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Discriminacion a un martir: The ballad of Felix Longoria

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DISCRIMINACION A UN MARTIR: THE BALLAD OF FELIX LONGORIA

A Thesis

by

CRISTOBAL A. CARRIZALES

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Major Subject: History

DISCRIMINACION A UN MARTIR: THE BALLAD OF FELIX LONGORIA

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December 2016

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis looks at how the Felix Longoria Affair propelled Hector P. Garcia, Lyndon B. Johnson and the American G.I. Forum into the national limelight, while also leaving the Longorias, Three Rivers and Texas in a state of disrepair. The affair in general helped expose injustices that were occurring to Mexicans American in Texas at the time, but left the family, Three Rivers and Texas in a battle over the legacy of how each would be seen in the annals of history.

DEDICATION

To my parents Cris and Rachel Carrizales thank you for always being there to motivate me and support me no matter how hard things got. I'm truly grateful for everything you've done for me and I thank God every day that I have parents like you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Michael Faubion my thesis committee chair for all the feedback and support he has given me. I can never truly thank him enough for everything he has done for me. Thank you for always being there for me when I needed to rant about any difficulties that I have had in this process and in life. Thank you for always being there for me as both a mentor and a friend. Dr. Levinson thank you for stepping in as a committee member and for all of your support through this process. Dr. Waite thank you for giving me the inspiration through your undergraduate Texas history class to pursue this topic and showing me that this topic needs to be further explored.

I would like to thank Grace Charles and the staff at the Hector P. Garcia Collection for assisting me in my research. I would also like to thank all the staff at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Collection at the LBJ Presidential Library for assisting me in my research.

To all my colleagues and fellow graduate students in the History department thank you guys for listening to me go on about my topic and for keeping things fun. I could have never done this without you guys. Lastly, I would like to thank my family for all the support and love they have bestowed upon me through this journey; I am forever indebted to you guys. And to my wife Alexandra Carrizales, thank you for always being there for me and helping me when I needed it the most, I love you and can never tell you how blessed I am to live out the rest of my life with you. Also to my son Andres, even though you are only a couple days old I want you to know that no matter what happens in life you will always have a dad who loves you.

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CHAPTER I

“THE WHITES WILL NOT LIKE IT”: THE FIGHT TO BURY FELIX LONGORIA

Private Felix Longoria was shot and killed while on a voluntary mission in the Philippines months before the end of World War II.¹ After his death, Longoria's body was interred in the Philippines where it remained until the spring of 1949, when it was returned to the United States for proper burial. However, his wife was denied the right to wake him in his hometown of Three Rivers, Texas, due to the funeral home owner's belief that the “whites in town would not like it.”² Upon hearing this Dr. Hector P. Garcia and the American GI Forum became involved in an effort to wake Longoria in Three Rivers. However, it was not until Texas Senator Lyndon B. Johnson became involved that Longoria was finally put to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, becoming one of a few Mexican Americans to be buried on the grounds.³

I argue that while the Longoria affair propelled Hector P. Garcia, Lyndon B. Johnson and the American G.I. Forum into the national limelight, it left the Longorias, Three Rivers, and Texas in a state of disrepair. The Longorias, though happy for the intervention, never truly gained what they sought, a wake for their loved one. Felix became more than a fallen soldier, he became a symbol for a cause, and the family was put on trial to nullify their efforts. The city of

¹ Longoria was shot and killed on June 16, 1945.

² Beatrice Longoria. *Signed Statement from Beatrice Longoria on February 9, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized Statement by Hector De Pena. February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

³ Arlington National Cemetery. *Historical Information on Prominent Hispanics Buried at Arlington National Cemetery*, www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/historical_information/prominent_hispanic.html, accessed May1, 2011.

Three Rivers fought to have Felix Longoria buried in their city in order to absolve themselves of any wrongdoing, and prove that the issue at hand was not due to racism but rather a rift between the Longoria family. The State of Texas, already suffering from years of racist accusations, tried to clear their name of any wrongdoing by whitewashing the affair and placing the blame on a small group of agitators looking for self-aggrandizement to the national forefront. I argue the affair in general helped expose the injustices that were occurring to Mexican Americans in Texas at the time, but left the family, Three Rivers and Texas in a battle over the legacy of how each would be seen in the annals of history.

To date, few authors have looked at Felix Longoria's early life as well as the involvement of women and the media in the affair. There is limited historical research that covers the extent of discrimination the actors faced in pursuing a wake for Longoria. Though most articles and books on the subject focus briefly on these topics, they focus only on certain aspects of the event. For instance, in *The American G.I. Forum: Origins and Evolution*, historian Carl Allsup argues that "the Felix Longoria case produced important results for the civil rights movement of Mexican Americans in Texas and the southwestern United States. For at least a brief time, Americans of Mexican descent were united in a single effort to fight Anglo prejudice and discrimination."⁴ Through this unification Mexican Americans were able to effectively challenge racial discrimination in Texas and bring their plight into the national forefront.

Allsup argues that racial discrimination played a large part in the funeral home's decision to deny burial services to the Longoria family. It is through funeral owner Tom Kennedy's famous words "the whites would not like it" that Allsup shows the underling racism in Texas

⁴ Carl Allsup, *The American G.I. Forum: Origins and Evolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 48.

during the 1940s.⁵ Though on several occasions Kennedy changed his statements to free himself from charges of discriminatory practices, his statements still show the racial divisions set in place by Anglos in Texas.

According to Allsup, the American GI Forum became involved in the Longoria affair not because of Beatrice Longoria but rather her sister Sara Moreno's plea to Dr. Hector P. Garcia for help in burying Felix Longoria. It was through Moreno's contact with Dr. Garcia that the event that helped bring the American GI Forum into the national civil rights arena came upon them.

While Allsup looks at the effects the American GI Forums involvement in the Longoria affair influenced the result, Manuel H. Peñas *Folksongs of Social Change: Two Corridos as Interpretive Sources*, compares the *Corrido Gregorio Cortez* and *Discriminacion a Un Martir* to show influences both had on the Mexican American population in the United States. Peña argues "that a functional relationship exists between the *corridos*, the historical incidents they depict (i.e., choice of subject matter), and the relative structure of Mexican society when they appeared."⁶ Though they differ in tone and subject matter Peña argues that each of these *corridos* acts as a "collective diary" to the feelings that each event brought about.⁷

Peña notes that as opposed to the Hero *corridos* of pre-World War II, *Discriminacion a un Martir* falls into what he calls a victim *corrido*. Pre-World War II *corridos* according to Peña focus on a single event of discrimination and how collective action helped resolve the issue. In *Discriminacion* "Longoria is portrayed as a helpless man who has been victimized by a vicious system that stigmatizes him and his kind even into the grave. It is only through collective

⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁶ Manuel H. Peña, "Folksongs of Social Change: Two Corridos as Interpretive Sources" (*Aztlan*; 3/ 1/1982, pg13-42, 30pg), 14.

⁷ Ibid., 14.

voicing of “*nuestras quejas*” that some sort of repatriation is possible.”⁸ Peña argues that though both pre-World War II and post-World War II differed in subject, they both played pivotal roles in the Mexican American community’s remembrance of each event. [See Appendix A]

George Green’s article *The Felix Longoria Affair* argues that “the Felix Longoria Affair, a 1949 incident in Three Rivers, Texas, illustrates that a single, small event can disturb entrenched institutions and lead to significant changes.”⁹ While acknowledging Allsup’s claim that the Longoria affair energized the Hispanic civil rights movement in the Southwest, Green argues that it also helped destroy the Good Neighbor Commission which was the only state institution that worked for Hispanics in Texas. Established in 1943, due to a ban on Braceros in Texas, the Good Neighbor Commission was created in an effort to appease the Mexican government by handling issues of disenfranchisement and racism of Mexican and Mexican Americans in Texas. While the Longoria affair helped the American GI Forum advance years ahead of where Mexican Americans were at the time, Anglos in Texas did little to change the racial sentiment most had against Mexican Americans. Though the Longoria affair brought about change throughout the nation, Green argues that Texas wasn’t ready for this type of social change. Green makes it clear that

even though most of Texas opposed the mortician’s refusal to open the chapel to the Longorias, and even though the daily press defended the Good Neighbor Commission, Governor Beauford Jester and his supporters were conservative, “establishment” men who were fed up with the troublesome state agency and thought that the whole Longoria affair was a case of spitefulness seized upon by a shrewd minority group agitator.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁹ George Green “The Felix Longoria Affair,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 19:3 (1991:Fall) 23.

¹⁰ Ibid., 28.

Jester and other politicians in the state decided that the Good Neighbor Commission needed to be dealt with in order to keep racial benefits for Anglos intact. Though they could not dissolve the Good Neighbor Commission they slowly started changing its structure in order to weaken it. First they decided that they would not reappoint Good Neighbor Commission state chairman Bob Smith who they believed was sympathetic to Mexican Americans and who had appointed the Mexican American sympathizer Tom Sutherland as director of the Good Neighbor Commission. Jester and his conservative supporters also decided that they would fire Sutherland at the first meeting of the New Good Neighbor Commission due to his constant agreement with Mexican Americans in Texas, who in their mind was under the control of Mexican American civil rights leaders, and because he insisted that the Longoria affair was a case of discrimination.¹¹ According to Green, other supposed Mexican American sympathizers such as Lloyd Bentsen Sr. were targeted for removal from the Good Neighbor Commission.

Green also argues that while the Texas raised funds for the Good Neighbor Commission, they often had enough money only to pay for their day to day cost. This, according to Green, was used as a method to keep the organization as quiet as they could. Though Jester died in 1948, his replacement, Allan Shivers, kept true to Jester's policies when dealing with Mexican Americans and the Good Neighbor Commission. Shivers had previously run into problems with Mexican laborers on his property which led him to make sure that the Good Neighbor Commission was as weak as possible due to a growing chance of an investigation against him by the U.S. Government.¹² In keeping with Jester's policies he guaranteed that the Good Neighbor Commission in no way could be used against him. Shivers also placed ultraconservative

¹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹² Ibid., 29.

Nevielle Penrose in charge of the Good Neighbor Commission to keep Sutherland in check and also to make sure that the Good Neighbor Commission was no longer interested in investigating acts of discrimination.¹³

Green argues the final nail in the coffin for the Good Neighbor Commission was the formation of the Texas Human Relations Council (THRC) in 1950. Shivers formed the Texas Human Relations Council as a non-state run organization that would look into discrimination in the state of Texas. To show that this was a viable organization he named Bob Smith, THRC Chairman, and brought in Mexican American reformers from throughout the state. In an effort to rid the Good Neighbor Commission of Tom Sutherland, Shivers convinced him that the Council would have fewer restrictions than the Good Neighbor Commission and since it was a private organization, it would be free from state control. In 1951 Tom Sutherland joined the Texas Human Relations Council as its executive director.

Though the Texas Human Relations Council had more freedom to investigate acts of discrimination within the state of Texas, Green argues that without the backing of the state they had little power to fight cases of discrimination. In gaining control of the Good Neighbor Commission and placing those who were sympathetic to Mexican Americans on the powerless Texas Human Relations Council, Shivers and Jester completed their goal of minimizing the effect the Longoria affair had on changing the social climate in the state of Texas.

In contrast to Green, *The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1949-1983* by Henry J. Ramos argues that “the GI Forum’s successful challenge to the Three Rivers establishment highlighted the possibility that Mexican Americans could realize the American dream through

¹³ Ibid., 29.

grassroots organization and community activism. In pursuit of that possibility, Mexican Americans everywhere turned increasingly to the Forum and to a generation of inspiring social change.”¹⁴ Ramos argues that from its inception the American GI Forum sought to become a national civil rights organization. Though it became a viable state organization within its first year, it was not until the events of the Longoria Affair that the American GI Forum came into the national civil rights arena. Contrary to Allsup’s belief that the Longoria affair had a brief impact on the American GI Forum, Ramos argues that the Longoria affair solidified the American GI Forum’s place in the national civil rights arena and helped it gain rapid growth outside of Texas.

Tom Kennedy according to Ramos,

invoked two biting reminders of the Mexican-American community’s second-class status, neither of which sat well with Longoria’s widow. First, Kennedy informed the family that the burial would be in the town’s segregated “Mexican cemetery.” Second, he denied the family’s request for use of the funeral home’s chapel to hold a wake in honor of Private Longoria on grounds that local “whites would not like it.”¹⁵

In making sure that the family was aware the body would be buried in the Mexican cemetery and would not be able to rest in the chapel Kennedy was upholding the racial hierarchy. Ramos makes it clear that Kennedy’s attempt to uphold the community’s racial sentiments led Beatrice Longoria to take the matter further to obtain what she felt was right for her husband. Though this was a common occurrence in the state of Texas, Ramos makes it known that Beatrice Longoria and the American GI Forum fought for Felix’s right to be waked in his hometown because, like any other soldier, he had the right to be waked in his hometown as a hero. After Garcia became involved in the matter Ramos affirms that “Garcia knew his organization could

¹⁴ Henry J. Ramos, *The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993), 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

not stand by idly on a matter of such blatant disregard for the rights and integrity of Mexican-American veterans and community members.”¹⁶ According to Ramos it was this belief that led Garcia’s pursuit to wake and bury Felix Longoria. Through calling George Grogh to confirm that discrimination had occurred and getting politicians involved, Garcia was making sure that people would hear about discrimination occurring in Texas and become active in the fight to rid the state of it.

