

# **A Heroic P**eople

MEMOIRS FROM  
THE REVOLUTION

Second Edition

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A HEROIC PEOPLE

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*Memoirs from the Revolution*

(Second Edition)

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
HANOI — 1965



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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*In 1858 the French colonialists began to invade Vietnam. Due to the fierce resistance of the Vietnamese people, it was not until the end of the 19th century that the aggressors and their henchmen—the local feudalists—succeeded in establishing their domination over the whole country.*

*Throughout imperialist and feudal rule, the Vietnamese people waged an unceasing struggle against their oppressors.*

*However, all the uprisings attempted before 1930 though heroic failed due to lack of correct leadership.*

*From 1930, with the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party—that is the present Vietnam Lao Dong Party—the Vietnamese Revolution steered a right course. Thanks to a skilful application of Marxism-Leninism to the practical conditions obtaining in Vietnam, the Party brought into full play the heroic fighting spirit, the revolutionary thoroughness and the vast creative potentialities of the Vietnamese people.*

*Under the leadership of the Party, the Vietnamese people led the 1945 August Revolution to success, won the historic battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, thereby compelling the French colonialists to sign the Geneva Agreements which restored peace in Indo-China. Since then, they have steadfastly been building socialism in North Vietnam and continued their struggle for national reunification by peaceful means.*

*Early in 1960, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Party, some veteran revolutionaries told the story of their underground activities before the August Revolution.*

*In this booklet we introduce to the reader an extract from President Ho Chi Minh's Address to the Meeting for the study of the History of the Party, and some memoirs of several leaders of the Revolution during the underground period.*

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HANOI — VIETNAM

## OUR PARTY HAS STRUGGLED VERY HEROICALLY AND WON GLORIOUS VICTORIES

*Extract from President Ho Chi Minh's Address to the Meeting for the study of the History of the Party organized by the Central Bureau of Propaganda and Education.*

...Before our Party was founded, there had been in our country three Communist groups. In 1930 a meeting took place to discuss their merging. Enemy repression was then at its fiercest. The delegates had to leave secretly for Hong Kong. Feigning to attend a foot-ball match, we sat on the lawn and discussed. Finally it was agreed that the three groups should be amalgamated into a single Party, called the Indo-Chinese Communist Party.

Our Party was born in the midst of the French colonialists' fierce repression. Soon after its birth, it organized and led the most heroic Nghe-Tinh Soviet insurrection.

When it was twelve years old it organized the guerilla movement to fight the French and Japanese.

Fifteen years after it was set up, it organized and led to success the August Revolution.

From the age of seventeen, it led the Resistance War, which it brought to victory at twenty-four.

After the restoration of peace, our Party has led and organized our people to build socialism in the North, turning it into a base of the struggle for national reunification.

Thus within thirty years, our Party has led two revolutions, the national democratic revolution and the socialist revolution. What made our Party win such victories?

In the beginning, our Party members were very few and were often arrested and imprisoned by the French colonialists. But our Party constantly marched forward. When the August Revolution took place, there were about 5,000 Party members, including those in jail. Less than 5,000 Party members have thus organized and led the uprisings of 24 million fellow-countrymen over the country to victory.

How could our Party achieve such glorious successes? At that time, a revolutionary might carry out his work until the revolution triumphed, or be arrested, murdered. But his conviction that the Party would win final victory was unshakable, so when he was arrested he was immediately replaced by another, when he was killed, a hundred were ready to take over his task. Our Party members were strongly united, single-minded, and very close to the people. That is why, despite its small number, our Party has led the Revolution to victory.

Many Party members had exemplary conduct and revolutionary virtues. Comrade Minh Khai was twice condemned to death, and died very bravely. Comrades Tran Phu, Hoang Van Thu and many others have set examples of heroism.

Examples of heroism are also numerous in our Party members' activities. For instance, there were comrades who worked secretly in dug-outs for months, writing propaganda leaflets, translating books and newspapers. When they reappeared in the daylight, their eyesight was weakened. There were comrades who, tortured by the enemy, lost consciousness several times, but did not say a word...

Our cadres and Party members are human beings, made of flesh and blood, but their faith in the Party, in the working class and in the force of the collective, makes them fight with determination until their last breath.

There were also young heroes like Trong, Sau... and many other unknown heroes. That is why our Party became stronger and stronger.

In the Resistance War, there were in the ranks of our Party heroic comrades such as Phan Dinh Giot who blocked a loop-hole in the enemy fortress with his body so that our troops might advance, To Vinh Dien who threw himself under the wheels of a gun carriage to stop its rolling downhill, and many others who pursued the enemy on an empty stomach for two or three days. These heroes of the Party, of the people, are heroes of the collective, they were impregnated with the Party's revolutionary virtues. Only with revolutionary virtues can we lead the working class, organize and unite the masses to bring the Revolution and the Resistance War to victory.

At present, in building socialism, we have important and complex tasks to do. We have defeated the

French colonialists and the feudal class, but we still have to fight against other dangerous enemies. These are poverty, hunger, backwardness.

We have started with a backward agriculture, a low standard of living. We have to struggle so that everyone in our country has enough food and clothing, work and leisure time, and receives education.

We have favourable conditions to build socialism. Our country has 'forests of gold and seas of silver', our people are industrious. The brother countries are giving us aid. But there are also difficulties such as flood, drought, the low level of general education and technique.

In general, our cadres and Party members are good and loyal to the Revolution. If we struggle with determination we shall certainly overcome these difficulties. Of course, political consciousness is indispensable, a Party member must know of politics, must study politics. But general education and technique are necessary to handle the machines which are becoming more and more complex. We are still weak in this field. In the factories of the Soviet Union many workers have finished their tenth form. But how many among the cadres here have finished their tenth form? So we have to learn much, we must endeavour to learn. Otherwise, we shall not make progress. If we do not progress, we regress. As society progresses, there are more things to do, more complex machines. If we do not endeavour to study, we shall lag behind, and if we lag behind we shall be rejected, through our own fault.

Is it right? If it is, you must endeavour to raise your cultural and professional level.

In our Party not a few comrades are self-conceited, they are overbearing and self-satisfied with their many years of revolutionary activities. It is a good thing to have engaged for a long time in revolutionary work, but we must always be modest and endeavour to study to progress unceasingly. Society progresses unceasingly. To build socialism in the North, to make of it a base for the struggle to reunify the country, we must endeavour to study.

In our Party, many have set examples of bravery in face of danger and sacrifice, because they believe in the Party, in the Revolution, and in the future of the working class and of the Fatherland. At present, in the persistent struggle against the American imperialists and the Diem clique, our fellow-countrymen in the South are also displaying outstanding heroism.

In the North all the labour heroes and model workers, responding to the Party's appeal, have been toiling selflessly for the people and for the working class. They do not think of personal gains and losses. They enthusiastically do what the Party wants them to do, endeavouring to surpass the set target. That is heroism too.

We Party members, the sons of the working class, of the working people, are very ordinary people but loyal to the proletarian class and determined to struggle for the people. The very fact that we are very ordinary people makes our Party very great. Apart from the interests of the Fatherland, of the

working class and of the people, our Party knows no other interests.

Yesterday's newspapers related the story of a militiaman named Tran Van Tan, a Lao Dong Party member. He was entrusted with the task of getting a quantity of timber, together with some comrades. There was a storm and their raft threatened to break up several times. Braving danger, Comrade Tan plunged into the river to repair the raft. When the raft arrived at its destination, it was found that a number of logs were missing. Comrade Tan volunteered to go and look for them, and he brought back all of them after two or three days. A militiaman is a man of an ordinary position. To get timber is an ordinary task. But to overcome all difficulties, to fulfil one's task, is heroism.

At present in the countryside, a heated discussion is going on: *which way to follow, that of individualism or that of collectivism?*

Why is our Party strong and becoming stronger and stronger? Because our Party practises *collectivism*. Every Party member should do likewise. But a number of comrades have not been completely won to collectivism, individualism among them is still prevailing. For example, in the question of remuneration they have shown discontent and jealousy. They want to do easy jobs and avoid hard ones, etc. Those comrades do not remember that during the period of underground activities, during the Resistance War, and at present, the heroes, and the model workers have not been struggling and making sacrifices for any remuneration, position or rank.

The close division of work in the Party and the State is like clockwork. The hands of the clock and the spring are two different parts but they act in close unity. None of the parts of the clock can be done without. Likewise in our society, our Party is a closeknit collectivity which does not allow individualism. Individualism is the source of many evils. Everyone, whatever his work, his position may be, is important. Any work that is useful to the Party, to the Revolution, is honourable.

The individualists cater for their personal interests only, not for the collectivity. They want to enjoy material privileges, and never volunteer for work. That is not good. With individualism there can be no enthusiasm, no progress.

Our Party is a great collective united in thought and in action. Every Party member must defend the Party and the Party's policies.

Has our Party displayed shortcomings? It has. To transform the old society into a new one is no easy thing. It is like demolishing an old house and building a new palace. In building the new palace, we cannot avoid breaking a few bricks, spreading saw-dust, etc. Likewise in building socialism, some shortcomings and mistakes are inevitable. But whenever it makes a mistake, the Party courageously admits it and resolutely corrects it.

Our Party has a very effective means to make its members progress, and the Party become stronger and stronger: *self-criticism and criticism*. Lenin has said: Only two categories of people are free from mistakes: the foetus in womb and the dead in their

coffins. Action is seldom free from mistakes. But when we make mistakes, we must frankly criticize ourselves, welcome the others' criticisms and resolutely correct our mistakes. *Individualism* makes us fear self-criticism and criticism, prevents us from resolutely correcting our mistakes. Thus it makes us regress instead of progressing.

In a word, our Party has been struggling heroically for the last thirty years and has won glorious victories. At present, it has to continue the struggle to build socialism in the North and make of the latter a base for the struggle to reunify the country. In this struggle we have many advantages. But we also meet with many difficulties. If every cadre, every Party member fulfils his duties, fosters and enhances the spirit of collectivism, gets rid of individualism, and closely studies politics, general education and technical knowledge, we shall certainly overcome all difficulties, and brilliantly fulfil our duties.

Lastly, I trust you will remember the above-mentioned and put it into practice. At present, we have over four hundred thousand Party members and over six hundred thousand Lao Dong youths, a strong government, a most heroic army, and our people are showing great enthusiasm. Furthermore, our country is a member of the great socialist family headed by the great Soviet Union. Therefore, if our cadres and Party members fulfil their duties and endeavour to study politics, general education and technical knowledge, we shall certainly succeed.

I wish you all continuous progress.

November 28, 1959

## BROUGHT TO POLITICAL MATURITY THANKS TO THE PEOPLE AND THE PARTY

### I

By the end of 1925, when a little over twenty, I worked aboard a French warship lying at anchor in Shameen port, a French Concession in Canton. Living far from my native country and my family, every time I went ashore I would leave the French Concession to make new friends from among the youth of the neighbourhood, a thing which I could do easily as I myself was a young man.

At that time I met Cam Xuyen, a Chinese who had lived in Vietnam and spoke fairly good Vietnamese. We became close friends and often went for a stroll together. Both he and his wife were engaged in revolutionary activities. I was told that Cam Xuyen's wife was very active. Wearing a red scarf, she used to make propaganda among the workers.

Once, on a Sunday, Cam Xuyen bought flowers and took me for a pilgrimage to Pham Hong Thai's tomb at Hoang Hoa Cuong. Standing before the hero's last resting place, I was greatly moved.

Some time later, Cam Xuyen introduced me to two Vietnamese named Ich and Vuong. Thanks to comrade Ich who was known later as comrade Ho Tung Mau, I became a member of the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association. Comrade Vuong was also present at the admission ceremony, but he spoke little. At that time, Canton was the revolutionary centre of China and seething day and night with public meetings of workers and of the masses. Whenever my friends and I could leave the French Concession, comrades Ich and Vuong took us to a Trade Union local in some quarter and there organized training classes for us.

"Can you go back to Vietnam?" comrade Vuong asked me in private over a year later.

"I can," I answered, "I will go at once if the Association wants me to."

Comrade Vuong personally made preparations for me to return to Vietnam. When confiding tasks to me he gave me this advice, "Don't do anything immediately after your return. Wait and see, because the secret police will be keeping a close watch on you."

Back in Haiphong, I lived in Cau Dat Street. Exactly as comrade Vuong had said, the French secret police agents were posted all day long opposite my house so I whiled away my time until they no longer suspected me. Only then, little by little did I get into contact with Hong Kong to bring in political documents. By April 1927, I went to work aboard the *Chambord*. This ship made alternate sailings to Hong Kong and Canton. Thus we had a very convenient means of communication. We organized the

smuggling into Vietnam of the Thanh nien (Youth) monthly, the book entitled "The Revolutionary Path" and other materials issued by the Association which were distributed to a large number of acquaintances in Hanoi, Haiphong and Nam Dinh.

A man named Luu Ba Ngu was entrusted with the task of distributing propaganda material. He inadvertently handed over a number of newspapers and other material to a bookseller named Nguyen Manh Bong. This fellow, an agent of the French colonialists, informed them of the receipt of propaganda material. Ngu was arrested and he said that the material had been given him by a man named Ba working aboard a ship. Ba was my pseudonym at that time.

The colonialists searched the ships for a man named Ba but found none. Warned of the danger, I left the *Chambord* to go to Thai Binh, and from there to Saigon.

In Saigon I met a number of comrades who had come from Canton and we got into contact with Ngo Thiem. We often saw him come to a house opposite ours but we never asked Ngo Thiem about it for the sake of secrecy. Later, after the successful Revolution, when speaking of the old days, comrade Ton Duc Thang told me that the house was a Party local where he lived with comrade Dong and comrade Ngo Thiem.

In Saigon, we received books and newspapers from Siam. By the end of 1927 and 1928, the movement was fairly strong, and the quantity of material received was growing, but the living conditions of those who devoted their whole time to revolutionary



activities were extremely hard. All the comrades in our group, beside engaging in revolutionary activities, had to work for a living. For our meals we had only some rice and boiled vegetables and one or two fried eggs, to be shared among six or seven persons. Comrade Ngo Thiem was our group leader. One day, when he came for a meeting with us, we asked him if he had eaten, and he said he had not, so we bought some beef soup for him. When he had finished it, he told us that he had not eaten for three days as the Party organ had not a cent left. On hearing this, tears came to our eyes and Ngo Thiem wept too, greatly moved by the revolutionary solidarity and comradeship binding us. From that day we decided to eat less and spend less to save some money for Ngo Thiem.

Before the Barbier Road murder case\* occurred, I returned to Haiphong where I immediately resumed revolutionary activities. At that time, the Party organization in the port city had grown in strength, with over one hundred members.

Early in 1929, the North Vietnam bureau of the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association directed all its members to proletarianize themselves. Thereupon all of us donned blouses, and those who could work in factories did everything possible to get in, while those who could not did any other manual work they could find. I tried in vain to get work in the

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\* After we had executed a traitor at Barbier Road, due to the imperialists' persecutions, our organization was broken, a number of comrades were arrested and sentenced.

Caron Works. Carrying out the instructions given by the Association, a number of its members including myself became rickshaw-pullers.

The decision on proletarianization had immediate effects. Our comrades organized the movement of struggle in all the factories where they worked. They did likewise among the rickshaw-pullers. In 1930 there was a general strike of rickshaw-pullers in Haiphong.

I found rickshaw-pulling a very convenient means to maintain liaison with the port, with the coming and outgoing ships.

One day I was informed that a number of people who had come from Hong Kong aboard a Japanese ship were not allowed to disembark as they had not paid the fare. They were comrade Ngo Gia Tu and other delegates to the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association Conference in Hong Kong. As they had left the Conference dissociating themselves from it, they did not have money for their journey home. Penniless but undaunted, they boarded a Japanese ship, promising to pay on their arrival in Vietnam.

A woman sympathizer then sold her jewels to pay the fare for comrade Ngo Gia Tu and his companions.

I took Ngo Gia Tu to my house where he stayed for some time. Afterwards he returned to Hanoi, issued the Manifesto of the newly founded Indo-Chinese Communist Party, then went to Saigon.

\* \* \*

By mid 1929, the Central Bureau of the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association sent for

me to do liaison work between Hong Kong and Canton.

After the founding of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party, the revolutionary organization abroad was still called Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association.

Soon after my departure, the assassinations of Thi Nhu and Thi Uyen took place in a lane behind the building of the Haiphong Mutual Education Society. This lane communicated with the Tham Thuat Passage where I lived. The secret agents searched my house and found a number of copies of our mimeographed newspaper "Red Flag". At that time I was doing propaganda work for the working class party.

On finding the "Red Flag" in my house, the secret agents arrested my mother and the comrades who lived there.

I had left for Hong Kong ten days before.

Back in Hong Kong I again found work aboard a French warship. Two months later, Léron, a French inspector of secret police and a specialist on political affairs, came to Canton, where he went to the French sailors' club to investigate. I felt great anxiety and thought the moment was near when I should be handcuffed. Happily, I managed to avoid arrest. I asked the leaders of our group to let me go away, but they told me to stay. At that time I did liaison work between Canton and Hong Kong, was in charge of the Party finance and did propaganda work among sailors.

Four months later, I received an order from home to leave work aboard the French warship as the colonialists were actively searching for me. A comrade in

the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association then advised me to join the Communist Party.

"The Communist Party is founded at home, what is your opinion?" he asked.

"My opinion is that I will follow which side is right."

"What do you think of the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association?"

"The Association's historic mission is over. The revolutionary movement in our country has reached a stage when the organization of a Communist party becomes a pressing need."

"Which party should we follow, that in Vietnam or that organized here?"

"Any will do provided it conforms to the aims and principles of the working class."

"The Indo-Chinese Communist Party has displayed shortcomings, so we organized the Annam Communist Party. But sooner or later the two parties will certainly merge into a single one."

"Now that I am here, it is all right for me to join the Annam Communist Party. But I wish that in the near future all communists will belong to a unified organization."

I was admitted to the Annam Communist Party in October, 1929.

After my admission I had the choice of one of the three tasks: either to return to Vietnam where there was a great need for cadres; this was the best thing to do, but for the fact that the French police were after

me—to go to Yunnan to assist the comrades there in propaganda work among the Vietnamese residents — or to go to Shanghai to establish grassroot bases for activities among the Vietnamese residents and soldiers there.

Like all young people, I had a liking for new and difficult tasks. Without hesitation I chose Shanghai. The comrades in charge gave me a ticket costing six dollars and told me to go to Shanghai where I was to work for my living and to bring into being mass organizations three months after my arrival.

In the French Concession in Shanghai, there were 4,000 militiamen and regular troops. There were also a number of workers. With the families of the soldiers and workers, there were altogether 6,000 Vietnamese in Shanghai. There were 1,000 French troops and French warships were permanently at anchor in Woosung Port. Many ships plying between Marseilles and Yokohama stopped at Shanghai. I knew that Shanghai was of vital importance, but I had no acquaintances there and did not speak the Shanghai dialect.

On taking the six-dollar ticket and thinking of the hard task facing me, I felt great anxiety.

Searching in my mind, I at last remembered Ba Den, a member of the Cooks and Servants Union founded by the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Association in Hong Kong. (At present, Ba Den is working at the Nhan Dan newspaper Printing House.) Ba Den had an acquaintance in Shanghai so I obtained from him a letter of introduction to that acquaintance.

In Shanghai, I put up at an hotel, then called on Ba Den's acquaintance, a young man named Thuyet who was a medical student. I told Thuyet that I had come to Shanghai looking for a job.

"That's rather difficult," Thuyet said. "How about coming to live with me in the meantime" ?

Thuyet, together with two other men named Nganh and Tran Tam owned Tran Tam Restaurant which catered for French soldiers. Tran Tam had overall charge, Thuyet went to school and did book-keeping in his spare time, and Nganh who was at the same time a cook for a French family, got the provisions for the restaurant. I became a waiter.

Only a few days later, I established contact with a number of people to set up a base.

One morning, Vietnamese workers at the French-owned Oxygen Factory in Shanghai came to our restaurant to collect money to assist the family of a worker who had died aboard a ship. Seeing the workers' readiness to join in an act of solidarity, I went to meet them. They were all natives of South Vietnam and were patriotic and well-intentioned people. But they were not class-conscious as they had received no revolutionary propaganda.

On my suggestion, a mutual assistance organization was founded, so that those who were living far from their fatherland and their families might help one another in case of need. Thus, less than a month after my arrival in Shanghai, I could report to Hong Kong the results of my activities.

Our mass organization was developing and beside the workers who were its first members, the servants,

cooks, and small merchants soon joined. As a result, it extended to the garrison. First to join were the militiamen, then came men of the regular army and sailors. Then we began to build a Party organization.

The movement was growing in strength and, having too much work to do, I requested Hong Kong to send some comrades to assist me. Five or six comrades in turn came to Shanghai to work with me. Among them was comrade Phiem Chu — whose real name was Do Ngoc Du — one of the seven men who organized themselves into the first Communist cell in Hanoi.

One day I received an anonymous letter which had the tone of a love letter. The man who wrote it asked me to meet him in the billiard room of the Hsien Shil Company, a big department store in Shanghai.

At the appointed time, I came to the rendezvous. Finding nobody there I was about to leave when I heard somebody calling from behind, "Hai"! I turned round and great was my joy: the man I saw was comrade Vuong!

He led me into the street, gave me his address at an hotel and told me to come to see him the next day. Of course, I could not miss the rendezvous with him. During our meeting, I reported to him on my work. Afterwards he introduced me to comrades of the Chinese Communist Party.

The first Chinese comrade with whom I got into contact was Thai Xuyen, a woman, who is now a member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. She came in person to the restaurant where I was working to fetch me and took me

to quite a good hotel where she introduced me to a comrade member of the Central Committee.

The latter raised the question of propaganda activities among foreign troops in Shanghai and also discussed organization among French and Vietnamese troops. He gave me equipment for mimeographing with which we were to print propaganda leaflets.

But the question was how to distribute propaganda leaflets in the vast Shanghai area? The Chinese comrades told us to draw a map and mark on it the places where the leaflets were to be distributed, and a distribution group would take care of the rest. At that time, the Chinese comrades' activities in Shanghai had considerably increased. There was a large number of people specializing in distributing leaflets. The work of agitation and propaganda was as active as in the pre-insurrectionary period in our country.

One day, Chinese comrades threw leaflets into a sympathizers' house I was visiting. The sympathizers picked up the leaflets.

"Indeed Vietnamese revolutionaries abroad are so many!" they said in admiration.

As the number of distributed leaflets increased the movement spread like wild fire. With the development of the situation, our contacts with the Chinese Communist Party became closer. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party organized a committee for propaganda activities among foreign troops, with the participation of Vietnamese and Japanese. Chinese comrades directly agitated among British troops, Japanese comrades were to work among Japanese, Korean and Formosan troops (Formosa was

then a Japanese colony). We were in charge of Vietnamese and French soldiers. Our liaison by correspondence with the Propaganda Committee was maintained through a bookshop owned by a Japanese comrade. As the propaganda work expanded, it was entrusted by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee to the Kiangsu Committee. Now that it was handled by the Party primary organization, propaganda and agitation work was intensified.

Our propaganda work spread to French troops. The Tran Tam restaurant was frequented by them. It was well-known that they would usually get drunk and break up everything in sight. However, some among them behaved correctly, looked calm, thoughtful. When I saw such men, I would engage them in conversation, then introduce them to Phiem Chu who spoke good French. He would take them out for a stroll, and talk to them. Some French soldiers confided that they belonged to the French Communist Party or some mass organization of the French Communist Party.

The movement gained not only the Vietnamese soldiers and militiamen, and French soldiers, but also the Vietnamese and French sailors on French liners and warships. There were Party organizations on nine ships plying between Marseilles and Yokohama: the *D'Artagnan*, *Athos II*, *Chenonceaux*, *Sphinx*, *Porthos*, etc. The Vietnamese on all these ships, except the *Sphinx* with only two Vietnamese, joined the Sailors' Union. On some ships, there were Party members. Liaison between Shanghai and Hong Kong, Saigon and even Paris, was greatly facilitated.

As the movement expanded, we took into our own hands the distribution of propaganda leaflets. The Chinese comrades, using maps, could distribute leaflets only on doorsteps, outside fences or by throwing them into railway cars, or handing them over to soldiers in the streets. Now that we had bases everywhere, we could drop leaflets anywhere we wanted. We also published newspapers, the "Political Consciousness" for Vietnamese residents and troops, then the "Clarion" specially for Vietnamese troops and the "Red Army" for French soldiers.

I remember that comrade Vuong wrote a number of articles in prose and in verse for our newspapers. I met him in Shanghai four times. The last time was when he came to our place for a meeting with us. He criticized the shortcomings in each issue of our newspapers, told us how to write articles. I was deeply impressed by comrade Vuong's carefulness and thoroughness.

One of our achievements in Shanghai which was most interesting was the bringing of revolutionary activities to the French warship *Waldeck Rousseau*. This was the very ship on which the historic Black Sea rebellion took place in 1918. The comrades on the ship posted leaflets in the dining-rooms, lavatories, and even put them into drawers. The officers were upset but their painstaking investigations did not reveal where the leaflets had come from. Later on, on the occasion of the thirteenth anniversary of the October Revolution, our comrades, dizzy with their success, proposed to fly a red flag over the French warship, to repeat their elders' heroic deed in 1918.

The Party advised them to refrain from rashness and to carefully preserve the Party organization on the warship.

What made us engage in our revolutionary activities with increasing ardour? In that historic year 1930, the newspapers we received from home were full of news of our countrymen's spirited struggle. That was for us a great inspiration, especially the news about the Nghe-Tinh Soviet, which filled us, the expatriates, with growing revolutionary enthusiasm. Comrade Quoc Long, a native of Nghe An province and graduate of Whampoo Military Academy, had left Chiang Kai-shek's army in which he served as an officer, to join us in our secret Party activities. One day, after reading a newspaper from home, his eyes sparkled and he cried out joyfully, "Oh, fine! they held a meeting in my own village!"

Ho Ngoc Lam who was then a field officer in Chiang Kai-shek's general staff, once came to Shanghai from Nanking. He took us to a restaurant and in the course of conversation, told us, "Now that the revolutionary movement in our country is so powerful, I am ready to go home to command the army, if the Party wants me to do so."

\* \* \*

At the end of 1930, I was arrested for the first time. I then realized that the imperialists had been tracking me for a long time. I was arrested as I was leaving the Oxygen Factory. The French secret police had noted that every time I came to the factory,

propaganda leaflets were subsequently distributed in many places.

I had with me all the required papers and no secret document whatever. The only thing found on me which the police suspected was a collection of tramway tickets. I kept these tickets because the iron discipline of the Party required the spending of every cent to be justified. The secret agents examined the tickets.

"Why do you have tickets for the Japanese and British Concessions and even to the Chinese City (this was the name given by foreigners to the Chinese-administrated area of Shanghai)?" they asked me.

"I visited the parks," I answered calmly. "There are beautiful ones in the Concessions and in the Chinese City. I went there in my leisure time."

The police seemed to suspect that I was the man they were looking for. But I kept on saying, "I have come here in quest of employment. I would be very happy if you could give me some work to do."

Tran Tam was called for. He was asked, as I was facing the wall, on the police's order, "Does Nguyen Luong Bang live in your house?"

"Nguyen Luong Bang?" Tran Tam answered. "No, there isn't a man of this name in my house."

The Chief Inspector of secret police ordered me to turn round.

"Does this man live with you?" he asked Tran Tam.

"Yes. His name is Hai, he lives with us while looking for a job."

"I entrust this man to you. You shall keep him until there is a ship bound for Vietnam."

Tran Tam took me back to his house. He was seeking to get rich, and was indifferent to the revolutionary movement.

Having no clear political ideas and under the influence of false propaganda, he praised everything that the Chiang Kai-shek clique did. But he had no liking for the French. He treated me nicely while I stayed in his house, awaiting deportation.

When there was a Haiphong bound ship, militia adjutant Thien came to fetch me. He gave me two dollars and, pretending compassion for a fellow-countryman, he said to me,

"I worry a great deal about you. You have found no work here and have now to go home without money. Since this is an order from above, we can't help it. You are a fellow-countryman of mine, so I give you this tip: when you arrive in Hong Kong, call on Mr. Suu at the Belgian Consulate, he will help you."

The name Suu immediately raised doubts in me. I myself had brought that man into our organization. How did he get acquainted with a fellow like adjutant Thien? He must be an agent of the French sneaking into our organization. In Hong Kong, he could, on the imperialists' order, hand me over to the French secret police.

My mind was still busy with these thoughts when adjutant Thien took me aboard the ship for Haiphong. He introduced me to the ship's compradore, pretending great kindness to me.

"Here is a friend of mine," he said. "I hope you will take good care of him."

I went to bed most naturally with a plan in mind that the next morning, when the ship arrived at Swatow port, in Kwantung province, I would go ashore and escape. But when I awoke, the ship was still in Shanghai port. I then confided to fellow-passengers my two suitcases — one in rattan and the other in cardboard — both filled with bits of old linen, then I went about, in order to give the slip to the secret police. I wandered all over the ship, mingling with the crowd of passengers. As the ship was preparing to weigh anchor, I ran down to the quay where I pretended to buy some fruit for the journey. I kept bargaining until the ship moved from the quay. When the ship had turned round to make for the sea, I jumped on a tram-car and went to the International Concession.

\* \* \*

From that day, as I was known to the police, I gave up outdoor activities and stayed at home to type and print our newspaper.

At that time, there was a shortage of cadres in the home country. I volunteered to go back to Vietnam. I had made all the necessary preparations and was waiting for a ship to return to Vietnam secretly. Then an unfortunate event happened. At that time there were in Shanghai two battalions of Vietnamese militiamen. The revolutionary movement was developing and many non-commissioned officers had joined our

organization. A non-commissioned officer eagerly expressed his desire to meet the cadre in charge of the organization. We discussed the matter at length and came to the conclusion that we should be vigilant but could not refuse to meet the man.

So I went and met him in a refreshment room. I gave him a number of leaflets to be distributed on May Day. Then we parted. To be vigilant I chose a deserted road but was aware. Indeed some strangers were following me. I got on a tram-car, then boarded a bus but they kept trailing me, I succeeded in shaking them off only at midnight. If I had not known the streets of Shanghai so well, I would have led them right to my home.

I told my comrades that we should be more vigilant. A comrade said that I had attracted the police's attention because of the long Chinese student-style gown, and European-style trousers I was wearing.

The next time, another comrade went to the rendezvous. Smartly dressed, I followed him to keep an eye on what was going on.

As we were getting near the rendezvous, we saw that secret agents were at all street corners. Not before midnight could we slip away from them.

The third time, I was again asked to go to the meeting with the non-commissioned officer. I calmly set out to fulfil my mission, guessing that the secret police would arrest me only when they could track me to my house. The rendezvous was at Hsien Shil Company, a big department store in Shanghai. As I arrived in front of the store secret agents appeared. I did not enter the store and kept walking in the

street. The policemen followed me closely. I walked ten kilometres in a drizzle, went from Nanking Road to Hong Kow Park then to the Japanese Concession, but the secret agents were still close behind. I bought a package of nuts, suddenly got on a rickshaw, telling the puller to run as fast as possible. Looking back, I saw that they were hard on my heels. Reaching Nanking Road, I told the rickshaw-puller to stop and paid him generously. Then I got into the crowded Yung On department store, boarded a lift and disappeared in the streams of customers.

No doubt there was a traitor. Our organization local was in the British Concession. We occupied the front room upstairs and a Chinese woman was living in a room behind ours. The landlord, a coal merchant, was living downstairs. Usually at five we went out to meet comrades returning from work and took them to our place. One evening, we remarked that a man in a room above the barber's shop opposite our house from time to time lifted a window curtain to look in the direction of our room.

"Our place may have been known to the secret police," I told Phiem Chu. "Dress smartly and go to the end of the street to see whether you are followed."

Phiem Chu did as I told him. He was immediately followed by the stranger. Clearly, the fellow was a secret police agent. We decided to change the house where I did printing work. First, I took the documents safely to the new address. On the second trip when I was taking away clothes and other personal belongings, I was arrested by the French secret police who came to the British Concession for the purpose.



That night, the questioning took place.

"Where did you take your things on the first trip?"

"I gave them to a Chinese who was waiting for me in the street."

I was beaten time and again but said nothing. That was why the comrades who came to my local were greatly surprised to see the documents intact but I was nowhere.

Some time later, Phiem Chu was arrested while engaging in propaganda work among French troops in Hong Kow Park. Then Quoc Long and other comrades fell into the trap of the imperialists' police.

Our organization was broken up. Thuyet, too, was arrested. He had just finished his medical studies, and had opened a prosperous consultation office right in the centre of Shanghai. Though he had not joined the revolutionary movement, he was arrested and ruined because he has had contacts with us, but he never uttered a word of complaint.

Fifteen years after, early in the morning of December 20, 1946, when the nation-wide Resistance War had just broken out, I was riding a bicycle past the Vac crossroad, in Ha Dong, when I heard somebody calling me, "Hai, hello brother Hai!"

I turned round and saw Thuyet.

"Oh, it's you! I thought you are still in Shanghai."

"Anh Nganh and I for a long time thought that you had been shot or guillotined. Only after the General Uprising did we know that you were still alive."

"My house is a few kilometres from here, please come with me," he insisted.

We talked of the past, then he told me, "The whole nation is waging a resistance war. Please let me and my family follow you."

From that day he took part in the Resistance. In the first years of the war, he went to the mountainous regions to make drugs for our cadres. Then he became a member of the Lao Dong Party and he is now working at Hanoi Drug Company.

As for the militia corporal who had got into our organization and made a trap for the police to arrest us, he subsequently proved to be a faithful agent of the French secret police. He was promoted gradually to the rank of adjutant. According to former Vietnamese residents in Shanghai, when news of the successful August Revolution reached the Vietnamese community all were elated, except that fellow who shot himself in the head.

## II

During the month of detention in Shanghai, I was tortured in turn by several secret agents.

One night, they beat me until I nearly lost consciousness. Then, they showed me a photograph in an attempt to induce me to talk.

"Do you know this man? Nguyen Ai Quoc, your leader, has been arrested in Hong Kong. If you have any good sense, talk!"

I looked at the photograph. Nguyen Ai Quoc was no other than the comrade named Vuong I had met. The police expected me to be demoralized by the news of comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc's arrest. On the contrary, the name Nguyen Ai Quoc and the leader's photo only increased my hatred for the imperialists and my determination to keep silent.

Phiem Chu and I were brought to Saigon, then to Haiphong by the steamer *Claude Chappe*. We were kept on the deck shackled all day long. On board there was a regiment of French and Vietnamese soldiers coming from France amongst whom we immediately engaged in propaganda work.

A passenger approached us.

"Excuse me, I would like to ask you for what reason you have been arrested?"

"We were arrested in Shanghai."

"To what Party do you belong?"

"To the Communist Party."

We were proud of the word communist. The passenger politely took leave of us but a moment later returned and gave us bread and food.

More and more Vietnamese soldiers came near and we were soon surrounded by them. We intensified our propaganda.

A French officer ordered the soldiers to stay away from us, but we kept talking. The gendarme who escorted us then took us to a compartment below

filled with passengers. This was another opportunity for us to carry out our propaganda work. The gendarme then took us to the cargo room. This place was terribly hot and the gendarme remained on top of a staircase to watch over us. The cargo room happened to be filled with Vietnamese workers returning from rubber plantations in South Vietnam. Over one hundred passengers including women and children were crowded into the suffocating cargo room. We had an excellent occasion for our propaganda work.

The gendarme was enraged. He shouted at us and threatened to beat us. We went on a hunger strike.

"If you die of starvation I'll throw you into the sea," he yelled.

"You have no right to illtreat us during the journey."

"You will see who will win, we or they," we said to the passengers.

Finally, we were taken to the third-class berth equipped with electric fans. Passengers — among whom were many soldiers — came to comfort us. When the ship reached Haiphong, workers from the rubber plantations came to bid us good bye before landing.

In Hanoi, we were interned in the local jail of the Secret police, with our hands and feet in shackles. We went on a hunger strike until our shackles were removed. It was late in 1931. The Criminal Court had been abolished, and I was taken to Hai Duong province to be arraigned before the Vietnamese Affairs court there.

