

Interview with
BILL GERTH
Texas Ranger, Retired

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Project: Texas Rangers

Interview Conducted at Mr. Gerth's Home
Wichita Falls, Texas
Thursday—November 13, 2008

Interviewed By: Nancy Ray and Eddie Ray
Longview, Texas

Present at Interview: Bill Gerth, Nancy Ray and Eddie Ray



Introduction

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BILL GERTH
TEXAS RANGER, RETIRED

NANCY RAY: My name is Nancy Ray and I am visiting with William, Bill Gerth of Wichita Falls, Texas. Today is Thursday, November 13th and we are at Mr. Gerth's home. The purpose of this interview is to discuss Ranger Gerth's career as a Texas Ranger. Ranger Gerth, do I have your permission to record this interview?

BILL GERTH: Yes ma'am.

NANCY RAY: Ranger Gerth, do you understand that this video will belong to the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco, Texas?

BILL GERTH: Yes ma'am.

NANCY RAY: And Ranger Gerth, do I have your permission to present copies of this video to various historical organizations such as museums, libraries, schools and once transcribed to place on the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum's website?

BILL GERTH: Yes ma'am.

NANCY RAY: OK. Let's begin with your full name, where were you born and when you were born.

BILL GERTH: My name is William Raymond Gerth, GERTH. And I was born December 7th, 1941. I was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas.

NANCY RAY: OK, what about your parents? What were their names?

BILL GERTH: Raymond W. Gerth and Myrtle Marie Girth.

NANCY RAY: Are they living now?

BILL GERTH: My mother lives in San Antonio now and my brother.

NANCY RAY: OK. What about... what is your brother's name?

BILL GERTH: Charles Ray Gerth.

NANCY RAY: OK, do you have any other brothers and sisters?

BILL GERTH: No, that's it.

NANCY RAY: Two was enough, huh?

BILL GERTH: Two was about we could handle.

NANCY RAY: OK, well, uh where did you go to school?

BILL GERTH: I went to Thomas Jefferson High School and graduated there. And after I graduated, I joined the Marine Corps.

NANCY RAY: OK, was that in San Antonio also?

BILL GERTH: Yes.

NANCY RAY: So your whole childhood was in...

BILL GERTH: My whole childhood was born and raised in San Antonio.

NANCY RAY: OK when you were in school, did you have any favorite subjects or a teacher that stands out in your mind... somebody who had an influence on you.

BILL GERTH: Yes, I had an English teacher my senior year. Her name was uh Mrs. Brown. And I remember this, I think about it this sometimes... She has us memorize a 50-line poem. And of course I was the last one in the class. And I was late. And uh she told me about a week before we were supposed to graduate... Mr. Gerth, if you don't do this poem, you're not gonna graduate. And she got my attention. And she said I'm gonna add 25 lines to this. You have to do a 75-line poem. And you better have it tomorrow. And I said yes ma'am. And I went home and I got a copy of Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven." And I sat down that night, and I stayed up all night. And I memorized 75 lines of "The Raven." And I walked in there the next morning and she said are you ready? I said yes ma'am. And she was kind of startled because she didn't think I was gonna do it. And I got up and I gave that 75-line poem and when I hit the end of the 75th line, she said well aren't you gonna finish it? I said no ma'am, you said 75 and that's all I got (laughter). But she kind of laughed and she said well I guess that's good enough. But I never worked so hard in my life. I had to write it out in red ink on white paper so I could remember it.

And I did it in like three sections. I never was so nervous in all my life but I needed that to graduate (laughter).

NANCY RAY: Didn't want to do it again.

BILL GERTH: No, I did not. If it had been 76 lines, I believe I would have crashed and burned right there.

NANCY RAY: Well did you play sports or anything?

BILL GERTH: I played baseball. I worked when I was in high school. I had three jobs. I worked after school then on Saturdays and Sundays. So I, I was pretty busy.

NANCY RAY: I guess so. Well then you also said when you... what year did you graduate?

BILL GERTH: 1960.

NANCY RAY: And then you said you went in the military?

BILL GERTH: I joined the Marine Corps, yes ma'am.

NANCY RAY: Well tell us a little bit about that.

BILL GERTH: Oh yes... That was one of my early mistakes I guess you could say. When I got to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego and I hit that yellow line... I could drive down the highway today and I could see the yellow line and the hair stands up on the back of my neck. I said I think I've made a tactical error here (laughter). *Short pause*

NANCY RAY: All right. You were about to tell us about the mistake in the Marine Corps (laughter).

BILL GERTH: Well it wasn't really a mistake. It was just one of those deals that once you get started, it's a little change from being a civilian to... going to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot. And I said Lord if I get through this, I'll keep my mouth shut and my eyes open and my ears open and luckily, I graduated with my platoon.

NANCY RAY: Good. Did you go overseas?

BILL GERTH: Yes, I did. I went to uh Hawaii and Japan and then I was stationed on Okinawa for fifteen months. And we went to the Philippines on exercises and I came back to the states and they sent me to Beaufort, South Carolina. And I stayed there... I was in the Marine Corps three years. And when I

got discharged September 27th of '63, I came back and I applied for DPS Academy and I went to the Academy on November 20th of '63. That was two days before the president was assassinated. We remember that day, November 20th.

NANCY RAY: Well... you were in the Academy then right after that happened.

BILL GERTH: Right. It was two days... we'd just started the Academy and the president was assassinated.

NANCY RAY: What... was there anything that stands out in your mind related to that while you were in the school that they were talking about?

BILL GERTH: Well, we were in PT at the time when they came and announced it. That was the only thing that gave us a break. They were running us to death (laughter). I said you know Lord, give me a break here and then of course they came out and made that announcement and we took up a little time. Of course that was a bad deal you know. And uh we always remembered that though, it was two days before he got killed.

NANCY RAY: Well tell us a little bit about the Academy.

BILL GERTH: DPS Academy?

NANCY RAY: Uh huh.

BILL GERTH: It was a good deal. The thing about the Academy was uh the difference between the Marine Corps and the Academy, you could always walk away from the Academy but you can't walk away from the Marine Corps. And that's... in one way it's a little more difficult. Of course they had the boxing and the physical part of it and uh some of the guys I graduated with retired up here. J. J. Tucker and Rip Van Winkle and some of the guys that I've known for all those years you know. It was tough but we made it. And we graduated March 20th of '64. And then I got stationed in San Antonio in the Highway Patrol.

NANCY RAY: Right at home.

BILL GERTH: Stayed there for a while and then uh I got transferred to Uvalde and I stayed there five years. And then uh I went to Kerrville, back in the Highway Patrol. I spent about 11 ½ or 12 years in the Highway Patrol.

NANCY RAY: Let me ask you before we leave the Marine Corps... What was your job in the Marine Corps?

BILL GERTH: I was an administrative clerk, any type, 0141 was my MOS. And I could guarantee you when we hit the beach in the Philippines' I had my typewriter so far out of the water it never got wet (laughter). But of course we got a lot of hoo-rahing about that you know.

NANCY RAY: I'll bet so.

BILL GERTH: I was the clerk.

NANCY RAY: That surprises me.

BILL GERTH: And I had a lot of... the pay records and the record books and the unit diary and all that stuff. I took care of the first sergeant and he took care of us.

NANCY RAY: OK. Well when did you marry?

BILL GERTH: September 7th, 1962.

NANCY RAY: OK, so that was... you were in the military.

BILL GERTH: Yes, I had one year left in the military when I married my wife.

NANCY RAY: Now what was her name?

BILL GERTH: Dixie Charlene.

NANCY RAY: All right, did you have any children?

BILL GERTH: I have three girls.

NANCY RAY: Three girls, tell us their names.

BILL GERTH: Laura, Robin and Kelly.

NANCY RAY: Are they all around here or...

BILL GERTH: Laura is in Iowa Park which is about ten miles over here. Robin is in Petrolia. She's about twenty miles away. And Kelly lives in Keller, Texas. She's a counselor for Saginaw High School.

I've got twelve grandkids, eight grandsons and four granddaughters. And I have a great-granddaughter and a great-grandson and I'm about to have another great-grandson next month.

NANCY RAY: You have quite a family.

BILL GERTH: I've gotta be father, mother, grandpa and grandma. That's my job now. That's what I do.

NANCY RAY: That's a big job.

BILL GERTH: It is (laughter). If I ever lose that calendar on my wall, I'm in trouble because I keep all the birthdays, anniversaries and everything on there. So I try to keep up with it. I try to do what my wife would have done. I do all right I guess.

NANCY RAY: Is there anything you'd like to tell us about your wife?

BILL GERTH: She was the love of my life. We were married 37 years. She had 30 years in the DPS just like I did. And I... I thought about this often that her years were probably harder than mine because she had to stay at home and worry about me being out working or whatever you know. And when she passed away, she had a heart attack. And I thought about that. Well maybe that brought along... brought about some of that you know. You get to thinking about things like that but sometimes you just think too much. You gotta let it go.

NANCY RAY: That's true.

BILL GERTH: I know but I think about it occasionally.

NANCY RAY: I'm sure she was a special person.

BILL GERTH: Oh she was. She was the love of my life.

NANCY RAY: Well, you said you started your Highway Patrol career in San Antonio.

BILL GERTH: Correct.

NANCY RAY: Does anything stand out in your mind about San Antonio in the Highway Patrol?

BILL GERTH: No, not really. I had... Joe Bateman was the first officer I worked with. He broke me in. I was green as a gourd... you could plant me in the ground and I would have growed limbs and leaves I'm

telling you. I'd never been a police officer before and he... of course he knew that. He helped me a lot... he really did (laughter).

NANCY RAY: So how long were you in San Antonio?

BILL GERTH: Let's see... March 20th of '64 and then I think March of the next year I was transferred to Uvalde and then I stayed in Uvalde five years. And uh I believe it was March again of 1970 I transferred to Kerrville. And I worked for Sergeant James R. England up there.

NANCY RAY: I've heard his name.

BILL GERTH: He was the best guy in the world. Best sergeant I ever had. And then in uh September of '75, I made Ranger and moved to Wichita Falls and I've been here 33 years. I just stayed here. I've been here longer than I've been anywhere else in my life.

NANCY RAY: Put your roots down, didn't you?

BILL GERTH: Yeah. I might as well stay right here.

NANCY RAY: Well when you were in the Highway Patrol, you working traffic and finding...

BILL GERTH: Accident investigation...

NANCY RAY: Out of that career, anything stand out in your mind? Anything funny or anything...

