

ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
FEDERICO “FRED” DURAN
An interview conducted on
May 10, 2018

Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

Angelo State University
West Texas Collection
“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

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NOTE: The following interview has been edited for content. For an unedited version, please visit the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection.

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.

LAMBERSON: Okay. Um so, my name is Christine Lamberson, and today is May 10, 2018, and I'm in Fort Stockton, Texas.

DURAN: Mm-hmm.

LAMBERSON: And can you start by just telling me your name?

DURAN: My name is Fred G. Duran.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and when and where were you born?

DURAN: I was born in this town, in Fort Stockton. I've been living here all my life. I turned eighty years old at the 1st of April.

LAMBERSON: All right! Happy birthday!

DURAN: Mm-hmm.

LAMBERSON: Um, and so, you grew up in Fort Stockton?

DURAN: Mm-hmm.

LAMBERSON: And can you tell me a little bit about how you define West Texas?

DURAN: Well, West Texas, of course, is the only . . . I like it because I was raised here, you know. I don't know any other place that I know as well as West Texas. I like it. People are very good, you know, and I've always had work around here. There's plenty of work, and I worked thirty-four years for one company then I retired in '93. Remember the company, Enron?

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm!

DURAN: I worked for them. But when I retired, I was fifty-five years old, so I went to work other places. I worked for the school as a bus driver and substitute teacher. And I worked out in the oil field, you know, with Lariat. There was some companies here, oil field companies—Lariat, and, uh . . . and what was the other one? I can't remember the name of the other one. But I worked for them, then I worked at the prison. There was a prison here. I worked for them. You know, uh, and last year I had to quit my work because of my condition. You know, I couldn't work too much, and even in school [laughs] you do a lot of walking and those hallways are long. And uh, I couldn't do it anymore, so I just . . . I've been out of work one year in April. So, I stopped working for one year now, and if I . . . if I didn't have this pain in my back and my leg, I'd probably be working somewhere because I love to work. But right now, I can't do it.

LAMBERSON: And when and where did you enter the military . . . join the military?

DURAN: I joined the military over here in Fort Stockton, and then they took me . . . from here, they took me to, um, El Paso.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. And what branch were you in?

DURAN: Army.

LAMBERSON: In the Army. And did you enlist, or were you drafted?

DURAN: I enlisted. I was seventeen years old.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: There was ten of us in the family, and it was bad. There was never money. My father left my mother, you know. He just left. Went to California and didn't come back. So, we were struggling real bad.

LAMBERSON: How old were you when he left? How old were you when he left, or do you remember?

DURAN: I must've been about, uh . . . thirteen.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and so, you were struggling. So, is that why you decided to enlist?

DURAN: Well, I thought if I enlisted, I could help my mother, you know. Because I was going to get eighty dollars a month in the Army. So, I enlisted, and I had that money sent to the house. I said, "Well, at least my mother can . . ." The rent at that time was fifty dollars for just a little bitty room, you know. I said, "Well, at least she won't be out in the streets. She'll have a place to live in." That's why I did it, and of course, she had to sign for me because I was underage. Then I took my . . . I got my training. They . . . they . . . my physical and everything was in El Paso, and I was inducted in El Paso. From El Paso, they took me to California. Fort Ord, California, and that's where I took my training. And uh, of course, I was young, you know, and I used to play a lot of baseball and run around all the time, so actually the training wasn't hard for me because we did a lot of walking and a lot of running. And then the rest of it was just learning how to operate all the . . . the weapons, and this and that. We had a lot of things that we had to learn, you know. The instructor would tell us about it, and how to protect yourself in the wintertime and the summertime—how to take care of yourself and everything. But it wasn't hard for me. And then when I . . . when you get that eight weeks of training, then they give you another eight weeks of other . . . some other kind of training. And then after that, then they'll assign you somewhere. So, after I had my . . . both of my eight weeks . . .

LAMBERSON: Were they both at Fort Ord?

DURAN: Yes.

LAMBERSON: Okay, uh-huh.

DURAN: Then they sent me to Korea.

