

**Oral History Interview of
Arthur Chancey**

**Interviewed by: Elissa Stroman
January 10, 2020
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*American Agriculture Movement Interviews***

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Interview Series Background:

The American Agriculture Movement grew out of the populist agrarian protests of the late 1970s. Officially chartered in August of 1977, it remains active. Materials in the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library reflect principally its formation, the tractorcade protests of 1977-1979, and the farm and rural suicide hotline prevention efforts of the 1980s. Materials include oral history interviews, photographs, video and film, and miscellaneous papers.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Arthur Chancey as he discusses his involvement with the American Ag movement and the tractorcade to Washington D.C. In this interview, Chancey begins by explaining his background with farming and what he is currently up to with his farm. He then moves on to discuss the tractorcade and what it was like being a part of that movement. Chancey describes the snow storm that hit Washington D.C. and how the tractors were used to dig out and transport people, including a CIA building. Chancey ends the interview by recounting the trip back home.

Length of Interview: 00:51:31

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Meeting with representatives in Washington and coming back home	21	00:47:31

Keywords

Farming, American Ag Movement, Tractorcade

Elissa Stroman (ES):

Okay. So, I will start this recording saying that today's date is January 10, 2020. My name is Elissa Stroman, for the Southwest Collection, and I'm interviewing Arthur Chancey, here in Lubbock, Texas, at the MCM Elegante. We are in one of the meeting rooms and there's some other stuff going on around the room, so that's what the background noise is. So, if anybody is—well, when we transcribe this, they'll know that there's a little bit of stuff, commotion, going on today. But Arthur, if you can start by saying your name and date of birth.

Arthur Chancey (AC):

Arthur Chancey. I was born April 1, 1950.

ES:

Okay. And where were you born?

AC:

Bonham, Texas.

ES:

Okay. And what are your parents' names?

AC:

AT, which was for Arthur Tobias, but everybody called him AT. And Dale Chancey.

ES:

Okay. And were—were they from Bonham, originally?

AC:

Yes, both of them were from Bonham. My dad is ninety-five and he's still alive.

ES:

Wow.

AC:

World War II veteran. Flew in a B-17.

ES:

That's amazing.

AC:

In World War II.

ES:

So, did you—tell me about the—did you grow up on a family farm?

AC:

Yes.

ES:

Okay. So, tell me about that farm.

AC:

Well, it was just a small farm. My daddy—after I was born, my daddy went to town and got a job. [Laughs] But my granddaddy still farmed and we—when I was young, we had beef cattle, a few dairy cows, chickens, hogs. My granddaddy raised registered Poland China hogs. Him and daddy showed hogs at the State Fair of Texas. The year mother and daddy were married, they had the grand champion boar and the reserve grand champion sow at the State Fair of Texas.

ES:

What year was that?

AC:

Forty-eight.

ES:

Forty-eight. How many acres was that?

AC:

About three hundred. Most of it was pasture. About forty acres of actual farmland. So it wasn't really big enough to—for my dad to make a living on, so. But my granddaddy, he lived until he was nearly ninety and he worked. We had—they had sheep, but my granddaddy—and of course, I would help a lot when I came in from school, feeding hogs. And started driving a tractor when I was eight, and my brother started when he was seven. So, we helped. And we did that—I graduated from high school, went to college at East Texas State University, which is now, Texas A&M Commerce. Graduated with a degree in Ag. While I was in college, I rented my first two farms because I always wanted the farm. I knew I had to get bigger. I had to get started. So, I stayed at home. I didn't live at school. I'd go down there, and take classes, and then I'd come back. The neighbor across the road decided to retire while I was about a sophomore or junior in college. I rented his two farms. And I just—I just kept on. Kept on growing. And when I graduated from college, my—the head of the Ag department down there, and he was the job placement counselor. He had me a job, working for international harvester. I told him I wanted to farm, and he looked at me, said a four-letter word, and said, "Didn't we teach you anything here?"

You don't want a farm. You'll go broke. I've got you a good job lined up." [Laughs] And I told him, "No, I want a farm," and he just shook his head. [Laughter]

ES:

Well now, your—you eluded to—your granddad farmed. So, when—and when did that—when did that start?

