

*Governor McNair Oral History Project*  
*South Carolina Department of Archives and History*

# Interview

*with*

Robert E. McNair

***Interviewer:***

Cole Blease Graham

***Date:***

August 23, 1983

**CBG:** This is Tape 28, Side 1, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is August 23, 1983.

Governor, we've talked generally about the development of a civil rights consciousness or the civil rights movement across the South and in South Carolina, and we've identified some general aspects of it. Perhaps now we can move to a more specific focus on events at Orangeburg. It may help to start with one more general question, though, and that is to talk about the state of training of law enforcement officials. What developments do you recall having occurred in this time period to help law enforcement personnel make a proper response to civil rights activities?

**REM:** Well, we'd had the experience of riots all over the country. Prior to this period of time, we had what we called demonstrations--and they were more peaceful demonstrations--and I think basically the most restraint ever used was the old fire hose, the water. But because of Detroit and Harlem and Chicago and places like that, the lack of training for local and state police to deal with this emerging type of situation caused the federal government to get concerned. You know, they had to come in and pick up the pieces quite often in places where there'd been just open warfare almost in the streets. So they, through the FBI, developed what was supposed to be riot control training programs, and we were one of the early states to take advantage of that.

Chief [J. Preston] Strom, head of SLED [State Law Enforcement Division], had developed a close relationship with the FBI, having served on a national board of directors of the chiefs around the country, and through that we were able to get in early on the training program. My recollection is we had the highway patrol put through the intensive FBI training program for riot control. We chose them for several reasons. One was they were mobile. They were probably the best trained to do their job that we had, they were uniformed, and they were easily mobilized and easily controlled.

The alternative was the National Guard, and my recollection is they had developed a riot training program also that they put themselves through. So we had both, and we took advantage of those training programs that were available. SLED, of course, was exposed to it and went through it also, but when it came to potential riots and riot control the highway patrol was trained to be the first-used force in the state with the national guard to be used as a backup-type of a massive people control because they did have the numbers and they could be mobilized, not on short order, but, you know, within a few hours.

**CBG:** Were reports made to you of the way the training was conducted? Did patrolmen, for example, go out of state? Did they train in teams?

**REM:** The FBI provided the training for the leaders who in turn put the others through training programs. The same thing with the national guard. When they developed a training program at the national level, that just came on down to the state level.

**CBG:** Do you recall ever sitting down with Chief Strom or some others, like, for example, the FBI personnel involved, and discussing what might happen should something break out in South Carolina?

**REM:** Well, we had meetings to talk about this kind of thing and how we would handle it. We had demonstrations happen, and we had to develop an orderly procedure for handling them. We decided early that we couldn't put the burden on the local chiefs of police and the local police departments for several reasons. They weren't equipped, they weren't manned, and they weren't trained, and because of the political implications. They were local, they were right there, and they had to live in that community. It put a lot of pressure on them to handle something when it got beyond just the normal type of situation that they'd run into from day to day.

So we did have that and we also had a very thorough understanding on how additional support would be called in. We had a clear understanding of the role of the National Guard and how the National Guard would be activated if that became necessary. It was down to the point that only I could activate the National Guard and only I could put the guard out in the streets because we just couldn't afford to cross wires or somebody going in one direction and somebody going in another.

We had sit-down meetings with Chief Strom, Colonel [P.F.] Thompson, General [Francis] Pinckney, who was head of the national guard, and everybody else that sort of fit into that to discuss how we would react to given situations, who would be in charge, and how they would all function. I learned early on that you couldn't have three chiefs in an emergency. You could only have one, and my decision was that I had Chief Strom. He knew more by reason of his information system. He had more contacts with community people, community leaders, than anybody else, and being the so-called civilian chief, who was appointed by and responsible directly to the governor, I felt he was the chief, and everybody understood that. When we did have an emergency, they were all to work with and report to and generally take supervision from him.

**CBG:** Did training go so far as to have, let's say, a mock drill or an exercise?

**REM:** I think I observed one or two training sessions, like you would normally, one or two National Guard training sessions where you observed them, you know, handling almost in reality an unruly crowd. Generally they would have to handle unruly crowds and brick throwers and rock throwers and things of that nature. When it came down to were people going to shoot at them and things like that, that was where it got

rather hairy. What do you do then? You know, if somebody throws a rock at you, you don't throw it back because that intimidates. If somebody throws bricks or things like that, you don't throw it back because that intimidates. You try to stay out of the way. You handle it without creating a confrontation, but I suppose we always had questions. If you're shot at, what do you do? You try to protect yourself, and you get out of the way, but the bottom line is law enforcement officers weren't out there to be shot at, and you didn't ask them to go out there and take a bullet and not do something about it or respond to it. So I suppose that's where you got down to the hairy bottom line, and people still debate that old question of what do you do. When the responsibility of putting people out there and risking their lives, I think you have to leave them some latitude to protect their life, and hopefully they're well enough trained to act responsibly and not precipitously.

