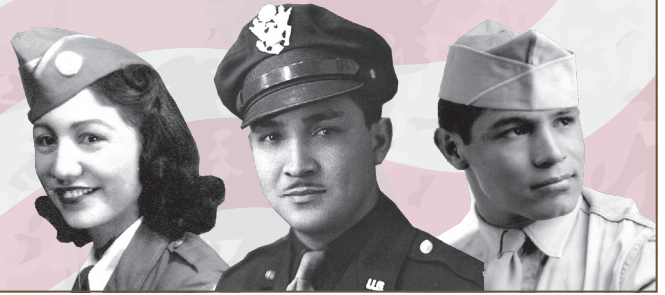


Special Issue, No. 09, Fall 2008

Insider NARRATIVES



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



COME JOIN US IN CELEBRATING A GREAT MILESTONE

10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY APPROACHES

It's hard to believe that in about one year, we will achieve a great milestone—the 10th anniversary of the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project.

It has been a remarkable journey involving thousands of people who have lent their time and skills to bring us to this point. With that in mind, we hope you and your family will join us in our 10-year celebration here in Austin next year, on Friday and Saturday, **October 2 and 3, 2009**.

While this announcement comes a year before the event, we wanted to make sure to give everyone enough time to plan the trip. Judging by how fast the past nine years have flown by, we know that before we know it, October 2009 will be here.

We plan to celebrate with a gala dinner at the new AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center on the University of Texas at Austin campus.

We will also host a one-day national conference the next day to discuss the future of the Project and to hold informational sessions on conducting oral history interviews, as well as other topics.

The conference center will be extending special hotel room rates for those who wish to stay the night.

More detailed information will be mailed out in the spring.

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the past nine years, we have traveled the country and met many great men and women who have shared their stories with us. To date, we've interviewed more than 650 men and women of the WWII generation. We will be traveling to McAllen

this fall to interview more and, of course, we continue to accept interviews and tributes.

Along the way, we've met many wonderful people who have volunteered their time, equipment and even their own money to travel to videotape these interviews and fill out the required paperwork. We've met countless others who have spread the word. We are thankful for their efforts.

We have had a great group of students and professional staff in our office, often volunteering their time to interview, to create exhibits and to make events happen. Many still volunteer or keep in touch with the Project long after their careers have taken them on other paths. We are grateful for their hard work.

We have published two books, "Mexican Americans and WWII" (UT Press, 2005) and "A Legacy Greater Than Words," (self-published, distributed by UT Press, 2006, reprinted in 2007). A third book is scheduled for publication in 2009. It is called "Beyond the Latino World War II Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of a Generation," and is a collection of scholarly essays inspired by the Project and edited by Drs. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and Emilio Zamora.

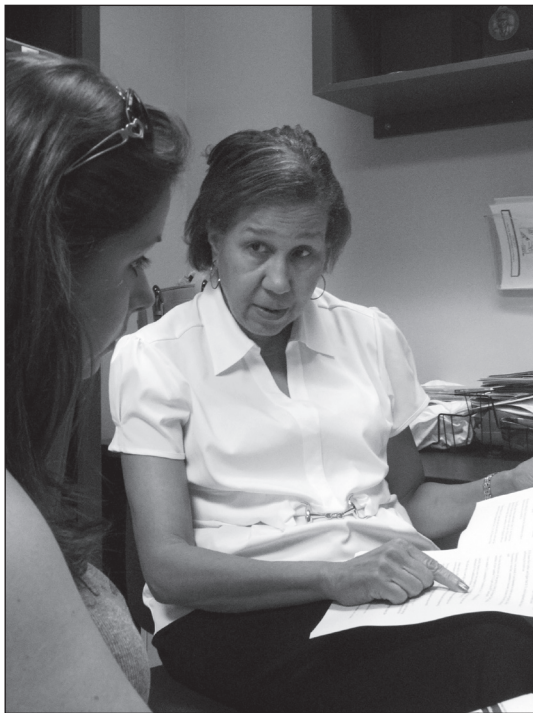
We have brought our veterans to the nation's attention, making sure that they were included in the 2004 WWII Reunion in Washington, D.C. and in the 2007 PBS documentary on WWII.

None of our efforts would be possible without the generous support we've received over the years. We hope that you will continue to help the Project flourish and expand.

With your help, we have accomplished much these past years and we look forward to celebrating with you and your family in 2009.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: BOBBI BOWMAN



NAME: Bobbi Bowman

BIRTHPLACE: Lynchburg, VA

RESIDENCE: McLean, VA

(From right: LaBarbara "Bobbi" Bowman edits the work of journalism junior Sarah Danielle Flahrity at the University of Texas, Austin. Bowman, Diversity Director at the American Society of Newspaper Editors, is speaking in classes and helping Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project.)

This fall, our friend Bobbi Bowman flew down to Texas from Virginia to edit stories written for the U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project.

This is the first time that Bowman worked with Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez's journalism students. Bowman, who works for the American Society of Newspaper Editors as their diversity director, was more than happy to work with these students on their stories.

Bowman is also an enthusiastic student of WWII. Project Manager Raquel Garza recalled meeting Bowman at the International Conference on WWII at the National WWII Museum in 2006.

"She was very interested in listening to the first-hand accounts told by veterans and others who experienced the war firsthand," Garza said.