Once the media became involved, Ramos argues that Anglo leadership in Three Rivers and Texas attempted to show that the GI Forum and the media had falsely portrayed what had occurred. “The local chamber of commerce endorsed a statement issued by Tom Kennedy in which he denied that he had ever refused Beatriz Longoria use of his funeral home’s chapel, asserting that he had discouraged its use because he believed Mrs. Longoria’s wishes had differed from those of the deceased soldier’s parents. The suggestion here was that the problem arose as a result of conflicts not between Anglos and Mexican Americans, but rather between Mexican Americans themselves.”¹⁷ Ramos points out that this was a common attempt by Anglos in Texas to divide and conquer those who opposed them. By dividing the group and turning the attention on them, Anglos sought to turn the act of discrimination into petty fighting between those that accused them of discriminatory practices. Though this had worked in the past Ramos establishes the fact that while the Longoria family had problems in the past they were united in their attempt to bury Felix. It was this unity that led the family to go against the public attacks on them and bury Felix at Arlington National Cemetery.

¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷Ibid.,

After the burial of Felix Longoria the state of Texas ordered the Good Neighbor Commission to see if an act of discrimination had truly occurred. Though the ruling found that no act of discrimination had occurred, the minority report written by Frank Oltorf and the withdrawing of Representative Byron Tinsley's name from the majority report underscored the decision. "In the end, the document was never incorporated into the state legislative record and the matter was effectively dropped."¹⁸ While Green argued that the House Committee's findings hurt the significance of the Longoria affair due to them leading to the demise of the Good Neighbor Committee, Ramos saw it as victory for Hector P. Garcia and the American GI Forum.

While Ramos and the authors before him centered their arguments on Mexican American involvement in the Longoria affair, Julie Leininger Pycior's, *LBJ and Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power*, focuses on how Lyndon Baines Johnson's involvement shaped the outcome of the Longoria affair. Though Pycior's rhetoric is similar to Allsup's, she takes a completely different path to show how Longoria came to his final resting place. Focusing on the relationships that Johnson had with ethnic Mexicans in Texas, Pycior argues that Johnson's efforts to bury Longoria gained him respect within the Hispanic population which later garnered him votes in his Senate and eventually, a presidential election.

Pycior notes that after Johnson heard of the event through a telegram sent to him by Dr. Hector P. Garcia, he called a friend, Robert Jackson at the Corpus Christi Caller to confirm the story. It is at this point that Johnson saw an "opportunity to use his sympathy for Mexican Americans as a vehicle for both their advancement and his own."¹⁹ According to Pycior, Johnson's main reason for becoming involved in the Longoria affair was for political gain and

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Julie L. Pycior, *L.B.J and Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press. 1997), 69.

not because of the injustice surrounding the incident. Pycior notes that though Johnson's actions in aiding the Longoria family were just, his involvement was based on political gain.

Pycior argues that Johnson knew he could not do anything to get Felix Longoria buried in Three Rivers. The funeral home was a private institution, and the owner had the right to refuse service to anyone he wanted. Since Johnson could not force the funeral home to hold services for Felix in Three Rivers he decided to give the family the right to bury him at Arlington National Cemetery. Johnson also pledged his help to the American G.I. Forum because they conduct themselves in a peaceful manner knowing that mass rallies and protests would hurt his political agenda. Knowing this, Garcia followed what Johnson set out to do to further the cause.²⁰ It was through this that Garcia and the American GI Forum took Johnson's assistance to bury Longoria. Pycior notes that though this placed Johnson in a controversial position, in the long run it helped him politically.

Manuel Peña's *Musica Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* focuses on the effect that the *corrido* *Discriminación a un Martir* had on the overall Longoria affair. From the beginning of his book, Peña argues against Americo Paredes' notion that "the 1930's was the historical limit of the *corrido* tradition in Texas."²¹ He notes that *corridos* did not decline after this period but rather found a new way of being expressed through the victim *corridos* of the 1930's. The most influential of these *corridos* was *Discriminación a un Martir* which narrates the events surrounding the death and burial of Felix Longoria.

²⁰ Ibid., 70.

²¹ Manuel Pena, *Musica Tejana: The Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation* (College Station: Texas A&M Press.1999), 76.

Peña argues that the *corrido* “kept the incident alive in the social memory, while it contributed to raising the level of political consciousness and activity within the Texas-Mexican community at large.”²² The song overall helped show that if the community joined together and fought for its rights, anything they set out to do could be accomplished. Though Felix Longoria was just a man, Peña argues he represented the Mexican population as a whole. Peña also argues that the *corrido* demonstrates that “it is the community itself and not a larger-than-life hero that, through collective action, saves the day for the people.”²³ While the song focuses on the discrimination experienced by the Longoria family, it also makes clear that through the actions of the community Longoria’s burial at Arlington National Cemetery was achieved. While the other books focus mainly on the success that Johnson and the G.I. Forum had in the Longoria affair, Peña makes it a point to show that the collective actions of the community played a major part in the burial of Longoria. This argument brings to light the fact that other organizations including League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) got involved but were not primary actors in the attempt to bury Longoria. Peña also argues that through the *corrido* the Mexican American community saw Johnson acting out of sympathy for the people and not for political gain.

Adding to Peña’s argument that the Mexican American community played a large role in the outcome of the Longoria affair, Ignacio M. Garcia’s, *Hector P. Garcia: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice*, looks at how Mexican Americans through the Longoria affair challenged the social structure in Texas and how this challenge helped Dr. Garcia and the American GI Forum move into the national civil rights movement. Garcia also argues that through the Longoria affair Dr.

²² Ibid.,79.

²³ Ibid,79.

Garcia wanted to bring prejudice against Mexican American to light in order to discuss and resolve it on a national stage.²⁴

Garcia argues that “Mexicans and Mexican Americans were expected to understand the social parameters in communities like Three Rivers.”²⁵ In asking to use the chapel, Beatrice was crossing these social parameters and forced Tom Kennedy to make a decision either enforcing said parameters or giving her an alternative. In giving Beatrice the alternative to hold the wake at her home, Kennedy was enforcing the social boundaries put in place by Anglos. Garcia argues that through this Kennedy opened the door for Beatrice and the American GI Forum to challenge Anglo discrimination that was set in place.

Through their actions in the Longoria affair Mexican Americans “told the Anglo American community that Mexican Americans could unite, that their cause was just, and that there were many sympathizers outside of the barrio.”²⁶ The Longoria affair showed Mexican Americans that when they united as a whole through organizations such as the American GI Forum they could effectively challenge the social structure set in place by Anglos in Texas.

While authors before him focused on how the collective action in the Longoria affair pushed Mexican American civil rights forward, Patrick James Carroll’s *Felix Longoria’s Wake*, discusses the different effects individuals had on the Longoria Affair and how they affected the overall Mexican American population. What makes Carroll’s book stand out is the fact that he is the first person to interview Beatrice Longoria, Felix’s wife, and had access to all those involved

²⁴ Ignacio M. Garcia, *Hector P. Garcia: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2002), 131.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 108.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

in the affair. Through his interviews with Beatrice and others, Carroll gives a clear picture of the events that unfolded based on personal accounts.

Using interviews and primary material from the period, Carroll's book is able to weave all sides of the Longoria affair together. Through his look at the affair he shows how the Longoria affair affected both the Mexican Americans and Anglos involved in the affair. While others typically only look at Mexican American involvement in the affair, Carroll shows how the Anglos involved were affected by the events that transpired. Through this Carroll illustrates how the racial climate in Texas between Anglos and Mexican Americans was further strained by the Felix Longoria affair.

Carroll argues that though the Longoria family was successful in burying Felix at Arlington National Cemetery and the American GI Forum found their way into the national spotlight, the original goal of finding Felix a place to be waked was never accomplished. While dignitaries, military leaders, and politicians attended his funeral, Carroll argues that the one thing they were fighting for was never accomplished. Though Felix was never waked, the honor and significance of where he was buried superseded, in the mind of those involved, the need for him to be waked.

Similar to Carroll's book, Michelle Hall Kell's, *Hector P. Garcia: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights* shows that "through Garcia's intervention and sustained leadership, the Longoria incident evolved into a galvanizing moment mobilizing and organizing disparate groups toward the formation of the post-war Mexican American civil rights movement."²⁷ Through Garcia's efforts to fight discrimination in the Longoria affair, the

²⁷ Michelle Hall Kells, *Hector P. Garcia: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006)

American GI Forum was pushed into the forefront of the civil rights movement with him leading the charge.

Kells, like the other authors before her, looks at the affair as challenging the underlining racial bigotry that occurred in Texas and the United States. She argues that in Texas, Mexican Americans were not only exploited by Anglos but also were seen as a “forgotten people.”²⁸ With Anglo domination in Texas at the time Mexican American had few means of resisting discrimination against them. “For Garcia, white Americans did not accept the truth of racism because they did not see it. His job was to make white America see the truth of racism by vividly representing real and particular cases of discrimination against Mexican Americans.”²⁹ According to Kells, the Longoria affair gave Garcia what he needed to show that racism still existed in the South. In bringing the Longoria affair into the national arena he accomplished his goals of showing that discrimination was alive and well in the South and that people needed to stand up and fight against it.

While most see the event as bringing Dr. Hector P. Garcia and the American GI Forum into national prominence, I argue that the Felix Longoria affair helped unite Mexican Americans in Texas to a common cause which helped set a precedent on how to successfully fight Anglo discrimination in South Texas. I accomplish this by showing how racial discrimination in the South Texas led Beatrice Longoria and the American GI Forum to fight for the burial and wake of Felix Longoria. While many historians before me have looked at the implications of the Longoria affair on the national stage, my focus is on the effect the Longoria affair had on long standing racial discrimination in South Texas.

²⁸ Ibid., 73.

²⁹ Ibid.,

The following chapter, chapter two, discusses the United States military campaigns in the Philippines focusing mainly on the battles fought on the Island of Luzon. I tie in casualty of Mexican Americans, medals received, and the overall treatment of Mexican Americans during the war. I also detail the discrimination Mexican American soldiers faced as they took to their new lives as soldiers.

The third chapter discusses the overall importance the Longoria affair had on Mexican American society. The chapter looks at Beatrice Longoria, Tom Kennedy, Hector P. Garcia, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, and how each person's actual decisions affected the outcome of the affair. Through their actions I shed light on how each uses the affair to fight racism and prejudice that so often occurred in South Texas

Next I look at how Mexican American women in South Texas became active in the fight to bury Felix Longoria. I examine the involvement of Beatrice Longoria, Sara Moreno, Jane Kennedy, Carolina Longoria, and the American GI Forum Ladies Auxiliary involvement in the Longoria affair. Through the actions of these women, I show how they helped support the cause and how support in turn led to a new understanding in women's fight for equal rights.

Finally, in chapter five I examine the efforts by the Texas House of Representatives to nullify the affects of the Longoria Affair, through the Good Neighbor Commission. This chapter also looks at how in recent years the Longoria affair has seen a resurgence causing the matter to be reexamined in Three Rivers. Through this I argue that while many have tried to play down the significance of the Longoria affair, it is still influential to this day.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY LIFE AND WAR YEARS OF PRIVATE FELIX LONGORIA

On April 16, 1920, in Three Rivers, Dolores and Guadalupe Longoria gave birth to Felix Longoria. His father, Guadalupe, worked as both a carpenter and fence builder for the Anglos in town. Through this and his ability to speak both English and Spanish, Guadalupe became the middle man for the Anglos and Mexicans in Three Rivers.¹ With Guadalupe's new position within the social hierarchy, the Longorias became a prominent family in Three Rivers.

Longoria's family resided on the "west side in Mexican Town; constituting about a fourth of the community's population of some 3,000."² During Longoria's youth, the city was heavily segregated with the Mexican Americans receiving the worst of everything the city had to offer. Though segregation was not official, Mexican Americans in town were often "discouraged" from using community buildings or Anglo-owned businesses.³ In 1924 Guadalupe Longoria was contacted by several Anglos in town to discuss overcrowding in the cemetery. They informed him that the cemetery had become too crowded and that he should encourage the Mexican Americans in town to buy the property adjacent to the current cemetery and use it for

¹ Guadalupe was the go between for Anglos looking for workers and Mexicans looking for work. As a trusted Mexican American citizen, Anglos often hired workers through Guadalupe, leading Mexican workers to go through Guadalupe when in search of work rather than going directly to Anglo employers.

² Green, George N., "The Felix Longoria Affair", *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 19:3 (1991:Fall), 23.

³ State of Texas, *Three Rivers Inspection made of Area on February 21, 1949*. Austin: Report. February 21, 1949. Mary and Jeff Bell Library 202.44 Garcia Collection. AD: Felix Longoria Affair

their burials.⁴ The Mexican Americans in town agreed to this and Guadalupe built a fence that separated the Anglo and Mexican sides of the cemetery.

Anglos in Three Rivers also set up separate schools for Mexican American children, who they believed lacked the skills to succeed in the Anglo school. The Mexican school was a small wood building located outside the city limits. The building suffered from poor lighting, small quarters, poor heating, and a lack of essential teaching supplies for the number of students that attended.⁵ Mexican students of all ages from Three Rivers and the surrounding areas attended this school. Teaching these students was a difficult task for teachers given the varying ages of these individuals. While some of these students could read and write, others were learning basic English skills for the first time. While the Anglo school was well funded and taken care of, the Mexican school suffered from a lack of funding and essential resources.⁶

While the city was heavily segregated during Felix Longoria's youth, his family was better off than most of the other Mexican families in Three Rivers⁷. With Guadalupe's steady work, Felix and his brothers were often taken out of school to work for their father, limiting their education. This led to Felix dropping out of school in third grade in order to work for his father full time. As Felix grew older he worked in "the oil fields drove a truck and also built fences alongside his father, Guadalupe."⁸

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Ibid.,

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ His family was seen as better off than other Mexican Americans in Three Rivers because the status that Guadalupe Longoria held which afforded them certain privileges. Though Felix and his brothers dropped out of school they were still seen as being in a place of power and status due to their father.

