

## **Transcription: Pedro Morales**

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*Today is Wednesday, March 20, 2013. My name is James Crabtree. Today I'll be interviewing Mr. Pedro Morales. This interview is being conducted in support of the General Land Office Texas Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Mr. Morales is at the Floresville Home in Floresville, Texas, and I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to speak to us today. It's an honor for us and for our program.*

**Pedro Morales:** Thank you.

*Sir, the first question I always start off with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, we was living in the country at the time, and we were just farming and raising chickens, turkeys, and everything else, what it is. We used to ride horses and tame 'em and all that stuff.

*Where did you grow up? Did you live in Floresville as a kid?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, at Saspanco, where the big lake was. I don't know if it's still there or not. Used to be a big lake on that ranch.

*Did you have any brothers and sisters?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, I've got one sister. We were seven but we are only two now. One sister.

*But you have seven siblings growing up. Did anybody in your family, had anybody served in the military before you went in?*

**Pedro Morales:** No.

*So tell us then how it came to be that you went into the military. What branch did you go into?*

**Pedro Morales:** We went to the Company C, 99<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion what the name was.

*So you were in the Army?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, the Army.

*Were you drafted?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, I was drafted.

*Tell us, did you think you were going to get drafted? Was it a surprise to you?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, it wasn't because I was by myself. I was of age, and I wasn't married or anything like that. We had . . . I had my mother and two younger brothers, sister and brother who was also we were taking care of. But I knew there was no excuse for me not to go.

*Sure. What conflict? Were you in World War II?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes.

*Were you in school when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Do you remember when that happened?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, I remember it happened but I can't tell you too much about it. I don't know. It just went out of my . . .

*When you got drafted, where did they send you to for your basic training?*

**Pedro Morales:** California.

*California?*

**Pedro Morales:** Salinas, California.

*Was that the first time you had been away from home?*

**Pedro Morales:** Right.

*What were your thoughts at that time?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, it wasn't too much to say about it. We just gotta do it.

*We're you scared or excited or nervous?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, nervous, I guess. And anxiety too because we was doing something that we never heard or done about it before.

*How did your family feel about you going off?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, my mother was feeling pretty bad, of course, like all mothers but there was no, didn't shake or anything like that. There was no . . . She knew what we were up against so it was okay.

*Sir, what are your memories of boot camp, basic training out there in California?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, it was kind of tough because it was a concentration camp for Japanese. They had them over there, and then they pulled them out and then we came in, and it was too muddy. It was muddy all the time. I don't know why. But anyway, I hurt my knee and I had to be out for a week, and I kinda twisted my . . . We was jumping off of the truck and fall down and roll over, so we'd make a tie on the wires because we were running telephone lines at that time. But, I did well and then strong enough to start all over again.

*What were your drill instructors like, your DIs, or the ones that taught you? Do you remember anything about them?*

**Pedro Morales:** It was Sergeant Branch who was very good to us, and like I was thinking the other day, he told us, he says, "There's some that care and some they don't, and some they don't give a damn." He said, "That's the kind of people we're gonna have trouble with, the ones that don't give a damn." He was right because you were trying to be the best you can and they goof off or stuff like that.

*What type of training did you go through?*

**Pedro Morales:** Mostly we were running the few wires, telephone, and all over we tied whatever we can or opened the trees or buried underground.

*So you went through basic training in California learning how, I guess, to fire a weapon and march and that sort of thing?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, yes.

*At what point did they put you in the Signal Corps?*

**Pedro Morales:** When we went over there across. We knew we was going somewhere but we didn't know, of course. It was a secret. But we started, we was going to a cold place because we had issued heavy clothes and stuff like that, and when we got to Port Moresby, New Guinea. That's where we started getting briefed of all the heavy equipment and clothing and stuff like that.

