

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 27
David Campbell Jones Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: This is Dr. Hal Henderson and I am interviewing Mr. David Campbell Jones, a member of the Georgia House of Representatives during the Griffin and Vandiver administrations. This interview is taking place in Mr. Jones' office in Sylvester, Georgia. The date is July 22, 1994. Good morning, Mr. Jones.

Jones: Good morning.

Henderson: Thank you very much for granting me this interview. How did you come to know [Samuel] Ernest Vandiver [Jr.]?

Jones: I guess I first knew him when he was adjutant general, but I didn't know him really that well. But being in the General Assembly and seeing him at functions from time to time But I was not that well acquainted with him in the early days.

Henderson: Two of Georgia's most interesting politicians during this period of time were Eugene Talmadge and Herman [Eugene] Talmadge, and Ernest Vandiver was very much supportive of those two gentlemen.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: What was your impression of Gene Talmadge and Herman Talmadge?

Jones: Well, Gene Talmadge was a little bit ahead of my time. Herman Talmadge . . . came along right after his father died, and my first recollection of Herman Talmadge was that

he committed himself to appoint my father to the State Highway Board and reneged on it [laughter]. So, I got along with him through the years; I served two years in the General Assembly while he was governor and we got along all right. But I always sort of remembered that [laughter].

Henderson: Well then, did you consider yourself a member of the Talmadge faction or the anti-Talmadge faction or independent?

Jones: No, I was pretty much independent. Garland [Turk] Byrd was a very good personal friend of mine from junior college, and I remember that he told Herman Talmadge one time-- the three of us were in the governor's office--said, "He's almost like a Talmadge man."

[Laughter] But I was not; I was always very conservative in my political thinking and in the beginning Herman Talmadge professed to be conservative in his political thinking, but when he got to spending money he changed pretty fast.

Henderson: In 1954 Ernest Vandiver runs for the lieutenant governorship.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: Did you play a role in his campaign in any way?

Jones: Well, let's see, Billy [William K.] Barrett was running at the same time, wasn't he? Well, you know Judge [William J.] Forehand from Tifton. Judge Forehand was very active in veterans' affairs at that time with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and of course, they were a pretty active group at that time. That was not all that long after World War II, you know. He came to me and wanted to put on some sort of function for Billy Barrett, who was very strong with the veterans' groups, you know. At that time, I didn't really know Ernest Vandiver that much, and more or less because of Judge Forehand, who was also a very good personal friend--

he came from Sylvester--I agreed to help him promote Billy Barrett. We pulled up a flat bed trailer in front of the courthouse out here and, I think, had every radio station in south Georgia bought for that program. Never did know who paid for it all, but we put that show on out there.

That was a pretty big deal for Worth County, and in that time, of course, everybody listened to the radio and people apparently I saw people from Adel, Valdosta, and everybody had listened to that program from Sylvester. It did ole Barrett a lot of good and Ernie Vandiver lost this county [laughter]. That was his first loss, I think, and I tried to call Bill Forehand before you came here to tell him I was going to use his name and. . . . But just the attention that this program got, I think, is what cost Ernie Vandiver this county at that time. We didn't have any particular reason to oppose Ernie Vandiver. We were just supporting Billy Barrett because the veterans around here wanted us to do it, you know.

Henderson: Did Ernest Vandiver ever hold that against you politically?

Jones: No, I don't know that he every really gave it much attention. I only heard in recent years that he said the one thing that was always in his craw was that he never carried Worth County. I haven't really checked that, but apparently that's true. He never could understand why.

Henderson: There was another gentleman in that race, William T. [Thomas] Dean. Did you know anything about William T. Dean?

Jones: No, not really.

Henderson: There was a gentleman from Lanier County, John W. [Wesley] Greer.

Jones: Oh yes, I knew John Greer through many, many years up until he died.

Henderson: What kind of person was John Greer?

Jones: He was a very public-spirited fellow. He started out, of course, with the old Ed [Eurith Dickinson] Rivers faction, which is before my day. I knew a lot about it mostly because of John Greer. But John was a fellow who could move in all circles, and politics was a profession with him. John had practiced law a little bit [laughter], if it need be or whatever. It didn't matter. You know, he represented a lot of truckers and all, just as if he was a licensed attorney, but he was an interesting character.

Henderson: Did you have any impression that behind the scenes Governor [Herman] Talmadge or Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] were helping Ernest Vandiver in that campaign?

Jones: Oh, yes. He had the Vandiver family connection with Talmadge and then his wife with the Russells, and he really used that to launch his career, no question about it.

Henderson: Why do you think he won that race in 1954?

Jones: I don't know. Billy Barrett had a lot of veteran support, but politics was changing a lot and Billy Barrett in his campaigning used the old style. I remember when he spoke from the flat bed truck down here we were sitting behind him and it was right funny--he'd just stand on his toes, you know, he was giving such an oration. Times were changing and Ernie Vandiver was looked upon on as sort of a new era and I think that helped him . . . Of course, he got elected because the Talmadge and Russell forces were very powerful at that time.

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

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: I want to go through some people in the Griffin administration and just let you recall your impression of these people.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: Marvin Griffin.

