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[Reflections on Japan and his ambassadorship. Cold War, shifting decisively into economic area by end of his time:] *

Don Oberdorfer: The U.S. was still very much in the throes of the Cold War. In the early '80s the Cold War intensified, and by the end of the period when Gorbachev was there and so forth, the Cold War was beginning to dissipate and U.S. attentions had begun to shift more decisively into the economic area and things like that. Our relations with Japan, it seems to me, would have had to [have] made some substantial shifts during and around that period of time. That's a long time, over a decade.

Mike Mansfield: Yeah.

DO: And I just wanted to know what your thoughts were, looking back on it. How did the degree to which our relations did change or develop or make some new departure during the time that you were–

MM: In the security [field] they [relations] developed rapidly and quite satisfactorily. The Japanese on their own initiative agreed to take over the protection of the sea lanes for 1,000 miles extending from Tokyo harbor to Guam approximately, and also from Kobe, I think, the same distance southward, which brought them to the straits between the Philippines and southern Taiwan. They increased their defense contributions from somewhere around $1.5 to $2 billion, probably around 20 percent of the total cost, up to about $5 billion by the time I left. It amounted to about 73 percent of the total cost, almost everything outside of the salaries of the military and the civilian defense attaches was, and is, still being paid for by the Japanese government.

The only real troubling spot, speaking generally and widely, was trade. We aggressively pressured Japan from Washington, not so aggressively, but I hope more understandingly, from Tokyo. We tried to bring about a shift in Japan, which would sort of counteract the depression we were in in the late '70s and early '80s. At that time–during that period Chrysler owned about 25 percent of Mitsubishi; Ford about 35 percent or so of Mazda; and GM had interests in several concerns to a smaller degree. But we found fault with the Japanese. They were exporting too many cars. We didn't realize back here that we were producing the same old vehicle in the same old way, whereas the Japanese were becoming more mechanized, more robotized, keeping more up to date, quite continuous. I had a visit with Doug Fraser around

1980-81, I believe. He was then president of the UAW. He said the union and the industry wanted two things: more transplants in the United States of Japanese car manufacturers.

DO: Transplants meaning they manufacture here? Is that what you are talking about?

MM: Yup. And a reduction and limitation in the number of cars exported to the U.S. Agreement was reached on both. The reduction of exports was supposed to last for two years, maybe three. It's still in effect and is kept in effect by the Japanese. As far as transplants are concerned, they've invested approximately $10 billion in five, six or seven plants. Mazda in Michigan; [?] with Ford; and that union [?] thing in California; Toyota with General Motors, Mitsubishi-Chrysler, I think, in Illinois–on a 50-50 basis. Since then I think Chrysler has sold its stock to Mitsubishi; Toyota built a plant in Georgetown, Kentucky; Nissan built a plan in Smyrna, Tennessee, there may be one or two others, I don't recall them. All are successful. I don't think any of them are unionized except Mazda.

DO: Do you think the UAW regrets it now?

MM: Don't know. They've tried to unionize some of the plants, especially Nissan, but so far unsuccessful. I assume Doug Fraser thought they could be unionized. They've been very productive. As a matter of fact I think, generally speaking, the American autoworker has in many instances proved himself more productive than his counterpart in Japan. The industry as a whole I think has control of about 25, 28 percent of the total U.S. market. As a matter of fact, they are shipping cars back to Japan. So trade was the big factor during all those years. When I left, the table was clear except for rice. They had a meeting on rice and they didn't come to a settlement, but they agreed to discuss it at Montreal six or seven months later. The trouble was that we faced up to issues singly rather than collectively, and once we got through with settling one problem, we'd come up with another. That was sort of short-changed when, what's the lady trade commissioner, what is the lady's name who was the trade commissioner?

DO: Oh, I know who you are talking about. I know it. I'll think of it. [Carla Hills – D.O.]

MM: She was the best trade commissioner of the lot, bar none. But she and Williams, her undersecretary, or next to her, developed the SII plan and laid things on the table. They accomplished a good deal more. That's the way we should have been going long before that. But it's the same old story. Although this year, while the Japanese surplus has increased, it isn't so much of an issue because of the situation in East Asia and the lack of aptitude on the part of Japan in facing up to it.

