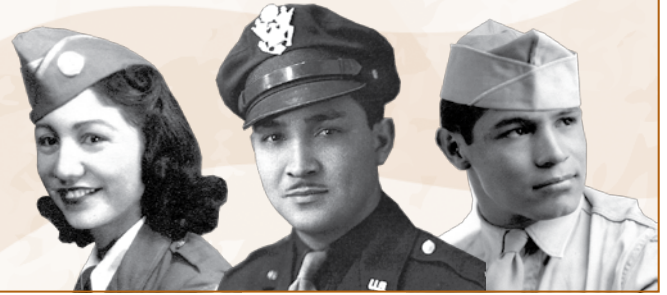


Insider NARRATIVES



U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project • University of Texas at Austin

MILESTONES AND THE ROAD AHEAD

FROM THE DIRECTOR:



Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez

If you've been wondering where your newsletter has been, we hope this issue will give you some idea of what we've been up to. It has indeed been a year like no other, one we are not likely to see again, but one that underscored why a project such as ours is so necessary. It has also forced us to confront a reality: we have much more work ahead to ensure that U.S. Latinos and Latinas are part of our nation's historical memory.

We can't do it alone. We need your help.

When we confirmed, in January 2007, that the 14.5-hour PBS/Ken Burns World War II documentary, "The War", had no mention of Latinos, we set out to address the omission. We took a leading role in the Defend the Honor grass-roots campaign, speaking out about why this was important.

Regardless of what we thought of the final outcome of this documentary—interviews with two Mexican American veterans and one Native American veteran were added, but somewhat conspicuously—the issue brought a greater awareness of Latino contributions to our country.

Would there have been any concerns raised about the documentary had it not been for the Project? Perhaps not; our project was perfectly poised to sound the alarm. We have supporters/volunteers like the great Gus Chavez, an organizer extraordinaire, who solicited the earliest letters of concerns, and who has a vast network of like-minded activists, including the National Hispanic Media Coalition, which also took a leading role.

Also, we had proof: more than 600 videotaped interviews, thousands of photographs, hundreds of other artifacts, like discharge papers, letters and even a uniform. We had books documenting the contributions, we had a Web site. No honest person could dispute the authenticity and uniqueness of the Latino WWII experience.

Bottom line: had it not been that we had already documented the richness of the U.S. Latino WWII experience, it would have been much easier to ignore the protests.

We have gotten great support from other organizations and individuals. We thank you for the donations and kind words. And we hope you will help us get to the next level in our work, and details are developing.

There are things we must do: we must continue interviews with WWII generation folks who are still remarkably spry. In the coming years, we're hoping to expand to include other generations of Latinos and Latinas. We must always have a presence at conferences, to create a greater awareness of the treasures we have here and to remind folks to include Latinos.

Next year will mark the 10th anniversary of the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project. We'll celebrate in style and then we'll get to work on the next level of the Project.

We need your help. If you can volunteer (as an interviewer, photographer, indexer, or arranging an interview session in your city), that's appreciated. If you can make a donation, no amount is too small, or too large. We promise to keep doing quality work, because our community, and our country, deserves the very best we can do.

We've shown that together, we can make a difference. We hope you'll join us to continue making a difference.

OUR WEB SITE: A HOME FOR OUR HEROS

It's taken a few years, and a small army of patient, hard-working people, but our new Web site is finally up and running. And it's only going to get better in the coming months.

The new site is searchable (by state of birth, city of birth, last name, wartime military location), has a video called Oral History Step by Step, has longer stories, more photos and soon, there will be much more.

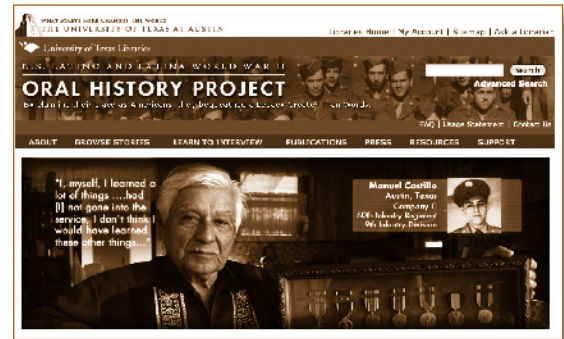
The redesign began in earnest with a grant from the UT Libraries in 2006 and was launched in November. But even before that, in 2004, the first necessary steps were taken to creating the database that allowed the site to be searchable by various fields.

In the last issue of the newsletter, we mentioned our wish to add video to our new Web site. Thanks to a generous anonymous donation, the Project will be able to add some video clips to the site. The donation will also allow the Project to purchase new computers and other hardware, and to improve the database which the Project uses in almost all aspects of its operation,

from sending out letters and postcards to keeping track of the hundreds of interviews we've done and keeping us organized about what we still need to do.

If you haven't seen the new site, here is a link: www.lib.utexas.edu/ww2latinos.

Please change your bookmarks on your internet browser.



The new Web site has been years in the making and we thank the following people, below, for their hard work, patience and support:

