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Award of Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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(Signed) Mike Mansfield
(Date) Sept. 28, 1966
A Transcript of a Recorded Interview
with

SENATOR MICHAEL J. MANSFIELD

Richard D. Challener, Interviewer

Washington, D. C.
10 May 1966
PREFACE

This transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Professor Richard D. Challenger of the Dulles Oral History Project with Senator Michael J. Mansfield, in Washington, D. C., on the 10th of May, 1966.

Senator Mansfield has read and approved the transcript as corrected.

This statement represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed conversation. The reader, therefore, should bear in mind that he is reading a text of the spoken, rather than the written, word.
CHALLENGER: I wonder if I could begin this by asking if you recall when you first got to know Mr. Dulles?

MANSFIELD: I really didn't get to know him until he became the Secretary of State, and he became the Secretary of State my first year in the Senate which was 14 years ago.

CHALLENGER: Yes. What sort of dealings did you have with him in those early years?

MANSFIELD: Very close and fairly intimate dealings. Of course, we came in contact with one another because of his position as Secretary of State and my position as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee.
I was delegated to be one of the three American delegates to the Southeast Asia Treaty Conference, the Manila conference, along with the Secretary and former Senator Alexander Smith of New Jersey. Then we became involved in the question of what was at first Indochina and became the Independent States based on the 1954 Geneva agreement. He called on me many times for advice and counsel as to what should be done in Diem's early days. For a while I was quite free with my information and advice, but eventually I began to recognize that that responsibility was not mine but his. So, we mutually broke off that relationship. But it was a good relationship down through the years. I felt, always, free to express my frank opinions with him, and while at times I differed with him decisively, he always took it in good faith, and I'm sure he gave every suggestion I made his earnest consideration.

CHALLENGER: Okay. Now, that gives me a number of leads to open up some questions about. Could I ask you how Mr. Dulles, in general, dealt with the Foreign Relations Committee?

MANSFIELD: He had a close relationship, especially with Senator George, with whom he breakfasted at least once a week -- most of the time, I believe, in Senator George's apartment, but much of the time,
also, in the Secretary of State's office. As far as the rest of the Committee was concerned, he got along with them very well. I think the Committee on the whole treated him with courtesy and consideration, and I believe he got a good deal of cooperation out of the Committee.

He was a very astute man, very knowledgable, very pragmatic, but a man who was fitted for the job which he occupied and which, I understand, he had prepared himself for over a good many decades.

CHALLENER: That's correct. Yes. Was he fully open and frank and free in discussions with the Committee?

MANSFIELD: As much as he could be. I don't think any Secretary of State can be fully open and fully frank, because the job itself imposes certain inhibitions and prohibitions. But on the whole he was quite frank. Of course, I would say that he was great at the use of the lawyer's language, and he could spin out an explanation a good deal longer than was necessary, but my original thesis would still hold.

CHALLENER: How did he react to questions?

MANSFIELD: Good. He was knowledgable. He knew the answers.
And if he was in difficulty, he was pretty adroit at avoiding being drawn into what he would consider to be an entrapment.

CHALLENGER: Did you work much with his staff, as it were, or more with the Secretary himself? In other words, when you wanted to get information, would it come directly from the Secretary?

MANSFIELD: With the Secretary usually. He was not averse to picking up the telephone and asking for suggestions, and if I had arguments to offer he was not averse to calling me up and explaining his point of view and on occasion come around part way to my point of view.

CHALLENGER: Did you think, in general, that the Senate Committee got involved sufficiently in the policy-making process?


CHALLENGER: Why do you say "too much"?

MANSFIELD: Because the responsibility is not ours really, and as
I tried to indicate earlier, I think he leaned a little bit too heavily on me in the matter of Diem and some of the moves he made after taking over in South Vietnam -- to such an extent that I felt it had to be broken off, because it was outside the ken of my responsibility and entirely within the purview of the Executive branch under the Constitution.

CHALLENGER: Do you have any general recollections of Mr. Dulles' feeling about the situation in what was then Indochina in, say, 1954, at the time of the Geneva meeting?

MANSFIELD: Only that he was very careful when he sent Bedell Smith to Geneva not to become directly involved. He sort of stood outside the chamber door while the negotiations were going on and gave his, and thereby the government's, assent as to what was being consummated there.

I do recall, for example, though, that at the time of the Manila Conference, which set up the SEATO treaty, that he came to me when I reached Manila from Saigon and said that he and the Joint Chiefs of Staff with one exception, General Ridgway, and the chief officers in the Department of State with one exception, Bedell Smith, had advocated that, in view of the stepped-up attacks then being made
on the Quemoys and the Matsus' that we should bombard the China mainland in return, in retaliation.

