10-11-1978

Interview no. 698

Harold D. Frakes

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Harold D. Frakes (1928 -)

INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martinez

PROJECT:

DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 11, 1978

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 698

TRANSCRIPT NO.: 698

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Border Patrol Agent.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Impressions of migrant poverty along the border; incidents in connection with apprehension of aliens, including attempt on his life; work on the Canadian border with Hungarian refugees in 1956; work as U.S. Marshall during James Meredith's entry into the University of Mississippi in 1962, including violent confrontations with white protesters.

Length of interview: 1 hour Length of transcript: 39 pages

Harold D. Frakes
by Oscar J. Martinez
October 11, 1978

M: Mr. Frakes, could we start off with some basic biographical information? When and where were you born?

F: In Hennessey, Oklahoma, September the 26th, 1928.

M: Did you grow up in Oklahoma?

F: In Oklahoma, yes. Went to college at Oklahoma State University.

M: Oh, we'd play Oklahoma State sometimes. We'd always get wiped out in football. How did you happen to join the Border Patrol?

F: Well, it's kind of a funny story really. I was working for the Boeing Airplane company at Wichita, Kansas, and there was a fellow named Roy Johnson that was working with me, and he was about 65 years old. And he decided he'd retire and they gave him a gold watch for his retirement and a handshake, and I didn't see how you could survive too long on that. So I saw this ad in the Wichita, Kansas, paper for Border Patrol agents, and so I went down and took the written exam and passed it; and took the oral and the physical and was on my way.

M: When was that?

F: I entered on duty in October 18, 1954.

M: And where did you for your training?

F: Well, initially I went to El Paso to the Border Patrol School at Fort Bliss. And then from there I was assigned to Mercedes, Texas.

M: Do you remember having any preconceptions about what you

would find in a place like El Paso--what the duty would be like or what the town would be like?

F: Not really. The only thing I had seen was in the American Rifleman that Bill Toney had written some articles about pistol shooting and competition shooting, and he showed some border patrolmen and they were wearing khaki uniforms because in that time, well, they wore khaki like the military. And I saw that and I always did like competition shooting, and I thought, well, that'd be an opportunity to do something I like and make a living at the same time. But as far as El Paso, it was kind of a mystique or a mystery to me and I thought I would really enjoy it, /getting away to Mexico, too/. Of course, Mexico, I travel in Mexico extensively. Even today. I just got back from Guadalajara and Michoacan.

M: Vacation trip?

F: Yeah. But I take 'em all the time. I have an airplane and I fly down there all the time.

M: Was El Paso and Ciudad Juarez the way you imagined the place?

F: Well, really, you know, from Marty Robbins' records and such as that, possibly. And I don't know when he wrote that record "El Paso." As far as the climate was concerned, it was a lot drier than I was used to and that was a surprise to me. And then it was a lot colder at times. But I enjoyed that because it was refreshing, as far as the

climate was concerned. And as far as the town itself of El Paso, I didn't ever work in El Paso. I got to go down to the Border Patrol office one time. The rest of my time was spent at Fort Bliss at the Border Patrol school, because we went to school five days a week, and then on Saturday they had us painting buildings, painting barracks and stuff, and we didn't get off the base. So really I didn't get off the base. And then they warned us about staying out of Ciudad Juarez because they said there'd be a good opportunity for us to get over there and get in trouble. And so those of us who heeded the warning didn't get over there very much. So I really didn't get much exposure to El Paso or Juarez.

M: I was wondering when the first time you went to Juarez was and what experiences you had. Juarez was quite wide open at that time.

F: Yeah. I was afraid to drive my car so I think we rode over on a...I think they have a streetcar or trolley or something there that you can ride.

M: They used to.

F: And then we got off and walked around. And I guess the impression I got of Juarez was that everybody was trying to sell you something. And it seemed like the morals of the area, at least, seemed to be that there was a lot of prostitutes and things that were readily available, and nobody had any reluctance to solicit right on the street.

And that's kind of what I remember about it, but that's been a long time, 24 years.

M: Was there any culture shock crossing into Ciudad Juarez?

F: Well, it was kind of a mystery. I mean, I felt very sorry for the poor people. I saw the poor people, and then of course I saw some of the places that the rich people had. /There/ didn't seem to be much of an in-between. It looked to me like /there were some/ in Mexico that had things had everything, and the ones that didn't have anything were just destitute. That's the impression that I got, that there wasn't any middle class as we have here in this country. That was the impression. I think that through the years that I've maintained this impression, except that I notice that the middle class is coming up in Mexico. And I think it's gonna be the salvation of Mexico when they get a middle class developed to where everybody has a little something.

M: Yeah, the middle class is growing in Mexico. It's still small, but they're growing. How was your training there at Fort Bliss?

F: Well, if I remember, it was about six weeks is all that we stayed. And we had physical education. I remember that there was a lot of sand burrs there. I got sand burrs in my tennis shoes and I remember that. We had to do a lot of running and the air was so dry that it

burnt my lungs from breathing the air. As far as the other training, about the two basic things that we had was Immigration Law and Spanish. That was the two basic things. And of course firearms. And we were taught to shoot machine guns then, submachine guns, Thompson and Rising, which we don't even have anymore. They've completely eliminated those.