DO: I want to ask you a kind of off-the-wall question before I proceed with Japan because you do something, you did it just now. You did it every time I talk to you that I find absolutely amazing. You have these facts somewhere in your brain lined up so that you can if somebody asks you, as I did at that lunch at the Willard, what do you think about that situation? You could do it in a five-minute version, ten-minute version, probably a fifty-minute version of the

situation. How did you train yourself to keep all these things in your mind in relation to one another? That is a skill that very few people have on a spontaneous basis.

MM: It's no skill, it's a concentration on one issue. Japan was the issue, and the problems when we were there. I've kept up fairly well. But there are other areas where I'm less adept. At the luncheon at the Willard, everybody talked before me. Gave me a chance to think about my ideas.

DO: Most people are not thinking, they are just participating in the conversation. Do you, before meetings, or not before a lunch like that, do you think through what you're going to say and even write it down, or are you just concentrating on it and you are able to scope it out in your mind?

MM: Oh, I make notes. From time to time I see a nice article in a newspaper or magazine. I keep the ones I think are valuable, look at them occasionally. But no special preparation. People want to know what Japan should do now. Well, I think the answer is obvious. They ought to overhaul their financial system on the basis that we did with the RTC. They should do away with these increase in taxes, 5 percent from 3 percent and the value added tax. They should clear up, clean out, and lay all of the financial data on the table and face up to reality. That's the only way they're going to come back. They have to do it some way. They're still very prosperous. They have to face up to reality. They have to be more consumer conscious, less producer oriented. We think they aren't too bad off. [But] The stock market does nothing but plunge in recent years, down. We look at the 4.3, now 4.1 percent unemployment rate. We think that isn't bad. You don't realize that if you work one hour in the two weeks or month preceding the compilation of the statistics, you are considered employable and you don't bring in the people who have just given up looking for work. I would say their unemployment rate is 8 to 9 percent, based on our standards.

DO: Let me go back to the period when you were ambassador. Did you feel that U.S. attitudes toward Japan changed substantially or in any serious way during that period?

MM: No. The pressure was from the Congress. I guess the trade representatives were influenced by what the Congress was saying and sometimes doing. It [trade] remained <u>the</u> issue, the only real issue. But while the picture is worse today, it isn't talked about much. Except I noticed that in the last few days, we want the Japanese to buy more computers from us. We turned down a big computer deal, which some government agency had worked out with one of its branches in Colorado, and it didn't go through. I think the Japanese just withdrew finally in dismay if not disgust. But, we've already bought 12 or 13 computers from Japan, and now I know we are yelling because the Japanese aren't buying enough. And we're yelling because they haven't bought enough in the way of autos and auto parts as they have agreed to. They have more than fulfilled their agreement, which was not an agreement but a promise by the private sector that they would try and increase their auto/auto parts imports by the U.S. up to certain points. They have and we're still complaining. We complain too much. We've always

looked at our side. We've been afraid, or reluctant rather, to look at the other side. We were always right and the other side was always wrong. We've repeated that in many parts of the world. It's poor policy. Too much policy is directed from Washington. Too many missions come out. The ambassador is undercut. Policy is made back here. Just like in the private sector, the companies send out their representatives. In the final analysis it turns out they know a hell of a lot more than the parent company officials here in the United States, but they are the ones who are making all the trouble.

DO: What did you conceive your role as ambassador to be? The ordinary ambassador, who doesn't have the prestige or experience or contacts that you have, tends to be the guy who delivers the messages and he sends back the report to the Washington. But my sense is that your role is a little bit different because of your experience, because of the trust given to you by President Carter and President Reagan and so forth. What did you think your role as ambassador was?

MM: About the same as the ordinary ambassador, except that I was a political appointee and not as hedged in as the professionals who had to observe certain rules, regulations and barriers. I forget what I was talking about, but I had no hesitation in calling up Carter, or George Shultz or – hmm, he's a New York lawyer now [Vance, D.O.], he resigned because of the unsuccessful Iranian hostage–Cy Vance—and I used it on a limited basis. Maybe it was halfway successful. I don't recall even the issues.

