

CHAPTER FOUR

The Greatest Rainy Season Ever

In general, with regard to weather the B2 theater was divided into two seasons, a rainy season and a dry season, both of which lasted 6 months. In the mountainous region, the rain arrives early and is heavy. In the lowlands the rain arrives late and is lighter. Especially during the rainy season the water flows down from the high-elevation watersheds in large volume and at a rapid rate, overflowing the basins of low-lying rivers and canals, especially the Mekong River basin, before slowly draining into the South China Sea. During the dry season it is possible to walk all over the Dong Thap Muoi area, a low-lying depression in the lowlands, but during the rainy season it becomes a vast sea, with the water reaching depths of 4 to 5 meters in some places. The principal means of travel is by boat. In eastern Nam Bo, although the jungle-and-mountains area is high-lying the rainwater also inundates the fields and roads and the red soil becomes muddy. Such weather and soil conditions exerted a considerable influence on the activities of the concentrated units and the technical combat arms. Therefore, in the rainy season our large units and those of the enemy were forced to scale down their activities and take advantage of that time to prepare for the coming dry season, when they would send powerful forces to attack each other. Over the course of many years of the war, that had become the rule. But the 1974 rainy season was an unusual rainy season in the B2 theater. We were determined to break that rule and act urgently to create a new opportunity and change the gloomy rainy season into the brilliant dawn of a new period. During the June conference, during which the Standing Committee of COSVN reviewed the 1974 dry season and discussed the coming direction, its secretary, Pham Hung, concluded that:

"In this year's dry season a new factor has appeared: We are winning victory and ascending while the enemy is weakening and descending. We must not stand still but must win even greater victories and force the enemy into even greater decline. During this year's rainy season we have many advantages and many capabilities for winning greater victories than during any previous rainy season, even greater than those of the past dry season. Regardless of the weather and the difficulties, we must step up our activities in all regards, create a new status and new strength, materially and with regard to morale, for the military regions, provinces, localities, and main-force units so that they can begin the 1974-1975 dry season with a strong, vigorous spirit. In 1975, especially during the 1975 dry season, we will be capable of winning victory, transforming the situation, and creating a new turning point, one of decisive importance."

There was nothing mysterious about COSVN's prescience. It was based on the actual situations of ourselves and the enemy on the battlefield and reflected the results of the activities of millions of comrades and compatriots in all hamlets, and of tens of thousands of guerrillas, local troops, and main-force troops, who contended with the enemy for each person and each inch of ground, every day and every hour, all over the theater. It was a result of profound

understanding of ourselves and the enemy. It was a result of full understanding of the objectives of our revolution, firmly grasping revolutionary methods, and clearly understanding what we had to do and where we had to go, and at the same time profoundly understanding the plots, acts, desires and capabilities of the enemy.

At that time questions were asked that caused us to think a good deal: "Why, when facing that hopeless situation, did the puppet Thieu regime continue obstinately to adhere to its reactionary political line and deny the true situation in South Vietnam--that there were two zones, two regimes, two armies and three political forces--but refuse to admit there was a third force, was unwilling to form a coalition with the 'Viet Cong,' and was determined to sabotage the Paris Agreement and continue the war?" "Why did they continue to hang on to the stupid military strategy of defending everything, land-grabbing all over the place, and trying to wipe out the liberation armed forces and liquidate the PRG of the RSVN?"

We had long known that the puppet Thieu regime was only a lackey, a tool of the U.S. imperialists. All of its thoughts were under the guidance, and all of their actions were under the command baton, of their masters. Thus the answer to those questions lay in the plots and policies of the United States.

In his book "A Soldier's Report" Westmoreland admitted that "He (P. Harkness) and the other U.S. officials went to Vietnam to implement a national policy that had been drafted in Washington." As for the statements of the South Vietnamese military and civilian leaders quoted in a report prepared for the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense titled "The Collapse of South Vietnam," "According to Tran Van Don, General Vien admitted the dependent role of South Vietnam. Another general agreed that the South Vietnamese leaders had been pressured into the implementation of American plans." Nothing could be clearer than words that slipped out of the Americans and puppets after their complete defeat.

Our people's war against the U.S. imperialists was very complicated with regard to both content and form from the very beginning and--through its developmental processes--to that time. It was not merely a national liberation war against aggression and was not merely a class war between revolution and counterrevolution in our country, but was more complicated, a war which manifested the struggle between the forces of progress and reaction all over the war, which converged on the key battlefield: Vietnam! Immediately after France was forced to sign the Geneva Agreements, the United States opposed them and was determined to intervene in Indochina and throw out the French, so that it could assume the role of international gendarme. The U.S. plot to occupy South Vietnam and make it the first line of defense against the socialist camp and prevent the influence of socialism from spreading, so that it could become the masters of the rest of the world (except for the socialist countries). The Americans thought that Vietnam, although a small country, occupied an important strategic position in the world. The United States, rich in dollars and modern weapons, was capable of and had to defeat the socialist bloc there without having to clash with the Soviet Union or China

(China was at that time still a country in the socialist bloc). The U.S. leaders thought the prospects of that strategy were high; they were self-confident, did not deeply study the Vietnamese nation and people, disregarded the experience of their French friends, and ignored the just voice of Americans who protested the war and of the progressive people of the world. As a result, the more bogged down they became the more they had to escalate the war, and the more they escalated the war, the greater were their losses in men and materiel. Like a greedy, addicted gambler they continued to lurch from one defeat to another. After they had escalated to the top-most rung they of course had to deescalate, but both escalation and deescalation were measures for carrying out the global strategy of the U.S. imperialists and carrying out their plot to achieve global hegemony and oppose the socialist bloc. When the strategy of "massive retaliation," based on a monopoly on nuclear weapons, was bankrupted and the three revolutionary currents were attacking victoriously all over the world, the United States had to shift over to a strategy of "flexible response" with its three types of war--special, limited and general--in order to take the initiative and win under any circumstances, and especially in order to oppose the national liberation wars. After that strategy was applied on the Vietnam battlefield in 1961, the special war was defeated at the end of 1964 and the beginning of 1965 and the special war was bankrupted in 1968, but the balance of forces in the world and the conditions at that time did not permit the United States to start a general war and use nuclear weapons, so the strategy of flexible response was rendered impotent. Perplexed and confused, Johnson hastily came up with the "de-Americanization" policy in hopes of pulling his feet out of the Vietnam quagmire. But the U.S. imperialist leaders and strategists were unwilling to accept the disgrace of defeat and still believed that the United States was destined to rule the world. They were very afraid that if they lost Vietnam they would lose a whole series of other countries according to the "domino theory." Therefore, after Nixon became president he adopted a strategy of "regional defensive alliances" which was in fact a policy to mobilize and win over the forces of the world to oppose the socialist bloc, so that the United States would not stand alone. In Vietnam they transformed that strategy into the Vietnamization--not the de-Americanization--of the war. People were partially correct in saying that Johnson wanted to get out of Vietnam by "de-Americanizing," while Nixon wanted to remain in Vietnam by "Vietnamizing the war." In fact, Nixon, unlike Johnson, had not been demoralized, so he tried hard to pursue the unchanging objectives of the U.S. imperialists. Before and after the Paris Agreement the United States implemented its strategy of Vietnamizing the war by seeking all ways to make the puppet army and regime strong militarily, economically and politically so that they could defeat the liberation armed forces and annihilate the PRG of the RSVN, keep South Vietnam as a nation dependent on them and permanently divide our country. Those objectives had never changed. The only change was using Vietnamese blood to replace American blood. The Americans were forced to sign the Paris Agreement although its contents were not advantageous for them and their puppets. But they signed it anyway, thinking that they could reverse the situation by dishonest and crooked schemes, by the economic strength of the United States and by its intricate, insidious diplomatic activities all over the world. They regarded the Paris Agreement as only a means, as a tactic, during a certain strategic phase. They signed the agreement so that they could implement the provisions

beneficial to them while misrepresenting and rejecting those that were not beneficial. Their objective was still to serve their victory. The strength of weapons and dollars are the true "laws" of the U.S. imperialists in the world today. Their own words have very clearly revealed their insidious plot. Lt Gen Tran Van Don of the Saigon puppet regime, said in his book "The Unending War in Vietnam" (published by the Presidio Press, California and London, 1978), "He (i.e. Charles Whitehouse, the deputy U.S. ambassador who accompanied the Kissinger delegation to Saigon in mid-October 1972 to explain the Paris Agreement and persuade Thieu to sign them) said to me, "The agreement has some good points and should be signed. It is only a piece of paper and will change nothing, you will see."

At the beginning of January 1973 Tran Van Don and Bui Diem, heading a special delegation sent by Thieu to Washington to learn of the U.S. intentions, reported to Thieu that Alexis Johnson, a U.S. undersecretary of state, said privately to me (i.e. Diem): "We have been friends many years, and I am speaking to you as a friend. The fact is that the United States has not changed its objectives in Vietnam." And in a Top Secret message sent to Thieu at that time, Nixon stated that "The freedom and independence of the Republic of Vietnam are still supreme objectives of America's foreign policy."

