

## Voces Launches Two Digital Initiatives

Even as Voces works to add important interviews to its treasure trove of archives, it's finding innovative ways to reach audiences. This summer 2013, Voces created Foto-Voz and Alta-Voz.

Both take existing interviews—some dating back to our earliest recordings in 1999—and add new dimensions to them.

Foto-Voz incorporates new audio recordings of interview subjects as they view their own archival photographs—a sort of audio and photo slide show. A pilot for Foto-Voz is being created in conjunction with the PBS television station located across the street from the

Voces office. In fall 2013, KLRU is scheduled to broadcast a national documentary, “Latino Americans,” (<http://www.pbs.org/latino-americans/en/>), focusing on 500 years of Latino history in the United States. Voces has partnered with KLRU to produce five audio/photo slide shows.

The production of these first five Foto-Voz segments is the product of a team effort: visual coordinator Tino Mauricio chose five Austin-area World War II veterans and civilians who had a good selection of photographs; volunteers and staffers audio recorded WWII-era Latinos as they viewed their photos. Meanwhile, Carlos Morales, a recent University



Photo by Tino Mauricio

Raymond Sanchez interviewed by Voces volunteers Anisha Vichare, left, and Carrie Powell, right, at his home in June 2013 for the Voces Oral History Project's new digital initiatives.

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### A Note from the Project Director

Voces relies on the talents of many people. It was especially clear this year as we launched Foto-Voz and Alta-Voz, our newest initiatives. I had a spark of an idea, and asked a former student, Nicole “Nikki” Cruz, if she could help.

After graduating in 2003, Nikki had lived in Los Angeles for seven years, working in advertising as a creative producer and writer. She returned to her hometown Austin and jumped at the chance to work on the Project.

To edit Foto-Voz, I called on a recent journalism masters graduate, Carlos Morales. He, too, was eager. He worked tirelessly to take five-hour interviews and deftly distill them to less than five minutes.

Tino Mauricio, our stellar visual coordinator, scanned new photos for the slides, got the best audio recording possible and trained our two serious-minded volunteers, Carrie Powell and Anisha Vichare.

For Alta-Voz, Nikki rewrote our web stories into narrative form. The cherry on the sundae was when Ron Oliveira, a local TV anchor/reporter, agreed to read our first Alta-Voz story.

All in all, the teamwork with individuals’ special touches made that kernel of an idea into much more than I could have envisioned. Now that’s what my 89-year-old mom would call *juna maravilla!*



Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

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Photo by Tino Mauricio



Alvino Mendoza interviewed at the Voces offices on June 26, 2013, at UT Austin, by volunteer Carrie Powell.

[Continued from Page 1] of Texas M.A. in journalism graduate, edited the slide shows.

Foto-Voz may be seen and heard here: [www.vocesoralhistoryproject.org/fotovoz](http://www.vocesoralhistoryproject.org/fotovoz)

The second new initiative is Alta-Voz, narrations of stories from our website. These stories were rewritten into broadcast form, and then read as an audio recording.

The first Alta-Voz was narrated by Austin veteran TV anchor/reporter Ron Oliveira.

Future narrations may be read by family members, other broadcast journalists and actors.

That effort may be heard here: [www.vocesoralhistoryproject.org/altavoz](http://www.vocesoralhistoryproject.org/altavoz)

Voces is mounting a major fund-raising campaign to continue these two efforts, as well as process and record new interviews.

To learn how you can support our efforts, please call 512-471-1924, or see the back page of this newsletter.

Read more about our Digital Initiatives. See how you can help on page 19 and 20.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: HENRY MENDOZA

### Henry Mendoza

*Cal State Fullerton Adjunct Professor Henry Mendoza has previously volunteered to interview and edit for the Voces Oral History Project. He has also helped organize interview sessions, and more recently has used Voces to teach journalism, history, and to offer insights to his students into the tensions of bias and patriotic pride.*

*We shipped Henry a big box of duplicates of our interviews. His students wrote the stories from those interviews, and Henry edited and graded their work and sent us the stories.*

**Question:** How did you first hear about the Voces Oral History Project?

**Henry Mendoza:** Dr. Maggie [Rivas-Rodriguez] and I have been friends for about 30 years, since she joined me on the founding committee for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. We have served on professional advisory committees here and there, and shortly after Defend the Honor (in 2007) was started I edited stories for several of the early publications. I have been involved in all aspects of Defend the Honor [and Voces] ever since.

**Q:** What did you learn from doing this?

**HM:** I learned how many people are still living with the problems, issues and stigmas they first confronted in WWII.

**Q:** Why did you decide to help this time? What did you and your students do for the project?

**HM:** Maggie's request for help was a no-brainer. Her project is important. My father served in WWII, and I know what he went through then and subsequently. I first worked as an editor, then as an interviewer, then as the organizer for West Coast visits, and then by including some of my writing classes at Cal State Fullerton.

**Q:** What do you think your students learned from being a part of the project?

**HM:** I believe they learned about WWII, about diversity issues, in the U.S. and historically, about immigration issues and the military, and about the roles of men and women in wartime. I believe they also [learned] about the social issues that have again emerged in recent years.

**Q:** Why was it important to you that your students be a part of this?

**HM:** Time is essential and of the essence for the Voces activities to continue. That is particularly true regarding the WWII vets. Sadly, they are dying too soon, and they deserve to be heard. Their contribution to victory in one of history's most important conflicts needs to be recorded for posterity and accurate history.

Photo courtesy of Henry Mendoza





Photo courtesy of the Lees

## Richard Lee and Anne Lee

*Faculty and students from St. Bonaventure University stepped up to the plate over the past year to help Voces continue to write stories from its ever-growing audiovisual archives.*

*The effort was a tremendous success thanks to academics, such as Anne E. Lee and Richard A. Lee, in St. Bonaventure, N.Y.*

*Anne Lee is assistant registrar and adjunct professor of journalism at St. Bonaventure, which is located in southwestern New York state. Richard Lee is professor of journalism and mass communication at St. Bonaventure.*

*They, like Henry Mendoza, assigned their students to write stories from our interviews and sent us the edited stories.*

**Question:** How did you first hear about the Voces Oral History Project?

**Richard Lee:** Since I taught part-time at Rutgers University and am working on my doctorate at the school, I am on several Listservs. I received an email about Voces through one of the Listservs.

**Anne Lee:** My husband read about it through a Rutgers University Listserv. He is a former Rutgers adjunct and is completing his dissertation in a Ph.D. media studies program at Rutgers.

**Q:** Why did you decide to help this time? What did you and your students do for the project?

**RL:** The Voces project appealed to me for several reasons. St. Bonaventure is located in a somewhat remote area of New York state, so it is difficult to find real-world reporting experiences for them. Voces served this purpose. I also like the fact that the project provided students with an opportunity to have their work published. I used the project for two students who took my Writing and Reporting II class as an honors course. For honors students, we are required to assign them an additional activity, so Voces worked well again.