Jones: Oh, he was an interesting fellow, a very capable fellow. I always liked him; I couldn't go along with him all the time. When they had a little split toward the last of the Griffin administration, I went with Ernest Vandiver. That was some kind of extension of the road program or something. I can't remember the details, but I remember . . . he wanted me to vote with him on this program and called me to the governor's office. At that time, we lived on Sylvester-Moultrie Road and our farm was there and my father lived there. Dr. [Walter Alvan] Blasingame was head of the Highway Department for Moultrie and they were redoing that road. Of course, they were doing it because Dr. Blasingame wanted it done to give Moultrie a better route to Atlanta, but Griffin called me to the governor's office and told me he was going to cancel that road if I didn't help him. And I said, "Well,"--of course, I knew he was not going to cancel the road 'cause it was already under construction.

I said, "Governor, you just have to do it. My daddy'll just have to ride in the mud for another four years, but I just can't go with you. That's just the way it is, you know." He let me get all out into the outer office and almost to the hallway, and one of his aides said, "Hold it a minute, Mr. Jones. The governor wants to speak to you." He came out and he said, "You know I was just pulling that on you, didn't you?" [Laughter] That was the kind of fellow that he was, he didn't hold grudges too bad. But I went against him and he treated me the same. You know, back in that time, sometimes folks would hold things against you pretty strong, but I generally

didn't have that problem 'cause I just told him how I stood, you know, and he'd press it to the limit and then accept it [laughter].

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

Jones: Yeah, I liked ole Cheney. Cheney was a pretty big operator though. Very delightful fellow. I remember when Ernest Vandiver became governor, [J.] Willis Conger and Cheney Griffin represented Decatur County, and they took their seats for the new session right in the back of the chamber. I guess they realized that they were not going to be all that active with Vandiver as governor. When Vandiver was making his state of the state address he said, "The day of cronyism and squandering the public's money is over in Georgia," and Cheney [was] on one side and Willis on the other. Cheney said, "Willis"--out loud where we could hear him all over the back of the chamber--"Get your bags packed. We just as well to go back to Bainbridge. There's going to be no money to be made this four years." And you could hear him all over the chamber [laughter].

Henderson: How much influence did he have in his brother's administration?

Jones: I don't think that he had a lot of influence over issues or over programs that they started. He worked mostly on hiring and firing and such as that and caused his brother a little trouble all along, I think.

Henderson: How about Roger [Hugh] Lawson [Sr.]?

Jones: I don't remember much about him. I can't . . . The name is very familiar, but I somehow have lost track of him.

Henderson: Do you recall T. V. [Truman Veran] Williams?

Jones: Oh yes. Oh yes, yes.

Henderson: What was your impression of Red Williams?

Jones: Red was sort of like Cheney [laughter]. Red came from down here at Sumner, Georgia. His wife did. Red was just a political animal, you know, and played the game.

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

Jones: I knew Roy, but not that well. He was a . . . in that group, but I didn't know much about him.

Henderson: One of Marvin Griffin's critics referred to his administration as the most corrupt in state history. You think that's a fair assessment of the Griffin administration?

Jones: They did a little hiring and firing type things that you wouldn't see done today but . . . I didn't see that much of it in the General Assembly. They didn't exercise that strong a control over the General Assembly, even less I would say than the Talmadge administration had. The revenue department was . . . run in a fashion that I didn't think was quite right. `Course, that was Red Williams' operation. But what I saw of things was a lot of people hired for minor jobs that didn't do any work much, but that was not a big item. There was a good little bit of that, I think, but. . . .

Henderson: So you don't recall it being more corrupt than, say, any other administration?

Jones: Well, Ernie Vandiver . . . [and] Carl [Edward] Sanders, they ran a pretty straight shop. I would say that they ran it more by the book than Griffin did. Griffin still. . . the purchasing department and things like that, I think that they did a lot of favoritism. Marvin Griffin himself, I never really saw him that close to those activities. I think that he was a fellow that liked his friends so well that he let a lot of them go further than they should. That was always my impression of him. He was a jolly, nice fellow, and I think he had a hard time

keeping his people in line because he hated to call them in line, you know. That was just my impression of those things that developed at that time.

Henderson: How would you describe the relationship between Governor Griffin and Lieutenant Governor Vandiver? Was it cordial or adversarial?

Jones: I think it was cordial until toward the last of the Griffin administration, and then, of course, Ernie Vandiver was positioning himself to run for governor, and I don't think that. . . . I think if Griffin had had his choice he would've picked somebody else to succeed him.

Henderson: One of the major fights in the legislature during the Griffin administration is in 1958 over the rural roads issue.

Jones: That's right.

Henderson: Discuss that issue some more for me. Why was Marvin Griffin proposing the expansion of the rural roads authority?

Jones: They wanted to let a lot of contracts before he left office [laughter] and Vandiver opposed him. That's the time when I was called downstairs and I went with Vandiver, and I had no particular connection with Vandiver at the time. I just knew that that money was going to be spent too fast to be spent wisely. That's the reason I opposed it.

Henderson: Did Ernie Vandiver personally contact you to do some lobbying?

Jones: I don't think he did. I can't remember--it's been so long ago, but I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I think he was a little surprised when I stuck with him on it because I really had not been lobbied by his people particularly. I just. . . .

