

# PASSWORD



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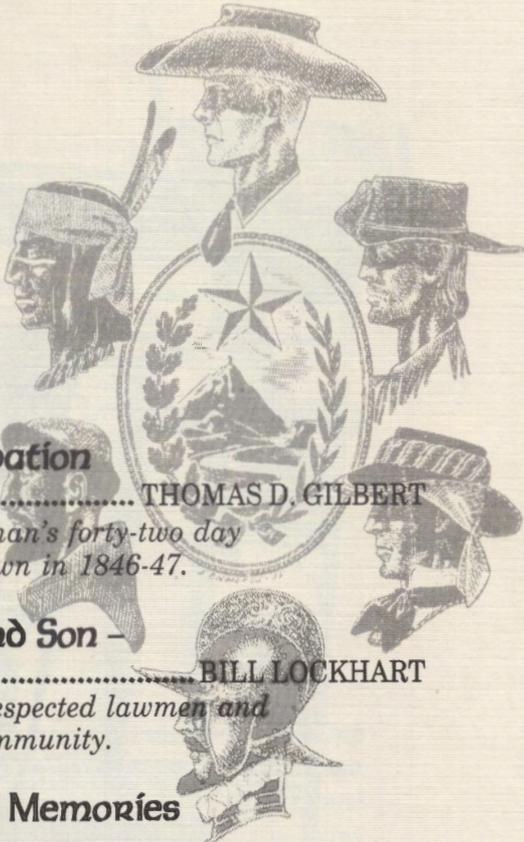
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Doniphan ordered the men into line of battle. After some time it became apparent that an attack was not forthcoming, and the men, "cursing the false alarm," were dismissed to their tents and ordered to keep their weapons at hand. Before daybreak, a similar sequence of events occurred – shots out of the night, a full alert, a false alarm, leaving the men "much vexed."<sup>1</sup>

During the encampment of December 26, Lieutenant C. H. Kribben expressed the general feeling when he wrote, "We have every reason to believe that there is more in store for us."<sup>2</sup> With this attitude, the column cautiously approached the Pass on the morning of December 27. After advancing about seven miles (eight miles north of El Paso), the forward guards spotted a large party of Mexicans approaching along the opposite side of the river. As they drew near, a white flag appeared, and instead of Mexican soldiers, the party turned out to be a delegation of town leaders ready to surrender El Paso to the invaders. After distributing gifts of bread and "Pass wine," the delegation led Doniphan and his command across the river and into town.<sup>3</sup>

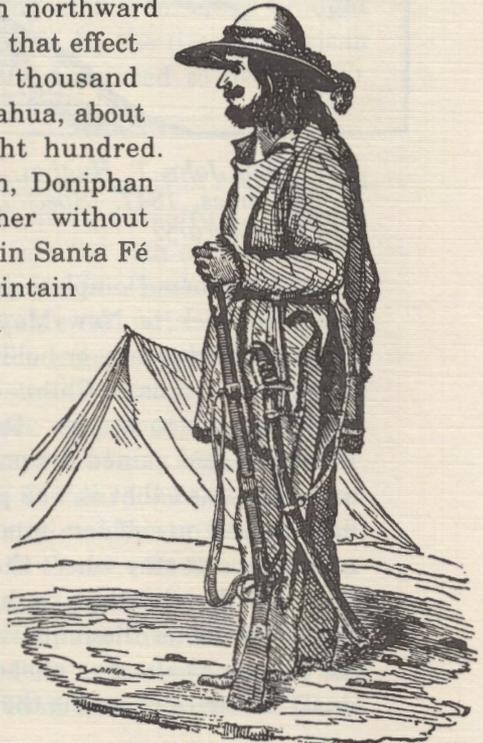
Doniphan was informed by his hosts of the reason for his surprisingly pleasant reception. As the fleeing Mexican soldiers had straggled into the El Paso defenses late Christmas Day, Colonel Luis Vidal, their commander, heard the exaggerated accounts of the reverse at Temascalitos, the Mexican name for the Brazito battle site. "Supposing himself pursued and threatened by a terrible danger," Vidal disbanded the local militia, gathered his remaining forces, and immediately proceeded by forced marches to Chihuahua City. El Paso was thus "most infamously abandoned."<sup>4</sup>

As the Missourians entered the little Mexican town, they discovered that most of its residents had fled with the army. Enough Paseños remained, however, to welcome the Anglos with more wine and baskets of locally grown fruit. The United States flag was raised over the plaza. It "waved in triumph," wrote Missourian William H. Richardson. But the raising of the "detested American standard" was a "sad event," noted Mexican Ramón Alcaraz. The regiment then moved on to the countryside south of El Paso. The men set up camp wherever they could, some in a cornfield ("amidst plenty of burrs and sand"), others in an abandoned corral, a vineyard, a "bare spot of earth." As usual, the officers managed to obtain better accommodations in town, quartering in private homes.

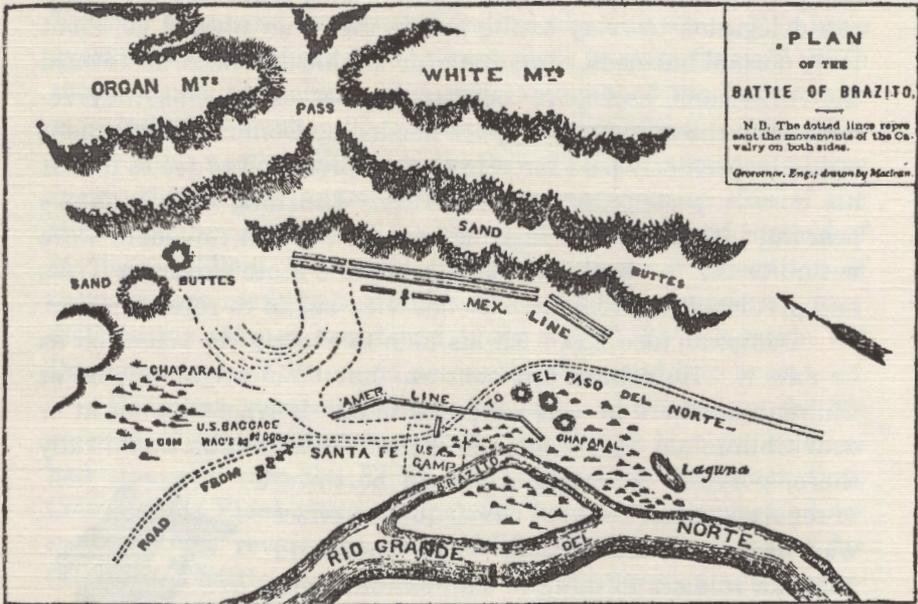
On the morning of December 28, the town leaders paid another visit to Doniphan, seeking to determine the nature of his occupation. Having received no word or even rumors concerning the whereabouts of General Wool, he [Doniphan] was not yet sure what his next move should be, isolated as he was in the enemy's country. He ordered the release of three Arkansas traders that had been held prisoner in El Paso. He then requested the Mexican delegation to relay to the people that they should go about their normal business, remaining "peaceable and neutral" toward the Americans, and gave assurances that as long as they remained in the area, any supplies needed by Doniphan's regiment would be promptly paid for. He further promised to see to it that his men respected the local citizenry. Learning of Doniphan's peaceful intentions and hearing reports that the invaders were not quite the "barbarians" that Chihuahua state Governor Trías had predicted, the fugitive Paseños soon began to return home.<sup>7</sup>

Doniphan also met with his men to explain the situation as he saw it. He related his concern that Wool might not be at Chihuahua where he was supposed to be. If Wool was not at or near Chihuahua city, it was likely that the Mexicans would rally there, possibly mounting a return northward to regain lost territory. A rumor to that effect was beginning its rounds - ten thousand Mexican soldiers forming in Chihuahua, about to move against Doniphan's eight hundred. Whatever forces were to the south, Doniphan did not wish to proceed any further without artillery. He had left his batteries in Santa Fé - Sterling Price needed them to maintain order in northern New Mexico, and

*The Volunteer - This cut was originally drawn to represent J. W. Patton, immediately after his first fire, at the Battle of Brazito, but is here given as a sample of Col. Doniphan's command. Frontispiece John T. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition. Cincinnati: U. P. James, 1847. (Special Collections, University of Texas at El Paso Library)*



Wool was reported to have a strong artillery regiment in his army. After the Brazito encounter, Doniphan realized he needed his guns after all, and subsequently dispatched an urgent request for them. He had also sent a company further into the interior in an attempt to capture the fieldpieces of the fleeing Mexicans, but the enemy had disappeared into the Chihuahuan desert.



Map from John T. Hughes, *Doniphan's Expedition*. Cincinnati: U. P. James, 1847. (Special Collections, University of Texas at El Paso Library)

To his men, Doniphan posed the following questions: Should they fall back to New Mexico in comparative safety to await more definite orders, or hold their position, wait for the artillery, and then push on to Chihuahua city – Wool or no Wool? He put the questions to a vote. Doniphan's men were volunteers and Doniphan had gained his position by their consent, so he apparently reasoned that it was proper for his quasi-military band to have its say on such an important decision. The vote was almost unanimous to stay where they were and continue the campaign.<sup>8</sup>

The decision having been made, the Missourians settled down to wait for the requested artillery to arrive, and to prepare for further challenges ahead. The men were moved from their dusty bivouacs (it seems they had also been welcomed to El Paso

by a winter sandstorm) to more comfortable quarters in town. An old barracks behind the church was occupied by as many soldiers as it could accommodate, the overflow taking up residence in nearby buildings. In addition to being more comfortable, the men were more concentrated in case of sudden attack. As local children returned with their families who had earlier fled, they were met with a pleasant surprise – their schoolhouse had been appropriated, and was being used by the troops to store hay and forage.<sup>9</sup>

