Eulogio "Lefty" Soto
World War II Veterans Project
Interviewed July 30, 2009
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Transcript by Stefanie Stallings

Discussion prior to beginning of interview

Eulogio "Lefty" Soto: We played in Tempe. We went to Tempe Beach and played. We went to Coolidge, Casa Grande, and Superior and Miami, Arizona.

Jean Reynolds: Did you ever play against anybody in Phoenix?

ES: No.

JR: So it was kind of like the East Valley?

ES: Yeah, I know, yeah. No.

JR: Yeah. What was your favorite sport to play?

ES: I'd say in high school, it was football. Then, basketball. As short as I was, I still made the varsity. Then, of course, when I came back, I was too old to play, so we couldn't participate in any sports then.

JR: What was it that you liked about football?

ES: I played quarterback.

JR: You were the quarterback?

ES: I played quarterback.

JR: Wow!

ES: I called the signals and I ran with the ball. I handed out too. Football was my favorite actually in high school.

JR: Why did you like it?

ES: I don't know. I used to watch it on TV and on the radio. A lot of it, and football. That's about it. Then Coach Watts was our coach. He was in the Navy. When we were drafted, he went in the Navy and then we came back. Before he went and came back, he said, "Lefty if you come back from the service, go to college and take drafting." He wanted me to be, what is it that makes…?

Earnest Robinson: Drafts man?

JR: Like drafting?

ES: Drafting, for like homes. Mechanical drawings.

JR: Mechanical drawings, like floor plans?

ES: Right.

JR: For the architect?

ES: He says, "You'll make a good one." "Left handed?" I says. He says, "Yeah. We'll look at your writing." He could tell right away. He said, "There's nothing wrong with you. You write better than I do and I write right handed."

JR: So what was it that made you such a good writer?

ES: I have no idea. Because at home, at first, we didn't have a television. All we did was listen to the radio. I used to like to read and write. And that's how I became with my writing. For being right handed usually. He says left-handed writers, sometimes you can't even read their writing. I made sure that my signature was just right.

JR: What were your favorite subjects in high school?

ES: Mathematics.

JR: You like mathematics?

ES: Yeah. I like it. History I didn't care too much for. (Laughs) But, mathematics I did. Like I said, I didn't even get a chance to take Algebra. That would have been my favorite.

ES: When we first came back, when I first started school, we went to that Winn School over there, which was second. First, second and third grade. The fourth grade, they sent us over to Cleveland school, which is Chandler Boulevard now.

JR: So first through third, you went to Winn, right?

ES: Yeah.

JR: Then Fourth through Eighth grade, you were at the Cleveland school?

ES: From there, I went to high school.

JR: Can you tell me about? What it was like to transition from the Winn School to the Cleveland school? Do you remember that?

ES: Yes, it was kind of embarrassing because we still didn't know how to speak that good of English. There we were, mixed. Over there, it was all Mexicans. We were taught not to speak any Spanish, so we could learn it. Every once in a while, we would forget and get mad at each other and start cursing each other.

JR: Well it's your first language. My husband, his first language is Spanish.

ES: Is that right?

JR: Yeah. So he talks to his family in Spanish. And he has a lot of friends that he speaks Spanish with. He can just switch back and forth whenever he needs to.

ES: My wife, after I came back from the service, they went back to school and she was in my class. We were just friends. We double dated with her cousin and a friend of mine. They had been going steady before World War II. We came back and we double dated one time with them. We got married before they did. In fact, they were in the wedding party there.

ES: They live in Casa Grande now.

Interview begins

JR: Well let's start. We'll do a little bit of family history. I'll ask you the questions. We're just gonna talk about your early experience, growing up in Chandler, before, and then most of the interview is going to be about your military service. So that's what we are going to be focusing on. Let's start with your parents. What were your parent's names and where were they from?

ES: My parent's names were Jose and Guadalupe Soto. S-O-T-O. And at the time, they had been married. Like I said, they came from Mexico, November 3rd, 1919. They started working for Mr. Dobson. I wasn't born. They had been married a year and half in Mexico. I wasn't born until 1924. They came 1919 and I was born 1924.

JR: Which part of Mexico where they from?

ES: Sonora.

JR: So one of the towns in Sonora.

ES: Then in nineteen, I forgot what year it was, but my grandpa was a carpenter and blacksmith man. You name it and he could do it. He used to cut hair around the Mexican towns. People that couldn't afford to pay a dollar and half, he'd do it for 25 cents. But, he did all that. Let me tell you another thing, too. When we were

living in Glendale, Arizona, my mother passed away when I was five and half. My sister, she's married to Roy Buelna now. She's eighty. Let's see, I'll be eighty-five on November 17 of this year. She'll be 83 and a half. We're still living here. My Mom and Dad died when they were really young.

JR: So your parents came with your grandparents, right?

ES: Yes.

