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Fletcher Thompson

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short, and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by Young Harris College, the Richard B. Russell Library and the University of Georgia. Our guest

today is former State Senator and United States Congressman Fletcher Thompson. Fletcher, we are delighted to have you on our program.

FLETCHER THOMPSON: Thank you, Bob. It's great to be on.

SHORT: Before we get into your very successful political career, let's talk for a minute about your early life growing up in College Park, Georgia.

THOMPSON: Well, Bob, I was born in College Park, Georgia, in 1925 on February the 5th. And that was during the Depression years. I can remember Mother and Dad struggling at that time. And my grandfather lived in East Point, and he was in the real estate business. And he had very disastrous effect on some houses he owned. He had too many mortgages, couldn't pay them off. So we moved up to East Point to consolidate the houses. Mother and Dad kept the house down at College Park. But my grandfather was a Republican, and he had been mayor of the city of East Point for – golly, I don't know how many terms, but about 10 or 11, 12 years, in the late 1880s and 1890s. But most of my memories relate to being in East Point.

My grandfather was born in 1857. He was seven years old when Sherman came through North Georgia, and he had a number of stories to tell me about that. He lived to be 99 years old. Some of the more interesting ones were the fact that his father, James Dalrymple Thompson, was a doctor, and he'd been born over in Jackson County near Jefferson, Georgia. And then they lived up in North Georgia for a while, then they settled between Rome and Cave Springs. But he

apparently was one who was opposed to secession, and he kind of headed up a movement like that around Floyd County. And most people don't realize that Floyd County voted not to secede from the Union. In fact, most of North Georgia did. And there was a very, very close vote as to whether Georgia would secede from the Union in 1860 – I guess it was 60. The vote was held in Milledgeville and it barely carried. But my great-grandfather, James Dalrymple, held that position. And he and others were frowned upon by some of the local people, but they had a lot of supporters, too. And as a doctor, he went ahead and joined the Confederacy, and he was in his Confederate hospital around Cedartown when Sherman came through.

My grandfather tells me this story, he was seven years old at the time. The main body of Sherman troops were coming from Chattanooga down to Atlanta, but they were a little bit to the west of that. But there were scouting troops that came out, and they got word that some were headed that way. And he said he remembers his mother getting behind a mule and plowing the ground out there and taking the valuables in the house and burying them in that new-ploughed area because they were afraid that they would be looted. He also tell this story, that they saw some Union soldiers coming up there, and he ran, he jumped in a haystack. And apparently some of them saw him at that time and he didn't know it. But he says they came up to that haystack and they said, "Shall we burn this haystack, or should we shoot our rifles through it? What will we do?" He said about that time one of them grabbed him by the foot and pulled him out. He said, "It scared me so much I wet my pants." [laughter] But that was the story there. And he also tells me this, that his mother was a Baskin from Carroll County, and they were very much in favor – the Baskins were very much in favor of secession. But when he married – I

think it was Elizabeth Ann Baskin. I'm not certain of her name. I would have to look it up. But when he married her, her father gave her a couple of slaves, and he refused to have those slaves. He says, "You're going to have to turn them loose or give them back." But that was the way that he was.

And then after the war, there were people that – Grandpa referred to them as "scallywags."

These were not carpetbaggers; these were scallywags. And they were very much upset about some of the people that had been opposed to secession, and they were trying to find my great-grandfather, James Dalrymple Thompson. They decided they'd better move, so they moved to Atlanta. And he has quite a story about how long it took them. It was a rainy, wet day and night getting into Atlanta. But they first stopped in Peter Street and stayed there for a short while.

Then they went down to what is now East Point. And my great-grandfather gave the land for the East Point Avenue Methodist Church. He called it the Nellie Chapel Church. That was my grandfather's sister that had died. And he refused to associate it with the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church – the Methodist Episcopal Church South, I guess, was the proper name.

Instead he associated it with the Northern branch. And it was a small church, but it really the first church in East Point. The First Methodist Church really was on the Connally Plantation just outside of East Point, then brought in. But it had the name First Methodist. But the East Point Avenue Methodist Church is directly across from the City Hall. And if you look, there's a graveyard there. There's still some Thompson graves in there. And it was not until 1938 that there was a merger between the Methodist churches and formed the United Methodist Church that it then became part of the other. But Grandpa taught Sunday school there for about 50 years.

And he was very much a Republican. My dad became a Democrat, much to the chagrin of my grandfather. But I remember as a small boy sitting in the living room, and we were on Church Street in East Point, on Sunday afternoons. Both of them smoked cigars, and I used to love the smell of that cigar. There were just layers of smoke in there. But they would argue politics.

And Grandpa was a strong Republican. And Dad had become a Eugene Talmadge supporter, and he later was elected, I guess, Tax Commissioner of the City of Atlanta and Fulton County. He was Attorney for the Tax Assessors before that.

But I think when I first became involved in politics was when Eisenhower and Taft were running. And being a World War II veteran, I was very much for Eisenhower. And I remember handing out some Eisenhower materials and so forth. My dad, although he was a Democrat, he was for Bob Taft. And he didn't like the fact that I was for Eisenhower, but that was just one of those things. But anyway, later on, when I was a member of the East Point Rotary Club, some friends tried to get me to run for Congress. Not Congress, for the State Senate. Charlie Brown was our then senior state senator. And most people don't realize, but in Georgia, the state senators, up until about 1960 or 62 – I'm not positive. I think it may have been 60 – could not succeed themselves. Now, only Fulton County could. And Charlie Brown had been able to succeed himself for several elections. He was the senior state senator at that time. He had made some of the people mad. And they took up a little collection and wanted me to run and kind of swelled my head with that, and I agreed to run. I did not realize at the time – and I told him, I said, "If I run, I'm going to run as a Republican." Well, some of them tried to talk me out of that, and I said, "No, I'm going to run as a Republican."

So I went ahead and qualified as Republican. I'd never been in the Republican Headquarters up until that time. And I didn't know I was going to have opposition, but this was for the 34th Senatorial District, which basically was South Fulton at that time. And we had other state senators that had been elected two years before when the new law took effect.

SHORT: Reapportionment.

THOMPSON: Right. And so anyway, Guy Hill qualified against me. Now, Guy had been active in the Republican Party. I think he had run for County Commissioner two years before or something like that. He was a very fine man. But anyway, we had a primary battle. And I'd been active in my church. I'd been chairman of the official board now. Board of Stewards we called it then. I'd headed up some of the fundraising activities and president of the Sunday school class, been active in there. I was a Cub Scout master at times and been active in the Rotary Club. And, of course, I went to high school at Russell High, and a lot of people knew me there. So anyway, I think I raised about \$4,000 for that particular campaign. And we had some signs printed up, which I didn't put out during the primary at all. But when the primary occurred, I lost by two votes. I came home that night and I'd lost by two votes. Neither Mother nor Dad had voted for me, because Dad was not going to vote Republican and Mother says, "Standish made me do it." My dad's name was Standish Thompson. And anyway, a recount was ordered. I didn't ask for it, but they did it anyway because there was only two votes difference. And I won by about 13 votes on the recount, and then went on and won the general

election with Charlie Brown and became a state senator. But that was the way that my early politics had developed.

SHORT: Before we get further into politics, let me ask you a question about your military service. You had a very distinguished military career.

THOMPSON: Well, Bob, thank you. I appreciate that. Like so many people, I did what I was told to do and went where I was told to go. I did not do what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. And I remember vividly when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The day after that, I was a senior in high school and I was actually 16 years old, but there must have been 8 or 10 of us that were out on the playground. There was a culvert in kind of an area, a washed area. Some of the guys were smoking, and we'd do that to hide. I wasn't smoking at that time. But anyway, every single one of us wanted to go into service. We had heard President Roosevelt's Day of Infamy speech, but we felt – it just motivated us. And he said, "We will proceed to ultimate victory, so help us God!" And each and every one of us wanted to go into service. Most were 17 at that time. And of all those that were there, I know four in my class that were killed during World War II. Directly across the street from me was Billy Townsend. Billy was a fine young man, but he was killed on the Invasion on Normandy. And Tom Harper lived down the street from me. Tom was killed on Iwo Jima, and actually it was the day before the real invasion. He was part of the group that were trying to destroy some of the barricades in the water to keep the landing craft from going up. But Tom lost his life there. Bobby Thompson,

who is no relation to me, he was a paratrooper, and he was killed in a paratroop drop in Belgium. I think it was Operation Margaret Garden or something like that. Marvin Garden. And then Frank Henry was killed in a training accident in Memphis. So I was very fortunate I came through without being killed.

But the day that I was – well, let me regress a minute. In February I became 17. And originally you had to have two years of college and be 20 before you could be an aviation cadet. But they had changed the rules, stating that if you were 17 and you passed the aviation cadet exam and you had your parents permission, you could become an aviation cadet. Without my parents knowing it, I went downtown and took the aviation cadet exam and passed it. I had been president of the Model Airplane Club in Russell High, which I'd built a lot of model airplanes. But I was very interested in flying. And my brother, who was a pilot, he has another story. But anyway, neither Mother nor Dad would allow me to go in service. They wouldn't sign for me. So the day that I was 18 I went to the draft board and I said, "I've already passed the aviation cadet exam. Now, I want to go." And so about two weeks later they had me on a troop train heading to Texas, and I just knew that I was going to be going to Aviation Cadet's. But I ended up in Abilene, Texas, in the 90th Infantry Division. And I went to the company commander, I said, "Look, there's a mistake." I said, "I'm supposed to be at Aviation Cadet's." He said, "No mistake, son. You're in the infantry now." [laughter]

But anyway, I went through basic training. And just as we finished, orders came through transferring me to Aviation Cadet's, and I went through the Aviation Cadet program. Went first to Wichita Falls, Texas, and had to go through basic again. I said, "This is ridiculous. I just

finished basic training.” They said, “Yes, but this is Army Air Corps.” So I had to do that. Then they sent me to this college training detachment in Ada, Oklahoma, East Central State Teachers College. And I got 10 hours in a Piper Cub. They wouldn’t let me solo it, but I felt after two hours I could do it.