DO: Well, one of them was. The first one, I think, was the issue of Carter's plan to limit American sales of nuclear materials because of his anti-plutonium drive, which came just at the time that the Japanese were building the Tokaimura reprocessing plant, and nobody had given mush consideration to how this was going to effect the Japanese. And I think you intervened with Carter to tell him let's give some consideration to this.

MM: Yes, and to point out that the idea was inaugurated by President Ford, that what the Japanese were doing was at Ford's suggestion, and that what we were doing was going contrary to that and holding everything up and putting everything in abeyance.

DO: Another one where Washington was consistently–during the Carter administration, and the very first part of the Reagan administration, they wanted to push Japan much harder to increase defense spending. They were wedded to these numbers – one percent of GNP and so forth and so on. In the materials which the security archives have already gotten from the government, this is interesting. Here's February, actually this is the last year of the Carter administration, February 1980. Here is a Washington Post story: "Mansfield says today Japan is moving at the right pace with it's defense budget." Then here's a memo from Nick Platt to Bob Komer, who was in the Pentagon, explaining how you had arrived at your statistics about what Japan was doing, and he says, basically, "Mansfield presented correct statistical information as he knew it on March 13th, but there has been some new information they've gotten." Here's a memo from Komer.

MM: Who?

DO: Bob Komer.

MM: Oh, yeah. Bob Komer.

DO: [D.O. recites materials from government files, including memos from Bob Komer complaining about Mansfield. He doesn't want to see them.]

"Bob Komer, to the Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, saying, CI believe you should be apprised of these figures. Ambassador Mansfield's defensiveness on this matter is not only contrary to U.S. government policy as I understand it, but confuses the Japanese.' However, Nick Platt says, 'Only the President would be able to turn Mansfield around. Therefore, we must propose that you send a memo to the President before Mansfield returns, but he'll hear of this, encouraging you to do so.'" I don't think he did. Here is another one from Komer saying, "'We should push the Japanese to do more to help out and supporting Korea.' Harold Brown asks Komer, 'Are we sending the Japanese confusing signals?' because after you say you're encouraged by Japan's decision to increase defense spending. ** Komer says, 'Yes, we've been sending confusing signals and I've been raising Cain about it. Once again Mansfield has gone off the reservation, and I've asked Platt how to set the record straight.'" In other words, they're back there in the Pentagon, fooling around—you can have these if you want a copy of them or don't—

MM: Either way.

DO: —Saying, we ought to push these guys for more percentages and you're encouraging the Japanese when they take a step. They want to do much more in the way of giving of giving them a shove.

MM: I think going up from $2 billion to $5 billion isn't bad. I think 72 percent of the total cost of maintaining 35,000 to 40,000 troops and defense civilian personnel, paying the wages of all the Japanese working in American installations, everything almost except the salaries and wages, is very bad. As a matter of fact, when I left Japan was spending more than any NATO partner in defense expenditures, and was third after the U.S. and the Soviet Union then. I don't think any country, any of our allies, has come even close to furnishing the assistance to our military that Japan has, not even close: 73 percent.

DO: What I get from this is: You were very much on board the idea that the Japanese should do more; the question was how do you get them to do it? Do you go over there and hammer them with these figures, or do you try to encourage them to move ahead?

MM: I didn't have to encourage them. What they did, they did voluntarily. They knew that we were interested in maintaining the stability of East Asia, they knew that we had signed a made-in-America security treaty, just like Constitution though to a lesser degree, the Japanese Constitution. What they did was to voluntarily, without any discouragement from me, to their budgets, and they finally came to a conclusion that it should be about 1 percent of their GDP. And they kept there more or less and as their surpluses and GDPs increased, they added more to their share, took on more responsibility of their own, like the 1,000 miles defense of the sea-lanes west of Guam and south to the straights between the Philippines and Taiwan on their own initiative. They had a bigger destroyer fleet out there I think than we had by far. They were not averse at all to shifting more of the responsibility on us because under the treaty we had agreed to come to their defense if attacked–no similar agreement from them. I'm surprised by what Mr. Komer said because the defense people out there were very satisfied, sometimes surprised.

DO: Did you have much problem with Washington saying do this, do that, or trying to do things in a way you didn't think would was going to be very effective?

