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TRAVELS, WITH MANSFIELD

Interview #3

Wednesday, August 14, 1985

RITCHIE: We concluded the last interview with your first trip to Vietnam. Can you tell me about your subsequent trips to Vietnam with Mike Mansfield in the 1950s?

VALEO: Yes. I think it's important to get the Senate's role in Vietnam a little bit more clearly than the historic record now shows it. I'm thinking particularly of that TV show which was on Channel 26 not too long ago [PBS series, "Vietnam: A Television History"], which was a rather complete and thorough job, except for the congressional aspect of it, and particularly the Senate's role. They interviewed me in connection with that, but then omitted a good deal of the material that involved the Senate. I think the Senate was central to the whole Vietnamese resolution, so I think that that should not be lost.

Last time we were talking about the 1953 trip. It was an eye-opener for Mansfield as well as for myself. There were very few members who knew much about Southeast Asia at that point. It was not on the main stops for any of the missions that went out, with the possible exception of Bangkok, but Indochina certainly was not in the usual itinerary. There had been one or two members who went to Saigon: Bill Knowland went through; Nixon went

through in that early period. As far as I know, that was about it. It's possible that there were others, but I don't remember any. In any event, as a result of Mansfield's report, and talks with Dulles after we got back, I think [John Foster] Dulles was very favorably impressed with him and to a degree shared his views on Indochina. The net result was that in '54 he invited Mansfield and Senator [John] Sparkman to become members of the delegation that was due to set up the SEATO organization. There was a 1954 meeting in Manila for that purpose. He not only invited Mansfield to be a member of that delegation, along with Sparkman, but he invited Mrs. Mansfield to go out with him in his own plane. Mansfield and I went out by way of California but separately from the Dulles people because, for one thing, Mansfield and his wife didn't, at that time, fly on the same plane. So we went out commercially and Mrs. Mansfield went out on Dulles' plane.

Well, while we were at Manila for the SEATO conference, I was pretty much in the background. I did not attend any of the meetings. Mansfield was regularly there with Dulles. It was at that time that the Dienbienphu crisis occurred. Mansfield later related to me that Dulles had pulled him aside and said the French situation in Dienbienphu was extremely critical and that it was essential that something be done or they were going to have a disaster. He said that—I believe it was Admiral [Arthur] Radford who was Chief of Staff at that time had recommended a surgical

strike to support the French at Dienbienphu. This had been proposed to Eisenhower, and Dulles asked Mansfield what he thought he should do. He had not yet spoken with Eisenhower himself, but the message had come out to him. Mansfield's response was not to do anything until he had discussed it with the congressional leadership, that if he couldn't get their concurrence, he should stay completely away from it. I don't know how that subsequently registered in policy. Eisenhower in the end decided not to do the strike, as you know. I'm sure that if it got into the pot at all it was obviously a constructive aspect of that decision.

After the SEATO meeting, the treaty was signed in Manila, and I think Mansfield was a signatory, along with Sparkman and Dulles. Dulles went back home. We went on to Vietnam. I think we spent two or three days in Hanoi first, because the French had already lost at Dienbienphu at this point and they were preparing to evacuate Hanoi, in accordance with the terms of an agreement which they had worked out with the Viet Minh. So we were in Hanoi in the last three days while the city was still under French control. They had set up a Vietnamese front government. We were invited by the Vietnamese who was then the governor of Tonkin to a dinner. It was a very gloomy occasion, since all of them had to get out within the next two or three days. I sat next to one, and it was done still in a very French style, although these were Vietnamese. The jackets were all white, the suits were all white at that time,

that was the formal dress in Southeast Asia. The dinner was superb. I mentioned that to the person who was sitting along side of me. He said, "We might as well as least have a good dinner, since we have to leave now." He looked very rueful, naturally.

That was the period when the refugees—the Catholic refugees primarily—started to flow out of Tonkin through Haiphong, down to the south. Ho Chi Minh at that time said there was no need for them to leave, that they would not be molested. But they were frightened, and their priests, and undoubtedly the Vatican, must have decided that that was a desirable thing to do. There was a committee under Leo Cherne, who had provided some funds for refugees at that point. Our navy moved in to provide the transportation down to Saigon. When we got back to Saigon they were receiving these refugees. A lot of women from the embassy were passing out immediate supplies. They were in rather wretched condition. They were mostly peasants from the fields.

At a dinner at the embassy that night—I guess Heath was still ambassador at the time—I began a discussion with somebody from the embassy staff about what we were going to do now in Vietnam, whether we would move out of Saigon as well and just clear out and let the French work out their own arrangement. He said, "Oh, we haven't got time to think of that. We've got to worry about the refugees now." It struck me then, very forcibly, how when you're faced with a virtually insurmountable problem, and

no matter how you turn it looks like it's going to be negative, you'd rather not look at it. You look at the immediate situation. It's a little bit like that novel, *On The Beach*, which was an early book on the aftermath of nuclear war, when people are doomed to die in Australia, but all they can think about is their gardens and that sort of thing. Much the same kind of reaction.

From there we went on into Laos again and into Cambodia. This was the first time Mansfield and I met Sihanouk. In the previous trip, the '53 trip, we had tried to see him, but he had gone up to Seimrap, which is where Ankor Wat is, and he refused to see us. The reason was that the French were trying to persuade him to lead a front government that they would set up, in an effort to save Cambodia from the rest of the downfall. He refused to have anything to do with it. I remember, in the bar in the hotel in Phnom Penh, meeting a French cavalry officer who had been Sihanouk's teacher at St. Cyr. He said, "I don't understand him, he was like my son. I did everything for him when he was in St. Cyr, and now he won't even talk to me!" But Sinhanouk was not being deliberately malicious. He knew that if he had any chance of leading the independence movement, which was then beginning to take very strong roots in Cambodia, he had to do it thoroughly independent of the French, and in a way of us, because our relationship with the French at that time was still not too clear.

