

The Military History Institute of Vietnam

Victory in Vietnam



**The Official
History of the
People's Army of
Vietnam,
1954–1975**

**Translated by Merle L. Pribbenow
Foreword by William J. Duiker**

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Foreword: The History of the People's Army

William J. Duiker

In the quarter of a century that has elapsed since the fall of Saigon, the performance of the U.S. armed forces in the Vietnam War has been exposed to exhaustive, and often critical, analysis. Relatively little attention has been paid, at least in the United States, to the victors. Although a few scholarly studies have focused on the origins and the buildup of the North Vietnamese army (formally known as the People's Army of Vietnam, or PAVN), a full-scale analysis of its own performance in the South has not yet appeared. Several books on the PAVN have been published in Hanoi, but until now, none has been translated into the English language. This is unfortunate, because the role of the PAVN in the South and the nature of its relationship with the local insurgent forces (known popularly as the Viet Cong) has never been properly explored.

With the publication of this book, ably translated from the original Vietnamese by Merle Pribbenow, the University Press of Kansas thus fills a yawning gap in the growing literature on the Vietnam War. Published in a second edition in 1994, it was written by a committee of senior Vietnamese military officers under the general direction of the Military History Institute in the Ministry of Defense in Hanoi. There are, of course, some inherent limitations with this approach, since institutions have a natural tendency to laud their own performance and cover up mistakes. This drawback is undoubtedly even more pronounced after a military victory, when it is tempting for senior military commanders to gloss over errors that have been committed and bask in the aura of success.

Such shortcomings are fully visible here. A heavy dose of triumphalism permeates the text, as well as a sense of moral superiority that the forces of good have inevitably been victorious over the ranks of global imperialism. Still, the authors are not entirely unwilling to admit errors in the drafting and execution of policy, and on occasion they display a refreshing sense of candor in admitting instances of defeatism and hubris within the ranks. It is for these reasons that this

book will be useful to specialists and general readers alike who wish to explore the view from the other side of the Vietnam War.

The second of two volumes on the history of the PAVN, the book opens in 1954, a moment of considerable significance in the history of modern Vietnam. In July of that year, the Geneva Conference had brought an end to the First Indochina War, which had been fought between military forces led by the veteran Communist Ho Chi Minh and the French. Reflecting the fact that neither side had attained a decisive victory in that conflict, the Geneva Agreement had temporarily divided the country into two separate regroupment zones—Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the North, and a non-Communist administration (eventually to be known as the Republic of Vietnam, or RVN) in the South. A Political Declaration drafted at the conference contained an appeal for national reunification elections to be held in 1956, but the appeal was non-binding and had not been approved by two key delegations at Geneva, the new Vietnamese administration in the South and the United States.

It was at this point that the United States first became directly involved in Vietnam. As French forces withdrew in accordance with the Geneva Agreement, the Eisenhower administration decided to sponsor the new anti-Communist regime in South Vietnam, with its capital in Saigon. This volume thus focuses on the period leading up to and including the Second Indochina War (what is usually described in Vietnam today as "the American war"), a conflict that first began to gain momentum in the late 1950s and concluded almost two decades later with the occupation of Saigon by North Vietnamese military forces in the spring of 1975.

It is important for American readers to note, therefore, that by the time this book opens, the PAVN had already amassed considerable experience in developing its military capabilities as the vanguard of the revolution. The first units were formed during World War II, at a time when Indochina was temporarily occupied by Japanese military forces. The commander of these first units—known as Armed Propaganda Brigades because their function was as much political as military—was Ho Chi Minh's talented young colleague Vo Nguyen Giap. Giap would eventually develop as the movement's chief military strategist in the war against the French.

In preparing to make their bid for national independence at the end of the Pacific War, Communist leaders recognized that they lacked the capacity to defeat the Japanese or the French by force of arms alone. In both size and weaponry, their forces were inferior to both adversaries. They therefore sought to rely on what they perceived to be their political advantage (support for the cause of national independence from the local population), as well as on other familiar devices applied by the weak against the strong, such as guerrilla tactics and an astute use of diplomacy. This strategy led the Communist Party to victory in August 1945, when its fledgling forces (popularly known as the Vietminh) seized power in Hanoi and declared the formation of an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

But the French were unwilling to abandon their "balcony on the Pacific," and after abortive negotiations during the summer of 1946, the First Indochina

War broke out in December. Although their armed forces were still no match for the French in a head-to-head confrontation, General Giap and his colleagues calculated that a protracted struggle, characterized by the military and political mobilization of the local population, could undermine enemy morale and eventually force the French to withdraw. The possibility of an outright military triumph appeared increasingly probable after Mao Zedong's Communist Party came to power in China in 1949, a stunning shift in the regional balance of power that provided the Vietminh with a powerful new ally.

By then, however, the conflict in Indochina had become a factor in the Cold War. The United States intervened on the side of the French to avert the alleged threat of a spread of the Red tide throughout Southeast Asia. After an offensive on French positions in early 1951 was driven back with heavy losses, Vietminh forces reverted to guerrilla tactics in a bid to extend the war and undermine support for the war in France. In the early spring of 1954, Vietminh troops won a major psychological victory by seizing the isolated French military base at Dien Bien Phu, located in the far northwestern part of the country. With public opinion in France increasingly tired of the "dirty war" in far-off Indochina, French leaders signed a compromise peace agreement at Geneva.

The Geneva Conference thus opened a new phase in the history of modern Vietnam, as Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues returned to Hanoi as the leaders of a de facto government with administrative control over more than 10 million people. Although the Geneva Agreement had called for national elections in 1956, it soon became clear that the new government in Saigon, led by the feisty anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem, had no intention of holding them. Instead, he sought to suppress the remnants of the Vietminh movement that had been left in the South after the signing of the cease-fire.

The new situation created a dilemma for DRV leaders in Hanoi, who now faced the task of bringing about recovery from the war and laying the foundations of a socialist society in North Vietnam. As a stopgap measure, the new regime authorized its followers in the South to undertake measures for their own self-defense and launched an intensive program to modernize the North Vietnamese armed forces in case armed struggle should resume. The authors provide us with some useful information about that program, but they make no reference to the bitter internal debate that took place in Hanoi over the respective priorities to be assigned to domestic reconstruction and national reunification. In fact, differences over the policy to be applied in the South became quite sharp, and threatened to undermine relations with Hanoi's allies as well as the policy of consensus that Ho Chi Minh had carefully crafted since the end of World War II.

This period of hesitation came to an end in 1959, when Ngo Dinh Diem's campaign to "eradicate the Communists" decimated the ranks of the Party's clandestine apparatus in South Vietnam. At a fateful meeting of the Central Committee held in January, Party leaders decided to return to revolutionary war. How that program would be carried out, however, was left unresolved. What was cer-

tain, as this book makes clear, was that the DRV would, if necessary, play a direct and guiding role in the process. The first priority was thus to establish supply routes for transporting equipment and personnel to the South. When completed, the land route consisted of paths and trails that crossed the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and snaked through the forests of southern Laos. A second maritime route was scheduled to follow the coastline of the South China Sea.

Infiltration began slowly, with only about 500 "regroupees" (southerners who had been sent north for training after the Geneva Conference) being sent down the Trail during the first year of operation. They were assigned positions of leadership for the emerging revolutionary movement in the South. But as the war heated up in the early 1960s, the rate of infiltration increased substantially. By the end of 1963, over 40,000 soldiers and cadres, mostly native southerners, moved down what would soon become known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. That number represented about one-half of the full-time troops operating under Party command in the South, and 80 percent of the movement's technical personnel.

In the authors' own words, the infiltration of personnel and supplies became a major factor in changing the balance of forces in South Vietnam in favor of the insurgent forces. Whereas the ratio between the Viet Cong (formally labeled the People's Liberation Armed Forces, or PLAF) and the Saigon government's armed forces (the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, or ARVN) was about one to ten in 1961, it had been reduced to one to five a year later. Not surprisingly, the movement gained considerable momentum and vastly improved capabilities in confronting their adversary. By the time John F. Kennedy entered the White House in January 1961, the situation in South Vietnam had become a major issue in the Cold War.

One of the strategies applied by the Kennedy administration to counter the growing insurgent movement was the so-called "strategic hamlet"—fortified villages designed to keep the guerrillas from obtaining access to the Vietnamese population in the countryside. The authors concede that at first, the program proved to be highly effective in isolating the guerrillas from their chief source of recruits and supplies. During much of 1962, the Saigon regime managed to create the new organizations faster than the PLAF could destroy them, resulting in a perceptible decline in morale within the movement. Insurgent units also encountered serious problems in coping with ARVN's increasing mobility, as the latter could now be transported quickly by helicopter to trouble spots throughout South Vietnam. Such conditions aroused a temporary mood of optimism in Washington, and may have been a factor in persuading the administration to draft plans to reduce the size of the U.S. presence in the RVN.

But prescient observers in Washington and Saigon, noting the haste with which the strategic hamlets were built and their unpopularity among the local population, tempered their optimism. By the spring of 1963, the guerrillas had figured out how to cope with the strategic hamlets, as well as with ARVN's new mobility. At the battle of Ap Bac in January, PLAF units showed that they could defeat South Vietnamese troops even when the latter were supported by the latest in U.S. military technology.

While the strategic hamlets were being steadily attacked and destroyed in rural areas, tensions between the Diem regime and local Buddhist activists erupted in the major cities. Saigon's harsh suppression of dissident monks soured relations with the United States, and in early November a military coup, launched with tacit approval from the White House, overthrew the Diem regime. As the authors make clear, at first Party leaders were uncertain how to respond, but they soon decided that the coup in Saigon presented a major opportunity to achieve a breakthrough in the South. At a meeting of the Central Committee in December, they approved a plan to increase infiltration and intensify the level of fighting in a bid to overthrow the new government in Saigon. Although the authors are silent on the issue, the decision aroused bitter debate in Hanoi and soured relations with Moscow, where Nikita Khrushchev was opposed to measures that could threaten his policy of peaceful coexistence with the West. But Party leaders in Hanoi, urged on by the militant new First Secretary Le Duan, were obdurate. Senior civilian and military officials opposed to the decision were pushed from their positions.

Beginning in 1964, the role of the North in the conflict in South Vietnam steadily increased. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was expanded to permit the dispatch of PAVN main force units to the South. The process accelerated after the Tonkin Gulf Incident in August, which Hanoi interpreted as a sign that Washington was determined to prevent a Communist victory. By the winter of 1964-1965, the Saigon regime was on the verge of collapse.

Lyndon Johnson's decision to dispatch U.S. combat troops to South Vietnam in the spring of 1965 was a major setback to policy planners in Hanoi, who had hoped to keep Washington from intervening directly in the conflict. By mid-summer, the growing U.S. military presence made it clear that victory would come only after a protracted and bitter struggle. Still, Hanoi did not flinch. Convinced that the enemy was faced with serious political weaknesses, Party leaders decided to challenge U.S. troops on the battlefield. The size of the PLAF was expanded to over 175,000 guerrillas (apparently not including 80,000 paramilitary forces), and a new DRV draft law doubled the size of the PAVN to over 400,000 by the end of the year. Of the 50,000 troops sent to the South in 1965, a growing percentage were native northerners.

It was now up to General Nguyen Chi Thanh, Hanoi's new commander in the South, to prove they could win. A charismatic military leader with a fervent belief in the Maoist doctrine that spirit could overcome superior firepower, Thanh had apparently been selected for the assignment because Le Duan now viewed Vo Nguyen Giap as excessively cautious. Expressing confidence that the PAVN could defeat the technologically superior Americans on the battlefield, Thanh lured U.S. troops to Ia Drang Valley, a mountainous region along the Cambodian border, to test his assumptions. In the bitter battle that ensued, both sides claimed victory in the first direct confrontation between North Vietnamese and American combat forces.

Nguyen Chi Thanh's ambitious strategy resulted in high casualties on both sides. For a time, Hanoi apparently made every effort to provide him with the necessary manpower. By the end of 1966, the size of the PAVN had reached

700,000, with two-thirds stationed in the North and the remainder in the South. The total number of full-time troops operating in South Vietnam was up one-third compared with the previous year.

Still, the sheer weight of the growing U.S. military presence was taking its toll. Although the authors are somewhat circumspect about the issue, they tacitly concede that Thanh's aggressive strategy was arousing second thoughts in Hanoi. As U.S. troop levels continued to increase in 1966 and 1967, Vietnamese casualties increased dramatically, with predictable consequences. Morale within the movement began to suffer, leading to passivity, lack of discipline, and high rates of desertion. U.S. military intelligence sources took such evidence as an indication that the tide was slowly beginning to turn in Saigon's favor.

By the spring of 1967, DRV leaders were faced with a difficult choice. The Saigon regime, under a series of post-Diem political and military leaders, was still quite fragile and had not been able to win the "hearts and minds" of the local population. The Johnson administration was faced with a growing antiwar movement in the United States and around the globe. Still, Hanoi had been unable to turn such advantages to good use at the conference table or on the battlefield. It was now deemed vital to bring about a change in the situation that could have a dramatic effect in the United States, where presidential elections were scheduled to take place in the fall of 1968.

Plans for the famous Tet Offensive were first drafted during the spring of 1967. Hanoi's goal was to lure U.S. troops to outlying areas around the country so as to permit its own forces to concentrate on the more vulnerable ARVN units in the highly populated lowlands. Frontal assaults on enemy positions in the countryside would be combined with general uprisings in Saigon and other major cities. North Vietnamese war planners hoped for an outright victory, but were prepared for a lesser result that would lead to the formation of a coalition government and a negotiated withdrawal of all U.S. troops from the RVN.

The authors, repeating official claims in Hanoi, declare that the Tet Offensive, launched at the end of January 1968, was a "great strategic victory," and in fact the first reports suggested that the insurgents had achieved great gains in the countryside. At the same time, suicide attacks against U.S. and GVN installations in Saigon had a massive psychological impact on public opinion in the United States. Shaken by such reports, the White House agreed to make key concessions in an effort to bring about peace talks. After Tet, it would no longer be possible for the United States to increase its military presence in South Vietnam.

Still, Hanoi's claims of victory were overstated. Internal documents indicate that Party leaders were somewhat disappointed at the results of the offensive, and the authors concede that DRV war planners had underestimated the military capabilities of the enemy and overestimated the level of support for the insurgent forces in the urban areas. They thus tacitly confirm claims by the Pentagon that the attacking forces had suffered heavy casualties in the fighting, and would be unable to retain their gains in the countryside.

The price for Hanoi's excessive optimism was paid in 1969. The insurgent forces in the South (PLAF units had been especially decimated) were unable to hold on to their territorial gains, and Saigon managed to regain control over many areas that it had lost during the offensive. In the meantime, U.S. troops managed to drive PAVN troops back to isolated areas of the country, such as the U Minh Forest in the Ca Mau Peninsula, the Plain of Reeds near the Cambodian border, and parts of the Central Highlands. Supplies of food and military equipment for the insurgents were severely affected, and pessimism about future prospects rose to dangerous levels within the ranks.

By 1970, however, the situation once again began to improve. The coup d'état that overthrew Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia helped to revitalize the revolutionary movement there, and Saigon's ill-fated attempt to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos showed the ineffectiveness of ARVN troops when operating without full U.S. air support. Perhaps more important, North Vietnamese leaders took full advantage of the U.S. bombing halt announced in the autumn of 1968 to improve and expand infiltration routes into the South. The Ho Chi Minh Trail now reached a total length of over 6,000 kilometers, and a new pipeline to ship fuel to the front was under construction. Hanoi's planners could now place corps-sized main force units on the battlefield to confront the increasingly demoralized South Vietnamese forces.

In March 1972, Hanoi launched its Easter Offensive to coincide with the presidential campaign in the United States. Attacks by PAVN units were concentrated in the northern provinces of the country, where the proximity to the DRV offered the possibility of reinforcements and logistical support. The authors follow official sources in heralding the campaign as another great success, but they concede that U.S. air cover and the lack of logistical capacity prevented a greater victory. The ambiguous results were fully reflected in the compromise peace agreement that was signed in Paris the following January. All U.S. troops were to be withdrawn from South Vietnam; all Vietnamese units on both sides were permitted to remain in place. In return, the DRV formally recognized the legitimacy of the Saigon regime under its president, Nguyen Van Thieu, pending reunification elections to be held at some time in the future. There was no mention of the presence of North Vietnamese troops in the South, but Article 7 declared that no additional troops or matériel were to be introduced into the RVN.

As it turned out, neither side lived up to the terms of the Paris Agreement. The Thieu regime ignored the cease-fire and launched intensive attacks on enemy-held areas in the country. Although insurgent units at first sought to avoid confrontations with ARVN troops, the DRV took full advantage of the situation to strengthen its forces in the South. By late 1974, Party leaders recognized that a more aggressive approach was needed, and plans were drawn up to launch a military offensive aimed at achieving total victory within two years. As it turned out, the Thieu regime panicked, opening the door to Hanoi's victorious Ho Chi Minh Campaign, which brought an end to the war in the spring of 1975.

The authors have little to say about the final offensive that has not been said before, but they confirm the widespread impression that it was almost entirely a northern operation, with leadership over the operation in the hands of senior strategists sent down from Hanoi and trainloads of troops and weapons moving south from the DRV for transit over the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the battlefield.

How do the authors explain North Vietnam's stunning victory in the Vietnam War? To the seasoned observer, their answers are hardly surprising: occupation of the moral high ground, a decade of experience in fighting the French, strong Party leadership, and the support of the Vietnamese people. What is most conspicuous by its absence is any reference to the assistance provided by Hanoi's chief allies. Beginning in 1965, the Soviet Union provided significant amounts of advanced military weaponry to help the DRV defend its skies from U.S. bombing raids. Over a period of two decades, China not only sent billions of dollars in military and economic aid, but also dispatched half a million technicians, advisers, and combat troops to assist the DRV in its struggle. China also provided a major deterrent to any potential U.S. decision to invade North Vietnam. It is difficult to imagine Hanoi's stunning victory without the firm support of its fraternal allies, who will not be pleased at the lack of gratitude expressed here.

As we have seen, the authors also fail to provide sufficient insight into the strategic debates that periodically erupted within the Party leadership over the course of the war. At times, these controversies apparently became quite bitter and involved relations with Hanoi's allies as well. Also unmentioned were the occasional tensions that strained the relationship between Party strategists in the North and their representatives operating in the South. To what degree were PLAF commanders able to influence major policy decisions reached in the North? Such questions are entirely ignored in this account, which leaves the misleading impression that decisionmaking in Hanoi was a simple affair, reached by unanimous consent and carried out unquestionably by the insurgent forces in the field.

This book, then, is by no means the full story. In fact, it would undoubtedly be unrealistic to expect the current regime in Hanoi, which relies partly on its aura of victory to legitimize its rule in contemporary Vietnam, to provide a completely forthcoming assessment of its performance during the Vietnam War. Still, the authors have offered some significant revelations of their own—including the cardinal importance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the key role played by North Vietnam in guiding the struggle in the South—that should offer new insights to the reader interested in exploring the view from the other side. A number of key questions remain unanswered, but one of the more pernicious myths about the Vietnam War—that the insurgent movement in South Vietnam was essentially an autonomous one that possessed only limited ties to the regime in the North—has been definitively dispelled.

Translator's Preface

In 1968, faced with the prospect of a two-year commitment to a new job as a file clerk deep in the bowels of the CIA Headquarters Building at Langley, I volunteered for the only assignment with sufficient priority to free me from my desperately boring existence: training as a Vietnamese-language interpreter/translator for assignment to Saigon Station. After more than a year of language and collateral training, I arrived in Saigon in the spring of 1970 and promptly fell in love with the country. The scenery was lushly exotic, the work exciting, the culture fascinating, the women beautiful, and the people (like me at five feet seven inches) were *short*—for the first time in my life I could stand in the middle of a crowd and actually see what was happening.

I immediately and naively informed my new boss that I intended to stay in Vietnam until someone forced me out at gunpoint. Five years later, on 29 April 1975, someone did just that. I left Saigon aboard a Marine CH-46 helicopter, dazed and confused at the rapid collapse of the largest and most expensive U.S. military effort since World War II.

Despite the shock and disappointment that attended my departure, my love for the country and its people never faded. During the next twenty years, I continued to work for the agency as a translator specializing in Indochina affairs. With an insatiable appetite, I also devoured every book I could find on the Vietnam War, in an effort to come to terms with my own experience and better understand what had gone wrong (for everyone, not just the Americans) and why. It was my great frustration, however, to find very little on the war written from anything other than an American perspective. I felt strongly that many of the answers I was seeking would come only when there was greater access to the views of the victorious Vietnamese. As the years passed, my frustrations grew, even as I accumulated a deepening understanding of the American involvement in Vietnam.

Then, in 1994, an old friend who knew of my obsession returned from Hanoi

with a gift for me: a copy of the newly published *History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, the official overall history of the Vietnam War compiled by the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense's Military History Institute. Not surprisingly, given my decades-long quest, I became immediately and deeply fascinated by the book, reading and rereading it again and again. Despite the obvious (and unsurprising) Communist rhetoric, as well as the victors' understandable exaggerations and bravado, I did indeed find answers—very believable answers—to many of my questions. In effect, my reading of this tome confirmed much of what I'd only surmised previously—that many of the accepted “truths” contained in some of our most notable histories were, quite simply, wrong.

I initially translated several excerpts from the book as a favor to a friend who was compiling an official history of U.S. efforts in Vietnam. After my retirement, I wrote a related article for the magazine *Vietnam* that focused on North Vietnamese operations in the early 1960s. That article led Dr. Lewis Sorley to ask me for translations of the sections of *History of the People's Army of Vietnam* that dealt with the latter stages of the American War in Vietnam, which he incorporated into his much-praised book *A Better War*. Intrigued as I was by some of the book's revelations, Sorley encouraged me to translate the entire book for publication in this country and introduced me to Michael Briggs at the University Press of Kansas, which had published Sorley's highly regarded biography of Harold K. Johnson, LBJ's army chief of staff. Meanwhile, other authors approached me for translations of other sections of the book and, before I knew it, the entire book had been translated.

About the translation itself: I have tried very hard to render the original as accurately as possible and to preserve the “voice” of the PAVN authors. As William Duiker himself notes in the Foreword, this necessarily means that the work has some “inherent limitations . . . since institutions have a natural tendency to laud their own performance and cover up mistakes.” I have made no effort to exclude or hide such “limitations,” which, in any case, will be readily apparent (as well as ripe for debate) for the readers of this translation. After all, much of the point of making this translation available is to allow American readers to have unfiltered access to the Vietnamese viewpoint, however flawed some might consider it. We Americans have our own blind spots and special views with which other nations and peoples take issue. My hope here is to help further the dialogue and debate on the war by, in effect, opening a direct channel to the “other side.”

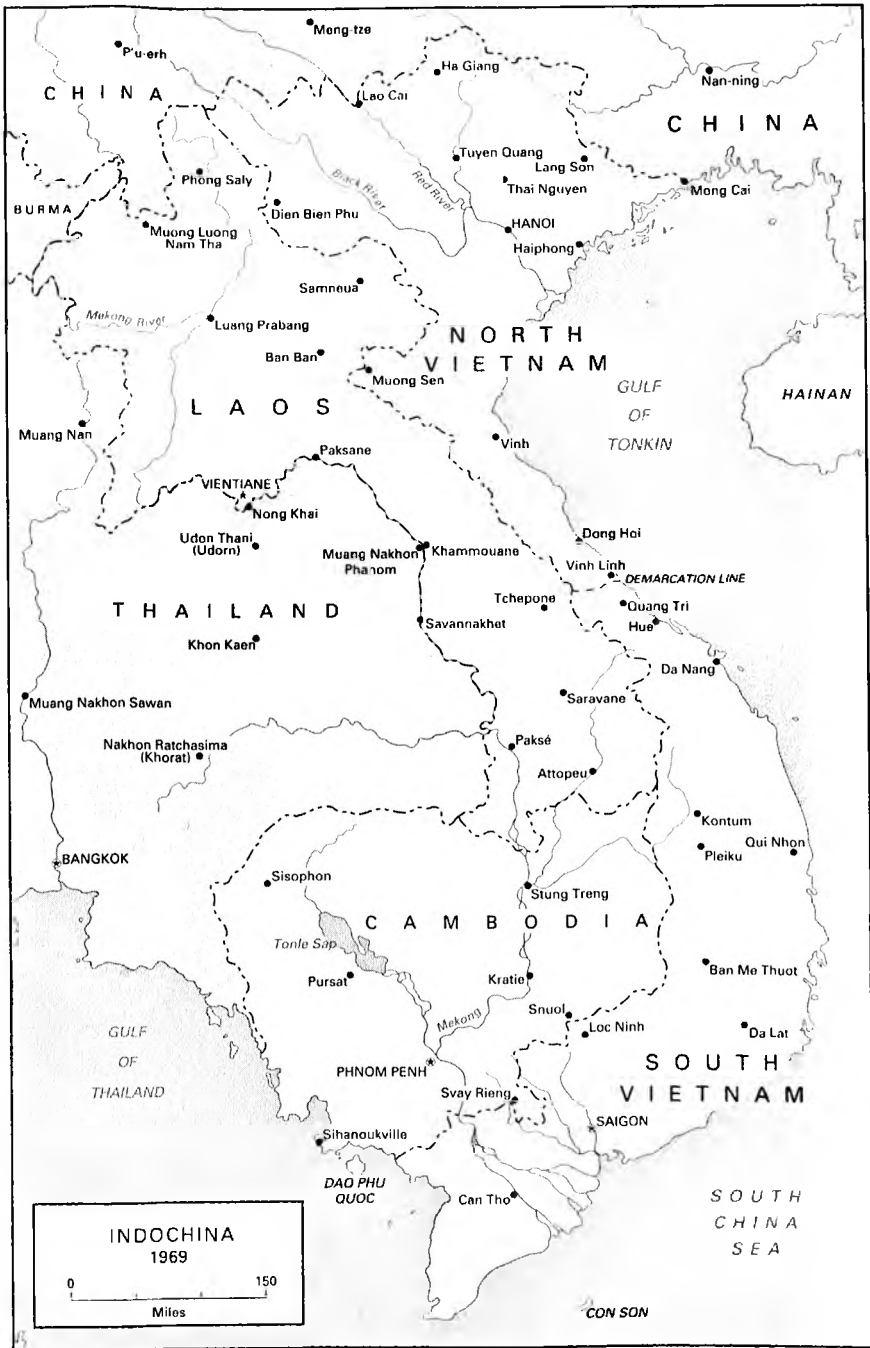
It should also be noted that the Vietnamese-language edition—because the Vietnamese consider it a continuation of the previous volume—begins with Chapter 9 followed by Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13. Each of those “chapters” are subdivided into “sections.” American readers, however, will readily see that what the Vietnamese classify as chapters and sections are here more comfortably and conveniently designated as parts and chapters, respectively. In addition—because I treat this translation as a self-contained volume—I begin the book with

Chapter I of Part I and then number the remaining chapters and parts sequentially throughout the rest of the book—that is, no chapter or part number is repeated. Information enclosed in brackets has been added to provide additional explanatory information on terms or locations. In some cases I have provided the original Vietnamese term, also enclosed in brackets [], for additional clarity.

I must admit that getting to this point has not been an easy affair. Once the translation was completed, I still needed to clarify the status of the work's copyright, a concept still evolving in postwar Vietnam. Finally, after a protracted effort, in keeping with the requirements of the 1998 copyright agreement between the United States and Vietnam, and with the gracious cooperation of the Vietnam-USA Society and the People's Army Publishing House, copyright approval was obtained and the project was allowed to move forward.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Dr. Sorley for his pivotal encouragement and support, Michael Briggs for his tireless efforts, and my wife and family for their patience and understanding during the long hours this translation entailed. I hope scholars and military history devotees find this book as interesting and informative as I have.

—*Merle L. Pribbenow*



Courtesy U.S. Army Center of Military History

Terminology

- A-12: Single-shot 140mm rocket launcher (modified from BM-14 launcher)
- A-72: Shoulder-fired SAM-7 anti-aircraft missile launcher
- Americal Division: The 23rd Division's name, the "Americal Division," is derived from the division's original formation during World War II on the island of New Caledonia in the South Pacific. The "Ameri-" in the name comes from "American" and the "cal" comes from "Caledonia."
- Annamite Mountains (Truong Son): The mountain range running from the Central Highlands of South Vietnam up the spine of the Indochina Peninsula to China. The Vietnamese term means the "long mountains."
- B: Communist code designation for South Vietnam
- B-40: Soviet-designed shoulder-fired anti-tank rocket launcher RPG-2
- B-41: Soviet RPG-7 anti-tank rocket launcher (upgraded RPG-2)
- B-72: Soviet AT-3 (Sagger) anti-tank guided missile
- B2: Military designation of the military front controlling the portion of South Vietnam including Cochin China and the extreme southern provinces of Central Vietnam. B2 was under the direct control of COSVN.
- B3: The Central Highlands Front
- B4: The Tri-Thien Front
- B5: The Northern Quang Tri-Route 9 Front
- C: Communist code designation for Laos
- Cochin China (Nam Bo): The southern portion of South Vietnam from the southern end of the Central Highlands through the Mekong Delta to the Gulf of Thailand, approximately the South Vietnamese Army's Military Regions 3 and 4. (I have used the French colonial term for this area to make it more accessible to American readers who may have trouble dealing with the foreign sound of the Vietnamese term "Nam Bo.")

Tri-Thien: The provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien

Western Cochin China: The southern half of the Mekong Delta, from the Mekong River south to the Gulf of Thailand

Introduction

Following the 1974 publication of *History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, Volume I, Volume II of *History of the People's Army of Vietnam* was presented to our readers on the 45th anniversary of the formation of the People's Army and the 100th birthday of Chairman Ho Chi Minh. Because it was so thick, in this initial printing Volume II of *History of the People's Army of Vietnam* was published as two books.

Although containing a number of mistakes, because of inadequate research or because of the limitations of the writers, during the past few years *History of the People's Army of Vietnam*, Volumes I and II, have been used by the people's armed forces as documents for study, historical education, and to pass on our traditions. They have served as a useful research tool for staff agencies and research cadre, especially for historians both within and outside the armed forces.

The Military History Institute of Vietnam has received many opinions and criticisms of these two volumes. After absorbing these opinions and criticisms, and in response to our needs for research and study, the Military History Institute of Vietnam and the People's Army Publishing House has arranged to republish (with corrections and additions) both volumes of *History of the People's Army of Vietnam*. This is a work that will be of value for historical science in general and for military history in particular.

The Military History Institute of Vietnam and the People's Army Publishing House wish to sincerely thank the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Finance, the Government Pricing Committee, and the Finance Department of the Ministry of Defense for their financial assistance. We would also like to thank all readers, staff agencies, military units, and scientists both inside and outside the armed forces for their enthusiastic response and their active contributions that enabled *History of the People's Army of Vietnam* to be reprinted on

the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Army of Vietnam (22 December 1944–22 December 1994).

*Military History Institute of Vietnam,
People's Army Publishing House*

PART I

Building the People's Army into a
Regular, Modern Armed Force:
Maintaining and Developing Revolutionary
Armed Forces in the South, 1954–1960

Urgently Reorganizing Our Forces: Preparations to Deal with a New Enemy

A NEW STRUGGLE BEGINS

Our victory in the resistance war against the French colonialists and the intervention of the United States marked the beginning of a new phase in the development of the Vietnamese Revolution.