El Paso del Norte, the temporary home of the Missouri volunteers, had a long history. A Spanish presence had existed in the area since 1581, when exploration, missionary, and colonization parties began travelling through the Pass between the interior and the New Mexico frontier. In 1659, the Mission Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Mansos del Paso del Norte was established on the western bank of the river to minister to the Manso Indians. The town grew up around the mission, the permanent church having been completed in 1668 and still in active service today. Within a century of its founding, El Paso's Spanish population exceeded 1,000. Four slightly newer mission settlements, located a few miles down river, added another 600, and a variety of Indian groups living at the missions brought the total area population to about 3,000. By the time of Mexican independence in 1821, this total had increased to over 8,000, more than half residing in El Paso del Norte.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the need for a dependable supply of sacramental wine at the missions gave rise to a thriving viticulture. Spanish grapevine cuttings were introduced into the rich alluvial soil by the early missionaries, and an intricate dam and canal system was developed to replace the inadequate rainfall. An inventory in 1755 reported 250,000 vines in the area, supplying not only local needs, but providing a healthy means of trade. A variety of fruits, vegetables, grain, and livestock supplemented the industry, but Pass wines and brandies formed the basis of the economy. By the end of the eighteenth century, El Paso dominated the agricultural trade between Chihuahua city and Santa Fé. In addition, its strategic location along the El Camino Real forced virtually all trade to move through the Pass, establishing El Paso as an important commercial center. An estimated annual average of \$90,000 worth of merchandise passed through between 1743 and 1843. The opening of the Santa Fe Trail from Missouri to Santa

Fe, added American goods to the flow, but deteriorating Mexican/American relations severely restricted this potentially enormous trade until, by the time of Doniphan's arrival, El Paso and points south were closed to Anglo outsiders (trespassers were imprisoned; for example, the Arkansas traders released by Doniphan).<sup>11</sup>

In his monumental book, **The Great River**, Paul Horgan wrote, "As the people returned...enterprise saw opportunity, victor and vanquished combined in the commerce of appetites."<sup>12</sup> The Mexican War had diminished El Paso's trade opportunities. Here, however, was a ready-made market – a captive audience. Although the Missourians had not been paid since their enlistment, they always seemed to have money available to spend.<sup>13</sup> The Paseños had the supply – wine, produce, and livestock. The Anglos provided the demand. It might be argued that the "cordial welcome" given the invaders and Doniphan's orders that the local residents "go about their business" were the means by which the Mexicans made the best of a bad situation. As Professor C. L. Sonnichsen wrote, "Some American historians like to think that the citizens secretly wished for American rule. Anyone who knows the Mexicans could never believe this. A fiercely patriotic people with a strong sense of national honor, they have died by the thousands during the last century for their country's welfare. They could not have been indifferent to this invasion."<sup>14</sup> The Paseños for the most part accepted the American presence. One of the local aristocrats, Juan Ponce de León, freighter, miller, and farmer (believed to be the first to cultivate and occupy the east bank of the Rio Bravo, the site of the future American El Paso), opened his storehouses and offered corn, wheat, and of course, wine and brandy for sale. Another resident made regular journeys into the nearby mountains to bring back loads of wood for sale. Profits were there for the taking. Anglos found it singular that the Mexicans were "yesterday in arms against us and are today calling us *amigos*." Apples, melons, and dried fruit were for sale in the streets at low prices. Wine and brandy were available in "great abundance," as well as *mescal*, *pulque*, and *aguardiente*, a local whiskey. The local merchants were not without competition, however. American traders who had followed in the wake of the army, soon set up shop in the plaza. Their customers were not only the soldiers, especially those preferring American whiskey, but Mexicans hungry for American goods.<sup>15</sup>

Doniphan soon realized that he had a problem on his hands with so much liquor readily available. Several times he attempted to restrict sales of distilled spirits to his men, but the supply and the demand were both so great that his efforts came to nothing. His regiment was made up of men "of a restless and roving disposition" and "the little discipline" imposed upon them was "totally insufficient to prevent rioting and dissipation." Occupational duty soon became boring. Drinking was not the only vice available. Both the Americans and the Mexicans loved to gamble. All around the plaza, horse and mule races and games of chance – monte, chuck-a-luck, twenty-one, and faro, grew so numerous and popular that the streets soon became blocked. At length, Doniphan prohibited gambling on the streets because of the congestion, no doubt merely moving it indoors where another type of activity was going on as well. The Americans found the Mexican girls much to their liking; officers were no exception. One observer wrote, "It seems a general thing among the officers to have mistresses, and some of them carry it so far as to keep two or three at the same time." Lieutenant Benjamin Talbot's company even signed a petition of protest against him for keeping a thirteen-year-old girl in his room.<sup>16</sup>

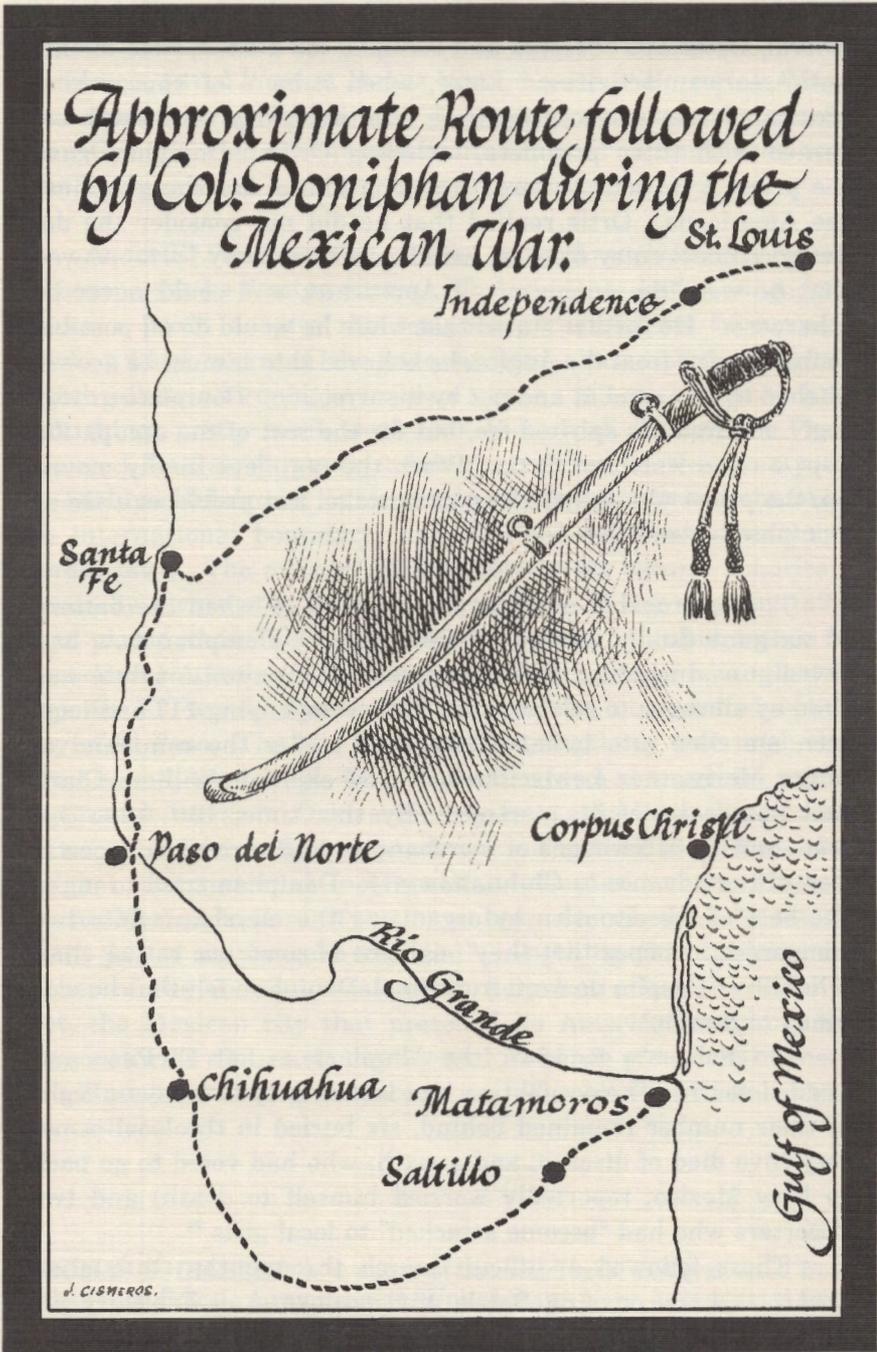
Doniphan began to find more suitable activities for his men to divert their attention from the local attractions. A search was conducted for arms and ammunition of local residences and buildings belonging to Paseños openly hostile toward the Americans. This not only warded off possible trouble during the occupation, but also helped to re-supply the army. An old gristmill was taken over by some of the officers and men to prepare flour for the upcoming campaign. In January, a group left for an up-river hunting trip, spending ten days and having "much sport." Another squad went out in search of wild horses. Doniphan also conducted drills and inspections whenever possible to prepare his men and to try to instill a semblance of esprit-de-corps.<sup>17</sup>

He had one company in his command that had no need for an infusion of military spirit. This was a group of twelve slaves that had accompanied the regiment on the expedition. These men belonged to the volunteer officers and took care of the various chores in camp and on the march. In Missouri, the harshness of slavery was less severe than in the deep South, and blacks and whites worked and often socialized side by side. One historian

noted that, "Greater integration between the two races existed on the western frontier of Missouri than perhaps anywhere else in the nation." As the column moved down the Rio Grande from Santa Fé, the blacks were as enthused as the whites at the prospects of tangling with the Mexicans. Their enthusiasm was, however, of a vicarious nature. They were, after all, unarmed slaves. At Brazito, their great opportunity arrived. In the confusion preceding the Mexican charge on the disorganized American camp, the slaves grabbed weapons and fell into line beside the white Missourians. Their conduct and valor under fire won the respect of their masters. They were now accepted as comrades-in-arms and were allowed to form their own company. Doniphan armed them with captured Mexican swords and rifles. They decorated themselves with bits and pieces of gaudy Mexican uniforms that had been strewn across the battlefield. Joe, the servant of Lieutenant John B. Duncan, was elected captain. The company was said to be "fired with military ardor" and "impatient for the foe." At the reviews held in El Paso, the black soldiers marched proudly alongside their white counterparts. The company later fought with distinction at the Battle of Sacramento. After the regiment completed its expedition and disbanded, the blacks returned to their former slave status.<sup>18</sup>

