

**S. Ernest Vandiver Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 5/22/1967**  
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Vandiver, S. Ernest; Governor of Georgia (1959-1963). Vandiver discusses his role in John F. Kennedy's [JFK] presidential campaign in Georgia (1960), JFK's push to gain southern support during this campaign, JFK's policies regarding civil rights, and events that occurred during his presidency, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

S. Ernest Vandiver

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S. Ernest Vandiver

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1, 4, 14, 23	Vandiver's interactions with John F. Kennedy [JFK] before he became president
1, 7, 15, 21, 28	JFK and the Georgia delegation's support
2, 15, 34, 59, 64, 69	Vandiver's impressions of John F. Kennedy [JFK]
6, 11, 20, 25, 46, 60	Civil rights
10	1960 Democratic National Convention
10, 16	Vandiver as the protest candidate for the vice presidential nomination, 1960
17	JFK meeting with Southern governors regarding vice presidential nomination
31, 40	Presidential campaign in Georgia, 1960
32	JFK's trip to Warm Springs, Georgia
38	Vandiver's relationship with Robert F. Kennedy [RFK]
40	The role of religion in JFK's presidential campaign
42	Vandiver's potential appointment as Secretary of the Army
47, 65	Integration of schools
52	Voting rights
54	International trade agreements regarding food and textiles
57	Meeting with JFK over the Cuban Missile Crisis
67	Interaction with JFK at Inaugural Ball, 1961
69	JFK's call to Vandiver requesting the release of Martin Luther King, Jr. from jail

Oral History Interview

with

S. ERNEST VANDIVER

May 22, 1967  
Atlanta, Georgia

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Governor Vandiver, do you recall when you first met John Kennedy?

VANDIVER: Yes. I think that the first time I met him personally was after the 1956 Convention when he came to Atlanta, Georgia at the invitation of Mr. Robert B. Troutman, Jr. There was a Democratic meeting which he addressed at the Dinkler Hotel here in Atlanta. And I, along with three or four other hundred Georgians, had an opportunity of shaking hands with him and meeting him personally.

STEWART: You didn't, then, see him at the 1956 Convention?

VANDIVER: No, I did not. I, of course, as a member of the Georgia delegation had the privilege of supporting.

[-1-]

him for vice president. I will have to admit that probably the reason the the Georgia delegation supported Senator Kennedy for the vice presidency was their dislike for Mr. [Estes] Kefauver, who later did receive the nomination for vice president. It was an

alternative choice, rather than support Kefauver who was an anathema to the Georgia delegation.

STEWART: Did you personally--were you very well aware of Senator Kennedy's capabilities at that time, do you recall?

VANDIVER: No, I was not. But if I'm correct I believe that they showed a film, of which he was the narrator, about the Democratic Party, and he was an extremely attractive young fellow who seemed to have great promise. I think probably the showing of that film brought his name and political attractiveness to the notice of the Convention. Really I, other than reading the story of his election to the Congress and the Senate in national magazines, had no personal contact with him. I knew of him, of course.

[-2-]

STEWART: Did any members of his staff have any contact with you or the Georgia delegation at that Convention, do you recall?

VANDIVER: As I recall, Senator Kennedy did come by briefly and appear before the Georgia delegation. Of course Marvin Griffin was Governor of Georgia at that time. Georgia operates under the unit rule, and, since the delegates are chosen--or were at that time--by the Governor whatever the Governor said was the way the delegation voted. He certainly could control a majority of the delegation. I believe that he did come by briefly. I'm not clear on that though.

STEWART: But it still was more an anti-Kefauver thing than a...

VANDIVER: I would have to say that that's true, that there wasn't any great movement in Georgia for John Kennedy for vice president, it was more of an anti-vote against Kefauver.

STEWART: Do you recall your reaction to this appearance that he made before the Democratic state organization?

[-3-]

That would have been in '57 or '58.

VANDIVER: Yes. That was after the '56 Convention. I don't recall anything that he said at that particular time. I know that Bob Troutman, Jr. had gone to college with Joseph Kennedy, Jr. at Harvard and he knew Jack Kennedy very well. He came to Atlanta at the instigation of Bob Troutman. He did make a

very attractive appearance. I do recall that each and every person who was present at that meeting received a Christmas card the following Christmas from Jack and Jackie.

STEWART: This was standard practice I hear at that period.

VANDIVER: I guess so.

STEWART: Do you recall when it became apparent to you that he was going to make a run in 1960, and what were your first impressions of him as a candidate?

VANDIVER: I think in 1958 when he came to Atlanta and made that appearance before the Georgia Democrats I realized that he was serious about running for the presidency. However, at that particular

[-4-]

time, nobody was sure at all that he would be a formidable candidate. He had made a fairly good showing at the '56 Convention and had attracted attention to himself nationally, but at that particular time nobody considered him as a formidable candidate.

STEWART: Do you recall when you started to consider him as a serious candidate?

VANDIVER: I would say about a year before the Convention, as he began to move around the country more, as he began to get publicity in the national media, as he began to make preparations for the various primaries around the country, we realized then that he was a serious candidate and would be formidable.

STEWART: What were your own personal views of him as a candidate, say, in late 1959, early 1960?

VANDIVER: I guess maybe because we were very close to the same age, it was a little difficult for me to visualize a man of that youth becoming President of the United States. Of course, at that time, Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] was

[-5-]

President, and Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] as Vice President stood out as probably the leading candidate. And we in Georgia of course--I was Governor at that time--the Georgia delegation, after conferring among ourselves and with our congressmen and with our two senators, decided that we would support Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] at the National Convention in 1960, which we did.

STEWART: What type of an image would you say, as far as you personally were concerned, did Senator Kennedy have on the whole problem of civil rights during this period?

VANDIVER: During this period I would say he was a little vague on civil rights. He was seeking the votes of the southern states at the Convention, and I don't think he made any pronouncements of any great moment, really, that would alienate those votes. However, we did feel that Senator Lyndon Johnson, with his record at that time in the Senate of the United States, was more favorably

[-6-]

disposed toward our position than was President Kennedy, candidate Kennedy, at that time.

STEWART: Was there any support at all for Kennedy within the Georgia delegation?

VANDIVER Robert Troutman, of course, was not a member of the Georgia delegation but he was constantly working on the membership of the Georgia delegation in support of Kennedy. The only one that I can recall that actually publicly stated that he was for Kennedy at that time was a man by the name of James W. "Taxi" Smith, who was then, and is now, an attorney down in Albany, Georgia. And he was publicly for Kennedy. He was a member of the delegation. However we went under the unit rule, and he was just one member. I think he was the only one. He went out to Los Angeles a week or two before the Convention with Bob Troutman and I think worked actively for Kennedy among other delegations and among the Georgia delegation.