On this trip, Bowman worked with students over the course of four days to make sure that their stories of our interview subjects' accounts would do them justice.

We're thankful for her hard work and of course, to the students for sharing their talents.

We hope she'll join us again next year!

How did you first learn of the Project?

Maggie told me about the project.

What made you decide to volunteer?

Maggie asked me and no one says no to Maggie. Particularly not a World War II fanatic like me. I was thrilled with the invitation.

I know you're very knowledgeable about WWII, what sparked your interest?

When I saw my first B-17, it was love at first sight.

What do you like best about working with students?

Their enthusiasm. Their curiosity. The desire to sometimes learn more about what their grandfathers and grandmothers did in the war that saved the world.

What advice do you have for future volunteers?

Come and have a great time working with wonderful students and learning much more about all facets of the war.

Anything you would like to add?

Generation Y must understand and appreciate what the World War II airmen, soldiers, Marines and sailors did. They literally saved the world. We must pass on these stories. Their stories of heroism, fear, racism, discrimination and uncommon valor can NEVER disappear into the mists of history.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: THE JASSO SISTERS



(From left: Joycelyn J. Cavazos, Marilyn Jasso, and Evelyn J. Garcia standing next to a painting Evelyn's daughter, Adriana, created of the Jasso brothers and their mom).

NAME:

Evelyn Jasso-Garcia, interviewer
Joycelyn Jasso-Cavasos, volunteer
Marilyn Jasso, volunteer

BIRTHPLACE: San Antonio, Texas (all of us)

RESIDENCE: San Antonio, Texas (all of us)

The Jasso sisters have been active and vocal supporters of the Project since Evelyn Jasso-Garcia interviewed their father in 2001. They've volunteered at interview sessions and even helped organize protests of the Ken Burns documentary in 2007.

We're proud to count them among our friends.

How did your first hear about the project?

My dad had read an article about the project in the San Antonio Express-News in 2000. ... My dad, mom and I later attended the first symposium on the Project ... where we met Maggie. My dad thanked her for documenting their stories but politely reprimanded her for not commencing this project at least 10 years (before) so his brothers and brothers-in-law could have shared their stories. (They were all deceased).

Why did you decide to volunteer?

Maggie is a very good recruiter. She recommended that I interview my dad. I believe in the Project and (its) importance.... I began interviewing my dad on Father's Day 2000. It took me 8 hours or eight "Sundays with Dad." I was hooked on his story and I wanted to get it right since I realized I was historically illiterate about WWII and its magnitude. ... I think it took me so long because I felt I was doing five interviews. I wanted my dad to tell me their story too since my uncles were no longer with us.

What was it like to interview your father?

It is up there as "one of the best things" I did with my dad. In addition to filling out that "fifty page questionnaire," I had him swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. You have to keep in mind

that I was interviewing the "cabezudo" (hardheaded) one of the family. My mom was present during most of the interviews to keep us both in check (Turns out I'm cabezuda too!). Dad had a tremendous pride in being born in America, going to WWII, working at Kelly Air Force Base and being in Texas Air National Guard post WWII. We grew up attending military parades at Kelly or Lackland. One of his desires was that I would follow in his footsteps by joining the Army Nurse Corps during nursing school. I didn't. This was the late sixties and I wanted to participate in ending war but the wars on poverty, injustice, and the like. So dad was being interviewed about WWII by his most radical daughter.

Anything unusual happen during the interview?

I really enjoyed the side stories such as the song "La Despidida" that soldiers in San Antonio requested at night clubs prior to leaving to war. During the interview I asked him to sing it and he did the best he could. I went to Janie's Record Shop to look for it and she knew exactly what I was talking about. The next interview I played the CD for my parents and they sang along.

I also enjoyed the letters from home (mainly from his sister). ... I had my dad read the letter from home informing him that his dad had passed away. Dad was in Leopoldville when he received the letter from his brother, Frank, two weeks after the death of his dad. As he read it, he cried. It was emotional.

What advice do you have for future volunteers?

If your relatives are still living, interview them. My dad was 84 when I interviewed him.

Complete the questionnaire first. It will serve as a template for your interview. Take your time. One hour a week till you are done is good.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ELVIA O. PEREZ



NAME: Elvia O. Perez

BIRTHPLACE: Friona, Texas

RESIDENCE: San Antonio, Texas

Elvia O. Perez began volunteering with the Project in 2007 as a translator, when she was asked to put her linguistic skills to good use by her daughter, Raquel Garza, who manages the Project.

Since then, Perez has found new interview subjects and conducted interviews. Over the past two years, she has been a volunteer we can always count on.

The Project is grateful for all of her contributions.

How did you first hear about the Project?

I first heard of the Project through my daughter, Raquel Garza. She was an undergraduate student at UT and became involved as a volunteer through her professor (and the Project's founder), Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez. A couple of years after graduation, she became the Project's manager! I am so proud of her and the work she is doing!

Why did you decide to volunteer?