**CBG:** Was that about the way that the meetings and the training sessions left that question, would you say?

**REM:** You almost had to leave it there, but urging restraint, you know. The last thing you wanted was a confrontation. It was always to sort of yield and avoid and not put yourself in a position of getting into a real hostile kind of confrontation if you could avoid it.

**CBG:** Was the sequence of events in February of 1967 something of an exercise, or was that seen as being real, or maybe not much to bother about when the professors were fired?

**REM:** That was almost--you know, if there was sort of a common occurrence or an expected event--one of those where the professors were fired by Dr. [Benner] Turner, who, as I think we've been through, had come to run the institution with sort of a firm hand and had lost his communications with the faculty and the students and the community for that matter. That was nothing that ever got where it got angry and unruly. It was a normal student demonstration against some overbearing administrator, and I think we all, then even, had to sometimes put ourselves in the position of those students down there who were totally frustrated. They were there, we'd opened up opportunity, we'd talked about equal opportunity, and they just didn't feel like they were getting a good education. The faculty was woefully weak in certain areas. There were some course offerings for which there really weren't people who were competent to teach. I think that sort of fed and bred this. These were faculty members who had come in and were white, and I think they had become very involved in the student movement and the faculty involvement in administration of the school.

That should have been and was an indication to us that we had problems down at State College. But to us they were internal although I can't say that we didn't know Orangeburg was a trouble spot. The school and the city never had really developed good relations. It was sort of that's the college over there you know and the city over here, and there was never the kind of working relationship or community relations. I don't

think there was any effort to develop a college-city or college-community relations committee to help build that and improve on it. Dr. Turner enjoyed a good image and a good reputation and was respected certainly by everybody, including the so-called white leadership, but, as we say, as we learned, time was changing, and the faculty and students didn't feel like they were caught up in what was happening.

**CBG:** Did those events cause you or others in the state government to single out State College in Orangeburg for special attention?

**REM:** Well, it certainly did. It caught my attention because it was clearly evident from just a first blush look that there were problems there, and they had to be dealt with. The faculty had to be dealt with. The board of trustees was all-white and historically had been all-white, governing a black institution by reason of the fact that historically the legislature always elected white business people. In some respects that may have been good because they could get political attention, but I'm not sure all of them could. Mr. [W.C.] Bethea from Orangeburg had been on the board for as long as any of us could remember, a fine gentleman and he just loved that school like people love Clemson and all, but I don't think they were aggressive enough to tell us in a forceful way that things were festering and that we ought to be doing more for it.

It did get attention in that respect. They got mine that we had to change the board; we had to upgrade the faculty and the program down there; we had to improve the facilities. I went down and went through the college and looked at the classroom facilities, in some instances the dormitories, and concluded very quickly that this was just no atmosphere in which people could really feel like college students and learn. So we started a program of changing. The legislature was certainly very cooperative because they willingly left vacancies on the board of trustees so that I could appoint, and then they would confirm it when they came back. That gave us an opportunity to get people like I.P. Stanback from here and several other good recognizable black leaders, people in the black community, not activists all together, but yet active business leaders who had the respect of the black leadership and of the white leadership, to get some of those kind of people on the board.

We had the question of the presidency that had to be dealt with because it was obvious that Dr. Turner had sort of served his time. It was a very delicate, difficult matter to deal with, and it sort of came down to where the governor was the person to deal with it.

**CBG:** How did you go about that? Did you have a feeling that maybe you were going beyond the usual role of the governor?

**REM:** It'd been mine to avoid that because I made it very clear in the beginning that, although I was an *ex officio* member of several boards, I did not plan to involve myself in that activity. I attended once a year for the purpose of sitting there and letting them know of my interest in the institution, what we were trying to do overall, so that they could get an understanding of what we were trying to do in higher education generally and to listen to them, but I didn't want to get involved in the day-to-day administration of any institution. So I attended one meeting, and then I didn't attend any more unless I had a special request. But this was one where I felt like we had to get that school straightened out, and the board needed help in doing it. I was able to get James Rogers from Florence to take over the chairmanship of the board, get him on the board, get him chairman, a very progressive, forward-thinking, responsible, respected, white leader who the black community had confidence in, and that's where we really got moving, was under his leadership.