Thus it is clear. The deep-lying plot of Nixon and Kissinger was to, by signing the Paris Agreement, send the U.S. troops home, secure the release of the U.S. POW's, calm down U.S. and world opinion, and shore up the U.S. military forces, which were no longer prepared to carry out the U.S. global strategy, while having a period of several years of breathing space in Vietnam in order to carry out the following insidious plots:

1. Providing additional equipment, weapons, and modern technical equipment in order to transform the puppet army into a strong force capable of annihilating the liberation armed forces. Increasing economic development aid and investment for the puppet Thieu regime in order to develop that regime, which the United States recognized as the only legal regime in South Vietnam, into a Southeast Asian regime that was strong militarily, politically and economically.
2. Providing reconstruction aid for North Vietnam, using material-technical bait to tempt North Vietnam, infiltrate and monopolize it, and by that means restricting the north's aid for the NLF SVN, using the north to restrict activities in the south, and plotting to achieve the peaceful transformation of the regime in the north.
3. Using the policy of U.S.-style detente on a worldwide basis to create pressure and limit the aid of the socialist bloc for both the north and the south, in hopes of strangling our ability to fight. In fact, after reaching agreement at Shanghai to retain Thieu and keep South Vietnam in the U.S. orbit, China limited its aid to Vietnam, especially with regard to large weapons and transportation facilities. In the "Nixon's Trip to China" chapter of his memoir "The White House Years," Kissinger recounted the working sessions of Zhou Enlai and Nixon: "Zhou's position on Vietnam was a masterpiece of tortuous circumlocution; he objected to Nixon's opinions more out of sorrow than anger. He expressed 'sympathy' for the people of North Vietnam but said

nothing about common interests. He referred to China's obligation to help Hanoi not in terms of the solidarity ideal, or in terms of legitimate national rights, but in terms of the historical debt owed Vietnam because of the Chinese Empire in the past.

"His principal argument regarding the necessity of an early end to the war was that it caused the United States to become bogged down and to waste much energy which should be expended on more important parts of the world. Zhou criticized our negotiating position in a very perfunctory manner. He demanded that we withdraw our troops from South Vietnam. He never supported Hanoi's political program--and of people who criticize us--regarding a coalition government and the overthrow of Thieu."

Then Kissinger concluded, "Our diplomatic activity was about to succeed in isolating Hanoi." The United States truly believed that its scheme to divide the countries of the socialist bloc, and its worldwide detente policy, were about to bear results.

4. Along with the above plots, it was necessary to flout their strength by retaining a strong U.S. military force in Southeast Asia to serve as a deterrent force, intimidate weak-willed people, and support the Thieu clique.

By means of schemes, the Thieu regime would gradually become stronger, the PRG of the RSVN would become increasingly stronger, Thieu would be capable of eliminating the opposition and gaining full control of South Vietnam, and South Vietnam would be transformed into dependency of the U.S. imperialists in that strategic location on the western shores of the Pacific.

In accordance with that scheme, the United States was continuing to implement its strategy of Vietnamizing the war in South Vietnam despite the Paris Agreement. The President and the other key officials in the U.S. administration at that time stressed that in order to persuade Thieu that the United States would always be by his side, it was necessary to provide him with all kinds of aid and be prepared to reintervene in South Vietnam if necessary. Even Kissinger had promised Thieu, in the course of his trip to Saigon in October 1972, that the United States would use military forces to attack and occupy North Vietnam by attacking north from the 17th Parallel. Thieu gleefully suggested that it would be necessary to land troops nearer the objective than attacking north from the 17th Parallel. Although Thieu and his clique were concerned about their fate as servants, were ordered around and treated with contempt by their U.S. masters, and had weak position and strength, they were still confident of the support of their masters and thought that if they got into trouble their masters would certainly not go back on their word but would protect and assist them. The puppet Brig Gen Le Trung Truc, who had been an aide as the chairman of the Interministerial Committee to Coordinate the Cease-fire, admitted that "The United States always bragged about its peerless strength. Thieu had absolute confidence in the military strength of the United States, and thought that since the United States was involved in Vietnam it would remain involved to the end."

Because it was so confident of that, the Thieu clique was blind to the real situation and continued the war in order to fulfill its subjective desires and the intentions of its masters. Such were the plots of the United States and the acts of Thieu. He was under no illusions that the disciple and master would strictly adhere to the agreement. The United States not only wanted to occupy South Vietnam but had the even more insane desire of invading and occupying the North, in order to divide and control the socialist bloc. That illusion had the very encouraging support of his new ally--China--and had been tested during the recent period and events. If the Chinese rulers during the 1960's had not given one signal after another, by many different means, so that the United States could understand that it was free to act in Vietnam provided that they did not clash with China--"If you don't bother us we won't bother you"--in 1965 the United States would not have dared to brazenly send troops to South Vietnam, and then wage a war of destruction against and blockade the North. If in 1972, at Shanghai, they had not promised to save Thieu and South Vietnam for the United States--as Luigi Sommaruglia wrote in the Italian newspaper IL MESSIGORIO on 3 April 1979, "China accepted the U.S. recommendation that Thieu be retained in South Vietnam, with the result that Vietnam would, like Korea, be permanently divided. In return, Nixon promised that China could join the United Nations and take a seat on the Security Council, and that the United States would abandon its policy of supporting Taiwan"--the United States would not have boldly withdrawn its troops from Vietnam and changed its strategy, but still believed that it could remain permanently in South Vietnam.

In brief, that meant that whether the United States remained in Vietnam or left Vietnam it had the assurance, ironically, of its gigantic friend to the north, a country bordering ours.

It had been a year and a half since the Paris Agreement was signed. The actual developments in South Vietnam did not follow the meticulous arrangement the United States had made, or the plan that had been drafted by Nixon and Kissinger. The reason for that was something Nixon and Kissinger did not take into consideration and could not comprehend. That was the effect of their adversary's intelligence and courage in thought and action. If after 1973 we had believed that by one means or another the Paris Agreement would be implemented, just as we had believed that 2 years after the Geneva Agreements there would be a general election, or if we had incorrectly evaluated our strength and that of the enemy, and had been guilty of leftist or rightist mistakes in thought and action, the situation would have been different. Of course, faltering steps could not be avoided during the initial period. But a faltering period of the first 3 or 4 months of a new strategic phase of a long war was a short period. It was not sufficiently long for the enemy to take advantage and win victory. On the contrary, we were vigilant, our party's guidance was acute and timely, and our people and armed forces were closely united in combat and revolutionary struggle, so we were on the ascent and the enemy was on the decline and could recover. The enemy's wily, cruel schemes were not timely and could not be carried out. The puppet military forces could not become stronger, but were becoming dispirited and were falling apart. They wanted to augment their large civilian self-defense forces and build strong, mobile regional forces capable of occupying and defending all areas, but now those two forces were now declining numerically, many surrendered

or deserted, and outposts and bases were abandoned. They wanted to concentrate their regular forces into completely mobile forces with modern, highly sophisticated equipment and weapons in order to reduce the number of troops and save money for economic development while still maintaining a strong military, but now they were forced to urgently increase their troop strength and the number of units, but still did not have sufficient forces to hold the localities and there were no mobile forces. They wanted to expand and stabilize their area in order to appeal for foreign economic construction investment, but that area shrank and was unstable, and no one dared invest in it. They had a serious budget deficit and U.S. aid had to be used for military expenditures. They wanted to create a strong ruling party, the "Democratic Party," but they forced everyone to join "Mr Thieu's Party," which was made up entirely of opportunists and political speculators who joined in hopes of attaining promotions and getting ahead, who stole and bribed to their heart's content, and bullied the people. How could there be a strong ruling party? Thus the puppet Thieu regime did not become stronger in all respects, as the United States hoped, but was becoming weaker in all regards--militarily, politically, economically, etc.--and was in ruins and going downhill.

After the U.S. imperialists were defeated, they had to retreat militarily and shift over to employing all sorts of devilish plots to set up a "prestigious puppet" to replace them and firmly control South Vietnam. But that puppet did not stand erect but had begun to collapse, so at that time what was needed was a shove sufficiently strong to push it into the abyss so that neither the pupil nor the master could save it. That was an opportunity.

The correct evaluation of that situation and a correct realization of the opportunity were extremely important with regard to strategic guidance on a key battlefield that was representative of all of South Vietnam.

Lenin said that "Revolution is a science, but at the same time it is an art. It demands sensitivity toward the situation and timely positive response to changes in the situation. Revolution is always creative." COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission evaluated and were aware of that changed situation in order to guide all rainy season plans and activities, while also drafting a 1975 plan, especially for the 1974-1975 dry season, and reporting it to the Military Commission of the party Central Committee.

During the July 1974 conference of COSVN the secretary stressed that "The winning of a decisive victory in 1975-1976, especially our efforts during the 1974-1975 dry season, is within the purview of Resolution 21 of the party Central Committee and COSVN Resolution 12, which call for the winning of a decisive victory during the next few years. We must fulfill our rainy season mission and positively prepare to fulfill our 1975 mission. Great efforts are required on the part of the entire party. The basis of our decisions was the situation during the recent period, especially during the past 4 months of 1974. A directive will be issued to the military regions and provinces to review the implementation of Resolution 12, make all-out efforts during the rainy season, and make truly good preparations for the 1975 dry season, with a truly resolute spirit. We will make a full report to the Central Committee and recommend that it guide the combining of diplomatic struggle and coordination on all battlefields in South Vietnam."

The contests of the 1974 rainy season activities, according to the guidance of COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission included:

--Continuing to defeat the enemy's pacification plan by launching counter-offensives and offensives, expanding the area under our control, and developing the political struggle movement for the masses to arise to become the masters in the various areas, especially in the Mekong Delta and the area around the capital. Holding a conference in September 1974 to recapitulate the task of opposing pacification throughout the B2 theater.

