ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

MARIO MARTINEZ

An interview conducted on

October 27, 2016

Interviewer: Anthony Brown

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 Mario Martinez are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 27, 2016.

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BROWN: First off, what is your name?

MARTINEZ: Mario Joseph Martinez.

BROWN: When and where were you born? Where did you grow up?

MARTINEZ: I was born in Big Lake Texas, on May 24, 1981. Originally at the San Angelo Hospital here that is now Community and I was raised in Big Lake from '81 until 1991 around then moved here to San Angelo and was here from San Angelo up until 2002 when I joined in the service.

BROWN: How do you define West Texas? Where does it begin?

MARTINEZ: Where it begins or the environment?

BROWN: Just in your own understanding, how does it begin? Like which location, which part of Texas.

MARTINEZ: Pretty much from the El Paso area, almost a little bit before you get to the Dallas area and the Panhandle. It's more of a country setting, you know, a desert type environment. Some areas have mountains, you know, like Alpine and whatnot. The rest of it is kind of like a dry desert area.

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

MARTINEZ: If they are true West Texans, they don't complain about weather, harsh work. They just do it. It's gotta get done. They knock it out. Other areas, they cry, complain, the weather gets a little bad, they wanna run inside. That's what I've noticed. The city folks don't like the bad weather or the heat.

BROWN: Yeah. How would you categorize West Texans' relationships with the military?

MARTINEZ: I don't know. The only thing with the closer relationship with the military and West Texas is religion and West Texans. A close third is guns and West Texans. Like hunting and what not. Very, very close. It's almost intertwined, ingrained in us. You grow up here, you're almost expected to either know someone in the military or become in the military yourself.

BROWN: Okay, let's see here. When and where did you enter the armed forces? Which branch did you serve in and what were your years of service?

MARTINEZ: I signed up here in San Angelo. I originally tried to sign up in Dallas, Texas, in 2001. That didn't work out through the Air Force but then the Army picked me up here. I went to the Amarillo MEPS office. Got approved over there and, six months later, was sitting in Fort Sill, in Lawton, Oklahoma to do my Thirteen Bravo Field Artillery Training. From there, did five-

and-a-half years as a 13 Bravo. Then that contract was up because it was a six-year contract. Then I signed up for another MOS for my second contract. That's the one I didn't get to completely finish and that's whenever I went 96 Whiskeys, which is a water purification. So I learned how to work reverse osmosis machines and I did that for another 18 months before I got out.

BROWN: Okay, you kind of explained this next question a little bit. During your years of service, were you primarily enlisted in the ranks or non-commission officer?

MARTINEZ: I never became a non-commissioned officer. There was two times I had an opportunity to become a non-commissioned officer. The first time was after my first deployment, like about two years in the service. I was going to be . . . Ah, they had just started the corporate recruiting program, where the specialists with combat training, they were going to go ahead and like promote us a little quicker to corporal, which isn't a pay raise just, it's like, you become a boss, but you are not really a boss in the civilian world. They wanted me to do the recruiting, but I got myself in some issues. So, lost that rank and went all the way back down to private, and then worked my way back up again. Got myself back in trouble when I came back from my second deployment. I lost all that again and then just went back up to specialist and then started making my way back down again. It was like a little escalator. Peaks and valleys. Peaks and valleys. I should have come out as a sergeant first class. I came out as a private second class.

BROWN: In which military conflict did you take part?

MARTINEZ: I took part in Operation Iraqi Freedom in Ramadi, Iraq, from the end of 2003 until about 2004. My second tour in Iraq was Baghdad and that was from about 2006 to 2008, whenever I caught that fifteen-month tour. In those two times, I've spent both 30 days in Kuwait but at different locations. Then, whenever I switched jobs, I spent 90 days in Afghanistan at a good air field working on the flat line fuel and water, adding hydrochloride to water tanks.

