

OH Vandiver 01B

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

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Side One

Steeley: Governor Vandiver, who else was there that night with you in the capitol, holding the fort as it were?

Vandiver: Ben [Benton] Odum, who had been named executive secretary by Gene [Eugene] Talmadge and who was a close friend of Herman's [Eugene Talmadge], was there. Benton is dead now. William Kimbrough, who was Herman's brother-in-law, married Herman's sister, was there. Most of the people who were there are not living now. Bill's dead, and so is Benton Odum. But they were his closest associates. Roy [Vincent] Harris was there. Roy, of course, had been a very ardent supporter of Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall, and then when he and Arnall got crossed at the end of the Arnall administration, he supported Gene Talmadge in 1946. And he, of course, had been very active in working with the legislature, trying to get the legislature to elect Herman.

Steeley: Why did he split with Arnall?

Vandiver: I think Arnall had indicated to him that he would support him for governor after his term. Then at the end of the Arnall administration, Ellis tried to get the constitution amended so that he could run again, and that was when Roy and Ellis split over that constitutional amendment.

Steeley: And Roy was Speaker at that time?

Vandiver: He was Speaker of the House, yeah.

Steeley: Okay. When you said you went on home, you got a shower, laid down, and almost immediately got a phone call, and went and made a speech to the Tomato Growers of Georgia . . .

Vandiver: Tomato Growers Association, yeah. I don't know how in the world Herman accepted that invitation at that time, but he did, and then he called on me to fill it. [Laughter]

Steeley: Well, what did you do then? Did you go back home and go to bed, or did you get back down to the capitol?

Vandiver: I don't think I ever got back to bed. I think I just missed that night's sleep, and I went on back to the capitol. Things were happening so fast. As you may recall, we had M. E. [Melvin Ernest] Thompson, who claimed [that] he was governor. And he was contending that he should be in the governor's office, but he was holding forth in the lieutenant governor's office 'cause he'd just been elected lieutenant governor. And then Ellis came back into the capitol and decided that until the court had made a decision that he was governor. So, he was in the rotunda of the capitol, right under the capitol dome. Ellis was there, M.E. was up on the third floor in the lieutenant governor's office, and Herman was in the governor's office. We had three governors at that time. And it was quite a story over the nation. It . . .

Steeley: I remember they talked about it being like a banana republic down here with . . . One of them had the guard on their side and somebody else had to, what, the militia, on their side, and somebody else had the troopers on their side?

Vandiver: I think that was about the way it was. 'Course [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] had been appointed adjutant general, and he had the guard, and that was Herman's side. And I

think maybe the state patrol was on Ellis's side. And maybe the militia was on M.E.'s side.

Anyway, it was quite an experience.

Fitzsimmons: The militia might have been the State Guard that was mentioned.

Vandiver: It was. The State Guard was what. . . .

Fitzsimmons: When was that phased out? Now State Guard came in . . .

Vandiver: It was really phased out right after the end of World War II.

Fitzsimmons: It came in right about the time World War II, did it not, or . . . ?

Vandiver: It came in at the beginning of World War II.

Fitzsimmons: Yeah, I thought so.

Vandiver: When the National Guard went away, was federalized, and went away.

Fitzsimmons: Yes, that's right.

Vandiver: Then, of course, they organized a state militia, which was to handle any emergency inside the state while the National Guard was away in the army. And I guess M.E. had that militia.

Steeley: That was his group, huh?

Vandiver: I guess it was. I don't recall. [Laughter] I do know that Marvin Griffin was Herman's adjutant general.

Steeley: Well, he had been with Arnall, hadn't he?

Vandiver: Yes, he had. In fact, he and Ellis Arnall had been very close friends, and during that campaign, Marvin Griffin ran for lieutenant governor, I believe, against M.E., and M.E. won. And then Herman appointed him adjutant general. Now, Arnall had appointed

Marvin Griffin adjutant general prior to that time. He brought him back from the South Pacific, where he was in the army, and had appointed him adjutant general.

Steeley: Papua New Guinea or somewhere.

Vandiver: Yeah, and so there was a falling out there somewhere. I never did know exactly how that happened, but he and Arnall split, and he became a supporter of the Talmadge's.

Steeley: Well, now, you and Marvin were never very close, were you?

Vandiver: No, we were not. Marvin and I, of course, I was lieutenant governor at the time he was governor. And when I ran for lieutenant governor I made it very clear that I was going to run as an independent, that I was not running as a candidate for lieutenant governor with any particular candidate. In fact, there were about eight or ten running. And, uh, you couldn't run successfully, I don't think, with--you'd have to pick out the one that won in order for you to win. So most of the lieutenant governors have run as independents rather than with ticket.

Steeley: In fact, I think this last time was about the first time they had actually had a ticket, wasn't it?

Vandiver: I believe that's right.

Steeley: Yeah, when [Joe Frank] Harris and [Zell Bryan] Miller ran as a pair and advertised it as such.

