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Interview no. 847

Bob Ybarra

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

Name of Person Interviewed:	Bob Ybarra
Name of Interviewer:	Michelle L. Gomilla
Date of Interview:	April 1, 1994
Length of Interview:	1 Hour, 5 Minutes
Length of Transcript:	48 Pages

Biographical Synopsis

Secretary, International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), U.S. Section; former Special Assistant to U.S. IBWC Commissioner, Joseph F. Friedkin; born in El Paso, Texas, December 7, 1942; attended Guardian Angel School, Zavala Elementary School; lived for brief period in San Jose, California, returned to El Paso in 1960; graduated from Austin High School; enlisted in U.S. Air Force; worked as cab driver and construction worker in El Paso, Texas to help pay college expenses; graduated from Texas Western College in 1968 with degree in History and Journalism; began working as newspaper reporter and columnist for *El Paso Herald Post* in 1968; penned weekly column on U.S.-Mexico border topics called "Border Briefs"; recruited by IBWC as specialist on U.S.-Mexico border, 1975; named IBWC Secretary soon after.

Summary of Interview

Mentions schools attended in El Paso, Texas; graduation from Texas Western College; employment with *El Paso Herald Post* as newspaper reporter and columnist; discusses development of portfolio on U.S.-Mexico relationship, including Chamizal settlement; recollects experience writing "Border Briefs," weekly column that covered spot news and economic news, particularly in Cd. Juárez-El Paso area; recollects publishing series of articles concerning impact of Chamizal settlement; recruitment by IBWC as border specialist and trouble shooter; service as Special Assistant to U.S. IBWC

Commissioner, Joseph F. Friedkin; reviews responsibilities of IBWC; reflects on early impressions of Chamizal issue; history of Chamizal dispute; recounts intermingling with staff personnel of Mexican Presidents Alvarez Echeverría and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz; remarks on changes in thinking of Mexicans on Chamizal issue; recalls comments concerning Chamizal settlement made by cab customers from Chamizal area and Ciudad Juárez; construction of new international bridges, Chamizal Memorial in Ciudad Juárez; mentions proposed construction of alien detention facility; identifies movers and shakers during Chamizal settlement, including Frank Smith, Superintendent, Chamizal National Memorial, Raymond Telles and Judson F. Williams, City of El Paso Mayors, Jerry Woodard, El Paso County Judge, David Herrera Jordán, Mexican Commissioner, IBWC, Joaquín Bustamante, Principle Engineer, IBWC, Mexican Section, Bermúdez and de la Vega families, René Mascareñas Miranda, and Fernando Borrego; mentions Pedro García, descendant of Pedro Ignacio García, Mexican who filed first claim to the Chamizal; reflects on how officials on both sides of U.S.-Mexico border worked in treaty implementation; highlights of Four Point Program, including passage of special legislation to take care of renters and property owners forced to relocate from Chamizal area, construction of Border Highway, construction of a national park to memorialize Chamizal Treaty, relocation of Franklin Canal, and relocation of railroads; reaction of El Pasoans to paying tolls on international bridges; 1989 centennial celebration for IBWC; sentiments of Chamizal residents forced to relocate; recalls fanfare at ceremony attended by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson and Mexican President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz to celebrate opening of new concrete-lined channel; state luncheon at Paso del Norte Hotel; reflects on idea of creation of Chamizal National Memorial; ideas of construction of reflecting pool and placement of statue of Benito Juárez at Chamizal National Memorial; recapitulates comments made on script of historical narrative, "The Brown Report"; provides anecdotes on narrators chosen for Chamizal Memorial documentary, including Ricardo Montalban and Fernando Lamas; phenomenon of long lines on international bridges; replacement of Bridge of the Americas; demise of intimate ties between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso officials; Operation Intercept; G. Gordon Liddy; Operation Dignity.

Chamizal Oral History Project

Bob Ybarra
By Michelle L. Gomilla

April 1, 1994

This is an interview with Bob Ybarra, former assistant to the United States International Boundary and Water Commissioner, Joseph Friedkin. The interview, conducted by Michelle Gomilla, is part of the Chamizal Oral History Project. We are located at the International Boundary and Water Commission's offices at 4171 North Mesa Street, El Paso, Texas. Today's date is the 1st of April, 1994.

- G: Before we begin discussing your involvement in the Chamizal settlement, Mr. Ybarra, I'd like to ask you to share a bit of biographical information with us. Perhaps you can begin by telling us when and where you were born, please.
- Y: Okay, that's easy. I was born in El Paso, Texas on December 7, 1942. And that's one year after the event- [World War II]- not that same year. I was educated in schools here in El Paso and...
- G: Where did you attend elementary school?
- Y: Of all places, I started out in Catholic school. [I attended] Guardian Angel School in El Paso. And I went to public school

for one year at Zavala [Elementary School]. After that, I studied in San Jose, California. We lived there for a number of years. I returned back to finish high school in El Paso in 1960. [I graduated] out of Austin High School here. And then after that, I started college, but I gave it up very quickly [and] went into the Air Force instead. I was too busy having a good time, I suppose. And then I went back to UT El Paso- that was Texas Western College then- in 1964 and I got out with a Bachelor's Degree in January of 1968...

G: What was your degree in?

Y: ...in History and in Journalism. That was in January of [19]68. Actually, I crowded a lot of my journalism courses so that I could get a job one week after I graduated. I graduated on a Friday, or at least I completed the last final and I knew what I was passing, and then on a Monday I went to work for the *El Paso Herald Post*. This was in January of [19]68. And I worked in the *El Paso Herald Post* as a newspaper reporter, columnist, [a] little bit of everything. In those days in newspapering we did it all.

And, as time developed, I developed a portfolio on the federal government which included U.S.-Mexico relationships [and] which included the Chamizal settlement. And then in addition to that, I also developed a federal government portfolio. I covered the federal courts, I dealt with the agricultural development, business news, and overall Mexico news.

In those years I did publish a weekly column on U.S.-Mexico, particularly on the Juárez area. And we called it "Border Briefs." And this was a Saturday column. And we covered everything that there was to be covered: sometimes spot news, sometimes economic news. There were exciting years in those days. That was the year of the Tlatelolco Riot in Mexico in [19]68. And, as I left the *Herald Post* in 1975- this was October [19]75- it was a different Mexico from [the Mexico of 19]68. What happened in 1968 at Tlatelolco changed the world forever in Mexico. There was a lot of efforts at bringing the border economy into the Mexican stronghold. This was the start and the beginning process of the *maquiladora* movement in the border cities. I was fortunate to see the inauguration of the first one way back then and saw the development of that for quite some time. It's all interesting. I still keep my columns somewhere in a box at home and I'm sure these are all in the archives somewhere. But those were exciting years.

And since I had a portfolio on [the] U.S.-Mexico border then, I was recruited by the International Boundary and Water Commission to be their specialist on the border [and hired as a] kind of a trouble shooter. [Since I was] knowledgeable about the area [I would] be able to bring in the, oh, both the domestic [and] political interests together and a lot of undertakings that were underway at that time. This was, again, in 1975. I served as a Special Assistant to the U.S.

