

CHAPTER SIX

A Once-in-a-Thousand Years Event: The Spring General Offensive and Uprising

A people who know how to arise and take up arms and wage a life-or-death war to liberate themselves from the yoke of slavery must also know how to conclude the war in the most advantageous way. Under the wise leadership of the party, we had sacrificed and fought staunchly and had signed the Paris Agreement in hopes of ending the war in an atmosphere of national reconciliation and concord and end U.S. intervention with honor. But our enemies thought differently. They turned to an insidious plot intended to cause the war to "fade away" so that they could win complete victory. But in life, people who play with fire get burned. The United States was able to evaluate our fighting strength and courage, but it did not yet understand the cleverness and intelligence of the Vietnamese people, and thought that it could deceive us. If the legality of the agreement could not end the war, the only method would be the use of revolutionary violence. Our people were much in need of peace, but true peace that was tied in with freedom and national independence and was in accord with the conscience of mankind. With a strong sense of responsibility toward our people and the people of the world, the Political Bureau of the party Central Committee issued a resolution calling for the completion of the national democratic revolution throughout our nation and the eventual unification of the homeland during the 1975-1976 period. Implementing that resolution, the Political Bureau made a specific decision: to attack Ban Me Thuot and the Central Highlands, in order to create a favorable opportunity for the concluding phase of a fierce war that had lasted 30 years.

Two years had past since the Paris Agreement. But the sound of gunfire had not ended on any of the battlefields. Vietnamese blood continued to flow. The Americans and their vassals could return safely to their countries because we observed the agreement, while the Americans continued to carry out their strategy of "Vietnamizing the war" and not "bringing peace to Vietnam." That "2 years" figure had a double meaning. The Geneva Agreements decreed that after 2 years there would be general elections to unify our country, but the Americans and Diem tore the treaty to shreds before the ink had dried on it. During those 2 years the guns of Diem's army never fell silent, as it shot and killed patriots in the "denounce communists" and "kill communists" campaigns. But there was a fundamental difference between those two 2-year periods. After the Geneva Agreements our entire army had to regroup in the north, so in the south there was only the Diem army, which was free to fire on unarmed people. But after the Paris Agreement our army remained in place and its positions were interspersed with that of Thieu's army in the jungles-and-mountains, lowlands and urban areas. The enemy could not freely violate the agreement without being punished. None of their nefarious plots could escape the vigilant eyes of our people and our liberation armed forces. Throughout the 1973-1974 dry season, then the 1974 rainy season, then the 1974-1975 dry season, there was one violation after another and one punishing blow after another, and now the positions and strengths of the two sides had changed: we

were stronger than the enemy. The liberation of Phuoc Long Province was a blood-red milestone, so both we and the enemy could see it clearly. But although it could be seen, it was necessary to do something. Up to that time there was enough time to strictly implement the agreement and end the war, or so I thought. Both of our diplomatic delegations continued to "hold their ground," one in elegant Paris and the other at Tan Son Nhat, "a socialist concession in the middle of Saigon," as it was called by Western journalists. But time was passing, one day after another, and long after the gunfire stopped at Phuoc Long it had to resume at Ban Me Thuot. So it was all over: the truck was racing full speed down a steep incline and could not be stopped.

I thought of the Ban Me Thuot battle in that way: the truck had started its engine. Its effect could be compared to a fuse which would detonate the "fire-cracker" of the puppet army and regime, which had weakened seriously but were strangely still subjective and obstinate.

From the time I learned that the Political Bureau had ordered the attack on Ban Me Thuot I was certain that we would win a brilliant victory in that battle, for the forces we would use were many times superior to those of the enemy, both quantitatively and qualitatively. We would strike an unexpected lightning blow in their undefended rear. Most of the puppet troops there were stationed in the division and regiment rear-area bases. The enemy had concentrated their military forces in, and paid much attention to, the forward areas: Pleiku and Kontum. That defensive deployment of the enemy was based on their assumption that our main attack would be in Kontum, a view they continued to hold until the day Ban Me Thuot fell. And as stated above, like a tree that had been cut down at the base, after Ban Me Thuot fell there would be no way to hold on to the Central Highlands. If Thieu did not immediately order the evacuation of Pleiku and Kontum to obtain the troops to defend the coastal provinces, before long those two provinces would also be lost. Later, when the Central Highlands were lost, which led to the disintegration of the coastal provinces and to complete defeat, the United States hastily covered up the main reason for its painful defeat in the Vietnam war and in Indochina, which weakened and troubled the United States, by blaming Thieu for abandoning the Central Highlands on his own accord, without asking the opinion of the United States. A number of Western journalists echoed that U.S. propaganda argument, and even some of our cadres thought that that was the truth, for they did not clearly understand the campaign and strategic significance of the attack on Ban Me Thuot. The disastrous U.S.-puppet defeat was due to the unjust, antiprogressive, anticonscience of mankind aims of the barbarous war of aggression, manifested by a passive defensive strategy of keeping control of the population, setting up outposts and holding ground everywhere. Once the enemy had awakened and wanted to withdraw their forces to form an enclave in an important strategic area with rich population and material resources--the old Nam Bo area--it was too late. We had calculated our moves in advance so that the U.S.-puppets were no longer free to withdraw into an enclave, but were cut up into fragments and were subjected to attacks and uprisings all over at the same time, which disintegrated the puppets' entire 1-million-man army.

Comrade Le Duan had asked a strategic question, which I quoted above, "Attack to annihilate all or to disintegrate all?" To "attack to annihilate all" does not mean to annihilate the enemy to the last soldier and the last unit, but to strike one or a series of blows to annihilate the enemy's principal forces, for only then can we cause the enemy to lose all capability to resist and enable ourselves to win total victory. To "attack to disintegrate all" does not mean not striking a shattering blow to cause the rapid decline of the enemy, until they no longer have the will and capability to resist or counterattack, which leads to complete disintegration and complete defeat, even though they still have many troops and large quantities of weapons and equipment. The shattering blow does not necessarily have to annihilate the principal enemy troop concentrations, but annihilate a certain part of the enemy forces and take a number of strategically important localities, thus creating a decisive situation by causing the enemy to lose all of their morale and will to fight, become chaotic, and when subjected to repeated attacks and uprisings will disintegrate into large segments and then completely collapse. The policy and methods to be selected depend on each specific war and on the specific strategic phase. It may be said that that is an art in the conduct of war. That art is manifested specifically in the organization and division of the battlefield and organizing the deployment and use of combined forces, and the fighting method of coordinating the various kinds of forces and the localities in each period of time. That is the art of creating and developing to a high degree the combined strength of the nation and the strength of the era. It is the art of leading and guiding general offensives and uprisings in a revolutionary war and armed uprising waged by our party. When one understands those secrets one will understand that the U.S.-puppet defeat was in no way surprising or strange. Their destiny was determined by a solidly deployed strategic position which gradually put them onto a path which led to a grave that had already been dug. It definitely was not caused by any one erroneous decision by Thieu in the Central Highlands campaign or in any other previous or succeeding campaign. Both the United States and Thieu started the war, were subjective and obstinate, committed political and strategic mistakes, and were buried together in the pit of defeat, so they cannot blame each other. As for us, the wisdom of the party and its correct revolutionary objectives, strategic line, revolutionary struggle methods, and manner of concluding the war led our country along the glorious path of total victory.

When thinking about the Ban Me Thuot battle, the Central Highlands campaign and the development in South Vietnam as a whole after the Central Highlands campaign, especially the possible developments in the B2 theater, I was both enthusiastic and very anxious. I understood that the situation would develop very rapidly and that our theater would be profoundly influenced. The opportunity would be priceless, and would require us to take bold and prompt action. But we had so little time--it had been only a month since we returned to the base area from Hanoi--to disseminate the Political Bureau resolution and make all necessary preparations so that we could open fire on "D Day" with coordinated actions in all parts of the region, as ordered by the High Command.

Two days after returning home, on 3 February, I worked with the Regional Staff, rear-services, and political organs and with the 4th Corps to grasp our situation and that of the enemy in the military regions, and reviewed B2's plan for

the second phase of the dry season, in order to prepare for the meetings of COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission. Fortunately, B2's dry season plan was essentially on the right track. During the COSVN conference from 13-16 February, many specific problems were posed and discussed so that they could be resolved. In the process of approving B2's plan for the second phase of the dry season plan, the comrades in COSVN worried about the units that would put pressure on and attack Saigon from the south. They stressed the necessity of quickly stepping up our activities in the Cho Gao, Go Cong and southern Long An areas because our movement was not yet strong there and it was not yet assured that our armed forces could move up close to Saigon's 4th, 7th and 8th precincts. Another source of worry was the armed forces, especially the main-force units, in the theater, a key theater which was at that time still too weak. The additional forces we had requested from the central echelon had not yet arrived, and the strategic reserves were deployed too far away. In addition to the military plan, the conference stressed the necessity of immediately drafting plans for mass uprisings, to insure the use of the combined forces of the people and the armed forces, and to organize a unified command made up of comrades in the party committees, military units, governmental administrations, youth, women's and peasants associations, and military proselyting organs in each village, district and province, especially in Military Regions 8 and 9 in the Mekong Delta. That truly was a plan for a general offensive and uprising: it was necessary to insure that the villages could liberate villages, the districts could liberate districts, and the provinces could liberate provinces. The conference also discussed in detail the organization and work of the military management committees after the liberation of towns and cities. On the basis of the experience we had gained in solving problems in Phuoc Long City just after its liberation, such as organizing and insuring safety, caring for the lives of the people, insuring ordinary activities and production, punishing spies and saboteurs, etc., we would provide prompt guidance for the localities. Finally, the conference discussed measures for disseminating and explaining the Political Bureau resolution without exposing secrets. It was necessary to maintain military secrets and national secrets in all phases in order to insure success. Failing to carefully discuss measures to maintain secrecy, being found out before one could act, and everyone knowing about a decision just after it was made were reasons for failure and could not be forgiven. That was a difficult problem. The echelons and sectors had to thoroughly understand their missions, be inspired so that they could endeavor to win the greatest possible victory, and carry out plans as well as possible without letting the enemy know and make countermoves. Brother Bay Cuong emphasized emphatically that it was necessary to act without saying anything, or very little. We had to oppose exaggeration, revealing one's intentions before acting, and promising much but delivering little. It was necessary to resolutely:

--Say nothing about the completion of the democratic national revolution.

