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Interview no. 837

Joseph F. Friedkin

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

Name of Person Interviewed:	Joseph F. Friedkin
Name of Interviewer:	Michelle L. Gomilla
Date of Interview:	April 6, 1994
Length of Interview:	1 Hour
Length of Transcript:	34 Pages

Biographical Synopsis

Former Commissioner, IBWC (International Boundary and Water Commission), U.S. Section; born October 13, 1909 in Brooklyn, New York; son of actor and tailor; moved to El Paso, Texas, 1917; attended Zavala Elementary School, Lamar Elementary School, Morehead Elementary School, and El Paso High School; 1932 graduate of Texas College of Mines and Metallurgy in Mining Engineering; joined IBWC as junior engineer, 1934; as hydraulic engineer, performed water supply and flood control studies that preceded the 1944 water treaty with Mexico; served as Major in U.S. Army Engineer Corps, 1942-1946; worked on Mississippi River flood control and navigation problems; served as Resident Engineer in San Diego, California, 1947-1952; IBWC Principal Engineer at El Paso, Texas, 1952-1962; appointed April 1, 1962 by President John F. Kennedy to head U.S. Section of IBWC; provided technical, creative, and conciliatory advice about Chamizal issue during June, 1962 Kennedy-López Mateos meeting in Mexico City; supplied engineering plan and technical details to end Chamizal dispute; oversaw logistical work after ratification of Chamizal Treaty in 1964 of relocating the Rio Grande, international bridges, and some 5,000 people and businesses; worked on distribution of waters of the Rio Grande and Colorado Rivers between the United States and Mexico; involved in operation and maintenance of the Rio Grande Rectification and Canalization Projects; American Dam and Canal; Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project; Falcón Dam, reservoir and power plant; sanitation plants at Douglas-Agua Prieta; Morelos Diversion Dam on the Colorado River; design and construction of Amistad Dam near Del Rio, Texas; retired from IBWC, 1986.

Summary of Interview

Recalls early years in El Paso, Texas; schools attended, work as junior engineer, hydrographer, and hydraulic engineer with the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), U.S. Section; recounts responsibilities involved in solving international boundary problems between Tijuana-San Diego, Calexico-Mexicali; recollects experience as Major in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; assignment to Vicksburg, Mississippi to Mississippi River Commission of Corps of Engineers; appointment as Resident Engineer in San Diego, California; assignment to El Paso, Texas as Principal Engineer for IBWC, U.S. Section; reflects on appointment by President John F. Kennedy as IBWC Commissioner, U.S. Section; technical and advisory assistance given of Chamizal issue at Kennedy-López Mateos 1962 meeting in Mexico City; sketches history of Chamizal dispute; efforts made to convince El Paso citizens and officials, such as Sam Young, President of El Paso National Bank, Ellis Mayfield, President of El Paso Chamber of Commerce, and Mayor Judson F. Williams to accept proposed Chamizal settlement; trip made with Thomas Terry Connally, Chairman of Foreign Relations Committee to discuss Chamizal settlement with Texas Governor John Bowden Connally; discusses special legislation enacted by congress to authorize payment to property owners in Chamizal area; logistics of relocating families, commercial businesses (Peyton Packing Plant, broom factory, lumber company, iron works plant), railroads, and utilities in Chamizal land transferred from the United States to Mexico; reminisces about David Herrera Jordán, IBWC Commissioner, Mexican Section; recollects trip taken with U.S. IBWC Commissioner, Lawrence M. Lawson, to Davis Dam on Colorado River; comments on good working relationship between IBWC Commissioners on both sides of U.S.-Mexico border; addresses relocation of international bridges; highlights of Four Point Program, including construction of Border Highway, relocation of Franklin Canal, relocation of Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, and Texas and Pacific Railroads, and creation of Chamizal Memorial; construction of dam north of El Paso for 1967 commemorative ceremony at Stanton Bridge to celebrate signing of Chamizal Treaty; malfunctioning of switches during ceremony; gifting of pillow by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson to daughter, Kim Friedkin, during commemorative ceremony at international bridge; assigns credit to key individuals responsible for hammering out details of Chamizal settlement including Morris Rainey, attorney, Manuel Tello, Mexican Secretary for Foreign Relations, Thomas G. Mann, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, and Crawford Kerr, attorney.

Chamizal Oral History Project

Joseph F. Friedkin
By Michelle L. Gomilla

April 6, 1994

This is an interview with Joseph F. Friedkin, former United States Commissioner of the International Boundary and Water Commission. This interview, conducted by Michelle Gomilla, is part of the Chamizal Oral History Project. We are located at Mr. Friedkin's home, 3821 Hillcrest Drive, El Paso, Texas. Today's date is the 6th of April, 1994.

G: Mr. Friedkin, before we discuss your involvement in the Chamizal settlement, I'd like to ask you a bit of biographical information. If you could please tell us when and where you were born, please.

F: Well, I was born in Brooklyn, New York. And when? In 19[0]9, October 13. My father, he came over from Russia. He was born in Russia and came over to this country. My mother was Irish. And they were both in show business at that time- the stock companies. That was the thing in that age- stock companies.

G: There's no business like show business!

