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## Interview no. 231

E. V. Ayala

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: E. V. Ayala (1920- )  
INTERVIEWER: Rodolfo Mares  
PROJECT: Class Project  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 28, 1976  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
  
TAPE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_  
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 231  
TRANSCRIBER: Rodolfo Mares  
DATE TRANSCRIBED: April 28-29, 1976

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Administrator of the Federal Detention Center in El Paso. Mr. Ayala was born April 3, 1920 in Christmas, Arizona, a small mining town located in the southern mountainous area approximately forty miles south of Globe, Arizona. His parents were both United States citizens, but his father was born in Penjamo, Guanajuato, México on February 2, 1878, while his mother was born in 1882 in Mammoth, Arizona. She was born a citizen of the United States on land that her parents were born Mexican citizens on.

In 1975, Mr. Ayala received the Bennett Award, the highest administrative accolade within the Federal Prisons system, for outstanding work in operations in the Federal Detention Center of El Paso.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

The prison system in such institutions as the Federal Prison Camp at Florence, Arizona and the Federal Detention Center in El Paso; illegal aliens.

[The following interview was conducted on April 28, 1976, with Enrique Ayala, Administrator of the Federal Detention Center of El Paso, located at 8833 Montana, El Paso, Texas. The interview is being conducted for the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas at El Paso.]

M: How did you get to El Paso?

A: From the time that I was born 'til the time that I got to El Paso was approximately thirty-one years. Did you want to know anything in between?

M: Yes, please.

A: I graduated from high school in Hayden, Arizona, in May of 1940.

M: From there did you go into the service?

A: Prior to serving in the Army I went to Arizona State Teachers College in Tempe, Arizona, which is Arizona State Univeristy now. I attended there for approximately a semester and a half before enlisting in the service prior to the war.

M: After you got out of the service?

A: I went into the service and spent thirty months overseas in the South Pacific, and after getting out of the service I attended the University of Arizona, there at Tucson, for approximately another semester and a half. Having been one hundred percent disabled upon release from the service, I was unable to continue my education, being in and out of the hospital. So, I married and I had to find a livelihood, so I went into Civil Service.

M: Specifically in which field?

A: I went to work for the Air Force Security and became Chief of the Security for the Manhattan Projects in Tucson, Arizona; and being no future in the Manhattan Security, I looked around and passed the tests for Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs, not taking any of them. I

took an examination for the OP (Bureau of Prisons) in 1951. So I reported to McNeil Island, Washington. In 1953 I transferred to the Federal Correctional Institute of La Tuna, Texas as a Correctional Officer. In 1954 I was transferred to the Federal Prison Camp at Florence, Arizona, as a Correctional Supervisor, working title Lieutenant.

M: Where is Florence, Arizona?

A: Approximately half way between Tucson and Phoenix. I remained for approximately ten years, until 1964.

M: How many are in the staff there in Florence?

A: We had approximately thirty-five, and we had three hundred inmates. Our inmates consisted of citizens and aliens, approximately one third citizens and two thirds aliens.

M: Did you find that any trouble at all?

A: Having worked at McNeil Island and being stationed at La Tuna, no trouble. While at my stay at the Prison camp in Florence, we were in charge of fighting forest fires, and certainly most of [the men] were aliens unable to speak English. Consequently, I wrote a booklet on forest fire fighting in Spanish, and we fought fires throughout the state of Arizona.

M: So you would take men from the camps out to fight the fires?

A: My personnel would take out details and see that they were well supervised and that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing.

M: Can you remember any unusual events or stories that occurred while you were at Florence?

A: Stories? No stories; they're all factual. Well, prior to my arrival at

Florence, the previous year they had some seventy-odd escapes. I arrived in May and they had already had about thirty-some escapes. After my arriving for the rest of the year, there were about a dozen escapes, then the following year about a dozen, and then there were some years that we didn't have any escapes. This was one of the major things that ever happened to me, because the late J. Edgar Hoover of the Bureau of Investigation wrote me a letter requesting that I write a by-line story for their FBI bulletin that is distributed to all law enforcement agencies and to some foreign countries. This article was published in the FBI bulletin (tracking of escapees).

M: And this was taking advantage of your knowledge in tracking?

