

Canada's Chief Delegate in Saigon

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Michel Gauvin

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By JAY WALZ

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OTTAWA, Feb. 7—In the anxious weeks before the Vietnam cease-fire the Canadian Government hesitated about taking a supervisory role that everyone knew would be long and troublesome.

"But there was never any question about picking Michel Gauvin to head any truce team sent in," said one of the Canadian diplomat's superiors. In fact Mr. Gauvin, who is 53 years old and the Ambassador in Athens, was asked several months ago if he would head a Canadian peace mission if one was organized. "He didn't hesitate a minute," A. E. Ritchie, Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, told a correspondent.

From Athens it was reported that when Mr. Gauvin was directed to depart for home within 24 hours, he left behind a harassed secretary canceling dinners and other engagements. He has not hesitated since.

Arriving in Saigon with his 130-man military team at 3 A.M., Mr. Gauvin was dismayed on being told that a get-together of the truce commission due to be held at 8 A.M. had in fact not been arranged. Despite weariness after the 30-hour flight from Montreal, he would not rest until he had invited his colleagues from Hungary, Indonesia and Poland to meet him at 10 A.M.

The First Chairman

At this initial session of the International Commission of Control and Supervision, Mr. Gauvin noted signs of reluctance among his colleagues to take the chairmanship, so he took it himself on a temporary basis (he was later named the first formal chairman on a rotating basis). He has been the spokesman not only for the Control Commission but often for the Four-Party Joint Military Commission,



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to which the Control Commission reports.

Though Mr. Gauvin is an experienced career man, it is said that he is seldom bound by protocol. Although he is a wartime army major, he is described as never impressed by brass.

In Vietnam Mr. Gauvin, a French Canadian, has the advantage of being volubly persuasive in both English and French.

His Gallic temper often erupts into a quick flash explosion, but then he reasons," an associate said. "He can argue with the Americans in English and with the North Vietnamese in French, and standing between them can act as interpreter. It may help in speeding things up."

Mr. Gauvin's reputation as a troubleshooter began, appropriately, in Indochina in 1955, when he was one of the first political advisers to the Canadian team on the International Control Commission established by the Geneva conference of 1954.

As leader of the Canadian section of the United Nations mission to the Congo during the 1964 Stanleyville crisis, Mr. Gauvin, according to Mr. Ritchie, demonstrated

"cool-headedness and political sensitivity, attracting the respect of both civilians and the military."

Michel Gauvin (the name is pronounced go-VANN, to rhyme with Gauguin) was born on April 7, 1919, in Quebec City, attended French grade schools and was graduated in economics and politics from Laval University in 1940. Almost immediately he joined the Canadian Army, which sent him to Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany and awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross.

In the years since, diplomatic friends in Athens, Ankara, Lisbon and Addis Ababa have known him as a good golfer, an avid hunter, an enthusiastic horseman, a good sailor—he has a five-ton yacht—and "a not always good bridge player." The father of two teen-agers, he is divorced.

A Tie Despite the Heat

A short, rather stocky man with wavy, sandy hair, he wears dark suits and ties despite the tropical climate. According to newsmen in Saigon, his dress to some degree reflects his approach: serious, somewhat tense, a bit gruff and reserved.

On the other hand, they say, he seems more alert, more energetic, more "take charge" than the members of the other delegations, and he has been accessible to the press. As a result he has assumed a far more public role than anyone else in the peace-keeping machinery.

His manner and his assumption of a public role, it is felt in Saigon, have given him considerable clout in the deliberations.

During a rare tour in Ottawa several years ago, Mr. Gauvin's yen for involvement with people led him to join a French-speaking little-theater group. A former member, asked if he was a good actor, replied: "Oh, he was never an actor at all. Michel just got people together, stirred them up and got the show on the road."