

Transcription: José Botello

Good morning. Today is Friday, August 23, 2013. My name is James Crabtree, and today I'm interviewing Mr. José Botello. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Botello is at his home in San Antonio. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.

José Botello: Thank you.

Yes sir. Sir, the first question that I always start off with in these interviews is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life and background before you went into the military.

José Botello: Okay. My boyhood was spent in a little town, Saint Catarina City, during the '20s, and then Encinal, Texas, in my youth, in my boyhood, and then Laredo in my teenage days. From there I went into the Navy.

Did you grow up on a farm or in a town?

José Botello: In the little town.

Little town, yes sir. Did you have anybody in your family that had ever been in the military?

José Botello: Oh, yes. All of them. In fact, my great-grandfather was in the Civil War.

Really?

José Botello: In the Rio Grande Detachment. And I had an uncle that was gassed in World War I, and then in World War II, practically everybody in the family was in the military.

So were you in high school when the war started? When World War II started?

José Botello: Correct.

Do you remember that day? Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day at all?

José Botello: Oh, yes, I do. I remember I was watching one of the cowboy movies at the Royal Theater in Laredo, and when I came out, somebody said, "Did you know that Pearl Harbor was bombed today?" "No, I didn't." So it became quite a . . . The next day we went to school and they broadcast it over the intercom in Martin High School, Laredo. And then the teacher was crying and we were cheering. We asked her why she was crying. She said, "Because many of you will die in the war," which happened.

So at that point, did you think that you were going to go to war yourself at some point?

José Botello: No, I thought I was too young for that. But, we were all happy that we were at war. Can you imagine that, huh?

So at that point, you were in high school. I imagine you probably followed the events of the news and the war.

José Botello: Yes, I remember exactly. I used to go to the public library and read all the news there at the library because it was the coolest place in town.

Makes sense.

José Botello: And I read all about the trains, the trains and the ski troops and all that kind of stuff. And then when the Allies were out there in Dunkirk and trying to escape and all that.

Yeah, that was a debacle too.

José Botello: Yeah.

So when was it, sir, that you were able to go in the Navy? Did you sign up as soon as you could or where you drafted?

José Botello: No, I was drafted into the Navy.

How did you get . . . Did you get a telegram notice? Is that how you learned of your drafting?

José Botello: Yeah, I got a notice that Uncle Sam wanted me, and I consider Uncle Sam as the best uncle ever. In other words, Uncle Sam for me became the richest and the best uncle I ever had.

Yeah. So when you got the draft notice, how long was it before you had to report to your basic training? I'm sure you had to go through some sort of medical screening first and that sort of thing.

José Botello: Oh, yeah. I had to go through getting the injections and all kind of stuff, and then I went to Virginia to Camp Peary, Virginia, near Richmond.

How was it that . . . They put you in the Navy, correct? Or did you have any sort of choice as to what branch?

José Botello: Well, I had some sort of a choice because I was watching a movie, and a girl that I liked, when they showed the sailors parading on Fifth Avenue, she said, "Oh, how cute." So then I thought that the Navy would be the best thing for me because of that girl . . . I didn't even know her but when I heard her say "cute," I wanted to be in a sailor's uniform.

So when you got drafted then, you had a little bit of choice then of what branch you wanted to go into.

José Botello: Yeah, I didn't know. I just said, "Navy," and I got a big stamp in San Antonio, and they said, "You're going to the Seabees." I said, "Seabees? What's that?" He said, "You'll find out." And I found out.

So they sent you to Virginia then really, for your basic training?

José Botello: Uh-huh.

Tell us, sir, your memories of Camp Peary and Virginia and your training there.

José Botello: Well, it was a training that, as usual, a lot of pain and it was cold for me. I've never been in such a cold country in my life so I had to go through the whole freezing period. And from there we went to Pearl Harbor.

Okay. When you're doing your basic training, how long did you spend there?

José Botello: October, November, December, about three months.

About three months. Do you remember, sir, what some of the other men were like in your platoon? Were they primarily young and from around a lot of the different parts of the United States?

