



Supervising a Peace that Never Was:

Recollections of Canadian Diplomatic Personnel in Indochina, 1954-1973

Co-edited by Helen Lansdowne, Nick Etheridge & Phil Calvert



**University
of Victoria**

Centre for
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Indochina, 1954-1973**

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Cover photo: Canadian, Indian and Polish ICSC Commissioners and staff enroute to Hanoi by Commission aircraft on April 30, 1968. Canadian Commissioner Richard Tait third from the right, Chris Dagg on the extreme left.

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Editor's Note:

The contributions that follow focus on the involvement of diplomatic personnel in Indochina. This collection of essays is intended as a primary source illuminating a largely forgotten chapter in Canadian diplomatic history. We are deeply grateful to the contributors for sharing their recollections, and to others, especially the Historical Section at Global Affairs Canada, for their interest and support. It is worth noting that contributors have written about, or been interviewed on, events that took place between 50 and 70 years ago. While their recollections, opinions and judgements are their own, we believe they provide a valuable resource for those conducting research on Canada's role in Indochina from 1954 to 1973.

Helen Lansdowne, Nick Etheridge & Phil Calvert

Introduction

Brendan Kelly¹

Unexpected, unwelcome, but unavoidable was how the Canadian government viewed the invitation forwarded in July 1954 from British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, co-chair of the Geneva Conference on the aftermath of the Korean War and the situation in Indochina, for Canada to serve on the International Commission for Supervision and Control (usually abbreviated as ICC) established to supervise the cease-fires in French Indochina – Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Since the late 19th century, Indochina had been the jewel of the French empire, but its occupation by Japan during the Second World War was followed by a bitter struggle for supremacy between France and the Viet Minh (a nationalist-communist coalition dedicated to Vietnamese independence) and their respective allies. The First Indochina War (1946-1954) culminated in France's defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, which dramatized the wave of decolonization sweeping the world and marked the beginning of the end of the French Empire. Exhausted from the fighting, France signed the Geneva Agreements, ending hostilities in Indochina.

Negotiations in Geneva involving representatives from Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (created in 1945 by the Viet Minh), France, Laos, the People's Republic of China, the French-backed State of Vietnam (created in 1949 by the French), the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States led to three separate ceasefire agreements for Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and three separate ICCs to monitor the execution of the agreements there. Of the three, the situation in Vietnam was the most complex and controversial. Under the terms of the ceasefire agreement, France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) agreed to withdraw their forces from the north and south of the country respectively, with the 17th parallel serving as the demarcation line. No new military equipment was to enter the country, no foreign military bases or alliances were to be established, and no reprisals were to be exacted against people or groups in either

¹ The views expressed in this paper are the author's alone and do not represent those of either Global Affairs Canada or the Government of Canada.

zone, where democratic liberties were to be guaranteed. Finally, prisoners of war were to be released and Vietnamese civilians free to move either north or south during the maximum three-hundred days afforded the military withdrawals. Crucially, the partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel was meant only to be temporary, pending national reunification elections scheduled for July 1956. Reflecting the Cold War division of the world at the time, three very different countries were chosen to serve on the ICC: Canada from the Western alliance, India (the commission chair) from the neutral nations of what was then called the Third World, and Poland from the communist bloc.

The invitation to Canada to join the ICC was unexpected because, although Canada, as a belligerent in the Korean War (1950-1953), had sent a small delegation to Geneva under Secretary of State for External Affairs Lester B. Pearson to participate in the first half of the conference there, they left after the focus of the negotiations shifted to Indochina. It was unwelcome because Canada had no direct national interest in Indochina, which for most Canadians was an exotic if vaguely threatening place that one usually only read about in newspapers. While the ranks of the Department of External Affairs (the DEA, the predecessor of today's Global Affairs Canada) included a few "mish kids" born in Asia to missionaries, the vast majority of its officers had never set foot on the continent. In fact, in 1954, Canada operated only a handful of diplomatic missions in Asia: in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), India, Indonesia, Japan, and Pakistan. It is indicative of how little the department knew that the first assignment of a Canadian diplomat posted to Paris during the Geneva conference was to find a good map of Indochina and to send it back to headquarters in Ottawa forthwith.¹

The invitation to serve on the ICCs was the more unwelcome because, although Canadian diplomacy was casting off its ultra-cautious approach of the 1930s for a more active and engaged role in the world after 1945, the DEA's personnel resources were stretched thin. Diplomacy within the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, along with a host of other multilateral institutions created in this period as part of the rules-based international order being built on the ashes of the Second World War, required more diplomats. So too did the fifty-three diplomatic and consular posts Canada now maintained abroad. Yet the number of Canadian officers serving at home and in the field totalled only 267. In the circumstances, Canada's membership on the three ICCs represented a major administrative burden for the DEA (the demands on the Canadian Department of National Defence, which would provide most of the Canadian personnel for the commissions' fixed and mobile inspection teams, were even greater). Finally, although Canada was a member of the British Commonwealth and a donor under the recent Colombo Plan for Co-operative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia, the gaze of most of its diplomats was fixed on the North Atlantic area, in particular the United States, by far Canada's most important bilateral partner, and Western Europe, where NATO was building up its forces to deter the Soviet Union from attacking. In short, if Europe was the Cold War's main theatre, Southeast Asia was a sideshow, a place Canadian diplomats, from Pearson on down, feared becoming entangled.

1 Peter Stursberg, *Lester Pearson and the American Dilemma* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1980), 125n3.

But in July 1954 such entanglement proved unavoidable when the invitation to serve on the ICC arrived in Ottawa. A week later the Canadian government announced in a two-page statement released by the DEA its acceptance “with full knowledge and appreciation of the responsibilities that will go with membership” and “no illusions about the magnitude and complexity of the task.” While Indochina was far from Canada, Ottawa recognized the broader importance of the duties that it had been asked to assume: “We know from experience ... that just as local conflicts can become general war, so conditions of security and stability in any part of the world serve the cause of peace everywhere.” While regretting that the peace settlement in Indochina and its supervision had not been placed under the United Nations, the government noted that Canada’s decision to participate was “fully in harmony” with its responsibilities under that organization. That said, Canada was not being asked either to guarantee or enforce the ceasefire in Indochina, something only the former belligerents could do. The ICCs had “no enforcement obligation or responsibility;” rather, their role was purely “supervisory, judicial and mediatory.” The ICCs had a “reasonable chance” of successfully implementing the ceasefire agreements; if experience proved otherwise, “no useful purpose would be served by continuing their [the Commissions’] existence.” Consultations with its closest allies had bolstered the Canadian government’s willingness to undertake this “onerous but honourable assignment.” Above all, the government recognized the “serious consequences” a Canadian refusal to participate might have on the ceasefires in Indochina through delay or complications. “We have no illusions that the task we are undertaking will be either easy or of short duration,” the statement concluded, “but we take satisfaction from the fact that in performing it Canada will be playing a worthy and responsible part in an effort to strengthen peace.”² In hindsight, the response above was a clear-eyed assessment of the mission foisted on Canada in the summer of 1954. Never, however, could the statement’s careful drafters in External Affairs have predicted that participation on the ICC in Vietnam would last almost two decades, lending credence to James H. (Si) Taylor’s comment in this volume that it is “almost impossible to kill an international organization.”

In fairness, the ICC in Vietnam worked reasonably well during its first year because the two parties to the ceasefire agreement – the French and the Viet Minh – had an interest in making it work. The French were resolved to leave a country that was costing them an increasing amount of blood and treasure; the Viet Minh, for their part, saw the French departure as the first step in reunifying Vietnam. As a result, the ICC was able to play a useful mediatory role when it came to such things as the exchange of POWs and the transfer of civil administration in Hanoi and Haiphong from the French to the DRVN. An estimated 800,000 Vietnamese civilians – most of them Roman Catholic – also used the three-hundred-day grace period afforded by the ceasefire agreement to move from North Vietnam to South Vietnam.

But there were early signs that the peace agreement cobbled together at Geneva was fragile. For example, the ICC received disturbing reports that civilians in the north were being

² Department of External Affairs, *Statements and Speeches*, No. 54/36, “Statement on Canadian Membership in the International Commissions for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia,” July 28, 1954.

prevented from moving south. Similarly, each side accused the other of reprisals and of violating democratic freedoms. None of this was easy for the ICC to investigate since it required the cooperation of the local authorities, especially in the north, where the communist regime would only let the ICC see what the regime allowed it to see. The Viet Minh, for their part, increasingly believed that they had been robbed at the peace table of the fruits of their military victory. The southern-based State of Vietnam, which in mid-1955 became the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) under (Catholic) President Ngo Dinh Diem, had never signed or accepted the Geneva Agreements and was opposed to national reunification elections; it feared the Viet Minh, given their prestige under their leader Ho Chi Minh as nationalist freedom fighters, would win (as events behind the Iron Curtain in Europe proved, there was also no such thing as free and fair elections in communist states). The RVN had a strong ally in the United States, which had also not signed the Geneva Agreements. Fearing that the loss of Vietnam to the communist world would set off a chain of falling dominoes in Southeast Asia, the Americans vowed to bolster South Vietnam and transform it into a viable state. Thus, although the Geneva Agreements provided sufficient respite from the fighting to allow the French to withdraw from Vietnam, Canada's assignment on the ICC soon took on an indefinite character.

With the peaceful reunification of the country as embodied in the elections an increasingly remote possibility, the flaws of the International Commission for Supervision and Control became more glaring from 1955 on as it struggled to supervise, much less to control, the situation in Vietnam. From the start, the ICC was hamstrung by its lack of enforcement powers and the requirement of unanimity for all its major decisions, a tall order given the nature of commission membership. In 1954 Lester B. Pearson had instructed the Canadian delegation to the ICC to approach its work with "objectivity, impartiality and fairness."³ But the Poles saw their own role on it much differently. They delayed and obstructed investigations of North Vietnam while spearheading the study of any and all complaints against the French and South Vietnamese. Canadian diplomats who served with the Poles on the ICC in Vietnam over the years had trouble recalling any votes by the latter against North Vietnam. By contrast, the Canadians were willing to – and did – censure South Vietnam for violations under the Geneva Agreements.

If the Polish stance was expected insofar as the Canadians knew it was dictated by Moscow, the Indian performance as ICC chair was a source of great disappointment. As the Department of External Affairs later observed of the Canadian experience of working with the Indians on the ICC, "In no other international forum have working relations with the Indians been so close; and nowhere else has our sense of dissatisfaction and frustration with Indian policy been so intense."⁴ As the (ostensibly) neutral chair of the commission, the Indians, the Canadians believed, often pursued compromise for its own sake when the facts in a given case called for a tougher stance against North Vietnam. Yet, as an Asian country, India had a vested interest in what happened in that part of the world. Hostile to Western

³ Quoted in Robert Bothwell, "The Further Shore: Canada and Vietnam," *International Journal* 56, no. 1 (2000-2001): 93.

⁴ Library and Archives Canada, Department of External Affairs, Vol. 9400, File 20-22-VIETS-2-1, pt. 19, Ottawa to Delhi (for High Commissioner), 16 October 1966.

colonialism, the Indians took a dim view of the French and then American presence in Southeast Asia. They also seem to have concluded that the Viet Minh would one day reunify Vietnam and thus that it was generally in India's regional interest to avoid provoking them. This was especially true after the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Although China was a major ally of North Vietnam, India's conflict with China meant that New Delhi would seek to exploit the growing split between China and the Soviet Union to curry favour with Moscow (the Soviet Union was of course North Vietnam's other key backer). The upshot was that the Indians generally resisted Canadian attempts to turn the ICC into a more forceful body.

A more dynamic ICC would still have been powerless to bring peace to Vietnam, where in the late 1950s the US government sent money, equipment, and military advisers to bolster the Diem regime. In 1959 North Vietnam initiated a major campaign of subversion and armed insurrection against the South Vietnamese government and began building the Ho Chi Minh trail, a logistical network of roads and trails that mostly ran through Laos and that would be used to send soldiers and weapons to South Vietnam to assist the National Liberation Front (or Viet Cong), officially formed there the next year. Northern subversion of the south had been occurring in one form or another since 1954, something that, though difficult to prove, had concerned the Canadians on the ICC. In 1962, in a rare case of Canadian-Indian agreement, the commission released a special report (from which the Poles dissented) concluding that "armed and unarmed personnel, arms and munitions and other supplies" had been sent by North Vietnam into South Vietnam to carry out "hostile activities, including armed attacks" against the army and government there. Moreover, North Vietnamese territory had been used "for inciting, encouraging and supporting hostile activities" in South Vietnam. The special report also noted that South Vietnam had received military assistance from the United States and that such arrangements amounted to a de facto military alliance.⁵

The conclusions of the ICC's 1962 special report made no difference on the ground in Vietnam. As the communist insurrection against the South Vietnamese government became more intense, so too did the repressiveness of the Diem regime, which by 1963 had become deeply unpopular. Although US policy had been "to sink or swim with Ngo Diem," in November 1963 the United States tacitly supported the South Vietnamese military coup that assassinated him. With South Vietnam in a vulnerable position, in the spring of 1964 US President Lyndon B. Johnson sought to convey to the North Vietnamese the American determination to defend it. Since the Canadian commissioner on the ICC enjoyed relatively easy and inconspicuous access to Hanoi, the Americans asked the Canadian government to send the recently appointed James Blair Seaborn to deliver this message, which included the prospect of US economic aid should the North Vietnamese cooperate. But the North Vietnamese were neither intimidated by the stick nor attracted to the carrot in Seaborn's message, a stance reinforced during his subsequent visits to Hanoi over the next year and a half.

⁵ Department of External Affairs, Press release No. 33, [June 25, 1962].

Meanwhile, a military incident between the United States and North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 prompted a US congressional resolution authorizing Johnson to take all necessary measures to retaliate and to maintain international peace and security in Southeast Asia. In February 1965 the United States launched air raids against targets in North Vietnam. Such American escalation exercised the Indians and the Poles on the ICC, who submitted a special report on it to which the Canadians appended a minority statement that, while not condoning the attacks, argued that they had to be seen in the context of North Vietnam's subversion campaign against the south (in 1963 the Canadians and Indians on the ICC had completed a legal report documenting this phenomenon, but over the next two years the Canadians could only watch as the Indians refused to agree to its release). In March 1965 the United States initiated Operation Rolling Thunder, a gradual but sustained bombing campaign of North Vietnam, and 3,500 US Marines, the first US combat troops to arrive in South Vietnam, waded ashore at Da Nang. Although the Canadian government sympathized with the aims of US policy in Vietnam, American methods caused unease. When in April 1965 Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson suggested during a speech at Temple University in Philadelphia that the United States consider a bombing pause in Vietnam, he was berated by President Johnson at Camp David the next day.

By 1965 the Vietnam War was escalating beyond control. From Saigon, Blair Seaborn, supported in Ottawa by key Canadian diplomats who had themselves experienced the Indochinese morass over the years, pushed for Canadian withdrawal from the ICC. But an international commitment made was not easy to break. Nobody, from the United States to the two Vietnams to Britain and the Soviet Union, wanted Canada to leave and thus dramatize how badly the Geneva machinery of 1954 had broken down and how hopeless the cause of peace had become. Perhaps, it was argued, the ICC might have a role to play in bringing the warring parties together, or even facilitating peace discussions, or, eventually, supervising an entirely new peace. Better, then, for Canada to bide its time and not take drastic action. The Canadian government was also conscious of the fact that, while service on the ICC hardly resembled the United Nations peacekeeping operations Canada had helped to pioneer that were popular with Canadians, there was enough of a link between the two activities to make leaving a "peace" commission more difficult to justify publicly. Similarly, Ottawa recognized that ICC membership allowed it to resist any demands from Washington to send Canadian troops to Vietnam (although Canada did operate a development assistance program in South Vietnam). Finally, for better or for worse, it offered the Canadian government a window on the most dangerous and intractable international issue of the 1960s and thus a voice in its resolution.

Such a voice appealed to Canadian foreign minister Paul Martin, whose ambition to succeed Pearson as prime minister was well known. From 1965 to 1968, Martin worked tirelessly – if fruitlessly – to bridge the divide in Vietnam. In 1966, for example, he sent the retired Canadian diplomat (and Chinese-born "mish kid") Chester Ronning to Hanoi twice to clarify North Vietnam's price for talking peace with the United States. When the Americans were unimpressed by the answers Ronning brought back, Martin travelled to Warsaw and

Moscow to urge communist leaders there to convince Hanoi to clarify what its response would be if the United States, as North Vietnam and its allies demanded, ceased bombing. Canada was also interested in how the ICC could bring the warring parties together. If that project never got off the ground, the commission at least allowed Martin to send Canada's top representative on it to Hanoi to probe for any shift in the North Vietnamese position that might hold the key to peace in Vietnam.

The increasingly active nature of Canadian diplomacy on the Vietnam War between 1965 and 1968 contrasted with the inactivity of the ICC and highlighted the fact that the conflict had become as much a domestic as a foreign policy issue. The American involvement in Vietnam, which in 1967 included almost 500,000 troops, sparked protests in the United States and around the world. Canada, which would become home to an estimated 50,000 American draft dodgers, was no exception. In the rebellious 1960s, the "quiet diplomacy" favoured by Canada's professional diplomats was dismissed as "quiet complicity" in America's allegedly immoral war, footage of which appeared on television screens nightly. That some Canadian-made military equipment sold to the United States under bilateral defence-production arrangements found its way to Vietnam only added fuel to the fire. So too did press reports that Canadian personnel on the ICC were "spying" for the Americans (the reports, while sensationalized, contained some truth; Canadian personnel had passed information to the Americans and other allies about conditions in North Vietnam, although, given the tight restrictions the North Vietnamese placed on Canadian movements, the value of the "intelligence" was debatable). For Canadian diplomats who had served on the ICC and seen the North Vietnamese in action first-hand, the increasingly critical mood of Canadian public opinion was troubling. While not "hawks" on Vietnam in the American sense of the term, Canadian diplomats with experience in Indochina took a dim view of North Vietnam's designs on the south. If they were uneasy about the United States' deepening involvement in the Vietnam War, most nevertheless continued to sympathize with the overriding goal of US policy: the preservation of South Vietnam's independence.

In March 1968, with the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive having seriously weakened US public support for the war in Vietnam, President Johnson announced a partial halt to the bombing of the north (a full halt was implemented in October) and American willingness to enter into peace talks. The resulting negotiations took place in Paris from 1968 to the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973. While not a participant in the peace process, the Canadian government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau fully endorsed it. One aspect of the discussions, however, made Ottawa uneasy: the possibility that Canada would be asked to serve on a new supervisory commission in Vietnam, something American diplomats had raised with their Canadian counterparts from the late 1960s on. By then, a remarkable one third of Canadian diplomats had served in Indochina. Few wanted Canada to prolong its service on the ICC, but they also recognized the great pressure that would be put on their country, especially from the United States, to do so.

As a result, the Canadian government developed and shared with the Americans and others several conditions on which it would base its decision to serve on any future ICC. The most

important was that the commission have a reasonable chance of being effective. It should thus have full freedom of movement. A “continuing political authority” should also assume ultimate responsibility for any ceasefire agreement and receive reports from the commission and its members. Given Canada’s unhappy history on the ICC, these were sensible requests, but an effective commission was as anathema to North Vietnam in 1973 as it had been in 1954. Insofar as such North Vietnamese opposition prevented the overriding US goal of a peace agreement that would allow the United States to completely withdraw its troops from Vietnam, the Americans would not push the issue.

The result was predictable. With the Paris Peace Accords on the verge of signature, Canada, Indonesia, Poland, and Hungary were officially invited to supervise the ceasefire by serving on the International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICCS). The new commission was as bad as the old, if not worse, but the pressure on Canada to join it in 1973 was similar to that which it had faced in 1954. Once again, a refusal to participate would jeopardize the fragile edifice of peace that had been built. Moreover, there were Canadian-American relations to consider. Just as Canada’s acceptance of ICC membership in 1954 had helped to ease the French out of Vietnam with their POWs in tow, Canada’s agreement to serve on the ICCS in 1973 would similarly assist the Americans.

If saying “no” to commission membership was essentially impossible, the Canadian government qualified its “yes.” As Canadian foreign minister Mitchell Sharp announced on January 24, 1973, Canada was willing to serve on the ICCS for sixty days and then to reassess. On the ground in Vietnam, Canadian diplomats would not be silenced by the commission’s stultifying rules on unanimity. A blunt, no-nonsense officer in Michel Gauvin was appointed commissioner in Saigon. When it became clear that the Poles and Hungarians would do everything to prevent investigations of North Vietnam, he publicly voiced Canada’s frustrations through an “open mouth policy.” After Canada failed at a diplomatic conference in Paris in February to gain acceptance of the need for a continuing political authority to which the ICCS and its members could send their reports, Sharp personally visited Vietnam, where it was clear neither South nor North Vietnamese forces were respecting the ceasefire agreement. Ineffective as the commission was, like its predecessor, no one but the Canadians themselves wanted Canada to leave it. At the end of March, with the last US combat troops in Vietnam set to depart and with most American POWs having been freed, Canada, to avoid ruffling diplomatic feathers, least of all American ones, announced its willingness to serve on the ICCS for an additional sixty days. That said, if by that time the situation in Vietnam had not improved, Canada would withdraw from the commission (providing a further thirty-day grace period for its replacement to be found). In the end, Canada remained on the ICCS until July 31, 1973. With the United States having achieved its “peace with honor,” and with Americans increasingly focused on the Watergate scandal engulfing the presidency of Richard Nixon, the Canadian government had little to fear from its decision. As for Canadian diplomats on the ICCS, they had no wish to be present for what happened next in Vietnam. Thus ended Canada’s nearly twenty-year service on the international control commissions there, one of the longest and most extensive commitments in Canadian diplomatic history.

The recollections in this book are primarily those of Canadian diplomatic personnel who served on the international control commissions in Vietnam (though, as we have seen, there were separate commissions in Laos and Cambodia, each of which had their own history) and should be seen as an unofficial sequel to a similar collection published in 2002: *Canadian Peacekeepers in Indochina 1954-1973: Recollections*. As with that book, the great strength of this volume is that its editors have assembled a diverse cast of characters to reflect on what it was like to live and work in Indochina from 1954 to 1973. If this introduction has focused on the high-level diplomatic history of Canada's involvement there, the contributions that follow speak to what might be called its social history, that is, the lived experience of individual Canadians from the Department of External Affairs, both men and women, posted to a far-off land about which they knew very little. The essays that follow evoke the tragedy and comedy, the boredom and excitement, the disappointments and rewards – in short, the humanity of life there. A recurring theme is the perennial frustrations associated with the international control commissions. Another is that of comradeship among the Canadians assigned to them, of bonds forged and lifelong friendships made. The theme of personal sacrifice also runs through this collection, doing one's duty, however difficult, a reminder of what the Foreign Service means. Finally, the recollections in this book capture how Indochina became a kind of training school for an entire generation of Canadian diplomats with no previous experience in Asia. Today, as Canada implements its Indo-Pacific Strategy, Canadians would do well to read this volume and to learn more about one of Canada's earliest and most important diplomatic engagements with a region of the world that will only grow in importance as the 21st century progresses.

A Year with Uncle Ho, Redux:

Interview with Si Taylor, April 8 2022

I'm going to be talking about events almost 70 years in the past, at a time when I was 25 years old. I am now 92. Canadian Peacekeepers in Indochina 1954-73: Recollections, edited by Arthur Blanchette, is a book everyone should read. The chapter I supplied is entitled "A year with Uncle Ho". That year was July 1955 to July 1956. It was my first posting. I had been two years in the Foreign Service, and I had been sent out on loan to the Cabinet Secretariat. So, I wasn't actually in the Foreign Service when the Government of Canada accepted the invitation to serve on the Indochina Commissions.

If I had been in the department, I very probably would have been on the first team that went out in 1954 to one or other of the commissions. As it was, it took some time to extricate me from the Privy Council Office, so I missed the first team. I arrived just at the end of the first year of the commission's activities. This is important because what had been specified as a set of tasks for the commission to supervise had been accomplished by then. What remained in the second year of the commission's existence was intended by the Geneva Conference to be a preliminary period of cooling off, during which preparations would be made for national elections in Vietnam. The negotiators hoped that these would enable a political solution which would allow North and South Vietnam to be reunited.

I should say the Department of External Affairs, as it was called then, had really made no preparations, unsurprisingly, for an obligation of this kind. The Department was still very young, really. Its first post-war growth produced a state of constant expansion, and this sudden and unexpected commitment of departmental resources had a very considerable effect. It was a demand on all categories of staff. Everyone from foreign service officers to administrative officers, clerks, communicators, and secretaries served on the various commissions right from the very beginning. Also right from the start, women served on the staff of the commissions. The original period of service had been specified as nine months, but that was later extended to 12 months. Try to

imagine the scale of the imposition on our scarce resources: the number of foreign service officers required to staff the three Indochina commissions for a year was virtually equivalent in number to that required to staff our largest embassy - Washington. Over a three-year period, the effect on the staff reservoir amounted to opening, suddenly, with no notice, three embassies the size of our largest. The department had to scramble, and that meant calling in all the officers it had on loan, and hiring from outside. When I was in Hanoi, there were people from both government departments, and from the private sector.

When I arrived in Vietnam in July 1955, Geneva's year-long timetable for the accomplishment of both the practical tasks arising from the ceasefire, and preparations for elections was quite evidently falling apart. The principal tasks had already been accomplished quite successfully. There was a ceasefire which held, unlike some other ceasefires we are now familiar with. Basically, both parties wanted it that way. By then, the French had lost something like 10,000 POWs at the strategic disaster of Dien Bien Phu (while inflicting 8000 communist casualties) and those men all had to be returned. I saw a few of the prisoner lists, though I didn't have anything to do with the release of the prisoners. They were all released, as were the communist prisoners. The French fought in Vietnam with their professional army (unlike in Algeria later, where conscripts were used), but the lists were full of foreign names because a large component were from the Foreign Legion: Germans; Hungarians; and Eastern Europeans.¹

There had been a sensible provision in Geneva for a 300-day period in which the partisans of each side would be able to return to the zone they preferred. If you were a communist soldier fighting in the South, you would want to go to the communist North, and vice versa. This produced one of the major, or partial, failures of the commission. The reference in the ceasefire agreement is to article 14d, which initially provided for 300 days, and was subsequently extended to 360 days. This produced a flow of refugees from the North: even within the extended period, the number was, I think, under a million - something like 750-850,000. But in the process of allowing these people to go south, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) - the Northern party to the Geneva agreement - along with other Northern authorities, placed enormous obstacles to the flow of refugees. That was a source of enormous outrage and frustration to those of us serving on the commission, because we estimated that if people had been allowed to move as freely as the ceasefire agreement had intended, at least a million and a half people would have fled from the north to the south. But by the time I was there, the 360 days had expired, and anyone in the North opposed to communist rule could no longer escape. We were aware that there were probably hundreds of thousands of anti-communists still in the North, but we could do nothing about it as the regime was repressive. That was a source of total frustration, and the principal preoccupation of the Canadian delegation while I was there.

1 I do not know if there was the same trouble over them as there was over prisoners from the Korean war. Then, the communist side insisted that a prisoner originally from a communist country - though that person was violently anti-communist - had to be returned to the country of their birth.

Most of my work had to do with another sub-article of the ceasefire agreement - 14c. This was a sensible provision to safeguard from persecution people who had been on the other side, if they chose to live in the zone of their former opponents. It was designed to protect them and grant them their civil liberties, even though they had fought on the other side. This was important because the communist forces had fought all over Vietnam- there were areas all over the country that were in the hands of the communists. These forces could have been locally raised, so when peace came and the regime in the South was trying to assert its control in a heavy handed way, many of these people were arrested.

The Northern intelligence service worked very well, so that the news of these arrests in the South was not a secret to the Northern authorities. They complained that article 14c was being violated by the South. Well, who knew whether these people deserved to be arrested or not? In any event, it provided a basis for thousands of claims of violation of 14c that were filed by the Northern side. These were all referred to the Southern authorities so that they could either provide an explanation or restore the prisoner's liberty. There, the people were thoroughly cowed. It was rare for anyone to protest the regime. If they did, and the South found out, the Northern authorities explained that the prisoner wasn't incarcerated for political motives, but for arson. That was the end of it; there was no way to pursue the matter beyond that. This gave the North a tremendous propaganda advantage. This file was my responsibility, and I dealt with these cases almost all the time I was in Vietnam. As you can imagine, this was not rewarding work.

The situation in the North was very repressive. Almost all the Vietnamese at the time were firmly anti-colonial. It didn't matter whether you were a communist or not, you just wanted the French to leave. What was happening in Indochina at the time was simply part of a much larger picture of the disappearance of empires from Asia: the British had gone from India; the Dutch had been forced out of the former Dutch East Indies; the Japanese were out of Korea; and it was the turn of the French to be forced out of Indochina. If you could have taken a poll, that was the view of virtually all Vietnamese.

But along the model of the French Résistance, the communist leaders had had a very prominent part in opposing the Japanese occupation in WW2, and they became the strongest element in opposing colonial rule. They were led by men like Ho Chi Minh, who had been a dedicated communist since just after the First World War. While there were Vietnamese anti-communist nationalists in the South, they had nothing like the prestige of the communist leaders like Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van Dong (the Foreign Minister), and General Giap (the great victor of Dien Bien Phu.)

The communist regime in the North was prestigious in that sense, but it was in the first flush of government, struggling with problems for the first time, and using some communist models that they later admitted were serious mistakes. One was the land reform that was going on in the countryside while we were there. We didn't see very much of it because we were confined to Hanoi. If you were a civilian member of the commission, you couldn't

go outside the city without the permission of the authorities. In fact, in a year, I went to the North only once. The military officers who served on the fixed and mobile teams were, of course, allowed within their regions. For the commission headquarters staff, it was like being in prison. You couldn't tell what was going on in the countryside. This included "peoples' justice", which were more or less lynch trials of people accused of being 'landlords'. This didn't make much sense, given the economic organization of Red River agriculture. Many of the people accused of being 'landlords' and so summarily executed, were not really 'landlords' in the sense of communist propaganda, but merely farmers with small holdings.

That was the situation in the North - very repressive, but with a prestigious leadership. The Hanoi I remember was a city where the streets were entirely empty because there were no small businesses - they were all closed. There was no traffic, either, although there were traffic policemen at every intersection. The only decorations were huge portraits of Ho Chi Minh and huge banners with slogans on them that were supposed to be manifestations of peoples' 'enthusiasm'. I can still remember some of them: Ho chu tich muon nam! (Long Live President Ho!) and Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam, Muon Nam! (Long live the Peoples' Party of Vietnam!)

The situation in the South was a confusing picture. The French had ruled all three Indochinese countries through the old monarchies, so there were royal houses in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. In Vietnam there was still an Emperor, Bao Dai, who spent a good deal of his time on the French Riviera. The Vietnamese were keen to kick out not only the French, but also this languid monarch. The leader of the republican nationalists in the South was Ngo Dinh Diem, and in my first month in 1955, Diem was in the process of removing Bao Dai and ending those colonial arrangements so as to control his half of Vietnam.

This was extremely difficult as there were various groups, not just the Viet Minh (which in American days became the Viet Cong), who had extensive areas under their control. In addition, there were three quasi-religious sects, although at one end of the spectrum they were really just thugs and racketeers. There were the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Bin Xuyen. The latter were a really nasty bunch who, when I was first in Vietnam, were in control of rackets in Cholon, Saigon's twin city. They had something like an armed encampment in Cholon, and as an early task, Diem had to control those guys and kick them out of Cholon. He managed to do that, but they found refuge in the countryside. So there was a terrible problem of public order in the South all the time I was there. The regime was shaky, authoritarian, trying to impose its control, and only gradually gaining control. The Southern leadership never did control the entire countryside.