--Say nothing about the 1975-1976 2-year plan.

--Say nothing of the general offensive and general uprising.

--Say nothing about the new resolution; act as if there was only Resolution 21, the resolution of which the enemy was aware. Disseminate the work step-by-step, under tight control but promptly.

In accordance with the spirit and contents of that COSVN conference, we held a Regional Military Party Commission conference at the end of February to initiate all military tasks.

Before we began the second phase of the dry season in March, in accordance with the order of the High Command, the situation of the enemy forces in the B2 theater had undergone a number of changes. Most painful for the Americans and puppets was the fact that the pacification on which they had spent so much effort and money had been heavily defeated. The most evident defeat was in the Mekong Delta, which was highly populated and rich and which they hoped to make their final redoubt. After going all-out in January to carry out operations to retake land and relieve sieges along the border in Kien Tuong, in the Cho Gao area in My Tho, in the Thay Pho area in Tra Vinh, in the Thoi Binh area in Ca Mau, and in the Rach Gia-Ha Tien area but achieving no results, and indeed suffering losses in the lowlands, the enemy had to shift over to opposing our new offensive phase, which they expected before or after the lunar new year (about 10 February). In eastern Nam Bo they intended to concentrate troops and attempt to retake Phuoc Long City by means of their "Operation 271," but they were unsuccessful because since they were being attacked everywhere they could not put together sufficiently strong forces. They shifted the focus of their efforts on taking Mt. Ba Den, a position that was vital to them not only with regard to the defense of eastern Nam Bo and Saigon but also for the defense of Kampuchea and Phnom Penh (Lon Nol). Between 20-26 January the puppet III Corps, in the presence of a representative of GHQ, used forces of the Tay Ninh Sector and the 25th Division, with strong artillery support (an average of 6,000 rounds a day) and air support (84 sorties per day), launched an extremely vicious attack on the mountain. They used 29 helicopters to land many waves of troops to retake the position atop the mountain, but met fierce resistance and lost much manpower and many airplanes and helicopters. Ultimately the enemy had to accept defeat and withdraw to defend Tay Ninh.

The very significant victory of the battle to take the Mt. Ba Den position and the fighting to hold that position in the face of a fierce enemy counterattack was an extremely brilliant feat of arms of one of our small but elite units: the 47th Reconnaissance Battalion of the Regional Staff, reinforced by 2 sapper companies of the 429th Regiment, an antiaircraft machinegun unit, and a mortar unit, a total of 300 cadres and men. Clearly understanding the value of the battle, the Regional Command designated comrade Ba Tran, the regional deputy chief of staff, and comrades Son Bich and Chin Loc, commander and political officer of the intelligence branch, to approve the operational plan, and assigned comrade Huynh Long, deputy intelligence commander, and comrade Hai, commander of reconnaissance forces, to directly command the fighting. During the night of 3 December our units attacked the Mt. Ba Den position from three directions. To the southwest the main unit, led by comrade To and his deputy comrade Thang and with five enlisted men, penetrated to the center of the strongpoint and killed many of the enemy. But the enemy, aided by airplanes and helicopters, counterattacked and retook the position. Toan died

heroically. Under the guidance of the upper echelon, the unit changed over to laying siege to the position, cutting off all sources of supply and not allowing a single helicopter to land troops. The imperiled enemy troops had to withdraw at the end of December, but nearly all of them were killed or captured. Because it was an important strongpoint with modern equipment used to monitor a large area and with a communications station that relayed messages to battlefields in both Vietnam and Kampuchea, both the puppet GHQ and III Corps were determined to retake it by means of extremely fierce attacks. But our small reconnaissance-sapper unit defeated a combined enemy force dozens of times larger. That was a victory of both position and force, of cleverness, intelligence, courage and combat skill, will and determination, willingness to bear difficulties and hardships, and selfless sacrifice for the great undertaking of the people and the nation. In that sense, was the battle not a microcosm of our liberation war against the U.S. imperialists? Few defeated many, small defeated large, the benevolent defeated the uncouth and the brutal, and justice defeated perversion. The battle was even more valuable because it took place in the last phase of the war and rendered the enemy deaf and blind so that we could attack their final lair.

During that period, our intelligence reported that the enemy learned of our intentions for the 1975 dry season high point, from Tet to June 1965: we would concentrate on disrupting their pacification program, the focus of which was in the Mekong Delta; weaken the puppet army; force Thieu to resign; and achieve a political solution by forming a coalition government. Or perhaps we would launch a general offensive to take such cities as Quang Tri, Kontum, Tay Ninh, Long Khanh, Kien Tuong, and Chuong Thien. On 18 December, at the Presidential Palace, the puppet Ministry of National Defense reported on the military situation and predicted that:

--In Military Region 1 we would attack to force the withdrawal of the district seats near the mountain region, threaten the lowlands, shell the Da Nang air-base, and take Hue.

--In Military Region 2 we would seek to permanently cut routes 1, 19, 14 and 21, to isolate and attack Kontum and Pleiku Provinces.

--In Military Region 3 we would attack to take Tay Ninh City, force the abandonment of Chon Thanh, Phu Giao, and Tri Tam, and isolate Saigon by blocking routes 1, 4, 20 and 15.

Then it concluded that we would begin our spring-summer campaign in March 1975 to implement our key plan for 1975: strongly attacking the pacification program, winning control of additional land and people, and depleting their military potential. The other military regions would coordinate their activities. The "communists" had nearly completed their activities.

On all battlefields they strengthened their defenses and sent out reconnaissance troops to spy on and monitor our forces. They urgently restored the units that had recently suffered heavy losses or been wiped out. The enemy continually alerted the various echelons that we would attack during the lunar new year period, then announced that our attack would begin on 14 February,

then that it would begin on 20 February, etc. They paid special attention to Chuong Thien in western Nam Bo, Kien Tuong in central Nam Bo, and Tay Ninh, Hau Nghia, and Long Khanh in eastern Nam Bo. Most of the forces of the 25th Division were concentrated in the vicinity of Tay Ninh City. The entire 18th Division was sent to the area east of Saigon, around Xuan Loc. The airborne and ranger troops were sent to search the northern outskirts of Saigon.

In general, in late February and early March the enemy was certain that we would launch a dry season offensive and had a plan to counter it. But they still were not certain about the scale of the offensive and by what means we would carry it out, did not know when it would begin, and guessed wrong about the focus of our offensive. Meanwhile, the morale of their officers and men continued to weaken; they were very tense and did not believe that they were capable of coping with us. There was also disorder in the ranks of the puppet army and administration. Thieu and Khiem were at odds and Ky was eagerly awaiting an opportunity to carry out a coup d'etat and take power. The United States had to seek all ways to help Thieu and avoid a dangerous political upheaval. Martin, the U.S. ambassador, and Polgar, head of the U.S. CIA in Saigon, acting feverishly, stayed the hand of Ky, advised Khiem to suppress the opposition parties, protected Thieu, covered up for the Thieu regime in the United States, and came to grips with U.S. public opinion and the U.S. Congress.

In Saigon, the mass struggle movement became increasingly strong: there were demands for relief from hunger, the workers opposed layoffs, and "refugees" demanded rice. The women's movement demanding the right to live also struggled seethingly. Newspapermen protested the closing of five opposition newspapers and the arrest of dozens of journalists. There were demonstrations and fasts demanding the release of political prisoners, that Thieu resign, and that a government be formed to carry out the Paris Agreement.

After the loss of Phuoc Long and the Mt. Ba Den strongpoint, Tan Ninh Province was threatened and there were many rumors that we would liberate Tay Ninh so that it could become the capital of the PRG and the RSVN. The situation in that city was very chaotic. Some of the people, fearing that they would be killed in the fighting, fled to the countryside, to areas controlled by the revolution, or even to Saigon. The people living near the puppet military strongpoint left the area so that they would not be caught up in the fighting. The Cao Dai leaders, realizing that the puppet army could no longer protect them and the Holy See was in danger of being destroyed, declared their "neutrality" and encouraged the puppet regime to withdraw its military forces, including the civil guards, from the "holy ground," although they had long relied on those forces to oppose the liberation troops.

In An Giang, the Hoa Hoa sect organized its own armed forces to defend itself and to carry out its own political scheme once the Thieu regime collapsed. On 30 January 1975 Thieu issued a decree dissolving the Hoa Hoa militia, for he could not allow "an army within an army." Therefore there were clashes between the Hoa Hoa armed forces and the Thieu police in Sadec, Kien Phong and Long Xuyen. Thieu's bloody suppression resulted in many deaths and hundreds of Hoa Hoa militiamen were captured, including its leaders.

Thus by the beginning of the second phase of the 1974-1975 dry season, all over South Vietnam, and especially in the B2 theater, the puppet Thieu regime was faced with an extremely confused situation militarily, economically, politically and socially.

On the basis of the plan for the second phase of the dry season that had been approved by COSVN, the Regional Command assigned missions to and approved the plans of 4th Corps, the divisions and the military regions. Comrade Tam Phuong, i.e. Maj Gen Le Quoc San, commander of Military Region 8, personally accepted his mission. He was very enthusiastic and confident of being able to correctly implement the plan of both liberating the provinces in his military region by means of attacks and uprisings and fulfilling the important mission assigned him by the Regional Command: insuring the success of the theater as a whole, using his forces to participate in the all-out assault on Saigon from the south and on the main objective--the puppet national police headquarters--and taking and cutting strategic Route 4 in order to cut off the puppet capital from the south. He said to the Regional Command, "The soldiers and people of Military Region 8 have the great honor of being able to participate in the historic campaign to take Saigon, the final U.S.-puppet lair. Only after many years of war could we arrive at this glorious hour. On behalf of the armed forces of Military Region 8, I promise to carry out the plan that has been approved and win the greatest possible victory, in order to be worthy of the confidence of the upper echelon.