MM: Not much. But I always tried to see the other side. I have throughout my lifetime recognized that sometimes there are two, and maybe as Foley says, even more than two sides to every question. But I have never forgotten the fact that while I try to understand the other, that I was the representative of my own country and that came first. But if they had any reasonable arguments, I would be sure to bring it to the attention of the State Department or somebody and to present their point of view and to arrive at my own conclusions. I had a degree of independence that the ordinary ambassador didn't have because I was a political appointee.

DO: Did Carter or Reagan give you any special charge to do about Japan? Or just said go out there and be a good ambassador?

MM: No, except that when I was sent to Japan, Carter sent me on a trip to Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. It is my understanding, second hand, that when he broached the suggestion to the State Department there was a good deal of laughter, and wondered what the hell he was doing this for. The idea was a foolish one, but he did send me to those three countries. I did make a report of my visits there. I hate to say this, but I think the impression was, based on what Carter allegedly stated, that I was sort of an ambassador to Asia.

DO: That's what I have heard he said. I have not tracked down where he said it. Apparently, Dick Holbrooke was not too happy about that remark.

MM: Dick was a good fellow to work with. Full of himself, very knowledgeable, fast moving, easy to anger. We got along extremely well.

DO: At end of Carter administration, as I understand it—you were very interested in staying on and our friend, Jim Ludwick, the reporter for the Missoula paper, you had correspondence, I think, with Gerry Ford, who said that you had called Ford and asked him if he would call Reagan and suggest that you stay on as Ambassador to Japan in the Reagan administration.

MM: That is correct. I wanted about six months more to finish up what I thought should be finished up. I was halfway packed when Reagan called me and asked me to stay on, at 2 o'clock in the morning there, and then Henry Jackson called me and said he [Reagan] had informed the Democratic Senate caucus that he was going to ask me to stay on. I did talk to Ford and told him I wanted to stay on for about six months more to finish the job. I stayed on eight years more. I felt the job was finished then because a new administration was coming in, a new Congress was coming in, all the trade problems on the table were taken care of except rice, and that had been shifted forward to a Montreal meetings some six or seven months later. That's right.

DO: At beginning of Carter administration, and for the first couple years, as you remember, one of the major controversies regarding Asia was Carter's plan to withdraw American ground troops from Korea.

MM: Yes.

DO: How did you feel about that and how did the Japanese feel about that?

MM: I agreed with Carter and felt it was the right move. The Japanese disagreed very heartily. About six months later I changed my mind after I got a chance to look at the real figures—the overwhelming strength of North Korea on land, the importance of the area then still, even today. I just changed my mind. The figures didn't hold up, and I—

DO: This was after the reevaluation of North Korean strength.

MM: That's right. After I saw how much they had—land, sea and air, compared to South Korea, I changed my mind and I told them so in Washington.

DO: Carter changed his—well, he didn't change his mind, he changed his policy. He told me that he still doesn't believe the figures. He said he always has felt they were cooked up by the intelligence agencies—

MM: I believe the figures.

DO: —to thwart his—but he said it's beyond the capability of even a president to find that out.

MM: No, but I would believe the figures because ours would be accurate, and the North Koreans evidently placed their army in the first position.

DO: Was that issue serious enough to cause a real friction between the United States and Japan? The Japanese reaction? Of course, this came not too long after the fall of Saigon and all of that idea that America's pulling out of Asia and so on.

MM: No. The administration really didn't try to put it into effect. They talked about it, but they maintained, what was it, Second Division?

DO: Yes.

MM: And they sort of gradually and silently pulled back.

DO: Right, but I was thinking about the Japanese reaction. How serious was their reaction to this?

MM: They were worried. Their reaction was overwhelmingly against the proposal. They didn't say much, but they felt it a great deal. They were pleased when—it was a buffer for them too.

DO: We mentioned in the car going to that luncheon to where you dropped me off the incident where you apologized so deeply to the Japanese in connection with the Naval atomic submarine that surfaced and hit this freighter. And there were a number of different situations while you were ambassador where the U.S. military wasn't too fast to admit . . .