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

MARTINEZ: I didn't think I was going to make it past the MEPS office and then, by the time it was time, I was able to get myself out, I was almost through basic training. I had already knocked out nine weeks of basic training. I had like six months of AIT left. I just stuck with it.

BROWN: Okay! That kind of goes to the next question. What was your training like?

MARTINEZ: My training was not fun. We just learned how to work as a group, become strong individuals, and the first set of basics I went to was just learning how to shoot heavy artillery. So, track vehicles, are called howitzers . . . The M-109 Alpha 6s, they look like the Abrams and the Bradley tanks you see except they got to stop whenever they fire. Unlike the 1s, the Abrams, they shoot a bigger round. The Abrams only shoot a 105. We shot the 1-55 millimeter. It's a little bit fatter, a little bit heavier. But the combat training was primarily, ah, had a safe, like in case one of us got hit, how to stop the bleeding, you know how to handle the situations, anything from learning how to work radios, definitely learning how to work our machinery, like our heavy

machine guns, our medium weight machine guns, our personal weapons and definitely the howitzers.

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

MARTINEZ: They still had "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" going on but there wasn't a really lot of racism going on. But a lot of the racists kind of ended up sticking to themselves. But, you know, you got similar situations you grew up in, similar things that you like, you hang out with those people. We just happened to notice that's just how it broke out. You know, it's not like we only the Dominicans would mess with Dominicans or anything like that. The people from Puerto Rico were . . . You know, they hang out with the people from "the Island," that they call it. You know, not the people that grew in New York that were Puerto Ricans, you know, the Nuyoricans and, you know, they sometimes didn't hang out with the Mexicans. But it's because we all like the same music, like the same drinks, you know, stuff like that, so you just get along more.

BROWN: That's good.

MARTINEZ: Then if you're a Mexican from Georgia, that's straight country, you get along better with the Texans.

BROWN: Let's see here, did you find your service challenging at all?

MARTINEZ: It was nothing but a challenge. Whether it was the training or just trying to keep myself alive. Something was always a challenge and even whenever I was here in the states, I always had personal issues going on. You know, I got divorced while I was in there. Had financial issues while I was in there. Personnel that didn't have the right information about me, so they were always thinking the wrong thing. So it was always a challenge. I mean, I loved it and I like meeting and exceeding the challenges, especially changing people's minds about me. And they just see some slow, stupid Mexican. And then I'm more highly trained than they are in some stuff and, you know, my rank was always pretty low, you know, I was always in the lower private section. Highest I ever got was you know, specialist. But they just saw the rank. They didn't see or ask how long I've been in or where I've been at or what I've been in to.

Because, I mean, I had the field artillery training but I was delivering the rounds, which means counting the rounds, the ammunition, the what's called the dunnage, which is like the trash. So I was in South Korea, literally driving through South Korea, like delivering at their secret ammo stations where we get rid of our dunnage, where we would pick up our rounds, you know. That was me. Showed up to work, do PT, get done real quick, meet at the motor pool. We would already have our vehicles loaded up. Ride convoy straight down through South Korea, head a little bit southern. We were a little north than South Korea. We would head down south a little bit, go to the bunkers we needed to, pick up all the ammunition. We might be there all day. We might ride out around seven or eight in the morning and be heading back around six, seven, eight at night, and that's just the convoy back to our base. And we still had stuff we had to do there, like sometimes we would have to have people sleep in the vehicles overnight. You know, just so we had guards. Because we still had our munition areas that we took care of, you know. That was just a small portion of the different training I did. So, you know, I was jack of all trades, master of none.

BROWN: What conception did you have of the United States at the time of your enlistment? What did America symbolize to you? What did you think it stood for?

MARTINEZ: I didn't really have a concept like that at the time. But the more I spent overseas and the more I talked to people from different countries, that's whenever I realized how low they really thought of us, and how big headed we really are as a country. You know, it opened my eyes to stuff I didn't see. You know, the big major issues we have here in the U.S., they are nothing compared to other countries. They have way, way less opportunities. Way, way less stuff that we take for granted. They will be happy if they see a half-stocked convenient store. We complain. We call that shit ghetto. We stay away from that type of shit. They are not even used to that. They still have to go kill their own animals, stuff like that, in some countries. You know, what did open my eyes to some of that was . . .

