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Interview no. 646

Arthur Adams

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Arthur L. Adams

INTERVIEWER: Jim Marchant and Oscar J. Martínez

PROJECT: _____

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Investigator, U.S. Customs Service.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Experiences as a Border Patrol agent, 1948-1957; working with Chinese illegal aliens, 1950s; experiences with the U.S. Customs Service.

Length of Interview: 2 hours Length of Transcript: 80 pages

Arthur L. Adams
by Oscar Martinez and Jim Marchant
August 10, 1977

JM: Okay, the first question I'd like to ask you is where you were born and a little bit about your youth. What did you do?

AA: Well, I was born in Chicago, Illinois, on June 22, 1923. I stayed there and completed my high school education. I moved around quite a bit when I was a kid, throughout the city. I went to five grade schools and two high schools. Graduated in June of 1941. Went to work. Saved enough money in six months to get out of town. I went down to Miami, Florida. Thought I'd like it down there. That was in October of 1941. I got a job down there, and then on December 7, the war broke out. January 1942 I joined the Navy for a six-year hitch, and several years later I was put into the V-12 program, discharged to the reserves and in 1946 was commissioned. Went out on an LST and was discharged from the Navy in June of 1947. I went back to Chicago. Went to work for General Motors Company, spent about a year and a half with them. I was on the six day a week graveyard shift. My wife worked days, so I wasn't too happy about staying with that.

JM: What did you do with them?

AA: I worked in the test floor of the electrical motors division.

JM: Is that what you were trained in the Navy, electronics?

AA: No, I was an aviation mech in the Navy until I went to that V-12 school, and then I was an officer on an LST.

JM: What's the V-12?

AA: That was that Navy college training program. We're V-12 for

part of the time where we stayed in the uniform, the Navy uniform. And then when they went to transfer to the University of California at Berkley they had the NROTC program, and we were put into that. The war ended before we completed the course so we went back into the active service if we had enough credits to qualify for the commission. Otherwise we went back where we came from.

JM: And you needed what, two years or three?

AA: Three. It was an accelerated program. I had a total of three and a half years credit, including Navy Aviation Mech school that I'd been to. So I was far enough along to where I was commissioned. And I went on an LST. After a year I was discharged.

OM: What is an LST?

AA: Landing Ship Tank. And then when I got out of the Navy I went to work for General Motors working on the test floor on diesel locomotive engines. And that's probably where I lost my hearing. I was working in a boiler factory with 15 engines up on a full load all night. I worked the graveyard, midnight to 8:42 in the morning.

JM: How long were you with General Motors?

AA: About a year and a half.

JM: What'd you do after that, Art?

AA: Well, then I got the job with the Border Patrol, January of '49.

JM: Could you tell us a little bit about how you went about getting the job there? That would be your first federal government job besides the Navy, right?

AA: Yeah. Well, I just saw the Civil Service announcement for the Border Patrol and other jobs. And at that, wages, of course, right after the war were not what they are now. And I think I was making about a buck sixty-five an hour at General Motors, and as I said, working the graveyard shift while my wife was working days, and that wasn't any way to live. So I started looking for another job. Found the Border Patrol offering along with others and they had the best pay. They were offering at that time \$3,051 a year, that was the salary.

JM: And what year would that be?

AA: That was in the middle of '48.

OM: Not bad for 1948.

AA: No, it wasn't too bad. This was either in the spring or the middle of '48. So I took the exam and oral interview and then waited. I think I finished my oral interviews somewhere around October. And between Christmas and New Year's, December, I got a telegram asking me if I would accept an appointment in El Paso, Texas. And the salary then had gone up to \$3,351 a year. It was a three hundred dollar jump while I was waiting. So I reported to El Paso, Texas. That was the first Border Patrol school after the war. It was done at the old Camp Chigas, which I don't know if you're familiar with it. How long have you been here, Doctor?

OM: Well, I'm familiar with the area, I grew up here, but I hadn't heard of this school.

AA: Well, you remember the old Santa Fe Bridge as it was years ago when they had the old red building with the big tower down there? The old wooden building? Well, that was called Camp Chigas. That /was an/ immigration facility down there. They had the school there. They called it Camp Chigas.

JM: Chigas. Does that have a meaning or no?

OM: That's an interesting name.

AA: Not that I know of. I don't know what. But it was the Border Patrol headquarters in El Paso at that time.

OM: Is this were you became a member of the Border Patrol? Or did you get signed up somewhere else and then came here for the schooling?

AA: No, I had to report here on my own. My appointment was here in El Paso. I had to find my way down here.

OM: At your own expense?

AA: Oh, yeah. Any government job you report to from non-government work, you pay your way to your first job. Usually a subsequent transfer once you're in government service, the government'll generally pay your way, but not the first one. So I reported in here on the 10th of January, 1949.

OM: What did you know about El Paso at that time?

AA: Nothing. In fact, people up in Chicago wondered if I'd enlisted in something and why I ever considered ever going to El Paso. You know how yankees are. They think if you leave Chicago or New York you're going to the hinterland. So that's the way it was. Everybody thought I was crazy up there.

OM: What impressions did you have of this place?

AA: Really none. But I had driven through El Paso one time while I was in the Navy and I remembered the old Del Camino Courts and the smelter. That's all I could remember about the place. Came through here in the evening or at night time, and I think stopped in Las Cruces for the night. I was driving. And that's the only time I ever been in El Paso. In fact, the only time I've been in Texas, I came into Texas on the north, come in about Dallas and drove across Texas through and on out to the west coast. I had no conception of the area at all. It was a surprise, I guess, after the greenery up north to see the desert down here. But by the same token, I never appreciated humidity, so I've always liked it down here.

OM: Well, how did the school go? How did the training go?

AA: Border Patrol school? Well, we had a five-week school at that time. As I said, it was the first school they'd given since the war, so they were more or less new at it.

JM: This is the first class?

AA: First class after the war. They had taken on a bunch of temporary help during the war years and up to that time, but there'd been no formalized schooling, regular classes. That was the first one in several years. I think there was probably about 30 or 40 of us in the class, I don't remember; very good size, probably around thirty. The rules there were pretty stringent. And I believed them when they told me that if I failed the school I wouldn't have a job. So I left

my wife in Chicago, I came down here, put up at the YMCA and prepared to study. And I did study. As it turned out they didn't bust anybody out of the school, but they give you a six-months' test in Spanish and law, immigration law, all the things they taught. And then they give you a ten-months' examination. If you didn't pass that ten-months' examination, you were out. In fact, a lot of guys were dropped out that were in that school. Something came up later that they figured that the test was unfair, that some of the things hadn't been properly taught. And they gave those people that flunked out of that one an opportunity to come back in. Some of 'em did about a year later, came back in, same guys. The school was good.

I went to work in El Paso for the rest of my first year. I was assigned right here in El Paso. And January of 1950 I was assigned to Fabens, Texas, and that's a lot of different work than we have here in El Paso. We cut sign in the upper valley sand hills out to Mount Riley, in that area; worked information in town; worked down the valley to meet the Ysleta station officers.

JM: What was the river like then when you were there?

AA: I guess pretty much the same as it was until it was gone over here with the Chamizal. That was the first change in it. The straightening of the river from what it was years ago occurred in 1936, I think. It was on the basis of flood control and everything. South El Paso used to flood, and the valley down here around, oh, Glenwood and that area

used to flood pretty bad, and they straightened out the river I think in '36.

JM: That was a WPA project, wasn't it, building that levee and the whole thing?

OM: I don't think so. It was part of the International Boundary and Water Commission. It was a project with Mexico.

AA: That had to do with the irrigation system, the Elephant Butte project. And as I say, part of that I think got straightened out, as I recall hearing. But there was no further changes in the river.

JM: Well, how long were you in the Border Patrol?

AA: I spent about five and a half years in Fabens. And then I went to Las Cruces for six months. And in May of 1956 I got a two-grade promotion and transferred to investigator in Chicago after being down here seven and a half years, from January of '49 to May of '56.

JM: What was the actual cases like when you worked at this time? What did you do as a Border Patrolman then?

AA: Well, in Fabens we had farm check. That was considered rough duty station. We never worked in dress uniform down there. Las Cruces and Lordsburg were the dress uniform stations, where you ran road blocks and all that sort of thing. Fabens, Fort Hancock, Ysleta, Presidio, Columbus were all rough duty stations, farm and ranch checks mostly.

JM: What were some of the things that they were smuggling in 1950 other than just wetbacks coming?

AA: Nothing real big except some liquor. But again, the liquor

smuggling days were in the past, and the narcotics smuggling days as we know 'em now hadn't started really.

I think in the five and a half years that I was in Fabens, I recall people talking about a big load they made in 1948 before I got down there. They had a big marijuana smuggling case and big shoot-out down there. One of the officers that was in that was still there when I came. During my time there we searched 'em the guy had, I don't know, 40 or 50 cigarettes. And the agents, Customs agents, came out of El Paso.

JM: In those days, 40 or 50 cigarettes was big, huh?

AA: Yeah, that was a big case. They came down and took the prisoner. In fact, George Scales, one of the guys that was an agent when I came here, who just recently died, was the officer that came down. He handled the liaison with Immigration. He handled most of the cases. I can't recall any other marijuana cases that were made at the time I was down there. We had a cattle smuggling case, a couple of head of cattle, one night, and again Customs agents came down and took it. Occasionally we'd catch 'em hauling a sack of soto1 or something like that.

JM: What is that?

AA: Well, that's even worse than mescal and tequila. That's the lowest on the totem pole, I think. Use it to clean car fender or something.

OM: Poor man's drink. (Laughter)

JM: Sotol? Is that what it is?

OM: Sotol.

AA: But the type of work we did down there netted us mostly wetbacks.

JM: Was there any organized wetback smuggling down there then?

AA: No, not that we were aware of. I can't recall getting into any smuggling cases where we actually filed on haulers, except when we went out and worked roadblocks. We'd go up Pine Springs on the Carlsbad Highway. We used to go up there several times a year. And they'd pull people in from the different stations, send you up there for four or five weeks at a time. There we ran roadblocks and we caught smuggling cases, alien smuggling cases, and filed on haulers. That was about the only roadblock we were running in this area at the time. We didn't have any that we ever operated out of Las Cruces north or anything like they do now.

JM: When you were working did you work on a GS level schedule like it is now, today?

AA: Yeah. When I got my appointment it was under the old classified systems, CAF. Called it a CAF-6. During my first year they were re-classified to the GS system, so it became GS-6. Seven was the journeyman grade. You get that after one year, and you remained a seven. And I remained a seven until May of 1956 when I left Las Cruces and went to Chicago as a Grade-9 investigator.

While I was in Chicago they raised the journeyman grade to grade eight, and the supervisors to grade nines.

JM: How about the investigators? Did they remain the same?

