

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

MARY WALLING

An interview conducted on

March 16, 2016

Interviewer: Michael Walling

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 Mary Walling are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 16, 2016.

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MICHAEL WALLING: We'll go ahead and get started. Um okay. So, what is your name?

MARY WALLING: I am Mary Walling.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. When and where were you born?

MARY WALLING: Flomot, Texas, which I'm sure you've never heard of.

MICHAEL WALLING: Never heard of it.

MARY WALLING: It is right below the Caprock, going west, forty-five miles east of Plainview.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay, okay. Okay, I kind of got an area where that is. Um where did you grow up?

MARY WALLING: I grew up there.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay.

MARY WALLING: On a cotton farm, a cotton and wheat farm.

MICHAEL WALLING: All right. That's good.

MARY WALLING: That's where I grew up.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. How do you define West Texas? Like where does it begin?

MARY WALLING: Well, I used to think it began back up there below the Caprock where I lived, but uh since I moved to San Angelo I've found out this is part of West Texas. And it actually kind of begins right here.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yep.

MARY WALLING: I . . . I looked up the towns to make sure, and sure enough, San Angelo is one of the farthest East, and then it goes El Paso—that's part of it—then it goes on up to Abilene, Odessa, Lubbock, Amarillo, Midland. Up in there. So, I think it kind of begins right here.

MICHAEL WALLING: Um-hum. Yeah, I agree. I . . . for me, it was just kind of like a weather thing. Like, wherever the weather starts getting worse and starts looking more dry, that's kind of West Texas to me. I think . . .

MARY WALLING: Just a . . . but I always thought this was more like Central Texas.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yeah, me too. But, yeah.

MARY WALLING: It's West Texas.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. What do you think the difference is between West Texans and Texans from other regions of the state?

MARY WALLING: Well, for one thing, we're used to the wind, the dust, and there's a lot more farmers. It's mostly farmland and ranch land. And farther east, you have a lot of trees and you don't have the cotton crops, and the grains, and all those crops that they grow around here. That's, to me, the difference. More wind, more dust, more crops.

MICHAEL WALLING: All right. That's a great answer. How would you characterize West Texans' relationship to the military?

MARY WALLING: Well, I think they're dedicated because we have the Air Force base here. It does training and they have a lot of recognition. So, I think everybody here is pretty dedicated to doing what they need to do.

MICHAEL WALLING: Exactly. Okay. What is the name of your relative who served in the armed forces?

MARY WALLING: Dennis Walling. And he was my husband and he's your grandfather.

MICHAEL WALLING: Um-hum. When did they enlist in the armed forces?

MARY WALLING: Well, he didn't actually enlist. Well, he did enlist. He . . . he was drafted. He didn't enlist on his own. He was in the National Guard during college and uh he took a coaching job at Dalhart. First job was coaching basketball and he didn't have time to make a lot of the meetings. He missed too many, so he got drafted.

MICHAEL WALLING: Oh, okay. What uh . . . what years was he in the service?

MARY WALLING: Nineteen fifty-five to '57. Two years.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. In which military conflict did they take part?

MARY WALLING: Well, he was in Korea. Uh he was sent to Korea after the war was over. The war was over in '53 I believe, so it had been over a couple of years. But there was still a lot going on, and they were guarding the pipelines in Korea. That was part of his job in his company.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay.

MARY WALLING: To keep uh . . . there was a lot . . . the pipelines that brought gas from uh North Korea to South Korea, wherever, but there was a lot of uh Koreans that were stealing gas, and they had to be . . . they had to guard them from that.

MICHAEL WALLING: That'd be scary. Okay. What about number seven? Is it . . . do you have something to say about number seven?

MARY WALLING: Why . . . why did they enlist? Well, now, he didn't enlist. He . . . he was drafted.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. Oh, that was the one I just asked.

MARY WALLING: Yeah.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay.

MARY WALLING: Number eight.

MICHAEL WALLING: What were your thoughts about your family member's decision to serve?

MARY WALLING: Well, I didn't much like it because we had a nine-month-old baby, and we'd just been married about two years. He'd just started his career and I was teaching. So, I was very concerned about that; that Sherri would grow up not knowing her dad.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yeah. Yeah, that's scary. Okay, this is pretty much number nine, too. Okay.

MARY WALLING: Yeah, well, I was hoping that he would uh . . . I was glad that they weren't there fighting. The main fighting was over with, so I wouldn't have to worry about that.

MICHAEL WALLING: Right.

MARY WALLING: But just him being gone for so long was a big problem.

MICHAEL WALLING: Right. Yeah, I could not . . . I couldn't imagine that. What was your conception of the United States at the time of your family member's service?

MARY WALLING: Uh well, I thought it was a real safe place because I was young. I didn't know much about politics. I didn't care much about politics. I didn't pay a lot of attention, but uh it was a much safer place than it is now. Quite different now.

MICHAEL WALLING: You think so?