As for Military Region 9, although he had to travel a long way and overcome many difficulties, comrade Ba Hai, i.e., Maj Gen Pham Ngoc Hung, commander of the military region, also went to the Regional Command to personally accept his mission. He had taken the risk of traveling openly, but his trip was very meticulously organized. He promised to select the 1st Regiment, the strongest regiment in the military region, which along with the provincial 3d Regiment and the local militia forces, were liberating the strategically important Vinh Binh-Tra Vinh area, and cutting Route 4 and the Mang Thit River, if so ordered, to join the forces of Military Region 8 in attacking Saigon from the south. Although difficulties were involved in interdicting the Le Te airfield, he promised to go all-out to fulfill that mission in order to contribute to the common victory. Meanwhile, comrade Sau Hat, i.e. Senior Colonel Nguyen Trong Xuyen, commander of Military Region 6, was very worried about his difficult mission of liberating an area from Binh Tuy Province to Di Linh, Dalat and the coastal provinces in his military region, for in that military region we had many difficulties in all regards. The organized mass forces were not yet sufficiently strong and with regard to armed forces there were still very few local troops, there were not many guerrillas, and there was only one main-force unit: the 812th Regiment. His careful weighing of his strength in comparison to such a great mission was entirely appropriate to the sense of responsibility of a cadre with actual combat experience. On behalf of the Regional Command I analyzed the situation in the B2 theater as a whole and the advantageous factors in the present strategic phase that would create very great strength with which the military region could fulfill its mission. In coordination with the other forces, troops and people in the military region, the main-force 812th Regiment would make a worthy contribution and would win a big victory, as in other parts of the theater. He felt

more at ease and promised to make a maximum effort, but I sensed that he was still quite worried. Even so, I knew that he would fulfill his mission because he had confidence in the upper echelon and in the overall efforts of the theater as a whole in that important phase.

Senior Colonel Le Van Ngoc, commander of Military Region 7 and, comrade Dang Ngoc Si, deputy commander of the military region and commander of the 6th Division, were present at the Regional Command to accept their missions. They briefed us on the weakness of their understrength divisions and requested the Regional Command to urgently provide additional troops and equipment, but made a firm promise to overcome all difficulties in order to correctly implement the plan. The military region's most important mission was coordinating with the 812th Regiment of Military Region 6 in rapidly mopping up the enemy in the Tanh Linh and Vo Dac areas of Binh Tuy Province to create a convenient staging area from which the 4th Corps could attack Xuan Loc, Bien Hoa and Saigon, and cut Route 1 between Xuan Loc and Rung La in order to isolate Saigon from the coast of central Nam Bo, cut Route 15 between Saigon and Vung Tau, and join 4th Corps in attacking the enemy.

With regard to 4th Corps, it still consisted only of the 7th and 9th Divisions and its combat arms were still very weak. Initially, as requested by B2, the General Staff intended to send the 968th Division from the Central Highlands to reinforce 4th Corps, then decided to replace it with the 316th Division, but it could send neither. Finally, it decided to send the 341st Division, which was undergoing training in our Military Region 4. On 11 February I sent a message to the High Command recommending that the division be sent south urgently: "Recommend that brother Tran (i.e. the commander of the 341st Division) be sent south early. Only if half of it arrives by the first part of March can it arrive in time." We must assign in advance a number of cadres who are familiar with the battlefield and are combat experienced so that as soon as the unit arrives, they can reinforce it and provide urgent tactical training (the division had not had much actual combat experience). We also readied a technical reconnaissance unit consisting of experts and the light equipment and machinery needed for their work, to be turned over to the disposal of the division staff. In general, the 4th Corps was still understrength with regard to both infantry and combat arms. Even so, the operational plan assigned it by the Regional Command divided it into two areas of operation: Binh Long, Binh Duong and Tay Ninh, and Route 20, Long Khanh and Bien Hoa. Each of those two areas required a division from the corps, combined with the forces of Military Region 7 and the local provincial forces. The comrades in the Corps Command expressed their aspiration of being able to concentrate the entire corps in one area of operations so that it could have stronger combat strength with which to strike an annihilating blow in order to create a common transformation in the theater. We at the Regional Command had thought about and reflected upon many aspects of that problem. The principal reason we formed the corps was to use it in a concentrated manner so that it could have the strength to strike annihilating blows, in order to both win big victories and steel the units, so we were completely sympathetic with the worries and thoughts of the corps. But, regrettably, we were in a period in which there would be very rapid changes on the battlefield. The Ban Me Thuot battle was certain to create a strong transformation all over South Vietnam

and force the enemy troops on the eastern Nam Bo battlefield, which included Saigon, to urgently take up strong defensive positions. It was an area in which the enemy would react quickly and strong, with maximum effort, to save themselves. In order to defeat we had to know not only how to concentrate large strong forces, but also, and especially, to take steps and carry out schemes to disperse the enemy, deceive the enemy and prevent it from discerning our intentions, so that we could launch surprise attacks and win certain victories. We were already behind schedule in forming our corps. We had not yet received the additional forces we had requested to deploy in the various areas in accordance with a strategic-campaign position that provided for all contingencies, including sudden military and political developments. Therefore, we had to know how to deploy and use the forces we had on hand in the most effective way in order to win the greatest, most timely victories. The B2 theater had the enormous responsibility of insuring that the final, decisive attack on Saigon was launched at the right time and won a certain victory. If it was to fulfill that responsibility it was necessary to create at an early date favorable conditions for deploying forces; to move up close to and tightly encircle Saigon; to create staging areas from which to launch attacks from the various directions; to be prepared for all contingencies; and to be able to act immediately once the opportunity arose and the order was given. If we had to start thinking about a plan for an offensive against and an uprising in Saigon during the rainy season of 1974 in order to draft a plan for the 1974-1975 dry season, now it was even more important that we be prepared to carry out that offensive and uprising. Although the corps was still under-strength, it was made up of elite divisions which were very familiar with the battlefield and of experienced cadres, and it was the main force available to the Regional Command. Therefore, we had to make very careful calculations when using it, so that it could be used very properly from both a campaign and strategic point of view, and in accordance with the extremely important current phase. On the eastern Nam Bo theater, if at that time we had concentrated in one area the enemy would have concentrated their forces in the same area and fiercely opposed us. We had to flexibly maintain the initiative so that we would not be caught up in a tug of war between ourselves and the enemy. If we were to strike effective manpower-annihilating blows we had to attack the key points and draw in the enemy in order to annihilate them, but the enemy would defend those key places to the end. Therefore, the Regional Command decided to use the corps in two different areas to expand the staging areas north, northwest and east of Saigon, and launching surprise attacks on and annihilating the enemy in places very advantageous to us without having to clash with the enemy in places vitally important to them, while at the same time deploying our forces so that they could launch an offensive when necessary. Our forces were small but would become strong and would win one victory after another.

Another important focal point of the B2 theater's activities was to annihilate the enemy and expand the liberated area in western Tay Ninh and in the Ben Cau-Queo Be area in order to create a staging area for the attack on Saigon from the west and for blockading Saigon from the southwest and cutting it off from the Mekong Delta. Therefore, the Regional Command decided to use the 5th and 3d Divisions in those areas. Later, in order to insure the success of the attack from the west--a very difficult but very important direction--the Regional Command decided to form Group 232--corresponding to a corps--to unify

the command of both divisions, the local forces, and the subordinate combat arms. Comrade Nam Nga, a diligent and brave cadre who had high regard for justice and who had gained much experience in commanding main-force units during the anti-French resistance war in southernmost Central Vietnam, had personally commanded the fighting in Binh Tuy during the first phase of the dry season and had been on the staff of the Regional Command for years, was appointed Group Commander. His political officer was comrade Tam Tran, i.e. Maj Gen Tran Van Phac, and his deputy commander was Maj Gen Nguyen Van Nghiem.

With regard to the sappers and commandos in the Saigon area, in order to achieve unified, close command in the various directions the Regional Command decided to set up commands for each of them. Those north of Saigon were commanded by comrade Muoi Co, i.e., Nguyen Thanh Tung and comrade Nguyen Van Tang, an Army Hero; those to the southwest were commanded by comrades Nguyen Van May and Guyen Van Hat; and those to the east were commanded by comrades Tong Viet Duong and Le Ba Uoc.

D Day of the second phase of the 1974-1975 dry season campaign--in fact the beginning of the general offensive and general uprising all over South Vietnam--had been set by the High Command: "The night of 9 March and the early morning of 10 March 1975." That day had arrived. In coordination with the B2 theater, from the mountains and jungles of Military Region 6 to the Mekong Delta and the area around the capital, and the main-force troops, local troops, militiamen, and guerrillas, enthusiastically rushed forward together to annihilate the enemy. The entire B2 theater simultaneously arose and attacked! Except in a few areas in which we encountered initial difficulties, our attack slowed down, and our victories were limited, such as in the Hau Giang area of Military Region 9, and in Ben Tre Province (Military Region 8), our attacks went well and everything went according to plan. We were winning a resounding victory.

In the Saigon area the forces of the municipal unit and the sappers, by launching absolutely secret surprise attacks, and insuring their victories without harming the theater as a whole, were authorized to open fire during the night of 8 March and the early morning of 9 March. A large number of enemy outposts, in the directions that had to be cleared for the movement of our forces and for activities the sappers and commandos were about to carry out, were wiped out. The civilian self-defense forces, which became demoralized after they were attacked and were educated by the people, largely disintegrated during that period. The enemy's control in many areas in the outskirts of the city was weakened. Outstanding victories were won in the taking of a number of enemy outposts around Hoc Mon on Route 8 and in the Rach Tra area, which were important to the enemy defenses north of Tan Son Nhat airbase and Saigon. In Binh Chanh, the headquarters of the 86th Ranger Battalion at Tan Tuc suffered heavy losses. At Thu Duc, about 40 percent of the enemy's Sicona chemicals depot was destroyed. On 20 March the Quyet Thang Battalion, in cooperation with the local troops and guerrillas, wiped out an escorted 51-truck convoy taking ammunition to Cu Chi along Route 1, and wiped out or inflicted heavy losses on four enemy companies sent to relieve the convoy.