José Botello: Oh, yeah. That's where I really found out about the United States of America. Because here in Texas, all I spoke was Spanish and Tex-Mex, and the little towns. In the Navy, I had a Ph.D. in cuss words, in Navy talk.

Sir, tell me if you could, as I thought it was a pretty good anecdote when we first talked the other day about how to pronounce your last name.

José Botello: Oh, yeah. I told you about that, huh?

Yes sir. If you could tell us again so we can record it, I thought it was pretty good.

José Botello: Yeah, the chief petty officer called the role and said, "Joes Botello." And I said, "Here." And then he left and then a guy next to me, he said, "That stupid chief. He doesn't even know that your name should be 'Hose Botello.'"

I thought that was pretty funny. And your name is actually pronounced Bo-tayo, right?

José Botello: At home, but in the Navy I was always Botello.

So you always kind of had more of an Italian pronunciation throughout your time in the Navy?

José Botello: Yeah.

What type of training did you get there in Virginia? They teach you how to swim and how to fight fires on ship and things of that sort?

José Botello: Well, I was in the Navy and I don't know how to swim.

Really?

José Botello: But I knew how to float because I was a Boy Scout in Laredo, and they taught me to float.

So as long as you didn't drown, I guess, it was okay.

José Botello: Yeah. Well, you know, in the Navy, they just threw you into the pool and said, "You can swim or not." So when I went there and got thrown into the pool, it was in October or November, something like that, and I floated. And then the instructor said, "Get outta here." So I escaped the Navy lessons.

When you were there at your basic training, you already knew, I guess, that you were going into the Seabees, right?

José Botello: Yeah.

So I guess you went through your basic training in Virginia. Then when did you go into your actual Seabee training?

José Botello: Well, I didn't have any Seabee training. We were . . . Let me explain about it. I was not a Seabee, a regular Seabee. The regular Seabees were guys that were already . . . You know, they were carpenters and they were engineers. They were everything else, and they got their ratings. They didn't have to go through the boot training like I did. We were just like the batboys in the baseball field, you know, watching the game and being the batboys really. What they wanted us Seabees or the seamen to do the guard duty and the KP and everything else that those guys were not gonna do.

Sure, to augment them. I know that Seabees built all sort of things, and they had very specialized skills.

José Botello: Oh, yeah. They were tremendous guys. They knew how to do everything really. And they were already ranked. They didn't go through the training. They just put on a Navy uniform, that's all.

Sure. I've read some of the history of the construction battalion and how I think originally when the war started, they were all civilians. And there was a particular battle, I forget which one it was now, where they had to fight the Japanese.

José Botello: Correct.

And at that point the Navy realized, okay, we need to go ahead and make these men members of the Navy, you know. Pay them, give them uniforms, and that's how the Seabees came about I believe. Is that right?

José Botello: Yeah, and the Seabees needed mess boys and guards. I spent most of my lifetime as a guard.

Okay, yes sir. So where did they send you to after you finished your basic training in Virginia?

José Botello: We went to Pearl Harbor. We went to Port Hueneme in California, and then Pearl Harbor, and then to the Pacific Ocean.

Tell us, sir, what it was like when you saw Pearl Harbor for the first time? Because obviously you had heard about it as where the war started. What are your memories of the first time you saw Pearl Harbor?

José Botello: Well, there was only one hotel, and the Navy took it over. And Honolulu was a small town back then. We were in a place called Quonset Point. We had to go through Hickam Field, the Air Force base, in order to go to Honolulu. And that's where I went, made my first innocent mistake.

Tell us about that.

José Botello: I saw a long line of sailors in Honolulu, and I said, “What’s that? What are they doing there?” And everybody started laughing and I didn’t know why until I sort of . . . “What did I say?” It was a long line for the prostitutes, you know.

Oh, Jeez. That’s why they were laughing at you?

José Botello: Yeah, that’s what . . . Because I didn’t know what it was all about.

Yeah. How long did you end up spending at Pearl Harbor? Were you there for a while just waiting for further transport? Or were you based there for a while?

José Botello: No, we were there only about two or three months or less than that. In Pearl Harbor, when I was there at Pearl Harbor, my father died but I couldn’t go to the funeral. So then my outfit, my Seabee outfit, was broken into a detachment, and I was in that detachment that went into Tinian. We spent about 55 days aboard ship before we hit Tinian.