Commissioner. It was the U.S. Commissioner [Joseph F.] Friedkin. I'm sure you've probably interviewed him. He was, in fact, the expert on Chamizal that remembers that stuff intimately. And much of what I know about the development of the Chamizal I learned from him or from the records that we have here at IBWC. In my job I have to go back to a lot of the papers to look at issues that are coming up now and how these reflect on what was done in the past. So, as a result of that, I do have that intimate knowledge of the Chamizal. It's not the direct knowledge in many cases of the development of the treaty, but certainly the implementation. I was involved in some aspects of it.

Since 1975....I was shortly after that named as the Secretary. Secretary is a treaty position for the Boundary and Water Commission. Since we are an international organization, we are, in fact, diplomatic officers. And we are entrusted by the U.S. and Mexico to carry out a number of requirements under the boundary [and] water treaties and these cover the entire border from the Pacific all the way to the Gulf. We have responsibilities in boundary demarcation, river stabilization- like Chamizal- [and] flood control. We have international dams and reservoirs at Amistad [Dam] and at Falcón Dam. We have also [the responsibility of] deliveries of water to Mexico. We have treaty allocation of waters. We have, finally, involved ourselves quite intensively and recently on border environmental issues. And these are

primarily the construction of wastewater treatment plants, the operation of these to handle sewage on both sides and, also, working out arrangements either in one country or the other for solution of border sanitation problems. We were involved in the salinity issue over the Colorado River and we have been applying the agreements that were signed back in the [19]70s. So that's basically my life since back in [19]42. And here it is 1994.

G: When did you first become aware of the Chamizal issue itself?

Y: Oh, let's see. I would say when I was still in Catholic school, back in the early days. And this was somewhat one of those things where you have a father- and my father was born in the last century. You've got to remember he was born in Tucson, [Arizona] in 1894. And most of our family lived in Tucson and they did not move to El Paso until 1941. But in his conversations with some of the people that he dealt with- and he worked as a boiler maker at the Southern Pacific Railroad- in some of those conversations, one of the pet peeves he had was that here we are in a school learning certain things that are based on an anglicized culture and, on the other hand, there really isn't that much information about Mexico imparted in the school system. And this was interesting to us because even though we spoke both English and Spanish, [we spoke] primarily Spanish to the parents. But otherwise, we were speaking totally in English. There was this, oh, I say, inter-family need in which my mother would

make sure that we learned to read Spanish, and at least write Spanish, and at least read some, or she would read some poetry to us. So she was quite interested in book learning. The situation there was that out of these conversations would come this story that there's a piece of land between El Paso and Juárez that belongs to Mexico. And, of course, we would ask our teachers and they'd say, "No. You're crazy. There's no such thing as that, you know. It just doesn't develop right...." So this was just an on going passing fancy in those years.

We didn't really hear about it again until I was in the military. I served in the Air Force. And my last six months were at Holloman Air Force Base so I was close to the area. And since I was trying to prep myself to go back to college, I did a little bit of reading. And, again, I've always had this interest in U.S.-Mexico relations, even in those years, so that I read a little bit about it. And even in some of the college text books you would hear that there was an issue over Chamizal but not much was said about it. So we don't really know more about this until about while I'm still in the military. We hear about the meetings between [President John F.] Kennedy and [President Adolfo] López Mateos in Mexico City and the fact that the Kennedy administration has agreed to reopen this case and settle it. And that, of course, stirred my interest.

G: Why do you think Kennedy decided to settle the issue while he

was in office?

Y: Well, again, I can look at it as I think now and what I thought back then. What I thought back then was that I was captured in the Democratic Party politics of the time. This was in the [19]60s. And I was very interested in that process. I was very interested, like a lot of people my age at that time, that you have a young President, a new administration, and we're going to change the way government does things. And one of the promises we kept hearing, at least through the staffers and people that were involved in the campaigns, was that the United States for the first time would be looking in a different way- southward- and try to bring in a lot of things. We were happy with Peace Corps, you know, things like that. But we were also happy with some of the things that you would hear about [such as the] Alliance for Progress and all these things. So at that time, I thought it was all this one part of one new scheme where it would be a new relationship. And one way to settle this would be to look at some of the old problems that had been hidden, but never really exposed to the public. And I thought this was one of the reasons why Kennedy was doing that.

As I went into college and learned a little more about it in a, say from an academic standpoint, then I thought that some of our feeling was correct at that time. But, on the other hand, we also then learned that there were a lot of other issues that were not going all that well between the

United States and Mexico having to do with the boundary. And that's when I learned about the salinity problem with Mexico and the Colorado River. And, again, we're receiving this from another perspective- not as an insider but rather something that's in a text book and interpreted by your college professor. And, again, this is all in the U.S.-Mexico curriculum that I took quite heavily and, also, on the political science side, which is also another perspective, and, of course, in the economics, and all these other interdisciplinary areas that you look at. So that was a second perspective.

I now can go back and say, "Here I am in my young 50s," and go back through these different phases and the next two phases in my life that were to follow. One would be the newspaper work and then the other one would be, of course, my current professional work which is now well going into twenty-two years easily. But in my eight years that I was with the newspaper, I did have this very close relationship with news makers on the Mexican side, both at the local level and the national level. And, in this case, we actually mingled with the staff personnel of a couple of Presidents there [such as Alvarez] Echeverría and the guy before him- what was the guy? Not Luis Cortínez, but...

G: [Gustavo] Díaz Ordaz?

Y: ...Díaz Ordaz. And so we did have this intermingling. It was mostly with the Echeverría administration that they really

made a great effort to try to talk to news media people on our side. And I did travel to Mexico quite a bit, too. And in the cocktails- over a tequila, over a *cerveza*- you learn a lot. You learn a lot about things in Mexico...

G: Tongues seem to loosen.

Y: ...and you get a Mexican perspective on the [issues of] salinity, particularly, [and] on the Chamizal. So that's another phase. You've got to take that into consideration. But, at the other hand, you're a newspaper man. You're bound by certain ethics. How much can you publish? You only publish what is for the record. The other stuff, you simply add it to your learning bank that sometime in the future it helps you in making decisions. And it has certainly helped me in the position that I'm in in which I have to be quite sensitive to the issues in Mexico [and] the needs in Mexico. But, on the other hand, I also have to be aware of the fact that my job is to protect the United States' interests. This has been, you know, quite a useful lesson.

But again, in the case of the Chamizal, what I learned during that phase is that you have different generations of Mexicans. [You have] the older generation of Mexicans, which are a different type of people who are more disciplined, more worried about the past, [and] more nationalistic. They do have, in fact, a sort of European type of upbringing in that you're somewhat more organized than the younger generation. And it's been in many cases [that] they look to the past more

than to the future. I saw the struggle between that generation and the newer one- and this was exposed during the Echeverría years- when you have a change in that kind of thinking. But if you look at the old guard, they would tell you the old story about how bad the United States has acted towards Mexico, that Mexico tried to settle this issue over many, many, many years, and it was simply not possible because the United States wanted to keep Mexico as part of their sphere of influence. This being the case then, this was something that for the United States it was not something that could be settled.