MARY WALLING: So . . . yes.

MICHAEL WALLING: Heck yeah.

MARY WALLING: Yes, I watch the . . . all the politic . . . political things going on now, and it's scary in that North . . . is back on the . . . in the news, making their . . . trying to make their

atom . . . their nuclear whatever to blow us up. So, that's scary.

MICHAEL WALLING: That is scary, yeah.

MARY WALLING: So . . . so, we didn't really have that worry back then that much because we conquered North Korea.

MICHAEL WALLING: You think, like, other . . . other countries that would want to hurt us are like less able back then?

MARY WALLING: Oh, yes, they were.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yeah. Okay. How did you stay in touch with your relative during his or her time in service?

MARY WALLING: Well, we did a lot of that. Uh we wrote letters about every other day. Dennis uh took video pictures to send home so Sherri would maybe know him when he came home. So, we had a lot of movies that he sent home on the old-fashioned reels.

MICHAEL WALLING: That's awesome.

MARY WALLING: And lots of pictures. And I have some pictures I'll share with you.

MICHAEL WALLING: Really? Wow, that's cool. That is cool. If your family member participated in conflict, what was your understanding of that conflict?

MARY WALLING: Well, about the only conflicts I said was uh guarding of the pipelines and the properties. And he was close to the thirty-eight parallel that divided North and South Korea, so, it was just protecting their territory and . . . and the gas pipelines and so forth.

MICHAEL WALLING: That's cool.

MARY WALLING: So, that was . . . that was his part there.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. Did you follow the news about military activities or learn information from your relative about the missions he was . . . he or she was involved in? If so, through what channels of communication (letters, television, et cetera)? If not, how did knowing your relative's whereabouts and activities affect you?

MARY WALLING: Okay, as I said before, lots of letters and movies. So, the communication was great. So, I knew what he was doing and where he was at all times, which probably didn't happen if you were in the middle of a huge conflict.

MICHAEL WALLING: Right, right.

MARY WALLING: So, uh didn't have to worry about that. I knew he was safe all the time.

MICHAEL WALLING: Right. You see anything at the time on like T.V. and stuff like that?
Or . . . ?

MARY WALLING: Uh not that I remember.

MICHAEL WALLING: Oh.

MARY WALLING: T.V., it was just coming out at that time. We weren't . . .

MICHAEL WALLING: Anything . . . anything on the radio? Like . . . ?

MARY WALLING: Uh my parents were . . . Sherri and I moved home with my parents to Flomot to stay with them while he was gone, and we had one of the only . . . one of the first television sets in that area. And it was kind of snowy, so there wasn't a whole lot of news, but if there was, it wasn't anything that . . . to worry about that I remember.

MICHAEL WALLING: That would . . . that would be something to hear. You know . . . said he was telling you, you know, he was fine, and then something happens.

MARY WALLING: Yeah.

MICHAEL WALLING: You see on the T.V. That would be terrible.

MARY WALLING: Yeah. Yeah, that would be.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. So, we're on fifteen. What were your most vivid memories of your family member's time in service?

MARY WALLING: Uh . . . my most vivid memories were how lonesome it was out on the farm.

MICHAEL WALLING: Right.

MARY WALLING: Uh and . . . and there were good memories. Uh he sent lots of gifts and um china—that china over there in that china cabinet. He s . . . he sent three sets, three whole sets of china. One to my mother, one to his mother, and one to me. And crystal. And he sent lots of uh . . . uh material, silks and things, from Japan. He traveled . . . and uh things for Sherri. Lots of . . . there were lots of fun things.

MICHAEL WALLING: That he . . . he sent . . . he got in Korea?

MARY WALLING: Yeah.

MICHAEL WALLING: He got the china in Korea?

MARY WALLING: Yeah. Well, I think he got it in Japan.

MICHAEL WALLING: Oh, yeah. Okay.

MARY WALLING: There, it was a lot cheaper. Things were a lot cheaper there because Korea didn't have a lot.

MICHAEL WALLING: Right, right. Wow, that's awesome.

MARY WALLING: Well, and he was in the uh—I was going to tell you more about this at the end, but—he was in uh . . . he played basketball and football, so he got to travel a lot more to a lot of different places.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay.

MARY WALLING: That was a big plus.

MICHAEL WALLING: In Korea, he got to travel?

MARY WALLING: Yeah, they got to travel and play games, but I don't know if they played in Japan. But uh I think they did.

MICHAEL WALLING: Really?

MARY WALLING: Honestly, I don't remember that much.

MICHAEL WALLING: It was . . . it was just kind of like a league a little bit, I guess.

MARY WALLING: Yeah. Yeah.

MICHAEL WALLING: Something like that. Wow that's . . .

MARY WALLING: Different . . . different companies played each other, and then I think he got to go to . . . go, and he was on a winning team that got to go play in Japan, I think. He got to come home early because of his being team and . . .