*What was your particular job in the Signal Corps? Explain to us what you did.*

**Pedro Morales:** A pole climber. We'd climb poles, make the Rhombic, they called. It was like a big antenna on the front but the poles were 60 feet high, and you had to get up there and hang the wires and get down as fast as you could because somebody might take a shot at you.

*Pretty difficult work.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, it was until you get used to it, then you don't give a damn \_.

*Was it something that you wanted to do or was it something that when you were . . . ?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes. I was good at it. We can say that.

*But when you were in boot camp, did you ask to go in the Signal Corps or did they just tell you that's where you're going?*

**Pedro Morales:** We was told that's where we're going. But we did it, and now that I look back at it, we did the right thing.

*Yes sir. So you went through your basic training, and then you went to some sort of signal school training I'm sure, right?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes.

*Where was that held?*

**Pedro Morales:** Also in . . .

*In Salinas?*

**Pedro Morales:** In Salinas, yes.

*So after you went through all that, then they shipped you overseas, is that correct?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes.

*Where did they send you to first?*

**Pedro Morales:** Australia.

*What did you think of Australia?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, well, somebody was there before we did but it was a little waste around. But we did it, started climbing poles. It was my first job where I started to learn how to climb and get down from the telephone poles. It was the first time I was 60 feet up and it was in a boat.

*In a boat?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, a post, telephone pole.

*I guess you weren't afraid of heights then, were you? Because I think the average person probably wouldn't feel comfortable climbing a pole 60 feet in the air. Probably scare them a bit.*

**Pedro Morales:** No, it doesn't until you get really good at it.

*Tell us, how would you climb it? Did you have any particular tools they gave you to help you climb?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah. Hoops, what they call it, and the belts we used. We tied it. And the best thing is to do, learn how to do it and get down in one piece.

*Yeah. Did you wear any sort of spikes on your shoes, on your boots?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah. You gotta have it otherwise you couldn't have done it.

*So it's kind of like a telephone lineman then, right?*

**Pedro Morales:** Right.

*Going all the way up with the wire and back down?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah.

*So you did that in Australia first, practicing?*

**Pedro Morales:** We went for training in Australia. With that we went straight to Port Moresby, New Guinea.

*To New Guinea. What are your memories, sir, of New Guinea?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, it was wet and muddy all the time. But we got along. You had to learn how to do things in the rain all the time. And we did it.

*Did you see much of the Japanese? Did you have any contact with the Japanese?*

**Pedro Morales:** Not really too much. We were not in combat. We were supposed to go in and come out as long as the easiest way you could without letting the Japanese know that you were doing that, wiring a telephone or stuff like that.

*Yeah. You said that the weather there, the climate in New Guinea was pretty wet, I'm sure. Was it pretty warm as well, tropical?*

**Pedro Morales:** That's true. It was very wet and very hot. Very hot.

*What were the men like in your unit? Do you remember any of them?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, we all were good buddies, and we never had any problem with each other. They were good sergeants. They knew what they were doing, and we had to depend on that. We was okay, very good.

*How would you pass the time when you weren't putting up wires and poles and that sort of thing? How would you take care of the time? Did you have other duties?*

**Pedro Morales:** A lot of times we'd do anything, but sometimes we'd get to play ball. But it was dependent on the place you were that was dry enough to play or too wet.

*How about your living conditions? Where did you live?*

**Pedro Morales:** In tents.

*Were they large tents that a lot of men slept in or was it kind of an individual or two-man tent?*

**Pedro Morales:** We're six in each tent.

*Six-man tents.*

**Pedro Morales:** That's pretty much what we did, hot. With nets around them so we don't get bitten by mosquitoes. It was okay.

*How was the food?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, some days we had to eat very well and sometimes we didn't, depends on how long you'd been a shipment of food out there.

*Since you'd been resupplied.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah.

*Did you get much mail from home?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, what they called V-mail.

*Yeah, the little mail that they would shrink it down.*

**Pedro Morales:** Right, yeah. We'd get mostly every day one letter from our mother or my girlfriend and stuff like that.

