

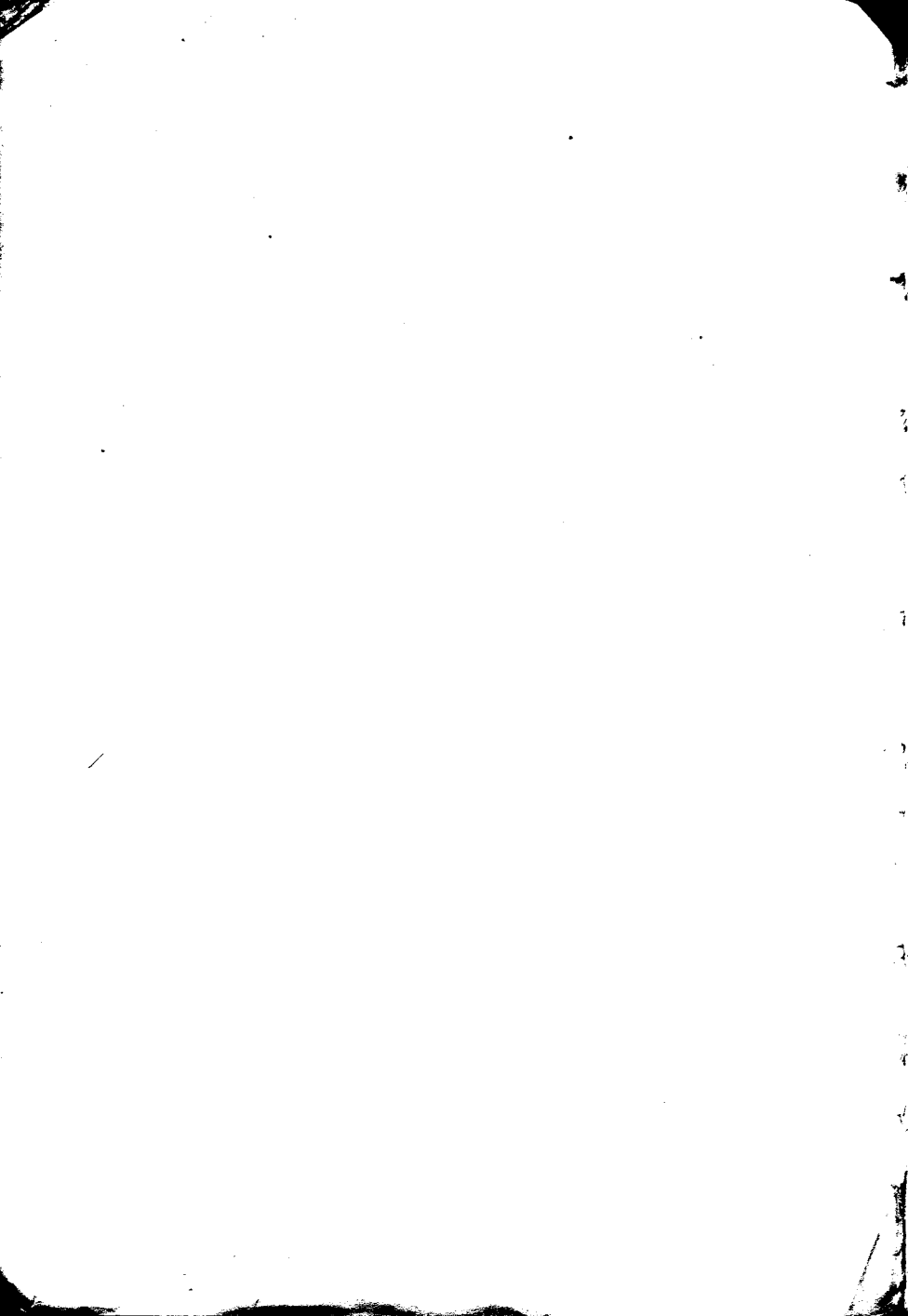
General VO NGUYEN GIAP

DIEN BIEN PHU

Third Edition (revised and enlarged)



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
HANOI — 1964



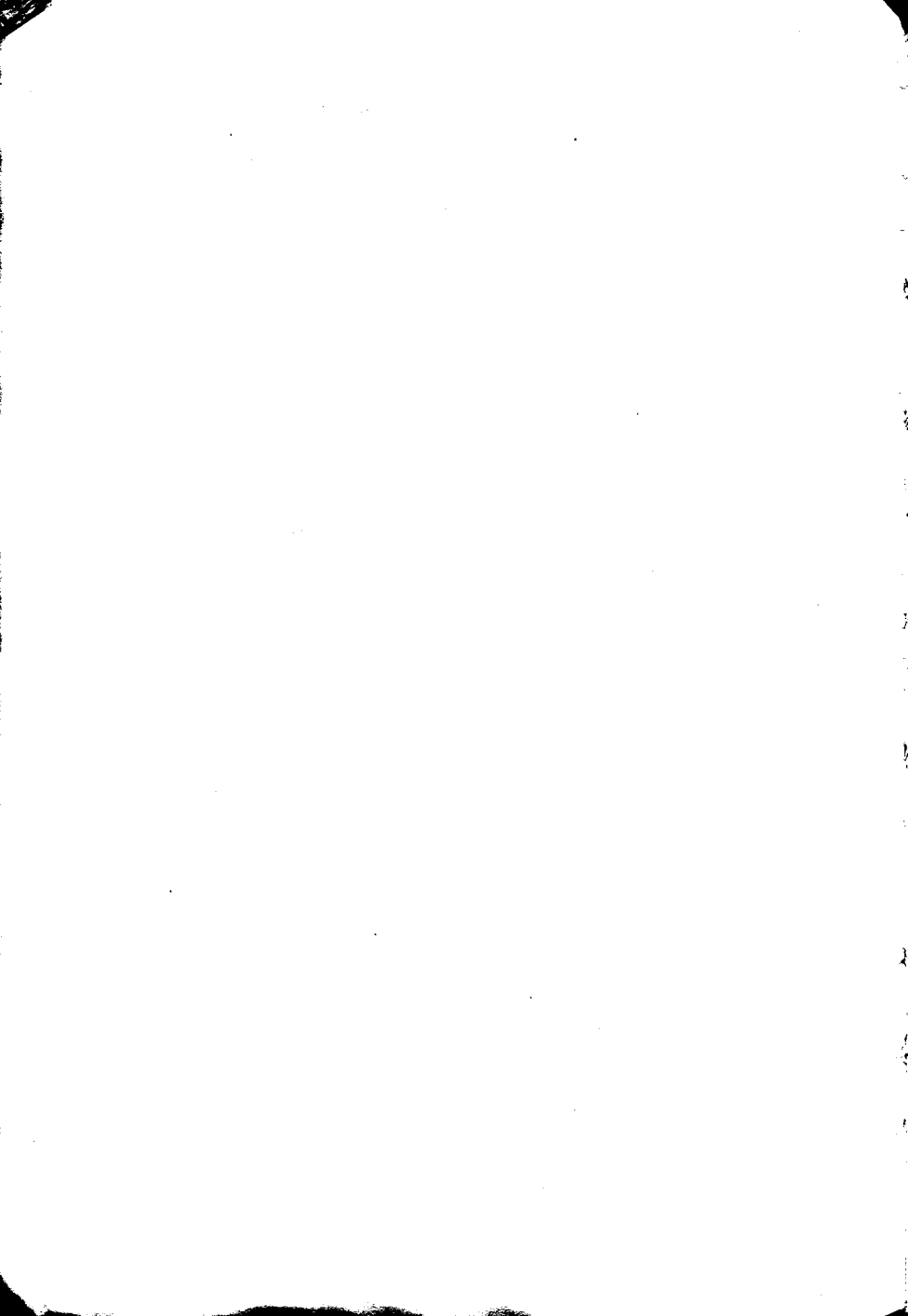
GENERAL
VO NGUYEN GIAP

DIEN BIEN PHU

(Revised and Enlarged Edition)

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

HANOI — 1964



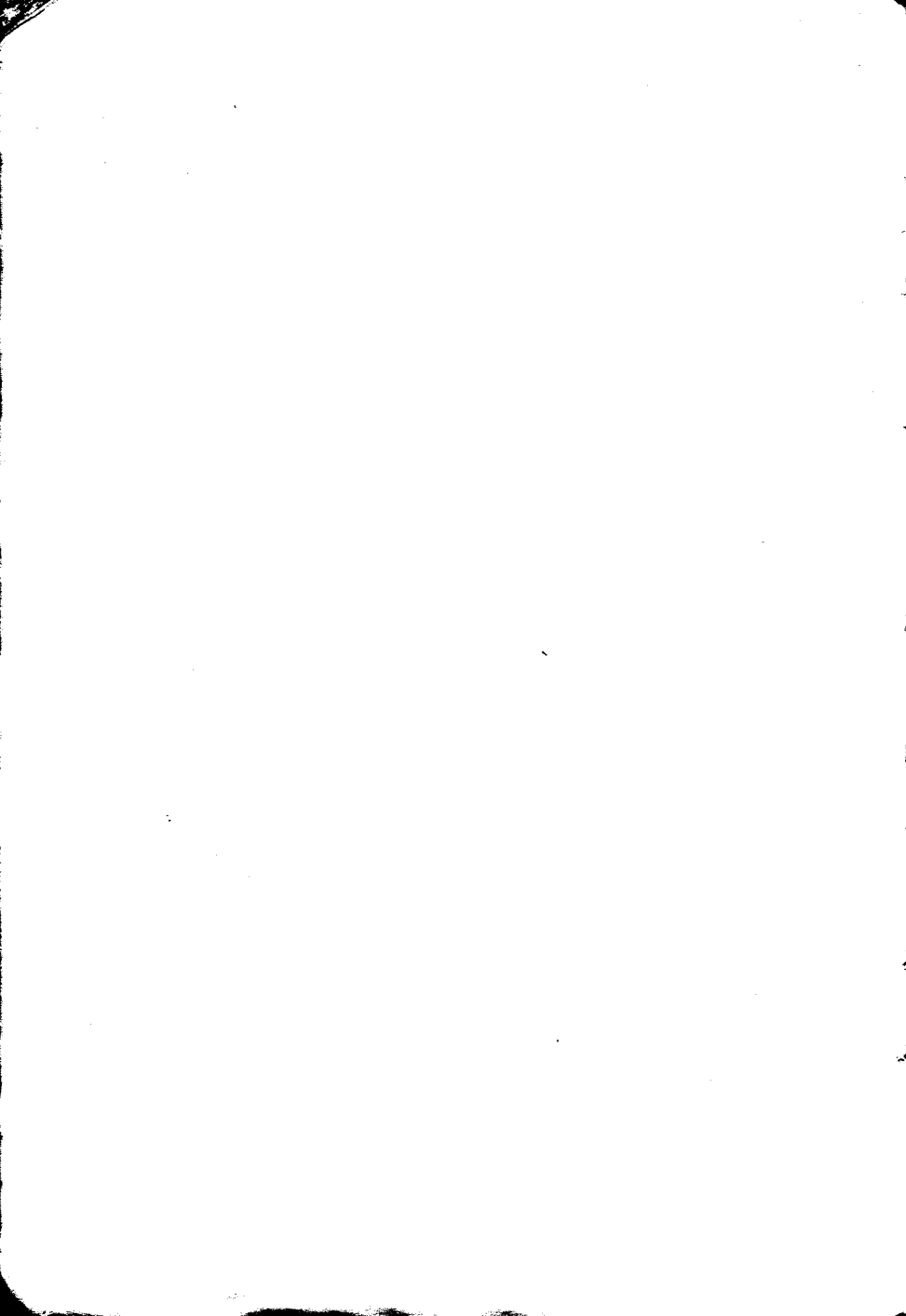
CONTENT

<i>Foreword</i>	7
<i>Notice</i>	9
<i>President Ho Chi Minh's letters</i>	11

DIEN BIEN PHU

I. The military situation in Summer 1953	17
II. The enemy's new scheme: the Navarre military plan	34
III. Our strategic direction of the Winter 1953 — Spring 1954 campaign. Our major attacks on the co-ordinated fronts prior to the Dien Bien Phu campaign	49
IV. The historic Dien Bien Phu campaign. The situation of the enemy and our strategic direction	77
V. The historic Dien Bien Phu campaign. Evolution of the military situation	98
VI. Paramount significance of the great Dien Bien Phu victory and the Winter-Spring victories	137

APPENDIX	175
----------	-----



FOREWORD

Ten years have elapsed since the memorable Dien Bien Phu victory and the repercussions of this battle still make themselves felt, as witness the passionate discussions still going on about it. How is it that the Vietnam People's Army born of an essentially peasant people at the outset equipped with primitive weapons had the better of a modern and seasoned army, not in small ambushes or minor engagements but in modern battles, in the course of a long campaign, requiring the co-ordination of various arms?

Has there been any "mistake" of the French High Command, or in other words, what has been the share of the protagonists' personal responsibilities and that of historical necessities which were to bring the French Expeditionary Corps to defeat?

For all these questions, no answer, no commentary could match the account of events made by the leading actor of the drama, General Vo Nguyen Giap, Commander-in-Chief of the Vietnam People's Army, especially when this account clearly and thoroughly

analyses the strategy which was worked out, and throws a most vivid light on all the military and political factors which contributed to the victory.

In two editions which were most successful, we introduced a series of articles written by General Vo Nguyen Giap on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the Dien Bien Phu victory. However the reader would like to have fuller information: these texts acquainted him with the strategy of the victorious People's Army in its outlines but concise as they were, they could not answer all questions.

Since then, the author has had the time to complete and enrich his text with new details and considerations, and the present edition will help the reader understand more thoroughly the unfolding of this historic campaign.

The main orders of the day and messages of the High Command of the People's Army during this campaign are published in an appendix.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Hanoi — 1964

NOTICE

We advise the reader properly to locate on the map of Indo-China, and that of Vietnam in particular, the following regions in order to be able easily to follow the unfolding of the operations :

Vietnam's territory includes three parts : the North or Bac Bo (formerly Tonking), the Centre or Trung Bo (formerly Annam) and the South or Nam Bo (formerly Cochinchina).

In Bac Bo, the region between the Red river and the Laotian border is the Tay Bac (North-West), a mountainous region where Dien Bien Phu is situated. Between the Red river and the Chinese border to the west of the Hanoi-Lang Son line is another mountainous region, the Viet Bac which served as the main base of the Vietnamese Resistance.

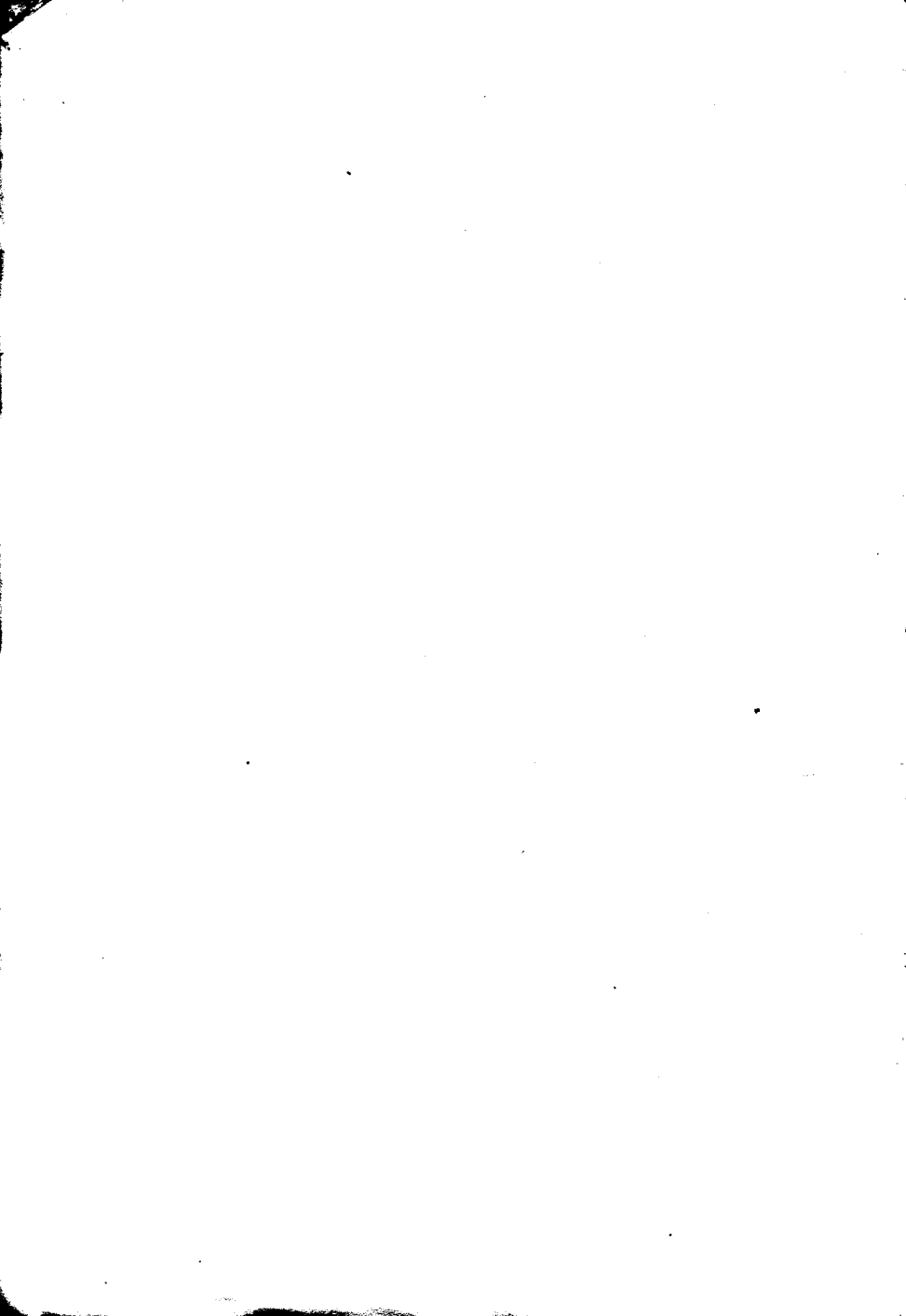
In Trung Bo, the region of Highlands is called Tay Nguyen in Vietnamese, Binh Tri Thien is a short for the three provinces of Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien (region of Hue).

From the military viewpoint, the country was divided into nine zones. Zone V where Operation Atlante took place is situated in the south of Trung Bo.

Herebelow are the names given by the French High Command to the positions of Dien Bien Phu :

Him Lam : Beatrice ; Doc Lap : Gabrielle ; Ban Keo : Anne Marie ; Hong Cum : Isabelle ; Eastern hills A1, C1, C2 ; Eliane ; another Eastern hill north of Eliane : Dominique.

The positions to the west of the Central sector are respectively called : Huguette (positions E, D, to the north-west of the main airfield) and Claudine (which comprises the C.P.)



**PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH'S LETTER
TO THE FIGHTERS ON THE DIEN BIEN PHU
BATTLEFRONT**

Dear officers and men on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield,

This Autumn-Winter, you are assigned the task of marching to Dien Bien Phu to wipe out more enemy effectives, extend our resistance bases, and liberate more compatriots still under the enemy's oppression.

Last year, you valiantly fought, destroyed many enemies, and scored great victories. I am very glad of it.

This year, after several ideological remouldings and military courses you have made more progresses. You must fight more valiantly, be more ready to endure hardships, and keep firm your determination in every circumstance :

Resolute to kill the enemy,

Resolute to abide by the policy,

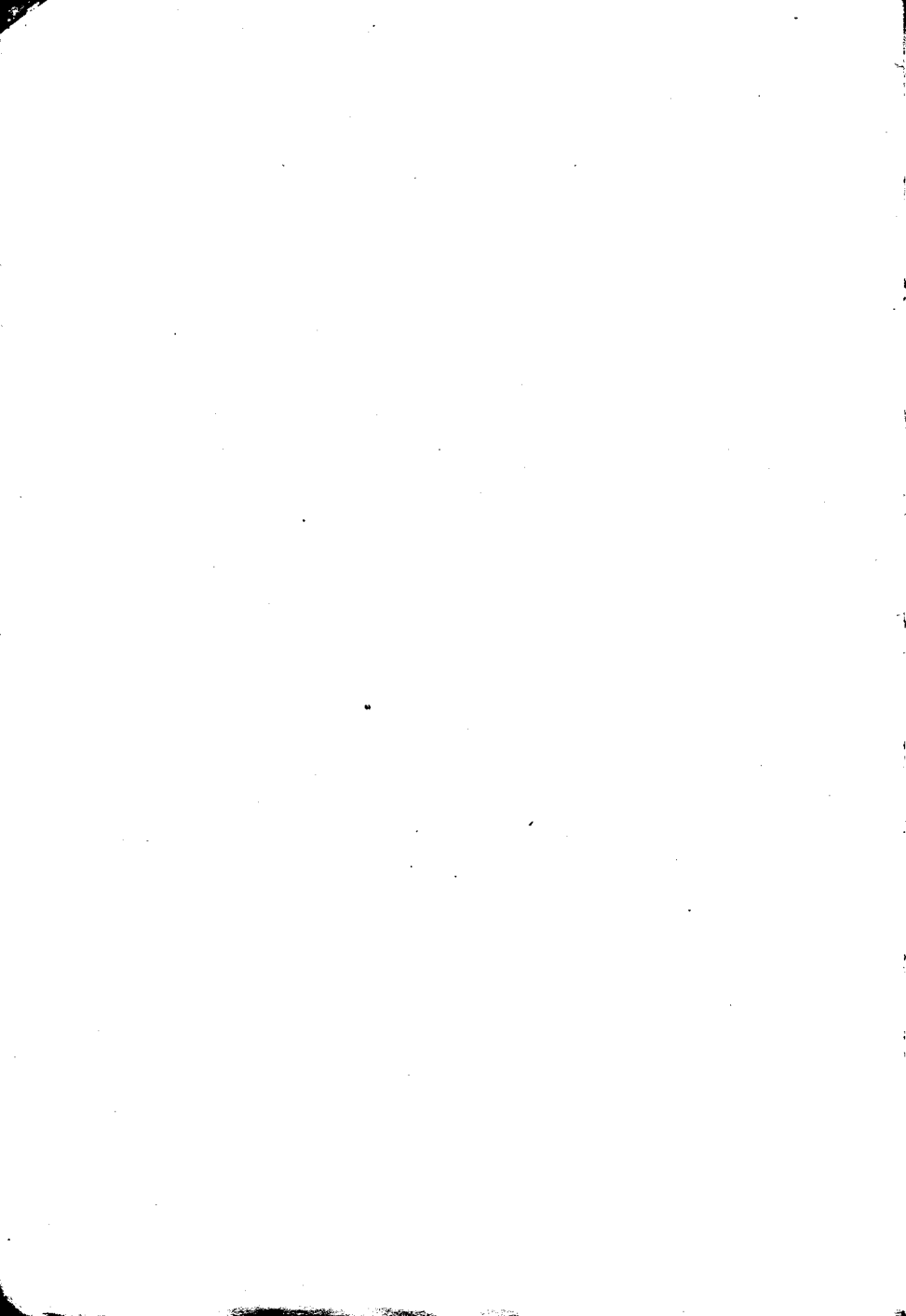
Resolute to win more successes.

The Government and I are waiting for your successes to congratulate and reward you.

With affection and determination to win

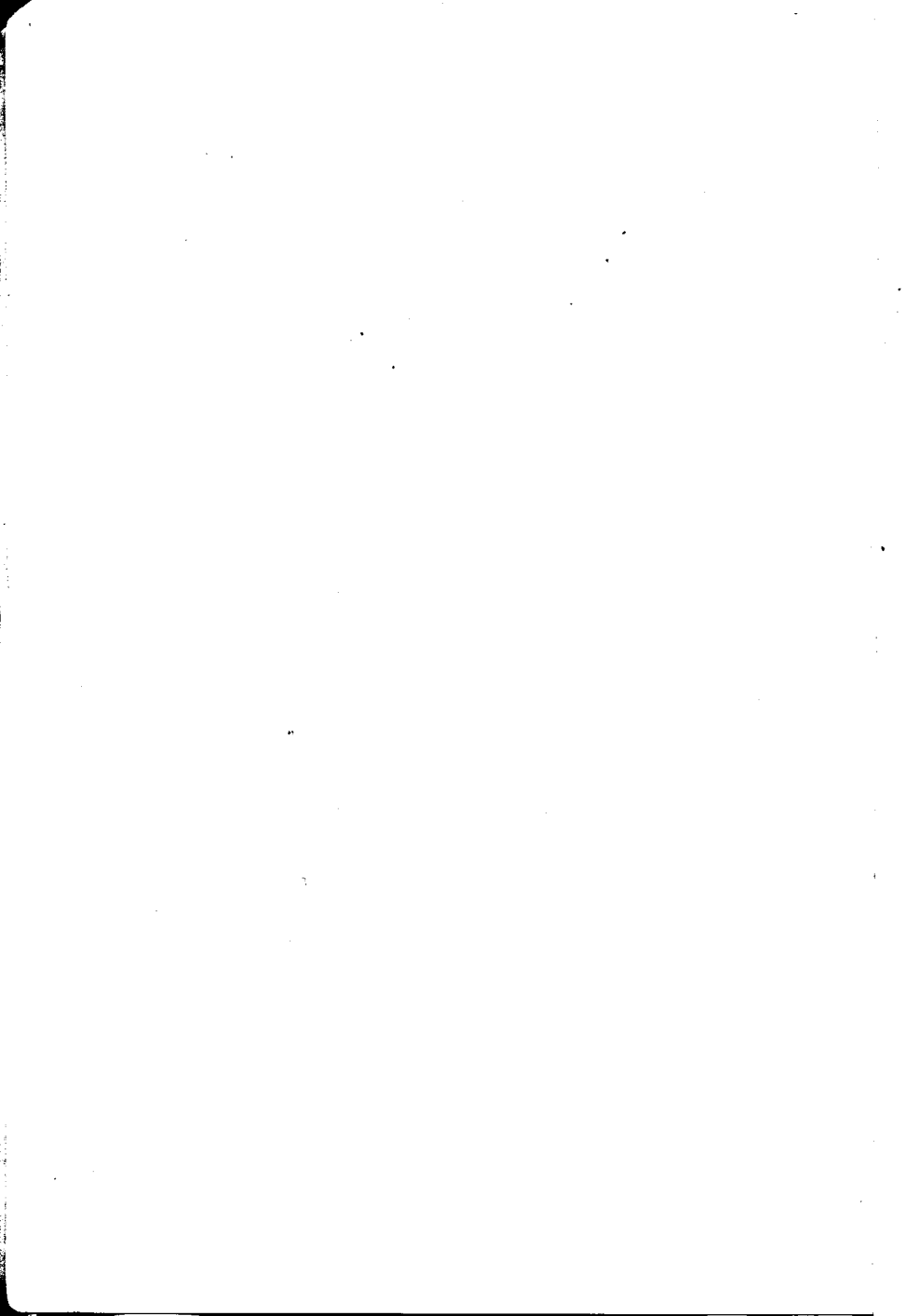
December 12, 1953

HO CHI MINH





PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH



**PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH'S
CONGRATULATORY LETTER**

TO OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, *DAN CONG* *, SHOCK
YOUTH ON THE DIEN BIEN PHU BATTLEFRONT
AND LOCAL PEOPLE

Our army has liberated Dien Bien Phu. The Central Committee, the Government and I convey our cordial greetings to you, officers, soldiers, *dan cong*, shock youth and local people, who have gloriously fulfilled your tasks.

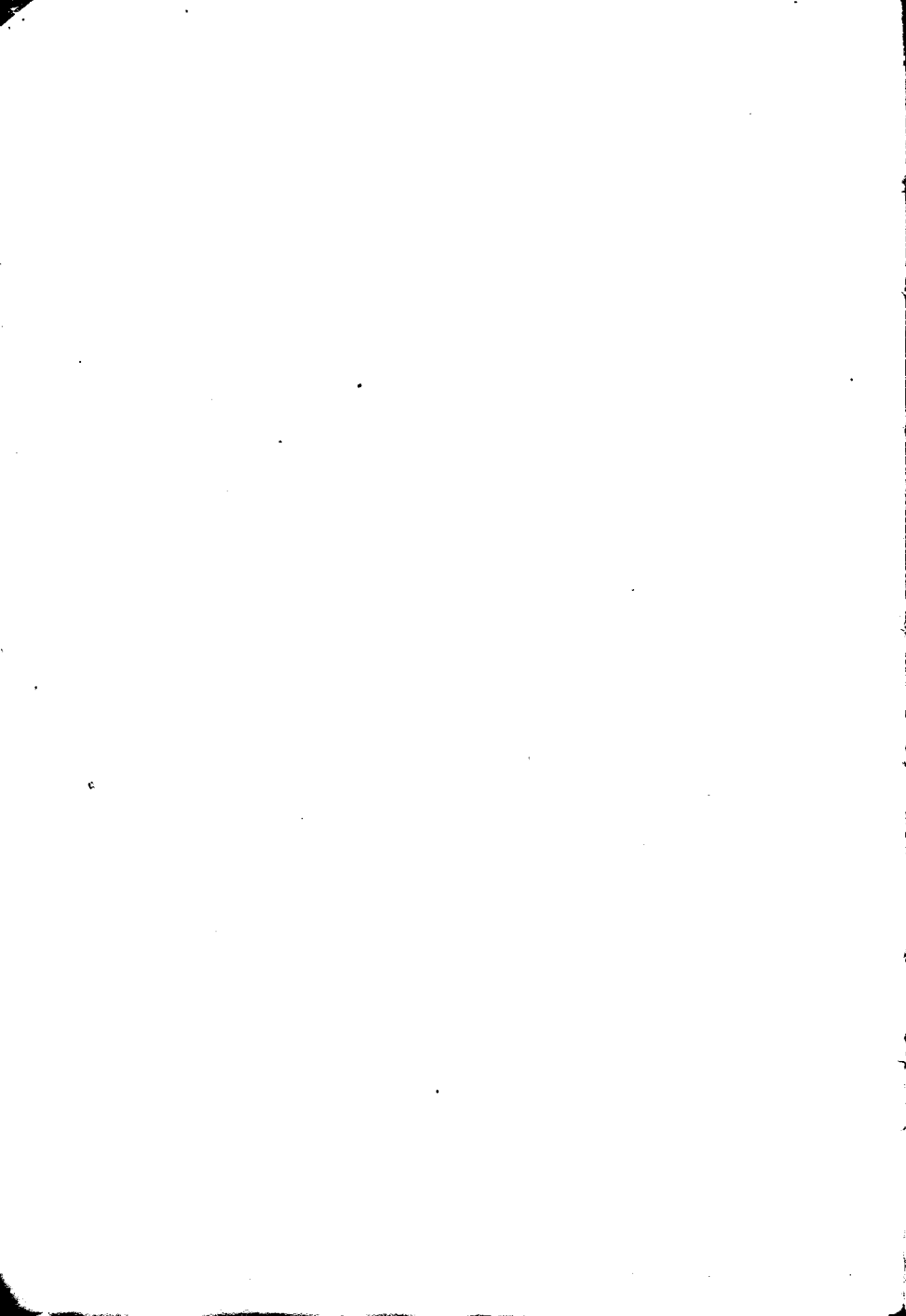
This victory is big, but it is only the beginning. We must not be self-complacent and subjective into underestimating the enemy. We are determined to fight for independence, national unity, democracy and peace. A struggle, whether military or diplomatic, must be long and hard, before complete victory can be achieved.

The Government and I will reward the officers, men, *dan cong*, shock youth and local people who have performed brilliant deeds.

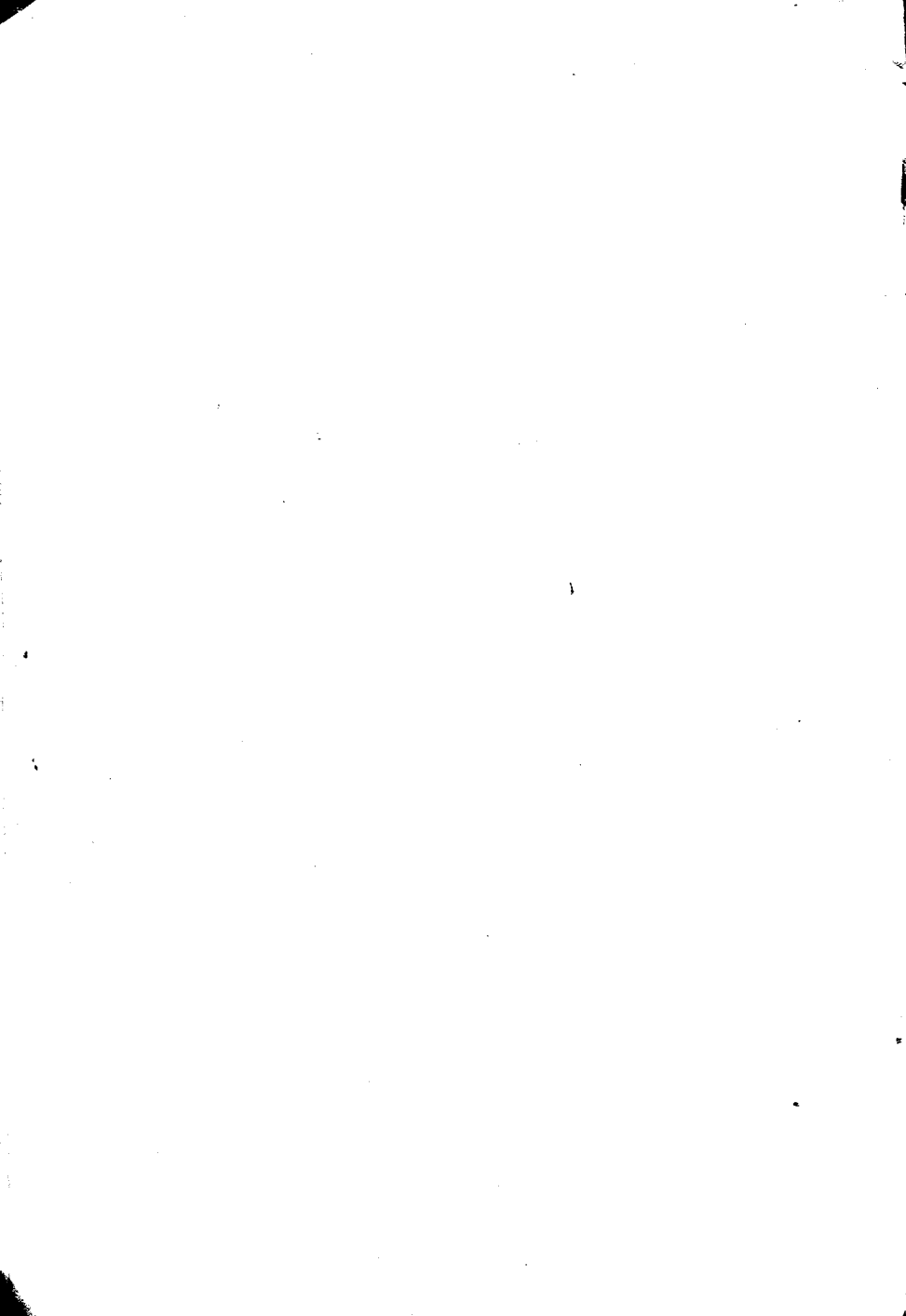
With affection and determination to win

May 8, 1954
HO CHI MINH

* People who out of patriotism help the troops in operation by discharging such tasks as building roads, transporting food and ammunition, carrying the wounded.



DIEN BIEN PHU



I

THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SUMMER 1953

In summer 1953 our people's War of National Salvation entered its eighth year. Those eight years were years of extremely hard and heroic struggle in which our army and people fought against the French imperialists' army of aggression which enjoyed the assistance of the U.S. interventionists and — in the beginning — an overwhelming superiority in arms and equipment.

Nevertheless, through eight years of protracted resistance, the strength of our army and people was not annihilated as the enemy had hoped for. On the contrary, it grew as the fight developed and brought more and more victories; the balance of force was gradually tipped in our favour. On the enemy side, they were cornered little by little into a passive state. As the war went on they encountered new difficulties and met with failure upon failure.

A brief review of what happened during those eight years of resistance is indispensable for the study of

the enemy's situation and ours, and of the military situation prior to Navarre's military plan, that is also prior to our Winter 1953 campaign — Spring 1954 campaign and to our preparations for the great Dien Bien Phu campaign.

Ours is a people deeply attached to freedom and peace, with a long-standing tradition of unbending fighting spirit against foreign aggression and for national independence. Immediately after the triumph of the August Revolution, President Ho Chi Minh, in the Declaration of Independence of September 2, 1945 stated before the whole nation and the whole world that "Vietnam has the right to be a free and independent country — and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and freedom."

It is public knowledge that, hardly a month had passed since the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam when the French colonialists, with the help of British imperialism, committed acts of provocation in Saigon in an attempt to reconquer our country. Meanwhile, they also hatched the scheme to reconquer Cambodia and Laos. They sent in an armoured division, and applied their "*lightning war*" strategy with the belief that they would succeed in "pacifying" Nam Bo within 10 weeks and using it as a springboard to attack the northern part of our country.

But this was a miscalculation. *Our people in Nam Bo stood up and fought.* What they had in hands were only primitive weapons, yet they were unyielding in face of the enemy. Guerilla warfare soon developed over the whole of the Mekong delta.

Our Party on the one hand led the struggle of the Nam Bo people and called on the whole nation to support them, and on the other hand exploited the contradictions existing within the enemy's camp by coming to a compromise with France with the signing of the March 6, 1946 Preliminary Agreement which brought about the withdrawal of 200,000 Chiang Kai-shek's men from our country, by adopting the policy of "*making peace in order to advance*", and by working against time to consolidate the people's power and the revolutionary forces, and to prepare ourselves against the enemy's new aggressive plots.

