Frank Valeo: Tell me more about what you’re doing and how far you’ve gotten?

Gregory Olson: It’s a book. The dissertation was complete in 1988. I thought the dissertation was pretty good, but, as I look back on it, it really wasn’t. Since that time I’ve reworked my material considerably.

FV: Was the subject Mansfield and Vietnam at that point?

GO: Right. I have a brief biography, which goes back to chronicle his interest in the Far East. It’s only 20 some pages, but that’s a very significant part of it. I’ve reached a point now where my chapters cover...chapter 2 is ’53 and ’54. Chapter 3 is just the 1954 trip. You get some notes on the various meetings on that trip. I don’t know if the senator wrote any of those. I know that he wrote some.

FV: Where did you find that? In his library?

GO: Yes. In his papers. He’s opened everything I requested that be opened that’s concerned with Vietnam. I wanted to look at letters from Jacqueline Kennedy that he had...The ’50s have been difficult for me, I think, partially because I don’t remember the 1950’s. While a lot of the people that had been involved directly, or were involved directly in Vietnam have memos and things, no one has really sat down and chronicled that period in late ’54 and early ’55. They kind of bunched it.

When I wrote the dissertation, I didn’t understand it. People like Townsend Troops(?) talked about Mansfield’s influence, but they don’t do it in any chronological timeframe. Looking at your notes from that trip in 1954 and then historic Foreign Relations of the United States (inaudible)... I think it goes up through about 1965. Basically, some government researchers had gone through and found some documents and published them in book form. (unintelligible sentence).

Right now, I have it through 1968. It’s about 400, 450, pages longs. I haven’t written chapters on Nixon. I haven’t gathered the information on him from the library yet. Nixon’s very difficult, simply because there’s so little that’s known of him (unintelligible). I hadn’t really planned on going to Gerald Ford’s library, but I called them about a month ago and they called back several weeks ago. The woman I talked to...this was going to be my first question anyway...would get the name. They did a check on Mansfield because they knew I was going to be there. She called back and said that Mansfield was “just involved in everything from day one to the end of the
Ford administration.” Then she said that Mansfield seemed to be Ford’s unofficial policy advisor. Do you think there’s any truth to that? That is not anything I’ve ever heard or read.

FV: If the...I’m trying to remember back the Ford period. We wrote a lot of memos back and forth. Mansfield wrote a great number of memos. I’m trying to put it in terms of what was happening in Vietnam at that time. That was...Mansfield was trying to end the war in Vietnam. He was doing everything he could. It was really Mansfield in connection with the White House. It didn’t matter who was in the White House; he was pushing constantly to try and end that conflict. I don’t know if you could term him unofficial advisor or official advisor.

It’s just one of those things...you can give it a title if you want. Ford did not call him all the time just to ask his advice, but he did, I’m sure, pay attention to the memos. He talked with Mansfield in the White House a number of times. The President had many pressures on him and many people advising him. I don’t think Mansfield has to be seen in that context. He was not a particular advisor for Ford. That would be inaccurate.

GO: I looked at Pat Holt’s oral history, which I guess he did in the early ’80s. In the spring of ’75, he said that President Ford was taking one billion in supplemental aid for Vietnam. The Foreign Relations Committee sent Chuck Miessner and Dick Moose to Vietnam.

FV: I certainly remember Dick Moose went.

GO: Holt suggested, I guess, along with one other person earlier, that the Foreign Relations Committee used to do that. I had no idea. Anyway, you said that they were horrified by what they found and that the situation had deteriorated greater than anybody really thought, which lead the Foreign Relations to decide not to back that one billion supplement. It seems they contacted Mansfield - Meissner and Moose. He was the person they called to set up a committee meeting before they arrived back from Vietnam. Do you remember anything about that at all?

FV: Not about any specific meeting, I can’t say that I remember that. I was not involved directly with them. If they called Mansfield, he did not mention it to me. If he were going to do anything about it, he almost certainly would have mentioned it to me.

GO: I have one document to the senator that...

FV: I’ve forgotten what I wrote. I know I wrote an awful lot...

GO: This is the only one I’ve ever found without a date. When I start plunging into this material, I think it’s possible I will be able to figure out when it took flight, but I thought you might have some recollection of it. It’s certainly an interesting document.

(pause)

Frank Valeo Interview, OH 393-002a, b, c, d, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
FV: I think I remember vaguely what happened. The longstanding government was in very bad shape at that time. The group headed...which was really the old Khmer Rouge head...At the time they had accepted Sihanouk as their head...or public head. He was cooperating closely with them because of the tie-in through China. The ambassador came to see me. The Cambodian ambassador came to see me and to see Senator Mansfield. [He] wanted some help in getting the thing stopped, literally. I think, probably, somebody from the State Department may have come to see Senator Mansfield about that. The question was whether or not a mission...that he would undertake to see Sihanouk, with whom he had this long acquaintance and a good one...to see whether or not he might persuade Sihanouk to call a halt to it. I wrote that as...if it were going to be done, these things would have to be incorporated into it. You would have to put that somewhere near the final (unintelligible) of the mountain head(?), government at that time.

GO: During the whole Nixon-Ford administration, Cambodia became a real big issue. I’m going to jump back to 1959 briefly. There were some hearings on USAID in Vietnam brought on by...

FV: I remember it very well because I went to Vietnam at that time with [Carl M] Marcy...

GO: I learned that two days ago that he made that trip. I had no idea. Is that the only trip you ever made to Vietnam without the senator or were there others?

FV: Probably the only one. I can’t quite remember. I made a trip...two trips to the Far East without him on other matters at his request. That one was also at his request because I had already left the Foreign Relations Committee staff at that point and had gone to work for him directly. I think they called me back to do that one trip with Marcy. Or he wanted me to go with somebody from the Foreign Relations Committee to inquire into the newspaper charges of corruption and so forth.

GO: Marcy said that...let’s see if I can find my notes...he just mentioned that you had special access to [Ngo Dinh] Diem because of Mansfield and that you could bring some message from Mansfield to Diem on that trip, but Marcy says he doesn’t remember what that was in his oral history. Do you have any recollection if there was some special message from the senator?

FV: I remember seeing him and...it probably was one of impressing Mansfield’s concern and also his personal good wishes. Of course, his relationship with Diem was a good one. I would think that (unintelligible)...I can’t recall anything specific in terms of inquiry that he wanted made of Diem. I’m sure it must have been an expression of concern because I can almost see Diem’s face now when I spoke with him at that time. He was a little perturbed by what I said, but not, I don’t think, anything extraordinary—just that Senator Mansfield might be worried about what was happening in Vietnam. I think that concerned Diem as well.

GO: Was the concern the aid program or did it transcend...?
FV: Yes, these reports were coming in. They were very disturbing in the United States. (unintelligible). From what I knew at the time, he...i’m sure that’s all it was, not more than that. There was nothing extraordinary about whatever it was that I was conveying to him. I’m quite convinced that it was just general concern on the part of Senator Mansfield and, probably, a reaffirmation of his personal confidence in Diem’s abilities to...it would be something like that.

GO: Nothing as direct as talking about news relations or news influencing the government or...?

FV: No, I don’t think so.

GO: You do pronounce it with a “z”: “Ziem”.

FV: Yeah, the accent.

GO: (unintelligible) will tell you that sometimes the documents...we have this tendency in our country to Americanize everybody’s name. At a certain point, you can’t...according to Dr. Colegrove’s(?) hearing, he suggests that Fulbright wanted to come out with an internal report, which was very moderate, and that you and Senator Mansfield thought that that report was not accurate. It was too pro-administrative and kind of ignored Colegrove’s charges and that there was some friction, perhaps, between you and Mansfield and Marcy and Fulbright over that initial report. Do you remember anything like that?

FV: Who said this?


FV: Gibbons.

GO: ...Volume one, which was the first I wrote about it...

FV: Do you know Gibbons, by the way?

GO: No.

FV: He used to work with me up at the Library of Congress.

GO: Really?

FV: He did a beautiful job on Vietnam. I think that’s what he was born for.

GO: I’m waiting on Volume Four to get the first three volumes in clear and definitive order...
FV: I don’t know...Carl Marcy and I were very close for a long, long time and then our paths sort of divert—not that we ever became enemies. I don’t mean to suggest that at all, but we went in different directions. I think there was always a certain amount of irritation because I had left the committee and then gone to Mansfield. Mansfield had this consuming interest in foreign relations, so constantly he was showing up separately sometimes from the views of the committee. I think you have to take that as far as background. Maybe there was some evidence of friction given by a call at that point, which maybe suggested more than there was.

My own feeling was that, if there was friction, it was because Mansfield was acting almost as his own Foreign Relations Committee. I think that’s sometimes what hurt Marcy. I don’t really recall an (unintelligible) that had blown over and we got along fine on the trip. There was no problem. As far as any reports were concerned on that trip, we would have agreed on it before we got back, I’m almost certain, on what we were going to write. I don’t know precisely what Gibbons would be referring to then.