⁸ Green, George N., "The Felix Longoria Affair", *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 19:3 (1991:Fall), 23.

At the age of sixteen, Longoria met Beatrice Moreno of Corpus Christi. Beatrice had moved to Three Rivers with her family when her father, who worked with the railroad line, was relocated to town. Shortly after Beatrice's arrival in Three Rivers the two started to date. Two years into their courtship, Felix asked for Beatrice's hand in marriage and the two became wed. After their wedding the two moved into a small white house across from Longoria's parents. A year into their marriage, work in Three Rivers became scarce forcing Felix and Beatrice to move to Corpus Christi. While there, they lived with Beatrice's family and Felix did odd jobs to support his wife. After a short time in Corpus Christi, Felix and Beatrice moved back to Three Rivers. It was during this second move that they had a daughter, Adelita Longoria. In order to support his growing family Felix went back to work for his father and also found a part time job in the oil fields outside of town. While things went well for the Longorias, one event would soon change everything.

On Dec 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II. When word of the attack arrived on the mainland, fear and confusion spread throughout the Mexican American population.⁹ For Thomas A. Hernandez the news of the attack came with some bewilderment "I didn't even know what Pearl Harbor was; we thought it was another country."¹⁰ While most knew of the attack, few knew where the attack had taken place and what significance, if any, it would have for them. Others reacted differently. Paul Lopez Solis recollected that "it came over the radio, and at first I thought it was a joke. You didn't know whether to take it seriously or cry or do what. We said well, we've got to go and

⁹ Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez. *A Legacy Greater Than Words: Stories of U.S. Latinos and Latinas of the World War II Generation*. (Austin: U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project/ UT Press, 2006)

¹⁰ Kristina Radke. *Interview of Thomas A. Hernandez*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted April 6, 2002.

see what we can do about it, about enlisting, and so everybody you met was going to enlist.”¹¹

Like much of the country many Mexican American men joined the armed forces after the attack on Pearl Harbor. For some joining the army was a way to get out of poverty, while others simply joined because they felt it was the right thing to do. George Salmeron remembered that “in our neighborhood it wasn’t, are you going to join or not? The question was when.”¹²

News of the war also fell hard on the families whose sons would soon be going to war. Upon hearing the news that the war had started the mother of Joseph Rodriguez cried out “hay van mis higos a la guerra/ there goes my sons to the war.”¹³ This was a common reaction mothers had as their sons were about to go out to war. As a close knit culture, many Mexican American mothers were never far away from their sons. When war broke out, they faced the fear of whether their sons would be returning from war. While some worried whether they would see their children again, others knew their sons were fighting for a just cause. Often mothers felt that since the country had been good to them, their sons should fight in the war.

Although segregated at the time, the young men in Three Rivers had something in common. No matter what race they were from, they could be drafted into the armed forces to serve in World War II. On November 11, 1944, Felix Longoria was drafted into the military forcing him to leave behind his family to serve his country. Though he was saddened by having to leave he was ready and willing to serve his country overseas.

¹¹ Elizabeth Egeland. *Interview of Paul Lopez Solis*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted January 22, 2003.

¹² Rajesh Reddy. *Interview of George Salmeron*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted April 2, 2003.

¹³ Alicia Dietrich. *Interview with Joseph Rodriguez*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted December 11, 2001.

Felix reported to processing at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. Having been drafted later in the war, twenty four year old Felix was placed into Infantry Replacement Training at Fort Hood, in Fort Hood, Texas. “Infantry Replacement Training centers were set up by the United States Army to train the many replacements that they had long anticipated would be needed to defeat the well-trained German and Japanese Armies, which had been fighting since 1939.”¹⁴ The draftees placed under this training underwent a 17 week program that prepared them for what they would see in combat. Upon their arrival at these camps the troops went through processing where they “filled out insurance and allotment papers, were given I.Q test, and were read the Articles of War.”¹⁵ After this draftees received a military-style haircut and were given their uniform. Not knowing where they would be sent as replacements for depleted units these soldiers trained in all areas of combat.

It is estimated that 250,000 to 750,000 Latinos served in the armed forces¹⁶ during World War II.¹⁷ This newfound military lifestyle had varying effects on the Mexican Americans who were placed in the Army. For the most part the Mexican Americans looked and acted like every other soldier; from following orders to their manner of dress it was hard to tell many of the Mexican American soldiers from their Anglo counterparts. The one thing that brought them together and set them apart from the others was their ability to speak both English and Spanish. “We applied our bilingual advantage to the utmost; using Spanish to understand each other better, and to curse the damn sergeants, who kept blowing their damn whistles every ten

¹⁴ Raúl Morín. *Among the Valiant: Mexican American in World War II and Korean*. (Alhambra: Borden Publishing Co., 1963), 85.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁶ The true number of how many Latinos served is unknown due in part to the fact that at the current time Latinos were considered part of the white race. Adding to the difficulty was that fact that Latinos of African ancestry were often grouped with black troops and Latinos with English surnames cannot be distinguished from Anglos.

¹⁷ U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/ww2latinos/index.html> accessed Sept 22, 2010.

minutes.”¹⁸ Though this ability to speak without others knowing what they said brought them together it also created problems for them.

When [Latinos] got together, we would automatically carry a conversation in Spanish, not in English, because we weren't very professional in English, so [the white soldiers] would give us hell and say, you're in the American Army; speak English so we spoke English.¹⁹

Many Anglo drill sergeants and soldiers often took the Mexican Americans' lack of English skills and Spanish language as a sign that they were not as intelligent as Anglo soldiers.²⁰ This often led to Mexican American soldiers being passed up for promotions or even being barred from becoming officers.²¹ Though the ability to speak both English and Spanish aided Mexican American soldiers while they were in camp, it also led to discrimination.

Though discrimination was apparent to some in the army, for the most part, it brought Anglos and Mexican Americans together. “Rich or poor, light or dark, the educated and the ignorant all were through together to accomplish the same objective, mainly that of learning military skills; and all were subjected to the same rude army discipline.”²² Although this adjustment was difficult at first, over time they grew to embrace each other as brothers in arms. For most Mexican Americans this adjustment was fairly easy. Having grown up in the barrios and slums of different cities, many had become acquainted with people of all races. For some though there was quite an adjustment to be made. Many of the Anglo soldiers who came from

¹⁸ Raúl Morín. *Among the Valiant: Mexican American in World War II and Korean*. (Alhambra: Borden Publishing Co., 1963), 84.

¹⁹ Erika Jaramillo. *Interview Natividad Campos Sr.* Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted September 1, 2007.

²⁰ Alyssa Green. *Interview of Alfonso Rodriguez*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted November 3, 2002.

²¹ Brandi Grissom. *Interview of Pablo Segura*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted September 9, 2002.

²² Raúl Morín. *Among the Valiant: Mexican American in World War II and Korean*. (Alhambra: Borden Publishing Co., 1963), 88.

the South, where discrimination ran rampant, had to adjust to this new life where men of color were entrusted with their lives. Basic training for the most part was where these differences were ironed out and where their bonding began. It was “here for the first time in their lives they became acquainted and really got to know their fellow countryman of a different nationality and racial background.”²³ This in turn helped the soldiers realize that they had to stick together and get past racial differences if they wanted to make it out of the war alive.

After basic training Private Felix Longoria spent one last evening with his wife and daughter at Fort Hood. The next day Longoria said his goodbyes to his wife and daughter not knowing that it would be the final time he would see them. After leaving Fort Hood, Longoria boarded a ship in Corpus Christi, Texas, with other infantry replacements headed to the Philippines as a member of the 27th Infantry Division in the spring of 1945.

The Pacific Theater was a vastly different war than its European equivalent. While in Europe one was often fighting in cities, towns, villages and the country side, the Pacific theater was focused on long, hard fought amphibious landings on islands spread throughout the region. Most of the Islands the U.S. Army attacked were well defended and prepared for U.S. invasions. This made amphibious landings difficult for the U.S. army and meant that attacks on these islands often ended in many casualties to the U.S. armed forces. Once the soldiers had captured the islands they were often faced with difficulties. The constant rain, heat, and lack of supplies led to many of the American soldiers contracting disease such as malaria, yellow fever, and cholera. While they were infected with these maladies many of these soldiers had to fight off the Japanese, walk miles in combat zones, and wait until aid came before they could be treated.

²³ Ibid., 87.

In Europe, troops frequently went into cities where they found shelter, alcohol, food, goods and women. In the Pacific once an island had been captured most of it lay in ruin from constant U.S bombing. This left little shelter for the troops to escape the monsoon rains that troops repeatedly faced in the Pacific. Also many of these islands were uninhabited leaving the American soldiers with little in return for their efforts. When Americans landed on many of the islands they often had no supplies, food, or people who knew their language. These islands habitually had little to no infrastructure, making obtaining supplies hard for troops on certain parts of the islands.

Before World War II the Philippines were an American territory in the Pacific that housed much of the American forces in the region. With such a large U.S. force on the island, Japanese forces decided that once their planned bombings on Pearl Harbor were deployed, a Japanese invasion of the Philippines was necessary to rid U.S. forces from Japanese territory. The Japanese goal for an invasion of the Philippines was simply to crush the enemy's forces on the island and destroy all bases of operation that could be used by the Americans in an offensive against Japan.²⁴

On December 8, roughly 4 ½ hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor the Japanese troops began the invasion of the Philippines.²⁵ Though they expected the U.S. resistance to be strong due to the attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese bombers and troops were met with little resistance. This was due to small troop numbers on the island and General Douglas MacArthur's wish to attack the Japanese once their entire army had come ashore.²⁶ The superior numbers of

²⁴ Douglas MacArthur's General Staff. *Reports of General MacArthur: Japanese Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area Vol. II Part I*. (Washington: Department of the Army, 1950), 87.

²⁵Ibid., 90.

²⁶ Douglas MacArthur's General Staff. *Reports of General MacArthur: The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific Vol I Part I*. (Washington: Department of the Army, 1950), 7.

the Japanese aided them in a swift victory over the American forces. By Jan 2, 1942 the Japanese successfully captured the Philippine capital of Manila. MacArthur's troops soon retreated to the Bataan Peninsula where he figured his troops could hold off the Japanese until American reinforcements arrived. Though this helped slow the Japanese invasion it did little to stop their advances into the area.

On March 16, 1942, after being ordered to retreat from the Philippines, MacArthur and his staff arrived in Australia. Upon his arrival MacArthur met with the media and stated "The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines and proceed from Corregidor to Australia for the purpose, as I understand it, of organizing the American offensive against Japan, a primary object of which is the relief of the Philippines. I came through and I shall return."²⁷ The only thing that mattered to the men still fighting and the many Filipinos left in the Philippines was simply MacArthur's vow that no matter what he would return. This saying was placed everywhere on the island and even after the Philippines fell to the Japanese, troops and the Filipinos used this as a rallying cry against the Japanese.

With a lack of supplies and a superior Japanese army headed their way the Americans and Filipino troops who were left behind did what they could to survive. With little food many of the troops resorted to eating monkeys, iguanas, and the horses and mules that they had brought with them to Bataan.²⁸ This along with the lack of medical supplies to treat the many diseases they had come in contact with all but spelled doom for the American soldiers on Bataan. On

²⁷ Dale Andradé. *Luzon 1944-1945*. (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1996), 3.

²⁸ Helen Perlata. *Interview of Agapito E. Silva*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted November 30, 2001.

May 7, 1942 Lieutenant General Wainwright surrendered the U.S. and Filipino forces to the Japanese Army.²⁹

After the surrender U.S. and Filipino soldiers in Bataan were forced to march 60 miles from Bataan to Cabantuan.³⁰ While on the march those that struggled or simply went out of line were killed on the spot. Many times Japanese soldiers would halt the troops when someone sat down to show them that if they stopped they would be executed on the spot. Others were desperate for food and water and often took whatever chances they had to get some, if they were caught by the Japanese troops they were usually bayoneted on the spot. In the Japanese code you were never to fall down, when the troops fell “the Japanese would put them up against a post, and practice their bayonet on them.”³¹ It is estimated that 10,000 lives were lost on this march which came to be known as the Bataan Death March.³² Those who did survive the march were placed in labor camps in both the Philippines and Japan where they faced severe hardships and often death until the war ended.

After their capture of the Philippines the Japanese knew they had to gain the respect of the Filipinos to maintain order on the Island. The Japanese “launched a showy program designed to transfer the Filipinos’ loyalty from the United States to Japan.”³³ Through propaganda the Japanese tried to show the Filipinos that through their common Asian heritage they were one and the same. Through this they also sought to show the Filipinos that as Asians they should join

²⁹ Douglas MacArthur’s General Staff. *Reports of General MacArthur: Japanese Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area Vol. II Part I*. (Washington: Department of the Army, 1950), 122.

³⁰ Ashley Clary. *Interview of Arthur Smith*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted March 13, 2001.

³¹ Joanne R. Sanchez. *Interview of Abel Flores Ortega*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted March 29, 2001.

³² Ashley Clary. *Interview of Arthur Smith*. Courtesy U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Interview conducted March 13, 2001.

³³ Rafael Steinberg. *Return to the Philippines*. (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1981), 8.

together against the Americans and their Allies. What the Japanese failed to see was that most of the Filipinos saw themselves as a Hispanic American people, due to their Spanish roots, and less as an Asian country.³⁴ This in turn led to many of the Filipinos seeing the Japanese not as liberators but rather as invaders. Pockets of resistance soon sprang up being led by U.S. officers and soldiers who had escaped into the woods before the American surrender at Bataan. Though these groups were small in size they managed to create havoc for the Japanese army and gained intelligence for the American forces who had vowed to return.

