



Michael Joseph Mansfield

March 16, 1903 - October 5, 2001

Washington, District of Columbia

Michael Joseph Mansfield, the Butte copper miner who became the longest-serving majority leader in the history of the United States Senate, died at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington on the morning of October 5, 2001. He was ninety-eight. The cause was congestive heart failure.

He was born in New York City on March 16, 1903, to Irish immigrant parents. After his mother died, he was sent as a small boy to live with relatives in Great Falls, Montana. At fourteen he lied about his age to join the Navy during the First World War, then served in the Army and, from 1920 to 1922, as an enlisted Marine in the Philippines and China, where his lifelong fascination with Asia began.

Back in Montana he worked underground in the Butte mines for most of the 1920s. A schoolteacher named Maureen Hayes urged him to finish his education; she later became his wife, and he credited her for nearly everything that followed. He earned degrees at the state university in Missoula and taught Far Eastern and Latin American history there before winning a House seat in 1942.

Montana sent him to the Senate in 1952. He became majority leader in 1961 and held the post for sixteen years, preferring persuasion to arm-twisting and sharing credit to an almost stubborn degree. With Republican leader Everett Dirksen he steered the Civil Rights Act of 1964 past a long filibuster, and he grew into one of the earliest Senate voices urging an end to the war in Vietnam.

President Jimmy Carter named him ambassador to Japan in 1977, and President Ronald Reagan kept him there. He served more than eleven years and liked to call the U.S.-Japan relationship the most important bilateral

relationship in the world, bar none. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1989.

Maureen Mansfield died in 2000. He was buried beside her at Arlington National Cemetery. Notice Nearby remembers the quiet Montanan who believed the Senate worked best when nobody needed the spotlight.

Services

Died at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C., October 5, 2001. U.S. Representative and Senator from Montana; Senate Majority Leader 1961-1977; U.S. Ambassador to Japan 1977-1988. Interment: Arlington National Cemetery. Portrait: 1985 public-domain photograph, hosted by Notice Nearby.

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