M: But they had them in those days?

F: Oh, yes, yes. That was part of our training. The reason I remember is because in particular we had one guy from the Marines that was quite good with a submachine gun and there was a .45 automatic caliber and the cartridges. But every few rounds they'd put a tracer. And we were shooting at silhouette targets, and that caught several of the silhouettes on fire and burn up the target. That's why I remember.

M: After your training where did you go?

F: Well, I came directly to Mercedes here, just up, what is it, about 20 miles from here more or less. Well, I guess it's in the same county that we're in, Hidalgo County. And I started on duty there. And they had a...I guess I can use the term that they used then, because it's passe and we don't use that term anymore. The term that we had then was, it was 1954 and it was called the wetback drive.

M: The wetback drive. Operation Wetback?

F: Something like that. And they had a lot of people here from the Northern border, investigators, and from Florida and different places. And it was our job to apprehend as many people as possible and try to clear 'em out. And we in that year of '54, which I just got in the end of it, but the statistics show they apprehended over a million aliens.

M: I've seen the figures. It's amazing.

F: And the thing I remember about this and the reason I felt that we were doing good for the Mexicans as well as for everybody, I mean the Mexican nationals, is because at that time, every little resaca or pool of water where they had enough water where you could dip water out, well, they had a Mexican family--the mother, the wife and the children. And the children were often sick and the wife was sick because they were drinking this stagnant water. And they were living in little houses called jacales, which are made out of sticks that are interwoven and then with the palm leaves on top. And this was not a good thing. And then the Bracero Program came along and then they had to bring just the workers and leave the families at home, and they paid them better wages and they had to provide medical attention for them and they had to give 'em housing, and if they got sick they went to the hospital. And it was better, it really was better, because these people were dying like flies out there living in just

appalling conditions that they imposed upon themselves by coming over here. And I still feel that way, I still feel that we were doing them a service.

M: These were makeshift camps?

F: Yes, just everywhere.

M: Everywhere?

F: Yeah, just along the edge of the river. I remember that they were along the edge of the river and they were around, just everywere. Now I can't confirm this because I don't have this personal knowledge, but it was my understanding that during World War II that there was a laxity of enforcement to provide the manpower to harvest the crop because our people were in war, and so they let these people in in the '40s, and they didn't really make too much enforcement effort. And therefore this is why they had all this build-up of people in the border area, is because there hadn't really been a strict enforcement. I've heard old-timers, that were old-timers when I came in, talking about a Mexican passport. And I says, "What do you mean?" They says, "Well, if he's got a shovel over his shoulder or a hoe, you don't talk to him. He's employed. You leave him alone. Or if he's in a field you can't talk to him because he's in a field, and you have to only talk to him if he's walking down the road and looks like he's transient or just came in." But I, that was before my time. I have no personal experience on that. But that

sounds reasonable because we did have a big build-up and there has to be a reason for that, because we didn't have the restrictions on enforcement that we have now. I mean, there were very few aliens that ever had an attorney or anything like that. They'd just load 'em up and they'd go back. It seems like most everybody I remember is from Guanajuato or some place like that.

M: Jalisco, Michoacan.

F: Yeah. It's a...and I don't understand this, but I have yet to personally talk to an alien who's from the Yucatan area. They don't seem to come here. They're Mayan and they don't seem to have any interest in coming over here. I've been traveling down there quite a bit and I was kind of interested. I'm very much interested in the Mayan people. They're entirely different than anybody, and they're lovely people. They're small and they're very nice, I really enjoy the Mayan people. Very much.

M: Do you recall any interesting incidents during that time, the wetback drive or Operation Wetback?

F: Well, I don't know that this would be particularly interesting, but this is one little incident that happened over at San Benito, and I was working with a fellow named Harry F. Clayburgh. And I was a trainee, new on the job. And we went to this dance that they had out in the little dance hall out there in the country.

We came driving up in our jeep and we were in uniform, of course. And I said, "Are we gonna go in and check these people?" And he says, "No, just wait a minute." And so we stood around outside and pretty soon I heard somebody fall down and knock the breath out of 'em. You know, you could hear the breath, kind of "uh," like that, you know. He said, "Okay, that's what I was waiting for." And I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well," he said, "come on, I'll show you." And we went around behind the dance hall where the back door was, and there was a plowed field. And these girls had started running to get away, these prostitutes that were over here from Mexico. And when they hit that plowed field in those high heel shoes they fell down, and we just went around gathering 'em up, loading 'em on, all of 'em. (Chuckles) I don't know that that's too interesting, but...

M: Well, it is, yeah.

F: It shows that if you know your area, you know what you're doing, you can kind of, you don't have to... And that saved us going in there and chousing everybody because they all ran out the back way.

M: Where were these prostitutes from?

F: Just the border areas. They'd just come across the river just immediately adjacent to it. And we'd take them right back down to the bridge, write 'em up and

take them down to the bridge and send them back.

M: Is that pretty common, prostitutes crossing the river and coming over?