In addition to my daughter's power of persuasion, I feel that documenting the experience of Latinos during the war is an important endeavor. Lots of Latino families were connected to the war in one form or other and too often, they don't even realize it! My own father served stateside. He was an only son and worked with his dad contracting labor to shear sheep in Washington, Montana and Colorado. This was important to the war effort as the wool was needed for uniforms and blankets. When he was drafted, his family appealed through their congressman; he was not granted an exemption from service but was stationed in California throughout the war. My own mother-in-law was a Latina "Rosie the Riveter." Throughout the war she worked at the Armory in San Antonio making the shells used by tank gunners!

Like I said, I volunteered because I feel that it's important for Latinos to know how they contributed to the most important cause of the 20th century: that of keeping the world free.

What did you take away from your experiences, translating and interviewing?

I've interviewed veterans in both English and Spanish and I've enjoyed it tremendously. Even as a kid I loved to talk to older people. I've always been fascinated with hearing about life and events from people who experienced them firsthand. Listening to veterans and their spouses talk about their trials, tribulations and triumphs has enriched my own life.

While interviewing in Spanish, I came to realize that these veterans were more comfortable speaking Spanish because it was their more fluent language; they had attended school and spoke English but often their formal education had only lasted 3 or 4 years. When translating their words, I've assiduously attempted to maintain the spirit and truth of their experience.

What do you think people can learn from the Project?

I think that people, society at large, can learn that Latinos are not all first-generation non-English speaking immigrants. Lots of us have deep roots in this country and we too have made important contributions to its well-being.

What advice do you have for future volunteers?

Don't wait, volunteer now! The generation that served in World War II is growing older and passing away. It's important to document as many of their stories as possible. Every veteran has a story, help him or her tell it. It will enrich your own life, I promise.

MIIS: MULTIPLE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SESSIONS

Even though summertime's a chance to slow down and take a break, the Project has been chugging along as much as ever.

In May, Project staff and volunteers did interviews in San Antonio and El Paso. In San Antonio we were able to interview 13 people and in El Paso we interviewed 9 people.

In July, we flew to San Diego for the NCLR convention and also conducted interviews with three veterans.

As always, we wish to thank our Project Staff for their hard work, time and effort, as well as the volunteers who joined us in San Antonio and El Paso.

The Project extends a special thanks to Kris Rodriguez in San Antonio and to Robert Rivas in El Paso. Without your dedication, we would not have been able to do all that we do!



Pictured left: Erasmo Lopez photographed at the San Antonio Veterans Center on May 3, 2008. (Photo by: Valentino Mauricio)



Lopez (right) and a friend hold a sign announcing the end of the war. The sign came from the Stars and Stripes newspaper.



MIIS PARTICIPANTS

EL PASO MIIS PARTICIPANTS

Felipe T. Roybal
Manuel Vera
Angel Romero
Bertha Parra
Ricardo Garcia
Juan Baez
Jose Molina
Manuel Calderon
Jose Salas

SAN DIEGO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Peter Chacon
Robert Cardenas
Carlos Montoya

SAN ANTONIO MIIS PARTICIPANTS

Ramiro Cortez
Ramiro Ramos
Ralph Montalvo
Emilio Torres
Alfred De La Cruz
Abel Vela
Angela Vela
Albert Caballero
Erasmo Lopez
Ismael Navarez
Baldomero Estala
Andrew Guzman
Arthur Munoz

2008 NCLR CONFERENCE



Pictured above: Carlos Montoya (left) and Rick Leal speak with convention participants at the Heroes and Heritage Luncheon during the NCLR conference. Montoya was one of the veterans interviewed by Project staff during the trip.

Pictured below: Dr. Jose “Pepe” Villarino and Jesus “Chuy” Valdez play a song to attract visitors to the Project’s Defend the Honor display at the NCLR conference in San Diego.



Project staff traded Austin’s heat and humidity for cooler temperatures when they attended the National Council of La Raza’s annual convention in San Diego.

Project Manager Raquel Garza and Marc Hamel, our new Visual Media Coordinator, attended the conference in July.

“This year, we had our own booth and we were so excited to be in San Diego,” Garza said. “We had a lot of people stop by to read up on the Ken Burns issue and also ask about volunteer and interview opportunities.”

The booth showcased a display on the Ken Burns/PBS issue and asked conference attendees to think about why we still have to fight for recognition for our contributions to the war effort.

In 2007, the Project was part of a grass-roots effort to insist that Ken Burns include Latino veterans in his documentary “The War.”

“The exhibit really made people stop and think,” Garza said. “It was a huge success.”

Gus Chavez, a longtime Project volunteer and cofounder of the Defend the Honor campaign, helped

distribute pamphlets about the Project and the DTH campaign.

We were also joined by musicians Dr. Jose “Pepe” Villarino, Jesus “Chuy” Valdez and Jorge “Profe” Rodriguez.

Villarino wrote and recorded a corrido “Los Soldados Olvidados de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.” The corrido expounds on the Ken Burns/PBS issue and reminds us of the valiant sacrifices made by the countless Latino men and women who served their country during WWII.

Having the musicians perform at the booth gave Hamel a chance to shoot some interactive photos.

“Pepe and Jesus not only played some great music that attracted people to the booth, but they also made them interested in the Project,” Hamel said. “It was great to have support from our friends in the San Diego area.”

Hamel conducted two interviews and also shot updated portraits of our veterans.

“This was my first trip with the Project and it was also my first chance to interact with the veterans involved,” Hamel said. “In talking with the people I interviewed and photographed, I heard some great stories.”

