Don Oberdorfer’s notes prior to recorded interview:

- I had not seen Mansfield for an interview for two months, although I had attended his 97th birthday luncheon in early March. I’ve done a number of things on this book project since then, but have not made nearly the progress that I had hoped. I’ve decided I just have too many diversions and outside activities, and need to get with it. I go to China on April 23 for 8 days and then have No Gun Ri meetings, but starting May 15 I will be in Montana five weeks concentrating exclusively on this. I also hope to spend the rest of the summer, except for possibly a week with Laura somewhere, on the project.

- Mike looked fine. Has gained a little weight in the past few months, which looks good, as he previously seemed gaunt. This time he did not use his hearing aids—I didn’t ask why—and occasionally had difficulty understanding me. But that was rare. He has not lost his sense of humor. When I kidded him a little or told a joke, that same crooked grin and hearty guffaw.

- When I was telling him, before turning on the tape, about my forthcoming trip to China, he said that as a boy he dreamed of going to faraway places such as China, the Himalayas, the Middle East. Finally got to China in 1922.

- As I left, he showed me pictures of Montana school children (Roberts?) who had visited him and who sent him their picture waving to him. Somehow they superimposed a Mansfield picture waving with them. He seemed quite happy and proud of it.

- As he walked in the interior hall with me, he said goodbye, “Tap er light.”
Don Oberdorfer: Who later became President.

Mike Mansfield: He was a mining engineer. I didn’t know he was in the SEN. He was China, in Manchuria.

DO: Yes. He was very much involved in the kind of humanitarian activities of its day.

MM: That’s right. It came right after the war and I think the war itself—if you can call it that—lasted until about 1922 or ’21—’21 anyway, when we withdrew our troops, after the armistice in Europe. And some Baltic count, I forget his name, set up some sort of a semi-kingship in Mongolia. Do you know his name?

DO: No.

MM: He was a very brutal fellow.

DO: I’ve never been to Mongolia. I’ve sort of wanted to go there, but.

MM: Well, there it is. Less than two million people.

DO: You can go by train from Beijing. There’s an overnight train that goes to Ulaan Baatar, the capital of Mongolia.

MM: You can go by train from Beijing there?

DO: Yes. I thought about doing it a year or two ago, but it didn’t quite work out.

MM: You can fly.

DO: You can also fly, yes. You can fly. I sort of thought I would like to go by train to see some more of the western part of China, which I’ve never seen before.

MM: Well you know, the Mansfield Foundation has some sort of a U.S.-Japan or U.S-Asia Center. I don’t know too much about it. But, they have set aside some money to take members of Congress to the Far East and I think Senator Reed of Rhode Island has been over there twice and he’s traveled by train and truck, accompanied by the head of the Center. Good man and really got to know China—I mean the parts that he saw. He spent a lot of time there and I didn’t
know it until last year. He’s enjoyed it, learned a lot. Never hear his name mentioned in the newspapers, though.

DO: No. Probably knows too much. (Mansfield chuckles.) Well I want to bring you up to date on what I’ve been doing and then ask you a few things. Since I saw you last it’s amazing to me it’s been two months, but I’ve done a lot of traveling. I went to my hometown of Atlanta. I spent some time in the Carter Presidential Library. I got one thing to show you from that. I went up to Minneapolis—where my son lives—to make a speech, and while up there I spent a couple hours with Fritz Mondale talking about Japan and what’s going on and so forth.

MM: Yes.

DO: I’ve written an article—at their request—for Bunsei Shunju, the Japanese magazine, on you, which they are going to publish this summer some time in their millennium issue. I’m not sure how it ties in with the millennium, but at any rate I wrote it, they are very pleased with it, they are going publish it. The guy who is translating it is a former Newsweek Japanese correspondent who came and saw me in Washington when he was here and I’m sure he’ll do a good job of translating this article. I went to the Naval War College for some exercises on Korea, which I’m still involved in. I met again at the Pentagon on this massacre case they’re investigating in the early months of the Korean War—No Gun Ri thing.

MM: Oh. Is there something to it?

DO: Yes. It happened all right. What we don’t know yet is why.

