

## **Transcription: Ernesto Martinez**

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*Good afternoon. Today is Friday, January 25, 2013. My name is James Crabtree. Today I'll be interviewing Mr. Ernesto Martinez. This interview is being conducted by telephone. Mr. Martinez is at the Guillen Texas State Veterans Home in El Paso, and I'm at the General Land Office in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's certainly an honor for us.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** God bless you.

*Yes sir. Sir, Ms. Culp sent me a little information about your background. The first question I always like to start off with in these interviews is just tell us a little bit, if you would please, about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Well, I was born outside El Paso in the neighborhood. It was mostly Mexican people. Most of them were from Mexico. I grew up there and in my early years . . . I'm talking about eight years, nine years old. We were very attached to the Catholic church. My father was a Knight of Columbus and I was an altar boy. So there was my life until I went higher up in grammar school. \_ . From there I went to another Catholic high school but it was Cathedral, Cathedral High School was its name. In El Paso. I made a lot of friends because it was all boys. Since we were about the same age, we all went to war. World War II.

*Were you in high school when the war started?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I just barely graduated from high school and then I joined. It wasn't long before . . . Maybe just a couple of months and then I went to take basic training in Maxey, Texas, I believe, and Camp Crowder because they were going to put me in the Signal Corps. But then from there we went to advanced infantry and then eventually, I think we went to New Jersey. And that's where we shipped out for Europe.

*Let me ask you sir, when the war started, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, do you remember that day? Do you remember where you were when you learned that Pearl Harbor was bombed?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I think it was a Sunday if I'm not mistaken.

*That's right.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I was still probably in the last part of high school. Nobody knew where Pearl Harbor was but it became known, you know. There was excitement, you know, it meant there would be war with the United States.

*Do you think it meant that you would be going to war yourself?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yes sir. I always wanted to be. Dad and Mom, I was still living with them. They didn't want me to volunteer so I hung around and some of my friends went. And naturally, there was one intimate friend that was killed in Cologne, Germany. They were bombing Cologne. He was stationed in England but he was in the Air Force. So I went through basic training. I started with Signal Corps. Eventually things were getting real hot. Then they were transferring us to the infantry. I took my basic in Camp Maxey, Texas. And from there we went

to New Jersey for shipment to overseas. But there were convoys going back and forth and the convoy consisted of quite a few ships, boats, you know.

*What unit were you with at that point?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I was with no unit. I was just replacement. So, I think, I'm not sure but they told us that we went through, close to the North Pole, because we went by ourselves in a huge British luxury liner. It had been a . . . Now it was a troop ship, you know. Some of them were saying that we were close to the North Pole.

*So you probably went pretty far up in the North Atlantic then.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, because when we were getting away from submarines. After a few days in the open ocean, we landed in Scotland. That was my first view of Europe. The Scottish then greeted us. And the thing about it was that to us it was kind of amusing, you might think. Seeing these guys wearing skirts. But they received us and then almost immediately, or a couple of days at the most, we were shipped to southern England facing the channel. They were concentrating troops there. An invasion just happened.

*The D-Day Invasion?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, D-Day. So they were still fighting for France, and we were in England. Then we went across through the reception centers and eventually . . . I didn't fight in France. France was already taken but we kept going and I think we got through Belgium. Yeah, I think so. And parts of some little country. But anyway, we wound up in Belgium after almost a week of traveling in mud and rain and what have you. Then we got to a receiving hospital at night, almost at midnight. There was, I don't know, maybe six or seven trucks full of recruits. Just rookies, you know, fresh from basic training. And the first thing we saw was . . . There where we went was a receiving hospital. I saw a lot of guys sitting around in the hospital, out in the open. And they were almost naked. We wondered, "Why don't they put 'em inside," you know, until somebody told us, "Well, those are the guys that just got killed." Because we thought it was a thunderstorm but it wasn't. It was my division, the Timberwolf Division, 104<sup>th</sup>, commanded by General Terry Allen from El Paso. And then my division was crossing the river there, I think it was the Ruhr River, and all we saw were casualties, troops, both German and American, that had just been killed. And for some reason, I guess they needed their equipment, you know, like boots and, you know, jackets and all that. And probably, I don't know why, but probably that's the reason that they laid them out there, outside, because the hospital was full of wounded soldiers that were crossing. From then on, it was a long night. That was our first taste of combat. We really didn't participate, the rookies, because we would have got there pretty late, about 11 or midnight. I guess when they finished crossing the river . . . At first, we thought it was a real bad thunderstorm, lot of lightning and thunder, you know, but actually, that was the front.