Let me ask you, sir, a little bit more about Pearl Harbor before we talk about Tinian. When you got to Pearl Harbor, were you able to see the aftereffects and the remnants of the bombing? Could you see some of the Missouri and that sort of thing?

José Botello: Yes, I did, and the oil leaks and all that. Everything was . . . We couldn’t go to the beach because we would get all oily and stuff like that.

So a lot of that was still . . . You could still see then very clearly, the effects of where the Japanese had bombed and that sort of thing?

José Botello: Yeah, that’s right.

So then after you spent about two months there at Pearl Harbor, you boarded another transport ship?

José Botello: Yeah, our battalion was broken, and we were in a detachment that was with the 4th Marines.

With the 4th Marines, yes sir. So they load you up, they detach you to the 4th Marines, and then you go to Tinian, correct?

José Botello: Yeah.

Tell us, sir, about . . . Well, I guess first tell us a little bit about the trip from Pearl Harbor to Tinian. How long did that take?

José Botello: Fifty-six days practically.

All aboard ship?

José Botello: Fifty-six or 59, I forget, yeah.

How did you pass the time aboard ship?

José Botello: Oh, my God. It was terrible. We were in the fourth hold.

Which is very low down.

José Botello: Yeah, way down there.

You're below the water line.

José Botello: So I spent most of the time topside just watching the Pacific. It was so pacific, so peaceful, so beautiful, really. And the good air and so forth. Down below it was all stinky. We didn't have any showers, just salt water showers. And, of course, I had to do a lot of KP work, the pots and pans, and you name it.

How many men do you think were aboard your transport ship?

José Botello: Jeez, it was loaded to the gills.

So thousands probably.

José Botello: Yeah.

And you were aboard with a lot of Marines and that sort of thing?

José Botello: Yeah. I don't even know who was there but . . . Because I spent most of the time by myself topside.

Yeah, that makes sense. Stay out of the heat and the smell of the below decks. I don't blame you. So did you know at that point that you were going to Tinian?

José Botello: No, we didn't know anything.

Just knew you were in the Pacific and you were cruising somewhere but didn't know where.

José Botello: Yeah.

So for all you guys knew, you could have been going in big circles.

José Botello: Correct. And we were going around in circles too, because of the convoy. There were a lot of destroyers and you name it, and they were circling around and we were circling around, and smokescreens and all kind of stuff, you know.

When did you finally arrive at Tinian? Do you remember the day?

José Botello: No, I don't remember exactly the day but I remember the day when we landed there very clearly.

Tell us about that, sir.

José Botello: Well, we were in one of those landing boats, and the bay there where we were to land was just thick with dead bodies, you know, Japanese, floating. And the boat had a hell of a time trying to get to shore. We finally made it and I don't know why there were so many bodies all over the place because the Marines had already taken care of the situation, you know, there.

They were out there and they had won the battle already when we landed. So we finally got ashore and set up our tents. We had a young lieutenant who was an engineer, and he was reading a book trying to find out how to set up the pup tents so we wouldn't get wet, and some Seabee said, "Well, sir, the wind is coming from that direction." You know, he just wet his finger, and the lieutenant said, "No, the book said that the prevailing winds are these other way." So he ordered us to get the tents the other way like the book said, and we got wet that night. We got soaked.

Yeah, the wind just blew it right in on you. So that was your first experience in Tinian.

José Botello: That was our first day in the invasion there.

At that point, did your unit pretty quickly turn to building and construction work?

José Botello: That's right.

What was the primary effort that you guys did? Were you building an airfield or building living quarters?

José Botello: Yeah, since you know something about the Seabees, they went out there and built up the airfields and the highways and everything else, you know. Set up the hospitals and all that. Actually, Tinian became the number one base to bomb Japan with the B-29s, you know.

It was a key place.

José Botello: Yeah, but the Japanese thought that Saipan which was the island above us, the big island, they thought that was the main base so they used to bomb that all the time. But they didn't know about our base. Tinian was the number one. So they hit it pretty good.