**AL:** I was teaching a feature-writing class at St. Bonaventure and my husband had some honors students, who needed to complete an additional project in one of his second-level writing and reporting classes. We thought Voces would be quite appropriate for both groups of students.

**Q:** What do you think your students learned from being a part of the project?

**RL:** From a journalism perspective, they learned how to

find the most important and interesting aspect of a story. They had to watch and listen to long interviews and then determine which parts were best to use in their stories. On a broader scale, the experience gave them a glimpse into what life was like in another era for people who generally came from far different backgrounds than their own.

**AL:** They learned 20th Century American history—both domestic and abroad—and they learned how these veterans and their families lived and worked and pursued their American Dreams. They learned that some of these veterans lived through hardships, especially in their young lives.

**Q:** What did you learn from doing this?

**RL:** My experience was similar to that of the students. From reading and editing their accounts, I gained a greater understanding of life in years gone by and the contributions made to our country by Latino veterans.

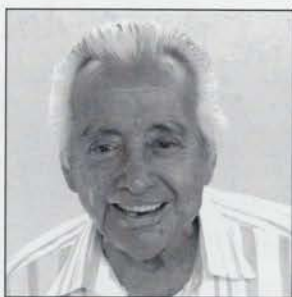
**AL:** This was a different experience for me in that these were the first veterans' stories I had edited that were being written by someone who had not done the interviewing. I learned I had to make sure students listened to the interviews on DVD more than once, that they took notes, and that they checked facts from both the DVD and the forms the veterans filled out.

**Q:** Why was it important to you that your students be a part of this?

**RL:** It was a great partnership, and we hope to continue it.

**AL:** This semester I am going to have my students work in pairs. Each student will write his or her own story on a veteran, but will have to watch another student's DVD and cross check/peer edit a story before I do final edits.

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: WWII



## Raul Arreola

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

When Raul Arreola was growing up in Los Angeles, his father kept a can of quarters and told his son the money would pay for his college education.

“For a guy that never went to school, he always thought of school,” Arreola said of his father.

Education did become the focus of Raul Arreola’s life.

Arreola’s family planned to return to Mexico during the Great Depression because the U.S. government was deporting or coercing hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to leave the country.

But his father, Epigmenio Arreola, lost both his legs in a traffic accident; so the family stayed.

The younger Arreola was drafted in 1942 and served in Europe as an infantry rifleman with the 3rd United States Army.

The war changed his perspective.

“I thought I was fighting for human rights, I thought I was fighting for patriotism, I thought I was fighting for all these things I was given,” Arreola said. “I still don’t know what patriotism is.”

He attended California State University in Los Angeles on the GI Bill, earning bachelor and master’s degrees in education and a master’s in Mexican-American Studies. He worked as a teacher and administrator.

*Interviewed on June 9, 2010, in Los Angeles.*



## Juanita Silvas Chavez

Interview by Taylor Peterson

As World War II changed lives, the small West Texas town of Sonora experienced its own cultural shift.

Mexican Americans like Juanita Silvas Chavez, who was born in 1923, were no longer barred from entering a pharmacy, a restaurant or the local soda fountain.

“Before that, you have to eat in the kitchen or outside. Not inside— ‘No Mexicans Allowed,’” Chavez said. “Everything changed after the war.”

When she was five years old, her mother, Clara Cupián González, died. Her father, Faustino Gonzalez Silvas sent her and her brother, Agustín, who was six years older, to live with different relatives.

Her father remarried around 1935 and the family went to live in Sonora.

Sonora was segregated, and it was “a very bad experience,” Chavez said.

On March 3, 1939, she married Torivio Chavez, who was 17 years her senior. He was a waiter in a restaurant at the Hotel McDonald, as well as a sheep shearer. The couple had seven children.

Chavez worked cleaning rooms at the Sonora Courts motel for 14 years and took in laundry for 40 years.

She also worked in different homes, including that of Dorothy Dulnic. She remembered Dulnic fondly. The woman co-signed a \$3,000 loan so Chavez could buy the home she still lived in at the time of her interview.

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



## Moses Diaz

Interview by Nancy De Los Santos

He may have been only 16, but Moses Diaz of Phoenix decided to enlist in the U.S. Navy in 1945 because, as he recalled: “I didn’t want to miss out on the war.”

His mother, Martina Diaz, had five sons serving in the military during World War II.

After basic training in San Diego, Calif., Diaz was assigned to work in the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone as an interpreter. He worked out of the 7452nd General Hospital at Fort Clayton in the Canal Zone.

“I got to visit a lot of Central and South American countries as an interpreter,” Diaz said.

After the end of World War II, Diaz joined the U.S. Army for two years. He then returned to Phoenix, worked at the Veterans Hospital and joined the U.S. Naval Reserve.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, Diaz volunteered. He was stationed aboard the light cruiser *USS Juneau CL 119* and said that he never left the ship during the war.

The ship fired night and day, trying to hit trucks or create landslides to disrupt enemy supply lines.

Diaz married Sophia “Fia” Chavez just before he was shipped to Korea. They had three sons; two joined the Air Force.

*Interviewed on Jan. 6, 2011, in Riverside, Calif.*



## Maria "Cora" Ramirez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

By the time President John F. Kennedy urged Americans in 1961: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," Maria "Cora" Sepulveda Ramirez already had been helping for 21 years.

During World War II, Ramirez volunteered at the Red Cross, wrapping bandages. She also prepared non-military issued clothes for the troops, especially socks.

"You were very glad to do it, because you were helping your country and also your family," she said.

Ramirez was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1921 but soon moved to New Mexico.

She attended elementary school in Tyrone, N.M., near Silver City, and worked for a family named Green.

Ramirez moved back to El Paso and graduated from El Paso High School. Her college plans were derailed, however, when she contracted rheumatic fever.

During World War II, Ramirez began working at The Popular Dry Goods, where she met her future husband, Conrado. The couple eventually had two sons and a daughter.

Ramirez volunteered for many years, raising money for Our Lady of the Valley Catholic School in El Paso, and serving as a den mother for Boy Scouts and troop leader for Girl Scouts.

Ramirez said the war gave her a new appreciation.

"I loved my country a lot more after the war," Ramirez said.

*Interviewed on Aug. 1, 2008, in El Paso, Texas.*



## Eriberto Rodriguez

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

Eriberto Rodriguez knew he had to sign up to fight in World War II after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Two of his brothers had already been drafted when he decided to enlist, and two other brothers later served in the Korean War. He grew up with five brothers and three sisters.

After joining the Army, Rodriguez was sent to Leghorn (Livorno), Italy, in September 1946, assigned to the 349th Infantry Regiment, 88th Infantry Division, 5th Army. His division was among the first units to liberate Rome. He later was transferred to the Morgan Line, a postwar demarcation line that separated Allied and Yugoslav administrations in an area of northeastern Italy.

He was assigned to deliver supplies to outposts in Yugoslavia, a 100-mile route.

Rodriguez said the Yugoslavians generally disliked the Americans.