F: Show business! As well as from the start, Dad traveled from....It wasn't vaudeville, but it was almost like vaudeville. And then we moved on. And up until the time I

was six or seven, [we traveled]. Dad settled here in El Paso because he thought it was time for me to go to school and stay in one place long enough to go to school. So Dad settled here in about 1917, 1916. And I went to grammar schools here.

G: Where did you live here in El Paso?

F: Well, we lived several places. Whenever the rent came due, [we moved], okay? (chuckles) No, we lived in several apartment houses in [El Paso]. Sunset Heights [was the] first area [where we lived]. And I went to Zavala School. And then we moved and I went to Lamar School for awhile. And then I went to Morehead School. Then I went to El Paso High School. And from El Paso High School I got out. The first job I could get was teaching school. I taught in the El Paso High School.

G: What did you teach?

F: Chemistry and physics. And then I got a job with the Boundary Commission in 1934. And...

G: Did you attend college here in El Paso?

F: Yes. From high school I went to UTEP [University of Texas at El Paso]. I worked a year out [of high school] and then I went to UTEP. Got enough money to go to school, at least the first [and] second year. Didn't take much then. (chuckles) And [I] graduated [from] there as a mining engineer. But this was in the Depression days. This was in [19]32, [19]33, [when there was a] deep Depression. When I started there in the mining [program], there were a lot of mines open in [19]28, [19]27. But by the time I got out, they were closed. So I

got a job teaching high school and taught there for a year.

And then [I] got a job on the Boundary and Water Commission- very fine gentleman was the Commissioner then, Mr. [Lawrence M.] Lawson, L.M. Lawson- and did a lot. And I stayed with the Commission here in El Paso from 1934 until [19]41. I measured the river. [That] was my first job- measuring how much water was flowing in the river. I used to run up and down all over from San Marcial down all the way down to Fort Quitman.

G: Did you have a title back then?

F: I was a junior engineer. And [in] 1941 I was assigned to go over to the Colorado River to Calexico-Mexicali and make investigations there. There was floods on the river. There was a problem on the boundary there. The Colorado River water was flowing into Mexico [and, as a result], created some international problems. Also, I made a survey there of the irrigated area in Mexico, which was important for the negotiations and the final settlement of the 1944 Water Treaty.

And in 1942, I went into the service- Army Engineer Corps- and was assigned to Vicksburg, Mississippi [to the] Mississippi River Commission of the Corps of Engineers. And I worked there with the Corps of Engineers for four years. And the main idea was to keep the Mississippi regulated so that the ammunition, U-boats, new railroads, [and] submarines could be carried down the river. This was the Corps of

Engineers' job. And then after the [end of the Second World] War in [19]46, I wanted to come back to the Boundary Commission. And they took me back and [I] was assigned to San Diego. I opened an office in San Diego and [was] responsible for the works of what we called the western end of the boundary. This was the Tijuana River. [We were responsible for solving boundary] problems between Tijuana and San Diego, [and] Calexico and Mexicali. And then in the Yuma area, the Colorado River was the big one. We lived in San Diego. And I was assigned there as a resident engineer until 1952.

[I] moved back to El Paso in [19]52 and was assigned as the Principle Engineer for the U.S. Section [of the International Boundary and Water Commission] and was in this position, then, until 1962 when I was appointed Commissioner. This was under [President] John [F.] Kennedy. And I continued as Commissioner there. Exciting times.

G: What did you think when you were appointed Commissioner by Kennedy? Or what was your reaction when you were asked?

F: I was elated, of course. (chuckles) And it was wonderful to have had that opportunity. And we were just so pleased. I just hardly ever expected it, you know. But I had made many friends along the boundary and working along the boundary. And [I] had their support. And it was an exciting time.

And the first thing that came up was the Chamizal. The first big project was the Chamizal. And late in [19]62- I had only been in office four, five, or six months- when there was

a meeting in Mexico City when President Kennedy went down and met with the Mexican President, [Adolfo] López Mateos. And one of the issues that they expected would come up was the Chamizal. And it did. And I was there to try to give what technical and advisory assistance I could [of] the situation on the border.

G: Why do you think the issue came up?

F: Michelle, this issue had come up- history will show- had come up before meetings of every....Mexico had raised this issue with the United States President- [and] almost each president- since beginning in about 1928, after the [Mexican] Revolution. Then [after] the Revolution, there wasn't much going on in Mexico, I mean, as far as foreign relations were concerned. But beginning in about 1928, when [Herbert] Hoover was in, each Mexican President raised it with the U.S. President [and said], "Let's get at the issue." And the problem didn't get any better. It got worse. It just [got] like a festering sore, as we used to say. And it was.

The big thing of the whole thing is that....The real important part of the Chamizal is that it's settled. [This issue was] a long standing dispute and a festering dispute between the United States and Mexico that interfered with relations or anything new they tried to get at. Mexico would raise the question, "Well, you didn't settle the Chamizal." And so, there's reasons back of that which I'll be glad to go into.

Then there was the Amistad Dam project. We finished the Falcón Dam project. We got into the sanitation problems. We got into the Colorado River salinity problem. So it was a lot going on. It was a very fortunate time.

