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This Francis Parker photograph shows San Antonio St. looking west in the early 1880s. The State National Bank is on the corner; Emerson and Berrien funeral home is in the middle. The small shop toward the end of the block has a barber pole out front. The First National Bank was at the opposite end of the block. See the article about its fire on page 47.

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Aiming for the Skies Over Fort Bliss
The Arrival of the Antiaircraft, 1940
By John Hamilton

As a result of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) decision in 2005, Fort Bliss is undergoing one of the largest and most ambitious transformations in its history. The Air Defense Artillery Center and School completed its move to Fort Sill, Oklahoma in 2009. On July 9, 2010, the 1st Armored Division planted its flag on Fort Bliss and formally became the largest organization on the post, supplanting the Air Defense Artillery. As divisional brigade combat units began to arrive at Fort Bliss in 2005, construction to house and support these units began in earnest. This started with the temporary quarters for the 4th Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Cavalry Division, with new modular barracks and administrative spaces plus temporary maintenance facilities and dining halls. Variously known as “Longknife Village,” “Highlander Village,” “Bulldog Village,” and now “Ironside Village,” these buildings provided air-conditioned living and work spaces to units that eventually moved into the permanent structures that now form East Fort Bliss.1 Fort Bliss, however, has undergone equally dramatic changes in its history, with soldiers having to endure much more Spartan conditions.

On September 20th, 1940, a troop train squealed to a halt at the Plainport Siding next to Fort Bliss (near the intersection of Sheridan and Wilson Roads today). The 1st Battalion, 202nd Coast Artillery (Antiaircraft or AA) Regiment of the Illinois National Guard had arrived after a long trip from Chicago, Illinois.

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1 As each arriving brigade combat team occupied these temporary barracks, the commander renamed the area for the brigade nickname or mascot. When the new commander of the 1st Armored Division arrived, he named the area for the “Old Ironsides” division and the last name stuck.
There being no other antiaircraft units on Fort Bliss, officers from the 1st Cavalry Division and the 7th Cavalry Regimental Band were on hand to greet the arrival. The post had no barracks available for the battalion, so the troops erected their tents in the old cavalry remount area, located just south of what is now Fred Wilson Avenue. These remount corrals extended north to include what is now Dyer Street. The next day the 2nd Battalion arrived on a troop train along with the 202nd Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, the Medical Detachment, and the Regimental Band. Commanding the 1st and 2nd Battalions were Lieutenant Colonels George F. Gorey and Charles T. Pulham, respectively. The regimental commander, Colonel Charles C. Dawes, resumed command when he arrived with the Headquarters Battery. Two days later, a motor convoy bringing all of the regiment's rolling stock and equipment reached the post. This included the regiment's 3-inch guns, M-4 gun directors, searchlights, and .50-caliber machine guns. With no antiaircraft headquarters command structure on Fort Bliss at the time, the 202nd was attached to the 1st Cavalry Division for temporary command and control.²

More antiaircraft units followed quickly. In early December 1940, the 63rd Coast Artillery Regiment (AA) arrived at Fort Bliss from its home station of Fort Winfield Scott, California. In January 1941, the 206th Coast Artillery (AA), Arkansas National Guard; the 260th Coast Artillery (AA), District of Columbia National Guard; and the 200th Coast Artillery (AA), New Mexico National Guard all arrived to conduct unit training at Fort Bliss. The 200th Coast Artillery was unique, having been redesignated antiaircraft from horse cavalry less than a year before.³ All were to occupy billet-

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² From a June 1990 letter of the Coast Artillery Association, El Paso Chapter, written by Roger S. McCabe, Historian, on file in the ADA Command History Office, Fort Bliss, Texas.
³ Cave, Dorothy, Beyond Courage: One Regiment Against Japan, 1941-1945, Las Cruces, New Mexico: Yucca Tree Press, 1992, p. 18. On April 26, 1940, the 111th Cavalry Regiment was redesignated the 207th Coast Artillery (AA). Because that designation had been a New York National Guard Regiment and New York wanted to retain the numerals from a unit with
ing space in the Fort Bliss cantonment and conduct training on the broad range spaces on the post. These events ushered in the transformation of Fort Bliss from a cavalry post to an antiaircraft post, mitiating a long period of antiaircraft training on the post.

Although the United States was not at war in 1940, war seemed imminent. Great Britain was defending itself against a Nazi air campaign while trying to reconstitute forces lost in the Dunkirk withdrawal. Japanese aggression in the Far East garnered considerable attention in the press. It was becoming more and more apparent that the United States might eventually stand alone against fascism and military aggression.

Congress passed a joint resolution on August 27, 1940, authorizing the president to call National Guard and Army Reserve units to active duty for a period of twelve months. On September 16, Congress passed the Selective Service and Training Act, allowing for a peacetime draft. The main limitation of this was that these forces could “not be employed beyond the limits of the Western Hemisphere except in the Territories and possessions of the United States, including the Philippine Islands.” Given the requirement to mobilize antiaircraft regiments as part of the Protective Mobilization Plan, the Army designated seven camps as Army Antiaircraft Training Centers. With its clear weather, ex-

Although the United States was not at war in 1940, war seemed imminent. Great Britain was defending itself against a Nazi air campaign while trying to reconstitute forces lost in the Dunkirk withdrawal. Japanese aggression in the Far East garnered considerable attention in the press. It was becoming more and more apparent that the United States might eventually stand alone against fascism and military aggression.

World War I service, New Mexico agreed to change the unit designation to the 200th Coast Artillery (AA). All antiaircraft units in the 1930’s were part of the Coast Artillery branch of service.


The PMP originated in 1936 and was conceived to mobilize a moderate and balanced force for defense of the United States. This plan was revised multiple times. See Kreidberg and Henry, pp. 476-492.
tensive range land, and railroad nexus, Fort Bliss was one of those centers.

Thus it was that the 202nd Coast Artillery Regiment (AA) arrived at Fort Bliss on September 20, 1940. It was organized as follows:

![Diagram of Mobile Artillery Regiment Organization]

**Mobile Antiaircraft Regiment Organization**

Presumably, the soldiers of the 202nd Coast Artillery settled into their not-so-comfortable bivouac around the old horse corrals in the September heat until better accommodations became available. Although the unit was not at not full-strength, the plan was to expand the unit with draftees. Meantime, Colonel Dawes began training his regiment on the Fort Bliss ranges. On December 10, the regiment shifted into new quarters on Logan Heights, but it remained in tents.

The end of October 1940 brought the 63rd Coast Artillery (AA), a Regular Army regiment, by motor convoy from Fort Winfield Scott, California. This was considered an excellent unit at the time because it had a good gunnery record, one battery having won the Knox Trophy for excellence in practice in 1928. In Janu-

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7 Logan Heights is still Logan Heights, located between Dyer and Alabama Streets. It is now a family housing area, Paso Del Norte Housing Area.
8 Coast Artillery Activities, "Battery 'E,' 63rd C.A. (A.A.), Wins Knox Trophy," Coast Artillery Journal, Volume 72, Number 1, p.70. The Knox Trophy was named for General Henry Knox of the Revolutionary War and was sponsored by the Sons of the American Revolution of the Common-
ary 1941, the other regiments arrived to train at Fort Bliss. The 260th Coast Artillery (AA), conducted a regimental road march from Washington, D.C. to Fort Bliss starting on January 13, 1941. The regiment passed through Forts Bragg, North Carolina and Jackson, South Carolina; through Waycross and Quitman, Georgia; through Biloxi, Mississippi and Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and then through Houston, Uvalde, Del Rio, and Marfa, Texas. The regiment arrived at Fort Bliss on January 30, completing 2,500 miles by road. Enroute the regiment was treated to celebrations, dinners, and concerts at every stop. The regiment reciprocated with gun crew drill and searchlight demonstrations and concerts by its own regimental band. Even the nineteen men sick in Walter Reed Hospital who could not make the trip joined the regiment shortly after its arrival on the post.9

The 206th Coast Artillery Regiment (AA), Arkansas National Guard, received its mobilization notice on December 31, 1940. Units in eleven Arkansas cities prepared equipment for movement. Battery D was equipped at war strength, with all of its guns. The remaining batteries were short, especially the searchlight battery (Battery A), which had only a single World War I model searchlight. This battery left Little Rock on January 14, 1941 in twenty-three vehicles, including five private automobiles. Batteries D and F left the same day with only two officers and thirty-two enlisted men driving vehicles. The preponderance of the regiment came by train. The first echelon arrived at Fort Bliss on January 17, moving into partially finished quarters on Logan Heights.

The 200th Coast Artillery (AA), New Mexico National Guard, received its activation orders effective at one minute past midnight on January 6, 1941. The regimental commander, Colonel Charles Gurdon Sage, handed over the operation of the Deming Headlight newspaper to his wife and began organizing the regiment for movement to Fort Bliss. The regiment's strength was about 750, and it would expand at Fort Bliss to a war-time strength of 1,800. Unit locations were spread all over New Mexico, from Deming to Taos, and Gallup to Carlsbad. However, the regiment assembled rapidly enough to arrive at Fort Bliss on January 15 and 16 join the other antiaircraft regiments on Logan Heights.