The passion in Cambodia in terms of independence at that time was extraordinary. I remember getting up in the very early morning and seeing hundreds of men walking around with wooden rifles, parading and drilling with obvious enthusiasm. Sihanouk at that time established himself in my mind as one of the few leaders in that area who was in very close rapport with what was happening in his own country. He was extremely astute, extremely patriotic, in Cambodian terms, and far, far, at that point at least, from the image of the playboy, which was spread—I don't know by whom—later on. He may have had that when he was younger, but that was certainly not his character at that point. And I think his political survival through all these years is indicative of that.

On the other end, in Saigon, Ngo Dinh Diem was just beginning to come into prominence. He had had a background of being an official under the old Hue government, which was Bao Dai's government, a front, in effect, for the French colonial regime there. Ngo Dinh Diem had been an official under that, and a very effective one, who had a reputation for being intensely nationalistic, in Vietnamese terms. The French did not like him. He was too independent for their taste. They didn't really want him; they had other people that they sought to put into the role of president of the new government. Ngo Dinh Diem had the endorsement of former Supreme Court Justice William Douglas, who had met him and had

introduced him to Mansfield and others in this country, saying how if we had any sense this would be the kind of person we'd support in Asia, instead of some of the others that we had taken up with. So Mansfield met him in Saigon with a kind of positive attitude, and it was reciprocated.

Diem at that time was very bright, very active. He was clearly determined to establish an independent Vietnamese government and would not have anything to do with a French-sponsored regime. So there was a struggle between Diem and other Vietnamese whom the French had endorsed, generals, military figures largely, that the French wanted to put into the presidential palace. Diem was in his own quarters at that time, not yet living in the presidential palace. A French governor general was still in Saigon. But we caught the flavor of what was happening in this situation from discussions with Diem. He had been in the United States at a Catholic monastery for a period of time—he was not a priest, but he was a very religious Catholic—and he had clearly won the endorsement of many of the leading people in the Catholic hierarchy in the United States. So he had an inside track so long as the French could no longer afford to run what amounted to the occupation on their own resources and had become dependent on us. By the time we went out again in 1955, he was in the president's seat.

The story is complicated, because at this point the first Geneva conference on Vietnam was meeting and trying to establish the terms under which the French would withdraw completely from Indochina. I don't know that I should get off into that, because I had no direct connection with Geneva. But as it looked out there in Saigon at the time, they were going to divide the country, at least for an interim period. Then presumably there would be some kind of elections, but nobody really expected that those elections would take place. And as it worked out, Diem refused to have the elections as provided for in the Geneva Accord.

RITCHIE: Would you say that you and Senator Mansfield were optimistic about the situation at that time?

VALEO: No, not at all. It was a way out chance. I think if we were asked for our own personal reactions, we would have said the best thing would be to forget the whole thing and get out. But that was not possible for a variety of reasons, which were essentially domestic, rather than international or foreign policy reasons. Eisenhower had made a speech about falling dominoes in Southeast Asia and I'm afraid the Democrats, as well as some of the Republicans who didn't like Eisenhower, were just waiting for another place to fall to the Communists—or at least Eisenhower so thought, so he just did not feel that he could move out of the situation at that time.

I don't think anyone expected Diem to be able to rally anyone. At most, he was seen as an interim figure. One of his sources of strength were the Catholics who had moved down from the North into the South. In addition to that, he attracted some bona fide Vietnamese nationalists who came back from Paris, largely intellectuals who served to round out his government. Some of them were very capable people. His brother Ngo Dinh Ngu had not yet appeared on the scene as a significant figure, nor had his brother's wife. They came somewhat later.

Well, I don't want to leave this hanging, but when we came back in 1954, in Mansfield's report that year there were two basic recommendations: that we ought to get clear of the situation unless there was a bona fide national government in place, which was so recognized by its own people. That was one point. The second point was that that government had to root itself in its own people and unless it did that, no matter what kind of assistance came from outside, it would not alter the situation. We were looking for a bona fide, national, anti-Communist leader. Diem really filled that bill, and he was the only one. He was the only one in that period who had any kind of stature in his own country. At one time, Ho Chi Minh had offered him a cabinet position in the coalition government, when the Viet Minh first took over after World War II. He had competence, and there was no question about his disdain for the French, his desire to separate

himself completely from French support. And really he was not that pro-American either. He was a bona fide Vietnamese nationalist.

Somewhere in this period between '54 and '55 he did become president. Sihanouk took over in Cambodia. There was also a new leader named Souvanna Phouma, whom we met in this period, in Laos. He had impressed us as rather capable and sincere in his efforts to form some kind of workable government in Laos. He was a pipe smoker, as was Mansfield. In these situations I acted as interpreter. I'm not that good in French, but it was adequate for the situation and there wasn't anyone else. They would sit there, largely in silence, puffing on these pipes. One would make a remark, and then the other would make a remark, and gradually there emerged some kind of meeting of the minds between them.

