

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 25
Robert Claude Norman Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: This is an interview with Mr. Robert Claude Norman in his law office in Augusta, Georgia. The date is June 9, 1994, and my name is Dr. Hal Henderson. Good morning, Mr. Norman.

Norman: Good morning.

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

Norman: Well, it's a pleasure.

Henderson: I'm looking forward to it. Let me begin by asking you, when did you first know Governor [Samuel Ernest] Vandiver [Jr.]?

Norman: I first knew Governor Vandiver when we were campers at Camp Dixie For Boys in north Georgia. I can figure back for the date. It was when I was, I think, thirteen years old, and Ernie was a year older. That would be 1919 plus twelve or thirteen. Let's see, thirteen plus nineteen, that would be 1932, wouldn't it?

Henderson: 1932. Were you and he close friends at the camp?

Norman: Yes, we were. We had both been at the camp the previous year and knew each other in the first year, and in the second year. But this was my second year in 1932, and we ended up being in the same cabin and slept with our heads right next to each other on the bunks, and we became very close friends the second year. We were in all sorts of activities

together as campers are. They keep you busy all of the time. He and I were just as close as we could be for two months that summer.

Henderson: Did you ever visit him at Lavonia while you were going to high school or as a youth?

Norman: I suspect that we did . . . make contact with each other briefly during those summers, but we were at camp for two full months. By the time we got back to our respective homes football season was on, and he played football for Lavonia and I played football for Washington, Georgia, and so my recollection is that we didn't see each other a great deal [except] during those two summers when we went to Camp Dixie together.

Henderson: I understand that you and Governor Vandiver were at the University of Georgia at the same time.

Norman: Yes, that's correct. We had a summer in-between the time we were campers at Camp Dixie, and we went back a third summer as counselors. So we in fact had three summers at Camp Dixie, two as counselors, excuse me, two as campers and one as a counselor. Then after that we went to the University of Georgia as freshmen together. In that interim year Governor Vandiver went to Darlington for a year, and we entered the University of Georgia as freshmen together in the fall of 1936, I believe.

Henderson: How would you describe the personality of Governor Vandiver while you were students at the university?

Norman: He was very open, warm, friendly. He was not loud; he never was. He was always soft-spoken, but he was real fun. Just a well-rounded, friendly fellow.

Henderson: Would you consider him an introvert or an extrovert or somewhere in-between?

Norman: Well, I would consider him an extrovert.

Henderson: Was he active in campus politics at the university?

Norman: Yes, he was.

Henderson: Do you recall any of those activities?

Norman: Well, they were so often and there were so many and so, so regular that it's difficult to describe them all. He was very active in campus affairs.

Henderson: While at the university, does he give you any indication that he is interested in running for state political office?

Norman: Well, one could see that he was quite interested in state affairs and in politics, but he never voiced specifically what offices he might run for someday, but if you--this was in his early days in Athens. He was active in campus affairs and was always interested in what occurred on the campus, and, I think probably he was working toward that end, that someday he would be in state politics, in the back of his mind. He had it in mind even then probably.

Henderson: At that time he was very supportive of the Talmadge faction in Georgia politics. Did that cause him any difficulties at the University of Georgia? I understand some of his friends were anti-Talmadge people.

Norman: Well, I think he was a great supporter of Governor [Eugene] Talmadge because his father was. His father was on the State Highway Board at one time and was a very strong supporter of Governor Talmadge, and his son, Ernest Vandiver, was also a supporter of Governor Talmadge. At the same time, you will recall the fact that Senator [sic] Talmadge had the run-in with the Board of Regents with reference to the Dean [Walter Dewey] Cocking affair, and the university was placed on probation by the Southern Association [of Colleges and

Secondary Schools], I believe they called it. There was a great protest at the university, and in the state, and in the newspapers about Governor Talmadge, his activities concerning the faculty at the University of Georgia. Governor Vandiver participated in some of that at first, and then his father, I think, told him not to. He was a faithful son, and, I think, withdrew from many activities with reference to the Talmadge-Cocking affair.

Henderson: Why do you think his father told him to separate himself from that issue?

Norman: Well, because he was, I think, he was on the State Highway Board--his father was--and he didn't want his son involved in that particular issue adverse to the interests of Governor Talmadge.

Henderson: Is there anything about this young student that distinguishes him from other students at the University of Georgia?

Norman: Well, he was well liked. He made friends easily and kept his friends. He was a sincere sort of person. He also made it a point to make friends in all areas of the campus in different . . . walks of life on the campus. He was quiet-spoken and sincere. He was not the backslapping type of person, but he made good friends, and he kept his friends, and his friends stayed with him throughout his career. One could see that he was interested in making friends, and in keeping his friends, and he has done so throughout his life. I believe that the friends he made at the University of Georgia was one of the outstanding contributions that he made in his college days to his future career.

