

4-12-1994

Interview no. 835

Joaquín Bustamante

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Recommended Citation

Interview with Joaquín Bustamante by Michelle L. Gomilla, 1994, "Interview no. 835," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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Institute of Oral History
The University of Texas at El Paso
Chamizal Oral History Project

Name of Person Interviewed:	Joaquín Bustamante
Name of Interviewer:	Michelle L. Gomilla
Date of Interview:	April 12, 1994
Length of Interview:	1 Hour
Length of Transcript:	34 Pages

Biographical Synopsis

Former Commissioner, International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), Mexican Section; born in 1922 in Nogales, Arizona; son of Joaquín Bustamante, Sr., Mexican Section's Principal Engineer for 42 years before retirement in 1964; attended Rusk Grammar School; graduated from Austin High School, 1939; attended Texas College of Mines and Metallurgy, 1939-1941; graduated as Civil Engineer from Stanford University, 1943; worked for National Irrigation Commission in Mexico City, 1943-1944; joined IBWC, Mexican Section, in June, 1944; placed in charge of National Border Program (Programa Nacional Fronterizo, PRONAF), 1961-1966; participated in study and preparation of graphs and charts for solution of Chamizal issue; appointed Principal Engineer, IBWC, Mexican Section, 1977; appointed by President José López Portillo as Mexican Commissioner, 1979; retired from IBWC, April 30, 1985.

Summary of Interview

Recollects professional career of father; schools attended in El Paso, Texas; employment with the National Irrigation Commission in Mexico City; early impressions of Chamizal issue; field trips made with father along U.S.-Mexico boundary; sketches origins of the National Border Program (Programa Nacional Fronterizo, PRONAF); recollects time spent working as head of PRONAF in Cd. Juárez under Antonio J. Bermúdez, Director General of PRONAF; provides historical sketch of Chamizal issue; sentiments of Mexicans when Chamizal Treaty was announced; recounts participation in studies and

preparations of graphs and charts in booklet published by Ministry of Foreign Relations in Mexico City, *El Chamizal: Solución Completa, Album Gráfico*; discusses differences between governments of Mexico and United States; recounts memories of Mexican IBWC Commissioner, David Herrera Jordan; reflects on close relationship between IBWC Commissioners on both sides of U.S.-Mexico border; discusses transfer of Chamizal land from the United States to Mexican government; structures passed intact to Mexico, including Navarro Elementary school, Border Patrol facilities, IDC Trucking Company; razing of commercial buildings, including Peyton Packing Plant, Mining and Smelter Supply Company; mentions activities after 1985 retirement from IBWC; uses of Chamizal Park in Ciudad Juárez not in accordance with Chamizal Treaty; forced retirement from IBWC; honorary bestowal of title of ambassador; employment as General Manager of materials testing company; time spent as engineer in construction company of Lorenzo Aguilar; membership in Juarenses, Ciudad Juárez group dedicated to obtaining historical information of Ciudad Juárez; discusses researching and writing history of the IBWC, Mexican Section; 1989 celebration of 100th anniversary of the Mexican Section of the Boundary Commission.

Chamizal Oral History Project

Joaquín Bustamante
By Michelle L. Gomilla

April 12, 1994

This is an interview with Joaquín Bustamante, former Mexican Commissioner of the United States-Mexico International Boundary and Water Commission. The interview, by Michelle Gomilla, is part of the Chamizal Oral History Project. We are located at Mr. Bustamante's home, number 109 Calle del Pino, Fraccionamiento Campestre, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Today's date is the 12th of April, 1994.

- G: Before I ask you to share your recollections and memories of the Chamizal issue and settlement itself, Mr. Bustamante, I'd like to ask you to share a bit of biographical information with us. If you could please tell me when and where you were born, please.
- B: I would like to start my biographical sketch with my father. My father was a civil engineer. He had a degree in Surveying and Hydrography from the National University of Mexico. And while still a student in 1906, he came to work for the Boundary Commission. And he worked for two years-

from 1906 to 1908. He went back to Mexico City, finished his academic studies, [and] got his degree in 1909, I believe. So he worked for two years with the Boundary Commission at that time.

And then, he went to his native state of Sonora and worked for several years in surveying mining claims. Then he went into politics. And he was a state legislator in 1919. He was one of the signers of the Plan de Agua Prieta, [the proclamation] which overthrew President [Venustiano] Carranza in 1919. Then he was interim governor of Sonora in 1920.

