quoted as saying:

"Every person in the country was deeply affected by this war ... And in the end, we all begin to see, I think, that there are no 'ordinary' lives."

Anyone involved in the Project will tell you that after interviewing more than 550 Latinos and Latinas, we would agree that there are no "ordinary" lives -- from Jose M. Lopez, who won the Congressional Medal of Honor; to Carmen Contreras Bozak, who was a member of the first WAAC unit to go overseas; to Pete Tijerina, who used the GI Bill to earn his law degree and would later found MALDEF.

"Our history is not a separate history," Garza said. "It is a part of the American experience and it deserves to be told as such."

Since mid-January, as more individuals have become aware of the issue, there have been dozens of letters and emails of concern to sponsors of "THE WAR". As of presstime, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists board of directors was sending letters protesting the exclusion. The National Hispanic Media Coalition chairman Alex Nogales has met with PBS President and Chief Executive Officer, Paula Kerger, to voice his concerns.

Individuals are contacting their elected officials, as well as PBS officials and representatives of the book publisher to make them aware of their displeasure.

To coordinate their efforts, volunteers have set up the following website: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/latinos_in_wwii

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

If you have an opinion you would like to express about the upcoming documentary, please share it.

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Knopf Publishing
Email: knopfpublicity@randomhouse.com
Phone: 212.572.2104
Mailing Address: Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, c/o Knopf Publishing/Author Mail
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

Meet the Office Staff:

Photos by Larissa Mueller



Name: Raquel C. Garza
Title: Project Manager
Time with the Project: I first became involved with the Project in 2000

About me: I was first introduced to the Project as an undergrad when I wrote a story from Pete Tijerina's interview. Since then, I've been hooked. I've transcribed, interviewed and written for the Project. Now, I'm managing the day-to-day end. Although my involvement tapered off when I graduated in 2003, I'm so glad to be back. There is much to be done this year and although we're a small staff, we're a dedicated one. I would also like to thank my mother for translating the "Oral History: Step by Step" script.



Name: Jenny Achilles
Title: Project Associate
Time with the Project: Five months in total

About me: I'm a Journalism master's student here at UT. I first joined the Project in the fall of 2005 and helped work on editing entries for *A Legacy Greater Than Words*. After a year of studying in El Salvador, I came back to the Project full time in February. I love the many facets of the Project—from interviews and stories to educational contests and information campaigns; no day is ever the same or ever boring!



Name: Larissa Mueller
Title: Visual Media Coordinator
Time with the Project: Six months

About me: I am a graduate student in photojournalism at UT. For the Project, I scan, resize, organize, and work with the photos and photo archives of veterans and their families. I enjoy sorting through the pictures of life in the 1940s, both at home and on the front. I particularly appreciate when a veteran submits photos from their youth in wartime, but includes pictures from throughout their lives. I love to see the progression of lives and lines on the faces of the courageous men and women of the Greatest Generation.



Name: Sara Hernando
Title: Project Assistant
Time with the Project: Two years

About me: Working for the project has been such an experience. As an undergraduate student at the university, I was lucky enough to come across Dr. Rivas-Rodriguez, and immediately knew I wanted to be a part of the project. Attending school as a full time sociology student and working is a full load, but one that has been well worth the effort. I have had the privilege to meet many courageous veterans and have had many exciting experiences.



Name: Meredith Barnhill
Title: Project Assistant
Time with the Project: Five Months

About me: As a journalist-to-be and a naturally curious person, I love having access to so many stories about the untold history of our nation. I was pleasantly surprised when Dr. Rivas-Rodriguez hired me as a staff member. It's a great feeling to work toward something as fun and rewarding as the Project.

Featured Interviews

Presented by the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project * Issue No. 6, Spring/Summer 2007



Sara Garcia Valenzuela

By Jessica Eaglin

In July 1924 Sara Frances Garcia was born in the small town of Edna, Texas — the first of eight children – to Henry Andrew Garcia and Mary Cisneros Garcia. “I had to be the example in my family and my role was to help my mother,” she said.