MM: This time they were, the Navy. I think the law of the sea or some thesis places about 95 percent of the responsibility on a submarine, which gets involved in an accident of that kind. The Navy was quick to admit it was at fault. They recalled the commander of the sub. They made sizable reparations within a six-months period, which was fast action for the Navy. The State Department and the administration was concerned and asked me to present their deep regrets, their being sorry, their apologies for what happened. They were doing their best to bring about a solution to it. I went down to see the Foreign Minister, and usually, to discuss this question, there is a bunch of cameramen in the room. The Foreign Minister sits here and I sit there. So we exchanged a few pleasantries. The TV people were given a signal to go. I said, "Let them stay please." And I stood up and presented our formal apology and my personal apology, and I bowed as deep as I could. The cameras got it. I wanted them to. I wanted the Japanese people to know it. The effect was beneficial. It helped to assuage in part a difficulty which we were responsible for, and then the payment, the reparations was done in record time. And believe me, that was record time for the Navy, because they knew they were in the wrong. It didn't hurt my personal relationship or my country's relationship with Japan as much as it could have.

DO: What was, if there were any, what was your most difficult moments in Japan as ambassador?

MM: None really. Continuous trade problems. No really big ones. On the whole, I would say it was fairly smooth.

DO: [Shows written "Idea – Vietnam – Southeast Asia" Mike Mansfield says it looks like his writing.] I want to ask you something about another subject. This comes from your archives in Montana, and I'm not sure if this is your writing, you've written this, or this is somebody else's written and it's shown in your archives. I don't know if you can tell from the writing if it is your or somebody else's. I believe it is written in the early 1960s sometime, around the time of the fall of Diem. But there is no label on it as to what it is.

MM: It looks like my writing. I don't know what it says.

DO: Well, it is your rethinking. What is represents is your rethinking of the significance of the collapse of Vietnam. We all lived for a while by the Domino Theory, that Vietnam goes, then the rest of Southeast Asia goes, and then there is a march of Communism and all that sort of thing.

MM: I never subscribed to that. I did subscribe to support of Ngo Dinh Diem, all the way through.

DO: Yeah. But, this is a just rethinking of that whole situation.

MM: It could be my writing, I don't guarantee it.

DO: It looks like your writing.

MM: It looks like my writing.

DO: If I could indulge you just five more minutes or 10 more minutes.

MM: Want more coffee?

DO: Yeah. I didn't quite finish that.

[Side two]

DO: Impressions of Southeast Asia. I spent some time this week with Frank Valeo. By the way, he has written this book basically about—the focus is the years when you were Senate Majority leader, operating the senate and so forth. He believes that the book has been accepted for publication by an outfit called ME Sharp, who also writes serious books about various Asian and other things. They want some revisions in it, which he could make. These are things about organization and that sort of stuff. But he is pleased that it looks like some months from now it is finally going to be published. At any rate, I was asking him about the early trips in 1953, '54, '55—trips to Indochina that you and he made together. On the first trip you met the French

General, Navarre. Who, as Frank described had rather poetic ideas about how he was going to trap the Communists and win the war against the Viet Minh and all this sort of thing. What was your impression of him and of Saigon and Hanoi in those early days?

MM: Saigon – another Oriental city, a pretty large Chinese population living in Cholon. The emperor of Vietnam was still alive, paying occasional visits to Vietnam, but living mostly in France. The French were having their troubles throughout the area. Navarre was very confident. I don't think he lasted too long before he was recalled and then the French gradually withdrew.

DO: He was still in charge at the time of Dien Bien Phu, and that was about the end of it for him, for the French.

MM: That's when Nixon wanted us to go in, and thank the Lord we didn't . . .

Unidentified Speaker: Excuse me, Dr. . . .. You can take it right there, Senator.

DO: Talking about Navarre, he had these great ideas about how he was going to trap the Viet Minh, and then, they trapped him basically at Dien Bien Phu. He walked right into their trap and that was about the end of him, and the end of the French. As you say, Nixon and Admiral [Arthur W.] Radford wanted us to go in there behind the French, which we didn't do, at least in that way.

MM: Eisenhower said no.

DO: When you went to Vietnam the next time, 1954, in Hanoi the agreement had already been made dividing the country, and they were getting ready to leave town—everybody. The French were turning it over. The Viet Minh were going to come in. Shortly thereafter refugees were flooding out of Hanoi going south – particularly Roman Catholics with their priests and so forth.