**CBG:** What was the train of events then in dealing with Dr. Turner and Chairman Rogers?

**REM:** Well, I think we had concluded actually that we needed a change in leadership at the school and that that change had to take place in an orderly way. We were trying to avoid just the open impression that students could get unhappy and faculty get unhappy and the president would go. So it was delicate to maintain a balance and also to protect the image of Dr. Turner. He had done a tremendous job. He had really built that institution, he loved it like it was his--and that may have been part of his problem--but we determined we needed a change, and we went through discussions of how we would accomplish it. The general feeling was that it could best be accomplished by me talking to Dr. Turner and trying to persuade him to go ahead and determine on his own that he wanted to take early retirement, that he felt he had about served it, done all he could do, and that it should come from him. Fortunately, he and I in a meeting at the mansion came to that conclusion and worked it where he would take the initiative and he would make that determination and make that decision, and we would give him all the benefits of his office in the way of retirement and allow him to continue to draw his salary for a period of time because I felt we owed it to him. I felt we really we owed him something for all he had meant to the state and all he had meant to the school.

**CBG:** This left with you with another problem of a replacement. What happened?

**REM:** Well, it did, and we'd been through all the problems down there, again trying to find some real leadership. I suppose the first thing we were interested in was finding somebody that could bring peace and calm and leadership to the college that the students and faculty and the community would have confidence in. So I made an inquiry of Matthew Perry, who had been just the counselor and the lawyer and the leader and probably the most respected black in the Southeast at that time. I asked Matthew if he would consider

taking the presidency of the college. I thought it would be something good for him. He'd practiced law all his life. He'd never made any money like most people. He'd practiced representing causes rather than clients with money and had a tremendous reputation. He had a reputation of being extremely bright. He could communicate well. I knew he would have the support of everybody, but Matthew felt that that really wasn't his calling and wasn't something he wanted to do even on a shorter term basis than you would normally have, and thus he declined to be considered after giving it some real thought.

We then started looking, and Dr. Jordan down at Savannah State emerged as the leading contender. He had a good reputation. He had a good reputation in the academic community. He had done a tremendous job at Savannah State. He was graduate of South Carolina State, a South Carolina boy, and from all the ones that we'd looked at, we all concurred he was the one. He was offered the position and accepted, and then the controversy erupted again in the faculty and outside. Apparently he had dealt with some problems at Savannah State in a pretty firm manner and had come through them quite well, we thought, but some of the people--their purposes weren't served by this thing being resolved this way. They had to keep it going. There was a professor on the campus, Dr. Charley Thomas, who didn't agree and wanted to be president himself. He led a faction in the faculty and in the community, and he continued to create opposition to the point that Dr. Jordan's response was, "I'm not coming into something like that. If I'm going to come into a divided college and if I've got all that opposition, then I prefer to stay where I am." So he, after accepting, called back and declined to take it.

During that time, we'd been through all of this, and the school was settling down under the leadership of Maceo Nance who'd been the business manager or vice president for finance, and I think, as we observed him, we gradually saw Maceo's strong points, and that was what we were looking for, communications, an ability to communicate with the faculty, the students, the community leadership, state leadership. Certainly all of us had confidence in him because we had seen him as Dr. Turner's sort of right arm, as his financial manager, and he did a good job. He impressed all of us at the state level. So then we determined that maybe we had the best man for the job already there in an acting position, and the board concurred after observing him and offered the job to him which he gladly accepted. My judgment is that he was the best of the group, you know, hindsight. He was in it, he grew up in it, he lived in it, he understood it, he could withstand the pressures of the internal controversy, and he emerged as a very strong leader. We saw qualities that we hadn't seen in Maceo when he was playing the number two, number three role.

**CBG:** Did Dr. Turner then leave Orangeburg?

**REM:** Dr. Turner did. He determined that he wanted to just get away. So he moved away from South Carolina, hopefully with no bitter feelings, but I'm sure with some regret and some bitterness and some

bitterness directed toward the black community. He felt they had let him down in his conversations with me. He felt he had sort of had the rug pulled from under him and all, but he was a great fellow, and I respect him for the way he handled himself.

**CBG:** What about some of the faculty members like Dr. Thomas who we just mentioned; did they settle down and accept Dr. Nance?

**REM:** Well, I think that was the interesting thing about Nance, was it continued, but it just sort of settled and died because he pulled things together very quickly.

**CBG:** Back to a usual faculty-president squabble.

**REM:** Yes. And he pulled the student body together. Obviously he had good communications with the students. He had worked at it and during this interim he had. What we discovered was that he was the fellow who was sort of holding things together for Dr. Turner all along, and he was the one people would go to and discuss their problems. He was the one the students would share their concerns with.