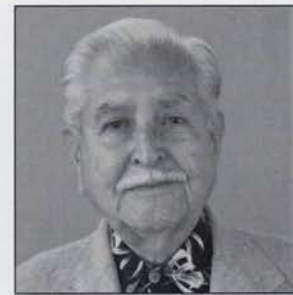
"We [had] some men that got killed by the Yugoslavians," Rodriguez said. "That was after the war [had] already been over."

He said that, although the United States was unprepared for war, "a lot of women were working in factories to help build airplanes and tanks. It was a war that everyone contributed to, and that was the reason we won that war."

Rodriguez returned to the United States and completed his service in Georgia as a tank gunner. He was discharged on May 6, 1949, and returned to Texas.

Rodriguez worked as an agent for the American National Insurance Co. for 28 years. He and his wife, Ophelia M. Rodriguez, had two sons.

*Interviewed on May 11, 2010, in Mission, Texas.*



## Maximino Rodriguez

Interview by Nancy De Los Santos

Maximino Rodriguez, a Mexican immigrant, was drafted in 1942 at the age of 21. Rodriguez's father suggested he move to Mexico to avoid military service, but Rodriguez wanted to do his duty.

After basic training at Camp Roberts, near Paso Robles, Calif., he was sent to Naples, Italy. He recalled when his unit, the Army's 338th Infantry Regiment, 85th Infantry Division went into battle.

Rodriguez said that about a third of the 240 soldiers died. He remembered the bloated bodies of the dead.

"Those were some of the horrors of war," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez was wounded during a battle in 1943, when his weapon accidentally discharged, shattering his shinbone. He was sent for treatment to Sheppard Field, near Wichita Falls, Texas. At one point, he said, his leg was almost amputated.

He married Margaret Silva. They lived in Los Nietos, Calif., and had five children. He opened his own jewelry store in Pico Rivera, Calif.

Despite the horrors that he saw during the war, he also recalled positive aspects of his experiences. "Going to the war made me aware of the good things this country has," Rodriguez said.

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

# What I learned from Voces



Photos by Timo Mauricio



*Kathryn Gonzales is the founder of Live Oak Legacies, a start-up that involves collecting personal histories for senior citizens.*

*Kathryn worked for the Voces project from May 2005 to Oct. 2006, helping with the website redesign, and in writing, editing, and researching.*

"While I thoroughly enjoyed my time working for Voces, I didn't get the full impact of what the project means in the grand scheme until I moved to New York three years ago. It occurred to me how little people know about the Latino, or more specifically, the Mexican-American experience, in the United States.

"This project does the important work of focusing on the universal convention of war and bringing to light all of the contributions Latinos made during these pivotal moments in our history. We're facing another defining moment for Latinos in our country when enlightening the general public on such efforts will help promote productive dialogue around policies that will affect this demographic, such as immigration. For this reason, I will forever hold a special place in my heart for Voces and Dr. Maggie."

## INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: WWII



### Ophelia Muñoz Rodriguez

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

As the wife and sister of men who served in World War II, Ophelia Muñoz Rodriguez always encouraged everyone to support returning veterans, no matter what the circumstances.

Rodriguez also urged younger generations to record the veterans' experiences.

"We are losing a lot of the veterans, and we need to tell people all the things that . . . were going on because they're going to forget [or] they're not going to know that they left a lot of things back home to go help the country," she said.

Rodriguez grew up as the daughter of a meat market owner during the Great Depression.

She attended Edinburg Junior College in 1945 (now the University of Texas-Pan American) and San Marcos Southwestern Teaching College (now Texas State University) in 1947. She said she became interested in teaching as a girl because her family used to have a big table in their backyard where neighborhood kids came to study.

"I took over teaching them, and so I kept on and did it for life," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez started teaching grade school in the border town of Mission, Texas, in 1949 and worked there for 30 years.

Rodriguez married, Eriberto Rodriguez, a World War II veteran, in 1954. They had two children—Chris Edward and Richard Lee.

*Interviewed on May 11, 2010, in Mission, Texas.*



### Henry Segura

Interview by Tom Padilla

Henry Segura grew up during the Great Depression in the area known as the West Bottoms of Kansas City, Kan., in a family of 10 children to parents who were Mexican immigrants.

Segura was the first person in his family of six other brothers and three sisters to graduate from high school. He was a senior at Wyandotte High School when he got his draft notice in 1943, but was allowed to graduate before being inducted into the U.S. Army. He served in the Pacific Theatre, participating in the capture of New Guinea, the Philippines, and the occupation of Japan.

Although he never experienced any discrimination in the military, Segura recalled knowing of only one Hispanic officer throughout his entire service in World War II.

He was assigned to Company A, 123rd Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Division, initially serving in a rifle squad and later in Japan as a staff sergeant.

Segura said he saw combat for the first time during the invasion and liberation of the Philippines after the New Guinea campaign. He recalled trying "to take one hill after another and digging in . . . Moving at night to catch the Japanese by surprise."

Segura said he and the others who served during World War II helped to create a better future for Latinos. After the war, he said, Latinos had more opportunities for education and better careers.

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



## Pedro Gomez Soto

Tribute by Frank Trejo

Pedro Gomez Soto stood up to his father to enlist in military service during World War II, and later became the most patriotic of Americans.

Soto was born on Sept. 9, 1922, in San Antonio, one of five children born to Aniceto and Juliana Soto. He had only an eighth grade education, primarily because working in the fields kept him away for large parts of the school year.

After Pearl Harbor was attacked, Soto's father sent his son to Mexico to evade the draft. He worked in Monclova, Coahuila, for Altos Hornos, a smelter.

It was there that he met Carmen Martinez. The couple traveled to San Antonio and married on Jan. 24, 1944. Despite his father's objections, Soto enlisted in the Army, trained as a paratrooper and was assigned to Company B, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. During one jump in Europe, he landed on icy ground and severely injured his back. He suffered from lower back pain for the rest of his life.

Soto settled in San Antonio after the war with his wife and, eventually, their three daughters.

He worked at Fort Sam Houston for 30 years before retiring in 1982. He proudly wore his veterans' "Screaming Eagles" cap and would swell with pride when strangers saluted him.

*Soto died on April 24, 2009, at the age of 87.*



## Manuel Vera

Interview by Raquel C. Garza

On Jan. 27, 1945, in freezing, blizzard-like conditions, Sgt. Manuel Vera was wounded in action near Nennig, Germany, when an explosion sent shrapnel into his right leg.

Just before Vera was wounded toward the end of the Battle of the Bulge, the company—Company K, 302nd Infantry Regiment, 94th Infantry Division—was waiting for replacements from the 301st Regiment, only a mile away.

Vera said he persevered through life, through war, and through many subsequent surgeries largely because of his faith and positive outlook.

"We are nothing in the world, if He doesn't help us," Vera said, referring to God.

Vera was born July 27, 1922, in Nebraska, one of ten children of Manuel Emmanuel Vera and Margarita Reyes Vera. Five of their eight sons served during World War II, and another one went to Korea a few years later. All returned safely.

Vera was drafted at the age of 20 in December 1942.

