

Interview With

FRED CUMMINGS
Texas Ranger, Retired

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Project:
Texas Rangers

Interviewed By:
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Luling, Texas

Present At Interview: Fred Cummings and Chuck Parsons



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Fred Cummings
Retired Texas Ranger

CHUCK PARSONS: Well I think that takes care of the preliminary...(break in tape). I have some questions here Ranger Cummings, but earlier we talked that ah....you thought you might like to tell us about growing up in a jail.

FRED CUMMINGS: Well I thought someone might find it interesting. My dad was Winfred Cummings, which was shorten to Windy Cummings, probably for good reason, because he talked a lot and perhaps that's where I got mine. But ah....he was elected Sheriff of Cuero County on January 1, 1953 and stayed in that office for 32 years. And I actually grew up in the Cuero County jail, the old jail, they have a newer one now that is also too little and they're talking about making it larger. But I actually grew up in the old jail, we lived on the first floor and the second floor was the actual jail part, it had two entrances, one into what mother and daddy called the apartment where we lived and then the other went up into the jail. And of course one has to remember this was starting in 1953, so it was far removed from the life that we live today. But when he went into office it was himself and one deputy, very small office at the courthouse, the jail is on the courthouse square there. And the office was open 8:00 to 5:00, for many years the courthouse was open all day Saturday and then they finally cut it down to a half day on Saturday and then they finally of course went to Monday through Friday. But there was no secretary, so if he and the deputy were out of the office well you didn't get anybody. And just a few interesting things that I almost question remembering, because they seem so removed from the life we live today, but when I was growing up if I or really anyone else was trying to find my dad, well the method you used is you picked up the phone and then an operator came on and said, "Number please". And you told them that you were looking for the Sheriff and they would always know where he had been and if it was Western Auto store, White Auto, they would call there. Well when he left

there he would always tell them where he was going next. So it was just a matter of time until you found him.

CHUCK PARSONS: Caught up with him.

FRED CUMMINGS: You might have to call two or three, according to how long it had been since the operator had chased him down last. And of course these were local operators that lived there in town and knew everybody.

CHUCK PARSONS: Knew everybody.

FRED CUMMINGS: And that's how you got police assistance, it definitely was not the days of six minute response times I assure you. But it's so foreign to think about that now, it almost....sometimes you wonder if you dreamed it. But it was very interesting.

CHUCK PARSONS: Now when you speak of the town, I'm not sure what town that would be.

FRED CUMMINGS: Gatesville.

CHUCK PARSONS: Gatesville.

FRED CUMMINGS: Coryell County, Texas.

CHUCK PARSONS: That's countycounty seat.

FRED CUMMINGS: Which is....borders Lampasas County to the north, just west of Waco.

CHUCK PARSONS: Right, okay. And ah....let's see when were you born and what were your parents names and did you have siblings?

FRED CUMMINGS: I was born March 17, 1948, in Coryell County. I had one sister, she is a teacher in Gatesville, still teaching, Jean, her married name is(inaudible). And ah....mother turned 91 last month and she's still getting around and lives by herself and does very well. Daddy passed away in '85 I believe it was and they were both from that area, they actually lived on Fort Hood beforewhen Fort Hood was private land it was not Fort Hood or Camp Hood as it started out. They lived there and of course when they made Camp Hood well they moved everyone off and that's when they migrated

on into Gatesville at that point. And dad worked for Cooper Grocery Company, wholesale grocery company out of Waco and worked in and around Coryell County until they went out of business. And that's when he ended up running for Sheriff over there, what started all of this I guess you would say.

CHUCK PARSONS: Now you're 6'4"...6'2"?"

FRED CUMMINGS: 6'5".

CHUCK PARSONS: 6'5". Were you active in sports in school?

FRED CUMMINGS: Oh yeah, pretty much like everybody was I suppose.

CHUCK PARSONS: Football in the fall.

FRED CUMMINGS: Football yeah.

CHUCK PARSONS: Basketball in the spring.

FRED CUMMINGS: Basketball, I think the best way I could put it I was a little clumsy.

CHUCK PARSONS: But you were tall.

FRED CUMMINGS: But I was tall, but it was something about me taking three steps and three guys laying on the floor, you know I don't think I had a lot grace about me, so we passed on that. Did a little discus and shot and that sort of thing, just like I guess most all the kids do.