**CBG:** What was going on with this Black Awareness Coordinating Committee that I guess comes from 1967? Was this something that worried you or was this seen as a positive?

**REM:** No, it was not. It was a thing that worried us because naturally all of us looked on it as being people that were stirring up trouble, and their success was based on how much trouble they could cause, and they were out trying to build an organization, rather than, in our judgment, really accomplishing a great deal.

**CBG:** Did they just capture the student government, was that it?

**REM:** I think so. I think that's what happened and it was natural. You know, it was a natural thing for it to happen. And I'm not sure there that it wasn't the sort of thing that was asked for, the attitudes, the governance of the school, student involvement and all of that had just reached a point to where it was ready for something like that.

**CBG:** Was there an awareness of the role that Cleveland Sellers was playing with this group?

**REM:** That really--and I've thought back on it, and I don't think that I recognized Cleveland Sellers's role in those early stages. I don't think I was aware of the fact that he was making such inroads himself. We were all at that time concerned about that group with Stokely Carmichael as its leader. They were almost on the subversive list, you know, really.

**CBG:** This was the SNCC [Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee] group.

**REM:** The SNCC group; and Cleveland Sellers was a protégé and a product of Stokely Carmichael. I'm not sure we understood all of that in the early stages. We got reports about it, and I think Cleveland Sellers emerged as far as I was concerned just days prior to the real confrontation down at State College.

**CBG:** Is this a matter you think perhaps SLED or SLED and the FBI were collectively monitoring and perhaps just hadn't percolated up to the governor?

**REM:** Maybe it hadn't, and maybe it had, but not to where it was a real thing that you watched daily. Now, the one good thing was the FBI and SLED had unusually good relationships and thus kept us fully informed of all of the people that came out of SNCC and out of these other groups that were trouble. You know, they would stir up trouble, and we would try to keep your eye on them and keep a watch on them, but I don't recall Cleveland Sellers, as far as I was concerned, recognizing him as somebody playing a significant role until then.

**CBG:** The FBI's involvement would have been that SNCC and SNCC-related operations would have really been a national base sort of thing, right?

**REM:** Yes.

**CBG:** So that they would be the leading edge to coordinate with.

**REM:** They kept up with all of them and kept a pretty good watch on the leaders in that whole movement and would notify you when they were moving in so that you could watch the activities and see what was going on.

**CBG:** There wasn't any real feeling, though, that even with the presence of Sellers and the presence of an organization that Orangeburg might really explode or turn into something extraordinary.

**REM:** I don't think so. Really, as I say, we knew Orangeburg had problems, and we knew the community and the school had problems, but I don't think any of us expected anything like that for several reasons. One is we thought we were making so much progress. We thought we'd come a long way, and we thought we were doing things, and we were dealing with the problems that we understood and the problems on the campus.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** You know, we were moving to upgrade the faculty. We moved to provide more money to allow the faculty to recruit better and to bring in people.

**CBG:** That's an interesting observation. A lot of times it appears that people think of the movement of the state to do things like upgrade the faculty or develop the institution were after the events in February of 1968.

**REM:** No, that had started back prior to that. We were aware and had been made aware, and the big problem that we had was keeping the events of 1968 from having an adverse effect on our efforts.

**CBG:** Adverse effect, yes.

**REM:** We really were concerned that it might have an adverse effect because you recall there was a strong movement to close the school. That was one of the first things that we had to deal with was to close the school and there was a strong feeling in Orangeburg that it ought to be closed and it ought to be moved.

**CBG:** And this was both in Orangeburg and in the legislature.

**REM:** And beyond that, yes.

***END OF SIDE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO***

**CBG:** This is Tape 28, Side 2, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is August 23, 1983. Governor, with things rocking along then, positive and active efforts being made to upgrade State College

and to bridge communication gaps between the city and the college, where does a bowling alley and Monday, February 5, 1968, come in? Was that an unexplained combination of events?

**REM:** My recollection is that the first report I got about a bowling alley problem, about anything unusual or anything that we should have been awfully concerned about in Orangeburg was that night after the incident at the bowling alley when I got a report from Chief Strom that there had been an incident at the bowling alley in Orangeburg and that it had erupted into a confrontation, a head-knocking session in which everybody got roughed up pretty good, including some law enforcement officers and some students, and that that had really set off a problem in Orangeburg. The students going back to the campus had pretty well knocked out all of the windows and things like that along the way. Orangeburg was really an exciting place, and he was very concerned about it. [These events occurred on the evening of Tuesday, February 6, 1968].

