

Richard B. Russell, Jr. Oral History Project  
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Senator Tom McIntyre interviewed by Hugh Cates  
April 21, 1971

CATES: This is Hugh Cates. I'm--April 21, 1971, Wednesday. I'm in the office of United States Senator Tom McIntyre, who is a Democrat of New Hampshire. Senator McIntyre, would you please recount or relate any personal information or reminiscences that you might have about Senator Richard Russell.

MCINTYRE: I think my first memory of Richard Russell was as a delegate to the Nation Convention in 1952. This was probably one of the high points of Dick Russell's career. And I remember this, this gentleman, I think it must have been the time he either withdrew his name from consideration to the convention, but he left the podium and came down the, through the delegates assembled and I had a chance to, to see him in probably what was one of his highest lights of his political career. As you know, it's often been said if Russell had not been from the South he might very well have been President of the United States-- And the next recollection I have comes ten years later in 1962 or possibly it was early in '63, and that was when my first appearance down here in the Senate and I think we're going over to the floor and here was this man who I'd followed his career and, you know, through the various newspapers during that intervening ten year span. He was a dean of the Senate at the time. He was, regardless of the presence of other senators here that might be senior at that time, Richard Russell, on our side of the aisle, was considered to be a senator's senator in every respect and probably the most brilliant man we had here. And I saw him in the hall, saw him in the elevator and as we're going up I identified myself and I remember the remark. He said, "Well, Tom," he put his arm around me, you know, here's a, I'm just a brand new neophyte, the first time that I've been in the U.S. Senate and I'm like any other experience I've ever had, whether I was at camp or at prep school or at college when you were first initiated why you were something that was less than the other fellow. Here was probably the outstanding man of the Senate, threw his arm around me and said, "Well, Tom, it's about time you good people of New Hampshire sent a fine Democrat down here to represent them." I was first, in my first two or three years I struggled to, to become a member of the Armed Services Committee which Dick Russell led for so many years. And then I remember not much of an anecdote really, but shows how human this fellow was. I think the, the most impressive thing about Russell to me was that here was a man that, who had earned his spurs, who was--but who had the Senate and his fellow senators were very high on his list and I think he used to take great delight in, in trying to instruct younger members of the body, and teaching them how he felt about the Senate as an institution. Even in the great debate of '64-'65 which he led for the cause of, we might say the South on the Civil Rights struggle. This animosity never held over. My votes, of course, a classical New England vote, the feeling that we must move in this direction and yet never bothered him. I do, do feel that, on the Armed Services Committee I was getting just a little bit unhappy that, I felt the control of the Committee was so much in the hands of Richard Russell that once in a while I got a little bit discouraged and felt that maybe I should get off because I was very junior, I think I was number 11 my first year on the committee and, but he had such a commanding knowledge of. the military affairs and long

before I had been here, during World War II he was all over the globe, down in the front lines and in the divisions, rears, trying to find out whether the equipment was working and whether the men were being well provided for. I don't believe he was ever for Vietnam, but I remember that he insisted that if we had men over there that they be given the best. It was one of his creeds. But getting back to that little anecdote, I remember I wanted to get a picture with him shortly after being named to his committee and I went down and, you know, even, still a great, deal of deference that I had for this gentleman and I even, just I got ready to pose and it so happens that my hair's receding on the right side of my head, at least it was as, at that time a great deal faster than on the left so I figured I had a good side, a better side, and in the position the photographer put us in, it was on my worst side. So I said, "Well, Mr. Chairman, would you mind if I shifted and stood on your other side so that my better side would be photographed?" He says, "Well, you're very lucky to still have a better side." Because, you know, Dick was bald or practically bald. I had a chance; I developed a little, habit of going to what you might call the inner sanctum of the Senate. The people who go in--our constituents come in, we entertain them in the, in the main Capitol dining room. Many of them are not aware that instead of turning to the right, you turn to the left, there's a little inner sanctum dining room where the Republicans all sit at a big family dining table and we Democrats sit in the rear, but at a big family table. And Senator Russell was a frequent user of this as are several of the southern senators including the gentleman you mentioned just a minute ago, Herman Talmadge. And I got into the habit of going down there and I found it very helpful and here we would sit and listen to Russell and John Stennis was a great one to do it, too, particularly when we have a little leisure time after lunch they would recount anecdotes and past experiences. Russell felt very deeply about the Senate. Sometimes today I worry about whether that feeling is being lost but it was a, in the last two or three years he used to talk more and more about personalities he had clashed with. He's a great admirer of Truman. But, all in all, I would say that Dick Russell was one of these wonderful men who make it possible for a younger man and a much less experienced man in government, because you know Dick was, he was, I guess, from the time he was about 28 or 29 in the State Legislature, Governor, and so on. He had a deep lore of experience and you could sit at his knee, so to speak, and learn. That's, I think, the greatest place in the world you can learn. So we all of us hated to see his decline his physical decline and used to speak of it considerably; and he used to admonish me about my cigarette smoking but I probably--if I had more time to exhaust some of the little memories I had--I never was a close confidant of his, just sort of moved around him, listened to him. I know I had a particular problem--the Portsmouth Navy Shipyard--and spoke to him about it and he was always very considerate about it. The last day of the 1964 session he came to me and said, "Torn," he said, "I don't think you've got anything to worry about on that Portsmouth Navy Shipyard." He said, "I had lunch with McNamara yesterday and they're not talking about Portsmouth." Unfortunately he was wrong on that because about a week or two after the '64 election, the order was put out to phase down, phase out the Portsmouth Shipyard. He was just one of those wonderful people that the American electorate and constituencies have had the great benefit of his, of his legislative leadership and caliber; and it's just too bad that these great men have to move off the scene.