MM: Not much in the way of details.

DO: So far. They are working on it. They tell us every few weeks what they’re finding. And I went to Texas and spent several days in the Johnson Presidential Library. I found out some good more material, something I’ve got to show you. I had a nice long interview with Bob Strauss.

MM: Who?

DO: Bob Strauss—Robert Strauss, about—who was the Democratic Chairman.

MM: Bob Strauss, yes. I haven’t got my hearing aid on so.

DO: Okay. I’ll talk louder.

MM: You’re talking loud. I can hear.
DO: We were talking about the time when he was the U.S. Trade negotiator when you were out in Tokyo as Ambassador. He would come out periodically and work on this stuff. I was in Princeton and I did some work in the John Foster Dulles papers. His papers are up at Princeton University. And as I said, the next thing is, Sunday I’m going to China for a little over a week. I’m going to have these meetings with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences about U.S.-China relations—a little committee that I’m on studying American public opinion toward China and Chinese opinion towards the United States. Also—I’ll leave you with this—part of what I did, we sent over this paper, which I’ve written about the China issue in the 2000 presidential campaign. So far this is just my little analysis of what the candidates have been saying. What position they’ve been taking on issues regarding China.

MM: Can I have this?

DO: Yes, absolutely. If you have time some time you might find it of some interest. And then I’m going over to Tienjin and the historian’s going to help me. We’ll probably go down to Peiho and see what we can find. Then, after I come back—on the 15th of May—I’m going to Missoula, Montana, and I’m going to stay out there for five weeks, working in the Mansfield Archives, going around the state. I’m going to go up to Great Falls and see your extended family up there.

MM: Right.

DO: I think it’s a great time to be in Montana—the middle of May to nearly the end of June. The weather ought to be good.

[He surprised me with comments suggesting he is keeping in close touch and describing himself as a Montanan — “we.” DO]

MM: Trouble is, it’s going to be a tough year. We haven’t had much snowfall, very little in the way of runoff. Agriculture is in bad shape. Crisis. Now rain, lack of it or moisture rather.

DO: Well at any rate, I’ll be doing that. I’ll come see you—if we can arrange it—someday between the time I get back from China and the time I leave for Montana—to tell you what I found out in China.

MM: Listen, when you go to China you might want to take note of the fact that—I think I’m correct—that for many years we used to have federal judges operating out of Shanghai in the ‘20s and ‘30s. Did you know about that?

DO: You mentioned it to me.

MM: Oh, I did.
DO: Just last night I bought a new book on Shanghai. It’s a history of Shanghai from the time that the westerners arrive—whenever it was—until 1949, the Chinese Revolution. And I thought this looked like a book that would be very interesting to read on those 13 hours when I’m sitting on the airplane headed toward China. So I’m going to read it.

MM: You haven’t seen any reference yet to federal judges?

DO: Well I haven’t even looked at the book. I just saw that was the subject and it’s new and it looked like an interesting book to read, but I’m sure you are right. Also, the young man who is my research assistant—the SAIS student—went down to Charlottesville and there are the Hugh Scott papers. Hugh Scott’s papers are there. I’m not quite sure why.

MM: He’s from Virginia originally.

DO: Was he? Well, okay.

MM: And he migrated to Pennsylvania.

DO: There was some wonderful stuff on your 1972 trip. He made his own notes of impressions and stuff and sent them back to somebody back here in his office, as well as having the impression of his aide—Bill Hill (?) and Brand (?) and so forth. And some of these are very interesting because it’s not just what or who was said, but his own impressions and ideas about what was going on.

MM: Yes. In a sense he was a good China scholar.

DO: Yes, he knew a lot.

MM: Collected a lot.

DO: He signed his name to these notes in Chinese. Not with Chinese characters but with the Chinese way of saying Scott. It’s a funny way of alliteration of these characters. Anyway sometime—I should have done it today, but I didn’t—when I see you I’ll make some copies of these notes of his and bring them. You’ll find them pretty interesting, I think.


DO: Anyway, they are down there. Carter Library—let me check my notes. Some of the most interesting things are about the Tokai-mura case—the case of the atomic plant that they wanted to build in Japan.