Despite Doniphan's efforts, his men caused occasional embarrassment. A portion of the municipal archives was destroyed by men quartered in government buildings. The irreplaceable manuscripts had been used to light candles. On January 13, three men were court-martialed for rape. Doniphan's men were described: "though good to fight are not careful how much they soil the property of a friend much less an enemy." Another wrote, "Mexico was hard-used by Johnny Gringo." One example occurred when a fearful Paseño attempted to shut a boisterous crowd out of his wine cellar one evening. The Anglos simply tore the door off its hinges and proceeded to clean out his supply. Another group returning from a fandango were "so much intoxicated as to create a great deal of confusion, destroying property, and committing other outrages which quite terrified the natives."<sup>19</sup>

During the occupation, Doniphan was continuously concerned with the activities of the openly hostile priest, Father Ramón Ortiz. The friar had helped to organize the El Paso militia



Map Illustration courtesy José Cisneros

and had accompanied them to Brazito. Shortly after Doniphan's arrival, Ortiz was arrested and confined for a short time for his anti-American activities. Later, when rumors of approaching Mexican forces surfaced again, a scouting party sent south returned with three prisoners, including Ortiz. Doniphan gave the priest a "furious lecture," accusing him of treachery against the Americans. Ortiz replied that he did not consider the delivery of his country from an invader as "treachery." He avowed that he was "the enemy of all Americans, and could never be otherwise." He further stated that while he would do all possible to free Mexico from the Anglos, he believed that it must be accomplished by fair combat and not by insurrection. Doniphan grudgingly admired his spirited foe, but for the rest of the occupation kept a close watch on Ortiz. When the regiment finally moved on, the priest was taken along as hostage, lest problems arise at Doniphan's rear.<sup>20</sup>

It was probably much to the relief of all when the battery of six guns finally arrived on February 1. Doniphan now had seven guns, including the one captured at Brazito. A salute was fired by all seven to celebrate, as the accompanying 117 artillerymen marched into town. They were under the command of Major Meriwether Lewis Clark, son of explorer William Clark and namesake of his partner. By this time, 150 American traders with 315 wagons of merchandise had arrived in expectation of the advance to Chihuahua city. Doniphan tried to make the best of the situation by organizing the merchants into two companies in hopes that they might be of some use rather than a liability. Despite no word from Wool, Doniphan felt that he was ready to march.<sup>21</sup>

On February 8, 1847, the Missourians left El Paso and headed south. The occupation had lasted forty-two days. Eight of their number remained behind, six buried in the local cemetery (five died of disease, and a sixth, who had voted to go back to New Mexico, reportedly worried himself to death) and two deserters who had "become attached" to local girls.<sup>22</sup>

There followed a difficult march through the Chihuahua desert and the ensuing Battle of Sacramento on February 28. Doniphan's thousand men defeated at least twice that many Mexicans. It turned out that Wool and his army had never come closer than 500 miles to Chihuahua, but had joined General

Zachary Taylor instead. The victory led to the occupation of Ciudad Chihuahua for fifty-nine days. The regiment finally moved on, found Wool at Buena Vista, near Saltillo, in late May, was inspected by Taylor near Monterrey, and was sent on to New Orleans where the men were finally paid and mustered out. For Doniphan and his men, the war was over.<sup>23</sup>

As for El Paso del Norte, it had come through its experience of occupation by foreign troops. The residents had managed to make a profit despite the temporary curtailment of normal trade. They tolerated the excesses and abuses of the Anglos, which all in all could have been worse. After the Americans left, things pretty much went back to normal. Life at the Pass changed forever, however, after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February, 1848. The Rio Grande became an international boundary, and El Paso del Norte became a border town. The mission villages down river became American towns by virtue of a change in the course of the river in 1829 that placed these towns on the east bank. A rapid influx of American settlers resulted in the establishment of new villages opposite El Paso del Norte. By 1873, one was incorporated as the city of El Paso. The two El Pasos existed side by side, with the same name, until 1888, when the older town changed its name to Ciudad Juárez.<sup>24</sup> Over a century later, the Pass cities boast of a population well over a million. Together they form the largest international metropolitan complex on the United States-Mexico border. They have been described as "Siamese twins joined at the cash register." Anything that happens in either of the communities cannot help but affect the other.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the Mexican city that preceded its American neighbor by two centuries retains its dignity and its sense of national honor, much as it did during the occupation. The spirit of El Paso del Norte lives on.

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# Gregorio Nacianceno García, 1st: Indian Fighter and Politician

By Bill Lockhart

**G**regorio Nacianceno García was a noted figure of his day, having been very active in the political life of San Elizario. He dedicated his life to the service of his community, and was so respected that many of his descendants were named in his memory. Although over seventy percent of Hispanic heads of households in San Elizario were illiterate in 1860, García could read and write – skills that he passed on to his children. The scarcity of literacy at that time may indicate that García descended from a presidial officer or another member of the aristocracy who had moved into the area. His prominence is confirmed by his name appearing on one of the twelve stained-glass windows of the San Elizario Catholic Church. Each window is dedicated to one of the community's leading citizens.<sup>1</sup>

Gregorio was born in 1820 in San Elizario, Nueva Viscaya, the son of Pedro García and Josefa Ana Olguín. He was drafted into the Mexican Army at the age of fourteen, and later fought against the United States in the Mexican War. He married María de los Santos Albillar sometime prior to 1841 and spent most of his early life as a farm worker and a farmer.<sup>2</sup>

García was "called upon to take a leading and active part in all the affairs of the people of San Elizario."<sup>3</sup> He served as Justice of the Peace for the community from 1851 to 1860, and also served as *Comisionado del condado* (county commissioner) from 1852 to 1855, along with Benancio Apodaca and Martin

Luján.<sup>4</sup> García's sworn statement upon taking office on August 14, 1852 emphasized his commitment to personal integrity:

*I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all the duties incumbent on me as County Commissioner for the County of El Paso according to the best of my skill and ability....[I] have not fought a duel with deadly weapons within the state or out of it nor have I sent or accepted a challenge to fight a duel with deadly weapons nor have I acted as second in carrying a challenge to fight a duel or aided or advised or assisted any person thus offending. So help me God.*<sup>5</sup>

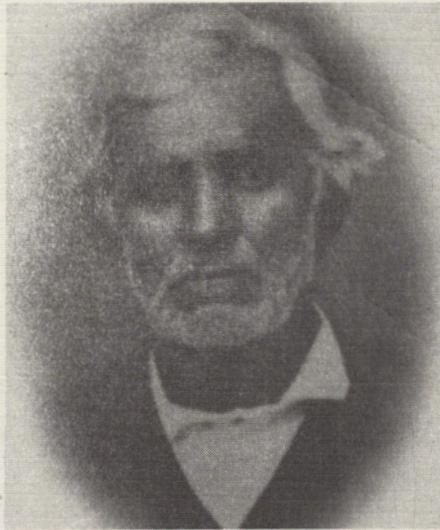
García was also willing to support other public servants. In 1851, he and T. J. Miller signed as sureties for the \$500 bond of Pedro Sisneros, constable for El Paso County. A year later, along with Chief Justice Archibald C. Hyde, he posted the \$5,000 bond for District Attorney Esler Hendree. Hendree was killed on July 18, 1853 when he and other armed Americans attempted to break James Magee out of the jail in what is now Ciudad Juárez.<sup>6</sup>

By 1860, García was doing well financially as proved by his claims in the census report. As a farmer and Justice of the Peace in San Elizario, he declared a real estate value of \$2000 and \$3500 in his personal estate. María also listed in the census report an estate of \$100, making them a wealthy couple for the time and place. The couple had six children: Felícitas, Carlos, Máxima, Secundino, Nacienceno (G. N.), and Juan.<sup>7</sup>

Most of García's children reached adulthood and married. His oldest daughter, Felícitas, married Ramón Zambrano in the 1860s. Three other García children married children of Telésforo Montes, a friend and associate of their father, Gregorio García, 1st. Carlos and Máxima had a double wedding in San Elizario, performed by Fr. A. S. Borrajo on May 13, 1871. Carlos married Marina Montes, and Máxima wed Agapito de Jesús Montes, an Indian scout and member of the Texas Minute Men. A year later, on August 29, Secundino married Gorgonia Alderete in a ceremony also conducted by Borrajo. G. N. married twice – first to Romana Sanchez on November 6, 1874, and after her death, married María Vasquez in 1910. Tomás, the youngest of the family, born sometime after 1880, later married

Angela Montes, the last of Telésforo Montes' children to marry into the García family.<sup>8</sup>

García was an early member of the San Elizario school board and donated the land and the building, now known as Los Portales, to be used for the school.<sup>9</sup> He was best known, however, for his valor as an Indian fighter. Hostilities had continued in the area and throughout the state until the early 1880s, causing the Texas legislature to pass a militia bill allowing local areas some measure of self-protection. A sixty-man frontier force,



*Gregorio Nacianceno García, 1st,  
County Commissioner,  
Precinct No. 4, 1878-1883  
(Photo courtesy El Paso County  
Commissioners Court)*

officially registered as Company N, was organized by García on August 26, 1870. The force was mustered out almost exactly a year later on August 21, 1871. García listed himself in the 1870 census as Captain of the S.F. Force, although this author has been unable to ascertain the meaning of the initials, "S.F."<sup>10</sup> A report to state officials in Austin proved that San Elizario needed the protection:

*Gregorio García of El Paso County stated that during the period from August, 1865 to February, 1867, the Indians seized more than nine hundred sheep and goats. García also reported that fourteen men were killed near San Elizario during February and March, 1866, by the Indians.<sup>11</sup>*

During an engagement, García received an arrow wound in the arm. When the arm became infected, he almost lost it, and it remained paralyzed for the rest of his life.<sup>12</sup>

García's wound apparently caused him to retire from the S.F. Force sometime prior to 1879. On October 5 of that year, he sent a note to Texas Ranger Lieutenant George W. Baylor in

El Paso that five "Mexican" hay cutters had been killed by Indians fourteen miles north of the "La Quadria [sic] stage station." Rangers under James Gillett rode all night to reach the scene to find that all of the hay cutters were still alive. Each one had seen his companions fleeing the attacking Indians and assumed that the Indians had massacred all the others.<sup>13</sup>