He asked for my views, and I told him that I would line up with General Ridgway and Bedell Smith. I felt it would be inadvisable. Alexander Smith went the other way. I asked him, also, to express my views to the President and that if any action of that sort was contemplated that the Congress be called back in session -- or at least the leadership be called by the President to the White House or to the hospital, where he was in Denver -- before a decision was made. He said he would call it to the President's attention. He did, in Denver. The President sided with General Ridgway and Bedell Smith, and that was the end of that.

CHALLENGER: In other words, in the summer of 1954 you felt that Mr. Dulles was committed to the idea of the bombing of the Chinese mainland in retaliation -- personally committed?

MANSFIELD: Personally, along with all the members of his executive staff in the State Department plus the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the exception of General Ridgway.

CHALLENGER: And it was the President's decision, and others, which kept that from coming to pass?
It was the President's decision which kept it from coming to pass.

Right. Now, could you tell me the extent to which Mr. Dulles thought or felt that there was any chance of saving what was left of Indochina after the Geneva affair?

I don't think he gave that too much thought. I think he accepted the division along the 17th parallel. He was not in favor, I do not believe, of the elections which were to be held within two years in both North and South Vietnam -- this is, in 1956. Frankly, I was not in favor of the elections either. That may have been a mistake on both our parts, in view of events which have happened since then. He was committed to Ngo Dinh Diem, as I was. I think that it was a wise choice, all things considered. I deplore the fact that since that time, his assassination has taken place, because I think that since then marks the turning point in the worsening of the affairs in South Vietnam.

I have the impression that Mr. Dulles changed his mind somewhat about the South Vietnamese regime as he saw Diem catch hold. Is this correct?
MANSFIELD: Yes, I think he was doubtful. But, after all, Diem followed Bao Dai, the emperor, who did not do much, and it was because of the impetus given by some of us -- I hope I'm being modest enough when I make this statement -- in behalf of Diem that gave the President (that is Ngo Dinh Diem) the initiative to wipe out the Bin-Zu Yen and to put down the Cau-Gais and the Hua-Haus, who were the dissident elements in South Vietnam at that time. And when these elements were put down, especially the Bin-Zu-Yen, the river pilots, and the vice concessionaires, in Giau Phu especially, but in Saigon as well -- concessionaires under Bao Dai, by the way -- from then on Diem began to acquire a foothold which strengthened in the immediately following years but which weakened somewhat in the last years of his reign.

CHALLENGER: Did you ever discuss with Mr. Dulles the extent of the American commitment at that time? How far did he feel we should support this government?

MANSFIELD: That's a hard question to answer because I don't know what his opinion was. We, of course, did send in some four hundred advisors, but I don't think we ever foresaw the day when we would be
engaged in actual combat with North Vietnam. Now that may be an overstatement because, looking back, I would assume that when you send in advisors you also make contingency plans.

CHALLENER: Do you think that he did develop the feeling that there was a chance of building a viable regime in South Vietnam?


CHALLENER: One last question on this -- I'm not quite certain how to word this -- you said earlier that you felt he had relied a little bit too much upon your advice and what you had to say. I wonder if...

MANSFIELD: Well, I would say my advice, among others. Because I'm sure I wasn't the only one. But at least his man in charge of Southeast Asian affairs, a man by the name of Kenneth Young, his Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, was coming down to see me all the time. And I was told by Young that he was coming down at the direction of Mr. Dulles. He may have been going other places. I hope he was. But I think I've explained that relationship fairly well.

CHALLENER: How did Mr. Dulles react when you indicated you didn't
wish to continue this?

MANSFIELD: He understood because, being the lawyer he was, he was aware of the implications of the relationship. And I think it was a new area for Dulles -- and for Mr. Young, too, I believe, although he'd been out there but not in an official capacity. I suppose they were looking around for advice from people who may have been there in order to get some guidance until they got their feet firmly on the ground and made up their minds definitely.

CHALLENER: Did you feel that Mr. Dulles was intellectually sure-footed on Southeast Asian problems?

MANSFIELD: I think that Mr. Dulles had his mind made up too often in advance, and once his mind was made up it was not malleable or viable. I think, though, as time went on he learned to shift and change with the changes which occurred and at the time of his tragic passing was more flexible than he had been when he came into office.

CHALLENER: Is it implicit in this that perhaps he was too pessimistic in '54 at the time of Geneva? Is this correct?
MANSFIELD: Yes. Too pessimistic and too pragmatic. It was all black and white, but as time went on he began to see the various shades of grey in between.

CHALLENGER: Could you describe your dealings with him in regard to several of the instances where he wished to get the approval of the Senate -- for example, in the Middle Eastern Doctrine and the off-shore islands, and so forth?

MANSFIELD: Well, on the off-shore islands, the Formosa Resolution, some of us argued that we didn't want such a wide resolution -- one that could be interpreted so that a Lieutenant JG or an Admiral in the Seventh Fleet would have the power to take the initiative into their own hands, and because of that Dulles talked with Eisenhower and was able to get a firm and flat commitment from him that if any decision was made, it would be made by the President of the United States. That still holds.