In the Mekong Delta the 4th Division of Military Region 9, along with the local forces and guerrillas, liberated Kinh Xang, O Mon, and Thi Doi, moved up close to Thoi Lai and Kinh Xang Xano, wiped out or forced the withdrawal of many outposts, and liberated a number of villages. In Vinh Tra the 1st and 2d Regiments cooperating closely with the on-the-spot forces, surrounded the Thay Pho strategic zone, wiped out the outposts on the Vinh Xuan road, wiped out two enemy battalions sent as reinforcements, forced the enemy in that strategic zone to flee, inflicted heavy losses on the Cai Nhum and Cai Von subsectors, cut Route 4, and essentially mastered the Mang Thit River. In Long An, beginning on 9 March the 1st Provincial Battalion annihilated an RF Battalion in Ben Luc District. The 8th Division of Military Region 8, which began its second-phase activities on 11 March, wiped out the Nga Sau base, an important position in the Cai Be area, bordering the Dong Thap Muoi region, in My Tho Province. The enemy used the 10th Regiment of their 7th Division to carry out a fierce counterattack to retake that position on 14 March, but we wiped out two battalions and the remainder of a third battalion was wiped out when we retook the base.. Many other posts in Cai Be and Cai Lay Districts were wiped out or forced to withdraw. Meanwhile, between 11-14 March, the 3d and 5th Divisions, annihilated enemy troops and completely liberated the Ben Cau, Moc Bai, An Thanh, and Tra Cao areas. By 20 March they had overrun the enemy position at Queo Be in Duc Hue District, extended our corridor in western Tay Ninh Province down to the Dong Thap Muoi area, and mastered a broad strip along the western bank of the Van Co Dong River in Tay Ninh and Long An Provinces, just as planned. That was the famous "Parrot's Beak" area which the Americans had greatly feared, for they regarded it as a vital staging area from the "Viet Cong" could threaten Saigon from the west. They launched many operations in that area, and dropped many bombs and laid many minefields in trying to transform that area into a killing zone. Especially, in 1970, U.S. and puppet troops passed through that area and penetrated deeply into Kampuchea, thus beginning the period in which the Vietnam war was expanded into the Indochina war. Now that "Parrot's Beak" area had been cleared of enemy troops, had been expanded eastward to the Van Co Dong River and southward to near the Van Co Tay River, it had become a staging area for us that was much more solid than in the past. When Queo Ba was threatened during the 1974 dry season the puppet III Corps urgently sent six task forces to sweep and defend that area at the same time. Now that their position and strength had weakened, the puppets viewed the enemy's staging area, which had been extended closer to Saigon from the west, as being many times more dangerous than in the past.

Thus less than a month into the second phase our soldiers and people in the Mekong Delta had attained notable accomplishments and were continuing enthusiastically and effectively to disrupt pacification, win control of the population, and win the right of mastery. In eastern Nam Bo, on the western bank of the Saigon River, on 11 March the 16th Regiment wiped out the Suoi Dong Hung position and on 12 March the 9th Division took the Tri Tam Subsector and on 13 March liberated all of Dau Tient District east of the Saigon River and the Ben Cui area west of the river. On 17 March the Cau Khoi position was taken and we gained control of a segment of Route 26 in Tay Ninh Province. Thus we had liberated a vast area along both banks of the Saigon River to form a staging area for the attack on Saigon from the northwest. The enemy used

the 3d Cavalry Brigade and a 25th Division force to counterattack along Route 2 at Suoi Ong Hung. That presented us with a good opportunity to annihilate an important part of the armored forces of III Corps, but due to deficiencies in our preparations and combat operations we could only inflict heavy damage on the enemy and force them to withdraw them to defend the area south of Bau Don. The armed forces of Tay Ninh Province during that time coordinated very well by attacking directly Route 22, cutting that road from place to place and from time to time, thus forcing the puppet 25th Division to defend that road in order to insure that Tay Ninh would not be isolated. To the east, between 15-18 March the 6th Division of Military Region 7 extended the liberated area along Route 2 from Xuan Loc to Ba Ria and completely liberated Route 3 from Hoai Duc to Gia Ray. On 20 March it took the Ong Don intersection and Suoi Cat, and by 28 March it had mastered a 50 kilometers-long segment of Route 1 from Suoi Cat to Rung La, thus cutting the lifeline connecting the central Vietnam coast with Bien Hoa-Saigon. The 812th Regiment of Military Region 6 completed the annihilation of Vo Duc and liberated a large area in Binh Tuy Province and the districts of Hoai Duc and Tanh Linh, thus creating a good staging area from which the 4th Corps could later attack Xuan Loc and Bien Hoa. Then the regiment, according to plan, moved quickly to coordinate with the 7th Division on Route 20 in the direction of Dalat. On 15 March the 7th Division launched its attack and by 18 March had completed the taking of the Dinh Quan district seat, a fortified strongpoint which backed up to a store outcropping and controlled important Route 20. After taking Dinh Quan the division took the Da Oai strategic zone and, along with the local forces mopped up the enemy, expanded the liberated area and mastered Route 20. On 28 March it launched a lightning-fast mechanized attack which liberated the city of Lam Dong in only 2 hours. Thus we had completed the expansion and connecting of an important, integrated and solid base area extending from Dong Thap Muoi west of Saigon, running from the western and northern parts of Tay Ninh Province to Phuoc Long, War Zone A in northern Bien Hoa, and to Binh Tuy and Ba Ria on the South China Sea. Saigon had in effect been surrounded from the west, north and northeast. The 812th Regiment, reinforced by an element of the 7th Division, took advantage of the opportunity and occupied the town of Di Linh. Thus all of Lam Dong Province had been liberated. That represented a great victory on the eastern Nam Bo theater during that period. It greatly strengthened our position north and east of Saigon and defeated the enemy's scheme to form a defensive enclave.

In Part II ("The End") of his book "Decent Interval, Frank Snepp wrote that "The next day the communist forces opened a new front in the southern part of that area (the puppet Military Region II) and advanced to Lam Dong City, 3 hours from Saigon by road, without meeting any resistance (more accurately, resistance had been quickly crushed). At that very moment Thieu and his generals were once again debating and weighing the possibility of setting up a defense line immediately north of the city (Saigon), extending from Tay Ninh to Nha Trang. Before nightfall, Polgar (the U.S. CIA chief in Vietnam) personally went to the Presidential Palace to inform Thieu and his generals that their plan had been smashed, for Lam Dong Province, the backbone of that defense line, had fallen into the hands of the North Vietnamese troops."

With the loss of Lam Dong and Route 20, the city of Dalat and all of Tuyen Duc Province (as it was called by the puppet regime) were isolated. Route 11, which connected Dalat with Phan Rang on the coast, was a very dangerous, twisting up-and-down road that could not be used to save the city. The liberation of Dalat was the responsibility of the B2 theater, but B2's forces were small and it had to move in close to Saigon and thus could not move up to liberate Tuyen Duc Province. After the Central Highlands were liberated our strong forces there could come down to take Dalat, then continue on to eastern Nam Bo, very conveniently and promptly. Therefore I sent a message to Van Tien Dung, then the commander of our forces on the Central Highlands battlefield, recommending that he send forces down to liberate Dalat because our forces had to advance toward Saigon and could not go to Dalat. Brother Dung replied in the affirmative. But the enemy troops, very confused and terrified, and threatened by our local armed forces there, fled from Dalat. An element of the 812th Regiment, along with local forces, took over Dalat on 4 April, pursued the enemy, and liberated Route 11 as far as the Thanh Son airfield. All of Tuyen Duc Province, including the important city of Dalat, had been liberated.

North of Saigon, after Cau Tieng was liberated the city of An Loc in Binh Long Province (to use the puppet regime's term) was tightly surrounded. There we had used forces drawn from the organs of the Regional Command, in coordination with the local forces and guerrillas, to threaten and attack the enemy from the beginning of the second phase of the dry season. On 23 March the enemy troops withdrew to Chon Thanh, a district seat far to the south on Route 13. By that time part of the 341st Division sent by the central echelon had arrived. We used a regiment of that division, along with an element of the 9th Division, to pursue the enemy and attack Chon Thanh. During the night of 31 March, after suffering heavy losses, the enemy troop remnants abandoned Chon Thanh. All of Binh Long had been liberated. Our main base area had been expanded and filled out until it reached close to Saigon, near the bases of the puppet 5th Division at Lai Khe and Phu Loi and of the puppet 25th Division at Dong Du, which became the outposts for defending Saigon from the north and the northwest. Even so, the enemy was still blindly trying to defend Tay Ninh, a city that had become distant and isolated, merely because it was afraid that it would become the capital of a revolutionary government.

In March the B2 theater had won great victories, thanks to active coordination with the principal battlefield--the Central Highlands--and by taking full advantage of the turmoil caused by the Ban Me Thuot battle and the succeeding battles. The harmonious coordination of all theaters in the south during the strong simultaneous attacks and uprisings were the result of the rapid decline and disintegration of the puppet army and regime. In Hanoi, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee had very closely monitored the overall situation and the situation on each battlefield, promptly reported on all developments in each area, and promptly guided and corrected the activities in each direction. It may be said that the Political Bureau and the Military Commission guided, and in fact exercised coordinated command of all the battlefields and guided the activities of all the offensive columns.

