

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

ANGEL ENRIQUEZ

An interview conducted on

February 27, 2016

Interviewer: Jayci Korus

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Angelo Enriquez are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on February 27, 2016.

This interview was conducted as a course assignment for the upper-level history class in the Department of History at Angelo State University in collaboration with the *War Stories* Project.

Interviewer: Jayci Korus

Transcriber: Alicia Dudley

Editor: Christine Lamberson

The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

KORUS: So, my name is Jayci, and it is February 27. I'm at the library in a study room with....

ENRIQUEZ: Angel Enriquez

KORUS: And we are about to begin his interview. So, first of all, where were you born, and where did you grow up?

ENRIQUEZ: I was born in a big border town of Del Rio, Texas. And I grew up right here in San Angelo since I was 3 years old.

KORUS: How would you define West Texas? Where does it begin?

ENRIQUEZ: West Texas... It's kinda hard to define and pinpoint West Texas. But pretty much when you run out of trees and you can see for miles and all you see is grass and dirt, welcome to West Texas.

KORUS: What do you think the difference is between West Texans and Texans from other regions of the state?

ENRIQUEZ: Oh... Basically when I think of West Texas, I think of driving back roads where, when you pass somebody on the back roads, you wave at them. It doesn't matter if you know the car, if you know who they are, you just wave. West Texas is friendly. We help each other out. We'll pull over on the side of the road and help you out if you have a flat tire or you just need a ride to go get some more gas. And you don't get that in parts of Dallas and San Antonio and Austin. The bigger cities, you just don't get that.

KORUS: How would you characterize West Texans' relationship to the military?

ENRIQUEZ: I don't know if you can minimize just west Texas and the military. But I can say that the two biggest contributing states into the military is California and Texas. And I think that says enough.

KORUS: When and where did you enter the armed forces and what branch did you serve in?

ENRIQUEZ: Well, I entered right here in San Angelo, Texas. What was the rest of it?

KORUS: Which branch did you serve in?

ENRIQUEZ: Oh, I joined the Air Force. Aim High!

KORUS: And how long were you- were your years of service?

ENRIQUEZ: I, I signed up for 4 years of active duty and 4 years in the reserves.

KORUS: During your years of service, were you primarily...enlisted? Never mind, not that question. In- In which military conflict did you take part?

ENRIQUEZ: I believe you skipped the part, I was primarily active duty. I wasn't commissioned, but I was active duty. I came in as a, E-3 thanks to my ROTC. And I stayed active duty my whole time. Now, as far as conflicts, I was in Operation Iraqi Freedom, obviously in Iraq. And I

was in Operation Enduring Freedom, and I was in Afghanistan. So, I was basically in every shit that there was to be in from '05 to 2011.

KORUS: Why did you enlist in the armed forces? What motivated you to do so?

ENRIQUEZ: Like I said, I was in ROTC. I enjoyed what I was doing. I've always loved being part of something bigger than myself. I love the uniform. I've always loved this country, and I thought somebody should step up with the ability to and be able to defend the country. And I guess the generic answer would be 9/11, when I was in 10th grade history class and they woke me up because I was sleeping. And I saw that shit go down and, you know, there was already a plan, but that just solidified it even more. That's pretty much what I wanted to do since I was in 8th grade.

KORUS: Can you tell me a little bit about your training?

ENRIQUEZ: Man... First day, getting yelled at "Get off the bus. Get off the bus. Pick up your bags, put them down gently. Pick 'em up; put them down gently. Pick 'em up; put 'em down gently. Get in line. Heel to toes, heel to toes." Butts to dicks actually. You're standing so damn close it happens. Ah. shaving. The first night you're there, everybody's bleeding. Shit's all weird. That was kind of the worst day, because after that, you kinda just get used to it. you get yelled at. I was bed number 13. So, room- Bunk inspection was always bunk number 13. I think that's my lucky number, though, I really do.

Man, I think the physical stuff was the easy stuff. I mean we wake up and go run and do push ups and all this crap, and march and get yelled at and fold the bed. And... fold your shirts in the right way. All that stuff was the easy stuff. The hard part was when you were in the classroom, and you were trying to learn and just sitting there, and you get comfortable and you start falling asleep. That was the hard part, staying awake. The rest of the stuff is all mental. You go in with good mental state and you're in good physical shape, you'll be alright as long as you don't take a swing at a guy. I saw that happen. It didn't work out good for him. Fucking dumb-ass. he swung at a TI [Training Instructor], and the TI put him on his face real hard. He got washed back to Zero Week. I'm not sure if he ever made it.