**CBG:** Did they make it aware--and by 'they' I mean Chief Strom and folks of that character--that bowling and the bowling alley had been a problem over a long time?

**REM:** I had no recollection, and I've made inquiry to determine whether I did know something about a bowling alley down there or not. I think everybody says, "No, it hadn't gotten up to us." We discovered later that it had been a thorn in the side. It was right there near the campus, and some of the college students had tried to bowl, and the fellow wouldn't let them in, and that had continued for some period--I don't know how long--and then this organized move on Monday evening was to go down there and really go in force to see about bowling and using the bowling alley. We got into it only, I understand, when the word in Orangeburg was it was going to be an organized group and they needed help.

So they rushed in some help down there, and that's when Chief Strom reports that he thought he had pretty well talked them into a peaceful solution and settlement of it, being sort of creative as he was, that the best thing to do was for two or three of them to go in, get arrested, and test the law. He was vaguely familiar with the public accommodations section of the act and wasn't sure whether that applied or not, but that was the normal way of handling things on his part, was to go ahead and get arrested. "Let's get it in the courts and get out of the street, and let's don't have a confrontation."

**CBG:** On that first day was this the extent of meetings and discussions in which you were able to engage?

**REM:** We had those, and recognizing that things had gotten real, real bad that evening as a result of the fight that took place out at the bowling alley, we knew things were at a fever pitch. Then the reports began to come in about what was going to happen in Orangeburg. Demonstrations and marches downtown were

planned, and the word we got was Orangeburg, the city, the business district was sort of an armed arsenal and that everybody was bolting themselves in the stores and ready for almost anything that might happen. The word was--and in my mind there was little doubt, knowing something about Orangeburg and the situation that existed that it could end up in just a terrible situation. So we had to begin to talk about what we were going to do to keep the business community and the students from just getting into a real conflict because we knew with them bolting in--and the word I got was that there wasn't a piece of ammunition left anywhere in that whole area. It had all been bought up, and the merchants were all going to protect their property with shotguns. So we had to come up with a way of keeping the students from going down Main Street.

My concern was that just like the bowling alley, even though Dr. [Oscar] Butler, who had then gotten on the scene--and I really didn't know Oscar Butler at that time--and was a leader, and people like that would talk about peaceful demonstrations, all it would take is one reckless rock throwing and one broken window and, in my judgment, all hell would bust loose in Orangeburg. So the more we got into it, the more serious we saw it down there, and the more aggravating the situation became, and the worse reports we got. I mean every report was worse than the one before.

We determined later that we had to take some very positive actions. One was to try to take advantage of the public accommodations act by getting the [S.C.] attorney general to--I didn't know until later that he had told them to open the bowling alley, that they couldn't keep it closed, and I'd gotten him to get the attorney general of the United States and see if he couldn't get some immediate action from them by getting them to start a suit here in the federal court under the public accommodations act.

**CBG:** The idea of closing the bowling alley would be to remove the object of a march. Would that be it?

**REM:** Well, our feeling on their part was that if the federal government had come in, the bowling alley would have had to have been opened up under the public accommodations act to everybody. There had been efforts, we understand, to get an agreement to where at least the college bowling team could have a night set aside for them to bowl and practice and things like that. So none of that had been able to be worked out, and our feeling was that if the federal government got involved, that the bowling alley would have to be opened up to be used by anybody or closed, one or the other. The fellow would have to go out of business or open it up. So if they moved in, they could move in under the public accommodations act and require him to keep it open to everybody.

**CBG:** And that would then defuse the situation.

**REM:** And that would have defused the situation. In the meantime, we couldn't get an agreement to open it up, and we couldn't get an agreement for him to let them have a night. All of this took place very quickly and hurriedly in discussions mostly with Chief Strom and others down there and me on the telephone.

**CBG:** This would be for the owner to let . . .

**REM:** The owner; and I never had any conversations with him, but we were trying, through the people there, to get something worked out, and when we couldn't, the federal government then was asked to come in. They agreed to do it and understood the problem, recognized it and agreed to file a suit immediately. We felt the filing of the suit by the federal government would show some real action and that the students would have confidence in the Justice Department making a move and that that would maybe calm them down to go on back and let that matter be resolved in the court. We kept trying to get the thing served. We were telling everybody that they were going to do it. They committed to do it, and it dragged on from day to day and kept getting worse instead of better.

