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Abstract

This paper will outline the setting up of the Military Component of the Canadian Delegation of the ICSC for Laos, 1954-55. It will examine the various problems and obstacles that Canadian military personnel met on the ground in Laos as they struggled to oversee the implementation of the Geneva Accords. The paper will rely primarily on the experiences of the Canadian commander of the Military Component in Laos, Brigadier R.E.A. Morton.

Brig.-General R.E.A. Morton and the Establishment of the Military Component Canadian Delegation of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos, 1954-55

By Andrew C. Young (Royal Military College of Canada)

It is difficult for those unfamiliar with its functions to judge the performance of an International Commission. One is prone to assume that in a Commission of three delegates a matter is discussed and carefully examined, in the light of reason and justice, an opinion formed and vote taken. Then the resulting action takes place. Unfortunately this is not so, as it has not occurred in Laos during the past year and it is important to understand the reason why our Delegation feels so often frustrated and their actions limited.

- Maj.-General R.E.A. Morton

Laos, 1955

The Poles refused to see what the Canadians saw.

This paper will examine the activities of the Military Component Canadian Delegation (M.C.C.D.) of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos, 1954-55. It will do this through the reports of the Senior Military Advisor to the Canadian Delegation in Laos, Brig.-General (later breveted to Maj.-Gen.) R.E.A. Morton.

By examining the papers of Brig.- General Morton a clear picture emerges of the great difficulties faced by the military inspection teams in carrying out the terms of the Geneva Agreements of July 1954 concerning Laos.ⁱⁱ The Pathet Lao side will be shown, through its actions on the ground, to be using the Geneva Agreements as a cover to better position themselves for a renewal of the civil war in Laos. The Pathet Lao=s allies in thwarting the inspections of the International Commission were the Poles. There were six documents that were promulgated at Geneva in 1954 that ostensibly brought peace to Laos; they will be referred to as the Geneva Agreements in this paper.ⁱⁱⁱ

R.E.A. Morton

Ronald Edward Alfred Morton was born in Toronto on Dec. 12, 1900. His grandfather was Colonel W.D. Otter and this military heritage in his family undoubtedly influenced Ronald and his elder brother (Geoffrey) in their decision to seek military careers.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

After graduating from Upper Canada College in Toronto Morton entered the Royal Military College of Canada in the fall of 1919 for the three-year course. He found the hazing rituals by the senior cadets to be excessive and he vowed never to tyrannize over his own subordinates in the future.

In 1923, on leaving RMC, Morton was offered a commission in Lord Strathcona=s Horse in Winnipeg. Finding his stride as an excellent polo player and all around good horseman he thrived in the open social atmosphere of the Canadian West in the 1920s. He played polo matches throughout Manitoba and even went south of the border occasionally, to play U.S. Army teams.

In the interwar years there was little money for new equipment or training. Both the

Permanent Force and the Non Permanent Active Militia often spent their own personal money to provide funds for training. For Captain Morton his best opportunity for training came in 1930 when he left Canada for a two-year secondment to the 4th / 7th Dragoon Guards in England.

During Morton=s time with the Dragoon Guards he took as many courses on modern warfare as he was able to jam into his busy schedule. In Morton=s second year he was transferred to the 11th Hussars who had just converted from horses to armoured cars. This exposure to a mechanized unit made Morton one of the few Canadian officers to have experience in this field prior to the commencement of the Second World War.

In 1932 Morton returned to the Strathcona=s and then was sent to National Defence Headquarters. At NDHQ he was assigned the duty of administering the Army relief camps that had been set up across the country during the Great Depression. It was a burdensome and unrewarding job. In 1934 Morton married Sylvia Fink; they had a daughter and son in the next two years.

After marriage Morton returned to the Strathcona=s unit in Calgary. He spent a great deal of his time traveling across the Prairies to train PF and NPAM officers and NCOs. Training took place wherever space could be found and often in primitive conditions. When war broke out Morton was the senior captain in all of the Permanent Force; but he was soon to be given the opportunity to show the leadership qualities that he possessed. In September 1939 he was serving as a staff officer on the H.Q. of Military District 13 in Edmonton. He quickly started organizing recruiting in the district for the Canadian Army Active Service Force.

In the winter of 1939-40 Morton was promoted to Major and given command of the Strathcona contingent of the newly created 1st Armoured Cavalry Regiment for the 1st Division. Training centred around the Ontario town of Listowel. There was little modern equipment to begin training with however. Originally the unit trained with CCM bicycles! Being unable to ride a bicycle himself Major Morton secretly received instruction in riding one from his wife before showing the troops how to properly handle the newly issued >machines=.

After a couple of intermediate assignments Morton became the commanding officer of the 10th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Fort Gary Horse). As commander of the 10th Cdn. Arm. Regiment Morton showed his strengths as a trainer of men and as a fair but tough leader. Morton led the regiment in the D-Day landings on Juno beach and through much heavy fighting in Normandy; Carpiquet Airdrome and the battles south of Caen. On three separate occasions Morton=s own Sherman was hit by enemy fire and disabled; he was able to continue in command each time but did receive permanent damage to his hearing during the course of the Normandy fighting.