Vandiver: M.E. Thompson was the first lieutenant governor elected, but he never served.

Steeley: Right.

Vandiver: And Marvin Griffin was the second, and I was the third. And Garland [Turk] Byrd was elected after me during my term as Governor.

Steeley: And then Peter Zack [Geer, Jr.].

Vandiver: Peter Zack was my executive secretary, and then he was elected lieutenant governor.

Steeley: What did you do as a aide to Talmadge? Just kind of a jack-of-all-trades, or was it more like an aide-de-camp?

Vandiver: Oh, yes, you met the people who came into the office. You tried, if they had some problem, you tried to help them with it. I answered mail. If the Governor had a speech he couldn't make, he'd call on me to make it. Things of that nature.

Steeley: What'd a job like that pay, Governor?

Vandiver: Oh, I think . . .

Steeley: Back in those days . . .

Vandiver: Bad. 'Course, I didn't get anything for those sixty-seven days.

Steeley: Yeah.

Vandiver: Nor did anybody else who worked in the governor's office during that time, but I think the governor at that time made around, the aide in the governor's office made around two hundred and fifty, three hundred dollars a month.

Steeley: What, just kind of an average salary, or a little low?

Vandiver: That was sort of an average salary, really. The governor at that time made about, I think, twelve thousand, was the governor's salary. That's what it was when I was elected.

Steeley: Twelve thousand dollars?

Vandiver: Twelve thousand. Then somebody had introduced some legislation to provide for each board that the governor served on, and he served on many boards because he was sort of an ex officio on all the boards, that he received three hundred dollars a year for each board that he served on. I think my total salary from 1958 through--'59 through '63--was a little bit under twenty thousand, including all these boards that you served on.

Steeley: That's per year.

Vandiver: Per year, yeah.

Steeley: Not an exorbitant amount of money.

Vandiver: No, it's not one designed to get rich on. It's sort of hard to live on that salary. However, you do have other things, benefits. Of course, you have the executive mansion; you have, the state furnishes you a car and driver and security; and there are other things that . . .

Steeley: You get to go to a lot of nice places, and people feed you.

Vandiver: That's right; you get invited out occasionally. [Laughter]

Steeley: When you got back to the governor's office after making your tomato speech, was Ellis Arnall there? I've heard varying stories about what happened when he came back to the Capitol and faced Herman.

Vandiver: I don't recall that he actually faced Herman. I do know that he set up his office out in the rotunda of the capitol, and I remember Jimmy [James Marion] Dykes was a member of the legislature at that time, and he and Ellis got into a big argument out there in the rotunda of the Capitol. But Herman could probably tell you whether there was a face-to-face confrontation or not, but I don't remember that.

Steeley: Okay. What do you remember about that day?

Vandiver: Well, it's a little bit vague that first day because I hadn't had any sleep.

[Laughter] But we were busy. People were just pouring in there from all over the state, all of his friends, and, of course, everybody was excited about it.

Steeley: Well, did the legislation that got passed and signed by Talmadge, did Thompson automatically just kind of rubber-stamp that when he became governor?

Vandiver: I think most of the legislation was pretty well rubber-stamped. Although, it had to be. He was declared not governor by the Supreme Court. So anything that he did actually was illegal, anything he did as governor. But Thompson pretty well carried on in the same vein . . .

Steeley: Otherwise you'd have had to call the legislature back and do it all over again, wouldn't you?

Vandiver: [Laughter] That's right.

Steeley: I don't know how else you could have handled it if he just simply rejected it.

Vandiver: Thompson was governor for only seventeen months.

Steeley: Yeah.

Vandiver: And he was acting governor then. So he was not able to really get settled into the office and serve a term as governor.

Steeley: Well, Senator Talmadge said he kind of felt sorry for him. Not a whole lot at the time, but he said just a little bit, 'cause. . . .

Vandiver: Yes, well, of course, he didn't have very great support from the legislature because they'd just elected Herman. It was a difficult time for him really. I felt sorry for him, too, later, not right at that time.

Steeley: That's the way the senator was, it was later when he felt sorry for him. Said that not only did he have trouble with the legislature, he said, but he had Herman Talmadge going up and down his back everywhere he turned.

Vandiver: I remember Herman had a good friend named George [Daniel] Stewart, and George was kidding Herman one time and said, "Herman," said, "I don't know whether you're a very good politician or not," said, "You never have beaten anybody but M.E. Thompson."

[Laughter]

Fitzsimmons: Yeah.

Steeley: There's some truth to that.

Vandiver: Yeah, he was his main opponent. He was in that race and then in the next two races, governor's races.

Steeley: Well, after you got through that first day, and he settled in, did you have the feeling that he made a pretty good governor?

Vandiver: Well, I thought he did. I thought he handled himself magnificently. He did a fine job. He was so young at that time really. And he had had no experience really as governor, but he had had a world of experience working with his father. I thought that he handled himself beautifully. He did a fine job.

