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Carolyn Yellin- This is June 20th we are interviewing councilmen Wyatt Chandler at the Memphis search for meaning committee offices at 3677 Southern. Present for the interview are Mrs. Joan Beifuss and Mrs. Carolyn Yellin. We will just go right ahead and we tested and we assumed we are picking up. Councilmen Wyatt, Mr. councilman Chandler, do many call you by your last name?

Wyatt Chandler- Well a lot call me by my first name because of course it was my mother's last name.

Joan Beifuss- I was wondering what that was.

Carolyn Yellin- Well that already gets us started in the direction we would like to go is we would like to find out a little bit about your background and so forth and I know that yours is particularly interesting and has a lot to do with Memphis' background too and I wish you would just tell us a little bit about it.

Wyatt Chandler- Well my own background I was born of course in Memphis and I have lived in Memphis all my life. I went to public school here and then I went to Castlelights Military academy for 3 years and then went to UT for two years before the Korean war, and when the Korean war came along I volunteered and served for 3 years in the marine air corps. After the war I came back and I was married by then and had one child so when I had Memphis state and I got a BS degree and then I went back up to UT to law school. Graduated from law school there and came back and went into the practice of law. I have 4 children, I was married in 1950 to Beatrice Hatcher from Fayetteville Tennessee. I have served in two constitutional conventions for the state of Tennessee in 59 and 65 conventions and now I am on the democratic executive committee although I resigned from it in order to run for this particular office which I felt to be non-partisan and had no plans to ever return tot hat committee. I guess that is mostly it I don't know, my children are 16, 14, 13, and 9. And they all go to public schools in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- Which public school did you go to here.

Wyatt Chandler- I went to Bellevue before I went to Castle Heights in the 10th grade and went 3 years up there to high school in (muffled) Tennessee.

Joan Beifuss- How long had your family been in Memphis?

Wyatt Chandler- Well my father moved to Memphis back as a child back in the late 1890's I am not exactly sure what year, he was a small boy and he had of course always lived here and his family was from Jackson and his mother was an army brat born in the army hospital in Little Rock and the father was a colonel and chief surgeon at West Point for many years and served with (muffled) in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines and he yellow fever situation and they met I think in Albany Georgia when he was on his way overseas in World War 1. He started writing her I guess she was one of these USO type folks and she gave him some

sandwiches and he thought this is a doll and started writing her and of course came back..

Joan Beifuss- Was your father a lawyer?

Wyatt Chandler- He was a lawyer and of course served in Congress for 6 years and served as mayor for 6 years and was asked to serve again when mayor Tobey died before mayor Orgill took office, I think they asked him for 100 days. He was also the chief council in the Baker vs. Carr lawsuit which was a one man one vote lawsuit for the Supreme Court of the United States.

Carolyn Yellin- That was the bringing about the reapportionment?

Wyatt Chandler- That was reapportionment lawsuit which he was (muffled) and I think he served in the state senate in 1921 or 23 when he came back from the war and at that time he started making efforts to at least reapportion one house.

Carolyn Yellin- What was his feeling of why this was needed why was he such a strong...

Wyatt Chandler- Well primarily he was interested in the fact that Memphis had long been denied any sort of equality on the distribution of state taxes and it wasn't you know some ephidrial thing as far as he was concerned it was simply a matter that as you know many of the state taxes are divided on equally to the states, 50% equally to the counties regardless of their size or population and 25% say on highway mileage and highway tax and 25% on population. Well he just felt this was ridiculous that the larger cities had just gotten to the point or just be squeezed out by the rural areas.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you think he had any notion of the impact this would have just not in Tennessee but nationwide when he started in on this?

Wyatt Chandler- Well I think so he had, he knew it would definitely change the situation. He for many years tried desperately to have the state handle the situation on its own. And to at least reinforce in one house and maybe at least a balance, a balance between the rural and urban areas which he felt would solve most of the problems and they refused to do it and it finally got to the point where he had to do something and he was the last man to walk to the united states government to tell us what to do down here but he realized either that was going to happen or they would never do it on their own.

