

VICTOR ATIYEH

August 25, 1993

Tape 56, Side 1

C.H.: This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer for the Oregon Historical Society is Clark Hansen. The date is August 25th, 1993, and this is Tape 56, Side 1.

So we're in your office now. We've moved from the conference room. And I see quite a vast array of photos and other things. Maybe you could describe some of them?

V.A.: You bet. Let me start with - we could start almost anywhere, but let me start with - do you see that busted paddle up there?

C.H.: Yes.

V.A.: It says "The Governor Atiyeh Perpetual Up the Creek without a Paddle Award."

I was going up the Rogue River, and this paddle - this is the paddle end of a canoe paddle, broken off, came drifting down. So I picked it up, and immediately I had an idea of creating that award. When I gave it, I've got different heads of departments of government. John Lobdell is the first of them. And if they do a little foul-up or something, he was the first, I gave the award. Created it and put his name on it. It soon got to be quite a distinction to get that.

C.H.: What kinds of things did they receive this honor for?

V.A.: I'll tell you, the tape must get ready for this, but this is real, really happened. John was before a Senate committee. He was Public Utility Commissioner. And the Senate was just berating him something awful, and it had to do with utility rates. And they were showing him a real bad time.

And they said, "Now, Governor Atiyeh ..."

"No, no," he says, "this goes with the process."

And they kept hounding him, and finally they began to give up, except one Senator kept going after him.

Now, because it dealt with the utility rates, the room was full: television cameras, radio, the printed media, they were all there. The room was crowded. John is really getting - it's finally getting to him. Finally he said, "Senator, this job is tough enough. I don't have to take that shit." And he says this, now, with a room full of people.

Well, John was the first one to get the award.

Jane Houston, she got the award - made the mistake of firing her assistant during a legislative session. Now, this assistant had been there a long time, had made a lot of friends among legislators. And the legislators started raising hell with me. And I said, "Hey, wait a minute, guys. This is my business, not your business. I'm going to run my shop the way I want to run it. It's not your business." So anyway, Jane got it. She got it.

Johns Williams was supposed to have lost me. He's the Superintendent of State Police. Incidentally, Jane Houston was at that time Department of Commerce. John was Superintendent of State Police, and he finally said he'd like to go out with me one day, spend a day with me, instead of Lon Holbrook. And I was going to be somewhere and then fly, and he was going to take the car and meet me. But anyway, he was supposed to have lost me that day. Well, we missed connections. You can see it got a little tough.

C.H.: He was supposed to have lost you?

V.A.: Well, yeah. He was not where I landed; he was somewhere else.

Darryl Rawls, I'm trying to remember what Darryl did. I can't recall. He was General Services.

And they gave me - you see, my name's on it. They said to me, "Governor, you screwed up more than once," so they gave me the paddle.

Fred Miller got that paddle. He got it because they were doing some construction work on the bridge between Salem and West Salem, and it came around Christmas time, and you know, cars are coming in and it's crowded and -. So he sent out the word to tell people not to come into downtown Salem.

I said, "Fred -" now, I'm a retailer - "these people have been waiting all year long for Christmas to come, and you're telling people not to come down?" He got the paddle.

Leo Hagstrom, he was nominated for that paddle by Fred Miller. Really a funny letter. Leo was getting a lot of static from a lot of places for some of the welfare reform. He was the head of the Department of Human Resources. He got that, and Tom Monterossi, God bless him, he's a wonderful guy, Executive Department, I think we gave that to him more from affection than anything else.

But anyway, it got to be quite an honor to get the paddle. And that's the story of that one.

I mentioned earlier, but there is the award I got from the capital press corps. I really treasure that. Thanking me for my accessibility. That's a pretty rare thing.

The astronaut awards, actually the larger one has an interesting story.

I go to Albany for their veterans' parade, and they've invited astronauts, and astronauts have spent a week down in Linn County and traveled to different schools. And it's good PR for them and excites the children, understandably. And then there's the parade, and after the parade and after the parade a ceremony at the courthouse and then lunch, which ends the whole affair.