AC:

Well, he—oh, my granddaddy bought the farm that we were living on in 1936. Actually, my granddaddy had left East Texas, came out here to West Texas, around Lamesa, in 1929. He couldn't have picked a worse time. They were out here five years, I think, and never made a crop because that was the Dust Bowl days, the drouth and everything. So, he finally went back to East Texas and let's see—I guess, in '29 and '35, I guess, is when he went back. And then, in '36, he bought the farm that—where we lived on. And then, when daddy got out of the—out of the service during World War II, he came back and used a G.I. loan to buy the farm that joined us. And then, in '56, the next farm over became available and he bought it. So that gave him three hundred and something acres. But like I said, most of it was pastureland, not—about forty acres of farmland.

ES:

And so, even at that point in time, that was a small enough land that it was hard to make a living.

AC:

Yeah, it wasn't enough—it wasn't a big enough operation to—for daddy to really make a living out of it. And so, he was a carpenter and he worked in different jobs as a carpenter all of his life. And my granddaddy died when I was seventeen. He was nearly ninety years old. So, then, I was doing a lot of it. Me, and my younger brother, and dad, we were doing it after school, and after work, and whatever. But like I said, it was a pretty small operation. The cattle was pretty easy. By then, it was just beef cattle.

ES:

Uh-huh. And so, you're—you're out of college, you've got some land that you're renting, you're starting to, kind of, expand operations to try to make a living. Talk more about—

AC:

Well, yeah. I just started expanding and trying to rent land anywhere I could, and that was the boom years of '72, '3, '4, when prices were really good. But it was hard to get land because everybody was wanting it, then. [ES laughs] Prices were just about a parity, then. I mean, actually, in 1974—in August of 1974, I believe it was the eighteenth day of August, in 1974,

corn was, like, \$3.84 a bushel. That same day, in 2018, corn was still \$3.84 a bushel in the Chicago Board of Trade. Forty-four years later.

ES:

Oh gosh.

AC:

So, that's how good it was in '74, compared to what it is now.

ES:

It was a good time to be a farmer in the early seventies.

AC:

It was, except I didn't have enough land to get all the benefits out of it. But I survived. I mean, I kept growing, kept renting land, and kept building the operation. About '76, my brother came in and he decided he wanted to farm, so he kind of started working for me. And then, he rented—he got a little bit of land, and so, basically, that started us together. And we used the same equipment, worked together. He had his land, I had mine, until sometime in the nineties, and we just decided to make it a full partnership, and everything was fifty-fifty. And we just split the land. Now, in the eighties, we barely, barely survived. In January of '87, the bank sold us out. All we had left was two pickups. No farm equipment. But somehow, we made it. I had a good friend that loaned us some equipment. He was madder at the banker than I was. [ES laughs] I mean, I thought he was going to kill the banker, he was so mad at him.

ES:

That sounds like a common theme in this.

AC:

He brought us a tractor and a few pieces of it—well, we did have a planter. There was one planter that the bank somehow didn't get. So, we had that and had another neighbor that kept his equipment parked at our place and we used some of that. And somehow, when we got our wheat crop out, we took the money, and went and bought us another tractor, and we just started slowly coming back. One of the good things about '87, the farm program, they were trying to cut production, so you could lay a lot of your land out. They had that pick program and different programs, then, so we didn't have to farm a lot of it. We just laid it out, so that helped us. I don't think—there's no way you can do that, what we did then, now. It'd be impossible. But back then, we did, and like I said, we slowly came back and we started renting more land. And now—

ES:

I was going to say, what are y'all up to now?

AC:

Well now, we're farming about thirty-two hundred acres of cropland and we're running about a hundred and seventy-five mama cows. Plus, we wean all of our calves and run them on wheat pasture. It's kind of a stalker operation, but it's our own cattle. And we run them up to, like, seven hundred pounds, and then, haul them to Oklahoma City, and sell them. Six years ago, my brother's son graduated from high school, and he always wanted to be a welder on a pipeline, so he got a pipeline job in South Texas. After three weeks, he called his daddy and told him to come get him then. That wasn't what he wanted. He got real homesick. [ES laughs] He had a wife and two little boys. And he called and said that if we'd let him come back to the farm, that's what he wanted to do. So, he is working with us now. And my other brother is working for us now.

ES:

Um-hm. So, it's a fam—

AC:

Younger brother. He's not a partner. He's just working for us.

ES:

So, it is a—it's still a family operation.

AC:

It's still a family operation, yes.

ES:

You know, it's funny because I've heard that welding's darn good money, but the farm's still calling him back, and the family.

AC:

Yeah. Well, he was down there by himself. He didn't know anybody. He was twenty years old. Had a wife and two little boys. He missed them.

ES:

That's a good reason to come home, then.

