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## Interview no. 647

Wiliam Hughes

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: William Hughes

INTERVIEWER: Jim Marchant and Oscar J. Martinez

PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Director, 24th District, U.S. Customs Service.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Experiences with the Customs Service, 1960-1977;  
observations on changes in the Service since 1960.

Length of interview: 2 hours      Length of transcript: 56 pages

William Hughes

by Jim Marchant and Oscar J. Martinez

April 27, 1977

JM: Mr. Hughes, first of all, do you mind if I call you Bill?

WH: No, please do, please do.

JM: This tape, for my purposes, is to educate me on Customs, on what happens in the upper echelons of Customs, too. But before you get there I know there's a whole lot of procedures and promotions and work and preparation that goes into it. And to start at the beginning, could you tell us a little bit about your life--where you were born and what education you had and so on?

WH: Yes. I was born in Boston, Massachusetts. I'm 51 years old, just turned 51. I was born 1926 in April. And I went to the Boston public schools, and then later during World War II I had some education at Dartmouth College in a Navy V-12 program, an officer type program. And after getting out of the Navy in 1946, I worked for a while. And my father died just prior to my going into the service, and so my mother was a widow and I worked for a few years, and I was late then getting back to finish my education. I finally wound up taking my law degree at Boston University. So, most of my upbringing is, I'm a New Englander, I guess you'd call it. And the first 30 years of my life were spent in the Boston area, my education, my upbringing.

JM: Were you law enforcement orientated as a youth? Did you have any aspirations to go into law enforcement?

WH: No, not really. Only to the extent that when we're all young we play at cops and robbers, things like that. I guess I was always a cop instead of a robber. But no, I really didn't have any real idea at an early age what direction I was going. And we were a poor people and didn't expect college or anything like this. And my father was not a

professional man or anything. So I had no...no incentive or any overall direction, you know. It was really by way of my experiences working and having been in the service and one thing and another, being exposed to college, that I knew I wanted to get an education. And then I wound up in law school. And of course law, background in law prepares you for several things. I thought it was a good background to have, even if I would never be a practicing lawyer or anything.

And then later, I wound up working for an organization after college called Corporation Trust Company, which dealt with lawyers, providing services for them, mainly in setting up corporations, tending to mergers and dissolutions and filing corporate papers in foreign states and that type of thing. And that took me to Washington, D.C. I started in Boston and was later transferred to Washington. I left that company and found myself working with a law firm there in Washington, and the biggest, the biggest employer is the government. I wound up in the government then at the age of...I guess I went in when I was around 33 years old, I started in the government, and a year later, I wound up in Customs. I came into Customs when I was 34 years of age. So, I got a late start, you might say, in Customs.

I came into Customs as an investigator, a Customs agent, and my first station was El Paso. They took a look at my background and thought I had a good educational background. But as the man said that hired me at the time, he says, "You don't know anything about narcotics, do you, Mr. Hughes?" And I said, "No, I don't know a damn thing about it." He says, "Well, we're gonna send you to a place where you'll learn an awful lot about narcotics in a relatively short period of time." And he

said, "We're gonna send you to the Mexican border."

JM: Before you get further into this part of it, what did you do when you first hired into Customs?

WH: When I first came on in the government, I was in Internal Revenue Service as an investigator, an internal affairs type investigator. They called it security, but it was, you know, looking into integrity of the employees.

JM: Did you enjoy that?

WH: No, mainly because of the policies and the way they went about things. I didn't agree with it. This, there was at that time a holdover from the Senator McCarthy days, and I remember that quite well. I was never too happy with McCarthyism. And we were following people around. At that time, homosexuals were a terrible thing in the government. They were a big security risk. And I found myself running around chasing homosexuals and getting 'em out of the government. And I thought the whole program and some of the personal things that were involved were a little bit ridiculous. So when I had an opportunity to join the Customs Service, I had heard what the Customs Service did, I couldn't believe it...that they were engaged in really substantive type work, that they were out getting people that were smuggling narcotics and diamonds and defrauding the government. And I thought, that's something that I really could get my teeth into. I could believe in that type of thing.

JM: Who did you talk to to get you interested in Customs?

WH: I talked with a fellow investigator in the Internal Revenue Service-- he was a superior of mine, a fellow by the name of Jerry Kirby--at lunch

one day. And it so happened, this was in 1960, that the Interpol was meeting in the United States that year. They meet in different countries, and the United States was the host that year. And the Treasury Department in those days was the United States agency involved in Interpol. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, where a lot of people might've thought, never was into the Interpol thing for one reason or another.

JM: Would this've been 1958?

WH: This is 1960. And Kirby was on loan from Treasury over to this thing where they were presenting a bunch of cases to these Interpol people. While we were eating lunch, Kirby says, "Boy, I'll tell you, I'm going over those cases." 'Cause you know, the Treasury Department had six different investigative agencies. They had Secret Service; they had Internal Revenue Intelligence; in those days Coast Guard was attached to us, which had an investigative apparatus; then they had the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms they call it now, it used to be ATU; and the Customs Agency. And he said he'd been going through all these cases over the main Treasury and presenting some of the more dramatic cases to this group of Interpol people. And says, "Boy, those gaddamned people in Customs, they are really something." And he started to relate some of these stories about guys going under cover and going on these convoys, and I kept on thinking, "Boy, that sounds like it's right out of a paperback book." He says, "no, it's for real." And I said, "Boy, that's some kind of job." He says, "Are you interested?" And I thought it was just lunch talk, and I said, "Yeah, I'm interested. It sounds very interesting to me." About three o'clock that afternoon after we'd returned from lunch, I got a call from Kirby and he said, "I've talked

with Stanley Hall," who was a Mormon also. You know, we had several Mormon guys in the Agency.

JM: We're not all bad.

WH: No, no. But there're a lot of Mormons in the Customs Agency Service, as you probably know. They were hired in your part of the ward. He said, "Stanley Hall will talk with you." And I said, "Who the hell is Stanley Hall?" And he says, "Well, he's one of the guys in the investigative division at Customs. I thought you were interested." I said, "Well, fine." And he happened to be in the same building. We were in the IRS building in those days. So I went up a couple of floors and I met Stanley Hall. And then it started off that way. He says, "I understand you're interested in a job as an investigator with Customs." And I found myself saying, "Yes." And the next thing I know I was meeting Chester Emmerick, who was the head of the Office of Investigations then, and within a week's time I was hired. We were standing in front of a big map of the United States, and I was looking at the Texas-Mexico border and I was looking at New England, and I was saying, "By God, what've you done to yourself this time?" (Laughter)

JM: They asked you if you wanted go someplace that you could learn a lot about narcotics in a short time. Was El Paso the first place they mentioned?

WH: No. From what Kirby told me, I knew that Customs had overseas offices. And I was quite interested at that particular time in my life--I was single, actually divorced--but I thought I might like to go overseas. And I was thinking in terms of London. And I asked them about that. And Emmerick said, "Well, you've got a good background and everything for these foreign type of investigations on undervaluation and various

things that they do." He says, "But, you don't have any experience. We can talk about an overseas assignment after you've had some experience in narcotics." He said, "I think we'll send you to a place where you'll get a lot of experience in narcotics in a short period of time." So that's how I wound up coming out here.

OM: When did you come here? What was the year?

WH: In the fall of 1960. I got here about the first part of November in 1960. And unlike a lot of things that you're told ahead of time, it was everything they said it was. The Customs Service has changed quite a bit but I'll tell you, at that particular time, it was a blowin', goin' organization. Had great traditions. There were very few people in it. And you were expected to do the job, right from the very beginning. They didn't waste any time on carrying you along. They gave you a gun and a badge, they knew that you had been an investigator before and they expected you to catch on to the Customs type of lingo and the Customs type of investigations, and they put you right out. And I liked that. They treated you like a man.

I've had occasion over the years to look back on some of our changes and all, and I've said this, I've probably have said it in conversations that we've had. The thing that was the single most attractive characteristic about Customs was at the same time it's single failing, was it's single greatest weakness. That's fine to be able to treat, if you have a small organization and your people are highly visible, and you have day to day contact when you know exactly what they're doing. But when you get large and you start to have various echelons in between the people that are calling the shots and the people that are actually carrying it out, sometimes they'll take advantage of this type of thing.



In other words, if you don't have a blue jackets manual like the FBI, everybody's gotta sign in and punch a clock and all that type of /thing/, some people will take advantage of it. But I still have never abandoned the basic philosophy that people will give you as much as you allow them to give. If you treat people like they're damn fools or like kids, that's probably what you'll get back. But if you allow people to go out and act in a responsible manner, they'll develop to the extent of their abilities. And this is a very serious business. /The/ business that we're in is one where we're going to deny somebody their liberty or take their property away from them or penalize them. This is a serious damn business. And you can't do it with people that are immature or don't have a real healthy respect for the authority and responsibility that they have. But anyway, I'm getting off /the subject/.

JM: A little while back you and I were talking with one of my friends here, John Dollar, and you were telling him a little bit about an experience that went into this O'Hara, the treasury thing. Can you remember that? You were telling about the experience, your first early days in Customs, and how you came aboard, I was wantin' to get you to say that again. I thought that was pretty interesting.