During lunch, this Judy Resnick was sitting next to me, and they said, "We have an award for our astronauts." And she said, [whispering:] "Gosh, I hope it's beer."

Well, they gave her a clock or something. And I said, "Give me an address and I'll ..."

So we shipped down some Henry's Private Reserve, and it came back. It said no, they're not supposed to receive gifts. So she had printed this up, "With my very best wishes, thanks for the sample of one of Oregon's finest natural resources," but the "samples of one of Oregon's natural resources" was crossed out, and she wrote in there "trying." Well, that's why that's crossed out.

~~But~~ we were in a staff meeting one day, and Denny Miles came in and he said, "The shuttle just blew up." And Judy Resnick was on that shuttle. Neat young lady. You remember the teacher, but Judy Resnick was one of those who was in that shuttle.

Right below that is that is a picture of Jimmy Doolittle. That was my first Linn County parade. I was down there, and here's Jimmy Doolittle, General Doolittle. And I didn't have a camera, and there was some lady on the street, and I said, "Would you mind taking a picture of us?" And she did, and she sent that picture. So there's General Doolittle and myself.

The Boy Scout awards you can see. The jet I flew, both a 101 and F-4. I flew in it; I wasn't flying it. The one I had really trouble with was - I did okay in the 101, but the F-4, we were on maneuvers of some kind, and we were the aggressor. And I had on this G-suit, strapped into the G-suit. And they strap you into the seat, so you're part of the seat. You know, if something happens, you pull something and away you go. And I had the helmet on, and this oxygen mask. Everything's tight.

And he's going up and down and around - you know, the G-suit's filling, and my stomach's getting real woozy. I say to him, "You know, this is all the fun I can stand."

So we landed. And the media was there, of course; the Governor's going up on a jet. And one of the interviewers from television said, "You know, that's pretty good for a 16-year-old aircraft."

I said, "That's pretty good for a 60-year-old man."

C.H.: Right!

V.A.: The picture of above that, four Presidents: Reagan, Ford, Jimmy Carter and President Nixon. That's when Ford, Carter and Nixon went to Sadat's funeral representing President Reagan.

But I got that photograph, and then it took me a couple of years, and I got them all to autograph it. And there's a picture below that of President Reagan and myself in the oval office. They were taking pictures: "How do you want me to sign it?"

I said, "Sign it 'Ron.'" So there it is. "Ron."

C.H.: You addressed him as Mr. President?

V.A.: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, I wouldn't do anything other than that. Even Clinton, who I knew as a governor, I still address him that way.

I've flown in Air Force One, and there's the - well, I have more than one certificate, but that one was with President Ford. I've flown with President Reagan.

My good friend Mark Hatfield. Good friend.

C.H.: Is that in his office in Washington?

V.A.: That's in his office, yeah.

C.H.: The certificate over here of the Governor, I don't know if I mentioned it - right here, Oath of Office of Governor. You should see my first certificate. That's 1983, my second term. My first one, that's all done - it was not a very good looking piece

of paper, typed in there, and some not very good calligraphy, and I said to Norma Paulus at the time, "Norma, can't we get a better certificate than that for Governor?" And I think maybe she thought she might be one some day. Anyway, she produced this nice one.

I appointed myself a notary public because I wanted to get a nice looking certificate. But anyway, we got a good one for the second time around.

C.H.: And then there's one below that.

V.A.: That's from the Japan-America Society. As you know, I've taken a keen interest in that. Just retired from president. That's where this gavel -.

The watercolor of the old capital building was given to me.

C.H.: What is this citation up here?

V.A.: That is the Board of Trustees' Council of Advancement and Support of Education. I created - I think I may have mentioned that to you - you know, we have a trade delegation, and I've taken people overseas. And I said, "You know, there's a lot of things happening in Oregon in our ^{COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES} institutions. I'm going to have an education delegation. Get people to sign up, pack their suitcases, and we'll go around and visit the colleges and universities."

