



## **The Oral History of Robert “Bob” Wright**

February 14, 2024

Interview conducted by Libby Herland  
via telephone



# Oral History Cover Sheet

**Name:** Robert W. Wright

**Date of Interview:** February 14, 2024

**Location of Interview:** phone interview

**Interviewer:** Libby Herland

**Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:** 1962 – 1986. 24 years.

**Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:** U.S. Wildlife Management Officer (Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife), Pocomoke City, MD. Wildlife Management Officer, Salisbury, MD. Game Management Agent, Yuma Arizona. Game Management Agent/Special Agent, New Orleans, LA. Special Agent, Pasadena, CA and Yuma, AZ. Supervisory Special Agent, Phoenix, AZ.

**Most Important Projects:** Illegal overharvest of ducks and geese in Chesapeake Bay, Sonoran pronghorn sheep seizures from Mexico, first seizure in US of a leatherback turtle, seizure of a gray whale skeleton, thick-billed parrot protection and Desert bighorn sheep trophy hunting.

**Colleagues and Mentors:** Bob Halsted, Bill Davis, Bill Kensinger, John Cross, KC Frederick, Dave Kleinz, Dick Gritman, Neill Hartmann, Dick Endress, Jerry Smith, Clark Bavin

**Brief Summary of Interview:** Bob grew up in North Carolina. He explains his lifelong interest in hunting and how, after serving in the Korean War, he took a job as a wildlife conservation officer with the State of North Carolina. There he did hunting and fishing compliance and some bald eagle protection work. He met several U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wildlife management officers there and in 1962 was hired to be a U.S. wildlife management officer, stationed in Maryland. He talks about his duties at his various field stations, particularly on endangered species work, his work on the Mexican-U.S. border, his designation as a U.S. Customs inspector (the first time a FWS law enforcement officer earned that designation), working on Native American artifact protection, and his work as an instructor of federal, state and international law enforcement officers. Even though he was a Federal officer, Bob was awarded the Arizona Wildlife Officer of the Year by Governor Bruce Babbitt for the work he did in partnership with Arizona wildlife law enforcement officials.

## INTERVIEW

LIBBY HERLAND: Good afternoon. My name is Libby Herland. I am on the Fish and Wildlife Service History Committee. Today is February 14th, 2024. It's Valentine's Day, and I have the distinct pleasure of speaking with Robert Wright, also known as Bob. Bob is retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement program. We're going to learn about his career. And sitting in with us today on the call is his daughter, Becky Wright, who ended up having her own career in wildlife conservation law enforcement. So, this is a phone interview. Bob and Becky are in Arizona, and I am in Massachusetts, so we're recording this over the phone. Bob, thank you so much for being willing to take some time to tell us about your career. I know you had a number of "firsts" in the Fish and Wildlife Service in your career. We're really interested in learning about that and learning about how you got into law enforcement in the first place, in conservation. So, why don't we start by you just telling us a little bit about where you were born, when you were born, and your early influences in your life.

BOB WRIGHT: All right. I was born in Los Angeles, California, and at a very early age, my father, whose parents were in North Carolina, decided it would be a better place to raise me on a farm and in the wild country there, you know? So, I moved and grew up with my grandmother and grandfather in a little town called Lumber Bridge, North Carolina. And as I grew up, I was on a farm and in a wooded area. I spent all my time hunting or fishing or something else like that, and they all said, "That guy's going to turn into a bear or something. He spends all his time in the woods!" But as I went through school, I was still very interested in wildlife. And as I proceeded through school, I ended up driving a school bus for my junior year and my senior year in the school. They paid you an extra 20 bucks a month to do that. That money went normally to spend on buying some hunting and fishing stuff. When I got out of school, I was 17 and Korea was breaking out and I volunteered for the Navy. I went in the U.S. Navy and was accepted into submarine service, where I became a swimmer diver on submarines. At the end of that period of time, the Korean War period of time, I was discharged in September of '53. I came back home to Lumber Bridge, and, they said, "You need to collect your money from the government for being in service. Just collect each month." And I said, "No, I don't want to do that either." So, I started looking around and there was an advertisement in the paper for state highway patrolman and wildlife officers. I applied for both of them. I was first approached by "Wildlife." And we talked a little bit, and they said, "Well, we're in a re-organization pattern because we're changing from a political outfit to a strictly professional outfit, and you would have to attend a month school in Chapel Hill if you're selected that way." And I said, "Okay, no problem with that." Eventually I was notified that I should go to Chapel Hill, interview again, and at the end of that interview would be notified of what the solution was, and I was selected to attend the school. I graduated from that law enforcement school, which was really something (laughter), looking at it today, and I graduated first in the class. I was selected first to go into a county. We were assigned by counties. We were statewide officers, but we were assigned by counties for location. I spent my time in a little county. I had a county near Raleigh called Harnett County. That's where I started in my real professional wildlife law enforcement career. Worked there in North Carolina for a total of nearly nine years, part of it there in Harnett County, and the rest of it up in Davidson County and up in the mid-state of North Carolina on a big lake called High Rock Lake. It was quite an experience because at that time, in enforcement in North Carolina, wildlife enforcement was really a big hit or miss thing, because we still had a lot of holdovers from the old political times, and it was kind of a different area, but a very interesting area and a very busy area.

LIBBY: Okay, so let me ask you, what year were you born?

BOB: 1932. September 10th.

LIBBY: Okay. 1932. My goodness, you sound very robust. (laughter) I'm glad you are still so active and you're able to do this interview. Tell me a little bit about the work that you did when you were in North Carolina. Just a couple of minutes. You said that it was changing from a political to a, I guess, a little bit more professional. Is that what you mean?

BOB: That is what I mean. We were changing the entire organization of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and making it - they were trying to bring it into a very professional outfit. They were selecting a lot of us young guys to come in. We did the best we could. We started off as strictly checking hunting and fishing licenses and doing some recovery work on some wildlife. But as it progressed, we got more into it [recovery work]. The first eagle recovery work I was ever in was down in Harnett County on a pair of bald eagles that people were harassing. At that time, the only protection was on the bald eagle, but not on the golden eagle. We were successful there and drawing some attention to that. As it progressed on along, I went up to Davidson County. In 1958, the State of North Carolina was the first state to adopt the Hubert Bonner Federal Boating Safety Act. I was lucky enough at that time to make one of the first arrests for DUI on a boat because on a big lake like High Rock, there was always a lot of drinking and carrying on. That became one of the principal things - the boat law enforcement was very large - along with the fishing and the management of wildlife in the area. As it progressed more along the road, I became very interested in the migratory waterfowl. I'd always been interested in the dove hunting as a state officer and as a state officer, we started doing a lot of migratory enforcement on the ducks and the geese and the other migratory birds that really hadn't been a priority as a state law enforcement officer. I'd met a couple, three or four of the federal game wardens - at that time, they called them and a couple of them, I worked with quite a bit. One, by the name of Bob Halstead, later became one of the leaders in the Fish and Wildlife Service with the same approach of trying to bring everything into what is the betterment for the conservation and not necessarily for the people that they were chasing then.

LIBBY: You just kind of anticipated, the question I was going to ask, which was if you had much interaction with federal wildlife conservation officials in your job?