JR: 1919?

ES: Yes.

JR: They came straight from Mexico to Arizona?

ES: To the Dobson Ranch there.

JR: Now tell me your grandparent's names? What were their names?

ES: My Grandpa was Pedro R. Montoya. My Grandma was Luisa Montoya. Marquez Montoya.

JR: Do you know what it was that brought them to Dobson Ranch? Why did they choose that area?

ES: In those days, they were getting people after World War I that wanted people to come and help them with farm work and stuff like that. That's how they got here.

JR: So they were kind of recruited?

ES: Yes.

JR: Because the Revolution was just about done by that time in Mexico.

ES: Yes, right.

JR: What kind of work did your father do? You talked about work and that your Grandfather was a blacksmith. What did your father do?

ES: Before they got tractors, they used to use horses to get the farm work done. Then they got tractors. Then, he started driving tractors. We lived there for about, I think, when we were eight years old. That's when my grandpa built that house. We have a house that they built on Hidalgo Street. 381 South Hidalgo Street.

JR: So you were about eight years old at that time?

ES: Yes.

JR: That was probably about 1932 or so?

ES: Something like that, yeah.
JR: So you were born on January 19th, 1924. Is that correct?

ES: November 17th, 1924.

JR: Oh, I wrote down the wrong date.

ES: I'll be eighty-five. (Laughs) This October, I mean November.

JR: Where were you born at?

ES: They tell me that it was in Tempe at some kind of a clinic. But I don't know, it was in Tempe. Then I was baptized at the chapel that they have at ASU.

JR: Mm-mm. Oh, okay.

ES: That little old chapel.

JR: Ok, I think at that time, that was probably all we…

ES: We didn't have a church here in Chandler either then.

JR: That was part of that San Pablo settlement, right?

ES: Yes.

JR: In Tempe?

ES: Yep, right.

JR: So you were born in a clinic in Tempe?

ES: Mm-mm. They didn't have any hospitals, in those days.

JR: Right. Do you have siblings?

ES: Yeah.

JR: Who are they? What's their names?

ES: The oldest one is Delores Ferguson. The next one is Mary Helen. She's the one that's living here with me. She's got two kids that's living here with me too. Our son, his name is Edward Soto. He's a barber over in May's over in Tempe.

JR: That's your son?

ES: Yeah. Edward.

JR: So you had two sisters?

ES: No, one sister.

JR: One sister. So just Mary Helen is your sister?

ES: No, that's my daughter.

JR: Oh, ok.

ES: Mary Helen is a daughter. Cecelia is the youngest one.

JR: So those are your children?

ES: Yeah.

JR: Your children are Delores, Mary Helen, Edward and Cecilia.

ES: Cecilia Oswald.

JR: Do you have brothers and sisters?

ES: Yeah, but I don't remember what their names are. They're over in Telis and some place. These are half brothers and sisters because my Dad came and asked my grandma if it was all right. She says, "Hey you're too young, son you go, you have my permission to go get married again."

JR: Because you mom, your mom died you said (when you were?)

ES: Five, five and a half.

JR: You said you were five. So there weren't any other children?

ES: Yeah, my other sister. That's still living. She's married to Roy Buelna.

JR: Ok. And what's your sister's name?

ES: Estella.

JR: Estella?

ES: E-S-T-E-Double L-A. Buelna
JR: Buelna. Ok. Estella Buelna.

JR: And she's married to?

ES: Roy Buelna

JR: Roy Buelna. Ok. Was Estella older than you?

ES: No, younger.

JR: Younger, younger. If you were born in 1924, what year was she born in?

ES: She was born in 1926 or 7. I can't remember. I think it's 1927. If not, I'll call you later and give you the- [correct date]

JR: Now you grew up at 381 South Hidalgo. Is that correct?

ES: That's where we moved in from the Dobson Road. My grandpa built that three-bedroom house there. Then he built a shed for four more beds in the back. In those days, we didn't even have running water. We had a canal going in front of our area. Later on, we got water and sewer. We had to have an outhouse back there until we got that. Then when he built the house, we got a toilet in the back with two seats.

JR: What other families were living next to you over there?

ES: There was a lot. The Rosales family was. I can't remember some of those people, but we were all Mexican.

JR: Rosales?

ES: Yeah, but there was, I'd say at least eleven or twelve homes.

JR: You said, when you started first grade at Winn School, you were already ten years old?

ES: Yeah.

JR: Is that correct? Then you were at the Winn School for first through third grade?

ES: Mm-mm.

JR: Can you describe the Winn School for me?

ES: Yeah, well, it was just a classroom with about thirty, maybe twenty-five or thirty chairs and desks. We'd go in the morning, we'd have a little recess. Go to the bathroom, then bring it back. Then at noon, they'd give us an hour for lunch. We had to take our own lunch because they didn't have any cafeterias or anything there. Then, we'd go to school until 3:30 pm. I had to walk from Hidalgo Street all the way across the railroad track to the Winn School.

