

El Paso between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

My intention was a simple interview, perhaps with answers in a narrative style, but it really became an historical excursus from nineteenth to the twentieth century of El Paso, a Texas town on the Mexican border.

The interview with Professor Catherine E. Magni, teacher of Communication and Arts Theater at Bowie High School in El Paso (USA), tells of a world that the Italian kids of a few decades ago have discovered in the western movies, in the comics Tex Willer, Kit Carson, Davy Crockett and in the cartoons. Mythical stories that made us laugh, grown and now a part of the collective imagination.

With a time machine we go down to El Paso in 1830, before the Civil War and the unification of Italy, and we see what happened in the following decades.

Where was the city?

“It was an American Possession”.

Are the houses made of wood as we have seen in many western movies?

“No most homes were made of adobe”.

What happened in the following decades?

“In May of 1846 the forces of Mexico and the United States came to blows over the disputed territory east of the Rio Grande. President James Polk, with an eye on the Santa Fe trade and the territory to the west coast instructed the Governor of Missouri to raise a volunteer force to operate with regular troops under command of Stephen W. Kearney. The First Regiment of Mounted Missouri Volunteers chose a Kentuckian, Alexander Doniphan as their commanding officer. Colonel Doniphan would play no little importance in Southwestern history.

[James Wiley Magoffin](#) played arguably the most important role in convincing Governor Armijo at Santa Fe to relinquish the territory without a fight. Then General Kearney turned westward, leaving Colonel Alexander to lead his group of volunteers down the Rio Grande to El Paso del Norte and claim the lands of the east bank of the river.

Alarmed at news of the coming invasion, the citizens and government of Chihuahua prepared for defense. By December 26th, Doniphan and his force reached the encampment at *Bracito*, just above Paso del Norte, the local forces were joined by a detachment of some 380 regular troops.

Now under command of Lt. Col. Luis Vidal, the local command launched a party of dragoons to make contact with the enemy. Doniphan and his men were not expecting action so soon.

Trumpets sounded and the attack was commenced. Approaching the Americans in their European style march, the Mexican forces were gunned down by the Missouri boys firing from everywhere ... behind sand dunes, mesquite bushes, wagons, and even lying flat on the ground.

Mexican troops were now forced to retreat to make a final defense at El Paso del Norte. However defense of the town was not to be. Retreating troops made their way to points south leaving the town with no protection.

When Doniphan entered Paso del Norte on December 27th, only a delegation of townspeople met them. The area was now in American hands. Official possession would take place on February 2nd of 1848 with the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo”.

What is the Ponche Rancho?

“El Paso, Texas can trace its' beginnings to a ranch. For the 223 years (1598-1821) that Spain controlled our part of the Rio Grande Valley nothing (permanent) was developed on the East bank, or from our perspective, the north side of the Rio Grande before Mexican Independence in 1821. After 1821 the Mexican government wanted to expand development of the Northern Territories and began to offer grants of land to citizens (and foreigners) who would settle into the sparsely populated area.

In 1827, Juan María Ponce de León, of a noble Spanish family, and prominent citizen of the town of El Paso del Norte, received a grant of land containing some 200 acres. This land grant was north of the town and below the Rio Grande. Ponce commenced to develop his new property, planting cottonwood trees along an acéquia (irrigation canal), and fields of corn and wheat. Vineyards had long been a staple crop in the valley, and Ponce continued the planting on his new lands.

The first adobe home Ponce built (probably for his field hands, not himself) was located near what is now the intersection of Overland and El Paso streets.

However, the Rio Grande was prone to flooding, and in 1830 a violent spring flood washed away much of his crops and the home as the river shifted slightly to the South. Ponce Rancho/Franklin 1851 by H. C. Pratt.

Seeking compensation for his losses, Ponce petitioned for an additional grant of land which included land north of the river. This additional acreage was granted in May of 1830.