During the summer of 1944, after several major victories, the Allied leadership debated on whether to attack Formosa or Luzon. MacArthur, seeing his opportunity to return to the Philippines and uphold his promise to the Filipinos, argued for operations to be focused on retaking the Philippine Island. He argued that Luzon was the logical choice because seizing Luzon would cut off Japanese lines of communication, giving Allied bombers a working airfield that could be used to begin the bombing of Japan, and it fulfilled the promise that U.S. forces would return to the Philippines and liberate its people.³⁵ Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz argued that the same could be done by taking Formosa with the exception of keeping MacArthur's promise to the Filipinos. Nimitz believed that by taking Formosa, the Americans could cut off Japanese lines of communication giving the allied forces the ability to attack Japanese troops on both China and Japan.³⁶ The problem many saw with an invasion of Formosa before Luzon was it would be harder for the allied troops to invade. Though Nimitz had a large naval force he lacked enough troops to sustain a land campaign against the Japanese forces on the island

³⁴ Mark Roehrs. *World War II in the Pacific*. (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 140.

³⁵ Richard W. Smith. *American Military History Vol. II: The United States Army in A Global Era, 1917-2003*.(Washington: Center for Military History, 2005), 182.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 182-183.

without MacArthur's full cooperation.³⁷ Formosa's proximity to both the Philippines and China also left the American naval and land forces susceptible to bombing from both places. Lastly organizers of the attack came to the conclusion that it was easier to send Nimitz's ships to Luzon as opposed to sending MacArthur and his men to Formosa. This being the case President Roosevelt and his advisors decided that the best plan of action was to retake the Philippines.

With a plan set in place to retake the Philippines MacArthur began publicizing his imminent return to the island. Weeks before the planned U.S. Invasion of the Philippines MacArthur ordered U.S. airplanes to drop pamphlets proclaiming his soon return to the island. As the invasion grew nearer MacArthur stepped up propaganda and often dropped leaflets on landing zones the U.S. forces planned to use.³⁸ Though MacArthur felt his methods were beneficial to U.S Forces many feared that what he was doing would hurt the mission by informing the Japanese of the U.S. soon invasion of the Island which in turn gave allowed them to prepare for the coming offensive.³⁹

MacArthur knew that an invasion of Luzon outright would be difficult and thus chose Leyte as the first stage for the retaking of the Philippines. Unlike Luzon, Leyte had smaller Japanese units who the allied forces believed could be overrun quickly. The Allied forces also hoped to use Leyte as a staging ground for their soon invasion of Luzon. Through their capture of the Island allied forces sought to gain use the both the Airfields and Ports, in order to use them in the invasion of Luzon.

³⁷Ibid., 183.

³⁸ Mark Roehrs. *World War II in the Pacific*. (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 139.

³⁹ Ibid., 139.

On October 17, 1944, preliminary operation began in the Leyte Gulf with ranger units sweeping the area for mines and overtaking the smaller islands leading to Leyte.⁴⁰ The main invasion of the Island began on October 20, 1944. Naval forces began bombing strategic areas of the island where Japanese forces were believed to be. MacArthur knew that a successful retaking of the island could only be completed if Allied forces made sure to leave Filipino infrastructure intact.⁴¹ After several hours of bombings U.S. troops took the beachhead allowing MacArthur to come ashore at which time he gave a speech to the people who had gathered to greet the Allied forces.

This is the Voice of Freedom, General MacArthur speaking. People of the Philippines: I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God our forces stand again on Philippine soil—soil consecrated in the blood of our two peoples. We have come, dedicated and committed to the task of destroying every vestige of enemy control over your daily lives, and of restoring, upon a foundation of indestructible strength, the liberties of your people.⁴²

With his triumphant return to the Philippines, MacArthur began planning the recapture of the Luzon.

MacArthur came to the conclusion that in order to recapture Luzon he needed a base of operations closer to the island. On Dec 16, 1944, U.S. forces began the invasion of Mindoro which MacArthur sought to use as an airfield.⁴³ Within days of the invasion, the allied forces set up airfields on the island and prepared for the invasion of Luzon.

The invasion of Luzon began with naval operations in the Lingayen Gulf. Naval bombardment of the area began several days before the arrival of army transports in order to

⁴⁰ Charles R. Anderson. *Leyte*. (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1996), 12.

⁴¹ Douglas MacArthur's General Staff. *Reports of General MacArthur: The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific Vol 1 Part 1*. (Washington: Department of the Army, 1950), 191.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴³ Dale Andradé. *Luzon 1944-1945*. (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1996), 6.

keep the men from coming into harm's way and as an effort to clear the beaches of Japanese before the invasion force arrived. The Naval Fleet upon entering the Lingayen Gulf ran into Kamikaze strikes from the already depleted Japanese air force on the island.⁴⁴ After about a day of these attacks the Americans Navy secured the area and awaited the Army transports to begin the invasion Luzon.

General Tomoyuki Yamashita was in charge of Japanese forces in the Philippines. Prior to the U.S. invasion of the Luzon, Yamashita was informed that Japanese replacements would not be sent to relieve the depleted units on the island. Adding to this problem Yamashita's forces lacked supplies such as modern weapons, artillery, tanks, and armor.⁴⁵ Knowing this Yamashita came up with a plan to delay American troops as long as possible in order to give the Japanese mainland time to prepare for the inevitable invasion. Yamashita separated his forces into the Shobu, Kembu, and Shimbu groups. "More than half of Yamashita's strength of some 152,000 men was disposed as the Shobu Group in the Northern sector of Luzon, 30,000 soldiers of the Kembu Group were formed up in the south and west of Lingayen to guard the airfields, and 80,000 of the Shimbu Group stood ready to defend Manila and Luzon's pendulous southeastern peninsula."⁴⁶ Yamashita's intention was to have these groups hold their respective areas as long as they could and then retreat to the mountains on the east coast of the island where he believed Japanese forces could delay the Americans army from taking the island.

On January 9, 1945, American forces in the Lingayen Gulf began the amphibious landing on Luzon. Though many believed that the beachhead would be heavily fortified, American forces landed with little resistance. Lieutenant General Walter Krueger was in charge of the 6th

⁴⁴ Rafael Steinberg, *Return to the Philippines*. (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1981), 108.

⁴⁵ Dale Andradé, *Luzon 1944-1945*. (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1996), 9.

⁴⁶ John Costello, *The Pacific War 1941-1945*. (New York: Quill, 1982)

Army which held the 25th Infantry Division which housed the 27th Infantry Regiment of which Felix Longoria would soon join. Successfully disembarking on Luzon the 6th Army was ordered to move to Manila and help in the recapture of the capital city. Though Krueger obeyed the order he took his approach with caution due to fear of a counter attack from the larger Shobu group.⁴⁷ This angered MacArthur who believed that the American Forces movements were taking too long to reach their main goal of Manila. Along the way to Manila the Sixth Army and XIV Corps retook Clark Air force base where they meet little resistance from the Kembu group.

Before American forces could reach Manila General Yamashita order his forces to destroy all bridges and vital instillations in Manila and retreat into the mountains to begin their delaying operations. Though given direct orders to retreat Rear Admiral Iwabachi Sanji who was only partly under Yamashita's command decided that his men would defend the city at all cost.⁴⁸

American forces began the retaking of the Manila on January 31, 1945. The 25th Infantry Division was tasked with operations in the eastern portion of Manila. On February 14 the 25th and 32nd Infantry Divisions prepared a two pronged assault on the last two entryways into the Cagayan Valley.⁴⁹ The 25th advanced along Highway No. 5 from San Jose to the Balete Pass which they sought to capture. Sometime during this advance Private Felix Longoria joined the 25th Infantry division's advance as part of its 27th Infantry Regiment-"Wolfhounds". Operations in this area were difficult at first due to terrible heat, the steep mountains, and Japanese forces fighting every advance the 25th made. To make matters worse, in April monsoon rains began

⁴⁷ Dale Andradé. *Luzon 1944-1945*. (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1996), 9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁹ Douglas MacArthur's General Staff. *Reports of General MacArthur: The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific Vol 1 Part 1*. (Washington: Department of the Army, 1950), 287.

flooding the roads and making many of them impassable to the advancing division. On May 13th the 25th Army broke through the Balete Pass, giving forces an entry into the Cagayan Valley. From Balete the 25th and 32nd Divisions began moving along to Sante Fe and into the Cagayan Valley.

With the Balete Pass captured the 25th Infantry Division entered the Cagayan Valley where the remaining Japanese forces lay. “The valley, 40 miles wide and about 150 mile long, lay open to sea on Luzon’s north coast, but on the west and south it was separated from the Central Cordillera and the Caraballo range.”⁵⁰ Japanese General Yamashita chose the Cagayan Valley as his final standing point because of its vast number of caves, unforgiving landscape, and natural food supply. Upon American entry into the valley Yamashita’s plan was to hold advancing American forces there as long as possible.

With the 25th’s advance into the area they were met with the delaying efforts of Yamashita’s men. On June 16, 1945, a sergeant called out for volunteers to scout an area near the Cagayan River in search of retreating Japanese units.⁵¹ Private Felix Longoria upon hearing the request for volunteers accepted the call of duty and was soon on his way into the jungle. As the group made their way through the dense Cagayan Valley, they were attacked by a Japanese unit. When the gunfire ceased Felix Longoria was among the men who had died. Longoria upon his death received “the purple heart and Combat Infantryman’s Badge, and was laid to rest in a temporary military cemetery in Luzon.”⁵² Approximately fourteen days after Longoria’s death, on June 30, 1945, the Sixth Army was relieved by the Eight Army in order to prepare for the

⁵⁰ Rafael Steinberg. *Return to the Philippines*. (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1981), 182.

⁵¹ Si Dunn. *The Legacy of Pvt Felix Longoria* (Scene Magazine, Dallas Morning News, April 6, 1975), 7.

⁵² Green, George N., “The Felix Longoria Affair”, *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 19:3 (1991:Fall), 23.

invasion of Japan. Due to the atomic bombing of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Sixth Army did not see battle again.

Though hostilities had ended on the Philippines, Yamashita and his men still fought American forces on Luzon. “General Yamashita and about, 50,500 of his men surrendered only after the close of hostilities on 15 August.”⁵³ Upon the U.S. victory American forces began the difficult task of clearing the Philippines of Japanese forces still held up in the Cagayan Valley. These men often had to be convinced by Japanese soldiers that the war was in fact over.

On September 2, 1945, the Japanese surrendered to Allied forces aboard the USS *Missouri* ending World War II. MacArthur gave one last speech stating “today the guns are silent. A great tragedy has ended. A great victory has been won.”⁵⁴ For those returning home from war these words rang true, for the Longoria family though, the ending of World War II would bring a different kind of battle to the family. As sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers returned home from overseas they were met with a rapidly changing world. The Longoria family on the other hand, was faced with grieving Felix who was buried half way across the world.

⁵³ Dale Andradé. *Luzon 1944-1945*. (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1996), 29.

⁵⁴ Douglas MacArthur's General Staff. *Reports of General MacArthur: The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific Vol 1 Part 1*. (Washington: Department of the Army, 1950), 466.

CHAPTER III

THE LONGORIA AFFAIR

While Felix Longoria could lie next to his Anglo brothers-in-arms in his grave in the Philippines, discrimination at home made sure that they could not be laid to rest in the same cemetery or waked in the same chapel. Stationed overseas in the army Mexican American and Anglo soldiers had united towards a common cause. As they came home they were greeted with the old Southern practice of segregation and discrimination. Even in death, a hero because of his race, could not be waked or buried where their family wished them to be.

In November of 1948, Beatrice Longoria, the widow of Felix Longoria, was informed by the army quartermaster that her husband's body would be returned to the states in January of 1949. The army requested that all information pertaining to the re-internment of Felix Longoria's body be sent to them as soon as possible. After almost four years of dealing with the loss of Felix, Beatrice was forced to relive that horrid day when she received the news of her husband's death. Since hearing of his death in the summer of 1945, things had drastically changed for Beatrice. She and Adelita, Felix's daughter, had since moved to Corpus Christi in order to be closer to her family. Although Beatrice no longer lived in Three Rivers she decided to bury Felix in his hometown in order for him to be closer to his family and friends. What occurred next was something she could have never imagined. The events that occurred over the next couple of months not only had a profound effect on Beatrice and her family, but also

brought to light the injustices that were happening to Mexican Americans in Texas and helped push the American GI Forum into the national spotlight.

According to records, Beatrice Longoria went to the Manon Rice Funeral Home in Three Rivers to clarify the meaning of several documents that the army had sent her regarding the return of her husband's body.¹ Upon her arrival at the Rice funeral home, she met with Tom W. Kennedy, the caretaker of the funeral home and assistant to then owner Manon Rice, to preview the paperwork and to discuss whether said funeral home could arrange funeral services for Felix. Mr. Kennedy informed Beatrice what the documents entailed and notified her that the funeral home would be glad to aid her with the burial of her husband. Upon speaking to Mr. Kennedy they came to a preliminary decision that the Rice Funeral home would be in charge of all burial arrangements for Felix Longoria.² What is not clear is whether or not Beatrice informed the Rice Funeral home of her intention to hold a wake for Felix in their chapel at that time. It is generally believed that Tom Kennedy came to an agreement with Beatrice to set up burial arraignments in Three Rivers, but not chapel services. As far as Beatrice was concerned, Felix's wake and burial services were to take place at the Rice Funeral home. Based on this assumption on December 1, 1948 William E. Smith, County Service Officer of Live Oak County sent a letter to the Department of the Army on behalf of Beatrice to notify them that Felix's body was to be sent to the Manon Rice Funeral Home in Three Rivers and that any further information was to be sent to her in Corpus Christi.³

Shortly after their first meeting the Army sent Beatrice a letter informing her that

¹ Cecil Storey, Tom Cheatum, James M. Windham, Byron R. Tinsley. *Longoria Committee Temporary Findings*. Austin: Committee Record. April 7, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.40 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair., 2.

