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Interview no. 290.2

José Lopez

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Jose Lopez (1910-)
INTERVIEWER: Sarah E. John
PROJECT: Bicentennial
DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 12, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in Mission, Texas in 1910; was a boxer in his early years, traveled extensively throughout the United States, and also was a member of the Merchant Marine; joined the Army in 1942 and again before the Korean Conflict; retired in 1973.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography and his early life and boxing career; experiences in the Merchant Marine; experiences in the Army; events that led to his receiving the Medal of Honor; his experiences after receiving the Medal, his work with the Veterans Administration, and his return to active service in the Army; experiences in Korea; discrimination; thoughts on the Chicano Movement; personal comments.

1 1/4 hours; 23 pages.

(Oral History interview with Mr. Jose Lopez of San Antonio, Texas on June 12, 1976. Interviewing is Sarah John from the University of Texas at El Paso, Institute of Oral History.)

J: Mr. Lopez, could you tell me where you were born?

L: In Mission, Texas.

J: In what year, sir?

L: July 10, 1910.

J: Could you tell me the names of your parents, please?

L: My father was Calletano Lopez and my mother was Candida Mendoza Lopez.

J: Where were they from?

L: The state of Oaxaca in México.

J: Did you attend elementary school while you were in San Antonio?

L: I did. The school is now a college there. It was by the old Joske's. I can't remember the name of the school right now. I didn't attend too much school.

J: How far did you get in elementary school?

L: I believe I went up to the fifth or sixth grade.

J: What experiences do you remember about your grade school years?

L: Very little. I remember that there was a great life for the people who used to live on the farm, and it was mostly what our parents and neighbors and everybody there did. They used to see who was the best man to pick cotton in the fields, and they used to enjoy it. That was a great life. They had the season to pick their cotton and all the harvest they raised around the valley. We ran all around McAllen, San Benito, Mercedes. Then we moved to Brownsville, Texas, and from Brownsville once a man took me all the way to Louisiana. He had me like his boy, because he had one little boy. We were raised together like brothers. They were terrific people. I used to help him. He used to go

and buy cabbage, carrots, and bring them and sell them to the stores. I used to help him clean, and ride with him back and forth. They used to make terrific biscuits. Sometimes I'd go to bed, and those biscuits were so delicious that I used to get up at midnight and go in the ice box and eat some more!

J: While everybody else was asleep.

L: That's right. The next day they used to miss those biscuits, and they didn't know who had eaten them. So finally one day something happened, and I was afraid that they would blame me for something the kids did wrong. About two o'clock in the morning I took my clothes, the ones I had on, and took off right to the nearest depot. I took a train; I didn't know which way I was going. I arrived in Atlanta, Georgia. When I was there I tried to help at anything I could so I could get something to eat. There was an old Mexican man there. He used to sell tamales on the street.

J: In Atlanta?

L: In Atlanta, yes. He had three other people who used to go pick up the tamales in the afternoon, take off and go and sell them. He would give us some percentage from what he sold of the tamales. We used to sit down and make the tamales the way he made them. He used to go to the butcher's shop--he never, never took a bus or a streetcar. He used to walk miles to get the meat, buy it and bring it, and then he used to use corn meal and I think a little flour to make the dough. He'd boil the meat and put in the spices and everything. We used to sit at the table and make those tamales, and get ready for the people to come to go out and sell them. Finally, I discovered, I guess, that I liked boxing. Oscar Baez, from Atlanta, used to find those kids. I remember I

used to go where all the football players at Georgia Tech were and I used to take showers there. I remember that there were lots of colored people living close by there. I used to run, do my road work, and I used to go and steal some milk that people left at their doors. I'd take a quart of milk from different places.

J: How old were you then, when you were in Atlanta?

L: I was about 16, 18; something like that. Then I started boxing. Baez put me on at Lakewood Park in amateur fights. I was very good. I needed some shoes. He turned me pro, and I fought in the city auditorium, four rounds; and I won the fight and I got my shoes. He kept getting me fights, and I fought outside of Georgia. I went to Knoxville, Tennessee, and I took off from there and I went all the way to Pennsylvania. Another manager got me and I fought in Baltimore, Maryland. I fought a fighter from Chicago; I lost the fight. Then from there I took the train again. It was my transportation and I went all the way to California. When I arrived in Los Angeles, I had some friends and they asked me to join the Merchant Marine. I had to belong to the union before, and I joined the Merchant Marine. I started going with the freighters. We used to carry molasses back and forth from Hawaii to San Francisco. Then in those days we had... I just continued working for different companies. I worked with the Matson Company; they had big ships. Before that I worked for another line that used to go around the world. We used to go all the way from San Francisco, across the Panama Canal, and go stop in New York. Then from New York we would go all the way to Bird's Island, all the way around the Gulf of Persia. Then we crossed through the Suez Canal. We stopped in France and part of Spain, and crossed all over those places. It was beautiful. I learned more there than in school. It was in those days when my dreams were to fight Tony