By 11 March we had essentially taken the city of Ban Me Thuot. When he was informed of that victory by the High Command, comrade Le Duan said, "We previously had estimated 2 years but now, after Phuoc Long and Ban Me Thuot, we may step up the pace. Is this the beginning of the general offensive and general uprising?" Flexibility in such a situation is always the key to timely actions. The reporting of that victory was a great source of inspiration, but the Military Commission continued to urge the battlefields to launch strong attacks and win big victories. On 12 March comrade Vo Nguyen Giap sent a message to comrade Van Tien Dung in the Central Highlands which included the following passage:

"The Political Bureau and the Military Commission have determined that if a large part of the enemy's manpower is annihilated, the city of Ban Me Thuot and many district seats are lost, and Route 19 is cut, the remaining enemy forces in the Central Highlands will form an enclave at Pleiku and may be forced to carry out a strategic evacuation of the Central Highlands. Therefore, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission have directed that it is necessary to immediately surround Pleiku, cut off both the enemy's air route and land routes, and make good preparations to annihilate the enemy in both contingencies."* Clearly, we accurately predicted, at an early date, the enemy's actions. Not until 15 March did Thieu, because of the desperate situation, meet with his generals at Cam Ranh and decide to abandon the Central Highlands. On 15 March they secretly, and in an arduous and chaotic manner, began to implement their plan, and on 16 March Hanoi reported that the forward headquarters of the puppet II Corps and the U.S. Consulate had been shifted from Pleiku to Nha Trang. Between 18-24 March, the withdrawing enemy troops were completely annihilated or routed. The Central Highlands has been liberated!

The entire B2 theater was happy and enthusiastic and its activities were stimulated by news of the victories on the other battlefields, which was promptly reported. In coordination with the other theaters, the soldiers and people of Tri Thien also arose to carry out strong attacks and uprisings, and on 19 March liberated Quang Tri. The puppets' Military Region I was shaken and began to prepare to abandon Hue on 18 March. The High Command ordered the Tri-Thien Military Region to cut Route 1 south of Hue to prevent the 1st Division from withdrawing to Da Nang. The puppet troops were in a state of panic. Their only way out was to flee via the Thuan An river mouth, but they were wiped out by the 2d Corps and the forces of the Tri-Thien Military Region there on 25 March. The ancient capital of Hue was liberated for the second time (the first time was during Tet Mau Than in 1968) and for good. Similarly, with regard to Da Nang on 18 March the High Command ordered Military Region 5 to attack urgently and bold in and cut Route 1 south of Da Nang in order to surround and annihilate the enemy and prevent them from withdrawing into an enclave at Da Nang and moving to the south. In view of that favorable situation, and carrying out the orders of the upper echelon, the military region's 2d Division, along with the local forces, resolutely attacked and annihilated the enemy and liberated Tam Ky, Tuan Duong and Chu Lai. The soldiers and people of Quang Ngai, combining attacks and uprisings, completely liberated their own province. Thus a vast area and Route 1 south of Da Nang were

* "The Great Spring Victory" by comrade Van Tien Dung, pp 104-5.

liberated. The enemy troops in Da Nang had been surrounded and could escape only by sea, but were annihilated and disintegrated by 2d Corps and the forces of Military Region 5 on 29 March in an extremely tragic spectacle, no less so than in the Central Highlands and in Hue. We soon learned of all of that news, except that about an event rare in the history of warfare: the best puppet general dived into the South China Sea and swam out to a ship in order to save his life. (Related by Frank Snepp in op. cit.)

"On the morning of 23 March General Ngo Quang Truong, reputed to be the most skilled commander of the South Vietnamese army, had to tread water in the waves, totally incoherent, in order to escape from Da Nang. He was not a good swimmer, so an aide had to help him swim to a South Vietnamese patrol boat. The next 2 days he spent on a ship watching the remnants of his once-proud army burning and pillaging South Vietnam's second largest city. Perhaps later some of his comrades in arms would accuse him of the ultimate crime of not fulfilling his responsibility as commander by remaining behind to fight to the death. Of the 2 million refugees who were still in Da Nang, there were at least 100,000 deserters from the 1st, 2d and 3d Divisions and from the famous Marine Division, who were now no different than mice caught in a trap. Now they were ready to do anything, including betraying, stealing from and killing one another, to find a way of escape for themselves and their family."

The acute assessment of the situation and accurate, timely forecasting, flexible guidance, and resolute, skilled command of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee upset all U.S.-puppet strategic-campaign plans. We used the method of cutting down the tree at the roots, so "the mice were trapped" in the Central Highlands, at Hue, at Da Nang, and in the south. Our method of organizing forces was to move forces prepositioned in each area, in coordination with extensive local and militia forces on all battlefields of an extremely potent revolutionary people's war. Everywhere the enemy was attacked and surrounded in a very timely, rapid manner and could not flee or form into enclaves. Our use of combined forces--both armed forces and the political forces of the people--in a widespread general offensive and uprising created a peerless strength which struck down the enemy at a time when they still controlled a million well-equipped troops and whose master stood behind them and served as a pillar of support.

While that was happening in the north, in the B2 theater we were kept well informed by the Political Bureau and the Military Commission about the situation and were provided specific guidance encouraging bold attacks against the enemy to make certain that they could not form enclaves anywhere. We strictly implemented that guidance and won a great victory in the specific situation of the theater and in the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy. A U.S. CIA specialist observed, "Far to the south, in III Corps, the government troops also continued to go downhill, perhaps not as precipitously, but the results were the same: there was a loss of land and a loss of tactical flexibility. Around 20 March an ARVN division became bogged down in defending Tay Ninh and the area northwest of that city. Some government commanders wanted to withdraw or bring in another division from the Delta to serve as a mobile reserve. But Thieu rejected both proposals. He believed that the loss of Tay Ninh would weaken the morale of the troops and civilians in the other areas,

and that to bring in forces from the Delta would mean abandoning a vast area to the enemy, for the three ARVN divisions there had already been stretched to the limit.

"If that had been a chess move, Thieu would have already lost. He was about to be checkmated on all fronts." (Frank Snepp, op. cit.)

The overall situation in the south developed very rapidly, much more rapidly than we had anticipated, which created very favorable conditions for the theaters to win the greatest possible victories. We in the Regional Military Party Committee and COSVN worked very urgently and night and day closely monitored the military regions and units. News of victories flowed in and we sent out a stream of combat guidance messages. But we felt that we were still making slow progress and that our armed forces were not strong enough to fully exploit the situation. Brother Bay Cuong sent several messages requesting the Political Bureau to urgently send additional forces. On 23 March I received message No 81/TK from Van Tien Dung informing me of the overall situation and outlining the development of the attack after the liberation of the Central Highlands: advancing along routes 9, 7 and 21 with the objectives of annihilating the 22d Division, liberating Binh Dinh and Phu Yen, then liberating Khanh Hoa and Dien Khanh. The message stated, "We do not yet have forces to send you. By the time we are able to send them to you the opportunity to launch the final, war-deciding battle will be at hand. If we are to take advantage of that opportunity, the battlefield must be prepared in advance." At the end of the message he told me to begin thinking about the final battle so that I could come to meet with him and brother Sau (Le Duc Tho).

After reading the message, I felt disappointed. First, we could not yet be provided additional forces. Second, I had learned that the divisions in the Central Highlands would develop their attack eastward toward the sea. I thought that that was contrary to what had been decided during the Political Bureau meeting in January 1975. I remember that at that time brother Ba concluded that after the Central Highlands had been liberated our forces would rapidly develop their attack southward. As he spoke he spread out his hand and swept it down the map from the Central Highlands to Saigon. I could not forget how that image moved me, for that was what I was also thinking. I thought that if our entire 3d Corps came down into eastern Nam Bo immediately we could attack Saigon earlier and better take advantage of the opportunity. The enemy troops in central Vietnam would not have time to withdraw south. Furthermore, along the coast we already had the 2d Corps and the forces of Military Region 5, which were sufficiently strong to annihilate the enemy. But the next day I received a copy of a message from brother Sau Many (Le Duc Tho) to brother Bay Cuong (message No 71, 23 March):

"Have sent brother Tran (i.e. the 341st Division). That cadre (i.e. division) is skilled and capable. That does not include a number of other cadres to support those cadres (i.e. combat arms attached to the division that would be sent down). Those cadres will be sent immediately from the place where I am now. Prepare to make use of them as soon as they arrive."*

*Document of the War Recapitulation Office of Military Region 7.

I was delighted, but was worried that because those units had to travel a long distance they would arrive late.

On 25 March 1975 the Political Bureau met and decided to liberate Saigon before the rainy season (which began in early May).

On 29 March brother Ba sent a message (No 928/KT) to brother Bay Cuong which included the following passage:

"In view of our great, overwhelming victories and the extremely serious and unforeseen defeats of the enemy, the U.S.-puppet gang is faced with the peril of rapid collapse militarily, politically and with regard to morale.

"I strongly agree with you that at this time it is necessary to act very promptly, resolutely and boldly. In fact, the battle of Saigon has already begun.

"While urgently and promptly carrying out the strategic decision that has been made, I want to stress an urgent requirement: boldly increasing forces in order to immediately fulfill the mission of carrying out a strategic interdiction and encirclement, and cutting off Saigon to the west in the area of My Tho and Tan An."*

On 30 March brother Van (comrade Vo Nguyen Giap) also sent me a message:

"We have sent a message to brother Tuan (comrade Van Tien Dung) informing him that he should send forces south as soon as possible and make the best use of time. New technical equipment units are also now enroute south to reinforce the B2 theater. We have prepared a corps, which will soon head south to the B2 theater to serve as a reserve force."**

After the guidance message from the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee, COSVN and the Regional Military Party Committee met to discuss an implementation plan. COSVN Resolution 15, which resulted from that meeting, assessed and evaluated the situation as follows: "The revolutionary war in South Vietnam has not only entered a period of rapid development, but the strategic opportunity for carrying out the general offensive and general uprising to take the enemy's lair is ripe. From this moment the final, war-deciding strategic battle of our people, to complete the people's democratic national revolution in the south and achieve national unification, has begun."

With regard to missions, the resolution stated: "The direct, urgent missions of our entire party are to mobilize the entire party, the entire army and the entire population to concentrate their morale strength and forces, develop to a high degree the combined strength of the three offensive columns, the three types of troops and the three strategic areas, advance to a general

*Document of the B2 War Recapitulation Section of the Ministry of National Defense.

** Ibid.

offensive and general uprising, bring about the rapid and complete overthrow of the puppet army and puppet regime, win political power for the people, with a spirit of resolute, marvelously rapid and bold offensive, and be determined to liberate the villages, districts and provinces all over South Vietnam." The resolution encouraged the various echelons, "Make the best use of time, for at present, time is strength...." "We must truly concentrate each hour, each day and each month, beginning with April 1975...."