*Yeah, the artillery and that sort of thing?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, when they were fighting. And they started bringing casualties there. And I guess when they finished crossing, then a sergeant, some sergeant, came by and they told us to get off the trucks. It must have been about one or two in the morning, maybe later. We just . . . There must have been about a hundred rookies. We stood out there in the snow and pretty soon there was a bunch of sergeants that came over and, "You go here, you go there." So I went

with the group, you know, and it turned out to be that I was assigned to the 104<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the Timberwolves. From then on, that was my outfit, and we went, and I think they were fighting for . . . I forget the name of the first German town. They were almost to the border. And eventually, we were in Cologne. Cologne had been flattened. It's a huge city divided by the Rhine River. And all the bridges were sunk. They were in the water. But we went in, the 104<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the Timberwolf Division, and I think it was being supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division. The tanks. So actually there were two divisions. I guess they were commanded by the two generals, you know. Mine was Terry Allen.

*What were your thoughts? You got there that first night, you said you saw the casualties, and you're a brand new boot out of basic training. What were your thoughts at that point?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** You know, I had some experiences before that seeing troops coming back. But the thing was that we saw that and, "My God, those guys just finished crossing the river." And nothing, no fear or shock struck. I guess it was too much at one time. So we wound up with the Timberwolf Division and then they were getting ready to take the big, big city of Cologne. That's a huge city on the Rhine. All the bridges were sunk. So little by little we started integrating with the regular Timberwolf Division and we started going with the soldiers that had been already in combat. So, well, they were real nice. They'd say, "You stick with me and do what I tell you," you know, so they guided us through the first few nights. But oddly, it was that my division always attacked around one-thirty or two in the morning. We hardly ever fought during the day. So I guess it's history. It was raining and snowing when we came by way of Aachen, I believe, to attack the city of Cologne, supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored. I think one American general was killed there. If I'm not mistaken, I think it was General Rose. He was the one commanding the Armored. We stayed . . . My buddy, I made buddies with James Owens from Tennessee and he used to call me a Mexican and I'd call him a "Hilly Billy." But we became almost like brothers, you know. Sleeping in the same foxhole. He had been already in combat so he'd guide me through because I was just a rookie. Eventually we sat in a machine gun nest outside, maybe a few yards from the cathedral in Cologne. I think the cathedral was the only thing standing up. And Cologne is a huge city and the Rhine cuts right through the middle. So we were preparing to cross the Rhine, I guess on boats or canoes or whatever, and the Germans used to come out at night to eat, to get something to eat. But they were living in buildings that had been torn down or in basements.

*These are German civilians?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, the German civilians, yeah. Now the troops were across the river. That river is like the Mississippi. I don't know, maybe 500 yards wide, something like that. Me and my buddy, James Owens, we became inseparable, you know, and he used to call me, "You dumb Mexican." And I called him "Hilly Billy." We were getting ready to cross and eventually we got lucky and I think there was . . . It might have been Patton, down south. They found an intact bridge. The Germans hadn't blown it up yet. So they rushed us over there and we start crossing, like mad, you know. During that, the Germans were hitting their artillery because they want to destroy it. But we got quite a bit of troops across.

*When you were crossing, were you on foot or did you ride in a vehicle?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** No, we were riding a truck. But the bridge was, I'd say at least 60 percent, intact. They had been holes in it and the trucks had to maneuver, you know. So we were under constant artillery attacks. The Germans were still on the other side. Well, like, we're rookies, you know, we were right in the center half. Once we got across we started swinging up and some American troops, way up north, I guess, they were coming down. So what we were doing is . . . We were forming a semi-circle with the Rhine River behind us, you know. So we had taken the Rhine already. The Rhine River. I think in that attack General Rose, from the Armored, got killed. We went on to . . . You heard about the Ruhr Pocket, where we trapped a whole bunch of German divisions? But I was permanently assigned then to the 104<sup>th</sup> Timberwolf Division.