Henderson: Who were some of these friends you're making reference to?

Norman: Well . . . I'll have to give that some thought at the moment because it's been years and years ago.

Henderson: We can come back to that question.

Norman: Yes, all right.

Henderson: Now, did you go to law school with the governor as well?

Norman: Yes, I did. We went all the way through undergraduate and law school together.

Henderson: Describe law school at the University of Georgia at this time.

Norman: Well, it was a good law school even then and the classes were not large. I suppose we had about thirty-two or thirty-three members in our class. We had some outstanding students. We had some students who came from rural areas, and from the city, and from outside the state of Georgia, although not too many in that latter category. We all knew that Germany was re-arming. Many were in the military unit at the University of Georgia. They realized that they perhaps might be called to the armed forces at one time or another. The law school had some excellent professors. Our law class was mostly Georgians, I would say, and we had a fine group of outstanding young men in our class, and have stayed together through the years. We have had reunions every five years and still do.

Henderson: What do you and Ernest Vandiver do for rest and relaxation while at the University of Georgia?

Norman: Well, they had intramural sports at the university. Ernest Vandiver participated for his fraternity which was Phi Delta Theta, and I participated for my fraternity which was Sigma Chi, and I think Ernie began to play golf some. I never did take up golf at the university much to my regret later. The other intramural sports, and they were numerous, we

both participated in those for our fraternities, and I suppose those were the primary activities and athletics that we participated in at the university.

Henderson: While at the university, both as an undergraduate and attending law school, would you consider Governor Vandiver an average student, above-average student? How would you categorize him?

Norman: I would consider him an average student or perhaps a little above average.

Henderson: Anything else you'd like to discuss as far as your experience with him at the University of Georgia?

Norman: Oh my goodness, we haven't touched on a world of things that we did at the University of Georgia. He was active in [the] Panhellenic Council, or the Interfraternity Council, and he became the president of the Interfraternity Council in his senior year as an undergraduate, which was his freshman year at the law school. The Interfraternity Council was the group which ran and controlled the fraternity life among the fraternities, and to be president of the Panhellenic Council was the outstanding position for a fraternity man. Ernie got the job as a result of his leadership, and it took some political ability to attain that position.

The Interfraternity Council was divided into at least two political groups, and Ernie ended up being the . . . came out on top as the head of one group and became the president of [the] Panhellenic Council and made a very good one. At times the presidency of the Panhellenic Council could get into financially questionable activities, but it never did when Ernie was president. I recall that when the National Interfraternity Council was meeting in New York his senior year, he couldn't go because of other activities he was involved in, so he asked me to be the representative from the University of Georgia Interfraternity Council, and I went to

New York for the Panhellenic Council International Meeting at which Wendell [Lewis] Willkie was the primary speaker. This was at a time when war clouds were gathering, and Willkie was speaking of one world with a great deal of political emphasis on his possibilities of running for the presidency.

I came back and reported to Ernie on the meeting and to the Interfraternity Council. It had no real significance for the campus or for any of us, except it was a part of the political picture in the United States at the time. Ernie was in the military, I believe, and somebody else would do better talking about his activities in the military at the university if he was in it. I'm not sure . . . what part he played in the military activities at the University of Georgia. His outstanding work with the Panhellenic Council was one of the primary things I recall.

I also recall his . . . I had it in the back of my mind a moment ago. He was president of his fraternity, Phi Delta Theta, and made a fine leader for that outstanding fraternity at the University of Georgia. I think he was president one year or a portion of a year in his junior or senior year. He was He was [Long pause] He was very active in interfraternity athletics. The different fraternities played all sorts of sports against each other, and he was active in all of those for Phi Delta Theta, and played most of the sports which of course you will find recorded in the yearbooks. I played for Sigma Chi and he played for Phi Delta Theta, and these were great fun. At the Panhellenic dances, which were sponsored by the Panhellenic Council, the president, which was Ernest Vandiver his senior year in undergraduate school, of course, they sponsored two large weekends for dances, and he was the primary leader, the lead-out [?] at those dances in the fall and in the spring along with his date. He was initiated into Sphinx, which was the largest, highest honor you could get at the University of Georgia. I, too,

was initiated to the Sphinx and had the pleasure of voting for him. I'd been initiated in the fall, and he was initiated, I think, the next initiation in the spring.

