

HISTORY OF THE
U. S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Interview between:

John H. Guill, Retired Regional Assistant
Commissioner, Region IX

and

Robert G. Porter
Sun City, Arizona

March 1, 1978

INTRODUCTION

This is a transcription of a taped interview, one of a series conducted by Robert G. Porter, who retired from the U. S. Food and Drug Administration in 1977.

The interviews were held with retired F.D.A. employees whose recollections may serve to enrich the written record. It is hoped that these narratives of things past will serve as source material for present and future researchers; that the stories of important accomplishments, interesting events, and distinguished leaders will find a place in training and orientation of new employees, and may be useful to enhance the morale of the organization; and finally, that they will be of value to Dr. James Harvey Young in the writing of the history of the Food and Drug Administration.

The tapes and transcriptions will become a part of the collection of the National Library of Medicine and copies of the transcriptions will be placed in the Library of Emory University.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

TAPE INDEX SHEET

CASSETTE NUMBER(S) 1

GENERAL TOPIC OF INTERVIEW: History of the Food & Drug Administration

DATE: 3/1/78 PLACE: Sun City, Arizona LENGTH: 44 Min.

INTERVIEWEE

INTERVIEWER

NAME: John H. Guill

NAME: Robert G. Porter

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

ADDRESS: U.S. Food & Drug Administration
Denver, Colorado

FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM 1939 TO 1973 RETIRED? Yes

TITLE: Regional Assistant Commissioner, Region IX
(If retired, title of last FDA position)

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P. -This is a recording of a conversation between Robert G. Porter of the Food and Drug Administration and John H. Guill. The interview is taped in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in John's Home. The date is March 1, 1978. John, I'm going to ask that you start this out by having you give us a little sketch of your career so that persons listening to this tape will know who you are and then I invite you to discuss at length any subject that comes to your mind that you think would be of interest to a person who is writing the history of the Food and Drug Administration or who really wants to know things that might not appear in written materials about the Food and Drug Administration. So with that I'll ask you to tell us who you are.

G. -I started as an inspector with the Food and Drug Administration coming from an education in entomology. I began in Baltimore, was transferred as a resident inspector to Charleston, West Virginia, then to New York in a minor administrative post, then back to Baltimore as Chief Inspector for five years, then to Minneapolis for five years as Chief Inspector, and 18 months in St. Louis as Chief Inspector. In 1958 I was transferred to Chicago as Chief of the District where I met Mr. Porter.

P. -How well I remember.

G. - Then after eight very pleasant years in Chicago, I was transferred to San Francisco in the new position that Dr. Goddard had engineered. The position was abolished a year later and I don't know what to say about that because that was the end of my intense interest in FDA's fate.

P. - You mean you changed your attitude?

G. - I changed my attitude! I don't like to sound sour grapes, but loyalty counts for naught. It just--oh my family problems got on me and I just lost interest--well, I was out of the mainstream. I was into this PHS ramification of Food and Drug. Wonderful people to work with, and they tried hard and their method was different; but in the long run, probably was equally effective in getting correction of protecting the public.

P. - But it was not what you had intended to....

G. - Well, it was fine to me where you find somebody violating the law you get out the club and coax him around a little bit and get ready to put a good sized knot on him if he doesn't straighten up. Here you get states to do it. You pull their certifications so they can't operate interstate if they don't meet the requirements and also you have infinite patience in assisting and encouraging them to meet the requirements.

Well, I began work with Food and Drug as an inspector in Baltimore. I had taken the Civil Service test on

my 22nd birthday in April of '39 and was told by others taking the test that we would be lucky to hear from it for two years. One evening in September my father told me that he had gotten a call from a Mr. George Larrick offering him a job as a Food and Drug inspector, and was I interested because he felt it was surely for me--the salary was only \$2,000 and he was making many times that! So, if I was interested I had an appointment some time that week to be interviewed. I went to the interview and obviously passed. Mr. Larrick was at that time Chief Inspector for the Administration.