Carolyn Yellin- OF course that situation exists in so many places like Cook County Illinois and any place where there is a)(muffled) epicenter.

Wyatt Chandler- Tat's right where the original plan was to have a balance and have a fair distribution of the income, not an equal distribution I don't think we should get back every dime because we are going to have to support some of the poor counties, but certainly some ought to give back some equitable use.

Carolyn Yellin- It is interesting to me because this is really anticipating what seemed to be our biggest problems now in the 1960's the urban problems and evidently you grew up with an awareness of this or certainly your father seemed to approach it from an urban point of view right from the beginning.

Wyatt Chandler- That's right, even though he was from rural background and everything he always felt that the city needed help and the only help they were getting they were not getting it from the state so they had to go elsewhere.

Joan Beifuss- What was it like when you were younger growing up with your father in politics? Do you have any brother or sister?

Wyatt Chandler- I have one sister, who is married to a doctor out in Collierville. It was interesting, of course there were comings and goings and political leaders of the day and we did go around on many occasions as children to the different speeches.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you actually ever campaign for your father?

Wyatt Chandler- Never like they do now, they wear a vote for daddy sign across their chest and no he was really not into that type of thing because there really wasn't that much campaigning to be done. I think the most, I think some change in the scene here is that when I was a child there was usually one ticket and that was it. They would always have some perennial runners who would just run but primarily it was a Crump ticket and that was it.

Carolyn Yellin- And even in the primary there were a few if any primary contests too.

Wyatt Chandler- That's right it was all fairly (muffled) situation.

Carolyn Yellin- It was not one ticket it was really just...

Wyatt Chandler- That's right well there were no real primaries the republican party was almost nonexistent. It had a very skeletal make up and it really wasn't the thing to be a republican.

Joan Beifuss- That was I was going to ask, did the mayor run under a party label at that time?

Wyatt Chandler- No there were really no party labels, however often times they would be, the mayor would actively support democratic candidates. Everybody was a democrat and there was no as I say, there was no partisan politics everybody was a democrat.

Carolyn Yellin- Right. It reminds me of a wonderful story I think it came from Florida. Someone who wrote trying to start a republican party down there and wrote a county man saying would you please send us the name of all registered democrats and they got he answer back there ain't no registered republicans down here and if there was they would be registered democrats.

Wyatt Chandler- That's right. That is (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- I was going to say when did that change come here, when did the republican party become...

Wyatt Chandler- Well of course a lot of theories I have been to a lot of republican rallies and went to a lot where there was different praise was given out to various republican leaders like James (muffled) or inserting new blood into the party. In my opinion the change came about because the democrats locally turned to (muffled) and Gore and to other who were liberal and the old yellow domed conservative democrat had come up with Davis and others were forced to after losing for example, Davis would lose his race to (muffled) they would simply turn to the republican candidate and vote for him and as a result I think the democrats changed the republicans.

Joan Beifuss- One thing I never really understood...

Wyatt Chandler- Plus they were conservatives and not democrats.

Joan Beifuss- About Mr. Crump would you consider him progressive democrat, I mean he seems to be progressive in some ways and yet in other ways...

Wyatt Chandler- I would not call him a progressive democrat. I would call him a man who I believe understood the people of this community of this community entirely. He was from Holly Springs Mississippi boy who came up here and the city was made up during his tenure. Basically North Mississippi, eastern Arkansas and Western Tennessee folks. There was very little confusion of northern people very actively progressive sort of people. And he kept the city moving at a pace that these people wanted to move at. He led them but he didn't try to I don't believe that he had grandiose ideas of great progress he would not have tried to probably put him through because he mainly followed the feelings of the people here and I think that is out of that is what really grew his dominant position in the community.

Carolyn Yellin- Now, what were your father's relationship, what was your father's relationship with Crump and did it change over the years?

