

It was my view that a personal, on-the-spot visit to the Commission and direct conversations with political leaders in Saigon and Hanoi would greatly assist me in making informed and responsible recommendations to Cabinet. It was also my view that this visit would assist members of the opposition parties to make their own judgments about an important area of Canadian foreign policy.... The visit also afforded us an opportunity to form impressions about the Canadian role in Laos, where we have been asked to expand our participation in a reactivated Commission -- this is, the old Commission in which we are still present.

My invitation was not accepted by the Conservative Party but I was very glad to have with me parliamentarians from the other parties in the House and from the Senate.

With this group, a number of official advisers and 34 journalists, we set off from Ottawa a week ago Tuesday on a journey of 22,000 miles.

...Our first major stop was Tokyo. I was anxious to discuss Vietnam with my Japanese colleague, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Ohira, particularly as I felt the Japanese absence from the Paris Conference deprived those meetings of important and influential counsel. On arrival at Tokyo I was agreeably surprised to learn that the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Tanaka, also wished to see me....Both the Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister urged Canada to remain on the Commission despite the frustrations which they acknowledged. Their message was essentially "don't disturb the arrangements by withdrawal -- peace is too fragile". This was to be the prelude of advice which was consistently given to me by almost every political leader with whom I spoke during our visit.

In Saigon, I met with President Thieu, with the Prime Minister, and with my counterpart the Foreign Minister. I had a thorough briefing by the Canadian delegation to the International Control Commission and you may recall from your readings of the newspapers that there was a famous reception in Saigon given by Ambassador Gauvin, which was described as a diplomatic coup. It was, I believe, the first time that all of the parties to the agreement, including the principal representatives of the Viet Cong and of North Vietnam and the four ICCS representatives, had all come together under one roof in Saigon. And it really was quite a memorable occasion....

Saturday morning we flew to the regional headquarters of our International Control Commission at Can-Tho. Can-Tho is in the key Mekong Delta area, just south of Saigon. It was long and bitterly fought over as the rice bowl of Indochina. This was a fascinating and illuminating experience. We received an excellent briefing from Canada's External Affairs and military representatives and had discussions with members of the Joint Military Commission, as well as with the Polish, Indonesian and Hungarian members of the Commission.

The land in the Mekong area is still hotly contested. Indeed, the news of the last day or so has indicated how hotly contested it is because the confrontation that is now taking place at about division level is in the Mekong Delta area and indicates how crucial this area is to the struggle now going on. The Delta is quilted with leopard spots. You see, as I was saying,