Cancinera. I used to put his picture in front of me and say, "I hope someday I can meet you." I'd probably be ahead if I had established myself in one place, but I never stayed in one place.

J: You liked to move.

L: Once I had a beautiful opportunity in Kentucky. I was passing through, and I went by the school where they would play football. I got over there and I started playing with them. They promised to teach me; they would pay everything. It was terrific. They saw how I handled the ball; I was very active, very fast. But I didn't stay too long. That was the trouble with me: I never stayed in one place. Another problem when I was boxing was that I didn't know how much money I was getting for my fights. As long as I had clothes and a place to eat and sleep, I was happy. So, then when I was in the Merchant Marine they got me in the last fight. It was in 1937 in Melbourne, Australia. It was my last fight. I fought Jackie Bird, the champion of England, and I lost the fight. And it was the end of my boxing. Then when I came back, when I was in San Francisco, I was on the SS Mariposa, and we took a cruise to Tahiti. Every six months they used to get one of the ships to take a cruise there, and we stopped in Tahiti. I missed the ship, and there were two other men that had missed the ship too. In those days, the Tahitians used to go fight for the Italians against the Ethiopians. They thought we were not good people, and they had us in court. But we never committed any crime before, so we had one kid from California, a blond kid, and he talked for all of us. We didn't know too much about court, so he got up there, they had an interpreter and everything, and they promised that the first chance they had they would send us back to the States. I didn't want to come back to the States! It was a paradise there! [Laughter]

J: Oh, yes, but since they were going to send you, you might as well have left.

L: They let us out and then we continued there. We were getting food from the government, the Consulate from the United States, and from the agent from the company of the ship, because we had our papers. So we were getting that because we didn't do any work at all! We were enjoying ourselves!

J: It was paradise! [Laughter] Great!

L: But they decided that we should go back.

J: Now you had to start working again.

L: They put us on a sailboat. I believe the name of the sailboat was the "Golden Hind." That sailboat used to belong to a man from Australia or England, and the boat came from Hawaii and made a cruise to Tahiti. By the time we arrived with the big ship, the SS Mariposa, the passengers and the captain went in the Mariposa and left their sailboat there. So then the owner of the boat went back to Hawaii, got one captain, an old captain in Tahiti, and he agreed to take the ship back and take us back. The government paid so much for us three to come back. I didn't want to come back to the States.

J: I don't blame you.

L: In a way, it was the longest trip we ever made. When we departed from Tahiti, that was one of the main islands where the ships came, and we were coming back and we stopped at the Marquesas Islands. They used to tell us how many people used to be there until some people arrived and they brought leprosy. Thousands of people died and you could see some of the natives with sores all over their bodies. They said, "Okay boys. If you people want to stay, you can stay here." Because I had tried to escape, me and another boy. We decided to jump over the side

and get to the nearest island, and from the island I guess he was dreaming of some way we could make a raft to go back to Tahiti. We could never, never reach the island because the waves were down and the boat was going all the way up there when we were swimming, and that happened when the sun was going down. We jumped with pants only and no shirt. They had two Tahitians as a crew; one was named Tonga. They were big Hawaiian boys and they brought us back. They turned the boat around, they spotted us--they saw the blond kid and the reflexion. So they turned around and they got us like two birds out of the water. The captain took us down to eat supper and he talked to us like a father. He said, "You could have never reached the island because the sharks are waiting for anything coming to the island in the drift. And another thing, there is no one on the island." That's what he said, and he knew. He knew every drift of every island in the Pacific, the captain.

J: You were lucky, then.