His duties to protect the community were not limited to Indians, however. In 1849 and 1850, García, along with other San Elizarians, placed a guard on their *bosque* (woods) adjacent to the Rio Grande to prevent their neighbors in Socorro, Texas and Guadalupe, Mexico, from stealing timber. The guard remained active until at least 1898.<sup>14</sup>

Around 1870, Luis Cardis, later a victim of the Salt War, El Paso representative to a state convention, convinced the State of Texas to approve a canal to San Elizario. Captain García, along with his son, G. N., Jesus Cobos, Tomás García, and Joe Kidden formed a company to construct the canal. The state paid the contractors in Texas script upon completion of the project.<sup>15</sup>

By 1875, García was Justice of the Peace for Precinct No. 4. According to Elizario M. Montes, an eye-witness to the 1877 Salt War that was fought in El Paso and San Elizario, Captain García and his son, G. N., took sides with the Rangers, although not as active participants. After advising the rioters to avoid violence, they, along with Telésforo Montes, withdrew to the top of the Community Flour Mill, close to the house where Judge Howard was quartered.<sup>16</sup>

Walter Prescott Webb tells a different story. He says that Captain García played an active role, commanding a detachment barricaded in Ellis' store, but his forces were driven out and joined the rest of the Rangers.<sup>17</sup>

*The Mesilla Valley Independent* supports Webb, saying:

*Among the Mexican Nation we have found many honorable men...Capt. Gregorio García, an old gentleman, who has honorably filled many an important office in El Paso County is one of them. At the first sign of danger he joined the Rangers and fought with them to the last, being wounded twice.*<sup>18</sup>

An earlier edition lauded Garcia, saying he "fought like a tiger" and was wounded "in head and leg."<sup>19</sup> Both articles in the *Independent* claimed that García's son, Miguel, a private in the



*Commissioners Court, El Paso County circa 1883. Top Row: José M. Gonzalez, County Commissioner, Ysleta; Gregorio N. García, County Commissioner, San Elizario; Marshall Rodgers, County Judge; John Julian, County Treasurer; Juan Armendariz, County Commissioner, Socorro. Front Row: James H. White, Sheriff; M. Lowenstein, County Commissioner, Ysleta; John Dean, District Attorney; T. Falvey, District Judge; Manuel Flores, District and County Clerk; Robert Burney, Deputy District and County Clerk. (Photo courtesy El Paso County Commissioners Court and Bill Lockhart)*

Texas Rangers, was killed in the action. Miguel may have been the son, Juan, listed in the 1860 and 1870 census, but absent in 1880. Several of García's children, having two given names, were listed by different names at different times.

To confuse matters more, a second Gregorio N. García also played an active role in the Salt War. However, this García was the county judge at the time, and should not be confused with Captain García.

Captain García again took the oath of office as County Commissioner for Precinct No. 4 on December 3, 1878, and served until November 1880 when he was replaced by Telésforo Montes. García was by then sixty-one years old. A photograph of the commissioners court, circa 1883, includes García which might suggest that he had been reappointed by that time.<sup>21</sup>

In 1882, García was still a public servant, this time functioning as Notary Public for El Paso County, although he de-

voted most of his time to farming. Notaries at that time were more respected than they are today, often representing clients as *de facto* lawyers. In 1892, at age seventy-three, he served on a committee for San Elizario to help the alcalde oversee the use of irrigation water. On October 7, 1898, García died and was buried in the San Elizario Cemetery. He was seventy-seven years old when Fr. J. LaFors, S. J., administered the last rites.<sup>22</sup>

García lived in a unique time period. Without ever changing his residence, he resided during his lifetime in five different countries (in one of them twice) and on both sides of the Rio Grande. When he was born, San Elizario was a part of Nueva Viscaya under the rule of Spain. The community became part of Mexico in 1821, the Republic of Texas (at least on paper – Texas had no real control of the area) in 1836, the United States in 1848, and the Confederate States of America in 1861. At the end of the Civil War, San Elizario again became part of the United States. About 1830, the Rio Grande jumped its banks and created a new channel to the west, placing San Elizario, along with the other two Lower Valley towns of Socorro and Ysleta, on the east side of the river.

Many descendants of Captain Gregorio N. García were afterward named for the patriarch. His son, G. N., was given his exact name, while others had the name appended to their given name. Descendants of García still carry on the family tradition of involvement in the church and the politics of the town. Two of his great, great-granddaughters continue to be public servants in San Elizario. Ana Oporto has been the church secretary for over twenty years, and Ann Enriquez continues to work for the incorporation of San Elizario.<sup>23</sup>

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*G. N. Garcia 2d,  
Mayor.*

## Gregorio Nacianceno García, 2d: Lawman and Politician

By Bill Lockhart

**G**regorio Nacianceno García, 2nd, was born March 5, 1855 in San Elizario, Texas, and was baptized there on March 10. His father and mother, Gregorio García, 1st, and María de los Santos Albillar, were in attendance, along with his godparents, Martin García and Agripina Luján. Fr. Antonio Severo Borrajo, later to gain notoriety in the Salt War, administered the baptism. Called Nacianceno as a child, García grew up in San Elizario, living with his parents and five siblings. Fr. M. Bourdier performed García's first wedding, when he married Romana Sanchez on November 6, 1874 in San Elizario.<sup>1</sup>

García, twenty-two years old at the time of the Salt War, may not have taken an active part in that confrontation, but he did join his father in supporting the appointed law enforcement bodies. After the conflict, in December 1878, he replaced his father as Justice of the Peace for Precinct No. 4, serving until 1880. He took his job seriously, turning in \$155 in quarterly fines and penalties in May 1879, and \$250 in August. In 1880, he and Romana were living with the elder García, and "G. N.," no longer known as Nacianceno, recorded his occupation on the census as a musician. Perhaps the entry reflects García's sense of humor, or the gullibility of the census-taker, for García became the first mayor of San Elizario for the new incorporation that year; he remained in office until 1883. Garcia also helped A. J. Wingo survey the San Elizario town grant in 1881.<sup>2</sup>

On November 19, 1888, García, following in his father's footsteps, became the county commissioner for Precinct No. 4. However, he resigned shortly afterwards to become interim mayor of San Elizario. Reappointed as commissioner in May 1889, García resigned again in October to become a U.S. Customs Inspector. In 1891, he headed a committee to aid the *Alcaldes de Agua* (water commissioners) in San Elizario. In January 1892, he was appointed Postmaster of the village, replacing John Clark. He was again appointed to the water committee later that year.<sup>3</sup>



*Gregorio Nacienceno "G. N." García, 2nd, San Elizario, 1910  
Photo courtesy Rio Grande Historical Collections RG89-37/2, New Mexico State University Library*

In 1893, he ran for mayor but was defeated by Charles Heinz. Serving as postmaster apparently failed to fulfill the spirit of adventure García had inherited from his father, so, by 1895, he had become a deputy sheriff for El Paso County. In June 1897, he took on the added responsibility of water commissioner for Clint. He held the deputy's position until he again took the oath of office as County Commissioner on November 19, 1898 and held that position until 1904.<sup>4</sup>

García's name headed the list on a 1906 petition to hold an election to incorporate San Elizario; he again became mayor of the town in 1909 and 1910. The following year he lost to Lorenzo Madrid. He served as treasurer for the San Elizario Independent School District in 1910. Like most residents, García farmed while performing his duties as a public servant.<sup>5</sup>

By 1900, he and Romana had been married twenty-five years. She had borne him nine children, six of whom were still living. Sometime prior to 1910, Romana died, and García moved in with his daughter, Francisca Alarcón, herself a widow, and her

sons, Lorenzo and Ramón. In 1910, he married María Vásquez of Ojinaga, Mexico. The newlyweds lived in San Elizario until 1912, when they moved to Clint where García bought property from Pat Dolan and opened the International Wholesale Grocery Store. He continued his public service work as a Notary Public in 1917. At that time, however, the growth of the tiny settlement was too slow to support a store, so the couple went bankrupt. They moved to El Paso where, at the age of sixty-six, García joined the police department in 1921.<sup>6</sup>

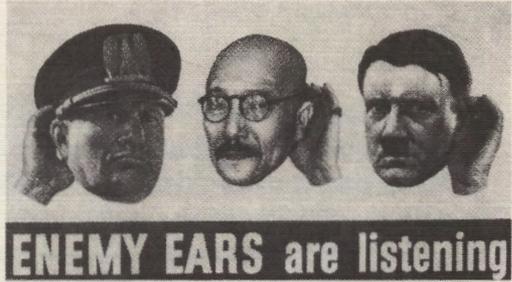
On Wednesday, December 28, 1938, at the age of eighty-three, G. N. García, 2nd, died and, like his father, was buried in the cemetery at San Elizario. He was survived by his widow, María, along with five sons and three daughters, offspring from both marriages. His name was carried on by a son, the third Gregorio, and another, Alfonso, who, like his father, became an El Paso city policeman.<sup>7</sup>

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## The Home Front: World War II and El Paso

### *San Jacinto Plaza – Center of Activities*

By George Saucier

**S**an Jacinto Plaza in El Paso was the center of much activity during the 1940s. I remember running through the milling people trying to catch my bus before it left for the valley. City buses loaded on the south side of the plaza and county buses on the north side. People milled around the plaza on the walkways, sat on iron benches scattered throughout the park, or waited for appointments under the large clock in the southwest corner. Many cut across the block, corner to corner, passing the alligator pool enclosure. Servicemen were especially attracted to the pool, a place to kill time while away from Fort Bliss or Biggs Field. Several times, inebriated GIs went over the railing to wrestle the alligators, but no major injuries occurred.

The main railroad tracks, leading from the east coast to the west coast, ran through the center of El Paso and along Main Street at the north side of the plaza. Except for a small strip of pavement next to the park, the area was dusty and unpaved.

The troop trains pulled into the Union Station on San Francisco Street ever so slowly, and those arriving from the east always held up traffic and pedestrians for long periods of time, with cars backed up for blocks.

As a high school student, I would often go with my friends to the Crawford Theater, a former vaudeville house turned into an affordable second-run movie theater. It was just north of the

tracks facing Mesa Street. Trying to come back to the plaza to catch a bus for home was impossible when the trains were there. Many times, we could look under the train cars and see the bus pulling out without us.