JR: That was quite a distance.

ES: Oh, yeah. But, like I said, maybe that's why I've been so lucky to be around. All that walking that I did with the Infantry and then come in carry the mail.

JR: Yeah, we'll talk a little bit more about that. So, at the Winn School, were the grades one to three all in the same classroom?

ES: No.

JR: Or were they separate?

ES: There were four rooms: two on this side and two. There was a hallway. It was where we could hang out coats or sweaters, whatever we had. And if we had a lunch, we could put a lunch up there on top, too. We had lockers.

JR: What is your memory about the quality of education that you received at Winn School?

ES: I thought it was real good, very good. I'd say, they would not allow us to speak Spanish anyway. So, we had to speak English. Aside from the teachers, they had a couple of aides there. That made sure we would speak English instead of Spanish.

JR: What would happen if you spoke Spanish?

ES: We would sit down over there. You can't play until you go back and don't do it again.

JR: Was that difficult?

ES: It helped a lot.

JR: Was it difficult?

ES: No, not really. They weren't mean about it. They were just, "We're doing if for your own selves." I'm glad they did. Now, my Spanish is the one that suffers because my kids, none of them speak Spanish. My wife and I used to speak Spanish when we didn't want them to know what we were saying. It worked, like

I said, none of them. The daughter that lives here with me, nothing. I can say something in Spanish and she won't know what I'm saying.

JR: Do you remember any of the teachers at Winn School?

ES: No.

JR: You don't remember anybody. Any of the teachers?

ES: Wait a minute. I can't remember to tell you the truth.

JR: Were any of the teachers Hispanic?

ES: No.

JR: When you got into fourth grade, you got into Cleveland School. Right?

ES: Yeah. The Cleveland School.

JR: And they integrated you with the other children.

ES: With the others. We still spoke Spanish outside when we could get away with it.

JR: What was it like to make that transition from Winn School to Cleveland School?

ES: Well, I thought it was going to be hard. But it wasn't. By then, I was going to school there and I got me a shoeshine box. I used to shine shoes downtown. People would come in. We had our own favorite customers that used to come in and get their shoes shined with us. So they'd give us fifteen or twenty cents.

JR: Where did you set up your box at?

ES: One of those that would could carry and go in front of the stores there. The stores never minded. They never complained about shining shoes. In fact, some of them would have their shoes shined with us, too.

JR: Did you have people from the San Marcos Hotel?

ES: No. We didn't.

JR: Shoe Shine?

ES: No. But I knew the Quartys. I knew the family. I met them because they used to go to our church.

JR: Now, once you graduated from eighth grade, then you went to Chandler High School?

ES: Chandler High School.

JR: So, you're in Chandler in 1940?

ES: Right.

JR: So what was it you we're doing before the war started?

ES: Before the war started, after I gave up my shoeshine, I worked for George Y. Wah. It used to be a Chinese-owned store, right across from Bashas'.

JR: On Boston.

ES: Right across from Bashas'. I would go to school and then after school, I would go over there and refill the shelves with canned goods for them. I never did any carry out for them. Mr. Basha, Ike Basha saw me one time. He says, "By the way," he says, "How much are they paying over there?" I says, "Forty-five cents an hour." He said, "If I give you sixty-five, would you come to work for me?" So, I went to work for him, restocking the shelves after football practice and basketball practice. I worked for Mr. Basha, Ike Basha about five years. Then, like I said, I was called to the service. I was drafted right after my sophomore year in high school because I was two years behind.

JR: So how old we're you when you were drafted?

ES: Because we had to register. At a certain age you had to.

JR: Right.

ES: And at a certain age, you had to.

JR: So were you 18 at that time?

ES: So, they called me. I went and took my physical and I passed it. I took my basic training. They sent me California. From there, they sent me to Camp Grubber, Oklahoma and I took my basic training there, which was six and a half months. Then, they sent me to California. Then, from there, they sent me to New Guinea after my advanced training. I had six weeks of advanced training and then they sent me to New Guinea. There, the Thirty-third Infantry Division was there. And I was picked up from the Thirty-fourth. The Thirty-third Infantry Division sent me to New Guinea there. I went to war with them right there.

JR: Let me back track just a little bit. And then we'll go more into that. We'll go back a little bit. Think back a little bit, to December 7, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Do you remember where you were when you heard about that?

ES: Yes, I remember. We were at the Rowena Theater on Boston Street there. They interrupted it. They said it had been attacked at, Pearl Harbor. December 7th. I remember President Roosevelt saying, "December 7th, Nineteen hundred and thirty- forty- thirty- forty-seven."

JR: 1941.

ES: 1941. They interrupted the movie. From then on, I just left. I didn't stay to watch the rest of the movie.

JR: How did you feel?