WH: Well, when I got out here I was two days late reporting on duty. But that had been occasioned by my going to Florida to see my son, who's now grown. He was just a little guy then. I had asked Emmerick if I could take a couple of days to go down to Florida and see my son because I thought I was going out west and I'd never come back again. A typical New Englander, you know. And he said yes. Well, they failed to tell the people out here at El Paso. So when I finally wound up here, I got into town at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Our office was

over in the old Mart building, which is now the Civic Center, is right in that area. And I thought, "Well, what I'll do is I'll just get a motel and I'll check in tomorrow." And then I thought, "Well, no, maybe I'd better go up there and check in now, and they can give me an idea where a good place to stay."

I got up to the office and I went in there, and the secretary was a great old gal, she'd been around in the agency service for years. She started to give me hell right off the bat. I didn't have to wait for the agent in charge. "Where have you been? You're supposed to be here two days ago," and all this business. So I explained to her and she says, "Well, Mr. Donpierre," who is the agent in charge, "is busy on the phone right now." She said, "But you go in there and he wants to talk with you." And, hell, I got in his office, I stood around there, he was on a call for several minutes. And this board that is over in Arthur Adams' office now that you've probably seen, the guys that were killed in action, while he was on the phone I started looking at this thing and see the faces of these western type guys and the very cryptic things. You know, "Joe Doe. Born in Tucson, Arizona on such and such a date. Entered Customs such and such a date, killed by Mexican smugglers." And I started looking at some of these guys and I thought to myself, "What the hell am I doing out here? They kill guys like these!" So by the time Donpierre got off the phone and sized me up, he put me to work right then and there. He said, "You know Schwartz don't you?" And I said, "Yeah." Well, we had been, we'd gone through Treasury school together. And Sam and I were the two new agents to be stationed here. Sam had been back out here ahead of me. He says, "Well he's down at the Santa Fe Street Bridge with Adams. You go on down there

and give 'em a hand."

Well, I didn't even know where Santa Fe Street was, let alone a bridge. And when I got down there, sure enough, they were in secondary and Adams was questioning this big, tall well-built guy and searching him. And Schwartz saw me come in the garita there and he says, "Hey, Bill." And he says to Arthur, "This is Bill Hughes. This is the new agent." And Art Adams, typically says, "That's great, Hughes. Stand out of the way." (Laughter) So, I was watching them search this guy and asking him all these questions, and then we wound up driving the guy home to his house. He didn't have any transportation. And I thought, "Well, this is a kind of a peculiar operation." Number one, I was worried about the search. I, you know, never heard of a Customs search. They didn't teach you that in law school. I heard of the fourth amendment, but I never heard of a Customs search. And anyways, I thought he had been, really exceeding his authority with regard to search because I didn't really understand Customs at that time. Then we wind up driving the guy out to his house down the line here. And for the rest of the night, I never did get to go to the motel or anything. We got that call on the radio to go back down and sit surveillance on that bridge. About two o'clock in the morning is when we finally wound things up and they took me and got me a bowl of soup or some damn thing. So they broke me in right away. They sure did.

And, you know, there were only five of us, and we covered all of West Texas, all the panhandle, all of the state of New Mexico and up into Colorado. We were going in those days. Well, in the first two years that I was here I worked three years, in hours. We used to keep

track of our overtime. It wasn't unusual at all that you and I might share the same desk (we had very crowded quarters) and they'd send me off to Albuquerque on some kind of an investigation; and by the time I got back, you would've been sent to San Antonio or some other damn place. I might not see you for six months or eight months. We were just so thinned out. It was quite an organization. In those days, too, marihuana, 40 pounds of marihuana was a big, big, case. And of course, today, you know what you're running into in patrol. Hell, 2,000 pounds and you can't even get them convicted. We would convoy 40 pounds of marihuana from here to Chicago. We'd get in the trunk like the Trojan horse and go into the bad guys' home, and they went to jail.

And we really thought that all we had to do, to show you what our naivete was like, we just thought by sheer industry, if we just worked hard enough, that we'd stem the tide, I guess, a little bit. Well, looking back we really had to be some kind of simpletons, because we weren't exactly kids. Most all of us were older. But we really believed if we worked hard enough that we could stem the tide.

JM: What kind of cases did you work on then? What were some of the activities you really did?

WH: Well, of course we worked the full range of investigations, Customs investigations. We'd do background investigations. We'd do the petition investigations for the collector, which is now the district director, where property was seized and the people would petition for its return and they'd make certain allegations or representations with regard to their honesty, and we'd have to go and investigate that. But by and large, the great bulk of the work was in narcotics investigations--marihuana mainly, heroin. Made some opium cases here, too, strangely. Hashish was unheard of in

those days. And cocaine, no one ever heard of cocaine in those days. We would go to work in the morning, and then at five o'clock, when you figure your office hours are over, that's when we started our regular work at night. We'd be on surveillance over in Mexico. I guess it isn't really good to say that anymore when you see what happened to the poor FBI and CIA and everybody. But we used to work regularly across the river on surveillance on Americans, or on dope dealers over there.

OM: You chased them around, trailed them?

WH: Oh, yes, we'd follow them around. Sure. And perform surveillances over there. You know, we'd get word that somebody out of Philadelphia was coming down here to do a deal, and we'd follow them around. And if they stayed over there we'd stay with them, you know. I might stay with them from eight o'clock in the morning to four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Then you'd come down and relieve me. Well, one time here, there were five of us in this station--three of us and a fourth guy. We worked continuously for three months, no days off. I mean all around the clock, following over 43 criminal cases. But it was that type /of cases/.

JM: Are there any cases that were memorable?

WH: Well, the Carlos Inglata-Tillman Overstreet case. Carlos Inglata was a guy who lived here. He's still here, I guess. He was the supply. He owned a couple of bars over in Juarez, too, but he lived on this side. Young guy. He got duped in with some guys up in New York, and amongst them is this guy Tillman Overstreet, who was a Harlem Globetrotter. Yeah, he was a big basketball player. But we worked on that case for a long time, and in the spring of 1961 it went to trial here. And it was a big case here at that time. It got headlines. Judge Thomason

sat on the thing. Smuggling being a continuing type of crime, you can choose the situs of your form, you know. The crime occurs in various places. So what we did, when the New York agents arrested the other bunch on the other end, we had the whole thing moved there for trial in Texas. Which was a pretty good thing, because of course the Texas courts took a really dim view of narcotics and stuff. I think there were something like 15 people arrested in that case, that conspiracy case that we made, and all 15 of them were convicted. It was a big case at the time.

JM: What were they conspiring to smuggle?

WH: Smuggling marihuana. They had smuggled hundreds and hundreds of pounds over a period of time between here and New York, and they put it in lockers. I wished then that I, you know, if I had any writing ability, those were the days to be writing some of these things. The stuff that this guy Wambauch was writing and made himself a lot of money and famous, hell, we had cases back in those days if we had written 'em up would've popped the eyes out of people, you know. But now, with all the sex and violence and whatever, if you write these cases people say ho hum. But in those days, you'd sit down with someone whenever you had a chance to socialize and something, you'd get to talking about your work, and people'd say, "Good, God!" They thought that was really superspy stuff. You know, we'd get in the trunks of cars and...

JM: You'd actually ride in the trunk of the car?

WH: Oh, Yeah. You see, the tactic in narcotics, the undercover buy, of course, was one of the principal police tactics which was practiced mainly by the Bureau of Narcotics, which is now the DEA. The Customs Service on the other hand had an entirely different tactical philosophy. We would,

because of our apparatus, our inspectors and so forth, being stationed on the borders of the country, we ran into the stuff as it entered the country. Usually the people who were carrying it were what we call mules, they weren't really the big shots. If we could convince them to assist the government in return for our bringing that assistance to the attention of the U.S. attorney, which usually got them a better sentence, you know, then we would convoy that load. We'd go with the bad guy, the mule, on to Chicago, see, where it was gonna be delivered to the real studs, you know. Now then, the old buy tactic, the bad guys had gotten smart to that a long, long time ago. Because you know, the police educate the criminals. So you could never really buy your way up to Lucky Luciano, you know. Forget about that. The early days of buying directly from somebody big, those days are gone. But on a situation car with a hundred pounds of marijuana going into Chicago, you can bet your life in those days that the big shot that had underwritten that whole thing was going to take position. So we'd pull the old Trojan horse deal. We'd get in the car, have the mule actually deliver us instead of the weed, and then we'd leap out and arrest them. And this used to...it was a very, very, profitable and valuable tactical operation.

OM: Do you remember a particular case that stands out in your mind when you did this personally?

WH: Yeah. I got on a case to Pueblo, Colorado, with Arthur Adams over here. He'll remember that.

/PAUSE/

JM: When you were going in the trunk.

