

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 04B
Samuel Ernest Vandiver Jr. Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson (Part B)
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Vandiver: [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was] trying to pack the Supreme Court, and since [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] and Senator [Walter Franklin] George both opposed him, and he was trying to see if he could change some senators, and he came to Georgia. They gave him a great welcome and a doctorate at the University of Georgia, honorary. And he went to Barnesville, and he came out in favor of Lawrence Camp, who was the U.S. district attorney at the time. And I remember Senator George was on the platform when he came out against him, tried to purge him. He said to the president, "Mr. President, I accept your challenge." The president said, "God bless you, Walter." [Laughter] That was quite an exciting moment in Georgia, 'cause I think Senator George might not have been elected had not the president challenged him, 'cause the people stated, even those who were ardent supporters of Roosevelt, that "We love you, Mr. President, but we don't want you to tell us who to send to Washington."

Henderson: Right. What role did you play in that election?

Vandiver: I worked with Herman [Eugene Talmadge]. Herman was the manager of his father's elections, all of them except one, I think one, that he was already in the service, when he ran in 1942. But he was the manager of all his father's elections, and I worked with Herman in that election. We covered discussions of key men and keeping in touch with key people in each

county. As you know, the county unit system was in effect then, and it was all-important that you know the right people in every county.

Henderson: Now when you're doing this full-time? I mean, are you doing this part-time or full-time during the campaign? How involved [unintelligible]. . . .

Vandiver: I was doing it not full-time, but a great deal of the time. I was not on the payroll, or anything like that. I donated my time.

Henderson: Now when Gene [Eugene] Talmadge runs for governor in 1940, do you do basically the same thing in that campaign?

Vandiver: No, I was in college at that time, and I did not have an opportunity to get into that campaign. My father was not on the highway board until he [Talmadge] was elected in 1942, but I was in college and didn't have a lot of time to spend. But when he ran for re-election they, 'course, took Georgia off the accredited list of schools, and I was at the university at that time, and I could feel the anger, and the [real distress] that most of the students had and told my father, who related to Governor Talmadge that he was making a terrible political mistake.

But later, and I think I've told you this before, Roy [Vincent] Harris was one of my friends. I appointed him to the Board of Regents after [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] had fired him, or had failed to reappoint him. Roy and I were pretty good friends, and Roy told me that he and Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall had courted the accrediting people. I mean, they'd really gotten to be great buddies with the accrediting people, and they asked the accreditation board to take Georgia off the accredited list to give them the issue to run against Gene Talmadge. They agreed to do it, and, of course, that was what beat him. People were concerned that their credits

that their children earned in college would not be accepted somewhere else, very much so. Every family in Georgia has got some connection with the University of Georgia. Dean [Walter Dewey] Cocking was the dean of education, and he was the one that Talmadge wanted fired. When you start messing with the University of Georgia, you affect everybody in Georgia practically, in some way or another. They had marches to Atlanta, and it was really a right tense time.

Henderson: During this period of time were you defending Gene Talmadge while you were at the university? Did it cause any difficulties for you?

Vandiver: Yes, I always defended him. In fact, Phi Kappa, this literary society that I was in, was one that Governor Talmadge was in when he was at the University of Georgia, and this was prior to the 1940 election. Some of the Phi Kappa students had gotten mad at Talmadge, and they'd taken his picture down which they had asked him to send over, and they'd had on the wall. Well, before the '40 election, about the only part I played in that was I led the group to restore the picture, get a picture [of Talmadge] on the wall. And when they voted to restore it, Governor Talmadge came over to [the University of] Georgia and spoke to Phi Kappa, and we got his picture back up on the wall before the '40 election. 'Course I think they probably took it back down again before the next election.

Henderson: In 1946 Gene Talmadge runs for the governorship. What was your role in that election?

Vandiver: I took a very, very active role. I worked with Herman. Herman was back from the Navy at that time, and Herman and I worked very closely together. I traveled the state pretty widely, particularly the northern part of the state, and worked very closely with him in

that election. I was the first appointment that he made in that year, that old Governor Talmadge, after he had been elected, named. Benton Odum and I were his two first appointments: Benton Odum to be his secretary, and me to be his chief aide.

Henderson: Now what would the chief aide do?

Vandiver: Well, an aide does just about anything the boss wants him to do, and [is] in charge of maybe letter writing and meeting people and making speeches when the governor could not be present and that sort of thing.

Henderson: In the general election of '46 there's a write-in campaign, to write in Herman Talmadge's name. Were you involved in any way in that write-in campaign?

Vandiver: Not in any way. I didn't know anything about that, until after it was done. This man [Gibson Greer Ezell] from Monticello, Georgia, I've forgotten his name, but he was just studying, going through a law book, he wasn't a lawyer, but he was reading through a law book, and found where if, in the event that no governor got a majority, or died before the election--I'm not certain exactly how that law read--but then it became the duty of the legislature to elect a governor. But that was at the time that we had our first lieutenant governor. We hadn't had a lieutenant governor up until that time, and M. E. [Melvin Ernest] Thompson was elected lieutenant governor at the same time that Talmadge was elected governor. So that was the legal situation, and it had to be decided by the Supreme Court, and the chief justice and one other justice, I think, sided with the Talmadge view, but the majority sided with the Thompson view. So Talmadge said he'd carry his case to the people. That's when he decided to run for governor in 1940 . . . '48, I guess it was.

Henderson: Now when the legislature elects Herman Talmadge to be governor, were you involved with his administration during those sixty-seven days he served as governor?

Vandiver: Yes, I filled the job that his father had originally appointed for me. I was the aide, and as we were talking at lunch, he had us all, most of his close friends, stay there all night long. I remember answering the telephones and people calling from all over the United States, wondering what in the world was going on here in Georgia. I think the stock reply was they'd ask where Ellis Arnall was, and they said they didn't really know, but they thought he was selling insurance down in Newnan. [Laughter] Anyway, I finally we went home that night, and the governor called me about seven thirty the next morning wanting me to speak to the Tomato Grower's Association of Georgia, which I did, because I was young enough to stand it, I guess.

Henderson: Were you involved in any of the lobbying trying to line up legislators to vote for Herman Talmadge?

Vandiver: I was involved in that. I was, very much so.

Henderson: Could you describe some of that activity?