Souvanna Phouma wanted to play basically the same role as that of Diem in Vietnam. He did not want to be seen as the tool of the French. He knew there was no future in that, for one thing. Nor did he want to be particularly a tool of the Americans, that was clear. He wanted to be someone who would be identified with the Laotian nationality, and that was difficult enough because there were two or three main strains, racial strains or cultural strains, in the Laotian kingdom, which had been put together by the French strictly for geographical administrative purposes and nothing much more. The king was still in Luang Prabang. I think

again we did not see him. Someone entertained us there, but it was probably his prime minister or privy counselor, but it was clear that Souvanna Phouma had already begun to run the government. The French could deal with him. He was the best they could find from their point of view. And that's where we left the situation in '54.

I must go back again to the Hanoi scene, because in those last two or three days of French-controlled Hanoi, it was really a fascinating thing to see. People were selling their belongings for just anything to raise some money if they were going to go south. There was great chaos. The soldiers had ceased to worry about it. I walked through one street and the paper makers were making Picasso's "dove of peace." They were getting ready to welcome the Viet Minh in three days, Ho Chi Minh and the rest. There was a sort of mixed atmosphere, on one hand a festive mood among those who were staying, and a panic mood among those who were leaving. It was a very strange time. But along what they called the Grand Lac, the big lake in the center of town—it was a beautiful city in those days—you still had the same situation with lovers strolling through the streets and the shops operating pretty much as usual. Well, in any event that was where we left the situation in '54.

We went back in '55, again to all three countries. This time we saw the Ngo Dinh Diem. He was in the palace as president and

looking very self-confident, noting that things had changed since the last time we had been there. The military people who had been proposed by the French as an alternative to Diem had either gone into hiding or left for Paris. He had begun to operate the country in a rather effective way. But it was still very obvious to us that his chances were very minimal that the situation could hold much beyond the date that was set for the election. In the meantime, he was playing the question of the elections, at that point, rather coyly. He didn't say he would not hold the elections. He would only say he would hold them if conditions permitted it, or something to that effect.

There were some charges already afoot that his military—who were left there by the French really, there were a couple of hundred thousand troops in operation—there were some charges that they were attacking against the terms of the Geneva agreement, some pockets of Viet Cong in the South. But the main attacks were against the old sects. There was one called the Hua-hao and another called the Kao-Dai. They were sort of cultures within a culture. They were similar to the old Chinese protection organizations, they not only committed crimes but then sold protection against the crimes—very much like a Mafia kind of process. These were the ones Diem really hit at. The French still had great influence in those sects, and Diem was trying to get rid of them because they were a threat to his own control.

They were rather ruthless people. Many of them later showed up in the war as some of our less desirable friends and allies.

But Diem's regime was well underway. We gave him whatever advice we could, it mostly had to do with land reform, and the need to develop a real, active rapport with his own people. That was basically our advice to him: to get out as often as possible in his shirtsleeves. He was still wearing the colonial uniform of the white linen suit. Interestingly enough, he wanted us to meet with his cabinet, and all of them came in so clothed. Mansfield, as a kind of symbolic gesture, took his jacket off and hung it on the back of his seat. Gradually, all of them did the same thing. I can't remember whether Diem did or not. He hired a fellow, through our aid program (Wolf Ladesinski) who was very famous in land reform in that period and had done the land reform in Taiwan. He had hired him as a principal advisor.

At the time, we were playing very close with him. Under the terms of the Geneva settlement to which we were not a signatory but whose terms Dulles had stated we would honor, we were supposed to have all of our advisors out of the situation, but we kept a small group there, under some sort of guise. That was the beginning of our subsequent aid mission to Diem, military aid mission. There were about forty or fifty Americans, I think it was something called Materials Recovery Unit. But it was a front, basically.

RITCHIE: Did you check with those people when you got to Vietnam? Did you get briefings from them?

VALEO: Not briefings from them. Probably we got them, I don't recall now. We probably got them from the military. We had an embassy there, so we probably got it from the military attaché.

RITCHIE: But you were aware of these other operations?

VALEO: Yes. They didn't really try to conceal it from us.

In Cambodia, Sihanouk had taken over, and this time he did invite us to meet with him. It was clear that he was on top of his own situation. I can't remember whether he was king then or not. His father died in this period. He succeeded him, and then abdicated to become prime minister, because he knew there was no future in his being in the monarchy, that it would have removed him from the active political scene. He was very warm and courteous.

I saw the beginning of our subsequent problems in Cambodia in that 1954 visit. Sihanouk gave a dinner for Senator Mansfield, it was a rather elaborate affair at the palace in Phnom Penh. Then he had the official court dancers afterwards; that was the entertainment for the evening. We had an ambassador there named [Robert] McClintock. It was his first post as ambassador. He had been a deputy chief of mission under Heath in Saigon, and when we

recognized Cambodia he was made the first ambassador there. He really bollixed it badly. I think really many of our troubles with Sihanouk, and there were many later on, traced to that first ridiculous, stupid encounter.

McClintock was a martinet. He carried a riding crop and he walked with two poodles wherever he went. He was determined that Sihanouk would listen to what he, McClintock, thought was best for his country. This had something to do with what kind of aid that we were supposed to supply, and so forth. Sihanouk, of course, would have no part of it. First of all, he was a king, and he was an authentic king in the sense of the old-fashioned concept of that word in Asia. On top of that, he was a very bright man and he really knew his country a little bit better than McClintock did. But McClintock was determined; he grew to despise Sihanouk; he gave him the nickname "Snooky," which began to spread around the town and Sihanouk heard it. This was the beginning of a hostility which got deeper and deeper as they went on. I'm surprised that Sihanouk never asked for his removal, but he should have at some point. It would have done him some good and it would have certainly done us some good.

