

OH Vandiver 01A

Samuel Ernest Vandiver, Jr. Interviewed by Mel Steeley and Ted Fitzsimmons

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Side One

Steeley: I'm Mel Steeley, and this is Ted Fitzsimmons of the history department at West Georgia College. This is June 25, 1986. We're interviewing today former governor Ernest Vandiver as part of our project on Georgia's political heritage. Governor, did you or any of your family have any ties to rural life in Georgia?

Vandiver: Yes, in fact we didn't have any ties to urban Georgia. [Laughter] We came from a very small town in a rural county. My father's family originally came from New York. They were part of the Dutch who came over, and they came down the Atlantic seaboard down through Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and my great grandfather came from South Carolina into Georgia. He fought in the--one of my great grandfathers--fought in the Revolution in South Carolina in the Battle of Calkins, I believe it was, the battle, one of the battles that he was in. My other grandfather was a Bowers, William Bowers, who came to Franklin County prior to, or came to Georgia prior to, the Revolutionary War. He, in fact, was away fighting in the Revolutionary War when he was scheduled to have a child, and he was given furlough to come home and was captured by the Tories in northeast Georgia and was shot by the Tories while he was home on furlough. His grave today is in Elbert County, and he was my great grandfather five times back, so our roots are pretty deep in northeast Georgia. We've been here a long time.

Steeley: Sounds like it. What was your early life like with your parents and your

grandparents? Could you tell us a little bit about your immediate family and what it was like to be a kid in those days?

Vandiver: Yes, I was born in Canon, Georgia, C-a-n-o-n, which is a very small town, about five hundred people. My mother had been married previously. Her husband had died, and my father taught school, and finally came back to Franklin County from teaching over the state, and settled down and met my mother. They were married in 1960, and we lived--I was born in Canon--and we lived in Canon until I was four years old, and then we moved to Lavonia, which is where my father's business was, and built a home there. And from that time on I've lived in Lavonia except for the time that I had to live in Atlanta.

Steeley: What year was it when you moved to Lavonia? Do you remember?

Vandiver: 1922.

Steeley: '22?

Vandiver: Uh-huh.

Steeley: Okay. Well, did your grandparents live close by there?

Vandiver: Yes, my grandfather lived in what was known as the Red Hill section of Franklin County, and my great grandfather lived there, and they were farmers and had had the struggle after the War Between the States. They both were Confederate veterans, and they were raised in that section of Franklin County, and my father was born in what is known as the Red Hill section of Franklin County, and so we've been there a long time.

Steeley: They were farming people, then?

Vandiver: Yes, they were.

Steeley: On both sides of the family. But your dad got into the mercantile business.

Vandiver: No, my father was--he was a farmer; he was a schoolteacher; he was an

insurance salesman. He was in the seed business; he sold seeds; we had gins, farms. He sold cottonseed all over the South.

Steeley: Um-hmm. Farm in Lavonia?

Vandiver: Quite active, yes.

Steeley: Very good.

Vandiver: He had about thirty farms that he at that time had. It was tenant farming, and he was quite an extensive farmer.

Steeley: What was his full name, sir?

Vandiver: The same as mine: Samuel Ernest Vandiver [Sr.]. I was Junior, and my son is the Third. He was named after my father.

Steeley: Okay. What was your social life like during these early years?

Vandiver: Well, it was very similar to any small town. I attended grammar school and high school in Lavonia. It was a local school. We had a football team; I played football. We had a basketball team. I played basketball, played tennis. When I was about ten years old, I went to camp up in the north Georgia mountains, Camp Dixie, and was up there for seven summers of my early life, where I played tennis and baseball and athletic activities. By the way, after I got in politics, I found out that Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall attended that same camp up in northeast Georgia. We discussed it. He was an honor camper at that camp in about the early thirties, and I was an honor camper about 1935. So we had something in common.

Steeley: He was just a little ahead of you.

Vandiver: He was a little ahead of me.

Steeley: Was that a private camp?

Vandiver: Yes, it was a private camp, boys' camp.

Steeley: Okay. How did the church figure into your life in these early days? Was that a center of social activity as well as religious?

Vandiver: Yes, the church was certainly a center of activity. I have attended the same church, same building, since I moved to Lavonia. That's been sixty-four years now, and I joined that church when I was about thirteen years old.

Steeley: Which church is that?

Vandiver: First Baptist Church.

Steeley: First Baptist. That's in Lavonia.

Vandiver: And I have been a member since that time. The BYPU [Baptist Young People's Union?], the activities that center around a rural town church, I was active in all of those.

Steeley: Do you remember much about fiery evangelists coming through?