F: Oh, yes. Yes, it's very common. I mean, I don't see that it's changed that much. Today, that's what I was thinking about, because they come over now. They didn't have any papers then but now they have the local cards or tarjeta local and they come over, they're a little more sophisticated. But the same thing. It's difficult to stop this kind of thing because they have these local cards. And a prostitute's supposed to be excludable, not come in, but then in order to prove that a person's a prostitute you've got to have records from the Mexicans to show that she's a registered prostitute. And they've had decisions down through the years that if you catch [one], even if you see a man pay a woman for prostitution, they have a ruling that says that one time does not constitute a professional prostitute and it's very difficult to establish this. And so they still come in with the local cards. And some of 'em still come across in boats. Right down here at Peñitas, they still come in boats and we still pick them up.

But we had a thing called the Emancipación, which was a boat that went out of Brownsville to Tampico and I think, I don't know if they ever got down to Veracruz. But they would haul aliens down. Maybe they went all

the way to Veracruz, I can't remember. It was an old Canadian mine sweeper and they had converted it over to haul people. And of course, a farmer, well, I would be the same way, I'd get seasick, especially if the water was a little rough, 'cause I'm not a seaman. And the fact that these people got seasick caused them to stay home. That's probably one of the biggest preventive measures that we ever had was running that boat and hauling those people back down to the interior of Mexico. But they did away with that. But that, well mostly everybody that we would send would be from the interior, that's been the Service's policy ever since I can remember. If you can catch an illegal alien and send this alien as nearly to his home, as close to his home, as possible, well, then, that person will stay home. If you take a person from Guanajuato and you put him across at Reynosa, well, there's very little incentive for him not to come right back. But if you send him to Leon, Guanajuato, and he's from within 20 miles /of/ there, he'll go home. Now how long he'll stay, I don't know. But after about two times like that it gets kind of frustrating and they stay home. Well, the policy has varied in accordance with the amount of money that they've had to spend, 'cause it does cost money to send people.

M: Right now the policy is to just take 'em across the river?

F: Well, no. We have a line on a map out there that if they /are/ from the border area--which actually the border area now starts at Tampico and runs up to Monterrey and the line and over to Big Bend country for this area--they'll be granted what they call a local voluntary departure, which is across the bridge at Reynosa or Progreso or Brownsville, Rio Grande City, where ever they happen to be caught. But if they're from the interior, well, then we have what they call a bus lift. And they're put on a bus at Port Isabel or they're sent to the center now, it used to be called detention camp. It's like a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

M: Like undocumented alien.

F: Yeah. But then they get I think a Mexican bus and this bus takes them to the interior.

M: How far?

F: Well, I don't know. I guess it would be in accordance with where the people are from, but I don't know where the terminus is, I've never had anything to do with it. But I think they go as nearly...you know, try to put the people in according to where the bus is going so that they can get them as near home as possible so they'll stay home. That's what they want to do, they want them to stay home. But then...

M: They don't.

F: Well, a lot do, a lot do. I don't know if you've traveled in Mexico or not, but if you go down in there you'll see there's an awful lot of Mexicans down there and they're not all up here. It may look like they're all up here but they're not. There's a lot of people down there. And things are getting better in Mexico. In fact, I just got back from Nicaragua, and you talk about culture shock. I flew from here to Tapachula and cleared customs and left Mexico there, went to Nicaragua, and I was down there about a week. And when I came back to Tapachula, Mexico from Nicaragua I felt that the standards for the average person were much higher for Mexico and I felt so much better getting back into Mexico as I feel when I come from Mexico into the United States. So to me, I mean, that's my personal feeling, but I'd say that Mexico is coming up. They're coming up in their, well, financial. That's the only thing that can...if you've got a dollar, you can buy beans, you know. And it's still the best bargain in the world for us to travel and yet it's...well, I like Mexico, I like to travel in Mexico and like the people. I never have any trouble with the people down there. Never. I never have. With anybody. Because I treat them like I'd like to be treated, and that's all you have to do to anybody.

M: And you speak Spanish?

F: Oh, yes. My wife is, well, your partner's name was Sanchez. Her maiden name was Sanchez.

M: Where's she from?

F: She's from here, she's from McSherryland, which is over by Mission, just about five miles from here.

M: Well, how did you meet her? That's interesting.

F: Well, I'm on the credit committee at the local credit union, and she's assistant manager there. And I worked there for many years, and now I'm on the Board of Directors. And we just got married. And she's very, she's very nice to me. She and I have a little game when we go to Mexico, that often she doesn't understand what they're saying. I mean sometimes. She speaks, her parents are "mestizo." Are you familiar with that term?

M: Yes.