*Were you present then? Did you get to handle any German prisoners of war? When they surrendered?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** No. We didn't have none of the prisoners of war. As soon as we took them, I guess they must have been MPs or something is the ones that took 'em.

*Okay.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** So we crossed that and then we were swinging up, I believe north, up, and some troops . . . It must have been the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 9<sup>th</sup> Army or something, was coming down. So what happened was . . . There was the Rhine and the Germans were coming down and trying to get out of that area but we were closing in the pincers for lack of a better word. I forget, but we trapped a lot of Germans in there. A lot of German divisions were trapped in the Ruhr Pocket. And from then on, we charged straight up close to Berlin. And it was daily fighting.

*How long did it take you to get, sir, from there to Berlin? Do you remember? Was it a couple of weeks?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I don't know, maybe, I would say about two months.

*Two months.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Because remember that we had to take a hundred towns between there. And the only thing was, I found out, that my division . . . I think they said it was the only division that never fought during the day. We always attack at one-thirty or two o'clock in the morning. I don't recall ever fighting in the day, you know. From then on we took town after town. It was always the same. The resistance and lot of artillery and this and that. One time, I forget the name of the town. It might have been Hays or . . . The name of the German town. But I think my battalion was attacking it from different angles. I was in the second battalion, 415<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. My company commander was John Paul from Oklahoma or somewhere around there. And my buddy was from Tennessee. Every night we took little towns here and there. So finally, one night we hit a big city, the name escapes me right now. But my battalion was attacking it and one of our battalions tried to, where they crossed, they had a big hospital and they took some German prisoners there. And we were coming from the other side, going into town. And I remembered that the Germans were trying to get out of the little town and go up to . . . They said that it was a German garrison but at that time it was maybe about four miles away from this little town. So these Germans were trying to get out. They were coming with a motorcycle and a guy on the side. What they were doing, they were just trying to open the way, and we were going in. It was some of my first experiences and I did something stupid, you know. I stood in the middle

of town right at the middle of the street right as the Germans were supposed to go out the highway to go and get help. One guy was shooting with his machine gun. The one that was riding in the seat, you know. The other one was driving. So I don't know if he ever had pointed that machine gun straight it would have gotten me because I was right in the center of the street. Anyway, when they got close, I got 'em with a bazooka round.

*So you fired a bazooka there?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, we had bazookas. For my company, we had two. But I think they were still very, in their infancy. I might be wrong, you know. Well, we got rid of them and then eventually we took the town. From there on it was town after town after town. But always at night.

*How many German civilians did you see? Did you interact with them very much? Did they surrender to you at all?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Well, not then. Eventually the war was coming to an end then we would get, you know, big quantities of them. We kept going straight to Berlin and taking all the towns that we could on the way over there. Lot of experiences happened, you know, this and that. One time in that town that I told you that we got those two Germans, we weren't aware of it, but we started to venture into the city again when all of a sudden, here comes a huge German tank. Was hiding between buildings. So what we did is, some guy fired shots at it. At the tire thing, you know, shots won't do anything. So we run into a building and the thing comes over and sets in the middle of the street and this building where we were was huge, several stories. They had a basement so some of the guys from the company, we ran into the basement. And I guess the Germans saw where we went because he comes over and gets outside of the building and pumps about six rounds into the building, you know. Six rounds from the tank. And anyway, we sneaked out the back way, the back, and we continued into town. But we lost a lieutenant and two sergeants in that attack. That I knew about. I know only what happened with my company and the battalion. Maybe, I know there were a lot of other casualties. But then it was almost the same pattern, and then as we got close to Berlin, one time, we used to set out for the attack, we used to set out maybe between nine and 10 o'clock. And this town must have been far away because we walked and walked. And then finally . . . On the way we saw lot of destruction, lot of houses. Finally, in the distance, I guess we were coming close to our target. In the distance we saw what looked like a big water. We thought it was a lake and I guess the moon was shining because it reflected like water, you know. The closer we got we started realizing. We got to this town and we enter, there was, oh my God, I won't say hundreds but many, many horses in the street. They were killed and all bloated and what we thought was water, it was blood running through the street because of so many horses. What happened was that . . . I heard later that the Germans were running out of petrol, or gasoline. And they were using the horses to pull the guns and Jeeps and what have you. And I guess the Air Force caught up with them and they had a \_ there. But anyway, the street was filled with dead horses and blood running like water. I didn't see any Germans so maybe they had been captured or killed or something. Because what I heard was that the attack happened in the afternoon and like I told you, my division never fought during the day, so it must have been about one or two in the morning, we crossed that town. There were lot of German equipment like trucks, Jeeps, everything, you name it. That's what they said, that the Air Force had caught up with them earlier. And then we kept on going and I guess we had a different objective. We went and attacked several towns. A couple of them, but