I was almost a year in South Korea. We were on a convoy and we had what is called a field training exercise, a FTX, and we were going from location to location, 'cause, you know, we delivered the bullet, the rounds and the projo, which is the little projectiles that send off . . . Imagine like a big bullet. You know how the bullet is broken down, right? You have the casing, you got the gunpowder in there. Well, for the howitzers, instead of the gunpowder being in the rounds, it's like a big casing, like itself, there is stuff behind it. Like a . . . you know, like the old muskets. It's more of that but, you know, they are little, little circles they look, ah, it's kind of hard to describe what they look like. But it's a little woven bag and it's got stuff, it's got a material inside of it that's really combustible and they got different sizes to send it out different lengths, and we would have to deliver that and what's called the fuses like the tip of it. So, imagine a regular bullet being in three pieces. You have to put it together so that way you have a combination of what you want to shoot, and that is how the field artillery works.

So, we are delivering that and it's the first time I have seen that much greenery in my life . . . I mean rice patties, as far as you can see. We were in the hill country in South Korea and there are these people as tall as that little water container you have, literally shaped like an L, 'cause their whole lives, all they have done is worked their farm. So, they are always bent over. They can't look up. They can look sideways and up. That was crazy. I had never seen something like that before. That's just their life and that's how they got by and here we were, the assholes running over their fresh crops with our vehicles because they could only have so much of the road they could use. We are driving around right over that shit cause our vehicles were so wide. You know, that's how . . . That's when it first started to click that there are a lot a lot of people that don't like us as a country.

BROWN: Next question is, were you deployed overseas? I know you kind of talked on that. If so what did you understand about the mission you were being asked to complete?

MARTINEZ: The first deployment overseas was to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and to try to slow down a little bit of the activity of the bad guys, what is called the Sunni Triangle. I had the joy of being stationed right in the middle of it and the compound that we had . . . The unit after us, they pretty much lost like, I think, three-quarters of it. Because they didn't pay attention to our warnings and they thought they got more training out of the video games than the actual training that they were given here in the U.S. and in Kuwait before they made it out there. But for us, we did not consider it a game. It was real life and, fortunately, I survived.

I almost died, third day in country there. It might have been my third but it was less than a week of me being there and it was a simple fact of going back to my bunk my rack to get a Kevlar . . . My helmet before I went and drove. We took, I want to say 60-80 something mortars and rockets around that time frame, and where I was supposed to be, the distance I covered to go from the doorway, to my rack whenever I doubled back, that's where we took about two mortars and a rocket. And the barriers that they hit . . . I literally would've been in front of if not a side of them. And that's whenever I had lost my first, the first casualty that I had known. The first person I knew. He unfortunately passed in the Port-a-John. Yeah, I think it was our second week in country. And the vehicles in the motor pool, like, they were all lined up, like, we are here in the U.S., you know, like a car show style. All of the vehicles are together in a section . . . And then all of the vehicles . . . And these people were watching and they saw that and took advantage of that. They wiped out about 80% of our vehicles. Took that and that was an eye opener right there . . . I still talk about that 'til this day. But the mission was pretty much for my unit, for 2/17 Service Battery . . . We needed to supply, like, we were the road people, we were sending the materials from. We delivered materials from what's called from the little base to base but over there they're called FOBS, forward operating bases. We would always be on the road delivering stuff from one spot to another. Sometimes taking personnel and sometimes doing some of the security for it. While we were still delivering ammo and stuff like that to the firing bases. So we had a lot on our plate at that time.

BROWN: I know you briefly said your unit but what was your unit that you served in your deployment?