A: Correct, tracking and apprehending escapees; and by doing this it shows the rest of the population they were apprehended, and discourages escapees. This was my greatest concern, and this was what transpired throughout those years. One more incident that I can say about the prison camp, or another unique factor that I have carried with me throughout my prison career, is that we have helped, our inmate population [has helped] in community disasters like fires, or a flood, or even eye-sores in the community. In Florence there were several times when a fire was in a home [where the owners] did not have the means to repair their homes. Certainly the community would help out in furnishing some of the materials, and I had all of the manpower of carpenters, painters, or you name it, and we would volunteer these people on our off-duty hours and weekends. After Florence, I was transferred to Seagoville, which is about 20 miles east of Dallas, and there we continued working with the community. Here at Anthony, there was an old church that was completely

in shambles, and the community wanted a meeting hall; and I took a detail for almost a year and a half and almost completed it, and passed it on to another officer that became interested in it. Even now that building is being used. Right now we have a sign painting class here at the Detention Center and we offer our services to government agencies and nonprofit organizations, and we make these signs free of charge. We are part of the community and we should strive to help them out.

M: After Seagoville?

A: I came back to La Tuna, Texas. I was over there for three years prior to the appointment at the Federal Detention Center which was opened on May 31, 1973, at the rear of the I & N Detention Facility.

A: Could you talk about the dynamics of the FDC?

M: It was opened to relieve over-crowding at the El Paso County Jail. They had so many inmates, especially the immigration violator, the short termers, they had housed at the County Jail. Consequently, they had the dormitories of the I & N Detention Facility not being used most of the time, so they transferred them to the Bureau of Prisons on a temporary basis and we opened up with one hundred and twenty-five inmates. Since then we upped to one hundred and forty-four, one hundred and fifty-six, and presently to one hundred and sixty-six.

M: At the beginning, what percentage were illegal aliens?

A: One hundred percent, but since that time we have had resident aliens and we have citizens.

M: How many inmates do we have going through the Detention Center yearly?

A: Approximately eight hundred, since they are short termers, meaning one

hundred seventy nine days or less.

M: They can be sentenced to as little as how long?

A: Some are sentenced to as little as ten days. We've had one who came in one Friday, and Monday morning he was released.

M: The inmate that we get here--predominately, is he serving the term for being an illegal alien?

A: Illegal alien or aiding and abetting. This is what I mean in aiding and abetting--he could be a resident alien or a citizen with less than a one hundred and seventy-nine day sentence.

M: What is the maximum sentence for an illegal alien?

A: The maximum sentence for an illegal alien is three years.

M: If three years is the maximum, why are so many given one hundred and seventy nine days or less?

A: Well, there's no rhyme or reason for it. Certainly when an illegal alien is apprehended, Border Patrol usually will, from my observation, just process him and he is just told to go back across the river in this area. Unless the alien is known by the Border Patrolman, or causes any sort of difficulty with the patrolman, then he will be brought in and prosecuted and pushed through the court systems, because the Border Patrol doesn't hold them that long to establish a pre-sentence report or previous criminal history.

M: So you would imagine that quite a few illegal aliens are not first timers?

A: No, they could be recidivists. After we receive the FBI report, we have had elderly inmates, coming across since 1946, that have spent one year, eighteen months, two years, and three years for illegal entry, and

now could have been given as little as one hundred and seventy nine days or less, simply because of not knowing his previous background. Illegal aliens are usually apprehended because they are illegal aliens and seeking work. It's very prevalent in this area that the majority of these boys apprehended in this sector are persons that are apprehended by city or state law enforcement personnel for doing something wrong, like stealing, or otherwise something else and being caught and sought out as illegal aliens, and turned over to I & N S.

M: Why would they not process them for stealing or something else?

A: Because they figure that the federal government will prosecute them and give them a little more time, or their facilities are over-crowded and they're just passing on the load to somebody else. All these factors are contributing factors--I wouldn't say that all these factors are the dominating factors.

M: Being so close to the Juárez border area, how do you feel that has affected the Detention facility?

A: It has affected it. That is, it was necessary to open the Detention Center to relieve the over-crowdedness at County Jail of illegal aliens.

M: How do you feel that Juárez and/or México has been affected by the presence of the Detention Center?

A: There are so many areas that the Juárez population and interior cities, states, and municipalities have found that the Federal Detention Center exists for. Their needs are sometimes our needs. For instance, Juárez--their people are always looking for some lost relative, and go to their Channel 5 TV, or through their radio stations, and ask



these people. And in due time, these stations call us. When they can't locate someone, especially someone that they suspect is illegally in the United States, they contact us, and we have been able to locate some of their missing relatives. It just so happened that yesterday a lady had been contacting everybody and had not been able to locate her missing son, a twenty-four year old subject, and she had not heard from him for the last two months or so. She finally contacted me, and I told her to call me by today at noon. During that time, I checked around and was able to locate him. He had been apprehended by Immigration, and had been sent to court and had been sent to jail. The jail gave me the information that he had been sent to Pecos, Texas, as a material witness, and he was still over there. I located him that far, so consequently knowing here within the city who is responsible for some of these detentions, I was able to locate him at Pecos. And when she called this morning, and I knew it was her, I gave the information. She said, "You know, I just called to thank you because I just got word from my son that he's at Pecos, and I did want to call you up to thank you because you went ahead and found out."