F: So on her passport they're resident aliens and they have been in the United States since before I was born, I believe, as legal resident aliens. They live near here and her father is from that town where they have the soda pop,Tehuantepec or whatever it is down there. And then her mother is from Veracruz. And neither one of her parents speak English, so she speaks Spanish fluently. But she has, well of course she speaks Spanish ten times better than I do, but she still gets confused a little bit on dialects. They kind of throw her. Since I don't know enough to recognize a

dialect, well, it doesn't bother me a bit. (Laughter)

I talk to the Indians and the Mayans. I just got through talking to some Indians in Michoacan and they're different. Now that's another group of people entirely. I'm a photographer by hobby and I do a lot of photography for the Border Patrol. And I had my cameras with me as I always do, and this woman had a purse that she had woven on the loom,you could see it back in the background. We'd stopped there. And I asked her if she'd sell it. Yes, it was 50 pesos, and I had no use for it at all. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what, I'll give you 50 pesos for the purse if you'll let me take your picture." And she said, "The purse is 50 pesos and you cannot take my picture." And that was it. And the Indians are that way. I think it's a supersti-tion or something. They do not want their picture made. And I honor them, I don't ever take their picture unless they give me permission. I bought a blanket and a sweater from an Indian family in Chapala, Jalisco. I spent about 650 pesos, and I said, "Now that I've bought these things I'd like for you to hold them and I'll take your picture." And he said, "You can take our picture for 50 pesos." And I says, "Well, no, thanks, I don't think it's worth that much for me to have your picture." But well, they're business people, I guess. But I couldn't go around

giving two dollars every time I want to take a picture of a Mexican. I'd go broke pretty fast.

M: When you first came down here, how long did you stay down here?

F: Well, I didn't stay very long. I stayed possibly a year. Maybe a little over a year. Then I had an opportunity to go to Detroit, Michigan in the Border Patrol. So I transferred to Detroit and worked in Detroit.

M: What did you do up there? It's the Canadian border.

F: Yes. Well, you still have the Mexicans up there and a lot of illegals. And since I had just come from the Mexican border, why, I was able to more or less detect the illegal ones by, well, just by being acquainted with them. I worked in that area and then we worked the Canadians who, they come over and work without permits, or you know, without immigrating. And then surprisingly there was quite a few blacks that came from Canada.

M: Blacks from Canada?

F: Yes. And they're really hard to dig out because they get in with the black element in Detroit. And they won't even answer the door when you knock on the door, you know. They're probably the hardest ones of all, at least for me. And then there was another aspect that they had that I enjoyed. They had a speed boat that they checked smuggling across the Detroit River.

I got to work on that a little bit. I enjoyed that.

M: Any interesting incidents?

F: No. Really as far as shoot-outs or...

M: Or just situations like the ones that you have described that illustrate some human interest element in them.

F: Very little happened in Detroit because that's a very inhuman town.

M: It sure is.

F: But I transferred from there to Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, which is up at the top of Michigan, at the very top in the upper peninsula, and that was more interesting. It required a lot more driving because we had the whole upper peninsula, which is 320 miles long. And we had worked that area. And I met a lot of interesting people, but we had very little...well, I worked snowshoes up there. I went on Sugar Island and I walked with snowshoes. First time I ever had to do that in my life, that was kind of different.

M: You were looking for aliens in the snow?

F: Yeah. You see, Sugar Island was across the river from Sault Ste. Marie, but it belongs to the United States. The river forks there I guess and goes around both sides of it. So they had summer homes there. Well, then these people, we got word that they were

coming across and breaking into the summer homes and robbing. Well, not robbing, but what would you call it? They were just pilfering and doing damage, and so we went to investigate. I never did find any evidence that that was going on. We caught...well, see, about that time they had the Hungarian program, I did get involved in that, too. While I was still at Detroit, before I went to Sault Ste. Marie, I went to New Jersey--New Brunswick, New Jersey--when they brought all the Hungarians in after the big...

M: 1956.

F: Yeah.

M: For processing?

F: Oh, yeah. That was quite a thing. I learned a little Hungarian. /I can say, "Show me your identification" in Hungarian/, which is a little different in Spanish. And I had to work on the gates, and as cars were coming they wouldn't pay any attention, and I had to learn "be careful" /in Hungarian/. I had a lot of human interest things there as far as the people. I voluntarily went into an area where they had tuberculosis and worked with them. And the Catholic Church and different ones were trying to help. And with so many people, sometimes things would get mixed up as far as who was gonna go where and what. Well, there was two wives and two young men, and the young men had

tuberculosis and they needed to go to a center for treatment, which they sent them. And then the wives were still at the camp and these guys were several hundred miles upstate somewhere. Well, they ran away from their tuberculosis deal and came back to the camp. I think it's Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, where we were. And then the time that everybody got through yelling at each other, well, then everybody got mad and so they signed an agreement to return to Austria. And I asked the doctor and I asked several /people/, "What does this mean?" They said, "Well, it's just the same as them signing their death warrant, because they'll die over there. 'Cause they need treatment." And I says, "Well, is it all right if I talk to these people and try to explain this to them and then get them to stay in the United States?" They said, "Well, yeah, but we've tried and we can't do a thing with them."

So I found an army personnel, I don't know what rank he was, corporal or something. He spoke Hungarian. And I said, "Would you come over and interpret for me," 'cause I couldn't speak Hungarian. And so I explained the options to them and how it was a mixup that they had been separated and not gotten back together when they were promised to be, and that the Catholic Church didn't intentionally do anything wrong, it was just a

matter of so many people and they weren't used to handling this volume. And I finally convinced them to remain in the United States. Well, I was really elated over that, but I ended up getting reprimanded for sticking my nose into some business that was already settled. But I told the guy that jumped on me, he was my supervisor, I says, "Well, whenever I have to take my choice between saving two people's lives or being reprimanded by you, I'm gonna take the lives every time. And you can just reprimand me all you want, and I don't care."