Steeley: Totally different from what the press expected, wasn't it?

Vandiver: The press expected him to be a wild man, and he was not. He was very dignified. He handled himself as a governor should, and when the Supreme Court made the decision that he had been elected illegally, he, of course, left the office and did it in a very dignified way.

Steeley: Did y'all talk to him about that? Did you decide, all sit down and decide what you were gonna do, if the court went against you, and that sort of thing?

Vandiver: Yeah.

Steeley: You were pretty close to him.

Vandiver: We knew what he would have to do. He would have to, if the Supreme Court ruled, they were the law of the land, the law of the state, we knew that he would have to leave office. And, of course, what he said was, and we had even discussed this even, that he would appeal to the court of last resort, which would be the people.

Steeley: How did y'all go about making decisions, big political decisions then? Were they made just kind of offhand or did you go down to Roy Harris's hotel room? You know, that's the fabled center of all politics.

Vandiver: Well, the Henry Grady [Hotel] was a very active place in those days, and a lot of politics was discussed and a lot of laws were passed in the Henry Grady, but most of the decisions had to be made away from the governor's office. There were just crowds of people in there, and you couldn't make a decision with a hundred people in your office. And that little office that he was in at that time is now the lieutenant's, is the executive secretary's office. That was the governor's office, and you put fifty or sixty people in there and you couldn't breathe. And there was just one right after another. And so, in order to make any sort of decision, you

had to get away from that group. I've heard Herman say, and I've had the same thing happen to me, that you start seeing people early in the morning, and you see them until afternoon, you almost couldn't recognize your wife at the end of the day you were just so worn out, just completely beat. And [laughs] I know Herman was the same way. At the end of the day he had to get away, he had to get somewhere and sit down and talk and discuss the problems.

Steeley: Well, [Joseph] Ebb Duncan used to tell some great stories about him getting away.

Vandiver: Yeah, he'd get away. [Laughter]

Steeley: Did you ever go with him on any of those trips just to go relax?

Vandiver: Yeah, I went with him to all of the governors' conferences as his adjutant general, and I think each--we had a Southern Governors' Conference and a National Governors' Conference every year. So in his six years, I went to twelve of them, I guess, with him. That's where you join the other governors and you discuss what problems you're having in your state and what you might do in your own state. And it was a relaxing time; it really wasn't a working time.

Steeley: There were interesting stories. One of them came out of *The Wild Man From Sugar Creek* about Gene Talmadge, talking about him taking all the people that he had appointed aide-de-camps [sic] and dressing them up in their uniforms and going to the Kentucky Derby with them and all that sort of thing.

Vandiver: Yes, I heard that. That was really before my time, before I was there, but I heard that he did; I know my father had a lieutenant colonel's uniform that he wore on state occasions.

Steeley: Technically, you could still do that today, couldn't you?

Vandiver: Oh, yes. It's an honorary *aide-de-camp*, is what it is, although I don't think they buy uniforms anymore. They did back in those days.

Steeley: Well, that's interesting. I just wondered. I got to be an admiral of the Georgia navy a year or so ago. I'm just wondering if I oughta get me a two-star flag to fly or something.

[Laughter]

Vandiver: In fact, most of those people that were appointed *aide-de-camps* [sic] and lieutenant colonels on the governor's staff, most of them had never had a uniform on. Some of them looked pretty peculiar sometimes. [Laughter] But it was the way they were dressed. They didn't have quite as many as they do now. Today they've got quite a few, and they did in my administration. But I think under the law they could have only sixty-four back in the thirties, and they had to be from a certain district. And then that law was changed, and there were many more than that [unintelligible] . . .

Steeley: Just taking the cap off now, I think.

Vandiver: Yeah.

Steeley: Okay. Ted?

Fitzsimmons: You managed Herman Talmadge's campaign, Governor, in 1948. How was the campaign funded, and what was the strategy?

Vandiver: Well, of course, the campaign was funded by your supporters. Most of them, most of the campaign funds, were donated directly to the candidate rather than dinners like they have today and big social occasions where you buy tickets. Every Monday the governor would be in town, or the candidate would be in town, and that was the day that people brought their

campaign contributions in. They liked to hand it to the candidate. They wanted to make sure it gets to him and doesn't get stopped by somebody else, and so Monday was set aside as the day that he would be there and receive campaign contributions and have strategy meetings. And then on Monday night, back in those days, it would be a radio program. That was before television. And he would speak on the radio, on statewide radio hook-up, every Monday night. Every Saturday afternoon was a radio network speech that was maybe on fifty or sixty stations at that time; it covered the whole state. But the campaign funds generally came into the campaign headquarters or mostly to the candidate himself. That was the way they did it back in those days.

Fitzsimmons: Were there any particularly heavy contributors that you remember?

