

Chief of the Tigua Indians dead at 89

By **Adriana M. Chávez**
EL PASO TIMES

Santiago Isaac Bustamante, Tigua cacique and one of the last full-blooded tribal members, died Wednesday. He was 89.

Tigua Lt. Gov. Carlos Hisa said Friday that Bustamante, his great-uncle, had suffered from Alzheimer's and dementia for about three years. In late November, Bustamante was hospitalized after doctors discovered that particles and fluid had accumulated in his lungs, Hisa said.



Bustamante

Bustamante was allowed to leave the hospital on Nov. 29 and spend his last days at home, Hisa said.

"It's a great loss," he said somberly. "I personally learned a lot from him. We're all mourning right now."

Hisa said most of the Tigua community, which con-

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sists of more than 1,600 members, visited Bustamante before he died and were able to say goodbye.

"He was very kindhearted," Hisa said. "Everything he had, which wasn't much, he gave to his people. We all had an opportunity to say goodbye and show our gratitude."

Bustamante was born on June 13, 1921, and raised in El Paso. During the Great Depression, Bustamante joined other tribe members in hunting and farming in order to keep the tribe fed, said Javier Loera, a Tigua war captain who was considered Bustamante's right-hand man.

Bustamante served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was stationed at Camp Roberts, Calif. He became the tribe's cacique, or chief and spiritual leader of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, in January 2001 after the death of Chief Santos Santiago.

Bustamante was also known by his Tigua name, Per-hui'n, the Tigua word for "rainbow," and had previously served in other tribal capacities, including tribal sheriff and captain.

"It's a tremendous loss to our pueblo," Loera said. "Through all the decades he was very instrumental in nurturing and preserving the traditional tribal ceremonies."

Hisa said Bustamante was able to share his experiences defending the tribe and trying to preserve its traditions during a time when the tribe's struggles "were more difficult than they are now."

Rene Lopez, 26, a traditional captain for the tribe, described Bustamante as a strong man who had a good sense of humor but who was serious about teaching the younger generations about the Tigua traditions. "There's very few traditional people left in the tribe," Lopez said.

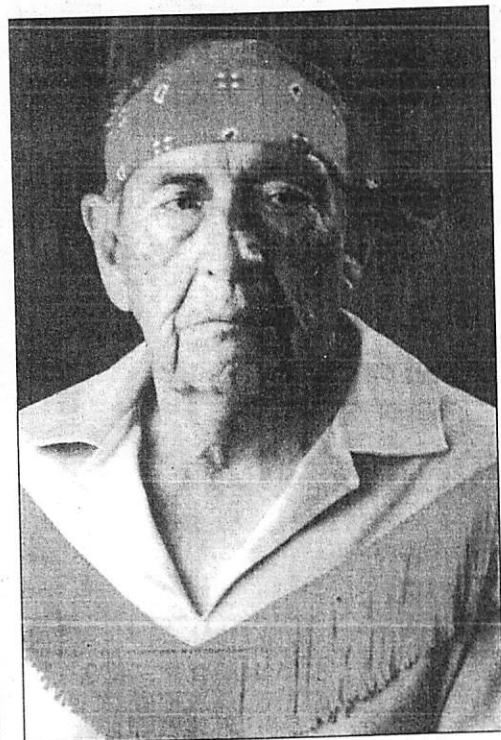
"The more elders we lose, the more the traditions go away. That's up to us now as traditional leaders."

A new tribal chief will be elected on Dec. 31.

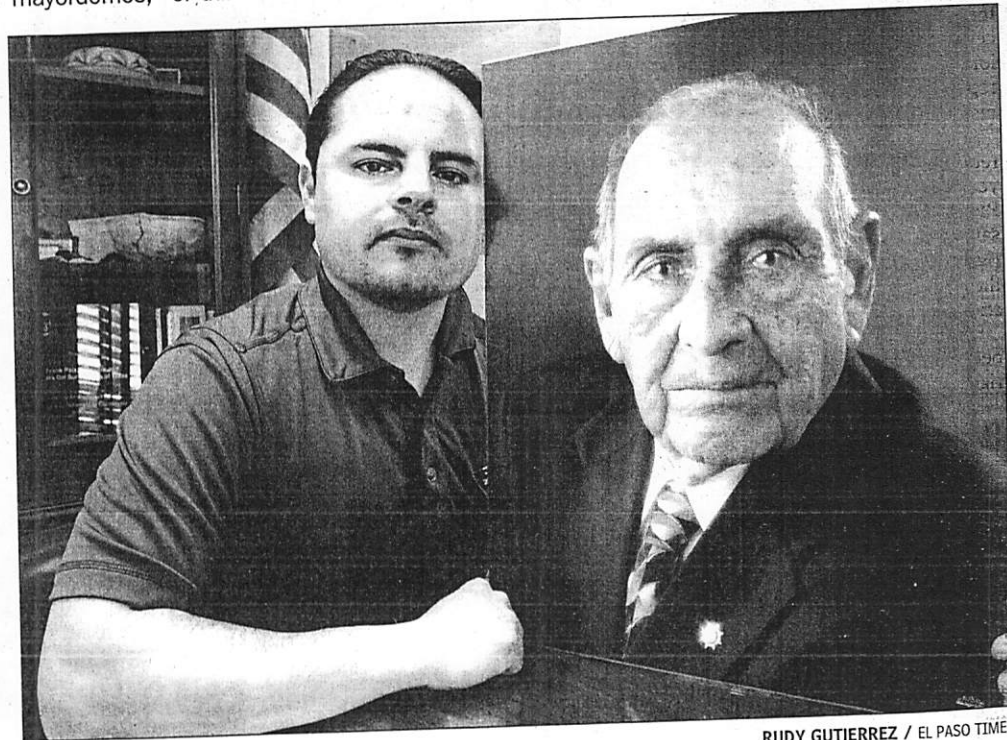


PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE TIMES / YSLETA DEL SUR PUEBLO

Cacique Santiago Bustamante, right, blesses "mayordomos," or tribal leaders, in this 2003 photo.



Santiago Bustamante, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo cacique, died Wednesday.



RUDY GUTIERREZ / EL PASO TIMES

Tigua Lt. Gov. Carlos Hisa holds a large picture of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Cacique Santiago Bustamante, who died Wednesday at age 89.