On 21 July 1954, the Geneva Conference on Indochina ended. The nations participating in the conference solemnly pledged to respect the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Foreign troops were required to withdraw from Indochina. A free general election would be held to unify Vietnam two years from the day the Geneva Conference ended.

While awaiting the general election, the cease-fire agreement provided that, in Vietnam, the 17th parallel would become a temporary military boundary. The forces of the People's Army of Vietnam would regroup north of the boundary, and the forces of the army of the "French Alliance" would regroup south of the boundary. The military boundary was to be temporary and under no conditions was to be considered a political or territorial border.

To implement the agreement the High Command of the People's Army of Vietnam ordered a nationwide cease-fire for our armed forces effective 0000 hour, 22 July 1954.

The war was over. Peace had been reestablished throughout Vietnam. On 13 May 1955, the last colonial aggressor soldier withdrew from the Hai Phong assembly area. The Northern portion of our nation, now completely liberated, began an era of the building of socialism. Meanwhile, in the South our people still suffered under the yoke of the imperialists and their puppets.

Our people's mission of liberating the nation was not yet finished.

Although the United States had directly assisted the French during the Indochina war of aggression (1945–1954) and was a participant in the Geneva

Conference, President Eisenhower announced that “the U.S. is not bound by the terms of this agreement.”¹

“Seizing the opportunity”² provided by France’s defeat and its forced withdrawal from Indochina, and concerned that “failure in Vietnam will lead to the expansion of communism in Southeast Asia and the western Pacific,”³ the United States carried out a vigorous program designed to push the French out and, using a new type of colonialism, to commit aggression against us by taking control over our nation and turning South Vietnam into an American military base. The American objectives were to maintain the division of our nation, to block and push back the tide of the people’s revolutionary movement in Asia and throughout the world, and to threaten the socialist nations.

In June 1954 the Americans brought Ngo Dinh Diem back from the United States to establish a puppet government in South Vietnam. A U.S. military mission (the Special Military Mission) was established in Saigon. The U.S. National Security Council approved an “emergency program” of economic and military assistance and replaced the French advisors with American advisors to Diem. The United States gathered a number of imperialist nations and U.S. satellite nations to form SEATO, a Southeast Asian military alliance. In September 1954, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were placed under the “umbrella of protection” of this Southeast Asian military group.

The Party Central Committee and Chairman Ho Chi Minh correctly assessed the aggressive nature of the American imperialists and closely monitored their schemes and actions. In mid-July 1954, even before the Geneva Conference had ended, Ho Chi Minh clearly stated that “the U.S. is not only the enemy of the people of the world, it has now become the principal, direct enemy of the people of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.”⁴ Uncle Ho said our policy was to “concentrate our forces to oppose the American imperialists.”⁵

This statement marked the dawn of a new era in the history of our nation, the era of opposing the Americans to save our nation.

Our people and our army now faced a new enemy, an aggressor, the strongest economic and military power in the imperialist camp, the largest and most dangerous counterrevolutionary power of our era. The resistance war against the Americans to save our nation would be a historic confrontation between socialism and capitalism, between the forces of the national liberation revolution and forces planning aggression and seeking to enslave all nations of the world under a new form of colonialism.

On 5 September 1954, the Politburo of the Party Central Committee met and issued a resolution to discuss “the new situation, new duties, and new policies of the Party.” The Politburo made an in-depth analysis of the new elements in our nation’s situation as we switched over from war to peace, from a situation in which our forces were dispersed to one in which our forces were concentrated and unified. The resolution placed special emphasis on two facts: that our nation had been divided into two zones with two different systems of social organization and that a new enemy had appeared—imperialist America.

The Politburo assessment declared that the American imperialists, the French colonialists, and their puppets would never leave us in peace to allow us to reconstruct North Vietnam. They would not allow us to unify our nation in a manner favorable to our side. The entire Party, the entire army, and the entire population would have to be vigilant and stand ready to deal with any possible development.

The immediate task facing our soldiers and civilians in both the North and the South was to struggle to implement the Geneva Agreement, to strive to consolidate the North, and to firmly maintain and expand the political struggle movement of the people of the South in order to consolidate peace, achieve national unification, and complete our mission of achieving independence and democracy for the entire nation.

During this new revolutionary phase, the People's Army would be the "pillar on which we would rely for the protection of the Fatherland and the preservation of peace." The Politburo decided to build the People's Army into a regular, modern, revolutionary army. This would be a long-term, complicated task in which the most constant and important factor would be the need for training, and especially for the training of cadres.

Under the collective, unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, our soldiers and civilians in both the North and the South urgently consolidated and reorganized our forces to prepare to enter a new struggle.

CONSOLIDATING PARTY CONTROL IN THE NORTH

In the North, because of the long rule of the imperialists and the feudalists and because of the ravages of war, we were confronted with many difficult and complex social and economic problems. Agriculture was decentralized and farming methods were backward. Industry was small and crippled. Many businesses, water control projects, transportation routes, railroad yards, and port facilities had been destroyed during the war. Before withdrawing its forces to the South, the enemy either dismantled and shipped out or sabotaged many pieces of machinery and large quantities of supplies, creating additional difficulties for us as we began the process of restoring production. In those areas that had previously been temporarily under enemy control, tens of thousands of hectares of farmland had been left to go to seed and villages and hamlets were left in shambles and desolate. Starvation appeared in many provinces. In the large cities and the province capitals over 100,000 people were unemployed. Almost 1 million people were now illiterate. Bandit gangs still operated in a number of our northern border areas. Over 1 million people, the majority of them Catholics, had been seduced, tricked, or forced to emigrate to the South.

With our nation temporarily divided into two halves, the Central Committee of the Party affirmed that the North was the revolutionary base area of the entire nation. The firm consolidation of the North was now our most basic duty. This duty was intimately connected with our struggle for complete independence,

democracy, and the future development of our nation. "No matter what, the North must be consolidated. We must move the North forward gradually, firmly, advancing toward socialism on a step by step basis."⁶

For the immediate future, the Party Central Committee and the Government established a policy of rapidly completing the work of land reform and implementing a three-year (1955–1957) economic recovery plan. This plan focused on the restoration and development of agriculture, handicrafts, fishing, and salt production; on the restoration of transportation routes and postal services; on providing employment and stability for people's lives; and on strengthening security and national defense.

As the tool of the people's government, our armed forces began to carry out new roles and new duties: to protect the work of rebuilding our nation, to actively participate in production, to participate in labor and contribute to restoring the economy, and to bind up the wounds of war.

As we transferred our forces to regroupment sites and took control of newly liberated areas, our army fought and defeated many enemy plots and actions designed to sabotage the cease-fire agreement. In the cities and large towns, our troops joined the workers in struggles against factory owners and reactionaries to protect machinery and supplies and ensure that the factories could continue to operate as usual. Division-sized Units [dai doan] 320 and 308 and units from South Vietnam that had regrouped in the areas of Nghe An, Thanh Hoa, Ninh Binh, Nam Dinh, etc., formed numerous operational teams to proselytize the people and combat enemy efforts to seduce or force our Catholic brethren to emigrate to the South. Cadre and soldiers visited each family, patiently explaining the policies of the Party and of Chairman Ho Chi Minh and exposing the insidious plots of the enemy. Even though the reactionaries used all kinds of tricks and devices to obstruct these efforts, in those areas our troops were able to reach in time, our Catholic brethren stayed behind and contributed to the rebuilding of our homeland and the building of a new life.

The High Command ordered the 148th Regiment in the Northwest [Tay Bac] Region and the 238th and 246th Regiments in the Viet Bac Interzone to work with local troops, guerrilla militia, and the civilian population of the border provinces to eliminate banditry. Our troops visited every ethnic minority tribal village, spreading the policies of the Party and the Government. They divided and isolated the reactionaries and clearly exposed their crimes. Our troops helped the local population restore production, rebuild villages, and consolidate people's governmental structures. The work of our cadres and soldiers had a powerful effect on the masses and won over those people who had previously followed the wrong path. The ranks of the bandits disintegrated, and most of them turned in their guns and returned home to resume normal lives. Security in the border areas of the provinces of Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Lai Chau, etc., was firmly maintained. We had crushed the enemy's plots to sow division and commit sabotage and we had strengthened the solidarity of peoples of all ethnic groups.

With regard to our efforts to rebuild the economy, our army reclaimed and cleared 64,000 hectares of farmland and helped the population in areas where military units were stationed by contributing tens of thousands of man-days of labor, plowing, harrowing, transplanting, harvesting, etc.⁷ The regular mobile divisions subordinate to the High Command and the armed forces of the Left Bank and Right Bank Military Regions contributed more than 200,000 man-days of labor, digging 500,000 cubic meters of earth and achieving high efficiency during the construction of the Bac-Hung-Hai agricultural irrigation project.⁸ In early 1955 North Vietnam experienced a severe drought. Units stationed in the lowlands contributed more than 6 million man-days of labor, dredging hundreds of kilometers of irrigation ditches, digging thousands of wells, and working with the farmers to fight the drought and save the harvest. During the autumn of 1955 the North was struck by a major typhoon. The High Command immediately dispatched a number of divisions and regiments to help save our dike systems and combat floods. In many locations our troops slogged through water day and night, using their bodies as barriers against the floodwaters so that dirt could be shoveled in to shore up the dikes. In Haiphong, soldier Pham Minh Duc (of the 350th Division) died a hero's death while trying to rescue civilians. The National Assembly and the Government awarded Pham Minh Duc the title of Hero of the People's Armed Forces.

On these new combat fronts our army once again demonstrated its revolutionary character and its combat spirit of sacrifice for the sake of the people. The people in areas formerly occupied by the enemy grew to love "Uncle Ho's soldiers" even more.

In 1956 our Party uncovered errors in the implementation of the land reform program and the program to revamp our organizations. In October 1956 the 10th Central Committee Session put forward timely, appropriate, and resolute corrective measures. During this same period in the South, Diem and the Americans publicly tore up the Geneva Accords and savagely suppressed the struggle movement of the masses. On the world stage there were a number of incidents of counterrevolutionary violence. Exploiting this situation, a number of reactionary elements in the North who had not been reeducated raised their ugly heads, spreading suspicion and criticizing the leadership of the Party.

In the face of these national problems, our army demonstrated its boundless loyalty to our revolutionary cause and proved itself worthy of the trust the Party and the people placed in it. The Party sent almost 10,000 cadre and soldiers to the rural areas to work with local cadre and with our peasant brethren to correct the errors in land reform and in revamping organizations. In areas where military units were stationed our cadre and soldiers went out among the masses, disseminating the policies and goals of the Party, contributing to the work of stabilizing the situation, and helping the people increase production and build a new life.

Through the efforts of the entire Party, the entire armed forces, and the entire population, the economic and social situation in the North gradually stabilized.

Law and order were firmly maintained. The land reform campaign of 1956 focused on the right of farmers to own their own land and distributed 334,000 hectares of land to the farmers, thereby completely eliminating the landlord class and erasing the last vestiges of feudalism in the North. By the end of the three-year economic recovery program, the level of educational development and agricultural, industrial, and handicraft production in the North had been restored to pre-World War II levels.⁹ Starvation and disease had been pushed back. Illiteracy had been eliminated. We had taken a step forward in improving the people's standard of living. The North had been consolidated and turned into the revolutionary base area for the entire nation, a firm foundation on which our army could build and expand.

BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL, REGULAR ARMY

In May 1955 the units of the People's Army operating in the South completed their transfer to regroupment areas in the North. The Vietnamese volunteer units operating in Laos and Cambodia completed their international mission and returned home. From an army dispersed throughout the nation and performing international duties in Laos and Cambodia, our army was now concentrated in the North. Speaking to army units preparing for a parade on 1 January 1955 to greet the return of the Party Central Committee and the Government to the capital city of Hanoi, Chairman Ho Chi Minh said, "Previously in the North we had only northern troops. Now we have troops from throughout our nation. Northern, Central, Southern—they are all here, and we even have our volunteer troops returning from service in friendly countries. We must sincerely be united, we must love each other, we must help each other make progress."¹⁰ Uncle Ho stated clearly,

The current duty of the armed forces is to strive to become a regular army. This is a new mission. You must not neglect your studies just because there is now peace. . . . You must study politics to have a firm grasp of the policies of the Party and the Government. You must study technical matters because, as technology is constantly advancing, we also must study in order to make progress. If we want our soldiers to be powerful, we must study politics and technology to progress toward becoming a regular army.¹¹

After ten years of building up our forces and fighting and defeating the French colonialist aggressors, our army had been tempered like steel and had matured in many areas. It had gained a great deal of experience in building a revolutionary army in a country with an underdeveloped economy and had gained combat experience against an imperialist army with modern equipment. Of special importance, our army had developed a corps of cadre capable of responding to any requirement or duty. This was a very important basis upon which to continue the development of the armed forces during this new revolutionary period.

With a total of 330,000 full-time troops as of mid-1954, however, our army was still exclusively an infantry army. Its table of organization, equipment, and weapons had not been standardized and the technical and combat capabilities and levels of administration and command of each unit were different.

Our main force troops in North Vietnam (including Interzone 4) had been organized into division-sized units [dai doan] and regiments and had participated in many campaigns and large-scale massed combat actions. Because of the differing conditions of the battlefields there, our main force troops in Cochinchina and Interzone 5 and our volunteer troops operating in Laos and Cambodia had been organized only up to the battalion and regimental levels. Our local force soldiers subordinate to the provinces and districts throughout our nation were organized into platoons, companies, and battalions. In mid-1954, the infantry forces of our army included six division-sized units and eight independent regiments, all subordinate to the High Command or to the interzones,¹² 54 main force and provincial battalions, and 258 companies and 175 platoons of district-level local force troops. The specialty branch units of the High Command included one engineer-artillery division-sized unit and a number of battalions and companies of anti-aircraft artillery, signal, reconnaissance, and transportation troops.¹³

The majority of our weapons and equipment were infantry weapons, which were not uniform in quantity or type and were of poor quality. Many of these weapons were unserviceable, and they were technically obsolete when compared to equipment used by other armies around the world.

Note: At that time our army possessed:

- 105,526 rifles (57 percent of which were serviceable) of four different types: Remington rifles and carbines produced during the Second World War, French MAS rifles produced during the period 1949–1950, and 7.9mm rifles produced by the Chinese Nationalists. In addition we had a number of Russian Modin rifles, Japanese Arinaka rifles, and French “Mut-co-tong” [*sic*] rifles produced during the First World War.
- 44,836 submachine guns (95 percent of which were serviceable) of five types: Thompson, Sten, “Tuyn” [*sic*], and MAS produced by the United States, England, and France, and K-50 submachine guns produced in China based on a Russian design.
- Light machine guns totaled 6,509 weapons (72 percent of which were serviceable) of the following types: Bren, Bren-no [*sic*], Hotchkiss, etc. . . .
- Heavy machine guns totaled 1,175 weapons (67 percent of which were serviceable), including Maxim machine guns produced during the time of the Russian Czars.
- Ammunition for the types of weapons we had captured from the enemy totaled only 200 rounds per weapon for rifles, 1,500 rounds per weapon for light machine guns, and 4,500 rounds per weapon for heavy machine guns.

- Artillery directly subordinate to the High Command consisted of two battalions of 105mm howitzers, three battalions of 75mm mountain guns, and seven batteries of 82mm and 120mm mortars.
- Transportation trucks totaled over 1,000.
- Signal equipment included telephones, 2-watt voice radios, and 15-watt radios.
- Engineering equipment was primarily hoes and shovels.

Almost 70 percent of our weapons and equipment had been captured from the enemy, 10 percent had been produced by our forces domestically, and 20 percent had been provided as aid by friendly countries between 1950 and mid-1954.

Our army's technical support facilities were very poor. Our entire armed forces had only five repair facilities to repair weapons and machinery and six factories producing medicines and military gear. Each of the facilities had only a few hundred workers.

Immediately after the end of the war the General Military Party Committee focused on directing all units to fulfill their responsibilities of transferring troops to regroupment sites and of urgently taking the first step in our reorganization, establishing table of organization and equipment standards and upgrading our equipment to guarantee that our forces would be ready for combat and prepared to progress toward building a regular, modern armed force.

Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap, Politburo member, Secretary of the General Military Party Committee, and Minister of Defense, and Comrades Van Tien Dung, member of the Central Committee and Chief of Staff, Nguyen Chi Thanh, Politburo member and Director of the General Political Department, and Tran Dang Ninh, member of the Central Committee and Director of the General Rear Services Department, personally went out to inspect and encourage our units as they regrouped and began to carry out their new duties.

The General Training Department, headed by Major General Hoang Van Thai, and the General Cadre Department, headed by Comrade Nguyen Chanh, were established to assist the General Political Department and the High Command in providing stronger guidance for the work of building an army under conditions of peace.

Our division-sized units [dai doan], the 308th, 304th, 312th, 316th, 320th, and 325th, were all uniformly redesignated as infantry divisions [su doan bo binh] as part of our effort to form combined-arms units and military specialty branches [binh chung]. Each division's table of organization included three infantry regiments, a composite artillery regiment,¹⁴ an engineer battalion, a signal battalion, a military medical battalion, and a truck transportation company. A division's firepower was two or three times that which division-sized units had during the war against the French. The General Military Party Committee transferred many cadre with experience in massed combat operations from these divisions to assist in organizing a number of new divisions.

The regrouped units from the South, volunteer troops from Laos and Cambodia, and a number of Northern main force and provincial and district local force troops were gathered together to form eight new infantry divisions and five new independent infantry regiments. Each unit was given the combat traditions of one battlefield or one locality.

A number of main force and local force battalions and regiments of the Viet Bac Interzone and Interzone 3 were combined to form three new infantry divisions. The 350th Division was formed in September 1954 and the 328th and 332nd Divisions were formed in June 1955. The main force 148th and 246th Regiments of the Viet Bac Interzone were transformed into independent infantry regiments directly subordinate to the High Command.

Regrouped soldiers from Interzone 5 were organized into two infantry divisions and one independent infantry regiment. The 305th Division, formed in September 1954 at the Binh Dinh regroupment area, was made up of units that had fought in the northern Central Highlands and in the central part of Central Vietnam. The 324th Division, formed in June 1955, was made up of regiments, battalions, and companies that had been formed and had matured on the battlefields of southern Central Vietnam and in the southern part of the Central Highlands. The 120th Regiment, formed in June 1955, was made up of cadre and soldiers from the ethnic minority tribes of the Central Highlands and the mountains of Interzone 5.

Regrouped soldiers from Cochin China were organized into two divisions. The 330th Division, formed in January 1955, was made up of units that had grown up on the battlefields of eastern and central Cochin China. The 338th Division, formed in December 1956, was made up of units that had been born and matured on the battlefields of western Cochin China [the lower Mekong Delta].

Vietnamese volunteer troops from Laos and Cambodia were gathered to form the 335th Division and the independent 640th Infantry Regiment, both formed in June 1955.

A number of main force regiments and local force battalions from the coastal areas were combined to form the coastal defense forces. Interzone 4 was given the 269th and 271st Regiments and the independent 500th Battalion; the Left Bank Region got the 244th and 713th Regiments; and the Northeastern Region got the 248th Regiment.

A number of local force battalions and companies from provinces along the Lao border were converted into ten battalions of border defense troops.

The remaining local force troops of the provinces of Quang Binh, Ha Tinh, Ninh Binh, Bac Giang, Thai Nguyen, Tuyen Quang, Hai Ninh, Lang Son, Cao Bang, Ha Giang, Lao Cai, and Lai Chau were converted into internal defense troops.¹⁵

Our artillery forces, consisting of two regiments from the 351st Engineer-Artillery Division-Sized Unit and a number of artillery units from the various

battlefields, were combined to form three artillery divisions, the 675th, 45th, and 349th Divisions, directly subordinate to the Artillery Command, and the organic artillery battalions and regiments of our infantry divisions. Major General Le Thiet Hung was appointed Commander of the Artillery Branch.

Anti-aircraft forces, consisting of six anti-aircraft artillery battalions subordinate to the High Command and a number of anti-aircraft machine-gun units from the various battlefields, were combined to form the 367th Anti-Aircraft Division and the organic anti-aircraft battalions and companies of our infantry divisions. The Headquarters of the 367th Division was assigned responsibility for providing guidance to the anti-aircraft forces of the entire armed forces.

Engineer forces, consisting of the engineer regiment from the 351st Engineer-Artillery Division-Sized Unit and the engineer battalions and companies from the various battlefields, were collected to form four engineer regiments, the 333rd, 444th, 555th, and 506th Regiments, subordinate to the Engineer Department and the organic engineer battalions and companies of our infantry divisions.

The signal forces of the armed forces were gathered together to form three battalions, the 132nd, 133rd, and 134th Battalions, directly subordinate to the Signal and Communications Department and the signal battalions and companies subordinate to the divisions and specialty branches.

The Transportation Department of the General Rear Services Department was dissolved. Military transportation forces were organized into two truck regiments, the 225th and 235th Regiments, subordinate to the General Rear Services Department and the Military Communications Office of the General Staff and the transportation companies of the divisions and specialty branches.

On 3 March 1955 the Airfield Research Section, directly subordinate to the General Staff, was formed, and on 7 May 1955 the Coastal Defense Department, subordinate to the Ministry of Defense and the High Command, was established.

The weapons and equipment of all units were cataloged and classified. A number of weapons supplied to us by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries after the signing of the Geneva Agreement were issued to the mobile divisions of the High Command and to units defending the temporary military demarcation boundary [the Demilitarized Zone], the border areas, coastal areas, and the offshore islands. Repair facilities for weapons and machinery, medical clinics, hospitals, and weapons and quartermaster warehouses were pulled together to establish production factories, repair factories, and large warehouse facilities and hospitals, which were then deployed to the appropriate areas to support the buildup of the armed forces and preparations for combat.

Under the leadership of the General Military Party Committee and the guidance of the General Political Department, all units conducted many study programs aimed at fully understanding the resolutions of the Party Central Committee and the Politburo regarding the current situation, revolutionary duties, and duties and formulas for the task of army building in this new period. Units of regrouped Southerners and volunteer troops which, unlike units in the

North, had not yet had an opportunity to study our land reform policy, were brought together for study sessions aimed at increasing their class consciousness. High- and mid-level cadre throughout the armed forces studied historical materialism. This was the first time our cadre had an opportunity to study basic Marxist-Leninist theory in one uniform study program. Educational study sessions were organized for all units. The study atmosphere was enthusiastic, especially among cadre from staff agencies and the technical specialty branches. Military schools began to hold primary and supplemental training classes in military and political subjects. Party chapters now openly provided leadership to their units, elevating the leadership role of the Party, raising the spirit of responsibility and understanding of their vanguard roles among Party members, and increasing their active involvement in building Party organizations among the masses. A system of Party activities days was implemented. This had a positive effect on the education of Party members and increased the quality of leadership provided by the Party chapters.

After many years of savage and difficult fighting, the number of wounded and disabled soldiers in our army had grown to 36,914 troops, of whom 41 percent were severely disabled. Tens of thousands of cadre and troops were suffering from disease, and of these 50 percent had serious illnesses requiring long-term treatment. In areas where troops were stationed, military units were provided with food by the local government and population, and they received skillful care for their physical and spiritual needs. The General Rear Services Department directed all units to expand their economic production programs and to build their own bases and headquarters facilities using bamboo supplied by the local population. Hundreds of State treatment facilities and hospitals and military recuperation groups, clinics, and hospitals restored our wounded and ill soldiers to health. In accordance with the requirements for national reconstruction, many healthy cadre and soldiers with specialized skills were transferred out of the army to work for State agencies and to work in political, economic, educational, or social areas. Those cadre and soldiers who no longer met the physical requirements for service in the army were sent back to their local areas to recuperate. Their local Party committees, local government, and the civilian population arranged jobs for them and helped them find a new livelihood. In their new locations our cadre and soldiers demonstrated the excellent quality of our armed forces, increasing the trust and esteem in which our army was held by the local population.

Implementing the directives of the Party and the State, in all localities Party committees, local governments, and the civilian population solemnly collected the remains of soldiers of the People's Army, village guerrilla militia members, and civilians and Party members who had given their lives during the resistance war, taking them for burial in martyrs' graveyards.

On 20 December 1954 our army launched the first military training program to be implemented during peacetime.

From the Demilitarized Zone to the northern border, from the mountain jungles to the lowlands, the coastal regions, and the offshore islands, from the cities to the countryside, the atmosphere seethed with enthusiasm for study, for building our army into a regular, modern force, and for increasing vigilance and combat readiness.

The General Staff and the military regional and divisional headquarters held many short-term classes, providing supplemental training to company and battalion-level cadre and supplying basic training lessons and training methods for technical affairs and tactics at the subunit level. Training sites suited to the terrain and to unit training programs were constructed in areas where troops were stationed. Internal regulations, disciplinary regulations, garrison regulations, and unit regulations began to be drafted. Under the direct supervision of the General Military Party Committee, the staff agencies of the Ministry of Defense urgently studied and drafted the first five-year plan (1955–1960) for building a regular, modern, revolutionary army.

By the end of 1956, the program to revamp the table of organization and equipment of the armed forces had been basically completed. From an exclusively infantry force operating on a dispersed basis throughout the battlefields of the three nations of Indochina, our army had been concentrated into 14 infantry divisions and five independent infantry regiments, four artillery and anti-aircraft divisions, and a number of regiments and battalions of engineers, signal troops, and transportation troops with a relatively uniform table of organization and equipment. The organizational changes and the initial military training classes during the two years of 1955 and 1956 were suited to the immediate requirements of our army for administration, command, and combat readiness, and were at the same time preparatory steps for the work of building the armed forces in the directions laid out by the General Military Political Committee.

THE BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE IN THE SOUTH

In the South, during the course of the regroupment process and taking advantage of this period when the enemy had not yet established his governmental apparatus throughout the country, many localities continued to give the people temporary ownership of land that had belonged to French colonialists and local feudal landlords. Local areas also issued Government medals and commendations and Ho Chi Minh emblems to people who had been of service during the resistance war against the French and to religious officials and local elders. All areas held meetings for people from all ethnic backgrounds and religions to celebrate our victory in the resistance war against the French and to publicize the terms of the Geneva Accords.

Implementing the September 1954 Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee, the people of South Vietnam quickly shifted from armed struggle to political struggle. The Cochinchina Party Committee, the Interzone 5 Party Com-

mittee, the Party Cadre Affairs Department for the provinces of extreme southern Central Vietnam, and provincial Party committees directed all cadre and Party members to remain in their areas of operation, to continue to recruit political assets among the masses, to maintain a number of bases in the jungles and mountains, to select and leave behind in each local area a number of military cadre, and to secretly cache a number of weapons. Party and labor youth group organizations at all levels withdrew into the shadows and began to operate in secret. Peasant associations, women's associations, etc., were disbanded. Mass organizations operating openly and legally, religious associations, production associations, mutual assistance and relief associations, sports and exercise associations, cultural and literary associations, etc., were established in all villages, hamlets, and cities. A number of cadre, Party members, and revolutionary civilians were selected and dispatched by the Party to secretly infiltrate the puppet government and the puppet army.

In November 1954 President Eisenhower sent General Collins to Saigon. A plan of aggression aimed at imposing the yoke of American neocolonialist rule in South Vietnam was drawn up under the name of the "Collins Plan." The contents of this plan were the following: The United States would provide direct support to the puppet Ngo Dinh Diem regime rather than providing assistance through the French; a "national assembly" would be established to legitimize the Diem regime; a puppet army would be established using U.S.-supplied equipment and training and operating under U.S. command; a new group of puppets would be quickly trained; and a number of economic and social programs would be implemented, such as resettlement of the population, "land reform," changing the tax laws, etc. These programs would benefit the capitalist and landlord classes and would allow U.S. capitalists to invest in South Vietnam. This was the first American plan of aggression in South Vietnam. It was to be implemented through a puppet regime and puppet army and was an extremely dangerous form of disguised, covert colonialism on the part of the imperialists.

Relying on his American masters, Ngo Dinh Diem attempted to raise the banner of "national independence" and to employ false slogans about "democratic freedoms." He spread propaganda for the reactionary "Can Lao Nhan Vi" ideology, forced the people to join reactionary associations set up by his regime, and gathered all his lackeys together to create a new social order that would serve Diem's plot to oppose the revolution.

With an ever-growing network of spies and traitors and an expanding system of guard posts and outposts, Diem and the Americans began to establish puppet governmental machinery at the local level, organizing village and hamlet leaders and interfamily groups. They forced individuals who had participated in the revolution to turn themselves in. Those who had husbands or children who had followed the revolution were forced to "disown" them. In many localities, when confronted with mass struggle movements for peace, they terrorized patriots who had participated in the resistance war against the French. The U.S.-Diem clique forcefully suppressed the population, conducting bloody massacres in Huong

Dien (Quang Tri province), Vinh Trinh and Cho Duoc (Quang Nam province), Mo Cay (Ben Tre province), etc. The population of South Vietnam did not enjoy a single day of peace after the Geneva Agreement was signed. From the very beginning the battle against this new enemy was a vicious struggle.

In June 1955, in accordance with an agreement reached between France and the United States, the French expeditionary army completed its withdrawal from South Vietnam. The puppet army that had been built by the French was now reorganized by the Americans into a puppet army subservient to the United States and designed to serve as a tool for the implementation of aggressive U.S. policies and to support the neocolonialist rule of the Americans. Most of the puppet officers trained by the French now became puppets of the Americans. As for the armed forces of the Binh Xuyen and of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects that France had organized and equipped, Diem and the Americans bribed them and tried to entice them to join with Diem. Clashes between the U.S.-Diem forces and the armed forces of the religious sects broke out in many provinces in Cochin China and Central Vietnam.

To exploit these divisions within the enemy's ranks, the Cochin China Party Committee and the interprovincial Party committees dispatched many military cadre to armed units of the Binh Xuyen, the Cao Dai, and the Hoa Hao with the goal of guiding these forces into opposing the oppressive actions of the U.S.-Diem clique. At the same time our cadre also strove to limit the acts of banditry that these forces were committing against the civilian population. Because they did not have a cause worth fighting for and because they were undisciplined and unorganized, after a short time these armed forces disintegrated and surrendered to the U.S.-Diem clique. A small element of the Binh Xuyen armed forces joined the revolution and were led by our military cadre to War Zone D in eastern Cochin China, where they were reorganized by us.

Cadre and Party members who were being terrorized by the enemy in the lowlands fled to our old resistance bases and were reorganized by the interprovincial Party committees of eastern, central, and western Cochin China into armed teams and armed groups. A number of our units disguised themselves as armed units of the Binh Xuyen and of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai religious sects in order to deceive the enemy.

In western Cochin China the Ca Mau Province Party Committee organized two armed units that called themselves the "Ngo Van So Company" and the "Dinh Tien Hoang Company." Each unit had a strength of about 100 soldiers, all Party members, and each was equipped with a few dozen guns. The province committees of Rach Gia, Vinh Long, Can Tho, and Soc Trang provinces organized a number of armed units, each unit having between 20 and 40 soldiers. The provincial committees dispersed the cadre and soldiers of these armed units to villages and hamlets surrounding our base areas to recruit local people to build up our organizations, to assist the local population with economic production, and to guide the people in struggling against the enemy. These units held regular

meetings and study sessions at night according to a fixed schedule. Each unit could gather or disperse quickly under orders from the provincial committee.