Did you have a lot of gear that had to come off the ship in terms of . . . Did you have tractors and things of that sort?

José Botello: Oh, yeah. Everything. Bombs, tractors, bulldozers, you name it. Everything that we needed for building.

Wow. A lot of gear and a lot of equipment.

José Botello: Yeah.

What was a typical day like for you if there was one there at Tinian?

José Botello: Oh, my God. A lot of work. Eight, 10, 12 hours a day, 16 hours a day practically, you know.

Were you on guard post a lot during that time?

José Botello: Did everything, guard, and the mess hall, and ship holds. Wherever they needed somebody, they sent us.

So it kept you busy.

José Botello: Yeah.

What was the mess hall like there? Did the Seabees actually build a wooden mess hall to eat in, prepare the food, that sort of thing?

José Botello: One of the best things about the Seabees, that when they landed they immediately started building, and no sooner did they start building that they built stills, ice-making machines, showers and all kind of stuff, that the Marines and the Army and the Navy would visit us all the time because they thought that we had the best chow.

Oh, I bet. You guys . . .

José Botello: I didn't think so but they thought so.

Sure, I bet actually eating a hot meal made by some mess men was a lot better than eating C-rations.

José Botello: Yeah, C-rations and all that, yeah.

Sure. I know that's always been the reputation of the Seabees. They show up and they start building and immediately things get better in terms of whether it's the airfields or the buildings you're living in, and everything, the roads, bridges.

José Botello: Yeah, in fact, the Marines used to say, "Don't ever hit a Seabee because he may be your father."

It may be your father? Because they were older, right? A lot more experienced? Like you mentioned earlier, they were tradesmen and craftsmen at what they were doing.

José Botello: Yeah.

When you were at Tinian, sir, I guess, were you able to get mail from back home pretty regularly?

José Botello: Yeah.

Tell us about that. Were you able to write to your family and keep them informed of where you were and how things were going?

José Botello: Yeah, my sister and girlfriends and all that from Laredo used to send me mail all the time.

When you got the mail, how long would it normally take for you to get a letter from the States?

José Botello: Oh, it would take days, 50 days, something like that. A long time.

Took quite a while, yes sir.

José Botello: And that reminds me because I got a letter in Tinian postmarked the same day from a friend of mine, and he was another Seabee. And I said, "The same day? He must be here on this island," because it used to take . . . So, I inquired and then I heard from somebody that

there was a new Seabee outfit out there quite a while from our base. So I dressed up or undressed, let's say, because I had nothing to wear practically except my shorts, and went looking for that base. And when I was there, I heard a noise and there was a Japanese staring down at me, all armed.

Really? Wow.

José Botello: And then I said, "I wonder what the hell to do?" And then I suddenly remembered to hit the deck. And then I heard a little noise in the bushes and the guy ran away.

Really?

José Botello: He didn't shoot at me.

So you were, I guess, given permission then to go from where your camp was set up over to the other Seabee camp?

José Botello: No, I don't even remember asking anybody for permission. I was just . . .

You just went.

José Botello: Yeah, I just went.

But you were unarmed?

José Botello: Yeah.

Wow.

José Botello: I didn't even have my hunting knife which I normally had.

I'm surprised you just went. I'm surprised you didn't worry about getting in trouble for going AWOL or something.

José Botello: No, we were pretty . . . Because at that time we didn't have the military. Our military commander was still in Hawaii. Our battalion was still in Hawaii. We were in Tinian. We were just like free, you know. Free from military regulations and all kind of stuff.

You're just getting the job done that the Seabees needed done, I guess.

José Botello: That's right. And the Seabees were the least to think about military regulations.

So when you got to that . . . You were along your way going to another camp, and it was just a Japanese soldier, I guess, who had somehow survived the battle and was living in the jungle.

José Botello: Yeah.

Wow. You're lucky that you're alive.

José Botello: That's right. But the second time when I was in Okinawa, I crossed the ridge where I was a guard then. And I crossed the ridge, the Japanese were still there. And I had a barbed wire fence in between, you know, between the Japanese and ourselves. And I was on this

ledge and then I saw a guy come out from a cave, and they have sort of like a little farm there, and started to gather something, and then I saw him, I said, "I got you." So I had him under my gun, you know, and I was ready to pull the trigger, and then he looked up and he quickly moved away and I didn't pull the trigger. So we were even.