Though they had recognized our country as a free and sovereign state, the French colonialists did not give up their intention of re-establishing their domination. The more concessions we made the more they stepped on our toes. They tore to pieces the Preliminary Agreement, went on with the war in Nam Bo and carried on their plan of peace-meal aggression, occupying a number of regions in Bac Bo and Trung Bo. The chances of preserving peace became more and more remote. The French colonialists occupied Hongay and Haiphong, and in December, 1946, stepped up their provocative actions. They wanted our militia to lay down arms and surrender, and committed acts of aggression in the very heart of Hanoi, our country's capital.

As an answer to the enemy, the entire Vietnamese people — responding to President Ho Chi Minh's appeal: "We'd rather sacrifice everything than lose our country or return to slavery" — rose up to stop the enemy's aggressive manoeuvres and save the country. *The nation-wide war of resistance broke out.*

From the first days of the Resistance, our Party had pointed out: *Resistance was the only way to defend the country and the fruit of the Revolution.*

Our Party also pointed out that: *Our people's War of Resistance was an all-out one waged by the whole nation. It would be a protracted war full of hardship, but would certainly be victorious.*

Our army and people placed their unquestioned confidence in our Party's lines. Our troops fought with utmost heroism to wear out and destroy the enemy on all fronts. In Hanoi particularly, they fought and kept their positions for 2 months in the very heart of the city. Those battles had an immense encouraging effect on our entire people, and at the same time helped wear away and pin down the enemy forces, thus allowing our government organs and armed forces to move to the countryside, and enabling our people to carry out all necessary organizational and mobilizational activities. We could actually preserve our main forces, arouse the whole nation and maintain and consolidate our bases in the countryside, making them our footholds and supporting bases for the prolonged resistance.

In the winter of 1947, the enemy threw over 10,000 seasoned men in a great offensive against Viet Bac* with the purpose of smashing our organs of direction and regular forces, so that they could secure a decisive victory and speed up the formation of a puppet government for the whole country. Our people and armed forces in Viet Bac fought back gallantly and scored a major victory. The enemy's "lightning war" strategy once again met with a fiasco. The Viet Bac victory thus engendered a stalemate. *The war entered a new stage.*

After the failure of the "lightning war" strategy, the French colonialists were compelled to prolong their war of aggression. They intensified their attacks in an attempt to "pacify" the occupied areas, to rob our resources and manpower, and to carry out their vicious scheme of "making war to feed war and using Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese".

In 1949, while the Chinese People's Liberation Army was winning major victories in their march towards South China and while the guerilla movement was developing widely and powerfully, the French colonialists post-haste despatched Gen. Revers to Indo-China to work out a new plan in the hope of saving the situation. Revers' policy was to increase the number of troops on the Bac Bo front, expand the occupied areas in the delta and the midlands to strengthen the defence of the quadrangle Lang Son — Tien Yen — Haiphong — Hanoi and to close the Sino-Vietnamese border. Other aspects of Revers' plan comprised the

* The northernmost of Vietnam.

development of the puppet army, the latter to be used as occupation forces, the regroupment of European and African troops into mobile units, and the intensification of mopping-up operations with a view to suppressing our guerilla movement. To carry out this plan, the enemy launched many fierce attacks and savage mopping-up operations, and broadened their zone of occupation in the delta and midlands of Bac Bo.

As for us, we advocated the *launching of guerilla warfare* on a large scale in all occupied areas. The tactics of "*independent companies and concentrated battalions*" was brought into practice and crowned with successes.

Part of our regular forces was split into independent companies which went deep into the enemy's rear, and there combined fighting with political work among the population, co-ordinated armed struggle with political struggle, destroyed the enemy while setting up and consolidating bases among the population, and led the local armed and para-military forces to fight the enemy in collaboration with the population. Propaganda work among the enemy troops, especially among the puppet soldiers, was considered as a strategic task and received a particular attention. Anti-mopping-up operations were successfully conducted. Guerilla warfare developed everywhere, and guerilla bases and guerilla zones were established in the enemy's rear which was gradually turned into our fronts.

While independent platoons and companies were in action in Bac Bo, Trung Bo and Nam Bo and helped

develop the guerilla movement, concentrated battalions were formed and trained for bigger raids and ambushes. Those battalions laid the bases for the coming mobile warfare. In 1948, 1949 and early in 1950, our troops began opening a number of small size campaigns which retained certain characteristics of guerilla warfare, fielding from three or four to nine battalions. In such occasions, we directed our blows at the enemy's exposed points so as to wear out their effectives and to expand our bases. The general military situation was one of fierce tug-of-war, and at this juncture our Party set out the policy of active defence and preparation for the general counter-offensive.

The 1950 winter marked a *great change* in the war situation. Our army had grown to a considerable extent. After the resounding victory of the Frontier campaign, we started many other major campaigns such as the Midlands campaign, the Highway 18 campaign, the 1951 Ha-Nam-Ninh* campaign, the Hoa Binh campaign in the winter of 1951 and the spring of 1952, and the North-West campaign in the winter of 1952. *A pattern of counter-offensive on a local plane could already be seen.*

In those victorious campaigns, we succeeded in wiping out whole mobile units of the enemy, putting out of action tens of thousands of enemy's effectives and liberating vast areas in Bac Bo. Many provinces of strategic importance such as Cao Bang, Lang Son,

* Ha Nam — Nam Dinh — Ninh Binh provinces.

Lao Cai on the China-Vietnam frontier, Hoa Binh on the road joining Viet Bac and the Fourth Zone, and the greater part of the North-West stretching from the Red River to the Laos-Vietnam frontier were liberated successively. Our Viet Bac base — the main base of the Resistance War — was greatly expanded and consolidated. In the mountain regions of Bac Bo, the enemy only kept Hai Ninh — a province in the North-East — the township of Lai Chau, and the Na San group of fortified positions in the North-West.

While our regular forces were winning victory upon victory on the main fronts, guerilla warfare developed powerfully everywhere in Bac Bo, behind the enemy's line. In the Hoa Binh campaign in particular, our regular units drove deep into the enemy's rear in the Red River delta, fought in co-ordination with the local armed and para-military forces, blotted out a series of enemy strongholds, widened the guerilla bases and guerilla zones and liberated millions of people. The occupied areas were considerably reduced and covered only about one-third of the territories adjacent to the main highways and urban centres.

On the Binh-Tri-Thien front despite the unfavourable topography of the area the guerilla movement held well. In the southernmost part of Trung Bo, our troops also went deep into the enemy's rear, expanded their bases among the population and set up new guerilla bases in the strategic Western Highlands. In Nam Bo, the liberated area in the North zone was firmly maintained, and the guerilla movement elsewhere developed widely.

In the summer of 1953, the Pathet Lao Liberation troops and the Vietnamese Volunteers in a joint effort made a surprise attack against the township of Sam Neua and the major part of the enemy's troops. The whole province of Sam Neua and vast areas in Northern Laos were liberated. This created a new pressure on the enemy.

A general assessment of the military situation in Bac Bo shows that from the winter of 1950, our forces constantly kept the initiative of action while the enemy, as days passed, found itself more and more in a passive state. It desperately called on U.S. imperialism to come to its rescue and the latter did intensify its intervention in the war of aggression in Indo-China. Meanwhile, many high-ranking officers in the French Expeditionary Corps had been recalled and replaced by others. De Lattre de Tassigny, one the best French generals, was sent to Indo-China. It is common knowledge that De Lattre had done his best to broaden the puppet army, concentrate military forces, build up many defence lines, and launch an offensive against Hoa Binh with the aim of regaining the initiative, but in the end he too was defeated. Gen. Salan, De Lattre's successor, was also another powerless witness of bitter defeats of the Expeditionary Corps on the battlefields of North-West Vietnam and Upper Laos.

Having to concentrate his efforts on the defence of the Bac Bo delta, the enemy left many of his positions on other fronts insufficiently guarded, thus giving our forces the opportunities to step up their activities and win still greater victories.

Above are the main features of the military situation from the beginning of the Resistance to the middle of 1953.

*
* * *

The situation of the two sides in summer 1953 can be summarized as follows:

ON OUR SIDE:

Through eight years of fighting and training, our *people's armed forces*, the core of the Resistance, had grown up from their infancy to full maturity. The People's Army then comprised many regular divisions and regiments besides a great number of local regiments and battalions. Militia and guerilla forces also developed quickly.

The coming into being and speedy growth of these *three forces* was the result of our Party's correct policy of *mobilizing and arming the whole people and waging a people's war*.

It was also the result of the correct tactics for a protracted revolutionary war: *To wage guerilla warfare, to advance from guerilla warfare to regular warfare, to closely combine these two forms of war, and to develop from guerilla to mobile and siege warfare*.

As mentioned above, the situation from 1950 to 1953 was characterized by the fact that together with local offensives, mobile warfare had become the main form of war on the main battlefield — North Vietnam —

where guerilla warfare still played a very important role. Meanwhile, on other fronts, the main role was still played by guerilla warfare.

Militia and guerilla forces had by then reached their maturity. Their fighting spirit had been heightened through the struggle in defence of the countryside. They had accumulated a wealth of experiences and had equipped themselves with a lot of weapons and equipment captured from the enemy, thus constituting a big reserve for our regular army.

Local forces which came into being in 1948 by merging independent companies with part of the militia and guerilla forces, were now able to shoulder the combat missions in their own localities, wipe out enemy troops, oppose enemy raids, defend their localities and fight in good co-ordination with our regular forces, militia and guerillas.

The most outstanding feature was the tremendous growth and high degree of mobility of our *regular troops*. All our regular divisions and regiments had been organizationally strengthened and re-equipped with new weapons partly taken from the enemy and partly manufactured by ourselves in spite of great difficulties and the scarcity of necessary means. The technical and tactical level and fighting capacity of our men had visibly risen through successive drives of training and through major campaigns. They were now quite familiar with mobile and siege warfare and concentrated operations involving sizeable forces and a vast scope of action, particularly in mountain re-

gions, and could carry out annihilating attacks, make deep thrusts, withdraw quickly and fight with initiative, mobility and flexibility.

Our people's armed forces, especially our regular forces, owed their visible and rapid progress to the fact that our *Party* had paid due attention to strengthening its *leadership* as regards the army, promoting *political education and ideological guidance*, and had continuously heightened the revolutionary and class character of our armymen. As a result of political remoulding classes, our armymen had a clearer view of the goal of their fight, their hatred for the enemy and their fighting spirit had heightened. The ideological remoulding campaign in summer 1953 especially reserved for the army was carried on while our Party was implementing the policy of Thorough Reduction of Land Rent and Agrarian Reform. The class consciousness and revolutionary strength of our armymen was thus further enhanced. Internal unity, unity between the army and people, international unity to disintegrate the enemy, internal democracy combined with strict discipline, determination and courage in fighting, and dynamism and diligence in duty and production, had become good habits and good tradition in our army's life.

Our *people* were unswervingly united as one man around the Party, Government and President Ho Chi Minh. They were resolved to carry through the Resistance, and had an iron conviction in final victory.

The Party's Second Congress in 1950 tabled the line of National Democratic Revolution, re-affirmed the correctness of the policy of Protracted Resistance, and

laid down the immediate tasks for the winning of final victory. The highly inspiring resolutions adopted by the Congress highlighted the way to be followed by the whole Party, nation and army to win new successes.

In 1952-1953, our Party put into practice the policy of systematic Reduction of Land Rent and Agrarian Reform and the slogan "Land to the Tillers", thereby succeeded in bringing into full play the anti-colonialist and anti-feudal spirit, and in fostering the might of tens of millions of peasants who constituted the main forces of the revolution.

Thanks to the correct policies of our Party, the worker-peasant alliance was ceaselessly consolidated, the National United Front was broadened and became more solid with every passing day, the people's democratic power was improved and strengthened, the consolidation of the bases in the countryside gained new successes, and the Resistance made headway in other aspects.

Internationally, the just and heroic Resistance of our people against the French colonialists and U.S. interventionists enjoyed ever increasing sympathy and support from the peoples of the socialist countries and the French colonies, and from the peace-loving people of the whole world.

The great triumph of the Chinese revolution had a tremendous effect on the international situation. It tipped the balance of forces on the international arena in favour of the socialist camp and of the forces of

democracy, national independence and peace. Concerning our people's War of Resistance, it had a still greater significance. After the birth of the People's Republic of China, we were no longer in an extremely difficult situation, namely, fighting within the enemy encirclement. We then had a common border with the great socialist brother countries, and our resistance bases were linked to the socialist camp.

In 1950, the socialist countries recognized the D.R.V. This event further enhanced our international prestige and position, and strengthened our people's conviction in final victory.

*

* *

ON THE ENEMY'S SIDE :

While in summer 1953 our people's Resistance was full of bright prospects, the aggressors were facing great difficulties.

The *enemy* then had about 450,000 men for the whole of Indo-China, comprising 120,000 Europeans, Africans and legionaries, the rest were puppet troops. Although those effectives showed a big increase in comparison with the enemy forces at the beginning of the war the balance of forces between the two sides already tipped visibly in our favour.

Right from the first days of the war of aggression in Vietnam the *lack in manpower* was constantly a grave danger for the enemy. That was because French imperialism had been weakened after World War II,

its manpower and material resources were limited, and the colonial war was opposed by the French people at home. Hence the impossibility of mobilizing a colossal material strength against us. But the main cause lay in the very nature of the unjust and aggressive war. The ultimate goal of the French colonialists was to grab our land. Faced with our opposition, they had to scatter their forces and set up thousands of military posts, big and small to protect what they had seized.

Thus, the war of aggression undertaken by the French Expeditionary Corps was a process of constant *scattering of that army*. And the more it was scattered the better conditions we had to destroy it, part by part.

As was said above, the enemy's "*lightning war*" strategy met with complete failure. When compelled to carry out a protracted war, the French tried by all means to make full use of the puppet army and administration, pursuing their policy of "*using war to feed war, Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese*" which they regarded as important in helping them overcome the shortage of manpower. However, their efforts to expand the puppet army did not bring about the expected results because of our ever-growing strength; and the bigger the proportion of puppet troops, the lower the morale of the enemy.

1950 was the year the enemy extended to the maximum the areas under their occupation. Yet it was also the time when the enemy forces were most dangerously

scattered. They had gradually moved into a passive defence, and *could not muster a strategic mobile force* strong enough to counter our attacks.

This weakness of the enemy was clearly revealed as soon as we had started local offensive campaigns. Not only were the enemy main forces wiped out part by part, but they had also to withdraw from part of the land they had previously occupied. The enemy, who took the initiative in every attack during the first period of the war, were now obviously in a defensive position in North Vietnam.

The enemy left no stone unturned to seek a way out from such an unfavourable situation and to pump more life into the puppet army, hoping to be able to have a massive concentration of mobile units. Unfortunately enough, the inherent contradictions of the war of aggression only led them deeper into the mire of defeat.

Politically, the unjust nature of the war of aggression aroused mounting opposition from the French people as well as from progressive opinion of the world's people. French and African mercenaries became more and more fed up with war. As a result of the successive defeats beginning with the Frontier campaign, the morale of the French army sank lower. The split among the French colonialists themselves became ever wider.

In order to save the worsening situation, the French colonialists depended more and more on U.S. aid and thus were bound more tightly to the U.S.. U.S. aid accounted for 12 per cent of France's Indo-China war budget in 1951, and for 11 per cent in 1953. The more

the U.S. increased their efforts in pouring aid to the French colonialists and in plotting to supplant the latter, the more acute the contradictions between them.

At this very stage, when the French colonialists were being bogged down in Indo-China and when the Korean Armistice was realized, U.S. imperialism availed itself of the opportunity to speed up intervention in Indo-China, planning to establish direct contacts with the puppet administration and to pull the rug from under France. Navarre's plan was a new plot jointly elaborated by the French and U.S. imperialists, whose objective was *to carry on and extend the war of aggression in our country.*

II

THE ENEMY'S NEW SCHEME : THE NAVARRE MILITARY PLAN

Early in 1953 the critical position of the French aggressive troops on the Indo-China theatre of operations posed to the French imperialists a most urgent problem which was to devise new measures to save the situation and avoid heavier defeats.

At that time, in France, the news of successive defeats in Indo-China aroused an ever broader and stronger popular movement for an end of the dirty war. In the French National Assembly the circle standing for a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam issue won ever more votes. Even the Laniel-Bidault reactionary government had to recognize that it had no more possibility to protract this war of aggression any longer and no more hopes of destroying our forces, and that it was high time to seek a way out. But what way out? Insoluble problem! The French government held that all efforts had to be concentrated to find out an "honourable way

out", that is a "victorious one". And to reach this goal it had to do its utmost immediately to intensify the war, and win relatively great successes.

In face of the French aggressive forces bogging down in Indo-China, U.S. imperialism unmasked itself as an extremely bellicose and wicked international gendarme. If the cease-fire in Korea had made the French political circles think that a similar solution of the Indo-Chinese problem would be possible, it impelled the Americans to intensify their intervention with a view to protracting and expanding the Indo-China war. Eisenhower himself had many a time insisted that international communism could not be allowed to make further progress in South-East Asia, especially in Indo-China, territory which the imperialists considered as a strategic position of prime importance. They ceaselessly brought pressure to bear upon the French colonialists, requiring the latter to make new war efforts while they actively prepared to supplant France. While intensifying their aid in every field, they obliged France to grant "independence" to the puppet governments, thus creating political conditions for them to have these governments under their direct control. In 1953 their military aid amounted to 20,000 tons monthly, sometimes 40,000. They sent to Indo-China hundreds of military personnel and a military mission to control the French colonialists and the puppet administration and ever more directly participate in the command of the war in Indo-China.

In mid-1953, with the consent of Washington, the French government appointed Gen. Navarre in the

place of Gen. Salan as Commander-in-Chief of the French Expeditionary Corps in Indo-China. Without having De Lattre de Tassigny's fame and rank Navarre was among the young generals of the French army a cultured man having a sense of strategy. After a very short period of investigation and research on various fronts he worked out a relatively perfect strategic plan hoping to reverse the situation, turn defeat into victory and win in a short period of time, a decisive strategic success.

Navarre held that one of the French government's fundamental shortcoming in the *leading of the war* was the lack of a set goal, which he considered as the main factor of the flagging morale of the Expeditionary Corps and puppet troops. Therefore, in Navarre's opinion, on the one hand, the French government had to define its own policy, which was to carry on the war to defend the French privileges in Indo-China; on the other, boldly to recognize the "independence" of the allied states within the framework of the French Union. It was necessary to make these "states" realize that they could win genuine "sovereignty" and "independence" only when they had defeated the Vietnam People's Army; and to this end they had to mobilize all their forces for the cause of "sovereignty" and "independence", and endeavour to consolidate and enlarge the "nationalist" armed forces. As regards the U.S.A., France was badly in need of her aid to continue the war; France and the U.S.A. had a common objective which was to reel back international communism, but France could not fight for this goal only to see herself ousted at last from Indo-

China. She had to fight for her own interests. Loyal to the interests of French imperialism and considering the problem according to the colonialists' viewpoint only, Navarre held that if the objective of the war could be defined as above, not only the French Expeditionary Corps would know the reasons for their sacrifice on the Indo-China war theatre, but also the "nationalist armies" would be ready to participate in the war in order to win "independence" and "sovereignty" for their country.

Concerning the *organization of the command and the direction of the war*, Navarre assessed that due to the successive cabinet crises in France and the reshuffles of top commanders in Indo-China, the French government lacked a close direction, and a concrete and continuous operational plan. He also realized that on our side, our army and people had a clear goal: to fight for the independence of the Fatherland, to have a very high fighting spirit, to follow a clearly defined policy of resistance, and to march forward resolutely under the leadership of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam headed by President Ho Chi Minh. Navarre held that only by urgently obtaining the aforesaid political prerequisites — war objective, policy towards the allied states, organization of direction, etc. — could France win victory in the Indo-China war.

In the *military* field, Navarre and the French and American generals estimated that the war situation became ever more unfavourable to the Expeditionary Corps. This was due to the fact that the Vietnam People's Army has grown very rapidly; our regular

troops were well seasoned, the local forces got very accustomed to the front ; our army had an extremely heroic fighting spirit, and a strong mobile force including many divisions, capable of launching relatively big offensive campaigns. In the meantime guerilla warfare which had developed everywhere pinned down and wore out a great part of the enemy forces. The Expeditionary Corps was ever more driven into a *scattered* and *passive* situation. The bulk of this force was confined to defensive assignments in thousands of posts and garrisons scattered on all fronts, thereby the local reserve force was weak, the general reserve force weaker still, *lacking* a strong *strategic mobile mass* to cope with the attacks of our regular forces or launch counter-attacks in order to win back the initiative. Navarre then concluded that this state of things had to be changed : on the one hand to build up *a strong puppet army* to solve the problem of effectives, on the other urgently to set up *a strong strategic mobile force* to wriggle out of the defensive and passive situation at that time and eventually win back the initiative.

Analysing the *strategic directions* liable to be threatened, Navarre pointed out the following remarks:

a) The *first direction* that might be threatened by our army was the Bac Bo delta. Here our guerilla bases and guerilla zones developed extensively and our local armed forces were fairly strong, hence we could use our regular forces to destroy part of the enemy's effectives and disrupt his lines in given sectors.

Navarre estimated that the above-mentioned danger had to be prevented, but it was not the greatest one. By fiercely harrassing our rears and constantly keeping a force of intervention ready he could surely check our attacks thanks to the mobility and might of his various arms. Any successes we managed to win would be only tactical. However, the delta, a densely populated and wealthy region with many facilities in transport and supply, offered many possibilities for our troops to launch a big offensive, hence its defence had to be most carefully organized.

b) The *second direction* that might be threatened by our army was North-West Vietnam and Upper Laos. In these mountain regions, the enemy defence system had many vulnerable points. As the enemy had paid attention only to the delta, which he considered as the "key position" of South-East Asia, his organization of the front in mountain regions had many shortcomings: his forces were scattered, his supply met with many difficulties, and the topographic condition—favourable to us—was unfavourable to him. These shortcomings and unfavourable conditions accounted for his severe defeats, especially in the Frontier and North-West campaigns. Therefore, he had to prevent the danger of an offensive by our troops in this direction. This attack would score successes not only in the North-West, but also in Upper Laos, and the important ensuing political repercussion would be notably felt both in Laos and Thailand.

However, after carefully considering our possibilities to use a big force in this direction, Navarre seemed more reassured, because the commanders

accustomed to this battlefield had asserted that in this sector our troops could not ensure their supply and send reinforcements on a large scale for a relatively long period, but could only use a limited force for relatively short offensives.

c) The *third direction* that might be threatened by our army was South Indo-China. Here, we had the strategic zone of Western Highlands bordering on Lower Laos, then the Nam Bo combat zone with important human and material resources and where the enemy forces, weaker than those in the North, were scattered in various localities to defend the occupied territory.

Navarre estimated that if our regular forces launched an offensive in this direction they could create a great confusion and win many successes. Though there was no sign as yet of such an offensive, this danger had to be prevented, since the liberation of the North-West by our troops and that of Sam Neua and many other localities by the Vietnamese Volunteers and the Pathet Lao Liberation troops in Upper Laos. Therefore, Navarre posed the problem of resolutely preventing our regular forces from expanding beyond the Northern battlefield, a "prohibited line", from Thakhek to Dong Hoi.

As regards the Southern battlefield, Navarre held that to let our troops control for years the thickly populated and wealthy provinces in the Fifth Zone and a fairly large area in the Ninth Zone in Nam Bo, was a grave mistake, for we could rely upon these zones to strengthen our forces and create new threats for the whole sector.

Proceeding from these considerations, Navarre and the French and American generals mapped out a large-scale operational plan, hoping to regain the initiative and to win a decisive success in a short period of time.

This *operational plan* envisaged two phases :

a) In autumn-winter 1953 and spring 1954 : to keep the *strategic defensive* in the North, carry out a strategic offensive in the South, at the same time develop the puppet army, muster troops, and build up big mobile force.

Concretely speaking, the enemy decided to gather a strong mobile force in the Bac Bo delta in autumn and winter 1953 to open fierce mopping-up operations to destroy our guerilla bases and guerilla zones ; at the same time he planned to launch attacks on our free zones in order to pin down and wear out our regular troops, driving us to the defensive before we could pass to the offensive. Meanwhile, he worked against time to develop the puppet forces and concentrate his troops as rapidly as possible.

After winter, that is after the season of big operations in the North, early in 1954, the enemy would avail himself of the forced rest of our troops to transfer the greater part of his mobile force to the South. At this period, the climatic conditions in the South were favourable to the operations of the enemy. His intention was to open big operations to occupy all our remaining free zones, particularly the Fifth Zone and the Ninth Zone in Nam Bo to remove all serious threats ; the enemy would take advantage of

his victories to develop new puppet forces and regroup new mobile forces, thus preparing a big offensive on the front of the North.

b) If the plan were working well, in autumn-winter 1954, he would transfer to North Vietnam his mobile forces greatly increased and highly heartened, then shift to a *strategic offensive* on the front of the North and win great military successes, thus forcing us to negotiate in conditions favourable to them. And if we did not accept his conditions he would destroy our regular forces.

To have the required forces to carry out this plan, Navarre advocated the following measures : to develop the puppet army on a large scale ; to regroup part of the occupation forces ; to ask for reinforcements from France.

Navarre had no other way than to resort to the perfidious policy formerly applied by Gen. Revers and Gen. De Lattre de Tassigny : "*to feed war by war, to use the Vietnamese to fight the Vietnamese*", to use puppet troops as occupation forces in place of European and African troops transferred to the regrouping points. The only difference was that Navarre insisted that it be applied on a larger scale and with more resolution.

With U.S. weapons and dollars Navarre and the French and American generals decided to build up in 1953 a new puppet army comprising 54 battalions named mobile battalions and to double this strength in 1954. Thus the effectives of the puppet troops amounted from about 200,000 to 290,000, not including the puppet soldiers in the Expeditionary Corps.

They used every barbarous and cruel manœuvre to impoverish our people in the temporarily occupied zones, mopped up, arrested, duped, coaxed, and corrupted the youth. From May 1953 to March 1954, the enemy succeeded in setting up 107 new puppet battalions 95,000 men strong — the highest figure since the beginning of the war. However the French and American generals had to acknowledge that in practice this expedient did not help, because it was only a quantitative increase at the expense of the quality of the units and the fighting spirit which flagged despite their psychological warfare schemes — signboard of sham independence, anti-communist ideology, full liberty given to the troops to destroy, rape and pillage during the operations.

Simultaneously with the development of the puppet forces, Navarre envisaged the rapid establishment of a fairly strong *strategic mobile force* capable of breaking all our offensives and destroying the main part of our forces later on. Thus in 1953 and 1954, he intended to build up a mobile mass of 7 divisions (6 divisions of infantry and 1 division of paratroops), comprising 27 mobile brigades in all. For this purpose, Navarre ordered the regroupment of his picked European and African units, which were to be withdrawn from a number of posts. At the same time he proposed the French government to send him two divisions, but received only 12 battalions coming from France, North Africa and Korea. In autumn-winter 1953, the enemy succeeded in regrouping a mobile force of 84 battalions on the Indo-China front, and to carry out the first phase of the Navarre plan,

he concentrated in the Bac Bo delta a fairly strong mobile force comprising 44 battalions, that is over 50 per cent of his mobile forces then existing in Indo-China.

Immediately after his appointment, Gen. Navarre had many a time declared that he had to act according to the slogan "*always keep the initiative*", "*always on the offensive*".

In summer and during the autumn of 1953, the enemy successively launched scores of fierce mopping-up operations in the occupied zones in Bac Bo, Binh-Tri-Thien and Nam Bo. In these raids he mobilized fairly strong forces, sometimes scores of infantry battalions covered by artillery and air force, such as in the large-scale mopping-up operations in Binh-Tri-Thien, the Hai Hau region (Nam Dinh province), the Luoc River region (Thai Binh province). He mopped these regions many times, massacred the people, arrested the youth, and herded the population into concentration camps for a closer control. He endeavoured to break our guerilla bases, sabotage our economy, destroy our reserve force, and use every perfidious scheme to develop his puppet troops.

In July 1953, he dropped his paratroops deep into our rear, attacked Lang Son, and boasted that we had suffered heavy losses, though in fact our losses were insignificant.

The enemy had his myrmidons intensify their commando activities, extending the fields of action of the bandits in the areas near Lao Cai, Lai Chau, chiefly Son La.

In August 1953, the enemy withdrew the whole of his armed forces from Na San to the delta, and clamoured that this withdrawal was a great success. Formerly, Na San had been considered by him as "the Second Verdun", blocking the road to the Southward advance of communism, but when they had to evacuate it in order to escape destruction, they declared that Na San had lost all military interest.

In October 1953, Navarre launched the Hai Au (Gull) operation in the region bordering Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa provinces, declared that he had regained the initiative, paralysed our regular forces and boasted of his readiness to occupy Thanh Hoa or attack in the direction of Phu Tho. Taking advantage of the march of the enemy on the free zone, one of our main units was ordered to choose positions with vantage ground to destroy his forces, unit by unit. Our troops had caused the enemy heavy losses on the Ninh Binh main front as well as in his rear. His troops had to withdraw from Nho Quan.

Since the arrival of Navarre in Indo-China to the first half of November everything seemed to run for the best: he could intensify "the pacification" of his rear, threaten our liberated zones, feverishly "mobilize" the youth to develop the puppet army, keep the initiative in the withdrawal of troops in some sectors,

or launch offensives on others, and boldly regroup his strategic mobile forces. At that time the enemy thought that our Autumn-Winter plan began to fizzle out, because a part of our regular forces had been worn out, our other main units would certainly be used for the defence of the free zones. All the orders of the day and "weekly letters" of Gen. Navarre to his officers and men as well as the French and American press, revealed an utmost optimism.

Suddenly, the enemy High Command received new pieces of intelligence; there were signs about the transfer of one unit of our regular forces to the North-West. The enemy was in a quandary: should we attack in this autumn-winter in the direction of the delta or the North-West, and if we attacked in the direction of the North-West, how to ensure the protection of his troops stationed in Lai Chau, and particularly how to protect Upper Laos?

After having weighed the pros and cons, Gen. Navarre decided to launch a new operation not mentioned in his former strategic plan.

On November 20, 1953, six picked mobile battalions were parachuted on the Muong Thanh plain and occupied *Dien Bien Phu*. The enemy's first intention was to reinforce the position of Dien Bien Phu, then get into liaison with Lai Chau to occupy Tuan Giao and even Son La and Na San. Thus the radius of his action in the North-West would extend and the defence of Upper Laos be ensured.

But, in mid-and late in November, the enemy found out new signs: it seemed that many of our regular units including the most seasoned ones were march-

ing in the direction of the North-West. These news at first vague, became more and more precise. The enemy detected the transfer of our troops for the first time in winter 1953, rather rapidly compared with the previous years when he realized the main direction of our attack only at the first shot, as it was the case in the Frontier and North-West campaigns.

An extremely important new problem claimed the attention of the High Command of the French Expeditionary Corps: in face of our army's intention to launch a big offensive, had it to withdraw from Dien Bien Phu or reinforce its garrison and accept the combat on the spot? On December 3, 1953, Gen. Navarre chose the second solution and ordered to keep Dien Bien Phu at all costs, and create every favourable condition to destroy an important part of our regular forces in case of attack; when necessary, troops could be withdrawn from Lai Chau to reinforce Dien Bien Phu. Basing on the Na San experience he felt quite confident that with a strong force and an up-to-date system of defence, Dien Bien Phu would certainly become an unassailable fortress. As our troops marched on the North-West the enemy had to find stratagems further to attract our regular forces, at last if we persisted in our offensive, our regular forces would certainly suffer heavy losses. Only in this way could the enemy's strong-points in the North-West be kept, Upper Laos in security and the Bac Bo delta not be attacked. Winter would bring new successes. And once our regular forces were worn out and weary, when the enemy's mobile forces would

be regrouped and reinforced, Gen. Navarre would freely shift to the Spring plan, that is to launch his strategic offensive on the Southern battlefield as envisaged in his plan.

This decision of Navarre was of an extremely great strategic importance. After having taken it, the enemy axed his propaganda about this success, stressing that the occupation and reinforcement of Dien Bien Phu were an irrefutable proof of the renewed strength acquired by the Expeditionary Corps and of its high mobile strategic possibilities. After the days of anxiety, optimism within the official circles and in the French and American opinion increased more than previously.

In the meantime our regular forces were actively preparing for the Autumn-Winter offensives and gradually tightening its encirclement of Dien Bien Phu.

A new page began in the history of the war in Indo-China.

III

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF THE WINTER 1953 — SPRING 1954 CAMPAIGN OUR MAJOR ATTACKS ON THE CO-ORDINATED FRONTS PRIOR TO THE DIEN BIEN PHU CAMPAIGN

As has been said in previous chapters, Vietnam's military situation in summer 1953 underwent important changes. On our side, from the Frontier campaign onward, our troops grew powerfully, won successive victories in many offensive campaigns and firmly maintained the initiative on the Bac Bo front. On the enemy side, he suffered successive defeats, his effectives were destroyed, the area under his control narrowed down: he couldn't help using new measures such as developing his puppet troops, reinforcing his mobile forces in an attempt to save the situation. As our forces on the Northern battlefield were markedly stronger than on others, and the Bac Bo delta was important politically as well as

strategically, the enemy was ever more prone to concentrate his forces to defend the Bac Bo delta, regarding it as "a key position in South-East Asia".

As early as 1953, our Party Central Committee had analysed profoundly and scientifically the military situation on various fronts in Vietnam in particular, and throughout Indo-China in general.

The Central Committee assessed that due to the uneven development of our forces on various fronts in Bac Bo, Trung Bo and Nam Bo, the bulk of the enemy main forces was gradually concentrated in Bac Bo, while on other fronts he was exposed on many sectors. In Bac Bo, his forces were regrouped in the delta whereas on mountain fronts, he was relatively weaker, and the topographic conditions there were favourable to us and unfavourable to the enemy.

Seasoned in great campaigns, our regular forces whose combativeness had been raised, acquired new abilities in mobile warfare as well as in siege warfare. However, as has been proved by the experiences drawn in the Midlands campaign, Road No 18 campaign and Ha-Nam-Ninh campaign in 1951, on the delta front, with our armed forces mustered to a certain degree, we could gain the absolute superiority only in a short period of time. As soon as the enemy, taking advantage of his possibilities in rapid reinforcement, brought in more mobile forces, we then met with many difficulties in continuing the development of our offensive. On mountain fronts, it was clear

that our troops had more favourable conditions to destroy the enemy, who was relatively scattered, and was handicapped in the use and development of the effectiveness of his artillery and air force, etc. His supply and reinforcement, only carried by air, were greatly limited. Our troops had many possibilities to secure and maintain a military superiority throughout the offensive campaign or in given directions during the campaign, hence we could score great successes.

Proceeding from the foregoing analysis and considering the destruction of enemy effectives as the main task, our Party Central Committee put forth a most correct strategic direction which consisted in *concentrating our forces to launch offensives in strategically important directions where the enemy was relatively weak in order to wipe out part of his effectives, liberate territory, at the same time compelling him to scatter his forces to cope with us on the vital points which they could not abandon; moreover the scattering of his forces created new favourable conditions for us to put out of action more of his effectives.* To speak more concretely, on the front of the Bac Bo delta, besides the main and immediate task which was to continue speeding up guerilla warfare in the enemy rear, we could also use part of our regular forces in minor battles. As for major campaigns, they should be launched in other directions. By so doing we would gradually create conditions to proceed to the liberation of the delta.

Once more the Party Central Committee re-affirmed the strategic direction of the resistance war in

general and the direction of operations of our army in particular as follows, "The general guiding principle of our liberation war is to conduct *a long resistance war by our own means*, therefore we must not be subjective, underestimate the enemy, take hasty steps and indulge ourselves in recklessness. To strike surely and advance cautiously, strike to win, strike only when success is certain: if it is not, then don't strike". Only fighting with victory was allowed. Fighting without victory was not allowed.

Our regular forces had to take mobile warfare as the main tactics. We used rapid mobile warfare to destroy the enemy effectives part by part. We availed ourselves of our superiority in armed forces to destroy the enemy wholesale in individual battles, not to wear out, not to rout him. Again it was necessary for our troops to co-ordinate siege warfare with mobile warfare. This was a necessity to bring our offensive campaigns to great victories.

We had predicted that after the cease-fire on the Korean front the French and American imperialists' new plot would be their endeavour to increase their forces and extend their aggressive war in Indo-China. The military situation in summer 1953 became markedly tense especially after the appointment of Gen. Navarre as Commander-in-Chief of the French Expeditionary Corps in Indo-China.

Our people and army stood undaunted in face of the enemy's new plots and manoeuvres. Our task was resolutely to fight in order to smash the Navarre plan, to defeat it. But what should be our strategic direction and operational plan? In face of the enemy's

new plot, how should we analyse the situation and define the principles of action in a precise way so that victory might be guaranteed?

The concrete problem was:

The enemy was mustering a huge force in the Bac Bo delta, concentrating an unprecedentedly great mobile force, fiercely raiding his rear, and launching big and small offensives against our free zones, should we either concentrate our forces to cope with the enemy or despatch them to launch offensives in other directions?

The first solution was: the enemy was concentrating his forces in the Bac Bo delta threatening our free zones, then we should muster all our regular forces or the bulk of them in the plain to destroy part of the enemy troops and to co-ordinate with guerilla warfare in order to defend our free zones for a certain time. After the enemy had suffered certain losses, and our free zones had been consolidated, we should either leave our regular forces operate in the delta or transfer them in other directions, according to the situation.