Vandiver: I heard my father talk about them. I don't recall any fiery evangelists coming to that particular church. I heard my father talk about [William A.] Billy Sunday, who I think was a native of Cartersville, and he was a great admirer of Billy Sunday. I've heard him talk about him many times. Talking about my grandfather, I had one grandfather that I knew who was a Confederate veteran. He ran away from home when he was thirteen years old and joined the Confederate Army. And his father was fighting, and he left home, hoping to join his father. However, he never saw him during the war. But he was wounded in action in the Confederate Army, and I used to sit on my grandfather's knee and ask him, ask him if he ever killed a Yankee. And . . .

Steeley: What did he say?

Vandiver: He told me that he had shot at them, and he had seen them fall, but he

hoped he never killed one.

Steeley: [Laughter] He was a good Baptist, too, huh?

Vandiver: He was a Baptist. In fact, all of my Vandiver family have been Baptists. A great number of them are Baptist ministers.

Steeley: When you were going to school in those days, did you find that there were any teachers that had an important influence on your life, or any of the subjects were particularly impressive to you?

Vandiver: Yes, I had a teacher in the seventh grade that had a profound influence on me. She was one of the greatest people I have ever known. She was Mrs. [Nannie Sue Brooks] Maret. Maybe you know D. W. [David William] Brooks?

Steeley: Oh, yes.

Vandiver: She was a sister of D. W. Brooks.

Steeley: Okay.

Vandiver: And was from Royston, Georgia, and she was one of the great teachers that I had. I had another teacher in high school, who was my coach and also my English teacher, who had a great influence on me. I, when I left high school, when I graduated from high school, my family felt like that I was not quite ready for the University of Georgia. And so they sent me to preparatory school. I went to Darlington in Rome and spent a year at Darlington after I graduated from high school. And I had a teacher there who had a great influence on me. He taught me history. His name was Parker, Roland B. Parker, who later became registrar at the University of North Carolina. But he was one of the great teachers I had. I think probably his teaching motivated me toward politics more than I would have been motivated had I not had him as a teacher.

Steeley: Was it just the interest, or the love of government, or it was just exciting to you, or what? What was there about it that got you into politics?

Vandiver: Well, my father was very interested in politics, and I do recall going to political meetings with him. He became very interested when Gene [Eugene] Talmadgewas running for commissioner of agriculture. He was running against a man by the name of J.J. [John Judson] Brown who lived in Elberton, Georgia. And they had a joint debate. They debated in Elberton and then they went back to Telfair County, MacRae, and debated there. My father went to the first debate and he was so impressed by Gene Talmadge that he drove all the way to Telfair County to see and hear the other debate between J.J. Brown and Gene Talmadge. From that time on he supported Gene Talmadge very vigorously, and I was growing up during those years, and, of course, listened and heard a lot about politics.

Steeley: Did you go to any of the big Talmadge rallies?

Vandiver: Yes, I did. I went with him.

Steeley: What was a rally like?

Vandiver: Oh, back in those days it was tremendously different from what it is now. People are so interested in sports or television or something else that it's hard to get them to go to a political rally, but there wasn't a lot of entertainment back in those days, and a political rally was entertainment for a lot of people. And then usually there was a free barbecue that they could enjoy. Gene Talmadge was a master politician and a great speaker. He could entertain a crowd like no man I've ever heard, including Herman [Eugene Talmadge], and Herman's a good speaker. But I went with my father to many of the rallies. Herman and I sort of grew up together. He was a little bit older than I was, but during some of those campaigns I'd go down and talk with Herman. He was helping to manage his father's

campaign. And I would travel around and put up signs all over northeast Georgia for Gene Talmadge. Herman and I first got to know each other back when we were boys about that age and became friends. My father was appointed to Talmadge's staff when he was first elected and served on his staff during the whole time, and then in 1940, when he was elected for the third time, my mother had just died, and Governor Talmadge thought it would help my father to get him away from home. So he appointed him to the highway board, and he served on the state highway board from 1940 to '42, I believe, under Governor Talmadge. I've heard my mother and father both talk about going to the mansion to some of the parties that they had. Course, I was a little young for that, but I sort of grew up with the Talmadges. I made my first political speech in 1936, when Talmadge was running against Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.]. He spoke in Royston, Georgia, and they had me on the program, and I made a speech. There must have been thirty or forty thousand people there. I was pretty frightened, of course, but got through it. And . . .

Steeley: You were supporting Talmadge, I assume.

Vandiver: I was supporting Talmadge, and my wife, who as you know is a Russell, she had an aunt that never quite forgave me. [Laughter] She wondered why Betty [Mrs. Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver] was marrying a Talmadge man.

Steeley: Well, maybe there was some reason. You must have charmed her. Who were your childhood heroes? Who did you look to as heroes? Did you ever know about Tom [Thomas Edward] Watson, for instance?