WH: Oh, this was in, I guess it was in 1962. It was around January '62. I

know it was cold. We'd been working on information here for some period of time with regard to a guy up in Pueblo, Colorado, a fellow by the name of Nick Guerra. And we knew that large amounts of marihuana were going up from El Paso to him. And then he had a brother in Chicago. Now Nick had a big beautiful farm on the outskirts of Pueblo, Colorado. And he had two apartment houses in Pueblo, Colorado. He had a lot of cattle. All of this was marihuana money--his cattle, the apartment houses there. He made a hell of a living at it. And we had heard, although we never were able to prove it up, that he would get the marihuana and put it up in mason jars. He'd ship stuff like it was farm produce from his farm and Pueblo, Colorado right into Chicago. It was a big market. Well, at any rate, we got lucky on that deal. We got an informant into this thing, and we knew where one of these loads destined for him was coming across and we got it. And there was a local fellow here that was the mule.

JM: He came through the bridge?

WH: Yeah. We nailed him and we had the inspectors get him, you know. And then that way we were able to cool our informant, you know how that is. We made it look like the inspectors just through ordinary inspection discovered it. So that, you know, that cooled our informant. The Customs apparatus was a far better way of attacking narcotics than the Bureau of Narcotics. Of course you have to take that with a grain of salt. I mean, I'm a Customs man, you know. But...we talked with this guy and he agreed to help us. And he had never run a load up there before. We were convinced that he was telling us the truth. And he was kind of down on his luck, and he had a couple of little kids. So he was offered a chance to make some money, and he jumped at it.

OM: You offered him money?



WH: No, the bad guys said, "Hey, how would you like to make \$50, 100 bucks?" You know. And the guy, he was out of work, he had little kids, and it was a good amount, you know. So we said, "Well," you know, "You're in deep trouble." Now mind you, you see, we were working under the old 1956 narcotics laws. And that's something I'd like to go into at a later time, the difference between the laws and the whole attitude with regard to the enforcement. But they were very, very stiff laws, as you recall. They had the penalty built right into the statute. And the judges didn't like them, and that's one of the reasons for their downfall--because it didn't allow the judges any discretion. And they thought that it was a legislation usurping their area of authority. You know the judges like to be able to say the sentence. But if you recall those laws, a first offense, there was no probation, there was no anything. Five years. Five years for openers, you know. And there was no probation, no good time. Second time it was 10 years. They were very stiff laws.

Okay. He understood that, that he was looking at five years. So we told him, "Well, look, if you will assist the government, we will bring this to the attention of the U.S. Attorney." That's about all you can say, you know. The people say that the cops make deals with the bad guys and everything. I've never, myself, and I've never been around any other Customs officer that I've ever heard say, "Listen, if you'll helps us out we'll get you out from this." The conversation doesn't go that way. You can just say, "We'll bring it to the attention of the U.S. Attorney." If the guy's smart enough, he knows that he's helping himself.

At any rate, we get up to Alamogordo. And we had to do some work

on the car and everything in order to set this deal up. And we had to make up a story for the guy so he could call ahead to Colorado to make some excuse why he wasn't gonna be right on time, tell him the car broke down or something. In the meantime we removed a great amount of the marijuana, and with the help of the state police secured it up at the state police barracks in Alamogordo. Well, Arthur Adams, who was senior to me at the time, and he'd been in the trunk many times in Chicago, he says, "Hughes, you're going in the trunk with me." And I says, "Well, that's fine. What the hell we need two guys in the trunk for?" And he says, "Because I've been caught in the trunk before and the surveillance cars lost me and I was all by myself and had to arrest three guys. So you're coming with me in case the cars that are following us lose us, at least we'll have enough manpower." "Okay."

But at any rate, it's one of my favorite stories but I'll cut it down.

JM: Don't cut it down.

WH: Arthur goes downtown while we're doing all of this. And mind you, there's an awful lot of legal stuff we had to go through. We had to call the U.S. Attorney in New Mexico, we had to call the U.S. Attorney in Colorado, we had to call Washington, we had to tell the Bureau of Narcotics--all of these things, 'cause this dude was going through everybody's jurisdiction. All of this rigamarole takes time. And of course, we have to come up with some kind of a reason why the guy doesn't make the delivery on time. And you always figure the guy on the other end is gonna be a little bit hinkey, you know.

Well, while all of this is going on, and taking out the weed and weighing it and doing all of our things, Arthur goes downtown to a hard-

ware store. And he comes back and he's got a length of plastic tubing and a plastic funnel. So I said, "What in the hell is that for?" And he says, "Well, you can see, you dumb, green agents don't know a god-damned thing about... We may be in that trunk for a long time and this is our portable toilet, Hughes." (Laughter) You know it was one of those old '50 Oldsmobiles. Remember when they used to have the tire stand up in the trunk and they had a wheel well in the bottom of the trunk? Well if you recall, in the bottom of that well, there usuallyy was a little robber cork where you could sweep out your trunk and put it there. So Arthur was gonna dig this tube out through that hole, see. Then if we were in the trunk for a number of hours or a day or whatever it would be, if we had to relieve ourselves, we had the faucet. I thought, "Geez, no wonder he's a grade 11 and I'm only a grade seven. That guy's got some smarts." Well, we get up to Walsenberg, Colorado. Now this is January mind you.

JM: You rode in the car or in the seats until you got up there?

WH: Yeah. We get up as far as Walsenberg, Colorado, which is about 50 miles below Pueblo.

OM: You were in the trunk at that time?

WH: No. We decided from there into Pueblo was a long deal. Now there's no town in between, so we decided we better get in the trunk now in the event that this guy sent out scout cars to sweep the tail of this other car, because we might not then ever get an opportunity to do it up closer.

JM: Did you have walkie talkies or anything with you?

WH: Yeah, those old jobs that didn't work a goddamn, those great big old motorola with the telephone kind of headset on the top. And the damn

antenna didn't work well, it didn't fit in the socket. And I thought, you know, sure, two guys in a trunk. No problem there. Until we went to get into the trunk. Arthur at that time, of course he's a short guy, but he was very stocky, and we both had on big parkas. It was cold as hell, January in Colorado. And I had a shotgun and then he had /his firearms/. But we were like two twins in the womb when we got in that trunk. They had to stick us in there and close the damn trunk down on it. And I had that damn shotgun leaning up against my face, that cold damn steel. And the car was an old rattle trap. All these fumes coming up. And the trunk door closed with like a coat hanger like.

Well, then two of our other cars stayed way back of us, but kept us in sight, you know. And we were having communication. /PAUSE/ We were having problems with the radio and stuff. We didn't know where the hell we were and sometimes we didn't even know if Hausen and the other agent was behind us. And it was a miserable in that goddamned trunk. So we're bouncing along the road and the thought suddenly struck me about you know, here we are in there, I started to laugh, and that really upset Arthur. God, he /says/, "Goddamnit, what's so goddamned funny!" You know. And we couldn't even move. And I /says/, "Arthur, how would you like to take a piss right about now." 'Cause there was no way we were gonna be able to do that. (Laughter) We had all those clothes on and everything.

So at any rate, we get up there and we were fortunate the thing went down fairly /soon/, we didn't have to wait. Like a lot of times those guys'll leave the car overnight or something like that. But the man made the telephone call and the fellow came out to wherever he had stopped and made a phone call. And we waited there for some period.

We could talk to him through the back seat of the car, it wasn't too good. But he said that guy was coming out to meet with him and then lead him to the farm. So we waited around. And sure enough the guy came up alongside. You could hear the engine running, you know, and doors closing, and our guy gettin' on. And they all went off. And we're trying to talk with the goofy agents, our brother agents that are supposed to be on surveillance, find out what the hell is going on. You know when you're inside of a trunk you like to know what's going on in the outside world, and nobody seemed to know. But they didn't want to follow them for fear of heating the deal out. And about an hour later they came back and they drove on off for this farm. And of course the agents stayed back pretty much then, because it was very bad country to try to hold a surveillance in. Drove us right into his garage in his farm there. And we leaped out and arrested him. He was the biggest marihuana dealer in Colorado at the time. He was, it was headline stuff.

JM: That must have been a hell of a shock to him, to have you come out of the trunk. What did he look like when you come out of there?

WH: Well, he was damn surprised, you know. Well, you know, put yourself or any of us in that spot. You're in your garage and out of the trunk come two guys with shotguns and saying, "Federal officers, get your hands in the air!" You know, he was just completely...! What happened was kind of funny. He pulled in the garage, the double garage, and we hear the door go down. And then we heard some talking. Our man was talking to him in Spanish. And Arthur can understand, I'm no good at Spanish. And I'm waiting to get the signal from Arthur to jump out, make the arrest. So, you can hear the doors, you know. Some of the marihuana was packed in

the door panels, right? And we wanted to wait until some of the marihuana was actually extracted from the automobile. That makes your case a hell of a lot better. You cannot then say, "Well, I didn't know there was marihuana in the car," right? So we heard the door panels being popped, and they were talking away in Spanish, like I say. And I know that Arthur said something, "They're talking about the marihuana." And so he says, "Okay, let's go." And we pile out, and of course, you know I've been in the goddamned trunk for so long my foot is asleep, I damn near land on my face. And there's nobody there. It's our guy. "Where the hell is Nick Guerra?" "He just went into the house." What he had been saying in Spanish to this guy was, "Is that the kind of junk you're bringing me up here from Texas?" He says, "For Christ's sake, I got better stuff than that in the house, I'll go in and show /you/." And he went into the house and he came back with a jar of really manicured marihuana. Well, we popped out and there was no guy to arrest. Our mule was standing there. So this side of the garage was open--it was a double door thing--and you could see the house. And just about the time he's coming out the kitchen door, we ran around behind the car and the wall of the thing. And then when he came into the garage, we arrested him. And he had a jar of marihauna in his hand like a mason jar. And it was really a very finely manicured marihuana. We told him, "Put the jar down nice and gentle." So it was a very good arrest. And it was the biggest thing at that time that ever happened in Colorado.