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The troops endured construction noise for several weeks. On Logan Heights' thousand acres, an army of excavators, bulldozers, graders, and carpenters had been hard at work since October 1940. Where before there were only a few caliche roads branching off Route 54, within weeks there were established roads, electricity, and water and sewer piping. These construction projects would expand as the Fort Bliss Antiaircraft Training Center grew.

The training regimen called for thirteen weeks of unit training, including the fillers from the Selective Service call-ups. Training began in earnest in February 1941 on Doña Ana Range. This range consisted of 421,582.72 acres of former ranch land in New Mexico obtained under an extended co-use lease. As of February 7, 1941, the 1st Battalion of the 202nd Regiment was conducting daily firing practice and the 2nd Battalion was conducting antiaircraft machine gun firing. Each night, the searchlight battery (A Battery) conducted night exercises on the range. The training location was somewhat of a challenge to Coast Artillerymen, who were used to other environments at lower altitudes. A target at ten thousand feet on Fort Bliss was actually at fourteen thousand feet above sea level. The main highway to the range was Route 54, as it still is today. The range provided two 3-inch gun firing points that could be used simultaneously. Two other points could accommodate 37mm or .50-caliber guns and could also be used at the same time. More were under construction. The minimum field of fire was about 120 degrees, with the maximum at some points of 180 degrees. Eventually 360-degree points were built. Additionally, Doña Ana Range allowed a commander to field his entire regiment, including searchlights, guns, and automatic weapons. No unit had ever had this ability anywhere before.

Logan Heights, 1941

As construction on Logan Heights progressed, the troops’ surroundings improved. The tent floors, beds, mattresses, and blankets were all new. Tents were heated with butane stoves. The mess halls, bathhouses, and latrines had hot and cold running water, and all buildings had electric lighting. Officers moved into tents that measured nine-by-nine feet. Captains and above had tents to themselves; officers below the grade of captain had a tentmate. Enlisted soldiers lived in pyramidal tents, 301 per regimental area. The tents were mounted on board frames with seven-foot side walls. Each regimental area included twelve mess halls, thirteen bath houses, three motor repair buildings, a regimental warehouse, and administration, recreation, Post Exchange, and infirmary buildings. The mess halls had gas ranges and large ice refrigerators.

Very soon, new soldiers inducted in the peacetime draft started to arrive. In March, four hundred selectees arrived and were assigned to the 206th Coast Artillery. All came from Camp Robinson, Arkansas, the home station of the 206th. The 260th Coast Artillery was brought to full strength in May, receiving 298 selectees from Washington, D.C. They were greeted by the regimental band playing “Hail to the Redskins.”

13 Picture from the Air Defense Artillery Museum, Fort Bliss, Texas. All pictures are courtesy the Fort Bliss Museums Directorate unless otherwise noted.
All arriving soldiers were greeted warmly by the city of El Paso. There were many dances and parties on and off post to welcome soldiers to their new environment. El Paso hostesses arranged for chaperoned dance partners. The city opened a major recreation hall downtown, which was a huge facility offering the very best of entertainment. There were United Services Organization (USO) shows that brought in major talents and movie stars, including Rosalind Russell, Jeanette MacDonald, and Dorothy Lamour. The newspapers advertised other high-toned diversions, such as opera singers and a troupe from the Ballets Russes. There were continuous showings of the latest movies at all of the theaters, including the Plaza Theater in downtown El Paso. And, the cabarets and restaurants of Ciudad Juárez (Mexico) advertised their attractions to the troops. Presumably, the less legitimate businesses and sordid diversions of the border town also had their appeal.

The Army even constructed a swimming pool in the Antiaircraft Training Center area along with a movie theater with wooden sides and a canvas tent roof. When the inevitable windstorm took the canvas roof, the theater just kept showing films under the stars. Soldiers also submitted pictures of their sweethearts back home to the post newspaper for selection as the unit sweetheart or “Huddle Girl.” Some of those selected got to come to Fort Bliss, along with their mothers of course.

However, amid all the available entertainment and diversions, this was a time of strict military discipline. A soldier was required to have a written pass or leave form signed by the commander or first sergeant to leave post. This was a powerful hold over soldiers that the Army does not observe today. If a soldier misbehaved, did not commit himself to training that week, had a dirty rifle, a rusty bayonet, or just irritated his first sergeant, he was doomed to spend a weekend on post while his buddies went into town. And uniforms were the order of the day, even on post while off duty. A notation in the Fort Bliss Cavalcade, the post newspaper of the time, reminded soldiers that troops had to wear blouses (dress uniform jackets) on post after 5 p.m. The wear of newly issued field jackets during non-duty hours was not permitted. Units formed basketball, football, baseball (hard and soft),

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15 Dorothy Lamour did not arrive the first time as expected. She had acquired a nervous condition as a result of a hectic appearance schedule, so the troops were disappointed that the famous sarong girl could not come. *Fort Bliss Cavalcade*, April 17, 1942.

volleyball, horseshoe, and boxing teams to fill what little off-duty time they actually had.

With so many antiaircraft regiments on Fort Bliss, the 1st Cavalry Division did not have the ability to oversee antiaircraft training while simultaneously conducting its own training. Accordingly, the Army activated the Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 39th Coast Artillery Brigade on February 10, 1941. This provided for the administrative and training oversight of what was rapidly becoming a major presence on Fort Bliss. The brigade then reported directly to the post headquarters, independent of the 1st Cavalry Division. With the impending formation of the 79th Coast Artillery (AA) Regiment, this completed the formation of the first Antiaircraft Training Center on the post.17

Commanding the 39th AAA Brigade was the first antiaircraft general officer on Fort Bliss, Brigadier General Oliver L. Spiller. Born on November 15, 1887, Spiller was a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. Graduating in 1909, he was commissioned in the Army Coast Artillery Corps in 1910. He had served in the usual staff and command positions in the Coast Artillery, including service with the Allied Expeditionary Force in France from 1917 until 1918, instructor in the Coast Artillery School from 1919 until 1924, and service with the coastal defenses of Panama from 1936 until 1939. He had commanded the harbor defenses of Eastern New York from 1939 until 1940. General Spiller would command the Antiaircraft

Training Center and 39th Coast Artillery Brigade until 1942, when he moved to command the Antiaircraft Artillery Training School at Camp Davis, North Carolina.

Brig. Gen. Oliver L. Spiller and his regimental commanders, 1941

In June, the 79th Coast Artillery Regiment (AA) was organized with a cadre from the 63rd Coast Artillery. The regiment was formed with a relatively experienced cadre of 167 men, and by July the regiment had a full complement of 1,453 raw recruits from the Selective Service draft. The regimental commander was Colonel Monte J. Hickok. Hickok was born in August 1887 in Missouri and was a graduate of the West Point Class of 1909, the same class as George S. Patton, Jr., Jacob Devers, and Robert Eichelberger. Commissioned in the Coast Artillery Corps, Hickok served as the commander of the 49th Coast Artillery in the Allied Expeditionary Force in World War I and as the commander of the Harbor Defense of Boston from 1937 until 1941. He would retire disabled later in 1941.

By the summer, convoys rolled out of Logan Heights daily, heading for Doña Ana Range. The 120th Observation Squadron on Biggs Airfield, flying O-47 observation aircraft, towed live-fire sleeve targets at around 6,000 feet, 2,000 feet behind the airplane.

18 Picture of all five regimental commanders and the AATC commander, February 1941, donated to the Fort Bliss Museum by Mrs. C.G. Sage.
That had to have been somewhat exciting for the crew of three. At night, the aircraft flew missions for the searchlight crews to acquire and track. The crisscrossing beams of light filled the night sky north of El Paso as they tracked the airplanes. With the open airspace, gunners could track up to eight targets at a time, maximizing crew training.\textsuperscript{19}

The regiments also recognized the need to train gunners to engage ground targets as a secondary mission. Anticipating the requirement, in 1940 Fort Bliss built an anti-mechanized target range on Castner Range. The courses were built on a narrow-gauge railroad track with banked curves to support a 125-pound target car moving at thirty-five miles per hour. The cars were constructed locally using a four-wheel two-axle chassis on a skeleton frame of light steel piping. Target covers made of salvaged canvas were mounted on the top, completing the affair. The cars could be handled by two men and were loaded on trucks, carried to the top of an incline, set on the track, and allowed to travel downhill by gravity alone. The average speed on the two one-mile-plus courses varied from twenty to forty-five miles-per-hour. The target crew at the top took shelter in stone blockhouses, which had to be exciting when the 37mm automatic cannons opened fire. The range looked like this:\textsuperscript{20}


Troops spent many sunny days at this range:

Moving Target Range, Castner Range 21

Units conducted long-distance convoy operations with all organic equipment as the unit training regimen approached completion. For example, Battery C, 202nd Coast Artillery convoyed to Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, a distance of 165 miles. A tour of the caverns was included. Batteries of the 200th Coast Artillery convoyed to Ruidoso, New Mexico in July 1941, dragging their 3-inch guns and setting up a bivouac for two days of welcome cooler weather and rain. Speaking of rain, in 1941 the post had gone a long time without rain, so the Taos Indians in the 200th Coast Artillery staged a rain dance in the spring to try to bring rain to the parched post. The resulting deluge and minor flood was so significant that the Indians were told to knock it off. 22

The month of July 1941 brought requirements for units to participate in the August Louisiana Maneuvers. From July 13 until July 26, Fort Bliss held its own preparatory mission readiness exercise before the units departed for the maneuvers in August. About 15,000 troops participated in the exercise, including elements of the 39th Coast Artillery Brigade. This included the 63rd,

21 McConnell, p. 455. The remnants of the railroad still exist on Castner Range, and the area still has much 37mm and 40mm unexploded ordnance.
202nd, and 206th Coast Artillery Regiments and the 2nd Battalion, 260th Coast Artillery. Their departure, along with the 1st Cavalry Division, left the post virtually empty.