MM: Tokai-mura, yes.
DO: Very early in your ambassadorship—the first months of your ambassadorship out there. Carter was death on proliferation and on the reprocessing of nuclear materials.

MM: Yes, it was an idea, I think, initially proposed, suggested by President Ford, though.

DO: That’s right. That’s correct.

MM: It was the absence of uranium or plutonium?

DO: Yes, plutonium, yes.

MM: It was holding up the building of it.

DO: That’s right, but I talked to your former science attaché, Justin Bloom.

MM: Very capable little fellow. He lives out in Bethesda?

DO: Right. Not Bethesda, but—

MM: He’s retired now, though.

DO: Not Rockville. If you go way, way out.

MM: Well, still alive.

DO: Nice guy.

MM: Knows his stuff.

DO: He told me this story that not long after you got here they got instructions—the instructions I haven’t found yet, but they are in the Carter Library, but they will come through—to tell the Japanese that you can’t operate this plant because of our policy change. And he felt that this was the wrong idea. It wasn’t really helpful. It wasn’t going to help the proliferation question, really. It was the wrong way to go. And he said he took his viewpoint, which he was asked to study, to Bill Sherman, who was the D.C.M., and said, “I think we’re doing the wrong thing. I think we have to tell Washington this is not the thing to do and they’ve got to make up their mind. Not let this thing linger on.” They drafted a cable to Washington in your name. He took it in and discussed it with you and he said you read it through and said, “Are you sure this is the right thing to do?” And he said, “I paused for about 30 seconds because this is a big thing to oppose what the White House and everybody was doing.” And he said, “I thought about it and I said, ‘Yes, I think it’s the right thing to do.’ Ambassador Mansfield took his pen and he wrote, okay, Mike Mansfield.” *** And here’s the cable.
MM: He was the expert. Incidentally sometime last year there were some difficulties at Tokai- mura.

DO: Yes, that’s right. Exactly. They had an accident there.

MM: Yes.

DO: Here’s the cable and here’s Jimmy Carter’s response.

MM: This is Carter? [Reads cable.]

DO: That’s Carter. You say, I’ve been at this job long, but I—you can have that. I’ve made a copy for you. The mythology is that Carter got your cable and wrote on it, “Tell Mike I agree with him.” That’s been written in a couple of different accounts. That’s not quite true, but it’s a little more complicated than that. But the effect of it is the same. It’s really turned the whole thing around. And Carter said we’re going to get this thing settled. We’re going to do it right away. I’m going to personally make sure it’s done and he did.

MM: And they got their plutonium

DO: They got the plant operating under some safeguards and so forth. There’s never been a reason to think the Japanese were not abiding by their agreements completely.

MM: No. No.

DO: But now it’s also been written numbers of times that you telephoned Carter on this. And I wonder if you remember anything about that, because I can’t find any telephone call in the Carter records, but that doesn’t mean you didn’t.

MM: I didn’t call Carter, never called him. I may have called Cy Vance, but I’m not certain. I wouldn’t bet on it. I know I talked to Cy on several occasions where we had slight differences—misunderstandings really—and got them cleared up. Forgot what they were. Never called a president.

DO: Well that clears that one up. But it’s interesting to have the cable and there’s the whole—I just gave you one document. I already have 40 documents on this case showing the whole history of this decision-making in the White House and in the National Security Council, the State Department, other cables back and forth from the embassy and so on. And it will be a very interesting episode. In fact, at some point, probably after I finish this book, I’m thinking that I might write a little article for somebody just about this case. It’s so interesting. Back and forth with the Japanese over this question of plutonium and there are so many documents that are now available for that. In the Johnson Library I found a lot of material that I hadn’t seen before and I also listened again to this tape that you and I heard a little bit of over there at the

