

ART OF **LIVING**

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**VISITING THE PAST**



— ODIE ARAMBULA —

**WWII POW torture was a horrid story of survival**

Recent school programs and community tributes to Laredo men and women who are currently serving or who have previously served in the military drew recollections of the horrid experiences of prisoners of war during World War II.

Observances of Veterans Day — previously known as Armistice Day, which marked the end of World War I — highlighted school and college programs last week ahead of the national holiday on Nov. 11. Last week, the lead feature of this newspaper's Art of Living section dealt

with the young men and women who were drafted or volunteered for service after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Some aspects of that fading oral history, however, got lost. For some who came back, theirs were stories of privations, torture and survival in the slave conditions of prison camps.

There were many whose remains were returned to families for military funeral services. Some surviving families received remains of their fallen heroes from foreign burial sites for services here.

While the news desk reviewed segments of World War II materials from books, magazines and newspaper clippings of the 1940s, we learned about local families who had two, three, four, and as many as five sons serving in the different branches of the military during World War II.

Some extended their tours or re-enlisted after the enemy on two fronts — in Germany and in Japan — surrendered. There were some who stuck around long enough to see action in Korea. There were also the memoriam reminders of young Laredo men who lost their lives in combat or at the hands of a ruthless enemy.

A 1943 clipping carried accounts of David, George P. and Juan Ramirez, all sons of Emilia Ramirez. Juan, a member of Martin High School's Class of 1958, served in the Army Signal Corps. George, who dropped out of MHS in 1942, saw combat duty with the U.S. Marines in Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands. David, a Martin graduate of 1943, was an aircraft mechanic with the Army Air Corps.

There were also the three sons of Mr. and Mrs. Andres Sandoval — Pedro, who served aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise carrier; Andres Jr., who trained in the Army Air Corps as an aviation cadet in San Antonio; and Arturo, who was an Army infantryman. The three were graduates of Martin High: Pedro in 1942, Andres, 1940, and Arturo, 1939.

The story of Luis Guerra, one of the five Guerra brothers who served in World War II, spelled out the savage brutality of the Japanese. Luis Guerra's story as a World War II casualty was printed in a Laredo Times front-page story on March 1, 1949.

He died at a slave-labor coal mine in Osaka, Japan, on Sept. 18, 1944. The article carried a picture of **Homero L. Martinez**, a pall-bearer who held the urn with Guerra's remains as the funeral procession departed Guadalupe Church. **Martinez had spent 37 months in Japanese prison camps.**

Readers learned that Luis Guerra and two other Laredoans, Carmen Guerra and Max Offerle, were among the American survivors of the Bataan Death March.

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*A Manageable Feast*

**'T-Day' vets offer advice for a memorable, stress-free holiday**

By **ASHLEY RICHARDS**  
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

Gathering with family and friends to feast for Thanksgiving is a cherished holiday tradition for many, but the cook in charge of preparing the meal is often left with a daunting task.

Turkey, stuffing, casseroles, sweet potatoes and cranberries are just some of the traditional Thanksgiving dishes served; but many hosts also take the initiative to whip up some creative dishes or non-traditional family favorites as they juggle dressing up the dining area and making accommodations for additional guests.

Never fear. The seemingly endless number of tasks to complete for Thanksgiving are not impossible to finish with time to spare, said Veronica Castillon, a

Laredo Independent School District public information officer by day and experienced homemaker by night.

**Head start**

Early preparation is key, Castillon said. "Our time is precious," she said. "I'd rather spend that with the kids."

Although Castillon completes her grocery shopping two weeks before Thanksgiving, it's not too late for others to begin preparing now.

Clear plenty of room in the refrigerator and stock up on all the groceries soon, Castillon said, although some groceries, like certain vegetables and herbs, can be purchased later to ensure freshness.

And to save time in the grocery store, make a list beforehand and try to lay it out in a manner that doesn't send you back and forth across the store. Also

consider buying pre-chopped goods like diced vegetables or herbs, Castillon said, as they can be a big time saver on Thanksgiving Day.

Castillon and Mary Freeman, famous among her friends and family for homemade pecan pies, both recommended preparing some of the side dishes and desserts before family arrives Thanksgiving Day.

Up to about a week before, sweet potato casserole and cornbread can be made and stored in the freezer, then warmed on Thanksgiving, Castillon explained.

Freeman, who makes pecan pies year-round as gifts, said she already has five pies stored in the freezer.

And while preparation work is vital in the weeks preceding Thanksgiving,

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Fresh flowers are part of Veronica Castillon's Thanksgiving decorations.

Photo by Cuate Santos | Laredo Morning Times

**SURFING THE CITY**

**It takes two to tango — and keep a happy household**

It's no surprise that most of my married friends live under the constant stress of trying to juggle family, work and social obligations.