BOB: Yes, a lot of it. And along the way, this one gentleman, Bob Halstead, said, "Bob, we're going to hire some new men." This is in 1962. "We're going to hire some new agents. We've got a lot of problems going on. We need some active agents, some that are interested in the wildlife itself and interested in preserving the wildlife for the people of the United States, not for the individual." So, he said, "I'm giving you an application." And he gave it to me. I got interviewed in June of '62 by Bill Davis, the director of Fish and Wildlife Service Region 4 in Atlanta. And he talked to me a while, and he said, "I'm going to have Bob Halstead give you a ticket to fly to Atlanta. We want to give you a physical and another interview." We did that. I flew down and interviewed again, went through an examination of some knowledge about wildlife and some knowledge about enforcement - criminal enforcement. "That looks really good. I'll let you know something." I went back and talked to - oh, I'd gotten married in '56 to my wife, Ann Wright. She was just darn near a game warden herself because the ladies that were married to the wildlife officers in the State handled a lot of license transactions, wrote fishing and hunting licenses to people who'd come by the house all day and then come by and complain night and day, it seemed like. I was always out in the field, so she had to handle a lot of that stuff. So, we talked it over. What would this federal thing be? We made up our mind. Well, it looked like it might be okay. I had been just promoted from what they called a wildlife protector to a wildlife patrolman in the State of North Carolina. It was

sort of like a corporal or sergeant's position then. No idea what it is now. And we were going to have to move anyhow to a different area in the state. When they called, Bill Davis called me from Atlanta and said, "You've been selected to go to Sebring, Florida, as an agent." I say, "Hey, that's great." He says, "Start getting your stuff lined up and you'll get the written confirmation." Well, I got this written confirmation and a phone call simultaneously saying, "Oh, there's been a little problem. You're not going to Sebring. You'll be going to Pocomoke City, Maryland." Where in the world is Pocomoke City? I knew about the Sebring. I didn't know anything about Pocomoke. And he said, "Well, we have a brand-new crew of agents there. There's going to be four. There's going to be three teams. Two of them will be formed. One of them is formed up with two new brand-new agents, and the other team is being formed up with two. You'll be the second agent on that. You're going to work on the migratory waterfowl poaching market business. The black ducks were being harvested on Chesapeake Bay for shipment to New York City for consumption in the market there - a very profitable deal, but it was an extremely rough assignment. We had one agent in the Chincoteague [area] that they'd shot up the house real bad, and the only reason he survived is he and his wife got into a stainless steel, porcelain steel bathtub. He decided he couldn't take it anymore, and they moved him to New York. Then we had another agent come in - in fact, that's the agent I was replacing. He had gotten tangled up real bad, and he'd gotten into a problem in Chincoteague, and they transferred him from the Chincoteague area to Sebring. And they moved me into Pocomoke City, Maryland, which was right on the line between Virginia and Maryland.

LIBBY: Right. So, you're moving into a real hotbed place.

BOB: Yes.

LIBBY: Yes. When you were working for the State, had you ever had any difficult encounters that would prepare you for this?

BOB: I had several difficult problems with the State that [I] would encounter. Got shot in the back one time by a squirrel hunter in August. Had an idea that I was going to apprehend a man that had been having some problems over the edge of the mountains that was shooting squirrels very early in the year, out of season. I went up and somehow or another I wasn't as sharp as I should have been, 'cause I apparently tracked him and went right past where he was hiding. And as I got down below him a little bit, he shot me in the back. (laughter) Well, it got my attention.

LIBBY: Were you wearing a bulletproof vest back then? They probably didn't even have them [then.]

BOB: No such thing as a bulletproof vest in those days. But thank goodness it was a cold day. I had an insulated pair of underwear on and a pair of padded underwear. And then we used to wear a dark brown, what they called an Ike jacket, leather jacket with cuffs and bottom. The shotgun was shot with the number six shot. It penetrated some and stung and it burned. But it was no problem. Later on, we did apprehend the man, and he went to court with it.

LIBBY: Okay. I'm glad you made it through that all right. I wanted to, before we move back to Fish and Wildlife Service. I wanted to just make sure I understood what you said. You were working as a wildlife protector, but your wife had to write up fish and game hunting licenses for people?

BOB: Yes. She wrote a real nice article for - it was published in the North Carolina Wildlife explaining what the wife of a wildlife officer had to do. I've got a copy of it someplace. I could actually get a copy and send it in that envelope that I'm sending with the other stuff, if you'd like to see it.

LIBBY: Yeah, well, that's really interesting. So, it really was a whole family job for you. Did you have children when you were in North Carolina?

BOB: I had one. My oldest daughter. The one you were talking to, Becky. She was born in Salisbury, North Carolina, in 1960.

BECKY WRIGHT: No. Lexington.

LIBBY: Born in Lexington, Kentucky – not Kentucky...

BOB: Lexington, North Carolina.

LIBBY: Lexington, North Carolina. Okay, great. So, you are prepared for moving into an area where there's some rough folks. There was a legal commercial market for black duck harvesting. Is that correct?

BOB: There was a street market for it.

LIBBY: I'm sorry. It was street market?

BOB: Excuse me.

LIBBY: I'm sorry. Can you explain to me? I just want to be really clear on the hunting.

BOB: We had several islands in the Chesapeake Bay between Virginia and Maryland that were inhabited by people who really never came ashore. Smith Island, Tangier Island, Bloodsworth. And they made their living from the sea either crabbing or oystering or hunting during the time that the birds were there, because hunting season didn't make a whole lot of difference to them anyhow. The market hunters did not want to buy ducks or geese that had been shot. They wanted them live-trapped, and then killed and dressed and packed in barrels of ice and taken up to New York City to be sold in the elite food markets, food restaurants, actually. They didn't want shot birds because there would be lead in them. So, we had to lay out at night in various places with offshore boats, and we'd find the traps and stake them out and apprehend people as they were going to their fishery traps and stuff. And so, we had ... [At this point, Bob gets a call from one of his daughters. Their conversation is not printed here.] Yes, that's my youngest daughter, ma'am.

LIBBY: No problem. I'll just make it a little aside.

BOB: That was my youngest daughter. But these people, they would have people come down from the New York area, New Jersey area, and they would pick up these ducks packed up in these barrels of ice and take them back. The U.S. Attorney in Baltimore had called us and said, "Look, we got to stop this act. We got to stop this enterprise. We got to break it up. It's very detrimental to the wildlife in the area and it's got to be stopped." He said, "You guys got to turn to it and work and do your jobs, and we'll back you

110%”. And let me tell you that the United States Attorney's Office in Baltimore, Maryland was one of the greatest avengers of duck and geese violations of any place I've ever worked in my entire career.

LIBBY: You know, that's unusual. That's great to hear. Often, it's hard - you have to practically beg the U.S. Attorney's Office to do anything when it comes to wildlife protection and law enforcement. So that's unusual.

BOB: You're going to see a couple of letters in the stuff I'm sending you from the U.S. Attorney's Office to me - a reference to what you're talking about. And they're good. We really appreciated the U.S. Attorney's office. The one here in Phoenix really bent over backwards because of all the endangered species stuff we were getting into. And it was really, a really different operation. [But if you took the time and had the patience to fully explain the repercussions of illegal wildlife harvesting to them, most U.S. Attorneys would help.]

LIBBY: Well, I do think it goes to show, sometimes you just have one person in the office who's more sensitive to this, or it could be a reflection of the times or where the location of the office is. I mean, obviously, we know in Chesapeake Bay, oystering and hunting were huge forms of economic, well, I want to say development, but that's not the word. But, you know, the ways people made their living – oystering and fishing.