On hot summer days, servicemen on the train had all the windows up and would hang out yelling and whistling at the pretty young girls who were waiting for the train to pass. Girls facing the train would walk on down the other way to escape the calls. The interested yells and whistles still came, with "hubba, hubba" indicating approval of a young lady's good looks (often the looks were not there but just a figure in a skirt brought on the whistles). Sometimes, the men threw letters, addressed to their homes, hoping the girls would mail them.

The YMCA at Oregon and Missouri and the Armed Services YMCA on San Francisco Street were each just a block or two from the plaza. They were a beehive of activity with servicemen often filling the areas around the buildings. The movie theaters in close proximity to the plaza were the Wigwam, the Texas Grand, the Crawford, the Palace, the Ellanay (Aliena) and the Plaza. They were usually full of service people. The USO was located in a big warehouse-type building on Campbell Street. I remember going there, at the invitation of the organizing women of El Paso, to entertain visiting servicemen. The local group kept this open for several years and did much good for the service personnel.

The churches, most of them north of the plaza and the tracks, opened not only their doors, but their hearts and homes to the lonely out-of-state servicemen. Sunday after Sunday, my mother entertained soldiers who attended our church by serving them dinners of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, English peas, and crisp lettuce salad, topped off by a large piece of apple pie, covered with vanilla ice cream. Afterwards it was time for relaxation, football in our large yard or a drive through the beautiful irrigated valley to show that we really did have vegetation in El Paso. Invitations to servicemen were extended by families across our city; consequently new acquaintances arose, and romances sprang up which led to marriages. Many El Paso girls left the city because of these Sunday dinners and invitations to out-of-state servicemen. After the war, many came back home to their beloved El Paso and its San Jacinto Plaza.

In summer, the days were long and hot. There was little or no air-conditioning. We went to the cool theaters to spend hot

afternoons. Sometimes, we just sat under the shade of the trees in the plaza, and waited for our buses, whether they be Sunset Heights, Manhattan Heights, Government Hill, Fort Bliss, or the buses going to the valley. While waiting, we could pull out our wallets or purses and rummage through them for food stamps or tokens, needed to buy gasoline and certain groceries because of wartime rationing.

When I left the plaza by bus, it was a long trip home for I lived ten miles down the valley on North Loop and Pendale roads. I had lots of time to think while on the bus, and I wondered whether the war would ever cease. At the end of the ride, it was nice to walk to my home where there was peace and security and love. At night, I wondered the same – where is peace and would it ever come and how long would it take?

I remember lying in bed and thinking about this when I would hear the sound of distant music coming into my bedroom on the breezes of the night air. It seemed to come from the east, where there was an encampment of German prisoners of war. It was about a mile from my home, and was located on a desert bluff above the valley, near present-day Zaragosa Road. I often hiked over to the camp and saw the prisoners with their arms hanging through the metal fence which restrained them. My mother warned me not to wander near there because it was a restricted area. Night after night, I heard this music, accordion with singing, come through the stillness of the night. It seemed to tell me that there were human beings on the other side of the world in this war who must also have homes, families, and cares like me and who loved life and made what music they could with whatever instrument at hand, even an old accordion. It seemed to be a much smaller and saner world.

Yes, the San Jacinto Plaza seemed to hold the activities of El Paso together. Those were good days, the 1940s.

## *Life in the Barrio*

By Alicia Gonzalez

I was born during the depression years, and throughout my childhood I remember that my parents struggled to support and feed their large family. We were considered to be better off than most because we owned our house plus rental property in

the backyard. Often the tenants living in these two-room apartments could not meet the few dollars rent. Sometimes they would share food they received from a relief program with my family which as property owners, did not qualify for government assistance. Times were hard, particularly for the many unemployed in El Paso's Second Ward. But the children who grew up there seemed to be oblivious of what was going on and did not realize they were poor.

But World War II changed our lives forever. In 1941, I was eleven years old when our country entered the war. The neighborhood started to change greatly. The war effort opened up opportunities to all. Clothing manufacturers began hiring seamstresses to make army uniforms, parachutes, and tents. Some of our neighbors were employed at the W.R. Weaver Company, manufacturer of rifle scopes, and others went to work at Fort Bliss. Many high school girls took part-time jobs at the five-and-dime stores, and at The White House and The Popular Dry Goods Company, large department stores. Everyone was earning a salary.

The most notable change began with the young ladies. They bought pretty dresses, beautiful high-heeled shoes, and wore new hats to church. Since nylon stockings were not available, my sister and cousins would paint their legs with makeup, and use eyebrow pencil for the seam lines. They could not do it themselves, so I would help them draw the straight lines on the backs of their legs. On Sunday afternoons, I would peak through the dance hall windows to watch the older girls dance and jitterbug with the young, uniformed soldiers.

At the same time, the young men in the Segundo Barrio began enlisting or were drafted into the Armed Services. It would be the first time many would travel away from home. My brother, George, joined the Navy after his high school graduation in 1943. Patriotism was in the air and good jobs required employees to be United States citizens. Many of the older folks began attending evening school, enrolling in English and citizenship classes. They did their homework along with us younger students, asking us to help them with their English assignments.

My father, David Concha, proudly received his citizenship, and was hired as a carpenter at Fort Bliss. Since he was a cabinet-maker, he eventually became the shop supervisor. Under his supervision, German and Italian prisoners of war learned to repair

furniture for the officers' quarters. Some prisoners made wooden toys – one built a rocking horse which my Dad said looked more like a mule than a horse.

My family's standard of living improved. Dad was earning a good salary and the tenants were paying their rent. Although we had ration cards for meat, coffee, sugar, and shoes, my mother could now afford to buy additional items in Juarez. And she was able to send us all to the Catholic schools.

Our house was also being upgraded. The old wood-burning stove was replaced by a gas one, and the ice box disappeared, and in its place, we obtained a refrigerator. It had a coin box attached to it, and mother would feed it weekly. Periodically, a collector from the appliance store would come, unlock the box, and collect the coins. When the final payment was made the coin box was removed.

On Sundays, we children received an allowance of eleven cents--ten cents for the movie and a penny to spend. Usually we bought a penny sucker which would last through the feature. We watched the newsreel in hopes of seeing the *USS Mississippi* on which my brother was serving. The ship, after other campaigns, entered Tokyo Bay for the Japanese surrender. The newsreels informed us of the horrors of war, but the El Paso *Herald-Post* became our main source of war news. Mother's favorite section was the Ernie Pyle stories, directly from the war front. We learned more through the newspaper reports than from my brother's cut up, heavily censored V-mail letters.

Sadly, the sons of many families did not return home, and a Gold Star was displayed on many windows in the barrio. Thanks to my mother's prayers, my brother returned home safely, took advantage of the GI Bill, and enrolled at the College of Mines.

After the war, the prisoners of war were returned to their homes. One of the Germans corresponded with my dad for a while, and we sent him a box of candy. My father stayed on at Fort Bliss until his retirement. Years later, when my own son was about three years old, his grandpa gave him an old, dusty rocking horse – “the one that looked more like a mule.”

## *Poofs of White Smoke*

By Elisa Martinez

**W**e would sit together, the family, in the dark room with shades drawn and whisper to each other. I was very scared, but I never said anything. The sirens outside would wail loudly as the searchlights criss-crossed each other in the sky, supposedly searching for enemy airplanes. Otherwise, the city was completely dark.

My father was an air raid warden. He kept his cloth bag handy, close to the front door. He had a vest with a special insignia on the back in the form of a triangle, a helmet, and a flashlight. He would put on his vest and helmet, take his flashlight, and leave quietly to patrol the neighborhood. His duty was to make sure that there wasn't any trace of light visible anywhere.

Traffic would come to a halt during these "raids" as the city disappeared from view. Then, the wailing would cease, the searchlights would be turned off, and everything returned to normal. But "normal" didn't happen until my father returned. His job was an important one, and everyone had to be ready in case of an enemy attack.

I was little, but I sat and listened to the adult talk – mostly about Fort Bliss and Biggs Field. They were important military bases considered prime targets for the enemy.

I was always scared. I remember the fear. A little girl listening to adults talk. They whispered as they put on their black clothes and left together in the big Chevrolet, only to return later with swollen eyes and solemnly shaking their heads from side to side. "*Pobre muchacho*. Poor boy," they would say as they sat in the chairs in the living room, "*Pobre muchacho*." I would imagine the casket covered with the American flag like the ones that I saw in the newsreels that showed sailors scurrying about on ships, firing white poofs of smoke at whirling airplanes that would then disappear with a splash into the sea. In the newsreels, men who lost their lives were called 'casualties' – my parents called them: *Pobres muchachos!* Poor boys!

Every night I went with my grandmother to pray the rosary at the Holy Family Church. It was filled with ladies fingering their worn beads. "Pray for an end to the war," she would say to me. I prayed with the rest of them, but then every Sunday,

the fuzzy newsreel told about the war, and still I saw cannons firing and white poofs of smoke. My parents would come home ever so often, shaking their heads, saying, "*Pobre muchacho*".

Even in Juarez, the newsreels spoke of the war and talked about the Mexican squadron, *Escuadron 101*. The war dragged on in spite of the ladies fingering their worn beads. Newsreels showed men sitting on tanks being hugged and kissed in welcome as they drove through cities "liberated by the Allies." The war continued in spite of the ladies fingering their worn beads.

There were so many men and women in uniform. El Paso was a bustling city. Everywhere downtown, display windows had familiar signs – UNCLE SAM WANTS YOU, BUY WAR BONDS, and TOJO GO HOME.

I especially remember one hot day. My grandmother, my brother, and I went to the Plaza Theater downtown to see yet another war movie – "The Story of G.I. Joe." It brought tears to everyone's eyes. We watched the newsreel with the white poofs of smoke disappearing in the sky. We walked out of the dark theater. As our eyes squinted in the sunlight, we found bedlam.

The streets were teeming with people dancing and crying and hugging and kissing each other. "The war is over," they shouted. "*Se acabo la guerra!*" They waved an EXTRA newspaper in the air. My grandmother joined in the melee, hugging and kissing. We became a part of the waving, joyous crowd. "*Ya van a volver los muchachos,*" my grandmother shouted, tears in her eyes. "The boys are coming home!"