GO: I found a document in Marcy’s papers, which I was looking at a few days ago. They’re in the National Archives now. It just suggested that you and Marcy split up in Vietnam in 1959 and you went to either Bangkok or Hong Kong to meet Senator Mansfield.

FV: Mansfield came through while we were on the trip. He did not go to Vietnam. He didn’t want to go, but he had me meet him. I can’t remember if it was Bangkok or Hong Kong. It was probably Hong Kong, but I’m not sure. We did that, but that was at the very end of the trip. That wasn’t earlier in the trip. It had no real relationship to the trip except that he was going through there and he wanted to talk with me. He was coming...I can’t remember...he came from Europe with his wife and I think he wanted to get some quick information on how the inquiry was going. It didn’t interfere with the inquiry in Vietnam at all. It was at the end of it.

GO: Did Mrs. Mansfield travel with the senator a lot?

FV: Frequently, almost all of the trips. Not in the early period, on those first three trips to Vietnam. In ’54, she came as far as Manila. Actually, she came out with Dollard(?). We met her, Mansfield met her, in Manila. We came the other way, by way of Vietnam, and went to Manila for the Manila Conference. They met there in Manila.

GO: I’m going to jump all the way back to the Nixon administration. I kind of prioritized these. When he assumed office in 1969, Mansfield had implied that he felt unchained, so to speak, because, as majority leader, it was strict in terms of criticism of Lyndon Johnson’s policy. While the statements right after Nixon’s election were that he’d give him a chance, six months or so after, he becomes more critical of Nixon’s policy. After Cambodia...

FV: (unintelligible)

GO: Right.
FV: I think he’d probably had it because, all along, he had felt that Nixon really was going to try to end the war as quickly as possible. With Cambodia (unintelligible) which he had vigorously fought Johnson not to do and persuaded Johnson not to do. Then the next president did it. Nixon, as I recall, at the time, left the impression that he didn’t know it was going to happen. Of course, Nixon was lying.

GO: Was Mansfield more comfortable in that role, do you think, as the out-party majority leader, with the ability to speak openly about his differences?

FV: No, it wouldn’t have made any difference. He was just as open with Johnson as he was with Nixon. It made it more delicate because he had to make sure that there wasn’t even the remotest suggestion of politics involved when he discusses any of these matters with Nixon. He spoke with him often. Nixon liked to talk with him on Asia, generally. He gave support for the so-called Nixon Doctrine. Matter of fact, he pushed it to make sure it stayed in because, as he [Mansfield] interpreted it, the document implied the reduction of the United States involvement in Asia. He continued to interpret it in that way, whether Nixon meant it that way or not, and he was never contradicted. So he actually went ahead with that. That was a very important point with him.

GO: Nixon sent Mansfield to China and that was trip that Senator Mansfield had wanted to take for some time. He’d mentioned it to Johnson. That must have excited him very much. He enjoyed going to China. Did you go with him?

FV: Yeah, I was on the trip. He took along somebody from the Foreign Relations Committee. Nolan(?) Jones was a staff person from the Foreign Relations Committee. Mansfield and I both had our own China experience. Our interest was very joint on that. He was in the army in China at the end of World War I and I was in the army during World War II in China. We both retained that interest over the years. It was quite a highlight for him and also for myself.

GO: What are your most vivid recollections from that trip to China?

FV: Meeting with Zhou Enlai, among others. The traveling around...it was very early in the game. The China of that period has changed considerably from it is even now, even in these last few years. People wore bad clothes. It was rough and grim and painful for most people. But they were surviving. It was such an enormous advance from what we had seen in an earlier period, when we saw these abject foundations(?) and huge masses of people on the move all the time. When we talk about homeless people, it was in the tens of millions of people at that time. We saw an enormous improvement between what we had seen earlier and what we saw on that first trip.

Most people would say how horrible it was, but, for us, it was immaterial. From our viewpoint, for both of us it was a mutual thing, an extraordinarily great advance. In turn, something that
would have been inconceivable 20 years before. We had very positive reactions to what we saw. We saw some of their, what looked to us, primitive, but nevertheless meaningful, efforts to begin some form of economic development in many places. Communism did not look as atrocious or as appalling as we sometimes made it appear. It seems like there was some way of feeding people, which didn’t exist before. Our reaction was very positive and, interesting enough, even Scott’s reaction was positive because he had been in China in ’46, very briefly.

Interestingly enough, there was almost no emphasis whatsoever on consumerism at that point. Quite the opposite: all of the slogans on the walls and everything else were, “Don’t consume. Don’t spend your half a Jiao on unnecessary things.” People wore the simplest of clothes. Everybody dressed as peasants, as in the Old China, in that period.

Oddly enough, after being there for two or three weeks, we came out through Hong Kong. Of course, you come into this citadel of consumerism which is Hong Kong. Your first impulse is I can’t stand this; I’m going to go back. It’s an odd feeling. Everybody in the party experienced it. You realize, after three weeks...there was no one there that could buy anything anyway. You are not influenced to do anything except produce. That would be it. Certainly not to consume. All of a sudden, you run into it. You realize the contrast between the two societies. After a couple of hours, that reaction...it was impulsive and almost instinctive in that first two hours coming out of China.

GO: Senator Mansfield sought a second trip to China with Nixon. Did that ever happen? Did he make a second trip?

FV: He made three trips.

GO: Okay.

FV: He made one every two years. The second one was made...in ’72, ’74, and...that’s wrong. The last one was made right around Mao’s death. That was...probably ’72, ’74, and ’76, but I’m not sure. I might be a year off.

GO: How would you describe the relationship between President Nixon and Mansfield?

FV: On the whole, good, but very cautious on the part of Mansfield and I would assume on the part of Nixon as well. There was a certain amount of give and take in the relationship that was bona fide.

GO: Caution that Nixon might try to use the favor he did in sending him to China for a favor in return or...?

FV: That really wasn’t it. I think he was concerned about Nixon’s stability. I’m being very honest. He did not want to upset him in any way. That was very much a concern of his.
GO: With all of the pressures from Watergate?

FV: Yes, especially after the Watergate scandal. Nixon was not an easy person for anybody even to know, let alone get to be friends with. They were not friends in the kind of the way you could be with someone like Gerry Ford. It was always proper. Nixon saw him whenever he wanted to see him. There was never a question of that. He was accommodating. Whenever Mansfield wanted anything, he would do what he could to respond to him.

GO: They had breakfasts frequently, according to Nixon’s calendar.

FV: They met from time to time, yes.

GO: Did the senator talk about those meetings? Was he very open?

FV: If there was something with which we were involved in—anything having to do with Vietnam for example—then he would have talked to me about it. And he did.

GO: They may have been taped. They can’t answer that question at Nixon’s library. I asked that question and the archivist said, “I can’t answer that.” If they were taped, I was told, 50 years from now, someone will get to listen to them. They will probably be closed for that long.

Shortly after Nixon came in, the senator made his second trip to Vietnam. That would be 1969. I think he went in 1969.

FV: Wait a minute; we’ve got to get this straight. I think you’ve got a mistake here.

GO: He didn’t go to Vietnam in ’69. The senator went to Indo-China.

FV: That’s right. We didn’t go to Vietnam. ’65 was the last...I remember so vividly that it was the last trip to Vietnam in ’65.

GO: I was curious why, in 1969, you would go...you would miss Vietnam. I wondered if it was because Mansfield had been perceived as an anti-war critic and might not have been as welcome in Saigon, but I have no idea.

FV: Let me think for a moment on the details of this. ’69, Nixon was president. The mission that we made was to, if I’m not mistaken, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and maybe Indonesia. I’m not sure of Indonesia.

GO: I’m not sure of Indonesia either.
FV: But certainly those three and not Vietnam. I remember specifically...we were still in Saigon in 1969; the forces were still there. It was his decision not to go back to Vietnam.

GO: Mansfield’s?

FV: Yeah. I’m not so sure why. He said, “I just want to stay away from there.” It was something to that effect at this point. Probably, he thought that he could nothing by going to Vietnam at that point.

GO: Was this trip...did Nixon ask him to take this trip?

FV: Yes. They had discussed it and Nixon said he thought it would be a good idea for him to go around. I don’t remember...was the trip....to elicit reactions to the new Nixon Doctrine. I think it was pitched in those turns.

GO: Did you talk to Sihanouk on that trip, then?

FV: ’69...

GO: I think Sihanouk was still there in 1969...

FV: Yes, but he was not in the country. It was not long after that that the coup occurred. Wasn’t it...?

GO: Yeah.

FV: I think he was in France getting medical attention, but we saw the fellow who pulled off the coup, the general.

GO: Lon Nol.