Vandiver: Not a great many heavy contributors. I don't recall many. Most of them were small contributions from people who had been interested in politics, people who had supported his father for years and years. There were a few. I remember Sandy Beaver was a big, a fairly big contributor. He was probably one of the largest contributors back in those days. He'd been a supporter of Herman's father, and then Ed [Edgar Brown] Dunlap up in Gainesville was a fairly large contributor. We weren't--money was sort of tight back in those days.

Fitzsimmons: Yeah.

Vandiver: Not like it is now, you know, when you raise three or four million dollars. That's a ridiculous figure when you compare it with the kind of money we raised back in those days.

Steeley: 'Course what you spend for about one minute of television now would have financed a campaign in those days.

Vandiver: Yeah, it's the same thing. Now, Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] told me one time that in his first campaign for governor that he spent a little bit less than three thousand dollars, and that was all he spent because that was all he had. Now, there were people who gave their time and their effort and traveled and did that sort of thing at their own expense. But spending out of his headquarters, it was a little less than three thousand dollars.

Fitzsimmons: You mentioned a minute ago, what was it, the sixty-seven days, you said as aide to Herman Talmadge, but later on you served substantially longer than that as adjutant general, some six years.

Vandiver: Right, I resigned as adjutant general when I announced to run for lieutenant governor. I didn't run in office; I resigned, and then ran. One of my opponents did not resign and used his organization to help him in his race. I remember I ran against John [Wesley] Greer. There was an article in the paper this last week about John Greer. He's seventy-five years old. He's been in the legislature many years. He was one of my opponents. Another one was Bill [William Thomas] Dean, who was from Rockdale County; he'd been in the legislature and was. . . .

Steeley: He became a judge later, didn't he? Or something?

Vandiver: I appointed him judge.

Steeley: Did you?

Vandiver: Yeah. When a vacancy occurred out there in that county, I called Bill in, and I said, "Bill, we ran against each other. We know a good bit about each other, but I think you're the best man to be judge in that circuit, and I'm going to appoint you."

Steeley: What did he say?

Vandiver: He was excited about it. He wanted to be judge. He was a fine judge, too; he made a good judge.

Fitzsimmons: You went on then to, you mentioned the race for lieutenant governor, and you served as lieutenant governor from 1955 to '59. When you ran for the office and when you were in office, did you really see it as a stepping-stone to the governor's mansion?

Vandiver: Yes, I think so. I think, in all honesty, you, a person who runs for lieutenant governor certainly has the office of governor in mind. Marvin Griffin had been adjutant general, lieutenant governor, and then governor. I had been adjutant general, ran for lieutenant governor, and I was governor, so it was sort of, during that day and time, was a stepping-stone from one to the other.

Steeley: What was it like to administer the guard in those days? Did you wear a uniform and that sort of thing?

Vandiver: Oh, yes, you did on formal occasions, not every day, but it was a period of reorganization. It was right after the war. And, of course . . .

Steeley: The Korean War was going on then.

Vandiver: Well . . .

Steeley: In part of it.

Vandiver: It came on later. It came on during the time that I was adjutant general, but we were in a period of reorganization mostly in the early part of my administration as A.G. [Adjutant General], and then later the Korean War--they didn't call it a war. It was. . . .

Steeley: Police action.

Vandiver: Police action. But, anyway, we had some National Guardsmen who went into active duty during that emergency, and we visited them in California. Herman and I visited the National Guardsmen who were called to active duty. I recall one man who served, General Joseph [Bacon] Fraser. He was from Hinesville, Georgia, and he was a brigadier general of the anti-aircraft brigade. You know [unintelligible]; he was a very fine gentleman, and he had served during World War II, and he had served with Harry [S] Truman. He and Harry Truman were very good friends. And then he came back, and his unit was one of the units that was called in to the Korean police action. And I had to call, the governor called me and told me that he had gotten a telegram from President Truman and that the 101st Anti-aircraft Brigade was to be called into duty, active duty. And so I had to call General Fraser.

I said, "General, the president has sent word to the governor that he wants your unit on active duty." He was a man in--he was getting fairly close to retirement at that time, and he said, "Well, General," he said, "I guess if I had to pick the worst time in the world for me to go on active duty, now would be the time." He said, "I just bought an island off the coast of Georgia, off the coast of South Carolina. And I'm cutting the timber on this island, and I'm right in the middle of that," and said, "But if my country needs me, you know I'm ready to go." That island was Hilton Head Island.

Fitzsimmons: Oh, boy.

Vandiver: He cut the timber off of it, and then his son, Charles [Elbert] Fraser, later developed Hilton Head Island as you know it today.

Fitzsimmons: Well, then, another question occurs to me. Let's see, you were in when these guard divisions were called up, and this was the time that Harry Truman was integrating

the armed forces, right in here. Now the Dixie Division came from Alabama. It was primarily in Alabama, the 31st Division, if I'm not mistaken. They were at Fort Jackson; they refused to integrate [unintelligible] . . .

Vandiver: That was a very difficult time.