STEWART: Why did so few of the congressional delegation become members of the Georgia

[-7-]

delegation, or is this usual practice in Georgia? I think there are only four...

VANDIVER: Members of the congressional delegation become delegates to the Convention?

STEWART: Right.

VANDIVER: I think we contacted each of them and asked them if they wanted to attend. And some of them did and some of them did not. Those who wanted to attend we made delegates.



STEWART: This had nothing--I think only one actually attended and four out of the twelve were delegates. Was this about the normal ratio?

VANDIVER: I would say generally that you'd have more than one out of the twelve congressional representatives. However I don't recall which one attended at the present time.

STEWART: But you don't feel this had anything to do with the contest between Kennedy and Johnson at that time?

VANDIVER: No, because each member of the Congress and of the Senate were tendered the opportunity of

[-8-]

attending as a delegate. As you recall, four accepted and only one attended.

STEWART: I had asked you before about the brief Talmadge [Herman Talmadge] for President campaign. Do you recall the origins of this at all or just what happened to it?

VANDIVER: Of course, Lyndon Johnson was not absolutely suitable to the Georgia delegation as a candidate, however he was more suitable than Kennedy. Seeking an alternative, as I recall it, there might have been a small amount of interest in the possibility of Talmadge becoming a candidate.

STEWART: Did you feel that such a movement might provide some leverage on the platform or on the selection of the nominee?

VANDIVER: That would have been possible had Talmadge been a favorite son, it could have been possible.

STEWART: You say Mr. Johnson wasn't a totally acceptable candidate. What was the main reservation...

[-9-]

VANDIVER: Well, parts of the delegation didn't believe that he represented the true feeling of the South. I think some of the subsequent events proved that they were right.

STEWART: Where were they leaning if they weren't that enthused with Johnson?

VANDIVER: Well, during the 1960 Convention the Southern states were in constant contact and there was a movement on the floor of the Convention to get me to run as a protest vice presidential candidate for the Southern states. And I think, had I won that I would not have had a chance in the world of getting the vice presidential nomination however, as a protest candidate I might have gotten the votes of ten or twelve Southern states.

STEWART: I was going to ask you about that later. Was there a fear among the delegates that there would be a problem as far as their loyalty to the Democratic party being challenged by the Credentials Committee, or had all this been worked out beforehand?

[-10-]

VANDIVER: No, we had no fears about that. Georgia was the only state at the Convention that had never gone Republican at that time. We felt like our credentials were pretty good and we had no fears of being thrown out of the Convention, if that's what you meant.

STEWART: I think Chairman Butler [Paul M. Butler] had taken certain actions or made certain noises in this direction in 1958 or '59, didn't he? This free electors business?

VANDIVER: It was ever thus from 1948 on. They made noises trying to frighten the delegates. We were not at all frightened about being thrown out.

STEWART: This wasn't a serious concern with anyone?

VANDIVER: No.

STEWART: Do you recall what hopes, if any, you had of keeping the civil rights plank of the platform somewhat in tune with the feelings of the South? Did you anticipate that you could possibly do anything?

VANDIVER: Yes. We anticipated that there would be a very

[-11-]

civil rights plank proposed, and there was. Of course, each state had membership on the platform committee, and we utilized this membership, as you may or may not recall, to submit to the Convention a minority report. I had had a heart attack in March 1960, some three or four months prior to the Convention. Physically I was not able to deliver the minority report, which I probably would have done

had I been in good physical shape. So I proposed that Mr. James Gray who was the chairman of the Democratic party in Georgia, whom I had suggested for chairmanship...

STEWART: He's from New England, isn't he?

VANDIVER: Yes, he is. He's from Connecticut. And we suggested that he deliver the minority report, which I think was signed by some twelve states in the South. And he did deliver that report to the Convention and caused utter confusion throughout America, a man from Georgia with a New England accent delivering a minority report. It was

[-12-]

quite an interesting report and received wide approbation, I might add, nationally.

STEWART: Did you feel that any mistakes were made on the part of Southern delegations in their efforts to tone down the civil rights plank? What I'm asking is, was it almost inevitable that the plank that actually went through was going to go through, or could anything have been done?

VANDIVER: We knew, of course, that the odds were against us. We were realistic as much as anything, but we were determined to try to present nationally the viewpoint of the Southern states. And we did that through the minority report.

STEWART: I've heard it mentioned that you considered a shift to Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] if a deadlock developed between Kennedy and Johnson. Is that true?

VANDIVER: That's not true. In fact, we didn't think there would be a deadlock. There was only one member of the Georgia delegation, as I recall it, who was

[-13-]

for Stevenson. And that was Mr. Blalock [D.B. Blalock, Sr.] who you met a few minutes ago. Through friendship, he was very close to Adlai Stevenson's brother-in-law, and he would have, had we not had the unit rule, would have liked to support Adlai Stevenson.

STEWART: But you didn't anticipate a deadlock?

VANDIVER: No, we did not. We felt that the people who were touting Adlai Stevenson at that Convention were even more radical than the Kennedy forces.

STEWART: But you had felt, even before, that Kennedy had it wrapped up?

VANDIVER: Of course, we knew that he was the leader. We knew that by the time he got to Los Angeles that he was that leader and it would be hard to....

STEWART: Before Kennedy's actual nomination, do you recall having any contacts either with Senator Kennedy or with members of his immediate staff, Robert Kennedy or anyone else?

[-14-]

VANDIVER: Not before the Convention. Of course Bob Troutman was around and he was the liaison man between the Kennedy headquarters and the Georgia delegation and would relate anything, any information, anything that he could ascertain to the Kennedy headquarters. And we knew that. He was very open about it. He's been a longtime friend of mine.

STEWART: Would Kennedy have gotten any votes on the second ballot from the Georgia delegation?

VANDIVER: Well, I might say that I recall very clearly that Kennedy appeared before the delegation, the Georgia delegation, prior to the voting. We invited Johnson; we invited Humphrey; we invited Kennedy and Stevenson to appear before the Georgia delegation. And as I recall, Senator Kennedy was realistic. He knew that he would not get any votes out of the Georgia delegation. He did make a pitch for support in the event that he were nominated. And I think by that time he was pretty sure he was going to be nominated

[-15-]

STEWART: You mentioned a while ago the movement to nominate you as the protest candidate for the vice presidential nomination. How did this originate, do you recall?

VANDIVER: Several of the governors of the Southern states contacted me and suggested that I accept the nomination for the vice presidency in order to give the Southern states a forum, an additional forum over the minority report, to present our position again to the nation over nationwide television. And I think, had not Lyndon Johnson been the nominee, that that could have developed. We were in a very poor position to put up a protest candidate when the man that we had supported on the first ballot suddenly became the vice presidential nominee.