So anyway, I went to Classification after that, and I qualified as high as you could qualify for pilot. But I also qualified as high as you could qualify for a navigator, and they said they needed navigators. Well, that broke my heart, because I wanted to be a fighter pilot. But I went through navigation school in Selma, Oklahoma. Not Oklahoma, Selma Field in Monroe, Louisiana. And then advanced navigation school at Ellington Air Force Base, Army Air Field at that time, in Houston. I loved celestial navigation. I mean, it was just something that fascinated me. And I guess I was at the top of the class, or maybe second, in that part. But anyway, they picked four of us out of the class to go to Air Sea Rescue. And I’d wanted to get in B-17s or B-24s and go to Europe. That’s what I wanted. But they then sent us down to Harlingen, Texas, for gunnery school. And I spent about a month down at Harlingen practicing aerial gunnery, and we would shoot targets being towed behind airplanes and stuff like that. They then sent us to Keesler Field, four of us, and we formed the 6th Emergency Air Sea Rescue Squadron. The 3rd had just been formed there. And while we were doing that, we did patrol in the Gulf of Mexico looking for German subs. We never spotted one, but some of those in our organization did spot some.

[phone ringing]

And I'm just going to let that ring. And anyway, I was disappointed that I was in that group. We thought we were going to Europe. Our port of deportation originally was Hunter Army Air Field in Savannah. We sat there for a couple of weeks, and we waited and wondered what was happening. And then they said, "Well, the orders have changed. You're going to the Pacific." So we went out to the Pacific, and I ended up down in New Guinea. We had to wait about a week to make our flight from Sacramento, California, to Hickam Field in Hawaii because of headwinds. Our PBYS cruised at 109 knots, and there were pretty strong headwinds, 40 and 50 miles an hour headwinds. And they said, "Well, you've got 2100 miles to go and you're just going to have to wait." So we had to wait a while, and it slowed us down. But we made it there. Then our first duty station was Biak, New Guinea, and the 3rd Air Sea Rescue had just left Biak. But we were there, and we covered some raids around Borneo and places like that. Then we went from there up to Chiki [ph] Strip in Tacloban on Leyte. Leyte had been secured. We didn't have any guns on our airplanes. Our airplanes were painted white. And usually we would be out away from the areas where there was active aerial combat, because we were searching for people who had gone down in the ocean. We evacuated some wounded off of Samar, which was an island just north of Leyte. There was active fighting going there. We'd land in the water and taxi up the beach and bring them back. We did that. Then we moved up to Luzon in the Philippines, first to Floridablanca, which is northwest of Subic Bay. No, San Marcelino. Excuse me. First moved to San Marcelino. That's where the 345th Air Apaches B-25 outfit was there. Then we moved to Floridablanca, which is also known as Clark Number 5; it was south of Clark Field. But we would cover raids over to Indochina, Hainan Island, Hong

Kong and China, from that area. And we'd have to leave about four hours or so before the bombers would because we were so darned slow. But whenever we did that, we had fighter cover. They would cover us. They had P-51s. They would rendezvous with us, and we would coordinate our rescue intents with the submarines and try to direct anybody that was hit to land by a sub so they could be picked up.

And let me say this, people don't realize the job the submariners did in Air Sea Rescue. They did a fantastic job, particularly when there were raids going on around the coast. Because they'd be a couple of miles offshore and try to get people to go in there. Probably the closest call I had during the war occurred – we were trying to follow a B-24 from the Jolly Rogers, and they were based at Mindoro, which is an island just south of Luzon. But they had been on a raid around Indochina, and we'd been out there covering. And this one 24 had been hit and had a couple of engines out, but he said he could make it back to the Philippines. Well, if we firewalled everything on the PBV and go about as fast as you could, we'd make maybe 145, 150 miles an hour. And he could slow down to about 190 miles an hour, something like that. Anyway, he ends up going in about halfway across. There was a little reef out there called Pratas Reef, which is right in the middle of the South China Sea. This was just beyond that. We saw the debris in the water. We saw there were some life rafts, with nobody there, just floating around. And so Sy Lacour [ph] was my pilot, and we decided to land. We landed in the water, and the waves were not that rough, but the swells were about 12, 15 feet deep and maybe a hundred yards apart. So your ocean is like this, with swells, and when you're down in the valley you can't see much. So on a PBV we had what we called "blisters" in the back, and you could

fold those up and you could get up on top of the wing. Well, I got up on top of the wing to get a better view. Because you're sitting very low in the water, almost like you are here with the water down where this floor is, and you just can't see that much. After about, oh, 10 or 15 minutes looking around, Sy decided that there were no survivors there. He started to take off. And there were two handholds up there. I knew what he was doing, because I mean both engines were revving up full speed. And my thought to myself at that time was, Is it going to be possible for me to hold on for about 400 miles going back to the Philippines? And then all of a sudden he cut the engines, and the nose of that PBY dove down like this in the water, and I almost went over the front of it. But I got out – got back in. I found out what happened. Carl O'Daniel, who was our radio operator – and they'd been, of course, in the blister looking for survivors – well, he'd run up there and told Sy Lacour, Lieutenant Lacour – he says, "Lieutenant Thompson's up on the wing. Thompson's on the wing." But it saved my life. But other than that, I really didn't have any close experiences.

But if you look at my certificate of service, I've got seven battle stars on my Pacific Theater ribbon, and the reason is because we performed searches in those areas where battles were going on. And everybody in the entire squadron got them. So it looks like I had a lot more combat experience than I did. We lost three people through enemy action, and that was part of Charles Allen's crew. He had been covering a raid up around Formosa. And here again a B-24 had been hit by ack-ack, and he was trying to make it back to the Philippines. And Charles Allen was trying to get him to ditch. He wouldn't do it. But he said there's an island just north of Luzon named Fuga, F-U-G-A, that he knows there a plateau, he's going to try it there. He did and he

crash-landed, and Allen flew over. And he saw some survivors standing around the airplane, so they landed in the water. But there were coral reefs around there. He couldn't taxi up to any beach. So Studs Meyer – and we'd been together for 18 months. Studs Meyer and two of the crew got in a life raft, and they went onshore to pick them up. And it turned out there was a whole company of Japanese there. They captured them, and then they started trying to hit the airplane with machine gun fire. And Charles Allen had no choice. He just had to get out of there, because he didn't have any guns. And they took Studs Meyer and the two others and tied them to stakes in a field and kept them there for about a week before they bayoneted and killed them.

SHORT: Mm.

THOMPSON: The officer in charge of that was tried for war crimes and convicted after the war was over. That was in Manila. But that was the only casualty that we had. And it really got to me, of course, because Studs and I were such good friends. He was from Buffalo, New York. But that basically was my war experience. And then went the atomic bombs were dropped, I was on Ie Shima, just off of the coast. We were dispatched to go look for survivors for the Indianapolis, which had been sunk. The Indianapolis had carried the atomic bombs and was heading toward the Philippines when it was sunk by the Japanese, but no one knew the location of it for about a week. So we started heading down there, then word got for us to come back, because they already had the ship zone and located them and so forth. So we went back to Ie

Shima. And the second bomb, I guess, was dropped. And then, at that time, the Japanese sued for surrender. And MacArthur sent word to them that they were to perform certain things. They had to have two Betty Bombers, which was a twin-engine bomber, painted white with green crosses, and they were told that they were to land at Ie Shima and they would be transferred to American C-54s and carried down to Manila where they were to sign the preliminary surrender agreements. And so I was there. I took some pictures of the Japanese airplanes as they came in to land. Very, very poor quality, little bitty contact prints. And they would not let us get near the airplanes when they landed. But we were on the flight line there and saw them get out. And they had a photo op. And then later they gave us some pictures of the Japanese surrender party that came and landed. And then they flew them back and then they took off to Japan.

There was a B-25 that was on a reconnaissance flight. The war, for all intents and purposes, was over, and there really wasn't any active fighting going on. But the crew of the B-25 had engine problems, and they had landed at a Japanese naval air station called Oitta, O-I-T-T-A, on the Inland Sea. And we were told, dispatched, to go up there and pick up the crew. And I guess this was just about September the 2nd. It may have been the day before or the day after, something like that. But I remember we landed in the water and then we taxied up, and then you can drop the wheels on a PBY and taxi up on the ramp. And we went in, and this Japanese naval lieutenant met us, and I thought that – he was not a friendly soul. But they took us to the Governor's palace and fed us the green tea, and we met the B-25 crew, which we picked up and came on back.