Now, as it happened, the Bureau of Narcotics followed a policy when Harry Anslinger was the head of the Bureau of Narcotics, of not doing any kind of cooperative work with the Bureau of Customs. They didn't

want...funny about police. But, we had notified them, as we were required to do under the rules, that we were coming. We asked for their assistance. "If you'd like to participate, we sure could use the assistance of your Bureau of Narcotics agents." No way. When we arrested Nick Guerra and later we seized three vehicles, and Denver is the only port in Colorado, we had to take the seized vehicles to the collector at Denver. We got up to Denver and a guy from the Bureau of Narcotics came over to see us. Now, I've forgotten his name now. And he congratulated us. And we thought that that was pretty strange, him coming, taking the risk of incurring the wrath of his superiors by coming by and congratulating Customs officers. And he says, "I'll tell you something." He practically had tears in his eyes. He said, "I wanted to be in on this so bad I could taste it." He says, "I worked on this guy for five solid years, and I never could get him. You guys went into him in one shot and took him down." He says, "He's the biggest marihuana dealer in the state of Colorado." He says, "I wanted to be in on this." He says, "I've bought from his cousins, I've bought from everybody in his family," He says, "But I never could've got him." He says, "The only way you could have gotten him is the way you did it." He says, "I'm sure sorry it didn't work out so that the Bureau of Narcotics guys could've been in on it."

But there was the difference, you know, in the tactical operation. And then, too, we worked conspiracies far more than the Bureau of Narcotics did. We would pick somebody up down here in El Paso, and by motel room registrations by other people they were connected with in Albuquerque and then by other things, we put all of this stuff together over a period of time. And when we finally broke a case, we'd

take and arrest four, five, six people. Where the Bureau of Narcotics tactical application was quite a bit different from ours. And their handling of informers was entirely different than ours. The Bureau of Narcotics actually were having their informers work off a beef, so to speak. Whereas we, the information that we usually got was either from competing dealers--you know, one dealer try to put the other guy out of business would tell you where his load is coming and things like that. We were always accused by, which is sort of hypocritical, we were accused by the Bureau of Narcotics of dealing with the undesirable element, you know. Christ. (Laughter)

But those were the heydays of everybody was against narcotics. And I can recall too, how things have changed, that we didn't have a local marihuana problem here in El Paso. As a matter of fact, most of the border towns did not have a local marihuana problem. This was a transit area. People would come from Chicago and L.A. and Detroit and other places, and they were scoring their stuff here and going through here and going on. You didn't find like you find now the kids and everybody using marihuana. It was an entirely different proposition. The bad guys were more visible in those days, too. And our border surveillance apparatus worked a hell of a lot better than what you got now. Say what you will with all the modern attitudes and what have you, we could pretty much on a suspicion just follow somebody with an Albuquerque license plate. Have no information at all, but just stick with them for two or three days, and we'd wind up with a case. Because there were an awful lot of Albuquerque hypes coming down here for a heroin score and over here at La Nacha's and the shooting galleries and stuff. Or we'd see an Illinois plate. We'd stay with an Illinois licence plate, and just



on sheer suspicion. Just flat out surveillance is the way we made a lot of cases. And so it required lots and lots of man hours and dedication to the job and what have you. We didn't have an informant apparatus like the Bureau of Narcotics did.

And then, since that time, a lot of the guys that were dealing right on the border have moved back, especially in South Texas. They've gone back from places like Miguel Aleman down to Monterrey and from Nuevo Laredo. They've moved their operation back from the border. And the younger people became more mobile. Used to be that young Americans were quite concerned about going to the interior of Mexico. And they go /now/, with the advent of the airplane and things like that. So, where we had a surveillance apparatus, the Customs surveillance apparatus, right on the border thing here, we knew where the dealer's houses were. And you know, maybe at lunch time we'd go out and make a swing by a known dealer's house to see if there were any cars from out of town around. These type of tactics don't lend themselves anymore, 'cause nobody is working the thing that way anymore. Because Customs of course is out of it since '73.

But the 1956 narcotics laws were...there're a lot of mischief within the laws, of course. But the judges did not like them because they felt it got into their area of discretion. They felt that the legislature had overstepped it's thing by building these penalties right into the statutes. Now then, there were some inequities, as there always are. For example, we would get the typical river case. We'd get information that so and so was gonna bring a load of weed across. And we'd go down and lay in the river and wait. And some poor guy, usually very poor guy, probably lives in one of those caves up behind Juárez there...I know this one in particular, a couple of kids starving, for

Christ's sake. You or I would probably be in the goddamned marihuana smuggling business if you're kids are starving and somebody offers you 50 bucks to tow a sack across the river, you know. So, we jump and we get this guy. What have we got? We got some poor devil that needs \$50 for his kids and he's facing five years. There's nothing we can't put him together with somebody else. And these things'd come into court.

Well, the judges began to talk to the prosecuting attorneys and say, "Goddamnit, I don't want these guys like this coming in here and having to give them five years," 'cause the jury found them guilty. The judge, nothing. He was gone. So in an effort to get around these things, and I'm sure that initially it was an altruistic type of thing, you know, the legal fraternity. I'm the judge and I say to you, we go to the bar association and say, "Listen, can't you find some other damn law to present rather than this? My hands are tied. I can't give a guy probation. This isn't administration of justice sending some poor guy off for five years." So then they started to get cute. They started reading the law books. And the next thing we knew, we got a lecture one day from one of the assistant U.S. Attorneys that from there on after, when we would arrest someone, we would ask him if he had the transfer tax receipt for the marihuana. They found themselves a little known IRS law that required a tax transfer. And in violation of it, there was a \$100 an ounce penalty. Well, of course, it was really ridiculous. You catch a guy at night out here, some poor Mexican guy, and you say, "Okay, stick 'em up, you're under arrest. Have you paid the transfer tax on this marihuana?" (Laughter) He'll look at you like you're out of your mind. But it then gave the legal end of the thing

the opportunity to present a violation of the transfer tax, which the judge could give probation and various things. And they dropped the substantive count, the substantive smuggling count, and penalized him on this lesser count where they could give him from two years or probation.

Now then, when the defense attorney establishment discovered this, then started all of this plea bargain and swapping around. And as a consequence, while that type of thing was initially designed to give some equitable treatment to some poor slob, the big shots, the real crooks, the guys you really wanted, were getting off on a goddamned transfer deal, you know. So you know, that went on. We became quite frustrated in some cases where we'd see the U.S. Attorney make a bargain for a guy that we really wanted to see go down and he'd wind up with probation. And then of course in the 1960s they did away with those laws. See, all of the narcotic laws were Treasury laws until what was it, '66 or '67 that they came up with this new law, the Controlled Substances Act. And that's got more ifs, ands, and buts in it. It covers pills and all kinds of controlled substances. It's got built-in escalated clauses in it that some pills, if there's a big abuse in it they can be raised up into a certain level of culpability and others downgraded.

And then just the general attitude of the public with regard especially to marihuana, the thing was changed a hundred percent. What are the latest statistics, you know. Several millions of people in the country use marihuana--including, you know, doctors, lawyers, college professors, you know. And it's getting that way it appears with cocaine and hashish and so forth. But I always felt that the

marihuana thing was far more insidious than the heroin traffic for this reason--that anybody can get into the marihuana traffic but not just anybody can get into the heroin traffic. The three of us could go across the river this afternoon and get into the marihuana traffic. Nothing to it. And I bet millions and millions and millions and millions of dollars have been made in marihuana. Ten times the amount of money has been made in marihuana than any other.

OM: Let me just follow up on this. You say the three of us could go into Juárez and get into the traffic. What would be the procedure for us to do it?

WH: Well, Oscar, it's practically this simple. We went over there to a taxi cab stand. And say that we were interested in buying some marihuana. That guy'd just take us in the cab to some guy and we could buy some marihuana. And then we would say, "Listen, we're from out of town here," and you could get right into it.

JM: Just as simple as a going to a taxi cab driver.

WH: It's about as simple as vice, you know. It really is. You know, they deliver the girl to your room, you know. But heroin is a little bit different situation. Those people are a little bit more guarded, you know. But that's why I say marihuana is so damn insidious. And everyone got into the fool thing. And you'd have guys, we arrested a guy one time who was a student at the University of Texas at Austin. A young guy, he was working on his Master's Degree, an advanced degree. When the trial came up, the judge looked at this guy and he says, "Well, you know what we've got here?" Because here was a young guy from a good family, you know, college guy. "Look at this young man here. Now this terrible sickness, this marihuana traffic and everything, this is what is happening to our young people because of those pushers."