Anyhow, the thing that underlined this personality clash was McClintock's ritualistic stupidity at the end of this dinner for Mansfield. We were lined up waiting for transportation. The cars started to come up for the departure and somehow or other the U.S.

military attaché got in the car ahead of the ambassador. I don't think it was intentional but McClintock was absolutely furious. He blamed it all on his local chauffeur. I can remember him saying "Je suis l'ambassadeur! I have to be the first one in line!" It was so ridiculous, it made me almost sick to my stomach. I'm sure that many of our problems in Cambodia had nothing more to them than this kind of personal clash with Sihanouk that started with McClintock.

One thing that I've noticed in the years of visiting American embassies abroad, they take on a kind of personality. Even though the figures change, the persons involved change, the attitudes have a certain continuity. It's an institutionalization of attitudes of a sort, so that it's very difficult to break the pattern. New people came in to the embassy in Phnom Penh and they too, began calling Sihanouk "Snooky." By the same token, the problem of how to control "Snooky" became a key to the behavior of that embassy. There was only once in all the years that I went there that it became apparent to me that there was an effort being made to break out of that pattern but it was very late. By contrast, the ambassador from Australia, who remained a very close friend of Sihanouk's, up until the downfall, had given strict orders in the Australian embassy that anyone who used the word "Snooky" would be returned immediately to Australia. He understood the significance of that kind of thing in dealing with a

personality such as Sihanouk. He did not take it lightly. So that's where we got off on the wrong foot with Cambodia, and I think much of our agony and that of the Cambodians later came from that initial arrogance.

I don't have any particular recollections of the Laotian situation from the 1955 trip, except that we met the new king. The old king had died and his son had taken over. He impressed Mansfield greatly. I don't think he quite lived up to the promise that we thought he had, but at that point Mansfield was very much impressed by him and thought that his future would be very bright in Laos.

RITCHIE: Did Mansfield ever consider visiting Hanoi on these trips after '54?

VALEO: Never. Never discussed it, never even suggested it, not after the fall.

RITCHIE: Do you have any thought on why he might not have considered it? At least in '55 there might have been more of an opportunity.

VALEO: I guess it could still have been done, if he wanted to do it. But I think you can't divorce this from the atmosphere at this time. Diem would certainly not have understood it. Moreover, we had already labeled Ho Chi Minh as a monster in public

opinion circles here in the United States, and to go and talk with him would have been politically difficult to begin with. I don't think he ever met Ho Chi Minh. It's conceivable that he ran into him back in China during World War II, but I doubt it. As I recall, Ho Chi Minh during that period was under the patronage of Chiang Kai-shek and he was in a southern Chinese city near the Indochina border. I think in Guilin or Liuzhou in Guangxi Province. At this point, Don, I can either go on with the Vietnamese story, or I can break it off, because there is a hiatus for a period of time. We didn't go back again for several years—I went back with Carl Marcy, but I can't remember what year that was.

RITCHIE: In '59.

VALEO: It was '59, yes. That was my next trip back. In the meantime, I'd been doing a lot of other traveling around in other places. Hickenlooper came to Mansfield after I went to work for Mansfield and asked him if he could borrow me for one trip that he wanted to make. Mansfield agreed to do it, and I went out with him for a long trip. It started in Austria—he was then on the International Atomic Energy Commission—and went around the world. Oh, it went all over the place, into Taiwan and a dozen other countries.

RITCHIE: Did Mansfield stop going to Vietnam at that stage?

VALEO: Yes. He may have made one trip without me, while I was traveling with Bourke Hickenlooper, or while I was traveling with Carl Marcy, I can't remember which. He stopped going for a period of time. His interests ran elsewhere. He kept tabs on the situation, but we began to get these discouraging reports about Diem's situation, that his brother and his wife had taken over from him, in effect. So as far as I know he did not go again to Vietnam in that period, up until the problem broke out that Marcy and I went to check on.

RITCHIE: Since you made so many trips there, you must have gotten a reputation as somebody who knew the area. Did any other senators ever approach you with any questions about Vietnam or Indochina in general?

VALEO: Oddly enough, no. By this time I was already seen as Mansfield's man. Except for Hickenlooper, who had this long, old friendship with me, there was no other request. I used to have meetings with the State Department people frequently. They would come back and make sure that I was briefed on what was happening. I'm trying to think of some of them who were involved. I should mention in this period I met Frank Meloy, who was later killed in Lebanon. He and I struck up a very strong friendship, this was in 1953. And Colonel [Edward] Lansdale was another one who later became a rather significant figure in the situation.

It was the embassy policy at that time not to support Diem quite that strongly. I think now we're talking about the embassy as distinct from Dulles. The Department itself had some reservations about Diem, largely because they were still reporting on Vietnam through Paris. And the French didn't want him, so they reflected in some ways the French attitudes. But that was not true of Frank Meloy, who was then a young Foreign Service officer. He had a very open mind on the subject. He was a very bright fellow. He introduced me to Lansdale in 1953 or 1954 in Saigon. He said there were two people other than Diem who were promising presidential candidates—Lansdale had his favorite, which was not Diem. It was a Vietnamese dentist who apparently had taken to politics. So Frank set up a breakfast, at which I met Lansdale and the dentist, whose name now escapes me. But they were obviously still pushing for someone else other than Diem. This would have been probably in '54.

RITCHIE: What was your impression of Lansdale?