² Ibid.,

³ William E. Smith. "*Longoria Felix Widow's Letter Request for Reburial Predated the Incident 12/1/48*". George West: Letter. January 1, 1948. 202.1Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

verification was needed about where the body would be sent to be reentered. Beatrice then contacted the Manon Rice Funeral home.

On January 1, 1949, T.W. Kennedy a northerner born and raised in Bellwood, Pennsylvania, purchased the Manon Rice Funeral Home from Manon Rice, thus becoming the sole owner and operator of the funeral home.⁴ On January 8, 1949, Beatrice returned to Three Rivers to make final arrangements for the burial of her husband. Upon meeting with Mr. Kennedy, Beatrice informed him that she would like use of the chapel to hold a wake for her husband. While she might have felt this was a harmless question to ask, Tom Kennedy was completely caught off guard. Mexican Americans in Three Rivers were segregated and Kennedy knew that if he allowed the body to lie in wake, it could create problems for him. It would disturb the way things had run in the city for years and potentially cause his business to lose money. He replied, “Well, Mrs. Longoria, I have lots of Latin friends but I can’t let his body rest at this chapel, because the whites won’t like it.”⁵ After having moved to Three Rivers several years before, he had learned that the city was run a certain way. Anglos stayed on their side of town and Mexican Americans did the same. If Kennedy let the body be waked at the chapel he knew that there could be consequences for him and his family. Since he was fairly new to town and had just bought the funeral home several days before this incident, he wanted to accommodate his main customers and ensure them that he would follow the rules set forth by the city’s Anglos. Mr. Kennedy did not fully understand the racial dynamic and did not want to muddy the waters. What he probably never dreamed of was that his words would haunt him for

⁴ Cecil Storey, Tom Cheatum, James M. Windham, Byron R. Tinsley. *Longoria Committee Temporary Findings*. Austin: Committee Record. April 7, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.40 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair, 3.

⁵ Beatrice Longoria. *Signed Statement from Beatrice Longoria on February 9, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized Statement by Hector De Peña. February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

the rest of his life and would open the door for social change in Three Rivers and the rest of the nation.

In order to appease Beatrice and lessen problems for himself, Mr. Kennedy proposed another alternative. Knowing that Beatrice still owned her home in Three Rivers, he suggested to Beatrice that she could hold the wake there, to which she reluctantly agreed to. They then headed to the house to make arrangements for the wake. Upon their arrival, Beatrice was concerned about the small size of the home, lack of proper lighting, and the fact that there was no running water. Though she pointed out several of these shortcomings, Mr. Kennedy continued with the planning of the wake at the house. He suggested various things to Beatrice on how they could make the setting work best for the number of people they expected. Although the house was lacking in Kennedy's mind, holding the wake there would be the best alternative for Beatrice. At the same time this would not upset the racial order. After further discussion, Beatrice reluctantly agreed to all the arrangements that had been made that day. Though she wanted to ask again about holding a wake for Felix at the chapel, she kept quiet and went on making arrangements for the funeral. After their meeting, Beatrice boarded a bus headed to Corpus Christi unhappy because she was not able to arrange a proper wake for her husband.

In Corpus Christi, she spoke to her family about the events that had transpired that day. She felt defeated and worst of all, was concerned that proper funeral arrangements for Felix were not made. Her family could not comprehend Kennedy's reason for denying her use of the chapel for Felix's wake, but they too knew little could be done. Upon hearing about this Beatrice's sister, Sara Moreno, informed her of what Dr. Hector P. Garcia, the founder and President of The

American G.I. Forum had done for her when she had run into discrimination as the chairwoman of the Orquidia Club, a young girl's organization.⁶

Sara Moreno felt that discrimination was involved and led her to contact Dr. Garcia. After talking to Beatrice, Sara contacted Dr. Garcia and explained the situation to him. As soon as he heard this, Dr. Garcia asked to speak with Beatrice. He wanted to confirm the story and discuss what she wanted done about the matter before he took any action. Upon speaking with Dr. Garcia, Beatrice informed him that all the information that her sister had given him was correct and that Mr. T.W. Kennedy "had informed her that she could not use the chapel because he was afraid that the whites would not like it."⁷ She also notified Dr. Garcia that at the time of her meeting with Mr. Kennedy she had agreed to hold the wake at her old home in Three Rivers.⁸ Beatrice then authorized Dr. Garcia to be her spokesperson and to contact Mr. Kennedy to seek use of the chapel at Three Rivers; otherwise he could set up reburial in Corpus Christi.

On January 10, 1949, after speaking to both Beatrice and Sara, Dr. Garcia placed a call to the Manon Rice Funeral home and requested to speak with Mr. T.W. Kennedy. After introducing himself, Dr. Garcia informed Mr. Kennedy that Beatrice had requested his aid in seeking chapel services for her husband, Felix Longoria. Upon hearing this, Mr. Kennedy stated that he and Beatrice had reached an agreement to use her old home to wake Felix.⁹ Dr. Garcia then stated that Mrs. Longoria had since changed her mind and sought the use of the chapel for the wake. Upon hearing this, Tom Kennedy explained to Dr. Garcia that he could not do such a

⁶ David G. McComb. *Interview of Hector P. Garcia*. Austin: Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. July 9, 1969. Accession Record Number: Ac74-277

⁷ Hector P. Garcia. *Sworn statement by Dr. Hector P. Garcia February 9, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized by Hector De Peña, February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library Box 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹ Gladys Blucher. *Sworn statement by Gladys Blucher February 9, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized by Hector De Peña, February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library Box 202.8 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

thing because “the last time the Latin Americans used the home they had fights and got drunk and raised lots of noise and it didn’t look so good.”¹⁰ Kennedy proceeded to explain to Dr. Garcia that Three Rivers was a small town and that he had to follow what the whites in town wanted or else he would lose his business.¹¹ After hearing this, Dr. Garcia emphasized the fact that Felix was a veteran and had died for his country and therefore deserved the right to be waked at the funeral home. Tom Kennedy again told Dr. Garcia that he could not wake Felix Longoria in the Funeral Home “because the whites in Three Rivers would not like it.”¹² It was upon hearing this that Dr. Garcia came to the realization that Tom Kennedy would not budge and politely ended the conversation. Garcia knew there was little he could do to change the mind of Kennedy. Kennedy in no way had violated any laws. His denial of services was his constitutional right. Though the matter infuriated Garcia he knew that the only way to get anything done was to convince both Anglo politicians and Mexican Americans to recognize the contributions of this valiant soldier who gave his life for his country and American democracy. With Kennedy’s denial of chapel service, Dr. Garcia gained access to what he needed most, a confession to what was alleged. If Kennedy had relented Garcia’s status as a civil rights leader might have never come to fruition. With Kennedy’s unwavering stance on not holding the wake at the funeral home, Garcia now had an avenue to challenge the racial status quo. Aiding Garcia cause further was the fact that Longoria was a soldier. Garcia later recounted

¹⁰ Hector P. Garcia. *Sworn Statement by Dr. Hector P. Garcia February 9, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized by Hector De Peña, February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library Box 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

¹¹ Gladys Blucher. *Sworn statement by Gladys Blucher February 9, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized by Hector De Peña. February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.8 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

¹² Hector P. Garcia. *Sworn statement by Dr. Hector P. Garcia February 9, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized by Hector De Peña. February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library Box 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

“yes, it made a lot of difference that he was a soldier, otherwise nothing would have been done. I think the question of the incident of Felix Longoria’s, why would it motivate our people, or all people, more than anything else. Because, first it happened after World War II. When we were supposed to have eliminated the superiority of one group of people over another. And then of course, Felix Longoria to have died in a voluntary action as a simple private, and get killed for his country and coming back and being denied use of chapel home was all in a combination of sort of a sad tragedy because it became a problem a situation of a Mexican-American being denied his rights, civil rights, but it became a problem again that the fact that a soldier had been denied the rights of being buried with full military honors.”¹³

Garcia used the fact that Longoria was a soldier to not only gain the support of Mexican Americans but all Americans. As a soldier Longoria was an honorable man who fought and died for his country, but as a Mexican American Longoria was a member of a marginalized population. Garcia used Longoria’s military status as a method to get passed his racial status and change the rhetoric of the story from Mexican American denied access to that of a hero who died at war. With Kennedy’s admission to denial Garcia had the perfect components to make a case on a national scale that not only resonated with a few but with the total population of the country.

Following his conversation with Tom Kennedy, Dr. Garcia contacted Beatrice to notify her of what had transpired. Though both were upset by these events, Dr. Garcia assured Beatrice that funeral services for Felix would be held in Corpus Christi. If need be, the American G.I. Forum would cover all costs.¹⁴ Following his call to Beatrice, Dr. Garcia placed a call to George Groh of the *Corpus Christi Caller Times* to inform him of the events that has occurred in Three Rivers. He was seeking his aid in getting the story out to the general public in an effort to drum up support for the cause. That evening, Groh contacted Tom Kennedy to verify Dr. Garcia’s story of what had occurred in Three Rivers. Groh informed Kennedy that he spoke for

¹³ Joe Frantz. *Taped interview of Dr. Hector Garcia*, Corpus Christi: Interview, March 23, 1989. Hector P Garcia Papers, Texas A&M University Corpus Christi

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

publication and proceeded to ask him if the funeral home had refused Beatrice chapel services.¹⁵ Kennedy replied that he did refuse chapel services to the Longoria family. Groh then proceeded to ask if his refusal for burial service was based on race, to which Kennedy replied “We never made a practice of letting Mexicans use the chapel, and we don’t want to start now.”¹⁶ Kennedy then informed Groh that “most of them (Mexicans) did not want chapel service.”¹⁷ Groh asked if it was a practice for the funeral home to hold chapel service for Latin American families and if the chapel had ever had a Latin funeral at the home. Kennedy responded that he had not had such a wake in his funeral home before. While Kennedy knew that Groh was investigating the matter for publication, he did not realize what effect the article would have on him, his business, and every facet of his life. As far as he was concerned, racial segregation was a common matter in Texas and since he had not broken any laws probably felt confident that the Anglo population as a whole would support him in the matter. After some minor discussion, Groh ended his conversation with Kennedy notifying him that “he had a hot potato” on his hands.¹⁸

After talking to George Groh, Dr. Garcia sent off seventeen telegrams to prominent federal, state, and media officials in an effort to gain their aid to fight the discrimination at hand. In the telegram, Garcia noted that the widow of Felix Longoria was refused funeral services by Manon Rice Funeral home, even though they knew he was a veteran from the Second World War. This was the only funeral home in Three Rivers. The denial was based on the belief that “other white people object to use of the funeral home by people of Mexican origin.”¹⁹ He also

¹⁵ George Groh. *Sworn statement by George Groh February 18, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized statement by Hector De Peña. February 18, 1949. Mary and Jeff Bell Library Box 202.14 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹ Hector P. Garcia. *Telegram to US Senator Johnson from Dr. Hector P. Garcia*, Jan 10, 1949. Corpus Christi: Telegram. January 10, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 203.12 AD: Felix Longoria Affair

made it clear that this kind of discriminatory practice was common in the state of Texas. Garcia ended his telegram asking for their support in fighting discrimination.

That evening after sending off the telegrams, Dr. Garcia proceeded to set up a protest meeting at the Lamar School in Corpus Christi. The American G.I. Forum believed that by getting the public involved in the cause, they could garner enough support to change the mind of the Rice Funeral Home Director. Members of the American G.I. Forum publicized this event by passing out handbills in both English and Spanish. They also went on both English and Spanish radio stations in the area to drum up support for the event. The handbills informed everyone that this event would take place on January 11, 1949, and was to tell of a great injustice that occurred in Three Rivers. It informed the reader of the actions of the Manon Rice Funeral home and how they refused burial for Felix Longoria, a veteran of the Second World War. The handbills also emphasized that “when a funeral home refuses to honor the REMAINS of an American citizen solely because he is of Mexican origin, then it is TIME that not only the American GI Forum but all the people should rise to protest this injustice.”²⁰ The flyer also requested that all veterans, their families, mothers of soldiers who died in the war and the general public come to the meeting “without fail or excuses.”²¹ So the appeal was made to vets, not Mexican Americans. An important point.

On January 11, 1949, the *Corpus Christi Caller Times* ran George Groh’s story with information concerning the protest that would be held that evening. That day, Groh placed a call to Tom Kennedy to follow up on the story and see if anything had changed since their last

²⁰ Dr. Hector P. Garcia. *American GI Forum Independent Veterans Organization Gran Junta De Protesta*. Corpus Christi: Protest Flier. January 11, 1949. Translation of Handbill in folders #103.5, #130.6, #130.7, Translated by Eugenia Landes. 12/20/89. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.3 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

²¹ *Ibid.*,

conversation. During the call, Mr. Kennedy stated that he would “discourage the chapel service for Longoria, but would not refuse if the family insisted.”²² It is not known why Kennedy changed his mind to the use of the chapel, but one could assume that the growing attention on the matter began to worry him. Groh proceeded to remind Mr. Kennedy about statements made the previous evening, none of which he denied. After the conversation, Groh informed Dr. Garcia that Tom Kennedy would discourage Beatrice from using the chapel for Felix’s wake. He also made clear that he would not deny their request if the Longoria family persisted.