BOB: It was a living they enjoyed and something they could make money at and something they enjoyed doing to begin with.

LIBBY: Right. So, you go up there to Pocomoke City. How long did you do this type of work and was this basically what you did for the time that you were there?

BOB: The whole time I was in Maryland, I spent two years in Pocomoke and two years in Salisbury, Maryland. My partner and I, Bill Kensinger, was the second team, and we worked commercial hunting in the goose fields surrounding the area in Maryland there. We worked duck hunting on the bay and also in blinds off on the islands of Assateague and out through there. We worked strictly at that time, on enforcing game and fish laws. Toward the latter - two years after I moved into Pocomoke City, I got involved in an endangered species problem, that later developed into an endangered species problem on Assateague Island with peregrine falcons. There was a group of people coming down from Pennsylvania and from New York, capturing live peregrines, using traps and things and putting them in hoods and then taking them back and disposing of them in the falcon trade. It was a real big industry and a lot of money to be made. I have pictures - they're over at the wildlife museum, [the] Fish and Wildlife Service museum. I got pictures of 30 some birds sitting on perches in old, abandoned houses out on Assateague Island. We busted all of those people.

LIBBY: Wow. You obviously had to operate a motorboat as part of your work.

BOB: Yeah.

LIBBY: Had you done that before?

BOB: I had. I've owned a boat since I was 12 years old. A boat with a motor on it since I was about 14. Yes, I've operated those, and I've operated up to 55-foot Chris-Crafts for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

We had a big one down on Corpus Christi. It was a seized boat, and we operated it a lot. I also taught, at Glynco, to our trainees coming in - boat law and boat enforcement operation.

LIBBY: All right. Well, I bet that was one of the things that made you very attractive to both the state and to the feds, that you knew how to operate a motorboat so efficiently. How about training? Did you have to go to any law enforcement training when you joined the Fish and Wildlife Service, at Glynco? At the time, were they doing training at Glynco, or were they doing it anywhere else?

BOB: I went through several groups of training. We first started in Blacksburg, Virginia, on some training, and then we moved over - it was the old Treasury Academy at that time. And then we moved over to our individual style [region]. And then I went through CIS - criminal investigator school - in '76 at Glynco and was invited to come back as an instructor at Glynco for troops there. I ended up going back quite frequently. Every time they had any Fish and Wildlife Service people there, whether there was a uniform, wildlife officers from refuges or whenever they were recruits for special agents. I also would supplement training in the other branches [of the Department of the Interior]. We had 65 different entities at Glynco at that time, of other agencies that were sending people for training, mostly uniformed people. They always wanted a little bit of information, especially the Park Service and especially the National Forest Service badged rangers. So, I got real involved in all of that. In fact, later in years here in Arizona, I used to teach a Park Service law enforcement training session at Bright Angel at Grand Canyon at least twice a year.

LIBBY: Well. That's great! It's wonderful when you can train the young [and] other people in certain aspects of your job and your responsibilities. I did that too, at NCTC. NCTC wasn't around when you were working, though. So, you just had the law enforcement center in Glynn County.

BOB: I went to the law enforcement center from '76 to '85. Gave training and we had one-week in-service training all the time every year there. I went through all that. We had a constant resource. Most of the regions had to form their own training team to go out, like here in Arizona. We went out - there are 22 [Tribal] entities recognized by the federal government as Native Americans, and we would go to them if they requested and give law enforcement training to their law enforcement officers during the year, at various times. Also, as a federal officer in Arizona, I taught in the Arizona Law Enforcement Training Academy for the state officers, called "ALETA", several different times. Talking about that, I had the opportunity also, while I was in federal service - we went to Canada to band ducks and geese up there during the summer occasionally. I had the occasion to be able to talk with the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) there at Saskatoon at their school because they were very interested in the federal law enforcement, because of the birds being transferred out of Canada into the U.S. It was just a very brief introduction so they would be able to recognize most of the federal wildlife laws on wildlife, the Lacey Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, all sorts of - the Black Bass Act. It was a lot of stuff there that they were very interested in. They were very receptive. At the same time, I was able, back in Arizona, to train several people in Mexico, in the state of Sonora and upper Baja and their wildlife officers there and helped with the apprehension in Arizona of five California hunters down below Lukeville on the rare and endangered species Sonoran pronghorn antelope. In fact, the horns that were seized in that particular operation are at the Smithsonian. We sent them over to them. Meanwhile, the government in Mexico kept five brand new Jeep Wagoneer Cherokees, the great big ones at that time, and a bunch of guns. They incarcerated, I think, a total of seven people - five of them for some length of time and fined a tremendous amount of money.



LIBBY: Yeah, that's really great. I know that's very satisfying. Well, let's go back. I don't mind jumping around a little bit, but we also like to try to stay kind of chronologically because it's interesting to see how your career progressed. Sometimes the way your career goes also reflects changes in the law or changes in policy or attitudes or situations. So, you were a game management agent in Maryland.

BOB: Yeah. And then I was a game management agent in Arizona next.

LIBBY: Okay. So, when did you go to Arizona and where did you go?

BOB: '66 and I went to Yuma, Arizona on the border. And then in 1972, I was promoted and moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, because they thought that, for some reason, I knew a little bit about importation and endangered species. So, I lived in New Orleans with my family. We all moved there. We lived there for one year, and at that time we were involved with the - real heavily involved - in the Endangered Species Act, because that was one of the few places in the United States that they shipped in live wildlife from Africa to various places in for zoos, and collectors wanted [endangered species]. So, we had to monitor that and take care of that.

LIBBY: That was that was in New Orleans, right?

BOB: Yes.

LIBBY: So, how long were you in Yuma? And I think you told me you were there a couple times. So, the first time you were there, you're a game management agent in Yuma. What was the work that you did in Yuma? That was quite a different environment for you, so was it like adjusting to much more desert areas, isn't it in Yuma?

BOB: It was strictly a game wardens job. We worked with the state a lot. We worked with U.S. Customs on the border all the time. I was on call, and they would call me to go to the border anytime they had anything they thought was incidental to wildlife [and a possible wildlife violation]. And I would go down there. And that's when I became appointed a Customs inspector also. At that time, we ended up with three agents in Arizona, one in Nogales and one in Yuma, and one in Phoenix. I spent all my time working with the State of Arizona, the U.S. Customs, and Mexican wildlife people because of the border there. [I was] really limited to that. And also, at that particular time, is when the United States government adopted the national artifacts - the Native American protection about digging up graves and stuff.

LIBBY: NAGPRA [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act].

BOB: I made one of the first cases or the first case on that up outside of Payson, Arizona. I caught a guy, or a pair of guys, digging up some pots and some bones there. It was prosecuted in Phoenix, Arizona.

LIBBY: Did you call that the Native Artifact Protection Act? There's also one called NAGPRA, I think, which is Native American graves and repatriation.

BOB: Yeah. It covers all that. And the principal enforcement agency right now happens to be the United States Forest Service, because they cover all the land around this area, or the BLM [Bureau of Land Management]. And it seems like BLM is taking up a lot of interest in this recovery of pots and shards and bones and what have you. That was a big operation in Arizona at that time. But in '72 I moved from - I

mean '73 - I moved from New Orleans to Los Angeles where I became, at that time, I was designated a special agent. I worked importations at the harbor and at LAX, the airport there. And when I wasn't completely tied up, I would do normal wildlife enforcement work in the surrounding area. But my time in California was based at the airport, basically, or the harbor itself, on smuggled wildlife.

