

OH Vandiver 01C

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

Date: 6/25/86

Cassettes #439 (56 minutes)

**COPY OF ORIGINAL INTERVIEW  
ORIGINAL AT WEST GEORGIA UNIVERSITY**

Side One

Fitzsimmons: Governor, we were talking about the integration of the university, and you said in making a decision you talked to a number of people, and among them Senator [Richard Brevard, Jr.] Russell. What was his advice?

Vandiver: Well, I think you probably know what his situation was. He had fought these battles in the Senate for many, many years. And, of course, he knew from his practice of law and his familiarity with the law that I had no choice except to follow the law. That I couldn't, if I had defied the court, then I had no choice except to try to get the state of Georgia to secede again from the Union. And we'd tried that once and hadn't done too well that time. And so he knew that I had no choice. One thing that Betty [Sybil Elizabeth] Vandiver and I have talked about a great deal was her father was a federal judge; he was a judge of the northern district of Georgia. And he never had to deal with this situation. He knew it was probably coming, but he became ill with cancer, and he died in 1955 before this situation ever came before his court. And we've thought about it many times, that the Lord was kind to him. He would have had to rule in such a way that it would have been extremely difficult for him.

Fitzsimmons: Been very painful, I suppose.

Vandiver: 'Course, Senator Russell, and he had managed all of Senator Russell's campaigns. He had been his closest confidant, closest advisor, and it would have been painful for him to have to rule. It was a blessing that he didn't have to rule in that instance.

Steeley: What was his name?

Vandiver: Robert L. [Lee] Russell [Sr.].

Steeley: Robert L.

Vandiver: He was judge of the northern district of Georgia for about ten years, and then he was nominated by, in 1950, by President [Harry S] Truman to serve on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. That was before the circuit was split up. It was Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. And he served five years on that court before he passed away.

Fitzsimmons: Will you comment just a minute on the Sibley Commission?

Vandiver: Yes, that, the Sibley Commission. Judge [John Adams Sibley] was a judge in Atlanta, who--district judge. At this time, of course, Judge Russell had passed away, and he was succeeded by . . . Judge Frank [Arthur] Hooper--I couldn't think of--Judge Frank Hooper, who was an appointee of Senator Russell's. He had nominated him, and he was a man who understood the situation in Georgia probably as well as anybody. And he could have ruled in the Atlanta case a year in advance of the time it was actually ruled upon by Judge [William Augustus] Bootle in Macon. But he, understanding what the situation was, gave the state of Georgia, the governor, and the legislature a year to try to work something out. Griffin [Boyette] Bell, at that time, was my chief of staff. He was in the law firm with Judge Sibley. I had known Judge Sibley a long time. He and Betty had worked together in the mental health program, building the chapel down at Milledgeville, and he had been a very close, wonderful friend of mine. Griffin made the suggestion that we appoint a commission and let them hold hearings in each of the congressional districts of the state, and let the people express themselves

as to how they felt about the situation, to outline exactly what the court was holding and give them an opportunity to testify.

I agreed with that on the condition that we could get Judge Sibley to be chairman of that commission, and I went to Judge Sibley and talked to him and told him that we needed his help. And at that time he was in his seventies and wanted to retire, I'm sure; he didn't want to get involved in all this political business. But, however, because of his love for the state and his friendship for me and others, he agreed to do it. And so we got the legislature to pass this resolution creating a commission and naming him in the resolution as chairman of the commission. And he did hold hearings in each of the congressional districts of the state. Those people who were for it, for integration, had a chance to say so. Those who were opposed to it had a chance to let everybody know that they were opposed to it. And it was an extremely difficult thing to do, to manage, to keep that thing from getting out of hand. And I knew that if somebody with the stature and the wisdom of Judge Sibley handled it, was chairman of it, that he could do it, but that the average man wouldn't be able to keep that thing from getting out of hand. But he did, and it gave everybody that wanted to an opportunity to say what they wanted to say about the problem. And it also gave him an opportunity to tell them just what the facts were. And the fact that this judge gave us this year made it easier, and I think it was extremely helpful to us to have the opportunity of letting the people say exactly what they felt about the situation.

Fitzsimmons: It really was a way of tapping the public opinion at the same time of educating.

Vandiver: That's right. When the commission came back, it ruled, I believe, seven to six in favor of keeping the schools open. So it was not easy.

Steeley: Who did you say advised you on appointing this committee and bringing Judge Sibley and all? How did you make that decision?

Vandiver: Griffin Bell was my chief of staff. In other words, he was my lawyer that I used as my lawyer in the governor's office. And we discussed it, Griffin and I did, with Walter [Odum] Brooks, with [Robert Lee, Jr.] Bob Russell, Bobby Russell, Betty's brother, and with Peter Zack [Geer, Jr.] and the other people who were around me in the governor's office.

Steeley: Was Peter Zack for it?

Vandiver: Peter Zack was not anxious to do that. He was on the commission. We put him on it, let him express himself. But he was not anxious to do that. But it seemed to me that that was the best way to handle it. You had to lay it out there and let the people know; you couldn't keep it from them.