AA: Yeah, they remained the same. They journeyman investigator grade was still nine, and it was pretty hard to get an eleven. But after I left Chicago and came down here they busted loose a few more, and we got eleven and they gradually upgraded.

OM: Let me ask some questions about your experience as a Border Patrol agent. Were you here in October of '48?

AA: No. No, I came here in January of '49.

OM: Okay. I was gonna ask you about a big incident that happened in October of '48.

AA: Was that at Fabens?

OM: Well, it was all along the river here in El Paso.

AA: Oh, the Shmoo Invasion?

OM: Yeah.

AA: Naw, I wasn't here.

OM: You didn't witness that?

AA: No, I heard about it.

JM: Well, enlighten me, what is this?

AA: Well, I guess it was before we had the bracero program, or maybe we had the bracero program.

OM: It was in between.

AA: But they wouldn't hire enough of those people. This worker

program, you know, they had it during the war where they let people come in. The railroad had a bunch of hired ones as I recall, as well as the farmworker. They needed additional help during the war and they brought 'em in. It wasn't only from Mexico, but Jamaica, and I guess some of the islands. Because later on I was on a clean-up in Denver and we got some people from Jamaica that had been up there for years as railroad workers or braceros and stayed on. We got one guy that spoke the King's English. And that was the first encounter I had with anybody that, you know, I was really surprised when I heard the English accent. Worked in a hotel. They'd been up there for years and he'd even been in our Air Force.

JM: You called this the Shmoo Invasion. Is that what it was?

AA: Oh, we used to talk, you know, the Shmoos in the cartoons. They say that all these people that had come to the border hoping to cross and get the aid in laborer card or bracero card, whatever it was called at that time, just like they did later on, they came up here in droves hoping to get a job and then there was just so many jobs. They processed what they needed. Then all these people were stuck over there starving. Well, I guess one day or one week or however long the thing went on, they just appeared on the levee, it was like an invading army, and they just walked across en masse.

OM: And the Border Partol let 'em.

AA: Yeah, well there's nothing you can do. What'd you do, grab one guy in each hand and stand there while a thousand of 'em go around you? But they came over by the hundreds, or literally thousands.

OM: Thousands, for a whole week. Ten thousand according to the newspapers.

AA: That was before my time, but I heard about it.

OM: Well, could you tell us about your experiences in apprehending illegal aliens here in El Paso and in Fabens? What incidents stand out in your mind? What cases stand out in your mind?

AA: Oh, I can't recall anything really out of the ordinary. It was a busy station. Especially during the picking season we were picking 'em up. We'd haul 'em into the compound area by the jail and set 'em down, wait for a bus to come down from El Paso, and haul 'em off here and we'd go out to catch another bunch. We cut sign in the sand hills a lot down there using jeeps and followed 'em out, try and catch 'em before they hit the Carlsbad Highway. We cut sign every morning down there. And if we didn't pick up anything to take us out in the hills, then we'd start a farm check. And we were assigned in different areas. And it was pretty much routine. Just check all the hands in the field, haul in the wets.

JM: One thing occurs to me as you're talking here, what was the public's reaction to the Border Patrol in 1950 and that era?

AA: Well, we weren't too popular with the farmers. They had

the Bracero Program in effect at that time, and that gave us a legal right to be in the fields, on their property. There were a few farmers that didn't hire braceros and they maintained that we had no right on their property. That was a bone of contention. One time they came along with a directive, I forget exactly what year it was, and said that we couldn't go in those people's property. We knew they were working wets obviously if they weren't working braceros and they didn't have enough family. Some farmers tried to get families that lived there and they'd work the family members. But most of 'em couldn't support enough family all year to pick a goodly amount of cotton. Some of those guys have hundreds of acres. So you knew they had wets. So it was almost like a game. The ditch banks in some areas, of course, belonged to the Bureau of Reclamation, and that was government property. So you'd catch 'em coming across the ditch bank or going from field to field across the public road and sack them up. And of course that irritated the farmers, but you still weren't on their farms.

JM: Can you remember having any thoughts at that time about the general economy of the country, how you felt, impressions of what this was doing to the economy? Were the farmers down here in the lower valley depression wages? by using these people or anything of that effect?

AA: Well, they certainly weren't paying the going amount. Some of those wets would never leave a farm. You'd get

one of those big farms and they'd have a wet check out in the middle of it, put a couple of hundred acres on any one side, not one road leading into it, and those people would stay right in that shack. They wouldn't go any place. They'd have a company store or there'd be a mercantile store somewhere around the area. Like down at Fabens, there was one at a cross-roads down there. They all shop there. And I don't think that there's any doubt but what they were exploited. I think the prices were high to 'em. I think a lot of their wages went just to subsist. What they didn't need to subsist on they were sending back to their families. We'd catch 'em a lot of times going home from up north, even. You'd catch 'em in town and you'd find out that the guy was just passing through, hooking up for the bridge to go back, and he'd have some money on him. And maybe some property. They used to buy these sewing machines, these treadle type sewing machines. That was a great item because a lot of these places, at least from the interior, didn't have electricity. So that was a big item, and stuff like that. They'd haul one of those sewing machines back on their back going home, and whatever money they hadn't sent home.

OM: What would you do with people like that who were just on their way to Mexico?

AA: Just process 'em. Lot of the time we had the voluntary return system. In the early years when I first came to the Border Patrol we had a good fingerprint section here in El Paso. And a lot of this traffic here in this

area was repeat traffic, too. We had a good fingerprint man and we fingerprinted everybody and ran their prints through down there at Camp Chigas when we had that building down there. And the so-called keepers, the previous offenders, why, we set aside for prosecution or formal deportation. Women and children, old people and first-timers, they voluntarily return to Mexico. We'd just list 'em, fingerprint 'em, fill out the proper forms and take them down to the bridge and watch 'em walk across. That's what they do now. We did prosecute the second offenders and of course with the fingerprint files here we caught a lot of people that later on they didn't catch or couldn't put a previous record on. They did away with the fingerprint system somewhere in the mid-'50s. I don't know why, /if they/ didn't have funds to support it or just why, but they did away with that. We had trouble with some farmers in Fabens and all over, didn't want you on their farms taking their hands. Ranchers were kind of a different breed of people. We'd go out to ranchers and they'd be in the middle of a round-up and really hurtin'. Why, you might let a guy stay there a day or two and let 'em get off the hook before you picked 'em up unofficially, but he'd be there when you went back for him.

OM: Were there cases where you were called in to pick up someone just before payday and they would be apprehended and lose their pay?

AA: I think most farmers were fair to that extent. I think they all paid the lower wage. What do you call it? The depressed wage, or certainly it wasn't the going wage. But then again these people didn't have any other source of income, I guess. And the sheer volume would make it uneconomical for the farmer to pay the going, regular wage. I don't know. But that's the way they justified it anyway. There were instances where we received information about a bunch of wets here or there in some particular farm and went out and sacked 'em up, and then in talking to 'em found out that they had two, three weeks wages coming or something like that, and pretty much knew that we'd been tipped off and that it was just before payday. In most instances we'd take the aliens to the farmers, see if we could get 'em paid before they left. If the farmer refused to do it the aliens would report it to the consul that they had been cheated out of their wages or hadn't been paid. And the consul would through other means try and collect their wages and forward 'em to 'em wherever they were.

OM: Was the consul succesful most of the time?

AA: I think in some cases it was.

OM: In some cases.

AA: Of course, we had no follow-up on that.

OM: That was the extent of your involvement in that.

AA: We'd make every effort we could to get them paid. And I think most farmers were fair as far as not cheating the people.

I say the wages were low, but most of the farmers didn't cheat 'em. You find in an area like Fabens, Fort Hancock and Ysleta that a lot of the people that work there work there year after year, and they're from right across the river and all those communities over there as well as from down south. So you know, farmer's not gonna cut his own throat, he's got those people coming back all the time. And you get a guy that cheats people regularly, he's liable to find his house and fields burned down some day, especially if they're close to the river. But most of them wouldn't pull that. But there were a few that tried to cheat 'em out of it and the consul would go after 'em. And the consul would also take reprisals of putting them off limits to the Bracero Program. If the conditions weren't acceptable within the standards set by our government in agreement with Mexico and that they absolutely were that bad that they wouldn't meet the standards, they wouldn't get any braceros, couldn't work 'em.

JM: What actually did the consul function as? Intermediary?

AA: Well, of course, these people legally or illegally here have access to their consular officer. He's their representative here, just like our people that go over to Mexico and get caught smuggling narcotics, they still have a right to complain to their consul. So this was the Mexican consul in El Paso that received the complaints and tried to take steps on their behalf, which was only fair.

OM: Were you involved in Operation Wetback?

AA: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I went to California on that job. I went to Yuma for about two weeks in '54, summer, July. And then I worked in Calexico and El Centro and Brawley about another six weeks. I didn't hit the lower valley drive. A lot of the guys left from California and went to the lower valley, they had another drive down there. But the big wetback drive was the one in California, a lot like they got on now.

OM: What do you recall about that operation?

AA: Frustrating. Hot. Unbearable out there in the daytime, and they were crawling over and under and through the fences. In that Calexico area they had an area right out of town, well, really in town, right at the edge of town between the town and the golf course, as I recall, where the land dropped into a big, wide gully. And they called the water going through there New River, and it flowed from Mexicali to Calexico, north. And it was the sewage from Mexico that was coming across, and it smelled like it. And it was overgrown with weeds. There was a fence across it but some of those aliens were desperate enough that they went under the fence and under that water, to where we had to send teams in there to put barbed wires on under the water level. And there was a stabbing and some shootings down in there with all the tall brush and a trail leading right along that river down in the gully. So they went in and cleaned it out to where you could drive through it and see everything that was going on. So we used to lay in on either side up on top at night because

that was a favorite crossing spot, out at the golf course. And they had concertina wire up on top of the fence. But the aliens, you'd go along there in the daytime and see the results of the night before's crossing. They'd throw mattresses and coats and everything else to keep from getting scratched as they went over to scale the fence.

JM: Kind of like it is down here now.

AA: Yeah. And they'd cut the wire. We had a team, a repair team. We'd go along every morning and replace wire, redo the fence, just a constant hassle. And then they had back-up teams on the roads where the traffic would have to funnel through, where they could funnel it in. It was just a constant, pick 'em up and run 'em back, pick 'em up again.

JM: Did you enjoy that?

AA: No, it was a miserable climate out there we were working. If you worked days, you just roasted. And if you worked nights, you were a little luckier but the mosquitoes ate you up. That All-American Canal runs through that area too, and of course there was just a few crossings there. Went by and check in some of those places. There were some incidents there, there were some incidents later on where smugglers had shootouts. But while I was there on the drive I don't recall any instances. We used to sit on the checks because that's the only place a lot of 'em could cross, little wooden bridge right there at the river. The canal was too swift for a lot of 'em

to cross. But again, there may have been some minor incidents, but for the most part it was pretty much routine--pick 'em up and send 'em back.

