

Interview with Captain Wilford Swinney

Interviewer: Kerry Owens

Transcriber: Kerry Owens

Date of Interview: March 31, 1986

Location: Austin Police Department, Austin, TX

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Kerry Owens: This is Kerry Owens, and I'm doing an interview for Southwest Texas State University, the Oral History Project, in the History Department. This is March thirty-first. It's 9:00. I'm at the Austin Police Department, and I'm interviewing Captain Wilford—

Wilford Swinney: W-I-L-F-O-R-D and the last name is S-W-I-N-N-E-Y.

Owens: Wilford Swinney. He's been with the Austin Police Department for quite some time. Captain Swinney and I have discussed the legalities of the interview and the options he has available as far as editing, that type of thing. I don't think at this point he has any questions. Do you think it's pretty clear, Captain Swinney, as far as how we're going to conduct the interview?

Swinney: Yes, it's clear now.

Owens: I guess I'll start the interview by asking Captain Swinney when he started to work for the Austin Police Department, or if he did something prior to that. Are you from Austin originally?

Swinney: Well, I came here at the age of five. I was born in a place called Burnet County, and the nearest town at that time was Bertram. I was born about two miles south of Bertram, off of Highway 29, old Highway 29. It doesn't exist any longer. The new Highway 20 goes through there now. I think the new 29 was developed about 1930, '33, along in there somewhere. When I came to work for the Austin Police Department on January 1, 1948. My dad was a police officer in 1926, so there is a little history there, I guess.

Owens: Your dad was a police officer here in 1926?

Swinney: Yes, uh-huh. He had a walking beat. He was stationed at Sixth [Street] and Congress Avenue. I think he stayed with the city about seven or eight months, and the reason being was he had a younger brother who was Clayton Swinney. Dad's name was Will, William Rance, and at that time you could not have any relatives working for the city at all, so the last one hired was, he was the first one to be turned loose. And so he was turned loose, and he went back to work for Swift and Company, which is a meat packing plant, which at that time was down in the 400

block of Congress Avenue, right near the railroad tracks, and he worked there a while. Then, he died in 1933 down in San Antonio Veterans Hospital. He was gassed in World War I.

Owens: I see. So, is that how you became interested in police work? (Unintelligible)

Swinney: Well, I don't know whether that had any influence on me or not, but I wasn't but four years old when he was a police officer. I don't have any recollection of him being a police officer. I have some photographs of him, and I have his old book that he kept in his pocket where he investigated some collisions down on Congress Avenue during his walking beat. I'm not so sure that they didn't do just as good of a job in those days as we're doing now. They gave the addresses of the people, the names of the people, the make of car, the license number, usually says, uh, I believe in one comment was that the people who had the collision worked it out among themselves. I didn't know if they had insurance, too, but usually the first thing they ask nowadays is "do you have insurance." But, it's interesting going back into that old little pocketbook. They had a little shirt pocketbook. I guess it must have cost a nickel or a dime, but that was the records they kept in those days. When I came here, we, there wasn't any such thing as an arrest card for the individual. They had what looked like a large book that was printed by Steck at that time. Oh, four or five inches thick and maybe sixteen inches tall and probably twice that wide when you opened it up. And it asked the officer's name and the defendant's name, and what he was arrested for and where he was arrested on one line all the way across that one page. It was a book that they kept at the booking desk, instead of individual cards. They never kept fingerprints in those days, unless it was something very atrocious that happened out among the public, like a murder or something. They took, oh, I'm sure they took the fingerprints in those days, but for a person that was just intoxicated, you know. But they take fingerprints for most anything nowadays.

Owens: Yeah, and somebody was telling me the other day they take, sometimes they take palm prints, additional prints, in addition to the fingerprints.

Swinney: Yeah, I guess it's because of the higher crime rate. Of course, when we have such a public that moves quickly now, from one point. They may only be in Austin, you know, for three or four weeks. Then they're gone to another location or something because of their jobs that they're following. They don't stay here like they used to a long time ago. Any community, just the small community. In the small community, everyone knows everyone, usually on a first-name basis, and if anything happens in the neighborhood, everybody knows it. But today, society in a large community really doesn't care. In small communities, like even if, in Burnet, my wife and I have another little home up in Burnet County. And Marble Falls, Bertram, Burnet, Florence, and all those little towns have one newspaper, and it will tell you that Aunt Maud was visited by her sister from Austin. So, with little excerpts in the papers, which is interesting to those people. They'll have a picture of a collision that happened, downtown Burnet or downtown Marble Falls. That's news to those people.

Owens: Front page.

Swinney: Sure. Front page. But here, it's different. I'm sure in cities larger than Austin. We carry more than they do.

Owens: Well, Austin's changed a lot, even since I moved here in 1967, I guess. Speaking of the sixties, I remember, were there any quote "gangs" in Austin? Because I remember some of the—

Swinney: Yes, there were gangs. The officer on the street was a street cop, and he kept up with gangs that was working in his area and in his district. And, they had the name of the leader of the gang. And his one gang leader and his little gang would disappear after they get twenty-four, twenty-five years old. For some reason, age catches up with them, and they start working for a living or they go to the penitentiary, so then they come back. Then they get too old to work in a gang anymore. But now, you don't hear so much about gangs anymore. Maybe it's more lucrative in other places. People are more innovative, and "Hey, I'm going to be leader," and not "I'm not going to follow this guy." It may be some kind of that stuff going on now.