Morton was promoted at the end of August 1944 and worked as GSO 1 at the headquarters of 1st Canadian Army. Near the end of the war he became the commander of the

Canadian Armoured Corps= Reinforcement Unit. After V.E. Day this unit became the 4th Canadian Repatriation Unit.

In 1946 Morton came home to Canada; reverting back to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He became commandant of Camp Borden in Ontario. At the end of the year he was given command of M.D. 12, comprising the Saskatchewan area. In 1949 he was promoted to Brigadier- General and was then despatched to Prairie Command, taking over from his brother Maj.-Gen. Geoff Morton.

In 1950 Brigadier Morton took command of over 5,000 troops, airmen and sailors in an effort to halt the disastrous flood in Manitoba that threatened to submerge the city of Winnipeg. He was successful in saving the city but a lot of the province suffered severe flood damage. In 1952 Morton became a student at the National Defence College in Kingston; this training stood him in good stead when he was sent to Asia later in the year.

Morton became Canada=s military attache in Japan and as such he headed the Canadian Military Mission, Far East from 26 Aug. 1952 to 31 Oct. 1954.^[vi] Although officially >in-charge= of the Mission until 31 Oct. 1954, Morton, in fact, had left this post at the end of July 1954 to work with the International Commissions being set up in Indo-China to oversee the implementation of the Geneva Agreements.

New Delhi Conference

On 25 July 1954 the CGS, Canadian Army, sent a confidential message to Brig. Morton directing him to proceed immediately to New Delhi on temporary assignment.^[vi] Morton was to act as the senior military adviser to the Canadian Delegation at the conference. Canada had accepted an invitation by the co-chairs of the Geneva Conference (Britain and the Soviet Union) to participate in the Truce Supervisory Commissions that were going to be put in place in the three nations of Indo-China. Morton was directed to represent the Chiefs of Staff at the New Delhi conference to ascertain the military requirements of the truce supervisory commissions that were to be established in the three nations of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam following the French withdrawal.

This initial message from Ottawa^[vii] directed Morton to proceed to New Delhi for a planning conference to start on Sunday Aug. 1st, 1954. The Canadian Delegation was to consist of the Canadian High Commissioner to India - Escott Reid, Air Commodore Rutledge from Ottawa and R.M. Macdonnell of External Affairs. After the conference Morton was to send estimates of the military requirements for the commissions to the CGS. He was then to proceed to Saigon to assist R.M. Macdonnell in setting up the commissions in Indo-China. Morton was also informed that AAs and when permanent military advisers to the Truce Commission are decided, you will be released for return to Tokyo.^[viii] In fact Brig. Morton was to remain in

Indo-China for over a year; this was to be his last assignment before retiring from the army.

A follow up message two days later to Morton from the CGS gave him an outline of the parameters of the mission.^[viii] The main points of which were that the Department of External Affairs was in charge of the Truce Commissions in Indo-China and that the role of the Department of National Defence is to support the Department of External Affairs by providing military advisers and military personnel for supervising teams.^[ix] It was stipulated that the only link the Canadian military personnel were to have with National Defence was in order to request equipment and additional personnel - operational issues were not to be discussed. In effect, although the bulk of Canadians serving in Indo-China were going to be Canadian Army personnel, they were de facto >on loan= to the Department of External Affairs.

A series of meetings were then held in New Delhi between the representatives of India, Canada and Poland (the three nations selected at the Geneva Conference to serve on the International Supervisory Commissions). These meetings ran from Aug. 1 through Aug. 6, 1954.^[x] The purpose of these meetings was to determine the structure and operational guidelines for the three commissions to be set up in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. At this point in time it was assumed by all that the elections called for in the Geneva Agreements for Vietnam would unite the country into one whole. It was decided by all the delegations that India should be the chair of all three International Commissions being established.

Even at the New Delhi Conference potential problems were foreseen and discussed about the mandate that the International Commissions (I.C.) were to be given.^[xi] Escott Reid drew up a memorandum for circulation amongst the members of the Canadian Delegation in which he raised several potential points of confusion, the most serious of which was that the words >control= and >supervision= are both used but the distinction is not clear.^[xii] Reid brought up the point that the I.C.s were not going to have the physical strength on the ground to >control= anything. Only agreement between the Communist forces on the one hand and the French Union forces on the other could bring about any positive action. All the I.C.s and their inspection teams could expect to accomplish was to facilitate understanding between the two parties and report on any breaches of the Geneva Agreements by either side.