Being a newsman at that time, of course I would be inquisitive. I would ask them, "But, on the other hand, have you ever looked at this? Have you ever looked at that? I talked to the younger people and they feel that some of you have an interest in punishing the United States on something like this."

The text books that you have in Mexico about the Chamizal are not realistic. A lot of that stuff you'd hear, in fact, is spread propaganda. But then, on the other hand, when I talked to the younger people they also had this anti-U.S. sentiment which was pretty well established. So that's the kind of feel that you get on why and how the Chamizal, and so on....

But I think all of them together at that time would say that they considered that to be a great trial for Mexico

in that they were able to go....You know, the old David and Goliath thing. And they got land that was rightfully theirs and, therefore, they were able to move ahead. That's in my newspapering days.

In those days, I did publish a lot of articles and talked with the individuals that were actually undertaking the relocations including [Joseph F.] Friedkin and others who were quite involved with it [such as David] Herrera Jordán, who was the Commissioner for Mexico on the other side at the time. I don't know [if] that's the relationship between press and news makers anymore, but we had two ways. First of all, we treated each other professionally. That is, "I'm here to interview you. This is what I want for the record," and so on. Having done that, we could then have the cocktail. We could talk. And from both sides, you get enough at the cocktail to learn how to slant your story and so on because people open up. They're more informal. But, on the other hand, facts stay as they are because that was a formal interview.

So we published a lot of stuff following the Chamizal [covering topics] from the relocation of the people [to]....That was a tremendous job. The other thing was the result of some of the work in El Paso. And I remember publishing a series on this thing for quite some time- for about five or six days- on the impact of the Chamizal. We're talking about the schools, especially the Bowie High School, Chamizal [Memorial] Park, the Border Highway, the relocation

of the canal, things like that. They were all complementary to the project and the project itself. Again, this was based on interviews with different people.

G: Did you have any family living in the Chamizal area?

Y: No. My current years were [spent] on Copia Street. That was while I was going to Catholic school. And most of my other years [after] coming back from California were in the Austin High School area. So we had no connection, basically, with El Paso. Our roots go back to the Sonora, [Mexico] and the Arizona area. We're really not El Pasoans. El Paso, I think, in those years was more influenced by the migration from Chihuahua. And that was....In fact, it's kind of funny in that when we were going to school and I would hear the Spanish language from the kids here. It wasn't quite the same as what you learned in Tucson or what they are taught in Tucson. There's a lot of *modismos* that are very, very different. And, of course, that always makes for an interesting relationship, sometimes good, sometimes hostile, but that's life. (chuckles)

G: When did you begin talking to the residents in the Chamizal? Because Kennedy and López Mateos met in 1962 and- if I'm not mistaken- soon after, machinery, more or less, was put into motion as if the treaty had already been ratified by both governments because...

Y: Now, as direct....You know, we're talking like, oral history, interviews, so I try to focus on the things I was involved in directly. And then there's those where I have been involved

going back, you know, in my current job trying to revisit the issue and discuss it with different people, particularly when you present papers and you discuss it with the academic community. That's kind of a retrospective. But as far as actually talking to the people, living with the people there, and so on, I was never a south-sider.

In those years, while I was going to college, the closest connection we would have would be that I worked my way through college as a taxi driver. And that, I think, is one of the best educations a person can get. I would highly recommend it from an intellectual standpoint. I would not recommend it as a safety standpoint. You can lose your life. But you do intermingle with the people from the Chamizal. Because one thing that surprised me was that I would say fifty percent of my clients when I was driving the cab were from the south side. There was lack of transportation but, on the other hand, the south-sider may be low income, and so on, but he will pay for a taxi, maybe from the *cantina* to the house or whatever, but, I mean, it was a real interesting situation. The comments, generally....And, again, this is between when the relocation is underway [and] the construction is underway. This is basically September, 1964 through December, 1967. And these were the years when the earth was actually moved.

Now, putting that experience aside, and just to give you a retrospect as an historian and as a person that probably has the best files on the Chamizal because of the connection I

have with it, the Chamizal Treaty was signed in 1963. It was not ratified until 1964. In 1964, the U.S. Congress had to pass a law that would provide the money to the United States government to be able to do all these things that we wanted to do. That was basically an expenditure of about \$42 million dollars in [19]64 monies. That encompassed actions for us [and] actions for Mexico. Mexico would finance their part of it. Basically, to transfer this land, and we're talking about almost one square mile- 435 acres net- that went to Mexico.... Some of that land was located.....If it were to go directly to Mexico under the 1910 conditions when the issue came out- was arbitrated, rather- than you would have a strange jut, and so on, in the river. So what the two governments were trying to do here was simply come up with a boundary that was straight and would enable development on [both the] U.S. and Mexico [side].

It would, in fact, open up a bottleneck of communication. And it would clear a lot of titles because everything....Whether the history teachers told us this or not, back in the [19]40s and [19]50s, the fact was that if you wanted to buy property in the Chamizal there was a cloud on that title. That's the reality. That's how you would really find out if whether that land was in dispute or not. So all of these things would be taken care of. Plus, the biggest thing was the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico would be improved. That was the biggest asset.

Okay, so you got all these things going on. We got a river to relocate. And that's basically- what- four and a half miles of river. The river [channel] would be concrete-lined. Half of it would be done by Mexico. Half of it would be done by the United States. And that divided the cost of that.

Then, the bridges....There were bridges that were in the old river channel. They had to be relocated. So you've got two railroad bridges. You've got the two downtown bridges. And then, Mexico would build the third bridge, which was the Cordova Bridge. There was no bridge at that site, except for the old river channel which was an old passage way. Mexico built that and the United States built the other two. So you put all that together, you have about a fifty-fifty split in the cost.

Now, in addition to that, each country had to handle their own situation on their own side, which means that U.S. had to bear the cost as part of those \$42 million to relocate the 5,000 families [and] demolish some five hundred structures. Some of these structures were kept intact [and] kept over in Mexico. Mexico paid for those through the treasury. We also, then, agreed that as part of the relocations we had to relocate some railroads that were adjacent to the old river. We had to relocate the canal which was in the downtown area, but we would relocate it adjacent to the river, parallel to the river. And this would be, again,

a public safety thing.

In addition to that, the families would have to be paid that were relocated. If you were to find them a new house, they could never afford it based on the type of house that they had. And these were property owners. So what the Congress passed in that 1964 Act was that we would have that Franklin Canal relocated because of the safety issue and, secondly, the United States would pay greater than market value for those houses. And the commission had a team of arbiters that dealt [with those forced to relocate], at least case by case. It just so happened at the time that there was a surplus of housing, particularly in the Lomaland area, northeast El Paso, Sunrise Acres, and so on, that it was possible for the people that were relocated to buy a house that was of greater value and in better condition.

Again, this is all happening when I'm driving a cab, particularly the people thing. That was the most exciting part of it. They're happy that the canal is going to be at least taken out of the old Second Ward. There was a lot of drownings [so] there was always this concern. They were happy about that. On the other hand, they were also happy that they would be able to get a chance to move to another neighborhood [and live] in a much better house.