MM: Yes, and they came down by the boatloads. I remember going down to the dock and watching them disembark

DO: This would have been the dock in Saigon when they were coming in?

MM: In Saigon, yeah. Not down below the river, but in Saigon, close to Saigon. They were coming in by the thousands and maybe the hundreds of thousands. And mostly, but not all, Roman Catholics. I suppose the attraction was Ngo Dinh Diem.

DO: I think a lot of the attraction was—was not the attraction so much—as the fear of what was going to happen under the Communists.

MM: That's right.

DO: Diem. You met Bill Douglas at this luncheon, which you and Jack Kennedy and others in Washington. [Diem at a luncheon hosted by William O. Douglas.]

MM: I don't remember the others. Somebody gave me the names sometime ago and I don't remember any of the others, but Kennedy and I were there at the luncheon hosted by Douglas in his chambers or whatever it was they have over there.

DO: You said several times you backed him all the way. But, what was your initial impression of him and how did you feel? Did you really feel that he could handle the job of turning this country around? How did you feel about it at the time?

MM: I was pleased to meet him, convinced of his sincerity, believed his statements that he differed with the French on many occasions, and was left with the feeling that if anyone could hold South Vietnam, it was somebody like Ngo Dinh Diem. We became good friends. We had good meetings with him until the last one. I first visited his brother [Nhu] and spent about an hour and a half or so with him. I think his wife was there, Madam Nhu. He was very critical of a speech I had made at Michigan State in a commencement address. I left there and went to see Ngo Dinh Diem, who had usually been very outgoing. He was very reticent. Aside from the University of Michigan speech, which he didn't mention, it was almost a replica of what his brother had said. I came away with the conclusion it was his brother who was running the government that Ngo Dinh Diem had just retired into himself. I wrote a report. I wrote reports on all these trips. I forget what it said, but it wasn't encouraging. As far as I was concerned, I still thought that Ngo Dinh Diem was the only one who could keep South Vietnam together. I was shocked and surprised when he was assassinated. I think it was one of the worst mistakes we ever made in Vietnam, and I think that statement can be proved by looking at who his successors were and what they accomplished or didn't accomplish.

DO: Did you have any inkling at all of any leaks that they were considering deposing him? That the administration was thinking of doing this?

MM: Not a thing. I was surprised. Still surprised. I don't know who did it.

DO: Well, the Kennedy administration decided to do it. I think it's pretty clear from the record. They didn't intend to kill him—

MM: A fellow called Conein.

DO: Conein, yeah. Lucien Conein.

MM: He was in on it.

DO: That's right. He was a CIA man who was in touch with the Vietnamese generals, with General [Duong] Minh and the others and so forth. I read the memorandum of the conversation that you had with Diem, the one you referred to in 1962. It really was rather remarkable. The guys says, "I'm going to see you again," and then he launches into a lecture, it must have taken an hour. It is just like you give somebody who has never ever been there before—we are doing this and that, our troops are over here, and so forth and so on. And you, according to this, didn't get a word in edgewise, basically, sitting there listening to this lecture. And then, the whole thing was over.

MM: That's right. It was approximately what his brother had said previously.

DO: Do you think there was just some point at which he felt he couldn't handle this, and turned it over to his brother, or what do you think happened to the man?

MM: I have no idea. I was just surprised. Someway, somehow, his brother, I think, exercised a degree of control over him. For all I know, Madame Nhu, who was a very aggressive lady—

DO: To what extent if at all do you think the fact that he was a Roman Catholic affected your thinking about him and what he was able to do, might be able to do?

MM: Not at all. That didn't impress me at all. The fact that he was staying with the Maryknollers made no difference. He was seeking a retreat, and he found it. If he had a friendship with [New York] Cardinal [Francis] Spellman, and he might have, it would have made no difference to me. His religion meant nothing. It was the man who impressed me. The strictness, I thought, under which he lived.

DO: Strictness meaning humble and not—

MM: Just being himself. Not throwing any fast balls. Being honest in questioning what I suggested to him. In one of my trips I suggested to him that he ought to roll up his sleeves and go out among the people in the country. A very bad suggestion. He didn't pay any attention to it. Good judgment.

DO: Why would it have been a bad [suggestion]?