During that COSVN conference we discussed at length how the situations might develop in the B2 theater. If we won additional victories on the battlefields, Saigon itself might be thrown into chaos. In that event, we cannot wait until a plan is drafted to grasp the opportunity before acting. Brother Ba's message to COSVN affirmed that the situation would develop rapidly, and that it was necessary to step up our attacks on the enemy and move up closer to Saigon. If our victory advanced a step further, a change might be brought about in Saigon. Time was strength. After carefully studying the guidance opinions of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee and carefully weighing the situation, our Regional Military Party Committee and Regional Command drafted a plan to attack Saigon with the existing forces. The plan was approved by COSVN and reported to the central echelon. The five-pronged attack on the city had been drafted, and the enemy units that had to be annihilated and the objectives that had to be taken had been determined. The problem was how to deploy and use our forces. The objectives in the city had been assigned and the sapper and commando forces that would attack from within had been deployed. Now it was a matter of forces attacking from the outside.

According to our plan, the eastern column, commanded by 4th Corps, made up the 7th, 341st and 6th Divisions; the northwest would be the responsibility of the 9th Division, and the 16th and 271 B Regiments; and the west would be the responsibility of Group 232, made up of the 5th and 3d Divisions. The attack from the south would be undertaken by the 88th and 24th Regiments of Military Region 8. To the north, we would deploy the Gia Dinh Regiment. If there were additional outside forces, they would be added to that direction. The forces for those directions had been assigned and we were closely monitoring developments in order to determine the best time to carry out that attack. In the immediate future it was necessary to annihilate additional enemy manpower defending Saigon, cut Route 4 and the Long Tau River, and interdict the airfields, to tighten the noose on Saigon so that the enemy could not form an enclave at the last minute and especially to drive a wedge between the puppet III Corps and IV Corps and tie down the enemy everywhere. COSVN agreed with the Regional Military Party Committee that it was necessary to launch an immediate attack on Xuan Loc and annihilate the puppet 18th Division and Cavalry Brigade, strong III Corps forces, and move up close to Bien Hoa. Group 232 was ordered to prepare to attack Moc Hoa and win control of the only road--Route 12--that could be used to send the 5th Division and technical military equipment down to cut Route 4 and, along with the 8th Division of Military Region 8, annihilate the puppet 7th and 9th Divisions. If that step were carried out well, we would win a big victory all over the theater and the puppet army and regime would vacillate and become chaotic and not be able to defend Saigon effectively, or else there would be an important political upheaval within the ranks of the

puppets or between the puppets and the Americans, in which case we would immediately grasp the opportunity and launch an offensive and uprising, combining military attacks and mass uprisings, and combining inside-out and outside-in attacks on the five most important objectives: Tan San Nhat air base, the puppet GHQ, the Capital Special Zone headquarters, National Police headquarters, and Independence Palace, in order to liberate all of the B2 theater.

On 31 March, I and Lt Col Nguyen Van Minh, an operational cadre with the Regional Command, and a number of other cadres came to Military Region 7 headquarters to assign missions to the military region and to 4th Corps. Before setting out I had sent a message convening the cadres and stating that I would arrive on 1 April. In March it had been sunny and dry. The road passing through War Zone A was only a dirt road but there were no obstacles. Our cleverly camouflaged command car moved rapidly through the jungle. It was the beginning of spring and the plants were in bloom. The flowers of spring blossomed everywhere; along the road purple pansies were mixed with golden apricot blossoms, green leaves and white leaves. It was also in the midst of the combat season, and the sounds of bombs and artillery shells were bursting in all directions around Saigon. It was a scene that was both attractive and martial, and moved one's soul. I emotionally remembered the victorious springs of our forefathers and of ourselves. Vietnam was still Vietnam. I recorded in my diary:

Golden apricots embellished the route,
The rustling jungle breeze crackled along with the guns
of spring surrounding the city.
Then as now the mountains and rivers are ours.
The brilliantly gifted Nguyen Hue, in love with
Princess Ngoc Han.

We traveled all day and into the night. The headquarters of the military region was situated on the bank of the Dong Nai River in the Vinh An area. The jungle there had been devastated but because the trees were large it still provided some cover. When I arrived there it was late at night. The enemy did not suspect that location, so it was regarded as being relatively safe. But night and day artillery shells fired from Hoc Ba Thuc and Cay Gao still exploded incessantly around the area, at times in large numbers and sometimes sporadically. All of the comrades who had been called in were present. Comrade Nam Cuc, i.e. Nguyen Nhy Y, secretary of the Military Region Party Committee, who was short and slim but had a resolute will, was arrested with me by the French in the Catinet secret police station and we were imprisoned together in the Saigon prison in Saigon in 1944-1945. When he saw me he was overjoyed and confided, "The situation is very encouraging. I'm anxious to return to Saigon and visit the poor neighborhood in Tan Dinh, where we set up a secret organ and were captured together by the French secret police, to see how it changed during the U.S.-puppet period...." Comrades Sau Trung, a member of the standing committee of the Military Region Party Committee; Duong Cu Tam, the military region's political officer; Le Van Ngoc, commander of the military region; and Dang Ngoc Si, deputy commander of the military region and commander of the 6th Division, appeared to be happy and enthusiastic. The 4th Corps comrades--Hoang Cam, commander; Bui Cat Vu, deputy commander; and

comrade Tran, commander of the 341st Division, which had become the 1st Division, had arrived during the afternoon. Although it was late at night we sat talking with one another, forgetting sleep and even fatigue. Early the next morning we held a meeting. I reported on the overall situation and on the situation of each battlefield in South Vietnam, the assessment and evaluation of the Political Bureau and COSVN, and the specific guidance of the Political Bureau and the Military Committee of the party Central Committee. I reported on the essential points of the attack on Saigon that had been drafted by the Regional Military Party Committee and approved by COSVN, so that they could understand the overall missions. Finally, we announced the decision of the Regional Command to attack Xuan Loc and annihilate the 18th Division and the 3d Cavalry Brigade and assigned missions.

We carefully discussed the specific plan for the battle, the capabilities for the situation to develop favorably or unfavorably, and the necessary measures. The comrades pointed out that the enemy had paid attention to defending Xuan Loc and that the fighting was certain to be fierce. If, after taking Dinh Quan, we attacked Xuan Loc right away and did not attack Lam Dong, that would have been very strange. I defended the decision to liberate Lam Dong for the following reasons:

--We had only mastered a segment of Route 20 between Dinh Quan and Phuong Lam, the corridor connecting 4th Corps and the War Zone A rear area, in the immediate future and in the long range, could not be insured. We were experiencing difficulties with regard to ammunition, so if we fought on a large scale it would be even more necessary to insure that corridor. If we mastered Route 20, we would not only have a road along which to advance toward Bien Hoa and Saigon, but also create considerable difficulties for Dalat from the south. If we do not expand our hold on the road immediately, the enemy might risk their lives and counterattack to retake it so that they could withdraw into a solid strategic enclave in the Saigon area and in Military Regions III and IV.

--Xuan Loc was an important strongpoint in the Saigon defensive system, and although the enemy had strengthened its defenses in comparison to the past, the enemy defenses there were not weak because they had deployed all of the 18th Division and 3d Cavalry Brigade there since February.

Everyone agreed that an attack on Xuan Loc had to be regarded as an attack on a blocking position that was extremely important to the enemy, so it had to be assumed that they would try to defend it and would send in strong defenses, and that the battle would be very fierce. Everyone discussed tactics and techniques very carefully and requested additional artillery shells and technical support facilities for the tanks. While we were meeting news was received that we had completed the liberation of Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa, which made everyone determined to achieve merit. The situation was developing very rapidly. We had set 10 April as the opening date of the battle so that there would be time to make meticulous preparations, but then we agreed to make 9 April "D-Day."

I also discussed with the comrades in the Military Region Party Committee and the Military Region Command the advance preparation, and organization and

working methods, of the military management committees of the cities of Long Khanh, Ba Ria, Vung Tau and Bien Hoa.

Before returning I ordered Group 75--i.e., the Regional Artillery Command--to immediately set up a long-range 130mm artillery fire support base at Hieu Liem, at the intersection of the Be and Dong Nai Rivers, in order to effectively interdict the Bien Hoa airbase and support the 4th Corps attack. For a long time, the 113th Sapper Regiment had been responsible for attacking the Bien Hoa airbase with rockets and mortars. Now conditions were good so we added a 130mm artillery base, so the fate of that airbase had been decided. The region's 75th Artillery Group had been the nemesis of the Bien Hoa airbase. It fought its first artillery battle there in December 1965, when it was armed with only 57mm recoilless rifles and mortars of various kinds, and along with the sappers destroyed a large number of enemy aircraft, including more than 20 B57 bombers that had just been sent over from the United States. That battle had been commanded by comrade Luong Van Nho, in charge of artillery, and comrade Hai Ca, i.e., Senior Colonel Tran Cong An, commanding the sappers. That was the first time the U.S. Air Force had been struck a painful blow. Maxwell Taylor, then the U.S. ambassador in Saigon, hastened to the airbase and looked disappointedly at the American eagles, with broken necks and smashed wings, strewn about in piles of scrap steel. Twelve years had passed, an extremely valuable period of maturization in an extremely fierce war. During that period the artillery cadres were steeled, the unit developed, and the upper echelon provided additional artillery and equipment. Especially, it captured enemy artillery--from 106mm and 107mm DKZ to 105mm and 155mm howitzers. Now it had 130mm guns with strong firepower, long range and great accuracy. It had contributed to all campaigns in the B2 theater and now it had the mission of paralyzing one of the large airbases during the decisive phase. The comrades who had commanded Group 75, from its first commander Luong Van Nho to comrades Dao Son Tay and Bui Cat Vu, and then comrades Son Tieu, Nguyen Tam, So, Lai, etc., may take pride in their contributions to developing the units and our creative use of artillery, including artillery captured from the enemy and both small and large artillery, in fighting in combination and independently, in attacking both fortified and field positions, and in shelling enemy aircraft at airbases and enemy boats operating on rivers, by all methods and under all circumstances.