She was in high school during World War II and worked various jobs: at the Refugio County Press, setting printing type and performing clerical duties; at her father’s mechanic shop, cleaning car motors; and as a dental assistant.

During her years at Draughn’s Business College in San Antonio, she met Alfred Valenzuela. The couple married in February of 1947, just two years after the war ended. Her husband worked at the courthouse. She stayed home with their first child, Alfred, following his birth in January 1948. After the births of her daughters, Debbie and Claudia, she worked part time for five months as a business manager for a contractor of migrant labor. “I was looking for a permanent job to help my husband,” she explained. “He was going to law school at the time.”

In 1957, she took a job with juvenile probation department, where she worked for 32 years and eventually moved into a managerial position. She joined the Golden Eagle Chapter of the American Business Women’s Association, where she served as president and was also named the chapter’s 1977 Woman of the Year. “I wanted to better myself as a business woman and a mother,” Valenzuela said. “I also did it to better my children and teach them to always work hard to better themselves.”

(Mrs. Valenzuela was interviewed at her home in San Antonio on Oct. 16, 2006, by Raquel C. Garza.)



Alfred Valenzuela

By E.J. Urbanczyk

Alfred Valenzuela found his older brother, Claudio, at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, before Claudio’s unit shipped off. Valenzuela recalled his words: “I’m not gonna make it, Fred. You’re gonna have to take care of mom and dad.” Claudio died in the invasion of Okinawa on April 21, 1945.

Valenzuela and his brothers grew up in Marfa, Texas. In high school he played the saxophone and discovered a love for jitterbug dancing. Following the war, dancing would also lead him to Sara Frances Garcia, in whom he discovered a lifelong partner. They married Feb. 16, 1947, and eventually had three children.

Valenzuela enlisted in the Navy the day after he turned 18, following in his brothers’ footsteps. Valenzuela’s brother, Raymond, served in the Army Air Corps.

In Hawaii, Valenzuela was eventually assigned to the oil tanker USS Suamico (AO 49) and participated in seven invasions as part of a naval fleet traveling from Pearl Harbor to Japan. Once promoted to site setter he was teased for wearing eye glasses. When asked to remove them, he memorized how many rotations would set the 5-inch gun in perfect position.

During one invasion, a Japanese kamikaze plane was shot out of the sky above the ship. “They claim it was my gun, or our gun, that did the shooting of the plane,” he said.

He was discharged from the Navy on March 11, 1946, with the rank of Petty Officer 1st Class. He had earned a several awards, including a Philippine Liberation Ribbon and ribbons for his service in the Gilbert Islands, the Marshall Islands, Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

(Mr. Valenzuela was interviewed at his home in San Antonio on Aug. 28, 2006 by Raquel C. Garza.)

Featured Interviews *continued...*

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Florence G. Gonzalez

By Emily Cox

Florence Gonzales Gonzalez set a strong example for her siblings and coworkers throughout her life. Her mother's strictness and high standards for work stayed with Gonzalez and later helped in her career.

She was born Telesfora Barbara Gonzales on Feb. 20, 1927, in San Antonio, Texas, but teachers couldn't pronounce Telesfora so she became "Florence." She was the fourth of nine children, two of whom died as infants, of Florencia Vasquez-Valdez Gonzales and José Gonzales. Later, when her mother became ill, Gonzalez became the family's bread-winner and helped care for her younger siblings. She graduated from Edison High School in 1943. "I wanted to be independent," Gonzalez remembered. "I wanted to see the world. I wanted to enter the service."

However, to remain near home to care for her ailing mother, she signed up for the United States Cadet Nurse Corps. She trained through the program; however, the war ended before she could join the military. Gonzalez remembered where she was on D-Day: at work in the orthopedic ward of the Baptist Hospital, where she worked with older veterans. "At night I never sat down," Gonzalez said. "And since I was bilingual, they'd ask me for everything." But she loved it. Many of the white nurses became unfriendly to her because they resented a Mexican American in their field. But Gonzalez "didn't take nothing from nobody."