3 Inch Antiaircraft Gun

With active combat underway in Europe and the Far East, the drive to expand the U.S. Army and prepare it for eventual war service continued to gather momentum. The mission to protect the continental United States and its territories had grown all-consuming, but soon the one-year term of duty for the National

23 All photos courtesy the ADA Museum, Ft. Sill, OK unless otherwise noted.
Guard units would expire. However, many National Guard units were reasonably well equipped and led, better in fact than many Regular Army regiments. Regular Army officers and noncommissioned officers were being scattered too thinly to train the expanding Army, which was suffering from too few trainers and leaders and too many draftees. Some Regular Army formations were actually ninety percent recruits. Thus, when it became necessary to deploy units to Hawaii, the Philippines, and Alaska, the National Guard units were actually better prepared to move.24 The war drew closer. By June 1941, the US State Department ordered all Italian consulates in the United States to close. Newspapers reported that Germany had opened a major military campaign against the Soviet Union. The pressure to retain the Guard units beyond one year and to increase the peacetime draft was overwhelming, but there was still resistance in the Congress. After determined insistence by the Army Chief of Staff and much debate, the Senate passed legislation extending the service of draftees and National Guard units by a vote of thirty-nine to thirty-four. Afterward, the House of Representatives reviewed and passed the legislation on August 12, 1941. This extended the term of service for draftees and increased federalization of National Guard units from twelve to thirty months. The measure passed by a House vote of 203 to 202. The blow of extended service was softened with a ten-dollar-a-month pay raise for all soldiers, regardless of rank. As this went on, German troops reached the Black Sea coast near the Ukrainian city of Odessa; Marshal Phillipe Pétain, the leader of Vichy France, committed to full collaboration with the Germans; and Britain and the United States warned Japan to stay out of Thailand.25

The antiaircraft regiments that returned to Fort Bliss from the Louisiana Maneuvers were now relatively experienced in maneuver warfare. As August ended and September began, some units were earmarked for deployment to fill immediate operational needs. The 206th Coast Artillery believed that, because all of its training had been in the desert climate of Fort Bliss, it would deploy to a desert climate. Instead, it was ordered to Alaska. On August 1, 1941, the regiment boarded trains for Camp Murray, Washington. From there, beginning on August 11, the regiment sailed from Seattle to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands. There they

would be in position for the Japanese air raids in June 1942. The regiment would remain there until redeployment to the contiguous United States in 1944.26

The 200th Coast Artillery (AA) was ordered to the Philippine Islands, departing for the west coast on August 30, 1941. On September 9, the unit left aboard ship for the Far East. The unit arrived in the Philippines and was assigned to Fort Stotsenberg, next to Clark Air Base near Manila. The regiment was defending the airfield there when the Japanese attacked on December 8. The regiment withdrew to the Bataan Peninsula, was eventually forced to surrender, and suffered on the Bataan Death March into the perdition of Japanese captivity. There is an old myth that the assignments of the 206th and 200th Coast Artillery rested on the flip of a coin. The loser was to be assigned to the desolate post in Alaska, and the winner was to go to the exotic Philippines. This is untrue. However, the decision to send the 200th to the Far East may have been based on the Spanish language proficiency of some of its soldiers.27

The remaining regiments stayed at Fort Bliss and were soon joined by other antiaircraft units. As time passed, the training program improved to accommodate the expanding antiaircraft force. As of June 30, 1941, from all of its antiaircraft training centers, the Army had fielded forty-three mobile antiaircraft regiments, six semi-mobile regiments, thirteen separate mobile battalions, and a barrage balloon battalion. With the degree of specialization that was emerging, the Army concluded that the antiaircraft force had to be separated from its Coast Artillery parent and the separate Army commands. So on March 9, 1942, the Army activated the Antiaircraft Command, concurrent with creating the Army Ground Forces

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26 Maxwell, Chapter 4, p. 25.
27 Ibid., Chapter 3, p. 22.
Headquarters from the General Headquarters. This brought Fort Bliss and the other six Antiaircraft Training Centers, the three Antiaircraft Artillery Replacement Training Centers, and a new Barrage Balloon Training Center at Camp Tyson, Tennessee, under the unified command of a single antiaircraft commander. The Antiaircraft Command also established an Antiaircraft School and an Antiaircraft Board, both at Camp Davis, North Carolina. The Antiaircraft Command established its headquarters in Temporary Building T, 14th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W. in Washington, D.C., until better quarters could be found. On March 31, the headquarters moved to the Mosque Building at Main and Laurel Streets, Richmond, Virginia, where it would remain until it moved to Fort Bliss in 1944.  

This effectively brought the Antiaircraft Training Center at Fort Bliss under a unified command.

After the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941, the United States Army went to war. The activation of units at Fort Bliss reached a frenetic pace in 1942. By the end of the year, the post had activated and trained eight antiaircraft regiments, two antiaircraft brigade headquarters (the 32nd and 46th) and fourteen separate antiaircraft battalions. The training program conducted from March 9 until December 16, 1942 was designed to provide trained units ready to deploy in the shortest possible time. At the close of 1942, Fort Bliss was well on its way to becoming the focus of antiaircraft training in the Army. The departure of the dismounted 1st Cavalry Division to the Southwest Pacific Theater in 1943 brought an end to the cavalry period in Fort Bliss history, and began the march to establish a major air defense training structure. That effort ended with BRAC in 2009.

Almost no trace exists of the antiaircraft training center barracks on Logan Heights. That area is now the Paso del Norte housing area. Casner Range is silent and unused, but still likely full of unexploded ordnance from the training in the 1940’s and 50’s. The old three-story stucco buildings that housed the 1st Cavalry Division and subsequently the antiaircraft training center are now used as administrative spaces for garrison functions. The nerve center of the post is now in Costello Hall, located on East Fort Bliss. The post of Fort Bliss continues to be transformed, as it has been so many times in its history.

Charles K. Hamilton: A Bird Man Over the Pass

By Esteban Vázquez

Many things have brought fame and notoriety to the city of El Paso, Texas. Scores of publications have been written on the legacy of wild gunfights, Fort Bliss, and the border culture. Other areas of our history, however, have received less attention. Aviation is part of the latter group, with only a few publications written about this transportation revolution in El Paso. Although it was the coming of the railroads that put El Paso on the map, the city’s history is also deeply connected to the aerospace industry. Two major airlines, Continental Airlines (now United Airlines) and Trans World Airlines started in El Paso as Varney Speed Lines and Standard Air Lines, respectively. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) also has historical ties with El Paso due to its proximity to the White Sands Test Facility. Even military aviation has its roots here when US military aircraft joined General Pershing’s troops on the Punitive Expedition into Mexico in search of Pancho Villa in 1916. Before all of this could occur, however, El Paso, Texas became one of the locations where aviation pioneers would introduce the locals to the advent of aviation. It was in 1910 that El Pasoans would witness their first aerial display from a pilot named Charles K. Hamilton.

As of 1910, aviation had not evolved much from the initial wood and fabric design of the unstable and would lose the lift needed to stay airborne during tricky aerial maneuvers, such as banking in turns or dramatic piloting. One of the most famous early transnational flights on the Vin Fiz Flyer. On September 1911, Calbraith Perry Rodgers flew a Wright Brothers model EZ for a $50,000 prize, set up by newspaper magnate William Randolph
Hearst, to fly from one coast of the United States to the other. The name of the aircraft derived from the sponsor, a famous meatpacker named J. Ogden Armour, who wanted to advertise his new Vin-Fiz grape soda. At the time, most aircraft lacked the navigation equipment that exists today. This meant that they followed the only manmade structures that spanned between cities, such as power lines, telegraph poles, and railroad tracks. Rodgers followed his own supply train along the tracks from Brooklyn, New York to Pasadena, California (including passing through El Paso via the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad line). Along the way, Rodgers and his mechanic rebuilt the Vin-Fiz so often that it only had three original parts left when it landed in Pasadena. Rodgers also arrived battered with multiple injuries and one of his legs in a cast. Death would catch up to him, moreover, in an airplane crash the following year.