That's my life sketch...(chuckles)...my professional career.

G: Okay. Let's go back to your involvement in the Chamizal settlement.

F: I had known of the Chamizal settlement having worked, of course, [with the International Boundary and Water Commission]. And efforts had been made to try to resolve it. Well, the United States tried to resolve it by giving Mexico money instead of the land they wanted. The United States tried to resolve it by giving Mexico an equal area of land in other locations. Now, Mexico said, "No. We want to settle it the way it was originally settled." And I understand Mexico's side on it because the history of the case- are you ready to go into that now?

G: Sure. You can familiarize us with it if you'd like.

F: Because I think you need to understand the seed of the problem. Why was it so important? Why was it? And it was because the United States and Mexico had agreed by treaty to resolve the issue by arbitration. And there was a three-man arbitration commission. And in the treaty that provided for this three-man arbitration commission, the treaty provided that the decision of the majority of the commission would be

final and binding on both countries.

Well, the decision of the arbitration was that about two-thirds of the land in dispute belonged to Mexico. And the United States refused to recognize it. Well, they had found different excuses. What the United States did was to offer to renegotiate, try to negotiate, [and] try to work out different problems. Now, this was in 1911. And the issue was not active, except for maybe two, or three years after that [or] four years. I'm trying to recite from the history now. But because then is when Mexico had it's revolutionary problems, in [19]16, [19]18, [with] Pancho Villa, [Emiliano] Zapata, and all of them. And Mexico had not really overcome it's revolutionary period until- well, then there was Porfirio Díaz in there- until 1928, finally. Well, Porfirio Díaz, of course, much earlier....But [with] each succeeding President there was still revolution in Mexico.

G: So the issue was put on the back burner?

F: They didn't really get settled until [19]28 or [19]29. But beginning then, each President referred to the arbitration treaty: "You, the United States, agreed to abide by the decision of the majority and you have not." Well, this is one of those things when you have two countries and one needs to find fault with the other for whatever reason. And this is the subject that Mexico picked up. And it obstructed the progress that the two countries could make together.

And there were several efforts made to resolve it. When

they straightened the river here, there was an effort made to resolve it, to so relocate the river as to resolve it. But they were not able to. There were too many people....Politically, it was very difficult in the United States, particularly the state of Texas. There were years in the [19]20s there- I don't know the exact years. But it was in the late [19]20s [or] the early [19]30s when there were efforts to resolve it. The Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate was Tom [Thomas Terry] Connally. And Tom Connally, in quote, he said many times, "Not one inch of Texas for Mexico." This is how strong it was. And you must bear in mind that there were people that were on the United States side of the river. There were U.S. people settling on the land. When it early got into the hearings, their land was cleared [of clouded titles] because there were no clear titles to the land. They were all clouded.

But then in the early 1950s, when Tom [Thomas G.] Mann was the Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, he reviewed the problem and thought it should be settled. And he was a brilliant fellow and [had] a very strong sense of right and wrong. And he tried to resolve it. He came to El Paso. But there was just too much political pressure against its settlement. And it just didn't move.

Well then, in [19]62, when its [settlement] was anticipated, Tom Mann was then the ambassador to Mexico. And he anticipated that the question would come up, which it did.

In fact, the Mexicans, they had an agenda that they talked about beforehand. And so, Tom made special effort in making it clear to President Kennedy the background of the treaty, the importance of getting it resolved to remove a festering sore between the two countries that was impeding- blocking- good foreign relations [and] working together.

Now I think, probably even then much more than today, Mexico was a little country trying to get along with a big country. And naturally, when they wanted something [or] they tried to get something, [or the United States] tried to get some agreement [or] Mexico to agree on something, Mexico said, "Well, how about the Chamizal?" They threw it in our face. So he, as an ambassador to Mexico, he keenly felt this problem and the need for it to be resolved. And so he, very clearly, outlined the situation with President Kennedy.

G: And he had met officials here in El Paso beforehand?

F: Not before. Not before. Well, in the [19]50s he did. But he wasn't able to make it stick. But with Kennedy there....Kennedy thought it should be resolved. And he being as he was- independent-minded and also a strong sense of right and wrong- he thought it should be resolved. But he also knew the political side of it. And so he directed Mr. Mann and me to make all the contacts, to try to clear the way. [He told us] that if we could clear the way that they would resolve it. He was for it. He would back the resolution of the problem.

So I went with Tom to the Governor of Texas. John

[Bowden] Connally was then the Governor. And he, too, was a very forthright man. I don't know if you've ever heard [of] him or knew of him.

G: Yes, I know of him.

F: Very forthright. Still is. (chuckles) And we explained to him. He was in the hospital. He was recovering from appendicitis or something. And we met with him and sat with him for an hour or two. And he said, "I agree. I think it should be resolved." Well, he then got his attorneys on it.

And the next episode was I met with the state legislators. Both of us met in Washington with other state senators and congressmen, particularly those from Texas. And they went along with us on this.

G: So they received the idea well?

F: Fairly well. They were concerned about what the people would think. [They asked], "What does El Paso think? What do the people of El Paso [think]?" That's their constituents, of course.