Vandiver: Yes, it was one of the moments in the political history of the state that the battle was fought from the very beginning. It was Arnall against Talmadge. Roy Harris had changed. He'd supported Talmadge. Arnall and Thompson were on one side, and the legislators that they knew and could influence. They worked on them night and day, and we were working on the others that had had Talmadge leanings and were supporters of him. It was pretty close. It was not a landslide by any means. But [there were] a lot of shenanigans that went on there. Some legislators would go out and drink too much and not be able to get there

for a critical vote, and so you'd have to send out for them [laughter] and bring them in. A lot of that went on on both sides. It wasn't just one side.

Henderson: Now what did you do as an aide to Herman Talmadge during these sixty-seven days?

Vandiver: Well, I mostly was answering letters, meeting people in the office, greeting them, and if they had some problem that I could help them solve without bothering the governor, I would do that. If it was something that they absolutely had to see the governor about, I'd go to the governor and tell him what the problem was and if they had to see him. 'Course everybody, really, when they come in there, they want to see the governor. They don't want to see an aide. So he told me that [laughter] he'd see so many people during the day during that period of time, just overflowing the capitol, that by the time he got ready to go home at about five or six o'clock, he couldn't find his way to the car [laughter], he was so confused. It is a difficult time. I experienced some of that after my election. 'Course, right after you're elected, all the jobs come up, your appointments come up, you have people that supported you that bring in people who need a job. You have to say no so many times that it's not a happy time of office.

However, the most important time of office, in my opinion, for a governor, is before he ever takes the oath. You pick the people who are to [be] your department heads first, and they are announced, and the people see who they are. That sets the tone for your administration. Now, Marvin Griffin had, and you will know this, a lot of bad publicity about the purchasing department. People, that were his friends, they'd be on the list, and the political enemies were not on the list, and they couldn't even bid on anything that the state bought or had to do. So I

picked the best man I could find to head up, particularly, the purchasing department, one that I knew was absolutely honest and could change the direction of the thing [purchasing department]. That was Bill [William Redding] Bowdoin, who was last president of the Trust Company of Georgia. I had a hard time getting them to let me use Bill 'cause he was a person who'd, he'd worked with the FFA [Future Farmers of America], and he'd been in public service, and he [was] a person of absolute integrity. I told Bill that I had a job that I needed him to do, and I was calling on him, and asked his bosses to let him do it. And they did. But he did restrict it to about a year and a half. He stayed there about a year and a half 'cause it took that long to get it straightened out.

And then there was General [Alvan Cullom] Gillem [Jr.], who was the commanding general of the Third Army, who. . . . He has retired from the Army, Lieutenant General Alvan Gillem. He was our friend. We'd known him, and he was Bill's assistant, and when Bill left to go back to the Trust Company of Georgia, General Gillem filled in and carried out the program. We changed the law so that everybody could bid. Nobody was prohibited from bidding that was reliable and had been in business and was eligible to bid, which was something that nobody had seen in a long time. That [the corruption in the purchasing department] went back through several administrations; [it] wasn't just Griffin. But that's one of the things I'm proudest of. We haven't had any problem with the purchasing department since we changed all those laws. You haven't read much about it, have you?

Henderson: No, sir. Governor, let me go back to the '48 campaign. Why did Herman Talmadge ask you to be his campaign manager, and what did a campaign manager do?

Vandiver: Well, as I've said, we had worked together since . . . oh, 1936 . . . when we both were boys almost. He had a lot confidence in me, and he knew that I would work hard and do the kind of job that needed to be done. 'Course, your job is to keep up with all of your counties and your key people in your counties and call them everyday, and frequently as possible, and bring them into the headquarters and ask them what the situation was. It was a full-time job, night and day almost. Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver] was pregnant with Chip [Samuel Ernest Vandiver III] at the time this was going on. I almost had to leave her by herself during that period of time. But seven days before the election, Chip was born, so the paper pictured me walking in the section [of the hospital] where the babies were born, walking up and down. I had more important things on my mind than the election right at that time.

Henderson: What role did Roy Harris play in that campaign?

Vandiver: Roy was an old-time politician, and he knew people from many, many campaigns back. Roy worked behind the scenes, and I always worked in the front. Then we'd all get together and compare notes and try to determine what needed to be done in this county or that county, but Roy was not out in front. Roy was not in very good . . . well, he'd been close to Ellis Arnall, and when Ellis decided he wanted to run for governor again, Roy decided he wasn't going to let him run for governor again, and that's when they broke up. I think a lot of people were surprised, as close as Roy and Ellis had been, that he supported Talmadge, but he was pretty bitter. He did it probably out of spite.

Henderson: During the 1940s Georgia had some of the most interesting politicians the state has ever had. Let me just run through and mention some names, and you just tell me your

opinion, your assessment, of them. You've already mentioned Roy Harris. Ed [Eurith Dickinson] Rivers?

Vandiver: Ed Rivers was probably the best speaker that we ever had in Georgia. He was a great speaker, a stump speaker, and could sway a crowd just as well as almost anybody I've ever heard speak. He got into office really in 1936 on the Roosevelt bandwagon. They tried to have the four R's. [Editor's Note: There were only three R's.] They had Russell, Rivers, Roberts--Columbus Roberts was running for commissioner of agriculture--and some other. Anyway, they had the four R's as best I remember. They tried to tie them all together, and Senator Russell tried to disassociate himself as much as he could from that "Four R" business. They were trying to get in on his coattails. But Rivers was most articulate and a very brilliant speaker, but the people who surrounded Ed Rivers were not the kind of people you wanted in positions of power or influence in Georgia.

Henderson: How 'bout M. E. Thompson?

Vandiver: M. E. Thompson was more of a schoolteacher than he was a politician. He'd been in schoolwork all of his life. That's all he'd ever done, and he made a lot of friends among the teachers. I think that really his election was attributable to the fact that he had made so many friends among the teachers, and he was able to beat Marvin Griffin, I believe was who he ran against, in fact I'm sure that he ran against Marvin. Of course, [Ellis] Arnall was supporting him very rigorously. Politics was really divided at one time; Marvin Griffin and Ellis Arnall were great friends. In fact, he appointed him adjutant general, called him back from the South Pacific, and got the army to [release him], appointed him adjutant general, and they were very close friends. I think the race situation [contributed to the conflict between them] because

Marvin was from deep south Georgia, and he was representing people who felt very strongly about it. Arnall was from north Georgia, where the feeling was not quite as strong, and they got into it, and anyway, became political enemies. Roy sort of attached himself to Herman and ran on his coattails; although Herman didn't ever say that that he was not running with Griffin, he didn't say he was either. The lieutenant governor in Georgia runs not on a ticket, but on an individual basis. And then when I ran for lieutenant governor, I made it very clear that I didn't know who was going to be elected governor, I was going to be my own man. So, I was able to get a lot of votes that Griffin didn't get.

