

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection  
OH Vandiver 26A  
William Lovel Lanier Sr. Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson (Part A)  
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**EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON**

Side One

Henderson: This is Dr. Hal Henderson. I'm interviewing William L. [Lovel] Lanier [Sr.], former member of the Georgia House of Representatives. This interview is taking place in Mr. Lanier's home in Candler County. The date is July 21, 1994. Good afternoon, Mr. Lanier.

Lanier: Good afternoon, and welcome to Metter and Candler County.

Henderson: Well, thank you very much. I'm looking forward to this interview.

Lanier: And so am I.

Henderson: Let me begin by asking you: how did you become acquainted with [Samuel] Ernest Vandiver [Jr.]?

Lanier: I think the first time I met Governor Vandiver was during the gubernatorial campaign of 1948 when Herman [Eugene] Talmadge was challenging acting Governor Melvin [Ernest] Thompson for the governorship, and Ernie Vandiver was managing Herman Talmadge's campaign.

Henderson: Two of the most interesting politicians in Georgia history were Eugene Talmadge and his son Herman [Eugene] Talmadge. Ernest Vandiver was a strong supporter of each. Would you discuss for me Eugene Talmadge and Herman Talmadge?

Lanier: Yes, I'll be happy to. Vandiver did have close ties there. Vandiver's father was appointed to the highway board by old Gene Talmadge in 1942 . . . [Cut off] 'Course, Ernie had managed Herman's campaign in 1948, but in 1947 Ernie married federal judge Robert L.

[Lee] Russell's [Sr.] daughter, who was the niece of Senator Richard B. [Brevard] Russell [Jr.].

So I say that for background. Now, the original question was to make a comparison between the two Talmadges.

Gene Talmadge was one of the most colorful politicians that Georgia ever produced. I guess Tom [Thomas Edward] Watson would be considered a very colorful one, and Gene's was sort of a take-off of his [personality]. Gene Talmadge had to have, oh, five or ten or fifteen fights going on simultaneously, and he could not live without one. It was a part of his life, and Herman, although he was a fighter, he sought to solve the problems more diplomatically than his father did. Both of them were very highly intelligent people, both Gene and Herman Talmadge, and both had compassion for the citizenry. So I think the biggest difference was that one had to have a daily fight and the other one used a diplomatic source to a great extent.

Henderson: One of the most interesting episodes in Georgia politics was the 1942 gubernatorial election. In that campaign one of the many issues concerned the accreditation of the University of Georgia. What knowledge do you have of that issue, the accreditation of the University of Georgia?

Lanier: 'Course, you'll have to keep in mind that I was a senior in high school, but Dr. Marvin [Summers] Pittman, who was president of Georgia Teacher's College, which is now Georgia Southern University, and Dr. [Walter Dewey] Cocking, a professor at the University of Georgia, were discharged from their duties by Governor Gene Talmadge because certain people had convinced him that they were trying to mix the races. The gentleman who is credited with having Gene Talmadge to fire Dr. Marvin Pittman was Dr. John H. [Harry Guyton] DeLoach, who was a professor at the college over at Statesboro. As a result of this, Roy [Vincent] Harris

and Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall saw--Ellis Arnall was attorney general at the time, and he saw an opportunity to challenge Gene Talmadge and use the school issue.

Now, one story that has never been told, and, as far I know, the only two people that Roy Harris ever shared this with were--he flirted with it with me, and then he told Ernie Vandiver that Roy Harris and Ellis Arnall went to the southern regional board [Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools] and planted the idea with them to take Georgia off the accreditation list, and that that and that alone was the only way that Gene Talmadge could be defeated in the state of Georgia. That story has never been told, and hopefully through this source it can be exposed, the real truth of that episode. As a result, just about everybody who had ever graduated from the University of Georgia or other institutions, or the one that the families were about to send their child, they didn't want--the rumor was that if their child finished there, it would be meaningless because it would not be from an accredited institution. That issue beat Gene Talmadge in 1942, and then Ellis Arnall became our governor in January of 1943.

Henderson: Ernest Vandiver is adjutant general during the Herman Talmadge administration. Do you think he was able to use that position to advance his goal of becoming governor of the state of Georgia?

Lanier: Uh, yes, indeed I do, because the National Guard in the state of Georgia is a political force, although it's not generally understood and known. It was a force to be reckoned with. However, we must understand this, that although Ernie had managed Herman's campaign in 1948, he was ineligible to help with the campaign in 1950 because he carried the rank as a major general in the army, recognized as a major general, and therefore could not participate in

an active campaign. He did not run for governor from the adjutant general position; he ran for lieutenant governor, and, of course, most of every community in the state of Georgia knew him because there would be somebody from a National Guard unit.

Henderson: Did you consider yourself a member of the anti-Talmadge faction or the Talmadge faction in Georgia politics?

Lanier: I was considered a member of the Talmadge and Russell [factions]. I did not vote 100 percent with the Talmadges, but philosophically my constituency was pretty heavy on the Talmadge side.

Henderson: Did you play any role in Vandiver's 1954 race for lieutenant governor?