Our Many Thanks

UTOPIA STAFF

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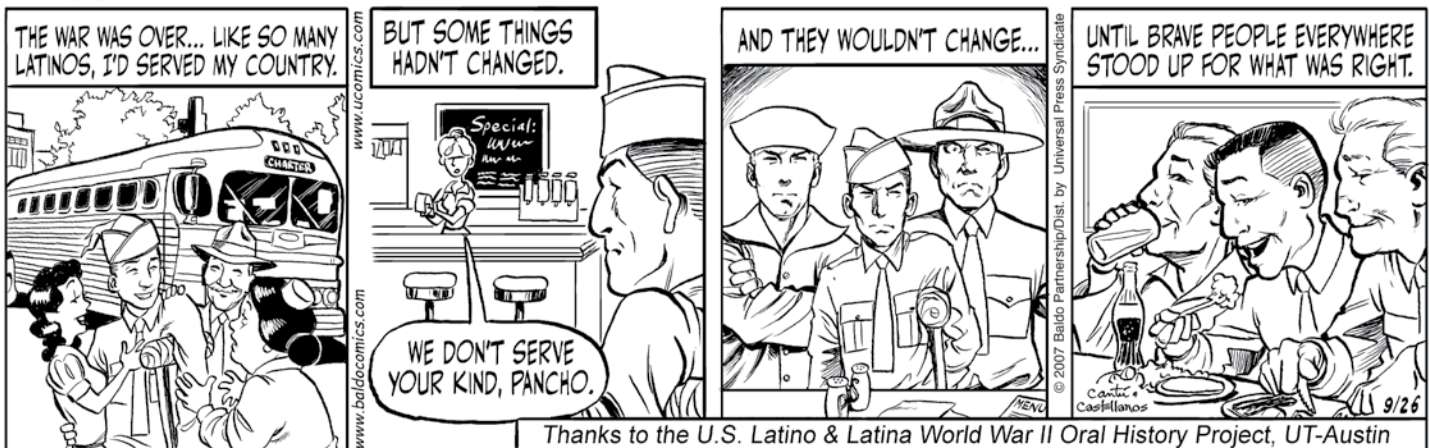
Richard Brito (Austin, TX)
Bill Davies (Sacramento, CA)

THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED IN THE PAST:

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Erika Martinez de Rizo, Charter Project Manager
Larissa Mueller, Visual Media Coordinator
Elvia O. Pérez, Translator, San Antonio
Brenda Sendejo, Project Assistant
Lynn Walker, Project Manager

BALDO CARTOON STRIKES A CHORD

BALDO



Used with Permission.

When cartoonist Hector Cantú, creator of the Baldo comic strips, learned that Ken Burns' documentary "The War" didn't include Latinos, he decided that his comic strip, "Baldo" would.

"The comics remain a powerful venue for communication and teaming up with (the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project) on this project can bring some excitement to the comics pages," Cantú wrote in an email to the Project.

Cantú and co-creator Carlos Castellanos created Benny Ramirez, a fictional character, to tell the story of Latinos in WWII.

Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, project director, was more than happy to supply Cantú with a copy of "A Legacy Greater than Words" and other materials for inspiration.

"I've seen how Hector and Carlos tackle important social issues through the Baldo comic strip," Rivas-Rodriguez said. "So, absolutely, we were thrilled to work with them in bringing the story of WWII Latinos to a new medium."

"Baldo" is a nationally distributed comic strip by Universal Press Syndicate and appears in more than 200 newspapers. It is Universal Press' first comic strip to feature Latino characters and themes—a perfect place for the world to meet Benny Ramirez.

Cantu's idea for the strip came to him as he kept up with the Ken Burns' issue.

"I have *tios* who served in WWII. So you can imagine my disappointment upon learning about the exclusion of Latinos from that PBS special," Cantu said.

The first strip appeared in newspapers on September

17, 2007 and ran for nine days. Ramirez, who tells his story through flashbacks, introduces Baldo to the hellish realities of war and his experiences in it.

Ramirez's story has many recognizable elements to those familiar with the Project. Ramirez enlisted after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, despite the discrimination he felt at home. Discrimination would follow him into the service in the U.S. Army. He decided to combat oppression by commanding respect—the character was a prize-winning boxer, who pulled no punches.

Ramirez, who served in the European Theater, won a Silver Star and would return home after being wounded near Bastogne.

Ramirez teaches Baldo that WWII was a great equalizer, everyone bleeds red and that no one should be judged by superficial measures, such as skin color. Ramirez tells Baldo that upon his return home, he still faced discrimination; something that would never change until everyone banded together—something that our real-life veterans have said in their interviews for the Project.

The strip ends with Baldo thanking the elderly veteran for sharing his story.

On Cantú and Castellanos' Web site, many fans posted their own family stories about grandfathers, fathers, uncles and others who served in WWII.

"The comic was able to reach such a wide audience," said Raquel Garza, project manager. "Adults and kids could learn something about the war and about the bravery of the Latinos who fought in it. It was a great moment for the Project and one of my favorite results from PBS."

PROJECT TIME LINE: 2007 YEAR IN REVIEW

January

Rivas-Rodriguez is among a small group that forms Defend the Honor, a grass roots organization to protest Ken Burns' omission of Latino participation during WWII.



Defend the Honor created buttons with nine different images of Latinos and Latinas who participated in WWII. These buttons can be purchased singularly or in bulk, please call the project office at (512) 471-1924 for more information.

January 13th

Project Director Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez gives keynote address, Mexican American School Board Association (MASBA) conference in Corpus Christi.

March 5th

Defend the Honor meets with PBS officials for the first time, at PBS headquarters in Arlington, VA

May 11th

Annual winners of the Project's essay contest are announced at a preview party for the new Web site.

May 22nd

The Project puts together an exhibit for Memorial

Day; Rivas-Rodriguez speaks at the State Farm campus in Round Rock.

April

Defend the Honor meets with PBS and Ken Burns in Washington. Burns promises to incorporate Latinos seamlessly.

June 9th - 14th

The Project attends the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) annual conference in Chicago, IL; staff interviews one new veteran.

June 21st - 24th

The Project attends the National Council of La Raza's (NCLR) annual conference in Miami, FL; staff interviews one new veteran.

Rivas-Rodriguez gets the Reuben Salazar Award for Communications.



Project staff members Yazmin Lazcano and Sara Hernando in Miami for the NCLR conference.

July 19th

Rivas-Rodriguez holds a Web conference for Defend the Honor.

August 4th

The Project conducts a Multiple-Individual Interview Session at the

Veteran's Center in San Antonio; 13 people are interviewed (See some of the stories in this issue of the newsletter).



Project staff member Joseph Boone in San Antonio for the Multiple Individual Interview Session.

August 23rd

Rivas-Rodriguez holds a Web conference for Defend the Honor.

September 1st

Conducts a Multiple-Individual Interview Session (MIIS) at the University of Texas at El Paso; 10 people are interviewed.

September 23rd

The Project participates in a rally, A Day of Honor and Remembrance, at the steps of the Texas Capitol to honor Latino WWII veterans.