Henderson: What's your assessment of Ellis Arnall?

Vandiver: Ellis Arnall was a colorful sort of fellow. He had a great background. He had a great family, a great political family. He was smart. I think he was going to school somewhere. . . maybe Vanderbilt or somewhere, and he got on the train, and he met a bunch of boys going to Sewanee [The University of the South], and he changed his mind, and [laughter] decided to go to Sewanee. Anyway, then he came back, might have gone to Mercer for a while, then he went to the University of Georgia, where he held some of the same positions I did. He was president of the Interfraternity Council when he was over there. He's a brilliant man, [a] manipulator. He and Roy could do just about what they wanted to as long as they were together. 'Course, Roy knew Georgia politics better than anybody, and Ellis, he was a quick learner, and they manipulated that thing in the race that Talmadge and Arnall ran against about as neatly as any political coup had ever done. He was smart. He got a lot of national publicity while he was governor that he had, he pardoned the man who was, wrote the book about *I am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang*. He appeared on a lot of talk shows, and that sort of

thing. He generally gave a good impression, and one thing he did, which, of course, was very popular, reduced the voting age to eighteen. His statement there that if a man was old enough to fight, he was old enough to vote, and he got that passed. He claimed that he got the state out of debt, and he did, but the reason he got the state out of debt, was [that] it was during the war [and] you couldn't build any roads, and you couldn't spend any money for anything, so he just paid the debt with the money that he couldn't spend. [Laughter] But he was a smart politician. I give him credit for being an extremely brilliant politician.

Henderson: Now after the '48 election, Governor Talmadge, does he ask you to be adjutant general or do you ask him that you would like to be adjutant general? How did that come about?

Vandiver: My father was extremely sick at the time right after the election time. He was able to vote, and then he had a stroke, and he was unconscious, and in the hospital in Anderson, South Carolina under an oxygen tent for forty-two days. We just thought he was going to die every night, and the doctor told us that even if he recovered that he may be a vegetable. They just didn't know what the outcome of that stroke would be, or how massive it was, or what damage had been done. So I didn't even see Herman for, I guess, three or four weeks, until the election. Finally--or maybe longer than that 'cause I was staying with my father, and finally, Herman called me and said, "I want you to be a part of my administration. You tell me the job that you would like to have." And I said, "Well, let me get back in touch with you." Marvin Griffin had just been elected lieutenant governor from the job of adjutant general, and it looked like a good way to meet a lot of people, maybe do a lot of good at the same time. So I checked the law and I was eligible, although I had not been a high-ranking

military officer by any means, but I was eligible under the law, and I did tell him that I would like to be adjutant general. There was a man named Alec [William A.] Cunningham, who was an old retired colonel, at one time had been the football coach over at the University of Georgia, who wanted to be adjutant general very badly, but Herman made me adjutant general, and Alec Cunningham assistant adjutant general. And Alec Cunningham and I got along famously. He was a great fellow. I enjoyed working with him. But Herman gave me the job I asked him, told him that I would like to have.

Henderson: Now, does being adjutant general . . . is it the stepping-stone to higher office?

Vandiver: Generally it is not, but it had been in the case of Marvin Griffin. This was right after the war, and everybody was required to either get in the reserve or National Guard. We had about 120 National Guard units throughout the state, and we had about twelve thousand men who were in the National Guard. It was an opportunity to get to know a lot of people over the whole state. Right now, it's not, it hadn't been considered a stepping-stone, nor has it been considered that in the other states. I've checked other states. They don't go from adjutant general to elective office often. In fact, I don't know of anybody else, any other state where it's happened. But we were in a period of reorganization and were able to accomplish a whole lot. The federal government was . . . if you wanted to build a new armory, they would put up 75 percent of the money, and we'd get the state to put up 12½ percent, and the localities 12½ percent. We built new armories all over the state. It was a time of growth. Practically every unit in the state had a new armory. We were able to do that, which everybody wanted, because at the end of the war they were meeting in firehalls and anywhere--barns or anywhere else they

could find a place to meet. And we were able with that national armory program to put new units practically everywhere, new armories about everywhere.

Henderson: When you become adjutant general, had you already made up your mind that you wanted to be governor?

Vandiver: Yes, yes, I had. I had been involved in politics so much, and for so long, that I . . . In fact, I thought about running for governor when Marvin Griffin ran.

Henderson: Why did you decide not to?

Vandiver: I talked with Herman about it. I told him that I was thinking about it, and he said, "Well, Ernie you're young, and you've got your whole life before you." He said, "Why don't you run for lieutenant governor?" I said, "Well, I will." And he said, I never will forget, he said, "First thing you do," he says, "You go over to the Atlanta newspapers, and you talk to those people and get to know those people and sit down with them and tell them what your plans are, what you hope to do." He said, "Every race I've run they've been against me." But he said, "It sure will be a lot easier if they'll be for you." And so I did that. I went over and talked with Jack [Johnson] Spalding, and all of the powers that be at the Atlanta newspapers, and they supported me. They supported me for governor, as you know, from reading the newspapers. They gave me great support, and I wish I . . . really appreciate it, because if I hadn't had that support during some of those real difficult times we . . . I don't know whether we would have gotten through them as easily as we did--'course it wasn't easy--but as well as we did.

Henderson: While you're adjutant general does Governor Talmadge ever call you in and you discuss politics or policy, or are you primarily military oriented?

Vandiver: I was primarily military. 'Course at every governors' conference it was a custom to invite the adjutant general, as your chief of staff, to accompany you to the conference, and you had, at that time, you had the national governors' conference, and you had the southern conference. And Betty and I went to every one of them, while I was adjutant general, up until the time I ran for lieutenant governor. We had a closer association during that time. I do remember this: when any orders came down from Washington they came, instead of to the adjutant general, they came to the governor, who was commander-in-chief. I remember he called me and said he'd gotten a call from President [Harry S] Truman, that they wanted to activate the 101st Anti-aircraft Brigade, which was commanded then by a General [Joseph Bacon] Fraser, Joe Fraser, who had been in World War II and had come out as a brigadier general, and we'd promoted him up to major general. He was the commander of the 101st, probably the most respected man in the National Guard. He was a wonderful man, just a great fellow, didn't drink, never raised his voice, didn't smoke, real role model for these kids, and everybody loved him. And so the governor gave me the job of calling General Fraser and saying, "Now, General, your unit has been activated." And I said, "Well, I'll talk with General Fraser, and I'll call him and tell him."