The day of the protest, Lyndon Baines Johnson, then a U.S. Senator from Texas, received Dr. Garcia’s telegram. Before taking any action, he called Mr. Robert Jackson, publisher of the *Corpus Christi Caller Times* to confirm what the telegram stated.²³ Mr. Jackson confirmed that everything the telegram stated was in fact true and that they had run a story on the matter. Jackson proceeded to inform Senator Johnson that he could put him in communication with Bob McCracken, who handled the story for the newspaper.²⁴ Senator Johnson proceeded to ask Mr. McCracken if what the telegram stated was indeed fact. Mr. McCracken replied “yes they do,” “we have investigated the incident and have already written a story about it, which corroborates the facts as given you by Dr. Garcia.”²⁵ Upon hearing that the story was indeed true, Johnson proceeded to read his reply of the telegram to both Mr. Jackson and Mr. McCracken. After hearing the reply, both insisted that any reference to either Tom Kennedy or the Manon Rice Funeral Home be left out of the reply in order to not cause any further problems for them.

²² George Groh. *Sworn statement by George Groh February 18, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized statement by Hector De Peña. February 18, 1949. Mary and Jeff Bell Library Box 202.14 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

²³ John B. Connally, *Memo From John B. Connally January 11, 1949*. Washington D.C.: Memo. January 11, 1949. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Pre-Presidential Confidential File Box 2. Pre Presidential Confidential File Longoria, Felix

²⁴ Ibid.,

²⁵ Ibid.,

Johnson also wanted to make sure that though he was aiding Mexican Americans, he did not want to upset South Texas Anglo voters who had helped him win a tight senate race several weeks before. Jackson and McCracken told Senator Johnson that other than that, the reply was appropriate for the situation and his solution was the best answer for the circumstances. After talking to both men, Senator Johnson sent off the telegram to Dr. Hector P. Garcia.

Dr. Garcia received the telegram shortly before the protest meeting at the Lamar School. Johnson's telegram informed Dr. Garcia that he was deeply saddened to hear the news of what had happened in Three Rivers, but neither he nor the federal government had any authority over civilian funeral homes.²⁶ Johnson went on to say that "I have today made arrangements to have Felix Longoria reburied with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery here in Washington where the Honored dead of our Nations wars rest."²⁷ He also informed Dr. Garcia that if the family did not want Felix to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, he could make arrangements to have him reburied at Fort Sam Houston National Military Cemetery at San Antonio, Texas. Johnson ended his telegram affirming that "this injustice and prejudice is deplorable. I am happy to have a part in seeing that this Texas Hero is laid to rest with the honor and dignity his services deserves."²⁸

Throughout the day, Dr. Garcia received telegrams from General Harry H. Vaughn military aide to President Truman, Governor Beauford Jester, Representative John Lyle, Texas Attorney General Price Daniel and R.E. Smith, Chairman of the Texas Good Neighbor Commission, who gave their condolences to Private Longoria's widow and stated that it was a

²⁶ Lyndon Baines Johnson. *Telegram from Lyndon Baines Johnson to Dr. Hector P. Garcia January 11, 1949.* Washington D.C.: Telegram. January 11, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 203.12 AD: Felix Longoria Affair

²⁷ *Ibid.*,

²⁸ *Ibid.*,

horrible disgrace that something like this could happen. Though many addressed the issue as being a disgrace, only Senator Johnson's telegram provided Dr. Garcia a clear means of action. Upon reading Johnson's telegram, Dr. Garcia decided he would read the letter that evening at the meeting to drum up support for the issue at hand and show that Anglo politicians were on their side. Though Garcia had never met Johnson before, this event would solidify a lasting relationship between the two.

That night, members of the American G.I. Forum and the general public rallied at the Lamar School to come up with a plan of action to fight the discrimination that occurred in Three Rivers. Dr. Garcia began the meeting by informing those that were present about what had occurred when Beatrice met with Tom Kennedy. He also stated that it was a great injustice that a soldier who had given his life for his country could not lie in wake in one of its funeral homes. After a short while, Garcia informed the crowd that he had received a telegram from Senator Johnson, who proposed that Longoria, as a distinguished veteran of the Second World War, should have the honor of being buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Garcia proceeded to read the telegram aloud and upon completion, the crowd erupted in celebration. Though Beatrice had not been informed of Senator Johnson's offer to bury Felix at Arlington National Cemetery, she too could not hold back her joy upon hearing the news. Garcia proceeded to ask Beatrice if she would agree to put the location of the burial up to a vote in order to have Felix buried at either Arlington National Cemetery, Sam Houston National Cemetery, or in Corpus Christi. Even though Beatrice knew it should be a private family matter, she agreed to the vote because the American GI Forum and other Mexican Americans had come to her aid. In Beatrice's mind they deserved the right to decided Felix's fate. After all votes were cast, it was determined that Felix would be buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Beatrice sent Senator Johnson a reply to his telegram on January 12, 1949. In the telegram, she stated that she was “humbly grateful for your (Johnson’s) kindness in my hour of humiliation and suffering.”²⁹ She thanked Senator Johnson for his offer of reburial for Felix at Arlington National Cemetery and informed him that she would gladly accept said offer. Beatrice also informed Senator Johnson that she authorized him to make arrangements to ship the body to Washington D.C. Johnson replied, saying that it was his honor to help Beatrice in her time of need and if she needed anything else she should feel free to let him know.

On January 12, 1949, Tom Kennedy wrote to Beatrice Longoria in an effort to rewrite the history of their meeting. First, he wanted to make it clear that at no time did he deny chapel service or burial of Felix’s body, but rather discouraged her from using the chapel.³⁰ He proceeded to inform Beatrice that his opposition to her use of the funeral home was solely based on the fact that there had been some misunderstanding between Beatrice and her in-laws. Kennedy also let Beatrice know that he was sorry if there had been any type of misunderstanding between the two and if she still wanted to hold a wake for Felix in the chapel, he would be more than happy to do so.

On January 14, 1949, Beatrice received Tom Kennedy’s letter and decided to reply. She started her letter by thanking Mr. Kennedy for his offer, but informed him that she felt that it was too late. Beatrice had decided that burial and funeral services would be held at Arlington National Cemetery and let Mr. Kennedy know that she held no grudge towards him or the

²⁹ Beatrice Longoria. *Telegram to Senator Johnson from Beatrice Longoria January 12, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Telegram. January 12, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.32 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

³⁰ T.W. Kennedy. *Letter from T.W. Kennedy, Jr. to Mrs. Beatrice Longoria, January 12, 1949*. Three Rivers: Letter. January 12, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.7 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

citizens in Three Rivers.³¹ In closing, Beatrice informed Mr. Kennedy that she was sorry about the matter at hand.

On January 13, 1949, J.K. Montgomery, Mayor of Three Rivers, S.F. Ramsey, President of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce, Bryan Boyd, City Secretary, and a fourth man went to the home of Guadalupe Longoria, the father of Felix Longoria, to discuss the incident with him and attempt to gain his support in their efforts to rebury Felix in Three Rivers.³² That morning, Mr. Boyd came to Guadalupe's home and requested that he go with him to a meeting at First State Bank of Three Rivers. Upon their arrival at the bank, they were met by the rest of the men. Shortly after their arrival, the men began asking Mr. Longoria several questions. Unfortunately, Mr. Longoria did not fully understand because of his limited understanding of the English language. Mr. Longoria told the men that even though he wished his son could be buried closer to home, he and his family had already made arraignments to bury Felix elsewhere.³³ He also stated that it was not up to him where Felix would be buried due to Beatrice being his next of kin. After several more minutes of discussion, the men returned Mr. Longoria to his home.

That evening the members of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce came to Guadalupe Longoria's home requesting that he sign a statement that they had prepared for him from the discussion they had earlier in the day. Written as if Guadalupe had done it himself the statement reaffirmed the notion that Beatrice was having a relationship with a man that

³¹ Beatrice Longoria. *Letter from Mrs. Beatrice Longoria to T.W. Kennedy, Jr., January 14, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Letter. January 14, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.10 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

³² Guadalupe Longoria. *Guadalupe Longoria Sr. Statement on February 20, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Notarized Statement by Hector De Peña. February 20, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.15 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

³³ *Ibid.*,

Guadalupe objected to and noted that Beatrice did not take the family into account when deciding where to bury Felix.³⁴ The statement went on to state that he hoped that his “Three Rivers friends will help us in getting his body brought back for burial.”³⁵ In closing, the statement reaffirmed the idea that everyone in Three Rivers is Guadalupe’s “friend” and that he did not know Dr. Garcia and wants nothing to do with him.³⁶

Guadalupe informed the men that he could not sign the letter since he had no authority on the matter; this authority belonged to Dr. Hector P. Garcia and his daughter-in-law.³⁷ At the time that these men came to Mr. Longoria’s house his daughter Carolina and sons Alberto and Guadalupe Jr. were present and told the men they would need time to go over the letter and explain it to their father. The men informed them that if their father did not sign the letter it would not be made public. After informing the family of these facts, they left the family to go over the documents.

After reading the letter, Guadalupe and his children tore up the letter, never having signed it. A few days later, the letter ran in the local newspaper even though the members had told Guadalupe and his family that it would not be published in the paper if it was not signed. The Longoria family refuted what was stated in the letter that ran in the press. The Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce continued to pressure Guadalupe to make statements against Beatrice

³⁴ Bryan Boyd, J.K. Montgomery, S.F. Ramsey. *Unsigned letter Written by Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce for Guadalupe Longoria S.R. to sign.* Three Rivers: Unsigned letter. January 13, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.15 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ *Ibid.*,

³⁷ *Ibid.*,

and the American G.I. Forum.³⁸ According to Carolina Longoria, her father became ill due to the constant pressure put upon him by these citizens of Three Rivers.

In an effort to clear Three Rivers of any wrong doing, the city made it known that they saw no error in what T.W. Kennedy did. They believed that actions taken by both Dr. Garcia and Senator Johnson were attempts to further their political careers at the expense of the Anglos in Three Rivers. This can best be seen in telegrams exchanged between both Senator Johnson and the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce from January 15-17, 1949. In the exchange, the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce accused Senator Johnson of having an “itchy trigger finger” and not fully investigating the incident before taking action in the matter.³⁹ Johnson’s reply to this is simple; he stated that he regretted that they condemned his actions pertaining to an American soldier being buried at Arlington National cemetery.⁴⁰ The Chamber of Commerce of Three Rivers reply to Senator Johnson stated that it had no problem with him choosing to aid in the burial of Felix Longoria, but it felt that he had not looked at reliable sources on the matter before coming to a decision. They felt that Johnson should reconsider the place of burial in order to absolve Three Rivers, Live Oak County and the State of Texas of any wrong doing.⁴¹

Johnson replied by affirming that he had investigated all facts before taking any action in the

³⁸ Carolina Longoria. *Sworn Statement by Carolina Longoria on March 7, 1949*. Three Rivers: Notarized Statement by J. Guadalupe Trevino. March 7, 1949. 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

³⁹ Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce. *First Telegram from Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce to LBJ on January 15, 1949*. Three Rivers: Telegram. January 15, 1949. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Pre-Presidential Confidential File Box 2. Pre Presidential Confidential File Longoria, Felix

⁴⁰ Lyndon Baines Johnson. *Telegram From LBJ to Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce on January 15, 1949*. Washinton D.C.: Telegram. January 15, 1949. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Pre-Presidential Confidential File Box 2. Pre Presidential Confidential File Longoria Felix

⁴¹ Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce. *Second Telegram from Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce to LBJ on January 15, 1949*. Three Rivers: Telegram. January 15, 1949. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Pre-Presidential Confidential File Box 2. Pre Presidential Confidential File Longoria, Felix

matter.⁴² He also maintained that no action of his was wrong and that he had merely aided the family in locating a place for Felix Longoria's body to be buried. Replies such as these became a common occurrence from Senator Johnson as the Longoria affair continued. Though at times he replied to letters stating that he was merely doing his Christian duty, other times he stated that he had only played a small role in the affair. Senator Johnson reply to letters was often based on the race or organization of the people who wrote him. Johnson often made sure that every reply was short and to the point in order to keep as much attention off of him.

The Good Neighbor Commission of the State of Texas, an organization that was founded in the State to improve relationships between Latin and Anglo citizens of Texas, wrote Dr. Garcia in order to come to a compromise they believed would be best for Texas and the Longoria family. The letter informed Dr. Garcia that the Commission agreed that what was happening in Three Rivers was wrong, but that he should remember that the state's reputation? was on the line, not only for this generation but for future generations of Texans.⁴³ The Commission, along with the Governor, requested that Dr. Garcia ask Beatrice to change plans for the reburial of Felix from Arlington National Cemetery to somewhere in Texas. They also made it clear that if Beatrice still wanted to hold funeral services at Arlington that was fine as long as the body returned to Texas for reburial where it ought to rest.⁴⁴ The Commission further explained that in doing so Dr. Garcia would help the Commission in its efforts to aid Anglo/Latino relationships in the State of Texas. Dr. Garcia notified the Good Neighbor Commission that the Longoria family

⁴² Lyndon Baines Johnson. *Telegram From LBJ to Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce on January 17, 1949*. Washinton D.C.: Telegram. January 17, 1949. Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Pre-Presidential Confidential File Box 2. Pre Presidential Confidential File Longoria Felix

⁴³ R.E. Smith. *Letter from R.E. Smith Chairman of the Good Neighbor Commission of Texas Austin to Hector P. Garcia January 17, 1949*. Austin: Letter. January 17, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.12 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

was grateful for the efforts of the Commission, but they felt that since the funeral was only a matter of days away it was unrealistic to change the venue at this late of a date.