Mike Mansfield Interview, OH 391-016, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
archives. And I’m talking to Harry Middleton, who is the director of the Library, because the tape is still very difficult to hear. There’s a lot of static on it. There was a microphone somewhere under that table that wasn’t visible and a line that went down to the basement of the White House where there is what’s called a reel-to-reel recorder—one of these big old-fashioned recording machines. The Nixon project out here at that National Archives, that works on Nixon’s tapes, has found a way to take a lot of the static out of tapes because the tapes that Nixon made in his Oval Office and Cabinet room and stuff, there is a tremendous amount of static on it. And they have come up with some technical means of clearing a lot of that stuff off. So I have asked Middleton, the head of the LBJ Library, if he would agree to send this tape up to the Nixon people—it’s all part of the National Archives—and clean it up so that I could probably hear a lot more on the tape. And he probably will do it. So it will be interesting. One of the things I found when I listened again to this tape and when I studied the various renditions of Johnson’s speech that he was reading you—he was reading you about the 6th draft of the speech—

MM: Right.

DO: And then, of course, the next day, he turned the whole thing completely around. It was not the keep-at-war speech; it was the speech that you heard on the 31st of March with “I want to speak to you about peace in Vietnam.” It was a very different speech. But at any rate, this really puzzles me: in the draft in what he read you, he read you from the draft but he exaggerated the amount of money it was going to cost to have these expert troops go into Vietnam. And he exaggerated the number of troops that they were thinking about calling up for the Reserves in this country. In other words, he had a draft that said our costs might be up to 2.5 billion dollars, but when he talked to you he said 3 billion. That was not on the paper he was reading from. And in terms of the troop deployments, he also exaggerated the number that would be required in the military call-up. It’s amazing to me that Johnson would—I don’t understand why he did that. Maybe he was thinking that if I make it sound bigger and then when I come back to Senator Mansfield and tell him we’re not going to send as much or it won’t cost as much he’ll like it better. I don’t know.

MM: As I recall, he didn’t mention a dollar figure.

DO: He did, though.

MM: He did say that he had sent airborne and Marines with no backup.

DO: That’s right.

MM: He said, what am I going to do? You’ve got to back them up. Sent them in. The 200,000 figure, the 40,000 figure, the answer was no.
DO: Right. No, you were very clear on that. The tape makes it very clear. You telling him they would just match you and more than match you if you do that. Which leads me to the question: Lyndon Johnson had to know what your reaction was going to be to sending additional troops. How many times had you sent him memos on Vietnam? How many times had McNamara even come to you earlier and said we think we’d like to send x number more troops and you said, no I don’t think so. So he can’t—Johnson, as smart as he was, knew perfectly well, I’m sure, predictably, you were going to say, no I don’t think this is a good idea. So why the hell did he go to all the trouble to lay all this down for you?

MM: Don’t know. Poor fellow, he was up against it.

DO: After the meeting, if you remember, what was your reaction to having heard all this from Johnson?

MM: My reaction was one of continued, I would say, despair. No hope. No possibility of reducing or withdrawing. I had no idea to offer—no ideas to offer except to say no, except in the case of the airborne and Marines.

DO: Did he tell you that he was thinking about stopping the bombing of some of North Vietnam?

MM: Not that I recollect. Want some more coffee? I’m going to have some more. Just bring it over here.

[Coffee interlude]

DO: Somebody told me—I forget now who it was—in one of my talks in Montana, that Maureen, when she would be campaigning without you used to go to these small towns.

MM: Yes, that’s right.

DO: And when she’d get there, she’d get out the phone book and read through the phone book and recognize the different names of people that were from that town so she’d be familiar with them when she’d go down the street or meet the ladies tea or whatever she did. She would remember the names—

MM: Oh yes.

DO: —by refreshing her memory on the phone book.

MM: She did. She stood in for me when I got sick once. Big speech. She did everything. Got me interested in politics. How the hell do you think I won?
DO: Yes, right. Exactly.

MM: She did it.

DO: Anyway, back to this thing in March 27, 1968—after this meeting did you tell anybody about it?

MM: No, no. Not until at least a year later. Nothing at the time. Didn’t mention it. Didn’t tell anybody on the Hill. Talked over it with Maureen, of course. But that’s the only one. [Of course there was the Senate colloquy].

