

Pathet Lao Says Troops Gain In Fight Against Coalition Foe

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VIENTIANE, Laos, April 22 (Reuters)—The pro-Communist Pathet Lao said today that its troops had forced soldiers of its partners in the Laotian coalition Government to give ground in fighting around a strategic road junction north of here.

Reporting this at a press conference here, a Pathet Lao spokesman declined to say, however, whether his side had won control of the Sala Phou Koun junction, 92 miles north of here, where fighting has continued for three days. He said the fighting would continue until the side withdrew its reinforcements from the area and halted bombing attacks.

The right-wing other side had said earlier that the Pathet Lao seized the junction on Route 13, the main road from Vientiane to the royal capital of Luang Prabang, and four other positions, including an airfield.

Biggest Fight Since Record

Forces of the two sides, which have equal representation in the Government here, were reportedly still locked in battle at dusk today—the most serious fighting since the coalition was formed two years ago.

The Pathet Lao official said at the press conference that right-wing elements had violated the 1973 peace agreement that ended nearly a decade of civil war in Laos.

The Vientiane side says it was the Pathet Lao that broke



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**Two sides have battled
for control of Sala Phou
Koun road junction.**

the cease-fire, and the Defense Minister, Sisoukna Champasak, has said the fighting had been joined by North Vietnamese troops. The Pathet Lao spokesman denied this charge today, terming it United States propaganda.

The disputed road junction, south of Luang Prabang, is the point where Route 13 meets Route 7, which runs from North Vietnam in the east across the disputed Plain of Jars.