STEWART: Did you have any indication that he would be selected before...

VANDIVER: Of course I had read a few rumors, but at that

[-16-]

particular time I did not think so.

STEWART: Would Symington [Stuart Symington] or Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] have been acceptable to you as a vice presidential candidate?

VANDIVER: Not as acceptable as was Lyndon Johnson.

STEWART: And Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], I assume, wouldn't have been.

VANDIVER: Humphrey at that time would not have been at all acceptable.

STEWART: You attended, I believe, a meeting of Southern governors in Kennedy's suite the morning after the nomination. Do you recall the major purpose of this meeting and do you recall what your reactions were to the meeting?

VANDIVER Yes. Bob Troutman called me after the President was nominated and asked me if I would attend a meeting with the nominee and if I would ask several Southern governors to come along with me. I said, yes, I'd be glad to. And as recall, Governor Fritz Hollings [Ernest F. Hollings] from South Carolina was close by, and I did contact him and ask him to attend that meeting

[-17-]

at the request of the nominee. And as I recall--I'm not sure whether Governor Buford Ellington was there or not, but I believe I did ask him to attend. Of course, he was very strong for Lyndon Johnson. I'm not certain whether he attended or not.

STEWART: There were a number of other people like...

VANDIVER: There were quite a few governors there--Governor Almond [J. Lindsay Almond, Jr.] of Virginia, Governor Hollings of South Carolina, Governor Edmondson [J.H. Edmondson] of Oklahoma and I--representing the southern area. I recall that Mennen Williams was there.

STEWART: By accident, wasn't it?

VANDIVER: We, of course, didn't know he was there by accident. I heard later that he was. But he was there. Governor Ribicoff [Abraham Ribicoff] was

there. Those are the main ones that I recall. I remember seeing Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] as we came into the suite.

[-18-]

STEWART: Was the purpose of this meeting to discuss the vice presidential nomination?

VANDIVER: That's correct. And as I recall, Senator Kennedy sat on the bed and called on me first among us to suggest who I thought would be the vice presidential nominee who would best help carry the ticket in the South. I stated without equivocation that I didn't think he would carry the South unless he did get Lyndon Johnson on the ticket because the entire South had supported Lyndon Johnson in the Convention for the presidency. I felt that some of the other proposed candidates for the vice presidency would not help him carry the South, and said so very plainly. As I recall, Governor Edmondson of Oklahoma agreed with me, Governor Hollings of South Carolina agreed and Governor Lindsay Almond of Virginia agreed. Governor Mennen Williams of Michigan very vigorously disagreed. He said that he didn't think he could carry Michigan with Lyndon

[-19-]

Johnson on the ticket. He was the main dissenter, really, at the meeting.

STEWART: Was it your impression that Kennedy had already made up his mind on this?

VANDIVER: No, not at that time. At that time I didn't know of the previous activities. I assumed that the meeting was called to get our judgment and that he would make up his mind afterwards. But as I understood it later, as events developed, that he had called Lyndon Johnson earlier that morning prior to this meeting. So I presume that this confirmed his judgment, that he had made earlier that morning.

STEWART: Was there any discussion at this meeting of the platform, the civil rights plank of the platform?

VANDIVER: Very little, as I recall it. We had poured it out into the cauldron of politics there in the Democratic party. We of the South had been whipped. And although there was some bitterness, I

[-20-]

don't recall that there was much discussed except for the fact that the South had supported Lyndon Johnson for the presidency, needed some person who was identified with the Southern region in order for the South to help carry the ticket.

STEWART: Do you recall whether Kennedy asked for your support of the ticket at that time, for the support of all the governors in the room?

VANDIVER: I don't think he did. I don't think he did. The main purpose of that meeting was to get the judgment of the various governors there on Lyndon Johnson or on who would be the candidate who could best carry their states.

STEWART: Did you have any other contact after this meeting with--at the Convention?

VANDIVER: No, not at the Convention, not with Kennedy himself. Of course, we were in contact with Troutman at all times. But, of course, there

[-21-]

was a lot of bitterness over the civil rights fight. In fact, a great many of the Georgia delegation left immediately after Johnson was nominated, didn't remain in Los Angeles for the acceptance speech, formal acceptance speech, which I believe was the next night.

STEWART: Right.

VANDIVER: In fact, I watched it on television from Atlanta.

STEWART: Why exactly did you withhold your support from the ticket for a month after the Convention?

VANDIVER: There were two reasons really. The platform on civil rights was particularly distasteful to the people of my state. That is the primary reason. The other was a reason of strategy. Had we come home and embraced the Democratic ticket and the platform that was adopted at the Convention, I don't think the Democrats could ever have won it. So we came home and protested, told the people we were not satisfied.

[-22-]

which we were not. And then when we did finally decide in the interests of harmony to go all out to help the Democratic party, I think there was a greater unanimity than there would have been had we come home and embraced the platform and the nominee.

STEWART: During this period, did you have any contact with Senator Kennedy or people on his staff?

VANDIVER: Prior to the time that we supported him, came out in support?

STEWART: Between the time of the Convention and the time you came out in support?

VANDIVER: Yes, we did. As I recall it, we received a call--I received a call as Governor from Senator Kennedy asking me to come to Washington to discuss his candidacy. James Gray, who was Chairman of the Democratic Party and who is again today Chairman of the Party, Bob Russell [Robert L. Russell, Jr.], who was my brother-in-law and who was national committeeman at that time, and I flew to Washington to have a conference with Senator

[-23-]

Kennedy and Senator Johnson. Prior to going to see Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson, I had some discussions about the support of the party with Senator Russell [Richard B. Russell] and with Senator Talmadge [Herman E. Talmadge]. Since Lyndon Johnson was now on the ticket as the vice presidential nominee, I wanted their views, what their votes were as to Kennedy because they had served in the Senate with him for several years. The three of us agreed that I, as Governor, it would be well for me to at least talk with him and determine what our course of action would be after the talk.

STEWART: Do you recall what this approach was at this meeting?

VANDIVER: Senator Kennedy's approach?

STEWART: Right, what arguments he made?

VANDIVER: Yes. We met in Lyndon Johnson's office, the Majority Leader's office in the Capitol, and Senator Kennedy was there. The first thing we

[-24-]

did was we called in the photographer and made a picture of Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson and Mr. Gray and Mr. Russell and I. And then, as I recall, Lyndon Johnson was the main spokesman of the two senators because we had supported him in the Convention. He was pleading for the support of the Georgia Democrats of the national ticket. I recall he said, "Ernie, if you will get behind Senator Kennedy and me in this election I will never forget it. I will tell my children to tell my grandchildren never to forget what you've done to help the Party."