Fitzsimmons: Well, did you as adjutant general, did we have any problems like that?

Vandiver: We had no integration in the National Guard.

Fitzsimmons: Was there really a Georgia Division that was called up or was it mostly brigade, battalion. . . .

Vandiver: Brigade. It was the Anti-aircraft Brigade, really, was the only unit that was called up.

Fitzsimmons: I wondered about that. I was familiar with the Dixie Division.

Steeley: When did the Georgia Guard integrate?

Vandiver: It was after I left office.

Fitzsimmons: Yeah.

Vandiver: So it was after 1962.

Fitzsimmons: Yeah. Well, you see the guard and the reserve, in a sense, there was a difference. These were local units. They had local people in them.

Steeley: Right.

Fitzsimmons: And your local . . .

Steeley: The reserve had been integrated for a good while, hadn't it?

Fitzsimmons: Well, yes and no, Mel. I think. . . .

Vandiver: Not too much.

Fitzsimmons: I think local, it's a matter of the local social prevailing. . . .

Steeley: Yeah.

Fitzsimmons: And, well, like so many of the schools, these units were neighborhood, community things.

Vandiver: Really, there was very little integration in the National Guard until, well, after [Carl Edward] Sanders was governor. I think. . . .

Steeley: So it began. . . .

Vandiver: Most of the integration began during the [Lester Garfield] Maddox administration.

Steeley: Isn't that something. The governor who stands out the most was a segregationist governor, even more so than you or Talmadge or some of the others, ends up being the governor who. . . .

Vandiver: Well, Lester takes a lot of pride in saying that he appointed more blacks to office than any other governor in history.

Steeley: Yes, he does.

Vandiver: He said that. I've heard him make that statement. And he said because of his stand he could do that, whereas some of us who had made contrary stands couldn't do it.

Fitzsimmons: Tell us now about your campaign now for governor. We've mentioned the lieutenant governorship as being the stepping-stone. Who managed your campaign and how was it funded?

Vandiver: It was funded pretty much the same way that Herman Talmadge's campaign was funded. Monday was the day set aside for people to come and visit you from all over the state and bring you campaign contributions.

Fitzsimmons: How did you feel on this Monday, really, with people bringing the money in?

Vandiver: Yes, well, it was very gratifying because we had adequate funding. In fact, I ended up sending campaign funds back after the campaign was over. We had adequate funds to fund the campaign. As you know, I'd had some difficulty with Marvin Griffin. We had crossed swords many times during his administration. He had planned to run a candidate against me, a man by the name of Roger [Hugh] Lawson [Sr.], who was chairman of the highway board. And he introduced legislation during the final year of his term to increase the rural roads program by a hundred million dollars. And I, of course, Herman and I discussed this, and we decided that what he was planning to do with that hundred million dollars was to elect a man governor, particularly his highway board member, chairman. And so we fought him in the legislature on that, over that issue, and we were, from the first day until the last day of the legislature, it was almost the whole session of the legislature, we fought. We argued and fought over members of the legislature to support and not to support that legislation. Of course, I was lieutenant governor, and they didn't want to--they wanted to try to pass it through the House first, and then they thought they could probably get it through the Senate, if they could get it through the House. So it was introduced in the House, and every night that the legislature was in session, I was going from hotel room to . . . [Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: [Unintelligible] people to try to persuade them to vote. And on the day of that vote, which was toward the last of the legislature, there were [sic] only three votes difference in the House of Representatives, and we won it by three votes. And I think really when he lost his rural roads program that Roger Lawson gave up after that. He decided he couldn't be elected if he didn't have the rural roads program to help him in his campaign, so he withdrew. But Red [Truman Veran] Williams, who was the revenue commissioner during those days, T.V. Williams, he probably hated me worse than anybody he'd ever known. Anyway, he got me up some opposition. He got me up this Baptist preacher named Bodenhamer, William [Turner] Bodenhamer [Sr.], who was from Ty Ty, Georgia, in Tift County. And he'd preached in Tift County and preached in Worth County, and all of that area down there, and married nearly everybody that'd lived in those counties, and preached funerals and so forth. But anyway, he wrote, he carried on the most vicious campaign, I think, that I've ever seen, or, maybe because I was the person involved in it, it seemed that way. But anyway, as we talked about previously, he excoriated Clarence Jordan, the man who operated this farm down in Americus, and accused me of everything that anybody could ever be accused of. And I never answered him, as I said, but it was awful difficult not to. But anyway, when the votes were counted, I had carried 156 counties, and he had carried Tift County, which is where he was from, Worth County, where he'd preached, and Decatur County, where Marvin Griffin lived. [Laughter] And those were the three counties that he carried. I carried better than eighty percent of the vote.

Steeley: Well, we still, we weren't on the county unit at that time, were we?

Vandiver: Yes, we were. That was the last race that was run on the county unit system.