October 4th

Rivas-Rodriguez is awarded the national Leadership Award by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

October 8th

Defend the Honor holds a Web Town Hall meeting in Washington, D.C.

October 9th

Rivas-Rodriguez presents a lecture at Brookes Army Air Force Base, Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, titled "A Legacy Greater than Words."

October 13th

Rivas-Rodriguez participates in a panel discussion at the American Sociological Association in Philadelphia, entitled "Race and Representation in Ken Burns' "The War."

November 9th

Rivas-Rodriguez speaks at the UT-Brownsville Veteran's Day Ceremony.

November 19th

The new version the Web site is launched.

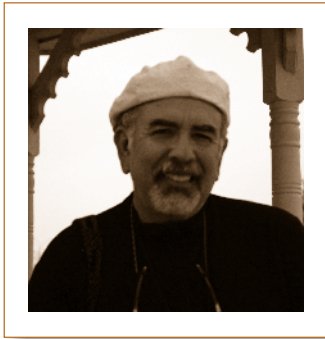
December

The staff partnered up with University of Texas College of Communications, technology team staff in order to create the new Web site and make other technology possible. The two teams posed for the Christmas card.



Thank you to all of our supporters who helped us to have a strong year, and we hope for continued support in the coming years.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHTS



NAME: Jesse Herrera
BIRTHPLACE: Monterrey, Mexico
CURRENT RESIDENCE: South Austin

How did you first hear about the Project?:

First heard about the project through a newspaper article in the Statesman and a conference for vets at the UT Campus Club.

Why did you decide to volunteer?:

I am a professional photographer and felt those skills qualified me to do a decent job. Plus being a Vietnam veteran, I felt a kinship with the WWII veterans.

Tell me about your first volunteering experience; was it overwhelming? Were you prepared?

The first time, I conducted a full interview, I felt somewhat nervous because I wanted it to be as professional as possible. I did not want to flub the interview and do a disservice to the project.

Anything funny happen during the interview?:

One interviewee mentioned how the first time he geared up for battle, he strapped so many bandoliers around his body, that his commanding officer asked him if he thought he was Pancho Villa.

What have you learned from interviewing?:

The main thing I learned from the interviewees was the dignified pride they took in having served their country, even though many came back home to face the same unfair economic and social conditions.

What advice do you have for future volunteers?:

I would advice future volunteers to try and not rush the veterans through the oral questions, because sometimes they can add unexpected information to your set questions.

Jesse has been conducting interviews in the Austin area.



NAME: Marcél Rodríguez
BIRTHPLACE: San Antonio, TX
CURRENT RESIDENCE: Austin

How did you first hear about the Project?:

I walked by the office in the Communications Center and peeked in. I had also heard about it years ago in 2000. I was working for an oral history project in South Texas at the time. Hard to believe it was that long ago. I knew of Dr. Maggie back then.

Why did you decide to volunteer?:

I wanted to see if there were possibilities to create a documentary out of the work of the Project. Paul Stekler encouraged me as well, considering the Ken Burns situation which emphasized the need to tell the stories of Latino WWII veterans.

Tell me about your first volunteering experience; was it overwhelming? Were you prepared?

The pre-interview took a long time. By the time we settled in for the interview, we were all a bit exhausted. But once the stories started to come, the interviewee drew energy from those stories.

What have you learned from interviewing?:

I've learned that the war had a ripple effect across this country in Latino communities. Empowering the men who went to come back to their communities and make changes. The impact of the war on Latino communities cannot be underestimated and more Latinos should see WWII story as integral to their story, as it was the beginning of a lot of positive change.

What advice do you have for future volunteers?:

Future volunteers should read about WWII before going on an interview. Think of it as a trip to another time and place and prepare accordingly.

Marcél has been conducting interviews in South Texas.

FROM CORONADO'S "CORAZÓN"

The Project has received much public attention during the past year, as their public profile was raised when Dr. Rivas-Rodriguez took a leading role in the Defend the Honor campaign.

From this publicity came many opportunities—more families came forward with stories to share; more volunteers offered their time to the Project.

Sam Coronado, an Austin artist, came to the Project with a different proposal.

Coronado, a painter turned printmaker, asked the Project if he could use photos from our extensive archives to create works of art. Several photos were used as part of Coronado's "Corazón" series.

"I decided to use the WWII photos to document our father's and grandfather's accomplishments and struggles," Coronado said in an email. "They fought and shed blood along side other soldiers for the same cause, only to be rejected as full citizens when they returned home. These photos gave face to some of the Mexican Americans that endured those struggles."

Originally, Coronado intended to make 20 to 25 pieces based on one photo. However, he realized he was limiting the number of photos he could include.

"Instead, I chose to develop a series of monoprint/collage images using the different backgrounds and images," he explained. "Each one is an individual piece. There are no two alike in the series."

Coronado donated several pieces of original art to the Project.

"We are deeply touched by Sam's generosity," said Rivas-Rodriguez. "These are beautiful pieces and I know they will be treasurers to those who get them."

The pieces of original art themselves also present the Project with opportunity—they could be sold as fund-raisers; they might be part of a traveling exhibit to raise awareness about the Latino experience during WWII.

"We're exploring several possibilities," said Rivas-Rodriguez. "We want to make sure to have the best showcase for Sam's artwork possible."



This photo was taken in Mission, TX, spring 1945, outside Esteban Garcia's parent's home. Garcia's brother, Pvt. Daniel R. Garcia, is in the casket. He was killed in action in Iwo Jima on March 2, 1945.



Richard Candelaria on Dec. 5, 1944 at the R.A.F. in Wattisham, England, home base of the 479th Fighter Group and the 435th Fighter Sqdn.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Sam Coronado began his career as an artist in 1969, when he was hired as a technical illustrator at Texas Instruments, and has worked in the graphic arts field ever since. He has owned art studios in Dallas, Houston, and Austin, and has illustrated books and magazines in the United States, Mexico, and France. He has created logos for companies such as the Pedernales Electric Cooperative and has illustrated magazine articles for Hispanic Magazine.