"[I] wanted to go to war," Vera said. "A lot of times you want to see something different, [but] once you get there, it's nothing beautiful."

In 1945, Vera returned home, and in 1948 he was honorably discharged. For his service, he earned the Purple Heart.

Vera married Natalia Flores Vera, and they had two children. He became a watch repairman and later worked for more than 30 years in civil service.

*Interviewed on May 10, 2008, in El Paso, Texas.*



## Paul Ybarra

Interview by Veronica Triana

Paul Ybarra never considered himself a hero, even though he lived through the Normandy invasion of D-Day, and sustained two battle injuries. All he did, in his view, was perform his duty to his country.

He was only 17 when America joined World War II in 1941, but Ybarra was drafted almost immediately after turning 18. Most of his friends and two of his seven brothers were also called to serve.

After training, in May 1944, Ybarra shipped out to England as part of the Allied forces that landed at Normandy.

Ybarra recalled seeing bodies of men who had fallen to Axis gunfire floating in the English Channel as his landing craft approached the shore.

After surviving the invasion and a friendly fire Allied bombing, Ybarra and his platoon entered Paris and headed for Germany. Ybarra received his first injury near the German border: a shot to the hip landed him in a hospital for a month. A short time later in Germany, he was shot in the left leg.

He was discharged on Nov. 5, 1945, at the rank of private first class. Among the medals he received were two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Medal, and a Gallantry in Battle medal. Ybarra said fighting in war was something he had to do.

"If you have to go to war to serve the country, then go. Serve," he said. "You won't be sorry."

*Interviewed on June 25, 2010, in Wellington, Kan.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: KOREA



## Jesus Bañuelos

Interview by Valerie Martinez

Jesus Bañuelos knew at a young age that the Army was calling him. He was the sixth of the Bañuelos boys to serve in the military.

“That’s one thing about my family: We were always thankful we were born in America and we were Americans,” said Bañuelos, who grew up in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. “My father and mother loved this country.”

Two days after his 18th birthday, Bañuelos started thinking about the future and marriage to his girlfriend. That’s when he enlisted.

“The only reason I went in was because I wanted to save my money,” Bañuelos said. He said he served in the Army’s 24th Corps.

Bañuelos went to Japan as part of the occupying forces for a month in 1946. A year later, Bañuelos was sent as part of Company K, 1st Platoon to the U.S.-occupied southern area of Korea, where he honed his kitchen skills.

“They say it was a cooking school. They wanted you to have some diploma to say you went to school in order to get your ratings,” Bañuelos said.

In September 1949, Bañuelos was discharged, and three months later his dream came true when he purchased his first home. He married his sweetheart, Dora Nazabal, on Feb. 13, 1950, and they had four boys and one girl.

*Interviewed on June 9, 2010, in Los Angeles.*



## René A. Cazares

Interview by Rita Sanchez

René A. Cazares was 16 years old and working as a stock boy at Macpherson Leather Corp. in downtown San Diego, Calif., when he enlisted in the U.S. Army.

“I worked all my life,” Cazares recalled. “Even when I was in Korea, the money they paid me—I sent the whole thing to my mother. I didn’t keep anything for me.”

Cazares was born in Nacozari, Sonora state, Mexico, the second of 11 children, and moved to the U.S. in 1944. He only completed junior high school.

He recalled how sad his mother was when he joined the Army and was sent to Korea in 1950.

“When I left the house, my mother looked at me like she was never going to see me alive again,” he said.

Cazares fought for 15 months in the 1st Cavalry Division, serving at the month-long, heavy casualty battle at Heartbreak Ridge, along the 38th parallel.

Cazares recalled one particularly sad incident when a North Korean, who had been shot, was calling for his mother. Cazares said he went up a hill and tried to stop the bleeding.

Soon after that incident, Cazares’ squad was sent to Japan for rest and recuperation. But in Japan, he contracted malaria and was hospitalized.

Cazares was in the Army 18 months during which he became a U.S. citizen.

*Interviewed on June 7, 2010, in National City, Calif.*



## Charlie Ericksen

Interview by Frank Trejo

Charlie Ericksen has spent most of his adult life advocating for better treatment of the Mexican-American community.

Perhaps the most lasting legacy for this Chicago-born son of British and Norwegian parents is having co-founded the Hispanic Link News Service, a nationally syndicated news and commentary provider based in Washington, D.C. Ericksen served in Korea and Japan during the Korean War as part of the 40th Infantry Division of the California National Guard. He worked in the public information office, writing stories from the GI’s perspective.

When Sgt. 1st Class Ericksen returned home late in 1952, he went back to his old newspaper job at The Los Angeles Mirror. The Stanford University graduate later attended Mexico City College, using the GI Bill. In Mexico, Ericksen met and married Sebastiana Mendoza. They had one son and then moved to East Los Angeles. They had four more children. In East Los Angeles, Ericksen began to write about the Latino community, his sensitivity heightened by his relationship with his wife. In 1980, he, Sebastiana, and their son, Hector Ericksen-Mendoza, started Hispanic Link News Service, later adding a newsletter, Hispanic Link Weekly Report.

Sebastiana died of cancer in 1996. Ericksen said he has learned that: “If you can write, you can always make a living.”

*Interviewed on Feb. 26 and 27, 2010, in Austin.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: KOREA



## Al Gonzalez

Interview by Henry Mendoza

Former Sgt. 1st Class Al Gonzalez laughed when he recalled “weapons” he never thought about when he was training to go to Korea.

Gonzalez demonstrated how his superior officer—after telling members of his squad as it was getting ready to be shipped out that they might run out of ammunition—had scratched his head for a second, and reached behind his backside.

“You can pull your pants down, put your hand back there, get a handful of \_\_\_, and throw it at ’em!” Gonzalez recalled him saying.

The Latino veteran said he had joined the U.S. Army hoping to get an education through the GI Bill. “I was looking for a better life,” he said.

He was first assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, 325th Infantry Regiment, and then transferred to 2nd Infantry Division, 387th Infantry Regiment. After he arrived in Korea in December 1952, Gonzalez fondly recalled how his mother would send him a feast of “refried beans and torts (tortillas),” which would take a month to reach him through the mail.

The Korean armistice took hold in July 1953, when the major fighting suddenly stopped, but not before the Chinese let go one last barrage of shells on the American troops.

“They were trying to get as many of us as they could before the war ended,” he said.

*Interviewed on June 7, 2010, in National City, Calif.*



## Miguel Martinez

Interview by Dan Garcia

Miguel Martinez recalled that his father instilled the value of a strong work ethic in him and his siblings from an early age. His father’s motto was: “No matter what the job is, give it all you’ve got.”

And that is precisely what Martinez tried to do. Born in 1931 in Parsons, Kan., Martinez grew up and attended schools there. To stay out of trouble, he got a job working on the railroad, where his father already worked. To help support his family, he gave half of his earnings to his mother.