FV: Lon Nol. Yes, we saw him. Did we see Sihanouk as well? I’m not sure. I would have to check my own notes on that to see. We certainly saw Lon Nol on that trip. I remember the very first time we ever met him. At that time, he was a loyal supporter of Sihanouk. Sihanouk considered him practically his practically his brother and depended heavily on him. It came as quite a shock to us. The betrayal came as quite a shock.

GO: Cambodia seemed pretty stable in 1969.

FV: Yes, there was no question about that. It was still good. Now I remember: Sihanouk was there. We did see him. I remember a statement he made after dinner. It was a small dinner, maybe 20 people. He said that he didn’t know how long he could hold out, but that he was going to leave...I’m not entirely certain on this, but he was determined to leave with the
Cambodian people...if he had to leave, if the situation became untenable, he was determined to leave them with an impression of the monarchy that had been the golden age of Cambodian history. I remember him saying this. It impressed me greatly because I didn’t why...his position seemed so secure. He was so well thought of in the country. The people adored him. That was universal. It was not something very limited. This coup that came along was one of the last straws in the situation. Absolutely abominable.

GO: How was the situation in Laos in 1969?

FV: We saw the king in Laos. Now I remember that trip a little bit better. He was worried. The king in Laos was clearly worried. We had met him when he was the crown prince, going back in the ‘50s. He was a man of considerable self-confidence. He was very sure of himself as the crown prince. His father was still living, but was rumored to be giving out and (inaudible). The son was young and impressive as a potential leader. By the time of ’69, he was deeply concerned. He was concerned about the Chinese strictures(?) coming from the north. He was concerned about us and the way we had...the way the country had become a battleground. In ’53, there were only two battalions of Laotian troops. The rest were French, Foreign Legion, and German. By ’69, he already thousands of people there. They had all these (unintelligible).

GO: The Laotian armies never much liked to fight, did they?

FV: That was the theory, but they got to be pretty (unintelligible). Some of the French command were saying, “We have these two battalions that we’re training, these Laotians. But it’s really a foolish waste of time...”

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
FV: "They’re nice people," he said. "They don’t like to fight. They don’t want to do it. They want to go home on weekends and see their families. They need it. You can’t tell them about discipline. They don’t want to hear it."

GO: In 1962...

FV: At that time, it was one of the great tragedies: that we took these people and projected them into the late 20th century with catastrophic result.

GO: As late as 1962, Mansfield said, once, that the Laotian troops like to take their guns and fire them in the air rather than brandish them. That must have been some change.

Was Souvanna Phouma, I may be mispronouncing that...

FV: No that’s right. Souvanna Phouma.

GO: He was still there in 1969?

FV: He was there as far ’69, but the thing had changed completely by then. It was completely immersed in the war at that point. The American Embassy was practically running the whole campaign.

[Break in audio: rest of Tape 1, Side B blank]

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
[Tape 2, Side A]

GO: Testing...Ok, so we’re back in 1965 and you go to Laos first. Mansfield had a secret meeting with Sihanouk. That was kind of arranged, apparently, before he left. Sihanouk may have requested it, at least according to the paper trail. There’s some memo from Mansfield back to the State department indicating that the other senators...that it would cause difficulties if he met with Sihanouk without the other senators. I don’t find any answer to that, but there is a transcript of the meeting. It may even be your notes of the meeting. Clearly you and Senator Mansfield met with Sihanouk. Relations with the Johnson administration in Cambodia weren’t real good. He talked with you...it wasn’t clear if the other senators were at that meeting or not. My guess is they were...

FV: No, they weren’t. There was one meeting with Sihanouk. It’s hard for me to remember the substance of the meeting, but there was one meeting alone with Sihanouk. I don’t know at whose request...I think it was at his request if I’m not mistaken.

GO: Then you went to Vietnam, after that meeting.

FV: Yes...He entertained the other members of the party. As a matter of fact, he even came with us up to Angkor Wat, where they had a picnic luncheon at the ruins.

GO: Did the press know about that? That the senator met with Sihanouk or was that all kind of quiet?

FV: There was no press there as far as I remember.

GO: In reading about the trip, it wasn’t mentioned. The Vietnam part is what was covered.

He had a meeting with Henry Cabot Lodge and William Westmoreland on that trip. The transcript of that meeting is really interesting. (unintelligible) Mansfield was asking really tough questions. Westmoreland was talking about attrition. I suppose attrition was a fairly new concept.

FV: The word had become...attrition had become a word by that time (unintelligible)

GO: Westmoreland, in reading that transcript, seems almost excited about the (?), if you would. More Americans had died in the last few weeks than in the previous few years and he was already counting the difference in death and seemed to think this was the way to go. When I was reading it, it made me think back to [Henri] Navarre and Dien Bien Phu. When the French set that up, it was basically for attrition. They thought that, win or lose - and they expected to win - they were going to kill so many of the Viet Minh, it was going to be a great French victory.

Frank Valeo Interview, OH 393-002a, b, c, d, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
FV: I think that’s correct...(unintelligible) at Hanoi...the French General Navarre...Dick Russell was there too at that. He just happened by. He was in the city on his own. He was travelling on his own. I was there with Mansfield. Navarre and [Rene] Cogny were the two French generals. Navarre was the overall commander - he had just been appointed - planning the overall strategy (unintelligible) for the Dien Bien Phu thing. Cogny was his field commander, who was going to exercise his plans. They would wind it up very shortly.

GO: Was Cogny the one...I’m mispronouncing, but was he the one that was at Dien Bien Phu in charge then?

FV: No...he was Chief of Staff for Navarre at that time. Navarre was the overall commander. Interesting. It’s definitely a brilliant comparison.

GO: Going back then to the ’53 trip, we’ll just jump back 12 years. That must have been really exciting.

FV: It was an eye-opening experience, for me especially. That was my first...no, I had gone out previously with the Foreign Relations Committee on the around the world trip. I had been in China. I didn’t really expect ever to be going to Vietnam. That was not one of the places that I had on my list of places to go when I drew it up in college or whatever. It was just by accident that I got connected with Mansfield. From that, a lot of other things occurred.

GO: Mansfield couldn’t (unintelligible) after that one time. He was issued, I think, the first passport to Laos by the Laotian delegation and you were issued the second.

FV: I have the second; that’s correct.

GO: Just to touch on it, he was the first senator Nepal on that trip. The world was really very different.

FV: There were only ten Americans in Nepal at the time and we weren’t even sure we could get in. It’s changed. A lot of things have changed.

GO: On those early trips, did you stay in cities pretty much or did you...? I know you visited the ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, but did you pretty much stay in large cities?

FV: It was limited time: we’re talking maybe about three or four days in each city. We rarely had more than three or four days. You didn’t get very far in the city. It depends. On that trip with Carl Marcy, we thought that was a very thorough exploration of Vietnam. We went to several places and we came back by railroad. We were coming back by railroad because this was one of the things that they showcased for us: that Dien had brought out, that they had restored the railroad traffic. I figured (unintelligible) on our way down to Saigon.
We had a very thorough exposure to Vietnam, but, these other places, it was pretty limited. For one thing, there was no way to find them. We got lost trying to find the royal capital in Laos. Vientiane was the administrative capital and then there was the other city, a hundred miles north, where the king lived. I wasn’t sure...the maps at that time showed two stars and I wasn’t sure what it meant. We finally found out that one was royal capital and the other was the administrative capital. Vientiane was the administrative capital. Luang Prabang was the name of the royal capital.

We had a navy beach craft that was getting us around, just as Mansfield and I. That was getting us around in Vietnam, from Saigon up to Hue. Then we wanted to go to Laos. We wanted to go to the royal capital as well as the administrative capital. The navy pilot had French charts. There were no were American charts on Indo-China. They were following the charts and they went 400 miles beyond Luang Prabang. They couldn’t find it! The only way they did...the capital was shown on the map as being on the Mekong River. They knew they had to be above it, so they just followed the river down 400 feet [miles?] until they came to the city. That was Luang Prabang. That’s how primitive it was at that time.

There were no...in Laos, at that time, there were two Americans, two young fellows. They were running...they had a house up there. They were on a houseboat built in Saigon. They were running the consulate, if you will. We still had not recognized Laos as an independent county at that point. The other one...in Phrabang at that time....there were about eight or nine Americans in the consulate in Phrabang (?).

GO: The “P” was pronounced then? We tend to emphasize things and people tend to call it “Homvihane” now.

FV: It’s PhrabangThere’s a slight “P” sound.

GO: Mansfield was optimistic after the ‘53 trip, for a couple of months anyway. Probably a long time afterwards. One of the interesting things from his files is he picked up all of these friends, many of whom were in the press. After the ‘53 trip, he corresponded with William Hurd(?), I may be pronouncing it, Arnaud de Borchgrave, who later became kind of a conservative columnist, anti-communist type...let’s see, there’s correspondence with Charles Collingwood, Edward R. Murrow...I mentioned an interview one time he did. Jack Dowling(?), Larry Allen, et cetera. He was writing a lot, back and forth, and, I suspect, learning about the issue of Vietnam and sharing information with these members of the press.