DO: When Johnson died, you made a statement and you put out a press release and you made a statement on the floor. What’s interesting to me is you praised him for being one of the great presidents as far as his domestic policy was concerned. You said he would be long remembered as a person who did a Great Society, etc. You didn’t say a word about his foreign policy. You just said nothing on that subject, which I find significant, that you praised one thing but you just didn’t mention the war or the other stuff.

MM: I was in a tough spot. Couldn’t do it. He took up Kennedy’s programs. Added to them. Got them passed. Domestically speaking, he was a great president. And he was the president. So you had to tread carefully, and think of the institution.

DO: I don’t know if I showed you this before, but this is really fascinating. This is a note you made December 5, 1963. This is about two weeks after President Kennedy had been killed on November 22, 1963. Johnson hadn’t even moved into the White House yet because Jacqueline Kennedy and her children were still in the White House for some period of time.

MM: He stayed at Mrs.—the hostess with the mostest—place, I think.

DO: This just says the Elms. I’m not sure what the Elms are. Not a great copy but.

MM: That was the name of the place. Remember that lady?

DO: Oh, Cafritz? Gwendolyn Cafritz?

MM: No, not Cafritz. An Oklahoma lady, she was “the hostess with the mostest” and she went back to Oklahoma eventually. But her place was called the Elms. Johnson was staying there. [Perle Mesta.]

DO: These notes are very interesting. It says, “A most remarkable evening. Lady Bird called me around 10 and asked Maureen and me out to dinner with a few friends—the Fulbrights, the Humphreys and Jack Valenti. Wanted us to send in the names of ambassadors.” And it goes on about various topics—Charlie Engelhard. He wanted to do something with Engelhard. “He
wanted a memo on Vietnam and said Russell wanted us to pull out. Asked me three times for a memo. Asked my advice on an ambassador to the O.A.S., etc.” Mentioned Tom Mann. I’ll give you this copy. But this was an evening that you spent with LBJ and these others—the Fulbrights, the Humphreys and Valenti—just after Kennedy was killed. And the point of it was—

[End of Side A]
You sent him a memo and you sent him also copies of the most recent memos on Vietnam that you had sent to President Kennedy before he was killed. These are printed in the series—the State Department Historical Document series called Foreign Relations of the United States—and there is a little footnote. The footnote says that in the Johnson Library they found these memos with a buckslip—a referral slip—attached to it from MacGeorge Bundy. MacGeorge Bundy says in a note directed to Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara—the two secretaries of State and Defense—“The President wants each of you to write a memorandum refuting Senator Mansfield’s ideas.” In other words, right from the start, he’s not really taking these at their serious value. But somebody—either Johnson himself or MacGeorge Bundy, or both of them—are saying let’s get some memos together to tell him he’s wrong.

MM: I think it was four of them. I forget who the other two were.

DO: Well there was Bundy, Rusk and McNamara and eventually somebody else also sent in a memo—who was it?—saying it was wrong. But in other words, what’s interesting to me is Johnson here is asking for these memos, but when he gets the memos a week later the reaction in the White House is, let’s get some material here so we can tell Mansfield that he’s full of bull.

MM: Yes. Well, that was to be expected. Didn’t change my opinions any.

DO: But why do you think it was it to be expected? Why would expect that kind of reaction?

MM: Well, because he had an albatross around his neck and he didn’t know how to get out of it. Didn’t want to be considered a president who lost a war, I guess. I’m just guessing. He called on his experts to answer it. I think they got together. I don’t know where I got that information. And did get up an answer which was contrary to what I had suggested. I noticed that McNamara came around while he was still in the cabinet.

DO: That’s right.

MM: Bundy, I don’t know. Rusk, I think, stayed with Johnson until the bitter end.

DO: The one person who in at least the second tier of that circle who had ideas similar to yours was George Ball.

MM: Yes. But at the meetings, George didn’t speak up. I was the only one at most of them.

DO: He wasn’t in a lot of them, too. In many cases he was not in the meeting because he was the deputy to Rusk, not the number 1 guy.
MM: But, when he was there—and it was only a few times—he didn’t say anything. He was in a difficult position. [emphatically:] But I was too. Because I was the only one, and I didn’t feel too comfortable, to put it mildly. Chiefs of staff, this, that and the other there. But it was done. I felt I had to do it.