Yeah, that's interesting.

José Botello: The guy at Tinian didn't shoot at me and I didn't shoot at the other guy in Okinawa.

That's interesting. How long did you end up spending at Tinian before you went to Okinawa?

José Botello: Oh, let's see. We were in Tinian maybe about six months later, something like that.

What do you remember about Okinawa?

José Botello: Okinawa, I remember waiting there aboard one of the landing ships while the Navy and the Air Force and although the Marines were fighting and the Army was fighting, and the Navy was throwing all kinds of bombs and there were all kinds of airplanes, and we were very safe on our landing ship.

Could you kind of see what was going on in terms of explosions and that sort of thing on Okinawa?

José Botello: Oh, yeah. We saw everything from the ship but the Japanese, I don't think that they even bothered about us. We were small ships. They were after the big ones, you know.

Sure. I think you're probably right. What was Okinawa like once you were able to go ashore?

José Botello: Very peaceful. Everything was there. We just started again, just building all kinds of bases and so forth.

During that time, you did a lot of guard duty and KP duty and that sort of thing?

José Botello: Yeah. And in Okinawa, the worst thing that we experienced was the typhoon. I forget the name of that typhoon but it destroyed a lot of our Navy.

That's right. There was a pretty famous one that a lot of ships were sunk that got caught out in it. Tell us about that typhoon, your experiences there aboard Okinawa.

José Botello: Well, a good experience or a bad experience?

How did you weather it? Were you able to take shelter and just ride out the storm?

José Botello: Yes, I took shelter in one of those big Army trucks that was sort of parked near a place where the wind didn't hit that badly. So I was in that cab all night long. But one of my tent mates, he was sort of like Radar in MASH, very innocent type, very decent, and real nice guy. He and others went to the caves. There were some Japanese caves where they buried their dead, and that's where they spent the night of that hurricane. But he, when he went to, had the call of

the night, the piss call you might say, he went over there to look for . . . And he ended up in the pit toilet down below.

Oh, he fell in, okay. That's not good.

José Botello: He fell in and spent the whole hurricane. And, of course, we started laughing about it for the rest of the year.

That's pretty horrible experience for him. Wow. Not good. How long, sir, did you end up spending on Okinawa?

José Botello: We stayed there during April until the end of the year.

Until the end of 1945?

José Botello: The end of 1945, yeah.

So were you aboard Okinawa then when you learned that the war had ended?

José Botello: Yes.

Tell us, sir, about that.

José Botello: I still have the picture over here. We were . . . We didn't know about the atom bomb. We didn't even know about it in Tinian or in Okinawa but we just heard . . . In the Navy they say scuttlebutt or gossip. And so we heard that there was a bomb that could destroy a whole city and all that, and we used to say, "Oh, scuttlebutt." Anyway, we were watching a movie. In fact, I remember the movie. It was "Hello, Frisco, Hello." And we were watching that movie when the lights begin to . . . The searchlights begin to circle up in the air, and then bombs bursting in air and all that kind of stuff, and flares and you name it. All kinds of cannon and all that. And we were shouting to the guy, to the projectionist, to, "Turn off the light, you idiot." And then somebody said, "The war is over," over the phone. The war is over. We stayed there, and the war was over. We went wild that night.

I bet it had to have been a great relief, an unbelievable feeling to know that it was over.

José Botello: And that was the first time in my life, in my Navy life, that I shot my rifle.

In celebration.

José Botello: In celebration.

Yes sir. Wow. How long then after the war had been won was it before you were able to leave Okinawa?

José Botello: Well, the war was over in August I think it was.

That's right.

José Botello: And then we stayed there until after December.

Okay. Did they have you still building more things there, or what were you doing during that time?

José Botello: Oh, yeah. The war never ended for us. But like I told you, most of the time I was just a guard.

Once it had been announced that the war was over, I guess you're getting ready to return back to the United States, did you have any intention of staying in the Navy at that point?