Lanier: I managed his campaign in this county, and I also worked in the state headquarters. Before he made a formal announcement, Griffin [Boyette] Bell, who later became a federal judge and a circuit judge, and later as Attorney General of the United States under the [James Earl] Carter [Jr.] administration, he and I opened an unofficial headquarters in the Dinkler Plaza Hotel on behalf of Ernie. In the afternoon after the legislature adjourned, many members of the House and Senate and people who were visiting with them would come by for a Co-Cola [Coca-Cola] or something and visitation.

Henderson: Why were you attracted to Ernest Vandiver as a candidate?

Lanier: Ernie is a clean and honest and honorable man, and I guess our common denominator also would have been the relationship with the Russell and the Talmadge family.

Henderson: In the 1954 campaign for lieutenant governor there were four candidates. I'd like to mention their names and let you give me your impression of these candidates. The first candidate was Mr. William K. Barrett.

Lanier: Billy Barrett of Augusta, Georgia. Billy had served as a member of the General Assembly from Richmond County, and under Herman's administration he was head of the [Department of] Veterans Service. Billy got into a little bit of trouble in the House one time. He could not amend a bill, and he made his way into the office to amend it after hours, and so Billy was never quite able to shed that. However, Billy Barrett, as director of the [Department of] Veterans Service, did a good job and was fairly well liked.

Henderson: William T. [Thomas] Dean.

Lanier: Bill Dean had been, if my memory serves me correctly, president of the Senate before we had a lieutenant governor. A very formidable type of person but was linked with the anti-Talmadge faction, and that limited his ability to be elected on a statewide basis.

Henderson: John W. [Wesley] Greer.

Lanier: John W. Greer was a legislator from Lanier County, Lakeland, Georgia, and one of the members of the brain trust of Governor Ed [Eurith Dickinson] Rivers. John had some problems and difficulty too because some of the legal scholars didn't think that they followed the letter of the law perfectly. However, John was a very friendly person. You could not help but like him, and he was very skillful in the House of Representatives.

Henderson: How active were Governor Talmadge and Senator Russell on behalf of Vandiver's campaign in 1954? Did they play a role?

Lanier: Yes, uh, 'course, Vandiver was Talmadge's top protégé. I think we could borrow it from the politics of Virginia, and let's go back to the days of Governor and Senator Harry [Flood] Byrd, and they would meet every election time in the apple orchard, and if you weren't invited to the apple orchard thing, you didn't get elected. But there is one thing that Governor

and then later United States Senator Byrd--if a man wasn't totally clean, the senator would wipe him out, and not let him run on his ticket anymore. I think that, number one, Talmadge liked the Vandivers because Ernie and his father both were loyal Talmadge supporters, and then Ernie had ability. He was good on his feet, and then he knew that Ernie would not do very much that would embarrass him.

Senator Russell, I cannot remember him taking an active part. However, under the set of circumstances it was not necessary because it was widely known, and every time Ernie was introduced he was introduced as having married Senator Russell's niece [laughter], so he didn't have to come out for him.

Henderson: Did Governor Talmadge play an active role or is he behind the scenes in the 1954 campaign?

Lanier: He didn't hold, to my knowledge, any press releases, but Herman was not bashful about, if you were in his office or if he was at a meeting and you asked him who his choice was, that he would tell you Ernie Vandiver. However, he was also close to Billy Barrett, but he would--yeah. Everybody knew that he was, you know, his choice.

Henderson: [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] is governor while Ernest Vandiver is lieutenant governor.

Lanier: Yes, sir.

Henderson: I'm going to go through some individuals in the Griffin administration, and I'd just like for you to give me your impression of these people. Let me begin with Marvin Griffin himself.

Lanier: One of the most articulate fellows you ever saw, had a million dollar personality, and one of the best storytellers maybe that Georgia politics has ever had. He was interested in the welfare and well being of Georgia. His shortcomings were some of his appointees that allegedly wanted to compensate themselves beyond their salaries on the state payroll.

Henderson: How about his brother, Cheney [Robert Alwyn] Griffin?

Lanier: Well, [laughter] Cheney was considered the man behind the green door, and the hatchet man, and never denied it. One thing that I remember about Cheney, and Cheney was a very personable type fellow, you'd like him, but after they had accused Marvin and some of his department heads of not following the letter of the law, a group from Dahlonega, Georgia, had panned some gold to paint the [Georgia Capitol] dome gold, and he looked at me--he called me "cuz." I think he called a lot of other people "cuz." He looked up there one day, he said, "Cuz, had I known they were going to accuse us of all they did, I'd have never left that gold on the dome." [Laughter]

Henderson: Roger [Hugh] Lawson [Sr.].

Lanier: Roger Lawson, as I recall it, was a Solicitor-General or a district attorney, maybe of the Ocmulgee Circuit Court, which, uh, his hometown was Hawkinsville, Georgia. Marvin put him as head of the highway board, and he did a commendable job. He did not have the name recognition; he did not have the finances, and by the time that he came in on the scene the Griffin popularity had begun to wane, and really that took him out of the governor's race in my judgment.

Henderson: T. V. [Truman Veran] Williams.