Then we went back and they said, "All right. You're going – tomorrow or the next day you're

part of the occupation troops.” So we flew into a place called Konoya, which is on the southern tip of Japan, right across Kagoshima Bay, Kagoshima being one of the largest cities there. And this was a Japanese Kamikaze base. Our squadron occupied the ceremonial hall where the pilots were given funerals before they would go on the kamikaze missions. And this particular base was where they had the baka bombs. That means “fool.” We called them baka bombs, but that’s a Japanese term for “fool.” And basically what a baka bomb was the nose of a torpedo and then a plywood fuselage going back, plywood wings, very limited instruments in it, and three rockets in the tail. It had to be carried by a twin engine bomber, and they would bring it within about 25 miles of the fleet and drop it. And the bomber was supposed to go back to Japan, and then they would fire the rockets as needed and die then. There were a couple of Japanese military personnel when we landed, and they didn’t know what to do. We didn’t know what to do. But I remember talking to one of them that spoke English. He said he also spoke French. And I asked him, I said, “Why in the world, ” – he told me he was going to be a kamikaze pilot, but they didn’t have any airplanes the baka bombs in. The Navy and the Army Air Corps just about destroyed all of their twin-engine airplanes. And I asked him, I said, “You’re educated. Why would you commit suicide?” And do you what his answer was? He says, “If I could take just one American ship with me, it’d be the greatest thing I ever did for my country.” I never saw the guy again, but that was the dedication that they had.

And another funny thing is, after that, there were a few Japanese soldiers or navy personnel around for about a day. And then I don’t know what happened. They just disappeared. They just vanished. We did not see a Japanese woman for about two weeks. And I think the reason is

they thought we were going to kill and rape all of them. But back in the hills they had caves.

And they had machine shops in the caves. They had bunks in there. The bunks, which started about here, about four or five deep, and they had about this much space for them to sleep in, with straw mats, and that's where the soldiers were. But they also had about 300 or 400 of these baka bombs stored there, but they couldn't use them because they didn't have any way of launching them. So that was basically what happened.

Now, I had enough points to come home at that time. And I remember our squadron commander came over and he said, "Lieutenant Thompson, how'd you like to be adjutant of the squadron?"

I says, "Gosh, that'd be great. I'd appreciate that." What I didn't know was that meant I had about another four or five months of occupation time. But anyway, he made me adjutant, and I stayed on for three or four months in Japan, then came back. And they wouldn't let us fly our airplanes back. Our airplanes were destroyed, and they took bulldozers and bulldozed them into the ocean. They took brand new engines that'd been pickled – what we called "pickled."

They're encased in wooden crates with plastic around them to preserve. And they put those in the ocean, just destroyed all kind of equipment like that. But we had to come home on a liberty ship, and it took us almost 20 days. But I came on home.

SHORT: And went to Emory University.

THOMPSON: I went to Emory University. And actually, I had gone to North Georgia College for one quarter before that. My dad wanted me to be a doctor. So I wanted to go to North

Georgia. I did. And then in the fall, he agreed – he said, “You’re either going to go to Emory or I’m not going to pay for your education.” So I went to Emory for a quarter. And I wasn’t a very good student, I don’t think, because I was not real interested in it. I was just waiting till I was going to be 18. And then I had the time that I went in service. But when I came back, I got out of service, and, Bob, the most important thing happened to me in my entire life. I came home and I took my uniform off, and it was St. Patrick’s Day. I put my high school sweater on. This was a Sunday, the 17th of March. And I went to the old soda fountain across from Russell High, and I met one of my friends outside, Robert Moore. We went inside, and I looked and I saw the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen in my life, and she turned out to be my wife later on. But I thought she was really sophisticated. She had a black dress on and she’d been to church and so forth. And anyway, we went over to talked to them. And I asked her for a date and she agreed. We went to the Varsity that night. So I thought I had to dress up, because there she was, dressed up. I took my high school sweater off, put a suit and tie on. She went home and she put on saddle oxfords and a sweater.

[laughter]

But eight months later we were married, and we’ve been married over 62 years now. But that was probably the most eventful thing in my life.

SHORT: You became a lawyer then.

THOMPSON: Well, not initially. I stayed in the Reserves and I would fly on weekends at

Dobbins. Made \$54 every weekend I flew. And I'm telling you, that was big money back then. Now, on the GI Bill I went to Emory. I graduated from Emory. About the same time I graduated, I had a son. And then I was called back into service in 1950. And when I was called back in, I said, "Look, I wanted to be a pilot." So they said, "Well, go ahead and apply for pilot training." So I did and I went through pilot training. And here again I wanted to be a fighter pilot. But because I was already a navigator, they said, "You're going to multiengine." So I went to multiengine training and learned to fly B-25s. And then I was assigned to the 306 Bomb Wing at MacDill, which was a B-47 outfit. And the reason for that was that I had the ratings of navigator, pilot, and bombardier and, actually, radar operator. And to fly a B-47 is basically a two-man crew. You had to have that. The B-47 was our first jet bomber, you know.

SHORT: Mm-hm.

THOMPSON: And so I was down there for a short time. And then they formed a joint atomic task force. And that joint atomic task force was to conduct atomic tests out in the Pacific, and we actually exploded the first hydrogen bomb. But I was transferred to Walker Air Force Base in Roswell, New Mexico, and there we were flying B-50s. And we conducted a number of tests out in Nevada, dropping atomic bombs and testing them. And then went out to the Pacific and exploded the first hydrogen bomb, which was not an airdrop. It was built in a shed on a little atoll off of – oh, we were on Kwajalein Eniwetok. And I remember seeing that. And they had a tunnel going about 150 feet to Instrumentation. And Dr. Plank, a PhD, was in our VOQ with us,

and he was one of the head scientists. And he said they were going to get some instrumentation off that. But I don't know how they did, because when that thing went off, it vaporized the whole damn island and just everything. But we had to send sampling airplanes through the clouds for 14 hours. And we'd send them in at anywhere from 1500 feet up to 42,000 feet. We had one casualty, Robbie Robinson. He was an F-84 pilot. And we had F-84s to do sampling. The F-84G is a straight-wing airplane. And on the tip tanks, they had a screen. And they would fly into the cloud and collect debris from it as Dr. Plank would direct various things. But we followed it for about 14 hours. And the airplanes had to refuel, all of the fighters had to refuel. But Robbie went in at 42,000 feet. And at 42,000 feet, an F-84G, that's about the service to ceiling. It's only able to indicate about 510 knots or something like that, and it's just staggering. But anyway, he spun out. He came out on the wrong side of the cloud and started heading the wrong way. We had transponders to keep track of them, but nobody could pick him up. Because the electric interference in the cloud was so great, when they would go in, we'd lose it. But he went out on the other side and started heading the wrong way. And then when we finally did get him, we couldn't get a tanker to him in time and he went in. And that was the only casualty.

It was called Operation Ivy, and the hydrogen bomb was called the Mike shot. We earlier had exploded the King shot, was the most powerful atomic bomb that had ever been exploded. But it was a piker compared to that hydrogen bomb. I mean, that hydrogen bomb was just – I was about 30 miles away up at about 30,000 feet. And I'm telling you, it was like 1,000 flashlights going off compared to the atomic bomb. But people don't understand the power of hydrogen

bombs. And if you had one explode over Five Points, say at 2500 feet, it would absolutely vaporize the concrete and steel buildings there. I mean, the destructive power is just unbelievable.

SHORT: Frightening.

THOMPSON: It is frightening. We cannot afford to have a nuclear exchange. But anyway, that's basically my military experience. And as I said, I'm not a hero in any way whatsoever. But like so many people in our World War II roundtable, we have some real heroes in there. And I could take a long time to tell you some of the stories they have, but some of them are really great heroes. But most of us there, we have some who were in the Quartermaster. And one signal corps, he was stationed on Iceland during the entire war, and he had to keep track of all the airplanes going back and forth. But that was very important, too.

SHORT: Mm-hm.

THOMPSON: Then we have one that was on the Bataan Death March, and he tells his story. And we have a number that were in D Day and the Battle of the Bulge and others. It's very disturbing to hear some of the stories. But basically that's my war experience.

SHORT: Well, let's get around to you becoming a lawyer.

THOMPSON: The reason I became a lawyer was this: after I got out of service in 1953, I guess it was, I remember General Blanchard was upset with me because he wanted me stay me to stay in, wanted me to become regular, and I told him that I figured I either had to be a civilian or be career military and my wife didn't want me to be career military. So anyway, I got out and I went with Associated Aviation Underwriters. And, gosh, it was a fortune, and I got that job almost immediately when I got back. They had an ad in the paper; I answered it, and they said, "Yes, we want you." So there were two of us in the office. And Associated Aviation Underwriters was an association of 40 stock companies: Firemen's Fund, Great America, a number of – but Insured Eastern, TWA, American, U.S. Steel, General Motors, and a lot of private airplanes and so forth. We in effect were the aviation department for 40 stock insurance companies. And as part of my duties, I had to coordinate the lawsuits we had going in the Southeast. And I was given an airplane, and I had 11 Southeastern states I would cover. And I would work with attorneys that were handling claims that we had various places. I decided I need to be a lawyer.

I had an AB degree from Emory. But I was full-time. I wish I could have gone to Emory, but I went to Woodrow Wilson at night. I would time myself so I could come in two nights a week, and I'd fly back in for that, then I'd fly back out the next night. Two years of doing that and I was president of the graduating class. I think there were only two of us that passed the bar exam at that. But I did that.

Then Harvey Watt wanted to give me a raise and to leave Associated Aviation. I went with him.