--Strengthening our forces militarily and politically in order to create the position and strength to enable them to fulfill their 1975 mission. We had to be strong in each village, each district, and each province so that we were capable of developing those areas on our own. In comparison, in 1960 there were nearly 5 million people in the liberated and contested areas but were brilliantly successful in the simultaneous uprising. In 1968, when we controlled nearly 4 million people, we won a victory in the Tet Mau Than general offensive and uprising. Thus the norm regarding the number of people we had to control by the end of that rainy season, and prior to the 1975 dry season, was equal to the 1968 level.

--Concentrating on rapidly accelerating the urban work. At that time, the contradiction between the ruling comprador bourgeois-bureaucratic-militaristic clique and the various strata of people was becoming fierce, especially in the cities. We were capable of creating a strong urban fist.

--Firmly grasping the armed forces and being concerned with development, training and combat. The time had come when all three types of troops had to be developed rapidly and strongly so that they could fulfill their key mission of being the decisive forces.

--Building up the liberated area and base areas and insuring the transportation corridors. Despite the handicaps of the rainy season and the efforts of the enemy to stop us, we had to, by all means, augment the supplies and rear services of the forces, areas, and military regions so that they could be prepared to win big victories during the dry season.

--With regard to the party's leadership, it was necessary to motivate the cadres, enlisted men, and masses ideologically. We had to enable the entire party, the entire army, and the entire population to clearly understand the insidious plots of the Americans and puppets, clearly understand our new victories and the new factors of the situation and enthusiastically endeavor to advance. In view of the insidious plots of the enemy, they had to realize that there was no other course than to use revolutionary violence to oppose counterrevolutionary violence, and that it was necessary to attack strongly in order to defend our right to live. Everyone had fully to bring into play their capability and responsibility in order to win a big victory. It was necessary to oppose rightist tendencies and vagueness regarding the enemy.

--The echelons and sectors had to rectify their table of organization and working methods so that they could be appropriate to the new situation,

streamlined, appropriate to the actual situation and the grassroots situation, and have the highest effectiveness.

One of the most urgent tasks during the rainy season was preparing military forces for the dry season. Since all of the forces had to participate in fighting the enemy in all three areas and attain the norms assigned by the upper echelon for the rainy season, all three types of troops and the military organs had to be concerned with organizing and developing units, and with training in order to increase their combat effectiveness and complete our deployment on all parts of the battlefield. That Regional Command force development plan was approved by the Military Commission on 6 June and immediately afterward disseminated to the military regions and the various echelons, down to the base level. The intention of the plan was to mobilize the localities, to the greatest extent possible, to achieve the unlimited expansion of the village and hamlet guerrillas and local district troops, so that the districts could have battalions, and the villages companies, with which to defend themselves and expand the liberated areas without requiring the aid of the provincial forces. That was based on the actual experience of My Xuyen District in Soc Trang Province and of a number of places in Kien Phong Province. During the recent dry season we effectively retaliated against enemy land-grabbing and by that means expanded the liberated area, so that it was made up of many hamlets and villages which formed a contiguous area. In such places, the popular masses arose and participated enthusiastically, along with the guerrillas and local troops, in attacking the enemy and wiping out, or forcing the abandonment or surrender of, many outposts set up by the popular PF and RF troops in the villages.

The provinces had to expand efforts to encourage youths to enlist and, along with recruits assigned by the upper echelon, supplement existing units or be organized into strong provincial battalions. Depending on its circumstances, each battalion should have between one and four battalions. The provinces capable of doing so, and required to do so by their missions, could organize a light regiment and a few independent battalions. During that period, except for Military Region 6 and Saigon the other military regions--7, 8 and 9--were to have a number of independent regiments directly under their command. In order to enable the military region commands to remain fully abreast of all military and political forces, and command the offensives and uprisings throughout the military region, and in order to streamline organization and have a strong main-force fist, in August 1974 the Regional Command decided to organize a light division for each of the military regions by consolidating the independent regiments, strengthening the combat arms, and organizing division command organs commanded by a deputy military region commander. Military Region 9 organized the 4th Division, made up of the 10th, 20th, and 30th regiments and commanded by comrade Nguyen Dinh Chuch. In Military Region 8 there was the 8th Division, commanded by comrade Sau Phu (Senior Colonel Huynh VAN Nhieu) and consisting of the 18th, 24th and 320th regiments. In Military Region 7 its two independent regiments--the 33d and 4th--were organized into the 6th Division commanded by comrade Dang Ngoc Si (code name Hai Phong). In Military Region 6, where our conditions were difficult in all regards, which was distant from the aid and command of the upper echelon, and which lacked manpower, materiel, and transportation facilities, in order to be

appropriate to the mission and operational guidelines and mode there, we had only organized independent infantry battalion, sapper units, guerrillas, and armed work teams. In view of the new situation and the missions that would be assigned to the military regions, in May and June 1974 the Regional Command ordered the merging of the 186th, 840th and 15th infantry battalions, and the artillery, communications and other companies, to form the 812th Regiment, which was to undergo urgent training and make Binh Tuy and Binh Thuan provinces its main area of operations. Because it did not clearly understand the intention of the Regional Command, the military region was not yet clear about forming that regiment. The Regional Command explained to it the necessity of organizing the regiment and ordered that it be organized immediately to promptly fulfill its mission and avoid missing the opportunity. In 1975 that regiment, along with the local forces and other units, liberated most of Binh Tuy and Lam Dong provinces, all of Tuyen Duc Province, and part of Ninh Thuan Province, thus brilliantly fulfilling the mission of the military region.

In the Saigon Special Zone, in addition to the forces deployed by the Regional Command inside and outside the city, because of its special conditions we only organized separate battalions, such as "Determined To Win" battalions 1, 2, 3 and 4, along with the district local troops, guerrillas, armed security forces and armed youths. (The Gia Dinh Regiment was formed later.)

By that time the Regional Command directly controlled the 5th, 7th and 9th Divisions, the 201st, 205th, 16th and 271st independent regiments, the 27th Sapper Group, the 316th Municipal Commando Group and a very limited number of combat arms units. In the B2 theater there were five battalions of vehicle-pulled artillery of the various kinds, including two battalions of 105mm and 155mm artillery pieces captured from the enemy which were very short of ammunition, and three battalions of tanks and armored vehicles which were under-strength and included M41 tanks and M113 troop carriers captured from the enemy. The combat engineering and communications units were even weaker. There was only one river-crossing combat engineer battalion with insufficient equipment, a construction battalion, two battalions of combat engineers, three bridge-and-road battalions, two wireless radio battalions, and a wired communications battalion. For a long time we had complained to the comrades with the General Staff and in the Combat Arms Command of the High Command that our forces were too small at a time when we were responsible for a large, key theater such as B2, and of course had often demanded additional personnel, facilities, equipment, weapons and ammunition. What commander would not want to control ample combat forces and have reserves so that he can fulfill his mission as well as possible. Perhaps that was why some of the comrades at the General Staff complained that B2 had a localistic, partialistic attitude and demanded more than the B1, B3 and B4 theaters. We heard many such complaints, not directly, but from others who related those biased observations to the extent that when we discussed military forces we often said, "Let us heed what the Greek philosopher Pythagoras said: "If you suffer an injustice, console yourself; the person truly worthy of pity is the one who caused the injustice." We added that a skilled general did not always have to have plentiful forces in order to win.

Even so, when we felt that it was necessary to do so we still made recommendations to the upper echelon, and continued to demand additional forces. We decided to organize a corps for the B2 theater by combining the 9th and 7th divisions and a number of existing combat arms units, and recommended that the High Command give us an additional division and tank and artillery units, and that those units arrive at the battlefield at the beginning of the dry season so that a strong corps on that important battlefield. After receiving the approval of the High Command, at the military conference held in July 1974 the Regional Command officially decreed the formation of the corps, called the 4th Corps, of which comrade Hoang Cam would serve as commander and comrade Hoang The Thien as political officer. In addition, the 271st and 205th independent regiments were formed into the (understrength) 3d Division, commanded by comrade Do Quang Hung, to facilitate command. The 3d Division, as well as the 5th Division, the 16th and 201st Regiments, the 27th Sapper Group and the 316th Commando Group were directly under the Regional Command so that they could be used wherever necessary.