Another issue that was to hamper the operations of all three commissions in the future was that of judicial impartiality. The Canadian delegation was instructed A...that Canada=s representatives on the three Commissions will reflect a Western outlook in their approach to the problems which the Commissions will have to solve, it is important that they should at all times do their utmost to maintain an attitude of judicial impartiality in the performance of their duties.^[xiii] The theory being that Canada would represent Western interests, Poland the communist viewpoint and India the neutralist stance.^[xiv]

Brig. Morton was to find the Poles prejudice in favour of the Pathet Lao=s position in Laos particularly damaging to the efficient operation of the inspection teams operating

throughout the countryside. Throughout the conference Morton had taken the lead in giving advice about the structure of the military inspection teams that were to be established and the types of officers and other ranks and their trade specialities that would be required. It was agreed that the Indians would provide the bulk of the security personnel and communications troops deployed to the three commissions. As Morton had been instructed by the CGS in Ottawa to keep the numbers of personnel as low as possible (due to manpower shortages in the Canadian Army) he found the Indians= willingness to shoulder these roles a plus.

On the other hand there was no logistical or transport support provided to the inspection teams by the three countries on the Commissions. These supports were to be provided by either the French Union forces or the communist forces, depending on who controlled the territory that the inspection teams were operating in at the time. Relying on these sources for logistical support was to prove to be a severe handicap in the operation of the inspection teams.

Phnom Penh

Early on Saturday morning, August 6th, 1954, all three delegations departed India by plane for Indo-China. The cease-fire was to come into effect by August 11th in all three Indo-Chinese states and the International Commissions were supposed to be up and running by then. Of course only a token representation would be available on the ground but the delegations were determined that some people would be in place by the 11th of August.

On Aug. 7th Brig. Morton and other Canadian Delegation members arrived in Phnom Penh; there they were cheered by crowds who thought that their arrival signified the end of the war in Cambodia. They were greeted and dined by Prince Sihanouk. Due to a shortage of senior foreign service officers Morton was left behind in Phnom Penh to fill the role of acting commissioner of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Cambodia. It was imperative that the I.C. be set up in the next few days and he was the only available senior Canadian at hand in Cambodia. Thus he began his one year >accidental= tour of duty in Indo-China.^[xvi]

Morton remarked on his first few days in Cambodia that Alt was here that I first learnt that feeling of frustration, which was to appear quite often later. @^[xvii] Communications with either Hanoi or Ottawa were impossible to establish during Morton=s brief time in Phnom Penh. He was operating entirely under his own discretion. After a couple of weeks Morton was relieved and was flown to Saigon and then up to Hanoi for further assignments.

Hanoi

Morton arrived in Hanoi via Saigon towards the end of August after hitching a ride on a Curtis Commando aircraft. Brig. Morton=s work in Hanoi was mainly concerned with preparing

for the arrival of Canadian personnel. In Hanoi Morton continued his practice (begun in Cambodia) of personally visiting the proposed team sites for an inspection tour. He noted what was lacking at the sites and made every effort to have them corrected before personnel were despatched there. He also endeavored to bring along his Indian and Polish counterparts on these inspection tours. Morton was evidently the active factor when it came to practical military matters on the International Commission, a characteristic he was to continue in Laos.

Morton was also gaining a more practical idea of what the requirements for the fixed and mobile teams were to be and just what types of troops the Indians were prepared to commit to the mission. This knowledge made it easier for him to revise his estimates of the requirements for Canadian Army personnel needed in Indo-China to the CGS in Ottawa. Morton also worked out a wastage figure of 10% for the personnel deployed in all three countries. This figure was not based on any hard facts but just his best guess based on his decades of service as a soldier. In fact, the 10% figure proved to be Aremarkably accurate. @

Already the International Commissions were all well behind schedule in having a functioning and effective organization on the ground in late August AWe knew that few of the team sites in any of the states would be ready for occupation and it appeared unlikely that sufficient Polish officers would have arrived to make up teams. @[lxvii](#)

Morton also made the flight several times below the provisional demarcation line in Vietnam to Saigon to check on the situation in >South= Vietnam. Originally meant only as a line of control, pending all-Vietnam elections that were to take place under the terms of the Geneva Agreements, it developed into an international border between North and South Vietnam. Brig. Morton found that where the French were responsible they were making reasonable efforts to improve the sites for the inspection teams. On the other hand, where the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.N.) was responsible little or no progress had been made. [lxviii](#) Morton chalked up this lack of effort on the part of the D.R.V.N to lack of administrative experience; but the Viet Minh had just won a war, hadn=t they? In August 1954 Morton was still optimistic that the International Commissions could be made to operate effectively; a view that was to change with hard experience.

The Indian Air Force was very energetic at this stage in flying in personnel to Hanoi. The Indians complained to Morton of the small number of Canadians available as well as the total absence of any Polish officers. Everyone was wondering what had become of the Poles, they were rumored to be somewhere in Siberia making their way towards China on the trans-Siberian Railway.