DO: How did you feel after these meetings, when everyone else is going this way and you alone going that way?

MM: Not too well, but no regrets.

DO: But, what galls me is that you had had more experience in Indochina than all the rest of them put together. Most of these guys if they had ever set foot in Indochina it was very briefly in a guided tour.

MM: Well, they had access to more information than I did. They knew what was going on better than I did. I just had general convictions and those convictions increased as the time passed. But the situation in which I was placed became more difficult. I had to express them.

DO: It became more difficult as the escalation went on? Is that what you’re thinking?

MM: Yes, I felt the pressure because I was just alone. I would have liked some help. But it didn’t work out that way. But I was able to accommodate myself eventually. It took a long time to bring that war to an end.

DO: It sure did.

MM: Terrible thing: 58,000 dead. 300,000-plus wounded. I found out the other day that the Koreans were involved to a far greater degree [than he thought]. I read it in some paper. I got it around somewhere. To a total in excess of 300,000, but that was on a movable, transfer basis. I don’t know it, but I think that we paid for it. And the Philippines, we paid for them sending in a small force; Australia, New Zealand. We bought our allies. But I didn’t realize the extent to which the South Koreans were involved.

DO: Yes, and now their Korean press—some of it—is digging up stories about their massacring Vietnamese civilians, and it is embarrassing to the Korean government.

MM: Well, it’s somewhat similar to My Lai.

DO: Yes, and to this No Gun Ri thing, which we are looking into. Yes, they were heavily involved, no question about that. The other thing is—I think maybe you looked at this—the Justice Department, FBI, sent forward these papers about the case when Hoover had lunch with you and Dirksen and so on. [Discussing FBI papers on meeting with Hoover re: Ellen Rometsch]
MM: Yes, I read that one. I didn’t read the first two. I haven’t read them yet. Or the first one? Is the third one?

DO: Well actually this is what they sent you. This is yours and I’ll give it to you. But what is interesting to me is they didn’t send you—for some reason, I don’t think it’s deliberate—they didn’t send you the whole thing. They left off one page and they have things blacked out on the copy that they sent you, which are not blacked out on the copy, which is available down at the FBI. Why, I don’t know. I think it’s probably just somebody’s clerical—

MM: Oversight.

DO: Clerical oversight. But this tells about Hoover’s coming to visit you and Senator Dirksen and telling you about this woman whose name was Rometsch. You’re saying that there is no—this is the part that they didn’t send you, particularly the last two paragraphs. I don’t know why they didn’t.

MM: Who is the ‘I’ here?

DO: Hoover, J. Edgar Hoover.

MM: There we are. [Reads the papers.] That’s one of the meetings that my memory is really dim about. I really have little or no recollection of that meeting.

DO: You don’t remember?

MM: And I don’t know how you fill in those—

DO: Blanks, yes. Well, one of the things in this file, which I’ll leave with you—actually it’s not in this file, but in a file that I got from them earlier—is that Nick Katzenbach, when he became Attorney General a year later asked to see this file. Something had come up about the file.

MM: About the what?

DO: About this file. And Bobby Kennedy had taken this file with him when he left as Attorney General. Bu Katzenbach, who was his successor—some controversy had erupted—he wanted to see it. So they sent it to him. So I talked to Nick and asked him does he remember anything about this? He says he has a very dim memory, but I’ve sent him a copy of it—of these papers—and maybe it’ll refresh his memory. The real question—the only important question here—is whether President John F. Kennedy was implicated in fooling around with this German woman or not or whether it was only other people, members of Congress and one thing and another.

MM: First, who asked us to visit with Hoover?
DO: Bobby Kennedy—Robert Kennedy. Well he arranged it.

MM: It wasn’t the President?

DO: No, although you reported to the President afterwards. You told the President that you were shocked by what you had heard.

MM: But I’m so shocked that I can’t remember much.

DO: Yes right. It may be one of things you didn’t want to remember. It’s so seamy.