MARTINEZ: In a . . . The first and the second one was Second Battalion 17th Field Artillery, Second I.D. They were based out of South Korea. It's not to be confused with the one in Washington at Fort Lewis. Our unit hadn't been deployed for 50 years by the time we got the order. And I was upset because I had been in country for thirteen months waiting to get my leave days built up, so I could go on leave. I literally got my combat orders the week I was trying to drop my leave packet to come back to the U.S. for vacation. So that was wonderful, and then I had the joy of having desert training in the monsoon season in South Korea. You can just imagine that. I was better suited for Vietnam training than for Iraq. [Laughs]

BROWN: Did you serve in direct combat during your deployment?

MARTINEZ: What do you mean by direct combat?

BROWN: I guess up close and personal.

MARTINEZ: No, I was pretty fortunate. The guys I worked with, they would take contact, you know, the closest I typically came to it day to day was just the rockets coming in, the mortars coming in being outside of the wire. Either driving a vehicle or being a gunner on the road on the vehicles themselves. Being security during the patrols. But there's only maybe two fire fights I was in whenever I was in Baghdad. It was still 217 FA, but they were switching over to 4th I.D. and, at that point, we had been flagged over at . . . over at Fort Carson in Colorado Springs. But I got lucky. I stayed in the vehicle. The closest fire fight I did have, my vehicle got shot up but not too bad. Just because I couldn't get out of the driver seat and shoot the machine gunner maybe

like 60 feet in front of me. We got our vehicles messed up pretty bad. But you know it was going to be worse if I got hit and then I took about three or four people out of the fire fight in the heat of it just because I tried to play Rambo, you know. All I could do is fold my arms and start yelling, and luckily, we were artillery guys so we could. The gunner was ducked down in the literally sitting down in the floor of the Humvee 1151, and he just had his arm way up and was just shooting them . . . What did we have, the M240 Bravo? And we would just tell him, give him directions and he'd aim the gun you know, like "Left one," you know, "Up one," you know, just little stuff like that we would understand that we were trained on. I lost my voice that night. Stayed up all night and then we had to do another patrol a couple hours after that. It was a fun, fun day, but luckily nobody got injured in that one.

BROWN: That kind of answers a little bit of the next question. It's a two part. Were you wounded in action or did you ever become a prisoner of war?

MARTINEZ: No, I fortunately never got wounded. My scars were more mental, survivor's guilt and I never became detained by the enemy, so I was fortunate of that. Always had to stay on your toes.

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

MARTINEZ: Poorly educated, majority of the people that were trying to fight us were just being misguided because it was mainly in Baghdad from 2006 to 2008 whenever we were always in the neighborhoods, always patrolling. We pretty much lived outside of our FOB for about six days out the week, four days out the week. So . . . We were always, always in the neighborhoods, always trying to make a presence. Since they weren't highly educated, they couldn't read, you know, but they were still highly religious people. They would be corrupted by, ah, I forget the name of it, but the person that would be teaching their religion. We call it . . . In the Catholic religion, it's a priest but I forget what they call it over there. They hated Americans, they didn't like Americans, so they would brainwash their people in the neighborhood to hate Americans too. And these people would honestly have no reason to hate Americans. But just because their priest told them, we were horrible, we were bad, we were infidels, we needed to die. Even though he wasn't trying to raise his hand. He wasn't getting any blood on his hand. He was just sending people on letting them die, letting their family suffer. You know, so, I felt bad about that. And then the females . . . and they were treated pretty bad. Some of them there, around the areas we were in, we would pull into a neighborhood, and it could be, say around sixteen-year-old female, her brother is probably like twelve or thirteen, he is dragging her by the hair. You know, kicking her, and slapping her. Dragging her inside of the house, so that we don't see them. They can't look in our eyes, you know, if they we happen to make eye contact, like later on, they will get beaten up whenever we are not around. It's just an eye-opening experience right there. You know, when you are in your 20s that's some hard stuff to see.

BROWN: That kind of answer this next question. What were their conceptions of the United States? But did you ever engage with them in a conversation about what America meant to you?

