

Intro/Sebastian Cervantes: The History Club since the start of the semester has elected new officers. The Mesquite's Brandon Hossaini spoke with the club's faculty adviser Francis Galan, attended their recent Zoom meeting, and interviewed president Carlos Talavera, and vice president Dylan Merten. They discussed the challenges of running a club virtually, as well as attending the first History Club meeting this year. Brandon talked to the president and vice president about their fascination with their families and ancestors' roles in major historical events and explained how history can be just as fascinating for students who might think otherwise.

Dylan Merten: Let's say you're not really into history, but you find civil rights interesting. Like the whole movement, the history of civil rights movement interesting. Well, you know, you could be talking with, I don't know, say, me or any other student there, and you're like, "Oh, you know, I find that interesting." And then it's like, "Oh, really? Well, you know, did you know about X, Y, Z," or "Hey, these professors talked about this before still. And so it's almost like networking in a way."

Brandon Hossaini: That was Dylan Merten, vice president of the History Club at Texas A&M-San Antonio. Spend any amount of time with him and Carlos Talavera, and you're likely to end up talking about World War II, the civil rights movement and other major events in history. Dylan also mentioned more about how the History Club is integrating technology into their meetings.

DYLAN: I would say make it more interactive if possible. Even, like, even say like have movie nights over Zoom, which, you know, then could be a little bit easier picking the movie...but I would just say overall interaction and just in general with the, like online meetings is probably the goal.

BRANDON: Speaking of interactions, Dylan also talked about working on getting people involved in the club during the pandemic.

DYLAN: One of the things I hope for this year is that, you know we get more active and even have events if possible, whether it's, you know a drive in for a movie, you know, drive-in movie or like one idea I had last year was to walk on the mission trail because in the thick of the pandemic, the trails are still open. Like the path was still open and it's only maybe 10 minutes away from campus and you know, it was outside. So it was, you know, "Hey, like it would work well." And that was one of the ideas I had, but it just, everything kind of fell flat halfway through the semester.

BRANDON: Meanwhile, Carlos Talavera disintegrated the preconceived notions about the history club only talking about history.

Carlos Talavera: When people just hear history club — Oh, they're just going to be talking about historical events. It's not really true. There are ideas that we do have, yes. We're going to go like visit like historical events, like past times where we go, like I know they said they went to

like to the Missions or they'll go to like talks around San Antonio, like the Holocaust talks or just hosted by the professors on campus. But it's not really, we're just sitting there. We're just like trying to inform more people about like these things that happened.

DYLAN: I know with myself, I'm a big, you know — I'm into history a lot, but I would say World War II is certainly a big interest of mine, and I remember just talking about it and mentioning something with one of the students and we went on for, like, a 10-minute conversation just about our interests and stuff, so.

DYLAN: I think that was you and me, one time, after, like —

CARLOS: Yeah (laughs). It was before Dr. Westermann's class, but there was someone else in the History Club as well.

BRANDON: That youthful enthusiasm has changed the dynamic of the club and their presence on campus, according to Dr. Francis Galan, the faculty adviser.

Francis Galan: This marks a significant transition for the leadership of History Club because of the fact that both of them are very, very young. Our previous officers have generally been nontraditional students, and so they have had either careers or they've been in the military or some kind of leadership positions. So, I'm hoping that this then will also be a bit of a transition for the History Club in just being able to recruit younger students — because I think that makes all the difference when it comes to not just the fundraising but overall presence on campus.

BRANDON: These young students are not only establishing their roles on campus, Carlos being 20 and Dylan being 22, they are discovering the roles that family members played in historical events. Carlos shares an example.

CARLOS: I'm a big World War II fan, as — as Dylan. And I actually had family members who served during World War II. So, but I do like more like the Pacific theater than the European theater, but all my family members went to the European theater. So it's kind of hard to choose like a specific event. For me just being like the big also like Naval historian that I am, I would like to go see like the battle of Leyte Gulf, which was like the largest Naval battle in history. And the last time battleships will fight gun to gun.

BRANDON: Wow, it's very impressive.

CARLOS: Yeah. I could — I could talk all about it, but I don't want to take too much of your time.

BRANDON: No, please. If you'd like to talk about it, go right ahead. I'm here for you guys.

CARLOS: So, I believe it was like 14 days in total of just constant fighting. Somewhere around there. I could be wrong or off by a few days. But there's one section it's off in the Surigao Strait to a battleship, older battleships sunk at Pearl Harbor were stationed there [under the command of Jesse Oldendorf](#) and they just completely stopped the Southern Japanese force and

obliterated it in like hours. They did like torpedo runs from early on by just small patrol boats. And then once the Japanese got in range of the big guns, and that's when the fireworks started happening basically.

BRANDON: I see, I see. What about you, Dylan? Do you have any more moments in history you'd love to participate in or go back to?

DYLAN: Plenty of moments. So there, I would say there's two categories.

One version would be like, just kinda like family history, seeing past family members. 'Cause just like Carlos, I actually had two relatives serve and died in World War II. I'd want to see them, like not in battle, but just see how they, you know, who they were and it's not even just them as well. It would also be different family members. I actually had an ancestor who fought at the Battle of San Jacinto. So that's another one, but I would say there's a, there's a, there's quite a lot.

I always thought it would be interesting to see almost like the pretty much like the Conquistadors expedition, mainly Cabeza de Vaca, because I've always found his to be the most interesting, which his, his expedition, well, it wasn't his, he took over after the main person in charge died, but that was just such a doomed expedition. There were only four survivors left when they were found – out of 400.

BRANDON: Interesting.

DYLAN: I believe 600 maybe. But I would definitely say that the Battle of San Jacinto, it has always seemed interesting, or even the Alamo, um even like American Revolution or just early colonial era would always be cool to see, but I would definitely say those. And then with World War II honestly, D-Day has always just seemed fascinating, which is funny, cause I'm like Carlos, where I find the Pacific much more interesting, but the invasion of Normandy has always just been such a fascinating topic.

CARLOS: Another thing that I was going to say is that I would witness would be D-day as well. 'Cause actually, my uncle or great uncle was there on D-day with the 90th Infantry's second armored battalion. He was actually also part of the North African campaign. And from North Africa, they sent him to D-Day with one of his brothers. And he was, I believe, from what records we know, he was part of like the third to fourth wave of infantry. So it was well after all the carnage that happened. So of course he probably saw a lot of bad things there. But that will probably be interesting to see of course. There's one story my grandma told me that he was reported missing in action sometime in 1944 or '45. But it would be kind of interesting to see like where exactly he was reported missing, find out what battle, what happened to him. 'Cause he actually – they found him a few days later – but in a German uniform, just trying to fight back to the front lines, which was, it's really interesting because nobody knows anything else other than that, from that point.

BRANDON: Sometimes it's the personal history that resonates the most. The History Club's next meeting is March 25th at 7 p.m. on Zoom. The link is available [here](#). This is Brandon Hossaini, signing off for The Mesquite.