Warrior Week was badass. We finally were able to go out into the field and get dirty as shit and have face paint all over us and pretend like we're doing combat, which is hilarious. Because when you deploy, it was nothing like that. Obviously you're deploying from- into a sand pit and you're playing GI Joe in mesquite trees and cactus. It's totally different. Except they got cactus in the desert too. That shit hurt.

KORUS: What were race relations like when you were enlisted?

ENRIQUEZ: We were all green, we're all blue. It don't matter if you're black, white, Mexican. It kinda mattered if you were Israeli or something. But...we kinda wondered, but at the end of the day, Haji Boy was just a friend. You know, he's just as good an airman as everybody else. There really wasn't race. There wasn't that sexism. There was no race, it was just, you do your job, you get rewarded. You don't do your job, you get punished.

KORUS: Did you find your service challenging?

ENRIQUEZ: Not really. It was just something that I did.

KORUS: Were you deployed overseas? If so, what did you understand about the mission you were being asked to complete?

ENRIQUEZ: I was deployed 4 times. My first time, I didn't understand shit because they were sending us to a place called K2. Basically that base was being closed, and we were there to close it off. Provide security. It was in the green zone. We were gonna have good meals until that disappeared and then for the next 2 weeks, we'd be eating out of a box, getting on a plane, and going home. But when we got to Manas, that's not how it worked out. And they said it was closed and that we're gonna go to Iraq, because that's where they needed us. So, I had absolutely no clue what the hell was going on.

KORUS: Did you follow the news before you entered the service?

ENRIQUEZ: I tried to. But it's one of those things that you just don't want to know what you're getting into.

KORUS: How did you receive information about the events in the US and abroad?

ENRIQUEZ: Mostly through the radio. Some through TV when we got a chance to watch it. Some through internet when we got a chance to do it. You know, it was pretty slow, so it's not like we got to do it a lot. And then some through the phone calls that we got twice a week. But it was only 15-minute phone calls, so we tried not to talk about anything that was unnecessary.

KORUS: What units did you serve in during your deployment?

ENRIQUEZ: I can't really remember them all, but I do remember that I was part of the 344th, which is an attachment of the Tuskegee Airmen. So, that was pretty amazing.

KORUS: What did you think of the local inhabitants that you encountered?

ENRIQUEZ: God, those fuckers stank. They- If you can hear that huffing and puffing, that's my service dog. Some of it was her. No, but they really did stink. Their- their showers were nonexistent, and you're living in 115 degree weather. And there's about 20 or 30 of them inside a 15-person vehicle. And you never really did get used to that smell.

KORUS: When you interacted with the local inhabitants, what did you think their conceptions were of the United States?

ENRIQUEZ: Some of them were happy that we were there. And some of them could care less. They were just going on about their business. There's always the thought in the back of your head that some of them were there for their virgins.

KORUS: How did you stay in touch with your family and friends during your service?

ENRIQUEZ: Don't you pay attention? I called them. Remember, I said that up here. I called them. Hey, I gotta mess with you a little bit.

KORUS: How- how did your service influence or affect your family at home?

ENRIQUEZ: Up until then, I'd never even been out of Texas unless you count Mexico, which I just think that's south Texas. But other than that, I've never been outside of Texas. I've never been away from my mamma more than, you know, a couple of weekends. And...Hell, my first station was in Oklahoma City, Tinker Air Force Base. Are you gonna sit on my lap?

KORUS: He's talking to the dog, not me.

ENRIQUEZ: I mean- If Jayci wants to sit on my lap, that's what's gonna happen. But I am talking to my nightmare, my little service dog who's being very rowdy right now. Or am I?

And Tinker AFB is about 7 hours away from here, so instead of being able to see my mom every weekend like I was used to, I saw her once every couple of months. And then, of course, when I deployed, we really didn't have Skype and whatnot in 2004. Not as easily as you have it now. Especially when you're deployed. Connections are minimal. So, I'm Mexican. I'm really close to my family. Talking to my mom and dad back and forth was a daily thing, and I didn't get to have that. So, it just made things a little bit harder, but it made us closer, if, if that makes any sense whatsoever. We had to work at it a lot more.