There were some that were very unhappy, particularly in the Rio Linda area- in where the old Bowie High school is- but, [also], going further down. Those were probably some of

the better houses in Second Ward. By standards elsewhere in El Paso they probably weren't, but they considered these to be private ownership, and so on. And there weren't that many tenements in that area. The tenements were located in some other areas. So, again, these people that were there were somewhat unhappy in that they'd been living there all their life. They owned their houses and now they were going to move to another place. But, on the other hand, once they settled in the other place, they realized that you're getting a better structure. And that's good.

But, on the other hand, you have the downside of it. And on the downside of it, I remember people complaining that, "Here I am living in northeast El Paso [in] Sunrise Acres. I don't have the grocery store next door. I have to take a bus to downtown. I have to go to a church that I don't know the people around here. There's a lot of white-faced people that look at us rather strange and that's not the sort of thing that I'm comfortable with. I'm comfortable with noisy areas. I want to have parties. These people don't let us. I need to have a dog. I never liked to have a dog, now I got to have a dog to keep the burglars out," or whatever. And you heard this all the time.

And there was conflicts between those that were settled, particularly in the Lomaland area and the Ranchland Heights, where you had these people that had bought houses there and there was this big surplus and, all of a sudden, the people

moved in- some of these so-called outsiders, undesireables, and so on. So there was some conflict there [such as] gang fights. Some people just never accepted that. So that was the sort of thing that I would hear about in the taxis because....That was good for my taxi business in that instead of taking him from one part of Second Ward to another, I would take him from Second Ward to Lomaland, or to Sunrise, or where ever they lived.

Again, there was happiness and unhappiness, particularly in the grocery store. I found it very interesting because they were not only looking at the location [of the grocery store] but because of the tab [available there]. You could pick up a tab at a grocery store. And maybe they'd cheat you on that tab, but at the end of the month they'd pay it up and you're back again. Sort of like the old company store in mining communities.

Cantinas were important. Some [cab fares] I would still bring back from, say, Sunrise Acres [and] places like that, all the way to.....Oh, let me tell you. I've got to tell you the name of some of the *cantinas*. You had Maggie's Place...

G: Where was Maggie's Place located?

Y: On Mesa Street. Then there was the Guadalajara Bar and that was very....And then you had the, oh, my goodness, Jalisco, Guadalajara, my goodness, several on Mesa Street, [and] some on El Paso Street. Of course, the old Hollywood Cafe was always an exciting one. Oh, Tenampa- a wild place. Right

across [the street from the] Hollywood [Cafe], there was a Venice Cafe. And there was a food place as well as the other. And that was interesting for me because when you're driving a cab you eat wherever you can. And so sometimes I had to munch a taco or two there and that was where you'd find stories and so on.

G: At that time, were you talking to people in Juárez?

Y: Just those that were clients. And we had a lot of people in Juárez that took cabs, but they were not the same type of conversation that you had with the natives or the people that lived in the area. The people I talked to were basically middle-class [people of] Mexico and they were indoctrinated in Mexican history. They knew their text books well. And they were just glad that Mexico got this land back. If there was any controversy they were always saying, "First of all, we don't want any houses of ill repute to be going out over here. We're concerned about the image that Mexico has. This is bad for us. We want to wipe that out. We want that to be just a green area with schools, with museums, and roadways, but no businesses." And, also, they were so glad that the bridge was going to be free. One thing I learned [that] was a common complaint, especially when you crossed the border to the other side, was that there was a toll that was going to be kept on the downtown bridges. And a lot of them thought this was not fair. I mean, after all, those bridges had been paid for. [Comments were made such as], "Why should the companies

continue to charge tolls when it's a fact that the federal governments that are building these bridges and turning them over to the previous owners?" So they felt there was some inequity there. That was basically the comments I would hear from Juárez.

G: In the process of relocating the international bridges, what did the governments [do]? How did they handle the traffic? Was it rerouted? Was a temporary structure built?

Y: Yes. This was a nightmare for a guy in my position. (chuckles) But, on the other hand, we saw that something good [was] coming in the future because when you look at the downtown area, the old Santa Fe Bridge is pretty much is where you see the old underpass and there's the government of Chihuahua building. That used to be the old inspection facilities. And, really, it wasn't that old. It just had been remodeled. And there was something similar on the Mexican side. I remember there was an old escalator, but most of it was simply ramps.

The other thing was that to get to that area, you first of all had to drive pretty much level area but you had the Santa Fe Railroad and then you had some, I believe, eight Texas and Pacific, Missouri and Pacific Railroads. So you had a series of lines. And it was not unusual to have to wait for a long time to cut [through] those. And, of course, any wait, you're talking, that cost you money as a cabbie. And also, it would tie up the traffic. You would have long, long lines

just waiting for that train to back off. And this was basically a switch yard. It was slow moving rail traffic. So that was one bad condition.

So when they started to build the bridges....Keep in mind that the river slightly moved over in this direction in the downtown area and further away when you go into the central areas. So the disruption here was not as bad as it was in the central area. And the central area wasn't that important because it was partly uninhabited. But in this congested area, what was done first of all was the old bridge remained. And not too far from it, but again, to another side, just to the side of it- I think this was to the east of it- the new construction began. And the same thing was being done for the Santa Fe [Bridge] as well as the Stanton Bridge so that the old traffic could remain on the other one. And you could see the construction. There was some disruption, but not really that much. Once that was constructed then, the next step was that there had to be work in demolishing.

And then you had to do the work on excavating the channel, which means that those bridges were, in fact, ready to go in 1967. Because the moment that the bridges were done then, there was a boundary that was flagged between those bridges throughout the entire area. And that would be the site of the new channel. So once that was done and some excavation was actually started then in 1967, that was when- I think it was- [President Lyndon B.] Johnson and [President

Gustavo] Díaz Ordaz were in El Paso and they had a ceremony in the Chamizal Park on the Mexico side. And...

G: Did you attend that ceremony?

Y: Oh, yes. Yes, I was there. As a matter of fact, I skipped school just to be there. And it was interesting on that side because you had a different type of a way to get to Mexico. What had happened before the Chamizal was that whole area was Cordova Island, which was an enclave in the United States that was fenced in, and you had monuments all over the place. And I think it was [in] about [19]64 or so- [19]65- I was in college at the time...

End of Tape One

Side A

Beginning of Tape One

Side B

Y: Well, anyway. This was in [19]64. I was still in college. I was just getting involved in party politics [with the] Democratic party. And Woodrow Bean was county judge and he had a very close relationship to L[yndon] B. J[ohnson]. He was V[ice] P[resident] at the time. And, as I recall, this was a time there was a lot of wrangling for a new crossing in that area [as there had been] for many, many, many years. And one of the pushers on the other side was none other than René

Mascareñas [Miranda]. You know, he had been mayor of Juárez in the [19]50s. And, anyway, he had pushed on that side. I think his successors had also pushed for that bridge. But what eventually happened was that Woody took the....He had enough political pressure to have somebody cut the fence and have installation of temporary facilities. So there was a Cordova Port of Entry. And that was basically an old road that would go through the old Barrio del Diablo, Hammett Street, kind of wind around, make a left jut, and so on, and then go into Juárez. Juárez, then, would have a narrow road. The narrow road would go over the old bridge. Eventually, they built a second bridge. And then that opened up the business area, which is on the other side of the old river channel, which is the old Amigo Supermarket, Del Rio Supermarket, [and] places like that that were very popular attractions.