In the Middle East Resolution, the administration offered a resolution which would, in effect, nullify to a degree both the powers of the Congress and the President -- most especially the Presidency. We were able to offer some arguments in the Committee which forced a change in the wording of the resolution and which, I
think, made it more effective and more constitutional.

CHALLENGER: Did you have any reservations, yourself, about the way in which the Secretary of State would seek to get the endorsement of the Senate in advance, or things of this sort?

MANSFIELD: Had then. Still do.

CHALLENGER: Did you discuss your reservations at any time with Mr. Dulles -- in general?

MANSFIELD: Not with Mr. Dulles, but I discussed it in the Committee on several occasions. I think it's a bad precedent. I don't think that these resolutions are necessary. The President either has or hasn't the powers as Commander-in-Chief and President, or if he hasn't, then he ought to come to the Congress for additional powers, but he doesn't need the powers which these resolutions -- all of them -- have given him in any instance that I can recall.

CHALLENGER: Why do you, yourself, think that Mr. Dulles sought these resolutions?
MANSFIELD: For protection, so that if anything went wrong the
Congress would be in with the Executive on what would happen.

CHALLENER: Well, I'm shooting around a lot because I know your
time is quite limited.

MANSFIELD: It is.

CHALLENER: On this question of the Suez crisis and the Aswan Dam,
do you have any recollections about the cancellation of the Aswan Dam?

MANSFIELD: Very vague. I'm not at all sure that they're correct.
But I do recall that Secretary Dulles, when he first went to Egypt, pre-
presented General Naguib, who was then in control, with a silver plated
revolver -- which I thought was a very extraordinary thing to do, to
put it mildly. Then when Naguib was overthrown and Nasser came in,
Nasser either said or did something which was antagonistic towards
us, and then all of a sudden Secretary Dulles announced that the funds
which we were going to advance to help build the Aswan Dam would not
be forthcoming. And, on that basis, the Egyptians turned to the Soviet
Union, and I believe they have furnished, by far, the greater amount
of the money needed to bring about creation of that Dam, although we have participated through our aid program in the retention of some of the statues and temples and what-not which would be lost with the building of the Dam.

CHALLENGER: Well, I asked that because it's been said that there was opposition to Aswan within the Foreign Relations Committee and that some Southern Senators were upset by the cotton problem and things of this sort...

MANSFIELD: Well, I think it was more widespread than that, as far as the Aswan Dam was concerned, but when the decision was made, there was very little opposition to what the Secretary did.

CHALLENGER: Could he have got the appropriation through the Senate, do you think, if he had decided the opposite course -- that is, to go ahead with it?

MANSFIELD: I think it would have been nip and tuck.

CHALLENGER: Nip and tuck. Okay. From where you sat, how did...
you see the relationship between General Eisenhower and Mr. Dulles?

MANSFIELD: Close. Very close. And I think the President depended to an extraordinary degree upon Mr. Dulles, who was, in effect, in reality, the Secretary of State.

CHALLENGER: In other words, you really felt that Mr. Dulles called the shots, made the major decisions, and so forth?

MANSFIELD: That's right, I do. Without question.

CHALLENGER: Are there any particular incidents that stand out in your relationship, your personal relationship, with Mr. Dulles that ought to be made a matter of record?

MANSFIELD: No, only that he was always courteous and considerate and gracious, willing to listen to my points of view, whatever they were, never lost his temper. I thought he was an excellent Secretary of State, did a good job. I didn't agree with some of the things he did, but I always ask myself when I attempt to criticize people in high positions just what would I have done had I been in their position,
and sometimes even on the basis of hindsight I don't know that I could have, generally speaking, done any better.

CHALLENGER: You mentioned earlier that he was a bit inflexible, as you saw him.

MANSFIELD: Yes.

CHALLENGER: And that changed?

MANSFIELD: That changed as he grew into his job. Even though he was prepared for it, he had to learn a lot once he got in there, and he recognized the tugs and the balances which exist between the executive and the legislative branches of the government. I think he also began to change his mind a little bit about the rest of the world. You may recall it was Dulles who made the proposal that there be an exchange of journalists between mainland China and the United States, a proposal which is still in effect and has never been put into operation.

CHALLENGER: When you say "inflexible", could you elaborate just a bit on that?
MANSFIELD: Briefly. He had his mind made up, he knew just what he wanted to do and how he was going to do it, but as time went on and he ran up against difficulties here and elsewhere -- among our allies, for example -- and he modified his views somewhat.

CHALLENGER: What were some of these matters on which you disagreed with him?

MANSFIELD: Well, the Formosa Resolution, for one thing, the Middle East Resolution for another. There were other situations which I can't recall off-hand, but there were others. Not too many, because I looked upon him as a great Secretary of State.

CHALLENGER: Well, I think this would be the point to stop.

MANSFIELD: Okay.