Lanier: Red Williams was an attorney from over at Douglas, Georgia. Marvin named him revenue commissioner from day one, a former legislator, a highly skillful man, but there was no gray area on whether you liked or disliked Red. He had his following, and then he had certain prominent people over the state that looked at him with tremendous reservation.

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

Lanier: Roy Chalker owned the newspaper over at Waynesboro, Georgia, and as far as highway work he was an unknown, but he was tremendously loyal to both Marvin and Cheney Griffin. I would say that perhaps the best highway chairman during my days was Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.] from over--Jim Gillis, Sr.--from over in Soperton, Georgia. I don't think Roy was that caliber of an administrator, but I think you'd have to say that Roy did a satisfactory job.

Henderson: One of the critics of the Griffin administration called it the most corrupt in state history. How would you describe the Griffin administration?

Lanier: Well, in a way like Huey [Pierce] Long [Sr.] of Louisiana: constructive and questionable. You know, Huey Long was one of the most progressive men at his time in maybe the United States, but there were certain practices that he enjoyed, and the allegations against him were not complementary. And I think the same could be said of Governor Griffin.

Henderson: How would you describe the relationship between Marvin Griffin and Ernest Vandiver?

Lanier: Did you ever read the story of Julius Caesar? In that we had [Marcus Junius] Brutus and [Julius] Caesar. I think--and this [was] unusual because both were products of the Talmadge administration, although Marvin started off as an Ed Rivers protégé. In 1946 he ran [for the lieutenant governorship] on a ticket with Gene Talmadge. Gene Talmadge was elected

governor and died before he went in office. Marvin Griffin was beaten by Melvin Thompson. So he had a history of being with Talmadge and Ed Rivers, but immediately after Marvin became governor, and it began the allegations heaped on Marvin Griffin and his brother Cheney. Of course, Ernie took the high road and to be for what was right and just, and that caused a division between the two men.

Henderson: Was the relationship between these two men ever cordial? Was there much of a relationship of any kind or did the relationship deteriorate over the years?

Lanier: I don't believe it was ever like twin brothers, but they were working on the same team and tolerated each other. When the scandals began to break, I think it furnished the proper atmosphere for a divorce.

Henderson: Going back to the scandals, do you think that Marvin Griffin was himself corrupt, or that the people around him were corrupt, or a combination of the two?

Lanier: I would say that some people around him were more corrupt, and, of course, he had a tendency like many other people I've known to try to protect and to shield him. I think in the latter part of it he was more aware than he was in the first part of the episode.

Henderson: Does the relationship between Herman Talmadge and Marvin Griffin deteriorate?

Lanier: Yes, it did. I think they remained on speaking terms and friends, but Herman did not cotton to anybody in public office that would do anything to embarrass him.

Henderson: To put this in perspective, could you tell me when were you first elected to the legislature and how long have you served?

Lanier: I was elected to the House of Representatives in 1950. I was elected six times, and during my sixth term, which would have given me twelve years--John F. [Fitzgerald] Kennedy was elected president of the United States, and Dick Russell and Herman Talmadge recommended me as state director of the Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service. So I resigned during--halfway between--halfway into my sixth term to take that position.

Henderson: Now, one of the major fights in the legislature in the Griffin administration occurs in the 1958 session. This is a fight over rural roads. Could you discuss that fight for me?

Lanier: Now, you're talking about the bond issue. Marvin Griffin had his floor leader to introduce a fifty million dollar bond issue. When it came for a hearing before the committee--it was a public hearing--Governor Griffin came down himself and did a creditable job . . . and without notes. He did a fantastic job in explaining the need for it. Representative Wilbur Orr of Wilkes County, Washington, Georgia, led the fight against it, and did a superb job, one of the best performances I witnessed during my six terms in the House.

Okay, it was not sure who was the winner, so Roy Harris and others convinced Frank Cheatham, the member of the House from Chatham County, who is just retired as senior superior court judge there, to move on Friday afternoon that further action be postponed until Monday. Well, when Frank walked down the aisle on his crutches, he immediately--there was some sympathy there, but Frank Cheatham was one of the finest men I've ever known in my life and just as clean as a hound's tooth, and when he asked that House to "Let's think this over on the weekend," it gave both sides that chance to lobby heavily, and it was tremendously heavy over the weekend. Then when we went back on Monday, I believe Roy Harris, Bobby [Robert

Lee] Russell [Jr.], maybe one or two more and myself, we counted noses, and we didn't miss a nose count, and there were 205 members. We missed it by two, and we defeated that. Now, it was believed that the primary factor behind this was this would be a money raising scheme and more patronage where Marvin Griffin could raise funds to put behind either Roger Lawson or ultimately Bill [William Turner] Bodenhamer [Sr.] from Ty Ty, Georgia.

Henderson: What role did Governor Vandiver, at that time Lieutenant Governor Vandiver, play in defeating this in the legislature?

Lanier: Well, there's not but twenty-four hours in a day, so I'd say he came pretty damn close [laughter]. But he did not take the front row, but, see, Bobby Russell was his brother-in-law, and, yes, he was very much involved.

Henderson: Now, you mentioned some intense lobbying. Could you discuss that further?

