

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 19
Douglas Embry Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: This is an interview with Colonel Douglas Embry at his home in Stone Mountain, Georgia. The date is March 16, 1994, and my name is Dr. Hal Henderson. Good afternoon, Colonel.

Embry: Good afternoon, Doctor.

Henderson: Thank you very much for granting me this interview.

Embry: Yes, sir. Glad to.

Henderson: Let me begin by asking you: what was your association with [Samuel] Ernest Vandiver [Jr.] while he was adjutant general?

Embry: General Vandiver, as the adjutant general back in 1949, hired me as an assistant information officer with the state Department of Defense. I'd just graduated with a degree in journalism from Emory University, so I was fresh out of college and looking for a job. I had been a first lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve, and having World War II experience as a pilot, and he being a pilot, and me being a journalist, and he wanted an editor for his *Georgia Guardsman* magazine, I seemed to be the logical choice and he took a chance on me.

Henderson: Ernest Vandiver becomes adjutant general at the age of thirty. Did his youth present any difficulty in commanding the National Guard?

Embry: No, not at all. He was sort of a born leader in my way of thinking because everybody had a great deal of respect for him. I was the one, I think, that had the most respect

because he was a man that you could look up to in many respects, and I'll get into all of them if you want me to. [Laughter]

Henderson: If you'd like to go ahead now, go right ahead.

Embry: Well, over the years, when as adjutant general, I learned to love him because he was a family man, he was a Christian, and he was honest. That's what I admire in a politician. He was sort of a father figure for me even though I was twenty-four at the time he hired me. I thought very much of him, and his family, and his children, whom I got to know because I took the pictures of them for their Christmas cards that he sent out.

Henderson: Okay. He served as adjutant general for about six years. How would you describe his stewardship as adjutant general of the state of Georgia?

Embry: Well, the record is very clear on that. He was instrumental in getting the National Guard armories of Georgia started. He was among the first, I believe, that--we had this new armory construction program, and he negotiated with all the city and county governments throughout the state, working with this engineer at the Department of Defense to arrange the construction of these, and the financing of them, which was done 75 percent federal, and 12½ percent county, and 12½ percent city financing. So he arranged all that, and so you can see from the record of the guard armories around the state that he completed almost all of them, I believe, during his tenure.

Henderson: Do you recall how many armories you're talking about?

Embry: I believe there were around sixty-two, if I remember correctly.

Henderson: What was the approximate size of the state's National Guard at that time?

Embry: We were below ten thousand. He instituted a recruiting program that resulted in us going above ten thousand, and we made much to do about that because we had a lot of World War II veterans, of course, that were sort of the staple of the guard, but we needed new recruits, and right after the War there weren't too many volunteers. It was sort of a good time for the economy and people were not in need of a job at that time. But we pressed on, and we had a lot of material to distribute throughout the state and a groundswell of enthusiasm from our National Guard armories around the state. We brought them in, but it was due to his leadership.

Henderson: Okay. Exactly what does an adjutant general do?

Embry: Well, he is the military head of the National Guard, which is primarily financed by the federal government, but he is appointed by the governor, and acts as the military head, and hires all the state employees, and supervises the federal employees. He also is in charge of, what they called at that time, the state Civil Defense Agency in addition to his job as adjutant general. At one time he also had a role in the selective service process when that was instituted.

Henderson: Some of his political opponents during the 1954 lieutenant governor's race accused him of using his position as adjutant general as a stepping-stone to [a] higher political position. Do you think there is any validity in those criticisms?

Embry: Well, the only thing I can think of that they could have possibly honed in on was the fact that back in those days we had--the Civil Defense Agency posted signs around the state for evacuation routes to be conducted by the local officials to make sure that the residents could get out of the area into a safe haven from a possible nuclear attack, and on these signs his name was there as civil defense director, lending authority to the sign and the urgency of the concept. So that's the only thing that I can figure.

Henderson: Okay. Does being adjutant general require a great deal of travel throughout the state?

Embry: Yes, it did, not only throughout the state, but he traveled throughout the country because we had the National Guard Association of the United States meetings as well as an Adjutant Generals' Association of the United States meetings. Plus, when the National Guard of Georgia Army and Air would go on the training exercises at other places other than Georgia, he would often visit them during their training to inspect them and build the morale, let them know that he was interested in their welfare, and he was there to be with them during that time. Field training is pretty strenuous activity for guardsmen who have to participate for two weeks a year in that type of exercise.