On September 3, 1954 General Megill relieved Morton from his post in Hanoi. Brig.-General Morton was given the brevet rank of Major General and sent to Laos to act as the senior military adviser to the Canadian Delegation of the ICSC Laos. [lxix](#)

Vientiane

Vientiane, the capital of Laos, was also to be the seat of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos. Maj.-General Morton flew to Vientiane and on September 9, 1954 he took up his post as senior military adviser to the Canadian Delegation. In Laos Morton was to find that the major physical factors hampering the operations of the I.C. in the country were the mountainous terrain and the monsoon climate (peak rains came in Apr.-Sep.). He was to find the political obstacles to the proper functioning of the I.C. much more troublesome than the rains, however. In early November the Canadian delegation flew up to Luang Prabang to present their credentials to the King. ^[xx]

ICSC Laos

Flying from Hanoi to Vientiane on Sep. 9, 1954 Morton observed the rough terrain of northern Laos, which borders China and >North= Vietnam. This was the base area of the Pathet Lao (PL) communist guerrillas. The Pathet Lao virtually controlled the whole of the northern Laotian provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua except for a few Laotian National Army (LNA) posts. Contrary to the Geneva Agreements, the PL forces in these areas were claiming the right to administer these provinces. The Geneva Agreements did not call for any partition of Laotian territory between the two rival forces however. This de facto partition of the country was to prove to be a major (and unsolvable) problem for the ICSC in Laos during its first year of operations.

Mr. Frank Ballachey, the acting Canadian Commissioner in Laos met Morton at the Vientiane airport. This airport was the most important one in the whole of Laos as it was able to operate in all weather conditions (including the monsoon season) and at night. ^[xxi] In September 1954 the French Air Force (F.A.F.) was still present in large numbers at this airfield. A daily courier flight by the F.A.F. linked Saigon - Phnom Penh - Vientiane - Hanoi. It provided the essential physical link between the commissions and allowed them to cooperate with each other when necessary. ^[xxii]

After some difficulties in arranging for the initial set-up of some of the inspection team sites eventually eight fixed teams were established in Laos; Savannakhet, Tchepone, Pakse, Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, Sam Neua, Luang Prabang and Phong Saly. ^[xxiii] Some of these fixed team sites did not become operational until 1955 however.

The Poles were very slow in getting their officers deployed to Indo-China. This meant that the I.C.s were slow in setting up teams. A team could not be established unless there was an equal representation of Poles, Indians and Canadians. Another problem facing the Canadian Delegation (indeed all delegations) was that of accommodation, it was in very short supply in Vientiane. The Indians were supplying the communications and administrative support to the Commissions and for that reason their troop strength on the ground was three to four times

that of the Poles or the Canadians.

The People=s Volunteers Viet Nam (P.V.V.N.) and the Pathet Lao were suppose to be concentrating their forces in the north of Laos before retiring across the border into >North= Vietnam or disbanding their units and returning to their villages. The International Commission was supposed to have supervised this action throughout October and November 1954 but owing to the inability to set up teams at that time this supervision did not take place. While the concentration of communist forces in the north certainly did take place, the disbandment of these forces did not. The two northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly remained in Pathet Lao hands; Morton wrote A...the trouble which was to plague us all year had begun in the two northern provinces of Laos. @ [\[xxiv\]](#)

The International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos was headed by a Secretary-General. This position was always to be filled by an Indian as India was the lead nation on all three of the International Commissions in Indo-China. India also provided the chairman for all lower level sub-divisions of the ICSC Laos, right down to the three man sub-team level. On the suggestion of Morton the functions of ICSC Laos were divided into two primary components - a military committee and a political committee. The political component was the executive head of the ICSC and the military component carried out inspections and verification work in the field. In each of the two components there would be equal representation of the Indian, Canadian and Polish delegations. The chief commissioners of each national delegation had ambassadorial status in all three countries; Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Although the Commissions could and did cooperate with each other they operated independently and made their own decisions -subjected of course to the internal and international politics that impacted all of their decisions.

ICSC Laos (1954-55)

Sec.-General (India)

Commissioner (Canada)

Commissioner (Poland)

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Military Committee

Senior Military Advisor (India)

Senior Military Advisor (Canada)

Political Committee

Political Advisor (India)

Political Advisor (Canada)

Senior Military Advisor (Poland)

Political Advisor (Poland)

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Fixed Teams - Sub-Teams (from fixed teams for field inspections)

(1) Savannakhet

(2) Tchepone

(3) Pakse

(4) Xieng Khouang

(5) Sam Neua

(6) Luang Prabang

(7) Phong Saly

(8) Vientiane

* **Support Troops** (for communications and administration were provided by India)

***Logistics** (as per terms of the Geneva Agreements logistical support was to be provided by French Union Forces and / or Pathet Lao troops)

***Mobile Teams** (some Mobile Teams were set up initially but most were disbanded by 1955)

In addition to the International Commission there was also set up, in Laos, a Joint Commission. The Joint Commission was composed of the two warring sides in Laos (The French / Laotian Government Forces vs. the PL / PVVN). The Joint Commission was responsible for working out the details of implementing the terms of the Geneva Agreements. The International Commission was to supervise, verify and control the implementation of the Agreements by both sides. How the I.C. was suppose to control the activities of the two sides was not specified in the Geneva Agreements. In the beginning of the operation of the I.C. in Laos the French often spoke for the government side and the Vietnamese for the rebel side, even though these discussions concerned Laotian territory. Early in 1955, with the winding down of the French military presence, the Joint Commission was dissolved. After this the Laotians began to speak for themselves more on both sides of the ideological divide; although Morton and others suspected that the North Vietnamese were actually directing all Pathet Lao activity.