Wyatt Chandler- Well his relationship I think he was, when he started into politics like I said as he came back from the war he had been of course a captain and back in those days you know everybody from here went together and he was always Captain Chandler to most folks here. He was of course for him and he worked for him almost all the way through. When he was mayor they did have, well when he was in congress I guess they had several falling outs as you would call it and he pretty well stuck to his guns. A lot of people think that he got pretty popular and for that reason Crump sort of urged him we will say to return to Memphis. He was voted I think as one of the top 10 congressmen in congress after the road to bankruptcy. So we got him back here and of course he began to (muffled) and many occasions there was 4 to 1 votes down there with daddy voting against the other 4. They were pretty well totally controlled by Crump. And finally he resigned, he didn't want to

lose or I guess he finally realized he was going to be called upon to do things he didn't want to and wouldn't do and he would be outvoted and he simply resigned and got out. He never came out and openly fought them. I think that he was different from Crump the type of man he was at all. Both of them were men in my opinion of great integrity but I think Crump would have done a little more in the political way to get his way than daddy was a convincer or an arguer he was not a power play man. He was never a man in my opinion forcing it upon the,

Carolyn Yellin- Did you, when he was in Congress were you in Washington at that time?

Wyatt Chandler- No we always lived here as a matter of fact when he was in Congress for 6 years I went to Washington one time and that was to see a football game when I was 10. And that was the extent of it. I have gone many times since then but when he was in Congress we always lived here and we always lived in the same household and my mother, my sister and I.

Joan Beifuss- Where did you live.

Wyatt Chandler- I grew up at 1530 Peabody which is I don't know if you know where it is.

Joan Beifuss- Sure.

Wyatt Chandler- And I have never lived anywhere else except that neighborhood except when I was in the army and the marine corps and in the school (muffled) down there close to Peabody and McLean.

Joan Beifuss- The Crump house is right down there isn't it?

Wyatt Chandler- It is down Peabody just a short way.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled).

Wyatt Chandler- Right.

Carolyn Yellin- How did you get, you yourself when did you start getting involved in politics when and why?

Wyatt Chandler- Well I have worked, well I guess in college I worked a little bit, oh I was (muffled) because I grew up in it so much it was a natural thing to do but what happened mainly the first time that I ran, I backed other people of course and did the usual running around and talking and so forth,. I actually got into the first time when daddy had been to the 1953 constitutional convention which was a very important convention. The one in 59 was frankly almost a farce. I think primarily put on the ballot much as this one is to postpone the possibility of a real (muffled) on our income tax legislation by the rural people on the legislature. The only three things that were there was whether you were going to extend the Chair's term the trustee's term or allow 18 year olds to vote and we had to have 7 delegates, or 8.

And it was going to be the top elected group and daddy didn't want to run again and they asked me to run.

Joan Beifuss- That was in 59?

Wyatt Chandler- That was in 59. And lasted I think 10 days, the extent of the trustees term from 2 years to 4 years and did not allow the 18 year olds to vote and did not extended the chair to 4 years. They wanted two 4 year terms rather than 3 two terms.

Carolyn Yellin- We were speaking just a moment ago in fact going over some of the councilmen who we have already talked with. Who was a native Memphian and who is not on the council and actually there aren't too many native Memphians are there?

Wyatt Chandler- I don't really know where all of them are from to tell you the truth I really don't.

Carolyn Yellin- Well this was what, many grew up here but as far...

Wyatt Chandler- I think Blanchard grew up here now whether he was born here now I don't know. Pryor I think..

Carolyn Yellin- Yes prior was. But I was thinking that your roots are so deep in the community and with your father begin so involved and your having grown up with this that you may have more of a view of the continuing picture in Memphis than some of the others who were close to these events.

Wyatt Chandler- I don't know about that but I just, I think I feel this way about it. (muffled) So I do know how people my age and more or less across the board feel about it. As a lawyer much like many others I have contact with a great diverse group. It is hard to present to 7 or 8 labor unions and I represent their side of things one day and I also represent Baptist Hospital and (muffled). Of course day to day (muffled). It is a day to day (muffled) all my life. It is as much as I feel about things as my day to day (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- Now did you support the new charter the new government?

Wyatt Chandler- No.

Carolyn Yellin- You were...

Wyatt Chandler- I was really (muffled). Well the only thing I did against it I did at my father's request he was (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- and he was still living at the time?