AC:

He just decided it wasn't as much fun as he thought it would be. So, and during his teenage years, he hadn't been real interested in it. We'd try to get him to do something and, "I don't want to do that." You know? And I just didn't expect him to do it. But when he came back, I mean, he was perfect. He never complained about anything. And now, he's got two little boys that are

seven years old and that's all they talk about, is farming. When two years ago, Santa Claus asked one of them—they're twins.

ES:

Oh, wow. [Laughs]

AC:

Yeah, they're twins. Asked one of them, said, "What do you want for Christmas?" He looked at him, he said, "Well, I want a new pickup, and a new tractor, and some farmland." And he was five years old.

ES:

Wow. I bet that made you proud.

AC:

So, we feel pretty confident that since—by the time my brother and I get so old to do this, they'll be grown. And right now, that's what they want to do, so my nephew will have his two sons to keep it going.

ES:

Well, that's great. So, on the cattle thing, let me ask you, while we're talking about the modern farm, do y'all still have—I noticed a lot of, like, the cattle sales in our area, in the smaller towns, have shut down and you have to go to bigger towns. You said you take it to Oklahoma City.

AC:

Well, we have the local sales, but Oklahoma City, they bring about a hundred dollars more.

ES:

Okay. I was wondering the justification.

AC:

Yeah. They just—they sell better up there. So, we do a little bit with the local sale barns. I mean, we have one in Durant, which is forty-five miles. There's two at Paris, which is about forty-five miles. One at Sulphur Springs, which is sixty miles. I mean, we've got local sales we can go to. We just—we load a big truck, and take them to Oklahoma City, and it doesn't cost any more than it does to sell them local, and they usually bring a hundred dollars more. So, you know, you take eighty head up there, that's eight thousand dollars.

ES:

It's worth the effort, then.

AC:

A hundred head, you know?

ES:

Yeah.

AC:

We learned that two years ago. We loaded the big truck, and we got seventy-five on it, and had fifteen left. So we took them to one of the local sales. The next day, they all sold the same day. There's a hundred and thirty-something dollars difference in them, I think. So that's why we go to Oklahoma City.

ES:

[laughs] Okay. What—well, why don't we backtrack a little bit? So, you were talking about, in the seventies, it was a really good time to get in on farming, and then, it kind of deteriorated for a while. And I know that that's when—the late seventies is the rise of the American Ag Movement.

AC:

Yeah. Tractorcades.

ES:

Yeah. So, let's talk about that. Like, what—you know, what were farmers saying? What kind of stuff was happening in your area that you saw that was raising these issues?

AC:

Well, I mean, the prices had gone down and people were struggling. And so, when we started hearing about the difference things going on—in '77, when they talked about the strike, we would go to meetings and started listening to them. I remember a group of us went down to Dallas, to the football stadium down there. They had some kind of a deal down there. We went down there to that. And then, when the strike day came, December the 15, well, we had a local tractorcade that had several hundred tractors from about four or five different counties. It was at Sherman. And so, we went to that. And then, we started our office—wherever, we'd meet over at the farm auction—equipment auction place, over at Howe [?] [0:17:12]. We would meet over there. And then, in January, they were going to Washington. So, a big group from our area, we had an airplane that nearly everybody on there—the airplane ride up there, everybody on there was farmers from three or four counties around there. We went to Washington. I went and both my brothers went. Two of us went on the airplane and the middle one drove with another friend. They drove up there. That was kind of my first experience. I'd never been to Washington. I was amaze—I mean, you know, I was just a country boy. [ES laughs] I was just amazed at the place.

We stayed up there for a few days, then we came home. Sometime that next—that year, they got to talking about the big tractorcade to Washington. And so, that fall, we were having—we were still having these meetings. And we had a meeting one night and they were—they said, “Well, we’re going to have this tractorcade to Washington.” And they were saying, “Well, who wants—who can go? Or who wants to go?” And a friend of mine, who was, at the time, even younger—I was in my twenties. He was in his middle twenties. He said, “Well, I can go. I’ve talked to daddy and daddy said I could take one of our tractors.” He said, “If somebody can help me,” he said, “I’ll go.” And I said, “Well, I can go with you.” And all those older guys looked at us and said, “Why are you sending two kids up there by themselves?” [ES laughs] Because we were both in our twenties. So, another man, volunteered. He didn’t have any cattle. A lot of the guys had cattle and they couldn’t—one of the guys, especially, he said, “Well, I’ve got five hundred cows to feed. I can’t go up there.” But he said, “I’ll help y’all.” But anyway, the other man didn’t—he just farmed and he said he’d go with us. So, the three of us loaded up. They put a camper, a little pickup camper, on the Gooseneck Trailer, hooked it behind a forty-four-thirty John Deer Tractor. Put the pickup on the back of the Gooseneck, and we took it to Dallas, and joined up there, and drove it all the way to Washington D.C. Now, the county next to me, east of us, they had six tractors and sixteen people that went. The county that joined us, to the southwest, they had three—three or four tractors. Oh, there was seven or eight of those. They, kind of, back and forth. Some of them would go wild and go back home. So, there was several from my area, in that general area, that went on the tractorcade.