BILL GERTH: Well I think the most frustrating thing of all those years in the Highway Patrol... of all the fatal accidents that we worked you know. There were statutes to cover these like homicide by motor vehicle or murder with a motor vehicle or aggravated assault with a motor vehicle. I was only in court one time on a fatality accident in twelve years. And I got to thinking about that, I said you know... and we were arresting DWIs and every time we could get one, we'd take them off the road. But then you'd have those bad accidents, it just seemed like we never got anything done as far as fatalities. And that's one reason... I thought well I'd like to try something else. I don't think I'm doing very good here you know. And I had some great partners, I really did. I had Jackie... Jackie Peoples was my partner for about four years in Kerrville. Charlie Scoggins in Uvalde, Jerry Shaw... you know these guys, you put your life in their hands. Especially when you're working with a partner because when you stop the car to get out to make a contact, his job is to get out and watch the traffic. If he says jump, you jump. You don't turn

around to look to see what it is... you jump because he's saved your life. Because so many officers get run over out there and it's easy because people... they'll be driving at night and they'll pick up those taillights and whether they're parked or driving, they don't know the difference. And they'll just plow into the whole mess. So your partner can save your life out there.

NANCY RAY: I've heard that that's probably one of the most dangerous jobs.

BILL GERTH: It is. It is... you've got to watch out for traffic. Of course you stop fugitives or you know armed individuals or whatever. There's more danger today I think than when we were working because drugs and methamphetamines and... Most of the chases nowadays are either methamphetamine addicts or meth heads or whatever they call them now. But it's dangerous, it really is.

NANCY RAY: Well what drugs or narcotics were big when you were working?

BILL GERTH: Probably marijuana and pills at that time. That was probably the biggest thing really.

NANCY RAY: Well I was gonna ask. When you were in the Academy, do you remember who your monitors were?

BILL GERTH: Uh, Sergeant Roberts was my platoon and then there was Sergeant Wells. That's a long time ago.

NANCY RAY: A long time. Well while you're thinking about that, what is the most important thing you took away from that Academy to help you? What did you learn?

BILL GERTH: Well it's a very good Academy. They teach the basics in everything. But they try to teach you to tell the truth, to find out the truth. That's the basis of anything you do. I don't care if it's working an accident... you try to find the truth. And the truth is like putting the genie in the bottle sometimes. It's right there but you can't get your hands on it. People would rather climb a tree and tell a lie than stand on the ground and tell the truth. I mean they'll lie... that's just life you know. It's the way it is. But you try to find the truth and you protect yourself because there are people out here that will take your life if you let them. And uh they taught us you take care of yourself and your partner you know. Because they're bad people, they're not all good people. And they are a lot of good people but there are some that are just bad.

NANCY RAY: Well, is there anything about your highway patrol career that stands out... before we go to Rangers?

BILL GERTH: Well, I guess all the years of pushing the black and white, nothing really that stands out.

NANCY RAY: Did you have radar?

BILL GERTH: I think I had radar about two months out of my whole career. Most of the time when I was in Uvalde, there was a little old town called Knippa and it was about twenty miles out of Uvalde. And I remember there was a little café there on the side of the road and there was a mesquite tree there. And Knippa is about ten miles between Sabinal and twenty miles from Uvalde. If I couldn't run them down in ten miles, then I was... I was in bad trouble. Because I just sat there you know because hell we didn't have no radar. We didn't have all that fancy stuff. We just had to kind of watch them and run them down and then pace them and then let them pull away. Then you'd either write them or warn them. It was kind of archaic I guess you'd say.

NANCY RAY: That was part of the times.

BILL GERTH: That was it. We did the best we could with what we had you know.

NANCY RAY: Did you ever have any instances when you had to take someone in? You had one set of handcuffs is what I've heard, that was all?

BILL GERTH: Well we were issued one set but generally we had a couple extra because you never know when you'll stop a carload of folks you know. And you always used the handcuffs. That... that just takes that little doubt out of their mind and it takes the doubt out of my mind. Because I know they ain't going nowhere. And I like the leg irons too.

NANCY RAY: Leg irons?

BILL GERTH: Oh yes, yes. That just takes away all that thought of running you know.

NANCY RAY: Did you have to use them much?

BILL GERTH: Oh if I had them I used them you know. It didn't bother me. I'd put them down and they'd look like a destroyer when we'd go in there because you ain't gonna get away.

NANCY RAY: Were they mainly drunk?

BILL GERTH: No, mostly fugitives or you stop somebody for armed robbery or a major crime or something. They're not gonna get away. Or if he does, he's gonna be dragging that car with him (laughter).

NANCY RAY: Were you ever drawn on?

BILL GERTH: No, you know I was very lucky in my whole career. I don't think I ever had any serious uh... where somebody tried to hurt me or my partner or take my life or anything like that. So really I had a remarkable career.

NANCY RAY: Good. Well you were in San Antonio which would be urban. But...

BILL GERTH: Yeah, Uvalde... my partner and I, we had Uvalde, Dimmit, and Zavalla Counties. We had three counties that we worked. And we worked a week of days and a week of nights. And when the night man went in, like five to two, the day man was on call. And we worked like that for like four years. And then sometimes we'd have a wreck way down around Carrizo Springs. That's about a hundred miles down there and a hundred miles back you know. So we had a pretty big area.

NANCY RAY: Well what was the difference between an urban and a rural... more like Uvalde or Kerrville?

BILL GERTH: Well when you're in the country, you do a little bit of everything. Because when we were in Uvalde, we had a sheriff and two deputies for the whole county and two Highway Patrolman.

NANCY RAY: Do you remember the sheriff's name?

BILL GERTH: Kenneth Kelley was at Uvalde.

NANCY RAY: That was my uncle.

BILL GERTH: Really? Kenneth was?

NANCY RAY: Surely is... is my uncle.

BILL GERTH: He's a good fellow. He was sheriff there a long time.

NANCY RAY: I've heard that Kerrville shut down at five and noon on Sundays.

BILL GERTH: Sometimes you know. But they had somebody either on call. But we usually had a day unit and a night unit. We had probably... there were four men at Kerrville. Jackie and I, Glen (*unknown name*) and Don Oats. Jackie and I were partners and the other boys were partners.

NANCY RAY: OK. Well what, what encouraged you to become a Ranger?

BILL GERTH: Well I think you... and this is different for every patrolman. Uh you get, you'd just like a change you know. You do it so long and then... monotony is the worst thing you can get in the Patrol. You have to keep your stuff wrapped together at all times. Complacency will get you killed. And you like to get a change and... you know I'd like to try that. And my, I went to school at night while I was in the Highway Patrol in Kerrville. I went to school three years to get two years of college. And just before I made Ranger, I needed about six hours to get my associate degree which I was gonna do. And when I made Ranger and came up here, I never did go back. I said I've got a job to do here so that kind of ended that.

NANCY RAY: Was there a specific Ranger that really influenced you?

BILL GERTH: Yeah, it had to be Leo, Leo Hickman. When I came up here... the first time I ever met Leo... you know he's just one-eyed and he looked just like a Ranger... he had the hat you know and he looked nice. He really looked good. And he... the first time I met him, he just backed off and he kind of looked at me with that one eye. He walked around (laughter) and looked at me. And I was nervous as I could be. And he said boy... he always called me boy. He reminded me of Foghorn Leghorn (laughter). You know the old cartoon? And I was the little chicken hawk. He said now boy, the Department has their probationary period and I have mine. And you're on probation. I said yes sir. So Leo was an old sergeant in the Marine Corps and I was a corporal. So I always started off a little bit lower you know. So... and he uh... he did more I guess to influence me. He taught me what it meant to wear that star and wheel. And more than that, he taught me how to wear that star and wheel. And I you know... he said now boy, you listen to me and I'll tell you a few things. Leo was a field Ranger. Now that's the guy that's out in the car working with the troops. Working with all the guys out in the field you know. He wasn't a pencil pusher or a paper shuffler. He was a Ranger in the field. And his motto was, go to the sound of the guns.

Wherever there's trouble in my area, I go because I'm gonna get called anyway. And I liked that. And he taught me that... that's one thing he taught me. And I tell you. He is uh... the reason I'm sitting here today talking to you is because of Leo Hickman. He saved my life.

NANCY RAY: Tell us about that.

BILL GERTH: He uh, he would tell me things. He told me about that time that he was a Highway Patrolman in Beaumont. And him and two deputies and a civilian that was with the deputies were going out to pick up an old boy on a warrant. And they walked up to the house and the subject in the house opened fire with a .22 rifle. Well Leo was the only one in full uniform so he shot him right above the eye. He said it knocked me flat down. And he said the blood came out of my eye pulsating just about as big as your little finger, arterial bleeding. He said my God I had blood all over me. Couldn't see, got it in my good eye and I got down on the ground and couldn't see nothing. And he said he reached over and the only thing I could find was a dang chicken coop. He said I laid down there and I could hear the rounds hitting around. The dirt was flying up. Well this guy shot one of the deputies and killed him. No, he shot the civilian and killed him and wounded one of the deputies. And he said I finally put pressure on that eye and stopped the bleeding. And uh finally I got to where I could see just a little bit out of my good eye. And I could see that guy in there at a double window. And he was getting ready to shoot again. He said I ducked my head and he shot. And that .22 hit me in the neck... ran down his spine and out the left cheek of his rear. And he said I just thought that one in the eye hurt. He said that one in the neck felt like somebody shoved a red-hot hayfork down my back. He said that made me mad. I got that pistol out. He said I could see him walking back and forth. He said I took aim on that window sill and I shot two rounds and he said I hit him because I could hear him flopping in there. He said I got so weak, I'd lost so much blood I was going up there and trying to go in there and the other deputy stopped him and he said I like to have passed out. And they got him to the hospital and they saved his life. But he lost the eye. And funny thing about Leo. He's the most determined man I ever saw in my life. When he, when Billye, that's his wife, she went up to get him out of the hospital. And she said I'll drive you home, Leo. And he said no, I'll drive myself home. Of course he's hardheaded you know. He got in that car and he drove himself

home. Of course I always wondered you know why he was so damned determined and this, and one day I was shaving. And I thought well I'll just... I just got a piece of cotton and a piece of tape and I just taped one eye. And I tried to work one day with just one eye. And I'm telling you what. You've got to change everything you do. And you've got to kind of sweep at things to pick them up. And when you're driving, you really have to watch that center line because you lose your depth perception. And I got a, I got an insight into Leo why he was so damned ornery and mean sometimes. That's why (laughter) because he's just tough. And then that deal where he saved my life. He would tell me things you know. Tell me things that a working Ranger, a field Ranger would know. He said now you listen to me boy, because this might save your life someday. And I listened. And uh it came to pass. And this was '75, '76, and he was... he took me under his wing and he was my mentor. And he taught me a lot of things. A lot of them weren't in the general manual but they were things that a working Ranger should know to keep you alive. And in '83, just like you pick up the paper today and you see where officers are in pursuit of a wanted individual, armed individual. Well it came to pass that uh there was a city officer named Steve Thayer.

