An Oral History Interview

with

GEORGE “BUDDY” DARDEN (part 2)

conducted by
Julie Ferdon

Atlanta, Georgia
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George “Buddy” Darden was born in Hancock County, Georgia on November 22, 1943. He received a law degree from the University of Georgia in 1967 and worked as District Attorney for Cobb County from 1773-76, after which he returned to the general practice of law. He served in the Georgia state house of representatives from 1980 until 1983, and in the United States House of Representatives from 1983-1995. While in Congress, Darden worked with Congressman Morris Udall on the House Interior Committee. Darden currently practices law in Atlanta.
Starting Side 2 here. Water disputes are fascinating.

They are. In fact, *Arizona versus California* is a landmark.

It certainly is.

And our chairman, Clay Long, who’s working on the matter with me, was the law clerk to Justice Hugo Black in the Supreme Court of the United States, when *Arizona versus California* was decided. So he brings a lot to our team. But anyway, I work on the team here in the firm that is representing the State of Georgia, trying to resolve this. We go into mediation next week, down in Florida, over one of the basins. If we can find hotel rooms in the Tallahassee area, because of the vote count going on now. I think we’ll be able to. But that’s what I’m mostly doing.

Do you think about running for office again?

I don’t have any plans to. You never say what you’re never going to do. I came within a whisker of being appointed to the Senate this year. Senator [Paul] Coverdale died. I was under consideration for that, but Governor Barnes made the right step when Former Governor Miller decided to accept the appointment. He was a natural person to do it, especially considering he had to run for office for the remainder of the term, within three months after he took office. So, as you know, Senator Miller was elected very handily in a special election, and was the right choice. But I was very strongly considered for that, and would have been very honored to have accepted that appointment. I have no, really, desire to go back to the House.

Another thing I’m doing you may be interested in, I’m doing some work for NDI, the National Democratic Institute. I’ve been to Senegal, to Turkey, and to Indonesia, to speak to members of the parliaments of those countries about civil/military relations, and also the ethics codes. You know, Mo was very involved in that. I eventually served on the Ethics Committee as well—not with him. So I continue to do some of those things as well.

That sounds fascinating.

So I don’t have any complaints. President Clinton nominated me to be a member of the board of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation last month. But I think it’ll probably just be a recess appointment. I don’t anticipate the Senate being in a position to confirm me, under the present climate.

Let me finish up with two questions. One is, what do you think Mo’s legacy will be?

His legacy will be civility, integrity, and in general, good will and humor. And this sounds trite, but you can disagree without being disagreeable, and that you can represent your point of view and your constituents, and the national interest as well, without being in a personal battle from time to time. And this is also not an original thought with me—we all heard it many,
many times—but it’s the old notion of taking your responsibility seriously, without taking yourself too seriously. I think all those come to mind. And plus, he was just a very, very—he was just fun to be with, fun to be around.

JF: Interesting that you use the terms civility and integrity. Those are the very words that the Udall Center and Udall Foundation have chosen for their banners.

GBD: Oh, really?

JF: With Mo, is civility and integrity.

GBD: Of course, legislatively, it will be on a number of public lands and environmental issues. That’s where you think of him in terms.... And earlier persons, I didn’t, because the so-called Watergate reforms were in place by the time I got there. But as draconian as the House was at the time I got there, it surely must have been a pretty dismal place before he and others conducted the reforms of ’74.

JF: My final question is one I ask everybody. We talk a lot about Mo’s strengths. What did you see as his weaknesses?

GBD: I can’t really pick out a particular weakness that he had. Like all of us, he didn’t like to—he would prefer to address issues that were a little easier to deal with, than some of those that were more difficult. And like all of us, he would prefer to take up issues that were fun to deal with, rather than.... He’d rather do environmental issues, for example, rather than the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. But nothing really particularly comes to mind, what you might say were his weaknesses.

I’ve got to emphasize that I didn’t know him outside of member-to-member. We would all come together from everywhere in the United States—from Hawaii, to Arizona, to New Mexico, to Maine—on Monday or Tuesday, and then we would scatter and disperse. Literally, sometimes we’re all over the world. And then be back again the following Monday or Tuesday. So I don’t know about what his other life was, or what his personal life. I’m inclined to think, though, that at least in his latter years, his whole life was his work.

JF: I think that’s probably true.

JF: I don’t think he had, really, any life outside of the House. He was not required, like those of us in these swing districts, to go home every weekend. In fact, it was kind of an extraordinary event when he came home. He had to go back maybe a couple of times to campaign, but nothing like what most of us did. He had gotten far beyond that point.

JF: And it’s not a quick hop, skip, and a jump to Tucson from Washington.

GBD: No. In fact, you’ve probably either got to go through here, or go through Chicago, to get there. I know there’s a direct flight to Phoenix from Atlanta.
JF: Or through Dallas. A lot of them are through Dallas.

GBD: Right.

JF: Well, thank you very much for your time. We really appreciate it.

GBD: Well, sure, it’s my pleasure. I really appreciate the opportunity to kind of reflect a little bit, because to be honest with you, I forgot you were coming. I was up there in the middle of a meeting, and I hadn’t even thought about what I was going to say today. And you get so busy and involved in your day-to-day things, I didn’t really have a chance to think about and reflect on some of those. But it was most enjoyable for me to have a chance, even though I had to do all the talking, to think back and reflect on Mo, as one of those people who you really looked up to and you really respected and admired. But sometimes “out of sight, out of mind.” I haven’t really given it much thought lately.

JF: It’s good to go back and think of the things that he represented.

GBD: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]