SEEKING INFORMATION: CAN YOU HELP?

DO YOU KNOW?

Janice Goldman is looking to locate WWII veteran Aurelio Armendariz who served in the 36th Texas Division, 142nd Infantry.

Ms. Goldman wrote the Project in March seeking Mr. Armendariz.

“He served in the same unit as my father, David Goldman, during the same time frame. I am doing research regarding my father's WWII experiences.”

If you know Mr. Armendariz, or also served in the

36th and have some information to share with Ms. Goldman, please contact her. You can reach her by email: jg2333@msn.com or by phone: (773) 502-5449.

If you have news to share, or are seeking someone, please contact the Project by emailing us at latinoarchives@www.utexas.edu. We will publish your request in the next edition of our newsletter.

POINTS OF PRIDE



Belisario Flores (above) was inducted into the Texas National Guard Hall of Honor at Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas.

Flores was interviewed by the Project in 2004 in San Antonio.

He was honored in July for 41 years of military service. He served from January 1945 until his retirement as a brigadier general in July 1986.

Congratulations, Mr. Flores!



Rudy Garza of Chicago sent the Project photos from the 60th and last annual reunion of the 76th Infantry Division Association.

Garza was interviewed for the Project in Chicago in 2002.

The reunion was held in October 2007 in Washington, D.C. About 300 people attended the event.

Garza (above, right) is pictured with fellow 76th member Pedro Lopez; the two also posed for a group shot of the 93 veterans who were in attendance.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT



Joe Bernal

Interviewed: February 12, 2006 by Mauricio Valentino
in San Antonio, Texas

Over the last 78 years, Joe Bernal has made service to his country a priority. Whether it was in the military, as a teacher or in the Texas State Legislature, Bernal dared to make a difference.

His first taste of politics came as a Student Council representative at Lanier High School. To encourage students to speak English, ribbons reading, "I'm an American, I speak English," were given out at the beginning of the week. As an advocate for bilingual education, he also noted that developing the ability to articulate an argument in English is just as important as being able to speak and write in two languages, the skills on which bilingual education focuses. As high school ended, Bernal knew the next step was not college but military service. After basic training in 1945 at Ft. Hood and extended training at Ft. Ord in California, he boarded a boat bound for places across the Pacific. He never saw combat, however, as a typing class earned him an eight to five desk job as an Air Command clerk in Tokyo.

Before leaving for war, he said he always felt like people looked at him as a Mexican. Upon his return from the Pacific, however, attitudes had changed, he said.

"There were towns outside of San Antonio where you couldn't get a haircut. On the West Side where I grew up, there were places in San Antonio where you couldn't buy a house. We came back from the service, we were the American soldiers," he said.

Both Bernal's bachelor's and master's degrees were paid for by the G.I. Bill. He attributed his subsequent earning of a Texas House of Representatives seat to the respect that elders had for him.

"I was a good Chicano. That's why they wanted me," he said. Chicanos were underrepresented at the time in the Texas Legislature.

"When I got into politics I found out that 80 percent of our people weren't finishing high school. Now it's 30 percent," he said.



Teresa Lozano Long

Interviewed: December 7, 2004 by Brenda Sendejo
in Austin, Texas

After graduating from high school as valedictorian, Teresa Lozano Long left Premont, Texas, for the University of Texas at Austin. She recalls being one of the few Mexican-American girls in her physical education classes.

"One day I was in my swimming class and I realized that I was the only Mexican-American girl," she said. "I thought, 'This is where I can help, give back. I'll have the opportunity to encourage young people.'"

After completing her master's degree, she took a job teaching physical education in Alice, Texas at a junior high school. She was hired during the first year of Anglo-Mexican American integrated classes, and was one of the first Mexican American teachers there to teach something other than Spanish.

She ultimately earned a doctoral degree in education.

She had a lot of company during her doctoral studies, as her future husband, Joe R. Long, a fellow former teacher from Alice, was pursuing his law degree, an opportunity made possible in part by the G.I. Bill.

In addition to education, community giving has been a passion throughout Lozano Long's life. She has done much volunteer work, as well as given donations and established arts and education scholarship funds and endowments.

Looking back on her life, she said the sacrifices her parents made, coupled with her own hard work, allowed her to overcome challenges.

"I've had a good life. It hasn't always been like this," Lozano Long said. "We know what it's like to go to school with practically no money and just get by."

She acknowledged, however, that Latinos have made significant strides during her lifetime.

"Doors are opening, but you have to work for it, sacrifice," she said.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Juan Martinez Jr.

Interviewed: 2003 by Amanda Marie Morrison
in Apple Valley, California

World War II draftee Juan Martinez Jr. was inducted into the Army Jan. 14, 1943. For nearly three years, he was assigned to Battery A 468th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapon Battalion, fighting at the Battle of the Bulge and elsewhere in Europe.

When he was discharged on Nov. 23, 1945, he had risen to the rank of corporal and had earned several honors, including five Bronze Campaign Stars, a Good Conduct medal, a Victory Ribbon, two Overseas Service Bars and a Rifle Sharpshooter Badge.