**CBG:** How did that dragging occur? Do you know?

**REM:** I don't know, frankly, because I can remember sitting in the mansion almost losing my patience and having [Daniel] Dan McLeod get them on the phone right then and there and saying "Please get the thing served this afternoon." We wanted the papers served. We even had the people--we had alerted the marshal's office and all, who was always involved with us, we had alerted them to be prepared to have those papers served the moment they got them. We didn't care whether it was five o'clock in the morning or ten o'clock at night. We wanted them served so the word would be out and everybody would know about it. Why the delay I don't know until this day. We kept getting, "They're on their way, they're on their way. They're going to be done, going to be done," and I recall that day it got so bad and all down there and had us all very concerned and about keeping control that that was when we had just an aggressive plea to the Justice Department to get those papers served that day.

I had called down and, in fact, sort of summoned the mayor and the city council to meet with me in my office the next morning at ten o'clock, and I wanted to get them all up there in the office to see if I couldn't get some kind of action out of city council, either to close the bowling alley or to do something. On my own initiative, when I discovered from reports that the bowling alley was still open--some students went up and there were whites in there bowling with the doors locked--that's when I ordered the bowling alley closed on my own initiative until we could get this thing worked out, under my emergency power.

**CBG:** Would it have taken, what, a telephone call to the federal office building here to get the papers?

**REM:** They were fixing the papers in Washington. They wanted them to prepare them, as I understand it, and send them down here. They wanted to do them up there and get them down here, and, of course, all we wanted was to get them served, and we kept urging them to get it done, get them down here, get it served because the officers here were ready and prepared to do it. At that time, you know, they had those special divisions in the Justice Department that had grown up to do all of this.

**CBG:** Have you speculated, I mean, other than just not knowing, that maybe it was just an internal foul-up.

**REM:** I think it was an internal foul-up.

**CBG:** Nobody was communicating.

**REM:** I think they were communicating, but I think it was just . . .

**CBG:** System was overloaded.

**REM:** . . . just that the system didn't work that way. I'm not sure they recognized either the fever pitch this thing had gotten to, the explosiveness of it, and that's why that day we were almost begging them to get the thing done and get it on down here.

**CBG:** But then our attorney general of our state reopened . . .

**REM:** That's an understanding that I have that I have no personal knowledge of. I did not know that at the time.

**CBG:** And then subsequent to that it was possible to see whites in the bowling alley bowling.

**REM:** That was the information that came to me, and that's when I ordered Lieutenant [Leon] Gasque, who was the assistant chief, to close it and to close it on my authority and that's when he closed the bowling alley, and that's when we made our big plea to the Justice department and when I had arranged for the mayor and the city council to meet with me on the next morning--whatever those dates are--in my office, and then the episode took place on the preceding night.

During all of this, you know, there were just all kinds of information and reports coming in about problems. We'd gotten reports about burning the campus and destroying it, things like that. We had to make decisions on things as they developed, and our decision was we'd risk that, that no way would we let the officers, guard, or highway patrol, go on the campus to put out a fire or do anything because we were going to take that risk. We didn't announce it. That was pretty well settled; that we were going to protect property around the campus was the decision that was made just generally. We even went so far as to divert traffic on a federal highway. It'd gotten so bad with rock throwing and brickbats coming off the campus, tourists going by, until we rerouted the traffic to move all of that away from the campus and pull the guard and everybody back so that everybody was back across the streets surrounding the campus, keep anybody from being on it.

**CBG:** So the sequence of events really is to slow down the anger by getting the bowling alley open to everybody, and then, when that doesn't work, to fall back to the next best line of defense and that is to contain the angry students on the campus because if they go out into the town, property or students or citizens . . .

**REM:** We were convinced we would have a real bloody confrontation if they'd gone out into the town, particularly down in the business section of town, and thrown any rocks and bricks and knocked out some windows and storefronts and things like that. We knew the community was fairly well armed around that campus.

**CBG:** So the old riddle that every political science student gets of protecting property rather than persons really is not quite that easily sorted out in this situation.

**REM:** It's pretty difficult to do it.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** I think all of the discussions centered around, to a large extent, protecting the students.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** That was one of our objectives, was to protect them by having a curfew, and issuing the order that they stay on the campus we felt was the best way we could control that situation at that time until we could do something to ease the tension and ease the pressure and get things worked out. So we immediately started

trying to resolve the bowling alley problem. We couldn't resolve it locally. Then we tried to get the federal government to enter in. We got nothing but, "Yes, we'll do it," and "We're going to do it," but unfortunately they didn't do it as expeditiously as we thought they should. Then it just kept heating up and heating up with the rock throwing from the campus, with the old gasoline homemade fire bombs being thrown out around the area, with the cars being hit and having to divert traffic, with what came to me as very firm concerns that there was firing from the campus at the officers, and all of that going on. So it was a very, very delicate thing, and then that afternoon came the reports that the students had broken into the National Guard armory. The reports were, naturally, that the rifles there didn't have firing pins, but they'd gotten some ammunition that was stored in there. So all of that added to the tension.