He had formed the loss of license insurance program for pilots. If they could not pass their physical, they'd get \$50,000. And I helped sign up United Airlines and several others on that payroll deduction for him. And then I thought, well, I'll go into private practice for law. And the reason was that I knew practically every fixed-base operator in the Southeast, and I'd been in talking with them and so forth and so on. And it was kind of tough initially, but I had a number of cases come to me because they knew I had the aviation experience and I was a lawyer, and it was working out pretty darn good. And then that's when I got involved in politics.

I was in the East Point Rotary Club, and several of the people wanted me to run against Charlie Brown. And at that time I told them, I said, "Well, I'll run." They'd taken up a collection and got something like a couple of hundred dollars, and it kind of swelled my head. And I'd been thinking about politics to some degree anyway. My dad had been in politics, even though he was a Democrat. But I finally said, "Okay, I'll run, but I'm going to run as a Republican." Well, a couple of them didn't like that, but they said, "Well, that's all right. We just want you to get rid of Charlie Brown." [laughter] And Charlie actually was a very fine public servant. He had been around a long time as County Commissioner. He was the Senior State Senator. And so anyway, I qualified. I'd never been in the Republican Headquarters. I went up there to qualify, and they said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm Fletcher Thompson. I want to qualify for the State Senate." The day after I qualified, Guy Hill qualified. Guy had been active in Republican Party politics. He'd run for county commissioner two years before and didn't win. But anyway, we had a primary battle. And I went home the night of the primary election. I'd lost by two votes, and neither Mother nor Dad had voted for me. And Dad was not going to vote in the Republican

primary, and Mother says, "Standish made me do it."

But we had a recount, and I won by about 13 votes. Then I went on and defeated Charlie Brown and was elected to the Senate.

SHORT: So when you served in the Senate, you were a very rare individual because there weren't very many Republicans.

THOMPSON: That's true. Dan McIntyre, I think, was our first Republican. He had been elected two years before. He was from Fulton County. And we had Wiley Wasden from Savannah and Frank Miller from Dekalb County, and myself. We were all elected at the same time. And as a state senator, I learned some very good political lessons. One lesson was this, that you don't have the power you think you have. I know I had a reporter from the Atlanta Journal-Constitution come to me, and he says, "Fletcher, do you know that the state patrol only has the right to enforce traffic laws and the laws of segregation?" And I said, "No, I didn't." He said, "Yes." He says, "In fact, if there's corruption in a county, even the GBI can't go in and investigate that unless the Sherriff or the County Commissioner invite them in." And I said, "Well, what if the Sheriff and County Commissioner are involved in the corruption?" "Well, they can't become involved in that unless they're invited in." I said, "Well, that's ridiculous." So I drafted a bill to allow the GBI to go and investigate crime in any county in Georgia without being invited in. I thought, boy, this is a great thing I'm doing, I mean just fantastic. Well, we got the bill into committee, and the committee agreed to pass it. And all of a sudden there started

being more sheriffs and county commissioners around the halls of the State Capitol than you've ever seen. And I thought that was just normal politics for what was going on. But Peter Zach Geer was the Lieutenant Governor, and Peter Zach was a very imposing person. I mean, he was very dignified and had a lot of authority with his approach and so forth. But he was chairman of the Rules Committee. The Rules Committee determined whether or not you could have something voted on. And I remember going in when they were considering this bill. As I walked in the door, he says, "Fletcher, are you here about that bill that's dead?" I said, "Governor, that bill's not dead." I said, "It's up before your committee to vote on." He says, "It's dead!" And it was.

[laughter]

Later on, after I was gone, it was changed. But that was a good political lesson I had there. One other thing that happened to me in the State Senate – well, there are a couple things. That was about the time that we were talking about creating MARTA. And the counties of Fulton, Dekalb, Clayton, Cobb actually, and Gwinnett were involved in it. And each county was to select a representative and a senator to serve on a drafting committee. Well, the senators from Fulton County decided to elect me to be on that drafting committee, which I was very honored because I think there was seven at that time and five were Democrats, only two Republicans. But I was on the drafting committee, and Jack Etheridge was on the drafting committee representing the House part. But we worked until two o'clock in the morning drafting the MARTA Authority Act. Ben Johnson from Dekalb County, he was dean of Emory Law School, he really did the bulk of the work on it, because he brought us in initially a proposed authority

act and we went through it. And this was when the newspapers and I became at cross things, because they said that I was being obstructionist, because I was probably about the only one insisting that all bids be competitive bids for the highest and best bid. And I fought that for four or five nights, and they would publish articles about how I was deterring things. And poor Ben, he would go back that night and then they'd bring some new wording in the next night, and we'd been arguing and arguing and arguing. But I ended up being one of the co-authors of the MARTA Authority Act, along with the others there.

Two other things I wanted to get done at that time. I wanted a uniform emergency telephone number for the fire and police for Atlanta, Dekalb County, Fulton County, Marietta, East Point, College Park, Decatur and so forth, so people would just call one number and do that. I also wanted all law enforcement vehicles in Georgia to be painted the same color, and that was whether they were a sheriff or local police or a state trooper, whatever. And the reason for that was I felt it was give more of a presence of police and people wouldn't know whether or not it was a local sheriff or state patrol or whatever. But I was never able to get any support on that. I drafted a bill for a uniform emergency telephone number. And Bill Bryant was a lobbyist for Southern Bell, and he was one of the nicest guys you've ever known. I don't know if you ever knew Bill.

SHORT: I knew Bill.

THOMPSON: But Bill was a fine person. And he came to me and he says, "Fletcher, would

you please hold off on that.” He says, “You’re going to cause all kinds of problems.” He said, “We’re not equipped to do anything like this.” He says, “Bring it in next session.” So I agreed to do that, and I forgot about it. Well, then I got into the congressional thing. And the way that that happened was Jim O’Callaghan had run in 1964 for Congress against Charles Weltner. Charles Weltner had defeated James Davis who was longtime congressman there. And Jim O’Callaghan carried almost all the white precincts, but he only got two percent of the black vote. But Weltner defeated him fairly easily. And we could not get anybody to run as a Republican against Charles Weltner. I remember going to Rodney Cook’s home and being there until about two o’clock in the morning, a group of us, trying to get him to run, and he wouldn’t do it. He would not do it. The next day – now, I guess this is in April or something like that, maybe May, before qualifying was ending – we were in the Republican Headquarters and everybody descended on me to run. I said, “Look, I think I can be reelected to my state senate seat. I don’t want to run for Congress.” And they kept after me and after me, and I said, “Well, look, my wife doesn’t want me to run. I’m sure of that.” Well, I didn’t know it, but somebody went out and called her, came back and said, “We just talked to your wife, and she said she’s not going to keep you from running.”

So anyway, I said, “All right. I’ll agree to run on one occasion – one thing. I will never ask anybody for a political contribution. Now, I want you to understand that. You’re going to have to raise all this money. I’m not going to do it. I’m just not going to do it. I think I’m being made a sacrificial lamb.” But anyway, I agreed to run, I qualified. And I guess – I don’t know the exact date, but it may have been as late as June, may have been as early as April. I don’t

know the exact date we had for qualifying in at that time, but it was on the last day. Jean Ferst was a very active Republican. And the reason they wanted me to run, they said, Look, you're from the south side. It's been Democrat mainly. You're well known there. You've been elected. You've defeated the senior state senator in that area. And Buckhead is primarily Republican. And there are a lot of Northerners that have moved down from Massachusetts and Illinois and Pennsylvania and so forth and settled in Roswell and Alpharetta and Sandy Springs, and that area is Republican. If we can put the Republican North and the Democrat South with your vote together, we think you'll have a chance." Well, as I said, I said, "All right, I'll do it. But I'm never going to ask for a political contribution." And they raised the money for the campaign.

Out of the clear blue, there was a guy by the name of Hal Phillips that called, and he wanted to know if he could run the campaign. And this, I guess, was in June, maybe as late as July. And Hal was a graduate student at Harvard Business School. He had already graduated from Harvard. And he said he just wanted to have the experience of doing it. So he came down and he became our campaign manager. And we had a hard time raising money. And all the time they were telling me, "Well, go see so-and-so and ask him for some money and he'll give you some money." I said, "Look, I've told you, I'm not going to go begging for campaign contributions. I'll do it for somebody else, but I'm not going to do it for myself."

But anyway we go along. And Lester Maddox was running and Ellis Arnall were running in the Democratic primary. Everybody figured Lester didn't stand a chance, because he had run blacks out with ax handles and guns out of his Pickrick restaurant and so forth. And we figured Ellis

Arnall would easily defeat him. Well, lo and behold, when the primary occurred, Ellis Arnall defeated Lester Maddox for the Democratic primary. When that happened, I remember Hal Phillips saying, "Fletcher, you're going to be elected to Congress." I said, "But we've still got a battle." He said, "I'll tell you, he's not going to get 98 percent of the black vote, because they're not going to vote a straight Democratic ticket with Lester Maddox heading it up. It's not going to happen." We felt very good about that.

So things rock along. And then toward about the last week of September, one of the girls in our campaign headquarters came to me and said, "Mr. Thompson, do you know that this guy Mason is a Weltner spy?" And this is something that I've never put out for publication before, but it's the truth. And he was a very nice guy. He was maybe 60 years old. But he would open envelopes. He would seal envelopes. He would make calls. He would do anything that was needed there. And I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "Well, we saw him go into the Weltner headquarters about two or three days ago after he left here, and we thought, well, we'll just follow him the next day." And they said, "We followed him for three days. And after he leaves here, he goes to the Weltner headquarters."