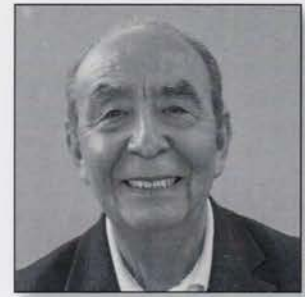
Martinez enlisted in the U.S. Army as soon as he turned 18. Just before he left for basic training, his mother handed him all of the money he had given to her over the years. She said she refused to let her needs slow down his dreams.

Martinez spent 16 months in Korea and was honorably discharged in 1952. He returned home. In 1959, he married Maria Hernandez. The couple had five children.

As a first-generation American, Martinez served his country proudly.

“I am proud of my heritage and the ability to identify with Mexican culture,” he said. “But I have no doubt in my mind that I am an American.”

*Interviewed on 6, 2010, in Wichita, Kan.*



## Gustavo Montaño

Interview by Frank Trejo

Anti-Catholic persecution in Mexico drove Gustavo Montaño’s parents to seek an environment free of prejudice and injustice for their children.

They settled in Los Angeles’ Boyle Heights neighborhood, joining other immigrant families.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Montaño saw some of his Japanese neighbors being rounded up and shipped to internment camps.

Following high school, he enlisted in the California National Guard, and his unit was mobilized in 1950 for the Korean War.

Initially deployed to Japan, his unit in the 40th Infantry Division was sent to Korea in 1951. The soldiers were ill-prepared for the bitter temperatures, which hit 20 degrees below zero.

“I was more scared of getting frostbite than getting shot at,” Montaño said.

Montaño said most Americans know little about the Korean War.

“People don’t recognize the Korea veterans, because they think that the war was part of WWII, because the same people that were running World War II were running the Korean War,” he said.

Montaño returned to Los Angeles, enrolled in college and became an expert in the aerospace field, working on such projects as the Apollo program, fighter jets and nuclear power plants. He retired in 2000.

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

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: KOREA



## John Montenegro

Interview by Valerie Martinez

A single code word kept John Montenegro out of the Korean War.

Montenegro was heading out to sea aboard the *USS General J. C. Breckinridge* troop transport ship, just beyond the San Francisco harbor. Enlistees were assigned two code words, "Dive" or "Evil." Those who were given "Dive," like Montenegro, were to be stationed in Okinawa, Japan, for the next 18 months. The rest were sent to fight in Korea.

"I didn't have sense enough to be afraid. Put it that way," Montenegro said. "I fully expected to go to Korea, but the Army had different plans for me."

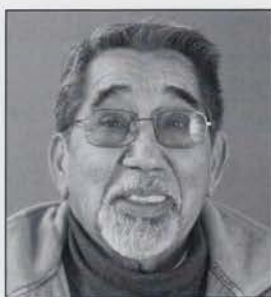
During his year-and-a-half tour in Japan, he worked his way up to sergeant.

Montenegro, a native of Wichita, Kan., had joined the Kansas National Guard, and then transferred to the active duty Army and served in the 29th Regimental Combat Team. His time in the military exposed Montenegro to a variety of cultures and ethnicities.

While stationed in Okinawa, Montenegro sent home \$40 or \$50 out of each paycheck. The rest he saved. When he was discharged in June 1954, he had a modest bankroll.

Montenegro returned home to his job with the Santa Fe Railway, where he worked for 44 years, until his retirement in 1990.

*Interviewed on June 15, 2010, in Wichita, Kan.*



## Jesus Ramirez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Jesus Ramirez took on many roles in his lifetime.

But Ramirez said his two greatest accomplishments were serving his country in the U.S. armed forces from 1949 until 1950, and marrying Noemi Ortega in 1954.

The couple raised three children. Social responsibility was always important in his life.

Ramirez began his career supervising juvenile detention hall from 1953 to 1955. In the mid-1960s Ramirez began working at the Los Angeles County Department of Personnel Action.

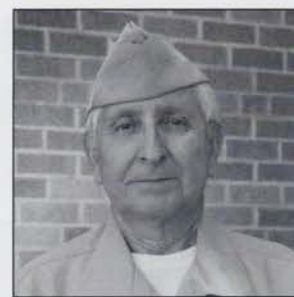
"During this time there was a trend to bring affirmative action to Los Angeles, and I was approached to enter this field based on my race," Ramirez said.

He helped convince Los Angeles County leaders to give minorities equal access to jobs by eliminating barriers such as height limits that led to excluding Asians and Latinos.

Ramirez also met with department managers from the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, the Fire Department, and other departments to persuade them to hire minorities.

Ramirez said he "was proud to be able to serve this country and grateful for the opportunities it has given me."

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



## Felipe Rangel

Interview by Joseph Schuetz

Felipe Rangel was in the Korean War, was wounded, and lived to tell the tale.

During his childhood he was run over, twice; once by a milk wagon and then by a car. The head injuries he suffered during these two accidents affected his memory throughout his life. He stopped going to school after the eighth grade. "School was a little hard for me because of the accident I had," Rangel said.

Rangel, who was born in 1931 in Topeka, Kan., had seven brothers and six sisters.

He wasn't old enough to serve during World War II, in which he lost two of his brothers. When the Korean War began in 1950, Rangel knew he was going to be drafted.

In Korea, the Marine rifleman was wounded one night when he was operating a machine gun. An explosion blew him backwards with injuries to his legs and above his right eye.

A member of the 1st Marine Division's 2nd Battalion, Rangel was awarded a Purple Heart, as well as the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal and the National Defense Service Medal.

"The medals remind me of the memories and the good friends I made, and that I was lucky to have survived," Rangel said.

*Interviewed on June 16, 2010, in Topeka, Kan.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: VIETNAM



## Germán Abadía

Interview by Manuel Avilés-Santiago

When he got his draft notice at the age of 18, Germán Abadía's first thought was to go into hiding. But the Puerto Rico native changed his mind when he learned that refusal to appear could land him in jail.

Abadía, who was born on Sept. 3, 1948, was raised by his uncle and aunt, Juan and Modesta Abadía, whom he considered his parents. Abadía never forgot the first time he saw Juan Abadía cry. It was the day he told him he was being drafted into the Army.

He was sent in January 1967 to Fort Jackson, S.C., for basic training. His toughest challenge was language. Abadía spoke mostly Spanish. After basic training, he went to Fort Benning, Ga., where he completed airborne training.

He was assigned to the 159th Engineer Group, 46th Engineer Battalion (Construction), Company A.

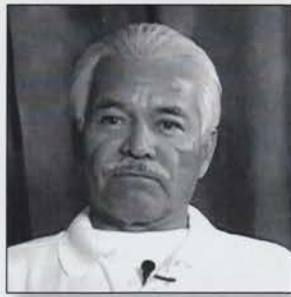
The first thing he noticed about Vietnam was the scorching heat, which was similar to Puerto Rico's.

He said he experienced racism throughout the time he served.

He believed his health suffered because of the war. He had diabetes, high blood pressure, and other problems associated with diabetes, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder.

For his service, Abadía earned a National Defense Service Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal, a Vietnam Campaign Medal and a Good Conduct Medal.

