

# 'A Man of the Middle Road'

## Laos Peacemaker Heads for Cambodian Post

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Washington Post Foreign Service

VIENTIANE—John Gunther Dean, 48, America's new ambassador to Cambodia, goes there from a post in Laos where he has practiced successfully a sometimes flamboyant, intensely personal style of diplomacy.

He is credited by associates with having put together the February, 1973, cease-fire in Laos, and the subsequent protocol agreement that helped bring peace to Laos where a coalition government is expected to be formed under Prince Souvanna Phouma, an old friend of Dean's.

"I am a man of compromise, of the middle road," says Dean. "I am not a dove. I do believe that negotiations are the way to resolve differences."

Dean's Laos cease-fire maneuverings took place while he was deputy Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, who carried on America's secret war there with an enthusiasm that later killed his chances at Senate confirmation for a higher post.

"Mac made the war and John made the peace," said one diplomat. "It was just a matter of two separate functions."

When a military coup threatened the cease-fire in August, Dean drove to the Vientiane airport and confronted the putschist generals, shouting "I pay your damn salaries" and threatening to cut off U.S. aid if they continued.

Then he drove to Pathet Lao headquarters and assured the Communists that the United States did not support the coup. The coup failed.

Dean has been confirmed by the Senate and is expected to leave Washington this week for Phnom Penh.

He concedes that making peace in Cambodia may be immensely more difficult than it was in Laos. War rages in Cambodia now, and there is no central figure like Souvanna to draw the warring factions together.

Dean gave a glimpse of his style at a recent going-away party in Vientiane when he huddled with Souvanna in the corner of a crowded veranda.

Expansive and animated, Dean the counselor and confidant dispensed advice, wisdom, praise and jokes in rapid, perfect French as the aging prince puffed on his cigar, and listened with apparent pleasure, declaring overoptimistically at one point, "I will have the new government by the time you get to Cambodia."

A man of medium height with receding black hair, clear hazel eyes and a quiet but resonant voice, Dean was born in the Prussian industrial center of Breslau in 1926, the son of a wealthy Jewish corporation lawyer. His mother: beautiful, Austrian, gentle, 20 years younger than his father, an international socialite, herself from a background of wealth and privilege.

It was a world that Dean says he remembers only dimly now: a world of culture and elegance, of private governesses and tutors and first-class excursions to Rome, Paris, London, of skiing trips to the Swiss Alps, chandeliers and Meissen china, dark paneled rooms hung with originals of the great masters, and of deep-carpeted libraries where his father, a scholarly man, would sit for hours puffing his cigars and reading Virgil and Cicero in Latin.

"In my youth, I always traveled first-class," Dean said. You didn't ask questions. You lived a certain kind of life, you lived well. I had a certain amount of comfort at all times. I never really suffered very much."

When the darkness of Nazi Germany began to close in around the family, they moved to the United States.

The family got aboard the Queen Mary in London and sailed to New York first class, fancy-dress balls and black-tie dinners all the way. Then they took a train to Kansas City, where an uncle lived. They moved into half of a duplex in a nice neighborhood. John Dean recalls it was hot in Kansas City. He recalls the man who lived in the other part of the duplex used to sit on the porch and spit tobacco juice in the afternoon.

"The great heartland, the Midwest, where people accepted me, made me one of



JOHN G. DEAN  
... "man of compromise"

them," said Dean. "It was an instant pressure cooker—high school, honor roll, going out on dates. You know, the whole shebang. I grew up as any other American kid did in the Middle West before Pearl Harbor . . ."

When he was 16, Dean went to Harvard, where he studied politics and economics. It was the beginning of a long academic career that would land him undergraduate and masters degrees from Harvard, and a string of degrees in art, literature, international law and other subjects from various universities in Paris.

But after his first two years at Harvard, he broke his studies to join the U.S. Army as a private and was sent to Germany where he helped sneak the families of German scientists out of the Soviet zone.

Through all of this, and the beginnings of the diplomatic career that he began in 1950 as an economist with a forerunner of the Agency for International Development, Dean was haunted by a fear that he would be discriminated against as an alien, and then later, as a foreign-born American. He became a citizen in 1944.

"I think the main theme of my entire life is I've adopted myself to any situation that's come along. If I had to be tough, I was tough. If I had to make peace, I made peace. This is partially a certain amount of discipline. I will adjust to

the situation. I could live in France and speak like a Frenchman, for example. I could go almost anywhere and adjust to the situation."

Dean's father had an enormous impact on his life.

"He was an extremely kind man, a humanist, very much so. I think I learned from him a very balanced approach to life. We maintained a correspondence while I was at Harvard. Lord Chesterton or somebody had a correspondence with his son, so we decided we'd do it.

"Each letter would start off with a Latin or Greek or French quotation. I told him my impressions of Harvard. He would discuss my exams, and give advice, always in a kind way. I think the most important feature of his letters was that people matter, people and human suffering. This was something that he cared about, and something that I also care about.

"He cared about rich people, poor people. He would take a case for a poor person free of charge 50 years ago when this wasn't done that often. A great sense of humanity, warmth were the dominant traits of the man."

"And he did something that people don't do today. He was interested in art, the sciences, languages, the classics. Today people are much more interested in one field, but he kept up with the various disciplines. He felt this sort of cross-fertilization would make a more balanced person."

Dean's career took him into the State Department at the bottom rung. He served in Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia, the United Nations, Washington.

As first secretary of the Paris embassy in 1967, Dean worked tirelessly in, as he likes to put it, "The patient search for establishing contact with the other side."

His principal contact was through Etienne Manach, then head of Asian affairs in the French Foreign Ministry and now France's ambassador in Peking.

Hanoi's first serious peace-feeler was relayed through Manach late in Jan-

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uary of 1967 in a meeting with Dean and the late Robert F. Kennedy nearly a year before the peace talks started.

Dean then spent a year as a fellow at Harvard's Center for International Affairs, where he found the students "very idealistic" but where he was also "repulsed by the extremists."

"During that year there was the incursion into Cambodia and I saw the campus go up in flames. If anything I'm a man of moderation, a

man of the middle. Extremists of the left or the right personally don't appeal to me."

From 1970 to late 1972, Dean was in South Vietnam as director of pacification in Military Region I, the northern part of the country.

Now, he said "I've started reading books on Cambodian history, I've got to know what happened in the past. How did the Khmers ever get there, what's the social background, how are they different from the Lao? How did the great influence of the king ever get established there?"

If there is a solution for Cambodia, Dean warns, it won't come in a neat package.

"The Lao solution, for example, is certainly not a logical solution, not a tidy or legalistic one," he said. "We Americans have a legalistic tradition, and these people don't have it quite the same way. Hence you find the documents signed here (in Vientiane) can be internally inconsistent. You could have Roscoe Pound or someone look at these things and he'd have a fit, and yet in this part of the world this is probably what may work."