And then he went to work for the Agriculture Department. [He was] in charge [of] agricultural studies along the west coast of Mexico. And he came back to the Boundary Commission in 1924. I was born in 1922. So ever since then, I've been associated (chuckles) with the Boundary Commission. He worked with the Boundary Commission from 1924 until his retirement in 1964, a total of forty-two years. Of those forty-two years, I was with the Commission from [19]44 to [19]64, [a total of] twenty years. And I was in for a total of forty-one years. So altogether, we put in eighty-something years with the Boundary Commission between my father and myself- sixty-five years continuously, either he or I. So that's my pre-history before I was born. (chuckles)

I was born in 1922 in Nogales, Arizona. My mother's

sister had a little, private hospital in Nogales. And my parents were living in Hermosillo [Sonora] at the time. But for that reason, I was born in Nogales. I never lived there. I was born there and they took me back to Hermosillo. So even though, by birth, I had United States nationality, I never claimed it or made use of it. I was always a Mexican.

I followed in my father's footsteps. In 1924, when he came to the Boundary Commission again, I entered Rusk Grammar School. That must have been about [19]26 or [19]27 to [19]35. In [19]35, I entered Austin High School, which was very recently built. It was finished in [19]32, I think. It was brand-new. I graduated from Austin in [19]39. I entered the [Texas] College of Mines [and Metallurgy] in September of [19]39 and stayed through September of [19]41. Then I transferred to Stanford University and graduated in 1943 in Civil Engineering.

Then I went to work for the National Irrigation Commission in Mexico City for a few months in late [19]43 and early [19]44. And after the 1944 Water Treaty between Mexico and the United States was signed, the Commission increased its labor force. So I came back to work for the Boundary Commission in June of 1944. And I stayed there until the 30th of April, 1985.

G: When did you first become aware of the Chamizal issue, Mr. Bustamante?

B: Well, I must have been about three years old, I think.
(chuckles) I don't remember when I first became aware of it.
Must have been- what- my very, very, early childhood. My
father always talked about it. And as a child, I guess,
since I was about eight or ten years old, I always
accompanied my father on the field trips, either in the
local area or sometimes when he'd go out of town on field
trips, I'd go with him. And as soon as I was able to carry
a chain or (chuckles) a transit, I would help him. So, in a
way, I started working for the Boundary Commission
(chuckles) when I was eight or ten years old.

G: You were a junior engineer?

B: I was a junior engineer. So a lot of the things that I have
in my memory are from things that he told me, apart from
things that I've read. I've always had a rather intense
intellectual curiosity, (gestures toward book shelves) as
you can see by the books I have (chuckles) accumulated over
time. So I read everything I can get my hands on. And much
of what I know, I've read. Some, I've heard. And I've been
acquainted with the personnel of the Boundary Commission,
both the United States and the Mexican Sections, practically
all my life. I've known all of the Commissioners for both
sides in the last fifty years. I've known them personally-
the Principle Engineers and the Secretaries- apart from my
direct contact with the lower level engineers when I was
starting out. So that's, more or less, my background.

And then in [19]61, I think it was, Mr. Antonio [J.] Bermúdez, who was Director General of the National Border Program, asked me to be in charge of the work here for the Border Program here in Juárez. Although I was working for the Boundary Commission at that time, I was authorized to moonlight on it. So for five years I was in charge of all the PRONAF [Programa Nacional Fronterizo] work in Juárez. We built the PRONAF commercial center. We built the new bridge over the river, the one that has the curve in it, you know? We enlarged the Zaragoza Bridge, which was very narrow. We enlarged it so that two trucks could cross on it. And we built several streets in Juárez.

G: Could you tell us a little bit about that program that was initiated here along the border [and] the reasoning behind it or...

B: Well, Mr. Bermúdez...(Mrs. Bustamante enters room, taping stopped and started again) Well, Mr. Bermúdez- I don't know if you are familiar with who Mr. Bermúdez was- but he was a local businessman from Juárez and then he became mayor of Juárez about [19]41 to [19]44, sometime in there. And he was always interested in the development of the city. After being mayor, he was treasurer for the State- State Treasurer- and then he became Federal Senator from Chihuahua, in which post he only lasted a couple of months because then he was appointed...(Mrs. Bustamante enters room, taping stopped and started again) He was appointed

Director General of Petr6leos Mexicanos, in which he lasted twelve years. When he left Petr6leos Mexicanos, he started promoting the idea of the industrialization of Ju6rez. And he started promoting a program by the federal government to promote the development, not just of Ju6rez, but for the entire border region, including the southern border with Guatemala. And President [Adolfo] L6pez Mateos appointed him, then, Director General of the National Border Program.

The National Border Program was intended to promote the development of all the border cities, including the ones along the southern border, in their social, economic, and cultural aspects. The Border Program did work in Ensenada- which isn't right on the border, but it is very close to it- Ensenada, Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Ju6rez, Ciudad Acuña, Piedras Negras- not Laredo, Laredo is an exception- Reynosa and Matamoros. And in the southern border, I'm not familiar with the work in the southern border, but I know they built hotels and airports to get tourists into that region. So I was with him for five years. And after five years, I was tired of double-dipping. (chuckles) (Mrs. Bustamante enters room, taping stopped and started again)

The federal administration in Mexico City changed. And President [Gustavo] D6az Ordaz took over. And he didn't sympathize very well with the Border Program, so he started cutting down on the financing of it. And that caused Mr. Berm6dez to resign. And the new Director came in. And I,

as I said, I was tired by then of working. (chuckles) I was very enthusiastic, but I was physically tired. So I told the new Director that I considered my obligation to Mr. Bermúdez had been satisfied.