I've noticed that there are some differences in the way couples manage their households. Some are still living in the dark ages where the husband leaves most of the household and family duties to the wife. Personally, I don't see how any woman would marry one of these guys in the first place.

One friend told me, "I didn't know he was so chauvinistic until we started a family."

I told her she should have checked to see if he was a mama's boy. This is usually a telltale sign that he's expecting to marry his mother, a woman who will basi-



— GABRIEL CASTILLO —

cally do everything for him.

Not all men are created equal, though. Times have certainly changed since we were kids. It used to be that dad was the primary breadwinner and mom would stay home to clean, cook and take the kids to school.

Today, "Mr. Mom" shares carpool duty and dressing the kids, not to mention cooking, cleaning the house and still bringing home

at least some of the bacon. The scales have also tipped with a larger percentage of women who bring home a bigger paycheck than the guys. It only makes sense that, with our already hectic lifestyles, couples should make every effort to share the workload to make life easier on each other.

It's like the saying goes, "It takes two to tango." Yet in today's world, it also takes two to pay the bills, shop for groceries, clean the house and raise a family.

**A happy homecoming**

Speaking of happy couples, Adolph and Mary Gutierrez recently opened their beautiful new home in Winfield Estates to announce to a gathering of family

and friends the engagement of their daughter, Katy, to Colin Painter. Sharing the hospitality duties were their other two children, A.J. and Amanda Gutierrez.

The groom-to-be brought little Hayley Painter and his father, Bill, to the family affair.

Four generations of beauties were also on hand to celebrate, beginning with Mary's 95-year-old grandmother, Herlinda Gutierrez; her mother, Nora York; and her daughter, Katy. Herlinda, who resides in San Antonio, lit up the room with her infectious smile and congenial personality.

**Martha and George honored**

Another group of congenial and exuberant guests were in at-

tendance for an elegant brunch honoring Mary Lamar Leyendecker and Tom Gates.

Hosts Anna and John Galo, Arturo N. Benavides Sr., Monica and James Notzon, Fernando A. Salinas and Javier Santos welcomed guests to the Tesoro Club at La Posada Hotel. There we met up with Irma and Vicente Garza, Judy and Carlos Zaffirini, and Marcel and Nora Lee Notzon.

**More marriage**

Already taking the plunge were Rafael Romo and Lisa Gonzalez, who exchanged wedding vows recently at the historic San Agustin Cathedral. The newlyweds were congratulated by their

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## ENGAGEMENT

### Magallanes-Gonzalez



**ARIADNE ALEJANDRA MAGALLANES**

Ariadne Alejandra Magallanes and Jose Baldemar Gonzalez Jr. are excited to announce their engagement and forthcoming marriage.

The bride-to-be is the daughter of the late Agustin Magallanes and Amelia J. Magallanes. Ariadne received a Bachelor of Arts degree in communication from Texas A&M International University, and a Master of Arts degree in communication from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is an instructor at

Laredo Community College.

The groom-to-be is the son of the late Jose Baldemar Gonzalez and Elvia Lina Gonzalez. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing from Texas A&M International University. He is employed as a registered nurse at Doctors Hospital of Laredo.

The couple will exchange wedding vows on Dec. 15 at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. A reception will follow at the Majesty.

taking care of last-minute food dishes and dining area preparations in the hours before the meal is also necessary.

“By the time your guests arrive, you don’t have time to be putting together the green bean casserole,” Freeman said.

“The day before, I set the table,” said Castillon, who decks her home out in fall décor and even sets up tables outside for a pilgrim-style meal.

To further prepare, Castillon lays out platters and serving pieces with labels so she knows where each dish will be placed.

To lighten the load, Castillon and Freeman said they divvy up the duties, asking siblings and other family members to bring side dishes, desserts, disposable cups, ice and drinks.

“If you have people that are traveling from out of town, have them bring sodas and cups,” Castillon advised, since it would be difficult for them to travel with food dishes.

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And for the clean up, “Have everyone chip in, especially those that didn’t bring anything,” Castillon said with a laugh.

Also, be prepared with plenty of aluminum foil and plastic wrap for storing leftovers. Stock the kitchen with storage bags as well, she said, to send guests away with leftovers.

The centerpiece of a traditional Thanksgiving meal is the turkey, and to make it more than just appealing to the eye, Castillon and Freeman recommended ways to ensure you’re serving moist turkey meat.

Castillon’s trick, which she picked up from Yvonne Casso Barrera at local cooking classes, is to marinade and baste the turkey in white wine.

“The result is a very moist turkey that you see on the inside and crispy on the outside,” Castillon said.