OM: Mr. Adams, how did you feel about apprehending aliens-- people who were poverty stricken, desperate for jobs that came over here? How did you personally feel about detaining them and sending them back to Mexico?

AA: Well, I think you're gonna have to look at that from a point of view, that's your job, that's what you're getting paid to do. You can't help but feel that there's argument on both sides. These people are starving and need the work, and the farmers need the help. We found a lot of people leaving the lower valley and going north to pick beets and everything else rather than picking cotton down in the valley. Or there was a bunch of people, these trucks were leaving the lower valley and this area going north after the different seasons. They'd follow the crops. But there wouldn't have been a Bracero Program if there was sufficient help from the United States to do this. So there apparently wasn't sufficient. Why they knocked off the Bracero Program, which gave it some semblance of legality, I don't recall all the arguments against it. I guess the people started to unionize and the unions were probably against it, saying it depressed the economy.

I think what we were faced with, too, that we all realized that while we might sympathize with the poor man as you're talking about, who simply crossed over there to pick cotton and support his family and was an honest, easy going

guy (and that was true in the earlier days, there was a lot of people like that), in later years you ran into a more militant type of people. We started getting the gamblers and the bums and everybody else trying to work their way into the Bracero Program. I sat on the screening out there at where the county sheriff's academy is now. That was a screening area. We screened braceros there for a while. And we rejected a bunch out there because you get people in there that had hands like a gambler, there wasn't a callus on 'em. They were just over here either to work their way north or to cheat the rest of the people. They're gamblers and thieves and everything else. Well, you learned that you couldn't sympathize with that group. In fact, you didn't want 'em. While you could sympathize with the poor wetback, if that's what you're gonna term him, you had to realize too that a lot of these people were gonna go north, take jobs in the big cities, and there they were in competition with our citizens. Talking about just picking crops and it's argumentative there, but a lot of them do go north. There's just a lot of them are out there.

JM: You worked seven years with the Border Patrol all together?

AA: Almost nine.

JM: Nine years?

AA: I was in Chicago a year and a half as an investigator.

JM: Did you generally feel a sense of satisfaction after you finished working with them?

AA: Yeah. Yeah, I figured we were accomplishing something. Of course, when you run into a thing like Operation Wetback drive out there or our present situation where they're just coming in in droves, you know, you feel like you're spinning your wheels. You certainly didn't have enough help to keep up with it. And you, of course, I think any patrolmen is gonna wonder why the Mexican government didn't do something about it. I think we were probably more perturbed with the Mexican government than we were with the wetbacks themselves. Because based on the simple facts of life, you know damn well that there's two classes of people down there, the rich and the poor; and the rich were exploiting the poor. We felt the Mexican government could have been doing a lot more for those people and they wouldn't have had to come over here. When you stop and consider and from talking to some of these wetbacks that you send back, and you'd run into the same ones a lot of times coming back on these farms, you'd almost get to know these people. You'd drive by a farm and spot a guy and you might've had him the week before and you'd just call him. That's your right. In the early days that's all you did, you'd just call him. Or you'd sit down on the river at night and you could have 50 of 'em gathered up there and then have a bus or somebody come down.

In later years you had to wrestle with them. You didn't sit 50 down and expect them to sit there. They got a little more militant. But you'd get to know a lot of these people and in talking to them you'd find out that even with meager

wages they might be going back with or the meager property they'd be taking back, like the guy I'm talking about with the sewing machine or something for his family that he couldn't get down there, these clowns on the bridge'd take some of that stuff away from 'em. So you couldn't have any respect for Mexican government officials at that time. They were exploiting their own people. Certainly not doing a lot for 'em. That's the way we felt about it.

OM: Did you ever have to use your weapon in apprehending aliens? Did you ever face a fight with aliens?

AA: Wrestling matches, yeah. I've had a few of them on the river, and managed to hold on to some and lost a few. And I was outraced by a few.

JM: That's a common occurrence now, I'll tell you that.

OM: Do you recall any particularly humorous incident when you were faced with that kind of a situation?

AA: Oh, early in my career, in fact I was still on probation and stationed in El Paso. Wasn't humorous but... One Saturday morning we picked up some wets right in a local area down there. We took 'em back to the Camp Chigas which is, you know, like a hundred feet from the river, way the river was then. And I made the mistake that I think a lot of young Patrolmen make since I hadn't been in very long, I opened the door to take the alien out of the back, but he was between me and the river, and he hooked it. And I could see myself losing my job as a young probationer if that guy escaped. He went into the river, I went into the river. And when I got about the middle of the river, my

partner, who was an old timer, called a halt. And I remember standing in there threatening that guy with everything imaginable if I ever caught him again or laid hands on him, and he just laughed and gave me the finger. (Laughter) Went his way. Had to go home and change clothes and worry about my job. But I didn't get fired.

OM: Did you get a reprimand?

AA: No, I had a pretty good partner and there wasn't too many people around on a Saturday morning, so nobody there made any issue of it and I don't think the chief ever heard about it. We used to have chronic complainers, one farmer down there who's dead now. Incidentally Jim, he was a Mormon. He was nasty and he just tried to make trouble for anybody who came. Every time I come on his property he'd find some reason to call the chief and complain. But the chief knew him pretty well so he'd call me in and tell me he had to complain. That was the end of it. He's dead now, don't have to worry about him or the chief. (Laughter) I don't know. I think it's probably true of any policeman. If you take everything personal, you're not gonna last very long. You're gonna get eaten up with ulcers, you're gonna go crazy. You have to assume that you took the job, you knew what you were gonna have to do. And of course, you work to get beyond wetbacks on the river all your life, get into investigation, which I thought was more interesting. I went to Chicago as an investigator. But I made

up my mind early that I was gonna do the job. I fought with a lot of farmers and I picked up a lot of wets. But as long as a man was halfway decent to me, why, I had no reason to be other than to him. After all, it's just a guy trying to find a job for the most part, except with the exception of a few you'd run into that you had problems with.

OM: Were you ever involved in apprehending maids here in El Paso?

AA: Well, I worked in El Paso the first year. I was assigned to what they called then the City Scout detail, plain clothes detail, with some older officers. And we worked information. And as I recall, we worked a few maids. But I think most of ours was on information and for the most part we stayed south of Paisano Drive or south of the downtown area, unless we had specific information. I don't recall being engaged in any shotgunning on buses or anything like that, or going up in Kern Place or even north of Paisano and just sitting on street corners apprehending people that looked like they might be working. There was a little too much to do that we didn't concentrate on maids. There was enough wets running around crossing. We used to use these towers. There was a tower at Camp Chigas and then there was one right here at the old Cordova Island, right there on Paisano Drive. And then there was one down at right below San Elizario. There was two down in the Fabens territory, or one further down.

We used to use those towers quite a bit. You'd spend hours up in that tower watching them cross and telling your partners down there where they were crossing. Lot of times we'd climb up there right at dusk and you'd see the buses unloading on the Mexican side, 'cause you can see the road over there from those towers in the lower valley, know where the crossings are gonna be. Then you come down out of the tower and you lay in up a nearby crossing and sack 'em up.

OM: Were those towers pretty effective then?

AA: Yeah, sure. But I'll tell you, it wasn't any fun climbing those. (Laughter) It was a fair piece up that ladder.

JM: When you were here as a Border Patrolman, and in El Paso in particular, did you ever get involved in any political schemes here that you can remember with the local government? For instance, somebody calling you and telling you that so and so has illegals working for him and that kind of thing, trying to put a black mark on somebody politically, to do that?

AA: No, I can't recall any political implications to it, Jim. Whatever information we got, we worked. If we thought after working it or in looking at the information that it might be just a...

JM: I guess what I am really asking is, the motives of an informant, really.

AA: Well, of course, yeah, there's a lot of motives, that you knew they'd get paid or you want some other remuneration where it's revenge.

OM: Any scandals that happened around here while you were a Border Patrolman?

AA: No, not that I can think of offhand. That's looking back a lot of years. Do you recall any in those years?

OM: No.

AA: No, I really can't. You know, I spent one year in El Paso and this was our district headquarters, but /would/ go weeks on end and never come to El Paso. We worked at night and we'd get a carload or something, we'd haul 'em in. Work during the day during the picking season, especially where we were getting them by the hundreds, the bus'd come down and get 'em. We put in a lot of hours working down there either farm check, sand hill sign cut or laying in on that river. And making extra trips to El Paso didn't hold any attraction for us. We lived in Fabens, we worked that area and we stayed down there pretty much. El Paso was kind of remote other than to shop and go to a movie, because there was only very few movies in those days. Not much shopping in Fabens. But we really didn't get caught up into the El Paso scheme I don't think in those out stations so much.

OM: Well, what about in Fabens? Anything in particular happen?

AA: No. We had a pretty good bunch of people down there. There was oh, 12, 14 of us maybe at any given time. It was kind of a training area, too. The PI's that would be hired, if they wouldn't have a school right then, brought 'em in here as the school was filled up, they'd send 'em down

there for a month of in-service training before they went to school. And they put 'em with one of the older hands to have a new man to break in. Well, that was a regular thing in Fabens. We had a lot of additional help that you really had to keep an eye on. There were brand new guys, never carried a gun or a badge or anything else. So for a long time we were a kind of a training ground down there, too.

JM: What kind of firearms did you carry in those days?

AA: Well, most of us, the standard issue was what they call the new service revolver, which was a 38 on a 44 frame. It was a very good weapon. Had 'em for a number of years. And they still had 'em when I left here. Later on they started getting the Magnums as I recall. They got some new weapons. I don't think we have old guns, but they were good guns.

OM: You mentioned having participated in a clean-up campaign in Denver. Could you tell us about that?

AA: Well, from time to time they'd send details out into these areas to assist, for instance in Denver and northern New Mexico, during the season when people would move out of the lower valley and go north to Montana and Wyoming, and the beet country.

OM: By the lower valley do you mean the Lower Rio Grande Valley?

AA: Lower Rio Grande Valley.

OM: Down in Laredo and Brownsville, that area?

AA: Yeah. They'd finish the picking down there. You know,

down there they had to have the crop plowed under by September 1st because of the boll weevil. Ours here could go into January sometime before all the cotton was picked. But by that time there was enough hands here doing it. People generally didn't move from the lower valley to here to work. They'd pack up everything they had and head north. We used to run roadblocks up around Raton, New Mexico, and invariably some of those people'd have their wet relatives along and we'd take the wets and let the rest of them go on. And from time to time as funds permitted, they'd send teams up to work places that didn't get much attention. For instance, Denver had two investigators to cover the whole state, or whatever area they covered in addition to Denver. And I think it was four or six of us were sent up to Colorado one year. And another year they went into the fields in the San Luis Valley, a team went in there.