In Hai Duong prison, I fought for the removing of shackles and chains and the distribution of blankets and mats to all prisoners, including common-law

convicts. When an interned bonze went insane and attempted suicide by cutting his throat with fragments of a bowl he had broken up, the French governor of the province ordered all bowls to be taken away. I urged the fellow-prisoners to demand the restitution of bowls, and at the same time the distribution of raincoats and hats to go to work.

As our struggle succeeded, the common-law convicts showed great consideration for me. They said that they had got many things thanks to Mr. Red Star (This is the nickname the comrades interned in the secret police jail had given me).

I often explained to the common-law convicts, my fellow-prisoners,

"We have succeeded because all of us have joined in the struggle. Alone, I could do nothing."

Many of these men afterwards took a good attitude towards the Revolution.

In June 1930, the Hai Duong provincial court sentenced me to life banishment.

I was taken back to Hanoi and, on the train, an incident took place which I could never forget. I was a convict escorted by an armed militiaman. As I was looking through the window at newly harvested fields, a kindly-looking elderly woman, about fifty years old, dressed like a small merchant, asked the militiaman to let her sit beside me.

"Excuse me, young man, could you tell me why you have been arrested?" she asked me.

Seeing that she was very attentive to me, I told her frankly that I had been arrested in Shanghai. The woman knew about me.

"So you are Nguyen Luong Bang from the Thanh Mien district. I know about your affair through the newspapers my children read to me. You young men devote yourselves wholeheartedly to the country, we admire you very much. Nowadays, the French who rule our country are arresting young men like you to put them in prison or to kill them. We are very sorry for you all. I must tell you that I have brothers and nephews who did revolutionary work like you who have been arrested and imprisoned, that is why on seeing you I can't help thinking of them."

Then she beckoned her daughter — a girl of eighteen or nineteen, to approach.

"Go and get something for your brother to eat," she told her.

When the girl came back she brought rice cakes, sweets, tea and lemonade, and politely invited me to help myself.

"Don't stand upon ceremony," the woman said. "You are no stranger to us. We meet for only a short time, so take some cakes and have some refreshment to please me."

All the way from Cam Giang station to Gia Lam station, the woman remained sitting beside me, asking me about events in France, Germany, Japan, Russia, China and about our revolutionaries. The girl, who was sitting beside her mother, kept staring at me and listening to me attentively. She was strangely sweet and charming. Apparently they were natives of the Lim or Dang district, in Bac Ninh province.

The woman and her daughter alighted at Gia Lam station. Before leaving me they took all the money

they had, one piastre and forty cents in all, and offered it to me. I flatly refused but, as I was handcuffed, I could not prevent them from putting the money into my pocket.

They remained on the platform, seemingly reluctant to leave me. When the train started, the kind woman followed me with eyes filled with sadness.

"Good luck, dear Bang, good luck!" she cried out.

The girl too kept looking in my direction.

In Hanoi jail, I kept thinking for many days of the chance meeting in the course of the short journey. How good these people were! My conviction was further strengthened as I thought of the sympathy of our fellow-countrymen for revolutionaries, which was so sincere, so natural. With cadres to propagate the Party's policy among the people, a revolutionary movement would be brought into being.

I had been contemplating escape. My idea was welcomed by comrade Nguyen Tao. As new developments were leading to a world war, many comrades who still kept up their spirits felt impatient before the revolutionary movement. We held a meeting under the plank bed to discuss our escape. Comrade Le Duan and comrade Thuc (the latter is now working in the Public Security Ministry) participated in the meeting.

The plan we then made could not be carried out. After the performance of a play in which comrades Duan, Thuc and other comrades took part, the prison superintendent charged us with instigation to disorder and all ninety prisoners were to be put in shackles for a month. Comrade Nguyen Tao and I were determined to escape by all means.

Some comrades proposed to tear our clothes to make parachutes with which to jump from the roof of the prison building. That was too risky! The only way was to obtain our transfer to the hospital where we would saw off the iron bars and escape.

Tao, Tuyen, Hao Lich, Dam and Man feigned illness with various kinds of diseases and were sent to the hospital. Cuong and I were still in the prison when a hunger strike broke out to demand the restoration of our rights to write letters, read newspapers and to smoke. On the sixth day of our strike, the prison authorities still refused to make any concession when we got news from Tao and his friends that preparations for escaping from the hospital were nearly complete.

How to obtain our transfer to the hospital? Cuong and I thought of feigning a cholera attack. Knowing that comrade Tran Duc Thinh who was then interned in our prison had many ingredients of Eastern medicine, we went and asked him to give us some ba-dau grains, hoping these would give us diarrhea.

After six days of hunger strike, our stomachs were empty, and the grains we swallowed only caused us to vomit. We thought of taking some blood from our veins, and using it to feign blood vomiting. But we could not find an injection needle to take out blood.

There was only one way left: to feign suicide by stabbing at our necks.

We carefully stabbed ourselves, and with our necks and breasts red with blood, ran out shouting to fellow-prisoners to fight on, then, after crying out some slogans, fell to the ground.

"Oh, Red Star is dead!" our friends exclaimed.

Our strategem worked and we were immediately taken to the hospital.

The physician who attended to us was a surgeon who had just returned from France. After tending our wounds, he sighed.

"Why should you kill yourselves?" he said with a central Vietnam accent. "Live on! If you are falsely accused, send a petition to the authorities. It's no use to commit suicide!"

Then he called for his attendant.

"Dress their wounds loosely," he told him. "Otherwise, in case of their death, it might be said that the bandage was too tight."

Pheng and some common-law convicts put both of us side by side on an ox-cart and took us to the political prisoners' ward. Cuong and I half opened our eyes and exchanged faint smiles.

Tao was already waiting at the door of his ward.

"Who is coming, Old Mr. Pheng?" he cried out from distance.

"Red Star and another."

"What have they got?"

"Six-day hunger-strike, then suicide attempt."

We entered the ward.

"Play your parts well as there are many members of the Nationalist Party here," Tao said. "It would be very dangerous for us if they knew you have been feigning."

"Five of the six iron bars have been sawn," he went on. "We can get away to-morrow. Are you too ill to go?"

"We can go."

At the far end of our room were the four cells for prisoners who were seriously ill or those with heavy sentences. In each of the adjoining cells was a madman. A genuine madman was comrade Quy, an electrician from Nam Dinh province, who had gone insane after being struck on the head with a hammer by the colonial police.

The other man, who was only feigning insanity, was Tuyen, one of our comrades. He beat the door with his fists to make a din which jammed the sawing noise.

"Bearded" doctor came and after examining Cuong and I, ordered us to be taken to a cell and locked up. I was getting anxious. Tao and Dam succeeded in inducing the guard to lend them the key of our cell, saying that they wanted to come and see us. When they left our cell, they did not lock the door.

In the prisoners' room there were many members of the Nationalist Party. The previous time when I came to the hospital with a genuine illness, they immediately spread the rumour that Red Star was attempting escape. For this reason, the comrades decided that I should be the last to get out, so as not to raise the Nationalists' suspicion. The Nationalists too had come to the hospital to attempt escape. Most of them belonged to well-to-do families, had money, but as they were poorly organized, their plan could not be carried out. We could not let them know that we were making preparations to escape, especially as one of them, Iron-faced Lam, was fiercely anti-communist.

How to get away without letting them know? Various ways were proposed. Finally, we decided to

offer them coffee mixed with a quantity of sleeping drug.

Our plan worked and we learned later that they fell into a deep sleep until they were awakened the next morning by the gendarmes who came to investigate our escape.

We in turn left the ward through the window, the iron bars of which had been sawn off. With a cord made by torn blankets, we got to the ground, then climbed up the wall, the top of which was covered with broken glass, got through the barbed wire and jumped down into the street.

We were in Phu Doan Street. It was Christmas-Eve. People were crowding into Huyen Lane, thronging into the Big Cathedral. We mingled with the crowd.

For our escape we needed money. After we got the money, we had to find a way to keep it until we got out.

Cuong had a twenty-piastre banknote. He entrusted it to me while we were still in Hanoi prison.

Those twenty piastres, added to the sum in Hao Lich's possession, were divided among us, each getting about five piastres. According to the set plan, Tao's group went southward, while Cuong and I went north. After a six-day hunger strike and with the slashes at our necks still bleeding, we were dead tired. But once on the road, we kept on walking, forgetting all our pains and weariness. It was a windy winter night and biting cold. We felt the wind lashing our faces as we reached the Red River bank. We stole down under the bridge and, striding among the reeds and along the edges of maize and bean fields, we went

straight to Nghi Tam, Tu Tong. There we hired a sampan to sail upstream to Viet Tri. It was dusk by midway. We told the boatman to let us get ashore. It was somewhere in Yen Lac district, Vinh Yen province. Cuong and I managed to make a place for sleeping between the furrows of a ploughed field, and slept soundly until the next morning. We walked all day along the canal, cutting across the fields, going up hill and down dale until evening when we got near the village of Cuong's mother. Cuong told me to let him go there alone and seek contact with our organization in the village. He took me to a deserted wood and told me to wait there, and he would send someone with food for me.

I sat there in the pitch dark night, under the chilly drizzle. I was wearing two suits of clothes which my comrades had given me. On the way I had bought a palm-leaf raincoat and leaf hat, but I still felt the cold, and a vague fear crept upon me. I was afraid of snakes, boas and tigers. It would be stupid to die here, in this wood, after such an effort to escape. I groped my way to the ricefields, gathered some straw to cover my body and hoped to have a sleep. But I felt very cold — it was terribly cold that year — and could not sleep a wink. When morning came I withdrew to the wood, hiding myself in the bushes, looking around to guard against snakes and wild beasts. That night I had again to sit there in the rain. Thus I spent the whole day and also the following day waiting for someone to bring me food. Nobody came. I was ravenous and my nerves were strained with impatience. The next morning, having no sight of Cuong I decided

to go down to the provincial town and try to contact some people whom Cuong had once told me were sympathizers. However, when I knocked at their doors and gave a hint of my case, nobody wanted to take me in.

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My vain trip to the town had only provided me with the opportunity to take some food, which gave me back some strength to live and to face the forthcoming difficulties. When I came back to the wood, I met a man who looked much like Cuong. He was indeed Cuong's brother.

"My brother came here with some friends to take you home," he told me. "But he didn't find you. Where were you last night?"

"As I had waited in vain in the wood," I said, "I went to the field and spent the night there."

"Cuong charged me with telling you to stay in this wood for some more time. He will come and take you home tonight or to-morrow night."

I went back to the wood. It kept on raining unceasingly. I waited there for two days and two nights. On the third night, I was out of patience and ventured to go to the village and knocked at Cuong's brother's door.

The door half opened and the man waved me away.

"Cuong has been arrested," he whispered, "get away! The secret agents are prowling the village."

Where to go? I hurried back to the wood and sat down for a while, thinking over what to do. Then I

made up my mind to go to Thanh Mien where I thought I would be safe.

I used the torn piece of blanket as a scarf around my neck to hide the bandaged wound on my throat. Then I went straight to the provincial town and bought a ticket at the railway station.

For many days, the police and guards had been searching the people at the station. They told the travellers to take off their hats and their scarves. It was indeed quite easy to recognize the signs which Cuong and I bore: shaved head, wounded neck. But they were not very intelligent: they searched only the coming and not the leaving travellers.

I travelled in the train to Yen Vien station where I jumped down. Cutting across the ricefields, I went to Ngat Keo and had breakfast there. Afterwards I boarded a bus which travelled to Quan Goi and I walked to Thanh Mien.

When I was in Hai Duong prison, I enjoyed much sympathy from the common-law prisoners. A fellow-prisoner named Cuu Tan, who was native of my district, often said to me, "When you get out of prison, please don't forget to call on me."

I had never before expected to have such an early opportunity to respond to his invitation. I arrived at his house very late at night, and he welcomed me warmly. When in bed, I told him my real position. A friend in needs is a friend indeed: Cuu Tan was very kind to me, taking all precautions to hide me.

He took me to Ap Don and entrusted me to a farm labourer named Tu Hoi, a close friend of his, saying

that I was an unfortunate relative in need of protection. Tu Hoi agreed at once. Later on, when Cuu Tan disclosed to him that I was in fact a revolutionary activist, Tu Hoi and his wife showed no fear. The only trouble was that they were too poor. Their children having hardly enough to eat, it was a heavy burden for them to feed another mouth.

"You are too poor, friend," I said to them one day. "My staying here has caused so much trouble for you. I wish to ask you permission to leave to-morrow."

"No, don't go anywhere," they said. "It would be a pity if they arrested you again. Please stay here with us and share our frugal meals."

The peasants were so kind, even when they were not yet conscious of revolution. That gave me a more profound confidence in the masses. I realized that good people were many while the traitors were but a handful. Later on, after my second arrest, Tu Hoi was also imprisoned for some time. His family was broken and driven away as far as Vinh Yen province. During the Resistance War, he also gave shelter to our cadres working in the enemy's rear. After the restoration of peace, on visiting Hanoi, they came and saw me.

"When you stayed at our home," Mrs Tu Hoi reminded me of the old days, "we used to say to each other, why, this gentleman is obviously not a farmer, yet he is quite strong at work."

When I first came to Tu Hoi's, I indeed knew nothing about farming. Coming out of jail I had a pale complexion. I had to tell the neighbours that I had come back from Cochinchina where I had been

ill from malaria while working in the rubber plantations. As my white thighs caught too much attention, I had to cover them with mud every time I went to the fields. After a few months, my complexion soon turned dark. I worked very hard at farm work; I could do almost everything a peasant could do: carrying paddy sheaves, manuring, threshing, and so on. I was also learning to harrow and was about to know how to plough when I was arrested again.

Some time after my arrival at Ap Don, I sought to create a revolutionary nucleus there and published the *Cong Nong* (Workers and Peasants), an underground periodical written and duplicated by myself in a most rudimentary way. It was widely circulated in the area and even reached the Haiphong ship workers who sometimes sent me some money to support the publication. I still remember a young catholic in Ap Don whom I had won over to our cause and who used to go to Sat market to buy paper, ink and other printing material for me. He helped me diligently and knew how to keep our work secret.

When I was arrested, no one in Ap Don would disclose to the French the names of those who had contact with me. The peasants there, who were Buddhists and mostly Catholics, though not fully conscious of the revolution, hated the French and injustice and were willing to protect the revolutionary activists.

Arrested again by the imperialists, I was once more sentenced to life imprisonment.

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Twice sentenced to life imprisonment, I never resigned myself to let my life be undone by imperialist fetters.

I was deported to Son La together with comrade Truong Chinh. When my comrades were released, I told them to organize my escape after they had gone home. But this could not be done because they were too busy with the work in the Democratic Front which was in full swing, and besides owing to the distance communication was difficult.

I was thus the only communist staying in Son La together with four other prisoners who were members of the Nationalist Party. Three of them were later won over to the cause of communism and fought in our ranks. During many years, we had nothing to do but to learn and to teach each other.

My comrades who had been released often thought of me. They sent me a lot of gifts on the occasion of the 1937 New Year's Day. Then they sent me our periodicals. These were addressed to two electricians, our sympathizers in Son La. It was a hard way for these papers to reach me. My two friends would put them into a tarred tin box which they buried at a place near a pillar of Ban Giang bridge, at an end of Son La town. Twice a week as the prisoners were allowed to take a bathe in the stream, I managed to go to the place, unearth the box, remove the papers, then put the box again in the same place. During three years, I regularly received many newspapers, *Tin Tuc*, *Doi Nay*, and others, the one replacing the other that had been banned by the authorities. Thanks to these periodicals, I always had the impression that in spite of my

loneliness in the prison, I was still in contact with the Party, I could still feel the breath of the revolutionary movement which was seething and developing every day. It was indeed thanks to them that I was able to maintain my fighting spirit, to overcome pessimistic thoughts which sometimes crept upon me in the lonely life of a deportee in this remote place.

Towards mid 1940, comrade To Hieu was sent to Son La. After To Hieu's arrival, a Party cell was set up in the prison, and we talked about organizing an escape. Preparations began from that time. We tried to look for sympathizers amongst the Thai people and especially the youth. We prepared medicine, money, clothes and, first of all, identity cards. A sympathetic clerk in the French Resident's office provided us with brand new cards. Having no seal, we counterfeited it.

In summer 1943, as the Viet Minh movement was strongly spreading throughout the country and the Party needed more and more cadres, the Party cell of the prison decided to organize an escape for comrades Ninh, Tran, Hien and myself.

Our escape from Son La prison has been thoroughly described by Tran Dang Ninh in his book "Twice Escaping from Prison". Thinking of this escape, we can never forget comrade Gia, a young Thai who had shown us the way out of Son La province and who was arrested and shot by the imperialists after he had fulfilled his mission and returned home. He was enlightened to the need for revolution by comrade Hoan, and was one of the first Thai members of the Youth Union for National Salvation. Many other Thai of his age who were educated at the same time

with him by the Son La prisoners later became good cadres of the Viet Minh movement, in the fight to liberate the North-Western region and in the building of socialism in this region at present.

Nearly a month later, after braving many a difficulty, Ninh and I contacted comrade Hoang Van Thu at Van Phuc village, Ha Dong province. We spent a whole night talking. We were glad to hear about the development of the revolutionary movement. Then from Van Phuc, comrade Ninh and I went through Mo, Cot, Buoi villages to the Red River bank, crossing the river in a ferry at Tu Tong. Over ten years before, when Cuong and I escaped from Phu Doan Hospital, we also took a boat at this place to go upstream. At that time, the revolution was like in a foggy night. Now, it was seething everywhere with the vigour of a young boy growing into manhood... Following our guide, comrade Bach Thanh Phong, we crossed the river and met comrade Truong Chinh who had been waiting for us there, in the midst of a ricefield. I remained to work with him while comrade Ninh went to Bac Ninh to meet comrade Hoang Quoc Viet.

Comrade Truong Chinh told me to go to Trai (Vong La) village, opposite Chem village, and promised to send someone for communication. There, I lived with a comrade who in order to ensure my safety, did not allow me to leave my room in the daytime. I might only have a walk in the courtyard after nightfall. He was keen on keeping me in secrecy, but his too great esteem for a Party cadre nearly betrayed my presence there.

Those days I was expecting a liaison from comrade Truong Chinh. One day my host asked a certain scholar from Dong Ngac village to come and make some inscriptions in Chinese on his altar tablets. This scholar was a relative of the head of Trai village. So the latter was also invited to a dinner in my host's home.

Before the dinner, my host often came into my room to bring me food. I protested but he would never agree to let me have dinner after his guests. His coming into my room was noticed by the village head who suspected my presence. He prowled around my room before sitting down at the table. I then opened a large trunk and hid myself inside it. Just after that, my host's son-in-law, whom I knew as hostile to the revolution, came straight into my room.

Thinking that my presence had probably been revealed, my host arranged my transfer to another comrade's house. But when I got to a place where a liaison agent was to meet me, I found nobody so I waited there under the shade of a kapok tree. As I was a stranger there the little buffalo-boys gathered around me and asked, "Whom are you waiting for?"

I waited there till after nightfall without meeting anyone. Then I crossed the river and went through Chem village to Hanoi.

I went straight to comrade Vu Dinh Huynh's house, whom I met in Son La in 1940. He had been arrested together with other comrades who collaborated in publishing the *Tan Xa Hoi* (New Society), during the period when we carried out legal activities. He was released after serving his sentence.

He told me to stay at his home, which was in Nha Ruou Street, and wait for comrade Van Tien Dung who used to come there, disguised as a Buddhist monk, to meet other comrades.

I remained there about a month without meeting comrade Dung. I again left Hanoi and returned to the place where I first came after my escape from Son La. The comrades who put me up were two extremely poor brothers in Yen Thanh hamlet, Mai Linh village. Their meals consisted only of some rice blended with maize, some boiled vegetables with salt. They had not even a rush mat to serve as cover in those winter days. It was true that, in those times, only such poor people dared to have me in their home. The two comrades and their parents were extremely kind to me. Their parents, wives and children all died during the terrible famine of 1945. The two comrades also fell during the Resistance War.

There, in Mai Linh village, I succeeded in again contacting the Central Committee. Meeting comrades Truong Chinh and Viet, I saw that they were sad. They told me the news: comrade Hoang Van Thu had been arrested. We were much afflicted by this event and thought of comrade Thu with regret.

The enemy was intensifying its repression against the revolutionary movement. That was why my making communication with the Party had met with so many difficulties.

Comrades Truong Chinh and Viet gave me the responsibility of propaganda activity in a safe area, propaganda work among the soldiers and financial

matters upon assuming my task as the Party's treasurer.

"How much money is there in the Party's fund?" I asked them.

"There are twenty four piastres in all," comrade Truong Chinh answered.

In late 1943 and early in 1944, the revolutionary movement was at its height. The expenditures of the Party were increasing day by day. The propaganda work of the Party and the Viet Minh required an ever larger amount of material, ink and paper. With only a lithographic-stone our "printing" house which was managed by comrade Khiem put out two clandestine periodicals -- *Co giai phong* (Liberation Flag) and *Cuu Quoc* (National Salvation). Money was not a decisive factor, but it would greatly help the movement.

I then remembered that comrade Huynh had once communicated to me something to which I had not given much attention: a certain Party sympathizer, upon learning of Red Star's escape from prison, wished to offer me a sum of money, some cloth and advised me to go to China.

I told comrade Huynh to arrange my meeting with this friend in the very centre of Hanoi. This Party sympathizer handed me ten thousand piastres for the Party's fund. Later he continued to give us more money. He is now working in a government office and I often meet him. The Party never forgets those who have shown such sympathy for the revolution.

With the money the first thing we did was to buy more equipment for our printing house: lithographic-

stones, printing-types, letter paper found on the black market, etc. We could then print various kinds of posters—some in French, and special issues of our newspapers. That sum was also partly used as capital for some trades destined to get more profits for the Party's fund. From Thuong Cat village where I stayed, I directed a network of traders. We dealt in anything we could : rice, vegetable oils, timber, treacle, etc.

By the end of 1944, the great famine began to sweep over the country. As people were living in extreme poverty, we always paid them for our meals. In Lien Mac village, I stayed at the home of a middle peasant. He had not enough rice and had to eat vegetables, maize and potatoes instead, and even bran soup. I remember that at that time our cadres in Nam Dinh and Thai Binh regions, when asking the Central Committee for food allowances, did not ask for the price of rice but for that of bran soup.

After I became the Party's treasurer, I suggested to the Party Central Committee and the General Committee of the Viet Minh to issue treasury bonds. My suggestion was adopted. The bonds were printed in the Party's printing office by means of a new press invented by comrade Hoang, who used for that purpose a bicycle crank-gear. The bonds bear this inscription printed in red ink, "The Fatherland will remember your contributions" and below, another line of three words, "Independence, Freedom, Happiness." I had the honour to sign on these bonds with the pseudonym Trieu Van. I took that pseudonym in memory of an old revolutionary, Dinh Chuong Duong, who took the pseudonym Trieu Phong after the name

of a district in Quang Tri province. The seal affixed on the bonds was a copper one. I have asked many comrades without success, the name of the unknown artisan who made that historic seal.

The bonds issued by the Viet Minh were warmly appreciated by various sections of the people. (For that reason they were counterfeited by the Nationalist and Restoration parties). They made a valuable contribution to our preparations for the general uprising in August 1945 by our Party and entire people.

In the Party, there were severe regulations concerning financial questions. At our meetings, comrades Truong Chinh, Viet and I always reported to one another our smallest expenses. Every cent spent for tea or fares had to be noted down on a long thin piece of paper hidden somewhere about our bodies. After adding up the expenses, we counted the change in our pockets. Except for the printing workers who had to work very hard and so had the right to some extra pocket money, we all were given only enough money for two meals a day.

At that time, comrade Thu was executed and comrades Truong Chinh, Viet and I stayed respectively in Bac Ninh, Hung Yen and Ha Dong provinces. We used to meet in comrade Hoi's kitchen, on the other side of the Red River. Sometimes our meeting lasted until far into the night and we slept there, in the kitchen. At other times, we met in a hut in a garden of a peasant member of the Peasants for National Salvation Association. In those winter nights, we had to gather bamboo twigs and leaves to make a mattress, as we

had neither mat nor cover. We had often to tear away the thorns which stung us during the night.

Later on, we managed to meet at a pagoda. It was still very cold. We spent the night there, lying close to one another, and the next morning, continued our meeting. We also used to meet at the pagoda of Dong Ky village. The monk and the nun of this pagoda were very kind. They considered us as their relatives. At first we had to pay for our meals, then later the monk said that as the pagoda was now better off, he would not accept our money. Indeed, our meals were better than before, though still very meagre. We held our meetings there many times. One night, as an enlarged meeting of the Central Committee Standing Board was going on, the village chief constable broke in and asked, "Why are there so many strangers in the pagoda?" The monk answered calmly that we were all acquaintances from his own native village who were driven here by famine, looking for some jobs. But the constable did not go away. Feeling the danger, we managed to get away through the garden and continued our meeting at the next village, Dinh Bang.

That night was March 9, 1945, the very day when the Japanese coup-de-force took place. Far away, in Hanoi, gun shots were resounding. It was in that errant meeting that we adopted the directives on the Japanese-French conflict and our action.

\* \* \*

Early in August, 1945, we reached the Viet Bac guerilla base to hold the plenum of the Party Central

Committee and the National Congress at Tan Trao village. I again had the opportunity to meet Uncle Ho.

During those historic days, he lived in a little bamboo cottage, at the foot of Re col. We stayed in Cay Da hamlet, not far from there, and we used to go to see him at night. Once, in the course of our conversation, he stared at me and said, "You look much older than in the days you were in China."

I asked him, "You still remember me?"

"Of course, why not?" he replied.

"You, too, look much older than before," I said.

At that time, Uncle Ho was not in good health. Having just recovered from illness, he looked thin and pale. I recalled the first time I met him in Canton, some twenty years before.

The National Congress in Tan Trao elected a National Liberation Committee. I still remember that after the election, all the members of the Committee stepped out in front of the Tan Trao temple to swear an oath. Uncle Ho himself read the oath. That was an extremely solemn moment for every member. One felt that the revolution was entering a completely new stage. An armed guerilla unit fired three bursts of shots to salute the historic event of the nation. Later, in Hanoi, the National Liberation Committee was enlarged and transformed into the first Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Vietnam Democratic Republic. With the agreement of the Central Committee and President Ho, I asked for my withdrawal from the Government to work in the Viet Minh Front and to take charge of the Party's finance.

After my trip to Hue, together with comrades Tran Huy Lieu and Cu Huy Can, to represent the Provisional Government in accepting Bao Dai's abdication, I was charged, upon my return to Hanoi, with looking after the President. During those days we were overburdened with work, the President was busy all day long. On September 2, 1945, after reading the Declaration of Independence at Ba Dinh Square, he went straight to the Government building and worked till far into the night, receiving innumerable comrades who came to ask for directives. In the Government building, he used to have his meals together with other cadres and employees. The cooks would prepare a large camp kettle of rice and some stewed fish to be shared by all comrades working there. At night, I accompanied the President to No. 8, Le Thai To Street.

Numerous difficulties followed one another. The French unleashed war in the South. The troops of Chiang Kai-shek, under the pretext of disarming the Japanese, poured into the North. The President had known too much of the Chinese Kuomintang, and before their arrival, he already predicted that they would drag in all kinds of counter-revolutionaries to carry out subversive activities in our country. He said, "Our policy towards them should be that of Cau Tien\*".

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\*i.e. the policy of patience and temporary resignation practised by Cau Tien, an ancient Chinese king who had endured untold sufferings before beating his enemy. (Translator)

And during those days when the people's power was very precarious, when difficulties seemed insurmountable, the President and the Central Committee, relying firmly upon the clear-sighted patriotism and the invincible force of unity of the people, steadily led the whole Party and nation in the struggle and succeeded skilfully in eliminating one enemy after another. In those extremely perilous moments, the President not only had to think over every question day and night but he himself had to deal with the reactionary Kuomintang. Our people's forces eventually won and the clear-sightedness of our leader had safely steered the ship of revolution through a route scattered with dangerous reefs.

In those days of tension, I used to take him to the suburbs every night. (The house in which he spent his nights was situated on the La Thanh dike, between Ngoc Ha and Buoi market). On my return to Hanoi after the war, I revisited the place but found no house there: it had been completely destroyed by war without leaving a trace. He would continue to work far into the night. The next morning, he would wake me up before dawn to go to the city where he would begin his workday very early. In winter, it was biting cold when getting to the car, but he would wear only a single khaki suit.

Since I met him in Canton, Shanghai, I have had many opportunities to live with him and I always found that he led a very simple life. I remember having once met him in his study at Shanghai. It was in winter, the temperature was down to some degrees below freezing point. Though we had not enough to

eat, we always had to get some coal for heating, as it was intolerably cold. That day, upon entering his study, I shivered with cold, whereas outside, in the street, I was kept warm by moving.

"Why, how can you work here without heating?", I asked.

"I have no stove."

"But it is too cold."

"I am used to that."

He was then working at his desk which was loaded with books and papers in various languages.

His life is a most worth-while book to be written.

\* \* \*

Recalling these past facts, I remember how many are the comrades and friends who have fought together for the Party's ideal, who have guided me, helped me, sharing the same joys and pains during the days of hard struggle. Many of them have passed away. The more our Party's work is developing, the more I regret the passing of those comrades.

Recently I had the opportunity to talk with President Ho about Cam Xuyen, the friend who led me to the Revolution, to him. He also thinks of him quite often, that kind-hearted, merry and resourceful young man. The President said that he had tried to enquire the man, but he could not find the trace of him or his wife anywhere. It is presumed that they both fell in the Canton Commune movement.

**After NGUYEN LUONG BANG**

## **NEVER TO GIVE UP WORKING SO LONG AS ONE LIVES**

When I was taken into the 'death' cell of Saigon prison there were already three non-political prisoners sentenced to death there. Thanh and Ro had each been given a sentence of exilement to the Poulo Condore island jail, but were later sentenced to death on murder charges. The third detainee, Mot Dam, was charged with committing a murder in Gia Dinh. They recognized that I was a political prisoner and sympathized with me from the very first moments.

"Mr. Nho had been in this cell," they told me. "That copy of the ballad Kim Van Kieu is his."

Ly Tu Trong was called Mr. Nho by non-political prisoners in this cell, and even by security agents and prison guards, as a mark of their respect.

Trong had been here, I said to myself. In a corner of the cell, there were some book leaves that had already turned yellow. They were some pages from Nguyen Du's ballad Kim Van Kieu left behind by Trong. The great national poet had been with this communist even in this death cell and until the moment he stepped up on the guillotine.

Trong had passed away, but the torn book Kim Van Kieu was still kept in the cell and the name Mr. Nho still remained in the hearts of these non-political prisoners sentenced to death.

I gathered the several pages left from the ballad, and the memory of Trong burned deep into my soul.

On the day Trong was executed, I was still detained at My Tho jail. On the previous day, all the detainees held a protest hunger strike.

I was arrested in My Tho on a charge of "attempted murder during a demonstration, arson and disturbances of security and order". This was the first May Day demonstration to be held in broad daylight in My Tho in 1931. The demonstrators captured and shot a village official on account of his crimes against the people.

The imperialists took me to different prisons. Finally they put me into the death cell, after the special criminal court had pronounced a death sentence against me. I was then 20 years old.

The death cell was a small room 3 by 6 metres in size, sealed by 3 walls and an iron gate. In one of the walls, a piece of iron, riddled with holes which were too small to push a cigarette through, served as a window. No daylight entered the cell, and a fire-coloured light was kept on throughout the day. It was extremely hot. I lay flat on the cement ground undressed, one of my legs confined to the stocks, which ran the length of the cell. Every two or three months, the security agents unlocked the stocks so that my other leg could take its turn. Each time I had the position of my leg changed, all other prison cells were

kept under lock and key, and troops, guards and security agents were mustered. Except for a chamber pot made of sheet iron, not a single metal object was to be found in the cell. The only utensils were a coconut shell bowl and a wooden barrel with a rattan hoop. The prison guards, most of whom were natives of Corsica, were constantly afraid of the prisoners, whose hearts were filled with hatred. Thanh, Ro and Dam cursed them almost non-stop. Each time the guards opened the cell to give food to the prisoners, they were cursed. Once a guard had the chamber pot overturned on his head, but withdrew quietly with his body covered with excrement.

A French priest visited them in the cell. "Is there anything I can do to help you?", he asked.

From the end of the cell, a prisoner sat up.

"Come in Father," he said politely. "I would like to talk to you."

No sooner had the French priest come in than the prisoners seized him and pulled his beard, shouting, "Stay here with us, Father, to share our joy."

I was not in favour of such actions.

The secret agents and prison guards took the attitude "Don't worry about them, they are mad dogs". In their minds, it seemed, communists and other persons sentenced to death were all alike.

"One lives to good deeds, good deeds live for ever," I said to Thanh, Ro and Dam. "Even though we are going to be guillotined, we will never allow our virtue to be stained. Virtue is its own reward. The guillotine is in the next room, but we must behave correctly, and live as men. In so doing, we will come



to realize that their law always betrays their will, even despite the introduction of death sentences."

Thanh, Ro and Dam listened to me attentively.

"What we live for is where we differ," I continued. "We are working for the revolution. I have been in different jails and acquainted with many non-political prisoners. In general, they follow the political prisoners. A man cannot behave otherwise. We shall never allow the colonialists to hold us in disdain..."

"We understand," they replied. "We know that murder is a bad deed. But we are driven into an impasse."

I explained them what their impasse really was. "In the long run," I said, "all social evils are the products of the French colonialist regime. To get rid of poverty and all other evils, it is necessary to overthrow this regime and build a new society, a communist society. To curse and beat the prison guards is of no avail. We must strike at the root, which is the exploitation and oppression of man by man."

I started "organizing" the cell. Things could not run smoothly if one did whatever one liked in dealing with the guards I thought. We had better appoint a delegate to contact them. Thanh, Ro and Dam agreed to this, and unanimously chose me. Since then, the cell had become shipshape. Each morning, our cook, who is a prisoner too, but not sentenced to death, came and asked what we required for our meals, and we gave our orders.

Formerly, Thanh, Ro and Dam liked to nag at the cook: "Listen, go to Ben Thanh market and bring us fresh vegetables," or "Listen, we want a fat capon

cock. Make sure that it is a live one, and we must hear him crow before you kill him."

The French used to give good food to prisoners sentenced to death. "Give them good food before they die," they said. So we had ham, fried chops, roast chicken or French dishes as our daily meals. If there was anything we wanted, we only needed to ask.

We ate rice crust\* only when it was scorched a golden brown. Our comrades outside were correct when they said that to enter the death cell was "to go and eat scorched rice crust with a coconut shell spoon."

Near the death cell there was a cell for women prisoners, both political and non-political. Sitting at the door of the cell, we could see them. Many prisoners took their children with them. The sight of these little creatures, thin and dirty, playing in the prison grounds gave us much food for thought. I told my prison mates to put aside part of our daily food ration for them. At each meal, we distributed a ration, copious enough, to the children in the women prisoners' cell. It was a habit with the children to look at us from afar, waiting for their share when it happened that our meals were not given in due time.

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Seeing that they now received less beatings and coarse words, the security agents and prison guards began to come nearer to the cell, but cautiously all

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\* The crust of rice sticking to the bottom and sides of the pan after cooking is slightly burnt and crisp, and has a toasted flavour.

the same. They knew that this was thanks to the presence of a political prisoner, and consorted with me. I myself enquired of them how things were going on in Saigon to take the weight off my mind.

A prison guard, Alexandre by name, who happened to be a socialist, made friend with me. Once he asked me thoughtfully, "One of the things that amazes me most and that I cannot understand is why the communists are always in a cheerful mood, even though they know they have not long to live. When they are still at large, they fight painstakingly. Kept in prison, they behave correctly."