While Dr. Garcia and Senator Johnson maintained their convictions to bury Felix Longoria at Arlington National Cemetery, the American G.I. Forum collected money for the Longorias. After the Lamar School rally, donations from every part of Texas poured into the Corpus Christi office of the American G.I. Forum. Donations ranged from twenty five cents to five dollars. Some donated up to one hundred dollars. By February 5, 1949, the American G.I. Forum reached their goal of \$1,500, enough money to send all members of the Longoria family to Washington D.C. to witness the burial of Felix Longoria.⁴⁵

On February 15, 1949, the Longoria family flew to Washington D.C.. Upon their arrival, Senator Johnson's aides took them to the Senator's office where they met for the first time. On February 16, 1949, Felix Longoria was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery in a group burial that included nineteen other servicemen. What separated Felix from the others was the diplomats, politicians, and Generals were in attendance for Felix's burial. Senator Johnson believed that the funeral should remain a private affair and therefore was closed off from the journalist. After the twenty-one gun salute, Beatrice was presented with the United States flag and was greeted by those in attendance who gave their condolences. After the burial, the Longoria family headed to Corpus Christi.

Johnson later wrote a letter to Dr. Garcia where he "hoped that this (the burial) brought to the Longoria family some measure of gratification and relief from the embarrassment I know

⁴⁵ Hector P. Garcia. *Contributor Thank You Letter February 5, 1949*. Corpus Christi: Letter. January 5, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.40 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

they must have felt during the past month.”⁴⁶ He wrote that he enjoyed, the time spent with the Longoria family and offered his help if Garcia or the American GI Forum needed it. In closing, Johnson made it clear that the matter had been resolved and saw no need to continue to publicize it.

Though in the end, Felix Longoria was buried at Arlington National Cemetery, he never received the wake that both Beatrice and Dr. Garcia had fought so hard to gain. This can be credited to the sustained racial tensions that persisted in the South prior to and following World War II. In moving the ceremony to Arlington and burying Felix in a mass burial the Longoria family had no way of making arrangements to wake the body and bury him at the same time. Though he was buried where the nations honored dead lie the family gave up the one thing they sought the most out of the whole ordeal, to wake Felix in a chapel. In giving up the wake the families showed that through collective action they could get politicians to support their cause. It was through this event that organizations like the American GI Forum who had grown indignant against segregation and discrimination became a voice for Mexican Americans in Texas.

⁴⁶ Lyndon Baines Johnson. *Letter From LBJ to Dr. Hector P. Garcia February 16, 1949*. Washington D.C.: Letter. January 16, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 203.12 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S INVOLVMENT IN THE LONGORIA AFFAIR

From the inception of the Felix Longoria affair, women's involvement was crucial in the day to day efforts to wake and bury Pvt. Felix Longoria. Women took an active role in how the Felix Longoria affair developed and concluded. They moved from out of the shadows and into the spotlight of a media event that spurred the political successes of the American G.I. Forum and Mexican American civil rights in Texas.

Though the GI Forum was a veteran's organization, Garcia saw the family unit as a means of power within the Mexican American culture. In order to tap into this Garcia sought to include every aspect of the family unit into his organization. As Ramos argues, "With the full involvement of each veteran's family, the organization was empowered to undertake vigorous efforts to ensure benefits and public assistance for its members with demonstrated support from the greater Mexican-American community."¹

In order to accomplish his goal of including the family within the organization's structure, Garcia ordered that all chapters of the American GI Forum have a Ladies Auxiliary according to the organization's constitution, "All persons, male or female, who had served

¹ Henry A.J. Ramos. *The American GI Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1949-1983* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1998), 7.

honorably in the armed services, were eligible to join. In addition, all women over 21 and related through marriage or in the third degree to a veteran could be active in the American G.I. Forum Auxiliary.”² In an effort to gain as many female members as possible, Garcia asked all members to sign up their wives, sisters, widows, and mothers into the Ladies Auxiliary.³ In doing this, Garcia assured that in every chapter of the American GI Forum women and their families formed and integral part of the organizations daily operations.

While other mutual aid societies at the time typically did not allow women full involvement, the American GI Forum gave them full rights from its inception. Women were given full voting rights within the organization, were allowed to organize chapters, and hold office in both their own Auxiliary and the GI Forum.⁴ In giving women full rights, Garcia believed that they could become active members in fighting for community, school, and family rights. Garcia believed that women knew what their families needed, and would take an active role in the fight to gain equal rights for their families.

While some women took on leadership roles in the organization, the majority of those that joined took on support roles. Women typically were the fundraisers for the organization, holding voter registration drives, food plate sales, and beauty queen contests. Through these fundraising practices, the American GI Forum was able to keep membership costs low and pay for all GI Forum expenses. This helped the GI Forum grow rapidly and focus on all their goals

² Carl Allsup. *The American G.I. Forum: Origins and Evolution* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, 1982), 50.

³ Michelle Halls Kells. *Hector P. Garcia: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 45.

⁴ Ignacio M. Garcia. *Hector P. Garcia: In Relentless Pursuit of the Justice* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2002), 185.

without worrying about insufficient funds. In essence, the role women played aided the organization's goals in making sure that funds were readily available.

It was through Dr. Garcia's decision to organize women in the early days of the American GI Forum that brought to the organization the event that would propel it into the national spotlight. Several weeks before, Sara Moreno's sister, Beatrice, was denied chapel services for her husband. Moreno, the Chairman of the American GI Forum-sponsored Orquidia Club, discussed with Dr. Garcia the fact that several members of the club had been denied access to the roller rink at Mathis State Park.⁵ Moreno informed Dr. Garcia that she was sold a ticket to use the roller rink because she passed for white while other members of the club were denied access because they looked Mexican.⁶ Though Moreno was of Mexican ancestry the color of her skin was enough for her to blend in with Anglo society. While many took advantage of these characteristics Moreno stood up for her convictions and fought for those who were less fortunate than her.

Upon hearing this, Dr. Garcia informed Hector De la Peña, a well-known lawyer in Corpus Christi, of the incident. De La Peña contacted Texas State Park officials who had helped Mexican Americans gain access to the roller rink at Mathis State Park. This victory placed Dr. Garcia in direct line to successfully fight discrimination according to Moreno. Given Garcia's track record in addressing issues of racism, Moreno contacted Dr. Garcia when her sister was in need of aid.

⁵ David G. McComb. *Interview of Hector P. Garcia* (Austin: Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, 7/6/69) Lyndon Baines Johnson Oral History Collection. Accession Record Number: Ac74-277

⁶ Patrick J. Carroll. *Felix Longoria's Wake: Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 61.

While most hold true to the idea that Beatrice contacted Dr. Garcia, in reality Sara was the one who sought help for her sister. Shortly after discussing the matter with Beatrice, Sara contacted Dr. Garcia. She informed him that her sister had been denied the use of the chapel at the Manon Rice Funeral Home and sought his aid in gaining chapel services for Felix. It was through Sara's request that Dr. Garcia met with Beatrice and became involved in the Longoria affair. If not for Dr. Garcia's assistance in Sara's time of need, the refusal to hold a wake for Felix would have been just another act of discrimination that occurred in the day to day lives of Mexican Americans in Texas.

While her sister Sara was outgoing and ready to fight discrimination, Beatrice was shy and hesitant to take action. Beatrice did not want to cause trouble, but knew that Felix deserved better than to be waked at their old home in Three Rivers. Though she had originally agreed to the decision to wake Felix at her old home, she sought to honor the memory of her husband by giving him the wake he deserved. It was through this and this alone that motivated Beatrice to authorize Dr. Garcia to seek chapel services for Felix at the Manon Rice Funeral Home.⁷

In stepping outside the box and allowing Dr. Garcia to seek chapel services for Felix, Beatrice was taking considerable risks. She was taking a private matter and making it public. In doing so, she opened herself up to further discrimination at the hands of both Anglos and Mexican Americans. Women were typically restricted to handle matters of the home and little else. In bringing this matter to light Beatrice was breaking cultural and social traditions.⁸ Since Felix's family still lived in Three Rivers, she had to believe that the family would stand behind

⁷ David G. McComb, *Interview Of Hector P. Garcia*, Austin: Interview, June 9, 1969. Lyndon Baines Johnson Oral History Collection Accession Record Number: Ac74-277

⁸ Michelle Halls Kells. *Hector P. Garcia: Everyday Rhetoric and Mexican American Civil Rights* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 80.

her and the American GI Forum's attempt to hold a wake for Felix while they faced a storm of discrimination from Anglo citizens. Though there were considerable risks, Beatrice stuck to her decision knowing that Dr. Garcia and the American GI Forum would back her up and protect her from further discrimination.

Tom Kennedy's refusal to open up his funeral home to the Longoria's pointed to his traditional exclusion of Mexican Americans because the "whites won't like it."⁹ Though Beatrice understood that Felix would be buried at the segregated cemetery in Three Rivers, she never expected to be denied access to the chapel. Having lived in Corpus Christi Beatrice might have seen chapel services as the common way to hold a wake. While this was true for larger cities in the state of Texas, in small towns such as Three Rivers, Mexican Americans were traditionally not allowed the right to use the funeral home. In seeking chapel services for Felix, Beatrice broke with tradition upsetting the status quo in rural Texas.

Traditionally, Mexican American families in small towns throughout Texas held wakes in their homes.¹⁰ This was due to widespread poverty within the Mexican American community and given the lack of Mexican-American-owned funeral homes.¹¹ While others typically could not pay for chapel services, the Longoria family was well off and could afford chapel services. Beatrice's request, though breaking with tradition, was rooted in the idea that Felix had fought and died for his country and deserved the right to have a proper wake. She felt that the status of the Longoria family in the city was enough to overcome racial barriers, particularly the lack of

⁹ Beatrice Longoria. Signed Statement from Beatrice Longoria on February 9, 1949. Corpus Christi: Notarized Statement by Hector De Peña. February 9, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

¹⁰ Vicki L. Ruiz. *Women on the U.S.–Mexico Border: Response to Change* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 202.

¹¹ Ignacio M. Garcia. *Hector P. Garcia: In Relentless Pursuit of the Justice* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2002), 109.

access to chapels Mexican Americans faced.¹² Though these things were true, in the end, Tom Kennedy was not going to allow a Mexican American, regardless of his hero status, access to his chapel because his Anglo clientele would disapprove.¹³

While the Longoria family could afford chapel services for Felix, his race not his class was the reason for the refusal of burial. Tom Kennedy's sole reason for not allowing Felix a wake at the funeral home was based solely on his ethnic background. Though the Longoria family was a prominent family in Three Rivers and had even helped found the cemetery where Felix would be buried, the fact that he was Mexican was enough for Anglos to disapprove of a Mexican American lying in wake in an Anglo funeral home. If Tom Kennedy had gone against the norms set in place by South Texas Anglos the likelihood of him remaining in business were be slim. Due to the possibility of Kennedy losing business he relented to these norms and disallowed the Longoria access to the funeral home. Though Beatrice felt that Felix deserved better the fact that he was Mexican in South Texas automatically dissolved several possibilities to where he could be buried. While Beatrice fought to wake her husband, Jane Kennedy fought to keep her family together throughout the Longoria Affair.

Tom Kennedy met Jewel Knezek while stationed at Camp Swift outside of Bastrop, Texas. In 1944, after a short courtship Jewel and Tom were married. It was at this time that Jewel was bestowed the nickname Jane by Tom. In December of 1944 Tom Kennedy was shipped out to serve on the German western front. "On April 1, 1945, April Fool's Day,

¹² Ibid, 110.

¹³ Gladys Blucher, *Statement By Gladys Blucher Secretary to Dr. Hector P. Garcia*. Corpus Christi: Sworn Statement, February 9, 1949. Mary and Jeff Bell Library 202.8 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria

Kennedy suffered shrapnel wounds when his boat was shelled while crossing the Rhine River.”¹⁴
After spending several months in a Belgium hospital, Kennedy was shipped back to the states.

Upon his arrival Kennedy met his wife at her parents’ house in Schulenburg, Texas.¹⁵
While Beatrice mourned her husband, Jane was dealt the task of helping her husband recover from injuries he sustained during the war which limited what he could do. Though at the time it was difficult, Jane took care of him and never left his side.

After Kennedy recovered from his injuries and graduated from mortuary school, Tom relocated his family to Three Rivers, Texas. After a short time in Three Rivers the Kennedys welcomed their only child Susan and Tom bought the Manon Rice Funeral Home.¹⁶ It was upon Kennedy’s purchase of the Manon Rice Funeral Home that the Longoria affair erupted.

With Tom being accused of racism, hostilities came towards the family. Having grown up in Texas Jane was used to the racial dynamic that was in place in Deep South Texas. What she was not prepared for were the letters, calls and threats that soon overtook her daily life. According to the correspondence, Tom had become the most racist man in America, and because of it his entire family was at risk. From the beginning to the end of the affair Jane stood by Tom, defending him.

Jane did not question her husband’s decision to deny chapel service, to the Longoria’s. In an interview several years after the affair Jane noted that the discouragement was based on Beatrice having a relationship with another man.¹⁷ According to Jane this was common

¹⁴ Felix Longorias Wake Carroll, Patrick J., *Felix Longoria’s Wake: Bereavement, Racism, and The Rise of Mexican American Activism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 91.

¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Patrick Carroll. *Taped interview with Mrs. Jane Kennedy and Thomas House*. Courtesy Hector P. Garcia Papers. Mary and Jeff Bell Library. Corpus Christi, Interview conducted July 27, 2002

knowledge in the city of Three Rivers and was the main reason why Beatrice had left to Corpus Christi. In discouraging Beatrice from using the chapel, Jane made it clear that her husband was looking out for the Longoria family and was avoiding any conflict that might happen at his place of business.¹⁸ Though her family would come under scrutiny, Jane never wavered when asked to defend her husband's decision.