NANCY RAY: What was the last name?

BILL GERTH: Steve Thayer, THAYER. And a Highway Patrolman named Billy Gilbert and myself were in pursuit of a bank robber. And uh he was running. We were running him hard. He was coming into town and I was chasing him. I jumped him out here on Sisk Road off of a radio broadcast. They said be on the lookout for this car and I saw the car. And then I saw a guy walking and he ran up to the car and he jumped in it and he took off. And I called Billy and I said I need some help. And Billy said I'm in route. And the old boy started coming into Wichita Falls and I was about, oh 50 yards in back of him. And he got to the city limits and he made a wild U-turn right in front of three cars... liked to have wrecked out. Well he took off back the other way and I called Billy. And I said Billy, he just made a U-turn, he's coming to you. And I had to work my way through them two cars and I was a little further back. Well by the time he got up to Billy, Billy made a U-turn on him. A city unit made a U-turn on him and headed back to Billy. Well they're hot-footing it around Southwest Parkway and they came to a turn, a 90 degree turn off Sisk Road. Well he took a right on that Sisk Road turnoff but he was going so fast that he hit the

curb with his truck. When he hit the curb, he killed the engine in that truck and the truck came to rest inside the roadway. Billy made the turn and the officer made the turn. I went and jumped the curb and flanked him on the left side. Well before I got stopped, he was out of that truck and running on that black and white with an automatic weapon... shooting that car. He shot the radiator and the hood. He shot through the windshield. One of the rounds went through Billy Gilbert's hair, that's how close it was. Well I had my 12-gauge shotgun in the front seat. When I heard that... when they put out that broadcast, I got that shotgun out and had it there. As soon as I saw what he... he started shooting and I got stopped... I went over the top of the car and I shot him in the chest with that shotgun, 12-gauge shotgun. He spun around, shot in the air, and down on the ground. I thought well this is over... and I was wrong. Because he jumped up and ran to the side of that car... or pickup. He was driving a Dodge pickup with a camper shell. And when he got to the side of that truck, he came up to the passenger door and he was looking for me then. He... when he got out, he was looking on that black and white. He forgot about me. I was driving a black, unmarked car. He never did really know who I was but he was suspicious because I was driving around and chasing him. And he gave me a full silhouette on that driver's side window. He came up and looked and I got from here up and he's looking. He's looking for me. He looks through the driver's windshield and he sees me. And I, of course I drug out that .45 and I put the blade of that .45 right under his chin and I shot two rounds through the windshield and it shattered that passenger window. And he went to his knees. And I was... I was far enough back that I could see him on his knees underneath the car. And he was rocking back and forth doing something. And I didn't know until later that he had a ring of keys and the door to that pickup was locked.... Thank the Lord. Because inside on the seat he had a Browning 9 mm fully loaded and two clips. That's what he was going after. Well this is the part where Leo came in. Leo told me, he said sometimes you may get in a situation to where uh a subject will take... hiding behind a car you know. He said if you can see him underneath the car, you can shoot underneath the car about halfway in the middle and ricochet a bullet up into him, hit him in the foot or the leg. And I remembered that and I could see him rocking. I didn't what he was doing so I aimed underneath the car about halfway and I shot one round and I hit him. And I heard him yell. And he started

rocking a little faster and I said well I don't know what the hell he's doing but if worked once it will work again. And I shot another round under there and I hit him in the other leg. And I hit him hard this time and he screamed. I mean it was different from a yell and a scream. And uh then I lost sight of him. And I said oh hell, round three coming up. So I went to the front of that pickup with my pistol in a high-port shooting position. And the first thing I saw was his head. He was jerking around and he looked at me. And that's when I ended it right there. That was the end of the deal. So if it hadn't been for Leo you know, it was just one of them bad deals. He was wearing a bulletproof vest. That's why the shotgun didn't work.

NANCY RAY: So, there are things you learn out of books and there are things you learn from...

BILL GERTH: You learn more from the old Rangers and the old officers that have been through it. And you know... Leo's been to the mountain. He nearly lost his life and he told me several times, he said you can always kick these doors you know. One of these days you'll kick one and you'll... you'll wish you hadn't kicked it. So he (laughter)... he was a wise fellow. And he saved my hide. And you know, he never got any recognition for this. But every time I spoke publicly, at his retirement or anything like that, I acknowledged the fact that I'm standing here because of Leo Hickman. He saved my life... and he did.

NANCY RAY: That's good acknowledgement for him.

BILL GERTH: Well, that's all I can do. He's still the best Ranger I ever saw.

NANCY RAY: Well, let's go back to when you became a Ranger. Do you remember anything about the interview board? What year was this?

BILL GERTH: Yeah, it was 1975. July of (laughter)... The night before the interview board... you know you take a statewide test. When I was going to school, I took a year in college in night school of the new penal code. So I really I had a jump on everybody taking this exam because I had a year of the new penal code that went into effect in September of '75 or whenever. And I passed the test and I made the interview board. And then the night before the oral interview board, there was a bunch of us down there. And we went to the movie and I said I've gotta get out of here, this will drive me crazy. So we went to see Jaws you know. And I said oh Lord. There was a line from here to Alabama to go see that. And it filled

up from the back to the front and it ended up that we had to sit on the front row. And I'll bet I was as close as you to the screen so everything was just magnified. And I jumped up... I remember when that old boy... he had come out of that boat. I jumped up and I hit both them guys and I screamed and jumped ten feet. It scared me half to death (laughter). Well, everybody in there like to have died. We were so close. I thought good god I've gotta get out of here. And then we had to go back and get ready for that interview board the next day. And I said I don't know if I want to go through this all again (laughter).

NANCY RAY: But you made it.

BILL GERTH: Yeah, I made it. Captain Mitchell was on the board. Pete Rogers, Maurice Beckham, Chief Ray... let's see... who else was on there? Captain uh, Captain Wilson, the senior captain, Bill Wilson. Yeah, they're kind of ornery because they had this conference room and they'd open those blinds in back of Bill Wilson. And that sun was shining and you couldn't really see you know. They kind of... they kind of aggravate you... they kind of aggravate you a little bit.

NANCY RAY: They had to work at it.

BILL GERTH: Oh yeah. Well, we couldn't have got any more nervous.

NANCY RAY: OK, so who else made it with you?

BILL GERTH: Uh, there were two openings when I took the test and then when we went to the board. There were two openings in Texas, one in Pecos and one in Wichita Falls. And uh Joe Coleman was the intelligence agent in Houston and he came out number one and I came out number two. I was lucky to get number two. And I figured why heck, I might as well go to Pecos and try to find me a house because he's gonna pick Wichita Falls as sure as God made little apples. And for some reason, Joe was in Houston and he said I've gotta get out of here. And he chose Pecos and I like to have passed out. I said oh thank you Lord, thank you because I didn't want to go to Pecos. I said oh god. And I came to Wichita Falls and stayed here eighteen years.

NANCY RAY: Who was your captain when you first came?

BILL GERTH: Bob Warner was the captain when I first came here... and Charlie Moore and Bruce Casteel and then Joe Wilie... I worked for four captains.

NANCY RAY: Well, do you remember your first case?

BILL GERTH: Oh, you know... I don't really remember it. But of course I've been retired fifteen years. And I worked a lot with a lot of good officers. And uh I got a lot of credit that they did you know. We worked together... I had some of the best sheriffs. Sheriff Jake Bogard in Clay County and Jack Harney in Archer County. And I worked with these guys seventeen... eighteen years. They were like my brothers. And they'd call me and I'd help them. I always told them, I said I don't have to run for office, you have to run for office. You make all the press releases and I'll help you with anything we've got to do. But you can do the press releases because you've got to run and you know... bla bla bla. But uh... now they pulled some bad tricks on me and I did the same to them. Of course you've got to have a sense of humor because policemen are noted for their bad sense of humor I guess you'd say. But it's a pressure valve. It's a relief because you see a lot of bad things. And you've gotta have a way to let the pressure off you know.

NANCY RAY: So can you think of any pranks somebody played on you or you played on them... that you want to talk about?

BILL GERTH: Oh yeah... yeah... Sheriff Bogard, he used to get up early in the morning and he'd get the paper. And he'd call me about 4 o'clock in the morning and he'd say, what'cha doing? Well, I was sleeping you know, what the hell did you think I was doing? I got a bad old deal out here at Thornberry, you need to get out here right now. I said well what is it, a body or bad... And he said just get out here. Well I'd get up and run like hell to get out there and he'd be sitting on the side of the road in the car reading the paper (laughter). And I said what is this you got me out for? He just said you get your light and you come with me. I said oh god. He said it's over here. And he was real serious and I thought well it must be something pretty bad you know. We went tromping off over there and I had my light and he said shine your light over there. I shined it over there and there's a hole in the ground about that big, about that deep. I looked at it and said it's a hole in the ground. What the hell... you know what's the deal here? He said looky there. I shined my light over there and there's another one. And I said what in the hell is going on here and he said there's ten of these. I said well what... what's the deal? He said somebody come out

here and they stole ten pecan trees. And I could have killed him (laughter). I said you mean you called me out here to look at these ten holes at 4:30 in the morning because somebody stole ten pecan trees. He said yeah, and he said I want a report on this because this is a crime and right after you get this information we're gonna go eat breakfast. He just wanted to go eat breakfast. You know for years we'd go... we went to Aspen, Colorado, to pick up a prisoner one time. We were driving along there and he said stop the car right here! And I'm saying what, what, what? He said look, reckon that's one of our trees? I said *no!* And he'd do that to me for the next ten years. I'd say damn you sorry outfit (laughter). He was terrible and he'd do all kind of bad things to me. Of course I did bad things to him too. I aggravated him a little bit.

NANCY RAY: Yeah, it was a two-way street?