MARTINEZ: Yeah, it was around it was still in Baghdad, we talked to some of the . . . We lived, we shared a compound with the Iraqi Army, and some of them would speak English. A lot

of Iraqis actually went to high, high . . . colleges here in the U.S. Like, stuff I'm never going to be able to go to. You know, Harvard, MIT, stuff like that. And these were just guys walking around in penny loafers and slacks, button down short sleeved t-shirts, just running a shop in Iraq. You know, they knew about New York. They had lived there and always talked about the high price. And they found out I was from Texas. They would ask me if I knew how to ride horses and stuff like that, you know. But it's not racist. They were curious, you know, I was one of the closer things they had seen to a cowboy. But what was the question again? I lost track.

BROWN: You kind of answered it. You just pretty much you talked about earlier what you thought their conceptions was of the United States?

MARTINEZ: They really felt bad for us because we had Bush as a president at the time whenever I was in the service and they were trying to figure out how he made presidency. They would always ask if it took a lot of money to be president or what, you know. Or if we were serious, that this guy was actually our leader. I had to apologize a lot for him. And then we had a bunch of younger, older people that we worked with that . . . They didn't know how to act, you know. There are always some people that make a bad impression wherever they go. Unfortunately, some of them wore the same uniform and are from the same country we are from. So, you know, I had to apologize for some of them sometimes. But I actually engaged in some pretty good conversations and a lot of them had pretty much raised through war like that's all they have known, is some type of conflict in their country or their country with another country, you know. I didn't realize that until I was actually there and hearing some of the stories, you know. It's crazy when they are talking about when they were little kids and they would see their uncle and aunts dragged out and like, you know, hands . . . They got their legs crossed and a pistol to the back of their head and, you know, they just get their bodies left there and they got to bury them and sometimes, if they even tried to bury them, they got shot at. You know, it's a harsh life. So, it changed my perspective on how horrible the U.S. is. It's like, they're nothing compared to over there. Especially whenever this one area in Baghdad, it was a neighborhood made out of pieces of trash, houses made out of trash. A whole neighborhood, a little bit bigger than this place you stay at, nothing but houses made out of trash man.

BROWN: How did your service influence or affect your family at home?

MARTINEZ: Like my blood family? It was hard for them, I scared them a lot. They were intimidated by me greatly. They didn't know when I was going to snap. They didn't know when I was joking and they were scared of the stuff I was capable of doing. Because I was a lot stronger than I am now and a lot bigger than I am now and imagine if you soaked in some kerosene. Really short. It didn't take a lot for me to blow up. It was really bad. So, my family had to deal with a lot. Like my mother, my sisters, and then the ex-girlfriend that I have now that is the mother of my child . . . I'm embarrassed of the ways that I've acted in front of her and my child but all I can do is try to improve. That's why I am a lot more mellow than I am then I was then.

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

MARTINEZ: Being really drunk smelling like liquor, running . . . I don't know how many miles that day. I would smell so bad of alcohol that, in the running formation that . . . they would put me in the very back. I was so loud and still so drunk at the time. I would out run the sober people and I would almost always end up in the first half of the group. And they couldn't breathe. I was the chain smoker. They weren't drunk. They were well rested, well hydrated, been drinking electrolytes, and you know, drinking water. I was dehydrated had just smoked a cigarette before I ran. Luckily I didn't catch myself on fire. That's how much liquor I reeked of. And they could not call cadence because they were so winded and now I just laugh so loud that when I ended up by the person calling cadence they would literally lose their step, jump to the side, and get mad at me and have to yell at me at the end of formation like at the end of the run. And we got done cooling down and stretching and I would, if it was a battalion run or something bigger, like that brigade, I would have no voice from after that run up until maybe lunch. I would have no voice until lunch and it was funny because, every time we had a run, like that would always happen.