Although she volunteered at Fort Sam Houston reading letters to soldiers, the war didn't personally affect her until one of her cousins, Floyd, died overseas. When she finished her training in 1948, she was at Brackenridge Hospital in Austin, Texas; she remained there for her internship period then returned to the Baptist Hospital System in San Antonio. At 27, she married Julian Gonzalez, one of her longtime friends and childhood classmates. The couple had three daughters — Diane, Barbara and Julianna — whom Gonzalez raised with the same lessons that she learned during her life.

(Mrs. Gonzalez was interviewed in her San Antonio home by Raquel C. Garza on Aug. 2, 2006.)

Edward Frazer

By Kathleen Bily

Growing up in a mostly white neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas, Edward Frazer and his family were ignored by neighbors most of the time. His mother was from Monterrey, Mexico, and Frazer was darker-skinned than his father and an older brother. "My brother had lighter skin than I did so he was more accepted," he said. "Skin color determined if you were a minority member or not." His teacher also judged him by the language he spoke. "I came to school not knowing one word of English," Frazer said. "My teacher thought I was retarded and then disobedient."

However, while serving in the Philippines during World War II, Spanish became an asset. "I found Spanish useful in all my jobs, for helping people and as a means of learning a livelihood," he said.

Drafted into the Army in 1942, Frazer trained in electronics and was later assigned to the Signal Corps. He transferred into the Army's 81st Infantry Division, and on Sept. 19, 1944, they invaded Peleliu, a Japanese-controlled island in the Philippines. In September 1945, they were transferred to northern Japan. "We went looking for weapons of mass destruction," Frazer said. "They were working on it [the weapons] in Japan and North Korea, but we beat them to the punch."

After returning to San Antonio, Frazer took advantage of the GI Bill and studied Mexican history and art in Mexico and San Antonio. He was in the Army Reserves and was stationed in Germany for a year. For several years, Frazer taught English as a second language in Peru, Costa Rica and Panama. When he returned to the U.S., he continued teaching English. Frazer retired in San Antonio with his wife.

(Mr. Frazer was interviewed by Raquel Garza on Aug. 8, 2006, at his home in San Antonio.)



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Delfino Guerrero

By Regina Dennis

Delfino Guerrero was more than happy to share his memories.

Guerrero said he is honored to have served his country in the war, and is glad he can relate his story to others. "I'm proud to tell my story. It makes me feel good sometimes, thinking about the past," he said.

Born in Wichita, Kansas, Guerrero is one of nine children born to Mexican immigrants. His parents moved to the U.S. shortly after the Mexican Revolution. Joaquin, Guerrero's father, was part of the war effort that aimed to overthrow Porfirio Diaz.

After dropping out of Washburn Trade School in Chicago, Guerrero was drafted in February 1941 and was sent to Arkansas where he began basic training and was later sent to Illinois to become a paramedic. Although he had not enlisted, Guerrero truly wanted to fulfill his civic duty.

He was assigned to the 38th Infantry Division. After basic training, Guerrero was on a ship to Auckland, New Zealand, where he would be stationed for two months. After leaving New Zealand, Guerrero arrived in New Caledonia. He was stationed in the South Pacific for three years on an island that served as a medical station for injured soldiers.

At the end of his first tour, Guerrero enlisted for another three years in the service, returning to New Caledonia before being transferred to Manila in the Philippines. He was discharged in December 1945 and returned to Chicago, with many medals, including the Asia/Pacific Campaign Medal, the WWII Victory Medal and the Good Conduct Medal.

Guerrero married Carmen, a childhood friend from Chicago. The couple had three children, one boy and two girls. His son, Delfino Jr., served as a Marine in Vietnam for three and a half years.

(Mr. Guerrero was interviewed at his home in Chicago by Bill Luna, on May 10, 2006.)

Roberto Guerra

By Lizette Romero

Roberto Guerra had a deep pride: pride in his military service in World War II; of his unit, which distinguished itself in Europe; of the many medals he earned for his actions; and of the woman who saw beyond his injuries, took him as a husband and raised their six children.

The Purple Heart Medal he earned reminded him of both the losses and wins of the 36th Division: "I'm very, very proud to serve for the 36th Division," Guerra said. "I'm very proud of this unit."