The formation of a corps at the B2 theater level and of divisions for the military regions was a positive preparatory step with regard to the theater's main-force units, in order to meet the demands of the situation and the operational policy adopted by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Committee for the coming period. It was warmly applauded by the people, the sectors and the echelons who helped carry it out. It inspired the soldiers and people of the B2 theater to enthusiastically advance to the winning of new victories. It also demonstrated the greatest period of large-scale force development ever in the B2 theater, with regard not only to main-force units but also provincial and district local troops and village and hamlet guerrillas. The armed forces were not the only ones to be developed rapidly during that period; the party forces at the base level and the mass political forces also grew much larger and stronger, even in areas in which we had been very weak. For example, Cho Moi District in Long Xuyen Province was a district in the weak area, and was a narrow strip of land between two large rivers, the Tien Giang and Hau Giang. Prior to 28 January 1973 there were only two party chapters in the district and very few of the masses were organized, although the people there were very good and had a long revolutionary tradition. By the end of the 1974 dry season, however, we had eight party chapters which encompassed 11 of the total of 13 villages. We were able to create hundreds of secret and special guerrillas and had 79 agents in 15 civilian self-defense groups and intergroups of the enemy. Our cadres could move about and mobilize the masses to struggle everywhere in the province. Another example was Cho Gao District in My Tho Province, which lay immediately east of National Route 4 and was bordered by the Tien Giang River, the Cho Gao Canal, and a branch of the Van Co River. The terrain presented many difficulties for our cadres operating there. There were 20 villages in the district. In 18 of them there were party chapters and mass infrastructures. In all, at that time our military and political forces numbered 4,336, while the enemy had 3,318 RF, PF and civilian self-defense troops. We gained superiority in a district which had been one of our weak districts. Furthermore, a number of village officials and families of puppet soldiers contributed tens of thousands of dong to the district's resistance war fund. According to combined data, by the end of 1974 there were 3.4 million people living in the liberated and contested areas in the B2 theater, in low-level and

high-level revolutionary organizations, which was not far below the 1968 level. During the rainy season we could endeavor to increase that number even more. The reason for that was that COSVN continually monitored and guided the military regions and provinces, by direct contact with the localities and by means of directives 01 to 08, the principal contents of which were urgently creating position and force and changing the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy. The norms regarding the development of actual military and political strength in the localities, and activities to oppose the enemy and expand the liberated area, which were assigned by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission to the military regions and provinces for the recent dry season had been attained and surpassed. COSVN also was confident that the norms that had been set forth for the rainy season in the B2 theater would be surpassed to an even greater extent. All of the cadres who participated in the military conference in July expressed determination to overcome all norms assigned by the upper echelon. Those comrades brought up a very new situation: the popular masses all over were aware of the decline of the enemy and our victorious position, just as stated in the party resolution, which proved that the masses had caught up with the guidance of the party or, in other words, that the masses were marching in step. Whenever that is true, whether in wartime or in peacetime, the revolution will have the strength to do everything, to resolve many difficulties which were seemingly unresolvable.

During that July military conference we disseminated and explained the April 1974 resolution of the Military Commission of the party Central Committee which had been approved by the Political Bureau in order to, on the bases of the most recent developments in the situation, supplement Resolution 21 of the party Central Committee. The resolution evaluated the new U.S. plot as follows: "The basic plot of the U.S. imperialists is still to carry out the 'Nixon Doctrine,' impose neocolonialism in South Vietnam, and transform South Vietnam into a separate, pro-American country, but shift over from using U.S. military forces directly in the fighting to using the puppet army and regime, with the effective aid of the United States with regard to military advisers, economics, and finance."

"In order to implement that scheme, the United States has from the beginning consistently carried out a policy of both signing the agreement to restore peace and helping the Saigon puppet regime continue the war."

The resolution observed that "In places in which we have resolutely counter-attacked and attacked the enemy have been confused and passive and have encountered difficulties. They have been pushed back in Military Region 9 and have been stopped in Military Region 8, and although they had succeeded in grabbing a little land in Military Region 5 they were stopped. We have wiped out a rather large part of the enemy's manpower, defended our liberated enclaves in the Mekong Delta and around Saigon, defended our vast liberated areas and base areas, and maintained our strategic threat to the enemy."

The resolution gave specific guidance to the battlefields: "Go all-out to take advantage of time to strengthen forces, strengthen material resources, and concentrate guidance on insuring that the lowland areas, especially the Mekong Delta, undergo a clear transformation in our favor."

"Military Region 5 must correctly evaluate the situation, clarify the thinking of cadres and the operational mode, cooperate closely with the main-force units, the local troops, and the militia and guerrilla forces, achieve close coordination between the Central Highlands and the lowlands, essentially restore the movement to the 1972 level and further expand it, and defend and gradually fill out the liberated areas and base areas in the Central Highlands and the western parts of the lowland provinces.

"In eastern Nam Bo we must defend the liberated enclaves around Saigon and consolidate them into strong staging areas which form an increasingly tighter noose threatening Saigon, and further consolidate and expand the corridors connecting the outskirts of Saigon with the vast liberated and base areas.

"Tri Thien must consolidate its position in the contiguous area, penetrate deeply down into the lowlands, create political and guerrilla bases, weaken the enemy's control, advance to coordinating the three spearheads (political, military and proselyting among enemy troops), advance the movement, reconstitute the three areas, destroy the enemy's multiple defense line position, and continually threaten the enemy in order to pin down the airborne and marine divisions and create advantages for the other battlefields in South Vietnam, while at the same time maintaining and strengthening the liberated area."

At the conference there were also presented a detailed evaluation and assessment by COSVN of the rainy season plan and a preview by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission of activities necessary to win a great victory during the 1974-1975 dry season. The cadres attending the conference, who had battlefield experience and had been in constant contact with the base levels and with danger during the different periods, agreed unanimously with COSVN's assessment of the situation. That unanimity became collective strength with which to implement the party's resolution and strength which was passed on to the party members and masses.

Immediately after the military conference, comrade Pham Hung, as secretary of COSVN, secretary of the Regional Military Party Commission, and political officer of the Regional Command, joined us in explaining the resolution in detail to groups of cadres from each military region. Especially, we discussed with the cadres from the Saigon Municipal Unit the development and deployment of the various kinds of military and political forces, both secret and open, as well as the operational forms, especially the form of armed activity in the outskirts and in the city. Comrade Pham Hung personally resolved questions in the consciousness of the city's cadres regarding the deployment of sapper regiments in the outskirts and military activities in those areas. Many cadres had the mistaken viewpoint that the party organization and mass organization in the outskirts were still weak and that sappers and local troops should not be deployed there because they might be exposed, because they feared that the enemy and launch sweeping operations had destabilized the situation, thus preventing them from building infrastructures. They were especially afraid that if the sappers or local troops fought the enemy there, all of their bases would be broken up. If armed forces were stationed there, would they not fight if the enemy arrived? Thus the question of "How should we fight to avoid breaking up the bases?" greatly confused them. A number of

places withdrew their armed forces or forbade them to fight. He emphasized that "Our party's line is to attack the enemy in all three strategic areas--the jungles-and-mountains, the lowlands, and the cities--and to attack them with both armed forces and political forces. If that is to be accomplished it is necessary to organize and deploy military forces combined with mass forces. The only differences among the areas is how to organize forces and what types of forces to deploy. We must attack the enemy by means of all three offensive spearheads, so it is necessary to study how the attacks by the three spearheads should be carried out and where in order to win small and large victories. We absolutely must not fight a protracted guerrilla war and not refrain from combat. In war, we cannot hope for stability in order to organize forces, and forces organized under such conditions of artificial stability cannot be of high quality. In the present strategic phase we must further tighten the noose on Saigon, and must be prepared to achieve coordination among the various areas in order to win a victory during the coming dry season. We must not be tardy. When cadres have correct viewpoints and struggle bravely, and when there is close coordination between the local party committee echelons and the military command echelons, there will be correct modes. We must be bold, and dare to think and do."

A very important, unforgettable example of daring to think and do was the transporting and stockpiling of food and ammunition for the B2 theater during the rainy season by warriors who truly were "the first to go and the last to return," in the tradition of the Nam Bo resistance war, warriors who endured difficulties and hardships but were taciturn and were so happy over the victories of their comrades that they all but forgot their own victory. They were the rear services warriors? Throughout the rainy season, with its heavy rain and mud, tens of thousands of rear services troops, along with hundreds of thousands of people worked day and night on all routes from the rear to the front, through muddy, flooded fields, and the rivers and water of Dong Thap Muoi, the U Minh Forest, and all over the Mekong Delta, to the mountains and jungles of Military Regions 7 and 6, to the outskirts of Saigon, and into the capital. Perhaps the rear services branch of B2 reflected most clearly the skilled combination of all elements in our anti-U.S. war: combining the army's rear services with the national rear area, combining on-the-spot purchasing and production, combining specialized rear services with the people's rear services, combining military forces and mass forces enlisted men and civilian laborers, regular troops and guerrillas, large-scale and small-scale, open and secret, secretly carrying supplies across enemy areas at night, secretly using trucks and boats to transport supplies on roads and rivers, transporting supplies into the cities, combining the modern with the primitive (ox carts, cargo bicycles, motorboats, rowboats, backpacks, etc.), and combining the supply work with combat to annihilate the enemy and defend our supply forces. Even in the command structure of the Regional Rear Services Department combination was necessary to insure a high degree of effectiveness of its work. Comrade Tu Khanh (Maj Gen Dao Son Tay), the department's political officer, who had been a worker in the Ba Son factory in Saigon, was born in Gia Dinh Province, participated in the revolutionary movement at an early age and joined the Indochinese Communist Party. In the anti-French war he was a deputy commander of the Military Command of Gia Dinh Province. During the anti-U.S. war, before changing over to the rear services sector he was the

regional artillery commander. Thus he knew a good deal about the military, the city and the people of Saigon, and the eastern Nam Bo region. He was loyal and sincere and loved and was deeply concerned for the cadres and men and knew how to insure that the troops would fight victoriously. The department commander, Bui Phung, from the outskirts of Hanoi, had served as a staff officer of the Rear Services General Department and was expert at his profession. Comrade Tu Vo (Vo Phat), the department's deputy commander, who had been secretary of the Long Chau Tien provincial party committee during the anti-French period and had engaged in revolutionary activities in the Mekong Delta and in Kampuchea, was a person with many accomplishments in creating local sources of materiel for the sector. The lower-echelon cadres made a similar deployment so that they could combine their talents, virtue and knowledge of their work, familiarity with the battlefield, ability to locate sources of materiel, and knowledge of human nature. The assignment of great tasks must be accompanied by organizing and selecting people who are capable of carrying out those tasks, in order to insure their success. It would be impossible to relate all of the combinations that were made to create the combined strength which enabled the B2 rear services sector to support all battles and campaigns, no matter where or when they took place, from the beginning to the end of the war. Even during the period in which the B2 theater was experiencing the greatest difficulties and shortages with regard to food and ammunition, especially in War Zone A in northern Bien Hoa in 1966, the region deployed and kept there the 81st Rear Services Group commanded by comrade Muoi Thien.* Therefore, when the 9th Division had to fight in that area it had rice and ammunition without having to take them along and be slowed down. While en route to an assignment in 1966, I visited the 81st Group. Comrade Muoi Thien and his men assured me that they were determined to "hold their ground" no matter what the situation. In addition to being attacked by bombs, shells and poison chemicals, the men serving there had another dangerous enemy: malaria. For that reason, during "the 9 years"**, the men had a saying, "The Ma Da and Song Be--heroes meet their end" (the place where the Ma Da River flows into the Song Be River was famous for being insalubrious and caused the death of many of our soldiers from malaria during the anti-French period.