Well for Christ's sake. Pushers is another thing that's always bothered me. I hate to hear a policeman say pushers. It's a very unprofessional thing. What in the hell is a pusher? Nobody has ever defined a pusher to me. Was this 23 year old kid a pusher or an innocent victim of the nefarious trade? When you stop to consider that on Friday evening he and a couple of other college buddies from well-to-do families decided they'd kick in a couple or three hundred dollars a piece. And one of them was a flyer would rent a plane. And they had money set aside for lawyer's fees just in case something went wrong. They flew down to Sabinas, Hidalgo on Saturday morning, scored about a thousand pounds of weed, and fly back in the week and make in the vicinity of 30 to 50 thousand dollars. What's a pusher? I'd rather them say trafficker. But here was judge salvaging his conscience by using this bogeyman type thing, The Pusher. The pusher is a bogeyman for politicians and for judges and for do-gooders to say, "Ah, the terrible pushers. We ought to get them." Who the hell are the pushers? That conjures up some kind of an image like I'm jamming it right down your throat. "Hey, come here kid, I want to..." Push weed. That isn't the way it works at all.

But there's a tremendous mythology about the narcotic traffic and about the cops and the crooks. And it's very discouraging after so many years to see these people like these congressman coming around here, or the GAO, or various survey teams. And you talk to them and they don't hear a goddamned word you're saying. They've got their minds made up, and they got the pusher mentality. And we've lost, frankly, the war, from a policing standpoint, with regard to marijuana, certainly. If you put it on a dollar and cents thing the traffic is so enormous now that the expenditure for more and more

policemen and against the declining rate of prosecutions and convictions, I'm not sure that it's really a practical situation to pour more money into a policing effort.

You see, really in a narcotics thing, you have three basic disciplines. You've got the policing discipline, which is poised against the availability of the drug, right? Then you have the sociological effort, the people that are trying to rehabilitate the poor devils that are caught up in it---you know, your halfway houses, your methadone programs, etc., trying to rehabilitate the people that are in the... Then you have a third discipline, which is an educational discipline, which is trying to provide the type and sufficient information to keep new people from joining the traffic. Well, I don't think, you know, from the policing aspect which I've been in, we haven't really done a very good job with regard to the availability of the thing. It's available. Well, I'm wondering if the other disciplines are any more successful when you consider that there's no way of telling how many people are in these methadone programs, because they don't trust the police apparatus, you know. If we would ask them for statistics to see how successful our programs are, they're naturally gonna be suspicious of us because they feel this compulsion to protect their wards. Then, too if you can't see how old the kid is at the end of the line outside the methadone clinic, you can't tell how effective the educators are, too. But if there's a brand new 13-year-old kid at the end of the line this week, somebody in the educational apparatus failed.

But from the point of view of availability, we've got big, big problems. And if you go into a cost ratio on the thing, I think that you'd find tremendous sums of money being spent in the policing apparatus as against what's being captured and people going to jail, destroying the apparatus.

/PAUSE/

OM: A while ago you mentioned this legendary figure here on the border, La Nacha. Could you tell us about your experiences or what you know about her activities since you've been here on the border?

WH: I can tell you about, naturally, about my knowledge of her. But I am not the most knowledgeable Customs officer with regard to La Nacha. There are several other Customs officers here who are really walking books on that lady. She ran a shooting gallery over here in Juárez, which is to say a place where heroin addicts went and got their fixes and shots, right there. And there was a considerable number of Albuquerque hypes, as we call 'em in the trade, would come down to La Nacha's. And we'd follow them around town, naturally. And sometimes they'd after getting a fix over there at La Nacha's they'd bring a little bit back with them and we'd try to intercept them at the border. We did. Some of the older, more professional hypes that had fallen two or three times, they were smart enough just to go over and get a fix and come back. They'd be high or low on heroin, whichever it was, and wouldn't have any heroin with them. So we, as far as a Customs violation was concerned, we didn't have any.

But she had several sons and they were all in the narcotic traffic. Aside from running the shooting gallery, she did supply heroin into the smuggling apparatus, from here to California and from here to Chicago and other places. Now, whatever her connections were they were really strong, because she survived several political regimes. She was, according to our intelligence, wired right up to Mexico City. They had put her in jail down in the Three Sisters Islands, I think they call them the Three Sisters Islands in the Baja California, in the Gulf, during World

War II, for some type of illegal activity. I don't know what that was, but that's the only time I've ever heard that she was ever jailed. And she was there for a couple of years, but she got out of that. And then as the changes in political structure would in occur in Juarez, if you recall, they used to shut everything down for a couple of days till they'd get everything straightened out again. And the cops'd go around to the bars where the girls were and to the shooting galleries. She always came out on top and continued in business.

But her sons, a couple of them met with untimely deaths. The last I heard of her, she had disappeared from Juarez. I don't know where, or if she's even still alive. She was quite, quite old even in those days. And this is back 16 years ago, 16,17 years ago. But Arthur Adams, who is the agent in charge here now, has a great deal of knowledge about her and about her sons and their connections with other well known narcotic traffic dealers, both in Juarez and in the area around Eagle Pass and up and down the river. She was connected all the way across to California and all the way down the river. She was definitely a major figure in the heroin traffic. And she used to sell her heroin in color-coded bindels. You know the bindel papers that you get the heroin in, a little bindel. The green paper would be a five-dollar paper, and the red paper'd be a ten-dollar paper, yeah, and a white paper. I remember we've caught guys, you know, arrested guys, and we've suddenly discovered that there was a color-coding to some of these things. But she was very clever. She never came into the United States that we know of, because we had a warrant for her arrest. I think it was a Customs warrant. I'm not sure, it may have been the department. But there was a warrant outstanding. Never to my knowledge came, you know. If she did we never, we never caught up with her.



JM: I was gonna ask you two questions. First of all, just for a minute, are there any Customs violations, or were there then, for bringing prostitutes into El Paso or into the United States?

WH: No Customs violations. If you're in the area of illegal aliens, of course that would be the Immigration Service, Border Patrol and Immigration Service. And also possibly into the area of FBI violations of the Mann Act or whatever, crossing boundaries, state boundaries and international boundaries with regard to prostitution. But as far as a Customs violation, no.

JM: The other question deals with your personal life and your family. I know from experience and guys that I've worked with and people that I've known in the past have had a difficult time in law enforcement with their family. How has it affected you and your family?

WH: Well, thank God I've got a very, very good family, good family life. It's been in recent years that I've recognized just how much pressure and how really I didn't treat my family fairly, because we were gone all the time. And I met my wife here in El Paso. We got married here. And I was in the business at the time. But it really wasn't fair to expect that she knew anything about it just because she knew me before she married me, that I was in this type of work. The first year of our marriage I was gone nine months the first year. And we didn't have any children. She was by herself. The only other people that the wives knew were other Customs agents' wives. Now the agents didn't, you know, the agents were sort of a separate group. We didn't really have a great deal of connection with the Inspectors or other Customs people. And so the wives of the agents, the only other people that they knew that they could talk with about the business were other Customs agents' wives.

And, you know, you'd be out of town for two weeks and you'd get back and you'd be in town for a couple of days before you'd be out of town for another week or so. And during the time you were back in town, you'd be trying to get back in touch with your informants. We actually treated our informants a hell of a lot better, I guess, then we did our families in a lot of ways. And that upset the wives. Because even when you were home, you weren't home. You were out at night in the area keeping your contacts up and trying to find out what was going on in the El Paso area while you were gone, you were in the country. And this had its effects on some families. We've had a number of divorces amongst our agents. The gals just, some of them just didn't figure that was a life that they were interested in. And some of the agents, we're a peculiar bunch of people anyway. They were more, really more devoted to the work. If it came down to a yelling contest between a wife and her husband, the husband might just tell the wife, "Well, the job comes first," you know. And you hardly ever had time for vacations or anything. And weekends, forget about them. You worked a great deal of time. And if you made the mistake of taking leave and not getting out of town, I guarantee you they'll call you, because we just didn't have enough people. And they'd give you a call, and you'd be off.

JM: Now, all this time we've been talking about your first tenure of service in El Paso, is that right?

WH: Yes. That was from '60 to '64.

JM: When you were here at that time, was anyone that was working with you ever hurt in the line of duty or this kind of thing? That would cause additional problems?

WH: No, we were very fortunate. None of those officers were injured. We've had some men killed and others injured, crippled for life and things like that. But of those officers that I've worked with, thank God none of us was seriously injured. I tell you, there was less chance of shooting back in those days than there is today. And about the most dangerous thing, the thing that most of us feared, I know I did, was not working undercover or getting into an arrest situation, it was a high speed chase. We had a number of high speed chases around here and up the road to Las Cruces and out the road going toward Sierra Blanca and things like that. And you know, I always was nervous in those. We came close to wiping out ourselves a couple of times on those high speed chases. But we were very fortunate. I don't know why we didn't have more serious automobile wrecks and people badly injured.

