



Interview with

Patrick Peña
Texas Ranger

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Interview with
Texas Ranger Patrick Peña of Company “F”

Ranger: I’m happy to help in any way that I can, and answer the best I can. Hopefully it will give some insight.

Adam: Alright, if there are some that you don’t necessarily want to answer, or you just draw a blank, we can skip a question and go to the next one.

Ranger: Okay.

Adam: What is it about the Rangers that made you want to serve?

Ranger: A Ranger in particular?

Adam: Just a Ranger in particular.

Ranger: I came into the Rangers from narcotic services, which is conducting investigations, narcotic investigations, so that started my interest in investigative work, obviously the Rangers are the primary investigative branch of our department, so it just takes it to a whole other level. Where I was primarily working gang and narcotics crimes, this opens doors to all kinds of cases, more special, and obviously criminal in nature, whether it’s public corruption or elected officials or anything like that. It just opens up doors. It’s the more complex cases that opened my interest. There are no two cases alike, and every time that phone rings, you’ve got to a scene, you don’t know what you’re going to walk up on we worked last night up until midnight. I think it’s the complexity of it; that’s what caught my interest. Personally, and I won’t say most of us, but for me, I have a lot of pride in Texas, and the Texas Rangers are just an iconic legend of Texas. You grew up know what a Texas Ranger is, I mean it’s kind of hard to explain, but to me you can’t get any higher than this, in my opinion. I mean, there are other agencies out there, federal agencies that get paid more than we do and they probably get to do a lot more fun things than we do, and they probably get a lot more credit than we do, and stuff like that, but none of that interests me. It’s what we stand for. To me, that means a lot.

Adam: What do you think is the current public perception of the Texas Rangers?

Ranger: Oh wow, a lot of times they didn’t know we still exist. Probably the one thing we get the most when I’m standing in a restaurant or walking in to get gas at a gas station, a person will walk up to me, and a lot of times they will still ask what I am. And a lot of times when I tell them what I do,

they will be surprised, “I didn’t know there still were the Rangers”, which kind of bothers my mind, maybe because I grew up in law enforcement, with my father I always knew Rangers still existed, but a lot of people aren’t aware that Rangers are still around and still do what we do, and how much we still have a say-so, and how much we still are involved in criminal investigations, and they don’t even know it. I guess, it’s because we’re so much behind the scenes, but I think that when people do know who we are, and realize that we are still around, a lot of them are in an awe, I think, because a lot of times, they say, “I’ve never met one,” so they knew that we still exist, but they’d never physically met one. So the fact that they’ve seen one with their own eyes, you can just kind of get a sense that it’s almost like they’ve met somebody famous or something, just because of the look on their face. They say they don’t see much of us. I think the people who truly know who we are, when they think of us, they think of the crimes and the complex cases, the ones that nobody wants to work, and that we’re the ones who are the go-to-agency. They know what we can do, and what we do. When they hit the wall, and they just can’t go anymore, they just need the extra push, or the extra resources, or the extra manpower, they call us without a doubt, and they know we’re going to show up, we’re going to be thorough, we’re going to do a good job, and we’re not going to leave until it’s done, so I think the perception of us is some people who don’t know we exist, some people who did know we exist, and are kind of in awe, and the ones who work with us on a daily basis or know what we do, and they call us when it’s time to go to work, because they know we’re going to get the job done. I think there’s a few categories that I give personally.

Adam: Are there any drawbacks or benefits because of the general public perception?

Ranger: In what way exactly?

Adam: As far as the identity of a Ranger.

Ranger: There is a lot expected of you. I don’t know if that’s the angle you’re going with. I know there’s a certain reputation that the Rangers before us have built, getting the job done, no matter what, and right. Those are big shoes to fill, and I don’t want to say it’s a drawback: it’s a lot of responsibility that’s put on us, maybe even pressure to a point. It’s like you’re on a bright stage, by yourself and everyone’s looking at you, because when you’re called in, and you arrive, it doesn’t matter what kind of scene it is, everyone’s looking at you. No matter who’s on scene, they all look at you for answers, and I think it’s because the Rangers before me have always found that answer, so they expect for you to do the same. It’s not a drawback, there’s just a lot of responsibility.