This was the time when innovators pushed the limits of human flight and pilots routinely risked their lives. Many cities in the United States benefited from the creation of these flying marvels. Despite being located at a distant spot in the desert,

El Paso had become a modern city by the beginning of the 20th century, largely because of the coming of the rails. Electric lighting, powered trolleys, automobiles, and the telephone were some of the modern amenities that were part of the lives of El Pasoans in 1910. This was the perfect circumstance for this west Texas city to discover the wonder of powered flight. The individual who first overawed the people of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, with an aircraft was Charles K. Hamilton.

Hamilton was born on May 30, 1885 and had an interest in aeronautics as a boy. At the age of 18, he joined a professor who did experiments by dropping a glider from a balloon. After the glider pilot died in one of those flights, Hamilton continued piloting gliders, including introducing the first airship flight in Japan. He started hearing of the success of early aviators, such as Louis Bleriot and Glenn Curtiss in late 1909. After Glenn Curtiss rejected Hamilton’s requests to learn to fly, the latter started teaching himself in one of Curtiss’ aircraft while the owner was away on a quick trip. Upon discovering that Hamilton had secretly used his aircraft, Curtiss was initially angry, but then came to admire the aerial talent of the young pilot. From there, he became part of Curtiss’ exhibition pilots, the Curtiss Aviators.

There were inherent dangers in flying. Many pilots that Hamilton flew with, such as John Moisant, perished when they crashed while displaying their aerial feats. Like many of his colleagues, Hamilton himself had many brushes with death, from harsh weather, crash injuries, and from crashes that constantly required replacement parts. He was a daredevil. He put his life in the hands of a frail wood and canvas aircraft that rocked constantly when the propeller spun. Hamilton not only stayed alive during his daring aeronautical feats but also became the first pilot to make a documented night flight.

9 Ibid. The article stated that Hamilton’s flight over Japan was the first airship seen in the Orient over the Bay of Osaka, Japan.
10 Ibid.
11 LeShane, *Hardware City Fliers*, 4.
12 Ibid. 4-15.
14 Ibid., 160; LeShane, *Hardware City Fliers*, 3.
problems because the pilot cannot see trees, electric wires, birds, buildings, landing sites, and other hazards. Worse of all is the spatial disorientation when a pilot loses the perception of the aircraft’s pitch and bank, something that when the pilot has no horizon to rely on. In fact, this problem was a factor in the deaths of Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and “Big Bopper” Richardson when their aircraft crashed in 1959. Hamilton, however, relied on a brilliant insight: he followed nocturnal birds during his night flights.16 Birds were the perfect masters to teach Hamilton how to fly above and away from unseen obstacles that stood perilously high from the ground. It even became a point of amusement for Hamilton, during a nocturnal exhibition flight, when he chased a bat attracted to a searchlight attached to his aircraft and almost crashed into the crowd!17

In late 1910, he broke away from Glenn Curtiss’ exhibition team and became a freelance aviator.18 One of the solo exhibitions he made was at Washington Park in El Paso, Texas. Washington Park was the perfect place to exhibit aviation to the people of El Paso. The park was an oasis where individuals could swim in a public pool, relax among the many trees and flora, or even peacefully row a boat in a lake surrounded by trees.

18 LeShane, Hardware City Fliers, 14-5. It was never disclosed why the business relationship between Glenn Curtiss and Charles K. Hamilton had a fallout. But the author of the cited article stated that it might have been due to Hamilton’s drinking and failure to make an exhibition flight on schedule.
The lush vegetation around Washington Park allowed El Pasoans a place of social congregation and relaxation from the harshness of the desert and hardships of life in a city across the border from the Mexican revolutionary war. The park was so popular to the community of El Paso that law enforcement protected it from ne'er do wells. El Paso police officers arrested prostitutes who dipped into the park's pool in 1910.19 This social retreat became the idyllic location to hold the first aerial display in west Texas.20

In the middle of February 1910, the Curtiss biplane, belonging to Hamilton, was unpacked from railroad baggage and made ready to fly in El Paso.21 A week earlier, the El Paso Herald touted Hamilton's abilities in order to bring individuals to see an aircraft for the first time.22 On February 22 and 23, 1910, Charles Hamilton overawed El Pasoans at Washington Park.23 He tested his aircraft in ten events: breaking his own short landing record, reaching a high altitude, breaking his own speed record, being the only pilot to glide his aircraft to a safe landing, showing the feasibility of cross-country flights, testing his maneuverability, displaying the aircraft's reliability, and flight testing his aircraft.24 He would also race against the owner of a local Buick, and race against a motor-

20 It preceded the flight of the Vin Fiz, over El Paso, by nearly six months.
22 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
cycle from a local dealership.25 He even flew into Mexico at an altitude of 250 feet before returning to Washington Park.26 The El Pasoans cheered on as the scruffy looking pilot flew over them in daring maneuvers.27 On the second day, the ‘man bird’ scared photographers and police officers as his aircraft dipped straight at them.28 The aviator even made the crowd burst into laughter when a flock of crows scattered in fear as Hamilton flew overhead. After his aerobatic feats, El Pasoans were able to examine the bi-plane more closely while taking a photograph with Hamilton.29 The pilot amazed the citizens of El Paso and successfully entertained them with the abilities of aviation.

The show was successful enough that Charles Hamilton would return to the city the next February with six other aviators.30 Unfortunately, this trip ended badly for Hamilton. After the air show, an agent of Mexican revolutionary, Francisco I. Madero, approached him.31 Madero convinced Hamilton to do a reconnaissance flight over the federal army garrisoned in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.32 His flight took him, and two other individuals, at a low altitude above Juárez.33 He flew low enough to see the glisten from the bayonets of sentries near the border and buzzed above soldiers positioned near churches, homes, theaters, and the bullfighting ring.33 He safely returned and the Mexican revolutionaries compensated him with an expensive gold watch.34 This would have been the end of the story, but, regrettably, he decided to enjoy the nightlife of Juárez after his flight and government troops promptly took him to a Mexican jail.35 Weeks later, the Mexican government released him in an emaciated state and with pneumonia permanently undermining his health.36 Despite his injuries in Mexico, Charles Hamilton continued exhibition flying all over

25 Ibid., The program notes that this is the second event in history that a motorcycle races an aircraft.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 LeShane, Hardware City Fliers, 15.
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 LeShane, Hardware City Fliers, 15.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
the country; even broken bones, fatal air crashes of fellow pilots, and illnesses did not keep Hamilton from doing what he loved.\textsuperscript{37} However, an internal hemorrhage in his lungs fatally cut his eleven-year flight career short on January 22, 1914.\textsuperscript{38} It was ironic that his colleagues perished in air crashes while Hamilton died with an organ failure while in bed at his New York City apartment.\textsuperscript{39}

Modern day daredevils pale when compared to this pilot. He flew while lighting cigarettes in the air. He had cold beer waiting for him on landing. He duelled with other pilots during aerial maneuvers, and he even tossed coins to the children below.\textsuperscript{40} The pages of history have buried Hamilton’s legacy under the adventures of more famous pilots, but his contributions to human flight, nonetheless, captivated the people of El Paso in the early days of aviation and attracted others to reach to the skies and beyond.

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\textsuperscript{37} Morehouse, “The Flying Pioneers,” 161; LeShane, \textit{Hardware City Fliers}, 10-5.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}, 20
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, 10-20

**ESTEBAN VÁZQUEZ** was born in Tucson, Arizona from parents who were natives of El Paso, Texas. He grew up living in El Paso, Texas; Omaha, Nebraska; and a decade living in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. After graduating from a Mexican high school, Colegio Latino Americano, he did his undergraduate studies at the University of Texas at El Paso, majoring Political Science with a minor in History. He then went to law school in San Diego, California. After discovering that his real passion was the study of history, however, he instead enrolled in the History Masters program at the University of San Diego. He earned his degree of Master of Arts in 2011. He then returned to his home town of El Paso, Texas, where he continued his passion in history and is currently volunteering at the El Paso County Historical Society.
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ernst Kohlberg was shot to death on June 17, 1910 inside La Internacional Cigar Factory in downtown El Paso. His killer was John Leech, the manager of the nearby Southern Hotel. Leech walked into La Internacional shortly before closing time and fired two bullets at close range, fatally rupturing Kohlberg’s aorta. Leech made a half-hearted attempt to flee, but soon surrendered himself and the murder weapon to a pursuing police officer. He was convicted of first-degree murder and sent to the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville, where he remained until he was pardoned by Governor James (“Pa”) Ferguson in February 1918.1

Ernst Kohlberg and John Leech embodied the best and worst of El Paso’s socio-economic world. Born in 1857 in Westphalia, Kohlberg was a German-Jewish immigrant who arrived in El Paso at age 18 and who worked his way to wealth and prominence in the mercantile and real estate businesses. His most successful enterprise was La Internacional, which he established with his brother Moritz in 1886, the largest cigar manufacturing plant in the American Southwest. At the time of his death at age 53, he also owned the St. Regis Hotel, the Southern Hotel (which he leased to his future murderer), and several other El Paso properties. Generous to a fault, Kohlberg was well known and respected throughout the city.