Vandiver: Yes, I heard my father talk about Tom Watson, and I heard other people talk about Tom Watson. He was quite a populist and had considerable strength in the rural area where I was. I don't think he was ever elected to any office except United States Senate,

and he was elected shortly before he died. But he was a factor in politics. He had a group of people that were strong for his beliefs, and he had a considerable influence in my area. I heard them talk about him. I don't know that my father supported Tom Watson, but I've heard him talk about him.

Steeley: He wouldn't have been one of your personal heroes or anything.

Vandiver: No, no. I was a little young to get involved in politics at that time. I think he died when I was just a kid.

Steeley: You were just a little boy when he died.

Vandiver: Yeah, but I remember some people from my time going to Tom Watson's funeral in Thompson. A funny thing happened to me when I was campaigning for governor. There was a sheriff in McDuffie County at Thompson named Len Norris. And Len and I were great friends, and I didn't know exactly what Len's association was with Tom Watson. He was a great deal older than I was and knew Tom Watson very well. But anyway, I made a speech in Thompson during my campaign and I praised Tom Watson during this speech, and when I got through Len said, "Well, I enjoyed that speech," but said, "I didn't care much for what you said about Tom Watson." Said, "I knew him too well." [Laughter] He didn't have as much influence in his own hometown, I don't think, as he had in other areas.

Steeley: Who were your heroes? Did you have anybody in particular?

Vandiver: Yes, I think Senator Russell was probably my first hero. I remember my father carried me to a political speech when he was running for governor over--in a little area known as Cromer's Mill in Franklin County, and I heard him speak. And I was greatly impressed by him, and he was a political hero of mine and my family's. My father supported Russell in every race that he ran except when he ran against Talmadge, and my mother was

an ardent supporter of Russell, of Dick Russell.

Senator Russell's father [Richard Brevard Russell, Sr.] was judge of the Superior Court in Franklin County where we lived, and, in fact, he was holding court in Franklin County when Dick Russell was born, and the story is that he got in his buggy--this was before they had automobiles--he got in his buggy and I think he had some spirits hidden away somewhere in his buggy, and he consumed considerable spirits on his way back to Winder to celebrate the birth of his son. And he had a shotgun, which he carried for protection, and they said he fired that shotgun all the way from Carnesville, Georgia, back to Winder to celebrate the birth of his son. He had three daughters first, and, of course, he wanted a son, and his first son was named for him. And then later he had a lot of other sons. In fact, we just had a reunion, and several of his sons are still living. In fact, Fielding [Dillard] Russell, whom you may have known, he was head of the Department of English down at Statesboro at Georgia Southern. He was one of his brothers. He was there, and Walter [Brown] Russell is still living. He's eighty-three now. But Judge [Richard Brevard] Russell [Sr.] had fifteen children, and thirteen of those children lived to a fairly ripe age.

Steeley: All by the same woman?

Vandiver: Yes, all of those were by the same woman. He was married twice, but he didn't have any children by his first wife. But Ina Dillard--she was a Dillard--from near Athens, and all of the fifteen children were by the same wife.

Steeley: So, Senator Russell, then, had twelve living brothers and sisters.

Vandiver: Yes, he did.

Steeley: Okay.

Fitzsimmons: Looking more, Governor, to the, perhaps, the national scene, do you

have any memory of any sort of the stock market crash of 1929?

Vandiver: Rather vague. I remember more about the droughts that we had because my family was in the farming business. We weren't in the stock market. [Laughter] We didn't know much about the stock market, but I do remember the crash, and I do remember the stories about people jumping out of buildings and windows and that sort of thing. This was, I believe, it was in October of 1929.

Fitzsimmons: That's right.

Vandiver: And I remember the campaign for the presidency that was prior to that when Herbert [Clark] Hoover was elected. I remember Al [Alfred E.] Smith, he was the governor of New York, and some of the jokes that they were telling back in those days. I remember hearing them in school. One particular--I was talking to my wife coming over here about it--you know, Al Smith was in favor of repealing Prohibition, and Herbert Hoover was strenuously opposed to it. And one of the stories that we heard back in those days was that a lady had twins, and she named one of them Herbert Hoover and the other one Al Smith, and she could always tell which one was Al Smith because he was wet. [Laughter]

Fitzsimmons: That was a factor certainly, I'm sure, in rural Georgia, you're mentioning the national . . .

Vandiver: Catholicism was a factor, too, and . . .

Fitzsimmons: Was that really, you think, a strong factor?

Vandiver: Oh, there's no doubt about it.

Fitzsimmons: Yeah.

Vandiver: Although Georgia went for Al Smith, it was by a very meager vote.

Steeley: With Baptists, Catholicism remained a factor. I know in 1960 my dad voted

Republican for the first time in his life 'cause [John F.] Kennedy was a Catholic.