BILL GERTH: You know we had a lot of fun but we did a lot of good work. They had a lot of bad deals uh... especially if there were homicides and burglaries and stuff and he'd always call. You know he was the best one in the world. And the best... he was honest... honest as the day is long. And he told the truth. And with those two things, you can work with anybody. And he was! He was outstanding. Jack Harney was the same way. We did, we did a deal on Jack Harney one time. Jake and I were down there drinking coffee with him and he, he was real vain. He couldn't see worth a hoot and he had big old thick glasses. We called them Coke bottles you know. He had them old big thick glasses. So he went to the ophthalmologist and got him some contacts. And I think he spent about \$350 on these. And he had them setting on the desk there and he gets up and goes in the room to do something else. And I looked down at those and I looked at Jake. He looked at me and kind of grinned. I said should we? He said we should! And we opened that thing and we switched those lenses. One of them had a red dot on it for the left eye and one for the right eye. And we didn't say nothing. He come in and he said ya'll excuse me. He was real vain. He grabbed them things and he run in there and he put them in right quick (laughter). And he come back in that office and I was just about to die. And he said you're gonna have to help me. He said I got this one in here and it looked like half a pound of ground. He'd done got that lens in there and them big old fingers and it just looked terrible. He said you're gonna have to get that little suction thing and get that lens out of there. I can't see (laughter). So I got that little suction cup and I just stuck it on his eyeball

and I pulled it out a little bit. And I fished around a little and said hell I can't get that thing. You're just gonna have to get through the day you know. He says I can't see nothing. That damn ophthalmologist... I'm going to Wichita Falls and I'm gonna whip his ass. And he called his wife, Dolly. Dolly come up there and she said now Jack, you know you really don't want to do that. And he said I damn sure do! I spent all this money and I can't see nothing (laughter). Well, Bogard and I left. I said now is the time for us to leave. And he went up there and he went storming in that ophthalmologist's office and he just eat him up one side and another. And he said well Mr. Harney, if you'll just sit down maybe we can figure this out you know. He said let me look. He fished them lenses out and he said I think I know what's wrong here. But you've got the wrong lens in the wrong eye. That's why you can't see anything. And he sat there and he rolled them eyes and he cut them eyes over at... Dolly was telling me this. He cut them eyes over and he said I know what happened (laughter). Boy, he was after us from then on. Well we... we had a lot of fun like that but we worked too. We had a good relationship. If it was a bad deal, we worked as long as it took to find the truth.

NANCY RAY: Well how did you build up the relationship with these guys?

BILL GERTH: Oh, just working. You know I went over and introduced myself to them when I first made Ranger. I said well I'm the new guy on the block. If uh... if you need anything. You know... Leo told me never out dress the people you work with. You know you can wear a \$500 suit and a \$700 pair of boots and a \$400 hat and look like you come out of a hatbox. He said ain't nobody gonna say a word to you. They won't even drink coffee with you. Well sometimes I'd wear bluejeans and a shirt. Most of the time I'd wear a shirt like this with a tie and a little light jacket or something. And I never wore a hat. I never did like hats. And I might have a badge on or I might have it in my pocket. It might even be in the car. Sometimes I'd even have my gun in the car. So I... I was pretty non-descript. You couldn't really tell I was a Ranger. And I liked that because that was my edge. And I was more effective when people didn't know who I was. Or I could be sitting in the café there or sitting somewhere in the back, whatever. They'd come and do their deal and they don't know me from Adam.

NANCY RAY: Didn't stick out, did you?

BILL GERTH: And it worked in that deal with that bank robber too.

NANCY RAY: How's that?

BILL GERTH: Because when I drove by him the first time, he was walking toward that truck and he eyeballed me and he picked me up. And I just had a shirt on, no tie, driving that black car. And I had seen the truck and I saw him and just kind of drove by and kind of glanced at him. But he picked me up and he followed me all the way down. And I went about a block and a half and I made a U-turn. And when I came back, there was a house over there right off of Sisk Road and it had a storm cellar in the front yard. And he was sitting on that storm cellar petting a little old dog. When I came down the road, he picked me up and he followed me all the way down. And I just kind of glanced at him... looked in my mirror... and I said that's gotta be him. Ain't nobody else around here. And when I made another U-turn and come back, he was gone. That's when I saw him running to the car. I said well, the run's on and that's when it started. But he didn't know who I was. And once that black and white joined that deal and the city officer, he forgot about me. He was zeroed in on that black and white. And that's why he fell out in the open on them first. But I... we were lucky that day. See all he had to do when that passenger glass shattered on that truck, all he had to do was reach in there and get that pistol. But he didn't think of that either. He was standing there trying to unlock that damn door. Thank you... thank the Lord that door was locked... or it would have been round three.

NANCY RAY: Well you mentioned the badge. When you pinned on that badge... and you also mentioned that Leo taught you what that meant... what... can you describe how you felt... the feelings that went with that badge?

BILL GERTH: Well, he told me he said boy, you pin that badge on, it don't weigh hardly anything. But there will come a day when that thing will feel like 300 pounds sitting in the middle of your chest. And I really didn't realize what he was saying until years later. And then I had a deal where a girl was killed in Fort Worth. And she was stabbed 35 times, sexually assaulted, stripped naked. Brought her to Clay County, drove down a country road and stuffed her in a culvert. And uh one of the guys working for Lone Star Gas Company was driving to work. They had a little rain... if it hadn't been for the rain... the water

came down and washed her out of that culvert. And they called us as soon as they found her. And I had her mama and daddy come out to see me. We didn't know who she was. That's the cleanest crime scene I've ever seen except for just the body. Because the water washed the body out, washed all the physical evidence away... nothing but rocks... there was not one piece of physical evidence that we could gather except the body. And we got the fingerprints and I think it was like a week later we got a hit of a missing girl out of Fort Worth. And then her mama and daddy came to see me, wanted to... and her daddy... I'll never forget as long as I live. He said uh what are you doing to solve the murder of my daughter? And he looked me right in the eye and then I knew what Leo was saying. And if that doesn't build a fire under you, nothing will. And I said I'm gonna turn every rock I can over to find out. And we worked... you know we figured this was uh... she was killed over there and then dumped over here. And of course they had jurisdiction over there and they did a great job. They, they had another murder where a disc jockey was murdered and the same guy that killed the disc jockey killed this girl. And they tried him for capital murder for killing the disc jockey and he got the death sentence. And then I had to go to Austin to testify on this as another case deal, same deal. Anyway, he got the death sentence and he finally got executed for that deal. And that was, that was the way that we solved that one. We kind of backdoored into it. They did a hell of a job. And they got it solved.

NANCY RAY: Well working with families like that, that has to be tough.

BILL GERTH: Oh, I tell you that's the hardest thing. And I've had some... some deals like that I stayed in contact with the father for... for years you know, especially with DNA. Back in '85, DNA was just starting and I'm a firm believer that DNA is the greatest thing that ever happened in law enforcement. I'm telling you because it, it is... and this was the beginning you know. We had a lot of the physical evidence but we didn't have the technology that... hadn't caught up to like it really is today. It's just, my god, they can do wonders today.

NANCY RAY: Well what were your biggest tools, investigative tools, without DNA?

BILL GERTH: Well, uh the biggest tools...

NANCY RAY: What helped you solve crimes?

BILL GERTH: Well, you... one of the ways is that you get with the offices that you work with all the time and you try to preserve the crime scene. The crime scene is the most important thing in the world. Well you have officers come in there and they'll tromp through everything and they really... everybody that comes in a crime scene brings things in and they leave. And they pick things up from a crime scene and they take things out. And the more people you have come in, it just messes it up. If you can ever get... if you have a crime scene like a homicide, put an officer at the door and stop. Nobody comes in here but either the chief or the sheriff or whoever or the district attorney... whatever. And you do the crime scene. But it hardly ever happens that way. Everybody's got to come in and look. We, we kind of got together and said we need to do a different thing. If we have a bad deal like that, we'll put an officer at the door. And if you have to go in this crime scene, I want a report saying what the hell you're doing in here. You're not just gawking, looking around. I've had a bad deal where there's been a murder and they... a guy would walk over and say I got the gun. I picked it up over there (laughter). Why in the hell did you do that? Why didn't you just leave... oh I'll put it back. Can't do that. You have to leave it the way it is. And it's just a matter of working with guys over a period of time where they get to where they're pretty dang good you know. They know what to do. And then uh you work together and you get it done. We had the lab facilities... and a lot of things they didn't have. But a lot of times you'll have a sheriff and two deputies and that's it. And then one of the deputies has to spend the night at the jail because they don't have any jailers you know. Good god, it was like in the 1930s. Really! And the reports... oh god, who, what, when, where and why. That's it. And if you could answer those questions on a report that was it you know. It was... (laughter)... Hell, I always you know, I would kind of aggravate old Bogard and Harney. I always carried a bunch of Big Chief tablets. You know Big Chief from when you were a kid?

NANCY RAY: Yeah.

BILL GERTH: And a number two pencil. He called me on a bad deal. This was a damn killing or something. And I'd go up there and I'd say well I'm ready to go work. And I'd open that Big Chief tablet and write the date down. And he'd say you beat any damn thing I ever saw. You can get more stuff in a

Big Chief tablet... And I said what the hell is the difference in this and a spiral notebook? It's just... Big Chief makes me feel better. I'm more relaxed (laughter). Of course I did it just to aggravate him.

NANCY RAY: You have that little spark, don't you?

BILL GERTH: Well (laughter)... we had a lot of fun. We worked some bad deals and when it was time to be serious, we could be serious. But when you... you have to laugh. Laughter is a great thing (laughter).

NANCY RAY: It is. Well the details seem to be something you really have to focus on. Is that right?

BILL GERTH: Oh, yes. The most... and when you start, you have to start correctly. Because if you get off the beam in the beginning, the further it goes the further away it gets. And you make a mistake in the beginning and you have to live with it forever you know. And you have to get this ready to be prosecuted. And uh... I know Dick... Dick has... the reports they do now... of course they've all got computers. And they've got to be meticulous you know. Every "T" crossed and every "I" dotted. He spent more time doing reports and Dick worked some tremendous cases while he was here. That Nocona deal was... ten homicides and probably even more than that. And there was one he worked down in Jack County where a young mother had her little boy in a car seat and her ex-husband stopped her on the highway and he stabbed her in the leg. She was an athlete, she would have run. But I don't think she would have run too far and left that baby. And he stabbed her to death and then took off... and just left the baby in the carrier. And then she was murdered on the side of the road. This was a cold case you know. Her old sorry husband was a suspect a long time... like eight or nine years. And Dick got on that case and he worked until he got that thing solved. And they convicted him and gave him life in the penitentiary and that's where he should be. He should be on death row is where he should be but that's you know one of them deals.