L: We were, yes. He said we could have never reached it, because the waves take you a long way. And swimming, it looks close, but it was a long distance. Then when we arrived in the Marquesas Islands we told him, "Okay, we'll go back to the ship, but you let us go on the next island that we stop at." He said, "Okay." And that was when we stopped in the Marquesas Island and they had the leprosy, and, oh! mosquitoes that you don't feel, but later the reaction of the poison is so terrible that you want to take your skin off! We didn't want to stay. Finally we ran out of food. We picked bananas and coconuts; we ate bananas for supper and lunch, and only the water that we used to get was from the rain. There was one lady, she looked like you, she was

was with 11 people who were in the boat, and we used to save water for her to take a bath. And we used to catch fish and eat. When we got to Hawaii the ship was like this: we were starving, hungry; the newspaper came, took our pictures and everything. The engine broke down; we had to go by sail. When there was wind we could advance, when there was no wind we were surrounded by water that looked like glass. That was the longest trip I ever had in all my life in the Merchant Marine. I worked in Pearl Harbor before the Pearl Harbor bombing. Then I went from Pearl Harbor back to Los Angeles. Just when they bombed Pearl Harbor I was in Los Angeles, and they were getting all the Japanese. They got me too. They thought I was Japanese.

J: Oh, my!

L: I showed them I was not Japanese, I was Mexican. They got thousands of Japanese at that time. Then I got another ship and I went to New York, and then I went to Philadelphia. I signed up for the draft in Philadelphia. It was close to where they had the Liberty Bell. And then I went to Boston and all around there. Before I went to New York, they were going to mount guns on my ship, a freighter. I said, "Well, before I go, I want to say goodbye to my family." So we had a choice. If you were in the Merchant Marine you wouldn't be drafted, but if you stayed away from the ship they would draft you. So when I got into Brownsville, I saw my old girlfriend, who is my present wife. I asked her, "What do you want me to do?" We got married in 1942, and so she said, "I'd rather see you in the Army." I came into San Antonio and I volunteered for the Airborne. Then they asked me, "Why do you want to join the Airborne?" I said, "Well, it will be the quickest way for me to get this thing over with." From San Antonio they sent me to

California to become an Airborne. But they found out I was married and in those days they didn't want married men. When my wife said that I could go in the Army, then I went in the Army.

J: What did your family feel about that? What was their reaction to your joining the Service?

L: Well, the only family I had was my uncle, because my mother was gone and I never saw my father. My uncle was happy as long as I was happy.

J: And your wife seems like she was happy about it, too.

L: Well, she wasn't happy. She'd rather have me in the house sleeping! Anyway, I went to California and took my basic training, and then they put me in the Infantry because they took me off from the Airborne. I'll never forget, before we finished basic, they were teaching us so we could go to the Pacific. My unit was getting off, they were gone, they were leaving on the train. We had a field about two miles long, and the night before I busted my ankle and it swelled up. They had me in the hospital, and I begged the doctor, "Let me go, please! I want to go with my unit. I don't want to be separated from them." He said, "Okay, I'll tell you what. If you can carry those bags the way you are, and cross the field, you can go." I said, "I'll do it!" And I dragged myself and those bags, and I got it. The guys saw me and they helped me. Then it was like a family when you were in the Service. You could trust each other; you could leave your money out. It was nothing of what it is today.

J: Were there any other Mexican Americans in the unit with you at the time?

L: Oh, yes. The Second Division was mostly Mexicans. As a matter of fact, there were five buses that came from all over the valley when we came to San Antonio; they brought us into the Army. Alberto Hernandez, he's still in San Antonio, he was captured, a prisoner of war. There were

three of us they used to call "The Three Musketeers," and we joined the Second Division. We went to Fort , because of manuevers we had in Louisiana, and we used to fight with the cavalry division. Then from there they moved us to Wisconsin. We stayed there until some newspaper man said, "Where is this famous Second Division hiding out?" And that was all, we were ready; and they shipped us right from there to overseas-- Ireland. We were right on the border of the north and south in Ireland, near Belfast. Armagh was the closest place. It's where General Patton gave us a big talk. We waited an hour and a half for him, standing at attention. Then he told us the truth, because he had already fought in Africa and all those places. So they were getting us ready, and then they sent us to Southwest England. We were ready for the invasion-- Omaha Beach. We had anything we wanted--movies, shows, steaks, ice cream--anything; but we couldn't go anyplace; it was all right there. We started seeing those big bombings in England, so finally the day came when we were ready for the invasion in Southern France, Omaha Beach. That is one feeling--I don't know how a human being can go through that. I wanted to cry, I wanted to run, I wanted to hide, I wanted to scream; I was afraid. That's a terrific feeling. You hear the shells and things that are hitting the pieces of steel on the plane, and you have to jump. It was a terrific feeling.