Henderson: You mentioned your lobbying experience there. Do you recall any other lobbying activities done by anybody, whether it's the Marvin Griffin side or the Ernest Vandiver side?

Jones: Oh, of course, it was a battle down to the wire. Griffin meant to win it, you know. He called individual legislators to his office. Back then, you know, they had to phone upstairs, and the governor was on the line all the time, and they'd call you down [unintelligible] all the time. 'Course, the ultimate was when the governor himself asked for you personally one-on-one, you know. That's when he pulled the Sylvester-Moultrie Highway deal on me, and I just told him that I hated to lose the road but that I thought his deal was wrong and I was not going with him on it. He went along and he said, "Dave, what can I do?" You know, I said, "Well, Governor, I want to be your friend, but I'm not going to go with you on this and that's just it." That's when he drew the road on me, but then before I got into the hall, he called me back and laughed about it, you know. But I don't think that Vandiver ever really--I don't remember him ever really pressing me on that bill one way or the other. [Cut off]

Henderson: Besides voting with Lieutenant Governor Vandiver, did you play any other role in that fight?

Jones: No, I was just one of a substantial group of people in the House at that time who were trying to hold spending down a little. In those days we had some right substantial people. I remember Ben [Benjamin James] Tarbutton with the old Central Georgia Railroad, old man Brack [Daniel Braxton] Blalock of Blalock Machinery Company, and [William] Hershel Lovett, Feeley Lovett's grandfather, I guess. We had a lot of those kind of people. I was . . . and [William Sylvester] Stuckey [Sr.] was in the House at that time. There were a group of us

like that. I was out of their class financially but we were trying to hold spending down a lot. We thought they were spending too much money. We liked the Rural Roads Authority in the beginning, but we felt like that it was being overdone by extending the borrowing authority that soon after the first one, you know.

Henderson: Did Senator Talmadge or Senator Russell play a role in that fight?

Jones: Not that I remember. I think that Bob [Robert Lee] Russell [Jr.], who was brother-in-law to Ernie Vandiver, took a big part in it. They probably used their influence of the Russell machine, if you'd call it that at that time, but it was not visible.

Henderson: Who were some of the major players in this fight on both sides? You mentioned a few of these people. Can you recall any others?

Jones: Well. . . .

Henderson: Was Cheney Griffin involved?

Henderson: Oh yes, oh yes. Cheney worked on it pretty hard, you know. Cheney, you know, would tell you either you're with us or you're against us. If you don't go with us, we're going to punish you. If you do go with us, we'll reward you. But. . . you knew where Cheney was coming from [laughter].

Henderson: Why do you think Ernest Vandiver finally won that fight?

Jones: Well. . . the media was on to Griffin pretty strong. They helped in that fight, and Vandiver was the beneficiary of the media attack on the Griffin administration in its last days, you know. Of course, when one governor is fixing to go out, you know, they look to the new [laughter].

Henderson: So in a way this was the 1958 governor's election?

Jones: That's right. That was the opening salvo of the coming election, no question about that.

Henderson: Now in that election in '58 the Griffin people are not able to get a major candidate.

Jones: That's right.

Henderson: Why not?

Jones: Well, they hadn't groomed anybody. They were enjoying their own administration to the extent that they didn't think about grooming someone else, I think. I think that's very easy to let happen.

Henderson: William T. [Turner] Bodenhamer [Sr.] finally enters the race.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: Tell me about William T. Bodenhamer.

Jones: Well, he's a pretty nice fellow, but he got carried away on most of the issues and let himself. . . . At that time there were a lot of periodicals right extreme in their views being printed and disseminated all over the country, and I think Bodenhamer subscribed to every one of them and took them every one to heart. During that period of '57 and '[5]8 he was in the House, and he'd feel compelled to get up and make a speech on a point of personal privilege right frequently and quote these periodicals that he subscribed to from all over the country, and he . . . lessened his effectiveness by overdoing it and taking sort of extreme positions.

Henderson: Do you see the Griffin people actively supporting Bill Bodenhamer in that campaign?

Jones: I don't think they had anything to do with him getting into the race. A lot of them, having no other candidate, probably supported him, but he was not a candidate they sponsored, I don't think. I think he just--as he did about his speaking on points of personal privilege so frequently, he just decided it's time for him to run, that people needed him [laughter].

Henderson: In the 1958 race, do you play a role in that campaign?

Jones: Not too much. Like I say, I was right busy with my business, and, of course, if you're in the General Assembly, you know, the first thing you do is try to keep quiet enough to get by qualifying day without opposition, so you have to stay out of it that long, you know. I didn't take a big part in it, no.

Henderson: In that campaign Ernest Vandiver makes the "No, not one" promise.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: Do you think that was a good promise to make?

Jones: He was. . . . Of course, I remember--didn't he make that statement in his inaugural address?

Henderson: No, I think it was in the political campaign, during the campaign.

Jones: Maybe so. I don't think that he thought that that was reality. I didn't at that time. I remember--I thought it was in his inaugural address. I don't know what made me think that, but . . . I think that was the influence of the Talmadge faction on him. He was a realist, and I think he overstated his case substantially.

Henderson: When Governor Vandiver assumes office, there is a financial crisis in state government. The state is spending more money than it's taking in. Now, how did he deal with that situation?