My memories of the war are those of a child. I remember the scrap metal drives, doing without many things for the war effort. I remember President Roosevelt on the radio. I can still hear the wail of the siren, and see the huge reflectors at Fort Bliss. I remember the fear I felt and the poofs of white smoke that disappeared into the sky, and I remember the feeling of the word peace on that special day when peace did finally come.

## ***World War II Memories***

**By Ysidro Cervantes**

I was fourteen years old when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and clearly remember that day because my mother had the saddest of eyes. Our family sat with ears pressed toward an old-fashioned wooden radio, listening to the news.

Later, many friends and relatives gathered at our house and listened to President Roosevelt's address, calling upon our nation to unite. My mother and aunts embraced, knowing that soon their sons would be called to serve their country. My older brother, Matias, my cousins, Fritz and Roy Moeller, Henry, Aaron, and Emilio Duchene, all were of draft age and soon enlisted for military duty. Many others from my neighborhood joined or were drafted; it would be three years before I would join the Navy and serve in the Pacific Campaign.

During the war, a sense of pride developed among the young men and women serving in the military. For many Mexican-Americans, it was not only an opportunity to leave El Paso, but also to participate in a national endeavor. It made one proud to see a brother or friend wearing the American uniform.

When my older brother left for the military, my mother made a *manda*, or promise, to God that she would walk on her knees from the front of the San Lorenzo *iglesia* to the altar while chanting prayers. She later carried out this promise, and one that she had made for me as well. Her knees were scraped and stockings torn, symbolizing the depth of her faith. These *mandas* were carried in the hearts of many soldiers.

During the war, telegrams were delivered on bicycles by Western Union men or boys dressed in green uniforms and short boots. Some families who had a son killed in the service often tied a black ribbon to their front door and dressed in black. Wounded soldiers were taken to William Beaumont Hospital.

Before the war, El Paso was a small city, and walking to work or to go shopping was not unusual. My father worked as a boilermaker for the "SP," or Southern Pacific, and walked to the railroad yards everyday. We would seldom see him, as he arrived home late from work, and left at the crack of dawn. He was one of the first Mexican-Americans to work for Southern Pacific in El Paso. Higher paying jobs were usually reserved for Anglos. For many minorities, especially Mexican-Americans, the war opened doors to better employment, and brought an end to much discrimination.

El Paso at that time was truly the Pass of the North. Trains ran around the clock, transporting cargo, troops, and equipment, creating a boom for El Paso's economy. Missouri Street ran along the railroad yards from Piedras Street to downtown El Paso. Troop trains often stopped along this stretch of buildings and houses.

Businesses along that part of Missouri Street did well. With their heads and money sticking out of the railroad car windows, the soldiers bought sodas, cakes, snacks, magazines, and trinkets from street vendors. During layovers, they flooded the bars, shops, cafes, and grocery stores as well. Some of the businesses along Missouri were: the Hernandez Grocery, Casa Mañana Cafe, Missouri Cafe, Ahumada Grocery, Huerta Grocery, Missouri Inn and Cafe, Town House, and Anchor Inn.

During the war, Fort Bliss expanded with its training facilities. El Paso and Ciudad Juarez boomed as a result – El Paso growing in all directions. At the beginning of the war, El Paso extended west as far as Smelertown where ASARCO is located. On the northeast, *Chivas* (goat) *Town* served as the outlying boundary. It was close to Our Lady of Guadalupe church on Alabama Street. The people there raised goats in their yards to produce milk and cheese. They made their homes from the rocks close to the mountain; some of them are still standing. To the east, Loretto Academy served as the boundary; just east of Radford School was a ranch owned by Charlie Bassett. My uncle, *Tio* Apolino Ortega, worked there caring for the horses.

The area just east of Zavala Elementary School (now visible from the Juarez exit on I-10) is where my father built our home on Hammett Street. It no longer exists as it is part of the north-south freeway; however, during the war, wagons could still be seen passing through the neighborhood on unpaved, hard, dirt streets. There were blacksmith shops which shod the horses, and made or repaired iron tools.

Fort Bliss expanded with Logan Heights becoming a main center for raw recruits for basic training. Bars, shops, and cafes blossomed along Dyer Street as these businesses catered to the needs of the growing military. Downtown became the center of social life with its many theaters. The Colon at times had live shows from Mexico City; Paco Miller, a great ventriloquist, would bring a spectacular show to El Paso. Restaurants like Boltons, Gateway Coffee Shop, Far East Cafe, and Coney Island were some of the favorite eating places.

During the war, El Paso came together as a united community, and its citizens enjoy a cherished freedom that should never be bargained away.

**GEORGE SAUCIER** received a B. A. from Texas Western College and an M. A. in Fine Arts from the University of Southern California. He was formerly the Supervisor of Fine Arts in the Ysleta Public Schools and now teaches part-time at the University of Texas at El Paso.

**ALICIA GONZALES** attended schools taught by the Sisters of Loretto, then took secretarial training, and worked for twenty-five years as an administrative secretary in the University of Texas at El Paso Library.

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**YSIDRO CERVANTES** graduated from El Paso Technical High School, served in the Navy, and is retired from Civil Service at Fort Bliss where he was a mobile equipment inspector.



*Downtown El Paso as it appeared during World War II, 1940-45.  
Photo courtesy El Paso County Historical Society*



## Recollected Images: Football San Eli Style

By Sam Sanchez, Sr.

**R**ecently my oldest son invited me to San Elizario to see a football game. All my kids had graduated from Clint High School, but I was raised and attended school in San Elizario. That night, Clint High School was playing San Elizario which some students considered to be *the* rivalry of the football season.

As the game progressed, my thoughts went back to the year 1950. As I stood on the sidelines watching the game, a series of recollected images, nostalgic in nature, went through my mind. It was in 1950 that football as a competitive sport was introduced at San Eli. Played at the junior high level (there was no high school), seventh and eighth grade boys were asked to try out for the team, the San Elizario *Eagles*.

The first day of school was always very exciting. The usual smell of new clothes and new leather shoes was in the air. Girls with pigtails and boys sporting home-made haircuts were evident throughout the school yard. The bell sent the students running to form lines outside the door of individual classrooms until the teachers were ready to wave them inside. Eager with anticipation, the students maneuvered for good seats in the classroom, all for different reasons. Some to be close to best friends, others to be as far away as possible from the teacher. I managed to get a seat near the front, to the left of the teacher, hoping to be in his blind spot. My hopes were shattered when he moved his desk to the corner of the room and I found myself right smack in front of him.

For us boys, the excitement came from knowing that our first football practice session was scheduled for that day after school. All prospective players were encouraged to attend.

The dressing room was under the stage of the auditorium-gymnasium. There on the concrete floor, in a big pile, were our uniforms obviously used and old and smelly, but exciting to see nevertheless. They had been there a long time. We came to realize that football had been played at San Elizario before, but none of us could remember when. I managed to get a pair of pants that were way too big for me. I also got a jersey, a set of shoulder pads, and a helmet. Later, I had to relinquish my helmet to a bigger player, as there were not enough helmets to go around.

By two-thirty in the afternoon, we were making our way to the practice field, smelling like buffaloes even before working up a sweat. The lower grade kids were out on the field playing marbles. After chasing them off the field, we proceeded to clear it of debris and trash, making it playable. To the town folks, we must have been a sight, fifteen or so junior high kids dressed in oversized uniforms, leather helmets, picking up trash.

Lorenzo G. Alarcon, superintendent of the San Elizario schools, was also our coach. He had begun teaching there in 1922, at *Los Portales*, the old school building. His versatility as a school administrator surfaced early in his career. He substituted for absent teachers and coached all sports. In 1938, he had coached a San Elizario basketball team to an El Paso County championship, defeating Courchesne School before a capacity crowd at Ysleta High School.

It was a big event for the people of San Eli. Even in 1950, San Elizario had not changed much since 1850. There were two grocery stores, a post office housed in the El Molino building, and the church, the most impressive structure in town, projecting a special charm with its unique Spanish architecture and well-kept surroundings. Scattered around town were seven *cantinas* that had sprung up in the 1940s to serve the influx of *braceros*, documented Mexican alien workers contracted to help the farmers harvest the crops while their children attended school full-time, and while the older sons were off fighting a war.

We practiced without a coach though that first week. Mr. Alarcon was driving the school bus for the ailing bus driver. Our practices consisted of playing street football garbed in those old

football uniforms. By Friday afternoon a game had been scheduled with Clint Junior High. Mr. Merrick, our seventh grade teacher, assumed the coaching responsibilities and tried to initiate some form of discipline. We were assigned positions on offense and defense and ran through a few plays.

Things didn't look too good for us when the Clint players arrived. Among them were some high school students who had just graduated from San Eli two years before. Be that as it may, we were impressed with the way their uniforms fit. We saw how a football uniform was supposed to look on a player. They ran around the field a couple of times, formed a circle in the middle, and went into some ritualistic exercises that left quite an impression on us.

Richard Sambrano and Albert Gill, two upper class students at Clint, were the officials for that first game. They gave us some advice as the game progressed. One might even say that they were coaching us. The outcome of the game was not bad at all. We lost, but only by a small margin. The score was not really important – what was important was that we had played a good game, and the whole school had let out early to see it.



*Front Row: (L to R) Librado Rivera, Alfredo Madrid, Julian Martinez, Samuel Sanchez, Gregorio Apodaca, Arturo Robledo. Back Row: (L to R) Ramon Arevalo, Gustavo Baltierra, Pedro Saucedo, Mr. Merrick, Lorenzo Olmedo, Lorenzo Torrez, Herbert Sanchez. Photo courtesy Sam Sanchez, Sr.*

By the next game, we had learned the value of ritual-type exercises on the field. We were also sporting new jerseys and helmets which gave us tremendous confidence. It sure made a lot of difference to look like a football team with uniforms that were at least all the same color. We even had a group picture taken.

We also learned the advantage of using added padding inside our uniforms to minimize the pain from playing a contact sport. Across the street from the school was a cotton gin. Unknown to our coach and other school officials, we took cotton from the bales to stuff inside our uniform pants. Besides the added protection, it made us look heavier than we were.

We played Tornillo, Fabens, Socorro, Cooley, and Van Horn. We beat Clint the next time we played there. The funny thing about going somewhere to play was that Mr. Alarcon would never tell us *where* we were going to play. As we rode along on the bus, we would ask him where we were going. All he would say was, "You'll find out soon enough."