In the Plain of Reeds base area the Interprovincial Party Committee of central Cochinchina collected 150 cadre and Party members who had been operating within the ranks of the Binh Xuyen, recruited an additional group of local youths, and combined them to form two armed units that were called the 2nd and 4th Binh Xuyen Battalions. The provinces of Long An and Chau Doc also organized provincial armed teams bearing such names as the "Phuoc Du Battalion," the "Du Quang Battalion," the "Dinh Bo Linh Battalion," etc. Some of these units had almost 100 soldiers armed with several dozen guns. These armed units operated in a dispersed fashion and recruited political agents among the local population in the provinces of Kien Phong and Kien Tuong. A number of units expanded their areas of operation to the area north of Route 4 and My Tho province.

In the base areas of eastern Cochinchina the provincial committees of Tay Ninh, Bien Hoa, Ba Ria, Thu Dau Mot, and Gia Dinh provinces organized a number of revolutionary armed teams, each team having around 50 soldiers. These teams established production and logging areas in Trang Bang, Long Thanh, Long Nguyen, Hat Dich, Suoi Linh, Ma Da, etc., to support their own personnel. In mid-1956, acting on orders from the Eastern Cochinchina Interprovincial Committee, the Party chapter in the Bien Hoa prison organized a prison breakout in which 600 cadre and patriotic civilians being held in the prison escaped. A number of these escapees were assigned to our armed teams in War Zone D and in the Long Thanh, Hat Dich, etc., base areas.

In our former resistance bases in the Central Highlands and in the mountain jungles of the western portions of the provinces of Central Vietnam, many cadre and Party members worked with our ethnic minority compatriots, taking advantage of the tribal traditions of these people who carried weapons to protect their own villages and lands to provide armed self-defense personnel to defend our political struggle movement. They maintained control of such areas as Tra Bong and Ba To in Quang Ngai province; Vinh Thanh, An Lao, and Van Canh in Binh Dinh province; Tho Do and Ma Du in Phu Yen province; Hon Ron and Cay Dau in Khanh Hoa province; Tan Tuc, Tung Bung, Doan, Soap, and Dac Uy in Kontum province; and Bac Ai in Ninh Thuan province.

The armed teams that were maintained in our resistance bases during these years when the South Vietnamese revolution shifted from armed struggle to political struggle were the first organizations we used to restore and rebuild our revolutionary armed forces in South Vietnam in later years.

RESOLUTION TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE

In March 1955, the Party Central Committee (2nd Session) held its seventh plenary session in the capital city of Hanoi. Chairman Ho Chi Minh and Comrade

Truong Chinh, General Secretary of the Party, presided over the session. Shortly thereafter, in August 1955 the Central Committee held its eighth plenary session. Based on the developments within our nation following the signing of the Geneva Accords, the Party Central Committee once more affirmed that the immediate, most concrete, and most dangerous enemies of our people are the American imperialists and their lackeys. "The immediate struggle objectives for the entire Party, the entire armed forces, and the entire population of both North and South Vietnam are peace, unification, independence, and democracy. Our struggle will be prolonged and difficult, but we will surely be victorious."¹⁶

"If we wish to fulfill this great duty, we must have forces. In order to have forces, we must strive to consolidate the North and move the North forward step by step toward socialism. We must also maintain and expand the political struggle in South Vietnam."¹⁷

The Central Committee emphasized that "building a powerful People's Army, consolidating our national defense during peacetime, is one of the key tasks required for us to strengthen our revolutionary forces."¹⁸

In April 1956, during his closing speech to the 9th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, Chairman Ho Chi Minh stated clearly that,

When assessing the prospects for achieving unification of Vietnam through peaceful means, we must always remember that the enemies of our people, the American imperialists and their lackeys, still occupy one-half of our country, and that they are now preparing for war. Therefore, we must always raise high the flag of peace, but we must at the same time also raise high our defenses and our vigilance.¹⁹

Uncle Ho confirmed the decisive position of North Vietnam in this new struggle of our nation:

If you want to build a good house, you must build a truly solid FOUNDATION. If a tree is to be strong, its leaves green, its flowers beautiful, its fruit firm, then you must care for and build up the ROOTS of the tree. North Vietnam is the FOUNDATION, the ROOTS of the struggle to complete the liberation of our people and the unification of our nation. Therefore everything we do in the North must be aimed at strengthening our forces in the North and the South.²⁰

The revolutionary struggle of our people in both the North and the South moved into a new phase. The Resolutions of the 6th, 7th, and 8th Plenums of the Party Central Committee and the instructions of Chairman Ho Chi Minh clearly pointed out our new enemies and laid out basic issues regarding the directions and duties of the revolution. These resolutions and instructions served as guidelines toward which the entire Party, the entire armed forces, and the entire population would strive.

During the two-year period of 1955 and 1956 our army properly carried out

its "duties as a combat army and a working army,"²¹ at the same time completing the task of reorganizing its forces. From an army operating on a dispersed basis and carrying out its combat duties throughout the battlefields of the three Indochinese nations, our armed forces had taken their first step toward concentrating our forces and achieving uniformity in organization, command, and equipment. These were very important foundations upon which our army could build to advance toward developing a regular, modern army under peacetime conditions in the North, at the same time standing ready to respond to any new requirements and missions for the revolution.

During this new stage in the development of our nation and of our army, the Central Committee of the Party advocated the development of a strong standing army of high quality and with an appropriate strength level, and the building of a powerful reserve force built on the entire population, the foundation of which would be the implementation of a system of universal military service.

Analyzing our situation and our revolutionary and military duties during this new phase, the Central Committee of the Party clearly stated two requirements: Building a revolutionary, regular, modern army must be closely linked with the need to consolidate and develop our rear area [North Vietnam], and consolidation of our national defense must be closely linked with economic development.

Based on an assessment of the limitations of our armed forces, on the state of our economy, on our nation's specific terrain and weather characteristics, and based on our revolutionary duties, on the responsibilities of the armed forces, and on the ability of friendly countries to provide us with assistance, the Central Committee laid out the formula: "Actively develop the armed forces in a gradual, systematic basis to move toward becoming a regular, modern army." While implementing this program, the Central Committee said, we must oppose impatient ideas that were divorced from the realities of our situation. We must, however, also make a maximum effort to save time because the schemes of the enemy are very dangerous, the requirements of the situation are very pressing, and the task of building up our army is very urgent and very demanding.

These basic concepts for building our armed forces and consolidating national defense during this new phase of the revolution, as set forward by the 12th Plenary Session of the Central Committee, marked a new level of maturity in our Party's military theory in general and in its theories for the building of revolutionary armed forces in particular. These ideas represented a step forward in improving the theories on building a people's army and consolidating a national defense based on the utilization of the entire population, which had been set forward in the Resolution on Self-Defense Units of the 1st Party Congress in 1935, the Resolution of the 1945 Military Conference of North Vietnam, and our Party's military resolutions during the resistance war against the French imperialists and the American interventionists (1945-1954).

The Resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Central Committee clearly laid out directions and targets for our army to use in developing and increasing its combat strength and combat readiness during the years North Vietnam still enjoyed peace, at the same time realistically preparing our army for a large-scale war of national salvation against the Americans.

THE 1955-1959 FIVE-YEAR MILITARY PLAN

During the 12th Plenary Session (March 1957), the Party Central Committee also approved a five-year (1955-1959) plan to build the army and consolidate

national defense. This plan had previously been drafted by the General Staff and the General Departments of the armed forces in 1955 under the direct guidance of the General Party Military Committee and approved in principle by the Politburo in early 1956.

The plan set forward the following duties for building our armed forces during the five years from 1955 to 1960:

- to build a regular and relatively modern Army;
- to establish the initial basic organizational structures for Navy and Air Force Service branches;
- to create conditions that would enable us, when we began our next plan, to modernize the armed forces to an ever greater extent.

The plan spelled out the following specific requirements:

1. Reorganize the structure of the army to provide a standing force level that met the needs of the revolution and was at the same time appropriate to the size of our nation's population and to the budgetary capacity of our government.
2. Improve our weapons and equipment to strengthen our firepower and technical resources, implement rather basic changes in the equipment of our infantry divisions, and equip the specialty branches we were in the process of creating. Devote attention to the training of technical personnel, to building warehouses and supply and repair facilities, and to the instruction of cadre and soldiers in maintaining and utilizing our new weapons and equipment.
3. Expand regular training in military subjects, political subjects, cultural subjects, and physical fitness. This was a central, long-term, and continuous task necessary for building our armed forces during peacetime.
4. Cadre training was designated as the key element in the work of training our troops. Together with on-the-job training, we would send command cadre at all levels of all service branches and specialty branches to receive training in supplementary training schools and send a number of cadre to full-fledged training schools in order to enable our leaders and commanders to fully carry out their responsibilities.
5. Implement a system of regulations for the armed forces, including military regulations, security regulations, internal regulations, and disciplinary regulations. Study and draft combat regulations and regulations for political activities, staff operations, and rear services [logistics] operations. Implement four major systems within the armed forces: compulsory military service, service requirements for officers, a salary system, and a system for awards and commendations.
6. Strengthen staff agencies at all levels, especially at the General Staff level and at the Military Region and Division level. Develop staff agencies capable of organizing, training, and commanding an army made up of combined arms specialty branches.

7. Develop and expand the matériel support facilities of the armed forces to the level required for a regular and relatively modern army. Directly link the strengthening of rear service staff agencies at all levels with ensuring the provision of full matériel support to our plans to build our armed forces and prepare for combat.
8. Strengthen the leadership role of the Party and increase political activities. This was one of the most important subject areas and would play a decisive role in building a regular, modern army. Emphasize the development of basic-level Party organizations. Implement a system of delegation of responsibility under the collective and united leadership of the Party committee. Political activities must be aimed at increasing socialist awareness, increasing the combat spirit of the armed forces, developing unanimity throughout the armed forces on theories and actions for the implementation of our plan for building our armed forces and consolidating national defense and combat readiness. Political activities must delve deeply into tactical and technical matters and into the implementation of all regulations, the fulfillment of responsibilities, and specialized matters.

The first five-year military plan (1955–1959) also set forward specific tasks aimed at strengthening our defenses and combat readiness. These included increasing the combat readiness of units serving in border areas, along the Demilitarized Zone, in coastal areas (Line 1), and of air defense units. Other tasks included intelligence operations, building national defense projects and railroads, repairing airfields, studying the construction of naval bases, developing a military command communications network, etc.

The Party Central Committee approved both the national defense budget for the 1955–1959 five-year plan and the plan for distributing and utilizing that budget.

More than two years after the liberation of North Vietnam, the Party Central Committee had met and passed a special resolution regarding the work of building our army and consolidating national defense and had passed a five-year plan for building our armed forces. This was a major event, demonstrating the Party's tight control and leadership over the army. With respect to our army, this was the first time since its establishment that the army would be built in accordance with a long-term plan and under peacetime conditions. The plan set forward basic, overall issues, laying out a concrete program for our army's first step down the road toward becoming a regular, modern army. This was a new problem for our Party, our people, and our soldiers. "This is not just a political problem, it is also a political, economic, and scientific problem. It demands a continuous and vigorous effort by the entire army and the entire population."²

In May 1957 our army began a program of political meetings to study the Resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee on army building and consolidating national defense.

The program of political activities had this goal:

Based on the consolidation of the Party's leadership role in the armed forces, take a step forward in our entire army's understanding of the Party's revolutionary duties and policies during this new phase. In concrete terms, this means understanding both our policy of building North Vietnam during the transitional period as we advance toward socialism and our policy regarding national unification. Our army must at the same time take another step forward in its understanding of the tasks and formulas needed for building up the armed forces and strengthening education in policies and in current events throughout the armed forces.³

During this period, "because of the effects of the errors in implementing the land reform program and in revamping organizations, when considering various problems some cadre and soldiers often have been found deficient in their ability to correctly distinguish between truth and error, between right and wrong. The internal struggle to clearly distinguish between truth and error has also been overly cautious and weak."⁴ A number of cadre and soldiers

do not yet clearly and definitively understand that although the work of completing the people's democratic national revolution in South Vietnam will be a difficult, protracted revolutionary struggle; this is a struggle we are certain to win. They do not yet clearly understand that the task of systematically building North Vietnam into a socialist system is a great revolutionary transformation that will require continuous and vigorous efforts. They do not yet fully realize the difficulties we must overcome. With regard to the work of building our army into a regular, modern force, there have been scattered instances of laxity and a lack of organization and discipline. Mechanical, dogmatic, and reactionary phenomena have surfaced among our ranks. These types of thinking and understanding have affected the spirit of solidarity and the enthusiasm of our troops.⁵

ARMED FORCES POLITICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The first study seminar for high-level cadre from the entire army and for midlevel cadre from the staff agencies of the Ministry of Defense was held in Hanoi under the direct supervision of the General Military Party Committee. Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap, member of the Politburo of the Party Central Committee, Secretary of the General Military Party Committee, and Minister of Defense, personally read aloud to this seminar the Resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee on the tasks and formulas for army building during this new phase. Comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh, member of the Politburo of the Party Central Com-

mittee, Deputy Secretary of the General Military Party Committee, and Director of the General Political Department, presented a document entitled "Increasing Socialist Awareness, Opposing Individualism," which stressed the outstanding revolutionary character and traditions of the army, criticized the effects of capitalist thinking and the appearance of petit bourgeois thoughts, and emphasized the need to guard against and overcome pacifism, the weakening of our combat spirit, individualistic thinking, and arrogance and officiousness.

At the conclusion of the seminar our cadre were honored by a visit from Uncle Ho. Uncle Ho told the seminar,

Your just-concluded studies are in unanimous agreement with the Resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee. That is a very good thing. During this conference, the General Military Party Committee undertook sincere self-criticism, and cadre conducted excellent criticism and made a good first step in self-criticism. You evaluated and distinguished clearly between truth and error, reviewed strengths and deficiencies in our major tasks, clearly saw your own correct thoughts and erroneous thoughts, and more clearly understood the work of building our army. You have strengthened your ideological positions, strengthened solidarity and unanimity from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top. These are achievements upon which you must build.⁶

Uncle Ho appealed to military cadre to "work to help the Party, the Government, and the army resolve problems and exploit advantages, increase our sense of responsibility and our efforts to complete the work of army building, our first and most immediate task being the successful completion of our program of political activity for low-level cadre and soldiers."⁷

During the summer and fall of 1957, mid- and low-level cadre and soldiers of the entire armed forces began a program of political study of the Resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee. "Through this study, our cadre and soldiers took their first step forward in socialist awareness. Proletarian thinking made an all-out counterattack, totally destroying capitalist thinking and erasing feudalistic thinking. A number of cadre who had fallen into error came to their senses. Those who were opportunists or harbored thoughts antagonistic to the Party gradually were exposed."⁸ During this turning point for the revolution and the armed forces, the army firmly maintained its ideology. The entire armed forces united around the Party Central Committee and resolutely fought to protect the Party and defend those principles necessary to build the army.

Following the great success of the 1957 political activity program, in 1958 and 1959 our army conducted many study programs aimed at continuing to increase socialist awareness and at understanding the military and political policies and duties of the Party. Basic Marxist-Leninist theoretical subjects, such as philosophy, political economics, and scientific socialism, were incorporated into

the study programs of all army schools. Cadre from the platoon level up received on-the-job training in historical materialism. Through a proper understanding of theory and methods of thinking, the political awareness of the army's cadre took a clear step forward.

BUILDING SOCIALISM AND AMENDING THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN

In December 1957, at the 13th Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee, Chairman Ho Chi Minh read an important report. For the first time Uncle Ho set out two revolutionary strategies and explained the close relationship between two revolutionary duties. He said:

We are now implementing two revolutionary strategies: the popular democratic nationalist revolution and the socialist revolution. Both these revolutionary duties are important, and to disregard either one would be a mistake. However, the duty of consolidating the North and moving it systematically toward socialism will be of decisive importance for the total victory of the revolution during this new phase. Only if the North is consolidated and advances toward socialism will we have a firm foundation to ensure victory in the struggle to reunify the nation. On the other hand, the preservation and growth of our revolutionary forces in the South is the factor that will directly determine the success of the revolutionary struggle in South Vietnam. At the same time, this factor will also provide strong support to the task of preserving peace and consolidating North Vietnam.⁹

Correctly applying Marxism-Leninism to the specific conditions of our nation in this new situation, the Party Central Committee and Chairman Ho Chi Minh laid out a policy of simultaneously advancing the cause of socialism in the North and advancing the cause of the popular democratic nationalist revolution in the South, thereby raising both the banners of national independence and socialism. This was the combat objective of our army and guided the entire process of army building and combat operations of our armed forces during this new phase.

In 1958 North Vietnam began a period of reform and building socialism, achieving the deepest and most profound revolutionary transformation in all history. The system of exploitation of man by man was basically eliminated. New production relationships in two forms, state ownership and collective ownership, were established. The technical and material structures of socialism began to be established. The Party sent thousands of military cadre and soldiers to our rural areas to explain our policy of collectivization of agriculture. Some units spent their money to help increase production and many cadre and soldiers contributed their own personal savings to purchase agricultural tools to support the coopera-

tives. The date of the establishment of agricultural cooperatives became a great holiday in the rural areas of North Vietnam.

During mid-March 1958 the General Military Party Committee decided to amend the plan for army building, increasing the time frame for the completion of the plan by one year (until 1960) in order to match it to the three-year (1958–1960) State Plan for reform and economic and cultural development, and speeding up the pace of army building in all areas. The major elements included in the amendment to the plan included:

1. Reducing our total troop strength, improving weapons and equipment, developing specialty branch units, and finalizing army administrative systems to turn the armed forces into regulars with the goal of completing the building of a regular, relatively modern Army by 1960. At the same time the full capacity of the armed forces would be utilized for the task of economic development.
2. Continuing the work of training cadre and building military schools.
3. Increasing training and the study of military science.

This plan laid out concrete measures aimed at strengthening the defenses of North Vietnam, preparing for war, building base areas in the Northwest and in the western portion of Region 4, and actively developing a reserve force.

On 20 March 1958, the General Military Party Committee held a conference of high-level cadre from the entire armed forces. During this conference the amendments to the plan for building the army were disseminated. Chairman Ho Chi Minh addressed the conference. He instructed the army on two immediate tasks:

One: Build an ever more powerful and more combat-ready army to maintain peace, defend the nation, protect the building of socialism in North Vietnam, and support the struggle to unify our nation. This task includes building a standing army and developing a reserve force.

Two: Actively participate in production to contribute to our economic development and to the building and consolidation of our rear area.

These two tasks are both important, are in total agreement with one another, and are closely linked, because both are aimed at making our army ever more powerful and North Vietnam ever more secure.¹⁰

On 21 March 1958, the Ministry of Defense issued a directive setting tables of organization and equipment for the specialty branches of the Army and for the first units of the Air Force and Navy.

The Army [Luc Quan] was to consist of the following specialty branches: Infantry, Anti-Aircraft, Artillery, Engineers, and Signal, plus a number of

Armored, Transportation, and Chemical Defense Branch units. The Army would be the primary service branch of our armed forces and would be the decisive force in securing victory on the battlefield.

Within the Army, the Infantry was the primary specialty branch. It was organized into seven divisions, six brigades, and 12 independent regiments, and would have a total of 93,000 soldiers.¹¹

The table of organization strength of an infantry brigade was set at 3,500 soldiers organized into four infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, one anti-aircraft artillery battalion, and smaller units of signal, engineer, chemical defense, reconnaissance, transportation, and military medical troops.

The table of organization strength of an infantry division was set at 8,689 soldiers organized into three infantry regiments, one artillery regiment, and a number of support units.¹² Two-thirds of the infantry's weapons were modernized by replacing older weapons with SKS rifles, AK submachine guns, RPD light machine guns, and "Cooc-ni-lop" [*sic*] medium machine guns, all firing the same caliber bullet, and with the "Bazooka 40" [B-40, the Russian RPG-2]. All these weapons were made in the Soviet Union, China, and other fraternal socialist countries. The firepower of an infantry division in 1960 was equal to the firepower of our entire army at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. With vastly increased combat power, our infantry divisions and brigades were our army's tactical combat units.

The Artillery Branch, the principal fire support element of our army, had under the direct control of the Artillery Command a table of organization strength of 17,500 troops. These forces were organized into four 122mm howitzer brigades (the 364th, 368th, 374th, and 378th), four regiments (the 82nd, 14th, 204th, and 208th) of long-barreled 85mm and 122mm cannon, and four regiments (the 214th, 218th, 224th, and 228th) of 88mm and 57mm anti-aircraft guns. Besides these mobile reserve artillery units under the High Command, the branch also included the artillery regiments and anti-aircraft battalions organic to our military regions and infantry divisions. Although their primary weapons had previously been shoulder-fired artillery pieces, now our artillery troops were equipped with numerous long-range, powerful field artillery pieces, signaling a tremendous leap forward in the quantity and quality of our artillery forces.¹³

Anti-aircraft troops (the principal ground-to-air firepower of our Army) under the direction of the Anti-Aircraft Command and directly subordinate to the Ministry of Defense and the High Command, had a table of organization strength of 7,500 soldiers organized into six anti-aircraft regiments (the 210th, 220th, 230th, 240th, 250th, and 280th) equipped with 75mm, 90mm, and 100mm anti-aircraft guns, and two radar regiments (the 260th and 290th) equipped with P-8 radars. On 1 March 1959, for the first time our radars sent out their signals, defending the skies of the Fatherland. 01 March was designated as the official birthday of the Radar Branch.

Our Armored troops were established on 5 October 1959 with the formation of the initial regiment, made up of 202 cadre and soldiers and designated the

202nd Regiment. The regiment was equipped with 35 T-34 tanks and 16 CAY-76 76mm self-propelled guns produced by the Soviet Union. The birth of our armored troops was a new step forward for our army in increasing its assault power.

Our Engineer troops, the combat support force of our army, were under the command of the Engineer Department and had a table of organization strength of 4,500 troops organized into two construction regiments (the 229th and 239th) and two bridge and river-crossing regiments (the 219th and 249th) equipped with 200 specialized vehicles and a number of portable bridges and ferries. In addition, our engineer force also included the engineer battalions and companies of our military regions, infantry divisions, and brigades. The growth of the Engineer Branch provided a significant increase in the mobility of the branches of the Army.

Our Signal troops, the force that supported our army's command coordination in combat, were under the command of the Signal and Liaison Department. They had a table of organization strength of 3,000 troops organized into the 303rd Regiment,¹⁴ which had three battalions (wireless, telephone, and cable construction). In addition to these troops were the signal battalions and companies and the general signal stations of our military regions and divisions. The birth of our first signal regiment marked a new stage in the development of our military signal and communications branch.

Our Chemical Defense troops had a table of organization strength of 600 troops organized into one independent battalion directly subordinate to the General Staff and eight chemical defense units subordinate to the infantry divisions. Our chemical troops were equipped with a number of flamethrowers, 214 specialized vehicles, and more than 4,000 gas masks and chemical protective suits. These were the first units of our Chemical Defense Branch, the branch responsible, together with our other armed forces and the civilian population, for defending against the enemy's chemical weapons of mass destruction.

Our Transportation troops had a table of organization strength of 2,000 soldiers organized into three truck transportation companies (the 225th, 235th, and 245th), subordinate to the General Department of Rear Services and equipped with 1,600 vehicles, and one river transportation unit equipped with boats. In addition to these troops were the transportation companies and battalions subordinate to our military regions and infantry divisions and brigades.

Air Force troops had a table of organization strength of 2,000 soldiers organized into the 919th Air Transport Regiment, equipped with 39 Soviet-made IL-14 and AN-2 aircraft, and a number of cadre and enlisted framework units for our first air combat regiment, which was then in training abroad. In January 1959 the Air Force Department of the General Staff was established to provide an organization to exert command over Air Force facilities and to administer our airfields. This was the initial component that formed the foundation for building the Air Force into a modern Service Branch.

Our Navy had a table of organization strength of 1,300 sailors organized into two coastal patrol boat groups (the 130th and 135th) equipped with four 50-ton patrol craft and 24 79-ton patrol craft. These boats were armed with 20mm and 40mm guns and were equipped with radar. In January 1959, the Navy Department of the General Staff was established to provide command over naval units and to administer navy port facilities.

In this manner, during the implementation of our first five-year plan to build our army and consolidate national defense (1955–1960), our armed forces took a step forward in developing specialty branches and significantly increased the firepower, assault power, and mobility of the Army. By 1960 troops of the technical specialty branches made up 49 percent of the total strength of the armed forces.

In April 1959 a number of security troop units and provincial local force troops, totaling 8,000 soldiers, were transformed into People's Armed Public Security forces whose administration, command, and training was provided by the Ministry of the Interior.

Security troops [bo doi bao ve] totaled 4,500 soldiers organized into ten battalions under the command of the General Staff and the military regions.

Based on our need to divide up the battlefields in accordance with our overall strategic deployment and the requirements of overseeing the work of army building, the Party Central Committee and the Government decided to divide North Vietnam into six military regions: The Viet Bac Military Region, the Northeast Military Region, the Northwest Military Region, the Right Bank Military Region, the Left Bank Military Region, and Military Region 4. During peacetime the military regions would oversee all activities related to combat readiness (including building of national defense fortifications), troop training, and the maintenance of security and public order in their areas. The Military Region Headquarters was the highest-level military organization in each strategic area. These headquarters were responsible for implementing the military policies and missions laid down by the Central Committee, the General Military Party Committee, and the Ministry of Defense; for guiding and leading national defense operations and building military capabilities during peacetime; and for providing guidance and command to armed forces located in the military region during time of war.¹⁵

Local military organizations at the province, district, and village level were all uniformly designated as provincial units, district units, and village units.

The General Staff, the General Political Department, the General Rear Services Department, and the headquarters of the military regions and the specialty branches were all reorganized in accordance with new tables of organization in order to effectively provide guidance and command to an army made up of many specialty branches. The General Cadre Department was reorganized into the Cadre Department of the General Political Department. The General Military Training Department was reorganized into the Military Training Department of the General Staff.

The implementation of this new table of organization structure was the target of a continuous effort by our army lasting for three years, from 1958 to 1960. With a new overall troop strength (160,000 soldiers) appropriate to the situation and a rationalized organizational structure and modernized equipment, the combat strength of our army was increased to a significant extent in response to the needs and responsibilities of the immediate situation. At the same time we established the organizational structure of an army made up of many combined-arms specialty branches.

To implement our policy of reducing the number of soldiers in our standing army and providing additional personnel for the work of economic development, tens of thousands of cadre and soldiers were transferred to state governmental agencies and state enterprises.¹⁶ Older soldiers and those whose health would not permit long-term service in the armed services were demobilized or transferred to other areas. Military regions, divisions, brigades, and independent regiments also established their own units to build headquarters facilities and to build national defense construction projects. These units became national defense worker teams that built a large percentage of the offices, residences, garages and armories, training schools, rehabilitation clinics and hospitals, warehouses, etc., of our army. [Note: A "national defense worker" (cong nhan quoc phong) is a civilian employee of the Ministry of Defense.]

Troops that were declared in excess of the new tables of organization of a number of units¹⁷ were organized into regiments and battalions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Defense. These new units built a strategic road network in the Northwest, participated in the construction of the Viet Tri and Thai Nguyen Industrial Zones, and built 35 state farms in Dien Bien Phu, Moc Chau, Yen Bai, Phu Tho, Son Tay, Hoa Binh, Phat Diem, and the western portions of Nghe An, Ha Tinh, and Quang Binh provinces. Working on this new battlefield, these units displayed the outstanding traditions of the armed forces, maintained tight organization and control over labor resources, and achieved a high level of economic efficiency. The 98th, 85th, and 83rd Regiments, working in the Northwest, became excellent bridge-building units. The cadre and soldiers who built our state farms became socialist agricultural workers, at the same time serving as reserve troops for our army. Many of the state farms built by our armed forces later became locations where troops were stationed, and some state farms later served as the foundations for the construction of the troop and supply transit stations of our strategic supply corridor during the war against the Americans to save the nation. However, because we did not correctly foresee how the situation would develop, when we transferred part of the army to the civilian sector to work on economic development duties we did not retain a sufficient number of cadre and troops familiar with the battlefields in South Vietnam to enable our army to adequately respond to developments in the revolutionary war in the South.

STRENGTHENING PARTY CONTROL AND CADRE TRAINING

To strengthen the Party's leadership over the army, with the approval of the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Party Central Committee, the General Military Party Committee issued a number of regulations regarding the duties, authority and relationships between the staff agencies of the Ministry of Defense and the staff agencies of the Party Central Committee and of the Government. Military Region Party Committees under the direct leadership of the General Military Party Committee were established. The responsibilities, authority, and relationships between the military regions and provincial units and the local Party committees and local governmental authorities were also clearly spelled out.

Campaigns for "raising socialist awareness and honing the proletarian positions and beliefs of Party members" and "building strong Party chapters" were carried out throughout the army. Party members studied documents entitled "Becoming a Good Party Member" and "The Duties and Authority of Party Members." The Party system of collective democracy and Party development activities were carried out in a vigorous, uniform manner in accordance with a careful formula that placed primary emphasis on quality. Between 1954 and 1958 military Party chapters inducted 35,000 new Party members. After transferring a large number of cadre and Party members to State governmental agencies and enterprises or to local areas, Party members still made up between 30 to 40 percent of the total troop strength of our armed forces. In 1957 we began to conduct Party chapter congresses from the battalion up to the division level. This was a wide-ranging political program aimed at implementing the system of collective democracy, strengthening the all-encompassing leadership of Party committees at all levels, increasing criticism and self-criticism, and strengthening Party and political activities. The Vietnam Labor Youth Group was established within the army. By 1958 the entire armed forces had 3,000 Youth Group chapters and Youth Group members made up 51 percent of all cadre and soldiers in the age groups eligible for membership. After education to increase their political knowledge and their understanding of the importance of organization and discipline and after practicing propaganda campaigns among the masses, our Youth Group chapters became our assault units in the army-building and combat operations of all basic [low-level] units of our army.

In November 1958 the General Military Party Committee convened a conference of all political commissars and political directors from the entire armed forces to disseminate a draft of proposed regulations for political activities within the People's Army of Vietnam. These regulations laid out the nature, duties, and principal content of all political activities in order to strengthen the Party's leadership over the army, set forward the duties and authority of political staff organizations, and to serve as the basis for all Party and political activities within the army.

In 1958, under the direct guidance of Comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh, the General Political Department completed a review of the army's Party and political

activities during the resistance war against the French.¹⁸ This review laid out the history of the force-building and combat activities of our army, focusing on the history of the Party's leadership role in the army. The building, maturation, and victory of our army was directly related to the unceasing consolidation and strengthening of Party and political activities within the army. The total, un-contested leadership of the Party in political, ideological, and organizational matters was of decisive importance in enabling our armed forces to achieve maturity and gain victory. Party leadership was implemented through political and military policies and through a Party organizational network within the army and a tightly controlled system of Party and political activities.