KORUS: What are your most vivid memories of your time in service?

ENRIQUEZ: God... So, there's a guy. His name is Brian Slaten. And we're in the dorm after work was being done, and we're off the next day. Or if we weren't off the next day, we didn't have to be up until 12:00, didn't have to show up to work until 12:30 and didn't have to be on post until 1. So, we could stay up all hours of the night and just do whatever the fuck we wanted. And Brian was such a bad influence on me. And then there was Manalacos. And the only reason I remember his name cuz it was so difficult is because it sounded like "man I like hoes." And so Manalacos and Brian Slaten, they both flunked out of PJ [Pararescue] school. And for the first few- for the first year you could see how much that affected them. Because PJ- Security Forces is badass, but PJs are on a different level. But, I made friends with them because we were all on the same level. We weren't PJ status, but dammit if we weren't close. And we set ourselves apart from everybody else. So, I was over there a lot.

And, honestly, one of my most vivid memories is me, him, Manalacos, whatever 3 girls we had at the time that we were dating, taking Yeager bombs and playing spades. Listening to music. Just being some dirty grunts. And we did that so many times I couldn't tell you which time it was, but that's what we did. On the weekends, again, we'd all pile into his Chrysler Sebring and... God, I don't know how we made it because he was always drunk as shit when he was driving home. But so was I, because I'd be dancing with some girl on the dance floor, and he walked right up to me with a shot of Jose, and he was like "Here you go." And I'd be drunk as shit by the time we left that place. But he never set me wrong, because I remember sometimes I'd be going home with a fat girl, and he'd stop me. And he'd tell me about that. So... You try to remember the good times over the bad times.

My second most vivid memory, the one that comes to mind, would be my first deployment Balad, Iraq. Mortaritaville. I think it was like Saddam's international airport or some shit. It had

an Olympic-size swimming pool inside and out that was already there. And... I remember we were just starting the day. Or it was midday- It was midday, and there was- My partner at the time, Barksdale, he looked like that black Beetlejuice that's always on Howard Stern. This motherfucker looked like Beetlejuice. He was a goofy staff sergeant. But he was like, "Man, I gotta go take a shit." I was like "Alright, go take a shit." And I'm going through my iPod because they just come out. It's 2005. And I just barely got mine, and I'm going through it. I'm reading a Maxim magazine or FHM. One of those guy magazines. And all of a sudden, I hear that sound that the alarm goes off. And shit. I'm like "Fucking hey, man. Not today." It was a nice day. Cloudy, comfortable, relaxed. And they come, and you can hear it. And usually when the bombs go off or the mortars come in, they go off and you can't hear them. Dispatch will tell me the trajectory technology picked it up, and it landed in this section. Go figure out where the fuck it's at. But this time, it hit close within half a mile or so. And you can just hear 4, 5, 6 go off. And I'm like "Fuck, this is real." And I never put my PFE, my personal protection equipment or my PPE- PFE is a thing you put on your gun it makes a laser- but my PPE on as fast as I did that day. And Barksdale was taking a shit, so I ran in there and I was like "Yo, bro, you ready?" He was like "Fuck, I'm wiping." And I laughed so hard, and I probably shouldn't have. But he rolls out, still trying to put his blouse on- Because as a cop, as a cop right, you have your gear belt that carries your gun and all your ammo, and then you wear a vest that has all your other ammo and your handcuffs and all sorts of shit. And we were doing- We were doing base security at this point. And so when you take a shit, you take off your bulletproof vest, your- Because when you respond to things, we're responding as cops. And we're responding as cops to people who have guns. So, we wear a bulletproof vest, and then we wear our blouse, and then we wear the ammo vest on top of that. We have our radio, we have our utility belt, we have our, our leg holster for our 9 mil. And then we usually sling in our 4's. And he left his 4 with me because I was watching it. So, when you take a shit, you gotta take all that off. You can't just pull your pants down and go.