Steeley: Well, this is kind of the turning point, isn't it, Governor, when Peter began to see a difference in being a segregationist and a racist.

Vandiver: I think that's right. I think that's right.

Steeley: You would be a self-avowed segregationist, but I think you would deny being a racist. What do you see as the difference between the two?

Vandiver: I hope I'm not a racist. What I did, I did, I did believe in. . . in segregation, and I still think that it would have been far easier if the court, the Supreme Court, had allowed this situation to evolve rather than just saying, "Now this is it. Now you've got to do so and so." I'm afraid that it caused a generation almost of children who were involved in all of these

problems in these schools, busing, all of the problems that faced these high schools being integrated. If that could have evolved, and it would have taken longer, of course, but I think it would have saved the education of a lot of children who lost it in the confusion of having integration just set out and said, "Now, this is it. You've got to do it." I feel like that. I come from a county where the black population is only 13 percent. Had I come from a county like Tolbert County, where you've got 80 percent, or a county like Burke, where you've got 75, maybe I wouldn't have been as understanding. Maybe it was meant for somebody to come from a county that wasn't just overwhelmingly one side or the other to be in that position at that particular time.

Steeley: How did you generally go about making decisions as governor, and what was it like to be governor at that time?

Vandiver: At that time there was a great deal of power in being governor. It's something that--you had complete power over the finances. Herman [Eugene] Talmadge had it; [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] had it; and I had it. And [Carl Edward] Sanders had most of it, although he didn't have as much as we did. It was something that you had to be extremely careful not to abuse. I had also pledged not to raise taxes, and we cut services, cut out a lot of business that we felt was not overwhelmingly important. We cut down on expansion for a period of a couple of years, and then we were able to save enough money so that the last couple of years we were able to do a lot of things that we could have done the first two years maybe if we had raised taxes. But that was a difficult thing to do, to try to keep from raising taxes. It [unintelligible] Georgia was not growing at the rate it has in recent years, where the tax base has grown so much. In fact, the total revenue in 1958, from '58 to '62, was about three hundred

million a year. And, as you know, last year, I think we got over five billion, didn't we, was our revenue last year. So it was during a period of economic depression as well, and it was pretty hard to administer the state government and not raise taxes. And yet I think in the long run it worked out pretty well. 'Course they haven't been raised much even since then, but the base has grown so much.

Being governor, though, it was something that you had to be extremely careful with every word you said, everything you did. You live in a glass house, and your family sometimes suffers from it. I've got three children. One of them was particularly affected by it, I think. She was so timid, and she couldn't stand the spotlight. The other two seemed to get along pretty well. But even today I think she's probably--we were away so much; we were in the spotlight. My baby daughter would come down and mingle with the crowd; this daughter would stay upstairs. She didn't want to be around that sort of thing. It affects your family; it affects your life. It's a great honor. There's no greater honor that people can bestow on you, but it's one that has to be handled extremely carefully.

Steeley: Did you find a lot of joy in it? Did you enjoy it?

Vandiver: There were parts of it that you enjoy. The governors' conferences were always a period of relaxation. You get to meet the governors from other states. I know we, Betty and I, took a trip to South America at the instance of President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy. After he had been elected, he wanted the governors to make a special trip to South America and visit Brazil and Argentina, sort of an ambassador. And twenty-eight of the fifty governors went on this trip. We were gone three weeks, and we had an opportunity to really get to know the other governors, which was a great joy. You got to know some of them too well.

[Laughter] Some of them you thought you might like before you went on the trip. You ended up you didn't like 'em; some of them that you. . . .

Steeley: Who was your most memorable governor that you went on the trip with?

Vandiver: Well, [Edmund Gerald] Pat Brown was the governor of the state of California at that time. His son later was governor, but he was governor at that time and had just been elected. He had just beaten [Richard Milhous] Dick Nixon, and he was, of course, the man who was the topic of all the conversation because he had beaten the former vice president. And when he didn't get what he thought was the proper reception, when he didn't get asked the proper questions, he'd bring them up himself, [laughter] and got to know him pretty well. He was sort of--well, very aggressive, I'd say.

Steeley: A legend in his own mind, as it were.

Vandiver: That's about the size of it. Mennen [G.] Williams was another one that was very much like that, from Michigan. If he didn't have a press conference at every town, every stop that we made in South America, he'd call one, have his own little conference. Others we learned to love and really appreciate.

Steeley: Did you ever know [Nelson] Rockefeller? Was he . . . ?

Vandiver: Yes, he was governor at that time. He was elected at the same time I was. Nelson was an unusual fellow. He had all the facilities in the world to be governor without spending the state's money. And he had all of these advisers on his own payroll, and he came up with all of these programs. He was the man that started the movement for Medicare. By the way, when we had this difficulty, Georgia was very much in the news because of the segregation-integration controversy, and [Jack] Nelson called me one day and told me that he

thought if we'd handle it in such and such a way that it would be fine. I said, "Well, Governor, you know your state, and I hope I know mine." I said, "If you'll just handle yours, I'll try to handle mine." [Laughter] And I had another governor from Massachusetts who held a press conference and decided he'd come down and tell us how to handle the situation. And he called me and told me he was coming. And I said, "Fine, I'll meet you at the airport." And so I met him and we started driving into town to the hotel and he started telling me what we ought to do, and we ought to do this and that and so forth. And I said, "Now, Governor, I talked with Governor Rockefeller and I told him and I'm going to tell you that we're going to try to handle our situation down here the best we can. And you don't understand our people. You don't understand our situation, and your advice will not be of any help to me. I'm glad you came. We'd be delighted to have you stay with us and stay a few days, but as far as discussing that, I don't want to discuss it with you." So he turned around and got in his plane and went back to Massachusetts.