So I called General Fraser in Hinesville, Georgia. He lived in Hinesville and he said, "General, I can't think of a worse time for me to have to go back into the service." He said, "I've just bought an island off the Carolina coast over here." He's in the lumber business. He said, "I'm cutting all the timber off the island," and he said, "I'm right in the middle of it, and it takes a lot of supervision." But then he said, "If my country needs me, I'll go." And that island was Hilton Head [South Carolina]. [Laughter] And when he got back, he finished--he didn't have

to stay in too long; they never did go overseas. It was the Korean conflict. It was a war, but they called it a conflict. He stayed in about a year. He got through cutting timber over there, and he gave it to his son, Charles [Elbert Fraser], and Charles developed Hilton Head after he'd got through cutting the timber. And that's probably the greatest place in the South for retirement and recreation. It's a wonderful place.

Henderson: You were the youngest adjutant general, I believe, in the United States at the time.

Vandiver: Yes, I was.

Henderson: Did that present any problems?

Vandiver: It did, 'cause I, as adjutant general, my uniform carried two stars. I was just twenty-nine years old, and most of the generals were fifty, sixty years old. When I'd go to these conferences there'd be quite a contrast between me and these older generals. However, I enjoyed working with them and got to be on the board [of directors] of the Adjutant General's Association and got to know them all and enjoyed working with them. When I was lieutenant governor, 'course I maintained my interest in the National Guard, and we kept building armories. By the time I got through being governor, we had built over 120 new National Guard armories.

Then when I was governor, they put me as chairman of the National Guard committee, and I worked with Cyrus [Roberts] Vance, and with the secretary of defense, [Robert Strange] MacNamara, when they were trying to reorganize the guard. There was a period there that they were trying to reorganize the guard. I represented the National Guard, and they were trying to do away with the National Guard. They wanted everybody to be in the reserves. 'Course the

governors, everyone of them was opposed to that, because the National Guards belonged to the states, except when they were needed by the federal government. We were able to work out a workable situation with Cyrus Vance and MacNamara. When I saw President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy later, he told me how much he appreciated the way we worked it out.

MacNamara was sort of a bull in a china shop. He'd been president of Ford Motor Company. He was used to giving orders, and everybody jumped and did what he said. He ran into a buzz saw when he tried to change everything. We had, at that time, I think, forty-eight governors; they just said, "Hell, no, we're not going to let you have our National Guard. We're going to keep it." But we were able to work it out and when I was serving my last year as governor, they gave me the National Guard medal of honor at the national meeting, which I greatly appreciated, 'cause I had worked with them for many years.

Henderson: Let me go back to the 1950 campaign. Did you play any role in that campaign when Herman Talmadge seeks reelection?

Vandiver: I did not--not any active role. I was in the military. I did talk to Herman, asked him if he wanted me to resign and get into it. He felt like that he had the thing won, that he was going to get elected. He had a good feel for it, although I got and raised some money from friends--I didn't raise any money out of the National Guard--and helped him. But I didn't take any active role in that campaign as a manager or area manager or anything. He told me he didn't think I needed to.

Henderson: Herman Talmadge serves six years as governor. How would you assess his administration?

Vandiver: Herman Talmadge has one of the sharpest minds of any man I've ever known. He was brilliant. He was as good a politician, and as smart a politician, as any man I ever saw, but he had that weakness, and he carried that weakness with him to Washington. How he got by with it as long as he did, I don't know. He carried several of his Georgia people up there like [Harvey] Lowell Conner, state patrolmen that had driven him around. I know he looked after him for a while under those circumstances. But when he ran [for the Senate in 1980], and Betty [Leila Elizabeth Shingler] Talmadge made those statements about keeping money in an overcoat, all that stuff and the divorce and everything, I worked as much as I could, and as hard as I could for him, but I called [people] who'd been his friends, and I'd say, "We got to raise some money to get Herman on television." You know, we just ran out of money. "You may not think it's close, but it's close." And we knew it was close. They'd make some crack about "Well, tell him to get it out of his overcoat." [Laughter] [There is] not much you can say about that.

So he had trouble raising money after that. He knew it was close. He sent out an urgent telegram to every friend he had about a week before the elections saying that it was close, but most of his friends didn't believe him. They thought he was just going to be re-elected. But then he got beat, and he thought he had won, and I went to bed that night thinking he'd won. He was leading; I went to bed about one, two o'clock, and he was leading by a substantial majority, but then those votes started coming in. . . . [Cut off]

End Of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: He'd [Talmadge] always been able to win. But Mack [F.] Mattingly was not qualified, really, I don't think, to be a senator, and Herman had at that time become head of the agricultural committee, which was very important for Georgia, and was senior . . . second to Russell Long on the finance committee, positions of power that could be of great help to Georgia. But they didn't think about that in that election, and they replaced him. It was just a matter of time until Mack Mattingly was going to get beat, 'cause he didn't have any strength. It was [an] anti-Talmadge vote; it wasn't a pro-Republican vote.

Henderson: Let me go back to the year 1952. Senator Russell ran for the presidential nomination, of the Democratic party. Were you involved in that effort?

Vandiver: Very definitely. I talked to Senator [Herman] Talmadge, then Governor Talmadge, and told him I didn't feel like I could do what Senator Russell wanted me to do and had asked me to do, as long as I was adjutant general. At that time I was Selective Service director, and I didn't think that I could do what he wanted me to do politically. And he said, "Well, I'll give you a leave of absence." So, I resigned as adjutant general, and Selective Service governor--uh, director. For a period of time there, for about two or three months that I worked for Senator Russell, and I traveled with him. I traveled with him out west. I traveled with him up in New England and worked with him until the campaign was over. Some of those places I think I was able to make a difference, particularly in Arizona. I'd been stationed in Arizona for two years during the war. We got the delegation from Arizona to support Senator Russell--that was outside the South, and that was important, to get some state that was not a southern state, truly southern state.