And then so, he was getting ready still buckling his shit up. He get's in and we get a call that it was in- I can't remember the number- Like H4 or something. And we all know what H4 is. H4 is the tent city. It's not up-armored or ah, ah, protected stuff. It's fucking nylon tents. So, we raced there. And it's amazing how you can go from a 22-year-old E-4 or E-2- or E-3, E-3. I was A1C, E-3 and show up at a scene and everybody is looking at you for direction. And you look around and these people were just blown up. And they're looking at you saying "What the fuck do I do?" And so, all you can do is say "Everybody shut the fuck up. If you're not injured and you're not helping someone who is injured, get into the bunks." Which, you know, that's just concrete bunkers, but still. So, we got, maybe half of the people out of the way, and then we realized what we have on our hands. And we picked up people and we put them in different up-armored vehicles and stuff and we escorted them to the hospital. And carrying people into the hospital. I never knew the guy's name, I heard he was ok, but I never knew his name. But I still picture his face. And I mean, shit, you're carrying them into the hospital, the hospital that you volunteer a lot at because, A. that was a real nice place to see pretty women. They walk around without a blouse and stuff, and when you're deployed, that's pretty much best as it gets. And B, when you help out in there, you get to eat from their chow hall, and their chow hall was pretty good. And then, I'm a

new airmen, so I'm trying to look at promotion, so that looks good on my EPR [Enlisted Performance Report]. And you go into a place that you're very familiar with and it has a different- I mean I've seen it a lot, but this time, I'm covered in blood, and I'm helping these people in. And finally, when I thought it was all said and done and we got everybody in and I no longer had a job, then I was getting back in my car. And I was about to breathe a sigh of relief. I was just about to exhale and we hear them again. And so...

One of my proudest moments is I got in the car and Barksdale got in the car and they- They set the sector, and I knew exactly where to go and exactly how to get there as fast as possible. And so crisis management on point. We drive out there to the perimeter where it's at, and we had a Turkish guy. Our concrete barriers were made by a Turkish guy. And they had a contract, you know, he was from Turkey. We always used to go there and eat sheep kabob and like rice and bread and he used to feed us pretty good. So, I knew where it was at. So, we get in there, and luckily he's there standing. Because I was worried about him. He was there standing said "It went off over there. It came from the fields over that way." And like a dumbass, I climbed up- the concrete barriers were laying on their side about 4 or 5 stacked on top of each other. I climbed up 4 or 5 concrete barriers, and I was looking for any sign of anything going on. And I mean, looking back now, 22 years old on top of a barrier, I was like "Fuck, I was asking a sniper to take me out." And I was able to find out where the shit landed. I was able to call it in, and they did all the math and they were- All of a sudden, you hear them Apaches take off, and real quick just fly right overhead. They lit something up, they flew right back, and landed. And just like that. The day was done. And we went home, we got debriefed, we got told we did a good job. And then as a defender, as a security forces member, I got hit with some of the hardest news that I could have been hit with. And I think, what really it hit hardest was because we paralleled each other so well- I found out that Elizabeth Jacobson passed away that day. And she was 19 years old. A stellar defender, an awesome woman, and she was at the base that I wanted to be at. She was at Goodfellow. And I kinda felt like, man, if things were just twisted a little bit differently A, that could have been me. or B. that could have been somebody that I knew. SO, throughout the whole day, but a hundred miles from where I was at- And if you think about it 100 miles really ain't shit compared to how big the world is and the coincidence of it all- 100 miles away from where I was at, she was hit with an IED- improvised explosive device- and she passed away. Those are my two most vivid memories. I wanna go back to playing spades.

KORUS: Did you face any challenges when you returned to civilian life? If yes, what challenges?

ENRIQUEZ: Adaptation. Adapting from civilian life to military life is so fucking easy. Because it's like slapped in your face like bam, military life, there you go. It's so- It's weird for me to go from what I was doing in the military to being a civilian. I mean, my shit doesn't transfer over. What are you really good at? Well, I'm really good at village raids and all sorts of this shit. Base security and high threat level traffic stops. I'm good at that. I'm not- have no idea what I'm good at in civilian world. Which is why I came to college, and I still don't know. So, being reinclimated- Is that the word? Yea, inclimated into civilian life is just so difficult going from one to the other.



KORUS: After your time in the military has your conception of the United States changed?