Of course, I had a high regard for Lyndon Johnson, but I wanted to talk with the candidate, because I had something on my mind at that particular time that I wanted to discuss with him and I didn't want to discuss it with anybody else. You may recall that during the Eisenhower Administration, during the civil rights difficulties in Arkansas,

[-25-]

that President Eisenhower sent federal troops into the state. My primary interest in wanting to discuss this problem with Senator Kennedy was that I, as Governor, did not want the federal troops sent into Georgia. I thought that we could handle our own affairs, and I wanted to secure a promise from Kennedy that he would never send federal troops into the state of Georgia if we supported him. So we went back into the little bathroom in Senator Johnson's office privately, and I posed my problem to him and told him that certainly we could not support if he proposed to do the same thing in Georgia that Eisenhower had done in Arkansas, because we did not want federal troops in Georgia and we wanted to settle our own problems and we would. We wanted his cooperation rather than his sending in the troops. And he agreed to that. He did mention, he said, "Well, maybe marshals could handle the problem." I said, "We don't want any marshals either. We

[-26-]

want to handle our problems ourselves and we will." So he agreed to it.

STEWART: He agreed both on marshals and...

VANDIVER: That's right. He agreed that they would never send federal troops nor would they send marshals. I said, "Well, I'll go home and think about it. Then we'll let you know."

STEWART: Were there any other areas of the civil rights policies of the Administration that were discussed; for example, new legislation or any actions by...

VANDIVER: Of course, I knew that with the civil rights platform that had been adopted at the Convention that he would sponsor civil rights legislation. Of course, civil rights legislation had been sponsored, historically, for many years. I knew that he would be no exception. Our main reason for this conversation with Kennedy was that I did not want Georgia to have the same image that Arkansas had. And he agreed to it without equivocation.

[-27-]

STEWART: You were quite satisfied then with...

VANDIVER: Well, I didn't promise my support immediately. I said, "Let me go home and think about it and discuss it with some of my friends and then we'll let you know." Well, we did that. We left--I believe that was in the middle of the week. I came home and discussed it with several members of the Georgia delegation in Congress, several of my political friends and advisors. And then on the following Monday at my press conference I announced publicly for the first time that we intended to support the national ticket.

It sort of shook up the political structure of Georgia. In fact I left my office fairly early that day and went to the Executive Mansion. About the middle of the afternoon, I got a call from Senator Kennedy and Senator Johnson. They, of course, had already gotten the word over the wire services, that I had come out and supported the ticket. The first question that Senator

[-28-]

Kennedy asked me, he said, "Governor, are you in the bomb shelter out at the Mansion?" I said, "Well, I probably ought to be, Senator, things are in a rough situation down here in Georgia right at this particular time. But I'm not in the bomb shelter, I'm in the living room of the Mansion." And he told me how much he appreciated what we'd done. Lyndon Johnson was there and he got on the phone too and expressed his appreciation. So we went on from there.

STEWART: Hadn't you had a visit from Governor Furcolo [Foster Furcolo] of Massachusetts during this period? And if so, was that at all related to this plea for your endorsement?

VANDIVER: We were having civil rights difficulties down here at that time, I believe. Practically during my whole administration we were having some difficulty. No, this had no relation to--he did not come down here to make a plea for Georgia to support the Democratic party. I

[-29-]

think Governor Furcolo was in political trouble at home, and when we had some civil rights difficulties down here, he thought it was politically propitious to come to Georgia and get a lot of publicity out of his visit. Of course, as governor of another state, I treated him with every courtesy and at the same time told him privately that we'd look after our affairs, he'd look after Massachusetts.

STEWART: Apparently you didn't do him much good because he lost the nomination for U.S. Senator.

VANDIVER: That's correct. And as I say, it was a play on his part to receive publicity which he thought would help him in Massachusetts. I saw

through the political ploy, and, although we always treat visiting governors with courtesy, that was about the extent of the conversation. I did tell him that we'd handle our affairs and presumed he would handle his in Massachusetts.

[-30-]

STEWART: As far as the organization of the campaign here in Georgia, what exactly was your position? Were there any significant changes organization-wise from previous campaigns, say from the 1956 campaign?

VANDIVER: Yes, I got some of my close personal friends together, and we organized a campaign. I remember the Speaker of the House, George L. Smith, who is again Speaker of the House here in Georgia now--we got him to head the campaign in south Georgia. We got my chief of staff, Griffin B. Bell, to be the manager of north Georgia. And we set up a really effective Democratic organization. By the way, Griffin Bell is now a judge in the U.S. Court of Appeals. He was appointed by President Kennedy. We wanted the candidate to come to Georgia and we thought that the best place he could come.... Nixon had come to Atlanta and had drawn a tremendous crowd.

[-31-]

STEWART: That was very early, I think.

VANDIVER: That was fairly early in the campaign. We thought that if we could relate Kennedy's campaign to Roosevelt's [Franklin D. Roosevelt] campaign, who was extremely popular in Georgia and sort of a second native son, that it would be of political help to him. So we set it up for Kennedy to come to Warm Springs, to speak at Warm Springs. As I recall, he came, and Senator Talmadge and I met him in Columbus. He landed in Columbus. We went on the plane and met him before he got off. There was a right sizable crowd of people outside the plane and he asked me, "Who are these people? Are these farming people or are they mill people? Who are they?" He was expecting to make a little extemporaneous speech there. We told him they were just Georgians. They were just people from Columbus, from around Columbus. So he made a little speech immediately after he got off the *Caroline*.

[-32-]

A very nice little speech, four or five minutes. Then we got in the car to go to Warm Springs. The streets were lined, really, from Columbus to Warm Springs. All the school children had been allowed to leave school and come by and wave.

I recall particularly that, when we'd go by a Negro school, that Kennedy would make an extra effort to wave to them and on one or two occasions stopped the car and got out and shook hands with the Negro principal and with some of the Negro children. Of course,

Senator Talmadge and I did not do that. We, of course, were not the guest of honor so we sat in the car while he shook hands with the people along the way. But he got a real enthusiastic reception. Then we got to Warm Springs, where there was a tremendous crowd.

STEWART:               Were you surprised at the size and enthusiasm of the crowd?

[-33-]

VANDIVER:             Frankly, I was. And among the crowd were some young girls that might or might not have been of voting age that just went into hysterics. That was my first experience with the hysteria of the ladies, which I must say caused me to sit up and take notice of the attraction that he seemed to have for the ladies. We went to the Little White House. We had a platform right in front of the Little White House. We had governors from several states there. I remember John Patterson, the Governor of Alabama, was there. Senator Talmadge, of course, was there. Senator Russell was not there. There were several congressmen there as I recall, I don't remember which ones. We had a large and enthusiastic crowd, which surprised me, frankly. I introduced Kennedy. I must say that the criticism that was levelled at me in the introduction was probably valid. As I said, we were trying

[-34-]

to relate Kennedy to Roosevelt. So I had talked about Roosevelt most of the time during my introduction, and what he had meant to Georgia, and what a great Democrat he was. Finally I got around to introducing Kennedy as representing the same political philosophy as Roosevelt. He made a great speech. I was real impressed with his speech. I watched him--I was behind the lectern and was behind the President, and I was able to see the crowd and the crowd reaction. There was tremendous enthusiasm among those present, and I saw a great many of my political leaders in the audience, some of them those that I had not expected to be there.