We went to Washington, Wyoming and Arizona, throughout the West. One thing about it, the people in the Senate who were Republicans were as good or better friends with Senator Russell than some of the Democrats, and no matter what state we went into, the Republican senators had called their friends, and they were just magnificent to him. They did anything he wanted to do, except vote for him. They were willing to do . . . and that was true in every state.

Right funny stories in some of the states. The format would be you'd go in, and each state had already picked their delegates, and what you'd do is have a party, a cocktail party, and invite all the delegates to come and meet the candidate. The funniest one was Massachusetts. We had the cocktail party, and that was when [John William] McCormack was speaker of the House of Representatives, and McCormack was there, and all of the delegates, and all of them are Irish. Most of them probably had a drinking problem [laughter]. At least, it looked that way after that cocktail party. This distinguished looking lady, who was national committeewoman of Massachusetts, came in and she was so distinguished. McCormack introduced her around to the Georgia party and to the senator, and she just kept throwing those drinks down, and when she left, she sounded like a fishwife. [Laughter] She had really reverted to her true self. She was just staggering around. I told Betty it was the funniest thing I ever saw. She changed completely from this distinguished lady into really a fishwife.

Henderson: Now were you present at the 1952 democratic convention?

Vandiver: Yes, I was.

Henderson: Now what did you do there?

Vandiver: I worked with the delegates I had met during our travels. There were other people that were with us, too, during those travels. Earl Cocke was one of them that was with

us, and others. I particularly concentrated on Arizona people, 'cause I had something in common with them. I knew a lot of people in Arizona that they knew. We wanted especially to get a state outside the South, and that was our best chance to get one, so I worked with them more than anything else.

Betty's father [Robert Lee Russell Sr.] was a federal judge, and, of course, he couldn't take any part in politics. What he did [was] he came up and got a room in the hotel and stayed in that room, and Senator [Russell] would go down and talk to him every now and then and tell him what the situation was, but he never did--nobody ever saw his face. [Laughter] But he had managed all of the senator's campaigns, Bob Russell had, and he knew more people, and probably knew them better than the senator did, because he was speaking with them all the time. He and George and the senator [Russell] were in Washington. He kept the fences built up, and he was a masterful campaign manager. I guess the senator talked to him, Bob Russell, Sr., two or three hours a week, every week. He used to get on the phone with him and he'd keep him appraised of everything that was going on. There were other people around that were interested, that had been great friends of the senator, like I remember Paul Bryant, who was working in state government, but he was not under the merit system. But he stayed at the Henry Grady [Hotel], and he watched everybody that came in the Henry Grady, and he kept in conversation with everybody that was the senator's friend up there. He had others around over the state, like Judge [Frances Muir] Scarlett down in Brunswick, who'd been one of his closest friends. Pat [Ernest Howard] Griffin, who was Marvin Griffin's father, was one of Senator Russell's friends. He was in the legislature when the senator was the speaker. He had probably more political friends and done more political favors for people than any man that ever served

up there. He served up there thirty-four years. I was there when he died, and during that time people had sons who [were] in the war and wounded, and trying to get them home, and things like that that he could pick up the phone and call and get something done immediately; people don't forget those things. He had a tremendous faculty for remembering names. He could remember names much better than anybody I ever saw. Herman Talmadge was about as good, but he wasn't as good as Dick Russell.

Henderson: Let me go to the 1954 campaign. You're running for lieutenant governor. Does either Senator Russell or Governor Talmadge support you openly or indirectly in that campaign?

Vandiver: Not openly. Neither one of them supported me openly. I think Herman told his friends, and I think probably Senator Russell, when he could, would tell his friends to help me. I ran against Billy [William K.] Barrett, who was the director of the veterans service department at that time, William [Thomas] Dean, who had been chairman of the [association of] county commissioners of the state of Georgia, and John [Wesley] Greer, who had been a great friend of Ed Rivers, and had been in the highway department. He's still living; he just retired not long ago. And [I] ran against those three.

Betty and I got in an old Pontiac, which we didn't have any air conditioning [in] back then, and we went into every county in Georgia, and went to the courthouse and shook hands. [If] somebody had asked us to speak we'd speak. Of course, you always had a standard speech that you could make. We didn't miss a county. Betty would go up one side of the street, and I'd go up the other, and I think Betty got more votes than I did. She's raised in politics, and everybody loves Betty. She's so friendly and so nice. Sometimes she got a little bit

discouraged. We'd drive at night a lot of the time 'cause it was so hot in the daytime. We'd drive several counties distance at night, and then get up the next morning, and work all day and then drive at night. We had a little pamphlet that we gave out. "This is Your Life" was the name of it, and it gave my record from the time I was born until I got up to be a candidate for lieutenant governor. Betty was giving out these pamphlets. She was standing in a grocery store one time, and she gave this lady at the cashier's stand this pamphlet. She handed it back to her and said, "I've already subscribed to *Life*. I don't want to subscribe to that thing." [Laughter] Betty said she thought people were just looking at those things and [not] reading them; afraid nobody even looked at them.

Henderson: During this campaign, who served as your close political advisors?

Vandiver: My closest advisor was Bob [Robert Lee] Russell [Jr.]. He was my brother-in-law, Betty's brother. He, and Peter Zack Geer [Jr.]--Bob was from North Georgia, Peter Zack was from south Georgia, and they, working with [Curtis] Dixon Oxford, who was also, helped me out in my campaign. I was spending most of my own money 'cause I didn't know how to raise money for myself. I could do it for someone else, but it's awful hard to ask people for money when you're running. Those three were really the ones that did the most work, and Bob Russell did more than any of the rest of them, 'cause he was as close, closer than any brother I could have had. From the time Betty and I got married, Bob and I were just as close as any two people ever were.

Henderson: Did you use any of your connections with national guardsmen to help you in this campaign?

Vandiver: Not openly. I think every one of them was supporting me. I know George L. [Leon] Smith [III] was in the legislature, and I ran into George L., and he said, "I won't tell you I'm for you a 100 percent." He said, "My captain of the National Guard unit down in Swainsboro told me if I didn't help you he wasn't going to vote for me!" [Laughter] So I had a lot of people like that, good friends, that were very helpful. Bo [George J.] Hearn, who I had asked the governor to appoint Bo after I resigned to run for lieutenant governor, and he had appointed Bo as adjutant general. He was a great help. He had been president of the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], state VFW, and the American Legion. He had a lot of contacts too.