The second solution was: the enemy was concentrating his forces in the Bac Bo delta where the conditions of combat were more favourable to him than to our regular forces, to use our forces there would bring us limited successes and we might suffer losses. Therefore, it was necessary for us to transfer our regular forces in other directions where the enemy was relatively exposed, to destroy his effectives more

advantageously and compel him to scatter his forces to cope with the situation; meanwhile we should speed up guerilla warfare in the enemy's rear throughout the country. If the enemy attacked our free zones, his forces would be ever more scattered; and our victories in the directions where the enemy was exposed, would automatically compel him to withdraw from our free zones.

At that time, we could already see the main lines of the Navarre plan, but the enemy's plot did not concretely come to light yet. Our Party Central Committee studied and analysed the situation, firmly grasped the spirit and fundamental strategic direction put forth previously to proceed to the adoption of the direction of operations in the Winter 1953 — Spring 1954 campaign. This strategy was: *to use part of our regular forces to launch offensives upon the directions where the enemy was exposed, at the same time to seek for opportunities to destroy the enemy in mobile warfare in the direction where he could attack deep into our free zones. Meanwhile we would speed up guerilla warfare on all fronts of the enemy rear, and actively carry out all necessary preparations among the people, the local troops, the people's militiamen and the guerillas in the free zones, so that our regular forces had a free hand to fulfil their tasks.*

The *operational plan* was in its broad lines:

a) To use part of our regular forces to launch an offensive in the north-western direction, destroy the enemy who was still occupying Lai Chau, thus liberating the whole North-West.

b) To propose the Pathet Lao Liberation troops to co-ordinate with the Vietnamese volunteers units in order to launch an offensive in the direction of Middle Laos, destroy the enemy effectives, and enlarge the liberated zone.

c) As the enemy's action was not yet clearly seen our immediate tactics was to post an important part of our regular forces at a certain point, completely conceal them, and keep ourselves ready for action. In face of our troops' offensive in the north-western direction, it was possible that the enemy would send his reinforcements there; in this circumstance, we would dispatch more regular forces in that direction to wipe out his effectives. The enemy might also attack deep in some direction of the Viet Bac base to cut our lines of communication and supply, destroy the lines of reinforcements of our forefronts, and cause losses to our free zones, at the same time compel our regular forces to withdraw from the North-West. In this case, we would seek ways and means to attract the enemy deep into our rear and then use part of our regular forces to put him out of action.

d) In the delta, we would speed up guerilla warfare in the enemy's rear, consolidate and develop our guerilla bases and guerilla zones, undertake effective co-ordinated operations with the aforesaid offensives. If the enemy attacked our free zones, we would wear him out and tried to destroy part of his effectives.

Above was the operational plan worked out for our army on the main battlefield — the Northern battlefield.

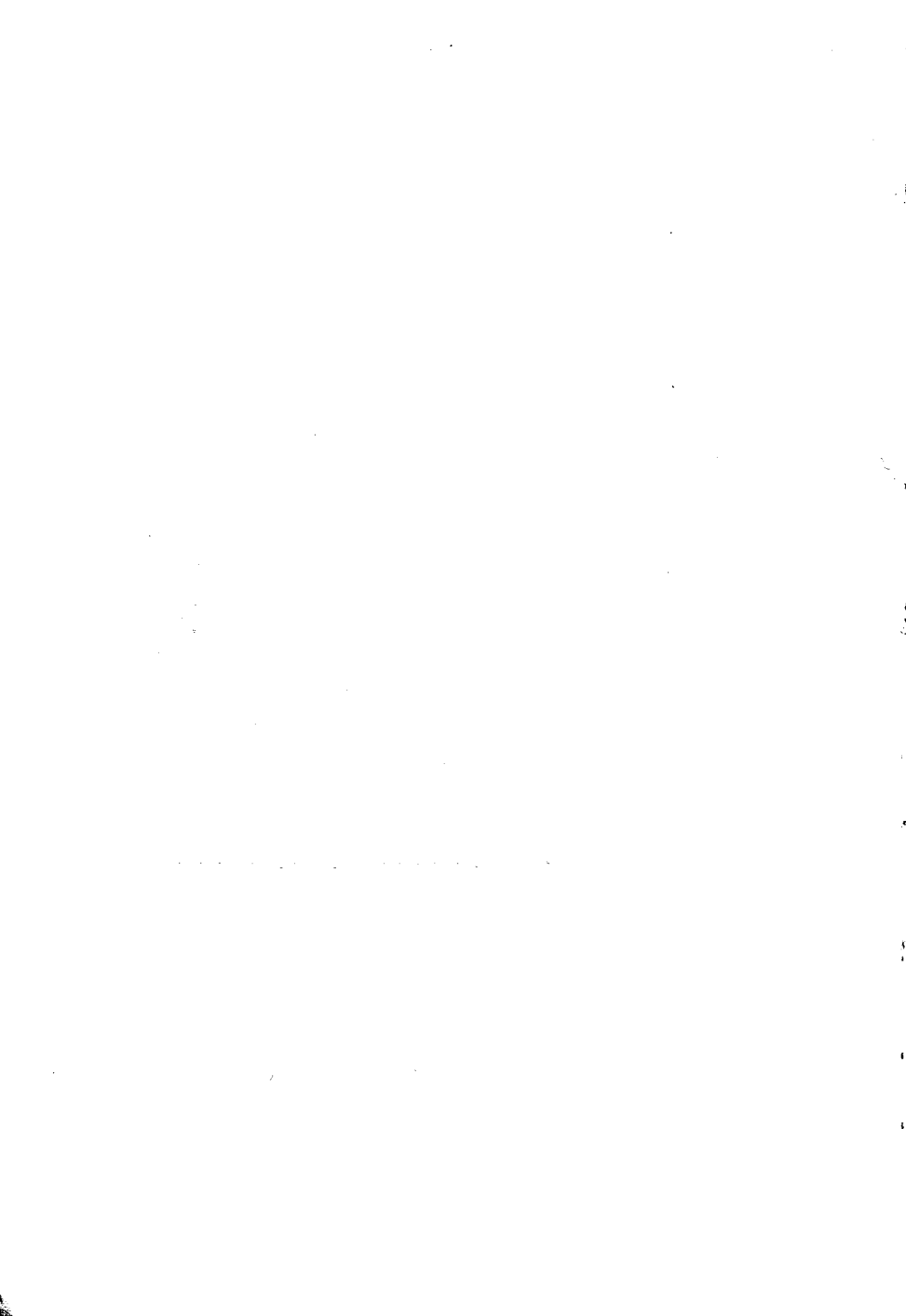
The Party Central Committee again based itself on the enemy situation and ours, and on the aforesaid strategic direction, to define the Winter-Spring operational plan for the Southern battlefield whose broad lines were as follows :

a) In the South, we had a large free area which was the Fifth Zone where our armed forces were relatively strong. At that time, we had received reliable information about the enemy preparations for an attack to occupy our free zones. In the Fifth Zone, we faced a problem which was also as difficult to be solved as that in the North : the enemy was preparing to launch an offensive upon our free zones; should we use the bulk of our regular forces to cope with the enemy's scheme and defend our free zones or rush them to another direction in which we had many more favourable conditions to destroy the enemy effectives.

We reached a bold and precise resolution which was to concentrate the bulk of our regular forces in the Fifth Zone to launch an offensive upon the front of the Western High Plateaux in order to destroy part of the enemy effectives and liberate part of the territory. The people, the local armed forces, the people's militiamen and guerillas, together with a small part of our regular forces, had the task of making active preparations to cope with the enemy's scheme of encroaching upon our free zones. We assessed that the enemy might attack and temporarily occupy part of our free zones, but if our offensive developed favourably on the Western High Plateaux

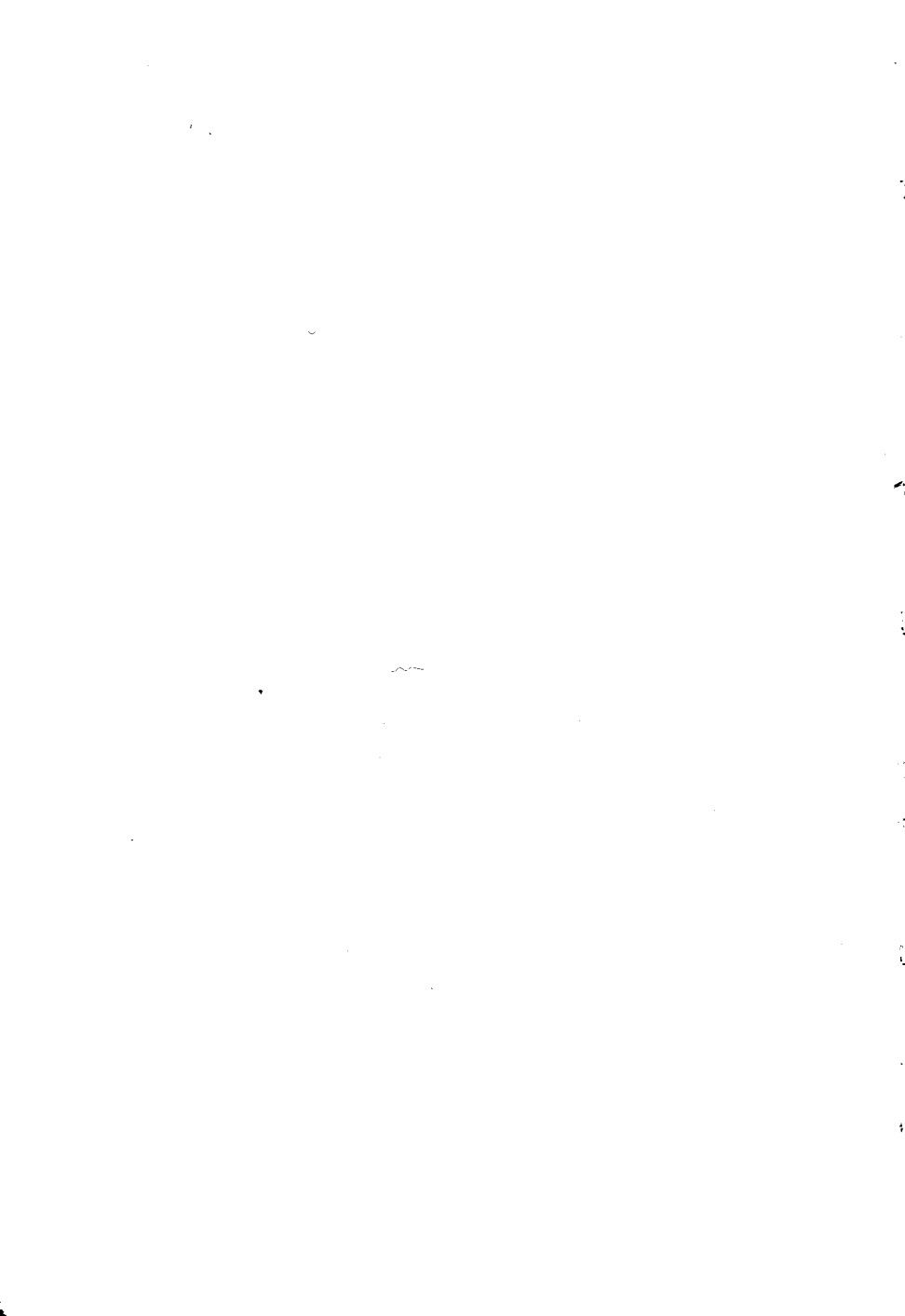


The Political Bureau discussing the leading principles of the campaign





The V.P.A. High Command working out the plan of operations



front, he would finally be compelled to withdraw his troops from the area he had just occupied and perhaps even from many other localities.

b) With regard to the Nam Bo front and that of the southernmost part of Trung Bo, our task was to speed up guerilla warfare, take advantage of the new favourable conditions created by the transfer of the bulk of the enemy's forces to other directions, to multiply small attacks in which we were certain of victory, wear out and destroy the enemy effectives part by part, intensify the political work among the puppet soldiers, and enlarge our guerilla bases and zones. Our people and army in the free Ninth Zone also made active preparations to cope with an eventual enemy offensive.

The aforesaid operational plan proceeded from the following fundamental principles on the strategic directions and direction of operations :

First, in the liberation war waged by our people, the most fundamental strategic principle was to destroy the *enemy effectives and increase our forces* ; only by destroying the enemy effectives could we change the balance of forces between the enemy and us and liberate territory. If due to the defence or liberation of territory we did not steadily abide by the principle of destroying the enemy effectives, in the end our forces would be easily worn out and we would be unable to defend territory, let alone to liberate it. Therefore it was necessary firmly to grasp this main principle.

Second, we had to strike to win, strike only when success is certain, strike to wipe out the enemy. At

the start of the war, our military forces were much weaker than those of the enemy, if we did not firmly grasp the principle of striking to win and to destroy the enemy, our forces could not increase, and grow stronger. With regard to our army which was that of an oppressed nation, of the poor toiling people, it was necessary for us firmly to grasp this principle : to strike only when success is certain ; if it is not, then don't strike ; to wipe out the enemy but not to wear him out. We had to do in such a way that after a combat, after a campaign, our troops grew stronger, and the enemy troops weaker.

Third, because we wanted to destroy the enemy effectives and to strike only to win and not to be defeated, because we had to realize these goals in conditions of the enemy being strong, and we militarily weak, our *strategic direction* could not allow us to choose other directions than those where the enemy was exposed, and relatively weak and where we had many favourable conditions in all aspects in order to concentrate our absolute superiority in matters of troops and firepower, for combats of wholesale destruction. Drawing experiences from the successes and failures in the first years of the resistance war, we realized all the clearer this important principle : to attack the sectors where the enemy was exposed or relatively weak. At the beginning of this chapter it has been recalled that our Party Central Committee had correctly reaffirmed the strategic direction of our regular forces : to spearhead our offensives upon the fronts where the enemy was exposed, in the important directions where the enemy

was relatively weak, in order to destroy him. When working out the Autumn-Winter 1953 — 1954 plan, we based ourselves on the direction set by the Party Central Committee.

Fourth, because our aim was to destroy the enemy effectives, attack the enemy where he was relatively weak, and create favourable conditions to destroy him, in the practical military conditions obtaining at that time, whose major feature was the concentration by the enemy of a fairly powerful mobile force in the Bac Bo delta, we should not launch large-scale offensives upon that powerful mobile mass but seek ways and means to compel him to scatter his forces, first of all in many directions, in this way he would be weaker in every direction, and we would have many more conditions to wipe him out ; the best thing was to scatter him in the directions unfavourable to him in topographical conditions, in the use of weapons and technique, in transports and supply, etc., and thus we would have many more conditions to destroy a greater part of his effectives. If the most important point in the Navarre plan was to overcome all difficulties, use all measures, resolutely concentrate forces, build at all costs a strongest strategic mobile mass to cope victoriously with our offensives, and moreover, to launch large-scale offensives to destroy our regular forces, the very important point in our Winter-Spring operational plan was to overcome all difficulties, use all measures, *keep firm the initiative, determinedly compel the enemy to scatter*, smash his concentrated mobile mass, compel him to split his regular forces in various directions, then choose the

directions most favourable to us to destroy him. We strongly believed that we could do that because we had grasped one of the important contradictions of the enemy's aggressive war: the contradiction between the concentration of forces and occupation of territory, the contradiction between the build-up of a large-scale mobile force and the scattering of his forces to various regions, between the strategic offensive and strategic defensive.

Our Winter-Spring operational plan also crystallized and emphasized the *principle of dynamism, initiative, mobility and rapidity of decision in face of new situations.*

Dynamism and initiative meant to seize the good opportunities, choose the front favourable to us and unfavourable to the enemy to attack him, and destroy his effectives; it meant determinedly to avoid the situation in which we had to cope passively with the enemy, but on the contrary we had to compel the enemy to despatch his troops wherever we liked; again it meant that if the opportunities did not exist we would create them to destroy the enemy.

Again why did we need *mobility and rapidity of decision in face of new situations*? For the enemy's situation could change rapidly, partly because he had a concentrated force and many means of transport, and partly because our activities compelled him to react. On all fronts in general and on each direction in particular, the enemy could withdraw his troops from one sector to reinforce the other, and this reinforcement could be great or small, he might attack our free zones or might not, and if he attacked

our free zones, he might choose one sector or the other. Our troops had to be most mobile and rapid in order not to let slip any opportunities to destroy the enemy.

How should be mobility and rapidity of decision in face of new situations? This meant the readiness to fight the enemy in any condition when he was not yet reinforced, when he had been reinforced or was withdrawing: we were ready to fight either in the delta, or in the mountain regions; if conditions changed unfavourably to us while we were carrying out our operational plan, we immediately transferred our troops to other directions or withdrew them; if the situation changed suddenly the forces transferred to one direction would be immediately despatched to another. With regard to the army, mobility and rapidity of decision in face of new situations meant constant readiness to fight on whatever battlefield, at any time, in any form, with an enemy in his position or on the march, to engage in mobile warfare, siege warfare or guerilla warfare provided we could wipe out the enemy effectives. In short, mobility and rapidity of decision in face of new situations was an expression of dynamism and initiative, drawing its source from the determination to wipe out the enemy effectives. All ideas and actions were aimed at reaching the basic goal which was the destruction of enemy effectives.

A general survey of all fronts throughout the country showed that our Winter-Spring operational plan aimed at frustrating the Navarre plan, was the expression of a co-ordinated action in all directions

in Bac Bo, Trung Bo and Nam Bo, etc., the expression of a close co-ordination between regular warfare on the main fronts and guerilla warfare in the enemy's rear, a close co-ordination between the task of destroying the enemy effectives and that of liberating territory, with the destruction of enemy effectives as the main task.

The realization of the aforesaid tactics meant that we could take advantage of the enemy's weak points and contradictions to destroy him: contradiction between the consolidation of his defence system in the temporarily occupied zones and the offensive upon our free zones, contradiction between occupation and pacification of the Southern battlefield on the one hand and the transfer of his troops to Bac Bo on the other, contradiction between territorial occupation and military concentration.

The realization of the aforesaid tactics meant that we could destroy part of the enemy effectives, disperse his mobile forces, liberate part of the territory, build new bases, create new fronts, thus creating conditions to destroy many more enemy effectives.

The realization of the aforesaid tactics meant that we could constantly keep our initiative, and drive the enemy into a more and more passive situation.

The realization of the aforesaid tactics meant that we could frustrate the new enemy plot, smash the Navarre plan like we had done with De Tassigny's.

Such were our strategic direction and operational plan in Winter 1953-Spring 1954.

To carry out these direction and plan, in the regions threatened by the enemy, we had scattered our stores, transferred our offices and schools deeper in our territory, made preparations to cope with every enemy offensive by our own means. In the enemy's rear, the people together with the armed forces and para-military troops were feverishly preparing to parry the enemy raids.

In October hundreds of thousands of *dan cong* had been mobilized to prepare for various fronts; the communication lines which had been widened, were repaired.

In mid-November, a part of our regular forces marched to the front-line, in the direction of Lai Chau. The Vietnamese volunteers, together with the Pathet Lao Liberation troops, also got themselves prepared to operate in Middle Laos. Our Winter-Spring offensives were about to begin.

At this very period of time, the military situation underwent a new change.

The enemy detected the transfer of part of our regular forces in the North-Western direction. On November 20, 1953, part of his mobile forces was parachuted on Dien Bien Phu to occupy it. A new situation was thus created.

We timely assessed this new situation as follows:

About the enemy's landing of his troops on Dien Bien Phu, though we could not foresee its exact time and place, it happened within the limit of our prevision that if the North-West was threatened the enemy would send reinforcements in that direction. Thus,

in face of the threat of our attack, the enemy losing his initiative, had to despatch part of his mobile forces to Dien Bien Phu in order to protect the North-West, cover Upper Laos, and smash our offensive plan.

How would the enemy situation change in the near future? The enemy might defend Dien Bien Phu and Lai Chau at the same time, with the protection of Dien Bien Phu as the main task.

If threatened he could regroup his forces to one single position which he would reinforce to some extent; we did not yet know exactly the position he would choose, but it would be probably Dien Bien Phu.

If being more heavily threatened he might reinforce that position to some extent and transform it into a fortified entrenched camp (in this case he might choose Dien Bien Phu as a premise to build his position) but he might also withdraw.

At that time we could not yet affirm that the enemy would stay or withdraw, that he would stay at one point or at two, for a long or short time, that he would send in reinforcements in great or small numbers first, because we did not yet have reliable information to foresee the enemy scheme; second, because the enemy also faced many difficulties: if he withdrew he might lose territory, if he sent in great reinforcements he would scatter his mobile forces and might be destroyed, therefore he might not have a well-defined plan, or he might have it which he might change when he met with difficulties arising from our action.

However changeable the enemy situation might be *the landing by the enemy of his air-borne troops on*

Dien Bien Phu was advantageous to us. It laid bare the contradiction of the enemy between occupation of territory and concentration of forces, between the occupation of the mountain positions and that of the delta positions.

In consideration of the aforesaid assessment, the units of our regular forces which were marching to the North-West, were ordered immediately to attack and destroy the enemy at Lai Chau ; at the same time, a wing of our forces advanced rapidly towards the North of Dien Bien Phu, cut the retreat of the enemy from Lai Chau to Dien Bien Phu, prevented him from marching from Dien Bien Phu to meet his forces coming from Lai Chau, at the same time we closed on the enemy at Dien Bien Phu, encircled him and prepared for the battle to come.

LIBERATION OF LAI CHAU, ENCIRCLEMENT OF DIEN BIEN PHU

On December 10, 1953, we opened fire on the Lai Chau front. Formerly we had wiped out or forced to surrender thousands of bandits in the regions of Muong La and Chau Thuan.

The enemy at Lai Chau had withdrawn part of his forces to Dien Bien Phu by air from December 7, 1953. The remainder comprising two battalions of puppet soldiers and 23 companies, was prepared to withdraw by the mountain tracks to rally Dien Bien Phu.

Having been informed of the withdrawal of the enemy from Lai Chau, our troops immediately marched forward along Road № 41, now Road № 6, to pursue him. On December 10, we destroyed the outpost of Pa-Ham, about 30 km from Lai Chau. On December 12, 1953 our troops liberated Lai Chau town.

On December 13, our troops wiped out the enemy in retreat at Muong Pon and Pu San peak. Two days before, we had destroyed part of the enemy forces coming from Dien Bien Phu at Tau village, 10 km north of Dien Bien Phu.

After more than ten days and ten nights of fighting, pursuit, encirclement and destruction in this mountain region, our troops liberated the remaining part of the enemy-occupied zone in Lai Chau province, wiping out 24 companies.

After our victory in the south-western part of Ninh Binh province, the Lai Chau campaign was a great success of our troops in winter 1953-spring 1954. This victory gave more confidence to our army and people.

Another consequence of the Lai Chau battle was that the enemy had to reinforce Dien Bien Phu hastily to avoid the danger of being destroyed. The Navarre's regrouping plan began to be frustrated.

Besides the Bac Bo delta, Dien Bien Phu became a second point where the enemy concentrated his forces.

Our troops hurriedly encircled the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp.

LIBERATION OF THAKHEK AND SEVERAL REGIONS IN MIDDLE LAOS

Parallel with the preparations to attack Lai Chau, orders were given to the Vietnamese volunteers to co-operate with the Pathet Lao Liberation troops to launch an offensive on the Middle Laos front, where the enemy was relatively exposed. Early in December, detecting our activity, the enemy hastily rushed reinforcements to this sector.

On December 21 and 22 the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese units launched two successive attacks upon Kham He and Banaphao near the Vietnam-Laos frontier, destroying completely two enemy mobile battalions, the greater part of another mobile battalion and a battalion of artillery. After a series of victories the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese units rushed towards Thakhek while pursuing the enemy in his flight along Road № 9.

The enemy bewildered withdrew from Thakhek to Seno, a military base near Savannakhet. On December 25, the Pathet Lao Liberation units entered liberated Thakhek, a town on the bank of the Mekong. The liberated zones were extended to Road № 9. A number of enemy posts stationed there were also destroyed.

This was another great victory of our troops in the winter 1953-spring 1954 campaign. To face our activity in time the enemy had to transfer hastily his mobile forces from the Bac Bo delta and other fronts to reinforce Seno and turn it into a big fortified entrenched camp in order to impede the Pathet Lao

and Vietnamese units in their advance into Lower Laos. Navarre was compelled to scatter his forces over several points.

Besides the Bac Bo delta and Dien Bien Phu, Seno became the third point where the enemy concentrated his forces.

LIBERATION OF THE BOLOVENS HIGHLAND AND THE TOWN OF ATTOPEU

Simultaneously with the attack on Middle Laos, one unit of the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese forces crossed dangerous mountain regions and advanced deep into Lower Laos where it effected a junction with the local armed forces.

Taking advantage of the exposure of the enemy, on December 30 and 31, the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese forces defeated an enemy battalion in the region of Attopeu and liberated this town. Following up their victory, they advanced toward Saravane and liberated the whole Bolovens Highland in Lower Laos.

The enemy had to despatch reinforcements to Pakse town.

LIBERATION OF KONTUM AND THE NORTH OF THE WESTERN HIGHLANDS

Though defeated in many sectors, the enemy still remained subjective in appraising the situation. Due to the easy occupation of Dien Bien Phu he thought

we were not strong enough to attack it, not only because it was a very strong fortified entrenched camp, but the distance which separated it from our rear created insuperable obstacles for us in the supply of food if we wanted to attack it. He thought that our many-sided attacks were due to our hesitancy in tackling with Dien Bien Phu and that we would soon be obliged to evacuate the North-West because of supply difficulties, then he would find the means to destroy part of our regular forces and carry on his plan to occupy Tuan Giao, Son La, and eventually to return to Na San.

It was this same subjective appraisal which made him mobilize on January 20, 15 battalions to launch an offensive upon the southern part of Phu Yen in the Fifth Zone. This was the Atlante operation, a strategic offensive envisaged by the Navarre plan, aimed at occupying our whole free zone in South Trung Bo.

Despite the enemy's attack upon our free zone, our troops in the Fifth Zone carried on their plan most resolutely, leaving behind only a small part of their forces to cope with the enemy and cover our rear, while the bulk attacked the Western Highlands, a strategically important sector where the enemy was relatively exposed.

The offensive began on January 26. The next day, we destroyed the Mandel sub-sector, the strongest one, then we wiped out the post of Dakto and liberated the whole north of Kontum province. On February 17, we liberated Kontum town, swept the enemy from

the northern part of the Western Highlands and advanced as far as Road № 19. Meanwhile, we attacked Pleiku town. The enemy bewildered had to stop his offensive in the plains of the Fifth Zone, withdraw many units from there and even a number of units from Middle Laos and Binh-Tri-Thien to reinforce Pleiku town and a number of strongholds in the southern part of the Western Highlands in order to parry our blows.

The Kontum victory was another great success of our army and people in the Winter-Spring campaign. In the Fifth Zone, we foiled the threat of the enemy upon the rear of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces, liberated the whole of an important strategic base in the north of the Western Highlands. Our free zone ran from Quang Nam and Quang Ngai sea-coast to the Vietnam-Laos frontier, linked with the liberated south-western part of the Bolovens Highland of friendly Laos.

This victory proved all the clearer the accuracy of the Party Central Committee's guiding principle. The enemy was more and more obviously driven on to the defensive. He had to transfer troops from the Bac Bo delta to reinforce Middle Laos, and afterwards from Middle Laos and Binh-Tri-Thien to reinforce the Western Highlands.

The enemy concentrated forces in an attempt rapidly to attack and occupy the Fifth Zone, but had to stop this move to react to our offensive.

The enemy wanted to concentrate his forces but was compelled to continue scattering them. *Pleiku*

and a number of strongholds in the south of the Western Highlands became the fourth point where he concentrated his forces.

Our offensive on the Western Highlands was victoriously carried on till June 1954 and scored many more successes, particularly the resounding victory at An Khe, where we cut to pieces the mobile regiment № 100 which had just returned from the Korean front, thus liberating An Khe and seizing a large booty in vehicles, weapons and munitions.

**LIBERATION OF PHONG SALLY AND THE NAM HU
RIVER BASIN, THE PUSH FORWARD TOWARDS
LUANG PRABANG**

After the defeat of Lai Chau, Dien Bien Phu became too isolated. The enemy tried to effect junction between Dien Bien Phu and Upper Laos by increasing his occupation forces along the Nam Hu River basin as far as Muong Khoa, hoping to establish liaison with Dien Bien Phu.

To put the enemy on the wrong track, destroy more of his effectives and oblige him to continue scattering his forces in order to create favourable conditions for our preparations for the offensive upon the fortified entrenched camp orders were given to the Vietnamese volunteers to co-ordinate their action with the Pathet Lao Liberation troops for an offensive in the Nam Hu River basin.

On January 26, the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese forces attacked Muong Khoa where they destroyed one European battalion; then exploiting this success, they wiped out the enemy in the Nam Hu River basin, and came within striking distance of Luang Prabang.

The Nam Hu front-line considered by the enemy as his strategic line of communication, was smashed, 17 enemy companies being destroyed, including one European battalion. Luang Prabang was threatened.

On the other hand, the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese forces advanced to the north and liberated Phong Saly. The resistance base of the Laotian people was expanded, linked with the Sam Neua liberated zone and our North-West.

In face of the powerful offensive of the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese troops, the enemy had to reinforce Luang Prabang with his mobile forces withdrawn from the Bac Bo delta.

Once more, Navarre was compelled to continue scattering his forces. Luang Prabang became the fifth point where the enemy concentrated his forces.

**OUR SUCCESSES ON THE FRONTS IN THE ENEMY'S
REAR IN THE BAC BO DELTA, THE THREE PROVINCES
OF QUANG BINH, QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN,
THE SOUTHERNMOST PART OF TRUNG BO,
AND NAM BO**

When the enemy was in difficulties to cope with the successive attacks of our regular forces in many sectors, everywhere on the fronts in the enemy's rear,

our regular forces, local forces, people's militia and guerillas effectively exploited the situation to speed up their co-ordinated activities.

In the Bac Bo delta, guerilla warfare developed very powerfully. Our regular and local forces destroyed many important enemy positions, including large ones such as Hoang Dan in Ha Nam province, La Tien in Thai Binh province, Tu Son in Bac Ninh province; compelled the enemy to withdraw from a series of other positions, including important ones such as Bo sub-sector in Bac Giang province, Diem Dien and Cao Mai in Thai Binh province, Kinh Mon in Hai Duong province, Phu Luu Te in Ha Dong province, Ao Khoang and Suoi Me in Son Tay province. Various forms of attacks, ambushes, communication warfare developed powerfully, destroying whole companies, sometimes whole battalions; Road № 5, an enemy vital strategic line of communication, was threatened seriously, being sometimes cut for weeks on end. Especially in two great attacks on Cat Bi and Gia Lam airfields, our army men destroyed scores of enemy planes. In the following months, guerilla warfare in the Bac Bo delta developed still more powerfully. The propaganda work directed to the enemy also scored very great achievements. The guerilla bases and guerilla zones were greatly expanded, totalling three-quarters of the territory controlled by the enemy.

Binh-Tri-Thien, and in the southernmost part of Trung Bo, our troops' activity was also intense, striking powerfully on the communication lines, derailed many enemy trains, smashed many enemy raids,

expanded the guerilla bases and guerilla zones, increased the propaganda work among the enemy ranks and won many successes.

In Nam Bo, throughout the whole Winter-Spring campaign, our troops endeavoured to speed up co-ordinated activities. Due to the transfer by the enemy of his mobile forces to other fronts, the influence of our successive victories on many fronts, the preciseness of our principles of action, and the doing away with a number of former shortcomings, guerilla warfare which was being developed powerfully, scored very great successes. The enemy in over 1,000 posts and watchtowers was either destroyed or compelled to withdraw. The free Ninth Zone was firmly maintained and expanded. The large and small guerilla bases and guerilla zones were restored and greatly expanded. Many localities were liberated, and the number of soldiers crossing to our side amounted to thousands, and afterwards to tens of thousands.

*

* *

Early in March 1954, when reviewing the general military situation on various fronts, we saw two noteworthy characteristics :

First, our troops, taking the initiative of launching a series of offensive campaigns in many directions,

were victorious everywhere, destroying part of the enemy effectives and liberating many localities including important strategic areas.

Second, the enemy strategic mobile mass was no more concentrated in the Bac Bo delta but scattered over several directions: Luang Prabang and Muong Sai in Upper Laos, Seno in Middle Laos, Pleiku, the south of the Western Highlands in the Fifth Zone, and part of his picked forces was pinned down at Dien Bien Phu. Navarre's famous mobile mass concentrated in the Bac Bo delta was by then reduced from 44 battalions to 20 battalions, a great part of these battalions was no longer mobile and had to be scattered in order to protect the important communication lines, particularly Road № 5.

The Navarre plan was going bankrupt.

Navarre's scheme was to build up an ever stronger mobile strategic mass to win back the initiative, but we obliged him to scatter his forces in many directions, and subjected them to gradual destruction and passive reaction.

Navarre's scheme was to wear out and destroy part of our regular forces, frustrate our Winter-Spring plan; however, our regular forces, instead of being destroyed, won successive victories, while his main forces suffered heavy losses.

Navarre's scheme was to "pacify" his rear, but there guerilla warfare developed ever more powerfully.

Navarre's scheme was to launch offensive campaigns to threat our free zones, pin down and wear out our regular forces, but our free zones were not

threatened and our regular forces kept on their mobility at a high degree, whereas the enemy rear was fiercely attacked and more threatened than ever before.

However, the French and American generals did not want to admit this disastrous truth.

They even reckoned that our activity in winter 1953-spring 1954 had reached its peak, that our withdrawal was beginning, and that we lacked the strength to continue our offensive.

They even reckoned that despite their casualties they had been able to cope with and check our Autumn-Winter offensives and now it was their turn to get back the initiative. Proceeding from this assessment, Gen. Navarre ordered to continue the strategic offensive on the Southern battlefield, concentrate relatively great forces to continue occupying the Fifth Zone and resume the Atlante plan which had been interrupted. On March 12, to win back the initiative, he started an attack on Qui Nhon.

Not for a moment did he believe that on the following day, March 13, 1954, we would launch a large-scale offensive on the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp. Thus began the historic Dien Bien Phu campaign.

IV

THE HISTORIC DIEN BIEN PHU CAMPAIGN THE SITUATION OF THE ENEMY AND OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Dien Bien Phu is a large valley situated west of the mountainous zone of the North-West.

It is a plain 18 kilometres long by six to eight kilometres wide. It is the biggest, and most densely populated of the four large plains in the North-West close to the Vietnam-Laos frontier, situated at the junction of important roads linking with Lai Chau in the north-east; Tuan Giao, Son La, Na San in the east and south-east; Luang Prabang in the west and Sam Neua in the south. The French and American imperialists considered Dien Bien Phu as a strategic position of utmost importance, a strategic position between North Vietnam, Upper Laos and the South-West of China, capable of becoming an infantry and air base of extreme efficiency in their scheme of aggression in South-East Asia.

The effectives of the enemy at Dien Bien Phu which were in the beginning about six battalions were gradually reinforced to cope with our offensive. When we launched the attack, the garrison had 12 battalions and seven companies of infantry; during the campaign the enemy continued to send as reinforcements four battalions and two companies of paratroops, thus totalling 17 battalions of infantry, made chiefly of Europeans and Africans and crack paratroops units. Moreover there were three battalions of artillerymen, one battalion of sappers, one armoured company, a transport unit of 200 lorries and a permanent squadron of 14 aircraft. Altogether 16,200 men.

These forces occupied a fortified entrenched camp having three sub-sectors which supported one another and comprised 49 strong-points. Each strong-point, with its own disposition of defence, formed with others a "complex resistance centre" defended by mobile forces and artillery, and surrounded by communication trenches and barbed wire, having important and autonomous possibilities of defence. Each sub-sector comprised several strongly fortified resistance centres. Each resistance centre as well as the whole fortified entrenched camp were defended by a system of underground works, and a system of auxiliary works (fences or fields of barbed wire, mine-fields) and an extremely powerful firing network.

The most important was the *central sub-sector* situated in the middle of the Muong Thanh village, the chief town of Dien Bien Phu. Nearly two-thirds of the forces of the garrison were concentrated here (eight battalions comprising five stationary and three

mobile battalions). It had many resistance centres supporting each other and surrounding the command post, the artillery and commissariat bases, and protecting the airfield. To the east, there was a system of very efficacious fortified heights, especially hills A-1, C-1, D-1, E-1 which were the most important defence works of the sub-sector. Dien Bien Phu was considered by the enemy as an unassailable and impregnable fortress. In fact, the central sub-sector was defended by quite a strong force, and the eastern heights could not be attacked easily. Besides, the artillery and armoured forces of the enemy could intercept any of our approaches, across the flat plain; a system of fortifications, barbed wire and trenches would permit the enemy to wear out and repel any assault, a mobile force of battalions of paratroops was ready to co-ordinate its action with the resistance centres in order to counter-attack and break any offensive, and the motorized artillery and air force could check any attack and annihilate our artillery positions considered by the enemy as easily detected because they were set up on the slopes facing the valley within his firing-range (the distance from the heights dominating Dien Bien Phu to the airfield was from 10 to 12 kilometres).

The *Northern sub-sector* comprised the resistance centres on Doc Lap hill and Ban Keo. The position on Doc Lap hill had the task to defend the Northern side, and check all attacks coming from Lai Chau.

Him Lam, although belonging to the central sub-sector was however like Doc Lap and Ban Keo the

most advanced peripheric position ; it defended the north-east and checked all attacks coming from Tuan Giao.

The *Southern sub-sector*, also named Hong Cum, had to check all offensives coming from the south while protecting the liaison with Upper Laos.