LIBBY: Tell me about some of the things that you saw there. What were people trying to smuggle?

BOB: A lot of ivory, especially the ivory from China coming in. It was worked ivory. It was not raw ivory. It was worked. It was worked into figurines and things - statues, lamps, whatever you need. And, then there was a lot of endangered animal parts. In fact, I have a picture of myself and Lorne - the guy that played on Bonanza...

LIBBY: Oh, Lorne Greene. Lorne Greene.

BOB: ... posing with a tiger skull and some stuff. [He was there to observe the operation and wasn't involved in the smuggling.] We located within the tiger head about 12, 15 ounces of heroin. They were smuggling it in the tiger head. (laughter) So, we [Lorne Greene and I] made a commercial for the Fish and Wildlife Service while I was in LA [telling people not to bring in wildlife from other countries]. And there was another commercial made with Bob Stack about - at that time., it was about rifles and endangered species. So, it progressed from that, [but] all of a sudden, the border became a lot more important - the Mexican border, and I had a chance to come back to the Mexican border, to Yuma, Arizona again.

LIBBY: Well, can I interrupt you for a minute? You're going actually really fast. When you were in Los Angeles? How many years were you in Los Angeles?

BOB: A year.

LIBBY: Oh, just one year. So, you're doing all this port work and airport work. When did the Fish and Wildlife Service start doing that kind of work? Had they been doing it for a while, or were you there at the beginning of that?

BOB: I was probably at the very beginning of that<sup>1</sup>, especially the airport work and the port. It was very hit and miss all over the United States for a long time, and it started progressing after '72, really.

LIBBY: That's what I wanted to try to get a sense of because, to be perfectly frank, you've been around, you were around earlier than probably anybody that I think I've ever interviewed. So, I think you were there at the beginning of a lot of history in terms of how law enforcement changed, because by now, Clark Bavin was the chief, and he wanted to make the wildlife conservation law enforcement more professional. He changed you from being game agents to being special agents and that type of thing. And you were there for that.

BOB: Yes, I was. I was in Canada, and I met Clark Bavin when he was hired. He came on a banding crew. I met him at that time. Got to know him pretty well. And over the years, even a lot better. But yeah,

---

<sup>1</sup> Port of Entry investigations had been local and somewhat unfocused up to 1972. After the Endangered Species Act was enacted in 1973, the FWS started a more coordinated enforcement effort.

he brought professionalism in. It was you're looking at two different figures here [two different approaches.] You're looking at somebody [an agent] that is very astute with the knowledge, being able to comprehend all the things that you can do legally to get things better. And you're looking at another individual [agent] that looks down his nose and [thinks] there's nothing to do but run down the guy, catch him and put him in jail. It's a hard difference between the two. And Clark was very, very good in what he was doing and did a wonderful job [at promoting professionalism]. And the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is way far better off today than it would have ever been, I imagine, if it hadn't been for him. There was a lot of kids like me coming along and we couldn't see past our nose. We were always interested in stopping the violation, apprehending the person and going on to the next one. And it was nice to have somebody who was looking to the future to make sure there were things done, that would prohibit things from happening, rather than the direct apprehension at the latter date.

LIBBY: Oh, that's very nicely said, Bob. I really appreciate the way that you just said that. I think that's important. Was this something that a change that you and your fellow game agents were receptive to or was there a little bit of "I'm not sure we want to do it this way."

BOB: Well, I won't say that any of the men wouldn't do it, but there was a lot of guys that were more receptive to doing some of these other things. You've got to remember just about all the old heads were all duck cops. We're all raised chasing rabbit hunters and quail hunters and duck hunters and goose hunters. And it took a little transition within our frame of our operation to go from one thing into an organization of a lot of other things.

LIBBY: Right. Yeah, I can see that. So now, before we move you back to Yuma, I wanted to just check in on you with your family because it is now - it's about 1974. So now do have all three -you have three daughters. Is that correct?

BOB: That's correct.

LIBBY: And are they all born by this time?

BOB: They're all, I'm sorry. What?

LIBBY: Had they been born?

BOB: Oh, yes. Yes. Two of the daughters were born in Salisbury, Maryland, and then all three [correction: five] of us were together and we all moved. We never went to a station without all of us there.

LIBBY: And did your wife work outside the home?

BOB: No, ma'am. She was pretty busy trying to take care of the kids and keep up with the crazy husband. [And she was a Girl Scout troop leader.]

LIBBY: Were you busy? Were you gone a lot? Were you working a lot of hours? And did you have to travel a lot?

BOB: Yes, ma'am. We were always gone. It seemed like – you have to remember - at one time, I remember we only had 103 or 104 wildlife agents in the United States, and that included the Washington

office personnel. So, we responded to calls. While I was in Maryland, we responded to calls up in Maine and New Hampshire and everything else to assist other agents. And we helped states [game wardens] at various times. When I was in Pocomoke, I went to Canada a couple times banding, and then back in Arizona, we responded to a lot of the western states - to things happening, and you would be gone for sometimes just 2 or 3 days and sometimes 2 or 3 weeks.

LIBBY: Right. I know Jerry Smith, I read his oral history interview, and he's told me that he'd go up to Canada for weeks, and then he'd come home, and then he had to go right away and go off and do migratory bird enforcement. And he'd be gone for weeks. And it was really quite a strain, I would assume, on your wife and your family. You weren't around that much.

BOB: Yes. And, you know, it's so funny because Jerry is such a (laughter}- he and I became such good friends. I out dated him in age and stuff. And I used to raise (unintelligible) with him. He says, "You're going to be an old man someday, and you're not going to remember a dadgum thing." "You're probably right. But I'm going to keep through with you always."

LIBBY: I think you both are pretty sharp. I think you both are remembering a lot. You're both really good in the memory department. Okay, so now you've move back to Yuma. Did you want to go back to Yuma? Were you happy about that?

BOB: I begged to go back to Yuma on the border.

LIBBY: Really!

BOB: I missed it tremendously, I missed the camaraderie of being with the people on the border - the Customs people, the Agriculture people, all the people down there. It was so good. And I was in such a good position at Yuma because [it] was one of the largest wildlife refuges in the United States. It was a combined 5 or 6 refuges. The office was there. I had a nice office in there finally, and they were so nice. They would take all the messages. It was an easy place to work, and I could be out working all the time. I was not bound to the office because they had radio contact with me all the time, and it was an easy, good place to work and enjoy. And I was able to be home a lot more than I was in a lot of other places.

LIBBY: Well, that's good, because your daughters are definitely growing up now. Were you stationed - is there a Yuma National Wildlife Refuge or is it Imperial in Yuma? What was the name of the refuge?

BOB: The Imperial National Wildlife Refuge, Kofa National Wildlife, Cibola National Wildlife, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife, Havasu National Wildlife.

LIBBY: That's quite a few. So, was that all part of a complex at the time?

BOB: The complex at the time was just - all these refuges were located away from the complex [headquarters]. They were scattered all over the lower part of Arizona there. But the paperwork and the commanding personnel were there. It was nice because I was able to train a lot of wildlife enforcement officers right there on the spot. And that's where about, I think, 7 or 8 of the special agents that came on later. came from. We had three supervisors that came from Arizona Game and Fish from that area - John Cross, K.C. Frederick and Dick Endress.

LIBBY: So, they had been Arizona people first. I did not realize that.