J: I've seen actual newsreel films of that and it's unreal.

L: I don't know how to express myself, but... . So I guess God was with us, because I survived, and I went right through it. When we hit the strong Germans that were there, we just continued pushing through until I got hit. They said I had seven lives!

J: Ah, you made it!

L: They found that the bullet didn't go through. I had a clip, I was a machine gunner. I had a clip and the bullet struck right through the lead. It threw me down and made a wound on my skin, but that was all. I said, "They got me!" Then they looked for the bullet and finally the doctors found the thing. I sure kept the bullet. We passed the hardest objectives that we went through; we made it. We lost lots of good friends. Every time we had a miss, we used to look at each other and say, "Who will be next?" But we drove all the way to Czechoslovakia. We hit about 1500 Germans. They said they'd rather give up to us than to the Russians. We just had them right in the field. I had my machine gun cocked then; I was mean. And then we found prisoners of war, and I found Alberto Hernandez. I found him. He was skinny; good looking boy. And I got four Germans. I had to keep them one night. It's not good to remember. I get emotional.

J: Can you talk a little about the events that took place when you were awarded the Medal of Honor?

L: When I was coming back from...we were on the points system. You had to have so many points and they'd send you back to the States. I have over the number of points. At the time, everybody that was a section leader or machine gunner had a section of machine guns. I was a sergeant already; they gave me rank. They wanted to make me an officer, but I didn't want it. So we were sent to Czechoslovakia and they brought back I believe about eight deuce and a halves, and everybody was going home. Oh, I had a lot of souvenirs, and we put them in the truck and everything. Everybody was so happy that they were coming back, and they took us to this big city in Germany where they executed the Germans, Nuremburg. Well, right there they had a camp for us to become more "civilized" because we were coming from the front. So everybody was getting out from the deuce and a halves, and then

somebody said, "Sergeant Lopez, Sergeant Lopez!" My heart went to the ground, because all those squad leaders and section leaders were being sent to the Pacific to fight up there because of experience. He said, "You go back and put all your things back in the deuce and a half." So we left at noon from there, and we got back in Czechoslovakia, I believe, about one or two o'clock in the morning. I slept in the hallway or someplace. The next morning everybody that was at Reveille was ready, and there was a big commotion, and everybody was shaking hands with me. I said, "What happened? What did I do?" "The company commander wants to see you." They were looking for me, and they took me up there. The company commander treated me like a little boy and wanted to get me the best clothes I could have. He said, "I'll take you back to Nuremburg. You know you have to meet General John Van Fleet." He was the Major General that presented me with the Medal of Honor. The company commander took me someplace that they had a clothing store, and he bought me pants. I still had my torn shirt, so I got one. We got into the jeep and he drove the jeep. He was so happy that I was one of his men. And when we got to Nuremburg, all the Colonels were there and I was saluting them. I was afraid, and they said, "Well, how do you feel?" "All right." He said, "Do you care for a drink?" I said, "Drink? Yes, sir. Coca Cola will be all right." He said, "No, no! How about a drink?" I said, "Can I have one?" He said, "Yes!" I was afraid! Then they took me to the Officer's Mess. Oh, I was afraid! In those days we would respect our leaders, our officers; the First Sergeant and everything. Everybody stood at attention and wow! I felt that it was really something that happened to me! They said, "This is nothing. This is the beginning." Mayor La Guardia in New York was waiting for me, and on the ship that brought us back, they didn't know

who I was, and I was sleeping all over the place. Finally, three or four days before we arrived in New York, they started looking for me. They said, "Come here!" They took me to the hospital to sleep there. They gave me steak, they gave me ice cream. Wow! Then when I got into New York they took me to a radio station for me to say something. Then they asked me about this or that, and people were all over me. They wanted to do this or that for me. Then they brought me to San Antonio. In San Antonio, everybody was waiting for me, even the Mayor of the city. As a matter of fact, I was not from San Antonio, they expected Cleto Rodriguez. They moved me from San Antonio to Brownsville. They took me, the Mayor from San Antonio and all the big leaders from the city of San Antonio drove me all the way. I met the Mexican Consul. And they took me all the way from San Antonio to Brownsville to meet my wife. They had a big parade. I sold war bonds, and they gave me some. Then I went to México City with my wife and daughter. She was a little baby, now she's got four kids! Then they wanted to make a movie in México. They thought I had money; they wanted to do this for me and that for me. I was in a hotel, and we were just giving money right and left. I didn't know the future for tomorrow; I was crazy. I was drinking too much and They had a unit called the 201, Mexicans that fought in the Pacific. They came in and they took me to lots of places, they presented me. I was in the city when the Presidente of México City had something for me and one of the heroes in México City, Leonardo C. Ruiz. They took me to lots of shows. Have you been in México City?