[The] price situation was different. You could eat very cheaply out there, you could get a shoeshine, get a haircut, and all that stuff. A lot of people did that. We did that. But we would have to drive through Hammett Street and go over yonder. So when this Chamizal ceremony took place in [19]67 then, at that time all of the traffic was routed through the old Cordova area. But at that time, they were able to move the detour side and then opened the actual new bridge. It was interesting.

I watched that very carefully because I did some odd jobs

here and there. One of the things I used to do....I had a friend in the construction business. He was either working for J.D. Abrams or R.E. McKee. And when there was an opening or something like that I'd go work for him. And one of the things that they were doing [was that] they were working on the downtown bridges. And I helped them a little bit on the rebar and some of the construction, stuff like that. And one of the things they would always do when we had a break, they'd take us over to see the Mexican construction which was under way which, to me, was exciting at the time. But at night, it was no longer exciting because at that time, instead of living at the dorms, what we did- my brother and I, which we were both going to college together- we decided to buy an old house trailer. And we parked that in Alameda and Hammett Street[s]. And all night long you could hear the pounding of the reinforcements rods, or the pilings, and so on that you used to construct the bridge.

G: On the Mexican side?

Y: On the Mexican side. And what amazed me was that this was a twenty-four hour operation on the Mexican side because they were convinced that that bridge was going to be finished by 1967. And they did. They finished it. Once that bridge was done, the boundary was lined by these flags that I mentioned. [This meant] that it was ready to have a ceremony.

At the same time, we saw activity on the Mexican side. And to me, this fascinated me because they were actually

constructing a memorial to the Chamizal before the whole thing was done. And this is what you see now. A lot of it was just bare concrete. Then they brought in some marble slab from Guadalajara or- Querétaro, I think it was- Querétaro. And then they started placing flag poles. And then, all of a sudden, they had some trees that came out of nowhere. It was beginning to look very pretty. And that's where the signing ceremony took place- at the Chamizal Memorial on the Mexican side. And the bridge was just so-so. And I remember taking some pictures. I still have some slides of that somewhere in my collection. But it was interesting. That's what was an actual on-going thing. Now this was, again, in [19]67. So I was still in college [but] getting close to getting out. I was crowding a lot of hours so I did get out in January of [19]68. And then I went right into newspaper work. And then I got into that other phase that I mentioned.

G: At one point I remember an idea was proposed to construct a[n alien] detention facility very close to the border and there was a bit of disagreement about where it should be located. Do you remember that?

Y: Yes, from both sides. What I remember at the time and what the city fathers....We were young people there. It's interesting when you're in politics at a very young age in that you see these older people. And an older person of thirty years old is old, you know. They're so wise and know how to say these things so well. And they're out there and

they can defend a person's rights so nicely. I mean, it's something that really fascinates me. But as you grow older, you become one of them or get older than them. And then, it's a different perspective.

But at that time, yes, I remember the controversy was that when the Chamizal was going to be relocated and there was going to be a swap of land, which was the lower end of the Chamizal. Actually, what happened is Mexico would give us a chunk of Cordova- 193 acres- and then we, in turn, would give them another 193 [acres] from another area. To get those 193 [acres] back to Mexico, we would have to give Mexico the old detention facility. We would have to give Mexico the IDC trucking facility and we would give Mexico the Border Patrol building. In addition, there was chunks of the landfill. The landfill would go to Mexico and- what else would go to Mexico- parts of the treatment facility, [the] water treatment plant. So all of that had to be relocated somewhere else. The question was, "Do you want to put those right here? Or do want to move them somewhere else?" And the conventional wisdom by the politicians was that, "Let's get these terrible-looking things with towers and all that. Get them out as far as possible." So for that reason they were relocated over to Montana and what is now Hawkins Street.

G: Near the [El Paso Municipal] Airport?

Y: Yes. Now, that what's you hear there. Now that I've got access to the files and I've talked to the movers and shakers

at the time, much of that is confirmed. It was public outcry. And it was also in the interest of the relationship with Mexico. This was not only a local thing but, I think, the U.S. government at Washington level and even Ambassador [Thomas G.] Mann, who was the big leader in this whole thing in Mexico, recognized that this was an era of good feeling [and said], "Let's not mess it up by doing these things." And therefore, there was a pretty good consensus that it should not happen. So I think the local politicians....At that time I heard them say a lot of things but I think Washington understood [and] was sensitive to the issue and they didn't [allow it to proceed] in that direction.

G: You mentioned that you talked to the movers and shakers or saw them. Who were the movers and shakers?

Y: Well, you know, that's interesting. Not that long ago- 1989- we put together our centennial celebration for the International Boundary and Water Commission. We were formed in 1889 by treaty. And at that time, I kind of thought it'd be nice if we could get some of the old movers and shakers back in one place. [I wanted to find out] how many of them [were] still around and just have a kind of assembly over at the new Chamizal Memorial. And, of course, at that time Frank Smith was the Chamizal Park Director, a good friend. I've known him for many, many years. Since he got on that job we've always talked about [having the assembly.] This is our happy issue. At that time we had visitors. We had Raymond

Telles. Raymond Telles was mayor at the time. [He was involved in a] part of it. [The idea of having the assembly], it went on and off. Of course, we had Travis Johnson, who was a county judge, after Woody. Remember, Woody resigned because he exposed himself that he hadn't paid his taxes...(knocking at door, taping stopped and started again) He was a county judge after Woody resigned. And I think Travis was there for awhile. Jerry Woodard was the county judge after him. He was also one of these movers and shakers. Judson Williams was, I believe, mayor at the time, after Telles. So he was a mover there. Who else?

G: How about on the Mexican side?

Y: On the Mexican side you have, of course, the Mexican Commissioner. That's David Herrera Jordán. And, of course, he died some years back- in [19]79 I think it was. But he was instrumental in quite a bit of it. Now from their side, in the Juárez area, René Mascareñas [Miranda] has to be quite a mover on that in that he was a businessman with very strong ties to the Bermúdez family. And, of course, the Bermúdez family was quite active in that. You also have the de la Vegas, Borrego- I think Borrego died- Fernando Borrego. But they were with the Cruz Blanca, Coca-Cola, all of these distributorships. And the de la Vegas, you would probably in those years tie them to the Del Rio Super Markets and groups like that. The Bermúdez were with the Amigo Super Market and they now have the Pueblito Mexicano. Have you seen that?

That's...

G: Yes.

Y: ...that's Jaime's. And, of course, Jaime Bermúdez really deserves a lot of credit on this. Jaime, by the way, he started his career at IBWC with the Mexican Section. He, of course, has a construction company. It was CUNSA at the time. I don't know what it is now. Oh, let's see. Who else? Joaquín Bustamante, who was an engineer at the time for IBWC, his father had been Principle Engineer and Joaquín eventually became the Mexican Commissioner after Herrera Jordán died. That was in [19]70- after he retired, rather- [in 19]78. And then Joaquín retired in 1985. There was a lot of people within the Mexican Section that were quite active in this. And there were some that were outside the Mexican Section that were within Juárez. I would say Rafael Pérez [Serna] would be one of them. He died recently, not that long ago. Who else? No, that's about it that I can think of just off the top of my head.