NANCY RAY: Well that raises another question. You had to be frustrated with some of the outcomes. You know you worked hard and you tried to get a conviction and you couldn't... was there a case at some point that just didn't go the way you wanted and it was a frustration?

BILL GERTH: Oh yeah, you uh... you know you have to depend on the jury. Once you present the best case that you can and I've worked with the district attorney you know... Richard Byrd in Vernon was a cracker-jack DA. I mean he was the voice of the people. Now by god he stood up for the people. And he'll go in there and he'll lay it out and when it gets in the hands of the jury you know, you're done. They're gonna reach a verdict, whatever it is, and you just have to live with it. That's the way it is. There's just no, no appeal really. But you do the best you can with what you have and sometimes you don't have a lot. Sometimes you don't even get to, get an indictment. And then I've got one old murder case, happened in 1985, Billy Tom Gillespie in Archer County. And that's the only case I've still got active. And we worked it, I don't know... as long as we could. And then uh we testified before the grand jury and they didn't think there was enough evidence to indict so that's where it sits today. And every Ranger that's come in here... Durochez came in here after I retired. Dick got on it and every one of them has run the string out and added string to the end and tried to get it solved. And it's just one of those lingering deals that's... One of these days somebody will pull the right string and it will all just unravel. But you just have to... you have to live with it. I've still got all the reports in there, every damn one of them. I had a poisoning case too. A secretary poisoned her boss over a period of time. And her and the wife were doing it. *(pause to change discs)*

NANCY RAY: OK, we're back and you were just about to tell us about a case involving poisoning.

BILL GERTH: It was. It was an arsenic poisoning case. Uh Sheriff Bogard called me one time and uh he said I've got something here I really don't know what I have. I said what do you have? And he said the hospital called me and said there was a man died up here of arsenic poisoning and he's from Clay County. And he died several days ago and they're getting ready to have the funeral. He said there's something wrong here. So we went up there and we got with the people at the hospital. One of the nurses called the Sheriff's Office, thank god. And we got all the records and we got to checking and he had died of a massive dose of arsenic. He had 50 times the amount of arsenic in him from a normal person. Well, we got to working on this and he lived north of Jolly, Texas. He was a plumber, a commercial plumber. And uh he had a really big operation. And the secretary that worked for him and the wife... he had all of his

plumbing supplies at the house. He had a warehouse. And this was a million dollar setup. And he built this church out here. It was the last thing he worked on. And we got, we found out that uh... a little before the time he went to the hospital... that the daughter and her boyfriend had spent the night at their home. And the boy went down the next morning and got a glass of cranapple juice, just a regular glass of cranapple juice. And he drank that cranapple juice and he set the glass down. He took about ten steps and he just went into convulsions. And they said well by god he's had a stroke or something. They loaded him up and sent him to the hospital. Well, his mother called the sheriff and said there's something wrong here. Said he drank that damn cranapple juice and he's having these reactions and I'm taking him to the doctor and they're doing analysis on the blood and everything. And uh she said I... there's something wrong here. And that was two things wrong here, there's something going on here. And we went out and talked to the secretary and talked to the wife. And uh.... And he had made about three visits to the hospital here and nobody in the world ever snapped on that arsenic poisoning. But we went through the records and they knew about it two or three weeks before he died you know. And they kept visiting up here and every time they'd visit, he'd have a relapse. He'd get sicker and sicker. I think they were giving it to him in the hospital. So he finally died. He died of acute arsenic poisoning. Well we went out one day, this was kind of funny. We went out and talked to the grieving widow and we're talking... said do you mind if we search out here and see if we can find any arsenic or anything? She said no, you just search to you little heart's content. We got a consent to search so we went out. Most of the people living in the country throw all their garbage in a pit. Well, Bogard you know... since I'm the sheriff of this county and you're assisting, you need to get in that pit and dig around (laughter). I said yeah, I kind of figured that's why you brought me along you know. So I jumped in the pit... being like I was. And I found an Ocean Spray Cranapple jug... had the cap on it. And it had about oh... a quarter inch of water in it. I said you know all the cranapple juice I ever saw was kind of a different color. Somebody washed this out. So we just seized that and we sent to forensic. The Institute of Forensic Science in Dallas did the autopsy... And that water in that bottle contained enough arsenic to kill half the people in Jolly. And I said my god, Bogard, do you know what we've found? We have found the smoking cranapple jug (laughter). And of course we had a

little humor there. And I said by god, this is a bad deal. They, they poisoned him and killed him. He was worth several million dollars. He had race horses and I mean it was a big deal. And we worked on this case and uh we never could come up with the arsenic and that was one of the key things. We went to the grand jury and they brought them in and we polygraphed them and they failed the polygraph. And they did a lot of stuff. They cleaned up the house and they did a lot of things that really got our suspicions up. And we just sat and we waited you know. And we didn't have enough evidence to indict either one of them. So it rocked along... we waited two years. And uh Jake got a call one day from a storage locker out there on the Seymour highway. He said I just got a locker out here that hadn't paid their rent. And uh I opened the door and there's a bunch of articles in here from a lady in Holiday. And the, the secretary's name was Debbie Baker. And the lady that rented the locker used a fictitious name but she used her righteous address in Holiday, the real Debbie Baker's address. That was a clue. I said oh, I smell a rat here, Bogard. So we got a search warrant. We went back in there and we inventoried everything in that storage locker. And we found a little bottle of Crowley's Rat and Mouse Poison which contains arsenic. And it had about three quarters of it gone. And I kind of laughed... this will help us. This is a smoking Crowley's arsenic bottle. And that's what got her indicted. And the funny thing about this... because uh she had completely forgotten to pay the rent on this thing. That's what got us in there. And somehow this guy that owned the uh, the locker had called uh his attorney which was an associate of her attorney. And I guess they got to talking about it. Said they got a damn deal out here that's got Debbie Baker's stuff in it. So he hot foots it and calls Debbie Baker who was living in San Marcos and he said have you rented something... a storage locker? And she said *uhhhh*, oh my god. She picked up the phone in San Marcos and calls the storage locker and I'm sitting in there with him. And he said oh Mrs. Jones... she said I'll send you an express money order right now. He said oh, I'm afraid it's too late. The officers are here and they're inventorying this stuff. She just panics. Well she hangs up the phone and I said who was that? He said that's the lady whose name is on this thing. And I said oh... we got her now. We got a subpoena for the phone records and that call from her home in San Marcos was the one that tied... the tie that binds... went right back to that storage locker. That's her. That was enough to get her indicted. Had a big trial. It

was like an Errol Flynn movie, good lord. And the jury... and they did the old flim flam. We didn't have enough to indict the wife but we had enough to indict the secretary. And they had mismanaged a bunch of money. I subpoenaed records for a year from the bank. And the bank was about to kill me. They had to go back and get all these checks and stuff. And we went through all that and we found out all this stuff you know. And uh... and finally the jury said... you know... and the defense played it great here. They made it look like she was just a helper and the wife was the one that did the murder. Well that's her deal... she got all the money and everything. We said, you know... and he played it beautifully. And the jury came back and gave her ten years probation for homicide. And of course we all liked to have died. I said oh lord, ten years probation for a murder... oh... jesus... And we never did get enough evidence to indict the wife. But she got her probation and she rocked along there for about four or five years and she quit paying her fees. You know you've got to pay a fee to the clerk and all this kind of stuff. Well she just quit. So they just went down there and revoked her probation and yanked her back into court. Said hey, you've gotta serve ten years in the penitentiary. *Uhhh...* She is down in prison right now. She just failed her first parole. She's been in like three years now. She won't get out until 2012. So it took a long time. But I've still got everything in that file. It's... I've got four volumes about that thick (*he indicated the size*), and every statement we took from the 75 recorded statements on this. Everything that I had was in there and it's just... there were four copies made: one for the DA, one for me, one for Lubbock, and one for Yates' Sheriff's Office. But I got one of the original ones. I'm still waiting on the grieving widow.

NANCY RAY: You probably still have the Big Chief tablets.

BILL GERTH: I've got several of them (laughter). I put them all in those uh those plastic bins when I retired. I had a ton of stuff. Eighteen years worth of stuff... I had two files full of stuff. I said what am I gonna do with all this stuff?

NANCY RAY: If the widow ever messes up, you're there.

BILL GERTH: Well, you never know, especially on a deal like this. There's no statute of limitations on homicide. If she ever decides she tired of taking this load by myself... I might just tell what she did on this... so we're back in business. (laughter) And I've got it all in there.

NANCY RAY: You're ready!

BILL GERTH: And I'm sitting on it (laughter). I'm kind of sorry but I'm kind of like that (laughter).

NANCY RAY: Let me ask you. Accomplishments... some accomplishments are through citations and awards. Is there an accomplishment to you that you feel really good about? Maybe nobody else even knows that it's... it makes you feel that good. But something of your own that makes you feel really good about your career.

BILL GERTH: Well, I think that uh... you're talking about accomplishment... if you can do a job and do it right and... You know if a person needs to be convicted or whatever and it's done right, that's an accomplishment to me. Or you help somebody that can't help themselves because uh... there are people out here that just prey on these poor souls. My god, if they're just victims of crime and they don't have anybody to look out for them or help them... if you can do that, you've done good. And that's the basis of the whole thing really.

NANCY RAY: Well I also understand you're the... you have a Medal of Valor. Is that correct?

BILL GERTH: Yes.

NANCY RAY: Would you tell us about that?

BILL GERTH: Oh, it's just...

NANCY RAY: I figured that.

BILL GERTH: I'm gonna kill Dick Johnson.

NANCY RAY: No, he's not the one.

BILL GERTH: Oh, he didn't say it?

NANCY RAY: He didn't.

BILL GERTH: Oh he always sets me up on these things.

NANCY RAY: He didn't. Honestly he did not.