ES: Like I said, I tried to volunteer. They wouldn't take me. So I waited until they drafted me.

JR: But you were ready to go?

ES: Oh yeah! My grandma wasn't ready to let us go because my uncle had already gone. They sent him to Europe. We were just about eight months difference. He came back and he didn't go back to school. But I did because I wanted to finish. I wanted to finish high school and go to college. Like I said, instead I ended up getting married.

JR: Who was your uncle?

ES: Uncle Reynaldo Montoya.

JR: Reynaldo Montoya. Okay.

ES: It was from the Montoya family. My grandparents.

JR: And he served in Europe?

ES: He served in the Infantry but I don't remember what unit he was with. But, he was also in the Infantry. I think most of us Mexicans were put in the infantry because we didn't have the knowledge to put us in the quartermaster. I knew that's why they sent us, too, because a lot of the ones we had in the infantry were Mexicans.

JR: Was it all? Was there a lot of Mexicans? Was it a big mixture of people?

ES: Yes, it was. There was a mixture. But the Thirty-third Infantry Division didn't have a lot of Mexicans. So that helped me, too, with my English. Thank god for that.

JR: Ok. So you were drafted your sophomore year?

ES: Yeah.

JR: Your branch you said you served was the Army?

ES: Yeah.

JR: And you were in the 136th Infantry Regiment?

ES: Right. Battery A. Company A. Battery is Artillery. Infantry is the company. Company A, 136th Infantry.

JR: I was looking at your papers here and it says you entered Services on July 30, 1943. Which is kind of interesting, because today is July 30th.

ES: I'll be darned, that's right isn't it.

JR: Yeah. It's kind of an interesting coincidence.

ES: I hadn't noticed that.

JR: Yeah.

ES: Remember I didn't know what date it was.

JR: So uh, where did you enter service at?

ES: Like I said, they sent us to California. I think it was Fort Orin, California. Yeah. Then from there, that's where I took my advanced training. Then from there, they sent us to New Guinea. That's where I joined the Thirty-third Infantry Division. The island, no barracks, no nothing. We slept in tents, and sometimes, if it rained too hard, we didn't even put up our tents. We just threw the tents over us. You're moving every night. You move at night, so that nobody can contact you.

JR: Right. What was your military specialty?

ES: Just Infantry, rifleman.

JR: Were you a good shot?

ES: Well, yeah.

JR: Well, because you had all those athletic skills, I wondered if that transferred over?

ES: Yeah, rifleman. The others had machine guns and rifle and mortars, too. You know what a mortar is? You put it in and "Pacchhh."

JR: Yeah.

ES: I was a rifleman. Those are the ones who are in the front. The ones behind us, to protect them and to protect the rest of the units.

JR: How did you feel about being a rifleman?

ES: I likes it.

JR: What was it you liked about it?

ES: Firing the rifle! (laughs) Yeah. I don't know about many I killed or hit. But I know I used it quite a bit. I used to carry our ammunition in our fatigues with the big pockets. If we ran out of ammo, we had to go to the back and get some.

JR: Can you describe a little bit more about what it was like to be on New Guinea?

ES: Well, New Guinea. From there, we went to the Philippine Islands. I was in Luzon, Philippine Islands when the war ended. They gave us a tour of it before we got real involved. They took us to one of the Catholic churches there. It was just real bombed down. They were rebuilding it by time we got there. The churches were so big. We would go in with the civilians there. They treated us real nice. They bow to us. I says, "You don't have to do that." No. But we were protecting their land.

JR: Do you remember what the date was when you actually came to New Guinea?

ES: No.

JR: Was it in 1943 or 1944?

ES: No, it had to be 1943 because from there, like I said, we went to New Guinea. That's where I joined the 136th Infantry Division there. And my memory…

JR: That's ok. How long were you on New Guinea for? Do you remember how long it was?

ES: In New Guinea?

JR: How long?

ES: Just about three or four weeks until they found a unit that needed us. Then from there, we went to the Philippines.

JR: Do you remember what it was like traveling from New Guinea to the Philippine Islands?

ES: No, because we boated in at night. Everything was dark. We couldn't even open up the windows to look out side. I can't remember. The ships were real slow in getting there because they were going like this. They don't go straight because the planes can get you. Bombers. Anyway, New Guinea.

JR: You were talking about the trip over on the boat at night. You were going to the Philippines. You said the boat was kind of weaving back because of the…

ES: We got there. Then from there, we got a little bit better until we hit. When we went there, we end up in Luzon in the Philippine Islands.

JR: Can you tell me what you thought about Luzon when you arrived there?

ES: It was real poor. The Japanese had bombed them, too. Some of their churches. The churches were bombed. The Catholic Churches. All other big buildings because the Japanese went in there and bombed the Philippine islands. That's how come we ended up going over there, too. And what else?

JR: Were you involved in any invasions?