The enemy *artillery* was installed in two bases : one at Muong Thanh, the other at Hong Cum, capable of supporting each other and protecting the surrounding strong-points. Besides the artillery of the fortified entrenched camp, each resistance centre had its own artillery comprising mortars of all sizes, flame-throwers, and direct-firing guns, disposed in a close fire system which ensures its own protection as well as that of other strong-points.

Dien Bien Phu had two *airfields* — the main field at Muong Thanh, and a reserve field at Hong Cum ; they linked with Hanoi and Haiphong in an airlift which daily made nearly 100 trips supplying from about 200 to 300 tons of goods and airdropped from about 100 to 150 tons.

The scouting *planes* and fighters of the permanent squadron constantly flew over Dien Bien Phu. The mission of bombing and strafing our troops, to protect this entrenched camp was taken up by aircraft taking off from Gia Lam or Cat Bi airfields and later by the planes of U.S. aircraft carriers anchored in the Ha Long Bay.

Navarre asserted that with such powerful forces and strong defence system, Dien Bien Phu was the strongest fortified entrenched camp never seen in Indo-China, "an impregnable fortress". From this

subjective viewpoint the enemy considered that an attack from our part would be very improbable, estimating that if our troops ventured to launch an offensive, he would have the good opportunity to inflict an inevitable defeat on us. Dien Bien Phu would be for the enemy a battlefield prepared to cause our regular forces heavy losses. The enemy went so far as arrogantly to challenge us for an attack.

*

* * *

On our side, immediately after the parachuting of enemy troops into Dien Bien Phu, we had the assumption that under the threat of our forces, the enemy could either withdraw, or strengthen his defence there, and turn Dien Bien Phu into a fortified entrenched camp which offered us a good opportunity to put out of action his picked troops. Proceeding from these considerations, while attacking Lai Chau we urgently sent part of our forces in the western direction to cut off all liaison between Lai Chau and Dien Bien Phu, encircle this base, cling to the enemy lines and prepare for the battle.

Dien Bien Phu was a strong fortified entrenched camp. The *fortified entrenched camp* was a form of defence newly devised by the enemy on the Indo-China war theatre; it had already made its appearance, but on a lower level at Hoa Binh late in 1951, in the Plain of Jars (Laos), and at Na San in 1952-1953. Before this newest and strongest form of defence a problem which arose was: should we attack the fortified entrenched camp or not?

Formerly, when our forces were still weak, the enemy set up small positions and fought with small combat units. When our troops were able to destroy his small reinforcements and small positions, the enemy system of disposition was developed and consolidated a step further, relying upon big fortified positions with ever more solid works, powerful armed forces and fire-power, and relatively big shock-units. Later on, in face of the growth of our army, when the fortified positions were in danger of being wiped out, the enemy either withdrew his forces to preserve them, or reinforced them and organized the defence according to the form of fortified entrenched camp.

This formula of fortified camp was not an initiative of the French colonialists' aggressive army. In World War II the German fascists had utilized this defensive form, setting up "hedgehogs", hoping to check the powerful offensives of the Red Army against Berlin. The French and American generals only applied the German fascists' experience to the Indo-China war theatre, hoping to check the progress of our army.

Facing the enemy's new defensive tactics, what should be our tactics to record the maximum of successes in the condition where the balance of forces between us and the enemy was known. It should be stressed again that when working out operational or tactical solutions, we always proceeded from the fundamental principles of strategic direction which consisted in *destroying the enemy effectives and striking only when success is certain*. Proceeding from the aforesaid fundamental principles, when the form of fortified entrenched camp made its first appearance,

the possibilities of our troops to wage a long campaign and our tactics were still limited, we advocated not to directly attack these centres, but to try to immobilize the enemy regular forces there, while our regular troops would operate in the sector where the enemy was relatively weak and more exposed and where we had more favourable conditions to destroy his effectives. We had applied this tactics in the Hoa Binh campaign: while the enemy concentrated his forces in this town and built it into an entrenched camp, we launched our main attacks not on Hoa Binh but in other sectors and annihilated the enemy reinforcements and his positions along the Da River, and launched victorious attacks on his rear in the Bac Bo delta. Later on, when the enemy concentrated his troops in the Na San fortified camp, after some engagements during which we destroyed part of his forces but also suffered losses we decided not to attack Na San immediately. Then the Vietnamese Volunteers, in co-ordination with the Pathet Lao Liberation troops, launched an offensive in the direction of Upper Laos towards the south-west of Na San, and score great victories.

However this formula was not the only one workable. We judged that the problem of direct attack on and of annihilating the fortified camps had to be solved at any cost, and that it was a natural outcome in the evolution of the war, in the process of development of our army. In fact, only by wiping out the fortified entrenched camp, could we defeat the enemy's newest and highest form of defence, thwart his greatest efforts in organizing his defence system, provoke

in his ranks a new crisis, create a new military situation, pave the way for our army to progress, and impel the development of our armed struggle.

In fact, since the appearance of fortified camps we worked very hard to study this new form of defence, assess and analyse its strong and weak points, point out adequate tactical principles as well as the requirements in technique and equipment, and the difficulties to overcome in order to train our troops, and make them capable of annihilating the fortified camps. And it could be said that at the beginning of autumn-winter 1953 our troops were prepared for this task. Thus when realizing that the enemy could strengthen his forces at Dien Bien Phu and turn it into a fortified entrenched camp, our Party Central Committee rapidly took the firm decision to seize the opportunity in order to wipe out this base.

When deciding to annihilate the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp, we based ourselves on our army's new possibilities, on the characteristics of this battlefield, and the large-scale operations on our side and the enemy side at this front.

In the evolution of the military situation in winter 1953, Dien Bien Phu gradually became the central point of the Navarre plan. Only by annihilating this base could we smash the Franco-American plot of protracting and expanding the war. However, the necessity to wipe out Dien Bien Phu and its importance could not be regarded as the essential factor to justify the decision of the offensive. The crucial prob-

lem was whether considering the balance of forces at that time, and the new possibilities of our troops and those of the enemy, we could initiate a new method which consisted in attacking directly a fortified entrenched camp, in this case Dien Bien Phu; in other words, could we be sure of victory in attacking Dien Bien Phu, a very powerful fortified entrenched camp?

Compared with Na San, Dien Bien Phu was much superior in effectives and fire-power; its disposition of defence was also much more modern. While Na San was a fortified camp smaller in size and having simple resistance centres, Dien Bien Phu had a whole system of complex resistance centres. Navarre and the French and American generals spoke highly of Dien Bien Phu, and considered it as a complex fortified entrenched camp provided with highly organized defence system. They concluded that our troops, who had been unable to wipe out Hoa Binh and Na San were naturally incapable of attacking Dien Bien Phu, an impregnable fortress.

Navarre and the French and American generals also held that their superiority at Dien Bien Phu was due to the long distance between the fortified entrenched camp set up in the middle of the mountainous regions of the North-West, and our bases in the rear. An attack on Dien Bien Phu would necessitate fairly big forces, very long lines of supply during a rather long period. They learnt by experience that we had no large-scale reinforcement and supply possibilities in such a long period, not to mention that his air force would inflict heavy losses on our lines of supply. As to

say that Dien Bien Phu lay in the middle of a valley surrounded by mountains, one did not forget that this valley was very large and that the roads from Tuan Giao to it were only tracks inaccessible to the transport of artillery ; not to speak of the approach of our troops across the flat plain which would go beyond our means. This is to ascertain all the more clearly that Dien Bien Phu was unassailable.

Basing himself on the aforesaid reasons, Navarre took the firm *strategic decision* to reinforce Dien Bien Phu, accept the combat with our regular forces, and considered Dien Bien Phu as the ideal battlefield to inflict heavy losses on our troops, if we dared to attack it.

The reasons given by Navarre on the excellence of this position were not without foundation. His error was to see only the strong points of Dien Bien Phu and not its vulnerable points. His greater mistake was that with the conception of a bourgeois strategist he could not visualize the immense possibilities of a people's army and the entire people who were fighting for independence and peace ; it was still more difficult for him to realize the evolution and remarkable progresses of our people and our army, understand and appreciate the great possibilities of an indomitable fighting spirit of a people's army which was determined to fight and to win.

On our side, when deciding to attack and wipe out the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp, did we realize all the advantages of the enemy and foresee all the difficulties that we could encounter ? We were aware of all this, but we also saw the enemy's weak

points that we could take advantage of ; moreover, we were conscious of the immense possibilities of our army and people to overcome all the difficulties, and to neutralize the strong points of the enemy in order to win victory.

Dien Bien Phu had all the strong points of any fortified entrenched camp, but also its particular strength. Its isolated position in the middle of an immense and hilly region involving the North-West and Upper Laos, far away from the rears, chiefly from the enemy's big airfields made its supply and reinforcement entirely dependent on air-way. If this way was cut off or blocked, this powerful fortified entrenched camp would expose all its weak points, gradually lose its fighting ability and initiative, land in a defensive position and face more and more intricate conditions ; in case of danger, a withdrawal would be very difficult. This is not to mention that the already low fighting spirit of the enemy troops could sink more deeply in case of difficulties or defeat.

On our side, we had picked units with a high fighting spirit, having made important technical progresses and well equipped, enthusiastic and determined to destroy the enemy. We could make use of our superiority in effectives and fire-power ; our troops had already a certain experience in siege warfare, they were trained to attack fortified entrenched camps, they were able to overcome difficulties, and make the necessary preparations to annihilate these camps. The supply of food and ammunition for a huge force, far away from our bases and during a long period was in fact very difficult, but we had an immense rear, the

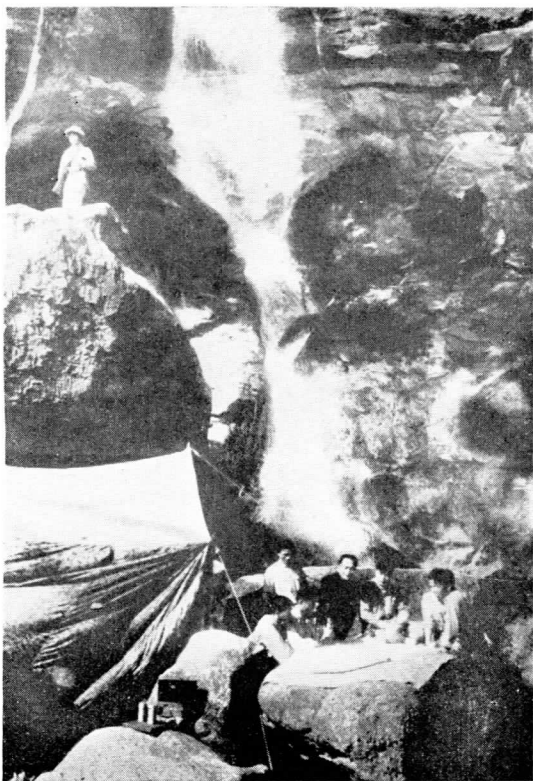
support of our entire people and Party who concentrated their forces to serve the front and to secure food and ammunition for our army, thus allowing it to fulfil its task.

We also considered the possibilities of reinforcement on the side of the enemy when Navarre disposed of big mobile forces. However owing to our winter offensives this mobile mass was greatly scattered, and, as we foresaw it, would be further in the days to come. We thus highly valued the effect of the co-ordinated fronts which created good conditions for our regular forces to annihilate Dien Bien Phu and curb the reinforcements of the enemy for this entrenched camp.

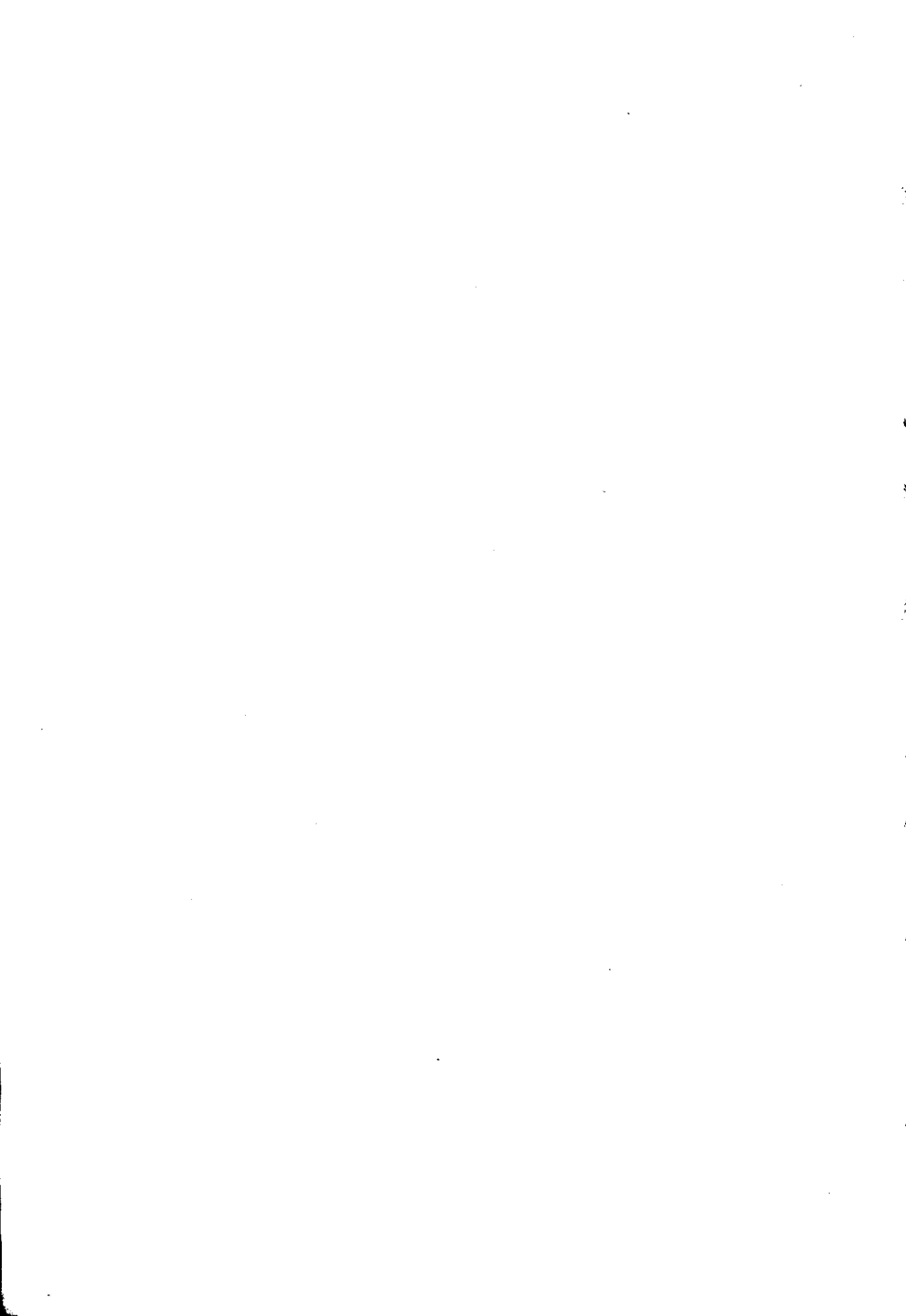
On the basis of this analysis, and firmly sticking to the principle of destroying the enemy effectives and striking surely, the Party Central Committee took the firm decision to wipe out all the enemy forces at Dien Bien Phu. While Navarre chose this base to give a decisive battle to our regular troops, we also chose it to do a *strategical decisive battle* against the enemy. We were resolved to concentrate the overwhelming majority of our picked units to destroy the most seasoned enemy forces in the most powerful fortified entrenched camp in Indo-China.

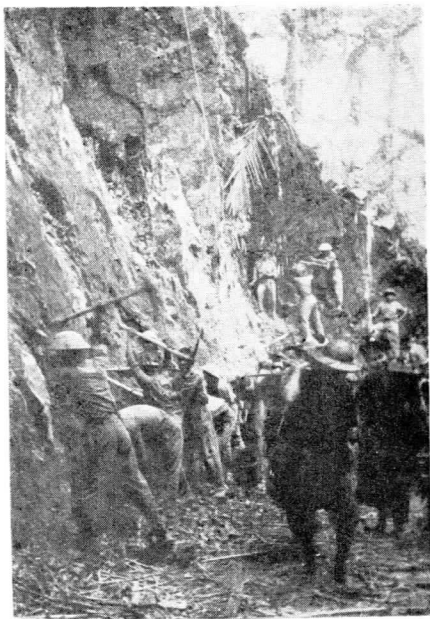
This important resolution was based on the principle of dynamism, initiative, mobility and rapidity of decision in face of new situations that the Party Central Committee pointed out for our strategic direction in winter 1953-spring 1954.

In the *first phase* of the Winter-Spring campaign, on the basis of this principle, we launched many offensives on the points where the enemy was relatively



At the V.P.A. command post,
on the Dien Bien Phu Front





Infantry units and
engineer corps
opening the
"road of victory"

Hauling the guns
across the jungle





exposed, while we pinned down his main forces at Dien Bien Phu, to allow ours to crush him on other fronts, at the same time made necessary preparations to attack the fortified entrenched camp.

In the *second phase*, when the preparations at the Dien Bien Phu front had been completed, and the repeated successes of our troops on various operational theatres had created new favourable conditions, we attacked the fortified entrenched camp.

Formerly, we had tried to avoid the positions where the enemy was strong, and chosen the important strategic points where he was relatively weak to destroy him; in the Dien Bien Phu campaign we concentrated the greatest part of our regular forces to attack this most powerful fortified entrenched camp. While in the beginning we had used mainly the form of mobile warfare and small siege warfare, in the Dien Bien Phu campaign, the form of operation was a large-scale siege warfare having the character of a positional warfare. In the plane of the decisive battle of strategic importance as well as the scale and the form of campaign, the offensive upon the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp marked a *new stage* in our Party's leadership of the armed struggle as well as in the growth of our army. The victory in this big campaign would certainly create a new situation for our people's resistance war.

Since the launching of the offensive, the task of our regular forces at the Dien Bien Phu front, thus becoming the main front of the whole country, was not to encircle and pin down the enemy, but to pass on to the offensive to wipe out this camp.

At other fronts our troops had the task to operate in close co-ordination with Dien Bien Phu in order to wear out and put the enemy out of action, scatter and pin down his forces, and reduce to the maximum his possibilities to reinforce Dien Bien Phu.

After it had been decided to take Dien Bien Phu, the problem of paramount importance was to know how to annihilate it : this would be the *guiding principle of this campaign*.

In the early stage, when we encircled the enemy who had just been parachuted — he was still in small number and his disposition of defence and organization was still loose — we did want to work against time and to profit by the deficiency of an adversary who had just occupied the terrain *to do a rapid battle in order to win a rapid victory*.

If we followed this principle we would have to ensure an absolute superiority in effectives and fire-power, we would attack the enemy from many directions, with one main thrust and other prongs penetrating deep into the enemy's line and cutting the entrenched camp into several sectors ; concentrate our effectives and fire-power, strike at the weakest and most important points, and taking advantage of the enemy's deficiencies, wipe out the bulk of his forces ; then we would continue to put out of action his remaining forces, and fulfil the task to completely annihilate this entrenched camp.

A swift attack with a swift victory would have many advantages : our troops were in good fettle, fatigue

and wearing out were not to be worried and the supply of food and ammunition could be certainly ensured without great difficulty as the campaign did not last long.

However, these tactics had a very great impediment: despite their ideological and tactical preparation our troops lacked concrete experience in attacking fortified entrenched camps because this was the first time that they attacked a fortified entrenched camp, and a powerful one.

That is why while making preparations, we continued to study the situation of the enemy and make sure of our possibilities once more. We found that the enemy had reinforced his effectives, built his lines of defence, and organized a fairly strong defence system. Grasping the principle of striking surely we estimated that while this entrenched camp had been strengthened and the enemy was no longer temporarily occupying the terrain, a rapid attack to win a rapid victory would not vouch for complete success. In consequence, we resolutely affirmed that the guiding principle of the campaign was *to strike surely and advance cautiously*.

According to this principle, we no longer conceived the Dien Bien Phu campaign as a large-scale *siege battle*, which took place unremittingly in a short period of time, but a *campaign in which a series of siege battles having the character of positional warfare*, were fought in a rather long time, in this campaign we would have absolute superiority in number to destroy the enemy, sector by sector, till the fall of the entrenched camp. A campaign waged by

striking surely and advancing cautiously would bring new difficulties and obstacles. The longer the campaign dragged on, the more the enemy could consolidate his defence works and bring in reinforcements ; on our side, our troops could be worn out and exhausted, and could meet the greatest difficulties in supply.

But striking surely and advancing cautiously was the *sure guarantee of victory*. A general survey showed that the balance of military forces between the enemy and us tipped in our favour, but it was only a relative superiority ; by fighting step by step, we could concentrate an absolute superiority in effectives and fire-power on each battle and would ensure victory. Such tactics corresponded to the technical level of our troops which had by that time only experiences in siege warfare and in destroying at a time only a stronghold defended by two or three companies or a battalion ; now it was necessary to make a step further in destroying at a time one or several strongholds, — each defended by a battalion — lying in a fortified entrenched camp ; we could raise our technical level through fighting by means of waging a series of siege battles which were hard and complex but not very great before proceeding to the destruction of the whole of the enemy forces.

In striking surely and advancing cautiously, we could keep complete initiative, attack the enemy at any time and at any front as we liked ; we would attack him only when we were sufficiently prepared and sure of victory, otherwise we would not attack or would delay the attack ; we would defend only the

positions which had to be defended and could be defended, otherwise we would not defend; after a battle, we would wage another one immediately if possible, otherwise we could take a rest to reorganize our forces and make better preparations for the next battle.

In striking surely and advancing cautiously we could aggravate the enemy's greatest difficulty which was the problem of supply and transport. The longer the campaign, the heavier the losses suffered by the enemy in effectives, weapons and munitions, and the greater the difficulties he would meet in supply and transport. He would be in greater difficulties if we could keep under our control his airfields and his only supply line, and did our utmost to tighten our encirclement.

A general survey of the fronts throughout the country showed that if the Dien Bien Phu campaign lasted long, on other fronts we would have more favourable conditions to destroy more enemy effectives, liberate more territory, at the same time satisfactorily co-ordinate our action with the main front.

Due to the foregoing reasons, we resolutely affirmed that the principle applied in this campaign was *to strike surely and to advance cautiously*. This resolution required a very great determination, that of firmly keeping the principle of striking surely while conducting the operations, and of exerting all-out efforts to overcome thousands upon thousands of difficulties and obstacles to secure victory for the campaign.

The enemy might be reinforced, and in this case, we would have to fight many more battles and only with harder fighting could we destroy the whole of the enemy forces. Between the necessity of fighting many hard but surely victorious battles, and fighting fewer battles in which we were not certain of victory, we chose the first solution. The enemy might receive more reinforcements but not as he liked, especially when we could already restrict his supply and transport and were operating actively on all fronts throughout the country. If he was reinforced, he would be stronger to cope with us, but meanwhile he would meet with greater difficulties.

Our troops might be worried on account of the losses and fatigue, but it was not that we had no more means to avoid or lessen these losses and fatigue. We should pay the greatest attention to the health of the troops, see to it that they had better food and better rests, intensify the prophylactic measures on the fronts. We should actively dig trenches, build strong shelters, make careful preparations for the replenishment of our units and the rapid reorganization of our forces after each combat so as to ensure unremitting fighting. A long-term operation would easily entail losses and fatigue, but compared with the enemy, we were in a better position as we were encircling him, and we could advance or withdraw at our free will. As for the enemy, he was encircled and could not have initiative at any time; we could fight him or not to fight him, while the enemy was constantly forced to live in the trenches, within our encirclement, his morale was tense, and he was afraid of being attacked at any time.

Therefore we were determined not to fear losses and fatigue, and to do everything in our power to overcome them and secure complete victory for the campaign.

As the campaign dragged out, the supply became our most difficult problem. In former campaigns such as that of the North-West, though smaller in size and effectives, and the front was nearer our rear, there were days when our troops had to live on rice gruel and at times due to the difficulties in supply, we struck upon the idea of giving up our operational plans. The Dien Bien Phu front was over four hundred kilometres from our rear, and the supply line was very dangerous at many sections, in case of enemy air raids or unfavourable climatic conditions and obstacles our supply and reinforcements to the front would meet with very great difficulties. But we were determined not to flinch from these difficulties and adopt another strategic direction which would not ensure victory. On the contrary, to win complete victory for the campaign, we must raise the spirit of enduring hardships of all our officers and men, and the heightened consciousness of serving the front of the commissariat, the transport and supply service, and of the *dan cong*. With the determination of the Party Central Committee and Government, and the sacrifice and efforts of the people in the rear, we were confident that we could ensure the supply and reinforcements to the Dien Bien Phu front. In this connection, on the enemy side, it was not that everything ran smoothly for him; if we could restrict or cut off his air line, he would meet with insuperable difficulties beyond prediction, due to

his very great requirements in supplies and munitions, to the increasing casualties he had to suffer and the flagging morale of his mercenaries.

Another worry of ours was that if the campaign dragged out, the rainy season would be coming. On the mountain fronts, the rains might cause great damages, the roads might be destroyed, the fortifications might become wet, the health of our troops and *dan cong* might be badly influenced. But compared with the enemy we were in higher positions whereas his fortifications built in the valley might fall in or be flooded, while he could not concentrate his troops on higher level and open grounds for fear of our firepower. Therefore the unfavourable climatic conditions might create difficulties for us, but also cause great difficulties for the enemy.

In fact the Dien Bien Phu campaign has testified to the correctness of our principle of *striking surely and advancing cautiously*. This guiding principle brought the campaign to complete victory.

To materialize the principle of striking surely and advancing cautiously, we gave our *operational plan* at Dien Bien Phu a content which consisted of *a series of siege battles aimed at destroying at a time one or several enemy resistance centres, setting up and tightening our encirclement, limiting and afterwards completely cutting the enemy line of supply and reinforcements and in the end, wiping out the whole of the enemy forces*.

The campaign was conceived in two phases :

a) In the first phase, we would *destroy the enemy outer resistance centres*, set up and tighten our offen-

sive and encirclement positions, narrow down the enemy occupied area, limit and afterwards cut off his line of supply and reinforcements.

b) When we could create sufficient conditions, we would shift to the phase of *general attack* to destroy the whole of the enemy forces.

Generally speaking the military situation developed in line with the foregoing direction, but in practice this development was more complicated in detail.

V

THE HISTORIC DIEN BIEN PHU CAMPAIGN EVOLUTION OF THE MILITARY SITUATION

Four months had elapsed from the time the enemy's paratroops occupied Dien Bien Phu to the time we attacked and annihilated it.

During this period the enemy did his best to intensify his military power, dig more combat trenches and communication trenches, build more fortifications and consolidate his defence system. Early in December 1953, after Navarre had been resolved to transform Dien Bien Phu into a powerful fortified entrenched camp, the enemy worked out a four-step plan for defence :

Step 1 : To slow down the advance of our troops by using air force to bomb and strafe our main communication lines from Yen Bai and Thanh Hoa to the North-West ;

Step 2 : To kick our troops out of Lai Chau by violent bombardments ;

Step 3: To check our attacks on Dien Bien Phu by causing heavy damages to us;

Step 4: After these victories, to expand his zones of occupation.

Towards the end of November 1953, the enemy attempted to launch an attack on Thai Nguyen-Chu Chu to destroy our stores and attract our regular forces. After weighing the pros and cons, he realized that he was not able to carry through his plan because on the one hand he lacked effectives and on the other he was afraid of meeting the same failure as in the offensive operation against Phu Tho-Doan Hung the previous year.

The enemy thus stepped up the bombing and strafing of our communication lines day and night in the hope of dealing a blow at one of our important weak points which was the supply to the front, in order to foil our offensive plan.

ACCELERATION OF PREPARATORY WORK: OPENING OF THE ROAD TO HAUL GUNS; BUILDING OF POSTIONS FOR OUR ARTILLERY AND INFANTRY; SUPPLY WORK; THOROUGH PREPARATION OF THE ATTACKING FORCES; OBSERVATION OF THE SITUATION OF THE ENEMY

It was precisely when the enemy had prepared to face all eventuality and used every means to cope with the situation, that we carried out a *gigantic preparatory work* to realize the determination of the Party Central Committee to launch a big offensive for the annihilation of the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp.

Carrying out the instructions of the Party Central Committee and the Government, our Party and people mustered their forces and did their best to win victory in this Winter-Spring campaign, the central target of which was Dien Bien Phu.

As has been said in Part III, we had launched many successful offensives on various fronts, annihilating an important part of the enemy's force, compelling the enemy to spread his mobile force everywhere, liberating important regions including the surroundings of Dien Bien Phu, thus isolating completely this entrenched camp and reducing to a certain extent the possibility for the enemy to send reinforcements to the Dien Bien Phu front.

At Dien Bien Phu, a thorough preparation was actively made for the big campaign to come.

a) When the enemy paratroopers began occupying Dien Bien Phu, this far-away entrenched camp was linked with Road 41 by a mule-track nearly 100 kilometres long — the Dien Bien Phu-Tuan Giao track — which had been rarely used by the enemy and by us since a long time. This track crossed an uninterrupted series of hills and valleys with steep gradients and was cut by nearly one hundred big and small streams.

To allow our regular army, especially our artillery, to attack Dien Bien Phu, the first problem to be solved was immediately to build the Dien Bien Phu-Tuan Giao track into a motor road. With great difficulties, our troops managed to open this road and to build a dozen bridges in a relatively short time. Until the end

of the campaign, our engineering units kept this road in good repair despite increasing sabotage activities of the enemy and torrential rains and floods.

b) Our troops succeeded in *opening the roads and hauling the guns into position*. At first, when, taking advantage of the enemy's weak points, we wanted to strike swiftly, our ordnance pieces were hauled by trucks to the surroundings of Dien Bien Phu, and from there to the eventual line; they were dragged into position during seven days and nights on end by the efforts of our armymen. When it was decided to follow the principle of striking surely and advancing cautiously, our troops were resolute to haul the guns out of their positions to complete the preparatory work.

Then five roads were opened to move our guns in by trucks in order to use our artillery with more mobility. These roads ran along the mountain slopes, crossed the passes around Dien Bien Phu within the range of the enemy guns and traversed the regions where no track had ever been seen. Our armymen had hacked away the jungle and fulfilled their task in scheduled time. These roads could be kept in repair and in secrecy till the end of the campaign owing to a skilful camouflage.

To prepare for the offensive against Dien Bien Phu, our artillery was again moved in along these newly built roads, and at the sections inaccessible and dangerous to our trucks, the guns were hauled into position by men's strength. The building of these roads and the hauling of our guns was an uphill and heroic struggle of our artillerymen and infantrymen, and

reflected the combativeness and love of labour of a revolutionary army. In these works, our officers and men displayed a great courage and industry; they were not daunted by enemy artillery and aircraft; unsparing in work, they did their best to introduce innovations, increase labour efficiency; work against time to fulfil their task; in difficult and perilous circumstances there were soldiers who sacrificed their lives to save guns.

Contrary to the assumption of the enemy who believed that our artillery could never be carried near his fortified entrenched camp, we managed to move hundreds of tons of ordnance pieces and munitions to the battlefield along steep slopes and across deep ravines.

c) We built very solid *artillery positions*. To secure a powerful fire and the safety for our guns in a rather long time, we built very solid artillery casemates capable of bearing the brunt of the enemy 105 mm. and 155 mm. cannons; these positions were built at places completely unsuspected by the enemy; they were carved deep into the mountain and hill slopes and so skilfully camouflaged that they could hardly be detected by scout planes and could stand any bombing and shelling. Besides these real positions, we installed sham positions to sidetrack the attention of the enemy, disperse his fire-power in order to waste his bombs and shells.

The enemy underestimated our artillery, believing that not only was it weak in fire-power but it could not be hauled near his positions. He was certain that if ever we managed to haul our guns into the posi-

tions which would be likely to threaten him, it was completely possible for him to detect our firing-nests at once by his modern observation devices and to riposte by artillery and aircraft. However, contrary to his calculations, thanks to a careful preparation, throughout the offensive campaign not only was our small artillery not destroyed but it did a very efficient job and was the terror of the enemy.

d) We *built solid entrenched positions* for our command organs and the necessary positions for our infantry to launch the attack and approach the enemy.

As it was a protracted campaign against a quite powerful enemy, we considered it an important duty to guarantee security and continuity in command and work for the command organs and combat units. To this end, our armymen built very solid casemates for the division command, most of them were carved deep in the mountain slopes and could bear the brunt of the bombardments by enemy artillery and air force.

In the first phase of attacks, the task of our army was to annihilate a number of outer posts which were strong resistance nests protected by a very complex network of auxiliary positions and fortifications, by direct fire and cross-fire sweeping the mountain slopes and by a plunging fire to intercept all the junctions likely to be used by our troops to rush for the attack; moreover these positions were protected by the firing-nests of the central sub-sector and southern sub-sector according to a plan elaborated beforehand. This is not to mention the activity of enemy planes. In these conditions, to vouch for the success of the coming operations, our troops buckled down to digging trenches.

building starting points for the attacks; they dug a system of communication trenches of nearly one hundred kilometres long for our troops to approach the enemy line and carefully prepared the bases of attack. This elaborate preparation curbed the effect of the enemy fire and secured victory for our troops.

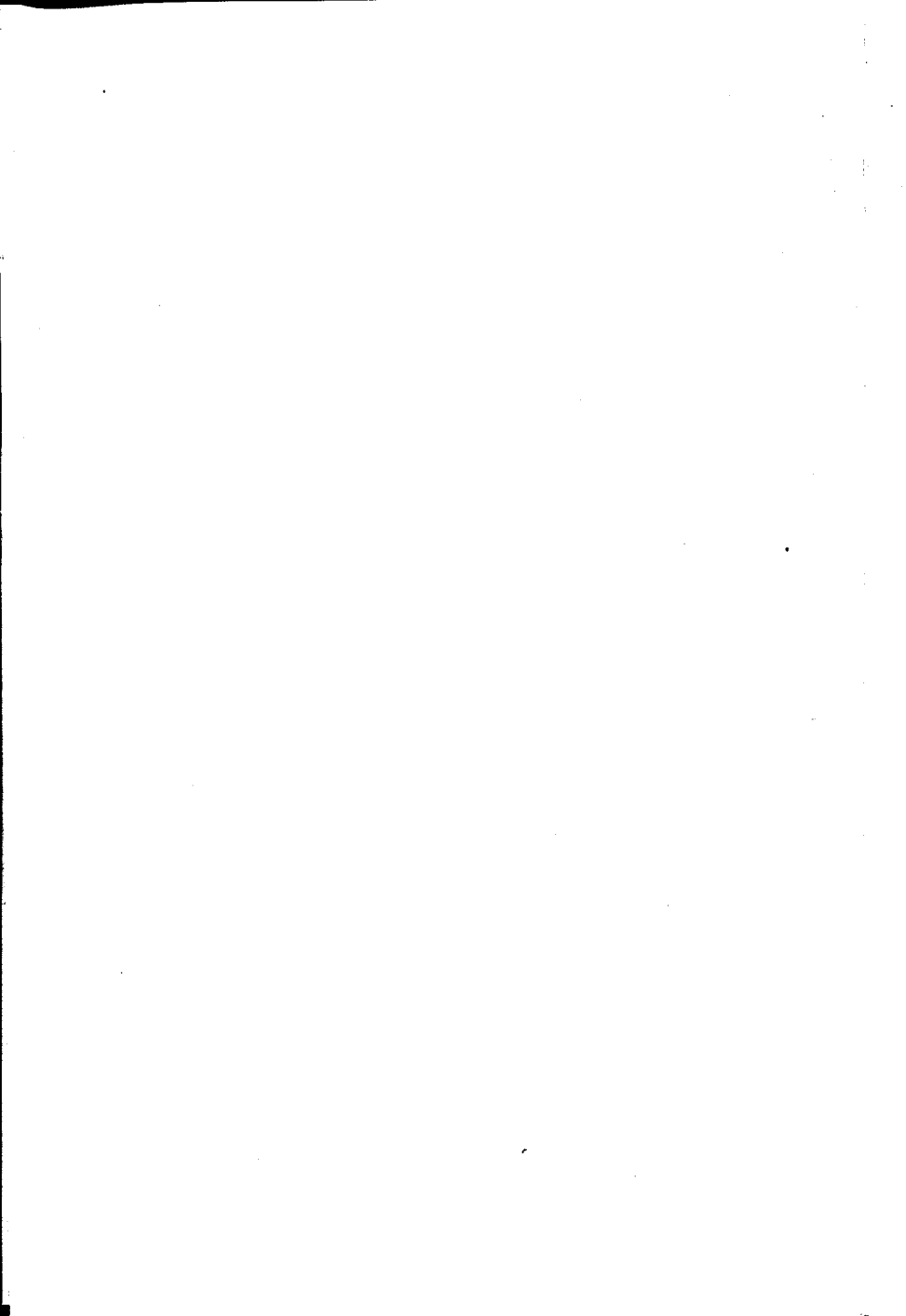
e) Our *supplies* were well prepared. The requirements of the campaign in food, ammunition and medicines were very great. Responding to the appeal "All for the front, all for victory" launched by the Party Central Committee and the Government, our people devoted their manpower and wealth to the Dien Bien Phu front; the inhabitants of the free zones, of newly-liberated regions in the North-West as well as the regions in the rear of the enemy, served the front with enthusiasm. We organized supply lines hundreds of kilometres long from Thanh Hoa or Phu Tho to the North-West, passing through dangerous sections pounded and destroyed day and night by an enemy who did his best to check our transport and movement.