VALEO: Well, at that point I didn't really know him. I didn't even know of his reputation in the Philippines. I learned more about that later. But at that point he was quiet, he was in the background, he did not push things. He put forth, in effect, the dentist, but that was it. As I recall, he was wearing a moustache. He looked a little bit like Erol Flynn, I think. I got nothing much more clearly about him from Frank, because he was

a CIA operator, obviously, and Frank was also under restrictions in terms of talking about him. Frank never spoke of him in glowing terms, nor did he speak of him in hostile terms. He just introduced him as a member of the staff or something, who sat in while we were talking to the dentist.

RITCHIE: Did you have any other meetings with Lansdale in the '50s?

VALEO: I may have met him one other time. But the last time I can remember seeing him was about three years ago, at a party at the former ambassador's house, the former ambassador from Vietnam to Washington who is now a very old man, if he's still living. He and his wife had Lansdale and me and a few other people with ancient connections with Vietnam. So I really don't know that much about him. I know more about him from his reputation in the Philippines. I did meet at that time the chap who wrote the book, *The Ugly American* sometime in the fifties, and I think Lansdale was the prototype for the hero in the book.

RITCHIE: Eugene Burdick?

VALEO: Not Burdick, but the other one.

RITCHIE: William Lederer.

VALEO: Lederer. He had been, I guess, a public relations man for one of the U.S. fleets out in the Pacific. He was a

great, amiable guy. He didn't know anything at all about Vietnam, but it was just that he was sick and tired of the kinds of stories that we were hearing. He wrote potboilers, and *The Ugly American* was a potboiler. But it had a good title and it appealed to Americans' sense of guilt about everything they do abroad, so it fit in. I can remember having dinner with him sometime later, he was then on the staff of the *Readers' Digest* as a consultant, I think. He invited me to dinner in a hotel here in Washington. We sat down to dinner and he was the first man I've ever seen send a bottle of wine back! The fellow poured the sample of the wine, he looked at it and shook his head no, and said take it away. After the man left, he said, "I don't know whether the wine was good or bad. But he asked me and I just thought I'd try it." But that's the kind of personality he was. He was an amiable guy. I liked him very much personally.

RITCHIE: I edited the volumes of the Foreign Relations Committee for the late 1950s, and I never saw Vietnam mentioned at all from the mid 1950s until the scandal over aid in 1959, when Albert Colegrove started writing articles about it.

VALEO: The reason why it doesn't come up in their records is because they never had hearings, never did anything about it. Mansfield was the only one that paid any attention to it, really. He was the only one who knew anything about it. We always did a report to the committee, and it was then circulated, but who read

it, I don't even know. I don't think they regarded it as part of the official committee records; it had nothing to do with the committee per se. It was an advice to the committee, in effect. But the State Department read the reports, Dulles read the reports, and that's where the impact was felt.

RITCHIE: Could you tell me about the trip to Vietnam you made in 1959 with Carl Marcy?

VALEO: Yes, the background to that had to do with the Colegrove reports. Colegrove was a young reporter at that time with Scripps-Howard. These stories appeared, I guess, in the *Washington Daily News*. It was a tabloid; the stories were sensationally done. Mansfield picked them up and said, "What do you think of that?" We hadn't concerned ourselves much with Vietnam in this period because we assumed things were moving along fairly well. He said, "Don't you think we should look into it?" That's the way it began. We set up an inquiry through the committee and through Carl Marcy to look into the charges which were appearing in these Colegrove stories.

The first thing we did was to get Colegrove in for a talk. He had not been to Vietnam before. It was a first trip for him. He had had very little exposure to Asia, as I recall, certainly none to Vietnam before the trip. My own reaction to the stories was that they were not an extraordinary picture of what probably

went on not only in Vietnam but in most Asian countries at that period. A lot of it had to do with the corrupting influence of U.S. dollars through the aid program, which were poured into that area in quantities which had never been seen there before. Since the area is full of people who knew how to trade sharply, it looked like a bonanza, and in many instances it was turned into that. When you add to that the fact that we knew virtually nothing about it—I don't think we had a Foreign Service officer until about the mid-'50s who could even speak Vietnamese. It was assumed the language there was French. So if you spoke French you got assigned to Vietnam. To a degree, that was true. The people in authority spoke French. But if you got away from the top layer you began to run into something quite different.

In pursuing the Colegrove inquiry we tried to get a hearing that focused on the subject he had raised. We called in [Elbridge] Durbrow, who was then the ambassador. We called in somebody named Williams, who was the commanding general of the aid program. We had them up for a couple of days of testimony in hearings over which Mansfield presided. After that, we decided that Carl and I would go out there and make a circuit of the country to the places where Colegrove had indicated there were problems with contractors. He and I went out to Saigon, to Banmethuot I believe it was, we went to Hue and to several places up in the highlands.

We came down from Hue to Saigon by the railroad. I don't know if Carl told you the story about the fellow in the compartment alongside ours on the train. He and I went into the dining car to have lunch or dinner, and the waiter said to me in French, "You must be very important people." I said, "No, we're just Americans who are traveling. We work for the government." "Oh, no," he said, "you must be, because there are two people in the next compartment who are going along with you to make sure that nothing happens to you."

RITCHIE: Were they bodyguards, or were they just trailing you?

VALEO: I don't know for sure which, maybe both. I won't go into a description of the railroad if he already did. There's no point in repeating it.

RITCHIE: He said it was quite luxurious.