He was very active in the debating society of which he was a part, which was Phi Kappa, and participated regularly in their debates each Wednesday night, and in their special debates. He became president of Phi Kappa for one quarter or one semester, I don't remember whether they elected presidents twice a year or three times a year, but Ernie was a president of Phi Kappa and won a Phi Kappa debating key and He, along with several of his friends in Phi Kappa, had a big time getting involved in a prank involving accusations that the rival Demosthenian Literary Society was involved with the . . . with the . . . communists, the distinguished body of which I happened to be president at that same time or shortly thereafter. We accused them of being involved with the communists or the Anyway, it was all in fun and made a lot of the existing political conditions in Europe, each side accusing the other of being involved.

Henderson: Anything else you'd like to discuss about the University of Georgia? [Pause]
Can I ask you a question about his adjutant generalship?

Norman: Sure.

Henderson: He becomes adjutant general during Herman [Eugene] Talmadge's administration.

Norman: That's right.

Henderson: Did he discuss with you prior to his becoming adjutant general whether he should or should not?

Norman: No, he did not. I was practicing law in Augusta and had just begun an active practice down there with a fine legal firm with which I had become associated, and my activities were largely . . . associated with that firm and practicing law at that particular time. I was not closely related to Ernie's activities when he was adjutant general, except that he came through occasionally, and every time he came through he would call, and come by, and either spend the night or more likely we'd have a meal together and sit and talk a while.

I remember on one occasion he and his driver visited me in my law firm, and we had a fine time together, and he told me then he had ambitions to run for lieutenant governor in the future. I, of course, told him I would be on his side, and would be happy to do anything I could to help him, and wanted to be of service to him in whatever way I could. I expect this was in the waning days of his service as adjutant general. This was after he had been adjutant general for some time. I know he made an excellent adjutant general, and he came rather often because we had a . . . a group in or near Augusta to which he devoted some time when he was adjutant general. He often came down there to give attention to that group and it was often that I did not get to see him.

Henderson: Do you see his becoming adjutant general as a stepping-stone to higher political office?

Norman: Yes, I think so.

Henderson: From the standpoint it opens up connections throughout the state of Georgia?

Norman: Yes.

Henderson: How actively did you support him in his race for lieutenant governor in 1954?

Norman: I was quite active. There was a group of us who were his friends in college days who organized and met in Atlanta monthly, and organized, and contributed, and rallied up the state, and assumed responsibility for . . . raising money, making contacts, making contacts with former friends at the University of Georgia, making contacts with friends that we'd known ourselves, and in meeting in Atlanta. As the campaign grew on we met more often in Atlanta. I suppose as the time came we sort of chose up the state and worked not only through the University of Georgia names but through names in different parts of the state where we came from and where we had contacts. We made up lists and so forth, and we went to Atlanta and met regularly, and wrote letters, and wrote cards, and did everything we could.

Henderson: Do you recall who were some of these people?

Norman: Yes. There was a . . . [Cut off] You've already asked it?

Henderson: Yes, sir.

Norman: Among these old friends from college days who worked for Ernie when he ran for lieutenant governor were Jim [James Anderson] Dunlap from Gainesville, Bob [Robert C.] Norman from Augusta, Jim [James Coleman] Owen [Jr.] from . . .

Henderson: He's from Gainesville.

Norman: Well, Jim Owen is from Griffin.

Henderson: Okay, Mr. Norman, you said this group was also involved in raising money.

Norman: Yes.

Henderson: How much money does it take to run for lieutenant governor in 1954? I know this has been some years ago. Are you talking about a large amount of money?

Norman: Well, it was large to us, but I don't think it was very large in terms of what it took to run for governor or lieutenant governor even. I expect what we did really was to raise the money for our postage, our mailing, our efforts to get some money for advertising and newspapers, and that was about the gist of it.

Henderson: While Ernest Vandiver is lieutenant governor, the governor of the state is [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.].

Norman: Yes.

Henderson: Would you describe the relationship between Governor Vandiver and Governor Griffin?

Norman: I would say it was not very close. They both ran their own separate races and went their own way. Governor Griffin and Governor Vandiver had different platforms and different viewpoints and they were not very close.

Henderson: In the 1958 legislative session there is a major confrontation between Governor Griffin and Lieutenant Governor Vandiver over the expansion of the rural roads program.

Norman: Yes.

Henderson: Were you involved in that fight in any way?

Norman: No, I wasn't. I was still busy trying to make a living and practice law that I was not in the legislature, and I was two hundred miles away. I didn't get involved in any of the legislative battles that year.

Henderson: You were not asked by Lieutenant Governor Vandiver to do any lobbying on his behalf?

Norman: Not that I recall.

Henderson: What do you think that fight was all about?

Norman: Well, I think it probably was about the leadership of the state in the future.

Henderson: In 1958 Ernest Vandiver wins an overwhelming victory in the governor's race.