José Botello: No, not at all. In fact, when I was discharged right here in Houston, Texas, and then the Navy guy says, "Would you like to continue?" I said, "Never. I'd never be in the military the rest of my life."

So you were done.

José Botello: Famous last words, because I spent most of my life working for the military.

Interesting.

José Botello: For the government. And that's why I say Uncle Sam was the best uncle I've ever had.

That's great.

José Botello: Because Uncle Sam not only sent me to the Pacific and opened my eyes and ears, but also he sent me all over the world teaching English as a second language to the military.

Oh, that's great. Yes sir. So when the war ended, I guess you took a train back home to Texas? Is that right?

José Botello: Uh-huh.

Tell us, sir, what it was like when you got back home to Laredo and saw your family again for the first time in a while.

José Botello: I didn't get much time because I went back to school, and then I went to college.

What I was asking, sir, do you remember what it was like the day you got home from the war, when you got back and saw your family again, I guess, your mom and dad or whomever. Do you remember what your homecoming was like when you got back home from the war?

José Botello: Oh, of course. My mother was very happy, and the folks, my younger brothers and sister, they were all very happy.

Did it feel good to be back?

José Botello: It sure did, yeah.

That's great. So then at that point you said you went ahead and went into college, right?

José Botello: Yeah.

Were you able to use the GI Bill?

José Botello: That's why I said that I had the greatest uncle in the world. Because of Uncle Sam, I went to college.

Where did you go to school?

José Botello: At A&I in Kingsville.

Kingsville, yes sir. Did you know at that point what you wanted to do after you finished college?

José Botello: No, no. I never did. I just wanted to have a good time, you know. So the dean . . . They knew us by name, by first name. So the dean saw me wandering down the hall and said, "Joe, you haven't made your degree plan." I said, "I don't know what to take, sir." He said, "You'll find out right now. Sit down." So he looked at my record, my school record and all that, and he said, "You're gonna take economics." And just like the Seabees, I didn't know what the Seabees were, I didn't know economics was either. So he ordered me to take economics as a major and government and sociology minors. And, so I did. I never did find out what economics was because I never practiced it, and I never worked with it.

You were able to graduate, right? So that was the key thing, getting a degree, I guess.

José Botello: Yeah.

So once you had graduated then, is that when you went to work for the military again?

José Botello: No, I couldn't find a job really. At that time it was so difficult to find a job, even with a degree.

Sure, a lot of returning servicemen, too.

José Botello: We had a heck of a time, and especially with my degree, economics. Anyway, finally, by mistake, I ended up in what they call the language school. When I read about the language school, I thought it was a foreign language school, and it turned out to be English. And then I started working for them, for the Defense Department.

Where was that? You said you traveled all over.

José Botello: From there, yeah. The language school was just beginning so I started right from the beginning, and they were teaching English to all the pilots from different countries.

That's great.

José Botello: With the new invention, with a tape recorder. So I started in the tape laboratory just putting tapes and playing them for the students and all that. And then it became bigger and bigger, and then we started building schools all over the world. Then English became the language for the Air Force, for the pilots.

That's right, exactly. I think a lot of people don't realize that but all around the world, the language that is spoken by pilots and air traffic controllers is English, so if you . . .

José Botello: Correct, and we started that.

That's amazing. That really is.

José Botello: We took English . . . And our supervisors were all foreigners. The chief of the language school was a Frenchman, and there was a Dutchman, a Belgian, a German. All the supervisors were foreigners. So that's why I thought it was a foreign language school, but it finally turned out to be an English language school, so it was foreigners that made English the language of the world really, for the military.

Sounds like it was a great program. How long were you involved with that?

José Botello: Well, the rest of my life.

The rest of your life, yes sir. So pretty much late 1940s you started with that, and you stayed on until you retired, I guess, right?

José Botello: Correct.

When was that?

José Botello: And then I got interested in languages and linguistics and everything else about language.

When did you retire from that job? Was it in the 70s?

José Botello: Well, my daughter was murdered.

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

José Botello: And after she was murdered . . . She was resisting a guy that wanted to rape her, and then after that, I lost all ambition to stay at work and so forth.

Yeah.