Owens: Well, I remember in the early sixties, the Overtons? Is that the name?

Swinney: Yeah, that was the name of one gang, uh-huh.

Owens: I remember they had a gang, and you didn't hear too much about it, but it seems like you never hear of that same type thing anymore.

Swinney: No, you don't, no, you don't. Not around here. They may be working some other place, but not around here. There were about six or seven gangs that were working out of Austin at that time. There is an interesting fact about the gang you just mentioned. One time, they'd gone to Chicago, and they were going to take over some of the businesses up around Chicago, and they pulled in there in their Lincolns or Cadillacs, I forgot which, but anyway, it seems as though those little dark fellows with long overcoats and funny-looking little hats is the way Mr. Overton described them, Jimmy Overton described them, they came out to the motel where they were staying and just opened the doors and came on in and pulled their long coats back, and it seems there was a firearms in there, like Thompson submachine guns, and they were invited to leave, which they did.

Owens: Yeah, well, I think I would have, too.

Swinney: Of course, the guys, they're not going to say that for the record or anything, you know. They'll be, when you're talking to them or interviewing them or something, they'll lead you on like that. Let you know what's going on. Some of it you can believe, and some of it you can't, and some of it—

Owens: What would you say, who, when was the time in Austin's history when there were more gangs and there was more open violence?

Swinney: I think around, anywhere from about, well, about 1955–56, along in that area on way up to about 1968, '69, along in there, they were quite prevalent. And at that time, 1957, I was working in auto theft detail, and this was just a little one-man gang deal, but this young man did, did about \$92,000 worth of business, which was big business in those days. My partner and I went out to California and brought him back. And, ah, he committed quite a few of those crimes in auto theft, and there's ways that he was stealing cars and selling them at a Los Angeles auto auction, and those people got ripped off out there, and the word got back over here what were, then we know where our cars were going. Took us some time. He left Austin and went on down into Mexico and stayed down there for a few months, and he then determined that the authorities there were taking him for his money, so he and his girlfriend took off and wound up in Salt Lake City, Utah. He went into business there, and he didn't like the business he was in, which was, he had a bunch of rotisseries that were heating hotdogs, and he said the people weren't eating hotdogs. So, then he goes down to San Diego and goes back into the auto theft business again, and the fellow from NATB, which is National Automobile Theft Bureau, we were feeding those people and the FBI all of our contact's information. And they made contact with him over on the old side of Mexico itself, on the far side of the bridge. And he was given a choice. They said, "Well, we know that you have sold a couple of Cadillacs over here that were stolen from California, and the Mexican authorities are watching me now, and they know I have a partner, but I never introduced them to a partner. And if I tip my hat, that means that you are the culprit that stole the stolen Cadillacs over here, and they will come, and they will get you here, and you will go the Mexican penitentiary here. Or, if I do not tip my hat, then you are my partner, and you and I will walk across the bridge over to the American authorities where the American authorities are waiting for you over there. So, you have a choice—do I tip my hat or do we talk." So he said, "Let's walk."

Owens: Yeah.

Swinney: And he walked, and then we brought him back.

Owens: Were there, do you remember any shootouts?

Swinney: No, there weren't too many shootouts that I know of. And not with the police department or anything else. There might have been some shootouts with some of the gang members or that we hear word of later on.

Owens: Well, do you think traditionally Austin has had less of that type of violent crime than most cities?

Swinney: I think so. I think we have been very fortunate. We have tended to alleviate most of them. The only one that was really bad around here was when Whitman got up into the tower that time and wounded so many people and killed so many others. His wife and his mother were the first ones, you know, that went. They lived out in South Austin. We made that scene. That was my day off. I was painting my daughter's bedroom when that went down. And, in those days, the lieutenant and the captain and all the people that was, even though they were on one shift, each one, each member of that shift had different days off. The most that you could see of an individual would be five days. There's other people that would be on the same shift, but you may not see him but maybe three days out of the five-day work frame. But, in comparison then with today, today's shifts, the entire shift is off the same time. That way you work more as a unit, more as a team. The other people, every time a patrolman took off, there was a relief person for him, or the lieutenant, it was his day off, or it was a relief lieutenant came, had a relief captain came in, and sometimes the guy that you would see for three days, the other people that you wouldn't see for two days. Those people had different bosses. They may get to see you one day out of five or two days at the most out of five, see. The most would be five out of five, but at the least would be two out of five, so in the meantime he had three people that was, and even those could be relieved, you know, those relief people might have relief. He'd see you for two days and another relief man for two days and another man for one day, so it wasn't much continuity there.

Owens: Right. I remember Whitman. I remember when that happened. I imagine they called a lot of officers in.