And so, we met in El Paso [with] many groups. We met with the bankers. We had one very strong supporter. [He] was Sam Young, who was then the President of the El Paso National Bank, [and] Chairman of the Board, and was very influential in El Paso at that time. Are you a native of here?

G: No, I'm not.

F: Otherwise, let me interrupt a minute. How long have you been here?

G: I've been here nearly seven years, on and off.

F: Seven years?

G: Yes. But the names you're mentioning I'm familiar with, yes.

F: Well, he had quite an influence with a number of people. His attorney at that time was Gordon Harding. And there was a problem for Sam Young with Gordon Harding. He got all his Board of Directors together. And we met with the whole group [and] explained it.

G: How about the Chamber of Commerce? Were they involved?

F: Oh, yes, yes. The Chamber of Commerce [was involved]. At that time, Ellis Mayfield was the President of the Chamber of Commerce- Ellis, yes. And they supported it one hundred percent after [we gave our] explanation of it.

One of the problems was by that time the Chamizal area, which the City of El Paso leaders recognized....The area of the Chamizal had deteriorated. The buildings were not kept up. No one really had a clear title to any land there because it was in dispute. So the land was deteriorating. Not much was coming of it.

We met with the mayor, Judson Williams. But before Judson, it was- I'll think of his name in a minute. He was the first one. He met with his Council and agreed to it. He thought it was the right thing, too. And most of the Chamber members were for it. And some of them, I thought, were [in favor of the settlement, [but] maybe the reason [for their approval of settlement] wasn't quite right. [They may have

thought], "How much money do we get out of it?" But anyway, they went for it.

And then we met several times with many groups. What I tried to do- and I think we did fairly well- we tried to get representatives of people who lived in the area. It was hard to talk to all of them personally. So we tried to get each area to appoint representatives to talk to us.

G: Do you remember the names of some of those representatives?

F: No, I sure don't. But many times we also had public meetings. I remember we had one right down in the what is now the Chamizal area. It was a school there. We met there. And I had a bit of a difficult time.

G: What was the general tone of the meetings?

F: The general tone of the meeting was good, except there were some who were against it. [They said], "You can't push me out of my home. You can't take my home away from me." [Others said], "How much am I going to get paid? I want a lot of money. I want to be able to send my children to school (chuckles) on the money we get from the house." And you can understand those people. I mean, for many of them it was an opportunity. But for the majority that we met with, my feeling was it was an opportunity for people to get compensated- and I think well- for their property so they could move north of the tracks. And, as I mentioned earlier, there were places north of the tracks they could get for their....

But after- and I'll come back to this in a moment because I think it's an important part. Well, I think now maybe would be a [good] time. With regard to their relocation [and] finding another place, we appeared before the congressional committees and got authority to pay property owners in the Chamizal that replacement value in hardship cases, [especially in cases] where a person had a hut [or] had an adobe shack that the money he would get for it would not let him relocate to a place of equal utility, we were able to give him enough over and above the market value so that he could. Then, and even as now in many cases- most cases- the government can only pay market value. But, as I say, for many of those old, broken down houses, the market value would not have been enough for those people to relocate.

G: So special legislation was passed?

F: Special legislation was passed for this. And it's the first time that legislation has been passed by the congress that authorized payment for property in hardship cases up to the replacement value instead of market value. This was a big thing for many people. So with this, this gave people an opportunity for people to move north of the tracks, as we say. The commercial people- well, let me come back. For the inhabitants of the area, there were still hardship cases for those who lived around the church [or] they had their own little grocery store. There was a real human problem there. But for the majority of them, my impression, and for what

surveys I have seen- the one that I mentioned- there was never any problem. There was never a serious problem.

G: How were people notified that they had to move or of the Chamizal Treaty?

F: We established an office right down in the Chamizal area. And we made it open to the people to come in. Well, we had representatives meet with the people first. We didn't send them a letter. [The representatives would] meet with the people and explain the situation. And after explaining to them, and meeting with them several times, and making arrangements for them to see other houses....In this office we established in the Chamizal, we set up a desk for every real estate man that was interested in it.

G: How many real estate men were interested?

F: And there must have been ten, twelve, fifteen. We set up an office [with] a desk for them there and they could show their wares. So the people could go in there and meet with them and see what the houses were. And the real estate people would take them out and show them. And this was a time when the real estate people were glad to have the [business]. That's one of the good timing things. And there were places that they could move to. But Bill [William E.] Wood was right in the middle of it- Bill Wood. But this was a good move. I don't know how he fell into this, but he did. But I had some real estate friends that advised with me [on] what to do.

G: Did...

F: And that helped a lot, having the people be able to go right and see what was there [and] talk with them. And I tried to select the people to meet with the [Chamizal residents] that were understanding people and not government agents. And it worked out quite well.

G: Did most of the people move to particular areas?

F: No. They were pretty well scattered. Many of them moved down the valley. Many of them moved up to the northeast area. They were not many of them moved into the west side, as I remember.

G: How about the commercial establishments?