LAMBERSON: Okay. So, what was your . . . what was your MOS when you went to . . . ? Did you stay in enlisted ranks, first of all?

DURAN: Mm-hmm.

LAMBERSON: And then what was your job when you went to Korea, when you were sent to Korea?

DURAN: Well, my first job I was in infantry.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: And then later on, I went into heavy weapons, which they . . . you know, you've got this mortar so that you can fire bombs—bombs that are about this size, not the real big cannons but a small cannon that you use out in the field. I got into that, then one time I got into driving a truck, hauling things around. And uh . . . well, it's just, uh, an experience every day, you know,

but I did . . . I'm glad that I went, because I'm still . . . what I learned in the Army, I'm still using it to live more, see. It shows you how to live for yourself and . . . be independent, you know, do things by yourself, and respect people, and help wherever you can, you know, and be close to . . . to God, to the Lord. Be active in the church, whatever church. I'm Catholic, but, you know, whatever church you're at, you've got to be active and serve that church, you know.

LAMBERSON: So, were you active in church while you were in the military, too?

DURAN: Mm-hmm. Yeah, when I got there about . . . about eight days later, they called in for a retreat. If anybody wanted to go to a retreat, you could sign up. And it was this high . . . high . . . in Korea, there's a lot of hills and mountains and all that. It was the highest mountain over there that they had a little chapel over there. That's where they were going to have the retreat, so I signed up for it. They called the place "Little Heaven." So, I went over there for four days. We did nothing but pray, then Mass, and heard some lectures from the priest, you know. And that was something beautiful to me. I really did like it.

LAMBERSON: And was the chapel, was it a military chapel, or was it . . . was it like a Korean priest? Or an American, or . . . ?

DURAN: An American priest.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DURAN: Yeah, and I guess the . . . the military built that church because when I was there, the church was already there.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. And so, when were you in Korea?

DURAN: Well, I got to Korea October the 21st, 1955.

LAMBERSON: Okay, and how much did you know about Korea before you went?

DURAN: I didn't know nothing. But the . . . the winter times over there get . . . it was getting thirty below. Very, very cold. There's times when I had about seven layers of clothes on me, and I was still cold [laughs]. But they gave you enough . . . the . . . the right equipment, you know, to keep yourself warm. And uh, all we did . . . the war had been over maybe nine or ten months when I got there, but you would still patrol, you know, what they call uh "occupational forces." Kind of watch and make sure the war don't start again. But we did a lot of mine . . . cleaning minefields.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay.

DURAN: There was a lot of minefields out there that we . . . we would clean them out. Take your bayonet, you lined up, you know, and then you moved forward sticking that bayonet on the ground like that [makes tapping noises] until you hit one of those mines, and then you uncover it. Then we had another guy come in, and kind of deactivate the mines so we won't blow up. Man, we did a lot of that.

LAMBERSON: And where were you stationed and doing that? Were you near the demilitarized zone, or . . . ?

DURAN: Oh yeah, we were right there. We'd go all over the place, but when we got to the demilitarized zone, the North Koreans wanted us . . . we would get about . . . sometimes we

would get as close as twenty yards from them. We would just wave back at each other, you know.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DURAN: And we'd go back to our business, and then . . . there was not a lot of villages. Seoul was just a little village. It wasn't what it is now. Just a little village, you know. There was nothing. People didn't have nothing to eat or nothing. It was poor. It was poor, and it's hard to see kids . . . [crying] it's pretty hard, you know, to . . . we know they were hungry, and we would try to give them whatever we could. But that's the worst part of it is seeing people starve. I thought I was poor when I went over there, but I know compared to what was going on over there, I wasn't poor at all because we had a meal every day, you know. But that . . . that . . . that was very hard to take. Little kids—maybe eight, nine months, you know—out in the snow with no clothes on.

LAMBERSON: And did you have much interaction with the Koreans? Did they . . . did they talk to you, or did you work with Koreans?

DURAN: We worked with the South Koreans.

LAMBERSON: Uh-huh.

