

42. The Commission had decided by majority vote that some Royal troops existed in the two northern provinces before and at the time of the Cease Fire of 6th August, 1954, although it was not possible to find out either their precise strength or position. The fact is that before the Cease-Fire, the military situation in these two areas was extremely fluid and that neither of the High Commands knew precisely where their men were, and if they did know, they were not prepared to disclose the details. After the Commission's pronouncement that the Royal forces did, in fact, exist in the northern provinces prior to 6th August, 1954, it was claimed by the 'Pathet Lao' that they had no right to be there and that they should, therefore withdraw. The Commission decided that in the face of these two conflicting interpretations of the Geneva Agreement, there was no possibility of either the Commission agreeing on a common interpretation or both the Parties accepting it. Yet the incidents and clashes continued and it was obvious that if they were to be prevented, some solution, without affecting the legal claims and liabilities of the Parties, had to be found. Various solutions were examined by the Commission, but it became increasingly evident that, without both sides agreeing to such a solution, no effective work could be done or the declaration by the Parties made on 9th March, 1955, implemented.

43. Accordingly, the Commission called upon both the Parties to send their military delegations to Vientiane and open talks with a view to arriving at a solution which would ensure that military incidents did not take place. After considerable delay and hesitation, the delegations met in Vientiane on 27th June and the talks were opened. The Military Committee of the Commission had been charged with the working out of different solutions for the consideration of the Parties and they were asked by the Commission to assist the Parties informally at each stage and keep the Commission informed of developments. These talks are still continuing, and although some progress has been made, the eventual solution is not yet in sight.

40. On the other hand, the Royal Government claimed that the true significance of Article 14 was that the 'Pathet Lao' were to restrict themselves in the re-
government zones in the two provinces with a connecting corridor, and that this did not mean that the Royal Government had forfeited their right of free movement in these two provinces. In this interpretation the Royal Government claimed that the only significance of Article 14 was that the 'Pathet Lao' were given limited rights in the two provinces and in the corridor and had no right of movement in the other provinces. At the same time, the Royal Government, being a sovereign authority, had unrestricted right to move forces anywhere in the territory of Laos.

41. With such a situation, it was inevitable that opposing forces frequently found themselves against each other and clashes took place. It is true that Article 13 had prescribed that each force should respect the territory under the military control of the other, but since no demarcation had taken place, it was impossible to decide which territory belonged to whom. There was also the additional difficulty of defining the words "territories under the military control".