Roberto Guerra was the third of 11 children born to Pedro Olivo Guerra and Guillerma Lara Olivo, both natives of Mexico. When he was drafted in July 1943, at the age of 18, he joined his two older brothers who were already in the U.S. military. Guerra served in the European theater, fighting in Italy, southern France and eventually Germany. He was injured twice in France — first, shrapnel injured his left arm and later, bullets injured his left knee and right ankle.

"I was in five major battles," he said. "But to me they were all major battles. None of them were easy."

While hospitalized in Temple, Texas, he was discharged in February 1946, with the rank of sergeant and with several medals, including a Purple Heart Medal (with one oak leaf cluster) and a Bronze Star Medal.

Following his return to the States, he married Baubila Portillo, although he remained amazed that she chose to marry him. "How did she look at me? I was a crippled guy!" he said. He was proud of her because she was the one who took care of the couple's six children — Beatrice, Aldino, Rachel, Robert Jr., Linda and John Albert — and gave them their religious instruction.

(Mr. Guerra was interviewed at his home in Austin on Sept. 1, 2006, by Mario J. Cruz.)

Juan Martinez Jr.

By Meredith Barnhill

Juan Martinez Jr. has always considered himself an American. "I'm American, it just happens that both my parents came from Mexico," he said. After World War II ended he encountered racial hostility: "I used to be an American soldier, now I'm a ... Mexican who can't buy houses."

He was born on Nov. 20, 1922, in El Paso, Texas, to Juan Martinez Sr. and Sebastiana Valdez Martinez and grew up speaking both Spanish and English.

He learned the value of hard work at a young age, while working at his father's pharmacy and drug store. In high school he was interested in basketball and football, but his father insisted he work at the family business in his spare time. He graduated from Bowie High School where he served on the school senate as president pro-tem his senior year.

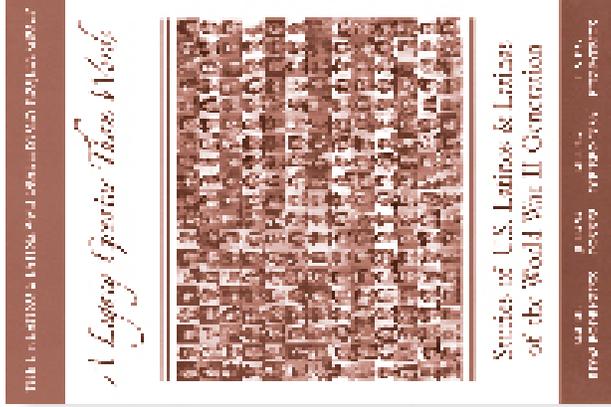
When the war began, Martinez aspired to be a machinist. He worked as a laborer in a lumberyard for the Southern Pacific Railroad before he was drafted into the U.S. Army. Martinez was assigned to Battery A, 468th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapon Battalion, for nearly three years, working his way from the rank of private to corporal. He earned several awards and decoration ILO honors, including the European Campaign Medal with five Bronze Campaign Stars, a Good Conduct medal, a Victory Ribbon, two Overseas Service Bars and a Rifle Sharpshooter badge.

After the war, he attended Texas College of Mines and Metallurgy, which is now The University of Texas at El Paso, for a degree in marine biology.

On June 1, 1947, he married Maria Luisa Talamantes. She passed away in August of 1996. In July 2000 he married his second wife, Marilyn Jean Eckenberg; the two reside in California.

(Mr. Martinez was interviewed by Amanda Maria Morrison on April 29, 2005, in his home in Apple Valley, Calif.)

ORDER A Legacy Greater Than Words



SINCE 1999, the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project at the University of Texas at Austin has captured the untold stories of this WWII generation. Altogether, the project videotaped more than 500 interviews throughout the country and in Puerto Rico and Mexico.

This volume features summaries of the interviews and thumbnail photographs of the individuals. The stories featured in **A Legacy Greater Than Words** chronicle the lives of Latinos in the 1930s and 1940s—stories that generally have been omitted from historical accounts of either World War II or the Great Depression. Distributed by the University of Texas Press.

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