*Did you have a chance to write them back very much?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah.

*That's good.*

**Pedro Morales:** \_

*How long would it normally take you to get a piece of mail? A couple weeks?*

**Pedro Morales:** Sometimes a couple of weeks, sometimes less, but sometimes more.

*How did your girlfriend handle you being away?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, I guess okay because she waited for me until I got back, and after that we got married.

*That's great. Did she or you keep any of the letters that you wrote during the war?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, I didn't get to that. Mama got rid of them. My mother got rid of them. We had too much stuff to move around, so much stuff. But we did okay.

*How long were you in New Guinea?*

**Pedro Morales:** Almost three years.

*Three years. That's a long time to be in one spot.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, it was but you don't have time to worry about that because when you have something to worry about getting up and fixing what you have to be fixing.

*What was the hardest part of being in the Signal Corps?*

**Pedro Morales:** Climbing, I guess, the telephone poles. The rest comes easy.

*Was that a pretty routine thing, that you had to climb a lot of the poles?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes sir.

*So pretty much every day you think?*

**Pedro Morales:** Every day.

*Every day. What was the main reason that you had to climb so much?*

**Pedro Morales:** Because they were using that Rhombic they call to, so that the Japs wouldn't cut into their conversation or listen to anything that was said over the air. Very important whether to build them and how and what place.

*Did the lines get damaged a lot though? Is that part of the reason why you had to . . . ?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, no. The reason that we had more use for it. We have a built another one and another one, whatever it costs.

*While you were there in New Guinea those three years, did things get better as time went on? Did the food and that sort of thing get better the longer that you were there?*

**Pedro Morales:** I think it did. Like I said, you get used to it, kind of eating and stuff like that. So we didn't care too much about it.

*Were you ever homesick?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, not really.

*What about USO shows? Did you have any USO shows come through while you were there?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, sometimes they did. We seen Jack Benny, I think, came by.

*Jack Benny? That's a pretty big name.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah.

*How about news from home in terms of what was going on in the world? Did you have a pretty good idea of what was happening in the war and that sort of thing?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah. My sisters, they used to tell us what's happening and what's going on, all by V-mail but we got it.

*Were you in New Guinea then when the war ended? Did you spend your entire tour in New Guinea?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, about that time we got to Manila, the Philippine Islands.

*How long was it after the Philippines were liberated that you were there? Were you part of the . . .?*

**Pedro Morales:** Six or eight months. D-Day was about six or eight months before we got in.

*Got in to Manila?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah.

*What are your memories of the Philippines?*

**Pedro Morales:** Very, very nice people. They were good to us, and we can depend on them for anything. They were very nice. They treat us very nice.

*I'm sure they were glad to see you guys.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, they were.

*After having been occupied by the Japanese.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah. Well, the first thing they wanted us to do is get rid of the houses where the Japs were living because they were pretty messed up and nobody else could live there after they left, so we had to tear them all down and clean up. And they were very glad to have us help them. But it was okay.

*How about your officers? Did you have much interaction with them?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, but they were good people too. They were very nice to us. They had to at that time.

*I think you said you had some brothers, right? Did any of them go in the military?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah. My brother went to Saipan.

*Went to Saipan. Was he in the Marines Corps?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, Army.

*Army. Did you know how your brothers were doing? Were you able to get word from your parents?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, once in a while we got a letter from them. Because I know my brother wasn't too much to write at that time. They didn't have time to do it anyway. But we kept an eye on him.

*That's good. So you were in the Philippines. Were you there when the war ended?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes.

*Tell us about your memory of that.*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, everybody sort of hollering and hooting and doing as much noise as could be done. They were happy, we were so happy. Everybody was happy and really proud.

*I'm sure you were very excited as well, right?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, sure. Yes sir.

*How long was it at that point before you were able to go home? Did you have enough points to go home then?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes. I think we had enough. We stayed there about eight or 10 months and then we came home.