Always someone didn't know me. Staff sergeant or sergeant thought I was just trying to be a smartass and just be loud for no reason when they didn't know. I already knew my homeboys at the beginning of a run had to hold their breath so, that way whenever we came on our way back, that we would be sounding loud and awesome. So, I had to bring it on home, you know. I had to cover most of the running and the yelling. It had to be so funny. They would be so upset. I tried talking to them and, you know, I didn't have a voice. They would be like, "What's wrong with you, soldier?" There would always be an older NCO that had known me since before I started losing rank that was a higher NCO at that point or a high up officer if he was noncommissioned. At least a sergeant first class or master sergeant coming over, getting in that staff sergeant ass about harassing me and give them the whole back story on me. Or it would be like, if it was an officer, be like a major, who I have known since he was captain fresh out of the academy, you know fresh out of officer school coming in as a butter bar lieutenant, you know. a little yellow line, on his rank. At the time it was on the collar because he was in BDUs. Now it's on the chest and they would always put that I always talked to that sergeant. It would be funny because on the run that the sergeant would see if I do the same thing and I would still do the same thing. So that's my vivid memory of the military. Just couldn't help it but always get myself in trouble. I was just trying to help the team.

BROWN: What sources of technology did you use in the service?

MARTINEZ: Ah, we used a GPS type device in our vehicles. Also, if we were shooting, they had a type of system for radio communication that the military uses, you know, where you put the mic to your ear and push that little button. There was, ah, I forget what it's called but it was pretty much where the coordinates would come in and we would have to rotate and elevate to a certain level. And it would give us the round and the bullets and there was a touchscreen type deal.

Whenever I was on the 119ers, it was mainly the radios. Like I said, GPS-type system. Actually, when I was in Baghdad, I forgot that we had radio jammers. We had two different systems that didn't work too well, so people hardly used them. Later, they finally came out with a pretty good one. My vehicle hardly got hit since I kept the frequencies in check. We started using the . . . I forget the name of the technology. It was a camera that took a picture of your eyeball, ah, bio-metrics, some of those materials. It took a picture of the eyeball so, that way, no matter what name you'd put in, it would always pop up. I think now it's a thumb print.

Let's see, what else . . . That was just the technology to utilize the radios. Our radios, we'd always have to change them up on certain days. And we'd just have to . . . I don't know exactly how it worked but I know I was in there long enough to where two different types of equipment came out. The first one was a big old box with wires, a big pain in the butt. The second one looked like a little palm pilot and that's what they started switching to towards the last year I was in. I wasn't around for much of the new equipment. Oh, and thermotechnology too. I got to use a lot of night vision gear. So that was fun.

BROWN: Did you face any challenges in returning to civilian life?

MARTINEZ: Everything was a challenge. Even relaxing was a challenge. My body was beaten up at that point, I had driven myself so hard. I thought I was okay but I wasn't. It took a couple years of counseling and lot of heart-to-hearts with my family and some personal experiences. So, ah, I don't know if I can go into detail about everything but I was fortunate that there was a psychiatrist who works with people who have PTSD. He was using mescaline, you know, in a medical environment to help them, you know, I never got to be a part of anything like that but, you know, it took a lot of me messing up and a couple of agencies telling me I need to get my shit together. You know, CPS, workforce commission, my mother, and just realizing that I wasn't alright, and working towards it. It's a big change. I wasn't ready to leave. I wanted to stay in but I got kicked out. I was still ready to fight, I was still filled with piss and vinegar. Ready to take on the world still. And the most experience I had was truck driving. Got a DWI three times while I was in, so couldn't fall back on it. Civilian world, yeah, it's cool to tell stories and know how to shoot artillery but it doesn't relate to anything in the states. So, I fell back on that old movie line . . . They give you a gun to fight for Uncle Sam, and then you learn how to build refrigerators in a factory when you get out. Yeah, that pretty much sums up how I fell out. I still had 18 months out on my contract. I wanted to get out debt free, honorable, you know, I didn't have children at the time. I was trying to get my bills paid off. I got the rug pulled out from under me. All that went bye-bye. And then coming back to nothing. The whole time I was in, people were going to school, actually doing something with their lives. You know, doing something. Here I was at 30, didn't have a damn thing going for me. Back at my mom's house. So that was a real swift kick in the balls.