J: Yes.

L: I went to where there's a marble building, right by the park. It's

sinking. It's a big building.

J: Bellas Artes?

L: Bellas Artes. Right there, they had the Americans, the British, and the different nationalities, and they brought seven from Oaxaca. Oh, we had a terrific evening. It was packed, the place was packed. I have pictures of them. Then they had a big parade. I went and inspected some of the soldiers they had in México, I ate with them. They had me in the parades. I went to the Virgin of Guadalupe, because I prayed to her many, many times. And I went to Chapultepec and to Xochimilco. They had my name with flowers on one of the boats, "Sargento Jose Mendoza Lopez."

J: Do you think they were very proud of you because you were a mexicano too?

L: Right, right. To the present time, my wife has a piece that says, "El derecho ajeno es la paz," and it's a piece of pure gold. Oh, they were paying for me to stay in the hotel, but as soon as people used to go up there, I just used to give my money to those people. They used to come up and see me in the hotel. Then I took my wife and my daughter in a taxi all the way from México City to Veracruz.

J: Oh, my gosh! (Laughter)

L: What a thrill! Then I went to San Juan de los Lagos. I got back to Texas and I was looking for a job. I had no money. I started spending my war bonds. Then the Congressman from Brownsville got me a job in the Veterans Administration, and I reported to San Antonio. I said, "Well, I don't know what I'll be doing, cleaning the building or what." Next thing I know, I was up in the Post Office.

J: There you go.

- L: Reading books, and who was across from me? Cleto Rodriguez.
- J: Oh, no! (Laughter)
- L: We were reading letters, the Bill of Rights for the benefits for the veterans, the help they needed in the hospital, see that they got good benefits; if they had a 10% disability, and if he was not satisfied and if we felt that he deserved more than than what he was getting, we would go and fight. We'd give them rate and board, and a doctor. I had a good friend, Mrs. _____. She would say, "Joe, you are my boy. You'll go all the way." We did a good job in the VA. Finally she said, "You know, Joe, you should go back in the Army. That's your life." So in 1949 I went back in the Army and enlisted in Fort _____, and they said, "Oh, we know where you want to go, back to the Second Division." So I didn't have a choice, they sent me back to the Second Division. I went from San Antonio; I had a car which I bought for \$150 and I had all my kids and my wife, and every time I passed through a town everybody saw my car. I had pots and pans all over, and my boys will never forget those things! (Laughter)
- J: I'll bet they won't.
- L: They say, "Daddy, I remember when people would come up and look at us." We never made it with the car, it broke down. So I turned it in and got another one with another \$100. So I made it all the way to Fort ^{Lewis} ~~Louis~~, Washington. I arrived there and they put me with the Second Division. They gave me quarters right by the officers. It was something. I had five bedrooms; brand new, beautiful quarters and all my kids were happy there with me. And then what happened?

Korea broke out in 1950. I said, "Honey, don't worry. I don't have to go." I don't have to go? I didn't have a chance to say goodbye to my wife! That was the quickest move. They moved us from Fort ^{Lewis} ~~Louis~~, Washington into Takoma. They had Greyhound buses, and they picked us platoon for platoon. There was an old man that I used to work for, as engineer and electrician. He was very good with me, he loved me, and he cried. We got in the ship; we hadn't been in the ship 20 minutes and the ship was gone, because we had to move; they needed us. We were at full strength. I thought we'd stop in Japan, but no way, we went right on to Korea. And we started right away, they sent us right to the front. And we just left everything. We just picked up fatigues and just what we needed for the front. I had experience already, and the job they gave me, I don't think anybody wanted it. I was on grave registration. I used to pick up the dead people. So when the Chinese were breaking through, they gave orders to go look for the body of General Dean. They thought he was killed.

