Military Artifacts Sought from Harlingen Veterans and Their Families

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Today's Harlingen doesn't think of itself as a military town, yet about 17.5% of its 99 year existence as a chartered city has seen large military contingents stationed here. These include the 12th Cavalry and 6th Cavalry from May 1914 to May 1917 during the Mexican Revolution/Bandit Era period, the U. S. Army Air Corps with its Harlingen Army Gunnery School at the Harlingen Army Air Field (August 1941 to October 1945) during World War II, and the U. S. Harlingen Air Force Base with its navigator and cadet training school (April 1952 to June 1962) during the Korean Conflict and into the Cold War.

In conjunction with the upcoming Centennial Celebrations planned for 2010, the Harlingen Arts and Heritage Museum moved to reorganize its history display building. At present the contents of this structure emphasize Lower Rio Grande Valley history, a reflection of the museum's original purpose. The Advisory Board of the museum recently approved a plan to redirect the museum's history presentations to provide expanded Harlingen history. The changes to be made are considerable and will be made incrementally.

However, as a first step the goal is to organize and develop the present large activities room into an exhibit area that will tell of Harlingen's past military history and just as importantly the role Harlingen's men and women of the military have played in WWI, WWII, the Korean Conflict, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, Gulf War, and the Iraq/Afghanistan War on Terrorism. In this respect it will act as a memorial to all Harlingitenites who served and those who continue to serve their country.

While the museum does possess military-related artifacts and a gun collection with some weapons used in various engagements, it needs to round out the collection. With this in mind it solicits Harlingen veterans or the family of deceased veterans to donate or loan to the museum appropriate articles. These can range from draft notices to discharge papers, award medals and commendations, insignias and patches. Enemy souvenirs, such as captured flags, are always of interest. Uniforms from the various wars, especially WWI would look engaging on manikins. Weaponry, cartridge belts, canteens, helmets, boots, and the nuts and bolts of actual military life bring home the realities of day to day action. Naturally photographs of our down-home people on duty put a human face on it all. These and much more would be welcomed. On the home front such items as ration books, Victory stamp books, War Bonds, air raid warden gear, gasoline rationing category windshield stickers, Gold Star Mother banners, Cold War Civil Defense items, etc. would also be assets. Accompanying each donation or loan item should be written information describing the item and its origin. This will facilitate the creation of descriptive display labels.

If you believe that you have items of possible interest, please contact the Acting Museum Coordinator at 216-4900. The physical location of the museum is 2425 Boxwood, within the TSRTC Campus near the Harlingen International Airport.