Vandiver: It was a factor particularly in Georgia in 1928, during that campaign. Senator Russell was Speaker of the House, I believe, at that time, and he supported Al Smith because he was a Democrat. But it was a very close race, and Herbert Hoover almost carried Georgia. I do remember, though, when I was working with Senator Russell, when he was contesting for the Democratic nomination back in 1952, and we were in Massachusetts and were speaking to the delegates. He was speaking to the delegates to the convention in Massachusetts. He reminded them that he had supported Al Smith back in 1928, and they almost ate him up. They just couldn't believe a man from the South would support Al Smith during those days. Although he didn't carry Massachusetts he had, in the convention he had a lot of good friends because he had supported Al Smith.

Fitzsimmons: You mentioned the election of '28. How about '32?

Vandiver: I remember that very well because Talmadge was governor at that time, and my father was on the governor's staff. And when [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt was elected, we just felt like he was the savior. And the Talmadge administration had a special train that went from Atlanta to Washington. My mother and father went to Washington to the inauguration in 1932. I stayed at home and listened to it. Back in those days the inauguration was in March instead of January. I remember it was very cold, and I was out in the weather a good bit, probably more than if my family had been at home, and when they got home, I had a bad case of the flu. And I remember my mother regretting that she was away from me during that period of time.

Fitzsimmons: Did the fact that Talmadge so bitterly resented some of Roosevelt's New Deal programs, did that put any sort of strain or stress on your father's loyalties?

Vandiver: Well, my father was such an ardent supporter of Talmadge that he certainly agreed with Talmadge, I think, on his feelings about the presidency. I recall, I had an uncle, you know Roosevelt came, brought the alphabet programs, the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps], the RFC [Reconstruction Finance Corporation], and all of that. They called them alphabet programs. And one of them was where you set aside a certain part of your farm and didn't plant cotton or corn, and I had an uncle who stated that he would not let anybody tell him what to do with his land. He would plant what he wanted to, when he wanted to, and my father, although he was a little more cooperative than that, he was not at all in favor of most of these programs. However, what the president did was, as it turned out, what President Roosevelt did, was the savior of the South, really.

Fitzsimmons: I think a great many southerners had these really sort of divided feelings, with state and national politics being really in a sense two different ball games.

Vandiver: That's right. I recall very well the campaign in 1938, when Roosevelt came to Georgia to receive a doctorate from the University of Georgia and left Athens and went to Barnesville, Georgia. And . . .

Steeley: At the buggy works down there.

Vandiver: That's right, and endorsed [Lawrence] Camp for the United States Senate against Walter [Franklin] George. And I remember very well that Senator George stood up after his speech and said, "Mr. President, I accept the challenge." And, of course, he won by a tremendous majority even though the president was opposed to him.

Fitzsimmons: Well, I expect Georgians never have wanted outsiders, even though they admire them a great deal, to tell them how to vote.

Vandiver: No, they haven't. They resent that very vigorously. I have seen that

happen time and time again.

Fitzsimmons: Was the New Deal, were any of the New Deal programs of direct benefit to your family? You mentioned your uncle.

Vandiver: Well, I think most of them were. We were not in favor of them at the time, but, looking back on it, certainly the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps, which built beautiful parks still in existence over the state. The farm programs that he had were of great benefit to my family because they were in the farming business, and it helped them. However, the politics and the business were two different things.

Fitzsimmons: Sure, yeah. Tell us a little bit about your association with the Joseph D. [Dillard] Quillian firm in Winder.

Vandiver: Yes, when my father was on the state highway board, he and Joe Quillian were very great friends. They got to know each other very well. At that time I was in law school, and he had told my father that when I got through law school that he would like for me to come, and he'd like to talk with him about practicing with him. Well, the war came along about that time in 1941, and nobody could practice law at that time. You were too busy off in the service. So until after the war, of course, I didn't practice law. And I came back after the war and entered into practice with Joe Quillian, who was a very great lawyer and a very fine person. Later I had the opportunity of getting, asking Herman Talmadge to appoint him to the Court of Appeals, which he did, and then I had the privilege of appointing Joe to the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Fitzsimmons: There's a Gum Log district in the Lavonia area. How did it get its name? Are the people there different from other places?

Vandiver: Yes, I would say that they're considerably different. Gum Log, I don't

know whether you've heard about Gum Log, but it was one of the famous places during the Depression. They made a fine brand of whiskey [laughter] over in Gum Log that was famous all over the state of Georgia. And . . .

Steeley: Mr. Fitzsimmons digs up all these things about whiskey and bootleggers . . .