The Teams / Inspections

The Instruments of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos were its teams. Policy was decided by the International Commission at the political level - between the Commissioners or their delegates. The Military Committee directed the implementation of the International Commission's decisions, fulfilling its directives but not making the executive decisions itself.

The teams were made up of an equal number of representatives from the three nations, plus the necessary number of interpreters and an Indian Signal detachment. The Fixed Teams were established at a number of fixed points in Laos (see chart above) as stipulated in the Geneva Agreements. The Teams were designed to carry out investigations in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Agreements.

Although there were provisions made for mobile teams to be established and some did operate, all but one of the mobile teams were abolished by April 1955 due to lack of personnel and the resources to support them. Only the mobile team at Luang Prabang was kept in being after April 1955. In actual practice a fixed team would usually throw off a sub-team; composed of an Indian, a Canadian and a Polish Officer, plus support personnel. This sub-team would then proceed to carry out the investigation called for in the field. Due to the mountainous jungle terrain and the lack of adequate roads, the teams generally used helicopters to conduct investigations. Some investigations were carried out in the south using jeeps when weather conditions permitted (in the winter).

The Pathet Lao side were most interested that the teams should focus their attention in the south of Laos to investigate the flow of arms being provided by the departing French to the Royal Laotian Government (R.L.G.). The R.L.G. were most interested that the teams should focus their attention in the north of Laos where the Pathet Lao had control of two provinces. Disputes arose on the I.C. (between the Canadians and the Poles) over the direction the investigations should take - north or south. The Poles were ardent Pathet Lao supporters and did all they could on the Commission to support the communist side.

Although the I.C. was officially up and running on Aug. 11th, 1954 it was not until mid-October that all the fixed team sites were occupied; one site, Tchepone, was not occupied until May 1955. Morton puts the blame for this tardy start squarely on the Poles who were late in arriving in Laos. As a result of this slow start the I.C. was unable to monitor the concentration and supposed demobilization of the Pathet Lao and P.V.V.N. forces in the north of Laos.

It would be interesting to look at the types of complaints that the International Commission actually investigated during its first year of operations;

Until the P.V.V. and P.L. moved out of their concentration areas -

(a) Importation of arms by the P.V.V./P.L. from the D.R.V.N., made by the Royal Laotian Government;

(b) Forced recruitment into the F.U.P.L. (Fighting Units Pathet Lao) of their citizens, by the R.L.G.

(c) Stealing, intimidation and non-payment by P.V.V. and P.L. soldiers, made by the R.L.G.;

(d) Murdering and molestation of civilians by the P.V.V. / P.L., from the R.L.G.;

(e) Counter claims of various sorts from the P.V.V. / P.L., mostly in the South;

After the P.V.V. / P.L. left their concentration areas, until the present time -

(f) Forced recruitment of R.L.G. citizens by the P.V.V. / P.L., from the R.L.G.;

(g) Molestation, robbery, assault, slaughter of live stock and of murder, from both sides;

(h) Political suppression of P.L. sympathizers by the R.L.G. (generally in the south), from the P.L.;

(i) Seizure of arms caches in the South, placed there by the P.V.V. / P.L., from the R.L.G.;

(j) Shooting, ambushes, assaults and abduction, from both sides;

(k) The presence of Viet Minh (North Vietnamese) personnel, units, H.Q. and Depots in the north, from the R.L.G.;

(l) Illegal import, carriage and storage of armaments by the P.L., from the R.L.G.;

(m) The capture of a border village, its inhabitants and a platoon of the L.N.A. after a raid, from the R.L.G.;

(n) The surrounding and the prevention of L.N.A. (Laotian National Army) troops from securing water and fuel for the garrisons in their forts on account of P.L. military action, from R.L.G.;

(o) The illegal presence, movement and seizing of air fields and other territory belonging to them by the L.N.A. from the P.L.;

(p) The presence and movement in north Laos of Koumintang troops, from the P.L.;

(q) Attacks and threats thereof, seizures of places >belonging to= the other side, paradrops (by the L.N.A.) And reinforcing, both sides;

(r) The illegal flight over >P.L. territory= of a B26 bomber and photography and the killing of civilians therefrom, from the P.L.; and others. @^[xxviii]

In February 1955 the Joint Commission was abolished in Laos due to the drawdown of French forces in Laos. Up until that time the Joint Commission and its various sub-units had worked closely with the International Commission in carrying out its investigations and providing logistical support, especially from the French side.

Many problems faced the teams as they tried to carry out their inspection and verification duties. After the disbandment of the Joint Commission in Laos there arose the problem of a shortage of interpreters provided by the P.L. side. Without interpreters provided by both sides the I.C. was not permitted to carry out investigations. Many pending investigations were delayed for months by this P.L. delaying tactic. Morton attributed this to deliberate obstructionism on the part of the Pathet Lao.^[xxix] Morton saw that there were many investigations that the P.L. did not want to be carried out - by not supplying interpreters they could block investigations as and when they chose. After several months of this lack of cooperation by the Pathet Lao the Canadians finally got a resolution through the I.C. that investigations could proceed even if one side did not provide interpreters.