Jones: You know, I get all these different administrations confused. I'm not. . . I don't remember exactly that situation.

Henderson: Okay, let me go to another question. He had an honesty in government bill. What was that bill all about?

Jones: I remember we had a bill; I didn't remember it being Ernest Vandiver's bill. I believe that we had an honesty in government bill, and I remember--it's an interesting thing. Sloppy [James Henson] Floyd [Sr.] was in the General Assembly and he opposed this bill in committee on the grounds it excluded members of the General Assembly. He said that he would not support the bill until they included themselves in it. Three hours later the headlines of the *Atlanta Constitution* hit the streets: "Floyd Opposes Honesty in Government," [laughter] and he sued them. He told me this: that they had a mistrial, a hung jury, in the first trial, and he said the jury hung because they had one man on the jury who wanted to give him fifteen million dollars damages and wouldn't agree to anything less [laughter]. In the end, they paid, one of the few times Atlanta newspapers have ever paid anybody, a public official on a libel suit. They paid Sloppy five thousand dollars, and I think they owed it to him. I did not remember that Vandiver had sponsored that bill but that was an interesting sidelight to the bill that I remember quite well.

Henderson: Let me mention some people who were involved in the Vandiver administration and you just give me your impression of these people. Griffin B. [Boyette] Bell.

Jones: Yes, I didn't know him that well at that time but he's a fine, fine man. I saw him at Carl Sanders' function very recently.

Henderson: William R. [Redding] Bowdoin.

Jones: Didn't know a lot about him. Very substantial fellow, though.

Henderson: His executive secretary, Peter Zack Geer [Jr.]?

Jones: I know Peter Zack fairly well. That was a sort of a strange combination, Peter Zack and Ernie Vandiver, but. . . .

Henderson: Why do you say it was a strange combination?

Jones: They were very different sort of people. `Course, now, they're both tough as can be. Back when Ernie Vandiver was lieutenant governor, he could stay up all night, he and Peter Zack, and take a shower and go to the Senate and preside without a minute of sleep [laughter]. They did it quite frequently. It always amazed me how tough they both were in that regard. They burned the oil, I'm telling you [laughter].

Henderson: Now, what would they be burning the oil doing?

Jones: Well, they attended a lot of functions around Atlanta [laughter].

Henderson: How influential do you think Peter Zack Geer was in the Vandiver administration? Was he a close advisor, confidante, to the governor?

Jones: I think that he was mainly his tie to south Georgia. He could help him relate to south Georgia, and I think that was the practical aspects of that relationship.

Henderson: How about Mr. Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.]?

Jones: Yeah, I knew Mr. Jim through many, many years. He was. . . . He knew how to horse trade and that's what he did. I think he was a pretty good administrator.

Henderson: If you wanted a road during the Vandiver administration, did you go to the governor? Did you go to Mr. Gillis?

Jones: Of course, when I wanted something done I went both places [laughter]. If I could get a word out of the governor's office to the Highway Department, I tried to get that done, you know, to make it a lot easier. But it was done both ways, of course.

Henderson: Now, when you went trying to get roads was there something in return that was expected of you?

Jones: No, I think in most cases they thought it would have an effect on you but I never did experience anyone saying, "Okay, if you want the road, you've got to do this or you've got to do that." I never did encounter that. I think some people did, but by your own actions and attitudes through the years you're put in a category that when you go and ask for something they treat you accordingly. I always tried to conduct myself so that my voting in the legislature had nothing to do with what I was going to get in return, and I think if they know that they don't try it on you. And you get just as much, you get just as much done as if you swap votes. 'Cause if you ever let them know that you were in the swapping business, then you were out. You know, they might swap with you, but they don't respect you [laughter].

Henderson: It has been said that governors in the past have promised roads and jobs in return for votes. Did you ever see any indication of that during the Vandiver administration?

Jones: No, I don't--I did not. Ernie Vandiver was. . . he was a pretty tough individual and he didn't. . . . The idea that you would push him or that he would trade off with you just was not--it was distasteful to him. It just was not his nature.

Henderson: When you say he was tough, what do you mean by that?

Jones: Well, he didn't mind standing up and being counted. If you went to him with a swap deal, you know, his position was, "Well, I'm right, and I shouldn't have to do that" [laughter]. And he believed that he was right, I'll promise you.

Henderson: Let me move to the legislature and let me talk about some people who were in the legislature and their relationship with Ernest Vandiver. Lieutenant Governor Garland T. Byrd--did they get along?

Jones: Yeah, I think so. Garland Byrd was a very likeable fellow. Of course, he was a strong Talmadge man, sort of a protégé Herman Talmadge, but he's the kind of the fellow that would get along with people without much difficulty. He recognized that the governor had the power, you know.

Henderson: So then there's not that adversarial relationship like there was between Griffin and Vandiver?

Jones: No, no.

Henderson: How about the relationship between Ernest Vandiver and Carl Sanders as far as the legislature?

Jones: I don't really know anything about that. I knew Carl Sanders early on when he was in the Senate, but I don't have any particular knowledge about the relationship between those two. There again, Carl Sanders was very ambitious and he came to Atlanta not to be a senator or representative. He came to Atlanta to go to the top, and he's working on that every minute, I can assure you.