Norman: Yes.

Henderson: What do you attribute that victory to?

Norman: Well, I attribute it to the fact that he had made a fine record for himself, that he'd worked very hard, and had a fine organization throughout the state, and that he had the support of Senator [Herman] Talmadge and Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.], and that he just worked very, very hard, and he and Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver] both campaigned in every county in the state, and he just worked hard and the people were with him. He really had a great victory.

Henderson: In that election Lieutenant Governor Vandiver makes the "No, not one" statement. Did he discuss with you prior to making that statement whether he should or should not have made it?

Norman: No, he did not. At that time I was not in his headquarters in Atlanta. I was out in the 10th District, the 10th Congressional District, which I lived in at the time, and I primarily worked in the 10th Congressional District for Ernie and devoted my time to going to all the counties in that state, and he did not consult me as one of his major political advisors in the state headquarters in Atlanta.

Henderson: At that time did you think that statement was a mistake?

Norman: I thought that probably he did not need to make it and therefore I wish he hadn't.

Henderson: Why do you think he made it?

Norman: I think he was probably sort of pushed into a corner to do it, and some of his advisors told him to do it or urged him to do it.

Henderson: If you had to pick out one advisor that you probably think was trying to influence him along this way, who would that be?

Norman: Well, I've always thought it was Peter Zack Geer [Jr.].

Henderson: When Governor Vandiver is elected, do you play a role in his administration?

Norman: Did I?

Henderson: Yes, sir.

Norman: Well, yes, I guess I did. I was appointed chairman of the Georgia Ports Authority and worked very hard trying to develop our ports, particularly Savannah and Brunswick. We knew that the county unit system was going to be declared invalid, and I told Ernie that he needed to begin thinking in terms of doing more for the larger counties, and our ports had great possibilities in the future, and that we needed to develop them more, and develop more trade in the interest of our economy. He was most cooperative and gave me all the support in the world, and we did some really important things for the future economic development of our state which even now are paying off.

Henderson: Why were you picked to be chairman of the Georgia Ports Authority?

Norman: I don't know. I think Ernie wanted to have somebody who he trusted and also somebody who would work and try to do something to improve it [the ports], just like he wanted everybody else in his retinue of leaders to do something worthwhile in the state.

Henderson: How active a role did he play in improving Georgia's economic relations with other countries?

Norman: He was very active. He backed me in everything I asked him to do. He organized the world conference, the world trade conference in Atlanta, and invited various trade representatives to come from other states and from other nations. He took a world trade group to Europe, and leaders from all over Georgia went with us, and they did a great deal to interest people in Europe in Georgia and our ports, and, most importantly, he got our leadership in Georgia aware of the importance of our developing ties in trade with Europe and South America and later, even later with the ports of . . . of the East, particularly Japan.

Henderson: How would you compare these activities with those of his predecessor?

Norman: They didn't do very much. We didn't find them actively involved to a great extent. They did not fund very much. He funded a great deal more in the four years that he was governor than they ever did.

Henderson: Is there anything else you would like to say about your tenure on the Georgia Ports Authority?

Norman: We made tremendous strides in those years, I think, in developing our trade, and we got the state interested in it, and we got the business interest involved, and we got banking and trade circles involved. The first time the governor made them aware of his interest and his support for it financially as well as his influence. I believe we made great strides during the Vandiver years.

Henderson: Who else served with you on the Georgia Ports Authority?

Norman: Another great Vandiver supporter, who, by the way, isn't one of those that was with our group from the very beginning. Howell Hollis [Jr.] from Columbus was on the ports authority, and Thomas M. Johnson from Savannah was one of our ablest financial people, and he was on the ports authority and did a splendid job. W. D. Trippe from Cedartown was on the ports authority, and. . . . How many have I said?

Henderson: I think about four.

Norman: Um Middleton Harris from Brunswick, who was a splendid member of the ports authority, and was a great aid in supporting the programs of the administration.

Henderson: Does Governor Vandiver consult with you on a frequent basis about the Georgia Ports Authority, or does he turn it over to you and let you run the Georgia Ports Authority?

Norman: Well, he and I were very close, and so we talked about it regularly. I was enthused [with running the ports authority] and wanted to help very much, and I really gave it a major portion of my time during the four years that Governor Vandiver was governor. I would say that he gave me all the support I needed, and then let me run it with his backing, his enthusiastic backing, and I think we made excellent strides.

Henderson: Is your position a full-time position or is it part-time or . . . ?

Norman: No, it's just a part-time position.

Henderson: I see. During the 1960 presidential campaign, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is arrested in Georgia. Governor Vandiver plays a major role in getting Dr. King released. Were you involved in any way in this release?