P. - Did he interview you?

G. - Yes.

P. - Oh, did he.

G. - During the interview he said, "all right, you're an inspector. I'm a butter dealer. I want you to go out the door and come in and collect a sample of butter from me." Well, not having any idea how we took a sample of butter unless it were in one pound, I went out and in the door and said, "Good morning or good afternoon as the case may be. Sir, I am a Food and Drug inspector. I want to collect a sample of butter that you have." And Mr. Larrick said, "You're going to make holes in my tubs of butter?" Well, I never knew that butter came in tubs! So I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Well, what are we going to do with those holes?" I said, "You can point to those holes proudly and say to anyone who asks 'The Food and Drug Administration has examined this butter and it passed--what's left has passed.'" Apparently, that made a good impression because I did get the job. That same afternoon I was introduced to an elderly gentleman named Frank Wallard who was the Chief of the Baltimore Station, visiting in Washington at the moment.

On October 2, 1969, I reported for duty in Baltimore.

P. - 1939.

G. - 1939. What did I say?

P. - You said 1969.

G. - Well, I only backed up ten years! I'm getting senile!

P. - I'm trying to keep the record straight!

G. - Allright -- 1939. When I arrived and began to fill out all the papers and forms and so forth, there were no inspectors in the inspectors' room. About every twenty minutes Mr. Wallard would come in with a pamphlet, a book or something on the Food and Drug Administration and suggest that I read it and return it to him. By the end of the day I had quite an accumulation, more than a briefcase could hold! I set about to dutifully reading and learning as much as I could of this organization. Sometime during that week,

about the second or third day, in the early afternoon Mr. Wallard came in to see me and said "you're an inspector and I have an assignment for you." There was a salesman in one of the department stores selling El Alguinaldo Cuban Honey. Mr. Wallard told me to go listen to what the man said and see what the situation was. And, I did so. He was a regular spieler telling us that the El Alguinaldo Cuban Honey when diluted like it was water and gargled would cure a sore throat, possibly made claims for strep throat. Then he rakes in all kinds of blatant medical claims. After the jars had been sold, offered for sale to the assembly, I stepped up to the salesman and identified myself and obtained copies of the leaflets and bought a bottle of the honey. I sought to get the records on the honey, but he said that he carried it in his car from place to place and I wasn't quite advanced enough to know how to handle that situation. However, I told him that I believed he was making excessive claims for his product and that he was apt to get into trouble. He wanted to know whom he could talk to about this who was knowledgeable, and I said well don't come down to my office here in Baltimore because the boss seems to be a bit of a "fuddy duddy". I would suggest you go to Washington and see Mr. George Larrick, because he seems to know what's going on. The interview with the salesman was terminated more or less on that note,

and I returned to the office. By Friday of that week, I was before Mr. Wallard, and he was sternly admonishing me about my performance with the salesman of the honey. He had a letter in hand from Mr. Larrick which stated that the field personnel should not refer people to headquarter's personnel specifically because when they arrive, that person that they sought might be out and they would feel they were getting second best with any substitute.

After I had worked as an inspector in Baltimore District for several years I began to drift into sanitation aspects of food inspection. On one occasion I inspected the Wood's Coffee Company in Roanoke, Virginia. I found on the second floor that the dirty burlap bags of coffee were encrusted with mouse pellets and that the bags were dragged across the floor and dumped into a hole in the floor over the coffee roaster. I felt that this was most insanitary even though the pellets were roasted with the coffee and undoubtedly sterile! The manager invited me into the coffee tasting room. At that time I did not drink coffee and he wanted me to sample various blends of coffee. I declined. Later he wrote to Mr. Larrick: "What do the Food and Drug Administration mean by sending a person into his plant who knew nothing about coffee?" Mr. Larrick's reply was that while I might not be an expert, while Inspector

Guill might not be an expert in coffee tasting, he was too modest with respect to his expertise in sanitation.

P. - Tell me something about your reactions to Larrick. What kind of a man was he?

G. - I thought he was a very fine, sensitive, kindly person who had a strong sense of duty towards the public in protecting it to the full extent of the law Congress had given us.