Adam: How influential has entertainment media been in that public perception?

Ranger: Oh wow, yeah, that’s really all they know us as. The ones who really don’t know we still exist, they we’re just all on movies now, and same thing in the movies. The movies in general have

just made law enforcement work so much harder, especially going back even to all the CSI movies and all the investigative movies where they solve a crime in a one hour block of an episode and forensic work, they just make it look so easy. When I watch these TV shows myself, I'm like, "I wish it was that easy," and it's discouraging because people truly think that we can do that in an hour because they've seen it on TV, because not only do we think that's what they think of us, but because they tell us that. "We know it only takes an hour. Why don't you just do this and that?" That's not how it works. There's a process, and you could even put that into just movies about Texas Rangers. Again in the movies, they just always show the Rangers coming in, and saving the day, and doing what's right, and sticking up for the innocent and the weak, and standing against the wrong. All of that is great because all of that is true, but sometimes Hollywood and movies can overdo it, and make it look a lot easier than it really is. There's a lot hoops we have to jump through, and there's a lot of politics as well, because we have to work with these agencies and sheriffs, police chiefs, federal agencies and the district attorneys, and it's just so much. Families of the victims. Did you ever think of that? We deal with the victims' families as much as we do with the district attorney, and so you have to wear all these different kinds of hats and the movies make it looks so easy, and they just cut a lot of that out. They just do all of the entertaining things, and the fun stuff, which we do have some of that, but those come and go, but the hard work is always there.

Christine: They don't show you writing in the cases. I've seen your cases.

Ranger: Yes, you know for every hour of fun, that's like eight hours of office work with it so a lot of it starts and ends right here where I'm sitting. It really does. And what's the point of going out there and smacking cuffs on somebody and throwing them in jail if you're not going to file up a case that's going to mean anything? So it starts and ends, not necessarily at the desk, but just the work and preparation that goes into the case later on. There's a lot to it.

Adam: You talked about some of the operations that the Rangers are doing now, so what are the extent of the current operations of a modern Ranger?

Ranger: You mean as far as our duties?

Adam: Yes.

Ranger: Oh wow, there's so much added now. Well, obviously the main ones, I'm sure you already read up on or been told, just the standard objectives, where they conduct a special criminal investigation, suppress criminal disturbances and riots. We help protect the governor and any type of political official that comes into our areas. We work most all officer related shootings. Any employee in our department that suffers any serious bodily injury or death, we investigate those. We obviously assist federal, local and any other state agencies in their investigations. We provide border security now, on top of everything else. Gosh, there's so much more now even. We've

created the SRT, the special response teams, which is like a miniature SWAT, that's located throughout the state. There's six of them. And of course, we have our full-time SWAT team that we have over in Austin. And everyone knows what SWAT officers do. We have the crisis-negotiation unit. I'm actually on that, we're hostage negotiators, or just crisis negotiators.

Christine: Don't you also do investigation in public officials, like corruption?

Ranger: Yes, public corruption of elected officials. Crimes that other agencies cannot do, or are unwilling to do, or don't want to, because it's too dirty or too many politics involved, because the beauty of the Rangers independence. We don't have to answer to a sheriff or a police chief. Unfortunately, there are some bad police chiefs and bad sheriffs and bad elected officials and so forth, and nobody really wants to get involved with that because it's dirty work. They call us because what's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong, and we don't care who you are. We're going to go in and get the job done. And we also have Rangers who are certified hypnotists and we also have a lot of guys who are trained in the forensic mapping, like a 3-D mapping of a crime scene. They go in, and they shoot with all these lasers, and they create a crime scene, and they can go back 30 years later, and pull it up on a computer, and there will be that crime scene, and it's all 3-D and you can walk through it. And so we have guys who are highly trained in processing crime scenes as well. There's so much that we can delve off into, that it's just, there's so much.

Adam: What do you think would help people to become more aware of all these things that the Rangers are doing nowadays, since most of them are still surprised that they are an operating agency?

Ranger: What can we do to help that?

Adam: Yes, or just what can be done in general, that you could do, or somebody else could do?