But we went into Denver and Pueblo to work the city. What we found there was, we didn't find anything in the steel mill or the Colorado fuel and iron, big pumpline at Pueblo, because they're pretty unionized. We did find a lot of wets working in the brick plants and places like that. You'd find particular industries where they were working, you'd have to work information. A lot of times the investigators in Denver would have so much information they couldn't get out and work it. The team'd go up there and get with them and take some of that information

and they'd reduce it to writing and go out and work it. We moved into Denver and we found most of our wets in Denver either in the stockyards, packing plants, or in the hotels, and mostly in the hotels working. And that's where we ran into people who had been there for years, hadn't been touched. Like the Jamaican I was telling you about. We'd find people there that had been up there years and had three or four kids already. Well, they had a program that they used to call...well, it was almost like an amnesty type thing. What did they call that? Anyway, you wouldn't just sack up those people with American citizens and kick 'em out. Suspension of Deportation. You'd have to process paper on 'em and then they'd hold hearings and stuff, but you wouldn't remove the people. They'd be entitled to a hearing. Most of those people then who had raised families here would then at some future date, if they got all their papers in order, when they had 'em all in order, would then be able to make one trip to Mexico and then make a reentry properly and legalize their status. Some of those suspension of deportation cases went on for years while they tried to get documents. And again, there was a feel of exploitation by some unsavory characters.

El Paso had their share, we were not without our unsavory characters. They'd engaged these people, clear all their documents for them. And while some of the organizations were there to help the alien families and

everything for whatever it cost, nothing more, and sometimes for free, there were people in this town who really took 'em for everything they had. By the time they got their status legalized it cost them three times as much as if they had gone down there themselves and tried doing it. We had our share of that here, and may still have it, I don't know.

OM: Could you tell us a little bit about the work you did in Chicago as an investigator?

AA: Well, I was assigned as the Chinese investigator in Chicago, strangely enough.

JM: Is that because you spoke Spanish? (Chuckles)

AA: My Spanish was never real good, it was passable. Border Patrol Spanish.

OM: Your Chinese was better. (Laughter)

AA: Chinese, no, I didn't. Chinese investigations were frustrating type things in Chicago, although you ran into a lot of good eating down in Chinatown because you found out where all the good eating places were. And it was never the tourist places, it was always the back alley joints that the Chinese interpreter could lead you into. We had one Chinese interpreter in Chicago. We'd work Chinatown mostly on information and the Chinese were of course notorious for always looking after their own. You'd go into Chinatown and there might be an old store building with 50 cots in it and the old men laying there. But they weren't charity cases, they were being taken

care of by the families, by the benevolent society. They were never, never on city welfare. Those people looked after their own.

The big thing with the Chinese investigation were what we called paper sons. When the Chinese first came over here working the railroads and all that sort of thing many, many years ago, or the Chinese that were here in years past who would go back to China to find a wife and whatnot or make a periodic trip to China, would possibly stay there long enough to have a child. When they came back into the United States, there were ports of entry for Chinese. They could only come in at Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York--places like that. And when they would come in the investigators would sit down with them and go over their complete history. We had what we called port files, and it was family histories which were later used on these things. For instance, in there you'd find a guy being interrogated and he'd say he was in such a village. He had the third house from this particular marker and he would describe this house. We had files that showed where the dresser was, what kind of a clock was on there, who all his relatives were, who the head man of the village was. We had histories where you could sit down and draw a map of that town.

JM: Would the government still have those histories like that? Do they still keep them?

AA: Those port files go back many, many years. What we found in Chinese investigations and what our frustrating problem was there was that they would establish phony children. Maybe they didn't have any children back there, but somebody would pay them a certain sum of money to establish a phony child. So they would say that they had a child while they were in there and we'd give them a name. And the Chinese had several names, so when you're working Chinese cases you always have a Chinese write his name in Chinese characters as well as in English, wrote English. They had birth names, milk names, family names, all kind--three or four names for each guy. All this stuff was documented. And then these enterprising and unscrupulous types in China would then take a guy who had no legal method of coming in and they would find one of these family histories that had been established, and they'd fit the guy into that slot. So he would be schooled in that family history to where when he came over and he sat down with that guy who had that port file and had a complete history of everybody in it, he'd be able to tell you who his aunt and uncle and cousin, where everyone of them houses were, and where the dresser was and where the clock was, and he had it down pat. Was an absolute education on his part and he was a phony. And he paid heavily for it. And those people were coming in. We discovered of course, that, and then in those later years of course, this was Red China,

by then you didn't get any more. And our concern there was that the Red Chinese and the subversives were working their way in that way.

I think we documented over a period of years, and this wasn't my particular thing, I mean it was documented by immigration over years, some villages maybe with six houses had produced some fantastic number of sons--never daughters, always sons. You know, out of 10 families living in a village over a period of years they might have 50 or 60 or 100 sons--more than you could possibly have, even if you were very prolific. So there was no way to go back and check once the Red Chinese took over. So that's when we went into the blood tests, and that's when a lot of 'em got caught short. When the blood test program first went into existence they didn't know about it. These paper sons were all over here and we were running backgrounds on 'em. And it was tested in court whether we had the legal right to make blood tests. So we hauled the so-called parents in and the so-called child, and we'd run blood tests. And of course you can't prove that a son is a son of a particular pair of parents, but you can prove that he is not the son of those parents because certain blood combinations can't produce that other. And before they got wise to what we were doing, we stopped a lot of them. This thing was so prevalent that after I left Chicago they went into what they call the Chinese Confession program. These people

were able to come in and admit guilt and establish the proper history, and if they were otherwise admissable I believe they obtained some admisability and were allowed to stay if they were good citizens, hadn't got in all kinds of trouble.

But during those years when we were interrogating these people against these port files which we'd send for, bring in, we used a Chinese interpreter. There were very few immigration guys that spoke Chinese. And you always wondered about the Chinese interpreter, whether he was loyal to his . You'd ask a question like, "Ask Joe Blow who his great uncle is," or "Did he ever smoke opium," or something. They'd talk for five minutes, when they'd turn, "He said no." Say, "Well, you know, that's a hell of a lot of conversation for a no. What else did you talk about," It was very frustrating. You didn't know what was going on around you.

OM: Maybe I missed this earlier, but where did you get those port files?

AA: The port files were kept in the ports where the Chinese entered.

JM: The ports of entry.

OM: In the ports of entry. And when they had entered, a history of the individual had been recorded of where that individual had come from, just detailed the history of his family.

AA: His whole family history, in minute detail. You'd try to establish a family history if you were working on a particular guy. You'd want to establish all of his relatives and his whole family tree.

Might send to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Frisco or Seattle, and get a stack of files back.

JM: Did the Immigration service ever do this with anyone else other than the Chinese?

AA: No.

OM: What was the purpose?

AA: Well, they weren't legally admissable, Asiatics weren't, in all those years. And these people who were here who were United States citizens, I guess having come in in the years before there was any type of immigration at all who had established their right to be here, always had to check out of the country or they'd never get back in. And when they left they were interrogated at length of where they were going. What they said about their relatives, their family, all this is recorded. Then when they came back in be it one year, two years or three years later, they might be bringing a wife or... no, they couldn't bring a wife back. But they would've been married over there and established if they were gone three years, they'd have three sons. Never had daughters.

OM: Why not?

AA: Well, the sons were the ones that were gonna pay off in later years. Chinese had no respect for girls anyway.

Always wanted sons.

OM: And if they had girls they just didn't claim them?

AA: Yeah.

JM: Somebody else's responsibility there.

OM: Whatever happens to those girls?

AA: A guy might go over there and have three girls, but when he came back he'd claim three sons. And then in later years he'd get a lot of money to put one of those phony sons into the slot.

OM: Into which slot?

AA: Into one of these slots that he claims, one of these sons that he claims. Because then the child would have a right to enter because his father was a citizen. That's why they were establishing this, see. So that in later years some guy could come over when he's 18, 20 years old or whatever, and say, "I'm the son of Joe Blow."

OM: I was confused about that.

AA: And a lot of money changed hands on that table.

OM: Gosh, that's interesting.

JM: That's a whole new ball of wax I'd never even considered before.

AA: It was interesting, but frustrating. /As/ I say, you got to know Chinatown pretty well. Knew all the good Chinese restaurants to eat in. We had two Chinatowns in Chicago, two different families. It was real interesting. I stayed up there about a year and a half and then I couldn't get out. I had enough of Chicago. You never go back where

you came from figuring it to be the same. It wasn't. We thought after being down there all those years it might be nice to go back to Chicago, but when we got back there we didn't like it. I couldn't get out, so I took the exam and became a Customs Agent.

JM: Oh, is that right? That's when you became a Customs Agent. Where, here again?

AA: Well, I took the exam in Chicago and I was accepted.

OM: What year was that?

AA: September of '57. I was accepted up there and they asked me if I would accept a job in Del Rio, Texas. Couldn't get down to Western Union fast enough to tell them, "I'll be there." And before the wire even cooled off and I got packed up, I got another wire back and asked me if I'd accept El Paso. I picked up the phone then, I didn't even wait to go to the Western Union Office. I said, "When do you want me there?" It's like coming home. I came back here on September 30, 1957 and I've never left. So my whole Customs career is right here.

OM: Could you tell us about what you did when you first came back?

AA: Well, of course, when I came here and all the way through until the merger with the DEA in July of 1973, a majority of our work was devoted to narcotics. Of course, we had no choice. There was a lot of complaints out of headquarters that we weren't doing the prod work and the neutrality work

and everything else that we were assigned to do. But it was a case of, you know, one took precedence over the other. There was no way you could ignore the narcotics, it was here.

JM: In 1957, now, you're talking about.

AA: 1957. When I came here they worked a lot of narcotics with the city squad. We adopted city cases for federal prosecution. That was something that was established before I got here. Then when the narcotics business really picked up, the city filed state, and we had enough to keep us so busy we didn't adopt cases anymore. We went into straight federal prosecution.

JM: When you first went for Customs, what kind of training did you get? Did they retrain you?

AA: Oh, yeah. You know, every agent, within usually the first few months that he's on board, they'll try to send him to the Treasury Law Enforcement Training School in Washington.

JM: Is that where you went?

AA: /Yes./ That was for all Treasury agents. I went there in early '58.

JM: Can you remember some of the first cases you worked out here when you first came back in, and if you could kind of make a comparison between that and Immigration work you were doing here?

AA: Well, of course, you're dealing in one with commodities and one with people. With narcotics, of course, there

was a lot of narcotics seized on the bridges. And in those days there was very little heroin. We had addicts. There's a bunch of addicts here. We weren't catching too much heroin on the bridge, not in the quantities they catch it now. A pound was unheard of. Everybody'd go across and shoot and maybe bring a gram back. Or a paper, not even a gram. It was mostly papers. Fifty cigarettes, half-pound of weed, stuff like that. That was the quantity in those days. And then we hit...Albuquerque came to life.