DURAN: They were in our group. We used to train with them and everything else and talk to them all the time, you know. Uh, they helped us because we . . . we were protecting them from the North Koreans, you know. But also, their army was mixed in with our army. We would go through the day going about our duties and all that. I was there . . . I was there eighteen months. Eighteen months. They're good people, you know. You just find ways to communicate, you know, and help one another and everything else.

LAMBERSON: Did you have translators?

DURAN: Yeah, we had translators. But, you know, you can pick up a few words to more or less get by for the day. And sometimes they would go home and visit, and they would get, uh, maybe some time off, and they would go visit their families, and then they would come back with pictures and show us their pictures of families and all that. And after six months over there, they give you what they call an "R & R," Rest and Recuperate, and they used to send us to Japan. I don't know how long—at least a couple of weeks. You would go over there and then you would come back.

LAMBERSON: And what was . . . what was that time in Japan on R & R like?

DURAN: Oh, that was good. Japan was . . . Japan was real good. They were modern, you know, had big hotels, cars, and trucks, and just . . . colleges for the kids, and there was a lot of activities going on in Japan. I went to a town named Yokohama. Yeah, they got good places over there where you can go and eat, and hotels where you could stay. That was in '55. So, they sent us over there every . . . every . . . I got to go twice. I got to go twice on R & R.

LAMBERSON: And what did you do when you were on . . . when you were there? When you were in Japan?

DURAN: Just visited, go around and try to know the people. [Phone rings.] Oh, excuse me.

LAMBERSON: That's okay. I can pause the . . .

[Interruption: Telephone call. Interview resumes.]

LAMBERSON: Okay, so, you were telling me about R & R.

DURAN: Yeah, we used to enjoy that, you know, because you go over there, and you can go in a club where there was music, you know, and other people there. And you could get a nice, real hotel, sleep in a good bed, you know. And it was a lot better than Korea.

LAMBERSON: So, when you were, um, looking for mines and cleaning for mines, were, uh . . . was it dangerous? Were you worried? Could . . . were people injured? Were . . . ?

DURAN: Well, we didn't get to see anybody get injured, but a lot of times, you would be marching, you know, and like . . . like going out and . . . and like, uh, more or less the . . . checking out different places. And one time we were out there, and we didn't realize it, but we found out we were right in the middle of a minefield. So, we stopped right there where we were, you know, and start getting out one by one and start going that way. One guy goes right and another guy follows him. One guy goes that way—nothing happened—and another guy followed him. Just do what you can do to get out of that minefield. And uh, there's others where we just had to clean them up.

LAMBERSON: And what kind of terrain were you cleaning usually? Were those like farmlands or were . . . was it in forests or . . . ?

DURAN: Farmland. What they call over there . . . they call those rice paddies.

LAMBERSON: Oh, sure.

DURAN: They . . . it's real muddy, you know. They put a lot of water on there, and there was nothing but mud. I mean, you go all over those places, and then, uh, that's where they . . . they plant a lot of rice over there—a lot of rice because what they ate most of the time was rice. And uh, sometimes we would go around it or . . . but, you know, everybody was looking for those mines, and, uh, there's times when you would have those people would map it. You could map it, you know, and . . . and tell everybody, you know, "That's . . . there's mines there, be careful." We were kind of exploring and documenting. See? Because we didn't know where they were and things like that. But I never did see anybody get hurt because a mine, when you step on it, okay, it's got a little button on the top. Then when you take your foot off, that's when it's going to blow up. But as long as you keep that button pressed down . . .

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DURAN: . . . you're not going to blow up, but you can't stand there very long either [laughs].

LAMBERSON: Yeah, um, and so, what . . . what were . . . what was your most vivid memory from while you were there?

DURAN: The worst memory was those people starving, you know, had nothing to eat.

LAMBERSON: And what . . . was that in the towns or the villages?

DURAN: Villages. That's all there was, villages. There were no towns or nothing. I never did see a store, or anything like that, or . . . people just . . . and they'd go out and find wood, you know. They had to go out every morning. You could see a man that was probably thirty years

old, and he would look like he was about eighty years old, you know, because of the life they were living. They would just bundle up in little cloths with rice on it and just head out looking for wood. Whatever they could find, they'd bring it back to the villages, make a fire, and cook.