Ranger: I think the museum has really helped out a lot because a lot of people have told me that, for one, they didn't know the Rangers were even still around and operational until they passed through I-35, and they say they saw the billboards, and they stopped by, and they didn't realize what all we do, for one, and two, that we still do it. I think, just for the general public, it's just, I don't want to say advertise it, but I don't know how y'all could put it out more that we're still here, but I do know the museum here does a lot for us, because a lot of times people relate with us through the museum. People say, "Oh yeah, I've been to the Ranger museum!", and they talk about the museum more than they're asking me questions because they just talk about the museum, because that's all that they can relate to. So a lot of times, what the museum has to offer, is really the perception the public has, and really is all they know about us. Besides that, just what you see on the TV shows, but they're all Hollywood movies, they're not Ranger movies, and I think maybe doing something with real

Rangers where they would be talking about cold cases or interviews, just putting it out there to the community, that what we do today, because the law changed over time, and jumping over obstacles, and we're still here. And I don't even know really what's out there in ways to get us out there. That's kind of out of my mind. Because we're so quiet, we work behind the scenes, and we work these cases, and we don't get any spotlight on us, unless it's a huge case, and we're the primary investigative agency, then we'll be on newspapers and the Internet, but a lot of times, we don't get any of the credit. The sheriffs, and the police chiefs, and the other agencies get it, because that's what we want. We want to sustain them, we don't want the spotlight. We're there to give them support, and do what's needed, but to give them all of the attention and credit, basically. We let them run with it, so it's hard for us to let the public know it was us, because we're behind the scenes, and we don't really want them to know what we're doing. So I think what the museum does, and all of these presentations that y'all do, that's what really gets the people, the ordinary citizens, knowing what we do. I don't have much on that one. It's kind of tough for me, because I don't much really know so...

Adam: Would you say that there have been any milestones among the Rangers, as an organization, within the past 25 years?

Ranger: Yes, just like any other job that's been around this long, or any other agency, organization or business; any business that's been open for the past 25 years, has had to jump through hoops, and get through obstacles, because times change, technology changes, and 25 years ago, there weren't cell phones, there weren't the kind of computers we have today, and everything is so digital and fast paced, and a lot of that has helped us though to work in our investigative cases, with our analytical work. Just like today, how much do we need our phones? How much can they help us on a daily basis? And technology has happened with us too, even going from horses to cars is one thing, going from single shot action colts to semi- automatic pistols or fully automatic rifles. There's just things that we've had to evolve in with time, but I think as far as the Rangers, what's the hardest thing we've had to do, it's change with the times, but never lose focus of the legacy, tradition. I think that's the hardest obstacle, because society changes, people change to a point. We're a lot different than the

1800's, our belief system, to a point, our values have changed, our priorities have changed. It's not fault of anybody, just times have changed, and so to be a Ranger in the 1800's to being a Ranger today, I would assume, we are probably two different people, but we have the same common goals still, and we are still upholding the same legacy and the same tradition, and the same responsibilities, and I think that's the hardest thing about being a Ranger, is changing with the times, but yet, never losing focus of the legacy and the tradition that's been built before us. So you got to juggle both.

Christine: We were talking earlier when he mentioned that question, and I said if I had to guess what might be a milestone, it was about maybe five years ago the Rangers kind of did a re-

organization, and you took in SWAT, and you started increasing your border duties. Do you know exactly when that happened?

Ranger: I do not know, but I want to say you are right on the money, around five to seven years ago. I know it hasn't been more than ten, I know, so it's been less than ten years. That was a lot when the governor put that responsibility on us, on handling all the politics, all the federal government stuff, getting help on the border, so he turned to the Rangers. That's what we did in the 1800's, so he just gave the responsibility back to us, and you're right. We formed the Ranger recognisance team, that do long undercover operations down there in intelligence, and any kind of illegal activity, usually related to drug cartels. Now the SRT, now we have developed those, and those guys do tours down there as well. That was something that we hadn't had to do, and now with all the responsibilities and work load we already have, in general, now we're having to go down there for weeks at a time, and put everything aside here back at home, all our casework, and everything that we have, to go down there and do those other duties that we now have to do. We have to change hats, and do more of a tactical operation down there, and you come back home, and you don't have time to rest. You have to change hats again, and you have to come back in here and pick up on your cases, because your cases don't wait for you, they're still going on, and you got to play catch up, so you have to work almost twice as hard for that. It's just something we've had to deal with, just accepting that responsibility that's been put on us, and we'll gladly accept it, but it's just been tough.