FV: This was ’53 and ’54? I’m not familiar with that. I was still at the Library of Congress. What happened was...the way I got connected with Mansfield: I did some work for him when he was in the House, out of the Library of Congress. He came up to the Library of Congress looking for some research. I was assigned to do it for him. He was apparently quite pleased with what I’d done for him, so occasionally he would call me and ask me for help. In the interim, he was still
in the House, and I went over the Foreign Relations Committee, from the Library, for an inquiry they did. They kept borrowing at the Foreign Relations Committee.

This went on for a period of several...I didn’t want to leave the Library of Congress. I was quite content working there. I was chief of the of the Foreign Affairs district of Congressional Research there. It was then...I didn’t really want to leave that, but they kept borrowing me over the Committee. When Mansfield came to the Senate, the only person he knew on the Foreign Relations Committee, to which he was assigned, was me from his earlier experience. He requested me on a couple of occasions and then finally asked me if I would go on this trip. I was still on loan(?) at the Library of Congress. Mansfield got permission from the Library of Congress so that they could loan me to the Foreign Relations Committee. That, in turn, would let him...so that I could go with him on this trip. That’s the way our relationship started.

GO: Eckells(?) said that they borrowed you from the Library of Congress and just never returned you.

FV: That’s just about what it amounted to. Finally, I gave up and actually joined the staff for a brief period of time before I went directly to work for Mansfield.

GO: Let’s see...I’m trying to think of his name now...When you were in Hanoi in 1953, you stayed with someone in the State Department...

FV: Yes.

GO: ...whose name I have written down somewhere.

FV: Good because I don’t think I can remember.

GO: At any rate...

FV: I’ll recognize it if I hear it.

GO: I’m going to ask the question and keep looking for where I have it. I totally lost my organization. You and Mansfield asked him to have lunch on May 12, 1954, right after Dien Bien Phu fell.

FV: This was in Washington. He came back here.

GO: Sturm (?) is his name.

FV: Who?

GO: Sturm.
FV: Sturm, yes. He was the one I was thinking of.

GO: He recorded that, in all the conversations with Mansfield prior to that and (unintelligible)...that Mansfield had always been vehement about no American ground troops in Vietnam. He said, on May 12th, that he didn’t express the same kind of vehemence. He seemed to just accept that. My question was was there a brief period after the fall of Dien Bien Phu where Mansfield may have thought American ground troops or American commitment of bombers and pilots...

FV: The question that came up was not so much anything about ground troops. It had to do with a concealed group of military men, who would go up there. Because of the Geneva agreements, we were supposed to withdraw from South Vietnam. That was part of the agreement, if I’m not mistaken. One of the things they wanted to do was to leave behind a military advisory group of about 75 men, who would go, not by the name “military advisory group”, but by the euphemism “property gatherers”. They were supposed to “inventory American military property which was still left there in South Vietnam.” He may have gone as far as to acquiesce in the idea of letting that military advisory group stay there under that cover, but it had absolutely nothing to do with combat. There was nobody even suggesting combat at that point. That really came in strong force in ’55.

GO: After the ’54 trip, Mansfield, all of sudden, had this relationship with [John Foster] Dulles, where Dulles seems to be sending Kenneth Young to talk with him. When [J. Lawton] Collins...When Eisenhower sends Collins over to clean up the situation in a couple of weeks and Collins decides that Diem isn’t going to be able to solve the problem, you have this situation... I don’t know what the French word is, but Gibbons called it an advancement between two, in French, between Mansfield and...

FV: (unintelligible)

GO: That’s it. It seems interesting...it seems just fascinating to me that Collins is sending all of these telegrams to the State Department. Kenneth Young or some of the other people are taking these Mansfield. Mansfield is responding and sending those responses back to Collins in Saigon. I assume part of that is because Dulles was favoring Diem, as well as Mansfield, and so Dulles was using Mansfield as part of his argument with Collins in fighting to get Eisenhower to agree with him. What was that in relation to...?

FV: The whole thing was involved in the question of how bona fide was going to be an establishment of an independent state in Vietnam. The French were resisting that still. They were looking constantly for people who were essentially puppets. Collins, among others, were taking their cue primarily from the French at that point. Mansfield was a fresh voice and a fresh view point in the situation. He was looking for a bona fide, meaningful independence as being the only conceivable way in which you could counteract the communist...the communist...
structure under Ho Chi Minh. If you really had even the remotest chance of doing that...he was
never very sanguine about the possibility of doing that, but, if there was any chance of doing it,
you had to have somebody who was a bona fide, nationalist. That was Diem. The others...he felt
that the other names that were then mentioned at the time were, basically, tools of the French.

(break in tape)

FV: He didn’t want any part of that, whereas Collins - I don’t know whether he realized that or
whether it was just kind of a lack of knowledge of the situation - and others at that time really
wanted to coordinate our policies with the French, rather than with another independent
Vietnamese faction, which they saw as (unintelligible).

GO: Mansfield had a lot of allies in the State Department, like Kenneth Young...

FV: He had some. Not a lot. It was still a traditional position in the State Department. Saigon
never reported directly to Washington. They reported through Paris. That tells you what
corruption there was in the State Department. There were two groups in the State Department.
(unintelligible) maybe Kenneth Young among them, who felt the time had come to go along
with real independence in Asia, if you were going to get anywhere in terms of restraining the
communist advances from China.

GO: Robertson is another name...

FV: Robertson came in as an aid to Marshall in China. He was a militant anti-communist. I don’t
think you could ever describe Mansfield as a militant anti-communist, but he recognized that, if
you were going to...if that were the basis of your policy, then you would have something that
was meaningful. Otherwise, we were going to have to do what we eventually did in Vietnam.

GO: Dulles was sort of in Diem’s camp then too.

FV: Dulles was moving in that direction. Dulles probably...he felt that, but he felt also certain
other restraints that made that impossible. Yes, Dulles wanted Mansfield’s OK on a lot of these
because for two things. First of all, it gave him a counter force to some of the more militant
people in the executive branch, who really, at that time, were ready for us to drop bombs all
over the place – nuclear bombs – wherever we thought it might help, including Dien Bien Phu
among others. Dulles, I think, fully appreciated the idiocy of that and, therefore, wanted to hold
those in check. At the same time, he wanted some Democrats that he could turn to because he
couldn’t turn to Fulbright. He and Fulbright were at swords’ points most of the time. I think he
turned to Mansfield as somebody who at least understood the situation and could act with
something of restraint. That’s of course what happened when he invited him to Manila. He was
trying to keep some Democratic alliance.
GO: I’ve looked at the phone conversation, basically, when he called Wilkes George(?) to find a Democrat. It was kind of more convenient than anything. Mansfield was going to be over there anyway and George couldn’t go or something. Do you think they developed some closeness on that trip...?

FV: I think so. They were in New York in ’58 at the UN General Assembly meeting. The relationship was good then. I was a congressional advisor at that point to the delegation in New York at the 13th general assembly. Dulles, of course, was in charge of that. Mansfield and [Bourke B.] Hickenlooper were the two congressional members of the delegation. I was the congressional advisor. I could see...I got to know Dulles in that period. I could see their relationship was fairly solid. There was a certain amount of mutual respect.

GO: When Collins came...in April ’55, he came back. He didn’t suggest (unintelligible) that Diem should be thrown out. He met with Mansfield. He then spoke privately with Mansfield and he met with the Far East...

FV: I remember the meeting. I wasn’t in the meeting, but I was outside when it happened.

GO: Do you remember anything about Mansfield saying anything about the meeting?

FV: Yes, I sort of vaguely remember. Now that you mention it, I can still vaguely remember something about it. He, in effect, said that Charles doesn’t really know much. He just bought what they handed to him. Primarily, he meant the French influenced members of the American Embassy in Saigon, those that were influenced in that direction in policy.

GO: It seems to me that Diem benefited from Collins being in Washington because, when he went to war with...whatever that sect was called, [Edward] Lansdale was there and Lansdale disagreed with Collins about Diem too. So, he was able to use his influence to help out Diem.

FV: That is not entirely accurate. Lansdale had his reservations about Diem.

GO: Did he?

FV: That’s my judgment, yes.

GO: In his memos...

FV: He did not have any reservations about the need to, if you were going to do anything in South Vietnam, it had to be done as an independent person. He had other candidates for the job.

GO: He didn’t get along with Collins. He said...