"The communists always behave correctly," I told him. "Outside or inside the death cell it makes no difference. You are amazed, because you mistakenly believe that the meting out of capital punishment would make us lose our reason and become frantic with terror. But the communists see clearly which way to go and know what their aims are, and are therefore clear-minded. Capital punishment may bring madness and wildness to those who have no aim in life, no political ideal, no future. As for us, we see our future clearly. Although I am sentenced to death, my future is that you will cease to exist, while we shall gain our independence and communism will be achieved in our country. We are fully conscious that while carrying out the revolution to overthrow this regime, we cannot avoid being arrested or killed. Among us it is a case of life and death. To be kept in this cell is not strange to me."

The secret agents and prison guards said among themselves, "At death's door, the communists continue

to behave correctly. They rise above all pettiness. They have their own greatness."

Alexandre was later transferred to Poulo Condore where he met me again. He no longer beat the prisoners. He even told me news broadcasts.

Once, I jokingly told them, "Your system of capital punishment is very cruel and horrible. Horrible for you too, because you impose it and are unable to handle it. You are beaten and cursed by non-political prisoners. Death sentences, for the communists, are ineffective. We are transforming this horrible system for you as well. You must be very thankful to us for this."

They tried to save their face, saying, "Aha! these non-political prisoners! Who cares about them, the mad dogs!"

Unfortunately, one of the prisoners, Thanh or Ro, I cannot remember, who knew a little French, sat up briskly and shouted, "Who are you to say we are mad dogs, damn you! Let's give him a chamber pot."

I immediately held him back. The guards made off quickly, their face taking on a bewildered look.

\* \* \*

In the cell, we played cards and dice we had made ourselves for amusement. We glued scraps of paper together to make cards. We moulded bread-crumbs to make dice. We smoked and applied the cigarette to the wall to get off some tar for the black spots on the dice. We crumpled the wrapping paper from cigarette

packets and inlaid it in the dice to make red spots. Our meals were followed by chatting. When we were tired of chatting, we played cards and chess. It was true "gambling". Those who lost the games were forced to take as much food as they could.

In the central prison, there was a library to cater for the French. I borrowed books and read them, and then told the stories to Thanh, Ro and Dam, to their great delight. We read such books as *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* by Alexandre Dumas.

I then thought of helping them to read and write. "Do you want to learn a few words?"

"Heavens! What's the use? We are going to leave this world. We are sticking our heads on the guillotine. Don't talk about learning, man."

"Don't talk like that. We cannot remain idle, unless we think we are useless. If we are still of any use to society, we must work so long as we live. Learning is working. Here, we learn in order to be able to read books. This gives us pleasure and helps us to understand many interesting things. We will lose nothing, even if we perish. On the contrary, we will gain much."

I then arranged for the purchase of illustrated books on various plays. There is hardly any south Vietnamese who does not like the *Cai Luong*, or reformed theatre. Thanh, Ro and Dam could understand the plays from the illustrations, but not the story. I read it to them. Lying by my side, they raised their heads and listened to it. From time to time I stopped reading.

"Here they start on a *Tau Ma* tune, let's sing the *Tau Ma*."

The trio sang the tune at the top of their voices.

"Here they start on a *Nam Khach* tune. Let's sing the *Nam Khach*."

And the trio were quick to respond to my request.

This so attracted them that they began to have a love of learning. Each day, I taught them a few words. After about 3 months, they were able to spell and do some reading. Their thirst for learning increased.

"Brother Hung, get on," they would say, every morning as soon as they woke up.

They soon read very well, and each had his own book to read. Without the stocks, one would have taken the cell for a study belonging to poor students.

When they were able to read, we started acting plays. With the plays at our disposal, we studied them and distributed the casts among ourselves. We turned the chamber pot upside down to make it our drum. We sang and every tone was used, tenor, soprano, bass, etc. Gaiety prevailed in the cell. Not knowing what was happening, the guards rushed to our cell one night, and to their great surprise, they saw us lying stark naked with our legs still in the stocks, stroking an imaginary beard and singing.

"Off with you," I said to them. "There is nothing to be worried about. It is terribly boring here and we act plays to amuse ourselves."

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In general, our death sentences were confirmed or rescinded after 6 or 7 months. After that period, we would know whether or not we were to be guillotined. The sentence if commuted, would be imprisonment for life with hard labour.

I had been kept in prison for not less than 7 months. Dam had already been executed. Before his execution, he was transferred to another cell. One morning, just before dawn, feet pounded along the passage outside. I heard Dam's voice, "Brother Hung, I am going to be guillotined. Good health to you all, goodbye."

Not long before that, Dam had had no peace of mind, and could not eat. At night, waking up, he would remain still. He no longer read. He used to spend the time looking at the ceiling. He would roll a cigarette as thick as a thumb, and after he had finished smoking, spit it against the wall. The cigarette ends stuck on the wall, formed a long row and dried up. It was not until then that the French took him away. Two other Party members, who had been transferred here together with me, and I myself were still left out. But experience indicated that if our sentences were to be rescinded, this would already have happened. We had been here for 7 months, and we were sure that our sentences were still in force. Discussions were held on how to preserve our initiative at the time of our execution. "What do you want?" This was the customary question the French used to put to the prisoners before they were executed. We prepared our answer.

"We will arrange our turns for the guillotine among ourselves. You need not interfere."

It was decided that comrade Cau would be the first to step up on the guillotine. Next was comrade O, and I would come last.

"You will be the last to mount the guillotine," Cau and O told me. "So you will witness the deaths of those who precede you. It is very like dying several times."

But I was transferred to a tribunal, to attend the hearings of what the French called "The Trial of the Indochinese C.P.", at which they tried comrades from the Central Committee down to provincial committees.

It was in early May 1933, and the revolution was on the wane. At the tribunal, I again met comrade Ngo Gia Tu and Nguyen Van Luong.

#### After PHAM HUNG

## READY TO FACE THE GUILLOTINE

When nineteen I was a worker in Nha Be and one of the leaders of the workers' strike there. At that time, the strikers beat a foreman to death, seriously injured a cook and seized several guns from the troops who were rushed in to suppress the strike. I was arrested and arraigned at "The Trial of the Indo-chinese Communist Party".

Because of my refusal to plead guilty to anything, I was confined in a pitch dark basement for twenty-one days. I could not make out anything inside. On the fifth day of my confinement, however, I realized that at each meal two mess-tins of rice and other food were thrown in for me. Previously I thought that there was only one.

The court declared as "political prisoners" those who organized and edited revolutionary newspapers. As for those involved in strikes, seizures of paddy, beatings of soldiers,... they were indiscriminately accused of "banditry and offences against public security", instead of political offences. We were not allowed to plead. I had only time to say, before

being taken away, "You behead people who are allowed to say only 'Yes' or 'No'. Isn't that strange justice?"

Hung was able to finish his sentence, saying, "This is strange justice. I have one head which has been sentenced to be chopped off my shoulders, and now you pronounce a second death sentence against me. I don't know where you will find the other head."

Tu was even more stubborn in his statement, "You have slandered our Party. Therefore, I must be allowed to defend it first. As far as I am concerned, I will answer you later." And he persisted in his demand to defend his Party.

During the trial, the International Relief Association and the French Communist Party asked progressive barristers in Saigon to act as our defence counsels. A barrister said, "I ask the court to consider my client's youth and lack of mature thinking..."

One of the comrades stood up and intervened, "No, this is a faulty defence. I don't agree with it. Although we are young, we think over what we do. To free the nation and to free the working class how can people dare to call this a lack of mature thinking?"

Finally, the court pronounced the verdicts. On "political offenders", sentences of deportation for life, imprisonment ranging from fifteen to twenty years, and confinement in Poulo Condore were imposed. On "offenders charged with murder and rebellion", like Le Quang Sung, six other persons and I, death sentences were imposed. For comrade Hung, in addition to

the previous death penalty, a 20 years' sentence of hard labour was imposed on him.

\* \* \*

One day, Sung and I entered the Saigon Central prison.

Upon arrival at the section for prisoners sentenced to death, I heard a very familiar voice calling, "Luong, Luong, here is your mate; we will share this cell together." The person calling me was Hung. He was enjoying sitting close to the door of the cell. At that period, prisoners in this section demanded that the door of the cell be opened a few times a day to let the light in and to enable them to enjoy a look outside.

Thanh and Ro also greeted us, "Come here, the cell is rather narrow to hold all of us, but it doesn't matter."

We were in all seven souls living in one cell. Hung jokingly said, "We will order a banquet for tomorrow, and have a drink together."

In our prison, if we wanted to have drinks on Sundays, we would send for the orderly and say to him, "We have a bad cold, is there anything to drink?" The orderly would understand what we meant, and would bring in spirits from the dispensary.

Some days later, the French chief guard came in. He told Hung, "The appeal court agrees with the verdict of death passed against you, but as there has been a more recent trial, the decision from Paris has not yet arrived. I am telling you this because I know

you are not afraid of death. I have bought some rum and cigars, one glass of rum and one cigar for each of you."

We had been told that the French gave rum and cigars to prisoners sentenced to death just before the execution to cheer them up.

Hung asked, "Why don't we have them now? The execution might happen at any time."

The chief guard brought us some rum and three cigars. Hung then asked, "We are seven people here and there are provisions for three only. It is not enough."

The additional shares were brought in. We all smoked our cigars and soon the cell was filled with smoke.

For some days, Hung appeared in court and was absent from "home". Thanh and Ro in the meantime resumed their old habit of cursing and beating the guards. The latter came to us and complained about this. After inquiry, we learnt that the guards were rude to them.

Nevertheless, that was not the root cause. Since Mot Dam had been executed, Thanh's and Ro's concern had increased. They guessed that their execution day was approaching and yielded to their violent tempers. We sought to appease them by our advice. We exposed the evils of society which had led them to crime. Thanh and Ro spoke of the days they had spent in Poulo Condore and of the bad treatment by the chief guard and other jailers there. In Poulo Condore the regime was extremely harsh. Many detainees committed suicide. Some of them, when a murder occurred, claimed to be the author in order to finish up with a

"death sentence". I proceeded to explain, bit by bit each day and in a mild manner, until Thanh and Ro finally understood.

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After a time, the prison guards asked us, "Do you want to lodge an appeal?"

"Yes," we replied, "all the more so, as we have committed no offence and death sentences have been imposed on us."

We subsequently signed applications for appeal.

Barrister Cancelleri, who had been sent by the International Relief Association to act as our defence counsel, often visited us. We were told that he had been a member of the French Communist Party and had left it. However, he remained a Party sympathizer. He came each time with gifts of food and cigars. One day, he handed us some money. We refused it.

"We have everything we need. You have been kind to us and have defended us."

"The money has been sent to you by the International Relief Association," Cancelleri replied.

"Has it? We will accept then. Please convey our thanks to the International Relief Association."

Cancelleri told us that the French Communist Party was waging a campaign demanding a reversal of the death sentences imposed on us. We had vaguely heard this information before, when we read French newspapers.

How had the French papers reached us? When we asked to borrow some to read, the chief guard dared

not lend us Saigon papers, but he handed us copies of *L'Intransigeant*, the *Marseillais* and *Paris Soir*.

"These are the papers I have and as a special favour I will lend them to you," he said.

From then on, we read newspapers every day. We were particularly interested in the Leipzig trial of comrade Dimitrov by the Hitlerite fascists. The trial, which echoed throughout the world, was reported with abundant details by bourgeois papers. In our cell, we closely followed its development, even more closely than those living outside the prison. We read comrade Dimitrov's defence statements and learnt the way he based himself on existing reactionary legislation to defend his Party and to accuse imperialism. We learned many things, from the spirit and the attitude of the communist militant who defended the Communist International and the Bulgarian Communist Party and nation, who pointed a finger at the face of the Goerings and the Hitlers to accuse them, to the experience of struggle in court. French bourgeois papers described him as "Dimitrov, the brave man".

We took interest in reading these reports and felt very proud, and our maturity increased.

"Had we gained this experience before," we said among ourselves, "in court the other day we would have given the French the kind of answers they deserved."

During that period, we succeeded in establishing communication with political prisoners in the front prison building. We borrowed books from the prison library and wrote invisibly in them using boiled rice liquid. We informed the comrades in the other building

of the titles of the books concerned. They then borrowed them and painted on a page, previously agreed between us, with a solution of tincture of iodine to make the letters appear. By this method, we were informed of the situation outside. As we were awaiting the execution day, we did not give any information on our personal situation.

Behind our cell was a row of papaws. Sparrows often came there and cheered us with their twittering. One day, petty-offence prisoners came with long sticks and poles to chase them away. They said they had received the order from the chief guard to protect the papaws and to keep the ripe fruit for us. We invited them to come in, and told them, "If you chase the birds away we shall lose the pleasure of listening to their twittering. This doesn't matter, but you should keep the ripe papaws for the children in the women's cell. They are innocent yet are confined there."

One day, the jailers brought us a large quantity of good food. We did not know where the food came from. Later, we realized that they had taken it away from the parents and wives of petty-offence prisoners who had brought these gifts to their sons and husbands in prison. We then said to the jailers, "Those people are leading a harder life than we. We forbid you to take anything away from them."

The jailers admired us more and more with each passing day. Some of them were moved to the point of telling us of their repentance and apologizing.

We told them, "We are fighting the French and the imperialists, we feel no enmity towards you."

Their admiration for us grew.

Whole days were spent in entertainment and fun, playing games, singing songs and performing operas. When the cell door was open and people walked past, we always found something pleasant or funny to say to them.

At night when we heard street-vendors shouting their wares we jokingly repeated their calls. "Who will buy coconut juice with sugar?" We then felt as if we were actually walking along the pavement. Noises coming from outside revived memories of street and factory activities and we felt an unbearable nostalgia for them.

\* \* \*

One day, Thanh and Ro fell ill, although not seriously. The prison warders came and told them to go to the prison hospital. This was a pretext to take the men to their execution. Before leaving, they spoke to us, "You said earlier that before we die we should keep our awareness and shout slogans. Now tell us some of these."

They had guessed what would happen to them. We, too, shared their apprehension. If they had lived, they would have become honest men.

Some days later, at five o'clock in the morning, we heard slogans echoing from the distance — faint, but quite perceptible: "Down with French imperialism!", "Long live the Indochinese Communist Party!" The slogans were shouted calmly. We all heard them, and knew that Thanh and Ro were going to their death. Silently we glanced at each other.



The chief guard came in.

"Your friends have bid you farewell. Did you hear them?" he asked.

"Yes."

"There are two cigars left... will you smoke them?"

We took the two remaining cigars from the packet which had been given to Thanh and Ro that morning, held them in our fingers a long time, then lit them.

The chief guard broke the silence: "The two men are not of your group, why then did they shout slogans?"

"There is nothing strange in this. They have realized where good sense lies. Every thinking person will condemn you. Are you aware of that?"

With an uneasy smile he went away. For people like him it takes time to understand many things.

Six months elapsed. For thirteen months Hung had been in the condemned cell. It was my sixth month in prison. We discussed plans for everything — how to walk to the guillotine and how to face it, so that when death came, we should die in a fitting manner. We asked the guards for a description of the guillotine. They provided us with every detail, and asked me why we wanted to know.

"I want to know thoroughly," I said, "so that the execution can go through as smoothly as possible."

We asked them about the proceedings and the way they take prisoners to the execution. They explained everything.

Usually this question is put to the victim, "Do you have the last rites?" (A Catholic priest was present at executions).

Our answer would be: "What should I want them for?"

"Is there anything you want to say?", the French would ask, because they presumed that when the prisoner faced death, he might lose his self-control and confess, hoping that this confession would save his soul. The French were very shrewd indeed, but they should not have expected us to confess anything. They would ask this question, "Do you want to leave a message for your family?" Well, a question like this was welcome. According to imperialist regulations, each prisoner was allowed to write one letter only. For this we had our plan: Le Van Sung's wife named Sau Diec, was a courageous militant who loved him very much. It would be better that Le Van Sung write to his wife. Hung and I would, on behalf of the comrades, write to Ngo Gia Tu and other comrades in Poulo Condore, who were our close and most cherished comrades-in-arms.

We prepared in advance our statements to be made before the guillotine. They were aimed at condemning imperialism, making propaganda for the Party and exhorting the masses. As they would not allow the worker-peasant masses to attend our execution and there would not be much time, we prepared something straightforward and concise. We chose the four following slogans: "Down with French imperialism", "Long live the Indo-Chinese Communist Party", "Long live the Indo-Chinese Revolution", and "Long live the Communist International".

We then learnt to sing "The International". The song was to be sung in rhythm and in unison in the

execution yard. At that time "The International" had already been translated into the Vietnamese language. The version of that time did not differ very much from the current one, apart from two or three words.

From then on, at night we went to bed early, because the condemned men were usually taken for execution at about 5 o'clock in the morning. We wanted to get up early and have time to wash ourselves, do our hair and dress properly before the final stroke.

These were the preparations for the day of our execution, which we carried out each day. Nevertheless, nobody came to take us away.

In the seventh month of my imprisonment, the chief guard came one day and said, "Why have you not applied for an amnesty?" "Why should we do so", we retorted, "we have committed no crime. To make revolutions is not a crime. We wish to appeal, to oppose your justice and your law, but we will never apply for an amnesty. It depends on you whether you behead us or not."

The chief guard and the attorney general in turn came and sought to influence me, arguing, "You are only 19 years old, there is still a long life ahead of you. Besides you have an education..."

These words were repeated over and over again by the chief guard and the attorney general for two days. We could not bear their repetitious advice, and sent them away and had done with them.

Cancellieri also came (it might have been under pressure of the attorney general).

"You have not applied for an amnesty and have defended your prestige as Party members," he told

us. "This is a lofty attitude. However, in my opinion, you should apply for an amnesty. It is only a matter of proceeding which does not affect nor harm the honour of the Party."

"To date you have assisted us in many ways," we replied. "We thank you very much for that, but this time, we ask you to agree to our not following your advice."

At that time, in France the movement for the release of political prisoners in Indo-China was very strong. The imperialists have wanted us to sign applications for an amnesty. We would do no such thing! At nights we continued to practice singing and went to bed as early as before. In the mornings, we rose early, dressed and did our hair, and waited for the final call.

\* \* \*

About a month later, the chief guard entered, rubbing his hands.

"Well, now... it is finished," he said.

"What is finished?" we asked.

"It is now over for you, you will go tomorrow," he said.

"We shall go tomorrow, shall we? Well, we are ready. We have been waiting for a long time already," we answered.

"No, I mean that you will leave here for another place... to Poulo Condore."

The French Communist Party launched a vigorous campaign, demanding an amnesty for "the 10,000

political prisoners in Indo-China, especially the cancellation of ten death sentences." This struggle, inspired by proletarian internationalism, eventually won. But when the chief guard reported the news to us, he juggled with words to see if there was any sign of apprehension among us. Later, Cancelleri showed us press articles and parliamentary statements by French communist deputies. We then realized clearly that through the 7 to 8 months of our imprisonment, the French workers and people had waged a relentless struggle to save our lives.

Hung, Sung and I, said to one another, "We owe our lives to the French proletariat."

In the early days of January 1934, we left the Saigon Central prison for Poulo Condore. Leaving an underground hell, we landed in an earthly hell. Eleven years later, Hung and I still shared the same stocks and fetters as we had done in the condemned cell. We resumed our militant activities and struggle. Hung was very determined. His prison certificate was filled with the red marks of the scars from the innumerable punishments he had received. Following the triumph of the Revolution, our Party and Government sent a ship to take us to the mainland. We returned to Saigon at the very moment the French started the hostilities there on September 23, 1945.

We then began a new struggle...

**After LE VAN LUONG**

## **STEMMING FROM THE PEOPLE**

**Cao Bang, one of the two centres of  
the movement in Viet Bac—President  
Ho Chi Minh returns to the country**

Cao Bang was a province where the revolutionary movement began very early. As early as 1929, many cells of the Young Comrades' Association were set up there. When the Indo-Chinese Communist Party came into existence, Cao Bang then saw the founding of many Party cells within its limits. Even during the years of white terror, Party organizations were preserved. In the period of the Popular Front Movement, the revolutionary movement in the province developed on a relatively wide scale among the local people. Many meetings were held in support of the All-Indo-China Party Congress. Many struggles were waged by the workers at the Tinh Tuc Mine. When World War Two broke out, the French colonialists in Indo-China surrendered to the Japanese fascists; at the same time, they stepped up their repression against the revolutionary movement. Cao Bang then experienced colonialist repression too. Leading and rank and file Party members went underground for the safety of Party organizations and maintaining the movement which was faced with many difficulties.

At that time, "Ong Cu"\* — as President Ho Chi Minh was familiarly called — returned to the border region. Our group, composed of comrades Phung Chi Kien, Pham Van Dong, Hoang Van Hoan, Vu Anh and I, was working in China. Following France's complete loss, Uncle Ho considered that the situation called for our speedy return to the country, to establish connections with the masses and the Party Central Committee. Uncle Ho, together with a number of comrades, then returned to the China-Vietnam border region. We temporarily stayed in a village on Chinese territory, where the local people were very sympathetic. They had been influenced by the Chinese Red Army, and as they knew that we were Vietnamese revolutionaries, they extended to us their best assistance. At that time, a number of leading and rank and file Party members in Cao Bang, such as comrades Le Quang Ba, Hoang Sam, Bang Giang and others, fled the enemy's persecution to China to seek connections with the leading organs. They were delighted to meet Uncle Ho personally.

Uncle Ho decided to send these comrades to the border region for a period of training before being sent to the country to organize the Viet Minh League. A short-term training course was held in a Chinese village, near the frontier. Uncle Ho proceeded to organize it very carefully and meticulously. A program for the course was first worked out. After that we

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\* There is no equivalent expression in English for "Ong Cu"—which means an old man enjoying the affection and respect of the people.

were asked to prepare the course in six or seven lessons. A summary for each lesson was drafted and submitted to discussion by the whole teaching group before we started writing the full text. The text itself was submitted to a final collective check-up. We were advised to make sure that both the content and the phrasing be easily understood by the masses. These lessons were later printed and published in a book entitled "The Path of Liberation". This first course for training Viet Minh cadres yielded very good results. The course closed just at the approach of Lunar New Year Festival. The trainees were in good spirit when they left for home, and had confidence in the certain success of the consolidation and development of the movement and the organization of the Viet Minh.

After enjoying the Lunar New Year Festival in China, Uncle Ho left for home too. Our office was established in a cave in Pac Bo, a hilly region about from 2 to 3 kilometres wide and from 5 to 6 kilometres long. The distance from the cave to the frontier line between Vietnam and China was a little more than one kilometre. The Nung nationals who inhabited the region were very sympathetic people, scattered in the valley and the hill-sides, in hamlets of two or three families. The biggest hamlet comprised at most ten families. The region was covered with rocks, dense forests, huge vegetation and some scattered small rice fields. In front of the cave was a thick bush of reeds and wild weeds which hid the entrance almost completely, and it could not be seen even at a short distance. The cave was very deep. Outside, at

the foot of the hill meandered a very pleasant stream, which swelled in some places into large ponds about the size of a lake. Near its banks were rugged rocks, with at some places stalactites interwoven with huge and flat rocks. Uncle Ho usually worked on the bank of the stream, or at the training centre in a near-by hamlet, and returned to the cave at meal-times. At night it was chilly in the cave; a fire was lit to warm it up, without being seen from outside.

Uncle Ho paid special attention to the question of secrecy and always looked after the security of the office. Whenever he noted some signs of suspicion or tracking by the enemy, he advised moving the office to another place. Once, we received the news that enemy's agents had infiltrated the region. We moved the office deeper into the jungle. To reach our new location we had to walk along a ravine and climb several steep passes. Our refuge-hut was built underneath a canopy of interwoven rattan palms. It was pitchdark there even in the day, so we had to climb and work at a higher rock. After some time, for greater secrecy, we moved to a grotto. It was small in size and could accommodate only three or four of us. In days of heavy downpours, snakes crawled into the grotto for shelter.

Underground life was extremely hard. To preserve health and good work, Uncle Ho improved hygiene practice. He rose early every morning and woke up the office staff for some gymnastic exercises before work.

At night, as we had no kerosene for a lamp, a fire was burnt instead, and we sat around it to discuss

or to chat. Meal-time was observed punctually, the meals being exceedingly small. Occasionally, we ate meat, a dish we called "the Viet Minh meat" made of mashed pork roasted and salted in the ratio of one part of meat to three parts of salt.

We went fishing in the ravine as a means to improve our food rations. The cook, comrade Loc, was a very kind old man of strong faith in the revolution. He looked after the health of Uncle Ho and all the office staff with solicitude and devotion. When Uncle Ho was sick, he would grant him a "priority" serving him a bowl of the liquid taking out of the boiling rice. The water taken from the ravine for drinking purposes was filtered through coal, gravel and sand before use.

Although this health practice was closely followed everybody was affected with malaria. Many times in the course of a meeting Uncle Ho had a fit of fever, we suggested him to take a rest, but he refused saying, "Only by struggling against our ailment can we overcome it."

As the revolutionary movement developed and we moved to Lam Son valley, near Nuoc Hai district, in a region of rugged mountains which we called the "Red Blockhouse". This name was given to it because of the clear red of the rocks and in reminiscence of place where revolutionaries used to meet. Here, Uncle Ho kept to his simple and austere habits. This life spent in a cave greatly undermined his health. In periods of upsurge of the movement, when supplies were not too hard to get, the material life in the office did not suffer much from

shortage. But when the enemy repression was acute, the blockade tightened and the office had to move deeper into the jungle, food supplies were exceedingly difficult. Once, the office moved to a region inhabited by the Man Trang minority nationals. The local people had no rice for food and lived on maize all the year round. The office staff, too, had to live on maize gruel for months. Uncle Ho's health was affected. Comrade Loc had a small supply of rice he wanted to cook for him, but he refused to have it. Uncle Ho said the comrades seriously sick should have rice, as for him he would eat his share of maize.

In the period he worked in the Viet Bac, Uncle Ho once fell badly sick. It was in 1945, after the Japanese coup d'état. At that time, the Liberation Zone was already set up and expanded. We accompanied him from Cao Bang to Tan Trao. About July, 1935, preparations were under way for the National Congress in implementation of the Party Central Committee's decision. The provisional leadership of the Liberation Zone held its headquarters in a hut on stilts in Tan Trao village, near a banyan-tree which has become historic. I was then on permanent duty there.

Uncle Ho lived in a small hut on the hill-side less than one kilometre from the village. Walking from Cao Bang by foot was too exhausting for him. After a period, he fell gravely sick and had a persistent high temperature. In the first days of his sickness he could not eat rice and had rice gruel instead. Later, he was too sick to eat even rice gruel but only a boiling rice-liquid. He had moments of coma. Although, unlike in

the past some medicines were available, the whole stock comprised only a number of pills of quinine and phials of camphor.

Every day, I had to report to Uncle Ho on our work. His condition caused me great anxiety. Asked about his health, he invariably replied that his illness should not be a matter of concern, and advised me to be calm and to continue with my work. About six or seven days later, I saw that his condition had worsened. After the usual report, he told me to leave. I said that as there was nothing very urgent to do I could stay on with him. He probably felt the gravity of his condition and agreed to my staying for the night. At times when he recovered his senses, he talked to me and I sensed that he wanted to make his will. Calmly and slowly, he told me, "Now, the situation both at home and abroad is favourable. Our Party must lead the people to regain independence, at any cost. Even if we have to fight a battle scorching the whole Truong Son Range we will fight it until independence is won." After a moment thinking, he went on dealing with more concrete work: "Now, the movement is spreading. However, in this period of the rising tide, attention must be directed to consolidating the movement, educating reliable militants and training more cadres. Short-term courses must be opened to train local cadres, and Party cells must be developed in order to preserve the movement in case of set-backs. As for the armed struggle, it must be developed, when conditions are favourable, but at present it is necessary to reinforce our resistance base to meet eventual difficulties."

As I listened to him, I had the feeling that he was also anxious about his health, and my anxiety increased. I wrote a letter to the Central Committee to inform them about Uncle Ho's condition. At the same time, I sent for the comrades in various villages to ask them about curing Uncle Ho's disease. When asked, the old folk replied that it was a case of high fever. They also said that near the village there was a good specialist in the treatment of this disease. That very night I sent a messenger on his horse to seek the physician. Next morning the physician came. He felt Uncle Ho's forehead, felt his pulse, and prescribed an odd kind of root he brought from the forest. The physician burnt the root and mixed it with rice-soup which he gave to Uncle Ho. After two treatments, Uncle Ho felt better and some days later recovered completely from his illness.

We were infinitely happy. Unfortunately, since then, we have not been able to find out what kind of root it was which cured Uncle Ho so quickly.

Now let us look back to the period in Cao Bang when Uncle Ho was still living in Pac Bo region. Comrades Phung Chi Kien and Vu Anh were already there. Comrade Lam (i.e. Pham Van Dong), comrade Ly (i.e. Hoang Van Hoan) and I were still working in Tsing Si and making the trips between Tsing Si and Kwei Lin. We usually come to Pac Bo to attend meetings and present our reports to Uncle Ho. Occasionally, Uncle Ho, together with comrade Phung Chi Kien, came to meet us half way. Uncle Ho usually walked long distances. Sometimes, he walked tens of kilometres without fatigue. One day, as we went from

Tsing Si and he came to us, we met one another half way and held a meeting in a market-place. A comrade who just came from the country eagerly told him as soon as he saw him, "Comrade X. has been arrested!"

Uncle Ho sedately told all of us to enter an inn and ordered some soup and vermicelli for lunch. Only when the meal was over, the discussions began. Uncle Ho then slowly said to the newcomer:

"Now report the news from home. Try to keep calm."

Every time we went to Uncle's office, we felt at home, closer to the Party, in the warm surroundings of a revolutionary family. He often said, "The Party is the family of the communist militants." He often recommended: "Every action of ours must stem from the Party". He inquired after our health and showed his great concern for our living and working conditions.

The office was always filled with a bright atmosphere of revolutionary optimism. When the movement was on the upsurge, the comrades returned to the office in high spirits, bringing back with them something of the lively atmosphere of the localities from which they came. The calm atmosphere in the office would remind them that the revolutionary fight would continue for a long time and in hard conditions. Even during a setback of the movement, due to the enemy's hard repression and before the confusion of the masses, we would find when we returned to the office the same calmness and unshakable faith in the future of the revolution, every time we returned to the office.

This was one of our most profound impressions: not to be complacent in periods of the high-tide of the

movement and not to show pessimism when the movement receded. Uncle Ho educated the cadres in the firm confidence in the future of the revolution.

He often said, "Revolutionary work is an enduring task, lasting months and years, so it must be carried out with a firm will, thorough thinking and no haste".

When we returned from work and there were no urgent things to do, Uncle Ho would raise the problems for us to think over before we held the meeting and engaged in discussion. Uncle Ho's suggestions were very concrete and practical. When discussion was over and a decision was adopted, its implementation became imperative. Uncle Ho always supervised the concrete plans for every task, big or small. The period of activity by his side taught me a very valuable practice: when a decision on revolutionary lines is to be taken, far and wide investigations are necessary, but when actual work has started special attention must be paid to concrete things, either big or small. If small things are not done well, bigger ones are not likely to be accomplished with success.

Soon after his arrival at Pac Bo, Uncle Ho ordered the secret publication of the paper Viet Nam Doc Lap (Independent Vietnam) which appeared twice a week on two small papers printed by lithography in bold letters. The articles were simple and short, so simple and short that we had to raise the question of making them richer in content, using smaller letters to have more articles and a better presentation. But Uncle Ho said, "We shall continue to write short articles and new items, boldly printed, to suit the level of the masses!" In fact, after some time, we saw the great

effect produced by the Doc Lap as a propagandist and an organizer. Its influence was due to its correct political content which suited the level of the masses. Obviously, it carried what the masses wanted to learn and they could easily understand, thereby raising their consciousness and leading them forward. The paper later was extended to four well-printed pages and received warm appreciation of the masses.

Uncle Ho paid special attention to educating and training the cadres. He translated the History of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of the Soviet Union into the Vietnamese language, typed it himself into many copies of which he sent one to each of our working units to study.

Uncle Ho kept close connections with the local people, paying frequent visits to the old folk and teaching the youth how to read. He had special love for children. He often wore an indigo coat after the fashion of the Tho minority people and looked like a native old man. The local people greatly loved and respected him and usually called him "Ong Ke" that is a respectable old man in a high position. His simple manners, his optimism, his close contact with the people and his warm affection for his comrades were and — it can be said — still are very strong.

In March 1941, the 8th enlarged Congress of the Party Central Committee was held in Pac Bo. It was presided over by Uncle Ho. As everybody knows, this congress was of historic importance. It decided on the Party's new policies, put forward the problem of national liberation as the central and urgent task of



the entire people and drafted the lines for the Organization of the Vietnam Independence League and the preparation for armed uprising. At the same congress the C.C. decided to preserve and develop the Bac Son-Vu Nhai liberation base, to consolidate and expand the base of Cao Bang and to build them into two centres in preparation for armed uprising in the Viet Bac region.

### **Powerful upsurge**

Following a period of activity in China, we were marked by the Kuomintang as communists. We were then ordered to return to our country to work there.

Comrade Tong (i.e. Pham Van Dong's new name) and I returned to Cao Bang at a time when the movement there was consolidated and in many places was firmly developing.

It was then at the end of 1941, and the Viet Minh movement had spread to many districts. The compatriots of the Tho and Nung nationalities enthusiastically joined the various associations for national salvation. Everywhere young men and women led the movement, doing propaganda and organizational work, and military training. Adult women, too, possessed a very persistent and determined spirit of revolutionary struggle. In many localities, children also joined national salvation organizations where they were active in liaison and sentry work. In all the villages where the movement was relatively high, Party cells were developed. Gradually "wholly organized" villages

were set up, then "wholly organized" counties and "wholly organized" districts. In "wholly organized" localities the great majority of the people either joined national salvation organizations or sympathized with the revolution. In "wholly organized" villages Viet Minh committees settled all questions relating to the everyday activities of the local people. Marriages were certified by the local organizations which also served as an intermediary in the settlement of contending claims on land. The majority of the village officials were won over to the revolution. They showed sympathy to it or joined national salvation associations. Some rare reactionaries were either isolated or closely watched. In the lower levels, a regime of dual administration came into existence; legal administration officials usually sought the Viet Minh committee's instructions before they went to the district and the provincial offices. They reported everything to the Viet Minh committee when they returned to the locality.

The majority of civil militiamen joined revolutionary organizations or sympathized with the revolution.

At that time, to cope with the revolutionary movement, the "mandarinal hierarchy" instructed the administration to reinforce vigilance. Each village had two or three sentry posts. However, as both the civil militia and the local people sympathized with the revolution, the majority of these enemy posts turned to be our sentry. A number of those lying along our secret communication line were used as our posts of liaison.

The movement also developed strongly in the higher mountain regions peopled with the Man Trang. The life of the local people was exceedingly hard. The mountains were very rugged and there was little arable land, the roads crossed steep rocks and access was almost non-existent. The French, mandarins and local officials carried out most ruthless exploitation. The revolutionary spirit of the people in the region was very high. The Man Trang compatriots were extremely happy to meet Viet Minh cadres. They were greatly impressed to see that when people joined the organizations to fight like brothers against the French and the Japanese, all members, whether they were Kinh, Tho or Man, showed unusual mutual affection. They loved us as their kiths-and-kins and provided a selfless support to the revolution.

National salvation associations rapidly developed and extended in the region. Party organizations were set up. Among the first Man Trang compatriots to join the Party was Comrade Hong Tri who was utterly poor but possessed of incomparable revolutionary spirit. When the Japanese launched raiding operations in the region, he led the people in his village to struggle, heroically losing his life.

An outstanding feature of the movement was national solidarity. Already, in the days of underground struggle in Cao Bang, get-togethers were held between representatives of the nationalities, the Tho, Man, Nung, Kinh, Chinese residents and so on, in a very warm atmosphere. Delegations of the Man nationals went down the mountains to see the movement in the rice-land region. They were met with warm

welcome and encouragement by the compatriots there. After these visits they reported their impressions at meetings held in their hamlets. From time to time both in the lower land and in the higher mountain regions, photographic and drawing exhibitions were held, exposing the crimes committed by the French and the Japanese and highlighting the progress achieved by the revolution with exhibits of guns and flags as well as documents on the Soviet Union and the world revolutionary movement.