Adam: What does the upcoming bicentennial mean to you, as a Ranger?

Ranger: You can't even really describe it, it's unbelievable really, and it's hard to fathom the thought. I think it's a great milestone. I think it speaks volumes of what Texas represents and I think what the Rangers represent. To keep something like that alive for 200 years, is unbelievable, but I think it's the people of Texas that's kept us alive also, it's not just us. Texans have kept us alive and every Ranger for the past 200 years has done their job, in keeping that image, and keeping that legacy alive, so we can make it 200 years, and hopefully another 200 after that, and keep it on going. So I think it's a great thing, I think it's awesome.

Adam: What do you think should be the goal of the bicentennial celebration?

Ranger: The goal I would love to see, again going back to the public being more aware of what we do, and just to see how we have evolved over the 200 years, and letting them know and assuring them that we can evolve for the next 200 years, and there may be flying cars in the next 200 years, and guess what, we're going to be flying around in cars too, because we're going to change with the times. So I just want them to know that we're here, and we want to stay. And I want people to know how important a role they play in keeping us around, because it's a team effort of Texas and Texas Rangers go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other, in my opinion. I want them

to know they play a vital role in who we are, and I want them to know how important that is.

Adam: What kind of celebrations and activities do you feel would be appropriate for the bicentennial?

Ranger: The only thing I can kind of relate it to, I know we had the 75th jubilee anniversary for DPS, and all that was going around. Of course that's a department, and at every regional office in the state, they had a huge jubilee day, and every employee in that office was able to come in, so I think that would be great for every company headquarters throughout the state.

For all six company headquarters to have every employee in that company be able to invite their families, and have it be open to the public, and they could have helicopters out there, they could have the SWAT guys all geared up, and all the SWAT tanks out there, and they could have the Rangers wearing all the different types of what we do. Some guys were wearing the Ranger recon outfits, the special response team outfits, the SWAT outfits, Rangers on horseback, and booths set up of them for education, a lot them for fun. I know we ate, and there were presentations given by the colonel and the chief of the Rangers would also be great. I think just that getting everybody together for a big party, I just think that a big party, a big BBQ, hopefully it will be on a pretty day, and big nice-outside events. When I went to those with the department, the big jubilee celebration, they were nice, they really were. So I think something like that would be a good thing, and they add face-painting booths for the kids, and they had a lot of interaction for the employees and law enforcement. Even all the local law enforcement agencies were invited, it was just more like everybody come on in, and everybody hung out at these booths and interactive booths that they had as well, and there was food and music. But I think it's not just all about the fun, it's to get them in, celebrate, which is fun, but also walk away learning something, and knowing that we're still here, and knowing we want to be around for 200 more years.

Adam: So entertainment, engagement, and education?

Ranger: Yes, exactly.

Adam: What do you feel are the core values behind the Rangers, as an organization, the people in it?

Ranger: What are some of the core values? I think integrity, to me is one of the most important, because people come to us, knowing we're going to do the right thing, no matter what. Sometimes we have to go up against our own, we have to right wrongs that are sometimes close to home. It's an ugly job, but sometimes, somebody that nobody wants to have arrested. No one wants to work that one crime, because it's a big political figure or it could be somebody from our own department that's doing something wrong. It could be somebody that we know, or have worked with in the past. It's just one of those things that we have to do what's right, and we put all that aside, and people

know that we're going to do that. That's why they call us, we do a good job of something that nobody wants to do. We go arrest the guy that nobody wants to arrest because we know that one of our core values is integrity. Loyalty is up there as well, and hard-working has to be up there. This job is not easy, it's a lot of stress and long hours and responsibility, and we just accept it, and take it day by day. Those three really stand out to me, even as well as courage. It gets lonely out there sometimes when you're by yourself, and I mean that not physically, I mean just because you can do the right thing no matter what, and sometimes you're by yourself when you do that, and sometimes you make a lot of people mad when you do that, but it doesn't matter, because it's the right thing, and you've got to have the courage to back that up.