ES: Just the one going into the Philippines. Like I said, I was there maybe about 6 months. Then we were sent to Kyoto, Japan for Army of Occupation. The people there treated us real nice. We felt so sorry for them because all their buildings were bombed. The barracks that we went to, had never been bombed. There were Japanese barracks that they had.

JR: Can you describe Kyoto?

ES: It was a big city. But you know what? It was bombed. I may have some pictures there that I'll show you later. It was really bombed real bad. But the people treated us real nice; they even bowed heads. You don't have to do that, you know. If they had a big Catholic Church there and I didn't think they had any Catholics there, they we went to mass there. They all were real nice people. Big Catholic Church. They started giving us a big Mass and then for them. So, they could do it in their language.

JR: Mmm. That's interesting. Now when you were on Luzon?

ES: Uh-ah

JR: Can you describe what it was like being part of that battlefront on Luzon? Were you ever under enemy fire?

ES: Oh, yeah!

JR: Like what was the experience? Can you describe that a little bit?

ES: Like Infantry, you're out there in the open. You hear bullets going here or they hit a tree or something like that. All you have to do, you're almost always on the ground with a rifle like that. You don't stand up too much unless you're behind a tree or something like that. But the trees weren't very wide, but it's the Infantry where the people suffer the most actually. When you start out, you go out like this and so many apart like that. And you're moving forward. And you're moving all and sometimes you get to go like that. Where the land or water comes out like that. So and then you have to go over it again somewhat. But there in those jungles, it rains so much every night or every day actually.

JR: Going back to Luzon, you talked to about what it was like being in the jungle and being part of the infantry. What were some of the hardships you encountered while you were there in the jungle?

ES: I guess, the heat. The heat was one of them and it's wet. You sweat so much in the Philippines. It was so hot. You have to wear the fatigues and they're heavy to begin with. Then you're carrying your pack in the back and your rifle and ammunition. That was a hardship right there in itself. Just carry the ammunition. Then, you got those combat boots, too. They are heavy- but thank God for the-snakes. With these, they could get you. But with the combat boots that go up to here, they did that for our protection, too. Other than that it was just a jungle really. That's all it is.

JR: Was it frightening? Did you have any kind of emotions about being in the Infantry and being on the front line like that?

ES: No, but I was scared all the time. I prayed more then, than I ever do now. I think.

JR: Were you ever captured?

ES: Nope.

JR: Did you ever capture anyone?

ES: No.

JR: What did you think about your commanding officer?

ES: He was a fine man, a real nice man. I got see him one more time because, like I said, my wife flew back. We got to fly back to Illinois for a convention that they had. They hold their convention in Wisconsin. So we went a couple of times, my wife and I because we had some friends over there, too, in Quincy, Illinois. They would come spend the winter in Chandler. We would go to our church. We would go out to eat. We ate most of the time when they were here.

JR: What do you remember about the men that you served with?

ES: The men that we served with, they were all real nice people. In fact, when I first got there, I was one of the first, the only Mexican in company A. Then, we got about seven or more later before we went to the Philippine Islands, when the war ended. Then from there, like I said, I ended up in Kyoto, Japan for four and a half months. I was sent home. Maybe three or four days, then I went back to school. The government was paying us $47 dollars a month for going to high school. That was a lot of money in those days.

JR: When you were in Luzon, were you wounded at all?

ES: No.

JR: You never were wounded though?

ES: No.

JR: You never were wounded even though you were on the front line? Wow.

ES: No, thank God.

JR: Did you see other men in your company get wounded?

ES: I had three friends that were killed. See, when in the Infantry, you lay down. Like a wall, but you're separated like that. They were shot. They were out in the open when they killed them. You get behind a tree or something like that. The trees were that wide. Jungles, that's all it is, jungles. No trails at all. Hardly any trails at all.

JR: How did you feel about the people you were fighting?

ES: Well then, when we were fighting, we didn't like them. But, like I said, when we got back, when we got to Japan, they were so, so nice. They even bowed at us and all that. They didn't have to do that. Even in church. I didn't know we had that many Catholic Philippines in there. But our church, it wasn't as big as the ones they had over there. And Molina.

JR: What were some of your strongest memories of your experiences during the war? What memory stands out the most about being in the war?

ES: I try not to think of any of them. But, I remember the ones, friends that were killed. They were real good friends. I contacted some of their families when we got home and wrote them because I had their addresses. They were so nice to return my note, saying, "We thank God that the good Lord brought you back." Things like that. Very religious people. Not all Catholics. But, we were all there. Catholic, Mormons and all of them. But we were and anything else. That picture right there, you can look at it.

JR: Now on V-E Day when Germany surrendered, were you in the Philippines at that time?