VALEO: Well, it was luxurious in one sense, but when you had to cross the rivers the bridges were in pretty bad shape still. Many of them had been blown up by the Viet Minh and Viet Cong. It was a twelve hour trip which probably would normally take about five hours or thereabouts. It was an old-fashioned Orient Express kind of train. Diem was very proud of the railroad and the restoration of railroad communication between Hue and Saigon, because it had been out for years and years. It was one

of the things he really felt indicated that his government was on the way back. That was still a very promising time. They were beginning to export rice again, which had been a main export crop in the South in the prewar days.

Things did not look that bad in '59. Again, I don't know how much of it was his doing, or the doing of his government. I think they have to be given credit for some of that. On the other side, Ho Chi Minh was still hoping that they would come to some peaceful solution which would permit him to take over, so they were restrained in terms of their efforts to undermine Diem's government. This may have been due to the fact that Ho Chi Minh and Diem had had previous contacts in the revolt against the French. Certainly Ho Chi Minh must have recognized him as a bona fide nationalist in every sense of the word. In a way, it was a little like the Mao Tse-tung/Chiang Kai-shek thing. I constantly drew that parallel. Vietnam was almost a microcosm of the Chinese revolution.

RITCHIE: In what way?

VALEO: Well, you had the factions dividing in the same way. You had the sects, who were the equivalent of the warlords or the red and green dragon societies which went back to an even earlier period of imperial Chinese history, when these groups started as protective organizations in China as they did in these other countries. Particularly in Vietnam, not quite so much in

Cambodia and Laos. In Cambodia and Laos you could see the other inputs of influence, particularly the Indian cultural influences. But in Vietnam it was heavily Chinese influence. The sources of the society were so clearly Chinese. There were some primitive tribes up in the hills that were not in that pattern, but the overwhelming characteristic was clearly Chinese culture, or an obvious derivative of Chinese culture. Much more so than even the Japanese or the Korean. So it was not surprising that many of these Chinese patterns repeated themselves.

RITCHIE: In December of 1959, Senator Albert Gore, Sr., held a couple of hearings in Saigon, as part of that Colegrove investigation. Were you involved in those? I think he chaired the subcommittee that went over.

VALEO: Oh, did he? No, I don't recall that at all.

RITCHIE: That was the first time I had seen his name associated with Vietnam. I wondered if you had served as an advisor.

VALEO: I don't think his association was a deep one. It was probably on the basis of a single trip. I never talked with him about it. He never talked to me about it. But then you get into Gore's personality.

RITCHIE: In what way?

VALEO: Gore was a rather—how shall I describe him—he was a very egotistical man. He really loved the sound of his own voice, which he used beautifully, I must say. I don't think he really needed any support, or wanted any support in anything he did. He just felt that he was on top of just about anything he picked up. He was always pleasant, I don't mean to suggest that he wasn't pleasant, it was just that he sort of lived in his own world.

RITCHIE: Is that a common characteristic of United States senators?

VALEO: No. But there are some that do have it. He certainly would have been one. There are others that I can remember, but I remember him particularly for that. He also had intellectual competence and so did Wayne Morse. Wayne Morse was much the same way. They were not club-men in the Senate sense. They were part of it, but not part of it. One can almost say they were looking at the presidency. You could almost pick out the ones that were looking for the presidency, in terms of those characteristics.

RITCHIE: Did you have any dealings with John Kennedy in those days?

VALEO: Yes, that came in, but I don't know whether we want to take that up here, Don, or whether we want to take it up under presidency relationships.

RITCHIE: I just wondered in terms of Vietnam. He did make a few speeches on that in the Senate.

VALEO: Well, we have to go on from '59 for that. I did not know him well as a senator. I had met him maybe once or twice in the Senate, but I didn't know him at all.

RITCHIE: I was trying to ascertain who the senators were who showed some interest in Vietnam.

VALEO: Kennedy would have shown it for the same reasons Mansfield showed it, because Bill Douglas introduced Diem to both of them. Kennedy also had a favorable impression of Diem at that time. And I think justifiably so, because Diem was an impressive person and it was clear where his heart was.

RITCHIE: Before we go ahead to the Kennedy administration, let me backtrack a little. The Colegrove investigation was an aid investigation, and you had spent much of the late 1950s studying the aid program.

VALEO: Yes.

RITCHIE: Was that one of the reasons for your connection with that investigation?

VALEO: Well, by this time I was closely associated with Mansfield, and Mansfield had the investigation. They turned to him immediately on this, and he was the one actually who raised the question, whether they ought to look into it. So it would be through that channel that I became involved in it.

RITCHIE: Could I ask you just a little about the aid investigation? I wondered if you could give me some of the background of that investigation which was, I think, around 1956, '57, or '58.

VALEO: Yes, somewhere in that period. It started out with a Point Four study. I was still in the Library when Truman suggested the original Point Four Program, which was essentially a kind of nonreligious missionary approach to the underdeveloped world. I think it was a kind of afterthought in his inaugural speech but it had a very wide appeal. Everybody talked about it. In South America they talked of "Punto Quatro." And "Le Point Quatre" in France. It was all over. Everybody was talking about Point Four. Nobody really talked about aid.

Point Four came in when the Marshall Plan had just about expired. It was part of the birth of the whole aid program beyond the Marshall Plan. In a way, we still had an awful lot of energy

for use abroad, we still had a lot of personnel who had gotten trained on the Marshall Plan, there was still a lot to be done in the world, and the two sort of came together in the beginning of the Point Four, which was really a nominal, limited kind of concept originally. But it immediately grew from that into the idea of a much broader program. It was a point of decision, I think, that we probably in retrospect should have restrained ourselves from getting into aid on the kind of scale that developed.