M: What'd he say?

F: Well, he got mad and walked off. See, some of those people they felt might be Communists that were infiltrating, and we had to take interviews from them through interpreters. And I don't know how it happened, but I got the word later when I got back to Michigan that they had put out the word that I was a Communist sympathizer as a result of /my actions/.

M: That you were?

F: Yeah, because I had talked these two people into staying, you know. And things get twisted around. But I thought, "Well, I still feel like I did the right thing, 'cause there's two people still alive because of what I did." But I don't know, I still don't feel too good about it because the people that knew better, which was the chief (his name was Armand Hassef), who was the one I

cleared everything with, and he called me after it was all over and he says, "Well, you did the right thing and you had cleared it with me." And I said, "Well, why don't you tell the rest of these people?" And he said, "Well, let's just let it drop. It's all /over/." You know, and that left me hanging. It didn't really affect me in my career or anything, but a lot of people felt that I was somewhat less than a patriot, which I wasn't. It's just things that happen like that, but you just have to make your choice--what you're gonna do. That was when I was still at Detroit. They flew us in a C-46, I think it was. The Border Patrol flew us up there to Maguire.

M: That was just temporary duty?

F: Yeah, about a month or so. And then we landed at Maguire Air Base there and then we went on out by bus, I guess it was. Then Sault Ste. Marie, I made some acquaintances there, but there really wasn't that much work to do there. It's just more of a just being there. You know, it's kind of like carrying a gun. They say, "Well, have you ever had a shoot-out?" Say, "Well, no, I haven't had a shoot-out, but how many times would I have been shot if I hadn't had the gun?" You know, 'cause it's a preventive measure, and that's what more or less Sault Ste. Marie is. If they didn't have the Border

Patrol there, well, they'd have half of Canada over there working and knocking everybody out of their job, I would imagine. So it's a preventive measure. And I would rather prevent people than to arrest them after they've done something wrong. That's my feeling, I've always felt that way. I'd rather have the Mexicans stay in Mexico than to have 'em come over here and pick them up and put them back. I'd much rather have them stay. On paper, it doesn't look as good, because you're not making the number of apprehensions and everything. But still, all in all, it's better for them and better for us if they don't come over here in the first place, as far as our country is concerned. See, that's why we don't have that much trouble with Canada, because their standard of living is very similar to ours. In fact, it's difficult to see the difference, really.

M: It must've been hard to detect Canadians who were illegal aliens.

F: Well, I set up a system over the time there and I talked to a lot of Canadians, and I wrote a little pamphlet and sent it in as a suggestion, which was /summarily/ rejected. But the Canadians speak different than we do. The city dump, we call the city dump, they call it nuisance grounds. And we'll say garage, and they'll

say garaage. And we'll say aluminum and they'll say aluminium. And you can draw these people out and get those differences and pick a Canadian out every time. But they rejected it because they felt... I don't know. There's always somebody that's got a reason why to reject something. But I had a...

M: You had a list of words.

F: Yeah. Quite a few. There's a tremendous difference in the speaking. Of course, in the border areas sometimes there's a carry over. I know that everyplace I've been I have picked up a little bit of dialect, or accent or little dialect from those people, and I start talking like them. Everyplace.

M: Was there anything else aside from differences in speech?

F: The Canadians?

M: Dress, behavior?

F: They dress a little different. Canadian clothing was a little different. A lot of it was imported, 'cause they do a lot more business with...

M: More European.

F: Yes. They do more business with Europe than we do. See, they belong to the Commonwealth, so they have British and Scotch, and you know, different things--wool form Scotland and things like that. Oh, basically they wouldn't know anything about our government, so if you'd ask them about our government, who's the

congressman, who's the vice president, even who's the president, or how is the government run, the Congress and the Senate and the Representatives and things like that. You could just, all kinds of questions you could ask them. Kind of reminds me of a story that I've heard about the Germans in World War II that tried to infiltrate our lines. You've probably seen that where they would... Germans speak excellent English, but they wouldn't know about who won the World Series and stuff, you know, kind of stuff like that. But you can draw them out, and then once that you get a wedge, then you could go ahead and open it up pretty well. Once you find a chink in their armor where they didn't /know/, "Aha, you don't know," this or that, and then you can go ahead.

I remember one time that the police turned over a confidence man to me who was running a game where he was cheating people out of money. And he was an older man, but he was a very smooth confidence man. I had him there writing him up at Sault Ste. Marie. We had brought him back from, oh, two or three hundred miles out and brought him back in. And I asked, you know, the questions that you ask, "What is your name, what is your wife's name?" And he said, "Well, I don't have a wife." He said, "I lost her," and he started crying. Well, the police had told me

that he was really a confidence man, so I called my partner in from the other room and I said, "You want to see a real confidence man in action?" I said, "Watch this guy." And he was bawling. And I said, "Now, do you want to tell me the truth about your wife?" I says, "You're not impressing me a bit." And he says, "Well, yeah, she ran off with another guy." She didn't die or anything, she just took off with somebody else. And he quit crying immediately. You run into those kind.