Swinney: That was August first. Well, they didn't have to call them in. They heard it on the news, and they came in. That's what it was on that. I know I came down because I called and said, Lieutenant Jake Barnett was on duty at the desk at that time, and I called down, and he said, "Well, we really don't know." Said there's not real good information that was coming in. There was lots of information that was coming in, but we really don't know who is up on the tower. That's doing the shooting. There's a lot of people dead all over town, and so when the news got out of that nature, well, then everybody came in that felt anything for those people.

Owens: Yeah, that was a really bad thing. That was in 1960—about '60?

Swinney: About 1966, August first.

Owens: Oh, 1966. Where was your first job at the police department? What—

Swinney: My first job was walking a beat on Congress Avenue at Seventh Street, and my beat ranged one block on either side of Congress Avenue and from Seventh Street to Ninth Street. And, I just walked those beats and issued citations for misparked cars and gave more information than I knew I had at the time. And one of those people wanted to know where the hotel was or where Barton Springs was, what was that big building at the end of Congress Avenue up there,

just all kinds of questions to ask. I think we had more contact with the people in those days, and the people knew. See, we had, in those days, we had walking beats in the, ah, up on the Drag, and ah, we had walking beats on West Sixth Street. We had two walking beats on East Sixth Street, one from Congress Avenue down to Neches and the other one from Neches [Street] to East Avenue, which we now know as IH-35. East Avenue had two lanes north, two lanes south, and that was it, with a sixty foot-wide esplanade in the center. And in those days, in that esplanade, in about the ninety block, there was a gazebo, and on Saturdays and Sundays the bands would play, and people in the community would go listen to the bands. Bands would also play at Wooldridge Park at that gazebo. There was another gazebo, well, it was a lookout. Where was it? In about the twelve or thirteen hundred block of East Avenue. At that time, part of East Avenue just stopped when it got to about the 1100 block because the hill was too steep. There wasn't a road over it as such. Later on, they made a road.

Owens: Now, this is IH-35.

Swinney: Yeah, there was a large hill there in those days. We had to patrol that pretty well during watermelon season because the trucks would come from South Texas, they'd hit that, just beyond Eleventh Street when they got the road finished and everything way back there, and they'd be overloaded, and they'd twist the drive shaft off. And here you'd have an automobile or a big truck that couldn't go forward or backwards. I mean, relied on his brakes. We tried to get him stopped, and we'd have to get some wreckers to get him over the hill, put a new drive shaft on, and away he would go. But they were quite loaded. Lots of power, but the drive shaft's a little bit weak. And they're just hollow tubes, you know. And, let's see, when I came to work here, I was trying to remember. I believe the city limits was at—the north city limits was Forty-Fifth [Street] and Guadalupe. The south city limits was Oltorf [Street] and South Congress [Avenue]. The east city limits was about the 2800 block of East First Street and the west city limits was at the police boat docks. It's grown some since.

Owens: What's the police boat docks?

Swinney: Well, that's that little. If you follow West Sixth Street, near the intersection of Enfield Road and West Sixth Street, there's an embankment there, which is Lake Austin, and there's an area there where the police had a dock, and we had three boats. The Parks Department has that now. They took that chore over.

Owens: Oh, I see.

Swinney: To patrol the lake.

Owens: I see; y'all patrolled along Town Lake.

Swinney: Yeah, we patrolled the lake for a long time—for many years, many years. And, ah, preventing drowning, speeding boats, you can't make a wake there because it washes ashore and erodes the shore, especially against the shore. You don't want a speeding boat there. It makes a large wake. If they are going to speed, they need to get out in the center of the lake. There were a lot of people that run over docks at night, you know, running too fast, too close to the shore, they should be just tootling along out there with their lights on. A little intoxicated.

Owens: Did they get ticketed for things like that?

Swinney: Pardon?

Owens: Did they get ticketed for things like that?

Swinney: Mostly warnings for that, unless it was really bad and you had told them several times, then they'd get citations, but usually they would take care of themselves by running over someone's dock or running up on the shore, and that would be punishment enough.

Owens: Yeah, and that was taken over by—

Swinney: Parks and Recreation Department. Yes, they have that now. They have all the parks.

Owens: I see. Yeah, I've seen those cars, and they do issue citations.

Swinney: Yes, at one time when they, when the Parks and Recreation [Department] took that over, that chore over, their cars were green, and they had a green uniform. But now they have blue and white cars, the same color as ours, as the police department's. And their uniforms is the only thing that's different, a little bit different. They're brown-colored.

Owens: Yeah, what, ah, when you first started out working for the police department, what was your salary?

Swinney: I think my salary was \$165 per month.

Owens: Was that a pretty good salary at that time?

Swinney: I didn't think so. I was making \$205 when I was flying in the Navy, and there was many times that I had contemplated about going back into the Navy. And I enjoyed it. The only thing I didn't enjoy about the Navy was that I just hated to get up when everybody told me to. Now's the time you have to get up and blow that horn, you know. And play "Reveille." But as far as everything else in the Navy, I really enjoyed. I especially enjoyed flying. I don't fly now, when things costing so much, so my wife and I, we have the largest motorcycle built in 1983, a big Honda with everything on it.