LAMBERSON: And were . . . were these people near where you were? Like, did you . . . did you see them regularly and . . . or . . . ?

DURAN: Yeah, they were there close to us, but we . . . their place was off limits to us. Of course, you know, we could go over there and talk to them and everything else, but there was a regulation that you can't . . . couldn't go over there too much because it was off limits. You know, they may hurt you; you may hurt them, whatever. But you could find time, you know, to go over there and talk to them, and sometimes we'd go over there and give them a blanket or something like that, you know. Help them out just whatever we could. They were poor. I mean, they were very poor. No, a blanket to them was something special. They would really appreciate it. And that's how they carry their babies, you know. They wrap a . . . like a sheet. They would wrap it around and tie that baby on their back. That's how the women carried their babies. Carry them everywhere.

LAMBERSON: And did you see very much difference in different parts of Korea? Were you in . . . in Seoul some or from different regions?

DURAN: Nah, the whole place was . . . we used to go around through all the villages, and it was the same thing. Korea is one hill after another, you know. You're down this hill, and you've got another one next to it. Just a bunch of hill . . . hills and a lot of rain and cold. Of course, we were always . . . we had a camp, you know. We more or less stayed in that camp, but during the day we would march somewhere else. But we would always come back to the camp. And there at the camp, that's where we had our . . . our rations, and a place to stay and sleep and eat. You know, we'd put those rations in a barrel and . . . heat them up . . . heat them up with water, and the rice would get hot, you know, and you'd open it up and eat it.

LAMBERSON: And so, were you in sort of a temporary camp or were you on a base, a more permanent . . . ?

DURAN: Temporary base.

LAMBERSON: Oh, okay.

DURAN: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: Did it have a name?

DURAN: No.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: No, in Inchon, which is right as you go in, you know . . . at Inchon, that's where we had all the like supplies and . . . uh, and people, you know, carrying stuff out there to where everybody else was. But out . . . out in the villages, we just had, uh . . . we did a lot, uh, digging . . . digging a lot of holes. You know, when you're going to spend the night or whatever, you had to . . . you get with another guy—two to a ho . . . foxhole. You dig a hole, and you take your steel pot, put it in there, and then fill it up with those pinecones. Fire them up, and they warm up the hole. Spend the night there. But over here at the camp, we had those little kerosene stoves. We had those, and then we had a regular kitchen where we could eat a good meal. They had cooks and everybody there. But out in the field we just had to take what we had.

LAMBERSON: And when you were out in the field and kind of moving around, was it mostly to look for mines, or were you moving for other purposes?

DURAN: No, no. We were kind of, uh, guarding.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: Guarding to make sure the enemy wouldn't come across, things like that, you know. And see if we hear anybody being attacked or whatever.

LAMBERSON: And that was, again, kind of close to the demilitarized zone when you were out in the field then?

DURAN: Mm-hmm. Yeah, very close.

LAMBERSON: And did you ever have any, um, moments when you thought that they were coming across, or were, you know, there . . . ?

DURAN: There was times where they put us in alert and told us to be careful because they've heard . . . they have heard things that they might start firing their cannons our way, from the North to the South. And then we'd just be a little more, you know, serious about guarding it and all that. But I never did see them shoot this way when I was there. They were ready. Man, they had those big cannons, and they would have them camouflaged. The bombs were about this big. As a matter of fact, I lost my hearing over there from all those bombs and everything.

LAMBERSON: Oh yeah, and how did you lose . . . ? From their bombs or from ours or . . . ?

DURAN: From ours. We used to fire the bombs, you know, and then train. We kept training, you know, and a lot of times, our bombs and just the noise, and we didn't . . . you wouldn't have any ear protection.

LAMBERSON: Sure.

DURAN: And now at my age, [laughs] I can't hear very well.

LAMBERSON: [Laughs] Yeah, I understand that. Um, and what did you think . . . you said you didn't know that much about the Korean War before you went or about Korea. Did you know . . . what did you know about the Korean War?

