

Transcription: David Martinez

Good morning. Today is Friday, October 25, 2013. This morning I'm interviewing Mr. David Martinez. We're at the William Courtney Home in Temple, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today for this program.

David Martinez: Glad to be here.

It's an honor for us. Sir, the first question I always start with when we do these interviews is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

David Martinez: I used to run a wrecker business in Huntsville.

In Huntsville?

David Martinez: Yes, in Huntsville. Then I served on the city council there. Time just goes by so fast, you know. It's hard to keep up, but I'll do all I can.

Were you born in Huntsville? Are you from Huntsville originally?

David Martinez: Westfield.

Westfield.

David Martinez: Do you know where Westfield is at?

No sir, I don't.

David Martinez: Close to Houston.

Close to Houston. Westfield. I thought you said Huntsville.

David Martinez: Yes.

Were you born there? Born down near Houston?

David Martinez: No. I was born in Huntsville.

In Huntsville. Okay.

David Martinez: Yes.

Did you grow up on a farm or in a city?

David Martinez: No. In the city.

In the city?

David Martinez: I was a fireman for about 30 years.

Wow. Okay.

David Martinez: Firefighter.

What branch of the service were you in?

David Martinez: Army.

Army. Do you remember when you went into the Army? Were you in any conflicts? Vietnam era? Korea?

David Martinez: World War II, I believe.

World War II. You look younger than that. I couldn't tell. So you're a World War II veteran?

David Martinez: How old do you think I am?

I don't know.

David Martinez: Eighty-five.

Eighty-five. That's great. You look like you're doing great. So you're a World War II veteran. Were you drafted into the Army?

David Martinez: Yes.

Do you remember getting a draft notice? Do you remember that day?

David Martinez: I can't remember it.

Can't remember that? Did you have any siblings? Any brothers or sisters that served in the military?

David Martinez: All of them passed away.

They did. Did any of them go into the service during the war?

David Martinez: I think four of us were in the service.

Four of you. So when the war started up were you still in school or were you out of high school?

David Martinez: I was out of high school. They draft me.

Did you think there was a good chance you might be drafted? When the war started did you think there was a good chance you'd be drafted?

David Martinez: Oh yeah.

You did. So when you were drafted, I guess it wasn't a surprise to you.

David Martinez: Oh no. I think it . . . You know time goes by so fast, you know. We were going to go fight the Japanese. In fact, we boarded a ship and go fight the Japanese. That's what it was, yes.

Do you remember what unit you were with? Were you assigned to a particular outfit?

David Martinez: I was in the Army.

Yeah, but do you remember your battalion or company you were with or anything like that? Division?

David Martinez: No, I can't remember.

But you do know that you went to the Pacific?

David Martinez: Oh yeah.

Share with us, sir, any memories that you have about heading into the Pacific to fight. Anything that stands out? Any stories you'd want to share with us? Anecdotes?

David Martinez: No. I know we were ready to go fight the Japanese. Getting ready to board a ship, you know. But they found out the United States going to send troops there so they just backed off.

So the war had basically ended before you had to go over there?

David Martinez: Pretty close.

You had to have been relieved at that. You had to have felt good that it was over before you had to go?

David Martinez: Oh yeah. But I had a brother that spent four years fighting the Japanese.

Did you talk to him much about that?

David Martinez: Oh yeah.

What were some things he told you?

David Martinez: I can't remember, you know.

I'm sure you had to have been proud of him though and thankful for the fact he made it through the war.

David Martinez: Oh yeah. Yeah, I'm sure glad that I was able to serve, you know, because that's our obligation, you know, to go and protect everyone else. Like we are protected, you know.

Absolutely.

David Martinez: The United States is a good country. We are very blessed to live here.

I agree. We are blessed because of men and women like yourself that have served our nation through the years. That's really the big part of this program is to try to save these interviews and these stories so people can listen to them hundreds of years from now, hopefully, and learn something from them and not forget some of these stories. So what did your family think about you going in the Army? Were they scared or were they happy?

David Martinez: They were happy. My parents were very Christian people, you know. We serve the Lord and it was all right to go in the service, you know. There was no problem there. But I'm glad we all made it back, you know. We put our trust in the Lord.

I'm sure that had to have been a comfort to you when you were in the Army that you had faith. I'm sure that gave you extra strength to come through some adversity and tough times. Do you remember anything about boot camp? What was boot camp like? Do you remember drill instructors, that sort of thing? Drill sergeants?

David Martinez: They draft us in there and prepare us to go fight the Japanese, you know, in Japan. That's where we were headed to. Japanese found out that the United States were going to send troops there so they just backed out. Because they were doing lot of damage around the small countries around there. Killing lot of people.

The two atomic bombs I think helped persuade the Japanese to surrender too. I think they knew at that point that there wasn't anything else they could do.

David Martinez: That's the truth. We were very fortunate to be in there.

Exactly. Because otherwise, in all likelihood, it sounds like you and the men you were serving with would have gone to Japan and fought in that invasion. It would have been very, very dangerous.

David Martinez: We were ready to board a ship. But the Japanese found out the United States going to send troops there so they backed out, you know. They were killing a lot of people up there.