Our trip to Fort Hancock that year was the most memorable one of the entire football season. The school bus was old and Mr. Alarcon couldn't get it going that afternoon. We pushed it around the school building a couple of times and still the engine wouldn't start. Thinking that the game might have to be cancelled, we were surprised when Mr. Alarcon drove up in his car pulling an empty cotton trailer he had borrowed from the cotton gin. He told us to climb in and we made it to Fort Hancock, a little embarrassed, but in time to play the game.

During the game one of the players ripped his pants and cotton spilled all over the field. Mr. Alarcon and Mr. Merrick were not too amused by the fact that we were stuffing cotton inside our uniform pants.

Another amusing incident I remember from that game concerned one of our players. He had "traded" his worn out tennis shoes for a pair of new football shoes he found in the dressing room. On the bus on the way back, it turned out that the football shoes belonged to one of our own players. The boy had to give them up and walked home barefooted as he had left his old tennis shoes at Fort Hancock.

It was dark when we returned. We rode the trailer straight to the cotton gin and dropped it off. The mechanic was still

working on the bus when we left the school grounds and headed home to our chores and supper.

Today, San Elizario is quite different from the town of the 1950s. There are no more cotton gins and fewer *cantinas*. Most of the farms have been turned into suburban additions called *colonias*. The post office is located in a government building and staffed by strangers. The school district has expanded to include two elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. Nineteen school buses and numerous other vehicles transport the students; no longer is it necessary to press cotton trailers into service to haul students to a football game.

To remember such events in one's life is to re-live the past as I did while my son and I watched a football game one Friday evening recently in San Elizario.

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**SAMUEL SANCHEZ, SR.** traces his roots back to the Spanish presidial days of San Elizario. He is a graduate of Clint High School and attended Texas Western College. He and his wife, Minerva, are former directors of the El Paso County Historical Society and Sam is presently president of the San Elizario Genealogical and Historical Society; he frequently lectures on local history.



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*“Proverbs: Edged  
tools of speech.”*

– Bacon

## *Dichos from the Lower Valley*

By Marta Estrada

**M**y mother was the first person to introduce me to proverbs or Mexican *dichos*. She was raised in the small town of San Elizario, a farming community in El Paso’s lower valley, where everyone was either Mexican-American or of Mexican ancestry, and of the Catholic faith.

It seemed that every time she wanted to convey a thought, she came up with a *dicho*. She had one to fit every occasion, to predict an outcome, or to apply to basic child-rearing, using the punishment of God when it concerned the teachings of the Catholic faith.

As I grew older, the proverbs were a source of annoyance to me because they fit so well. Some were sheer sarcasm or humorous, while others were filled with the voice of wisdom. She came up with so many so frequently that I started to collect them. From memory, she came up with about three hundred and fifty. I often asked her how she came to know so many, but she couldn’t recall. I concluded that she must have picked them up from hearing her older brothers’ and sisters’ conversations. Recently she told me she might have picked them up from working in the cotton fields among the other workers.

Proverbs are found in all cultures and languages. Every culture seems to have them. Some are particular to a certain race. Most of the Mexican proverbs I collected have an English equivalent. Others cannot be translated. They just do not sound the same in another language. Proverbs often pop up during the course of a conversation, or arise out of a special occasion or circumstance in one’s life. Nevertheless, as I studied and collected

them, I noticed a pattern emerging. Some came about to educate or to entertain. Others were historical in content and outdated. Others reflected family life or working class mores. Several revealed religious beliefs. There are some that are still used today; others get coined along the way, but usually there is no known source to which to credit them. For example, "Es como el chicle; se mastica pero no se traga," or "He's like a stick of chewing gum, one chews on it, but it's not to be swallowed" – in other words, "a person to be contended with, but not to be taken seriously."

One of my least favorite sayings is "Por eso Dios no le dió alas a los alacranes porque volando pican." "If God had intended for scorpions to fly He would have given them wings." This is usually intended for someone experiencing rough times, saying "sometimes God doesn't grant one's requests because they might be more harmful than good." In English, it translates as "Be careful what you pray for because you just might get it." One of my more favorite sayings is "El único tiempo que la tortuga progresa es cuando saca la cabeza." "The only time the turtle makes any progress is when it sticks out its head," or "If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again."

My grandmother, Celsa Carrasco, was born, married, and later buried in San Elizario, typical of most early San Elizario families. She was widowed by the age of thirty, and was left to raise a family of five on her own. She later married Adiodato Paniague, a man ten years younger than she, who was my grandfather. My grandparents had long passed away before I was born. I have heard that my grandmother's children by her first marriage were musically inclined. My uncle Chayo played the *bandolina*, a pear-shaped string instrument similar to a mandolin. My uncles, Vicente and Gabriel, played the guitar. The latter had a knack for composing and writing poetry. From my grandmother's second marriage, my mother turned out to be the *dicharachera*, or one who speaks by making use of *dichos*.

The following are the ones I have selected with an English equivalent or can be easily understood when translated.

CANDIL DE LA CALLE Y OBSCURIDAD DE SU CASA.

"He's like a lamp post out on the street and lives in total darkness in his own home." (Better known around town but a stranger in his own home.)

CARAS VEMOS, CORAZONES NO SABEMOS.

"Faces we see, hearts we don't know."  
(You can't tell a book by its cover.)

LA ESPERANZA ES LA ULTIMA QUE MUERE.

"One's hope is the last to die." (Hope springs eternal.)

LIMOSNERO Y CON GARROTE.

"Beggar carrying a big stick." (Beggars can't be choosers.)

LOS INOCENTES Y LOS BORRACHOS SIEMPRE  
DICEN LA VERDAD.

"Children and the drunks tend to speak the truth."  
(Out of the mouth of babes sometimes come gems of wisdom.)

CELOSO DE LA HONRA Y DESENTENDIDO DE LOS GASTOS.

"Quick to defend his honor and dishonorable in his obligations."  
(Jealous of his honor, but unwilling to act honorably.)

NADIE SE VA DE ESTE MUNDO SIN PAGAR LAS QUE DEBE.

"No one leaves this earth without paying his or her dues."  
(What goes around, comes around.)

NO HAY MAL QUE POR BIEN NO VENGA .

"Nothing bad happens that doesn't result in something good."  
(There's a silver lining behind every cloud.)

YA PORQUE MATÓ UN PERRO LE PUSIERON MATAPERROS.

"One cannot escape one's bad reputation." (One's faults stand out more readily than one's virtues.)

CUANDO DIOS NO QUIERE, SANTOS NO PUEDEN.

"When God is unwilling, not even saints can intervene."

DIOS CASTIGA SIN PALO Y SIN CUARTA.

"God punishes without using a stick or a whip."  
(God moves in mysterious ways.)

DIOS NO CUMPLE ANTOJOS NI ENDEREZA JOROBADOS.

"God doesn't play favorites nor straighten out hunchbacks."  
(God does not always acknowledge whims and desires.)

DONDE UNO PONE LOS OJOS, EL DIABLO METE LA COLA.  
"Where one sets one's eyes on is where the devil sticks his tail."  
(The devil zeros in on one's selfish desires.)

LA VERDAD NO PECA PERO INCOMODA.  
"It's not a sin to tell the truth, but it does make one  
very uncomfortable."

LA ZORRA NUNCA SE VE SU COLA.  
"A fox never looks at its own tail."  
(The pot is calling the kettle black.)

A UNA MUJER NI TODO EL AMOR NI TODO EL DINERO.  
"Never give a woman all of your love or all of your money."

A BOCA DE BORRACHO, OÍDOS DE CANTINERO.  
"Only a bartender can listen to a drunk."

NOSOTROS LOS ARTISTAS COMEMOS CON APLAUSOS.  
"Artists (actors) live off of their applause."  
(refers to the starving-artist image.)

SOY HIJO DE PASCUAL OROZCO Y CUANDO  
COMO NO CONOZCO.  
"I'm the son of Pascual Orozco, and when I'm eating don't bother  
me. (Don't bother a man while he's eating because he's likely not  
to acknowledge you.)

CUANDO UNO SE ACUERDA DEL DIABLO ES PORQUE  
HA DE ANDAR CERCA.  
"When one remembers the devil, it's because he's usually near by."  
(Speaking of the devil...)

COMO ESTARÁ EL INFIERNO PARA QUE LOS DIABLOS  
ANDEN AFUERA.  
"Hell must really be hot, for even the demons are out."

SI LA ENVIDIA FUERA ROÑA, COMO ESTUVÍERAMOS  
TODOS RONOSOS.  
"If envy were like a skin rash, we'd all be covered with scabs."

APRENDIZ DE TODO Y MAESTRO DE NADA.  
"Jack of all trades and master of none."

EL QUE LE PRESTA DINERO A SU AMIGO PIERDE  
EL DINERO Y PIERDE EL AMIGO.  
"He who loans money to a friend not only loses his money  
but also his friend."

EL QUE A HIERRO MATA, A HIERRO MUERE.

"He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword."

EL QUE SE METE A REDENTOR, SALE CRUCIFICADO.

"He who wants to be savior (peacemaker) winds up being crucified."

LE DAN AL DIABLO LA CARNE Y QUIEREN CONFORMAR  
A DIOS CON LOS HUESOS.

"Carnal knowledge is giving in to the things of the flesh and trying to please God with what's left over." (Some give their best meat to the devil and offer God the bones.)

YA LOS GOLPES DADOS, NI DIOS LOS QUITA.

"Once physically abused, not even God can change that."

(The die is cast.)

DATE A VER EN DESEO Y HUELES A POLEO:

DATE A VER CADA RATO Y HUELES A CHIVATO.

"Let yourself be seen less often, and you're as refreshing as mint; let yourself be seen too often and you'll start to smell like a goat." (After three days, fish and company smell.)

DE LA SUERTE Y LA MUERTE, NO HAY QUIEN SE ESCAPE.

"There's no escaping one's fate or death."

(Death and taxes are always with us.)

EL QUE ADELANTE NO MIRA, ATRÁS SE QUEDA.

"He who does not plan ahead lags behind."

EL QUE ENTRE LOBOS ANDA A AULLAR APRENDE.