MM: We aren't that country. I think it's problematic whether it would have succeeded. It did with Sihanouk, but Nho Dinh Diem was not [Cambodian King Norodom] Sihanouk. Sihanouk had more on the ball and a more difficult problem.

DO: Talk to me a little bit about Sihanouk, your impressions of Sihanouk. You didn't meet him on the first trip in '53. He wouldn't see any foreigners at that time. But in '54, the second trip, you did meet him. By that time he was on the way to getting rid of the French as overlords, felt more confident and so forth. But, what did you think of Sihanouk when you met him?

MM: Very talkative. Very interested in his country. When I think of Sihanouk, I think of Cambodia; when I think of Cambodia I think of Sihanouk. Gave up the throne; returned it to his father and mother. Established a good relationship with Beijing and eventually with Seoul, afterwards. He did go out among his people with his sleeves and pants rolled up, and did, at least for the photographers, did go through the motions of being a farmer. My feeling is what we let him down when [Prime Minister] Lon Nol, was it?

DO: Yes.

MM: Lon Nol took over during his absence. That he made a mistake in going from Paris to Moscow, I believe, rather than coming back to Phnom Penh. He was a tempestuous sort of fellow, full of ideas, very friendly towards me, and in reestablishing the relationship Nixon asked me to go to Phnom Penh. I forget what year it was. Delighted to go, he put out the red carpet, had the soldiers and their arms, brought out the ballet, had a sumptuous dinner. Has a lovely wife in Monique, a French Cambodian. Nixon breached the Cambodian border. Whether Sihanouk was in power then or not I don't know.

DO: Yes.

MM: I think he was.

DO: It was under Nixon that Lon Nol took over. Now let's see, whether the breach was before or after I'm not sure.

MM: Anyway, I was impressed with him, liked him, agreed with his ideals. While he shifted here and there and everywhere else, he was always doing so because he wanted to keep Cambodia, Cambodia. As far as he was concerned, being king meant nothing. I think he willingly would have become a peasant if his country could have remained his country. Now he's back as king with no power. When the Vietnamese invaded, he sort of sided with the Khmer Rogue at the time. That was a debatable decision.

DO: Do you think in retrospect that Nixon used you badly by sending you over to reestablish relations and then moving against Sihanouk?

MM: I didn't feel it personally, no. It just happened. He called us down to the White House and told us what was going to be done.

DO: This is when he sent the troops into that part of Cambodia, toward the east?

MM: Some sort of an abbreviated form, headquarters or—

DO: He claimed it was the headquarters of all Communists and whatever, it turned out not to be, but . . . He wasn't asking your advice, but telling you the troops were about to move or moving, right?

MM: That's right. That the move was already underway.

DO: What was your impression of the other great figure in that Indo-Chinese area of the time, Souvanna Phouma in Laos?

MM: He was playing his position for all it was worth. He had to contend with his brother, Souvannavong, who was a communist.

DO: Did you meet Souvannavong?

MM: Yes and he started to give me a lecture on American relations with Cuba, and Fidel Castro, and I got away from him. Souvanna Phouma veered with the wind. Souvannavong was the head of the Pathet Lao. The only decent fellow I met was the last king. I forget his name. [Sisavang Vatthana.] He was a king in name only. Lived in Luang Probang, a lovely little village. I went up to see him, got off the airport there, and the place was covered with Americans in civilian clothes. I didn't ask any questions, I assumed they were CIA. I had a nice meeting with the king.

DO: This would have been in the '62 trip or earlier?

MM: I forget. I think it's all in the reports because I made a report after every trip. Some years later, I don't recall, he disappeared, he died or something happened. And so did Souvanna Phouma and Souvannavong came in, I think as President. I am not certain, but I think so. What has happened to him, I don't know. I assume he's dead. He was getting along and what the situation is like in Laos today I have no idea.

DO: I believe it. It was always a kind of "Never Never Land" place to me on my trips there.

MM: It still is. It's a lovely country. During the Vietnam war, the Chinese had built roads south from Yunnan, I believe, into either Cambodia or Laos. I just don't recall. But anyway, there was some traffic and probably some trade going on. And now the poor area is a drug hot spot. Now I read in the paper Cambodia has the biggest percentage of AIDS of any country. Corrupt, is the answer. A former Khmer Rouge is the head really, and the king is just a symbol. I think he still has influence with the people, but he doesn't seem to want to get out and do it. I think he also has cancer, going to Seoul and Beijing for treatments. I think he's announced it publicly.