Later, the Cao Bang Provincial Committee was reorganized. In November 1942, an All-Cao Bang congress of Viet Minh representatives was convened, which elected the official Viet Minh Provincial Committee. Connections between organizations of the Viet Minh League from village and district levels to the provincial leadership were well-established. In "wholly organized" counties and districts, democratic elections were held in each village and at higher levels. Following this period, the Inter-provincial Committee for Cao Bang, Bac Can and Lang Son was set up with comrade La as secretary. He had long experience as a cadre, knew many ups and downs in Party work, and won high prestige among the masses. He was regarded with affection and admiration by Party members and the people. He did Party work with great devotion, despite his fragile health. Comrade La continued his position as secretary of the Cao Bang Provincial Committee, until his death last year.

To consolidate the movement, special concern was then paid to training. Uncle Ho said, "We must have

the people with us before talking of an uprising". Therefore our efforts were directed to consolidating the existing organizations and developing new ones. Many short-term training courses were organized in various districts but many comrades who lived far away could not attend for fear of losing much of the time to be devoted to production and being detected by the enemy. The comrade teachers were then organized into mobile groups to teach in turn in various localities. Each locality chose a secret site far from the village, where the cadres would gather, bringing with them food for a period of training lasting from 5 to 7 days. All village cadres were thus trained. The Inter-provincial Committee then planned to open training courses of a higher level and at the same time to extend enrolment in these courses to young men and women who were not members of executive committees. A large number of good members of national salvation organizations applied for enrolment. At the end of each course, a party was organized, attended by representatives of people from various walks of life, and time was spent in singing songs, thus stimulating further everybody's ardour for work. Uncle Ho took a direct part in training cadres and a number of peasants living near the office. Only a number of local cadres knew the Vietnamese language. Women especially were among the majority who did not speak this language. Uncle Ho advised us to learn the Tho dialect. In regions peopled by the Man Trang we used drawings as a means of teaching in the first training course held there. To explain how the French and the Japanese oppressed and exploited our people, we

made a picture of a French or a Japanese beating Vietnamese people who carried on their backs crushing taxes. We drew pictures of Man and Tho minorities and Vietnamese majority nationals taking one another's hands to illustrate that solidarity was necessary to drive out the French and Japanese. Gradually the Man people learnt Man script and studied in this dialect. The content of the courses was very simple. After discussing the situation at home and in the world, and why it was necessary to fight against the French and the Japanese, discussions began on the preparations for armed uprising, the organization of national salvation associations and self-defence groups, the five stages of underground activity, the handling of meetings, the way to speak at these meetings, etc.

I was in charge of a teaching group, and of the work in Hoa An, Nguyen Binh and in the region of the Man Trang. The training courses yielded splendid results. I remember that only in one of these courses, although the standard program was observed, in the part devoted to the international situation, discussions were also held on the "four contradictions".

During the graduation-ceremony held at the end of the course, a good member who used the underground name of De Tham raised his hand and asked to speak: "I ask the leadership to accept my withdrawal from the Association".

"Why do you ask to withdraw?" I asked, bewildered.

"In the Association, I can do everything, but now I find that what I have learnt is too difficult. I cannot remember it and I am afraid that I am not able to fulfil my task."

This was the most instructive experience on teaching. I had drafted a comprehensive program for study, but comrade De Tham asked to withdraw from the Association just because I added to the program the "four contradictions".

Within the Party, training work also held an important place. Training courses for Party members came under the responsibility of the Inter-provincial Committee. For a number of cadres of the provincial level, the program of study comprised, apart from the discussions on the Party Central Committee's resolution and the policies of the Inter-provincial Committee, initial study of the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

#### **Preparations for setting up armed units**

About the end of 1941, also in Pac Bo, Uncle Ho issued instructions on the organization of the first armed unit in Cao Bang; this was a platoon including comrades Le Quang Ba, Hoang Sam, Bang Giang, Le Thiet Hung, Duc Thanh, The An and others, with comrade Le Quang Ba as commander. The platoon was entrusted with the task of defending the Party's head-office, to consolidate and maintain communication-highways and at the same time to assist in the training of self-defence and fighting-defence units.

In every locality where the revolutionary movement extended and the masses joined national salvation organizations in large numbers, self-defence groups were set up among the youth of both sexes. The question of military training became urgent. The demand

was raised everywhere but cadres were lacking. Those comrades who knew something about military practice assisted. The question of editing documents on military study was also considered. Uncle Ho wrote a book on guerilla warfare, very simple in content and easy to read. The Inter-provincial Committee issued an instruction on drafting the program for military training and a unified vocabulary for military command. At first it was not easy because the whole affair was brand new. Even on the march, the cadre was not used to shouting, 'left-right...', and those in the ranks felt embarrassed. The movement for military training grew steadily. Each term lasted from 5 to 7 days, and started as soon as field-work afforded the trainees some spare-time. After a period when self-defence units were already strengthened fighting self-defence units were set up whose members were chosen among the most valorous members of defence units in the village.

It could be said that all young men and women in wholly organized villages joined self-defence organizations and underwent training for one or two terms. There were in each village one or two platoons of fighting-defence, relatively well organized and trained. During the same period, the Inter-provincial Committee organized training courses for military cadres, each lasting one month and comprising 50 to 60 trainees. Despite the difficulties arising from underground status, the schools which were set up in the jungles did not lack in "scope". For instance the third term of the military-political class in Kim Ma county, when it was unearthed, caused astonishment to the

imperialists. It comprised several palm-roofed blocks housing hundreds of trainees, a conference hall, dining-room, dormitory, gun-shelves and the parade ground situated on three levels, with a stair-way of about 50 to 60 steps. At the end of 1943 in Nuoc Hai region, Hoa An district, there were military reviews held in broad daylight in the fields, and sham battles involving some 40 or 50 men, and on some occasions close to 1,000 men in an area covering several counties. With the expansion of the armed forces, the atmosphere of the preparation for uprising became more intense.

Apart from training, ammunition supplies were also a very important and difficult problem. Members of the self-defence units equipped themselves by their own means with one weapon, such as dagger, spear, fire-arm or flint-lock. In some regions the local people contributed funds to purchase rifles locally-made on the other side of the border. Each member carried a coil of rope and learnt the way to capture enemy agents. With a view to solving the problem of arms supplies, the Inter-provincial Committee decided on the establishment of a modest smithy to carry out experiments in the making of hand-grenades and land-mines, of which comrade Cap was in charge. Some five or six workers formed the staff of this smithy. Materials such as iron-pots, copper trays and brass basins were given by the people. The choice of the site for this smithy was a big problem; it had to be located in a deep valley, behind a wall of several mountains in the "Red Blockhouse" region, to hide the noises of hammering from the outside. After many hard months

of experimentation, the first land-mine was produced. Previous tests carried out with parts proved to be satisfactory. On the day the test of the whole land-mine was to be carried out, I got word from comrade Vu Anh and comrade Tong asking me to come. The testing ground was near the smithy-workshop, at a place surrounded by high mountains. The land-mine was placed in a hole at the foot of the mountain, while the "spectators" sat at a higher spot behind huge rocks to watch the test without being worried about fragments of shell made of pig-iron. A rope about 100 metres long was attached to the land-mine to pull it when the order was given. We waited anxiously. Comrade Cap shouted the order. All eyes were directed to the land-mine. Smoke came out... and that was all. We waited for a long moment but no explosion occurred. A Tho comrade burst into laughter, saying, "It doesn't want to move." The first test proved to be a failure. However, comrade Cap persisted in his research and eventually succeeded. This workshop continued production until the victory of the August Revolution, when it was enlarged into the Lam Son arsenal and contributed a major part in supplying ammunition to the front. This smithy in the "Red Blockhouse" region could be considered as our first arsenal.

From the period Uncle Ho returned to the border region, he kept thinking of establishing a line of contact with the Central Committee in the Lower region. Especially following the decision of the 8th Congress of the Party Central Committee to set up two centres of the movement in the Viet Bac region, the question of

liaison between Cao Bang and Bac Son-Vu Nhai became more urgent.

Apart from the ordinary intelligence-communications it was necessary to organize promptly a line among the masses from Cao Bang to the Lower region. Only by this method could liaison be maintained during the enemy repression and in periods of armed activities guerilla groups could move favourably.

The liaison with the Lower region had to pass the localities inhabited by the Tho and the Man Tien people. We began to organize the Man Tien compatriots. At first we sent a Tho comrade who had a peasant mate in the locality of the Man Tien for propaganda work. Like the Man Trang, the Man Tien had a high spirit of anti-imperialism, simple and gentle feelings and good habits of mutual assistance. They welcomed the idea of organizing associations to fight against the French and the Japanese, but they required that an oath be formally taken to be fully confident. The oath was taken by either extinguishing a burning incense-stick or beheading a chicken. The wording of the oath ran like this: To unite with one another like kith-and-kin in the fight against the French and the Japanese in order to save the country and the village, and to achieve the program of the Viet Minh; not to leave one another in difficulties and betray the Association because of enemy's repression; those who betrayed would face annihilation. The one who took the oath would plunge the burning incense-stick he kept in hand into the water to extinguish it or he would chop off a chicken's head with one stroke.

Gradually Party cells were set up among the Man people. The first Man Tien to join the Party was comrade Hoan, native of Ha Hieu, in Cho Ra. He worked very ardently, won high prestige among the people and contributed a major part in organizing the zone of the Man Tien. The imperialists seized him. They tortured him eleven times during which he fainted but did not give any information. Finally they shot him. Prior to the shooting, his wife visited him. During the visit he told her, "Probably they will shoot me, but you have not to be worried, because the revolution will certainly triumph. You will keep your loyalty to the Party and assist the cadres in their work." He then handed to his wife a drug made of tiger-bone, saying, "Keep this drug and pass it on to comrade Van, when you meet him. Tell that I send him my best wishes and want him to take this drug to preserve his health to be able to work."

Later I had the chance to pass Ha Hieu and visited comrade Hoan's family. I saw his mother, his wife and his children. Comrade Hoan's wife wept bitterly, recalled the story and handed me the tiger-bone drug. The mother through her tears told me, "Although Hoan is dead and the harvest is not good, every year after each harvest, I spare a small quantity of glutinous rice for the guerilla fighters. You, my sons, should kill the last French and Japanese to enable us, the Man people, to live."

As the movement surged ahead, the enemy began their repression. They brought soldiers from the provincial capital and the district, from Ngan Son

northward, and from Nguyen Binh and Cao Bang on both sides, to encircle Kim Ma county and control various communication - highways, big and small, to capture cadres and unearth our underground offices. Together with comrade Thiet Hung, I was teaching at a training course and was sick with malaria. The local people told us, " French repression is now very acute. They have brought troops to search for you. Our Association's activities must be suspended for some time. You must temporarily withdraw to the jungle or return to the head-office waiting for the 'heat' of the repression to cool down."

Uncle Ho and the Inter-provincial Committee, on learning the news of enemy's repression, sent messengers to invite us to return to the office. Comrade Thiet Hung and I exchanged our views: if we went, local organizations would be disbanded, therefore, we should propose to Uncle Ho that we stay on to continue with our work, and join our efforts with the local compatriots in opposing the enemy's repression and preserving the organizations. On that day, the enemy carried out a very close search. Comrades Lao and Khanh guided us the whole night through steep mountains and deep ravines, where there seemed to be no road, in heavy showers and pitch darkness. We continued our march until dawn in a dense mist without being able to see anything around us. Late in the morning, as the mist cleared, we realized that we were walking on a bare hill, near the village, and that the enemy soldiers were searching at the foot of the hill. We agreed to go on all fours, and after having crawled for several kilometres we reached the

margin of a forest. We continued our walking, but at noon, we were exhausted. The guides pulled our hands to help us to move ahead. At about sunset, we reached the place we had planned, on the top of a mountain. There, we began preparations for building with the local people and leading the opposition to the enemy repression. Following this journey, both comrade Thiet Hung and I fell gravely sick and had fever for two and a half months. We had no medicines and took decoctions of " nu ao " root. Some women comrades worried about our conditions and brought our tunics to the soothsayer who would say prayers for our recovery. How could we recover by this method! When connections were resumed, comrade Cap came from Uncle Ho's office and gave us quinine pills which partially cured our disease.

In fact, the scale of the enemy's repression was then smaller than in subsequent times. But because it was the first time it was carried out in the region, it created great difficulties in maintaining the organizations. The movement declined for sometime. However, propaganda and training work continued. The movement then surged again. National salvation associations and self-defence groups passed the test. In the fields of Kim Ma, pre-uprising meetings were again enthusiastically held. Soon after this period, the first congress of the Man compatriots was convened and the Quang Trung zone established. The movement vigorously developed.

On one occasion, at the celebration of the Russian October Socialist Revolution, representatives of the people of Nguyen Binh and Ngan Son counties gathered

and discussed the preparations for armed uprising. Nearly 300 of them attended the gathering and about ten fighting self-defence groups took part in a military parade.

To help in propaganda work, we edited the program of the Viet Minh in rhymed verses: the five-foot verse Viet Minh pamphlet. I translated it into Man Tien and Man Trang dialects, also in verses. Many revolutionary songs were composed on the folk themes of the Tho and Man which helped to publicize the Viet Minh program very broadly and rapidly. In some hamlets, where the people were newly organized, when we came to attend meetings we found women and children reciting by heart the Viet Minh five-foot verses while they ginned cotton or pounded rice.

At that time, Party organizations were developed in Bac Can, and the provisional Bac Can Provincial Committee was set up.

The first committee secretary was comrade Dang. He was a loyal and resolute cadre. During a repression, the enemy soldiers encircled the office, comrade Dang fought them and fell heroically.

As the movement spread southward, the need for more cadres was strongly felt. In response to the appeal of the joint provincial committee, nearly one hundred young men and women cadres in Cao Bang left their families to join armed shock units.

We provided ourselves with guns and hand-grenades. Comrade Thiet Hung had a revolver which often missed fire, as for me I had a dud hand-grenade. However, we carried them constantly by our sides for their good effect on the morale. In

combination with local cadres, armed shock units used propaganda work in their many-winged advance southward. Shock units for development purposes went first to establish connections, and carry out information, propaganda and organizational work. They were followed by shock units for consolidation purposes, choosing loyal members among the masses, opening short-term training courses, and relying on newly trained local cadres to develop the movement.

In order rapidly to expand mass organizations, it was not absolutely necessary to organize one village after the other according to proximity. According to the situation, any locality could be organized by sending shock units which would secretly cover long distances to the place where the people were known to be relatively sympathetic. There they would set up organizations which later were linked with one another. We called this method of development, "parachuting".

On our way southward, an event occurred which is worthy of notice. Along with the development of the movement, I moved gradually from Kim Ma to Hoang Hoa Tham county, then to Ngan Son, to inspect the work and to organize training courses for local cadres. One day, when I was in the mountain near Ngan Son district town, I received an urgent letter from comrade Tong, asking me to return immediately to the head-office.

I returned to Cao Bang. The head-office continued to be located in Lam Son mountain. Comrade Tong and comrade Vu Anh informed me that Uncle Ho had gone to China, that he was arrested and jailed for a



period and recently died of sickness there. It was a great shock. I felt stunned. All of us were infinitely sad. Uncle Ho dead! This was a great sadness for our Party and our whole nation. We decided to inform the Central Committee of this sad news. We discussed the organization of the memorial service and agreed that comrade Tong draft the funeral oration. Comrade Cap brought Uncle Ho's rattan handbag and opened it to see if there was anything which should be preserved as a souvenir of him. We intended to send comrade Cap to China again to inquire of the place of Uncle Ho's tomb. Some days later, I left the office to return to my work. That night, together with a comrade I went southward, passing desolate hills overgrown with wild reeds, in the chilly cold, under a star-spotted and transparent sky. I felt very lonely and sad, I could not confide my feelings to anybody else, and looked at the stars through my tears.

After a period, we unexpectedly received a newspaper sent to us from China. The Chinese characters written in the margin of the newspaper unequivocally betrayed Uncle Ho's handwriting, which read, "I wish my brothers at home good health and good work. I am all right here". It was accompanied by the following verses:

"The clouds embrace the peaks, the peaks embrace the clouds,

"The river below shines like a mirror spotless and clean,

On the crest of the western mountains my heart stirs as I wander.

"Looking towards the Southern sky and dreaming of old friends."

We were filled with boundless joy. We showed the newspaper to comrade Cap and asked,

"What does all this mean?" "What do you think of this?"

Comrade Cap replied, "I don't know. When I was in China the Kuomintang mandarin actually told me that Uncle Ho was dead."

We asked comrade Cap again and again: "Now repeat the Chinese words he told you to see what they are."

Comrade Cap repeated the words. We tried to discover their meaning, and reached this unexpected conclusion: Perhaps in his talk with the Kuomintang mandarin, comrade Cap mistook the word "su lo", that means "yes", for the word "xu lo" which means "dead".

We broke into happy laughter. This was the end of several long months of sadness and worries.

About August 1943, the road to the South cleared up. I went to meet comrade Ba, i.e. comrade Chu Van Tan.

I remembered that over one year ago, after the movement southward had started, I learnt that comrade Tan had secretly left Bac Son for the border region, from where he reached the office of the Cao-Bac-Lang Inter-provincial Committee. I met comrade Tan in Lam Son. The Party then decided that comrade Tan return to Bac Son, to consolidate the organizations along the road from That Khe and Dinh Ca and to

organize the connections from Thai Nguyen to Cao Bang. The Party also decided that I continue with organizing the march to the south. We discussed many possible roads of junction. Comrade Tan introduced to me some cadres of Bac Son who would co-operate in organizing the march to the south.

After a relatively long period of hard work, through innumerable difficulties along the road southward, a broad section of the people in many localities was organized. The road led to many villages inhabited by the Tho, Man Tien and Man Do nationalities.

All along the road to Phu Thong, Cho Don, in my advance to the south, I saw the enthusiastic atmosphere of the preparations for the uprising and the increased consciousness of the masses. The compatriots, whether they were Tho or Man, were very good people, who gave the revolutionary cadres a particularly warm welcome, especially in Man hamlets, along the slope of Phia Bioc mountain range, where there was a persistent light rain even when there was sunshine at the foot of the range. All the Man compatriots joined Viet Minh organizations. Women and children all learnt by heart the five-foot Viet Minh verses composed in the Man dialect and many revolutionary songs. When there were reactionaries lingering about the region, the compatriots took great efforts in protecting the cadres. Sometimes they hid cadres in their private bedroom and in sanctuary-places for spirits, which they kept in great devotion and previously had not allowed strangers to enter.

After about a fortnight of travel, I came near Cho Chu and followed the mountain track which passed at

the foot of Coc Post to reach the agreed place of meeting with comrade Tan. With boundless joy, we met each other in a rice-field, deep in the jungle. We then called a number of cadres of Bac Son who were working in the region and cadres of the march to the south, to a meeting during which experiences were exchanged. A merry party followed the meeting, after which we spread palm-leaves on the ground to serve as our beds for the night in the open air in the jungle.

Comrade Tan informed me about the situation of the movement in Thai Nguyen and in the Lower region. Our revolutionary bases in Bac Son and Vu Nhai were consolidated and the movement was spreading to Cho Chu and Dai Tu. The enemy continued its policy of repression. The comrades of Bac Son showed great courage in the face of difficulties and danger, and valuable efforts in expanding the organizations among the masses. Comrade Tan also said that he had reported the situation to the Central Committee and that a Central Committee Party member would come soon. I waited for a period, hoping each day that this leading Party member would arrive, but because of acute enemy repression and the difficulty in travel he did not come. At the end of the second week, I returned to Cao Bang because I had promised to be there with the intention of consolidating further communication-highways. After that I would return here again. I had spent the two past weeks in writing the pamphlet "Experiences of the Viet Minh in the Viet Bac Region", to be sent to the Lower region.

I arrived in Cao Bang just in time for the Tet, or Lunar New Year Festival. On the eve of the main day

of Tet, the majority of cadres from nearly twenty armed shock groups of the march to the south gathered to celebrate their past achievements. The banner with these embroidered words, "Successful Assault", which was awarded to the March to the South Corps by the Central Committee of Viet Minh League and the Party branch of Cao-Bac-Lang brought immense enthusiasm to everybody.

About that time, the enemy began their big campaign of repression.

#### **White terror in Cao - Bac - Lang**

In 1942 and 1943, the Viet Minh movement in Cao-Bac-Lang reached its climax. In Ha Quang district, a thinly populated locality mostly inhabited by the Nung minority people, for example, according to data made available by the district Party committee, the membership of national salvation organizations rose from 1,053 in 1941, to 3,096 in 1943, including 1,049 staunch members and 235 members of self-defence units and fighting self-defence units, 6 short-term political and 3 short-term military training courses were opened in the district. By 1943, the entire people in the district had joined national salvation organizations, with a membership of 5,453, including 2,250 staunch elements, 1,004 self-defence guards and 15 fighting self-defence units. The number of political and military training courses was 11 and 26 respectively. 10 cultural establishments were set up by the people to wipe out illiteracy. In many places, women emulated

in growing vegetables and breeding silk-worms to raise funds in support of underground cadres.

In the military field, in all organized localities of the inter-provinces, almost all young men and women joined self-defence and fighting self-defence units, and received constant training. It can be said that during the period of underground activity, the rural area of Cao - Bac - Lang had put into action the line of "all-people organizing and all-people arming".

Between 1942 and 1943, the Inter-provincial Party Committee opened many courses for the training of military cadres. Military parades and exercises were organized. A military exercise held in Hong Viet village in July 1943 was participated by 1,000 people, including members of self-defence units and fighting self-defence units, Viet Minh leaders and staunch members at village level. The aim of these military parades and exercises was to create conditions for the cadres to learn the art of the command and intensify the training of fighting self-defence units. They were at the same time a show of force to strengthen the confidence of the revolutionary masses, win over middle-of-the-roaders and put pressure to bear on local reactionaries. However, with such a method, we would easily expose our strength and secrets, and cause the enemy to stage raids.

The building of food reserves was also properly carried out. "Insurrection" paddy and maize reserves were set up in every district. The masses were active in carrying out the plan for partial scorched-earth in various hamlets. Hide-outs were dug deep in the forests by the people. They burnt fire-wood to bake the inside

wall of these hide-outs, paved them with timber and bamboo hurdles, and, after filling them with paddy, covered them again with timber, and bamboo hurdles, and earth. Arms purchasing was carried on intensely. Every family did all they could, even by selling paddy and buffaloes, to smuggle weapons from Chiang Kai-shek's troops on the other side of the border. Smithies sprung up everywhere to repair fire-arms and flintlock rifles, and turn out swords and knives. The people enthusiastically contributed scrap iron, copper, ploughshares, copper wash basins and trays, etc.

The French fascists, lackeys of the Japanese fascists, decided to carry out ruthless repression, in an attempt to head off the armed insurrection. Their plan was to conduct outright repression simultaneously with coercion and hoodwinking, aimed at destroying the people's bases, cutting off food supplies to underground cadres, and then launching military attacks to annihilate secret organs of the Viet Minh.

The very moment when the enemy was intensifying its repression I parted with Chu Van Tan, and from the Cho Chu-Cho Don border, returned to Cao Bang.

Half-way there, near the town of Bac Can, I noticed signs of the repression. Upon my arrival at Na Lum, or "Forgotten Field", a remote village on the top of the Phia Bioc, I received a letter from comrade Duc Xuan, informing me of the surging tide of the movement, and asking me to take part in a meeting to be held by the people down in the valley. Comrade Duc Xuan was the leader of the "Vanguard Unit to Advance Southwards", a militant and courageous comrade, skilled in composing folk songs and in propaganda

work. When I reached a village at the foot of the mountain on my way down to the valley, news was received saying that the enemy was deploying its troops to carry out a raid on a base near Phu Thong. Losing vigilance, comrade Duc Xuan was ambushed by the enemy and shot when he was opening the meeting. His head and amputated arms were put on display at the market.

This road was thus disrupted. The masses were stricken with bewilderment.

I took a jungle path across the Phia Bioc mountain range and returned to Cao Bang.

As stated earlier, when I arrived in Kim Ma, it was Lunar New Year's Day. The region was being subjected to intensified raids by the enemy. Its main objectives were the areas where large-scale military exercises had been held. The headquarters of the Inter-provincial Party Committee installed in the Lam Son valley, was repeatedly encircled by enemy troops.

We decided to temporarily withdraw to another place and not to use armed force to resist, each time the enemy took the field. Once they fired mortar shells on the area where the paper Viet Lap was published, but did no damage. Moreover, the enemy troops were without morale. Hardly had they penetrated into the forest when a young pioneer from our headquarters shouted "Charge!", and caused them to take to their heels.

In some localities, the enemy resorted to humbug. They issued communiqués and announcements, summoned the people and recommended them to go on with their peaceful work, and not to join the Viet

Minh for rebellious activities. They used deceptive words, claiming guarantees of freedom for those who gave up underground activities and returned to their families, and calling on underground cadres to surrender themselves to the "government". The result was complete failure for the enemy. The Viet Minh did not budge one inch, its rank-and-file being prepared for any eventuality and having a clear idea of the enemy's machinations.

The imperialists changed over to repression. They reinforced their secret services, set up military posts to encircle key areas as well as areas where the revolutionary movement was surging ahead. More secret agents were nominated, more civil guards were mustered and mobile commandos formed.

Revolutionary cadres and even their relatives were hounded and arrested. Families whose children joined the revolution, or which were suspected of having relations with the revolution, would have their houses burnt down and their property confiscated.

In many localities, secret paddy reserves were unearthed and destroyed, and whole villages razed to the ground. Those who were found in possession of "Viet Minh" documents were shot on the spot. Their heads and amputated arms and legs were put on display in towns and districts. Big rewards were given to those who succeeded in decapitating underground cadres. The rewards ranged from 1,000 piastres and 1 ton of salt to 30,000 piastres.

Drawing experience from their campaign of white terror in Bac Son and Vu Nhai, they ordered the grouping of villages. Any village with less than 20

houses and located in remote areas were dismantled and grouped into fixed points. As a result, countless villages were deserted and houses dismantled. Many houses were burnt down because the owners failed to remove them in time. Many a time, standing on the top of the mountain, we eye witnessed these tragic fires caused by the imperialists down in the valley. Devastation and desolation prevailed throughout Cao-Bac-Lang.

Once grouped into concentration areas, our compatriots had to live an extremely wretched life. Major villages were forced to grow 3 layers of bamboo hedges, to mount guard at night and to call the roll every day. Curfew was imposed from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Not a grain of rice was allowed to be transported out of the villages. Many people were arrested and shot on the spot. Their only crimes: they had a basket of paddy seed sent for maceration, or brought a bag of rice to the market.

The imperialists sent their agents to infest the revolutionary ranks, causing suspicion among comrades. Raid, plunder and arson were carried out almost daily by enemy troops, in addition to forcible drafting of man-power. Villagers were forced to sign affidavits, pledging themselves not to join the Viet Minh.

In the face of such a situation, the Cao-Bac-Lang Inter-provincial Party Committee promptly decided to launch a mass movement against persecution and terror. Party cells and Viet Minh village committees were asked to form anti-terrorist shock committees, embracing all Party members and militant members of national salvation organizations. Measures were

taken to prevent reactionary elements from creeping into these organizations.

The people's anti-terrorist spirit was very high. Each time the imperialist troops staged a raid, Party members and militant youth went to various localities, conducting explanation and propaganda work to bolster the people's morale. However, faced with the enemy's atrocities, some localities were bound to flinch.

In some areas, the people asked for temporary suspension of their organization's work; at other places, from one village, no less than 40 or 50 young men and women would take to the jungle.

The Cao-Bac-Lang Inter-provincial Party Committee issued a directive, calling on cadres who were still engaged in open activity, to heighten their vigilance and take care not to be captured by the enemy. Cadres were also urged to stand ready to "go into hiding". They were asked not to stay at home at night, to be provided with self-defence measures when they travelled by day, build food reserves for at least 2 or 3 months, and maintain liaison with leading comrades to be able to disappear in any emergency.

The number of underground comrades grew steadily.

The Inter-provincial Party Committee decided to organize these comrades into "secret groups" as the nucleus of the movement. A "secret group" was composed of underground comrades from one or two villages, most of whom left their families and took refuge in the jungle. Each group had its own premises, called a "thieng", or a secret hut of smaller size than

those we often built during our military campaigns. It was paved with bamboo, covered with wild herbs or banana leaves, and set on hill tops or in thick forests. The path leading to our premises ran across several steep water falls. To reach the premises, we could not take the side lane, but had to walk across the water falls so that no traces were left. As a result, we were dripping wet when we arrived.

A "secret group" generally comprised 4 or 5 members, sometimes close to 10, working under a fixed regime and a stern discipline. There were hours for mass work, for study and for military training. Study and production from morning till 3 or 4 p. m., then dinner. After dinner, "secret men" crossed forests and mountains, streams and torrents, and, guided by a secret signal, made for meeting-points. It was at these places that they met Party members or strong supporters or national salvation organizations from the villages. These people, risking their lives, went up hill and down dale to bring food supplies to secret groups, give them accounts of the situation, and discuss what was to be done to cope with enemy raids in each village and hamlet.

Members of secret groups then spent the night, sleeping right on the edge of a river or a ricefield if the weather was favourable. At dawn, they returned to their premises. One had to reach the forest before the mist dispersed, to be free from criticism, and not to be a curse to the locality. Their hard life, their bravery and perseverance in sticking to people's bases and the masses, gave a powerful impetus to the struggle of the revolutionary masses.

The imperialists were well aware that a close link existed between the Party and the masses, between secret groups and villages and hamlets. They intensified their campaign of terror, set up military posts almost everywhere, encircled key mountain ranges. They pushed villagers on as far as the forests and marched behind them. This was a "disturbance", or a "hunt for revolutionaries through forests". At times, troops were sent at night to lay ambushes at fords. At others, scouts of Man origin were sent at dawn to follow traces on dewy paths to track down the hide-outs of secret men, in order that troops could be sent for their encirclement and annihilation. Sometimes, on sunny Summer days, tracts of suspected forests were set on fire one after another. Once, we escaped being burnt alive by finding a shelter close to a brook. Many premises of secret groups were constantly in a state of siege. The Bac Can region was the enemy's main target. Once, comrade Hoang Sam, 2 local cadres and I were besieged for 3 days running on a hill top in Hoang Hoa Tham county. To cook our rice, we had to use lengths of female bamboo as containers and cut liana to obtain water. However, we were far more lucky than many other dear comrades who had been killed by the enemy during this period of large-scale raids. Each time secret premises were discovered, nearby villages were practically razed to the ground. In Hoang Hoa Tham county where the movement was particularly high, two thirds of the inhabitants abandoned their villages and took to the jungle.

The movement of the masses temporarily subsided. The people remained kind, but terrified. They said, "When the insurrection day arrives, we will rise up to kill the enemy. But prior to that day, we decline the venture, because any meeting with a secret comrade would cause the whole village to be burnt down." However, insurrection could not be staged unless the people's bases were preserved.

People's bases should be preserved at all costs. We explained this to Party cells and all cadres to make them understand. No matter how great the difficulties were, Party members and cadres should always remain with the masses. Enemy raids provided opportunities for sorting out staunch elements.

After each meeting, members of secret groups again went to various localities, carrying with them a bag of dried food each. They waited for the people on their way to the market or met them in their fields to establish contacts, and informed them of the victory of the Soviet Union and the Allies, and of the rising tide in the delta. They assured the people that terror could never curb the revolution, and mapped out plans for them to continue with their organization's work.

At the next meeting, members of these groups gathered and verified their presence. Some, or even many comrades, might be absent. Generally speaking, those who failed to come back at the appointed time would have been killed when they were at work. As far as material conditions were concerned, only maize or unpounded rice was available in some regions, and in others, people had to eat wild roots in place of rice. As for my office, we ate rice with bulbs of wild banana

trees for months. Salted water was used to boil them so as to take out the astringent substance which was very sharp to taste. This made them eatable although they continued to irritate our stomach.

With such food, we sometimes were unable to climb the mountains, being too weak. It was not until the movement rose again that we were supplied with some fat. However, with the flames of confidence and with the spirit of sacrifice, everybody was ready to march forward, and remained unflinching and happy.

As a result of the armed attacks by the imperialists, the revolutionary bases became more solid, although their scope was restricted.

After a certain time, the movement resurged in many localities and gradually grew into armed struggle. The Cao-Bac-Lang Inter-provincial Party Committee directed the secret groups to achieve militarization, to secure arms and ammunition, step up military training, and carry out military activity simultaneously with political activity. The directive also urged application of "guerilla style", to be perfectly trim and always in a state of preparedness, ready to leave for another place upon receiving orders.

Unrestricted armed groups, usually composed of from 7 to 12 members, were set up in various districts. Wherever conditions allowed, units of the strength of a platoon were formed. These local armed units were generally concentrated to conduct propaganda, annihilate the ringleaders of the reactionary clique, or ambush small enemy patrol units with a view to taking control of the mountains and forests. But due to the fact that their scope of activity was kept aloof from

people's bases, in order to avoid repression and reprisals, it was to some extent limited. For instance, the tracking down of the traitor Tong Doan in Kim Ma for his punishment caused a lot of trouble. When a suitable place of ambush was found, which was far from people's bases, he did not come by. As luck would have it, one day he went to the market. He was immediately followed by an armed unit and shot dead. The women returning from the market on that day commented, "He has been punished by the Organization."

Following this, other traitors got cold feet, but later they became active again.

As a result of enemy raids, the southwards road was disrupted at many points. We sent shock working teams to help the masses to oppose raids, and to preserve people's bases. Even with this, we succeeded in reopening the communications only section by section.

Towards the beginning of 1944, liaison with the lowlands became a matter of extreme urgency. By Party decision, we concentrated a number of local armed units, organized them into a "Platoon to Advance Southwards" and planned to make our way along top-secret jungle tracks to establish liaison with people's bases at the foot of the Phia Bioc.

All along the road, many villages had been destroyed and burnt down. At concentration villages, the enemy posted heavy sentries. The "Platoon to Advance Southwards" began driving south from Kim Ma. It marched at night, took rest during the day, and resumed its march after sunset. I remembered those nights when we marched under heavy rains, the jungle tracks were flooded, and everybody was



wet to the skin. It took us quite a lot of time to reach a cave to shelter ourselves. We made a fire to dry our clothes, and then continued our march until 7 or 8 o'clock next morning. We chose a covered place, spread leaves or trees to make our bed, and spent the rest of our day in the heart of the forest. Sometimes, it took us 2 or 3 nights' march to reach a village where people's bases were to be found.

At times we had to make our way through villages overrun by reactionaries. The road we took was unique and ran near their look-out post. Walking in the mud or with the help of a stick, we had to take good care not to make the slightest noise.

After 8 or 9 days' march, we passed through Cho Ra, and arrived at the appointed place at the foot of the Phia Bioc. Travelling together with the armed platoon were a number of cadres who carried with them a piece of lithographic limestone and ink and paper. Our plan on arriving there was to set up an office and publish newspapers, after liaison had been established with people's bases and the region consolidated.

Our arrival at our destination made us happy, although everybody was weary. Usually, we would go to sleep at once. But that night we felled trees to erect our hut, and took our rest only after we had built it. In the meantime, I sent comrade Thanh Quang, a native from Cho Ra, to get into contact with reliable bases in the locality. When he returned next evening, he revealed that people's bases in nearby villages had recently been wrecked, and many houses of comrades burned to the ground. The people told us that the enemy was carrying out raids, and that their troops

were making searches. We immediately posted sentries at various points, slept to regain our strength, and then made our way back to Cao Bang. We had to eat meagre rice soup on our way back because we had prepared our food supplies only for the going and not for the return journey. Returning to Cao Bang, each of us was taken seriously ill.

Although this large-scale raid created many difficulties for us, it resulted in strengthening the spirit of bravery and sacrifice of our cadres and the masses. This spirit was a prerequisite for the armed insurrection.

#### **Towards armed struggle**

By June, 1944, the savage white repression carried out by the French fascists reached an unprecedented scale. In the face of the frantic raids of repression perpetrated almost daily by the French, the people looked forward still more eagerly to the outbreak of the revolution.