"He who hangs around with wolves learns to howl like them."

(Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.)

EL QUE NO LE ARRIEZGA NO CRUZA EL MAR.

"He who doesn't take risks will never cross the sea."

(Nothing ventured, nothing gained.)

EL PEZ POR SU MISMA BOCA MUERE.

"A fish gets caught for taking the bait."

PUEDE MÁS EL VICIO QUE LA RAZÓN.

"Bad habits win over reasoning." (Bad habits are hard to break.)

EN LA CARCEL Y EN LA CAMA SE CONOCEN LOS AMIGOS.

"True friends will visit us whether in the hospital or in jail."

SOLO EL TIEMPO SANA HERIDAS.

"Time heals all wounds."

UN MENTIROSO, CUANDO DICE LA VERDAD NADIE LE CREE.  
 "When a liar speaks the truth no one believes him."

AMORES DE LEJOS, AMORES DE TONTOS.  
 "Lovers who love a distance apart, are foolish lovers."

EL NOPAL SE VISITA NOMÁS CUANDO TIENE TUNAS.  
 "The prickly pear is visited only when its bearing fruit."  
 (A friend in need is a friend indeed.)

LA IGNORANCIA NO QUITA EL PECADO.  
 "Ignorance does not take away the sin." (Ignorance is no excuse.)

LA LÁSTIMA NO SACA LA ASTILLA NI CURA LA HERIDA.  
 "Pity will not remove the splinter nor heal the wound."  
 (No use crying over spilled milk.)

LA PRÁCTICA HACE AL MAESTRO.  
 "Practice makes the master." (Practice makes perfect.)

EL QUE DE SU CASA SE ALEJA NO LA HAYA COMO LA DEJA.  
 "He who leaves his home, upon return, will not find it as he left it."  
 (You can't go home again.)

PARIENTES TIENE UNO, PERO AMIGOS HAY PARA ESCOJER.  
 (You can choose your friends, but not your family.)

UN VIEJO MALVADO HACE AL HIJO MACRIADO.  
 "A malicious father makes his own son ill-mannered."

ESTÁ COMO EL QUE SE CAYO DEL CABALLO;  
 AL CABO QUE YA ME IBA A BAJAR.  
 "He's like the man who got bucked off his horse; he was ready to  
 get off anyway."

DESPUÉS DE LA TORMENTA VIENE LA CALMA.  
 "After the storm, the calm."

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**MARTA ESTRADA**, a native of San Elizario, is a Library Assistant with the El Paso Public Library. A graduate of Ysleta High School, she received her B. A. degree in sociology from the University of Texas at El Paso. The author expresses her appreciation to **TOM HEALY**, Assistant Director at the El Paso Public Library, for his invaluable assistance in preparing the manuscript.

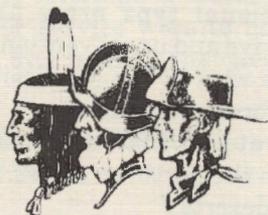
## Editor's Notes

Regarding the World War II Memories essays presented in this issue, members of the Editorial Board found the detail recounted by the authors vivid and interesting. The logo appearing on the title page of the articles was provided by DR. CHARLES MARTIN, a director of the Society and also director of the contest. The government poster depicted had special meaning for El Paso. An article by Editorial Board member, NANCY HAMILTON, entitled "Spy on the Border: Dr. Wolfgang Ebell" (*Password* Winter, 1987), tells of the subject's arrest here in El Paso and his subsequent trial and internment. Hamilton points out that El Paso sat in a strategic location with nearby Fort Bliss, refineries, smelters, heavy troop train movements – all valuable targets for the enemy, and that El Paso, as a gateway to Mexico, was "an important link in Nazi Germany's worldwide [spy] network." While searching for photos of El Paso during the war and having little success, I was told in effect by one person, "We just didn't walk around taking pictures wherever we wanted to in those days."

Although you have received information about the Society's Historical Memories Contest (*Password* Summer, 1995, 90), please be reminded that your entries are due December 1 and should be addressed to MICHAEL J. HUTSON, Drawer 1977, El Paso, TX 79955.

Also, please remember that the TOUR OF HOMES, scheduled for SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1995, will take place in SUNSET HEIGHTS, once called the "Silk Stocking" district of El Paso.

– CPH



**TWO EAGLES IN THE SUN** by Richard C. Campbell. Las Cruces, N.M.: Editts...Publishing, 1995. Paperback, \$14.95

This book should have been available forty-five years ago when I first arrived in El Paso, fresh from the "Anglo" environment of Central Texas. Naturally, the same could be said for other "immigrants" to the Southwest. The author, a relative late-comer, arrived on the scene thirty years ago when he and his wife stepped off the train in Lamy, New Mexico. The new surroundings, in stark contrast to the familiar suburbs of Michigan, must have been quite a surprise to the couple. Although the author does not mention it, the encounter with a new culture must have been just as engaging.

Mr. Campbell, who is a Methodist minister and a certified teacher, came to the "majestic mountains and blue skies" of northern New Mexico to work in a parish which consisted of mainly Spanish-Americans, "A degree of acculturation simply happened," he states in the Preface, but having known and worked with the author for over a decade in a high school setting, I can assure you that "a degree" would not have satisfied his interest or intellect.

**TWO EAGLES IN THE SUN** is the culmination of three decades of intensive study and observation of Mexican-Americans in the borderlands of the Southwest. True to the teaching profession, Mr. Campbell relies on an inquiry approach. He develops and leads us through a modern-day version of the Socratic method.

Posing over 300 questions that are categorized in twelve broad subject areas, the author responds to each one objectively and in uncomplicated language. Most of the answers are concise; some no longer than a brief paragraph, others a page or two.

Mr. Campbell first defines some terms, such as Hispanic, Anglo, Gringo, Chicano, Cholo, and Pachuco, labels used to identify special groups. He follows by delving into the nuances of the first language of a majority of Hispanics, explaining and clarifying its grammar, usage, rhythm, and pronunciation, and adds some spice with some examples of "strong" language.

Other chapters on Hispanic values, customs, folklore, and popular culture, follow. The familiar, like *curanderas*, *camposantos*, *la llorona* are covered, as are little-known celebrations such as *El Brindis del Bohemio*, a poem recited and dramatized at New Year's. Another chapter deals with a variety of questions concerning religion and religious celebrations. Of particular interest to some readers is "Why Is the Catholic Church Worried About Membership Exodus?" This dilemma is addressed with

factual information based on writings of the Church itself.

One only needs to turn to the twenty-two pages of Bibliographic References the author used in preparing and documenting the manuscript to realize the amount of research involved. It would have been most helpful, however, had Mr. Campbell numbered the references and included the number with the answer, giving the reader a quick reference to additional source material.

In addition to the bibliography, there are three appendices: one lists helpful resources "for going deeper;" another identifies "Hispanics Who Enrich America Today;" and a third, deals with Mexico's history and culture.

This is a veritable "handbook" that should be in the hands of everyone living in the Southwest where cultures blend and complement each other, rather than separate and distance themselves from each other. This volume may prove to be as helpful to the Hispanic as to the Anglo, and certainly as valuable to the old-timer as to the newcomer.

The attractively-illustrated book may be ordered from EDITTS...Publishing, P.O. Box 208, Las Cruces, NM 88001.

CLINTON P. HARTMANN  
El Paso, Texas

## Briefly Noted....

**WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE: THE TRUE LIFE ACCOUNTS OF THE DESPERADOS OF THE WILD WEST** (Historical Briefs, Inc., \$19.95 paperback) is a compilation of contemporary facsimile newspaper pages telling of the exploits of outlaws from the James Brothers to John Wesley Hardin. It is a wonderful period piece, fun to look through. One does wonder, though, why the story of Hardin's death is reproduced from the Cuero Daily Record rather than from an El Paso paper. This quibble aside, order from the publisher at Box 629, Verplanck, NY 10596. Ask also for their full catalog, which features many similar compilations of other topics.

On the subject of gunslingers, El Paso novelist Elizabeth Fackler has just published **BILLY THE KID: THE LEGEND OF EL CHIVATO** (Forge Books, \$24.95 cloth). In this fictional account, Fackler manages to humanize Billy without glorifying his deeds or wallowing in his victims' blood. Well worth reading for its insight into historical events.

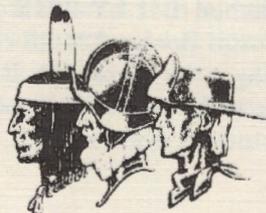
The story of the camel experiment carried out by the U.S. Army in the 1850s has been told before, but Eva Jolene Boyd in **NOBLE BRUTES: CAMELS ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER** (Republic of Texas Press, \$12.95 paperback) presents a very thorough and readable account of the entire venture. The facts are well documented; added to the text are several useful appendices, including a chronology and brief biographies of the individuals most closely involved. These camels of course came through El Paso in 1857, en route from the port of Indianola to California. Camels are definitely an odd fact of Southwestern history, but a most fascinating one.

**BOB KLEBERG AND THE KING RANCH** by John Cypher (University of Texas Press, \$27.95 cloth) is an account of the King Ranch in the 20th Century, in some ways an extension of Tom Lea's history, **THE KING RANCH**. Cypher worked with Kleberg for forty years, and no one could possibly have been better suited to tell this story.

Three recent reprints of Southwestern classics are highly varied in their coverage but all worth a second look. **NEW MEXICO'S ROYAL ROAD: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail** by Max L. Moorhead (University of Oklahoma Press, \$14.95 paperback) should be in any collection on El Paso history. First published in 1958, it remains the standard work on the Chihuahua Trail.

Ben K. Green's **HORSE TALES** (Northland Publishing, \$12.95 paperback, first published in 1974) brings back three of this masterful storyteller's most colorful and humorous tales centering around horses.

Most timely of all is **THE DAY THE SUN ROSE TWICE** by Ferenc Morton Szasz (University of New Mexico Press, \$14.95 paperback, first published in 1984). This definitive account of the events leading up to the Trinity Site nuclear explosion on July 16, 1945, is of course now part of international history as well as of our small corner of the world. The debate as to whether the discovery unleashed at Trinity Site should have been used as it was has been raging fiercely in recent months, and will no doubt continue unresolved for decades, possibly centuries, to come.



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