ES:

So did—was there communication between, like, the counties in these meetings to say, “We’re going to all meet up and all, kind of, go up together,” or—

AC:

Oh, not really. I mean, we joined them in Dallas, and I guess, the Collin County people joined them in Dallas. We were going down Interstate 20. The ones from Paris and Cooper, over there, that was east of us, they joined us in Canton. The first night, we spent in Canton, Texas, where they have the big flea market. They’re famous for the Canton First Monday. It’s huge. And we parked on their parking lot grounds there. But the ones from Paris, met us there that night. And then, the next day, we travelled from Canton to Shreveport, Louisiana. And we spent the night, Friday night, in Shreveport. And then, we went from Shreveport to Monroe. And Saturday night, they had a big meeting in Monroe. Had a fish fry. Lots of—of course, all of the ones that—now, our tractorcade started here, at Lubbock. It started at Lubbock, for all of the South Plains. And now, the I-40 bunch started at Amarillo. The Panhandle bunch was in it, the South Plains bunch. And then, they went down to Abilene, and—

ES:

And came over.

AC:

And came on twenty, all the way. You know, everywhere they'd go, they'd just pick up a few more people, and it just kept a growing. And so, when we were in Louisiana, that night, we were having this meeting and they were asking Louisiana farmers, "Well, how many of y'all are going?" And they said, "Well, we hadn't really planned on it." They said, "Well, y'all got to have somebody." So, those people went. Left Saturday night, they worked all day Sunday, getting ready, and the next—and Monday morning, when we left Louisiana, several of them joined up with us. Maybe eight or ten tractors from Louisiana, and they did all that in a day. I mean, because they weren't planning on going. [ES laughs] But they joined us. Then, the next night, we stayed in Jackson, Mississippi. And I remember it for two things: That's the night that the Olympics was going on, and I think that's the night that the American hockey team beat the Russian hockey team. And also, at that—we had a meeting at Jackson, and the governor came down and spoke to us, and told us if we had any trouble, to call him. And some of the farmers went up, talked to him, and he took them to the governor's mansion, and they spent the night there. And so, we went from Jackson, Mississippi, to some little town in Alabama. I'm not—I don't remember. I know there was a university there and all of our flags got stole. They had flags on our tractors, and most all of them got stoled. I guess, those college kids wanted those flags.

ES:

Flags for, like, the different states?

AC:

States, and American flags, and, I guess, we had some—some kind of a flag with—I don't remember exactly what it was—about the movement, or something, you know? But yeah, we had a lot of Texas flags. Well, and then, it might've been some Louisiana and Mississippi flags. We'd come through three states, so there could've been some state flags there. The next night, we spent at Talladega Motor Speedway, at the speedway. And then, we went on into—and I'd say, we picked up people in Mississippi. We picked up people in Alabama. They knew we were going down Interstate 20, and they'd just be waiting on the side of the road for us. They just got in line behind. Then, when we got to Georgia, we stayed there at the Fulton County Stadium, which was the big stadium that the football and baseball team played in, on their parking lot. But there was a lot of people from Georgia, came in. The most of any state, besides Texas. And I remember going over a big overpass on Interstate 20, and we were looking back south, and as far as you could see south was tractors coming in from Georgia. As far as you could see in either direction was our tractors. And so, when we left the next morning, we were a long, long line of tractors.

ES:

Did anybody have—did y'all have any, like, way of saying, oh, it's X number of miles of tractors? Or numbered? Was there ever anybody counting it?

AC:

Oh, at one time, after we got out of Virginia, I think it was thirty-five miles long. But now, we had pretty good intervals between us. I mean, we would have several hundred yards. Now, that included tractors and support vehicles, which there was a lot of pickups, campers, motorhomes, whatever. You know, those trucks that had tools on them, fuel. I mean, support—

ES:

To help with things.

AC:

Support vehicles, you know?

ES:

Right.