always at night. One of the towns was this town that I told you that the guy was coming with a motorcycle. It was a bigger town than where the horses were dead. And there was a garrison there. But anyway, we took the town and it must have been daybreak because it was getting lighter. And some guys had found some coffee or something. The town had been taken. It was cold. So we were cooking some eggs that some guy had, and as it got clear, here comes down the highway from the German garrison, here comes all kinds of American troops, tanks and Jeeps and infantry down the highway. And they said, "What happened?" And I said, "We thought that you guys had been all wiped out so we came to take the town." "No, it's already been taken." But I hate to tell you this. I mean, regardless of who it is, the enemy or . . . But that guy that I hit, you know, it got the driver, no, not the driver, the one sitting with the machine gun, and threw him out, just like somebody picked him up out the seat of the motorcycle and just threw him out on the street where he looked like he had stepped out of the shower with so much blood, you know. And then the other one kept going because out of the town was only, oh, maybe less than a block. And he kept going. And I don't know whether I should say this by telephone but I trust your discretion. If it's not proper, don't print it.

*No, we're not going to print it. We're just saving this story for posterity but I know . . . I mean, I think anybody that has ever read anything about war and combat knows that that's part of it. That's part of fighting.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Well, if I'm not mistaken, I think it was the town of Haiger like I told you there were so many towns. But it was a break and then some guys had found some eggs and we were cooking them, and when they started coming in, I said, "What the hell are you guys doing?" And says, "Well, we heard that you guys had been wiped out, so we came." And says, they used to call them "hymies." They said, "There's a hymie outside on a motorcycle, and his body but we can't find his head." So proudly that bazooka round decapitated or something like that. I know I'm relying on you. I don't know whether I should talk to . . .

*Oh, no sir. You can share with us whatever you want to share. I can tell you that we understand what combat is and . . .*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Use your discretion, you know.

*Sure. Well, I'm sure it wasn't easy for you to have been in that situation.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** So the same thing repeated night after night, night after night until we were passing a river I don't recall but we were getting close to Berlin, and I think when we got . . . I forget the name of it, so many towns. We were . . . They halted us and there was a river that passed through there. I used to know the names but they were pretty size towns, and they put a stop to us in there. And they let the Russians, the Russians were going to take Berlin.

*So they stopped you to allow the Russians to advance into Berlin.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah. You remember the river where they stopped?

*I'd have to look it up. I don't remember the name.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** But so many things happened because, well, we were there almost a week and we could have taken Berlin in a week. I think the Russians were still two or three-hundred

miles away. You know, we did nothing, just to hang around, and some guys decided to go swimming in the river because by that time it was getting a little warm. I'll be darned if the Russian soldiers didn't open up on them while they were swimming in the river, and then we started firing to them, and poor officers, they had a hell of a time firing, you know.

*At that point, did you see many civilians fleeing Berlin or have many German soldiers surrendering?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, we saw hundreds, I mean hundreds of German soldiers surrendering. Big huge bunch of them, and most of them were just young kids.