BOB: Yes, ma'am. We had a lot of people. If you look back in the records and check back, you'll find out a heck of a lot of people had a lot of fun in Arizona and thought they could have fun everywhere that way. (laughter)

LIBBY: So, tell me about your work, the work that you did, particularly the work on the border. I'm interested in some stories about that area and that time.

BOB: Okay. One of the craziest things was I got a call from Lukeville, which is a port of entry from the Gulf of Mexico, it's the Sea of Cortez, actually. And they said, "We've got something here, and we don't know exactly what it is, but you got to get over here, Bob, because you will know what it is. And besides, we got to get rid of it." It didn't take me long and I get over there, I said, "Wow, that smells." "Yeah. Look at that pickup truck sitting back there." I said, "Yeah." "Well, the shell is in the back. It looks like some kind of turtle, we think. Go look at it." There was a leatherback turtle shell that filled up the back of a pickup truck. It smelled so gosh darn bad that nobody could stay around. They had all the information on it. "We seized the truck and [the turtle] because we didn't know what else to do." And I said, "You did perfect. I'll take the information and process it." And they said, "Well one thing you've got to do, you can't leave here and leave that thing sitting there." So, I called the sub-office of the Cabeza Prieta which is in Ajo, about an hour, an hour and a half from where we were and had one of the refuge people drive down and bring a man with him. And they drove the pickup truck and the turtle shell back to the refuge and locked it up as secured evidence in a shed there at the refuge. That was, I guess, the first leatherback turtle shell they'd ever seen. We had been getting a lot of hawksbill turtle shells because the shrimpers there would catch a lot of hawksbills in their shrimp nets, and they would take the meat out of the turtle and keep the shell, and they would give it to people on shore, and they would clean it up and they would sell it to all the tourists going in as a wall hanger. And it was very seldom for a long time that you didn't get 4 or 5 hawksbill a week out of Lukeville, and about double that out of Port San Luis and occasionally out of Andrade, California, which was also part of my territory. It was on the Colorado River itself. We also got involved at that time what everybody was seizing all on the border - turtle oil lotion. It was advertised as saying it improves your skin and this, that and the other. And we were seeing it like it was going out of style and going on the word of the manufacturer. Finally, we said, "We'd better do something about this." So, we sent it off for analysis and it comes back. There's not a darn drop of turtle oil in it. So, we quit seizing turtle oil.

LIBBY: That's funny. So, were turtles protected at that point in time?

BOB: The Endangered Species Act covered the sea turtles at that time.

LIBBY: Right, and so, this is the full, the new, the amended Endangered Species Act; the one of 1973.

BOB: Yeah. Now, the other thing that happened is that San Luis port of entry in Arizona there, over a period of about 4 or 5 months, they kept calling me. "Got some more whalebone down here, Bob." So, I go down. They'd have it and the information on it, and I'd pick it up. And over that period of time, in the back yard of the big refuge complex, we assembled nearly a whole gray whale carcass. I mean, jawbone, ribs, vertebrae, everything you could think of. They had the whole backyard covered in this stuff.

LIBBY: Well, where did they come from?

BOB: From the Sea of Cortez, across the border at San Luis.

LIBBY: But was it washing up? How did you get it?

BOB: People were picking them up and bringing them in for souvenirs.

LIBBY: Okay. So, people were picking them up and bringing it in.

BOB: They were tourists in Mexico that thought they could bring back a souvenir. I got a picture, -I think I sent it in - of one of the wildlife refuge trucks with the two jawbones in the back of it. It's a big, big truck. And the jawbones stick out way - 3 or 4 or five feet longer than the bed of the truck. I don't know how anybody thought they would bring that in and not declare it. (laughter) But they did. And finally, National Marine Fisheries - I contacted them and then they re-contacted me and said, "Well, yeah, we would like to have it. Just put it in a little box and send it." And I said, "You people don't understand what I'm telling you because a little box isn't going to hack it." So, they sent somebody over from California, Los Angeles to look at it, or from San Diego, and they looked at it. A couple of weeks later, I get a call back and say, "We're going to send a packing crew over there, and they're going to pack it in crates and send it to Washington's National Marine Museum." I guess they did, they packed it in crates. It went someplace.

LIBBY: That's right. I've had some experience with whale skeletons as well in Massachusetts, washing up on the coast. And yeah, you need a big crate to move those.

BOB: They get out of hand in a hurry when you don't have a whole lot [of room]. We filled up the refuge yard with a whale.

LIBBY: Well, the thing is, you're in Arizona, so to have a whale in your yard is pretty unusual. (laughter)

BOB: It was. I know these people could have been coming - most of the people that entered from San Luis were from California, Oregon and the State of Washington. Because the California Game and Fish were a lot tighter on the border on enforcement of that stuff. Arizona was allowing the Federals to completely enforce the wildlife enforcement on the border.

LIBBY: I don't know where San Luis is. Where is it in Arizona.? Is it on the western part or...

BOB: It's on the far western border of Arizona. If you look at the Colorado River where it punches into Mexico, it's right there in that corner. You come up there on the California side about seven miles. You have a place called Andrade, California, which is another port of entry. But it's a California port of entry there. And California was taking care of it somewhat, except it was so close to me I ended up taking care of it.

LIBBY: Did you get involved with anything like any parrot smuggling or anything like that when you were working in the border?

BOB: Yes, especially the thick-billed parrot was being smuggled, which was an endangered species at that time. We made several cases on that in the area around Douglas and Naco, Arizona, which is in the

eastern part on the Arizona border. They're all on the border. And then other than that, we always were picking up red-headed, double yellow headed or yellow headed birds at the border. People would take a silk stocking, nylon stocking and put a live bird in it and tie a knot and stuff it up under the dashboard. The bird would live, and they would try to smuggle them into the United States. We made an awful lot of cases on those.

LIBBY: How did you figure out that was happening? Was that already been happening before you got to Yuma and somebody else discovered it, or did that start happening while you were there?

BOB: We had an informant one time tell us something about it. So, we started using the canine dogs on it too. Canine would do it. And also, let me tell you, if you start questioning somebody that's got something under the dash of their car and they start to get so nervous, they can't even talk to you, you can readily suspect there's something. Some of those customs inspectors at that time would just take out a big jackknife and just rip the dash right open. And there's the parrots, you know. One of the agents that we hired, name of Dave Kleinz, became the parrot specialist for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Really foremost. In fact, he was so good, U.S. Customs hired him as their person in Houston, Texas. Hired him away from Fish and Wildlife and made him a U.S. Customs inspector [correction: agent.] Hired him at a grade higher than he was with Fish and Wildlife. (laughter)

LIBBY: Well, you go where the money is, and also, where you could do some good work, obviously. So, tell me, what else? What were some of the other highlights in Yuma?

BOB: We caught a judge from California, one of the superior court judges driving a California car issued to him. He and his wife had a trunk load of birds that they had been hunting in Arizona. We didn't seize the car, but we did seize the birds and cited him in the federal court.

LIBBY: What kind of birds was he hunting? Do you remember?

BOB: Morning dove and white winged dove.

LIBBY: Okay. Doves.