AC:

But when we finally got up there, in Virginia, I think it was thirty-five miles long.

ES:

Okay. And I know—well, you kind of implied there was a lot of, like, parking issues along the way and just—

AC:

Well, every day, somebody would go out ahead, try to find a place for us—

ES:

To gather.

AC:

To park. I mean, so like I said, we stayed at Talladega. They had the big parking lot. That was fine. The next night, we stayed in Atlanta, at the stadium, because that was a big parking lot. The next night, we just stayed in a man's pasture in South Carolina. And I remember we got there a little early. It was a beautiful day. We got there—I remember playing baseball, had a baseball game. But it was really pretty. And we were lucky because we were the southern—the guys up north were fighting snow, and blizzards, and ice. We were—we didn't have any of that, you know? And the guys that would go ahead and try to find something, they went into some of these little towns, and they would go to the sheriff's office, and say, "Hey. We got all these tractors coming. We got to find a place to park." And the sheriff, sometimes, would say, "Well, that's not my problem." And then he said, "Yeah. Well, when we get here, it will be your problem. We got thirty-five miles of tractors and stuff lined up." So they would start trying to find a place for us.

The next—after that little small town in South Carolina, out in this man's pasture, which was a good place to park, we went to Charlotte, North Carolina. We spent the weekend there. I think, at their fairgrounds, or something. I don't remember exactly. Then, we left there on a Monday, and the next night, we were at Durham, North Carolina, and they couldn't find any place, and we just parked all over town, on the streets. I mean, we were just everywhere. [ES laughs] And that was, probably, one of the best experiences because the local people came out and talked to us. And there was a fuel truck, came along, and filled up everybody's tractor. From local farmers that had put it together, and the people would come out and visit with us because we were in their front yard, nearly. And it was—that was a good experience because of all the people we met. It was funny, most of the people you met were friendly and for us, but there's always something. Because everybody, then, had CBs [**Citizens Band radio**]. We were talking on CBs. That's the way we communicated. And we were talking to a lot of the truckers. Well, most of the truckers were behind us, but every once in a while, one of them, "Why don't you farmers go home? You're just blocking the highway."

ES:

I was going to say, it's the one that got behind the thirty-five mile.

AC:

Well, of course, we were—they had the other lanes. We were on four-lane highways.

ES:

Oh. Then, you're—yeah.

AC:

You know, we were always interstate, all the way.

ES:

That's right, yeah.

AC:

So, I mean, we couldn't have done that on a little one. But they could get around us. I mean, it wasn't—like, we didn't have traffic blocked that bad. But if some—if one of those truckers would come on there like that, there'd be fifteen or twenty of us there, and we would just let him have it. "Well, you stupid idiot." And a lot of the other truckers would, too. The other truckers would say, "Hey, we ought to be doing what the farmers ought to be doing. We ought to be getting together and doing something like this. Don't be criticizing them. We need to be joining them." I mean, that was the majority, but there was always a few. And it was a few cars, but we had fun with it. It was an experience I'll never forget. So then, we left Durham, and we went on into Dinwiddie, Virginia. We had a meeting and a meal there that night. We picked up some

Virginia farmers. The next day, we went on in to where we were going to stay. It was called Pohick Park. It was in Virginia, right outside of Washington. We stayed there, like, five or six days, waiting for the other tractorcade to get there because we had the easy route. We didn't have all the ice and snow in the mountains. They all had mountains to go through and we didn't. So, we stayed out there in our camper. And of course, then, the big day came. And that morning, about—I don't know—three o'clock, we all left, and converged into Washington, and that was a huge deal.

ES:

Right. Well, tell me about your experience in Washington.

AC:

Well, that morning, my friend, Bruce, that had the tractor, he took the tractor—now, on the way up there, Bruce would drive it from morning until noon. We'd always stop at noon. Just pull off on the side of the road and eat lunch, or whatever. I mean, sandwiches or whatever.

ES:

I was going to ask, what about food on that?

AC:

Well, that was a—some of them had it real good. The three of us, we got to—we were in this little camper, and we got there that night, and we started thinking, "I don't know how to cook." Bruce said, "I don't know how to cook." And Bob says, "Well, I don't know a whole lot about it." So, we managed. [Laughter] We managed to fix—have something for us to eat. But some of them that had their wives with them, that was a lot of their jobs. I know the bunch from Paris, they—and I've still wondered about this poor woman. This young couple that just got married, and they were going on there, and she—they had the freezer in the back of a cattle trailer hooked up to one of the tractors, and they kept a generator there, keeping it—so, they were keeping their food in this freezer and refrigerator in a cattle trailer, and she was doing all the cooking. Her husband was helping her, but she was fixing meals for, like, fourteen of them. And they would fix sandwiches and stuff. And I don't remember what we did.