This was the background to our work: the North and South were most unlikely to cooperate in preparation for national elections. The happy Geneva scenario was totally unrealistic, all the more so because in the South there was an extraordinary anomaly. The French party to the ceasefire had been the French Command. The French, having evacuated the North

at the wishes of the regime there, finally departed entirely from Vietnam. As it happened, I was there at the port in the spring of 1956, when the French Admiral in charge of the French Asia fleet went aboard an aircraft carrier, and the next day the French command in Indochina was dissolved. This meant that the French party to the ceasefire agreement no longer existed. The South Vietnamese government never accepted that it was the legal successor to the French, pointing out that they had never signed the ceasefire agreement. They did say that they would extend practical cooperation. In my experience they were pretty faithful to that; the Liaison Officer was a man called Colonel Lam, who was later killed. The Indian government, as commission chair, kept trying to persuade the South that it should accept legal responsibility, but they never did. For my entire tenure, the commission had only one legal party when there should have been two, and the situation on the ground was utterly unpropitious in terms of holding national elections. Furthermore, all the constructive work that could be accomplished had been accomplished, so we had to try to stem our growing frustration and cynicism. You can see that in some of the chapters in Arthur Blanchette's book.

You can say "OK, that's a dismal picture," and yet we were really quite happy, despite all the restrictions on us. I think I was the first officer to serve a whole year in Hanoi. In order to show the Commission's presence in the South, we did get out of Hanoi every two or three months for a day or two. There, our movements were not restricted. I hitched rides on commission planes and got to visit just about all the fixed-team sites around the whole coast in the South: Nha Trang; Cap St Jacques; Tan Chau; and the old imperial capital Hue, which became infamous during the American war. I have happy memories of all that - lovely white beaches where we swam and sunned ourselves- a tropical paradise. In Cap St Jacques we were assigned to a hotel that had been a French barrack, and the kit of a departed French officer was still there, bundled up and addressed to be shipped out. The address was in Algeria, so he was going from one war to another. It was a sad thought.

Even in the North there was quite an active social life, in a way. Down the street from the Hotel Metropole, where we lived, was the Canadian mess, and that was a very popular social centre. We had guests all the time. The most famous guest was Ho Chi Minh, himself. He came in his jungle suit and his sandals made of old rubber tires. Ho had great charm; he was a very sophisticated man. The jungle suit, rubber tire sandals and the wispy beard - those were just for propaganda. He was an absolutely convinced card-carrying communist, but he had great charm, spoke a number of languages, and was perfectly at ease in company. I remember him picking out our administrative officer, one of several charming women from the department, and a very friendly person. Ho sat beside her, and they chatted like old friends. If you wanted to hear General Giap recount his great battle, he would lecture on the subject, sort of like hearing Wellington describe the Battle of Waterloo. Those were our Vietnamese guests. The head of the North Vietnamese liaison office was Colonel Ha Van Lau, who became famous in the American days.

We didn't have contact with ordinary people in Hanoi. The population didn't dare to have

social contacts with you. But there was quite a large French delegation there, headed by a man called Jean Sainteny. He had had contacts with Ho Chi Minh during the resistance days of the war. The French hoped they could retrieve something of their legacy in Vietnam through the Sainteny Mission. But Sainteny was never there - he waited in Hong Kong, I think, for a propitious moment to come to resume a dialogue between France and North Vietnam. It never came. His staff were partly civilian and partly military. One of them left me with his képi (French military cap with a flat top and horizontal brim) - probably an intelligence officer - as a result of an exchange of hats at a party.

At the very beginning of my time, there was still a US Consulate in Hanoi and a Consul - Tom Corcoran was his name, I think - and he was given a State Department award for his service in Hanoi at the time. He had two vice consuls, whose papers I helped to burn at one point. Their instructions were to hang in there for as long as they could. The authorities were determined to kick them out, but they couldn't do anything peremptory or violent because the Americans were protected people. Finally, the North Vietnamese got them by saying they were guilty of traffic offences, or something like that, and the North Vietnamese refused to renew their licenses.

The Canadian delegation organized entertainments of its own. Here's a story I remember with affection. It was going to be a New Year's party. We had our own script for it, and provided our own music. Vern Turner (who died last year) was a delegation member, a neighbour, and a friend for years. One of the things I remember about Vietnam is that you made good friends there, even though you never served together again - Vern was one of them. Vern played the trumpet. We wanted him to play in the musical evening, but he didn't have a trumpet in Hanoi. So that night, we went to the street for music and musicians in Hanoi. (As in China, streets sell a particular type of product.) It was all dark, and everything was shuttered up, but we managed to rouse the owner of a store which sold musical instruments. There were almost none left, as there was no market for them. He didn't have a trumpet, but he did have a flugelhorn, and Vern could play it. So Vern bought the flugelhorn, and on the night of the concert, which we staged as a version of that old Make Believe Ballroom, we had a compère with a microphone who said, "Now, we bring you from the land reform ballroom, the music of.." All those tricks from the big band era. On his flugelhorn Vern played what was then a showpiece trumpet song called "Cherry Pink and Appleblossom White". We both got 60 years of laughter out of that! He served much longer in Vietnam than I did, and went back in 1973 as the senior political advisor to Michel Gauvin on the ICCS.

As to work experience: my commissioner for most the time was David Johnston, who had been Canadian Permanent Representative to the UN. But when I first arrived, Sherwood Lett was still commissioner. He was not from the foreign service. A distinguished soldier in two wars, and a friend of Lester Pearson, he had been Chief Justice of British Columbia. The combination of military and judicial distinction made him an appropriate choice, and he was, I believe, instructed for, and expected to adopt, an attitude of judicial impartial-

ity. The difficulty arose from trying to reconcile this approach with the fact that Canada had been invited to serve as the Western representative on the commissions, balancing the then-communist Poles, and was expected to defend the Western case. This was not always easy when our South Vietnamese client, so to speak, caused problems. As for the North: we struggled constantly with frustration and obstruction. We were impressed, however, with the ordinary Vietnamese people as a whole, and by the beauty and richness of their country. Under the right government, we felt that they could be leaders in Southeast Asia.



Ambassador Vern Turner plays the Hanoi flugelhorn with assistance from his wife Beryl while posted in Moscow 1986-90.

Was there subsequent interest in my commission experience on the part of External Affairs colleagues? When I was posted to Delhi in 1956, my boss was Escott Reid, one of the most dynamic men who has ever been in our foreign service. He was in the middle of the Suez crisis. He tried to influence Mr Nehru, and was preoccupied by that task. His staff was equally preoccupied. I was recovering in hospital at the time. The Canadian High Commission showed no particular interest, at the time, in what I had experienced in Indochina.

I had Indian friends in Delhi who had served in Hanoi, and I should say that, despite the differences that tangled the commission's work all the time, we had contacts with both the Poles and Indians. The Indians had gone to some trouble to assign first class people to the Commission. The two Indian commissioners in Vietnam while I was in Hanoi, M.J. Desai

and G.P. Parthasarti, were happily back in Delhi when I got there. These were both superior men who had both passed through the very fine screen of the Indian Civil Service. Despite my being a junior officer, I was nonetheless able to have things to do with them. MJ Desai, in particular, I admired a great deal. There were several other able Indian former members of the ICSC in Delhi, and I kept up with them in Delhi. They were fine fellows, too.

Interestingly enough, the Polish Commissioner in Hanoi, Mihailowski, was a charming and very intelligent man who later got into trouble with his bosses. He was perfectly open and intelligent. Bill Bauer, who had been cross-posted to Hanoi from Warsaw, also kept up with him. We had contacts across the three delegations, and it wasn't all hostility and misunderstanding.

Later on in Delhi, when Escott Reid had departed, there was a question about reconvening the Laos commission. There were careful negotiations with the Indians anticipating that. Chester Ronning, who had become High Commissioner by then, received regular instructions on that. He had to prepare his notes to meet with Desai, who by then was the number two or three in the Indian foreign ministry. At that time, my High Commission colleagues showed some interest in my Indochina experience, but in general there wasn't any.

By my calculations, by the mid/late 1960s, about a third of the officer corps of External Affairs had served in Indochina. More people had served in Indochina than in any other single posting. To me, that meant you had your chums with the same experience, but to the rest of the world this was an insiders' club, and the rest of the world wasn't much interested. The military subsequently decided they wanted a ribbon for service in Indochina. Some generous soul asked whether the civilians should get one too. Ed Ritchie, who was Under Secretary said no - the Foreign Service doesn't require ribbons. But 20-30 years later someone changed their mind, and the Peacekeeping Medal was created. Some of us who were on the commissions and still around got that medal.

What other historic residue from the commissions? Some people had enjoyed working with the Indians, but there was subsequently a certain amount of anti-Indian feeling among some of the Canadians. It certainly wasn't altogether a happy relationship. There was also quite a large reaction to the North among a number of us who served in Indochina during the American war in Vietnam. We were not much for the fashionable "Jane Fonda" view of North Vietnam. However justified their cause, we knew what the North was like, and what they were like could be pretty nasty. There were too many people in our service who had no illusions about what they could be like. Thank goodness the regime has changed a lot since then.

This commitment in Indochina was totally unprepared, totally unexpected. At the time, the Far East division of the Department was principally concerned with Korea, because of the Korean war. I don't think anyone thought much about the French war in Vietnam while it was going on. I suppose we did some useful work in our own way, though the Geneva

Agreement didn't help the French to find a graceful way to leave. But as we subsequently saw, it's almost impossible to kill an international organization. No one thought we would go on for 20 years and two Vietnam commissions, and to produce this vast body of people expert on Indochina. In such an unforeseen situation, we always need to ask ourselves about the duration of our commitment. Some of them are interminable: Vietnam was not the only one. Cyprus was the same thing, and Afghanistan. Who knows how long involvement in the Ukraine will last? You might wisely observe that the thing won't be over in a hurry. Sometimes things go on for years.

But it also made me sceptical during the tenure of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. He had this rational, hard-nosed theory about the nature of foreign policy, that you determined the foreign extensions of domestic interests, and more or less drew a line around them - that defined your foreign policy. The problem with that approach is the subject of that famous PM Macmillan's phrase about history - "events dear boy, events" - and Pierre Trudeau got his comeuppance domestically with the FLQ crisis. You could have said at the time, and I'm afraid some irreverent people (including me) did say, that what happened to us in Indochina is a perfect illustration of "events dear boy".

Did we do any good? Well, we kept the peace in the early days, and there were some accomplishments in the first year which the team could take pride in. I don't think I did much good personally, but that was the luck of the draw in terms of the work I was assigned (article 14c of the Geneva agreements.)

Did we think the South would survive? Not in our heart of hearts, but we may have helped to spare the South from Communist rule for 20 years. This is not to say that their own rule was by any means perfect, but it was preferable to communist rule. But this delay in the South becoming communist subsequently created sympathy for the boat people who fled the South after 1975. The Vietnamese boat people who came to Canada have been highly successful. My family helped sponsor a Vietnamese family. We have subsequently followed the model of appealing to the Canadian public to help sponsor refugees.

What were the Vietnamese attitudes to me on my 2000 trip back to Vietnam? I can't claim to have met officials on the trip: as tourists we were in the hands of Vietnamese guides and service people. We did, however, deal with a young woman from the travel agency, and with her, as required, we went through the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum in Hanoi (like the one in Moscow for Lenin, which I saw on a subsequent posting to the USSR). There is Uncle Ho in his mausoleum: Ho Chi Minh, the father of his country, almost mythical and deeply revered. I said I had seen and talked to Ho Chi Minh. The young woman then asked me if I had been in Vietnam before, and she was astounded when I said, 'yes'.

We went to Indochina not because we had interests there, but precisely the opposite - because we were supposed to be disinterested in the area. But I think our experience in Hanoi on the commissions advanced the notion of Canada as a Pacific country. In 1954

we had only been involved in Korea; we had earlier been forced to leave China and didn't recognize it; and Japan was in a state of recovery. There wasn't a sort of power-focus in Asia. But there we were, sending a disproportionate number of people to French Indochina, which forced people to look more at Asia. That was a big change. The Indochina commitment pushed us in the right direction, especially considering the position of China, Korea, India, and Japan now. It was, in a sense, an introduction for many in the foreign service to the region of vital interest it has become, and that was surely useful.

Interview:

David Anderson Remembers

Vietnam ICSC in 1963, for which I volunteered, was my first posting after my probationary year. It seemed to be the quickest way of getting out of Ottawa. There was a high turnover of staff in Saigon because men served there for only a year, while women served for only nine months. In my case, the posting turned out to be for 16 months.

So why did I volunteer? Aside from the escape from Ottawa, it was going to be an interesting post. The Americans were building up in Vietnam in 1963, with some 12,000 advisors and technical staff already there, and it was pretty clear that the decision was going in favour of greater involvement. It was also quite important that it was a French-speaking post. For a junior foreign service officer from Victoria, it was important to have a chance to use French - you couldn't get very far without it.

It was also fairly well-paid. The Commission was created in 1954 by the British and Russian co -chairs of the Geneva Conference, and staff were paid a per diem and expenses directly from some source (perhaps British or UN). This included our hotel accommodation. So, you could pretty well bank your Foreign Affairs pay. It was nice for a junior foreign service officer to think your pay was piling up in that way. In Vietnam there was a commission secretariat run by the Indians that dealt with things like per diem allowances

So, I went to see Mr Maybe, then the head of Personnel Division, for a discussion on postings, which all junior officers had. After beating around the bush, he asked, "Would you like to go to Vietnam? I said, "That's what I put down on my preference form", and he said, "Oh really? But so you did!" That settled any problem he had, and he didn't have to persuade me.

So, I went as a legal advisor. Legal Advisor was something a little different. There was a report that had been written by the Indians and Canadians without Polish participation, about infiltration of men, equipment and material from North Vietnam into the South. That

was the first time we had the Indians do anything of that nature. Previously, the Indians had been pro-Chinese and had not wanted to do anything critical of Chinese (or for that matter Russian) involvement in Vietnam. But in 1962 the border dispute between India and China blew up, so then there was a change of heart. There was a certain determination among some, though not all, of the Indian foreign service officers, to punish the Chinese by showing they could do something the Chinese would not like.

This involved a number of other international relationships, other than that between the Indians and Chinese. For example, we were never sure if the North Vietnamese and Chinese were good friends or not. The other argument for the delays created by the Indian foreign service officers was that, if we lay low, the trouble with China would pass, so we were better off not doing things in Vietnam that the Chinese might not like. But again, we were all guessing. Not surprisingly, the Russians were clearly finding the Vietnam War quite a financial drain, as the Americans now find Ukraine.

In any event, the report by the Indians and Canadians was prepared and it was fairly detailed, I didn't think it was quite as important as the Americans and South Vietnamese were making out, or indeed as Ottawa was making out. The Indians, after participating and writing the report, had backed off and had a change of heart in Delhi. Personally, I was never sure that the relationship between the Chinese, Indians and North Vietnamese was as good as was assumed. The Indians denied they had backed off and said, "No no no - there are just some details we would like to change." My counterpart was an intelligent and engaging Indian foreign service officer called Rangarajan, who had a law degree, but who, like me, was not a practising lawyer. He was a past master at delay. If I recall correctly, in the early years of the Indian foreign service many of the Indian diplomats had been to Oxford or another British university. Without such a degree they would be disadvantaged compared to the other Indians in the foreign service who had studied in Britain. Certainly, the Indian government liked to send its foreign service officers to Britain for a year.

So, I passed my interview with Mr Maybe and was sent out to Vietnam sometime around April 1963, spending a week in Hong Kong on the way. I got to Saigon and stayed at the Continental Palace Hotel. This was a 1930's old fashioned colonial era hotel like the Metropole in Hanoi, with ceiling fans rather than air conditioning, and large sparsely furnished rooms. We had our offices in a run-down former French military camp that the Foreign Legion had had at one point. When the rains came in summer there were large puddles. It was still an operational military camp when the commission occupied it. There was a fleet of absolutely ancient Peugeot cars, which we all expected to die and fall off the road. We had a driver, but as a junior officer I didn't have a car, and I travelled in the mornings from the hotel to the office with Tom Delworth, my immediate superior and political officer in Saigon. There were security issues, but nothing ever happened to me or anyone I knew. We didn't see much of the Indians and even less of the Poles.

It was obviously not a normal diplomatic mission, but there were certain things that seemed to be in the tradition of a normal mission, such as political reporting. At the time I got there

- about June 1963 - there was a peace initiative to end hostilities between North and South. This was named after the Polish Commissioner Mieczyslaw Maneli. It included the Indian Commissioner, Ramchundur Goburdhu, and the French Ambassador in Saigon. The French always had an odd belief that they could somehow recover their position in Vietnam. We were not included, even though we were a commission member, nor did I get a briefing on it from our Commissioner, Gordon Cox, when I first got there. It was strange, and a surprise to me that the French were included instead of us. Though it was called the Maneli Initiative it was actually more a French and Indian initiative. There were things going on in Delhi that included Galbraith, the American Ambassador, which I was unaware of and as a junior officer didn't need to know. It was Delworth and Cox who were following it, but they were not involved in this initiative. There was at the time some indication from the North that they would be willing to end hostilities. But later we heard there had been a major debate in the Hanoi Politburo over whether they should first concentrate on building up a socialist economy, or on reunifying the country. The people who wanted early reunification won out, so Hanoi pursued the war.

Maneli was a very interesting guy. He later defected to the US and taught at the City University of New York. He had been a major player in the Polish resistance in the Second World War. He had been captured two or three times by the Gestapo and had managed to escape. I remember he gave me a ride in his car once, and he showed me his arm, which had a triangle tattoo mark. He told me if the triangle was facing down instead of up, he wouldn't be alive. He was an interesting Pole. He was protected by his resistance compatriots, but the government didn't completely trust him. He was a resistance Pole rather than a communist Pole. In Poland he had been the dean of a prominent law school and had been pulled out of that job to go to Vietnam.

The other Commission member working on the initiative was Goburdhu, the Indian Commissioner, who had never really lived in India. He came from Mauritius. He spoke French and Hindi, but I imagine his first language was French. As a student he had a scholarship to London but had somehow altered this scholarship to a university in France. When Indian independence was declared he went to India. He had been practising law in London at the time, however, so he really had very little involvement with India up to that time. He was a Francophile to the nth degree.

Ultimately the Maneli initiative came to nothing, though it excited people at the time. I heard a little of it from Delworth, but not a great deal as Delworth was not directly involved, nor was Cox. That, combined with the stalled progress of the legal report, meant we were just discovering how difficult the Indians could be - how successful in delay and confusion they could be: "I just want to change a few little things"

Article 14 of the 1954 Geneva Agreement (which neither the US nor South Vietnam signed) set up the ICSC. It was supposed to be balanced, but wasn't because India had other fish to fry, chiefly relating to their relations with China. The agreement prohibited the importation of arms and equipment into Vietnam. There were, I believe, 14 military team sites in the

north and 14 in the south. Each contained military personnel from the three member countries, who rotated through these sites every three to four weeks. But they weren't allowed to see anything; for example, a request to inspect a North Vietnamese airport was denied on the grounds that it was a private flying club. There was no way we could deal with that. It was better in the South than the North, but the South was the area being infiltrated by arms and equipment.

The Legal Report was a collection of all these reported incidents, which would include evidence there had been infiltration - details like identifying the tread marks in the mud made by sandals worn by the communist fighters. Those sandals were made from rubber tires in North Vietnam or China. Shell casings of Russian or Chinese manufacture were further evidence. There were hundreds of these incidents, and usually something had been left behind to indicate someone had come from North Vietnam. So, all this was compiled in the Legal Report.

But it was not going very far. My job was to try to get the Report through the system of the Commission in Saigon. By the time I got there, as noted already, the Indians were having a rethink about the approach they would take. This meant they basically did nothing. So, the work was coming to naught. There were uncertainties with the French too - what would they do, what wouldn't they do. The Americans were moving in. No one knew much about their aims, other than to prop up the South Vietnamese government, and to provide a bulwark in Southeast Asia against communism. At the time, the domino theory suggested that if South Vietnam fell, then Malaya and Thailand and Indonesia would fall and you would wind up with a communist Southeast Asia.

But despite these frustrations, the assignment did take me to Saigon. It was a city with quite a pleasant sense of decay. There was a lot of corruption and a lot of people looking out for themselves. I was a member of the golf club; indeed, I joined just about every club I could find. I was a member of the Cercle Sportif which had a swimming pool. They also had excellent tennis courts. And I joined Le Cercle Hyppique (the riding club), which still existed, however precariously, 10 years after the French had left. I even went water skiing on the Saigon River, thanks to my friend, Mr. Penn, who ran the Esso refinery on the river and had a boat. These clubs were all great fun. The French still in Vietnam were mostly Corsicans, and I think they ran the drug trade. If they didn't run it, they were heavily involved in it. They ran a lot of restaurants as well. We ate out for two meals a day, while breakfast was at the hotel. It was important to have good restaurants as we were there for a year. We used the Restaurant Givral a good deal.

Saigon was a well laid out city and had lovely gardens. The Presidential Palace had beautiful grounds around it. The diplomatic corps was quite extensive as the Americans had persuaded friendly countries to install an ambassador in Saigon. Saigon had better infrastructure than it needed or deserved, but it was run down. The golf club was quite interesting because it was dead flat. When it rained, it flooded. It was considered to be proof against listening devices. According to rumour, you could run into young men there who were employed by the Swiss

banks in Saigon. They were British, mainly, but there were also other nationalities. They felt they could talk freely while playing golf with South Vietnamese generals who wanted to discuss their investments and ways of getting money out of South Vietnam.

Saigon could be very corrupt. I was once responsible for getting 50 Canada-bound Vietnamese students on a plane, and it was going to be difficult because at the airport the military police picked up about a third of students bound abroad for military service. By the time I went out to the airport with my 50 students, the military police were waiting. I had some cartons of cigarettes and Canadian whisky with me, just to keep things moving. I never told the Commissioner that I had bribed the customs and immigration people and the military police. I thought he might not appreciate it, or at least not appreciate the fact that I had told him. The Americans the same week got only about two thirds of my 50 out.

The aforementioned Mr Penn, who ran Esso's refinery, was clearly paying protection money to the Vietcong in order to service the planes and the South Vietnamese army. A Mr Hyland, who had a goose- and duck-down business, was probably in the same position. There was the occasional anti-corruption drive, especially on customs violations. These generally resulted in an ethnic or national Chinese being executed under a plane tree in the public square in Cholon.

I ran into a couple of Americans I had known before. One of them I had been to school with in Switzerland, and he was a captain in the US armed forces. He was already on his third tour in Vietnam. One evening we went for dinner with another group of six or eight people. One of them had been a French pilot in Dien Bien Phu. His plane had been shot down and he had lost a leg there but had survived. He was lucky, considering how few French Union military at Dien Bien Phu were ever released. As the evening went on and we drank more French and Corsican wine, the former French pilot came up to my American friend who had been serving in the Mekong Delta, took him by the lapels and started shaking him. He kept saying "Don't get killed! Don't get killed! Nobody cares! Nobody cares!" It was quite a scene at the rooftop restaurant where we were, with this heavily limping ex-pilot - quite a big man - taking Tony's lapels and telling him not to get killed. The ex-pilot was right.

I later went down to the Delta to visit this American friend, who was an advisor at a South Vietnamese army artillery post, shelling potential enemy sites. You could hear the roar of the canon in the middle of the night. This was in a village in the Delta, and I couldn't understand it - we had dinner in an open-air restaurant there, and any person on a passing motorcycle could have tossed a grenade. That also applied in Saigon, where restaurants were bombed from time to time. But we used to go to them, nonetheless, because we assumed that if they had been grenaded once they wouldn't be again for a while. The one incident that happened to me in Indochina was an explosion at a gas station in Cambodia while we were waiting to cross the river on a ferry.

We were young and did crazy things. There were all sorts of people who turned up in Saigon.

One was an Italian from a medical drug company who had an MGA sports car. Once, he and I drove to Cambodia to have a look at the Angkor Wat ruins. At one point we had to slow down to about 20km/hour. The week before there had been an attack on the same road, so I asked him if we could go a little faster. He pointed to the Italian flag decal on the windscreen, implying that no one would dare attack us. He was also in the habit of asking “What would Mussolini do?” He asked that question as the car sat in a mud puddle on a country road, and we were not sure what to do. “Advance immediately!” was his own reply. So he did. We got stuck up to his hubcaps. We had to get local Montagnard hunters, who emerged from the jungle, to lift the car and carry it out.

The one place you could go to was Cap St Jacques (now Vung Tau) on the coast. There was a row of large American cars parked just off the square where the Continental Palace Hotel and the Saigon opera building were located. You could rent one of these cars for \$30 or so to go to Cap St Jacques and swim. But you were always concerned because from time to time there was trouble on the road there.

The American Ambassador at the time was Henry Cabot Lodge. I got to know him because he and his wife had a niece who came to stay, and I was taking her out from time to time to go for dinner and water skiing. Quite often – three or four times - I was told they couldn’t allow her to go out to a restaurant that evening. I remember once driving up in a taxi to the American residence to pick her up, and I heard this ominous ‘click-click’ sound. Then you knew the American security guards weren’t happy to see you. But because sometimes I couldn’t take her out for dinner, we had dinner with Ambassador and Mrs Lodge. Occasionally there were other guests, as well. Once at the table there was a Brigadier General (or Colonel) - a Marine. He boasted that a couple of battalions of marines would fix the war. He couldn’t believe that the skinny young Vietcong were shorter than their rifles, and that they held hands as they walked along - something that was perfectly natural to them. But the Americans always found this very doubtful.

When I was there, a Vietcong was killed by an American guard. This was probably not the first time. There were American advisers (for technical support) with the South Vietnamese troops, who were all carrying weapons for self-protection. They were not supposed to take part in battle, but the line was very blurred. There were probably other incidents that were not reported.

There was a big press corps in Saigon, quite a number of whom won Pulitzer Prizes for their journalistic efforts in Vietnam. On the whole, they were despised by the American military establishment, which had no use for them. But the American troops, from whom these journalists derived their information (often contrary to the party line) were a bit more friendly. The journalists were interested in us because we were the only people who regularly went to North Vietnam.

The Commission had a little airline. Aigle Azur was the name of the company, the head office of which was on the Champs Elysée in Paris. It had a few Boeing 307 Stratoliner air-

craft. They were like DC3's in that the tail had a wheel which sat on the ground. But unlike DC3's, they were four engine aircraft. There were four aircraft until one crashed enroute to Hanoi in October 1965. It still has not been found 60 years later. A Canadian foreign service officer and two Canadian military personnel, as well as Indian and Polish ICSC members, were killed in the crash. The French pilots who flew them were pretty excited at one point because the Indian Commissioner complained that the pilots were barefoot, and he wanted people properly shod on the plane. We didn't see the purpose in this. More concerning to us was how many drugs the crew had ingested.

Given how little it was likely to accomplish, there was always the question of why the Commission was kept going. The argument was that it could do something, and maybe it would do something. And uniquely, we did have continuing contact with North Vietnam. We had one foreign service officer based in Hanoi at the time. This was Paul Romeril. I didn't really get to know him too well. He was always in Hanoi, and I was in Saigon or Phnom Penh. I went up to Hanoi once. Delworth went more frequently than I did. The Commissioner would occasionally go up there, but I don't recollect how often. Hanoi was very quiet. There were virtually no vehicles on the roads; it was all bicycles. It was always a surprise to see a truck, and it always drew comment as we tried to identify it.

This was before major American attacks on North Vietnam occurred. The August 1964 USS Turner/Maddox incident which was the basis for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which expanded the war - had not yet occurred. To this day, I'm not sure if there was an incident or not. The rumour at that time, correct or not, was that the attack on the destroyers by motor torpedo boats was inspired by a Chinese propaganda film, then showing in Hanoi, about Chinese motor torpedo boats attacking an American destroyer. This was just rumour, but probably about as good or bad as any other rumour at the time. It would seem foolish to attack destroyers with motor torpedo boats. I still wonder if it was true. Reports were not consistent, and it seems uncertain.

South Vietnamese President Diem was assassinated in a military coup on the evening of November 2, 1963. Before the coup there had been a lot of troop movements. Units had been sent out of town because they were not considered as loyal to either the rebels or to Diem as they should have been. So, in that regard, the stage had been set. Delworth and I were down on the bund that ran along the Saigon River, where there was a South Vietnamese navy ship docked. The ship was flying a red signal flag. This was alarming because that flag could indicate that a ship was using live ammunition. There were also military aircraft buzzing around overhead. At that stage of the coup, the navy and air force were on different sides, or so it appeared. Machine guns were being fired in our direction, but over our heads. We didn't necessarily know that was the case at the time. I remember lying on the cobblestones in the drain beside the road, wondering if and how I could move the cobblestones aside to get even flatter. Of course, I smelled of garbage for the rest of the day. Alas, I encountered a very nice French woman in a hotel elevator a little later, but the smell of garbage must have been too much for her: I never saw her again.

The next morning when I walked up to the palace, I saw an armoured personnel carrier in flames on the road beside the presidential palace. At that point we didn't know what had happened to Diem or to his brother Nhu. There were at least four Diem brothers. One was the Governor in Hue; he was later executed. Another was a Cardinal in Rome. The assassination of Diem and Nhu was tied in with the Maneli Initiative. The Diem brothers had concluded that they could not win the war, but the South Vietnamese military, headed by General Minh, wished to continue it. They did not approve of the Maneli negotiations that were going on. General Minh wasn't very bright, but he became the next President. The attack on the presidential palace was successful, even though the troops took the palace only to discover that Diem wasn't there. In fact, he was in the house of a Chinese merchant in Cholon, the Chinese city adjacent to Saigon. He was picked up there by the troops loyal to Minh and killed in a rather barbarous way inside an armoured personnel carrier.

I don't know if the story is correct or not, but I heard that the military rebels came into the office of the head of the Navy and asked whether he was with them or against them. He replied that he couldn't yet decide, so the soldiers shot him on the spot. There was also a story that the man was involved in a romantic triangle, and that's why he was shot. But that was Vietnam - a lot of things happened that were inexplicable or illogical.

In the afternoon after the coup, a Vietnamese nuclear physicist of considerable repute, together with the former Ambassador to France (who was considered to be a member of the Diem regime's inner circle) were crossing the square in front of the hotel in the ambassador's Citroen. As we watched from the bar of the hotel, he was held up by the crowd. It looked like it was going to be the end of him. But the car door was slammed shut in time by an army captain aide, and the car pulled away. On the night of the coup, I was looking down at the square from the annex of the hotel across the road, and I could see a row of armoured personnel carriers. I realized, however, that I was silhouetted against the night sky, and that if there was a potential for Molotov cocktails to be lobbed from above, the soldiers below might be nervous, so I quickly moved.

Was the Diem assassination a turning point? The Americans at that time had some 12,000 advisers in Vietnam, but after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in the US Congress, the American presence eventually went up to well over half a million. The South Vietnamese army had seemed to be holding reasonably well while I was there. The Americans were trying to bump it up to another level. They were convinced they could cut the North Vietnamese supply line, but in the end they couldn't. They were defeated by the success of bicycles and trucks coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

We saw a fair bit of the Americans. We always liked being invited by the Americans to their mess hall at lunch - the steaks were flown in from California. The Commissioner did not like our accepting this, fearing it showed potential bias. That was perfectly true - it did. You can be bribed by steaks quite easily, I discovered. But I saw more of, say, the Australian second secretary, Kim Jones, at their embassy. He went on to a very distinguished career. I also regularly saw the Belgians, some of the French, and the Dutch. We played tennis with them.

The American military were much more self-contained, and it was an indication of potential bias if you spent too much time with them. Nevertheless, as mentioned, I did know some of them. One was an old school friend. And I did visit American advisor outposts.

In the meantime, normal life was going on. I went water skiing on the weekends, and horse riding three days a week. There was a young lady who rented the “other half” of the horse I rented, whose father was a classic example of the Vietnamese people left behind by the French. He had spent eight years in France learning the mining trade and was the head of the only serious mining business in South Vietnam. That poor horse saw me coming with my 185 pounds and must have preferred the young lady with her 95 pounds. In the middle of the park, which was about 100 meters long and 60 metres wide, there was a little hill. It was only about as high as a table and twice the size, but it was called Johnston Hill because when President Johnston visited Saigon he addressed the American troops from there.