Norman: No, I was not.

Henderson: There is talk that President-elect [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy will nominate Governor Vandiver to the position of Secretary of the Army. Governor Vandiver eventually withdraws himself from consideration. Were you involved in any way in this episode?

Norman: No, I was not.

Henderson: If Governor Vandiver had discussed this with you or--did he discuss this with you?

Norman: No, he didn't.

Henderson: If he had, would you have recommended that he remain as governor or become secretary of the army?

Norman: Well, it's a moot question now. I don't know that I would've been in the position to advise at that point since I was so involved with the ports authority rather than in a position of being a political advisor. I think he would've made a great secretary of the army, and I would've been pleased if he had taken it. I believe he could've made a fine secretary of the army. He's a good administrator, and he doesn't hesitate to stand up to what needs to be done at the time. At the same time I know that he felt keenly his responsibility to complete his term as governor of Georgia. I was not in the position to know all of the facts so I would not have a final opinion on it at this point. [Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Henderson: Mr. Norman, you had some other names that you wanted to add to your list of people that were helping Governor Vandiver.

Norman: Yes, this was during his first effort to run for lieutenant governor, I guess it was. I've thought of a few more names as we've gone along here. I think I've named Jim Owen but I'll mention it again to be sure. He's one of them. Griffin [Boyette] Bell joined the group later. He was in Atlanta. He was not one of our fellow students, but he came along later to join the group in Atlanta and help try to elect Governor Vandiver as lieutenant governor. I can't read my writing here. [Long pause] I guess that's the only additional ones that I have.

Henderson: Okay. In the 1960 legislative session the Sibley Committee was created. Why do you think the Sibley Committee was created?

Norman: Why?

Henderson: Yes, sir.

Norman: I think it was created in order to try to give the people of Georgia an opportunity to express themselves on the serious and all-important question that was facing us at the time, and in order to give us time to discuss it across the state in-depth. I think Mr. [John Adams] Sibley and his committee served a very valuable function in that regard.

Henderson: Were you involved in either the creation of or the functioning of the Sibley Committee?

Norman: No, I was not, but I was in the background encouraging people to serve on it and encouraging the creation of it.

Henderson: What was your impression of John A. Sibley as chairman of this committee?

Norman: I thought he was a splendid citizen, and an able person, and that he did a magnificent job. I thought he did what needed to be done to make our citizens aware of the magnitude and the gravity of our situation, and to think about it on both sides of the question,

and to make us aware of what our future was under one system or the other. I knew Mr. Sibley, and we're very proud of what he did.

Henderson: The committee holds hearings all over the state of Georgia. Did you attend any of those hearings?

Norman: Yes, I did and I also listened to them on radio. I'm not sure whether we had television, but if I we did I watched them on the television also.

Henderson: Which hearing did you attend?

Norman: I don't recall.

Henderson: Do you recall any of the atmosphere of that particular period? Was it hostile? Was it . . .? What was just the atmosphere of that period?

Norman: I thought that the atmosphere of that meeting was serious, contemplative. There were some serious discussion on both sides of the issue. Mr. Sibley handled the questions very well, and the discussion was serious, and he saw to it that things stayed in hand well. It was a very helpful meeting, I thought.

Henderson: The majority of the committee recommends that public schools be kept open.

Norman: Exactly.

Henderson: Did you agree or disagree with that recommendation?

Norman: I agreed with it very much.

Henderson: Governor Vandiver was a segregationist and ran as a segregationist. Why do you think he accepted the recommendations of the Sibley Committee?

Norman: I think Governor Vandiver had a very, very difficult decision before him, but I think he thought the schools at the end were more important than maintaining the segregated

school system, and I think he himself was convinced that we had to face up to this issue and to . . . live with this the best way we could, and to see that our schools were preserved, that the most important thing we had to do was to preserve our school system. In the end it proved to be correct.

Henderson: During this crisis--desegregating the schools in Georgia--does he discuss his course of action with you?

Norman: Well, yes in part. He had already made his decision to have the schools stay open. The legislature had spoken, and he had done a magnificent thing in my opinion in offering the decision to the members of the legislature immediately. They had followed his leadership, and I thought he had almost overnight changed the atmosphere in the state and that people were relieved that he had taken the burden of making the primary decision for them. If not for them then--if that's not the correct language--then he had made the primary decision that left our schools open, which was the thing that all of us in the end decided was the best decision, and it certainly [unintelligible].

Henderson: How difficult a decision was this? Does he go through a great deal of turmoil?

Norman: He certainly did; he really did. I was with him so many times and he was praying over it. He was so thoughtful about it. He was asking the advice of the best brains and the best thinking in Georgia, with leaders in Georgia, from all walks of life.