But Bob Russell was my main contact. He was the one I could talk to better than anybody else about what the true situation was. That name recognition is a tough situation, when you're running in 159 counties, 'cause they don't know who you are really.

Henderson: What was the extent of the Talmadge organization behind your campaign?

Vandiver: I think most of them were behind me. 'Course, Billy Barrett was a part of his administration too, you know. And all of these veteran service officers, he had them--Betty and I, one day, were driving down the road, and there wasn't a sign on any telephone pole. The next day they were all over the state. He had sent those things out to every veteran service office in the state. I'd resigned [as adjutant general]. I didn't want to get the National Guard actively in politics. I'd resigned. But he had those veteran service officers tacking up posters all over the state, and it got awful discouraging [laughter], 'cause we had two or three people hired to go around and put them up. But I did find out those signs don't elect people. People find out really in other ways how they are going to vote. I talked to friends and family and people that I had

gone to school with and gone to Darlington with and gone to camp with, friends that I'd made over my lifetime were all just as active as they could be.

Henderson: I know this has been some years ago, [but] do you have any recollection of how much your campaign cost, and where did most of the money go? Did it go for radio time, advertisements?

Vandiver: Most of the money came from me, [laughter] 'cause I didn't know how to get out and raise money. I spent about twenty-five thousand dollars of my own money.

Henderson: Now was that considered a great deal of money back then?

Vandiver: It was considered a whole lot of money for a secondary race, not for the governor's race, but for a secondary race it was. If it hadn't been for Dixon Oxford getting in it and raising me some money, it would have really hurt. But I spent twenty-five thousand of my own money on that race.

Henderson: Now where did most of that money go?

Vandiver: It went for tacking up signs, hiring somebody to put signs up, all over the state. You kept two or three cars going all over the state, and having to pay all those expenses: hotel, meals, and that sort of thing, and then I had the headquarters at the Henry Grady, which was right expensive, and had to have rooms for Bob and Peter Zack, pay all their expenses. I had some volunteers that helped out in the campaign headquarters, like some of my kinfolks [would] come by and do typing and that sort of thing. But I didn't have a lot of money, just had a lot of friends that really got out and spent their money to help me, people like Calhoun [Austin] Bowen [Sr.], Frank Rigdon down in Tifton, people I'd gone to school with, and had known over the years, national guardsmen, just friends you make over a lifetime. And they

spent their money locally, but most of them, at that age, and we were pretty young then, didn't have much money, hadn't had time to accumulate any money. So I never did get my twenty-five thousand dollars back. [Laughter] But Dixon raised me some money, which, I guess, the whole campaign probably cost fifty thousand.

Henderson: In comparison to the other candidates did you spend about the same amount that they did, or do you spend more, or less or. . . ?

Vandiver: I probably spent a little bit more, 'cause I didn't. . . . Billy Barrett used everybody in his office, veteran service officers all over the state. He used them.

Henderson: That was not in violation of any law back then?

Vandiver: At that time, it was not. It wasn't in violation of any [law]. They were just a political organization . . . [that's] all they were.

Henderson: Did you have difficulty as a candidate for lieutenant governor getting a crowd together? I would think the big race would be the governor's race?

Vandiver: That's right, and what you had to do was pretty well follow the speakers in the governor's race, [laughter] and use their crowds to get around and give your cards to and handouts. No, you don't get any big crowds to listen to candidates for lieutenant governor, not when you got three others in there. And they were pretty well qualified people. Billy Barrett, of course, was--had been veteran service officer for six years. Bill Dean had been chairman of the county commissioners of Georgia, and John Greer had been one of Ellis' [Arnall] friends, and Ed River's friends all through the years. So they all had their political groups that were supporting them.

I do remember one incident that was right funny. Bill Dean had been all over the state, and he'd gotten discouraged, 'cause he'd been running into a lot of my school mates, and people that were telling him they were going to vote for me. And he went over to Monroe right [on the] last day or two before the election, and he went by to see one of my roommates--he didn't know he was my roommate, that had been his friend all through the years, and his father had been his friend, and he asked him to support him, and he said, "I'm sorry," but said that "I roomed with Ernie Vandiver in college, and I can't support you this time." Bill Dean said, "Well, I'll be damned." He said, "I believe he's roomed with everybody in Georgia." [Laughter]

Henderson: Were there any major issues in that campaign, or it's just mostly personality?

Vandiver: It was personality and footwork, really, mostly. I sometimes think the reason my feet are in such bad shape is Betty and I walked too much over the state. [Laughter]

Betty Vandiver: That was back in the days of high heels and pointed toes, and my feet hurt me then. I'm dying now, 'cause I only wear [them] long enough to go somewhere, and then I come home. [Laughter] [Cut off]

Henderson: You say that one of the candidates, Mr. Bill Dean, got sort of bad in the campaign. What do you mean by that?

Vandiver: Yeah, well, he didn't really get mean; it was just a political campaign, and he was trying to get elected. I didn't fall out with him, because he said things that he thought would help him in the election, and he accused me of using the National Guard, which was probably true, and I couldn't get mad with him much. Anyway, we had a lot of fun. He

supported me when I ran for governor, had a lot of fun, when I got to appoint him to the judgeship, and he served until he died, until he retired.

Henderson: Did John Greer and you ever get into any arguments at all?

Vandiver: No arguments at all. John was just the nicest opponent you ever saw. I didn't ever say a word against John.

Henderson: Would you make reference for the tape about your briefcase?

Vandiver: Yes, I had all of the material, and newspaper articles, and the fact that he'd [Greer] been indicted in my briefcase. I didn't want to use, wasn't going to use it, unless he really attacked me, and he never did. He was just as nice an opponent as I've ever had. Now [William Turner] Bodenhamer [Sr.], who was in the governor's race [in 1958], I could never forgive him.

Henderson: We'll come back to the governor's race. In that campaign--this is the '54 campaign--the Atlanta papers endorse you. Is this because you carried forth with Governor [Herman] Talmadge's suggestion [that] you go over there and cultivate their friendship, or why do you think they endorsed you?