G: Overall, do you think officials on both sides of the border worked well together in implementing the treaty?

Y: Oh, yes. I think so. Just one thought here. One man, not necessarily a mover and shaker at least, but it's interesting. Pedro García, he owns a- I used to kid him about that- a chicken farm. It's a real chicken farm over on the Juárez Valley. I don't think it's there anymore. But he is the grandson, I guess, of the original Pedro García who made the

first claim to the Chamizal back in eighteen sixty-something when the first change took place.

As far as working together, again, look at it from different phases. When I was still quite young, going to college, driving a cabbie, and so on, it sounds like it's working very nicely in that it's getting done. You know, that's the thing that turns out. But, on the other hand, you do have these conflicts and you still hear about them. Oh, particularly on the construction site I would hear the construction supervisors saying, "They're not doing it quite right over there. We're having problems with the plumbing. We're having....." As you get older you find out these are part of the things that you learn in construction. You expect it. And these are resolvable issues.

At the same time, from the college text books and so on, you do have, generally, a pretty conservative UT Texas Western College at the time. So there really wasn't that much passion for Mexico, at least in our [classes]. And they pretty well felt that it was a good thing.

And then in my newspapering years then, I do find that you learn some of the ugly things and so on. And then in conversations that you have with the, again, the people that were actually involved in negotiation, you find that it was very difficult getting there. It was not an easy job. There was a lot of resistance, and so on.

But, as far as the two countries working together, the

fact that they signed a treaty, that's good. The fact that they were able to implement it through a commission without anybody shooting each other, that's also good. But then, when you get each side independent of that, how did they manage to get all the relocation done? Did they talk to the right people? And talking, again, to the movers and shakers on the side, [I was told that] these were not easy things.

El Paso pretty well told Ambassador [Thomas G.] Mann that, "There's no way you're going to get this treaty approved through the senate because we're going to resist it unless there's something in it for us. And that is, you've got to give us a lot of things. You've got to give more than fair market value to the people that you relocate. You've got to do this in an orderly manner with the least amount of disruption. You've also got to relocate the Franklin Canal. You've got to give us the Chamizal land. You've got to give land for the new Bowie High School and you've got to come up with land for the Border Highway." And so, those were the four principles that were signed between them as a requirement.

Then, when you get into your congressional hearings, there was generally a lot of support from El Paso with those promises. And, again, you're talking about a free bridge that had to be free- Cordova Bridge. You had to go into other aspects. Like, for example, the canal drownings was a very serious problem in Second Ward. The Bowie High School, that

was mostly a cultural thing. Much couldn't be done over there because of the disputed properties.

But you also had those that were not exactly happy about it. The great state of Texas said, "You can't give away our land." And the Texas Attorney General at that time- I want to say it was Wagner Carr- came up with the opinion why Texas is a sovereign republic- at least at that time- and therefore, the U.S. could not give that land. Of course, this was ignored. Eventually, it did happen. But there were little things like this that made it very difficult to get this thing across.

Then, there was a lot of discontent over the fact that you have toll bridges that are going to remain toll bridges. There was a lot of people upset over the fact that you're going to have these high, arching bridges. There was jokes about battleships going underneath and so on. But there was reason for a lot of these things. And those bridges in the downtown area are high because you avoid all the railroad traffic and you've got to span over a canal and over the railroads. And you've got approaches that you've got to follow. And so, that was the reason for that. And then, you can take it back. And if you remember all the waiting in those railroad lines, then it really is a good thing.

And, of course, you've got the people that felt they were not getting sufficient money for their house. They wanted to get more. It was always an issue. [Joseph F.] Friedkin used

to kid me about his legal advisor. [His] legal advisor was trained in karate or judo, I think. And every time they had these public meetings- and there were hundreds of these meetings. And we got records of these meetings- on and on and on- and the number of people that participated. All of them were trying to build a consensus so that the treaty could be signed and ratified. It was not easy. It was not easy to do it. There was conflict. There was conflicts, even after the settlement, because people wanted more for their properties, especially the businessmen. They wanted an opportunity to be where the action is, make money off of it, and so on. These are things that always happen.

G: You mentioned meetings. What type of meetings were held?

Y: These were public meetings in the affected area. Some were held with the individuals themselves who were going to be relocated, like one neighborhood at a time, this area at a time, the tenement owners, or the tenement dwellers. Others were with the Chamber of Commerce and the City Council, depending on what group. The railroads had to be consulted because it was such a massive undertaking. And I can't remember what we did with those, but they're probably in the archives.

There's one thing [I remember]. I used to chat with [Joseph F.] Friedkin about these things, kind of reminiscing over some of the things where he was involved or where I was involved in different areas. And we used to have a book here.

I can't find it. It was a book of before and after. And these were the houses where individuals lived- the ones that we took- and then next to it was a photograph of the area at which they were relocated. And physically, it sounded very good. And we used to have these little discussions. And so, [we'd say], "This is great to move somebody, [at least] from an academic standpoint. But, on the other hand, there are these social issues. They want the Church nearby. They want the *cantina* nearby and these are things that...." We'd say, "Well, but, I mean, you know, when we were growing up and mamma and papa says, 'We're moving,' we'd move and nobody argues." But this is a different world now. It's more of a touchy, "feely" world that we're in now. We've got to take into account social effects. And that was interesting. And then there was a generation difference, of course. It was...

G: So what was the general tone of the meetings? For example, [in] the meetings that were held with residents, did they voice concerns, complaints?

Y: Well, I was not in all of them directly. I probably attended maybe one, maybe two, over in the Hammett area because there was noise happening over yonder. But most of what I know about this is what's on record. And, yes, they were vocal. They were vocal mainly over the property value. [They said], "The fact [of the matter is] that I've been living here all my life. I'm not about to move," you know, that sort of thing. From the business side, there were some complaints that [were

voiced such as], "Perhaps you're taking more than you need, more land. You really don't need that. Maybe if you move your bridge slightly that way you can spare my property." [I heard] that sort of thing. But, basically, that was it.

G: When were you approached by the International and Boundary Water Commission to come on board?

Y: Oh, my goodness! September of 1975. I joined on October 15, [19]75. So it was just thirty days....

G: So by then, the Chamizal...

Y: Oh, yes. Yes, by that time the Chamizal was already a done deal. Fact is, I was still a reporter when we attended the last ceremony. And that was in [19]68. And in 1968 that's when the....Towards the end of [19]68, almost early 1969, we had [President Lyndon B.] Johnson and, again, [President Gustavo] Díaz Ordaz attend a ceremony over at the downtown bridge. And that ceremony wasn't for the boundary- the boundary had already been established- but, rather, [for] the opening of the channel. And the concrete-lined channel had been done and so on. It was a nice ceremony. On the other side away from the bridge the IBWC had set up something and, all of a sudden, when Johnson pushed a button over here you had an explosion over there [and] the water started coming through the river. It was all very impressive. There were speeches to be made and the usual comments.