And no one had ever done that. People should know what's going on. Some really good stuff's going on in our colleges and universities. So we spent about three, four days doing that. And this they presented me, this is a national group of educators, but basically dominated by Bud Davis. And I went down to Austin, Texas, and they gave me that award.

I received the Sigma Delta Chi, that's the top one up there. The only story about that one is that I just got it. What's the date on that? 1988. I just got it about three months ago - I mean, the actual plaque. Anyway, I just got it, from Sigma Delta Chi.

The awards we talked about earlier are right there on the wall. The U.S. Department of Council, National Council of Christians and Jews, special commendation. Anti-Defamation League. Those are all part of that.

This wall that I'm looking at is my Indian-Deschutes wall. The top picture is Eliza Bill, a wonderful woman. Umatilla. Got to know Liza very well. Go up to round-up and go visit her in her tepee.

C.H.: She lived in a tepee?

V.A.: Oh, no. She'd go to the round-up. You know, they set up tepees at the round-up.

C.H.: I see.

V.A.: But Liza - when I was sworn in in 1979, cold, bitterly cold icy day, and all of a sudden Liza Bill shows up. She was not well. She was ill. She'd gotten on the bus from Pendleton, Oregon and had come down for the inauguration. Neat lady. She passed away, and I went up to her funeral. Little tiny church. This was a - it wasn't an Indian ceremony; Christian ceremony. Little church out in the middle of wheat field.

So her family gave me that photograph of Liza Bill and the wallet, which - I had that picture. I can look out of my office in Salem, and I had it hung on the wall, I could see that all during my tenure as Governor, the picture of Liza. Then when I came home, I put the wallet and the picture together.

The plaque right below that, just as I was leaving office late in 1986, the tribes in Oregon had a dinner in Salem for me. And incidentally, the Yakimas came down, too. Anyway, they gave me that plaque.

Below that is a - you can see pretty much hand-made - it's a lifetime fishing permit on Warm Springs Reservation. And I understand they've only given out a couple of those in their

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history. [*American Indian words*], which apparently says, "Let's go fishing."

The certificate up there, that was interesting. That was part of the Deschutes acquisition, and you could buy - I think it was \$25 and you'd get a square inch of the Deschutes River, or something like that. Anyway, that was a way of raising money, and that's a reminder of that Deschutes Purchase, along with the photograph below. It's an old photograph, but that was also commemorating the Deschutes Purchase.

And then the concurrent resolution was passed after I left office by the legislature - I was unaware it was going on - naming the Victor G. Atiyeh Recreational Area, which is that part of the Deschutes of the acquisition of the Deschutes.

You can probably see the sword hanging up there. I bought that in a souk, which is a small - well, a bunch of small shops in Damascus, Syria. I wanted a Damascus sword, and this was way back in somewhere, and I haggled with the guy and bought it.

C.H.: Did you have a problem transporting that at all?

V.A.: No. Packaged it pretty well. Indicated what we had.

C.H.: And does the clock have particular significance?

V.A.: No. I bought that. That was hanging in my office in Salem. That's the working office of the Governor. So I just took it off the wall and brought it home. I had it before that, too.

I almost hate to tell clock collectors because some fellow called and said he understood I collected clocks, and I really didn't, but a friend of mine had a clock one time, and I said, "Gee, that's interesting. If you ever sell it, let me know."

Well, he apparently presumed I collected clocks. I just happened to like that one that he had.

So a guy called, and he says, "I've got some clocks." And I thought, "Uh oh, he's a collector." You know, "There's no way I'm going to deal with clocks."

"How much do you want?" he said.

"I want \$75."

"Well, I'll come take a look."

I bought this Seth Thomas, an old wood-framed time clock, a battery-operated school clock, and then he threw in a mantle clock, all this for \$75. That was a very good buy. Very good buy. That's a very nice clock.

C.H.: And this saying on the wall underneath the clock?

V.A.: I saw that, and I asked someone to do the calligraphy for me. And it's something that I like. ~~It's beautiful in an ugly way. I can't read that.~~

C.H.: ^{There is a beautiful and an ugly way to say} "[indiscernible] almost everything, and happiness depends upon which way we take. You can upset a person for the whole day by the harsh way in which you may call him in the morning, or you may give him a beautiful start by the cheeriness of your greeting. So not only in words, but in all the little common courtesies and duties of life, think of the beautiful way of doing each."