Owens: Were you a motorcycle cop, was that one of your—

Swinney: Yes, I rode motorcycles in 1951 and 1952. I had the first Harley-Davidson that had a chrome front end on it with hydraulic shocks. It was called a Hydro Glide, and there's a lot of interesting stories on that. One time, we had to escort some fellow by the name of Cotton, Joseph Cotton, and John Wayne, Bob Hope, they stayed in town for about three or four days, I believe it was. We met them out at the airport when they came in, and they had a lot of young actors and actresses with them that was coming up in the world, and I remember there was a forty-foot float, if you know what that is. That's a big trailer behind a rig. They had parked this forty-foot float near the aircraft. Cactus Pryor was the emcee, and he was welcoming them, everybody into town. And, he whispered something to Bob Hope, and Bob Hope took the microphone, and he said, "I am so happy to be in Pflugerville." And they got a rise out of it; everybody was out at the airport.

Owens: That sounds like something Cactus would do.

Swinney: Yeah, he'd pull something like that. Yeah, he and I were schoolmates.

Owens: Oh, really.

Swinney: Yeah, sure was.

Owens: I used to know Cactus real well. He's a real incredible person.

Swinney: Yes, he really is.

Owens: I thought about doing him for this interview, and he would have some wonderful stories, but really, this is more aimed at vocations, at jobs and just your average individual who works every day, you know, nothing terribly exciting, although police work, I know, is very exciting.

Swinney: It can be. There's a lot of things that happen that are criminal. There's a lot of things happen that are just blasé, just everyday life, and there are a lot of things that happen that are sad. And, there's more frustration in this job if you let it frustrate you than there's anything else because it can be very frustrating. It can be very frustrating. You can do your very, very best, and somebody is going to complain about it. You can do nothing, and people will praise you for it. And that's not the way it's built. You shouldn't be that way. I try to tell my troops that if you find the job too frustrating, maybe you should get another vocation, if you can't live with it, because you're not going to change the world. Ah, you might give the world some advice and everything, but you can please some of the people some of the time, but you're not going to please all of them all of the time.

Owens: No.

Swinney: No way. No job I don't think you can do that.

Owens: That's true. Well, do you think the attitude toward police officers has changed?

Swinney: Oh, yes.

Owens: A great deal?

Swinney: Oh yes, very, very much so. When I came to work here, we had four cars, one north, one south, one east and one west. And, then there was a central car. The central car's number was 87. I had that car for three years, and my partner in those days was a guy by the name of Carl Petri. And he was a world of information. So, 87 was the collision car. No matter where the collision happened or how small it was or how great it was, 87 got the call. These guys had a little bit more education in accident investigations, and they loved accident investigation or otherwise they wouldn't be in the car. So they were assigned there. Our traffic captain in those days was a fellow by the name of Blackman, Captain Blackman; he's a heck of a guy, a real nice guy. And, Captain Rogers and Captain Fowler and the Captain over CID at that time, the detective bureau at that time was Captain Ted Klaus. Captain Rogers is still with us. He's retired. He's still down here. Later on, my mentor and in cadet class was Lieutenant Russell Forester, who was retired not only as a captain in the police but also as captain in the Navy. So, ah, I had some very good instructors.

Owens: Uh-huh, there were five police cars?

Swinney: Yes.

Owens: Total?

Swinney: Yes, marked cars. They were unmarked. Well, in those days, the uniformed officers' cars were not marked. They were just, however they came from the factory, that was the color you got. If it was black, black, if it was yellow, yellow, if it was green, you got a green one. The detective bureau's cars, let's see, one year we had Plymouths and one year we had Dodges, and we had Chevrolets, and we had Fords. And I remember the first 1949 Ford we got in. That was the lowest thing I'd ever seen, I guess. All the rest of them were real tall, you know, 1947, 1948 models. Plymouths and Fords, they were real tall. But the new 1949 Fords came in, and they were real, much lower, and people was making comments about it and jokes about it. They'd say, "What size of shoe horn do you need to get in and out of that thing" because it didn't have a flat floorboard. The floorboard in it dropped, and we were wondering how in the world do you get the mud out of here because we were out in the mud and the rain and the, all kinds of weather, and the floorboards get muddy. How do you sweep the mud out? You have to get you a scoop or something, or a little whisk broom to whisk up the mud to get it out. You just can't wipe it out like we used to. So, that was another problem that faced us. Another thing that faced us was that, and I know it got into the traffic bureau of the city, not the traffic bureau of the police department. But the guys that put up the parking meters and drew the stripes on the

roadway, back then on Congress Avenue, as the cars got larger and the doors got larger, well, parking spaces began to shrink. You couldn't open your doors to get out. The door was too large. Of course, it doesn't matter now because they've taken away most of the parking places out there on Congress Avenue and beautified it.

Owens: Yeah, that's true. Well, were those cars specially equipped to be faster than most?

Swinney: No. No. They were just whatever came off the line. I remember in those days, the early days, they all had clutches. And, you had to shift the things. And then, let's see, when was it. We got the first automatic transmissions; I guess it was in 1955. We had six cylinder Fords, and you could get after a guy who had a 1954 Chevrolet standard shift or something, and he'd outrun you. So, we felt like it couldn't pull a gumdrop out of a baby's mouth you know, it was real slow, real slow.