G: And who was the new Director?

B: Mr. José [S.] Vivanco. José Vivanco had been mayor of Monterrey. And he was influential in the state of politics in the state of Nuevo León. So I resigned then. I didn't have any more to do with it. The Border Program sort of just fizzled out in the next couple of years. They didn't fund it anymore and it finally ended.

G: And at this point, you were still working with the Boundary Commission?

B: Yes. I never interrupted my work with the Boundary Commission. I moonlighted sometimes, but I....(chuckles)

G: Do you remember the meeting of President [John F.] Kennedy and [President Adolfo] López Mateos in Mexico City when they...

B: Yes.

G: ...decided to settle the [Chamizal] issue?

B: Yes.

G: What was your reaction?

B: Well, my reaction was happiness. It was a problem with...(phone rings, taping stopped and started again) It was something that my father had talked about almost constantly and we knew it was something that, sooner or

later, had to be resolved. It was a thorn in the side of both countries. It was a thorn in the side of both countries. Land titles in El Paso were uncertain because even though the territory was under the jurisdiction of the United States, it was under the jurisdiction *de facto* but not *de jure* because the United States recognized that it was still under discussion. So many of the land titles were- I wouldn't say precisely invalid- but they were...

G: Cloudy?

B: Cloudy. Ambiguous. Naturally, the descendants of the original landowners in Juárez were very unhappy because their property had been lost. And there was another problem that entered in. The river rectification, which was carried out in the late [19]30s and early [19]40s, extended from Cordova Island clear down to Fort Quitman. But it could not extend upward because the boundary was uncertain. So that was another thing that had to be resolved.

G: Why do you think the United States government waited so long to decide to settle the issue? Because from my understanding, the Mexican government had been willing to settle the issue a long time ago and the United States government just kept on putting it on the back burner.

B: Well, I think, for the United States government, even though it was a little thorn in the side of their relations, they really didn't give it much importance because compared to other government problems it was minor, very minor. For

Mexico it was, more than anything else, a matter of pride. Especially [in light of] the fact that in 1911, the Arbitration Commission had been favorable to Mexico and the United States had refused to recognize it. So that hurt our national pride. We felt that that land had been legally adjudicated to Mexico under the United States and [the U.S. had not] respected the Arbitration Commission's [decision].

G: How did the Mexican elementary or secondary text books portray the issue of the Chamizal? I know you attended school...

B: I couldn't answer that directly because I never read (chuckles) elementary text books in Mexico. But I can imagine that they portrayed it in a very unfavorable light.

G: And you mentioned that your father had constantly talked about the Chamizal issue to you. What sort of things did he tell you while you were growing up about the Chamizal? Do you remember?

B: Well, of course, he took me to visit it and he showed me the actual land and extensions. And he told me about the Arbitration Commission in 1910 and [how] it had voted in favor of Mexico [and] decided that part of the territory belonged to the United States and part to Mexico, which was the main objection of the United States Commissioner, Anson Mills, to accepting the arbitration award. And he explained all of these things. And he told me, also, about some proposals for a solution that had been made by one of the

Boundary Commissioners- I guess, in the late [19]20s it must have been- Mr. Pedrero Córdova. And he, as I recall, he published his proposal or something without the approval of the government. And that cost him his job. (chuckles) That cost him his job. So all these things are what I remember my father telling me.

And then, when this agreement between the two governments was announced- in 1963 I believe it was- there was great joy in Mexico. That's one of the reasons that in Mexico John Kennedy is very highly [regarded]. Not just the fact that he did this, but that he showed that he really wanted to patch up relations with Mexico and improve them. And, to this day, he is very highly regarded in Mexico. He and [Abraham] Lincoln.

So when the two Presidents issued instructions to the Boundary Commission to propose a practical solution to the problem, we were all real excited because we were going to be able to work on it.

G: And at this time, you were still employed as an engineer with the Boundary Commission?

B: Yes. And the two Commissioners, Mr. David Herrera [Jordán] from Mexico and Mr. [Joseph F.] Friedkin from the United States, well, they started working on this. And, of course, we, who were their assistants, had to put in our little two cents worth, also. So I participated in all of the studies and the preparations of graphs and charts and all those

things for the Mexican Section.

G: Was this preliminary work before the treaty was ratified by both governments, the planning that you were involved in?

B: Yes. The Boundary Commission made a study and proposed a solution which was later incorporated into the treaty. I don't know if you're familiar with a booklet published by the Foreign Ministry of Mexico City called, *The Graphical Solution to the Chamizal*?

G: No, I'm not.

B: Let me show it to you.