Once you bureaucratized the aid structure, you made it compelling to find things to do abroad. It was one thing when you picked out a particular situation, you aimed your effort at it, you built up the staff you needed to do that, and then closed it out. But it's another thing when you set up a permanent bureaucracy, because my whole experience in government is that once you have a structure set for one country abroad, it becomes almost imperative to have it set up for as many other countries as you can. I think that's been the pattern of the spread of the aid program. That's not to say that there isn't a need for a lot of this, but when it takes on that pattern, then you have to worry about personnel who are only going to be there for a limited period of time. You have to shift them from this post to that post at the end of a two-year term. You begin to put in the pattern of a foreign service in a number of places where, in my judgment, it doesn't belong.

It's one thing to put Foreign Service officers in a country and keep them there only for brief tours. It's another thing to put an aid personnel there and keep them there only for two or three years, or whatever it is. There's a need for Foreign Service officers; they're reporters and it's essential that they learn to report anywhere. That is not necessarily true for aid personnel. When aid became a permanent organizational structure, I think that it began to lose its real sense of mission.

The Point Four Program originally was conceived of as something of a mission where we would send out groups of people in the pattern of the old missionaries, to help improve agriculture, public health and so forth. It was very naive in many ways, but it had a good deal of very genuine, social motivation. We felt that this was part of our responsibility as a world leader, and I think very properly so. We had at that time a lot of techniques which were meaningful in underdeveloped countries, particularly because of our own Department of Agriculture, which had done so much work here during the Depression in developing skills and capabilities which in a sense were very similar to the ones that were needed in many of these countries. But the aid program evolved in patterns which made it essentially an instrument of international politics, and a bad instrument of international politics in my judgment. Then once we got into a military aid program for a particular situation, it became necessary to have a

military aid program wherever you could put it. As a result we involved ourselves in situations where really, our national interest is not necessarily served by deep involvement.

That was my reaction generally to the aid program. To some degree, that was reflected in the studies that we did of the aid program. There was a long report on the program. Part of it had to do with the organizational structure; as a matter of fact, much of it had to do with the organizational structure. We tried to deal with it, as I recall, by proposing to break up the organization and put the parts that were relevant to politics in one place and the parts that were not relevant to politics, such as the Point Four, in something away from the government as far as possible, or by using the U.N. channels. But it was very difficult to do that once you had an aid-bureaucracy established. In subsequent years, if a new administration had somebody to pay off, it put them in charge of the aid program. It didn't matter whether it was a Republican or Democratic administration..

RITCHIE: There's a sort of a dance that the Congress was doing at that point: the Senate would increase the amount of foreign aid, the House would cut the amount, and they would go to conference committee and split the difference. But nobody seemed really to have a sense of how much aid was necessary, or was it doing any good.

VALEO: Precisely, and it was so hard to measure it. When we set up the committee study, I guess it was Eisenhower who set up his own Rockefeller group—and later on I'll tell you a story that belongs in the historic record, because it's one of the funniest stories involving Nelson Rockefeller—but Rockefeller's group resisted any changes in the situation, so we got nowhere with the recommendations from the committee. The same recommendations keep reoccurring in subsequent investigations and studies of the aid programs.

The Rockefeller story I mentioned is very amusing. During the aid study, [Nelson] Rockefeller requested time to come up before the committee, which Mansfield was chairing. We had a hearing. It was a small hearing, it wasn't public. Rockefeller just wanted to tell Mansfield what they were doing in the commission and so forth. The only other senator present at the meeting, besides Mansfield, was Bill Langer of North Dakota, who was really a Plainsman of the old school. He was right out of central casting. He had given up smoking, but he couldn't get over the business of chewing on a cigar, so he used to chew on a cigar in the cellophane wrapper. He was sitting there watching intently and chewing on the cigar and Rockefeller was going on at great lengths about what they were doing in his commission. When he finished, Mansfield said, "Bill, do you have any questions?" Langer was an absolute isolationist at this point. Moreover, he was furious at

the State Department because there had never been an ambassador from North Dakota, and he had said repeatedly and publicly that he wasn't going to vote for anything for the Department of State until an ambassador from North Dakota had been appointed.

So he was sitting there looking at Rockefeller, and he said (this is my paraphrase of his quote): "Wasn't your Daddy out in the Dakotas one time?" Rockefeller looked perplexed. "My father?" he said. "Oh, I think I know who you mean, you mean my uncle. You're right, I did have an uncle who was there." Or a granduncle, I don't know which it was. "Yeah," Langer said, "I thought so. You look a little like him." He went on, "You know, he used to sell medicine." Rockefeller said, "Oh, of course, he had a patent medicine and he was selling it all over the West." "Yeah," Langer said, "and it wasn't any good either. My Daddy had cancer. He sold some to my Daddy and he said it would cure his cancer. My Daddy died." Rockefeller looked absolutely flabbergasted. Mansfield interjected, "How old was your father, Bill?" Langer said, "He was ninety-three." Well, you know, years later, when Rockefeller was vice president, I reminded him of that story. I said, "Do you remember that hearing?" He said, "How could I ever forget it. It was the most incredible thing that ever happened to me!" He said, "I didn't know what to do. I didn't know whether I should laugh or what. It completely took my words away."

RITCHIE: Do you think Senator Langer was suggesting the aid program was a patent medicine scam?

VALEO: No. He wound up by saying, "But you're not like your uncle. If you want to get confirmed for something, I'll vote for you."