P. - How did he deal with people, John?

G. - He was very tactful, seldom pugnacious or destructive. He tried to deal with people up and my impression was that he assembled a supportive team. It seemed to me that he tended to praise rather than criticize.

P. - Do you have any--were there any kind of subjects that he was really interested in doing any accomplishments and goals sort of that you know of that were maybe peculiar to him--I really don't know what I'm asking exactly. I'm just trying to find out did he just go along and do the things that came before him or was he pushing in some area of Food and Drug work?

G. - Well, it seemed to me that while he did cover the spectrum he tended to show more interest in the drug phases where I felt at that time, I know at that time, we were woefully weak. I would say he was probably instrumental in guiding the intensification of drug inspection work where we knew what we were doing and we were finding

significant violations rather than just comparing the formula vs. label.

P. - Don't you think--it would be my recollection--that he fostered a lot of training in drug work.

G. - He did.

P. - When he came in we had a few experts, but not very many and by the time he went out we had a lot of people who had pretty good fundamental training in drug work.

G. - I recall the first inspection drug training conference which happened in the late '40's. It was customary at the time for inspectors to put on skits at the evening conference meals, banquets.

P. - Was this for entertainment or was this...

G. - Well, entertainment and education. Alfred Barnard who was Res. Inspector in Washington and I was Chief Inspector in Baltimore. We were attending this conference and we decided to put on a skit concerning estrogens and built out of a barrel and a bunch of paper, tape, string, the back end of a mare which was balanced to lean against the wall. We brought it into the hotel banquet room and draped it until it was time for our skit. We also had enlisted Joe Milunas' aid as part of the skit. The mare had been painted a lovely chestnut brown and Inspector Milunas began his inspection of the production of estrogen. It started by lifting the horse's tail whereupon a stream of golden fluid poured into a bucket which Joe sampled with one

finger, tasting it and then we had him rigged with two balloons under his bosom and a carbon dioxide sparklet gas release which was suppose to fill the balloon. Unfortunately this was built in such a rush that we were unable to test it adequately. When Joe broke the sparklet, the cold expanding gas going through tubes running over his bare belly under his shirt gave him quite a shock and the baloons didn't fill up equally. One of them got real big and one looked like a fried egg. The sequel to all of this was we abandoned our materials in the hotel and Barnard reported to me that Mr. Larrick had called him and said "The manager of the hotel says for you to get that junk out of his office because they put the horse in his office and people are coming in and talking to the horse instead of him."

Now, I've got one here that I would like to mention about Dr. Dunbar.

P. - Okay, great.

G. - During the war many people were hired who had not taken the Civil Service exam as a pre-requisite to their positions so they did not have permanence. A group of people--Food and Drug people--from around the country was assembled to put together a proper civil service test for these people to pass and achieve permanence.

I was assigned to a group on site and there were about ten of us around a large table over in the basement of the South Building of Agriculture with pads and books and endeavoring to do the task of building a civil service examination. At one point our leadership was a local bacteriologist whom I had not met earlier before and I assumed that he knew all the personnel in the building and was well acquainted since he was assigned in Washington. I sat with my back to the window facing the door and at one point I noticed Dr. Dunbar, our then Commissioner, pause in the doorway. I nudged our fearless leader and he looked over to the door and then went back to his writing. A moment later Dr. Dunbar spoke to me and said "Guill, I don't know these people!" Thereupon introductions were made. It amazed me that people right there in headquarters didn't know their Commissioner where as I from afar did.

P. - I think in retrospect though that's easy to understand. The Commissioner gets around to the field and the field people really do have a better chance.

G. - Yes, it could be. They always had an assemblage when they came to a field station in the district, and we'd get the word on what was doing and what was hoped to be doing whereas I guess the Washington crowd was just too big and unwieldy in that day; and left it to the supervisors to inform the people.

P. - John, we're just about at the end of this tape. I'll get it turned over.

Okay, now we're on.