John Leech was Kohlberg’s polar opposite. Born in 1858 in Philadelphia, Leech had a brooding disposition, a quick temper, and a propensity to blame others (especially Jews) for his misfortunes—in other words, he possessed a violent personality and extremist views. Like many El Pasosans of his era, his life was largely dictated by the army and the railroad. He served in the U.S.
Leonard Goodman, III, standing next to the Ernst Kohlberg portrait

Sixth Cavalry from 1881 to 1886, before moving to El Paso to work on the G.H. & S.A. and the Santa Fe railroads. He rejoined the army during the Spanish-American War (1898-1902), this time serving with an engineering corps in the Philippines. It is not known whether he ever saw actual combat. After being discharged in 1902, he went to work for the El Paso & Northeastern, but a train-related accident soon left him with a permanent leg injury. It was at this point that Leech changed careers and leased the Southern Hotel from Kohlberg, becoming its manager. He resided in the hotel with his wife Lizzie and their two young children, John and Mary. It was probably not a happy marriage. In April 1912, after he had been sent to the penitentiary, she divorced him on grounds of cruelty, stating in her petition that he “frequently abused her, and one time beat her so that she was confined to a hospital for several weeks.”

The Southern Hotel offered Leech more than enough income to pay his monthly lease and cover his family’s needs. However, Leech was a gambler and the El Paso area was a gambler’s paradise, so a portion of the hotel’s intake vanished at the Juárez racetrack across the Rio Grande. Leech was in arrears to Kohlberg off and on during their seven-year business partnership, but it was
only in 1910 that his debt began to spiral out of control, reaching $1165 (six months’ back rent) by the time of the murder. In early June 1910, Kohlberg asked that the back rent be paid immediately and in full. When Leech balked at paying, Kohlberg sent a constable to the Southern Hotel with an eviction notice. Leech’s hot-headed response was to grab his .38-caliber pistol, head toward La Internacional on foot, and kill Kohlberg in cold blood.

The trial of State of Texas vs. John Leech took place in October 1910 in the 34th District Court, with Special Judge Patrick Henry Clarke presiding. District Attorney Walter D. Howe handled the state’s case, assisted by some of El Paso’s best-known attorneys: William W. Turney, Dan M. Jackson, Thomas A. Falvey, Victor Moore, and Marvin W. Stanton. Leech’s defense rested in the hands of John E. Wharton, a prominent New Mexico attorney and former judge who had recently moved to El Paso; and Preston E. Gardner, another El Paso newcomer who would later run unsuccessfully for mayor on the Ku Klux Klan ticket. “The Leech trial promises to be the hardest fought legal battle in the history of the El Paso courts,” opined the El Paso Herald.³

The prosecution’s star witness was Walter Kohlberg, the 25 year old son of Ernst and Olga Kohlberg. Walter testified that he had seen Leech come into the store and also seen Leech pull the trigger. “Leech came in and sat down very deliberately, and said to my father ‘I see you have done it.’” A short exchange between the two then took place, after which Ernst turned around and walked toward his private office. “At that Leech got up, and I heard the first shot fired, and I saw him fire the second shot which struck my father in the back. Father fell in toward the cashier’s window, and he never said another word.” Subsequent witnesses testified that Leech had threatened to “kill Mr. Kohlberg” and “kill the damn Jew” at least three times in the past three years, always when the possibility of an eviction loomed.⁴

The defense attorneys relied primarily on what they called the “unwritten law”—the right of persons to protect themselves and their loved ones from harm. Ernst Kohlberg, they argued, had been trying to convince Lizzie Leech to become his mistress and when John Leech found out about Kohlberg’s lewd intentions he was gripped by an uncontrollable desire to protect his home and family. It was, in other words, an honor killing and not a hot-headed response to the eviction notice. The defense team also embellished its narrative with common anti-Semitic stereotypes, hoping
that some jurors might share Leech's anti-Semitism: Jews were
cheapskates and swindlers, who got rich off the labor of others;
they lusted after virtuous Christian women and therefore deserved
whatever misfortunes befell them.

The defense's principal witness was John Leech himself.
Leech testified that he had met Kohlberg in 1886, when he first
moved to El Paso and that all of their interactions had been amici-
cable until January 1909, after a fire at the D. W. Payne Whole-
sale Store (located on the first floor of the Southern Hotel) caused
some collateral damage to the upstairs rooms. According to Leech,
Kohlberg applied lamp-black and gasoline to the upstairs walls to
make them look more damaged than they were, thereby swindling
the insurance company. Leech further claimed that Kohlberg had
promised him $200 for going along with the fraud, but Kohlberg
then swindled him too and gave him only $100. Money disputes,
mostly over the rent, continued to disturb their relationship from
that point on. "At the time of the homicide on the 17th of June last,
I owed him $765, and he sent down a bill or statement for $1165,"
he testified. "It looked to me like he was trying to rob me out of so
much money."

Leech also claimed that he became outraged when his wife
Lizzie suddenly confessed to him that for the past year Kohlberg
had been demanding that she become his mistress. Kohlberg al-
legedly told Lizzie to dump her husband and begin an affair with
him. "You are a fine looking young lady," Kohlberg supposedly said
to her, "and you are foolish—you have [a] nice appearance, and you
are always nice and neatly dressed, and I like your looks, and I
like your ways." Leech testified that he had entered the cigar store
with the sole intent of confronting Kohlberg about his lewd inten-
tions regarding his wife, and not with the intent to kill him. He
alleged that he was provoked into firing his pistol when Kohlberg
shouted "damn you and your wife."

In the end, the jurors believed Walter Kohlberg and not John
Leech: after a short deliberation, they came back with a unani-
mous verdict of murder in the first degree. Seven of the twelve
jurors voted in favor of the death penalty, but the others did not,
so they all agreed on the sentence of life in prison. "The Jews have
got the country so let the bastards have it," Leech bellowed, after
hearing his sentence: "If I had had my way I would have told them
to hang me instead of sending me to the penitentiary."
Leech soon had reason to thank the jury for giving him prison time instead of the hangman’s noose. Huntsville turned out to be more akin to a “club fed” experience than to a hard-rock prison, especially once he was transferred to one of the lightly guarded auxiliary camps. “I have been an honor and state trusty for a long time,” he wrote the El Paso Herald in 1915, “no guards looking out for me, never locked up, go and come at will, have a nice horse to ride in and out to town, go and come by myself, well thought of by all of the officials, a good clear record since I have been here.”

Leech received another welcome surprise in April 1917: Governor Ferguson granted him a “conditional pardon,” which allowed him to go free as long as he did not commit any other crimes against the State of Texas. To be sure, the governor revoked the pardon a few days later on the grounds that Leech had “threatened the lives of other persons” (perhaps code for “not paying a sufficient bribe,” as the governor was notorious for demanding kickbacks in return for pardons). But Leech successfully appealed the governor’s decision, arguing in a courthouse in McLennan County (a Ku Klux Klan stronghold) that he had not violated the terms of his original pardon. In February 1918, the County Judge ruled that the governor’s revocation “was without just cause” and he ordered Leech’s immediate release. Leech was 59 years old and had served less than eight years of his life sentence.

ENDNOTES


3 “Leech’s Trial Starts,” El Paso Herald (October 3, 1910).

4 “State of Texas vs. John Leech, in the District Court of El Paso County, Texas, 34th Judicial District, September Term, 1910, No. 5250,” in El Paso County Criminal Files (“Old Criminal”), Media and Microfilms, UTEP Library, MF524, Roll 35, 0674-75, 0702, and 0782.

5 Ibid., 0715.

6 Ibid., 0718 and 0746.

7 “Leech Receives Life Verdict with Bravado,” El Paso Herald (October 21, 1910).


9 “Judgment in Cause No. 4565, Ex Parte John S. Leech,” Records of the Texas State Penitentiary, Huntsville, Texas.
Genevieve, Eleanor, and Olga Kohlberg in 1935. This picture was taken in front of the Kohlberg residence on the corner of Yandell and Corto streets in Sunset Heights.

My grandmother kept a portrait of Ernst Kohlberg in her home library as a constant reminder of his continued presence as the family patriarch (see page 28). The painting had been commissioned around 1904, when he was in his mid-40s. Like all portraits, it is frozen in time; it captures him at the moment when he was one of El Paso’s most successful businessmen. His eyes are penetrating and they seem to follow you around the room. After my grandmother’s death in 1935, my father hung the portrait in our house. I then kept it in my living room until 2011. It now hangs in the house of my eldest son, Leonard Goodman, III.
Reflections on My Grandfather, Ernst Kohlberg

By Eleanor Goodman

I never met my paternal grandfather, Ernst Kohlberg. He was murdered on June 17, 1910, inside his cigar factory, La Internacional, in downtown El Paso. He was just 53 years old at the time of his death. I would not be born for another eighteen years.