Use centralized democracy as the system and collective leadership as the highest principle for the Party's leadership. During periods of savage warfare as well as during this period of peace in which we are building our army into a regular, modern force, this principle must be absolutely respected. Practical experience has proven that through the strict implementation of this principle we have been able to maintain internal solidarity within the Party and, on that basis, have maintained solidarity within the army. Also through this principle we have been able to exploit the intellect of the Party and of the masses, reducing subjectivism and narrow-mindedness within the leadership and avoiding and preventing the vices of individualistic exercising of power, arbitrariness, and anarchy.¹⁹

It was therefore necessary to carefully build a strong, honest system of Party organization within the army; to unceasingly work to strengthen the working-class character and the revolutionary traditions of the army; to keep the army loyal to the Fatherland, to maintain a flesh-and-blood connection with the workers; to provide unquestioning support to the Party's leadership; and to fulfill the army's role as the reliable, sharp tool of the proletarian dictatorship of the State. Political work within the army took education in Marxism-Leninism and in the policies and directions of the Party as its basic responsibility. Political work also did an excellent job in persuading cadre and soldiers to strictly adhere to discipline and rules and regulations, delved deeply into technical and tactical subjects, and contributed to caring for the material and spiritual needs of the troops.

The completion of the review of Party and political activities and the dissemination of draft regulations for political work were important events that contributed to maintaining our principles for developing a revolutionary army as we moved toward building a regular, modern force. These two events helped to raise the level of political awareness of our cadre and soldiers, to implement our system of collective leadership, to stimulate democracy, and to respond to the requirements and responsibilities of our army in pursuing the cause of socialist revolution and the struggle to unify our nation.

With regard to the need to build up the cadre ranks of our army, the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee declared that we must "develop our

cadre ranks to provide them a basic understanding of Marxism-Leninism, a certain level of cultural, scientific, and technical education, school them in modern tactics, and give them a firm grasp of modern military tactics and technology."²⁰ This was one of our most important responsibilities in the work of building our army and was the central component of our peacetime training program.

During the resistance war against the French colonialists, our army had developed a corps of cadre who were absolutely loyal to the Party, were aware of the ideals of the revolution, and were experienced in combat. Because our combat requirements were continuous and urgent, however, our cadre did not receive basic training in the art and science of modern warfare and their educational level was still low.²¹

As we moved into this new phase, the General Military Party Committee issued the following directive on cadre operations: "While firmly maintaining both our moral and skills standards, we must be extremely aggressive in promoting cadre from the worker and peasant classes while appropriately promoting cadre from other classes who have been tested and have demonstrated a progressive attitude and loyalty to the revolution."²² In accordance with the spirit of this directive, during a six-year period (from 1955 through 1960) our army promoted 32,636 cadre one or two grade levels. Some problems appeared during the implementation of this directive, such as emphasizing only the above standards and disregarding the need to provide supplementary education to cadre from the worker and peasant classes. There were also problems with an excessive emphasis on ideology and continued prejudice and narrow-mindedness toward cadre who came from other backgrounds. Because our Party had correct cadre policies and regulations, and thanks to timely adjustments instituted by the General Military Party Committee, these mistaken tendencies were limited and finally overcome.

Having received both on-the-job and school training, platoon, company, and battalion-level cadre all were able to draw up unit training plans and programs for each separate phase of activity. They knew how to organize and conduct troop training in the style of a regular army. Mid- and high-level cadre underwent a yearly training program in theory, politics, and military affairs. Basic education was an element of training activities. Many collective basic education classes were organized at the unit level. The Military Cultural [Basic Education] School was established. The number of professionally trained education teachers within the armed forces grew to more than 1,000.

In April 1956, the Army Officers School of Vietnam, commanded by Comrade Le Trong Tan and Political Commissar Le Quang Hoa, began training its 10th Class in Hanoi. Almost 4,000 political and military cadets, both infantry and specialty branch students, received training and supplementary education in accordance with a basic, long-term study program. This was our largest cadre class, and most of the units of our army were represented within its ranks. Comrade Pham Van Dong, member of the Politburo of the Central Committee and Prime Minister, and Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap, member of the Politburo

of the Central Committee, Deputy Prime Minister, and concurrently Minister of Defense, attended the opening ceremony for this class.

On 6 April 1958, after two years of study, the school held a graduation ceremony. The cadre and soldiers assigned to the school and the school's students were extremely honored to greet Uncle Ho, who attended the ceremony. Discussing the duties of the students after their return to their units, Uncle Ho emphasized that "you must aggressively apply those things you have learned here, but you must apply them in a practical way, appropriate to our current situation. Do not try to apply them in a dogmatic, mechanical manner."

Based on the ever-increasing requirements of our specialty branches, on 18 February 1958 the artillery training curriculum was detached from the Army Officers School and the Artillery Officers School was established. On 30 March 1959 the engineering curriculum was taken out of the Army Officers School and the Engineer Officers School was established.

The Rear Services Cadre School²³ expanded its training and supplementary education of cadre to include specialized quartermaster, weapons, ordnance, vehicle administration, transportation, and POL [petroleum, oil, and lubricants] training. The Military Medical School became the Medical Officers School, which began training military medical cadre at the university level.

Both the Mid- and High-Level Political Supplementary Training School and the Mid- and High-Level Military Supplementary Training School were established in May 1955, based on the Mid- and High-Level Political-Military School that was established during the resistance war against the French. These two schools continued to hold supplementary training classes in military and political subjects. The basic topics of these training classes were basic Marxist-Leninist theory; the military and revolutionary policies of the Party; strategic, campaign-level, and tactical problems in modern warfare; command, Party, and political operations; and rear service-technical operations within the armed forces. Although they were still small and their facilities and equipment were limited, our regular military schools systematically increased the quality of their instruction and played an important role in the training of a corps of cadres with a good basic, general level of knowledge, which responded to our requirements for building and developing our army.²⁴

By 1960, of the total number of cadre from platoon level up in our army (34,856 individuals), 15,564 cadre (including infantry and specialty branch cadre, military, political, and rear services cadre) had received either basic or supplementary training at the military training schools within our nation. In addition, 2,400 cadre of all ranks had been sent abroad to more than 40 military institutes and training schools in the Soviet Union, China, and other fraternal socialist nations. This was a major achievement in the work of building the cadre ranks of our army. This achievement ensured that our army would be able to fulfill its immediate duties of army building and combat readiness and provided an excellent foundation for further progress within the army in the future.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES AND ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

On 20 December 1958, Chairman Ho Chi Minh signed a decree that promulgated a system of service for officers, a salary system, and an awards and commendations system for the People's Army of Vietnam. The entire army was enthusiastic about receiving rank insignia reflecting the level of duties being performed and about receiving medals and victory commendations acknowledging their achievements in the nation's sacred resistance war. The salary system reflected the deep concern of the Party and the State for our army. The standard of living of our cadre took a step forward.

The entire nation was gratified by the honor and maturity of our army and applauded the concern and care shown by our Party and our State for the armed forces. At the ceremony bestowing rank insignia on our high-level cadre,²⁵ Chairman Ho Chi Minh gave the following lesson: "No matter what your position, you comrades must always serve as examples, you must always show yourselves worthy of being the loyal, complete servants of the people."

The implementation of a system of universal military service was a major reform in the work of developing the armed forces of our nation and was intimately related to the lives and the ideological thinking of the population and the army. For our army, the implementation of universal military service created conditions that enabled us to reduce the size of our standing army; implement the standards and systems for transforming our forces into a regular army; build up reserve forces; and strengthen forces devoted to the work of economic development. Universal military service was an appropriate measure to support our needs and responsibilities for army building in this new phase.

In 1958, the provinces of Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho, Nghe An, and a number of other local areas began, on a trial basis, to call youths into the army in accordance with the new system of universal military service. In August 1958, the General Staff convened a conference on building up our reserve forces in North Vietnam. The conference decided that, along with the induction of troops under a system of universal military service, we would also implement a program to register and administer all cadre and soldiers of the People's Army under the age of 45 who had been discharged or transferred to civilian jobs, and to register and administer all youths between the ages of 18 and 25 and all technical personnel employed by State agencies who met the physical standards and other requirements for service in the reserves. The conference decided to provide military training to reserve troops for a period of between ten and 15 days each year, to provide military training to students at universities and at technical high schools, and to expand the national defense physical education and sports movement for workers.

In April 1960, Chairman Ho Chi Minh signed an order implementing the national universal military service law.

Soldiers who had volunteered for service during the resistance war against the French colonialists and who had been discharged or transferred to work in

State enterprises or agencies were registered for service in the reserve forces of the army. A class of youth who had just reached the age of service under the new system, who met the physical and educational requirements, and who clearly understood their duties to the Fatherland and to the people of our nation were mobilized into the army for a three-year term of service. The army became a giant school for an entire generation of our youth.

By 1960, alongside our standing army, which was step-by-step being transformed into a regular, modern force, North Vietnam had organized a powerful reserve force totaling 780,000 soldiers, of whom 750,000 were youths from 18 to 25 years of age and 30,000 were veterans who had been discharged. Of the total number of reservists registered for service, 130,000 were Category 1 reserves. This group was held under tight administrative control and received excellent military training so that, whenever the order was given, they could be rapidly sent to reinforce units of our standing army.

Together with the implementation of systems for military ranks, salaries, awards and commendations, and compulsory military service, in 1956 our army began to study and implement the system of general army regulations consisting of internal regulations, unit regulations, disciplinary regulations, and guard regulations.

The draft internal regulations set forward the responsibilities of our soldiers, command relationships within the army, and internal systems and rules.²⁶ Unit relations, disciplinary regulations, and draft security regulations covered the administration of troop activities, discipline, troop conduct, and provided guidance for soldiers to carry out their duties while engaged in regular activities, training, and in combat.

In all units, from the barracks to the training fields, everything was carried out strictly in accordance with regulations. Daily life was strictly regulated and orderly. Patrols and guard duty, orderly duties, and combat alerts were all tightly organized. Understanding of the importance of adherence to orders and regulations was high. All cadre and soldiers studied and developed a thorough understanding of the requirements of these regulations. There was uniformity in basic combat procedures. Troops were trained to act seriously and swiftly and to always be vigilant and ready for combat. This was a long, patient struggle aimed at overcoming old habits from guerrilla and dispersed times and habits based on the individualistic and haphazard nature of a small-scale production economy. We developed a workers' attitude directly linked to the requirements of modern industry and inculcated in our soldiers the serious self-discipline of a revolutionary army. Although a few units still displayed manifestations of emphasizing only the mechanical and external implementation of regulations, and there were occasions when misunderstandings and mistakes occurred and when the regulations themselves were seen as the most important factor, in general the implementation of these regular army regulations produced good results and marked a new level of maturity in the organization and discipline of our army from 1954 to 1960.

COMBAT TRAINING

With regard to military training, the 12th Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee clearly stated that training was the central requirement for the completion of the work of building an army in peacetime. Working from a foundation of uniform organizational and unit structures, troop assignments were rather stable, material support facilities were strengthened, and training activities systematically began to turn the army into a regular force.

All platoon and company-level cadre and 50 percent of all cadre from the battalion level on up received instruction and training that was uniform both in content and methods.

Soldiers studied weapons theory and were trained in shooting techniques, the use of bayonets, grenade throwing, and breaching and overcoming obstacles. In addition to basic weapons training, practical fire and night firing lessons were incorporated into the training program. Training in physical fitness and sports was considered a part of the technical training program.

With regard to tactics, all units were trained from the squad up to the battalion level in offensive and defensive combat in regular terrain, and steps were taken to study and begin training in combat methods for use in mountain jungle terrain, in swampy rice fields, in river crossings, and night combat operations.

Yearly military training conferences were held both at the basic unit level and for the entire army. Infantry and artillery troops made clear progress in their firing techniques. Armored, engineer, signal, reconnaissance, etc., troops began to understand and properly utilize the technical equipment of their specialty branches.

After three years of basic-level training (from 1955 to 1957), individual and small-unit combat capabilities, technical knowledge, and tactical skills were raised to a high level. This was a very important factor that enabled us to begin training in combined-arms combat at the regimental and division level and to increase studies in the implementation of various forms of tactics.

In May 1957 the General Staff held a tactical exercise involving a regimental attack on enemy forces occupying prepared defensive positions. The objective of this exercise was to review the application of basic-level tactics in actual terrain conditions and to use the table of organization, weapons, and equipment levels on which our army was then based. The force conducting this exercise was the 88th Regiment of the 308th Division, reinforced by a number of the division's military specialty subunits. Chairman Ho Chi Minh himself came to the exercise range to observe the soldiers during this live fire exercise.

The success of this exercise marked a new step forward for our army in its ability to conduct massed regimental-level combat operations supported by specialty branch units. At the same time, the exercise revealed certain deficiencies in the application of modern combat principles to the actual conditions of our nation and our army and revealed that combat coordination between the three types of troops had not yet been truly achieved.

Speaking to the cadre and soldiers of the 308th Division and to representatives of units from all parts of our armed forces who participated in the exercise, Uncle Ho directed that combat by our main force troops must be closely coordinated with guerrilla warfare conducted by our entire population. It was necessary, he said, to draw on the experiences and build on the excellent traditions of the division during the resistance war against the French to carry out the tasks of training and development of the unit.²⁷

During 1958, the General Staff directed the 324th and 325th Divisions in conducting defensive combat exercises in the Military Region 4 area and directed the 320th Division during an exercise in which they attacked an enemy force conducting an amphibious landing in low-lying rice-field terrain on the right bank of the Red River. The Mid- and High-Level Military School directed the 335th Brigade in an exercise involving combat against an enemy airborne landing in mountain jungle terrain in the Northwest. During 1958 we also carried out 48 command-post exercises at the division and regimental levels of various units. Along with "shooting congresses" and reviews at the end of training cycles, these combat exercises represented an important method for increasing the combat power and the combat readiness of our army during peacetime.

In March 1959, the General Staff held a conference to review combat training activities during the past four years (1955–1958). The conference affirmed that the formulas, principles, and content of our training program were fundamentally correct and that it was essential that the lessons must be properly absorbed by the troops. The results of the training courses conducted during the 1954–1959 period had "increased the command abilities and our cadres' and soldiers' basic understanding of modern warfare and provided a foundation for the study and development of our tactics."

The conference criticized "the appearance of instances of mechanistic actions and responses to situations based solely on the strictures of our regulations without studying and employing fighting methods appropriate to the actual equipment and weaponry of our army and to the special characteristics of the battlefields of our nation. In these instances, attention was being paid only to basic training, and there was a failure to apply training to our actual combat responsibilities."²⁸

The General Staff decreed that by 1960 preliminary conclusions should be drawn up regarding the primary tactical problems facing our army. The General Staff assigned to the military regions, divisions, and brigades the responsibility of studying a number of different types of tactics. To implement the Resolution of the 12th Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee and the instructions of Chairman Ho Chi Minh,† the General Military Party Committee decided to immediately conduct a review of our combat and army-building experiences during the resistance war against the French, to elevate these experiences to a new level of importance, and to apply them in the development and training of our army.

In an atmosphere of enthusiasm, as the rural areas of North Vietnam underwent agricultural collectivization, a new emulation movement arose among the people's armed forces—a movement to advance military science, to expand training activities, and to build the army into a regular, modern force.

The 364th Artillery Brigade began a study program to train its troops to become “fully qualified artillerymen.”²⁹ The 1st Battalion of the 305th Infantry Brigade launched a movement to “take the lead.” The 2nd Company of the Left Bank Military Region came in first in the physical fitness program and was awarded the title “Fast-as-the-Wind Company.” The General Political Department compiled and disseminated the experiences gained in these programs and publicized exemplary units and individuals. In November 1958 the General Military Party Committee launched an emulation campaign to “advance rapidly to complete and overfulfill the army-building plan.”

Following in the footsteps of the “Train Troops to Accomplish Feats of Valor” movement and the other emulation movements during the resistance war against the French colonialists, these were “socialist patriotic emulation movements, for the cause of the struggle for unification, to build the army and consolidate national defense. In truth, they were movements reflecting the consciousness of the masses, with education and leadership provided by the Party.”³⁰

These training and army-building movements were strengthened by our hatred for the United States and Diem. On 1 December 1958 the enemy viciously poisoned and murdered hundreds of cadre and patriotic citizens being held in the Phu Loi prison. The fascist actions of the U.S.-Diem clique created a wave of bitterness among all classes of the population of North Vietnam. Millions of people in North Vietnam attended meetings and demonstrations demanding revenge for our brothers in the South. Thinking about the South, producing and working for the sake of the South, became a great movement among all classes of the population of North Vietnam. Training geared for the Southern battlefields and readiness to march to the South to fight became a requirement for and the sincere goal of all units and of every single cadre and soldier in our army in the North.

The 324th Infantry Division and the 305th Infantry Brigade expanded training in troop movement operations, in moving vehicles and artillery through jungle mountains and lowland terrain cut by many rivers and creeks, in coordinating infantry with sappers and infantry with artillery to destroy fortified “enemy” strong points. A number of units of the 305th Brigade began airborne training to become paratroopers.

The 330th Infantry Division trained for combat in low-lying terrain with many villages and hamlets, rivers, streams, and water-covered fields. They trained to attack “enemy troops” while the enemy was moving or to temporarily shift over to the defensive.

The 335th Infantry Brigade studied and trained in offensive and defensive combat operations in jungle mountain terrain to prepare themselves to return to the battlefields of Laos to carry out their international duties.

The mobile divisions, brigades, and regiments of the High Command studied and trained in combat operations supported by artillery and armor provided by higher levels. They practiced long-range marches and prepared to carry out their assignments on any battlefield whenever the order was given.

Military Region 4 began to study and train in methods for organizing and supporting our troops to enable them to conduct field marches and field operations while they were on the road to the battlefield.

In 1960, all the developmental tasks of the first five-year military plan had been accomplished by our armed forces. Following the period of combat and army building during the resistance war against the French, our armed forces had developed and matured to a new level, a transition level in the quality of our combat power, thereby laying the foundation for the development of our army into an increasingly modern and increasingly regular force ready to respond to the new tasks and responsibilities of the revolution in both North and South Vietnam.

SITUATION IN THE SOUTH AND THE DEBATE ABOUT ARMED STRUGGLE

In South Vietnam, after two years of consolidating their ruling apparatus, the United States and Diem had built up a reactionary armed force with modern equipment totaling 150,000 regular soldiers and 100,000 Regional Force, militia, and police troops. The enemy concentrated this entire force to implement their policy of "denouncing and eliminating Communists," savagely oppressing our revolutionary forces and our revolutionary movement.

As they were being terrorized by the enemy, the people of South Vietnam were filled with hatred and longed to use weapons to fight the enemy. In a number of localities, however, there was still confusion over what kinds of activities and struggle methods should be used. For this reason our revolutionary forces suffered losses and our struggle movement encountered new difficulties. The policy and methods to advance the revolutionary cause in the South became the subject of vigorous study by our Party.

In June 1956 the Politburo issued a resolution regarding the responsibilities of the revolution in the South for the immediate future. The Politburo stated clearly that "our struggle method throughout the country is presently political struggle, not armed struggle. To say this does not mean, however, that we will never employ self-defense measures in limited situations."³¹ The policy laid out by the Politburo was to "once again develop armed forces up to a specified level. . . . to organize self-defense measures among the masses aimed at defending our struggle movements and rescuing our cadres when necessary."³² To achieve this goal "we must consolidate the armed and paramilitary forces we presently possess and build bases for use as rest and fallback areas. We must also build strong mass organizations that will enable us to maintain and build armed forces."³³

On 18 August 1956 the Politburo sent a letter to the Cochinchina Party Committee setting forward more clearly a number of concrete tasks to be implemented in South Vietnam:

In the current situation, we must organize self-defense units in the villages and hamlets and in factories, city blocks, and schools. The duties of these self-defense units will be to maintain order and defend the mass struggle movements, to provide communications and warnings, to guard cadre meetings, and to rescue cadre when the need arises. . . . Unit members must be Labor Youth members or Party members and should be organized into teams and units with an assigned unit commander and unit deputy commander.³⁴

These were correct, timely policies that would have a significant effect on the maintenance and development of our self-defense armed forces in the South. Because communications were difficult, however, many localities in South Vietnam never received the June 1956 Politburo resolution.

In August 1956, Comrade Le Duan, a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee who had been ordered by Chairman Ho Chi Minh and the Politburo to remain behind to lead the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam, wrote the "Tenets of the Revolution in South Vietnam." This document affirmed that the road to advance the revolution in South Vietnam was the road of revolutionary violence.

After fully studying the resolution of the Politburo, in December 1956 the Cochinchina Party Committee held an expanded meeting, including a number of secretaries of interprovincial Party committees and secretaries of provincial Party committees in Cochinchina. Comrade Le Duan, Politburo member, and Comrade Nguyen Van Linh, Acting Secretary of the Cochinchina Party Committee, presided over this meeting. This conference passed a resolution on the organization and operating procedures for self-defense armed forces. The resolution had been drafted by Nguyen Minh Duong, Secretary of the Central Cochinchina Interprovincial Party Committee.

The resolution affirmed that

at the present time, when the entire South is conducting a political struggle, it is not yet time to launch guerrilla warfare. Instead our policy should be to conduct armed propaganda operations. Armed propaganda units are armed operations units. Propaganda team members and cadre will reveal the true face of the enemy to the people. They will encourage hatred, develop revolutionary organizations among the masses, suppress enemy thugs and intelligence agents, win the support of enemy troops, proselytize puppet troops and governmental personnel to support our mass struggle movements, and limit any combat with the enemy that might reveal our forces. In organizational terms, we will establish separate squads and platoons. These units will be dispersed into cells and squads for purposes of living, traveling, and oper-

ations, but they must be organized into platoons with a command section to administer the unit, carry out political operations, and train the unit's troops. Their equipment must be light. Training for these units should include propaganda operations, education in inciting the masses, persuading enemy troops, and increasing understanding of the Party and knowledge of a number of military technical areas.³⁵

Through the resolution of the Politburo and the resolution of the Cochin China Party Committee, our Party once again affirmed that the road to the development of the revolution in the South was the road of revolutionary violence.

With a full understanding of the guidance from the Party Central Committee, in response to the wishes of the masses and applying the guiding thoughts of Chairman Ho Chi Minh and their own experience with armed propaganda prior to the August Revolution to the new historical conditions in which they found themselves, the Cochin China Party Committee and the local Party committees in South Vietnam set forward appropriate policies and operational procedures that played a decisive role in the maintenance and development of our armed self-defense forces in the South and gradually seized the initiative in developing the revolutionary struggle and countering the new strategic measures being implemented by the United States and the Diem regime.

Beginning as early as 1957, to implement their "Communist denunciation, Communist elimination" policy, the United States and Diem mobilized a large portion of their regular troops as well as local armed forces and the puppet local governmental apparatus to increase acts of terror and oppression against the people. They began to concentrate the population, establish "new farming land" areas and "population concentration" areas, and carry out stringent population-control measures aimed at separating the people from the forces of the revolution. They established prisons all the way down to the village and local group level, and they tortured and murdered cadre, Party members, and citizens sympathetic to the revolution. They suppressed demonstrations and strikes by workers and the laboring classes in the cities. In 1957 they promulgated "Decree 57," which declared that land the revolution had distributed to the peasants had been illegally seized and forced the peasants to sign contracts, pay tribute, and return the land to the landlords.

White terror gripped the rural areas and cities of South Vietnam. In 1955, after our soldiers regrouped to the North, many provinces in South Vietnam still had several thousand cadre and Party members, and every village had a village Party chapter. By 1958-1959 many villages had no Party chapter, and many Party chapters numbered only two or three members. Only 5,000 Party members were left in all of Cochin China.³⁶ In Central Vietnam 70 percent of all Party chapter members, 60 percent of all district Party committee members, and 40 percent of all provincial Party committee members had been arrested or killed. A number of lowland districts had no Party organization left at all. In Cochin China

75,000 hectares of land that had been granted to the peasants by the revolution during the resistance war against the French were taken back by the Diem puppet regime. "The masses are filled with hate for the enemy but they are being savagely oppressed. They are being forced virtually to their knees and are unable to stand up against this."³⁷

While all looked with longing toward Uncle Ho and North Vietnam, the revolutionary base area of the entire nation, the Party members and people of South Vietnam displayed a firm resolve not to buckle under to their vicious enemy. Even when viciously tortured to death, our cadre, Party members, and revolutionary citizens maintained their spirit, refusing to surrender, betray, or abandon the revolution.

There were continual struggles by workers and laborers in the cities demanding their rights and demanding democracy, fierce battles by the peasants to combat relocation and land-grabbing activities, and armed defensive struggles by ethnic minority peoples of the mountainous areas to protect their ancestral lands. In many locations our citizens dug up the weapons that had been cached in 1954, seized weapons from the enemy, beat their scythes into halberds and spears, or even used peasant scarves to secretly eliminate traitors, spies, informers, and police thugs.

Implementing the Party's policies concerning political struggle supported by armed self-defense, our local areas organized and developed hard-core organizations from Party members down through loyal civilians to the masses of the population to recruit and maintain contact with our agents within the traitor associations, self-defense forces, and even in a number of regular units of the puppet army. Self-defense units to protect the staff organizations of our province and district Party committees and secret armed squads and platoons were organized in many provinces. In Saigon and Cho Lon our self-defense forces grew out of the movement fighting against Diem's efforts to evict citizens and seize their property, and then remained in existence disguised under such names as volunteer fire prevention and fire-fighting associations, antirobbery associations, etc. In the villages and hamlets of the rural lowlands "secret action" cells and units were established. Faced with the demands of the masses and the need to protect our revolutionary organizations, a number of provincial and district Party committees ordered these cells and units into action to eliminate the most dangerous and vicious traitors, spies, and hooligans in local areas. In Rach Gia, Ca Mau, Kien Phong, Kien Tuong, Ben Tre, and many other locations the killing of such traitors, spies, and police thugs raised the morale of the people, caused divisions in the enemy's ranks, and reduced acts of terrorism by the enemy.

In the U Minh Forest in western Cochin China and the Plain of Reeds in central Cochin China, armed units operating under the guise of armed forces of the Binh Xuyen and of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects were consolidated and reorganized by provincial Party committees into a number of armed propaganda units. These included the "Ngo Van So Battalion" and the "Dinh Tien Hoang Battalion" in Ca Mau province, the "U Minh Battalion" in Rach Gia, the

“502nd Battalion” in Kien Phong, the “504th Battalion” in Kien Tuong, the “506th Battalion” in Long An, and the “512th Battalion” in An Giang. In the base areas of eastern Cochin China, the Cochin China Party Committee gathered together a number of armed units and groups and, bringing in two companies and two platoons from western and central Cochin China, reorganized these units to form six armed companies (the 59th, 60th, 70th, 80th, 200th, and 300th Companies). A number of provinces established their own full-time armed units, such as the 250th Company in Bien Hoa province, the 40th Company in Ba Ria province, and the Thu Dau Mot Provincial Company. Although they were called companies and battalions, in actuality each unit had only around 50 soldiers each and was equipped with a small number of guns. Each unit operated under the guidance and leadership of the interprovincial Party committees or the provincial Party committees.

The responsibilities of these units were to conduct armed propaganda, eliminate enemy thugs, organize and proselytize the population, consolidate our forces, protect our base areas, and protect the leadership organs of the Party. In order to carry out these duties, every unit devoted a great deal of time to political and military studies. Their political study documents included the “Tenets of the Revolution in South Vietnam” by Comrade Le Duan and the resolution of the Cochin China Party Committee on the organization and operations of armed propaganda units, mass propaganda operations, and proselytizing operations against enemy troops. A review by the Central Cochin China Interprovincial Party Committee of all armed propaganda units in its area of operations in 1958 revealed that 70 percent of the cadre and soldiers of these units were able to properly present the policies and directions of the Party to the masses and could properly perform their mass proselytizing duties.

With regard to military affairs, command-level cadre relied on their experiences with training and combat during the resistance war against the French to draft training documents and to organize training for troops in firing weapons and in ambush and assault tactics.

To support their activities all units relied on the local population, at the same time actively working to increase production themselves. Soldiers operating in the outskirts of the U Minh Forest lived and worked with the local population in the villages and hamlets. Some years each soldier was able to collect 300 kilograms of paddy [rice]. In the Plain of Reeds, because the terrain was swampy and very sparsely populated, our soldiers and cadre usually had to live in bushes and thickets, using two “ca rem” boards to shield themselves from the sun and the rain, cutting reeds and wild grass³⁸ and harvesting untransplanted rice to support themselves. In eastern Cochin China every unit established its own production area and built bases and roads up to Binh Long and Phuoc Long to link up with the southern end of the Central Highlands. Here, in wild, sparsely populated mountain forests, our units had to move regularly to avoid enemy sweeps and their lives were filled with hardship. Sometimes they had to dig roots to eat instead of rice. In order to remedy their lack of food and weapons, a number of

units organized small ambushes against enemy vehicles transporting food and money, such as the battle of Minh Thanh in Thu Dau Mot province on 10 August 1957; the battle of Trai Be in Bien Hoa province on 18 September 1957; and the battle of Dau Tieng in Thu Dau Mot province on 10 October 1958.

Beginning in 1956 the Diem puppet regime launched many large military sweep operations aimed at destroying our revolutionary armed groups in the base areas and at supporting the "Communist denunciation" and "Communist elimination" campaigns. In his "Thai Ngoc Hau" military campaign the enemy used two divisions of regular troops, many local regional force battalions, and four Navy groups to sweep through 18 provinces in the lowlands of Cochin China. In the enemy's "Truong Tan Bui" campaign he used three divisions of regulars, two regional force regiments, and one naval group to conduct sweeps in the provinces of eastern Cochin China. Enemy forces penetrated deep into our bases in the Plain of Reeds, War Zone D, and the Duong Minh Chau War Zone.

To deal with the enemy's military sweep operations the Central Cochin China Interprovincial Party Committee rapidly withdrew its leadership organs deep into the Plain of Reeds base area and ordered its armed units to avoid the enemy spearheads to preserve our forces. At the same time the Interprovincial Committee dispersed a portion of its forces out into the local villages and hamlets to help the people counter the enemy's acts of terror against them. A number of units went down to Duc Hoa and Ben Luc in Long An province to conduct armed propaganda operations, threaten the enemy's spies, thugs, and traitors, and expand our political organizations. The Interprovincial Committee of eastern Cochin China directed its armed units to withdraw to Ly Lich and Bu Chap in the north and to the northwestern portion of War Zone D in order to establish new base areas and preserve their forces.

In Interzone 5, because of the enemy's terrorist activities and because local Party chapters "did not clearly recognize the individual characteristics of each different portion of the region so that appropriate struggle methods could be applied in each different area,"³⁹ the struggle movement among the local population in the lowlands suffered serious setbacks. In early 1958 Comrade Le Duan, member of the Politburo of the Central Committee, met with a number of the leading cadre of Interzone 5. Le Duan pointed out to them that Interzone 5 encompassed three main areas: the cities, the lowlands, and the Central Highlands. He said the Central Highlands was a region of great political and military significance and value. Le Duan said that, building from a firm political foundation, we must rapidly organize armed forces at the squad level, or at most at the platoon level, to conduct independent operations to protect the villages and farmlands of the highlands. When the situation permits, he said, we must expand our activities to launch a guerrilla movement combined with flexible sapper-style attacks. We must urgently build up relatively secure areas to serve as base areas for our movement. On another front, he said, we must expand the political struggle in the lowlands and the cities.

Carrying out Comrade Le Duan's instructions, during the summer of 1958 the Interzone 5 Party Committee met to review the situation and lay out new policies and responsibilities. Comrade Tran Luong, Secretary of the Interzone Party Committee, presided over the meeting. The Interzone Party Committee decided to "expand the building of base areas in the Central Highlands and the western portions of the provinces of Central Vietnam. Establish production organizations, store rice and salt, mobilize the people to work 'revolutionary slash-and-burn fields.' Take the first step toward the creation of paramilitary forces. Form a number of full-time platoons and organize self-defense units in tribal communities and in villages to protect mass struggle movements, rescue cadre who have been captured by the enemy, eliminate enemy tyrants, and revive and expand our political organization."⁴⁰ These were correct and timely policies that were of decisive importance in reviving and expanding the armed forces of Interzone 5.