Redeveloping his fields, Ponce built a new home in 1832. This ranch house was located on what would come to be Lot 176 Block 17 (Anson Mills Map), the location of today's Centre Block building between the Plaza Theater and the Mills building”.



Ponce Rancho/Franklin 1851 by H. C. Pratt

As it was in the founding and development?

“The Foundation Is Laid For years a stopping point on the Santa Fe to Ciudad Chihuahua trail, the pass would now be a focus of East to West migration Shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, it became known that gold had been discovered in California. The impact on El Paso would be dramatic. Three of our earliest pioneers, [James Wiley Magoffin](#), [Hugh Stephenson](#) and [Simeon Hart](#) established ranches and continued their business interests here.

In 1848 th US Army announced that a military post would be established at the pass. It would be called "The Post Opposite El Paso" referring to El Paso del Norte.

Taking advantage of the potential, Benjamin Franklin Coons (usually referred to as

Mr. Franklin) acquired the Ponce ranch and began increasing its' facilities in anticipation of the Army's arrival in September, 1849. Leasing these facilities provided Coons with income in addition to his trading interests. The arrangement was short lived. In 1851, following Coons' disastrous 1850 attempt to bring a wagon train of goods from San Antonio, the Army announced it was pulling it's troops out and moving them into New Mexico. Because Coons was unable to continue payments on the ranch, Ponce repossessed. Although Coons stay here was brief, his memory lives on in the name of our Mount Franklin. The little village would be known as 'Franklin' for many years - even after it was incorporated as El Paso in 1873.

The "Post Opposite El Paso" would return in 1853 by order of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. On March 8th, 1854 the post received it's official name, Fort Bliss, named for Lt. Colonel William Wallace Smith Bliss, formerly adjutant to Zachary Taylor. Bliss, who died in 1853, is buried at Ft. Bliss National Cemetery.

Another of the earliest citizens was William T. "Uncle Billy" Smith. The time of his arrival is unknown, however by 1850 he was working for, or with Ponce, ramrodding wagon trains. In July of 1852 came the death of Juan Ponce de Leon.

Seeing the potential for a thriving future town, Smith waited an appropriate amount of time, then, in 1853 offered the Ponce family \$10,000 for the ranch. Being uncertain as to whether or not their old land grant would be recognized by the new government, they agreed to sell.

For the next five years, in between times operating the freighting business, Smith tirelessly worked to encourage visitors to stay and become our first residents. He frequently gave out parcels of land on very easy terms just to get them to establish roots.

Accommodations were always a problem in early El Paso as there were no 'hotels', only adobe buildings serving as residences and small businesses. Probably our first 'hotelier' was [A. B. Rohman](#). Arriving in 1852, Rohman soon sent for his wife and daughter. They arrived in 1854 and opened a boarding house in the adobe building formerly part of the original Ponce ranch house. By 1880 this 'boarding house' became the Central Hotel and the property would remain in the family until circa 1900.

One who established roots was [Josiah F. Crosby](#). Crosby had been appointed District Judge in 1854 and was in San Antonio looking for a group to join to make his way across the desert to assume his duties. It so happened that "Uncle Billy" had a wagon train ready to go. Crosby asked to join and Smith gladly took him along. It was the beginning of a close relationship, personal and for business. Crosby became Smiths' friend and legal advisor.

Destined to play a major role in the community was [Benjamin S. Dowell](#). Dowell came to the pass in 1850 and was employed supervising Ponces' vineyards, agriculture being only one of his many talents. He married Juana Marquez of Ysleta but they soon left to try California. Their first child, Mary was born there in 1854 and Ben and Juana decided to return. Dowell operated a billiard parlor on El Paso street, and it became the center of social life for the men of the town.

[Simeon Hart](#) first saw El Paso in 1848. Hart, from Highland New York, then St. Louis, was a member of the Missouri Cavalry that passed on the way to the battle of Santa Cruz de Rosales. Recuperating from wounds in the home of Don Leandro Sequieros, he proposed marriage to Don Leandro's daughter, Jesuita. Marrying the young lady (17) in 1849, Hart brought her to El Paso and established a mill and a home which still stands on El Paso's West side.