Cao-Bac-Lang was likened to a powder keg about to explode.

Meanwhile, the world situation gradually shifted to the stage of utter defeat of fascism. In Europe, following the battle of Stalingrad and the big Soviet offensive, the 2nd front was opened. In the Pacific, the Japanese fascists were driven into a critical situation, and had to abandon a number of important bases beyond Japan's territorial waters.

In early July, 1944, the French fascist government headed by Petain collapsed. De Gaulle followed in the

wake of the Anglo-American forces and returned to France to set up a new government. Such a situation caused the antagonism between the Japanese and French fascists in Indo-China to grow sharper and sharper. A coup-de-force to do away with the French influence was inevitable.

In country, the revolutionary movement was becoming widespread, Viet Minh organizations grew in strength and scope with every passing day. The people were fully conscious that a change would certainly take place, and that it should take place.

In face of this situation, the Cao-Bac-Lang Inter-provincial Party Committee called a meeting of cadres at the end of July, 1944, to discuss problems relating to the armed uprising. Responsible cadres from the various localities were present. A review of these popular figures indicated that the effort of the imperialists yielded very little results; all leading cadres remained safe.

The meeting was held in a large cave, high in the mountain and surrounded by thick forests. The meeting hall was properly arranged, with an archway, a flag pole, several rows of tables, and dining and resting places.

Sentries were posted in the perimeter, in 3 rows and in all directions on the passes. Apart from the "Man" comrades in the locality, armed units from various districts were called in to protect the meeting. After months of life-and-death struggle against the enemy, we now were able to sit down and discuss a matter so much awaited by everybody. The enthusiasm was boundless. This enthusiasm was mingled

with some pride, pride for the people and for the Party. It was obvious that terrorism could never curb the revolution.

The political report submitted to the meeting arrived at the following conclusion:

"Considering the situation in the world, in the country and of the movement in Cao-Bac-Lang, conditions are ripe for guerilla warfare to be launched in the provinces."

The discussion quickly led to the adoption of a resolution on the uprising, because it was in keeping with the seething and tense situation brought about by the enemy's savage raids. All the delegates acclaimed the resolution. A delegate of the Nung minority group stated his ardent desire, "The baby has long craved for milk. It is only now that the mother feeds her baby. We are determined to annihilate the enemy."

The mother was the Party, the Organization. The love of the members and the admiration for it, knew no bounds.

On the following day, the meeting held discussions on the content of the word "uprising", and decided to use instead the phrase "to launch guerilla warfare" to avoid any misconception among both the cadres and the masses. A time-limit was set for all necessary preparations to be completed.

The localities were asked to give further training to heads of groups and political commissars and ensure the required figures in accordance with the plan of the Inter-provincial Party Committee. In addition to those already in the ranks of armed units, training should be given to a number of heads of

groups and political commissars as reserves: all secret comrades, men and women alike, having good health, were compelled to attend training courses for heads of groups and political commissars. The Inter-provincial Party Committee undertook the training of commanders of platoons and companies.

We also opened urgent courses for the training of cadres for the rear. We selected from 3 to 5 staunch and influential persons from each village and gave them training in rear operations against the Japanese as well as in administrative work. These people would set up provisional people's administration when the guerilla warfare was launched.

Members of fighting self-defence units in various localities should be mobilized, in accordance with the Inter-provincial Party Committee's plan, to join guerilla units. They were divided into 2 groups: those in the first group would take part in guerilla activities right at the moment they were launched; those in the other group would serve as reserves. All of them were formed into sections and platoons and received intensified training, with arms and food supplies in a state of readiness.

The purchase and production of arms, especially hand-grenades, were speeded up. 150 bullets should be made ready for each flintlock rifle. Food reserves should be built for at least 6 months, part of which, turned into dried food, sufficient for a period from this year's rice crop to next year's maize crop.

District Party committees should re-adjust secret communication lines and scouting committees, and

give the people a general idea of the intelligence service.

With regard to scorched-earth tactics, the people already received instructions. In many localities, they had already some experiences and had plans for hiding paddy in underground barns.

What was left to be done was to re-adjust scorched-earth plans for villages and cantons and, on the basis of declarations submitted by the villages concerning lives and property, to work out beforehand an all-out and more thoroughly scorched-earth plan.

Concerning evacuation, attention should be given to the following principle: during their evacuation, the people should be placed within the framework of the organization so as to be able to take up production and support the battlefield. To push through the movement, and prepare for the launching of guerilla activities, armed units were ordered to beat off the enemy's attacks, in order to carry out the decision to take control of mountainous and forest areas.

An Inter-provincial Military Committee was set up to accelerate preparation work, gather information about the enemy's situation and study plans for the launching of guerilla operations.

Cadres and Party members took up preparations with might and main. It was a scene of bustling, lively but quiet activity of a secret enterprise. The people's spirit also rose to a new height. The collection of paddy in support of guerilla fighters was achieved far above plan in many localities. An old woman sold a major part of her property to purchase arms for her sons and daughters.

In many districts, elderly people decided to order all young men and women to enlist into the army when called upon by the organization.

People lived the pre-insurrection hours in hope and excitement.

In various localities, cadres were instructed to hold meetings, at which the people were given the understanding that the launching of guerilla activities did not in any way mean immediate success. Instead, it called for continued efforts and more sacrifices, and sometimes, temporary and partial set-backs. And as a result, the people would still face many deprivations and hardships. This explanatory work was carried out quite thoroughly.

It was in September.

Harvesting was nearing completion. A major part of the preparatory plan had been achieved. The first shots of the armed action had already been fired in many localities. Everything was in a state of tension and expectancy.

#### **The Vietnam Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation**

In face of this situation, the Inter-provincial Party Committee planned the holding of a last meeting to decide on the date and the time for launching guerilla activities.

Right at that moment, it was learnt that Uncle Ho was returning to the country from China, after being released from Kuomintang jails. Arriving in Pac Bo, he heard reports on the movement and was informed

of the decision to launch guerilla activities. He met leading comrades, analysed the situation and gave his criticism of the decision, which was based only on the situation in Cao-Bac-Lang and not on the situation of the whole country, that is to take into consideration only the parts and overlook the whole.

With the conditions of that time, to launch guerilla activities on such a scale and with such methods as were decided by the Inter-provincial Party Committee would inevitably meet with numerous difficulties. No other locality in the country was found ready to respond to it, and the imperialists would muster their forces to cope with the situation.

Militarily, the decision failed to realize the principle of concentration of forces; cadres and arms were scattered; a force serving as a nucleus was completely lacking.

Uncle Ho held that the period of development of peaceful revolution had passed but that the time was not yet ripe for a general uprising.

To use political forms alone in our activity was inadequate to push through the movement. But the enemy would cause us to run risks if we immediately launched the insurrection. The struggle should be shifted from political to military forms. However, under the present circumstances, political forms were still more important than military ones. To advance the movement, we therefore needed to find a suitable form.

At the same meeting, Uncle Ho laid down the task of forming a liberation army. This army, being small at its initial stage, should be called the Vietnam

Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation. Its task was to use armed struggle to mobilize the people and call on them to rise up. At the beginning, the line of action was to give more attention to political activities and propaganda work than to military activities and operations.

Uncle Ho's analysis of the situation, and the new line of action he laid down gave a clearer idea to the cadres who warmly acclaimed it.

And so, the Vietnam Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation was founded.

After dealing with the problem of principle, Uncle Ho also guided me in working out a concrete plan: how to organize the unit, to judge its effectiveness, where to recruit men, how many arms, what about food supplies, and how to establish liaison with the localities.

It took a whole day to map out the plan. Views continued to be exchanged far into the night. Uncle Ho still weighed the pros and cons. The plan was submitted for further discussion by others the next morning.

To launch the armed struggle along the new lines, Uncle Ho laid stress on two points: — to act resolutely and swiftly; one month after its formation, the unit should have recorded fighting exploits, and the first attack ought to be a victorious one; — in action, attention should be given to building up good relations between the main unit and local armed units and between the army and the people, and to constantly maintaining liaison with the leading organ.

He also directed attention to problem of secrecy. When the unit was about to set out, he gave it further recommendations: to avoid being subjective and exposing forces, to strive to keep secret, to be more secret and fully secret. We should conceal the strength of our forces; when we were in one direction the enemy should mistakenly think we were in another direction; we were strong and the enemy should mistakenly think otherwise; when we were about to take action, the enemy must be blithely unaware.

I have related the movement for revolutionary struggle and the preparations for the armed uprising in Cao-Bac-Lang until the formation of the Vietnam Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation. Under the leadership of the Party, and with the direct guidance of President Ho Chi Minh, the people of Cao-Bac-Lang had fought heroically, Party cells and members, self-defence units and fighting self-defence units, secret groups, shock armed units, local armed sections and platoons had overcome untold hardships, and many of our best comrades had sacrificed themselves gallantly. The more the enemy intensified its repression, the more was the movement trained. Sometimes, it was narrowed down, but soon mounted again. All this indicated that it was not a mere accident that the Vietnam Armed Unit for National Liberation was born in the mountainous and forested areas of Cao-Bac-Lang. And it was not by chance that this armed unit "was small at first but had far-reaching vistas". Its strength, and what is more the strength of our army, lay in the extremely great strength of the united struggle of the masses.

On receiving a new directive, we left Pac Bo and rejoined the Inter-provincial Party Committee, our heart filled with enthusiasm and confidence. The directive was actively executed. Cadres and weapons were sent back. The first 34 comrades who took part in the formation of the unit were chiefs of sections and platoons and outstanding valiant fighters from local armed units or fighting self-defence units. They included a number of cadres who just returned from China after having received military training there. At that time, 3 kinds of armed forces had taken shape in Cao-Bac-Lang; the Propaganda Unit was the main force; around it were local armed units and semi-armed self-defence units. Although they were still at a guerilla stage, these 3 forces associated with one another and maintained close co-ordination.

I have a good recollection of this, because this was new to me and created a deep impression.

One day before the formation of the unit, I received a directive from Uncle Ho written a small piece of paper and enclosed in a packet of cigarettes. Two days later, strictly observing the directive, the Propaganda Unit achieved its two first military exploits: the victories of Phay Khat and Na Ngan. The first communiqué on these military achievements was published in the paper Viet Lap. At the same time, the Inter-provincial Party Committee called on the people to broaden the movement for over-all support for the army. The Unit's influence spread swiftly. The people were greatly enthusiastic. Middle-of-the-roads turned to the revolution. Traitorous elements

showed their anxiety. The enemy carried out its searches with more reservation. Many bases were quickly restored and extended. The movement surged ahead steadily. The people supplied the army with large quantities of food. Cakes were sent in baskets. Gifts included buffaloes, oxen and pigs. There were also TT poems, TT rice and TT funds for arms purchase (TT was the under-cover name of the Unit). Among the youth, there was a surging movement for joining the Liberation Army, a request for enlistment in the Liberation Army.

From Phay Khat and Na Ngan, the Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation advanced towards the Thien Thuat zone where it swelled afterwards to a company. More fighters, picked from local armed units, were quickly concentrated. In many areas, these local units were developing into platoons. Part of the arms captured from the enemy was distributed to them, to the great delight of their members. At that time, further equipment with 2 or 3 primitive weapons such as bolt rifles, sufficed to give the fighters great enthusiasm. Intensive efforts for operational work were made by the localities for the main forces to launch attacks on the enemy.

The bulk of the company, after its formation, was sent to carry out activities in the Dong Mu - Bao Lac region on the Sino-Vietnamese border to distract the enemy, then secretly returned to the Cao Bang - Bac Can border, while leaving behind a small section to conduct propaganda in Kim Ma, Tinh Tuc and in the Phia Oac mountain.

We planned to drive southwards when the movement rose. On our way back from the border area, we were whole-heartedly received by the people. Even people in areas close to enemy posts openly carried torchlights to welcome the army. As the Lunar New Year Festival was drawing near, young men and women in some areas spread festive meals on tables they laid on the road side, and spent the whole night waiting for the troops to entertain them. Upon arrival at Hoang Hoa Tham canton, we found that everything had been made ready by the people to welcome the army.

Thatched houses capable of accommodating the whole company had been set up in the forests. There were also a drilling ground and large quantities of food supplies. The local people lived in dire poverty. However, they gave the army unreserved support. During the three festive days of the Lunar New Year, many young men and women, and elderly people left their homes and enjoyed their Festival together with the army. Recalling this, we think that nothing on earth could return the people's kindness and contributions.

At that very moment, communications with Thai Nguyen which were disrupted by enemy raids, were restored by shock teams. We made intensive preparations for driving southwards. Comrades Tong and Vu Anh went to the Tran Hung Dao forest where they visited the army and discussed plans for a March southwards. No sooner had they parted with us than the March 9 coup-de-force broke out. This afforded

new favourable conditions. The Vietnam Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation, from the deep jungle, moved to the Kim Ma open field. Golden-starred red flags were hoisted over every village and hamlet. The people were overwhelmed with joy. The scene of that day still lives in my memory. The blue sky looked more superb. The whole atmosphere became cheerful and enlivened. The first impressions of an independent nation filled everybody's mind.

Then a major section of the Unit drove to the south, and all along its way set up revolutionary administration, disarmed enemy troops and formed new units of the revolutionary armed forces.

In Cao-Bac-Lang, the Party leadership issued a timely directive, urging the formation of village people's administration, the launching of guerilla activities and the expansion of the army. Immediately after the Japanese coup-de-force, at least 15 or 20 new companies of the National Liberation Army were formed, one after another. Recruitment took place almost everywhere to reinforce the Liberation Army. At a recruiting centre near Nuoc Hai, more than 3,000 young men volunteered to enlist. The countryside of Cao-Bac-Lang was turned into a liberated area.

Meanwhile, in the heart of Bac Son and Vu Nhai National Salvation troops rose up, carried out guerilla attacks, set up revolutionary administration and increased its armed strength. Units of National Salvation troops soon met the National Liberation Army. The Bac Ky Military Conference held in Hiep Hoa decided to group all revolutionary armed forces under

the single name of Vietnam Liberation Army. A liberated zone was set up, embracing the provinces of Cao Bang, Bac Can, Lang Son, Ha Giang, Thai Nguyen and Tuyen Quang and part of Bac Giang and Vinh Yen provinces.

The situation took a quick turn. The anti-Japanese movement for national salvation surged ahead. The Party held its national Congress, followed by the National People's Congress in Tan Trao. Then the Japanese surrendered, and the August Revolution broke out. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam came into existence.

Reviewing the process of the formation of the first units of our army, from units of National Salvation troops, and the Vietnam Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation, to the Ba To guerilla platoon, until the August General Uprising when millions of people rose up to seize power, the coming into existence of many new units of the National Liberation Army from North to South, emerging from the masses, from self-defence and fighting self-defence units formed by the people, it is obvious that our army was born and grew up from the movement for revolutionary struggle of the masses. From the very beginning, it was placed under the leadership of the Party, and was brought up and supported by the people. This is the reason why it grew up rapidly with many heroic exploits to its credit during the war of resistance, contributing a tremendous part to the great cause of national liberation. For this reason, our army will surely fulfil its glorious task in the new stage of the Revolution: to defend socialist construction in the

North, serve as a prop for the struggle for national reunification, and contribute to safeguarding peace in South-East Asia and the world.

It is safe to say that the People's Army of today cannot exist unless there are the people, the Party and President Ho Chi Minh. Our army is an army of the people and for the people.

**After VO NGUYEN GIAP**



## OUR PEOPLE, A VERY HEROIC PEOPLE

### I

In recalling stories of the past, I remember the whole period of slavery, with all the bitterness and shame of an inhabitant of a dominated country; I also remember the deep hatred we felt for the foreign invaders.

On people of my generation the explosion of Pham Hong Thai's bomb exerted a very strong influence.

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We were studying at the Technical Practice School of Haiphong when Governor General Merlin went to Japan. On his stop-over at this town, he visited our school. We had to organize a pompous reception in his honour; a great contingent of troops armed to the teeth were mobilized to show off the military forces and to intimidate the youth. When Merlin came back from Japan and arrived at Kwangchow Pham Hong Thai threw a bomb at him but failed to kill him. At this news, we were filled with

joy and told one another, full of admiration, "The French are so strong and Pham Hong Thai dares to act! Ah, super, very heroic indeed!"

The next year, Phan Boi Chau was arrested, brought to Vietnam and sentenced to death by the French colonialists. Merlin returned to France, and Varenne came in his place. About July, a messenger came from Hanoi and told us to petition for an amnesty of Phan Boi Chau. Varenne was then at Doson for his summer vacations. Very early one morning we leapt over the hedge of the boarding school, and proceeded to the Rao district in order to stop Varenne's car and lodge our petition when he came back from Doson. At class time, seeing the school completely empty, the Director rushed about in all directions to look for us. He came to the Rao district and herded us back to school. There, the French resorted to colonialist treatment; they beat us. We defended one another, protecting our friends from being taken away or beaten. The most active of us was Luong Khanh Thien; he stood at the front row and energetically pushed off the French. In the scuffle, Gassi, a French teacher, had his shirt torn off; he screamed at the top of his voice that we had beaten him. Policemen were called and proceeded to raid us. We launched a strike in protest.

Over thirty students carried on the strike to the end and left the school; among these were Luong Khanh Thien, Luu Ba Ky and I. We were bosom friends, animated with the same spirit and sentiments, but now we had to part from one another, each going his own direction in search of a job. I went to the

mine at Phan Me and worked there for a few months, then got work at Mao Khe colliery. At that time, I remember, the workers in Mao Khe were very fond of stories about revolution. I worked in the mechanical section. Every day, the workers would bring the vehicles to be repaired to the "coal-bed" and take off the "connecting-rods". Putting look-outs at both ends of the workyard, we would gather and listen to the stories about Phan Boi Chau's trial, Phan Chu Trinh's funeral, the Nguyen An Ninh movement in the South, or Nguyen Ai Quoc in Russia. I chose good elements to found a sporting association, get relief funds, collect money and buy books and newspapers. I was eager to act but did not know the proper way. This was common to a great number of young people who were undergoing a mental crisis, looking earnestly for an ideal, a sense of meaning for their life. Luong Khanh Thien got a job at the Nam Dinh spinning mill, Luu Ba Ky worked aboard the Chantilly, plying between Marseilles-Saigon-Haiphong. They often wrote to me, making allusion to the revolution. This filled me with the desire to go to a populous region where I would be able to get in touch with the revolutionary movement.

Early in 1928, I returned to Haiphong; being a turner, I could get a job without difficulty at Caron works. Then I again met Luong Khanh Thien who had left the Nam Dinh spinning mill and was working at the Haiphong spinning mill.

"Hello, got it?" he asked immediately.

"What do you mean by it?"

"The Party, the doctrine. I thought you had got it."

He talked to me about the revolutionary movement, then introduced me to Nguyen Duc Canh who took the necessary steps for my admission to the Youth Organization. Canh was still very young, rather thin but very agile and was one of the comrades endowed with a fairly good theoretical knowledge. He was in charge of the Haiphong Youth Organization. He talked to me about labour, about workers and capitalists, about surplus value. Every word of his penetrated my mind like water in a piece of dry chalk.

Mine was a joint Youth cell including Doai, a worker of the Cua Cam power plant, Ngo Kim Tai, a policeman and Tu Bieu, the husband of Old sister Tu. We used to hold our meeting at the Tus'. Their eldest child was only about five or six years of age. Normally he nestled himself in our lap to frolic, but when we held our meeting, he would stand in front of the door to warn us by speaking aloud of the arrival of any stranger. Tai was a policeman. As soon as he learnt that the French were about to mop up a certain city-quarter or were keeping a watchful eye on a certain sector, he immediately informed the Youth Organization of the fact. Whenever a struggle was being waged, Tai would ask to be on duty at night. He would walk ahead along the streets where we were to post leaflets, and spread paste on the wall. We followed him and merely stuck the leaflets on the paste. Thus our work could never be discovered. Early in 1929, we succeeded in setting up primary organizations in most of the Haiphong enterprises such as the cement factory, power plant, glass-works, spinning mill, Caron works,

and the harbour service. In April, May, and June of the same year many struggles of the workers broke out. Shortly after, Thien was arrested.

Early in 1929, being dismissed from Caron works I began to carry out underground activities. This was also the moment when the various cells sent their representatives abroad to a congress of the Youth Organization. My cell decided that the question of founding a communist party must be tackled by the congress, since the worker movement already developed. All the cells in north Vietnam had the same aspiration. In July, we got information that the proposal for the founding of a communist party put forth by the cells of north Vietnam had been rejected and their representatives had left the congress. At the end of August, the declaration on the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party was published. After the founding of the Party, we proceeded with the redistribution of forces. I was sent to south Vietnam to carry on revolutionary work there.

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On my arrival in south Vietnam, I was introduced to a comrade named Ngo Si Quyet. On seeing him, I recognized immediately that Ngo Si Quyet was Ngo Gia Tu himself. After being expelled from school, and still unemployed, I went once to the village of Tam Son, province of Bac Ninh to pay a visit to one of my friends. I met Tu for the first time at Tam Son, his native village. He had just been expelled from his school, the "Lycée du Protectorat" and was now tem-

porarily concealing himself in the countryside. When I first met him, I felt a deep sympathy for him, and did not expect to meet him in revolutionary activities. He was a very good comrade, with deep political consciousness. Although busy with his leading work, he mixed with the workers, and lived closely with the dockers at Saigon harbour, pulling lorries of coal and cement, exposing himself to sun and rain doing all kinds of hard work. The conscious workers took pity on him and wanted him to stop working. On every occasion they told us, "Let him stay home. If he needs money, we shall subscribe to feed him." In spite of his work at the harbour, Tu worked hard at settling Party problems, never failing to come to a meeting, however far the place where it was held.

Ngo Gia Tu, Le Van Luong, and I lived in Chieu hamlet in Khanh Hoi. I looked for a job and got one at the Badet mechanical workshop. Later on, I succeeded in getting a job for Luong at the same workshop. Some time after, I left Badet workshop and got employment at Faci enterprises where workers were in greater number.

In south Vietnam our propaganda and mobilization work among the workers were to some extent easier than in north Vietnam. Luong and I lived at the same place. Every morning, we cooked our rice, and spread some fat and salt on it; then we took breakfast and packed the remaining part for the factory. At noon we joined the group of workers who were taking their meal on the pavement, took out our package of rice, had our lunch with them and engaged in conversation. We analyzed experiences taken from practical life, helped

the workers think over and compare with their own experiences, thus acquainting them with the need of a revolution. Seeing that we were also workers and poor people like them, they sympathized with us very rapidly. Luong was at that time still quite young and kept company with the young workers. At the workers' quarter, he easily made friends with all the neighbours because he loved children very much; everywhere he won the affection of the children. He taught them to sing, read and write. We succeeded in forming a foot-ball association at the Chieu hamlet. The more we were loved by the villagers and the workers and lived closely with them, the more the movement developed and, at the same time, the more easily we were exposed. Therefore we had to change our lodgings very often. Moreover, Luong was a youngster in the prime of his youth, and his fine-looking appearance drew the attention of young lasses in this hamlet. The girls looked at him and talked among themselves about him. One of these girls living next door to our room was bold enough to tear the paper pasted over a chink of the partition and secretly peer into our room. For fear of being discovered, we had to move unceasingly from one place to another all over the hamlet of Chieu. At last we transferred to Thu Thiem. At Thu Thiem, I met Luu Ba Ky who had just left his ship and gone ashore for a visit. At this time, I was appointed by the Party to go to Paris to get into contact with the French Communist Party. I went aboard the Chantilly to ask for a job, and with Ky's recommendation and my worker-certificate, I was employed without difficulty.

In November 1929, we went to France on board the Chantilly. I landed at Marseilles and looked for the address the comrades had given us before leaving. The French comrades gave us a very warm welcome, and wired immediately to Paris for instructions from responsible comrades. The reply was that we were invited to Paris at once. I worked in the ship's engine-room and one of the boilers was damaged, so I had to repair it and could not go ashore. I asked Ky to go in my place and establish liaison with Paris. The French comrades gave us all possible assistance, asked carefully about the situation, and furnished us with books, documents, and means of work. They also presented us with a number of pistols for self-defence and established a liaison line for the future.

Early in February 1930, we were back in Saigon and learned that the Hong Kong Conference has been held and the merging of the communist groups had been successful. The organization sent comrade Lau and I to the North to attend the first meeting of the Party Central Committee. On the evening I set foot in Haiphong, the liaison led me to the Chinese Resistance Club and told me to wait for the comrade in charge. I thought I should meet a tall and strong man, but on his arrival, I saw that he was thin and weak in his French coat and Vietnamese trousers. He wore a felt hat on his head and under it shone eyes which squinted a little. He spoke with a Nghe An accent, often coughed painfully and appeared to be tired, which roused into me a deep compassion.

"We shall attend a conference aimed at officially electing the Party's Central Committee", he said. "We

still have plenty of time. You will remain here, and I shall give you documents to read. As for comrade Lau, I shall send for him in Hanoi and bring him here.'

Afterwards, I came to know that the comrade I met on that day was comrade Tran Phu himself. Leaving him, I went to Old sister Tu's. She arranged for me to live in a blind-alley in Bac Ninh street. Unfortunately, on that very night, due to Nghiem Thuong Bien's betrayal, a whole set of bases in this quarter was discovered. The Security made a thorough inquisition. Being a newcomer, I was taken unawares and arrested along with sister Tu. As we were taken away I told her, "We must keep up our morale." During the whole period of long detention and cruel torture, sister Tu was very heroic, and did not divulge one word to the French.

We were imprisoned at the security service of Haiphong. By the beginning of May, many other comrades were also arrested and put into jail with us. Comrade Le Thanh Nghi and many others had been taken from the mines to Haiphong. I had been in jail for a week when the May Day struggle broke out. At first, the cell where I was detained was not crowded, many others were empty, but after May Day, all of them were crammed with prisoners. Le Thanh Nghi, arrested at Coc 5 (Kilometre the Fifth), was put in my cell. He related how, at the mines, flags were hoisted, leaflets pasted, and banderoles hung up on May Day. So, on May 1st, 1930 the struggle had broken out very widely and strongly.

By mid-Summer the number of detainees at the security service of Haiphong had increased. It was unbearably hot in the cells. We had to put the cask of excrement on the bed and lie down on the cement floor, after sweeping it clean.

At the security service, late at night we were taken out for torture and questioning. Whenever we heard the rattle of the key hitting the door, everyone shuddered. And night after night, our brain in tension, we ground our teeth at the noise of our comrades tossing under the whip of the enemy. When the torturers had finished beating one of us out of his senses, they would drag and throw him back into his cell. Then, his comrades would surround him and give him what comfort they could.

I was beaten on a score of consecutive nights. One night, I fainted away and fell to the ground. Upon recovering my senses, I saw the security agent's whip which, in a very strong blow, had fallen at my side. It was of leather-covered copper wire. I understood then why each blow of the whip was as heavy as lead, why it numbed my brain without making it bleed. But I could press down my skull as if it were a dry grapefruit. My eyes were red and swollen like those of a golden fish. Seeing my face in such a state, my co-prisoners nicknamed me Chung Vo Diem\*. After undergoing tortures, I always wrapped my head tightly with my gauze tunic which I still managed to keep with me. But in spite of this, my head ached acute-

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\* Chung Vo Diem was a Chinese queen famous for her ugliness.

ly, and I used to look for a corner of the cells to lie down and press my head against the wall to alleviate the pain. In winter, I was again tortured. Though my feet swelled with the blows, once I was back in my cell, they were forced in iron shackles. Since then my feet have been damaged.

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Our sentence was not yet pronounced but the French transferred us to Haiphong jail and detained us along with the members of the Nationalist Party. We organized cultural and political courses for our comrades. Ordinary members of the Nationalist Party, witnessing our activities in prison, felt a sympathy for the communists. Their desire to get close to us was all the stronger as they saw us heighten the collective spirit, always helping one another, equally dividing among ourselves the presents received from our families, and sparing nourishing things for the weak and the sick.

Through study, struggle and organization, our general standards made obvious progress. Economic prisoners gradually understood us better. Having sympathized with us, they often helped us in making liaison with the outside when they went out for hard labour. Many prisoners working in the secretariat also sympathized with the revolution and were very enthusiastic in giving us their assistance. Among the French soldiers also there were many good people.

As a rule, the prison was guarded at night by French soldiers. Feeling lonely when doing their night

duty, and seeing that we could speak French, they often came to us and chatted. Among these soldiers, there were two natives of Marseilles. They were very pleased at my knowing Marseilles and used to talk with me about their own country. We became quite intimate, and they furnished us with all we wanted. They gave us milk and medicine for dysentery and eye-sores. They were also the suppliers of pipe tobacco for all of us. One night in early November, the weather had turned cold, and these two soldiers asked,

“Do you want anything?”

We discussed among ourselves then replied,

“Please give us some metres of red cloth.”

We were thinking of the very high blockhouse of the prison. If we could hang up a flag there it would be a very pleasant thing. The French soldiers gave us the required cloth and the flag was made. On the night of November 6-7, 1930, on the 13th anniversary of the great Russian October Revolution, we carried out our plan. Some other French speaking comrades called all the French soldiers to our corner and talked desultorily with them. In the meantime, comrade Phuc An, a Chinese electrician, very skilful at climbing, clambered up to the top of the blockhouse and fixed our big red flag.

The next morning, we feasted our eyes on the sight of it while the jailers did not notice anything. At nine o'clock the director of the prison, coming back from Lac Vien and seeing a red flag on top of the blockhouse, hurried back to assemble the jailers and poured his anger on them. They were petrified with

terror and emphatically stated that the blue-legged militiamen \* had hung up the flag.

"Let him who has hung up the flag climb up and take it down!"

The blue-legged militiamen were ordered to take the flag down, but none could climb up, the block-house being too high for them. At last, only long after the sirens of the enterprises had announced the end of working hours, could they mobilize firemen with their ladders to come and take the flag down.

At nightfall, we learned from the common-law prisoners who came back from their daily hard labour that the people outside were very pleased at seeing the flag. Afterwards, many anonymous givers sent us gifts, food and medicine, through the common-law prisoners.

We still had some red cloth left, and trusted it to women-prisoners who hid it in their turbans, feigning to use it to reinforce their plait. The jailers made a thorough search, but their efforts were fruitless. On the day when we were brought to the high court at Kien An, we took out our red flag, brandished it aloft and shouted at the top of our voices, "Down with imperialism". People in the streets were confined to their houses and ordered to shut their doors. We yelled our slogans all the louder.

At the tribunal, I was sentenced to life imprisonment and exiled. After the "collective" sentence had been pronounced for hundreds of us, we unfurled the two rather big red flags still hidden on our bodies and,

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\* Vietnamese militiamen wore leggings made of blue cloth.

as one we shouted "Down with imperialism", "Long live the communist party". French soldiers and secret agents rushed on us and rained down their blows.

Seeing that we had held high the banner of struggle, members of the Nationalist Party became more inclined to our side.

"We should do like you have done," they said. "The leaders of our Party are doing nothing except wait for their death."

Upon arrival at Hanoi prison, they still further increased their sympathy for us. Some of them expressed discontent when they saw that we did not use the same intimate names with them as we did among ourselves, and they reproached us with discrimination. When we organized entertainments, they joined in. Some had previously been officials, notables or chiefs of canton, and they contributed to the entertainments by staging ritual ceremonies, using prisoners' blue trousers as their ceremonial tunics. They bowed, went forward and backward on the cement floor of the barracks to reconstitute the obsolete customs in the countryside. And their acting was so good that we split our sides with laughter.

The leaders of the Nationalist Party were very angry, accusing us of taking their men. All our proposals for unified action in the struggle for the improvement of the prisoners' life met with their obstinate objection. We struggled for better rice, vegetables, chopsticks and bowls for our meals, but one of the leader of the Nationalist Party objected, "The struggle will lead to nothing but repression and terror.

Why should we need bowls and plates! The Indians eat with their hands and they are all right." The struggle went on, however. The French repressed savagely but they had to surrender before the resoluteness of the majority of the prisoners, furnish us with chopsticks and bowls and allow us to prepare our own meals.

At the end of Summer 1931, when it was still hot the French colonialists took us to Haiphong again, then to Saigon on board the Claude Chappe. We were kept in the hold, in groups of ten, shackled to an iron rod, five or six metres long. On land, we had to carry this long, heavy shackle on our shoulders while walking. The French escorts were very cruel, beating us mercilessly. Should someone frown at his friend being beaten, the satanic soldier would cry out angrily,

"You are discontented, aren't you?"

And a cow-sinew whip would thrash on the face of the man who had taken pity on his comrade.

When we arrived at St Jacques Cape, they threw all our clothes into the sea. A great number of us thus fell ill because of the cold weather at night and the cement floor on which we had to sleep. We were to wait on the mainland since arrangements at the cells at Poulo Condore Island were not completed.

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We arrived at the Island on a pitch dark night. We entered the enclosure of the jail which was surrounded with high stone walls covering an area of over ten hectares. Grass was thick, silhouettes of

bodhee-trees and banyan-trees appeared to be as dark as ink and as gloomy as a forest. We thought we were walking across a big grave yard. We were herded through big and small gates which were all guarded by French sentries. We groped our way to a thick sheet-iron door which grated and gave us the creeps. Only then we knew that we had reached the ward. Again another door with iron railing. Before we could see where we were the French guard locked both doors up and left without a word.

It seemed as if we had gone astray in hell. Thick darkness blinded our eyes. We were groping around and calling one another noisily without knowing what to do in this new situation when we heard some knocks over our heads. We held our breath, but nothing could be seen. Some knocks again.

"Who's there? What's the matter?" we asked.

"Comrades, you've just come from the mainland, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Someone come up here, let's have a talk."

"Let somebody help me up," Luong Khanh Thien enthusiastically asked us.

We helped Thien up. It was too dark and we did not know which way to climb.

"Here are the matches," came a voice from the roof.

And a match box was thrown to us. A match was lit. The barrack was large, with two cement platforms running on either side and a lavatory at the end. The walls were four or five metres high, with a window near the roof; big iron bars made up the window rail.



Thien was raised up to the window, took hold of the iron bars and hoisted himself to the top of the wall connecting with the next ward. Luong Khanh Thien, since his childhood, had had what we now call the vanguard spirit. Being very dynamic, he could not bear to remain idle. He was nicknamed by his close friends as "the god of sufferings", because he led an ascetic life. In any circumstances, he always took less food and clothes than others, sparing everything in the interest of the common cause.

We did not know whose voice it was on the top of the wall but the word "comrade" filled us with confidence.

When Thien jumped down on the floor, we lit another match and saw that he was holding some thread and needle. The representative of the prisoners who had come before us gave us the thread and needle to mend our clothes and recommended us first to be most careful in our struggle because the French had patrol-docks on the roofs and could fire down if necessary. Second to pay attention to water as here water was very unwholesome. It spoiled your eyes and made your teeth loose if you used it to wash your face and your mouth in the morning. We shuddered on hearing this. Next morning, as soon as the jailers opened the door to let us out, everyone ran to the well to see what the water at Poulo Condore Island was like.

The water of the well was as red as that in a grave, with slimy scum floating on its surface. However, we were forced to take our baths with this water which we took to a cistern and poured on one another with an iron bowl. It was dirty and frightened

us. Afterwards we knew the place better and found that the sandy soil, if dug out a little deeper, would yield clear water. Therefore we decided on a plan of struggle for permission to work in the open air and dig wells by ourselves. The French did not agree and we were only herded into the yard and just given enough time for the sweeping of the barracks. Living all the time in darkness, everybody became very pale. Moreover, we had scabs all over our bodies due to the filth. Each night, we took the remainder of our drinking water to the wards so that two or three people might take a bath.

Our food was also very scanty. Metre-long spinach was thrown into the frying-pan, unwashed. A sour soup made of dry fish and fermented rice, we called "motorcycle" soup, because it gave us diarrhoea and at the lavatory we made the same noise as a motorcycle. We craved fresh food, some gathered grass and ate its green sprouts. In September 1932, a big storm swept over the island, destroying some houses and unroofing others. The prisoners, exposed to the rain and the sun, fell ill and died in great numbers.