G: Okay. Let me turn the tape off. (taping stopped and started again)

B: First...

G: The name of it is...

B: ...this booklet is named *El Chamizal: Solución Completa, Album Gráfico*.

G: And who was it published by?

B: This was published by the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Mexico City. I think it's a very poor presentation, very poorly printed. But all these graphs were produced here in Juárez by the Mexican Section of the Boundary Commission. I personally worked on all of these graphs. (shows booklet) They're all numbered and [there is] a very brief description of what it shows.

G: Was this, then, a proposal?

B: This was the proposal that was made to the two governments,

which was the basis for the treaty. This shows the area under question. (shows booklet) This shows one of the myths that grow up about the Chamizal, that the territory extended clear up to the White House [Department Store], which is not true...

G: In El Paso, the White House Department Store?

B: ...because of this plaque that says, (reads inscription) "On this spot then, the river of the ancient city of El Paso del Norte, when [Juan] María Ponce de León, the first settler on this side, built his house in 1827." Well, many people thought that that demonstrated the Chamizal extended clear up to that point, which is not true. In the first place, in 1827, it was all Mexico. There was no United States in this area. In the second place, this then just says, (reads inscription) "On this spot then, near the river." How near? Fifty feet away or a mile away?

G: Very vague.

B: Very vague. So this has no validity to it. It was a myth that grew up. So this shows the location of the plaque and so on. This shows (points to map) all positions of the river in different eras. This, in orange, shows the river as it was surveyed by [William H.] Emory and [José] Salazar [Ilarregui] in 1852 when the official boundary survey was made. This is a probable position of what it was in 1827. And that was in 1962. This shows different positions of the river in different years. This showed, then, the actual

difference between the river in 1952 and the river in 1896 when the....Pardon me...(interruption, taping stopped and started again)

So this next graph (points to graph) shows the probable position of the river in 1864 before the large floods of that year. This shows, of course, the Cordova Island. The river really went around this way. (refers to map)

G: Were there people living on Cordova Island, ever?

B: Not that I know of. It was always farm land. There may have been some little huts or something, but I don't remember seeing people actually living there.

This shows (points to photographs) some of the buildings in or near the Chamizal where investigations were made trying to determine where the river might have been.

G: And some of those buildings, [such as] La Casa Blanca- the White House- and...

B: Because it had that plaque and all.

G: And what else?

B: They had the old Opera House, Hotel Windsor, the old court house, Pomeroy's Stable, the county jail in 1853.

G: The Texas and Pacific Railroad Station, is that what it is?

B: Uh huh. This showed that in the early part of the century, there was nothing down in this area. This was Mexico at the time. This is the old Fort Bliss. Look at it here.

(points to map)

G: So this booklet was done for the Mexican Section of the

International Boundary and Water Commission?

B: Done by the Mexican Section.

G: And did the United States Section prepare a similar [booklet]?

B: Possibly. I'm not familiar with a similar thing by the United States Section. And these (points to map) are some of the depressions found in the land in 1897 that indicated that, at some time, the river had flowed in this area.

G: The river flooded often?

B: The river flooded often at that time. This shows (points to map) some of the cross sections which were made- pits [were] dug- trying to determine by examining the ground, the sediment, and so on, where the river had been after the river had covered all this area at one time or another. This shows several of the positions of the river in 1881, 1886, 1910, 1853, 1885, 1827. This is, more or less, hearsay because there had not been a survey at that time.

G: Were you working alongside U.S. engineers...

B: Yes.

G: ...at the time?

B: Yes.

G: And what was the relationship like with them?

B: Oh, very good. It's always been very good.

G: Congenial relationship...

B: 1864 (points to map) with a big question mark. Probably somewhere in this area.

- G: Big question mark. And what is this?
- B: So this (points to map) attempts to show how the river moved south in different areas until it finally got to this line on different dates.
- G: And it goes from 1827 to...
- B: [18]27 to 1962. And [the map shows] the increase in the land area. This is what we call- what name should I give it in English?
- G: You can say it in Spanish.
- B: *Una gráfica artificiosa*- an artificial graph. We tried to show the area of the Chamizal land in regard to the dates. We get this line. (points to graph) Then by interpolating here, in 1864, we get that it was 177 hectares. So this shows a possible solution- returning 177 hectares to Mexico in this area, which is the actual Chamizal area. Then you have 156 hectares in Cordova. The entire area of the Chamizal is 333 hectares.
- G: Total?
- B: Total. But in this solution, Cordova goes to the United States to eliminate this protrusion of Mexican territory into El Paso.
- G: Do you think that Mexico agreed on returning or transferring the Cordova section to the United States because there were very, very few residents living there?
- B: Well, that was one of the positive factors, that it was just uninhabited. If it had been inhabited they probably

couldn't have done it.