There, "miraculous speed" must be understood as preparing the battlefield in advance, and having supplies where and when they are needed. If that was to be accomplished, it was necessary to foresee developments early, accurately and promptly, and be an organization that was skilled in making preparations in advance, efficient, and made up of brave and resourceful people. There can be no miraculous speed if we "wait until the water reaches our feet before jumping." If one waits until something happens before acting, how can one act in time? The Americans and puppets had large and small transport planes and many helicopters and could not get the job done in time, let alone having to meet requirements under urgent conditions. The B2 rear services had the technique of "feathering the nest in advance." It cached hundreds and thousands of tons of food, weapons and ammunition in the guerrilla enclaves and

*Senior Colonel Vo Van Lan, now commander of the Rear Services Department of Military Region 7.

**"The 9 years" referred to the anti-French period.

the areas in which the main-force and local troops would operate when necessary, and cached explosives, weapons and ammunition in the outskirts of cities and next to the enemy's airfields, ports and supply depots; and inside the cities, near important objectives, such as for the sappers and commandos in Saigon, whom we used in accordance with plans drafted by the upper echelon. Without cleverly organized forces commanded by suitable, capable cadres and without revolutionary masses, such tasks could not have been carried out. In order to prepare for the 1974-1975 dry season, during the rainy season the rear services sector transported to the military regions, including Saigon, more than 3,000 tons of weapons and ammunition, and supplied to the units sufficient quantities of base ammunition loads and food for combat and for reserve stocks. It stockpiled in areas in which the dry season battles would take place, especially in eastern Nam Bo, nearly 30,000 tons of materiel, including nearly 8,000 tons of ammunition and 1,500 tons of POL. Something else noteworthy about the B2 rear services sector was that it tried to create local sources of materiel whenever possible, and only requested from the upper echelon what it could not obtain locally. In 1973 and the rainy season of 1974, the materiel obtained locally by the B2 rear services sector amounted to 73 percent of the theater's needs, so only 27 percent were requested from the central echelon. Correctly carrying out the order of the Regional Command, the rear services sector insured that there were always on hand stocks of food, medicine and military medical equipment; enough POL for from 3 to 6 months; and sufficient weapons and ammunition for 1 year. Achieving those feats on a distant, key, extremely fierce battlefield was a very significant accomplishment. When I met with them, those rear services troops who gave their all in all campaigns, they were spontaneously happy despite the hardship and danger, and said nothing about their work.

At the beginning of 1975, I went to the Ta Lai ferry crossing on the Dong Nai River in War Zone A in northern Bien Hoa. I talked with the driver of a truck full of ammunition who was robust and lively. He was bending over feeling the tread of a worn tire but suddenly stood straight and said, "I'm from Ha Bac and came south in 1973. My name is Pham Van Mieng." The comrade who was driving the motorboat that was pushing the ferry across the river was older, and was thin but wiry. He said, "I'm from Ca Mau, and enlisted during the simultaneous uprising. My name is Ut Den. I'm studying new things up here. Back home I only knew how to drive a boat with an outboard motor to take my wife to the market." "So you have a wife," I said, "Do you have any children yet?" He replied, "I had a 3-year-old boy who was shot to death by the PF on a sweeping operation. Then I enlisted for good because I was determined to get revenge." I felt sorry for him. I asked, "How about comrade Mieng?" He replied, "I don't have a family yet. After we win I'll volunteer to stay on here." "So," I said, "are you interested in some girl?" "No, sir," he replied, "I have to take care of my truck night and day." I remember that in 1968, when crossing the Saigon River at night, I met at a ferry crossing in a bamboo grove that had been tattered by bombs and shells but was still capable of camouflaging small groups, several very young girls who were carrying heavy boxes of ammunition to bunkers on the bank. I recognized two of them, Miss Tham and Miss Lien, Warriors of Emulation who had participated in victory celebrations at the regional base and at the Rear Services Department. Most of the girls were from the outskirts of Saigon and had enlisted to do rear

services work in the Saigon-Gia Dinh Zone. When they recognized the commander they were very pleased and gathered around, excitedly asking, "When will Saigon, Tan Thoi Nhat village, and Be Diem be liberated?" Another interrupted, "How About Tan Hiep village in Hoc Mon? You only think of your own village." "Will we be able to go home after Tet?" I wonder where Tham, Lien Mieng, and Ut are now! So many people, including rear services cadres, fell on the battlefield. The first rear services director of B2, comrade Nguyen Van Dung, a worker from Saigon, his hair grey after two resistance wars, also sacrificed his life in the line of duty. In that war there was no division into rear area and front line. The rear services personnel always had to advance to the force and enthusiastically go in advance to prepare the battlefield.

In August and September 1974 the Regional Staff, along the lines delineated by COSVN and under the guidance of the Regional Command, drafted an operational plan for the 1974-1975 dry season that foresaw the winning of a decisive victory within the next few years. At the beginning of October, COSVN discussed and approved the plan. During the meeting, each comrade in COSVN clearly and specifically analyzed the situation on the battlefield and the overall situation, and unanimously decided to win a decisive victory and complete the national democratic revolution in 1975-1976; 1975 would be the pivotal year and in 1976 we would victoriously conclude the war. It was not easy to reach such unanimity. There was much hesitation and reflection, and much analyzing and going over problems again and again. Everyone spoke of the decline of the puppet army and regime in the various areas. In the cities there had appeared a mass political struggle movement to oppose the corruption and impotency of the puppet Thieu regime, and that situation had considerably affected the morale of the enemy troops. Everyone concluded that our position and strength had become stronger and had developed uniformly on all battlefields. Our village and hamlet guerrillas had wiped out and eliminated enemy outposts. But there was still concern about a number of remaining weaknesses: although the guerrilla and local forces had recently developed strongly, numerically they did not yet meet requirements; our main-forces had not yet fought a major annihilating battle; and although the mass movement had become stronger it was not yet strong enough to carry out an uprising and overthrow the puppet regime. Our three strategic blows--main-force, rural and urban--were not yet uniform. Our urban attacks were still weak. Although the United States had been defeated and had to withdraw its troops from Vietnam, and the situation in the United States was in upheaval politically and the United States was in poor shape economically and financially, it was essential that we be clever in order to limit U.S. intervention and insure that we won a rapid, efficient victory. All of those concerns were very correct. They were the truth and everyone realized that it was necessary to make great, continual efforts in order to insure victory within that period of time.

The participants reached unanimity in determining the stage of the revolution and the stage of the war we were in, and agreed with the opinions of Muoi Cuc (comrade Nguyen Van Linh, deputy secretary of COSVN): "The Thieu regime is in a state of serious decline, in part because its contradictions are developing and in part because our attacks are becoming increasingly strong. We must attack even more strongly and more often, and not allow them to regain their

strength. We are now capable of pushing the enemy back step-by-step, winning partial victories, and eventually winning total victory. The puppet regime cannot hold out beyond the 1975-1976 dry season." Bay Cuong concluded that "The enemy is undergoing an all-round crisis that is also affecting the central regime, not merely just one aspect or a certain area. The puppets will decline at an increasingly greater rate, like a truck going downhill, and there is a possibility that that rate will suddenly increase. We still have deficiencies and weaknesses, but we are capable of overcoming them and are in the process of doing so. We are winning a big victory even during the current rainy season. We are capable of making good preparations for the coming dry season. We estimate that we can complete the national democratic revolution in 1976. The year 1976 will present an extremely important opportunity. But 1975 must be the pivotal year; only if we endeavor to win victories that year can we create conditions for winning a decisive victory in 1976. We say 1975, but in fact the decisive period will be the 1974-1975 dry season. It is necessary to fully grasp the spirit of the dry season plan discussed by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission, fully explain the significance and contents of the dry season from top to bottom, and understand that this year's dry season plan is a closely coordinated campaign plan encompassing all the military regions--the Military Region 6 to Military Region 9--both the main-force and local troops, and the rural, jungle-and-mountains, and urban areas. It must be coordinated very harmoniously. This time, more than at previous times, we have a plan for coordinating, discussing and carefully preparing, from top to bottom, and in both the military and the party echelons. We are determined to win a big victory. Thus the leadership and guidance of COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission must be tight during this year's dry season. There must be close coordination between the party committee echelons and the equivalent military echelons in guidance and command. We must do a truly good job of carrying out the dry season plan, while also preparing to develop strongly if the situation develops in our favor. We must try to win the greatest, most timely victory in 1975."