*Sure.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Many of them were all raggedy. I guess they gave them used uniforms, and they look like the soldiers do in war. They were hungry and scared and everything. But we just played it easy there in that town and eventually the Russians came close and they had the honor of Berlin. But at that time, although they were our friends and we were fighting the same common enemy, the relation between us and the Russians were, well, at least the soldiers, maybe officers, they fraternized, I don't know, you know, because we were just privates. But the relation between privates, it wasn't too good.

*Yeah, that doesn't surprise me based on things that I've read and heard.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, they didn't like us and we didn't like them, and I think I heard that there was an incident where they started firing at each other, but there's a river that goes . . . Oh, there's two big towns there close to Berlin. I forget for many years, and I'm already, this month, this coming month, I'm going to be 87.

*That's great. Yes sir.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** So I still remember, you know, things.

*Let me ask you, sir, when you were over there in Europe during that time, were you able to get letters or packages from home?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yes, but some of them were a month old or something like that, and usually the packages that we got were, well, they were all spoiled, the candy or cookies, they were crumbs.

*Did you have any brothers that were in the service during the war?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** No, I was the only child.

*You're an only child.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, and my parents were very, very Catholic, and I was an altar boy and what have you. But when I came back, you want me to talk a little bit about . . .

*Yeah, absolutely. So when the war finally ended, how long was it before you were able to come back from Europe?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I don't remember but it wasn't too long because we were right at the Elbe River, I believe. That's the one that's close to Berlin. And the Russians had taken Berlin, and they started pulling us because we still had the invasion of Japan. So they pulled us out and the troop trains, you know, going back and forth, and we lived in those trains coming back, and eventually we arrived back in La Havre, France, and we stayed there until the whole division was together I guess. But something funny happened because the USO came one time, and they said that it was going to be a big fight. Joe Lewis was going to fight somebody.

*Joe Lewis, okay.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, the champion, you know.

*Yeah, famous boxer.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, so everybody was excited, you know. They had built a temporary ring. We were all there, you know, preparing to come back to the States because we still had the invasion of Japan. And so the USO show started, and there were several numbers and one of them was Joe Lewis comes in the ring, you know, ready to fight, his trunks. And then guess who he was fighting? Bob Hope. Yeah, so Bob Hope comes with huge blouse and then he must have had about four girls, movie stars I guess, with him and Jerry Colonna, they were all assisting him, and bathing him, and Joe Lewis was by himself and his trainer. So they get in the ring and then the bell rings, and, oh, the comedian, Bob Hope, he jumps out of the ring, and he's running around the ring and Joe Lewis is trying to catch him and telling him to get inside but, no, he runs out of the ring.

*That's funny.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** They did that for about two rounds, and finally he decides to go . . . Meanwhile all these ladies were bathing him and attending him with a towel and wiping his mittens. And all of a sudden, I think it was in the third round, he decides to go in, you know. And they fought about two punches, and they go into a hug and then they stopped the fight. And all the umpires go in there and they argue, and the girls and a big commotion inside the ring. And finally they announced that Bob Hope had won the fight on a technicality.

*What was the technicality?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I don't know. So, Bob Hope defeated Joe Lewis.

*That's pretty funny. So you and a lot of the men from your unit were able to see that skit.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Well, it was while we were waiting to come back to the States. Like I told you, we still had Japan.

*Sure.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** So eventually I think the whole boat, there was a whole boat that came back, and I guess it was the whole division that was over there. And then they gave us, I forget how much, they gave us some leave, and I came to El Paso and visited my parents for a couple of weeks I think, and then we met in San Luis Obispo, I believe it was.

*Out in California?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** California, and we met there. We had a little training there, the combat troops, but the special troops, you know, like the medics and clerks and all that, I think they had already left for Hawaii, and that was our port of embarkation that we were . . . I think we were going out of San Francisco, the combat troops, and join them in Hawaii, and eventually we were going to D-Day on Japan. But they told us that there was hundreds of women . . . Again, I don't know if I should mention this but they told us there were hundreds of women and they were wiring them up so when the invasion came, we were unloading the boats, that they would run and mingle with the troops and, you know, pull the trigger. But again, I trust that you will . . . You know more about this. I don't know whether I should say this or not.

*No, sir. This is your story. You're not saying anything outlandish or anything that we haven't heard before.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** The Japanese might take it as an insult, Japanese women, you know.