Owens: Uh-huh, five police cars. I wonder how many they have now?

Swinney: Well, I have fifty-two people on my shift, and right now, on this afternoon's shift, see, there was two shifts on the street, see. Potentially, you'd have 104 officers.

Owens: Uh-huh, now you're in charge of all the officers on the street?

Swinney: I have one shift. Captain Vasquez is on tonight. He has the second shift. See, they came on at 3:30 and at 4:30 they, we split, like that, see. None of the city is vacant at any time. And then my shift comes on at 7:30 and 8:30. Half comes on at 7:30, and the other half comes on at 8:30, and we don't get off until 5:30, see. The first half gets off at 5:30 in the morning, and the second half gets off at 6:30 in the morning. We'll be by ourselves from 3:30 in the morning all the way up until 6:30 in the morning, by ourselves. Then, the early morning shift comes on. Also, the motorcycles will be coming on, and the horses will be coming on, and the walking beat will be coming on, and the walking beat doesn't get off until 3:00 this morning. So, from 3:00 this morning until about 9:00 in the morning there won't be anyone walking on Sixth Street. That's just the (unintelligible) part of town. And all the businesses are closed, and there's ours anyway. Maybe people are cleaning up and getting ready for the next day's business and that stuff.

Owens: Well, what, let's see, you start out as a quote "street" cop, and what did you do next?

Swinney: Next was the three-wheel motorcycle, and then I went into solo motorcycles. And in between there I was three years in the accident bureau, and then from solo motorcycles I went into the detective bureau.

Owens: Well, now, solo motorcycles versus three-wheel. At one time, were all motorcycles three-wheels?

Swinney: No, they wasn't that. They were spec. The first one, they was all solos. And then later on we got the three-wheel Harley-Davidsons.

Owens: What was the advantage of the three-wheel?

Swinney: Well, the three-wheel motorcycle stayed downtown at low speeds and marked the tires on parked vehicles, parking zones, and the solo stayed on the outer fringes on the city, on high-speed roadways. We also worked the traffic every morning at school. One of my schools was Ridgetop, Fifty-first and Airport Boulevard. I worked that in the morning. I worked it at noontime, and I worked it in the afternoon. There was so many kiddos coming and going, so that was on Airport Boulevard. We also had stop signs at the juncture of East First, Fifth, Seventh and Airport Boulevard; it's a heck of an intersection down there. And to alleviate traffic—

End of Side 1, begin Side 2

Owens: Now, we were talking about the stop signs were cut at an angle.

Swinney: Yes, they were cut at an angle, but a 45 degree angle with a hinge key. And, in the morning time, we would favor the traffic going eastbound toward Bergstrom Field because at that time we only had one bridge. And ah, that's the old steel bridge, which is still for southbound traffic. That would help the people going to work toward Bergstrom, and then we would stop the flow of traffic that was going westbound because there wasn't very much of it. And we would hand-work that traffic there at that time. And then in the afternoons, we would reverse the stop signs. We'd drop one side and pick up the other one, you know, with a little pin in there, a little locking pin, so the sign wouldn't fall over during the wind, you know. And then, after you left that post, well, you'd put the stop sign back up where everyone would have to stop. It's a four-way stop. And they don't do that anymore. We really don't work the traffic like we used to.

(Unintelligible) walking beat a little. See, they had several walking beats up and down Congress Avenue. We had one from First Street to the railroad station, and we had a man stationed at the railroad station. He checked the MKT and Missouri Pacific. There were two train stations on opposite sides of Congress Avenue. And then we had a walking beat at Sixth Street. We had another one at Seventh Street, and the other one was at Ninth Street to Eleventh Street. We had four walking beats, five on Congress Avenue, one in the university area, went from Nineteenth Street to Twenty-Fourth Street and, on Guadalupe. And then we had two walking beats on East Sixth Street and one on West Sixth Street. So, walking beats, as some of the troops now say, "Oh, we're going on a walking beat, that's new." But, it isn't new. Walking beats have been here, I know, since 1948. We may have stopped it at certain times and picked it up again.

Owens: Well, I was going to say, of course Sixth Street, that area. But, other than that, I really wasn't aware of walking beats.

Swinney: Yes, the complexion on Sixth Street has changed. Years back, it would be a beer joint on the left, music, and a barber shop, and a beer joint, and a grocery store, and a beer joint, and a saddle-making shop, and a beer joint, and a shoe repair shop. Seemed like every other place was a beer joint, with loud music, especially on Friday and Saturday. It wasn't wild. I'd say it was noisy, but people, ah, business people would open the doors and play the music, and the guys that would have the best band had the most customers, you know. That's where the big time was. And one time, my partner, referring to old Carl Petri, and I was slowly driving east on Sixth Street and hear a gunshot and hit the emergency brake and bail out of the car and hit the door of this beer joint, and he was a guy I'd gone to high school with, and I called him by name, I said, "What's going on!" And he said, "Ah, there's a rat back here," and he showed me a dead rat that he'd shot with his pistol. But, I haven't heard of anything like the happening.