Vandiver: Well, I hope they endorsed me because they thought I was the best qualified, but I think the fact that I went over there, and Governor Talmadge had said some things in the campaign when he was running against M. E. Thompson. [He suggested that] M. E. Thompson was back here dodging the draft and the Vandiver boy was out defending his country as a B-17 pilot and stuff like that. Well, part of that was true, and part of it wasn't, and I told Herman, I said, "Don't say things like that that are not true." And he said, "Well, a man with a military record, and a fellow that hasn't got any--he can't say a damn thing." [Laughter] And then when

I went to the newspapers, I told them, I said, "Governor Talmadge exaggerated my military record, and I want to make it clear that I wasn't any hero, or anything. But I did what I had to do, and what the Army and Air Force told me to do, and that was all I could do."

Henderson: How important were newspaper endorsements back then?

Vandiver: I think they were very important, although most of the politicians have run against the newspapers. But it allowed me to carry counties that I wouldn't have carried without [those endorsements]. I was endorsed by the Savannah paper, the Augusta papers, and nearly every paper in the state.

Henderson: Do you actively solicit their endorsements?

Vandiver: I went to them and asked them to support me, and most of them did. I don't remember any other large city newspaper endorsing any other candidate. I was fortunate; they were very kind to me.

Henderson: Let me come back to Mr. Dean one more time. I read of his criticisms of you in the Atlanta paper, and it said that you had written each national guardsman in Georgia, asking them to contact twenty-five voters, to urge them to vote for you. Do you recall doing that?

Vandiver: I might. I, I might have. I don't, I don't remember actually writing a letter, but my headquarters might have written that letter, but I won't say it's not true, because it might be. I was trying to get vote wherever I could and I . . . The National Guard had been good to me, and I needed the help. [Laughter]

Henderson: What accounted for your election in 1954? Was it superior organization, your vast number of friends, what was it?

Vandiver: I think my association with the University of Georgia, my friends that I made there, friends I made through the National Guard, friends I'd known, and made through other places I'd been like camp, and I had a lot boys from Georgia that had gone to Camp Dixie with me, that I knew, that just got and worked their hearts out. I'll tell you one thing that helps: if you've got a good reputation in your hometown. People in your hometown go somewhere, and the first thing they'll do is they'll ask about you. "What about that boy from your town that's running? What do you think of him?" And if you haven't got a good reputation in your hometown, and the folks don't like you, it can be hard to overcome. But if they say nice things about you, and they've known your family, and your father, and your mother, and they say nice things about you, then they tell their friends that. It just goes from mouth to mouth. That's about the best campaign you can do, really.

Henderson: Marvin Griffin is elected governor in 1954, and while he's governor, you serve as lieutenant governor.

Vandiver: That's right.

Henderson: Describe your relationship with him while you were lieutenant governor.

Vandiver: I had made it very clear during my campaign for lieutenant governor, and every speech that I made, that I was not campaigning with any one candidate. Fred [Frederick Barrow] Hand was running, and Tom [Thomas Mercer] Linder was running, and they had a whole group of candidates that were running. I said during the campaign that I will support the governor when I think he's right, and I'll be against him when I think he's wrong. I'll be an independent thinker, and I'll do what I think is right. The first year or two, we pretty well. . . . Well, we were invited to the same places, and we were friendly, and got along pretty well. And

really when things got tight, he decided that I was not his friend and that he was going to put up a candidate to defeat me. At that time he picked Roger [Hugh] Lawson, [Sr.], who was chairman of the highway board, who he figured could, through his influence on the highway board, could carry a lot of counties by promising roads and that sort of thing. And then in addition to that, he came out with another program, and it was the last section of the legislation, to spend another hundred million dollars on rural roads.

Well, this rural road program was pretty popular. People had roads that never had roads before in these country counties, and you have to remember we're still under the county unit system, and he'd been able to do a lot of favors for people. So I, when he came out with that proposal for this session of the legislature, I talked with Herman about it, and I said, "Herman, what are you going to do if he turns this rural road program over to Roger Lawson? He's going to be a formidable candidate." Herman agreed, and I said, "I think I'm going to do everything I can, and I hope you will talk to anybody you can, to defeat that bill in the legislature. They say it's a political bill, and that's all it is." And I think that was about as tough a campaign as I ever had, was that bill in the legislature, and he didn't bring that bill up until he thought he had enough votes to pass it in the House. He didn't bring it up in the Senate, because I was the lieutenant governor over there and he was afraid he'd lose it over there. But he brought it up in the House, and every night during the legislative session, and all day, after I got through presiding over the Senate, I spent all the time talking to members of the legislature. Some of them were up until midnight. Wherever they were in town, I knew where they all were. We'd go to their suites where they were having a few drinks and parties and quail dinners, and everything that goes on in the legislature, and I knew pretty well, every person who's going to

vote. There were a lot of them that stayed on the fence. But I knew it was going to be close, and I think Marvin [Griffin] finally decided, "Well, I just, I'm going to give it a shot and see." When that final vote was counted we defeated that thing by five votes. . . [Laughter] in the House, where I supposedly didn't have enough influence to beat it. But we had worked so hard on it, and a lot of people had helped. It wasn't just me. You don't do things like that by yourself. We worked so hard on that one thing, Roger Lawson backed out of the race, and he called me and told me he wanted to support me, Roger Lawson did.

Denmark Groover [Jr.] had been Marvin's campaign, uh, his majority leader in the House. Denmark and I had been friends since we were at the University of Georgia. He came up as a freshman, when I was about a junior, and I rushed him in my fraternity, put the pledge button on him, and we had been close friends. They tried to get Denmark to run against me, and Denmark came to me and told me, "You know, I can't run against you. I'm not going to run against you."

About all they could find left that they could influence to run was Bodenhamer, and he was chairman of the states' rights council, and he was a Baptist preacher, and had been--I don't know whether he was then president, or had been president of this school down close to Ailey, anyway he later was president maybe--I don't know. Anyway, he'd been a schoolteacher and a preacher. He'd married people all over south Georgia. He was from Ty Ty, Georgia, in Tift county. He carried on the worse campaign, meanest campaign, campaign of lies that I have ever seen a candidate do . . . make. He just told outright lies.