ES:

[Laughs] You survived.

AC:

We survived, though. We survived. And like I said, we got up there and that morning, we all went in, and it was all kinds of chaos.

ES:

So did you take—y'all took the tractor and then, also, the truck with the—

AC:

Oh yeah. We had the—

ES:

You took everything with you?

AC:

We had the trailer still behind the tractor. Now, the guys from the next county over, which, we knew them. They had a motorhome they had rented. And so, all we had was that little old bitty pickup camper. I mean, one of them little pickup campers that goes up over the—you don't see many of them anymore. They used to be—I mean, that thing was little. And so, we would ride with—in the motorhome—with a bunch from the other county, if we weren't driving a tractor. And so, that morning, we went in in the motorhome and our tractors, and we drove around up there for a while. We got—well, I remember we stopped there, by the USDA [**United States Department of Agriculture**] building, stayed there for a long time. And finally, we pulled in the mall. And we had this big rally up on the Capitol steps. Of course, while we were having this rally up there, every—all the tractors were down there on the mall, they surrounded us with all these old trucks and everything they could find, and kind of blocked us in, which was the best thing that ever happened. I mean, here we were, in the middle—you couldn't have been in a better spot in Washington D.C., and we couldn't leave, so there we were. So we backed our trailer up against the USDA—one of the USDA buildings. And stuck an extension cord through the window, and went in there and plugged it in so we would have electricity. And I mean, we were up on their porch, really, there. We stayed there for a few days. Then, we got—we decided we needed a motel room, a hotel room, so we went down to where a lot of them were staying and got us a room. I think there was eight of us staying in one room. There was four in beds and four on the floor. Of course, we were—everyday, there'd be something going on. Then, the big snowstorm came that snowed two-foot one Sunday night. It completely shut Washington down. And one of the guys that was in with the Collin County bunch—by then, we were just, kind of, all together. I mean, they were the next county over. He had a tractor with a blade on it. And—oh, that afternoon, when we went back, after the big rally up there, they had everything blocked off. Well, we went back, and got in our tractors, and pulled up, and there was an opening there, where you could come in and out, and there was some policemen there. And we pulled up there and they were telling us, "No, y'all can't go through there." Well, the lead tractor just took off, and they just jumped out of the way. Well, seven of us—seven of our tractors got out. So we rode around Washington for two or three hours, just seven of us, because everybody else was locked in. And I got in the tractor with Bruce, and we would just ride around up there around the Capitol, and all those—Senate and Ag building—I mean, the Senate and House buildings. We

were just riding around up there. And we had a car following us all the time, which we knew was some kind of law enforcement. And we would just—you need this?

[Pause in recording]

ES:

We just got that we have a ten-minute warning. So, we're going to finish up. We're not going to get everything recorded right now, but we'll get Washington, at least, so.

AC:

Okay. So, yeah. But anyway, we rode around for about two hours. This car was following us and just to mess with him—all these tractors could just make U-turns just like this. Well, we was all on our CBs. We'd just say, "Turn." Well, we'd hit a break, and we'd just slide around, go the other direction. Well, they'd have to scramble around, trying to get that car turned around, and follow us. We'd do that for about fifteen minutes, then we'd do it again. We were just playing with them. We did that for about two hours and we got tired, so we took our tractors down to the motel, where everybody was staying, and kind of the headquarters, and we just pulled them up in the parking lot, and parked them there, and we kept them there until, like I said, the—until the snowstorm. And when the snowstorm came, well, we got the tractors out. And the one boy had the bulldozer blade. He started pushing snow. They were calling in. People couldn't move. So, nurses and doctors couldn't get out. So, they were letting tractors out. Well, we were already out anyway. So, we would go out to apartment complexes and pick up a nurse, whatever, take her to a hospital, and then pick up somebody from a hospital, and take them home. Well, we did that for two days. And people were doing that—they were pulling people in and out, people that got stuck in the snow, they were pulling them out. And all of a sudden, we were everybody's heroes because of all the work that we were doing. One farmer there from Missouri, had a big four wheel drive tractor with a big bulldozer [?] [0:39:54] blade. He had completely cleaned off Pennsylvania, Constitution, and Independence Avenue with his tractor. I mean, they were totally unprepared for this snowstorm and so we did that. Then, we got this call on the third day to come over to this place to clean their parking lot off and do all this stuff. So, we take the tractor with the blade on it and we decide we'll take three more tractors just to—just for show. So we go over there, and we get there, and this thing has got a guard and a gate—it's got a gate in it, a locked gate. And they said, "Yeah, y'all come on in." And we're looking there, what is this place? Well, we later found out it was CIA [Central Intelligence Agency].