Owens: And this was on East Sixth Street.

Swinney: Yeah. The people on Sixth Street today is different than way back. Way back there, they were guys who worked eight and ten hours a day, laboring like that, and they'd go down there and blow off a little steam. But today, it's, you have your boutique shops and things like this. It's a different crowd altogether. A much different crowd. And if you go down there today, I think, they are more business-oriented.

Owens: Well, what about the detective work, did you enjoy that?

Swinney: Well, I had five years in juvenile, and I enjoyed it at first, but that got too frustrating. And, I told Lieutenant Perry, who was my boss at that time. I said, "Look, I have two children at home." He said, "Yep, I know that." I said, "I understand the way that this is supposed to work, I'm supposed to love my children and tolerate all others. I'm beginning to tolerate mine. I'm beginning to hate these other little fellers." Because, really, if you get down and get to talking with kids about, you know, how (unintelligible) most of the time the kid was ignored by his parents, and he had to fend for himself. And then, when the kid got into a jam, the parents weren't concerned too much with the jam that he was in. What they were concerned with is the embarrassment to them. Embarrassment in front of their neighbors. Embarrassment to their kin. They needed to be embarrassed in some cases. I know of one case that comes to mind real quick.

We had been having a lot of fires off of Nineteenth Street, where now is located the (unintelligible) area, at Nineteenth and San Jacinto. It was a street in those days, and this little youngster was at the service station there, that Exxon service station at the Northwest corner of Speedway and Nineteenth Street. Speedway doesn't exist there any longer. This little fellow would go in there and get him a quart bottle of gasoline, and he'd go to the "little campus" over there and get a nickel's worth of matches, a box of matches. And he'd go drop the gasoline in there and set it on fire. The firemen come out and just rushing like everything and start putting out the fire. Well, that went on for some time, and the arson investigators and I and a couple of

other guys got together, and we caught the youngster. It was a fourteen or fifteen-year-old kid, and he was going to class at University Junior High School, which was a teaching complex at the University of Texas.

End Tape 1, begin Tape 2

Owens: This is Kerry Owens interviewing Captain Swinney again. To explain what happened, side two of my previous tape, was, somehow side two wasn't any good. The tape gets less and less intelligible; therefore, Captain Swinney has agreed to do side two of the tape again. So, we're going to pick up at approximately 580 on the counter where he is talking about the boy that was the arsonist, and we are going to more or less recount what we discussed. I am going to go ahead and let Captain Swinney continue with what we were talking about at that point.

Swinney: I will go over this last paragraph, which is, it was a fourteen or fifteen-year-old kid. He was going to class at University Junior High School, which was a teaching complex at the University of Texas in those days. Well, we captured this young feller, setting the fires and everything. We got him to the station and were interviewing him, and it appears that the young lad never had any counseling with his parents, or his parents weren't taking care of him. They were more interested in their nineteen-year-old, which was also a University of Texas student who was going to graduate at the age of nineteen from the university. The young boy that we had captured apparently knew how to get to school and take some of his courses at school and go directly home, but once he got home, well, his parents would lock him in his bedroom, and there he would remain until the next day when he would go to school again. They'd take him to school and drop him off. So, as a diversion, when he'd get out of school, he'd buy himself some matches and got him a little can of gasoline, and he'd set fire to the little campus in the high, grassy areas, and that's what caused the firemen to come out. We were able to capture him, finally. So, I asked him during the interview, "If you had your wishes and could do anything you wished, what would you like to do?" What he said he'd like to do was to saturate an automobile with gasoline and then make him a trailer of this gasoline up the street, which would be uphill, you'd be going west on Nineteenth. And he said that he'd like to wait until the man that owned the car came and sat in the car and then set fire to this gasoline and watch the trailer of fire go up to him and set this man on fire. He said he'd like to see the guy's face when the fire engulfed him. Well, we thought this was a little bizarre, so we took him out to Travis County Probation Department. Those people didn't believe his story for a long time because they had him over there for a week or so. But, that's one of the things, just some of the things we run into down there. It's weird.

Owens: You never heard anything about him, the child, again?

Swinney: No, we didn't. We never did. We didn't do any follow-up on it because it was in the hands of the judge, and that was J. Harris Gardner in those days, and usually what would happen

is that he would call the parents in, and then he would get help for not only the parents but the child too because he said it was a family situation, it wasn't just the child. The family had to be involved with it also, and I think Judge Gardner was quite smart on that, a very smart person for those days.

Owens: Are there any judges in particular that you had, the police department had a real problem with in the past, or by and large do you think they, most of them were cooperative and fair?

Swinney: Oh yeah, I don't know of anyone that was crooked. Let me put it that way. Every one of them was fair. The ones that come to mind real quick was J. Harris Gardner because he was the juvenile court judge, also district court judge, but the juvenile people were under his jurisdiction, and he was strict, but he was fair, but he was fair toward the child. The child came first, as it should be. But he wasn't lenient. I wouldn't say he was lenient at all.

Owens: About what time was that? I don't remember that name.