Frank Valeo Interview, OH 393-002a, b, c, d, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
FV: He definitely would not have agreed with that point of view, but he was also a Young Turk, in his own way. He did not think that Diem was the right man. He had another candidate, whose name now escapes me, but I remember hearing it in Saigon. I talked to him at that time. He was brought in to me by a very dear friend of mine, who was then a young Foreign Service officer. I was young myself. Frank Malloy, who was later killed in Lebanon. He was an ambassador there. Malloy was a young Foreign Service officer and he said, “There’s somebody at the embassy you want to talk to.” He brought in Lansdale. I could tell from that conversation that they really had another account(?), other than Diem. When Diem was chosen, Mansfield at least recognized that that was better than going along with a colony kind of...or pro Tran point of view. That was a real split at that time: whether you were pro Tran or pro Vietnamese nationalist, basically.

GO: Collins like [Phan Huy] Quat. Quat was the person Collins was always pushing.

FV: I don’t even remember the name anymore.

GO: Dr. Phan Huy Quat. He was a civilian who was involved in leadership in ’65, briefly, and then he got turned out. But there were no names that came up that seemed as capable as Diem as far as you and Mansfield.

FV: Mansfield thought...I didn’t...Mansfield met Diem through Bill Douglas, the Supreme Court justice. He had met him very briefly. He and Jack Kennedy both met him at the time. That was the name he carried. It was completely...I didn’t even know the name when we first went to Vietnam.

GO: In ’53, when you went to Vietnam, the name Diem wasn’t coming up much. It was still...

FV: No, we saw Diem in ’53.

GO: He wasn’t in Vietnam then, was he?

FV: I think...

GO: He came into power in July of ’54.

FV: We saw him in ’53 in Vietnam. We first met him when he was not of the command in power(?). He was there and somebody arranged a meeting. I have no idea how that happened. I have no recollection of how that happened, but we met him for the first time...I have to withdraw that. I’m not sure of the circumstances. It was ’54, probably, the first time we met him in Vietnam. He was then in control, but very shaky and unstable. That was the sequence.

GO: Did Mansfield ever talk about that meeting with Douglas, Kennedy, and Diem?
FV: He only mentioned it. Bill Douglas was the one who introduced us to him. He was up at some seminary in New Jersey.

GO: There was one person at that meeting who proofs(?) from the Foreign Relations of the United States still doesn’t identify. Gibbons speculates that it was Diem’s brother, the Archbishop Thuc. Is that how it’s pronounced, the Archbishop’s name?

FV: Yeah, I don’t remember.

GO: Mansfield doesn’t remember who was at that meeting either. I asked that question. It seems to me it might have been his brother because there was another Vietnamese there who took an active part. Mansfield didn’t say much. Kennedy and Douglas had both been to Vietnam and they asked most of the questions.

Tell me about Wesley Fishel.

FV: I knew Wesley very well. He was a close friend of Diem. It was very bona fide and it went on for a long time. He was very trusted by Diem. He trusted him almost more than anyone else I know. He went over there...I saw him in Vietnam and saw him here many times. He used to come to Washington once in a while. He always stopped by and chatted. He was always tied up in his anxieties. He always knew the thing was about to fall apart. He was fighting a last ditch battle to keep it alive. That was his general tenor when you approached him in a conversation on the subject.

He went out there on a mission to meet him...a mission of some sort. I remember seeing him here and he was very optimistic at first when he brought out Wolf Ladejinsky. Wolf, I also met him out there. Wolf Ladejinsky did a very good job of it, trying to plan the land reform, which everybody regarded as critical to resolving the internal Viet Cong problem. If you didn’t solve the land problem, you wouldn’t be able to deal with it. Ladejinsky, fresh out of Taiwan, where he’d done something similar, had a good of confidence from Diem, I’m sure, in part derivative through Wesley Fishel, who brought him out in the first place. After...I can’t remember now just how these trips worked out.

When I saw him later, I knew that he was losing hope that it was going to work. Ladejinsky had been let go. I think it had something to do with when the brother and sister-in-law began to assume a greater role in the situation. Once they came in, I think Wesley Fishel gave up on the situation. I don’t think there was ever a formal falling out; I just think he kind of withdrew from it and came back.

GO: It was kind of like trying to get North and French(?) Vietnam after Diem’s assassination.

FV: Yeah.
GO: He wrote a letter in the '70s that I should have brought it, but I didn’t think of it. He responded to Mansfield about...he said something about...it sounds like it’s still 1954 or 1955 and he’s still (unintelligible)

What about...what are some of these other names. There are so many interesting names from the '50s. Charles...Chester Bowles is someone who wrote to Mansfield quite a bit.

FV: Chester Bowles is, of course, not directly immersed in Vietnam, as you know...

GO: More interested in India.

FV: More interested in India, but he also brought a question of less...(unintelligible) in the world, how to bring them out, and developed the concept of development...what worked. I don’t know much about Chester Bowles relationship with Mansfield and Vietnam.

GO: There was a critic of Mansfield in the 1950s, whose name was Delaire DuVariare(?) who was a North Dakotan. He had been to the Far East a lot.

FV: Weird guy. He was one of the weird ones. He used to write all the time.

GO: There are a lot of letters.

FV: He saw communists everywhere. He was one of them.

GO: He probably was. He was against Diem. In the 1958 campaign, he was writing a lot of stuff to Montana editors, who were all sending it off to Mansfield. He wrote an article for the American Monthly in the late '50s...

FV: (unintelligible something about the magazine?)

GO: I didn’t know that. It was very anti-Diem.

FV: I don’t know what he wanted, what he really wanted. I think he wanted us to be there, to take it over, and run it. He wanted us in the war, which he got anyway.

GO: You never met him or anything.

FV: No, never met him. I remember the letters. I remember them very distinctly. Mansfield would show me the letters once in a while. He would say, “Look at this guy. What do you think of him?” I remember that very distinctly. I have no idea what he looked like or what he really was like, but his letters were hideous.
GO: Did you meet...you must have met [Ngo Dinh] Nhu and Madame Nhu on the 1962 trip. Did you meet them before that?

FV: Yes.

GO: Did you meet them before that or was the '62 trip the first time?

FV: That was the first time.

GO: Nhu sounded...he kept talking about, in transcripts...I think Mansfield might have met with him twice...organization and...

FV: He was the real source of the idea of fortified villages. That was his concept. He had a meeting with me...other than the regular meetings, I remember one at midnight one night because that was the only convenient time. I met him at his own palace. He went on and on and elaborated on his concepts of the fortified village, which I think others in the State Department later achieved credit for at some point. There was always this going on all the time: who was really responsible for what, which is typical, I suppose, in that kind of an undertaking.

GO: Was that a workable plan, strategically?

FV: I don’t know. Like so many other things, if you were going to try to defend people in the villages...if the premise was correct...that these people were not really loyal to the Viet Cong, but just terrified by the Viet Cong, and, that if you once could protect them, they would be very loyal to the orders of the government... (tape cuts off)

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
FV: Theoretically, it’s conceivable. If you had the right kind of people to carry it out, who were going to be really considerate of the people in the villages and treat them with a decency that they should have, we should expect something like this work. Yes, I suppose it’s theoretically possible. It could have worked, but there were those big “ifs”. I’m not sure...we did try it. It was tried in different places. The premise may have been wrong to begin with. The people out in the hills, doing the fighting, they had been much closer to the people we were presumably protecting from them. We...when I say “we”, I don’t mean us; I mean even the Vietnamese, who were presumably going to do this.

GO: The French had tried something similar.

FV: It’s an old concept. There’s nothing new in it. You go to war and you protect people. Then they can be themselves and, therefore, they will support. That’s the theory. I don’t know. Looking back on it—

[Break in audio; rest of Tape 2, Side B blank]

[End of Tape 2, Side B]
GO: There’s only 30 minutes on a side, so they don’t last very long. I found a letter from January, 1955 in Mansfield’s library addressed to President Eisenhower, suggesting he was interested in a party post of some kind. Do you know anything about that?

FV: Mansfield was interested? ’55?

GO: In January of ’55.

FV: I guess maybe he was thinking of not running again at that point.

GO: He had a bad...the ’52 election was a very unpleasant thing for the senator.

FV: Yes, I remember that. It wasn’t...this was ’55. I think maybe he decided he didn’t want to be a senator. That’s possible. I don’t really know. That’s the first I’ve heard of that.

GO: He was interested in a party post and, ultimately, got one. I think (unintelligible) to be going to China...

FV: Maybe he was thinking the senate wasn’t right for him. I don’t know. That’s the first I’ve heard of that. That’s interesting.

GO: In the ’50s...

FV: You never found an answer an answer to it?

GO: I didn’t find an answer. You would think that the president would have to respond to a senator, but I didn’t...

FV: I know that, earlier, he had been offered a post by Truman. I think it was Assistant Secretary of State or something like that. I didn’t know that...He wasn’t an ordinary politician by any means. He was more a scholarly type, somebody normally you would look for in the bureaucracy and not in politics. He didn’t like...there were a lot of things about politics he didn’t like. Down deep, it was in his blood: enough to keep him in office for a long time.