One thing that I noticed that surprised me, I had thought he was a tremendously polished speaker and, with all of the campaigning that he had done, that it would be typical of the campaign speech and attitude of a normal politician in Georgia. But I noticed that his hand shook tremendously and

[-35-]

his leg shook. He seemed to be extremely frightened, looking at him from behind. And yet his speech didn't indicate that at all. I don't believe the people out in front knew that he was that excited or was frightened.

STEWART:               That's very interesting.

VANDIVER:                However, as an old politician, you watch the actions of the candidate, and I noticed that in the course of the speech. After his speech, we finally got him through the crowd, carried him to La Grange, Georgia. Meantime the *Caroline* had flown to La Grange, and they picked him up in La Grange and carried him to his next speaking engagement. But he made a tremendous impression.

STEWART:                Did you become more enthusiastic with the ticket as the campaign progressed?

VANDIVER:                I have to admit that I did. I think the enthusiasm probably became greater at the first Nixon-Kennedy debate. It looked to me then that he had a chance to

[-36-]

win. As I recall it, we had the Southern Governors' Conference, a meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas. We had all the Southern governors there together. And most of us watched the first Kennedy-Nixon debate. I think all of us were fearful that Nixon would just eat him alive. But he held himself so magnificently that I think most of the Southern governors who were supporting him began to get some enthusiasm after that first debate.

STEWART:                Did Lyndon Johnson campaign much in Georgia?

VANDIVER:                Yes, he had a campaign train that came through the South. He was probably the most effective campaigner in the South because he knew the southerners probably better than did anybody else in the country being a Southerner, a Midwesterner--I don't know exactly which he is, but his grandfather lived in Georgia and was sheriff in one of the adjoining counties here back prior to the War Between the States.

[-37-]

So he had some roots in Georgia. He was a very effective campaigner. I remember I joined the campaign train over in South Carolina. My brother-in-law, Bob Russell, who was very close to Lyndon Johnson, had joined the train, I believe, somewhere in North Carolina. And we made several stops in South Carolina. Then we made one in Toccoa, Georgia. We made one in Gainesville, Georgia. And then we came to Atlanta here where we had a very enthusiastic crowd and where I introduced Lyndon Johnson to the crowd; and he made a speech from the back of the train.

STEWART:                Did you have any other contacts with Senator Kennedy's campaign headquarters, with Robert Kennedy or Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] or any of those people during the campaign?

VANDIVER: Yes. During the campaign, Bob Kennedy came down and met with a group of political leaders from the Southern states, and Larry

[-38-]

O'Brien came with him. Bob, at that time, made a nice impression on the political leaders who were present. I recall that Mrs. Vandiver and I were with him that night, and we ate and were talking about our children. He had quite a few children, and we had three. We made a little trip out to the Governor's Mansion and got our children out of bed and let them meet Bobby Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy. I think he made a fairly effective appearance down here.

STEWART: Were your relations quite cordial and quite smooth at that time?

VANDIVER: With Bob Kennedy?

STEWART: Yes, and with O'Brien?

VANDIVER: Yes. We made the transition from fighting him to supporting him fairly easily. Our relations were cordial. We were in touch with him several times, many times during the course of the campaign by telephone, one of which I related to you earlier. I

[-39-]

think really the thing that helped President Kennedy carry the Southern states was the meeting that we had, which I instigated, of the Southern governors at a rally here in Atlanta. We invited the Southern governors to be present. Among those governors we had Farris Bryant from Florida, we had Fritz Hollings of South Carolina, we had Lindsay Almond of Virginia, we had--let's see, we had some more--Buford Ellington of Tennessee, we had Luther Hodges of North Carolina. Each of the governors made a speech to this group. This was two or three weeks before the election, and I think generally it brought more enthusiasm than anything else that was done in the whole South.

STEWART: Religion, I assume, was one of the biggest problems in Georgia.

VANDIVER: It was not as big a problem in Georgia as it was in some other states.

[-40-]

STEWART: Oh really? Well, how significant a problem was it?

VANDIVER: Well, it was a problem. I think, had Kennedy not been Catholic, he would have carried the state by a much larger majority. But Georgians

are reasonably tolerant and religion is not the factor it is in some other Southern states, Texas for instance. I recall that Al Smith [Alfred E. Smith] carried Georgia when he was the nominee, and he was a Catholic. So we didn't get a lot of kickback on that. Of course most of the Protestant ministers were concerned and some of them even preached from the pulpit about it. But I don't think--oh, I'm sure it cost him several thousand votes, but I don't think it was a real problem in Georgia.

STEWART: Could the Democrats have won without Johnson's presence on the ticket?

VANDIVER: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think, had not Lyndon Johnson at that time, with his associations in the South, been on the

[-41-]

ticket, that Georgia might have gone for Nixon.

STEWART: Was there a fear, were you fearful that some of the electors would not vote for Kennedy-Johnson? I think only seven of the twelve had supported the ticket and five were holding out, but eventually did vote for the ticket.

VANDIVER: Of course, it ran through my mind that there was a possibility that they wouldn't. But the state had gone overwhelmingly for Kennedy. He carried it by a sizable...

STEWART: I think it was the second highest margin in the country next to Rhode Island.

VANDIVER: Any elector certainly should follow his state's desires. Most of them were pretty good friends of mine, and I felt like they would support the ticket.

STEWART: And they all did. Could we discuss the whole matter of your potential appointment as Secretary of the Army? How did this possibility arise? Was there any discussion of it before the election?

VANDIVER: None at all before the election. In fact, it

[-42-]

was never discussed until, I believe, December of 1960. Bob Troutman, again, as I indicated earlier, was a close friend of mine, was the main promoter of the possibility of my being tendered the appointment of Secretary of

the Army. And I must--with my military background, I must admit it did hold some attractions for me. I had been Adjutant General of Georgia for six years and was extremely interested in the military. However, Bob Troutman was the primary instigator of it and talked with Kennedy about it. The thing reached such proportions--I discussed it with Senator Russell and with Congressman Vinson [Carl Vinson]--the thing reached such proportions.... It was all out of proportion to what actually happened really. Congressman Vinson made a statement that he was certain I would accept the appointment, and, of course, it had not progressed to that state at all, really.