Now this is just a little background showing how the river in the late [19]30s and early [19]40s was rectified. All these orange areas (points to map) are pieces that had been cut off from one side or the other and how the river wasn't absolutely a straight line but all of these curves had been eliminated. That was shown to demonstrate that it was technically feasible and historically acceptable to make a change in the river. It had been done before. This is sort of a close up of that [and it shows] how the different areas had been cut off from Mexico and from the United States. And in this rectification, the new channel of the river was located so that areas cut off from each country were exactly the same. So neither country gained or lost territory.

So that was the basis for the final proposal that this area (points to map) be returned to Mexico, that this part of Cordova Island be transferred to the United States, and that this area in here be returned to Mexico. So Mexico would have all of this [and] part of this Cordova Island would go to the United States. There would be no territory of one country intruding into the territory of the other. So that was the final solution. This album was printed in Mexico City for the illustration of the public [and] to try to explain to the public how the solution was arrived at. Because many people couldn't understand it. It was just [up

to the Mexican government to] tell them or put it in writing in a text.

G: So this book was available to the general public?

B: Yes. It was available to the general public.

G: Were there any visits to Ciudad Juárez by any federal government officials explaining the treaty itself or telling the people about the treaty? Because I know in El Paso...

B: I think it was just the Boundary Commission itself. I don't remember anybody coming from Mexico City expressly for that purpose or explaining it.

G: Because I know in El Paso, Ambassador Thomas Mann...

B: Yes.

G: ...met with City officials and explained what...

B: Yes.

G: ...would take place or what was proposed to take place.

B: Yes. I remember I met Mr. Mann several times. There is a difference between the way things are handled in the United States and in Mexico. And, you know, in Mexico we have a very centralized government. We do not have very much contact between federal officials and the state and municipal officials. And in the United States it's quite different.

End of Side A

Beginning of Side B

B: For example, Mr. [Joseph F.] Friedkin explained to me how he had to coordinate his work with the mayors of the border towns, and with the state governors, and so on. And we don't do that so much. The federal government does what it needs and it does not go to any great lengths to explain or to acquiesce with the local governments. It keeps them informed and that's about all. So, for that reason, I don't recall anybody coming from Mexico City expressly for that purpose.

G: What do you remember about Mr. Jordán- David Herrera Jordán? Did you meet with him often?

B: Engineer David Herrera Jordán was a great man. He was a great engineer and he became a great diplomat. He was my boss for thirty-two years. He's one of the few Mexican Commissioners who has entered the Commission as Commissioner. Most of them came up from the bottom- as I did. In the early [19]40s, late [19]30s, he was Resident Engineer on the construction of El Azucar Dam, which is now called Marte R. Gómez Dam, on the San Juan River in the state of Tamaulipas. And he was one of the bright boys of the National Irrigation Commission. And then before he finished that dam, he was transferred to Hermosillo [Sonora]. He was put in charge of the construction of

Abelardo [C.] Rodríguez Dam in Hermosillo, which was a cooperation between the state government and the federal government. And the state governor was General Abelardo Rodríguez, who had been President...(phone rings, taping stopped and started again)

Engineer Herrera Jordán had a very close relationship with General Rodríguez. And when the 1944 Water Treaty was signed, it was decided in Mexico City that they needed a Commissioner who was familiar with the construction of dams. Because that was provided for in the treaty, that several dams would be constructed on the river.

G: Along the border?

B: Along the border. So with the backing of General Rodríguez, Engineer Herrera Jordán was selected to be Commissioner. Well, when he arrived here as Commissioner in- was it in March or April of [19]47- he was a field engineer. I don't think he was very comfortable in an office. And he didn't know anything about diplomatic relations. But he learned. He was a smart man and he learned quickly. And at that time, as I recall, Mr. [Lawrence M.] Lawson was still Commissioner for the United States. They got along pretty well. And at that time, I was assistant to my father, who was the Principle Engineer for the Mexican Section. And my father and he had a very close relationship. And I did, too, even though I was several rungs down the ladder.

And then, when my father retired in [19]64, [19]65- I

don't recall the exact date- I still remained as assistant to the new Principle Engineer, but I had a closer relationship to Commissioner Herrera at that time because of my father. And then, of course, in 1977 I became Principle Engineer. So from then on, I saw him everyday and consulted with him. I was very, very privy to his thoughts and his actions. And I respected him very much. I appreciate very much the way he treated me. He was always very tolerant (chuckles) of my mistakes and very generous in privileges and so on with me. He allowed me to attend the technical meetings of the American Society of Civil Engineers on government time. And he permitted me to attend a meeting sponsored by the International Development Bank in Argentina in 1960. And I felt I was very fortunate in working for him. And he had a brilliant mind. He was smart. And, as I say, even though he knew nothing about diplomacy, he learned. He learned and I think he turned out to be a good diplomat. (chuckles)

G: I would think that he would almost have to have had a good relationship with Commissioner Friedkin because if they hadn't have had any mutual understanding or cooperation- and a bit of diplomacy I might add- the Chamizal settlement may not ever have been hammered out.