GO: He didn’t seem to have much a relationship with Eisenhower. He didn’t have much direct contact.

FV: No, as far as I know. I didn’t know him that well in that period. I had made the trips with him, but I was still separated from him because I was still working on the Committee or in the Library in that period. So I don’t know, at that period, what...
GO: He and Kennedy were very close in 1959.

FV: That was a good relationship and a close relationship.

GO: Part of that was involved in their interest in Vietnam and Diem.

FV: I don’t really think it was that so much. It was much broader.

GO: Skipping into the Johnson administration, I found an interesting...Averell Harriman considered Dean Rusk to be frozen in the 1950s, in terms of his outlook about communism and Vietnam.

FV: I wouldn’t disagree with that.

GO: I kind of agree with it to. In his memoirs, Rusk...how did he refer to him...he wasn’t very kind to either Senator Mansfield or Fulbright.

FV: No, he didn’t like Mansfield.

GO: He referred to Mansfield as a “fascinating character” and, beyond that, he basically talked about Mansfield being one of those who signed Sino(?). Rusk, I think, was miffed that Mansfield, as one who had signed Sino(?), was upset when the Johnson administration used Sino as justification. How would you describe Mansfield’s relationship with Dean Rusk?

FV: (inaudible) Nothing like his relationship with Dulles.

GO: McGeorge Bundy...

FV: Rusk had a bureaucratic outlook. Basically, you can’t understand Rusk. I don’t know what he does in his memoirs; I didn’t read them. You can’t understand Rusk without realizing that he had to defend the US position on China in those years when it was almost indefensible.

GO: You’re way back...

FV: Way back in the Truman administration. It fell to him to do it. He got an awful bad reaction to it at times. That’s one thing. You can’t understand Rusk without realizing that he’s the man who used the phrase “yellow horde”. You can’t understand...if you don’t realize it in this day and age...that’s why when Harriman said he’s frozen in the ’50s, he’s probably right. I’d even go back further. He might have been frozen in the ’40s. Basically, that was Rusk’s problem. He couldn’t understand a person like Mansfield, certainly, who lives in contemporary times, if nothing else. You have to live in contemporary times, if you’re going to be a politician. That’s...

Frank Valeo Interview, OH 393-002a, b, c, d, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
GO: McGeorge Bundy was the person who responded to all of Mansfield’s memos, or many of them, and wrote long rebuttals, I suppose. Did he and Mansfield have much contact?

FV: No. He didn’t...he wouldn’t have much with McGeorge Bundy. McGeorge Bundy and Rusk both belonged in that school of thought, which had little respect for legislative politicians, very little respect. They may have had some respect for presidential politicians, but certainly none for legislative politicians. There was very little ground. That’s unlike Dulles, who had a different view of the political processes in the country.

GO: How about [Robert Strange] McNamara? Was he different than Rusk and Bundy?

FV: McNamara was different in an odd way. He did not have an intellectual background. He had a business background. So he was different. Both of them, both Rusk and Bundy, were intellectuals, in a real sense. In some ways, Bundy represented the intellectual disdain for politicians; Rusk represented the bureaucratic disdain for politicians. Both categories, insofar as we can generalize about anything, share this utter disdain for politicians.

GO: McNamara just came out, a few months ago, (unintelligible) and talked about Vietnam. As far as I know, that’s the first time that he has really publicly talked about it. Apparently, when he changed his mind about it, he almost had an emotional breakdown and had a real difficult time. I found in Marcy’s paper, in 1969...and McNamara must have been with the World Bank in 1969. He certainly...Johnson was no longer there and he left before that happened. McNamara invited a lot of the members of the Foreign Relations committee - maybe not all of them, but Mansfield, Pell, McGhee, Aiken, Munt(?), Pace, Javits, Sparkman, Church, Dodd, Hooper, and Fulbright – to a steak dinner in his office in 1969.

FV: I’m not familiar with it.

GO: I didn’t think you’d remember. I was just fascinated with...

FV: (unintelligible)

GO: I know that, about that time, he testified on the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Mansfield was very gentle in his questioning. I perceived that there wasn’t...

FV: I think he felt sorry for McNamara. For McNamara, it was something that he didn’t really understand. He tried to apply his own abilities and capabilities to a situation where they were not applicable. That’s why the body counts became a measurement and so forth. That pleased Johnson. Johnson liked to drag out the body count every time they met down there.

I think he felt sorry for him because McNamara is a highly talented man. I wouldn’t take it away from him. He really was the father of the use of computers in the government. He brought in
the computers and the people knew little about them at the very beginning. It was very portent. It changed the whole structure in the Defense Department, for which he was little appreciated because of his association with Vietnam later.

GO: That probably made people forget everything. (unintelligible) Some historians, basically...they call it the Hawk and Dove theory. Johnson inherited these three advisors, who had been in the Kennedy administration, and, basically, didn’t want to escalate, but was persuaded by those three men to do so.

FV: Just a theory.

GO: You don’t buy that, then?

FV: You ask yourself, who’s the president? He could have listened to Mansfield.

GO: Why do you suppose he didn’t? He had George Ball, too.

FV: The reason why he couldn’t...I don’t think he could listen to Mansfield. I wouldn’t put George Ball in the same category. That’s another category. With Mansfield...I think he couldn’t because he knew him as his assistant in the Senate and he didn’t think he was all that smart. I think it’s as simple as that. “I know more than anybody in town.” That would be his view. That would be Johnson’s approach. Johnson would think that Mansfield isn’t that smart...or whatever the case may be. Maybe it’s not in terms of smarts, but some other characteristic. “Why turn to him for advice? I’ve been advising him how to do it all these years. I don’t need his advice.”

These fellows down here...I travelled with Johnson. I went on this trip, so I have some feel for his personality. The way he reacted to different people on that trip was very revealing. These are the people that are supposed to know about these things. Congress is supposed to know about other things. He came out of the Roosevelt period when Congress didn’t get involved in foreign policy to speak of. He just felt that he couldn’t...He liked Mansfield. It wasn’t that he didn’t think he was a nice fellow and a good senator, but that’s not what I need down here. I need all these brainy people who live in this business. I want the best I can get and these are the people down here.

GO: You came on Mansfield’s staff in ’58, right?

FV: Right, on his personal staff.

GO: You had a couple of years to look at his relationship with Johnson, when he was Johnson’s whip.

FV: Yes, while we were on the whip job. I remember that.
GO: What was that relationship like?

FV: Nothing much. Johnson...Mansfield did mix it up on the floor occasionally. He was not one of those powerful (unintelligible) or anything like that. I wouldn’t put Mansfield in that category.

GO: George Reedy...I asked George Reedy, who teaches at Marquette...he’s kind of retired now. Interesting fellow. I asked him...

FV: I know George. He was on the ’61 trip.

GO: Was he?

FV: Yeah.

GO: I didn’t know that. He...he described the Mansfield/Johnson whip/leader relationship as a good working relationship, but there was certainly no warmth to it, which was unusual because Johnson could be a very warm man.

FV: True. I think that’s accurate. The only reason was Mansfield was not. Nobody ever got warm with Mansfield. The closest anybody came to that was [George] Aiken, probably. There it was formed...and [John O.] Pastore for a time, but that sort of tapered off.

GO: Let’s jump to Aiken. They were pretty much in agreement on Vietnam.

FV: Yes, because Aiken the ’65 trip.

GO: And they had breakfast a lot?

FV: Yes, they were very close.

GO: Were there...you mentioned Pastore...any other senators that you think he was close to?

FV: Not really. I would say that, in all the years I was with him, it would be those two. I’m trying to think of a third one. That’s about it. He liked everyone. He got along fine with almost all of them. But those were the only two that there was any kind of opening up on a personal basis.

GO: Pastore got upset one time when Mansfield wouldn’t openly support him for whip, maybe.

FV: I think it was whip.
GO: That just rang a bell, I guess. Were there any senators who Mansfield did not like? He didn’t seem to like dislike people very often. What about Wayne Morse?

FV: No, he wouldn’t dislike Wayne Morse. (unintelligible) If he did, you wouldn’t know it anyhow.

GO: A lot of Democrats...Mansfield seems sometimes to get along better with Republicans than Democrats.

FV: He always reminds me of Fiorello LaGuardia, the famous mayor of New York. One of the quotes from LaGuardia goes, “In politics, you’re always doing for your enemies what you should be doing for your friends.” I think the appearance of getting along with Republicans is as much that as any other thing. On the other hand, he worked under two Republican...he worked under a Republican president for eight years. He finally got the job he wanted out there in Asia. (laughter) It wasn’t the job he wanted. He wanted China.