And then after that, it was a visit to this hotel [that is] now the Westin, [then] it was Paso del Norte. The old

hotel, it was still pretty run down at the time because when there was word that the Presidents were going to meet and have a state dinner at the- state luncheon, rather- at the Paso del Norte lobby, there was a flurry of activity. They were cleaning it up and all sorts of things. It was very beautifully put together. The old Tiffany dome was probably cleaned and the walls were repainted. Some of that old gold tint to those Corinthian columns, all of a sudden, came up again. It was very nicely done.

What we had is at the upper level- probably the east side of that lobby at the sort of, like, a balcony or mezzanine of sorts. That's where the El Paso Symphony Orchestra was there. And, of course- I think it was Orlando Barrera who was the conductor at the time- and they had a lot of nice music. The fact is, I think, if we look hard enough, we probably have a tape of that music. I remember listening to it one time. But we do have a tape of all of the music that went on during the time. Downstairs in the lobby, the whole lobby was redone and you had [President Lyndon B.] Johnson, [President Gustavo] Díaz Ordaz, and then all of, again, these movers and shakers that I'm talking about.

And [the event was an] "invitation only" type of thing and [we] got to eat there. From a newspaper, the only one that got an invite to go down there was the editor. I was up here [motions upward] at the other balcony which was assigned to the press and we had....Oh, it was a mess but we got to sit

through the whole thing, listen to the speeches, and so on. After that, it was all over. [The] limousine [took] off to the airport. It was a done deal. That was it on Chamizal. After that period, Chamizal was still pretty much in the mind of a lot of people.

G: When did you learn about the idea of constructing a park on the traded lands?

Y: That was in the early going. That was in the early going when the politicians in El Paso insisted that if they were going to get that treaty through, they needed to satisfy the aspirants at El Paso. One of them was the Chamizal Park. And at that time, the problem was complicated in that you don't declare parks that easily in the federal system. You can do a memorial, [or] you can do this, but then you can only do a memorial to a big, broad event. You cannot do it strictly for this one event. So Chamizal is more than just Chamizal. It's basically a memorial to the entire work of the IBWC from a hundred years to now. And that is memorialized in that film that they have.

But at the early going, there was a lot of ideas tossed around. One thing [discussed] was pros and cons on a reflecting pool. I remember that was, geeze, an exciting.... People said, "Why do you want a reflecting pool? You got all these sand storms. You're going to have this thing full of mud. It's never going to work. The type of commemoration...." Then you had the old red neck sentiment,

you know, "The hell with Mexicans. We don't want them," you know. [I'd hear that sort of stuff. Others said], "Why should we commemorate them?" And then there was somebody who said, "Let's have a statue of Benito Juárez here. Just like the Mexicans are putting a statue of [Abraham] Lincoln on the other side." And there's still a lot of that racism. It was quite rampant. It exists. I know it existed then and it exists now. But, again, that was the controversy at the time. We followed that through because later on, what happened was, you had to have a separate bill, a complementary bill, for the Chamizal Memorial establishing that. You also had to have a separate law for the Border Highway. And there was a lot of disappointments and so on because many people expected the Chamizal to be something bigger than that. A lot of people not only expected the land for Bowie High School, they also expected the feds to have built a school. They expected the reflecting pool in the other place. They expected a lot more. They expected an amphitheater, something very nice. They expected a total highway system when, in fact, the feds were only saying, "We'll bill you money for the highway as far as giving the right-of-way, but as far as bridges over that highway, you're going to have to pay for them yourself." Then you had the....When the Chamizal was actually built there was a lot of concern. People see you have a lot of grass, but no trees. [They would say], you know, "Why [does] Mexico have a lot of trees? Why can't we have them?" You know, [I'd hear]

that sort of thing.

That was quite a bit of the controversy after the Díaz Ordaz and Johnson meeting. A lot of it dealt on these complementary projects [such as] the [Border] Highway and the Chamizal [Memorial]. And, of course, the canal had been relocated. There was some controversy [concerning that phase. I heard comments such as], "What do you do with the land? Let's cover it up." The City of El Paso came up with [an idea of creating] Paseo de los Heroes or something like that. They did come up with a nice covered area there.

As far as the Chamizal itself, one thing that I remember getting involved in with Frank Smith, [Superintendent, Chamizal National Memorial], was over the film that was the documentary. And I did go over a lot of the stuff that they put together [such as] the "Brown Report," which is a historical narrative on the boundary and so on. And I did comment on that in those years and, in fact, as I recently commented on it again when they reissued it. We also had comments on the scripts for the film. And I was part of Frank's advisory board on that. And there were some things that we changed.

I recall one thing that really stuck out was that there was a little segment there about....[The segment read something like], "This was a period of lawlessness in which we had American cowboys intruding into Mexico and...." Then the segment mentioned the "...Mexican *bandidos* on this side."

And, you know, [the film had] little nuances like that. I remember we scratched out [these segments]. There was a lot of discussion over these things. To the Park Service's credit, they accepted all of that- all of the changes- and it was very well done. We had groups, like from LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens], and others who helped us on the advisory committee.

Then the one thing that really upset us was the first cut of the film which had some of these things which would later on- I'll tell you now- which was the nuances....But the second part was the one that concerned us the most. And that was the narrator.

G: Who was the narrator?

Y: Fernando Lamas. And his Argentinean accent just didn't come across. It was awful. It was just awful. And, you know, we rejected that one after the other. [Some committee members] said, "But, I mean, the man is giving us a good price and doing" this and that "and basically he sounds very good." And I said, "Sounds very good to your ear, but keep in mind when it comes to culture you have a tin ear. It doesn't sound right. It's not going to go across. And there's the way he's mispronouncing some words that almost sound obscene." [Some committee members said], "Oh. Oh, yeah?" (chuckles) [I said], "And then the other thing. You're going to do this in English and Spanish. Now the English is rough, very rough, for Fernando Lamas. His Spanish is even worse." So he was

scrapped. That first draft, I don't know what they did with it, but it was just awful. Then Ricardo Montalban was brought in to do the other one. And he's done a masterful job, I thought, both in English and in Spanish. It's still a good film.

Well, that's basically it on the Chamizal that I can remember, [both] firsthand [and] secondhand. Now, I'm in a position where we revisit a lot of these issues. And, again, you see some of the people that were there. I saw them as a young- what- twenty-one year old coming back from the service, going back to college. I saw them as a reporter, first [as a] young reporter, [then as a] mature reporter. And I thought I had a great deal of respect with the community. I was a big part of it, [in] both U.S. and Mexico. And then I was a Foreign Affairs Officer. I think that's the word they used for my title here.

I'm well into my nineteenth year [of employment with the IBWC] so I've been here awhile, (chuckles) been here quite a while. And I do continue to advise, not only this present Commissioner, but other Commissioners who have been here before. And we've had, of course, a succession of Commissioners on the Mexican side. And the Department of State does rely on this office's advising [and] it's institutional memory on a lot of these things. So we do visit issues from time to time that bring us back to the Chamizal.