The drippings from a white wine turkey also make for flavorful gravy, she said.

Freeman, however, uses a slightly different method to keep the meat moist. Stuffing isn’t a favored dish in her family, so instead of stuffing the turkey with dressing, Freeman stuffs it with chopped apples, celery and a large bottle of Italian salad dressing or marinade.

“Then just dress up the turkey,” Freeman said. “It really makes for a moist turkey.”

Whatever the menu for Thanksgiving may be, early preparation isn’t the only thing that is important — so is cooking a meal that’s enjoyable for the entire crowd.

“What has become our traditional meal at our home is a compilation of favorite recipes that have been picked up ... over the years,” Castillon said. “There’s just a sense of satisfaction when you see somebody sitting around enjoy a meal.”

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Martinez, who was taken prisoner when the Japanese sank the U.S.S. Houston off the coast of Java on June 8, 1942, was the subject of a Mark Peterson story in The Times published Jan. 4, 1998. Martinez talked about how he lost his medals and other mementos of his POW experience as a result of the burglary of his home.

Officials of the Laredo Detachment of the Marine Corps League went to work and arranged to have the mementos restored to Martinez. Marine Brigadier Gen. Fredrick R. Lopez came to Laredo to present Martinez with a case displaying the medals and decorations. The U.S. consul in Nuevo Laredo, Rudy Watkins, was among the more than 300 guests at the Laredo Country Club who gave Martinez a standing ovation.

Among the medals and other decorations that were part of Martinez’s home display were four watercolor paintings portraying the horrors of Japanese POW life.

The 1998 Times story was one of the few times that Martinez agreed to be interviewed about his POW experiences. Peterson wrote, “After more than 50 years, he is still trying to forget the atrocities of the prison camps. He said he still fears hunger and thirst. He weighed 188 pounds when he

was taken prisoner and 93 pounds when he was freed.”

Peterson quoted Martinez as saying that he is unable to understand the cruelties of his prison camp existence, the inhumane way he and the other prisoners were treated by the Japanese.

“Some of the things were just beyond my comprehension,” he said.

He told Peterson that he felt “uncomfortable with the honors he has received and that he realizes that the awards are the community’s way of showing its gratitude for his service.”

“He feels grateful, too. Grateful to the citizens of Laredo for the support they gave his parents while he was a prisoner,” Peterson wrote. “He said he’s trying to pay back this town for all the things people did for his parents while he was lost.”

After the war, Martinez returned home and took a job as a bookkeeper with Killam and Hurd Oil in 1948, and he continued to work for the Killams until he retired. He died at age 83 at his home on Dec. 28, 2000.

In the midst of preparations for the Veterans Day observances, Martinez’s wife, Alicia, arranged for a son, Eduardo, to e-mail copies of the four drawings done by a Japanese-American, Frank

Fujita, who spent time with Martinez in a Japanese prison camp.

Fujita and Martinez were members of the 2nd Battalion 131st Field Artillery of the Texas National Guard. The unit became known in World War II history as The Lost Battalion of the 36th Infantry Division.

During their captivity, they were among the American POWs who were forced to work in railroad construction in Burma.

The story goes that Fujita passed himself off as a Filipino before his captors discovered his ancestry. His book, “Foo: A Japanese-American Prisoner of The Rising Sun – The Secret Prison Diary of Frank Fujita,” details in words and illustrations the daily life of a prisoner of war in the Japanese camps.

Eduardo Martinez said that his father came home after the war with four pieces of Fujita’s artwork that depicted the brutal treatment U.S. and other prisoners had to endure at the hands of the Japanese.

“Fujita was among my father’s best friends through their ordeal in Japanese prison camps until he was moved to Japan to participate in Japanese propaganda campaigns,” Eduardo wrote in his e-mail. “I can’t help but think that my dad would hope they would be

put to good use in preventing future tortures during the war.”

The story goes that the Fujita drawings were smuggled out of the POW camps and were published by leading magazines and newspapers around the world after the war. Ted Koppel interviewed the artist on Nightline, and Fujita was later featured as a former POW on the History Channel.

Eduardo cites one of the Fujita images where Japanese guards inflict “water torture, which is now called by the more subtle term, ‘water boarding.’” This type of torture came to light in recent congressional hearings in connection with Iraqi prisoners held in U.S. facilities abroad.

Peterson wrote, “Martinez does not see himself as a hero. The heroes, he said, are the soldiers who died in combat, the ones who were never able to return to the U.S.”

During one of his final visits to the newsroom before his death in 2000, Martinez, having returned from a visit to the Holy Land, confided that he had finally forgiven his POW tormentors.

“I don’t hate them anymore,” he said. “I am at peace.”

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