RITCHIE: Well, do you think that as a result of your study that Senator Mansfield really developed some strong opinions about the aid program, that it wasn't really working?

VALEO: Yes. But he may have felt that before and the study simply confirmed it. I don't know what his record is. I don't recall his voting record on later aid bills. I think some he voted for, some he didn't. But he certainly never felt the program was effectively used. He thought there was a great deal of wasted money in it.

RITCHIE: He was way ahead of someone like Senator Fulbright on that.

VALEO: Well, the Fulbright story is interesting in this connection. Fulbright was at this point, around the time of this investigation, beginning to develop his doubts about the program. He asked Carl to do a speech for him in which he'd express some of these doubts about the way the program was being administered. Carl gave me the draft to do. I did the draft of the speech, and

it was a very critical speech of the aid program, not wiping it out completely, but highly critical of some aspects of it, as I recall. Fulbright used the speech, and about a week later he called me in to talk with me. He showed me a big pile of mail he'd gotten on it. He said, "Carl tells me you did that speech." He said, "This is some of the mail I'm getting. How do you explain that?" I said, "Well, I think there's a good deal of concern in the country." And there was at that time, about what the program was doing to us in the sense of our getting involved. Maybe there may have been in the mail—also a reflection of a recrudescence of isolationist sentiment too. But the fact that the door was open to that was largely, in my judgment, due to the way the aid program had evolved after the Marshall Plan, which had had almost universal support in the country.

You can almost date Fulbright's change from that speech. He became progressively more skeptical. I remember one meeting of the committee, he was going through the aid program authorization bill and he was pushing it through with great impatience. He wanted to get it over with in a hurry. It was almost as though he had heard it so many times and he just didn't want to get into details. It was a two- or three-billion-dollar bill at the time. The committee was going down the items in the bill, with an executive branch witness and Fulbright came to an item and said: "What's this?" It was something for the Inter-American Sanitation

Commission. It was a fifteen-thousand-dollar increase in their budget, or something like that, which probably amounted to fifty thousand to begin with. It was a real peanut. He said, "What is this?" They had a witness from the State Department, the Latin American officer, and the fellow said, "Well, that's a small increase." Fulbright said, "I know it's a small increase, but it's still fifteen thousand dollars. What is it for?" He said, "It's an old inter-American organization," I don't know how he described it. Well, Fulbright said, "Are any of the other countries putting any money into this, or are we the only ones?" He spent about twenty minutes or a half hour on that one item for fifteen thousand dollars, and he finally cut it out. But I think that really was the way he began to express his doubts in the way we were operating abroad.

RITCHIE: The program, I guess, had become so large and complex that it was hard for any one senator to have any sense of what it all meant and where it all was going.

VALEO: Oddly enough, some of the senators had more sense of that than the people in the executive branch, because they kept changing the administrators so often. The greater continuity was in the members of the committees on the House and on the Senate side. They really knew more about the program at that point than the people who were trying to justify it.

RITCHIE: One of the proposals that came out was to abolish the International Cooperation Administration, and put into the State Department the non-military aid program.

VALEO: Right. Was that in our recommendation or in a later one?

RITCHIE: I'm not absolutely sure, but Senator Mansfield introduced that several times in the late 1950s.

VALEO: Yes, that was one of the recommendations probably. What we did was to try to draw a distinction between what amounted to political aid and what amounted to the kind of things that were involved in Point Four, or similar things which really had no real direct political implication, at most a remote one. The theory was that if it's political, then the State Department knows best how to administer it. Much of that had to do with budgetary support for other governments. It had to do with funds for the maintenance of their military. It seemed to us that it should be clearly labeled as political aid if you were going to use it, instead of getting it mixed up with things which had really a rather noble purpose, such as the Point Four Program and some of the money which was funneled through the U.N. development fund and other programs of that sort. They didn't want that, because the great bulk of what we were already calling economic aid really was political aid and not economic aid at all.

RITCHIE: So the State Department opposed it?

VALEO: I guess the whole administration was opposed. It was probably taken up in NSC and decided they had to resist that because it would be too obvious then what the money was being used for.

RITCHIE: Mansfield's proposals were defeated in the late '50s, but in '61 there was a reorganization of the aid program. They did abolish the International Cooperation Agency and set up AID.

VALEO: But they changed names rather than changing the way the thing functioned. Their argument was—we go back to Vorys, whom I mentioned earlier—you really have to keep it all concentrated so you can see the whole picture. But that really wasn't it. In some respects, there may have been some national purpose in not revealing how much was political, but everybody else in the world knew it except ourselves. Really, it was kind of like putting our own heads in the sand so that we didn't see it. It was a way of living with ourselves and feeling good about aid as a noble gesture, even though some of it had nothing to do with nobility at all. I think we suffer from that. I'm not saying you don't have to sweep things under the rug every once in a while but every time you do it you pay a price for it. I don't think we're ready to pay that price, but I think we're paying it anyway in many places.

RITCHIE: You watched it all evolving in the 1950s when it was falling into place.

VALEO: When it fell into place and when we moved more and more away from the noble concepts which attended our policies at the end of World War II, when the U.N. was a great hope, when we moved more and more back in the Machiavellian direction, and probably reached an apex with Kissinger.

RITCHIE: Well, I wanted to start talking about your work with Senator Mansfield when he was whip. Maybe that should be a separate subject.

VALEO: That is a separate subject.

RITCHIE: So this would be a good point for us to stop today.

VALEO: Fine.

End of Interview #3