There was an apartment for rent above the stables. I unsuccessfully tried to get the Indian Commissioner, who was head of administration, to switch me from the hotel to the apartment. The very first thing he said after the Diem coup was, “Do you see how wise it was not to have you way off on the other side of town?” He said he was always thinking of my welfare. I thought that was very kind of him. I don’t think he was ever Ambassador to France, which was an unlucky decision for him, given his Francophile disposition. He had his family with him in Saigon. Gordon Cox’s wife, Beverly, who was a New Zealander originally, was also there. I don’t think Maneli had family in Saigon. The Canadian Commissioner was in a separate villa and the rest of us were at the hotel.

The Commissions were set up with a military component headed by a Brigadier or Major General. These provided staffing for the team sites, which were locations from where we were observing possible importation of military equipment. There must have been close to 100 military personnel in the Canadian contingent in Vietnam. At any given time, half would have been at team sites and the other half in Saigon waiting to rotate to team sites. Those of us on the civilian side didn’t always have the best relationship with them. The military were mostly veterans of the Second World War who had rejoined the service at the time of the Korean conflict. They were mainly at Major level, though some were Captains. The Americans always joked about the age of Canadian ICSC officers. In the US military, no captain can be past the age of 45, whereas in Canada they could be. The Brigadier was the number two in the delegation and became the Acting Commissioner if the Commissioner was not present. For their part, the military thought we were way too young, over-ranked, and immature. Delworth, my immediate superior and political officer, who I greatly admired, was the equivalent of a Lieutenant Colonel. Cox was later replaced by Blair Seaborn, a very civilized guy, who was responsible for implementing an initiative to end the war, though it didn’t get very far.

The small civilian side of the delegation also included, of course, the support staff - communicators, secretaries, and Canadian administration staff. Romeril was the only civilian in Hanoi. In Cambodia, Tom Pope was the Commissioner. He was writing reports to Ottawa

that were very critical of South Vietnam and the Americans. He was sent off on holiday, so I went up to Phnom Penh for a month to replace him. (I went to Phnom Penh several times, but the month replacing Tom Pope was the longest.) There were only two other Canadian support staff in Phnom Penh. Vientiane, Laos was the same - very few Canadian civilians were posted there at any one time. But the staff in Cambodia and Laos could be expanded very quickly, as technically I was legal advisor to all three commissions - Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

It was great fun in Phnom Penh. There was a French saying: the Vietnamese industriously work and have three rice crops a year; Cambodians watch and have only two crops a year; and in Laos, they lie down and sleep and have only one crop a year. There was a certain amount of truth to it. Cambodia was very Buddhist. I remember a Frenchman being berated by a Cambodian monk who said good Buddhists didn't kill butterflies. (Although they were willing to kill each other.) The little I saw of Phnom Penh was a gracious city with tree-lined, wide boulevards - very lovely. It was not a vigorous place in any commercial or administrative sense. But it was fun. If you went to the airport and the plane wasn't on time, the stewardesses would all start line-dancing while waiting for the plane. If anyone was in political trouble, they immediately went to hospital because there was an unwritten rule that you couldn't be questioned in hospital.

When Prince Sihanouk came back from medical treatment in Paris, I was told, as Acting Commissioner, to turn up at the airport at 2 pm wearing a white suit. I had to have a white suit made quickly and it cost me \$40. There were these young ladies at the airport, presumably air hostesses, spreading flower petals before Sihanouk as he descended from the Air Cambodge flight, and progressed along the walkway, shaking hands with the diplomatic colony.

I remember the French July 14 celebration in Phnom Penh in 1964, in the garden of the French Embassy. I couldn't believe how much champagne was coming to me and to the group with whom I was chatting at the time. I asked the British Chargé d'Affaires, who was in the group, why the service was so lavish. He replied, "Oh, I bribed the waiters." I'm sure French would have loved to know their staff was being bribed by the British.

I went up to Laos, and it was quite interesting too. They had built an Arc de Triomphe- like monument to the dead, which may still be there. It was built with cement that was supposed to be for aircraft runways serving American military aircraft based in Laos. The main hotel in Vientiane (the Thousand Elephants Hotel) had a monkey on a long chain, which would jump down on the shoulders of newcomers. Of course, they hadn't been told that a monkey was about to descend on them, so there were always shrieks. For all its faults, the colonial era had given these Indochinese cities more atmosphere than they have had since, and I enjoyed them. There were still 5000 French, mainly Corsicans, in those cities. Most of the Corsicans had no scruples, but then the French didn't either - it was an opportunistic environment.

So, I left Saigon finally in 1964, probably in August, and was followed as legal adviser by Derek Fraser. Then I went to Hong Kong. I felt that the Vietnam ICSC experience was useful to me personally. It was a sensible decision to go there, and the appointment also served Mr Maybe's interests. It was also useful from the French language point of view; I spent virtually all my time with French-speaking Vietnamese. One example of how acculturated the Vietnamese were then was my chance meeting in Saigon with a Vietnamese friend who taught at the Institut Mme Curé, the French junior high school. I asked her why she wasn't teaching or at school that day. "Oh," she said, "On Thursdays and Mondays they teach in Vietnamese, and I am not qualified to teach in Vietnamese." This from a woman who had never been out of Vietnam in her life. She, herself, had been taught with the same curriculum they had in France, and was only qualified to teach in French, not Vietnamese. Innumerable people had dual Vietnamese/French passports. Mme Nhu, the widow of President Diem's brother, died in France, as did her daughter. They were lost souls in a way, betwixt and between, but they were very interesting people - very intelligent. To be accepted for scholarship in the colonial era you had to be good. They had a strong attachment to Vietnam, but not so strong that it excluded attachment to France. And they were good fun to be with.

Was there diplomatic experience gained in Saigon? We were not a regular post, that was quite clear. We did do political reporting, and I prepared the odd paper. We looked after students and had an aid program. But never having had a subsequent normal diplomatic posting (because I went from Saigon to Hong Kong, where I was technically assigned to the trade section but was actually a language student), I can't describe in detail what I may have missed or gained in terms of experience in Saigon.

But in general, it was a good experience. We were relatively few in number, and we were exposed to others in the diplomatic colony. The tripartite negotiations in the Commission were a little different experience from bilateral or multilateral work, but I thought it was quite good training. It wasn't particularly liked by all though. At my interview with Maybe before I went, I had the feeling that he might have anticipated that I'd have to be persuaded to go to Saigon, and that was why he needed to play a last card by saying that, when I returned, there could be a rewarding subsequent assignment. This suggested that deals were made - go to Vietnam for a year and afterwards you can have something you want.

Did the fact that so many young diplomats went to Indochina with the Commissions influence Canada's subsequent policy toward Asia? Yes, I think so. Because of the ICSC, there were far more foreign service officers who were in Southeast Asia than would otherwise have been the case. We did not at that time have extensive embassies in that part of the world. So, I think it probably did. But I couldn't give a concrete example of how a subsequent policy decision with respect to the Indo Pacific was influenced by ICSC experience. And there were some who served in Indochina who wondered why they were there.

I had a sense, maybe quite wrongly, that there was an attitude in Ottawa that if the Indians could play the peace-making game, so could we. That was because of the Maneli initiative, and because North Vietnam didn't take the 1964 Seaborn missions to Hanoi more seriously. There was the attitude that if there was going to be movement and change, we - meaning Canada - could perhaps be the vehicle to effect it. After all, we had the only connection between North and South. We had good relations with the governmental ICSC liaison staff in Hanoi and Saigon. The liaison staff were important people, and they went on to other significant jobs in their own administrations. Personally, I thought that it made sense, once you are there, to stay there. It might have been a little different if we had been invited to participate in the ICSC ten years later, say in 1964 instead of 1954. But we failed to realize how intractable the situation was - how difficult it is to stop a war. And as for Laos and Cambodia - you just don't know. There were wars there, as well. Wars are unpleasant things; you want to help stop them, even if they are difficult to stop.

In 1964, at the end of my time in Saigon, there was a bit of innocence when it came to the visits to Hanoi by Blair Seaborn, my commissioner. He was given a difficult hand to play. The other slightly later (Canadian) peace mission to Hanoi was that of Chester Ronning. I saw Ronning in Hong Kong on his way through to Vietnam. That was another attempt at peace-making, but Ronning's experience was with China. There seemed to be a lack of understanding that Vietnam was not China and was not even an adjunct of China. I thought it was a little bit naive to send someone to Hanoi just because he had had good relations with China. There probably was an earlier opportunity for peace at the time of the Maneli initiative, but the North Vietnamese turned it down after the crucial politburo meeting in Hanoi, during which there was an argument between those who wanted to continue the war and those who wanted to build up the economy. It seemed there was an opportunity then, but it just didn't pan out. For his part, de Gaulle, then in power in France, seemed to believe that the French empire could be restored, and this would bring peace.

As for the Americans: the Ambassador, Cabot Lodge, as Republican running mate to Nixon, had lost to Kennedy in the 1960 US election, and had earlier lost his Senate seat to Kennedy in 1952. Was he appointed Ambassador so that, if anything went wrong, he could be blamed? And I was always interested in Kennedy. He escaped criticism about American intervention, but to my mind once Kennedy had died, Johnston had no choice but to proceed. But I don't know the American political system well enough to judge the flexibility Johnston had.

And there may be deeper roots. Back in 1954, the Americans had sent landing craft to pick up a tremendous exodus of Vietnamese, almost exclusively Catholics, who wanted to leave the newly communist North. Whole villages left at a time. The question of the influence of the American Cardinal on American foreign policy at the time always interested me. I'm sure that in Eisenhower's presidency the Church continued to play a big role on Vietnam policy, contributing to the eventual huge US commitment there.

Three Blind Mice: A Year and a Half in Vientiane

Fred and Eva Bild



Friends from Vientiane bid farewell to Fred and Eva at the Nongkai Thailand train station at the end of their posting to ICSC Laos in 1967 (Fred and Eva on the left).

It was 1966 when I was first told that I was being sent to Vientiane, and I was in Tokyo with Eva and our three daughters on our first posting. In those days you didn't question assignments, and anyway, in Tokyo I was a Third Secretary - the Embassy's Information Officer - and in Vientiane I was going to get a big title - Senior Political Adviser to the Canadian delegation.

So, I said, "okay, what does a Political Adviser do?" I went to Ottawa before going to Vientiane, and was briefed on how the delegation functioned, how to deal with the Poles and the Indians, and, basically, how to apply the 1962 protocol.

I had no idea what was going on in Indochina then, although I knew we were part of the ICC and that half of our colleagues had been posted in Indochina. ICC Laos, though, was not a child of the 1954 agreements. The 1954 Conference did determine that Laos was one of the three countries that had to be supervised, but it was at a second conference, chaired by the British and the Russians, that ICC Laos was set up, with Britain and the Soviet Union becoming chairs.

When I arrived in Vientiane in August 1966, Commissioner Keith MacLellan was there to meet me, and to take me to the Canadian delegation. The delegation consisted of three diplomatic officers, twenty-five commissioned military officers, and several non-commissioned officers, as well as External Affairs support staff, which included secretaries, clerks and communicators.

The ICC responsibilities were divided among the three delegations: Canada; India; and Poland. Canada was responsible for transport, and India oversaw all administration, including our lodging. (I cannot for the life of me remember what responsibilities were assigned to the Poles.)

That first day, Commissioner MacLellan took me to meet the Indian Commissioner, Mr. Puri. He was the senior member of the tripartite arrangement. They discussed the recent meetings they had had with the Polish Commission. It was an extremely brief introduction to how the ICC operated.

After we got back to the delegation, Mr. MacLellan asked me to accompany him, his wife, and one of the senior military officers, to Luang Prabang, to make his farewell call on the King. The next day we flew to Luang Prabang - the Royal City, and the site of the King's palace. We arrived on the airstrip and waited and waited in the drizzle for the car that was supposed to come from the Palace. We took shelter under the wings of the small plane. When a car finally appeared, it took us to the banks of Nam Khan, where we waited again.

While the others boarded a small boat, I climbed up to a new bridge that was being built over the Nam Khan River, connecting the airstrip to the city. The bridge served me well, as long as I held on to the chicken wire on the sides. I looked far down to the water and saw the Commissioner and his officer in their summer whites, and his wife in a sundress, crossing the river in the boat. I met them on the other side, and we all waited some more. It started to drizzle again, but this time there was no airplane to give us shelter, nor a car! It was a long wait. Finally, the Palace car arrived—a yellow Edsel! Years later, when the Palace had become a museum, friends of ours visited it and sent us a picture of the yellow Edsel in the royal garage.

One morning, soon after I arrived in Vientiane, the Mekong overflowed its banks, and the streets were flooded. I was staying at the Lane Xang hotel, on the banks of the river. That morning I had to find someone to paddle me in a pirogue to the delegation.

A few days later, I met a Canadian engineer, Henry Angell, who worked for Bechtel. His company was building a dam in Laos. He had a jeep, and one day he said he was going to drive to the airport to see what the situation was like there. I went with him. As we were driving along, we saw open-air bars along the banks, and all these people sitting up to their knees in the river, looking at the Mekong. We inspected the airport—things were okay—and we headed back to town. We went back past the bars, and the water had risen. The people were still there, but now they were all standing up! It was a relaxed kind of place!

After Mr. MacLellan left, I was Acting Commissioner. Soon the Indians came to see me, and asked to use the helicopters, since they were having trouble doing shopping during the flood. This gave them a chance to hop around. This was my introduction to the place.

A few weeks later, I was apprised of the fact that the Norwegian freighter, Halvard, was entering the Bight of Bangkok, bringing my wife, three daughters, and our Nanny from Kobe.

I took one of “my” helicopters to the airport in Nong Khai, Thailand. From there I was able to hitch a ride on an American military flight to Bangkok, and from there went straight to the Hilton Hotel. I fully expected to find them all there. Little did I know that it would be at least ten days before the ship docked, owing to the fact that there were only ten berths in the Bangkok Port.

While I waited, checking daily on the Halvard, I learned that Brigadier General and Mrs. Stewart Cooper had arrived in Bangkok. This allowed me to meet them, and to tell them a bit about Vientiane. As our stays in Bangkok overlapped, it gave us a chance to get acquainted. The Coopers soon left for Vientiane.

While I was waiting, I went to the main Post Office of Bangkok and sent two telegrams to the ship, addressed to my wife, Eva, to reassure her that I was awaiting her in Bangkok. Here's Eva now:

“Meanwhile, the last word I'd had from Fred was in a telex I was given when our ship stopped in Hong Kong, and I visited the Canadian Consulate. In the telex, he explained that Vientiane was completely flooded, and, while he was sorry he wouldn't be able to come to meet us right away, we should go to the Hilton Hotel and wait. Therefore, I decided to be brave and not even go onto the deck as the ship docked. I was starting to pack up, when our second daughter, Maia, aged four, came in shouting “I saw Daddy, I saw Daddy!” Seconds later, another door opened, and there HE was!!! One ,more second, and a man in a uniform came in waving two telegrams for “Mrs. Bild!” It was a wonderful reunion! (Guess who the telegrams were from...)

It was a very weird situation in the ICC in Laos. We did have the same functions as other ICC delegations: our job was to oversee the peace agreement and the neutrality that had

been imposed on them, and to investigate illegal military activity. But we never did any investigations during the time I was there. We would go through the motions. We would meet with the Polish and Indian delegations, and our commissioner would say, for example, that we had information that there was some activity at the border. The Indian representative would say “Yes, Mr. Cooper, but you know, an investigation has to be unanimous.” In other words, the Indian delegation never agreed to investigate unless the Poles agreed, and the Poles never agreed. This all had to do with Indian relations with the Soviet Union—they were courting—India was trying to get all sorts of advantages from the Soviets.

As I’ve said, there were twenty-five military officers in the delegation, and I was also responsible for the two French Army pilots who flew our helicopters when we did investigations. In all the time I was there, the lack of investigations made all those officers a most miserable lot. They were bored stiff. The only time I set foot in those helicopters was the result of a car accident up-country - one of them was sent to rescue us.

There was nothing much to do. I’d meet regularly with my opposite numbers—the Poles and the Indians. The Senior Political Officers—they were all very proud of their titles—would get together once a week, and there was something in the Protocol that said we had to do periodic reports on what was going on. I thought this was a good exercise, and I could also send the reports to Ottawa. We’d negotiate about what was going on at the time we were supposed to investigate. For example, we’d report that Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma had had meetings with some of the delegations, and had said this and that, and the Soviets had responded, and so on.

We never said anything damning about anyone, and we’d negotiate this among ourselves. I pretended to my colleagues that I was dead serious about this, so they had no choice but to come to these weekly meetings. It was a great booster to me—it taught me how to negotiate with these people. We basically negotiated history—it’s the sort of thing you usually do in a university setting—getting together with people with different views, and negotiating a report. Those reports still exist. Several years ago, I was asked to an academic conference at McGill on the history of the ICC. I mentioned the reports, and McGill confirmed that they are still there in the archives.

Our principal role was to supervise the country’s observance of its neutrality, as per the Geneva Accords. Subsequently, an additional function was added to the Laos ICC as a result of a skirmish that had taken place in Vientiane between government forces and the Pathet Lao - a communist-led guerilla movement. Their chief representative was Soth Petrasy, whom some of the anti-communists had tried to assassinate. As a result of a cease-fire that ended the skirmish, the government asked the ICC to provide security for Soth Petrasy. The ICC provided that security by stationing one officer from each of the delegations every night in Soth Petrasy’s home. Our officers called that “baby sitting.”

What made the place interesting was not only the presence of the Russians and Poles, but the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese delegations and embassies. You had a great

spectrum, although we never saw the East Germans. It was a diverse group.

We had good access to Vientiane. My commissioner and I had an official call on the Prime Minister, Souvanna Phouma, talking about our jobs and how we were doing. He had nothing really significant to say to us, except to warn us to keep an eye on the Pathet Lao.

I had a very interesting time in many ways, instructing Brigadier General Cooper on the management of a delegation abroad. I wasn't an expert myself, but I did at one point say to him, "All these military guys here are bored stiff and spend all their time complaining about how terrible it is, having nothing to do. Can't we send half of them back?" He replied, "Okay, let's try it out." That caused a stir, and suddenly the military were saying that they had to be there. But we did send half of them home. We had a senior military adviser who came to political meetings, but we didn't need all the rest.

On October 22nd, there was an attempted coup d'état. It was not many weeks after my arrival, and after Eva and the girls had arrived, and we had settled into our house. It was in the morning. I was at work; Eva was in the market; two of our daughters were in school; and the youngest one was at home with our nanny. Suddenly, there were bombs falling. We rushed outside and could see them in the distance—bombs falling out of little T-28 planes, belonging to the Royal Lao Air Force. We were told that Lao Air Force General Thao Ma had been denied a promotion, so he took six T-28s and bombed RLAF headquarters hoping, but failing, to kill Major General Kouprasith. Eva again:

"I was alone at the market, and suddenly all the market people were pulling down their shutters. Our three children were all in different places: our oldest daughter, Eva Rebecca, was at the Lycée Pavie (where one of her classmates was Soth Petrasy's son); our middle daughter, Maia, was at the Alliance Française Kindergarten; and Sarah, the toddler, was at home with Sakayama-san, our Japanese nanny. Everyone was scattered. At a store I asked, "Qu'est-ce qui se passe?" and they said, "Madame, rentrez chez vous, rentrez chez vous!" So, I phoned the office and asked Fred to pick up our eldest immediately. He did! I drove to get Maia, and went home to get Sarah and Sakiyamasan. We all met up at the Commissioner's house!"

On the way home, I saw long lines of people all heading up to the main temple called That Luang. That was their immediate reaction to the coup: "There's a coup, you go to the temple." The whole town was lining up, like refugees trying to get out of the country—lining up to get into temples. I could not help but compare the people's rapid reaction in this case to the languid way in which they reacted to the rising waters of the Mekong.

Commissioner Cooper invited all the staff to stay at his place because we didn't know what was going to happen. I decided to go downtown to see if I could get some information about what was going on. I went down near the Monument and Lane Xang hotel, and there were no people in the streets except those leaving for the temple. I ran into David Myers from the British embassy, and he said, "Fred! Where can I find Prince Boun Oum?" We went to the

residence of Souvanna Phouma and knocked, but there was no one there. That speaks to the informality of the place. By the way, General Thao Ma and ten of his men with their T-28s flew that same day to exile in Thailand.¹

Life in Vientiane



Vientiane Laos 1966 - the British-Canadian Tombola stand to raise money for the Red Cross, staffed by Eva Bild.

I found Vientiane a very enchanting place, with nice cafés and French restaurants. It was easy to make friends. We found very pleasant people among our colleagues, and in the French, British and American communities. We gave, and attended, a lot of casual dinner parties. Frank Manley, an American, was the local fixer—providing services you couldn't get from the locals, like selling cars and car insurance. He stayed on in Vientiane for a long time.

We had a very nice villa, right across the road from the Mekong, opposite a compound where there were people from the British Embassy. Our eldest daughter started the first grade in French at the Lycée Pavie, and she was speaking French in no time. The second one went to the Alliance Française kindergarten. The Australian ambassador was right next door, and that whole family was very friendly. Their son was the same age as

our daughter. We became friends with the Number Two in the British embassy, and years later, when we were in Bangkok, he was Britain's ambassador to Thailand. It was easy to have friends. Everybody was in the same boat, with the same things to complain about. Here's Eva again:

"Life was peaceful. It was a bit of an adjustment because you couldn't drink the water, and you had to worry about snakes. When we had the floods, you'd find the snakes on the roads, swimming past you. Laos had the record for the most poisonous snakes. There was one called the "three-step snake" because if it bit you, you could take three steps and then you were done. It was also the only place where the ground was often muddy, but there was dust everywhere, as well!"

¹ FYI I have now found out, thanks to Wikipedia, that his original motivation was to force the higher-ups in the RLAF to end the practice of allowing planes to be used for drug smuggling. Seven years later, Thao Ma repeated his attempted coup in Vientiane. Though he succeeded in bombing the RLAF headquarters, he failed once again to kill Kouprasith. This time the T-28 he had commandeered was shot down. He was wounded, captured, and executed. He was 42}}



The Lao Crown Prince buys a tombola ticket from Eva Bild

Oldest daughter Eva Rebecca (Muggi):

“What I remember was how random the whole place was. You could never tell what was going to happen next. I’d first become aware of the world in Tokyo. I had gone to a convent school, and everything was so organized - you knew what time the bus was going to come, and so on. And then in Vientiane everything was so disorganised. We never took buses, but to get a taxi one stood at the side of the road and waved when one passed. Then you crowded in with five or six other people!! Even the French school was kind of random. I had a lovely French teacher from Marseilles, and I learned French from her. They say it took me about six weeks, but I don’t remember that.”

When we left Vientiane, we found it difficult. We’d been there hardly a year and a half, but we had had a lot of events. There were many unexpected ones. We had a car accident on an outing out of town, and my Sarah was injured. That was when the helicopter came to rescue us.

I went back to Vientiane years later, in the 1980s, when I was ambassador in Bangkok with accreditation to Laos and Vietnam. I presented my letters of credence to Souphanouvong. It was really weird, and I was not prepared for it. One moment I knew everyone in the community, and the next, I knew no one. Everyone had a different look in their eyes. They’d all

gone strange. I wasn't able to have any serious conversations with anyone. We didn't have any aid programs there, so there wasn't much to talk about. It was sad, compared to the way it had been before.

The locals did not seem better off. But we did some shopping, and bought some pottery and textiles, and those people seemed more like they had been in the old days. Eva:

As we were leaving the Lane Xang Hotel to drive back to Bangkok, a woman offered us a little child, a baby. I said no, thank you, but I was kind of horrified. I think there were those who saw people like us, who didn't look like monsters, and who were somewhat prosperous, and thought, "why not give my baby a chance for a better life?"

While I have invariably regretted leaving any posts abroad, I can't say I was heartbroken when we were leaving Laos. I was comforted by the knowledge that we had established enduring friendships, which we would be able to maintain wherever we went next. This proved to be true.

Indochina - Some Reflections

Alan Sullivan



(left to right) Alan Sullivan, David Smith, Chris Dagg, Manfred von Nostitz in a Saigon restaurant, 1973.

When joining the Foreign Service, new officers began the guessing game of where and when a posting abroad might be forthcoming. I learned my fate in the spring of 1965, when I was posted to Saigon. Not having a wife, I called my parents to give them the news. My mother said that, if I was going to be in this business, I should be where it's at. In 1965, Saigon certainly filled that bill, with US troop numbers rapidly rising from 100,000 to an eventual 500,000. My father thought it was a personal vendetta against me by Paul Martin, then Secretary of State for External Affairs (Foreign Minister), since I had chaired a recent election for the Progressive Conservatives.

My departure later that summer brought about the usual round of farewell parties and vaccinations against everything, topped off by a grand

farewell at Ottawa airport. I gave a great wave at the top of the stairs to the aircraft - only to discover that I was boarding the wrong plane!

I had several days in Hong Kong, then a haven for cheap tailors, to get outfitted for the heavy, humid climate of Saigon. Eventually I got to Vietnam. On arrival I was cheered to see the newly-minted Canadian flag over our Saigon office. I was less enthusiastic about the office accommodation, which was basically an open-air French army camp dating back to the late 1880's. It had no air conditioning!

I was, formally, the Canadian delegation's legal advisor for the three Indochina commissions (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), but, in fact, I was only dealing with the Vietnam ICSC based in Saigon. In addition to my commission duties, I was the junior political officer, and as such dealt with the Canadian aid program in South Vietnam. This was growing at the time, with the government under pressure to do more. On the other hand, some argued we should not give aid to South Vietnam at all, given our "neutral" role in the ICSC. The aid workload was demanding at my level, as we had a large student community to deal with. They tended to call at the office daily to see where their applications stood. Further, I had to test their English and French, as universities in Canada relied on our judgement. Added to this, we dealt with consular issues through the British Embassy.

Dealing with commission affairs was tricky, as our role under the 1954 Geneva Agreement was to represent the West on the commission and ensure its interests. At the same time, we had to maintain Canada's traditional balance in our international dealings. Occasionally, Canada voted against South Vietnam on one or other issue, while Poland, representing communist interests, did not vote against North Vietnam even once during our 19 years on the commission. Some of the cases before the commission's legal committee were under investigation for many years. A favourite ploy of the Poles and the Indians was to send new cases to the legal committee, allowing for prolonged consideration there, and thus enabling those delegations to control the pace of activity. There was a joke that the commission received a request from South Vietnam to investigate communist weapons entering through ships in the port of Saigon. At the same time, North Vietnam accused the South of bringing in American soldiers, contrary to the Geneva Agreement. The investigating Canadian military officer asked, "What American troops?" The Polish officer asked, "What communist weapons?" The Indian officer asked, "What ship?"

For all the arcane nature of the commission's procedures, the US and other countries considered that the commission provided a continuing channel for communication with, and a Western (Canadian) presence in, Hanoi. So, we lumbered on for nineteen years. While it was a dangerous assignment by any standard, there were times when it was more than scary: one night, the co-pilot of the commission aircraft on which I was flying into Hanoi rushed out of the cockpit and pointed out the right-hand window. A fireball coming from a surface-to-air missile was headed our way. I learned later that it missed us by 25 seconds. We had lost our Hanoi External Affairs representative along with several military personnel and other commission personnel when, earlier in the year, a similar aircraft had disappeared on route

to Hanoi. It has always been my view that they were on a flight that didn't just suffer a malfunction. Others might argue that the commission's aircraft were, themselves, an on-going danger. The commission leased Boeing Stratoliners (if I recall the name correctly) – precursors to the DC3's. They were on the Saigon-Paris run before World War II.

Notwithstanding all the downsides, the Canadian ICSC members formed a special bond, and I was proud to be known as an old Indochina “hand”. It was a unique assignment with elements of the French Foreign Legion and MASH, not to mention the involvement of Jane Fonda. I think my time in Vietnam led me to believe that, although Canada did not seek a role in the Commissions in 1954, they provided a unique experience for many foreign service officers over many years. And we believed our role was helpful to Western interests. When encouraging Canada to take on a role in the new Commission for Vietnam (ICCS) in 1973, one senior American official said that it would give us more years to train junior Canadian Foreign Service Officers.

My next encounter with Indochina - particularly Vietnam - came accidentally when I was the weekend junior departmental duty officer in the fall of 1972. That weekend a message came from Washington advising that there might be an imminent breakthrough in the ongoing Paris Peace talks on Vietnam. They sought Canadian assistance in drafting the elements of a new and effective International Supervisory Commission in Vietnam. A task force was quickly formed in Ottawa to develop policy ideas on what the elements of an effective commission should look like. I was invited to join this group at a Saturday morning meeting. When they realized that I had both ICSC Vietnam and legal experience, they asked me to take on the job of legal advisor to the task force. During the next weeks, the task force deliberated on what an effective international commission would look like. Vietnam Task Force members demonstrated an exceptional commitment to their work, and worked with good humour, often into the middle of the night. This was in addition to my own job as Deputy Director for Federal -Provincial Relations, which at the time was an especially busy one. These two responsibilities dominated my life as I tried to deal with both domestic and international activity.

The peace talks on Vietnam finally reached a ceasefire agreement in Paris on January 27, 1973, and we arrived there a month later. The ceasefire agreement provided for an international conference to underwrite the outcome of the peace talks. As I recall it, eighteen participants were involved in the February International Conference, including Canada, as a prospective member of a new truce supervisory commission. For their part, the North Vietnamese didn't want any role for the UN in the conference. With the ICSC participating in the new commission, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, was anxious not to make a premature decision to withhold Canadian troops already in Vietnam. This was despite what I would guess was a majority view among old Indochina hands that Canada should not stay in Indochina for another 19 frustrating years. Mr. Sharp was also particularly concerned to avoid any departure of Canadians from Vietnam before US prisoners of war were released.

Our role at the international conference was fraught with subtlety, given the many interests of the players. While the Minister, Mitchell Sharp, headed the Canadian delegation to the conference, Ralph Collins, recently the first Canadian Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, was the senior official. When asked by the Americans who he wanted to name as chairman of the officials' working group set up to finalize the text of the Paris Conference, he nominated me, to my great surprise. Since the Ministers had already met to confirm the broad outlines, the international agreement as a whole was not contentious at this point. Nevertheless, several little issues cropped up in the officials' working group. As its Chairman, I was able to play a role, modest as it was. What happened demonstrated how final consensus can be upset, slowed down, or even stopped by proceedings at the official level.

The first issue while I was in the chair was related to UN representation. As already noted, the North Vietnamese were very anxious to avoid any UN involvement in the peace process. All had gone well at the morning session, but there was someone I didn't recognize sitting at the end of our delegation who appeared to be part of it. At the afternoon session, he resumed his seat and put up a UN nameplate. The North Vietnamese got wind of this and informed the Americans that they would not resume participation at the meeting until there was a decision about the UN representative. The Americans and others, including one of the Canadian delegates, urged me to take the chair and recall the meeting. I refused to recall a meeting in which the North Vietnamese would not be participating. To me, it was a point of logic that you don't make peace without the participation of those who are essential to delivering it. Behind the scenes a solution was found. I received the news that the North Vietnamese would resume their seats. The Conference was eventually concluded with all 18 signatures. Some years later I was told by an American colleague that, at some point in the conference, he told Henry Kissinger that he could not "deliver" Canada (so much for a day's work.)

The second issue, and another modest contribution I made, concerned the signatory languages of the International Agreement. The listing of signatories of the Agreement was to be in French alphabetical order. However, the North Vietnamese wanted Vietnam to be in the first signature spot. They reasoned that, as the conference was all about them, their people would not expect to see a foreign country in the first signatory spot. The French were interested in this issue because it touched on France's international standing. I proposed that the procedure to be used should list Vietnam first and thereafter the other participants in French alphabetical order. In the end this formula was accepted, and the working group concluded its work that afternoon as originally foreseen.