MM: No, I’m not usually shocked to that extent. But my memory of that is extremely dim. I have no recollection of Kennedy being mentioned at any time. He was the Attorney General then?

DO: Bob was the Attorney General. And this is only a few days—it’s November 7, 1963 and this happened on October 28th, so it’s just about less than a month before President Kennedy was killed.

MM: I don’t even know why Dirksen and I were asked. I talked it over with nobody except my wife. But you might ask Hillenbrand—maybe Dirksen talked it over with him.

DO: Maybe.

MM: I think he was close (?). No, the little fellow

DO: Aide to Dirksen?

MM: Had a sort of a Latin name. What’s his name?

DO: I don’t remember. I knew Marty.

MM: Domdimingo? Domdiminico? Dom something?

DO: I could check. [Oliver Dompierre.] I’ll check that.

MM: No.

DO: I’ll check that. What happened was the reason that they went to you all was that there was a Senate inquiry going on into Bobby Baker headed by Senator Everett Jordan, who was the head of the Senate Administration Committee.

MM: Ethics.
DO: Or Ethics Committee, whatever it was. And this whole thing had been sort of been brought out into the open by Senator Williams of Delaware—John Williams.

MM: He would, if it was brought up.

DO: And then Clark Mollenhoff, who was an investigator reporter, worked with Williams—great big guy.

MM: Big, tall.

DO: Yes, exactly. They printed a story in the Des Moines newspaper. When the thing started to bubble up they persuaded this woman to leave the country. She was a German national anyway. She wasn’t an American citizen. She was married to an, I think she was married to an American G.I. but then she never got an American citizenship. And then this inquiry is going on. And what they wanted to do was to persuade Senators Everett Jordan and Williams through you and Dirksen not to go into this angle of this escapades of this woman. And in fact Jordan didn’t, and Williams put out a statement saying he wasn’t going to go into that part of the story.

MM: Williams said that?

DO: Yes. So they dropped it and I don’t know what happened with it. Probably Dirksen would be more likely to talk to Williams than you.

MM: I was very friendly with Williams. I got along well with him. He and Johnson used to tangle. But he never tangled with me. He just treated me well. But he was always looking for information.

DO: Well we knew in the press he was a guy who was always digging up something. And usually, it often turned out to be true too.

MM: Yes. He was a good senator; he was a careful senator, a very conservative senator, a good friend. Got along well. He used to join George Aiken and me quite often at our breakfasts in the cafeteria and then later in the Senate Dining Room when it became available. Matter of fact I think I was having a tough campaign—forget whether it was ’70 or ’64—and I got word from George Aiken that he and Williams were prepared to go out there and campaign for me, and either do so for or against me, either way I want it. [Both men laugh.]

DO: But they didn’t actually. You didn’t have them come did you?

MM: I didn’t accept their offer, oh no. It was a tough race. I think it was. No, it wasn’t a tough race.
DO: You never had a tough race after ’52.

MM: That was a bad one. It was really a bad one. It was the only bad one. Maybe [the proposed intervention] was the last one, on account of my vote on gun control.

DO: Oh yes, could be. I’ve got some interesting papers on that too; about the gun control issue and estimates of your aides out in Montana as to how harmful it would be and so forth and so on.

MM: Well two Montanans were killed here at that time.

DO: And, that’s right. And that’s what you—particularly this young Marine, I think.

MM: From Fishtail.

DO: Do you think you would have taken the same position even if he hadn’t been killed? Remember this is right after Bob Kennedy was killed and after Martin Luther King was killed.

MM: I would have to say questionable. I don’t know. But I did go out—after the vote when I toured in Montana—I did go out to Fishtail in the Absarokees [home of Marine]—that was a way in—and met with his folks for about an hour.

DO: I want to ask you another Montana question. When you were a kid and you ran away from home and you rode the rails out to the West Coast do you remember anything about that?

MM: The first time I ran away was as far as—I didn’t get along with my aunt.

DO: I know, yes. She’d never had children, right?

MM: No. I’ll say beforehand that I think she was right most of the time, but I was difficult to handle. I ran away the first time around 1914 or ’15, and I got as far as Ulm, about 15, 20 miles away from Great Falls. Some sheriff’s people picked me up, took me back to Great Falls.