*Interviewed on June 17, 2010, in Fajardo, P.R.*



## Dan Arellano

Interview by Manuel Avilés-Santiago

Once a migrant worker, Dan Arellano became an amateur historian and has helped chronicle the Tejano contributions to Texas history.

Arellano, born in San Antonio on March 12, 1947, moved to Austin, where he graduated from Travis High School. At age 18, Arellano enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He served stateside during his time in the Navy.

"Quite frankly, I don't remember if I [served in the military] because it was my patriotic duty or economic necessity," Arellano said.

He was discharged from the Navy in 1968. Arellano married, and divorced; he had two children.

After his service, he worked as a mail carrier and later as a Realtor.

He wrote "Tejano Roots: A Family Legend," published in 2006. It focuses on the 1813 Battle of Medina, south of San Antonio, in which Spanish colonial forces quashed a pro-Texas independence rebellion.

He leads annual excavations to pinpoint the battle site, with dozens of volunteers helping.

He also volunteers with Tejanos in Action, a veterans' service organization, that was successful in naming schools and post offices for different Latinos killed in action.

*Interviewed on Dec. 13, 2009, in Austin.*



## Rita Brock-Perini

Interview by Samantha Salazar

As a 30-year-old captain in the Air Force Nurse Corps, Rita Brock-Perini cared for thousands of soldiers and helped hundreds of nurses in the largest Air Force hospital in the United States during the bloodiest years of the Vietnam War.

Brock-Perini was born on Oct. 17, 1938, in Phoenix, Ariz. After high school, she trained at the St. Joseph's School of Nursing in Phoenix.

She worked for 10 years as a nurse and then enlisted in the U.S. Air Force.

After Officers' Candidate School, Brock-Perini was stationed at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. As the war intensified, she worked at Wilford Hall Medical Center.

"We had to be very efficient in the way that we worked because we had numbers and numbers [of wounded]," she said. "They never stopped coming."

In 1971, she left the Air Force and took an administrative job with the American Red Cross.

She obtained her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from Arizona State University and became active in veterans' groups, including the Veterans Medical Leadership Council.

"Those of us who can do anything to make [veterans' lives] better should be willing to do it," she said.

*Interviewed on Aug. 14, 2010, in Phoenix.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: VIETNAM



## Isaac Camacho

Interview by Robert Rivas

Army Capt. Isaac Camacho vividly recalled the terrible night—Nov. 22, 1963—when he was captured by the Viet Cong. He was held for nearly two years until he fled, becoming the first U.S. prisoner to escape from Viet Cong captivity. That night, Viet Cong forces overran his U.S. Army Special Forces base camp at Hiep Hoa, South Vietnam.

“They’re crawling all over the fences, they’re coming in to get us, and we’re just not going to be able to defend ourselves,” Camacho recalled. “It was really bad; I’m lucky to be alive.”

Camacho and three other men were captured, beaten, blindfolded and transported to the guerilla army’s base. He spent 21 months living in shackles and was confined to cages, one of which was just six by eight feet.

Born and raised in Fabens, Texas, southeast of El Paso, Camacho joined the elite Special Forces in 1951. Before going to Vietnam, he was stationed in Germany, Japan, and Fort Bragg, N.C.

Camacho planned his escape from prison since his first day. His break came when, during a heavy rain, he slipped away through a bar he had worked loose. Finally, he followed a stream that became a river, and eventually found a U.S.-occupied rubber plantation.

“That was the first sign of civilization that I had seen,” Camacho said. “I was just elated.”

*Interviewed on April 24, 2010, in El Paso, Texas.*



## Manuel Cavada

Interview by Olivia Puentes-Reynolds

It was an evening like any other in Saigon in April 1967. Manuel Cavada, an Air Force crew chief, was doing the routine maintenance on C-121 Super Constellation planes.

But within minutes, he realized that rockets had been fired and were heading his way. As he was running for a bunker, Cavada felt an intense pain in his right leg.

“A big chunk of metal was in it. ... It was still sizzling when I pulled it out,” he said.

At the same time he saw his friend, Frank Macias, lying on the ground—a gaping wound in his back.

“I dislodged a huge piece of metal in his back, and he started shooting blood all over the place,” Cavada said. He took what was handy—his white socks—and “popped” them into the hole in Macias’ back.

The attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base in northern Saigon left several people dead.

He enlisted in the Air Force in 1964, after graduating from high school.

After his time in the service, Cavada obtained an art degree from the Glen Fishback School of Photography in 1974. He still worked as a photographer at the time of his interview. One of his counselors, however, had told him he would be better off pursuing a career as a mechanic.

*Interviewed on June 6, 2010, in National City, Calif.*



## Guadalupe Martinez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

Guadalupe Martinez didn’t want to be a stay-at-home mom, or clean houses and offices. She wanted to become a legal assistant. Martinez, a young adult during the Vietnam War, didn’t agree with anti-war protesters.

“I never understood why people would protest something they had never participated in,” Martinez said. She knew the young men who were drafted had no choice.

After high school, she took legal secretarial courses in a business school and started her career as a legal secretary.

When she was 21, she married Michael Martinez, who had been a Marine.

“He had the same goals as I did, which were doing better than our parents did, and to continue education,” she said.

They later had two children, Eulalia Belen Martinez (now Ramirez) and Simon Gerard Martinez.

Martinez later worked for a publishing company. At the time of her interview, Martinez worked as an administrative assistant for Judge Henry W. Green Jr. at the Kansas Court of Appeals. She was looking forward to retirement to be able to spend more time with her family.

“They are my life. I want to give them everything that I can... give them knowledge, instill in them hope, faith and charity,” Martinez said.

*Interviewed on June 16, 2010, in Topeka, Kan.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: VIETNAM



## Gloria Lerma Rodriguez

Interview by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

After seeing what the Vietnam War did to her brother-in-law, said Gloria Lerma Rodriguez, a native of El Paso, Texas, she felt even more strongly that the United States had no business fighting it.

“Whoever can hear me will probably think I’m a traitor to my country, but this war didn’t prove anything. Nothing was gained,” Lerma Rodriguez said. Her brother-in-law came back, apparently after having a breakdown.

Rodriguez said she had opposed U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam from the very beginning, when she was 25 years old.

Rodriguez graduated from Jefferson High School in El Paso, Texas. When teachers and principals wanted students to talk among themselves, Rodriguez said, “they would say, ‘All English.’ And so, instead of trying to speak it, you know, we would just be silent. We wouldn’t say anything.”

Rodriguez was one of 14 children born to Ramon and Elisa Lerma. At night, her mother would count the number of heads when the children slept to make sure all of them were accounted for, Rodriguez recalled.

She married Fernando Rodriguez, a friend from high school, on April 24, 1960. He had graduated one year before her, joined the Air Force in 1957, and made the military his career. She and the couple’s two children lived in various places, depending on where he was stationed. That experience gave her an awareness of other cultures.

*Interviewed on Nov. 27, 2009, in Austin.*



## Rudolph “Rudy” Lopez

Interview by Valeria Fernandez

Growing up in Phoenix, Rudolph “Rudy” Lopez knew he was destined to serve in the military.