My last involvement in Indochina was the pursuit of peace in Cambodia in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The ASEAN countries, Australia and France had been working for some time to bring about an international conference on Cambodia, which had suffered both the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime and continuing international isolation following the Vietnamese invasion in 1979. Given the Canadian government's growing interest in South-east Asia, and its focus on the Asia Pacific area more generally, Canada expressed interest

in attending the conference. The Paris International Conference on Cambodia was duly convened in August 1989. At that point, I was ambassador in Rome, and had just begun my holidays at home in Williamstown, in eastern Ontario. Ottawa HQ rang asking me to get to Paris as soon as I could, in order to head a delegation of officials, and to chair the First Committee of the Conference. The Minister at the time, Joe Clark, had chosen me from a list of senior officers submitted by the Department, as he and I had worked well in my previous role as Assistant Deputy Minister for Political and International Security Affairs.

The Ministerial session of the conference had designated Canada and India as co-chairmen of the first committee, but in the event, the Indian representative deferred to the Canadian representative on a full-time basis. Though I was a couple of days late, I was installed as full-time chairman on arrival. It was extremely hot in Paris that summer, and the Kleber Centre was not air conditioned. My first initiative as chair was therefore to invite gentlemen to remove their jackets, with the permission of the ladies present. From the satisfied looks around the table, I felt I was off to a good start. The conference continued for a month, but it became clear that issues such as power sharing in an interim Cambodian government remained deadlocked, and that the Cambodian parties were not yet ready to agree. Overall, the working sessions of the first committee were relatively peaceful, although at one point I did have to take Tommy Koh (Ambassador of Singapore at the UN) to task for taking on the Cambodian Foreign Minister in a heated exchange. At the concluding plenary session of the conference, our minister produced a text that allowed the conference to be suspended. This was preceded by a rather hysterical speech by Prince Sihanouk, in which he chided those who put too much emphasis on bloodshed among Cambodians: "Cambodians have been killing each other for years, so it's nothing new".

Subsequently, and before a Cambodian agreement was finally reached later in 1991, my role in Paris resulted in two consultative trips around the world. These were undertaken to promote the resumption of peace talks, possibly with UN participation. We may never be sure that these trips advanced matters, but one aspect of the exercise was clear to me: in all my various roles in Cambodia, I was treated with great courtesy and listened to with respect. The world sees Canada as an honest cop on the block, especially a world with more block than cop. I believe our work was worthwhile, and in later years it helped to stimulate the thinking of those countries which, like Vietnam and Cambodia, had not yet benefited from the economic growth of the Southeast Asian region.

What conclusion do I draw from my experience with Indochina over 30 years? On reflection, it ranks as the foundation of my career as a Canadian Foreign Service Officer, allowing me to live comfortably in a world seeking a balance between good and evil, and between weak and strong. Many others have said that the world needs Canada. The Indochina Commissions, and later Canada's role in Cambodia, were a powerful contributor to the experience and training that helped earn that reputation.

Memories of Indo-China Back When Stan Carlson Recollects

Memories can be dangerous things - the worst episodes become the most memorable. This tendency is particularly evident in foreign services. We may over-rate our roles or accomplishments, or just as often, under-rate those self-same achievements. Fortunately, the gods of history will sort the sheep from the goats.

In the mid 1960's, the war in Vietnam found the Canadian Government, and especially its foreign service and military, in a cleft stick, or maybe on a barbed wire fence. Canada was part of an international control commission supposedly trying to bring peace and reconciliation in post-colonial Indochina. Despite this theoretically neutral role in former Indochina, we were also long-time friends and allies of the USA. By this time, the USA was waging a major war in Vietnam, and occasionally in neighbouring states.

The Department of External Affairs had a somewhat opaque policy on the first postings of new foreign service officers. One thing was clear: if one was a single male officer, an early assignment to one of the three Indochina Commissions was guaranteed. So, I volunteered for Vietnam as my first overseas assignment. To no one's surprise, I got it. What I was supposed to do, once I got there, was not so clear. In fact, since Canada's role – or roles – were not so clear, perhaps that, too, was not surprising.

My memories of that assignment begin with the flight from Hong Kong to Saigon. I was seated beside an American reporter on his first assignment to Vietnam. He was gung-ho - out to reveal the truth to the folks back home. We promised to keep in touch. A week later, he found me seated in the bar of the somewhat rundown Continental Hotel. The Continental was the home-away-from-home for members of the Canadian delegation. The American was on his way out, back to the USA. He had been in his first fire fight. In the fog of war, he could not see the enemy, much less tell the good guys from the bad guys. That was a common refrain for many who served in roles in that country.

And so, I reported for duty at the Canadian Delegation. I was driven there in a white-flagged Toyota by a local driver (who later turned out to be a North Vietnamese supporter, to no one's surprise). Our delegation was housed – if that is right word – in a former French Army compound. My office, such as it was, had been a stall in the former horse stables. Fortunately, the French took better care of their horses than their troops, so the office was spacious, if draughty.

It turned out that most of my time was spent on development assistance, with an occasional splash of political work. We already had enough good and competent political officers, so much of my time was spent trying to appear competent as I sort of oversaw a rehab clinic, a TB clinic, a leprosy clinic, and a plethora of Vietnamese students off to Canada for post-secondary education. The latter group was sent off, content in the knowledge that few would return while the war went on. Fortunately, we also had officers on secondment from our aid agency, who provided expertise and folk memory.

One perk – if that is the correct term – involved my spending one week out of every four in Cambodia, again minding our small development assistance programme there. This mainly involved sending students to Canada. A minor inconvenience in both countries was refusing “gifts” that the grateful parents tried to give us.

Entertainment in Saigon was limited, especially for those of us with a somewhat staid background. The outdoor bar at the Continental proved congenial. One highlight – again perhaps the wrong word – was the night that the square and the city hall in front of the hotel absorbed two sets of incoming Viet Cong rockets. When I went to check on the safety of our staff in the hotel, I found one colleague in difficult circumstances. Each of our rooms had a very large water container. These containers held back-up water for when the hotel water supply broke down. They were in our bathrooms, supposedly the most secure location during rocket attacks. In the noise and confusion, my colleague had sat down rather heavily on the ceramic lid of the container, breaking it, and firmly wedging himself into the container. It took some effort to get him out of a bum rap.

Transportation could also be problematic. Somewhere along the way, I acquired a small Honda motorcycle and an Austin Mini. They proved challenging, especially getting out of the barbed wire strung in an apparently random fashion across Saigon streets in the evenings.

In-country air transportation was relatively easy. All the time I was on development assistance business, I could fly Air America. This was the fleet of small and medium-sized aircraft, which was sponsored by the CIA, but was apparently operated at sufficient arms-length to avoid questions of conflict of interest.

Travel among the four delegations in Saigon, Phnom Penh, Laos, and Hanoi was provided by CITCA, a French company with a tired fleet of aircraft built around the end of World War II. One could visit friends in other delegations if, and when, the aircraft were flying, as well as using the aircraft for business. But getting into Hanoi was difficult, due to “air

operations". My most memorable trip involved a flight to Cambodia. We passengers boarded in Saigon and waited and waited while the pilot tried to start the engines. Try as he might, he could only start three of the four engines. We passengers were disembarked. The pilot took off on three engines. We watched as he flew up, put the aircraft into a shallow dive, and engaged the fourth propeller. The fourth engine jump-started, and the pilot landed, all four propellers roaring away. Remarkably, without question, all of us clambered back on board, and we went on our merry way. I think the flight assistant served champagne, but I am not sure.

A Canadian Secretary in Indochina, 1969-1970

Recollections of Anne-Marie Bougie



Anne Marie Bougie at the Tokyo Airport enroute to Saigon

In 1969 I found myself posted as a secretary to the Canadian Delegation to the International Commission of Supervision and Control (ICSC) in Saigon, South Vietnam. In those days the secretaries posted to Indochina, and indeed to most posts abroad, were usually women, as were some of the other support staff. The officers were nearly always men. The assignment to Saigon was for a year. After two days in Honolulu and five days in Tokyo, D-Day arrived. On May 3, 1969, I embarked on the final stage of my journey, which took me to Saigon after a stopover in Manila, Philippines. It was on the descent to Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon that I realized that the time was serious, and that we could be shot down at any time. Too late to back off. Saigon airport served as a civil and a military airport, thus the busiest in the world. The civilian planes, and especially the military ones, came and went in all directions. How we managed to find a way in this busy flow, I wonder.

Due to a technical problem, my plane was a few hours late leaving Tokyo, and I had no possibility of warning anyone in Saigon about the change in my arrival time. The sergeant responsible for welcoming Canadians at our Mission had to spend several hours at the airport waiting, not knowing when I would arrive. In Saigon, it was forbidden for taxis or any private vehicles to cross the barrier that gave access to the airport (a distance of nearly half a kilometer), so it was imperative for passengers to be met by someone with a special pass, and one for the driver, as well as for the car. That is why, during my sixteen months in Saigon, I made countless trips to the airport with a chauffeur and an official car, to meet and escort our nurses and therapists who worked in Quang Ngai and Qui Nhon, when these aid workers came to Saigon on vacation, on business, or simply in transit to Canada.

The heat in Saigon was overwhelming and the bombing ferocious. The first nights, sleep did not come. I was so much on the alert that I seemed to hear the planes fly to the other end of the country. I went through all the imaginable states of mind: laughter, downcast, insom-

nia, nonchalance, nervousness, nightmares, and loss of appetite. I lived my cultural shock, which we were so often warned about and that was so common in a new environment, and what an environment! Fortunately, it was short-lived.

I was invited one evening to visit the British, who lived near the port. We were playing charades when a bomb fell near the place. No one paid attention; the game just continued. I said to myself, "These people do not even hear the bombs fall anymore. Is that getting used to the war? If they're indifferent, why should I care, either?" Suddenly, my fear vanished. I regained my appetite and my sleep. Seven or eight rockets could fall on the city at night, and they didn't even wake me up.

Canada did not have an Embassy in Saigon, but it was a member of the International Control Commission (ICC), with Poland and India. Our offices were located within the walls of a former French military camp known as the Hui Bon Hoa (Mares Camp), and our building used to be a stable for horses. Easy to imagine, seeing the building all in length, with a large corridor in the center and offices on each side - the old horse stalls, no doubt. There was "chicken wire" in the windows. In place of air conditioning, we had only ceiling fans, which sent our sheets and scraps of paper flying in all directions. The humidity was so high that we typed on moist paper, and all the envelopes were stuck together. The wash-room was so old and so repulsive that I resigned myself to using it only when I had reached the limit of retention. It was not unusual to see a small lizard sitting on the toilet paper, taunting me.

The military contingent had their offices in another building, and that was where the coffee maker percolated all day long, from the opening to the closing of the offices. Both civilian and the military personnel gathered there for the coffee breaks, and it was claimed that we could solve all the problems of the planet while the war raged outside. It was there that those who slept lightly reported to those who slept soundly (the category to which I belonged) on the number of rockets that had fallen on Saigon during the night.

I spent my first day cleaning the office and emptying the drawers of mouse droppings. An adjustment was necessary to work in that place. When using the photocopier, it was important not to forget to turn off the other appliances, otherwise the fuses blew, and the technician came in grumbling because the telecommunications system had also been blown up. Our working conditions were certainly not easy, but we chose to laugh at them. The team was great, the morale was good, and the military personnel and the civilians got along fine.

All Canadians, military and civilian, stayed at the hotel. I was staying at the Hotel Continental, an old colonial-era building whose terrace has been the most frequented place in Saigon. Even during the war years, it was the rendezvous of tourists and foreigners. The hotel was in the heart of Saigon, and its neighbor was the National Assembly, formerly the National Theater. The large central market was nearby, and was the site of occasional acts of terrorism. It was at the Hotel Continental that some shots for the film *The Quiet American*, (based on Graham Green's book), were made.

We liked to go to Cholon, a suburb city known for its good Chinese cuisine. Cholon was louder, more populous, and more dilapidated than Saigon, with its narrow streets and shops that resembled those of a bazaar. There were several Chinese temples in Cholon.

Canadians sometimes went to Vung Tau beach, formerly known as Cap St. Jaques, two hours from Saigon, but security was not always assured. It was not possible to get there without first obtaining the green light from the American military. Seafood restaurants stood along the white sandy beach. Several well-to-do residents of Saigon owned villas there, and the Americans had set up an imposing military camp.

If I were immune to the fear of bombing in Saigon, that was not the case for Quang Ngai. I had made friends with two Canadian nurses who were taking care of a tuberculosis center (a Canadian International Development Agency - CIDA project) with a doctor and a lab technician, and they had invited me to spend a weekend with them. I arrived with two colleagues on a Saturday. A foreign pilot would never have found the place. There was only one barely suitable runway track and a small hut nearby, and that was called the Quang Ngai Airport. Our Canadians occupied a rather modest villa, where there was no security, and their spare time was spent outside in the small garden. American friends had come in the evening and had lectured the girls for their lack of caution. There was no Canadian flag flying to differentiate them from the Americans, no guards watching the entrance, and the gate had no padlock. Furthermore, our hosts did not even lock the door of the house at night, but they did not know it. All these precautions would have served no purpose in the event of a bomb attack from an airplane, but at least the Viet Cong (the North Vietnamese communists against whom the Americans and South-Vietnamese were fighting), who were hiding in the city, knew that it was the home of innocent Canadians. Canada was recognized for its role as “referee “ and neutral country in this war.

I was given the most beautiful room in the house, on the second floor, while the others slept in cabins in the backyard. The nurses occupied the bunker on the ground floor. The door of the house was not locked at night so that, in case of severe strikes (red alert, as it was said in the military jargon), the occupants of the cabins could enter the bunker without losing time looking for the key. In other words, I was all alone in this villa, all doors open.

I had developed a phobia for the Viet Cong, having heard all sorts of stories about prisoners of war and the treatment they had received. As Quang Ngai is located closer to the northern border than Saigon, the Viet Cong were all over the city. The Canadians' house was between an American military camp and that of the Viet Cong's, and at night the bombardments were relentless. All I wanted was a respite of a few minutes to give me time to fall asleep. I probably would have slept through it all, but the rockets that passed over our heads non-stop, and the bombs dropped by American B-52s were not conducive to sleep. To add to my fear, the staircase never ceased to creak. I imagined it was a Viet Cong climbing the stairs.

The first day went well, since the bombardments were less intense, and I did not think too much about the Viet Cong. On the second night, the nurses had given me a sleeping pill – a

dose for a horse, but it was useless - the fear canceled the effect of the medicine. This second night was a perfect copy of the first one - an awful sleepless night. Later, I was invited to go back. "No thanks, the nights are too long" was my answer. Fortunately, I did not suffer from gastrointestinal or urinary disorders, since the toilet was outside the house. This situation was corrected a few months later, and a bathroom was fitted inside, much to the relief of the occupants, who thought that this improvement could loosen up their bowels.

I went to spend another weekend in Qui Nhon, where Canadian physiotherapists were in charge of a rehabilitation center - another CIDA project. Qui Nhon is south of Quang Ngai, where bombing was less intense, and security more adequate, so the nights were more peaceful.

One Sunday, we went to visit some Canadian missionaries who had a small hospital in Bien Hoa, forty kilometers north-west of Saigon. Bien Hoa is known for its pottery factories, and it was in this town that several refugees had taken up residence. There were rubber plantations nearby. While caring for the sick, the brothers raised pigs, which they sold, to help finance their small makeshift hospital.

We had just visited the hospital, and we were going round the pigsty (good entertainment for a Sunday afternoon), when a bomb fell nearby. The brothers rode off with their van to see if there were any wounded. They came back with "the ambulance" full of bloodstained and shocked people. The bomb had fallen on a small hamlet not far from the hospital.

We returned to Saigon in the late afternoon, and we followed a jeep filled with Vietnamese soldiers. Suddenly, a soldier standing on the rear step began to fire in all directions. We never understood what had happened, but we had had a narrow escape. Only a couple of meters separated us from the jeep.

We were young, and that often means being carefree. This carelessness was sometimes pushed to the streets of Saigon after the curfew, at our peril and to the dismay of the American military police (MP). For one reason or another, there were always MPs in our way to catch us in the act and lecture us. An American soldier (GI), who was completing his one-year mission in Vietnam and who had spent it in combat, decided to celebrate his survival before returning to the United States. As his curfew as a soldier was at 9 pm, a good Canadian Samaritan from the ICC, whom I would call Max, had lent him civilian clothes to allow him to go unnoticed after his curfew. The curfew for the civilians (us) was at 11 pm. After having gone out on the town, we finished our evening at a Canadian friend's house. We counted on his chauffeur to take us back, but in the late hour, the latter refused to drive us. He was absolutely right, because the regulations were even more severe for the Vietnamese than for the foreigners. And so at 2 a.m., we found ourselves in the streets of Saigon, making our way back to our hotel.

Our GI was terrified and trembling with fear. I trembled with him, because if he had been caught by the American patrolmen, he'd have been imprisoned, for sure. As a US soldier, he

was not allowed to go out in civilian clothes, and was strictly forbidden from going out after 9 pm. He said to himself, "It would be too stupid to spend a year at the front, come out of it without a scratch, then to go to prison after a night letting off steam." To add to our nervousness, the US military police were everywhere that night, and very vigilant. Fortunately, Max, the life of the party, always ended up coaxing the soldiers, and we were allowed to continue on our way after a little sermon. As we turned the street corner, a few blocks from our hotel, another jeep appeared coming in the opposite direction. We took off, and we managed to evade the police. We closed the door at the same time that the jeep stopped in front of the hotel, and the MPs hesitated, probably wondering whether they should follow us or continue on. To our relief, they decided to leave. Our GI, still had the street to cross to go to the annex of the hotel, and he probably spent the rest of the night thanking all the saints for sparing him prison, and promising himself he'd never do it again.

Life in Saigon continued, but Max, the happy-go-lucky one, started to get depressed without knowing why. Everyone did their best to help him and to try to understand what was happening, but he remained as mute as a carp. One morning, he was found dead in his hotel room. The entire Canadian colony was in a state of shock. Everyone felt guilty: "I might have done more. How come I did not see this coming?" He was given a fine funeral before his body was returned to his grieving family in Canada.

Life without Max wasn't the same. When we walked past his old room, we accelerated the pace and looked in the other direction, as if we were afraid of seeing him through the closed door. There was a police investigation, but the mystery about this tragic death still remains.

Sometimes we would take the curfew seriously and stay quietly at the hotel, and we played cards all night. Since I hate cards, scrabble suited me better. We stopped early in the morning to take a shower before going to work half asleep.

At the beginning of my posting, I had plenty of free time in Saigon, perhaps even too much. Our days at the ICC ended at 1 pm: it was simply too hot to work without air conditioning. A Canadian from Montreal, who ran the office of an American insurance company, had hired me in the afternoons to do his work in French. In addition, I taught French a few hours a week to a young Vietnamese soldier, a friend of my neighbor who was a Canadian at the ICC. This young Vietnamese decided one evening to take me, atop a motorcycle, to visit a fortune-teller.

The old man began by telling me that I would make a long journey. He knew, of course, that I had come from Canada, and that I would inevitably return one day. He continued, with all the seriousness in the world, saying that he saw a lot of money in my cards. In the end, very disappointed with this nonsense, I asked him how much I owed him. He replied: "Usually I charge \$5.00, but for you it will be \$10.00 since I saw a lot of money in your cards."

I was lucky enough to be invited to the family of my “pupil” on the occasion of Tet, the first day of the Vietnamese year. This event was celebrated with pomp for the members of the family only, but the young Vietnamese wanted to show me how this New Year’s Day was celebrated in his country. His family had fled North Vietnam at the advent of communism. By way of expressing my gratitude for their invitation, I brought them a small souvenir from Hanoi, their hometown. They were moved to tears because they still pined for their former home.

Whenever there was a reception at the Canadian Brigadier General’s, and there were many, we girls were invited. We were a rare commodity in the military and foreign colony of Saigon. At one of these, the Vietnamese girlfriend of a colonel at the ICC clung to me as soon as she saw me, since I was the only girl who could speak French, and her English was lame. One day, she told me that she had spoken of me to her cousin, a lawyer-shipowner, and that he wished to meet me. “Why not,” I said to myself, “He is not going to marry me.” He believed in doing things in a big way, this gentleman - invitations in writing, and limousine trips with chauffeur in full livery (cap and white gloves.) Our ICC guys, who were often on the hotel terrace sipping their beer and eating their chips, laughed at so much decorum. But then, they were used to taking us out in a rickshaw or cyclo (little sulky pulled by a man on a bicycle). After a few weeks of this, the gentleman cousin got straight to the point, and proposed. He said he wanted to build me a castle, anywhere in the world: I only had to choose the country. The money did not seem to be a concern for him. I was more frightened than impressed, and suddenly it was over. There were no more pepper crab brunches, or suppers in the great restaurants of Cholon. I was back in the rickshaw.

One Saturday night, we decided to be wise and watch a movie in our Canadian club, the Beaver, and we ended up at midnight on the balcony terrace of the hotel with brooms and cardboard boxes, trying to catch geckos (small lizards of Asia). The next day, one of us had the bright idea of mounting a gecko race against the Australians, Americans and British. With all the hustle and bustle this involved, we woke up a part of the hotel’s clientele and the servants, and everyone went hunting for the geckos, without much success. The race did not make headlines either.

Sometimes, on a Sunday afternoon, we would go for a boat ride on the Saigon River and, again, our guys were boasting. At one point the river narrowed, and the dense vegetation on each bank could easily hide the Viet Cong. At least that’s what they told us. I was none too brave myself, but the young Vietnamese girls who accompanied us were frightened to death. Our soldiers knew how to involve me in their adventures, and I did not know how to say no.....

One night, two majors who had been celebrating at the hotel, knocked on my door. I turned a deaf ear because I did not want to get up. But they persisted, and, finally, in order to avoid waking up the whole floor, I was forced to open it. They had decided to finish the evening at the home of a New Zealand friend, way at the other end of the town. This is where they were dragging me along. In vain I told them that it was foolish to go out in the

middle of the night. I could not see how it would be possible to get to her house when there was no means of transport in a city which was typically asleep by the curfew. But they had thought of everything.

Once on the sidewalk, they stopped the first US military policemen who showed up, saying that we wanted to “go home” after a night out with friends. If they had known that we were leaving home! The patrolmen were not at all pleased to see us hanging around the streets in the middle of the night after the curfew, they agreed to take us. Then it was the New Zealander’s turn to be awakened to prepare an omelet before returning to the hotel at sunrise once the taxis had begun to roam the streets again.

In November-December 1969, I was sent to Phnom Penh in Cambodia for a temporary assignment. What a contrast! As much as the city of Saigon was effervescent, that of Phnom Penh was asleep. In Phnom Penh, the siesta was sacred. Every day for three hours the city was in slow motion, hence the expression that Cambodia was drowsy. At nightfall, the streets were deserted even though there was no curfew.

A Sunday hike allowed me to see Sihanoukville, a port city on the Gulf of Siam. It was a few hours from the capital. I was sorry not to have the chance to visit the famous temples of Angkor, in the forests of Siam Reap, a few hours north of Phnom Penh. After four weeks of dead calm, I was glad to return to the hectic life of Saigon.

Our Commissioner (Ambassador) in Saigon was also accredited in Laos. Every two or three months, my colleague and I alternated accompanying him to Vientiane for a week of work. Vientiane was a little more animated than Phnom Penh, and it had kept its cachet as the provincial town it had been before becoming the capital of Laos.

It was also in Vientiane that I must have eaten flies without realizing it. I lived in a hotel on the Mekong River – a great breeding ground for mosquitoes. The first night, while I was having dinner in the dining room, I found flies on my plate, seemingly lifeless. I called the waiter to report this horror, and he was quite surprised that I asked him to replace the food. He came back with another plate, and I was astonished to find that there were as many flies as on the first one. I was not going to ask the poor guy to run from my table to the kitchen all evening. I looked around and found that the other guests had the same problem, but they seemed to be used to it. They simply removed the flies and ate the food, anyway. With a certain disdain, I did the same thing. The flies seemed to appreciate my drink, as well. And so, the same ritual marked each meal. I put aside the flies and ate the rest.

The ICC had its own airline, l’Aigle Azur, flown by French pilots, probably veterans (pilots and planes) of the France-Vietnam war of the years (1940’s and 50’s.). This aircraft was the only air link between Saigon and Hanoi, with stops in Phnom Penh and Vientiane, where the ICC was also present. Only ICC members were allowed to board the plane, Every Friday, the plane would take off for those three cities. It only stopped in Hanoi to leave and take passengers, mail, and cargo, and it returned to spend the night in Vientiane. The

next day, it continued to Saigon after a stop in Phnom Penh. Very often, the plane was not allowed to land in Hanoi for unknown reasons. It had to turn back with its cargo, to the dismay of our people in Hanoi who were awaiting mail, food, or even more importantly, to get out of there.

The Canadians in Saigon took the opportunity to go to Phnom Penh or Vientiane on the weekend to see colleagues. I even jumped into the plane one Friday morning with several others, to go to a party given by the Commissioner in Phnom Penh, and to return to Saigon the next day on this same plane. In contrast during a stay in Bern, I had the opportunity to drive to Geneva after a day's work, to go to a party with friends. I returned early the next day to arrive in time for the opening of the Embassy, but to fly to the neighboring country for only one night to celebrate was rather extravagant. But that was Saigon!

In Saigon we were faced with unusual situations (to put it mildly) that would have been unthinkable and unacceptable in Canada. One day I had to assist the doctor, an officer in the Canadian Army, who needed to perform a small operation on a young woman. He had his clinic in the Mission and, of course, he needed an "assistant" to pass him the instruments. He must have thought I was the right person for this position. Could it have been because the bombs that were falling all around did not make me flinch? I kept telling him that I could not stand the sight of wounds or blood, but it was pointless to argue: I was "his man."

I have to admit that it really was a minor operation, since a serious case would have been referred to the hospital, but it was at the limit of what I could bear. The young woman had a boil on the thigh and she probably waited too long because the infection was such that, once the pus was removed and the wound was cleaned, there was a nasty hole to fill. The doctor used sterile gauze bandages before applying the dressing, and a good length of gauze was used. Needless to say, perhaps, I saw everything of the operation, whether because I did not have much choice or, perhaps, as a test my nerves. I didn't faint. No doubt it was my pride that made me hold on. It seems that I passed the right things because it was done neatly and rather quickly. I thought the young woman was very brave. Although she gnashed her teeth, she did not move a finger while I would have sent everything flying with my zero tolerance for pain. Although pleased with myself, I warned the doctor not to make a habit of the request. "Once is not custom, doc!"

In September 1970, it was time to leave Saigon. Normally, the duration of the assignment in Vietnam was one year, and I was ready to stay longer, but I received a flat refusal from the Department. In those days, it was unusual for a secretary to remain more than nine months, and they probably thought that something was not right with me for wanting to stay two years in this country of war. Their decision was irrevocable, and I had to accept it. I had gained four additional months only because they had difficulty finding a replacement.

I was sad to leave Saigon, especially since it was a tropical country. It is with melancholy that I said goodbye to my "comrades in arms" because I doubted that I would see again our soldiers who were scattered all across Canada.

Our Man in Hanoi

Leslie A.K. James



Les James in the Canadian Delegation Villa in Hanoi, 1970

I arrived in Saigon on 28 February 1969, prior to taking up my assignment in Hanoi two weeks later. It was a year after the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam. Succeeding Gordon Longmuir, I was the second Foreign Service Officer to serve in Hanoi as Permanent Representative of the ICC¹ since the death of J. Douglas Turner (and two Canadian army NCOs) on 18 October, 1965.² Little did I imagine that my year's posting in Hanoi would begin a five-year association with Indochina.

¹ Canadian Commissioner on the Vietnam International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC, usually abbreviated as ICC)

² Their ICC courier aircraft disappeared without trace on the routine flight from Vientiane to Hanoi.

Hanoi was not my first Asian posting. I had joined the Department of External Affairs in September 1965, and eleven months later, to my delight, was assigned to Kuala Lumpur. My parents had lived and worked there before the Second World War, thus I was not unfamiliar with the customs and climate of a tropical Southeast Asian country. Vietnam at war, however, was something else, and Hanoi under a totalitarian communist regime was a far cry from anything I had experienced in Kuala Lumpur. Indeed, before my departure from Malaysia, I was representing High Commissioner, John Hadwen, at an airport reception for Prime Minister Tunku, Abdul Rahman. The Tunku, with a scotch in hand, went along the line of heads of mission, shaking hands. When he came to me at the end of the line, a lowly second secretary, I introduced myself and said I was leaving KL shortly. He asked where I was going. When I said Hanoi, he laughed and asked what I had done wrong.

Arriving in Saigon at Tan Son Nhut air base, I was met by my FSO colleague and fellow University of Toronto graduate, Manfred von Nostitz, who would later succeed me in Hanoi at the end of his year in Saigon. The drive from the airport began with traffic held up by military helicopters landing, and US army medics rapidly transferring wounded soldiers on stretchers to ambulances – a dramatic reminder that I was in a war zone. After a drive through teeming and noisy streets to downtown Saigon, I was lodged at the famous Continental Hotel on the corner of Tu Do Street,³ beside the South Vietnamese National Assembly building (the former Saigon opera house) and across the square from the Caravelle Hotel. As I was to be his representative in Hanoi, I met Canadian Commissioner, Richard Tait, and was briefed by civilian and military members of the Canadian Delegation (Candel) on the working and communications arrangements between the Candel Saigon and Hanoi offices. I was also introduced to American diplomats specialising in North Vietnamese affairs. With the guidance of Manfred and other Candel members, I gained a familiarity with Saigon.

The open verandah of the Continental Hotel was a popular rendezvous point frequented by foreign journalists and diplomats, while the rooftop bar of the Caravelle, opposite, offered evening views of shelling and gunfire in the open countryside across the Saigon River. The war was never far away. Every night we heard B52s bombing Viet Cong positions outside the city. On two mornings before I left for Hanoi, I was awakened by the explosion of Viet Cong rockets fired into the Ben Thanh market, only a few blocks from the Continental.

On 14 March I left Saigon for Hanoi. Flights to Hanoi on the ICC charter aircraft departed every Friday from Tan Son Nhut, with stops at Phnom Penh and Vientiane. The last leg of the journey from Wattay Airport Vientiane began before dusk and ended at Gia Lam airport outside Hanoi about 8 p.m. local time. The experience was surreal. Sitting on the airfield at Wattay were a number of unmarked transport aircraft belonging to Air America and used by the CIA for clandestine operations in Laos. The ICC aircraft itself was one of several out-of-production four-engine Boeing 307 Stratoliners operated with French crews by the French charter company, Aigle Azur. These aeroplanes were so badly pressurised that, when clearing the mountain range between Laos and North Vietnam, it was not uncommon for

3 This was the former rue Catinat, now called Duong Dong Khoi under the Communists.

the glass of wrist watches to pop out! As there were few other means of flying in and out of Hanoi, there was usually a motley mix of passengers, in addition to members of the three ICC delegations (Indian, Canadian, and Polish). On one occasion, I found myself talking on the tarmac at Wattay with the Australian pro-communist journalist Wilfred Burchett (of whom more later) who, I noticed, was travelling to Hanoi on a Cuban passport.

Arriving at Gia Lam, we were confronted by a dingy run-down terminal building with minimal lighting and windows pasted with criss-crossed strips of anti-blast paper. I was greeted on my first arrival by our military adviser, Major Bill Ward, who also met and exchanged diplomatic bags with the Canadian diplomatic courier from Saigon.⁴ Arrival formalities concluded, Bill and I were driven in blackout darkness to Hanoi. We crossed the Red River into the darkened city over a wobbling pontoon bridge that replaced the 1899 Doumer Bridge, damaged by American bombing in 1967.