GO: His lecture notes...somebody wrote that historians in the 1930s tended either to be pro-Japanese or pro-Chinese...

FV: In the ’30s, that’s true.

GO: ...and that Mansfield was pro-Chinese. There was a little anecdote in his lecture notes about how the Chinese smile when you need it and the Japanese smile (inaudible). It was really kind of interesting to read that, given the fact that he became the ambassador to Japan. Did he...he sought that ambassadorship. He talked to Carter about this? Is this something that was kind of prearranged or maybe you don’t even know?

FV: I don’t know.

GO: A person who wrote for The Missoulian did a bunch of interviews and put a little pamphlet out on Mansfield a couple of years ago. I don’t know what his source was, but he indicated that Mansfield got Gerald Ford to intervene with Reagan, when Reagan was elected, to continue him in the ambassadorship to Japan. Was he close enough to Gerry Ford that that’s something that might have happened?

FV: He could have asked Gerry Ford to do something like that, but it doesn’t strike...I have no way of telling. I haven’t had much contact with in years, after he left the Senate.

GO: In 1964, with the Gulf of Tonkin decision, Mansfield stood up at that meeting. He was the only one who really opposed it all the way. (unintelligible). After the bombing of Pleiku, he stood up at a meeting of...
FV: No, you’ve got it wrong. It was not him. Morse opposed it. Morse was the only one who voted against. Morse and Gruening voted against it. [Gaylord] Nelson grumbled about it.

GO: But at the initial leadership meeting, Mansfield...

FV: You mean, at...not in the Senate.

GO: No. (unintelligible) voted for it, to Fulbright’s chagrin forever. They rushed that through real quick, compared to similar resolutions under Eisenhower. They looked at them pretty clearly. Mansfield stood up at that meeting and suggested that it was a mistake and then went out and told the press...

FV: This is a meeting with the president?

GO: Right, but to the press, Mansfield was, of course, very generous.

FV: Yeah, he wouldn’t...I’m not familiar with that. I didn’t think that he would oppose it. I have not heard that he had opposed it in the meeting.

GO: He did, in his way. He did that after the bombing of Pleiku. He was the only person to stand up and suggest that this response was not a good idea.

FV: His concern was always the deepening of the involvement. It would be in character, if they didn’t actually happen.

GO: Then, July 26th or 27th of ’65, when Johnson announced the commitment of ground troops, Mansfield was, again, the only person to stand up and oppose it. One of the leaders of the House suggested that Johnson had this way of asking people who would support him to speak first. [John William] McCormack was often given an opportunity to speak early in these meetings. Mansfield only came at the end when everybody had come on board. It had to take considerable courage to stand up when you’re sitting around congressional leaders, some of them military leaders, and administrative leaders and oppose it. Did he ever talk about that, the difficulty of standing up and opposing that kind of thing?

FV: No, never that I can remember. That he was very cautious, that I know. The way he did it: he was not militant about it. I’m sure it was never in militant terms. He would always introduce a note of caution. It used to drive Johnson crazy.

GO: I’m sure it did.

FV: He couldn’t pin him down and say, “Mansfield supported me on this.” He was looking for that. That’s what Johnson was doing all the time.
GO: When Johnson, a day or two before...right before the Wisconsin primary, I remember it clearly, Johnson took himself out of the race. He met with Mansfield for three hours a night or two before, just to tell Mansfield that he was going to do this. I’ve always been real disappointed that Mansfield, often, when he had these important meetings, he’d go back and write a memo for his files summarizing it; he never did on that one. Did he ever talk about that meeting with Johnson before Johnson withdrew?

FV: I was in Asia. That was one of the trips I was on alone. I remember hearing the news in the embassy in Japan at the time. I never discussed that with him. (unintelligible) was the ambassador in Tokyo. He told me that Johnson wasn’t going to run again. It caught me by surprise. I knew he was having difficulties, but I didn’t think he’d (unintelligible)...

GO: Apparently...I’m jumping ahead back into the ’70s. After the Eagleton Affair happened and [George] McGovern was looking for a Vice Presidential candidate, McGovern said in his memos that he asked Mansfield, who of course said no. Did the senator ever talk about that?

FV: He never mentioned it to me. If he did, he never mentioned it.

GO: I have a really interesting note that I think was from Eagleton to Mansfield. I’ll have to ask him. It was kind of a bitter note. It congratulated Mansfield on his good sense not to accept the Vice Presidency. It said something...it quoted that famous quotation from some Vice President in the ’20s about how somebody had two sons. One went to sea and one became Vice President and neither of them were ever heard of again. I’m not sure that it came from Eagleton. It would be an interesting thing if it did. I suppose Mansfield could tell from the handwriting...

Just in terms of your relationship with Mansfield and influence on Mansfield...clearly, in looking at his files, you sent him a memo during the Caldwell (?) Hearing that clearly indicated that you were close with him and perhaps influential. In the ’70s, there’s quite a bit more of that, very frankly. I just have to bring in this one example. You sent that memo to the senator and, within a couple of weeks, he issued a press release, which is pretty much your material. It certainly is, philosophically, something Mansfield said often about how he perceived his role.

FV: What was the statement that I suggested in response to the hearing? Do you have it on you now?

GO: No, I’m not really sure. When Mansfield issued the statement, which was pretty much your statement, it was over the Gulf of Tonkin resolution.

FV: It may be that he asked me to do that. In most of these cases, he asked me for a memo. I very rarely volunteered to him memos on my own initiative. That was very uncommon. He used to ask me for memos, certainly. I think that was true. It’s my recollection of the way we worked.
GO: But he used your material...

FV: He used a lot of it. Sure. The question of the initiative is important. I don’t think I initiated an awful lot, unless it as on some subject, which he had originally started...I didn’t go out picking something for him to work on—to do something for him to pursue. It was the other way around. He picked the subjects and then I elaborated or developed them, basically. That resulted in a memorandum. That was the usual procedure between us. That went on all the time. It went on almost...I won’t say almost daily, but it went on...even when I was Secretary of the Senate, I continued really in the same role, as you will see from the later work. Certainly on China. That came much later. That was our modus operandi.

GO: Did he have any other staff members that he used?

FV: Nothing like this, no. Occasionally, he would get something from the Foreign Relations...towards the end there, I was so busy with so many things, he used to get stuff from Norville Jones every once in a while. He took Norville on three trips to China. On the earlier trips, he said to get Norville and then we should have somebody else to give you hand on some of this stuff. We took somebody else from the Foreign Relations Committee on an earlier trip. Basically, he worked with a very small staff. He used the people on the Policy Committee for some domestic issues, people like Charlie Hearst. Almost 90% (inaudible) if not 95%. He worked with a very small staff. That was his nature.

GO: Did he ask you to write memos that he used as speeches sometimes?

FV: Sure. I did a lot of speech drafting.

GO: Did you consider yourself to have been highly influential...?

FV: He was his own man. He certainly...he was a deep thinker in his own right. I have fluency with words, which is (inaudible).

GO: McNulty is the only person I’ve ever found who suggested that you might have had undue influence on Mansfield.

FV: Undue...how do you define undue? Of course I had some influence on him.

GO: You had a relationship...

FV: You can’t have had a relationship of 25 years with someone...you wouldn’t have been in it in the first place, if you didn’t have some basis for it.

GO: In 25 years, if only one person puts that idea in print that your influence was undue...I am going to give these tapes to the Mansfield Center at some point.
FV: Good. I have my own oral history that will be coming out...I have a 10 year embargo on it. It will be coming out about 1997.

GO: Coming out through...?

FV: The Senate is storing it.

GO: They did the whole (?) thing, which are very interesting. They did a very nice job on (unintelligible). Is there anything you’d like to talk about for the record, or specifically for the Mansfield Center?

FV: Let me read this...(talking at same time)

(tape shuts off)

GO: I put it back on. I thought of a few other things. I’ll be angry at myself if I don’t ask them. One is, there’s a book out on Fulbright and Vietnam by a Canadian historian, Berman. There’s another Berman...I don’t want to give you his first name because it might be the wrong one. He clearly talks about things in Fulbright’s papers. He suggest that there was on the Foreign Relations Committee between Fulbright and everybody else on one side and Mansfield and Aiken on the other because of the perception that Mansfield and Aiken were keeping, maybe, Johnson informed of what the committee was doing. Are you aware of that kind of tension?

FV: I never heard of any tension between Fulbright and Mansfield. I thought both of them were potentially Secretaries of State, if you want my honest opinion. Both of them could have been Secretary of State; would have done a much better job than a number of people who have been incumbent in that position. As far as the whole committee being on the side of Fulbright, I don’t think that’s true at all. It certainly wasn’t true in Vietnam, when he went almost unanimously in the other direction. That’s not true. Fulbright was, in some ways, a kind of an authoritarian ken. He was very generous and open in some ways, but he was intellectually authoritarian. He really had difficulties on that basis. He wasn’t a warm glad hander. That may have been part of his problem.