When the work was done I hastened back to the Regional Command headquarters. When passing by the Rang Rang airfield in the midst of our War Zone A, I viewed the criminal scars caused by the puppet air force's continuous bombing practice there since the Paris Agreement. But the runways were still intact and when necessary our small aircraft could still use them which demonstrated the lack of skill of the puppet pilots. Just beyond the airfield, when our car was crossing the Ma Da River at a ford, two enemy fighter-bombers circled overhead: they had discovered our small convoy crossing the river. Our car sped ahead and turned into the jungle. I hid in a trench on the riverbank, watching the enemy aircraft diving and dropping bombs around us. Our anti-aircraft machinegun spewed out bullets at the enemy airplanes, one of which was hit and, trailing smoke, flew away. The convoy which had not been hit continued on.

After returning home at 0100 on 4 April I learned that Van Tien Dung's party had arrived the previous afternoon and had been provided living and working areas. I was very pleased, for the chief of staff and the entire forward headquarters of the High Command--codenamed Group A75--had arrived. They had arrived in time for the strategic, war-determining attack on the final U.S.-puppet lair. As usual, when I returned from a trip, no matter what the hour, my secretary brought me the urgent news and messages from the battlefield, the units and the central echelon. A long message from brother Ba which had been received on 1 April immediately caught my attention:

"The Political Bureau met on 31 March and listened to a Military Commission report on the developing situation of our general offensive during the past 3 weeks, especially during the recent period.

1. It agreed unanimously that:

"After our great victories in Military Region 9 and eastern Nam Bo, the liberation of Phuoc Long Province, and the great victory on the Central Highlands battlefield, our strategic general offensive began and within a brief period of time won extremely great victories.

"...2. Our country's revolution is now developing more seethingly than ever, at the rate of 1 day equalling 20 years. Therefore, the Political Bureau has decided to further exploit the strategic opportunity, with the guidance thoughts of marvelous speed, boldness, surprise and certain victory, with strong determination to carry out a general offensive and general uprising as soon as possible, during April at the latest. The factors of certain victory and surprise at present lie principally in making the best use of time and attacking the enemy while they are in a state of disarray and collapse, and in concentrating our forces to a greater degree on the main objectives at each time and in each direction.

"...3. In order to carry out the strategic motto along those lines, and to meet the requirement regarding time, beginning immediately it is necessary to draft a bold plan of action with the existing forces on the eastern Nam Bo battlefield.

"...The Military Commission of the party Central Committee has decided to rapidly shift the forces of 3d Corps and their weapons and equipment, southward from the B3 theater, and has ordered the reserves corps to move south.

"...In order to make the maximum use of time, we should not wait for all of the reinforcements to arrive and avoid irrational troop movements which affect the action time."*

There was also a long message from the Military Commission of the party Central Committee, signed by brother Van, which included the following passages:

*Document of the B2 War Recapitulation Section of the Ministry of National Defense.

"...At present, surprise is mainly a matter of time. We must move forces with marvelous rapidity and use the existing forces to act promptly, without waiting until all forces are concentrated before acting. In that sense, the Political Bureau has affirmed that the strategic, war-deciding battle for Saigon has begun.

"...C. The eastern prong, made up of the divisions now on the spot (we should avoid upsetting, time-losing troop movements), augmented by the necessary forces, especially technical military equipment, must first of all annihilate the 18th Division, take Xuan Loc, and move up close to Bien Hoa airbase as soon as possible....

"It would be best if the local troops were assigned the mission of surrounding Moc Hoa, while all of the regional main-force units there should, along with the main-force units of Military Region 8, immediately concentrate and move down to cut Route 4 between Ben Luc and Tan An and between Tan An and My Tho...."*

I went to bed with my mind full of thoughts. Over a period of 30 years there had been many long sleepless nights, but no night had been like any other. I thought about the enemy forces deployed on the inner and outer perimeters and our forces in each area of the campaign. I closed my eyes and imagined the approach routes into Saigon, the rivers and canals, the fields and the high-and-dry or muddy terrain. I agreed about the attack on Xuan Loc. But if we abandoned Moc Hoa and advanced to Route 4, how could we take the technical equipment along? I also imagined the enemy's reaction when we attacked. Saigon, a large city that was complicated in many regards, and the final lair of the enemy, had been surrounded and had no way out, which forced the enemy to hold out until there was no longer any hope before surrendering or disintegrating. It was also our beloved city. Its large population had to be protected and had to prevent the enemy from sabotaging the streets, buildings and social property. The terrain around the city was, by and large, high and dry, with many wide roads, unlike those in Central Highlands, which passed between high mountains, or those along the central coast which were long but narrow and easily cut which caused the enemy to panic and disintegrate. Since the enemy was collapsing, the existing B2 armed forces could, in coordination with the uprising masses, launch a direct attack on and liberate Saigon, but they were not strong enough to attack sufficiently rapidly and strongly to keep the city intact.

When I encountered problems I could not solve I often thought of Uncle Ho and silently recited a stanza from his Chinese poem "Studying Chess":

"One must have a broad view and think carefully,
And be resolved to keep up the attack.
If they are not used well two rooks are worthless,
But when there is an opportunity, one
well-used rook will insure success."

*Document of the B2 War Capitulation Section of the Ministry of National Defense.

I told myself that although our forces were small the opportunity had arrived: when there is an opportunity, one well-used rook will do, and we should not slow down the attack when the enemy is confused. I smiled to myself contentedly and dropped off to sleep. When I awoke it was dawn. I went to meet brother Dung, who had also awakened. We happily embraced each other. I asked, "How does it feel to be in Nam Bo for the first time?" He replied, "Moved and happy beyond description."

Then the conversation turned to the victories on the battlefields and we discussed what should be done.

Then we went to visit and shake hands with the comrades in the "forward headquarters." Comrades Le Ngoc Hien and Le Quang Vu had served as regional deputy chiefs of staff, so I already knew them. Comrade Doang Tue, artillery commander of the High Command, had come south for the second time. Many of the combat arm commanders, staff cadres, and operations cadres, who had come to the B2 theater, with its strange scenery but familiar people, were happy and enthusiastic. Thus the opportunity was at hand and our ranks had been strengthened. Once sufficient main-force units had been concentrated certain victory would be ours. It was truly a once-in-a-thousand-years opportunity.

That day we divided the work among two elements: the organs of the Regional Command and those of Group A75. I assigned to the B2 staff, political and rear services organs the mission of briefing the comrades in the forward headquarters fully and in detail on the battlefield situation, especially in the Saigon area, from the composition and value of the important enemy objectives to their defensive deployment, from the terrain of the various areas to our forces, large and small, inside and outside the city, the psychology, way of life, and capabilities of the people of Nam Bo and Saigon, the plans that had been drafted and the battlefield that had developed. The briefing had to be completed in the briefest possible time. From that movement on we were in a race with time!

In the afternoon of 7 April comrade Le Duc Tho, representing the Political Bureau, after a nonstop trip from Hanoi arrived at the Regional Command, then located west of the city of Loc Ninh, which later became the headquarters of the campaign to liberate Saigon. In the morning of 9 April, at a meeting attended by the comrades in COSVN, the Regional Military Party Commission, and the B2 Command, and key cadres of the regional and A75 organs, comrade Tho gave a briefing on the newest resolution of the Political Bureau. The resolution systematically assessed and evaluated the situation on the battlefield since Resolution 21, the outstanding developments on each battlefield, the relevant situation in the United States and in the world, and the decision to liberate the south before the beginning of the rainy season. He said, "The situation has developed very rapidly and the opportunity is extremely favorable, so our 1975-1976 2-year plan can and must be achieved within a few months. The Political Bureau has directed that 'At present, time is strength,' We must act quickly, boldly and unexpectedly, and win certain victory."

Then the conference reached a decision on the working method and on an explicit division of labor among the elements:

COSVN, the Regional Military Party Commission and the Regional Command kept their responsibility of guiding and commanding the general offensive and uprising throughout the B2 theater, especially close guidance of the uprising of the masses in Saigon.

The offensive campaign against the city of Saigon, which the Political Bureau later named the "Ho Chi Minh campaign," was commanded by comrade Van Thien Dung, a decision everyone supported. Meanwhile, the Regional Command continued to carry out its B2 responsibilities. Some of its comrades participated in the campaign command: comrade Pham Hung served as political officer, and comrade Le Duc Anh and I served as deputy commanders.

The regional staff, political and rear services organs had to fulfill two functions: one was to continue to help the Regional Command in the B2 theater; the second was becoming an organ of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign Command which was augmented by cadres and facilities of Group A75. The Regional Staff had to select cadres who thoroughly understood the situation, the terrain and the localities, and with many years of experience in commanding main-force units in the B2 theater, to help the corps of the High Command which would participate in the campaign but were confronted by extremely urgent circumstances: sometimes they had to join the fighting immediately, even before all of their units had arrived. Comrade Dinh Duc Thien, director of the Rear Services General Department who had accompanied comrade Dung, went directly to the Regional Rear Services Department, blended in with our comrades there, and worked with them in providing all necessary material-technical resources for the campaign.

Comrade Nguyen Van Linh, deputy secretary of COSVN, was especially responsible for mass uprisings, especially in Saigon. Comrade Vo Van Kiet, a member of the Standing Committee of COSVN, was responsible for guiding the takeover of the organs in Saigon and for guiding the planning and organization of the Municipal Military Management Committee. As a representative of the Political Bureau, comrade Le Duc Tho contributed opinions to all tasks of COSVN as well as the campaign command.

The Loc Ninh jungle, which was already famous, now had even greater historical importance and was bustling with activity night and day. Under the remaining canopies of leaves and clever camouflage nets, cadres, enlisted men and motorcycles went from one tent to another without stop. At night rays from the carefully masked electric lightbulbs fell on bright faces, maps containing countless secrets and many kinds of equipment and machinery, both old and new, thus giving a mysterious but modern, urgent but deliberate appearance to the supernatural jungle that contained both the Regional Command and the Campaign Command. Electric wires spread out in all directions, from one tree branch to another. And flashing over the horizon were the invisible signals of messages being sent to all areas. Comrade Xuan Dao,* in charge of communications in the B2 theater continued to complain about the chronic lack of machinery and facilities, and the lack of cables and overhead wires, but he was always proud of

*Senior Colonel Nguyen Xuan Dao (now head of the Communications Section of Military Region 7).

his brave cadres and men, who had done everything possible to insure unimpeded communications between the Regional Command and all of the military regions and units in all main-force campaigns in the B2 theater. Now Xuan Dao was delighted to be augmented by the communications facilities of the High Command at a time when requirements had doubled or tripled.