Henderson: Let's move to the House side. House speaker George L. [Leon] Smith [III].

Jones: Yes, he was a nice fellow, not really an aggressive fellow, and really enjoyed being speaker.

Henderson: Did he and Vandiver get along all right?

Jones: Oh yes. `Course, that's the way he got to be speaker, you know. I mean, back then the governor pretty well named the speaker, and he served at the pleasure of the governor almost. His position would be that he would do the governor's bidding.

Henderson: How effective do you think Governor Vandiver was getting his way through the legislature?

Jones: Right effective I would say. During those days, a governor was a strong figure. As I say, the speaker even served at the pleasure of the governor. That was just almost an accepted thing, that you named the speaker that the governor wanted. That changed sometime later on, maybe during the--I believe it was during the Vandiver administration. It might've been during the Sanders administration when they sort of had a independence movement led by Wilson [Bryant] Wilkes from Adel and there again, I supported that group. We had a group which we'd built on and agreed that the governor would never again select the speaker. We did it on a budget fight of some sort 'cause Wilson Wilkes later was appointed budget director by Carl Sanders as an offshoot to the work that we'd done there during that period, you know. But Vandiver was strong--all governors were strong governors then. Like when you can pick your own speaker and he serves at your bidding, you know

Henderson: What power did the governor have over the budget [unintelligible]?

Jones: Almost exclusive power. I can't remember where it was--it was in the last of the Vandiver administration, I believe, when we had this fight and. . . . I joined the group who sought an independent budgeting process.

Henderson: Why did you want an independent budgeting process?

Jones: Well, I thought that the government was being run by the bureaucrats and I just. . . . It didn't fit my nature to serve on Appropriations Committee and get a 200-page bill and hold up my hand and vote yes when I didn't even know what was in it and not have any input whatsoever, you know. I knew that that process was not conducive to good spending habits, and that people elected members of the General Assembly to go up there and direct how the money was spent and we weren't doing it.

Henderson: Let me go back to Governor Vandiver lobbying the legislature. Did he ever call you down to the governor's office and say, "I need your vote on this"?

Jones: Yes, several times, you know. I can't remember specific details, as I say . . . but, you know, I had a number of meetings with him. I . . . I, a time or two, voted where I was the only man on an issue. I didn't owe any of them my position and I was not running for governor. I voted like I thought I ought to [laughter].

Henderson: When you voted against the governor, did you have any consequences as a result of that from the governor?

Jones: No. I don't remember what the issue was, but I remember Vandiver one time was on his way to his car in the parking lot and he said, "Jones, I see you distinguished yourself again today." Of course, I'd voted against him, you know [laughter]. But it was in a friendly way, you know. There again, if you had a reputation of being your own thinker, they did not take offense

at it. If you had a reputation of being a man who could be directed, then they'd take offense at him because that'd change him, if they got on him real hard. If they knew that you were going to think it through yourself, they respected your attitude.

Henderson: Did Governor Vandiver try to cultivate a friendly relationship with the legislature, for example, inviting you to the mansion? Did he ever do that, have dinner and social occasions?

Jones: Yeah, yes, but most of my activities during his administration like that would be with a fairly sizable group, not one-on-one or three-on-one or anything like that, but a larger group. He worked with the legislature more or less as an institution rather than with individual people, now. Of course, George L. Smith having been named speaker by the governor, he'd call on George when he wanted him, you know. Of course, the floor leader would take directions from the governor. At that time, the governor had a lot more influence on legislation than they do now.

Henderson: Do you recall any critic in the House that was sort of a thorn in the side of Governor Vandiver? For example, did he and [Edwards] Culver Kidd [Jr.] have a good relationship?

Jones: I . . . I don't remember anything specific about that. Of course, Culver Kidd would prick any governor just enough to get his attention all the time, you know, or for the purpose of making peace with him later [laughter] or whatever. Culver Kidd was an institution unto himself [laughter] and a sharp operator.

Henderson: Do you have any knowledge of the governor, Governor Vandiver, ever getting angry or upset with a legislator?

Jones: I've seen him upset, but. . . . He had a little temper, but it didn't last long. I don't remember any specific individual. I've seen him . . . trying to, in the hallway speaking to somebody, trying to sort of change him and getting all, you know, carried away that he didn't seem to be getting anywhere. He'd get red in the face real easy, but I don't remember any specific member.

Henderson: Governor Vandiver has to deal with the issue of desegregation.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: In the 1960 session the legislature creates the Sibley Committee.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: What was the Sibley Committee and why was it created?

Jones: My personal opinion at the time and still is that it was to prepare the people of the state for what was inevitable. I think that Mr. [John Adams] Sibley approached it that way, and I remember they asked people from Worth County to attend a meeting in Moultrie. Some of the black leaders here, one of them being Cantrell who's since deceased, but he was a black school principal here, and they came to my office and we talked about what we ought to do there. Of course, my advice to them was, number one, that I shouldn't be giving them advice but I said to them that we, the people of this county, don't realize it yet, but there will be full integration in the schools. I said, "I think that's a foregone conclusion. So what we say or do in this hearing in Moultrie is not going to matter. That's not what the hearings are about, not to decide what to do because we're not going to decide. So we ought to have our testimony--bear in mind in giving our testimony that what we're going to have to do is have full integration and we ought to bear in mind that what we say and do should be directed toward making it peaceful if possible

because we're really not going to decide in Moultrie, and that committee's not going to decide because what's going to happen is a foregone conclusion." They're pretty smart people and they agreed and the testimony, like in Moultrie, from all over southwest Georgia among blacks and whites alike was--they would say they were against it, but it was not inflammatory or anything like that and of course it came to pass, you know.