I never met my grandfather and yet I feel that I know him because he had a larger-than-life personality and I was raised in the shadow of his memory. My grandmother, Olga Kohlberg, outlived her husband by some twenty-five years, but she never fully recovered from the loss of the family patriarch. She never remarried. Their four children—Walter (my father), Herbert, Elsie, and Leo—were permanently affected by the murder too. For my father, it was a life-changing event. He was on summer break from his studies at Columbia University, and he was working with his father at the cigar store when the murder took place. As the sole eye witness, he had to relive the murder when he testified in court. As the eldest son, he felt obliged to take over the family cigar business rather than finish his university degree.

There were other ways in which my grandfather’s presence loomed large over me and the rest of the family long after his death. I spent my early childhood years in the “Kohlberg home” on the corner of Corto and Boulevard (now Yandell). This was my grandparent’s dream house in Sunset Heights, a beautifully designed structure by Trost & Trost with ample land and a nice view of downtown El Paso. Unfortunately, it was completed just a few months before my grandfather’s death, so he did not have much chance to enjoy it. At various times all of the Kohlberg children
and grandchildren resided in this house, or in the small house next
door, which my grandmother built on the same property for my
aunt Elsie and her family. I have a vivid memory of my grand-
mother coming down the central staircase in the morning, wearing
high black boots and a long gray silk dress. It was embroidered
with lace and it reached the top of her boots. Her hair was quite
gray and she kept it in a chignon. She had piercing bright blue
eyes. I do not remember her as having warm personality or sunny
disposition. She was proud of her heritage and standing in the
community. She was strict with her grandchildren.

My father resembled my grandfather in temperament and
physique. Both were short and stocky, and prone to early bald-
ing. Both were outgoing, kind, and gregarious. Both possessed a
lot of energy and a wonderful sense of humor. Both were highly
intelligent and both had a deeply ingrained sense of integrity. My
grandfather seems to have been a member of every club and civic
organization in El Paso. My dad shared Ernst’s enthusiasm for
local civic affairs and he was beloved by all who knew him, but
health problems kept him from being as socially involved as his
father. Both were politically active in the Republican Party in a
city dominated by the Democrats. Both were also avid Scottish
Masons. Growing up with my father gave me some idea of what
my grandfather was like. They were two peas in a pod.

I partially missed out on my German heritage. Ernst and
Olga emigrated from Prussian Westphalia, a coal-rich province in
western Germany, which was the economic powerhouse of the new
Bismarckian Empire. Both of them came from grain-merchant
families. My grandfather was born in Beverungen and came to the
United States in 1875 at the age of eighteen. My grandmother was
born in the nearby town of Elberfeld and she arrived in the U.S. in
1884 at the age of twenty as his bride. They both mastered English
quickly, though neither of them completely lost their accents. My
grandfather also knew Spanish from a two-year sojourn to Mexico
in the late 1870s. My grandparents spoke to each other in German,
a language they passed on to their four children. My father and
my uncle Herbert were packed off to the homeland for three years
during their youths to polish their German. I regret that this tra-
dition did not carry over to my generation. None of the grand-
children learned German. When I was a child, German was used
in the Kohlberg household for all “adult conversation” so that the
grandchildren couldn’t understand. Perhaps my grandfather, had he lived long enough, would have made sure I learned German.

Another thing I missed out on, at least partially, was my Jewish heritage. Back in Germany, my grandparents were raised in the tradition of Reform Judaism. They met through family connections when Ernst went back to Germany to visit his parents in 1884. Like many German-Jewish immigrants, their affinity to Judaism was cultural as well as spiritual. My grandfather and grandmother were both founding members of Temple Mt. Sinai in El Paso. Both were lifetime members of this congregation, and they are buried next to each other in the Jewish Cemetery adjacent to Concordia. They raised their children—including my father—in the Jewish faith.

My generation’s religious upbringing was more complicated, and more in keeping with America in the 20th century than with Germany in the 19th. My father married Genevieve McHugh, a stunningly beautiful Irish Catholic. I was the sole offspring of this marriage. Meanwhile, my father’s sister, Elsie Kohlberg, married Dr. Branch Craige, a local physician who belonged to the Episcopal Church. Elsie’s two children—Branch Craige, Jr. and Ernst Craige—were raised as Episcopalians. So was I.

Interfaith marriages are common now, so I know it is hard for today’s youth to understand how difficult it was for Walter and Elsie to choose partners outside the Jewish faith. My grandmother never reconciled to this turn of events. In the German-speaking world, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews belonged to separate socio-cultural communities, and she was none too happy to see a Catholic and a Protestant join the family tree. I’m certain my grandmother would have been pleased to know that I married Leonard Goodman, Jr., a member of one of El Paso’s prominent Jewish families.

My grandfather was a very successful businessman. He co-owned, with his brother Moritz, La Internacional Cigar Factory, the largest tobacco-manufacturing plant in the American Southwest. It produced a wide variety of high-quality cigars made from fine Cuban-grown tobacco leaves. He also owned two hotels in El Paso: the elegant St. Regis, located on San Jacinto Plaza, and the modest Southern, located on South El Paso Street. He co-founded the El Paso Light Company and served as Director of the City National Bank and the Rio Grande Valley Bank. He had other business responsibilities as well. I wouldn’t say he had the “Midas touch” because not all of his enterprises turned to gold,
but he certainly knew how to prosper through hard work and risk taking. His success is all the more remarkable because he came to America in 1875 under contract with Solomon Schutz, one of El Paso’s most prominent dry goods dealers and a fellow Westphalian, and he had to work for Schutz essentially as an indentured servant for two years for $200 per year. By the time of his murder in 1910, he was one of El Paso’s most successful entrepreneurs and beloved citizens. The sympathetic character of Ludwig Sterner in Tom Lea’s *The Wonderful Country* is based on my grandfather.

My grandmother was able to live comfortably for the rest of her life largely because he left behind a thriving cigar business and some valuable real estate. She was very involved in local educational and civic affairs, and she left behind a legacy that now far overshadows my grandfather’s. Texas’s first public kindergarten, The El Paso Public Library, The El Paso Woman’s Club. The list of things she co-founded or co-promoted is quite long. Olga Kohlberg Elementary School is named after her. It’s an apt memorial because she believed deeply in education and learning. She was well educated, having graduated from the Elberfeld Seminary in Germany. All of her children went to college. Herbert graduated from Columbia and became a mining engineer. Elsie graduated from Smith College. Leo graduated from Princeton and later managed the St. Regis Hotel. My father, as I mentioned earlier, attended Columbia. In 1972, the El Paso Historical Society inducted her into the El Paso Hall of Honor, in part because of her role in introducing kindergarten to the Texas public school system.

My father loved to learn and read, but he was not as apt at understanding economic markets as my grandfather. He certainly did a good job managing the cigar factory after 1910, especially when one remembers that he had not planned on embarking on a business career. But *La Internacional* was forced to close its doors in 1924, as Americans became more and more fascinated with cigarettes. Cigars were passé and the market shrunk to a level where it became impossible to turn a profit. The closing of the cigar factory allowed my father more time to pursue his intellectual interests, especially his love of history. He was a personal friend of Carl Hertzog and Tom Lea, Jr. After World War Two, my father became the interpreter for Werner von Braun and other German personnel who had been brought to Fort Bliss to design rockets for the U.S. Army.
As a young man, my father became an avid cigar smoker, averaging about sixteen cigars per day during the years he managed the factory, and in 1929 his habit caught up with him. Just 44 years old, he was diagnosed with a case of throat cancer. Over the next several years, he underwent many expensive operations on his throat and mouth in New York City and Philadelphia hospitals. These operations helped prolong his life, but they also left his face badly scarred and eventually also rendered him nearly voiceless. As a child, I remember that he would sometimes take me along to meetings and events so that I could serve as his "translator." It was sad to see such an outgoing and fun-loving man become so dependent on the use of a message pad to communicate. His throat cancer returned and in 1949 he died at the age of 64, the operations having extended his life by twenty years. No one knew back when he was a young man how lethal cigars were.

When we read abstractly about a murder in a newspaper or hear about one on television, we tend to think of it as an event, or series of events, of short duration. The victim dies and is buried. The perpetrator is pursued and arrested. The survivors grieve and then move on. But when someone we know and love is murdered, we know that this is not true. We experience it instead as a life-altering moment that changes our personal paths and reverberates across generations. A devoted wife becomes a lonely matriarch and widow. An eldest son must abandon his educational path to help the family business. A granddaughter comes into a family constellation that lacks a guiding star.

I came to know my grandfather through the void that his death left in the hearts of those around me. The murderer shot at my grandfather, but he struck the entire family, leaving everybody permanently wounded and everyone permanently changed. I came to know and understand my grandfather slowly over time, as I picked up a story here and insight there. In a way it took a lifetime to put all the pieces together. I am now a grandmother. My grandfather has been dead for more than a hundred years, and yet I continue to feel closer to him with each passing day. I can feel his warm personality, his intellect, his drive and determination. I feel a kinship to him that bridges generations. I never met my grandfather and yet I know that he continues to live inside me, my children, and my grandchildren.
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Desegregation Memories

By Nancy Hamilton

In May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka that racial segregation in the public schools was unconstitutional. The Brown case, grouped with several others, came to be known as "Brown I." As part of that ruling, the Court invited further arguments in order to begin formulating specific implementation decrees.

