

U.S. Aide in Ray Case

Fred Moore Vinson Jr.

ONE day in 1965 the telephone rang in the white brick home of Mrs. Fred M. Vinson Sr., widow of the Chief Justice of the United States. The caller was President Johnson. "Where's Fred Jr.?" he asked. Mrs. Vinson told the President her son was in Florida on a golfing holiday. Mr. Johnson told Mrs. Vinson he wanted her son to come to work for the Government.

"Mr. President," said Mrs. Vinson, "you strike terror in my heart."

Yesterday, speaking from her home in Washington, while her son was in London arranging the extradition of James Earl Ray, the suspect in the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mrs. Vinson explained her response to the President.

"Because I'm tired of public service," she said. "My husband had spent all of his adult years in public service. It's a very gruelling life, really."

Yet, she recalled, her son "didn't hesitate for a moment" to abandon a lucrative partnership in a Washington law firm to accept the post he now holds of Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Criminal Division of the Justice Department.

Money Not Important

Mr. Vinson's former law partner, F. Elwood Davis, of the firm that once was Reasoner, Davis & Vinson, recalled that the late Chief Justice had died without leaving a will and that it was said, "Money's not important to the Vinsons."

Mrs. Vinson said of her son, "He followed exactly in the footsteps of his father."

To both, she left little doubt, public service was a compelling idea.

Like his father, Fred Moore Jr. was captain of the baseball and basketball teams in college, president of the student body and a scholar who made Phi Beta Kappa.

Like his father, he was born in Louisa, Ky. The date was April 3, 1925, and as far as his mother, the former Roberta Dixon, knows, he always wanted to be a lawyer,

like his father. "He's very proud of his father," she said.

Fred Jr. and his brother James, district development specialist for the Appalachian Regional Commission staff, grew up in Washington. Fred, who could have gone to private school, chose to go to Woodrow Wilson High School, a public institution.

When he entered the Army Air Force in 1943, his mother said, he shunned an opportunity to become an officer, preferring instead to become a gunner. He held the rank of sergeant and was in the crew of a B-29 destined for duty in the Pacific when Japan capitulated.

Mr. Vinson was graduated from Washington and Lee University in 1948, and three years later, it awarded him his law degree.

'Very, Very Bright'

Mr. Vinson then entered the general practice of law in Washington. In 1954, shortly after his father's death, Mr. Vinson joined the Reasoner, Davis firm. A year later he became a partner.

"He is a very, very bright man," Mr. Davis said. "He does a tremendous amount of work in a short time with no effort. When he's handled a client, the client really didn't feel the great job he was doing."

He added, "He is a very good trial lawyer as well as a very good business lawyer."

In 1955, Mr. Vinson married Nell Pharr Morrison, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the Women's College of the University of North Carolina. Among those who attended the wedding were the late Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House of Representatives, three United States Senators, one former Senator, and Robert T. Stevens, the Secretary of the Army.

The Vinsons, who live in a three-bedroom, white brick home in Westmoreland Hills, Md., not far from Washington, have two children, Fred III, 12 years old, and Carolyn, 8.

Mrs. Vinson, who was suffering yesterday from laryngitis, whispered that her husband was an avid bridge and golf player, although his job has prevented him from enjoying either lately.

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Associated Press

IN LONDON FOR EXTRADITION: Fred M. Vinson Jr., Assistant Attorney General, talking with newsmen yesterday in front of U.S. Embassy. Mr. Vinson flew to London to help with the extradition of man identified as James Earl Ray, alleged slayer of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.