BOB: There was a retired Air Force Colonel lawyer - JAG judge advocate - who was having hunts over in Yuma every year for 5 or 6 years. And he would come over and they would rent a whole motel place over there, you know. 100 rooms, 50 or 60, 75 rooms [in several large hotels]. And he invited people to come over, and he would pay for everything, and he would take them out to various places where they would kill all the birds, they wanted to kill without regard at all to the limits. He would buy books of non-resident hunting licenses, and they would issue themselves a hunting license, but they didn't pay any attention to that. [They didn't care if they had a license.] We finally broke that up three years after we got started on it. It took that long to finally break it. We brought 12 special agents in from all over the West and part of the Midwest to work that, and we broke it up real good. And that cured that type of hunt there.

LIBBY: That involved some undercover work, obviously.

BOB: Yes, it did.

LIBBY: And were you the coordinator of that or [were] you just the case agent on that.

BOB: I was a case agent at the last of it. I also did some of some of the undercover work to begin with. I've done a lot of undercover work. In fact, in New Orleans, I ended up doing undercover work on ivory up in Alaska a couple of times with them.

LIBBY: Oh, tell me a little bit about that. That sounds interesting.

BOB: Going up there - you have a bad deal going up - where their people could sell ivory if it was "worked," quote, where they would have to do something. But they were selling a lot of ivory that wasn't worked. And so, we busted a couple, 3 or 4 of those people and that broke that trade up. It didn't take long to break that one. The word in Alaska - when you do something - the word gets out pretty fast.

LIBBY: Yeah. I think the one with the mourning doves and the white-winged doves is really interesting because you said that involved - was that some lawyers that were involved with that?

BOB: Yeah. But the guy that organized it was a retired judge advocate officer out of the Air Force.

LIBBY: A JAG officer.

BOB: He had been going to all the courts. He'd represented people in the Superior Courts in California. He made friends with the judges. And apparently, we missed a couple of the higher-ranking judges. This was one of the highest-ranking judges in California that we busted. In fact, I think it'll be in the paperwork I'm sending you - all the newspaper articles and stuff about it.

LIBBY: Fascinating. That's great. Now, did you have anybody not want you to bust these people because of their stature? You know, sometimes when you're dealing with people that are powerful, there's a lot of resistance to bringing them down.

BOB: The agents that I worked with in Arizona and in Maryland and in California - we busted senators. I personally busted the United States Postmaster General in Maryland. He was the ex-governor of North Carolina. We busted senators. We busted congressmen, and we busted a lot of people that we - I never saw any of my people back down from anything. Nothing. Never backed down. And you know what? I can honestly say I never had the Washington Office, or a Regional Office interfere with one of the cases we were prosecuting in court. I had a lot of complaints filed with congressmen and senators about our actions, and they were investigated by their staff in Washington. We came out smelling like roses on all of them.

LIBBY: Wonderful. That's great. You know, there was the reason why I asked that question is because there were some congressional aides, I don't even think they were the congressmen, although I may be wrong, that were shooting in a regulated shooting area in Maryland, and they were hunting when they weren't supposed to be hunting, or they were over limit or whatever it was. I don't remember the details, but the Regional Director in Region 5 in the northeast and the Deputy Regional Director got moved by the Director because of the prosecution of that case. I'm glad that you were able to get all the prosecutions done that you did.

BOB: We never had a minute's trouble. And I know the case you're talking about, by the way. (laughter) Now in the state of Arizona, I never had the State people ever object to anything. They'd call me a lot of



times, and we'd go in because I was not in uniform and in an unmarked vehicle, and we got into a lot of places. They appreciated that. Maryland did somewhat hang back on some of the prosecutions, but they never really rejected. They weren't overactive. And that's the same if you were in New Orleans If you were in Louisiana, if you were doing field work, you had to be very careful about the field agents, State field agents you were going with because they were afraid for their job. Ultimately, if they did the “wrong” thing in Louisiana, they could get fired.

LIBBY: Not everybody has the back of their higher ups. So, I'm glad you did. I'm glad that worked out for you. So, you were in Yuma for a few years?

BOB: Yes, I was in Yuma, the last time, from '74 to '78, when I was promoted to Special Agent in Charge, well agent in charge in Arizona – called Senior Resident Agent at that time - SRA. Stayed there from '78 to about '82, I guess '81 or '82 when I was promoted to Senior Resident Agent Supervisor for Arizona, New Mexico and southwest Texas.

LIBBY: And you were stationed in Phoenix in those locations?

BOB: Excuse me?

LIBBY: Where were you stationed? You had to move?

BOB: We moved to Phoenix. Only we lived in Tempe. We didn't move into Phoenix. My daughters all went to ASU. They all went to college there, and we were living very close to it. My daughter got interested - well, she used to ride with me a lot when we were there because it was always nice to have a nice, young, good-looking woman with you when you're snooping around something, you know? (laughter) She was always there helping me with that. I'd tell her occasionally, “Buy this. Buy that.” And she'd buy it. (laughter) She was always there hanging close to me. She went to ASU and was very interested in primates. (Redacted sentences here.) She majored in wildlife biology [and anthropology] and was hired by the State of Arizona.

BECKY WRIGHT: I was a double major.

BOB: A double major. She was hired by the State of Arizona as a wildlife biologist. She started working on the endangered Sonoran pronghorn antelope on the Cabeza Prieta, and along the way, ended up doing some work on eagles, and then [she] finally said, “Law enforcement is the way I go.” So, she went into law enforcement and worked her way all the way to, up from a wildlife enforcement supervisor to the wildlife chief in the region [correction: wildlife manager to Regional Law Enforcement Supervisor.]

LIBBY: I think it's great when the conservation law enforcement people actually have a background in wildlife. They don't all have that, especially now. Things are changing a lot. But I wanted to ask - this is very interesting. You're talking about Becky, right? When Becky was riding along with you and doing these buys and stuff like that, was she official? You know, you're not supposed to have anybody in a Fish and Wildlife Service vehicle unless they're a volunteer. So maybe things were different back then, but that's the way it is now.

BOB: They were very different.

LIBBY: Tell me a little bit about having your daughter out there with you.

BOB: They were very, very different. There were things that you just said that I have never heard from a supervisor that way, and I've never used it as a supervisor to another agent. But a lot of times when you're all by yourself and you're 4 to 6 hours from anything, you have another person with you. I had a lot of deputies. In fact, I had 3 or 4 deputy US game wardens. They used to - the old deputy game wardens - they used to ride with us a lot. But my daughter was riding with me because of the environment and because of where we were traveling, and you needed to have two people along. She could drive any vehicle that we ever had. She could work any radio or work any telephone. It was a safety factor a great deal of the time. And incidental to that, if we happened to stop by an Indian trading post on Highway 66 or something, and they had something real nice [illegal] that we ought to have, she could buy it. And later on, I'd go back, and I could take care of it after the fact. I did not arrest anybody while she was around, or I didn't apprehend anybody - put it that way.

BECKY: Yeah, I did - it was more like a ride along kind of situation where you're going out with them for the day, usually in pretty much a non-law enforcement targeted day. But like he said, I learned to drive when I was, gosh, 12 or 13 and started driving boats when I was ten. When I would ride along with him, I learned how to use the radio in case something happened and learned to identify bird feathers and such at a young age, so I could go into the stores and see if there were illegal feathers or turtle shell items, ivory, that kind of stuff. Yeah. So, kind of like pseudo undercover type work. It was fun.

LIBBY: Oh, I bet it was fun. And how old were you when you were doing this, Becky? Were you in college? Oh, no, you were younger.

BECKY: I started in high school, but then, once I got into college - I think I may have done some early on in my first year or two, but since I was a double major, I was really busy with school. And then I had the opportunity to work with chimpanzees at a rehabilitation colony here in Mesa, Arizona. So, yeah, it was mostly high school years.