Implementing the policies of the Interzone Party Committee, the cadre and Party members who had remained behind in the Central Highlands and the western districts of Central Vietnam, together with a number of cadre and Party members who fled to those areas from the lowlands, established facilities for producing food and for repairing weapons. Our people went into areas belonging to our ethnic minority brethren, worked the fields with them, lived with the population, and built up political and armed organizations. A number of full-time armed platoons were formed. In the contested areas in the lowlands and the mountains, revolutionary organizations among the population were gradually rebuilt. Some villages and hamlets were able to organize self-defense elements to kill local tyrants and to support the struggle movements of the masses that fought against the enemy's reign of terror.

By the end of 1958 many base areas had been formed at Hien (Quang Nam province); Tra Bong, Son Ha, and Ba To (Quang Ngai province); Vinh Thanh (Binh Dinh province); Tho Lo and Ma Du (Phu Yen province); Districts 2 and 7 (Gia Lai province); Tung Bung, Co Xya, Tan Tuc, Dac Min, Doan village, and Hien village (Kontum province); Dlay Ya (Darlac province); Bac Ai (Ninh Thuan province), etc.

After being revived and built from the political forces of the masses and after surviving a very fierce, difficult struggle by the masses to preserve and develop our revolutionary forces, by 1959 our armed self-defense forces in all South Vietnam totaled 139 platoons in Cochin China, 34 platoons in the mountainous areas of Interzone 5, and hundreds of secret self-defense teams and units at the village and hamlet level. This was a very important achievement of the South Vietnamese revolution during the years of political struggle between 1954 and 1959 and was one of the factors ensuring that the people of South Vietnam could move forward to carry out armed uprisings after the passage of the Resolution of the 15th Plenum of the Party Central Committee. At the same time this achievement provided the basis for the rapid expansion of our local armed forces in South Vietnam during the succeeding years.

3

The Development of Our Armed Forces during the General Uprising Movement: The Birth of Transportation Group 559

THE DECISION TO "LIBERATE" THE SOUTH

Faced with the steadily growing strength of the people's struggle movement in South Vietnam, in March 1959 Ngo Dinh Diem's puppet regime proclaimed that a state of war existed in South Vietnam. The regime switched part of its regular armed forces from mobile reserve duties to "territorial security" duties and ordered regular regiments and divisions to work with local forces in conducting sweeps in every region. In May 1959, Ngo Dinh Diem promulgated Law No. 10/59. According to this law, anyone guilty of an act of "opposition to the regime" could be punished instantly by execution "on the spot" by guillotine without a trial.

Hatred for the United States and Diem reached a peak throughout South Vietnam. "Where before in a single village a few hundred people had wanted to pour out of their homes to fight to the death against the enemy, now the masses had no other option than to rise up in a life-and-death struggle against the U.S.-Diem clique."¹ The elimination of the American neocolonial yoke of oppression on South Vietnam, the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem's brutal fascist regime, and the achievement of national liberation became vital requirements of the revolution. After almost five years (1954-1958) of savage struggle and although they had suffered losses, our revolutionary forces in South Vietnam survived and were again growing. The people of South Vietnam "have a high spirit of patriotism which I instilled in them during the resistance war against the French, during the revolution."² Although the world situation was experiencing a number of complicated developments during these years, through the use of appropriate struggle methods we now had the possibility of advancing the cause of the revolution in South Vietnam.

In January 1959 the 15th Plenary Session (expanded) of the Party Central Committee, chaired by Chairman Ho Chi Minh, was held in Hanoi. Representatives of the Cochinchina Party Committee, the Interzone 5 Party Committee,

and the Cadre Affairs Section of the provinces of extreme southern Central Vietnam participated in the session.

During this session the Central Committee decided "to liberate South Vietnam from the yoke of oppression imposed by the imperialists and the feudalists; to secure national independence and grant land to the farmers; to complete the people's national democratic revolution in South Vietnam, and to build a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, and prosperous Vietnamese nation."³ The revolutionary methods to be used to accomplish these goals were "to utilize the strength of the masses, relying primarily on the political forces of the masses (operating in conjunction with large or small armed forces, depending on the situation) to overthrow the imperialist and feudalist rulers and establish a revolutionary regime belonging to the people."⁴ "In order to achieve this goal, we must make vigorous preparations aimed at launching a popular uprising to overthrow the U.S.-Diem regime."⁵

In its resolution the Central Committee also foresaw that "it is possible the popular uprising of South Vietnam may become a protracted armed struggle between ourselves and the enemy. Our Party must plan for this possibility and make adequate and vigorous preparations for any eventuality."⁶

Summarizing the conclusions of the Central Committee session, Chairman Ho Chi Minh declared, "The responsibility for saving our nation belongs to the entire Party, to the entire population. . . . We must include South Vietnam in the general revolution of our entire nation and include our nation's revolution in the world revolution. . . . We will hold high the banner of peace because this is very much to our advantage. Peace does not mean, however, that our forces will not be ready. . . . If we organize our political forces properly, when weapons are needed we will have no problems."⁷

The Resolution of the 15th Plenum of the Party Central Committee demonstrated the offensive revolutionary thinking of our Party and once again confirmed that the road to the liberation of South Vietnam was the road of revolutionary violence. Foreseeing the direction in which the revolution in the South would develop, the resolution laid out guidelines for the developmental and combat operations of our armed forces in both North and South Vietnam. The resolution also gave our army additional time to make ready and actively prepared us to respond to all requirements for the expansion of the revolution.

In February 1959, immediately after the 15th Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee ended, the General Military Party Committee met in Hanoi. Comrade Le Duan, member of the Politburo of the Central Committee, briefed the committee on the spirit of the Resolution of the 15th Plenum.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL

In response to the Party Central Committee's assessments of possible future developments in the revolution in the South, the General Military Party Com-

mittee discussed such pressing matters as building bases and developing revolutionary armed forces in the South, expanding North Vietnam's role in the revolution in the South, and preparing our armed forces to crush any aggressive scheme the enemy might try to carry out. All this was done so that when armed struggle was needed to unify the nation, our army and our people throughout the nation would be able to fully carry out their duties.

The General Military Party Committee determined that the combat opponents of our army were the American and puppet armed forces, both of which had modern equipment. The equipment of our army was also currently being modernized. Both our situation and the enemy's situation were changing. Combat methods had progressed when compared with the period of the resistance war against the French. The revolutionary war that our population and our armed forces would have to wage, however, was still a people's war, a people's war under modern conditions. It would be necessary for us to arm the entire population and to build an armed force made up of main force soldiers, local troops, and self-defense militia. We had to build our army into a well-equipped, well-trained, modern, regular, appropriately sized revolutionary army with a high level of combat capabilities. We had to combine modern military science and the combat principles of an army made up of many combined-arms branches with the experience we had gained during the recent war against the French in order to decide the kind of training most suited for our new combat missions. We also had to build a politically and economically solid rear area capable of supplying every material requirement for war.

Speaking to the General Military Party Committee conference, Comrade Le Duan stated clearly, "we are not using warfare to unite the nation. If, however, the United States and its puppets start a war, we will also have to resort to war, and the war that the enemy will have started will give us an opportunity to unify the nation."⁸ Le Duan affirmed that "the only path open to the United States and Diem is to begin an unjust war, and we will certainly crush them when they take that path."⁹

To implement the Resolution of the 15th Plenum of the Party Central Committee and based on the results of the first military five-year plan (1955-1959), the General Military Party Committee decided to intensify our efforts to build a modern, regular, revolutionary army and to increase the combat strength and the combat readiness of the army. Preparations for sending the army to South Vietnam to join the battle were begun.

The 338th Division, which was composed of Southern regroupées, and a number of our infantry regiments were converted into training groups for cadre and soldiers who would be sent to perform their duties in South Vietnam. Tens of thousands of cadre and soldiers who were natives of South Vietnam or who were familiar with the battlefields of South Vietnam began to be gathered together for training by these units before being sent off to the battlefield. A number of mobile infantry divisions and brigades subordinate to the High Command, to Military Region 4, and to the Northwestern Military Region were brought up

to wartime strength. A continuous series of study seminars on the situation and on our revolutionary duties in South Vietnam were held by all units of the army. Many political activities, meetings, readings, and discussions of "Letters from the front lines of the Fatherland," etc., were organized with the aim of teaching our cadre and soldiers to hate the United States and Diem and to properly prepare our troops, in their thoughts and actions, to carry out any duty assigned to them by the Party. From the temporary Demilitarized Zone in Vinh Linh to our northern borders, from the mainland to our offshore islands, all units of our army actively studied and trained to prepare to enter the battle alongside the soldiers and civilians of South Vietnam.

In May 1959, in accordance with instructions from the Party Politburo, a staff agency under the direct control of the General Military Party Committee was formed to study the establishment of a transportation route to send supplies to the South. Comrade Vo Bam, Deputy Director of the Army Agricultural Farms Department, a man who had spent many years working on the battlefields of Interzone 5 and the Central Highlands and who was familiar with the land and sea routes from the North into South Vietnam, was placed in charge of this staff research organization. The Politburo directed that a special military communications group be formed to establish routes to send cadre, weapons, and other needed supplies to South Vietnam. This was a tremendous job of strategic importance that would play a direct role in the liberation of South Vietnam and the unification of our nation.

Military Transportation Group 559 was established on 19 May 1959. Group 559 had an initial strength of two battalions. The 301st Land Transportation Battalion was made up of 500 cadre and soldiers chosen from the ranks of the 305th Brigade. Captains Chu Dang Chu and Nguyen Danh (also known as Chinh) commanded this battalion. The 603rd Sea Transportation Battalion was made up of 107 cadre and soldiers, all natives of South Vietnam with seagoing experience. Comrade Ha Van Xa was appointed 603rd Battalion Commander and Comrade Luu Duc was named Battalion Political Officer.

During the summer of 1959, as Group 559 was urgently preparing troops and weapons for movement to the battlefield, in Military Region 4 the 325th Infantry Division was ordered to build an emergency military road, to be completed within three months, to enable trucks to carry supplies from Dong Hoi city in Quang Binh province to Khe Ho in western Vinh Linh. The 301st Battalion built its launch base at Khe Ho and established its first way station on the Ham Nghi Ridge. From there the battalion crossed the Ben Hai River down to Route 9 and then followed the secret com-mo-liaison routes used by Huong Hoa district and the Thua Thien Province Party Committee down along the eastern slopes of the Annamite Mountain chain, building a trail and establishing way stations in areas occupied by the Van Kieu, Ta Oi, Pa Co, and Ca Tu tribal peoples, always advancing toward the South.

On 20 August 1959 the 301st Battalion established Way Station 9 at Pa Lin

in western Thua Thien province and delivered to this way station its first shipment of supplies (500 kilograms) for passage to Interzone 5. To maintain absolute secrecy all weapons and supplies sent South during this period were manufactured in capitalist countries. The cadre and soldiers at the transshipment stations and the commo-liaison couriers and cadre groups marching to South Vietnam were ordered to avoid clashes with the enemy. They were ordered to "walk without leaving a trace, cook without smoke, and speak without making noise."

By the end of 1959 the human porters of the 301st Battalion had delivered to the Pa Lin Way Station a total of 1,667 infantry weapons, 788 knives, 188 kilograms of explosives, and a number of military maps, compasses, and binoculars.¹⁰ These supplies were delivered to Interzone 5 and a portion of these supplies were transported deeper into the interior to equip armed recently formed self-defense units in the Central Highlands and the western portions of the provinces of Central Vietnam.

By the end of 1959 this route had also been used to send 542 cadre and soldiers, the majority of whom were platoon- and company-level command cadre, sapper training cadre, cryptographic personnel, and weapons repair technicians, into South Vietnam to perform their revolutionary duties. Of these personnel, 515 went to Interzone 5 and 27 traveled all the way to Cochin China. These cadre and soldiers immediately began to form battalions, companies, platoons, and sapper teams in Interzone 5 and Cochin China. Although the numbers of weapons, cadre, and soldiers sent to the battlefield along Group 559's supply network during 1959 were not great, they represented a very valuable capital investment that contributed to the development of our revolutionary armed forces in South Vietnam. They constituted a first step in answering the needs of the Southern revolution following the approval of the Resolution of the 15th Plenum of the Party Central Committee.

To establish a sea infiltration route into South Vietnam, the 603rd Battalion set up a base on the Gianh River in Quang Binh province and stationed a secret radio team high up on the Hai Van Pass in Quang Nam province to broadcast navigation directions. The battalion used wooden boats disguised as local civilian coastal fishing boats. The first trial voyage was scheduled for November 1959 but the trip had to be postponed due to bad weather. On the second trip the boat encountered strong winds that broke the tiller and blew the boat in close to Ly Son Island of Quang Ngai province. The boat's cadre and soldiers, under the command of First Lieutenant Nguyen Bac (who had been proclaimed an "emulation combatant" of the entire army during the resistance war against the French), quickly threw their supplies overboard, thereby preserving the secret of our shipment of weapons to the South. Although these voyages were not successful, they provided valuable lessons for our soldiers to use in our seagoing supply operations in later years.

At the same time our supply routes were beginning to operate by land down the Annamite Mountain range and on the South China Sea from the North to South Vietnam, other transportation routes were also under construction to link

our separate base areas. Armed propaganda units from eastern Cochin China began to survey routes to the north. In Central Vietnam the Interzone 5 Party Committee set up communications routes and transportation corridors from the Pa Lin Way Station through the base areas in the western portions of the provinces of Central Vietnam down into the Central Highlands. In Cochin China two armed propaganda units (one belonging to the Cochin China Party Committee and commanded by Comrade Lam Quoc Dang and one belonging to Phuoc Long province under the command of Comrade Pham Thuan, Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee) and the 59th Company of the Eastern Cochin China Inter-provincial Party Committee, under the command of Comrade Nguyen Van Tam, began cutting trails through the jungle, crossing through regions where no human had ever gone in Bu Dang and Bu Gia Map (in Phuoc Long province) and So Nia (in Quang Duc province) to reach the extreme southern regions of Central Vietnam and the southern Central Highlands.

In October 1960, at Kilometer 5 on Route 14B in the triborder area of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, the Phuoc Long province armed propaganda unit established contact with the commo-liaison unit of Interzone 5. At the same time, in the Ro Ti area of Bien Hoa province, the 59th Company established contact with the commo-liaison company of the Party Cadre Affairs Section for the provinces of extreme southern Central Vietnam.

With the establishment of two routes all the way down to eastern Cochin China and the establishment of a transportation route along the Annamite Mountain chain linking our base area in North Vietnam with the South, the Fatherland's front line now began to take shape. The birth of Transportation Group 559 and the strategic North-South transportation route demonstrated the high resolve of the entire Party, the entire population, and the entire army to liberate South Vietnam. It was a very important first step that enabled us to expand our forces and develop a solid strategic position for the cause of the resistance war against the United States to save the nation.

After attending the 15th Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee, the Central Committee ordered the Central Committee members responsible for local areas in South Vietnam and the representatives of the Cochin China and Interzone 5 Party Committees to quickly return to South Vietnam to begin their preparations to elevate the Southern Revolution to a new, higher stage.

THE FIRST UPRISINGS IN THE SOUTH

During the first months of 1959 the situation in South Vietnam became extremely active. Because of the increasingly savage terrorist campaign being waged by the U.S.-Diem clique, the civilian population in many areas, led by our local Party committees, launched uprisings, resolutely combating the enemy and protecting the people's rights to make a living and to enjoy democracy.

In the mountainous regions of Interzone 5 many armed uprisings broke out conducted by our ethnic minority brethren who opposed enemy efforts to collect them into concentration camps and demanded to be allowed to return to their old villages. On 6 February 1959, the Ba Na tribal people of 11 hamlets of Vinh Hiep and Vinh Hao villages in Vinh Thanh district, Binh Dinh province, moved their hamlets deep into the jungles. By April 1959 most of Vinh Thanh district, consisting of 60 large hamlets (except for four hamlets in Bok Toi village) with a total of 5,000 people, had wrested control away from the government. In Binh Thuan province, on 7 February 1959 the Ra Giai tribal people rose up and destroyed the enemy's concentration areas at Brau and Dong Day in Bac Ai district. In April 1959 they destroyed the Tam Ngan concentration area. Also during 1959 the Cham and Hre ethnic minorities in Tho Lo, Phu Yen province, and the Ede, Gia Rai, Xe Dang, etc., in Ta Booc and Mang Khenh, Kontum province conducted a series of uprisings, killing tyrants and abandoning their old hamlets to return to the jungles to establish new hamlets where they lived illegally (according to the enemy's law).

Many different ways to organize revolutionary armed forces arose out of these uprisings. These included people's self-defense forces, secret self-defense forces, full-time guerrillas, concentrated armed platoons, etc. In Tra Bong, the 339th Armed Platoon was formed. The platoon was made up of 43 soldiers, 33 of whom were members of the Cor ethnic minority group and ten ethnic Vietnamese. In the contested areas of the lowlands a number of armed propaganda units organized by provincial and district Party committees aggressively eliminated tyrants and traitors and built mass political organizations.

In South Vietnam the elimination of tyrants occurred on a daily basis. Villages and hamlet puppets and self-defense forces were terrified. Every night they fled to sleep inside their military outposts and did not dare to arrogantly conduct searches as they had before. Hundreds resigned or were too afraid to carry out their duties. This movement was especially active in areas surrounding the U Minh Forest and the Plain of Reeds. In these areas our armed units, after a period of consolidation during which they had built up a solid base of support among the masses, eliminated many tyrants and repelled many enemy military operations. Supported by our armed operations, the people from a number of villages and hamlets near the U Minh base area moved into the jungle, establishing "youth residences" and "family residences," forming "jungle hamlets," a form of combat hamlet resembling those we had used during the resistance war against the French.

Revolutionary conditions developed in the rural hamlets and villages of the lowlands of Cochinchina and the mountains of Central Vietnam. Guided by the correct and timely policies provided by the Party Central Committee and using revolutionary forces we had maintained and developed during the years 1954 through 1959, the people of South Vietnam rose up in a revolutionary struggle that took many rich and creative forms. Many uprisings broke out from mid-1959 through the end of 1960. These uprisings helped South Vietnam's armed self-

defense to grow by leaps and bounds, enabling them to provide outstanding support to the mass uprisings.

In the fall of 1959 an armed uprising broke out in Tra Bong. Tra Bong was a district in the mountains of western Quang Ngai province. The Cor, Hre, and Ca Dong tribal people and the ethnic Vietnamese who live in this remote mountain region have a long history of patriotism and a tradition of struggle against oppression and foreign aggressors. During the years of struggle to preserve our revolutionary forces (1954–1959) the Quang Ngai Province Party Committee built a firm organizational base in this area. The committee led the people in struggles against the enemy to preserve their ownership of the agricultural fields of the highland villages. The Party Committee also infiltrated many cadre and revolutionary sympathizers into the puppet governmental apparatus in villages and hamlets in the lowlands. Many “determined-to-die” units were established to eliminate tyrants, and self-defense units were formed to protect the villages.

In August 1959 the people of the villages of Tra Bong district and of the western portion of Quang Ngai province organized enthusiastic meetings to celebrate the 14th anniversary of the victory of the August Revolution, and, in accordance with guidance from the Provincial Party Committee, to boycott the elections for Diem’s puppet National Assembly. In a number of villages clashes broke out between our self-defense youth and enemy soldiers. Unit 339 was dispersed into many small cells to key villages to serve as the backbone of the mass struggle. Other armed groups subordinate to the district headquarters intensified their own armed propaganda activities. Everywhere in the district the people blocked roads, planted punji stakes, hid their property, organized guard forces, disseminated information, and built fences for combat hamlets. Some villages withdrew to higher ground.

On 28 August 1959, while enemy troops were searching each hamlet to force the people to go out to vote in the election, the people of Tra Quan, Tra Khe, Tra Nham, Tra Phong, and Tra Lanh villages and people throughout Tra Bong district launched simultaneous uprisings. The soldiers of Unit 339 and self-defense youths ambushed, surrounded, and chased away enemy troops. Each soldier wore a red scarf and carried a pack on his shoulders and a coil of rope on his back. The masses conducting the uprising, wearing red cloth bands on their shirt-sleeves, destroyed puppet village offices, pursued and eliminated tyrants and thugs, and dissolved the enemy’s apparatus of oppression. Tra Bong’s mountain jungles echoed with the sounds of gongs, drums, and horns, interspersed with the shouts of the masses as they conducted their uprisings.

On 29 August enemy troops occupying outposts at Da Lip, Ta Lat, Tam Rung, and Nuoc Vot fled their posts in terror. The revolutionary masses, led by the soldiers of Unit 339, attacked the two remaining large enemy outposts in Tra Bong, located at Eo Chim and Eo Reo. After a two-day siege and after crippling an enemy company from the district capital that tried to come to their rescue, on 31 August the outposts at Eo Chim and Eo Reo were both taken. The remaining enemy troops fled to the district capital. The Tra Bong district chief himself fled to the province capital.

The people of 16 highland villages of Tra Bong district held a people's congress to elect a Revolutionary Committee and established a court to try 63 puppet tyrants within the district. The Tra Bong uprising, and those in the districts of Son Ha, Ba To, and Minh Long in western Quang Ngai province, the first armed uprising mounted by the soldiers and civilians of South Vietnam, was completely victorious.

Formed while preparing for and conducting an armed uprising, Unit 339 expanded into a company and its troops were now fully equipped with weapons. Many village guerrilla units were formed. On 19 August 1959 the Quang Ngai Province Party Committee formed the province's second full-time armed unit¹¹ in Son Ha district, and the districts of Ba To and Minh Long established the third full-time armed unit.¹²

To deal with this powerful uprising by the people of Quang Ngai province, during the final months of 1959 the Diem puppet government sent a division of regular troops plus provincial and district regional force troops to conduct continuous sweeps through the western districts, with the focus on Tra Bong, aimed at reestablishing their governmental apparatus in the villages and hamlets. Our full-time armed platoons and self-defense guerrilla units relied on defensive systems consisting of punji sticks, mines, and booby traps in the villages to resolutely oppose and repel enemy troop units when they moved into the highland villages. In the lowland villages the Province Party Committees established a policy of exploiting the legal rights of the people to expand the political struggle and to proselytize the enemy's troops. The struggle conducted by people of all ethnic groups in Tra Bong had now taken a new form, one that combined political struggle with armed struggle, to preserve the hold on power the masses had gained during the August 1959 uprisings.

In the base areas of eastern Cochin China and rural areas of the Mekong Delta, after absorbing the essence of the Resolution of the 15th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, our full-time armed units and armed propaganda units intensified their operations and carried out their mission of serving as an assault force to support mass uprisings.

On 25 September 1959, the 502nd Kien Phong Battalion, with a troop strength of over 100 soldiers, gathered to study Resolution 15 at Tan Hoi Co village in Hong Ngu district. After learning that the puppet 42nd Regimental Combat Group, traveling on more than 100 sampans, was conducting a sweep along the An Long Canal, the battalion command section decided to block and attack the enemy in order to capture his weapons, protect the base area, and influence the local population. With combat experience gained during the resistance war against the French and complete familiarity with the terrain of the Plain of Reeds base area, the cadre and soldiers of the 502nd Battalion won two successive victories over the enemy in two ambushes at Giong Thi Dam and Go Quan Cung on 26 September 1959. They wiped out almost an entire battalion of puppet regular troops, captured 105 prisoners (including the entire battalion command staff),

and confiscated 365 weapons, 30,000 rounds of ammunition, and 11 radios. The Giong Thi Dam and Go Quan Cung victories created a great impact among the masses, sowed fear in the enemy ranks, and highlighted the traditions of our army: winning victory in the first battle, fighting for a certain victory, and fighting battles that exterminated the enemy.

Using the guns captured in these battles, the Interprovincial Party Committee was able to provide additional armament for the 502nd Battalion and for 23 armed operations units belonging to the districts of Hong Ngu, Cao Lanh, and My An of Kien Phong and Kien Tuong provinces. The population of the areas around the Plain of Reeds, encouraged by this victory and supported by our armed operations units, increased their own efforts to eliminate tyrants and traitors and expanded our revolutionary associations and organizations. In many villages and hamlets the people beat drums and wooden chimes continuously for ten days and nights, terrifying and paralyzing the puppet administrators and puppet militia. In Hau My and Thanh My villages the people rose up, killed puppet administrators, spies, and thugs, and dissolved the village governmental administrative apparatus. In Long An province the 506th Battalion dispersed into squads and armed propaganda teams to work in the eight villages of Duc Hoa district, in the villages along the Vam Co Dong River from Thanh Loi to Binh Duc, and in Thu Thua district. In Rach Gia province the U Minh Battalion, exploiting a moment when the enemy had relaxed his guard, overran the Kien An military headquarters in An Bien district. In Ca Mau province, provincial armed forces destroyed outposts at Vam Cai Tau and on the Doc River, wiped out an enemy platoon at Hon Khoai, and blocked many enemy sweep operations in Nam Can and Cai Nuoc districts. In Tra Vinh province entire enemy platoons were wiped out during battles fought at Lang Nuoc, Dai An, and Long Toan. Beginning with only armed propaganda operations in support of the political struggle of the masses and operations to maintain and develop our forces, the armed self-defense units in the lowlands began to change their methods of operation in accordance with policy guidelines issued by the Cochin China Party Committee. They began to support mass uprisings and insurrections to seize control of villages and hamlets.

EXPLOITING SUCCESS IN COCHIN CHINA

In November 1959 the 4th Conference of the Cochin China Party Committee was held in the Duong Minh Chau War Zone in Tay Ninh province to discuss the implementation of the Resolution of the 15th Party Central Committee's Plenum. Comrade Nguyen Van Linh, Acting Secretary of the Cochin China Party Committee, presided over the conference.

After analyzing the situation in South Vietnam during the final months of 1959, the Party Committee concluded that "the enemy is on the defensive every-

where and can no longer rule the country in the way he wants. At the village and hamlet level the enemy is weak, not strong. Using primarily mass political forces, with our armed self-defense teams serving as the hard core, we are now able to eliminate the enemy's puppet tyrants and his vicious militia forces and take control of the villages and hamlets."¹³

The Party Committee directed the Eastern Cochin China Interprovincial Military Affairs Section to intensify the operations of our full-time troops and to conduct a large attack that would resonate through the entire region to encourage the revolutionary struggle movement of the masses and capture enemy weapons for use to equip our own armed units.

In early January 1960 a conference of military cadre from eastern Cochin China was held in Bau Ra in Tay Ninh province. The conference discussed the work of building up the armed forces of eastern Cochin China and armed operations to implement the resolution of the 15th Plenum of the Party Central Committee and the policies of the Cochin China Party Committee. A plan to attack Tua Hai was presented to this military cadre conference and was subsequently approved by the Cochin China Party Committee.

Tua Hai was an old French fort located seven kilometers northwest of Tay Ninh city. The puppet army had expanded the fort into a regimental headquarters base camp.¹⁴ The puppets had built high walls, dug deep trenches, and constructed many watchtowers. The camp was carefully patrolled and guarded day and night. During mid-1959 our contacts inside the base prepared to mount a mutiny but their plan was exposed. To guard against further mutinies, during the 1960 Tet new year's holiday the enemy allowed only one platoon, the alert platoon, to carry weapons.

This was a very favorable opportunity for our forces. The Eastern Cochin China Military Affairs Section decided to employ three infantry companies (the 59th, 70th, and 80th), the 60th Sapper Company, and three Tay Ninh province armed squads in the attack. A number of weapons that had been cached since 1954 were dug up and distributed to the units. Almost 500 civilian porters were mobilized to support the battle.

On 26 January 1960 (two days before the Tet lunar new year), our units, under the command of Comrade Nguyen Van Xuyen, Chief of the Eastern Cochin China Military Affairs Section,¹⁵ secretly approached the stronghold. In coordination with our agents inside the base who launched an internal mutiny, our units launched a surprise attack that seized control of the entire Tua Hai base, killing or capturing 500 enemy troops and confiscating 1,500 weapons.

The Tua Hai victory achieved the political and military goals set forward by the Cochin China Party Committee. The battle sent shock waves throughout the region, frightening enemy troops, especially the regional forces and militia troops in the villages and hamlets, and giving powerful encouragement to the masses to rise up against the regime.

THE BEN TRE UPRISING

In central Cochin China, in December 1959 the Region 8 Party Committee held an expanded meeting to expedite preparations for uprisings. Comrade Nguyen Minh Duong, Secretary of the Region Party Committee, presided over the conference. The Region Party Committee concluded that "the provinces of central Cochin China have just emerged from a period of ferocious struggle and our revolutionary organizations have suffered losses. In some places these losses have been serious. However, our leadership and our mass organizations still survive. Although their ranks are small, all our members are Party members, cadre, or citizens who are loyal and firm in their resolve to exterminate the enemy."¹⁶

To implement the resolutions of the Party Central Committee and the Cochin China Party Committee, the Regional Committee decided to mobilize the masses to rise up to break the enemy's grip and seize control of the rural areas. The uprisings had to be widespread to prevent enemy troops from being able to concentrate forces to suppress them. The provinces adjacent to the Plain of Reeds base area would intensify political struggles supported by armed operations. These provinces were directed to break the enemy's grip on the population, assert the people's right to govern themselves, expand our guerrilla bases, attack enemy sweep operations, and protect our bases. Region 8's other provinces would rapidly organize and expand their political forces, at the same time building armed forces to support the masses in preparation for a simultaneous uprising.

The Region Party Committee decided that the time frame for launching mass uprisings would be January 1960. Upon receipt of a guidance cable from the Region Party Committee, Comrade Vo Van Pham, Secretary of the Ben Tre Province Party Committee, held discussions with the members of the Province Party Standing Committee and intensified preparations for uprisings in two areas. Area 1 consisted of the districts of Giong Trom, Binh Dai, and Ba Tri, located on Bao and An Hoa Islands. Area 2 consisted of Mo Cay and Thanh Phu districts on Minh Island. Members of the Province Party Committee were assigned responsibility for individual tasks and sent to these districts to guide preparations for the uprisings.

On 1 January 1960, in Tan Trung village, Mo Cay district, Female Comrade Nguyen Thi Dinh, Deputy Secretary of the Province Party Committee, briefed a number of Province Party Committee members and members of the Mo Cay District Party Committee on the spirit of Resolution 15 and the specific policies of the Region Party Committee.

This meeting reached the following assessment of the situation: Enemy forces in Ben Tre province were numerous and vicious¹⁷ and they had a tight grip on the population. The people were bitter toward the enemy and were ready to rise up. The Provincial Party Chapter's leadership forces had been reduced to only 162 cadre and Party members, but all these individuals had spent many years conducting revolutionary struggle, were experienced at mobilizing the masses, and were trusted by the masses.

The meeting set forward the following requirements for the uprising: To launch powerful, continuous, and widespread mass uprisings aimed at the most dangerous points (which were also the weakest points), that is, the enemy's control apparatus at the village and hamlet level; to seize power and place it in the hands of the masses; to expand our political and armed forces; to consolidate and develop Party organizations; and to seize land for distribution to the peasants.