During that COSVN meeting we also discussed the eventuality of the situation developing rapidly and the puppet army and regime collapsing earlier than we had foreseen, especially if there occurred a military-political development in Saigon itself. In such an event the B2 theater would, by itself, have to launch the final attack on the enemy's headquarters lair and conclude the war, and must not fail to take advantage of such an opportunity. I reported to COSVN that we would go all-out to step up the development of local armed forces and guerrillas, and have the localities intensify the development of revolutionary mass forces in order to prepare for such an opportunity. But with regard to main-force units the B2 theater was still very weak, and lacked both the infantry and the technical combat arms to fulfill such a difficult mission. I recommended that the Military Commission of the party Central Committee immediately assign the B2 theater three or four divisions so that we could insure success in that final battle. From the point of view of the possible development of the situation, the strategic line, our method of organizing, deploying and using forces, and the position and role of the B2 theater, sending us three or four additional divisions during that phase would have been entirely rational. I reported in outline our plan for attacking Saigon and spoke of the necessity for those additional main-force units.

After discussing the situation the comrades in COSVN agreed unanimously and decided to request those forces from the central echelon immediately. But so that those divisions could reach our theater in time we would request the central echelon to assign those units on a rotational basis, i.e. send divisions from the Central Highlands to the B2 theater, then send replacement units from the Tri Thien theater to the Central Highlands, and so forth, until a sufficient number of units were deployed on the battlefield. By doing so we could reduce the time required to move the units.

COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission reported our plan to the Central Committee and its Military Commission, and recommended that the Political Bureau convene a meeting of representatives of all theaters to discuss a unified plan for all of South Vietnam during that phase.

The 1974-1975 dry season plan approved by COSVN was in fact a plan to prepare for a general offensive and uprising in the B2 theater, a plan to create conditions for advancing to winning victory to end the war in that key theater. Therefore, it had to be based on the preparation in advance of a plan for a general offensive and uprising throughout the B2 theater. In fact, we had nurtured that contingency plan for a long time beginning with the preparation and execution of the General Offensive and General Uprising of Tet Mau Than [1968]. During decades of combat in that theater, first against France and then against the United States, our military cadres had practically memorized each terrain feature, village, river and canal. We also fully understood our enemy and their capability to defend and respond in each period. More importantly, we fully grasped our party's leadership line in that war. We attacked the enemy by both military forces and political forces. Parallel military and political efforts would inevitably lead to a completely victorious general offensive and general uprising. Unanimously approving of and confident in that leadership line, we were always certain that the time would come when we absolutely had to carry out a general offensive and general uprising. Therefore, after the adoption of party Central Committee Resolution No 9 in 1963, a resolution which delineated that line very clearly, we in the theater that included Saigon-Gia Dinh, the capital of the puppet regime, continually thought about how the general offensive and general uprising should be carried out. In 1964 the B2 theater delineated five lines of attack on Saigon, then organized the Saigon Special Zone into subzones 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for the purpose of organizing and deploying forces and direct the general offensive and general uprising of Tet Mau Than. During that time we selected the objectives inside and outside the city, and organized appropriate types of forces to combine attacking from inside out to attacking from outside in. Tet Mau Than was an extremely valuable practical experience. Every day the war was developed by the use of many different forms and scales was also a day which further enriched our thought and provided us with additional experience. Now we were standing in the threshold of a second general offensive and uprising in Saigon and all over the B2 theater. Having mulled it over in our minds for many years, we had little difficulty in drafting a plan for Saigon and all of the B2 theater to serve as a basis for the 1975 dry season plan.

It was not a plan to launch a general counteroffensive against the enemy troops from a certain front, as in a regular war. We would not use exclusively

military forces--powerful main-force corps--to wipe out the enemy and chase them from the Central Highlands, or advance from Quang Tri to Thua Thien, Quang Nam, and Da Nang, then down to Saigon, then pursue the enemy to Cau Mau, Con Son, Phu Quoc, etc. Indeed, we would be incapable of doing so even if we wanted to, and it would be dangerous to do that if we were capable of doing so, for there was the danger that the enemy would gradually draw in their troops to form an enclave in a certain area and then, with the support of superior U.S. air and naval power, counterattack. The "Gavin Plan" had called for such a strategic enclave in the Mekong Delta. Gavin was a well-known U.S. general who came to Saigon in 1972, when the Americans and puppets were being knocked about and were being heavily defeated from Quang Tri to eastern Nam Bo. Against that background, is recommended a strategy of gradual retrenchment and withdrawal if the puppet forces were defeated. The last area to be defended would be My Tho-Vinh Long-Can Tho. He reasoned that the Mekong Delta was a manpower pool, the source of sustenance for Saigon, and the heartbeat of the "capital." The Mekong Delta would be a place for consolidating forces and aiding Saigon. There it would be possible to strengthen defensive forces and create the capability to counterattack the enemy under even the worst possible conditions. He remembered the lesson learned when puppet troops were sent from My Tho to save Ngo Dinh Diem in a certain year. He also thought that the Mekong Delta, which fronted the sea and Con Son, Tho Chu, Phu Quoc, and other islands, afforded a strong position and would facilitate the entry of U.S. forces from the Pacific. The ways the colonialists viewed things differed very little. In 1946, a directive sent to the D'Argenlieu, the French High Commissioner in Indochina, Moutet, the French minister for overseas colonies, stressed that: "Cochin China is the true focal point of our overall policy in Indochina. We must succeed, and succeed rapidly, in Cochin China because the future of the presence depends almost entirely on our victory or defeat there." D'Argenlieu also had the viewpoint that "Cochin China is the key to the Indochinese Federation in the French Union. If the authority of France is consolidated there, the Indochinese Federation in the French Union will become a reality." "The importance of Cochin China must never be forgotten. It will be the long-range foundation of the Indochinese Federation and the foundation of our influence."

Nguyen Van Thieu vehemently opposed Gavin's plan and thought that it was stupid and a surrender to the "Viet Cong." But that was a time when Thieu thought that he was still firmly in power and relied on the strong supporting pillar of the United States. But now that his tenure was no longer secure, was not the Gavin plan the best solution? The Western Press commented that "With a population of about 10 million in the Mekong Delta, could not Nguyen Van Thieu be the president of a Southeast Asian country with an area of about 60,000 square kilometers?"

But we had thought all that out before Gavin, as well as possibilities Gavin hadn't thought of.

*According to documents of the Historical Office of the Military Science Department.

From the very beginning, our party adopted a strategic plan of a marvelous general offensive and general uprising of a revolutionary people's war developed to a high degree. We attacked the enemy by means of military forces organized in many appropriate forms, combined with mass uprisings, on both a small scale and a large scale, in all areas: the jungle-and-mountains area, the lowland rural area and the urban area. In view of the fact that the enemy had complete superiority in the air, at sea, and on the rivers and canals, had modern weapons and facilities, could move rapidly by helicopter on all kinds of terrain, and had strong firepower, our principal forces were those deployed on the spot. Everywhere there were revolutionary forces, so everywhere the enemy troops went they were attacked by both military forces and mass political forces, by large forces and by small, elite forces, and by visible forces as well as by invisible forces. Even our main-force units fought only mobile warfare, but they remained within certain areas and cooperated closely with the local forces. There were no main-force units that operated all over the theater and apart from the localities. Our superiority was that the localities were very decisive in nature, but all the localities were united very closely from the central level. Did not Tet Mau Than in 1968 demonstrate that? On the same day, at a signal given by the central level, hundreds of cities, and thousands of villages and enemy objectives were attacked fiercely, to the point that the enemy troops, so much so that the enemy troops didn't know where to turn, and had no place to which to withdraw or retreat. The enemy were dizzy in Vietnam and even in the United States. Such was our miraculous speed, miraculous speed which encompasses a vast space in a short period of time, miraculous speed in combat activities, in campaigns, and more important in a strategic phase, in a method of concluding a war. Don't think of miraculously rapid attacks merely in terms of large, mobile units traveling long distances, for if you do you can't understand the actual situation.

Firmly grasping those strategic viewpoints, throughout the 1974 rainy season COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission went all-out in monitoring the localities and in supervising them in rapidly developing their military and political forces, and in creating position and strength, so that each place could expand its liberated area. In October 1974, COSVN issued a directive which stressed that "villages must liberate villages, districts must liberate district, and provinces must liberate provinces, throughout the B2 theater." The introduction of that immortal action slogan, based on the strategic viewpoint of combining offensive and uprising and on the actual developments on the battlefield, at that time created a terrible strength. The B2 theater's 1974-1975 dry season plan was based on the assumptions that B2 itself would have to carry out a general offensive and uprising in Saigon and that each military region and province would have to take care of their own battlefield needs without waiting on forces from the upper echelon, but cooperate closely in a common plan with regard to objectives and time, under the leadership of the central echelon. The contingency plan for a general offensive and uprising throughout the B2 theater was drafted on the basis of the following important factors:

First of all, it was necessary not to push the enemy back from one line of resistance to another, and not to allow them to withdraw into strategic enclaves in any area, in Saigon, in the Mekong Delta, or even on the islands in the South

China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin, as Gavin had planned. As for withdrawing into an enclave at Saigon, we had gradually taken steps to prevent the enemy from creating solid lines of defense and had gradually eliminated the possibility that they could form an enclave in Saigon. As for withdrawing into enclaves in the Mekong Delta or on islands, the most effective measures were carrying out timely and strong attacks and uprisings by the on-the-spot military and political forces, by strategically cutting the Mekong Delta up into many segments, and by annihilating the enemy in each area in order to prevent them from concentrating in a certain place to assume the defensive.

