

JUDGE ARNULFO DANIEL (A.D.) AZIOS: AN AMERICAN HERO AND SOUTH TEXAS COLLEGE OF LAW HOUSTON LEGEND

DAVID M. MEDINA*

South Texas College of Law Houston has produced great lawyers, judges, executives, professors, and leaders who have made significant contributions to Texas and America. As the law school embarks on its continued success under the South Texas College of Law Houston banner, it is fitting to reflect on a giant of a man who helped forge a path for all South Texas College of Law Houston graduates to follow. And, since this is the first publication of the *South Texas College of Law Houston Hispanic Journal of Law and Policy*, it is important that we recognize a great alumnus, a man who experienced adversity and willed it away. It is with great love and respect that this first publication is dedicated to the memory of the Honorable Judge Arnulfo Daniel "A.D." Azios, a great jurist and a great American.

Long before Judge Azios began his storied judicial career, he developed survival skills that would help sustain him during treacherous times. Those survival skills began to develop when his father passed away and continued to grow while enrolled at the University of Texas. His quest and hunger for knowledge was so powerful that he hitchhiked from his hometown of Laredo to Austin so that he could become a Longhorn. During his time at the University of Texas, Judge Azios was a student leader and scholar. While pursuing his dream, America was attacked on December 7, 1941, a day that President Roosevelt said "will live in infamy." The young Judge Azios soon found himself in Nebraska learning German. And, rest assured, this was not a random selection.

Judge Azios was a member of the famed 9th Armored Division of the U.S. Army and fought in the Battle of the Bulge in Germany, which was the largest and bloodiest battle of World War II. In fact, there were approximately 87,500 American casualties, and, interestingly, it was during that battle that troops were desegregated. Judge Azios was wounded and found refuge in a dark, dusty basement. He was captured and taken as a prisoner

* Former state district court judge, general counsel to Governor Rick Perry, and first South Texas College of Law Houston graduate to become a justice on the Texas Supreme Court. South Texas College of Law Houston, Class of 1989.

of war by the Germans. While his fate seemed doomed, his mastery of German perhaps spared him his life. He was able to communicate with his captors and became the leader of about 50 other prisoners. His ability to lead garnered the confidence and respect of other soldiers, which led to his 'great escape' with ten other American prisoners. For Judge Azios, the choice was either to die a prisoner or die trying to gain freedom. He and his men knew that if they were caught it would mean certain execution by the Germans. They also believed that if they did nothing, they would most likely starve as prisoners of war. Judge Azios chose to be free or die trying. And freedom it was. Judge Azios left the Army as a colonel and a decorated hero with three Battle Star awards. He returned home as part of the 'greatest generation' and helped build a new America.

Judge Azios found his way back to Austin and completed his pre-law studies. He then moved to Houston and attended our fine law school, South Texas College of Law Houston. After a successful nearly 25-year legal career, Judge Azios began his long and prosperous contribution to the judiciary. Having served as a Harris County district court judge, Judge Azios will forever be remembered as a great judge, and it is also important to note that he was the first Hispanic judge in Harris County.

Judge Azios was a mentor to many lawyers and judges, including retired Judge Lupe Salinas, my mentor and someone who provided great information for this piece. Judge Azios is a giant in our profession, and it is upon his broad shoulders that many South Texas College of Law Houston graduates, lawyers, and judges stand. He is the patriarch and direct link to all South Texas College of Law Houston judges. Our hope is that this Journal will help teach Judge Azios's history so that the path he laid for us is forever preserved in the cornerstone of what is now South Texas College of Law Houston.

On a personal note, I had the honor of meeting Judge Azios. He truly represents all that is good about humanity and our profession. And, finally, it is important to remember:

It is the Soldier, not the reporter, Who has given us freedom of the press. It is the Soldier, not the poet, Who has given us freedom of speech. It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer, who has given us freedom to protest. . . . It is the Soldier who salutes the flag, Who serves beneath the flag, And whose coffin is draped by the flag, Who allows the protester to burn the flag.¹

Judge Azios is the good soldier to whom I am forever grateful.

1. Charles M. Province, *It is the Soldier*, INT'L WAR VETERANS' POETRY ARCHIVES, <http://www.iwvpa.net/provincecm/> (last visited Nov. 11, 2016); see also *Military Quotes*, AM. VETERAN'S MEMORIAL, http://americanveteransmemorial.org/Military_Quotes.html (last visited Nov. 11, 2016) (attributing the quote to Father Dennis Edward O'Brien, USMC).