**CBG:** Plus, too, wasn't there the suggestion that in the armory were the .22s that the rifle team uses.

**REM:** That's right, .22s were in there, which were very real, and that live ammunition was there. So all of that, and most of the firing from the campus where they would see a bullet in the old Livingstone warehouse or something like what was normally rifle fire.

**CBG:** Were any weapons ever found and examined to see if they had been fired?

**REM:** To my knowledge, I don't think so. I never saw any, and to get beyond that, two very definite things came to me. One was from the officers there, including people not involved, like Ellis MacDougall, who was head of the Department of Corrections, who was there. He confirmed that there was rifle fire from the campus and the FBI people who were there, the local guys from here, who confirmed there was rifle fire from the campus and who later in the investigation plucked the bullets out of places where they knew the fire had come and gone in that direction. So we had all of that.

**CBG:** Were you in communication with President Nance or with student leaders to try to persuade them to stay on the campus during this time?

**REM:** We were in communication with just about everybody. We were talking to just about everybody who felt they could help. We had everybody that we thought could contribute something down there. We encouraged them all, like John Cauthen and all who had developed a good relationship by reason of his biracial committee activities here. John Cauthen was involved. Reverend [I. DeQuincey] Newman and those were involved, and I was helping them arrange their meetings at the church to try to calm things down. They were getting the former football coach involved down there to try to help them get the students under

control, all of that. So all of that was going on, and I was personally knowledgeable, talking to them all, discussing it back and forth, trying to figure a way to defuse it. We felt if we could ever get it defused that then we could handle it.

**CBG:** You could turn around and sort out the pieces and give everybody basically what they . . .

**REM:** Later . . .

**CBG:** . . . had intended to do. Were people circulating among the students in the dormitories to try to keep them in dormitories?

**REM:** There was some of that, and there were a lot of meetings, group meetings and student meetings. There were a lot of meetings around the campus and the churches and all by the leadership because I recall we kept encouraging them, the opposition, I mean, the ones trying to stir it up were having meetings, and we were always saying to them, "Look, don't test us on the curfew now, because we've applied that to everybody, including white weddings and assemblies of every kind, church services and all. So don't test us. Get back, get back in your homes; get back on the campus by that time."

**CBG:** Did you get a positive comeback, or were students so angry that the responses were . . .

**REM:** Our feeling is, and really it was always, that it was only a small percentage of the students who were involved in trying to blow this into a confrontation, open hostilities. The word we got was most of the students were in their dormitories, most of them were well behaved, most of them were staying away from it, most of them didn't want to be a part of it and that this was relatively a small group as evidenced by the night of the incident. You know, when you think about it, there were hundreds of kids on that campus, and there was just a small, small group and many of them apparently were non-students. Several that were shot were non-students, and one of those killed was a non-student and wasn't supposed to be there. They were supposed to be in their homes or wherever they belonged, not on that campus.

**CBG:** Was there an I.D. check in terms of students getting off and on the campus during the curfew?

**REM:** I'm not sure.

**CBG:** There's really no way to seal it.

**REM:** There's no way to do it. I think as much as they could they tried to get everybody. The main I.D. check was at curfew time and after. Nobody was supposed to go on and off that campus who wasn't a student, but obviously there's no way you could avoid that.

**CBG:** Were things planned for the students after the curfew hour on the campus? They could move around campus, couldn't they?

**REM:** I really don't remember. Yes, they had freedom of movement on the campus, and I don't really recall whether there were.

**CBG:** Yes. Did you have any inkling that things were as explosive as they turned out to be the day of the incident?

**REM:** I think we thought we were just about to get the thing under control, and we were bringing it under control, and that night was when I began to get phone calls telling me about Cleveland's movements on the campus, that he had just left Jack Bass. I received a phone call from Nat Abraham warning me of bad trouble brewing. He was obviously nervous and excited but didn't have any specific information. I called Jack Bass since I had heard he'd been with Cleveland, and told him, "Jack, if you know something, if you can help us, the way you can help us is by calming it. You can tell Cleveland Sellers the worst thing we can have is to have some kind of a confrontation or get this thing blown up. We've about got it under control." We thought we about had it. We thought we had it calming down. The campus was quieting down. The community was quieting. We had Justice saying, "Yes we'll serve." The bowling alley was closed, and I had the city council coming up to my office the next morning in which I fully intended to just lay it on the line. We were going to have one of those lay-on-the-line sessions.