F: The commercial establishments, many of them- the big ones there- had moved up the valley, [such as] this broom factory that's up the valley. And there was a lumber company that's up the valley [that was also relocated]. [They moved to] bigger and better facilities. They all just went ahead by [doing] this. They made it. There was an iron works that was just on its last legs anyway. The most important thing we got rid of was the Peyton Packing Plant. This was a sore spot- and a stinking spot- in that part of El Paso. That was a big advantage (chuckles) getting rid of that. But we negotiated with the Peyton Packing Company. And gosh, we had the [company] president down here for it working with us. And he finally seemed satisfied with it. He got a new place down the valley. As a whole, the people were, I think, relocated pretty well.

But let me go back. After we had met with the people in El Paso, the next step was- and before the relocation of the people- the next step was to present this to the congress. Well, first, we had to have a treaty with Mexico. How are we going to settle this? Where was the line going to be? And this is where I worked very closely with the Mexican Commissioner. And it was a very wonderful time for me.

G: Who was the Mexican Commissioner?

F: David Herrera Jordán.

G: Would you like to tell us a little bit about him?

F: Sure, because he was terrific. He came here- was a Commissioner before I was- [and] he took over the Commissioner's office of the Mexican Section in about 1950, [19]51, maybe [19]49- somewhere in that time. But he came in. He was a construction engineer for the Mexican government. They had what they called then a Bureau for Hydraulic Resources. He was the Secretary. Well, Mr. [Lawrence M.] Lawson was still the Commissioner then. And Mr. Lawson was- which he would be naturally- was very understanding. David was never in the diplomatic field before he was a construction engineer, but he had the right personality and the right approach. And they got along very well. And Mr. Lawson was very careful not to ever take advantage of his not having [any diplomatic experience]. And I remember the first trip I took with the Mexican Commissioner. Mr. Lawson asked me to go with him up to Davis Dam on the Colorado River for the dedication

of that dam. And I got to know him a little bit. And [he was] just I fine man, I thought, then. Well, then, when I got to be Commissioner and [started] working with him, we never really had a bad argument. We had differences, but he understood mine and I understood his.

G: So overall, you think you had a good...

F: We tried to work them out.

G: ...good working relationship?

F: Excellent, just excellent.

G: Do you think that ease of communication and desire to cooperate...

F: Oh, yes, yes.

G: ...oiled the machinery?

F: Yes. We often met at least once a week and, often times, two or three times in a week. And [our meetings were] very informal but we got things done pretty well.

G: Did you see yourself as a diplomat back then?

F: No, no. No, I didn't. I just didn't at all. But whatever the circumstances you'd come up to, if you had the good Lord with you (chuckles), and you'd think right, and you'd try right, you'd try to do the right thing...(Mrs. Friedkin enters room, taping stopped and started again)

End of Side A

Beginning of Side B

F: We didn't get into the Chamizal itself or the problem itself.
Do you want to get into that?

G: Sure.

F: We'd be backing up here, now.

G: That's okay.

F: Well, the Chamizal itself came about as a problem [and] as an international political issue between the two countries simply by the change in the course of the river down here in what is now bordering South El Paso and Juárez. And in those days, this was before [the construction of] Elephant Butte Dam. This was back in the 1860s. And the river shifted its course in such a way that land which had been on the Mexican side was transferred to the U.S. side. The river just went around and put land that was formerly on one side of the river on the other side of the river.

Well, Mexico claimed the land. That first claim was in the 1890s. The U.S. claimed the land. And so, that was the dispute. There were some 600 acres- 630 I think it is. And...(Mrs. Friedkin enters rooms, taping stopped and started again) So, as I say, U.S. claimed it. Mexico claimed it. There was an international dispute. Well, the first claim was in the 1890s that Mexico made. And the U.S. was not inclined to make any settlement at all. And it was tried later and there was no settlement.

Finally, there was a meeting here in El Paso of President [William Howard] Taft and President Porfirio Díaz [in] 1910 or [19]11- 1910 it must have been. And soon after that meeting, there was an agreement to enter into an Arbitration Treaty [in order] to arbitrate the settlement. And the Arbitration Treaty provided, as I said earlier, that the decision of the majority would be final and binding upon both countries. It consisted of a representative from the United States- the United States Boundary Commissioner at that time was General [Anson] Mills- and the Mexican Commissioner. And I've forgotten his name. And then there was a third, a man from Canada, [Eugene Lafluer], who was then a recognized international jurist. And, of course, the United States Commissioner claimed the land for the United States. Mexico['s Commissioner, Engineer Fernando Beltran y Puga], claimed it for Mexico. And this jurist, after hearing all the testimony [and] all the records, decided that two-thirds of it should belong to Mexico. What he decided was that the boundary should be at the location of the 1865 river- I think it was, I'm not sure.

Well, the decision turned on the language of a 1905 treaty between the United States and Mexico that was designed to resolve all the boundary disputes. Because the boundary was the Rio Grande. And the Rio Grande was shifting its course [at] different places all up and down the Rio Grande from here all the way to Brownsville and below to the mouth of

the river. And so, there were questions [raised] over [such [issues as], "Well, what happens when the river changes its course?" And the Treaty of 1905 provided that- if I can remember this- that when the river moves by slow and gradual erosion, the boundary moves with the river. But any other change wrought by the force of the current- now, that's almost the exact wording- any other change wrought by the force of the current, the boundary would remain at the location of the old channel. And in his decision, the jurist from Canada asked the question, "Was it slow and gradual erosion or was it by other forces?" He heard testimony that there were trees falling in the river, banks caving off, [and] houses falling into the river. And in his mind, as he said, by no stretch of the imagination could he consider this slow and gradual. And so, the decision favored Mexico for about two-thirds of the area.