He started painting in oils and acrylics and has experimented in various media including printmaking techniques, which eventually led to his latest endeavor, serigraphy. His graphic art skills have always kept his fine art alive and well. His artwork has been exhibited in the United States, Mexico, Europe and Africa.

In Austin, Texas, he was a co-founder of Mexic-Arte Museum, the state's official Mexican and Mexican-American art museum. He also founded the Serie Project, a non-profit organization with a mission to create and promote serigraph prints created by Latino artists and others in a workshop environment. Artists from Texas, the United States, and abroad have participated in this project. In conjunction with Coronado Studio, a print shop that produces screen-prints exclusively, the Serie Project administers and produces fine art prints, which travel at exhibition venues around the world.

Since 1986, Coronado has taught art and lectured on Chicano art in numerous museums, art schools, and universities throughout the United States. He is currently a professor at Austin Community College in the Visual Communication department in Austin, Texas.

From Coronado's web site: www.coronadostudio.com



Julia Aguillon in Laredo, Texas in 1943.



Ester Perez, 1945 in Hawaii. Having fun with her friends, María Guerra (left) and Consuela Doria (middle) at Hicken Field.

VETERANS VISIT METZ ELEMENTARY

Veterans from WWII to the present were met with thunderous applause during a Veteran's Day celebration at Metz Elementary in Austin.

On November 9, more than 30 veterans were in attendance, including three of the Project's participants. Ramon Galindo, Alvino Mendoza and Jesse Guajardo went to the elementary to share their experiences with the students as part of The History Channel's "Take a Vet to School Day."

"The kids have been learning about you all week," Jennifer Atkinson, a first-grade teacher at the school said while preparing the veterans for the event. "You're going to be like rock stars to them."

As patriotic songs played through a speaker system, the children clapped and cheered as veterans from WWII to the present day entered their cafeteria.

In order to prepare for the event, the children learned about the holiday and why it's celebrated; they also wrote essays, which were posted along the hallways, along with cards that expressed the children's pride and gratitude. The hallways were decorated with red, white and blue banners.

After a school-wide assembly, during which the children read quotes about freedom and sang patriotic songs, the veterans went to classrooms in order to share their experiences with the children.

The veterans taught the children about their

experiences through photos and even a little magic.

Mendoza joked that his age might prevent the children from seeing him as a war veteran.

"They probably won't believe us because we're old men," he said with a smile. "My grand kids don't pay attention to me."

Mendoza added he was glad for a new audience.

Mendoza, who served in the Pacific Theater, spoke to a group of fourth graders, who asked him questions about his war experiences.

"Everybody that grew up with me was leaving," he told the children. "And I felt I had to do my part."

Elvia Whitten, a bilingual kindergarten teacher, said she was glad the children got to meet the veterans, who were seen as positive role models.

"Our kids ... need to see somebody like them, that speaks the same language, that looks like them," she

said. "They need to see that they can achieve their goals, they can have a successful life."

Galindo, who served in the European Theater, spoke in Spanish to a group of kindergarten children. He even shared his love of magic with them, performing a few tricks he's picked up during his magic career.

"I had a very good time," Galindo said. "I enjoyed every bit of it. I saw so many happy faces, so many young faces. It was quite an experience."



Mr. Ramon Galindo (right) shakes hands with a teacher, Marissa Rodriguez (left), after speaking to a pre-kinder class at Metz Elementary.

THE PROJECT CELEBRATES VETERAN'S DAY

For Veteran's Day, Dr. Rivas-Rodriguez spoke to an audience at UT Brownsville. Her speech focused on Brownsville-area veterans of World War II who have been interviewed by the Project, and about the Latino WWII experience in general.

"It was a perfect, sunny, blustery day," Rivas-Rodriguez said. "It was wonderful to connect with our

Brownsville supporters, and to meet new friends."

The event also brought attention to the Project's Defend the Honor campaign, which raises awareness for WWII veterans' issues.

Meanwhile, in Austin, Raquel Garza, project manager, participated in a Veteran's Day event held at the Lorraine "Grandma" Camacho

Activity Center.

During the event, which served a free barbecue lunch to veterans and their families, Garza sold books and buttons to support the Project.

She also spoke with several families to inform them about The Project's interviewing efforts and even found two new veterans to interview for the Project.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT



Leno Diaz

Interviewed: April 6, 2007 by Raquel C. Garza
in his home in San Antonio, Texas

When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, Leno Diaz wanted to enlist.

However, as a Mexican national, he was turned away from every military branch.

Diaz wouldn't have to wait long for his chance to serve—he was drafted on November 21, 1942 and served in the China-Burma-India Theater as part of the 770th Bomb Squadron, 462d Bomb Group, and in Okinawa as part of the 1505th.

"It wasn't a hardship," he said. "No trauma. No wounds ... I got shot with other things. Ambition, desire to become better educated, that was my shot, that was my wounds."

While serving in the CBI Theater, Diaz said he was one of only two Hispanics in his company where he worked as an airplane mechanic.

He said that he and his fellow company members bonded during their time in the service.

"I got the wonderful experience to know people from different cultures, different sections of the country, different dialects, accents, education," Diaz said. "It was a family."

Diaz was discharged in November 1945 as a sergeant; he returned home to his family in Los Angeles.

After the war, Diaz worked as an electrician for some time before passing the GED and deciding to pursue a higher education. He earned his bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1953. He later earned his master's degree in school administration from California State University. He retired in 1979 after more than 25 years of teaching for the San Bernardino City Unified School District.

He married Elisa Gonzalez in 1949 and the couple had two children, Eduardo and Katharine.

Benigno "Tony" Gaytan

Interviewed: August 4, 2007 by Amanda Peña
in San Antonio, Texas

At 17, Benigno "Tony" Gaytan worked as a stock boy at a five-and-dime store in Laredo, Texas. The war had been raging for more than a year and young Tony found it ironic that clay toys he was unpacking at the store were marked "Made in Japan." Soon enough, he would find himself in the Pacific, battling for his life and his country.