Steeley: Did you even stop at the hotel?

Vandiver: He didn't stop. [Laughter] He later was convicted of a crime and served some time in prison, so. . . . And if you recall, they had more trouble in Boston than we had in Georgia, and, although I'm not vindictive, I couldn't help but remember . . .

Steeley: Take a little satisfaction?

Vandiver: Remember that maybe he didn't understand his own situation.

Fitzsimmons: You didn't exactly find him asking you for advice at that time either.

Vandiver: [Laughter] No.



Steeley: Didn't you kind of suppress a little desire to pick up the phone and call and give him some advice?

Vandiver: [Laughter] It was a little difficult, but after what I'd told him, I thought I'd best not. [Laughter]

Steeley: Who were you key leaders in the legislature? You appointed the Speaker for all intents and purposes.

Vandiver: Yes, that was back in the days when the Speaker was appointed. And, as Herman probably told you, he appointed [Frederick Barrow] Fred Hand, and Marvin Griffin appointed Marvin Moate, and, in effect, I appointed George L. [Lee] Smith [II], because the legislature would elect whoever you wanted. George L. Smith was my Speaker, and I think he was one of the great Speakers.

Steeley: Swainsboro?

Vandiver: Yeah. And then he remained speaker through. . . . Well, he was not Speaker during the Sanders term because George T. Smith. . .

Steeley: George T. came in.

Vandiver: Was Speaker, but he became Speaker after Lester [Garfield] Maddox was elected and then was Speaker until he died. So he was very well beloved by the legislature and was a good man, certainly helpful to me. Frank [Starling] Twitty was my floor leader. He was a fine speaker. He also had been a close friend of Herman's. And we were able to get our legislation through without any difficulty, everything we did, almost.

Steeley: Who were the opponents? Or did you really have any opponents in the legislature? Anybody really try to fight you?

Vandiver: Not too many. [Robert Alwyn] Cheney Griffin had a little coterie, a little group that he kept, that usually voted against anything that we were for, but it was a small group. And most of the legislation that we recommended to the legislature was passed almost unanimously.

Steeley: Who did you put in, say, to the position as the head of the public safety department or the colonel of the state patrol?

Vandiver: An old friend of mine who is a lawyer from LaGrange named Bill [William Perry] Trotter. Bill was a lawyer, had been a major in the army, and Bill Trotter went in as head of the state patrol for two years, after which time he resigned, and I appointed [Harvey] Lowell Conner, who at that time was aide to Senator Talmadge. He was in Washington, and we brought him home and made him head of the state patrol. He did a good job.

Steeley: You were looking for somebody in that case who was more of an administrative person than a police officer or something.

Vandiver: In the beginning, yes, because I think that's what they really needed at that time; they needed a good administrator. And although he had not come up through the ranks, he was a good administrator.

Steeley: I have to think that Hugh Hardison is the first one that ever came up through the ranks, isn't he?

Vandiver: No, Conner. Conner came up through the ranks.

Steeley: Conner had? Okay.

Vandiver: 'Course he was very close to Senator Talmadge and was his aide, state patrol aide, during the whole time he was governor.

Steeley: [Unintelligible]

Vandiver: He started out as a trooper and came up through the ranks.

Steeley: In fact, Conner was still with him in the '80 campaign.

Vandiver: Oh yeah, yeah. He was, he's been a longtime friend, Herman's.

Steeley: Were there any other particular appointments you were especially proud of?

Vandiver: Yes, I was proud of Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.]. He did a magnificent job as head of the State Patrol. I was proud of Dixon [Curtis] Oxford, who was a revenue commissioner. He ran that department as straight as it's ever been run. It's one of those places where, if a man didn't run it right, it can ruin you, it can ruin your administration. It almost ruined Marvin Griffin's administration 'cause of this man who was revenue commissioner under him. And, then Bill [William Redding] Bowdoin, as head of the purchasing department, was one of my, I think, one of my best appointments.

Steeley: Was Peyton [Samuel, Sr.] Hawes in your administration?

Vandiver: Peyton was not. He was in the Senate during my administration, but he was not a member. He was Marvin Griffin's floor leader when I was lieutenant governor.

Steeley: Okay.

Vandiver: Now, Carl Sanders . . .

Steeley: So, it's not likely he'd have been one of your people then.

Vandiver: No, but he was a good friend. We lived close together, and we've been good friends all through the years, but Carl Sanders was my floor leader.

Steeley: Was Albert Moore involved with you in those days?

Vandiver: Who's that?