Candel Hanoi comprised four persons: the Permanent Representative (PermRep), who was an FSO; and three military personnel - the Military Adviser (a major), a sergeant, and a corporal. The PermRep and the Military Adviser each served a year in Hanoi, their assignments staggered at six-month intervals to provide overlap and continuity⁵. The sergeant, re-assigned every six months, was a sergeant-writer who handled administration and typed reports for the PermRep and Military Adviser. The corporal provided security and was re-assigned every three months.

Candel occupied two old French double-storey villas, side-by-side on PhoPham Su Manh, a side street not far from the classical Hanoi opera house. While the three soldiers had rooms in the Military Villa, which also served as the Candel office, I resided alone next door in what was officially the Commissioner's Villa. The two villas were run as an extension of the nearby Hoa Binh Hotel, which provided domestic, kitchen and cleaning staff. They were obviously tasked to keep an eye on us. The North Vietnamese authorities also provided us with a driver and a local interpreter, Nguyen Huu Loc, who acted as general factotum. This position involved, for example, scanning the local newspapers for us and arranging appointments. Mr Loc was a kindly and helpful man who doubtless also kept tabs on us for the communist authorities.

I settled into the Commissioner's Villa on my first night in Hanoi. About six o'clock the next morning, I was awakened by a series of loud bangs outside. Leaping out of bed, I rushed to the window and flung open the shutters in time to see some sort of aircraft flying across the rooftops at high speed. The banging sounds were anti-aircraft guns opening up all over the city. Alarmed, I dressed and went down to breakfast in the Military Villa. It was the beginning of the first year of the Nixon administration, and outgoing President Johnson had called a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam the weekend before the 1968 US presidential election. When I told Bill Ward what I had seen, he told me never again to open

⁴ The Canadian diplomatic courier arrived on the same flight every week. Carrying the outbound diplomatic bag, the courier would go back to Vientiane on the return flight the same night.

⁵ Major Bill Ward was succeeded by Major Dale Crook halfway through my year.

the window like that, but to take cover under the bed! The bombing, he said, had indeed ceased, but American reconnaissance aircraft regularly flew over Hanoi at low level, as well as high altitude. Soldiers on the streets would open fire as they pulled their weapons from their shoulders. There was a real risk of being accidentally shot just looking out the window! A lesson learned!



Les James demonstrates the contents of the Delegation fridge, Hanoi 1970

Diplomatic life in Hanoi was extremely limited. There was a French Delegation General - a unique quasi-diplomatic arrangement below the level of an embassy - and a British consulate general. This was allowed due to Britain's role as a Co-Chairman, together with the USSR, of the 1954 Geneva Conference, but its activities were severely restricted. The consulate general was not accredited to the Foreign Ministry, but to the Hanoi municipality, and was not allowed to fly the flag or to display an official coat of arms. Furthermore, the consulate general was permitted no outbound cipher telecommunications nor diplomatic bag facilities⁶. The consulate general, which backed onto the property of our two Canadian villas, was on Ly Thuong Kiet, and the vice consul Warren Townend lived in an upstairs flat. The residence of Consul-General Gordon Philo and his wife was on another street in a villa reputed to have been a brothel. Again, no flag was allowed. We suspected that Gordon, a writer of detective novels and an academic authority on Dickens, was an MI6 officer.

This was confirmed in later years, as eventually was the MI6 affiliation of his successor, Daphne Park, who replaced him midway during my year in Hanoi.

Daphne (since 1990, Baroness Park of Monmouth) was a formidable Margaret Rutherford figure in her broad floppy hat and floral dresses.⁷ It was hard to imagine the effect she must have had on proletarian North Vietnamese party bureaucrats when she argued in vain to be allowed to import a bicycle. This was an issue we were familiar with, as the Canadian delega-

⁶ As a favour to the British, Canada allowed the sealed incoming and outgoing British diplomatic bags to be carried by the Canadian courier inside the Canadian "red" diplomatic bag.

⁷ Paddy Hayes, *Queen of Spies: Daphne Park, Britain's Cold War Spy Master* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2016) Margaret Rutherford was an English character actress post- World War II, known especially for her performance on stage and screen as Madame Arcati in Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit".

tion was allowed only two bicycles for the four of us. When I tried to import a third bicycle, the North Vietnamese, after much argument, allowed its entry only if we exported one of our two old bikes. I acceded to this arrangement so that I could have the pleasure of riding through the streets of Hanoi on a bicycle of obvious South Vietnamese manufacture.

All the East Bloc countries had embassies in Hanoi, as did a few “non-aligned” countries such as Algeria, Egypt, and Indonesia. Representatives of North Korea, East Germany and China shunned us, and would even refuse to shake hands when I introduced myself at receptions. Friendly exceptions to the general lack of warmth were the Czechs and the Indonesians. The Czechs, especially the military attaché, were holdouts from the 1968 Prague Spring, not yet replaced by apparatchiks after the Dubcek government was crushed by the Soviets. Bill Ward and I spent several evenings as guests of the military attaché, sampling his country’s famous Pilsner Urquell, and we reciprocated by inviting him and his colleagues to our film evenings.

I enjoyed particularly good relations with the Indonesians because of the cultural and linguistic associations of my previous posting in Malaysia. Ambassador Nugroho was a consummate Javanese gentleman of refined tastes and intellect. He shared with me his passion for collecting antique Chinese porcelain, some examples of which he had obtained in Hanoi. First Secretary Taufik was also someone with whom I had interesting exchanges on the Vietnam war and the situation in SE Asia. When the time came for me to leave Hanoi, Ambassador Nugroho invited me to a farewell dinner at the Thong Nhat Hotel (former Hotel Metropole), but had to cancel when he was informed that Canadians were *persona non grata* at Hanoi’s leading hotel. I was therefore very moved, even embarrassed, when on the day of my departure, Taufik brought to my villa the gift of an impressive lacquer painting of Halong Bay that I had often admired in his residence. It remains a treasured memento of his friendship, and of my time in Hanoi.

The Soviets in Hanoi were clumsy and arrogant. In the wake of the Soviet military overthrow of the Dubcek government in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and following instructions from Ottawa to curtail social contacts with Soviet missions, my predecessor stopped inviting Soviet diplomats to the fortnightly film evenings at the Canadian delegation. Foreign diplomats often met at the tennis courts of the French Delegation General to play tennis and drink *citron presse*. One afternoon I was approached there by a Soviet Embassy counsellor who introduced himself and lamented that he was no longer invited to our film evenings, complaining, “*Monsieur James, c’est ma tâche de connaître et cultiver des contacts.*” I replied with no little sarcasm, “*Monsieur Leschev, vous savez que je vais faire tout mon possible pour faciliter votre tâche ici à Hanoi,*” and walked away to play tennis. On another occasion, an extraordinary admission was made by the Soviet Ambassador. Canadian Commissioner Richard Tait and his wife Janice were visiting Hanoi. They moved into the Commissioner’s Villa while I took a room in the Military Villa. As requested, I arranged a programme of meetings including a dinner for eight to ten persons at the Commissioner’s Villa. The senior guest was Soviet Ambassador Shcherbakov, who had been in Hanoi since 1964. He was

seated on Janice's right, and as he spoke no English, he was accompanied by Embassy Counsellor Divilkovski, as interpreter. When Janice noticed he was not eating anything, she asked whether he was unwell. Shcherbakov's reply, as voiced by Divilkovski, was that he never ate any food sourced in Vietnam - all his food came from Russia. There was stunned silence around the table at this unexpected announcement. It was obvious that Shcherbakov was not happy in Hanoi.

As rival supporters and benefactors with China of the North Vietnamese, the Soviets had their problems in Hanoi. The Sino-Soviet split erupted in March with a military clash over the Ussuri River border dispute. This was reflected in a propaganda campaign by both sides, visible in the streets of Hanoi outside their respective embassies. Glass-encased noticeboards mounted on the walls outside both embassies provided passers-by with opposing accounts and images of fraternal Marxist soldiers fighting on the ice of the Ussuri River. Incidentally, although the nature of Chinese military support for North Vietnam was not conspicuous, on one guided excursion outside Hanoi we saw temporary signage in Chinese-language characters alongside Vietnamese road direction signs: that suggested the possible presence of Chinese personnel (military?) in the countryside.

When I met Wilfred Burchett⁸ at Wattay Airport he had asked me where my office was in Hanoi. I told him the name of the street and described the two Canadian villas. His eyes lit up, and he asked for more details of my villa. When I described the two pine trees in front of it, he said he had once lived there himself, and asked if he could visit it for old times' sake. I agreed, and we set a date for him to come to dinner. I was pleased with this coup, and when I got back to Hanoi, I invited Gordon Philo and his wife to join us for dinner. The day came, and I was dressing for dinner when I was informed that an unidentified foreigner was downstairs. I went down and found Wilfred Burchett waiting for me. Rather sheepishly, he told me it was not possible for him to attend my dinner, but he could not resist the temptation to see his former house. I invited him to look around briefly before he left. When the Philos arrived for dinner, I explained what had happened. Gordon was disappointed, but said he was not surprised. Clearly Burchett had been advised by his minders that the Philos and I were not appropriate persons with whom to dine.

Our travel in Hanoi was restricted to the city. We had a car and driver available for daytime and evening appointments, and for the weekly Friday bag run to Gia Lam. Otherwise, we could walk or cycle around the town, but only so far. We could not go beyond the diamond-shaped road signs bearing an underlined C (for the Vietnamese word *cam* meaning forbidden). Over time, we were able to delineate the boundaries of the restricted areas on a large city map.

During my year, Bill Ward and I were allowed two overnight excursions by car outside Hanoi, once in late April via the port city of Haiphong to beautiful Halong Bay, and on

⁸ Burchett was an Australian journalist whose long and storied career attracted both admiration and fury. His anti-imperialist sentiments drew ire from various western nations, especially when he espoused the cause of North Vietnam during the period under discussion.

another occasion to the former French hill station of Tam Dao, about 85 km northwest of Hanoi. On the road to Haiphong, we had to cross several rivers by pontoons because their bridges had been bombed. Nearing Haiphong, we passed a wrecked railway train lying on its side beside the track. Haiphong, itself, showed considerable bomb damage. Along the coast north of Haiphong, we spotted a mobile truck-mounted SAM unit in the trees, which our minder missed. We also witnessed an anti-aircraft battery open fire on an incoming low-flying jet aircraft. Our driver was so alarmed he almost drove off the road. Our minder urged him to drive on quickly, so that we should not see anything more. We had a similar experience with our minder on the visit to Tam Dao. Our group included Indian and Polish ICC delegation members. While admiring the spectacular view of the Red River delta from our 1,400 metre vantage point, we noticed a vapour trail high in the sky. Moments later a couple of SAMs were seen chasing after what was likely a high-altitude US reconnaissance flight. Despite our minder's attempts to divert our attention, there was neither sign nor sound of a hit. Bill Ward and I remained calm, but our Polish colleagues were quite excited and reluctant to move on.

On 20 July the world watched and listened as Neil Armstrong stepped onto the surface of the moon, saying, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." In our office in Hanoi, with a National Geographic map of the moon on the wall, we sat with Mr. Loc and listened on the VOA and the BBC to history being made. We felt as far away from this momentous event as anyone on earth could be.

Although there was no ICC business to conduct in Hanoi beyond maintaining the symbolic presence of the Commission as a vestige of the Geneva Accords, we had regular contact with the Polish and Indian delegations. Indian army signallers provided the common telecommunications link with Saigon, Phnom Penh and Vientiane. Most of our substantive messages used one-time-pad (OTP) cipher, an onerous and time-consuming system that was essential for important and confidential messages between Canadian delegations in Hanoi and Saigon.

In North Vietnam in 1969, there was one event of national significance for the communist Lao Dong (or Workers' Party), and that was the death on 2 September of their venerated leader Ho Chi Minh – but I was not there. I had planned to take my annual leave in Sydney, Australia, where I would propose marriage to a young Malaysian Chinese lady I had met in Malaysia. She was on a post-graduate Colombo Plan scholarship at the University of New South Wales. Three days before I left Hanoi on 29 August, CBC correspondent Michael Maclear arrived on a Royal Air Cambodge flight from Nanning, China, becoming the first Western television journalist admitted to North Vietnam. We met and discussed the war, the effects of the suspended American bombing campaign, and the unlikely prospects for peace. The timing of Maclear's visit was certainly fortuitous, as I would later appreciate when I awoke in Sydney one morning the following week to Australian headlines that Ho Chi Minh was dead. Maclear's filmed coverage of the funeral was shown around the world. Although I had missed this historic occasion in Hanoi, my credentials as a dinner guest in Sydney were definitely enhanced!

A singular issue that dogged my time in Hanoi was the case of Marc Cayer, a young Canadian civilian volunteer agronomist with the International Voluntary Service (IVS). He had been captured by North Vietnamese troops near Hue during their 1968 Tet offensive in South Vietnam. My predecessor had appealed to the North Vietnamese authorities for information on his whereabouts, and I, too, was instructed to do so. Each time I sought information, the North Vietnamese vehemently denied he was their prisoner. They claimed, of course, that they had no forces in South Vietnam, and suggested I should approach the National Liberation Front (the Viet Cong) through its Hanoi office. When I did so on Ottawa's instructions, I made clear to the NLF representative that my *demarche* was as a Canadian official in a consular



Les James laughing heartily with Marc Cayer after Cayer's release from North Vietnamese captivity, 1973. Toronto Star photo, resource Getty Images

capacity, and that our communications should not be regarded as either political or diplomatic recognition of the NLF. I stressed that Marc Cayer was a civilian non-combatant working for an international non-governmental organisation assisting the Vietnamese people. I said we knew that he had been taken prisoner, and that I had been instructed to request information from anyone who might be able to help. Like his North Vietnamese masters, however, the NLF representative denied any knowledge of Cayer, and said he was not their prisoner. Four years later, Cayer's name was on the North Vietnamese list of American POWs to be released under the terms of the Paris Peace Agreement signed on 27 January 1973⁹. He had been held in Hoa Lo Prison, Hanoi's infamous 19th century central prison (known by the Americans as the "Hanoi Hilton" or "Birmingham Jail"). It was a short stroll from the Candel office and I had often walked around its perimeter walls. Cayer

had been imprisoned there throughout the period of my assignment in Hanoi, and the assignments of my successors. After a strong protest to the North Vietnamese by our Permanent Representative, Nick Etheridge, Cayer was released to him on 13 February, and flew on the old ICC flight to Saigon. I was in Saigon from Ottawa with Alan Sullivan at the time to negotiate the standard operating procedures (SOP) for the new four-nation International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS) established under the Paris Agreement. It was one of the few satisfying aspects of my Indochina years that I was asked to escort Marc Cayer back to Canada (and, in effect, to debrief him en route). We left Saigon on 19 February via Hawaii, San

9 Marc Cayer, Prisonnier au Vietnam (Montréal : Ferron, 1973)

Francisco (overnight as guests of the Canadian Consul General), and Chicago, from whence a Canadian government jet flew us to a snowy Quebec City and his waiting family.

On my return to Ottawa from Hanoi in 1970 I was assigned to the Indochina desk, which combined the previously separate Vietnam and Cambodia/Laos desks. The Cambodia ICSC had been adjourned *sine die* in January. In February and March 1971, the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) invaded Laos along Route 9 in a failed attempt to cut the “Ho Chi Minh Trail” through Laos. I remember personally briefing the Hon. Mitchell Sharp over sandwiches in his ministerial office. The Laos ICSC remained moribund. Meanwhile, as US policy on Vietnam inched towards ending the increasingly unpopular and costly war, Canadian policy makers, reflecting twenty years of frustration with our ICC role, swayed between reluctance over any new “peacekeeping” endeavour, and the political necessity of not obstructing a peace settlement. After the Americans announced on 26 October 1972 that peace was at hand, a special interdepartmental Vietnam task force was established to consider Canada’s participation in a new supervisory commission, in the event of an imminent peace agreement. The SE Asia regional director, Daniel Molgat was chairman of the task force (of which I was also a member, along with several officers with experience in the Indochina Commissions.) Daniel has succinctly described the process that ensued. It led to Canada’s conditional “open mouth” participation in, and carefully managed exit from, the new ICCS established under the terms of the Paris Peace Agreement.¹⁰

Five years of Indochina affairs earned me a posting as a counsellor in Jakarta in late 1973. I replaced Chris Dagg, a former Vietnam hand. The ambassador was Tom Delworth, another ICC veteran. My focus changed, but there remained a Vietnam footnote recalling the humanitarian tragedy of Vietnam. Diplomatic relations between Indonesia and North Vietnam meant there was a DRVN embassy in Jakarta. South Vietnam, however, was allowed to maintain a trade office. My wife and I became friendly with the office’s French-educated deputy head and his wife, and we enjoyed their company socially from time to time. In early 1975, it became clear that the writing was on the wall for South Vietnam. I had been wondering about the fate of our friends until one evening in April when my friend asked whether I thought the end was near. I replied that I thought it was inevitable. He then asked whether I could help him and his family go to Canada. I undertook to do whatever I could, and with the Ambassador’s agreement, we approached Ottawa. To cut a long story short, our friends left for Canada and settled in Montreal. Sadly, while they had an older child with them in Jakarta, they had left a newborn second child with grandparents in Saigon before Christmas, assuming they would be returning to Vietnam later in 1975. It was several years before this young child was able to join them in Canada.

Leslie A.K. James, Guelph, Ontario, February 2022

10 3 Daniel Molgat, “The Sequel: Canada Does it Again in Vietnam”, Arthur E. Blanchette, in *Canadian Peacekeepers in Indochina 1954-1973: Recollections*. (Ottawa: The Golden Dog Press, 2002).

The 1968 Tet Offensive in Saigon

Chris Dagg Writes Home from the Continental Palace Hotel



Chris Dagg in his hotel room at the Continental Palace Hotel, Saigon, 1968

Well, as you have no doubt heard, the Vietnamese New Year came in with a bang. It has been a very interesting (and rather exciting) week but – I hasten to add – a very safe one, as far as I and the other Canadians on the delegation have been concerned. We have been confined to the Continental Palace Hotel throughout it all. For all sorts of reasons, this is known as the safest hotel in Vietnam. The prime dangers all week have been a) the danger of having to wear dirty socks for the third straight day; b) the danger of getting a worse bridge score in my next game than I got on my last one; and c) the danger of being given canned ham in the dining room tonight, since we had canned ham last night, and the night before, and the night before that.....

As soon as it all began, we received orders from the Acting Commissioner (our Brigadier General, since Mr. Dier is away) to stay in our hotels, to stay off the streets, and under no circumstances to try to go to the office. This was, as I said, a sensible precaution, and in this business we obey orders.....

I'm sure that the press reports have been pretty gruesome and, indeed, the fighting here in Saigon was pretty intense. But one must remember that Saigon is a city covering a huge area and that the fighting was confined to a very small proportion of it. The fighting was also of the 'close order' type, i.e., around certain buildings and installations. There was certainly no indiscriminate shelling or mortaring.

The closest fighting was on the first night at 3 a.m., when the American Embassy was attacked. It's about 8 blocks away. Since then, action has been confined to certain American installations far removed from the hotel, and to Cholon, a suburb of Saigon some miles away. The only taste I've had of the action has been the increased number of booms that waft in my window from the outskirts of the city, and the sound of small arms fire on the first night. Through the telephone, though, and through press friends who have been roaming around, I've been able to keep in touch, more or less, with what's going on, and have found it a very interesting week, obviously.



Chris Dagg at the Saigon Airport 1968. A Commission Boeing 307 Stratoliner in the background

Rumours fly thick and fast, as ever, but usually by the end of each leisurely meal in the dining room we have – or rather, we think we have – sorted the rumours from the masses of information that manages to reach us. It all makes for a rather grim picture of the situation in the country as a whole, at least in the short term. I'm sure there wasn't anyone who wasn't surprised at the scale of the attacks. The loss of life in the immediate vicinity of some of the house-to-house fighting (and there was very little in Saigon, but a lot in Cholon) is bound to be heavy. It will be a while before the South and the USA can recover the ground that has, inevitably, been lost over the past few days. Through press people, I've heard some terrible stories about refugees; as ever, the poor peasant in the countryside gets the worst of it.

As is to be expected, Saigon is even more like an armed camp now than before. The streets are deserted of civilians most of the time, since they've been told over their ever-present transistor radios to stay home, and troops and police are everywhere. They have the remnants of the attacking force more or less bottled up, and they react quickly to any flare-up.

With the people told to stay home, the hotel has to struggle along on whatever food it had stored, and with whatever staff it can get in, so it's been a bit austere, but we can hardly complain. It's been one opportunity to meet some of the people in the hotel, and an interesting bunch they are. Many of them are press, and almost wholly non-US press: BBC, ITV (Britain), German radio, London Times, etc. (It seems to me that the management makes a conscious effort to keep American personnel out of the hotel. In any event, there are very

few of them.) Frederick Nossal of the Toronto Telegram is here, and I've had quite a lot to do with him. He's a very pleasant and interesting chap.

We went to work today for the first time in a week. The backlog of stuff was depressing, but I didn't have a chance to get to it because I had to spend most of the day (or the half-day, as we only stayed until noon) trying to find out about the well-being of some of the Canadian missionaries, doctors etc, up-country. We have had no reports of any injuries to anybody Canadian.¹

There is a curfew in effect from 7 p.m. to 8 a.m., to keep the streets clear while the government forces try to flush out the remaining VC in Cholon. So, the streets are absolutely deserted, but the hotel is hopping, as everyone drops in on everybody else for drinks and to talk in order to ease the boredom. As we are the only accessible diplomats in the hotel (the Poles are here, as are the Indians, but they aren't very sociable, especially to newsmen) and – as diplomats – the only people with a seemingly endless supply of good Scotch, we Canadians are very popular. Since all the Canadians also have Ottawa-supplied refrigerators in our rooms, and we actually have ice (which the hotel ran out of days ago) our popularity is assured. Since the press here are a pretty well-informed bunch, having been to areas of action, and are good company, as well, I don't begrudge them the Scotch they drink. At something like \$3.50 for a bottle of Chivas Regal, I could hardly complain, anyway!

It's hard not to be amused by the many ironies and anomalies that one finds here, especially at this particular time. The highest hotel in Saigon is the Caravelle, across a small square from our hotel. It has a famous bar on the roof, and the pastime of many "round-eyes" (westerners) in Saigon is to sit on the patio of the Caravelle bar and watch the war. From there you can see the bombing on the outskirts, and the flash of gunfire in Cholon, all for the price of a Scotch and soda. And then there's the huge British correspondent in this hotel, with his equally huge wife, who walk their two tiny white poodles in the square every night at the same time, regardless of what curfew has been imposed. The police who guard the (National) Assembly Building across the street thoroughly enjoy the spectacle. Then there's the fact that it's 11 p.m. and there's the sound of bombs on the outskirts, and I've just finished watching "Mission Impossible" on a friend's TV, and have had an American beer, and nibbled on imported Planter's peanuts. It's all so unreal.

(Six days later) Downtown Saigon is pretty well back to normal today. The streets are crowded again, and the black-market stalls are out. There are many more beggars on the street, though. But with something like 100,000 refugees in the city, that's not surprising. This afternoon, I took a long walk in the downtown area (in circles) with a friend, to stretch my legs. There's no evident damage, except at the US Embassy, and that is being repaired rapidly.

1 In fact, one Canadian NGO worker, Marc Cayer, was taken prisoner in Hue and spent the next five years in captivity in Hanoi; the North Vietnamese never confirmed they were holding him, despite repeated Canadian enquiries.



The Continental Palace Hotel, the Saigon home for Canadian diplomatic staff for many years, as it appeared in 1968.

The airport is returning to normal. We went out there on Friday. Once a week (approximately), the commission plane – a charter aircraft that the commission has used for 13 years – flies from Saigon to Phnom Penh (Cambodia) to Vientiane (Laos) to Hanoi. There are several chaps going to Hanoi on this run: our courier; the Indians' courier; etc. Their baggage was, of course, marked with a tag reading "CIC²- destination Hanoi" The expression on the faces of the American servicemen waiting at the airport when they spotted those tags was something to see! I'm sure they are still thinking it over.

Extracts from a letter to Chris Dagg's family in Vancouver, begun on February 5, 1968. Letter and photos by kind permission of Lindsay Dagg.

² CIC - also known as ICSC

My Vietnam Sojourn 1970-71

Ian McLean



Ian McLean outside the Canadian Delegation Villa in Hanoi, 1971

In the summer of 1970, I was summoned to External Affairs' Personnel Department and told that I had been selected for an assignment to the ICSC in Vietnam. I had joined the Department 18 months earlier, and since I had no particular expertise in South-east Asia, the assignment came as a surprise. The ICSC was an interesting assignment, even though the Commission had lapsed into the doldrums. There was also a wider East-West dimension involved. I was also urged to accept.

Under the 1954 Agreements in Geneva, Canada, India, and Poland were tasked with: supervising the redeployment of troops of the parties involved in the Indochina conflict; ensuring the freedom of movement of the civilian population; preventing military equipment being brought into the territory of Vietnam; and overseeing the elections scheduled by the Geneva Agreements in the next two years.

The Commission ultimately worked until 1973, but since 1960 it had effectively ceased to function as intended in the 1954 Agreements. This was because Poland hamstrung joint action and on-site investigation of breaches. Thus, the Canadian delegation in Saigon had gradually come to operate more as a *de facto* embassy. However, a full working knowledge of the history and operations of the ICSC was a necessary requirement for an officer to be effective, even in this deadlocked Commission situation. I struggled to take all of this in during my Ottawa briefings, which took place in the short time I had before going on posting as “Legal Adviser” to the Canadian delegation. In my view it was a preposterous title, given my lack of experience and expertise.

I arrived in Saigon in the early fall of 1970. The ICSC delegations were housed in a compound, and the Canadian delegation had been allocated several spartan buildings as offices. I cannot recall a single meeting of the Commission during those first few months, and had no contact with members of the Polish and Indian delegations. Most members of the Canadian delegation were housed in the Continental Hotel in the city centre. The issue of the moment when I arrived was the infiltration into Cambodian territory by North Vietnam to supply men and material to the Viet Cong. Earlier in 1970, the controversial American military invasion of the “Parrot’s Beak” had attempted to slow North Vietnamese operations in Cambodia. It was a fact that North Vietnam was using Cambodian territory, and flagrantly violating the Geneva Agreements. The Poles were unwilling to examine this issue in the context of the Commission, and all decisions in this direction needed the agreement of all three parties.

During 1970-71, Saigon remained largely outside the actual combat zone, and had been so since the large TET offensive in 1968. One could move around safely in most areas of the city. In the evenings, the terrace of the Continental Hotel (we called it the “Continental Shelf”) was a gathering point for war correspondents, some of whom had seen action that very day, and had returned to Saigon by helicopter. I developed a few contacts, with the aim of supplementing the information stream our military received from the Americans. While some other members of the delegation had tasks related to our small aid program, and a program for students, my responsibilities lay essentially with the Commission, and the Commission was going nowhere in 1970.

In early 1971, I was sent to Hanoi to oversee our sub-delegation. It consisted of myself, a Canadian Major, two Canadian NCO’s, and an interpreter supplied by the Communist regime. To get from Saigon to Hanoi in wartime one had to fly via Vientiane in Laos. The only connection was via a French charter airline called La Compagnie Internationale des Transports Civils Aériens or CITCA. This involved an overnight stay in Vientiane, and a

departure the next day to Hanoi. The four- propellered CITCA Boeing 307 had to strain upwards to get enough height to cross the mountain range on the border of North Vietnam. On a nighttime landing in Hanoi, we would see a completely darkened city, with the airport runway lights turned on at the last minute.

We were housed in Hanoi in two aging villas, with a permanent guard post outside the only entrance. The architecture of the buildings in the streets around our villas was purely French from the twenties and thirties - a French suburb that had met some very hard times. There was no American bombing during this period, as bombing had been suspended by President Nixon. No Commission-related meetings took place in Hanoi during my stay. There was considerable contact amongst the non-communist diplomatic missions in Hanoi, principally the French, Swedes, and British, with social events and exchanges of views on the situation in North Vietnam. In addition, we and the French were able to obtain Western films for showings, which proved a popular draw. Our mobility was limited to biking around central Hanoi- often past the notorious Hoa Lo prison.

There were several interesting developments during my time in Hanoi. The first was Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou En-lai's surprise visit to Hanoi on March 8, 1971. With no warning, the resident Diplomatic Corps was asked to appear at Hanoi airport to greet his arrival. That included the ICSC reps, who were arrayed at the end of the long protocol-driven reception line. Zhou calmly worked his way down the entire line. There was much speculation on the timing of this visit, particularly in the context of Sino-Soviet rivalry which was very strong at that point. The North Vietnamese regime was trying to strike a balance but was clearly drawn more towards Moscow. China was North Vietnam's hereditary enemy, but they still needed Chinese military supplies. An agreement to provide economic and military aid was signed during the Chou visit. The USSR was said to be concerned about growing Chinese influence. Shortly after this visit, on March 28, Le Duan, head of the Vietnamese Communist Party, travelled to Moscow for the 24th Soviet Communist Party Congress. This trip was given a lot of attention in the controlled media, which pointed out also that a stop was made in Peking prior to his arrival in Moscow.

Another high-level visit during my time was the June visit of Ceausescu of Romania. Again, the Diplomatic Corps was lined up at the airport for a highly protocol-laden greeting. Ceausescu and his wife disembarked from an IL-18, with a huge retinue that again worked its way down the reception line ending with the ICSC. Little did any of us know at the time the fate that eventually awaited the Ceausescu couple.

I left Hanoi in the fall of 1971. An interesting experience, even though the principal mission of the ICSC remained completely dormant during my time in Vietnam.

Indochine Mon Souvenir

Nick Etheridge



Nick Etheridge by the unusable Hanoi Villa bomb shelter, December 1972

I arrived in Saigon as a 29-year-old enroute to Hanoi. It was late autumn 1972, a time when agreement between the US and North Vietnamese in Paris appeared to be at hand. It was a second posting I welcomed. My first was in Australia. The High Commissioner in Canberra, Arthur Menzies, (the son of a Canadian missionary in China and one of Canada's foremost Asianists) was a major influence on my nascent interest in the Asia Pacific. Heading back to Ottawa in 1970, I had self-indulgently routed myself via Bali, Jakarta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Thailand, Hong Kong, Osaka, and Tokyo. On that grand tour I came to recognize and love the varied sights, sounds, and smells of Asia, to say nothing of the cuisines. I was already sold. The major gap in my Asian experience had been Indochina, then in its own isolated world of strife.

Two years later, flying from a bustling, prosperous, and international Hong Kong (even then) into humid, chaotic, decrepit, and surreal

Saigon was like arriving on a different planet. Tan Son Nhut airport teemed with military aircraft of all shapes and sizes, both American and South Vietnamese. The busy Saigon streets during the day were full of old Renault taxis, Citroens, scooters and pousse-pousses, as well as military vehicles. The population had been swollen by villagers displaced by the war. As a constant nightly reminder of it, B52s could be heard bombing Communist sanctuaries in the rubber plantations not far outside the city. Saigon still had a stock of gracious, though by now run-down, French colonial architecture and grand boulevards. Streets which had once been tree lined had, in some cases, been widened to accommodate the increased traffic. At night, a 10pm curfew was enforced by nervous young South Vietnamese soldiers in their outsized American helmets.

The Canadian Commissioner was David Jackson, the last in a long line of ICSC Commissioners since 1954. The officers who worked for him - and I was no exception - found him a shrewd and very humane boss with excellent political instincts. I quickly felt myself to be a member of the small External Affairs team, living in the Continental Palace Hotel across from the old opera house in central Saigon. Then, the hotel had large rooms, bamboo furniture, and period bathrooms, well-equipped with outsized cockroaches. We ate a continental breakfast each morning in its courtyard, and each evening enjoyed citrons pressés on its verandah (dubbed "the continental shelf" for the human flotsam and jetsam that gathered there.) The hotel survives today as a much-renovated luxury hotel redubbed the Continental, though presumably without the cockroaches. For lunch or dinner in Saigon there was a small selection of French style restaurants run by Vietnamese, and some large Chinese restaurants in Cholon. On weekends it was possible to go to the coast to swim. Life in Saigon looked liveable.