*Yeah, you'd been gone for at least three years, right?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah. It was time to get out, come back home.

*I bet. When you got to leave, how long was it after the war ended before you were able to get to leave?*

**Pedro Morales:** I really don't know how long it was but it was about three months I think when we got ready and they told us we was going to come home.

*Did they send you on a ship?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes. It was the longest trip there. Fifteen days to get here.

*That's pretty long.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, it was.

*Where did you go back to? Did you go back to San Francisco first?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes.

*What was that like?*

**Pedro Morales:** It was very exciting because it was Christmas days when we were there, and it was all the cooks and everything and they prepared the food were Germans, German cooks.

*Prisoners of war?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes. But they were very, very nice people and good cooks. They were very good to us.

*How did it feel to be back home after having been gone for so long?*

**Pedro Morales:** It was wonderful I think. Yeah, it was good. You have to start looking for something else to do besides GI. But I went to my old job, plumbing. I knew how to do plumbing and that's what I did after and before I got . . .

*So when you got back to the States, how long was it before they discharged you out of the Army?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, it was just a matter of days.

*So pretty quick then?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, it was very quick.

*What rank did you have when you left?*

**Pedro Morales:** Staff sergeant.

*Staff sergeant, that's pretty impressive that you picked up that much rank in that short a period of time, right?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, it was on account of the job we had to do. It was very important and not everybody can climb 60 feet in the air.

*Yeah.*

**Pedro Morales:** We had some guys that would do it but sometimes it's better for you that don't . . . At least better to me I could do it better than anybody else, to put it that way. And I felt safe to go ahead and do it.

*Did you have any desire to stay in the Army after the war ended?*

**Pedro Morales:** Not really, no. After I got home, they sent me some letters and some people went to talk to me but my mother couldn't stand it. She said, "I had enough of that." So I stayed home.

*So where did you go back to after you got out? Where was home?*

**Pedro Morales:** San Antonio.

*When you got back home and were back in San Antonio, did things seem like they had changed at all or did it just seem like normal again?*

**Pedro Morales:** Some things were changed and some were worse, some were better. It was nice, that's okay.

*I'm sure your girlfriend who later became your wife, I'm sure she was glad to have you home after that long.*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah.

*How long was it before you got married then after you got back home?*

**Pedro Morales:** About a year or so.

*About a year. That's great. Did you keep in touch, sir, with any of the men that you had served with in the Army?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, for a while. For quite some time, they had a book. Each month they would mail us a book of where the parties were and holidays, who passed away and all the stuff like that. And so just lately we heard the last one of us, that I'm the only one.

*The only one from your unit?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah. I'm the only one left.

*Yes sir.*

**Pedro Morales:** \_

*Did you keep any pictures or uniforms or souvenirs or that sort of thing from your time in the Army?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah, there's a lot of them. We got the whole company together and we still got some pictures of that, the whole company.

*That's great. Did you keep your uniforms or anything of that sort?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, we turned 'em in.

*Oh, you turned them in, okay. Because I know some guys came back from World War II with a whole bunch of souvenirs and that sort of thing. I didn't know if you brought anything back with you.*

**Pedro Morales:** No, I'm not that type. It was too heavy to carry around. We had too much of it.

*You hear stories about some of these guys coming back with Japanese helmets or swords and that sort of thing, and I didn't know if you had done that or not.*

**Pedro Morales:** There was a lot of work to be done because you had to rush to leave right there, go pick it up and come back so, to me, it isn't worth it. I had enough of that.

*What did you end up doing when you got back to San Antonio? Did you get a job there?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yes. Back to plumbing. I was doing plumbing, gas seating and stuff like that.

*Was that kind of something you were doing before you got drafted?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, it was like plumbing, all the plumbing repair. I worked for \_ and they were doing all kinds of new machines that were coming out.