Steeley: Albert Moore, he was a senator from Cedartown?

Vandiver: Uh [sighs].

Steeley: You don't remember him?

Vandiver: No, he was not, he was not; I don't remember him.

Steeley: Okay. Who were the major, strong leaders in the Senate during that period, when you were lieutenant governor and later when you became governor?

Vandiver: Well, Peyton Hawes was the majority leader and then governor's floor leader, and then Carl Sanders was mine, and Bob [Robert Henry] Jordan, who was president pro tem, was a strong leader. Everett Millican, who was a senator from Atlanta, who ordinarily was not too popular with the senators from the rest of the state, Everett was a friend of mine, and had been a friend of mine when I was lieutenant governor. He was very helpful to me when I became governor. I carried Atlanta for the first time in a long time that a Talmadge man had carried Atlanta and all the big counties, most of them.

Steeley: Did they think of you as a Talmadge man? I was away at college during that period, and I didn't . . .

Vandiver: I had pretty well been categorized as a Talmadge man because I had been his adjutant general. I had managed his campaign, and I was in that category. I felt like that we'd been friends since we were boys and that. . . .

Steeley: I remember thinking of Talmadge more as a populist, and you as less a populist than as kind of. . . .

Vandiver: I don't think we--I think we're quite different in a lot of ways. We've been friends, but I think we're quite different.

Steeley: I think you're very different people, very different personalities and styles.

Vandiver: I think we were. At the same time, we were awfully good friends, too. We were able to get along well together.

Steeley: Now, [William Perry] Trotter was not a senator at that time. He'd already run through the Senate and gone into the House. Was he in the House?

Vandiver: No, Trotter was a senator when I was lieutenant governor. Then I appointed him to the State Patrol.

Steeley: That was at a time when they rotated the Senate?

Vandiver: That was back in the days when the Senate was rotated. In fact, Carl Sanders would not have been in the Senate when he got ready to run for governor if I hadn't called Mitchell County, who was supposed to have the senator. See, Carl was my floor leader, and then the Senate was supposed to rotate the last two years of my term as governor to Mitchell County. And I called the people in Mitchell County who were my friends and asked them if they would let Carl run for the Senate again, if they would give up their term. And they agreed to that. And so Carl, because of that, was able to keep his name in public and be in the Senate when he got ready to run for governor.

Steeley: Well, I'll be darned. Well, y'all had a real strong alliance there.

Vandiver: Oh, yeah, we were good friends.

Steeley: Well, now, did Peter Zack replace Carl in your administration?

Vandiver: No, no, Peter Zack. . . .

Steeley: Well, Carl was a floor leader.

Vandiver: He was a floor leader.

Steeley: Okay. He was . . .

Vandiver: Peter Zack was my aide when I was lieutenant governor and was my executive secretary when I was governor.

Steeley: Okay.

Vandiver: And then Carl was my floor leader when I was governor.

Fitzsimmons: The federal courts, Governor, I believe, attacked the, began the attack on the county unit system during your time, did they not?

Vandiver: Looks like the roof fell in on every [laughter], everything that had been part of Georgia politics during my administration.

Fitzsimmons: Well, this is true, now that you mention it. I think it was a tremendous transition time.

Vandiver: That's right. I called a special session of the legislature, and we tried to modify the county unit system and give more units to the larger counties. Actually, the county unit system is no more than the electoral system of the United States. And they can talk about it all they want to, but still it's basically the same thing. And I thought if we modified it, made it a little more fair, that we could get the courts to agree to it, but they wouldn't. They threw it out completely. Carl Sanders was elected by popular vote.

Fitzsimmons: You felt, then, that once this started probably that it was . . . that it would be just a delay tactic?

Vandiver: Very much like, very much like the segregation and integration problem. Once the courts took it, there wasn't much you could do with it, unless you wanted to defy the courts.

Fitzsimmons: One of the accomplishments, one of the things I'm sure that you look on with some pride is the, was the completion of the new archives building. Did you know Mrs. Bryan, Mary Givens Bryan?

Vandiver: Oh, yeah, sure. I knew Mrs. Bryan very well. Of course, Ben [Benjamin Wynn] Fortson [Jr.] was secretary of state, and that was under his department, and he, I think, had appointed Mary Givens Bryan. And she was a great friend of mine. Bob [Robert Greir] Stephens [Jr.], who later served in Congress from the tenth district, was in the legislature at that time. And Bob and I had talked about the terrible shape that the records of our state were in. They were out at, I believe, out at Rhodes Center, in that old building out there, and it was grossly inadequate. And so we proposed with Bob Stephens, proposed a new archives building and were able to get it through and get it built. Same thing with the coliseum over at the University of Georgia. They had been without, they said that Woodruff Hall, where they basketball games were played, was the only basketball court in America that was affected by the weather, that the roof was wide open [laughter], and it was just in terrible shape. So what we did [was] we built a coliseum that was a multi-use coliseum, where it could be used for agriculture, cattle shows, horse shows, hog shows, also for basketball and university activities. Cost us about a million dollars back then. It'd probably cost fifty now.