On the basis of the resolution and directives of the Political Bureau, the conference also concluded that the situation on the battlefield had continued to change rapidly. It was necessary to assume that at a certain time there could be a sudden change in Saigon, the final lair of the enemy. Therefore, in order to take the initiative under all circumstances we had to have a plan to act immediately when the opportunity presented itself with the forces on hand, without awaiting the arrival of the High Command corps. In the event that there was no sudden change, we would wait until all of our main-force units had arrived in order to have the superiority with which to overwhelm the enemy troops and strike an unexpected lightning blow in order to eliminate all resistance, prevent destruction and sabotage, and insure the safety of our largest, most heavily populated city. The conference unanimously approved the plan to attack Saigon by using the existing forces in the B2 theater that had been approved by COSVN and had begun to be implemented, and which we had carefully explained.

While B2 began to implement the strategic interdiction and surrounding of Saigon in accordance with the above-mentioned plan, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee resolutely concentrated all available forces on the Saigon front, in the final, strategic, war-deciding battle. Carrying out urgent orders of the upper echelon and with the fire of enthusiasm burning in their hearts, unit after unit rushed south in order to be in time to participate in the "national liberation celebration." Corps and divisions from the Red River Delta and Military Region 4 carried out a mechanized movement day and night along the Truong Son route. Main-force units of Military Region 5 and the High Command, technical military equipment which the soldiers and people of Military Region 5 had taken from enemy supply depots, advanced southward down the central Vietnam coast under the command of comrades Le Trong Tan, Le Quang Hoa, Hoang Minh Thao and Nam Long, who had been appointed by the Military Commission of the party Central Committee, annihilated the enemy as they urgently moved down to reinforce the prong that would attack Saigon from the east. Following them were supplementary troops from Hanoi, Tay Bac, Viet Bac, and the provinces of the socialist north, who were ready to sacrifice their lives so that our people could advance to dazzling new heights. Meanwhile, in the B2 provinces, especially in the Mekong Delta, many youths enlisted, joined the guerrillas and formed new units in order to create the strength with which, along with the people, to attack and arise to liberate their home areas. In Saigon, one regiment became two regiments--Gia Dinh 1 and 2--and in Military Regions 8 and 9 provinces, such as Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Can Tho, etc., practically all districts had a battalion. Some provinces had five or six battalions. Tens of thousands of youths returned to the military regions to supplement the main-force units. The spirit of the masses was seething. It was truly heroic: the whole nation was on the move, the whole nation was fighting, and the whole nation was arising. Oh! How sacred our homeland, how heroic our people!

During that time, for the enemy's part, they were very confused because they had suffered heavy defeats. The forces of I Corps and II Corps had essentially been annihilated and disintegrated. But they had still obstinately and hastily reassembled their forces and reorganized their defenses in Military Region III and Military Region IV. Thieu came up with a new strategy he called "light at the top and heavy at the bottom," i.e. he withdrew from the remaining areas in Military Region I and Military Region II in order to defend Military Region III and Military Region IV in accordance with the plan proposed by Gavin. If in the past Thieu had mercilessly cursed that plan, now he regarded it as a plan to save his regime, which was in its death throes. But unfortunately, it was too late! Even the Americans were still very subjective, especially Martin, the U.S. ambassador in Saigon. "Martin replied to the (U.S.) Senate that the South Vietnamese forces had carried out an orderly withdrawal from the Central Highlands, although there were reports to the contrary. And when the deputy head of the Vietnam section (of the U.S. Department of State) protested that optimism, Martin promised that within a year he would invite that deputy section head and his wife to visit Ban Me Thuot. Martin also appeared to be annoyed by his aide Al Francis. After reading a gloomy message from Da Nang, Martin cruelly commented that 'It appears that Francis' thyroid glands are acting up again.' Martin did not think that way because he did not understand the truth. He was always telling the pessimists--one after another--in Washington, that he regarded the loss of the northern part of South Vietnam as insignificant and that it had been a drain on the government's resources. The rest of the country was much richer and formed a unit that could be more effectively defended."* Even the CIA and Pentagon analysts took the view that: "Although admitting that large parts of Military Region I and Military Region II had been permanently lost, they argued that the government forces in the other parts of the country were sufficiently strong to at least hold the defense line north of Saigon until the rainy season began in May, after which the North Vietnamese offensive was certain to encounter difficulties because of the weather and the government would have time to reorganize and reassemble its forces and could participate in negotiations from a position of relative strength."**

In the morning of 25 March, a meeting of U.S. bigwigs held in the White House was attended by President Ford, Kissinger, Martin and Weyand, chief of ground forces and former U.S. commander in Indochina, to assess the situation and discuss a plan to counter the military developments in Vietnam. The meeting got nowhere because of conflicting reports, so it was decided to send Weyand to Saigon to personally evaluate the situation and discuss effective countermeasures with Thieu.

On 28 March, Weyand, Martin and an important delegation arrived at Saigon and began work immediately. "As soon as he arrived in Saigon Weyand focused his attention on a few basic objectives. In addition to the specific task of studying the situation, he concentrated on drafting a new strategy to save

*From the book "Decent Interval," Random House Publishers, 1977, New York.

**Op. cit.

South Vietnam. The key to that plan was to change Thieu's structure of 'light at the top, heavy at the bottom.' At first, Thieu, in accordance with that concept, hoped to set up an outer line to defend Saigon extending from Tay Ninh in the west to Nha Trang on the coast. But now that the communists had penetrated deep to the southern part of Military Region II, it was clear that some adjustments would have to be made. Weyand suggested as an alternative a new defense line anchored by Phan Rang City to the east, with Xuan Loc serving as the central base, and anchored by Tay Ninh in the west. Since Thieu had little choice he immediately accepted that recommendation."* Weyand emphasized to Thieu, "Xuan Loc must be held at all costs. To lose Xuan Loc is to lose Saigon."

"As the first step in implementing that new defensive plan, Thieu sent General Toan to defend Phan Rang (General Toan was III Corps commander) and in turn Toan directed his old friend Gen Nguyen Van Nghi (a former IV Corps commander who had been dismissed the previous fall for corruption) to set up forward headquarters there, along with part of the mobile division. He also sent an armored brigade and a few ranger units to eastern III Corps to strengthen the South Vietnamese division at the key city of Xuan Loc."**

Although he made those moves and gave the appearance of wanting to fight to the end, in their hearts neither Thieu nor the United States believed that the plan would work. That was demonstrated on 2 and 3 April, when Thieu secretly sent treasures he had pillaged from our people to Taiwan and Canada so that he could live the life of a king when he had to flee abroad. As for the United States, it also prepared a plan to take vengeance after it had to withdraw from Vietnam. "When the Weyand delegation visited Saigon, Johnson (CIA station chief in Saigon) requested permission to select some people to 'remain behind' and set up an organization of Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok, to serve as a bridge to the spy networks to operate permanently in Vietnam. In concept, that was a relatively simple problem. The CIA had already done so with groups of exiles in Eastern Europe many years ago."***

People of good conscience all over the world should, from that perfidy, understand the truth about the Vietnamese refugee problem, which the U.S. propaganda loudspeaker has ballyhooed for a long time. It is in fact part of a revanchist plan of the United States and the Chinese expansionists, who have formed an alliance after the bitter, disgraceful defeat in Indochina. It should also be amply clear that Bangkok is in fact a U.S. staging area for attacks on Indochina, where it hired Thai soldiers to participate in the fighting during the recent war, is also a base for training spies and sending them into Indochina to carry out the revanchist plan of the imperialists and expansionists, and the point of origin of all schemes to sabotage peace in Southeast Asia in the postwar period.

According to the new defensive plan, in addition to the puppet 25th Division at Cu Chi northwest of Saigon, the 5th Division at Lai Khe to the north, and

*Op. cit.

**Op. cit.

***Op. cit.

the 18th Division, 3d Cavalry Brigade, 2d Marine Brigade and 1st Airborne Division to the east, they urgently rebuilt the 22d Division and deployed it at Long An in the west to link up with the 7th, 9th and 21st Divisions in the Delta. In the outskirts of Saigon they also had an airborne brigade, three ranger groups and a number of RF groups. Inside the city they organized their forces into three defense zones manned by Police Field Forces and civilian self-defense forces in the precincts and subwards.

In order to give a meaningful send-off to the Weyand delegation, on 1 April we liberated Quy Nhon and Tuy Hoa, on 3 April 23 took Cam Ranh and Nha Trang and moved closer to Saigon to the north by taking Chon Thanh on Route 13, and on 4 April we liberated the city of Da Lat. Another noteworthy event was that on the morning of 4 April the Weyand delegation flew back to the United States to report on its completed mission at the White House and Thieu's Independence Palace was bombed by an airplane on 8 April. That airplane was F-5E piloted by Air Force Lieutenant Nguyen Thanh Trung, who took off from Bien Hoa air base and very accurately dropped two bombs on the place of the president of the puppet regime, foreshadowing the coming collapse of the lackey regime. Trung was a patriotic youth, the son of one of our comrades in Ben Tre, who had long been planted in the puppet air force. The time had come when we needed Trung to train our pilots to use the various kinds of airplanes and ordnance we had captured from the enemy so that they could be used if needed. The Phuoc Binh airfield in Phuoc Long Province was activated and guided the F-5E, the enemy's most modern airplane, to a safe landing. Nguyen Thanh Trung who achieved merit and was appropriately rewarded, fulfilled a glorious mission in the bosom of the enemy and returned in victory. That was one of the many-faceted countenances of the liberation soldiers, who operated wherever there were Vietnamese during the glorious anti-U.S. war for national salvation.