*Well, you're just telling us what you were told about the landing and the invasion, and I know from talking to a lot of other veterans that it was going to be a brutal fight if you all had had to make that invasion.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** It was gonna be, I think, worse than D-Day in Europe.

*I think you're right.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, because there were British troops, where the British and the American troops were always almost together. They were both together, you know, and by that time there were other troops, so it was going to be a huge thing, you know.

*Where were you when the war finally ended? Were you in Hawaii at that point?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** No, I guess . . . What happened? As soon as the Japanese surrendered, I think they froze the shipments, you know. I figured that at least we would go to Japan as the Army of Occupation but, no, they started in San Luis Obispo, they started decamp there and they started discharging troops that had been in three or four years already, and it was a receiving hospital so a lot of boys that were wounded and prisoners and everything. I think I even heard of the president, Ronald Reagan, was an actor then and he was in that camp. And they would come there and clear the papers and get discharged, and I still had like close to a year left. So then they assigned me to the bank there as a bank clerk. And eventually, I didn't last too long there because these German troops, I think there were two classes of Germans. One of them were the ones that were friendly to the United States, and they were treated like, you know, like it's already forgotten or something like that. But then we had a bunch of Hitler SS, they called them SS, and we were transporting them back from New York, and here in El Paso, I think they had, where the coliseum is, they had a lot of Italians. I don't think they ever brought Germans here, but we had 'em in California, and our job was to transport them back to the east coast.

*On a train?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** On a train, yeah. So we had to stand guard, you know, at the doors there so that none of them would jump out. Because a lot of them wanted to stay in the States but I think the only ones that stayed were the friendly troops because a lot of them went into barber, they were barbers and this and that, you know. Eventually I guess they stayed and married American girls or whatever. But I went back there and made several trips always passing through El Paso and seeing my family, and then it slowed down so then we started . . . We made about two trips taking American recruits, kids coming out of college, and they were going back east to train in basic training. And then eventually I got discharged. They sent me to Fort Sam Houston, and I got discharged from there, came home, and had to start all over but I did join a lot of military . . .

*I saw that. You were involved with VFW and the GI Forum and American Legion.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, and then I started painting because I have always loved painting but . . .

*Did you teach yourself? How did you become such a good artist?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Well, painting.

*Was it just through being taught yourself, or did somebody teach you?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** No, nobody, nothing. I never had one single lesson in my life. So I just guess in and trying and I started by painting Mickey Mouse and little cartoons, and then people like it, and they say why don't you paint this or that? And my family was very religious so I started painting crosses and Christ and little by little until I started moving on. Well, I became the Texas, two years in a row, Texas State Artist, without any lessons. I never went to one single lesson.

*That's great. And I read you've done a lot of murals, big murals.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Oh, yeah. Big murals. Someday you come to Fort Bliss, there's a big one at the gym at Fort Bliss, and then the veterans home, I've painted all the guys that got the Congressional Medal of Honor from Texas and the Southwest. There's about, oh, at least seven or eight just in the vets home.

*That's great.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** And then I painted murals up in New Mexico, a lot of military homes. And then I started getting interested in bullfighting, and I became almost a nut over bullfighting, so I started painting bullfight pictures, you know, the guy, the matador with the bull, and I guess they were pretty good because they started buying those for advertising the bullfights.

*Oh, that's great.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, and it went on and on, and I guess I just kept getting better and better.

*Did you do any painting or sketching when you were in the Army during the war or was this all just after the war that you started?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** No, it was after. There was no time.

*Yeah, no time to sketch or draw.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** We were hiding in the hole, foxholes full of water or snow. No, there was no time. No, this happened after and eventually I started getting on and then they had me on international TV out of Mexico City. Again I met a bunch of movie Mexican stars, and then I just kept on. And then I started working for the federal government, and I didn't have any fame, any name or nothing so nobody would hire me as an artist, and I went to work with IBM. I worked several years with IBM mainly at Fort Bliss, and it's a job. But I always kept my practice, and little by little it started, "Can you paint this? Or paint that?" Or "Can you paint a mural?" And I was selling paintings, and I used to . . . My wife used to go out and she would try to sell them for ten dollars, my first ones. And then, I mean, sometimes I would get quite a bit of money now. Well, I was married, happily married, and going back to church, and my love for the military never ceased so I eventually got a government job at Fort Bliss.