Well, I went to Hal Phillips and I said, "Hal, look, get rid of him." He says, "Just calm down." He says, "I know all about it." He says, "I've got a plan." I said, "What do you mean, you've got a plan?" He says, "Well, I'll show you." He had a calendar which was about this size, and it was the month of October, big squares for each day. If you looked at that, on the 15th of October, you would see the damndest media blitz that anybody had ever put on in Atlanta. Sixty-thirty there'd be a 30-second spot on WAGA TV, WSB TV and so forth, all of those, and he had that

going on for about two weeks. I said, "Well, what are you going to do with it?" He said, "I am going to make it available to this guy Mason." And I said, "What? What?" I said, "We don't have any money for that. He knows that." He said, "I've got a bunch of fake deposit slips over here." He says, "Everybody knows they're not supposed to go in my drawer," and he said, "I'm going to make it available to him."

Well, it was Friday, I guess about the last of September, and he made it available by telling this guy, he says, "Look, would you please take care of all of the office? I'm going to take all the girls out for lunch. They've been working real hard. He had taken and he'd put some dots around where things were in his draw, and he also put a piece of scotch tape back on the end of the drawer so if it was opened, it would fall down. He came back and the scotch tape had fallen and things were moved around. Well, we didn't think much of it except for the fact that that had happened. As I said, that was Friday. Well, Monday morning I'm getting ready to go to a debate at the Buckhead Rotary Club with Charles Weltner; he's the incumbent congressman. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution called and said, "What do you think about Congressman Weltner quitting the race?" I said, "What?" He said, "Yes, he said he will not run on the same ticket with Lester Maddox, that he just simply will not do it." That floored me. I really didn't know exactly what to say. But I said "Well, I just don't know exactly what to say, but we'll just see what happens."

Well, the interesting thing is that this guy Mason never showed up again. We never saw him again. He never came to our headquarters. Now, I don't know if he gave that information to Weltner or not. I don't know if that was the thing that tipped it, but I know that Weltner knew he

was already in trouble. And if he thought we had that going, I'm of the personal opinion – this is strictly my opinion. This is not a fact, and I never accused him of it at all. Never accused him at all. But I think that they got that information, and he thought he was already in trouble and we would have this blitz, and what Hal Phillips was tip the scales and got him to quit, which was kind of unprecedented at the time.

That was October the 3rd when he quit. Of course the election was the first Tuesday in November. They had about four weeks for the election, and they took four or five days to get a substitute in there. Wyman C. Lowe had been running against Weltner in the primary and he came in second. He wanted to be the candidate. But the State Democratic Executive Committee picked Archie Lindsey, who was a very prominent person from Roswell – he was the Chairman of the Fulton County Commission – to run against me. Well, poor Archie didn't have but about three weeks to put a campaign on, and so naturally I won the race and went on to Congress. And I was looking forward to being sworn in with everybody else and getting my office all set. And then the Sergeant at Arms of the House of Representatives called me and says, "Mr. Thompson, you may have to stand aside and not be sworn in at the same time everybody else is." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, a protest has been filed to your election." And I said, "What?" He said, "Yes, a protest has been filed." I said, "Well, what happened?" And he said, "Well, a man by the name of Wyman C. Lowe is protesting it, and we have to have a hearing and look into it, and he's coming up here." So he came up there and he appeared before – I guess it would be a subcommittee. I don't know the exact committee. I never met him when he came up. They never asked me to come and testify. But his argument was that he had gotten the

second most votes in the Democratic primary, and the Democratic Executive Committee should have picked him as the candidate rather than Archie Lindsey. And had they have picked him as the candidate rather than Archie Lindsey, he could have defeated me and he would be the one that would be the representative. Well, they threw that out and I went ahead and was sworn in. But that was an interesting thing that happened.

Well then, of course, I was able to be sworn in as a representative and as a freshman Republican trying to field my way around. And I know that one of the first things that happened, we had a bill come up before Congress and it had a great deal of support. Obviously it was going to pass, but I felt as though I had to say something. I mean, heck, I'm a member of Congress; I want to have a say-so. So I got up and I was making a statement in front of it. Les Arends was our whip. Les was a crusty old guy from Illinois, a longtime Republican, real nice guy. And Les pulled on my shoulder kind of, and he says, "Fletcher, everybody's going to vote in favor of this bill." He said, "You're going to talk them out of it." So I decided I didn't need to say anything more on that.

But another interesting thing happened. This was 1967, and we got a call from Bill Bryant that AT&T had been working on this telephone number, uniform telephone number. And some of the AT&T people came in my office and said, "Look, we have a number, 911. And if we can get a number of people in Congress to support it and we get some federal funding, it'll be not just for Georgia, it'll be for the entire nation." So I was one of the cosponsors of the 911 legislation in 1967. And I don't know whether or not what I did in the Georgia State Senate had to do anything with it or not, but apparently from what Bill said, they were working on it at the time.

So I actually cosponsored that legislation.

In getting committee assignment initially, George H. W. Bush and I were elected at the same time. And it was interesting that among the freshman Republicans he stood out, because he obviously had pull. He got on the Ways and Means Committee right off, and for a freshman Republican to be on Ways and Means Committee was something. But he and I became good friends, and we'd have breakfast together and discuss bills before Congress and so forth. And the war in Vietnam was going on. It was very controversial. And I was a big supporter of it. Lyndon Johnson, of course, was president at that time. And I remember Richard Russell, who was Chairman of the Armed Services Committee – well, I guess this must have been the first part of 1968. I'd been elected president of the freshman Republicans. We called it the 90th Club, and those were the Republicans elected in 1966 starting in 1967. But this was 68. And I'd been elected president, and Richard Russell called. He said, "I want you to come over and meet the President, Lyndon Johnson. I said, "Well, I appreciate it." I said, "I've seen him."

But anyway, we go over and go in the Oval Office and sit down. I think I said, "Hello, Mr. President. Goodbye, Mr. President." But the interesting thing was that he and Lyndon Johnson were arguing the war in Vietnam. And Dick Russell was saying, "We simply cannot stand there and just wait for them to come over. We've got to go and invade North Vietnam. We've got to get up and go into Hanoi." And Lyndon Johnson says, "If we do that, the Chinese are going to come in, and we can't afford it. But we're going to persevere." And these are almost the exact words he said, "I don't care how long it takes, we're going to persevere. They come across the DMZ, we're going to knock them back. And we'll persevere and we'll win." Well, we didn't

persevere. They persevered. The American public turned against the war in Vietnam. And although it was President Kennedy who sent the first troops in, it was a noble thing he was doing. We weren't seeking territorial gain. We weren't seeking any oil or anything like that. We were simply trying to help the South Vietnamese maintain their own form of government and not become Communists. And, of course, when he was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson became president, Lyndon Johnson escalated it greatly. But in the escalation, the American troops had their hands tied behind them, because they could not go into North Vietnam. They could conduct basically defensive acts, but not offensive. Later on they did have some air raids in there, and I had some friends who were taken as prisoner.

But there was a group that came into my office, and it may have been as late as '69, and they were going to close my office down. They were from Atlanta, long-haired, and they were against me because I was supporting what was being done in Vietnam. And I told my office staff, I said, "Just let them sit here as long as they want to." For about a day and half they just shut the office down. Then they got tired and they left. But the interesting thing is that years later, I'm practicing law and I'm a member of the Cobb County Chamber of Commerce, and one of the people there comes to me and says, "Fletcher, do you remember that group that came in and had that sit-down in your office?" I said, "Yes, I sure do." He said, "I was one of them." He said, "I had long hair." And he says, "You told us that 'one day you'll become part of the establishment.'" He says, "I am part of the establishment." He now holds the Chair of Free Enterprise at Kennesaw State University. But it was interesting.

SHORT: Those were very testy times in our country.

THOMPSON: Oh, very, very testy.

SHORT: What was the reaction of the majority of Congress to those demonstrations and bombings and things that were going on around the country?

THOMPSON: There was a division among the members of Congress, but basically I think more members were in support of it than were opposed to it. But of course we had the Jane Fonda incident, and I became a spokesman on that. And what astounded me was I couldn't get any support for that. I remember driving into the Capitol and hearing Jane Fonda on the radio. And basically what she was doing, she was broadcasting to the American troops in South Vietnam from Hanoi and telling them to disobey their officers' and commanders' orders and so forth and to just stop the activities, which was treason. And I took the floor of the House – I was the first one to do it – and I said, "This is treason, and we should have the Justice Department investigate this." I wrote a letter to the Justice Department, and I thought I could get more support. But I had a lawyer call me representing Jane Fonda, and he said, "Look, Congressman. You made these statements on the floor of the Congress, which you know you've got immunity, and you won't go out and make it in public." I said, "Listen, you come out, I'll make it on the street corner out here. And you want to sue me? You go ahead and sue me." Well, I never heard anything more from them. But the interesting thing was that I really could not get much support

among members of the Congress to bring charges against Jane Fonda. And I'm convinced to this day that it was treason and it cost the lives of many American troops. There's no question about it. But that was just one of those things that occurred.

SHORT: How partisan was the House of Representatives in those days?