But the risk of shooting has gone way, way up since those days. I think at the same time that the risk of shooting has gone up, there's been a lessening of respect for law enforcement officers. I recall quite clearly when I checked in here at El Paso and they gave me all of these guns. And I'd gone 34 years of my life without being a big guy on guns. And I thought they were putting it on me because I was an Easterner and they were kind of joking around with me. They gave me two hand guns, a shotgun and a rifle, a canteen, a Minox camera, and told me to make sure that I put a foot locker in my government car to have all of this stuff in. I thought, "What the hell, where the hell are the hand grenades?" It looks like we're gonna invade Mexico, you know. And I went home and I looked at all of that stuff and I thought, "I'm not too damn sure that this is the

business for me. Maybe they're just playing around with me." But then I convinced myself that they weren't fooling around, that I'd gotten myself out here on this border and that this was the nature of the business, that if there were guns around, there might be people that were willing to shoot you. And then I thought, my God, I would never think of shooting a federal officer. So I became convinced then that I could shoot somebody based on the fact that I know damn well there's someone in authority... And a federal officer I thought, was, you know... If anybody was bold enough to challenge you as a federal officer, he was probably a dangerous son of a bitch. And on the basis of that I decided, well, I could probably shoot somebody. Then I was able to live with the guns better then. But it's out of the fear thing more than anything else. I just figured, once I identified myself as a federal officer, if somebody was bad enough to take on a federal officer, he was bad news.

JM: That's interesting. Just in my own comment on that, I worked in the east, too, in New York City, then I came here. And I never took my gun out of the holster while I was in New York. It just didn't seem that you had to do that. You could get through the day without trying to do that. Down here, many times. It's a different, whole different kind of attitude towards the whole game.

That's got us up to 1964. What'd you do after that?

WH: All right, I left here in December of '64. I was transferred to Houston as an agent, and we were at Houston for about a year and a half. And I was promoted, selected for Agent in Charge in Savannah, Georgia. And we went on over to Savannah and we were there for two years, from the Spring of '66 until the Spring of

'68. And I went into Washington, D.C. then, into our headquarters office, and was assigned in what is now the internal affairs apparatus. And in those days the internal affairs apparatus worked centrally out of Washington. We'd go out throughout the entire country and do the employee integrity cases and things like that. And in 1969, you recall the now infamous Operation Intercept. I was drafted out of the internal affairs thing to take part in the planning of this Operation Intercept, along with several other people in Customs. And after Operation Intercept, which lasted only a few weeks but will probably last in history forever, they were gonna reorganize the office of investigations. And they asked me to come out of internal affairs and back into the line investigative apparatus and take part in the reorganization of the investigative service, which I did. And they had a fancy title. I was a Liaison Officer to the field from the Criminal Investigations division. I was into several jobs. I was a fireman, really. They sent me to New York one time as Agent in Charge to run the New York office during the time that John Mosely had gone to Miami as Agent in Charge, and the office was open in New York. And they hadn't selected a permanent Agent in Charge so they sent me up there to run that office for a while.

And then we had another intensified enforcement thing called Able 70. I don't know if you recall that. They called it two or three different names, the ICE, Intensified Customs Enforcement, but Able 70 was its initial name. And I was sent back to New York to learn what they called the northeast quadrant of the country of this intensified enforcement, which included all aspects of Customs--the inspectors, the import specialists, the agents and so

forth. We had a bunch of new men coming into Customs in those days, young agents. And then, I was selected as the Agent in Charge at San Antonio, after the reorganization of the investigative apparatus in 1970. We had been in a regional structure and that was reorganized into 20 districts. And I was selected to head up the 8th District of agents, which was at San Antonio. Covered the middle part of Texas.

And in 1973 there was this merger. They took 500 Customs agents by an order of the Department of Justice, and commingled them with the Bureau of Narcotics guys, and came up with this DEA thing we've got now. And I was gonna be forced into that thing. It was not a thing you had any choice about. They selected 500 guys based on their backgrounds with narcotics and everything. And I did not want to go to the Department of Justice. So I put in for the District Director's job at Laredo which was open, never really believing that they would select me because it's unusual that they select a District Director from the ranks of the investigators. They usually come up through the either the inspection or control discipline or through the C and B discipline. But I was selected as District Director, so I never had to go to the DEA, although I've still got my temporary identification card from the DEA.

JM: Well, you actually came out of field work when? When you left Savannah and went to Washington?

WH: Yes. And I was in Washington for two years almost to the day.

JM: That would take us up to roughly 1968, then?

WH: No. I went into Washington in 1968, right. And I was in Washington until '70, the summer of '70, when I came back to Texas. And I had

13 years in the investigative apparatus. And since '73 I've been a District Director...two years at Laredo, and then when Batad left here to go down to California, I asked them if I could be returned to what I consider to be my home. El Paso is home for me. And I figured with all of this damn reorganization and everything, my days in the investigative apparatus were over. I wanted to come back here and finish out my career.

JM: I was going to ask you one question reiterating back to when you were an agent again, though, for a minute. On what kind of basis did you do these things in Juarez? Did you have cooperation with the Mexican officials to do that? How did you work that out?

WH: Well, you guys promise me that this thing won't be so damn public that I'll get indicted, because some strange things happen in America nowadays. I'll tell you my best judgement of it.

JM: Well this was before there was any agreements or anything like that.

WH: Yeah, there were no agreements. Let me just tell you my impression of it. I'm sure that this holds water. See what you think. The Mexican authorities knew that we were operating in Mexico, no question about it. And as you look at it in the light of today's headlines and everything, that's foreign agents operating in, you know, in another country, right? But we never thought of it that way in those days. We had some damn dope fiend down here from Chicago or something and he went over there, and we'd go with him, you know. He was an American. And the dealers were over there and what have you. We didn't think that we were...these questions of violating someone's sovereignty or performing police activities in a foreign soil really never occurred to us. Maybe they should've, I don't

know. But we never would've made the cases without operating this way. And of course a number of the Mexican officials, frankly, were involved in the traffic.

Now, the FBI had a liaison man. He'd be over in Juarez and do his liaison with the various police, seeing things over there and everything like that. Now the FBI would come to us many, many times and ask us to get them information in Juarez, because they couldn't get any goddamned information in Juarez. I believe that the Mexican apparatus figured that the goddamned officers of the United States government, that they've got to worry about Customs. Because if you want to come over here and see your girlfriend or see your mistress or you want to come over in your uniform or whatever, it isn't going to be an FBI agent that's gonna stop you. Or it might be an Immigration guy, or a Customs guy could really screw with your business. If we wanted to really get mean, we could find... So I think it was what is characterized as a Mexican stand-off. They knew we were over there. They did certain things over here. And we didn't violate their people or that type /of thing/; we were surveilling, we were gathering information. But all of our arrests and everything, unlike what DEA is doing today, actually working in there and taking part in the arrests of Mexican citizens, we never did any of that kind of things. It was surveillance. It was the gathering of information and the setting up so we could make our arrests in America. And they had to know. The Mexican policing officials are not dummies. They know what the hell is going on, and they knew us by sight.



I used to caution young agents, especially downriver in the smaller towns when I was Agent in Charge. "Don't think you're gonna come in here in Del Rio, Texas or Eagle Pass, Texas or McAllen, and think that you're gonna disappear into the anonimity of this great big metropolis. I'll guarantee you 15 minutes after you're here every professional smuggler is gonna know precisely where you live, what kind of car you own. And they're gonna know when you're home and when you're away from home and everything else." They've gotta, they're professionals.

The world of the border is a world all by itself. It's got tis own culture, its own morals, its even got its own language. It's an economy built on smuggling and accomodations. It's neither Mexico nor the United States. It's a different world. The world of the border, and the world of the smugglers and things like thatl it's very interesting. There's only two ways to go. You either are so caught up with this thing and love it dearly, or you hate it. There's no...I don't think there's an in between. I love the border. I like everthing about it. And at the tender age of 34, you know, I don't know, I just...this is a second life for me and this is where my life is. But you think, what the hell, after a guy spending all of his years growing up back east, and come on out here. But it is a fascinating place and I just love the hell out of it.

OM: I wanted to ask you about the differences between working in Laredo and working in El Paso. What differences did you see? Is it the same kind of operation, the same level of smuggling, or are we talking about two very different places? In terms of the work

that you were involved in.

WH: They are different. They're quite a bit different, both from the point of view of the tactics that you have to employ. We had a much better informant apparatus in Laredo than we had out here. A great deal of our work, like I said earlier, was done on just sheer determination and just flat out surveillance. Don't like the look of that guy. Why is he here with Illinois plates? What's he doing around here? Let's find out what he's doing. Laredo was a much heavier heroin trafficking area than El Paso, Laredo being on the so-called Pan American Highway, and they call themselves the gateway to Mexico. The tourists that come in here are turn around tourists a lot. They don't go much further into the interior from here. Well, they go to Chihuahua. In Laredo, they're going right on through to Mexico City and down in.

So you've got a different type of character there. You've got an awful lot of people coming from the interior of Mexico to the border, and they've traveled much deeper into Mexico. And they've had an opportunity to make the contacts from the South American traffic that's coming through and into Mexico City, Tampico, and Veracruz. You know, the shipping type thing. A lot of heroin came in on ships, as we know now, and was off loaded say in Veracruz and what have you, and then driven across the borders back into New York as far as Montreal and what have you. The French-Corsican apparatus and things like that goes on down there more. Up here you had more of a local type of traffic. And this is a far more difficult area to police from a Customs point of view. It's spread out. This is a big, big...

this is the metropolis of the border, you know. And there are three bridges in this port spread out over a space of 15 and some odd miles. It's very difficult to hold surveillances in this area, as you well know, as a patrolman.