Though in any case we were to die, we could not bear to pine away. We mobilized the prisoners in all the barracks, even the hard labour prisoners and murderers to wage constant struggles. Struggle, repression, new struggle, repression again, but struggles for the right to live went on. As a result of each struggle we scored small concessions for the improvement of our daily life.

Once, our struggle was so resolute that Pagès, Governor of Cochinchina (south Vietnam), had to

come to the island to settle the matter. The struggle first broke out in the wards of the hard labour prisoners. There were about four or five thousand detainees in these barracks, among them Ngo Gia Tu, Le Duc Tho, and Le Van Luong... Hard labour prisoners had to go into the forest to burn charcoal and fell trees or to go to sea to fish and gather corals. We had no clothes and it was so cold that, when going to work in the field, we had to dip our body into the water to be a little warmer. When the prisoners in this ward started their struggle, they were repressed by the French soldiers and their screams echoed throughout the island. Hearing their cries, people in our two barracks climbed to the windows and shouted slogans in support. The jailers then shut up the hard labour prisoners. In protest, we launched a hunger strike and hurled our protest. Immediately the French soldiers rushed into our wards and beat us with their sticks and rifle butts. Some of us fell and were trodden upon by the soldiers' studded-shoes!

One comrade near me, being seriously ill, was lying on the marble-cold cement floor and coughing all the time.

"You should help me," he entreated. "I can't suffer any more. I am tubercular. If I remain here all of you will catch this disease. I am exhausted. Please strangle me."

"What nonsense you talk!"

"No, I have thought it over carefully."

Later, when everybody had gone to sleep, he managed to stand erect on the cement floor, then threw

himself onto the floor. But he was still alive. Bursting into laughter we ran to help him up, saying:

"Foolish, it's not so easy to die. We have to struggle for life".

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Poulo Condore was the very school to inculcate upon you an indomitable spirit. Through unity and organization, we gradually changed the dark regime of the jail. At first, we struggled for the opening of the prison outer door to secure a little more air. We demanded a small oil-lamp at night. By the end of 1933 and early 1934, the French had to allow us to go out to work in the daytime. After that, we did our best to organize our life and improve our strength for new struggles.

After we were allowed to go out for work, we took it in turns to sink wells, grow vegetables, prepare our meals by ourselves, and to pound rice and prepare vermicelli. Most of us had a profession: with our creative ability we invented a simple machine very convenient and very efficient to prepare vermicelli. The most pleasant thing was that we could rear poultry in our wards. We were not lacking in food for the poultry. In the prison store of dry fish, piled up to a height of two or three metres, there was a profusion of larvae, a world of food for our cocks and hens. At first we reared poultry in order to have eggs for the sick people but later, prepared chicken soup with the vermicelli we made; once a month to begin with, but later, with the number

of our poultry increasing, we prepared our succulent soup every week. The jailers were attracted by our delicious dish. The French guards also dropped into our kitchen and tasted our soup with great delight and noise, probably finding our soup better than theirs. In the improvement of living conditions in our barrack, comrade Khuat Duy Tien was one of our most active and resourceful managers.

We also organized foot-ball teams in the prison. Comrade Pham Van Dong was a well-known footballer on the island. He used to play at half-back and could shoot with either foot. After our entertainments, we would take a bath to keep ourselves healthy.

In all the wards, we organized Party cells. Our barrack, No. 2, had the "Common Views" as its organ with very good writers such as Nguyen Van Cu, Le Duan, and Bui Cong Trung who wrote a great deal. Time on the island seemed to pass quicker and quicker, we were in a great rush, and our daily programme of work very tight. The sailors supplied us with sufficient newspapers and magazines. French papers "Lu" (Read) and "Vu" (Seen) were regularly received. We followed closely the situation in the country and abroad. Dimitrov's case was perused with great care and delight. It really constituted a strong stimulus for us. I still remember the very hot discussion which broke out in our ward at the news of the Soviet Union's participation in the League of Nations. Some thought that the Soviet Union should not have joined this organization because it would be dangerous for her to cope alone with the joint efforts of the capitalist countries. Had not Lenin himself disapproved of the

League of Nations during his life-time? Others said that in the present world situation with the rise of fascism, the Soviet Union was right in adopting this line. She should avail herself of this tribune to speak for justice, to hold up the anti-fascist banner, to struggle for peace, and to defend small and weak peoples. The contending parties discussed the matter all day long. The discussion was all the livelier whenever we were allowed to gather in the yard, all eminent and eloquent comrades being present there. Finally the party approving the participation of the Soviet Union in the League of Nations was completely victorious.

Then came the rallying of the people in 1934 by the French Communist Party which foiled the plan for a coup d'état by the Cross of Fire fascist group. We followed with greater attention the situation in France which was changing in our favour. With the development of the movement, we organized cultural and political courses to teach one another. As for me personally, after all my days of activities, it was only at Poulo Condore that I studied and understood what the national question and the question of the peasantry were. In our room we hung up a map of the world with the Soviet Union and the Soviet zone of China coloured in bright red. Seeing this map, the jail director got terribly angry, rushed at it and tore it away. The next time he entered the barrack, a new map had been put on the wall, but he observed with satisfaction that it no longer bore the red patches as before. He approached and saw that on the spot of Moscow, we had drawn a big sign, as red as a heart full of blood.

"So, only this point is left?" he said mockingly.

"Yes, but this small red point will develop," said one comrade to tease him.

For these words, the chief-jailer gave us a severe beating with his stick.

From 1934 onwards, everybody took part in studying, except those who were seriously ill. Nguyen Van Cu, Le Duan, and Bui Cong Trung helped us learn theory; Pham Van Dong, Ha Huy Giap, and Nguyen Kim Cuong taught us general knowledge. On the island, we had the classical works of Marxism-Leninism, sent by the French comrades working on board the ships. We had a whole secret library. We dared not learn from the original copy of the books, but had to re-copy them in writing. The hand-written books were beautifully bound with covers made of the cloth torn from new blue clothes. We had "State and Revolution", "Anti-During", "Fundamental Principles of Marxism-Leninism", etc. Really we could not read all of them. The French made a search and found these manuscripts. Frightened, they asked where we had copied them from.

"The students who had studied in Moscow had written them from memory," we told the French.

The leaders of the Nationalist Party — most of them were sergeants or N.C.Os — deeply disliked our being absorbed in study. They warned the French to confiscate our books. Once the French took away two baskets of our hand-written books. However, the original copies were hidden in secret dug-outs which the bad elements of the Nationalist Party could not discover, in spite of their constant spying efforts. Neither did the French.

The leaders of the Nationalist Party became nothing but a group of informers for the French. They nursed a deep hatred for us, and often suggested to the French that the most active among us should be confined to the rice-husking room or the dark room. I was once put in the dark room, stripped to the skin and had to lie on the cement floor. I was living in a grave and being transformed into a living ghost. At meal-time, I was given a bowl of rice, and a bowl of water, just like the offerings made in worship of a ghost.

We organized entertainments to divert the attention of the French. We staged some comedies by Molière. Shoemakers and tailors prepared clothes from jute bags and dyed them with charcoal and brick, making them look like clothes of the time of Louis XIV. Even wigs were made for the actors to appear in the exact fashion of the French of old days. Comrade Cuong acted perfectly the part of the countess in the play "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme". The French were also admitted to our performances, and admired our talent. Afterwards, the jailers' attitude changed a great deal, and the guards on meeting us addressed us as Mr. so and so, or Uncle so and so. More and more we gained the sympathy of good elements in the Nationalist Party. The leaders of this party who had turned to be malefactors went deeper on the path of anti-revolution. Their only way now was to gather the backward elements and prepare spears and daggers in order to quarrel and fight with us. But they could do little because we were more numerous and highly vigilant. They then turned and punished the good elements in their ranks.

One day, at a time we were allowed to go out of the ward, sergeant Lang, one of the leaders of the Nationalist Party, appointed by the French as the keyholder and overseer of the whole barrack, took a walk together with Tuong Dan Bao. He put his arm around Bao's shoulder in a friendly manner but suddenly pulled a dagger and thrust it into Bao's neck.

"Bao is dead!" the prisoners shouted out.

Frightened, Lang pushed the dagger into his own neck,

"Long live the Nationalist Party!" he stammered.

The reactionary Lang died of the stab wound but Bao carefully taken care of by the hospital personnel recovered. He continued struggling until 1946, when he sacrificed his life on the south Vietnam front. At the time of the August Revolution in 1945, he led the Government Delegation to Poulo Condore to welcome comrade Ton Duc Thang and others on the island back to the country to take part in the Resistance war and the building up of the fatherland.

## II

By 1934, our organization on the island had gained strength. We decided to prepare for a number of comrades to escape from Poulo Condore to the mainland to rekindle the movement... We collected money,

food, sugar, honey and dried meat in our barrack to support the escape of Ngo Gia Tu. After this unsuccessful journey of comrade Tu\* many other attempts to cross the sea were successful. The voyage of Tong Van Tran in early 1935 was the first one which reached mainland safe and sound.

In 1935, we knew that the French Popular Front had been organized, that the revolutionary movement had become stronger and stronger there. We began to hope that, with the growing strength of the French working class, political prisoners would be liberated and allowed to return to the mainland. Our hope changed to conviction. We firmly believed that if the French People's Front should be victorious in the general elections, sooner or later we would be released. We applied ourselves more eagerly to study politics and general knowledge. The leaders of the Nationalist Party laughed at us, "It's childish to engage yourselves in study in the hope of receiving an amnesty from the French."

Newspapers from France conveyed to us the news about the glorious victory of the People's Front in the May 1936 general elections. All the good elements in the Nationalist Party were filled with hope like us. Then the Government of the French Popular Front was founded. We waited eagerly. The first batch of amnestied prisoners left the island, but our group was not yet released. The long summer passed and we thought there was no more hope of returning to the country. One morning late in the year the director of the jail

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\* Ngo Gia Tu's raft was lost in the sea.

called us, made us line up, scanned us from top to toe and looked at comrades Le Duan and Pham Van Dong.

"How can you be amnestied too?" he said very sadly.

"Do you regret it?" we replied. "You should know that we were arrested without grounds."

"The other group should have been let go away first," he said, pointing at the group of the inactive leaders of the Nationalist Party. "It is too dangerous to release you."

By the end of November, I reached north Vietnam and was escorted to my native village in Bac Ninh province. When I reached home I found my family had all been scattered. My father of over eighty years had died the year before. My two brothers had also died prematurely. Two other brothers of mine, who had been working in Cam Pha mines, had not returned to the village so far. Another one staying in the village was desperately poor. Every family in the neighbourhood was facing much greater difficulties than before. Seeing my native village in such dire poverty and sadness, I was burning to leave the village, to look for the comrades and to continue revolutionary activities.

I sought an occasion to call on the chief of the village and get information from him, but he had not received any instructions about my case.

"I can't find a job in the village," I immediately put the question. "I want to go away."

"You may go, it's up to you to decide."

Probably he found my presence undesirable and wanted to avoid the worries it might cause him. Without delay, I went straight to Hanoi. At this very

time comrades from all directions had come to Hanoi to contact one another and set about re-kindling the revolutionary movement. The first comrades I met were Tran Huy Lieu and Tran Dinh Long. They had been publishing the review "Song" (Life). They told me they were experimentally issuing some numbers, and intended hiring a house as an office, using it as a place for the comrades to assemble.

Then I met To Hieu, Luong Khanh Thien, and Truong Chinh. We temporarily divided into two groups, one group carrying on semi-legal activities, the other being secret. I belonged to the semi-legal group and was in charge of the Party's papers, along with comrade Truong Chinh. Truong Chinh had worked for French language papers, but from Autumn 1937, became political director of all Party organs in north Vietnam. When working for the Press, I was often busy with the office work of some Vietnamese language papers. I could not write much, having to go to meetings and then discuss work with the comrades. I looked after the political side of the papers and settled the daily questions raised by the paper office.

For the first time, we openly ran Party papers in Hanoi which was still under the heavy yoke of French domination. Only when one had read former lithographed papers secretly written and secretly read, did one realize how valuable was a printed and openly published paper. Every time we took the papers back from the printers, we would spread them on the table, and admire them. We were delighted and happy. In the printing works where we had our papers printed, the workers, either type-setters or printers, saw to it that

the paper of their own movement was printed cheaply and beautifully, and prevented the sabotage by the French and the proprietors.

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For the first time, the Vietnamese working people could express their views in their own legal press. Our papers had thousands of contributors among the masses. They reflected their own intense struggles, put forth the demands of each struggle to which the authorities could not remain indifferent, hailed every victory, however small, and popularized the experiences of the creative masses in organizational work and in struggle. I still remember that information on struggles sent in by the contributors increased so much with every passing day that we could not publish them all in the paper "News", and had to summarize them for a bi-weekly announcement. The readers could more easily realize the development of the whole movement, and the rising of the people's mettle.

Our papers succeeded one another in publication. Should one paper be closed down, another would come out immediately, sticking to the front. In north Vietnam there were such papers as *Le Travail* (Labour), *Rassemblement* (Gathering), *En Avant* (Go Forward), *Notre Voix* (Our Voice), *Doi Moi* (New Life), *Tieng Vang* (Echo), *Kien Van* (Knowledge), *Hon Tre* (Young Soul), *Tieng Tre* (Young Voice), *Tan Xa Hoi* (New Society), *Thoi Bao* (Times), *Thoi The* (Situation), *Ban Dan* (People's Friends), *Tin Tuc* (Information), *Doi Nay*

(Present Era), *Nguoi Moi* (New Man), *The Gioi Moi* (New World). In central Vietnam were the *Nhanh Lua* (Sheaf of Paddy), and *Dan* (People). In south Vietnam, we had *L'avant Garde* (Vanguard), *Le Peuple* (The People), *Viet Dan* (Vietnamese Citizen), *Pho Thong* (Popularization), and *Lao Dong* (Labour). To these papers we should add the *Dan Chung* (The Masses), published without permission in order to step up the struggle for the freedom of the press. These papers had opened the era of freedom of the press in our country.

If we re-read the Party's papers legally published at the time, we shall see how deep was our people's revolutionary spirit. After the years of white terror, the movement had been receding but now it soared up as if a fresh breeze was blowing.

In 1937, the workers' struggle strengthened. In north Vietnam, thirty thousand workers in the Cam Pha and Hong Gai mines launched a general strike. In south Vietnam, the four thousand workers in Bason ceased work. In the rubber-plantation area, if in one concession a strike broke out, all the other concessions in the neighbourhood would immediately support it. The biggest and the most important struggle was that of the workers of the trans-Indochinese railway. This struggle was advocated by the Party in order to step up the movement in the whole country. Implementing this policy, the conference of the railway workers held at Go Vap, south Vietnam in May 1937, had decided to begin the struggle on July 14. But it was launched before schedule as the workers at the Truong Thi mechanical works had to take action in the case of a worker being beaten by the manager of the

works. The whole country supported this struggle. At the Saigon railway station, engines were upset to block railway tracks. At Bason, Simac, Faci, and at the Cham tower railway station the strike was unanimous. In north Vietnam, a five-day strike at the Gia Lam railway enterprise was followed by that at Haiphong weaving mill and the Dap Cau paper mill. In particular, the peasants of the two "red" provinces of Nghe An-Ha Tinh, loyal to the worker-peasant alliance tradition, actively supported the strikers of Truong Thi, supplying them with rice, maize, sweet potatoes and other food and money, helping the workers' families to move to the countryside and settle there. The struggle spread even to Cambodia and Laos, where strikes broke out under the leadership of the Communist Party of Indo-China. Besides hundreds of workers' struggles there were also hundreds of peasants' struggles. The column "Against extra-taxes" of our papers, laying bare the greedy authorities and notabilities, were very much appreciated by the peasants. The strongest of the peasants' struggles were devoted to urging the re-distribution of communal lands in north and central Vietnam, and against the grabbing of lands by the landlords in south Vietnam. The manifestation against taxation of the peasants in Van Phuc village (Ha Dong province) was one subject eagerly discussed in many issues of our papers.

In Hanoi, in Mid-1937, at the Gia Lam railway workshop, Mit, a joiner, was driven by oppression and ill-treatment, into opening his belly with a chisel to commit suicide. We made an investigation and brought up the case in our papers so as to enlighten

and educate the workers and to extend the movement. The tramway workers' struggle was also very fierce. The movement of friendship association not only united the workers in enterprises, but also drew in other sections of the working people. Friendship Associations of joiners, bricklayers, tailors, hair-dressers, etc, sprang up like mushrooms. The movement of the printing workers was the strongest. That of the sawyers was also rather good. The latter's strike in that year caused most of the cabinet-makers' shops to close down. The women's and the students' movements were all strongly developed. Even the small-traders at the Dong Xuan market campaigned for the reduction of market taxes, marching from the market to the City hall.

1937 was the year when a very big demonstration involving hundreds of thousands of people, including intellectuals, turned down into the streets. There was the gigantic reception from North to South given to Justin Godard, the special envoy of the French Popular Front Government, to whom thousands of petitions voicing the people's aspirations were presented. This was a wide political move, a big demonstration of forces, and at the same time a test which paved the way for many future victorious struggles.

Because of the high tide of the movement, even such political opportunists as Vu Van An took part in the welcome to Justin Godart in front of the Hanoi railway station. He marched in the ranks of the demonstrators and was identified by the inspector of secret police Lanèque.

"Are you here, too?" the latter asked.



"I abide by the law," Vu Van An humbly said, turning pale.

He made some further steps, then stole off.

The movement was wide but not yet deep, however it was obvious that the forces of the Vietnamese working class were growing up and the leading capacity of our Party had been heightened.

By the end of September or early October, on behalf of the Party branch of north Vietnam, I attended the conference of the Central Committee to analyze the movement and map out new lines of action. I thus had the opportunity to go to south Vietnam for the second time. I took the train to Gia Ri, then had to go by buses, passing through province after province, down to Saigon. The Central Committee conference was held at Hoc Mon, Ba Diem. This was an area grown to betel leaves, where houses connected with one another and had no separating hedges. The people there were very good. Without being mobilized, they supplied the conference with more rice and fresh food than necessary. One family caught a big fish, which they gave to us. The villagers did not know what conference it was, but they guessed only that it was an important meeting of the Party.

Present at the conference were Le Hong Phong, Ha Huy Tap whose eyes were already aching, Nguyen Van Cu, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, Vo Van Tan alias Old Tan, a very affable man who later led the insurrection in south Vietnam and raised the yellow-starred flag for the first time in our country, and Nguyen Chi Dieu, representative of central Vietnam whose lungs were already damaged but he carried on valiantly till

the end. Comrade Minh Khai enquired about the movement in north Vietnam, about her acquaintances there. She expressed the desire to visit the North but could not do so until now. Comrade Nguyen Van Cu was always as thoughtful as in the days of detention in Poulo Condore. His little narrow eyes always seemed to be pondering over some important question. At discussion, he would thrust his head forward, with his eyes full of confidence. His views proved him to be well acquainted with the movement in south Vietnam.

The conference drew many experiences from the first years of the new movement, decided to establish the "Unified Democratic Front of Indo-China" with the worker movement as the basis, and embracing all progressive organizations and sections of the population.

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In execution of the resolution on the organization of the Front, the Party decided to change completely the method of organization, drawing the great masses into legal or semi-legal organizations. Thanks to this method, the movement was further expanded. Everywhere, the Party, the mainstay of the movement, was re-organized and further consolidated. Comrade To Hieu was working at that time at the office of notary Deroche. Though suffering from tuberculosis, he continued working day and night without respite. Comrade Hoang Van Thu sometimes went up to Hanoi to meet us at the silt area of Phuc Xa. Comrade Luong Khanh Thien used every possible means to mingle with the

workers of various enterprises with a view to establishing primary organizations of the Party. He was shadowed by the secret agents who suspected him but could not discover his activities.

Our semi-legal group was also watched day and night by the secret agents.

"We know all the places you live in," they told us.

"How can you know them?"

"There is no difficulty at all. The place where you live has nothing but the empty floor on which you spread yourselves at night. There is not the least furniture in your room."

In fact, our life was most simple in those days. We had not yet forgotten the hardships of prison life. All of us were passionately devoting ourselves to the movement and had no time to think of other questions. We always lived within the area near the Thang Long secondary school, choosing small and deserted streets only, from Copper street down to Phu Doan hospital street and never appearing in big or crowded streets for fear of being discovered.

Since the publication of the Party's legal papers, the masses came to the paper office as to the Party's permanent and legal office of liaison. The workers came to consult on the question of organizing Friendship Association or on the struggle slogans to be put forth. The small traders, the students, anyone who wanted to have their interests defended, always went to the paper office to seek advice. Peasants from Thai Binh and Phuc Yen also came to ask the paper to support their struggle. Among the people who came

in contact with the Party papers at that time, many joined the ranks of the Party afterwards and became active Party cadres. It was this close relation with the masses that gave strength to our papers. Generally speaking, all papers were influenced by the popular movement, particularly when this movement had gained intensity. The tone of many papers changed, raising many questions clearly, adopting a clearer point of view; many writers became gradually enlightened and bolder. "Compared with the press before 1936, the tone of the press after 1936 is undeniably more progressive". This was what many well-known journalists told us in the meetings of the Journalists' Friendship Association or when taking a united action in the Democratic Front. Some in the group Ngay Nay (\*), then cooperating with the Democratic Front, also appeared to be enthusiastic. They said, "Since the birth of the popular movement, our language has been greatly enriched. Struggling and political style is now very effective."

Along with the press, a great number of popular Marxist books dealing with the laws of the development of society, class struggle, the historical task of the working class, communism in brief, the Soviet Union, the French Popular Front, the Spanish Popular Front, the Chinese revolution, were written in an understandable style and openly published by the Party to educate Party members and the masses. Besides these books, I still remember a rather thick book entitled "Three years in the Soviet Union" by

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\* A weekly review with bourgeois tendency.

comrade Tran Dinh Long, published at first in newspapers, then as a book. We can say that this was the first report in book form of the revolutionary literature, greatly appreciated by the readers. Many writers and poets began to turn to the people and the working class. In the ideological field, the period of the Democratic Front obviously had recorded a considerable progress.

One day, at the end of 1937, I called upon Truong Chinh who was hospitalized at Bach Mai with lung-disease. We discussed the revolutionary movement. We realized that our books appeared in great numbers but the readers among the workers and peasants accounted for a very small percentage because the overwhelming majority of them could not read or write. To solve this question, comrade Phan Thanh was sent to old Nguyen Van To asking him to seek the permission of founding an association for the popularization of the national script.

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In 1938, I don't remember in what month, the Inspector of secret police Lanèque summoned me to the Security Service.

"You are a journalist," he said, "and you often withdraw to a quiet place and talk in a low voice with people. Because of this, Mr. Chatel doesn't want you to stay in Hanoi any longer."

He wrote the order to expel me from Hanoi. I was seen off by the comrades. I had to leave Hanoi at a time when the movement was at high tide, the Party

line of organizing the Democratic Front of Indo-China was pushing forward the movement to a new stage. Hanoi was preparing a big demonstration of forces on May Day, 1938 with unprecedented heroism. This was also the time when the Daladier clique was conniving at Hitler's invasion of Austria and about to surrender shamefully at the Munich conference. The Japanese had extended their invasion to south China, and the French reactionaries were planning to smash down the movement. Comrade Truong Chinh suggested to me that I should go to the countryside and establish bases to be served as footholds later.

At that time, in collaboration with comrade Vo Nguyen Giap, he had written the book "On the question of the peasantry" (under the pen names of Qua Ninh and Van Dinh).

I went to Bac Ninh and asked for work at the Dap Cau paper mill. The proprietors dared not accept me. I was wondering what I was to do when I met Nha, formerly one of my co-prisoners. Nha was running a butcher's shop called Bo Vo (fine calf) at Ninh Xa street, Bac Ninh. He invited me to come and live with him and sell the beef in his shop while he went to market for new supplies.

I worked there for a few days which I thought was sufficient to divert the attention of the security service and intended to start revolutionary activities. Nha told me that my activities should be carried out far from the town.

I established bases in the countryside of Bac Ninh, then at Lang Giang, Thang Market and even in Luc Lieu. Now and then, I returned to Nha's house and

lived with him for a few days. When Nha got married, I left him and went to Bac Giang where I again worked in a butcher's shop, using it as a foothold for carrying out my activities. Bac Giang had just experienced a big flood, and the population was living in dire poverty and suffering. Learning of my presence in the region, the chief of province Dang Quoc Giam sent for me.

"What intention have you to come here?" he asked.

"I am looking for a job."

"You lie, I don't believe you care about your life."

He questioned me for a long time, then resorted to temptations.

"If you need money, I shall help you."

"Thank you, your money can be spared for persons who need your help. As for me, I am able to work for my living."

From Bac Giang, I could not write directly to the comrades in Hanoi but had to send my letters through the bases in Luc Lieu and Tan Ap. Liaison comrades in the bases would go to Hanoi to convey them to the addressees. By mid-1939, the situation had changed and the imperialists launched continuous attacks against the movement. I wrote to Truong Chinh proposing a meeting to discuss the change to underground activities, in view of the new situation. The gist of Truong Chinh's reply was: "Correct.—The Organization has the same opinion and this line has been adopted. You should shift right now." I then resumed underground activities.

When I was in Hanoi, comrade Hoang Van Thu would meet me at Phuc Xa. He would tell me about the movement in the Highland. The people throughout the country were enslaved, but our compatriots in the mountainous regions had to suffer extra oppression. Beside poll-taxes and land taxes, others were levied on buffaloes, alcohol, forest control, on bamboo-trees, bamboo-shoots, chickens, cassava roots if brought to the market. Moreover, year out, they were pressganged to corvée for the building of roads and military posts or forced to serve local authorities and notabilities. In the years prior to the war, they had to build the Thai Nguyen—Bac Son, and Dinh Ca—Trang Xa military roads, hence their sufferings and hardships were a hundred fold greater than before. The imperialists carried out a most perfidious policy of division setting the Nung against the Kinh, the Tay against the Man and the Man against the Tay. From the very beginning, this strategic region had attracted the Party's attention. As early as 1930 bases had been established in Cao Bang and Lang Son. By 1933, we had bases in Bac Son—Dinh Ca. Being far away and very mountainous this region could not be kept under close watch by the imperialists. Therefore, the movement in this area was well advanced at the time of the Democratic Front.

Carrying on underground activities, we had little chance to meet each other. Hoang Van Thu sent me a letter saying, "War will inevitably break out. We should pay attention to mountainous regions. You must go there and make a survey. I have a base in Dinh Ca..." He told me to go to the market of Dinh

Ca, then walk two or three kilometres further and turn right at the place where stood a kapok-tree with a nest of crows on the top.

Following the instructions in the letter, I found the kapok-tree mentioned. By walking along the track and crossing a stream, I at last found the way to the house of comrade Chu Van Tan.

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For the first time, I carried out activities in a mountainous region. Here, it was quite different from industrial centres and towns where the movement had been so stirring in the last few years, different from market-streets or villages in the plain where the tempo of life was more pressing and more active. But this remote and deserted hilly region was to be the birth-place of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the inviolable base throughout the Resistance war.

Comrade Chu Van Tan introduced me to all popular bases. I talked to every family in order to grasp the situation in each house. About two weeks later, I started to organize and opened training courses. This region being still out of the repression zone of the enemy, we could hang up the flag with the hammer and sickle drawn on it, and gathered in the forest to commemorate the October Revolution.

After beginning the organization in Dinh Ca, I requested comrade Tan to introduce me to other acquaintances of his so as to establish bases among them. I was taken to Trang Xa, 10 kilometres from

Dinh Ca in the direction of Yen The. Some time later Tan accompanied me again to La Bang village, Dai Tu district, and introduced me to Thuc. The latter was a commune official, leading a rather easy life but he, his wife and children were all good. They liked to listen to stories of the struggle against the French or even about communism. From Thuc's house I went to establish bases in the village. Like Dinh Ca, this area had not experienced enemy repression, the population was not afraid and went to meetings quite boldly. I had now two places as bases in this hilly region. I went to and fro between La Bang and Dinh Ca, now in this place now in that. Some time later, introduced by some base in Thai Binh, I went to Yen Khanh, found the liaison comrade and succeeded in setting up bases in Yen Khanh and Yen Thuan. This was a farm-land area with a church. The population was composed of both christian and non-christian farmers. The base I established was not yet wide enough, and whenever I came to the farm, I had to sleep in the granary on the roof of the cattle-shed.

One day, lying on the roof of the cattle-shed, I was startled at the church bell tolling in long measured sounds behind the house and deafening my ears. Could I possibly be discovered? Probably the priest had rung the bell to alarm the population. The French would surely come to arrest me. I kept still in the cattle-shed and dared not go down. The church bell continued tolling. In the afternoon, my host's child came back from the field with his buffalo, and I asked him to find out why the church bell had been tolling so much.

"France is lost," the child said. "In the church a mass is being organized to pray for France."

I jumped down. That was a good opportunity indeed! Hurriedly I wrote to Hoang Van Thu, requesting him to prepare for me to meet him. I got the reply that he would come forthwith. Thu hastily rode to Dai Tu to meet me at the market. After analysing the situation and exchanging views, Thu told me that the bases should be extended, should continue to be extended here.

I applied myself to extending bases in the neighbourhood. One day, in early autumn a liaison comrade from Dinh Ca brought the news that there had been an insurrection in Bac Son, that revolutionary troops had seized the post of Mo Nhai and the head-quarters of Bac Son district.

I drafted a leaflet calling upon French soldiers to follow the example of the Paris commune fighters, and not to shoot at the revolutionaries. Then I went down to the plain to meet Hoang Van Thu and to attend the Party's zonal committee conference where it was decided to send comrade Ninh to Bac Son and to put the insurrection movement of this district under his leadership. Later on, the seventh meeting of the Central Committee was held at the house of old Dam Thi, Dinh Bang village. Dam Thi was an enlightened old man wholeheartedly devoted to the revolution. All his sons were Party's cadres. His eldest son, comrade Lim, had been arrested by the French. Being afraid that his house had been discovered by the French, we intended to avoid meeting there.

"My son Lim has been sentenced to imprisonment," Dam Thi kept telling us, "it is all right now; come and work in my house."

Our meeting was held at the first floor of Dam Thi's house, a very secret place. In the afternoon, when the meeting was proceeding, French voices were heard in the yard.

"We're discovered!" said Hoang Van Thu, slapping his thigh.

Subsequent investigation revealed that the cause of our being discovered was the cowardice of a man who, arrested by the French, had lost his morale and led secret agents to search the bases, just at the moment of our meeting. Hearing the noise downstairs, everybody thrust the documents into his pockets and jumped out into the upper yard.

"At all costs, let's go to Tam Son today and continue our meeting there," we told one another.

Dinh Bang village had a great many roads which were not connected with one another. From the upper yard, we slipped down to a path behind the house. One after another we escaped. The stronger comrades ran without stopping to Tam Son (the native village of comrade Ngo Gia Tu), I came later because of my weak legs. People in the neighbourhood, seeing us hurrying noisily, thought we were disbanded game-players.

Look, this man, old enough with his beard and moustache, is still a passionate gambler," they said.

Startled I brought my hand to my beard. I might be discovered on account of it, I thought. Therefore I

grabbed my knife and while walking I cut off the beard. But the knife was a little blunt, so I had to take a clod of clay in the field to sharpen it many times. When I had finished cutting off my beard the roof of the Cam Giang church was already near at hand.

In Cam Giang, I had established bases. I crawled through the bamboo hedge to comrade Phuc's house (he works now in the local military command of Bac Ninh), with the intention of borrowing some clothes for disguise. The house was completely deserted. Some mourning clothes were hung on the ancestral altar. I borrowed them, put the white turban around my head, slipped on the gauze tunic and in these garments of great mourning, I calmly followed the great road to the village mentioned by my comrades. In Tam Son, at the house of the base, I knocked the conventional signal. A man inside, looking through the chink of the door and seeing that I was in mourning clothes with gauze tunic and white turban, did not open to me. Only after comrade Thu came and recognized me, was I admitted. Seeing me in disguise Thu was filled with mirth. After the owner of the house had gone away both comrades Thu and Truong Chinh burst out laughing.

"Where's your beard?"

"Whom are you mourning?"

Present at the meeting was comrade Phan Dang Luu from south Vietnam to report on the situation there. He related that some units of the French army were about to be mobilized for the Thailand front. Soldiers organized into bases were numerous, their anti-war spirit was high, they wanted to mutiny.

Comrade Luu wanted the views of the Central Committee on the question of insurrection in south Vietnam.

After the discussion on this matter, Luu immediately left for south Vietnam to convey the resolution of the Central Committee on stopping the proposed insurrection. As for us, we continued the meeting to settle many other questions.

The situation changed very quickly indeed. The French imperialists had cowardly and shamefully surrendered to the Japanese fascists, offering them Indo-China and helping them consolidate their bases in Indo-China for the invasion of China and extension of their influence to South-East Asia. Under the double oppression of the French and the Japanese, the Indo-Chinese people's life, particularly the workers' and peasants', which had been very hard would become even harder. The high tide of revolution would come. Our Party should prepare itself to assume the sacred mission of leading the people in armed uprising to secure power, freedom, and independence. We should not miss the opportunity sought after for thousands of years.

After a thorough discussion of all the new lines of work, the Conference entrusted comrade Hoang Van Thu with the direct leadership of the movement in Vu Nhay and Bac Son which had then fallen into a passive position. He would have to maintain the revolutionary force by all means, shift armed activities to political ones, and secretly establish bases.

I remained in the plain area of north Vietnam with Truong Chinh. Gradually, we began to consolidate

and develop Party bases in the countryside of Ha Dong, Hung Yen, Ha Nam and Thai Binh. Then I went again to the region of Upper Ca Son and Lower Ca Son, Phu Binh district, Thai Nguyen province, to give political lectures at the Party's first training class for military cadres led by comrade Huy.

Some time later I was requested by the Central Committee to attend its eighth meeting. My comrades told me that this time a representative of the International would attend the conference.

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On the way to the eighth conference of the Central Committee Hoang Van Thu on behalf of the Central Committee examined the first section of National Salvation troops and entrusted it with the task of saving the country. This unit came from the re-organized guerilla troops of Bac Son and was the first armed unit of our Party and people, assuming the hard task of protecting the political activities in secretly establishing bases, struggling against enemy repression and creating conditions for the gradual building up of revolutionary bases when conditions permitted.

The group of comrades who were to attend the Central Committee conference gathered in the village of Phat, Dinh Ca. After two weeks of preparation, we set forth. The place of the meeting was near the frontier. Hoang Van Thu knew it well.

He suggested that we should follow our familiar road through areas where bases had been established.

We were waiting for the time of departure at the outskirts of the village in the house of an old man whose son was called Ruong. When we started, it was raining and rather cold. Our hostess was worried,

"Why should you leave in such rainy, cold weather?"

The previous night, the old man had sounded the heavens, the ground, the moon and the stars, setting an altar and burning incense sticks in the yard.

"I have foreseen that your trip will be very lucky. Many lucky things!" he said.

What this revolution-loving but still deeply superstitious old man had said was proved immediately false. Hardly had we gone out of the lane than the rain became stronger, the winds more violent. The forest raged noisily, trees fell down, and the streams rushing down like torrents caused us to turn back.

Seeing us stiff with cold and drenched to the skin, our old hostess said with tears in her eyes,

"Didn't I tell you! I am experienced in travelling in this mountainous region."

She kindled a great and cheering fire and, throwing us some cassava roots, told us to roast them to eat. This good old lady died later in a French jail.

The next day, we started again, the rain and wind having abated. After a short distance, we got information that on the high road, a close watch was being made by the enemy.

A question difficult to solve indeed. We had found no solution when comrade Tai, a local cadre appointed as our guide by comrade Chu Van Tan came upon an idea.



"There is nothing to be puzzled about," he said. Let's fell trees and break our way through the forest."

I thought Tai's proposal was reasonable, but was still doubtful.

"Are you sure of success?"

"I don't say it for joke."

"But have you ever gone in such a manner?"

He swore that when not yet conscious of the need for revolution, he had worked for opium smugglers, adding,

"I still remember well some very secret tracks which I have used many times."