After serving, Martinez didn't return to his previous employer, Southern Pacific Railroad. Keeping in mind the encouragement his officers had given him about getting an education, he instead took advantage of the GI Bill and enrolled at Texas College of Mines and Metallurgy, now known as The University of Texas at El Paso, where he majored in geology and minored in chemistry.

He also got hitched. On June 1, 1947, he married María Talamantes. The couple had five children: Martha (Morrison), Carmen (Reid), Irma (Felix), Arthur and Victor.

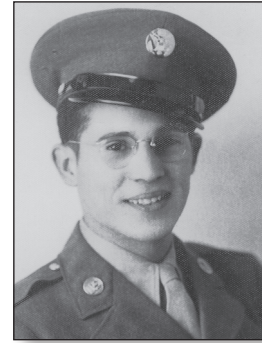
Rather than identifying himself with any particular racial group, Martinez always thought of himself simply as an American. He became acutely aware of racial hostility toward Mexican Americans in 1955, however, when he tried to purchase a house for his family in Victorville, Calif.

"Prior to buying my house in Victorville, I visited another house and the seller was threatened with [a] suit if he sold it to 'that Mexican,'" Martinez wrote the Project.

His response at the time?

"I used to be an American soldier, now I'm a ... Mexican who can't buy houses."

Martinez resides these days in California with his second wife, Marilyn Jean Eckenberg Martinez, whom he married in July of 2000.



Alfonso Matta

Interviewed: April 1, 2001 by Paul Zepeda and
Ernest Eguia in Houston, Texas

The fact that Alfonso Matta had been born in Monterrey, Mexico, and wasn't a U.S. citizen didn't stop the Army from drafting him in 1942. He was naturalized in New York before heading to combat in Europe, where he was a driver with the 3576 QM Truck Co.

"They asked me what I could do. I could drive. OK, they put me in a truck company," Matta said.

"I got shook up a lot of times on the truck, off the road or whatever. I still got a bump on the back of my head here," Matta said.

Matta tries to focus on the good experiences from his time in the war. "I kept [a] guitar with me all the time when I was in the service," he said. "There was this guy from Minnesota who played harmonica, and we played all the time."

He was discharged in December of 1945 at the rank of Tech 5, earning in proper order a Good Conduct Medal; the European, African and Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with three bronze campaign stars; and the WWII Victory Medal. In 1946, he married Mary Ruth Medellín. He returned to Houston to the printing job he had had since he started working at Texan Printing Company as a teenage dropout, and eventually became the owner of Al's Print Shop.

Though politics and political activism would become a big part of his later life, Matta said he didn't experience severe discrimination in either his work or during his time in the Army. Mary, however, reminded her husband of what they faced when they tried to buy their first house.

"The man talked to us and said he couldn't sell it to us because we're Mexicanos," she said.

Matta traveled back to Europe in 1985; however, this time it was as a member of Houston's Metropolitan Transit Authority Board, surveying European public transportation. He used his observations to push for a railway system in Houston.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Elena Ortiz

Interviewed: November 6, 2004 by Cheryl Smith Kemp
in San Antonio, Texas

San Antonio, Texas, resident Elena Ortiz has a deep family history rooted in the Canary Islands, Spain, Mexico and San Antonio. Her family fought at the Alamo, the Battle of New Orleans and in World War II.

Ortiz was born Elena G. Villarreal on June 18, 1927, in the city of Zaragoza in Coahuila, Mexico, to Felipe Gutierrez Villarreal, a small businessman, and Ofelia Garza Gomez Villarreal, a housewife. Shortly after Ortiz's birth, her family moved to San Antonio, where they had previously lived. (Her family returned to Mexico temporarily in 1925 because of relatives still living there, she later wrote the Project.) Her father owned a car-repair garage in San Antonio, and later a grocery store and fish market, as well as a pecan factory.

Ortiz's ancestors came from Spain and the Canary Islands. They first arrived in San Antonio in 1706 and were some of the first settlers to help establish the area's mission.

She's proud of her family's legacy: A bronze statue of her great-great grandfather, José Antonio de la Garza, was erected in Nacogdoches, and Garza County, in the northwest part of the state, was named after him.

Ortiz grew up the second of four siblings. Her older brother, Edmund, who served in the military for more than 20 years, was stationed with the Air force in Iceland during World War II. She got as far in school as high school, at which point she began helping her father at his grocery store/fish market. During the war, she took an office job at the Veterans' Administration.

In 1952, she married WW II veteran Richard Ortiz, whom she met at a cousin's party in 1944 after he served in the Air Force.

"Everyone was so young that was drafted," Ortiz said. "My husband was only 18 and he went straight to Africa. ... [He] doesn't like to talk about the war. He lost a few good friends in Africa and wants to keep it to himself."

After the war was over, Richard used the GI Bill to get a degree in pharmacy from the University of Texas at Austin. And her family threw many parties for cousins returning home as veterans, the women spending all day at her aunt's house making tamales and pastries, Ortiz said.

Life returned to normal soon after the war, said Ortiz, who still lives in San Antonio, along with three sons, two daughters, eight granddaughters and two grandsons.



Richard Ortiz

Interviewed: November 6, 2004 by Antonio Gil
in San Antonio, Texas

As a senior at San Antonio Technical Vocational School, Richard Ortiz aspired to be a pharmacist, despite a lack of funds for tuition.

