

Pragmatic Envoy to Cambodia

John Gunther Dean

By JAMES F. CLARITY

When John Gunther Dean took the Foreign Service entrance examinations in 1956 at the age of 30, his associates in Washington were puzzled. They asked why Mr. Dean, with several years' experience as a Government economist and the possibility of lateral entry into the Foreign Service, chose to take the tests as an aspiring college graduate would.

"So you can never say I got in by the back door," was the answer given by Mr. Dean, who was confirmed by the Senate yesterday to be Ambassador to Cambodia.

The 48-year-old diplomat, a 6-footer with a receding hairline, who smokes a pipe and has a quick, friendly manner, is said by friends to have been chosen over a number of officials, including a former ambassador who had State Department tenure before the young economist made his front-door entrance.

Stiffening the Waverers

Mr. Dean is getting his first ambassadorship, his friends say, because he is perceptive and pragmatic and had the luck to be what all diplomats would like to be—the right person in the right place at the right time.

He was chargé d'affaires at the United States Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, last August when a group of rightist military officers tried to overthrow the royal Government—at that moment in a crucial stage of negotiating the beginning of a coalition agreement with the Communist-led Pathet Lao.

According to his friends in Vientiane, Mr. Dean jumped out of bed on the morning of the attempted coup and drove to the home of the Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, a likely target for the rightist insurgents. Mr. Dean took the Prince to the



Perceptive—and lucky

embassy residence and had a heavy military guard placed on the grounds. Then he rushed around Vientiane telling Government politicians and military officers who might waver that the United States, often accused of supporting rightist uprisings, did not support this one.

As quoted by his friends, Mr. Dean told the Laotian officials that the United States would halt aid if the takeover was successful. It failed at least partly because of Mr. Dean's activities. President Nixon wrote him a letter thanking him for his morning's work.

Before leaving Laos for the hearings on his nomination, in Washington, Mr. Dean told friends that he had no naive expectations of working wonders in Cambodia, still in the throes of an apparently stalemated war. He is quoted as saying of Phnom Penh that "there is no one from the other side to talk to." Still, he is an acquaintance, although not a friend, of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the exiled Cambodian leader, who claims control of insurgent policy from his exile in Peking.

The new Ambassador was born on Feb. 24, 1926,

in Breslau, then part of Prussia, to a Roman Catholic businessman named Dienstfertig and a Jewish woman. Leaving Nazi Germany and changing his name in 1939, he became a United States States citizen in 1944 while serving as an Army lieutenant in Europe. He was graduated magna cum laude from Harvard in 1947 and received a master's degree there in 1950 after a year of study at the University of Paris.

In Togo and Mali

After several years as an economist with Government agencies eventually absorbed by the Agency for International Development, Mr. Dean, having passed his Foreign Service examinations and taken a pay cut, held posts in Togo and Mali, in the African and European bureaus of the State Department in Washington and with the American delegation to the United Nations.

He worked at the embassy in Laos between 1956 and 1959, moving to Paris in 1965. There, he was one of the diplomats involved in a famous footnote to history—the selection of the conference table whose shape had to satisfy the participants in the talks that eventually led to the Indochina cease-fire agreement.

After a tour in South Vietnam Mr. Dean became deputy chief of the mission in Laos in 1972 and was chargé d'affaires from April to September, 1973, while the ambassadorship was vacant.

Mr. Dean, who can discuss protocol and policy in terms of Cartesian logic or in earthy vernacular and in fluent French and German as well as unaccented English, is married to the former Martine Duphénieux, and they have three teen-age children.

In his spare time he plays tennis and cards and is, according to friends, a bridge player skilled in the tactic of the finesse.