LIBBY: Well, I think that's fascinating. And I'm really thrilled to have this little bit of information because it's just different. I've never interviewed an agent, a former agent that had his daughter or a child riding along with them. I think that's great. Bob, was your supervisor aware that this was happening and completely supported it?

BOB: As far as I know. Oh, yeah, sure he was (laughter) 'cause we'd meet him for lunch or something and occasionally he'd be along. You've got to remember that times have changed a great deal. Becky didn't have enough of wildlife. She retired from [Arizona] Game and Fish and became a Grand Canyon River guide, taking people through the Grand Canyon from Lee's Ferry all the way down.

LIBBY: All right. Fascinating. You sound like my kind of person, Becky. (laughter)

BECKY: Eight years of doing that. Lots of trips down the Canyon.

LIBBY: So, Bob, let's go back to your work in Phoenix. You were a supervisory special agent and a senior resident agent. Tell me a little bit more about the work that you did there. And you went to Phoenix in 1978, is that correct?

BOB: '78 I believe it was. Yes. I went there because of Customs. They knew about me and out on the border, and they said, "We need some help out here." So, when I went there, I naturally decided that it was very good for me to go out to the airport. And we got working on that, and the first thing we did was receive a large shipment. In fact, some of the paperwork you get is going to show part of a gorilla skull that people were bringing in. And they had over a thousand pieces of ivory and a couple hundred pieces of other stuff. They tried diplomatic immunity - the people bringing in were supposedly diplomats from Mali. And we said, "That won't work." (laughter) When they came into court in Phoenix, they brought the Ambassador from Mali.

LIBBY: Mali, right, in Africa.

BOB: When they came into court, the court bailiff wanted to know who they were. And they were talking, and the first thing - the judge called the bailiff over to told him and he came back and said, "Were you here when this happened? Were you with them?" And the guy [the Ambassador] says, "No, no, no." And he [the judge] said, "Well, then you're not a witness in this." (laughter) And so they came down and paid off [the fine] - I don't remember what the fine was imposed. They forfeited all the ivory, everything in there on an Endangered Species Act, on the one gorilla skull. They forfeited the rest of the ivory under the Endangered Species Act for no wildlife permit. They call it a 3177 permit; it's what you have to have to export ivory from a foreign country legally into the United States. Attached to that form will be the export papers from the country of origin, allowing that to be brought into the United States. It was a complicated procedure with them. And then, in the State, I worked real close with the State law enforcement officers to make sure that we were supplying any help that we could possibly supply and anything they needed, we'd try to get for them. We also went into a little bit of training with them at that time, and it was really easy because Becky at that time was the lead wildlife instructor for all the wildlife agents in Arizona here - state agents [and local officers.]

BECKY: I was **one** of the instructors.

LIBBY: Okay. Just one of the instructors.

BOB: She did a good job of all of it, so it made it easy on me. And we were working to try to establish a better working relationship. We had the best working relationship in the United States, apparently from what everybody said, state and federal wise. It was a fantastic relationship. We did relay information back and forth between us. And I don't think we ever really had a run-in on anything. And that's the reason that I got presented with that Wildlife Officer of the Year from Governor Babbitt, to me as a Fed, from the State of Arizona.

LIBBY: That's right. Because Bruce Babbitt, who became our Secretary of the Interior, he was the governor of Arizona before he became the Secretary.

BOB: That's right.

LIBBY: Right. So, he gave you an award. You were the Law Enforcement Conservationist of the Year in 1981.

BOB: 1980.

BECKY: Its sitting right over there. You want me to go look?

BOB: Yeah. Go look – make sure the date on it.

LIBBY: You were the first federal wildlife officer to ever receive that award. That's pretty cool.

BOB: That's right. '81. 1981.

LIBBY: 1981. That's what you said in your notes. Well, congratulations. That was an honor. I hope you got a bonus from the Fish and Wildlife Service for that. (laughter) I mean, that's something to be recognized by your State counterparts.

BOB: It was very, very good. I'd go to another state, and it was so funny – we always, it seemed, end up in one of their state offices, and they were always asking questions about, "How do you do this? How do you do that? How come this, how come that?" You know what I'm saying? "We did just the very best we could do. And it takes a lot of work from a lot of people to make something go across, [to accomplish anything]. You have to be receptive. And if you're receptive to a lot of things, you do accomplish a lot of things."

LIBBY: That's right. When we talked earlier in our pre-interview call, you told me about some fur smuggling that you had gotten involved with - some fur smuggling in Texas. Do you want to tell me about that?

BOB: Huh?

BECKY: Fur smuggling.

BOB: Fur smuggling. Yeah. You have to excuse me. Half the time, my hearing aids are not that good.

LIBBY: No problem. You've got an interpreter there to help you.

BOB: When I ended up with El Paso, that southwestern part of Texas, under my supervision, there was an agent there that had been trying to work with some people in Mexico, because there was people smuggling furs across the border near Marfa and down below Eagle Pass. In that area, they would bring bales of fur. Naturally, no paperwork to bring them across or anything. And for some reason, the action wasn't taking place that needed to be taking place. We had a little reorganization on that. We started seizing these bales of fur and the people. You'd be amazed. They'd have ocelot hides. They'd have bobcat hides. They'd have fox hides. Raccoons. Common house cat hides. Coatimundi. You name it. They had everything you could think of packed in these and they would bring them across. Ultimately, we found out a lot of the stuff was being bought by taxidermists to take into their shops to mount and sell. It didn't take too long, and that trade was broken.

LIBBY: That's good. Was that a big project? How long did it take you to break that?

BOB: Two years to break it.

LIBBY: Two years. Well, that's not that unusual though. It does take a while to set things up so that you can bring it down, so you can bring the people down appropriately.

BOB: It's an old game warden saying, "You've got to get your ducks in a row before you start shooting."

LIBBY: That's right. It's a lot of work and you want your prosecutions to be successful.

BOB: Yes.

LIBBY: Yeah. All right. Good for you on that. I also have something here about bighorn sheep hunting, in my notes.

BOB: (Unintelligible.)

BECKY: Bighorn decoy?

LIBBY: No sheep.

BOB: Bighorn sheep.

BECKY: Say it again, please, Libby?

LIBBY: In my notes from when we had our earlier call, I had something about bighorn sheep hunting. I guess you did some law enforcement on that. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

BOB: Yeah, the bighorn sheep, desert bighorn - you have to have it to complete your ace trophy [Grand Slam] of all the bighorn sheep. Unfortunately, Arizona has limited their bighorn sheep [permits] a great deal. It protects the species. So, the people would spend \$4,000 or \$5000 to go to Mexico and they'd harvest the same sheep just across the line in Mexico and smuggle it back into the United States -or try to. We made several big cases on those. Had one of the refuge men from the Imperial Refuge - he was a law enforcement officer for them, but he was a uniformed man. He got in plain clothes and went down to Mexicali to escort a man through the gate that we had the information on. We knew he had a bighorn sheep, and he [the officer] had watched them come through the gate. He followed him in an old pickup truck through California and into Arizona. We knew he had booked a ticket on an airplane out of Phoenix going back to Pennsylvania. We ended up, three cars following him all the way to the airport to where he got to his baggage to be transferred, to go to Pennsylvania. Then we busted him and seized the cape and one of the most beautiful set of horns that you've ever seen. I think, over the period of time that I was on the border, there was probably five, six, seven sheep along the way. All of them were prosecuted. All out of Mexico.