The second element was that we had to interdict, surround and isolate the enemy troops by means of both campaigns and individual battles, in order to annihilate them and prevent them from concentrating, supporting one another, and reinforcing one another. The enemy forces in the B2 theater were relatively large and consisted of the forces of more than two military regions, in addition to the forces of their Capital Special Zone and their general reserves. Wherever the enemy troops were they had to be attacked simultaneously, so that many would become few and strength would become weaknesses. If that was to be accomplished we had to firmly grasp the method of "two feet and three spearheads, and launch unexpected, timely, continuous, and repeated attacks all over the place and at the same time.

The third was eliminating the enemy's strengths and exacerbating their weaknesses. Throughout the course of the war, the Americans and puppets relied principally on a strong air force, control of the skies, strong air support, and mobility by transport aircraft or helicopters. Then there were the naval forces, the river flotillas, the mechanized troops and the artillery. Without strong air support the puppet troops would quickly lose their will to fight, which could easily lead to disintegration and surrender. In the B2 theater there were three large airfields--Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhat, and Lo Te in Can Tho--which were their ultimate sources of support and strength. Other than those airfields they would have to rely on the aircraft carriers of the U.S. 7th Fleet offshore. We had to have a plan and deploy special forces in advance, in order to interdict those three airfields to the greatest possible extent, along with anti-aircraft forces to guard against air attacks.

The fourth element was an attack on the enemy's nerve center to liberate Saigon, the most heavily defended place. Since it was a political, cultural and commercial center there were many roads connecting it with all parts of the country. Most important were Route 1 and the railroad, which connected Saigon with central Vietnam, and Route 4, which connected Saigon with the delta, which was the rice basket and manpower pool, and also Military Region IV, which still had relatively strong military forces. There were also Route 15 and the Long Tau River, which connected Saigon with the Pacific at the port of Vung Tau, which could be used for landing U.S. troops to save the puppets or as a port of debarkation for puppets returning to the motherland. Since Saigon was the war command headquarters, there were all kinds of lines of communication extending to the regions, the units and even the U.S. 7th Fleet. In order to liberate Saigon, it was first necessary to isolate it from the surrounding areas so that forces could not be withdrawn into Saigon to form an enclave, so that the enemy could not flee, so that there could be no reinforcements or way out. The result would be chaos and disintegration.

The fifth factor was that the attack on Saigon had to be strong, rapid and effective, and that the key objectives had to be taken practically at the same time in order to insure a miraculously quick victory and prevent the enemy from defending the city, consolidating their forces and using buildings in the city for defensive purposes, thus turning the city into rubble and creating difficulties for the attackers. There was yet another problem: we could not allow the political sorcerers to have time to build a stage and bring out the marionettes in order to produce a miracle and prevent the victory of the revolution. In order to do so, we had to closely combine storm-like attacks from many directions on the outside with attacks and uprisings all over the city. We had to avoid having to fight for each street and each house, and to take each objective. Strong main-force units would attack into the city from many directions, while the sappers and elite troops attacked objectives inside the city, the masses arose to take over the neighborhoods and government offices, defend the factories, etc. We had to prevent the enemy troops from having even the slightest bit of morale, so that they would disintegrate en masse. We would wage a revolutionary war within our compatriots' hearts: our party had directed us to firmly grasp the strategy of general offensive and uprising, with attacks and uprisings, with attacks from outside in and from inside out, and simultaneous attacks. That was miraculous speed. In order to accomplish that, COSVN and the Saigon-Gia Dinh Municipal Party Committee studied the deployment of each party chapter, each party member, each leadership activist, and each organized mass cell--youths, women, middle school students, and college students--in all important neighborhoods and organs. The armed forces included armed youths, armed security forces, commandos, and sappers, who were assigned objectives in the city and in the outskirts; they had been steeled and had a tradition. How about the main-force units which would attack into the city from the outside? They would be a very decisive factor in our success, so they had to be strong and we had to make very careful calculations. Even in a coordinated combat arms attack there also had to be coordination among the various kinds of armed forces and semi-armed forces, and coordination between the military forces and the political forces of the organized and unorganized political forces.

The plan called for the main-force units to attack from five directions. That part of the plan was based on the most essential objectives inside the city that we had taken quickly, practically at the same time. It was based on the nature and deployment of those objectives in the city and their relationship to the areas outside the city. It was based on the terrain and topographical features around the objectives and around the city. It was based on the enemy's defensive deployment and the capabilities of the staging areas from which we would launch our attacks, etc. Of those five directions, the northwest and north were the most advantageous. The terrain in both of those directions was good, dry, level and open, which facilitated the use of technical equipment, mechanized equipment and large main-force units. In attacking from those directions it would be necessary to cross open, sparsely vegetated areas near the An Ha bridge, the Rach Tra River and Lai Thieu, but those areas were narrow and easily crossed. The staging area for the attacks--although we would have to fight to further consolidate the staging area prior to launching the attacks--bordered our vast rear area and facilitated the movement and deployment of forces, supplying from the rear, and communications with the rear area and the

campaign headquarters. In their defensive deployments the enemy troops paid much attention to those two areas, for they were contiguous to our base area and our main-force units operated there continually. The enemy had deployed two relatively strong divisions in those areas, but they had been dispersed with regard to both width and depth and thus could not form a fortified defense line made up of fortified outposts. For their defenses had already been fragmented. The key objectives those two attacking columns had to take were not situated in the city and the attack routes were not complicated.

To the east, the terrain was favorable but the people did not fully support us. Our organized masses were still weak. An attack would be launched from that direction because it was necessary to attack and take such large and strongly defended objectives as the Bien Hoa AFB, the city of Bien Hoa, and especially the headquarters of the puppet III Corps, the corps with the mission of commanding the main forces defending Saigon. It would also be necessary to cross two large rivers, the Dong Nai and the Saigon. Although the roads were good, if the enemy destroyed the bridges it would be very difficult to reach the objectives in time. The staging areas of the attacks in that direction were distant from the rear area base and many difficulties would be encountered in transporting food and ammunition. Only if we fought to expand the direct rear area of that column in advance could we create supply routes and build up rear services stockpiles, for the enemy still occupied those areas.

The western and southern directions were the most difficult and complicated. In both of those directions the terrain, before we reached the staging areas and in the staging areas themselves, was low-lying and marshy, and was crisscrossed by many rivers and canals. Especially to the south troops on foot could not leave the road, not to mention mechanized vehicles and artillery. Drinking water had to be brought along. If vehicles and artillery were to reach the staging areas from which the attacks were to be launched, they would have to fight their way through and place a pontoon bridge across the Van Co River. Our supply lines would be long and difficult, because there were no roads. If the cadres and units had not operated in the area for years and did not have expert knowledge of the terrain, the localities, and the enemy, they could not overcome the many difficulties in order to create valuable lines of attack. But once the obstacles were overcome so that the attacks could be launched, there would be formed very lethal offensive columns the enemy did not expect which would insure the coordinated success of the entire campaign.

To the west and east we had a mission that was extremely important to insuring the victory of the campaign: completely surrounding and isolating Saigon before the attacks were launched on the center of the puppet capital. That mission included cutting Route 4 connecting Saigon with the Mekong Delta, cutting Route 1, and cutting the railroad to central Vietnam and Route 15 and the Long Tau River to the sea.

In order to insure that all five offensive columns could enter Saigon at the same time to take the most important objectives in accordance with a closely coordinated campaign plan, at a time when each direction had such differing conditions and characteristics, there had to be meticulous advance preparations and a number of extremely important tasks had to be carried out many

months in advance. One of those tasks was preparing forces for the western and southern directions. As stated above, those two directions required forces which knew the terrain well, were accustomed to operating in the marshy river and canal areas, etc. Especially, to the south we could not use vehicles and vehicle-towed artillery, but had to use portable artillery. The units had to be accustomed to fighting on complicated terrain under difficult conditions and take along their weapons, ammunition and food, and would be supported only by light artillery. There it was only possible to use regiment-sized units that were lightly organized and streamlined. They had to know how to disperse and concentrate flexibly, know how to cross rivers by using on-the-spot facilities and even without facilities, etc. They had to be units which were accustomed to living with the local people, knew how to coordinate closely with the guerrillas and local troops, and know how to persuade the people to fight with and support the combat forces. To the west we could use vehicles and artillery, even heavy vehicles and artillery, but we had to be expert at moving vehicles and artillery on complicated terrain, secretly crossing rivers at night, clever camouflaging, etc. In both directions it was necessary to meticulously prepare the approach routes from distant locations to the bivouac areas, and prepare the assembly areas and assault positions, which was a very difficult task because some of those areas were interspersed with those of the enemy. It would also be very difficult to stockpile supplies in those two areas, with regard not only to transportation but also to the erection of supply depots and medical aid stations, the transportation of wounded, etc.

On the basis of the draft plan for a general offensive and uprising in the B2 theater, the staff drafted a 1974-1975 dry season plan for the B2 theater which would begin in December 1974 and was divided into two phases:

--Phase 1, from the beginning of December 1974 to the beginning of February 1975.

--Phase 2, from the beginning of March to the end of May 1975.