CHUCK PARSONS: So when did you graduate from high school?

FRED CUMMINGS: 1965 I believe it was.

CHUCK PARSONS: '65.

FRED CUMMINGS: And wondered around just a little bit and ah....not terribly long and went with the department in 1968, July 1968. And you could go in when you were 20 at that time and I'd just barely turned 20 when I went in.

CHUCK PARSONS: But you had some college work at Tarelton?

FRED CUMMINGS: Ah...well that was when I was on the Highway Patrol....

CHUCK PARSONS: That was....

FRED CUMMINGS:in Tarelton, of course in Stephenville and I was stationed in Stephenville and took some classes up there. And then left there and went to Company B, Texas Rangers. Cause I had been on the Highway Patrol for about 10....well 10 years.

CHUCK PARSONS: Now the...the fact that your father was Sheriff, is that the reason you thought about law enforcement or was there another reason?

FRED CUMMINGS: Well I'll be very truthful, I have no idea. I just kind ofthat's where I headed and that's where I ended up.

CHUCK PARSONS: Uh huh.

FRED CUMMINGS: And ah....it wasn't ah.... I grew up with every kind of police there was, including Texas Rangers, cause it was a much smaller place back then. But it wasn't unusual to come in for supper and there would be police eating supper with you, you know, Rangers eating supper. Rode in the rodeo parade with the Rangers back when they had horses and they did that and came over to the rodeo more than one time. It was not I think that's what is so unusual about growing up the Sheriff's office and the jail, is that these things were real common back then, they weren't uncommon like they would be now.

CHUCK PARSONS: And when did you enter the Highway Patrol and how did you decide you wanted to be a Ranger rather than stick with Highway Patrol?

FRED CUMMINGS: Right....ah.... I thought it would be a lot more interesting to go into the Rangers and to do something other than just traffic enforcement and that's what got that started, and it was.

CHUCK PARSONS: I would think traffic could get rather monotonous.

FRED CUMMINGS: I think that's probably a good description of it. And after ten years of it....of course you couldn't apply for the Rangers until you were 30, so you know, but as soon as I turned 30 and I was very fortunate to make it the first round.

CHUCK PARSONS: And that was in 1979?

FRED CUMMINGS: Ah....yes. I went to Dallas....was stationed up there January 1, 1979 is when that started, so I was in Stephenville on the Highway Patrol from '68 through '78.

CHUCK PARSONS: And you were assigned to Company B?

FRED CUMMINGS: Uh hum.

CHUCK PARSONS: Captain G. W. Banks.

FRED CUMMINGS: Burkes.

CHUCK PARSONS: Burkes.

FRED CUMMINGS: Yeah. Banks was in that company at one time, but it was before ...before my time, yeah Banks had already retired at that point. But G. W. Burkes, yes.

CHUCK PARSONS: And how did you....what were the process or the steps from getting assigned to a particular company and then ending up in Lampasas. Cause most of your career has been Lampasas if I'm not mistaken.

FRED CUMMINGS: That's true ah....stayed up in Dallas the better....well going on close to 2 years. I believe we got here in August of 1980, because my boy was school age and my daughter was not at that time. But ah....and I believe we got here in August to put him in school in September, cause the school year was still back in the September days back then. And ah....but ah...no we were in Dallas and liked working up there and everything, but it's a long ways from Dallas to Gatesville. And saw Captain Mitchell at some point and told him that if he had an opening in Company F to get us back toward....my wife's also from Gatesville by the way and her folks are still over there, and so we were trying to get a little closer to home. And he got a hold of me one time and told me they were going to put a Ranger in Killeen and that he'd like for me to come down. And of course this is where we wanted to be, Killeen is Bell County which borders Coryell County. And ah....but we....Killeen is a much nicer place than it used to be and ah....the ah.... I thought about it awhile and of course when you're

....you want to be somewhere, you kind of walk on egg shells as how you word all this. And I finally told him, I said, “I’m not sure that Killeen is the place to bring my kids up”, at that time. And I talked to him for a little while and he said, “Well let me think about it”, and what not. It wasn’t hardly any time, a couple of days or three and he called back and said, “Would you like to live in Lampasas and work Bell County”. And I said, “I can pack and be there this afternoon”. So we ended up coming to Lampasas and when I first got down here that’s what I was doing probably 85% of the time, was working Bell County, all over it. And it was good, it was good.