BROWN: Did being from Texas shape your service at all?

MARTINEZ: Yeah, whenever I was trying to get acclimated to the tough environments, the heat in South Korea, the heat in the desert, or just the hard work, it was a little easier for myself. Because, yeah, I am somewhat of a city slicker but I still a country boy. So hard work is nothing I'm afraid of. My whole family worked in oil fields on my dad's side. There's a big amount of family on my dad's side. Even on my mom's side, the majority of them were in the oil field if they didn't do college. It's hard work. It's what I've known. It's what you know.

BROWN: After your time in the military, has your conception of Texas changed? Why or why not?

MARTINEZ: It has a little bit. It's not in a positive way mainly. Just a lot of close mindedness, and a lot of people too focused on Christianity. There are other religions. And if you're truly a

Christian, you can be considered of other religions as well. Just because someone's a certain color, doesn't mean they do stuff a certain way. Give everyone a shot. Let them mess up and go from there. But don't judge beforehand.

BROWN: Kind of the same question, but has your conception of the United States changed?

MARTINEZ: Yeah, after I ended up traveling the states while I was in service. I did my training in Oklahoma. After my Korea, I got stationed in Colorado Springs. Then from there I went to Virginia for three months, around the Richmond area. I did my training there for one summer. Then living in Tennessee, the Tennessee and Kentucky area at Fort Campbell for about eighteen months. I got to know a little bit about the U.S. the three times I went overseas. Yeah, we need to get some better education going. Gotta get out of this pity party. Pick up and earn your own. They're quick to talk about foreigners coming into this country but those foreigners are running some successful businesses. You wanna talk shit so bad, get your ass a business and compete with them. Be a competitor. You know, run them out of business because you run such a badass business. Try to get a piece of the pie and help the economy. Who cares what that girl looks like or what you're drinking or how big the rims are on your car or your truck? Do something to help your neighborhood out. A lot of that is missing in the U.S.

BROWN: How do you feel about your military service looking back?

MARTINEZ: Bittersweet. I mean, it helped out a lot. It messed me up a lot but it also helped improve me. So that's why it's bittersweet. I hated it going through it. I miss it and love it now. I could never go back to it. I've already tried. The only way I'm getting back in a uniform is if it gets so bad that they run out of the National Guard, the inactive reserves, and they've already started sending prisoners into war. So, they can bring back the draft. I already did my time and the way I got out is such a bad way that they would still consider not taking me then. That's bad. It was also a thing that tried to help me make better decisions. I was doing good for a couple years. Slipped up about a year ago but I'm on the up and up now.

BROWN: Do you have any advice for the young men and women just now entering the service?

MARTINEZ: Education, education, education. Get as much education as you can. Treat it as a life change. You'll never be the same when it's done. It's also gonna be some of the best years of your life. Save your money. That's about all I have. It sums it up for them. Good luck, God bless. Shit's not easy. But lace it up, one boot at a time. Keep your head down.

BROWN: Do you have any items or correspondents you'd like to share with this project? Would you like to share anything else about your service?

MARTINEZ: Lot of good memories, a lot of good personnel. A lot of them are still living, unfortunately some of them never made it back with me. Some are still serving now. I'd have to search through my stuff to see what kind of articles I have, possibly some letters I wrote in basic training. All the photographs are too personal and dear to me. I'd wanna keep them and pass them onto my children. Right now, just my daughter. But I might have more kids. She's definitely getting these dog tags when I'm gone. I already let her know that. She's five but she

already knows, when daddy's gone, these are hers. And if she's 18 and she wants to earn a pair, I may not be happy with it but I will let her try.

BROWN: Alright, this concludes the interview.