In 1941, after his graduation, Ortiz decided to enlist in the Army Air Corps. In 1942, Ortiz was sent to Washington D.C., and then spent the next two years in the European Theater as part of the North African Campaign Air Transport Command.

Ortiz said the pilots who flew in and out of the base were Ortiz's only true source of wartime information. His station was isolated and didn't receive news from the field.

Ortiz's WWII days opened his eyes to the world and opportunities ahead of him. In the military, he never encountered racism or segregation, as he had in his upbringing in San Antonio, and this experience motivated him to want more for himself and his family.

In May of 1944, Ortiz returned to the United States. He was stationed in Michigan and was assigned to the ATC Air Transport Co. Medical Evacuation Squad, air crews that delivered wounded GIs to hospitals close to their homes.

When the victory in Europe was announced, he went into Detroit for the night.

"[The celebration] went all night," he remembered, chuckling.

Ortiz was honorably discharged in October of 1945 as a Staff Sergeant and returned home to San Antonio. He later enlisted in the Air Force Reserves and retired in 1968 as a Major. With the GI Bill, he was able to realize his dream: He graduated from The University of Texas at Austin's College of Pharmacy in 1951.

When asked about the proud moments of his life, Ortiz said: "I was the first one to graduate college from my family.

Ortiz married Elena Villarreal in 1952. They made their home in San Antonio and had five children.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Amos Pacheco

Interviewed: March 22, 2006 by Chriselda Pacheco
in San Antonio, Texas

One September night in 1942, Amos Pacheco and Gloria Robles both happened to be at Bergs Mill Platform, a San Antonio, Texas, dancehall with a jukebox and bar.

"I was dancing with this other girl and she said, 'I'm too old for you, go dance with her.' So I went up to her and she was a little girl, 14 years old with pigtails and with white socks," recalled Pacheco of seeing his wife for the first time when he was 16 years old. "I didn't know how to dance very well, but I asked her to dance and that's where the trouble started."

They met. They danced. They eloped. On August 7, 1944, two years after their first encounter, they got married.

War wasted no time in separating the newlyweds, however, as the Army shipped Pacheco off to Camp Crowder in southwest Missouri fifteen days into their marriage.

"She didn't cry," he recalled, pointing to his wife beside him.

"No, but I fainted," she said, as she hadn't eaten anything the day he left.

The situation wasn't entirely tragic, however, as Pacheco had been looking forward to enlisting since he was 17.

His father made him wait until he was of legal age before he signed his draft papers.

Pacheco trained at San Antonio's Fort Sam Houston; Camp Crowder; and Camp Livingston, near Alexandria, La.; then was shipped overseas out of New York.

He arrived in France around the middle of February, joining the 90th Infantry Division about two and a half months before the war's end. A couple weeks into their time in Rhineland, the Germans attacked. Shrapnel shards flew into Pacheco's shoulders, chest and arms. Within minutes, however, the German soldiers retreated. One even turned himself in as a prisoner of war because he couldn't have gone too far with the injuries he sustained.

"War is hell. Kill or get killed," murmured Pacheco, who said he suffered for a long while from flashbacks of hiding and crawling.

Neither Gloria nor Amos stated how long it took for the two to adjust to life with each other after the war, but both acknowledged it took some serious time.



Pedro Perez

Interviewed: November 23, 2004 by Robert Hernandez
in Austin, Texas

On the afternoon of April 30, 1945, on the Philippine island of Luzon, Pedro Perez volunteered to rescue a scout that had been caught in a hail of machine-gun fire. During the rescue, Perez was wounded in both legs.

It would be a miserable 7 hours before he received medical attention.

"It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon ... and I bled from there until after 10 at night," Perez said.

Before this dramatic rescue, he experienced a time of fun without fearing danger. His Army unit traveled to various cities in Australia, where he remembered dances and cantinas – and women.

"We had all the freedom we could get," he said.

Perez enlisted in the Army and became a member of the 32nd Infantry Division in July of 1942, only 14 days after having come home from the Civilian Conservation Corps, which he joined in 1939.

Shortly after enlisting, Perez's division landed near Sydney, Australia. They then traveled to Brisbane, Australia, eventually ending up in New Guinea and then Luzon. When they landed in Luzon, enemy troops were firing at their barge. Perez's daring rescue came at this point.

It took such a long time for him to receive medical help because the hospital was more than 40 miles away. His wounds were so bad he remained in convalescence for more than a year.

Perez was honorably discharged in July of 1947, while convalescing in Fort Custer, Mich. He took home 10 medals of recognition, including the Silver Star for the rescue, the Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

In January of 1948, he married Eva Ochoa in San Marcos. He enrolled in Laredo Junior College and stayed for two years to learn to read and write in English. He also took a job as a tailor. The couple had two children, and they all moved to Austin in 1952.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Adolfo Reyes

Interviewed: September 11, 2004 by Steven Rosales
in Palmdale, California

A year after Pearl Harbor, 22-year-old Californian Adolfo Reyes was drafted.

He remembers being the only Mexican American in an Army unit full of white boys from Texas and Oklahoma. They gave him special treatment, he said, like a mascot.

After boot camp, he and other members of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, crossed the Atlantic and snaked their way from Ireland to the beaches of Normandy on June 7, 1944, the day after the D-Day invasion. The Germans were still pounding the beach front with heavy fire.