ES: I was still in the service at that time. This uncle of mine at this time. I got there in the morning. In the afternoon, he came in from Europe. He was in the Infantry, also, but he got wounded. But, he was not supposed to get married. He got married and had one kid and he died when the little girl was four months old. He was not supposed to. He got wounded somewhere. In other words, he was not supposed, but he didn't tell anybody. They found out later.

JR: So he was very young?

ES: He was just about a year and half older than me. He had finished high school. But I left right after my sophomore year.

JR: Then where were you on V-J Day?

ES: V-J Day, I was still in the service.

JR: So you were in the Philippines still?

ES: No, we were in Kyoto, Japan because I went there for four and half months, then I was sent home. I was home three or four days and then I went back to school. That's how come I graduated with the class of 1945 with Corley Haggerton.

JR: Do you remember how you felt when they announced that the war was over?

ES: Oh God, I never drank, but I drank that day. We had free beer and pop, but I drank beer. And now I don't care for beer. I'll eat and I'll drink a couple of Margaritas and that's it. But I've never been a heavy drinker or anything.

JR: When did you return to the U.S.?

ES: Uh, I'll have to look. I think it's in my discharge.

JR: I have it right here. I can go ahead and read that for you. Just for the record, that's January 29, 1946. That's when you were discharged.

ES: I was home for two or three days, then I went back to high school.

JR: How did that feel going back to high school?

ES: It felt good, like I said, we were getting $47 a month for going to high school. We could eat at the cafeteria. But you know what? I still went home all the way down the street, came and ran back. Then went home to eat lunch over at, and it was a long ways in those days, but there wasn't any building or nothing. You could just go across the street from the high school.

JR: What medals or honors did you earn as part of your service?

ES: Well you get the uh…

JR: I think it says here that you received the American Campaign Medal. The Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal. The Philippine Liberation Medal. The Good Conduct Medal. And World War II victory medal. Then, you got the Bronze Star.

ES: My Bronze Star. When I left they told me, "You've been turned in for the Bronze Star." I said, "What did I do?" You know when I got it? Ten years later. I got some articles there that were in The Chandler Arizonan. You might want to look at them and see. But that's what. Like I said, Raul Navarrete. He's a good friend of ours. He was our softball manager for the Hay Bailers. He got me in the National Guard, too. So when I went to Fort Huachuca, he found out that I had gotten a Bronze Star because I didn't tell anybody. But Henry, my friend from Casa Grande, that was in our wedding party, he told him that I had gotten a Bronze Star. Well, he came here and he talked my wife into giving him my Bronze star and had it presented to me at Fort Huachuca. He says, "If you are in the military, in active military duty, it's supposed to be presented to you." So that's what he did. I says, "I've already got one." He says, "Oh no, this is yours. Your wife gave it to me to bring it to you." Oh no, I got mad at my wife and said, "Honey, you weren't supposed to do that." She said, "He told me he was your Commanding Officer because if you were active duty at that time, it's supposed to be presented to you." So you should have seen the people looking at my Bronze Star. I says, "Let me put it on the table so you guys can look at it." So, I put it there in the kitchen and you guys look at it. When we get through, I'll take it back and put it up. But they had never seen a Bronze Star. I hadn't either.

JR: How did you feel about getting that?

ES: I don't know. It's just, I'm not any more of a hero than the others, you know? Why did I get it? I don't remember why. I have no idea. Maybe because they felt sorry for me. That's the only other thing that I can think of. Because all the others, and not all of them got the Bronze Star. So, I was one of the lucky ones.

We didn't have too many Mexicans in our unit, especially Battery Company A. It was only six or seven I think, with me. But those were replacing some of the others after they were killed. You know, I didn't speak to them. My Spanish wasn't that good, either. Like I said, we went to two reunions over there. At the reunions, I was the only Mexican there. We flew a couple of times. We went to Illinois for the reunion. The reunions are held in Wisconsin. From there, I went to see the University of Norte Dame. That was one of my favorite football teams. I got a tour of the university. And the football field where some of my heroes played football. And my wife got to go with me too.

JR: Who are some of your football heroes?

ES: Well, all the ones from Notre Dame. I can't even remember their names. I've forgotten some of them.

JR: So you came back and right away you went back to school. You graduated from high school in 1945 you said?

ES: Yeah.

JR: And what did you do after that after you graduated from high school?

ES: After I graduated from high school, I went to work for the local newspaper, the *Chandler Arizonan*. I was doing their sports for the high school. Then Mr. Williams says, "Lefty, you take care of the account." Because I took care of book keeping in school. "You take care of the money, I'll take care of the sports," Mr. Lynn Williams said. So I did that for about three months. Then Father Patterson from the old church went to the Valley National Bank to make a deposit for the church. He says, "You know what? I have the church account, my personal account and the farm account, which is in Gilbert." But I've never seen a Mexican working here. He says, "Well nobody ever applied." "If I get you one, will you at least interview him?" So from there, he went to Mr. Williams. Mr. Williams says, "Lefty, go. And if they take you, I'll let you go." Well, they knew me because I used to take the deposits over there. I wasn't there five minutes he says, "Can you come in Monday?" It was a Friday. "Can you come in Monday and start with us." So I went and told him. Oh my God, they couldn't believe it that they took me. Mr. Barman knew me, Jimmy David, the assistant manager. And I worked for the Valley National Bank for three and half years.