B: That's quite true. And that is something that's been characteristic of the Boundary Commission, at least in the last fifty years that I've been acquainted with it. There

has been a close, personal friendship between the counterparts. My father had a very close friendship with Mr. [William Harrison] Ainsworth, who was the Principle Engineer of the Commission before [Joseph F.] Friedkin, and then with Mr. [Lawrence M.] Lawson, also. And [as for] Mr. Lawson and Mr. Herrera Jordán, their friendship wasn't so close because their periods, obviously, didn't overlap very much. Mr. [Lawrence M.] Lawson left the Commission not very long after Mr. Herrera came in. And then Mr. Friedkin came. Well, there was one in between. There was Colonel Leland [H.] Hewitt between them. He lasted a couple of years, I think. And then Friedkin came in. And over the years, they formed a very, very close friendship as Friedkin and I have formed.

So, I think, that's one of the characteristics of the Commission that had permitted it to come to satisfactory agreements. There has been disagreements on national issues which each Commissioner has [been] obliged to defend his country's interests which is sometimes diametrically opposed, but personally, they've all had very good relations. All [the Commissioners have] had very good relations. So that's about all I can tell you about the Chamizal, directly.

G: May I ask you about the land that was transferred back to Mexico? Could you recall what the process involved after the Chamizal Treaty was implemented? For example, [on the

U.S. side], government appraisers went into the Chamizal area, [and] appraised the homes.

B: Yes. That is an interesting point. Mexico has always considered that private property is not subject to international negotiations. That's one of its strong points of its foreign policy in, for example, the expropriation of the oil properties in 1938. Personal property in a country is an internal affair. It's not subject to international negotiation. So in this particular case, after the properties in the Chamizal were appraised, Mexico bought them. They didn't particularly buy them, they paid the United States the value of those things. And they were destroyed. They were eliminated. So the land transferred to Mexico was transferred without any private properties on it all. [The land was transferred] directly government to government.

G: Were there any commercial buildings that were transferred to Mexico? Can you recall?

B: Commercial buildings?

G: If I remember, the Peyton Packing Plant was...

B: Peyton Packing [Plant] was eliminated. It was destroyed.

G: There was a mill.

B: It was the Mining and Smelter Supply. But it was destroyed also. As far as I remember, the only three buildings that were actually transferred were the Navarro [Elementary] School- where the University is now- the old Border Patrol

station- where the Mexican Section of the Commission is located now- and next door there was a trucking company's warehouse.

G: And the Mexican government paid the United States government for those structures?

B: For all the structures, even the ones that were destroyed and razed. So the land was transferred with no private property whatsoever. It was all directly [transferred] government to government. So then, when it was transferred, each country agreed within itself what it would do with the land. And the Mexican government decreed that all this land would be used exclusively for civic and cultural purposes. [There would be] no private interests in it whatsoever [and] no commercial uses. And you see we have the Chamizal Park. And, of course, in the United States they have the Chamizal Park and they have Bowie High School and things of that sort. But, just recently, we have noticed some uses in the Chamizal area which, in my opinion, are not in accord with that agreement. At the old Juárez Fairgrounds there is a private restaurant, or bar, or something there.

G: What's the name of it? Can you remember?

B: Adán, I think.

G: Adám?

B: Adán, with "n." And then, the building where the old trucking company was, [the IDC Trucking Company], which is next door to the present office of the Mexican Section of

the Commission, was taken over by the city. Well, first it was taken over by the Federal Public Improvement Board. Then it was turned over to the city. And they use it as offices for the Public Works Department. But now, they've added storage yards for their garbage trucks, and maintenance yards, and so on. It has the appearance of a dump now, a junkyard. That's something I've been trying to get fixed up, but I (chuckles) don't know if I'll have any luck with it. But in general, it's all been used for public purposes- cultural and educational and recreational. We have the University there. The old Border Patrol Detention Center, which is where the University is now....

G: If I recall, at one point during the implementation of the Chamizal Treaty, there was mention of building a new [alien] detention facility very, very close to the U.S.-Mexico border. Do you remember that issue?

B: I don't recall at the moment. I don't recall at the moment.

G: And the [El Paso] City government donated land near the airport to build the Border Patrol facilities there.

B: Yes. Well, the old Border Patrol facilities was in the land that was transferred to Mexico. That's where the University is now.

G: Were you involved in the relocation of the international bridges? Do you remember that?

B: Not directly because at that time I was beginning to be involved with the construction of Amistad Dam. And when the

actual construction work on the Chamizal relocation started, I didn't have very much to do with the actual construction work. But I did work on the studies to prepare the proposal for the settlement. So I don't know what else I can tell you about the Chamizal.

G: Would you like to tell us what you're working on now?

B: Well, I retired from the Boundary Commission in 1985-unwillingly. (chuckles)

G: What happened?