The P.L. quickly switched to other delaying tactics to hold up investigations they did not want to happen; such as refusing permission for a team to enter an area, saying the area was too dangerous for anyone to enter, referring the matter to higher authority but failing to respond to a request, all effective delaying tactics.

Beginning in May 1955 the Pathet Lao launched a low-intensity campaign to force out all of the remaining L.N.A. positions that remained in the province of Sam Neua. These positions were cut off, besieged and harassed by mortar and small arms fire; no direct assaults were attempted however. The government troops were offered safe passage back to R.L.G. controlled territory if they surrendered; several posts fell in this manner to Pathet Lao troops.

A sub-team out on an investigation was caught in a Houei Thou Fort and came under attack from Pathet Lao troops (along with its L.N.A. garrison). The Canadian Commissioner put in a strong protest over this matter to the I.C. and the resolution passed - eventually the P.L. ceased their siege of Houei Thou Fort and the sub-team was allowed to return to Sam Neua - unscathed.

The lack of adequate transportation (only four helicopters were available to the I.C. in

Laos) and the harsh climate, terrain and living conditions made the teams= work very difficult. What little infrastructure there was in Laos was destroyed in the late war. There was hardly a bridge standing in the entire Kingdom, all of the phone lines were cut outside the major towns and the roads were in a bad state of repair. [\[xxx\]](#)

Morton estimated that to effect real >control= over the Laotian borders he would need four mobile infantry divisions, widely dispersed. In fact he had, on average, under his direct command some 30-35 Canadian military personnel. [\[xxxii\]](#)

The Canadians

During Morton=s tenure as Senior Military Adviser Laos, from Sep. 1954 through Aug. 1955 he had seen 57 Canadian Army personnel arrive in Laos. On average there were 30 to 35 Canadian Army personnel serving in Laos on any given day. His figure of 10% wastage was remarkably accurate; while an External Affairs officer was killed in a road accident in the first year of the ICSC Laos, no Canadian military personnel lost their lives. Four soldiers were evacuated back to Canada on medical grounds and two more were evacuated for compassionate reasons. [\[xxxiii\]](#)

Maj.-General Morton always praises his own men in his inspection reports. He compares the Canadian officers with their Polish and Indian counterparts and the last two named do not compare favourably. Morton consistently finds that the Canadians on the teams are the natural leaders, they are keen to help themselves and are energetic in pursuing the directives of the International Commission.

The Indians

Morton wrote that the Canadians try to take a >neutral= view of complaints by either side in their deliberations but that the Indians take an even more neutral attitude. [\[xxxiiii\]](#) Morton believed that the Indian officers were leaning a bit too much on the Pathet Lao side in an unprincipled attempt to look neutral - regardless of the evidence presented to them of Pathet Lao wrongdoing. [\[xxxv\]](#) Morton also takes the Indians to task for being too anxious to maintain unanimity in the decisions of the International Commission. He thought the Indians wanted unanimity at any cost and this usually involved distorting the facts presented to the International Commission in order to appease the Poles.

Morton also found the level of professionalism amongst the Indian officers to be very mixed but this he attributed to their recent independence from British rule. His recommendation to his future successors was that they play up the commonalities between Canadians and Indians (English language, Commonwealth membership, common military heritage) in order to form a rough alliance with them against the Poles.

The Poles

If Maj.-General Morton was disappointed with his Indian colleagues' performance on the International Commission he reviled the Poles. Morton considered the Polish delegation to be virtually agents of the Pathet Lao. The Polish Delegation is, as we would expect, quite un-neutral in their opinions and actions. Almost invariably they offer ingenious excuses for the P.L. even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary and they argue them obstinately and with conviction. Their appointed task seems to be to maintain touch with the P.L. leaders so as to warn, advise and assist them. @[\[xxxv\]](#)

Morton felt that these activities by the Polish delegation damaged the prestige of the I.C. as an impartial body in the eyes of the French / R.L.G. side. He also felt it crippled the teams' effectiveness in the field having the Poles as part of an investigative team (at least when the team was investigating the Pathet Lao). Morton felt completely exasperated with the Poles and their tactics of delay as they sought to halt all investigations into complaints against the P.L. Confuse and delay - those were the tactics of the Poles. Morton probably would rather have had the Pathet Lao themselves on the I.C. rather than have to deal with the Polish officers.

The Pathet Lao / P.V.V.N.

Morton felt that the Pathet Lao and their Vietnamese allies the People's Volunteers Viet Nam (P.V.V.N. or P.V.V.) were the major obstacles to a stable peace in the Kingdom of Laos. The P.L. frustrated the work of the International Commission by delaying communications, by refusing entry of inspection teams into Pathet Lao controlled areas, by intimidation of teams, by withholding interpreters and other logistical support to the teams and by attacking posts occupied by the teams on several occasions.