**CBG:** Yes, which conceivably by the weekend or in a reasonable amount of time . . .

**REM:** We definitely thought so, and I still think that had Cleveland Sellers not precipitated a confrontation, not forced a confrontation, that the thing would have calmed down, and we would have resolved it. That's obvious now. Hindsight points back to what we thought all along.

**CBG:** So the idea that evening of big trouble could really have meant most anything, couldn't it?

**REM:** Oh, yes. Dr. Butler, Oscar Butler, and all of those had sort of become part of, “Let's keep this thing under control, let's don't let it blow out of proportion.” As we were saying, the last thing we wanted for them and for us, for everybody, was what happened. My feeling was that was the worst thing that could happen for them, as far as the movement was concerned or improving the school or getting community support or resolving some of those age-old community relations problems, things like that. We had people like Mr. Rut [Rutledge] Osborne, who was just aggressively trying to get the community leaders and college leaders together and all of those that had long been trying to improve relations down there.

**CBG:** Do you think Mr. Bass didn't explain himself because of maybe being a journalist?

**REM:** I think he felt his journalistic obligations were paramount to any thing else, and I still believe Jack Bass knew things we didn't know and we should have known, and, had we known, I might have taken a risk and precipitated the worse by picking Cleveland Sellers up. I probably would have taken a risk of picking him up had I had enough to indicate that he was going to really set off a confrontation.

**CBG:** You really couldn't move on that unless there was some cause.

**REM:** It was very delicate, and we knew that the worse thing we could do is to do something like that. That could set it off and had I done that or had we done that, in hindsight, that would have been the thing that started it. It would have been, “If you hadn't done that, you wouldn't have had this.” Then the old argument about the house which I had never seen. Why send a fire truck in there? Why not let it burn? Well, why not let all those old houses along the campus burn--and those were nice old homes among them. My understanding was that this house belonged to some old lady, some widow lady.

**CBG:** So it wasn't on the campus, it wasn't State College property.

**REM:** No, it was not. It was adjoining the campus but not part of the campus property and I think it had been set on fire a couple of times. They'd thrown fire bombs over to it or some other house and set fire, and this time the word I had was they were tearing the banisters and building a fire, trying to really get it going good. The firemen had been up there once or twice to put out fires on the periphery of the campus and had run into trouble and claimed they'd been shot at and all of this sort of stuff and just weren't going back anymore without protection. All I knew was Pete Strom calling me saying, “We've got a problem and I've had to send a highway patrol unit with the fire truck to put out a fire at a house that they'd set on fire next to the campus. I'd been getting reports about firebombs and things like that, and we were saying we made a

decision not to go on the campus, not to go in the dormitories and try to pull out the bad guys or something like that. We just said let's leave that alone.

**CBG:** That really would have precipitated a battle.

**REM:** Well, that would have started all the ninety plus percent students on the campus that were . . .

**CBG:** The heavy-handed stuff.

**REM:** Not involved in it, yes.

**CBG:** Yes. It would have been totally dismal.

**REM:** But the reports we got is that the campus was fairly quiet except for those areas where they were throwing things out of the dormitory or running out and throwing firebombs. Then we had moved the officers back across the street. We were trying to avoid any sort of accidental confrontation.

**CBG:** How did you interpret the events of the incident, or maybe a better question is how were those events interpreted to you as to just what happened when the students were killed?

**REM:** Well, I think Pete Strom was on the phone giving me a report, and said, "I've got to go, all hell's busted loose. I'll call you right back." I didn't know what had happened. He was right there on the scene, and it seemed like hours. It wasn't long, but it seemed like hours before he called me back to tell me what had happened, that one patrolman, as I understood it, was seriously hurt, wounded. They thought he had been shot, and that's the report I got, and that several of the students and people were wounded, and they were all at the hospital. Some of them they thought were dead, and they were trying to get a count, and he gave me a report as far as he could.

Well, I don't know what time it was, but I remember it was late, later on in the evening before I got the word what really happened. Then the next morning was when we tried to figure what to do now by summoning all the leaders in, getting all the black leaders in and everybody else. What do we do now? How do we pick this thing up and really keep it from just spreading all over South Carolina?

**CBG:** How long did it take to get a plan?

**REM:** Well, we had to move pretty quickly. We had to move rapidly, and we just had not been able to get moving in Orangeburg. That's where we immediately sent Reverend Newman and [Robert S.] Bob Davis along with [Robert] Bob Stoddard, mayor of Spartanburg, to pull together a biracial group under the leadership of a couple of ministers and Bob Clark, who was the big automobile dealer down there and had been the high school coach, and the former coach at State College, and getting all that group that were willing to meet.

***END OF TAPE***