*Was it hard to remember all that or did it come back to you pretty quickly?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, it came back quick. It really don't get out of you, not that easy. Once you learn how to do it, it will stay on you.

*I guess it's kind of like riding a bicycle then, you don't forget, right?*

**Pedro Morales:** Something like that.

*Did you and your wife have any children?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, we have two boys and a girl.

*Two boys and a girl. Did they ever ask you at all about your time in the Army?*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah, sometimes they do. My two boys are still living but my girl passed away. Superintendent in high school, Harlandale. She had a good job but cancer got after her and took her away.

*Sorry to hear that. Well, I'm sure all your children are proud of you for your service in the Army.*

**Pedro Morales:** Oh, yeah, they do.

*And now you're at the home in Floresville. How do you like that?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, it's . . . It has to be okay. It's all right.

*Is the food okay?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, yeah.

*That's good.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, everything is fine.

*Are there many other World War II veterans there?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, quite a few. There are some guys that I didn't know from Corpus Christi and all around mostly.

*Well, that's good. Do you all talk very often about your memories of the service?*

**Pedro Morales:** No, not really.

*Well, I'm glad, sir, that you agreed to let us interview you today because here at the Land Office, we have archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. So our goal is to take these interviews and save them for posterity so that future generations can hear this interview long after you and I are both gone. So it's an honor for us and it's something that every veteran has a unique story and unique memories, and so for us to be able to save this today is an honor for us.*

**Pedro Morales:** Thank you.

*In about a week or two, I think I mentioned this before we started recording, but in about a week or two we're going to send copies of this interview to you on CDs so you can give them to your family or friends. I'm sure your kids and grandkids would really appreciate having it.*

**Pedro Morales:** They would.

*And then we'll also send a nice letter and certificate signed by Commissioner Patterson. We put it in a commemorative binder, and it's just a very small way of the State of Texas saying thank you to you for your service to our nation. So be looking for that, and then I plan in the next several days too to interview some other veterans there in Floresville, so if you have any friends there at the Tejada home, please let them know about the interview you did because our goal is to interview as many veterans as we can. And they don't just have to be World War II, they can be from any time period, any branch of service. We're just trying to interview as many veterans as we can get. Sir, I really appreciate your time and your service. Is there anything, any memories or anecdotes or stories that you would want to share with us that I might have not asked about?*

**Pedro Morales:** Well, I can't recall right now. I'm kind of nervous.

*Don't be nervous. It's just you and me chatting, so I'm a fellow veteran too so I know sometimes there are certain things that are easier to remember than others. I think we got a pretty good interview here. Hopefully it's something that folks can listen to it and learn a little bit. Like I didn't realize there was so much climbing involved with the Signal Corps.*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes it is. Well, it was our team. I don't know why we were prepared but we were prepared on top of everybody else, said we were the best because we did what we had to do.

*What was the name of your unit again?*

**Pedro Morales:** 99<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion.

*The 99<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion?*

**Pedro Morales:** Right, Company C, 99<sup>th</sup>.

*Okay, I'm writing all this down. Where was the 99<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion headquartered? Were they located there in Salinas?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yes, at first, yes, and then was sent to Saipan, no, no . . .

*New Guinea?*

**Pedro Morales:** Yeah, New Guinea.

*And then pretty much spent the whole . . . Spent about three years in New Guinea and then on to the Philippines and that's where you were when the war ended.*

**Pedro Morales:** Right.

*That's great. Well, sir, it's been a real honor to talk to you today, and like I mentioned before, we'll be sending all this to you in the mail in a few weeks. I'll put my card in there too so you can get in touch with me. And then, of course, the folks there at the Floresville home know how to get a hold of me as well in the meantime. Again, sir, thank you very much. It's been an honor for me and just thank you on behalf of everybody here at the General Land Office for your service.*

**Pedro Morales:** Okay, thank you.

*Yes sir. Take care. Have a good day. Bye bye, sir.*

**Pedro Morales:** Good bye.