CHUCK PARSONS: But you actually had quite a territory, Bell and Lampasas, Coryell.....

FRED CUMMINGS: Well, right.....didn’t have Coryell when I first got here.....

CHUCK PARSONS: You didn’t have.....

FRED CUMMINGS:because Dad’s still the Sheriff and my cousin was the District Attorney, so we used to make jokes, if we were in court and somebody said “Mr. Cummings’, half the courtroom would stand up. So I didn’t really want Coryell County. Now I went over there some and helped other people, James Wright worked it for a good long time and ultimately made Captain, Captain Wright, but when he was a Ranger. It’s..... I was in and out of there all the time, but it wasn’t a primary responsibility, because I think we had about Cummings them up over there. But later on when Daddy finally retired well I ended up with Coryell County, this part of it and had Hamilton County too, Mills County and Lampasas County.

CHUCK PARSONS: Now your dad retired in 1985?

FRED CUMMINGS: I believe that’s correct.

CHUCK PARSONS: Yeah, 32 years.

FRED CUMMINGS: Yes.

CHUCK PARSONS: You also worked with Sheriff Gordon Morris.

FRED CUMMINGS: That’s the Sheriff here in Lampasas.

CHUCK PARSONS: Lampasas.

FRED CUMMINGS: Yes, he's been Sheriff ever since I came here and is still Sheriff. He's down there today pushing paper as we're sitting here talking.

CHUCK PARSONS: I think ah....somewhere I read he was.... I've forgotten when he began, but many, many years of servicing....

FRED CUMMINGS: Yes, a long time. I'm sure if he's not the longest tenured he's got to be right up at the top two or three at this point.

CHUCK PARSONS: Uh hum. I found an article about you and it dealt with a triple murder, was it in Lampasas County?

FRED CUMMINGS: We had one here out west of ...northwest in Lometa is that the one you're talking about?

CHUCK PARSONS: Right, in this article by Stan Redding.

FRED CUMMINGS: Oh yes, yes.

CHUCK PARSONS: And that was the only triple murder in Lampasas County? Could you.....

FRED CUMMINGS: Probably true.

CHUCK PARSONS: This must have been maybe a little more significant than

FRED CUMMINGS: Well ah.... I think one thing, that was in the days before we started having these Luby's and Bennigans and all of this other.....

CHUCK PARSONS: Oh yes.

FRED CUMMINGS:people probably expected a murder to happen, because they do and we all know that and they will continue. But probably three of them was a little bit more significant. The most significant thing about the whole thing is that when I got called, the kids were old enough to get on the telephone, so they couldn'tthis was the old days where you had one line coming into your house and no cell phone and pagers, and they couldn't get a hold of me and they finally sent the deputy up to

the house to get a hold of me and cause the kids were on the phone. And it was a holiday I suppose, it had to have been, that or maybe a weekend, but anyway, got a hold of me and told me what happened. I went to Lometa and we started doing what you do when you work murders. And of course there was three bodies out there and there were multiple shots fired, so you had a lot of work to do, it wasn't something that happened in an hour, you were out there hours upon hours trying to get that under control. And ah...finally in the middle of the night, that night, I want to think around 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock in the morning well we got to a point that we were going to stop and everybody was going to go home and shower and shave and change clothes and then be back in about three hours to start up again. And the ah....back in those days the two....the Ranger Company's I was in really only had about one rule and that rule was that when something happened you called the Captain. And that didn't mean fourteen hours later or two days later, that meant you found a phone and you call the Captain.

CHUCK PARSONS: Right away.

FRED CUMMINGS: Well in the excitement of working this murder and everything, and we had got a piece of a suspect or started on putting together and thinking we might have a clue, in the excitement of all that I kind of forgot to call the Captain. So when we got back, went home, three or four o'clock in morning, showered and changed clothes, didn't sleep and went back to the Sheriff's office and we were supposed to have a company meeting, so it must have been on a Monday would be my guess. And so I called in mainly to tell the Captain I wouldn't be at the company meeting. And ah... it was a very interesting conversation with Captain Mitchell, I didn't talk hardly any.

CHUCK PARSONS: You practiced your listening skills?