That's very nice.

V.A.: So I had that done.

C.H.: And the other things here in this case?

V.A.: Well, the one lights up. It says "Governor Victor Atiyeh." It's etched in glass, and the seal of Oregon. We had that back of the reception desk in Salem.

The one in front of that, that's a very recent one. That's the ^{Oregon} ~~Oregon~~ Golf Course, and I'm Chairman of the Board of Governors.

But in back of that there are three etched glasses. They are commemorating the NEC, Fujitsu and Epson, and I gave those to the chairmen and presidents of the companies at the dedication and kept one for myself. Just a reminder of some great days.

The little dagger there in front I got in Saudi Arabia. I don't collect swords, but I just wanted something representative of those areas, and because I'm a collector, I guess I thought, "Well, that's pretty neat," so I acquired that.

C.H.: Does the case itself have significance?

V.A.: No. I saw that one time.

C.H.: It looks like a typesetter's case.

V.A.: No, I think it's a file cabinet is what it is, a file case. It sits on something; it doesn't sit on the ground. I had that also ~~in my office~~ in Salem, that with the clock above it. That's not why I have it here. I bought it before we went to Salem. Dolores and I used to go to antique shops and places like that and buy it, so I bought that.

C.H.: And this seal of Oregon here in your window?

V.A.: Guy Miller, who was a Scout executive, his daughter did stained glass, and she made that and gave it to me.

C.H.: It's beautiful.

V.A.: I had that hanging in the window in Salem and then of course brought it here with me.

You see Japanese dolls. Oh, the airplane is an interest one. Ken Jernstedt was in the original Flying Tigers, an American Volunteer Group before America entered the war, and he was an original Flying Tiger. Somebody made that. He had another one, and he gave me that one.

The cannons, there was a company in Oregon that did make these things and did try to sell them. I think they went out of

business. Wonderful miniature replicas of cannons, done extremely well.

A lot of the things here are gifts that I got on some of my trips overseas.

C.H.: ~~And then these fuzz up on top?~~

V.A.: That's the Deschutes Purchase again. Heritage Landing, again because of the Deschutes Purchase.

The William Booth award from Salvation Army. Got that after - actually after I left office.

This wooden eagle I got in ~~Fuzhou~~^{FUZHOU}, China. ~~Fujian~~^{FUJIAN} Province, they gave me that.

This is American Airlines. Looks like ivory; it's plastic of some kind. Nice eagle.

C.H.: Is that a derringer?

V.A.: Yes. It doesn't really operate, but it's a Colt replica is what it is.

The sword I got from a friend of mine in Taiwan, again a miniature sword, kind of a letter opener thing. I thought it was pretty nice.

Boy Scouts awards and National Guard awards, things that I picked up from here and there.

This thing by the window, we call it ~~[indiscernible]~~^{ARGLERS}, Smoking - what would you call it? Anyways, glass underneath and a pipe that comes out one end, and you put the tobacco on top, and I think it filters through water; I'm not sure.

C.H.: A water pipe.

V.A.: Water pipe, okay. But that was in our family home in Ahmar, Syria. When I was there there were three of them, and I told my cousin, "Gee, I'd sure like to have one," and he said, "Well, take it." So that's from my father's home in ~~Ahmar~~^{AMAR}, Syria. It's an old one.

I have a lot of things that I gave to the Oregon Historical Society and the Washington County Historical Society.

Oh, I need to tell you about the Pioneer Award from the University of Oregon. I need to do that because the present board was there at the time, and that's the first time they presented those. And then a distinguished service award from Western Oregon State College, distinguished service award from Portland State University. An award from Pacific University. I'm on their board.

An award from Danny Thomas and St. Jude's. An award for establishing the Black Commission.