Maj.-General Morton speculated on the reason for the P.L. intransigence. [\[xxxvi\]](#) He believed that the Pathet Lao movement was very weak in Laos and that its leaders were subverting the terms of the Geneva Agreements by refusing to disband their forces. In fact the P.L. were using the terms of the Geneva Agreements to regroup, rearm and reorganize in the north of Laos. The Pathet Lao were openly in the process of building up a base area from which to continue the war against the Royal Laotian Government; similar to what the Viet Minh had done in North Vietnam in the late war against the French.

Sam Neua

A brief description of an inspection visit by Maj.-General Morton to the town of Sam Neua on April 10-12, 1955 may serve to illustrate some of the conditions under which Canadians operated in Laos. Fighting between the L.N.A. and the Pathet Lao was fairly common in the immediate vicinity of the town. Muong Peun had changed hands a couple of times, Houei

Thao Fort was besieged by the P.L. and Nong Khang had also been attacked by the P.L.

The town was located in a wide valley with access to an airfield nearby. Most of the surrounding countryside was controlled by the Pathet Lao with a few isolated L.N.A. posts holding out. The town of Sam Neua itself was in the possession of the P.L. The fort of Houei Thao overlooked the valley of Sam Neua and was held by the L.N.A.

After meeting with all the Canadian team members Morton accompanied Maj. Busse on a walk a few kilometres along the valley floor. On returning Morton organized a church service for those who cared to attend. That evening the local P.L. Committee held a dinner for Morton and the new Indian Chairman at Sam Neua, Commander Mehta (Indian Navy)

The next day Morton took a helicopter ride up to the fort at Houei Thao; he was impressed with the morale of the Laotian defenders. On returning to Sam Neua Morton was interested to see the preparations of a sub-team that was preparing to leave on an investigation. Four sorties by helicopter were required to lift the personnel and their equipment to the investigation location; the first flight took the L.N.A. and P.L. liaison officers and interpreters plus baggage and rations, the second flight took two Indian Army Signals ORs with their equipment plus baggage and rations, the third flight took the Indian and Polish interpreters and the fourth flight took the last three team members plus baggage and rations. [\[xxviii\]](#) Taking in rations and baggage with each flight was a precautionary measure to ensure that the team members had supplies in case the helicopter was unable to return for several days (this happened on more than one occasion due to mechanical problems or inclement weather).

After lunch Morton went for another >inspection= walk. He was proceeding down a path when he was grabbed from behind by an armed Pathet Lao soldier. The soldier indicated that Morton could proceed no further; all this was of course in breach of the Geneva Agreements as the I.C. was to have free and unhindered access to all areas of the country. Morton prudently retraced his steps (he was alone and unarmed) back to the compound site.

On the 12th Morton departed Sam Neua airfield in an old Dragonfly aircraft - he was not sure it would actually get off the ground but it managed - just. The inspection tour was routine but it showed the care Morton was taking to ensure that his isolated soldiers in the field were being taken care of as well as circumstances would admit. He checked the conditions of their housing, food, recreation, religious services, personal safety and the operations of the sub-teams in the field. He personally walked or flew into as much of the surrounding area as he could in the space of two days. The only thing that he objected to was that he forbade any of the Canadian team members from attending any public function at which communist propaganda was being promulgated. As Sam Neua was held by the Pathet Lao this must have had the effect of severely limiting Canadian attendance at public activities.

Conclusion

Thus by examining the papers of the Canadian Senior Military Adviser for the ICSC in Laos, 1954-55, Maj.-General R.E.A. Morton, a clear picture has emerged of the deliberate sabotage of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 concerning Laos by the Pathet Lao side. Assisted by their allies, the Polish Delegation on the ICSC, the Pathet Lao continually refused to implement the major requirements of the Agreements, namely disbandment of all their military forces and the return of control of the two northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua to Royal Laotian Government control. Morton's reports reflect his realistic and pessimistic view that the operations of the International Commission were being crippled by the attitude of the Polish Delegation and the obstruction by the Pathet Lao side. As a soldier, not a politician, he left the conclusions to be drawn these facts to others.

Endnotes

[i]. *Indochina - Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Laos, July 20, 1954*

The Avalon Project : Yale Law School
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/intdip/indoch/inch004.htm> Site viewed Oct. 20, 2003.

[ii]. The 1954 Geneva Agreements on Laos consisted of the following six documents;

- (1) *Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Laos.*
- (2) *Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference.*
- (3) *Declaration by the Royal Government of Laos Concerning Article 3 of the Final Declaration.*
- (4) *Declaration by the Royal Government of Laos Concerning Articles 4 and 5 of the Final Declaration.*
- (5) *Declaration by the Government of the French Republic Concerning Article 10 of the Final Declaration.*
- (6) *Declaration by the Government of the French Republic Concerning Article 11 of the Final Declaration.*

[iii]. For the most part information concerning the biographical details of R.E.A. Morton=s life are taken from the biographical file *R.E.A. Morton*, Directorate of History, Department of National Defence, Canada.