Lanier: Anybody that they thought--the Griffin side--that they had in their--I don't care what department it was--thought they had some inside to a member of the House, he was called, and anybody that the other side of the aisle, the Vandiver forces, they stayed on the telephone. In fact, a good many legislators didn't leave to come home that weekend because they were busy on the phone calling those that did go home and soliciting their vote.

One thing that I would mention that maybe is not germane to this: immediately after Ernie Vandiver became governor he introduced a hundred million dollar bond issue, and, of course, I supported that one. When I got home that weekend, some of the old Marvin Griffin folks were waiting for me, and they asked me why in the hell did I vote against a fifty million and voted for a hundred. I quickly told them that the Griffin fifty million dollars would not do

the job, and I would not be party to anything that'd be half done, and I supported the hundred million dollar [bond issue].

Henderson: How active was Marvin Griffin in this fight?

Lanier: Like 1000 percent. He was on the phone too, but I will say this for him: he-- without notes--he had done his homework. He made a tremendous presentation, but that Wilbur Orr that followed him--I'd say of all the presentations that I witnessed at a public hearing during my sixth term I'd have to put Marvin's presentation and Wilbur Orr's as maybe the best. Both were good.

Henderson: Besides Governor Griffin who were some of the major players on his side in this fight?

Lanier: Well, of course, Cheney, Red Williams[Ernest], highway commissioners that he had appointed, and I doubt seriously if he had a cabinet officer that wasn't actively on the phone from that Friday 'til Monday. I would say that every one of them were, all of his cabinet.

Henderson: Did he invite legislators down to the executive office to discuss this with them?

Lanier: Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, which was a common practice, and I guess it still is, for governor to send for you if your heart wasn't right.

Henderson: What were Vandiver's supporters using as their major argument why this should not be passed?

Lanier: Pork barrel, and it was a political scheme more than it was one designed to bail the farmers out of the mud.

Henderson: What's the major argument that Marvin Griffin is using to pass it?

Lanier: To get the farmers out of the mud.

Henderson: And I presume you played a rather active role in this fight?

Lanier: All that I could [laughter].

Henderson: Did Senators Russell or Talmadge get involved in this fight [unintelligible]?

Lanier: No, sir. I wouldn't be at all surprised that they weren't close observers, but I never knew of either one of them engaging themselves in it.

Henderson: Why do you think Ernest Vandiver eventually prevailed in this fight?

Lanier: The popularity of the Griffin [administration] had waned. Had it not been for the allegations of wrongdoing, Marvin probably would have won, but some legislators got a little scared of being associated with him at that hour of the game. [They were] afraid that they might give the appearance that they were tainted.

Henderson: If he had proposed this in 1957, do you think he might of been able to pull it off then?

Lanier: I wouldn't doubt it one bit. I wouldn't doubt it one bit, and in '56 for sure. See, he was elected in '54; he went in office. In '55 or '56, yes, he could have sold it.

Henderson: Why do you think a major candidate does not come forward for Talmadge [*sic*] to challenge Vandiver in 1958? They come up with Bill Bodenhamer, but. . . .

Lanier: No, you said Talmadge--you meant Griffin.

Henderson: I meant Griffin.

Lanier: I think the ones that were capable and in the caliber and category that you would like to choose from would not accept it because of the circumstances. All right, let's go back to another one, take a case. When [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt tried to purge Senator Walter [Franklin] George, he first offered this to. . . . Hmm, I can't think of his name now.

What was the man over at Carrollton, Georgia, that was national treasurer for the Democratic Party under Roosevelt? I can't think of his name, but Roosevelt first tried to get him to run. Well, he wouldn't run. Well, he knew that George and Talmadge were unbeatable, one of them would be. I think that the people who would normally become candidates knew that with the tainted image that persisted at the time it was a no-win thing. Then Marvin was aware that they couldn't beat him, but he was not going to let Ernie have it without working him.

Henderson: How would you describe the candidate William T. Bodenhamer?

Lanier: Well, William Bodenhamer, I liked him all right, but he never had a prayer in being elected governor of Georgia. He didn't have the name recognition, he was not properly financed, and then he suffered from the stigma of the allegations of the Griffin administration.

Henderson: How actively do you think Marvin Griffin supported him as a candidate?

Lanier: I think they did all they could for it, but it was just a commodity that was not to be sold at that time.

Henderson: What role did you play in that 1958 campaign?

Lanier: I managed the campaign here in the county, and I worked in the campaign headquarters off and on during the campaign.

Henderson: What did you do in the campaign headquarters?

Lanier: Helped with the strategy. I placed calls all over the state to people that I was in school with at ABAC [Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College] and the University of Georgia, Farm Bureau leadership in every county in the state of Georgia, and relatives over the state of Georgia. So I was used to bounce things off of and suggest things that he do, and press releases and the like.

Henderson: Who would you say were Governor Vandiver's major advisors?

Lanier: Well, of course, the Russell family, although they never surfaced as such, did, and Herman Talmadge, and, say, folks like Roy Harris. But in that particular campaign it wasn't necessary as it is in some campaigns because he didn't have a formidable opponent.