José Botello: A few years later I started teaching again but this time I was teaching immigrants that wanted to learn English as a second language.

That's great. That's very important. Excellent. And then when did you go to San Antonio? When did San Antonio become home for you?

José Botello: In 1960.

In 1960, and was it because of your job that you chose to be in San Antonio?

José Botello: No, because San Antonio was about the only place that offered a job. Laredo had nothing, and the little towns where I grew up, forget it.

That makes sense.

José Botello: So San Antonio was the one that gave a little more promise of finding a job.

That's excellent. I know you mentioned your one daughter, do you have any other children?

José Botello: Yes, I had another one, another daughter that joined the Coast Guard. I had a brother that was in the Air Force, and another brother who was in the Marines.

Oh, great.

José Botello: I had an uncle that was gassed in World War I, so everybody has been in the military service some way or another.

So it's a family tradition of service that way. That's excellent. Sir, how did you learn about our Voices of Veterans Oral History Program?

José Botello: I read it in the Express.

Oh, great. Excellent. Well, I'm glad you saw that and that you called us, and we were able to set up this interview because this is all about trying to save and preserve these stories for future generations, and I know everybody here at the Land Office greatly appreciates your service to our nation. In a couple weeks, we're going to send you copies of this interview on CDs so you can give those to friends and family or whomever, and we'll also include a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson. It's just a very small way that the State of Texas can say thank you to you for your service to our nation. So, be looking for that in a couple weeks. And I think, sir, you also had mentioned you have some photographs of your time in the war?

José Botello: Yeah.

If we could get any copies of those either emailed to us or even if you wanted to send hard copy originals that we could send back to you, we'd love to get copies of pictures because what we do with these interviews is we put them on our website, and if a veteran has any pictures, we like to add those to it as well so people can see the photographs while they listen to the interview. So I'll be sure to send you my address and everything, sir, so if there's any pictures you want to share with us, we'd be honored to have those, too.

José Botello: Okay, and really I have here in my little office . . . I have a little office where I have all the pictures and everything that . . . As I told you, I had a great-grandfather that was in the confederacy, and my father-in-law was in the German Navy and the Air Force in World War II, in the German Navy in World War I, and the Air Force in World War II.

That was your father-in-law.

José Botello: My brother-in-law was in the Navy, was a prisoner of war with the British, and so I have the military from both sides.

That's a lot of stories. So I guess your wife then is German, right?

José Botello: Correct.

Did you ever talk to your father-in-law about his service in the German military?

José Botello: Oh, yeah. I spent a lot of time in Germany with them, and they came over here, too. And my brother-in-law just died not long ago.

That's got to be amazing, some of those stories. For you to have served in the Pacific in the U.S. forces, and your father-in-law to have served with the Germans in the same war . . .

José Botello: Well, I was teaching in Europe, in the Middle East, in Africa, in South America, and everywhere else. Not teaching, I was setting up programs. And that's why I said I had the greatest uncle in the world, because he sent me all over the place.

Yeah, that sounds great.

José Botello: So that's when I got to learn other languages and to converse with a lot of people from different parts of the . . . In different languages. Now I cannot . . . Alzheimer's is getting me now. I cannot express myself anymore as well as I used to.

Oh, you're doing a great job today though. This is a good interview.

José Botello: I'll be 88 next week, five days from now.

Oh, that's great. Happy birthday in advance, sir. That's great news.

José Botello: And then I traveled all over the United States with the family, with the girls, with my grandchild. My grandchild was a synchronized swimmer so we went all over the United States.

That's great. It sounds like you've had the ability to travel and the love of travel. That's a real blessing there too.

José Botello: And with students from all over the world. The military . . . I respect all of them from all over the world. They coulda shot at me, my father-in-law, they were soldiers too, you know.

They had a job to do as well, circumstances they were placed in.

José Botello: Yeah.

Well, sir, that's quite a life you've had and really some good stories that you were able to share with us. Does your family talk to you much about your time in the Navy and places you went and that sort of thing?

José Botello: No, no. We don't talk too much about that. We just talk about food or something like that, you know.

Yes sir. Well, hopefully they know about some of the places you went and some of the things that you saw as a member of the Navy during World War II.