Vandiver: I figured he might have found out about that when he was commanding [laughter] the reserve unit in Lavonia. But it was famous for whiskey, and many of the families over there during the Depression could not have survived, I don't think, if they hadn't been in that business. The farming business was just about to--they were about to starve to death, but it brought several families through the Depression.

Fitzsimmons: It was a matter of putting . . .

Vandiver: It was quite famous.

Fitzsimmons: Putting corn in a different form [unintelligible] . . .

Vandiver: Putting corn in a liquid form, right [laughter].

Steeley: You were mayor of Lavonia. What was that like? How would you characterize the people of Lavonia, and the area itself, and your job as mayor there?

Vandiver: I had just gotten back from the Air Corps, Army Air Corps. I got back in September. There was an election in December.

Steeley: That was in '45 or '6?

Vandiver: It was in '45.

Steeley: '45, okay.

Vandiver: And some of my friends asked me to run. As Senator Russell Walton said, "When a man gets it in his head to run for office, it takes two men and one small boy to convince him he can be elected." [Laughter] And it didn't take too much encouragement for

me to run, but I did run, and didn't have any opposition, and served a year. At that time the terms were for one year. I was, I think, twenty-six years old. I was recalling to my wife as we drove over here today . . . [Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: There was a young fellow who was the son of a grocer in Douglasville-- I've forgotten his name--but he was elected mayor at that same time. He and I were pretty close to the same age. And then there was a young man from Ellijay who was about our age, and we got considerable publicity. In fact, we formed the Young Mayors Association of Georgia. We were all about twenty-six or -seven years old. It was quite an experience. It was not the most lucrative job I ever had. It paid fifty dollars a year, which was not too lucrative, but it was an enjoyable experience. I found out that the closer you are to the people, the harder the job is. If somebody's dog got in somebody else's yard, the first thing they did was call the mayor and say, "Get that dog outta my yard." And so you had to call the one policeman you had in town and make sure that he got that dog out of somebody's yard. Day and night, it didn't make any difference. If you were the mayor, they called you if they had some reason that they needed your assistance.

I did try cases in the mayor's court every Monday night. That was quite an experience. I remember there was one gentleman who had a habit of drinking too much and falling down on the street in the city, and one of the things that I had many of my constituents talk to me about was, "Let's see if we can't stop that." And so I had been mayor, I think, a couple of weeks, and he came before me as a judge in the city court. And I fined him a pretty strong, pretty stout fine for that time and told him that I was going to double it every time he

came before me in court, if he came back. Well, he came back one time about a month later, and we doubled his fine, and finally it got up to about three hundred dollars, I think. And we didn't have any more trouble with that gentleman drinking in town. Now, he would go just outside the city limits and drink with some of his compatriots, but he didn't drink and fall on the streets any more.

Fitzsimmons: Priced him out of business.

Vandiver: It was an interesting time to be mayor of a small town.

Steeley: You talked a good bit before about Gene Talmadge, and I remember you said that your dad ran into him back in '22 was it, or '24, when the J. J. Brown race was?

Vandiver: No, I believe it was '26.

Steeley: '26. Okay.

Vandiver: That was when he ran for commissioner of agriculture.

Steeley: And then your dad went on to become an aide to him when he got to be governor?

Vandiver: No, he was on the highway board.

Steeley: Oh, okay.

Vandiver: I was an aide. He appointed me as an aide to him in 1946 after he'd been elected. After he beat [James Vinson] Carmichael.

Steeley: Right.

Vandiver: And he made two appointments before he died. He appointed Benton Odum as his executive secretary and he appointed me as an aide. And then he died, of course, as you know, prior to taking office. And then the legislature elected Herman, and Herman wanted me to come in and serve as an aide to him, which I did for sixty-seven days.

Steeley: Now, you mentioned that one of the things that stood out in your mind about Gene Talmadge was his ability as a speaker. Was there anything else in particular that you remember him for?

Vandiver: Well, he was . . .

Steeley: What kind of man was he as an individual?

Vandiver: He was a rugged individualist; he was a farmer. A man of strong conviction. He was also a lawyer. He was highly educated. He was a graduate of the University of Georgia Law School, came from a fine old family in Georgia, and, uh, he was a brilliant man.

Steeley: Was he a very [unintelligible]?

Vandiver: He had great friends and great enemies. He was a man that you either loved or hated. And during his period of service to the state of Georgia, I don't think the divisions have ever been greater than they were during that period of time. It was either, you either were for him or you were against him.

Steeley: No middle ground.

Vandiver: No middle ground, no.

Steeley: Senator Talmadge said he remembered him as a man who was always keeping things stirred up. He said he wanted to have four or five major rows going at any one time and just despised any kind of harmony.

Vandiver: I think you characterized him fairly well. I've heard Herman say that the difference between him and his father was that his father would go out of his way looking for a fight and he'd go out of his way to avoid one.