As for Mansfield giving information to Johnson out of the committee...first of all, Mansfield rarely attended the sessions of the committee, so he would be a pretty poor source of information. Second of all, he had real objections about executive session. He avoided them whenever he could, particularly when they were being briefed by the people from the executive branch, on the theory that he never heard anything that he hadn’t read in The New York Times at least a day before. The only time...if you would sit there and listen to that, then you were stopped from speaking your mind; whereas, if you read it in The New York Times, you’re not. He was very stand-offish, particularly in the later years. He rarely...he didn’t go to very many meetings.

Frank Valeo Interview, OH 393-002a, b, c, d, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
GO: I noticed that in going through the executive sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which I think are published until about ’65 now. I just assumed that it was because he was busy as a majority leader that he didn’t have time to attend them, but he’s almost never there. They had interesting people come in.

FV: No...never...If you knew Mansfield at all, he’d be the last man to be a channel to Johnson, or anyone else for that matter.

GO: There’s absolutely no evidence of...

FV: Frankly, he didn’t talk much. (laughter) No...(unintelligible)...

GO: You didn’t have any feel for that tension, either?

FV: No, if there were anything that had to do with staff stuff (unintelligible)

GO: Berman suggests that, when Nixon comes in, Fulbright and Mansfield work together better, although he felt that Fulbright was kind of burning out by that time and wasn’t as effective. This was pretty much Johnson administration period. Fulbright and Mansfield are so interesting because they’re so parallel and analogous: in the sense that they were both friends of Johnson; they were both foreign policy experts, although Fulbright’s was pretty much European until the early ’60s; they both had powerful positions; they both started out, Fulbright talked about it openly, being private critics, but public supporters of Johnson.

With that Dominican Republic speech in April of ’65, Fulbright breaks with that and Mansfield stays with that original strategy they both followed. They took different directions and Mansfield continued to be close with Johnson. It seemed in 1966 that there was less correspondence, less connection, with Johnson. Was there a strain at that time that maybe ended after a while, between Johnson and...?

FV: Yes, because he was beginning to go on the Vietnamese(?). The only source of friction between Johnson and Mansfield was Vietnam. They had no real other quarrels that I can think of. Contrary to popular view, Johnson did very little in trying to influence the Senate after he became president. That was something, the idea that he was ordering the Senate around to do his business. That’s fiction. After he became president, after he was out of the Senate, after he became Vice President, he lost whatever influence he had in the Senate, which, at that time, was substantial. He was majority leader; he certainly did. Once out of it, you’re influence begins to decline immediately. That would have been a source of potential friction had Johnson attempted to do that in the Senate, but he never did.

GO: Was there tension when Mansfield first became majority leader because Johnson perceived that Mansfield didn’t do things the way he did? Did that lead to anything?
FV: Johnson was totally satisfied with Mansfield as majority leader because he was in the background and he never sought the limelight. (tape breaks off)

[End of Tape 3, Side A]
FV: That’s what Johnson wanted. He didn’t want people around to have competition with. That was for sure. Mansfield filled in dutifully whenever Johnson had to go away because of his bad heart. Ideal minority leader...majority whip.

GO: Erwin Knoll, who’s the editor of Progressive Magazine, which Mansfield used to follow.

FV: I remember that.

GO: Erwin Knoll must have been working in Washington in the late ‘60s. He told me...I sat next to him at a banquet once. He knew Anne Mansfield and that, in the late ‘60s, Anne was a Vietnam War protestor. Is that true?

FV: It’s not impossible. If she were in college, she would have been. I say she would have been, but it’s certainly possible that she would have been.

GO: You’re not aware of any tension between Anne and her father over Vietnam?

[Break in audio; rest of Tape 3, Side B blank]

[End of Tape 3, Side B]
GO: I won’t keep you much longer, but if there’s anything you’d like put on the record about Senator Mansfield for future people who, hopefully, will come to Missoula and research him. I’ve saved most things.

FV: Yeah, you did.

GO: There’s just an awful lot of interesting things about him. The truth is few people go there because, I suppose, it’s so far away. This book about Fulbright and Vietnam I mentioned, he went to see Aiken’s papers because they were public I suppose. He had to go to DC and Vermont. (unintelligible sentence).

FV: I’m going to go out myself. I’ve never been out to Missoula. My son’s going to marry a girl in Salt Lake City next year and I think I’ll make a trip out. I want to see what papers he’s got. A lot of it, is papers...I wrote a lot of papers to him in that period, in one form or another, but I have no idea now what’s in that collection. I think I’ll go back and take a look.

GO: You described to me in a letter how your relationship with the senator started (unintelligible). I suspect that would be of interest to scholars. Anything about Mansfield’s contribution or your relationship with him or anything like that...

FV: I think he was one of the significant factors in bringing the war to an end, which was one of his major contributions.

GO: How do you think that happened?

FV: By constant pressure...of course, it’s much more complicated. It goes into how he structured the senators, the Senate, and everything else, the main things that I will cover, myself, at some point. The constant pressure on the presidents to restrain involvement and, ultimately, to end it. Quite the opposite of Mr. [George H.W.] Bush and this present war. He wanted out and he knew that, having once gotten themselves in, there were no quick outs, but that, by constant pressure...which was reflective of what was happening in the country. After the war ended, as it did in the desert in 60 days, Johnson [Bush?] was a great hero, but that was not in the cards in Vietnam. Johnson never fully understood that, but Mansfield understood it.

GO: When Johnson took himself out of the race and decided to try to negotiate and end that war, that changed the momentum and, to some degree, the war started winding down. You think Mansfield contributed to that decision by Johnson at that point.

FV: Unquestionably.

GO: Under Nixon, it was more cutting off funds.

Frank Valeo Interview, OH 393-002a, b, c, d, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
FV: Then it was desperate. Then you couldn’t do it that way. There was no way out because they wouldn’t move. Bureaucracy, being what it is, it had no capabilities of moving. Only political leaders could move the bureaucracy. When Nixon took over for Mansfield, we were at a higher involvement. We were up to our ears. You might say it leveled off and we never went any higher. That’s true, but how do you get it down? You don’t get it down by saying, “Get it down,” especially if you’re a president who is trying to look as though he’s doing it in a way that Aiken could have done four years ago by declaring victory and getting out.

He can’t do it that way anymore because it isn’t that clear cut a victory anymore. You’re going to have to get out with some pain. You’ve got a president that doesn’t know how to get out with pain; you’ve got a bureaucracy, which cannot move without political initiative. You’re left with the one way, which is the most difficult and most impossible way to end a war, almost impossible way, which is through Congress, by cutting funds. That is, in effect, what happened and by putting limitations on the usages of the armed forces. That is the way the war ended.

GO: And Mansfield was instrumental...

FV: Very much so, although by that point, the actual legislative leadership had passed to Trent(?) and [John Sherman] Cooper and some others in the Senate. The House was almost split for some reason. They’d been working...worked a lot on other matters, but on this one they were almost right through, partly because of McFall(?) would be my guess He was still of the old school. This was something you leave to the president.

GO: How did Mansfield get along with Henry Kissinger? I meant to ask you that earlier.

FV: Not much contact. I went with them both on the (inaudible) conference in Mexico, the first meeting with the Latin American foreign leaders. I remember that. (inaudible). He’s in his own world too, in a way. He had the capability to communicate (inaudible)

GO: How about Melvin Laird? They certainly knew each other.

FV: The only contact I remember...I was Secretary of Senate at that point when he had the paper...those documents...the Pentagon Papers. Again, I don’t think there would be much more with Mansfield.

GO: Melvin...

FV: I remember because I had to guard the papers. They were put in my office. I had the 24 hour guard of the papers.

GO: Really?

Frank Valeo Interview, OH 393-002a, b, c, d, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
FV: Yeah.

GO: The fear was the administration was going to try and get them?

FV: No. The administration made them available to Congress and the Senate on the grounds that they were properly protected and would be made available only to members of the Senate and only without taking notes. That was the condition. I had to guard them. I had them in my office. I had 24 hour guard of them.

GO: During that whole Watergate period, Mansfield was fairly nervous about how this was going to affect...

FV: Very much so. I think not alone. He was again very sensitive to...

GO: Mansfield considered that one of his great contributions to help put together the Watergate Committee, which...

FV: Yes.

GO: He had to circumvent...who did he have...he had circumvent one committee to do it. I guess I haven’t concentrated on that because I’m focusing on Vietnam. I will give you last opportunity if you’d like to put anything else on the tape, but I want to thank you very much for this time.

FV: Not at all. I’m glad to do it. I don’t really have much more to say on it, although I could talk for hours on it, but I think it needs to be pointed to be honest.

GO: I really look forward to reading your book when it comes out.

[End of Interview]