JR: What were you doing at the bank?

ES: Teller, I was a teller at the Valley National Bank.

(Pause in recording to change tape)

JR: Ok, so going back to the Valley National Bank. You worked as a teller there?

ES: Yeah.

JR: How did you feel about getting that job?

ES: I felt good. I thought, "Oh boy!" But at the time, banks didn't pay very much while I was working there. Navarrete, I and eight Anglos. Ten took the test for the Post office and the two Mexicans and the one Anglo passed it. Ron Everett, the other Mexican. But he had a job at the Williams Air Force Base. He says, "Lefty you take it, I got a job." That how I became one of the first letter carriers in town. I carried the other side of Arizona Avenue to the 800 block on…

JR: So you were the west side or the east side?

ES: The east side, I took the east side. I went Arizona Avenue when back on Washington Street. I went back on Colorado and Delaware wasn't even finished yet. I had a home on Delaware where the post office is now. My grandma bought that lot for me while I was overseas. I was sending my allotment to them to buy groceries. I told them while before I left. You know what she did? She put it in a postal saving. I got money enough out of there to buy that lot for $400 on Delaware Street. And the rest of it, put it in a postal savings. When I got back, I had over like $1300 in savings, in postal savings. I was saving that money for them to use in groceries or something. And she saved it for me.

JR: And bought that lot.

ES: I had a house built there by Joe Martinez. It was an adobe house. It was only a two-bedroom house. We lived there for about five and a half years until the kids started coming. So we bought this house here and I had it built.

JR: When did you have it built the adobe house?

ES: The adobe house?

JR: What year?

ES: The adobe house was built after I came back from the service.

JR: Ok. So was it after 1945?

ES: Oh not only that, the house was built, and we had it furnished. No. We got married and moved into the house. We were living in a condo first, then we had that house built. No, it was already built before we went home. Before we got married, we had that refrigerator. A washer, not a dishwasher, but a washing machine, and a cooler. No refrigeration cooler. The back yard was way over behind it. Doctor Gilbert lived in one of the houses on Colorado Street. Joe Ryan

came from back east and he moved into one of those little apartments there. And from there we walked to church.

JR: Which was very close.

ES: Which was in the old one, there on Colorado Street.

JR: So which year was that when you moved into the house? Was it 1947 or 1948 or what year?

ES: It had to be right when I came back from the service.

JR: Ok.

ES: But if I remember correctly, we had it already built when I left. Because when we left, we left a key to the house for her mother and we had an old car. They had gotten a brand new Buick. But just three months and a half, just before we were married and when we went over to hand them the keys, they handed us the new keys to the car for us for our honeymoon. A Buick, brand new one. So when we came back, we went to Nogales and Tucson spent most of the time in Tucson. Two weeks and came back. She says, "Let's go to the house. I need to freshen up before we go the grocery store." We had given them the keys and we were supposed to go buy groceries. When we opened the refrigerator, there was milk, butter, you name it. Meat and stuff like that. And the freezer was, food in there. And the cabinet, where we kept our groceries. The canned goods. Was full of groceries too. I says, "Oh my god." Her mother and dad bought us groceries. So we didn't have to buy any groceries when we got home.

JR: What year were you married?

ES: In 1949.

JR: 1949. What was your wife's name?

ES: Josephine.

JR: Her maiden name?

ES: Noriega.

JR: Noriega. Is she from Chandler?

ES: She was born in Phoenix. When her parents moved over here, she moved with them.

JR: And you met her in high school?

ES: We were just classmates. We never dated or anything. But, like I said, this friend of mine that were in my wedding party there and his wife, were going steady before we got married. We double dated with them one time. We got married before they did. They were in our wedding party and they live in Tucson now. Not Tucson, Casa Grande. He's a meat cutter. He worked for Bashas'.

JR: So you two were married in 1949. You moved into that little adobe house over on Delaware?

ES: 180 North Delaware.

JR: 180 North Delaware. So it was north of Chandler Boulevard?

ES: Right there where the railroad track is. Facing the railroad track.

JR: Is the house still there?

ES: No.

JR: No.

ES: That's where the post office is now.

JR: What year was it that you came to this house now?

ES: I think it was in 1953 when the kids started coming. We had two kids then and we moved to here. We had three daughters and a son. The daughter Mary Ellen, lives with me here. But she works over off of Elliot and Arizona Avenue. Some office and computer work.

JR: Was the house already built when you moved here?

ES: No, we had it built.

JR: Ok.