Henderson: As adjutant general does he participate in giving a lot of speeches throughout the state?

Embry: Yes, he was called on quite frequently to make speeches at various organizations and to, as you might expect, tell them about the activities of the National Guard and the State Civil Defense and what is required of the state and the local officials to institute the various programs that are called for under his jurisdiction.

Henderson: You mentioned earlier that he was also state director of selective service and director of civil defense. Do you have any knowledge about what he would do in those particular capacities?

Embry: Well, in the selective service, of course, he was more or less the head of all of the various selective service organizations in the state at that time. As you know, we no longer have that program--only on paper. But he was most active in the civil defense because we had

this groundswell of activity once the local organizations' volunteer groups that needed to combine all of their resources in the case of an emergency. We had plenty of emergencies back in those days: tornados, and . . . I don't know about hurricanes, but we had, of course, fires and other activities in which he would have to dispatch National Guard troops to those areas at the governor's request.

Henderson: How was he to work for as a boss?

Embry: I enjoyed working for him. He was, of course, very authoritative, and I respected him for that, but, at the same time, I could always go in and talk to him, and I was directly under him. Later, although I had an information officer ahead of me for most of the time that General Vandiver was adjutant general, but as the editor I would consult with him on his messages that would go in the magazine, the *Georgia Guardsmen* magazine, which I edited.

Henderson: Did he write these addresses or these messages himself?

Embry: Yes, I believe he did.

Henderson: Would it be fair to say that he was a workaholic or is he less than a workaholic? How would you describe his everyday working style?

Embry: Well, I was pretty busy myself. [Laughter] I know he worked me pretty hard, and I would think that--I never got the impression that he spent a lot of leisure time. I don't believe he played golf like he might've wanted to or other activities. I know he loved his family and was close to them, but I don't remember him being what you'd call a workaholic or anyone who took a lot of time off. He seemed like he was always there; if he wasn't I usually knew where he was on some mission. I know he got to do a lot of traveling, like you said, and I'd like to tell you about some of them.

Henderson: Go ahead.

Embry: He was among the first to witness the atomic bomb explosions out there in Nevada when they were testing the radiation, and he went out there with some of his civil defense officials because that was the up and coming thing in those days. I thought that I would get to go, and now that I've found out all about that radiation I was glad I was not selected to be in his entourage. [Laughter]

Henderson: You have mentioned this but let me come back to it. How would you describe his leadership abilities?

Embry: Well, I think he's more of an executive rather than a military leader. He didn't require a lot of pomp and ceremony, although whenever he visited the National Guard units with the governor there would be a lot of that. The bands would play, and we would have an honor guard and all of that. But he himself was not the one that would require that type of greeting from the troops. He was highly respected, and as you can see from his political experience, elected lieutenant governor and governor, and had a good vote while he was running for the senate, that he is well respected throughout the state. Personally I don't know of any reason to think that anybody had any grudges against him politically or personally.

Henderson: Did you ever see him angry or at least displeased with someone who has worked for him or that he had command over? Was he the type of person that could get angry and express his anger?

Embry: I am having a hard time recalling anything like that of him. I easily recall it of other adjutant generals I've known [laughter], not Ernest Vandiver. He was more easygoing,

but yet he was authoritative and I never saw him lose his cool. He may have, but not in my presence.

Henderson: How would you describe his style of dealing with people? Did he have a laid-back style or was it aggressive or somewhere in-between?

Embry: I would say it was somewhere in-between and maybe more laid-back than the other. He thought things through, being trained as a lawyer. You know, he had an analytical mind, and I think he brought that to bear in his jurisdiction as adjutant general.

Henderson: How would you describe his personality?

Embry: I would say that he was a genteel man. Like I said, he was a Christian gentleman and I have seen evidence of that in his administration of the National Guard and civil defense. [He's a] very compassionate individual, and he was anxious to help where he could, and he would call on what resources he could in order to come to the aid of a community that needed help. So, I would say he more or less exemplified what I would call an ideal politician and a military leader that would encourage people to follow his edicts.

Henderson: Some of his friends and many of his critics said that he had a stubborn streak in him. Did you ever see that exhibited, or do you think that's a fair characterization?

Embry: Well, it's been a long time since I served under General Vandiver. He was firm when he needed to be firm, and he was lenient when he needed to be lenient. But I couldn't say that he had any other characteristic that would cause me to believe that.