The foundation for the town of El Paso came to be in 1858/59. Billy Smith informed Crosby that his freighting business was taking him away too often and he had little time to try to develop the village properly - he wanted to sell out. Crosby advised him not to sell, but Smith insisted. Five men who had come here seeking opportunity took Smith up on his offer.

Two brothers, John and Henry Gillett, Vincent St. Vrain, and W. J. Morton along with Crosby, formed the "El Paso" company and purchased most of the land, with Billy Smith retaining some of his. Ben Dowell also acquired several lots as well as farming acreage north of the town.

Visualizing their plans for a town, the founders needed someone with the ability to lay out a town plat. This task was given to [Anson Mills](#). This young man, late of West Point came to Texas to seek his future. Having come here in 1858 to make surveys, he was hired by the new towns' fathers for the task. After several attempts, a final plat was agreed upon. Most of downtown El Paso still retains the streets of the Mills Map. The plan was set. By 1860 El Paso was poised to make it's place in the sun".

What happened during the Civil War?

"The Civil War in the West. Although not fought on the magnitude of the battles in the East, the Civil War in the west was just as intense. Through the late 1850's men who were friends, or at least "got along" began splitting their allegiances. The war and it's aftermath brought El Paso's growth to a halt for the next two decades.

With three known exceptions, Anson Mills and his brothers William W. and Emmett, the men of El Paso were Southerners or Southern sympathizers. Some, such as Simeon Hart were in the latter category. Most of the others were Southerners by birth. These men hailed from such places as Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina and other southern states. Their loyalties were predetermined. As secessionist fever increased, so did tempers. Violence threatened on more than one occasion.

In February of 1861, El Paso followed the lead of the rest of Texas and voted for secession. Only two votes were against. Union troops were ordered to withdraw from the state and the flag of the Confederacy replaced the Stars and Stripes. In March, the western territory of the Confederacy grew as Mesilla, New Mexico and Tucson voted to become Confederate.

Anson Mills took the last eastbound Butterfield stage for Washington D.C. and offered his services. He would culminate his life long military career as a Brigadier General. Brother William stayed in El Paso, Mexico to observe Confederate

movements in the area. Little Brother Emmett, an employee of the Butterfield Company, along with six others, took a stage for California. They were ambushed by a group of Apaches led by Mangas Colorado near Cooke's Peak close to the present New Mexico/Arizona border. All seven were killed following a three day desperate battle. At the beginning of July, 1861, Colonel John R. Baylor and five companies of the Texas 2nd Mounted Rifles occupied Fort Bliss. Their aim was to take El Paso and Southern New Mexico (which included Tucson). Baylor didn't have to 'take' anything - it was all handed to him on a silver platter.

As the first year of the Civil War came to a close, General Henry H. Sibley arrived at Fort Bliss in December with three regiments of Texas Volunteers. Sibley's 'Army of New Mexico' had arrived with the intent of taking all of New Mexico Territory for the South. In February, 1862, the invasion had begun. Sibley's army took Socorro, then Albuquerque. In March, they occupied Santa Fe. Sibley's main plan was to capture Fort Union, the US Army's main supply depot. Two battles (or skirmishes) took place, then the main battle on March 28th at Glorieta Pass, just east of Santa Fe. Some called it the "Gettysburg of the West. A detachment of the Union Army had succeeded in finding Sibley's supply train and destroyed it. Without supplies and unable to live off the land, Sibley had no choice but to retreat to Fort Bliss. The Colorado volunteers from the battle would dog Sibley's troops down the Rio Grande. Confederate New Mexico came to an end. Arriving in El Paso in April, Sibley learned of a new threat. Volunteers from California, the famed "California Column" led by General James Carleton, had moved into Arizona, then Western New Mexico, and were bearing down on his position. Sibley began his retreat to San Antonio. Many of El Paso's Confederates went with him, James Magoffin and Josiah Crosby among the group. The California Column arrived in August and took command of Fort Bliss. Although occasional rumors of re-invasion persisted, the Confederate threat in the West was over.