B: Well, in Mexico, federal employees are entitled to their maximum retirement benefits at the age of fifty-five and thirty years service. In 1985, I was sixty-three years of age.

G: 1985?

B: 1985. I was sixty-three years of age and I had forty-one years service. So I was very gently asked to retire. (chuckles) So I couldn't very well say so. The post of Boundary Commissioner is by presidential appointment. You can't very well go against the President. If he says, "It's time to leave." Well, you leave.

That's another point that I would like to mention. As a result of the success of the Chamizal negotiations, the two Commissioners were rewarded by giving them the diplomatic rank of ambassadors, which they didn't have before. So Mr. [David] Herrera Jordán and Mr. [Joseph F.] Friedkin were designated ambassadors. And then when I

succeeded Mr. Herrera, I was given the rank of ambassador. I imagine Commissioner [Narendra] Gunagi has it now, I'm not sure. And I'm not sure whether the present Mexican Commissioner has the diplomatic rank, but I inherited it. And the rank of ambassador, of course, is designation by the President with the consent of the senate. So when they tell you to leave, there's nobody to appeal to. (laughs) You leave.

So when I left the Commission, I worked for about three or four years with a friend of mine that was just starting a construction company intending to construct *maquilas*.

G: What's his name?

B: Mr. Lorenzo Aguilar. Lorenzo Aguilar was an old, old friend of mine. He's an electrical engineer. He had been General Superintendent of the Juárez electrical system. And when he retired, he started this little construction company. So I went to work for him. In four years we built about five factories for the Japanese concern, Yazaki. We built one in Ascensión. Then we duplicated it- doubled it in size. Then we built one in [San] Buena Ventura. We built one in Casas Grandes. We built another one here in Juárez. And we built two speculative plants to rent out. But there was bad management in the company and it, finally, had to dissolve. So I left that.

And then for a few months I was General Manager of a materials testing company, which was a subsidiary of an El

Paso company. It was- what was that man's name? I have very great memory lapses regarding people's names.

G: That's okay.

B: Anyhow, I was General Manger of this testing company for several months. And I didn't get along with the owners, so I finally resigned. And since then, I've just had occasional work on consulting. And right now, the man that called me on the phone was a lawyer. I'm a witness in a lawsuit by one of the *maquilas* in town who is suing the contractor who built their building because they had settlement and a lot of defects in it. So they're suing the contractor and I'm a witness for the owner.

G: You're an expert witness.

B: I'm an expert witness on it. And I have to be at the plant tomorrow morning to testify about some defects. So that's what I've been doing the last few years. I don't have an office. I don't have a steady income, (chuckles) except my pension, but whatever I do once in awhile, it comes in handy. Keeps me busy and earns a little bit of money.

G: You mentioned that you were still today interested in the history of the International Boundary...

B: Oh, yes! Definitely, definitely.

G: ...and Water Commission. Have you been doing anything?

B: Well, for many, many years I thought of writing up a history of my father and of the Commission itself. But I keep putting it off, putting it off, putting it off,

procrastinating. And a few months ago, about three months ago, Mr. René Mascareñas [Miranda]- I don't know if you know who he is.

G: Would you like to tell us about him?

B: I'll tell you about him a little later. Mr. René Mascareñas asked me to join a group that he formed two or three years back called "Juarenses." And his idea is to get all these people- friends of his- to cooperate in obtaining historical information to make a general history of Ciudad Juárez. And each person has [been] assigned certain areas that they're supposed to study. So he asked me if I'd supply information for a history of the Commission. So I thought, "Well, I've been thinking about it so long. I might as well start writing it." And I started it. And I have so much material that it's very difficult to pick out things which I feel are important and not make it too long. I don't want to write a whole book on it. And I don't want to write an academic research paper. I just want to condense some of the information that I have from memory, from the books, and so forth into one book. It's not going to be published commercially or anything. It's just going to be a private book. I imagine it'll run about 150 pages, something like that. And I want to illustrate it with maps and photographs of people that worked on the Commission and so on. So I started work on that about a month ago. Right now, I have about sixty-five handwritten pages. And I'm taking it in

chronological order. Right now, I'm writing the legal aspects of the original Chamizal arbitration. And I have a bibliography of about close to seventy publications, books and pamphlets, and so on.

G: Are most of them...

B: And about fifty unpublished reports, and memorandums, and so on, many of which I have written myself.

G: And most of the sources are from the Mexican side?

B: I am writing it from the viewpoint of the Mexican side, yes. Most of them are from the Mexican side, not all of them.

Many of them are publications of the United States government. Many of them are joint publications of the Commission. Many of them are books which have been published for the general public. In fact, I even put in a novel. There's a novel published by a man named [Wallace] Perry. I don't know if he's still living or not. Probably not. He was a newspaperman in Las Cruces, [New Mexico].