Swinney: It was back in 1955.

Owens: Was it? Yeah, well, that was it. That was a few years, then, before I moved to Austin.

Swinney: Yeah, about '54, '55, '56, in those days. Listen, the Travis County Juvenile Home is named the Gardner Center, that's where it got its name, J. Harris Gardner, yes.

Owens: Oh, I see. Let's see, checking my list here, we, I don't know how we got into this from the arsonist, but—

(Interrupted by visitors to Captain Swinney's office)

Owens: Okay, we're back again. Let me make sure it's working correctly. Okay. We're in good shape. Captain Swinney, we talked before on the tape that didn't come out about the uniforms and the clothes that y'all wore when you first started with the police department.

Swinney: Yeah, okay.

Owens: And the raincoat, I thought, was particularly interesting.

Swinney: Yeah, we had a, when we first came to work, we had to buy our own clothes with the exception of the cap badge and the breast badge. That was the only thing that was furnished by the city. And our clothes could be purchased one of two places at either Penney's on Congress Avenue, in the 500 block, or right around the corner in the 100 block of East Sixth Street, Joseph's Man's Shop. They both had identical clothes. The shirts and the trousers were 100% wool, navy blue, dark navy blue. Long-sleeve shirts, a real tie, a "tie" tie, not a clip-on tie, and a wool cap. You know, a regular police officer's hat, but it was dark blue. And you tried to wear these every day. Well, you did, but my wife had to, I had to, in summertime I had to undress out

in the garage. I had another change of clothes out there. It was powerful. Wool gets hot in the summertime, August around here. Then we changed to a grey shirt, a cotton shirt, and then that shirt was changed, basically it was grey with the exception of the pocket flap and the epaulettes, they were blue, and then for a while the captains and higher ranks had white shirts for maybe four or five months, and that was it. That was [a] very short-lived shirt. And then we went to the light blue shirt, and then we had a stripe on the trouser leg. And then here, just recently, we changed to the uniform we are presently wearing, went back to the dark navy blue or black with a red piping on the trousers. When we came to work in '48, there wasn't any piping at all on the trousers. It was more of a police trouser. Now, it's like U.S. Marine Corps or something, you know.

Owens: Was that real, did y'all have air conditioning in the police building?

Swinney: No, we had no air conditioning. Yeah, we had air conditioning in the police building, but the police department at that time, in '48, was also in city hall. The police department was on third floor of city hall. And we didn't move into the police building at Seventh [Street] and East Avenue until '53, and then we just moved into this building just three years ago, I think it's about '83. And we'd been in the same location since '53. Uniforms change, automobiles change. In '48, we never had air conditioners. Never had heaters. I know one time, my riding partner was Carl Petri, and it was the wintertime, we had no heater in the car. It was a '48 model Ford. So, to keep the ice off the windshield, we stopped at Smother's Grocery Store in the 500 block of East Sixth [Street] on the south side, and bought a ten cent candle, a wax candle, cut it in half, and we melted a little bit of the candle and put in on the dashboard and lit it, lit both candles, and this would keep the ice off the windshields. Otherwise you had to roll the windows down and take the bitter cold. Unfortunately, the flame touched the windshield and shattered the windshield, so we had to explain that to Captain Blackman the next day, what we were doing with candles on the dashboard. Broke the windshield. There was a little old lady in the 100 block of Red River, and she flew the American flag on the front of her house. It was an old rock house, and she would, she was a little eccentric, but she was a fine person. And we helped her as much as we could. And one day she found out that the police cars did not have heaters, so she arranged to have four police cars outfitted with heaters at the Ford house. So she notified us, and it was okayed through the police department. So, we took the cars down, and she paid for the heaters being installed, not the city, but she did.

Owens: Well, who got the four police cars with the heaters, besides the chief?

Swinney: Well, that's all we had. Well, that's all we had was the four police cars in patrol.

Owens: Oh, that was it?

Swinney: Yeah, that was it.

Owens: Oh, that's right.

Swinney: Yeah, that was it. I'm talking about uniformed cars. I'm not talking about detective cars. I think there were three or four detective cars. I wasn't in the detective bureau at that time, so I don't know. I don't recall how many cars were in there. I wasn't assigned over there. But there were four police cars, one assigned north, south, east and west, and we had one that was central, that was 87, and 87, ah, took nothing but collision calls.

Owens: About the raincoat. Tell me a little bit about the raincoat.

Swinney: Okay, the raincoat. The raincoat is a huge thing, and it's; I guess it was made by Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company because it was sort of a khaki-colored cloth interior, okay, and solid black rubber on the outside and heavy. I think that thing must weigh fifteen or twenty pounds. I gave one to Lieutenant Lloyd Polk who is starting a museum of old artifacts of that nature. And he has it now. I also gave him a cap, a white shirt, a jacket, and this jacket is really something, and I, and, let's see, Chief Miles ordered these jackets, I guess in about '68 or '69, along in that area. And they were \$165 then, and they had two, I guess about three-quarter-inch gold stripes on each sleeve, similar to a Navy uniform, and then it had gold epaulettes on it. I thought Lloyd might need that, so he has that now. On consignment.