Now, we used to perform... You see, there was a patrol years ago, and then it's been reestablished. In the interim years the agent performed both functions. He performed the between the ports of entry type of surveillance plus the regular investigations, you know. And now, of course I'm sure the patrol officers can tell you how difficult it is to surveil in this area of the border as against Laredo. There's one bridge. Well, they've got another bridge now. There's a concentration of people right in one area. When you get outside of Laredo, either up river or down river, the road systems fall all apart there. But there are road systems here that run way the hell out. The river, of course, down there makes it more difficult for crossing. The banks of river are sharper there. There's more water in the river there because of course the Pecos comes in below here. And they have more right in the city limit type of big narcotic busts than we do in and around El Paso. We would make a lot of our busts away from here on information or by tailing people out, you know, and busting them out on the highways and things like that, or motel room type situations. But there's a heavy traffic down river. There's a higher concentration of towns and things down there, too, even from the interior. And then, too, San Antonio is close there. San Antonio offers a certain amount of anonymity for people flying in from up north. They can get in the car, shoot down the border, make a deal, or have the guy come up from the river and do the deal

in San Antonio, fade into the woodwork.

Some big, big heroin deals went through--the Suarez Dominguez case, the Suarez Dominguez that later committed suicide up here at La Tuna. That's one of the most dramatic cases I've ever heard of. You know, that was behind the Iron Curtain. They had double agents involved in that damn thing. That case went down in San Antonio. Suarez Dominguez at one time was the head of the Mexican Federal Judicial Police, a position somewhat higher than J. Edgar Hoover enjoyed here.

OM: When was that, when did that case take place?

WH: They got him in 1970, I believe, at San Antonio, just before I got down here.

JM: I have to look that one up. That was before I came to work for Customs.

WH: We sent agents to France and Holland and everything on that one. Boy, that one read like a real mystery.

JM: Did you have any involvement in that yourself?

WH: No. I sent one of agents to Europe on that, though. Was involved in questioning some of the Europeans over there. But it's a different...I guess I've rambled away from your question, Doctor, but it is a different type of tactical application. They did have a much better informant apparatus, the agents down river, than we did up here. Our just did not lend itself to that type of thing up here very much.

JM: When you were working as an agent before, did you ever have any of these people cross anywhere other than at the ports of entry with heroin or any, what we term now as a hard narcotic?

WH: I don't want to be anticipating you, but I think what you're driving

ports of entry, because we know it's coming in there. We're guessing about these other things. There's the bogeyman, the pusher thing again. Some guys are there flying it over us, they're flying it under us, they're moving it by mule and everything. Our statistics don't show that.

Now then, if I were given so much resources, so many men and so many dollars, where would I put it to catch the hard narcotics? Right into the ports of entry. And what do I mean by making the ports of entry more sophisticated? I mean that this mumbo jumbo that we have in the ports of entry with this dual inspection situation and all this confusion. Is he a Customs officer? Is he an Immigration officer? I think he was in agriculture. The optimum situation is that one agency control the ports of entry and the way the traffic moves through it, and not hall all these inter-agency squabbles and bullshit. And then, the physical structure of the ports of entry should be changed drastically. You can go anywhere on the border and you'll never see two facilities that look the same. If I had my way, they'd all be like Howard Johnsons's. Every goddamned one of them would be structured from a functional point of view and they'd all look the same. And we have to deny the general public a certain amount of observation access to what occurs in the ports of entry. Because we telegraph our punches. Cases that are made out here, they run over to secondary, here come the dogs, here come the guys. And they start searching the car and the guy is right down in the corner. He goes over drops a nickel in the telephone booth and calls the guy in the other end and says, "They got it." So we'll never be able to turn that into a convoy, take it out and take it back.

When I was agent in charge at New York, I went out to JFK one day to the international arrivals building. They have this great big...we call it a fishbowl. People went up there with their lunches. New Yorkers are funny people, you know. They go up there and they sit and eat lunch and watch all of these people coming through the Customs. We lost several cases that way. Lost several big cases that way. So we do know that heroin and hard narcotics are coming through the ports of entry. And I don't think enough has been done on that. I would surely put a major effort into that if they wanted more heroin intercepted. And then maybe as time went on we could worry about the other avenues of entrance to the country. I'm sure it's coming in a lot of different ways.

OM: Do you recall any humorous experiences that you might have observed or been involved in, in your work in the Customs Service?

WH: In retrospect it's all humorous, now. It's been a big joke on us. (Laughs) Oh, I don't know. I guess there have been some funny things. I thought Anthurs' portable toilet was one of the best I've ever run into. But I know there are some stories. I just can't think of any.

OM: Last time we asked Lewis Jones the same question and right off the bat he couldn't remember anything. And then when we finished, one story after another.

WH: I remember arresting Jesus one night. That was kind of funny, yeah. I was duty agent. We used to have duty agent and that way all the agents wouldn't get call out, you know. So the inspectors called me one night late. And this must have been back in the early '60s.

This was before hippies, if you can remember back that far. But /the/ inspectors called me up and said, "You the duty agent to-night?" I said, "Yeah." May have been Andy Tandro, I don't know. Some of the inspectors are still here that I knew when I was a buck agent. Says, "Well, you better come on down here because we've got a guy with some marihuana. He claims to be Jesus and we can't arrest him." So I get in my car and I came down. Lived right up there on Schuster. It was real quick down to the Santa Fe bridge. And sure enough, here's this guy, rather tall guy with long flowing sheets on and big beard and a lot of hair. And he did look like somewhat the pictures of Jesus, you know. And he had this funny looking car. And I thought it was a taxi cab painted over. And that's what it turned out to be. You know those funny cabs they have in New York, those real square looking jobs with the big doors on 'em. They're made by some particular company. It was one of those deals.

And sure enough he had a, the inspectors had taken from him one of those glass vials that good Cuban cigars used to come in. Manicured marihuana. So he was telling everyone how they were without authority to arrest him. Number one, you really can't arrest God, you know, and he was the son of God. And besides that, Customs, "You people in Customs have only the authority to arrest people that are bringing things into the country, smuggling things into the country," whereupon all the inspectors agreed to that. And he says, "Well, I didn't bring this marihuana into the country. I got this marihuana in Brooklyn." And what he had done, he was one of these guys that had answered the ad in the paper: Drive my car to California. You know, that type of thing. And he had a

couple of cats in this car that he'd been traveling. One was an angora cat and I think the other one was one of them evil looking jobs with the blue eyes.

JM: Siamese.

WH: Yeah. That goddamned car smelled. You know how cats... Oh, God, it was awful, see. One whiff of that and you closed the door. So I asked him what his name was, and of course he told me it was Jesus. And I said, "Look, Jesus, I think you're quite wrong about this, our authority to arrest you here. You say that you got this marihuana in Brooklyn." "Right." "And you've been traveling across the country on your way to California, just thought you'd stop in this funny little border town of El Paso and go across and see what Mexico was all about." "That is right." "And you carried the marihuana into the country." So he didn't know about this.

And we had a wonderful old guy in those days, he's since retired, Captain O'Rourke down in the Jailhouse down here. So I told the inspectors to call the animal rescue league or whatever to come get the cats. Well, this really upset this guy. The cats were his family, you know. And years later I was to meet an awful lot of people like this guy. But he was the first honest to God hippie I'd ever seen. And I thought this is some kind of a weirded guy. He's off his rocker, you know. So a guy showed up with one of them funny little wagons with the cage in the back and said, "Where're the cats?" He had a funny hat on. "Where're the cats?" And this guy's going, "You can't take my cats." He says, "Who the hell is this guy? Come on cats." Put 'em in the /truck/. I said, "The cats are going to their jail, Jesus, and you're going to our jail." And we went down and we got to Captain O'Rourke, took him up in there.



And O'Rourke is behind the counter where you book in the prisoners, you know. And he says, "What in the hell have you got this time, Bill?" You know. And I says, "Captain O'Rourke, this is Jesus." O'Rourke says, "Jesus, get on the scale over there and let's see what your weight is." So we locked Jesus up, and to my knowledge, he didn't roll the stone or the thing away from the door, he stayed there for beyond three days.

We found a great number of newspaper clippings out of New York papers about...do you remember years ago there were a whole series of airline stewardesses that were murdered? He had all of those clippings there. And then he had some funny Communist books. And in those days, we were required to intercept any Communist literature coming into the country and stuff like that. But this was already in the country, you know. We called the FBI up here. We figured, you know, there's the guys with the Communists and everything, that they'd be real interested in Jesus. But they didn't show much interest at all. I don't know what happened to him.

I know that there are some funnier situations over the years in arrest situations of one thing or another, but for the life of me I can't think of them right off the bat.

OM: Let me follow up on a recent incident that some people thought was funny. I'm talking about the tug of war situations that we had here a few weeks ago. Could you tell us from your perspective as District Director how you saw that incident, and especially the coverage that was given it by the press?

WH: Well, pure and simple, it was a violation of the Customs Laws.