FRED CUMMINGS: I practiced my listening and the only thing I could think of, and I still remember this, was thinking, boy I'm glad I'm on the telephone and I'm not in Waco, Texas. But he had read it....the press for some reason got real excited about this murder, and they will do that from time to time, they'll get excited about something this month and next month something identical happens and

they don't even put it in the paper. Well this one ah....and I don't know what the confusion was, I kind of think they thought that the folks that were murdered possibly were guns collectors and that a huge expensive gun collection had been stolen, which is not even close to what happened. But maybe that's what got them so excited. But anyway, the Captain was an early riser and his newspaper came, I think, around 5:15, 5:30 in the morning, so he was informed by newspaper. And he had been waiting until about 8:30 when his little super Ranger called in him about it. And I did a real fine job of listening.

CHUCK PARSONS: Yeah.

FRED CUMMINGS: In fact the joke was....of course I told the folks I was working down here with, after I found out I didn't get fired, and found out it was funny, and I told them and for a long time after that we'd get a call on some major event and one or more of them would say, "I've got a quarter". And of course phone calls....the pay phones in those days were a quarter. It took about two years for them to forget about that little old event. But that was the most significant thing I remember about that murder, justthey had aactually ended up and their son, who had got to using speed and had more or less, in police terminology, he had twisted off on speed and he ended up and he was the one who did it, put him in the penitentiary and he's still there today. And this was sometime in the very early '80's.

CHUCK PARSONS: Hum huh.

FRED CUMMINGS: In fact it took a long time before we laughed about this. And when I knew everything was all right, we were in a company meeting and I don't even remember now, but we had a new Ranger transfer in, somebody had, I guess, retired or something, I don't remember what Ranger it was. But it was somebody new to the company and we had our meeting and the Captain introduced him or something like that. And then he looked at me and he said, "Fred would you like to tell him what the company rule is". And then he kind of smiled, and I thought, well okay, it's over with now.

CHUCK PARSONS: At one point you actually thought you might get fired though?

FRED CUMMINGS: Well, I didn't think it was that serious, but I knew how I'd stepped in there pretty deep.

CHUCK PARSONS: You were kind of

FRED CUMMINGS: That was very clear.

CHUCK PARSONS:kind of on a probationary thing?

FRED CUMMINGS: No I wouldn't even say that.

CHUCK PARSONS: Not even that?

FRED CUMMINGS: You just....you just had done something really stupid that you knew you weren't supposedyou know you....that was not what you was supposed of have done. And ...but things like that happen you know.

CHUCK PARSONS: Well it wasn't exactly direct disobedience of a directive or something like that.

FRED CUMMINGS: Oh no, no.

CHUCK PARSONS: It wasn't quite that serious.

FRED CUMMINGS: You just ah....and of course Mitchell is one of the best Ranger Captains there ever was. So you didn't like the fact that you had displeased him, you know.

CHUCK PARSONS: Yeah.

FRED CUMMINGS: And then on the other hand too, you was sitting there thinking, STUPID. But you get all enthused and like I said, we had ...about the last couple of hours before we broke to go clean up, we had got and I don't remember what it was now, but we had gotten an indication somehow or another that this son could be involved in it. In the excitement of all that and you know, you forget. It's funny, don't take it serious.

CHUCK PARSONS: No, no.

FRED CUMMINGS: Yeah, it wasand it was all right, it wasn't anything. But it's hilarious now, we still talk about it every once in awhile. Captain Mitchell will even laugh about it every once in awhile and bring it up when we're together.

CHUCK PARSONS: It seems that murders are more common now than thirty or forty years ago, is that an accurate statement, or is the press dealing differently with....

FRED CUMMINGS: Well I don't.... I really don't know, I haven't looked at any statistics or anything like that to really know. Of course working several counties like all Rangers do, if there's not one here, there's one there, so you were just continually, you know, in the process of working them different places, just because you covered so much ground. And of course it's kind of the, I suppose, the ultimate crime to work I suppose. And that's what you seem to do a whole lot.

CHUCK PARSONS: When you get a call to investigate a murder, what are the steps that you typically would go through? I'm familiar with that from watching things like Law & Order, but how is it from you're perspective and you've gone through it a number of times.

FRED CUMMINGS: Well it's changed over the years, it even changed when I was working and I retired in 2001, September 1, 2001. And ah....even in that time period it's changed because we hadthere towards the end our labs have been finally upgraded to the point that they had personnel that had equipment and everything and you could call them on a major crimes. Now the smaller ones you usually didn't, but on murders and things like that and they would come out and do a lot of the scene processing for you, which was great, I mean that helped a lot.