And he wrote a novel called, *Each Purple Curtain* [San Antonio: S.A. Naylor Co., 1954). [The book] is about a young man from Mesilla, [New Mexico]- or one of these towns up the Valley- who studied engineering at the University of Texas and then started working for the Boundary Commission, and his adventures working for the Boundary Commission, [and] the studies for the construction of Elephant Butte Dam. And it's interesting reading. It's fiction, but it has a lot of true information in it.

G: Do you think he perhaps created the character in thinking of you?

B: No. I never met him. One day in the El Paso Public Library, I was browsing in there and I saw this book. And the title of it caught my attention, *Each Purple Curtain*, which is from Edgar Allen Poe's poem, "The Raven." I like Poe's poetry very much. So the title caught my attention. I pulled it out and started looking at it. [I said to myself], "Oh, it's [about] the Boundary Commission." So I checked it out and read it. And then after that, I went out and bought it. (chuckles) And then sometime [later]- I don't know when- I lent it to someone. And I lost it. And about a year ago, I was browsing through that place in Five Points- what is it, the Book Nook, they sell old books- and I mentioned....Oh, before that, I asked Leon Metz if he was familiar [with the title and] if he could help me locate it, you know. [He] never could. So then I wrote to some company that specializes in locating old books. No result. Then I mentioned to this- I forget the man's name that runs this little used book place in Five Points. And he said, "Yes, I remember [the book] quite well. I have it here. I have two copies of it." So I said, "Well, I'll buy one from you." And he sold it to me for about four times what it was worth. (chuckles) But I gladly paid it.

So I'm collecting photographs of some of the people that have worked on the Commission from way back when it was

first created in 1848. And I have certain biographical information which I still have to acquire on people's birth dates and dates of death, and so on. But I have just about everything I need to write the complete history.

G: Are you collaborating with Mr. Friedkin now?

B: We just chat on the phone once in a while. We have lunch once in a while. His wife has been quite ill in the last few years and we don't get together as much as we used to. Many times I call him and he says, "Well, Nell hasn't been feeling well. We'll have to postpone it for now." So I haven't seen him personally in, oh, two or three months now. But we call each other on the phone once in a while.

G: When do you hope to complete your research or the writing itself?

B: Perhaps by the end of the year.

G: And do they plan on compiling all of the...

B: Well, that's one of my problems- to get somebody to type all this stuff up and then proofread it, edit it and reproduce the photographs, and so on, and then possibly bind it. I don't know. I'll take it as I go. I have an offer from a friend of mine who offered me that he could get a secretary to type it up in a word processor. So I'm going to send the first batch of work to her in the next few days. And, little by little, I'll keep working on it.

G: Okay, would you...

B: Let me show you some of the photographs.

- G: Okay. (Mr. Bustamante exits to retrieve photographs, taping stopped and started again)
- G: Mr. Bustamante, I'd like to ask you one final question. Do you remember or did you attend any of the ceremonies commemorating the settlement of the Chamizal issue?
- B: Well, I attended the official ceremony when the agreement was made public and finalized, when the actual transfer of lands was formalized. The ceremony was at the Chamizal Memorial in Juárez. I was present with the two Presidents. At that time the President was- was it López Mateos at that time- it was Mateos and [Lyndon B.] Johnson. I was present. Then I was present at the ceremony at the Chamizal Park in El Paso a year or two ago, commemorating the- what was it- 35th anniversary of the Chamizal. I was there with Mr. Friedkin.
- G: Would you care to make any closing comments for us?
- B: Well. It doesn't have anything specific to do with the Chamizal. But we also had a ceremony commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Boundary Commission in 1989, five years ago.
- G: Was it the U.S. and Mexican Section or just...
- B: Both. I was out of the Commission by then, but, anyhow, I took part in it. And they organized a symposium and people came from Mexico City and from Washington to participate. And there were several papers presented on different aspects of the Commission. I presented a paper on it. And we had

people from the State Department and from the Foreign Office in Mexico City come up. And the Mexican Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp commemorating the 100th anniversary. And very few people know that the Boundary Commission has been in existence for one hundred years or that it's been in El Paso all that time- El Paso and Juárez. The Commission has always had a very low profile.

G: Why is that?

B: Well, I think they think they work more efficiently that way. I think they sometimes have overdone it because many people just ignore it. Many people don't even know it exists and some people have heard of it, but they don't know its history, or why it originated, or where it's located, or what it does. I think it needs a little bit more of publicity.

G: Well, perhaps your paper will shed light on...

B: Well, I don't intend to write a paper to be public property. (chuckles) I may run off half a dozen copies for my friends or something like that, that's it.

G: Okay, Mr. Bustamante. Well, I'd like to thank you for spending the time that you did with me in sharing your memories and relocations.

B: Well, I'm happy to do it. And if I can be of any help later on, just call me.

G: Okay.

B: You know where you can find me. (chuckles)

G: Thank you very much. This is the end of the interview.

End of Interview