It was a smuggling attempt of bringing in, I've forgotten the amount of marihuana, about 500 pounds of marihuana. And the culprits got themselves bogged down in the river. And they were half-way across that river and they were definitely destined for the United States. We're required to put down smuggling. That's what the United States Customs Service is all about. So, it was discovered originally by a policeman, a city policeman, and he in turn reported it to the Border Patrol and they to us. And our partolmen were sent out there. And I got some information right away from my supervisory patrol people, and the truck was in the middle of the river and on to our side of it, a portion of it at any rate--the motor portion of it was and it had marihuana on it. They had determined that, they had gone out to it. And I said, "Fine. Seize it."

Well, that's a very simple nickel and dime thing that our people do every day of the week. They see a violation, they arrest the culprits and they seize the merchandise. The only thing that was peculiar about it is, in the seizing of this thing, it required tow trucks because the thing was stuck in the mud; whereas usually when we seize something, we drive it away. Well, I guess we got a tow truck on it and then some guys over in Mexico decided that they wanted it and they got a tow truck on it, and then the tug of war aspect came up. And we just got a bigger tow truck is all. But it would've been a dereliction of duty not to take responsible action. Now, it happened within the

city limits of El Paso and it drew a crowd. And the tug of war thing got to be, you know, sort of I guess, humorous to a lot of people. But the actions of the Mexican guys, whoever the hell was over there, that's a violation of the law. If we could catch them we could arrest them trying to rescue the vehicle. There's a law. It's a felony. We call it "rescue from Customs seizure," some sort of peculiar title for it. If we put it out here and you climb over the fence tonight and decide to steal it back, you've violated another law. That's rescue from Customs seizure.

OM: Of course, they were trying to rescue it from their side.

WH: Right.

OM: So you didn't have jurisdiction.

WH: Well, that's right. Over there. We wouldn't have jurisdiction over there. I don't know who the hell was in charge of that tow truck over there. It could've been the culprits went back and decided to get a tow truck to save their marihuana. There's a lot of money laid out on that type of a deal. The newspapers of course got hold of it and characterized the thing as a big fiasco. Well, if this had occurred as it does many, many times, in a more remote area of the border, say down in the Big Bend, why it'd be of no news value. And we'd seize the thing and that'd been all there was to it. It's no less a crime because it occurred in the city limits of El Paso than if it occurred down in the Big Bend or some other remote area. And as a matter of fact, the area where that occurred, historically, if you like the history of El Paso and the bad guys, that's Smuggler's Run. In the old days of the liquor smuggling there were more shootings and killings

in that particular area between there and where the smelter is than any other area around here. A lot of lives were lost in there. So it's a classic, historical smuggling area. And people don't have a historical perspective, unfortunately.

I don't know. But like I said in the letter that I wrote to Professor Jung, we don't mind if people get entertainment out of police activity, so long as when they're called upon for jury duty, they can see the difference between comedy and violation of the law. It was a flat out violation of the law. But we're not without, we're not humorless. I guess it was funny. But I don't like our patrol people to be thought of some kind of Keystone Cops or anything like that. They're damned dedicated people. And they go out there and endanger... they could have been shot at or struck with rocks like the Border Patrol types.

JM: I was gonna bring that up, that incident that occurred last week where the Border Patrol had their vehicles' smashed up and the windows out of three vehicles smashed out.

WH: Well, we're quite concerned about that. There's been an escalation-- the tug of war, this thing, then the so-called Black Bridge Incident, then the time of the Raza Unida people. I'm quite concerned and there are several other people concerned about there seems to be an escalation in this thing. Now then, we've had these breaking the windows and one of the newspaper guys got a rock bounced off his head. Was it Ernie Gutierrez?

JM: Yeah. You know, one of our own patrol officers pulled his neck out of that. Paul Voltaire did.

WH: Did he? You know, Ernie has kind of jived us, I haven't seen him since the incident. He's a pretty good guy. But the next time there may be shooting.

OM: Were you worried during this incident that it could break out into something serious?

WH: No, not really. The people of El Paso and Juarez are not crazy people in my estimate. There are some nutty factions running around, there're little groups of nitwits that we didn't have years ago. But in order to make sure that we showed enough presence, I had the helicopter flown down over there to take a look at, see the crowd and things like that. I wanted to give my people as much visible support as possible. Most of the time when it's quite clear that you have superior forces and what have you, people will back away from a situation. That's the beauty of having horses, the mounted police in parades and big crowd things. The psychology of superior force, even though it isn't used, it calms people, you know. Sometimes it can have, depending on where you use it, it can have entirely opposite effect. If you show too much force you can... But that situation, I didn't really feel that we were in /danger/.

But now, in view of what has occurred since that time, I am more concerned. I think that one of these incidents, whether it be with the Border Patrol or our own people, there might be some nut out of the cover of the crowd, shoot at someone. That'll be a bad news situation. But this wasn't El Paso versus Juarez. And I'm sorry the damn newspapers kind of lent the thing toward that,

you know--the Mexicans versus the Americans, Americans-1, Mexico-0. This is a bad thing, because we tend to think of this whole thing as a single community. There's an international boundary running right down through the middle of it. That's what we've got to understand. But things that try to polarize people, you know, I don't think is a good thing at all. And I think that that thing had those overtones on it, you know--"Ha-ha, we got a bigger truck than you." I think that kind of aggravated some people.

JM: We've covered almost the whole of your career in Customs, from what you did when you first came in until now. Given a little retrospect on the whole of the last 16 years, how do you feel about your contributions and efforts that you've made in behalf of the public good? How do you feel about your job?

WH: I feel very good in one way. I really believe that I've performed a valuable service to the public and I've had a great many personal satisfactions for things that I've been connected with, that Customs have put me in the position to do it, important things. And things that are valuable to the public good. But on the broader side of that question, I really am frustrated with the government and with Customs in particular. I've been critical of Customs over the years, especially its management in some cases. I believe that we could do a far greater job than we're doing. I can see it. It's there. And because of foolish programs and some really, really crazy management practices, I see so much waste of time, waste of money. And that bothers me.

So I guess I've got mixed emotions. I've got a great deal of personal satisfaction that Customs has put me in the position to have. And I've made some very, very good friends. And my education has been increased with regard to people and places and things. But I'm really frustrated with the government. I think the government has gotten so damn complex and it's so wasteful, and especially as it relates to Customs, which I'm in. If some of the other organizations are as screwed up as some of our management in Customs, then they're in a heap of trouble. We just are not going about it right. And it is not because of the lack of dedication of the people in Customs. It's big problem is in the area of its management of its program. It's a very, very fragmented organization, especially in the past several years. We do not have the functional groups connected to each other properly. This is gonna change, thank God, shortly. Our dialogue, our liason with the prosecution apparatus of the government has been very poor lately. And as you know I've been critical of the U.S. Attorney. But we stand on the threshold of having a new an entirely new 180° change in that if this man goes in, the way that the ports of entry are run. I'd like to see an educational program in Customs whereby the line operative people are more aware of their impact on the public in addition to knowing their jobs, to being good technicians. I don't think that our line people have enough public relations awareness yet.

JM: We need to maintain a certain standard in government service in dedication to duty and actual performance of duty. And to compare

the average or the real accomplishment of you and of me in this kind of work, how do you feel that we compare with the private business sector of our community in El Paso? And after you've talked about that, when young people ask you questions like this, what advice do you give to them after they ask you a question on getting into government service versus the business sector of the community?

WH: Well, number one, I think that a career in government can be very rewarding. When I was a kid they used to joke around and say, "Well, if you can't get a job, go to work for the government." The government has become a far more complex thing. The work that it does in many areas can't be done by anything else but the government. In the area of the environment and various social programs, they couldn't be undertaken by private enterprise. In the area of the law and things like this, you've got to be in government. Well, they have private eye things that protect your house and things like that, but the government is responsible for that. And I got no hesitation to recommend a career in government to young people. I think we need young people in government.

That's one of the things that frustrates me. Here is Customs caught up with we need people, and yet we can't reach out here and get these people coming out of college--bright, young people that are interested in a job in the government--because of these damn, goofy, antiquated civil service laws that require us to take retired veterans or gold star mothers or some people on a program that we've got to somehow find a job for them even though they're not qualified. And I don't run in the faces of those programs



either, but I think that they're not well thought out. They're not integrated into a first class apparatus where the government actually can utilize the skills and talents of our young people. All these young people coming out of school can't find jobs, and yet we've got jobs that we can't fill. And when we can fill them they tell us, "You've got to select somebody that's already within the government." You can't go out to the register. Or if you go out to the register you'll never get down to Joe Blow or Sally Jane just out of school or college because you've got to take all these disabled veterans or some other damn thing. So they're a lot of frustrating things in the government. There're a lot of frustrating things in private enterprise, too. And while there are some careers in the private sector that are very rewarding, I don't think that you can find jobs that are any more challenging, that will require any less of your intelligence, your education, than in the government. There are some damn fine people in the government, really very skillful people, dedicated people; people that are very, aside from performing their function, are very fair, are innovative. Really, I would have no hesitation to recommend government service to anyone.

JM: That's fine. I appreciate your time.

OM: Thank you very much.