Next, the unit became entangled in the Battle of Brest. Reyes and a fellow soldier took control of a 37-millimeter gun and blasted shells toward a German-occupied building. He took the surviving Germans as prisoners of war, later receiving his first Bronze Star for his performance.

Reyes' next fought in the Battle of the Bulge, the largest land battle the United States military has ever fought. Waiting for a German assault, his unit spent two weeks in the bitter cold with few supplies. They began digging through the snow to find discarded parts of K-Rations, which had earlier been discarded, he said. Other soldiers' accounts show that men urinated on weapons to thaw them and slept with multiple overcoats and blankets.

The Germans began shelling Reyes' unit. Suddenly, the rifle he was holding against his right arm burst. His right arm and leg were paralyzed. He jumped into a foxhole and woke up in a Belgium hospital.

After recuperating, Reyes said he was reassigned in Paris and England for a few months. His ability to fight was never the same, though, and he was soon discharged. He was one of more than 80,000 injured in the Battle of the Bulge.

He spent the rest of his working life steadily employed as an inspector in a clothing factory for 11 years, followed by 30 years as a truck driver. He sought counseling for chronic nightmares, which he said got worse as he got older. He had flashbacks about the Army and bad dreams about his job.

Reyes shows no nostalgia for the war.

"I'm not proud of my service. I'm just glad that I made it," he said.



Anastacio Rodriguez

Interviewed: November 16, 2004 in San Antonio, Texas

Anastacio Rodriguez spent four weeks in Cheyenne, Wyoming, training with the Army for World War II, but he didn't need to be taught how to roll with the punches. Rodriguez had been taking hardship in stride since he was a young boy in Lockhart, Texas.

His mother had passed away by the time he was eight years old; his father within the next two years, leaving Rodriguez and his nine siblings to fend for themselves. On weekends, he and his brother would go downtown to hear from the town crier the weekly news, much of which concerned the war.

Rodriguez was eventually drafted into the Army, trained and assigned to the 648th Tank Destroyer Battalion. He didn't see his siblings for almost 3 years, although he tried to keep his sisters updated. They never really knew, however, because the Army censored his letters.

The war took his 400-person battalion to France, Central Europe and ultimately Germany. He said he experienced some combat, but that he doesn't like to talk about it. He focuses instead on happy times, like those with his children.

One thing he said he missed most about life before the war was home cooking. Their military meals usually consisted of canned food they heated by placing it on the engines of their trucks.

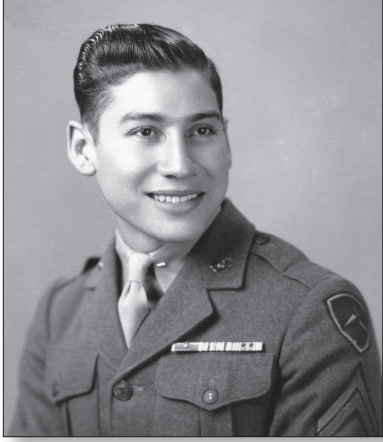
Rodriguez vividly remembers the day the war ended. When the news was announced, "I was jumping all over like everybody," he said.

He was discharged on Dec. 21, 1945, at the rank of Tec 5. While he was gone, his brothers had moved to San Antonio, so he followed them upon his return.

Living in Texas, Rodriguez said he came across some racial discrimination, but that the situation has improved.

"Things are better now between whites and Mexicans. Now everyone comes together," he said.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT



Hermenejildo "Hermi" Salas

Interviewed: April 20, 2005 by Chris Riley
in San Antonio, Texas

Hermenejildo "Hermi" Salas was an 18-year-old private in the United States Marine Corps when on Dec. 6, 1943, he boarded the ship that took him from his homeland and into the war. Assigned to Co. E, 2nd Bn. 21st Marines, 3rd Marine Division, Private Salas waited on the ship for three weeks as backup for men fighting on Saipan. Then, three days after D-Day, July 21, 1944, the military sent him to his first battle on Guam. To make the landing, the troops had to ride in amphibious tractors, floating landing craft propelled by tank-like treads and sometimes propellers, because coral reefs made the beach too shallow for traditional landing craft.

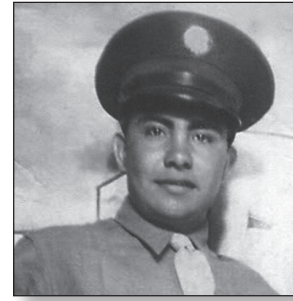
"The first thing I did was I headed for a coconut tree. And as I hit the deck, I felt something on my face, and I said, 'Oh, I'm hit, I'm hit,'" he recalled. A bullet had nailed the tree above him and pelted his face with bark.

Because of heavy fire, about half of his approximately 240-man company became casualties as then men made their way onto the beach.

Back on base, racial tension between Southern Anglos and the few Mexicans Americans had caused altercations, but the animosity ended when his unit was sent overseas, Salas said.

"Once you're in combat, you forget everything. You're buddy-buddy," he said.

The Marines discharged Salas on Nov. 1, 1945, at the rank of Corporal. He worked at San Antonio, Texas' Kelly Air Force base as a radio technician from 1948 to 1980.