CHUCK PARSONS: And this is picking up every little

FRED CUMMINGS: Well it....

CHUCK PARSONS:cigarette butt or shell casing or.....

FRED CUMMINGS: Well that you believe is appropriate to do, I mean it's not like you're picking up litter on the side of the road there. Butbut if it's....if it's ah....some questionable item, whatever it

might be, well certainly you want to....you want to obtain it. What helps so much about the laboratory personnel coming out is one, they do have some tests they run right on the scene. So if something is not....if you think something is blood, they can actually test it to determine if it's not. Now they have to ...they have to carry into the lab to actually determine absolute, but they can do it right there and it saves a lot of time that way. You know can have a lot of things that have no value whatsoever. The other part is that they are picking it up directly. So for chain of custody purposes you have cut out however number of many of people and put it directly to the lab. Well that helps a lot just on the bureaucratic paperwork part of it, which you have to have, I shouldn't call it bureaucratic because it's a necessity and you want that and that helps tremendously. The other real big thing that it helps with is they're on the scene, so instead of you going down there and trying describe what the crime scene looked and why you think these items out of these15 out of these 115 are more important or need to be done right now. Well they've been there and on the scene and boots on ground, well theyit's just so much simpler and easier. And that was a great step forward because for years and years and years, if it got done, you did it. It didn't matter if it was taking photographs or lifting prints or packaging evidence of whatever it was, well it was....if it got done you did it. And of course you're not there by yourself, don't get that impression at all, I mean you've got Sheriff's and Sheriff's deputies and D.A.'s investigators and inside the city, city investigators helping too, so it's not just you versus the world. But I think the lab was probably one of the bigger steps forward that we had.

CHUCK PARSONS: TV shows and movies to I guess, tried to give the idea that they are being realistic. Like when they come on a crime scene they bag everything that they think is important and put a little sticker here that you found it there and so on. Is that really close to reality?

FRED CUMMINGS: In a general sense it is.

CHUCK PARSONS: In a general sense.

FRED CUMMINGS: Anything you do you may later have to testify to in court, so you've got to be able to say, this item is the item that I collected from, and describe some location and then of course tell what happened to it later and it's called chain of custody. If I gave it to you and you stored it in your evidence locker and then later on somebody else gets from you and they carry it to the lab and now they've got to put three of us on the stand to testify to this one item, as opposed to one lab person saying, 'I collected it, it was in my laboratory'. So it's quite a bit simpler.

CHUCK PARSONS: To get off the subject of murders, were there any thefts or burglaries or other crimes that ah...particularly of interest or unusual aspect?

FRED CUMMINGS: Well ...you mentioned Lampasas County awhile ago and Sheriff Morris, when I came here in 1980, I don't remember exactly how many deputies he had, but I'd be surprised if it was more than four. And he was working everything, he was the investigator and he was very good at it. And I helped him on ...probably worked more burglaries and thefts in this county than I did the rest of them and I worked other places too. But by the ...just because I was here I suppose, you end up working quite a bit more. But ah...and they are interesting, it's just they're not elevated to the level of a murder.

CHUCK PARSONS: No.

FRED CUMMINGS: You know, I don't know any other way to put it, it's just if you're working you're probably going to really enjoy working the murders more than you're going to enjoy working a burglary. But it's still fun to catch a burglar too, cause there's probably not much more in life more irritating than coming home and finding your door kicked down. And it may not be that a tremendous amount of value was stolen, it might be your stereo that you only gave, you know, back in those days you might of gave \$25.00 for it. But it's the fact somebody came into your house and took your property, it's really irritating. So it was a lot of fun to catch burglars. And burglary by the nature of how it happens, you usually don't solve one burglary when you catch the crook. Because

CHUCK PARSONS: Multiple.

FRED CUMMINGS: Sometimes, somewhere, somebody did it one time and got caught, but most of the time when you catch him it's 15, 25, 35 and ah....

CHUCK PARSONS: And it might be in many different counties.