Lopez’s father was a member of the Army military police during World War II in France.

“My dad didn’t have much of an education, but as far as I’m concerned, he was second only to Jesus Christ,” Lopez said. “My dad was a super, super guy.”

Lopez’s brother and most of his uncles served in WWII. Several cousins served in the Korean War.

In January 1966, he joined the Army, after realizing that he might get drafted.

After basic training, Lopez went to Fort Campbell, Ky., in June 1966 with the 101st Airborne Division. In November 1966, he was sent to Vietnam.

Lopez was a ranger in a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol. On May 19, 1967, a member of his unit tripped a mine. Although he was injured, Lopez helped treat the wounded and kept the unit together.

Lopez was discharged in December 1968, at the rank of staff sergeant. He was awarded a Purple Heart. He initially refused to allow others to pursue a Bronze Star for him, but in 2001 Lopez finally received a Bronze Star with a V device for valor.

“I think it’s pretty neat! I saved two peoples’ lives, and they are the ones who pushed for it. It came from my peers, so that’s why it’s meaningful to me,” he said.

*Interviewed on Aug. 16, 2010, in Phoenix.*



## Manuel Lugo

Interview by Michelle Lojewski

Manuel Lugo boarded a plane in November 1969 on his journey to Vietnam. From the U.S. mainland to Hawaii and then to Okinawa, the flights had been lively. But “from Okinawa to Vietnam, you could have heard a pin drop,” he remembered.

None of the U.S. Marines on the flight knew what to expect, but they knew it was nothing to joke about.

Before he was drafted, Lugo lived in Phoenix, with his parents and his seven siblings.

“We were poor, but we didn’t know we were poor,” Lugo said.

His father, Charlie Lugo, was a World War II Marine Corps veteran.

Lugo said he was unprepared for the experience of war. He never knew what was going on, but he was always being screamed at.

“That’s exactly how Vietnam feels,” Lugo remembered.

Lugo was in the 2nd Battalion 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division.

Coming home was difficult for him when he thought about how easily he had adapted to killing and how many people back home did not support the war.

“They look at you like you did something wrong,” Lugo said. “You weren’t supposed to be proud.”

Lugo left Vietnam in 1970 and was discharged in 1975 with the rank of corporal. He was awarded a Navy Commendation Medal with a V device for valor.

*Interviewed on Aug. 16, 2010, in Tempe, Ariz.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: VIETNAM



## J. Mario Ortiz

Interview by Pablo Martinez

When J. Mario Ortiz enlisted in the Marines in July 1967, he was a year out of Topeka High School in Kansas, and all his friends were also enlisting. His father had served in World War II.

“I was young and foolish, I guess,” Ortiz said. “It was an obligation. It was the American way.”

Ortiz served 13 months and six days in Vietnam, but carried the war with him for the rest of his life.

Ortiz said he had horrific experiences during the Vietnam War. On his very first day he mistakenly found himself in a warehouse filled with bodies ready to be shipped home.

“Oh man, I didn’t want to see this on my first day,” Ortiz said.

Ortiz, part of Headquarters Company, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division, also watched those fighting around him die in battle.

He was discharged as a lance corporal in March 1969.

But he continued to have war flashbacks. To escape it, he turned to drugs and alcohol. He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), received treatment and worked at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. He was married briefly. His son, Christopher Ortiz, was born in 1993 from another relationship.

Ortiz said the medication helps, but PTSD remains a daily battle.

“It’s like they say in AA meetings: ‘One day at a time,’ ” Ortiz said. “As time goes by, things start to heal a little better.”

*Interviewed on June 6, 2010, in Topeka, Kan.*



## Albert Ramirez

Interview by Brenda Menchaca

For Albert Ramirez, the U.S. military was a great opportunity to serve his country. Ramirez, a native of Laredo, Texas, enlisted in the U.S. Army, the day after his birthday on April 8, 1957.

He trained in Washington, Alabama and Kentucky, before being assigned to serve in Germany from 1958 to 1960, during the Cold War era. He served with the 2nd Infantry Division, 101st Airborne Division and later to the 8th Infantry, 7th Army.

During his time in the military, while in Germany, Ramirez dated a girl named Joan, but her mother objected.

“She said, ‘What’s your name?’ and I said, ‘My name is Alberto Ramirez, and I am from Laredo, Texas,’ and she said, ‘Are you Puerto Rican?’ ” Ramirez recalled. “I said, ‘No, ma’am.’ ‘Are you Cuban?’ ‘No, ma’am.’ ‘Well, what are you?’ ‘I am a Mexican.’ ‘That’s even worse!’ ”

He was discharged on Feb. 1, 1960 at the rank of private first class. He met and married Emilia Soto, with whom he had three children. Mrs. Soto died in 2001.

Ramirez worked as a vocational teacher for 27 years at Laredo Community College and continued to teach in San Antonio before retiring in 2009.

One of the traditions that he has passed down to his children and grandchildren was the carving of benches with holiday motifs, just as his father used to do.

*Interviewed on March 6, 2010, in Laredo, Texas.*



## Arturo Ramirez

Interview by Grant Abston

Arturo Ramirez served in covert operations in Vietnam, came back and suffered from effects of Agent Orange, and would later protest the war. Ramirez began working as a child, cleaning offices with his father at the Union Stockyards in San Marcos, northeast of San Antonio, when he was eight years old.

After high school, he enrolled at San Antonio Community College. But when he received his draft notice in 1966, Ramirez enlisted in the U.S. Air Force at the age of 19.

He went to basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. While on temporary assignment in Taiwan, Ramirez was assigned to the Studies and Observation Group, a classified military operation that carried out missions during the Vietnam War.

“You were assigned that duty and then you operated however you could. You were on your own,” Ramirez said. He said he was involved in two six-month covert stints. Ramirez returned to the United States in 1970.

Despite health complications from exposure to Agent Orange, Ramirez said, it took 34 years for him to receive disability benefits.

Upon his return, Ramirez became involved in the anti-war movement, joining the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Ramirez also returned to school, earning his master’s degree from Trinity University in 1985 and his doctorate from Texas A&M University in 1990. He eventually started an environmental cleanup company in San Antonio.

*Interviewed on April 20, 2011, in San Antonio.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: VIETNAM



## John Reyes Jr.

Interview by Julie Rene Tran

John Reyes Jr.'s physical wounds from the Vietnam War healed; the profound impact of the war and life in the Marines remained.

Born on Nov. 18, 1944, Reyes was raised in Houston. He dropped out of high school in 1964 at 19 and enlisted in the Marines.

Reyes had never heard of North and South Vietnam; couldn't find them on a map. When he got there, his convoy ship pulled up near the mountains of the Qui Nhon U.S. naval base and immediately came under sniper fire.

Reyes was discharged on Jan. 28, 1970. He was awarded a Purple Heart for injuries he suffered in a mortar attack during heavy fighting between North Vietnamese soldiers and U.S. Marines in Operation Utah, which took place March 4 through 7, 1966.