Henderson: In that race he makes the "No, not one" promise. Would you discuss that?

Lanier: Well, I get excited and afraid every time I hear that repeated. I think it was at Thompson, Georgia. Everywhere it was I was in the audience, and I said, "Oh my God," because it was very evident that what was in pipe, that what the court was going to ultimately do. Then it wasn't necessary for Ernie to say this to win, and we came home with our heads at half-mast after that because we thought that maybe he made a commitment there that we couldn't live with. So the politicians that understood what was going on at Georgia and over the country, and in particular at Washington, knew that it was a bad statement and an unnecessary statement.

Henderson: Why do you think he made the statement?

Lanier: Well, we wondered at the moment, "Was it a slip of the tongue?" But I never saw that speech in writing, and I don't know whether it was premeditated or not. I don't know how to address that question, but it certainly was unnecessary.

Henderson: Do you have any idea who might be advising him to make such a statement?

Lanier: Nobody would ever take credit for it [laughter].

Henderson: Including Roy Harris?

Lanier: Nobody--well, I think if anybody would have, if anybody would have it would've been Roy. But the thing that tells me that Roy didn't--and I don't know who did--Roy would not

have had anybody to make a statement knowing that he couldn't live up to it, and especially after the competition was not that close.

Henderson: So I detect that prior to him making that statement, he did not discuss with you in any way whether he should or should not make the statement?

Lanier: He did not; he did not. I heard it the first time when everybody else [laughter] did.

Henderson: In that campaign and his campaign as lieutenant governor what contribution does Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell] Vandiver make to his success?

Lanier: She's a Russell, and in addition to being a Russell, Betty Vandiver is a tremendous lady. She meets people well. Well, she's a Russell. You can go in her home, and when you leave there she leaves you with the impression that had you not come that day that they would not have had a good day, but you made their day. A fantastic lady.

Henderson: When Governor Vandiver assumes office he faces a financial crisis: the state is spending more money than it's taking in. How does he cope with that crisis?

Lanier: Well, first of all, Ernie is as tight on money as bark is on oak. Some politicians have trouble saying no, and Ernie had trouble saying yes. He was willing to cut and we did cut out several things. One thing that he had us to cut out, and, of course, I didn't follow him on that, was we'd started this recreation department. They had a tremendous program going over in Statesboro by a gentleman by the name of Max Lockwood, and I did not go with the governor on that one. Then too, let's look at his history. When Dick Russell became governor of Georgia, the state of Georgia was flat on its back economically, and he abolished about 107 boards and commissions. He's the only man that ever put together a reorganization, in my judgment, that saved money. Now, I've been through many of them in the state government and

many of them in the federal government, but most of them don't save any money. They just shift some of their people in the right position. But Ernie was--oh, he was a conservative. Oh, was he ever a conservative.

But one trick we played on Ernie, and Ernie doesn't know it to this day: we wanted a coliseum at Georgia, and the silk stocking crowd--that's the north campus crowd--couldn't pull it off, so the farm boys took it over. When he was going to make his state of the union address, George L. [Leon] Smith [II], speaker of the House, Phil [James Philander] Campbell who was commissioner of agriculture, and myself, we controlled the gallery for tickets to hear the speech, and if you were not for the coliseum you didn't get in. We asked Ernie--we told him we didn't know how the people felt about it, but just to mention it in the state of the union and let's see what kind of response [he'd get]. Well, when he did that everybody in the gallery stomped and clapped so I thought the dome was coming off the capitol [laughter]. So we got us a coliseum [laughter] at the University of Georgia. But he was just conservative and he had enough guts to do what was necessary to--it wasn't popular, now, but he cut us back to where we finally got in better financial conditions.

Henderson: One of the first laws that he is able to get passed is an honesty in government bill. Discuss that for me.

Lanier: Well, this was typical of Ernie, and let me give you an example. It was right there in the House of Representatives. We had people that were doing business with the state that were in the legislature. We had people in the legislature that had state jobs. We had one person from Spalding County, who was a member of the House of Representatives and also a member of the Board of Regents, and it was things of this nature that caused him to make them choose: all

right, get on one side or the other. Keep your state job and stay out of the legislature or stay in the legislature and give up your state job.

I think it was things of this nature that caused Ernie to go for the honesty in government [Bill]. We had one--if my memory [unintelligible], we had one exception, though, to that, and that was to a fellow from down at Georgetown, Georgia, that was working for the Department of Agriculture. I believe an exception was made for him, and, of course, he later served a prison sentence for voting fraud [laughter]. Joel Hurst was his name.

Henderson: Governor Vandiver has a new criminal division created in the state attorney general's office and the purpose of that division is to prosecute alleged corruption in the Griffin administration. What do you know about that division [unintelligible]?

Lanier: Umm-hmm. You know, I was afraid you were going to ask that. I--and keep in mind now we're talking about something several years ago. I remember it, I remember it coming forth, but I cannot give you a rating on that just off the cuff. I'm sorry.

Henderson: Let me discuss, mention, some people who were involved in the Vandiver administration and you give me your impression or recollections of them. Griffin B. Bell.