One of the results of the cessation of hostilities was that the Union soldiers could now turn their attention to subduing the Apaches. As the military was occupied with the Civil War, the Apaches of the area became bolder and attacked civilians more frequently without fear of army pursuers. In 1863 American soldiers near Santa Rita, New Mexico captured the leader Mangas Colorado who had turned himself in. He was subsequently killed "... while trying to escape". General James Carleton, now commander of New Mexico, subdued the Navajo and Mescalero Apaches.

In January, 1863 the New Mexico Assembly, now under Union control restored Doña Ana County to New Mexico. In February the territory was cut in half as the Territory of Arizona was created".

What happened during the Franco - Mexican war?

"El Paso, Chihuahua, Mexico: The capitol of a nation. By 1863 with hostilities ceased, activity in the region came to a standstill. However, one of the most interesting incidents of the period occurred regarding what sometimes is known as the Franco-Mexican War. On the pretext of not being able to collect on outstanding loans, Napoleon III invaded Mexico and established Maximillian as emperor.

Mexican President Benito Juárez and his army were forced to retreat from Ciudad Chihuahua to El Paso del Norte. The American sympathies were with the Mexican people, however President Lincoln was unable to enforce the Monroe Doctrine due to the Civil War. Juárez and his forces came to El Paso del Norte in August of 1865 until June of 1866 when the French withdrew from Mexico City. While here, Juárez was welcomed and entertained by the Americans. One famous photo show W.W. Mills playing cards with the President. He was also invited to take refuge in El Paso, Texas but declined, refusing to leave Mexican soil during this time of crisis”.

Few words about the end of the civil war.

“The End of Civil War And its' Aftermath. The effect of the Civil War on El Paso was devastating. The little village with the promising future almost dried up and blew away. The town's leading citizens had left with the Confederacy. There was no law except military law. No travel except military. The wagon trains of goods that stopped on the way between Santa Fe and Chihuahua no longer passed by. The war brought an end to east/west freighting. Most of the citizens of the area were now newcomers. Many of the men of the California Column liked the area and settled in from Las Cruces to San Elizario. The Union men were in complete control. William W. Mills was named Collector of Customs in 1863 and for many years was one of the most powerful men in the area.

Most of the activity for the remainder of the 1860's was around the El Paso area. Soldiers, some from Fort Bliss, continued pursuit of the various Indian tribes in the region. Activity in El Paso was mostly subdued, but the few citizens who were here continued in their efforts to make the dusty village a town. M.A. Jones, a lawyer, turned his office into a school room. Later he would become the second mayor of El Paso. Mrs. Arabella Reed opened a small private school in 1867 which was taken over in 1868 by Mrs. Frances Clark. The attendance at each new school increased even with the small population”.

Please describe your frontier town in the late nineteenth century.



Map of the city in 1886

“With the arrival of the [Southern Pacific, Texas and Pacific](#) and the [Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe](#) railroads in 1881, the population boomed to 10,000 by the 1890 census. With a tempting green valley and a nearly perfect climate year-around, the town attracted a constant stream of newcomers, including many merchants, entrepreneurs, and professionals to come to the region to

benefit from the Mexican Free Trade zone.