Fitzsimmons: Yes. It was, and probably still is, one of the most advanced in the United States, for that matter.

Vandiver: It's a beautiful building.

Fitzsimmons: It is beautiful . . .

Vandiver: Real proud of it.

Fitzsimmons: It's very efficient, very effective. Another of the accomplishments of your administration was taking an interest in making changes as far as caring for the mentally ill is concerned. What really sparked your interest in this?

Vandiver: Really, what really brought that to immediate attention was that almost as soon as we got into office a reporter, Jack Nelson of the *Atlanta Constitution*, went down to Milledgeville . . . [Cut off]

#### End of Side One

#### Side Two

Vandiver: And wrote a series of articles about Milledgeville. Frankly, I didn't know too much about what the situation was. I knew it was handled by Alan Kemper, who was head of the Welfare Department at that time. It was under his jurisdiction. But after he had written these articles, Betty and I took a group of legislators, and we went down there and looked at it from top to bottom. And, frankly, I was shocked. I didn't believe, couldn't believe, that people lived like that. It was a terrible situation. You had twelve thousand people crowded into just a few little buildings. You had twelve doctors; that's all you had to look after twelve thousand sick people. And you had people that were local politicians that were trying to run the hospital. You had one man that had a drug store, and he was trying to sell all the drugs to the hospital. It was a . . .

Steeley: Was that [Edwards] Culver Kidd [Jr.]?

Vandiver: I think he had a drugstore at that time, yeah. [Laughter] Anyway, they tried to handle all the patronage of the hospital. Finally, we went down there and looked at it and knew that we had to do something. And we had special trips for the legislature and committees



to go down and see what the situation was. I think we came from probably fifty in the nation up to maybe tenth in the nation by the time we were able to get through with it. And today I think the other governors have continued working in the mental health field and have done almost everything that needed to be done. And I think we're probably one of the top states in the nation as far as mental health is today. We've built a series of regional health centers. We've got only -I think there are only sixteen hundred patients in Milledgeville. The rest of them are scattered around over in the regional centers, close to their families, which, of course, is very important to somebody who's sick.

They had no place to worship down there. They worshipped in a chapel where they had their dances and did everything else. Betty was very instrumental in helping and working with Mr. Sibley and Bob [Robert W.] Woodruff and a whole lot of other people in building some chapels down there. In fact, we built one big chapel and then we built five smaller chapels down there and didn't spend a dime of state funds. It was all voluntary, everything. We had people that were so interested in it. Almost every family has got somebody or knows somebody that's been in a mental hospital. We had one man that he was traveling and he'd send in fifty cents a week. He'd send Betty fifty cents a week from wherever he was, all over the state. We could pretty well keep up where he was going, and that, of course, was put into all these funds. And we got up, that way, we got up eight hundred and fifty thousand, I think, and Mr. Bob Woodruff saw we were getting close, and he helped us out, and we got up to the million dollars that was our goal and were able to build that without spending a dime of state money.

Steeley: Did you find that people like Mr. Woodruff and other, what you would call, powerful leaders, business leaders in Atlanta, were helpful to you?

Vandiver: Always willing to help, always willing to help when something was needed, when something that was important to the state was concerned, Bob Woodruff was right there. People like Mr. John Sibley, a man of great influence, great power, great wealth, were interested in seeing that Georgia made progress. And when you needed help, they'd give it to you.

Steeley: You had some turnarounds in your political career, one that we talked earlier about, Al [Alfred E.] Smith, and the problem of him being a Catholic. In 1960 John Kennedy ran as a Catholic, as I remember you supported Mr. Kennedy.

Vandiver: I did. I supported him. I introduced him when he spoke at Warm Springs and supported him with all the vigor that I could. We had a meeting in Atlanta with the governor of Tennessee, the governor of North Carolina, the governor of South Carolina, the governor of Florida, five or six governors in this region. We all got together and had the biggest political meeting I think that was held over there in the whole United States, as far as regions were concerned, and raised him a lot of money. I think it was very helpful to him because he did carry most of those states.

Steeley: And he had talked about an appointment for you. Would you tell us a little bit about that?

Vandiver: Yes. We had discussed that. Bobby [Robert B.] Troutman [Jr.], I think, was probably the instigator of that. I don't know whether you know Bobby or not. He's a lawyer in Atlanta. I was a classmate with him at the University of Georgia.

Steeley: Troutman and Sanders?

Vandiver: Well, that Troutman was Bobby's uncle.

Steeley: Okay.

Vandiver: His father was in King and Spalding, the firm. Bobby was pushing that more than anybody else. He wanted me to serve with Kennedy. He and Kennedy had gone to school together at Harvard, and after we supported Kennedy and helped him all we could, Bobby [Robert Francis Kennedy] wanted me to serve in the administration. And I did consider it. But I felt like I had a contract with the people, that I had agreed to serve as their governor, and I didn't want to run out on them, so I turned it down. He told me he'd like for me to serve with him sometime while he was president.

Steeley: You generally respected President Kennedy?

Vandiver: Yes, I did.

Steeley: You thought he did a good job?