/PAUSE/

AA: Albuquerque came to life. They started to have a real narcotics problem in Albuquerque. For some reason they've just got a lot of hypes. There's no way around it, the city's full of 'em. And in the early '58s they were running down here. They'd pool their money, send one guy down, two guys down. They'd go across the river and they'd buy 10, 15 grams, swallow it, and then go back and regurgitate it after they get back. That was the method. Either that or they'd come down on the bus. It was almost like a commuter run. We made our first, what we call 'em, a flush job, where you take them to the hospital, pump 'em out, that type of thing, in February of '58, the first flush job that we did away from the border up in Las Cruces, that far. And we made that stick through the appellate court. We had probably cause to justify.

JM: What happened?

AA: Well, three guys...didn't rob a store, they tapped a till; got the clerk's attention and one of 'em scooped up the money and they hooked it. Well, the clerk knew one of 'em and by process of elimination of his associates, why Jack Salter, who was later with us, and Mike Walsh down here, was the narcotics agent in Albuquerque, there was only one then. He worked with two city officers as a team down there for years. So he knew who it was and they called down here and said, "These three guys in a certain car got so much money and we're sure they're coming down there for narcotics." We had a perfect description of the guys, the car and everything else. We put a lookout on the bridge. One of the old inspectors said, "Well, I passed that car just a little while ago. It's already over here." We called a New Mexico State policeman, they stopped the car and held the people and we went up. And of course in those days all these warrants, there were search warrants, but it wasn't quite as strong as it is now. And we had probable cause. We had them identified on the border, knew why they were down there. And in fact, they had information that they were down there buying narcotics. We knew they had gotten the stuff. We took them to the hospital in Las Cruces and under medical supervision had 'em pumped out. And we got the narcotics.

JM: Did you have to be right there with them while they were/ pumping it out?

AA: Yeah, we were there.

JM: What kind of reaction does a man give you when you tell him you're gonna pumb his stomach?

AA: Well, he's generally not happy because it isn't only his stomach, you get the other end too. (Laughter) And we did recover the narcotics. And of course, it was tested in the appellate court.

JM: Was this Mexican brown heroin?

AA: That's all we've ever had here, tan. And they were lively characters. In later years, one of 'em was already a second offender, because when we got him back to Albuquerque he was giving us the ha-ha 'cause he thought he beat us. He dropped it out when our eyes were off of him just momentarily in the room while we were distracted to another one. He dropped what he had. Even after that flushing he was holding it in his cheeks. And when we turned our head, the next thing I know it was right on the floor right next to him. There was nobody else around. He denied everything. So we got him in the cell. I already knew that they had a buy on him in Albuquerque.

So what they'd do up there, they'd go out and make informer buys. And they'd maybe buy for six months and maybe have about 30 guys with two or three buys on each one, informer buys. All covered, everything. Then they'd go to the grand jury and get indictments, warrants. And then they'd go out and have a mass clean-up. Well, they were just about to start one of those, they had the indictments and everything and they had the warrant. And one of the guys we had, they

had an arrest warrant for. They had buys off of him. When the guy gave us the ha-ha's, we slammed a jail cell on him and we said, "Hey, the last laugh's gonna be ours. Wait'll you get back to Albuquerque." And I think he snapped 'cause there wasn't any more conversation. He knew he'd been hit. One of the other guys, both of the other guys in the later years came down and got caught again. But in those years it was just like a commuter run. We'd sit out on this bridge and get a guy from Albuquerque and know why he was down here. And we'd take him out to the hospital, and nine times out of ten we'd score. But they just hauled narcotics wholesale. But again, it was this gram type stuff.

JM: Well, you would call this a personal use type of thing. They'd come down and buy for themselves usually.

AA: Well no, they're selling too. You get a guy up there, you get two or three guys. They'd go around, they'd gather up \$50, \$100 bucks from everybody up there. Stuff would go for about \$25, \$30 bucks a gram over here. And they'd take it back, whatever they could swallow. We got one guy one time with five packages, about 25 grams that he'd swallowed. And by the time they cut that pack in Albuquerque and hit the street with about three percent stuff, you know, they make a lot of money on it. They were supporting their own habit and they were making money enough to buy the next batch. That's how some of 'em grew into being bigger dealers. By the same token you had a few overdoses,

because some of these guys'd start shooting over in Juarez while they were here, and they'd get a little too strong a dose, more than they were used to, and they'd get sick. But it was a nightly thing where, you know, it was nothing to have 150 hours a month overtime. It was just a constant goal all those years. Had a lot of family problems because of it, but there was just no way around it.

JM: If you wanted to keep your job, you had to do it, didn't you?

AA: Well, as I said, we neglected all the fraud and stuff that we do now because the narcotics was there. You'd be working on a narcotics case and an informer would call and say, "Well, this is going on right here now." And you'd have to send everybody that you had out and work that. And you'd get calls all night long. We used to set up on Albuquerque, the city police would call down here and say, "Well, Joe Blow and Joe Blow and Pete Small left town in such a car, they're coming down there." We'd get out on the highway and pick 'em up and follow 'em in, take 'em right over to Mexico, catch 'em coming back, take 'em out to the hospital.

JM: Did you ever follow 'em into Mexico, then, or out?

AA: Sure.

OM: Did these guys get sick having all that stuff in their stomach?

AA: Well, of course, one of the dangers...if one of those

containers perforated, why they'd OD. But they'd take the chance. Rode about a four-hour run back to Albuquerque in those days when we had 70 and 80 mile speed limits.

JM: How many do you suppose you solved with pumped stomachs? How many cases do you think you got during a period of like say from '57 to '62, or however long you were working that kind of thing?

AA: Jim, I'd say that we probably had an average of a flush job or two every week over those years, plus other stuff. Plus just plain searching and finding it in the car. Albuquerque just ran down here. That was our bread and butter, Albuquerque, at the time. We had more going to Albuquerque than we had crossing right here locally.

JM: Did these people put it in balloons or condoms or what?

AA: Condoms.

JM: Just condoms, just the general thing they use.

AA: Yeah. Of course by the time you got a...you'd get a guy to swallow one about that big, it maybe had five to 10, eight grams in it, and they'd pack it into the bottom and then knot it, and then they'd shove it through and knot it again. You'd get a condom that big that'd have six, seven knots in it. So there was a lot of thickness there. And it wasn't too often that one of those professionally packaged by La Nacha over here busted in a guy. But it could happen. There was an OD in Las Cruces, a nurse told us, just before we flushed those guys out up there, just a couple of days before.

OM: And these guys routinely just crapped out the stuff?

Or how did they get it out?

JM: Regurgitated.

OM: Did they throw it up?

AA: Yeah, they either threw it up or it came out the other end because we'd take 'em out to the hospital and they'd give 'em Epicac to make 'em vomit and enemas to get it out the other end.

OM: If you didn't catch 'em, what was their procedure for getting it out?

AA: Well, most of 'em could still regurgitate it when they got back. I say it was about a four hour run to Albuquerque. And a lot of 'em would take it all the way back. They knew the squad up there would be after 'em too. If they saw 'em on the street up there they'd pull 'em in. And they didn't want to sit all night in the jail or talking to some detective with that stuff in 'em. So a lot of 'em would try to get rid of it about halfway up or pass it off to a confederate and have them take it back in case they got picked up. But a lot of 'em would keep it in 'em because they knew the city had no authority to flush 'em up there. That was strictly a border search. And that ability to take these people to a competent medical authority to have 'em probed or searched, a body cavity search, was established by court cases, too, and in the appellate court.

JM: How long does it take these people to knock this kind of stuff?

I guess they're still doing it today to a certain extent.

AA: I wouldn't doubt if they are, Jim, but there're so many more sophisticated ways of doing it now. You know, now these days they're not hauling grams to Albuquerque, they're hauling ounces and pounds and kilos. There's no shortage in Albuquerque. You know the DEA's got a big office up there and the guy that's up there was one of my former agents who was a city detective when we were in Albuquerque when we were doing all this. He'd been through it all and he knows every hype in Albuquerque, but it's just a flood. There's just no way to keep up with it. And now it's kilos being flown in and brought across the bridge in car panels. Look at cases we've made on the bridge. There was one in one week down there at Presidio and two other cases down the valley, 28 pounds at a time. In those days 28 pounds, nobody had 28 pounds. We talked about grams.

Then the weed business came to the fore where we used to catch...well the first convoy we ran out of here to Colorado was 75 pounds.

JM: What was that? Was that with Bill Hughes?

AA: Yeah, that's the one Bill Hughes talks about.

JM: You wanted to piss in the bottle. What was that all about anyway?

AA: Well, that was, I had been on a convoy to Chicago and it was a delivery that was packed in the car. It was an informer

delivery type thing. We got the guy and he turned and agreed to go ahead and deliver. So we went up there and he made contact with this guy that he was supposed to deliver to, and then I got in the trunk. It was an old Chevy, had a big trunk. I rode all the way from south Chicago to the southside of Chicago, about 55th Street in the lakefront area.

JM: How far is that?

AA: Oh, probably about 10 miles, and I was in the trunk quite a while then. Then the guy horsed around and talked down there, then we drove off.

JM: Where you by yourself then?

AA: I was in the trunk by myself and we had people following us. And my radio, we found out, that I had in the trunk with me wasn't getting out of the trunk, we didn't have an external antenna, so they lost the tail. And we went into the garage and unloaded the stuff. And I was supposed to come out. This was an informant delivery, this wasn't the guy we turned, it was an informer delivery. And this guy was supposed to make another delivery, so we didn't want to burn him. And so they said, "Don't disclose your presence if you don't have to. Let him unload it." And then the guys following us would bust it as soon as we left. And this all came out in court as it turned out, so this is not talking out of school. Well, we got out in the alley, 'cause there was an agent driving with the informant, and he said, "There's nobody here." So I hopped

out of the trunk and I ran back to the garage and arrested the guy, and then the other agent and the informer drove off see if they could work this other case. So I sat there talking to him for about two or three hours until the guy could get hold of an agent-- this was in the early morning hours--and they didn't have agents' telephone numbers up there and he couldn't get hold of anybody. About three hours later they came wandering down the alley and were sacked up. We got a bonus out of it. There was a truck in the garage and it had about 40 pounds of it that they still had for their stash.

Well, this thing went to court and the defense attorney was contending an illegal search. We couldn't possibly have knowledge that the stuff was in there. We didn't want to disclose where I was, but we eventually had to. Told 'em, "Well, I was in the trunk and I was in the garage when they unloaded it. So I knew, and I went back and arrested them." We won the case.

JM: Seems to me like that'd be kind of walking into a dark room with two guys waiting with clubs to hit you over the head and not be able to see a thing, by driving into somebody's residence in the trunk of a car.