Others arrived seeking a cure for respiratory ailments in the warm, dry climate. Various sanatoriums were established catering to their needs. Small immigrant communities Jewish, Italian, and Chinese also arrived, adding to the diversity of the bustling town. The origins of the Jewish community dates from at least the 1880s, with the first Reformed synagogue, Temple Mt. Sinai, built in 1898. The cosmopolitan community established many educational and cultural institutions, including a symphony orchestra that is the oldest in Texas. The American Catholic hierarchy gradually exerted control over the El Paso Valley, sending out Jesuit priests who developed a network of parishes and schools over the 1880s-1910s. Their work established the foundations for the Diocese of El Paso, created by Pius X in 1914. Among the dozens of Jesuits active in El Paso, one of the most notable was Father Carlos Pinto (1841-1919), known as "the apostle of El Paso", for his work among the Mexican population. A native of southern Italy, Pinto arrived in Northern New Mexico and Colorado in the 1870s, working there until he was assigned to El Paso ca. 1890. Pinto established the parishes of the immaculate Conception (El Paso's first English-speaking Catholic Parish in 1893), Sacred Heart/Sagrado Corazón (El Paso's first Spanish-speaking Catholic Parish in 1893), St. Ignatius (1905), Guardian Angel (1908), and Holy Family (1914) parishes, among others. Working with the Sisters of Loreto at the Foot of the Cross, the Jesuits established schools at these parishes. A distinct architectural style is evident in these structures that have yet to attract serious historical research. The Jesuit High School in Ysleta was briefly expanded into a junior college in the mid-twentieth century.

However as with other frontier regions -undesirables also arrived: gamblers, gunfighters, thieves, murderers, and prostitutes. After the arrival of the railroads, El Paso became a [boomtown](#). Some historians, like Leon Metz, have stressed in their narratives the lawlessness that accompanied the arrival of Anglos, with "scores of saloons, dance halls, gambling establishments, and houses of prostitution lin[ing] the main streets". [\[6\]](#) El Paso hired a



St. Louis Street, El Paso, Texas (postcard, circa 1908)



Downtown El Paso 1908

town marshal with rough reputation, [Dallas Stoudenmire](#), who was known to shoot first and ask questions later. The "[Four Dead in Five Seconds Gunfight](#)" took place here on April 14, 1881. This was prior to the [Gunfight at the O.K. Corral](#) in [Tombstone, Arizona](#). Stoudenmire, the sixth marshal in eight months, was hired to "clean" and tame a remote, violent and wild town. Stoudenmire was an effective marshal due to his fierce reputation and dexterity with his pistols. He effectively intimidated a violence-hardened town and used fear to control the City Council. On May 28, 1882, the City Council announced they were firing the marshal. Stoudenmire learned of this discussion, he entered the Council Chambers; they were terrified and remained quiet. Stoudenmire strolled up and down the chamber as he scolded, cursed and threatened to shoot. Drawing out and twirling his pistols, he threatened, "I can straddle every God-damn aldermen on this council!" The coerced Council members quickly voted unanimously to retain Stoudenmire as town marshal. Stoudenmire glared at them for a few seconds before he calmed down and put away his pistols. Knowing Stoudenmire's fearsome reputation, the [Mayor](#) defused a tense situation by calling for an abrupt adjournment. Stoudenmire exited the Chamber and a potentially fatal incident was averted.

In 1883 the county seat was moved from [Ysleta, Texas](#) to El Paso. This was decided in a strongly disputed election in which counted votes were nearly three times the number of voters. In 1887 a smelter was established by [Robert Safford Towne](#) of Kansas City Consolidated Smelting west of town for the purpose of processing lead and copper ore imported from Mexico. This smelting facility was subsequently purchased by [Asarco](#) in 1899.^[12] Over time, two small settlements developed around the smelter, acquiring the hispanicized name "La Esmelda". The Catholic parish of Santa Rosalía y San José del Río served these communities. Prostitution and gambling flourished until World War I, when the [Department of the Army](#) pressured El Paso authorities to crack down on vice. Many of these activities continued in neighboring Ciudad Juárez, especially during the [Prohibition](#), which benefited bars and saloons on the Mexican side of the border. The Concordia Cemetery, also known as El Paso's [Boot Hill](#), is now preserved by the Concordia Heritage Association.^[13]



Suburban residential district, El Paso, Texas
(postcard, circa 1908)

What took place in and around the city in the early twentieth century?