BILL GERTH: Well, this was something that the Department came up with. And they uh... that was on this bank robber deal. And they did, they gave me that Medal of Valor and it was very nice and I appreciated it very much. But I... I've never been a drum beater or a horn blower. I just do my job and

that's good enough for me. And uh... Captain Moore said... I said Captain Moore I don't really feel good about this. I don't need that thing. He said by god you're gonna take that because it reflects on the Rangers. The more I thought about it well, yes sir, I understand... I went down and did my magic show and did everything you know. He said what are you gonna do with that medal? Well I'm gonna put it in a sock drawer I guess. He said no you're not. You're gonna give that to the Museum. And I got to thinking about that and I, you know... the Rangers were good to me. When I was a Highway Patrolman in Kerrville, I had my little loving wife and my three little precious girls and that's about all I had in the whole world. And they gave me a chance and they took a chance on me. There were only 94 Rangers when I made Ranger. And I... I thought you know... plucking me up and putting me out here. I said you know that gave me an opportunity and I told Captain Mitchell... Captain Mitchell investigated me when I went on the Rangers. And I told him, I said... if I can do this, I will not disappoint you. I will do the best I can and I have to learn a lot... I'll do the best I can. He said I know you will. And uh... and Captain Moore said... I said that'll be good, I'll just donate that. And it's nice. They were good to me for eighteen years and I can never repay that. But I got to thinking about that and I said I'll give that medal to the Museum for the Rangers. It's nice to give something back... something with honor. And it reflects on everybody, not just me. I don't give a damn about that. But it, but it reflects on the Ranger service... and that I like. That I like.

NANCY RAY: Good. Well tell us your most unusual case.

BILL GERTH: Oh lordy me. There was... there was one case that I never have been able to figure it out. Uh a guy called me down here and he said some guys went in my wrecking yard and they stole an anchor chain. I said a what (laughter)? He said an anchor chain. It came off a destroyer. It had 8-inch links and it was 450 feet long. I said my god that's... what in the hell do they use that for? He said well they use that out here in West Texas around Chillicothe and they get... they drag it between two cats and they clean that land you know. And he said there's an old guy bought that from me and uh somebody come in here and stole it. Well I said how in the hell did they steal an anchor chain because these 8-inch links... when you pick up one link you know you pick up another one and it gets heavier and heavier.

That thing's heavy! He said I don't know how in hell they did it but I got the tracks out here. It had rained like hell and they put... they got it on a damn flatbed trailer and they strung it on there like a big old snake. And it had rained so bad... my god it was terrible. And they liked to have got stuck when they pulled out on Texas 25. It happened just outside of Wichita Falls. And they was slinging mud and stuff and everywhere. And I followed them on the highway all the way to Electra. That's 25 miles over here. And every time they turned, they'd sling mud and stuff. So I just turned with them. And they got to a field back of Electra and they pulled it down in the pasture in the back of a bunch of trees. Why I just drove right back there, me and... me and Harney. I said it's like a blind sow finding an acorn... looky here! And to this day, I don't know how they loaded it. There were four boys and I... he said how in the hell did they load that? And I said I don't know. You know because hell we tried to move it and it was heavy because every time you picked up an 8-inch link... these are big old things. And you get the next one and it gets heavier and heavier. Well they had to lift that like 3-something feet and snake that up (laughter). I don't know. We never did find the boys but we got the chain back.

NANCY RAY: How did you get it back?

BILL GERTH: Well, we just called him and said you better get over there if you want this chain. I got the truck, trailer and chain but I don't know where the boys are that got it. And I had an inkling that this old boy had sold that chain for a certain price. And I'm not too sure he didn't steal it himself because another guy come in there later and offered him twice what that chain was worth because he had been all the way from Corpus Christi to Mobile, Alabama, trying to buy a chain for his cats. That's what he used. He said this is the only chain in five states and I think, I think he kind of pulled a little deal on us there but we never could really cipher it out. But we did recover the chain so... I always kind of thought about that... I said I could just see those guys lifting that chain and I bet they were sore because it was heavy (laughter). If it hadn't rained, we'd never found it you know. But every time they turned, they'd sling a bunch of mud and stuff. When you're lucky you know... you just have to be lucky.

NANCY RAY: Well I was gonna ask if you had a dumb criminal story but that might be it.

BILL GERTH: Oh, I had several of those now. They burglarized the school and when they'd go through the window they'd scooch through there and drop their wallet in there. And they burglarized the Western Auto up in Burkburnett and the lookout man's sitting out there and he drops his wallet right by the telephone pole. I said now ignorant as I am, *this* is a clue (laughter). That's the kind of clues I like to get for Bogard... Bogard, here we go, this is a clue (laughter).

NANCY RAY: Well what was your closest brush with death? Have you already told us about that?

BILL GERTH: Well no there was another one. Uh you know I worked twelve years on the Highway Patrol and never got a hangnail. But I come up here and within a month and a half, I damned near get killed. I said damn, this is a different deal because you know you can get killed anytime on the Highway Patrol, you never know what you're gonna stop. But when you're in the Rangers, most of the people you're dealing with are just sorries... you know they don't care about nothing. And I was over with Bogard in Clay County one day. And one of the deputies came running over there and said my god... they were having a divorce hearing up in District Court and the, the man and woman was up there. And the man pulled a pistol out and snapped it at the woman and snapped it at the judge and run out and got in his truck and headed south. He lives in Buffalo Springs. And uh I said oh lord that's a bad deal. So we got a warrant for aggravated assault on him and Buffalo Springs is about 25 miles south of Henrietta and then you go about another five miles. You were in the boonies now... way... there ain't nothing. He lived out there in a trailer house with his wife. Well, Sheriff Bogard and one of his deputies and one of the Highway Patrolman and me, we went out there. And when we pulled up to the trailer house... it was kind of an L-shaped trailer house. The truck that he was driving was there. All the shades were drawn. No sign of activity at all. But we sat there and we looked at it a little bit. We walked around, looked around. All the shades... nothing. We said well, if he's in there, no telling what he's gonna do. And he still had the gun that he snapped. And uh... had two doors, one on the back side and one on the front side. And a trailer door opens out on a trailer and then you, you know, step to the side and you walk in. We checked the back door and it was locked. All the windows were locked. Walked around to the front and the door opened... Let's see. I was standing here and the door would open like this. And I was standing to the side

where you were supposed to you know. And I reached down and I remembered what Leo told me. You know you open these doors, kick in there and go in like gangbusters, you never know what you're gonna walk into. And for some reason I reached down and I got that knob of that door and I turned it and I opened it about an inch and there was no activity. I looked down at that knob inside and there was a cotton twine around that thing and it went back into the dark. I said... the hair on my neck stood up and I said oh, this is not a good sign. Jack Phipps was the Highway Patrolman with me. I said Jack let me borrow your pocket knife. And he gave me his knife. I cut that line and it fell off into the dark. And I just kind of swung that door open and no activity. No movement, everything is quiet. It's dark in there. So I went in one side and he went in the other. And there was a chair sitting there, a lounge chair. And it was diagonal and had a bunch of clothes piled on it. And we went and searched the trailer and nobody's there, we checked. We cleared the crime scene and I got to looking at that string. I said well I wonder what the hell that was. I got to looking and I picked up that string and it ran to the table leg on the kitchen table. It was in a pulley. Went around that pulley and ran up to the back of that lounge chair. And I took those clothes off there and there was a 16-gauge, single-shot shotgun laying in the arm of that chair. And it was pointed right about my tie tack and I thought holy crap you know. Leo... you've done it again boy (laughter). And I unloaded the shotgun. I cocked it again, ran that string back up there. It was inside and I shut the door and I put it up where I cut it. And I opened that door ten inches and that shotgun snapped. I still have that shell... it's in there in my desk right now. I came home and I hugged my wife and my little girls and I poured me three fingers of Wild Turkey and I sat there and I drank that. And I said boy, it is nice to be alive. Because I think it was... I forget what kind of shot... it was a birdshot. But that far out of town, any kind of wound you would have got like that, you would never have made it back to the hospital. You were 25, 30 miles from the nearest hospital and I don't think they could, you could have stopped the bleeding or nothing. We were lucky. He had set that. In the meantime, see he had left in another vehicle and a Highway Patrolman in Decatur stopped him and wrote him a ticket for speeding. And then by the time we figured out what was going on and had put out a message, that patrolman called back and he said I just stopped him while ago and wrote him a ticket for speeding. And they got him

gathered up in Dallas. Brought him back and of course he was about half nuts. Sent him to the state hospital... never did prosecute him for nothing. But he had set that trap for his wife. He told us that. But didn't make no difference to me because I was the one looking at that thing. And it could have been any one of us just being on the wrong side of that door. And a lot of times you'll throw that door open and you've bought the farm. And I hadn't been on two months and I said oh lord, what am I into now? This is dangerous business. And it is. It is very dangerous. You've gotta keep your gear wrapped tight at all times. It's not the bank robbers and the kidnapers and all the bad deal, it's the \$25 hot check, somebody runs off and doesn't pay for gas... those are the ones that'll kill you. You've got to watch everything. And it's, you know it's just... you've gotta be lucky too.

NANCY RAY: OK. In the Rangers, you knew you were gonna deal with sorry people.

BILL GERTH: Oh yeah.

NANCY RAY: How did you come home and separate your work from your home?

BILL GERTH: Well I tried to keep it separated as much as I could. I didn't, I didn't talk to my wife... some things I'd tell her you know... well we're working a bad old deal or... but I tried to keep it from my girls. When I was on the Highway Patrol, I'd come home and eat lunch and I always put my pistol on top of the ice box you know when I was eating lunch. And they were always big-eyed looking at it. And I said ya'll see Daddy's pistol? Oh yeah, we really like that. I said OK, I'm gonna fix you. I loaded all three of them in the car and we went out... this was in Uvalde. We went out in the country and I said now this is Daddy's pistol. Watch this. Ya'll sit there and watch this. And I cocked that and I put a magnum in there and a ball of fire come out like this. And it literally scared them to death. They said oh my... I will never touch that. Oh my god the noise... you know it really shocked... I never had another problem with that. They never even messed with anything that belonged to Daddy anymore. It was a good lesson.

NANCY RAY: Daddy's toys are dangerous.

BILL GERTH: Yes... oh this is bad, I don't like that. But they were little stair steps you know.

NANCY RAY: Well you mentioned kidnapping. Did you ever have any kidnapping cases?

BILL GERTH: Oh, let's see. I think there were, there were a couple that the feds here worked with the DA's office and we kind of assisted you know... wasn't really per se... that was their deal. We just kind of filled in the blocks you know. But most of ours were burglaries and thefts and homicides and... We worked everything from fence cutting and goat stealing to capital murder. Anything in the penal code... that's about being when you're a satellite Ranger or field Ranger, you work everything. Hell if they steal water you know or whatever, you do whatever. I worked the famous pecan tree theft you know (laughter). I believe I wrote a report on that too (laughter). And the sergeant called me, Bud Newberry was my sergeant. And he was the salt of the earth. He said I got your report on those pecan trees. I said well, I got a request sergeant and I got called out and the Sheriff said he wanted this investigated and I guarantee you that I'm gonna look for them trees for the next 50 years. I'm not too sure that this tree over here in my neighbor's yard might not be one of them (laughter). We just got lucky. He said you go from one extreme to the other. I'd recover something with three candy bars and two Cokes and I'd turn in a recovery for 95 cents. And he said... I got a truck out here that was loaded with \$250,000 worth of Charlie perfume. A guy tried to hijack the company and he parked the truck in another town and hid it you know. We recovered it. Well that's a recovery. He said you go one from one extreme to another from 95 cents to \$250,000. I said well Sergeant I just report what I do. You said report what you do and everything'd be all right. He was the salt of the earth, he really was. He was a good fellow.