MICHAEL WALLING: That won. [Laughs] Golly, that's awesome.

MARY WALLING: Yeah. Yeah, he was . . . he was a pretty good player back then, like some of his grandkids are now.

MICHAEL WALLING: Probably a lot better now, though. Okay, so we're skipping sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen.

MARY WALLING: None of those apply.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. What were your fears about your family member's return home?

MARY WALLING: Okay, well, I was afraid that he would be different and that uh Sherri, who was two and a half when he came home—nine months when he left—I was afraid she wouldn't know him. And uh some of that was true. She seemed to know him, but . . . because she recognized him from all the movies, but they never really got along then. They had not bonded because he left when she was that age, so they always kind of conflicted after that.

MICHAEL WALLING: Really?

MARY WALLING: Yep. Still do. Still did all through her life.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yeah.

MARY WALLING: So, that was a bad part. That was a really bad part, but . . .

MICHAEL WALLING: How uh . . . how was he different?

MARY WALLING: Well, he was uh . . . he . . . he was real quiet and reserved, and, I think, kind of depressed. And uh didn't like to talk about it because there were still some things going on. Some of his . . . some of uh . . . uh guys up in the units that he was with guarding pipelines had, you know . . . had shot and killed some people, and I think maybe he saw that. Some of the people . . . guard the pipelines, the Koreans. And then one of the worst things he . . . he saw was babies uh . . . dead babies washing up on the shore. And I don't know where they came from, but . . . but that's about all he would ever talk about. He was like a lot of service people. They don't want to talk about what happened.

MICHAEL WALLING: I uh . . . my, you know . . . my dad, he didn't have much to tell me about it either, but one thing that he did tell me was uh . . . he uh . . . he never wanted to go camping. Like, Dennis never wanted to camp after that.

MARY WALLING: Now, that doesn't surprise me.

MICHAEL WALLING: He probably didn't like it, you know. I can . . . you know, I can see why, you know.

MARY WALLING: Yeah. Well, uh I think . . . later on, I think he had some flashbacks. And I'm not sure what . . . you know, what because he wouldn't talk about it, but I know he . . . I know he did have a lot of depression from that. So, you can imagine how bad it is if they're really in serious conflict. And the veterans now with all that PTSD.

MICHAEL WALLING: PTSD, yeah. That's . . . I mean, I can . . .

MARY WALLING: So . . . so, we were lucky it wasn't that kind of deal.

MICHAEL WALLING: That . . . but, yeah.

MARY WALLING: But it was still not great.

MICHAEL WALLING: Still traces of it, yeah. Okay.

MARY WALLING: I guess that probably answered the next question.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yeah, it does. Okay. After your family member's time in the military, had your conception of the United States changed?

MARY WALLING: Yeah—I think we touched on that a little earlier—it has. Um it's just not the safe place it used to be. And besides the being . . . not being safe from all the foreign powers, we have all the political conflict going on, and all the murders and all the violence going on in this country. It's just not like it was back in the fifties.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yeah, stuff is harder to control, yeah?

MARY WALLING: Yeah. It's changed quite a bit, and that's not good.

MICHAEL WALLING: Do you have any advice for family . . . families of young men and women who are just entering the service?

MARY WALLING: Just make sure they know what sacrifices they're going to have to undertake to be a part of it. Be sure that they're tough and strong to handle it.

MICHAEL WALLING: Yep.

MARY WALLING: That would be my advice.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. Do you have any items, objects, correspondence that you wish to share with the project?

MARY WALLING: Well, I have a lot of pictures that I'll share with you.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. All right.

MARY WALLING: You want to look at them?

MICHAEL WALLING: Sure.

MARY WALLING: Each one of them has . . . is written on the back of what . . . what they are about.

MICHAEL WALLING: I'm going to . . . I'm going to look at these in a second. Let's just finish this recording.

MARY WALLING: Okay. Uh, after we uh . . . well, I'm just going to add this to it.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay.

MARY WALLING: That uh Dennis, I told you, he . . . Dennis played football and basketball, and he was named to the all-service basketball team.

MICHAEL WALLING: Okay. That's awesome.

MARY WALLING: And he got to come back home early because of it.

MICHAEL WALLING: How . . . how early did he get to come home?

MARY WALLING: I think just a few months, maybe. But three or four months over there . . . but that helped.

MICHAEL WALLING: Well, that's three or four months you don't have to camp out in Korea. What uh . . . did he ever say, like, what . . . like, what was his living conditions like and . . . ?

MARY WALLING: Oh, uh well, you'll see in some of those pictures the barracks they lived in. He didn't really complain too much about the living conditions.

MICHAEL WALLING: Right.

MARY WALLING: Uh he had a lot of buddies that he enjoyed, and the basketball team and football team.

MICHAEL WALLING: Heck yeah.

MARY WALLING: But they didn't live out in the boonies like a lot of them have to. [Coughs] I'm sorry.

MICHAEL WALLING: Oh, that's fine.