The principal contents of the dry season plan were to continue to disrupt the enemy's pacification plan in the Mekong Delta, expand the liberated area, bring many additional people over to the revolution, expand and fill out the rear base area and the corridors connecting it with the battlefields, especially the principal eastern Nam Bo base and the areas east and west of Saigon, annihilate whole battalions and regiments of the puppet troops, liberate the district seats, continue to improve our position and strength, accelerate the decline of the puppets and be prepared to create and take advantage of opportunities in order to win victory. The locations and objectives of the attacks to annihilate the enemy and expand the liberated area, etc., had to be appropriate to the draft plan for a general offensive and uprising all over the B2 theater, as mentioned above. To accomplish those tasks and meet the norms that were set would be to positively prepare all conditions for the decisive victory.

In the Mekong Delta the key objectives of the attacks against the enemy were in the provinces of Vinh Long, Tra Vinh and Ben Tre. Vinh Long and Tra Vinh were situated between the Tien Giang and Hau Giang Rivers in the center of the Mekong Delta. Route 4 and the Mang Thit River were two strategic routes passing

through the provinces. To expand the liberated area and control of the population we would have to create conditions for cutting Route 4, gaining control of the Mang Thit River, and closing the Can Tho and My Thuan ferry landings, i.e. to cut the Mekong Delta into three parts and cut the enemy's Military Region IV into many isolated segments. That would be a strategic blow which would quickly smash the U.S.-puppet illusion that they could withdraw into a strategic enclave there after being heavily defeated elsewhere, so that they could stage a counterattack. Ben Tre, a province with favorable terrain, bordered on Go Cong, Can Duoc and Can Giuoc. Our victory there would both support the Vinh Long and Tra Vinh fronts and create a good staging area for the attack on Saigon from the south. In order to insure the southern attack on Saigon, the Regional Command planned to create two lines of advance: the first from the Long Dinh area in My Tho across Cho Gao, Tan Tru and Tan An, and then to Can Duoc, Can Giuoc and Nha Be; and the second from Ben Tre through Go Cong, then Can Duoc, Can Giuoc and Nha Be, then attacking into Precincts 7 and 8 in Saigon. Both lines of advance passed through areas that were strategically important to the enemy, which had set up many outposts in them. The terrain in those areas was difficult and they were far from the liberated areas. Therefore, if we did not act to create the necessary conditions many months in advance, and did not have expert units, it would be difficult for us to fulfill the plan.

In addition, Military Region 9 had the secondary mission of expanding the U Minh liberated base in the direction of Can Tho in order to prepare for the interdiction of the Lo Te airfield in Can Tho and the attack on the "Western Capital" [Can Tho], the headquarters of the enemy's IV Corps. Military Region 8 had the secondary mission of expanding the Dong Thap Muoi liberated area to Route 4, in order to prepare to cut Route 4 in the My Tho area and wipe out the puppet 7th and 9th Divisions to prevent them from reinforcing Saigon. The Regional Command also assigned Military Region 8 the mission of preparing regiments to participate in the campaign to liberate Saigon from the south, for only with the forces of Military Region 8, and active preparations of that military region, could we have conditions for carrying out that lethal surprise attack. The region also provided for the possibility of sending two Military Region 9 regiments from Tra Vinh to participate in the attack on Saigon from the south.

The main-force units of the region and of Military Regions 7 and 6 had to launch attacks to expand and complete the base areas and make preparations for the forces north, northwest, east and west of Saigon to surround, isolate and exert increasingly greater pressure on Saigon. At the very beginning of the dry season it was necessary to liberate Route 14 from Dong Xoai to the Quang Duc border in order to expand the regional base to the rear until it bordered on the Central Highlands, connect the Regional base with the area east of Saigon, and create conditions for opening up that route and building up material-technical stockpiles for that area in advance. In order to liberate Route 14 and attain those objectives, it was necessary to eliminate, at all costs, the key Dong Xoai objective, after which the provincial capital of Phuoc Long would be completely isolated. We needed only to surround the enemy there, for they were incapable of reacting. But if conditions permitted we would liberate all of Phuoc Long Province, thus filling out our rear area base and

causing psychological and political repercussions that would be very beneficial to us. The forces of Military Regions 6 and 7 had the missions of liberating the districts of Hoai Duc and Tanh Linh in order to create an area in which to assemble our troops and stockpile food and ammunition for the attack from the east on III Corps headquarters and then on Saigon. Then they were to coordinate with the upper-echelon forces to cut Routes 1, 20 and 15.

The regional main-force units also had to extend the corridor in western Tay Ninh, and liberate the Ben Cau and Queo Ba areas in Duc Hue District and the northern part of Duc Hoa District, in order to create a staging area from which to blockade Saigon from the west and create an area from which to launch the attack on Saigon from that direction. It was necessary to take the enemy position on Mt. Ba Den, a high point which controlled the areas north and northwest of Saigon, which was an observation point for monitoring movements in our base area and a communications center for relaying communications between the enemy's III Corps and all of its forces in those areas. We had to expand and fill out our base to the front by taking Binh Long, Chon Thanh, and Dau Tieng and controlling Route 26 for our forces and a staging area for the attacks on Saigon from the northwest and the north.

Thus the 1974-1975 dry season plan for the B2 theater was in essence continuing to attack the enemy to accelerate their decline, changing the balance of forces so that it was even more in our favor, and creating the opportunity for winning a decisive victory, which would in a practical way prepare for--or it could be said begin--the theater's general offensive and uprising and create conditions for the assault on the enemy's final lair.

The soldiers and people of the B2 theater began their dry season activities with very clear awareness of that important strategic phase, with confidence in victory, with a high degree of determination and with an enthusiastic spirit. The Regional Command, working directly with each military region and with each unit, reviewed their plans and inspected their preparation in all regards. Never before had a campaign been so meticulously and diligently prepared militarily, politically and with regard to both the attacking forces and the uprising forces, under the direct command of COSVN. Those seething, secret and urgent tasks were carried out very positively throughout the 1974 rainy season, the greatest rainy season ever!

In order to inspire them as they began that long-awaited dry season, in November 1974, the Regional Military Party Commission and Regional Command sent to all main-force, local and guerrilla cadres and men a letter of encouragement which included the following passages:

"The entire party, army and population are very determined to win a truly great, all-round victory in 1975 in order to bring about a turning point with the decisive significance of changing the balance of forces in our favor and creating a solid foundation on which to advance to winning a total victory.

"The 1974-1975 dry season victory will be decisive with regard to all in 1975.

"...Living in the sacred area of the Bulwark of the Homeland, the home area of the Nam Ky uprising, the general offensive uprising of Tet Mau Than, and many

brilliant feats of arms, you must clearly manifest a heroic spirit and be determined to record the 1974-1975 dry season in history with truly dazzling feats of arms.

"Overcome all hardships and difficulties and trod upon the heads of the enemy in advancing to win victory."*

At the end of October, COSVN received a message from the Politburo ordering comrade Pham Hung and me to Hanoi to participate in a meeting of the Political Bureau of the party Central Committee, along with representatives of the theaters all over the South, to discuss the plan for the coming period.

Our delegation set out on 13 November. During the same period, the forces all over the B2 theater were also busily setting out to the assembly areas to begin the dry season fighting according to the plan. I instructed comrade Le Duc Anh, the regional deputy commander, who would replace me during my absence, that in addition to making regular reports to the General Staff he should report to me on all developments in all parts of the battlefield. I would very enthusiastically receive news of victories, but I would be even more concerned with and monitor the difficulties and obstacles in the process of carrying out the plan.

Comrade Duc Anh reminded me, "Try to explain things to the Military Commission and request additional forces for our theater. The 4th Corps is still crippled and weak, the weakest of all the corps, but it is the main force of the key theater. I just can't understand." I promised that I would fulfill that mission. Both those who were going and those who were staying behind were full of confidence in our victory.

We once again set out on the route that follows the nation's mighty Truong Son range, along route 559, the Ho Chi Minh Trail. But this time we traveled much faster and with less hardship, for we traveled the entire distance from Loc Ninh to Hanoi by motorboat or automobile. The route passed through eastern Kampuchea, crossed southern Laos via Route 9 past Cam Lo and Dong Ha, passed through the former Zone 4, and went on to Hanoi. The "Ho Chi Minh Trail" was no longer a trail but was a system of motor roads with many north-south and east-west branches which were supplemented by the Mekong River, the Sekong River, etc., and had been further embellished by communications lines stretched taut by the wind and POL pipelines that crossed streams and climbed mountains. Here and there POL stations, machine shops, truck parks, and headquarters were operating busily. On one hill after another there were cleverly camouflaged gun emplacements and antiaircraft proudly and imposingly pointing skyward. That was a far cry from May 1959--the birthday of the trail--to the early 1960's, a period during which I was in charge, and assigned to comrade Vo Bam and a number of other "old reliables" the task of gropingly tracing out the route. As they went they had to make their way step-by-step, and when returning they left no footprints, yet the comrades in the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee continually admonished us to "be careful, be secret and be sure of yourselves."

*From the archives of the Military Science Office of Military Region 7.

Maj Gen Vo Bam, a member of the Communist Party in the 1930's, was from My Lai in Quang Ngai, the scene of a terrible atrocity by the United States. His spirit of revolutionary enlightenment, added to his love for his home area, caused him to have an iron will as strong as his husky body. During the first days of cutting a path through the jungles there were countless hardships. Heavy things were carried on the backs and shoulders of rubber-sandaled troops. Now, everyone who traveled the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" was full of confidence in the bright future and realized the mighty development of that vital route, which grew miraculously in the style of Phu Dong and the immortal bamboo of Vietnam. The Vietnamese bamboo, which still stood proudly all along the route, was victorious and will always defeat all reactionary powers, and all bombs, shells, poison chemicals, electronic equipment or anything else in the future.