DURAN: Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

LAMBERSON: Did you . . . ?

DURAN: I just knew that a lot of people from this town had gone over there. They'd gone over there, and one of them was taken prisoner.

LAMBERSON: Oh, really?

DURAN: But he came back. After the war, he came back. He's still living today.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

DURAN: Yeah.

LAMBERSON: And . . . and what was . . . did you stay in touch with your family? Did you have contact with people about . . . ?

DURAN: Yeah, every now and then I would write them a letter. I would write a letter maybe twice a month.

LAMBERSON: Okay. And did they write to you too?

DURAN: Yes.

LAMBERSON: And how did it affect them that . . . to have you away?

DURAN: No. Well, they . . . they just say to be careful, you know, and hoped that I would come home soon, and things like that. And, "Thank you for the money you're sending us. We really . . . we really need it."

LAMBERSON: Did any of your . . . were you one of the older kids?

DURAN: I was in the middle.

LAMBERSON: In the middle. Okay. Did any of your other siblings join the military?

DURAN: Yeah, yeah. It was four of us . . .

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: . . . that went into the military. And then we lost one in Vietnam, and the rest of us came back. But I just saw it as a way out and a way to help my mother, you know. That's . . . that's why I went.

LAMBERSON: And so, you were in Korea for eighteen months you said. And then when you came back, was that the end of your service, or were you . . . did you still have some time . . . ?

DURAN: No, I still had some time to do.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: And they sent me to Fort Benning, Georgia. I stayed there a while, and then that's where I got . . . finished my time. I was going to make a career out of it. That was my plan, to be a career soldier. But that military, you know . . . if you're not careful, you get to drinking too much. I saw a lot of that, a lot of drugs, and I said, "No, if I keep on living like this another year, I'll be dead." So, I just got out and came home.

LAMBERSON: Because you saw other people doing lots of drinking or drugs, or you felt tempted yourself?

DURAN: I was mixed in there with them doing it myself, too.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DURAN: We had people from all over the United States, all kinds of people. People that enjoyed doing those drugs, and people that did it not too much, you know, and all kinds. No, I just put in my time, three years, and came back.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. And what did you do when you came back?

DURAN: I got me a job.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: I got me a job with a gas company and went to work. And they hired me because I was a veteran.

LAMBERSON: Oh yeah? Uh-huh.

DURAN: Yeah, [laughs] they told me that. They said, "We're going to give you a job because you're a veteran."

LAMBERSON: That's great!

DURAN: Yeah, and I stayed with them, made a career out of that job, and it kept . . . kept on changing names. Every three or four years it would change. It started out Transwestern, and then Houston Oil, and Houston Natural, and it winded up as Enron at the end.

LAMBERSON: Right.

DURAN: But five companies got together to form Enron.

LAMBERSON: Yeah. And so, did you have a hard time transitioning back to civilian life, or did you have any particular challenges with that?

DURAN: For one year. I had a hard time for one year because . . . you know how when a cat is . . . is like growing . . . growling or something, and it sounds like a baby crying?

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm.

DURAN: And other times I would hear that, and it would wake me up. I would think it's a baby out there that . . . that was needing help. But that only lasted a year or a year and a half. And another thing that I had to get used to was to not carry any weapons with me because over there you had your weapon with you everywhere you went whatever it was: a rifle, or a gun, or grenades, or everything. When I got over here, I kept my little . . . I had a shoulder strap, and I had a gun in there, and I carried it with me. Nobody knew I had it, but I felt . . . without it, I didn't feel good, you know. But after a year's time, I just didn't deal with it no more. But you know, they train you to do those things, and it's hard to break away from them.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DURAN: We had to watch ourselves every minute, everywhere we went.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. And when you were feeling like you needed to watch yourself, were you comfortable around the South Koreans? Um, did you . . . did you trust them? And were you kind of watching across the demilitarized zone, or were you feeling like kind of danger was everywhere?

DURAN: We were looking out for the North Koreans. No, the South Koreans, we . . . we would see them every day, you know, and got to know them really . . . be good friends with them and all that.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. I see. And what about race relations in the military? What was that like?