Born in Laredo on February 13, 1926, Gaytan had 11 siblings—eight brothers and three sisters. He attended St. Augustine school in Laredo and completed the eighth grade. He would marry Francisca Carrillo in the adjoining St. Augustine Church in May 1950.

The couple had seven children, five sons and two daughters. Two of his sons would follow their father into military service.

Gaytan joined the Navy on August 30, 1943 and was assigned to the USS Telfair. Gaytan said there were only two other Mexicans on board the ship, but feelings or anxiety of segregation never existed.

"I always feel at the top," he said. "I never feel like I'm lower than anyone else—especially in the Navy—no matter what rank."

The Telfair was part of the Western Islands Attack Group, and was responsible for securing the anchorage at Kerama Retto, prior to the Okinawa invasion, according to the Dictionary of American Naval Ships, maintained by the Navy. On April 2, 1945 the task group was jumped by 10 or more kamikazes. According to the dictionary's Web site, the Telfair and her sister ship Goodhue "... were attacked by three planes in rapid succession." The two ships combined to explode one in mid-air. A second, after ricocheting between her starboard and port kingposts, smashed into Telfair's bulwark, then careened over the side. The third crashed into Goodhue's cargo boom and sank.

Gaytan said he was 50 to 100 feet away when the airplane hit: "I could have got killed right there," he said.

"I fell off real bad," he said, wincing at the memory of an injury to his right knee, tapping his leg lightly. "Still I can hear those bullets," he said, making whooshing sounds, "hitting right at us."

Gaytan was honorably discharged on January 11, 1946, having earned the rank of Seaman Second Class.

Despite the years passed since his time in the Pacific, his memories remain immovable.

"You got to live with it. That's all it is. You live with it. That's all," Gaytan said.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT



Julius Moreno

Interviewed: August 4, 2007 by Anna Flores Peña
in San Antonio, Texas

Julius Moreno's father made sure his children had a good education.

"We had a deal that he wouldn't take us out of school to help the family with money as long as we remained in school and graduated," Moreno said.

Moreno and all eight of his brothers and sisters graduated from Boling High School in Boling, Texas, about 60 miles outside of Houston. Moreno graduated in 1942 and worked in the neighborhood dry cleaners.

In January 1944, Moreno enlisted in the Army Air Corps with aspirations of becoming a pilot. Although Moreno didn't qualify, he was made a gunner and specialized as a radio operator in a B-24. He trained as an aerial gunner and then as part of a crew before he was sent to southern Italy as part of the 15th Air Force.

Moreno's crew was assigned to the 859th Bomb Squadron. His crew would fly into Axis territory and drop "agents, tons of arms and supplies" to resistance groups on the ground, he later wrote to the Project.

Moreno returned home from the war uninjured; he was honorably discharged as a staff sergeant in March 1946. He served in the Air Force reserves from 1946 to 1949 and then again from 1950 to 1953.

Moreno attended Texas A&M University and earned a degree in industrial engineering. He married Alice Herrera and the couple has a daughter, Sandra Moreno Werner. Moreno also has three grandchildren.

Moreno worked as an engineer for Kelly Air Force Base for 35 years. In his retirement, Moreno enjoys helping the poor by volunteering at the Christian Assistance Ministry and is active in his church, Covenant Presbyterian Church.

María Cristina Parra

Interviewed: August 4, 2007 by Elvia O. Perez
in San Antonio, Texas

In 1941, María Pozos Parra was only 14 years old when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. As a teen, she knew little about war and what would happen to the country.

"We were very scared," she recalled. "At that point, we didn't understand what war was."

Born in Corpus Christi, Texas to Cristobal Pozos and Guadalupe Ramirez Pozos, Maria and her family soon moved to San Antonio. There, her father worked teaching cane weaving. Her mother cared for Maria and her older siblings Domingo and Maria Gudelia.

Parra recalled playing with her older brother and sister. Her mother soon had another son, Francisco, just shortly after her father passed away.

Parra's oldest sister left school to help the family. Their mother eventually remarried and Parra and all of her siblings were able to attend school.

Parra said she learned about the war from her brother Domingo, who later joined the Army and served in the Pacific. He made them a crystal radio set and they would listen to the reports.

Parra also recalled the newspaper criers calling out the day's headlines.

In January 1945, Parra graduated from Fox Tech High School where she took secretarial courses. Parra took a job as a clerk at Randolph Field (later named Randolph Air Force Base).

"It was a very good job," she recalled. "I helped my mama a lot."

Parra recalled the shortage of workers at the time.

"I passed my test and I went right to work because they didn't have enough trained people," she said.

Parra met her husband, Ambrosio Parra, in 1946. Ambrosio Parra had served in the Navy during WWII on the USS *Suwanee*.

The couple met at Randolph Field where Ambrosio Parra worked as a machinist. They dated for several years before they married on December 1, 1952. They had seven children, five of whom survived into adulthood.

Parra recalled stories of her husband's service as well as the wound he received on Nagasaki—a radiation burn on his ankle that never completely healed. María Parra said the war was a catalyst for change for the Latino community.

"The respect came after the war."

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Frances Correa Reyes

Interviewed: August 4, 2007 by Elvia O. Perez
in San Antonio, Texas

Frances Correa had a difficult childhood, but she gained a loving and supportive family when she married Christopher Reyes.

Mrs. Reyes was born Mar. 9, 1925, in San Antonio. Reyes' mother left her and her sister Sally behind with their grandparents.

"Finally she left us, and she made her own life, and she would come to see us but my grandmother told her, 'You don't take these children,'" Reyes said.

Reyes went to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic School, where she attended church twice daily. She enjoyed the friendships with some of the girls at her school. However, the many-mile walk prevented her from continuing her education.

"Several times I just couldn't get there in time and naturally, they didn't like that," she said. "We couldn't go to any other school and we couldn't afford to get on the bus, so I had to quit."

One day, while at a local movie theater with her cousins, she met her future husband, Christopher. He had enlisted in the Army in 1938 and served in the Headquarters Detachment of the 1st Battalion, 12th Field Artillery Regiment; he also played bugle for their drum and bugle corps.