With the eruption of the Longoria affair, calls and letters flooded the Kennedy household. Almost daily Jane dealt with threats to her family's well-being. Susan Kennedy recalled that "after all this started, they (the letter writers) threatened to kill the whole family and they threatened to kill me."¹⁹ Along with threats to kill Susan, several people also threatened to kidnap her. Though there was a constant barrage of threats to the family, little was done to protect them.

While Tom had made it through war nothing could have prepared him or his family for the ills the Longoria affair brought on them. Tom became recognized as the nation's most racist man and his family suffered greatly for it. As everyone seemed to be attacking her husband and family, Jane stood by her husband through thick and thin. Though Tom was never the same after the Longoria affair, Jane never wavered in her belief that her husband had done the right thing.

On January 13, 1949, when members of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce came to Guadalupe Longoria's home requesting that he sign a statement that they had prepared for him, his daughter Carolina stepped in to make sure her father was not taken advantage of. Though

¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁹ Brad Olsen. Stuck in the past: Town forced to revisit purported racist history. Corpus Christi: Corpus Christi Times, April 12, 2004

Guadalupe was bilingual he still struggled with the language.²⁰ Carolina on the other hand was English dominant and made sure that her father understood exactly what the statement said. Carolina informed the men that she would review the document with her father and get back to them. At the end, both Carolina, her brothers and Guadalupe decided to destroy the letter. Through this Carolina became the middle man for her father and the members of the Chamber of Commerce. As their request for Guadalupe intervention became more unrelenting leading to Guadalupe becoming ill, Carolina made sure to run the men off from their home refusing them any access to her father.²¹

Instead of signing the document, Guadalupe publicly refuted its claims and joined Beatrice and Dr. Garcia in their quest to bury Felix at Arlington National Cemetery. While members of the chamber of commerce sought to tear the family apart it only brought the Longoria's closer in their quest to bury Felix. While the citizens of Three Rivers sought to clear their name, the state of Texas wanted Beatrice to reconsider her decision to bury Felix at Arlington National Cemetery.

Since the Longoria affair had become a national concern the state of Texas, which had already been under fire for its treatment of Mexican workers, sought to gain reburial for Felix within the state. State representatives contacted both Dr. Garcia and Senator Johnson in an effort to gain their aid in reburying Felix in Texas. They informed both of these men that Beatrice should think of what the implications of burying Felix at Arlington meant for the state. Though they never said she couldn't have a service at Arlington they asked that both men convince her to

²⁰ Guadalupe Longoria. *Guadalupe Longoria, Sr. Statement on Feb 1949*. Three Rivers: certified mimeographed copy by Hector P. Garcia. March 22, 1949. 202.15 Garcia Collection. AD: Felix Longoria

²¹ Carolina Longoria. *Sworn Statement by Carolina Longoria on March 7, 1949*. Three Rivers: Notarized Statement by J. Guadalupe Trevino. March 7, 1949. 202.20 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

bring the body back to Texas where it belonged. In doing this they were assuring that their reputation dealing with Mexican American was a good one in the eyes of the nation and the world.²² They also hoped that Beatrice would realize that the state of Texas needed her to bring Felix's body back because Texas would look bad in histories recollection of the events.²³

While Texas State Representatives and the Anglo community of Three Rivers pleaded with her to the very end to change the location, she knew that the burial at Arlington was the correct choice. While she gave up the convenience of having Felix near her, his death and burial had become something greater than she could ever imagine. On February 16, 1949, Felix was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery. Dignitaries, Politicians and the media came out to the event in order to honor the fallen hero. While Beatrice never did get the wake she originally sought his burial was an honorable one. So many had fought for her cause and came to her aid in her time of need. At the end, she gained a hero's burial for Felix.

Though they are overshadowed by both Dr. Garcia and Senator Johnson women were able to go against the grain of social traditions and helped find a justifiable conclusion in burying Felix Longoria with his brother-in-arms while raising awareness to the plight of Mexican Americans at a local and state level. Beatrice Longoria's personal sacrifice in not waking her husband in Three Rivers in lieu of burial at Arlington National Cemetery paved the way for women to actively pursue equal rights Mexican Americans in South Texas.

²² R.E. Smith. *Letter from R.E. Smith Chairman of the Good Neighbor Commission of Texas Austin to Hector P. Garcia January 17, 1949.* Austin: Letter. January 17, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.12 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

²³ *Ibid.*,

CHAPTER V

THE NEVER ENDING STORY

As the Longoria's returned home from Felix's burial, they were met with questions regarding the handling of the Longoria Affair. On February 17, 1949, Three Rivers State Representative J.F. Gray requested that the Texas House of Representatives begin a Legislative investigation into the Longoria affair. Gray felt that an investigation was needed in order to clear up "conflicting reports that have been circulating and continue to circulate, some such reports alleging that discrimination had been shown in the handling of his [Felix's] funeral arrangements."¹ These reports in Gray's mind spun the truth in such a way, that the public perceived the town of Three Rivers and certain actors involved, in a negative light. Gray believed that a Legislative investigation would clear up these misunderstanding and give the public a clear picture of what truly occurred.

Along with his request for an investigation, Gray submitted a bill to the House in an attempt to abolish the Good Neighbor Commission. Gray believed that the Good Neighbor Commission "had made untruthful reports about the Longoria incident" which he believed led to further strained relations between the state of Texas and Mexico.² In abolishing the Good Neighbor Commission and bringing to light the true facts of the Longoria Affair, Gray sought to clear Three Rivers, Tom Kennedy, and Texas of accusations of discrimination, which he

¹ *Representative vote inquiry in Longoria case*. Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi Caller Times, February 17, 1949

² *Ibid.*,

believed would help in the “continuation of good relations among the peoples of South Texas and to our international relations.”³

Members of the Texas House of Representatives voted 104 to 20 to approve a Legislative investigation into the Longoria Affair.⁴ The Speaker of the House named a five man committee to investigate the matter and appropriated \$1,000 to cover any expenses the committee might incur during the investigation.⁵ Though not originally stated in his request to the House, Gray made it known that all hearings dealing with the investigation would be public.

The investigation began on March 16, 1949, and was headed by Cecil Storey of Longview. The atmosphere outside the hearings was hostile. Tom Sutherland recalled

It was a dangerous atmosphere. It was like high noon in a Western Movie. That’s how ugly the attitude of the hangers-around was. One man showed a long Bowie knife. And other men said in loud voices so they could be overheard: You know, really, this Longoria bunch, they’re just a bunch of lowdown greasers.⁶

A South Texas Sheriff known for being a “killer of Mexicans” was also present at the hearing brandishing his Colt .45 and making sure that no trouble happened.⁷ Though there were law enforcement officers on the premise, someone managed to loosen the tires on one of the witnesses’ cars. Luckily the act was found out before anyone was injured. Adding further to the tension of the trial, Juventino Ponce, a veteran of World War II, was denied a haircut while in

³ Ibid.,

⁴ *Investigation Of Longoria Case Called: Hearings Of Racial Discrimination Are To Be Public.* (Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi Caller Times, February 18, 1949.)

⁵ Ibid.,

⁶ Si Dunn, *The Legacy of PVT. Longoria.* (Dallas: Scene Sunday Magazine The Dallas Morning News, April 6, 1975.) Mary and Jeff Bell Library 203.22 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair

⁷ Ibid.,

uniform at the barbershop across the street from where the hearing was being held because the barbershop didn't serve Latin Americans.⁸

On April 7, 1949, four of the five members of the House Investigative Committee submitted their majority findings. In their report they noted "that there was no discrimination on the part of the undertaker of Three Rivers, Texas, relative to the proposed burial of the body of the deceased Felix Longoria."⁹ The committee came to this conclusion based on several different factors. They found that upon Beatrice Longoria's and Tom Kennedy's first meeting, Mrs. Longoria informed Mr. Kennedy of a strained relationship between her and her in-laws. After this initial meeting one of Felix's brothers contacted Kennedy to ensure that any information dealing with the wake and burial of Felix be sent to the family due to their fear that Beatrice would not inform them of the funeral arraignments. "The Committee finds in this connection that the said Mr. T.W. Kennedy discouraged the use of the funeral home for the reason that he had in mind the strained relations existing between the said Mrs. Beatrice Longoria and the family of the deceased veteran, desiring to avoid any probable display of disagreement or trouble."¹⁰ Though the Committee did note that Kennedy had used some inappropriate language when discussing the funeral arraignments, they came to the conclusion that since he apologized for his statements they in no way were discriminatory.

In response to the majority report's findings, Frank C. Oltorf submitted a minority report. In his report, Oltorf disputed Tom Kennedy's claim that his use of language in the Longoria

⁸ Ibid.,

⁹ Cecil Storey, Tom Cheatum, James M. Windham, Byron R. Tinsley. *Longoria Committee Temporary Findings*. Austin: Committee Record. April 7, 1949. Mary & Jeff Bell Library 202.40 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria Affair.

¹⁰ Ibid.,

affair was simply “bad terminology.”¹¹ Oltorf argued that since Kennedy had reiterated his discriminatory statements to several people within the affair they could not be seen simply as “bad terminology.”¹² Oltorf argued, “I cannot look into the heart of Mr. Kennedy to ascertain his true intent but can only accept his oral words which appear to me discriminatory.”¹³

Another blow came to majority report’s findings when Representative Bryon Tinsley of Greenville requested that the majority report be withdrawn. Tinsley argued felt the report had been rushed given the discovery of new evidence. He felt the original report should be withdrawn and the investigation reopened. If the investigation was not reopened Tinsley requested that his name be taken off the majority report and that he be allowed to investigate the matter further.¹⁴

The Texas House of Representatives never acted upon any of the reports submitted by the investigative committee. Though they had gained national press, most were satisfied with the findings and the affair was quickly forgotten. Though several articles and books mentioned the affair, it was not until recently that the matter has come full circle.

In 2002, “Santiago Hernandez, a federal prison guard from Corpus Christi, began a campaign to rename the Three Rivers post office,” in honor of Felix Longoria.¹⁵ Hernandez believed the community would accept this petition with open arms. However, old wounds left by the Longoria affair quickly reopened. Though most had no problem with the renaming of the

¹¹ Frank C. Oltorf. *Minority Report on the Longoria Investigation*. Austin: Committee Record. April 7, 1949. Mary and Jeff Bell Library 203.1 Garcia Collection AD: Felix Longoria

¹² Ibid.,

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ *Rep. Byron R. Tinsley of Greenville asked that the Majority Report be withdrawn*. (Corpus Christi: Corpus Christi Caller Times, April 9, 1949)

¹⁵ Lianne Hart. *Texas town remains divided over WWII-era racial dispute: Controversy is reignited by move to rename post office for Latino soldier*. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times, June 27, 2004)

post office, others questioned the reason behind the measure. Residents argued that Hernandez submitted his petition for the wrong reasons. They believed he wanted to rename the post office in recognition of the Longoria affair and not in recognition of Longoria's military record. This would soon create conflict at a 2004 City Council meeting in which the city was to vote on a proposition from Representative Lloyd Doggett to place a proposal before Congress to rename the post office¹⁶. The town was divided on the matter, but the Council voted that it would not oppose the matter. While the post office to date has not been renamed, on April 17, 2010, the Texas Historical Commission placed a historical marker at the Manon Rice Funeral Home in recognition of the Longoria Affair.

On November 9, 2010 the PBS documentary *The Longoria Affair*, by John Valadez premiered renewing the old tensions between the citizens of Three Rivers. The documentary covered the affair, the attempts to rename the post office and the eventual placement of the historical marker. While many praised the film others criticized it as only showing one side of the affair. Richard Hudson and the friends of Three Rivers have since created a website longoriaaffairrevealed.com in an effort to show their side of the story in an effort to absolve Tom Kennedy and Three Rivers of any wrongdoing.

In 2014 the Manon Rice Funeral home was demolished to make way for a parking lot. While some believed that the site should have been preserved for its historical significance their concerns fell on death ears. Shortly after the parking lot was finished the Historical Marker was hit by a car and removed.¹⁷ To make matters more interesting, Hudson was now the chair of

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Elaine Ayala, *Three Rivers Eager to Whitewash Civil Rights Watershed*. (San Antonio: San Antonio Express News, October 18, 2015)

historical markers for The Live Oak County Historical Commission and approved the relocation of the marker to another site in the city.¹⁸

The Longoria affair opened up the doors for Mexican American civil rights in Texas and helped show that through the actions of a few long standing racial barriers could be broken. The outcome of the affair helped pushed Mexican Americans in South Texas to see that by challenging the system that was in place they could overcome the different obstacles they faced at the time. With the help of organizations such as the American GI Forum, Mexican Americans in South Texas found a way to challenge these longstanding racial barriers.

While the Longoria affair aided Mexican Americans, Hector P. Garcia and Lyndon B. Johnson, it also left the Longoria's, Three Rivers and Texas in a fight over the legacy of the affair. Though the Longoria's gained a burial for Felix at Arlington National cemetery they never got what they initially fought for, a wake for their fallen soldier. As the affair was thrust into the national spotlight the family's simple fight for a wake was placed on the backburner for the good of the cause. While the family was happy for the help the affair left them at odds with Three Rivers and Texas. In an effort to clear themselves of any wrongdoing the city and state did everything in their power to cover up the affair, discredit those involved and erase it from history. While many see the Longoria affair as having a fairytale ending to date there has not been a happily ever after for those involved.

¹⁸ Ibid.,

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