Sure. When you went into the Army, were you married or were you single?

David Martinez: I was single.

You were single at that time. Did you have a chance to send letters back home to your parents? Write to your parents?

David Martinez: Yes.

That's good. So when the war ended, how long did you have to stay in the Army before you got to come back home? Did you get to go home pretty quickly or did you have to stay in for a while longer?

David Martinez: I would say for a while, you know.

Because you had pretty recently joined the Army, right?

David Martinez: Oh yeah.

You kind of joined towards . . . You were drafted towards the end of the war?

David Martinez: I was drafted, you know. We all have an obligation to serve our country if we're going to live here.

Absolutely. When you finally got out did you come back home to Texas?

David Martinez: Oh yes.

So you never had a doubt you were going to come back to Texas?

David Martinez: Oh no. Texas is a big country, you know. Lot of people there. They're good people.

So you came back home. Was Houston home or was Huntsville home?

David Martinez: Huntsville.

Huntsville, Texas.

David Martinez: Let's see. We lived in Westfield one time. I can't remember that.

Where is Westfield? Is that by Houston?

David Martinez: It's close. Around Houston.

I've never heard of Westfield.

David Martinez: You never heard of Westfield?

I'll have to look it up.

David Martinez: Is that right?

I lived in Galveston for a number of years, so I know the Houston area but I'm not familiar with Westfield.

David Martinez: Yeah, Westfield is around Houston there.

Okay. So when the war ended you went back home and you became a firefighter, is that right?

David Martinez: Fire chief.

Fire chief.

David Martinez: Yeah, I was a fire chief.

For over 30 years?

David Martinez: Thirty years. Yes.

So you kind of continued that service of serving others, just like you did in the Army, except now you were serving as a firefighter.

David Martinez: Uh-huh.

I'm sure you had to have enjoyed it in order to stay around for 30 years.

David Martinez: Well, that's the obligation that we have to give if we live here in the United States. It's a privilege to live here in this country because it's a free country, you know, and we can serve it and be happy about it, you know.

Absolutely. What was it that attracted you to being a firefighter? What was it that made you want to be a firefighter?

David Martinez: I don't know. It's just that a lot of minority people couldn't get in something like that, you know. But I had run a business and that's the reason that I had the opportunity to do it and that's what I done. Serve my country, you know.

So you had a chance to be a firefighter at a time when a lot of Hispanics wouldn't have been given that opportunity?

David Martinez: Yes. I was about 30 years as a fire chief in Huntsville.

And then later, you said you were a city council member.

David Martinez: City council, yes.

So that's even more service. Did you enjoy being a councilman?

David Martinez: Oh yeah. You got to serve your country, you know, when you live here. I mean, that was my choice, you know. We had four brothers that went in the service out of five.

That's great. So it sounds like your family and yourself, you're all about service. Serving in the Army, serving as a firefighter, serving as a city councilman.

David Martinez: That's true. Yes.

How many years, sir, were you a city councilman?

David Martinez: Four years.

Four years.

David Martinez: I told you I was a fire chief too.

Sure. You weren't doing both at the same time though, right? You weren't a councilman and a fire chief?

David Martinez: No, I was doing both of them.

You were? Doing both at the same time. And that was in Huntsville?

David Martinez: In Huntsville, yes.

Yes sir. I didn't know they'd let you be the fire chief and a city councilman simultaneously.

David Martinez: Oh yeah. Well, you had to volunteer for something like that. You know you want to help your country, you know, because a lot of people out there they go somewhere else,

they don't like to serve their country or something, I don't know. But I really enjoyed that because that was my obligation and I enjoyed it. My parents were good Christian people.

I'm sure they had to have been proud of you and your brothers that all served during the war.

David Martinez: Oh yeah. One of my brothers served in India, fighting the Japanese up there, yes. He stayed up there about four years.

Absolutely. Was your family from Huntsville? Were you born in Huntsville?

David Martinez: Yeah. I was born in Westfield. You know where Westfield is at?

No, I don't.

David Martinez: Close to Houston.

Okay. So you were born in Westfield. And at some point you moved to Huntsville.

David Martinez: We moved to Huntsville, yes.

So that kind of became your hometown then?

David Martinez: Yes.

That's great.

David Martinez: I told you I was the fire chief there for about 30 years, you know. Because you don't find too many minority people do something like that.

Sure. Probably not during that period either, I guess. Lot of racism and segregation and that sort of thing.

David Martinez: Oh yes.

Did you get married after you got out of the Army?

David Martinez: Yes.

You did. Did you and your wife have any children?

David Martinez: We had two daughters.

Two daughters.

David Martinez: I don't know if I have any more living yet. I can't remember. Yeah, I got one daughter that's still living.

I'm sure they had to have been proud of you and what you did in the Army and fire chief and that sort of thing.

David Martinez: Well, it's a privilege to serve your country. You got to.

I agree. I agree. Did they ask you many questions about your service in the Army? Did you tell them any stories about basic training or anything like that?

David Martinez: No.

When you got out, did you keep any of your stuff from the Army? Did you keep any of your uniforms or photographs?