Sappers and shock-youths from the lowlands and the highlands courageously built or repaired the roads and neutralized time-bombs. The enemy destroyed the roads, we mended them; beating the enemy in courage our fighters highlighted their determination to open the *road of victory*. Even at the extremely difficult sections bombed and strafed day and night by enemy aircraft, our transportation was only a little disturbed and, generally speaking, was secure. Hundreds of men and women *dan cong* not flinching from any difficulty and danger, enthusiastically served the front and contributed over 3 million work-days.



▲
All the forces of the nation were mobilized to supply the front
▼





The government committee for supply to the front and the organs of the commissariat mobilized all possible modern and rudimentary means to transport food and ammunition to the front. Truck convoys worked to the limit of their capacity ; they ran lightless for nights on end, took advantage of foggy weather to run in the daytime, climbed high passes and ran along difficult roads and even along the sections where time-bombs had been dropped by the enemy. Tens of thousands of pack-bicycles and wheelbarrows, thousands of craft, convoys of donkeys and horses were employed to transport supplies to the front, using roads and tracks, deep rivers and swift streams.

Our people performed a wonderful deed unimaginable by the enemy : To cater for great effectives operating on a battlefront very far from our rear in a long period.

While doing this preparatory work, we had to watch the situation of the enemy at Dien Bien Phu and on other fronts throughout the country. At Dien Bien Phu the enemy strengthened his defence positions to a high degree ; it was thus necessary for us to make a profound study as to the concrete characteristics of the enemy and his strong points and weak points, particularly at Him Lam and the positions in the northern sub-sector, which were the targets of our first phase of attacks.

During the length of this preparation, our troops had to do heavy work, such as building the Tuan Giao-Dien Bien road, opening the roads and building the positions for our artillery and infantry, hauling

artillery into position. Within the range of the enemy artillery, under the constant observation of scout-planes, a gigantic building yard was functioning in the vicinity of Dien Bien Phu. To avoid unnecessary damages, our troops worked at night in the open country, then to gain time, they worked at day in the fog and under the camouflage of lattis works many kilometres long. It should be remembered that the enemy artillery and aircraft were very active throughout December 1953 and January 1954. In February 1954, while our preparatory work was in full swing, the enemy, thinking that perhaps we had given up our plan to attack Dien Bien Phu, sent his bombers to other fronts, especially to the Nam Hu basin and Luang Prabang where the Pathet Lao Liberation troops and the Vietnamese volunteers were launching successful attacks.

Many a time the enemy mobile force at Dien Bien Phu, propped up by artillery and tanks, made reconnaissance incursions into the surroundings of Dien Bien Phu. But they were repulsed by small units of our army which, taking advantage of the ground and solid positions, were able to protect our preparatory work and keep it in secret. Though fighting separately against an enemy many times more powerful, these units fulfilled their task very heroically. On January 30, 1954, a platoon defending a position north of Dien Bien Phu, repelled 7 assaults of 5 enemy battalions. On February 12, 1954 a group of 5 scouts beat back an enemy battalion. On February 15, 1954, one of our platoons repulsed 12 assaults launched by 3 battalions. Moving within 3 kilometres from the

enemy's line, our mountain artillery began threatening Muong Thanh airfield, creating impediments to his supply.

While doing such a huge work, our troops had to keep themselves in good fettle for the coming battle. The responsible cadres of combat units did their best to improve the health condition of their men, keep their number in full, improve the supply, secure for them good food and good rest, create condition for them to eat their fill, to have hot food and hot drink and to sleep soundly in the warm. Preventive hygiene was the object of great care by the army medical services at all levels. On the other hand, we spared part of our time to give officers and men more training in tactics and technique, specially in the installation of positions, in the co-ordination of action between infantry and artillery and in the attack of entrenched camp.

When the Party Central Committee had decided to wipe out all the enemy at Dien Bien Phu, when the principle of advancing cautiously and striking surely had been adopted and the plan of concrete operations, especially the plan of preparation, mapped out, the *political work* played a great role. Taking the Party cells as cores, this work gave officers and men a thorough political education and ideological leadership and imbued them with the great significance of the Dien Bien Phu campaign; it made everyone realize that the success of the campaign, like the success of all revolutionary works, was achieved only through valiant struggles, sacrifices and hardships;

it made everyone realize that, to win brilliant success, great efforts should be made, thereby it instilled a great *determination to fight and to win* into the troops. With regard to the principle of advancing cautiously and striking surely, at first not all officers and men agreed. Political work did its best to make our troops realize this principle and overcome their tendency to fear fatigue and losses; it gave them and maintained for them the determination to fight unremittingly and as long as possible. In the stage of preparation, political work inculcated on the troops the importance of preparatory work vis-à-vis the success of the campaign, hence it raised the determination and the courage of the officers and men in struggle, urging them to work more enthusiastically in order to spare bloodshed for their mates later on, to overcome difficulties and obstacles and to carry out the preparatory work successfully. Political work knew how to co-ordinate the education of the task of ideological leadership with the concrete requirement of this task in order to rouse the officers and men and show them the direction to march forward. Many practical slogans were put up, such as "Zealously to build roads for artillery is zealously to work for victory", "Zealously to build solid positions is zealously to work for victory", "To maintain the roads in good repair is zealously to work for victory", or "To have a road builder more is to create more favourable conditions for victory", "To build fortifications an inch thicker is to create more favourable conditions to defeat the enemy".

Towards the end of the first ten days of March 1954, the preparatory work was thoroughly completed and carefully supervised.

On March 13, 1954, our troops received orders to launch the great offensive against the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp.

As has been said in Part IV, the campaign was planned to include a stage for our troops to annihilate the outer posts, to tighten the encirclement, to curb and eventually to cut off the road of reinforcement and supply of the enemy; then followed the second stage in which a general attack would be launched to annihilate the whole of the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp.

In reality, the campaign developed in three phases :

a) *First phase* : our troops took the northern and north-eastern outer posts, i.e. Him Lam and all the northern sub-sector.

b) *Second phase* : it was the longest phase in which the most murderous battles were fought. In this phase our troops annihilated the key defence system of the central sub-sector, occupied the eastern hills and the airfield, took the enemy in a ring of fire, gradually tightened the encirclement, narrowed down the terrain occupied by the enemy and his air space and prepared to cut definitely his source of reinforcement and supply.

c) *Third phase* : this was a short phase as all the favourable conditions had been prepared, our troops took the last height in the east and shifted to a general attack to annihilate the whole Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp.

THE FIRST PHASE OF ATTACKS : ANNIHILATION OF THE HIM LAM RESISTANCE CENTRE AND THE WHOLE NORTHERN SUB-SECTOR

The Him Lam resistance centre was the strongest defence centre of the enemy. It belonged to the central sub-sector, 2 km. from Muong Thanh. Its mission was to protect the central sub-sector, command the Tuan Giao-Dien Bien road, check the direction from which came our major attacks on the outskirts of Dien Bien Phu. Him Lam was defended by a reinforced battalion of legionaries belonging to the 13th regiment of legionaries considered by the enemy as one of his most seasoned combat units. It was composed of three strongholds supporting each other and provided with strong positions of defence, efficient firing-nests and a whole system of auxiliary works made of fields of mines and barbed wire from 100 to 200 metres wide in some places.

The outermost post in the north-western direction, the Him Lam resistance centre, had close relations with the northern sub-sector of the fortified entrenched camp. This sub-sector included the resistance centres on Doc Lap Hill and Ban Keo. These three resistance centres made up an outer zone advancing in the northern, north-eastern and north-western directions. Doc Lap Hill was 700 metres long by 150 metres wide and 4 km. off Muong Thanh ; it was defended by a reinforced battalion of North Africans, protected by strong positions of defence and a solid system of auxiliary works and reinforced by a plunging fire. This strong position had the task to block up the road

and check our attacks from the north. The Ban Keo resistance centre lay on a hill north-west of the air-field, 2 km. from the central sub-sector, and was defended by a battalion of Thai puppet troops. All these three resistance centres were covered by 105 mm. and 155 mm. guns from Muong Thanh and Hong Cum, according to a careful and secret firing plan.

The task set to our army in the first phase was *to wipe out these three outermost resistance centres, destroy part of the enemy force, narrow down the enemy occupied zone, create conditions for our troops to tighten the encirclement and attack the central sub-sector.* This was the first siege battles given against the resistance centres of a very powerful fortified entrenched camp, and the first battles of the Dien Bien Phu campaign. If throughout the campaign, the direction of operations should firmly abide by the fundamental principles of striking surely and winning surely, in these first battles these principles should be grasped more tightly. It was precisely to secure *complete victory for these first battles* that our troops had made long and elaborate preparation and training, abiding by the principle of *giving battle only after it had been well prepared*; in siege warfare, the preparatory work should be completed in every respect; in a siege battle which had the character of a pitched battle done against a strong position located in a powerful entrenched camp, preparation in all respect for the combat should be all the more thorough. Without such a preparation, siege warfare could not be victorious.

With regard to the use of force, to vouch for the success of the first battles, we possessed an armed force and a fire-power absolutely superior to those of the enemy. Our infantry was three times or over three times stronger than the enemy's, our mortars and light artillery had a fire many times more powerful. The mission of our heavy artillery units was directly to protect our infantry on the one hand and to take the enemy heavy guns under its fire on the other.

On March 13, 1954 at 5 p.m. we started attacking the *Him Lam* resistance centre by a shelling.

Our artillery was scheduled to go into action at 4 p.m. But at noon, it happened that the enemy had discovered that our starting points were only 200 metres from his positions ; he sent a unit to attack us. One of our heavy artillery units received orders to shell Him Lam in order to repel the enemy and protect our positions and at the same time to shell the airfield and Muong Thanh to supervise the accuracy of our fire. The shelling destroyed some fortifications including the Him Lam command post and a number of stationary planes. The major commanding Him Lam post and the colonel commanding the central sub-sector were killed within the first minutes.

The attack on Him Lam began at 5 p.m. sharp. Our infantry and artillery co-ordinated their action quite closely. The first position was completely annihilated after one hour's engagement, the second after two hours. The attack on the third position in the north-west was arduous. The enemy artillery, paralysed at first, began to riposte more and more vigorously. At

10.30 p.m. we annihilated completely the Him Lam resistance centre, put 300 soldiers out of action and captured 200 others. The Him Lam victory was the first won at Dien Bien Phu. This battle of annihilation exerted a very great influence on the evolution of the campaign.

On March 14, 1954, the attack on the resistance centre on *Doc Lap Hill* started.

At 5 p.m. our artillery began to shell the enemy command post at Muong Thanh, his artillery positions and the airfield, and destroyed his fortifications on Doc Lap Hill. This artillery duel was very murderous. According to the documents taken from the enemy, to cover his positions on Him Lam and Doc Lap Hills and destroy our artillery positions, during three days, from March 13 to March 15, 1954, the enemy fired over 30,000 shells. On March 14, 1954 his aircraft coming from Hanoi bombed and strafed our positions all night long.

Owing to a heavy rain which delayed the hauling of our mountain-artillery into position, the attack on the Doc Lap resistance centre was started only at 2 a.m. of March 15 and ended at 6.30 a.m. with the complete annihilation of this stronghold.

At 6 a.m. an enemy infantry unit, propped by tanks, came from Muong Thanh and attacked us, but was forced to withdraw after suffering some casualties from our artillery.

The third resistance centre, *Ban Keo*, in the north-west, was isolated and heavily threatened by our troops. At the time when a unit of our main force was making preparation to annihilate this position, the

enemy therein was in utter confusion. On March 17, 1954 at 3 p.m. Ban Keo received 20 shells from our artillery. Though threatened by their French commanders, the Thai puppet troops availed themselves of the opportunity when the French took refuge in the trenches, to surrender with their weapons. The enemy tanks which pursued them were halted by our artillery and were compelled to fall back.

Thus the first two battles of the campaign ended in two resounding victories. The Him Lam resistance centre and the whole northern sub-sector were annihilated. The enemy's outer defence line on the north-east, the north and the north-west was broken, landing the central sub-sector in a more complicated situation because it was completely exposed on these sides.

These siege battles which were for us the first to have a positional character, destroyed the solid resistance centres of a very powerful fortified entrenched camp. Our troops made a big stride in siege warfare in the classical sense of the word, in co-ordination with heavy guns and anti-aircraft guns. These victories were of paramount importance insofar as they paved the way for the victory of the whole campaign and laid the foundation for the great victories to come.

In these two battles of the first phase, our positions of attack proved to be very efficacious. Our anti-aircraft defence and anti-artillery defence were so well organized that the effects of enemy aircraft and artillery were greatly restricted. Furthermore, our artillery was very accurate ; operating in good co-ordination with our infantry, it caused great damages to the enemy, destroying many of his artillery positions,

threatening his central airfield, and hitting home many stationary planes. Our anti-aircraft batteries came into action and shot down many planes in support of our troops.

On his side, the enemy suffered heavy losses, having two picked battalions put out of action, one battalion disbanded, and losing all the northern sub-sector and the key outposts in the north-east. The greatest anxiety of the enemy was that his comparatively strong fire positions were not only partially destroyed but proved of little effect; he was not able to use the anti-artillery tactics to annihilate our artillery positions. Moreover, the central airfield whose safety was badly needed to land reinforcements, food and ammunition at Dien Bien Phu, was taken under the fire of our artillery.

But, the greatest failure of the enemy was that he had underestimated the situation, thinking that we were able to annihilate only isolated posts defended by about one battalion and not to wipe out the resistance centres made up of many posts lying in such a strong fortified entrenched camp as Dien Bien Phu, the more so since these resistance centres were defended by the most seasoned units. He underestimated our small and weak artillery; but after the first combats, he was awe-stricken by the power of our heavy guns and anti-aircraft guns. A few days later, the colonel commanding the enemy heavy artillery units at Muong Thanh committed suicide.

From the strategic conception for the whole Indo-Chinese theatre of operations, the enemy committed

a very serious mistake : Thinking that we did not dare attack Dien Bien Phu and had given up our offensive plan, on March 12, 1954, Gen. Navarre pursued his scheme of launching, with an important mobile force, a strategic offensive on the Southern battlefield, by landing at and occupying Quy Nhon, thus making his force more scattered. This untimely operation created greater difficulties and caused him a further loss of initiative.

Nevertheless, despite our first victories, despite the great reverses he had suffered, despite the great difficulties he had encountered the enemy still had a very powerful force and was doing his best to cope with the situation. On March 14 and 16, 1954, he reinforced his troops with two battalions of paratroopers from Hanoi. He airdropped parts of heavy guns and ammunition, consolidated his defence line to bear the brunt of our artillery. He readjusted, organized and strengthened the protection of his airfield and replaced the puppet troops of the outer posts by European and African troops. He still believed in the strength of the central sub-sector and of his artillery and aircraft and that we would not be able to destroy them.

Redoubling their activity, his aircraft bombed and strafed our front and supply lines. The enemy hoped that by suffering heavy losses our troops would not be in a position to continue the attack, and would fall back, especially when the campaign protracted and our supply lines were violently taken to task, causing great difficulties to our supply of food, ammunition and medicines.



Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap inspecting
the anti-aircraft guns



SECOND PHASE OF ATTACKS: OCCUPATION OF THE EASTERN HILLS AND THE AIRFIELD; CUTTING THE ROADS OF SUPPLY AND REINFORCEMENT; TIGHTENING ENCIRCLEMENT, AND GRADUAL SHRINKING OF THE SECTOR OF OCCUPATION AND THE AIR SPACE OF THE CENTRAL SUB-SECTOR

The second phase was the most important, the longest and the most murderous phase of the campaign, because the central sub-sector was the most powerful sector, lying in the middle of the plain of Muong Thanh, and was defended by a system of very powerful strongholds built on the eastern heights.

After the success of the first phase, we assessed that though the enemy's force was partially put out of action, it was still very strong and the principle of our operations was still to *strike surely and advance cautiously*.

The task set for the second phase of attacks was to occupy the fortified heights defending the eastern side of the central sub-sector, rapidly to approach and encircle the enemy, to close in the positions of attack and encirclement, to neutralize then to occupy the airfield, to check then to cut off the road of supply and reinforcement of the enemy, to wear out and destroy his forces, to shrink his sector of occupation and air space and to prepare for a general attack in order to wipe out all the enemy.

The central sub-sector was composed of five resistance centres totalling over 30 positions defended by 7 battalions of European and African soldiers and one battalion of puppet troops, including some mobile

battalions of paratroopers. In it lay the command post of the entrenched camp, the main fire-positions, the armoured units, the commissariat and the central air-field. The whole sub-sector lay in the middle of the Dien Bien Phu plain. From the sub-sector to the surrounding hills, 3 to 5 km. long, the terrain was flat. To attack the eastern heights and tighten the encirclement, a tactical problem of utmost importance *was to approach the entrenched camp on a flat ground and to fight unremittingly day and night* when the artillery, motorized units and aircraft of the enemy were very active.

Since the time our main force began to make siege warfare the problem which harassed us was how to approach the enemy. Already in the previous important campaigns, we had solved this problem by taking advantage of the hilly terrain and of the night to approach the enemy secretly. Later on, when we were strong enough to attack more important strongholds, our troops began to build a few works to parry the effects of the enemy's fire but these works were still very rudimentary. That is why, except a few occasions, it could be said that previously all siege battles had been fought at night: sorties, combats, withdrawals. Owing to such restriction in time our possibility to annihilate the enemy in siege warfare was also limited. At Dien Bien Phu this important tactical problem came up again as an urgent requirement. It was solved by the policy of *building positions of attack and encirclement* and this construction was therefore considered as the central task of the preparation of the second phase of attacks.

The system of positions of attack and encirclement included the communication axes running around the Muong Thanh sub-sector and cutting the central sub-sector from the southern sub-sector; many lines of communication trenches provided with field works running from the surrounding hills to the proximity of the enemy's front-line; many cross communication trenches to increase liaison possibilities; in fixed positions it was necessary to build fire-positions, ammunition dumps, sleeping trenches, first-aid trenches, etc.

In about twelve days, our troops were able to dig a length of over 100 km. of communication trenches and combat trenches and build works of all descriptions. The enemy left no stone unturned to wreck our communication trenches and our positions, but despite the bombing and strafing by his aircraft and artillery, our troops advanced unchecked nearer and nearer the enemy by fighting many great and small battles. The building of the positions of attack and encirclement required a great effort on the part of our men who proved to be valiant in struggle, painstaking in work and persevering in overcoming difficulties and hardships, virtues inherent in a revolutionary army. The success of this construction enabled us to close in upon the enemy on flat ground, solve the problem of food transport, keep firm the front, fight unremittingly day and night and restrict the effect of the enemy's artillery and aircraft as much as possible. On the closing days of March 1954, the building of the positions of attack and encirclement was virtually completed and the starting points were prepared to storm the eastern hills.

On the night of March 30, 1954, the second phase of the Dien Bien Phu campaign began with *our attack on the 5 defence heights north of the central sub-sector*. This series of strongholds were the key defensive line of the enemy, the loss of which made the defence of Dien Bien Phu impossible. This explained the fierceness of the battles on the eastern hills.

On March 30, 1954 at 5 p.m. the attack on the eastern hills started. This was a large-scale battle because its aim was not only to annihilate a battalion but several battalions at a time; it was a complex struggle because it included a series of siege battles and annihilated many positions. It was started quite to our advantage. After 45 minutes, we destroyed all the enemy troops and occupied Hill C-1, near Hill A-1. After one and a half hours we put out of action part of a battalion of paratroopers and occupied Hill E, a stronghold in the north. After 2 hours we annihilated all the battalion defending Hill D and occupied this height which was the most important stronghold and the second advanced position in the northern direction. Then Hill D-2 was occupied. In the morning the enemy launched against these hills a counter-attack followed the next day by a second, but they were all fought back.

Special mention should be made of Hill A-1, the most important of the five hills and the last stronghold protecting the central sub-sector. The battle fought on Hill A-1 from the night of March 30 to April 4, 1954 was the most arduous. In the first night, we occupied two-thirds of the position. In the small hours of the next morning and throughout the day, the enemy force,

strengthened and propped by artillery and tanks, reoccupied two-thirds of the position. On the night of March 31, we launched a second attack which dragged until the morning of April 1; the result was that we reoccupied two-thirds of this position, but after many counter-attacks, the enemy retook part of the lost ground. On the night of April 1, we launched the third attack which degenerated in an arduous tug-of-war. On April 4, we still disputed every inch of the ground with the enemy who was taking advantage of underground trenches and solid works to parry our blows; in the end, each side controlled half the height. While this stronghold had not yet fallen, the enemy reinforced by paratroopers, launched on April 9, 1954 a counter-attack in an attempt to reoccupy Hill C-1; the battle raged for 4 days and nights and the hill was also divided into two parts, each under the occupation of an opponent.

Thus the attack on the hills east of the central sub-sector was crowned with an important success but all the targets set forth were not reached. Since the beginning of the campaign we had put out of action 5,000 seasoned enemy soldiers that is a force equal to 6 battalions, of which 3 battalions were completely destroyed. This force represented nearly two-fifths of the total number. The remaining force, over ten thousand, was still strong and later on reinforced by some battalions, but the morale of the enemy was sagging. With regard to the vantage ground, we neutralized the northern heights and almost all the important heights east of the central sub-sector; our positions of attack and encirclement advanced to the

proximity of the airfield; we tightened the encirclement, curbed the supply and reinforcement of the enemy, cut off his liaison between the central sub-sector and the southern sub-sector. His sector of occupation shrank and his air space was greatly reduced.

We advocated *to carry on the task* set for the second phase of attacks, that is to continue to consolidate our positions of attack and encirclement and draw them nearer the enemy's line, improve the terrain, occupy some important positions in order to tighten the encirclement, occupy the airfield to the point of cutting off all supply and reinforcement of the enemy, and threaten more seriously the interior of his line.

In application of this plan, we drew our positions nearer and nearer the enemy (from 10 to 15 metres in some places). In our hand, the eastern hills, especially Hill D-1, were turned into strong defensive positions, provided with firing works for mountain-guns and mortars, and solid fortifications. Our guns of all size constantly kept the enemy under their fire and the battle raged day and night.

Taking advantage of the trenches advancing near the enemy, we applied the *peacemeal occupation* tactics. On the night of April 1, 1954, in a surprise attack we entirely annihilated position 106 defending the western side of the airfield. On the night of April 2, position 311 lying in the west was under our fire; the enemy either surrendered or fled away. On the night of April 18, we annihilated position 105 defending the northern side of the airfield and on the night of April 22, while building works for the attack, our troops availed themselves of a favourable opportunity

to launch a surprise attack and occupied position 206 defending the western side of the central airfield which was thus entirely exposed. From the west, east and north, our lines of attack advanced towards the airfield, met there and cut it across. *The central airfield was occupied by our troops.* We tightened the encirclement further, the struggle became fiercer. The enemy launched many powerful counter-attacks, propped by motorized vehicles and aircraft, in an attempt to repulse our lines. The fiercest counter-attack took place on April 24 with the aim of driving our troops out of the airfield. The result was that the enemy was partially annihilated while our positions were firmly maintained and the airfield remained under our control.

The sector occupied by the enemy narrowed down to a square of 2 km. in side. The central sector was within range of our guns of all sizes. Our anti-aircraft batteries also moved in. The narrow air space left to the enemy was no more safe. At that time, to kill an enemy more, to occupy an inch of ground more, was also of important significance. On the one hand we annihilated the enemy's positions one by one and repelled his counter-attacks; on the other we vied with one another in sniping the enemy. Rifle-shooters, machine-gunners, mortar-gunners and artillerymen did their best in this action, causing him greater and greater losses; his morale was sinking; he constantly lived in fear and tension and did not dare move about for fear of being shot as soon as he went out of his fortifications. Our shock units penetrated deep into the enemy's line, destroyed his stores and decimated his force.

Supply and reinforcement became a very difficult problem for the enemy. Long since his airfield was no more utilizable ; specially from the time we had cut it asunder and brought it under our control, the enemy had no other alternative than to airdrop reinforcement, food and ammunition on Dien Bien Phu. However as the area occupied by the enemy was too narrow and his aircraft did not dare fly low for fear of our anti-aircraft batteries, only part of his supplies fell in his sector while a bigger and bigger part fell into our hand. We prevented him from picking up the parachutes to cut off his source of supplies ; on the other hand, we disputed these supplies with him and appropriated his food and ammunition to partially replenish our supplies. In this connection, it should be mentioned that we had utilized a lot of cannon shells dropped by the enemy to fire back at him. After the engagements on the eastern hills, the enemy airdropped two battalions in reinforcement ; later he dropped by waves units of what he called volunteers — totalling seven or eight hundred men — to reinforce Dien Bien Phu ; part of these troops fell into our hands and were taken prisoner immediately after their landing.

Throughout the second phase of attacks the situation was pressing. The American interventionists sent in many more bombers and transport planes to help the French defend Dien Bien Phu.

Excluding the American C. 119 squadrons, the enemy utilized at the Dien Bien Phu front two-thirds of his fighters and transport planes in Indo-China. By bombing heavily and repeatedly a given area, the

enemy hoped he would be able to save the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp. His bombers were very active in bombing and strafing what he believed to be our positions ; they burnt all the hilly region surrounding Dien Bien Phu with napalm bombs and destroyed with heavy bombs what was believed to be the positions of our artillery. On April 2, 1954 alone, his bombers and fighters made 250 sorties. This huge but desperate effort did not give the enemy the expected result. In the meantime, we tightened the encirclement ; our young anti-aircraft units operated very successfully and caused substantial damages to the enemy.

At the beginning of April 1954, the French and American generals saw that Dien Bien Phu was facing the threat of annihilation. At the same time the French government officially requested the U.S. to send squadrons of fighters and heavy bombers from the Philippines or from aircraft carriers of the U.S. 7th fleet to reinforce Dien Bien Phu. But there were disagreement in the American official circles and sharp contradictions between the imperialists themselves ; moreover, the enemy thought that such an act could not save the French Expeditionary Corps but would be severely condemned by public opinion at home and abroad and complicate the Indo-Chinese situation, bringing about unexpected consequences ; in the end this plan was given up.

In mid-April, the enemy contemplated to launch, from the Nam Hu basin, an operation to rescue Dien Bien Phu. Owing to lack of effectives, this plan was delayed many times and finally abandoned.

The enemy then intended to operate deep into our rear, with attack on Tuyen Quang and Yen Bai, and Phu Doan by the end of April. This plan was also given up because the enemy ran short of effectives and aircraft and feared he could not vouch for the success and would suffer a bitter defeat.

At the end of April, he gradually lost the hope of defending Dien Bien Phu. He realized little by little that though active, his air force could not "crush" our troops, ease off the encirclement and cut off our supply road. At Dien Bien Phu, what remained of his mobile force was 5 companies, his sector of occupation shrank to the size of from 1.3 km. to 1.7 km. The situation of his troops became alarming.

On our side, while throughout the second phase we fought unremittingly at the Dien Bien Phu front, the battle against the enemy was also very fierce and hard on our *lines of supply* from the rear to the front. As has been said above, there was a great requirement in supply and reinforcement for the campaign. Our combat units amounted to tens of thousands of men, our *dan cong* serving in transport reached hundreds of thousands, our lines of supply were as long as from 300 to 500 km., and the duration of service dragged over 6 months. Compared with the Frontier campaign, at Dien Bien Phu the volume of food needed was ten times over. If we take Son La as the limit of the zone of supply, the goods transported within this zone for the campaign amounted to 4.5 million ton/kilometres. However the means of transport was only partly mechanized, the remaining was rudimentary, using manpower.

During our preparation, the enemy did his utmost to destroy our lines of supply. But his aircraft was the most active in April, the month in which Dien Bien Phu was threatened, the direct supply made by the enemy for this entrenched camp met with greater impediments; the enemy considered the destruction of our lines of supply as one of his principal means to save the situation. Our roads were single track, narrow, badly kept and dangerous in some places. The enemy concentrated his air force and airdropped quintal-load bombs, time-bombs and "butterfly" bombs; his aircraft operated day and night, bombing and strafing the vital points such as the passes called Khe, Hut Gio, Lung Lo, Pha Din; some of them received as many as hundreds of tons of bombs in one day. This is not to speak of the great difficulties created by rain and flood. Owing to all these impediments, the stores at the front fell at times far below the norm.

To overcome these difficulties, and guarantee the supply to the front, the Party Central Committee and Government called on all the Party and people to make every effort to secure the transport of food and ammunition to the front. At times hundreds of cadres at medium level and high level were mobilized to serve the supply line; a great number of political cadres at the front also took part in supply work. Thanks to the great efforts displayed by the inhabitants, including the North-Westerners, and to the great heroism and endurance of the *dan cong*, especially at the fire line, we were able to thwart the perfidious scheme of the enemy who was attempting to sabotage our supply

work. Our task of reinforcing and supplying this historic campaign was fulfilled on a large scale. Our preparations were well attended to to enable us, in case of necessity, to fight throughout May and longer.

The characteristic of the second phase of attacks was that at first the operations were conducted after the rapid and resounding victories of the first phase ; that is why, to be sure of victory, on the field of ideological leadership, we attached importance to overcoming the manifestations of subjectivism and underestimation of the enemy because this would easily lead to the negligence in grasping the concrete situation of the enemy, and in building the positions which were not up to our requirement ; it would lead to the carelessness in grasping and controlling our fighting force as well as our plan of operations. However, the most important features of this second phase of attacks were the acuteness and fierceness of the struggle which required from our men a very great combativeness and heroism ; the long period during which our troops had to fight unremittingly and to cope with weariness, tiredness and tension ; the fighting conditions which were very hard and arduous because our fighters who had to shelter in their fortifications during the months of preparation, had now to fight and live for a long period in communication trenches and dug-outs. This is not to mention the difficulties created by heavy rains which broke away or inundated our positions. Sometimes the supply was irregular. As the battle was going on without respite, in the course of pushing forward our line of attack

and encirclement, the inevitable loss on our side made it necessary to timely replenish and re-organize our forces to continue the fight.

In these conditions, the *political work* which had played a role of paramount importance, continued to expound thoroughly the great significance of the campaign, and to interpret carefully the determination of the Party Central Committee which was to annihilate completely the enemy at Dien Bien Phu ; each success on our part and each reverse of the enemy encouraged our officers and men ; the example of combativeness and sacrifice of our heroes and fighters served to develop the revolutionary heroism among our troops and to keep firm and raise their determination to fight and to win. Political work also saw to the interpretation and supervision of concrete tasks such as : discipline and organization of the life at the front, supply of hot food and hot drink, arrangement for the fighters to have sufficient sleep ; we must see whether our positions had been built up to the requirement to enable our troops to move along in the daytime without being discovered by the enemy, whether these positions were not wet, and whether the rule of preventive hygiene had been observed. Political work also saw to the maintenance of the fighting forces in required numbers, the replenishment of these forces and promotion of new cadres. Great attention was paid to recruiting new Party members and re-organizing Party cells. The respect of a strict discipline, correct and timely punishment and reward were also important to raise the combativeness of our troops.

As the second phase dragged on, we obtained a more important success and a greater superiority in effectives and fire-power. In the course of the battles our plan of operations proved to be accurate; tactical problems could be solved very concretely. In the meantime, the enemy met with bitter failures and encountered great difficulties in effectives, reinforcement, supply and in the moral field.

However, it was precisely at that time, that a *rightist and negative tendency* appeared among our officers and men, under various forms: fear of casualties, losses, fatigue, difficulties and hardships, underestimation of the enemy, subjectivism and self-conceit. Following closely the situation of our army-men at the front, the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee assessed that the great victories won lately had created basic conditions for our troops to annihilate completely the enemy at Dien Bien Phu, but our officers committed mistakes, mainly because their "rightist tendency curbed somewhat the influence of our victories." The Political Bureau instructed, "*All levels of the Party, the Party members, and the cadres must do their best to overcome rightist tendency, consolidate and raise their determination, heighten their sense of responsibility before the people, army and Party, resolutely correct the past mistakes, grasp further the principle of striking surely and advancing cautiously, at the same time, work against time, strictly obey orders, overcome all difficulties and hardships, and fulfil their task of securing complete victory for the campaign.*"

At a conference of delegates of the Party committee of divisions and various organizations, a serious and thorough ideological struggle took place. The meeting assessed objectively the situation on both sides, pointed out our victories and the enemy's reserves, the conditions more and more matured for our army to destroy all the enemy, and requested our troops to abide by the basic principles and work against time to win final victory before the rainy season.

We have bluntly criticized the manifestations of rightist deviation and passivity, and pointed out that :

"The spirit of our Party and army is the revolutionary dynamism of the proletariat, its spirit of fighting without compromise and concession against the enemy. It is the revolutionary spirit in its fullest meaning, a spirit which warns people not to rest on their laurels and not to flinch from difficulties but to fight perseveringly in any circumstances, until final victory. In the army, this Party spirit in the heroism in fighting, the determination to destroy the enemy, the strict execution of orders, the resolution to overcome difficulties and hardships ; it is a spirit which makes people fearless of danger, fatigue, losses and sacrifice of lives. It consists in fighting unremittingly, not being subjective and conceited when achieving a success and not being shaken in case of defeat ; it enables you to keep in all circumstances your self-control and diligence and your persistence in struggle."

After this conference, a campaign of ideological education and struggle was launched from the Party committees to the cells, from officers to soldiers and

in all combat units. This campaign was a great success of the political work at the Dien Bien Phu front, and one of *the greatest achievements* ever scored by this work in the history of struggle of our army. The great result obtained was the suppression of all manifestations of the erroneous tendency. All the Party members, officers and men had more confidence in the final victory and an unshakable will to destroy the enemy completely. Imbued with a great determination to fight and to win and a great mettle, our units were eager to make preparations for a new phase of attacks and did their best to switch over to the general onslaught.

THIRD PHASE OF ATTACKS : OCCUPATION OF THE LAST HEIGHT IN THE EAST, ANNIHILATION OF NEW POSTS, FURTHER SHRINKING OF THE SECTOR OCCUPIED BY THE ENEMY AND HIS AIR SPACE, HEAVY THREAT TO THE INTERIOR OF HIS LINE, SCHEDULE FOR THE GENERAL ATTACK AND ENTIRE ANNIHILATION OF THE ENEMY

At the end of April, the situation was most desperate for the enemy. Nevertheless in the East, he still controlled two-thirds of Hill A-1 and a half of Hill C-1. His air space shrank a great deal but he continued to receive small quantities of supply dropped by transport planes.

The task set for our troops in this phase was to occupy the eastern heights still partly in the enemy's hand, to wipe out some positions in the West, to

annihilate new enemy's forces, to advance further our line of attack and encirclement, to concentrate the fire of all our arms on the interior of the enemy's line, to control what remained of his air space and to prepare for the general attack.

This third phase of attacks began at a time when the enemy was facing a desperate situation ; on our side, the morale of our troops ran very high, the difficulties in supply had just been overcome, that is why the battles given in this phase were strikingly rapid. Nearly all our units opened the fire at scheduled time, strictly carried out orders, fought most valiantly and fulfilled all the tasks entrusted to them.

This phase of attacks began on the night of May 1. We swiftly wiped out the enemy who was still controlling half Hill C-1, and occupied this position. On the same night, we quickly annihilated positions 505 and 505-A at the feet of the eastern hills situated on the left bank of the Nam Rom River. In the west, position 311-A was swiftly liquidated. In the southern sub-sector, we put out of action part of the enemy troops stationed north-east of Hong Cum. On the night of May 3, we took position 311-B in the west. Our lines of attack and encirclement advanced further and further, nearing the enemy's command post by less than 300 metres in some places.

There were signs that the enemy was contemplating to force his way through our line of encirclement, after the assessment by Navarre and other French and American generals that Dien Bien Phu was facing the threat of annihilation. He was scheming to regroup his forces in three columns and, under the

cover of night, to break through our encirclement and flee in the direction of Laos : a column of paratroopers would withdraw to the south-east, the second made up of legionaries and North-Africans would head for south and the third which included the units defending Hong Cum would take the western direction. An enemy column would start from Upper Laos to meet these three columns. Gen. De Castries and some units were to remain at Dien Bien Phu with the wounded. We closely watched the intention and preparations of the enemy and set to our units thus occupying the western positions the task to tightly control all the roads and tracks leading from Dien Bien Phu to the Laotian frontier. After the annihilation of this entrenched camp, we laid hand on an order issued by the enemy's command to carry out these operations of retreat on the night of May 7.

On May 6, at 5 p.m. our troops attacked Hill A-1. In the preparatory stage our sappers had dug an underground trench leading to the centre of the hill and introduced there one ton of explosives. With the powerful co-ordination of this explosion, our troops attacked this position from various directions, put out of action the defending unit composed of paratroopers of the foreign legion, and *occupied this last height.*

On the same night, our troops stormed and occupied Hill C-2, a secondary position between Hill C-1 and the Nam Rom River. Position 506, north of Muong Thanh bridge, and position 310 in the west fell into our hand. The enemy lost all the eastern heights as well as an important contingent of troops ; he

occupied only a sector of from 700 to 1,000 metres in side; the morale of his troops sank to the lowest point.

Everything was ready for the general attack. While preparations were being made to vouch for the success of the coming operations, on May 7, we detected some unusual signs on the side of the enemy: Except for a few planes which airdropped some food, all the enemy's planes carrying munitions returned to Hanoi without dropping their parachutes. Here and there in the sector held by the enemy, explosions were heard, pointing out that he was destroying weapons. A number of soldiers threw their arms and ammunition into the Nam Rom River.

We deemed that the enemy was in a turmoil. Our troops received orders to make themselves ready.

On May 7, at 2 p.m. one of our units attacked position 507, near Muong Thanh bridge. The enemy offered a weak resistance, all the garrison surrendered. Profiting by this victory we annihilated positions 508 and 509 on the left bank of the Nam Rom River. It was clear that the enemy fell into confusion and lost all his combativeness; white flags appeared in some places.