Since the province had no armed forces, the meeting decided to gather a band of brave youths and arm them with spears, knives, wooden guns, "coconut sprout" guns, etc., and organize them into action teams to eliminate tyrants and support the masses during the uprisings. This group would claim to be North Vietnamese soldiers belonging to the 502nd Battalion¹⁸ to deceive and frighten the enemy. We would combine the launching of our rural uprisings with attacks on a number of locations in the province capital to make a publicity splash in support of the overall movement. The villages of Dinh Thuy, Phuoc Hiep, and Binh Khanh, all in Mo Cay district, were selected as the province's targets. The Standing Committee of the Province Party Committee would directly supervise operations at these target villages. The date for the mass "simultaneous uprising" was set as 17 January 1960. Comrade Pham Tam Cang (alias Hai Thuy), member of the Province Party Committee, was sent to Dinh Thuy village to directly command the uprising.

On 17 January 1960 the people of Dinh Thuy village, with an action team serving as their assault unit, rose up, surrounded, and destroyed a militia group (tong doan) of 12 men and the village militia squad, hunted down and captured vicious puppets and spies, and dismantled the enemy's apparatus of oppression. Using 28 weapons that our forces had captured, the Province Party Committee formed several armed units and sent them to the villages of Phuoc Hiep and Binh Khanh to support mass uprisings there.

On 18 January (in Phuoc Hiep) and 19 January (in Binh Khanh) the people rose up and seized control. The popular uprisings of the three villages of Dinh Thuy, Phuoc Hiep, and Binh Khanh had achieved total victory. This initial assault shook the enemy's ruling apparatus and stimulated a spirit of insurrection throughout the entire province.

In Binh Khanh village, on 19 January the Ben Tre Province Party Committee collected all captured weapons and formed three armed squads, which were sent to perform armed propaganda operations and mobilize the masses in Minh Tan, Thanh Phu, and Mo Cay districts. A number of cadre were given good weapons¹⁹ and formed into the first armed platoon, which was designated the 264th Company [*sic*]. After beginning their uprising armed only with their bare hands, the people of Ben Tre now had guns and an armed force and could now carry out attacks on the enemy using political forces combined with armed forces and troop proselytizing operations.

During the period from 17 to 24 January 1960, the period called Ben Tre's "week of uprisings by the entire population," the people in 47 villages in the dis-

their own was very important because they provided a new source of strength for the revolutionary forces of the masses. The tactics of conducting a two-legged attack (political struggle combined with armed struggle) and a three-legged attack (political, military, and military proselytizing) against the enemy were used for the first time in this uprising.

THE 1960 GENERAL UPRISING

During the first months of 1960, while the simultaneous uprising was exploding in Ben Tre, political struggle movements and armed propaganda operations in support of mass revolts to seize control of villages and hamlets were breaking out in many of the provinces of Cochin China. As a direct result of the Tua Hai victory, in Tay Ninh province 30 Regional Force and militia outposts (out of a total of 60 outposts throughout the province) were either abandoned by their occupants or were forced to withdraw by mass uprisings and sieges. Seventy percent of the enemy's governmental apparatus at the village and hamlet level collapsed and disintegrated. The people held real control of 24 villages and had basically liberated another 19 villages (out of a total of 49 villages in the entire province). The armed forces of Tay Ninh province, which had begun as a number of squads responsible for protecting our bases and defending the province and district leadership organs, had now grown to 44 village guerrilla units, one battalion and two engineer-sapper companies at the province level, and the district local force companies.²¹

In Rach Gia province the U Minh Battalion destroyed the Ba The Regional Force outpost and a column of enemy reinforcements sent to rescue the outpost. The battalion also supported popular revolts, eliminated tyrants, and destroyed the Ba The Concentration Area.

In My Tho province the province's full-time armed platoon (which called itself the 514th Battalion), together with the Kien Tuong province armed platoon (which the Region Party Committee had sent as reinforcements) and the armed propaganda units of Cai Be, Cai Lay, and Chau Thanh districts stepped up armed propaganda operations along the Nguyen Van Tiep Canal, forcing the withdrawal of six enemy outposts and capturing 30 weapons. Supported by our armed operations, the population of many of the villages north of Route 4 rose up and held demonstrations, marches, etc. The revolutionary spirit of the people boiled over, resembling the days of the August General Uprising.

In July 1960 the Cochin China Party Committee held its 5th conference in War Zone D. Concluding that the insurrection movement of the masses in the rural areas had reached a new stage of development, the Party Committee decided "to continue the political offensive, to cause the enemy to fail, to put him increasingly on the defensive in all areas, to gradually defeat the enemy's plots and policies, and to create an opportunity for an uprising to overthrow the entire U.S.-Diem regime."²²

On the 15th anniversary of the Cochin China Resistance Day, 23 September 1960, the Party Committee ordered all provinces to launch a general uprising. From mid-September 1960 to the beginning of 1961, our general uprising swept through the lowlands of Cochin China and the mountains of Central Vietnam.

In Cochin China, taking advantage of the experience gained by the people of Ben Tre province, local Party chapters used action teams and guerrilla squads as assault units to support mass uprisings; eliminate puppets, spies, and tyrants; besiege and force the surrender or withdrawal of militia outposts; shatter the enemy's control apparatus; and seize control of the villages and hamlets. On 14 September 1960 the people of Ca Mau, Rach Gia, Soc Trang, Vinh Long, Chau Doc, Long Xuyen, and Can Tho provinces in western Cochin China conducted simultaneous uprisings. Long An, My Tho, Ben Tre, Kien Phong, and Kien Tuong provinces in central Cochin China conducted simultaneous uprisings on 23 and 24 September 1960. In eastern Cochin China our general uprising spread from Tay Ninh, Ben Cat, Dau Tieng, Cu Chi, and Hoc Mon down to Lai Thieu, Thu Duc, Tan Binh, Di An, Nha Be, and Binh Chanh on the outskirts of Saigon-Gia Dinh. People who had been forced into "new agricultural areas" and "concentration areas" revolted and returned to their old villages. Many demonstrations involving tens of thousands of rural people marched into the cities and towns demanding that the enemy end his acts of terror and his artillery attacks, shattering the calm of the cities. By the end of 1960 the populations of over 800 villages (out of a total of 1,296 villages in all of Cochin China) had risen up and taken control of their areas. Over 100 villages had been completely liberated.

In southern Central Vietnam, beginning in September 1960 the Party Cadre Affairs Section for the provinces of extreme southern Central Vietnam and the Interzone 5 Party Committee launched a wave of armed operations to support people of all ethnic groups in uprisings to seize control of the mountain villages. Massed armed units subordinate to the interzone and to provincial Party committees attacked and forced the withdrawal of 55 enemy outposts, wiping out 40 Regional Force platoons and capturing 400 weapons. People who had been forced into concentration camps and "new agricultural areas" rose up, destroyed the enemy's machinery of oppression, and returned to their old villages. Over 20,000 residents of the mountainous areas, representing all ethnic groups, had been liberated. The Interzone 5-Central Highlands base area expanded from north of Kontum down to Route 21, where it linked up with the base areas of the provinces of extreme southern Central Vietnam and the base areas of eastern Cochin China. A number of armed propaganda units went into the contested areas of the lowlands to build political and armed organizations, eliminate tyrants, and support the masses in their struggles against the enemy. In December 1960 the population of six villages, Hoa Thinh, Hoa My, Hoa Tan, Hoa Tong, Hoa Hiep, and Hoa Xuan in Tuy Hoa district, Phu Yen province, rose up and seized control of their villages, launching the general uprising movement in the rural lowlands of southern Central Vietnam. By the end of 1960 the people had

seized control of 3,200 of the total of 5,721 mountain hamlets in the area. Of the 3,289 lowland hamlets, revolutionary organizations had been rebuilt in 904 hamlets, and Party chapters had been rebuilt in 102 villages.

THE EXPANSION OF ARMED FORCES IN THE SOUTH

The enemy's governmental apparatus in the majority of the villages and hamlets in the rural lowlands of Cochin China and in the mountains of southern Central Vietnam had been shattered. Tens of thousands of puppets, spies, tyrants, and enemy armed forces at the grassroots level had been eliminated. Many of the enemy's new agricultural areas, concentration areas, and collective living areas had been destroyed. The general uprising had struck an unexpected and powerful blow against the fascist U.S.-Diem administration. Our liberated zones and areas where the masses had risen up and seized control of their lives had been expanded. Over 70 percent of the farmlands that the enemy had seized had now been returned to the farmers. The organized political struggle forces of the masses had greatly expanded, becoming a sharp and powerful attack force for the revolution. Through the general uprising, the revolution in South Vietnam had progressed from merely trying to preserve its forces to a posture in which it was on the offensive.

Under the leadership of the Party and with the support and nourishment of the people, through long years of struggle to preserve and develop our forces, our armed forces in South Vietnam had fulfilled their duty of serving as an assault unit and supporting the masses in their uprisings. Growing out of the high tide of the general uprising, three different forms of organization for the people's armed forces had appeared: self-defense and guerrilla teams at the village level, armed teams at the province and district level, and full-time troop units at the region level.

In Cochin China, 560 villages had formed guerrilla squads and 190 villages had formed guerrilla platoons, with a total strength of 7,000 personnel. In addition, every village also had dozens of self-defense militia. In Interzone 5 the self-defense guerrillas of the mountain villages totaled around 3,000 personnel. Born out of the political forces of the masses and rapidly expanding during the course of the general uprising, the guerrillas and self-defense troops were the Party's widespread popular armed force at the grassroots level. Their missions were to serve as an assault force to support the masses in their political struggle, to protect our revolutionary administrative apparatus at the village and hamlet levels, and to fight in coordination with our full-time troops during the coming revolutionary war.

Cochin China's province and district armed teams consisted of 123 platoons and 20 squads with a total strength of 7,000 personnel.²³ In Interzone 5 we had 123 platoons and 76 armed operations teams with a total strength of 5,500 personnel. These were full-time armed units born out of the mass uprisings and developed from our self-defense and guerrilla forces. They had been formed into

local troop units and served as the backbone of the people's war at the province and district level.

The full-time troops of the regions consisted of the 500th Battalion of the Eastern Cochin China Interprovincial Committee (997 soldiers), the 261st Battalion of the Central Cochin China Interprovincial Committee (266 soldiers); the 306th Battalion of the Western Cochin China Interprovincial Committee (771 soldiers); and two infantry companies and 12 sapper teams in Interzone 5, with a total strength of almost 1,000 soldiers. These were our mobile force at the regional level and were made up of units selected from the full-time armed teams at the district and province level. A large number of the cadre and soldiers of these units were Party members, had served during the resistance war against the French, and had matured and been tested in the general uprising. Among those serving in these first full-time units and in the military command sections of the regions, provinces, districts, and villages were 3,500 military cadre and technical personnel who had received training as regulars in North Vietnam and who had returned to the South during the final months of 1959 and the early months of 1960 down the commo-liaison routes established by Military Transportation Group 559. During this initial period, the weapons and equipment of these full-time troops were mostly items our soldiers and civilians had captured during the general uprising, together with items we had cached in 1954 and some homemade weapons and equipment.²⁴ The weapons of the guerrillas and self-defense forces consisted primarily of knives, halberds, cross-bows, spears, scythes, etc., together with a few guns captured from the enemy.

Supplies for the full-time armed forces were provided primarily by contributions from the people in the area where the unit was stationed and for which our revolutionary governmental apparatus at the village and hamlet level was responsible. A portion of these supplies were produced by our cadre and soldiers themselves.

All armed units were placed under the direct and total leadership of local Party committees. Party and political tasks were carried out by local-level Party committees. Each unit had a wide base among the people, and these units were loved and nurtured by the people.

THE BIRTH OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT

On 20 December 1960 the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam was born. The Central Committee of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam and the National Liberation Front Committees for the provinces and districts were presented to the people. These organizations served to gather together all the forces of the front and served as our revolutionary governmental administration. Military Command Sections were established at the region, province, district, and village levels to aid Party Committees at these levels in guiding and

commanding their armed units; in recruiting youth into the armed forces; and in receiving supplies provided by the people for use by our armed forces.

In accordance with a policy formulated by the Politburo of the Party Central Committee, the revolutionary armed forces in South Vietnam were named the "Liberation Army of South Vietnam." Implementing the Politburo's instructions, in January 1961 the General Military Party Committee stated clearly:

The Liberation Army of South Vietnam is a part of the People's Army of Vietnam, having been organized, developed, educated, and led by the Party. The Party's political and military policies are the decisive factors in its victories. The Liberation Army of South Vietnam bears the heroic traditions, the indomitable spirit, and the combat solidarity of the heroic people of South Vietnam. It also bears the glorious traditions of service to the people of the People's Army of Vietnam. The combat objectives of the Army are to resolutely implement the programs and policies of the Party, to liberate South Vietnam from the imperialist and feudalist yoke of oppression, to secure national independence, to distribute land to the peasants, and to move forward toward socialism.

The Liberation Army of South Vietnam is both a combat army and an operational and production army. In order to carry out its duties, the Liberation Army of South Vietnam will organize three types of troops: main-force troops, local force troops, and guerrilla militia. The army will be built on an urgent basis, but this must be done in accordance with the actual situation and with our own practical capabilities, and so that the army is able to deal with any unexpected eventuality. The development of full-time units will be our primary focus, but we must also consider the development of local forces and guerrilla militia as very important.²⁵

On 15 February 1961 the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam announced the unification of all revolutionary armed forces in South Vietnam under the name of the "Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam."

By the end of 1960, our people had completed six years of peacetime construction in the North and had survived a fierce period of struggle against the U.S.-Diem clique in the South. Under the leadership of the Party Central Committee, headed by Chairman Ho Chi Minh, our people in North Vietnam had completed the rebuilding of our economy, moved forward with socialist reforms, moved into a transitional period for the building of socialism, gradually strengthened our capabilities in all areas, laid the foundation for consolidating a national defense based on the entire population, and created a solid foundation for supporting the revolution in South Vietnam. In South Vietnam, beginning with a political struggle aimed at preserving our forces, our people had shifted to the offensive, beginning with insurrections launched in individual areas.

This was a transitional period for the revolution and a turning point in the

development of our army. During this period our army continued to be hardened like steel through numerous political efforts and through the building of a new society, and its socialist awareness and maturity had progressed to a new level. The successful implementation of our first five-year military plan (1955-1960) had changed our army from an exclusively infantry, inadequately equipped force with an organizational structure that was not uniform into an armed force that had a regular, relatively modern Army, the initial organizational components of a Navy and an Air Force, and that possessed both a strong standing army and a powerful reserve force. This was a new stage of development, a revolution in the organization and technical capability of our armed forces, which in turn created a great improvement in the strength and combat ability of our army. The results of the growth of our armed forces opened the door and provided an important foundation for our army to move forward with further building plans that would, step by step, send forces to the battlefields of South Vietnam and gradually, systematically advance toward large-scale combined arms combat operations to secure a glorious victory in the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation.

In South Vietnam, beginning with the political struggle of the masses and continuing through the general uprising, our armed forces rapidly developed into three types of organizations: self-defense teams and village guerrillas; province and district armed teams; and full-time troop units at the region level. This was an important achievement of the South Vietnamese revolution during the years of struggle to preserve and develop our forces. It provided a foundation our army could use to rapidly expand our local combat forces on the battlefields of South Vietnam and to maintain the initiative as we began the fight against the United States and puppet troops.

The achievements of the building and expansion of our army's forces in the North and the South during the years from 1954 to 1960 were very great and were of major importance in many different areas. Our army was able to learn from the experiences of fraternal socialist countries in building regular, modern forces. Because, however, we had not quickly summarized and reviewed our own experiences during the resistance war against the French, in some areas we were limited and deficient in studying and applying the results of foreign experience to the practical realities of our own army and the battlefield realities of our nation. Also, because we did not adequately anticipate the development of the revolution in South Vietnam, we did not adequately prepare the number of cadre needed to respond to the developing revolutionary war in South Vietnam; this was especially true for local military cadre. Six years of building was a short time, but it provided our army with a great deal of valuable experience.

Together with the entire civilian population, our army simultaneously carried out many tasks, resolving many of our own postwar problems (defeating the enemy's postwar plans, eliminating bandits, consolidating the newly liberated areas, rebuilding and developing our economy, and implementing programs for sick and wounded soldiers, for the families of our martyrs, and for the logistics

support of the army). The most vital task that our army had to always keep in mind, however, was to increase our combat strength and our combat readiness. The enemy had new strategic plots. This meant our revolutionary army always had to be alert, keep a close watch on our opponent, and prepare our forces in all aspects to be prepared to deal with any eventuality.

Maturing in an armed uprising and a protracted people's war in which we had to simultaneously build our forces and conduct combat operations, our army had not had an opportunity to develop fully. To increase our combat strength to a new level, our main force troops had to gradually, systematically, build themselves up into a regular, modern force. This was the precise direction that the Party had clearly and in a timely fashion pointed out for this new phase. The building of a regular, modern army constituted a revolution in our thinking, organization, and technical capabilities. During this building process we had to fully absorb the guiding principles of the Party, which emanated from the practical experience of our nation and our armed forces, especially in the area of the military arts. To enable our army to properly serve as the backbone force for a people's war and to utilize the creativity of revolutionary military arts, we had to place heavy emphasis on reviewing and summarizing the combat experience of our own army and our own people, our heritage of the strategic skills of our forefathers, and only then study, on a selected basis, the experiences of the armed forces of fraternal socialist nations.

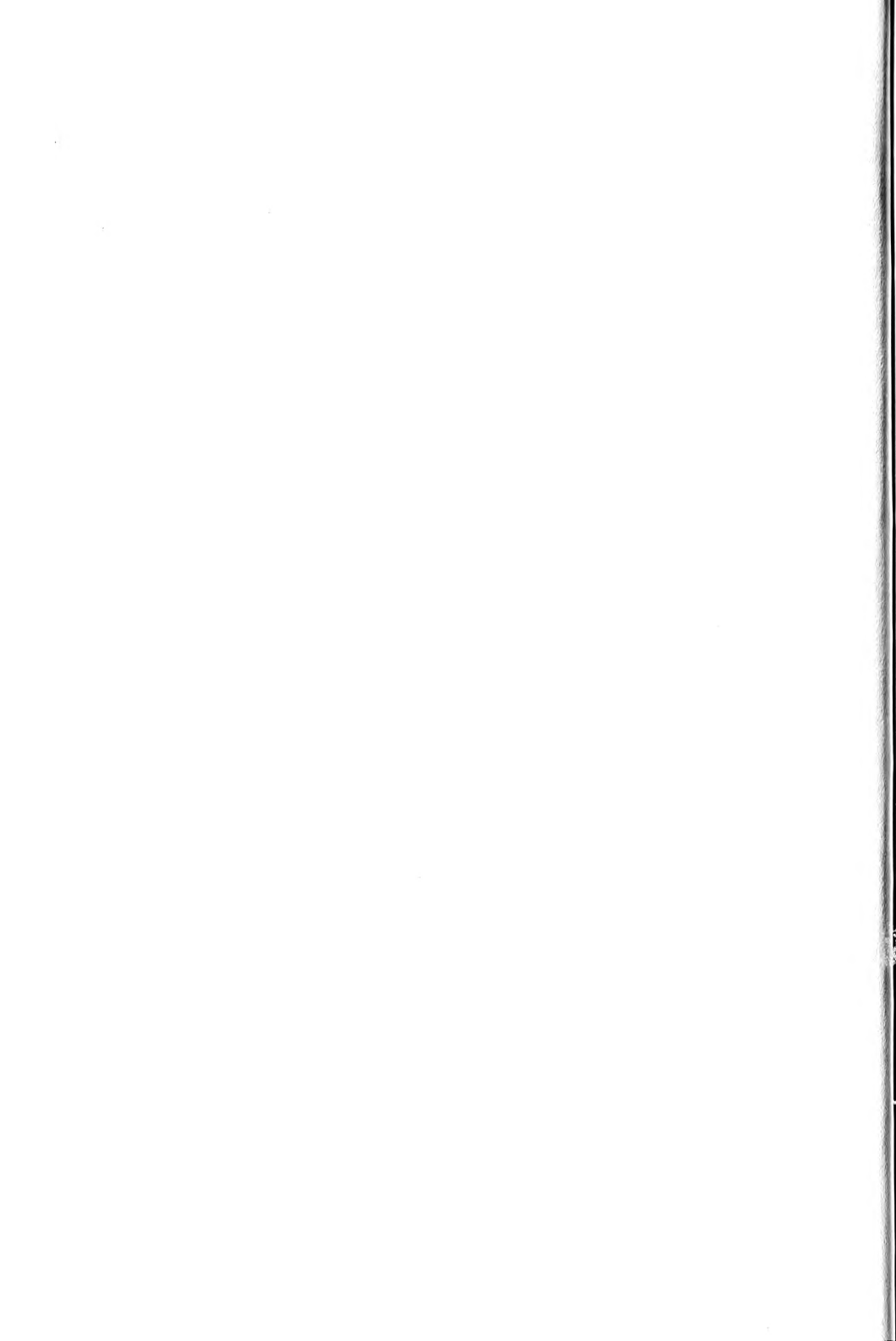
After its liberation, the northern half of our nation moved into a transitional period of building socialism. Completing the tasks of national liberation and protecting the building of socialism became the combat goals of our army. Combining economic construction with consolidating national defense, army building with strengthening our rear area, combining the strength of our race and the strength of our modern age, from this initial period of 1954–1960 our Party and our people prepared, in our nation and our army, the factors that would lead to the ultimate victory that would be won by our soldiers and civilians in the war against the Americans to save the nation.

Beginning in early 1961, because of the failure of their scheme to commit aggression and enslave the southern half of our nation through a policy of neo-colonialist rule, relying primarily on their lackeys to suppress our patriotic movement, the American imperialists were forced to change their strategy. They began to carry out a "special war" aimed at snuffing out the revolutionary struggle movement of our people in South Vietnam.

A new era for our people, the era of revolutionary war to protect the North, liberate the South, and unify our nation, had begun.

PART II

Intensifying the Work of Building a Modern, Regular Army, Expanding Our Massed Forces in South Vietnam, and Defeating the “Special Warfare” Strategy of the American Imperialists, 1961–1965



4

Developing Forces, Building a Battle Posture, and Preparing for a New Struggle

STRATEGIC DECISIONS FOR THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

In September 1960 the 3rd National Party Congress was held in Hanoi. After five years of work, our people in North Vietnam had completed the plan to rebuild and reform our economy and had begun to implement our five-year plan to build the technical and material structures of socialism. In South Vietnam, uprisings in individual areas had spread throughout the lowlands of Cochin China and the mountain jungles of Central Vietnam. It was becoming increasingly clear that the situation was developing into a revolutionary war as the Party Central Committee had foreseen. In Laos, after the May 1959 incident when the 2nd Battalion opened fire against the American imperialists and their lackeys, the Laotian revolution began to combine political struggle with armed struggle. On the international scene, faced with the growing strength of the socialist camp and the offensive force of the three revolutionary tides, the American imperialists had to alter their worldwide strategy. They shifted from a strategy of “massive retaliation” to a strategy of “flexible response.” They also began vigorous preparations for direct armed intervention into South Vietnam and Laos.

The Party’s 3rd National Congress analyzed the overall situation and set forward two goals as the overall tasks for our nation’s revolution during this new period: Push ahead strongly with the socialist revolution in North Vietnam and complete the popular democratic national revolution in South Vietnam. There was an intimate relationship between the two strategic missions of advancing the socialist revolution in North Vietnam and achieving national unification. Each mission would drive the other forward so that both would develop simultaneously. “The building of socialism in North Vietnam is the most decisive mission for the development of the entire revolution throughout our country and for the goal of reunifying our nation. . . . Our brothers in the South have the mission of

- regiments with powerful assault capabilities and firepower, and a number of composite artillery units capable, to a limited extent at least, of destroying fortifications, killing tanks, and shooting down aircraft.
3. Assist the revolutionary armed forces of Laos with military advisors and with the training of their cadre. Build up liberated areas and expand the armed forces of our Lao allies. Whenever our Lao allies request assistance, send Vietnamese volunteer forces to fight alongside the troops of our allies.
 4. Strengthen the Party's apparatus for providing guidance to the military and guarantee the united collective leadership of the Party over the army. In North Vietnam, take another step forward in reorganizing the leadership and command agencies of the Ministry of Defense and the military regions in response to the need to build modern, regular armed forces and to our requirements and combat missions in South Vietnam and in Laos. At the same time, make active preparations so that, in case the war widened, we could use the headquarters of our military regions as a foundation for the formation of field headquarters to command large main force units and as local military headquarters. Establish staff agencies and military units to carry out our international duties on the battlefields of Laos. In South Vietnam, organize a military command structure from the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) level down through provincial and district Party committees to village Party chapters. Proceed with the establishment of Military Region Headquarters.

The Central Military Party Committee would be the Party's highest-level leadership agency in the army. Now that the struggle of our people in South Vietnam had developed into a revolutionary war, the Politburo gave the Central Military Party Committee the responsibility for directing military activities in South Vietnam.⁶

With regard to the immediate directions and duties of the revolution in South Vietnam, based on the new growth of the movement the Politburo decided to change our struggle formula, to further intensify the political struggle while at the same time elevating the armed struggle by assigning it equal importance with the political struggle to enable us to attack the enemy with both political and military forces. The duties of the armed forces in South Vietnam were to rapidly expand their forces and step up their attacks to annihilate the enemy so that, in cooperation with the political struggle of the masses, they could cause the disintegration of enemy forces and enemy governmental structures in an ever-expanding area, take control of the mountain jungles, take back the rural lowlands, build organizations and intensify the political struggle in the cities, and create conditions that would provide us an opportunity to launch a general offensive and general uprising to totally overthrow the US.-Diem regime.

During the closing session of the Politburo session on 25 February 1961, Chairman Ho Chi Minh spoke and gave advice to the army. Uncle Ho said, "Our army is a people's army. Our war is a people's war. The army must be tightly

linked to the people. Within the army the spirit of mutual endurance and sharing of hardship is very important. We must improve our technical equipment, but the lives of the troops must be kept in line with the lives of the people.”⁷

The Politburo of the Party Central Committee set out clear directions and missions for our army building and combat operations during this transition period for the revolution, laying out the decisive factors that would ensure our army would be completely successful in fulfilling these responsibilities. The advice given by Uncle Ho provided profound instruction in revolutionary character and clearly showed us the foundation from which we should build the strength of our army.

Carrying out the missions assigned to them by the Party and Uncle Ho, our armed forces in North and South Vietnam entered a new period of growth and combat.

BUILDING THE ARMED FORCES IN THE NORTH

In North Vietnam, after the 3rd National Party Congress, a socialist emulation campaign directed toward the South grew in strength day by day. The Duy Hai Machinery Factory in Haiphong city, the Dai Phong Cooperative in Quang Binh province, and the Bac Ly Middle School in Nam Ha province set leading examples for the work of building socialism for the sake of our brothers in South Vietnam. Within the army, the “Three Firsts” emulation movement (to be the best, the most uniform, and make the most achievements in training and combat readiness), which began with the 2nd Artillery Battery of the 304th Division, quickly expanded into a mass-based, widespread emulation movement.

The socialist emulation movement in North Vietnam and the high tide of insurrection in South Vietnam signaled the beginning of a new phase in the development of our nation and our revolution. Chairman Ho Chi Minh affirmed his faith in the victory of the revolution in the homey, unpretentious lines of poetry he spoke to the All-Armed Forces Congress of Heroes and Emulation Combatants in 1961:

Workers wave high the Duyen Hai flag
 Peasants wave the Dai Phong flag
 Heroic soldiers wave the “Three Firsts” flag
 Workers, Peasants, Soldiers in great competition, in great solidarity
 Socialism is certain to achieve great victory
 North and South are certain to be united, our nation unified under one roof.

During the first months of 1961 the Central Military Party Committee held many meetings to discuss the force-building and combat missions of the army for the 1961–1965 period. Determining that the “current situation includes new

developments, and the requirements of our revolutionary tasks and military tasks are higher than ever,"⁸ the Central Military Party Committee decided to take advantage of this time of peace in North Vietnam to step up the pace and increase the quality of all of our activities by building an army with a high level of political awareness, excellent technical and scientific skills, strict discipline, and that was alert and ready to fight to defend North Vietnam and to fully carry out its mission of serving as the strategic reserve for the revolutionary war in South Vietnam.

For the immediate future, based on the developments of the situation in South Vietnam, on our own actual capabilities, and on the assistance provided by our friends, the Central Military Party Committee laid out a number of concrete requirements and objectives that our army must meet during the 1961–1963 period. With regard to our tables of organization and equipment, we needed to take another step forward in reorganizing our standing army to meet the requirements for regularizing and modernizing our forces; to concentrate on building up our specialty branches and cadre training schools and on expanding our militia self-defense forces; and be prepared to expand the army as required by the demands of war. With regard to combat training, we had to press ahead with the work of reviewing and summarizing our war experiences, of conducting research in military science, and of developing fighting methods suited to our army's level of technical equipment, the battlefield conditions in our nation, and our combat opponent: the U.S. armed forces and their lackeys. With regard to political and ideological affairs, we had to give the army a fuller understanding of its duties of building and defending North Vietnam and of being prepared to fight in South Vietnam whenever the order was given.

With a profound understanding of the strategic significance the mission of building our army into a regular, modern force had for the developmental and combat operations of our army, on 29 May 1961 the Central Military Party Committee launched an armywide campaign to "build the army by advancing quickly, strongly, and surely toward becoming a regular, modern force."

In the spring of 1961, arm in arm with the entire Party and the entire population, our army launched a wave of political activities to study the documents issued by the 3rd National Party Congress.

Our units studied revolutionary policy, military policies and requirements, and the relationship between our two strategic revolutionary missions: 1) building the army and defending North Vietnam and 2) intensifying the revolutionary war in South Vietnam. Following the study sessions conducted during the 1955–1960 period, the spring 1961 political activities campaign raised the level of socialist awareness of cadre and soldiers regarding their duties of army building and fighting in this new phase of the revolution, especially their duty to liberate South Vietnam and to deal with the appearance among our forces of instances of pacifism and a lessening of fighting spirit. This campaign laid a very important foundation for the ideas and ideology our army used to successfully implement the second five-year military plan.

In accordance with the directions and plans for army building that had been laid out, in March 1961 the Central Military Party Committee decided to establish the Strategic Review and Summary Section, which was assigned the mission of reviewing and summarizing our experiences in armed struggle and force building during the resistance war against the French to aid our mission of building our army and conducting combat operations. Lieutenant General Hoang Van Thai, member of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Army of Vietnam, was chosen to serve as Chief of this section. The Armed Forces History Office of the General Political Department, the Department for the Study of Military Science of the General Staff, and a network of other staff agencies established and organized by each branch down to the division level, worked to summarize our war experiences, draft unit histories, and study military science. The Military-Political Academy was formed out of the Mid-High-Level Military School and the Mid-High-Level Political School. Our schools for training infantry and other specialty branch officers were reorganized, the number of trainees increased, and the quality of their training and instruction improved. Many cadre with a background in military theory and with experience in combat and training activities were brought together at the General Staff, the General Political Department, and the General Department of Rear Services to work to draft combat regulations, textbooks, and training and instruction programs to meet our requirements for building a regular, modern army.