FRED CUMMINGS: Yes and ah...you may recover a lot of property where ever they're keeping it because they'll get rid of some of it, but usually some of it they'll still have. And you're trying to find the true owners of the property scattered all over everywhere. So it...it can be quite a challenge. We worked one out of this county.... I'm going to get out of camera and get another cup of coffee, but I'm not going to run off. Worked one in this county and I don't even to be truthful remember all the details of it now, but ah...it ah...(inaudible)....and we went to somewhere close to perhaps Leander, Cedar Park, somewhere down there and ah...myself and Sheriff Morrison and some of his deputies and seized every Christmas present the guy had out from under a Christmas tree. And every bit of it was stolen. And I just thought of that when you were saying unusual, and forgot all about that. Not very far off 183, on the west side of 183. Oh yes, there's a lot of oddities and strange things that happened.

CHUCK PARSONS: Were there any crimes that you worked that remain unsolved, that you didn't ever catch the bad guy, that maybe sometimes bothers you?

FRED CUMMINGS: Sure, sure, when you start out really think that if you work hard enough and long enough and try to use common sense, that you're going to solve every one of them. And ah...you pretty quickly figure out that's not going to happen.

CHUCK PARSONS: The odds are

FRED CUMMINGS: Well odds are that you're just going to run up and get something, that the clues aren't there. I used to tell a lot of people, you've got to have a clue, you can't just stand on a hilltop and look around and all of a sudden have a vision. It's not going to happen, you've got to have a clue. When you get that clue, now that's where you've got to do the right thing with the clue to get where

you want to go. But oh yeah, I can think of one, Evant, Texas up there, a bankers wife was murdered, and went home for lunch and it's never been solved. We worked on it, worked on it, worked on it and worked on it and have no idea who did it. Put a lot of hours into it. And then you have others also that they are unsolved in the technical sense, but in truth you know exactly who did it, there's just not enough to get to court on, it's just not there. But you know that without a doubt who has done the crime.

CHUCK PARSONS: Who the bad...who the culprit was.

FRED CUMMINGS: I had one in ah....murder his wife in Copperas Cove and we never could put enough together to get in the courtroom. And then they formed the unsolved task force in south San Antonio....(inaudible).. Rangers, and they took it and I had high hopes of them being able to go back after all this time had passed and maybe somebody would remember or what not. But they finally put it in the courtroom, but the jury wouldn't convict him. But at some point and time it doesn't hurt to try them, you only get to try them once, so if you make a mistake to try them and then two years later some good clue comes up, well you can't go back and retry them, and that's the fear of it. Of course after years and years go by well if nothing's happened, well the chances of something coming up later are nil and none more or less, so you might as well try it and let a jury see what they think of about it.

CHUCK PARSONS: It's real rare when you hear about somebody being charged with a crime of 15 or 20 years before. That's rare, at least from the normal radio news and stuff.

FRED CUMMINGS: I think that's probablyyou could say that, it doesn't happen every day. And common sense tells you, if you can't get it when it's hot so to speak, well the chances of going back later gets, you know, just get colder and colder and colder. And you've nearly got to have a situation where somebody could have solved it for you then, but for whatever reason they didn't come forward or for whatever reason they choose to tell all the truth at that time or something. And that's probably

what you hope for is that at some point they find the good Lord and it's time to get their business straight.

CHUCK PARSONS: Yeah, come and confess maybe. We hear a lot about the Ranger mystique. You know we hear this expression, one riot, one Ranger and so on. Is there such a thing or is that strictly something made up by the movies or television or something?

FRED CUMMINGS: Well I've been to a riot and I wouldn't want to be the only Ranger there I can tell you that. I think it's a little of everything, I really do. You know it's a little Hollywood and probably a little truth in it and it's like any....probably any police department or Sheriff's department you can go to it and if you can get the girls and guys that are working there now to talk, they can probably tell you stories that happened at Houston PD before they were born. But it's kind of turned into urban legend you know and they repeat them and things. And I think that's a little bit of it. I think probably the biggest thing that I think the Rangers had going for them is that they weren't tied to a real type bureaucracy. You went forward and you did what needed to be done. And as opposed to working under strict supervisory guidelines like you would if it was Dallas police department. You know, I mean you've got a stream that goes backward that you follow with your supervisors. And the way we worked, it was just much different and I think that helped a lot. Plus a lot of work we did...but I was stationed in Dallas, a little bit contradictory to what I'm saying I suppose, but a lot of the work I did was out in the country I suppose you could say, where there wasn't police on every corner. You know, you were talking about a Sheriff and a few deputies and that was just about it. So you got to know them quite well, because you worked so much with them, not just major things, a lot of like you referenced earlier, the thefts and the burglaries and things like that. So you got to work with them quite a bit on nearly everything. Butbut it would help you, there's no doubt about that. You know, there could be a long line of people standing to do something and you could look up and you'd be in front of it and get your business processed promptly, you know and things like that, that helped a lot. There's