Fitzsimmons: I want to go back on just one thing again. I keep coming back to this money, you know, the Monday as contribution day. At any time when you got money, did you feel actually or was it implied or implicit that there were any strings attached to it when these people contributed?

Vandiver: Many of them tried to. And I think some of them thought that they had. In fact, I had one man who gave me twelve thousand dollars. He was one of my largest contributors, and after I had been nominated and elected he started making statements. He was chairman of the state school board; he started making statements about he was going to do this and he was going to do that, and he was going to run it in such and such a way, and I called him up to my office, and I said, "You made a nice contribution to my campaign; you gave me twelve thousand dollars." I went down to the bank and borrowed twelve thousand dollars and I handed him a check. I said, "Now, we're even now. You're not to make those kind of statements that you're making. I'm the governor. I was elected by the people, and I'm going to run my administration. You're not going to speak for me." And I had to do that with several people who thought that when they made a contribution to your campaign that they'd bought you. Back in those days there were people who thought that they could buy you.

Steeley: Back in those days there were people you could buy.

Vandiver: Well, I guess that's true in some cases.

Fitzsimmons: Probably have been all along.

Steeley: Oh, I think that's true, then and now.

Vandiver: But anyway, if you gonna, if you let yourself get tied down like that then you may as well not be governor. I had one man who was a banker in Atlanta that told me that he would support me if I would let him name the state-banking superintendent. And I said, "Thank you very much, but if I'm going to be governor, I'm going to be governor. And if I let you name the state banking superintendent, then you'll be governor as far as that department is concerned." And I had to do that on several occasions.

Steeley: Usually , it's a thing if they come to you with deals like that, it almost guarantees they're not going to get what they want, doesn't it? Whereas if they left you alone . . .

Vandiver: It did to me. It did to me, Mel, because any time they tried, somebody tries to buy you with a campaign contribution then . . .

Fitzsimmons: You almost have to bend over backwards.

Vandiver: If you let them do it, then, of course, you've surrendered your right to hold office. I had one man that came to me and he was on the board of regents at that time. He said, "If you will reappoint me to the board of regents, I'll give you so much money. If you don't, I won't." I said, "You just lost your position on the board of regents." [Laughter] And that happened many times. I'm sure that all candidates have that happen to them.

Steeley: Oh, yeah. Well, I imagine most candidates, though, if they get elected, do try to take care of their friends.

Vandiver: They do . . .

Steeley: There's a big difference in that and bribing somebody.

Vandiver: But you can't go to a candidate and say, "If you do this, I'll do that." If you do, that's a ridiculous way to do it. Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.], I appointed chairman of the highway board, but Jim Gillis never mentioned being chairman of the highway board to me. He was my friend, he worked for me, and he had done a great job under Herman Talmadge. Marvin Griffin had kicked him off, and then he managed my campaign. And although we never discussed any position that I would appoint him to, I think he realized that I . . .

Steeley: If you got elected . . .

Vandiver: If I got elected, I would try to appoint friends that could do a good job. Now, the most important part of a governor's administration is before he ever takes office, between the time that he's elected and the time he takes office, because the people that you appoint to these positions are going to set the tone of your administration. And the state government is too big, it's too large for one man to try to run it. We've had people who've tried it and they couldn't do it. You've got to pick out the finest men that you can find, the best people that you can find, and put them in jobs and give them the authority to run it. And then, if something goes wrong, then you discuss it with them, but you've got to delegate authority because the state is too big. I think that was one of the things that happened to Jimmy Carter. He tried to run every department, and you just can't do it. The state is too big; the government is too big. You can't know all the circumstances about every department. The best thing you can do is find the best man you can find and let him run that department as long as he runs it right. Now, we'd had a lot of scandal in the purchasing department. I don't know whether you remember this or not, but there have been what they call shade tree merchants and five percenters and that sort of thing. They'd been doing business with the state. Well, I picked out a man that was the most

unlikely man to be head of the purchasing department you ever saw and begged him to take the job. He didn't want the job. Bill [William Redding] Bowdoin, who later became president of Trust Company of Georgia. Bill was one of the finest people that I've ever known, and straight and honest as he could be. And I asked Bill to go over there and straighten it out, and after he got it straightened out, then he could go back to his job at the bank. And it took him about a year and a half, but he got it straightened out. And really, since that time there has been no scandal in the purchasing department. We changed all the laws and made it so that anybody who wanted to do business with the state, that was in business, could make an effort to. All they had to do was fill out an application, and be the low bidder, and have a quality product. And that has been operated that same way since that time; I haven't seen any evidence of the sort of thing we saw during the other administration.

Steeley: How was being lieutenant governor? Was it as interesting and exciting as being governor? I can't imagine it would be.

Vandiver: [Sighs] It was probably a happier time. You don't have the decisions to make that the governor has to make.

Steeley: What was a day like as a lieutenant governor?

Vandiver: Well, of course . . .

Steeley: I know it would depend on whether or not you were in session, but. . . .