Lanier: Griffin Bell is the most underestimated man in public life I ever knew. There's a saying out here in the countryside when somebody's extremely brilliant. We say he's dumb like a fox. When I first met Griffin Bell I thought that he was average or maybe not quite average in intelligence, but the more I saw of him the more I liked him and appreciated him. Then I knew him as a federal judge and on the appellate court bench, and then as attorney general of the United States, and I'd have to put a big plus by his name, a man of ability and character.

Henderson: How influential was he in the Griffin [sic] administration?

Lanier: You mean to Vandiver?

Henderson: I mean Vandiver.

Lanier: Uh, I would say in Ernie's--the time that he called the several of us--now, I have heard fifty people. I would have to differ with that. There were not fifty of us there. I would say that my guess is that before that we got there that Griffin Bell said to the governor, said, "Now, Governor, regardless of the way you feel, we cannot close the university." When his time came to be called on he said as much before the group. [Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Henderson: How 'bout William R. [Redding] Bowdoin?

Lanier: Bill Bowdoin is an old vocational ag [agriculture] boy, and he became, I guess, second in command of the Trust Company Bank, wasn't it? He came on and headed up a commission for Ernie Vandiver, and didn't he also write a book on the Third House? [Editor's Note: The title was *Georgia's Third Force*.] A very outstanding man, a man of character, a man of ability, a man that had the potential of being a good governor of Georgia.

Henderson: Peter Zack Geer [Jr.].

Lanier: Peter Zack's vocabulary was better than most. He was very articulate. I think he would've admitted that he was highly intelligent and effective. He was good on his feet, and had he put as much time to his work as he did other things, he possibly could have become governor of Georgia. You know, he beat Lester [Garfield] Maddox for lieutenant governor, and then he lost out after that, but a man with tremendous ability.

Henderson: Mr. Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.].

Lanier: Mr. Jim Gillis, Sr. was born in Montgomery County, Georgia. His daddy, Neal Gillis, was a member of the legislature and he was a member of the legislature. He got Treutlen County created. How he did this: there was a governor's race going on, and he did a survey. He knew how every member of the legislature felt about the governor's race, and when he got to that man's house that was who he was for. And he got Treutlen County carved out of Emanuel and Montgomery and some of the others over there, and I don't hardly believe that there has been a time since the creation of the candidate he or his sons have not been in the legislature.

His youngest son was just reelected to the Senate Tuesday of this week. I think he went to the legislature in the 40's. Jim L. [Lester Gillis], Jr. served in the legislature. Then Jim L., Sr.--back when Ed Rivers was governor, and at that time there was only one state senator that could succeed himself, and that was from Atlanta, Georgia. The rest rotated, and there was a rotation, and John B. Spivey of Swainsboro, Georgia, wanted to be president of the Senate, which at that time was equivalent to lieutenant governor, except our constitution didn't provide for it. Old man Jim Gillis wanted to go on the highway board, so Treutlen County waived its time to furnish a senator and let John B. Spivey succeed himself. Thereby he became president pro tem of the Senate and Jim Gillis came on the highway board. Then when Herman [Talmadge] went into office he chose Jim Gillis, and then I believe Carl [Edward] Sanders had him as highway chairman. The best highway chairman in the history of Georgia.

Henderson: What role does William [Walter] O. [Odum] "Bee" Brooks [Jr.] have in the Vandiver administration?

Lanier: Well, I'm not so sure that I can respond to that. He was product of the Talmadge. . . You know, he started off--and I believe, was it the personnel board that he was the head of at

one time? Now, Bee Brooks was a Telfair County man, which is Herman[']s county]. So I know that there was a relationship there, but I cannot be positive because I associated more with Herman than I did with Ernie.

Henderson: Let me mention some people who were involved in the legislature during the Vandiver administration. Lieutenant Governor Garland T. [Turk] Byrd. What was his relationship with Governor Vandiver?

Lanier: Garland had been a member the House from Taylor County. He was elected while he was in school at Georgia. He and I were classmates. Then when Herman came in as governor in '48--well, '49, he named Billy Barrett as head of the Veterans Service Department and Garland T. Byrd as deputy director, and then he [Byrd] ran as a Talmadge candidate and was elected lieutenant governor. A very personable fellow, well liked in the Georgia legislature, but some of his other interests might have taken away from him. Then I think Carl Sanders saw that void and moved in and became the next governor.

Henderson: Was there a cordial relationship between Garland Byrd and Governor Vandiver?

Lanier: To the best of my knowledge, yes.

Henderson: How 'bout the relationship between Carl Sanders and Governor Vandiver?

Lanier: Well, what year are you talking about?

Henderson: During the Vandiver administration.

Lanier: Well, [laughter] there's a history here. This [laughter] thing gets sticky on both sides. He had--now, Ernie Vandiver will go to his grave believing that he elected Carl. Then when Carl wanted to run against Uncle Dick [Russell], they fell out. Ernie supported Jimmy

Carter against him, and they had an agreement, there's no doubt about it, that if Uncle Dick became incapacitated or passed on, that Carter would appoint Ernie Vandiver to the Senate. I was in a cotton meeting in Dallas, Texas, and the junior United States senator from South Carolina, the former governor of South Carolina, he and I had a conversation, and he asked me who he [Carter] was going to appoint, and I told him he was going to appoint Ernie Vandiver. He said yes, that he's visited Dick on his deathbed, and Dick told him that that would be the appointment.