I know I spoke to some civic group here one time, the [mayor of Sylvester], Mayor Lawhon, reminded me of that a while back, and I told them, I said, "Now, I'll go to Atlanta and I'll be voting against this and voting against that, but in the end we're all going to face it." And he said nobody in that crowd believed what I said that night, but I said, "It's coming and you're going to face it and David Jones won't stop it and you won't stop it." He said he thought I was making a rather foolish statement for a man in politics, but by that time we knew what was coming if you stopped and thought about it. Of course, we had trouble-free integration. Of course, it just happened at one lick here, you know, which turned out to be the best way. Well, that's what I think. I think Ernie Vandiver's motivation was to take the heat off of the governor's office. That was what the purpose of the committee [was], I think, and it served a purpose to prepare the people.

End of Side One

Side Two

Henderson: Now, you mentioned hearings of the Sibley Committee. You attended the hearing over in Moultrie?

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: Describe that meeting, that hearing. Was it adversarial? Was there tension there?

Jones: Mr. Sibley, of course, kept real tight control because he was afraid of things getting out of hand, but it was sort of a dull type thing with just people getting up and he'd let them make their statement. He might ask them a question or two, but he didn't allow it to get into a town hall meeting. He maintained a pretty tight control over it, and, as I remember, it was sort of disappointing to the people who went there to make speeches. They just didn't let it get that far. They let them make a statement. It was just a routine type thing. In other words, the hearing was not to elicit any information [laughter] or suggestions. It was just a hearing to pave the way for what was inevitable, I think, and it was, as I say, to cover the governor's office [laughter].

Henderson: What was your impression of John Sibley?

Jones: I didn't think he did all that good a job in his hearings. I think that he could have shown a little bit more respect for the local people and done a better job. I think he was so afraid of a flare-up that he overdid it. When everybody left the hearings, they had the impression that they'd been had, that they really were not invited to testify. I think that he could have shown a little more respect for the witnesses that he had invited there and done his job better.

Henderson: The Sibley Committee makes two reports: one is the majority report; one's the minority report. Do you recall those reports?

Jones: No, I don't. I . . . I really don't.

Henderson: The majority report basically was going along with the local option. Now, if I recall correctly, eventually the legislature has to vote on that issue or vote on whether to repeal the anti-segregation laws. We'll come back to that in just a moment.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: In January 1964 Governor Vandiver has to deal with desegregation of the University of Georgia.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: How do you think he handled that crisis?

Jones: I guess as a politician he had to put up a show, but there was no question in my mind and I doubt there was any question in his mind what the end result would be. See, we're talking about eight years after the '54 decision. It was pretty obvious, I think, to people like him that . . . they were going to integrate the University of Georgia.

Henderson: Now, some of the more adamant segregationists were talking about closing down the school systems, closing down the University of Georgia. Were you getting any pressure from any of your constituents to close down the schools?

Jones: No. Like the university system, I don't remember that I ever heard the local people here say much about that, but alumni of the University of Georgia didn't want to close the University of Georgia, I can assure you, and destroy what they considered a great institution, and even those who thought integration would be the worst thing that ever happened to it, they still didn't want to close the University of Georgia, I don't think.

Henderson: Now, how about on the local level as far as your public school system here? Were there people here in the county saying, "Well, let's close it down instead of integrating it"?

Jones: I guess you had a lot of people who would say that. A good percentage, I would say, would say that, but if their kids were out of school for six months they would be desperately looking for something. If you'd had something like a voucher system, a private school system would have sprung up and survived.

Henderson: The legislature had previously passed a great deal of legislation trying to prevent desegregation.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: And Governor Vandiver recommends that that be repealed.

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: What was your position on repealing those laws?

Jones: I really don't remember exactly. Like all folks in politics, I think that I knew what the end result was going to be but sometimes we did a little grandstanding and I was not . . . one to . . . [laughter] that was so total in my beliefs that I didn't do a little grandstanding myself. But I think at that stage that I probably went along. But I really don't remember those specific things. People's attitude toward segregation was pretty strong in this area and transcended all political groups too. It was strong, but people accepted it when it came pretty well. We just didn't have any flare-ups at all in our public schools here on the day they integrated.

Henderson: If it came down to closing the Worth County school system or integrating the Worth County school system, what was your position?

Jones: Oh, I wouldn't have closed the school system under any circumstances. Just couldn't do it. We had us a private school organized at that time that didn't--I think Bodenhamer helped organize it over here--didn't do very well at all. Now, they had a private school system later that

did right well but not that one. So at the time that the integration actually took place, they couldn't really get a private school organized here.

Henderson: Governor Vandiver was a segregationist, a supporter of Herman Talmadge [and] Richard Russell. He had promised "No, not one" in his campaign. Why do you think he changed his mind on this issue?