The two began dating and were married in 1941; the same year that President Roosevelt declared war against Japan. Reyes' husband was soon deployed to Europe.

Their daughter Sylvia was born on November 11, 1942 with a bowel obstruction. Reyes remembers taking her child to a hospital in San Antonio.

Reyes' mother-in-law helped Reyes raise her daughter and found a retired doctor in the neighborhood to help with Sylvia's problems. The relationship that formed between Frances and her mother-in-law was close.

"When we use to go out, I would tell people that I was her daughter in law, but she would say 'No, that's my daughter,'" she said.

Frances remembers the day that the war was declared over, which meant Christopher's return.

"I was happy," she said.

After the abandonment by her mother, Reyes found the true meaning of family and established an even better relationship with her husband.

"We had a good partnership," she said.



Alex Rodriguez

In 1998, Rodriguez typed out his story, his son provided the manuscript to the Project.

Alex Rodriguez of San Antonio joined the Texas National Guard in November 1940; soon after, his unit was federalized.

As part of the 1st Battalion of the 141st Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division, his year in the service was uneventful. However, on December 6, 1941, before he had begun the discharge process, he heard an unusual radio program.

"I ran out of my tent trying to find someone else to listen to it because I knew no one would believe me later," he wrote. "But everybody was taking a nap."

It didn't take long for him to understand that this wasn't a show; the United States declared war on Japan.

After intensive training, Rodriguez crossed the Atlantic in 1943.

He served in North Africa and took part in the Invasion of Salerno in September 1943.

During the battle, Rodriguez was taken prisoner and spent the remainder of the war in POW camps. He was taken to Stalag VIIA, Stalag IIB, Stalag IIIB and Stalag IVA.

He recalled the harsh treatment, the scant meals and the hope the men gave to one another.

After being liberated, Rodriguez and other POWs were taken to a hospital in Birmingham, England. Rodriguez had every comfort he'd lacked in the prison camps, but his body was not used to it. For many nights, he slept on the floor.

He was honorably discharged in September 1945.

Once home, he entered the civil service and worked for more than three decades in San Antonio's four military installations.

He married Lydia Perales on February 16, 1947. The couple had two children, Alex Rodriguez Jr. and Delia Rodriguez.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Bob Sanchez

Interviewed: July 7, 2007 by Marcell Rodríguez
in McAllen, Texas

At age 17, Bob Sanchez enlisted in the U.S. Navy after two close friends were killed in combat. It was 1945 and his choice would set his life in a bold new direction.

From naval intelligence, to the University of Texas at Austin, to practicing as a trial lawyer and activist in the Rio Grande Valley, WWII instilled in Sanchez a determination to make the world a better place.

Born in Laredo in 1927, Sanchez was reared in relative poverty. As a young man, he had a political conscience, which he attributes to his father, Trinidad Sánchez. His father always encouraged his children to pursue education.

Sanchez's father allowed his son to enlist and Sanchez was stationed at the Office of U.S. Naval Intelligence in Washington D.C. Sanchez considered himself a full part of the military, and that aura of purpose and inclusion elevated his sense of confidence. He was discharged in 1946, having earned the rank of Seaman First Class.

Taking advantage of the GI Bill, Sanchez enrolled in UT Austin and earned his degree in 1950.

In 1948, Sanchez was a founding member of the American G.I. Forum. In 1949 and 1950, AGIF began "pay your poll tax" drives in South Texas to register disenfranchised voters. Sanchez worked to eliminate the poll tax as a requirement to vote.

They registered enough Mexican-American voters to make them the majority of the electorate in the area. This marked a key shift in the political power in that region. The drives helped bring about the election of Hispanics across South Texas.

He received his law degree from South Texas Law School in 1953. Afterwards, a fellow law school graduate had the idea for them to open a firm in McAllen, Texas.

Sanchez attributes WWII with imbuing in him and other Mexican Americans the courage and sense of justice that fueled their fight for civil rights. Exposed to other ways of life, he saw "how the other half lived." He and his family, which included six cousins, as well as friends who fought in WWII, were determined to tackle the problems of inequality and injustice.

"WWII was a catalyst and changed things in America," he said.



Joaquin Amorós Santiago

Interviewed: July 10, 2004 by his niece Carmen Amorós
in a hotel courtyard in Patillas, Puerto Rico

Joaquin Amorós Santiago fought alongside his fellow Puerto Ricans in the 65th Infantry Regiment during World War II.

Amorós was born in Guayama, Puerto Rico, on Aug. 25, 1921, to Pedro José Amorós and Santos Santiago.

Due to economic restraints, Amorós attended classes in Guayama up to the seventh grade.

He worked in radio before the war as an announcer at the WPAP radio station; he also worked with marketing the station. He also sang with *orchestras* and *conjuntos*.

Since Amorós was still a minor when he wanted to volunteer to serve in the war, his father signed his papers.

His unit was sent to Italy and then to France and arrived two days after the U.S. forces had invaded Marseilles. From there, he said, they went to Germany, where they learned of Hitler's death.

His regiment remained in Germany and participated in the occupation of the country following the end of combat.

Amorós and his fellow soldiers stayed for three to four months and then left in November 1945 when he was discharged.

"We returned to Puerto Rico, with a warm welcome from the Puerto Rican government. At that time we were the heroes of the 65th Infantry."

After the war, Amorós returned to his radio work, and married his young neighbor, Julia Vasquez.

His communication training in the army served him in his career as well, his niece Carmen Amorós wrote the Project.

Later he moved to New York and got a job at the Hotel Taft.

Upon retiring, he returned to Puerto Rico and worked in communication at the central post office.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Gilbert S. Treviño

Interviewed: August 4, 2007 by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez
in San Antonio, Texas

Gilbert S. Treviño, born in Laredo, Texas, was 19 years old when he began his military career.

He was drafted into the United States Marine Corps in May 1944.

Five months later, he was shipped to Iwo Jima as part of Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Regiment, 3d Marine Division.