The hearing of further arguments let to "Brown II," announced a year later, in which the memorable words were: "all deliberate speed," "prompt and reasonable start," "good faith," "equitable principles," and "practical flexibility." The Court did not mandate immediate implementation of desegregation and made it clear that it was a matter for local school districts. At that time, I was the education reporter for The El Paso Times. In 1955 I was twenty-five years old and had served my apprenticeship in the Society Department, writing up weddings, birth announcements, and club meeting notices. Working in the newsroom was much more interesting.

By the time of the Brown II ruling, I had already written about a locally filed lawsuit by a young woman seeking admission to El Paso's state institution, Texas Western College (since 1967 The University of Texas at El Paso). In March 1955 Thelma White, with the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, had filed suit with the local federal court because she had been denied admission to the Texas school. A ruling by Judge R. E. Thomason was expected in July. I wrote an account of Miss White's efforts to enroll, as told to me by a local official of the NAACP, Mrs. E.M. Williams.
As a native El Pasoan, I had always been segregated from the black community, and it was Mrs. Williams who first introduced to me some of their problems when we served together on a committee that was organized by Hibbard Polk, a public school official. The group was called the Juvenile Delinquency Committee and met in the basement of the YWCA on Franklin Street, a couple of blocks from the newspaper building. I don’t know exactly why Mr. Polk asked me to serve, as I was young and single, except that I could provide publicity for the group. It was Mrs. Williams who impressed upon us that young people of her race could not attend movies, concerts, dances, teen-canteens, and other activities that were available to non-blacks. (Movie theater managers had told me state law required them to have a separate boxoffice for blacks if they admitted them to a theater.) The young people had to make their own entertainment and their families were very much involved in trying to keep them in line and out of trouble. Since El Paso was a military town, there were many young people in the military who were also affected by the color lines.

Thus, when Mrs. Williams brought Thelma White’s story to the Times, she told me of the honor student’s experience in being turned down at Texas Western by J. M. Whitaker, the registrar. He had told them that a desegregation law “would have to be passed by the Texas Legislature before Thelma could be admitted,” she said. “I told him I was very sorry that he could not admit her on account of her color.” Mrs. Williams said that, after talking to A. A. Smith, acting president of the college, she had advised him, “Everybody else in the world could be admitted to the school but an American Negro.”

She and Miss White had then traveled forty miles north to New Mexico A&M (now New Mexico State University), where “We found Christian people ... who treated us right regardless of the color of our skins.” Miss White enrolled in that school, although her tuition rate was higher than it would have been in a Texas school; the nearest Texas school that admitted blacks at that time
was Prairie View, 600 miles away. Miss White had been valedictorian of her class at Douglass High School, the only school for blacks in El Paso County.

Just about a year after the Brown I ruling, came Brown II. Relying on information from the Associated Press and an interview with a spokesman for the NAACP, I wrote a story that received a Page 1 banner headline on June 21, 1955: "NAACP To Ask Desegregation Here" with a subhead: "Plan To Present Petition Tonight To School Board."

Earlier on Monday, the day I wrote the story, El Paso School Superintendent Mortimer Brown had called and asked me to go to Douglass School and meet with the principal, Edwin W. Mangram. He did not tell me why and I don't think the story on the Supreme Court decision had yet moved on the AP wire. At any rate, I went to the county's only school for black students, where Mr. Mangram and the assistant principal, William Marshall, greeted me. We held a rather stiff conversation, tiptoeing around the issue at hand because I had not yet been informed about the petition to the School Board planned for Tuesday's meeting, but would learn of it after this interview.

They gave me a copy of a booklet, "The Development of Negro Education in El Paso," by Emmanuel Campbell, which emphasized the achievements of those who had attended there through 1945, the year of publication. Douglass housed grades one through twelve and an impressively high percentage of graduates of the high school went on to college, even though the nearest one they could attend in Texas was 600 miles away.

Upon returning to the newspaper office, I met with Dr. Vernon Collins, a 1913 graduate of Douglass who had become a respected physician and surgeon. He advised me that the NAACP planned to present a petition to the School Board at the regular meeting Tuesday evening. This was a tactic being tried by the organization in a number of cities as a follow-up to the Supreme Court decision. "The petition," he told me, "cites the recent decision of the Supreme Court which leaves the matter of integration up to the local schools." He added that he would not make specific recommendations to the board, noting that after time to study the petition, the board would be approached again to confer about it.

Meanwhile, a special committee of the State Board of Education had begun a series of meetings the previous week and was expected to report to the State Board in July. Its members were
concerned with legal implications of the court decision.

In my story about the NAACP petition, I quoted "no comment" responses from El Paso School Board members Mrs. T. P. Clendenin, J. F. Hulse, M. L. Hutchins, E. D. Medrano, and Ted Andress; the president, C. M. Irvin, was out of town and Dr. Ralph Homan was also not available. In later years, schools would be named for Mrs. Clendenin, Irvin and others of his family who had served on the board, and Andress.

As of that date, the San Antonio school district was considering desegregation, possibly for September, but was awaiting an attorney's opinion on the plan. Several public junior colleges had already ended segregation, according to AP.

The School Board met on the ground floor of El Paso Technical Institute, where the offices of the school administration were located. The building at Rio Grande and Oregon streets in the early seventies became the downtown campus of El Paso Community College, but in 1955 it housed vocational education classes of high school level and adult homemaking classes around the corner in a wing that had originally been Sunset elementary school.

In those times, years before the passage of the Open Meetings Act, the School Board was often accused—and rightly so—of being a "rubber-stamp" operation. Members would get together prior to a scheduled meeting and go over the agenda, ironing out their difficulties with any items and making their decisions in private. Then they would hold a public meeting, normally with nobody from the public present, sometimes with a reporter from my newspaper, and whip through the agenda, voting on the items without discussion. When Ted Andress chaired the group, he would accommodate me as a reporter by stopping to explain the items being considered.

The board additionally had a system of self-perpetuation. If a member's six-year term of office were about to expire and that member did not choose to run again, he or she would resign before the term was out and the board would appoint some trusted person to fill the vacancy and stand for election as an incumbent. The seven board positions were at-large; geographic representation would not come for many years.

On the night of the historic desegregation meeting, I was the only reporter present, along with a small delegation from the NAACP headed by Dr. Collins. Normally board meetings attracted no visitors at all and I was usually the only reporter. This was before television coverage and the Herald-Post, an evening news-
paper, would have had to pay overtime to a reporter for covering a night meeting; they would write a follow-up story the next day.

When I returned to the office that afternoon, another reporter, Ramón Villalobos, who lived near St. Joseph’s Parochial School, told me the local Catholic schools had desegregated two years earlier with no fanfare. I called Father Gerald McDonald, the parochial superintendent, and he confirmed this. Not a word of protest had been heard about the inclusion of black students in his schools over those two years.

As I entered the board room for the meeting Tuesday evening, I sensed tensions in the air and an undercurrent of excitement, although the board members did not let their faces show their feelings that much. That evening, when Mr. Andress made the motion to observe the Supreme Court ruling by unconditionally and immediately desegregating the El Paso schools. There was one “nay.” It was that of J. F. Hulse, a long-time board member and prominent attorney. A son of the Old South, Mr. Hulse found it too difficult to break with tradition and, upon hearing the board’s decision, he submitted his resignation and left the meeting.

One reason the board was able to make the desegregation immediate was that the regular school year was ending that month. Summer school was already in place, so the actual change would not have an impact until fall classes started the day after Labor Day.

Another factor was that El Paso’s Negro population traditionally had been very small. The 1950 census showed only 4,694 black residents, or 2.4 percent of the total for El Paso County.

The Army had desegregated following an executive order by President Harry Truman in 1948, so Fort Bliss and other military installations in the area had black families with school-age children, some of whom were already attending the parochial schools. Their presence could be expected to help ease into the change in the schools.

Meanwhile, the case of Thelma White was awaiting a ruling by Judge Thomason. In that case, Ted Andress, the School Board member who had moved for desegregation, represented the State of Texas in court. He had questioned the college president, Dr. Dysart Holcomb, suggesting that a court ruling was unnecessary because the University of Texas Board of Regents, which had authority over Texas Western, had ruled ten days earlier that Negroes could attend the school. Miss White’s attorney protested that the new policy was not adequate remedy and the judge agreed.
As reported in the July 18, 1955, *El Paso Herald-Post*, he invalidated Texas constitutional provisions and statutes that required separate schools for Negroes. Texas Western, as a result of Miss White's suit, became the first white public institution of higher education in Texas to admit black undergraduates; in September twelve were enrolled.