Jones: Well, I think he just bowed to the inevitable. I think he knew when he said, "no, not one," that he couldn't do it [laughter].

Henderson: At that time do you think his decision ended his political career or was damaging to his political career?

Jones: I wouldn't think so. People sort of--as I said, they expected politicians to grandstand to some extent and sort of overlooked it.

Henderson: In the 1960 presidential election Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is arrested in Georgia. Governor Vandiver plays a role in obtaining his release. Did you play any role at all in this episode?

Jones: No, no. I was not even close to it or anything like that.

Henderson: After the election of President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy there is some speculation that he would appoint Governor Vandiver to the position of secretary of the army.

Jones: Yes, I remember that.

Henderson: What was your impression of that episode

Jones: I just--my memory on that is rather vague. I didn't ever think Kennedy was going to do it 'cause I thought once Kennedy got elected he was through with Vandiver [laughter].

Henderson: Did you ever think that Governor Vandiver would accept if offered?

Jones: Yes.

Henderson: You did?

Jones: Yes, I did.

Henderson: Now, what would give you that impression?

Jones: He always seemed to enjoy being the adjutant general. He liked the uniform [laughter]. My brother was adjutant general in recent years. They like that job. My brother has been adjutant general about as long as anybody in history--ten years.

Henderson: Let me go back to him being adjutant general just for a moment. Does that help him politically when he decides to run for higher political office?

Jones: Oh yes. Yes. Well, you've got National Guardsmen in every community in the state and it just gives a fellow a little grass roots connection. A lot of these National Guardsmen are not that particular[ly] active in politics, but when they know a man personally they tend to activate themselves and they don't have any baggage. They make good grass roots support and I think he benefited a lot from that.

Henderson: During the Vandiver administration the county unit system comes under legal attack by the federal courts and the legislature is called into a special session to respond to a federal court order saying something's got to be done about the county unit system. What is your recollection of that special session?

Jones: I don't remember much about the details. I thought that they made a mistake in . . . their legal defense of the system. I thought they should concentrate on trying to keep one body based on area rather than population, concentrate on making the Senate represent various areas of the state and give up on the House of Representatives, instead of making a total defense of

the system. They might couldn't have done that, but there was precedence, of course, in the United States Congress for that sort of a thing. I thought that, like a lot of things at that time, that they didn't think it through, that they just made it a total defense of the county unit system rather than trying to salvage something.

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

Jones: Well, I think he . . . brought back respect for government and I think his reputation as an honorable person was well taken. I think that the people respected government better.

Henderson: Do you see any major failures?

Jones: Well, he didn't hold cost in line like he should have. I guess this fight on the budget thing took place in the last of his administration and. . . he didn't really fight the process. It was sort of a renegade group that insisted that we were going to look at the budget for the first time in history independently of the governor. I was in that group and pressure was on from the governor's office to maintain control, but we did it because we had a hard time getting the governor's office to hold down on spending.

Henderson: How would you describe his stewardship as governor?

Jones: Oh, he was a good governor. He . . . he wanted to make a mark and usually governors, you know, they think the only way to make a mark is spend a lot of money and build a lot of edifices. He's not to be faulted for that, because if you did I don't know who you'd give a good grade to in all our history. But. . . he had a reputation for integrity.

Henderson: How would you describe his political philosophy: conservative, moderate, liberal?

Jones: No, I think he had a conservative philosophy which he didn't hold in check as well as he should have [laughter].

Henderson: As far as spending?

Jones: Yes [laughter]. Most of it goes with my political thinking--most of it goes back to the budget. I'm a liberal in social issues and a conservative in money matters. Sometimes it's hard to reconcile the two, but. . . .

Henderson: Would you consider Vandiver a strong governor, a weak governor, or somewhere in-between?

Jones: He'd be . . . in-between. He'd be a moderately strong governor, but if he would've been--of course, this sort of rebellion in the House over budget matters was a product of the times. You were getting some people in the General Assembly, a lot of new people, and if he would've been a real strong governor, he'd beat that. But it took shape in the last of his administration and this lasted, you know. I think that deep down he believed we were right, and he didn't fight it too hard. So that's just my personal impression of his attitude toward us at the time who were trying to wrest control of the budget from the governor.

Henderson: Would you consider Herman Talmadge a stronger governor than Ernest Vandiver or they're about the same as far exercising power?

Jones: Well, Herman Talmadge, of course, was the heir to his father's machine and he was able to use that. I don't think he could've ever put it together himself. It was. . . still strong enough to carry him, and if he had not gotten [it] by inheritance I don't think he could've ever built it.

Henderson: How would you describe his style of dealing with people? Was he a backslapper and a storyteller?

Jones: No, Vandiver was a--I think he had sort of a hard time relating to small groups. That was just sort of my impression of him. A lot of people had the idea that he was sort of pompous. I don't think he was, but he left that impression sometimes and I think that communication one-on-one and with small groups was a little bit difficult for him. In their campaigning he had that thing. His wife made up for it, because she was just the opposite. But I always thought that he had a sort of a hard time in that regard.

Henderson: Well now, how would you compare his style with that of different people, say, with Marvin Griffin's?