By the end of the war, all three of his brothers had served in the military—one in the Marines, one in the Army and one in the Navy.

“You know, our family has always been very strongly oriented towards the military,” Treviño said, adding his grandfather and great-grandfather had also served.

Treviño was wounded in Japan when a mortar exploded and made him deaf. However, he didn’t report his injury immediately.

“I wanted to stay with my buddies during the battle even though it was very hard for me to hear,” Treviño said, adding he is completely deaf without his hearing aid.

After being discharged on February 15, 1946, he returned to Texas A&M to continue his education.

He earned his doctoral degree from the college of veterinary medicine in 1952.

While standing in line to receive his degree, he noticed a Western Union messenger, waiting among the graduates.

“I opened up the telegram and it said, ‘Greetings, you are hereby ordered to go to Corpus Christi Naval Base to take a physical to go to the Korean War,’” Treviño said.

He served in the U.S. Army and his new military duties were to inspect food, take charge of the small animal clinic and care for an old horse named Pat.

Horse duty was the most important, he said.

Treviño recalled a commander saying, “If you allow this horse to die on your watch, I’m going to send you to Korea on the first available plane.”

He retired from the Army as a colonel in 1976.

Treviño said he enjoyed his time in the Army more than the Marines because of the high level of racism in the Marines.

“Racial bigotry is slowly being erased from this country. Not entirely, there is still too much of it,” Treviño said.



Antonio Uribe

Interviewed: June 1, 2007 by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez
and Henry Mendoza in Corona, Calif.

Antonio Uribe felt military service changed him from boy to a man. Uribe, who served on a submarine during WWII, was born in San Ygnacio, Texas on January 13, 1925. He is the eldest of five children born to Alfredo Eloy Uribe and Esther Sanchez. As a young child his family moved to Laredo, Texas.

A chance meeting with a Navy chief in Laredo changed his life. With his parents’ blessing, Uribe left Laredo for boot camp in San Diego.

Uribe was instructed on flag signaling, Morse Code, and navigation. After his graduation the Navy announced that they were offering submarine service, and Uribe volunteered.

When asked why, Uribe laughed and said “because I was crazy.”

Uribe passed all of his training and in March of 1944 he was assigned to serve on the Submarine USS Sunfish SS-281. His primary duties were to correct navigation charts and ensure that all of the clocks ran correctly.

The submarine was sent to “seek and destroy” Japanese ships. Uribe served as a lookout, and stood on top of the submarine when it cruised to the surface, keeping a close eye on the horizon for the appearance of enemy ships.

His first glimpse of war came when he and another lookout spotted an anchored ship. After signaling the ship to identify, a Japanese merchant flag was raised and the submarine immediately fired torpedoes at the vessel.

Uribe was approximately 100 miles from Tokyo Bay when he and his fellow servicemen learned that Japan had surrendered.

Uribe was discharged from the military in December 1945. He married Josefina Solíz on November 30, 1957.

When asked what he remembers most of his participation in WWII, Uribe replies that it was a night while on lookout duty when a full moon graced the sky and he saw “the beautiful volcano in Japan” referring to Mt. Fuji.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Guy Vasquez

Interviewed: November 11, 2006 by Natasha Samreny
in Tampa, Fla. at the Veteran's Center

The United State's entry in WWII disrupted many lives and put many dreams on hold, including those of Guy Vasquez.

Vasquez was a first-year premed student at the University of Tampa and planned to advance his studies to medical school when he was drafted into the Navy in 1944.

Vasquez was the son of Sicilian and Spanish parents, his mother being Sicilian and his father being both nationalities; he learned quickly the value of hard work.

He helped his father and uncle operate their awning business and family farm.

Vasquez was sworn in at Camp Blanding in Florida before boarding a train for boot camp in Bainbridge, Md.

He enrolled in the Navy's hospital corps school and received medical training. Vasquez worked for Bethesda Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Md.

The Navy soon sent him to San Francisco. From there, Vasquez set sail for a two and a half month trip, which took the long route to pick up other seamen in Hawaii and avoid enemy ships.

The ship arrived in Samar, Philippines in 1944. He would later serve in Manila for two years.

Vasquez, a pharmacist mate second class, had many responsibilities including serving on the malaria control unit—where he tested water, sprayed pesticide once a week and treated soldiers.

Though Vasquez knew he was far enough away from the battle to not be hit by gunfire, the threat of the Japanese airplanes made him anxious, he said.

The emotional strain of the war made it difficult for Vasquez to operate at times, but he drew upon God and the thought of his girlfriend to keep him going.

Vasquez said he did suffer from a large amount of discrimination, and was able to speak some Spanish with the Filipinos he met during his service.

His brother, Manuel, also served in the Navy and fought in the Battle of Okinawa.

Vasquez was discharged in May 1946. He returned to the U.S. and married Virginia Sweigart that year.

The couple had two children, Bruce and Linda. Vasquez returned to school, and later, took over his father's business in Tampa.



Willie Vila

Interviewed: November 11, 2006 by Dulcinea Cuellar
in Tampa, Fla.

For Willie Vila, who served as a sniper in the Marine Corps in the Pacific, the only way to make it through World War II alive was to kill or be killed.

Vila, who was 16 when he enlisted, began his military service a month after Pearl Harbor was attacked.

He and his older brother Joe, who was 17, went to the local Marines recruiter in Orlando and lied about their ages after being rejected in Tampa.

Vila first experienced combat during the Battle of Guadalcanal, the first major battle between the Allied forces and Japan and lasted six months.

As a sniper, Vila headed off to crawl through the jungle looking for Japanese soldiers.

He always took his dog, Wolf, who growled when he heard the enemy and pointed his nose in their direction, showing Vila where to aim his rifle. Wolf was the best part of being a sniper, Vila said.

Later, Vila went into Okinawa's jungles to snipe with Wolf, where he got malaria and appendicitis. He stayed in the hospital until his division left for China, which was Vila's last stop before returning home.