And one of them that we've been quite involved in in the

last two years has been the replacement of the Bridge of the Americas. And that's an interesting case in that the treaty pretty well said it must be toll free. On the other hand, if the two governments want to change that provision the Commission has the power to interpret the treaty in certain ways. So therefore, if we had a consensus between U.S. and Mexico, and particularly the population, we probably could charge tolls at that bridge or reach an agreement for that. But as a practical matter, we know that we cannot get that consensus. The movers and shakers of the [19]60s are still with us. They remember the promise. And the feds should not break that. But, on the other hand, we have a lot of push now by U.S. and Mexico where both U.S. and Mexican governments want the "users" to pay that [toll]. That is the buzz word- "user" fees. [If the] "user" pays, [there is] less [of a] burden on the taxpayer directly. Although, in the end, we all pay for it. The commercial sector was quite involved in this in that when that bridge was first opened in [19]67. And the facilities were opened also in that year. [These were] new facilities. You're talking about eight lanes [on the] Bridge of the Americas [and a] big inspection facility with room to grow, and grow, and grow [that is] totally unutilized for the most part. There was criticism that it was overbuilt.

I think back in those days in nineteen- say [19]78- when all of a sudden the *maquiladora* movement takes root and we're seeing 1,000 trucks a day on that bridge. [As a result, it

has gotten] to the point that it's pretty well deteriorated. We have to take measures to protect the bridge [and] restrict limits on the amount of weight that those vehicles can carry. GSA, Customs, Immigration, and Agriculture, they had to expand those facilities to something where they can do almost five hundred inspections per half a day or whatever. They've come up with new mechanisms of inspections. They've also added additional vehicle lanes. There used to be eight. Now they have ten, I believe, or maybe eleven, something like that. So [even though they've done] all of that and, still, you have a crowded bridge.

You have the phenomenon of long lines. That was something we didn't see in the [19]60s. We started seeing them after 1969 with Operation Intercept. And it's never been the same since Operation Intercept. It will always be crowded. The world is changed. I've seen in those later years the change of the way we do business, the [way] border officials do business with the local community. We are bigger. We are a bigger city. Juárez is a bigger city. We no longer have the close, intimate ties between officials on their side and ours where [for example, if] you had a problem you got on the line and called Joe. And Joe and José would take care of it, you know. It doesn't work anymore. The District Directors of Immigration [and] Customs were pals. That's just the back of, oh- maybe not Gordon Adams, Adams was his last name...D.D...for Immigration. And then you had guys

like- what- Ray [Raymond H.] Dwigans. Ray Dwigans was one of these movers and shakers who was Customs Director. And it was just a nice time when they would come to the newspaper office. We would go to them. We would chat about [border problems and issues and say, for example], "What's the problem with [the crossing]? We've got a crossing problem." [They would say], "Oh, we'll take care of it." It was all very intimate.

Then Operation Intercept came on in [19]69. And then, that was just one night to the next [and] wham! It was shut. We got the federal government's explanation as to why these things happened. And at that time- this was, again, in [19]69- we had the same movers and shakers and they're being told by none other than J. Gordon Liddy that, "This is the way we're going to do business from now on and..."

End of Tape One

Side B

Beginning of Tape Two

Side A

Y: Anyway, G. Gordon Liddy was telling us that this was the way that business was going to be conducted in El Paso from now on. [He said], "We have a terrible drug problem." And he had flow charts and all this stuff about the amount of drugs that was coming through, how we had grown up nationally, and so on,

and so on, and that from now on, every single vehicle was going to be inspected at the bridge. They were going to have a complete search of every vehicle. There would be all sorts of searches of individuals. [He told us], "And you can expect long lines at those bridges. Sorry about that, but this is the way we're going to do things." And it went on, and on, and on. There was a lot of opposition by the business community, especially the downtown business area. And I remember with Schwartz- not Schwartz, the other guy, the friendly guy, the dark guy. I'll think of it. (chuckles) And [there were] others [opposed]. I could see the pain in people like Ray Dwigans, who....They had the old way of doing business. Now, all of a sudden, they had to be the bad guys. It was all changing now. You could see that this was a new El Paso. We're getting big. We're going to get informal. We're going to not have the close relations anymore. And that's basically what triggered a lot of that. And there was a lot of indignation, both on this side [and] on the Mexican side. Maybe at some other time we can talk about Operation Intercept and Operation Dignity on the Mexican side [and] all the exciting times we had during the newspapering of that time. But that's a different story.

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

Y: Well, I think what I just said is pretty much the transition you see here. The whole community is changed. The whole

community is changed. There was a time where, as a newspaper man, you probably had the visibility that probably your newscasters have now on television. Newspapers were still an important part. And this was an afternoon paper that I worked for which had very good circulation at the time. And we took pride in scooping the other guys on a lot of things. But it was visibility and people knew who you were. And it was a good feeling in that you were able to talk to them and it was a learning process. And this is where you learn the additional stuff that you don't pick up in formal interviews and so on. Like I mentioned the old *copita* [or] whatever. It's always something, even over at the golf course.

In the context of Chamizal though, I think I was quite fortunate in coming in when I did back from overseas where I was in the military and then starting school again. I, first of all, learned that these things that I learned as a very small child from my mother and my father were, in fact, real history. I mean, it really was a problem back then and it was something that was unrealized. I saw at those years on the surface the situation that was all of this hustle and bustle going on from the relocation of people and so on in the discussion. And [I also saw] those formative political years where you deal with these older people that know more about these things. And you learn from them, but you also get a better insight as to the process that's going on. And then, again, parallel that to my college education and I wonder

which is more important, whether I learned more from the political guidance that I got from the politicians, whether I got it more from the college of hard knocks being a cab driver, or whether I learned it from the text books and the curriculum that I learned at good old Texas Western College. Again, put them all together [and] it's a good, formative thing. It's given me an experience to learn a lot about the fed system. Fact is, I learned a lot about IBWC back in those years, also. That, in itself, gave me an opportunity to actually be recruited into the job that I have now.

Let's see, I'm going back into twenty years [and] reminiscing over the forty years- twenty years, rather- I can't help but think back at my last article, my last column that I wrote for the *Herald Post*. And as I recall, it was a nice headline that they gave me. It said, "Border Briefs Says Goodbye," or something like that. And then, what I do is come up with a wrap-up of the eight years, again, with the Mexican relationship. Basically, the Mexico that I saw in [19]68 is no longer the Mexico that I'm seeing in [19]75. It's not going to go backwards. Things are going to move forward. You got these issues in a broader scale of the loss of the familiarity of one another. The intimate knowledge and so on is becoming more bureaucratic, more inexact in many ways, but at the same time you do have a progress that's going on in Mexico. And what you see there is basically a microcosm of what we have seen here in El Paso.

G: Okay. Well, I'd like to thank you for your time. I've very appreciative.

Y: Oh, you're welcome. Enjoyed talking.

G: And perhaps if you have anything else to add, we can interview you again or...

Y: Well, if you're ever into some other areas that you think I know something about or somebody else recommends me, then I'd sure be glad to talk to you.

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

End of Interview