THOMPSON: Very partisan, but not as partisan as it is today. I was in the minority. And when I went in, I was put on the – it used to be the old House on American Activities Committee and the Post Office Committee. And I remember John Ashbrook from Ohio, he was a Republican, he wanted me to go look at the FBI file on Martin Luther King. I said, "No, I'm not going to do it. I just don't care to." But he was – the Democrats didn't like him at all. They didn't really bother me or did not like me. I felt as though I was liked. But I was also one that had a bill to allow a child to go to the neighborhood school. And I mentioned earlier this Jean Ferst who was heading up a fundraiser for me when I first ran. Her husband Bob Ferst was president of Scripto. And I told them that I was going to get this bill. Well, I had the bill drafted, and I gave a copy to every member of the Congress. And I had a Scripto pen that says, "From Congressman Fletcher Thompson. Please sign this." And anyway, the Atlanta newspapers gave me the devil. Said I was bigoted, I was a racist, and it just was not true. The statement I made was this: It's absurd to say a black cannot learn unless he's in with whites. If you're saying that, you are insulting the entire black race to say you can't learn with people of your own race, you've got to be with somebody else. If a school is inferior, that school needs to be improved and you need to spend

the funds on it, and that's what I would want to do. But a child should be able to go to his neighborhood school and not be bused sometimes for hours just for racial balance. And the Atlanta Journal-Constitution was very violently opposed to me on that.

And then, as you probably remember, in 1968 I had another race with Charles Weltner. And at this time I was the congressman, and Charles Weltner, of course, was trying to get his seat back.

Lou Kitchens was my campaign manager at that time. Now, what I'm about to tell you is basically hearsay, because I don't have firsthand information, but this is what Lou tells me. Lou says that in the Democratic primary there was a professor from Atlanta University by the name of – I believe it was Malcolm Dean – I'm not positive of these names, but I think that was his name – that ran against Julian Bond. And he had called Lou and talked to Lou, and he says that, "If Fletcher Thompson doesn't have an honest vote in the general election, he's going to lose."

And Lou says, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, if you look at the results of some of the black precincts, they have 85 percent turnout." He says, "I know that 85 percent did not turn out in those precincts." He says, "It couldn't have been more than 50 percent." And Lou says, "Well, what were they doing?" He says, "Well, they were voting for Julian Bond." Julian was this student non-violent coordinating committee, and he had some objection to Julian being seated in the Georgia General Assembly. Well, the Georgia General Assembly, or the House of Representatives, made Julian a national figure by refusing to seat him. If they had just gone ahead and seated Julian, there would have been nothing to it. But they refused, and there was a big controversy and so forth and so on.

But anyway, Lou said that he had to come up with something to be certain that we got an honest

vote in the black community, that we couldn't have an 85 percent turnout. He came up with the idea of hiring Pinkerton detectives, and we hired 40 Pinkerton detectives to cover the black precincts from seven o'clock in the morning till seven o'clock at night. They had relief for them during the day. And their sole function was to take a hand-counter and count the people that were going in to vote. And if more votes were cast than people went in, we were going to challenge it in court. At that time the law of Georgia was that each party could have official federal election – official observers of the Republican Party or Democratic Party. He had badges for these Pinkerton detectives, who were in uniform, that said "Official Federal Election Observer of the Republican Party," and it was in the shape of a shield.

Well, now I'm not here, but I'm told that by nine o'clock they had us in court, in Fulton Superior Court, seeking to enjoin our Pinkerton detectives as our poll watchers. And the judge says, "Well now, what are they doing?" They said, "Well, they're intimidating the voters, trying to keep them out and trying to keep the blacks from voting." He says, "Well now, is that true?" And our attorney says, "No." I think Oscar Persons was probably the attorney. But he says, "No, that's not true at all, your Honor." He says, "We just want to be sure we have a good honest vote in it." They said, "Well, yeah, but that badge they have on says 'Official Federal Election Observer of the Republican Party. And the uniforms and everything, it's intimidating.'" He then asked Weltner's attorney, he says, "Well now, does Mr. Weltner have any observers?" He said, "Oh, yes. We've got an observer in each one of the polls." "Well, what do they have?" "Well, they've got a letter in their pocket." He said, "I think you'd better have them take and pin that letter on their coat," and he refused to enjoin them.

But the interesting thing was that the turnout in the black community was down to about 50 percent, and as the incumbent congressman, I defeated Weltner pretty handily at that time, too. I even got some black votes. But bear in mind, C.A. Scott, who was the editor of the Atlanta Daily World . . .

SHORT: Was a Republican.

THOMPSON: He was a Republican. He supported me. He endorsed me and so forth. And I had some very good friends. And I had made good friends with Horace Ward, a black senator, and Leroy Johnson. They were good friends of mine, even though they were Democrats, when I was in the State Senate. So anyway, I won that election.

Then in 1970, Andrew Young ran against me. And at that time I was in Washington, and this program came on, *Black Panthers in America*. And I was watching it, and here is Andrew Young and they have him speaking. And these are, I believe, the exact words that he said. You'd have to get the actual clip. "The United States and Western civilization has so enslaved Latin America, Africa and Asia, it may take the destruction of Western civilization to truly liberate these areas." The moderator then asked him, "Well, would you support the destruction of Western civilization to do that?" He said, "Yes, I probably would." And that was an excerpt out of the 30-second spot about the Black Panthers.

Well, I called down here to see what people thought about it. Channel 11 was the ABC station at that time. And they said it wasn't played, it wasn't shown down here. So I contacted a vice

president of ABC and asked if he could get me a copy of that Black Panther thing, which he did. And we brought it down and tried to see if we could get the radio stations to show it, but none of them would do it. Or TV stations, none of them would show it. So we set up several places in Roswell, Alpharetta, South Fulton and downtown Atlanta where we showing that clip out of it if anybody wanted to come in and see it. WSB came in and they actually filmed it of the screen, and they did put it on WSB TV. But I was accused of mudslinging. They said that was the dirtiest tactic that anybody had ever pulled. I said, "Look, those are his words. They're not my words. I'm not saying that's what he said. That's what he actually said." He said it was taken out of context. Well, if you took the context of the whole Black Panther thing, it would scare the devil out of you, the other guys they had in there. But that was precisely what he said. And the Atlanta Journal-Constitution just gave me fits about it. But anyway, I defeated him.

SHORT: You defeated him. You defeated him, a very strong candidate. You defeated the former congressman.

THOMPSON: Right.

SHORT: A very strong candidate. And yet you decided to run for the United States Senate. Didn't you think your seat was pretty safe?

THOMPSON: No, not at all. Because after the 1970 census, they had reapportioned and made

the 5th District majority black. Bear in mind, Roswell and Alpharetta and so forth had been taken out of it. And I didn't think I could defeat Andrew Young in '72. Senator Russell had died maybe 18 months before, and Jimmy Carter, who was the Governor, had appointed David Gambrell to fill the unexpired term. And David Gambrell was running for reelection, so I decided the best thing for me to do would be to run for reelection to the United States Senate. Now, I understand that Bo Callaway also wanted to run. I never had a personal conversation with Bo, but this is what some people in the party told me. And if there was a poll taken as to between myself and Bo Callaway among Republicans, that I was favored over Bo Callaway as being the candidate. Now, whether this is true or not, I don't know. But I think had Bo Callaway had run, he would have won the election, because he had the money to run the election. I'd made a pledge that I would never ask for a political campaign contribution, and I stood by that. My campaign committee would get so damned mad at me. I wouldn't sign a letter asking for that. I wouldn't appear at a fundraising thing. I said, "I told the people when they wanted me to run initially that they were going to have to raise the money." And we figured it was going to take a million dollars to run a statewide campaign. We had a good organization. Had a guy by the name of Harry Bandaveras out of Arizona who came and ran the campaign. I did not like the way he was running it. But I was campaigning constantly all over south Georgia and everywhere else, spending my time on it. But I didn't have one single television ad, not even one ad to combat what the Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution and WSB were saying. If you look at the election returns of the 1972 race between myself and Sam Nunn, you'll see that I actually got more votes outside of Atlanta, down and around Brunswick and Savannah and over toward

Bainbridge and out in the state than Bo Callaway had got percentagewise. But I lost it in Fulton County and Dekalb County, and even Cobb, which I barely carried which should have gone strong for me. I just didn't do it. The end result was that I got about 47 percent, he got about 53 percent, except for the short term. There were two votes to be cast. One was for the six-year term along with all the other candidates, and you could punch a straight Democratic ticket for that. The other was for the short term, which was just Sam Nunn and myself. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution came out afterwards and said the term from November to January the 20th, that I had won. And then they had a recount, and I didn't win it. But I wasn't going to take it anyway, because it would give him seniority by having that. So he was able to get extra seniority by being able to be sworn in earlier.

But right after the election, T.D. James, who was my campaign treasurer, was very upset with me because I had refused to use two things against Sam Nunn during the campaign. And I think one reason I did, first of all, Sam didn't have a drinking problem and I knew that. He didn't have a drinking problem. But also, I had been accused of slinging mud two years before by using that thing against Andrew Young. But Sam Nunn had been involved in a controversial DUI hit and run as a young man leaving, I think, a Jaycee activity down around Macon, and they wanted me to use that against him. I said, "We're not using it. He doesn't have a drinking problem. We're not going to use it." Then the other thing was, they said, "Well, look. You've got a distinguished military career." I said, "I've had military service. I'm really not that distinguished, but I did what I was told to do." They said, "Well, he only served six weeks in the Coast Guard. And he stayed out of Vietnam by his uncle, Carl Vinson, was the Chairman of the

Armed Services Committee in the House, had all kinds of influence, and he got out in order to run the family farm. I said, "I'm not going to use it."