M: Where did you go next after being up there?

F: Well, from Sault Ste. Marie I went to Opheim, Montana as an Immigrant Inspector. And that's in Saskatchewan, across form Saskatchewan. Mostly there I just tried to stay alive. The port of entry was in a house trailer or mobile home, small one. And it was very light traffic, especially in the wintertime. And, well, the port was ten miles from town and the snow had been so bad that I burnt 20 gallons of gas going out to work and back, just getting stick and sliding around. It was really, really bad weather up there, twenty below for a week at a time, twenty below zero. And you had to have special heaters on your car and you had to wear clothing that you wouldn't believe, just to stay alive. And as far as immigration work, I guess about the main thing I did there was that two Chinese were coming, a man and a woman. They had a Chinese child with them,

they said it was their child, and I suspected that it wasn't. And then I broke then to the fact that they were smuggling the child in to a family here in the United States. And the child was indeed a Chinese and not their child, and they were smuggling the child into a family here. Well, when you get into Chinese you're in a whole new world, because they don't even use the same calender that we use. We had to get a special calendar to work Chinese cases. The Year of the Dog and the Year of the Sun and the Year of the Dragon, and they don't even use our calendar. Did you know that?

M: Yes. That's as much as I know.

F: So, it takes specialists to work Chinese. Really, you have to almost be Chinese to work Chinese, because it's really involved. And the names are practically impossible to figure out, 'cause there's like two letter last names and stuff like that, and it's very, very difficult to work Chinese cases. I made a lot of friends there on both sides of the border, but it was very slow and I didn't like being /there/. I guess as soon as I /could/ get out was about two years, that's kind of a hardship deal.

Then I went back to Algonac, Michigan, which is just about 50 miles upriver from Detroit, as an Immigrant Inspector, and ran a port of entry on a...it was a ferryboat that came in from Walpole Island, which is

in Canada. That island is full of Indians. And they're another group entirely. Well, let's see, at Sault Ste. Marie we had Ojibways, I think, 'cause the main hotel in town was Ojibway Hotel. I don't remember what these Indians were, but in this particular island, well, the Ford Motor Company and all these big companies hunted ducks, and they had hunting lodges and everything. And I got acquainted with all the Fords and everybody 'cause they had all come back from their hunting and they'd have to clear immigration and customs. And that was an interesting place. Then I went from there back to Detroit, only this time as an Immigrant Inspector. And I worked on the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit-Windsor tunnel as an Immigrant Inspector. And then I had an opportunity after a short while there to return to McAllen, here, as a Senior Patrol Agent. Which I did.

M: When was that?

F: Oh, I believe it was '62, 1962. And then I hadn't been here very long until I got involved with putting James Meredith in the University of Mississippi.

M: Oh, really?

F: Yeah. They flew us out of here and flew us to a Navy base, Millington Naval Air Station, I believe it was. And then they were gonna helicopter us in to the the campus but then they decided they could fly us to the airport 'cause they had control of the airport.

So they flew us there and then they put us on the campus. They gave us steel helmets and arm bands that said Marshall. Anyhow they had us designated U.S. Marshall, we were all sworn in as U.S. Marshalls and Deputy U.S. Marshall. And then we had gas masks and everything, night sticks. This was at Oxford, Mississippi. They wanted to enroll this man Meredith. This is when John F. Kennedy was President and Bobby Kennedy was Attorney General, and Katzenback was an assistant to the Attorney General. I worked with Mr. Katzenback, who later became the Attorney General, if I remember correctly. But I didn't ever see any of the Kennedys or anything.

But this first night that we were there...see, we surrounded the Registrar's, big building, columns on it and everything, that afternoon. And then as it got dark, well, then the students started to converge upon this thing. And there was a big circular drive out in front and they started setting cars on fire and turning them over. And when they started attacking us, well, the Mississippi Highway Patrol got between them and us, and they wouldn't let them. But then after a while, well, they couldn't do anything, they had to get out of the way to protect themselves. So that left us. And, oh, there was a man shot in the throat, a marshall shot in the throat, a regular marshall, not one of our people. They clipped his

artery in his throat with a shotgun blast, and he almost bled to death before they could get him out to the hospital.

M: Did you see that?

F: Well, I was there, I saw the blood. Yeah, I was there. I didn't minister to him, but I was there, I saw him laying there. And then, oh, they were throwing bricks at us. I saw one old man standing right in front of me get hit right in the chest with a brick and just moan and fall to the ground. And I was afraid it had killed him, but it apparently hadn't. He was a marshall. That would be very painful, I would imagine, to get hit with a brick, 'cause they come lobbing in over. And then as the night went on, well, we started throwing tear gas at them. Well, the wind was blowing from them to us, so we got all the tear gas back on us.