[At the University of Texas Law School, Heman (sic) Marion Sweat had been denied admission in 1946, although no law school for blacks was available in Texas. After lengthy legal proceedings, the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1950 that he should be admitted to the law school, which he attended for two years.]

The NAACP petition to the El Paso School Board was not the first petition to have been made to a governing body regarding education. In a little-remembered incident, a petition from students and faculty members to the University of Texas Board of Regents resulted in threatened punishments. A football game between the then College of Mines and Arizona State was scheduled in the fall of 1947. "The captain of the ASU team was African-American," recalled Mary Hill Mallooly, then editor of the student newspaper, *The Prospector*. "Dr. Dossie Wiggins, president of the college, announced that he could not play at Kidd Field because he was black. The journalism instructor, Charles W. Scarritt, and the whole staff were incensed. The staff included me, the editor; Scott Thurber, managing editor; you (Nancy Miller Hamilton), assistant managing editor; Rubén Salazar, editorial page editor; Elmer Grounds, city editor; Les Turner, sports editor; and Hawley Richeson, in some capacity."

The staff decided to write an editorial opposing the ban, she continued, did a college poll in support of their position, and also polled the Miner football team. A player from Chicago was the only one who objected. Their faculty sponsor, Scarritt, encouraged the drafting of a petition to the board, asking that segregation not be applied to visiting athletic teams. "Dr. Wiggins was furious," continued Mallooly. "*The Prospector* was destroying all support from the El Paso business community, he contended. He called Mr. Scarritt, me, and Rubén in for an interview. He kept repeating 'What will R. E. McKee say?' (I have always doubted very much if R. E. McKee would have said anything.) We argued vehemently that if a black could fight for his country, surely he could play at Kidd Field. Anyhow, he didn't play." The president demanded an apology to the Board of Regents and held out the threat of possible
expulsion from the school. The students complied.

Malooly speculated that Rubén's editorial "was probably the first pro-integration piece in a Texas white university."

In May of 1948, Wiggins got his revenge on Scarritt by firing him. For college teachers, this was the worst time of year to be job-hunting. Ordinarily, positions were sought months earlier. Scarritt, however, heard there was an opening at the University of Alabama. When he contacted the department chairman there, he was hired. The chairman said, "Anyone who is fired at the end of the year by Dossie Wiggins must be a good man. He did the same thing to my son when Wiggins was president of Hardin-Simmons."

Mary Hill (Malooly) transferred to Alabama, where she completed her degree in 1949. Salazar became a newsmen with a career in El Paso, Mexico City, and Los Angeles. He championed civil rights causes and died while covering an anti-Vietnam War protest in Los Angeles August 29, 1970, felled inside a building by a police tear gas canister.

Not only were El Paso's educational institutions early to eliminate segregation, but the City Council acted in June 1962, two years before the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, to outlaw discrimination in motels, hotels, theaters, and restaurants. The ordinance was introduced by Bert Williams, who later would serve as mayor. The current mayor, Ralph Seitsinger, vetoed the council's decision to become the first city in Texas to integrate public places. The four aldermen—Williams, Ted Bender, Ray Watt, and R. R. "Buck" Rogers, took another vote and overrode the veto.

RESOURCES


*El Paso Times*, March 31, June 1, June 21 and June 22, 1955.


Charles H. Martin, "Integration Turns 35 at UTEP." NOVA No. 105 (Summer 1991), pp. 4-6.

Charles H. Martin, Biography of Thelma Joyce White in *Handbook of Texas Online*.

Ramón Rentería, "El Paso was integrated city before most of U.S." *El Paso Times*, April 23, 2006.

Personal correspondence from Mary Hill Malooly to author, August 8, 2005.
Hall of Honor Nominations

The El Paso County Historical Society accepts nominations from the general public as well as from Society members for the Hall of Honor. One living and one or two deceased persons will be remembered and honored at the Society’s annual banquet in November. Nominations may be made for one or both categories. Nominees must be (1) outstanding men or women of character, vision, courage and creative spirit who have lived in what is presently El Paso County, (2) who have consistently done the unusual which deserves to be written or recorded, or who have created that which deserves to be read, heard, or seen, and who have made El Paso County better for their having lived in it; and (3) who have influenced over a period of years the course of history of El Paso County, or by their singular achievements have brought honor and recognition to the El Paso community, and (4) who have directed us toward worthy goals and merit being remembered by all El Pasoans as an exemplary guide to our future.

All nominations must be accompanied by a biographical resume that includes pertinent information about the nominee and the reasons for nominating him or her. Please include the nominee’s address and phone number if living, date of death if deceased, date and place of birth, years of residence in El Paso County, profession, and name and address of nearest known relative(s). The person making the nomination must give his or her name and phone number and mail all information to Chairman, Hall of Honor Selection Committee, El Paso County Historical Society, P.O. Box 28, El Paso, Texas 79940 by July 1 of each year.

HALL OF HONOR NOMINATION FORM

LIVING NOMINEE:

Name

Address (including zip code)

Birthplace_________ Years Residence in El Paso_________ Profession

Nearest Relative_________ Address

DECEASED NOMINEE:

Name

Place and Date of Birth_________ Date and Place of Death

Years of Residence in El Paso County_________ Profession

Nearest Living Relative or Close Friend_________ Phone No.

Address (including zip code)

NOMINATOR:

Name

Phone No._________ Date
The original First National Bank Building.
This is an 1884 Francis Parker photograph. On the far left are the State National Bank and the Wells Fargo station.

Remembering First National Bank

The First National Bank was one of the earliest banks to be opened in El Paso. Joshua Raynolds, John Adamson, Adolph Krakauer, James S. Hague, Joseph Schutz, A. A. Robinson and M. D. Thatcher opened the bank for business on May 26, 1881. It received official recognition on June 6, 1881.

First National began operations in a one-story adobe building at the intersection of San Francisco St. and Little Plaza. It moved to the southeast corner of the El Paso St. and San Antonio intersection in 1882. In 1906 James McNary, Raynolds’ son-in-law, became bank president while Raynolds continued as Chairman of the Board. McNary continued with the bank until 1931.

First National Bank celebrated its 50th anniversary in early 1931. Over the years it witnessed much growth in El Paso and some notoriety. John Wesley Hardin had offices there, and its location was at the center of the upper class saloon district. Inside the bank was a dignified oasis. In the early 1920s Edward Holslag provided 10 large murals depicting El Paso and Southwestern history. A commemorative booklet, “Southwest Milestones,” featured these murals along with a poem for each by Owen White. Only four of these murals are known to exist today—three at the El Paso International Airport and one with the Tigua Tribal Council.
**The Ysleta Mission**

Throughout slow passing years your whitened walls—
Have watched the growth of Souls. Your Vesper calls,
When first they smote upon the Indian's ear,
Aroused in him a dread: an unknown fear.
But Patience and the loving toil of those
Bold Fathers through whose efforts you arose,
Assuaged their fear and, through the leaching dark,
The untaught natives saw the glimmering spark
Which Faith awakes in every human soul.
Your funeral bells have marked with solemn toll
The passing of the Fathers, but their light
Upon your ancient Altars, burning bright,
Now sends its rays far from your whitened walls,
And every evening when your Vesper falls
Upon the convert's ear, he bows his head
And breathes a blessing on your Saintly Dead.

**The Smelter**

Hotter than any revivalist's Hell,
Vomiting smoke and a sulphurous smell;
Overalled Demons, bare to the waist,
Sweating and toiling in feverish haste,
Feeding and rending this modern Moloch,
Servant of Man in his Conquest of Rock.

Pouring out metal in ingot and bar,
Metal, Man's weapon in Commerce and War,
Metal, which makes man supreme on the Earth,
Metal, Man's measure of Value and Worth.
Such is the Smelter, the modern Moloch,
Servant of Man in his Conquest of Rock.

Such is the Smelter, and here in the West
Deeper and deeper we carry our quest;
Gouging Earth's pockets and stripping her veins,
Feeding his gullet, then taking our gains
Back from the vent of this modern Moloch,
Servant of Man in his Conquest of Rock.
The First National Bank flourished until the Depression when it failed on September 4, 1931. It was the largest bank in town at the time. It was in receivership for several years. Several shops were on the ground floor. The building was approximately 107 years old when it burned in 2012. One of El Paso's treasures disappeared.


NOTE: The poems by Owen White are the same as those used in Southwest Milestones. We used the poems from White's Just Me because they were easier to read.
Lecturas

Articles on El Paso and the Southwest recently published in other journals or books.

Chavez, Ernesto. “Ramon is not one of these: Race and Sexuality in the Making of Silent Screen Actor Ramon Novarro’s Star Image.” The Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol. 20, no. 3 (2011) [Ramon Novarro was from a Cd. Juárez family and his original surname was Samaniego.]


Schulze, Jeffrey. “The Chamizal Blues: El Paso, the Wayward River, and the Peoples in Between.” Western Historical Quarterly, Autumn 2012. [Explores the diplomatic history of the dispute while highlighting the experiences of border residents who were affected.]

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ORGANIZED MARCH 18, 1954

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