G. - The one person who stands out most in my mind and experience as Mr. Food and Drug is Alan Rayfield. In my opinion, he did more to build up inspectional expertise and reputation for accuracy and effective work. When Mr. Crawford became commissioner, I was present at an assemblage where he advised the field to prosecute the violators under any type of violation, Food and Drug law or otherwise, that we felt we could prove. He was also urging the field to shorten the time between the finding of a violation and the ultimate court action. During my tenure in West Virginia I had inspected two bakeries in Bluefield which were both insanitary. Alan Rayfield met me in Bluefield and inspected the bakeries with me after we had filed court action, prosecution, against both. One was endeavoring to clean up and the other was merely maintaining status quo. We went into court very shortly after the inspection and both bakeries were fined. Alan, however, discussed with the U.S. Attorney the application of an injunction against the laggand firm and between the two of them within a very few days had concocted an instrument that I recall being referred to as a de-novo injunction which was duly filed with the court and accepted by the defendants and public protection achieved very rapidly.

Unfortunately. We later found that this was an improper action in that it was brought in the name of the United States Attorney rather than in the name of the United States government as the Food and Drug law required.

P. - It seems like a minor difficulty.

G. - In 1941 Mr. Wallard's health began to fail and he ultimately passed away. Mr. McKay McKinnon, our Chief Inspector at Baltimore, was promoted to the Station Chief's job, and we were informed that Mr. Alan E. Rayfield would be coming down from New York to be our Chief Inspector. There was great consternation in the inspection ranks, as Mr. Rayfield had a reputation for instilling terror!

P. - Was he Chief Inspector somewhere else at that time?

G. - No, he was the reviewing officer in New York, reviewing inspection reports, critiqued them and handed them back for improved work, better information. He was an intense person, but I didn't see that he was such a holy terror when he arrived. I was about right. I felt supportive in that he appeared to want to improve the work of the inspectors. After I had gained more experience in the field work, I enjoyed very much working with him. The hours were long and arduous, but we made a very effective team in my opinion and I felt that I contributed somewhat to the effort. I felt that between us we improved photography, inspectional photography, and certainly improved sanitation inspections. The one fault to his effort was that he appeared to first

accuse someone, some minion of wrongdoing and make him defend himself rather than ask "Well, now, Joe, what happened?"

P. - Yes, I think that was his personal style.

G. - In the fall of 1959 when the cranberry contamination with aminotriazole was discovered, Chicago District undertook the sampling program which included the Wisconsin growing areas, harvesting areas, and lots in cold storage in Chicago, which would be shipped back to the cannery for packing. There was controversy over the accuracy of the method of analysis.

P. - Yes, I remember.

G. - However, in one lot taken to cold storage in Chicago, aminotriazole was identified and even though the packer or producer asserted that no aminotriazole had been used in the bogs, drained bogs--I believed that was supplied after the bog was drained--that particular lot was sampled ad infinitum and portions were being verified by headquarter's laboratory, and some other districts. But, the lot was ultimately seized because of the contamination.

The Department of Agriculture ultimately took over the cranberry program and was supposed to be testing each lot releasing those that showed no aminotriazole and paying the growers for any that were contaminated. In discussion with headquarter's people I felt that the interest in cranberries was very low and they were

quite willing to let the Department of Agriculture go on and handle the program, repayment and destruction of any lots that showed contamination.

As I recall, in the spring of 1960 we got word that 40 gondola car loads of cranberries were being shipped out of Wisconsin to a railroad dump in northern Indiana. Because of the low level of interest that I assumed on the part of headquarters in cranberries, I didn't report the matter directly to headquarters, but I did mention it to Mel Hosch, the regional director of HEW in Chicago, at the next staff meeting. Next, I got a hot phone call from my superiors in headquarters saying that Mr. Larrick did not like to learn of important events from the Secretary on a first hand basis.

P. - He got your report by way of Mel Hosch and the Secretary.

G. - Yes, he got his report through Mel Hosch and the Secretary.

Indiana was terribly upset because they hadn't cleared the matter with them on dumping this debris in their fair state. So, a belated lesson, Report it all.

P. - Thank you, John. This completes the tape.