

pying the area in question. It cannot but have an effect on the future operations of the ICCS in the deployment of its teams and its investigatory capacities, and as a result, on the attitude of the Canadian Government toward continued participation on the Commission.

#### Events leading to tragedy

The International Commission is still attempting to carry out a detailed investigation of the incident, and until it is completed, not all details will be known. In the meantime, however, Mr. Speaker, I wish to provide the House with the following information, as we have it to date, on events leading up to Saturday's tragedy, what we know of the incident itself, and what has passed since.

Under Article 4(d) of the Protocol on international supervision, attached to the 1973 Paris agreement, Lao Bao is a specifically designated team site of the ICCS. According to the agreement, the Lao Bao team was to have been in place and operational within at least 30 days after the agreement was signed. However, for a variety of reasons, it was not until March 17 that the first helicopter reconnaissance visit took place to Lao Bao, *via* Quang Tri and Gio Linh. For this visit the necessary assurances of safety were received from the Vietnamese parties involved and the Viet Cong provided liaison officials to accompany the ICCS team. A second reconnaissance visit was planned for April 5, to see if the Lao Bao facilities were ready for ICCS occupation, but it was abandoned when the Viet Cong liaison personnel were prevented by officials of the Republic of Vietnam at Quang Tri from boarding the helicopter.

This reconnaissance flight was rescheduled for April 7; on the morning of April 7, at Quang Tri, with clearances and safety guarantees for the flight received from both the South Vietnamese and Viet Cong authorities, the crew of ICCS helicopters numbers 006 and 115 were carefully briefed by Captain Parent on the exact routing designated by the Viet Cong as being safe for travel to Lao Bao. The two helicopters left Quang Tri at nine o'clock in the morning on April 7 for Gio Linh, where two Viet Cong liaison personnel boarded helicopter 006 and

a third boarded helicopter 115. The helicopters departed at 11.15 a.m. and proceeded along the route designated by the Viet Cong, from Gio Linh to Dong Ha, and from Dong Ha toward Lao Bao following Highway 9 at a pre-arranged altitude of 1,000 meters within the corridor two kilometers either side of Highway 9. At ten minutes before noon, helicopter 115 reported that it was in its final approach to Lao Bao. Approximately three minutes later the ICCS team in Quang Tri received a transmission from the helicopters to the effect that one was receiving ground fire and that the other helicopter had been hit by a missile and was going down. Canadian personnel aboard the surviving helicopter confirm that their helicopter was fired upon at this time. They report that it took evasive action and landed in a hamlet on Highway 9, from where they walked to the crash site of the other helicopter, about two kilometers away. There is therefore no reason to believe that either helicopter was outside the flight corridor at the time of the incident, and the weather conditions were excellent. The helicopter which landed safely was fired upon with small-arms after it was on the ground, where its ICCS markings could not have been mistaken. The PRG authorities in Quang Tri have issued their own account of what they call "the incident". They claim that the two helicopters were at least 25 kilometers, that is about 15 miles, away from the approved flight corridor when helicopter number 006 was shot down. The statement maintains that they had been this far off course for 40 minutes.

Within minutes, the Commission's regional headquarters at Hue were informed of the radio distress report and were told that there had been subsequent loss of contact. Immediately, Canadian and other ICCS personnel began common efforts in Quang Tri and in Saigon to get information on what had happened, and most important, to launch a search-and-rescue mission.

#### Rescue request refused

All efforts were to no avail. At Quang Tri, about 40 miles away, Colonel McLeod, commander of Canadian forces in ICCS Region 1, contacted representatives of the Viet Cong, which claims to be the party in control of the area

of the incident, who were across the river from Quang Tri. During the course of the afternoon of April 7, he was three times refused permission to proceed by either land or air to Lao Bao. He was eventually informed early in the evening of April 7 that necessary arrangements for safe passage to Lao Bao could not be made. Later he was told that one helicopter had landed safely, but that the other had, and I quote, met with an accident unquote. The PRG, or Viet Cong, representative would give no information on casualties or on the condition of the personnel involved. In Saigon, while General McAlpine and his three colleagues on the Military Committee of the ICCS left for Hue to conduct the inquiry personally, similar attempts were being made to secure information from the PRG or Viet Cong delegation to the Two-Party Joint Military Commission. These efforts, which involved a three-hour meeting between the PRG representatives and the Indonesian Chairman acting on behalf of the Commission, also failed. The Viet Cong would not permit a proffered American search-and-rescue operation to proceed from Thailand as the Commission had requested, and they refused to provide liaison officers for any search organized by the ICCS, although helicopters were standing by. Nor would they give any information on the personnel involved. Almost 24 hours after the incident, the best that could be obtained from the Viet Cong was a letter to the Commission confirming that one helicopter had "met with an accident", and that the PRG was organizing its own search-and-rescue operation.

#### Report given at last

By this time General McAlpine had proceeded from Hue to Quang Tri with other members of the ICCS Military Committee where, on the morning of April 8, he met with the same PRG representative who had refused Colonel McLeod permission the day before to go to Lao Bao. The Viet Cong representative reported, at last, that all those aboard one helicopter had been killed in the quote accident unquote, but he still either could not or would not say which helicopter was involved. General McAlpine was also told that the Viet Cong were bringing out the dead and survivors to Gio Linh that