Henderson: Are there people around him that are urging him to be defiant and to close down the schools?

Norman: There was some people around him who were urging him to do that, who would've been glad for him to bear the brunt of that and close down the schools. But he was

determined that our schools would stay open, and that our children would continue to be educated, and that we would not have the . . . confusion and the results that other states had had who tried to defy the federal government.

Henderson: Do you have any indication of how Senator Talmadge or Senator Russell reacted to his decision?

Norman: I do not. My understanding is that he did not ask them about it. He didn't want to put them on the spot. He didn't ask them to take any of the responsibility. He took all the responsibility himself.

Henderson: In looking back on it, who would you look upon as the most adamant segregationists at that time who were urging him to close down the schools? Was Roy V. [Vincent] Harris in this category?

Norman: Yes.

Henderson: Was Peter Zack Geer?

Norman: I did not hear him say so specifically but that's my understanding.

Henderson: Is there anyone else that comes to your mind?

Norman: Not at this late date.

Henderson: At that time when he made his decision do you think his position of keeping the public schools open was the end of his political career?

Norman: Yes, we all thought so.

Henderson: Who do you think were his closest confidants and advisors while he was governor?

Norman: Well, he had a number of close friends and advisors. His brother-in-law . . .

Henderson: Bobby [Robert Lee] Russell [Jr.]?

Norman: Bob Russell, they were very close and Bob Russell was a highly intelligent, capable friend and advisor. Bob [Robert Henry] Jordan, who had been one of his closest friends and advisors, continued to be one of his close friends and advisors. Griffin Bell, who was his Chief of Staff, was one of his closest friends and advisors.

Henderson: What influence did you think Betty Vandiver had over her husband?

Norman: I think Betty is one of the smartest and most intelligent persons both generally and in politics, and I think she had an excellent influence over Ernie. I think she did not try to lead him or push him, but I think she was a great source of comfort and advice and helped him make up his mind to things. She was a great source of spiritual and political advice.

Henderson: In the 1961 legislative session there is a major fight between the governor and the legislature over the budgetary powers of the governor. Were you involved in this fight in any way?

Norman: I was involved to the extent that I knew that it was a very basic fight, and that they were trying to take the budgetary powers away from the governor. The governor was my friend, and I also trusted him implicitly in terms of his honesty and integrity, and I therefore made some phone calls in behalf of keeping the powers over the fiscal affairs intact in the hands of the governor. I called several of the members of the General Assembly that I knew personally and asked them to vote with Governor Vandiver.

Henderson: How would you describe the lobbying activities of Governor Vandiver when he was trying to get legislation through?

Norman: I thought he was very effective. I was never very close to it except from down here. I did not stay in Atlanta. I was not a member of the General Assembly but I made phone calls from time to time to certain friends up there. I thought it was pretty effective.

Henderson: Do you ever recall him getting angry or irritated with a lawmaker or a bureaucrat or anyone in state government about anything?

Norman: No. I was not present at any time when that occurred.

Henderson: What would you consider the major accomplishments of the Vandiver administration?

Norman: Preserving our school system and . . . preserving our integrity in the budgetary and fiscal field; keeping our financial affairs in order with honesty and integrity in the administration of our state during the [unintelligible] times he was governor; keeping our schools open, [and] providing an example of integrity in the leadership of the state by the chief executive to be followed by all the other employees in government. I think it was one of the best run, most honest . . . administrations the state has ever enjoyed. [He] restored respect and integrity in the employment of personnel and in the administration of the state.

Henderson: Do you see any major failures or shortcomings of the Vandiver administration?

Norman: I do not.

Henderson: How would you describe his stewardship as governor?

Norman: I think it was a great and remarkable stewardship, and I think he was a good governor and deserves a great place in the annals of our state's history.

Henderson: How would you describe his political philosophy? Was he conservative, moderate, liberal, combination thereof?

Norman: I would say he was a moderate . . . conservative, a moderate conservative.

Henderson: How would you describe his work style? Was he a workaholic? Was he an eight-to-five person?

Norman: I thought he was a hard worker, but he didn't ruin his health over it. I thought he took good care of himself in the large part, except for the illness which he had which probably was brought on by the burdens of deciding the important issues that faced him. I think his health was excellent most of the time, and that he did a splendid job as chief executive of the state.

Henderson: Would you consider him a strong or a weak governor or some place in-between?

Norman: I would consider him a strong governor.

Henderson: How would you describe him as a politician?

Norman: I don't believe he would be ranked as a superlative politician. I think he would be considered as a man who put the state first and his own self-interest second. I think he has demonstrated his abilities as a politician and as a . . . leader in government. He is a good servant of the public.