I discussed the matter with Truong Chinh and Hoang Van Thu, then each of us took a large knife. Tai went ahead, to separate the leaves and looked for the track. Pointing at the place to be cleared, he ordered us to mow down bushes, to cut off branches and fell trees. We opened a way where there was none, clearing our track according to his instructions. So we proceeded, not following any route, but making our own path.

At doubtful places where we were not sure of our position, Tai would climb up the highest tree in the forest, look around to get his bearings, then slip down and continue to guide us. At each stage of our journey, he would drop into an acquaintance's house to cook our food, then bring it to us in the forest. Whenever we met with a good family, he would lead us there to sleep at night.

Once, night was falling when we stopped for a rest. I saw Tai surround a tree with his arms and grope

around its foot for a long time. I thought this young man probably was still superstitious.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm finding the direction."

"How do you find directions at the foot of a tree?"

"The warm side of the tree always shows to the West."

Near Van Mich, That Khe, the French post kept a very close eye on passers-by and people going to the market were in great numbers. On the high road, French cars were numerous. It was really difficult.

"In front of us, there is a river running to Long Chau," Tai proposed. "From here to there, it will take one night and one day only. If you agree, I shall make a raft."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure. It will be a quick journey with no fear at all of being searched or arrested."

At that time, Comrade Ninh had an attack of fever. We agreed to go by raft to make the journey less tiring for him. We then followed Tai into the forest to make the raft. A bed was made on the raft for comrade Ninh. Day and night a man sat by him to protect him from the sun and rain with an umbrella.

The river was the Ky Cung, the only river in our country which flows northwards. Its water ran very rapidly over the numerous reefs which emerged from the surface of the river. At first, only Hoang Van Thu and Chu Van Tan knew how to steer the raft, avoiding the reefs by means of long poles; but later comrade

Truong Chinh, then I, then everybody could hold a pole and steer the raft by turns.

"In future, we can enrol ourselves in the Navy," we told one another with satisfaction.

The water of the river was as blue as that of the Huong River (Perfume River) in Hue. Here and there, on either bank, some people were washing sand for gold. They thought we were opium smugglers and hailed us from the banks.

"Do you want to exchange the black food for red gold?" they asked. At the deep portions of the river, we met with the fishermen, who invited us to buy very fat carp and trout. Many parts were green with trees and bushes, which tilted their foliage and branches onto the surface of water. We had to heighten our vigilance as we drifted along the river, but this did not prevent us from enjoying the beautiful scenery.

In the fresh green and magnificence of the river and mountains, our raft drifted rapidly down the stream; and in a short time, the post of Van Mich was in sight. We decided that, in order to avoid the military posts, we should land and go around the mountain. As to our raft, we should let it drift and catch it downstream. In this walking portion of the journey, I went astray and gave great anxiety to my comrades.

We embarked on the raft again. Having past the last enemy post safe and sound, our raft floated down as light as a feather. Moonlight made us all the happier. While going, we exchanged our views on the strategic tasks of the revolution at that time. At the section of the river near the frontier, we landed and went into a village. The population there was composed of the

Tay and the Phan Sinh nationalities. Comrade Thu led us to the village. The whole hamlet poured out to welcome us.

"Brother Ly, brother Ly is back!"

The villagers surrounded him as if he were their own son. Every family wanted him to come to their house. Everyone wished to have him as guest. He laughed and enquired about every inhabitant, remembering every child in the village. When he said that we should leave immediately, the villagers showed their disappointment. Many expressed their disapproval, some became sad. In order to respond to the aspirations of the people, we called on every family and shared with its members their simple meal. The people were really good. When we set forth, the children held to Thu's clothes. Many women and girls entreated him:

"Brother Ly, go now but don't fail to come back here again." Comrade Thu is now dead! Seeing him so loved by the people, I decided I should learn his method of working with the people, and have affection for them as he had. With our Party having such cadres to gain the confidence and affection of the people, the success of the revolution is a certainty.

In the bright moonlight, we parted from the people because we wanted to be beyond the frontier before dawn. The chain of mountains between our country and China was strangely picturesque. The moon had risen as high as the mountain-top. We set forth with great delight in our heart. On the steep flank of the mountain, our silhouette stood against the widening horizon. It was a misty moonlit night which

turned into a grey dawn. We were light of heart but a little moved.

"How happy we are!" I exclaimed. "In one step, we can walk on the land of two different countries."

When we had crossed the frontier, comrade Thu led us to look for the local base of the Chinese Party. To be careful, we hid our arms on a hill, outside the village.

"Bring the arms to the house," the Chinese comrades told us, laughing. "No need to put them there. Every family has arms here."

This was Shia Tung commune, Tsing Si province. Comrade Thu met his old acquaintances again. We were still expressing our joy and happiness when news came which made us a little disappointed. The representative of the International was no longer here, but had left behind a letter for us.

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### III

According to the indications given in the letter of the representative of the International, we had to return to our country. One more day of walking and we saw the frontier landmark again. This was Cao

Bang, a province in the high region where, I remember, a very enthusiastic reception of Justin Godard had taken place at the time of the Democratic Front. A Party branch had been organized here as early as 1930 by comrade Hoang Dinh Rong, a worker of the Tay nationality. The seed sowed in this far away region of forest and mountain had grown good sprouts and had deep roots. After the bloody repression in 1930-1931, Cao Bang was one of the places which could still maintain the strongest bases in the country. Now, after the outbreak of war, the imperialists feverishly attacked the movement but the Party and people's bases in Cao Bang were always maintained and developed.

The comrades in Cao Bang looked after our security by arranging guards. We met the Provincial Party Committee, recommended better vigilance, a net of liaison to be organized to keep an eye on enemy activities. We also advised them to be prepared for all emergencies. The liaison man led us through the forest. We walked for a very long time to a very deserted place, climbed up an expanse of terraced fields, then followed a meandering stream and came to a deep valley, hemmed in on three sides by stony mountains. From the distance we could see an old man in dark blue clothes. Without looking attentively, one would believe that this was one of the numerous local old men. The old man came to meet us, laughing very merrily. I glanced at him. He was thin, but had bright eyes, a large brow, and a struggling, black beard. Only at this moment, was I told by the leaders of our delegation, "This is the representative of the International, comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc."

We had been delighted at the news of a meeting with the representative of the Internationale; now the representative was comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc himself! We could find no word to express our happiness. The name Nguyen Ai Quoc had inspired deep confidence to all Party members and the masses, to all the Vietnamese who did not forget the shame of being enslaved under the French domination, to anyone who still kept some love for the people and the country. I remember when the news of Nguyen Ai Quoc being captured in Hong Kong came to the Poulo Condore jail, we were filled with a deep anxiety. Afterwards, thanks to the active intervention of the International Red Relief Organization, Nguyen Ai Quoc was able to escape from the hands of British security. As soon as this news was known at the island, we all heaved a sigh of gladness and relief. For so many years, we had been pronouncing this name, with deep respect, confidence and affection, but few of us thought that in our life, we should have the opportunity to meet this outstanding fighter. Therefore, when comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc came to shake hands with each of us, I was so deeply moved that I did not know what to call him. I just grasped his hands tightly. Until now, Uncle Ho still remembers my faltering voice at that moment. Sometimes, chatting with me, he would hint of that meeting, "Viet called me by way of greeting, 'comrade'."

At first, all of us called Uncle Ho comrade, then Cu (venerable old man), but later Truong Chinh and Hoang Van Thu used the appellation "Uncle". We

found this word suitable to our feelings, and since then, we addressed our leader by the affectionate appellation that we are all using now.

The place of our meeting was also in the Pac Bo hamlet, Ha Quang district, but different from Uncle Ho's abode, the Pac Bo cave. This part of the forest was very thick. I remember that many mornings, we had to go to the tiered fields to take some physical exercise and to breathe a little fresh air. Our hut stood beside a stream, and when it rained, water flooded in and spread all over the floor. I still vaguely remember that our meetings were held around a bamboo bed, each of us seated on a log. It was in this secret, deserted, and far away place, and in this simple and unwallled hut that the most sacred questions were discussed—the destiny of our Fatherland, decision on the works which were decisively important for the future history of our country. As we know, the eighth session of the Central Committee determined the fundamental points of the national policy, pointed out the main contradictions of our society at that time, put forth the new policy towards the various classes, and decided on the appropriate tactics to be followed in the revolutionary mobilization.

Besides the conference hours, Uncle Ho would call the representatives of the various zones, each separately, for a talk. I was called twice or three times. Uncle Ho asked me about the people's life, and about the policy of oppression and exploitation of the Japanese and the French. I reported to him on the plight of our people who had been mercilessly exploited since the beginning of the war, and particularly since the

arrival of the Japanese: the French policy of plundering paddy, the pillaging by the Japanese, and lately the driving of the people out of their villages, to provide land for the building of airfields and garrisons, and the tortures inflicted by the Japanese soldiers on our compatriots at Gia Lam. These cruelties filled everybody with anger. For example, the Japanese invaders, suspecting an old woman of having stolen their belongings, tied her to a horse and spurred the animal to make it run forward. The victim died strangled by the pulling of the horse. The fascists had no equals in their cruelties and savagery. Uncle Ho sat on a rock, listening to me, his eyes filled with tears, which he wiped with the flap of his dark-blue coat. Once he asked me about the forces of the movement, the organization of the masses, the conditions of the cadres' life, and particularly about the manner in which cadres carried out their activities, avoided the tracking of security agents and kept their work secret. Uncle Ho inquired very minutely. Through his questions, I realized how deep was his affection for our compatriots and comrades, how great was his attention to the people's and cadres' lives. Then he gave me his explanations and his experiences in concrete works.

At session, many problems became clearer to me. When Uncle spoke to wind up the meeting, my understanding was like a dark place receiving a new bright sunray. In this gloomy corner of Pac Bo forest, listening to Uncle Ho speaking, I could foresee the brilliant prospects of the revolution in our country and the world over. What Uncle Ho said has come

true now. At that time his words were a whole firmament of truth to me. In May 1940, before the war between the Soviet Union and Germany, Uncle Ho had foreseen that fascism would inevitably attack the Soviet Union, and if fascism should wage war against the Soviet Union, the latter would sooner or later smash it down, thereby paving the way for the success of the revolution in many countries. "We shall have not only one Soviet Union," Uncle Ho said, "but many other socialist countries will come into being." The prospect of a new world formed after the gloomy darkness of war, appeared like a bright dawn and make everybody enthusiastic. Then he talked about the revolution in Indo-China, and stressed that in the short period of a few months, three insurrections had broken out successively in Bac Son, Nam Ky (south Vietnam), and Do Luong. This proved that our people are very heroic and very sensitive in politics; that is why they have stood up in revolt whenever there was an opportunity to do so. The revolutionary spirit of our people is very high, and this is a very precious thing. This was roughly what Uncle Ho said. His words were deeply meaningful and carefully thought over. They are true not only for the insurrections of Bac Son, Nam Ky, and Do Luong, but also regarding any revolutionary mobilization of the Party. In the period of 1930 — 1931 as well as in the few years of the Democratic Front movement, we have always seen the great dauntlessness of the popular movement. Through the whole history of our country, it is obvious that heroism and dauntlessness have become the nature of our class, people and nation. With deep

confidence in the force of the masses, I understood all the better what Uncle Ho said at that decisive moment. "The Party should completely stir up the revolutionary spirit and patriotism of all sections of the population in order to concentrate all our forces on national liberation and in driving out the French and the Japanese, direct all the forces of the Party to the central task of national salvation."

The Viet Minh came into being in this part of the Pac Bo forest. When choosing a name that called to the heart for the National United Front, we found the two words "anti-imperialist" rather stiff, and the beautiful meaning of the words "national restoration" had been smeared by the pro-Japanese elements. At last, we adopted the name Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh (Front for the Independence of Vietnam) or Viet Minh in brief. For a long period of time, the two words Viet Minh have stimulated the spirit of the people all over the country; the two words Viet Minh will remain for ever in history in bright gilded letters. It was Uncle Ho who drafted the ten policies of the Viet Minh. After the session, he wrote in his own hand a personal letter calling upon the compatriots: "Letter to the compatriots" signed by Nguyen Ai Quoc. This letter was beautifully written in vernacular writing. We took the message to the delta and had it lithographed and very widely popularized. It is strange that after living so many years abroad, visiting so many countries, Uncle Ho still remembered our ancestors' vernacular writing so well. Moreover, he was closely acquainted with the psychology of our compatriots in the countryside. The latter, particularly the

old people, read Uncle Ho's message in vernacular writing with great delight, and felt their confidence greatly increased.

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After the conference, we prepared to leave when an event happened which we will never forget. Comrades from south Vietnam, living far away, prepared to set forth first. Their luggage had been completely packed when Uncle Ho came to see them.

"Are you ready, comrades?"

"Yes, we are, Uncle."

"Do you remember my recommendations that the documents of the session should not be taken along with you?"

Being afraid that communications would be difficult, these comrades had copied the documents of the conference on very small pieces of paper, rolled them up and put them into the seams of their waistcoat. Uncle Ho told them to take the documents out and criticized them very severely. "Comrades, I have told you several times but you don't follow my recommendations. You should not take the documents with you. Should you be seized by the enemy, the loss would not be yours only. The youngest among you is over twenty years of age, the oldest over thirty. The people have spent a lot of time and effort to make you into such mature persons. Should something happen to you, it is not an easy matter to replace you. You should obey me, I assure you the documents of the session will be forwarded to you."

Uncle Ho's voice was severe but full of affection for the cadres. Once again, this practical but very precious lesson was engraved on our minds. Later, carrying out underground activities, we also practised what Uncle Ho had taught us, firmly refusing to let cadres take documents with them after the conferences. All directions or resolutions had to be conveyed by way of liaison.

Being a man of experience, Uncle Ho keeps a very high vigilance. His recommendations always prove to be correct in practical life.

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Truong Chinh, Hoang Van Thu and I went again from Cao Bang to Tsing Si, then to Lungchow and returned to the country by the way of That Khe. On our way from That Khe to Binh Gia, we suddenly saw French post-commanders and their soldiers going on patrol on horseback. From our high position, we could see them very clearly. If we fired at them, we could kill them all but we should be discovered. Therefore, we decided to hide in the grassy hill and let the French soldiers pass by leisurely just in front of us.

At Binh Gia, there was a bridge called Trang Lang, at both ends of which two local soldiers were standing on guard. It was a dark starry night. We approached them on tiptoe, put our pistols at their temples and forced them away, grasping them by their waist. While walking, we strived to prevail upon them. After three or four kilometres, we let them return home.

We deliberately dropped some match-boxes, and waste paper, and left our foot prints on the road in order to lead our enemies astray. Then we walked on the grass and proceeded to a valley surrounded by high mountains. In the village a solid popular base had been organized. On arrival, we agreed to stop there for some rest.

Truong Chinh, Hoang Van Thu and I entered a house in the village. Comrade Quy, a Chinese resident, acted as our guard. We were busy kindling the fire to prepare our meal when a stranger entered the village. The guerilla keeping guard at the entrance to the village had let him in, thinking he was our man, by his appearance.

Quy, seeing the stranger, jumped over the door of the house built on piles, intending to stop him for inquiry. The stranger fled. Quy returned to the house and called us to give him the pistol.

Then he went in search of the stranger. The latter had hidden in the forest. Quy shot at him but did not hit him. The villagers informed us that this was a local secret agent. Having been discovered, we gave up our meal, prepared our luggage and set forth immediately. Before going, we told the villagers to report to the district authorities,

"Some people came asking permission to spend the night in our village but we did not agree; they have gone away."

By so doing, we would deprive the district authorities of any ground to persecute the villagers in case of our being discovered.

From Bac Son to Trang Xa, Hoang Van Thu went ahead with the first group. Truong Chinh and I were walking on a grassy hill when we heard somebody whistle noisily. It was comrade Tim, now a member of the Bac Son District Party Committee.

"Why do you go this way?" he asked. "The French post-commander and the local district-chief are keeping guard on the hill."

"Is there any way to avoid the hill then?"

Comrade Tim pointed at the high mountain. We walked through the long grass and climbed for a long time before passing over the steep mountain. We had been climbing very high but from time to time the sound of a whistle made us feel cold at the neck. The French post-commander and the local district-chief were sending their men to search the forest in all directions.

Only Truong Chinh and I arrived at Trang Xa. The comrades who had gone ahead to contact the liaison had not yet come back. It was pitch dark and I knew the way but I could not orientate myself. We came upon a dry stream and then I found some smooth stones on which I had once sat during a meeting with some comrades. I could now recognize my way. I let Truong Chinh wait at a far portion of the stream, and entered the village to look for the nearest house of our friends. This was comrade Mao's house. I knocked at the door. Mao looked up startled.

"Good heavens! Why do you come back? They have been searching the village the whole afternoon, and have just left."

"They've gone, it's all right now," I calmly replied.

I said so, but in fact it was really a great danger that we had escaped. During the last few days, it seemed we had been playing hide-and-seek with the French soldiers. Everywhere we went, we always found our enemy in front of us, or met with their ambushes.

Some local comrades lit a torch to lead Truong Chinh and I to our secret office in the mountain. Then comrade Truong Chinh reported the new resolutions of the Party to the National Salvation troops. These were the first persons to hear about the new policy of the Party and they were most enthusiastic. Everybody agreed that the Party lines as such are very correct.

The new light from the Pac Bo cave cast its first bright rays on to the high mountain of Trang Xa, stirring up the hearts of the cadres and fighters of our Party's first armed unit.

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Truong Chinh, Hoang Van Thu and I stayed a few more days at Trang Xa to further discuss our work. By that time, Hitler fascism had started attacking the Soviet Union and we intended to send a comrade to Uncle Ho to ask him whether the Party resolutions should be amended because of the new situation. At that moment, because of the betrayal by a traitor called Cong, the imperialists blocked the communications in order to arrest the different delegations coming back one after another from the Party Central Committee session. At the same time, they were frightened by the situation in Bac Son and Vu Nhai areas where the



flames of insurrection, kindled the previous year, had not been quenched. The Party's armed forces were still maintained, and the underground movement continued to surge. The enemy hurriedly concentrated a great number of troops from Lang Son and Thai Nguyen to launch an attack against Bac Son and Dinh Ca, opening a second wave of white terror. They were very ambitious, thinking they would this time capture alive our leading comrades and drown our movement in fire and blood. The eight-month period of guerilla warfare began in the areas of Bac Son and Vu Nhai, in extremely hard conditions and with the highest heroism. The section of the National Salvation troops commanded by comrade Phung Chi Kien withdrew to the frontier and fell into an ambush on the way. Kien sacrificed his life, and Huy-the-thin was arrested. I was appointed to remain and help comrade Chu Van Tan in the consolidation of the remaining part of the National Salvation troops, in leading their fight, maintaining our forces and safeguarding the people and our bases in the first months of the guerilla period.

We can say that this was the first anti-mopping up operation in the history of our guerilla fighting. Enemy soldiers were posted along all the roads in the revolutionary base. All their administrative machinery — officials, guards, local militia, secret agents and reactionary elements — was mobilized to lead them to raid the Party bases, search each village, each hamlet, each corner of the forest, tracking each footprint on the moss or the grass, making signs at all paths or tracks in order to discover the ways followed by the cadres and the guerillas. Wherever they went,

the French troops massacred people and burnt down or destroyed their property. Thousands of people in Dinh Ca and Trang Xa areas were herded into concentration camps in Na Phao and Lang Giua, forced to live in the open air, exposed to the sun and rain, and thrown into dire poverty and sufferings. Chu Van Tan's father, over seventy years old that year, was also arrested. Some inhabitants of Dinh Ca who joined the National Salvation troops told Chu Van Tan and me,

"Here is the old man's message: Let Chu Van Tan and his friends be firm, and carry out to the end what they are doing now. We are arrested and imprisoned but we are not afraid."

However cruel the pirates might be, they would not be able to smash down our people's revolutionary spirit. In those dark days, the fighters and the people were associated one with another exactly like fish and water.

One afternoon, I still remember it was the 15th of the seventh lunar month, the French soldiers came and set fire to the village of Trang Xa. The flames rose skywards, and clouds of smoke darkened the atmosphere. We guerillas were posted high on the mountain, and, looking down at the burning village we felt as if our hearts were stabbed by daggers. Many comrades could not stand still.

"Allow us to go down and fight them, even if we should die," they eagerly suggested.

At nightfall, hundreds of people climbed up the mountain to meet us. Among them there was an over sixty-year-old couple, the old man holding a

frying pan and some chickens in his hands, and the old woman carrying one nephew on her back and leading another one by the hand.

"It is impossible to live with the French in the village," the old man said. "I have five sons, please take them all with you. My old wife and I, with these two children, want to go with you too."

"It is very hard for you both and the children to follow us, we are afraid you could not."

"Don't worry, we know how to arrange it."

Then the old couple and hundreds of others left for the mountain and settled there, concealing their grain, clothes and other things in caves or bushes and living in the open air, exposed to the sun and rain. The five sons of the old couple were accepted in the ranks of the guerillas. As they were all good shots and always hit their targets whenever they aimed at the enemy, they were called by their friends, "The Five Tigers". One of the five died in a battle to cover the withdrawal of his unit.

Also on this tearful night of the 15th of the seventh month, another old man stubbornly asked to follow us.

The old man had a little child with him. The boy wore a silver ring round his neck. He answered to the name of Do. We took pity on the old man and the child, but advised the man to return to the village after the withdrawal of the French, being afraid that he and his son would not be able to suffer the hardships of a life in the jungles.

"If you don't accept me," said the old man wiping his tears, "please take Do with you. He is my only son. If he remains in the village and happens to be killed by the French, I shall have nobody to survive me."

From then on, young Do went with us. In the Resistance War he joined the Army, and afterwards returned to his village to work as a local cadre. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the people in Vu Nhai again, I met old Do once more. He was very glad to let me know that his son Do has five children now.

I felt a great delight and embraced the old man.

"So, you are no longer worried about having nobody to survive you, are you?" I said.

I recalled the old story. The villagers, being greatly moved on hearing it, said, "The only way leading to life is to follow the revolution."

Some time after this 15th day of the seventh month, at the Khuon Manh forest, Ngoc My village, Trang Xa commune, a new section of National Salvation troops was founded and put under the command of comrade Chu Van Tan. This was the second section of the National Salvation troops. Before the yellow-starred red flag, we movingly commemorated the comrades who had sacrificed their lives, and admitted a number of new Party members. On behalf of the Party Central Committee, I talked to the section about its tasks and presented it with a yellow-starred red flag. I spoke about the fighters of the Soviet Red Army, now heroically struggling to safeguard the

Soviet fatherland, the hope of humanity. The Vietnam National Salvation troops had the task of maintaining the revolutionary bases and popular organizations and keeping up the armed struggle to stimulate the movement in the whole country and give practical support to the Soviet Red Army, now fighting on the first line of the world anti-fascist front.

In the beginning, the morale of the troops was very high, but later, through excess of hardships, their spirit sometimes wavered, and at moments of losses, some lost their morale and their inner party solidarity was easily loosened. I helped comrade Chu Van Tan in looking after the political work, applying my experiences of prison life to the organization of collective life. I assisted the troops in studying Party policies and acquiring revolutionary virtues. I discussed with them the question of living orderly and methodically, however hard our life might be. We would set up our huts beside a stream. After cooking our meal, we would pour water to wipe away all trace of our presence. At first, our huts were covered with palm leaves, but afterwards during the fighting we had to move on so often that we could only cut fresh banana leaves to roof our huts. At times the banana leaves had hardly dried when we were obliged to move to another place.

People of different nationalities, the Tay, the Phan Sinh, the Cao Lan, even the long-haired Man people living in high mountains, were all very good to the National Salvation troops. When we talked to them, they did not understand all we said, but hearing

about the fight against the French and the Japanese, hearing about the Viet Minh, they were greatly delighted.

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The new policies of the Party, the declaration, programme, and constitution of the Viet Minh and Uncle Ho's letter, sent everywhere, stirred up the revolutionary movement tremendously. Our comrades endeavoured to spread propaganda among the people and to mobilize them. Many ingenious innovations were applied, availing ourselves of such occasions as the pilgrimage to the temple of Hung Vuong or such anniversaries as that of Ngo Quyen, the two sisters Trung, Quang Trung, Tran Hung Dao, and Nguyen Trai to popularize the Viet Minh documents and Nguyen Ai Quoc's "letter to the compatriots". The Party National Salvation mottoes went straight to the heart of the masses. The Viet Minh yellow-starred red flag appeared everywhere, symbolizing the sacred soul of the country in everybody's mind.

In December 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, thereby opening the Pacific war. In this new situation, the Standing Central Committee issued a communiqué, putting forth the slogan "Not a single cent, not a grain of paddy, not a soldier for the Japanese-French invaders." Since the previous year, the French pirates had been cornering grain and paddy, the Japanese aggressors forcing the people to destroy their crops and to plant jute instead; to destroy cotton and to plant pea-nut, to evacuate and give their

village for the expansion of airfields, or for setting up barracks. The Japanese plundered buffaloes and oxen, pigs and poultry; even a bundle of straw, an egg or a handful of vegetable were taken; ripe crops were cut and given as fodder to their horses. The peasants were deeply angry. Since the breaking out of the Pacific war, the Japanese and the French competed with one another in exploiting our people to exhaustion. Shouldering this double yoke, and living in the poorest conditions, our people had their hatred for the invaders brought to a climax. I was given the task of working with the peasants, when I left Dinh Ca, Trang Xa for the delta. I engaged in developing the movement with other comrades, establishing bases to form a belt surrounding Hanoi, then to extend down to Ha Nam, Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh. Sometimes rendez-vous were fixed with comrades coming from Central Vietnam for liaison at the very centre of Phat Diem. Everywhere the Party's policy and line was quickly understood and enthusiastically welcomed by the people.

Once, comrade Nguyen Van Loc took me to set up bases in Tram Long, Ha Dong province, a remote and boggy area, a very convenient place for liaison with other regions. At first I was introduced to an old man of straightforward character living at the end of the village. Some time later, because of the development of my activities, I requested the comrades to find a lodging for me at the entrance of the village more convenient for my going and coming at night. A lot of effort was made.

"There is a place, a rather difficult one to live in," I was told. The children are all right. The mother is

also good, but the father is a little uncertain. However, since you need the place, you can go there. You will find an outhouse containing a little quantity of grain and unoccupied the whole day."

I went and live there. After attending meetings in other places, I would wait till noon, when the house was deserted, to come back; upon entering I would latch the door and, hiding my clothes and umbrella, climb on the heap of paddy, look for an undiscoverable place and sit near a chink in the wall. One day, whilst absorbed in reading documents I heard some knocks at the door. I strained my ears. The knocks were not the conventional sign so I remained silent. Some more knocks, I did not answer but looked through the chink to see who was there. The thumping outside became stronger and lasted longer.

"Who is there? Open the door," came the old man's angry voice.

I kept quiet. The old man got angrier:

"Open the door! Open! Who are you? What a queer man you are!"

To avoid trouble, I hurriedly hid the documents, took up my dress and umbrella, and opened the door to let the old man in.

"Who are you and where do you come from to steal into my house?" he shouted angrily.

"Be calm, please. Have a seat first, I shall explain to you."

"Say what you want, quick."

"I have come here under the suggestions of comrades, and have confidence in you."

"What confidence you mean?"

I began to speak about the Viet Minh policy, then about the French policy of taxes and the Japanese policy of exploitation and plunder. The old man had not recovered from his astonishment when I pointed to the heap of paddy.

"Think it over, please," I said. "If you were not forced to sell your paddy, your corn-loft would have been fuller than it is now."

The old man's features softened immediately; he seemed to lend an ear to what I said. So I went on speaking slowly and calmly.

"How are the Japanese now?" he suddenly asked.

It appeared to be all right now. I talked about the countries which were fighting fascism, about the Soviet Red Army which would surely win, then about the National Salvation movement which was developing in our country; in Bac Son, in Vu Nhai our troops had taken up arms to fight the French and the Japanese. The old man listened attentively and asked many questions. Then he called his son in.

"Bring me the bottle of alcohol, and the bowl of pea-nuts too."

Some alcohol and pea-nuts were brought in.

"I understand now. Interesting talk. Please, have a drink."

Sitting in the out-house sipping alcohol and eating pea-nuts, we talked for a long while. After this, the old man's house became the place I could frequent at will to extend our bases to neighbouring areas.

In these darkest years of our people's life, the fascist yoke weighed not only on the shoulders of the labouring people, but the cruel policy of exploitation

and plunder of the Japanese and the French also drove well-off people to the side of the revolution. A wide national united front gathering all patriotic forces was being formed to fight the French, to drive away the Japanese and to secure national independence.

Even at that time, our compatriots, when enlightened, loved the cadres deeply. The poor people in particular were warmheartedly affectionate to the cadres. I well remember a young man called Nuoi living near Ben Hoi, who often told us, even at the darkest moments of French repression:

"Whenever you pass by my house, don't fail to drop in, I shall prepare your meal and look after your security."

Nuoi was very poor. In his house there was neither bed nor bench but only a hearth and a litter of straw where all his family slept at night. The door had no panels at all. At night a small winnowing-basket was put against it. When we came, Nuoi insisted on leaving the straw-litter for us. We would not agree because should we accept, where would he and his family lie? At last, the winnowing-basket was put down for us to sleep on, thus leaving the door free for the cold wind to blow in.

Many persons though not yet Party members devoted themselves to the revolution, for instance, Mrs. Do Ca in the area of Van Phuc, which was to be the place frequented by Hoang Van Thu later. This old woman was a native of La Noi and she introduced me to many good elements there to enable me to extend our bases to Yen Lo, Truc Son and Mai Linh.

When urgent work required, she personally guided me in spite of the night and rain, being too careful to let somebody go in her place. She was afterwards admitted into the Party. Some time later she was arrested and died in jail.

The old buddhist nun in the village of Tao Khe once saved my life. I often came to meetings at the pagoda of this village. Seeing the presence of a stranger, the authorities had been suspicious for a long time. One night, they rushed into the pagoda by the back door. I had no time to escape, being taken so unexpectedly, and had to squat down. The old nun, seeing my situation, hurriedly called some other young nuns to stand in front of me to hide me. The authorities searched every corner of the pagoda without result and came to the place of my hiding. They intimidated the nuns by shouting their anger at them in the most arrogant manner. Fortunately, I was able to escape thanks to the calm answers of the old nun.

Generally speaking, monks and nuns could be easily won to the revolution because of their close association with the people's life. The monks of the pagoda in Kim Dong village named Truc introduced me to other monks so that I could establish bases in a whole system of pagodas in the region of Hung Yen, from the market Thi up to Ban Yen Nhan, My Hao district.

Relating the story about monks and nuns, I remember one event happening on an Easter Day.

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By February or March 1943, after the great Stalin-grad victory of the Soviet Red Army which foreshadowed the inevitable defeat of the fascists, the Standing Central Committee again met. The resolutions of the conference put forth the directions for the extension of the anti-fascist front of struggle against the Japanese and the French, to win over more allies and to push forward the struggle of the masses. They also defined for the whole Party the correct political attitude towards the different forces at home and abroad, taking the entire Party a step further in the unification of organization and single-mindedness with regard to political line. At that time, many of our comrades had not thoroughly grasped the spirit of the resolutions of the Central Committee Eighth Session: "To prepare for the insurrection is the central task of our Party and people in the present stage." The Standing Central Committee special meeting reminded the entire Party to realize the urgent situation of the war and revolution and issued concrete directives about propaganda work, organization and struggle. It set out the tasks of the workers, peasants and troops so as to prepare more diligently for the insurrection.

I was sent to attend the meeting of the Xu\* Committee of Bac Ky (north Vietnam). Comrade Tran Tu Binh called this meeting. He despatched a man to escort me to the appointed place at Co Vien, Binh Luc (Ha Nam), one of our early bases. In 1930, the

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\* Each of the three parts of Vietnam: North, Central and South.

peasants in Binh Luc had protested against taxes at the district headquarters, at the same time as the peasants in Tien Hai, Thai Binh, I arrived at the place at about four p.m. As soon as arrived, on studying the situation I immediately felt something abnormal in the village. Hitherto, coming to a base, the cadres and the masses had always been as close as in one family, the people guarding the cadres' meetings and never being so curious as to ask about or to look at what we were doing. But here, strange enough, some people were always roaming about and casting furtive glances at us with eyes which were not at all frank.

"Is it safe here?" asked comrade Binh suspiciously.

"It is. The comrade who arranged this meeting has just come out of prison, a reliable man."

"But I still feel uneasy. I would propose another house to sleep in but since we have arranged a rendezvous with comrade Tue here, this house can be taken as our meeting place."

Comrade Binh set off to look for an abode, returning shortly to say that a place was found, not very far from where we were. At nightfall, comrade Phan Trong Tue arrived, a tall man wearing a long gauze dress and a turban on his head. Seeing one another after a long separation, we spent some moment in inquiring about one another's affairs, before beginning our discussions. We worked till two o'clock in the morning, then took a little nap in the house that comrade Binh had arranged in the afternoon. We were just about asleep when barking of dogs was heard almost everywhere in the village. We woke up, startled. A lot of electric

torches were sweeping and focusing their powerful light at the house where we had been holding our meeting. Binh and Tue jumped out and ran away. I had intended to follow them, but I thought that we had better not escape in the same way. This was the first time that I came to this place for a meeting, and I did not yet know it very well. Secret agents were already tramping noisily on the village paths. I slowly went to the back of the house then to the field where I made my own way through rice-plants. The further I went the drier became the field; rice-plants, ready to be harvested, were as high as a man. I separated them, managed to squat down then lie flat on the ground and stretching out my arms erected the rice-plants again, one by one.

For about a quarter of an hour, the noise of tramping could be heard from my place. Secret agents, French and Vietnamese traitors, whistled and shouted angrily, making a deafening uproar in the village. Then I heard them kick open the door of the house where our meeting was held in the evening, and the voice of a halfbred Frenchman:

"Where's Cang? Where's Tue? Where's Binh?"

I remained as silent as the dead, pressing my belly to refrain from coughing. Enemy boots were already pounding the ground around the field where I was lying. I could hear the voice of inspector of secret police Fleutot shouting:

"Cang is really good at running away, in spite of his lame leg!"

The bright light of electric torches swept over the rice-fields then died down. I strained my eyes and ears

to detect any movement or sound, and stiffened all my muscles to be motionless. The enemy's voice sounded farther and farther away ; then silence prevailed again. Perhaps I might be safe! I was thinking of going away now but one thing puzzled me: from where I was, could I find a way to the river? A long moment after, I heard people go to and fro on the village paths. Dawn was nearing, the church bell began tolling its shrill notes. Men's voices came nearer, then footfalls were heard close by the field. Perhaps was there any road at the end of the field? In fact, some people were speaking,

"We are going to church very early this morning, we don't know whether the ferry-man will take us across immediately."

Lying in the field, I thanked my compatriots from the bottom of my heart: they had shown me the way to life.

Then some women talked among themselves,

"The tall man was very strong indeed. He ran to escape and was caught only by the joint efforts of many secret agents... But after being seized, he struggled hard by kicking the agents and tried to run further; he was at last forced down and bound up, but he kept on shouting and cursing."

What, the tall man? So Tue had been arrested. Could Binh succeed in escaping then? I was still free, but what was to be done to get out of this place? I intended to stay here a whole day and wait until nightfall to go away. It would be safer. I laid my hand on my leather pouch.

In those days, everywhere we went, Truong Chinh, Hoang Van Thu and I, always had a leather pouch at our belt, sometimes we wore it at the front, sometimes at the back. So, I thrust my hand into this pouch in which I hid my false identity card and took out a watch and a sharp knife. I lay on my side, putting the watch in front of me and planting the knife into the ground, ready to kill any man who ventured to rush on me.

It had been broad daylight for a long time, when some village guardians, returning from their patrol, arrived near where I was hidden. They spoke among themselves:

"The big bosses were too arrogant, they cursed us all the time."

"Damn them, they are also afraid of the communists and they rebuke us for having let the communists escape from our village."

"They have caused much trouble on Easter Day and now we have missed our morning mass."