ENRIQUEZ: I still think that we- America needs to be defended, but I look around and see a lot of pussies. A lot of big mouth wannabe tough guys who are all about defending their set or defending their hood or being the biggest guy out there, and nobody wants to step up and really do it. Everybody wants to make themselves feel adequate in their small little ponds but refuse to step up and see the big picture of how it's not about Grove Street. That's a Grand Theft Auto reference. But it's actually about America as a whole. I think it's opened up my eyes that realize that 7% of Americans will go off and defend their country. 93% of the people will bitch about how it's going.

KORUS: How do you feel about your military service looking back on it now?

ENRIQUEZ: God, I should have stayed in. I should have lied. I should have been totally lying about how I felt. I could have sought help from other people other than who I did, because once my PTSD and my suicidal thoughts started getting out there, it was kind of a downhill battle from there. I- I should have tried my best to stay in. I should have stayed active duty. I did 3 deployments in 3 years. So, back to back, to back. Christmas, my birthday, my mom's birthday, my girlfriend's birthday at the time, Thanksgiving, New Years, my brother's birthday, my other brother's birthday. I mean all that is in the- I was deployed 3 years in a row. I just wanted a break. And I had to get out, and I couldn't get that if I stayed in. He told me I was deploying again. And looking back, I wish I would have just stayed in. Who knows, man, maybe I could have been getting my tech sergeant stripe back from what I got it taken away the first time.

KORUS: Do you have any advice for the young men and women who are just entering the service?

ENRIQUEZ: Fucking study. Them books suck, but if you just take 2-3 pages a day, you just sit down instead of bullshitting. All the time in between your games of Modern Warfare, you're killing somebody, the game ends. You have 30 seconds, read the fucking books, the CDCs [Career Development Course], learn your job. Educate yourself. Because goddammit your promotions go up high, and the military ain't as bad- Granted, you get paid like shit, but all the benefits that you get, and if you retire from it, all the benefits you'll keep- Do your absolute best to educate yourself entirely. And dammit, I wish I would have got my Air Force associates degree 'cause that would have saved me 2 years from being in here and having to go to Howard. And that could have been GI Bill that paid for my bachelor's degree and GI Bill that could have paid for my Master's degree that once I do graduate I'll be able to make money. I mean- Yea so educate yourself. And take advantage of the opportunities that you get. Everybody says don't volunteer for shit. But when you volunteer, people are gonna start noticing. And now, instead of telling you, "Hey, Enriquez, we need you to volunteer." being voluntold to go clean up shit, they're like "Hey, Enriquez, you have a really good attitude, we're gonna volunteer you to go on flyaway missions to Alaska and Canada." Where I've been. I volunteered for every fucking thing that I had. And one time I gave up 2 of my days off to wash fucking cars. But I got rewarded for that by getting extra days off. I got rewarded for that by being sent to Alaska. Who the fuck goes to Alaska? And Canada? And you're not even allowed to carry your gun in Canada. It's some

weird-ass shit. You're there, and you're responsible for an airplane, but four Canadians have guns and you don't. And one Canadian shot the damn flight line. It was hilarious. He got all pissed off and threw the gun. Take advantage of the situation that you're in. And don't fuck around. Wear a condom.

KORUS: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

ENRIQUEZ: Wear a condom. Other than that... When you do get out, if you are having trouble, 22 veterans die every day from suicide. 22 veterans, and 1 active duty service member. And I tell you what, goddammit, don't piss me off. If you do that, I'll be pissed. Someone's gonna be pissed. You're gonna be missed. I know you're gonna say, that you know what, nobody cares about me. But I guarantee, somebody will care about you. Don't take that route. That is- That is never the answer. That just means that you no longer give anybody else the opportunity to help you out. If anybody listens to this, and that's the only thing you get, for the love of God, find help. Somebody cares. Somebody out there. There's always another option. And if you have PTSD, or you have some other kind of disability, get a fucking service dog. Because, I tell you what, my little nightmare, little lab that was jumping on my lap that Jayci told me to tell you she was jumping on my lap, and my dog Logan, they're the only reason that I'm alive. I mean... Do I think about it? Fuck yea, I think about it. Every once in a while, I think about what happens if I just let go. It never goes away. You just get stronger at it. And it's, it's not an option. Somebody will be upset. And, yes, people do die from heartbreaks, and if you kill yourself, someone could die from a heartbreak. Don't do that to anybody.

KORUS: Alright, thank you for your time. And we will be discussing more in the days to come.