Steeley: Did you find that to be pretty accurate? Of both men?

Vandiver: I think that was true. Herman spent a great deal of his public life trying to convert his enemies. I don't think Gene Talmadge, I don't think it made any difference to him.

Steeley: He didn't really care, did he?

Vandiver: He didn't really care. But Herman did, and most of the people who had been enemies to his father ended up being supporters of Herman.

Steeley: Did Mrs. [Mattie Iola Thurmond Peterson Talmadge] Mitt ever get involved in the political campaigns, or did she just stay back on the farm?

Vandiver: Mrs. Mitt, she was a strong person, and she mostly stayed back on the farm, but she would come to political rallies. I recall--she and I were great friends. I loved Mrs. Mitt. She was a wonderful person. She had more common sense, I think, than almost any woman I ever saw. She really was a person who was not highly educated, but who had a tremendous amount of ability and common sense. And she and I always got along well. In fact, she sat on the platform when I ran for governor. She was right there. Herman, of course, was in the Senate, and he couldn't ostensibly take sides, but Mrs. Mitt was right there, and she was a strong supporter of mine always.

Fitzsimmons: I'm going to look at, for just a minute, at your military career. Why and when did you join the Army Air Forces?

Vandiver: Yes, I joined the army air corps in 1942 and went into service in January of '43. I think it was after I graduated from law school. I went to Miami as a private, as an aviation candidate cadet private, I think was the official title, and took my basic military training in Miami, and I was sent to Illinois, Decatur, Illinois, and spent some time there. And somehow I got sent to the Western Flying Training Command. I got sent out to the west

coast and took my aviation cadet training in Santa Anna, California; took my primary training in Santa Maria; my basic in Tucson, Arizona; my advanced training in Texas. And then was stationed out in the Western Training Command most of my military life.

Fitzsimmons: Were you active in the reserve or National Guard after you separated?

Vandiver: Yes, after I got out of the air corps, as you know, I managed Herman Talmadge's campaign for governor, his first campaign, and he asked me to serve as his adjutant general, which I did. I served as adjutant general, which is chief of staff of the military of the state with the Air National Guard and Army National Guard. And I served from 1948, November of '48, until 1954, as adjutant general. This was a period of my life that I enjoyed tremendously because it was after the war. It was a time when the National Guard was in a reorganization. We had units of the National Guard that were meeting above the city hall, firehouses, or anywhere they could find a place to meet. We were able, I was able during my tenure as adjutant general, lieutenant governor, and governor to build more than a hundred armories, National Guard armories, in the state, and my association with those National Guardsmen were some of the happiest days of my life really.

Fitzsimmons: Do you feel that your military training, your military career influenced you in a positive or negative way later on?

Vandiver: Oh, undoubtedly, some of the friends that I made, the associations that I had and the friends that I made in the National Guard were some of the strongest friendships that I've ever had. And I recall George [Leon] Smith [II], who later was speaker under my administration, when I announced for lieutenant governor, George came to me and said, "I want to get on your team; I want to help you be lieutenant governor." I said, "Well, I'm glad to have you, George." He said, "I'll tell you why." He said, "My National Guardsmen came

to me and told me that I'd better do it or I wouldn't get elected." [Laughter] So a lot of them were like that. They were great friends of mine, that I had been associated with, and it played a tremendous part in my political career.

Fitzsimmons: Looking to your . . .

Vandiver: They were great friendships.

Fitzsimmons: Looking to your . . .

Steeley: Excuse me. You were there twice, weren't you, as adjutant general?

Vandiver: Yes, I went back as adjutant general under [James Earl] Carter [Jr.] for a short period of time.

Fitzsimmons: Looking to your district, your hometown, your home area, what is the political makeup of it, is it pretty solidly Democratic?

Vandiver: Yes, it has been. Probably the strongest Democratic, the strongest part of Georgia as far as the Democratic Party is concerned, has been that area. I know Hart County, which is an adjoining county of mine, always has been almost unanimously Democratic until Ronald [Wilson] Reagan ran for office, and he finally carried it, I think, in his last election. He didn't the first time, I don't think. I think it was when Ronald Reagan ran the first time, he lost Hart County and my county, too, because it's been Democratic.

Fitzsimmons: Well, I do have to ask you one other question. It's curiosity more than anything else, but just from what research I've done I seem to recall that there's at least a pocket of Republicanism in that area, around Canon especially, and since the Reconstruction period this has been true. Now, the Bowers family name comes to mind. Can you comment on that?

Vandiver: Yes, Ted, I'd be glad to. My grandfather was John M. Bowers. His

brother was [William] Billy Bowers, who was quite well known in that area. He was an inventor; he invented several things that later became very important, like a cottonseed planter. He had one that he invented. I remember that he invented one. He had a bunch of children and he had--every night they'd have to wash their feet. And he had a series of brushes that he would put over a tub and he would line up the children, and he'd take these brushes and he'd get their feet clean before he'd let them go to bed.