DO: Did you just walk there or what?

MM: No, no. They took me back.

DO: No, I meant you got that far by walking or by what?

MM: By walking mostly. I spent a night in jail. Then I went back to the grocery store where we lived the next morning. Then I guess I caused her more trouble, and they put me in the Montana State Orphans Home at Twin Bridges. I stayed there about eight months and that’s when I heard about the beginning of the war, the Lusitania, and things like that. Then they sent
me back home. This time they didn’t send me back to St. Mary’s [Catholic] elementary school, but to the Emerson School on the south side, about 12th Street South and maybe 3rd Avenue South. I was still dissatisfied, still wanted to see the world. I ran away again in about May 1917. I walked and rode up to Shelby on the Hi-Line, and from there on started taking freights. You had to be very careful because they had guardsmen on the bridges and the tunnels. Kept on going. Finally reached a place called Leavenworth, Washington, pretty close to Wenatchee. Got a job as a whistle blower in a lumber camp. When a tree was about to fall, I pressed the buttons to put everybody on guard. There were Oregon National Guardsmen in the vicinity. Wasn’t there too long. Got very friendly with guardsmen. I wish I could recall some of their names. Weren’t very many of them. About a squad. They were called back to their basic encampment at a place called Clakamas, Oregon. Then when they had all the units, they piled them on passenger trains with shaded windows and the like. And I went with that squad that I had become attached to in Washington State. They were going to a place called Yaphank, [Long Island, N.Y.] which was collecting, I think, National Guard units from California—they referred to them as the coonpickers—Alabama, Montana—the sheepherders—and I think out of it came the 42nd, the Rainbow Division. But I left, went over to New York, looked up my father. Remarried. Never knew my mother. Stayed with him for some weeks, don’t know how long, went around trying to enlist, getting turned down. Finally a Navy recruiter took me up, and around February 21, 1918, I joined the Navy for the duration of the war and was sent to what is that island off of Rhode Island? Newport. Took my basic training there. That’s about it.

DO: What were the people from the Oregon National Guard doing up in Washington State?

MM: They guarding bridges and tunnels.

DO: Oh, they were on assignment there?

MM: Yes, just as we had North Dakota guardsmen doing the same thing in Eastern Montana. Lots of tunnels and bridges.

DO: You mentioned that there were guards on the bridges and tunnels on the freight line. What would you do? Would you get on top of these freight cars? In the freight cars?

MM: In the cars.

DO: The doors would open without too much trouble?

MM: The doors were either open or opened easily. There were quite a few hobos in those days. Professional hobos. Little trouble.

DO: They showed you the ropes or they were nice to you?

MM: Treated me well. I didn’t mingle much with them, did my own—
[Interruption]

Unidentified Speaker: I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt but I think Chad wanted to talk to you about this article.

MM: Okay.

US: He’s going to be leaving shortly. He’s got a luncheon shortly.

MM: Okay.

DO: We’re about done.

US: But I don’t want to throw you over.

DO: No, it’s all right. No.

MM: I never mixed with them. I was sort of a loner then. I’ve been sort of a loner all my life.

DO: Just one more question. When you left home, what did you have? A pack on your back or anything or just what you carry?

MM: No, I had a little money. Less than a dollar to start with, I think. I can remember buying cans of pork and beans, little ones. Don’t recall how I scrounged most of the rest of the way, but I got that job in Leavenworth, Washington. Didn’t stop off much once I hit Shelby and got that far.

DO: Good. Well you keep this stuff. Look at it if you find it interesting. This is yours.

MM: Yes. But, I just met with a third group of youngsters from Montana yesterday. I’m going to meet with another one. They’re one of the highlights and I met with one group three years, another group two years, now I’ve got four groups this year.

[End of Interview]

* Some information in brackets are Oberdorfer’s observations and / or comments, though other information has been inserted for clarity by an archives oral history editor.
** Question mark in parentheses reflects inaudible section of dialogue.
*** This denotes difficulty in distinguishing the comments of Oberdorfer from his quoting of books or other documents.