At 3 p.m. our troops received orders to seize this opportunity to *launch a general attack on the fortified entrenched camp* without waiting for the night.

From the east and west our divisions co-ordinated their actions and struck directly at the enemy's command post. Though the enemy had still about 10,000

men left, he was completely demoralized. Wherever our troops went the enemy soldiers raised white flags and surrendered.

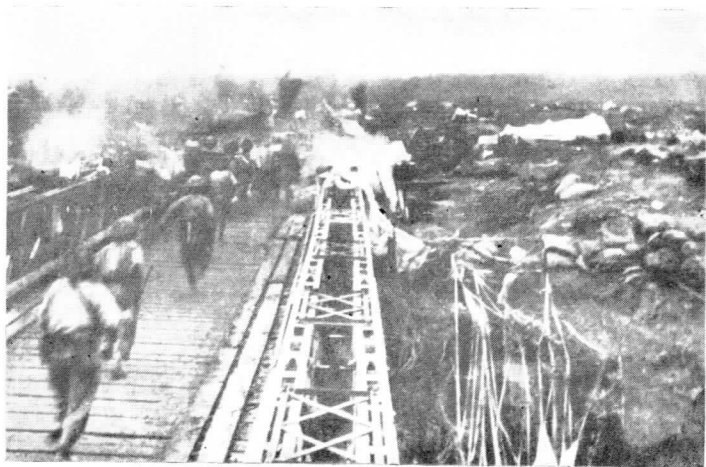
At 5.30 p.m., we occupied the command post : Gen. De Castries and all his staff were captured. All the enemy troops stationed at Dien Bien Phu came out and surrendered. They were taken prisoner and were kindly treated.

Our flag bearing the slogan "Determined to Fight and to Win" was raised aloft over the Dien Bien Phu plain.

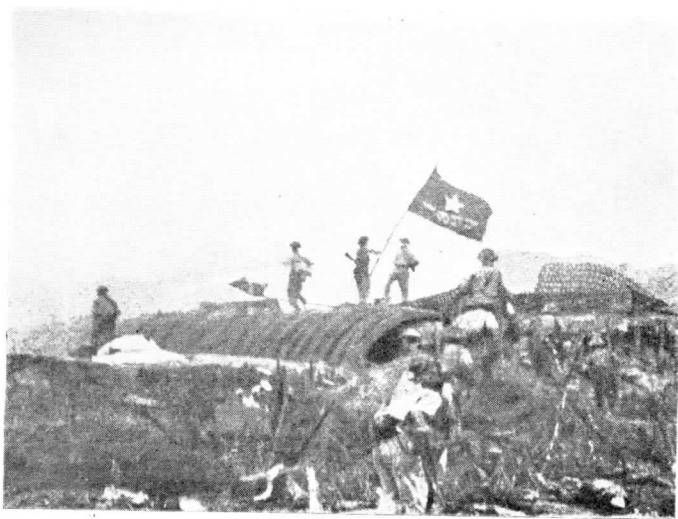
We attacked the southern sub-sector the same night. There the enemy, a force 2,000 strong, tried to withdraw in the direction of Upper Laos. Pursued by our troops and caught at 8 p.m. all the enemy troops were taken prisoner at midnight.

After 55 days and nights of unremitting struggle, the enemy at the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp was completely annihilated.

The historic Dien Bien Phu campaign was completely victorious. The strategic offensive of winter 1953 and spring 1954 of our army ended in a great victory.



Crossing the Muong Thanh bridge for the final assault



The Vietnamese flag, bearing the V.P.A.'s slogan :
"Determined to Fight and to Win", hoisted over
De Castries command post





◀ The survivors
coming out to
surrender

Surrender of Gen.
De Castries and
▼ his staff





VI

PARAMOUNT SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GREAT DIEN BIEN PHU VICTORY AND OF THE WINTER-SPRING VICTORIES

The historic Dien Bien Phu campaign and in general the Winter 1953-Spring 1954 campaign were the greatest victories ever won by our army and people up to the present time. These great victories marked a giant progress, *a momentous change in the evolution of the Resistance War for national salvation put up by our people against the aggressive French imperialists propped up by U.S. interventionists.*

An analysis of the new aspect of this resistance war brings out the following points :

First, in the strategic offensive of winter 1953 and spring 1954, we launched many attacks on the various battlefields of the country.

From the Frontier campaign in 1950 onwards the form of local counter-offensive had appeared. In each season of operations or in a certain period, our regular army was in a position to wage a successful offensive

campaign in a given direction of the main battlefield, viz. Bac Bo. In the following years we constantly kept the initiative on this main battlefield; the great efforts displayed by the enemy to wrest back initiative in Bac Bo were thwarted by our army.

In autumn 1953 and spring 1954 our regular army was able to launch attacks not only on various fronts in Bac Bo but in the Fifth zone; meanwhile the Vietnamese volunteers co-ordinated their action with the Pathet Lao Liberation troops and launched offensive campaigns in Upper Laos, Central Laos and Lower Laos. The scope of our Winter-Spring strategic offensive went beyond the main battlefield, and began to spread to South Vietnam and Indo-China.

Second. in the second stage of the Winter-Spring strategic offensive, we mustered the greatest part of crack units of our regular army on the main front, Dien Bien Phu, and launched a big offensive against this most powerful fortified entrenched camp defended by an important contingent of enemy picked soldiers.

Previously, and even in the early stage of the Winter-Spring offensive, the trend of our operations was to find a gap in the important strategic directions of the enemy to attack and annihilate part of his force.

In the Dien Bien Phu campaign, we proceeded to the concentration of our main force to annihilate the enemy's force and hammer at this entrenched camp believed by the enemy to be impregnable. The Dien Bien Phu campaign had fully the character of a decisive battle in the strategic point of view.

Third. in the Winter 1953 and Spring 1954 offensive, there was a new change in the form of operation.

Mobile warfare which included the units previously fighting in siege warfare and played the main role on the Bac Bo battlefield, then developed far and wide and played the main role on the battlefields of the Fifth zone and the neighbour country.

A greater change was that previously and in the first stage of the Winter-Spring offensive, the operational form frequently used by our regular army had been mobile warfare but in the Dien Bien Phu campaign — the central point of the nation-wide battlefield — our army used a new operational form, siege warfare, which has the character of a large-scale positional warfare.

At that time, guerilla warfare played a role of paramount importance at the fronts in the enemy's rear, and the main role in Binh-Tri-Thien and Nam Bo.

To judge by the enormous change and development of the scale of offensive campaigns, and of the character and form of operations of the Dien Bien Phu campaign, our army scored great successes never known before. *With these successes, our Resistance War shifted from the form of local counter-offensive to that of large-scale counter-offensive, from the strategic initiative on the Bac Bo battlefield to the initiative on other battlefields throughout the country.* There lies the great strategic significance of the great Dien Bien Phu victory and of other Winter-Spring victories.

In the Dien Bien Phu and Winter-Spring campaigns, we have put out of action a very important contingent of the enemy's force.

Dien Bien Phu was the greatest and the most typical battle of annihilation fought by our army up to this time, and the greatest victory ever won by our people for nearly a century of struggle against foreign aggression. The Dien Bien Phu battle was also regarded as one of the greatest battles of annihilation in the annals of armed struggle of weak and small nations against the aggressive armies of the imperialists and colonialists. At Dien Bien Phu we annihilated and captured more than 16,000 men, including the whole staff commanding the entrenched camp with a general, 16 colonels and 1,749 officers and non-commissioned officers. In this number were 17 crack infantry battalions, including 7 battalions of paratroopers, 3 artillery battalions and nearly one battalion of sappers, altogether 21 battalions.

A general survey of all the battlefields in the country, shows that in the Winter-Spring offensive, we put out of action 112,000 enemy soldiers, or one quarter of all the enemy armed forces in Indo-China ; out of this number, 25 battalions were completely destroyed. The number of American bombers, fighters and transport planes, including B 24 bombers, and C 119 heavy transport planes shot down or destroyed at Dien Bien Phu was 62, and the number of planes shot down and destroyed on all the other fronts in the country was 177, representing a very important part of the enemy's air force in Indo-China.



Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap inspecting the Dien Bien Phu
battle-field after victory



Since the time the French imperialists returned and unleashed their aggressive war, never, in a relatively short time, had they suffered such a heavy loss. It was all the more so since the great majority of the enemy force annihilated by us included his best units viz. the battalions of paratroopers, the battalions of European and African infantrymen considered by the enemy as "spearheads", "offensive blows", the backbone of Navarre's strategic mobile mass. These serious reverses caused a great apprehension in the high command of the French Expeditionary Corps and made the already sagging morale of their generals and soldiers sink more rapidly.

In the historic Dien Bien Phu campaign and in the Winter-Spring campaigns, we liberated large areas of strategic importance.

In Bac Bo, after the liberation of Lai Chau and Dien Bien Phu, it was the first time that the last enemy disappeared from the North-West. The resistance bases expanded, covering all the mountain regions of Bac Bo, from Viet Bac to the North-West and Hoa Binh, and linking with the large liberated areas of the upper part of Laos, our neighbour. The enemy was thus cooped up in the Red River delta.

The Fifth zone, one of our free zones coveted by the enemy, expanded much more widely. A large area north of the strategically important High Plateaux, was liberated. The threat caused by the enemy to the rear of the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh was dispelled. Our liberated zone which ran from the seacoast to the Laotian frontier

and linked with the liberated zone of Lower Laos was a new threat to the enemy in South Indo-China.

On the fronts in the enemy's rear, in the Red River delta, in Binh-Tri-Thien and Nam Bo, the guerilla bases and the regions where the guerilla operated expanded widely. The zones occupied by the enemy was so narrow that they were reduced to mere points and lines. The enemy-controlled regions in the Red River delta shrank; three-quarters of the territory in the enemy's rear were liberated.

In Laos, the Pathet Lao Liberation troops and the Vietnamese volunteers liberated Phong Saly province and the Nam Hu basin, expanded their bases in Upper Laos and the liberated areas in Central Laos and in Lower Laos. Throughout Laos, more than half the territory and half the population were liberated.

With the above-mentioned great victories and with the Winter-Spring strategic offensive culminated by the Dien Bien Phu campaign, *the Navarre plan worked out by French and American imperialists went bankrupt.*

The enemy suffered heavy losses in men. A great part of what was called Navarre's "strategic mobile mass" was annihilated, the remaining was compelled to scatter to the point of losing its mobility. The enemy's morale was most shaking. Large contingents of newly replenished puppet troops were disbanded. What was more serious for the enemy was that by liquidating the Dien Bien Phu entrenched camp, our troops defeated his highest and most powerful form of defence and put him before the prospect that the

other defence systems, much weaker than Dien Bien Phu, would be threatened with annihilation.

In this dangerous situation, the enemy of course, did not think of launching the strategic offensives mapped out in the Navarre plan, still less of the possibility to win decisive victories as calculated by the French and American warmongers. At that time, the greatest concern of the French government was to save the remaining force of the French Expeditionary Corps from threat of annihilation. In the middle of May 1954, Gen. Ely came to Saigon with instructions from the French government to Gen. Navarre to the effect that the occupation of the Red River delta should be reduced at once to the "useful space" and preparation should be made, in case of necessity, to withdraw French troops south of the 18th parallel. In substance, these instructions considered as main goal and priority task the protection of the remaining force of the French Expeditionary Corps. The plan for such a withdrawal was carried out at the end of June and at the beginning of July 1954. The enemy fled from Viet Tri town, the Cho Ben sub-sector, all the zone south of the delta embracing the province and city of Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Phat Diem and Bui Chu. In this retreat, the enemy was pursued and partially destroyed by our troops. Tens of thousands of puppet soldiers deserted the enemy's rank and passed over to the side of the people.

The great victories won at Dien Bien Phu and in Winter-Spring as a whole opened up a new political situation and made a decisive contribution to the success of the Geneva Conference in 1954.

The news of the Dien Bien Phu victory came right at the time when the 1954 Geneva Conference was preparing to discuss the re-establishment of peace in Indo-China.

This victory thwarted the scheme of the bellicose French colonialists and the U.S. interventionists who were contemplating to prolong and expand the aggressive war in Indo-China and seeking to torpedo the Geneva Conference. The Laniel-Bidault reactionary cabinet which had since earlier set forth the policy of "fighting to the end" and "internationalizing the Indo-Chinese war", fell and was replaced by a peace-seeking cabinet headed by Mendès-France.

Despite all sabotage attempt of the U.S. imperialists and the French warmongers, after more than seventy days of negotiations, the conference obtained a good result.

The delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam put forth at the conference the fundamental standpoints of our people and government, viz: *peace, independence, unity, democracy*, and regarded it as their fond aspiration and legitimate interests for the materialization of which the Vietnamese people were determined to make all sacrifice and struggle to the end. Our people won a great diplomatic success thanks to the broad unity in struggle within their rank, to the Winter-Spring victories and especially to the great Dien Bien Phu victory, to the solidarity of the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, to the unstinted support of the Soviet Union,

China and other brother socialist countries and the approval and support of the French people and the peace-loving people in the world.

With the Geneva Agreements signed on July 21, 1954 peace has been restored in Indo-China on the basis of *respect of sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam and her friendly neighbours, Cambodia and Laos*. After nearly a century of struggle for national liberation, and over eight years of valiant and hard resistance by the entire people, the north of our country has been completely liberated. The political clauses aimed at peacefully reunifying Vietnam through free general elections were provided for.

The successful conclusion of the Geneva Conference was a great victory for our people and the world's people who are struggling for peace, national independence, democracy and socialism and a severe defeat for the U.S. imperialists and the bellicose French colonialists.

The great Dien Bien Phu victory and the Winter-Spring victories as a whole had a far-reaching influence in the world.

While the bellicose imperialists were confused and discouraged, the news of the victories won by our army and people on the battlefronts throughout the country especially the Dien Bien Phu victory, have greatly inspired the progressive people the world over.

The Dien Bien Phu victory was not only a great victory of our people but was regarded by the socialist countries as their own victory. It was regarded as a great victory of the weak and small nations now

fighting against imperialism and old and new-colonialism for freedom and independence. Dien Bien Phu has become a pride of the oppressed peoples, a great contribution of our people to the high movement for national liberation which has been surging up powerfully since the end of World War II, and heralded the collapse of the colonial system of imperialism.

Dien Bien Phu was also a great victory of the forces of peace in the world. Without this victory, certainly the Geneva Conference would not be successful and peace could not be re-established in Indo-China. This substantiates all the more clearly that the victory won at Dien Bien Phu and in general the Resistance War put up by our people, and the victorious struggle for liberation waged by the oppressed people against imperialism and colonialism under all forms, played a role of paramount importance in weakening imperialism, thwarting the scheme of aggression and war of the enemy and contributing greatly to the defence of world peace.

*
* *

The Dien Bien Phu victory and in general the Winter-Spring victories were very great ones.

From the preceding chapters we clearly realized that *the main and fundamental factor for this victory was the correct political and military line of our Party, headed by President Ho Chi Minh.*

This line was the Marxist-Leninist line applied to the practice of our revolution, the line of a people's

war waged by the entire people in all fields, applied to the concrete conditions of the revolutionary armed struggle in our country. This line, imbued with the Marxist-Leninist fundamental principles on revolutionary war and revolutionary army and combining the valuable experiences of the Soviet Red Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army with our own experiences, was applied creatively to the concrete conditions of our revolutionary armed struggle.

As is known, by summer 1953, our people were facing new enormous difficulties. The French colonialists benefiting from an intensified aid by the American imperialists, were striving to prolong and extend the war in Indo-China. Within a short period, the enemy increased his forces fairly rapidly, concentrated a rather big strategic mobile force, launched operation after operation to "pacify" his rear, scrambled with us for manpower and wealth, and at the same time threatened our free zone, in an attempt rapidly to wrest back the strategic initiative.

In face of the perfidious scheme of an experienced and wicked enemy and of the threat of the French and American imperialists, if we had not been possessed of a revolutionary spirit and a firm confidence in the final victory, and if we had not grasped the Marxist-Leninist military science, we would have made mistakes in appraising the situation and estimating the enemy's strength and would probably have become pessimistic in face of the enemy's temporary strength, which would have been detrimental to our fighting spirit and even made us lose our bearings.

Basing itself on the experience it had drawn ever since in leading the revolution and armed struggle, on its thorough revolutionary spirit of a vanguard Party, and on its determination to wipe out the enemy and bring the Resistance War to victory, our Party Central Committee made an objective and scientific analysis of the situation, accurately assessed the enemy's strength, examined his internal contradictions, his strong points as well as his weak points, and appraised our difficulties as well as our army's and people's great fighting capacities.

Our Party Central Committee then worked out a correct strategic direction : to concentrate our forces to shift over to the offensive against the strategic points where the enemy was relatively weak in order to wipe out part of his effectives, at the same time to compel him to scatter his forces to cope with us at the vital points which he had to defend at all costs, thus creating new conditions to crush more enemy's effectives. This strategic direction — “dynamism, initiative, mobility and rapidity of decision in face of new situations” — gradually shattered Navarre's strategic mobile corps and brought our Winter-Spring offensive campaigns on all the battlefronts throughout the country to great victories.

When the enemy's main forces were scattered in many directions, with a part of his crack troops isolated at Dien Bien Phu, our Party Central Committee made a thorough appraisal of the situation of hostilities throughout the country, correctly assessing the enemy's very strong points and fundamental weak points at Dien Bien Phu. Prompted by the firm confi-

dence in the fighting capacities and creativeness of the people's army and our people, it made a strategic decision: to concentrate all forces to wipe out the whole enemy force at Dien Bien Phu. This clear-sighted and valiant strategic decision along with the correct direction of operations in this historic campaign have brought our army and people to great victories.

The second decisive factor for the Dien Bien Phu victory and in general for the Winter-Spring victories was the determination to fight and to win and the spirit of unity in struggle of our army and people under the Party's leadership.

The determination to fight and to win of our army and people in the historic Dien Bien Phu campaign and in the Winter-Spring campaigns in general was the boundless strength of the masses of people, especially the labouring masses, who, imbued with the Party's correct political line, had risen in arms to struggle for their elementary and most cherished aspirations, *independence for the Fatherland and land to the tillers, to pave the way toward socialism.*

This determination to fight and to win of our army and people was the continuation of our nation's indomitable fighting spirit, the heroism of a small and weak nation of a young revolutionary army opposing the strength, of a just cause and of an entire people to the powerful army of an aggressive imperialist country. This spirit was also the thoroughly revolutionary spirit of the proletariat patiently inculcated by the Party in the army, the firm determination to overthrow imperialism and its stooges, the fine heroic fighting spirit, the sense of surmounting all difficulties

and overcoming all hardships, the revolutionary heroism placing the interest of the people, of the nation and of the revolution above all, and the readiness for the supreme sacrifice for the sake of the revolution.

This spirit was tempered and enhanced by our people's long revolutionary struggle. Particularly in winter 1953-spring 1954 the policy of mobilization of the masses for systematic rent reduction and land reform greatly contributed to the enhancement of our people's and army's patriotism, class consciousness and revolutionary enthusiasm.

In the army, after many political courses on the goal of the national-democratic revolution and the task of the people's army, especially after the political class on the policy of land reform, our officers and men — peasants for the overwhelming majority — saw their class stand enhanced and their will to wipe out the enemy increased ; everyone was ready to go to the front with an ardent revolutionary zeal, ready for the most difficult tasks and ready strictly to implement the orders to wipe out the enemy and win victory.

With such a mettle our army could surmount any difficulty, destroy any enemy and discharge any task. As the enemy had planes, tanks and guns he believed that our army would be unable to open up roads, and hand our artillery pieces into position. Contrary to his expectation, our army had done that. As he had big forces, a powerful fire-power, solid fortifications and flat ground to his advantage, he thought that our army could not approach Dien Bien Phu without being

smashed, nor storm his centres of resistance, let alone undertake continuous operations day and night to destroy his strongest entrenched camp. Contrary to his expectation, our army had done all that he had reckoned unfeasible. Our army had wiped out the whole enemy force in the Dien Bien Phu entrenched camp.

In the great fighting on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield as well as on the other battlefields throughout the country in winter 1953-spring 1954, our army set countless examples of admirable heroism which constitute perennial tokens of its fine tradition. Be Van Dan offered his body as a machine-gun support. Hoang Van No bayoneted the enemy till he breathed his last; in a fighting posture To Vinh Dien readily laid down his life to protect an artillery piece. Phan Dinh Giot blocked an enemy loop-hole with his own body. They were scouts capturing many enemies by tricks, drivers staying at the steering wheel though wounded, engineers at grips with time-bombs, medical men and suppliers plunging into the fire of the battle to transport munitions and carry away the wounded, signal men devoting themselves to ensure communications, etc., and so many other shining examples. They were units on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield as well as on the co-ordinated battlefields, in the regular forces, the regional troops, the militia or the guerilla, all of them surmounted countless difficulties and hardships and performed glorious deeds, contributing their part to the victory of the campaign.

In the Dien Bien Phu campaign and in the Winter-Spring campaigns in general our people displayed a

great determination to fight and to win, dedicated themselves to supplying the frontline and struggled side by side with our army men in application of the motto "all for the front, all for victory".

Everywhere throughout the country, on the main battlefield as well as on the co-ordinated battlefields, in the free zone as well as in the enemy's rear, our people put all their strength and material resources at the disposal of the various battlefronts. On the Dien Bien Phu battlefront, to overcome the extreme difficulties in supplying a large-scale campaign, requiring a long time and involving big forces on a jungle battlefield hundreds of kilometres distant from their rear, our people displayed a very lofty heroism and spirit of unity in struggle with the army. Our people had performed a great deed beyond the enemy's expectation.

Neither the fire of the enemy's planes nor the hardships of the expedition could check the advance of the convoys of *dan cong* and transport workers on the roads, paths, rivers, streams, day and night carrying food and ammunition to Dien Bien Phu for the army to fight the enemy. So many admirable examples of heroism, endurance of hardships and overcoming of difficulties were recorded. The people in the newly liberated North-West though poor, enthusiastically contributed their little store of food to the army. The convoys of pack-bicycles raised the freight capacity of such vehicles to several hundreds of kilogrammes, sometimes to three hundred.

Drivers of sampans and rafts — women for the most part — crossed countless rapids and negotiated

numberless dangerous waterfalls. At the front-line, the people struggled side by side with the army men, plunging into the fire to transport munitions and carry away the wounded. Serving in the hospitals or as stretcher-bearers, the people tended the wounded as their kith-and-kin. On the roads, the people devoted themselves day and night to opening up and mending roads under the strafing of enemy planes or near time-bombs.

Not only did our people supply the army with war material and struggle side by side with the army but they also provided the army men with the most trivial things like needles and thread, sending them food, gifts and letters of encouragement, conveying to them the affection of the entire people and communicating to them the enthusiasm of millions of peasants engaged in land reform.

The spirit of unity in struggle, the determination to fight and to win of our army and people under the Party's leadership was obviously the decisive factor in the victory of the Dien Bien Phu campaign as well as of the Winter-Spring campaign. This is a proof that a solid rear is frequently a decisive factor in the victory of a revolutionary war.

The third decisive factor in the victory of the Dien Bien Phu campaign as well as of the Winter-Spring campaigns is the close co-ordination of the Pathet Lao Liberation troops, the Laotian friendly people's wholehearted assistance for our army volunteers, the sympathy and support of the fraternal socialist countries and of the peace-loving peoples in the world.

Throughout the resistance years, especially in Winter 1951-Spring 1954; in face of the aggressive scheme of the common enemy, the Pathet Lao Liberation forces and our army volunteers lived and fought shoulder to shoulder, thus winning a great victory for both nations. The Laotian people gave every support to the volunteer units and loved them as their kith-and-kin.

The peoples of the Soviet Union, China and the other socialist countries regarded the struggle of our army and people as a front-line of the socialist camp against imperialism, daily followed the development of the fighting on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield, vehemently condemned the French and American imperialists' scheme and acts aimed at prolonging and extending the war, and wholeheartedly supported and encouraged our people's struggle.

Here once again mention should be made of the very great role played by the experiences of armed struggle of the Soviet and Chinese peoples in our Resistance War.

Mao Tse-tung's military thinking is the very rich experience of the long armed struggle of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and people summed up into theory, the line of armed struggle of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country against a multifold powerful enemy. As the social situations of our country and China and the revolutionary struggles of both peoples have many similar fundamental points, Mao Tse-tung's military thinking has made very great contributions to our Party's leadership of the Resistance War. Since 1950 after the victory of the Chinese

revolution, our army and people had even more facilities to learn the valuable experiences of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and Mao Tse-tung's military thinking, and applied them creatively and successfully to the practice of our revolutionary armed struggle. This was also an important factor accounting for our army's rapid growth, for its successive victories, especially in the Winter 1953-Spring 1954 campaigns and the great historic Dien Bien Phu campaign.

While the struggle against the common enemy reached a decisive phase, with lofty proletarian internationalism, the French people and Communist Party gave every support to our people's just Resistance War, stepped up the heroic struggle for the ending of the dirty war in Indo-China, against the French war-like colonialists' policy of aggression.

The peoples of oppressed countries and the peace-loving peoples the world over also followed our people's struggle, especially the fighting on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield, with a profound sympathy and a wholehearted support.

We highly appreciate the sympathy and support of the forces of peace, national independence, democracy and socialism to our people's just struggle and consider it a most important factor of our victory.

*

* *

These were the factors which decided the victory of the great Dien Bien Phu campaign and generally speaking of other Winter-Spring victories.

As far as the aggressive French colonialists were concerned, after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the great reserve of the French Expeditionary Corps and the complete failure of Navarre's military plan, well known militarymen, statesmen, writers and journalists wrote a great deal about Dien Bien Phu and held different views regarding the cause of this reverse, the ones pinning the responsibility on the French government, the others on Gen. Navarre. This heated *controversy* is still going on.

We are all aware that, when Gen. Navarre was resolved to attack Dien Bien Phu to save Lai Chau and defend Upper Laos, he was much appreciated and lauded by strategists and politicians of all sorts, including the Americans. Even Gen. Cogy considered the attack on Dien Bien Phu as an operation carried out at the right time and in the right place, adding that if ever he were entitled to make a decision and had enough competence, he would have transferred the whole entrenched camp from Na San to Dien Bien Phu. Gen. Salan, on his part, said that the "attack on Dien Bien Phu is a necessity." Even French Premier Laniel who was not directly deciding this matter, on hearing the report, not only fully approved this scheme but said that "Gen. Navarre's creative decision has never been taken to task by any military experts in France and abroad."

After Gen. Navarre had taken, on December 3, 1953, the strategic resolution to "defend Dien Bien Phu at any cost" and "accept battle" with our regular force in order to inflict a severe defeat upon us, once again the French and American generals and politi-

cians unanimously held that "the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp is an inviolable fortress." Gen. Navarre and his subordinates, such as Cogy and De Castries, agreed that Dien Bien Phu was the most powerful fortified entrenched camp in Indo-China. Plevin, French minister for National Defence, Mac Jacquet, minister of Associated States and Gen. Ely, general chief-of-staff of the French army, came in person to Dien Bien Phu to make on-the-spot investigation into the solid system of defence of the entrenched camp, and were all convinced that it was an ideal battlefield carefully prepared to annihilate our main force. Gen. O'Daniel commander-in-chief of U.S. armed forces in the Pacific was of the same opinion.

It was not until the second half of December, when reports were heard that the bulk of our regular army continued marching in the direction of Dien Bien Phu, that the French High Command began to be anxious, thinking that if ever a battle was to take place, "victory would not be one hundred per cent guaranteed". Nevertheless, the French and American generals did not fully realize the great danger which was looming over Dien Bien Phu. At that time there was opinion to withdraw from that entrenched camp, but Gen. Navarre and Gen. Cogy maintained that "Dien Bien Phu must be defended at any cost", that to withdraw from it would "impair the morale of the defending troops who were jubilant over the prospect of a victorious defensive battle". On his part, Col. De Castries who at first was "determined to lure the opponent to this valley" to destroy him, did not have much confidence, thinking that the "battle would be

arduous, but he would be able to keep firm the front if he received in reinforcement two or three reserve battalions". However as time wore away no attack on the entrenched camp, but large-scale operations in Upper Laos on our part were detected by the enemy. Gen. Navarre thought that "the wave of attacks of the opponent" was ended. With such an appreciation, he sent part of his regular army to South Vietnam to pursue the Atlante operation.

During the attack on Dien Bien Phu by our army, the High Command of the French Expeditionary Corps worked out many plans; as they were never put into practice, the enemy has not been able up to the present time, to assess the outcome of these plans, whether they would end in success or in failure.

The enemy was contemplating to attack Thai Nguyen, Tuyen Quang or Yen Bai to cut off our lines of communication and supply. We can now affirm that if such an operation was undertaken, not only was the enemy unable to destroy our supply lines, but surely our main force, secretly hidden there, would have the opportunity to inflict heavy losses upon him.

The enemy was also planning to withdraw from Dien Bien Phu by air. If such plan was carried out earlier, possibly only a part of his main force would be annihilated. However since the second half of December, as we concentrated our main force around Dien Bien Phu and constantly followed hard on the enemy's heels he would suffer heavy losses if such a withdrawal was undertaken.

When at Dien Bien Phu the enemy was put in a dangerous spot, he contemplated to make a sally

toward Upper Laos. Should such an attempt be made, surely, all his forces would be destroyed in fierce battles because we had controlled all the roads and tracks leading to the Laotian frontier ; even though in the beginning some of his forces managed to run away the enemy would surely be destroyed on the battlefield of the hilly regions of Upper Laos, near Dien Bien Phu.

There was a time when yielding to the proposal of the Laniel-Bidault government, the American warmongers such as State Secretary Dulles, and chief-of-staff of U.S. ground forces Radford wanted to avail themselves of this rare occasion to send heavy bombers to Indo-China to save Dien Bien Phu. It could be said that if these American warmongers would carry through their scheme of stepping up their intervention, our difficulties would be greater but in the end the situation of the French Expeditionary Corps could not be retrieved and Dien Bien Phu could not be saved, etc. American political and military circles were aware of this ; not only were they afraid of the disapproval of progressive people of the world, including the American people, they did not dare involve Indo-China in a second Korean war. That is why even Eisenhower did not agree to this increased intervention, arguing that such a step would end not only in a "tragedy" for the U.S. but would "lead to war in Indo-China and South-East Asia." Churchill who was then Britain's prime minister said straight away that "intervention was not commendable" because "it would be a strategic mistake", and that "only Geneva offered the best opportunity".

When the war was ended, commenting on Navarre's "skilful strategy" the bourgeois Chuke Liangs who had quite accurate opinions on military matters said that Gen. Navarre's plan to attack Dien Bien Phu by paratroopers was understandable, but his resolution to choose Dien Bien Phu for a do-or-die strategic battle with our main force was erroneous in that he over-estimated too much his forces and under-rated the opponent's. Or they held the view that Navarre's resolution to concentrate his picked troops at Dien Bien Phu to give a fierce battle to our forces, and at the same time to send part of his main force to carry out the Atlante operation was a strategic mistake, because by so doing he dispersed his main force, a thing to be avoided, as he had declared. These opinions were correct; nevertheless after the fall of the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp, they were not so highly qualified as the naked truth was conspicuous to everyone. The question was whether these Chuke Liangs, in Gen. Navarre's place, would escape from viewing the problem according to the conception of classical war and according to the bourgeois strategic standpoint and whether they could see all the great possibilities offered by a people's army in a revolutionary war and by an entire people who were rising up to liberate themselves.

The aggressive war unleashed by the French imperialists in Indo-China dragged on for eight or nine years. Though they did their best to increase their force to nearly half a million men, sacrificed hundreds of thousands of soldiers, spent in this dirty war 2,688 billion French francs, squandered a great amount of

resources, shed a great deal of blood of the French people, changed 20 cabinets in France, 7 high commissars and 8 commanders-in-chief in Indo-China, their aggressive war grew from bad to worse, met defeat after defeat, went from one strategic mistake to another, to end in the great Dien Bien Phu disaster. This is because the war made by the French colonialists was an unjust war. In this war the enemy met with the indomitable spirit of an entire people and therefore, no skilful general — be he Leclerc, De Tassigny, Navarre or any other general — could save the French Expeditionary Corps from defeat. Neither there would be a mighty weapon — cannon, tank or heavy bomber and even U.S. atomic bomb — which could retrieve the situation. On the upshot, if in autumn 1953 and winter 1954, the enemy did not occupy Dien Bien Phu by paratroopers or if he occupied it and withdrew later without choosing it as the site of a do-or-die battle, sooner or later a Dien Bien Phu would come up, though the time and place might change ; and in the end the French and U.S. imperialists would certainly meet with a bitter failure.

*

* *

In the Dien Bien Phu campaign and other Winter-Spring campaigns, the sacred resistance war waged by our people against the French imperialists and U.S. interventionists won a great victory. The great successes scored by our people at Dien Bien Phu and at the Geneva Conference testified eloquently to the correct political line of our Party in this long and

hard Resistance War. Therefore in speaking of the factors contributing to the victory of the Dien Bien Phu campaign and other Winter-Spring campaigns, we could not fail to speak of the principal factors which decided the success of the resistance war waged by our people.

The success of the Resistance War, of Dien Bien Phu, was first due to the fact that our Party's policy of resolutely making the Resistance War was entirely correct.

Our nation cherished peace ; our Party and Government perseveringly pursued a policy of peace. But the French colonialists were determined to invade our country and kindle the aggressive war. In face of this aggression, our people had only a vital way left which was to wage a just war for liberation, to oppose the counter-revolutionary violence of the enemy by the revolutionary violence of our people.

Our Party's policy of resolutely making the resistance war was the only way to defend the fruit of the August revolution, and the independence of the Fatherland. Only when our people's resistance force was strong enough to deal the enemy a telling blow at Dien Bien Phu, was he compelled to relinquish his privileges and interests and recognize the legitimate interests of our people and nation and was the Geneva Conference in 1954 successful. An undeniable truth was that the imperialists would never withdraw of their free will unless the people use various methods of revolutionary struggle to oppose them energetically and perseveringly, and to thwart their scheme of war and aggression.

The success of the Resistance War, of Dien Bien Phu, was due to the fact that our Party has firmly grasped the revolutionary national democratic line of Marxism-Leninism. The Resistance War of our people was precisely the continuation of the revolutionary national-democratic task under the form of armed struggle.

The French imperialists invaded our country once more. In this situation, the national factor was of prime importance. Our Party also assessed that, the all-out revolution for national liberation should have a national people's democratic content. The anti-imperialist task and the anti-feudal task should co-ordinate closely with each other, because imperialism worked hand in glove with feudal landlordism against our people; because ours was a backward agrarian country and our peasantry was, numerically speaking, the greatest force. Our Party attached importance to the peasant question, not only because the peasantry was the main force of the revolution led by the working class, but it was also a basis on which a series of problems could be solved: we would rely on the countryside to set up the revolutionary administration and the bases of the revolution, to start the people's war, to wage a protracted guerilla warfare, to build up a people's army, etc.

Under the slogan, "*For independence of the Fatherland, for land to the peasants*", our Party mobilized the entire people, first the basic worker and peasant masses, united all the revolutionary classes and patriotic elements, united the nationalities within the

country, consolidated and broadened the National United Front on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance.

This correct political line has encouraged the entire people to contribute their huge force to the liberation war. It was precisely along this line that our Party was successful in the task of consolidating and expanding the rear of the resistance war, of building and strengthening the people's armed force, of mobilizing the manpower and wealth of the patriotic people, of carrying out the slogan "All for the front, all for victory". The entire people worked devotedly for the front; the determination to fight and to win of our army-men and people on the various fronts of the country especially at Dien Bien Phu, demonstrated all the more clearly the correct and clear-sighted political line of our Party.

The success of the Resistance War, of Dien Bien Phu, was due to the correct military line of our Party. As has been said above, this was the Marxist-Leninist military line applied to the concrete condition of the revolutionary war waged against a powerful enemy by a colonial and semi-feudal country besieged by imperialism.

Our Party has skilfully and creatively applied the line of people's war, waged an all-out revolutionary people's war, roused and armed the entire people.

Our Party which had a correct strategic line, assessed that our *Resistance War should be long and arduous, and fend for itself but would certainly be victorious.* Our people's armed force should be composed of *three kinds of armed forces: the regular*

force, the local force and the militia ; the principle of operation should start from guerilla warfare to regular warfare, from guerilla warfare to mobile warfare and siege warfare, with a constant close and flexible co-ordination between these forms of operation.

In practice, the Resistance War has testified to the brilliant success of the correct military line of our Party. Our people's armed force has constantly grown in strength in the fire of the battle, winning victory after victory, and passing from initial successes to greater successes.

The victories won in the Winter 1953-Spring 1954 campaign and especially in the Dien Bien Phu great campaign were a model of leadership of the war and direction of strategy and military operation along the Marxist-Leninist military line, and were a great success of this line.

The success of the Resistance War and of Dien Bien Phu, could not be taken apart from the favourable conditions prevailing in the evolution of the international situation.

Our Party constantly regards the Vietnamese revolution as part and parcel of the world revolution. The evolution of the international situation has always influenced the revolution in our country.

After World War II, the balance of force in the world between the revolution and counter-revolution has unceasingly tipped in favour of the revolutionary people, to the detriment of the counter-revolutionaries. Following the great victory of the Soviet Red Army over the German and Japanese fascists, the great triumph of the Chinese revolution has basically

changed the above relation of forces, the revolutionary force is definitely superior to the counter-revolutionary force.

A high revolutionary movement has emerged, in which the socialist system has played its main role vis-à-vis the trend of development of human society, the national-liberation movement has become a mighty revolutionary current, causing the disintegration of big parts of the colonial system of imperialism.