CATES: Senator McIntyre, you said earlier before we start taping that you'd probably recall a lot of little interesting stories after I leave, but do you recall any of these anecdotes that he might have said or told a group about at the inner sanctum lunch, luncheon table?

MCINTYRE: I'm afraid I get them confused with some that Kerman--

CATES: You indicated, Senator McIntyre, that you could not recall any of these per se, and that you might confuse what Senator Talmadge or Senator—

MCINTYRE: Senator Stennis--I--I do think that, you know, you really don't need, I've given you a few little recollections. I was never that close to Senator Russell. A fellow like Herman Talmadge who had a great affection and respect for him and also John Stennis who worked very close to him. And many others should be able to fill your, your library of memories of Dick Russell with much more accuracy and depth than myself. I--I just had a great deal of respect for him and the best thing I loved about him was the fact that the very first day I got here, you almost had the feeling that he immediately put me on the same level as himself.

CATES: This was one of the things I was going to ask you about but you have very adequately covered it and I might just record here just for the record. Looking at your biographical sheet it says, "Senator McIntyre was the first Democratic senator elected in New Hampshire in 30 years and the first Democrat in his state ever reelected to the United States Senate." And Senator Russell was certainly aware of that and that's probably what prompted that gesture.

MCINTYRE: It sure was.

CATES: Right.

MCINTYRE: He had worked, of course, with the man whose seat I had taken over, very closely, that was Styles Bridges, who was a very senior Republican down here and knew Styles very well. So I think, kind of interested in who the people had sent down to replace Styles and that was certainly a different breed of cat.

CATES: Did Senator Bridges say anything to you ever about Senator Russell?

MCINTYRE: No.

CATES: His relationship with him?

MCINTYRE: No, I only knew Bridges from afar.

CATES: Senator McIntyre, I notice here on your biographical sheet, too, that as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee you traveled to Vietnam in early February, 1967. I'm sure you probably gave Senator Russell a very thorough report on that trip. Are there, is there anything that you'd like to comment in connection with that trip?

MCINTYRE: Well, I talked to Senator Russell about that time. I spent about ten days over there. I had a strong feeling at that time--strange as it may seem--that, that it would all be over in a year. That's was a, I was over there one year before the, the Tet offensive of 1968 and while that's considered by the military to have been the high point of the, of the battle of over there, the turning point when American power and so forth began to take over, it was a tremendous shock

to the people back here. In 1967, the, no one becomes an expert in 8 or 9 days. In 1967 I, I think I probably gave a wrong but a rather glowing report of our progress in Vietnam. With only one bothersome point and this is, I failed to understand how we could overcome this pacification and I think Russell was much more concerned about that than I. I don't, any glowing report I gave him, I think he was always very dubious about this war.

CATES: Senator McIntyre, another thing I noticed on your biographical sheet--that you were elected a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in both 1956 and 1968. Everyone knows how disruptive the proceedings were in 1968. Did Russell discuss this with you?

MCINTYRE: No.

CATES: He did not?

MCINTYRE: No, no.

CATES: What would you say was Russell's most outstanding personality trait?

MCINTYRE: I'd have to say that, I would assign to him complete integrity--of calling it the way he saw it and having that backed up by tremendous experience and his own outstanding intelligence. The combination of truthfulness and ability and having been proved right so many times gave him a very powerful voice in the Senate. I know that in talking to Herm that he, that he had troubles back home, that he wasn't back there enough. But he was a very strong voice here. And I remember a very crucial debate that, I think it's one of the few that I sort of went in and before I went down on the floor and, and kind of asked God to make sure I didn't make a mistake on this one. It's the nuclear test ban treaty and, as you know, Russell opposed this and he was a very giant on the floor and the fact that he was opposing it didn't make any, made it much harder for me. We wanted to move, I think I wanted to move toward talking, discussing with the Russians, trying to communicate with them and trying to move away from the war and the deterrents and the theories of massive retaliation and all that, and--and I kind of clung to the fact that maybe this might be the opening wedge. So I, I really think that I've, I've given you about the highlights on this morning of April 1st when I have so many other things to worry about. He was just a great, great American and a great senator and I only--my only regret is that I, I never knew him deeper and better than I did. He was a man unto himself in the years that I ever associated with him. You didn't see him very frequently, at any of these socials, not that I cared much about going to them. But he was a delight to know, and I would suspect that in the composite that you're going to talk to that other characteristics that I just saw now and then, a kind of humility, an outgoing friendship to Republicans and Democrats alike, willingness to sit down and talk with them. No aloofness to this man at all. We miss him.

CATES: Thank you very much, Senator McIntyre.