

Travelling northward over seemingly endless jungles and rice paddies we arrived at Vientiane, the capital of Laos and the headquarters of the third Commission we were to visit in Indochina. Here we spent three days talking with the leading political figures and members of the Commission, and seeing something of the city and its environs. During our visit, negotiations were in progress between the Royal Government under Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and the dissident Pathet Lao, under his half-brother, Prince Souvannavong. During our first night in Vientiane I was able to have frank discussions with the leaders of the two delegations about the negotiations then going on and the general prospects in Laos.

During our visit to Laos I decided it would be useful to see one of the Commission's teams in action in the field in order better to understand the operations of the military components of these three international bodies. Accordingly, early one Friday morning in November I took off with the Canadian Military Adviser in Laos in a small single-engine plane for Muong Peun, some seventy miles north in the mountains beyond Vientiane. After a hectic flight into perhaps the most forbidding mountain and jungle territory I have ever seen, we visited the International Supervisory Commission Team at Muong Peun, which is in a salient held by Royal Government forces in Sam Neua, a province largely controlled by the Communist-dominated Pathet Lao movement. There are Indian, Canadian and Polish members on this team and their job is to ensure the separation of the forces of the two sides. Their presence is a deterrent to direct military action. This particular military concentration is in as primitive a place as I have ever seen. I was impressed with the orderliness and good humour of our officers who, in view of their location and surroundings, can have very little in the way of comforts of civilization.

Throughout the three countries of Indochina I was able to discuss the Colombo Plan activities which Canada has sponsored, and in Vietnam I talked to the Minister who would be representing his country at the Colombo Plan Conference in Wellington at a later stage in our journey. While Canada has not undertaken any large-scale projects in Indochina under the Colombo Plan as it has on the Indian sub-continent, we have nevertheless been able to provide a useful degree of aid under the Technical Assistance Programme, particularly to the Vietnamese, and to a lesser extent to the Cambodians and Laotians, in fields where we are particularly equipped to do so. Further projects are, of course, being considered as new opportunities develop for us to assist these people. Canada has an added advantage in undertaking this sort of work in Indochina, in that French is the main European language used, and trainees coming to Canada under the Technical Assistance Programme are able to receive instruction in the Province of Quebec.

Thailand, Indonesia and Australia

From Laos we travelled to Bangkok, the large and crowded capital of Thailand, for a brief visit. The fact that we arrived there on a Buddhist holiday necessarily limited the scope of our visit but, with the assistance of the British Ambassador, we were able to have talks with the Minister of Health and the Acting Foreign Minister. The main centre of interest in Bangkok is the Palace after which the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh seems to be modelled. The one in Bangkok includes about eight or nine pagodas, demonstrating the interest in and strength of Buddhism in Thailand.