[-43-]

The *Atlanta Constitution* came out with headlines saying I would resign and be appointed. And it had not gotten to that stage. They were wrong.

However, I did receive a call from President-elect Kennedy--I believe he was at West Palm Beach at the time--and he asked me if I was interested in being Secretary of the Army. I told him that I had some interest, but I felt that I had a job to do in Georgia that I couldn't give up because I'd been elected for a four year period. And I couldn't see how I could resign as governor and accept the appointment, but that I did have interest in the military and had some military background that I thought would be effective. But I indicated to him--and that was late one night when he called--I indicated to him that my primary responsibility was to the state of Georgia, and I intended to stay on. That was about the way the thing ended.

[-44-]

I had a terrible time convincing my friends that I didn't intend to do something like that, and I had a tremendous legislative battle the following session as a result of that.

STEWART: Is that right?

VANDIVER: Well, the man who was Lieutenant Governor at that time was Garland T. Byrd, and, had I resigned, he would have succeeded to the governorship. There were a great many people in Georgia in the legislature who didn't want to turn the budgetary control over to Garland Byrd. So they proposed legislation that would have taken away from the governor completely budgetary control. Of course I had to fight day and night for several weeks. And finally we beat it down about two to one. But as a result of this publicity about my possibly accepting this Secretary of Army appointment, I got into difficulty at home and had to battle

[-45-]

my way out of that one.



STEWART: It's unfortunate, of course, but the stories have always been that the position was offered, and then it was withdrawn because of the opposition of civil rights leaders and some northern liberals.

VANDIVER: That was never true. He never made the tender and I never told him anything except the truth, that I did have some interest but that my primary interest was with the state of Georgia. But he never made the tender, or did I say I would accept it.

STEWART: There was never any discussion of any other position, was there?

VANDIVER: No. He wrote me a letter, which I have somewhere, in which he said that he hoped that at the conclusion of my administration as governor, I would take some position. And that was about--well, he did put me on the Civil Defense Committee. I was chairman of the National Guard Committee of the Governor's Conference and on the Civil Defense Committee of the Governor's Conference.

[-46-]

He put me on with Nelson Rockefeller and Pat Brown [Edmund G. Brown] and several others on this National Civil Defense Advisory Committee. It was a non-compensatory position. It was just an advisory committee.

STEWART: Do you recall what your expectations were, say, in January of 1961 as to which way the Kennedy Administration would move in the whole area of civil rights?

VANDIVER: Of course I was hopeful that they would use a mature and a conservative judgment in their approach to the problem. I was quite pleasantly surprised, frankly, at his method, the way he did approach the problem. He didn't push it, as you may recall, at the beginning of his Administration, I think mainly because he needed the help of some of these Southern members of Congress to get his programs going. He delayed it, and, had he lived, I don't think we would have had the Civil Rights Act of 1963.

[-46a-]

STEWART: You don't think it would have...

VANDIVER: I don't think it would have passed. I think the Southern delegation could have defeated it. However, when Lyndon Johnson proposed it, with all his legislative knowledge, his personal knowledge of the Senate and the House, it made it doubly difficult to defeat.

STEWART: Did you have any discussions with the Kennedy people before the Inauguration relative to the integration of the University of Georgia that took place before the Inauguration?

VANDIVER: None whatsoever. None whatsoever.

STEWART: None at all. And the whole thing was over and done with by the time of the Inauguration, I believe.

VANDIVER: Yes, it was. As you may recall, we had a court order from the middle district of Georgia, Judge Bootle [William A. Bootle], Eisenhower's appointee, had issued an injunction in which he named certain people, including the Governor of Georgia, and enjoined them from interfering with it. Of course.

[-47-]

we had certain laws in Georgia on the statute books that would prevent it. We had to make the fundamental decision, we had to make it hurriedly, as to what course we would take. So I went before the joint session of the general assembly at night, the first time we'd ever had any night session of the general assembly--and it went on statewide television and radio--and made proposals by which we could comply with federal law. Fortunately these proposals were adopted by the legislature, and almost unanimously. We realized that the time had come. Everybody else had been talking about this problem when we aided and abetted. So we repealed all the laws on the books that interfered with the orderly procedure. And I think I signed it into law the day before I left Atlanta for Washington for the Inauguration.

STEWART: What, generally, was your overall position on the whole subject of school integration throughout the Kennedy Administration?

[-48-]

VANDIVER: Well, of course, I was opposed to integration of the schools until we could make an orderly progress, bring the white schools and colored schools up to a point where they both would be equally good without mixing the schools. I made some statements during my campaign which came home to haunt me during that difficult period, and still haunt me to a certain extent. However, under the laws that were on the statute books in Georgia at the time I ran for Governor, had they not been knocked down by the Supreme Court, we could have maintained segregation. We had the question to decide, whether or not we wanted to handle our situation like it was handled in Little Rock, Arkansas--by the possibility of using federal force from the outside--or doing it ourselves. I preferred that we handle our own problems ourselves, as I had indicated earlier to Kennedy when I secured his promise that he would not send federal troops into Georgia. And although it was



have been filing and the encouragement that the Justice Department was giving to people who were organizing voter registration drives?

VANDIVER: Of course we had certain statues on the books relative to voting rights. We put the Attorney General's office behind the local officials in every occasion where there was a challenge.

STEWART: Did you have any contacts with the Attorney General or people in the Justice Department on voting

[-52-]

rights suits?

VANDIVER: I had some contacts with Bob Kennedy on some problems that were indirectly related, I presume, to those suits. You may or may not recall that we had some demonstrations in Albany, Georgia about that time. Quite a few of the demonstrators were jailed. I remember I was down in Albany for voting--it must have been November or December--and got a call that Kennedy was calling me. I went back in, and he talked to me about the possibilities of trying to secure the release of these demonstrators. Of course they had violated local laws, and I told him without any equivocation that they had to abide by Georgia laws, and, if they did not want to, I was not going to intervene--and did not.

STEWART: Did you have any other contact with him that you recall?

VANDIVER: With Bob Kennedy or with the President?

STEWART: With Robert Kennedy.

VANDIVER: That's about all that I can recall with Bob Kennedy.

[-53-]

Then I had some more contacts with President Kennedy.

STEWART: Could you describe those? I went over the appointment books from the White House and I have at least two of them. There may have been more. There was a meeting on the poultry tariff in June of 1962. Do you recall this?