But the day after the election, T. D. tells the press that Fletcher Thompson should have used that thing about Sam Nunn's DUI and the accident and he wouldn't do it. Well, I didn't, and it was one of the mistakes I made. But I think the biggest mistake I made was in refusing to ever ask anybody for a political contribution, because we only raised about \$360,000. And a group of my supporters signed a note for maybe another couple hundred thousand or so. And after the election, we raised money to get that paid off, had a fundraising thing over in Augusta. Senator Towers from Texas came over as a speaker. And we got that paid off. But I ended up having to pay off a large part of the debt myself.

And it soured me on politics, because there was another thing that happened during that time that really soured me. Bear in mind, I'm the Republican candidate running for the United States Senate and had a good chance to be elected. Red Blount is the Republican candidate running for the United States Senate over in Alabama. Sparkman was a strong Democrat conservative, and Nixon liked Sparkman. But I'd been told that Nixon was going to come and campaign in Atlanta. They wanted to know if I would let my campaign staff prepare for his election. So for basically two weeks we did nothing but prepare for Richard Nixon coming down. This was for his election as president in 1972. And I was told that I'd be riding down the airplane with Nixon and he was going to endorse me, and we leaked that to the press. Leaked that to the press. A couple of days before we got a call from CRP, which was the Committee to Reelect the President. And I didn't take it, but Richard Ashworth, my administrative assistant – they call

them Chief of Staff now – took it and they said, “You’re going to have to tell Congressman Thompson that he’s not going to be able to ride down with the President because he’s not going to be able to endorse him.” And I said, “Richard, what do you mean?” He says, “Well, they said he’s got a problem. Senator Sparkman in Alabama is a good friend and he votes with him, and he cannot oppose him. And if he endorses you, he’s got to endorse Red Blount in Alabama. So he’s not going to endorse either one of you.”

Well, I’d already leaked to the press the fact that he would be endorsing it. Then they came in and said, “Well, you understand you’re going to be riding down with the President.” I said, “No. Look, I’m a Georgian.” I’m going to be down there and I’m going to shake his hand when he came on in. Well, I didn’t get any endorsement. Jimmy Carter, we all know we made mistakes in it together, he made a big thing out of it. He says, “The President would just as soon have Sam Nunn as Fletcher Thompson. He wouldn’t even endorse him.” Well, that kind of irritated me a little bit. But I still think if I had had some TV exposure and put my own ads up that maybe I could have pulled it out.

SHORT: What do you think about the cost of campaigning in modern times?

THOMPSON: It’s astronomical. The National Republican Committee contacts me all the time for contributions. I’ve written them, I told them, I said, “Look, I almost decimated myself paying off my campaign contributions. I didn’t get money from you when I was running for the United States Senate. And I’ve given a little bit of money, but I’ll give my money to individual

candidates.” And it’s kind of sour grapes on my part, I guess you’d say. But that’s just the way it is.

SHORT: Well, when this past presidential race began, those candidates had so much money in the bank that every additional dollar they got was just juice. And don’t you think that something should be done to curtail all that spending?

THOMPSON: I think that it should. However, under our Constitution, I don’t think you can prevent individuals from spending whatever they want to in support of a candidate that they like. It’s true, it does stack things in favor of those who have a lot of money. But if you look at this last election, Barack Obama obviously got a lot of votes through the internet. Or not votes, dollars through the internet that you couldn’t otherwise get. And the people did support him strongly. John McCain is a nice guy. He was not my candidate. Frankly, I would rather have seen Romney as our candidate. And whether the results had been different – or Huckabee from Arkansas, I like Huckabee, too. Either one of those, I think, would have been good. But Romney was one. And people were saying, “But he’s a Mormon.” Well, good gosh, that’s ridiculous. The press may play it up. But too much money is spent on campaigns. And I don’t know that there’s really a solution for it.

SHORT: Let’s talk for a minute about the Republican Party in Georgia and its growth. You were one of the pioneers, one of the first Republicans to be elected to the Georgia Senate and to

Congress. Have you been active in Republican politics since then?

THOMPSON: Not really. As I mentioned, I paid off some campaign debts, printing bills and so forth, and most of them I was able to compromise. But I did that with my own money, and I didn't ask anybody for contributions from it. The fundraising we had was basically to pay off the loans that had been made, taken by some of my supporters, and they were the ones who cosigned the notes. I never signed a note on it. I was sued by one person after that for a campaign bill which I refused to pay. And that was for an RV. My campaign committee had hired a fundraiser, and he was getting 10 percent of every dollar he would raise. Well, he rented an RV from somebody over in Thompson, Georgia, near Augusta, and they had "Fletcher Thompson, United States Senate" on it. They'd take it to Georgia football games and so forth and so on. I think they had a good time partying with it. I don't know. But anyway, after the thing was over, he sends me a bill for something like \$5,000 dollars for the use of that RV. I said, "Look, I never approved that. That was never approved by me. That was the fundraiser. He signed it in his own name." And he said, "For the Thompson campaign." But you can do anything, something like that, for. And I had to go to court for that, and they ruled with me, that I was not responsible for that obligation. But other than that, I think I paid off everything.

SHORT: The Republican Party now controls both houses of the General Assembly and the Governor's Office. What happened?

THOMPSON: Well, I've got a bone to pick with the Republican Party in Georgia on a couple of things. One is this so-called privatization. I think the biggest mistake the Republican Party has made since they've had control was to do away with the monopoly control of the Atlanta Gas Light over gas distribution. There's some things that you need a monopoly on. You have to have the pipelines going in. You have to have the supply, somebody taking care of it. It's logical that the Public Service Commission should regulate that and determine what's a fair price. The idea that you're going to create competition by letting Atlanta Gas Light still have the expense of laying all the pipelines and so forth and then giving them a profit, and then so-called marketers coming in and they'll say, "I'll give you a better price than this guy will. I'll give you a better price than this guy," and then they put \$5.95 extra on bill, it just is a disservice to the people of Georgia. I wish we could change it. And I was upset this last session when they were talking about removing from the Public Service Commission the regulation of electric rates. Sometimes people just don't think, in my opinion. I didn't like that. But still, I'm a Republican, and I support basic Republican policies.

SHORT: Well, you've worked hard. And of course, Bo Callaway, he's been very active in Georgia.

THOMPSON: Bo Callaway, I still believe, would have been the senator had he have run. He had the money to run. He later ran in Colorado, as you know, and he almost won. But Gary Hart ended up there. And Bo is a fine person. He did much to build the Republican Party in

Georgia. I think I had a part. I, of course, was the first Republican congressman from Georgia since Reconstruction. And one other thing, one other thing. This is something I haven't mentioned. I was the very first person, congressman or senator from Georgia since Reconstruction, to ever appoint a black to West Point, Annapolis or the Air Force Academy. Neither our senators or congressmen before I did this had ever done it. And I didn't give them anything. What I did when I first went in, I said, "I'm not going to make political appointments. I'm going to establish a committee, and we're going to let people compete based upon their high school grades, their extracurricular activities, a personal interview, whether they wanted to make the military a career, and also test, which was kind of an IQ that was taken. There were five different things. And on that we had blacks qualify for the appointment. And I did that, and really the papers never made much of it at all, the fact that I did that.

SHORT: What has life been like for Fletcher Thompson after politics?

THOMPSON: Fletcher Thompson has been favored. He's been very fortunate throughout my life. As I said, I've been very fortunate. I've got a wonderful wife, and she's playing bridge right now, today. She has a bridge party. But if you'd meet her, you'd love her. And I've got good health. I've had a couple of heart attacks. But I've won some golf tournaments. I've been club champion. So I've been very fortunate. I had a good career of law afterwards. After I got out of politics, I wanted to get back into aviation law. But I had not practiced for about seven years, and all of my clients and fixed-based operators had other lawyers representing them. And

people wanted me to represent them because of my so-called political connections. I really didn't have that. It's kind of funny. They think because you were in Congress, you've got a lot of influence and so forth. You really don't.

But anyway, I'm going to tell you one funny story. I don't know, this may be taking up your time. But G. D. Searle is the drug company that developed NutraSweet, aspartame. And as you know – oh, golly. I've got a senior moment. Don Rumsfeld. Don and I were in Congress together at the same time. So when they manufacture NutraSweet they have a byproduct, or a waste product, which is basically salt, but it's contaminated with amino acids. Another interesting thing about NutraSweet, the chemical formula for it has an A side and a B side. In other words, if you look at the molecular structure, if this electron is on the right side as opposed to the left side, it's sweet. If it's on the left side, it isn't sweet. In other words, half of it is sweet. And they have to separate that some way, and that becomes a waste product in the manufacture of it. So they have to get rid of this salt. If they try to refine it as road salt, it becomes too expensive. Well, they decided the best way to get rid of it would be to dump it in the ocean. And trying to figure out a place to dump in the ocean, they came upon the idea of the Savannah River and getting a place over around Augusta for a plant there and barge it out over the ocean, spray it out over the ocean. Well, I got a call, and they wanted me to represent them down here. And I was doing some work for the Atlanta Gas Light Company. And they wanted some land over there. Well, the Atlanta Gas Light Company had some land. And so I got them together with G. D. Searle, and they bought the land for the plant. Then they needed an ocean-dumping permit.