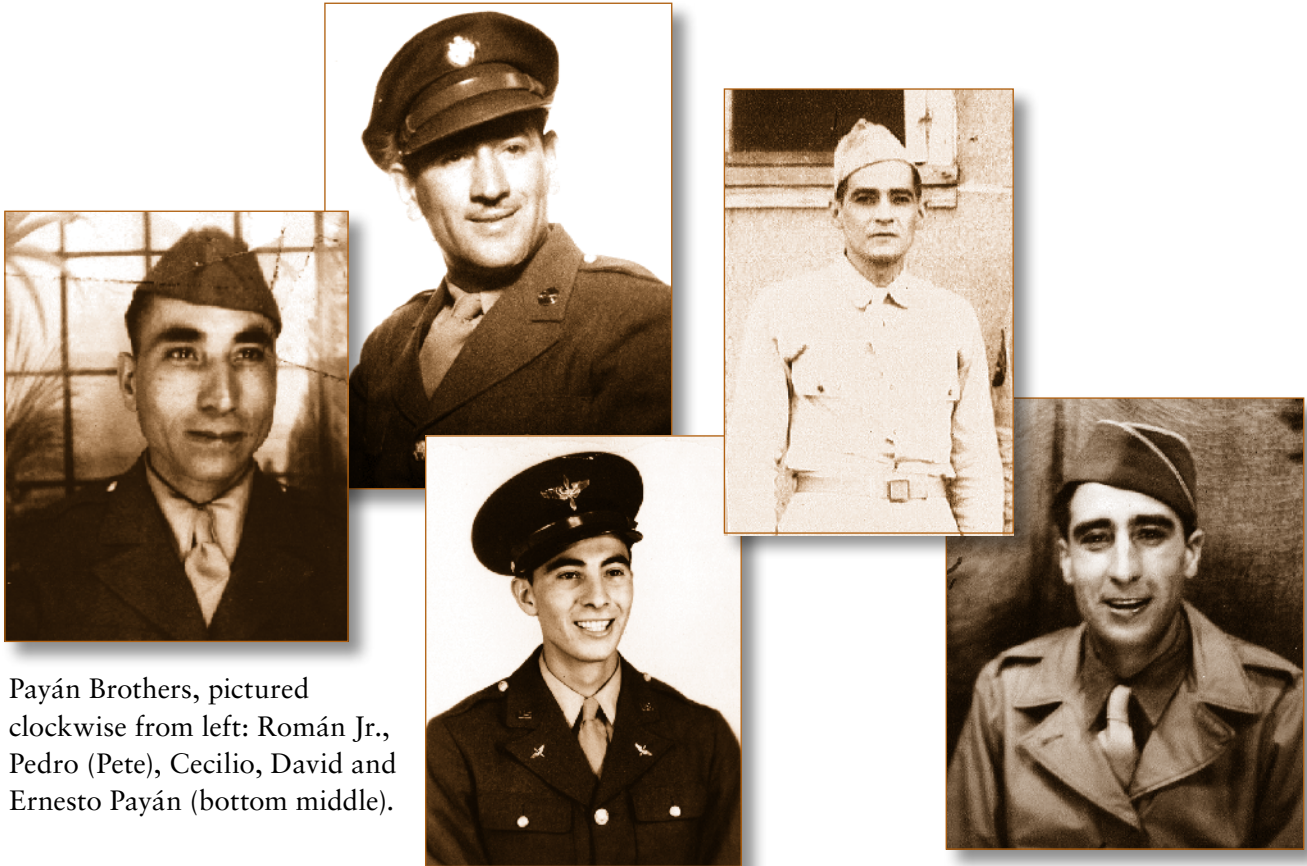
Upon arriving at his home on Cherry Street, he found an ecstatic family and three new siblings.

Vila married Dora DeDiego in 1947. The couple had two daughters, Denise and Nancy.

It was Vila's daughters who found and framed all of his World War II medals, awards and patches, including his three American Purple Hearts, a Navy Cross and the French Purple Heart. The city of West Tampa dedicated a park to Vila and his six brothers, who all served in the United States military.

"That feels good, they remember something," Vila said.

TRIBUTE FROM THE PROJECT



Payán Brothers, pictured clockwise from left: Román Jr., Pedro (Pete), Cecilio, David and Ernesto Payán (bottom middle).

Payán Brothers

Tribute provided by Eleanor Payán, niece to Román, Pedro, Cecilio, David and Ernesto Payán

Eleanor Payán was only a small child when five of her uncles went to fight against the Axis powers during World War II.

In her home town of El Paso, Texas, she recalled her uncles visiting home while on furlough; their uniforms clean and pressed and their shoes polished to a high sheen.

Payán's grandparents, Román Payán Sr. and Leonarda Molina Payán, were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States in 1907.

The couple had nine children: Ester, Elena, Román, Miguel, Pedro, Cecilio, Fernando, David and Ernesto. Of the seven brothers, five would serve their country during WWII: Roman, Pedro, Cecilio, David and Ernesto. Payán's father, Fernando, was not accepted for service as he failed a hearing test.

Román served in the U.S. Army as a member of the 47th Airborne Division; his service records were lost. He died in November 1995.

Pedro served as a member of the Texas Defense Guard and later served his country during WWII; his service

records were unavailable. He died in May 1973.

Cecilio also served in the Army in the European Theater as part of the U.S. Army. He fought in Algeria and the French Morocco, Tunisia and Sicily. He received the Purple Heart on September 10, 1943. He died in 1979.

David served in the 48th Engineer Battalion in the U.S. Army. He also fought in the European Theater and took part in the D-Day Invasion at Normandy. He died in September 2000.

Ernesto served in the U.S. Army in the Pacific Theater. He died in August 1983.

In 1945, Payán and her family got the news she had been waiting for.

"It was a joyous memory and an unforgettable moment when I heard 'the war is over!'"

Payán recalled attending a parade for the returning soldiers. She made confetti by tearing up newspapers. She went to a two-story building and raced up the stairs.

"I ran to an open window and threw the confetti out onto the street," she wrote. "My five uncles all came safely home."

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