Vandiver: If you weren't in session, of course, there wasn't a great deal to do, except you'd be traveling out over the state somewhere making speeches and that sort of thing. But you would get to your office at about eight o'clock in the morning, and you'd have a meeting

with your committee chairman and discuss legislation that was to be brought up during the day and priority legislation.

Steeley: Now, you appointed all the committee chairmen yourself.

Vandiver: I appointed all the chairmen, yes.

Steeley: That was based on what? What was your rationale for who you appointed?

Vandiver: Well, you tried to pick the men who were most able to head a committee, a man that had experience. Say you had a doctor who was in the Senate. Generally, you'd put him, make him a chairman of the committee on health. If you had a good banker in the Senate, he would, you'd put him as head of the finance committee. That sort of thing. You pick out your best people. And we cut the number of committees that we had in the Senate from about sixty, we cut it down to about twenty-five. And it made it a little more wieldy than it had been previously. The main thing, benefit, that a senator got, he could put on his stationery that he was chairman of this committee and chairman of subcommittees and three or four different committees. But, really, one man can't be active in all those committees, mainly because most of them meet at the same time. So, we tried to cut them down and make them really mean something, which, I think, was helpful.

Steeley: What did you do after you had your meeting with your chairman and all? Just go into session?

Vandiver: Well, you went into session and called the State Senate to order. And then you had your agenda, which had been previously set up, and you followed the legislation. The agenda was set up by the Committee on the State of the Republic which set the calendar. And you'd try to pick out your most important legislation to discuss and work with early in the day,

because as the day grew longer some of the senators--mostly, we had older people in the Senate than we did in the House, as a rule, and some of them would get pretty tired and have to leave in the middle of the afternoon, say. So you tried to do your important business early in the day.

Steeley: Unless they were your opponents, at which point you may schedule it for later in the day.

Vandiver: You might schedule it for six o'clock in the afternoon. [Laughter]  
Something you didn't want passed.

Steeley: Do you remember any particular piece of legislation that you were particularly proud of as lieutenant governor that you pushed through?

Vandiver: Yes, we set up the Stone Mountain Authority, which was something that Griffin and I agreed on. [Laughter] And we worked together on that. And we set up several authorities that have lasted over a period of time, a long period of time.

Steeley: What was the source of your opposition or your confrontation with Griffin?  
Do you feel free to go into that?  
What caused it all?

Vandiver: Yes, sure. Yes. It was pretty obvious what was going on in the purchasing department and in the revenue department.

Steeley: This is when Cheney [Robert Alwyn Griffin] was up there.

Vandiver: Yes, and the purchasing department was, of course, was Marvin's. He had one of his closest friends there. The revenue department, of course, was Red Williams, T.V. Williams, and there was a lot of activity going on with regard to liquor being allowed to be sent into dry counties and that sort of thing. And things that were brought up in the newspapers,

which we had to take a stand on, and did take a stand on. And we were generally pretty well crossed. And, then, of course, he decided he was going to elect his candidate to succeed him. And when he did that, of course, we had to fight him with everything we had. Really we got along fairly well at the beginning of the administration. It was only after he had picked the candidate to run against me and had started actively working against me that we really got into some difficult times.

Steeley: Okay.

Fitzsimmons: Well, I want to ask a question you probably have been asked a great many times perhaps. Let me introduce it by saying a man that influenced both you and I [*sic*], very, either directly or indirectly, Dean [William] Tate. I'm sure you remember Dean Tate. I remember sitting on Demosthenian Society steps one day and having him, he was talking to us, and he said, "You'll see the day that blacks attend the university." Okay. That day came. That day came when you were governor. In your "No, Not One Will Enter" speech, did you feel you were speaking more for the sake of tradition? And had you really pretty much seen the handwriting on the wall by then?

Vandiver: [Sighs] Well, Herman had run on that basis. Marvin Griffin had run on that basis. Everybody that had been elected in the entire South had run on that basis. I knew that the time was getting difficult. I was hopeful that it wouldn't happen during my administration. I was hoping that I could get through like Herman and Marvin had gotten through without having to confront the issue. However, things began to happen that made it, made me certain that there was a possibility of it happening in my administration. As you recall, Orval [E.] Faubus, who was governor of Arkansas, and Roy Harris and Marvin brought Orval to Georgia



Steeley: I know Henry very well.

Vandiver: Executive director of the Board of Regents; W.O [Walter Odum] Brooks-- Henry Neal, by the way, was my assistant attorney general when I was governor--Bob [Robert Lee] Russell [Jr.], my brother-in-law; Peter Zack Geer; there were about ten of us, I guess, who settled on the final draft of that speech, 'cause that was the same speech I was going to have to make during the whole campaign.

Steeley: And so you set it up early on? And took it as a strategy.

Vandiver: And so we set it up at the beginning, and we argued, we argued all night long about that one phrase, "no, not one."

Steeley: What were the arguments? Pro and con? Or do you remember?