Well, the United States raised certain questions [and said] that they felt that the finding was outside the terms of reference. And, legally, they felt that they had a case. [The United States also felt] that, legally, they were outside the terms of reference. But then, the United States said, "Well, let's renegotiate. We'll renegotiate this." Well, that went on. But then, as I mentioned earlier, the Revolution in Mexico [began]. Things were pretty much at a standstill until 1928 when the subject came up again and carried through until President Kennedy.

When following our meetings with the people, the governor, legislators, congressmen, senators, [and] people of El Paso, we reported then to the Secretary of State [and] to the President that we felt that there was a majority of the people for it. And we tried to get legislation to authorize a treaty to that effect. And we did.

In the hearings before the senate, there was a question of whether or not the State of Texas was required to approve. This was an interesting part- whether or not the State of Texas was required to approve any transfer of land from the State of Texas to Mexico or to another country. And it was a finding of the government at that time- of John Connally and his Attorney General- that it was not required. The approval of Texas was not required because when Texas went into the Union- let me think about this and see if I can get my facts straight. When Texas went into the Union it had many debts. It owed a lot of money. But the United States took over Texas and accepted it into the State of the Union with the understanding that Texas would keep its own state lands, except for military and other federal establishments, but that the determination of the location of the boundary was a determination by the United States, not the State of Texas. And that was the turning point as far as the legislature [and] as far as legally going ahead with the treaty.

So we negotiated the terms of it. I had a part in it. Tom Mann was really the key man in the negotiation of the

terms of the treaty on the diplomatic side of it. And I had the technical side of it. And it worked out very well. It was approved. And we went back to the congress then, after we got the treaty, and asked for funds to carry it out.

G: Can you remember some of the tenets of the treaty, Mr. Friedkin?

F: No, but if you'll hold a minute, I've got a copy.

G: Sure. (Mr. Friedkin leaves room, taping stopped and started again)

F: It provides, as I say, for the relocation of the river at the location that they agreed upon, which was the channel as decided by....Really, the purpose of the treaty was to give effect to the arbitration award under today's circumstances, as we said. And there was little modification. It wasn't exactly the land that had shifted because involved in it was the Bowie High School. And they wanted to preserve that. There was a little church there. There was another part of the school that was on the line. And, also, there was a church there involved. We didn't transfer those to Mexico. And that was the modification that was made.

But the first part of it is where the river should be relocated and provides that, (reads from copy of treaty) "No payments will be made, [as] between the two Governments, for the value of [the] lands that pass from one country to the other [as a result of the international boundary]. And after this Convention has" been "entered into force, and the

necessary legislation [has been] enacted [for carrying it out]..." the United States, [in conformity with its laws], would acquire the lands [to be transferred to Mexico and this] United States [land] would be passed to Mexico. Which we did. The river had to be relocated.

G: What did that involve?

F: It was relocated along the line that transferred exactly the proper acreage to Mexico that was called for in the arbitration award. The cost was shared for the reconstruction of the river channel. And that involved relining the river, and excavating the channel, and lining it with concrete. By lining it with concrete, it had served two purposes. One was to be sure it didn't move it again. But the other was is they took less space to have it in concrete than to have a big wide channel. And neither country had to give up as much land, which is what the treaty provided. (refers to copy of treaty tenets) The costs of constructing the new channel would be shared equally between the two countries.

G: How about the relocation of the two international bridges? Was that part of...

F: Yes, the two bridges were relocated. And it provided that the bridges....Well, the bridge that used to go on Santa Fe Street and on El Paso Street had belonged to what was then the street car company. And as far as the United States side of it was concerned, the United States donated the United States part of the new bridges that were built. And Mexico, I think, did the

same for awhile and then there was a change. I'm not sure what happened on the Mexican side. The Cordova Bridge was a completely new bridge which we built. And we shared the cost. Mexico paid the part on their side. We paid the part on our side.

G: When the bridges were being relocated, what happened to the traffic flow?

F: During the construction of the new bridges, we kept the old bridges intact.

G: So there was no traffic problems?

F: No interruption in the traffic.

G: Do you remember the...

F: And one of the key points of this was, and still is- it's still a point, an issue- is that the international bridges which replaced the two Cordova Island bridges shall be toll free unless both governments agree to the contrary. This is the Cordova Bridge. And it's been an issue for some time as to whether they should be toll free there. All of the commercial companies who do business in Juárez and El Paso want to keep it free. And I think it should be. We thought then [that it was a good idea to keep the Cordova Bridges toll free] and I think [today] it should be [toll free] to encourage the traffic between the two [countries and] the intercourse between the peoples. But this is still an issue because if the two governments agree to change it, they can.

G: But both have to agree?