Now, at this time Jimmy Carter's governor and I'd been out of Congress a year or two. And I applied for an ocean-dumping permit. Well, Jimmy didn't like the idea we were going to have an ocean-dumping permit off the coast of Georgia, because he says Union Carbide had been trying to get one out in Savannah for the waste products from their paper mill for years and it was being denied, and thought this would be a bad controversy. And I said, "We're going to dump salt in the ocean." So we hired Dames & Moore, a marine biology firm, and got the ocean-dumping permit, and the plant was being constructed. Well, Bill Johnson was General Counsel, and he called me one day. He says, "Fletcher, I want to go over to August and see how the construction is coming along. We've got another vice-president." I said, "Well, I'll fly you over in my airplane." See, I had a little airplane I used to fly back and forth to Washington in. And he said, "Well, fine." He came in and he said, "What kind of airplane have you got?" I said, "I've got a little Mooney." He said, "What's that?" "It's a little single-engine airplane." He says, "Gosh, we'd like to have at least two engines."

So anyway I called a friend of mine that had a Travel Air, and I've had a lot of experience in Travel Airs and twins and so forth. And I said, "Can I borrow your airplane? I've got a couple of VPs from G. D. Searle that want to go over to August." He says, "Sure, come on." So he based it out of what's now Hartsfield-Jackson Airport. It was Southern Airways Company, a Beechcraft distributor. We go there, a hot summer day. Pull the airplane out of the hangar, get in. I turned the switch, tried to crank the engines. The battery's dead, and they don't like that at all. I said, "That's not big deal. We'll just get a battery cart over here." I said, "An airplane engine's like a lawnmower engine. Has a Magneta. Once it gets going, it keeps going." Bill

says, "I hope it's better than a lawnmower engine."

[laughter]

But anyway, we get in the airplane and start taxiing out. It's hot. They say, "Can we get some air in here." I says, "Sure. I'll pull this lever and get some airflow." The darn thing came out in my hand.

[laughter]

He didn't like that either. I said, "Bill, what I want you to do is I want you to crack that door and keep that door open as we're taxiing out. And then, just before we take it, you'll close it, but that will keep you kind of cool." He didn't like that very much, and he said, "Okay." So we taxi out and he's holding the door. Finally they approve us for our departure, and I filed an instrument flight plan. And on an airplane you have what's called a transponder, which magnifies your radar signal. So the tower told me to squawk a certain frequency when I took off. I turned it on that frequency and took off. They said, "We're not picking you up." Now, I don't have the earphones on. I have a speaker. So they're hearing exactly what I'm hearing. And so I said, "Well, I guess this thing isn't working." And Bill says, "What does that mean? What does that mean?" I said, "Well, it's really no big deal. They've got radar and they know where I am. And I'll just climb on out." So anyway I do, and we climb out. I got up to my cruising attitude and bringing the power back to cruise settings. And all of a sudden the tachometer starts bouncing back and forth between the [indiscernible] and the right engine. He said, "What's that for?" I said, "Bill, I don't know."

[laughter]

I said, "But it's obvious there's a binding somewhere in that thing. But it doesn't make any difference." I said, "I can synchronize the engines by sound." And you can. You can synchronize them and get them going the same RPM by sound. Well, we go ahead and make an approach into Augusta, uneventful, land, check on the construction of the facility. This other VP had disappeared. He comes back pretty soon and he says, "We've got airline reservations going back."

[laughter]

But Bill used to kid me about that. He later became General Counsel for GTE, and I did work for GTE and some others and so forth. But I've been very fortunate.

SHORT: But you've been involved in civic matter and military.

THOMPSON: Well, that's true. I've got two things right now that are coming along. And one is the United Daughters of the Confederacy want me to address the Confederate Memorial Day at Oakland Cemetery. Told them they've got a problem. I mentioned earlier my great-grandfather. I said, "I'm afraid he was opposed to secession." And I've told them about it. They said, "Well, go ahead." But they said, "Please tell us something about states' rights, because it was really a war between the states rather than a civil war." I said, "Well, that's true." So I'm researching that.

Then the other thing is Common Cause wants to give me an award here in April for some work I've done in the EMC. I don't know if you're familiar with what's happening in Georgia EMC.

But I've been very upset with the way that that's happened. I've been very outspoken on it and have involved myself to a degree. I'm not filing lawsuits, but I have amendments through the bylaws to do away with a lot of the abuse that's been going on by the CEO. And he basically has made himself wealthy at the expense of the members, and he's made millions of dollars off of it. Members did not know what was going on. And it would take a long time for me to tell you what's happening on that.

SHORT: Mm-hm.

THOMPSON: But then another thing that has happened – and I want to give some of this information to you. You can take this with you. It's probably more than you want, but it involves something we as the Atlanta World War II Roundtable, a project we had. One of our members came back from Washington DC about, oh, I guess two years ago now and said he was disturbed that President Roosevelt's closing statements of his statement following Pearl Harbor was not left on the monument, "so help me God." And that was an exclamation that Roosevelt made, that "we will gain the ultimate triumph, so help us God." And if you listen to his speech, he emphasized that. It is not a religious statement he's making. It is a promise to the American people, an exclamation that we're going to prevail.

And so the people in the Atlanta World War II Roundtable said, "Well, look, Fletcher. You are a former congressman. Will you do something about it?" I said, "Well, I don't know what I can do." I said, "We can petition Congress for a sense of Congress resolution that they support the

adding of these words to it.” So we drafted – or I drafted a petition to Congress, and this is the petition right here to the United States Congress. We sent a copy of each one of the 100 senators each one of the 435 congressman with a personal letter asking them if they would support a sense o Congress resolution simply stating that we as members of Congress believe that in order for history to accurately depict what President Roosevelt said, that this should be added to it. Got only four responses: Johnny Isakson, Saxby Chambliss, David Scott and – oh, gosh. What is our 6th District congressman?

SHORT: Tom Price.

THOMPSON: Tom Price. A senior moment. He’s my favorite. I support him. Always have his sign in my yard. But anyway, Tom Price gave us unqualified support. The others basically gave us lip service. Phil Gingrey didn’t even respond. And I’m the deputy commander of the World War II Roundtable. Our commander lives in his district. He talked to him personally. He said, “Well, I’d like to have some more information.” I faxed him more information. Never got any response. But when you read this, you’ll see why we think that history is not being adequately depicted on the monument.

And also the reason for it is – I may be paranoid in this. But back in 1911, Congress formed the Fine Arts Commission of the United States. Now, the Fine Arts Commission is charged with the responsibility of the design of various memorials and the inscriptions that go on the memorials. The American Battlefield Association is responsible for the actual construction. They did a

wonderful job in the design of the World War II memorial. But of the seven members, none are World War II veterans. Two were not even American citizens – born in America, rather. They're American citizens now. They are noted artists and architects. Did a great job. But I think that they did not use "so help me God," because a couple of years ago there was a big debate in America about the use of "In God we trust" on our currency. And they considered it a religious statement. And in order to be more secular, they did not want to have "so help us God," included on that and therefore they left it off. That's my opinion. But when you see some of the responses we have – I wrote to George Bush, Sr. He and I were, as I said, members of Congress together. He said, "I agree with you. I'd love to have this on." I said, "I want you to do just one thing. Call your son and tell him to tell the Interior Department to give us a cost estimate of what it would cost to get that on there." And he said, "Fletcher, I can't do that. He's the President of the United States." I said, "You're his father."

[laughter]

But anyway, he sent it to the Interior Department, and they wrote a letter back saying that they felt as though it would not properly reflect what was historical. The historical statement was made by President Roosevelt, and it most certainly does and is. But nevertheless, that's what you have there. And I did not get involved with other veterans organizations. It's probably my mistake. But I was very disappointed in that. And we spent probably \$400 or \$500. We had \$5,000 pledged toward the construction. And our idea was that if we could just get a cost of what it would cost to change the inscription on the monument – you may have to take the entire granite plaque off. I've never seen it. It may be brass, I don't know. Put a new one on. But I'm

convinced that if we had a cost, we could raise that money nationally in a very short time and get it done. But the Interior Department's very opposed. Even if we raised the money, they would be opposed to it. And then George Bush dropped it. So I don't know if it's dead yet or not.

SHORT: Have you given up?

THOMPSON: I really haven't given up. But I've told – Bob Snap who is our commander. Bob is not a World War II vet. But we don't have many World War II vets anymore. We're all in the 80s and 90s. I'm 84 now. And so we're having to get younger people in there. But I think the only way we can do it is try to get the VFW and the American Legion and some of the others involved. And we were trying to do it just by ourselves. That was the decision that we'd made. I think that was probably a mistake there.

SHORT: Have we missed anything?

THOMPSON: I don't think we missed a darn thing. I've probably been much too wordy in talking to you.

SHORT: You've been great. One other question. How would Fletcher Thompson like to be remembered?

THOMPSON: Well, golly, I don't know. I think I'd like to be remembered as a person who did what he was supposed to do, went where he was supposed to go, who loved his country and who gets very upset when he sees injustices occurring. And that's the way I'd like to be remembered.

SHORT: Well, you've had a great career. And I want to thank you on behalf of Young Harris College, the Richard Russell Library and the University of Georgia for being with us.

THOMPSON: Thank you very much, Bob. Appreciate it.

[END]

**University of Georgia
Fletcher Thompson**

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