Anyway he was a Republican, which back in those days it was pretty bad to be a Republican in that part of the country. And I know he was appointed by President Andrew Johnson, who succeeded Abraham Lincoln, to be postmaster in that area. And in my family we've got the pardon that Andrew Johnson gave to him as a Confederate, as a person who had seceded from the Union. He had to have a pardon before he could be appointed postmaster. So he was a Republican, and I had several uncles and aunts that were strong members of the Republican Party. In fact, my great grandfather had slaves, and he freed his slaves prior to the War Between the States. And, he was, he believed in freeing the slaves.

Steeley: What were your years at the University of Georgia like, Governor? What do you remember about Georgia? Is there more to it than football and law?

Vandiver: Oh, yes, the associations that you made, that you make in college, and that I had the privilege of making in college, have meant more to me than almost anything. I was in, I got my A.B. [Bachelor of Arts] degree in four years. I took a combination course. I went to law school and got my A.B. and law degree in six years, but the associations that I had at the University of Georgia have been my strongest friendships that I've made. I was telling Ted a while ago how it even enters into politics today. My wife, of course, was a Russell, and her first cousin is John [Brevard] Russell, who's running for the Senate. And

probably my closest friend was Robert [Henry] Jordan, who I appointed to the highway board, and I appointed him to the Court of Appeals as judge. Well, his cousin is Hamilton Jordan. So we've got Hamilton Jordan and John Russell running against each other for United States Senate now. We're determined that we're not going to discuss politics.

[Laughter]

Steeley: At least until the primary is over with.

Vandiver: Until the primary's over.

Steeley: Did you . . .

Vandiver: Bob Jordan and I entered the University of Georgia the same year; we were members of the same fraternity, the same class, and we have been strong friends for fifty years.

Steeley: Did you know [Hamilton Jordan] Ham's daddy?

Vandiver: I met him. I didn't know him too well. But I knew all the other Jordans, Frank [Jordan] and all. Bob had a bunch of brothers. And his brother, by the way, during my campaign, he had a brother named Clarence [Jordan], whom you may have heard of, and this was the main issue when I ran for governor. I had a Baptist preacher running against me named [William Turner] Bodenhamer [Sr.]. And, of course, back in that era, segregation was one of the main issues. And Clarence Jordan had a farm down in Americus, Georgia, Cornumonia [Koinonia] Farm, that had a mixture of the races where they were working together. And it was a religious farm. And this Baptist preacher took out after me because Bob Jordan was my friend, and Clarence Jordan had this farm, who I had never met. I had never met Clarence. I never did meet him. But anyway, politics by association sometimes gets involved in political races.

Steeley: So you took a few licks on that one.

Vandiver: I took a lot of them, and I never did answer him. I refused to answer him, which is one of the hardest things to do in politics. When somebody makes a charge against you, it's difficult not to reply when you know they're lying, but I felt like it was best just to ignore that sort of thing.

Fitzsimmons: Difficult, but often wise.

Vandiver: It was wiser to ignore it, yes. It was hard on Bob Jordan and his family, though [unintelligible]. He really took out after him.

Steeley: Did you belong to any of the literary societies, the Demosthenian or the Phi Kappa literary society while you were there?

Vandiver: Yes, I did. I was a . . . [Cut off] I was a Phi Kappa. Herman, by the way, was a Demosthenian. Herman's father was a member of Phi Kappa, and that was one of the first things I did when I went to the University of Georgia was join the Phi Kappa literary society and engage in the debate and the politics that was involved. I recall that during Gene Talmadge's administration, you may remember the Cocking affair, where Dean [Walter Dewey] Cocking was the head of the Education Department, and Talmadge made charges that he was trying to involve the races in education. And that was when Ellis Arnall appeared on the scene, and the campaign was going full speed while I was in school over there. And they took Gene Talmadge's picture down. They had his picture on the wall because he was a former governor and had been a member of Phi Kappa. They took it down and put it in a trunk. And it stayed there until Gene began to start making moves to campaign again. This was when I was a senior in law school, I think. And so I started a movement to get his picture put back on the wall because he'd been a governor of the state and was a member of

Phi Kappa. And finally we carried it by a very slim margin, to get his picture back on the wall, and got it put back before the campaign of 1946. No, before the campaign of '42 because he ran against Arnall in '42.

Steeley: Right.

Vandiver: And I remember that Gene Talmadge, we then invited him to come over to the University and speak to Phi Kappa, which he did. I remember he came over and he brought Zack [Zachariah Daniel] Cravey, and he spoke to Phi Kappa and he had dinner with us that night after the speech.