Epifanio Salazar

Interviewed: March 13, 2005 by Francisco Cortez
in San Antonio, Texas

Joining the Army was a way for Epifanio Salazar to escape poverty. He left San Geronimo, Texas, on Jan. 12, 1943, at age 17, and headed to Seguin, Texas, to enlist. When the doctor asked him for his age, he lied and said he was 18.

Salazar was assigned to the Infantry Training Center at Camp Fannin, Texas. After basic training, where he was taught how to march, shoot and respect officers, Salazar was ordered to Camp Rucker in Alabama, to train with the 35th Infantry Division. When he arrived, he was given a uniform—shoes, khakis, socks, underwear and two hats—sent to the mess hall and given plenty to eat.

The Army paid him \$37 a month. He had no complaints.

While training at Camp Rucker, Salazar was recruited into the 305th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. "I didn't know what it was," Salazar said. "They paid \$50 a month to jump out of airplanes."

After four weeks of training with the 82nd Airborne, the military gave him another uniform and sent him into his first combat experience, in Sicily, Italy. His troops made their way through Italy and North Africa to Southampton, England, where they would remain until D-Day.

On June 6, 1944, they assaulted Normandy beach. "We did pretty good," said Salazar, when asked about the experience.

His combat tour ended during the invasion of Holland, where he was wounded by gunfire. He was discharged July 24, 1946, at the rank of Technician Fifth Class, and decorated with a Combat Infantry Badge, Airborne Wings, a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, a EAME Campaign Medal with 3 Battle Stars and a Presidential Unit Citation.

Back home, he immediately proposed to Maria Magdalena Gallegos. They live in San Antonio and have a son, four daughters, three grandsons and four granddaughters.

INTERVIEWS FROM THE PROJECT

Maria Torres

Interviewed: March 27, 2004 by Vanessa R. Torres
in El Paso, Texas

During World War II, “When my brothers left, it just seemed like something that belonged to my parents had been taken, and they didn’t know if they were going to have that something back,” recalled Maria Torres of El Paso, Texas, whose brothers—Alfonso, Jose, Maurice and Alejandro Holguin—served in the war.

Torres, now 75, was 12 when the war began; yet, she clearly remembers the impact it had on her family.

Her parents, Gregorio and Donaciana Holguin, who were born in Chihuahua, Mexico, were taking classes to become U.S. citizens and to learn English before the war. Once their sons left for battle in the South Pacific, they stopped attending, however.

“They were stuck to the house at night listening to the radio,” Torres said.

News became an important part of everyone’s life, she said, because many young people from El Paso’s Segundo Barrio neighborhood, where the Holguins lived, were serving.

Though Torres wrote “victory letters” to her brothers every day, she seldom received a response. Letters that did arrive were two or three months old and censored.

Despite the lack of contact, civilians in El Paso did what they could to support the soldiers. Torres recalled collecting scrap metal, which was accepted as payment for a ticket to the Saturday matinee and donated to the war effort. She and her younger siblings searched for old bicycles and cans with metal lids.

When metal wasn’t available, neighborhood children raised money to donate to the community chest, which was used to buy candy and cigarettes for soldiers.

She also helped her mother bake cookies to send to the soldiers.

Although sugar and butter were difficult to obtain because of rationing, the Holguins could purchase goods across the border in Juarez, Mexico.

Her parents returned to the happy couple they once were when all of their sons came back from the war unharmed.

Torres married a World War II veteran, Manuel, in 1949.

Gilbert Treviño

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

Gilbert Treviño was a 19-year old junior at Texas A&M College when he was drafted for the war. When he went to San Antonio for his physical, he expressed an interest in the Marines, and eight months later, he was in combat.

Wounded on Iwo Jima when a mortar round exploded and damaged his hearing, he declined to report the injury because, “I wanted to stay with my buddies during the battle even though it was very hard for me to hear.”

Treviño was discharged in 1946 at the rank of Private First Class. He soon returned to Texas A&M and changed his major from chemical engineering to veterinary medicine.

Six years later, in May of 1952, he was standing in line alphabetically, waiting to receive his doctoral diploma in veterinary medicine, when a Western Union messenger showed up and said he was looking for a man named Treviño. The deliveryman promptly presented Treviño with Korean War draft papers. He got called up again because, by law, all doctors assume a military responsibility regardless of prior service.

Treviño’s new military duties were to inspect food, take charge of the small animal clinic and care for an old horse named Pat, who’d been deployed as part of a cavalry battalion in WWII. Treviño said his commander made it clear that keeping Pat alive was the most important assignment, telling Treviño, “If you allow this horse to die on your watch, I’m going to send you to Korea on the first available plane.”

The horse lived to age 45. After Pat died, Treviño’s duties were mainly food-inspection related, which he wasn’t happy about.

“I felt I had gone to school for six years to be a veterinarian and to practice on animals, and that was so far removed from what I had envisioned to be my life work,” he said.

The Army discharged him in 1954, at which point he returned to his passion, veterinary medicine. This time he worked in a clinic in El Paso, Texas.

Treviño said he enjoyed being in the Army more than the Marines because he felt less racial tension in the Army.

“I don’t use my ethnicity as a club. I use it as a means for showing other people that any Hispanic can accomplish things as any Anglo – maybe a little bit better,” Treviño said.

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