something about, I think, getting a phone call from someone who says Texas Ranger as opposed to someone who says Investigator at whatever police department or whatever Sheriff's department. I think it gets your attention a little better and perhaps you listen a little better and perhaps you talk a little better and all of that. So I don't.... I enjoyed it, it was nice.

CHUCK PARSONS: A few years ago the ranks opened up for women in the Rangers and other minorities in the Rangers. Did you have any particular feelings about that at the time?

FRED CUMMINGS: No not really. I don't remember hardly anything about it, I mean it was a logical thing that what was going on in society. And it was a logical thing to do. The ah....if I learned anything it's you never judge what somebody can do by what you look and see. Because I've seen good investigators that as far as how they dressed and acted were just a train wreck. And then I've seen others go around that looked like they just walked out of the finest, you know, men's store and had spent two months salary getting dressed up that couldn't their way out of the parking lot we'll say. So I don't think it's a whole lot to do with it. The girls, the only thing I ever thought about them, and this is strictly based on having lived with my wife since I was a kid, is I thought it was going to be awful hard on them with kids. Because my wife....the house is on fire, she can get the kids and take them out in the street and thirty minutes later probably would remember me. And we love each other to death, but that's just....you know, thinking about those kids first. And I always thought when they started that, I thought I bet that's going to be a tough road to hoe as my daddy would say, because a lot of the work we did back then was not eight to five, five days a week. And it was go to a murder at 2:00 a.m. and work 18 hours straight. And you know, you're spouse wouldn't even hear from you until, you know, you showed back up. And again, this was before the days of cell phones where you can just stand anywhere and call anybody.

CHUCK PARSONS: Did your wife ever remind you to call?

FRED CUMMINGS: No really ah....

CHUCK PARSONS: Report to the Captain....report to me.

FRED CUMMINGS: No ah...when we got married well Betty was Sheriff and she was going to college to Central Texas over here. So we....she moved into the jail and we stayed together there until....off and on until finally we went to an apartment. So she, in a sense, had a little bit of a preparatory class in what was going on you know. So, no it didn't bother her, she a sweetie.

CHUCK PARSONS: You mentioned your children, how many children do you have?

FRED CUMMINGS: A girl and boy. We're very fortunate, they live right here in town, so we reach out and touch them real easy. The boys got two daughters, so I've got two granddaughters that are right here and it's not a problem chasing them down. I'm surprised they haven't come in while we were doing this, they're over here all the time. My daughter works at a bank in Copperas Cove and my son is an investigator here at the police department here in Lampasas.

CHUCK PARSONS: Now you....you often hear that growing up the son or daughter of a minister is extra difficult. Is there any special difficulties in being the child of a Texas Ranger?

FRED CUMMINGS: Well I don't think there was there, but you ought to grow up being the son of a county Sheriff in a small county in Texas.

CHUCK PARSONS: Oh, that has particular problems.

FRED CUMMINGS: I think so, I think so. Not problems, but it's just you know, the first thing I thought of when you said that. But ah....yeah I wouldn't want to ah....back in those days, and I'm sure you remember this, everybody wanted a loud set of pipes on their cars and all of this. Well you could probably, as they used to say, rack those pipes off at the Dairy Queen....it took daddy about ten minutes before he knew that you had done that. No I think it's a little bit.... I did not bring my work home and probably for that reason I think I had been through that and I just made the decision that work had a place and it wasn't....

CHUCK PARSONS: You could at least leave the papers at the office.

FRED CUMMINGS: Well it just ah....

CHUCK PARSONS: You might wake up thinking about it though.

FRED CUMMINGS: Oh sure, in your head, but as far as to talk about it and worry everybody with it, I really think I made an effort not to do that and let them grow up kind of just, you know, normal, whatever normal is you know.

CHUCK PARSONS: Whatever normal is.