When the relation of forces in the world has changed in favour of the revolution, it is obvious that time has come for the revolutionary forces to carry out an offensive strategy and spearhead the struggle at the aggressive and bellicose imperialists, headed by the U.S. This offensive strategy is now aiming at the regions which are the weakest fronts of imperialism, i.e. Asia, Africa and Latin America, to repulse imperialism step by step, defeat it part by part and secure success for peace, national independence, democracy and socialism.

The sacred Resistance War was put up by our people in the above-mentioned international situation. Our Party and people based themselves on the concrete historical condition of our country to carry out the offensive strategy against imperialism in the form of armed struggle and we have won a brilliant victory.

The great Resistance War of our people topped by Dien Bien Phu, has eloquently substantiated a truth of our time, viz :

In the present world condition, if a people — whatever weak they may be — rise up in unity, pursue a correct political line, and fight resolutely for inde-

pendence and peace, they have all possibilities to defeat the most cruel aggressive army of the imperialists and colonialists. The aggressive war unleashed by the imperialists and colonialists will certainly be defeated and the revolution for liberation of nations will certainly be victorious.

*

* *

Ten years have elapsed since the great Dien Bien Phu victory and the restoration of peace. Since then many momentous changes have taken place in our beloved country.

In the completely liberated *North*, under the leadership of our Party, our people have engaged in the period of socialist revolution and socialist construction. We have correctly followed the path outlined by our Party as early as 1930, and advanced from the national people's democratic revolution to the socialist revolution, without going through the period of capitalist development. This great change is the result of the long and fierce armed struggle waged against imperialism and its lackeys, a struggle to overthrow the domination of imperialism and colonialism and feudal landlordism. In a permanent revolution, the people's democratic power, which was formerly a worker-peasant dictatorial power in essence, has addressed itself to the task of proletarian dictatorship.

It is precisely after the establishment of the proletarian dictatorial state that we have rapidly achieved economic restoration, completed land reform and then

carried through socialist transformation. The toiling peasants, the real masters of the countryside, have of their free will embarked on the path of collective work, the path of co-operativization. All the capitalist industry and trade have been peacefully transformed. The socialist state economy has grown day by day. The regime of exploitation of man by man has been basically abolished. The socialist production relation has been established. Our people are enthusiastically carrying out the first five-year plan, making the first step in socialist industrialization and building the first material and technical basis of socialism. Our economy is advancing steadily towards an independent economy. The cultural life of the masses improves day by day. The people's power is consolidated and national defence strengthened.

During ten years, a very short span in the history of a nation, the North of our country has made big strides never seen before. These great achievements substantiate that the socialist system is very beautiful. Having a great love for labour and a high vigilance, which testify to a thorough revolutionary spirit, our people are making all efforts to build and defend the North and turn it into a more and more steady basis for the struggle for national reunification. Our people are enthusiastically vying with one another in patriotic emulation to show their gratitude towards their southern compatriots and constantly unite them in their heroic struggle against the enemy of the nation.

According to the strict stipulations of the Geneva Agreement, our people would have built a free and happy life in a peaceful, independent, unified, demo-

cratic, rich and powerful Vietnam ; but no sooner had the signatures of the agreement dried than the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen brazenly violated it and plotted to partition our country permanently in order to transform South Vietnam into a new-type colony and a military base.

It can be said that since the signing of the armistice agreement, the gun report of the war unleashed by the aggressors and traitors to the country has never ended in the South. The Ngo Dinh Diem administration, agent of the U.S., pursued a policy of terror and massacre, set up a fascist dictatorial regime, launched hundreds of mopping-ups with its regular forces, perpetrated unheard-of crimes, arrested and killed our southern compatriots who did not have even then an iron piece to defend themselves and who were using political struggles to oppose the enemy, and claiming independence, democracy, national reunification and the guarantee for man to have the right to live. Over these past few years, the U.S. imperialists overtly intervened in South Vietnam by force of arms, introduced there military personnel and combat units, shipped there tens of thousands of tons of weapons of all descriptions and squandered billions of dollars, or over one million dollars daily. They kindled the *undeclared war*, utilized South Vietnam as a battlefield to test what they called the "*special war*" with a view to repressing the movement of liberation of various nations.

Like our people throughout the country, our southern compatriots cherish peace. But once again, their revolutionary struggle has shown in fact that : *in face of*

the violence and war of the enemy, their only vital road is energetically to oppose him by the political and armed struggle of the broad masses and by the just war of the entire people. Our southern compatriots have risen up and waged a patriotic struggle to liberate themselves.

Under the banner of the South Vietnam Liberation National Front, 14 million people in the South have united as one man to save their homes and their country and to oppose the enemy of the people and nation. The manifesto and programme of action of the South Vietnam Liberation National Front have clearly shown the line of struggle which consists in *achieving the people's democratic revolution, overthrowing the neo-colonialism of the U.S. imperialists and their stooges, gaining independence, democracy, peace, and neutrality, and advancing toward the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland.* These manifesto and programme have reflected the fondest primary aspirations of our Southern compatriots, thereby rallying all the revolutionary classes and patriotic personalities, regardless of nationality, creed and political affiliation. The prestige of the Front is greater and greater. In the world, the heroic struggle waged by our southern compatriots has received a widespread and strong approval and support unprecedented in the history of revolutionary struggle of our people.

Following the correct path outlined by the Front, our compatriots have made a very valiant and fierce *people's war*, under very rich and creative forms of revolutionary struggle. From country to town, from

the highlands to the lowlands, *political struggle is very closely co-ordinated with armed struggle*. Organized into an unflinching political army, the broad masses of people have waged a direct struggle against the enemy, claiming for man the right to live and elementary freedoms, and demanding independence and democracy. In the meantime, guerilla warfare was organized everywhere and expanded very swiftly. The *valiant South Vietnam Liberation army*, which is still very young and has to fight in very difficult and hard conditions, has inflicted upon the enemy defeat after defeat and performed brilliant feats-of-arms which are the terror of the enemy.

The patriotic war put up by our southern compatriots has taken a *new turn*, the characteristic of which is that the balance of forces is changing in our favour, not in favour of the enemy. The Staley-Taylor plan aimed at ending the war within 18 months has collapsed. The network of strategic hamlets boasted by the enemy as a product of the most up-to-date and most effective experiences of the counter-revolutionary wars in Greece, Malaya, and the Philippines has been shattered in great parts by the rising movement of political and armed struggles of our people. The U.S. imperialists and their henchmen have suffered defeat after defeat without being able to find any remedy, though they have increased their effectives to half a million, raised the number of American advisers and combat troops to tens of thousands, applied thoroughly what they claim to be the newest tactics, employed the most up-to-date weapons in the war against the guerilla and resorted to the cruellest means of

destruction such as toxic chemicals. It is crystal clear that they have engaged in a "tunnel with no end in view". Contradictions within their ranks are more and more acute. Within a short period of time, the U.S. imperialists were compelled to change horses in mid-stream twice, each time provoking a coup d'état. However after each putsch their force dwindled instead of being strengthened, and the morale of their troops sank more deeply. At present the die-hard and cruel U.S. imperialists are striving to step up their armed intervention in South Vietnam in order to find a way out. But even in their political and military circles, nobody believed that their aggressive war in the South could end in a short time, and more and more people have foreseen that this war is drawing close to its bitter failure.

The valiant southern people who have struggled for twenty years on end are now making the *sacred resistance war for the second time*. With a firm combativeness and an incomparable heroism they are eloquently demonstrating the great truth of our time, viz :

In the present condition of the world, if a people — whatever weak and small they may be — rise up in unity, pursue a correct political line and fight stubbornly for independence and peace, they have all possibilities to defeat a powerful army of the predatory imperialists and their lackeys and to thwart all the plans of aggression of the imperialists and colonialists, old and new.

The world's people are doing their best to encourage the just struggle of our southern compatriots

and regard it as the front-line of progressive mankind against the cruellest enemy of the world's people: U.S. imperialism. Our southern compatriots will certainly show themselves worthy of this valuable approval and support.

The long and momentous Dien Bien Phu battle of our compatriots in the South will certainly win final victory. Vietnam, our Fatherland, will certainly be reunified. The U.S. imperialists and their stooges will certainly be doomed to a bitter failure.

*
* *

As centuries have passed, in the unbending struggle against foreign invasion to safeguard the independence of their country, the heroic Vietnamese people have written the most glorious pages in their history:

BACH DANG
CHI LANG
DONG DA
DIEN BIEN PHU

We are now living in a grand era.

Future belongs to us.

Under the glorious banner of our Party, headed by President Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese people will always advance to a brighter and brighter future. Socialist construction in Vietnam will certainly be crowned with success. National reunification will certainly be successful.

In the world, under the invincible banner of Marxism-Leninism, progressive mankind shall always march forward. The cruel imperialists and colonialists shall be swept out of the earth. All the oppressed peoples who are now rising up in struggle shall be completely liberated and shall be masters of their destiny and their country. Socialism and communism shall triumph completely. Mankind shall always march forward in peace and happiness.

We are proud that in the history of revolutionary struggle of the peoples and nations which stand up to smash their shackles and fight oppression and exploitation, Dien Bien Phu will remain for ever as a glorious feat-of-arms and a great event heralding the triumph of the oppressed peoples and nations and the collapse of imperialism and colonialism in the world.

The great Dien Bien Phu victory will for ever urge our people and nation as well as the oppressed nations in the world resolutely to march toward greater victories.

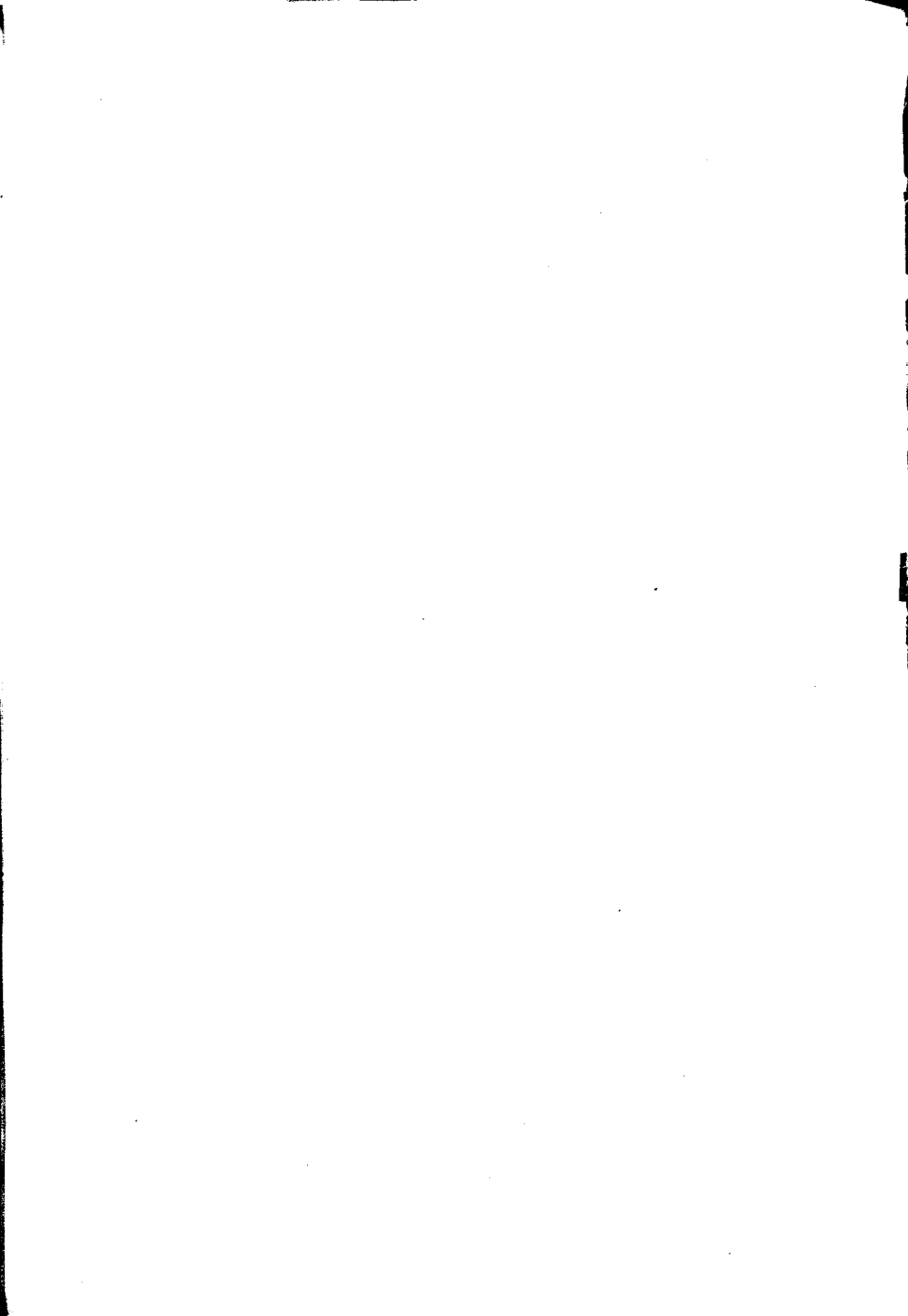
Dien Bien Phu will live for ever in the heart of future generations.

Hanoi 1964

IN COMMEMORATION
OF THE 10th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DIEN BIEN PHU VICTORY

APPENDIX

ORDERS OF THE DAY, LETTERS AND
NOTES OF ENCOURAGEMENT DURING
THE DIEN BIEN PHU CAMPAIGN AND
THE CO-ORDINATED CAMPAIGNS IN
WINTER 1953 — SPRING 1954



CONGRATULATORY LETTER

TO UNIT XX ON THE VICTORY WON
AT THE FRONT SOUTH-WEST OF NINH BINH

Officers and men,

At the beginning of Autumn-Winter, the enemy has concentrated his mobile forces to attack our free zone in the south-west of Ninh Binh hoping to destroy our rear and win back the initiative.

Although the enemy has concentrated a large contingent of picked troops, mobilized a great number of artillery pieces, armoured cars and aircraft for the front, you have fought heroically, overcome difficulties, seized the best opportunities to wipe out a great number of enemy troops and obliged the enemy to withdraw from our free zone.

This was our first great victory won on the Bac Bo battlefield at the beginning of operations in autumn and winter. It has also shown that you have made further progresses after the recent political remoulding in the army.

The High Command has decided to confer a third-class Military Medal on the whole unit.

I send my congratulations to all of you, and wish you good health and high spirits. I recommend you not to be subjective, not to underestimate the enemy after your victory, to be ready to destroy the enemy and perform new feats of arms.

With affection and determination to win.

November 7, 1953

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

ORDER OF ENCOURAGEMENT
TO OFFICERS AND MEN AT
THE DIEN BIEN PHU FRONT

Comrades,

On orders from the Party Central Committee, Government and President Ho Chi Minh, this winter you will go to the North-West to :

- Destroy the enemy's effectives,
- Win over the population,
- Liberate the regions still held by the enemy.

The enemy is occupying a region of our beloved North-West, scheming to sow division among our compatriots and trample them underfoot, and disturb our rear.

We must repair roads, overcome difficulties and hardships, fight valiantly, endure hunger and cold, go up hill and down dale, cover long distances and carry heavy loads to find the enemy in his refuge to destroy him and liberate our compatriots.

This winter, with the hatred for the imperialists and feudalists we have learnt in the political remoulding in the army, with the technical and tactical progresses we have acquired in the recent military remoulding, we will certainly strengthen and develop the victory of the North-West campaign in winter 1952, and will certainly defeat the enemy.

March forward valiantly.

December 6, 1953

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

ORDER OF THE DAY

ON THE OCCASION OF THE SEVENTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATION-WIDE
RESISTANCE WAR AND THE NINTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE SETTING UP
OF THE PEOPLE'S ARMY

Officers and men of the regular army, local forces, people's militia and guerillas throughout the country,

On December 19, 1953, the nation-wide Resistance War of our people has entered its eighth year.

On December 22, 1953, since the establishment of the Propaganda Unit of the Vietnam Liberation Army, our heroic people's army has been set up for nine years.

On the occasion of the anniversary of these two historic days I sincerely send my congratulations to all our officers and men who are fighting on all fronts in the country. I affectionately ask after the wounded servicemen. On behalf of the army I respect-

fully bow to the souls of those who have heroically sacrificed their lives for the Fatherland.

I send my congratulations to the *dan cong* who are serving at the front-line to ensure the supply of food and ammunition for the troops to kill the enemy.

I affectionately ask after the health of the families of officers and men, especially those of the wounded and martyrs.

Through eight years of resistance war against the aggressive imperialists our people's army has unrelentingly struggled against the aggressors.

In the fire of the battle, our army has started from small guerilla units to rapidly become a powerful army with hundreds of thousands of soldiers of the regular army and local army and millions of militia-men and guerillas.

Our army has won glorious victories, put out of action 320,000 enemies, liberated over 78,000 square kilometres of land, extended the Viet Bac resistance base from the Chinese frontier to the Laotian frontier, maintained and developed guerilla warfare and set up many large guerilla bases in the enemy's rear. Particularly since the Frontier campaign, our army has won seven big campaigns, and kept the initiative in the Northern battlefield.

At present, after having been heavily defeated by our army in the North-West, by the Laotian Liberation troops in Upper Laos, especially after the U.S. imperialists' defeat in Korea which obliged them to sign the armistice, the U.S. interventionists and the French colonialists are endeavouring to extend the war in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, carry out the Navarre

plan, recruit more puppet troops, concentrate their armed forces, launch mopping-up operations in the enemy's rear and attack the free zones, hoping to win back the initiative. This is a very perfidious scheme.

But we have the clear-sighted leadership and the correct political and military line of the Party, Government and President Ho Chi Minh, and the whole-hearted support of the National United Front, of the entire people. We also have the following new favourable conditions to smash the enemy's scheme :

First, after the political and military remouldings, especially after the recent political remoulding, our people's army has made great progress in politics as well as in tactics and technique. The officers' and men's fighting spirit raises further.

Second, our Party and Government have agitated the peasants to struggle for the successful carrying out of the reduction of land rent and interest rate. Early in December 1953, the National Assembly unanimously passed the law of land reform which gave back land to the tillers. This is an extremely important political success which filled our army-men with enthusiasm, increased the resistance of the entire people and enhanced the fighting spirit of our troops.

Third, the unanimous support of the World Movement for peace and democracy headed by the Soviet Union, of the French people and the French colonial peoples for our Resistance War has become stronger and stronger. The bloc of alliance between Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos is closer and closer. The International Day of Solidarity with the Vietnam people

decided by the World Federation of Trade Unions will strengthen our confidence and enhance the fighting spirit of our army.

To celebrate the anniversary of the nation-wide Resistance War and the setting up of our Army ;

To answer President Ho Chi Minh's appeal for the fulfilment of the two central tasks : to intensify the struggle against the enemy and carry out land reform ;

In the name of the High Command of the Vietnam People's Army I give orders to all officers and men of the regular armed forces, local forces, people's militia and guerilla :

1. To develop the tradition of heroism and endurance of our Liberation Army, to do your best to kill the enemy, destroy as many enemies as possible, step up guerilla warfare, defend the free zones, and smash the Navarre plan.

2. To strictly implement the law of land reform, the land policy of the Party and Government, and to resolutely support the peasants in their great struggle to carry out the slogan "Land to the tillers".

Officers and men,

Under the leadership of the Party, Government and President Ho Chi Minh, our people's army will certainly defeat the enemy, smash the Navarre plan as well as the schemes to extend the war of the French colonialists and U.S. interventionists.

Our people's army will certainly win the final victory in the heroic and glorious struggle for the complete independence of the Fatherland, the return of land to the peasants, and contribution to the defence of peace and democracy in Asia and in the world.

With affection and determination to win.

December 19, 1953

THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE,
AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

LETTER

TO THE TRAINING COURSE FOR CADRES IN CHARGE OF *DAN CONG*

On the occasion of the anniversary of the nationwide Resistance War and the setting-up of the people's army, I have received your letter in which you resolutely promise to study hard so that you will actively lead the *dan cong* in the fulfilment of their task.

The scale of military operations grows with every passing day. So are the needs of the front. The guidance of the *dan cong* is a very great problem, in which the leadership of the cadres has a decisive role. That is why when carrying on their task all the cadres responsible for the *dan cong* must:

— Raise their spirit to endure hardships and overcome difficulties, and their determination to fulfil their task.

— Pay great attention to the *dan cong's* life, persistently educate and encourage them to overcome difficulties, ensure supplies for the army, and refrain from bureaucracy and commandism.

— Strictly abide by the policy of nationalities and discipline towards the masses.

Your task is very heavy and very glorious. Do your utmost to fulfil your promises in the letter of engagement.

Affectionately yours,

December 26, 1953

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

MESSAGE

TO UNIT XX ENTRUSTED WITH THE MISSION
TO GO DEEP INTO THE ENEMY'S REAR FOR
CO-ORDINATED ACTION IN SUPPORT
OF THE DIEN BIEN PHU CAMPAIGN

The High Command has been informed that you have overcome great hardships and privations to fulfil your task.

I affectionately send you my greetings.

Your task is very heavy. To fulfil it is to make a worthy contribution to the common success, and create good conditions to win new successes in time to come.

You must raise your determination to carry out your task, endure hardships and sufferings, and overcome all difficulties.

You must firmly keep discipline and secrecy, defend against air raids, and watch-spies.

You must protect your arms and ammunition.

You must show that a revolutionary army is invincible.

I wish you high spirits and good health to fulfill your task.

With affection and determination to win.

January 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

**LETTER ON THE OCCASION
OF THE LUNAR NEW YEAR**
(SPRING OF GIAP NGO — 1954)

Officers and men of the regular army, local forces, people's militia and guerillas throughout the country,

Today is the first day of the Lunar New Year Giap Ngo. While we are merrily reading the messages of the Party Central Committee, the Government, the Fatherland Front and President Ho Chi Minh, I affectionately send my wishes for a happy New Year to the officers and men of the regular army, local forces, people's militia and guerillas throughout the country.

I wish the wounded a prompt recovery to return to their units as soon as possible ;

I wish the factory and office workers of the national defence great successes in the emulation to increase labour efficiency to serve the army ;

I wish the *dan cong* on all fronts good health and strong ardour to overcome hardships and difficulties in order to ensure the supply of food and ammunition for the army to kill the enemy;

I also send my New Year greetings to the families of the wounded and martyrs, and to those of the officers and men on duty.

This New Year has come when our army is defeating the enemy on all the fronts in the country. On the North-West front Lai Chau has been liberated; during their withdrawal, the enemy effectives have been destroyed. The enemy's regular forces at Dien Bien Phu are isolated and driven to the defensive.

On the battlefield in the Red River delta, our army hammers continuously at the enemy's positions, annihilates his reinforcements, harasses his communication lines (roads and waterways), extends the guerilla zones and guerilla bases, deals heavy blows at the local forces and light infantry of the puppet army.

In Binh-Tri-Thien our troops are intensifying their activities.

In the Fifth Zone while the enemy attacks the south of our free zone our army has launched successful attacks on the north of Kontum, destroying many important enemy positions and liberating large territories.

In Nam Bo, guerilla warfare is in full swing: many enemy posts have been wiped out or forced to surrender, many guerilla zones and bases extended.

Recently the resistance war in the neighbouring countries — Laos and Cambodia — has also scored

great victories. The Laotian Liberation Army has destroyed the enemy on Road № 12, liberated the greatest part of Thakhek province, cut off Road № 9, and liberated the north of Savannakhet province.

In Cambodia, guerilla warfare is developing, particularly in South-West.

The enemy has suffered defeat after defeat in his new military scheme. He has thought of concentrating his armed forces in the highest degree to "pacify" his rear, strike at the free zone, and win back the initiative. But at present his regular army is forced to scatter on many fronts: at Dien Bien Phu, Seno, and in the untimely attack on the south of Trung Bo.

To be obliged to scatter his armed forces is the greatest failure of the enemy, which will account for many other setbacks.

In the past year the enemy lost over 90,000 men. It will lose more. Confronted with these defeats, the French and U.S. imperialists will certainly strive to save the situation. We are not subjective and do not underestimate the enemy, but we are sure that in the new year we will certainly score greater successes.

The Lunar New Year festival has come when in our rear the people are elated at the news of victories, and are actively participating in the mass agitation for land reform; when our people and army are warmly observing the Vietnam-China-Soviet Union Month of Friendship; when the movement of struggle of the French people against the war of aggression in Vietnam is rising, and when the world movement for peace and democracy is giving us increasing support.

Enjoying the festive hours of a Tet of victory, we are all the more confident in the clear-sighted leadership of the Party Central Committee, Government and President Ho Chi Minh, we are all the more grateful to our people who have devotedly helped the army, and to the peace-loving peoples all over the world, headed by the Soviet Union, who have whole-heartedly supported us.

The Tet has come just when most of us are fighting the enemy on the front-line. To celebrate the Tet of victory all officers and men, all units, all arms, all fronts must :

— Energetically wipe out the enemy, and closely combine their action.

— Emulate with one another to perform feats of arms, and fight unremittingly,

— Do your best to win the banner “Determined to fight and to win” of President Ho Chi Minh,

— Make this spring a spring of glorious victory.

*The First Day of the Lunar
New Year Giap Ngo*

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY
General VO NGUYEN GIAP

CONGRATULATORY TELEGRAM

TO ALL OFFICERS, SOLDIERS AND *DAN CONG* IN THE FIFTH ZONE

In the name of the High Command, I

— Congratulate the officers and men on the Kontum front who have overcome hardships and difficulties, fought heroically, destroyed a great number of enemy troops, and liberated the town and the province of Kontum.

— Congratulate the officers and men in Tuy Hoa and the enemy's rear in the Fifth Zone who have fought, harassed and wiped out a great contingent of enemy troops, and protected the lives and property of the population.

— Congratulate the officers and men of the free zone who have studied hard, made active preparations to defend our rear and foil all the enemy's schemes.

In the name of the army, I thank all our compatriots of the national minorities who have devotedly supported the army to defeat the enemy.

The Kontum victory is our first great success on the Southern battlefield. It is one of our important successes on all the fronts this spring. It is a heavy blow dealt at the enemy's scheme on the Southern front, particularly when he is bogged down in Tuy Hoa. Victorious, you must not be subjective and underestimate the enemy, but endeavour to consolidate the liberated zone, strengthen and develop your successes, emulate with the brother units on other fronts to destroy more enemies, and win the reward promised by President Ho Chi Minh.

With affection and determination to win.

December 2, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

TALK
WITH THE ARTILLERY AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT
UNITS

On the occasion of the New Year's Day, I come to see you, and wish you all good health and many successes.

Please convey my affectionate greetings for a Happy New Year to all other comrades.

Of late, on the instructions from above, you fulfilled the tasks of marching to the front and hauling the artillery to positions and at regroupment places.

These tasks are regarded as combat tasks as they had to be carried out in hard conditions.

The fulfilment of these tasks is a success. I convey my congratulations to you all.

In carrying out our tasks, we have learned some great lessons.

First, we firmly kept our determination, fought valiantly and overcame all hardships and difficulties.

The tasks you just fulfilled were very heavy and difficult. Though living far from the battlefields for a long time and lacking fighting experiences, you firmly

maintained your determination, brought into play the valiant combativeness of revolutionary soldiers to overcome all difficulties and hardships in order to fulfil your tasks. Only revolutionary soldiers as we are could fulfil such tasks. This has shown the huge forces and inexhaustible possibilities of our army. You should clearly realize this to raise your confidence.

Second, the infantry, sappers, and artillery units closely co-ordinated with one another in a spirit of solidarity. Though having not yet many experiences in co-ordinating their actions, of late various arms united and co-operated with one another very closely, hence they could fulfil their tasks.

The close co-operation between various arms in the past as in the future will help our army win many successes.

Third, you strictly carried out the instructions from the upper levels.

Of late, while carrying out the instructions from the upper levels, you met with difficulties and hardships. But, confident in your upper levels, you strictly carried out those instructions, hence your successes.

To help you build up various arms, and acquire a good combative style in order to fulfil the glorious tasks to come, I remind you the following points :

First, you should fight valiantly, and actively destroy the enemy.

You should not get worried on account of the enemy air force and artillery and should not flinch in face of difficulties and hardships.

Valiantly to fight, and actively to destroy the enemy is the concrete expression of our thorough-going revolutionary spirit and of our standpoint of fighting for our nation and class.

In the time to come, you should develop in the highest degree your combativeness, put out of action as many enemy effectives as possible, and make them fear our artillery and anti-aircraft guns.

Second, you should strictly carry out the instructions from the upper levels.

You should carry out the instructions from the upper levels thoroughly, urgently, unhesitatingly, and unwaveringly. Only by so doing can we unify our will and action, and not let slip the opportunities of destroying the enemy.

Valiantly to fight and thoroughly to carry out the instructions from the upper levels are two fundamental points in the combative style of our troops.

Of late, you strictly carried out the instructions from the upper levels and as a result you scored successes, that was good. However, a number of comrades hesitated before difficulties, did not yet carry out the instructions thoroughly, seriously, promptly, these comrades must get rid of their shortcomings and must make progress.

Third, you should closely co-ordinate with the infantry.

The task of artillery and anti-aircraft units is to co-ordinate with infantry to achieve the task of destroying the enemy.

Therefore, in all circumstances, you should endeavour to overcome difficulties, and very closely co-ordinate with infantry.

Fourth, you should do your utmost in studying technique, in learning to be good shots.

You should raise your technical level, actively compete with your brother units in good shooting, bringing down many enemy aircraft and destroying artillery, stores, and solid fortifications.

In previous campaigns like in the last few days, the enemy daily fired aimlessly thousands of cannon shells, but in vain. Such a firing is a waste of munitions and a disclosure of one's position. We are quite different. Every time we fire, our firing must touch our targets in such a way that the next time, the enemy will fear our artillery and anti-aircraft guns.

Fifth, you should protect your weapons, and save munitions. Your weapons must be used to destroy our enemy.

You should protect these weapons like you do your own lives.

Of late, you highlighted the slogan "Better to sacrifice ourselves than to let our cannons be destroyed," and many comrades acted up to the slogan. From now on, you should develop this good point.

Sixth, the officers must always identify themselves with the fighters, sharing their happiness as well as their hardships and setting good examples for them.

Recently, in carrying out your tasks, many officers were close to their men, giving them help, and worked

with them in the hauling of cannons. This was good. **However** some of them did not yet love their men as they should do, abandoning their positions in face of difficulties, or if they went together with their men, they yelled reproaches and show themselves irritated. These comrades did not fulfil their tasks as officers. They must make good their shortcomings and must make progress.

To continue our preparations for the campaign, you should carry out the following tasks:

First, you should build very strong artillery positions.

Our fortifications must be thick and firm enough to stand the enemy shelling. Besides fighting you should work against time in reinforcing our fortifications. To make them one centimetre thicker is to create more favourable conditions to defeat the enemy.

You should build many sham positions to sidetrack the enemy, disperse his fire-power and make him waste weapons and munitions.

Second, you should review the recent artillery hauling.

The recent artillery hauling was the first big test experienced by our units. Through this test, all of you have made progress, at the same time you also showed your weak points and shortcomings. You should develop the spirit of criticism and self-criticism in the review in order to learn from experiences and make further progress.

c) Third, it is about the reorganization of the units. You should firmly maintain the combative forces of the troops.

The officers should be more concerned with the problems of food and rest of their men.

You should improve cooking so that food and drink be sufficient and served hot.

You should work out a rational time-table for inner life and for work so that the fighters may have enough time to sleep.

You should have the huts built carefully, avoiding dampness and cold wind so that the fighters may be warm.

You should intensify the prophylactic measures, the discipline of keeping secrets, the anti-aircraft defence, and the vigilance with regard to spies and traitors in order to improve the health conditions of the troops and not to suffer casualties when not fighting.

Today, I come to see you and remind you these things.

I wish you all high spirits, good health and great successes.

February 7, 1954

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE
TO THE UNITS WHICH HAVE DESTROYED
THE ENEMY AIRCRAFT ON GIA LAM
AND CAT BI AIRFIELDS

The High Command solemnly mentions in despatches your feats of arms for the whole of the Vietnam People's Army to know, and sends its warm congratulations to all the officers and men who have been brilliantly victorious in the two valiant attacks upon Gia Lam and Cat Bi airfields on the nights of March 4 and 6, 1954, destroying enemy aircraft and many of his munition stores, thus causing him very heavy losses.

This is a great military feat, one of the most heroic and glorious combats, the biggest destruction raid ever scored in the annals of our army, directly attacking the enemy's military centres lying close to Hanoi and Haiphong. These two attacks destroyed an important part of the enemy air force, including essentially bombers and transport planes supplied to French imperialism by American imperialism, thus

exerting a great influence on the activities and supply of the enemy air force, and creating favourable conditions for our many victories to come on the fronts throughout the country. These two attacks have thrown the enemy into a panic, and greatly inspired our army and people.

Your unparalleled heroism is worthy to be highlighted for all officers and men in the whole army to learn from.

I wish that you will make further efforts, not indulge yourselves in subjectivism, not underestimate the enemy, make a review to draw experiences, fight unremittingly and score further outstanding feats of arms.

With affection and determination to win.

March 8, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

**ORDER OF ENCOURAGEMENT
TO ALL OFFICERS AND MEN,
ALL UNITS,
ALL ARMS,

TO START A GREAT OFFENSIVE
UPON THE DIEN BIEN PHU FORTIFIED
ENTRENCHED CAMP**

Officers and men,

The Dien Bien Phu campaign shall begin.

This is the biggest siege campaign ever known in the annals of our army.

For these last three months since the enemy parachuted his forces on Dien Bien Phu, our troops have encircled and pinned them down there, thus creating conditions for us to defeat him unremittingly on all fronts throughout the country.

Lai Chau has been liberated, at the Nam Hu River front-line the enemy has been smashed, at Phong Sa Ly he has been also swept away. The Dien Bien Phu

fortified entrenched camp has become completely isolated, standing all alone in the midst of our immense rear.

The time has struck for our regular forces to launch an offensive upon Dien Bien Phu.

Our victory at Dien Bien Phu shall mean the destruction of the bulk of the enemy effectives, the liberation of the whole North-West, the expansion and consolidation of the immense rear of the resistance war, and a contribution to the successes of land reform.

Our victory at Dien Bien Phu shall mean the stride forward of our heroic people's army, and a very important victory of our resistance war.

Our victory at Dien Bien Phu shall mean the smashing of Navarre's plan which is suffering heavy failures, a telling blow dealt at the French and American imperialists' plot of expanding war. Our victory at Dien Bien Phu shall exert a resounding influence throughout the country and abroad, and shall be a worthy contribution to the world peace movement which is demanding an end to the war in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, especially at this time when the French government in face of its continuous failures, has begun to speak of negotiations in order peacefully to solve the problem of war in Indo-China.

In accordance with the order from the Party Central Committee, the Government and President Ho Chi Minh,

While our troops, in co-ordination with your action, are endeavouring to kill the enemy on all fronts throughout the country,

I call on all the officers and men, all units, and all arms on the Dien Bien Phu front,

To realize the honour of participating in this historic campaign,

To have a lofty determination to kill the enemy,

To firmly keep the principle of "striking surely and advancing cautiously",

To brave all hardships,

To overcome all difficulties,

To co-ordinate closely your actions,

To fight unremittingly,

To destroy the whole of the enemy at Dien Bien Phu and win a great victory for the campaign.

The combat hour has struck!

All officers and men, all units, all arms, valiantly advance forward, compete with one another in scoring brilliant feats of arms to win the "Determined to Fight and to win" banner awarded by President Ho Chi Minh.

March, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

FIVE RULES OF THE DISCIPLINE
IN FORCE ON THE FRONT DURING
THE DIEN BIEN PHU CAMPAIGN

To crystallize the determination of President Ho Chi Minh, the Party Central Committee and the Government,

To guarantee the thorough implementation of the combat instructions of the High Command.

To help all arms — infantry, artillery, sappers develop in the highest degree their valiant combativeness and the effectiveness of their technique,

To help all officers and men clearly realize their responsibility before the whole army in the great combat to come,

To win complete victory for the campaign,

The High Command takes the decision to issue the following five rules to be strictly observed by all officers and men on the front :

1) Any officer, any man, any unit who firmly maintains his determination in all circumstances, especially in urgent and hard circumstances,

thoroughly implements the instructions from above, fights valiantly, destroys many enemy soldiers, captures many P.O.W's, seizes many weapons, brings down many aircraft, etc. shall be rewarded.

Any man, any unit who wavers, does not thoroughly implement the instructions, flinches before the enemy, hesitates before difficulties, finds pretexts to shun his tasks, shall be punished.

2) Any officer, any man, any unit who correctly abides by the discipline concerning the keeping of secrets, the anti-aircraft defence, the vigilance against spies and traitors, especially during the march or the camping near the enemy, who does not let out the secrets of the operational plan and of the action of our troops, shall be rewarded.

Any man, any unit who shows a lack of vigilance, who does not strictly abide by the discipline concerning the keeping of secrets, the anti-aircraft defence, the vigilance against spies and traitors, who let out the secrets of the operational plan and of the action of our troops, who let out the secrets concerning the direction of the march and the camping position of our troops, thus causing losses to our troops and exerting a bad influence on the victory of the campaign, shall be punished.

3) Any officer, any man, any unit who correctly abides by the discipline concerning the time and the close co-ordination with other units, between infantry and artillery, between infantry and infantry, etc., who fulfils the combat tasks, shall be rewarded.

Any man, any unit who does not correctly abide by discipline concerning the time and the close co-ordi-

nation with friendly units, thus impeding himself from fulfilling his tasks and causing losses and difficulties to friendly units, shall be punished.