Adam: Why do you think the Rangers have become so iconic in American western culture?

Ranger: The pretty badge? The pretty badge and the two guns back in the day. Old western culture. Well to me, the old movies I used to watch growing up as a kid. Again, what are all those old westerns always about? There's always good and evil, there's always right and wrong. It's all black and white. You got a bad guy and a good guy, and at the end of the movie, the good guy always wins, and that could pretty much sum up the Rangers. There's bad guys out there, and we're the good guys, and we're going to win, sometimes it takes a little longer than others, but we're going to win, because right will always prevail in my opinion. It goes hand in hand with old westerns and it goes hand in hand with that mentality. That's just my little opinion on it, but everybody has their own.

Adam: Thank you very much. That's all the questions, and it's been a pleasure.

Ranger: I'm the world's worst person when it comes to speeches or something like that.

Christine: No, that's not a problem.

Ranger: If I was just here visiting with you over some coffee, oh I would be dead on; but when it's talking while recording with specific questions and stuff, I just draw a blank. I've always done that.

Christine: I told him you would be good, because you are always on the stand, having to give testimony, so I think...

Ranger: But that's a work mode brain, so again different hats you put on. But I always get more nervous talking to someone like you than I do with criminals, or testifying in court. I don't know why. Working with kids, when we do kid's groups at school functions... sometimes I wish I was testifying in court instead. But I love doing it, and it's important, and any opportunity we ever have to do things like this, just let us know.

Ranger: Yes, you know Jake was going to be here, but he's in another county, finishing up a scene

that we started yesterday and he got home real late so it's just been a busy week, a busy couple of weeks. In just four days, we've had two shootings.

Christine: So the incident in Lorena that was right off of the highway, was that considered an officer-involved shooting?

Ranger: It is an officer-involved shooting, and we work not all officer-involved shootings, but most of them, because everyone wants to have an unbiased party come in and work it, but if it involves our own department, oh without a doubt, we're going to work it. That one involved Waco PD and McLennan county sheriff's office, so it's two different agencies, so of course they were going to call us. Jake and I were almost in on that. We were in pursuit behind him, and of course we were in an unmarked truck, and we were zooming in around him, but he got away from us. If we had been about a minute, a minute and a half sooner, we probably would have been involved as well. We got there a little late, so we got to pull out the crime scene scanning equipment instead.

Christine: Maybe a better thing?

Ranger: Yeah, well you know, when you're driving down there, you're amped up and you want to get in on it, and we got there and it was all over, so we had to pull out the crime scene tape and all the little fun toys instead of the guns.

Christine: And that's something that you do a lot more of, is that you process crime scenes a lot more.

Ranger: Yeah, and that is something that we do a lot more of. Often times we would call the crime lab team to come process a scene and then they will help out, conduct interviews of the suspect, and arrest him. Well now, many times we don't even call the crime lab.

Yesterday, Jake and I went in sometime past midnight, we have all the equipment, the spray bottles, everything you see on TV, and the cameras, and we go in and work it ourselves. Document all the evidence, photograph all the evidence. We do scaled diagrams. And we get the search warrants, and do the interviews of all the suspects, witnesses, canvas neighborhoods. We do everything now.

The crime scene part is what takes more time, more time consuming. Its nice if we have help when we do that part, but sometimes we don't. They're training us now to where we can do everything; whereas 10 years ago, they just weren't require to do half of what we do now, but times have changed, and they've sent us to more training.

Christine: When will you think about retirement?

Ranger: In about 18 years. Yeah, I've got 18 years. I was one of the youngest ones at the time. There are a few younger ones than me. I was the youngest Ranger for almost a year.

Christine: So how long have you served, because you started off in highway patrol I assume?

Ranger: Yeah, 15 years overall. I started when I was 18 years old. I was a security guard at our DPS headquarters in Austin for three years, then went through DPS trooper academy when I turned 21, and I was a state trooper for Highway Patrol for 5 years. Then I worked narcotics for five years, and then I've been in the Rangers for a little over two.

[END]