And then they had two .22 rifles that I know of, and a high powered Army rifle. They started shooting with these .22 rifles. And I got a hold of a walkie talkie and got a hold of our command post. And I asked for permission to return fire, because they were really letting us have it. And so the best I can tell, they cleared this clear through the White House, my request. And it came back with a "Do not return fire," could not return fire no matter what. And I saw one of the Border Patrolmen get shot

down on the steps of this Registrar's office or this Lyceum or whatever they call it. And the bullet, .22 bullet,went through his thigh and he went down. Which is a superficial wound, it didn't hurt him that much. But these big columns were fluted and probably two foot in diameter, and they were probably 30 feet tall. And there's a guy laying back there with an Army rifle and he'd shoot in there and hit those columns, and the chuncks of rock would fall down on top of us. That scared me. I was scared all right.

M: That was combat.

F: Yeah. And I found out later, I was told that we used $50,000 worth of tear gas to try to repel it. And we didn't really get any relief until the next morning when the Army came. I think the man's name was General Billingsley was in charge of it. And they formed up the MPs with 101st Airborne, I guess. There's quite a few different ones there. But they formed up lines with bayonets fixed on rifles and they just made a sweep through this area. And anybody that didn't move, they'd just a jab 'em with the bayonets and they cleared out the area. But during the night, well, they went over to the chemical place, and they got acid and they threw it on some of the officers, the students did. And they'd come driving around with Confederate flags screaming

and waving. And then they got a fire truck somewhere or another, and they came running down through there with that and they got the hoses out and they started to try to knock the marshalls down with the fire hose, you know, pressure.

But the thing that bothered me about the whole thing was that Meredith was over in a dormitory asleep with some of our officers; and the registrar, I understand, had agreed to go ahead and register him. But that didn't satisfy what they wanted. What they wanted was for him to march in in front of everybody to the Registrar's Office and be registered as a matter of, I guess, showing them it could be done. So really the purpose wasn't to register the man, it was to show them that he could be registered, I guess. And so we had to hold this at all costs so that they couldn't take over this Registrar's Office, because they were gonna bring him in there and register him no matter what.

And so the next day, well, I conferred with Katzenback and he wanted to know if I thought it would be better if the men took off their helmets and arm bands and night sticks. I said, "Well, I think it would because right now this is just taunting the people that were suppressed. I think we're not really in any danger of being hurt. I think we ought to get this equipment off and just still be here, but not be here in an aggressive way. But just

to be here in case if we're needed." Which he did do that. I don't know that he took my advice particularly, but that is what he did.

And then after we'd been there all night, well... this is another thing that really bothered me. We were having this thing 'cause Meredith was black they were gonna enroll him in the University of Mississippi. Well, then the Army decided to send some food in, so they sent in sauerkraut and wienies. Well, the cook that they sent in was a black--with the food, you know. To me that was bad, that was bad. Because the people were already really uptight, you know, out there. And they had to go through these lines to get to us with this food. This is just like adding kindling wood to the fire. And then they sent an Army truck in with a black driver. And that poor guy, they punctured his tires. He's supposed to be in, you know, save the government equipment. And he was out there, and he said, "Don't do that." And it was one of these trucks that had the canvas on, they set that on fire. And then the worst thing they did to the poor guy was, and he was out in front of our lines, see, with this truck, so we couldn't get to him, he was out in no man's land. And then they took a carbon dioxide fire extinguisher and discharged it right in his face. And that was really bad, I thought. You know, that could freeze his lungs or his eyes or almost anything, or it could damage him a lot.

And we finally got him back away from it, but why the Army sent those black people in there, you know, at that particular time, it seemed like it was not too good planning.

We went out to a national forest, they'd set up a military headquarters there. We slept there and ate there. I just remembered back, when we had so much tear gas around I had a gas mask on all night long. I was starving to death. So they brought this sauerkraut and wienies, and I'd take ahold of this hose on the front of my gas mask and pull it out and stick a wienie in my mouth, take a bite, and slam it back down on there. And I was bawling like a baby because every time I'd pull that out I'd get gassed. And I found out where all the gas was coming from the next day. It was my suit. I had a suit on that it just soaked up that tear gas. And I couldn't wear that thing, I think I ended up throwing it away. It was really terrible. That's where all the gas /was coming from/. It just kept coming back on it, it just saturated my clothing with tear gas. Then they got their enrollment and we went home.

M: That's quite a story. How long were you there?

F: Not too long, just a few days. It wasn't anything like that month detail to the Hungarians or anything like that.

M: Were you anxious to get out of there?

F: Well, yes, because the people didn't like us and they didn't want to sell us gasoline, they didn't want us to come in

their stores, you know. Actually, I went down there with the idea that possibly I felt sympathy for the people having this imposed on them, something against their will. And then after I saw the way that they acted, well, I left there with a different attitude. I left there with the attitude that the people were not really very nice at all and they didn't do things in an orderly fashion, in a legal fashion, and that I really personally didn't see what difference it made if Mr. Meredith was in the Universiry of Mississippi or not. He was just trying to get an education. So it really changed my mind, 'cause I'd never lived in the South like Mississippi or anything. And they said some, oh little chants like, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate." And then some of the women, the girls, said things that I wouldn't even want to repeat, just screamed them at the top of their voice. Just terrible things that you wouldn't think that beautiful southern belles would say. But it was, it was just terrible things.

M: Can you remember an example?

F: Oh, yes. You want me to say it?