I can't remember the name of the city--but they took it and we could never get in. How could I be looking for bodies? Anyway, I picked up about 20 or 30, put them in the deuce and a half and brought them back. In no time, we had 500 bodies. My station was where the replacements came. They had the band when they came, and they played for them. They had a cook, clerks, and the main administration for the people coming in, to get their records and everything, and they sent them to different units. Then they were breaking through and they said, "We don't have anybody!" So they got me, they

got the cooks, they got the band, brand new, they got everybody. I was just thinking, "What am I going to do with this small rifle, me a machine gunner?" I picked up as many bandoliers as I could, I put them on my body and here we go. I guess God was with me. The captain said, "What in the hell are you doing up there, Lopez?" I said, "Sir, we've got a job, we have to do it." He said, "You get your you-know-what down here!" He said, "I'll see that you get out of here." And he sent me back; he sent me back to Japan.

J: You have seven lives, all right; I think so!

L: God was with me. And I guess I was happy. They sent me to Japan the rest of the time up there, and then from Japan I went back home to see my wife. She lost weight. Then I guess we just kept moving from place to place. This is why she didn't like the Army, because now she blames me that my kids are spread out. I have two in New York, one in a different place. She just has one daughter with us. She misses the others. Anyway, when I got out I had many people that wanted to do things for me, or for me to do something. Really, I didn't look for my own future because with all those things they gave me, I should never worry about my future with my kids. I didn't have any struggles. But I had to go back in the service because I just threw everything away. I didn't have enough education, the main thing, and this is why with all my heart I want all the younger generations to get as much education as they can. I'm very happy that all my kids did. The one that's married, she didn't finish high school, and now that she has four kids (it was in the paper) she

completed high school. Now she is going to college.

J: Great!

L: She is going to be a registered nurse. And my other daughter, Virginia, she didn't finish the eleventh grade and now she is going to school to finish high school. The other three finished, Johnny, Bibi and Mague, and they are doing very good. My boys have a beautiful future. I went through pretty hard times in the Army. I used to go and get things from the stores on credit and I just barely got enough money to pay all my debts and start all over again. But that's life. As I said, I didn't have any education, I didn't have a budget. That's what happened to lots of people like me, low education. But now since I retired from the Army, I'm taking life easy. I don't work.

J: When did you retire?

L: In 1973.

J: Oh, recently then.

L: I wanted to stay three more years, but they said, "No, you're too old." I'll be 66 next month, I'm 65. General Westmoreland let me stay. I sent him a letter and begged him to let me stay two more years because they had wanted to release me before. I wanted my daughter, my youngest daughter, to finish high school in New York. He said, "Okay, but you'll have to stay three years, not two." Good! That was better for me. So I stayed three more years and it was beautiful. Just before I retired they sent me back to Korea. I had to bring the news to my wife, and I said, "Honey it's something that I have to do. It's my country. I have to do a job." It's up to us, you know, no matter where

you go. It could be Japan, it could be Germany, it could be any country, as long as you are good to the little kids, the youngest. I'll never forget when I used to be in the boondocks. Kids used to walk for miles to go to school. I used to buy candy and I used to give it to them. And you do it one time, and the next time.... If first it was 10, the next time it was 40; and they waited for me! It was against regulations, but nobody would see me, so they were all over me; they hugged me. They didn't understand me, I didn't understand them, but everybody was smiling and they were happy. And I used to take the kids, the mamas and the papas just waved at me. In Japan it was the same way, it was the same way. As I say, if you go to different countries, you should respect the people. That's why I never had any trouble. They loved me, I used to be good with the kids.

J: If you respect them, they respect you.

L: Right. That's what they had, respect for me. But I learned it was best. They will remember the Americans, because they'll say, "Oh, he came and used to bring candy." I don't think I'd be in trouble for doing these things.

J: No, that's great.

L: Because that's how I want those kids to remember us.

J: What was your rank when you retired?

L: Sergeant First Class, E7.

J: Why do you think that as a group more Mexican Americans have gotten the Medal of Honor? Do you have any reason? They have, as a group, gotten more Medals of Honor than any other group in the United States.

L: As I said before, we were taught at the beginning, at training, and we went with our open heart and open mind and obeyed all those rules. We knew what was wrong and what was right. That's the trouble today, that we lost so many in Viet Nam, because we lost discipline; and in those days we had discipline. If we had orders to do something, we'd stay and do it, and that's what I believe. I don't believe they had to be Mexican to accomplish a job, like myself and others. They just happened to be there at the moment, in the place and the time when something like this has happened. From my own experience, when you are afraid, you still know you have to do it. You are afraid that you are going to die, but in your own heart, in your own..... Like me, I was doing things and I was praying. I am a Catholic and I believe in God. Maybe that helped me.