Wyatt Chandler- He was still living at the time. And he was not actively one way or the other but he was not for it for a lot of reasons. But I think that after the type of people that were elected last time they were elected had he known that this group

would have been elected he probably would have been for it but he was very much afraid that this type of government when you have a part time group working part time, if the other group that had run more against us more or less had been elected things would have been chaotic and I really believe that if (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Who was your opponent then in the final election.

Wyatt Chandler- oh (muffled). And of course Edmund and I had to run against Paul (muffled) but this other group in my opinion (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- You said earlier if I heard you that you wouldn't return to the democratic committee, was that the committee you met?

Wyatt Chandler- I am just not going to have anything to do with the democratic party in the foreseeable future.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you think you might change to the republican party?

Wyatt Chandler- That is a possibility but I haven't really decided.

Carolyn Yellin- Wasn't it Curtis...

Wyatt Chandler- Very personal switch and I hate to switch parties because it looks like you are just looking for the best side of the thing.

Joan Beifuss- Well actually you could function pretty well here without being aligned can't you.

Wyatt Chandler- Well I have been a republican in voting you see, I voted for the republicans even though I was on the (muffled) which I am really kind of ashamed of but everybody in town knew I was doing it, I mean ...

Joan Beifuss- (Muffled) do you think they are going to make any inroads in Memphis?

Wyatt Chandler- I think the weather storm was coming on strong and finally my mother in law from Fayetteville they were aligned democrats and then they became republicans and they used to vote conservative and now they are voting strong (muffled) in Fayetteville Tennessee that is where they are from.

Carolyn Yellin- One of these things this brings up is the question of polarization which is the word that everybody uses now about people are going more and more in one direction, very much in one direction or very much in the other. And I wonder if you feel that this is happening in the city?

Wyatt Chandler- I feel that this has been happening and I think that they are some things that are occurring lately to slow it down and again this recall (muffled) in my opinion is perhaps destined to polarize it again. The strike polarized the city to the point where had real trouble broken out it would have been white versus black and it would have been kill or be killed and really had the thing gotten out of hand, I

mean it was handled magnificently by the police and apparently the culprits were few and far between. But had the thing gotten out of hand I think there would have been several killings of people just helter skelter rather than just the damage to the property and I think it was completely a racial situation, brutal.

Carolyn Yellin- Then did you feel at the beginning that it was, that it had this potential, were you aware of this potential or as you think back now.

Wyatt Chandler- Well from the very beginning, the beginning of the matter as far as we were concerned of course we just simply the reading of the paper of the Champa, Lobe conversation. At that time to me it was a labor dispute between the labor union and the city. The negroes injected themselves into it and made it a racial issue, I realized very quickly that it had a real potential for trouble.

Carolyn Yellin- Did it occur to you at the beginning that this particular union, or the particular group of workers that they were working with were almost totally negro?

Wyatt Chandler- Well I knew that I was well aware that they were negro but they were also just employees.

Carolyn Yellin- But you still considered it mainly union?

Wyatt Chandler- Well I considered it totally union, the fact that they were negroes had nothing to do with the fact that they were trying to organize city employees. There could have been whites in there and it wouldn't have made one bit of difference and it hasn't made any difference since. This type of, first of all, this type of action led me to believe and I still believe that this is not the type of union to represent anybody much less the negroes. I thought they were trying to take advantage of them and I still do.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you think that the grievance procedures and so forth that had been set up were sufficient.

Wyatt Chandler- No I think they probably needed a better grievance situation, and they may well have needed an increase in pay and they may well have needed other changes which I think the city council would have been glad to give them without any union activity what so ever. We were not presented with this matter and if the matter had been presented by we will just say Jones would come to Davis as the head of the public works commission and said look man we got trouble down here thee people don't have a grievance procedure they can get along with, there are discriminatory practices, they are bringing in guys off the street and putting them in charge of negro laborers that have been there 20 years and could handle it this type of thing had been looked into, and I believe taken care of. But they didn't and the whole thing was we have been treated this way for 70 years and therefore we feel that we had to do this. This leads me to believe that they were treated this way for 70 years and were certainly treated this way under Ingram. They would rationally they would have given us an opportunity therefore, I feel that this was an act that

was rational and the other direction it was a pre-determined effort by people to shake this government and especially Lobe.