José Botello: Yeah, they know but, I mean, it's not the main topic of conversation.

Oh, sure, no. I didn't mean it like that. I just was wondering if they had ever asked you or you had ever shared your stories with them about your time in the service. Because there are some veterans that don't, that never really talk about it and their families end up later on, you know, saying, "Oh, I didn't know that granddad did this or he went there," that sort of thing.

José Botello: Well, yeah, that's true, too, because I never found out about my own background, my own ancestors until later when I was retired and I started looking at the Internet and finding out what my, where my folks came from.

Sure, yeah. I think that's true. I've studied a lot about my family history because I enjoy that sort of thing but there's a lot of people out there that can't tell you much beyond what maybe what their grandparents did and where they were from and they don't really know a lot of their history and that sort of thing. So it's important to get these stories saved so people can remember.

José Botello: Maybe something that might interest . . . I don't know if you're aware of that, but in the area where I came from, where my ancestors came from, they didn't have six flags, they had seven flags. There was a Republic of the Rio Grande.

I didn't know that.

José Botello: There was not recognized by anybody, by Mexico or Texas or the United States, but we had it, and the capital is in Laredo.

I didn't know that. I'll have to read about that. I have never heard about the Republic of Rio Grande.

José Botello: And it was called the Republic of the Rio Grande.

Interesting. I'll have to look that up.

José Botello: They still have a museum in the main plaza in Laredo, and they still have the capital there. And I didn't know about that until later when I retired.

Yeah, I'd not heard about that either, so that's good. I'll have to check that out. I always like learning new history, or history that's new to me that's something I wasn't familiar with before.

José Botello: Yeah, well, there was a Republic of the Rio Grande and the capital was Laredo, Texas.

Yes sir. Well, you'll appreciate the fact then, sir, if you like history that here at the Land Office we have documents that go back to the 1700s. In fact, we have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. So our goal is to take these interviews and add them to those archives so that potentially hundreds of years from now people can listen to these interviews and learn something that maybe that wasn't written in a book or just to hear that veteran's voice, you know, hundreds of years from now. So with that in mind, sir, is there anything you would want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are both gone?

José Botello: Yeah, I would like to say that there was, in the little town where I was raised as a boy, there was a . . . Such a small town but at the same time, we had a captain of a B-29 in Guam, and I never found out until later, way much later, that there was a B-29 called the City of Laredo. And the City of Laredo, the captain was a boy from Encinal. And he named it the City of Laredo because that was the biggest town close to Encinal, you know. Nobody ever heard of a little town, Encinal. So he called it the City of Laredo. And he died not long ago in Austin,

Texas. His name was Juvenal, and he had . . . For a little farm boy to become a pilot of a B-29, that's interesting in itself.

It is. It's pretty amazing.

José Botello: And that same little town in Encinal, there was another boy that was educated there but he was from Mexico. And then he returned back to Mexico and then he became, in later years he became a Ph.D., and he became a writer. He became something high in the government over there. But raised here in Encinal.

That's great. Those are good stories. Good stories I think people will appreciate, worth remembering.

José Botello: Well, that's what I have learned after I retired, and looking into the Internet and so forth.

Yes sir. Well, sir, I really appreciate, again, you taking the time today to share this interview with us, and if you know any other veterans of any age, any branch of service that are here in Texas that might want to share their story, please have them contact me as well.

José Botello: Okay, I will.

Like I said before, sir, we're going to send you a package here in a couple weeks that will have all this interview on CDs along with that letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson. And, again, on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everybody here at the Land Office, we just want to thank you, sir, for your service to our nation.

José Botello: His name is Patterson?

Patterson, yes, Jerry Patterson. He's the Land Commissioner.

José Botello: I see, okay.

He's my big boss. We'll make sure to send you a nice letter and certificate from him, too. It's just a small token of our appreciation for your service.

José Botello: Well, thank you for being so attentive.

Oh, yes sir. It's my honor. I'm honored anytime I can speak to a veteran and especially a World War II veteran like yourself.

José Botello: Thank you.

Yes sir. We'll talk to you again soon.

José Botello: Bye.

Yes sir. Take care. Bye bye.