J: Sure.

L: Maybe it's mostly what happened to some of us.

J: While you were in the service, Mr. Lopez, do you feel that you were treated very well in the service?

L: Yes, ma'am.

J: Did you see any discrimination against mexicanos or against blacks in the service at that time?

L: I'll give you one example. We were overseas and there was a man from Louisiana, and he didn't like to hear us speak Spanish. He never said anything to me but he said it to Alberto Hernandez. Alberto, he was... it hurt his feelings every time. Things like these happened and he would tell me. I'm a different guy, I don't take that. I told

him, "Listen, if I have something to say to you, I don't have to say it in Spanish; I can tell it to you in English. And it goes for Alberto. We like to speak Spanish and we are going to speak Spanish. I'm speaking for myself and for the rest of the ones in my unit." When I was in the service, it never was that they didn't let us be with them, or not attend because there were only white people or things like this. I never remember anything like this. We were like one family, as I said before, at the time in Korea. I don't know today how things are, but in my days, when I was in the Army, we used to like each other; no matter if he was Frank, or Jose, Manuel or Kruger. He could be a Russian or he could be a German or he could be Frenchman or Italian. We were all one big family, we liked each other.

J: So you had good experiences.

L: Right.

J: I want to go a little bit back in time. While you were growing up in San Antonio, how were the Mexicans treated then?

L: I would say all the way from Brownsville and all those little towns like Mercedes, as a matter of fact still some of the little towns, they divided the Mexicans and the Americans. And in my days, as a matter of fact they had signs that we couldn't use the latrine, because it was only for white people, and they had other latrines for other people. In the restaurants they wouldn't let Mexicans go in. I never was stopped, this thing never happened to me, but I've seen it, I've seen it. I have seen the signs. As a matter of fact, the buses had it then, "No colored, no Mexicans." I remember in Georgia,

a Negro couldn't go into a restaurant where white people used to eat, or in theatres. They used to have it in San Antonio. They used to go in the back, the colored people. They couldn't get to the front to go inside the movies. These were those things before. I'm very happy that this vanishes day by day.

J: So you think things are changes for the better now?

L: Yes, I do.

J: Do you have any ideas about the Chicano movement, that's going on today? Any comments you would like to make about that?

L: Since I retired from the Army, coming back from Brooklyn when I was stationed at Fort Hamilton, New York, I came to my home in San Antonio, I started listening to those things, "Chicano", Chicano here and Chicano there. I don't put too much attention on the thing, because I believe I'm in this country; I'm eating; I get my bread; I get everything from this country. I've taught my kids to obey the law here in the United States because they are citizens of the United States. They were born here. I believe we should work for things, for our neighbor, to help each other and protect each other, not to fight. Look at the politicians, they are the same way. I believe some people are just looking for something. They can't tell me they are doing it for the other guy or por el pobre mexicano; they are doing it for something, like politicians. A politician is going to help you because he wants your vote. Pobres mexicanos, they don't have the education and that's what happened. All you've seen in the Chicanos, they show as the low minority class. Because you'll find Mexican people that have

already gone through high school, they know better. They know they are citizens of this country and that's what we should look for tomorrow, for education and the betterment of our new generations, the ones that are going to take my place, your place. Look at the cities, how are they growing. We need more doctors, more lawyers, more teachers to teach our kids in school. This is the greatest thing in life.

J: When did you first hear the word Chicano. Do you remember?

L: Only in San Antonio. Yeah, in San Antonio. As a matter of fact, it was on the news the other day that some Chicanos are going to go to México and claim some land from Texas. I don't know how many cars went to México.

J: So you had never heard the word until a few years back.

L: Yes.

J: Is there any thing you'd like to add to this interview?

L: I hope God can help me to express myself, to help other people like me, the low in education, so we can express ourselves, to have communication between each other, and know what's going on in this world. Many people don't read the paper and I think it's wonderful to get down and read what is going on, not only in your neighborhood, but all over. This crime is all over, and those people who are taking dope and stuff like that, that's no good for our children and new kids that are coming up. I'm against that. I thank God that my kids... I hope that he protects them and keeps them away from all this. I want better things for all new kids that are going to high

school.

J: Thank you. It has been a great honor to have this interview with you, and thank you very, very much.

L: It's a pleasure.