Henderson: Some of his friends concede that he was a very frugal man. Was that demonstrated when he was adjutant general?

Embry: Yes, yes. Yes, it was. He was very frugal because when he came to ordering supplies for my office, he would question every little item to see if it was necessary, and whether or not we couldn't get it from the federal government rather than having the state government pay for it. So, I hardly endorse that observation. [Laughter] I wouldn't say that he was stingy; I'd just say he was frugal. That's a good word.

Henderson: Some administrators like to spend a lot of time with details. Was he a detail person or was he more concerned with just general policy and let other people deal with the details?

Embry: I think he kept up with things. How minutely he observed the procedures, I don't know, but I know he had some crackerjack people working for him that were up to snuff on the rules and regulations, and he went by those. So, he was persnickety when it came to taking care of business and doing it right and legally. He was a highly moral man, and I think that he was going to make sure the job was done right, and, as far as I know, in most instances it was.

Henderson: How large was the staff that he worked with?

Embry: We had a very small staff. We had an adjutant general, the assistant adjutant general for army, the assistant adjutant general for air, and we had the information office, which at that time was just considered consisting of the information officer, the assistant information officer, and a secretary. We had other secretaries, of course. He had one and they had a general secretary for all of the other senior officers there. But the state employees were at a minimum. We had a publications specialist there and we had some caretakers. But 99 percent of the employees in the Georgia Department of Defense and National Guard were federally paid, but

he was in charge of them. That's the way the National Guard works, and the adjutant general is head. So, I would say there's probably no more than fifteen, twenty state employees, maybe thirty.

Henderson: Now, did he hire any of these or were these already on board when he became adjutant general?

Embry: Well, I was not there when he became adjutant general, and I know he hired me and--personally, he interviewed me. There's a story behind that. I went up there to see him and he said, "Well, you're not here at the proper time," and so he wouldn't talk to me. I said, "Well, I thought you said to come at 4:10." And he said, "No, this is the four-ten state office building." [Laughter] So that was my fault. I got there at 4:10 when that was the number of his office. So I had to come back the next day and we worked together fine after that.

Henderson: What was your impression of Mrs. [Sybil Elizabeth Russell] Vandiver?

Embry: Oh, she was sweet. She was, I think, a niece of Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.], and she had that Southern charm and was just a real asset to him, obviously. [She] was always friendly, and affable, and just a pleasure to be around 'cause we had, of course, many occasions, social occasions, to be together, like they had a Governor's Ball when a new governor would come in, and the National Guard Association dinners and conventions. She was a delightful lady to know.

Henderson: Do you recall any humorous incident in which the adjutant general was involved? [Long pause] Did you have the impression that he enjoyed being adjutant general?

Embry: Oh, yes, I sure did. He loved to go and visit the National Guard troops and be there on special occasions. When he was invited he liked to talk about the National Guard, the

job that it did, and then civil defense, and he was always around and willing to go. I know of very few events that he turned down even though he was a very busy man. He tried to get out in the hinterlands of Georgia where the National Guard armories were and visit with them on special occasions. He was there to dedicate most of the armories once they were finished. They usually had a formal dedication and he was usually right there.

Henderson: When he runs for lieutenant governor and later for governor, do you have any indication that he is getting a lot of support from National Guardsmen?

Embry: I have no direct indication that he was, although he was so popular it's hard for me to believe that he didn't get almost total support from them. Of course, all the guardsmen were a diverse group of individuals; I'm sure they were from both Democratic and Republican parties and maybe some independents sprinkled in there. I don't know, but he was so well liked and respected that I'm sure that played a part in it.

Henderson: What do you think were the major accomplishments of his time as adjutant general? You mentioned the building of the armories.

Embry: Yes, that would be, I would think, the major thing, and also the recruiting of the guard and building it up to strength, because he started from scratch right after World War II. All of the units needed to fill up the ranks, and it was tough going bringing them in, but he persevered and we saw an increase every year until we got up to our strength.

Henderson: Did he have any disappointments as adjutant general? Was there some things he would have liked to do and was not able to achieve?

Embry: I'm sure he did. I just don't know what they might have been. He might be able to speak better on that, but I have no knowledge.

Henderson: I want to thank you for giving me the time this afternoon for this interview. It's been most informative.

Embry: Well, thank you, Doctor. I certainly have enjoyed meeting you and appreciate you coming up here and talking to me about one of my favorite people.

Henderson: Thank you. [Cut off]

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