F: Both have to agree.

G: Are you familiar with the Four Point Program...

F: No, I'm not.

G: ...that the City of El Paso was part of? [The plan concerned itself with] the relocation of the bridges, of old Bowie High School, an irrigation canal.

F: Oh, yes. I didn't understand the four points. Well, this comes back to an important part I think you have reference to. When we dealt with the City of El Paso to get concurrence [and] to [get them to] go along, this was when Judson Williams was the Mayor. He felt, and officials felt, that they should get everything out of this settlement that they could [and] that they should be compensated for the loss of land. This was the City of El Paso. And so, they felt it was important that they have a new highway down- the Border Highway. And we did. We provided in the authorization for the enabling legislation to carry out the works that included provision for a Border Highway. It was built. That's where the Border Highway was built.

G: How did the idea come about of the Border Highway?

F: Well, there needed to be another artery. There was a bottleneck in El Paso. The Cordova Island enclave moved into the U.S. side and the tip of the mountain here made this one of the narrowest places of the city. It was[n't] a big bottleneck, but it was a bottleneck. Well, as a part of the Chamizal settlement, Cordova Island was also settled. And the

city felt that it would be good and important to have another highway come along to relieve the traffic on what was then Paisano- and still is Paisano- and the other streets there. And we did. We built it. That's one of the points.

Another point was that the irrigation people- and they needed it....Well, the Chamizal, really, would cut off a part of the old Franklin Canal for the irrigation. So we relocated the canal up into the city and outside of the area of what would pass to Mexico and outside of the new river channel. So we relocated the canal.

The railroads needed to be relocated. This was a big job. There were three railroads involved- four railroads. It was the Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, the Mexican railroad- and there's another railroad here.

G: Texas...

F: Texas and Pacific- T and P. Well, I met time and time with them to try to get them to agree upon the relocation that all three would agree upon.

G: Was it a big headache?

F: Not as big as it might have been. These men were professional men and they wanted to keep as near to the same situation as they could, but just move everything north. In fact, what I did was there with them, I said, "You folks get together and you tell me what you want, (chuckles) what you can all agree on. You decide for yourselves."

G: Then come to me.

F: Then come to me. And they did. And it was worked out. We worked it out.

G: How much track was involved?

F: I've forgotten how many miles. But the total length that had to be relocated was something like, I guess, six [or] seven miles. But, with them there, there must have [been] eight or ten tracks. So it was some sixty [or] seventy miles, I guess, of tracks [that] had to be relocated. But that worked out quite well.

But so, we got the new Border Highway, the relocation of the canal- what was the other one- oh, the Chamizal Memorial. This was a big thing. It was important. This was good.

G: Whose idea...

F: It's worked out very well.

G: was it to...

F: Well, this was the Parks [idea], too. This was Jud[son] Williams and his group. And we felt, too, that the big thing would be [to] make it a park. Mexico had made a park on their side. They had dedicated their side to a park. And, of course, one of the reasons is you avoid the problem of who gets the land. There were political interests on both sides. On the Mexican side, [there were some] that wanted to take over the land. There were interests on the U.S. side. But the sentiment was deserving of a monument. And the congress and the United States government thought so.

G: I had heard that someone here in El Paso had wanted to erect

a statue of Benito Juárez because there was a statue of Abraham Lincoln over there and we should reciprocate and have a Mexican national hero here.

F: I hadn't heard that. I have not heard that. I never heard that one.

G: Were there any utility [companies located in the Chamizal that had to be relocated]? Well, I know the telephone service, the...

F: The electric service, the utility service, all had to be relocated. But there, again, we were working with professional people. It was not a problem.

G: There were no difficulties involved?

F: No serious difficulties. We paid for it. Whatever it was, we paid for it and had gotten contractors to do it under contract. Had a problem with something about the water lines. And it was a bit of a problem there, but I remember I went and talked to the man who was then the Chairman of the Public Utilities Water Service- fine man. And we talked. And I explained to him and he said, "We'll work it out." And we worked it out.

G: So the land that was passed to Mexico had been razed?

F: Cleared.

G: Cleared?

F: Cleared. It was cleared. The houses that were left, we tried to keep them up as well as we could. We watered the yards. And the houses went over there in pretty good shape. Mexico,

actually, took some of them. There was a public building. There was a school- the school there on south Hammett- that Mexico uses today.

G: Was that the Navarro Elementary School?

F: No, I don't think so. But I don't remember. It could have been. And then a big trucking company, [IDC Trucking Company], had fine facilities there. And the buildings [they owned], they're with the Mexican Section of the Boundary Commission, even today. [They] are the buildings which the trucking company built. And this man in charge of the trucking company, we had no problem there. He was satisfied.

G: A city dump also passed over.

F: City dump passed over, yes. I didn't want to talk much about this (chuckles)...(phone rings, taping stopped and started again) Well, I wasn't proud of that. But Mexico knew what it was. All the authorities in Mexico knew what it was and knew that there was a dump there. And they made the most of it. I think they....It was land you can build on. And there have been buildings [constructed] on it.

G: You can build over a city dump?

F: Yes, sure.

G: I was under the impression that you couldn't.