Vandiver: I had a great respect for John Kennedy, much more than I have for his brother. He was a real gentleman; he was a fine, fine president; I think he made a great president. I wish he could have lived longer. I served on a civil defense committee with Pat Brown and Nelson Rockefeller that met with Kennedy on occasion. This was, of course, sort of an honorary position, but I had been civil defense director for Georgia when I was adjutant general. And I happened to be in Washington at the time that the missile situation in Cuba heated up and was in Washington and discussed with Kennedy and with Rockefeller and with Pat Brown the letter which he had written to [Nikita Sergeyeovich] Khrushchev. He seemed to think that that would solve the situation. And it did. Rockefeller was all upset. I think his constituents were really giving him real problems. They felt like they would be the number one target, I guess. And Pat Brown was very much upset, and I think the calmest man in the room was John Kennedy. He was absolutely calm. He was cool. He was collected. I saw him

probably under the greatest stress that he was under during his administration, and I was happy that he was our president really rather than either of the other two, who had been candidates.

Steeley: You knew Bobby pretty well, too?

Vandiver: I knew Bobby fairly well. I'd talked with him over the phone. He had visited in Atlanta. He came out to the executive mansion, he and his wife. We woke up our children and introduced him to them. I knew him fairly well. I was not as great an admirer of Bobby as I was of John, however. Nor am I of Teddy [Edward Moore Kennedy]. But John, I think, was the cream of the crop.

Steeley: You worked in Governor [James Earl] Carter's [Jr.] administration, the first few months at least. How did you get with Governor Carter in '66, or would you just tell us about the '66 race, that might be the easiest way to do it, your involvement in it and how you ended up with Jimmy Carter.

Vandiver: Well, that involves some old political scars that I don't particularly care about going into. But I did support Jimmy Carter, and he and I had had some discussions, and my friends had had discussions with him about the possibility in the event that something happened to Senator Russell that I would be considered as a replacement for him. I really agreed to take this job as adjutant general under him to get back into the swing. I'd been out of state government from 1963 until 1971, to really get back into the political situation and hopefully to, in the event that I was appointed to the Senate, to be able to renew old acquaintances and so forth. And also, as I told you earlier, I enjoyed being adjutant general. It was a job that was very gratifying and was . . . wonderful people that I was associated with. And that was the way I happened to be adjutant general under Carter.

Steeley: Well, had you known Carter in the '66 campaign at all?

Vandiver: Yes, I had. In fact, when I had to get out of the campaign was when he decided to run for governor. He had planned to run for Congress against Bo [Howard] Callaway, and when I had to get out of the campaign, he decided he'd run for governor.

Steeley: And you got out because of a heart attack?

Vandiver: Yeah, I'd had some heart problems. And I had a friend, Bill [William B.] Gunter, who I'd gone to law school with, and Bill was supporting Jimmy Carter very vigorously in 1966. I was in a position where I had to vote for somebody else. I couldn't support him. But Bill Gunter, knowing that, asked me if I would talk to Jimmy and try to help him out and see if we could help him in his campaign because he knew absolutely nothing about a state race. And Jimmy Carter came to our house and spent one whole day, and I agreed to do this, to tell him who to contact in which counties and to try to give him some idea of the strategy that would be necessary to run a creditable race. Told him he'd have to eat a lot of ham and peas. And I was afraid he hadn't eaten enough at the time he ran in 1966. He had not made the civic club circuit, which is what you had to do back in those days. You had to speak in every little nook and cranny in the state and get to know people, let them know you. And he hadn't done that. But anyway, I spent this whole day trying to. I told Bill Gunter that I would help him with his campaign, although I was not going to vote for him at that time. I had pledged to vote for another candidate. And he seemed to be very grateful for it. After he lost, I helped make up the deficit in his campaign.

Steeley: So you had some ties going back that far?

Vandiver: I had some ties going back to '66. I did not know Jimmy; he came to the Senate after I left. He was there during the Sanders years.

Steeley: Well, now, his daddy had been an old Talmadge man, I understand.

Vandiver: He had been a Talmadge supporter. That was one thing that I knew about his political history. If there could be any more difference between anybody it must have been between Jimmy and his father.

Steeley: Well, now, you went into his administration and you supported him in the '70 campaign and went into his administration. Tell us a little bit about what it was like to work with him and his reorganization program and that sort of thing. What was your impression of all that?

Vandiver: Frankly, I was very disappointed in the way he went about it. He didn't reorganize state government. I had done as much or more than he had. What he did, he placed, he would take different parts of the state government and place them in different categories, but he ended up with the same structure, really, that he started out with.

Steeley: And more people?

Vandiver: And more people, and more employees. It was really no. . . . He did a very poor job and alienated, I think, probably most Georgians because of his actions, the way he went about it. There was no real reorganization, in my opinion. He just placed boards, a board that might be out here by itself. . . . Well, take for instance the Warm Springs board that controlled Warm Springs. He put that in the Department of Natural Resources, and pick out boards and put them somewhere. There wasn't any real reorganization, in my opinion.

Steeley: Just a paper reorganization in reality.

Vandiver: A paper reorganization was all it was.

Steeley: Did he try to reorganize the guard during that period or did he leave you pretty much alone?