*That's great.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** And then I started painting my people, Mexican people. And oddly enough, that was the time of the Chicano movement so a lot of my Mexican people, you know, charros and guys playing the guitar and whatever, they started being noticed and for some reason some of my paintings were adopted by the Chicano movement. And then I was popular with the military in America, and I was popular with the Mexicans but then, you know, I had to choose between one and the other, you know. So I stayed with them, you know, my wife was also told me, "Well, you have to be living with our children so you better stay with the government." And I worked many years with the government. In fact, I retired, so that must have been close to 30 years, right?

*That's great.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** And all this time I was painting, and never going to classes. There was never time, you know. I got four or five kids to support. And then they started inviting me to exhibit with the rest of the artists that had a name, and at first I wasn't welcome too much, you know, because I was just a street artist. And little by little, getting more and more until I got the Texas State Artist.

*That's great. That's a real honor.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** And then in Houston, I painted in the downtown church, a Catholic church in downtown Houston over there by the Galleria. I painted, the church is a hundred years old, and the early Europeans came there. I painted the resurrection there for Christ, the main altar, and I did a lot of religious paintings, and a lot of animal paintings and action paintings of different things. And then very, very little glamour. I did paint some glamour pictures.

*That has to be a good feeling, though, to be able to create a work of art like that that's going to last for a long time, that future generations will get to see. That's got to be satisfying.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Oh, yeah, I got a . . . Someday you come over here, give me a call or something and I'll show you some of my murals.

*I'd love to do that, absolutely.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Well, most of them my kids got 'em but there's a lot in public places. And then the military started hiring me to do military murals, and that was my love because I love the military, and I fought with the military. And then I also loved the music of Mexico but, I mean, this is my country so there was no conflict there, you know. So then I . . . All of a sudden, especially in Houston. You know my present memory is worsening. I remember things better from a long time ago.

*Yeah, that makes sense.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** This Catholic church in downtown Houston, the name escapes me. But I did a lot of artwork for the priest there. Then I started to get known in the eastern part of Texas and Oklahoma, and in Colorado, you know, because, in Colorado because the Chicano movement had Juarez over there with \_ and my daughter married a guy from Colorado so they lived there. I used to go and visit but little by little, I started pulling away and doing strictly American painting, military, and I spent something like thirty some years working for the military.

*Yeah, that's great.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** That's about it. I'm still going.

*That's excellent. Well, sir, it's been an honor to be able to talk to you today. This program is about preserving these stories so future generations can hear them. With that in mind, is there anything you would want to say to somebody listening to this interview years from now?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, well, what can I say? Love your country even if you have to give your life for it, and I love my country very much. And I get emotional.

*That's completely understandable. Yes sir.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** I still . . . I don't do any painting anymore because my hand shakes too much. I try to but I start shaking. I have a lot of equipment that my kids have brought me but even here I try to paint or write. I used to have a real fancy writing, you know, the old type?

*Calligraphy?*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Yeah, like I said, I can't control my hand. It starts shaking. So I almost live in memories but I'm listed in several books that have been published.

*Oh, no. You've got a great legacy just from all the painting that you've done. It's definitely something to be proud of.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** 'Course sometimes I didn't get any recognition from the professionals here in El Paso. You know, like, they didn't invite me to the festivities in the galleries and all that, but eventually they'll change a little.

*That's great. Well, sir, again I want to thank you for letting us interview you today but more importantly, on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone here at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our country, and this is just a . . . The stuff we're going to send you in a week or two is just a very small token of our gratitude for your service.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** You know, I would gladly do it again. If I could, the years, if I was young again, I would surely go again.

*I understand completely.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Okay, sir.

*Okay, well, again, thank you very much. It's been an honor, and we'll talk to you again soon.*

**Ernesto Martinez:** Okay. God bless you.

*You too. Take care. Bye bye.*