VANDIVER: I recall it very well. The European Common Market was doing everything possible to cut out the importation of products, agricultural products, from the United States into the Common Market. Of course

Georgia is the largest poultry producer in the United States, more than any other state. And our poultry, the part that we were exporting into the European countries was a very substantial part of our business. So we got the poultry leaders, and I called the President and asked if we could discuss our problems with him. And we did. As I recall, I followed up on it with a telephone call

[-54-]

days, maybe weeks, later. He advised me that he had written Chancellor Adenauer [Konrad Adenauer] a letter in which he had very subtly suggested that if they discriminated against agricultural products in the United States, we might move some troops out of Germany, which they did not want at all at that time--I don't think he made any threat, but merely suggested the possibility--that we had to cooperate. We had our forces, and we had some products we needed to sell in the Common Market.

STEWART: Were you generally in agreement with the Administration's proposals on the Trade Expansion Act and the handling of, for example, the textile agreement which related to it?

VANDIVER: The textile agreement caused considerable difficulties. It was one of our primary problems, really, the importation of Japanese goods into the United States. It affected our textile industry in Georgia to a tremendous extent. We, of course, opposed it. Later, several years later during the Johnson Administration,

[-55-]

we had more favorable, they had more favorable legislation.

STEWART: I noticed this European trade mission in 1962. Was this at all related to anything the Administration was doing?

VANDIVER: Well, not particularly, except it was an effort on the part of our leaders here in Georgia to let the, primarily the ports of Europe, the great ports of Europe know that we had two ports in Georgia; that there were other ports in the United States other than New York. So we spent three weeks over there and met with all the port officials, the main officials in Europe and England, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and Italy. It was the sort of thing that I thought the state should take the initiative on. And I did write the President a letter about it and send him some material that told about our itinerary. Got a very nice letter from him in which he said he'd read it and was quite interested.

[-56-]

STEWART: But the Commerce Department wasn't specifically involved in it?

VANDIVER: No. No, it was a state activity, a state action really.

STEWART: You were on the Governor's Civil Defense Committee, was it?

VANDIVER: That's correct.

STEWART: Was there anything outstanding or anything significant you can recall about your activities, anything of any note?

VANDIVER: Yes sir. I certainly recall this and will as long as I live. I happened to be in Washington at the height of the Cuban missile crisis. And as a member of the Civil Defense Committee--Nelson Rockefeller was chairman at the time, and when the crisis began to build up, Nelson called a meeting of the governors who were members of that committee. We went to Washington to discuss what the states might possibly do in the event of attack or crisis. During the course of the meeting there

[-57-]

we called the President and asked for an audience to discuss it with him. This was, I believe, on a Friday or Saturday, and it was reaching really a crescendo. Nelson Rockefeller was the spokesman as chairman of the Civil Defense Committee. We met with the President for some forty-five minutes. I recall that Governor Pat Brown was there from California and Nelson Rockefeller and maybe one other governor. But the thing that I recall most is that Nelson Rockefeller was almost in a state of panic...

STEWART: Really?

VANDIVER: ...over the possibility of missiles in Cuba. Evidently his people in New York were so excited about it and had applied pressure on him. But he really was almost, I would say, in a state of panic. I looked at the President and his calmness as contrasted with Nelson Rockefeller, who had been a candidate for President early in the campaign--remember, he

[-58-]

and Nixon had had some sort of a conference. I looked at Kennedy and I looked at Rockefeller and I thanked God that Kennedy was President and not Rockefeller because I had never seen a man in a period of crisis who was more calm, who was thinking clearer. I know that he had written Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev]. He told us that he had written him. He said that he didn't know what the reaction would be; that we might get an immediate response or the crisis or emergency might go on for some period of time. He just didn't

know. But the thing that I remember most was his calmness in crisis. I think the thing that I admired most about Kennedy was what I saw that day, because that was his most difficult hour and I was privileged to see him during that period.

STEWART: Let me ask you a few fairly general questions and then we can wrap this up. Did you have the feeling that President Kennedy fully understood the views of people like yourself and other

[-59-]

Southern governors on the whole civil rights problem?

VANDIVER: Yes. Maybe you have some record of it--I wrote the President a letter after he made his speech in June making his civil rights proposals. As you may recall...

STEWART: That's '63.

VANDIVER: This was '63, June of '63. I wrote him a letter and I was very much--I was already, of course, out of office at this point. But I was very greatly exercised by the fact that we had this restaurant down here known as Leb's Restaurant and the Negroes had demonstrated and had conducted themselves in such a matter as to almost inflame the entire population of Georgia. They had gone into this man's private property, forced their way in, had exposed themselves in his restaurant, had urinated on the tables; they had just gotten completely out of control. I suppose it was that incident that caused me to write a letter

[-60-]

to the President in which I proposed this new civil rights proposal as regarding private business and private enterprise. I sent it to Larry O'Brien because having been Governor I know sometimes these things can be, some secretary can answer it. Never gets to the man unless somebody calls it to his attention. So I sent the letter addressed to the President in care of Larry O'Brien. About three or four days later I was in my home in Lavonia and was out on the lake with my son who was about fourteen who was out skiing, and my wife came over to the lake and told me that President Kennedy was trying to reach me. So I went back to the house and returned the call. He got on the line and told me he had received my letter and he understood my problem from a state standpoint but that he had a national problem that he had to deal with.

As an aside, I might tell you a little funny part of this story. My son came back with me. And, at

[-61-]

that time I believe it was record had come out imitating the President. He had listened to this record many, many times, and he took great delight in imitating President Kennedy and did it very well. So, as we were coming back from the lake, he asked me, he said, "Daddy can I go upstairs and pick up the receiver and listen in because this will probably be the only time I will ever hear a President of the United States talk over the telephone." I told him yes, that it would be all right if he'd be real quiet, because there wasn't anything that we were going to discuss that I didn't want him to hear. The President started right into the telephone what he had on a national level, and I said, "Well, Mr. President we've got a hell of a situation down here. The things that you're proposing are just inflaming the people. We've had this incident

[-62-]

down here that has further inflamed them and we're just in a hell of a mess." He said, "We're in a hell of a mess up here in Washington." He said, "The Negro leaders are putting pressure on me to come forth with some positive civil rights programs." I said, "Well, Mr. President, don't you know that the Negro leaders are irresponsible, and whoever happened to be President at the time the same sort of pressure would be put on you, that they are completely irresponsible? They will oppose you." He said, "I know. I know. The booted Bobby last week." Of course my son was listening upstairs and when he mentioned Bobby, who was also mentioned in the record, I heard him fall to the floor upstairs he was laughing so hard. If you recall, the Negro leaders had gone by the Justice Department and had booted Bobby at the Justice Department. That was a week before this telephone conversation.

Anyway, we discussed

[-63-]

it for, I think, probably thirty minutes over the telephone. He understood my position, but at the same time he had a national problem that he said he had to deal with. Of course, as a practical politician, I realized that he did have it. But nevertheless I wanted him to know that some of his voters didn't feel the same way that others did. And he listened very carefully. He was a very warm person, a very kind person, and he seemed to have the ability to understand your problems even though he disagreed with them.