“Taft-Díaz Assassination Attempt. In 1909, [William Howard Taft](#) and [Porfirio Díaz](#) planned a summit in El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, a historic first meeting between a U.S. president and a Mexican president and also the first time an American president would cross the border into Mexico^[14] But tensions rose on both sides of the border, including threats of assassination, so the [Texas Rangers](#),

4,000 U.S. and Mexican troops, U.S. Secret Service agents, FBI agents and U.S. marshals were all called in to provide security.^[15] [Frederick Russell Burnham](#), the celebrated scout, was put in charge of a 250 private security detail hired by [John Hays Hammond](#), a nephew of Texas Ranger [John Coffee Hays](#), who in addition to owning large investments in Mexico was a close friend of Taft from Yale and a U.S. Vice-Presidential candidate in 1908.^{[16][17]} On October 16, the day of the summit, Burnham and Private C.R. Moore discovered a man holding a concealed [palm pistol](#) standing at the El Paso Chamber of Commerce building along the procession route.^{[18][19]} Burnham and Moore captured, disarmed, and arrested the assassin within only a few feet of Taft and Díaz.^{[20][21]}”

What happened during the Mexican Revolution?

“The [Mexican Revolution](#) (1910-1920) began in 1910, and Ciudad Juárez was the focus of intense fighting. Occasionally, stray shots killed civilians on the El Paso side. El Paso became a center of intrigue as various exiled leaders including [Victoriano Huerta](#) and (for a time) [Pancho Villa](#) were seen in the city. In January 1914, General [John Joseph Pershing](#) was stationed at [Fort Bliss](#), where he was responsible for security along the border and mounted the ill fated [Pancho Villa Expedition](#) against Pancho Villa after the infamous raid on [Columbus, New Mexico](#) on March 9, 1916. During this time period many refugees from Mexico fled to El Paso to escape the violence and economic disruption of the Revolution.



The Mexican Revolution General Pershing's punitive expedition camp near the border, El Paso, Texas (postcard, circa 1916): Franklin Mountains, left-to-right (i.e., south-to-north) are: Ranger Peak, Sugarloaf Mountain, and part of South Franklin Mountain.

A significant Mexican middle class population developed cultural, social, and educational institutions catering to their needs, including many located in central El Paso and in the Sunset Heights area. These included the Ateneo Porfirio Díaz, the Casino Mexicano (housed in the Toltec Building), Professor Servando Esquivel's Colegio Palmore, and the Colegio de las Hermanas de Jesús y María. The Jesuit Order, expelled from Mexico during the Revolution, played an important role in the development of community institutions and schools, aiding the American and Italian Jesuits already active in El Paso. They staffed parishes like Santo Angel, San Ignacio, and Sagrado Corazón in South El Paso and the Sagrada Familia, in Sunset Heights, as well as a chapel in Smeltertown. South El Paso street was the premier artistic and cultural center of Mexican El Paso, with over a dozen cinemas and theaters that featured the latest films, as well as vaudeville performers, tandas skits, carpas comics, nightclubs, and the occasional touring Spanish-language theatrical and opera company, such as that of the grande dame of the Mexican stage, Virginia Fábregas. Mexican cinemas in El Paso were important to the development of subtitles. Around the start of the 20th century, bilingual interpreters called out in Spanish the English-

language text of American movies, and this gradually gave way to on-screen translations. Azteca Films - a leading production company in mid 20th century Mexico, was housed in El Paso in the 1930s-1950s, and brought to South El Paso street theaters premier screenings featuring stars like María Félix. [\[22\]](#)

As a side story, some of my ancestors, my paternal Grandmother and her four sisters, came to the US escaping the attacks of Pancho Villa on young girls in Mexico. My Grandmother, Elodia Delgado Maceyra, was also one of the young ladies that danced for the President and with the President, when President Taft came to El Paso in 1909, as mentioned above”.