Well, then when Carter reneged on the agreement, then Sanders and then Ernie Vandiver became better friends, and to this day I think they get along pretty good. But you didn't be critical of Uncle Dick and keep the support. So Carl wanted to run against Dick, and he had a survey, and that survey came back 18 percent Sanders, 82 percent Russell. Did you know that? Okay.

Henderson: What was the relationship between Governor Vandiver and House speaker George L. Smith? Cordial? Adversarial?

Lanier: Cordial, but there's a history there. When this thing about Ernie's campaign was getting going, or about--it was in its embryonic or infancy stage, Phil Campbell and myself and maybe two or three more met with Ernie to pledge our support and also to . . . that George L. Smith would be elected speaker of the House. After he [Vandiver] was elected he said he had an open mind and would consider it, and the meeting with Governor-elect Vandiver was not very cordial at the time. But I don't know what caused him to use that language, but later he did not offer any opposition to George L., and as far as I know that they got along good.

Henderson: How effective was Governor Vandiver in dealing with the legislature?

Lanier: Good, good. If you'll go back and check the record, now, the bills that he had introduced, which were what we called administration bills. . . . I'm trying to think: do I recall that he lost a major one? Right off the top of my head, I don't remember one. I don't remember one, and then, on the other hand, the way to measure a governor's strength is if somebody introduces a bill that he opposes, and if Ernie opposed a bill it had rough sledding, very rough sledding.

Henderson: How would you describe his lobbying activities?

Lanier: Good.

Henderson: What would he do?

Lanier: Call you down, or send some member of his staff or some of his department heads that he knew that had rapport with you, or if there was one that you normally had a meal together or a cocktail together or family friends. . . . He knew how to use that, and that was primarily it.

Henderson: Do you think he enjoyed this type of lobbying activity?

Lanier: I question it. You know, Ernie was not the greatest what you call people-to-people. He was good, but, you know, some people like bodily contact and eye contact, and some people don't like it at all, and some are sort of mediocre. Now, Marvin Griffin, for example, relished the idea of one-on-one or one-on-two or one-on-three. Yeah. But in explaining his position Ernie was articulate.

Henderson: It's been said that from time to time governors will promise jobs and roads in return for votes. You have any recollection of Governor Vandiver doing that sort of activity?

Lanier: No, but I would say he was guilty. All of them are. I never had a governor to approach me in that manner. Never in my twelve years in the House. I never had a governor to approach me based on the job for a constituent or a road. However, it's been going on since day one. Now, if there were a governor that did not do it, I'd say it would be Vandiver.

Henderson: Do you recall any instance where he got mad at a legislator, upset with a legislator?

Lanier: Yes, sir. Yeah, I've seen him get upset. On that recreation bill that I was talking about, I wondered whether he would pass that or not, but I saw him--I didn't know he ever had a heart condition. Well, he didn't either at the time. If I had known it, and as upset as he got over that, I would have been concerned for him.

Henderson: Governor Vandiver has to deal with the issue of segregation. In the 1960 session the legislature creates the Sibley committee. Tell me about the Sibley committee.

Lanier: If there has ever been a God-sent man it was Mr. [John Adams] Sibley. Mr. Sibley was a native of Milledgeville, Georgia, in Baldwin County, and he worked himself up as president and CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the Trust Company Bank in Atlanta. I think I got the bank right. I would've never thought of him, although I had a lot of respect for him. I'd have never thought of him playing this role, and for a man to have played this role he had to be financially independent and a man that. . . fear was not in his vocabulary. No politician or active public office seeker could have played this role. It would have eviscerated him.

It was a very dangerous series of meetings. For example, the one at Sylvania, and I was speaking to the sheriff and he said, "I've seen more plow points in people's pockets today than I ever seen." He wasn't talking about plow points. He was talking about Saturday night specials,

and it got rather warm and intense between--well, for example, a Methodist preacher from Waynesboro, Georgia, and some of his own members. It was very sensitive, and I don't know of--now, this is the type of job that he could have done and this is the type of job that a gentleman you asked me about before that I said would make a good governor [could have done]. People like that would be the only persons that could handle a job like that and survive. There was no way they could reach back at him.

Henderson: Why was the Sibley committee created?

Lanier: In my judgment? Here is something that was going to happen, come hell or high water, because the courts were going to determine it. You could stand in doors like some governors did, or you could do what Governor [Orval E.] Faubus did in Arkansas, but the bottom line was it was going to happen. I looked upon it--now, this is just my own opinion, nobody else's--I looked upon it as a means of letting people cough up their grief, and get it out of their system, and then to see that it's going to happen, and it going to be done, now, let's not do anything that would damage the image of Georgia.

Henderson: The Sibley committee makes some recommendations. There is a majority report and a minority report. Do you recall those reports?

Lanier: Vaguely.

Henderson: Of the two, which one were you in support of?