AA: Of course, I stayed in the trunk of the car while they unloaded it. In other words, none of it was in the trunk, it was all in the door panels. That was the deal, that I would not disclose my presence if those other agents

would rush in. But when we got out in the alley the guy says, "Hey, there's nobody here."

JM: You had to turn around and go back in?

AA: Yeah, then I came out of the trunk. But he didn't see me come out of the trunk, he had already closed the garage door. But it wasn't locked. I threw up the door and then he was surprised, and I was standing there looking at him so there was no problem on the arrest. I had the gun and he didn't. After that they put two men in the trunk. They were sensible. (Laughter) One man in the trunk, they says, "That's fine if you have a nice case, but that's not too smart, you don't go in the trunk by yourself." The thing you're talking about with Bill Hughes, during my time in that trunk I had to go and I had to go bad. There was no place to go.

OM: This was the time when you were both in the trunk?

AA: No, the one he's talking about in Colorado was a result of this thing. We ran a convoy out of here, the one Bill probably told you about, to Colorado. And that, I built the pee tube out there in Albuquerque and installed it, and when he and I got the trunk there wasn't room enough to move to use it anyway. (Laughter) I've heard that one from Bill many times. Well, we had a lot of fun, a lot of interesting cases, caught a lot of narcotics. And as I said, we neglected our other work because we had no choice. You just simply couldn't let the

narcotics go around you while you went out and worked a fraud case, so we were censured for not keeping our fraud work up. So finally in about 1970 I guess, part of our appropriation and manpower funding by Congress at that time was, we were given specific orders, "This money is to hire agents to work fraud." We had to establish a fraud division.

JM: This is when you came with the different divisions, Tech and Fraud.

AA: Yeah, Tech and Fraud and Narcotics. We had 20 men here, so I had one supervisor and three men. Had a four-man fraud squad.

JM: How long were you in Customs before you became a supervisor?

AA: Well, in 1968 I was Assistant Special Agent in Charge, that's when Joe Ray retired. Jack Salter became Agent in Charge and I took Jack's slot as Assistant Agent in Charge. Then Jack left here in October of '70 and in December '70 I got his job as SAC. So then I was off the street.

JM: When I was hired with Customs here I came and talked to you and Ural Morgan. What did Morgan have to do with that?

AA: He was the Fraud supervisor. Dick Bartlet was the enforcement supervisor at the same time, and then we worked both. But again, it was a constant hassle. And the guys that worked Fraud still wanted to work Narcotics, so

they were out working Narcotics on overtime. They couldn't work it during the day, they had to work Fraud; but they'd come out at night and work it. And we needed 'em. We didn't have enough men to continue to work it, it was just a big hassle.

JM: Can you remember any incident where there was any violence that occurred during the arrest or during the investigation? I mean by shootings or anything like that that your men or you were involved with.

AA: No, I can't recall any shootings. We had a few characters that were armed; but suprisingly enough, compared to the number of arrests that we made there wasn't too many arms caught.

JM: Well, you spoke of neutrality violations a little while ago, too. What kind of neutrality violations did you come across in 1960, '59, or did you work that?

AA: Well, it was part of our mandate, but again just like with the fraud, we didn't have the manpower to devote to it. But it was the same thing we're facing now, the guns and ammunition being exported to Mexico. And until we got freed to where we are now, that's one of the things we concentrate on now that we're out of the narcotics business, is fraud--the 807 program, neutrality, and of course the commodity. Probably the most being smuggled in other than narcotics in this particular area is not cattle or anything, but parrots, birds. Of course, that's a lucrative racket. And we're certainly not getting

the quantity that must be crossed. I don't think they're all coming through quarantine stations, not when you...you know, we had that one case where we got 1500 parrots. So you know that it's a pretty paying proposition. But with the fraud, the neutrality, the parrot smuggling, and of course this currency law that we try to enforce is becoming more and more important. Try and keep track of the organized crime money type thing.

JM: Could you explain what the currency violations are?

AA: Well, Congress passed the law in order to keep track of organized crime, transfer of money by organized crime figures. They passed the Banking Act and the Currency Control, and then (I forget exactly what year) it was passed, several years ago. It laid dormant for about a year while it was challenged in the Supreme Court and it was upheld. Basically what it is, it requires anyone entering or leaving the country with over \$5,000 in currency or negotiable instruments to fill out a form and report that to Customs. The form we originally started using was an Internal Revenue form. We're using a very similar form now, but it's Customs form. Internal Revenue really has the bank records, transactions, to keep track of, and Customs has the departure and entry records to keep. What they were trying to do of course was find out who was taking the money to the Swiss bank accounts and who's

taking money out for narcotics and other illegal transactions. It's not designed to arrest the ordinary citizen. However, if the ordinary citizen doesn't comply with the law, why, he's gonna find his money or negotiable instruments seized also. Now in order to give the honest citizen and in fact even a dishonest one every opportunity to comply with the law, we're required to advise them of the law if they haven't declared it and we find it. The law is not designed to see how much money we can take away from people, it's to require to enforce compliance with it.

If for instance a person comes across the bridge and you ask him his citizenship and he tells you, and you say, "Are you bringing anything from Mexico?" in those general terms, and he said no, and you for some reason send him up for secondary search (for narcotics, contraband, just anything imaginable that you might search for) but during that search you find a quantity of currency over \$5,000, at that point you advise the man that there is a currency reporting law and give him the opportunity to fill out the form. The honest Joe Blow citizen is gonna fill out the form. If he says, "No, I'm not gonna fill out any form," then he's liable to be arrested and have the money seized. And of course a guy that's got a large sum of money and that's illegal money is not gonna want to claim it, or he's gonna have

IRS on his tail. So we do run into instances where a guy'll claim, "I don't know anything about it. I don't know how it got in my suitcase, in my car. I just don't know anything about it." But the thing is really designed to get at the racketeers and people who are taking sums of money out to buy narcotics, or collectors who are collecting and then returning the money to the source of the narcotics. But it's a very strong law that can be very useful. As I say, it's designed for racketeers, not the ordinary citizen.

JM: That's both coming and going, isn't it?

AA: That's right.

OM: How extensive is the arms smuggling going from the U.S. to Mexico?

AA: Well, there's a lot of controversy on that. We're not catching in this area large quantities of weapons. We catch guns and ammunition, but not, you might say, in commercial quantity--not a hundred machine guns or 100 automatic rifles or anything like that. There was a lot of publicity here a few years ago about all the weapons in Mexico--you know, that everybody down there got an M-16. Well as it's turned out, the weapons that the Mexican government has seized from people down there as a result of roadblocks, hit the guerillas, or catching the narcotics smugglers, of all those weapons seized there's been very few of the long automatic weapons.

They're semi-automatic pistols and revolvers. Really, the majority of them turned out to be 22's and old relics and everything else. So this big claim that all the guns were being traded for dope just hasn't panned out. There is undoubtedly weapons down there, and I'm sure the guerillas have some of those weapons. They've been seen with them, they have robbed banks. But the fact of the matter is that there's not all that many been reported as captured down there.

So when we find ourselves not catching hundreds of weapons going out of the country here, it makes us wonder if we're missing them, we're not getting the right information, or if they're really not going out here--they're going over us. But then nobody's come up with figures that show that all of these weapons they claim are down there are down there. By the same token, when you stop and consider the number of weapons that were lost in Vietnam, you have to face the realities that a lot of those weapons could well work their way into Mexico even if they don't come through El Paso. I'm sure that there was literally thousands of weapons either lost, captured, or that could find their way into any country that wants to pay the price for them.

JM: The question I have deals with the Mexican government and your position with what you're doing, really, right now. I was wondering how much is there you can say, I mean, whatever you can tell us, of how much intercourse is

there between your office and the offices across the river on working these cases and everything.

AA: Quite a bit. We, with the exception of one Collector at Customs who had a disposition where he couldn't get along with anybody, for many years we've had a good working relationship with the Collector of Customs and his department in Juarez. They've been very cooperative. We have mutual interest, as you know, on the cigarettes smuggling thing, which has received a lot of publicity. Since we're out of the narcotics business we don't work with the Mexican federal judicial police who were engaged almost exclusively in narcotics. DEA is their contact. Our sole contact by mandate and authority and our legal reason for being in Mexico is our contact with Mexican customs. We are allowed to work with our counterparts in any foreign country. And every foreign country has a Customs service, that's where we're unique. And we do have quite a bit of intercourse with the collector's department over there. The man that's over there right now is a very agreeable type fellow and easy to talk to. We have a treaty, a working treaty with Mexico as we do with other countries /which/ requires them to give us assistance, and /us/ to assist them. So our relationship on the border generally I think you'll find with Customs is excellent. And one of the former collectors of Customs from Juarez is now in Mexico City, and he was, again, one of the more agreeable..an aggressive

type that we got along with fine. He's down in Mexico City. So by virtue of those people moving around and us moving around, I think the Customs service has maintained pretty good contacts with our counterparts.

Again, the Customs Service there is not engaged like we used to be in narcotics. If a Customs officer gets narcotics or if anybody gets narcotics--state, local or anybody else--it's all turned federal. There is no local prosecution of narcotics in Mexico, everything has to go to the Mexican federal prosecutor. So nobody really handles narcotics. They make an arrest and a seizure and then they turn it federal. So if a Customs officer were to find narcotics he'd turn it over to the federal officers and that'd be the end of it. So that's what I say, they don't actively work narcotics any more than we do.

OM: You mentioned the problem of the cigarette smuggling here. What has been your involvement in this particular problem?

AA: Well, of course, American cigarettes going out of the duty-free warehouses which have been of course many years ago ruled legal in the state of Texas (their existence has been ruled legal by various court decisions and the state), American cigarettes go into these warehouses without the payment of internal Revenue taxes. And if they are exported, they don't have to pay tax on them. As long as it goes into a foreign country and isn't consumed in the United States it's not subject to Internal Revenue tax, which is 80 cents a carton.

So people are able to buy these cigarettes and you've seen 'em on the streets of Juarez. There's some 2500 vendors around town over there, last count, handling cigarettes, the American tourists. So you can imagine the quantities that they're leaving these warehouses and going to Mexico.

The part that Customs plays is that there is an Internal Revenue form covering the taxes that has to be turned in in order to cover them on the Internal Revenue tax. For instance, if they had 10,000 cartons and they sold them to Mexico, they were transported to Mexico, and the way that's handled is that they're sold to somebody at the store. A bonded cardman then takes those cigarettes to the bridge and delivers them under Customs supervision. A Customs officer looks at 'em and he signs the form. Then they go across the bridge supposedly into Mexico. The man takes that form back to his . . . he turns it into Internal Revenue. Now if he has the forms that cover 10,000 cartons and he had 10,000 cartons charged to his warehouse, then he doesn't pay any Internal Revenue tax because the stuff left the country. If for some reason or other he came up with only accountability for 9,000 cartons, then he would be required to pay 80 cents a carton on the other thousand cartons, and it would be a billing process from Internal Revenue. Customs really has no part in that except that we sign the forms attesting to the exportation.