What were the productive activities?

“Most included farming, cattle raising, there was a small private school. El Paso is also home to the University of Texas at El Paso, a nationally recognized educational institution and contains 5 surrounding school districts within the city limits and 2 others in surrounding towns”.

How many inhabitants there were in the city?

“It was sparsely populated, before there was a census”.

How far is the Mexican border?

“As it stands now, El Paso is 300 feet from the border”.

How is El Paso today?

“Since 1990, the local economy has been adversely affected by competition with low wage labor abroad, and the closure of the main copper smelter due to fluctuating metal prices, and excessive lead contamination found throughout many of the surrounding areas”.

Is the NAFTA applied? Does it bring trade and economic development?

“The implementation of the [North American Free Trade Agreement](#) in 1994 affected the local economy, with transport, retail, and service firms expanding, and the accelerated loss of many industrial jobs. El Paso is sensitive to changes in the Mexican economy and the regulation of cross border traffic; the [Mexican peso](#) devaluation of late 1994 and increasingly stringent controls of cross border traffic after the [September 11, 2001 attacks](#) were felt strongly in El Paso. In contrast to almost every other border city and popular belief, the commercial traffic at the [ports of entry](#) went un-interrupted during the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

Since the 1849 establishment of Fort Bliss in the El Paso area, El Paso has seen many booms in population. More recently, the [Base Realignment and Closure](#) (BRAC) commission has marked the base to receive more than 30,000 soldiers, which is estimated to add \$547 million to the El Paso economy. The expected 100,000 people destined for El Paso (30,000 soldiers and 70,000 dependents) will bring to El Paso a rise in population that has not been seen since the Mexican Exodus of the 1910s in which the town's population grew by at least 60,000 people that were trying to escape the carnage of the [Mexican Revolution](#).

Recent city-wide projects funded through the election of bonds have once again pushed the urban sprawl onward for El Paso. The most prominent of these projects was the complete refurbishment of the [Plaza Theatre](#) in Downtown El Paso.

The project was completed on March 17, 2006 at a cost of \$38 million. With the completion of a new freeway on the city's eastern edge, the city should experience the usual urban sprawl that accompanies such construction. With the arrival of military personnel and expansion of [Biggs Army Airfield](#), the city is also constructing a new "Inner Loop" (Loop 375 to Fred Wilson Avenue) that will connect the eastern section of the city to the Army Airfield. Once completed, Biggs Army Airfield is expected to be larger than the current space at Fort Bliss. Beginning in mid 2008, El Paso decided to reinvest in their downtown, with a full redevelopment initiative. Credit El Paso Historical Society”.

And what about problems with Mexican immigration?

“Immigration has become a national issue and the opinions vary as to how it should be handled. Some think that the borders should be closed, others think that the USA should compromise somehow with those undocumented aliens that already reside in the country. It is a hot, debatable issue”.

How are the relationships with the neighboring mexican city of Ciudad Juarez?

“Cd Juarez and El Paso are amiable neighbors and have found a way to support and co-exist in a peaceful way with one another. While the drug cartel wars were going strong a few years ago, Cd Juarez was known as the “murder capital” of the world, as reported on CNN, Cable National News. There was not much exchange between the two cities. People were afraid of crossing the border for fear of unsolicited retaliation from the cartels.

Another side note, many students cross the border from Cd. Juarez to come to school every day, especially to the secondary school where I teach, Bowie High School, which is located 300 feet from the Mexican border. Many still come with stories of how the drug cartels still ride down the streets of Cd. Juarez threatening citizens and stealing property, cars and trucks, in particular. It is still a city to be reckoned with in safety issues. It is still wild in many aspects, as it contains around one million inhabitants”.

Thanks Catherine for your kindness!

Eno Santecchia



A modern view of the mountains from the approximate location of the camp pictured above, near the Cassidy Rd. west entrance to Fort Bliss