Owens: On consignment.

Swinney: On consignment, not for lease or sell.

Owens: Right. Let's see, I think we talked, ah, that led into what did your women officers wear, and then I realized that there were no women officers to my knowledge until, let's see, around '70-something.

Swinney: Well, you're talking about uniformed police officers.

Owens: Yes, right.

Swinney: Okay, well, when I came to work there was a Mrs. Ammon that worked at the depot, the old railroad depot, not at Mopac but at Southern Pacific, which would be over on the east side of Congress Avenue at Third Street, and Mrs. Ammon's, ah, job was the to meet each and every train that came through town, if there was any information that anyone needed, she gave them that information. Now, she worked for the city, but I don't think she was a police woman. I never saw her wear a badge or gun or anything like that, and she never wore a uniform, but she had a desk and an office at the depot, and she worked for the city. Maybe something, I just don't know what her, what her title was or anything, but I know that when Mrs. Ammon called for assistance, she got it. Then, the next lady that came on as a police officer, I can't recall her name, but then the lady after her was Mrs. Adele Boyko. I worked with her for many years, and, when I was working for juvenile, I worked with her for five years, and even when we came to the new

building in '53, she was working for Lieutenant Joe Perry all this time. And she never wore a uniform. Boss Thorp was Chief of Police at that time, and he hired her, and she worked directly with the juveniles. But she had one hell of a lot of common sense. She fell right into the job. She knew exactly what to do. Her husband, Bill Boyko retired out of the U.S. Air Force, and he just retired recently from Chief of Security for Austin Independent School District. Then we didn't get into uniformed women in the police department until around '70, I guess, along in there, so some worked out, some didn't, just like men, some work out and some don't. Some people, they didn't know what police work was until they get into it, and then they find out that's not what they want to do.

Owens: Yeah, why do you think women didn't get into police work prior to that?

Swinney: I think it was the role. Just like everyone anywhere else. Women just didn't take on a man's-type job. It's like there are not too many of them working behind backhoes, you know, or in the carpentry business, or in masonry work, or in jobs that are just not suited for them. And one the opposite side, there's not too many men that are nurses, either.

Owens: Yeah, yeah, well, what, how do you feel about women's role in police work?

Swinney: I think there's a place for them. I don't in particular think the job is equal. Because there's too many reasons behind it. One case would be, when a police woman gets pregnant, she's gone from the time that she finds out that she's pregnant she's taken out of the uniform and placed into a non-hazardous-type position, sort of like a creampuff-type job, while her counterpart that graduated from the same school that she did, he's still out battling in the street. And then, after she has her baby, then she's gone for another three additional months until she can get back on her feet and come back to the job. In theory, it could happen that a police woman could get, could become pregnant and have a child and stay in a cushy job, and she could stay there until she made lieutenant and captain and never be on the street, never be a street cop, never be a street cop.

Owens: Yeah, do you think women shouldn't be on the street, do you think that that's too dangerous?

Swinney: In some areas of town, sure, there's no doubt about it. Unless they're real smart and large enough to take care of themselves and street-smart enough to take care of themselves. If you put a person, a female person, in an area and she wasn't suited for that area, you'd be derelict in your job for doing her that way. You could get her hurt or get her killed real quick, and as supervisors, their supervisors know this, and they're not going to put any person anywhere, male or female, in a position where they can get hurt. That's why we move people around because if you find when a person is real weak in one area, you sure don't want to leave him there. Because you're not doing anything but jeopardizing himself and yourself and the department.

Owens: Ah, let's see, I'm checking my notes here. Okay. Lawsuits seem to be so prevalent now, and I know that the police department has had some lawsuits filed against them recently from different groups for discrimination. Is that something that is recent, do you think that is, obviously a trend, no matter what business you are in.

Swinney: I don't know of any on discrimination. I don't know of any lawsuits on discrimination.

Owens: Well, I, maybe I didn't phrase that exactly. For instance, the, oh the lawsuit recently, the gentleman who was killed by suffocation, I don't even remember his name.

Swinney: Okay, I know what case you are talking about.

Owens: Those types of lawsuits. It just seems that the police department and every other type of business is. People are filing more lawsuits.

Swinney: Oh sure, yeah. A lot of these lawsuits are not filed by the people because they thought they might have had a lawsuit. A lot of these lawsuits are filed because the attorneys are looking for jobs, like, there was, on television here on, it was *60 Minutes*, I think, one of those a while back, they were interviewing an attorney in California, and he said as far back as ten years ago, there was one attorney for about every five hundred people, and now there's about one attorney for every thirty people. So, there's two ways their own lawsuits. They're either having lawyers, we're talking about, they're even having the lawyers now suing other lawyers who failed in a lawsuit, so. It's kind of strange.

Owens: So you, it's just, it's just the trend.

Swinney: Yeah.

Owens: We talked about education, how the educational requirements have changed. Have they changed a great deal?

Swinney: Oh yeah, sure. In Boss Thorp's day, prior to giving an examination for making the next higher grade, I think we went on more or less how well you did on the street.

[Tape concluded due to mechanical failure]

End of interview