What's happening because of the physical structure of this bridge is that we sign the forms when they depart down below. When they cross the top of the bridge they're out of sight. And they start dropping them on our side of the river as well as the Mexican side of the river and smuggle them back into the United States. Now this isn't the warehouse proprietor doing this, it's the Mexican vendor or the smuggler. But a lot of those cigarettes are really not going as far as Mexico. Now we've worked with Mexican Customs to try and stop this. But even if they go to Mexico in that quantity whether dropped on our side or smuggled back down the river after they've crossed to Mexico, they are getting back into the United States and they're being sold by the thousands of cartons right here in El Paso to the detriment of local vendors.

OM: Is it a big problem?

AA: It's a big problem.

JM: I've watched as many as 200 cartons drop off that bridge in one day.

OM: Making their way over here.

AA: Two hundred cases.

JM: Cases like these.

OM: Yeah. I've watched them, too.

AA: It's a very big problem. Of course the state of Texas is losing a lot of revenue; and by those cigarettes coming back to the United States and being consumed here, Internal Revenue is losing a lot of revenue.

OM: What is the state tax on those cigarettes?

AA: I forget the figure.

OM: Roughly do you have an idea? Less than the Internal Revenue tax or similar?

AA: No, I can get you the figure in a minute if you really want it. I've got it written.

OM: Later on. Is there a local tax on cigarettes?

AA: A city tax? I don't think so.

JM: I don't think so. They're subject to state and federal taxes. I was gonna ask you, when you have circumstances like these cigarettes that are being dropped, it occurs to me and I'm wondering (for my job and for my aspect of it, too), what can the Mexican officials do about it? Or what do they do about it?

AA: Well, you know, Jim, the thing's been going on for a long time. It's been argued in the paper. So anything we're saying here it's not something that hasn't been published. The Mexican government doesn't have the manpower to stop it any more than we do. You know, if we've got 20 Customs patrolmen and 20 Border patrolmen, which is far more than we have in any given area, you still couldn't stop more than 20 of 'em while another 40 ran by you. Because let's face the facts, you're not gonna shoot 'em.

JM: Yeah. But what I was thinking in particular was the aspect of how they come off the bridge themselves right here. Is there something that Customs can do when

they're going up the bridge or the Mexican Customs on the other end?

AA: Well, what we tried to do at one time, we followed the transporters up the bridge. Once the cardman delivers them down below whether they go over in his vehicle or another one, we made him sign off at the top of the bridge, and made that car in effect go into the converse of Mexico. If the Mexicans wanted to let him pass under the mordida system, which we all know exists, then that's their business. We couldn't stop it. But we did stop the dropping off the bridge for a while. But we don't have partolmen or inspectors to put behind every load of cigarettes going out and making 'em sign at the top of the bridge. So when they get out of our sight they drop 'em off. It's not a legal product in Mexico. This has been our contention, that it's not a legal importation to Mexico. There's a ban. They simply can't legally bring 'em in at this time. And yet they're there and they're being sold on the street. You may recall a couple of years ago where they stormed the Customs house, the old Customs house on 16th of September, when they seized a bunch of those cigarettes and the vehicles. And they literally stoned the Customs house and threatened the collector. And they turned 'em loose. So unless you were to prevent their leaving the United States you're gonna have a problem. The local vendors, the grocery people, store owners, distributors of tax paid cigarettes, are very upset about it, understandably.

JM: How much do you think there's really coming back in to El Paso and being consumed here? Do you have any idea?

AA: I'd say, one way or the other, Jim, probably 80 percent of 'em. What isn't dropped off the bridge is sold to tourists across the river...like you and I or anybody else that's over in Juarez wants to pick up a carton of cigarettes and bring it back. You declare it to Customs, you know there's no duty because they're American cigarettes. If you weren't the one that took it over and you acquired it in Mexico, there's no Internal Revenue tax. It's part of your exemption. The state of Texas by law limits you to bringing in two packages, both of which have to be opened. But you know, unless the state tax man is standing right where you can declare it, you know, what're you gonna do?

OM: You can bring two cartons?

AA: No, you can bring two packs under Texas law and both of 'em have to be opened.

OM: Two little packs.

AA: Two packs.

OM: Individual packs.

AA: Right. So everybody bringing a carton back even is in violation of Texas law.

OM: But the U.S. Customs person doesn't stop this?

AA: No, there is no law that permits the tax collector to be up on the Customs line, or Customs to enforce the state tax law. Now liquor is a different thing. By constitutional

mandate or law, we are required to enforce state liquor laws. And we tell the people when they bring liquor in and declare it to go to number 12 and pay their tax. We can't follow 'em down to see that they do it, but we do give 'em that direction. It's not the same with cigarettes.

OM: So someone can have two cartons of cigarettes and they declare 'em and go on.

AA: They just drive off the street.

OM: They just keep on going.

AA: Unless they want to go and pay the state tax on 'em.

OM: That's the state of Texas' problem.

AA: It's illegal to come to the United States that way under Texas law and it's illegal to go into Mexico because it's against Mexican law to let those cigarettes come in. Of course, we all know that a lot of 'em are passing Customs over there. They're paying mordida. And a lot of 'em are going down the river and going in and being sold on the street. A lot of 'em are being smuggled back.

OM: You mentioned La Nacha a while ago, and of course this is an operation that goes back a long time here on the border. Have you had any direct involvement with that outfit?

AA: Yeah.

OM: Could you tell us about it?

AA: Well, she's never made any secret. We know where she lives, we've seen her. Some of our agents know her well enough to talk to her and members of her family. We knew her sons before one of 'em was killed and died. The other one's still actively over there. I can't tell you from personal experience that he's actively engaged in narcotics now because I haven't been in touch with him for four years. But he definitely worked before that. Many members of her family were. She was the main Albuquerque contact for many years. She paid her way, obviously paid her way all these years. In 1943 she was put in prison by one regime. She spent 18 months I think at Isla Tres Marias. And then she bought her way out and came back and went into business at the old stand, and she was there till that warrant came out for her a couple of years ago. But a lot of people said, "Well, why don't you get La Nacha? You must have a warrant, she's been dealing dope." Well, she never dealt dope on this side. We didn't have any warrants for her. She couldn't come in to the United States. Operating on a Violeta Street right there. Right by her house anytime you want.

OM: What's the address?

AA: I'm not sure. I think it was 1240 Calle Violetas, but I'm not exactly positive of that number. That may be the mayor's house now. (Laughter) I think it was 1240

Violeta. It was right off the levee past the old abandoned electric company building there. You couldn't see her house from here, you'd hit the electric company building. But it's right there.

OM: Is she still around?

AA: About two years ago or three ago the DEA working with the Mexican police made a series of cases over there, and there was a warrant out for her. She went south and she's got property in Zacatecas. She's almost blind.

JM: How old is she now?

AA: I think she must be 150, but according to the record she was born in 1903. But we've always felt that she was a lot older than that. Maybe she just looks young. But we thought that she probably fled to Zacatecas and she was well enough heeled to keep paying off the...she couldn't operate without paying off, you know; let's face the facts. I don't know if she's back in Juarez or not. I really don't. I haven't heard of her. We had one report that she was dead, and I asked about it and people told me no, that's not true, she's still around. I really don't know, I haven't seen her. I haven't even been by her house in I don't know how many years. We're out of the business. I don't go over to the old haunts anymore.

OM: But you've seen her before?

AA: Oh, yeah.

OM: Personally. Have you talked to her?

AA: No, I've never talked to her. A former agent in charge here talked to her and a couple of members of her family. Some of the old agents in years past have known her personally. I talked to her former husband one time. But they were divorced many years ago. But that's as close as I got to her, talking to one of her ex-relatives.

OM: Who in the service around here can we talk to who's had contact with her?

AA: Well, the only old Customs agent still left here alive is Morel Burges. I'm not to sure he'd even talk to you.

OM: He lives in El Paso?

AA: /Yes./

JM: Customs has changed since 1973, is that right? When this DEA outfit started up? What is your office now comprised of? What divisions do you have in it? You have Tech and Fraud and what else?

AA: Well, neutrality, general smuggling, fraud, market value--well, there's several categories. You say smuggling, it can be any commodity. We've got categories for gold and jewelry, liquor; of course, prohibited importation like pornographic literature and the like; intelligence gathering on organized crime; the navigation violations, which is mainly the bridge runners and aircraft that don't report properly; marketing violations; imported merchandise not properly marked

at the country of origin; baggage declaration violation; failure to report merchandise being brought in properly; theft of government property; criminal cases, a category which would include the assaults on inspectors or other Customs personnel.

JM: You do background investigations, too?

AA: No, not unless it's at the request of Internal Affairs to assist them. We haven't worked a background investigation I don't think in a couple of years. The port claim type investigation, the automobile accidents and that sort of thing, is handled by Internal Affairs also. Until they had agents here we worked it and made our report for them. We were just doing their work for them. Not our category anymore.

OM: I'd like to ask you a question about Operation Intercept. Were you here when that took place?

AA: Yes.

OM: What stands out in your mind about that particular campaign?

AA: Well, I'd say it proved we can seal the border if we want to. It created a lot of stir, it made a lot of people mad, probably ruined a few automobiles boiling over on that bridge. Made a lot of people late to work or made 'em start early. But it proved that if necessary, we can seal up that border and search every car that comes across and that we were darn serious about trying to stop that narcotics. And of course it's a political thing, and it was stopped.

OM: Did it accomplish the objective?

AA: I think, well, you say accomplish the objective. The objective was to stop narcotics smuggling, and once we stopped intercept and let the commerce flow freely again we were running the risk of narcotics coming across the bridge. From a practical viewpoint there's no way we could 100 percent inspect automobiles with our present force and the volume of traffic. It would simply bring commerce to a halt. I think there's arguments rightfully or truthfully at least, that it affected the commerce on both sides and cost businessmen a lot of money. You got a lot of people just gave up crossing to shop on either side. These same businessmen that squawk about losing the money squawk the loudest when their kids get involved in narcotics. So you know, you can't talk out of both sides of your mouth. You want the narcotics stopped, you have to take drastic measures. I'd say that we slowed it down pretty well right there at least through these ports. And we had people out working the river, too. We had quite a large force in here, detail. We were working 12 hour shifts, 12 on and 12 off, then.

OM: Were there any incidents that you were involved in or witnessed during the campaign?

AA: You mean physical violence?

JM: Interesting ones or whatever?

OM: Well, that, or anything else that might've happened on the bridge.

AA: Oh, complaints. One of the consular officers was stopped. He failed to identify himself properly and was stopped and he got annoyed. When we found out who he was he was released, but he was annoyed anyway. Other than that we didn't have too many incidents, just a lot of mad people. A lot of people supported us a hundred percent, said, "Fine, let's seal off the border and stop the narcotics. I don't need anything out of Mexico anyway." A lot of people said they didn't go over there.