ES: We had it built. It's a three-bedroom house with a bath and a half. Kitchen. We got that fence in the back. And a swimming pool in the back too.

JR: Who built the house?

ES: I can't remember.

JR: But you hired a company?

ES: Yeah, they were doing these houses. All these houses built and we liked this one or she did.

JR: It was a developer developing the area.

ES: Yeah. There was nothing there, but those apartments. The church was there.

JR: Do you remember the name of the subdivision for this area?

ES: No. I can't remember.

JR: Tell me a little bit more about being a mail carrier. Can you describe what your job was like?

ES: It was real nice and I liked it. I knew a lot of people since I was born here. I carried twice a day for a long time there. We carried all the way to the 800 block on Washington, go back on Colorado Street and Delaware wasn't completely finished then. So I would eat lunch and I would go and pick up the mail. The post office was over on Boston Street. I bet it wasn't half as big, maybe the length of it was. It was real small. We had mailboxes, too. In fact, we had a mailbox, post office box 443A.

JR: Was that when the post office was on West Boston Street?

ES: On the corner on Boston.

JR: What did it look like inside the post office?

ES: Not real bad. It was so small. Then we moved across the street to across from San Marcos.

JR: To Buffalo?

ES: Yeah, Buffalo. Then we were there. That's where I retired from. Then, I went to work for the National Guard because Brown Everett knew I worked for the bank. They wanted people to do some bookwork, you know. So, they hired me full time. All together I spent twenty-nice and a half years with the Arizona National Guard. I ended up with thirty-three years in military service for the National Guard and regular Army.

JR: When did you join the National Guard?

ES: When I was working for the post office.

JR: So was this in the 1950s or when was it?

ES: It had to be at the 1950s. I was working for the post office.

JR: Do you remember what year it was you started working at the post office?

ES: Nineteen forty-nine, or something like that.

JR: Around the time you got married or something like that?

ES: I still worked like I said with the post office. I mean, the bank. Then, I took the post office test. I went to work with the post office. And I went to work for the post office. I ended up with, I don't know how many years I worked there. But I ended up with twenty-nine years with the Arizona National Guard.

JR: We're almost done. We're almost done, Lefty. You and your wife had four children right? And you had almost over fifty years here on Flint?

ES: Oh yeah, I would say we've been here almost fifty or fifty-three years.

JR: Yeah, it's a long time to be in one place. Thinking back to when you came back from the war. Then, you got married and were living in the area. How do you think Chandler was impacted by World War II?

ES: Well, Williams Air Force Base. You know that helped a lot of people. There's some people that were Williams Air Force Base that are living here, but I can't remember their names. They moved back from back east. When they were drafted, too, they went to Williams Air Force Base. So with the post office job, there was two Mexicans and eight Anglos that took the test, but two Mexicans and one Anglo passed the test. So, Raul says, "You take it." I got one and that's it.

JR: So a lot of people were getting employment sounds like, at the base. The base was also drawing people into Chandler. So Chandler started to grow a little bit.

ES: Oh yeah. There's people that I know that were at Williams Air Force base that lived in Tempe. They moved here just two years ago. And they called on the phone because I think I'm listed in the phone as E. M. Lefty Soto. So they contacted me.

JR: Did you know anyone in Chandler that lost his life during the war? Who died during the war? Anybody from Chandler?

ES: Yeah, by looking at the thing, they had down there. The Veterans' [billboard].

JR: Did you know any of them?

ES: Oh yeah, I knew some of them. But I can't remember their names.

JR: If you had a photo or something?

ES: Yeah.

JR: Do you feel that your service in World War II affected the rest of your life?

ES: Mmm, no, I don't think so. It made me stronger because I was afraid to do anything you know. After I came back, I was even afraid to start driving. Yep.

JR: So it sounds like you had more confidence.

ES: But like I said, I don't think I deserved that Bronze Star. Like they told me before I left, "You're going to get the Bronze Star." I didn't get it 'til ten years. There some articles there I'm gonna show you. You can look at them because I was really surprised. There was people there who were more qualified to get it than I was. I don't consider myself a hero.

JR: What lessons did you learn from your time in World War II?

ES: To be strong. I guess that's when I felt like, I got to do something. Like I said, I started working for the *Chandler Arizonan*, the bank and I took the test for the post office. I thought maybe someone else could have gotten the job besides me.

JR: Another question what lessons for today's generation would you like to pass on?

ES: You know, I don't know. I have no idea; I have no idea what I would. Like I said, I don't consider myself a hero or above anybody else. You know so? I wouldn't have any advice except to be yourself. And that's it. You know? Even after when Raul got the Bronze Star, everyone wanted to look at it. I took it off and I put it [away.] You guys can look at it. I'm not gonna leave it on my uniform. But I do have a uniform there with all my, all my, I'll show you. You got time?

END OF INTERVIEW