But my job was to be in Hanoi, not Saigon, so fairly soon I found myself on one of the venerable ICSC-leased, French-owned and piloted, Boeing 307 Stratoliners, headed to Hanoi. My chief memory of those planes - by then already antiques - is that they rattled so badly that a glass left unattended on a tray would soon fall off. On one occasion, one of the pilots came back into the cabin armed with a spanner. He lifted a trapdoor in the floor and disappeared to make some kind of in-flight adjustment. The cabin staff consisted of very attractive young women of mixed heritage. Before 1970, these planes had flown weekly from Saigon via Phnom Penh and Vientiane to Hanoi, but by 1972 they flew only to Vientiane and then into Hanoi.

On occasion, I stopped over in Vientiane and stayed at the residence of John Hammill, our Canadian ICSC representative there. Vientiane in those days was small, sleepy, raunchy, and even more surreal than Saigon. I can recall an entirely amiable dinner John hosted at the residence while I was there, which included a Communist Pathet Lao representative, as well as government representatives. This was at a time when there was a full scale Pathet Lao insurgency not far away.

And so, to Hanoi, where I was to be Canada's ICSC Permanent Representative - the very last, as it turned out. The Canadian delegation in Hanoi consisted by then of only three members: the External Affairs Permanent Representative; two military staff; a major; and a sergeant. In addition, there was Loc, a pleasant and willing Vietnamese assistant who acted as a translator (and no doubt an informant), a cook, and house staff, and a cheerful and mechanically-inventive young driver for the antique Polish car assigned to us when the authorities felt we needed it.



Hanoi Opera House with propaganda banners, January 1973

Our base consisted of two old French villas with a courtyard and very basic kitchen in between. They were located on a side street in the French quarter. It was an easy walk to the handsome opera, then festooned with propaganda banners, and to the two central hotels, the Thong Nhat or Reunification (now once more with its original French name Métropole), and the smaller Hoa Binh (Peace), which provided the staff for our villas. The best words to describe the villas are spartan and mouldering. The damp Red River climate - cold and clammy in winter and hot and humid in summer - had taken a visible toll on the old deco furniture and heavy drapes. I occupied one villa, while the major and the sergeant from the ground floor office lived in the second. A pith-helmeted young soldier stood guard outside the entrance.

I spent the early weeks in Hanoi familiarizing myself with the office routine, such as it was. I also called on a slate of diplomats and colleagues: the North Vietnamese ICSC liaison staff, headed by the very senior and avuncular Colonel Ha Van Lau; my Indian and Polish ICSC colleagues; the British (a pair of presumably MI6 officers accredited only to the municipality

of Hanoi); and the French, Swedish, Chinese and Indonesian contingents. In the afternoons, I cycled with the major and sergeant around the quiet tree-lined and bicycle-filled streets of central Hanoi. (I had ambitiously brought with me a three-speed Raleigh bike, which was by far the raciest bicycle in Hanoi.) There was usually a lively reaction from the young women on the street, who took us for Russians; their socialist countryside dress was in marked contrast to the middle class women in the south in their elegant ao dai.

We had no communications with Saigon or Canada other than via the weekly diplomatic bag. This was brought by a courier on the weekly ICSC flight, which we went out to meet in the evening. Anything we considered sensitive had to be coded using the laborious one-time pad method. The courier also brought B-grade movies provided by National Defence; these (generally awful) movies nonetheless allowed us to host regular film evenings in our delegation living room. They were well-attended by the French, British and Egyptians.

At that time, the ICSC in Hanoi was no longer conducting investigations, so there was little or no interaction between us and the other two ICSC delegations beyond social and administrative matters. The Indian chair was a stocky older General. The Pole was a quiet and personally pleasant man. To all intents and purposes, we operated as a quasi-bilateral mission, sending reports on what we were hearing and seeing in Hanoi and reading in the Party newspaper, Nhan Dan, as translated by Loc.

Major Paul Dupuis, an older man, and his Sergeant/Clerk Charlie, were excellent companions, professionally and socially. A weekly highlight was Sunday badminton and breakfast with the Indonesians, who, though in civilian dress, were clearly military men. The French delegation generale, somewhat destabilized by the death of their head of mission some months before when an American bomb hit his residence, nevertheless laid on quite sumptuous (for Hanoi) Sunday lunches, followed by lively games of boules organized by the gendarmes. I kept a menu from one of those lunches- galantine de volaille, pate de lapin, fromages de France, omelette Norvegienne.

All this gentle acclimatization changed dramatically on December 18, 1972, when the air raid sirens wailed for the first time since I had arrived. (My predecessor, Len Edwards, had endured months of bombing.) A woman's tinny voice on the street loudspeakers urgently intoned "Mai bai My! Mai bai My!" (American aircraft). So began the intensive 12-day Christmas bombing of the North, ordered, one learned later, by an angry and impatient President Nixon. His aim was to get the North Vietnamese back to the bargaining table in Paris, and signatures on a previously negotiated agreement that would secure the release of the American POWs in Hanoi. By day, low-flying F4's and A7's from aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin occasionally swept in under the low winter cloud cover. By night, B52's and F111's from Guam and Thailand hit targets around Hanoi and Haiphong.

There was scant damage in the centre of the city, except for the railway station, the Bac Mai hospital (where from outside there seemed to be little damage to the building, but piles of bed frames had been stacked in front), and a residential area (where the damage was, indeed,

severe). The North Vietnamese arranged for the Commission to visit the second two sites, though no formal complaint was made by them to the ICSC, so the exercise was purely a propaganda one. But central Hanoi with its lakes, French colonial buildings, and tree-lined boulevards was then a very compact city. The targeting of infrastructure outside the central area still seemed very close, and the activity of the sophisticated North Vietnamese air defenses made for an impressive sound and light show. Charlie the Sergeant was the luckiest; deaf in one ear, he only needed to sleep on his good ear to get a good night's sleep. On evenings when the North Vietnamese had shot down American aircraft, the Major and I attended the press conference where captured pilots were paraded for propaganda purposes. Though we attempted to take note of the names and condition of the prisoners, we had no radio communications, so no way to pass on this information in a timely manner.

Although there was an air raid shelter in the back garden of our villas, it had long since ceased to be used as such and was full of rubbish and rats. So, in the evening after dinner we usually walked over to the Thong Nhat Hotel, which had a deep and spacious cellar. (Apparently, the cellar was only recently rediscovered, having been blocked up when the hotel was renovated by Sofitel.) There, a remarkable group gathered at night during the bombing, consisting notably of Joan Baez, who, with two American companions, had come to Hanoi to deliver Christmas cards to the POWs, and boisterous sailors from a Cuban freighter, which had been trapped in Haiphong harbour when it was mined by the Americans earlier in the year. Joan Baez had her guitar and gave us nightly concerts. I taxed her patience by asking her to sing *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down* every night. I thought it sounded particularly à propos, with the rumbles and vibrations of carpet bombing overhead. I think she preferred singing something like *Kumbaya*.

The scariest moments of the Christmas bombing came on the evening when we went to Gia Lam Airport to meet the courier bringing and taking diplomatic bags. Once it was confirmed that the ICSC aircraft was going to attempt a landing, we set out by car. The trip involved using a one-way pontoon bridge across the Red River, the old French bridge having lost one of its spans to bombing long before I got to Hanoi. When we reached the darkened airport terminal there was a lot of broken glass, so there must have been bombing nearby. Probably by design, the Americans had left the runway intact. The French pilots, who may have been given a narrow window by the Americans and North Vietnamese, brought the venerable plane in and took off again immediately after the bag transfer had been made. If there had been a designated window, it certainly ended with the ICSC plane's hasty departure. On our way back to the pontoon bridge, running along the top of dikes with no headlights, very low flying aircraft - perhaps F 111's - thundered overhead. The car convoy stopped abruptly, and we all tumbled down the side of the dike to find ourselves huddling in the midst of some very surprised local villagers.

Were the Vietnamese in Hanoi visibly cowed by the bombing? The only time one could sense anxiety was over Christmas, when in fact there was a brief 24 hour pause in the bombing. We took advantage of the apparent lull to go to the Catholic cathedral in the

evening. It was mainly blacked out (no one knew if there was a real pause or not), but full to overflowing with Vietnamese, whose strained faces reflected the stress of the previous week. There were lighter moments, too. One day the British Consul General was walking on the street when the sirens sounded. A policeman gestured to him to take cover in one of the holes dug long before as one-person shelters along the boulevards. He obligingly did so. But because of his greater height, and no doubt due to the rubbish that had collected in these holes, most of him above the knees was well above ground. To complete the irony of the situation, he put up his umbrella against the drizzle, much to the hilarity of watching Vietnamese.

As inexplicably as it began, the bombing in isolated Hanoi ended on December 29. And so started the third and final phase of my Hanoi assignment. With the resumption of negotiations in Paris leading to a ceasefire agreement on January 27, the North Vietnamese ICSC Liaison Office decided to treat the Indians, Poles, and Canadians to some tourism, taking us upriver on a day trip to the Perfume Pagoda, and later on a weekend car trip to Ha Long Bay. The latter trip involved ferry rides across rivers. In each case, the Major from the liaison office unfailingly described it as the scene of a great naval victory over the Chinese in centuries past. From the shore, we viewed Ha Long Bay's then-unspoiled, serene beauty. Only some fishing junks sailed around the myriad islands. If one turned around and looked the other way up the road to the coal mining town of Hong Gai, however, one saw another vision, this one of the destruction wreaked by war. Another "treat" in this period was a reception with General Giap, the iconic architect of the decisive Viet Minh victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

With the Paris agreement of January 27, 1973, it had become clear that the Vietnam ICSC would be wound up and a new commission, the ICCS, established for South Vietnam alone. Three events marked the period before we closed our office in March. The first event was briefly hosting at our villas Marc Cayer, a Canadian agronomist working for International Voluntary Services, who had been taken prisoner near Hue during the 1968 Tet offensive. For some five years the North Vietnamese never admitted they were holding him, although we knew they were and were making frequent *démarches*. They only did so when releasing the American POW's in February 1972. Canada insisted Cayer be released directly to us rather than being included with the evacuation of American POW servicemen by American aircraft. Thereafter, Cayer travelled to Saigon on the Commission plane and thence on back to Canada. During our brief time with him in Hanoi, we were immensely impressed by Marc's poise and grace after his long ordeal. He has been back to Vietnam since, a courageous man of peace still.

The second event was the closure of our office, which took place after David Jackson had come to Hanoi to meet with the other ICSC Commissioners in Hanoi and had agreed to permanently adjourn the ICSC. Before actually closing down our operation in March, we hosted a small farewell reception in our Villa sitting room. As we were a delegation and not an embassy, and as I was a very junior diplomat, most of the attendees were from friendly embassies, with Colonel Ha Van Lau and his liaison staff in attendance. A notable exception was the Chinese

Ambassador, who came himself. I had called on him on first arriving in Hanoi and was surprised at how quiet the Chinese Embassy was compared to the Soviet Embassy, which was buzzing with activity. Of course, the presence of the Ambassador might simply have been explained by Canada's recent establishment of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. At the reception, however, and from what he said to me, I had the distinct feeling that China, despite its long time support for North Vietnam, was uneasy about what the future might hold for China if Vietnam was eventually reunified.

There was one embarrassing problem in closing the office. That was the presence of a rusting phosphorous grenade atop our filing cabinet. It had somehow been provided many years before so that we could destroy the contents of the cabinet if our office came under attack or needed to be evacuated quickly. As the only thing of any sensitivity in the cabinet was our stock of one-time pads, this precaution seemed gratuitous. Furthermore, given its condition, we didn't even want to look at this device, much less touch it. I requested instructions from Saigon on how to dispose of it, and I was told that I should contact the North Vietnamese military and ask them to deal with the problem. This was done by Loc in a nervous phone call, and then...nothing for many days. Finally, one morning, a thin unassuming-looking Vietnamese in a pith helmet showed up on his bicycle and asked for the grenade. After we expressed concern that he take the grenade away to dismantle it, he laughed and informed us that he had dismantled an unexploded 750 pound American bomb that had fallen on the road outside the French Embassy the night the French head of post had been killed by another bomb. To our horror, he crouched against the wall of our front yard and proceeded to take our phosphorous grenade apart. He wrapped each part in cloth before he put them in the carrier of his bicycle and rode off.

The third event was the visit to Hanoi of our Foreign Minister, Mitchell Sharp, in late March. Hanoi was the final stop on his fact-finding tour of South and North Vietnam, on which he consulted the Canadian delegation in Saigon and Can Tho, the governments of South and North Vietnam, and the Americans on the ground. His aim, in light of Canada's provisional role in the ICCS, was to get a personal feel for the prospect of peace, and the effectiveness of the new commission that had already been in place in South Vietnam for some two months. Even before the tour, Sharp had had serious doubts about the efficacy of the Paris peace accords and a Canadian role on the ICCS. By the time he reached Hanoi, he had probably made up his mind that Canada should withdraw from the Commission.

With the Minister accompanied by a phalanx of officials and journalists, the whirlwind visit of a few hours was a surreal end to my otherwise austere Hanoi assignment. A major worry for me was whether the Canadian Armed Forces Boeing 707 carrying the Minister and his party could land at Gia Lam Airport. Luckily, it could, and I recall the relief of seeing it taxi to the terminal with the maple leaf fluttering from the cockpit window. In the blur of events that day I remember the Minister's meeting with North Vietnamese Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, which had more the aura of an audience, with officials present on both sides. For the journalists, it was an opportunity to see Hanoi soon after the Christmas bombing.

And it was my swansong; I and my bicycle were loaded onto the Boeing 707 to be taken to Tokyo, from whence I was to return to Saigon for reassignment to our ICCS delegation as commission meeting notetaker and telegram writer until Canada finally withdrew from the Commission at the end of July.

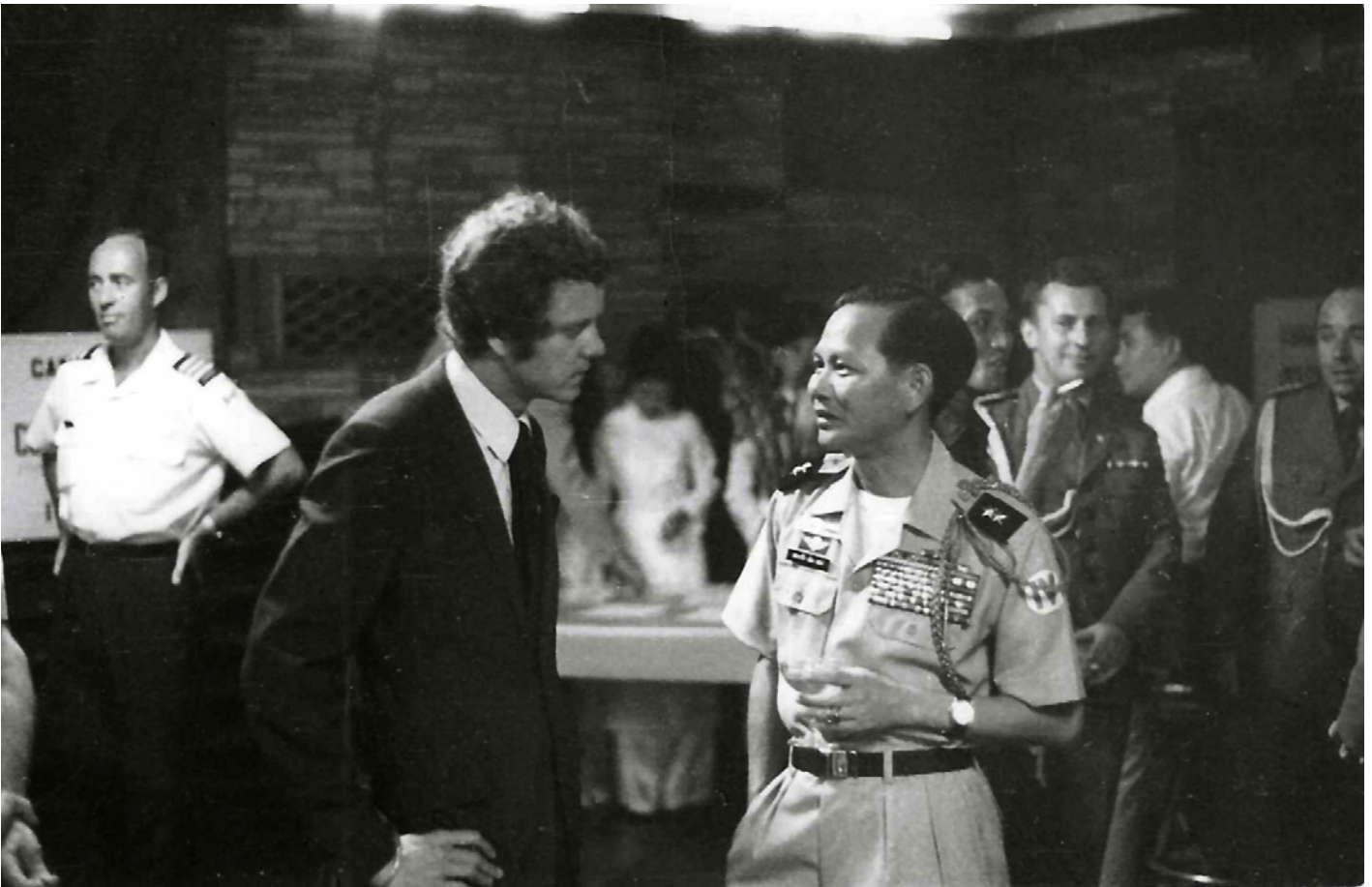
I cannot say that my eventful five month ICSC assignment in Hanoi, followed by four rather more routine ICCS months in Saigon, led either to a consistent career specialization in Asia, or was of any particular benefit to the subsequent evolution of Canadian foreign policy interests in the region. My career was eclectic, through some miscalculation on my part, but also because of the mysterious workings of the department's personnel branch. The closest I came to any kind of reprise where my Vietnam experience was useful was attendance at the 1989 Paris Conference on Cambodia, and a subsequent six-month solo assignment in Phnom Penh in 1993. There, I was part of the support group of countries prior to the UN -organized elections that year, and working out of the Australian Embassy.

One moment in the 1989 Paris conference, in particular, is etched in my memory. The Vietnamese Ambassador in one meeting proposed that, rather than bring the UN into the implementation of a peace settlement, a truce supervisory commission modelled on the ICSC and ICCS be set up for Cambodia. Our ambassador at the conference, Alan Sullivan, who had had extensive Indochina experience, was in the chair, so it fell to me in the Canadian chair to pour cold water on this idea. I did this with relish. I doubt this intervention marked any decisive turning point in the eventual acceptance that this time around the international role would be carried out by the UN. I also doubt that the Vietnamese were that serious about their proposal. But at least the opportunity to intervene on this point gave me some satisfaction.

Today, our long and frustrating experience in Indochina is largely forgotten except among historians who still argue over whether Canada in Indochina was really just acting as a tool of the USA. Canada's role has also been misrepresented as peacekeeping, which it was not. Personally, I think our role was an honourable one. It was based on Canadian interests which, then and now, must take into account our relationship with the US, as well as our ideals. At the end of the day, our experience did help to put Canada on the Asian map. Whether we subsequently took full advantage of our Indochina role in Asia is another question. Today, Vietnam is a very successful and well-integrated part of the Southeast Asian community, though still an authoritarian and officially communist country. My own trips back to Vietnam in recent years have renewed my respect for a country that has seen too much war and is embracing, without grudges, a dynamic Asian future.

Duty To History: ICSC Indochina & ICCS Vietnam Postings

Manfred G. von Nostitz



Manfred von Nostitz talking to South Vietnamese General Nguyen Van Nghi in Can Tho, 1973.

I joined External Affairs in 1967. My first job as a Foreign Service Officer was at the United Nations General Assembly under the tutelage of the consummate professional diplomats Vern Turner and Paul Beaulieu, where inter alia I admired their drafting of the seminal Resolution 242 on Palestine in English and French. Canadian diplomatic teamwork at its best.

Turner, a first generation veteran of the 1954 International Commission of Supervision of Control (ICSC), kindled my interest in Indochina. As

a result he arranged my next assignment to the Far East Division in Ottawa, headed by Asia experts Blair Seaborn and Tom Delworth, both first generation ICSC veterans.

In 1968, the deal was that after one year of working on Indochina affairs in Ottawa, I was to head off to Vietnam as the so-called Legal Advisor to the Indochina ICSC. Although not a lawyer, with my cultural and educational experience being primarily European and North American, I had University of Toronto studies of communism under my belt, with extensive stays in Communist Poland and Hungary representing Canada as a national team fencer. Accordingly I was by then well prepared - as far as an assignment to North Vietnam was concerned - when I headed for Saigon. This turned out to be a gateway posting that resulted in my being entrenched in Asia as a diplomat as well as a banker and businessman for over 50 years.

Before leaving Ottawa I had an invitation to meet with the Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, Marcel Cadieux. My scheduled 15 minute meeting with him stretched into an hour, with my listening for the most part to an impressive, passionate and hardline lecture and instructions about Vietnam from this veteran of the earliest (1954-5) days of the ICSC in Hanoi. This important meeting further compounded my interest in the ICSC.

I arrived in Saigon right after the 1968 Tet Offensive, expecting to encounter a tense security situation in Saigon in the wake of the countrywide fighting portrayed in graphic detail by the media. However the total opposite was true. Saigon, rated as a hardship war zone posting, was instead in 1969/70 a luxury posting with every conceivable amenity, indulgence, entertainment and culinary sophistication on offer.

The Tet Offensive was a devastating political setback for the US, shattering American domestic support for the war, with images of the US Embassy under attack. It was in fact a major military victory for Hanoi, notwithstanding more than 50,000 casualties on the Communist side, a loss resulting in a standstill in the fighting. Thus in Saigon there were no security concerns at that time. Even the periodic rocket attacks on the city from the other side of the Saigon river had stopped. From North to South the Viet Cong had been flushed out and sacrificed by the North Vietnamese leadership on the battlefield. It meant that henceforth the war would now be changing into straightforward confrontation between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese regular forces.

This post-Tet security environment and change of strategy on the part of Hanoi opened up the country for extensive travel. I took advantage of this opportunity visiting the old capital Hue, the mountain resort of Dalat, the beaches of Nhatrang and Vung Tau, the Cao Dai temples in Tay Ninh in the West, and the Coconut Monk island on the Mekong in the South. There were no improvised explosive devices (IED) or roadside ambushes to worry about. The only annoyance was to get past the military convoys on the highways.

On one of the regular weekend drives to the Vung Tau beach, we got stuck in an Australian tank convoy. The convoy would stop occasionally with bored Australians raking the

hills with cannon fire directed at supposed Viet Cong positions. As passersby we were well received by the Australians who gifted us with their expended brass cannon shells and invited us for drinks on their tanks.

In spite of being the Canadian Legal Adviser, during a whole year in Saigon, Phnom Penh and Vientiane I had no legal work. I did not attend a single ICSC meeting and had no professional contact with my Indian and Polish counterparts. Office hours were short. Due to lack of air conditioning the ICSC shut down at mid-day. Work was more akin to a regular embassy office reporting on a wide spectrum of military, political and economic issues. With most of the day off, there was ample time for other activities, of which there were plenty.

The highlight of each office day was a networking lunch, held at an incredible variety of quality French, Vietnamese or Chinese restaurants. Among the American civilians and military, the contingent of young Vietnamese-speaking foreign service officers was valuable, not only in terms of information but also in terms of relationships. Of particular interest to them was Canadian access to North Vietnam and Cambodia, countries which Americans at that time were barred from entry. Today I still count many of these American foreign service officers as life-long friends.

Another important group and source of information was the international press and photo-journalist corps, risk takers with a higher fatality rate than any other civilian profession in Vietnam. Over 60 of them were killed in action between 1954 and 1975. Of these personal friends, Francois Sully of Newsweek, Kent Potter of UPI, Sean Flynn of Time Magazine, Dana Stone of CBS and Larry Burrows of Life Magazine were killed in action.

Journalists, most of them cohabiting with me in the colonial Continental Palace Hotel, and important for exchanging information, were Robert Shaplen of The New Yorker, Marsh Clark the Time Bureau Chief, Jean Claude Pomonti of Le Monde, Juergen Bargman of the German Press Agency, Peter Kann of the Wall Street Journal, Kevin Buckley and Maynard Parker of Newsweek, Joe Treaster and Henry Kamn of the New York Times, Bob Kaiser of the Washington Post, and combat photographers Tim Paige, Nik Wheeler and Ennio Iacobucci, who shared their professional expertise to improve my photographic skills. There were two important meeting points on Saigon afternoons with the media community: the Continental Palace Hotel terrace, or the Caravelle Hotel roof top bar.

The Saigon Cercle Sportif Club remained a secluded oasis for the Vietnamese establishment. My membership enabled me, as a Canadian French speaker to get unique access to Vietnamese families and society. I was invited to join an exclusive Vietnamese tennis group, a mixture of civilian and military Vietnamese leaders including Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky. As a member of the Cercle Sportif Fencing Club, the publicity generated by my winning the Vietnamese National Fencing Championship further facilitated my access to the leading Vietnamese families, providing me with a better understanding of Vietnamese culture, politics and the war.

In Laos the ICSC also did not conduct any investigations in 1969/70 of North Vietnam's illegal troop presence there, because of the obstructionism of the ICSC Polish and Indian commission partners. We retained an office in Vientiane since it was a stopover on the weekly ICSC Indochina flight itinerary from Saigon, to Phnom Penh, Hanoi and back. I was in Vientiane quite often, usually when the last leg of the flight to Hanoi, through a special US/North Vietnam agreed corridor, was delayed due to security, weather or operational reasons.

Once on the way to Hanoi, the French crew walked off our ancient Boeing Stratoliner in Vientiane when it was about to take off for Hanoi. The reason announced laconically by the departing pilot was "Pas d'essence!" Another time on the way to Vientiane the landing gear had become stuck. This problem was coolly handled by the co-pilot who suddenly appeared at my seat with a hammer. He opened the floorboards and after intensive hammering was able to dislodge the landing gearing just in time for a safe landing.

These stopovers in Vientiane were always welcomed since it provided an opportunity to do some tourism--- like visiting the beautiful royal capital Luang Prabang. It also made time available to check out the Constellation Hotel, an important information and deal making hub in Indochina. It was run and hosted by the savvy French Indochina veteran Maurice Cavalerie, who was involved in all kinds of clandestine activities, and whose mantra was "I am not doing anything illegal because in Laos everything is legal." It was a fitting slogan for this hotel, a bridge between East and West favoured by Air America and the CIA, foreign correspondents, the Soviet KGB, communist Chinese, and all kinds of shady agents and entrepreneurs.

Cambodia was different. It was the only Indochina country where investigations were conducted during my time, and where I personally experienced the frustration of making progress with the ICSC investigations conducted by Dick Gorham, the Canadian ICSC Commissioner in Phnom Penh.

Gorham was a creatively aggressive investigator unilaterally documenting North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Accords. We estimated at the time that there were at least up to 30,000 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regular military in Cambodia. This Canadian role was historically important, since we were the only official third party ever to corroborate the North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia, always categorically denied by Hanoi. It was a model for me for the future on how Gorham side-stepped the blocking maneuvers of the ICSC Poles and Indians, as well as the disapproval of the Hanoi-leaning head of state Prince Sihanouk in 1969.

These Canadian investigative efforts eventually became intolerable for Prince Sihanouk, leading to his decision to expel the ICSC from Cambodia. At the end of 1969 we closed our Cambodian office. As part of this exercise I had to smash the cypher equipment with a sledge-hammer, before loading the remnants onto a boat and dispersing them in the Mekong River.

This was a job I took so seriously, that I ran out of gas way up the river and had to paddle back to Phnom Penh to finish one of my more idiosyncratic ICSC assignments.

Happily, the liaison job that I was tasked to perform in Phnom Penh enabled me to visit widely this country, residually more French than either Laos or Vietnam and still (except at the Vietnamese border) tranquil and peaceful in 1969. Americans were banned from visiting the country during my time, although Prince Sihanouk, the country's head of state, re-established diplomatic relations with the US in May 1969. Since there were no American, European or Asian tourists, I had the most unique visit to Angkor Wat as the only tourist staying in the "Auberge Royale des Temples" hotel, later burned down by the Khmer Rouge. There for two full days I had the privilege of touring and photographing the vast temple area without ever meeting a single foreigner.

In Sihanoukville, the port city and beach area, I had a similar solitary experience, not only on the beaches, but contrary to expectations, also in the nearby port of Sihanoukville. The port was of interest given the widespread American claims that the so called "Sihanoukville Trail" served as a massive supply route for the North Vietnamese troops in the South Vietnam. (William Shawcross, the author of the renowned book *Sideshow*, claimed that up to 80% of supplies for the North Vietnamese came through Cambodia).

However these claims - at least in 1969- struck me as a bogus American rationale to justify the bombing of Cambodia. I only ever saw two local ships moored in the sleepy port. There were no reported East European flagged ships in port the two times I was there, no unusual activity or numbers of personnel. There was also no security-- I had no problem walking around everywhere. I never saw vestiges of any arms shipments. This corroborates once again that nothing beats a physical presence to check out the reality of a situation on the ground. I also learned much later in 1973 when interviewing North Vietnamese prisoners in Can Tho that they transported their weapons down the Ho Chi Minh trail and knew nothing about any supply route from Cambodia.

After one year based in Saigon, I moved on to a six-month assignment in Hanoi as a so-called Canadian ICSC "Permanent Representative" in charge of a small Canadian military contingent. What a contrast Hanoi was to Saigon! Although a much prettier French colonial city than Saigon, it was at that time dreary, austere, regimented, puritanical and much more serious-minded than Saigon. There were no restaurants, no recreational facilities. We were fed tasteless Western food catered by a run-down hotel. It was stiflingly hot in the summer with no air conditioning and wet and rainy or "crachant" as the Vietnamese described it, in the winter. We had no heaters.

With no public entertainment of any kind, the Canadian ICSC Permanent Representative had a unique monopoly with current movies provided by the Department of Defence via the diplomatic bag, enabling us to hold a weekly movie screening. This was the most sought-after entertainment event in Hanoi, where even the most standoffish Soviet diplomats valued an invitation.

In contrast to the easy access enjoyed in Saigon, in Hanoi I was barred from any official contacts with the government, the Communist Party or the military. During my time there, just like in Saigon, there were never any ICSC meetings. The only official contact allowed was with the People's Army of Vietnam ICSC Vietnam Liaison Office, which did play a helpful role in facilitating our stay in Hanoi.

Sometimes they even went beyond their official mandate. In Saigon I had befriended Sean Flynn from Time Magazine and Dana Stone from CBS News, who both disappeared in Cambodia in April 1969. I learned from Cambodian sources that while heading for the border area to investigate the North Vietnamese troop presence, they were apprehended by the North Vietnamese. Accordingly given my position in Hanoi, I agreed to inquire about their whereabouts through the North Vietnamese liaison office. My request was accepted. However the response was a stern lecture that they were no North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, and thus Hanoi had no knowledge of these journalists. I was counseled not to pursue this query any further. I took this to mean that both friends were killed by the North Vietnamese to cover up their massive presence in Cambodia, especially when they risked being exposed by Time Magazine and CBS News.

In Hanoi there was one single western journalist representing the Associated Foreign Press (AFP). This stringer was granted a visa on the condition that AFP could only report on official statements by the Hanoi government. The diplomatic community was mainly composed of communist East Europeans -- friendly but boring and uninformed, sticking exclusively to the Hanoi propaganda line together with the Indian and the Chinese diplomats. The exception were the Soviet diplomats. As the major supply partner of Hanoi, they were uniquely well-informed but aggressively anti-American and hostile to Canada which they arrogantly regarded as an America proxy.