JM: I was gonna ask you a question here about the fraud business going on. I've learned a little bit about this twin plant program here lately on the way businesses are set up. I was wondering if there's any particular thing in the past few years that stands out in your mind--cases you've worked on on the fraud business that are concluded that you could talk about, you know, that kind of thing.

AA: Well, I think of course once we've started working, well, an 807 is quite a thing here on the border. Twin plant operation is category 807 in our schedule. Why they call it the 807 of twin plant, basically it's the same as any other fraud case--got us either an undervaluation or false invoicing, possibly claiming American goods returned when it's really of foreign origin,

avoiding duties. Some of it's inadvertent. And when we find that it's inadvertent or simply clerical error, that type of thing, and you do find that when you get through with an investigation, we simply collect the duties due and issue no penalties. Where you get a violation that's deliberate and some guy's been cheating the government (witness a case in the paper recently, one of our big outfits here), we assess penalties, we collect duties and we'll even go criminal on it depending on flagrancy.

JM: Is this necessarily the same as an IRS audit, where you go into it and start your investigation?

AA: Well, of course I don't know exactly what IRS does on an audit. When we get into the twin plants, recognizing that all Customs agents aren't super auditors... a lot of us have no audit training. I've got two guys here that are pretty good at it. One of 'em was an auditor in the past before he came to us. But we utilize a group of professionals that we have in Regulatory Audit, when you can use a professional auditor. We work the investigation, we establish the culpability. And then when you want to get down to exactly what was done, and take the books apart and arrive at a solid figure, then you use a professional auditor, and we have 'em. So it's a combination of Customs people working together on these cases.

You hear 807 here on the border because that's a big thing here that was untouched for years while we were working narcotics. 807 was in existence before we went out of the narcotics business. The law had been on the books but people didn't discover the merits of it and the advantages of the twin plant operation. Actually, as many plants as we have on the Mexican border, it's a small percentage to compare to what's foreign--Singapore, Taiwan, Caribbean countries--where there's cheap labor. You figure places around the world where there's cheap labor and considering that shipping charges are not all that much, big companies can go all over the world and have this work done. In fact, it looked like for a while with Mexico jacking up the salaries and everything over there and the restrictions they put on, they might put themselves out of the twin plant business. 'Cause they're gonna fold up and go where it is. But twin plants is just basically...if there's fraud there, it's just like any other fraud case. There're fraud cases all over the United States.

One of our big workloads in Denver is fraud. They don't work narcotics and they don't have any parrot smuggling to speak of. It's not a border operation and there's very few international flights coming in there. Merchandise comes in there for a wide area and

bond from all over the country. A lot of these people don't enter at the seaports, it goes into Denver for Wyoming, Utah, North and South Dakota, even Mexico, although we have an office up in Albuquerque. But there's fraud anytime you get somebody trying to beat the government. Anytime you've got an importer that wants to cut corners, you can have fraud. It's not just the twin plants.

OM: There's talk of establishing El Paso as a foreign free zone area. How do you see that?

AA: I really don't know. I've never had any experience with a free zone. I've never done any research on it, I'm just not at all familiar with all the ramifications. Basically I know what it is, but I'm not knowledgeable.

JM: We don't have too much tape left there. I wanted to get a couple more down before the tape ran out. I wanted to kind of ask you a personal question if you don't mind. You've been in and around knocking on government service for how many years now?

AA: Thirty-four.

JM: Thirty-four years. During all this time, have you ever compared yourself with, say the average man on the street kind of thing and compared him and his family life to what has happened and occurred to you during yours? How much sacrifice do you really think it's taken to do the job you've done?

AA: Well, I suppose there is a certain amount. I think it's

important to enjoy what you're doing or at least have some satisfaction from your work, or you shouldn't be doing it. We felt all those years we were working narcotics that, you know, it was a job that needed to be done, we really enjoyed it. We worked a lot of hours but we had a lot fun, too. It's interesting and there's a variety of work there. And as you say, you got problems because you're not devoting the time to your family. You wonder a lot of times if you're really devoting your time to your kids that needs to be devoted. I guess when they reach maturity and they're still good kids, you figure you made it all right. If they turned out bad then you wonder if it was some external cause or because you weren't there as much time as you needed to be. I think you'll find one thing, Jim, that a guy that has worked those hours and is used to working hours and being gone all the time, there's a certain amount of freedom, too. A lot of guys go home at five o'clock at night and if they want to go out for a beer or something, the old ladies question 'em about where they're going and what they're doing. A Customs agent's wife is so used to him coming and going at odd hours that you got a lot of freedom there. (Laughter)

Not all that bad.

OM: Side benefits.

AA: I think the main thing is that you're satisfied that

you're raising your kids properly and devoting enough time to your wife to make a good marriage. But as far as all the sacrifices concerned, well, I think we're enjoying what we're doing or we wouldn't be doing it.

JM: Well, the reason I was asking that is because in my experience with government service, especially the past few years, there's been a high percentage of officers that I've known that've not been able to make their marriages work. And I was wondering if you had any opinion on that during your tenure.

AA: Well, I think the long hours and stuff have contributed to it. I'd say if a guy was in this racket when he got married and the woman knew what she was getting into, he's got a definite advantage, if she really knew what to expect. A lot of us that weren't in this and were on eight-hour a day or six day or five day a week job, took a job like this and then went into something more. Like when the Border Patrol in the old days there was a certain amount of overtime because you couldn't quit while you were chasing aliens or hauling 'em in. We always worked overtime but it wasn't as bad as it was during the narcotics days. But if you acquire that kind of a life after you've been married, now that may be a little harder on the woman 'cause she didn't know what she was getting into when you started. I had a six day a week job when I got

married, working for General Motors. And I don't think my wife anticipated what I might be doing in the future any more than I did. But I've been married 30 years, so...

JM: Let me ask you this. Have you enjoyed what you've done for Customs?

AA: Yeah.

JM: If you had a 17 or maybe a 14 years old boy come up to you and ask you, "Should I go into government service?", what would you tell him?

AA: I can't encourage a young man to go into law enforcement like I could a few years ago.

JM: Why?

AA: I think the situation has changed to where a policeman's really the bad guy in the eyes of the court and the public now, where he used to be the hero. There's so much heat on enforcement now and these court decisions and the do good organizations that are just shooting for law enforcement. And you know yourself that the narcotics violators that we were chasing in the '50s and the hippie situation of the '60s, those people got smart and they start educating their own kind to be lawyers and judges. And now we're faced with a bunch of lawyers who are out and out rotten crooks just like they were back in the '60s when they were the hippies. And we got a few judges of the same ilk. We don't have the caliber. We've got some good lawyers and we've got some good judges, but

we've also got some of the '60s group who are rotten. And law enforcement lost a lot of respect. No, I wouldn't encourage my kid to go into law enforcement. I don't say I wouldn't encourage him to go into government service. There's a lot of jobs that you can do. But enforcement, police-type work, I wouldn't encourage it. A lot of kids have a natural bent for it, a natural desire, and they're going in spite of you. But I wouldn't encourage 'em.

JM: Do you think then that over the past few years that law enforcement, especially Customs Service type of law enforcement, has become more dangerous?

AA: I wouldn't say Customs Service law enforcement is any more dangerous. No, I think the narcotics people we were dealing with in the narcotics days are probably a lot more dangerous than the people we're dealing with now, because we don't have the volume. I mean we get an occasional say a gun runner or somebody that's gonna shoot you just like a narcotics violator would or a parrot smuggler, or maybe we're working on a parrot smuggler and we get a narcotics smuggler crossing the river. There's that element, it's still there. But we're not out every day of the week arresting narcotic violators--hypes that are desperate and want to get away and you know, that type of thing. So I wouldn't say that right now the Customs agent's job carries the

danger that it used to. Now you're in a different situation. You're in the group now that's working down on the river like we used to, like the Border Patrol always had done. I think the exposure is more on your side than it is the investigative side now.

OM: I'd like to ask just one more final question. A lot of people are worried about the situation that has been evolving here on the border with a lot of over crowding in cities like Ciudad Juárez, a lot of people unemployed of course, a lot of people coming over here illegally and smuggling seems to be on the increase. How do you see the future here on the border? Are problems going to get worse? Will the Customs Service be able to handle what's coming?

AA: Well, of course, the population has increased on both sides. It's not just a temporary influx over there, we've become major cities. I don't think our enforcement posture has grown with that population growth. I think every law enforcement officer group in the area is understaffed for what they're expected to do. The Customs Patrol is spread thin. The Border Patrol's spread thin. DEA has got a respectable force, but possibly not large enough for the amount of narcotics there is. We're losing housing in south El Paso. These tenements have got to fall down or be taken down one day and you're gonna have a relocation problem, so you're gonna have a

militant group. You've got a bunch of people down there who don't want to leave the barrio. If you could put new houses down there and put those people in 'em it would be fine. But you got people that were raised in the Second Ward that aren't gonna live anyplace else. That's their home, it always has been their home, they don't care what the condition of the place is. I'd say you probably have a similar situation in Juárez, although I imagine there's people up in those holes in the hills and out on the plains that would sure like to do better if they could, and they're gonna take the opportunity to come over here and better themselves. So I think we're gonna have an increased influx of aliens.

President Carter's publicity about amnesty is really causing us problems because they're coming over by the thousands, crossing in here hoping to get under whatever amnesty comes up. I think in the next few years we're gonna face some real problems when the influx of the illegal-type people went along with them. Because anytime you got the illegal farm worker coming over, you got the thief and the bad guy in, narcotic smuggler and other hoods. I don't think enforcement is...I think we're losing a little ground.

JM: How stable do you think the Mexican government is right now, and what do you think their posture is for the future?

AA: Well, I have an idea like I think a lot of us do, that we're hearing what the Mexican government wants us to hear. There's a lot of things going on in Mexico and probably a lot of suppression that we're not hearing about, like the student riots of several years ago. You know, there were a half a dozen reported killed, but if you talk to people that knew what went on there was a hell of a lot of more than half dozen students killed. I think to some degree there's a lot of freedom and hardly any libel law in Mexico. I don't know about the stability of the government, but I think they've got their problems.

JM: I wondered because I've been involved in separate cases with people that I knew were in the Mexican government and watched 'em and their involvement in narcotics crossing the river. And I'm concerned about that and I wonder about it, if that is a reasonable look at the Mexican government itself.

AA: Well, the mordida system in the Mexican way of life has been there for how many hundred years, you know. It's all right for somebody in the United States to look around and say, "Well, this is the way to do it because this is the way we do it." But by the same token other countries aren't ready to accept United States morality. The mordida system seems to be an ingrained and accepted way of life in Mexico. I don't say it's right by our standards, but it's going on.