David Martinez: I think I served on the city council. Did I tell you that?

Yes sir.

David Martinez: On the city council. I was a fire chief there for a good many years. I tell you, time goes by so fast.

I think you're right. I agree. It does go quickly. I think the older you get the faster it seems to go.

David Martinez: Goes too fast.

My theory on that is that the older you get the shorter a day or a week is in the percentage of your life. Like my wife and I, we've got four little kids and to them a week just seems like forever. They ask, "When's Christmas?" You say, "Oh, it's a couple of months." They think that's forever. Well, when you're two years old or three years old, you think about how long a month is in relation to how little they've lived. It does seem like a long time. But the older you get the shorter a month really seems. I think I can identify with you're saying.

David Martinez: That's the truth. I tell you it's a privilege to live here in the United States. It's a very good country.

I agree. I agree. How long, sir, have you been here at the home in Temple? The Courtney Home here?

David Martinez: In Temple?

In this home. The veterans home.

David Martinez: I can't remember.

You can't remember? Do you like it? Is it a pretty good place?

David Martinez: Oh yeah. They take care of you pretty well.

That's good. That's good to hear. Is the food okay?

David Martinez: Oh, yes.

Good.

David Martinez: I try not to eat too much.

You look like you're doing great. Like I said when we started, I didn't know how old you were so . . . It looks like you're doing all right. That's excellent.

David Martinez: One thing when you're a minority, you gotta prepare yourself to protect yourself, you know, 'cause a lot of people gonna try to run over you.

Sure. Hopefully there's not any of that going on here though, right?

David Martinez: No, oh, no, no, no.

No racial strife in the Courtney Home hopefully.

David Martinez: No, I can still hurt somebody pretty bad. They teach you that in the Army, you know.

Well, I think hopefully everyone here at the Courtney Home, they are all fellow veterans and hopefully everyone gets along okay. I've always . . . Every time I've been up here, it seems like everyone's getting along okay.

David Martinez: Well, I'm very proud to serve in the United States, in the Army and all of that, you know.

That's great.

David Martinez: That's a privilege there.

It is. Well, it's a privilege but it's also a tradition, and something that you helped carry on. I know that those that are serving today are carrying on that tradition as well. Really, that's why we do these interviews, is to save these stories for future generations. You know, at the Land Office where I work, we have records that go back to the 1700s. We have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the first Anglo settlers that came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. And our goal is to add these interviews like you and I are doing this morning to that archive so that hundreds of years from now hopefully people can listen to these interviews and learn something from them that might have otherwise been forgotten or not written down.

David Martinez: That's the truth.

So that's what we're trying to do, is to save these stories. With that in mind, is there anything you would want to say to somebody listening to this interview years from now?

David Martinez: My desire is that they serve the United States if they have to, and if they are that age, you know, to serve your country. It's a privilege to do that. It's an obligation to do it because we need protection there. But if they're going to go somewhere else, it's best to just go ahead.

I think that's well said. I think, you know, you got to have honorable people step up and serve if the country's going to stay strong, and you're one of those that served and helped continue that tradition. People can't forget that. There's always got to be somebody willing to serve, willing to step in the breach, and you did that as a fire chief as well as a soldier in the Army. So, we thank you for that.

David Martinez: I have one brother served four years in Burma, India.

In Burma.

David Martinez: The Japanese up there.

Yeah, the India-Burma-China Theater.

David Martinez: Yeah.

That was a tough area during the war. It was.

David Martinez: But we all have to put our trust in the Lord so he protect us.

That's great.

David Martinez: Live a good life like we's supposed to.

I think that's one of the keys, absolutely one of the keys.

David Martinez: Absolutely, yes.

That's great. Do you have a religious ministry program here at the Courtney Home? Do they have chapel here on Sunday?

David Martinez: I go to church here.

That's good.

David Martinez: I was a deacon when I was 18 years old. Oh, yeah. I had a father, mother, brother and sister, all are good people, Christian people.

Do you have pretty good turnout for church here on Sundays? Pretty good attendance?

David Martinez: I don't think they have anything around here.

Oh, they don't? So they take you somewhere for church? Take you to a church?

David Martinez: No, I can't remember to tell you the truth.

Well, I'm glad that you have that strong faith.

David Martinez: Oh, yeah. I got to 'cause I'm headed that way, not down.

Yeah, that's great. Well, sir, I'm honored that you came over this morning to be able to spend a little bit of time talking and recording some of these stories and memories. What we're going to do in a couple weeks is I'm going to send you a copy of this interview on CDs so that you can listen to it but also you can give them to any of your friends or family that might want to have them. And we're also going to send you a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson who is in charge of the Land Office which is the agency in charge of this home thanking you for your service to our country.

David Martinez: It's a privilege, serving my country. And it's an obligation too.

Yes sir. But it's a privilege for me and for everybody at the Land Office to be able to interview you and your fellow veterans today. So we want to thank you for that.

David Martinez: I appreciate that.

Thank you very much for your time this morning.

David Martinez: I enjoyed it, sir. Thank you.

Yes sir, thank you.