I smiled to myself in the field. "It is impossible that I should die on the day of the Resurrection Festival." The village guardians had been called back. This meant that the secret agents had withdrawn. I prepared to set forth. I tore off a flap of my white dress and used it as a mourning turban and buried the remaining part in the field. Covering my head with my gauze dress, I pretended to be a man returning from an anniversary feast; the dress protected me from the sun but also concealed my face. I had intended to start immediately, but on second thoughts I realized



that at this moment, a lot of people were still working in the field in groups of five or six and whispering about last night's raid by the secret agents in the village. So I postponed my departure for further information. At noontime, the village was completely quiet. Probably the peasants had had their meal and were taking their rest. I therefore stood up and stepped on to the field bank.

A little girl who was looking after her buffalo nearby started with fright on seeing me. She wanted to cry out but could not open her mouth. I went to her and said,

"Lass, why do you pasture your buffalo to the field so early?"

I talked softly to the little girl to soothe her fear, then left right away. Reaching the other side of the river, I was now safe. Standing on the dike of Thu Tri and looking back at the village of Co Vien, I could see the steeples of some small churches in distant villages. Smiling to myself I thought that it was probably due to the Resurrection Festival Day that I am still alive!

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That time comrade Binh also escaped. Subsequent inquiry revealed that Fleutot and his men had set this trap because the person whom comrade Binh had confidence in and sent to arrange the place of our meeting had surrendered to the enemy and agreed to serve them, in spite of his having been arrested by the French.

From 1943, we were intensely tracked by the imperialists. Everywhere we went, we saw our photographs pasted up to warn the people that we were persons to be looked for and arrested. After each meeting, Truong Chinh, Hoang Van Thu and I parted and went in different directions. We did not express our ideas, but seeing the others disappear at a turn of the road, we each wondered whether we should meet one another again at the next meeting. Comrade Thu worked on the armymen. Drawing experiences from the insurrection of Bac Son, Nam Ky (south Vietnam), and Do Luong, the Party realized that the work on the soldiers was very necessary for an armed uprising. The revolutionary armymen would furnish armaments and cadres to the insurrectionary masses. As a result of our work on the armymen, bases were established not only among the Vietnamese soldiers, but also among the French military men. The group of Chien Si, Nguyen Dan, was composed of comrades and friends from Germany and Austria, who, persecuted by the fascist authorities for their anti-fascist activities in Europe, had escaped into the French Legion and had been mobilized for Indo-China. They got into contact with our Party. Comrade Truong Chinh, besides his work of general leadership, assumed also the task of mobilizing the workers and doing propaganda work. His articles, signed or unsigned, in the Co Giai Phong (The Flag of Liberation) and the Tap Chi Cong San (Communist Review) instilled spirit in the popular movement and strengthened our readers' love for revolutionary literature. Many times he was surrounded by the

police and within an inch of being arrested, but thanks to the people's protection and his own care, he always escaped.

At that time, the security zone of the Central Committee besides the belt around Hanoi, included areas within Bac Ninh, Phuc Yen, and Ha Dong provinces. It spread also to the communes along the Cau river, in the region of Hiep Hoa, Bac Giang. These communes occupied a very important position, being in the liaison line from the delta to the National Salvation troops' bases in Thai Nguyen. Cadre training courses of the zone were normally held in these communes of Thanh Van, Hoang Lien and Van Xuyen. Once Truong Chinh led a training course there. Every morning, he got up very early and, after some physical exercise, began to work in his secret room. One morning, after physical exercise, he was taking out his towel to wash himself when the light of an electric torch fell upon his face. Stooping to avoid the light, he went to the back of the house and slid away to the river.

That time, guided by a traitor, the secret agents came to the village with the intention of wrecking the training course.

When Truong Chinh reached the river side, he intended to swim across, but when he stepped into the water he felt the sand come up to the calves of his legs. This was a silt embankment. He had to ford to the middle of the river and there found a small boat with an old fisherman throwing his net and a little girl pushing on her oars..

"Where are you going so early?" asked the old man.

"One member of my family suffers from stomach-ache, I come for a physician and am in a hurry. Please, take me across."

"If you are a Viet Minh cadre, I shall help you," said the man doubtfully. "I often take cadres across this portion of the river. Before the cocks crowed this morning, I saw them make a raid in the village. If you are a Viet Minh cadre, I shall ferry you across."

The fisherman brought his boat close and Truong Chinh stepped in, now sure that the old man was sympathizing with the revolution.

"Let me take you down to the portion of the river over there before you land."

The boat drifted to the tangerine plantation where there was a base.

"Land me here, please," said Truong Chinh.

Standing on the bank, Truong Chinh watched the fisherman drifting away. The old man took up his net again and told his daughter to row upstream.

Truong Chinh stood there until the fisherman disappeared at the turn of the river, then walked into the tangerine-garden. There he met comrade Tinh, the cadre in charge of the security zone, who has gone to look for him.

I once just escaped being arrested along with comrade Truong Chinh near Hanoi itself.

We met at Bun village, also called Dao Xuyen, near Bat Trang along with comrade Thien who came

from the Xu committee to report. We were meeting at five o'clock in the afternoon when disturbance was felt in the village.

"The French are coming in great numbers," people said.

"They are heading for the village."

The conference was interrupted and we dispersed, each to a different place. Truong Chinh went out first. At the entrance of the village, he saw the French and returned to say:

"We can't go now, they are too numerous."

We went back to our comrade's house. In those days there were no secret dug-outs. Looking around we saw nothing but a clump of bamboo-trees. We climbed up the hedge and one after another slid down, then escaped out of the village.

There, we ran in different directions. Truong Chinh and Miss An went by the path behind the village, cut through the field, and crossed the railway to go to Tu Son. Later, at our next meeting, we learnt that when Truong Chinh and Miss An got out of the village, it was nightfall and raining hard. The French were still watching the railway and the two comrades could go no further. They climbed up a fruit-tree by the roadside to wait for the French to withdraw and the rain to stop. As for comrade Thien and I, we proceeded to Bat Trang in order to go to Nam Dinh by steamship. We both went over the dike to the harbour and entered an inn. The inn-keeper told us that we had missed the ship. After deliberation, we decided to walk to the ferry of Van Giang where we would cross the river and go to Thuong Tin to take the train.

On second thoughts we realized that if we set forth immediately we would certainly be arrested. Therefore we hid in a maize field. It was July and the plants were high enough. No sooner had we hidden than the head-lights of cars on the dike illuminated the landing-place. The light swept over our heads. Actually the French were driving to the harbour in our pursuit. They seized our liaison, a man of the locality, and began to torture him on the spot with the electric current to force him to reveal where we had gone. Their extreme cruelty drove me mad with anger. I wanted to take out my pistol and give a bullet to each of them. Comrade Thien trembled with rage and I had to hold him back and tell him to keep quiet. The French beat our liaison for two hours then withdrew, taking him with them. After it began to rain heavily.

We sat in the maize-field, in spite of the rain. The starch of my turban began to flow down stickily on my face. The rain abated and after wringing out our clothes, we moved on. We walked along the foot of the dike and whenever we passed by a sentry post, we would take a by-way in the field. We kept on walking until we came to the temple of Van Giang, where we took a little rest, squatting at the foot of the dike, one watching while the other slept and waiting for the ferry to come in the morning.

Very early in the morning, after washing ourselves and crossing the river, we ran straight to Quan Ganh to take the first train to Nam Dinh. On arrival, comrade Thien got down first and, being still unknown, he got through easily. As for me upon looking outside I saw Fleutot's secret agents swarming all over the

railway station. Half of the train had emptied. The secret agents were standing at the door of each carriage to scrutinize every passenger. Fortunately, a lady was about to leave the train carrying a baby in one arm and holding a big barrel of fish pickle in the other.

"Let me carry the baby for you, Madam," I said.

The boy immediately agreed to be carried by me. I held him high and fondled him, I raised him higher and pressed his cheek against mine whenever I was closely watched by some secret agents. If I was looked at from another direction, I would change the position of the boy and carry him by another arm. Once out of the station, I gave the boy back to his mother and was warmly thanked.

"I am grateful for your assistance, you're very kind. Say good bye to Uncle, sonny."

I hailed a rickshaw and went to one of my acquaintance's, the owner of a cycle-shop. On seeing me, and, being aware of my revolutionary activities he said,

"You should not go about here. I don't know why to-day they make so thorough a search. This morning at the arrival of the steamship, they searched every passenger, and searched many times, it's terrible. You should leave this spot immediately."

I hired a boat and went downstream to Giao Thuy, where I looked for Miss Khoi and asked her to report to comrade Truong Chinh that I had escaped, and to ask him to arrange for my going there to continue the interrupted meeting.

As the revolutionary movement developed rapidly, the secret agents were mad with anger and they inten-

sified their raids. New and inexperienced cadres easily fell in their traps. Some began their revolutionary activities right after attending our training courses, but generally they were caught in the nets of the secret police after two or three months, or at best six months. It was a great loss when these cadres, formed by the movement, were captured. The movement developed as quick as a kite soared up into the sky at a high wind, and we could never develop enough cadres to meet the need of the movement. We decided among ourselves that we should at any cost rescue our comrades from prison; the precious capital of the revolutionary movement was to be found there. The jails of Son La, Cho Chu, Ba Van, Nghia Lo, Bac Me, etc. held an immense number of our comrades, well experienced in struggle. We therefore immediately got into contact with these prisons and prepared for their escape. From mid 1943 onwards, Sao Do, Tran Dang Ninh, Van Tien Dung, Le Duc Tho, Tran Quoc Hoan, Nguyen Van Tran, Le Hien Mai, Song Bao, Nhi Quy, etc. escaped one after another from Son La, Cho Chu, Ba Van jails. This was a great joy for all of us.

A woman, comrade Vinh, arrested in 1940 in Vinh Yen and incarcerated at Tuyen Quang jail, was also helped to escape, then to cross the Clear river and to go to the Resistance zone. Comrade Vinh is now my wife. We first met each other amidst the mountains and the forests of Viet Bac. It was in Spring 1944.

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Every year, I had to leave the plain and go on duty for some time in the base of Thai Nguyen. At the beginning of 1944, I was sent there once again by the Central Committee to inspect the situation of the National Salvation troops and to discuss with them how to make liaison between the part of the Central Committee in Cao Bang and the Marching Southwards troops. I returned to Trang Xa and opened a short-term training course for the cadres of the National Salvation troops. I then held a conference with them in which it was decided to divide our base into two sectors for the convenience of leadership. I went with a new section of troops to the new sector. All the outlets of the forest in the base were blocked by enemy post. After discussion we found no other way out than to avail ourselves of the dark night of the Tet (Lunar New Year) eve and to get out of the siege by passing just in front of the enemy post. In the afternoon of that day, we set off. The ladies in the village, the first adoptive mothers of the fighters — full of affection for their adopted sons and brothers as all fighters' mothers always were — embraced our soldiers, saying, "Pity, the people will be enjoying the Tet festival, and you are obliged to go off at the call of your duty." Each of us extended New Year's wishes to the mothers and the children, then started. We passed the Dinh Ca post then the La Hien post and turned into the forest, heading for Phu Luong and for Coc. Our section was completely composed of young men, mostly of young mountaineers, that is to say people who were keener than anybody else in enjoying the entertainments of the Tet Festival: song

competitions between girls and boys, ball-throwing games, etc. Spring is always a season full of sentiments for them. Marching in the forest, they noisily talked among themselves about the previous Tet festivals. We said, "We are going in search of better and more meaningful Tet festivals." And wherever the troops set foot in the forest, the light of their torches illuminated all the trees around. New Year switched over without our noticing it. In the depth of the forest, Spring had brought about young sprouts and new leaves. The song "Go on, Red Army" sounded in the air:

*Go forward, Red Armymen!  
Risk your life for a happier life,  
Hope for a peaceful and happy world,  
Go forward, Red Armymen!*

In the middle of this hopeful Spring, we reached the area of mount Hong (Rose). We tracked up the source of the Pho Day river. There, in a deep valley hemmed in on all sides by steep and high stony cliffs of the forest of Khuon Kich, so thick and shady that even in Spring, mist would not completely clear up before eight or nine o'clock in the morning, the founding ceremony of the third section of the National Salvation troops was held. I attended the ceremony, then left for the plain again.

This trip to the high region allowed me to foresee the first spring-time young sprouts and buds of our country. In the upper areas, the movement had greatly developed, the communal Viet Minh committees had replaced the enemy administration. All the questions in the commune were referred by the people to the

Viet Minh committee for settlement; contention among the peasants about water for their fields was also settled by the Viet Minh committee. Particularly in the highlands, age-old differences between various nationalities were in many places adjusted by the Viet Minh. So, the two administrative powers, the Viet Minh and the French, existed at the same time, the latter like a star fading away in the morning, and the former like the sun dawning in the east and gradually casting its rosy light over everything on the earth. When I met Truong Chinh at Hiep Hoa, I reported this situation to him. At that time, everywhere the movement had shown many new characteristics. Struggles continually broke out against the plundering of paddy and against the forced cultivation of jute and castor-oil plant. At some places Japanese soldiers were beaten to death by the peasants with their carrying poles. In cities and towns, the workers' and students' struggle also surged up. From this meeting with comrade Truong Chinh it came to my mind to convene a congress of the entire people and to raise the banner of insurrection; by association of ideas, I was thinking of the Dien Hong congress in the old time where the people decided to unite and to fight resolutely against foreign invaders. What I dreamed in my mind that year was realized the following year in the people's congress of Tan Trao.

On my way back to the plain, as usual, I dropped in on Old Diec to see if somebody had come to contact me. This old man's house, a very good base, was by the side of the railway, near the Duong bridge. He had a son with a bright face and intelligent

eyes but, unfortunately, the young man was dumb. We loved this man very much for his intelligence. He could read and write perfectly, and whenever he received an issue of the Co Giai Phong (The Liberation Flag) or the Cuu Quoc (National Salvation), he always pored over it, untiringly and passionately. It is regrettable however that he could not communicate his readings to anybody.

Hardly had I entered Old Diec's house when his dumb son led me into the inner room, closed, very dark, and deserted. He dragged me to the wall, pointed to a sheet of white paper bordered with black framing. On the snow-white paper, I read three words carefully hand-written:

#### HOANG VAN THU

I understood everything. I fell on to the bed and tears filled my eyes. The dumb young man also wept his heart out hugging me in his arms.

The next meeting of the Central Committee took place in the village of Dong Ky, Bac Ninh -- the very village where Hoang Van Thu, when alive, used to come and meet us. Truong Chinh, Sao Do, and I, gathered there but could not immediately start our discussions. Hoang Van Thu's death was a great loss for the movement. Having been closely associated with him, we all the more mourned for our comrade. Thinking of him, I always remember a sentence he often said,

"We cadres should take care to keep our heads. After the victory of the revolution, there will be a lot of work to do."

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The situation had become most pressing. In Europe, the splendidly heroic Red Army had vigorously launched its counter-attack, driven the fascist enemy completely out of the Soviet fatherland; it was now stormily advancing towards Hitler's den, and, on its way, successively liberating many countries in eastern and central Europe. Only then did the western allied countries hastily open the second war-front. Italian fascism collapsed. France was being liberated. On the Pacific front, the Japanese were defeated and withdrew helter-skelter to the continent. The Indochinese peoples were greatly elated at the glorious victories of the Red Army and of the anti-fascist front. Freedom awaited us; success lay ahead. The Party called upon the entire people to take up arms, and liberate the nation from the humiliating Japanese and French yoke, to share the glory of annihilating the fascists and restoring peace and happiness for mankind.

I still remember that, after the decisive Stalingrad victory of the Soviet Red Army, I had the opportunity to pass by Nhi Khe, in the outskirts of Hanoi; Nhi Khe is the native village of Nguyen Trai, one of our greatest writers and national heroes and a bright example for every Vietnamese patriotic intellectual. At Nhi Khe, some intellectuals asked, "How were you able to foretell right from the beginning that Hitler Germany would inevitably be defeated by the Soviet Union?"

After analysing the objective laws of development of human society, the certain collapse of capitalism and victory of the world revolution, I introduced to these friends some Party documents, "The Soviet Union

is Constantly Faithful to Peace" written in 1939, "The Pacific War" written in 1942, in which clear explanations were given about the material basis of our firm confidence in the certain success of the World Anti-fascist Front headed by the great Soviet Union. Thanks to this scientific and theoretic analysis of our Party, many intellectuals gradually departed from their narrow national point of view and took the progressive position of proletarian internationalism, and realized that the Vietnamese Revolution formed an integral part of the world revolution.

At that time, in a review legally published by a number of intellectuals, we found many articles with a patriotic tendency, but the line of their patriotism was not yet clear. We got into contact with them. In those days, our people were already fed up with the alluring words "Common Prosperity Bloc", "the Great East Asia" of the Japanese and meaningless slogans such as "France-Vietnam Co-operation", "National Revolution", "Labour, Family, Fatherland" of the Petain and Decoux clique. An increasing number of students and pupils in Hanoi and other provinces opposed the fake youth movement led by the French captain Ducoroy, sided with the revolution and took part in the struggle. The movement spread from young intellectuals to other strata of the intelligentsia. The Union of New Democrats was founded, made up of intellectuals and students of Hanoi. This was the predecessor of the Vietnam Democratic Party.

The situation in Indochina further and further confirmed the correctness of the Party's previous analysis. The French colonialists in Indochina turned

towards the De Gaulle government in exile. But when the treacherous Petain-Laval government collapsed and the treaty between Tokyo, Berlin and Vichy had no longer any reason for existence, French colonialists in Indochina, being still afraid of the Japanese, adopted an ambiguous and opportunistic attitude. In September 1944, the Japanese obliged the Decoux clique to clarify the French attitude, to declare war against the Allies and to let Japanese officers directly command the French army in Indochina. The French and the Japanese were at loggerheads, but they had to collaborate with one another because they feared that the Indochinese people would rise up.

Our Party had foreseen the March 9, 1945 events and asserted that "the pimple would have to crack and let out its pus." Indochina was on the verge of a general political crisis. Preparations should be speedily made for uprising to recover the Fatherland, as soon as the France-Japan clash took place. As early as May, 1944, the Central Headquarters of the Viet Minh issued instructions for active preparations for the insurrection. The high tide of the popular movement soared up like waves in an ocean.

Indochina was like a dry pasture land where the tiniest cinder could kindle a fire. By the end of 1944, lamentations and resentment were expressed everywhere by the people, their blood boiling with anger and hatred. This was the time when the horrible 1945 famine was approaching. The plundering policy applied during the last four years by the French and Japanese pirates had impoverished and exhausted our people to the utmost. At many communal meetings,

our comrades and partisans came to the gathering with empty stomachs and burning bowels, so hungry that they could not walk steadily or stand firmly on their feet. They issued the call: "The insurrection should be carried out without delay, otherwise the people will die of hunger". In fact, millions of our people died in the pre-harvest famine, in the year of the general insurrection. Our people's hatred in August that year found expression in marvellous heroism.

In a very steady way, our Party led the people forward on the path of insurrection, in execution of Lenin's teaching: "The major problems of a nation's life can only be settled by violence."

Just at the moment when the horizon seemed to brighten a new black cloud appeared. The Chinese reactionaries, misusing the name of the Allies, proposed that relations be established with the Vietnamese Revolution. The Viet Quoc (Nationalist Party) and the Viet Cach (Revolutionary League) were abroad. The Viet Minh was requested to go and discuss the merging of all anti-Japanese forces. The previous year the Standing Central Committee of our Party had estimated that the Vietnam Cach Mang Dong Minh (the Vietnam Revolutionary League), founded in China to fight the Japanese and the French, was to be welcomed by our Party, in spite of its disordered and complicated inner organization. So the Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh (Vietnam Independence League) was called upon to carry out united action with the Vietnam Cach Mang Dong Minh against the common enemy. The true intention of the U.S.-Chiang was not



unknown to us. We intended to take this opportunity to send a Viet Minh delegation there to sound the situation and to get into contact with the Vietnamese revolutionary circles in China.

I was sent to carry out this mission, along with Dang Viet Chau, Duong Duc Hien and some others. Our preparations were completed by the end of the lunar year. We hired a boat to go via Ha Tu, Ha Lam, and Ha Long Bay of which we had no mind to admire the beauty, being so preoccupied with our mission. Thence we went via Mong Cai to Dong Hung, also by boat.

The commanding officer of Chiang Kai-shek's Fourth Army at Dong Hung, — Chang Fa-khuei — received us very pompously, under the instructions of Chung King. The day after our arrival, we heard the firing of the Japanese attacking the French post at Mong Cai; this was the Japanese coup-de-force. Anxious to leave, we pressed the Chinese officer at Dong Hung to prepare for our early departure. The latter apologized, saying that it would take some time to prepare for the journey and the trip will be long and dangerous because of the numerous gangsters in the chain of mountains.

Pity for Marshal Chiang's troops! Troops afraid of pirates! They were so cowardly that, even in daylight and armed, they were afraid of pirates in their own country! By the end of March, the preparations for our departure were completed. We went through the gangster-infested region of Cau Tac (Pirate Dog) before reaching the foot of the big chain of mountains. The mountains were rugged, steep, and

high. The highest peak, the most dangerous, was the Po Ke. We started very early in the morning to climb it and reached its top only at noon. Although it was only three p.m. and we had only descended half of the slope Chiang's soldiers who escorted us asked to stop and spend the rest of the day there. They had heard of a great number of pirates at the foot of the mountain and were completely out of heart.

After three long weeks of march, we reached Xu Huan where we learned that the Japanese had occupied Liuchow and General Chang Fa-khuei had fled to the district of Pa Xa and set up his headquarters there. We went to Pa Xa and were received by Chang Fa-khuei and Sieu Uan. Both of them were of the opinion that the Japanese will be defeated. The Allies' victory was imminent. The Fourth Army would liberate Indochina. The Viet Minh should give all assistance to the Chinese troops "entering Vietnam".

These words came as a shock to us. Do they think that we don't know how to seize power? Chau, Hien and other members of our delegation were boiling with anger at these words.

Sieu Uan put forth his views:

"There are a number of Vietnamese residents here. Thanks to the attention of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the special care of General Chang, the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnam Nationalist Party) and the Vietnam Cach Mang Dong Minh (Revolutionary League of Vietnam) have successfully carried out their activities here. I propose that representatives of the Viet Quoc, Viet Cach and Viet Minh should work with the Allies."

By that time, the group of Nguyen Tuong Tam and Nguyen Hai Than had scattered after the Japanese attack against Liuchow. They were sent for by Sieu Uan but could not come in time. Not knowing what explanation to give us, Sieu Uan boasted:

"There is the Phuc Quoc (National Restoration) here which has big forces some hundred men strong." We just nodded but did not discuss this question. Then we went in search of the armed groups of the National Restoration troops and won over a number of them. Many good elements among them very sincerely told us that they now understood, and that Chiang Kai-shek and his like were no good at all. They asked to be allowed to return to the country and take part in the struggle.

We were having great difficulty in finding a method to cope with the Chiang Kai-shek clique when one day we saw an old man in blue clothes. Watching him carefully, I recognized him and was about to call, but he raised his arm and signed to us to keep silent.

The old man was Uncle Ho. After two years of detention by Chiang Kai-shek's troops he had returned to Cao Bang for a time and then left the country again to complete his work, and was now on the way back to Vietnam. I went to Uncle Ho's dwelling, reported my activities to him and asked for his instructions.

"It's correct to give an evasive answer," he said. "Now try to take leave and go away."

I went directly to Chang Fa-khuei to express our desire to leave. Chang gave a big farewell banquet, delivered a very high-sounding speech about peace,

liberation and friendship. Sieu Uan also spoke very vociferously in an affected revolutionary language. Accompanying us for some distance, Chang Fa-khuei took our hands and said,

"Hope to see you again in the old capital of Thang Long (Rising Dragon)."

Some months later, we actually met again in Thang Long. But Thang Long was then Hanoi, the Capital City of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam which spread from the Vietnam-China border to Ca Mau Point and where already the banner of Bac Son and Nam Ky (Cochinchina) fluttered. The Chiang Kai-shek clique, the sworn enemy of the Chinese people, became the direct enemy which the Vietnamese people, cursed and spat at. The running dogs and hunting birds which they brought with them to Vietnam committed a lot of crimes against our people and country. They were dirty rubbish which emerged for some time, but drifted away, scattered and were immersed by the great waterfall of the people, the builders of history\*.

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\* Along with 200,000 troops of the Chiang Kai-shek reactionary clique which came to north Vietnam tens of thousands of British-Indian troops, with the support of Japanese soldiers, misused the name of the Allies to help the French imperialists and colonialists to invade our country once again. Our people were then like a man knocked down by his enemies, some grasping his head, others pressing his feet. Our heroic people, brave and clever, successfully seized the hands of the imperialist interventionists, giving direct blows to the aggressors, and preserved the revolutionary power. We should not forget that after the success of the August Revolution, hundreds of thousands of Japanese troops, while awaiting to be disarmed, obeyed the U.S.-U.K. orders to act as gendarmes watching over the financial service and economic enterprises of

We escorted Uncle Ho back to the country, crossed the frontier, and entered the liberated area. Almost the whole area of Cao Bang, Bac Can, and Tuyen Quang provinces and part of Thai Nguyen, Lang Son, and Ha Giang provinces were already under the control of the Liberation Army. In the Liberated area, the people's revolutionary committee elected by the various sections of the population had completely replaced the ruling machinery of the Japanese and the French. Warmly supported by the people, it had seized power and was implementing the Party's "ten policies".

Back in the country, I fell seriously ill and could not attend the session of the Central Committee in Tan Trao. When recovered, I could attend the People's Congress after its opening. At that time, Uncle Ho also became very sick. But at the news of the sudden collapse of Japanese fascism, everybody felt relieved, every disease seemed to abate and disappear. Uncle Ho instructed that the Congress should be held very quickly and an appeal for general insurrection issued without delay. Work was allotted to every one of us. I was sent to south Vietnam, along with comrade Cao Hong Linh.

We left Thai Nguyen and went downstream to the delta by raft, then by boat. That year, the river rose very high; our boat on its way saved a number

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French capitalists in Indochina, safeguarding the properties of French colonialists, and taking part in manoeuvres to restore the colonial regime in Indochina. Even before the end of the 2nd World War, the imperialist powers planned a contemptible betrayal to oppose the anti-fascist movement and the struggle for national independence of the people in Indochina and South-East Asia.

of people who were drifting in the current. Near Bac Ninh, our boat took a short cut through the flooded fields. At Yen Vien, on the high road we saw a car with a very big yellow-starred red flag; through loud-speakers came the songs "To Smash Down Fascism" and "The Heroic Fighters", and between the two revolutionary songs a voice was heard saying: "Hullo, Hullo, the insurrectional forces led by the Viet Minh have mastered Hanoi at 4 p.m. to-day. Power in the Capital City is completely in our hands."

We travelled in this propaganda - making car straight to Hanoi. There red flags and banderoles dazzled our eyes. The car carried us from one liaison to the other, and at last to the Hanoi Insurrection Committee where I met comrade Nguyen Khang. Here our comrades had been working since morning, without taking a meal. In the morning, 150,000 people had participated in a demonstration, seized the north Vietnam Governor's palace, and the Town Hall, then from 1 o'clock to 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the whole of our forces in Hanoi surrounded the Militia garrison, struggling until the withdrawal of the Japanese tanks and troops who had been guarding the streets. Comrade Khang discussed with me the questions to be settled immediately, and informed me that the People's Revolutionary Committee of Hanoi and that of north Vietnam were to introduce themselves to the people on the following day.

At 7 p.m., we left Hanoi for south Vietnam in the car which had transported comrade Thap to north Vietnam.

Everywhere we went, we brought concrete information about Hanoi, about the successful insurrection of its inhabitants, thereby giving to all the comrades a source of great elation and enthusiasm.

Out of Hanoi we rolled at full speed on Road No. 1 and passed through Bang, Lim, Dong Van, Phu Ly. Everywhere flags had been hoisted and many villages by the roadside were illuminated with torches. At Dang Xa, self-defence troops were tramping to and fro. It was not yet 9 p.m. when we reached Nam Dinh. At the entrance to the town, a self-defence girl, sword in hand, stopped our car and asked for our pass. We produced our papers and were led by a comrade in an office nearby to the former French Resident's palace. Comrade Van Tien Dung met us and his first words were: "All is done here."

After a short rest, we went on our journey. Only at ten kilometres off the town could we drive in high gear: people in big groups were on the road, carrying flags and shouting slogans at the top of their voice. On the flank of Mount Non Nuoc a line of big white letters was seen: "Long live the success of the Vietnamese Revolution". At Ghenh, Bim Son, then Len, we had to show our papers.

"We're all your friends."

"Please go on, comrades."

We arrived at Thanh Hoa late at night when the town was sound asleep, except for groups of young people busy hanging banderoles across the big streets. Comrade Le Tat Dac received us in the former French Resident's palace. After washing ourselves, we talked about the situation until the sky began to turn faintly

light. We left Thanh Hoa for Vinh where we arrived at 9 a.m. Comrade Nguyen Tao met us.

"They had very expeditiously done away with the Japanese, and appointed Mr. Le Viet Luong as chairman of the provincial committee."

We passed by Ha Tinh and Quang Binh, via Ngang pass. It had been a long time since we last saw the sea. For us cadres, who had spent so many years in underground activities, we felt greatly elated to see that, in our revolutionary bases, forests and mountains were ours. Now, driving proudly on the long transcountry road, we were all the more moved and elevated with our victory at the sight of immense expanses of sky and sea. We arrived at Quang Tri, then at Hue. Comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh and comrade Lanh (i.e. To Huu) informed us that the Emperor has surrendered. He was waiting for the Central Government envoy to come and take over his seal and sword.

At Da Nang, comrades Le Van Hien and Le Dung were waiting for us, having been informed of our arrival by telephone from Hue. With great joy we again met comrade Huynh Ngoc Hue, a very energetic, confident and enthusiastic young worker. One of the great delights of our trip was that we could meet many of our comrades at each stage of the journey. At Da Nang, comrade Cao Hong Linh got information that his native district of Hoi An had also established people's power. The local comrades invited him to attend a meeting with the people of his native village, but, remembering Uncle Ho's recommendations at our departure: "Go in haste to south Vietnam as

quick as possible, don't lose a day", he took leave of the local comrades the same night and set off with us. His simple luggage contained a very precious remembrance: a blue suit worn by comrade Le Hong Phong when living in China and handed him by a worker in Nanning. We climbed up the Hai Van pass and arrived at Quang Nam. Here, as on many other portions of national road No. 1 we saw division after division of Japanese troops retiring to regroupment areas with all their equipment, horses, and arms, big and small. They were all crestfallen, officers and men alike. It had the appearance of a defeated army. At the top of the Hai Van pass, the Japanese requested us to stop our car. Finding some pistols in it, they reported the fact to their officers. The commander of the unit came to meet us. We pointed at the yellow-starred red flag on the front-mudguard of the car and showed him our credentials issued by the General Headquarters of the Viet Minh. The Japanese officer asked our pardon and begged us to go on our way. Quang Ngai was astir with an atmosphere of tense struggle. Meetings and armed demonstrations were taking place everywhere. Short-haired self-defence girls aimed their spears at the tires of our car, shouting: "Halt!" We produced our papers, but they were not satisfied. I had to alight and explain to them for a long time before they found us acceptable and agreed to introduce us to their superiors. Comrade Tran Qui Hai, who had just attended the Tan Trao congress, had already arrived. We thought we had gone fast with our car, but others were faster. Comrade Hai led us to the bungalow and treated us to a drink of coco-nut

milk. After some talk, we took leave, heading our car southwards at full speed.

At Phu Yen, we had to stop a whole morning. An old group of Viet Minh was quarrelling with a new one; the matter was referred to us for settlement and we had to sit and listen to both parties' allegations. Their common question was "Who is Ho Chi Minh", but when it had been answered, they were all satisfied and their difference were amicably settled.

Then our car continued on the road in the southern part of central Vietnam, a beautiful road, as straight as a ramrod, flanked with the mountains and the sea and bathed in the limpid and bright sunshine.

Here, as in all other places we had passed, yellow-starred red flags had been erected everywhere on either side of the road. The demonstrators flowed along raising their arms and shouting slogans as they walked. Crowds of people poured onto the high road, with spears, lances, knives, hammers, bamboo sticks, and wooden rods in their hands, all faces showing immense bravery and a high spirit. We set off without knowing what was in store for us on the road ahead, but the trip turned out a chapter of cheering events, one after another in an endless sequence. Through the length of our country with its huge mountains and long rivers, people rose with lightning swiftness and sweeping vigour. Everywhere, the revolution had seized power, everywhere, we saw our national flags fluttering. Slogans were shouted in different dialects, either north or south, but all animated with the same enthusiasm and high-spiritedness. It seemed as if a strong electric current had passed through the whole country, stirred it up

and set it in motion. This August electric current was the innate undauntedness of our nation, the glorious revolutionary traditions that our Party had been developing and nurturing since 1930. This August electric current was the strength of our just cause, of our Party's correct line and policy; of slogans for struggle put forth by our Party at each specific moment, always in conformity with our people's aspirations; of propaganda work which had deeply rooted the Party's ideas in the masses. This August electric current was the natural result of the patient mobilization which had brought about the mighty front of Viet Minh, thereby giving to our people—stimulated by the glorious victory of the Soviet Red army and the anti-fascist forces the world over—deeper confidence in the invincible forces of their own solidarity. That is why, at the hour of favourable opportunity, the Party's call to uprising met with the immediate response of every patriotic soul in Vietnam.

Lenin's famous teaching in the decisive hours of the October Revolution, strongly inspired the Vietnamese communists: "Hesitation leads to death. We should be audacious! audacious! audacious!" Confident in the strength of the heroic masses, our Party, with less than 5,000 cadres and Party members, but animated with the boldness of going forward, led the people to rise, and ensured success to the nation-wide struggle.

Exactly one week after we left Hanoi, we reached Bien Hoa, the threshold of Nam Bo (south Vietnam). It was late in the night. The control post was set up

deep in the forest. The local comrades stopped our car and phoned to Saigon for instruction.

We took up the phone to talk directly to comrade Nguyen Van Nguyen at the other end of the line. Nguyen was exceedingly glad. We felt it through his voice.

"You are needed here. Come this very night, do."

We took our car again and drove on. Behind us ran the truck of the local self-defence troops escorting the Frenchmen they had captured when the latter parachuted into the forest of Bien Hoa. None of them could escape, and now they were being sent to the big jail of Chi Hoa.

Saigon!

In this brightly illuminated city, the red of our flags appeared all the more beautiful. Comrade Nguyen met us:

"Completed yesterday."

He accommodated us at the Nam Bo Phu, formerly the south Vietnam Governor's palace. Hardly had we closed our eyes when comrade Nguyen knocked at the door to rouse us:

"Representatives of all sections of the population, hearing of your arrival, are urging earnestly to meet the envoy of General Headquarters."

After meeting with the Xu committee, we went to the conference of the above-mentioned representatives; some asked about one policy, others inquired about another and, at last, the same question was put, here like in all other places:

"Please let us know who is Ho Chi Minh? Is he..."

Who else? The head of the revolutionary State power is the respected leader, the experienced fighter of the working class, the most faithful son of the people — comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc. This information was met with ovations:

“ Warm support to the Central Government headed by President Ho Chi Minh. ”

The great prestige of Uncle Ho and the blood-soaked flag of the Party and the Viet Minh had united the whole people into one bloc. The national bloc, wider then ever, had been the iron and granite basis of the nascent revolutionary power.

I wired to the North: “ Power was seized in all the 21 provinces passed by. The uprising has also been completed in the six provinces of Nam Bo (south Vietnam). ”

The reply from Hanoi read: “ On September 2nd, the ceremony will take place for the Independence... ”

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Like all other citizens, I will never forget the date September 2nd, 1945, when the independence of our country was proclaimed. On the birthday of our country, I was in Saigon, the heart of our beloved Nam Bo, among millions of our compatriots whose hearts and souls were turned to the Ba Dinh square in Hanoi, listening to the voice of our Fatherland. Uncle Ho read the Proclamation of Independence, his voice was warm, gentle, and resonant as I had heard it, years ago, in the depth of the Bac Bo forest.

**After HOANG QUOC VIET**

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