Henderson: How would you describe him as a speaker?

Norman: Well, I think there are plenty of others who make more rattling [?] speeches. I think his calm and deliberate manner and his firm, deep voice encourages people to trust him and to respect what he says. I don't think he is an outstanding orator, but I think he speaks well and directly and gets his message over.

Henderson: How would you describe or compare his speaking style with that of, say, Marvin Griffin?

Norman: Well, they're two different types of speakers. Marvin Griffin is a jovial . . . orator type, a different type of speaker from Governor Vandiver.

Henderson: Some politicians are known as backslappers. Would it be fair to characterize Governor Vandiver as a backslapper?

Norman: No, you wouldn't. He attracts you because of his quiet, calm, gentle ways and his friendliness, but not the backslapping.

Henderson: How would you describe him as a campaigner?

Norman: Well, I think as a campaigner he is effective because he is sincere. He's quiet. He is receptive. He knows government, and is friendly and cheerful, and makes a good appearance. I think he is a good campaigner.

Henderson: How would you describe his personality? Is he outgoing?

Norman: Yes.

Henderson: Anything else about his personality?

Norman: Ernie has a warm, inviting way about him. People want to speak to him; people want to come up to him and get to know him. He's friendly. He's the kind of person you would like to get to know better after you met him. He's an attractive looking person.

Henderson: Was he a joke-teller?

Norman: Well, with his friends he is. He tells me a lot of jokes. I don't know that he does publicly too much, but he's a very . . . interesting person.

Henderson: How would you describe his style of dealing with people?

Norman: Well, it's engaging. It's calm; it's sincere. It's attractive.

Henderson: In a conversation with, say, some of the people working with him would he tend to dominate? An aggressive type personality?

Norman: I think he would meet them on their own ground and on an equal basis, calmly and pleasantly. He would allow them to speak and he would speak as well.

Henderson: In 1966 Governor Vandiver is considered the leading candidate for the governor's race of that year. He has to withdraw for health reasons. Were you supporting him prior to his withdrawal?

Norman: Yes, I was. As a matter of fact, I was going to be one of his campaign managers and was going to take a leave of absence from my firm to be in his headquarters in Atlanta. I was shocked and surprised and disappointed when he called me to say he was ill and on his doctor's advice was going to be forced to withdraw from the race.

Henderson: Did you have any indications prior to that that his health problems may prevent him from running?

Norman: No, no. I did not. We were gearing up for the race.

Henderson: How difficult a decision was this for him?

Norman: Oh, it was very difficult, very difficult for him and his family, and for me, and all of us.

Henderson: In 1972 he runs for the U.S. Senate. Did you play a role in that campaign?

Norman: I supported him and voted for him and planned to help in his campaign in whatever way I could. I did not plan to be in his headquarters in Atlanta. I cannot recall the reason, perhaps my own health or perhaps I was too involved in legal affairs at the moment.

Henderson: Why do you think he was not successful in that race?

Norman: [Long pause] Let's get off the record for a minute. Can you turn your machine off? [Cut off]

Henderson: Mr. Norman, when Senator Russell dies in 1971, Governor Vandiver anticipates his appointment to the Senate by Governor Jimmy [James Earl] Carter [Jr.]. Governor Carter instead appoints David [Henry] Gambrell. Were you involved in any way in any of this? Did you know any of the circumstances?

Norman: No, I did not. I was not involved, and I did not know any of the circumstances.

Henderson: Prior to the 1962 governor's election Governor Vandiver comes out in support of Carl [Edward] Sanders for governor in return for a Sanders commitment that he would never run against Senator Russell. Did Governor Vandiver ever discuss this matter with you?

Norman: Yes, he did.

Henderson: Could you discuss this matter with me?

Norman: I, of course, was a good friend of Carl Sanders because he practiced law here in Augusta. His office was just above mine in this building, and he came along just a few years after I did. He was younger than I. I took an interest in his . . . beginning to practice law, and in his advancement in the law, and in his interest in politics. I supported him for each of his races . . . for the General Assembly from Augusta and Richmond County. He and I were good friends and still are.

At one point . . . he became close to Governor Vandiver, which I heartily recommended because of Carl's ability. He became his [Vandiver's] floor leader in the Senate. Governor

Vandiver asked me about that, and I recommended that he appoint Carl because Carl was quick on his feet, and had a good mind, and was a very able legislator and lawyer. Later on, when Carl had shown his ability as floor leader for Governor Vandiver in the Senate. . . Cut that off a minute. [Cut off] Then later on is when Vandiver thought he was going to get the appointment from

Henderson: Jimmy Carter?

Norman: From Carter when he was governor?

