

MICHAEL JOSEPH MANSFIELD

1903 – 2001

The Montanan who was to serve a record 16 years as majority leader of the U.S. Senate ran away from home in Great Falls in 1918 and managed to join the Navy at age 14. After stints in the Army and Marines, he returned to Montana and toiled nine years as a copper miner in Butte.

With help from high school English teacher Maureen Hayes, whom he married in 1932, Mansfield pulled himself out of the mine shafts and obtained high school and college degrees.

By 1933 he was professor of Latin American and Far Eastern history at the University of Montana. He taught for 10 years, then began a decade as a member of Congress. Mansfield's 24-year Senate career began in 1953, and eight years later he became majority leader. Though instrumental in international relations, national affairs and Congressional reforms, he never neglected his constituents.

In a 1976 letter to then-President Ford, after deciding to leave public office, Mansfield wrote: "My years in Congress encompass one-sixth of the nation's history since Independence; the administration of seven presidents; the assassination of a president and other extreme outrages against human decency; able political leaderships and seamy politics and chicanery; the dawn of the nuclear age and men on the moon; a great war and a prelude of more wars and an uneasy peace . . ."

The soft-spoken, pipe-smoking leader, who became a legend in his own lifetime, went on to be one of the most influential and effective postwar American ambassadors to Japan.