DURAN: Well, to me, you know, we had guys coming in from New York, uh, Michigan, California, Texas. There was one guy that had just become a citizen of . . . he was from Mexico, and they sent him into the military, you know. He was from Mexico. Me and him spent a lot of time together. But I didn't see . . . I didn't see any . . . anything. What I saw one time was one of our friends, he got a Dear John letter from his wife. She sent him a Dear John letter, [crying] and he just went off into the hills and shot himself in the head. Can you imagine a woman doing that? She should've waited until he got home or something, you know.

LAMBERSON: Yeah. This was when you were in Korea?

DURAN: Yeah, it was one of my friends. Yeah, he didn't say nothing. He just read the letter, walked off a little ways, shot himself in the head.

LAMBERSON: Wow.

DURAN: It was hard for him, you know. Most of the guys that were there, they were married. I wasn't married when I was there. I was very young, but I could see those other guys that were married, they would take it a little hard. They worried too much. To me, I didn't have that kind of worry. I worried about my family and my mother and brothers. Them other guys that were married, you know, they . . . they would write a letter every chance they get. We're taking a break somewhere, they take that paper and pen and start writing, start writing. At the end of the day, they had a letter sent . . . mail it in to the . . . to the . . . to the wives.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Is there anything else that stood out to you, um, kind of either about your time there or about kind of coming back? You said you lost your hearing. Were there . . . were there other things that kind of, um, I don't know . . . lingering effects, maybe, that . . . from your time in the service?

DURAN: No, no. I loved the experience. I appreciate the experience now, and I have a lot of benefits now, you know. I get VA doctors, and VA medication. So, I advise the people now, if you're going to go, there's a lot of good benefits now. You can get your education in college, and they pay for it. But you got to remember: when there's a war going on, your first duty is the war. But if there's peace time like now, you can get a . . . you can go to college, study whatever you want to study. There's a lot big opportunities, and they pay real good now. For those young guys making a career, you know, they should at least give it a try if they want to. Of course, there's a lot more opportunities everywhere for the young kids. That's what I would tell them. "Hey, if you like the military, go for it," you know, "but be careful. Remember one thing: see, when you're in the military, you're under two laws—the civilian law and the military law." And for people . . . there's people that can't handle it, you know. If you get in trouble . . . get in trouble over there, you go to town and get in trouble over there, and come back, you still got to face the law for the military law. So, you're under two laws.

LAMBERSON: And what did you think when your, um, siblings joined the military? The ones that were younger, like . . . or was it your sibling who was killed in Vietnam? What was that like for you?

DURAN: Well, my brother, he had just finished college. He had been out about a year and a half. Started work over there . . . was a teacher over there in . . . in Dalhart. He was married when he got out because he was going with this girl, and they both graduated together, so they got married. He didn't . . . he . . . he took the place of my brother. He hadn't received his order. My

brother received the orders. He volunteered to go to Vietnam. And my other brother, they sent him to Germany, so he had . . . he went to Vietnam. And then he was almost out, but he didn't want to . . . he didn't want to leave the front lines and get over there to where they were going to fix him up to send him home. And uh . . . and my other little brother, he was always very sad about that. I told him, "No, I would've done the same thing. You would've done the same thing." You know, we don't want the younger brothers to be in the war when we . . . we can take them out, serve ourselves, you know. It's hard, but you have a younger brother, and your older brother not being there. So, that's what he did. He took his place. So, it just happened to be that he didn't come back. He came back, I mean. When they got the notice that he got killed, we had to wait on him for nine days. It was nine days before they brought him home. And he's buried right here in Fort Stockton. Yeah. But there's others that didn't come back. They didn't find them. That's . . . that's even harder there, you know, for the mothers.

LAMBERSON: Yeah. Um, what did you find to be the most, um, challenging part of your service?