Joan Beifuss- Did you see the hand of Mr. Ingram in that?

Wyatt Chandler- I saw his hand and interestingly enough I might add this in here I was of course for Lobe not (muffled) because I had my own race to run. My wife is first cousins of Billy.

Joan Beifuss- I am sorry what?

Wyatt Chandler- First cousin.

Carolyn Yellin- Of Ingram?

Wyatt Chandler- That's right. Her mother and James mother are sisters but I have never supported Ingram. I supported him originally he married and divorced with two children. He was practicing law and not doing real well wanting to be a city judge. He came in and asked me to help him, I was very active in the very young lawyers club, I was vice president or something like that. And we did help him and he was elected and he immediately began almost in my opinion, almost a psychotic attack on police. Which I talked to him several times about and since that time (muffled). I talked to him yesterday, I still talk to him and all but I just won't support him, I talked to him yesterday and asked him about this recall, and asked him if he had anything to do with it, he said no. I said well everybody in town thinks you did and if you don't I think you need to come out against it and strongly against it. He said he didn't give the recall or not (muffled). That's...

Carolyn Yellin- Do you feel now that the negro community is as unified as it was during the period of the strike. We, I would preface that by saying that almost everyone on all sides have spoken of the fact that there was unity in the negro community, and I maybe you don't agree with that.

Wyatt Chandler- I think there was unity in the negro community. I think that labor people whether we want to admit it or not are very religious. Their orientation is towards religion and when you have every preacher in the city backing anything I don't care whether it would be right or wrong I think you would tend to unify and I think that is what happened. The preachers did back this to the hilt almost unanimously, I think there were one or two who didn't and I think there was great unity.

Carolyn Yellin- Was that the first time that had happened here that you could remember that you had the negro ministers...

Wyatt Chandler- The first time the negro ministers had played in any real potent degree upon them as far as I could tell.

Carolyn Yellin- How about back around 1960, 61 when there were the sit-ins and...

Wyatt Chandler- I don't remember any real....I was here in 66 but I don't remember anything like this, it has never been anything like this in this city in my opinion,. Nothing close, they always had the virgin elements, they always had the inner squabbles like everybody else. Just like the republicans and democrats and this was the first time I saw a broadly unified effort even the most conservative negros in my opinion (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- Did this alarm you at the time or did you consider it more urgent that there be a settlement or did you, how did you think it affected this situation when you became aware of it.

Wyatt Chandler- Well I was always hopeful of a settlement, I was always hopeful that one could be worked out. The unity was good in the sense of (muffled) perhaps. The unity, what really, in my opinion what really changes things and turned it around as far as the council is concerned, you had the council up there with about 7 people who I think are rather liberal. Just kind of (muffled) liberal. (muffled). You had Pryor Donelson, Blanchard and perhaps Perel and these people were known to be (muffled) segregationists and they all (muffled). I think they looked now and they could not imagine working out some thing and I think that they would (muffled). But the day that Davis had his own meeting and invited the workers to come before us and come and speak. I was notified immediately the night before I had some meeting of some kind maybe the Christians and Jews conference or whatever it was, I was asked to be there just to sit in. I came and I sat in and of course the first thing that happened was he asked Worth to speak and he would not speak. They were told not to speak and I saw T.O. Jones (muffled). They brought in the entire crowd as you know, packed in and came running down the aisles and Ezekiel Bell started to (muffled) we don't need to worry about fire regulations in this building. We don't like what goes on here we will tear it down, we will tear down the seal and it has a cotton bale on it and that is the symbol of all our slavery days etc etc. That followed by another meeting that they said we will have what we want today or you won't leave this room. That took quite a talking to, to get out of the room really. Then this was followed by another tirade when they did speak again and he said I won't know exactly what he said but to the effect that we are the good guys we represent the thoughtful negros in this community, we want you to know that unless you go along with us now, they, this shadowy they, is going to burn your city down. I don't know if (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- I am going to interrupt you here in fact we have run out of tape.

(Tape End)