

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : G. C. Wilmoth, District Director

FROM : G. J. McBee, Chief Patrol Inspector, El Paso, Texas

SUBJECT: Relations between Customs and Immigration Border Patrols.

DATE: December 14, 1944

Since the Immigration Border Patrol began functioning as a unit at El Paso, Texas in 1924 its relations with the Customs Border Patrol, which at that time was known as the Mounted Customs Service, have been very unsatisfactory. The Mounted Customs Officers treated the members of this new organization as though they were unwelcome guests, and few of them missed any opportunities to politely sneer at the newcomers and make disparaging remarks about their uniforms, often describing them as, "Dressed-up like a bunch of bell-hops".

A feeling of unfriendliness quickly developed between the two organizations and this feeling still exists, although not as pronounced as it was during the old liquor-running days. The line sector lying between Monument No. 1 West and Ascarate, Texas, a distance of approximately ten miles, has been the cause of much bickering and unpleasantness between the two patrols. This sector lies almost entirely within the city limits of El Paso, Texas and is unquestionably the most active stretch of boundary line, both from the standpoint of alien crossing and merchandise smuggling, on either land border. The possibility of accidental gun battles in this area, between units of the two patrols, has been a constant menace since 1924. A number of agreements covering the dividing of this sector between the Immigration and Customs Patrols have been made during the past twenty years: In 1926 when I entered on duty as a patrol inspector at El Paso the territory worked by the Immigration Patrol extended from the Last Chance Garage on the west to the City Disposal Plant on the east. The Customs had the Ascarate, Val Verde and Smelter Districts. In sector deals which took place during 1933 and '34 they gave up none of their territory and gradually acquired Immigration Patrol territory until they had taken over about one half of the Last Chance Garage-Disposal Plant Sector. These agreements were terminated by your letter of June 18, 1940, file No. 3022, addressed to the District Superintendent, Southwest Customs Patrol, El Paso, Texas. Since July 1, 1940 the Immigration Border Patrol has worked at any point located in the El Paso Sector at any time patrolling operations were thought to be necessary at such point.

It is neither practicable nor possible for two patrols such as the Customs and Immigration Patrols to function efficiently and amicably in the same sector and it is highly impracticable from the standpoint of efficiency to divide a sector into working areas, assigning certain areas to one organization to the exclusion of the other. The Customs Service has never maintained an actual line patrol. They usually work on information, watching line crossings from distant points while seated comfortably in automobiles. Practically no alien apprehensions have been made by them in very active sectors during

times when they had the exclusive patrolling right in the sector. It has apparently been a working policy of the Customs Patrol, since I have known the organization, to attach no value or importance to the arrest of illegally entered aliens. This assertion is based on their record in this respect. The Immigration Patrol on the other hand actually patrols and guards the boundary line both day and night and arrests or attempts to arrest all persons seen crossing, treating smugglers of contraband and aliens alike. Nothing is allowed to pass unless our officers have reason to believe that the crossing is a preliminary move to a larger action that will follow immediately. A common practice of Customs Patrol Officers, which has prevailed since our patrol was organized, is to scout along active line sectors at night in automobiles. Their cars are easily seen and recognized by spotters who quickly inform their "gangs" on the south side of the "Line", and all contemplated operations in the sector are called off. Work done by Immigration Patrols on foot, and this is the only efficient way to work an active line sector after night, is usually fruitless, when interference of this sort takes place.

A number of clashes, some of them resulting in an exchange of shots, have taken place between officers of the two patrols in the El Paso Sector during the past several years.

Our records show that on July 31, 1933 Patrol Inspector Charles Askins, Jr. was fired on by Customs Inspector William T. Coe and Coe's informer, a "rat" known as Felipe Siqueros, while Inspector Askins and Patrol Inspector William B. Duval were attempting to arrest five liquor smugglers who had just crossed the Rio Grande River with their loads at a point about 600 yards west of this headquarters. In an attempt to arrest the smugglers Askins and Duval drove their truck as rapidly as possible toward a point where the smugglers would leave the river and enter the settlement. Before our officers reached them, the smugglers dropped their loads on the north bank of the river and ran back to the Mexican side. While examining the liquor that had been dropped Inspector Askins was fired upon, without warning, by Customs Inspector Coe, who was using a rifle. Shortly after this Inspectors Askins and Duval were both fired upon by Coe's informer, Siqueros, who had been furnished a rifle by Coe.

Shortly before former Patrol Inspector James W. Metcalf was transferred from this place to the Alpine Sub-district he and another patrol officer were fired upon by Customs Officers while they were attempting to apprehend a group of liquor smugglers near Bowie High School. This school is located about 1000 yards east of the Stanton Street International Bridge and about 400 yards north of the boundary line. When Inspector Metcalf and his partner approached the smugglers the entire group was fired upon without warning by Customs Officers. The smugglers immediately made good their escape in the darkness and the patrol detail,

thinking their attackers were hi-jackers, returned the fire. After a number of shots had been exchanged the two groups of officers began calling back and forth and thus made known their identity to each other. I can find no account of this incident in our records and my statement of the happening is made entirely from memory.

Instances wherein officers of the two patrols have challenged each other at night, but fired no shots, are, I am satisfied, quite numerous, although our records contain no account of them.

During the early part of 1927 Patrol Inspector Harvey H. Hill and I were challenged by Customs Officers Carnes and Roberts near Ysleta, Texas. Shortly after dark Inspector Hill and I were walking through the fields toward a river crossing south of Ysleta. We heard someone coming from the direction of Ysleta and moved off the trail and attempted to conceal ourselves in the only cover available, which was a small patch of weeds about one foot in height. We had no more than dropped down into the weeds when two men came into view carrying rifles. They saw us immediately and we aimed our guns at each other and called out that we were Federal Officers at about the same time.

Sometime during 1928 Patrol Inspectors Galitzin N. Bogel and Henry W. Bush found an automobile loaded with liquor parked on the highway near Fabens, Texas. No one was near the car when it was found so these two officers parked their car near the liquor car and waited for the possible return of the owner or driver. While they were waiting two Customs Officers came up and upon learning that the unattended car was carrying contraband attempted to take possession of it. After considerable threats, much argument and I believe some display of weapons the Customs Officers finally gave up and left. This incident was related to me by Inspector Bogel shortly after it happened.