PREPARING FOR BATTLE IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND LAOS

To implement the Central Military Party Committee's directive to prepare our army to enter combat on the battlefields of South Vietnam and perform its international duties in Laos, the General Staff decided to bring a number of units up to wartime table of organization, strength, and equipment standards in order to have on hand a number of powerful infantry units that, when needed, could be sent to operate on the "B" (South Vietnam) and "C" (Laotian) battlefields. Units brought up to wartime status included the 325th Division, the 341st Brigade, and the 244th Regiment of Military Region 4 and the 316th and 335th Brigades and the 148th Regiment of the Northwest Military Region.

The 338th Division was reorganized into a special training group. All cadre and soldiers being sent to the battlefield were sent to Group 338 for training. This training included the situation and duties of the Southern revolution, supplementary training in technical and tactical matters, training for a long march, and physical training. A number of these cadre and soldiers were organized into framework groups for staff agencies and military units, whereas others were organized into units for their long march. After their arrival these individuals would receive specific assignments based on battlefield requirements. Because the international situation was undergoing a number of complicated developments,

because of the limited ability of the battlefield to absorb them, and because of the limited ability of Group 559 to support them and to transport supplies, the initial groups of cadre and soldiers sent to fight in the South during the period 1959–1963 were made up primarily of regroupees from Cochinchina and Interzone 5 and cadre and soldiers with previous experience fighting on the battlefields of South Vietnam. Weapons sent to the South consisted mostly of infantry weapons plus a number of mortars and recoilless rifles.

In September 1961, the Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee approved a General Staff proposal for building up our forces on the South Vietnam battlefield during the 1961–1963 period. According to this proposal, besides the expansion using locally-recruited forces, we would send to South Vietnam 30,000 or 40,000 troops who had received regular military training in North Vietnam. All cadre and soldiers who were natives of South Vietnam or were familiar with the South Vietnamese battlefields, both those in the armed forces and those working in other sectors, were registered and given supplementary political, military, and physical training to prepare them to be sent to perform their duties on the battlefield. All national defense enterprises increased the production and repair of rifles, submachine guns, mortars, small arms ammunition, grenades, etc., in response to the immediate requirements of our armed forces in South Vietnam. Military Transportation Group 559 grew to between 2,000 and 3,000 personnel and used primitive forms of transportation to support the southern march of our soldiers and to increase the supply of material support to the battlefield.

Going to “B” (South Vietnam) became a glorious combat duty, a source of honor and pride for every cadre and soldier in the army. With their eyes always turned toward the South, our army’s cadre and soldiers trained day and night, improved their combat skills, and practiced long marches carrying heavy packs to prepare themselves to cross the Annamite Mountains to South Vietnam to fight the Americans.

THE WAR IN THE SOUTH

In South Vietnam, during the last months of 1960 and the early months of 1961 the mass uprising movement, combining political struggle with military struggle, expanded into a number of important areas, the outskirts of the cities, and areas populated by followers of various religions. Face-to-face political struggle became ever more widespread and employed even stronger slogans than those used in the past. Areas in which the people had gained control over their own lives expanded day by day.⁹ The development of our political forces and our military forces took a step forward.

The U.S. policy of aggression and its attempt to impose neocolonialist rule over South Vietnam suffered a serious failure. In May 1961 U.S. Vice President L. Johnson visited Saigon and secretly signed a treaty of cooperation with the

Diem puppet regime, promising to support Diem and to be ready to send U.S. military forces to assist Diem's army. In June 1961 Kennedy dispatched the Stalay delegation to South Vietnam to lay out a plan to crush the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam within 18 months.¹⁰ Three months later General M. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited South Vietnam to study the situation and to supplement the military aspects of Stalay's plan.

On 18 October 1961 the United States and the Diem puppet government signed a mutual defense treaty in Saigon. Ngo Dinh Diem proclaimed a "state of emergency" and assumed "special powers" in South Vietnam. In Washington, President Kennedy announced that "the U.S. armed forces are prepared to participate in an increased allied military effort with the Republic of Vietnam . . . and will participate in military operations with the Army of South Vietnam." In November 1961 President Kennedy and the U.S. National Security Council approved a "special warfare" strategy for South Vietnam and approved the Stalay-Taylor plan to "pacify" South Vietnam within 18 months. In December 1961 two U.S. helicopter companies and 400 "Green Beret" commandos arrived in South Vietnam,¹¹ marking the beginning of a period of transition from the use of U.S. advisors to the direct participation of U.S. armed forces in combat operations.

Operating under American command and using U.S. dollars and U.S. weapons, the Diem puppet regime worked to draft new soldiers and to upgrade troops. In only one year, 1961, the regular army grew to a strength of 200,000 men. These soldiers were organized into seven infantry divisions and six Marine battalions. Regional Force strength grew to 80,000, organized into one or two battalions per province, Popular Force strength grew to 70,000 soldiers, organized up to company strength at the district or precinct level.¹² The enemy built thousands of new outposts and launched tens of thousands of sweep operations aimed at wiping out our revolutionary armed forces, extinguishing the struggle movement of the masses, and restoring control over the village and hamlet level. The two primary measures used by the enemy in his "special warfare" strategy were: a) to collect the population into areas called "strategic hamlets" in order to control the population, wipe out our cadre, Party members, and guerrillas living among the people, and cut our armed forces off from access to the people; and b) to use puppet soldiers to conduct sweep operations using "helicopter assault" and "armored vehicle assault" tactics to annihilate our revolutionary armed forces and support the collection of the population into "strategic hamlets." With regard to North Vietnam, the United States and its puppets dispatched reconnaissance aircraft and sent commandos to conduct sabotage operations to block the movement of personnel and supplies to South Vietnam. The U.S. Joint Chief of Staff prepared a contingency plan for use if the puppet army and puppet government in South Vietnam was in danger of collapse. This plan called for the dispatch of a portion of the U.S. combat forces stationed in the Pacific region and of a number of infantry and Marine divisions from the United States to South Vietnam to participate in combat operations.¹³

Closely monitoring each step in the development of the revolutionary struggle movement in South Vietnam and the enemy's new schemes and actions, in early 1960 the Politburo foresaw the appearance of a new situation, a vicious and complex struggle between ourselves and the enemy for control of grass-roots governmental authority at the village level. To conduct this struggle the United States and its puppets had no other option than the use of military forces as their primary tool to oppose us. To defend against them and restrict and respond to them in a timely manner, our soldiers and civilians had to monitor the ability of the American imperialists to intervene by force of arms.

To implement our formula of combining armed struggle with political struggle, the Politburo decided to intensify attacks in all three strategic areas. In the mountains, where the military struggle would play the primary role, we would annihilate enemy troops in order to widen our liberated areas, build bases, and expand our armed forces. In the rural lowlands the military and political struggles would play coequal roles. We would have to assess the balance between these two types of struggle, depending on the actual balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy in each area. In urban areas the political struggle would be preeminent and would be conducted in both legal and illegal forms.

During the resistance war against the French, our soldiers and civilians in Cochin China and Central Vietnam had built many solid base areas, places where full-time armed units could be maintained. Many war zones became famous for their achievements in annihilating enemy forces and in building up our own forces. These included War Zone D, the Duong Minh Chau War Zone, and the Rung Sat area in eastern Cochin China; the Plain of Reeds in central Cochin China; the U Minh Forest in western Cochin China; the mountains of the Central Highlands; and the western portions of Central Vietnam. During the years of struggle (1954–1960) to preserve our forces and to develop to a high tide of insurrection, we continued to maintain and expand these bases, and once again, in a new historical context, the bases again became areas where the first full-time armed units in South Vietnam could base themselves and conduct operations. Even though these areas were sparsely populated and were economically backward, the mountain and jungle terrain was very advantageous for the building up of forces and for combat operations, especially at a time when our revolutionary armed forces were still young. People from all ethnic groups in the mountain base areas quickly allied themselves with the revolution. With one heart they looked to the Party and Uncle Ho for leadership. Even when suffering shortages and hardships in their daily lives, our people wholeheartedly supported the revolution and contributed toward "feeding our troops." In areas where we had military supply routes the people enthusiastically served as porters, carrying rice and ammunition for our troops. Relying on favorable terrain and assisted by people of all ethnic groups, our full-time armed forces used these mountain bases as places to rest, consolidate, and grow in strength, systematically building the mountainous areas into battlefields to attack and destroy the enemy.

The rural lowlands were a rich, heavily populated area and a local source of personnel and supplies for our armed forces. In these areas our units relied on "leopard-spot" bases (liberated hamlets and villages), "bases in the bosom of the population" to build and expand their forces. When operating in the rural lowlands our full-time armed units received aid and support from the people and the local guerrillas, enabling us to properly combine our military attacks with the political struggle. In the urban areas our cadre and soldiers actively recruited agents from among the civilian population, within the governmental apparatus, and within the enemy's army, and prepared for armed operations.

The work of building and expanding our bases and armed organizations in all three strategic areas was a great achievement by our soldiers and civilians in South Vietnam during the initial years of the war against the Americans to save the nation. These bases were scattered throughout the enemy's area. The bases had strong points within each area, were linked together, and enjoyed solid backing from our great rear area in North Vietnam. With favorable terrain and the protection of the local population, our bases became resting places for our full-time armed units. They contributed to the creation of a widespread people's war battlefield posture, an offensive posture for our three types of troops that supported the political struggle of the masses in all three strategic areas.

Relying on these bases and the ever-expanding areas in which the masses had seized control, our army in South Vietnam took a new step forward in its development.

By the end of 1961, our self-defense guerrillas had grown to a total strength of 100,000, with 70,000 in Cochin China and 30,000 in Region 5 (including Tri-Thien and the Central Highlands). Many liberated villages were able to form full-time guerrilla platoons using weapons captured from the enemy and homemade weapons.¹⁴ This force was the backbone of the armed struggle combined with the political struggle at the village and hamlet level and was an important force providing combat support and a constant source of reinforcements for our full-time armed units.

Our provincial and district local force troops and regional main force troops had a total strength of 24,500 cadre and soldiers. Each district was able to form a local force platoon, and some districts organized forces up to the company level. Each province had one or two companies. The strength of a provincial local force company was around 100 soldiers, more or less, organized into infantry, engineer, and fire support platoons and support subunits. Province and district local force units were equipped with American automatic rifles, light and medium machine guns, and 60 and 81mm mortars. A number of units, especially in Region 5 and the Central Highlands, began to receive French Mat rifles, 57mm recoilless rifles, and 82mm mortars shipped down from North Vietnam. Many provinces established weapons repair facilities and weapons production factories using the abundant supply of unexploded enemy bombs and shells that the local population collected and gave to our soldiers.

The main force troops of our military regions totaled 11 battalions: six battalions belonging to Military Region 5 and five battalions belonging to Military Region 6 (extreme southern Central Vietnam), Military Region 7 (eastern Cochin China), Military Region 8 (central Cochin China), Military Region 9 (western Cochin China Bo), and the Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Region. Each military region battalion had a strength of 400 to 500 soldiers and was organized into two or three infantry companies, one sapper company, one fire support company or platoon, and support subunits. These battalions were primarily equipped with captured enemy weapons and weapons shipped in from North Vietnam.

On 9 September 1962 the 1st Infantry Regiment was officially formed in the Duong Minh Chau base area in eastern Cochin China.¹⁵ This was the first regiment-sized mobile main force unit to serve on the battlefields of South Vietnam during the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation. This was also the first time we had ever formed a regiment-sized unit in Cochin China. The initial forces of the 1st Regiment consisted of two infantry battalions and one cadre framework battalion. Command cadre from company up to regimental level were primarily individuals who had served during the resistance war against the French and had received regular military training in North Vietnam. A number of the regiment's cadre had been transferred to the regiment from Military Region 7's 500th Main Force Battalion and from provincial local force companies. The enlisted soldiers of the regiment were courageous youths who had matured during the years of political struggle and the period of insurrection. Their weapons and equipment consisted of guns captured from the enemy and a number of Mat carbines and rifles, 75mm recoilless rifles, and radios shipped in from North Vietnam.

The Party Central Committee, COSVN, and the local Party committees devoted a great deal of attention to building and increasing the quality of our armed forces in South Vietnam. Many Party members with experience in combat operations and in force building were chosen by the Party to serve as the backbone for building up our main force and local force units. In 1961 Party members serving in our full-time military units made up 50 percent of all Party members throughout South Vietnam. This factor was decisive in establishing the political strength of our units and guaranteed the growth of our forces and the combat victories of our armed forces in South Vietnam.

To ensure the centralized, united leadership of the Party over our armed forces, the Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee organized a system of military command and guidance under the Regional Party Committees, Provincial Party Committees, District Party Committees, and Village Party Chapters. The Military Affairs Section of COSVN was the staff agency that assisted COSVN in guiding and commanding our armed forces in Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam. Major General Tran Luong, member of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Director of the General Political Department of the People's Army of Vietnam, was appointed as Military Affairs Section Chief. Region 5 (including the entire Central Highlands and the provinces of Ninh

Thuan, Binh Thuan, Quang Tri, and Thua Thien) established a Military Region Party Committee and a Military Region Command. Major General Nguyen Don, alternate member of the Party Central Committee and former Commander of Military Region 4, was appointed Secretary of the Region 5 Party Committee and concurrently Military Region Commander and Political Commissar.

Our network of agencies conducting Party and political work within the full-time armed units was consolidated. From the local force company level up, every unit had a political officer. District local force platoons had a Party chapter. The work of political education and ideological leadership focused on educating our cadre and soldiers in hatred of the United States and Diem and increasing their combat spirit and their resolve to liberate South Vietnam and unify the Fatherland.

Rear services [logistics] support for these units was the responsibility of the rear services offices of the COSVN Military Affairs Section and of the various military regions. Each military region built rear services bases¹⁶ and was responsible for collection and purchasing duties, receiving supplies, establishing stockpiles, transporting supplies to operational theaters to support their troops, increasing their own partial self-sufficiency in food, establishing factories for the production and repair of weapons, etc.¹⁷ Rice provided by the population or collected and purchased by rear services agencies and stored in people's homes was transported by civilian porters and by local means of transportation (boats, vehicles) belonging to the civilian population.

While building up their forces, our armed forces in South Vietnam also intensified their activities, eroding the enemy's strength and killing thousands of enemy troops.¹⁸ Province and district local force troops cooperated with village guerrillas to repel many sweep operations mounted by enemy regular and regional force troops and supported the masses in uprisings to seize and retain control over their own lives. In Region 5, full-time armed units conducted powerful operations in the southern portion of the Central Highlands and in the contested areas of the lowlands. During an action campaign in the Bac Ha-An Khe area in mid-1961 they wiped out ten outposts and eliminated from the field of combat three companies of enemy troops. In eastern Cochin China, on 17 September 1961 the 500th Main Force Battalion of Military Region 7, in cooperation with local force troops of Phu Giao and Tan Uyen districts, attacked and seized the Phuoc Thanh sector headquarters, which was held by one Ranger battalion and one police company. Our forces held control of the city for three days. After the battle, using 600 weapons captured from the enemy and with new reinforcements, the military region formed the 700th Infantry Battalion and the 900th Fire Support Battalion.

Although the scale of operations of our armed forces was still small, these operations nevertheless made a contribution toward advancing the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam, combining armed struggle with political struggle. The armed struggle and the armed forces played an increasingly important role in the overall struggle.

In 1961, a year of transition between the period of uprisings in individual areas and the period of revolutionary warfare, through the efforts of the entire Party, the entire population, and the entire army, the armed forces in South Vietnam grew rapidly. They took the first step toward creating the three types of troops, received firm leadership from the Party, and organized a command system from the top down to the bottom. During this first step in building up its forces, the army in South Vietnam still had a number of weaknesses. These weaknesses included a lack of uniformity in the pace of development of armed forces between regions; a lack of balance between the different types of forces; weaknesses in the equipment and level of technical and tactical skills (especially in tactics for attacking outposts and lines of communications) of our full-time units; problems in logistics support in the mountain base areas; and a great shortage of cadre and technical personnel. The birth and development of the armed forces in South Vietnam was one of the success stories of the heroic long-term revolutionary struggle of the people of South Vietnam, and it marked a new step forward in the maturation of our army during the resistance war against the United States to save the nation. Operating under the name of the "Liberation Army of South Vietnam," our full-time troops in South Vietnam became the local combat force of our army on the battlefield. They had the responsibility, together with the entire nation, of directly fighting against and defeating the U.S. and puppet soldiers, liberating South Vietnam, and unifying the nation.

WAR SPREADS TO LAOS

In Laos, following the defeat of the French colonialists and the forced withdrawal of the French army under the terms of the Geneva Agreement of July 1954, the American imperialists replaced the French. They used the rightist forces as lackeys to carry out their schemes of aggression and to impose their own neocolonialist rule over Laos.

Under the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party the people of Laos began a new period of struggle to maintain and develop their revolutionary forces, protect the two liberated provinces,¹⁹ and achieve their goal of building a peaceful, neutral, and prosperous Lao nation. In May 1959 the United States and its lackeys blatantly attacked the liberated area, seeking to seize weapons and wipe out the armed forces of the Laotian revolution. Under the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party the 2nd Pathet Lao Battalion fought heroically, breaking through the enemy encirclement and moving its forces out to launch guerrilla warfare in southeastern Xieng Khoang province. This was an important victory, marking the beginning of a period of political struggle combined with armed struggle in the nation of Laos.

The strength of the revolutionary movement and the growing pacifist, neutralist, and patriotic tendencies of the people of Laos after the August 1960 coup

in Vientiane²⁰ greatly disconcerted the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys, Phoumi Nosovan and Boun Um. In September 1960 the United States, using military forces loyal to the rightists supported by soldiers of the Royal Army of Thailand, attacked Vientiane and sought to destroy the bases of the Lao revolution and encroach into the liberated area.

In response to a request from our Lao friends and in accordance with instructions from the Politburo, elements of the People's Army of Vietnam again marched out to carry out our international duty on the battlefields of Laos.

In November 1960 a number of military advisors and a 105mm artillery battery were sent to reinforce Lao troops fighting to defend Vientiane. In early 1961 a number of infantry, artillery, and engineer battalions from the 316th and 335th Brigades of the Northwest Military Region and from the 325th Infantry Division and the 271st Regiment of Military Region 4 were sent to conduct combat operations in support of the soldiers and civilians of our Lao allies.²¹ In addition to combat units, our army also sent military advisors and formed operations teams made up of cadre and soldiers experienced in mass proselytizing work, to be sent to Laos to help our allies expand their armed forces, consolidate their liberated zones, and build up revolutionary forces behind enemy lines. A military cadre training school to assist the Lao revolution was established. Weapons captured from the enemy during the resistance war against the French and a number of other types of technical equipment were shipped to our allies.

Carrying out the words of Chairman Ho Chi Minh, who said, "Helping a friend is helping ourselves," our volunteer cadre and soldiers displayed the revolutionary quality and excellent traditions of the People's Army of Vietnam. They took on hardships for themselves while reserving the best things to our allies, they shared the hardships of the people of this friendly nation, they respected and loved the Lao people like members of their own families, and they stood ready to sacrifice their own lives for the revolutionary cause of our friends.

The combat alliance of the soldiers and people of the nations of Vietnam and Laos against one common enemy, the U.S. imperialists, was a special relationship based on the long-standing close association of our two nations and steeped in the sacred spirit of international proletarianism of our two Parties and our two armies. This alliance created new favorable conditions that enabled the Lao and Vietnamese Revolutions to grow in strength and ensured that our army could successfully carry out its tasks of army building and fighting on all battlefields.

From the end of 1960 until April 1961 the soldiers and civilians of Laos, fighting alongside Vietnamese volunteer troops, liberated the provinces of Sam Nua, Phongsaly, and Xieng Khoang and most of the province of Luang Prabang. The strategically important area of the Plain of Jars and Routes 7, 8, 9, and 12 were included in the Lao liberated zone. In May 1961 the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys were forced to accept a cease-fire and agree to attend the Geneva Conference on Laos.

THE STRATEGIC TRANSPORTATION ROUTE EXPANDS INTO LAOS

In view of the growth of the revolution in the nation of our Lao allies and with the agreement of the Lao Party Central Committee and of our own Party Central Committee, the Central Military Party Committee approved a recommendation from Military Region 4 Headquarters and the Headquarters of Group 559 to launch an offensive campaign against enemy forces in the Route 9–Southern Laos area. This offensive was aimed at enabling the Lao revolution to expand to the south and at transferring Group 559's strategic transportation route to the western side of the Annamite Mountain chain. The window of opportunity for launching this campaign was the period before the date of the cease-fire between the Lao parties that was agreed upon during the Geneva Conference.

The 325th Infantry Division, the 19th Border Defense Battalion of Military Region 4, and the 927th Ha Tinh Province Local Force Battalion were dispatched to Laos to conduct coordinated combat operations with the soldiers and people of Laos. The Commander of the 325th Division and the Commander of Group 559 became part of the campaign command headquarters.

On 11 April 1961, the 19th Border Defense Battalion, working with a number of Pathet Lao units, advanced along Route 8 and liberated Cam Cot and Lat Sao. The 927th Battalion attacked Muong Phin town. The 101st Regiment of the 325th Division attacked and captured the town of Tchepone. Exploiting these victories, the Vietnamese-Lao allied forces advanced along Route 9, expanding to the east as far as the Ka-Ki Bridge (Ban Dong) and to the west as far as Muong Pha Lan. The enemy defensive line was shattered along a stretch of more than 100 kilometers along Route 9. The campaign ended in a clear victory on 3 May 1961, before the cease-fire order in Laos came into effect. The liberated areas in Laos had been expanded in an important strategic region and the Pathet Lao army and our Vietnamese volunteer soldiers had been tempered in battle, raising their combat capabilities to a high level.

As soon as Muong Phin and Tchepone were liberated, Group 559 immediately “flipped” its strategic transportation route and its commo-liaison route from the eastern side to the western side of the Annamite Mountain range. The 301st Battalion was given additional reinforcements and was elevated to regimental status, becoming the 70th Regiment. This regiment built a road through Vit Thu Lu and over High Point 1001 and opened a trail for portering supplies along the western slopes of the Annamite Mountains. The 25th and 26th Engineer Battalions of Military Region 4 and the 927th Ha Tinh Province Local Force Battalion built a transportation route for use by vehicles connecting Route 12 with Route 9.²² The 98th Engineer Regiment (subordinate to the High Command) was sent to the area south of Route 9 to rebuild the road from Ban Dong to Muong Noong.²³ The 98th Regiment then continued to build a supply road to Bac and a commo-liaison trail to Tang Non. Engineering troops from the 325th Division repaired the Ta Khong airfield at Tchepone, enabling transport aircraft of the

People's Army of Vietnam to land and to make parachute drops of supplies, transporting emergency shipments of weapons and vital supplies to the battlefields of South Vietnam.²⁴

On 5 May 1961 a group of military cadre being sent to reinforce the COSVN Military Command and the military regions in South Vietnam departed from Xuan Mai²⁵ in Hoa Binh province to march down the road along the western side of the Annamite Mountains to Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam. This group was made up of 500 personnel, the majority of whom were mid- and high-ranking cadre, and was led by Major General Tran Van Quang, alternate member of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Army of Vietnam. The group departed just after the Soviet Union had successfully launched a space capsule named *Orient*, which carried the first person to fly into space, Hero Yuri Gagarin. To celebrate this momentous historic event the group decided to call itself the "Orient Group." On 28 July 1961, after three months of continuous marching, including many days in which the daily food ration had to be cut and cadre were forced to eat forest vegetables instead of rice because of enemy sweep operations or because the rice stores placed along Group 559's com-mo-liaison trail were insufficient, the "Orient Group" completed its journey of more than 2,000 kilometers, arriving at an assembly area on Hill 300 in Binh Long province.

Comrade Tran Van Quang was named Deputy Chief of the COSVN Military Affairs Section. The other cadre of the group were assigned to staff agencies of the COSVN Military Affairs Section and to the military staff organs of Military Region 7, Military Region 8, Military Region 9, and the Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Region. These assignments were made in preparation for the establishment of military headquarters organizations at the military region level and for the formation of main force regiments. On 1 June 1961 a second cadre group consisting of 400 personnel led by Comrades Nguyen Hoang Lam (also known as Nguyen Van Bua) and Le Quoc San departed for the battlefield. This group reached its assembly point in the South in early September 1961.

In December 1961 Route 129 was completed. The 3rd Truck Transportation Group of the General Rear Services Department was assigned to transport supplies to South Vietnam down Route 129, delivering their shipments to Na Bo, north of Route 9. Group 559's strategic transportation route had entered a new phase—it was now able to combine the use of primitive transportation methods with motorized transport, building the transportation route and the com-mo-liaison route up to a point where it was secure, stable, and could support an ever-growing flow of supplies and personnel to the battlefield.²⁶

During 1961 a new situation developed on the Indochinese Peninsula. The U.S. imperialists launched their "special war" in South Vietnam and made a direct armed intervention into Laos. The Lao and Vietnamese people moved into a new period of building and fighting, a period of revolutionary warfare against the Americans.

State industrial and commercial enterprises grew strong, completely dominating all aspects of our national economy. In 1954 North Vietnam had only 41 factories, of which 20 were large factories, but by 1963 we had 1,000 factories, of which 217 were large factories. A number of important foundations for heavy industry, such as machine making, electricity, metallurgy, chemicals, and mining, had been laid. Industrial production increased 52 percent between 1960 and 1963. Light industry and handicrafts produced most of the consumer goods used by our people domestically. Our railroad, waterway, and road networks expanded.² A civil aviation industry run by the armed forces was founded. The growing strength of the laboring class, together with the development of our industry, communications, and postal system, provided an important foundation for the systematic development of our national defense industries. With aid from the Soviet Union, China, and other fraternal socialist countries, the economy of North Vietnam was able to provide an ever-increasing portion of our technical and material requirements, further advancing our efforts to modernize our army.

Tens of thousands of people from the heavily populated lowland provinces volunteered to build new economic zones in the piedmont and high up in the mountains. Plans for a new rural countryside and for state farms, lumber enterprises, and economic organizations run by the State or by collectives were developed in strategic areas, resulting in a new distribution of our population and combining economics with national defense.

With regard to social and cultural affairs, 95 percent of the population of North Vietnam were now literate. Compared with 1954 figures, the number of students in schools up through the high school level increased by 3.5 times and the number of university and trade school students grew by 25 times. Improvements were made in sanitation and the prevention and treatment of diseases. Our new soldiers, serving under a system of universal military service, were all healthy youths who had received an excellent education in the socialist school system.

Ten years after its liberation, North Vietnam had made progress that was unprecedented in the history of our nation. From the cities to the countryside, everywhere one looked one saw economic and cultural organizations belonging to the State or to collectives. The lives of the people constantly improved and their cultural and spiritual lives made steady progress. The nation, the society, and the individual all had been transformed. North Vietnam was systematically developing into our national rear area and provided a strong foundation upon which to build our army and increase our combat power.

While implementing the first five-year military plan from 1955 to 1960 our armed forces had grown from a number of isolated, inadequately equipped infantry units into a regular, relatively modern Army and had established the initial structures of our Service and specialty branches. In 1961, however, in the face of a number of new military duties, our armed forces displayed a number of weaknesses in organization, equipment, scientific research, and in the military arts.

The goal of the second five-year military plan (1961–1965) was to build a

standing army with an appropriate strength level, containing all the elements of a modern army, with a table of organization and equipment capable of meeting the requirements of combat in our own nation and throughout the Indochinese Peninsula, and an army that could be rapidly expanded through the formation of new units when the war widened.

Our organizational tables had set the strength of the standing army in North Vietnam for the 1961–1965 period at 260,000. As long as North Vietnam still enjoyed peace, however, the Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee decided to keep the strength of the standing army at 170,000 troops³ and provide excellent training to the troops of the standing army to enable them to be able to perform their combat duties during the initial stages of a new war. It was also decided to greatly expand our militia self-defense forces and our reserve forces to enable us to rapidly expand our forces.

To implement this decision of the Politburo, the General Staff established two table of organization structures for our units. Infantry units on combat-alert status, anti-aircraft units, Air Force units, and Navy units were given their wartime table of organization strength levels. Peacetime table of organization strength levels were established for units that were below wartime strength levels and for “framework” units consisting solely of cadre and technical personnel. Cadre excess to table of organization strength levels were “cached” in the staff agencies and schools of the armed forces. Cadre and soldiers who had been discharged back to their local areas or transferred to work in the economic or cultural sectors were registered for the reserve forces and assigned to reinforce the self-defense militia forces. They could be recalled back into the army whenever necessary.

As the nationwide armed force of the masses and the powerful reserve of our army, self-defense militia forces were organized in all administrative units, production facilities, agencies, and schools. Each village in North Vietnam had approximately 100 guerrilla militia fighters. In cities, towns, and industrial areas, self-defense forces were organized in every agency, enterprise, and city block. In 1963 self-defense militia forces throughout North Vietnam totaled 1.4 million personnel organized into 95 battalions, 4,700 companies, and 32,000 platoons. Twenty percent of these militia troops were armed with rifles, submachine guns, and medium machine guns. A number of self-defense militia companies and battalions were equipped with 12.7mm anti-aircraft machine guns. A total of 1.2 million individuals⁴ were registered as members of the reserve forces, of whom 180,000 were category 1 reservists who were kept under tight administrative controls. Each year 25,000 soldiers, discharged after completion of their military service requirements, were registered into the reserve forces. Military training was increased for self-defense militia, category 1 reservists, and students at universities and trade schools. The work of inducting youths into the army to fulfill their national service requirements and of returning youths who had fulfilled their service requirements to their local areas was carried out according to a

yearly schedule. A number of local areas, agencies, and enterprises carried out on a trial basis the induction of troops into the army in accordance with wartime induction regulations.

During 1963 North Vietnam continued to maintain the strength of its standing armed forces at 173,500 personnel.⁵ With a strong reserve force and an excellent national program of military training, 15 days after mobilization orders were issued North Vietnam could increase its combat forces to 260,000 troops. In the event of a wider war it would be possible to quickly increase the size of the standing army to between 350,000 and 400,000 (during the 1964–1965 period) and to 500,000 during the 1966–1967 period.

STRENGTH AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PEOPLE'S ARMY

Based on the strength of our standing army, during the 1961–1963 period the Central Military Party Committee and the Ministry of Defense made additional adjustments to the tables of organization and upgraded the equipment of the entire armed forces in order to increase the combat power of the Army and to continue to build the basic organization structures of the Anti-Aircraft–Air Force and Navy Service Branches.

The Infantry Branch was organized into six divisions, six brigades, and three independent regiments subordinate to the High Command;⁶ the main force battalions and regiments subordinate to the military regions; and the local force provincial and district companies and battalions. An infantry division included many different specialty branch components, had relatively modern equipment, and was capable of moving across all types of terrain. Each division had a table of organization strength of 9,590 personnel organized into three infantry regiments, one artillery regiment, one anti-aircraft artillery battalion, one battalion of anti-tank guns, one engineer battalion, and assorted support units. The division's weapons and equipment consisted of 5,000 automatic rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns, all firing the same caliber of cartridge;⁷ 174 artillery pieces and mortars of different calibers;⁸ 40 37mm and 20mm anti-aircraft cannon; 190 trucks and artillery prime movers; a number of sets of light bridging equipment; 250 radios, 36 switchboards, 300 field telephones, and 300 kilometers of telephone wire. The 308th Division was brought up to full table of organization strength in personnel, weapons, and equipment in order to study the organization, equipment, and tactics of regiment- and division-sized combat units on all types of terrain.