Jones: Oh well, entirely different [than] Marvin Griffin, of course. Marvin Griffin was very difficult . . . to not like. The people who opposed him at every turn liked the fellow 'cause he knew how to make you like him. Of course, what I told you about the road deal--the first thing that crossed his mind after I left there was "I've lost his vote, but I don't want to lose his friendship," and he called [me] back out of the hall. He just. . . . It was his nature to do that.

Henderson: How would you describe Ernest Vandiver as a politician?

Jones: Well, I wouldn't say that he was all that capable a politician. I think he knew government well and knew how to make government work, but he got elected governor by the Talmadge and the Russell factions and he probably could not have done it without both of them, was my impression at the time.

Henderson: How would you describe him as a public speaker?

Jones: Of course, all the speeches I heard him make were prepared, you know. He did a good job as a prepared speech [sic]. I usually didn't pay much attention to those, you know. I'd received an advanced copy of the state of the state address and I knew what he was going to say before I read it anyhow. You know how those things are. He was fairly effective, but. . . .

Henderson: How would you compare his speaking style with, say, Marvin Griffin's?

Jones: No comparison. Marvin Griffin, there again, just knew how to do it. It was almost as if he was born with it, you know. He just knew how to do it and there are a few people come along, you know, that make you feel comfortable, even though you disagree with them. It makes you wish you could agree with him, you know. That's the kind of fellow he was [laughter]. I don't think Ernie Vandiver ever commanded close personal loyalty with people. People didn't feel real close to him, I didn't think, or didn't feel anything compelling them to go along with him. Of course, I, most of the time, agreed with him so I didn't have any problem with that, you know. But I don't ever remember disagreeing with him when disagreeing with him worried me because of the personal relationship, you know.

Henderson: Some people have said that there was a tinge of stubbornness in Ernest Vandiver.

Jones: I would say so, yes.

Henderson: Did you ever experience that stubbornness?

Jones: No, not really. Well, in this budget thing, we'd accuse him of that. Wilson Wilkes was the fellow. There again, Wilson Wilkes is likeable fellow and maintained a good personal relationship with Ernie Vandiver during all this period. But I remember a time or two there, he'd say to the governor, "You just are determined not to go along and being stubborn," you

know. Vandiver would make some sort of remark like "Well, there's some virtue in being stubborn." You know, he didn't consider that a failing [laughter].

Henderson: In 1972 Governor Vandiver runs for the U. S. Senate and he does not win. Why do you think he was not successful?

Jones: I don't know. I think that the Talmadge faction was not near as prevalent over the state as they had been and I don't think they tried to help him much. The Russell influence was dwindling and so his base that carried him to the lieutenant governorship and the governorship really no longer existed. That's what gave Herman Talmadge such a shock, but he forgot that most of the people voting when he got defeated were not even alive when the Talmadge and Russell machines existed. Like a lot of people in politics, they forget that things change and I think that's probably what happened to Vandiver. He would've made a good senator. He would've been all right.

Henderson: If you had to rank recent governors, say, from Herman Talmadge down to the present, would you rank Ernest Vandiver as one of our outstanding governors, average governors, or below average?

Jones: I'd say he's above average, but I think Carl Sanders was a very strong governor. Sanders had a direction and took it on with zest and made it work, you know. But, of course, Vandiver was beholden to the Talmadge and the Russell organizations and, of course, I don't think that the Russell organization called on him very much but the Talmadge people called on him for rewards and that hindered him a little bit. But I think he was an above average governor. He was not as outstanding a personality as Carl Sanders, you know, in my opinion.

There again, I had a closer personal relationship with Carl Sanders and that always colors your thinking.

Henderson: Going to his personality, was Ernest Vandiver's personality extroverted, introverted, or somewhere in-between?

Jones: In-between, but . . . in dealing with other people rather formal. I think he had a little difficulty with that, for a politician.

Henderson: What influence do you think Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell] Vandiver had on Ernest Vandiver?

Jones: I think a lot. That was always my impression. She helped him a lot.

Henderson: In what respect?

Jones: Well, just in tying him to the Russell faction, calling attention to that. She was a good street campaigner and a very ordinary acting person, you know. Where he could not act in an ordinary fashion out on the streets of Sylvester campaigning, she could. I remember seeing her on Isabella Street down here campaigning one day, and folks just couldn't believe that Senator Russell's niece could get down with the people like that, you know. She just knew how to do it and liked to do it, which is part of what makes you effective.

Henderson: Final question: what do you think is Ernest Vandiver's place in Georgia history?

Jones: Well, I think that, despite his "no, not one" statements, that he faced as much as anybody at that time could do and still remain viable in politics to the fact that integration was inevitable. Though I think his Sibley commission was to cover his behind, that was all right. I don't see anything wrong with that. I think he helped prepare the people for what was inevitable and did it in a fairly responsible way. As I say again, as responsible as you can be and still get

elected. I don't think that he had any intention of ever allowing our school system to destroy itself or be destroyed or our university system to be closed down. I don't think he ever gave any thought whatever to doing either one of those things.

Henderson: Mr. Jones, I want to thank you for this interview. It's been most informative and most enjoyable.

Jones: Thank you. Thank you.

End of Side Two

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