But in addition to all those things, you know, there's a lot of things that people gave, and you can't keep them all. I still have a lot of it in the back room, but I worried about it; what do you do with these things? People value them, and they gave them with great sincerity. What do you do with them?

And I was talking with Tom ^{VAN GILMAN} ~~POTE~~, and he said, "Well, give them to the Society." So the Society got a lot of things, and Washington County Historical Society got some things. And I still have a lot in storage.

People were pretty generous to a governor, and I appreciate it all very much.

C.H.: Were there things of particular note? I mean, I'm sure that there are some wonderful treasures among the things that you gave to the Historical Society, but anything you were particularly fond of that you can recall at the moment?

V.A.: Well, it would be kind of curious, not necessarily more than that. I can recall - I'm sure the Society has - at the Rose Festival, you know - what's the beer company that has the Clydesdale horses?

C.H.: Budweiser.

V.A.: Budweiser. And you know, they've had entries here with their Clydesdales. They gave me a plaque with the horseshoe of one of those Clydesdales. It is a huge, huge, horseshoe. Big. On a plaque. And I kind of liked that, but I gave that to them.

I'm trying to remember what all I gave them. When the fleet's in town, they give you a plaque representing each of the ships. I've got a bunch of those, and the Society has those.

Gosh, I really can't remember everything that I gave them. It's just a lot of it, and I still have a lot left.

It's interesting; some people like to paint. I have painted portraits of me. And one I have a pair with Dolores and me, two separate paintings. Really very nicely done. Several of them are rather - something like I would do. I've got those. They're in the back room.

C.H.: Never to see the light of day.

V.A.: Well, someday I suppose they will.

That's part of it. It's a wonderful thing that happens. People, you know, like to give you something. A great memento of a great time.

C.H.: Anything else?

V.A.: Oh, I've got some paper stuff that I kept of my own. Various things that relate to - remember I told you about that executive order; I've got that executive order in a file over there.

C.H.: This is a beautiful desk.

V.A.: Oh, I should mention that desk. That was given to me. It was made in the State Penitentiary. Gerry Frank paid for the inmates' time, and some other people donated wood. When I saw it, it became an instant heirloom because, you know, I know - oh, three generations, "My great, great grandpa's desk when he was Governor of Oregon" kind of thing. You know, you can understand that.

The fascinating thing about it is ...

C.H.: Oh, that's beautiful.

V.A.: ... the inlay here on the desk top is the Seal of Oregon. Underneath all that paper at the top it says "Governor," then below it "Victor G. Atiyeh."

Then over here it says "1979," and then when they presented it, it was in my first term. So it had 198- - it had the eight, but no number out there. Didn't know. So after I was reelected, they came back and inlaid the -7. So that was done afterwards.

It's carved on the side with the - two ^{PANELL} paddies. There's a salmon and beaver, and the other side is the Oregon grape, ^{* DOUGLAS FIR} all carved in the desk.

But now the day came when it was going to be delivered. This was all a surprise to me, but then I knew about the delivery. So I said, "Okay, deliver it into the ceremonial office. Tell the press it's coming." And I said to myself, "If they're going to make a mess out of this thing, let's do it right now." So before it even moved into my office - you know, because it was made in the state pen and all the rest - it was there for public view.

But that's the way to do it. There was nothing dishonest about the whole thing, but still you know how they stir things up if they feel like it, and I said, "By George, if they're going to do that, let's have them do it right now." So that's how we had it delivered.

C.H.: Was there any comment made about the prisoners doing it?

V.A.: No. No, they knew where it came from. The whole story was told. They admired the desk like I did and you do.

My granddaughter, who is ^{my} ~~the~~ ^{CHILD} oldest granddaughter - that's my son's daughter ^{MEAGHAN} ~~Megan~~, she will get that, and then it will go through whatever line that she has.

But you know when you look at it, I said, "Hey, there's an instant heirloom," you know. There it is with my name on it, you know, Governor. So it's pretty neat. And I'll tell you, roll-top desks are really great, because I close up at night, anything loose goes under there and I close it, and it looks like I've never been in the office.

[End of Tape 56, Side 1]