Steeley: Well, let me pick up on that one. What did you do at dinner that night?

Vandiver: Well, we talked politics. We talked politics.

Steeley: Were you a pretty ardent segregationist in those days?

Vandiver: Yes, I was. I was. It was the question of the day during those days, and I'd be dishonest if I say I wasn't. I think about ninety-five percent of the people of Georgia were, ninety percent of the people of Georgia were . . .

Fitzsimmons: Sure, yeah.

Vandiver: Even those who disagreed with Talmadge were. It was a way of life. It was the way you were raised. Some of my great friends when I was growing up were young black boys that were good friends of mine. I grew up with them and loved them, but there was that, there was a difference, and it was just the way that the situation was. Unless you lived back in those days you can't imagine what it was.

Steeley: So you were fairly supportive, then, of the whole program that Talmadge was pushing? Not just because you knew Talmadge but because you really believed in what he was doing?

Vandiver: Yes, I believed in it at that time.

Steeley: Were you thinking in terms while you were at Georgia and in Phi Kappa of getting into politics yourself that early? You mentioned something about a lady in the eighth grade and then later your history teacher at Darlington, both kind of helped you out a little bit.

Vandiver: Yes, because my father was so interested in politics, I think he wanted me to get in politics. He never said so, but he carried me to political speeches and indicated that he was very happy when I was elected mayor, and he was interested in all of that. Of course, he was there when I managed Herman's campaign for governor, very supportive. He's always been very supportive.

Steeley: Was he alive when you were elected governor?

Vandiver: No, he was not alive when I was elected lieutenant governor. He died in 1951. And I was elected lieutenant governor in 1954. And governor in 1958.

Steeley: Okay. Tell us a little bit about your experience as an aide to Herman Talmadge. Of course, you didn't have any experience as an aide to Gene 'cause he died before anything could have happened.

Vandiver: Well, Herman served sixty-seven days as governor. This case, of course, was being tried in the court. I had worked with Herman during the campaign before the legislature met, and we had talked with members of the legislature, and we had a full-scale campaign going between the time that Gene Talmadge died and the time that Herman was elected by the legislature. And we worked, I worked night and day with him during that period, trying to persuade the members of the legislature to support him. I was there the night that he was elected by the legislature. I was standing at the rostrum at about two o'clock when he was sworn in by a judge who was a strong supporter of his. I was

downstairs when he went downstairs to assume the governor's office.

Steeley: By downstairs you mean to the governor's office itself?

Vandiver: From the legislative halls down to the governor's office.

Steeley: Right.

Vandiver: He went directly from the legislature down to the governor's office.

Steeley: What happened there?

Vandiver: Ellis [Arnall] had already gone, as I recall. He was governor at that time.

Ellis had gone, but his executive secretary was there. And, as I recall, one of Talmadge's supporters named John Nahara from Waycross, Georgia, got out of hand. I don't know whether John had been drinking or not. There was some drinking going on that night [laughter]. But anyway, they got into a scuffle, and John struck the executive secretary of Ellis Arnall, and that was the picture that was showed all over the nation, I think. But finally Herman went into the governor's office. He told me and some other close friends of his to stay there that night and make certain that everything was secure. I was there when the locksmith came and changed the locks on the door. There were people calling from all over the United States, and wanted to know what was happening. Of course, I remember somebody called, and I heard a man answer the phone and ask where Ellis Arnall was. And they said well, they thought he was down in Newnan selling insurance. [Laughter] This was right after the vote that night. But anyway, I left at six o'clock that morning. I stayed there all night.

Steeley: Who else stayed with you? [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] stay with you that night?

Vandiver: No, Marvin wasn't there all night. He was there for a while, but he wasn't

there all night. I was there all night, and finally got away at six o'clock and went to my apartment—this was before I got married—and took a shower, and went to bed, and had just about gotten asleep when the phone rang and Herman was on the phone. He said, “Ernie, I was supposed to make a speech to the Tomato Growers Association at the Biltmore Hotel at seven-thirty.” And he said, “I’m tied up; I can’t get away.” Said, “Would you go make the speech for me?” [Laughter] And I said, “Yes sir, I’ll go.” Well, I got up and dressed and went to the Biltmore Hotel on the morning after the election by the legislature and made a speech to the Tomato Growers Association.

Steeley: What in the world could you have said to them? [Laughter]

Vandiver: I told them that politics was just about as speculative as growing tomatoes. That growing tomatoes is a pretty difficult thing to do and politics was, too. And I had just experienced it. I knew what it was. [Laughter] That was about all I could say.

Steeley: Yeah. I suspect it was. This might be a good time to take a break right here.

Let them transfer tapes.

[Cut off]

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