In contrast the Chinese diplomats were low-key and courteous, never proselytizing on behalf of Hanoi. As I only learned much later, this was due to secret negotiations with the Saigon government to establish a neutral South Vietnam. Such a South Vietnamese state would have been at cross-purposes with North Vietnam's objective to create a unified communist Vietnam by means of a military victory.

Thus in my daily contacts I was confined to a small close-knit group comprised of the French "Delegate Generale", the British Consul, the Indonesians and the Swedes who had the only full Western embassy at that time. The French still enjoyed a special status in Hanoi. They were allowed to retain their beautiful compound in the city with office and residential buildings and a tennis court accessible to us at any time. The highlight once a week was an invitation to lunch for a special French meal. However, a political discussion with the French was limited since the two Delegates Générale during my time were Simon de Quiriél (who told me he wanted an anti-aircraft gun to shoot down American planes) and Rene Servoise who was contemptuous of South Vietnam and emotionally anti-American. Any political discussions with either of them was unproductive.

The French had a fellow traveler in the person of the Swedish envoy Jean Christoph Oberg, who was also overseeing an extensive Swedish aid program in North Vietnam. With Oberg I not only fought it out on the tennis court but also disagreed strongly about every single issue relating to the Vietnam War. However, despite these differences, we remained the best of friends, a friendship that was extended when after the war we were brought together again via postings in Thailand. Oberg, articulate and intelligent, but very militant, tried in vain to obtrude himself into the Hanoi/Washington negotiation process, but was rejected as too biased by the Americans and even too extreme for the North Vietnamese.

The Indonesians had the only embassy that was staffed with professional and capable political and intelligence officers. They were well informed about North Vietnam and interested in my perspective on South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. They were very friendly with Canada, always particularly generous and helpful hosts prepared to assist with transportation as well as extending a standing invitation on weekends to enjoy an Indonesian lunch with them and to take part in informal badminton competitions.

The most valuable diplomat in Hanoi at that time was the redoubtable Daphne Park, the British Consul. A specialist in Soviet Affairs, she was an undercover MI6 officer, who had an already brilliant career behind her, with important successes in Moscow. Although humiliatingly she was accredited not to the Hanoi government but to the city of Hanoi, that did not impede her from being the most authoritative analyst on Vietnamese communism as well as North Vietnam's objectives and policy. Regular contact with her was the most valuable asset during my posting in Hanoi, since all of her analyses and predictions about the course of the war turned out to be unfailingly accurate.

As Canadians we had a unique Western position in Hanoi. The British and French were represented in both capitals, but they could not directly move from one capital to another. Once they were in one capital, they were contaminated. The only Westerners who moved up and down directly between Hanoi and Saigon during the war were the Canadians. This made us especially sought after for information during the war. This dividend improved as the war went on. The earlier 1954 to 1965 ICSC generation of Canadians who were based in Hanoi and Saigon were there during a more open period, compared to the secluded and inaccessible war capital during my time in Hanoi in 1970.

That privileged status provided exclusive access and outsized influence. In my case it was not commensurate with my junior rank on a first posting. Thus my assignment in Hanoi provided me with unique credentials that were helpful in my subsequent posting to the ICCS when dealing with both North and South Vietnamese officers tasked with the implementation of the 1973 Paris Peace Accord.

Although deemed by the North Vietnamese as surrogates of the US enemy, we Canadians residing in Hanoi were always treated correctly and courteously by the Hanoi officials. People on the street were friendly, especially when it was determined I was not an unpopular

Russian but a Canadian. For instance I was invited once by a Vietnamese (maybe a government agent) whom I met on the street to share a friendly drink at a sidewalk tea shop

We had free run of Hanoi which we were allowed to explore with nocturnal bicycle rides. Not once was I ever harassed by anyone in Hanoi, in contrast to later experiences in Myanmar or Pakistan. Fluency in French was an advantage with all the older generation of North Vietnamese, ranging from hotel staff to officials. Given this experience, I personally opposed the evacuation of our Embassy from Saigon in 1975, convinced because of our ICSC treatment we had absolutely nothing to fear from the North Vietnamese.

On one of my trips to Hanoi I inadvertently had the unique distinction of bringing back some weapons materials that had originally come down the Ho Chi Minh trail. Just before heading back up to Hanoi, I had been at a shooting range in Saigon firing a Chinese AK 47 rifle presented to me by a South Vietnamese general as concrete violation of Article 17 of the Geneva Accords. After I arrived in Hanoi I discovered that I had neglected to remove two loaded AK magazines from a gym bag I had brought with me. I decided to dispose of the ammunition magazines in the middle of the night by throwing them in the Pagoda Hoan Kiem Lake, a famous landmark in Hanoi. I subsequently donated the AK47 to the Canadian war Museum on my return to Canada.

Given the isolation of Hanoi, the value of the ICSC office was that it enabled us to make unique observations. The North Vietnamese were surprisingly liberal in my time, allowing ICSC Canadians to travel around the country with pre-approved itineraries, albeit always in the company of official minders. From my observations, North Vietnam had no defenses either on the coast or north of the DMZ dividing the two Vietnams. Their troops were oriented for duty in the South. The North Vietnamese correctly calculated that no defensive troop positions were ever required north of the DMZ given that the Americans, deterred by their Korean war experience, would have been very reluctant to send ground forces into the North.

All during my time in Hanoi, North Vietnam was being bombed. However the media created a misleading perception that the city of Hanoi was being bombed in 1969/1970. Although Hanoi streets had one-person manhole shelters along them, during the whole time I was there no bombing took place in Hanoi, nor even an air raid alert sounded in the city. The closest the war came to Hanoi was the sound of bombers flying overhead. The only target that was actually hit was a power plant on the outskirts of the city. Even the Red River bridge on the way to the airport was still intact at that time, though it was hit later.

The Haiphong port was only ever partially damaged with facilities quickly fitted up again to resume receiving massive Soviet aid. Chinese aid mostly came to North Vietnam via train routes, but the bombing was never able to shut down this important supply route. Effective bombing to deny Soviet and Chinese aid, would have made a substantial difference, instead of the futile bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail.

This was corroborated by the North Vietnamese captured soldiers that we interviewed in Can Tho in 1973. Interestingly General Nguyen Vo Giap, Defense Minister from 1944-80, thus in charge of North Vietnamese military strategy, when interviewed after the war, wondered why the Americans had not bombed the critical dike infrastructure. He indicated that if he had been in charge of the bombing campaign, he would have made destroying the dikes a priority.

Whether in Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia, by the time I arrived in Indochina in 1969 the problem that stymied the ICSC was not the predictable support of Hanoi at all times by the Communist Poles. The main reason the ICSC was dysfunctionally dormant in 1969, was obstruction from the purportedly neutral Chairman India. India had tilted toward North Vietnam after the 1962 China-India war and viewed a victorious North Vietnam as a bulwark ally against their traditional enemy, China. The Indians turned out to be right since today Vietnam is the most important counterweight to China in Southeast Asia, and in this respect the closest unofficial ally of the United States. It was this Indian shift that effectively ended any cooperative work with Canada, resulting in Canadian frustration and hostility stemming from India's ICSC role that continued well into the 1980's.

This was a negativity that was remarked upon by Prime Minister Trudeau when I accompanied him during his 1983 visit to ASEAN. It prompted him to instruct me to have the External Affairs Department make plans for him to visit India to mitigate this legacy. While his proposed visit never got off the ground, I accompanied Secretary of State for External Affairs Allan MacEachen on a visit to India later that year, during which MacEachen sought to restore more balance to the Canada/India relationship by proposing to scrap the Canadian nuclear boycott of India.

From my ICSC assignment in Hanoi I went away with some important mind-changing takeaways. Given the unique opportunity to study Vietnamese communism on the ground I changed my thinking about the objective of the war. The North Vietnamese had morphed from their experiments with doctrinal communism after their disastrous land reforms of the 1950s into a predominant nationalism, opportunistically espousing communism as a means to enlist the support of China and the Soviet Union to achieve their unification objectives. Telling in this regard was a response I elicited in 1969 from the Head of the North Vietnamese Commission Liaison Office, Colonel Ha Van Lau. When I asked him why Hanoi was waging the war, he told me that the main reason the North was striving to unify Vietnam was to create a strong country, in order to stand up to China in the future, and not to attack any other country in Southeast Asia.

For me in Hanoi, the American conviction that Hanoi was fighting to spread communism throughout Southeast Asia just did not hold water. Geopolitical pragmatism was the main driving factor to create a unified Vietnam. There was no substance to the widespread assumption that Vietnamese communism was part of the global struggle against imperialism. The North Vietnamese had no interest to impose communism on any other country, not even on Cambodia or Laos where they had a military presence, but only to advance their

national security interests. It also struck me that in spite of being bombed in the North and killed in the South by Americans, the North Vietnamese remained positively disposed to America as compared to their main supporters, the Soviets and their historical enemy China.

Thus in spite of persistent rumours in Saigon that Chinese troops were building up in North Vietnam in 1969/1970, there was no evidence whatsoever of any Chinese military presence anywhere in the country. While Soviet military technicians were observed and confirmed, Hanoi was absolutely determined to keep the Chinese out. As a footnote, a Canadian historian, in a book published in 2006, cited Chinese sources claiming that in 1969 there had been 320,000 Chinese troops in North Vietnam, manning anti-aircraft guns and ground to air missile batteries. On the basis of this claim, the historian suggests that Chinese Premier Chou En Lai had lied to Henry Kissinger in denying the presence of Chinese military in Vietnam, when in fact he had been telling the truth.

Our reporting on the Chinese role was an example of our special value in Hanoi, reassuring the Americans who were always concerned to avoid a parallel situation to the Korean war in which the Chinese had become heavily engaged. It also became something of a harbinger for what was to follow after 1975; the Vietnamese assault on the Khmer Rouge communist allies of the Chinese in Cambodia, and the subsequent Vietnamese repelling of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979.

While the public perception of Canada's long role in the ICSC was that it was a failure, my takeaway from this experience was instead that it was in many ways a success for Canada. Our membership in the ICSC provided Canada with a helpful "locus standi". Domestically and internationally the ICSC enabled the Canadian government to hew to a middle path domestically between military engagement and the strong anti-war movement bent upon condemning the US engagement in Vietnam.

Like Australia, Canada was under immense US pressure from both Democrat and Republican administrations to contribute combat troops as America's closest NATO ally. The ICSC enabled us to stave off this pressure, allowing the Canadian government successfully to insist that Canada as a formal party to the 1954 Geneva Accords could not compromise its neutral diplomatic position on the ICSC by becoming a combatant in the War. By relying on our obligations to the Geneva Accords, we were able to keep the domestic peace, while maintaining good relations with the US without acceding to a combat role

In contrast Australia had no such option and as a result of succumbing to US pressure suffered close to 3,000 combat casualties with over 500 Australians killed in action. Thus the ICSC membership not only saved Canadian lives, but it also helped Canada to avoid the social and domestic turmoil that plagued Australia as a result of becoming a combatant in the war.

At the end of January 1973 the Paris Peace Accords were signed setting up the International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICCS) comprising Canada, Hungary, Poland and Indonesia. About to set off to Yokohama for Japanese language training. I received a call on a Thursday evening asking whether I wanted to return to Vietnam on Saturday to head one of the seven ICCS regional centres. I jumped at the offer given my continuing interest in Vietnam. I figured my ICSC experience could be applied productively to this new commission.

Given this previous experience in Vietnam, I viewed the Paris Accords as primarily a strategy to get the American troops out of Vietnam and help return their POWs. Thus it was in the Canadian interest to join the ICCS for the sake of Canada-US bilateral relations, to help our American friends in a difficult position. However, I did not ever believe that the Paris Accords were capable of bringing peace to Vietnam. Hanoi, based on my experience, was undeviatingly committed to the conquest of South Vietnam. Although President Nixon preposterously heralded the Paris Peace Accords as “peace in our time” and an “agreement to end the war,” the fighting instead intensified. There was no provision in the Peace Accords for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops already in the South, a status tacitly accepted by the Americans. Hanoi would never accept a compromise on this in its consistent quest to conquer South Vietnam.

With the ICCS getting underway, I asked for and was allocated Region VII headquartered in Can Tho with five outposts spread around the Mekong Delta. With two thirds of the population, one third of Vietnam’s GDP and more than half of the country’s agricultural production, I figured that the outcome of the war would be primarily decided in the Mekong Delta.

I was especially pleased to be reunited in Vietnam with Vern Turner as the Deputy Head of the Canadian ICCS delegation and to work again with Dick Gorham who had formulated and then oversaw the so-called “open mouth” policy allowing us Canadians in the field to be completely open with the international media. This had immediate resonance with me since I already had an extensive international media network in place from my previous ICSC posting.

After arriving in Can Tho I had two immediate priorities: to establish an effective role and harmonious relationship with my capable Canadian military colleagues, and to secure for Canada the ICCS Chairmanship role. In these respects, I had the distinct advantage of being the only ICCS officer with previous ICSC experience in both Vietnams. This provided me with the requisite status to achieve both aims.

These in-country credentials were immediately tested when I took issue with the Canadian military wearing shorts as part of their uniform, and urged that they wear long pants instead. Shorts, I argued, would diminish the respect the Vietnamese and our Indonesian ICCS partners would have for Canada. The military accepted my view that culturally in Vietnam and in Indonesia shorts were only worn by schoolboys. Shorts also symbolized the colonial era, and were the wrong kit in the Mekong Delta where mosquitoes were spreading malaria and dengue fever.

My other priority in Can Tho was to get a mandate from Ambassador Michel Gauvin, the Head of the Canadian ICCS delegation, to lift the unanimity restrictions that had so bogged down the ICSC. Gauvin was new to Vietnam and therefore not weighed down with ICSC baggage, but he was a World War II veteran experienced in military affairs. An unconventional action-oriented iconoclast, Michel Gauvin, and Vern Turner, an ICSC veteran, made a great team, and provided the critical support from Saigon ICCS headquarters without which nothing could have been accomplished in Can Tho.



Manfred von Nostitz with Ambassador Michel Gauvin, South Vietnam 1973

The ICCS in contrast to the ICSC, had the advantage of not having any one country appointed as the Chairman. Gauvin, by force of his leadership capability, had already assumed the Chairmanship role in Saigon. With his approval I was successful in emulating his status to become the de facto Chairman of the ICCS in Can Tho. I also secured his advance commitment to discard the ICSC unanimity rule enabling me to accede to any investigation request without seeking Polish and Hungarian approval. Gauvin's proviso was that the Indonesian partners had to be onboard so that Canada was not acting unilaterally.

My position as ICCS Chairman also could not have been secured without the support of the Canadian military. They performed impressively and efficiently in setting up the Region VII infrastructure, an accomplishment much appreciated by the Hungarian, Polish and Indonesian ICCS partners. This involved logistics not only in Can Tho but also at our five ICCS outposts in the field, with the helpful cooperation of the American and South Vietnamese militaries. This was very different from the previous ICSC setup. It involved taking over American operating facilities with Vietnamese staff ranging from barracks to restaurants to clubs, to ground transport and helicopters. Thus for the first 60 days before the Americans departed, I personally had at my disposal six American Huey gunship helicopters operated and serviced by veteran free-wheeling American crews who were listening to the Doors or

Jim Hendrix over their headphones while swooping over the Mekong Delta paddy fields. This military gunship fleet was eventually replaced by more sedate Air America helicopters after the Americans had withdrawn.

The cooperation with the Americans was smooth because they were committed to leave with a withdrawal underway, but also because of the special affinities between the Canadian and American militaries. The Americans particularly respected the Canadian military for their competence in setting up a region-wide logistic infrastructure and the ICCS Secretariat.

On the American military side, I was fortunate to have to deal with Major General Frank Blazey, the last American commanding officer responsible for the Mekong Delta region. Blazey was an impressive professional army officer whose effort and cooperation to assist and support the ICCS was outstanding. Luckily for me he was also a keen tennis player. Every weekend he would convene a tennis competition combined with a briefing, inviting me and my Indonesian partner Colonel Eddie Sudrajat to be updated. We could raise any issues concerning the withdrawal of the Americans which were quickly addressed and resolved. All throughout this ICCS endeavour, Blazey consistently expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the role that Canadians and Indonesians were playing with respect to the orderly withdrawal of the American troops. This made the ICCS task much easier to accomplish.

When the American military departed, they were replaced by a young corps of outstanding State Department officers. Their competence came to be seen as a “Golden Period” for the American Foreign Service. They were attached to American Consulates all over the country. Most of them were Vietnamese speakers. I had befriended many of them during my previous posting in Vietnam. In the American Can Tho Consulate General my critical contact was Frank Wisner, under whose exceptional leadership the transition from an American military presence to a civilian team was skilfully managed. The ICCS mission benefited from his indispensable assistance.

On the Vietnamese side I was equally fortunate in establishing a close relationship with the Vietnamese commander of IV Corp Lt. General Nguyen Van Nghi. He was particularly interested in benefiting from my ICSC posting in North Vietnam and Cambodia. He invited me for a private military briefing every Sunday at 0700 hours. He was a sophisticated intellectual career officer, a nationalist, a patriot who had already fought the Viet Minh as a young man with the French. He foresaw the American abandonment of South Vietnam in 1973, lamenting the fact that Congress had cut American funding for the South Vietnamese military, which was already causing his forces to run low on ammunition. He did not abandon his troops in 1975. He allowed himself to be captured by the victorious North Vietnamese resulting in an arduous lengthy incarceration in a “reeducation camp”, before his release and departure for the US. He never compromised his principles and although goaded by his captors never voiced any criticism of his close partnership with the Americans. Given my respect for him, I tried to contact him and help him during his incarceration but was regretfully unsuccessful in these efforts.

The ICCS would have been as dysfunctional without the crucial support of the Indonesians, to balance off the obstructionist Poles and Hungarians, militant Hanoi supporters who even supported the futile myth that there were no North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. Following up on my close relationship with the Indonesians in Hanoi, I developed a crucial supportive relationship with their ICCS Delegation.

In this regard I formed a specially close bond with Lt. Colonel Eddie Sudrajat, a brilliant Special Forces Intelligence Officer who not only was professionally invaluable with respect to ICCS business, but who also became a lifelong close friend. Upon his return to Indonesia Sudrajat rapidly advanced to become Chief of the Armed Forces and Defence Minister and leader of the Justice and Unity Party. In this capacity he hosted me several times in Indonesia as well as including me in an official visit to Malaysia where I was High Commissioner in the 1980s. Given my experience with the Indonesians in Hanoi and Can Tho I always felt that Canada had missed out on leveraging this Canadian/Indonesian cooperative relationship to a more substantive level.

The phasing out of the last American troops proceeded very smoothly during February and March 1973. By January 1973 only about 25,000 troops were left in the country, mostly air cavalry units supporting the South Vietnamese ground forces. There were no ceasefire violations involving the American military to investigate since there was no longer any confrontation between the US and North Vietnamese forces. The reason for this was that the North Vietnamese did not want to disrupt the withdrawal of American forces, having agreed with Washington that they could retain North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. This was an achievement accomplished at the negotiating table which Hanoi could never have achieved on the battlefield.

This important understanding freed up the North Vietnamese forces to focus their aggressive efforts exclusively on the South Vietnamese military. Accordingly, with the post ceasefire intensification of the war there was no shortage of investigation requests precipitated by North Vietnamese attacks. As a result, the Canadian/Indonesian partnership conducted about 40 investigations, all boycotted by the Poles and Hungarians. While we published these ceasefire violations in line with the "open mouth policy", none of these reports ever became official ICCS documents because they were not only opposed by the Poles and Hungarians in Can Tho, but were also blocked by their HQ delegations in Saigon.

One such investigation stood out by shedding some definitive light on one of the most debated issues in the war, namely to what extent North Vietnam was running the war in the South as opposed to the indigenous Southern Viet Cong, who according to Hanoi propaganda and the anti-war movement were spearheading a revolutionary war against the occupying American forces and a Saigon puppet government. This ICCS investigation, which played an important part in the Canadian decision to withdraw from the ICCS by documenting the post-January 1973 infiltration of new North Vietnamese personnel into South Vietnam, was the result of some unusual circumstances.

Following the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, the French/British author journalist Olivier Todd came to Can Tho with Frances Fitzgerald, the American anti-war activist and author of "Fire on the Lake". According to Todd, he and Fitzgerald had been provided information by Communist contacts where they could meet local Viet Cong forces in the far south Ca Mau Peninsula of the Mekong Delta. Invited to join this unusual excursion was the American Boston Globe reporter David Greenway, who according to the North Vietnamese, was introduced as a Canadian journalist. Greenway told me subsequently he was not made aware that he was portrayed by the North Vietnamese as a Canadian national.

In order to get to their destination, the group, through the American Consulate, requested approval to proceed, and this was granted by the IV Corps commanding General Nguyen Van Nghi, who also provided logistic support for their travel to the Ca Mau Peninsula. Unknown to the group, this approval involved South Vietnamese military intelligence orchestrating the visit and collecting the exact coordinates and details of the communist base camp. Thus after the visiting group left this Communist base, General Nghi, increasingly concerned about the stepped-up infiltration from the North and the transfer of three North Vietnamese regiments from Cambodia to the Mekong Delta in violation of the Paris Accords, bombed and then attacked this North Vietnamese base killing most of the troops and capturing the rest.

When the General debriefed me on this operation during my regular weekly session, he acceded to my request to make these North Vietnamese captives available for interrogation by the ICCS. While the Poles and Hungarians balked at the invitation, dismissing the offer as a South Vietnamese propaganda exercise, the Indonesians immediately consented to take part. The Poles and Hungarians in Saigon also tried to block this investigation, but Ambassador Michel Gauvin, with the support of his Indonesian counterpart, green-lighted this investigation. After accepting my request to have no South Vietnamese military personnel present, we interviewed six of the captured North Vietnamese, some of them selected because of their assignment to guide the Todd/Fitzgerald group. Others were selected because they had only arrived in Can Tho two months after the Paris Accords were signed. All the prisoners appeared well treated, relaxed and informative, while appearing to enjoy the interaction with ICCS Canadians and Indonesians.

While my main questioning focused on their knowledge of and adherence to the Peace Accords, the North Vietnamese were fascinated by Frances Fitzgerald, who they were told was actually Jane Fonda, known to these soldiers indoctrinated by Hanoi propaganda, as a supporter of Hanoi. Surprised by her appearance in Ca Mau they asked me a lot of questions about her, divulging that the main interest of the woman who they thought was Fonda was to see bomb craters caused by American bombs. Since there were no American combat operations in the Ca Mau peninsula, they were instructed by their superiors to show the purported Jane Fonda duck ponds that resembled bomb craters.

As for the Indonesians, this opportunity to interview North Vietnamese regular soldiers was an intelligence bonanza. They were not at all interested in compliance with the Paris Accords

or Jane Fonda. Their singular objective was to gather intelligence about the North Vietnamese army such as their training, their command and control structure, the size of their battalions and platoons, how many rocket propelled grenades, machine guns and SAM 7 missiles a battalion brought down from Hanoi.

None of these North Vietnamese combatants had ever heard of the Paris Peace Accords or a ceasefire. They had been briefed that their mission was to complete the final phase of the North Vietnamese takeover of the South. Their infiltration was corroborated in a meticulously detailed, poignant diary, kept by one of the dead troops, which was presented to me by General Ngi. It was a most valuable document, which I had translated and brought to the interrogations.

This was a pivotal investigation because it documented North Vietnam's blatant historic violation of both the 1954 Geneva Agreements and the 1973 Paris Accords and put the kibosh on the widely espoused thesis that the war in the South was conducted by the local Viet Cong and not steered by North Vietnam or waged by the North Vietnamese army. Although since my 1969 posting in Hanoi I had understood that the war was totally orchestrated from the North, I was still surprised that North Vietnamese army personnel had been dispatched to the most southern tip of the country, always reputed to be exclusive Viet Cong territory.

The interrogations of these North Vietnamese conclusively documented that Hanoi paid no attention whatsoever to the Paris Accords mandating a ceasefire and for Hanoi to respect the self-determination of South Vietnam, with Hanoi required to stand down with its forces. Instead Hanoi was funnelling more troops into South Vietnam, bolstered by the stepped-up assistance of the Soviets especially to take advantage of the waning American support to South Vietnam.

This important investigation report never attained official status since it was blocked by the Poles and Hungarians. Through our "open mouth policy" we shared these findings with the media. Consequently, reports of the investigation were carried in the New York Times, Washington Post and major TV networks. In this way we achieved our goal of publicly putting the kibosh to the widespread anti-war thesis that the war in the South was conducted by local Viet Cong forces.

Notable however was the anemic official American reaction to this investigation. The report was downplayed by the US government because of the American commitment to the Paris Accords by which North Vietnamese forces were allowed to stay in place in the South in return for allowing the American combat troops to withdraw without any interference by North Vietnam. The US was reluctant to highlight these ICCS findings in order not to complicate their military withdrawal from Vietnam.

By the end of March 1973, Canada had performed its most essential early ICCS task of seeing off the American troops smoothly and effectively, avoiding a 1975 Saigon type of departure chaos. In Can Tho I bid farewell to Frank Blazey, the last American General



Foreign Minister Mitchell Sharp, with Manfred von Nostitz, Can Tho, 1973

leaving the Mekong Delta, with a formal handshake ceremony at the Can Tho airport, recorded on film by CBS TV. At the same time the Canadian ICCS delegations in the other six regions of Vietnam fulfilled their missions in similar fashion. Given our long valuable experience in Hanoi, Canada also did an effective job in helping resolve sensitive POW issues, playing a pivotal role in making possible the return of all American POWs to the US.

Meanwhile as Canada had foreseen prior to the signing of the Paris Accords, the determination of North Vietnam to take over the South continued without interruption. With all these developments reported to Ottawa, Mitchell Sharp, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, expressed his concern that "Canada had come to Vietnam to observe the peace, but wasn't sent there to observe the continuation of the war", and decided to pay a visit to Saigon, Hanoi and Can Tho, in March 1973 to consult and make a decision about the future role of Canada in the ICCS .

Against the backdrop of American and Vietnamese briefings, I also had an extensive opportunity, together with my military colleagues, to brief Minister Sharp personally, emphasizing that instead of a ceasefire, Hanoi had intensified the war, infiltrating more troops and materiel, not just down the Ho Chi Minh Trail but also through shifting troops over to Vietnam from Cambodian sanctuaries.

On March 28, 1973, one day before the last American combat soldier was slated to leave Vietnam, Minister Sharp, by then back in Ottawa after his Vietnam visit, reflected these briefings in a press conference. He stated that “Canada was not interested in a charade, in taking part in an exercise of just being there” and as a result he would end the Canadian ICCS mandate in another 60 days as a deference to the Americans in order to give them time find a replacement.

While Minister Sharp pointed out in this press conference that “the ICCS had a function to perform”, he did not mention that Canada had done a helpful job, so appreciated by the Americans, in overseeing the dignified and orderly departure of the American troops from the seven ICCS regions in the country, in addition to playing a key ICCS role in the release of all the American POWs in Hanoi. In any event, as a result of this press conference, Canada terminated its participation in the ICCS, and withdrew from Vietnam on July 31, 1973, to be replaced by Iran.

These Control Commission assignments continued to be of advantage to Canada, while also an asset for me personally in my subsequent career. At the time of my posting as Chargé d’Affaires in Bangkok in 1975, my Indochina expertise enabled me to play a significant role in the Indochina crisis of that year and to help alleviate worries in Thailand, following the fall of Saigon, about a regional threat from Vietnam. I was regarded by the Thais as a Vietnam expert, and therefore had senior civilian and military access and influence with the Thai government.

When subsequently, Bill Bauer, a first generation ICSC veteran, took over as Ambassador, he was asked by HM King Bumiphol to prepare for him personally and confidentially an assessment on the implications of the developments in Indochina for Thailand. I collaborated with Bill Bauer to draft this paper; it was an example of the two generations of Commission veterans working together to produce an assessment that enhanced the role of Canada in Thailand at the time.

The same was also the case in Washington where I was posted in 1977-81. There I had special access to the American senior officials and politicians who had been in Vietnam and who were now in leading positions, such as Vietnam veteran Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State.

After my Washington posting I was recruited by Tom Delworth, another first generation ICSC veteran, to head External Affairs’ South/ Southeast Asia division of External Affairs. In light of my ICSC/ICCS background, this led to my organizing PM Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s 1983 visit to all the ASEAN countries. While accompanying the Prime Minister on the trip, Trudeau at one stage invited me to a private dinner to discuss Canada’s Indochina involvement.

The ICCS experience also paid off in later years when as Ambassador to Pakistan in 1989 I worked closely with Benon Sivan, the Head of UNGOMAP (United Nations Good Offices For Afghanistan and Pakistan), and the Canadian UNGOMAP military contingent, to supervise the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. It was a similar situation to Vietnam - orchestrating a smooth and orderly withdrawal of Soviet troops- but just like in Vietnam leaving behind a continuing war without any peace prospects.

By 1974 more than one third of all Canadian foreign officers had circulated through Indochina, gathering valuable experience and creating a core of Asia expertise. This experience was shared by the first generation of Canadians who served in Indochina from 1954 to 1965, as well as a second generation posted there during the war from 1965 to 1973. As a member of the second ICSC generation it was a unique privilege to have worked and bonded with the first ICSC generation to develop a Canadian Asia Pacific architecture. This process included the Canadian breakthrough formula to recognize China in 1970, becoming a founding Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, a member of the ASEAN Security Forum, implementing innovative CIDA programs in Asia, and the establishment of the Asia Pacific Foundation. It also included taking in more Indochinese refugees per capita than any other country, and encouraging the provinces and the Canadian business community to increase trade and promote Canadian education throughout the Asian region. These were achievements specifically praised and attributed by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to the Indochina generations, and was the rationale he emphasized for wanting to make his extensive visit to Southeast Asia in 1983.

While the passion and commitment to Asia has diminished with the retirement of both Indochina generations, the architecture remains in place for further development by a new generation of Canadians. Meanwhile the personal bonds established among both diplomatic and military colleagues still endure 50 years after Canada's involvement with the Control Commissions ended in 1973, as reflected in the current important effort to record for history the unique experiences of the many Canadians who served in Indochina.

Saigon, Hanoi and Hue 1970-73 - My ICSC and ICCS Experiences

Geoff Charlebois



Geoff Charlesbois in Hue, 1973

I arrived in Saigon in September 1970, after serving for three years as a Vice-Consul in Mexico. I had not expected a posting to Vietnam, but I was delighted when informed by the Department of External Affairs that I was to serve there. I had for some time had a fascination with eastern Asia, and this posting was a first chance to give some substance to that fascination. I don't remember what my title was, but I was assigned to the development aid section of the Canadian delegation to the Commission Internationale de Contrôle et Surveillance (CICS). That, alone, speaks to the state of the commission by 1970. At that point, the commission had ceased to function as was intended when it was established in 1954. The Canadian delegation was essentially acting as an embassy to the Republic of Vietnam, and, like many embassies at the time, there was a section devoted to overseeing Canada's development aid program. Under the supervision of the section head, retired military officer Colonel David Veitch, my work consisted of vetting the files of Vietnamese students who had been awarded scholarships for study in Canada. A further responsibility was to make occasional visits to the Canadian-sponsored anti-tuberculosis clinic in the town of Quang Ngai, and to the rehabilitation centre in the town of Qui Nhon.

At Qui Nhon, I saw for the first time in my life the ravages wrought by leprosy, a disease little known in Canada. There I also experienced the depth of feeling of those Vietnamese who sympathized with the Viet Cong movement: while I was walking along a street in the town, a woman spat at me. Fortunately for me, her aim was faulty, and she missed her target.