Henderson: Right.

Norman: I had to straighten those two out [?]. What have I said thus far?

Henderson: Is it your understanding that there was an understanding between Carl Sanders and Ernest Vandiver that Carl Sanders would never run against Senator Russell?

Norman: Yes, that is my understanding. Have I answered any of that?

Henderson: No, sir. No.

Norman: Yes, that is my understanding. I was close to Carl, and I was close to Governor Ernest Vandiver. Governor Vandiver told me that he had exactly such a promise from Carl Sanders before he agreed to support him for governor. After Governor Vandiver told me that he had agreed to support Carl Sanders--I already wanted to support Carl Sanders because he and I had been long time friends, and he was from my hometown, and I had supported him for all of his races in the legislature, both in the House and in the Senate. I had therefore agreed to support him for governor against Marvin Griffin, and I had agreed to organize the 10th District for him.

I really worked hard at it, and being from the 10th District all my life and having handled the 10th District for Governor Vandiver, I went to the headquarters in Atlanta and stayed up there a good bit, and then went across the 10th District time and again with Wyck Knox, who was the campaign chairman for Sanders. We worked on the 10th District very hard for Carl. I did everything I could to get him elected, and was successful in carrying most of the 10th District for Carl for governor, and was at the headquarters in Atlanta the night he won. I was so very happy that he did. He was so pleased that he reappointed me as chairman of the ports authority. I had the pleasure of serving as chairman of the ports authority for an additional four years in his administration. I thought Carl made a good governor, and I was proud to be part of his administration after the Vandiver administration.

Henderson: Let me ask you about another citizen of Richmond County, Roy V. Harris. Why so you think Governor Vandiver appointed Roy Harris to the Board of Regents?

Norman: I was surprised when he did that, and he did discuss it with me. I guess it was because he knew--unless he thought that Roy Harris and I were not friends. Actually we were. We were in . . . different local political parties at one time but we had become good friends, fellow lawyers, and had tried cases together, and we were good friends. But I think he thought that Roy Harris would make a good regent because he knew about more about the school system than most people, and because he wanted to heal old wounds, and be sure that they were good friends again 'cause they too had their differences. I believe he just didn't want Roy Harris to be at odds with him, plus he knew that Roy Harris knew a lot about the board of regents, and could be helpful to the state in that regard.

Henderson: Mr. Norman, what do you think is Governor Vandiver's place in Georgia history?

Norman: I believe that historians will treat him very kindly. I believe he will be remembered as one of those governors who faced one of our most difficult eras and made the right decision at the right time . . . or the right decisions at the right time in behalf of the people of Georgia and of the future children of Georgia, even if . . . what he thought at the time was [to] his own . . . disadvantage for the future, and even if at the time everyone thought that would be the end of his political career, and that he would be unpopular forever after. As it turned out, he is no longer unpopular. He is generally looked up to and appreciated by thinking people all over the state of Georgia today, and that appreciation will grow in the years ahead. He will, in time, be looked upon as one of our great citizens and a great governor.

Henderson: Mr. Norman, I want to thank you for granting me this interview. It's been most informative, and I have enjoyed it.

Norman: Well, thank you for coming. I enjoyed being with you and enjoyed having this opportunity to think back over these turbulent years, and now I'd like to take you to lunch.
[Cut off]

End of Side Two

END OF INTERVIEW

Name Index

B

Bell, Griffin Boyette, 17, 21

C

Carter, James Earl, Jr. (Jimmy), 26, 27

Cocking, Walter Dewey, 3, 4

D

Dunlap, James Anderson (Jim), 10

G

Gambrell, David Henry, 26

Geer, Peter Zack, Jr., 13, 20

Griffin, Samuel Marvin, Sr., 11, 24, 27

H

Harris, Middleton, 15

Harris, Roy Vincent, 20, 28

Hollis, Howell, Jr., 15

J

Johnson, Thomas M., 15

Jordan, Robert Henry (Bob), 21

K

Kennedy, John Fitzgerald, 16

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 15

Knox, Wyck, 28

O

Owen, James Coleman, Jr. (Jim), 10, 17

R

Russell, Richard Brevard, Jr., 12, 20, 26, 27

Russell, Robert Lee, Jr. (Bob), 21

S

Sanders, Carl Edward, 26, 27, 28

Sibley, John Adams, 17, 18

T

Talmadge, Eugene (Gene), 3, 4

Talmadge, Herman Eugene, 3, 8, 12, 20

Trippe, William Davis, 15

V

Vandiver, Ernest Samuel, Jr. (Ernie), 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29

Vandiver, Sybil Elizabeth Russell (Betty), 12, 21

W

Willkie, Wendell Lewis, 7

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