

6. Both Parties continued to report violations of the cease-fire agreement to the Commission. Owing to irregular availability of helicopters at that time, which restricted the movement of teams, conclusive investigations into all these complaints could not be carried out. The Pathet Lao Liaison Officers apparently did not have adequate authority and this fact also contributed to the difficulties of investigation. However, one investigation was completed during November in the area of Ban Nakeng, a post south east of Muong Peun. This investigation showed that Ban Nakeng had first been occupied by the Laotian National Army on 1 June 1955 and that the Pathet Lao unsuccessfully attacked it during September and October 1955.

SITUATION AT HOUEI THAO

7. During the period July to October 1955, the situation in Houei Thao caused serious concern. The main reason was that the only water-points available for Laotian National Army troops lay outside the limits of territory held by the Laotian National Army. Clashes occurred when Laotian National Army troops attempted to draw water from these points. The Laotian National Army alleged that the Pathet Lao had laid mines around water points as a result of which several casualties were suffered by the Laotian National Army troops when drawing water. There was considerable exchange of fire between both the Parties in which mortars and small arms were used. The safety of the subteam at Houei Thao was in danger. To restore calm, a conference was held at Sam Neua on 13 October, 1955 under the auspices of the fixed team there and attended by representatives of both the Parties. An agreement (Annexure 17) was reached and cease-fire was ordered in Houei Thao area effective from 18 October, 1955.

8. The Sam Neua agreement had a salutary effect on the situation at Houei Thao though minor complaints of its violation continued to be received from both sides. The Laotian National Army complained that the firing and mining was directed against water parties, while the Pathet Lao complained of firing and violation of the Sam Neua agreement by the Laotian National Army. The Commission ordered investigation into these incidents and found that both sides had violated the Sam Neua agreement. The Commission issued fresh exhortations to both the Parties to implement this agreement fully.

9. In spite of this the exchange of fire continued and the Laotian National Army water parties came under fire on two or three occasions. During the exchange of fire between the two parties the Commission team was subjected to great difficulties and inconveniences and there was considerable danger from mortar and small arm fire. This was caused by the fact that the team at Houei Thao is situated in the middle of the Laotian National Army positions. On five occasions during the period 1 December, 1955 to 16 January, 1956, the members of the team carrying the Commission's flag came under fire from the posts and areas held by the Pathet Lao. The last incident was of a serious nature and the Commission remonstrated with the Pathet Lao about these occurrences. The Pathet Lao replied "that our soldiers have never fired at the International Commission....., that the Houei Thao sector is a place where the limits are not quite precise, that the armed groups of the Royal Government