Red [Truman Veran] Williams, who was the revenue commissioner, was his main supporter, and Red was getting money from the liquor boys to put him on television. Bob

[Robert Henry] Jordan was a friend of mine I'd met when I went to the University of Georgia. We were in school together; we were fraternity brothers. I didn't have a better friend anywhere than Bob Jordan. Clarence Jordan was head of the Koinonia Farms over in Americus. That was Bob's brother, and he [Bodenhamer] accused me of being in favor of integration, because they'd integrated those farms over there. It was more of a religious organization than anything else. And I had never met Clarence. I wouldn't have known him if I'd met him in the street, but Bob was my friend. The hardest thing I had to do in that campaign was not to just take out after him really. But I never answered him. I didn't answer any charges that he made. I just ignored him. I talked with Herman about it, and Herman said the best thing to do was ignore it. But it was hard, because it was affecting that whole family, that Jordan family, and they were a big family of people. And they had a lot of friends, of course, and Bob, and his brothers didn't agree with Clarence, and what he was doing over there. They were not in agreement with him, but he [Williams] and Bodenhamer talked about it and discussed publicly in the speeches and on the radio and on television: I was an integrationist.

Well, that's about the worse thing you could be in 1958. I made a speech out at Decatur in which I said something about that we weren't going to have integration. You had to change people's hearts, and I felt like that the middle of the road was the path to take to try to solve our problems. Well, he [Bodenhamer] picked up that middle-of-the-road business, and claimed that he was not any middle-of-the-road man, he was a real segregationist, and I had a terrible time trying to keep myself from answering him. I thought of going after him, but I never did. But I think the battle was won with that rural roads vote. They couldn't get anybody other than Bodenhamer to run--except one, there was a cowboy singer up in north Georgia, what

Henderson: Abernathy?

Vandiver: Leroy Abernathy. He got in just for the fun of it, I think. I don't think he was ever really serious.

Henderson: Let me go back, just for a few questions, about the Griffin administration. Then I want to come back to the '58 election. You said by '58, Griffin had determined that you were not his friend.

Vandiver: He determined that he was going to try and beat me.

Henderson: Okay. Now your relationship with the governor, prior to '58, to that legislative session, was it harmonious, was it congenial, or was there some tension there?

Vandiver: There was tension there.

Henderson: Why was there tension? Why was there some disagreement?

Vandiver: Because I didn't agree with a lot of things that the Griffin administration was doing, and I knew they were doing. I knew that they had their buddies that were selling to the state down there without bids. I knew that they had a bunch of shade tree merchants, people that had never been in business, that sold things to the state, and they go out and buy them and sell them to the state. He had cronies that would. . . and he wouldn't let people bid on things that the state needed. The state was spending a lot of money at that time, of course. They had the hospital [Milledgeville State Hospital], they had all the food they had to buy, the medicine they had to buy, and the purchasing department was just the hotbed of corruption, really.

And the revenue department was just about as bad, because Red Williams, he was the one that really was pushing Bodenhamer so hard, and he had the liquor folks over in Barrow [County], because the revenue commissioner, if he wants to, can put you out of business. Of

course, all of them violate the law sometime or other. Whether they do it intentionally or not, they do violate the law, and if you want to, you can put any of them out of business, and he put a lot of them out of business if they didn't contribute. So he was able to raise a whole lot of money from the liquor people, and he'd let them sell the liquor in dry counties. At that time we had a whole lot more dry counties than we got now. He would allow them to sell whiskey in those counties if they'd make a good contribution. He had a corrupt administration. There wasn't any question about that.

Henderson: Governor, was he himself corrupt? He claims that it's the people around him that were corrupt.

Vandiver: Well, if you know the people around you are corrupt, and you don't do anything about it, you're corrupt in my opinion. Guyton DeLoach was head of the forestry department. He was getting kickbacks on every machine that he bought for the forestry department throughout the state. I never could prove it, and so I let Guyton stay there for a while, and then I got some evidence on him, and called Guyton DeLoach down to the department, and he was a great friend of this newspaperman over at Waynesboro. What was his name?

Henderson: Roy [Franklin] Chalker [Sr.]?

Vandiver: Roy Chalker. He pulled all sorts of shenanigans, but I didn't have anything against Guyton, but when I did get the evidence in him, I called him down to my office, and just laid it out there on the table, and said, "Tell me about this." He said, "Governor, you know everything I know." [Laughter] He said, "Here's my resignation." I said, "Okay." Newspaper people wanted to know if I fired him. I said, "No, he's resigning."

Henderson: You serve four years as lieutenant governor. Describe your experiences presiding over the Senate and being in the position of lieutenant governor.

Vandiver: It was a happy experience generally. You had a camaraderie with the senators. You got to know them real well. Generally they were older than the members of the House. People tended to elect older senators than they did House members. There were people there that never said a word while they served, but they were just sterling people; they were great people.

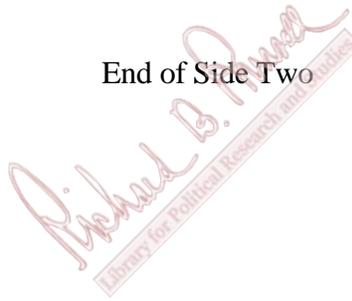
I knew the ones that were tied in with Griffin, and the ones that were not. There were some . . . well, Griffin's floor leader in the Senate was a good man, and he was honest, Peyton [Samuel] Hawes, from Hartwell [Georgia], out of Elberton. And he and I were good friends, and he supported me in spite of all the fighting that we had between Griffin and me. It was just a pleasant experience. Everyday we would meet, the [Rules] committee would meet and set up the agenda, and I think we did. . . . The things that Marvin Griffin did that were good, we supported. Stone Mountain Authority, setting that thing up, that was a great thing. It's about the number one tourist attraction in Georgia now. We finished the carving. We got the lift to carry people to the top of the mountain. They built motels. They've done a lot of good things. That was one of his main programs, and I supported that. And I supported the Rural Roads Program the first time, but the second time I knew what he was doing and why he was doing it, and that's the reason we fought him. Everybody else did it, too. They knew what he was. . . . Roger Lawson's going to be the candidate, and we were able to beat that. That was the governor's race. I had people come in and say, "Well, it's all over." [Laughter] I think that determined the governor's race. We beat him in his last year.

Henderson: As lieutenant governor, looking back on it, can you look at some accomplishments that you had, and maybe some failures as well?

Vandiver: Yeah, what we did, we had too many committees. Oh, gosh, we had committees. I think we had fifty or sixty committees, and everybody wanted to be chairman of this committee or that committee. We cut it down to a reasonable number, workable number, and then tried to have sub-committees that would take part of the burden off the full committee.

[Cut off]

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