4) Any officer, any man who, in circumstances of hard fighting with heavy casualties, remains actively diligent, rapidly reorganizes his unit to fight unremittingly, firmly grasps the opportunity to put out of action many enemies, shall be rewarded.

Any man, any unit who is not diligent, who shows indolence and weariness, who does not pay attention to the reorganization of his unit, thus letting slip the good opportunities, who does not fight unremittingly and does not fulfil his task, shall be punished.

5) Any officer, any man, any unit who correctly implements the policy concerning the wounded and the dead, the policy concerning war booties, and the policy concerning the P.O.W's and the surrenderers, shall be rewarded.

Any man, any unit who does not correctly implement the policy concerning the wounded and the dead, who destroys or wastefully utilizes war booties, kills or tortures the P.O. W's and the surrenderers, shall be punished.

March, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

ORDER OF ENCOURAGEMENT

TO ALL OFFICERS AND MEN ON VARIOUS
FRONTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO
CO-ORDINATE THEIR ACTION WITH
THE DIEN BIEN PHU CAMPAIGN

Officers and men on various fronts throughout the country!

Over the past three months our troops have encircled the enemy main forces in Dien Bien Phu, like we have encircled them in Hoa Binh. At the same time, on all fronts throughout the country we took advantage of the exposure of the enemy to speed up guerilla warfare, and we won many successes.

On March 13, our troops attacked the outskirts of Dien Bien Phu. They continue encircling and pinning down the enemy there. At present he is concentrating his air force and makes preparations to transfer more reinforcements to Dien Bien Phu.

Our units on all fronts have the same task of intensifying their activities, destroying the enemy's effectives, attacking his important roads and water-

ways, and exposed central points, thus paving the way to the smashing of the military plan of French and American imperialisms.

Our guiding principles are :

Actively to keep the initiative,

To launch small combats with certain successes,

To fight unremittingly,

To co-ordinate with all fronts throughout the country.

March 13, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

CONGRATULATORY LETTER
TO THE UNITS VICTORIOUS
IN THE TWO COMBATS AT HIM LAM
AND DOC LAP HILLS

I solemnly send my congratulations to all the officers and men of various units and arms who highlighted their valiant combativeness and close co-ordination during the nights of 13 and 14 of March 1954 in the annihilation of Him Lam and Doc Lap hills which had been the most fortified outposts of the enemy, destroying two-thirds of the Northern sub-sector of the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp, completely put out of action two enemy picked European-African battalions, bringing down and destroying many enemy aircraft, thus causing him heavy losses.

The two attacks annihilating Him Lam and Doc Lap positions were two biggest siege attacks ever known in the annals of our army. These were the first offensive attacks upon the enemy fortified entrenched camp. These were the first offensive attacks with the co-ordination of artillery and anti-aircraft units. These

victories have marked the obvious growth of our army and laid good bases for the forthcoming victories. You should learn from the experiences drawn from the recent combats and should not be subjective and should not underestimate the enemy. The enemy is doing his utmost to reinforce Dien Bien Phu, you should actively consolidate and develop your victories, continue encircling the enemy in Dien Bien Phu, create favourable conditions for our troops on all fronts throughout the country to destroy as many enemy effectives as possible, thus smashing the military scheme of French and American imperialisms.

With affection and determination to win.

March 15, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

MESSAGE

CALLING ON THE TROOPS TO BUILD OFFENSIVE AND ENCIRCLEMENT POSITIONS ON THE DIEN BIEN PHU FRONT

Officers and men, fighters on the Dien Bien Phu front!

In the first fighting phase of this historic campaign, we have gained great victories and the enemy has suffered great losses. All of you have known this.

The Party Central Committee has sent a letter to congratulate you, emphasizing that this is a historic campaign, and reminded that you shall fight persistently and perseveringly and shall not be subjective and shall not underestimate the enemy.

The Army Party Committee has also praised you.

At first the enemy tried to hush up the public opinion on the reality, but now he can do it no longer. He has said, "If the flag of the Democratic Republic

of Vietnam fly over the Dien Bien Phu fortifications, the situation of Indo-China will undergo great changes influencing the whole of South-East Asia”.

He fears that if France loses the battle, she will be in a disadvantageous position at the Geneva Conference.

The day before last, the reactionary ruling circles in France observed five minutes' silence to encourage their troops at Dien Bien Phu. What wretchedness !

All the big French papers have frontpaged the news of the Dien Bien Phu battle. *L'Humanité*, organ of the French Communist Party, has warmly acclaimed the victory of our army.

I have told you these news so that you may better value the honour of participating in this historic campaign, not be subjective and not underestimate the enemy, and have greater confidence and make greater efforts, and be imbued with the *principle of striking surely, advancing cautiously and fighting unremittingly*.

Today, I want to talk with you about some problems of ideology and tactical principles. I will speak in simple terms ; try to listen to me and you will understand what I say. I will say nothing difficult.

At present we have won great victories, the enemy has suffered heavy defeats, but he is still powerful. Our superiority in effectives and fire-power has increased, but it is not yet an absolute superiority. Therefore, we have to strike surely and advance cautiously.

In what respects is the enemy still strong !

He is still strong because *his effectives are still nearly ten thousand strong*. Though his morale has flagged, and the difficulties he has met with are incalculable, we must not underestimate him. If we underestimate the enemy we shall be defeated.

The enemy is still strong on the three following points :

First, he can still *parachute supplies*. We have controlled his airfields but have not yet completely cut his supply line.

Second, he can still *parachute reinforcements*. We have controlled his airfields but cannot yet completely cut his reinforcement line.

Third, *his artillery has been still very active, his air force will be even more active*. Our artillery and anti-aircraft guns can curb the activities of the enemy artillery and air force only to some extent.

In this situation, are you willing to overcome those three strong points of the enemy ? I am reported that you are burning with the hatred for the enemy artillery and aircrafts, and are very angry when seeing that he could still parachute supplies and troops. Thus all of you want to deprive the enemy of his three aforesaid assets.

What shall we do to attain that important goal ?

After completing the positions of attack and encirclement and realizing the greater part of the aim of gradually depriving the enemy of the three aforesaid assets, what shall we do ? Now you shall pool your

efforts to complete the building of positions. Next time, I shall tell you what you must do afterwards.

I am reported that you have spent many days on end building positions between combats and some of you are wearied.

But if we are wearied, we must remember that the enemy within the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp is in greater tension and more wearied than we are, his wounded have no shelters and no medicine, his fortifications have fallen in or shaken, his supplies are running short, and his casualties are increasing under our shelling.

Thus, shall we take rests so that the enemy may take rests too and reorganize his ranks, call for reinforcements, receive the supplies dropped by his air force, and bring into full play his artillery and air force, or shall we, being members of a People's Army and of the Vietnam Workers' Party, highlight the courage of enduring hardships, and overcome difficulties, getting ourselves a bit more wearied in order to make the enemy ten times more wearied and cause him ten times more difficulties? Which shall we choose between these two roads? I am sure that you unanimously answer that we shall develop our army's tradition of enduring hardships, overcoming difficulties, and fighting heroically in order continuously to build positions, and unremittingly to fight the enemy.

To say so does not mean that we do not attach importance to the health conditions of our fighters. On the contrary, officers shall attach the greatest importance to the health conditions of their men, and

soldiers shall take care of their own health and to that of their comrades-in-arms. Especially the cooks shall make efforts. Shelters on the front shall be good, they shall not be untidy. Rice and tea shall be served hot. The health service shall intensify the prophylactic measures. Officers at all levels shall control this work because it is the material basis for continuous fighting. This is a very important work.

I remind the officers and political commissars and instructors one more thing : to work out a very *detailed plan* for the building of positions and distribution of forces in order to spare time and efforts of their men. Especially they shall get themselves close to the fighters to encourage them, and supervise the building of positions. Recently, due to your superficial supervision, in many places they were built carelessly and as a result our casualties have increased.

I emphasize once more that the *officers at all levels shall in person supervise the building of positions*. This is a duty. Officers at any level who do not fulfil it shall be subject to disciplinary sanctions.

In short, *the immediate central task at the present time is to build positions of attack and encirclement at a rapid rate and according to norms ; at the same time we shall fight the enemy to wear him out and fulfil our task of building positions*.

To build positions is firmly to grasp the principle of "striking surely and advancing cautiously". We shall not fight, or we shall fight victoriously. To say "striking surely and advancing cautiously" does not mean that we shall not work against time. We must

actively *work against time*, because if we complete our positions one day sooner, we will increase difficulties for the enemy one day sooner, and create more conditions for our certain victory one day sooner. *To dig one more cubic metre of earth at this hour means actively to work for the victory of the campaign.*

As our present central task is to build positions, the General Political Department decided that the first criterion to win Uncle's "Determined to Fight and to Win" banner is the building of positions.

The building of positions is a combat task no less glorious than the attack upon the enemy to destroy him.

Have you understood clearly what I have said? I am certain that you have.

If there are some who do not yet understand clearly, the officers shall give them further explanations and their comrades shall help them.

Only by clearly understanding our tasks can we develop all our forces, and once we can develop our forces, we shall certainly fulfil our tasks.

Our troops are strong enough to haul our artillery over tens of kilometres along hilly roads, hack the jungle to build tens of kilometres of road, establish over one hundred kilometres of positions and destroy the enemy most fortified strongholds. It is certain that our forces shall *fulfil the task of building the offensive positions and encircling the enemy*, thus creating conditions to win complete victory for the campaign.

You all have your share of responsibility in this important task.

I shake hands with you and wish that you shall make further efforts.

With affection and determination to win

March 20, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

· TO THE UNITS OF THE REGULAR FORCES,
LOCAL FORCES, MILITIAMEN AND GUERILLAS
WHO WON VICTORIES ON ROAD № 5

The High Command sends warm congratulations to you who, after having successfully attacked many enemy trains last January and February, launched a powerful offensive in March on the enemy system of defence works on Road № 5, razing many enemy positions and watchtowers, destroying many enemy reinforcements, especially the destruction of several bridges and sections of railways, thus for many times cutting off the enemy most important strategic road on the Bac Bo front.

In your victorious attack upon Road № 5, an enemy vital communication line, you destroyed an important part of the enemy effectives, attracted his mobile troops, especially interrupted the transport of American munitions from Haiphong to Hanoi and to various fronts. Your action is a close co-ordination with that of our army on Dien Bien Phu and other fronts.

Together with the successful attacks on Gia-Lam and Cat Bi airfields, your victories on Road № 5 have highlighted the indomitable spirit of our army and people in the enemy's rear, at the same time brought out the failure of the enemy in his scheme of "pacifying" his rear in the Red River delta. Despite the unevenness in size, tactics and technique, your combativeness is no less valiant than the determination to fight and to win of our officers and men on the Dien Bien Phu front.

You should do your utmost to consolidate and develop your victories, speed up guerilla warfare, actively help the people fight the enemy, prevent yourselves from subjectivism and underestimation of the enemy, and continue to co-ordinate closely with our army's encirclement of Dien Bien Phu.

I wish you further victories.

With affection and determination to win.

March 23, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

LETTER

TO OFFICERS AND MEN BEFORE THE WAVE OF ATTACK ON THE EAST SECTOR OF THE DIEN BIEN PHU FORTIFIED ENTRENCHED CAMP

Comrades,

1. Last day I wrote to you about the building of positions for attack and encirclement, and promised to you that when the work is nearing completion, I would tell you what to do next to win a new victory for the campaign.

Today our positions are on the main ready. That is a huge work indeed. It has enabled us to tighten our encirclement and limit the enemy's reinforcements and supply. Moreover, they have brought the central sector of the enemy under the range of our mortars, and covered the movement of our troops in their assault against him. They have almost annulled the effect of the enemy's air raids. They will help us score new successes.

2. Today I inform you about a most important news : our High Command has decided to launch a big attack on the enemy at Dien Bien Phu .

This operation has three aims :

First, to wipe out as many enemy effectives as possible in several successive engagements. To this end we must not only strike at many places at a time but also rush most valiant units deep into the enemy's positions to sow confusion and wipe out as many enemy effectives as possible along with a certain number of his C.P.

Second, to destroy and occupy part of the artillery positions of the enemy to deprive him of this support, then use it to shell him.

Third, to occupy such places as advantageous to us, hold and use them eventually to threaten the remaining enemies most efficiently.

I believe you are eager to take part in so important a fighting.

Does this attack mean a general assault ? Not yet, because the enemy still has a great force. However, this operation will exert a decisive effect in creating favourable conditions for a general assault.

3. Why has our High Command decided to start so important an onslaught ?

Because it reckoned that our troops had four conditions to win :

a) This time we have absolute superiority in effectives as well as in fire-power, especially as our mortars of all sizes can directly and immediately shell the central sector of the enemy.

b) We have fairly solid positions of attack and encirclement; therefore in this fighting our army keeps on following the principle to "strike surely and advance cautiously".

c) Our army which has scored successes in recent fightings and now in field work, is more experienced in dealing with a fortified entrenched camp than before, confident in the certain victory and determined to win it.

d) The morale of the besieged enemy is sinking daily as the number of wounded increases and the supply becomes difficult; after hoping in vain that his planes could bombard our artillery positions and strafe our troops he is now in a state of anxiety and confusion.

Those are the conditions for us to defeat the enemy.

4. However, undertaking a big offensive we are bound to encounter difficulties.

a) The first one is that some of you, having not clearly realized the situation of the enemy and ours, become subjective, underestimate the enemy, and pay undue attention to organizing the fighting, which can lead to failure. Others, having not yet grasped the importance of the coming assault, do not make all-out efforts and pay small heed to their task.

By overcoming those erroneous views you can win certainly.

b) The second difficulty is the organization of the fighting. When striking a position you must prepare for rapidly making a breach, keeping clear of your former mistakes. When pushing a thrust you must have well equipped and tidy troops with sufficient

explosive, small weapons and shock force. Besides, there are other difficulties in the organization of the fighting concerning the operations in day-time, the means of preventing block, the way to ensure good transmissions, etc. Those are concrete difficulties which officers and men have to overcome to win victory.

5. In brief, the coming attack is far greater than the previous ones. What is to be done to secure success?

Answer :

The only requirement is that all officers and men must be imbued with the determination of the High Command, behave resolutely and valiantly, strike rapidly, settle rapidly, attack fiercely and not let slip any opportunity to wipe out the enemy. Should one fall, another will take his place, officers and Party members must set good examples to the entire army, each man must set a good example when assaulting the enemy, everyone must show a strong mettle, not be afraid of difficulties or casualties, strike terror into the enemy's heart at the sight of our troops. All of you must have such a determination, and emulate to raise aloft President Ho Chi Minh's banner "Determined to fight and to win".

Comrades,

Once this attack won, we shall inflict most heavy losses upon the enemy, creating the required conditions to wipe out the whole enemy force at Dien Bien Phu.

Once this attack won, our army will make a step forward from destroying an enemy battalion in a siege battle to putting out of action several battalions in a battle.

This is a great trial for both officers and men.

Our entire army on all fronts, our compatriots throughout the country are longing for the news of this victory.

Our Party Central Committee and President Ho Chi Minh are waiting for the news of this victory.

All men, all units, all arms must enhance their determination, and fulfil at any cost this glorious coming task.

I wish you many shining deeds !

Shaking hands with you warmly before you go to the battle.

With affection and determination to win.

March 29, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

LETTER

CALLING ON THE DIEN BIEN PHU FIGHTERS TO PUSH AHEAD THE EMULATION DRIVE TO SNIPE THE ENEMY

Rifle-shooters,
Machine-gunners,
Mortar-gunners,
Artillerymen,

After our great victories at Dien Bien Phu, our positions of encirclement have reached the enemy's central sector.

This sector is now within the range of all our pieces of artillery.

To wear out, exhaust and kill the enemy as much as possible,

To keep him in constant fear and strain, spoil his appetite and trouble his sleep and subject him to an imminent death,

To create conditions for our troops to win greater successes, eventually to wipe out the whole enemy force at Dien Bien Phu,

I call on,
All rifle-shooters,
Machine-gunners,
Mortar-gunners,
Artillerymen,

Highly to promote their ardour to kill the enemy,
actively to emulate in sniping him at Dien Bien Phu.

To kill one enemy with one bullet,

To display patience allied to zeal, accurately to
aim at the enemy, and to hit the mark for every shot.

Who will be the best rifle-shot on the Dien Bien
Phu front?

Who will be the best machine-gunner, the best
mortar-gunner, the best artilleryman on the Dien
Bien Phu front?

The High Command is waiting for your exploits
to congratulate and reward you and your units.

With affection and determination to win.

April 22, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

LETTER
TO ALL *DAN CONG* ROAD-MENDERS

Our historic campaign has scored great victory. The enemy is facing countless difficulties, but he still offers a stiff resistance.

His scheme is actively to destroy our communication lines with a view to causing us difficulties of supply, especially in the coming rainy season.

Therefore your task is most heavy and important. It requires a valiant sacrificing spirit, a persevering abnegation like the fighters' ardour to kill the enemy at the front.

I hope that you will strive to emulate in ensuring safe roads, thus providing sufficient food, weapons and ammunition for our troops to kill the enemy and contributing to the great victory of this historic campaign.

With affection and determination to win.

April 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY
General VO NGUYEN GIAP

LETTER

TO THE WOUNDED AND THE SICK ON THE DIEN BIEN PHU BATTLEFRONT

I am glad to inform you that on May 7, our heroic people's army destroyed the whole enemy force at Dien Bien Phu, including 21 battalions of crack troops totalling 16,200 officers and men, thus liberating the entire North-West.

With the complete victory at Dien Bien Phu, we have materialized the determination of the Party Central Committee, the Government and President Ho Chi Minh, and created favourable conditions for our army and people to win greater victories. By wiping out the enemy at Dien Bien Phu, we have backed in a realistic and efficient way, the peasants' struggle for land and the diplomatic struggle of our Government delegation at the Geneva Conference.

This glorious victory is due to the clear-sighted leadership of the Party Central Committee, the Government and President Ho Chi Minh, to our

people's support to the front, and for an important part to the spirit of valiant fighting and the endurance of hardships of our people's army. Throughout the campaign, you have set many examples of a revolutionary people's army, shown yourselves most worthy of being the best sons in defence of the Fatherland, the fighters of world peace and democracy.

Uncle Ho sends you his greetings and congratulations.

Comrades,

The Franco-American imperialists heavily defeated were forced to discuss about a peaceful settlement for the Indo-China issue at the Geneva Conference, but they most perfidiously schemed to sabotage the Conference and continue extending their aggressive war against our country. We must enhance our vigilance to the utmost, constantly bearing in mind Uncle's teaching: "This victory is big, but it is only the beginning... A struggle, whether military or diplomatic, must be long and hard, before complete victory can be achieved". We must be ready to foil the enemy's new plots and deal him heavier blows.

Comrades,

While our army celebrates its victory and enthusiastically prepares itself to promote it, you have to stay in hospital for treatment. You rejoice at the victory and at your own feats, but you cannot restrain your impatience for a prompt recovery to return to your

units and carry on your assignments. This spirit is worthy of merit. I hope you will show patience in your treatment and wish you prompt recovery to carry on the fighting and score new feats.

With affection and determination to win.

May 11, 1954

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

LETTER

TO THE COMPATRIOTS IN THE NORTH-WEST

The Dien Bien Phu campaign has ended in a great victory. The valiant Vietnam People's Army has put out of action over 16,000 enemies, the North-West has been completely liberated.

On behalf of all officers and men of the Vietnam People's Army I convey my congratulations to the entire North-West people and my thanks to all of you who have done your utmost in supplying food to our troops, serving as *dan cong*, sending letters and gifts to our army and looking after our wounded and patients.

I wish all of you good health and good courage to put into practice our President Ho Chi Minh's teaching: let all nationalities unite with one another and help mutually as brothers of a family, maintain order and strive to increase production for every one to enjoy security and welfare, voluntarily enlist in the

army and guerilla organization to liquidate the pirates and traitors, protect their villages and oppose the enemy's new schemes.

I wish the entire North-West people many new successes.

May 15, 1954

THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE
AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY
General VO NGUYEN GIAP

COMMUNIQUE
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY HIGH
COMMAND

The great campaign launched by our army at Dien Bien Phu officially began on March 13, 1954 with the first assault on the outposts of the entrenched camp. The enemy's effectives then included 12 battalions of infantry and paratroops, three battalions of artillery and heavy mortars. Our successive and victorious attacks have compelled the enemy to send as reinforcements five battalions of crack paratroops along with other specialized units, which has brought his effectives to 21 battalions and 10 companies. The enemy has built a vast fortified entrenched camp, more solid than that at Na San, comprising many clusters of small posts, in all 49 posts on an area 12 kms long by 6 kms wide with two big airfields for heavy planes.

From March 13, 1954 when our attack began until May 6 when our final assault was launched, our offensive against Dien Bien Phu was undertaken unremittingly and fiercely during 55 days and nights. On May 7, at 10 p.m. our army destroyed the entire enemy force at Dien Bien Phu. The historic campaign of Dien Bien Phu has scored complete victory.

According to preliminary estimates, our army has put out of action 17 battalions of infantry and paratroops, three battalions of artillery and heavy mortars, and annihilated all the units of motorized vehicles, air force, sappers and transport, etc. The list of enemy casualties included over 21 battalions of infantry and paratroops, 10 puppet companies, in all 16,200 men completely put out of action.

a) Below are the names of the enemy units destroyed :

1. Airborne brigade № 2 comprising seven battalions :

— Battalion of colonial paratroopers № 1, battalion of legion paratroopers № 1, battalion of colonial paratroopers № 2, battalion of legion paratroopers № 2, battalion of colonial paratroopers № 6, battalion of colonial paratroopers № 8, battalion of puppet paratroopers № 5.

2. Mobile brigade № 9 comprising six infantry battalions :

— Battalion № 1 of the semi-brigade of legionaries № 12, battalion № 3 of the semi-brigade of legionaries № 13, battalion № 1 of the regiment of legionaries № 2, battalion № 3 of the regiment of North Africans

(Algerians) № 3, battalion № 1 of the regiment of North Africans (Moroccans) № 4, battalion of puppet Thais № 2.

3. Mobile brigade № 6 comprising four infantry battalions :

— Battalion № 3 of the regiment of legionaries № 3, battalion № 2 of the regiment of North Africans (Algerians) № 1, battalion № 5 of the regiment of North Africans (Algerians) № 7, battalion of puppet Thais № 3.

4. Two battalions and a company of 155 mm. and 105 mm. guns and one battalion of 120 mm. heavy mortars totalling 48 pieces belonging to the regiment of colonial artillery № 4.

5. Two sections of anti-aircraft defence with 12.7 mm. batteries.

6. One battalion of engineers, one company of motorized units with ten 18-ton tanks, one transport company with 120 vehicles.

7. The Dien Bien Phu air base including a permanent air force formation of five reconnaissance planes, seven fighter planes, four transport planes and one helicopter, and a body in charge of the air force.

8. The staff and bodies attached to it in charge of information, liaison, logistics, medical service, military police, repair of vehicles, etc.

9. 10 companies of puppet Thai (for replenishment).

Moreover there were infantry units belonging to mobile brigades in the Red River delta mustered by

the enemy and dropped on Dien Bien Phu to replenish the decimated units. They were called "volunteer paratroops for reinforcement" of Dien Bien Phu.

b) The list of enemies killed or taken prisoner included :

— The whole high command of the enemy at Dien Bien Phu.

— The whole staffs of the subsectors South, North and Central.

— The staffs of the three mobile brigades and all the commands of battalions of infantry and other arms.

The high officers known so far comprised :

— Brigadier General De Castries, commander of the North-West military zone and commander of Dien Bien Phu, captured alive.

— 16 colonels killed or taken prisoner among them :

Colonel Trancart, first assistant commander in charge of the North-West affairs,

Colonel Gaucher, second assistant commander, of mobile brigade № 9,

Colonel Langlais, third assistant commander and commander of mobile brigade of paratroops № 2,

Colonel Piroth, fourth assistant commander and commander of the artillery,

Colonel Allieu, commander of the South subsector and commander of mobile brigade № 6,

Colonel Guth, chief of staff at Dien Bien Phu,

Colonel Ducruix replacing Guth (killed),

Colonel Guerin, commander of the air force at Dien Bien Phu,

Colonel Vaillant, commander of the artillery replacing Allieu,

Colonel Lemeunier, assistant commander of the central subsector,

Colonel Seguin Parzies, chief of staff replacing Ducruix, etc.

The officers killed or captured from second lieutenant up to major totalled 353, while the non-commissioned officers killed or captured numbered 1,396, in all 1,749.

There were 57 planes shot down and destroyed at the front and 5 others brought down on the way to the front, in all 62, including heavy bombers B. 24, bombers B. 26, transport planes C. 119 and fighters Handiver, all of them supplied by the U.S. to France.

Our army captured all the weapons and munitions, equipment and material in the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp (statistics are not yet available but the number of parachutes alone exceeds 30,000).

If the Dien Bien Phu campaign has ended in so great a victory, it is thanks to the clear-sighted leadership of President Ho Chi Minh, the Party Central Committee and the Government, to the unyielding and valiant fighting spirit, the endurance to hardships and the extraordinary maturity of all officers and men on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield, to the devotion of the people in the rear and the *dan cong* in serving

the front, and to the most effective co-ordination between the army and the people on all the battlefronts throughout the country. Dien Bien Phu is a very great victory, unprecedented in the annals of the struggle of the Vietnam People's Army.

May 8, 1954

(Excerpt from the Communiqué of the High Command)

ORDER OF THE DAY
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE DIEN BIEN PHU VICTORY

(Read at the review on May 13, 1954
in liberated Dien Bien Phu)

Officers and men of the infantry, artillery, anti-aircraft defence and engineers victorious on the Dien Bien Phu front,

Officers and men of the regular army, local troops, people's militiamen and guerillas on the battlefields throughout the country,

Today, in liberated Dien Bien Phu, I solemnly congratulate all officers and men on the battlefields throughout the country.

By order of the Government and President Ho Chi Minh, I solemnly mention in dispatches among the Vietnam People's Army the great exploit of the officers and men of the infantry, artillery, anti-aircraft defence and engineers who have won this brilliant victory of Dien Bien Phu.

I respectfully bow before the memory of the heroes who have sacrificed their lives for this historic victory of Dien Bien Phu.

Dien Bien Phu is a very great victory, unprecedented in the annals of the struggle of our army. We have destroyed over 16,000 picked troops of the enemy in his strongest fortified entrenched camp. We have liberated the whole North-West, extended and consolidated the vast rear of the resistance, and contributed to ensure the success of the land reform.

Together with the regular army, the local troops, the people's militiamen and the guerillas throughout the country, together with the Pathet Lao Liberation troops... we have foiled the Navarre plan, dealt a most heavy blow at the scheme of extending the war by the bellicose French colonialists and American interventionists.

With the Dien Bien Phu campaign our army has made a leap forward, from small-scale positional warfare destroying an enemy battalion to large-scale positional warfare wiping out over 21 enemy battalions. This maturity constitutes a solid base for our army to put out of action more enemy effectives and bring the resistance to more brilliant victories.

Our army has won a glorious victory at Dien Bien Phu thanks to the clear-sighted leadership of the Party Central Committee, the Government and President Ho Chi Minh.

Our army has won a glorious victory at Dien Bien Phu thanks to the valiant and tenacious fighting spirit, to the endurance of hardship and overcoming

of difficulties of all officers and men at Dien Bien Phu. This spirit must be further consolidated and strengthened.

Our army has won a glorious victory at Dien Bien Phu thanks to the devotion of the *dan cong* in serving the front, the compatriots in the North-West and in the rear. On behalf of the army I express my gratitude to the *dan cong* and compatriots as a whole.

Our army has won a glorious victory at Dien Bien Phu thanks to a most effective co-ordination between the regular army, the local troops, the people's militiamen and the guerilla, on the battlefields throughout the country. In the Red River delta, guerilla warfare has developed most powerfully, our army has many a time cut off road № 5, conducted successful raids on Gia Lam and Cat Bi airfields. In Binh Tri Thien we have been very active.

In the Fifth Zone, we have liberated Kontum, stroke deep in the enemy's rear, shattering his scheme of attacking our free zones. In Nam Bo guerilla warfare developed powerfully and scored many successes. I warmly congratulate all officers and men on various battlefields throughout the country.

Our army has recorded a glorious victory at Dien Bien Phu thanks to the close co-ordination of the Pathet Lao Liberation troops... On behalf of the Vietnam People's Army I wholeheartedly hail the spirit of solidarity in struggle of the Pathet Lao Liberation troops.

*

* . *

Today, celebrating this victory, on behalf of the Vietnam People's Army High Command, I order all officers and men on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield and all various battlefields throughout the country :

1. To realize the great significance of the Dien Bien Phu victory, at the same time to grasp the perfidious scheme of the bellicose French and American interventionists, absolutely to avoid subjectivism, self-complacency and underestimation of the enemy, to be vigilant and ready to smash every scheme of the enemy.

2. To strive and study the valuable experiences of the historic Dien Bien Phu victory, to develop to the utmost the fighting spirit full of dynamism, valiance, tenaciousness of the "Dien Bien Phu fighter" in order to raise the combativeness of our army and make it invincible.

3. To actively fight to consolidate and develop the victory of the Dien Bien Phu campaign, to consolidate and develop the achievements of the Winter-Spring victories, to win more brilliant victories.

I solemnly hand to all the victorious units the banner "Determined to fight and to win" that President Ho Chi Minh awards the officers and men at the Dien Bien Phu battlefield.

Under the banner "Determined to fight and to win" of President Ho Chi Minh,

For the sake of the independence of the Fatherland,
For the land to be distributed to the tillers,
For the sake of peace in Asia and the world,

Let all officers and men courageously march
forward!

With affection and determination to win,

Dien Bien Phu battlefield

May 13, 1954

FOR THE HIGH COMMAND
OF THE VIETNAM PEOPLE'S ARMY

General VO NGUYEN GIAP

ANSWER

TO AN INTERVIEW OF THE WEEKLY
REVOLUTION AFRICAINE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DIEN BIEN PHU VICTORY (May 1963)

QUESTION — *Could you, please, General, make known, what are the decisive factors of the Dien Bien Phu victory.*

ANSWER — The Dien Bien Phu battle is the greatest victory of our people and army during the war of liberation against the French imperialists and the American interventionists.

Among the decisive factors of this historic victory one must speak naturally of the factors belonging to military strategy and tactics.

Here I would like to stress that the most important, the most decisive factor of the historic Dien Bien Phu victory is the iron will, the very high fighting spirit of our people and army who, responding to the appeal

of the Party and President Ho Chi Minh, were resolute to muster all forces to wipe out at any cost the enemy's picked troops in the Dien Bien Phu entrenched camp.

Delving deeply into the matter we can say that the fundamental factor of the Dien Bien Phu victory is the same which led our long and arduous war of liberation to final victory.

This factor is the correct political and military line of the Vietnam Workers' Party. The party has rallied our entire people in a broad national united front, built up and educated the People's Army, correctly and skilfully led the people's war against aggressive imperialism, with the fundamental slogan; "National independence", "Land to the tillers", "Progress toward socialism". Another important factor of our victory is the wholehearted sympathy and support of the peace and freedom-loving people throughout the world, first of all the people of the socialist countries, those of France and the French colonies.

This sympathy and support have greatly encouraged us.

QUESTION — *Could you, please let us know the role of the population of the rear in the preparation and carrying out of the Dien Bien Phu campaign.*

ANSWER — The marvellous resistance of the Vietnamese people against the French colonialists and American interventionists with the Dien Bien Phu campaign as its apex, has taken the character of a just war, a people's war waged by the entire people in all fields.

Throughout the nine years of resistance never did the Vietnamese people contribute so much labour and effort to serve the front as in winter 1953-spring 1954, that is in the preparation and carrying out of the Dien Bien Phu campaign.

Acting up to the motto "All for the front, all for victory" and inspired by the achievements of land reform, hundreds of thousands of people — peasants for the overwhelming part — have enlisted as *dan cong*, footing thousands of kilometres, ensuring the supply of food and munitions, mending roads, looking after the wounded... of their own free will, the people have sent tens of thousands of tons of paddy and thousands of tons of foodstuffs to the army, mobilized vehicles, sampans and rafts to serve the front. The people in the enemy's rear and even those in the provisional occupied towns have also eagerly contributed paddy to the army, as well as everything needed by the front.

It is precisely the devotion and boundless courage of the population in the rear, resolute to serve the front, which have enabled us to solve a tricky problem considered by the enemy as insoluble: to supply the Dien Bien Phu battlefield and the other co-ordinated battlefields with foodstuffs and munitions, through long distances, on a very large scale, and under the fierce and continuous strafings and bombings of Franco-American aircraft. The contribution of the population in the rear to the Dien Bien Phu victory has been very great indeed.

QUESTION — *Could you, please, tell whether there was an important American aid to the French Expeditionary Corps during the Dien Bien Phu campaign?*

ANSWER — Since the first years of our patriotic resistance, the American imperialists had closely colluded with the French colonialists, supplied them with weapons, munitions, planes, gunboats to massacre the Vietnamese people.

After their rout from the Chinese mainland and their shameful defeat in Korea, the American imperialists stepped up their intervention in Vietnam, taking advantage of the difficulties facing the French to kick the latter out of Indo-China. In fact they had taken the command of the war in Indo-China since 1953, witness the Navarre Plan.

Since 1951 American aid and weapons poured into Indo-China had increased with every passing day.

From 119 million dollars in 1951, it rose to 800 million in 1954.

American weapons introduced in Indo-China averaged 6,000 tons monthly in 1952, rose to over 20,000 tons in 1953, and at times to nearly 100,000 tons in 1954, especially during the Dien Bien Phu campaign.

Ever since the day when the French colonialists dropped paratroops on Dien Bien Phu and began building the Dien Bien Phu fortified entrenched camp (11-1953) the American imperialists had established a number of airlifts to supply weapons and foodstuffs to the French, then sent aircraft carriers of the

Seventh Fleet to Bac Bo Gulf and despatched American pilots directly to man American planes flying French colours to massacre the Vietnamese people.

The realities of the aggressive war in Vietnam as well as in the Dien Bien Phu campaign have shown that for the French imperialists and colonialists this is a dirty war waged by the French soldiers and a contingent of other mercenaries with dollars and weaponry of the American imperialists.

QUESTION — *What are the main conclusions to be drawn from the results of the Dien Bien Phu battle?*

ANSWER — From the experience of the Vietnamese people's war for national liberation in general, especially of the Dien Bien Phu victory, I think we can draw the following conclusions :

a) Dien Bien Phu is not only a great victory of the Vietnamese people but also a great victory of progressive mankind, of all small and weak nations fighting against colonialism under every form and for independence and freedom, of the forces of socialism, democracy and peace the world over.

The Dien Bien Phu victory has proved that in the present world conjuncture a small and weak nation which has a correct line, rises up as one man, is resolved to fight for independence and democracy, against imperialism and colonialism under every form, and enjoys the sympathy and support of the world people, will surely win final victory.

b) In their emancipation struggle, in face of the acts of violence and war by the aggressive imperialists and colonialists the oppressed nations have no other way than a resolute political and military struggle by the people, a political and military violence of the entire people. The political and military struggle of the entire people, the people's war, the people's army, the National United Front of the entire people, such is our way to subsistence and victory.

c) We all know that Dien Bien Phu has paved the way for the conclusion of the Geneva Agreements in 1954 restoring peace in Indo-China and recognizing the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam and two other countries: Laos and Cambodia.

Therefore we can conclude that every negotiation with the imperialists must be backed by and go along with a resolute struggle under every form against all their perfidious schemes; it is only when the people's forces have grown in the struggle that the imperialists resign themselves to relinquish their privileges and interests and recognize our legitimate rights.

We can also conclude that by their heroic, long and hard resistance, by their great Dien Bien Phu victory, the Vietnamese people have struggled not only for the independence of their fatherland but also for the safeguard of peace in Vietnam and in South-East Asia, which is being seriously sabotaged by the American imperialists in the South of our country and in Laos.

d) For us, the Vietnamese people, we can draw an important and specific conclusion: if formerly the

Vietnamese people have defeated the French and American imperialists, particularly on the Dien Bien Phu battlefront, today in the just emancipation struggle of our compatriots in the South against the extremely barbarous undeclared war of the American imperialists and their stooges, the heroic Southern people will surely win final victory. The liberation of the South and the national reunification of the Vietnamese people will surely win victory.

e) Through their schemes of intervention and outright aggression, the American imperialists all the more unmask themselves as the cruel aggressors of the Vietnamese people, the international gendarmes, the most ferocious and dangerous enemies of the world people and the national liberation movement.

We are confident that, everywhere in the world, in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the U.S.-led imperialists, however perfidious and machiavellian they may be in their scheme of enslaving the peoples, will surely fail shamefully in the end. The emancipation struggle of the Asian-African and Latin American peoples will surely score brilliant victories.

QUESTION — *We propose you, General, to convey some words to the readers of Revolution Africaine, a weekly which unreservedly support the national liberation struggle of the African peoples.*

ANSWER — I am glad to convey to the readers of "Revolution Africaine", to all our friends in Africa, our most heartfelt greetings, our greetings of fraternal union and unshakable resolution in our great struggle

against colonialism under every form, for the independence and freedom of the African peoples as well as of the Asian and Latin American peoples, for genuine peace in the world, peace in national independence, freedom and happiness.

The African peoples always regard our victories, specially the Dien Bien Phu one as their own. I would like to express here our heartfelt thanks for your thorough support, formerly during our patriotic resistance as today in the peaceful socialist building in the North and the emancipation struggle of our compatriots in the South.

We wish you brilliant success in the struggle for a free Africa, free of any imperialism and colonialism under every form — old and new.

Printed in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