Lanier: Well, that wasn't the issue. The issue was, as I said what I thought the main purpose was. It was coming, and like I told Governor Vandiver at the mansion that day, that although we were not racist in Candler County, we were segregationists, including the blacks [and] a lot of their leadership. Of course, they talked to me very frankly about it. So it's going to happen,

so you handle it in a fashion that will not cause a division between the races. Do it in the best fashion that you can promote peace and harmony because we've got to live after the day that decision is made. So I would not have voted to have closed the University of Georgia, and so stated to the governor, and I think on the Sibley Commission report, although had it been put to a referendum in this county, I think it would have possibly gone against the majority, but I think I would have had to have voted with the Sibley Commission.

Henderson: Did you get any pressure during this period of time from some of your constituents to go along and close the public schools?

Lanier: The thing that I remembered most--yeah, there were some, but I never was really highly pressured by anybody in this county during my twelve years in the House. I've seen members on each side of me get 150 or 200 telegrams a day, and I would get none. I never went through that metamorphosis of politics. But I had a wire that I kept back in my dresser drawer for students at the University of Georgia from Metter, Georgia: "Mr. Bill, please don't let them close the University of Georgia," and then maybe a sentence of why. I thought enough of it that I kept it 'til my house was burned, and I would have not voted to close the University of Georgia, no.

Henderson: In January of 1961, Governor Vandiver has to deal with the desegregation issue. Discuss that desegregation issue for me.

Lanier: Well . . . let's see, *Brown v. . . .* the people of what year? '54. So it was just a matter of time when it was going to get here, and in the session of, I think it was, '55 we passed a bill saying that any university or any school system that received any funds from the state of Georgia that admitted a person of color, that their funds would be automatically shut off.

Well, this was what it was about, and the only way to get around that is for the legislature to remove that statute, and what Ernie did was ask--bounced it off of us that day, and from that day that we moved forward to taking that off the books. So once that was taken off the books that was it, right? 'Cause, see, there wouldn't be no schools closed. Had we let the schools close, it would've been a matter of how short a time that the federal authorities to assemble themselves to have overridden us, just like they did George [Corley] Wallace and Faubus, and Mississippi was, what, Ross Barnett? Umm-hmm. It was a no-win proposition.

Henderson: There was a meeting at the executive mansion. Governor Vandiver invited key leaders in state government. Reports of 50 or more members there. Were you present at that meeting?

Lanier: Yes, sir.

Henderson: Could you describe or discuss that meeting for me?

Lanier: Very tense. I differ with the number that was present. I don't think--I would have guessed, oh, twelve or fourteen, but it might have been more than that. But I would certainly differ with. . . . I know Governor Vandiver was there; George L. Smith, the speaker of the House, was there; Griffin Bell was there; Frank [Starling] Twitty was there; Carl Sanders, who later became governor of Georgia. I can know where they're seated right now. He [Vandiver], as I recall it, surfaced the issue and discussed the pros and cons, and the first person he called on was me and I told him, I said, "Now, I do not come from a racist county. I am not a racist. I come from a segregated county. I am a segregationist. But, Governor, you cannot count on me to close the University of Georgia." Carl Sanders said basically the same thing. Frank Twitty said basically the same thing. Now, I've heard some people say that there was only two there

that agreed with the governor. I can't buy that. I'm sorry. I think it was more than that, and I know who the first one was that was called on.

Henderson: Now, we're talking about the same meeting? There's not two or three meetings here? This is the meeting where the governor is going around asking various people their opinion about what. . . ?

Lanier: After he had outlined it and the consequences on both sides.

Henderson: In January of 1961 he addresses the legislature at a historic night session. Were you present at that session? Describe that session for me.

Lanier: Now, that was one where he was asking us to repeal that [legislation to maintain segregated schools]. It was, as I recall it, a very uncomfortable night. Now, a majority. . . . Now, there was some people there that could not vote with the governor because the folks back home would not permit it, and the ones that knew that the governor was right, they had some reservations. I would imagine that several of them had to take some sleeping pills that night. It'd be my guess.

Henderson: Let me go back just a moment to the Sibley committee and clear up something for me. Now, was the legislature called upon to adopt any of the Sibley committee recommendations?

Lanier: Well, I don't remember it that way. After that meeting, you know, and then when Ernie asked us to abolish the act of '55, that in effect agreed with the majority report of the Sibley commission.

Henderson: Now. . . .

Lanier: I started to say, but I believe there were some other lesser things in that report that we dealt with, but for the sake of me I cannot touch it down. But the guts of it was that abolition of the '55 act.

Henderson: Is the action of the legislature of the governor's recommendation, is it pretty well unanimous or is there some opposition to the governor's request?

Lanier: There was some opposition.

Henderson: Now, where is the opposition coming from?

Lanier: It didn't go, as I recall it now, necessarily [along] party lines like Talmadge versus anti-Talmadge. It went how'd the folks back home [wanted], and a fellow knowing that we had to do this, if he could do it and get by with it.

Henderson: And how did you vote?

Lanier: I voted with the governor.

Henderson: Did you suffer any consequences because of that?

Lanier: I did not. I never had an opponent as an incumbent. [Cut off]

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