M: Yeah, of course.

F: Well, they'd come up to a marshall and they'd say, "Your mother was f-----d with a two-dick nigger." And that was just one thing. That's not too nice for a young lady.

M: Southern girl?

F: Yeah. Just screaming at the top of her voice. (Laughter) And the other thing that was not so bad, it was just something I just remembered, "We like Ross, he's a hoss." And that's Ross Barnett was the governor, and he was opposed to this thing, so they liked him. But I felt that the Mississippi Highway Patrol had abandoned us, but I found out later, at least I heard later, that they set up a perimeter around the city and checking vehicles coming in, and they found one vehicle full of Army rifles. And if they hadn't have stopped that, we'd have been wiped out. So I take back what I thought about them, 'cause they were caught in the middle themselves, you know. They were caught in between a rock and a hard place, but they were out there. And I understand they did shut down a lot of munitions coming in, which would've been terrible. There'd have just been a massacre, 'cause we weren't even allowed to shoot back. And that's a fact.

M: Did that experience affect your views or your feelings in an way about coming back to your regular duty?

F: No, not really. No, because it was totally different, it had nothing to do with my regular work. It was an area which I really didn't feel that I had any business being in anyhow. I'm not a U.S. Marshall, I never did sign up for that. And we were pressed into service. And I don't believe...well, we have been since then on a few occasions, but not me, I have never been. But it didn't really affect me as far as this work is concerned,

'cause it was too disassociated from it.

M: You came back here to McAllen after that?

F: Yes. And then I stayed here and I was subsequently, not as a result of that or anything, but several years later I was promoted from Senior Patrol Agent to Agent in Charge, which is the job I have now.

M: What I wanted to ask you is if you have any outstanding incidents, recollections of things that have happened to you in this area, in the Valley--tragic stories or humorous stories, interesting stories?

F: Well, I have a personal story that I feel is rather tragic, that a man tried to kill me. I was with Javier Rios, who was trying to question this man, and the man wouldn't respond to him, And he was standing on the other side of an irrigation ditch, and I thought, "Well, we can't have that. We've got to talk to him." And so he refused to come over. So I says, "Well, I've got old boots on anyhow, I'll just go on across and get 'em wet." And I got stuck in the mud. He took a hoe and hit me in the head and chopped me from one temple to the other and dropped my forehead down over my eyes. And then he was drawing back to kill me, and Javier Rios pulled his gun on him and told him if he didn't drop the hoe he'd kill him. And so the guy dropped the hoe, and I went over, pushed my forehead up, and I went over and put handcuffs on him, and put him in the car.

M: You didn't pass out?

F: No. And I teach first aid. So then I took a towel and put it around my head and twisted it and held it in the back to stop the blood. And then I had Javier take me to the hospital. I never did pass out. And I never did hit the guy or anything. I never even thought about pulling my gun on him. I was so surprised, I guess.

M: You were bleeding all that time?

F: Oh, yes, covered with blood. And the thing that kind of bothered me is that he wrote to his Congressman and said that I pulled my gun on him. And I wear my gun like this with the strap on. And then we got home, I took the gun off, well, the holster was full of blood and all over the strap, and I never had pulled my gun, never had even unstrapped the gun. Yeah, there was a gun pulled on him all right, by Javier, after the guy hit me. This is an area which I stress to my men, and I really feel this--I'm not saying it just because we're on tape or anything. But that we are Border Patrolmen, we're not Mexican American, we're not Anglos or black or whatever, we're Border Patrolmen, and each time that we go out, the man that you're with is your partner, just a Border Patrol partner. And I don't care who it is. And your life depends upon him and his depends on you. And you've got to be close, very close. And Javier Rios would, by his name, you'd say he was Mexican American or a Latin American, but Javier Rios was my partner and he saved my life. And I'm very appreciative of that.

M: When did this happen?

F: Oh, it's been several years ago. I don't know, '68 or something like that.

M: Here in this area?

F: Yes. And the guy got off without being prosecuted because of intervention by a Congressman, 'cause his father wrote and told him a bunch of lies and so, that I had done all these atrocities, which I hadn't done. And I had a little trouble not being bitter about that, but I'm not bitter about it because the Congressman didn't know and he was just trying to help his constituents, and he's done a lot of help for the Border Patrol. He got this building built for us and things. I don't feel hard to anybody about it. I feel sorry for the guy, because he things that we're gonna try to get back at him and we don't even know his name now. He's scared to death all the time. I feel that he's really suffering more than I have, really, 'cause he thinks in terms of venganza or revenge, which I don't. I don't think in those terms.

M: Anything else?

F: Oh, not really.

M: Any humorous incidents?

F: No, not that I can think of just offhand. Sometimes things that we might think humorous wouldn't be so humourous if they... No, I really can't think of any specific incidents of anything. We have a lot of funny

things about the way we speak Spanish. Like, oh I don't know, just different ways. And you have to watch that you don't start talking Spanish that way. (Chuckles)

M: Can you give me an example?

F: Oh, I was trying to think of one. "Es arriba a usted." "It's up to you." (Chuckles) See, that's not Spanish.

M: [They are] "pochismos."