Vandiver: No, no, he left me alone. I think that he realized that I knew a little bit more about the guard than he did, having served there for six years. And so he left me alone.

Steeley: Well, it's rather unusual to have a man that's a former A.G. [adjutant general] and lieutenant governor and governor coming back to an A.G. slot.

Vandiver: Well, really, as I told you, what I had hoped to do was get back into the political swing.

Steeley: So if an opening came when Senator Russell stepped down. . . .

Vandiver: If an opening . . . in the event that something happened, then I would be available.

Steeley: Well, why, then, did you leave it?

Vandiver: Because I wasn't appointed.

Steeley: Oh. That's sensible enough.

Vandiver: And, uh, so I left it, and determined that I was going to run for the office, and I did run. We, every former governor except Talmadge, who was in the Senate and couldn't say anything, every one of them was opposed to me. Carter, who was in office. . .

Steeley: He'd appointed [David Henry] Gambrell.

Vandiver: He'd appointed Gambrell. Sanders, who, he and I had alienated, been alienated from each other; Maddox was supporting another candidate, and every other governor

was opposed to him, so, but I did come pretty close to Sam [Samuel Augustus] Nunn [Jr.] even with that.

Steeley: Was Sam Nunn a surprise to you?

Vandiver: Frankly, he was. Sam had been in the legislature, had been not a legislative leader, but he ran a good campaign. And he and I had agreed that whichever one came in second and third would help the other one against Gambrell, and we did. I wrote twenty thousand letters for Sam Nunn. And I think I helped him get elected.

Fitzsimmons: I wouldn't doubt it.

Steeley: Did you think that had you not had health problems back in '66 that you might have won that one?

Vandiver: I think I would have. I think there were a lot of people that felt like, that I wasn't, I wasn't physically able to do it, and I think probably the Lord realized I wasn't. Maybe I, at least Betty and I think, probably the best thing that happened to me was that. . . . I would have gone to Washington at the time that the, that Nixon was about to be impeached, and it wasn't a happy time to be in Washington, really.

Steeley: No.

Vandiver: It was a terrible situation; Watergate and all of that disturbance would have been a lot of pressure.

Steeley: You've mentioned your wife a number of times. Would you give us kind of a capsule version of what the role of a first lady is in a modern state like Georgia?

Vandiver: Well, she was the ideal, in my opinion. She campaigned with me, side by side, when I ran for lieutenant governor and when I ran for governor. We'd walk up and down



the streets of the towns of Georgia, and she'd go on one side and I'd go on the other. She'd end up getting more votes than I would usually. She was a great help, a tremendous help. Don't know if I could have done it without her.

Steeley: How was she as a first lady when you were governor? What kind of things does a first lady do?

Vandiver: Well, we had three small children. We had children that were pretty young, and of course her primary duty was her being a mother. But she was able to do a lot of things other than that, like the Chapel of All Faiths, the mental health program. . . .

Steeley: Did she take on things she wanted to take on, or did you find things that you thought were important and you'd ask her to go check on this for you?

Vandiver: No.

Steeley: [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt used Eleanor Roosevelt like that a lot. He'd send her out to go find out about this or that, and then she'd report back to him.

Vandiver: No, Betty didn't do things like that. The mental health thing was something that she was really interested in. And she went with me to Milledgeville and saw what the situation was. And that program was something that she just grabbed hold of and really did a tremendous job with. Anything else that came up, she was a great first lady.

Fitzsimmons: You mentioned Senator Russell several times. Tell us about Senator Russell.

Vandiver: Senator Russell, in my opinion, is probably one of the greatest statesmen that this country has ever produced. He was elected to the legislature when he was twenty-one years old. Served about ten years in the legislature and ended up being Speaker of the House. Ran

for governor when he was about thirty years old, beat out some old political machines. Served a couple of years as governor, and the Senate vacancy opened up and was elected to the Senate, and, of course, was elected seven times to the United States Senate. There are only three men in history who have ever been elected that many times. He served about forty years, served as, he was the greatest parliamentarian in the Senate. He represented his area of the United States, I think, better than any other man in the Senate. I think Senator Talmadge will tell you what a great leader he was while he was with him. And Senator Talmadge was a great senator, too, in my opinion. We had two great senators. A lot of people wanted him to run for president. I think he realized that he came from the wrong part of the country to be elected president at that time and with the situation as it was.

Steeley: But he did have a campaign, though.

Vandiver: He did.

Steeley: And then you were very involved in that campaign.

Vandiver: I asked Governor Talmadge at that time if I could take a leave of absence. And so I resigned from my office with a leave of absence and went with the senator during most of that campaign. Traveled with him and worked in Washington and all over the country, all over the United States.

Steeley: That was in '52?

Vandiver: That was in '52. And he was so well-received, even in states that he knew that he didn't have a chance of carrying, that it was just marvelous to know that the people he served with in the United States Senate of different political parties would have all of their friends in that state just roll out the red carpet when he'd come into that state, knowing full well

that he wouldn't carry the state. But they wanted Dick to be well-received. And he probably had more influence on this country than most presidents. He could have been majority leader at the time Lyndon Johnson became majority leader. He supported Lyndon [Baines] Johnson and that's the reason he was majority leader. I think before Lyndon Johnson left office that he became somewhat disenchanted and disappointed in Lyndon Johnson.