Vandiver: Well, W.O. Brooks, who had been an aide to Talmadge and Griffin and had been my friend since he worked in Gene Talmadge's office years before, he was afraid that we, felt like that we ought not to use that phrase "no, not one." Peter Zack Geer, he wanted to use that phrase. My brother-in-law wanted to use that phrase. We talked about it almost the whole night, and, finally, 'course I made the decision. It was my decision, and I made the decision to use it in the speech, hoping to be able to get through my four years [laughter] without having it happen. But it was discussed at length prior to the time that the campaign started.

Fitzsimmons: What was the reaction when the university was integrated? What was the reaction of your constituents? What sort of. . .?

Vandiver: [Sighs] When the order from the court was handed down, I called a meeting at the executive mansion of every department head in state government, every member of the state government who had anything to do of importance: the floor leader in the legislature; the

Speaker of the House; the lieutenant governor; Jim Gillis, the chairman of the highway board; [Curtis] Dixon Oxford, revenue commissioner; W.O. Brooks; Frank [Starling] Twitty; the whole group that were part of my administration, I asked them to meet me in the afternoon at the executive mansion. And we laid the situation out to them and said, "Now here's what it is: it's either integrated schools or no schools." Under the law, of course, it was no schools. The law was if one child was integrated into either the university system or the high schools, that the funds would be cut off automatically. Well, that was the case that was being decided, and was decided, and I went around the room and asked each individual who was a member of my administration, department heads and so forth, what they would recommend that we do. And there were some fifty of them present, and there were only two of that fifty that were present that said, "We've got to keep the schools open." One of those was Frank Twitty, who is now deceased; the other was Carl Sanders. And Carl and Frank had just been out over the state with the Chamber of Commerce meetings. They had really been closer to the people than most of the other people had, more recently, but those were the only two that said, "We've got to keep it open." And so I had to make a decision of what I was going to do, and that was either you keep the schools open or try to cut them off. And, frankly, I talked to Herman about it, and Herman says, "Ernie, you've got to figure out some way to go to jail." Said, "That's the only way you're going to get out of this thing." [Laughter]

Vandiver: Yeah, right. And I discussed it with Senator Russell, and I was trying to find some solution. And, finally, I made the decision that I'd just take whatever criticism I got. I was there; it was my time to be governor; it was my time to take whatever came. I figured I'd ruin myself politically, that I never would be able to be elected to anything again. Of course, I

talked it over with my wife, and we talked about it and prayed about it, and we made the decision that whatever it was, we couldn't close the schools. That we had to go on, no matter what I had said, and that we just had to, the decision had to be made, and that we--you couldn't see a million children on the streets with the schools closed; you couldn't see the university closed. One thing that I think that helped us during that period of time was the fact that they brought the suit against the University of Georgia. If they'd brought it against Tech, there was not that strong feeling of families. Everybody in their family has got somebody that went to the University of Georgia. There's not a family in Georgia that doesn't have some connection. Tech has got a lot of out-of-state students. 'Course, they've got a lot of students that are natives of Georgia, but the people of Georgia just didn't want that university closed. They didn't want it integrated either, but they didn't want it closed.

And I remember Roy Harris's law partner, who was in the legislature, he came down to my office after we'd made the decision, and he said, "Ernest, I've got a daughter who's at the University of Georgia, and she's in that dormitory where Charlayne Hunter is, and I'm going over there and take her out of school." And I said, "Well, that's your right. I can understand if that's the way you feel, that's what you want to do. So his name was [James] Roy McCracken. He's deceased now. He was a member of the legislature from Justin County. He was the dean of the legislature, been there longer than anybody else. He came back in my office Sunday--Monday--that was the weekend that he was going to take her out, and I said, "Roy, did you take your daughter out?" And he said, "No." I said, "Well, I thought you were going to take her out." He said, "She wouldn't go." Said that girl lived all the way down the other end of the hall, and she wasn't bothering her, and she wasn't going. [Laughter] She told her father, she said,

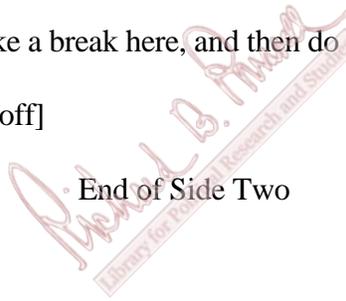
"I'm just not going; I'm going to school as long as the school is open." And that happened many, many times to members of the legislature who had children in school. When we made the recommendation to the legislature, there were only fourteen votes that were opposed to it, to the program of opening up the schools. Cheney Griffin and some of Marvin's closest friends were the ones that voted against it, and this one fellow, who just felt like that he just couldn't vote for it, Roy McCracken, was one of them.

Fitzsimmons: [Unintelligible] break here, I think.

Steeley: Okay, we'll take a break here, and then do one last taping after this one.

Vandiver: Okay. [Cut off]

End of Side Two



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