ES:

[Gasps] Wow. [Laughs]

AC:

It wasn't—it was one of their installations. It had something else on the gate, but it was CIA and

it was where they did a bunch of their communications work. We worked there for two days. The first day, we got the shovels and we cleaned the sidewalk. And those people would come by, thanking us, "Oh, y'all don't know how important this is. This is a very important place." "Well, what is it?" Well, nobody would say. So, we were outside working. Well, we went in and there was two guards there. They said, "Well, y'all can't come in any further. This is as far as you go." And, "Well, why not?" "Well, you just—this is a restricted area." We said, "Well, we've got to go the bathroom." Finally, they said, "Okay. One at a time. Go run down there and you come right back." And so, we were sitting there and we got a phone call. This guy—one of the guards gets a phone call and he said, "So-and-so CIA so-and-so." So then, we knew for sure what it was. And every time somebody there would come out, they would put a deal in the—an alarm in each room that if something went off, this alarm would go off. So, we got in real good with these two guards and they said, "Well, what are y'all going to charge for this?" And we said, "Oh, we're doing it for free." Said, "Oh no. Y'all are crazy. Charge them and they'll pay." And so, that night, we went back and we figured up a deal for about ninety-six hundred dollars. We itemized it out. Five hundred dollars an hour for the tractor with the blade. Twenty-five dollars an hour for the work. I mean, you know, we had it all itemized. So the next morning, we go back up there, and two of the guys that were working with it—and one of them was crazy. He was kind of the ringleader of it. He walked in and told—those guards were there and he said, "Well, okay. Y'all told us we needed to charge." He said, "We've got a bill here. Who do we give it?" They said, "We'll call." So they call somebody up, and they give them this bill, and they said, "Well, we can't pay that." And they said, "Yeah. Sure you can. You're the CIA. You can do anything." And they said, "Well, we've got to talk about this." And so, they went in this room and they started discussing it. And they finally offered to pay us if we'd take a check. That was our biggest mistake. We should've took a check, it would've been good, for the full amount. But anyway, the guy kept saying he wanted cash and they kept saying, "We can't do cash." Well, the guy that was representing us told them, he said, "Well, sure you can. Y'all have gotten a printing press down there in the bottom of this thing, where you print those new hundred dollar bills out." And so, finally, it goes on all—well, right after lunch, our tractor had a sign on the front of it, said, "Sherman, Texas." I was from Bonham, but I was with one from Sherman. So, anyway, this guy comes out, he said, "Where is the guy from Sherman? I need to talk to him." He said, "Well, he's right over there." He said, "Well, I'm from that area, pretty close." He said, "Since I'm from that area, I want to talk to him." And somebody said, "Well, where are you from?" He said, "Oh, I'm from Bonham." They said, "Well, we've got somebody here from Bonham." So, I go over there and I start talking to him. I go to school with his sister. I knew his sister. I knew his daddy. His daddy was a farmer that owned the cotton gin, about six miles from where I lived. And it blew my mind. Here's this guy that was raised within six miles of me that worked for the CIA.

ES:

Wow. But you never knew it.

AC:

And I never knew it, no. And I knew his sister. Still, to this day, I know his sister. We're on the cemetery board together.

ES:

Did you ever ask her about it?

AC:

Oh yeah. Yeah.

ES:

Ask about what he does and find out more?

AC:

Well, she never knew exactly what he did. But she knew where he worked. But anyway, he was saying, he said, "What are y'all going to do?" And I said, "Well, we're out of here." And the guy in there doing the negotiating had told them that if they didn't pay us, we was going to pull them tractors down there and block it. [Laughs] And so, he was—he was asking if we was really going to do that because if they were, they were going to let everybody go home. I thought, you know, we're messing with the CIA. We better think about this for a little while. [Laughs]

ES:

Definitely.

AC:

So anyway, at five o'clock, the guy doing the negotiating, he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If y'all want cash, I'll give you eighteen hundred dollars. And it's five o'clock. We got to do something." So our guy finally said, "We'll take it." So the guy walks down the hall, he comes back with eighteen brand new one hundred dollar bills. And our guy says, "I told you y'all printed them." So anyway, we left, took our tractors back to the motel. But that was quite an experience. I tell people that, for two days, I worked for the CIA. [Laughs]

ES:

You did. That is amazing.