FRED CUMMINGS: It didn't do any good, he goes to college and graduates and then ends up at the police department. And that's another change, he goes to college and gets a business degree and goes to work at the police department and has a masters in criminal justice. And ah....been here at the.... I used to could remember the first person in DPS that ever had a college degree, but now I forgot who it was, it was not a Ranger, but ah.....that was somewhat foreign back in those days.

CHUCK PARSONS: Do you....we have Texas History month coming up in March and I know back where I live there's some requests for a Ranger to come into the classrooms and give a talk to the children. Do you get requests to come and talk about being a Ranger or your experience?

FRED CUMMINGS: I have.... I've done it before ah....it ah....what I quickly found out, you have to be real careful....and I'm not griping don't get me wrong. But when you go to Mrs. or Mr. So and So's class, there's no telling how many teachers see you show up, up there so you've done one and now you've got 12 or you've got 14 that wants you to go and you have to be real careful, cause you just can't do all of them. And ah....but yes, I've done it before. I had a....I was in Austin for a school and I think it was a week school, years and years and years ago and it was on a Friday and they were going to let us out at noon on Friday. And Jeff Heard who is retired now, but he was in DPS training down there and was with DPS for a long time, and Jeff saw me and one thing led to another and his daughter was a teacher and her school was just not far from the DPS and they were having Texas history. And the next thing I knew, instead of going home after being in Austin for a week, I was standing beside a

camp fire on a hot day, in a parking lot, they had put down sand and then put some wood and built a fire and they had these kids, I want to think first or second graders, but I was there maybe an hour and so it was fun. But I immediately thought about Jeff because he when Inearly every time I see him, which is not often now you know since we're both retired, but he would always bring up how many camp fires had I been to that day or something. Yes you get that and don't mind doing them, it's just you got toyou put crooks in jail is what you're doing, so you've got to kind of factor that in. So you get to involved in

CHUCK PARSONS: Now several Rangers within the last few years have written their memoirs, like Glenn Elliott and more recently, Ray Martinez. Have you thought of writing a book about your experience?

FRED CUMMINGS: Not at all.

CHUCK PARSONS: Is that a possibility in the future?

FRED CUMMINGS: I doubt it, I just ah.... I mean a lot of new things....(inaudible).....new things, but trying to put them together in a book that would actually be interesting, I mean that's somebody I don't.... I just never crossed my mind.

CHUCK PARSONS: If ah....if a young person today asked....told you he was thinking about going into law enforcement, whatwhat kind of advice might you give?

FRED CUMMINGS: Well I think I'd want them to understand it's not television, it's the real world. So they shouldn't make a decision based on television. And ah....if they haven't been around law enforcement any at all, I might even suggest to them that they go to their local police department or Sheriff's department and tell them what they're thinking about and ask them if they can come down there and sit through ajust in the background, sit maybe through a shift or two or three and see what happens and all that and make sure that's really what they want to do. Because it's just not television, it's the real world out there.

CHUCK PARSONS: There's not a lot of glamour.

FRED CUMMINGS: There's really not, in the sense of if you believe Hollywood and all of that. It's a lot of self satisfaction, you know, when you finally.....you get some piece of trash and put it where it needs to be and it feels really good when you get to do that. It feels really good when you get a call and they say that bloody fingerprint that you've got and they tell you who it is. And it feels really good when you watch that crook sign his name across the bottom of a Miranda statement. And so there's a lot of real good feelings about it you know. But one has to understand it's a lot of work and it can get really dangerous sometimes and all that and you need to be prepared to deal with that. And ah....you....the pay has come way up from what it was, but even at that, you're still not going to have you know, a vacation house and a regular house.

CHUCK PARSONS: You mean this is your only house?

FRED CUMMINGS: This is my only house and I'm proud to have it.

CHUCK PARSONS: Well you've got a herd of deer in the back.

FRED CUMMINGS: That's true, got a herd of deer, yeah. But I don't.... I don't know that I would change anything, I'd just like to be 30 years old and do the whole thing one more time. And what little bad was with it, that's fine too you know.

CHUCK PARSONS: Well any....anyany job is going to have some bad days.

FRED CUMMINGS: Oh that's true, that's true.

CHUCK PARSONS: Even....even if you're homeless and unemployed, some days are going to be worse.

(tape ends abruptly.....nothing else on tape).