[iv]. Lt.Col. Herbert Fairlie Wood. *Strange Battle-Ground : Official History of the Canadian Army in Korea*. Published by the Authority of the Minister of National Defence, Ottawa, 1966, p.277.

[v]. *Message from CANARMY to CANMILMIS 25 Jul 54*

File 4 : Formation of the International Truce Commission 1954

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[vi]. Ibid.

[vii]. Ibid.

[viii]. *Notes For Guidance Of Canadian Military Representatives - Indo China Truce Commission, 27 July, 1954*

File 4 : Formation of the International Truce Commission 1954

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[ix]. Ibid. p.1

[x]. *Indo-China Supervisory Commissions Preliminary Talks, New Delhi, August 1 p.3*

File 4 : Formation of the International Truce Commission 1954

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[xi]. *Memorandum : New Delhi Discussions on Indo China Supervisory Commissions*

E. Reid / July 30, 1954 p.1

File 4 : Formation of the International Truce Commission 1954

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xii\]](#). Ibid. p.1

[\[xiii\]](#). *Letter Of Instruction To Canadian Representatives To The New Delhi Meetings On Indo-China, Ottawa July 28, 1954* p.1

File 4 : Formation of the International Truce Commission 1954

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xiv\]](#). For the view that Canada eventually became the agent of the United States on the International Commissions see James Earys= 1983 work *In Defence of Canada : Indochina Roots Of Complicity*

[\[xv\]](#). *The Beginnings of the International Commission in Indo China* p.6

File 9 : Manuscript Account Of Experiences in Indo China, Including Publishers= Advice 1956-57

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xvi\]](#). Ibid. p.7

[\[xvii\]](#). Ibid. p.8

[\[xviii\]](#). Ibid. P.9

[\[xix\]](#). *Exclusive For Morton From V.C.G.S. Reference Allocation Military Advisers OPS 155*

379/WR/020340Z AUG 54

File 4 : Formation of the International Truce Commission 1954

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[xx]. *The Kingdom of Laos p. 11*

File 9 : Manuscript Account Of Experiences in Indo China, Including Publishers=
Advice 1956-57

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xxi\]](#). *The International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos p.3*

File 9 : Manuscript Account Of Experiences in Indo China, Including Publishers= Advice
1956-57

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xxii\]](#). Ibid. p.3

[\[xxiii\]](#). *Appendix G : Channels of Communication M.C.C.D. Laos*

File 6 : Annual Report of the Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xxiv\]](#). *The International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos p.4*

File 9 : Manuscript Account Of Experiences in Indo China, Including Publishers= Advice
1956-57

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xxv\]](#). *Annual Report Of The Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos : For The
Period Of 1st September, 1954 Until 31st August, 1955 Vientiane, Laos 15 Sep 55 p. 5*

File 6 : Annual Report of the Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xxvi\]](#). Ibid. p.5

[\[xxvii\]](#). *Remarks Upon The Political Aspect Of The Canadian Army=s Task In Laos* p.1

File 6 : Annual Report of the Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xxviii\]](#). The following list (a) to (r) is taken from

Annual Report Of The Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos : For The Period Of 1st September, 1954 Until 31st August, 1955 Vientiane, Laos 15 Sep 55 p. 6

File 6 : Annual Report of the Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

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[\[xxix\]](#). *Annual Report Of The Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos : For The Period Of 1st September, 1954 Until 31st August, 1955* Vientiane, Laos 15 Sep 55 p. 7

File 6 : Annual Report of the Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

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[\[xxx\]](#). *Report On Certain Strategic Aspects of Laos*

File 5 : Reports of the Senior Military Adviser, International Supervisory Commission,
Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[\[xxxii\]](#). *Annual Report Of The Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos : For The Period Of 1st September, 1954 Until 31st August, 1955* Vientiane, Laos 15 Sep 55 p. 8

File 6 : Annual Report of the Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

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[\[xxxiii\]](#). *Personnel Present During The Year, 1 Sep 1954 - 31 Aug 1955*

File 6 : Annual Report of the Military Component, Canadian Delegation, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

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[\[xxxiii\]](#). *Remarks Upon The Political Aspect Of The Canadian Army=s Task In Laos* p.1

File 5 : Reports of the Senior Military Adviser, International Supervisory Commission, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

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[\[xxxiv\]](#). Morton may be confusing the idea of *impartiality* with *neutrality*. For a thorough discussion of the difference between the two concepts see the article by Dominick Donald *Neutral is Not Enough : The Confusing Legacy Of Traditional Peace Operations Thinking* in *Armed Forces & Society* Vol.29 : No. 3 Spring 2003 pp. 415-448.

[\[xxxv\]](#). *Remarks Upon The Political Aspect Of The Canadian Army=s Task In Laos* p.2

File 5 : Reports of the Senior Military Adviser, International Supervisory Commission, Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31

National Archives of Canada

[xxxvi]. Ibid. p.3

[\[xxxvii\]](#). *Visit To The Fixed Team At Sam Neua* p.2

File 5 : Reports of the Senior Military Adviser, International Supervisory Commission,
Laos 1954-55

R.E.A. Morton fonds MG31 G31 National Archives of Canada