The CICS also had responsibility for Laos and Cambodia, and as a member of the Canadian delegation, I made occasional visits to both countries. There was little to do in either country – yet another sign of the state of immobility into which CICS had fallen. As the years 1970 and 1971 progressed, the effects of conflict in Cambodia became increasingly visible, as barriers controlling movement were erected

around Phnom Penh. Any thought of visiting the great temple at Angkor Wat had to be put out of mind, given the control of that area by the Khmer Rouge.

In September 1971, I was sent to take charge of the four man sub-delegation (three military and one civilian) in Hanoi, the capital of what was then called the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN). Shortly after my arrival, I met formally with Colonel Ha Van Lau, then the DRVN's official liaison officer with the CICS. This was my first and last meeting with the good Colonel.¹ The meeting was cordial, but unproductive. Having seen the situation in Saigon, especially that of women, I asked the Colonel if he realized the suffering that the continuing war was causing. His response was that the people were willing to suffer whatever was necessary for their country's liberation.

I was in Hanoi from early or mid-September to the beginning of December 1971. It was a brief period that was agreeable, but not fruitful. By order of President Nixon, bombing by the United States Air Force had been suspended for a period. The weather was good, and our non-Communist colleagues were helpful. The French mission had weekly film showings, and I think that the Swedish mission did, also. I rode about the city on a bicycle, although there were areas designated by roadside signs with a large letter "C", which were off limits. The delegation had an ancient Polish vehicle with a driver assigned to it. This could be used whenever necessary, and I had one relatively long-distance trip to the tourist mecca of Ha Long Bay. I was accompanied on that trip by one of my military colleagues, our local driver, and an interpreter. Our route took us through the port of Haiphong. What struck me at the time was the contrast between what we were hearing in the media about massive destruction from heavy American bombing of Haiphong, and what we saw in our short passage through the city: there was little visible damage, other than at the port facilities.

The restrictive nature of the DRVN regime could sometimes be quite evident. We Canadians were housed in two 'villas'. Next to us on one side was a rundown villa housing Vietnamese families. One day, I was outside when a woman from the neighbouring villa looked over the fence between us and pointed to a rubbish shed at the back of our villa. What she was seeking were used beer cans, which could be flattened and used as protective material against the rain on their roofs. I gave her some. Shortly thereafter, I heard an angry exchange between the woman and a Vietnamese soldier guarding the area. The woman looked sheepishly over the fence once again, and returned the beer cans.

My time in Hanoi with the CICS came to an abrupt and unexpected end. On December 3rd, the most senior of my military colleagues, a major, came to my office. He informed me that my father had died suddenly the previous day. The message had been relayed through CICS communications operated by the Indian military. With the agreement of the Canadian Commissioner, David Jackson, I left as quickly as possible to return to Montreal, where my mother lived.

1 Ha Van Lau eventually became Permanent Representative of Vietnam to the United Nations.

And then, a year later, I was to return to Vietnam, this time with the ICCS.

Arriving early in February 1973 about ten or twelve days after my military colleagues, I was greeted at Hué's airport not by the senior military office, a Lieutenant-Colonel, but by one of his Majors. I was given the message that the Colonel wished to see me in his room that afternoon. As I was supposed to be head of the Delegation team in Region One based at Hué and the sole civilian, I wondered if this was harbinger of a difficult relationship with my military colleagues.

As requested I appeared about four in the afternoon at the Colonel's room in the Huong Giang hotel where the regional Delegation was lodged. Colonel Bentley MacLeod was well supplied with Canadian beer. We availed ourselves freely of this and conversed amicably for several hours. We arrived at an agreement whereby the Colonel recognized me as head of the regional Delegation on all matters of a political nature. On the other hand, he insisted that on military operational matters he would make the decisions. He asked that if I had any concerns with the way that his personnel were working that I take up the matter with him rather than directly with the person(s) concerned. There were of course matters that were of both a political and operational kind but the arrangements that we had discussed on my first afternoon in Hué worked remarkably well throughout to our mutual satisfaction.

The following months for me, as the person responsible in Region One for the political aspects of the ICCS's work, were characterized by almost daily meetings with the three other delegations. With Colonel Macleod by my side these meetings usually revolved around questions of deployment to team sites. These meetings sometimes became a trifle testy. Our Communist interlocutors often sought reasons to avoid deployment while we on the Canadian delegation pressed for deployment. On one occasion, which sticks in my memory, the younger of the Hungarian officers at one meeting stated wide-eyed that deployment to a certain site could not take place "because there are snakes". Our Indonesian counterparts were supportive of us Canadians, but they generally tended to avoid actively engaging the Hungarians and the Poles.

On April 7 an ICCS helicopter with a crew of three left Hué with an inspection team consisting of one Canadian, one Indonesian, and two Hungarian officers, as well as two Viet Cong liaison personnel. Over South Vietnamese territory under control of the Viet Cong the helicopter was struck and destroyed by a SAM-7 heat-seeking missile. All on board were killed including the Canadian officer, Captain Charles Laviolette.

The Viet Cong admitted the shooting down of the helicopter but claimed that the loss of the helicopter and its crew happened because the helicopter had deviated from the route that had been designated for it. The Canadian delegation denied this and sought to gain access for the ICCS to the crash site. This was refused by the Viet Cong. Consequently, it was never possible to determine with certainty whether or not the Viet Cong version of this tragedy had any merit.

Most of the interface with the media on this matter was carried out by the Head of the Canadian Delegation, Michel Gauvin or by the senior military officer, Major-General Duncan McAlpine. Nonetheless I was interviewed by Joe Schlesinger of the CBC and by a reporter from the New York Times, Fox Butterfield, I believe. These interviews, while not hostile, did suggest to me that both these journalists were inclined to give more credence than I did to the Viet Cong version of events.

The following three-and-a-half months consisted of more of the same unproductive dialogue at the frequent meetings of the four delegations, as I have mentioned above. We did however enjoy a short break over the fourth weekend in April as the Polish delegation, curiously I thought for representatives of a professedly atheistic regime, insisted on time off to celebrate Easter.

While Canada continued to participate in the ICCS, the then Secretary of State for External Affairs, Hon. Mitchell Sharp had announced on 29 May that Canada would definitively withdraw its participation. The Canadian delegation left Vietnam on 31 July 1973.

1973. Vietnam. L'aventure CICS/ICCS

Gabriel Lessard



Gabriel Lessard beside captured North Vietnamese tanks, Kontum, Central Highlands, 1973

1. J'arrive.

Je suis entré au ministère des Affaires étrangères le 6 juin 1972 après une courte carrière comme responsable des examens pour la Commission scolaire régionale Côte-Nord. Cet emploi a d'ailleurs bien failli me coûter mon entrée dans le sacerdoce qu'était le Ministère. Après un premier examen de la Fonction publique, un deuxième de connaissances générales suivait qui, lui-même, était couronné par une rencontre avec trois diplomates chevronnés qui avaient mission de vous «planter». L'un des trois, après une discussion sur la valeur des examens à laquelle j'avais répondu qu'ils permettaient d'identifier de bons candidats, non néces-

sairement de dépister le meilleur, avança qu'en me choisissant ils pouvaient commettre une erreur; à quoi je répondis, après un moment d'hésitation, qu'ils pourraient aussi avoir pris une décision heureuse.

Me voici donc jeune diplomate à l'essai. Pour la première fois, en novembre 1972, les fonctionnaires canadiens à l'étranger ont la possibilité d'exercer leur droit de vote à l'élection fédérale. Par je ne sais quelle grâce, j'ai été choisi comme courrier diplomatique spécial pour cueillir les votes de nos collègues en Asie. C'était une opération plus chaotique qu'aujourd'hui du fait du plus court rayon d'action des transporteurs de l'époque, des arrêts fréquents et de la distance à parcourir. Quoi qu'il en soit, l'opération fut un succès.

2. Je pars.

Le 30 janvier 1973, mon agent du personnel, Marc Perron, me convoque pour me demander si j'acceptais de partir à pied levé pour le Vietnam du Sud afin de servir sur la nouvelle Commission internationale de Contrôle et Surveillance qui naîtrait des Accords de Paris signés le lendemain. Je répondis comme les scouts: « toujours prêt ». Ainsi le lendemain, sans doute après une discussion avec Dérek Burney, à l'époque directeur du personnel qui utilisera par la suite cet exemple pour illustrer « la flexibilité et la rapidité d'exécution du Ministère », Marc me convoque à nouveau pour me dire que je serai le plus jeune membre de la délégation canadienne près la Commission internationale de Contrôle et de Surveillance (CICS) et que j'avais 24 heures pour me préparer...

Branle-bas de combat. J'avais un appartement, une voiture et tout un tra-la-la dont je devais de partir très rapidement. Le Ministère organisa la rupture du contrat de location de l'appartement et s'occupa de la logistique générale, de mettre à jour mon passeport, etc. La voiture demeurait un défi pour lequel il n'y avait pas, à l'époque, de solution immédiate. La veille, à la suite du premier entretien avec Marc, j'avais pris la précaution d'appeler mes parents pour leur dire qu'il se pouvait que je parte pour le Vietnam dès le lendemain et que ma voiture posait un problème. Mon père, comme toujours, relevait déjà le défi alors que ma mère devenait de plus en plus inquiète.

Mon père avait déjà décidé de venir chercher ma voiture, sauf que mes parents demeuraient sur la Côte-Nord, à Bergeronnes, près de Tadoussac. En gros, cette distance est à une journée de voiture d'Ottawa. La météo s'annonçait mal. Toutefois, le traversier sur le Saguenay était encore en opération. Mes parents ont donc quitté les Bergeronnes en espérant pouvoir prendre l'avion à Québec qui les mènerait à Ottawa. Or, rendus à Québec, les avions sont cloués au sol en raison d'une tempête hivernale. Le seul moyen de communication encore en activité était l'autobus. Mes parents sont arrivés en début de soirée à Ottawa et repartiraient le surlendemain avec ma voiture qui allait être entreposée aux Bergeronnes.

3. J'apprends.

J'ai atterri à Saigon vers 11h30 le 6 février 1973, une date qui a marqué l'histoire. Car à 14h00 se réunissait pour la première fois la Commission Internationale de Contrôle et de Surveillance (CICS). Saigon, de ce fait, devenait le point chaud de la scène internationale: un des moments clés de l'histoire de la guerre froide allait s'y dérouler. La première session de la Commission mettrait donc en place les mécanismes de mise en œuvre des Accords de Paris qui éventuellement devait ramener la paix dans la péninsule du sud-est asiatique et apaiserait les tensions de la Guerre froide.

Toute la presse américaine et internationale était en ce jour présente à Saigon pour cet événement majeur. Il est difficile aujourd'hui d'imaginer la taille imposante que pouvaient représenter les équipements des communications de l'époque. Étant arrivé vers 11h30 et sachant que cet événement aurait lieu, dès les procédures aéroportuaires complétées, je demandai au personnel qui m'accueillait de me conduire directement à la délégation canadienne. Mais 14h00 était déjà dépassée. Ne restaient à la délégation que les secrétaires et les communicateurs qui m'ont rapidement donné les instructions pour gagner la salle de conférence.

Environ 150 mètres séparaient les bureaux de la délégation canadienne des bâtiments de la salle de réunion. Ces 150 mètres étaient bordés d'arbres, mais surtout bondés de journalistes et d'équipement de communication sur les 100 derniers mètres avant le bâtiment même. Tous les acteurs étant déjà en session, la meute de journalistes, les caméras, les microphones et tutti quanti se rabattirent sur ma personne, me posant multiples questions sur ce qui allait se passer... Or, je n'en savais strictement rien et je me sentais écrasé par cette presse qui semblait vouloir ma peau... Voilà pourquoi je me suis toujours par la suite méfié de la presse.

4. Je retiens.

Qu'ai-je retenu des sessions de la CICS? Tout d'abord, la maestria de notre chef de délégation, mon maître, l'ambassadeur Michel Gauvin. Qu'il était beau de le voir opérer! Lorsqu'il intervenait, tous les participants devenaient attentifs, en particulier les chefs des autres délégations indonésienne, polonaise et hongroise. Il s'exprimait tant en français qu'en anglais avec une aisance et un panache qui désarçonnaient, en particulier les interprètes qui étaient tous des pays de l'est. Michel Gauvin prenait un malin plaisir à les tenir sur le qui vive, reprenant au besoin des traductions lorsqu'il jugeait que sa pensée n'avait pas été bien interprétée.

Michel Gauvin était un personnage hors norme. Ses soirées se terminaient toujours très tard. C'était un oiseau de nuit. Il aimait le bridge et les échecs. À mon avis, il n'excellait ni dans l'un, ni dans l'autre, mais il aimait le jeu. Après une victoire aussi surprenante que rapide aux échecs, il voulut m'enseigner le bridge, ce sur quoi je ne l'ai pas suivi. Car son horaire et le mien ne pouvaient se concilier. Étant l'agent junior, je devais arriver tôt au bureau pour aider

à préparer les briefings du jour. Michel Gauvin, lui, se levait toujours plus tard, mais absorbait très vite tous les derniers développements et attaquait de pied ferme toutes les réunions de la CICS.

5. J'analyse.

La CICS a été un outil de la Guerre froide. Elle a été conçue en fonction d'un monde divisé entre l'Ouest et l'Est, entre le capitalisme et le communisme. Ainsi, deux délégations représentaient chaque bloc, soit le Canada et l'Indonésie pour l'Occident et la Pologne et le Hongrie pour l'Est. Cette composition devait en assurer l'objectivité. Le Canada avait beaucoup hésité à s'engager dans cette deuxième commission internationale. Il jugeait que la première Commission, celle qui avait suivi les accords de 1954 sur le destin de l'Indochine, n'avait pas été un succès. Or, le Canada en avait fait partie durant toute son existence en compagnie de l'Inde et de la Pologne. Une faiblesse de la structure de cette première commission avait été que les rapports de d'incidents militaires n'étaient transmis à aucun organisme qui eut pu rectifier ces situations.

Le Canada jugeait donc à priori que cette nouvelle commission, la CICS ne conduirait pas aux résultats escomptés, ce qui effectivement fut le cas. Cependant, suite aux pressions énormes des USA, de Kissinger et du président Nixon, le Canada a accepté d'y participer. Le Canada espérait qu'au lieu d'être tout simplement acheminés aux protagonistes, les rapports des incidents militaires trouveraient d'une façon ou de l'autre leur chemin jusqu'au Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies qui pourrait prendre les mesures appropriées. Le Canada possédait aussi d'autres avantages. Tout d'abord, il connaissait bien le terrain du fait de sa participation à la première commission. De plus, le professionnalisme des forces armées canadiennes était reconnu de tous.

Le Canada accepta donc de s'engager pour une période de six mois afin d'évaluer la fonctionnalité de la CICS et de mettre en place les modalités sous lesquelles elle opèrerait. C'était principalement la tâche des 250 militaires de l'armée canadienne et des 50 membres du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères.

J'ai déjà souligné que la composition de la CICS en quatre délégations devait en assurer son objectivité. Encore cette notion restait-elle à définir. Pour le Canada, l'objectivité signifiait rapporter la réalité telle qu'elle était vécue ou perçue par des observateurs militaires qui devaient décortiquer la dynamique d'un incident. Si un militant du Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire avait été à l'origine d'une escarmouche, il fallait le signaler et éventuellement condamner le ou les responsables. La même logique devait s'appliquer tant dans le cas d'incidents provoqués par le Gouvernement du Sud Vietnam que par les troupes du Nord Vietnam dont la présence factuelle au sud n'a jamais été admise, sauf en expliquant que le Nord pouvait répondre à une demande du Gouvernement révolutionnaire provisoire.



ICCS aircraft 1973

6. La parousie rouge.

Pour les tenants de la philosophie communiste, soit les représentants de la Pologne et de la Hongrie, pour le Nord Vietnam et pour le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire, notre philosophie de l'objectivité ne s'appliquait tout simplement pas. Car, pour eux, l'objectivité se concevait dans le contexte de la réalisation du Grand soir rouge, c'est-à-dire de la victoire totale du communisme, de l'égalité pour tous, etc. Nous étions en pleine Guerre froide et les communistes avaient une foi absolue en leur supériorité philosophique et historique. Étaient donc objectifs ceux qui avaient compris le sens de l'histoire qui nécessairement conduirait à la réalisation du Grand soir rouge. Pour la Pologne et la Hongrie, leurs alliés, le gouvernement du Nord Vietnam et le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire, ne pouvaient donc être coupables d'aucun manquement aux Accords de Paris. Ils avaient compris le sens de l'histoire.

Nous faisons ainsi face à une deux conceptions de l'objectivité qui étaient inconciliables. La CICS pouvait condamner unanimement le gouvernement du Sud Vietnam, mais jamais l'allié du gouvernement du Nord Vietnam, soit le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire. Le Canada, par sa simple présence contribuait à projeter sur la scène internationale une image négative du gouvernement du Sud Vietnam qui devenait le mauvais larron. Il était le coupable, l'acteur de mauvaise foi qui ne voulait pas réellement mettre en œuvre les Accords de Paris, en mettant fin aux escarmouches et à la guerre. Le Canada était le jouet d'une dynamique à laquelle il souhaitait mettre fin.

7. Un blocage.

La CICS connut un moment de grande tension lorsque, par mégarde, un rapport d'incident préparé par les quatre délégations militaires condamnait unanimement le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire. Les délégations de Pologne et de Hongrie dont un premier échelon avait approuvé le rapport, ont alors mis leur veto à la transmission de ce rapport aux protagonistes. L'inénarrable Michel Gauvin a alors demandé une suspension sine die de la session de la CICS et a fait valoir qu'elle ne reprendrait pas tant qu'une solution à la transmission de ce rapport n'aurait pas été trouvée.

Encore une fois, je souligne que nous opérons sur le point chaud de la scène internationale. Tout ce qui touchait la CICS faisait les manchettes de la presse mondiale. Les gestes de la délégation canadienne étaient commentés dans tous les journaux, particulièrement au Canada, et ne recevaient pas systématiquement l'appui de la presse. Alors a commencé avec la centrale un dialogue qui nous a fait beaucoup réfléchir. Ce fut d'abord le directeur qui attira notre attention, demandant de réviser notre copie; puis le directeur-général; puis le sous-ministre... Michel Gauvin réunissait son équipe et discutait des tenants et aboutissants de toute cette affaire. Puis, un jour il nous dit : « Les gars, nous avons épuisé toutes nos cartouches. Nous avons résisté jusqu'à maintenant, mais je m'attends à recevoir des instructions du Ministre Sharp. Il nous faudra capituler ». Sauf que les instructions du ministre n'ont pas eu le temps de nous parvenir. Car les délégations communistes avaient finalement accepté de transmettre le rapport. Nous étions soulagés et heureux.

Il y aurait certes d'autres anecdotes à raconter, mais elles n'ont pas la même signification. Étant le plus jeune agent sur le terrain, j'avais été désigné comme agent de liaison avec le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire que le gouvernement du Canada ne reconnaissait pas. Cela m'a parfois donné l'occasion de corriger des notes et de participer plus directement à conception de l'action.

8. Ré-évaluation de la situation.

Le Canada n'avait donc pas réussi à faire valoir que les rapports de la CICS devait trouver leurs chemin jusqu'au Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies. Il s'était engagé pour six mois et voyait que rien ne changeait, que la guerre se poursuivait de façon différente et plus subtile. Le ministre Sharp vint en mission dans la région pour évaluer la situation. Il était accompagné d'une importante délégation de la presse et son avion fit escale dans les pays de la région pour entamer des discussions avec les gouvernements, y compris celui du Vietnam du Nord. Je fus pour ma part envoyé au Laos pour aider notre chef de mission, en particulier avec la presse. Ma première mission fut de discuter avec le directeur de l'aéroport qui était de sang royal. Il me fallait donc donner de la "majesté". C'était plutôt cocasse...

Ma visite au Laos me valut une autre expérience avec la presse. Le ministre devait en effet à chaque étape donner une conférence de presse. Le plus respecté de tous les journalistes, le



Ambassador Gabriel Lessard at a Vietnam- Canada bilateral function in Hanoi, 24 April 2008.

représentant du Devoir, était celui qui donnait le ton, du moins en ce qui concerne la substance. Pas toujours très fier de ses condisciples, il me dit : « Gabriel, si tu n'as jamais vu une meute de loups affamés, prépare-toi, ce sera pour aujourd'hui ». Il a ainsi parfait mon éducation en ce qui concerne la presse... Je demeure toujours méfiant.

Le ministre Sharp, rentré à Ottawa, fit son rapport au cabinet et le Canada annonça sa décision de se retirer de la CICS. Il sera remplacé par l'Iran. L'expérience canadienne aura duré exactement six mois. Je faisais partie du groupe des derniers agents à quitter le Vietnam du Sud le 6 août 1973. Moins de deux ans plus tard, le retrait du Canada se révélait prémonitoire avec la chute de Saigon le 30 avril 1975. Entre temps, le Canada aura permis aux États-Unis de se retirer « dans l'honneur » et de contribuer à mettre fin à un chapitre pas nécessairement très glorieux de leur histoire. Le Vietnam, après avoir été deux entités reconnues internationalement sous deux commissions internationales redevenait un seul pays avec la victoire du Nord sur le Sud.

9. Un note personnelle.

Le Vietnam a beaucoup compté dans ma vie. J'y ai vraiment eu le sentiment de faire partie de l'histoire en marche. Il a été le terrain de mon apprentissage et une école de formation sans pareil. J'y remettrai les pieds comme ambassadeur 32 ans plus tard. Je craignais que mon expérience de la CICS soit perçue négativement par mes interlocuteurs. Ce fut tout le contraire. Les Vietnamiens valorisaient que j'aie été un témoin de leur histoire.

10. Je ressasse.

J'en reviens à ma première nuit à Saïgon. Compte tenu de l'arrivée massive de militaires, de diplomates, de journalistes et de curieux de toutes sortes, la capacité hôtelière de la capitale sud-vietnamienne était complètement débordée. La délégation canadienne n'ayant pas pu me retenir une chambre dans un hôtel décent, je me retrouvai dans un hôtel de seconde, sinon de troisième catégorie. Tout est calme lorsque j'entre dans ma chambre où la lumière avait préalablement été allumée. Tout est normal lorsque je me couche. Compte tenu de l'excitation de cette première journée, je ne pouvais dormir que du sommeil du juste... Mais le décalage horaire avait aussi des conséquences qui me conduisirent à allumer. Le plancher, les murs, le plafond, tout bougeaient. Mes murs se déplaçaient. Des blattes, plus familièrement des cancrelats, d'une taille que je ne connaissais pas, d'un à trois pouces, tapissaient tout et étaient en continuel mouvement. Que faire? Éteindre la lumière en espérant qu'il n'en tombe pas trop sur mon lit... J'ai souvent été logé dans de beaux hôtels, mais j'ai aussi été logé dans des hôtels de deuxième et troisième ordre où le « canadien moyen » n'aurait pas accepté de loger. La fonction et le devoir ont toujours primé sur les conditions matérielles. C'était vrai pour moi, mais aussi pour la très grande majorité de mes collègues, sinon tous et toutes. Je tiens à le souligner pour tenter de mettre fin à certains mythes qui minent nos instruments diplomatiques en les réduisant au champagne et à la vie facile.

Biographies

The Honourable David Anderson PC OC OBC

David Anderson joined the Department of External Affairs in 1962. He was posted to ICSC Vietnam/Cambodia/Laos in 1963-4, and thereafter to the Canadian Commission Hong Kong 1964-8. In 1968 he left the Foreign Service and entered Parliament as MP for Esquimalt -Saanich, becoming the first chair of the House of Commons Committee on Environmental Pollution. In 1972 he became leader of the British Columbia Liberal Party. After losing his seat in 1975 he became an environmental consultant and an adjunct professor at the University of Victoria. In 1993 he was reelected to Parliament as MP for Victoria, and until his retirement in 2006 served in a succession of cabinet positions including as the longest serving Minister of the Environment 1999-2004, in which role he ensured Canada's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the passage of the Species at Risk Act.

Fred and Eva Bild

Fred Bild joined the Department of External Affairs in 1961. From 1961-63 he was Cultural Attaché at the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo. In 1966-7 with his wife Eva he was posted to ICSC Laos. Thereafter he spent a year at the École National d' Administration in Paris, had three further postings in France, from 1979-83 was Ambassador in Thailand and from 1990-94 was Ambassador to the Peoples Republic of China and Mongolia. In Ottawa he had assignments as Director of Personnel and Assistant Deputy Minister for International and Security Affairs. He retired in 1996 and has been teaching at the Université de Montréal at the Centre d' Études de l' Asie de l'Est.

Anne Marie Bougie

Anne Marie Bougie from Quebec City joined the Department of External Affairs as a secretary in June 1966. In the next 34 years she served at posts in Turkey, Vietnam ICSC, USSR, Ivory Coast, Colombia, Algeria, Haiti, Switzerland, and France, and subsequently had short term temporary assignments in in Ottawa, Jamaica, Denmark, Turkey, Senegal, Zimbabwe, China, Poland, Ireland, Australia and Geneva Switzerland. She fully retired in November 2000.

Phil Calvert

Phil Calvert joined the Department of External Affairs in 1982. Subsequently he had three postings in Beijing, in 1984-7, 1994-7 and 2004-8. He also served as Director of the Technical Barriers to Trade Division at Ottawa headquarters, and was Deputy Chief Negotiator for

Canada during China's accession to the World Trade Organization. From 2021-2016 he was Ambassador to Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. He retired in 2016. He is a co-editor of this project.

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Stan Carlson joined the Department of External affairs in 1966 and subsequently held diplomatic assignments in Vietnam ICSC, Trinidad and the UK. From 1985- 1993 he was Executive Secretary of the Intelligence Advisory Committee in the Privy Council Office. From 1993-2000 he was Chief of the Situation Centre in the Department of Peacekeeping Affairs at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. His extensive reserve military experience included RCAF reserves, COTC, and the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. He retired in 2000.

Geoff Charlebois

Geoff Charlebois joined the Department of External Affairs in 1966. His foreign postings were Vietnam ICSC and ICCS (Hue), Republic of Korea, China, Germany, Mexico and Colombia. His headquarters assignments included units responsible for Western Europe, Latin America and security and intelligence. After retirement in 1993 he undertook contract work for the department on Sudan, Nigeria and South Africa. He has also been an election observer with the UN, OAS and OSCE.

Chris Dagg

Chris Dagg joined the Department of External Affairs in 1966. After working on the Indo-china Desk in External Affairs he was subsequently posted to ICSC Saigon in 1967-69 and then to Indonesia from 1971-74. While posted in Indonesia he was assigned to the Canadian delegation to the Paris International Conference on Vietnam in February 1973 and then with ICCS Saigon. He left External Affairs in 1974 and worked with INCO in Indonesia 1974-9, in Indonesia with CIDA and Guelph University 1980-87, and after 1987 at Simon Fraser University. He died in 2016. He had been preparing a study of Canada and the ICSC 1954-65 for the Canadian Institute of International Affairs.

Nick Etheridge

Nick Etheridge joined the Department of External Affairs in 1967. He was posted to Canberra Australia in 1968-70, to ICSC Vietnam in 1972 and to ICCS South Vietnam in 1973. Subsequently he had a number of European assignments related to Canada's participation in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, was Canada's representative in Cambodia in 1993, Chargé d' Affaires in the Baltic Countries 1993-5 and High Commissioner to Bangladesh 1996-9. He retired in 2002 after being Director of Defence Relations Division at headquarters. He is a co-editor of this project.

Leslie James

Leslie James joined the Department of External Affairs in 1965. Posted in Kuala Lumpur twice, Hanoi (ICSC), Jakarta, Bonn, Seoul, Delhi and Wellington, in Ottawa he was Indo-china Desk Officer 1970-73 and Deputy Director of S.E. Asia Division. He was Canadian Exchange Officer in Canberra 1987-8. Awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal, he retired in 2003.

Brendan Kelly

Brendan Kelly is the head of the Historical Section at Global Affairs Canada and a Senior Fellow at the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History at the University of Toronto. His biography of the Canadian diplomat Marcel Cadieux, *The Good Fight: Marcel Cadieux and Canadian Diplomacy* (UBC Press), was awarded the 2020 J.W. Dafoe Book Prize for the best book on Canada, Canadians, and/or Canada's place in the world. His research on Canada and the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam has been published in the *Canadian Historical Review*. He is the former Book Reviews Editor of *International Journal*, Canada's leading journal of global policy analysis.

Helen Lansdowne

Helen Lansdowne is the Associate Director of the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives (CAPI), at the University of Victoria. She specializes in issues of development and gender in South-east Asia and rural China state-society relations. Helen was instrumental in helping to administer seminal justice system development work in the emerging economies of Vietnam and Cambodia in the early 2000s, and, in addition to overseeing CAPI's overall operations and administration, helped to establish and run the centre's highly regarded international student internship program for outgoing Canadian students as well as the centre's incoming cultural exchange and training programs, undertaken by thousands of visiting students and hundreds of cross-sector professionals from across Asia. Helen teaches Gender Studies in the Department of Social Sciences at Camosun College is co-editor of numerous academic volumes, many derived from international CAPI conferences and helped found CAPI's online, open access journal *Migration, Mobility, & Displacement*.

Gabriel-M Lessard

Gabriel-M Lessard est entré au ministère des affaires étrangères en 1972. Il a servi à Vietnam ICCS, Sénégal, Côte d'Ivoire et la Suisse. De 1977 à 1980 il était en congé du gouvernement et travaillait pour Alcan à Aix-en-Provence à titre de responsable des relations avec les gouvernements d'Afrique et du Moyen Orient. Entre 1995-98 il était Ambassadeur en Éthiopie, et entre 1998-2005 il était à Ottawa à titre de directeur des Affaires de la Francophonie et plus tard directeur exécutif adjoint et directeur des Enjeux mondiaux au Secrétariat de l'évaluation du renseignement. Il a été ambassadeur au Vietnam en 2005, et a pris sa retraite en 2009.

Ian McLean

Ian McLean joined the Department of External Affairs in 1968. He was posted to Vietnam ICSC, Permanent Mission to the UN and to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Geneva, France twice (second time as Deputy Head of Mission in Paris) and Italy (Consul General in Milan). His last assignment in Ottawa was as Director General, Canada-USA Relations Bureau. He retired in 2004, and continues in his role as a Board Member of the Juno Beach Centre, Canada's memorial museum in Normandy.

Manfred von Nostitz

Manfred von Nostitz joined the Department of External Affairs in 1967. After working in the Far East Division at headquarters he was posted to ICSC Vietnam in 1968-70 and subsequently to ICCS Can Tho in South Vietnam 1973. He had postings in Austria, Thailand and the USA (Washington DC) and was later High Commissioner in Malaysia and to Brunei (1984-88) Ambassador to Pakistan and Afghanistan (1988-92), and Ambassador to Thailand (1994-7). In Ottawa headquarters he held several senior posts including Director of South and Southeast Asia Division, Director General International Organizations, and Director General Security and Intelligence. He retired from the Department in 1997 and has since worked in the private sector.

Alan Sullivan

Alan Sullivan joined the Department of External Affairs in 1964. He was subsequently posted to the ICSC Vietnam 1965, Trinidad, the Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva, Lebanon and the United Kingdom; as Ambassador to Ireland, Austria, and Italy; and as Consul General in New York. His Ottawa assignments included the post of Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet for Foreign Affairs and Defence in the Privy Council Office, and as Assistant Deputy Minister for Personnel. From 1995-9 he was President of the Canadian Institute for International Affairs in Toronto. He retired in 1999.

James (Si) Taylor

James Taylor joined the Department of External Affairs in 1953 and was subsequently posted to ICSC Vietnam (Hanoi 1955-6), India, France, and as Ambassador to NATO Brussels and later Japan, as well as being appointed to senior positions in Ottawa. In 1985 he was appointed Under-Secretary of State (Deputy Minister) for External Affairs. He retired in 1993 from his final posting as Ambassador to Japan.



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