NANCY RAY: What do you think are the characteristics, or should be the characteristics of a Ranger?

BILL GERTH: Well, there are so many good men out here that could be Rangers and they've on the road in the Highway Patrol 15, 20 years. I think you've gotta have eight years now before you can take the test. And there's... there's a lot of qualified men throughout the Department I guess. But if you tell the truth and you're honest, that's... I think those are the two basic things. And you have character you know and you take care of your family and take care of your wife and kids you know. I was married 37 years to my wife and I don't know how she put up with me. And they'd call at all hours of the night. You'd be on vacation and you'd get called out to a bank setup deal. And that was another of Hickman's deals. They called him and me out to go to Bryson. There was a lady and her husband were robbing

banks. They called me off vacation and we went down there. Captain Moore got down there and he said... Leo and I got there early. He told Leo said you set it up for whatever we've gotta do. So Leo set up a crossfire that nobody could live through. And he said we're gonna put the sergeant in the bank. And when they come up and they pull up in front of the bank... And these were... they were armed and they had automatic weapons and they wore bullet-proof vests and they had a silhouette in the back of their car that they used in case you'd shoot at them. And they'd go in the bank and they'd shoot to get everybody's attention. And he said we'll set up a crossfire here. When they get out and they walk up to the bank and open the door, the sergeant's job... he was gonna be in the bank and he locked the door. He said once they turn that knob two times, if they can hear surrender over the gunfire they might have a chance (laughter). He told Captain Moore that and Captain said umph, sounds like a good plan and he took off (laughter). That's my boy Leo. Leo said we're gonna fix them. Yeah, we'll fix them right here. This will be the end of that. Mr. Hickman... Mr. Warmth. No... he is a piece of work now, I know that.

NANCY RAY: Those were the words you used...

BILL GERTH: Yeah. If they can hear the word "surrender" over the gunfire, they might have a chance. And he meant it too.

NANCY RAY: OK. Any other... did you ever go on any manhunts?

BILL GERTH: Oh gosh yes.

NANCY RAY: On horseback or anything?

BILL GERTH: Dick worked with the prison. They had just built the prison out here when I retired. And then they got a bunch of dogs out here and they use the dogs for different manhunts. Dick rode with all those guys you know. And uh...

NANCY RAY: But that was after you?

BILL GERTH: Yeah. Mine was a Plymouth. If I could get them with a Plymouth I got them you know.

NANCY RAY: Did you ever have any crashes... any accidents when you were driving... that you can tell us?

BILL GERTH: Yeah. Well there was one time(laughter). This was a kind of funny deal. Captain kind of got irritated with me.

NANCY RAY: Which captain was this?

BILL GERTH: I think this was Captain Moore. He was just a little fellow but he had them flashing blue eyes and when you got a rear end from Captain Moore, you know... and I got several of them. And I deserved it. I was... Sheriff Harney and I were doing something one day and we were looking... after some old sorry and I... We didn't have any radios you know or telephones or nothing and they say you need to call the office... something about something. I wheeled up there and I had an old Plymouth. No, it was a Chevrolet I think it was. And I threw it in park but I didn't get it in park right. It stopped in reverse. When I opened the door and got out and run to the phone, the car backed up and tore the door off. I said oh god. And he's laying over there in the seat just whipping himself laughing... it's funny ha ha ha... I said that damn Harney. Why didn't you reach over and put the brake on? He said I could reach it. I was laughing too hard. Well I had to call Captain Moore. I said Captain I got a little bad old deal here. What is it? I loved Moore because his philosophy was it's a lot easier to get forgiveness than it is permission. And I said I need a little forgiveness. He said what have you done? I said well its Harney's fault because he didn't stop the car. And I told him what happened and he (*made a sound*). You could tell he was a little frustrated with me and he said get it fixed and call a trooper and let them work a fleet accident. I said OK. I called the trooper and he did his magic show and I had to drive Sheriff Harney all the way back to Archer. I just picked up the door and put it in the back seat and we're driving down the highway you know. And we meet everybody we know and they had to see that. They said ah ha ha... you know it was a big funny deal. And I said yeah all my clues are flying in there, I look like a whirlwind. I'm losing half my crime inspection stuff. My Big Chief tablet is fluttering back there. And I drove him home and he laughed all the way down there. I said there'll come a day (laughter), you just wait. And I drove home and I come in here. I took it down there and they put me a new door on. Oh god... Just another Errol Flynn movie.

NANCY RAY: If there was something you could go back and do differently, what would that be?

BILL GERTH: Oh lord. You know I don't really know off the top of my head. I know when Sheriff Bogard got cancer and he was, he was dying, and I had been down to the Davidian deal. I stayed down there, oh... a long time. We did uh... we did part of the crime scene on where the fire was. And then he was really sick. And when I got home, they called me and said he was in the hospital. I went over there and this was the day he passed away. And I'm sitting in there talking to him. I'm about to just die you know and he's laughing. He said you know what I've got waiting for me. I said... Harney had passed away you know a couple of years before. I said no I don't. He said Harney's up there waiting at the Pearly Gates. He said they wouldn't let him in because I know some of the stuff he did. And he said I'm not too sure I could get in. And he's kind of laughing and I said I'm about to cry. Well I tell you what, when you get up there you wait with Harney. And I'm not gonna be as quick as you are but I'll be up there and between the three of us, we'll figure a way (laughter). And he just busted out laughing. And bless his heart, he passed that day and it like to have killed me. He died in May and hell I retired in September. I had 30 years and I said that's enough. Thirty years, I'm a 30-year man, that's enough for me. And my wife was kind of sick then too. We had some good times. We'd go antiquing. We'd go to Oklahoma, antiquing. We'd stop and eat Mexican food and throw beer bottles in the Red River coming home. You know we just had a good time.

NANCY RAY: Uh uh... It's the simple things, isn't it?

BILL GERTH: Oh yes. It's the fun things... with the kids and all the grandkids. We had a great time.

NANCY RAY: Well tell us a little bit about the Davidian... your responsibilities at the Branch Davidian issue.

BILL GERTH: Oh that was, that was a sad deal. Uh they called me, Captain Wilie called me and said get your clothes together and go down there and be ready to stay two weeks. So I gathered up my... and took off and we went down there. And the initial part of it you know we really didn't do anything. I don't know how we really got into it. This was a Federal deal all the way. ATF and FBI and I don't know, somebody volunteered our services to do an independent investigation. I said oh Jesus, we don't have no business in this. And then uh we stayed down there I don't know how long and they sent us back home.

And then uh they called us back and that was the day that they made the run on the, on the Davidian compound. That day I was out on one of the roadblocks and I saw the fire start. You know you could see the whole compound and the fire started on one end and the fire started on the other. And the wind was blowing 60 miles an hour. You could have had a hundred firetrucks there and it wouldn't stop that wind. Well this thing was all put together and pieced together. And when it caught fire, it was like bad. And once it burned completely down, we had to go in... I think they initially wanted us to go to the crime scene and then uh there were cars parked in front of the compound and they wanted to try to find out who shot first. Or the holes and... the holes and all this stuff. And they had a regular gun battle there. And once it burned down, they had been in there and they moved all the cars and the crime scene was messed up. But once it burned to the ground, the house and the bunker and all the things, there were ashes oh, about as high as that second step (*pointed to the stairs*) all through here and all the people that burned to death in there. They called the coroner out and he put a little flag by all the bodies. And uh luckily, and all the Rangers that were down there, I don't know how many there were. But uh I know the Ranger from Abilene, Marshall Brown from Haskell, and several others, they drew the bunker. This was the bad deal because that bunker was just a big square bunker house. It had a door in it and inside that bunker uh they had a roll of automatic weapons stacked in there. And there was enough ammunition in there that it was, it was almost two and a half feet deep... the ammunition that caught fire and exploded. And these were all fired shells in there. This was just a mass of stuff. And in the back were all the women and the children that had died. And then they had, they had really... they worked for a couple of days that we didn't have on Scott masks, we didn't have nothing. And those guys... and this was... this smelled terrible. The wind was blowing over that. Now our area they divided the Rangers into teams... a team leader and a team correspondent who did the report. And Ray Cano was my team leader and we took from the bunker all the way out to the end and we had the tower. And we had to grid that off in grids of ten by ten. And we took everyone and we sifted everything in that thing. We ran it through sifters. We recovered jewelry. And anytime you'd find a body part or whatever you'd have to call a coroner. He'd come over and photograph it and tag it and ID it. We got every exploded shell. Every fragment, every rocket part or any ballistic

anything... you tagged it and you listed it as evidence. And we did uh ten by ten and we went through that whole thing. And when we finished that whole thing, it was... we went all the way down to the dirt. I mean we shoveled it in grates and went through everything. And then I don't know... when they left down there, I think they had four semi-truck trailers full of evidence they took to the FBI lab in Washington. I mean there was stuff... and we had I don't know how many people on our team. A lot of people from the FBI and a lot of people from the lab... and they worked their tails off. My job, I don't know how I got this job. My job was to write the report. Oh Jesus, this was a nightmare. And we had to document every ten by ten square and I made a report. And I showed a column over here uh A, B, and a C. And like uh if you had a rifle laying in that ten by ten square, I'd put a 1 (one) on that. And then a 1 to A was a measurement. A 1 to B was a measurement. And a 1 to C was a measurement. And I used that on the side over here. Item 1 was fifteen feet from A, sixteen feet from B, and you triangled every physical piece of evidence but you didn't clutter up your drawing. So you could put a 1, a 2, but you went by the numbers and the numbers correlated with what the description was and then you had the measurements. And we invented this. We just thought it up and it worked great because you had so much stuff in a ten by ten. You know we had several shooting positions in this part of the building that had burned down and there were weapons... we recovered I don't know how many weapons. And all of them were fully automatic. We found several Star of David necklaces and rings you know. And this was a bad fire, this was a bad deal. And one of the guys that was shot off the tower by one of the snipers, he was buried in the front yard. We had to dig him up. Do that... Another good deal. But it, it was a... and we also had to interview all of the agents. There were like thirty some odd I believe and they were in about two or three trailers you know. Remember how they pulled up in those trailers and they fell out and did their deal? Well we, we took recorded statements from every one of those. And we had a drawing of the front of the Davidian compound and then Captain Weathers, or Sergeant Weathers come up with this. He said why don't we just get that layer of the front of the building and we'll ask them in this tape when you got there, what did you do? Well I got out and I run to Point A. Well what did you see when you got there? Well they were firing at me from these two windows over here. All right, let me give you this red marker and