STEWART:                   The reason I asked the question, I've frequently heard it said that the President did have some difficulty really understanding the motivation of some Southern politician, I think probably more the people in Congress--why they insisted, why they were.... In his view they were so reasonable on most other

[-64-]

economic and foreign affairs problems, but yet when it came...



VANDIVER: The President's problem was this. I believe he has in the state of Massachusetts, he had about 2 percent of the population was Negro. In Georgia it's close to 30 percent. We've got some counties in Georgia where it's 75 percent. And if you integrate the schools there you'll just have a Negro school. That's all there'll be. You can't make something excellent by putting something that is far from excellent all together. We had been raised with this problem; we knew the problem. We felt that it would resolve itself by evolution rather than by revolutionary statutes. Of course he was under great pressure to get something done by the Negro. And he didn't understand the problem because he wasn't raised with it. We had grown up

[-65-]

with the problem. We knew about it from the time we were born. I can understand why he would have difficulty.

STEWART: Do you feel, though, that both he and others in the Administration made a sufficient effort to try to get the viewpoints of people like yourself? Or do you feel, on the other hand, that the people in the South made enough of an effort to make their views known to him.

VANDIVER: Well, of course, most of them did it publicly. And, of course, he would not answer statements that some politician had made publicly, and I don't blame him. He couldn't do it publicly. But where a friend of his, who had gone out on a limb to support him such as I had, expressed private concern, as soon as the letter came to him he picked up the phone and called and tried to tell me what his problem was and tried to understand what our problem was. I appreciated that, even though

[-66-]

we were poles apart on what we both believed. But there was communication. That's something that we haven't had very much of with some of the other presidents.

STEWART: Other than the meetings and the conversations that you've mentioned, were there any other contacts that you can recall with the President himself?

VANDIVER: I recall one other time when I saw him, and this was right after we had had our difficulties in the Georgia legislature over the integration of the schools. I went to the Inauguration, and my wife and I went to the Inaugural Ball at the Sheraton Plaza. I believe it was the Wardman Park at that time. They had four or five Inaugural Balls around the city. He went to all of them and spent a few minutes. But the Sheraton Park was the largest. My wife and I went there, and most of the governors that I knew were there; Abe Ribicoff and quite a few of the others. He came in and was standing

[-67-]

up fairly close to the orchestra and smiling. The Secret Service had him in pretty good tow. He recognized me--he hadn't met Mrs. Vandiver at that time--he recognized me and made a mover over to where I was, and the Secret Service people jumped in between. They didn't know who I was. Evidently he told them that it was all right, it was an old friend. And so we talked for a couple of minutes. I told him what a great inaugural speech it was. I think it probably will go down in history as one of the greatest in history. He was very pleased by the fact that we'd come. We mentioned the problem we had in Atlanta. Just a couple of minutes' conversation.

STEWART: That's about all the questions I have unless there's anything you want to add.

VANDIVER: Not except that that picture there is one of my prize possessions and I plan to keep it as long as I live. I thought he was a very

[-68-]

warm person and I thought he made an effort to understand our problems. I realized that he had national problems and we had regional problems and he had to do what he believed was in the best interests of the nation.

[END TAPE I, BEGIN TAPE II]

STEWART: Why don't we just let me ask you the question. There was an incident that you wanted to relate to this tape that you felt should be kept separate. Could you describe this?

VANDIVER: Yes, that's correct. During the course of the political campaign in 1960, early in the morning President Kennedy, the candidate Kennedy, called me at the governor's mansion on the Prado in Atlanta, Georgia. He told me that he had just ascertained that Martin Luther King had been placed in prison in DeKalb County. He asked the assistance of the governor's office in seeking the release of Martin Luther King. I recall, I believe, that it was some sort of traffic violation for which he had been arrested. He suggested that I discuss this from time to time with Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], who was in Washington, since he was traveling in the course of the campaign. I immediately called my brother-in-law, Bob Russell [Robert L. Russell, Jr.], who was the national committeeman from Georgia, and discussed this problem with him, of whether or not we could secure the release of Martin Luther King from the prison in DeKalb County, Georgia. He, of course, was very much interested and worried for fear that any activity that we might engage in might become public. I assured him that this was a personal conversation between candidate Kennedy and I, and that nobody other than my wife was

aware of the telephone call. We then determined that we would do what we could to use the governor's office to secure the release of Martin Luther King. My brother-in-law, Bob Russell, then called George B. Stewart, who was secretary of the Democratic Party of Georgia at that particular time and who was an extremely close friend of the judge of the city court of Decatur, which is in DeKalb County, so that we could contact this judge through Mr. Stewart, the secretary of the Democratic Party. This we did and I later had a conversation with the judge confirming--he wished to confirm the fact that I had talked with President Kennedy personally. He agreed to release Martin Luther King from the jail. I had some three or four conversations with Bobby Kennedy in Washington during the course of negotiations to effectuate the release of Martin Luther King. In the meantime, candidate Kennedy had called Mrs. Martin Luther King and sympathized with her. Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] had done absolutely nothing. I think that it probably was one of the real turning points of the campaign. We were able to secure Mr. King's release, and candidate Kennedy was able to make great capital of it. And I think that in the closeness of the election that it could very well have been the

[-69-]

turning point of the campaign and it could very well have meant the election of President Kennedy.

STEWART: Do you recall what specific reasons Senator Kennedy gave when he first called you for wanting to get him out?

VANDIVER: Yes. He said that various groups were calling him from all over the United States complaining about Martin Luther King being in jail, and since I was governor of the state in which he was incarcerated, could I use my office to get him out? Of course, it would have been, I think, political suicide, with the temper of the times as it was, for it to have been publicized if we did what we did. However, with my interest in seeing that Kennedy was elected president, I was willing to take that chance. Up to this particular time, nobody knows how it happened. My brother-in-law who was my go-between in the negotiations is now dead. The other two individuals who know about it are living; Mr. Stewart is still living and the judge is still living.

STEWART: That's very interesting. I was trying to recall what descriptions I have seen of the situation and I just can't think exactly what was made public as far as how the release was brought about.

VANDIVER: Well, we had at that time a mayor of Atlanta, William B. Hartsfield, who personally claimed credit for securing the release of Mr. King. However he had nothing whatsoever to do with it. The negotiations were handled from the governor's mansion with the secretary of the Democratic Party and with the judge.

STEWART: Well, he was involved in the subsequent telephone call, I believe.

VANDIVER: The mayor might very well have talked with candidate Kennedy or with Bobby Kennedy but he didn't have the power to secure the release. The only person I think that could have done was the governor of the state at that time.

STEWART: That's very interesting. Is there anything else on that particular incident?

VANDIVER: That's about the story of that particular incident. That's about all of it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-70-]