DURAN: Well, like I said, uh, it's just the weather. The weather. You're in a place where it's cold and rainy and all that. And . . . but other than that, you know, when you're as young as I was, you really don't have too much on your mind. You just do the best you can, and that's it, and you try to learn as much as you can. But as far as going through something that was real hard for me, I never did do that. I could handle whatever I had to go through. I could handle it because I was young and in good condition.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. And when you came back . . . you mentioned some of the like, you know, pay and military benefits, you know, for young people going into the military now. Did you, um, use any benefits when you came back, or did you find the VA treated you well when you arrived back?

DURAN: Well, I didn't . . . I didn't really use the med . . . the VA benefits until I got old. Maybe when I first got my . . . see, I got three back operations. When I got my first one was when they started helping me with my medication. But while I was young, I never did take any medication of any kind.

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LAMBERSON: Is there anything else you wanted to share about your time in the military?

DURAN: Well, I really . . . most of it I forgot about it, you know.

LAMBERSON: Yeah.

DURAN: Like, I'm just glad that I served. I'm glad that I served, and I feel like now that, you know, all those people in Congress and all that, they should use . . . there's a lot of veterans right now that could do some good, especially with the border, you know. You can guard . . . you can guard . . . you can do something. They need to ask volunteers, you know, see. Because you know all this knowledge, military knowledge, and you can still do some good somewhere, but they don't take it because you're too old. But they should ask for volunteers, you know. "We need volunteers for this." I could be out in the mountain, you know, just kind of surveying. Make sure everything's all right, you know. I don't see why the government don't do that. I bet they . . . they'd pick up a lot of volunteers—old veterans, you know. Because these kids, they go to war now. They train them, but they don't have the experience that we have. See, we know how to . . . where the enemy is. We know how he's going to act. We know where to find him. Everything, you know?

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. The older veterans?

DURAN: Yeah, the older ones. That's because of the experience we have. And those little young kids, you know, they just get the training and put them out there where all the wounding, all the shooting, and all the fighting is. They don't stand a chance. They don't stand a chance. But I feel like if they started asking for volunteers, you know, they . . . they'd do some good. We've got a lot of veterans here that maintain good shape. They could help out real good. I would . . . I would go over there if they'd take me. I would go do whatever I could, you know. I can still fire a gun, you know. I can still stay out there all night guarding something or whatever. But I'm happy, you know, that I served. I'm happy that . . . for my country, that we have a good country. I loved the experience that I got.

LAMBERSON: Okay.

DURAN: You have any family in the military?

LAMBERSON: Not currently, no. But I don't have . . . I suppose I probably have cousins who are of military age, but not too many, um, who are that . . . yeah, that age. I mean, I have family members who, you know, older family members who are veterans. Um, but my grandfather was in World War II, and . . . um, yeah. But none of them are currently of that age, approximately. [Laughs] I don't have any career . . . uh, career military family members.

DURAN: In San Angelo college, don't they have that, uh, what do they call that training? ROTC?

LAMBERSON: ROTC, yeah!

DURAN: They have that?

LAMBERSON: Yeah. Yeah, they do. Actually, one of my students is being commissioned tomorrow. So . . .

DURAN: Yeah, when they go in the Army, they go in as lieutenants and all that.

LAMBERSON: Yeah. Mm-hmm. It's . . . um, my particular students are in the Air Force part of the ROTC. But, yes, they have a strong ROTC program there.

DURAN: Those are the guys that in a war they're . . . they're very helpful, because they can know . . . they can know how to . . . how to run the war, how to fight it, how to put people where you need them, you know. Those are the guys that become generals. They have a lot of knowledge because they study a lot.

LAMBERSON: Yeah, one of the students who works with this project is also—well, she's working with this project for three more days until she graduates—but is also . . . will be a RO . . . or an Air Force officer. Was in ROTC. So, yeah, they have a great program there.

DURAN: There's a lot of females in the military now.

LAMBERSON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

DURAN: When I was there, there wasn't any . . . any at all. They wouldn't take them, but now they're everywhere. They're good. They're very good soldiers. You got any other kind of questions?

LAMBERSON: I think we've covered all of my questions. Thank you so much for talking to me.

DURAN: Well, thank you.

LAMBERSON: We appreciate it.

DURAN: I enjoyed it.