F: No, you can. But there have been a lot of tall tales about it. But we weren't hiding anything. Mexico knew exactly what that area was. And they accepted it. And that was part of the land. So there was never any serious problem about it

between the two governments, or at the Commission level, or at the diplomatic level.

G: Did you attend any of the commemorative ceremonies where the Presidents, [for example], met at the bridge in 1964?

F: Yes. That one in 1964.

G: That was [Lyndon B.] Johnson and [Adolfo] López Mateos?

F: Right, right. This little girl you saw here (points to photograph of daughter), Kim...

G: Your daughter?

F: Uh huh. She was just a little tot then and she went up- she was a talker, still is- and she went up and visited with Mrs. Johnson. And Mrs. Johnson gave her a pillow. She had a pillow (chuckles) and she gave her a little pillow. So this was a big day. It was a big day there. That was on the Cordova Bridge. And then there was a ceremony over on the [Stanton Street Bridge] at the end of it there with Johnson and the more recent President.

G: [Gustavo] Díaz Ordaz?

F: Díaz Ordaz.

G: That was in 1967?

F: Yes, right at the end. On the Stanton Street Bridge. And this was when the....It (chuckles) was kind of a funny incident there. We wanted to show the President the water coming down through the new channel. So we built a dam up north of El Paso, enough to hold the water and get a channel full of water. And then, [according to our plans], we'd blow

it and let the water flow down. And we had little switches up on where the Presidents were. And I was on one side and the Mexican Commissioner was on the other side. When it was ready, why, we- the two Presidents were standing there watching to see what was going to happen- we pressed the button. The Mexican Commissioner pressed the button on the other side. And...

G: Nothing happened?

F: Nothing happened! (laughs)

G: What did you do?

F: Oh, I could have fallen through the floor! But, finally they did get the signal up there. And they blew it and it came down. (laughs) But I'm sure it was only thirty seconds or so, but it felt like it was a...

G: A lifetime!

F: Yes. That was kind of funny.

G: So how did you feel once everything was settled [and] the loose ends tied?

F: Oh, I was think it was quite a feeling of satisfaction. The big thing was- and that you have hit upon- was the humanitarian side of it, [and] the social side of it, which was taking care of the people. And I think we did a pretty fair job on that. And I think it was reflected by the fact there were so few condemnations. I think we had less than ten condemnations out of all the properties. And several of those were because the titles had to be cleared. There were some

who were dissatisfied but by and large, as I say, people got to move north of the tracks [and] got a better place to live. There really have been no bad aftereffects. One of the professors over at the college here was very concerned. You probably have an article of it [or have] seen his article. He was very concerned that there was going to be a big upheaval in the lives of people who have relocated- social upheaval. And I don't think there was any serious upheaval, except for some as I mentioned, [such as] those who'd go to their churches and the older people who liked their own little surroundings [and lived close to] the little grocery store.

G: If you were Commissioner today, would you have done it any differently?

F: I don't think so. I would much rather have done it under the conditions that existed at that time (chuckles) than today.

G: Okay. I'd like to ask you one final question, Mr. Friedkin. I've read- [and] it's been said- that from the beginning of the negotiations of the Chamizal settlement, that you were the workhorse, that you labored hard in the vineyards and did all of the spadework. Who do you think deserves the lion's share of credit for hammering out the details of the Chamizal settlement?

F: Well, I would say the whole U.S. Section of the Boundary Commission. We had a good crew. They did very well to carry it through. We had Morris Rainey. He was an attorney. He was a small town attorney in Lordsburg, [New Mexico]- no, not

Lordsburg, Van Horn- and he came up here and was practicing. He was a graduate of the [Texas] School of Mines [and Metallurgy] and then went to law school. But he just handled things very well. For the matter of also dealing with people in there, [there] was a man by the name of Crawford Kerr. Crawford Kerr was an attorney here- now, his son- but he was a man that people had in faith in, trusted, [and had] confidence.

G: And what was his position?

F: He was in charge of the relocations. And we had good engineers on the construction of the new channel. Most important, [were] the real estate people who dealt with the people that had homes there. So we were very fortunate. But as far as really getting things started and the moving ahead with it [and] making it, Tom Mann deserves the principle credit on the diplomatic side of it. [He was] working with Mexico at the top level [at] the level of the embassy, working with the Mexican President and his staff. Actually, the man that Tom worked with, the Mexican [Minister of Foreign Affairs], Manuel Tello- and I met with him several times. He was a very quiet, reserved intellectual. And he and Tom just got along fine. I had great admiration for Tom Mann. He just, kind of, got it started. And he felt that it was right that it be settled. And he settled it.

G: Okay. Would you like to make any closing comments, Mr. Friedkin?

F: Well, I'm glad to have been so fortunate as to have had that experience.

G: Okay. Well, I'd like to...

F: I'm very grateful for that, very grateful.

G: I'd like to thank you for your time.

F: You're welcome.

G: I'm very, very appreciative...

F: I'm glad to see you. Let me have your last name again, please.

G: Gomilla...

F: Gomilla?

G: ...Benavides.

F: Will you write it out for me?

G: Sure. This is the end of the interview.

End of Interview