"You get the Purple Heart because you're stupid," Reyes said. "You zig when you're suppose to zag, nothing to be proud of."

Ultimately, the war changed him. Reyes said he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and that it was hard for him to let people get close to him after the war. He was married twice and had four children.

But he never regretted the four years he served in the Marine Corps.

"You could not do better," Reyes said.

*Interviewed on April 8, 2011, in Houston.*



## Alonzo R. Rivera Jr.

Interview by Olivia Puentes-Reynolds

As he caught a midnight train in Fresno, Calif., to serve in the Marines, Alonzo R. Rivera Jr., knew his life as a farm worker was behind him.

Rivera enlisted in the Marine Corps on Sept. 19, 1961, at the age of 21. That same year, he married Carmen Lozano. He wrote letters to her and, about once a month, she sent care packages filled with Mexican goodies.

Rivera went to South Vietnam on Feb. 17, 1968, as a member of Kilo Battery 4th Battalion 12th Marines, and later transferred to the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Marine Divisions.

Rivera was discharged on Jan. 18, 1981. He earned two Navy Commendation Medals and two Purple Hearts. However, he blamed his prostate cancer on his exposure to the Agent Orange herbicide used by U.S. forces to clear Vietnamese jungle areas, and said he still suffered from other war-related illnesses, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

He later worked for the U.S. Customs Service for 23 years. His wife passed away in 1972 of leukemia. He remarried in 1994 but divorced three years later.

"If I had to do it over again, knowing I would be going through this. I would do it in a micro-second," he said, "because I'm a proud American."

*Interviewed on June 7, 2010, in National City, Calif.*



## Hector Sanchez

Interview by Liliana Rodriguez

When 18-year-old Hector Sanchez learned he had been drafted into the U.S. Army to fight in Vietnam, he knew that he had to face the challenge and remain optimistic.

"I believed out of the goodness of my heart, to me, this is the best country you can live in," Sanchez recalled. "And if you want to live in this country, you've got to fight for your country."

Sanchez grew up in Sonora, Texas, 172 miles northwest of San Antonio.

Sanchez was stationed in Vietnam from 1969 until 1970. He was assigned to the 3rd Platoon, Company B, 3rd Battalion, 8th Infantry.

"A lot of guys can't take it. You get used to seeing people lying on the ground. All you have to do is go forward and survive, that's all," he said.

Sanchez was honorably discharged as a private 1st class in 1975. Among the medals he received were the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with two Bronze Stars, the Republic of Vietnam Service Medal, the Combat Infantryman's Badge, the National Service Medal, and Good Conduct Medals.

Sanchez worked in the oil industry and then in construction until retiring in 2001. He married Carmen Galindo on Nov. 21, 1973, and the couple had two sons and one daughter.

Sanchez struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder for a long time. He appreciated the aid he got from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

*Interviewed on Aug. 1, 2010, in El Dorado, Texas.*

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT: VIETNAM



## Modesto Sanchez

Interview by Manuel Avilés-Santiago

One of the most vivid memories of the Vietnam War for Modesto Sanchez occurred moments before he boarded the ship that would expose him to combat and change his life.

“President Lyndon B. Johnson passed by to check on the troops and he asked me, ‘Where you from, Sanchez?’ and I answered, ‘From Aguada, Puerto Rico, Mr. President,’” Sanchez said. “Meeting the president is one of the greatest things I could have experienced in the war.”

In Puerto Rico, Sanchez worked as a mechanic and welder in his hometown. On Nov. 3, 1965, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was flown to North Carolina for basic training.

It was during training, that Sanchez experienced his first taste of racial discrimination. The clash of languages and cultures created tension among the trainees.

The men were then flown to California and sent by ship to Vietnam.

“As we entered the [South Vietnamese] port . . . our ship began to be attacked. I was filled with fear and anxiety,” Sanchez said.

Sanchez was part of the 512 Transportation Company, 54th Battalion, a combat transport support unit.

On Sept. 24, 1967, he left South Vietnam, and five days later was back in Puerto Rico; no one was there to welcome the troops.

“The Vietnam War is the most important thing that has happened to me and something I will never be able to forget,” Sanchez said.

*Interviewed on Dec. 31, 2009, in Aguada, Puerto Rico.*



## José Mariano Soto

Interview by Lilliana Rodriguez

He had big dreams of a football career, but in October 1967 José Mariano Soto, a college student living in Laredo, Texas, volunteered for the Marine Corps.

Soto grew up in Laredo with his parents and two older sisters.

“I always wanted to join the Marine Corps because of the uniform and because of all the propaganda that they only take the best,” said Soto.

After boot camp and intensive military training, Soto was sent as a rifleman to South Vietnam.

When he arrived in Da Nang, he recalled seeing men who were returning home.

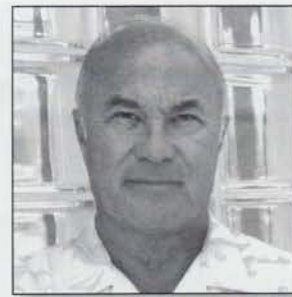
“You could see on their faces that they had been in some place in hell. The thing that really got me thinking that I was in a very hostile area was that there were 20 body bags, and they were American soldiers,” Soto said.

He was assigned to Quang Tri Province, serving with the 1st Marine Division 3rd Battalion 26th Marines, India Company.

Among the challenges Soto survived was the bloody siege at Khe Sanh, where he faced not only the enemy but the cold and constant rain, with little food or sleep.

After his discharge as a private, he returned to Laredo and lived with his wife, Beatriz Adame Soto, and their children. Looking back on it, he smiled at the ambitious young man who volunteered for Vietnam.

*Interviewed on March 6, 2010, in Laredo, Texas.*



## Henry Soza Jr.

Interview by Taylor Peterson

The horrors of the Vietnam War remained so etched in his mind that for decades, Henry Soza Jr., continued to be haunted by what he had seen and heard.

Serving as a U.S. Army combat medic supporting Troop B, 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), Soza's actions so distinguished him that he was twice awarded the Silver Star, as well as a Bronze Star, among other honors. But the futility of the war drained him.

“War is so sad. The [weapons] that they had can tear you apart so badly,” Soza said.

Soza was born on July 21, 1943, in Tempe, Ariz. After being drafted on Oct. 12, 1967, he went to basic training in El Paso, Texas, and then for medical training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio.

According to his military records, Soza was awarded his two Silver Stars for risking his life to treat men injured in the field and then dragging them to safety despite heavy gunfire. His actions took place in April 1969 in what was then the Binh Long Province of South Vietnam.

Soza was discharged on Oct. 5, 1969, with the rank of specialist 5th class. He also was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal, a Vietnam Campaign Medal and an Army Commendation Medal.

But after returning home, he had trouble adjusting.

“I've heard the term ‘get over it.’ And maybe we should,” Soza said. “But you don't forget something like that, there's too much hurt that you see. How do you get over that?”

*Interviewed on Aug. 16, 2010, in Tempe, Ariz.*



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Photo by Tino Mauricito



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