LIBBY: What was illegal about that? That they were hunting in Mexico without a permit? Or were you were not allowed to bring them across the border?

BOB: They were hunting in Mexico without the proper license. There was no permit or license at that time. They were hunting and bringing in wildlife that is restricted. That has to come in - if it comes into the United States - it has to come in on a Declaration 3177 - with a permit from the federal government of

Mexico allowing it to come in. And it has to be declared upon entry to the United States for legal importation, which none of them had done.

LIBBY: Thanks for clarifying that for me. That's great.

BOB: No problem!

LIBBY: Are there any other cases that you want to tell me about? Any other things that you did that you want to make sure that we hear about?

BOB: Not really. I'd say it was with me and with most of the guys I worked with, it was everyday work. It was nothing really out of the ordinary. You made the cases, and you followed them and got them prosecuted, and you went back and found somebody new to worry about. You had a lot of funny things come up. One time I was on patrol on the Havasu National Wildlife Refuge, and a boat was coming down, and there was some frivolity going on in the bow of the boat. And I stopped and I cautioned the people in there, and I checked it, and I said, "I need some identification." So, the guy said, "Well, I don't have it here. My name is Mark A. Coin." I said, "Well, that sounds real good. What shop is that at?" And he said he kind of fumbled. Somebody says, "Well..." I said, "I know, I know, you're married, you've got a wedding band on. I know you're nervous. I know the lady here isn't your wife. She's much younger than you are, and I know your name isn't Mark A. Coin. And I know now if you don't soon give me some suitable identification, I'm going to take you in without the identification for failure to identify." I said, "As far as I'm concerned, the lady has done no wrong, and anything else is up to you." He said, "Well, here, wait, wait." And he identified [himself], gave me all that information and I wrote him a citation. At that time, we were giving citations on the river, and I wrote a citation for \$500. (laughter) And he said, "What? What are you going to charge me with?" I said, "I'm going to charge you for failure to identify and attempt to evade an apprehension." "But five hundred? I never heard of it", he said. I said, "You don't have to fight it. It's just a citation. All you got to do is come into court and you can testify anything you want, and I'll be there." He says, "No, thank you. I think I'll take care of this." That was an unusual little case.

LIBBY: That was a big fine for those days. I mean, it's a big fine even now!

BOB: It was a big fine in Arizona in those days.

LIBBY: I was wondering if you felt that the penalties that were imposed on all these violators were adequate? I guess just stopping the activity is really important because you stop the activity and you're preventing the loss of future wildlife. So, stopping the activity is the most important.

BOB: We looked at in the way that we wanted to do the best for the wildlife involved and the conservation of the species that we were dealing with. The adequacy of the fines, naturally, were up to the courts that were handling them. And the fines that I mentioned to you were set by the court in what they called a bond schedule. And whatever that bond schedule said, you really used it there. If there was something very heinously wrong or more difficult when you wrote a citation, you would make an indication on the citation that the judge might really want to hear this case, or you might want to increase the fine, or whatever it is. It was not within our purview to increase the fine in the field on something. We stuck pretty close to various bond schedules. Now, this I'm saying is in Arizona. In New Mexico, we did the same thing. Texas was a little bit different.

LIBBY: We're close to wrapping up. Why don't you tell me a little bit about some of the people that were either your mentors or colleagues that you worked with, that you really liked, or maybe people that you mentored - what that was like, and if there's any special people you wanted to mention.

BOB: Well, there's one person in particular, probably two. That's Bob Halstead - he's deceased now. He was in North Carolina. There was a lot of the guys that really, and I've been so proud of having people that I tried to help along the best I could, because I was just an agent. When you got a guy like Tom Striegler, became deputy chief, came from Kofa National Wildlife Refuge. Dick Gritman, senior SRA - he came from Kofa.

LIBBY: I didn't know that.

BOB: Neill Hartman from Havasu. Then I have my State boys I was so proud of. John Cross became SAC in this region here, and K.C. Frederick was ASAC here. Dick Endress a SAC in Florida. Gosh. John Schroeder - he died from cancer. He came from Kofa. He was on the Texas border down there.

LIBBY: What was his name again?

BOB: The name was Schroeder. I mean Schrader. I'm sorry. He died of cancer. There's a lot of people that I had a lot of dealings with. And my favorite, Jerry Smith - hell yes, I would put him up at the top of the list, too. Clark Bavin, naturally. Gosh, I had a lot of real good friends. I had a deputy Secretary of the Interior that I really liked an awful lot. I had to go before a big meeting on his retirement and present him with a duck - a mounted black duck. He had always wanted one. And the agents got together and presented him with one. He wrote me a couple real nice letters. I think I'm enclosing them [in the material I send to NCTC.] Let's see. Yeah - Otis Beasley. You may have recognized the name.

LIBBY: No, I don't. I was going to ask you who it was. I do not recognize that name.

BOB: B. Otis Beasley, Assistant Secretary of the Interior. Just very brief. And there's two of them there, and they'll be enclosed. Dated '65 and '66. They'll be enclosed in the stuff you get.

LIBBY: 1965 and 1966?

BOB: Yeah.

LIBBY: That's way before my time.

BOB: Yeah. In '66, he says, "I want to express my deep appreciation for your presence at the reception dinner given in my honor at the Sheraton Hotel on the occasion of my retirement from federal service." Of all present, I surely don't know anyone I'd rather had here than you and the more delighted to see. Of course, I regret that Bob Halstead could not be here, but you certainly upheld the prestige [of the Federal Game Agents} with the manner in which you made the presentation of this beautiful black duck."

LIBBY: Well, that's wonderful. That's really wonderful. Well, Bob, this has been a great interview. Is there anything more you'd like to say?

BOB: No, I just I just like to say I hope that things will continue and do very good. The conservation of our wildlife and our being in this world depends on a very few people. And these people have got to be able to do their job, be able to have the ability to perform the duties that should be being done and appreciated for doing those duties, and I hope this continues on in the future. A lot of it has in the past. I wish I could continue for another 90 [years], because my law enforcement career actually spans 40 years. After I retired, I started doing volunteer work for not only the Mojave County Sheriff's Office as a boating officer coordinator there, and also for the Arizona State Parks and Recreation where I did a lot of programs and stuff with them and finally quit with a total of 40 years in the enforcement field.

LIBBY: Right, because you were you actually retired in 1986 from the Fish and Wildlife Service. All that other work you did - was that as a volunteer or did you actually get paid for some of that?

BOB: Oh. I've got a letter from the Arizona Parks and Recreation saying. "We don't know how to pay anybody that has over 2,700 hours of volunteer service." (laughter) They gave me a lifetime pass to the Arizona State Parks.

LIBBY: Great. Well, I hope you're still using it.

BOB: I hope so too. But it's just been probably the greatest life anybody could ever live. I never worked a day in my life, and I've never regretted a day of it.

LIBBY: That's so wonderful. Well, Bob, I'm going to end this interview, but I'm going to just stop the recorder. You just stay on the line. I'll be right back - I'm not going to hang up from you. I'm just going to stop the interview. Okay? Thank you.

BOB: Okay. Thank you.

LIBBY: Thank you very much.

KEY WORDS: bird banding, border, endangered species, fishing, game wardens, hunting, law enforcement, migratory birds, overfishing, partnerships, poaching, waterfowl, wildlife refuges