AC:

But that was the most interesting story that came out of Washington D.C., on my part, was first off, that we did that and that that was CIA. What we found out, later, was those people did the communication spying. It was a communications center, where they were listening in, and doing all that kind of spy stuff, and people sending information back. That's what that building was for.

But it was—like I said, it was really interesting. Oh, and that first day, we—there was—we had some trouble with one of the tractors and they had some guys come up there to help us, and it was noon, and we were right across from the state department. And they said, “Well, let’s go over to the state department. We’ll eat.” Well anyway, we went over there and they liked to have never got us in. They finally got us in. They had these—all those buildings up there have these huge cafeterias in the basement. You’ve got to, to feed all these people. That day, Golda Meir was there. She was the Prime Minister from Israel. She was there, so that’s why the security was so tight. They liked to not let us get in. But that was another big deal, you know?

ES:

Yeah. Well, so we’re going to have to wrap up because y’all are about to leave. But was there any sort of stuff that you did in Washington, meeting with anybody? Meeting with your representatives? Or what else did y’all—

AC:

Oh yeah. We met with—we met with our representative and we met with our senator. We would go to meetings and meet with those people. Yeah, we did that all the time. And then, nearly every day, we would have a tractor—we’d drive some tractors out somewhere. We went down by the White House, in front of it, parked one day. And then, we—I mean, one weekend, they told everybody to bring their kids down and we’d give them tractor rides around the mall. So we would ride people around in our tractors and mostly everybody were just as friendly as they could be. I mean, you know, it was—they’d never seen all this kind of stuff. It was something for them to see. Finally, after three weeks, we decided to go home and there’s another story. We had unloaded our pickup, and were using it to drive around, but we still had our tractor. So, we hooked the trailer back up to the pickup. We were going to put the tractor on the back of that. We didn’t have a place to load it. So we got to looking and there was a Smithsonian—the steps going up to one of the Smithsonian buildings. We said, “We could back that trailer up to that, and pull that tractor around, and load it up.” This was, like, on a Saturday night. We were leaving on a Saturday night. And so we start backing up. So, here comes this cop, “What are y’all doing?” “Well, we’re going to load this tractor. We’re going home.”, “Well, you can’t do that.” And Bob said—that was the guy that was with us—he said, “Well yeah.” He said, “Somebody down here said we could.”, “Well, who?”, “Oh, I don’t know.” So, this guy’s going down. “Well, I’ll go ask him.” Bob said, “Hurry up and get that tractor loaded before he gets back.” So we run—we jump—we run out there, we pull that tractor up there, we throw the chain over it, we boom it down, and we’re pulling out, and that guy comes running, “Y’all can’t do that. Y’all can’t do that.” Bob says, “Goodbye. We’re gone.” We left, and of course, we came back home. From the day we left to the day we got back, it was six weeks.

ES:

And what was going on at your farm back home in those six weeks?

AC:

It was raining, muddy. So, my brother was feeding the cows.

ES:

There wasn't going to be much going on anyway.

AC:

No. There wasn't any farming going on that winter. So, my brother was feeding the cows, taking care of that. And so I wasn't missing a whole lot there, then. But anyway, I came—by the time we got back, it was nearly time to start planting, and it took us, like I said, five days to get home because we kept having flats on that trailer and all kinds of trouble. Pulling that big tractor with a pickup.

ES:

[Laughs] So why did y'all decide to switch on the way back?

AC:

Well, we didn't want to drive a tractor all the way back.

ES:

Oh okay.

AC:

We wanted—we put the—we wanted the pickup so we could make better time.

ES:

Make better time. Oh okay.

AC:

Yeah. We didn't want to drive that tractor all the way back.

ES:

Yeah. So, on the way back—

Monte Monroe (MM):

They're going to leave, I think.

AC:

Are they?

ES:

Okay. Well, sir, I've got your contact information. Thank you for talking to me. Maybe we can—

AC:

Yeah. We're just half-through.

ES:

I was going to say, we haven't even gotten started. So, we'll be in touch.

AC:

All the other things that we did.

ES:

Yeah, so—

AC:

I've been to—all over the—nearly, all over the United States, going to meetings. All the way to Canada.

ES:

Well, then, let me—let me—actually, thank you for today. I'm going to turn this off for now.

End of Recording