M: Could we take it beyond Juárez?

A: We get letters from throughout México. I get letters from Acapulco, or Guadalajara, or all over México. They write to me and ask me if I could locate or give information about their relatives.

M: Now, you mentioned newspapers or radio?

A: About a year ago there was the Excelsior newspaper from México City and they sent a photographer who had a personal interview with me, and

I allowed him to interview the inmates and see how they were treated. They gave a rundown of the Federal Detention Center here at El Paso. Then there was the time when Channel 2 sent a photographer, and a lady interviewer from México City came up and also did a documentary on the Detention Center. We have had very nice response, and certainly this is the food to continue to give help to the community. Certainly, like any community, we have our problems, but we have everything we need to exist, and whatever we have we utilize to the best and proper use, and in turn correspond to us very admirably. You name anything that we have here--it is part of community. We have electrical problems, water problems. We have feeding, clothing, laundry, pressing, and writing home. The only thing they haven't got is the freedom to come and go as they please, to go home--but we have got the highest percentage of visiting per inmate than most other institutions. There is no limit to the number of hours they can visit here, given that it is a Saturday, Sunday or national holiday. And certainly during the Christmas holidays, for two straight weeks in a row they can come every day. We might have one hundred and fifty visitors coming to visit seventy-five inmates, on about two visitors per inmate visit.

M: Do you see any conditions that bring about certain conditions in the Detention Center?

A: Certainly there are not enough jobs, or the hear-say of the earning power that they hear they can have in the United States. But then these tall stories that they hear from individuals that have either been over through the Bracero program, or illegally, of those that earned good money, and

took good money back home--well, certainly to hear these stories, some of these young people go along with it and try their luck at it. Even with the recession in the United States or the bad times in the last year, the general influx of aliens continued.

M: Do you see any specific patterns within population of the influx?

A: That brings to mind one thing that has been very noticeable, and mainly in the city of Delicias, Chihuahua. I have noticed that at least twice in the last couple of years that all of a sudden here comes this influx of ten to twenty individuals that were apprehended with illegal entry cards. I certainly noticed it from other cities, but not as much as from Delicias. I suspect con-men invade certain cities, and with these cards, they entice some of these poor people with stories of earnings and gains to the point where some of these people even sell or mortgage their homes and property and come to the United States. They then lose their homes or this and that, o que la mula se la van a llevar porque no he pagado. Things such as this will transpire where some con-guy has made a good killing.

M: Do you see changes in the future that are going to affect the institution?

A: In curtailing the influx of aliens to the United States? No, none on the basis of the fact that the economy of the United States has to and will improve. México is certainly growing, but not in comparison to their population growth. In 1958, I went to several different penitentiaries and studied their systems and their system of treating the felon. The crime has no bearing on those who have the means to live in comfort; while the felon that hasn't got a thing, he has just the bare necessities. It's a dog-eat-dog life. There is a solution, a solution that would make

a great dent in the curtailing of this influx that comes continually-- after being apprehended once, I'm sure he would not come a second time. Back in 1958 I discussed this with penologists when I was visiting their institutions. With the help of the Mexican government, as in the outbreak of hoof-and-mouth in the late forties and early fifties, we helped in controlling the disease in every way possible. Not too long ago, because of the amount of narcotics coming into the United States, we sent all sorts of personnel to burn and curtail the marijuana being grown in México. Certainly, México doesn't like to hear or see their citizens contributing to a problem of the United States and think it belongs to them. These are their people. So I came to the conclusion (and this was my idea) that if we would build three to four detention centers at the border (probably one in Mexicali, one in Nogales, one here in Juárez, one in Matamoros) on the other side in México, we would build these as they haven't got the funds and so forth, and these would hold illegal aliens that our courts sentenced; and they, as responsible for their own citizens, would detain them. These center would not be up to our standards, but similar. México would furnish the personnel and we would have maybe three individuals overseeing the operations. Their treatment over there--well, I won't say it's harsh, but it is either a yes or no situation. There's no two ways about it. I would think once incarcerated in one of these facilities, the inmate would think twenty fold more times about coming back, and being apprehended, and being subjected to treatment at these centers in their own nation. I think this would be the only effective way to curtail the influx of recidivists.