you draw from here to there showing where you were receiving fire. And did you shoot back? Well yeah I shot back there and then I shot over here. Well use this blue to show where you shot over here and where you shot over here. And everybody we interviewed... I think I did twenty some odd of them. And it took sometimes three or four hours to sit there. And we told them, said just like you're doing, this is your statement. You put anything you want on it. We want to record it and we're gonna... I'll give you a copy of the tape. I'll give you a copy of everything we do but we want to just find out what happened you know. And I interviewed that agent in charge of that SWAT team in New Orleans. He lost two or three, two men who got shot off that roof. He said I've worked with these guys for fifteen years and we never got a hangnail. We've been on a hundred of these things and we never got nothing. And he said I'm sitting there watching two of my men get shot right in the head right in front of me. They had some shooters in there. They were up in that tower. And they had uh... they could do it you know. They did a number of them. It was a bad deal. But we worked it and we got it all done and of course they had all the trials and everything.

NANCY RAY: Your job had to be very tedious doing that.

BILL GERTH: Well it was. It was. It took a little while to do it too. And then... well every Ranger team had a section of this burned down thing. And there were like, oh I don't know, six different teams that were doing this. Then you compiled it all together. It was interesting. When you interviewed, I don't remember, eighteen or twenty people. And you get those things laid out and you set them... stretch them out and you look at who was firing where, you'd be surprised how the consistency of what they were saying was true. And then they all, they all had handguns. I don't think there was a rifle in the whole bunch. They all had either Sigs 9, 9 mm or a little bigger, whatever. Hell, half of them were out of ammunition you know. Might have a clip or two clips and you shoot them up and you're out of business. And these guys had thousands of rounds. It was a bad deal. It really was. But we got her done and then we come home.

NANCY RAY: You did your job. Well think about your career as a Ranger. What were the things you liked most about being a Ranger and the things you liked least?

BILL GERTH: Well, let's see. I liked the camaraderie of the Rangers back then. It's different now and I don't know that, you know, for sure. But I get around and I keep my ear to the ground. The guys, I hear them talking you know. But we had a camaraderie that was so funny and you know there were 94 Rangers and hell, I knew everybody and they knew me. And if they needed something in Wichita Falls, you call me and I'll drop whatever I'm doing and I'm gonna take care of business. That's my job. That's why I'm here. And if I call Laredo and old *unknown name* down there and I say I need you go talk to someone, he'd take care of it you know. That's what you did. But I... we'd go to in-service school (laughter). Oh lord. And I never had so much fun in my life. And these guys are just you know... they're messing with you all the time (laughter). Hickman is a class act. We're sitting in class and we had to pass a test. You had to go down for a week and it's pretty serious you know. They got this curriculum...

NANCY RAY: Or it's supposed to be.

BILL GERTH: Well yeah. Huh, Hickman said now boy, we're going down to this school and you're gonna have to study because we either swing separate or we swing together. And I said I knew what that means... I gotta study because... and he sat right next to me. This was funny. We had an old guy down there named Taylor, he was a training specialist. Taylor was always watching us you know. He said I know you two are up to something. Said you only got three good eyes between you and I don't want to see them eyes looking over on your paper you know. He was always after us... would accuse of us of cheating... hurt me.

NANCY RAY: How dare he!

BILL GERTH: It hurt me. I said now we, we don't cheat but we might coordinate a little bit (laughter). We might have a little class discussion or something you know. And he said I don't want no cheating and I know you always sit on the back row, the amen row back there. And we always did. It's funny. Old Max Womack from Atlanta, Max was the older Ranger. He'd come over there and he'd say can I sit with ya'll? Ya'll will cheat and turn it in. I said why we've got a bad reputation in Company C. You know all the guys in Company C sat on the back two rows you know. And we'd be taking a test or something and uh Hickman's sitting over here... And remember when you was in school and somebody would do

something and you kinda of *giggle*... Get the kind of giggles and you just have to hold it in you know. Well if you sat next to Hickman, this is the way it was. And I'm just about to die. And he's over there scratching and making noise. And he learned to whisper in a sawmill. He'd say *psssst* (laughter). And I, you know... and the back three rows are all old-time veterans. These are all old... these are peace officers that have been there thirty or forty years you know. They're all oldtimers. *Psssst!* What? He said *what's the answer to 38?* And you could hear him all over the room (laughter). I said gaaaa... And Lefty was the senior captain and he's sitting up there and he's just kind of bore sighting us you know. Mitchell was up there and he's just rolling his eyes saying oh god, what are they doing now? And Taylor's over there eyeballing us. And uh I looked down and I couldn't hardly keep a straight face. It was a fill in the blank question he asked. And the answer was "to protect and defend." *Got it! Got it!* (laughter) And he takes that Number 2 pencil and he goes to scratching on that thing. And he stops. And I'm kind of watching him from the side of my eye. And he sets that pencil down and he just sits there like a big old goose looking around. And I said oh god, what's he gonna do now? He grabs that pencil and he just goes to erasing. Just making noise and then he's knocking that eraser off there and making noises and just shuffling papers and everything gets... Taylor comes over there looking and you know Lefty's just looking... And I said oh god, don't... please don't let him do something else (laughter). I'm sitting there. And see my job... I'm sitting in the middle of all the guys in Company C. And my job was to say turn the page now, we're all on the same page (laughter). I'd say turn the page now. *I'm not ready.* Oh dang. *Well... it's all messed up.* Well we're on page 4, whatever the hell it was. And then he'd be ready and I'd say are you ready now... you know. It was an Errol Flynn movie. And then we're sitting there and he says *psssst!* And they just about busted then. And I said what is it now? He said *how do you spell protect?* (laughter) And when he said that, the last three rows absolutely exploded... just... I mean everybody threw their hands up and they said we quit! Mitchell come back there and said my god, they're gonna fire us all. What in the hell is going on back here? And I said well it's Hickman, he can't spell cat... he can't spell nothing! And he's just causing a disturbance you know. And he said you better settle down or they're gonna fire us all. And uh (laughter)... You know it's a funny thing. It's just a phenomenon that

Hickman and I always made the same grade (laughter). I don't know how it happened. We had another test we took down there and Taylor liked to have got us on this one. It was a long essay question and it was at the end of one of these big long tests you know. We, we figured before we got enough points we could pass we said, Hickman said let's go drink coffee. I said well we got this last question. He said **oh the hell with that... we'll just go drink coffee.** I put "I don't know" and he put "I don't know either." (laughter). Gaaaa... Taylor just went crazy! He said I got you now. And Hickman said I don't believe so. We didn't really answer the question. He said... he said he had to give us a little technical... I'll let you off on this *technicality*. But I know you're up to no good back here. He (Hickman) said no, we live at the foot of the cross you know. We go to the library every night and study. Oh... it was... and you know you go to chow with these guys and oh god it was... Jackson would take one of your boots and throw it in the dryer or the washer or something. The camaraderie was wonderful. It was just... and I wouldn't... I wouldn't trade those memories for a million dollars. And I hope the Lord gives me those memories for the rest of my life because it's...

NANCY RAY: You have many.

BILL GERTH: I have... I sit out here and I do something and I get to thinking about that damn Hickman (laughter). He's a character. You've got to interview him.

NANCY RAY: We will, we will.

BILL GERTH: He's a piece of cake. Don't believe everything he says.

NANCY RAY: OK, I won't.

BILL GERTH: Just kind of watch what he says.

NANCY RAY: OK, I'll take it for a grain of ... (laughter) I'll say I'm not supposed to believe everything he says that Bill Gerth said (laughter).

BILL GERTH: He said if you ever write a book, I'm gonna haunt you until the day I die. I said you'll already be dead. He said I'll haunt you anyway. You know he put me on probation when I first got here.

NANCY RAY: He did?

BILL GERTH: He never let me off. I was the only Ranger in the history of the Ranger service who served my entire career, 18 years, and I was still on probation. And when I retired, he said *don't think you're getting off this easy boy... you're on secret probation* (laughter). So I guess I'm still on you know. I'll just ride it out.

NANCY RAY: Now what year did you retire?

BILL GERTH: I retired in September of '93.

NANCY RAY: And what have you been doing since then?

BILL GERTH: Well, I've been... you know my wife was sick and then she died in '99. We had a lot of good times together. I pretty well stayed with her. And when she passed, I become daddy and mama and grandpa and grandma. And I take care of the grandkids and I'm in charge of flats, radiator hoses, fan belts... you know. If the car breaks down, call Grandpa. That's my job.

NANCY RAY: Grandpa can fix it.

BILL GERTH: That's what grandpas do for a living. And I'm a professional ballgame goer. I've got four grandsons playing football. They play Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays. And those double headers are killers. Grandpa says that's hard on me. I got me a cushion over here with a big cushion in it and I take that and I sit on it. They look... as soon as they walk out they look to see if you're up there. Grandpa's here.

NANCY RAY: Gives some stability.

BILL GERTH: That's what grandpas do for a living.

NANCY RAY: That's right. Well, I want to thank you for your time.

BILL GERTH: You're very welcome.

NANCY RAY: Thank you for your service to the state of Texas. And do you have any advice for a future Ranger that might want to look at this?

BILL GERTH: Oh... just uh you know... just stick to the basics. Do what's right. Tell the truth. And uh take care of your family because they're, they're more important than just about anything. And it's hard... it's a hard job. And the, like I said, there are people out here that will take your life if you let them. You

have to... every day you go to work... you have to be prepared to deal with whatever. You can't be... you can't be very passive. You have to keep your stuff wrapped tight at all times. That's about all I can tell them.

NANCY RAY: Good advice.

BILL GERTH: And good luck! (laughter)

NANCY RAY: And good luck.

BILL GERTH: And they still make Big Chief tablets

NANCY RAY: They do, they sure do, and Number 2 pencils (laughter). Thank you very much.

BILL GERTH: OK.