DO: Speaking of China, I know I think you told me once that you had a meeting with Chou En Lai. You may have been one of the last Americans to meet with Chou En Lai.

MM: Maureen and I were probably the last [Americans] to see him…

DO: In Beijing. One of your former aides told me that in your library in the U.S. embassy you didn't keep very many pictures, but you kept one of Chou En Lai there, autographed to you, on the wall.

MM: Yes. I think Charlie Ferris borrowed a picture I had of Maureen and I meeting with Chou En Lai and also meeting with Deng Xiaoping. When Maureen and I went over in 1974, the year that Chou En Lai died—

Woman, unidentified: I'm sorry. They're waiting for Mary's birthday cake. It always seems to happen when you've got somebody.

MM: Give me five minutes. I'll be down there.

Woman, unidentified: Five minutes, okay.

MM: I had heard that Chou En Lai wasn't feeling well and I didn't bother, but he sent word that he would like to see Maureen and me. Sent a car, so we left. It took us half an hour to go to the hospital. There was a red carpet out. We grouped around him. He was in the middle. He looked a little gaunt. We just exchanged pleasantries. When we got up to leave, he came out to the door with us. His last words were, "The door between our two countries should never have been closed." And Maureen wept and I was very much impressed. It took us five minutes to get back to the guesthouse. Coming, it took us a half hour, so I guess they were…[killing time?]. Pretty soon he died.

DO: You had met him before, right?

MM: Oh, yes. I look upon him as one of the great statesmen of the present century.

DO: Absolutely.

MM: Mao Tse-tung reunified China. Chou En Lai kept it together, through ups and downs, through all troubles. And Deng Xiaoping, economically speaking, capitalized China.

DO: I think he's going to go down—his achievements are going to be amazingly recognized. To me I can't think of another person in contemporary times who has almost single-handedly turned around a major country the way Deng Xiaoping did.

MM: No. They'll be no turning back, I don't think. Given time, there'll be a degree of flexibility within the government which will gradually move toward capitalism too.

[End of Interview]

Don Oberdorfer's notes after the interview

Meeting today 8/28/98 in his office with Mike Mansfield. He looked greyer, a bit gaunter, seemed to be having more trouble with a hearing aid. But he was as alert and clear as ever, remarkably so. I asked him how he was able to keep so many facts and ideas in his mind.*(see the transcript for the answers)

While I was there, the doctor for himself and Maureen called. He took the call, and I could hear both sides. She is not doing well* fell and cracked a rib, in pain, not sleeping well. Using a walker and is trying to remain active. At the end of our conversation, Mike Mansfield gave me back the tape recorder I had given him, suggesting that Maureen might wish to record reminiscences. I can't do this, he said simply.

He stays with her all the time, except for the days when he is in the office. She is now supposed to take pills every 4 hours. A maid is there four days a week from 9 a.m. Mike Mansfield will stay home until she arrives, I gather. He told me he's planning to stay home on Wednesdays when the maid doesn't come, and is there nights and weekends. An example of complete devotion.

As to his own health, the doctor told him that the x-rays look better. He does not believe a heart valve operation is needed, that congestive heart failure is not as serious a threat. However, he arranged to have a pulmonary specialist see and evaluate Mike Mansfield next week.

The office—two big cans of Sir Walter Raleigh pipe tobacco on his desk. A lovely Ukioe print on one wall, a big calligraphy over his desk, several pictures, including a blow up of the famous one of him, JFK, Scoop Jackson at the plate at a congressional softball game.

Made coffee as usual. Told me before the tape was running that he made the coffee in Japan in order to encourage the Japanese to get away from the Office Lady serving tea. It didn't do much good, said Mike Mansfield. (Of course, he was doing this long before Japan, I think.)

He seems to be increasingly interested in my progress, and suggested we continue when I was ready to quit the interview after about nearly an hour. We would have talked even longer * we did for about 1:20 or so * but there was a birthday party in the office, to which Mike Mansfield was summoned.

** Information in brackets is the observations and/or comments of Oberdorfer.*