Steeley: In fact, he hid out in Spain for almost a year one time, didn't he? When Lyndon was running for election in his own right.

Vandiver: Not when Lyndon was running; that was another election. [Laughter]

Steeley: Oh, was it?

Vandiver: He was pretty close to Lyndon at that time. In fact, he and I and Bobby, his nephew, Betty's brother, and Carl Sanders and J.B. [John Brooks] Fuqua went out to the LBJ Ranch and went deer hunting with him after he was elected president.

Steeley: What was he to you? Uncle Dick or Senator or . . . ? How did you relate to him?

Vandiver: Well, he was Uncle Dick to Betty, but to me he was one of the great statesmen of the country. Really, I went to him on occasions for advice on important matters, and he was always very helpful to me. I think he directed this nation during the period of years there when Lyndon Johnson was majority leader and [Dwight David] Eisenhower was president, John Kennedy was in the Senate. He had served with Harry Truman. He was an advisor to five or six different presidents. He was a close advisor to all of them. All of them had tremendous respect for him. And I think as chairman of the Armed Services Committee and as chairman of the Appropriations Committee, he probably was as influential almost as the

president of the United States. And he loved the Senate. He was dedicated to it. In his opinion, that was the greatest job in the world, and he loved it and worked at it. As you know, he was not married. He was able to read bills himself and not have aides to advise him what was in the bills. He knew what was in them. He had twenty-five or thirty senators who would come and ask him how to vote on almost any question because they knew that Dick knew what was in the bills, and they respected his judgment enough to ask him what his views were on the subject. He was a great American, no doubt about it.

Steeley: They're telling us to stop here right now. I'm going to go ahead and call a halt to it at this point. We've got about four or five questions left. If we can just sit here and wait and let them switch cameras, we'll go ahead and do that. Is that all right with y'all? Jim? Okay. We'll just wait, and you all just switch . . . [Cut off]

End of Side Two

## Name Index

**B**

Bell, Griffin Boyette, 2, 4  
 Bootle, William Augustus, 2  
 Bowdoin, William Redding (Bill), 11  
 Brooks, Walter Odum (Bee), 4  
 Brown, Edmund Gerald, 7, 19  
 Bryan, Mary Givens, 15

**C**

Callaway, Howard (Bo), 21  
 Carter, James Earl, Jr. (Jimmy), 20, 21, 23

**E**

Eisenhower, Dwight David, 27

**F**

Fortson, Benjamin Wynn, Jr., 15  
 Fuqua, J.B., 27

**G**

Gambrell, David Henry, 23, 24  
 Geer, Peter Zack, 4, 13, 14  
 Gillis, James L. (Jim), 11  
 Griffin, Robert A. Cheney (Cheney), 10  
 Griffin, Samuel Marvin, Sr., 5, 9, 11  
 Gunter, William B. (Bill), 21

**H**

Hand, Frederick Barrow, 9  
 Hardison, Hugh, 10  
 Hawes, Peyton Samuel, Sr., 11, 12  
 Hooper, Frank Arthur, 2

**J**

Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 27  
 Jordan, Robert Henry, 12

**K**

Kemper, Alan, 16

Kennedy, Edward Moore, 20  
 Kennedy, John Fitzgerald, 6, 18, 19, 27  
 Kennedy, Robert Francis, 19, 20  
 Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeevich, 19  
 Kidd, Edwards Culver, Jr., 16

**M**

Maddox, Lester Garfield, 9, 23  
 Millican, Everett, 12  
 Moate, Marvin E., Sr., 9  
 Moore, Albert, 11, 12

**N**

Nelson, Jack, 7, 16  
 Nixon, Richard Milhous, 7, 24  
 Nunn, Samuel Augustus, Jr., 24

**O**

Oxford, Curtis Dixon, 11

**R**

Rockefeller, Nelson, 7, 8, 19  
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 25  
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 25  
 Russell, Richard Brevard, Jr., 1, 2, 20, 23,  
 25  
 Russell, Richard Brevard, Sr., 2  
 Russell, Robert Lee, III (Bob), 2, 4

**S**

Sanders, Carl E., 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18,  
 22, 23, 27  
 Sibley, John Adams, 2, 3, 4, 17, 18  
 Smith, Alfred E. (Al), 18  
 Smith, George Leon, II, 9  
 Smith, George T., 9  
 Stephens, Robert G. (Bob), 15

**T**

Talmadge, Eugene, 23, 26  
 Talmadge, Herman E., 5, 9, 10, 12, 26

Trotter, William Perry (Bill), 10, 13  
Troutman, Robert, Jr., 18  
Truman, Harry S., 2, 27  
Twitty, Frank S., 9

**V**

Vandiver, Sybil Elizabeth (Betty), 1, 2, 16,  
17, 24, 25

**W**

Williams, G. Mennen, 7  
Woodruff, Robert W. (Bob), 17, 18