The Artillery Branch was organized into 70 battalions and more than 100 separate batteries equipped with more than 1,000 pieces of field artillery and 1,700 mortars and recoilless rifles. Directly subordinate to the Artillery Command were four brigades equipped with long-barreled 85mm and 122mm guns and 152mm howitzers and capable of providing fire support to two different the-

aters of operations.⁹ Each military region was assigned one artillery regiment (equipped with 105mm howitzers and 160mm and 120mm mortars) and one battalion of 75mm anti-tank guns. These forces were capable of providing fire support for one infantry division in combat within the military region's area of operations. Military regions along the coast formed a number of artillery units to defend offshore islands and assumed direct control over coastal defense regiments. The Artillery Command organized two cadre framework brigades and reserved a number of artillery pieces and mortars that could be used when needed to rapidly form new units.

Engineer troops were organized into seven regiments directly subordinate to the Engineer Department and the engineer battalions subordinate to the military regions and infantry divisions. Now equipped with river-crossing equipment, vehicles, and road construction machinery, our engineer troops were able to support the movement of infantry divisions in one theater of operations and to support traffic in the theater rear area.

Armored forces consisted of one regiment (three battalions) equipped with T-34 and T-54 medium tanks, PT-76 amphibious tanks, and CAY-76 76mm self-propelled guns. The armored forces, operating alongside our infantry, were capable of conducting combat assaults in key battles.

Signal troops were organized into regiments and signal centers subordinate to the Signal and Liaison Department and signal battalions and companies subordinate to military regions, infantry divisions and brigades, and to Service and specialty branches. Our signal equipment had grown rapidly in both quantity and quality, ensuring uninterrupted communications between the High Command and all units of our armed forces and with the battlefields in South Vietnam and Laos.¹⁰

Sapper forces were organized into three mobile sapper training battalions, sappers responsible for the battlefields of South Vietnam,¹¹ and sapper-reconnaissance cadre framework units of platoon and company size for the entire armed forces. In March 1974, Battalion 74B of the Research Department of the General Staff was formed. This battalion was made up of nine sapper-reconnaissance training teams to support the war in South Vietnam and four sapper training teams to perform international duties.

Chemical troops were organized into companies and battalions equipped with chemical defense equipment. These units were subordinate to the General Staff and to the military regions and infantry divisions.

Transportation troops were organized into three regiments (the 225th, 235th, and 245th) subordinate to the General Rear Services Department and transportation companies subordinate to military regions, Service and specialty branches, and infantry divisions.

By the end of 1963 our Army had grown into a full-fledged Service Branch made up of many separate combined-arms branches. The level of equipment and mobility of our infantry divisions and brigades and of our specialty branch units

had been substantially improved. Infantry troops made up 49 percent of the total strength of the armed forces; artillery troops made up 10 percent, and engineer troops were 8.5 percent. This proportion was about right in relationship to the combat missions and level of equipment of our armed forces at that time.

Our anti-aircraft and air force troops continued to expand and to improve their equipment, systematically building themselves into a modern service branch. The Anti-Aircraft Artillery Branch consisted of 12 regiments subordinate to the Anti-Aircraft Command. These regiments were organized into two elements: strategic area defense anti-aircraft forces and field anti-aircraft forces. The strength of each anti-aircraft battery was increased from four to six 37mm or 57mm anti-aircraft guns. A number of older weapons (40mm, 85mm, 88mm) were replaced with new 57mm and 100mm weapons. The Radar Branch formed a new regiment, the 292nd Regiment, and added a number of additional companies and pieces of radar equipment to its 290th and 291st Regiments. The Air Force Branch was organized into three regiments. The 919th Regiment operated various types of transport and support aircraft including IL-14s, Li-2s, AN-2s, and MI-4 helicopters. The 921st Fighter Regiment was equipped with three companies of Mig-17s. The 910th Regiment performed training duties. In October 1963 our first anti-aircraft missile regiment was formed,¹² made up of 243 framework cadre and soldiers but not yet equipped with missiles.

To concentrate our forces, unify command, and increase the combat strength of anti-aircraft troops defending our airspace, on 22 October 1963 the Central Military Party Committee and the High Command decided to combine the Anti-Aircraft Command and the Air Force Department into the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch. Senior Colonel Phung The Tai was appointed Service Commander, and Senior Colonel Dang Tinh was appointed Service Political Commissar. Beginning with one anti-aircraft artillery division (the 367th Division) formed after our victory in the resistance war against the French and subordinate to the Artillery Command, by the end of 1963 the air defense forces of our armed forces had been formed into an independent service branch, administering modern technical support facilities and made up of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Branch, the Air Force Branch, the Radar Branch, and various support units such as signal, engineers, search lights, meteorology, etc.

Our naval forces grew rapidly and in the proper directions, developing a battle posture capable of defending the coastal areas and offshore waters of North Vietnam and transporting supplies to South Vietnam. In 1961, the first torpedo-boat group¹³ and a company of anti-submarine vessels¹⁴ were formed. With these groups, together with our two patrol boat groups (Groups 130 and 135), the People's Navy of Vietnam's fleet of modern naval vessels was born. Military ports at Bai Chay, Gianh River, Cua Hoi, a number of technical stations and radio transmitters, coastal-defense artillery firing positions, anchorages, caves for storage of torpedoes, ship cranes, etc., were built. On 3 August 1961 the Ministry of Defense established Naval Bases 1 and 2 to administer the territorial waters and

offshore islands from the Northeast to Military Region 4. Patrol Zone 1 (on Van Hoa Island), Patrol Zone 2 (on the Gianh River), and the Haiphong Zone were established. In August 1963 the Standing Committee of the Central Military Party Committee assigned the responsibility for transportation of supplies from North Vietnam to the battlefields in the South to the Navy. In January 1963 Sea Transportation Group 759 changed its designation to Naval Group 125.

Beginning with a number of boat teams and a company of mine sweepers formed during the initial years of peace in North Vietnam, by 1964 the Navy had almost 100 surface vessels of different types, including coastal patrol vessels, torpedo boats, submarine chasers, transport vessels, reconnaissance vessels, and a number of service and support vessels. Although their numbers were still small, the Navy was a relatively complete force made up of combat and support vessels able to fight in our coastal waters and to transport supplies to the battlefields in South Vietnam. Major General Ta Xuan Thu was appointed as Navy Commander and concurrently Navy Political Commissar. The Navy had become a full-fledged service branch of our armed forces, the backbone of the effort to defend the territorial waters of the Fatherland.

In this way, during the period of force building covered by the second five-year military plan (1961–1965), our army developed the structure of a modern armed force consisting of three Service Branches: the Army, Air Defense–Air Force, and Navy. The mobile main force units of the High Command and the main force troops of the military regions had become significantly stronger. The organizational structure of the entire armed forces and of each unit ensured that they could carry out their short-term missions of army building and combat readiness. This structure also was capable of rapidly expanding our forces to keep pace with the expansion of the war. With the assistance of the Soviet Union, China, and other fraternal socialist countries, our Party, people, and army had overcome the many difficulties confronting an economically backward nation, had developed a number of technical specialty branches and Service Branches, and had significantly improved the equipment of our different types of armed forces.

In comparison with the goals of the five-year plan, especially in light of the increasingly urgent combat duties of the various battlefields, our army was still weak in field artillery, high-altitude anti-aircraft weapons, tanks and armored vehicles, engineering equipment, communications equipment, and transportation vehicles. The plan, however, represented a step forward on the road to building a regular, modern army. It played a decisive role in developing our forces and in increasing our combat power for the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation.

Along with improvements in organization and equipment, our army pushed forward to create technical facilities to support training and combat readiness. Command networks for the High Command, military regions, and service branches; national defense projects in the key defensive sectors; airfields, military ports, artillery firing ranges, strategic communications networks, etc., were

built and provided with increasingly modern equipment. A network of repair and maintenance stations for weapons and vehicles was established at the level of infantry regiments and specialty branch battalions. National defense enterprises, warehouses, hospitals, clinics, etc., were combined into large installations ready to carry out production plans in support of wartime operations. The Small-Arms Department and the Ordnance Department of the General Rear Services Department and the service branches and technical specialty branches operated factories to produce and repair infantry weapons and to repair field artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, communications equipment, optical equipment, vehicles, tractors and towing vehicles, boats, barges, etc. Efforts to study and manufacture ammunition for infantry weapons, mortar shells, mines, and grenades increased. Enterprises subordinate to the Military Medical Department and the Quartermaster Department of the General Rear Services Department manufactured military medicines, uniforms, dry rations, canned goods, etc., fulfilling an important portion of our requirements for daily operations, for the establishment of reserve stocks to prepare for enemy attacks against North Vietnam, and for the support of our armed forces in South Vietnam. Construction troops subordinate to the Military Installations Department and to military regions and units did most of the work in constructing headquarters and base camps, schools, rehabilitation stations, a network of warehouses, factories, and machine shops, vehicle and artillery storage garages, etc. The ranks of our technical cadre and workers increased rapidly in quantity and quality. In 1954 our army had only a very small number of doctors and technical cadre,¹⁵ but by 1964 the number of national defense workers in our nation had grown to more than 10,000, among whom were thousands of highly skilled engineers, doctors, pharmacists, technical cadre, and technical workers. These were important elements of our army building program that enabled our army to implement the organizational systems required by a regular force and to increase our combat power. They also created a reserve for use in time of war.

Cared for and nourished by the Party, the State, and the people, the material and spiritual lives of our troops improved day by day. Almost all units had solid, permanent base camps with electricity and water to support the demands of training and daily activities. Besides the salary system that had been put into effect, other supplementary programs to improve health and to provide workers with insurance, sanitation, disease prevention, etc., were implemented on a uniform basis throughout the armed forces. Culture houses and libraries were built at the company level. Cultural classes, artistic performances, film showings, libraries for books and newspapers, and sports and physical fitness activities all became part of the daily life of all of our units.

The task of ensuring that all regulations were firmly adhered to was carried out by properly educating our cadre and soldiers to understand the importance of obedience and discipline and by regular inspections by cadre at all levels. Procedures for duty watches and combat readiness watches; maintenance procedures

for weapons, vehicles, and machinery; and procedures for daily activities, study sessions, and maintenance of internal security were implemented, guaranteeing that each unit and each individual maintained a high state of combat readiness. The phrase "disciplined like a soldier" gave evidence of a new lifestyle, a new source of pride for our younger generation, and our youth and students studied this discipline.

The work of Party building within the army and all areas of political activity received special attention. All companies had a Party chapter, and 60 percent of these Party chapters had enough Party members to elect a Party committee. Thirty percent of the infantry platoons and artillery gun sections had at least one Party member. Tens of thousands of outstanding Youth Group members, including thousands of cadre and technical personnel, were admitted to Party membership. Because the work of Party development was performed properly, the percentage of Party members in the entire standing army was constantly kept at around 30 percent, even though each year we trained about 25,000 new soldier draftees. The implementation of the "Four Goods" Party chapter building campaign,¹⁶ the emphasis on criticism and self-criticism during Party activities, and the development of a Party member's vanguard role in serving as an example to others increased the Party's leadership role in units at the lowest level. The ranks of our political officers increased rapidly in both quantity (making up 24 percent of the total number of cadre in the army) and quality (75 percent of political cadre at all levels had received basic and supplementary professional training).

Under the leadership of the Central Military Party Committee and the guidance of the General Political Department, headed by Comrade Song Hao, work on drafting theoretical study documents and political education documents for cadre at all levels and guidance documents for Party and military activities within the army was completed. Some documents were published as books, such as *Activities of the Secretary of a Party Committee* and *Company-Level Political Activities*. Basic subjects in Marxist-Leninist theory (philosophy, political economics, scientific socialism), Party history, Party building, and political activities within the army were all developed into systematic programs of study at the army's schools and institutes, and study documents on these subjects were prepared for on-the-job training of cadre and soldiers. Political activities during training and during combat were subjects taught at basic and supplementary training schools for both military and political cadre.

With a regular and rather systematic program of education in Marxist-Leninist theory and in the major aspects of the political and military policies of the Party, the level of political awareness and the ideological methods of the cadre and soldiers of our armed forces were improved to a significant extent. This was an important success for our second five-year military plan and was a decisive factor in enabling our army to successfully complete its army building plans and in raising the level of combat readiness and the combat power of our armed forces.

With regard to the work of building up our cadre ranks, the second five-year military plan set forward the goal of building a cadre corps that was absolutely loyal to the Party and the revolution and had a high level of political awareness and a rather high level of education and knowledge of modern science and military technology to enable our cadre to meet our requirements for peacetime army building and to gradually build the quantity and quality of our cadre in response to the requirements of combat and of other duties.

Working to make the most of this time while North Vietnam still enjoyed peace, the Central Military Party Committee emphasized the provision of basic, long-term, and supplementary cadre training in our schools and increased the use of supplementary, on-the-job training, using many rich and varied methods such as short-term training, command staff exercises, and encouraging cadre to study on their own.

The school system of the armed forces was strengthened and expanded. In North Vietnam there were two study institutes,¹⁷ eight officers training schools,¹⁸ one basic education school, and five military-political schools at the military region level. A total of about 15,000 students received basic and supplementary training each year. In South Vietnam we established the military-political schools subordinate to COSVN and to the military regions to train company-, platoon-, and squad-level cadre. Our corps of instructors grew in quantity and quality. Relatively systematic training programs were drafted based on our review of lessons learned during the resistance war against the French, on the combat realities in South Vietnam and Laos, and on a review of training documents used by the Soviet Union's Red Army. School and classroom facilities and instructional equipment were expanded and improved. Tests for candidates for entrance into the schools and to meet national graduation standards were developed and organized into a set of formal procedures. In a ten-year period (1954–1964) our army provided basic and supplementary training to a total of 41,000 cadre of all ranks (58 percent receiving basic training and 42 percent supplementary training), 2.7 times as many as were trained during the resistance war against the French. The highest number of cadre graduating in a single year (1964) was 8,473. During this ten-year period a total of 4,900 cadre received basic training abroad, of whom 3,063 were command cadre and 1,837 were specialized or technical cadre. This was the highest number of cadre who received basic training abroad since the establishment of our army. At a time when our country still faced many difficulties, when our instructor corps and instructional and training equipment was still deficient in many areas, the provision of basic and supplementary training in our own schools to 60 percent of our military cadre represented a major effort on the part of our Party, State, and army. After many years of continuous combat, this was a period when the high-level and mid-level cadre of our army had a chance to study and increase their knowledge of theory, the military arts, and their capacity to organize and command a modern army in preparation for a new war. Almost all platoon-level and company-level cadre received basic training in

our officers' schools. Cadre of the newly established Service and specialty branches received conversion training for their new specialties. An enthusiastic movement for all cadre to obtain a basic education developed, providing a good foundation upon which cadre at all levels could study to increase their knowledge of science, technology, and the military arts.¹⁹

In 1964 our entire armed forces had a total number of 52,041 cadre. Of these, 41,420 cadre, 18 percent of our troop strength, were in North Vietnam and 10,621 cadre, representing 10 percent of the total troop strength, were in the South. The makeup of our cadre corps responded to the mission of building a modern armed force made up of many combined-arms branches. Although in 1954 90 percent of our cadre were infantry cadre, by 1964 50 percent of our cadre were infantry and cadre of other service and specialty branches and specialized cadre made up the other 50 percent.²⁰ Besides the number of cadre serving in military units and staff agencies, we also had cadre reserves working in agencies and schools and cadre receiving basic and supplementary training in schools both in Vietnam and abroad.²¹ Our reserve forces had a total of 123,000 cadre registered as reserve members. We had 320,000 cadre who served as commanders of our militia self-defense forces; of this total 54,000 had received some type of training in military schools.

The growth of our cadre ranks was an important accomplishment of our ten-year program of army building (1954–1964). The cadre corps of our army had grown in response to the need to administer and command an armed force made up of many combined-arms branches. Our Party and our army had seized the initiative by taking the first step in preparing our military cadre corps to be ready to cope with a large-scale, prolonged, and vicious war of aggression conducted by the American imperialists.

DEVELOPING TACTICAL CONCEPTS

In order to increase the quality of training of our troops, especially training of cadre, the Central Military Party Committee set forward a policy:

On the basis of a review of lessons our army has learned in combat and utilizing the combat experiences of the armies of our fraternal socialist brothers, and based on the tables of organization and equipment that our army has established, urgently study and prepare tactical training documents and strategic campaign training documents for uniform use throughout the armed forces. Increase training activities to allow every military unit and agency of every service and specialty branch to successfully carry out their combat duties in every possible situation.

The goal was to study military science and actual operations of the entire armed forces in order to develop combat principles and tactics for use against our new

combat opponent, the U.S. armed forces and their lackeys, on our own terrain in our own country. The principles and tactics chosen would be suitable for use by an armed force made up of many combined-arms branches and operating increasingly modern equipment.

With the direct participation of many leading members of the Party and the army, by 1963 many projects to review and summarize lessons learned in both the armed struggle and the building of the people's armed forces during the resistance war against the French had been completed. Documents were prepared summarizing a number of major campaigns conducted by our main force troops, the guerrilla war behind enemy lines, Party and political activities, and rear services activities of the entire armed forces and of each individual battlefield. All these documents provided many lessons drawn from experience for use by units in carrying out the missions of building up forces and conducting combat operations in the resistance war against the United States. Practical lessons drawn from combat operations currently under way on the battlefields of South Vietnam and Laos provided additional fresh and vivid experiences for these documents. In addition to the strategic review projects conducted by the Ministry, each military region, provincial unit, division, and specialty branch also carried out a review of its experiences in force building and combat operations in its local area and within the confines of the unit itself.

In early 1964, the Central Military Party Committee and the Ministry of Defense held a conference to review lessons learned during the resistance war against the French colonialists. Comrade Truong Chinh, General Secretary of the Party during the resistance war against the French, attended this conference. Based on the experiences of our soldiers and civilians in force building and combat operations, the conference stressed one of the primary lessons learned: Using as our foundation the development of local armed forces and emphasizing guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines to force the enemy to disperse its forces, we would need to aggressively build up and emphasize the importance of the role to be played by our main force mobile troops. If our main force army was equal to or stronger than the enemy's strategic mobile forces, with proper strategic and campaign guidance our soldiers and civilians would be able to win great and continuous victories in campaigns and combat operations, maintain and develop the strategic initiative, and transform the entire character of the war.

After the Ministry's conference to summarize the strategic lessons, staff agencies of the High Command, military regions, service branches, specialty branches, and individual divisions held a number of conferences to summarize and study campaign and tactical subjects.

The Military Science Research Department of the General Staff and the *People's Army* magazine organized a seminar on tactical thinking. Colonel General Van Tien Dung, alternate member of the Party Central Committee and Chief of the General Staff; Major Generals Vuong Thua Vu, Hoang Sam, Chu Huy Man, and Hoang Minh Thao; Senior Colonels Hoang Cam and Doan Tue; and many

other high-ranking cadre of our army raised many pressing needs for tactical study, viewing such studies as important work that would help increase the quality of military training and ensure that the army was ready to fight and capable of winning battlefield victories. The conference laid out eight tactical concepts²² and discussed the application of these tactical concepts to the work of studying and writing training documents, organizational tasks, and tactical training methods.

The lessons drawn from the resistance war against the French and from ten years of force building in peacetime conditions shed light on many of the problems our army faced in force building and combat operations during this new phase. The Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee stressed the idea that the war against the United States to save the nation that our people and our army were now conducting was a people's war, closely combining both guerrilla warfare and conventional warfare methods. The three combat methods suited for this war were maneuver tactics, attacks against bases (by main force and/or local force troops), and guerrilla warfare (by the civilian masses, by self-defense militia, by local forces, and by dispersed elements of our main force troops). These three combat methods were intimately related and mutually supportive. In our war guidance, we had to apply these methods flexibly, depending on the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy and on the actual situation in each phase of the war and on each battlefield. In building up our army we must firmly grasp practical ideas based on our strategic military responsibilities and on the particular form of warfare and the type of combat method in order to establish the appropriate size and organization for our forces, and we must constantly work to increase the combat power of our three types of troops, with special emphasis on our main force troops.

The Central Military Party Committee set forward 11 tactical principles:

1. Aggressively annihilate enemy troops while preserving our own forces.
2. Fight when victory is certain, fight only after preparations have been completed, fight to win the first battle.
3. Closely coordinate the combat operations of main force troops, local force troops, and self-defense militia.
4. Concentrate forces to annihilate each enemy element.
5. Attack resolutely and continuously, defend actively and stubbornly.
6. Deploy forces with a main focal point and keep a strong reserve force.
7. Exercise independence in battle, take the initiative in cooperating with and supporting friendly units, maintain close coordination.
8. Develop a capacity for close combat, night combat, and continuous combat.
9. Closely link political and military operations, combat and enemy proselytizing operations.
10. Exploit our political and spiritual advantage, fight courageously, defeat an enemy who has a technological advantage.
11. Be aggressive, maintain the initiative, use flexibility and mobility, creativity and cleverness, secrecy and surprise.²³

These were correct, innovative combat principles derived from actual experience that would be of value in providing guidance for training activities, in increasing the combat power of the army, and especially in the combat operations taking place in South Vietnam and on the battlefields of Laos. Many of these principles were developed into excellent combat traditions and combat behavior that contributed to the glorious feats of arms performed by our soldiers and civilians during the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation.

Based on the review and summary documents and the results of the first phase of research on military science and the military arts, the General Staff supervised the drafting and upgrading of our technical and tactical training programs, placing emphasis on realistic training based on actual combat operations.

With regard to defensive operations, from exclusive reliance on continuous trench lines, our troops now began to train in directional defensive combat operations, firmly holding defensive blocking positions along the enemy's lines of advance in combination with counterattacks against enemy forces landing by air, by sea, or attacking in a number of motorized ground spearhead columns.

With regard to offensive operations, from training in simple attacks against enemy forces occupying continuous trench lines, our troops now began training in deep penetration attacks, continuous attacks from the march, attacking an enemy that had withdrawn into a network of defensive strong points, combining attacks against enemy weak points with envelopment and flanking maneuvers, surrounding and isolating the enemy, and annihilating each separate enemy element.

Each separate specialty branch focused on studying and training in specific tactics suitable for use in specific situations depending on terrain, equipment, and specific opponents. Infantry troops trained in fighting while on the move, in ambushes, and in assaults in various situations, such as while the enemy was conducting a sweep operation, when the enemy temporarily switched over to the defensive, when the enemy was occupying solid defensive fortifications, when he was landing forces by helicopter, when he was conducting a motorized march, etc. Sapper troops trained in tactics for attacking outposts, bridges, ports, airfields, warehouses, command posts, and enemy leadership organizations inside cities and towns. Artillery forces trained in both independent missions and in providing fire support to infantry forces, utilizing such tactics as raids, ambushes, night attacks, secret deep penetrations to attack strong points behind enemy lines, and firing using the "detailed and proper" method²⁴ in order to meet the requirement for rapid and accurate fire. Anti-aircraft troops trained in different methods of deploying their firing positions, in aircraft recognition, and in the rapid acquisition of targets. Naval troops trained in rapid docking and weighing anchor for vessels and in attack tactics for use against different types of enemy vessels. Self-defense militia trained in tactics for use in defending their areas of responsibility, in firing at low-flying aircraft, and in tactics for use in attacking, surrounding, and capturing enemy commandos, etc.

We made many advances in our technical training, especially in techniques

for firing weapons and artillery, techniques for transmitting and receiving communications signals, radar acquisition of targets, naval electronics, and flight techniques for the air force. The combat operations then under way in South Vietnam encouraged our cadre and soldiers to closely link their studies to battlefield realities and to the accomplishment of their combat missions. The phrase "Sweat on the exercise field to lessen bloodshed on the battlefield" became a slogan in our army. Many units immediately applied this training to the conduct of their duties. Our radar troops trained while they turned on their sets to monitor enemy activities. Our engineer troops trained while they built national defense projects.

Based on the realities of combat on the battlefield, all units trained their cadre and troops in the use of different types of weapons and equipment to enable them to support or replace one another during combat. Infantry troops practiced firing every type of rifle, submachine gun, and light machine gun. Artillery gun crew members practiced performing each other's duties. In addition to field artillery, they were also trained in all types of man-portable artillery (57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles, 82mm and 120mm mortars) and practiced firing using field-firing procedures.²⁵ Sapper soldiers learned to use numerous types of enemy weapons and equipment and learned to drive automobiles, motorcycles, tanks, and ships. Signal troops learned to operate radios and to make reports. All sailors on our naval vessels learned how to operate the vessel's guns, etc.

Units focused on field training on many different types of terrain and in difficult weather conditions in order to enable our cadre and soldiers to make long marches and meet the requirement to be able to march long distances and carry heavy loads along the road from our great rear area to the battlefield. The 308th Division, the unit given the title of "Vanguard Division," conducted a follow-up study of various aspects of march movements. The entire division, carrying its full complement of weapons and equipment, crossed 400 kilometers of mountain trails in 14 days and nights. When it arrived at the assembly point, 93 percent of its troops were in good enough physical condition to immediately begin combat operations. Artillery troops, "legs of bronze and shoulders of iron," practiced carrying 120mm mortars, broken down into component loads, on bicycles and transporting dismantled 75mm mountain guns on modified "wheelbarrows." Signal troops trained in long marches carrying loads of 35 to 40 kilograms (personal equipment, rice for the journey, radios, and enough spare batteries to operate radios for six months). Rear services troops studied and improved different types of quartermaster items and equipment to adapt them to field operations and to reduce the volume and weight of equipment that had to be carried in order to increase the mobility of our troops. Rubber sandals were improved to make them strong and durable. The "frog pack" was produced. This pack was strong enough to carry all necessary personal equipment and had large, thick shoulder straps, which reduced shoulder irritation. Tarps, hammocks, and many different types of personal equipment were fabricated and produced.

The results of this tactical and technical training were reviewed during training exercises and in actual combat operations on the battlefield. Combat exercises conducted at Thanh Oai, Ha Tay province, in 1961 and at Cam Giang, Hai Hung province, in 1963 by the 308th Infantry Division (reinforced by artillery, armored, engineer, and signal elements) demonstrated that the main force mobile units subordinate to the High Command had improved their mobility and combat capabilities. Military region main force units held exercises involving offensive and defensive combat operations in mountain jungle terrain, on low-lying, flat terrain, and practiced opposing "enemy" air and sea landings. The General Staff and headquarters staffs of the military regions, service branches, specialty branches, and divisions drew lessons from these exercises, adapting the organization, equipment, and tactics of their tactical units and adjusting coordination procedures between different forces and between main force and local force units.

THE NAM THA CAMPAIGN IN LAOS

During the spring of 1962, at the suggestion of our Lao allies and pursuant to instructions issued by the Politburo of the Party Central Committee, the Central Military Party Committee and the High Command assigned the Northwest Military Region responsibility for sending seven infantry battalions and a number of specialty branch units from the 316th, 335th, and 330th Brigades to Laos to cooperate with our Lao allies in launching an offensive campaign against enemy forces in the Nam Tha area in order to crush the enemy threat in northern Laos. After eight years of army building under peacetime conditions, our army would launch its first offensive campaign. This campaign provided an excellent opportunity to test combat training, to make further improvements in our organization and equipment, and to gain experience in conducting an offensive campaign in mountain jungles.

In March 1962, two infantry battalions and a number of specialty branch units of the 316th Brigade marched to Nam Tha, where they built defensive positions to block enemy forces. The High Command established a ground transportation route across from the Northwest Military Region and concentrated the entire 919th Air Force Regiment to transport supplies for the campaign. The 2nd and 4th Infantry Battalions of the 335th Brigade, carrying all their own weapons and equipment, marched for 12 days and nights to reach the assembly area. In late April 1962, after receiving additional reinforcements (the 3rd Battalion of the 330th Brigade), the Lao-Vietnamese allied forces opened fire, destroying a number of enemy positions on the outer perimeter and securing an offensive position from which we could attack the enemy's entire defensive area. By massing our forces to destroy individual enemy units and then, when the opportunity arose, launching powerful, continuous attacks that combined assaults with envelopment and flanking maneuvers, the Lao-Vietnamese allied army drove the

enemy back until his forces disintegrated. Our forces liberated Muong Sinh and Nam Tha, then developed the attack by launching a pursuit of enemy forces.

The Nam Tha campaign ended in victory on 12 May 1962. A significant portion of the Lao puppet army's elite forces, equipped and trained by the United States, had been destroyed.²⁶ The liberated zone of our allies in northern Laos expanded by an additional 800 kilometers and 76,000 people. Our troops gained considerable experience in organizing and conducting an offensive campaign, especially in mobile operations; in organizing defensive positions; in fighting enemy counterattacks; in conducting raids and pursuit operations; in assault tactics; in conducting deep penetrations and enveloping and outflanking enemy forces; and in political and logistics operations during an offensive campaign in mountain jungle terrain.

Worries and concerns that "we may train this way but we do not know if these methods will work when we actually go into battle," which had appeared among a number of our cadre and soldiers, were disproven and we proved that "if we train this way and fight this way, we are certain of victory."

THE WAR IN THE SOUTH ENCOUNTERS DIFFICULTIES

In June 1963 the Central Military Party Committee met to assess the results of army building activities during the period 1961–1963 and to discuss a plan for the defense of North Vietnam. Comrade Le Duan, First Secretary of the Party Central Committee, attended the conference. The Central Military Party Committee concluded that substantial progress had been made during this three-year period (1961–1963) in the work of building a modern regular army, strengthening the self-defense militia, and expanding the reserve forces in North Vietnam. There had been significant improvements in the combat power of our main force mobile troops. We had increased the number of reinforcements being sent to fight in South Vietnam and to assist the Laotian revolution. Our army had grown sufficiently to enable it to successfully carry out its three missions of defending North Vietnam, fighting the revolutionary war in South Vietnam, and fulfilling our international duties. Our army could now be quickly expanded to serve as a strategic reserve force for all of Indochina. We had identified a number of weaknesses we should concentrate on correcting during the coming years. These weaknesses included the fact that our technical specialty branches had not developed at the same rate as our combat elements, that we had limited technical and material support facilities, and that a number of our units did not have the requisite combat skills and mobility to carry out their missions.

The Central Military Party Committee reached the following decisions: To intensify efforts to build a modern, regular army; to reach all the target goals of the second five-year military plan; to send additional forces from the North to fight in South Vietnam, at the same time increasing local recruiting in the South;

and to increase the operations of our full-time troops on the battlefields of South Vietnam. To retain the initiative and cope with the ever-increasing acts of provocation by the American imperialists, the Central Military Party Committee approved a program for the defense of North Vietnam. This program consisted of combat planning directives, plans for the mobilization and expansion of the armed forces during the initial outbreak of hostilities, and plans to convert North Vietnam's economy to a wartime production economy.

Speaking to the conference of the Central Military Party Committee, Comrade Le Duan stressed the need to adhere to practical realities when conducting studies, organizing forces, and providing combat guidance to the armed forces. Our army building efforts and our buildup of the rear area of North Vietnam must be based on our strategic revolutionary duties and on the size of our population, our nation's economic capacity, and on the amount of assistance provided by fraternal socialist nations. The issue of combat operations had to be addressed in the following manner: "Based on the enemy's situation and on our own capabilities, we must seek every possible means to defeat the enemy."²⁷

During the first few months of 1963 the situation in South Vietnam underwent considerable changes, and North Vietnam no longer enjoyed peaceful conditions for the work of army building in North Vietnam. Our armed forces confronted many new problems in carrying out its army building and combat missions, which included maintaining combat readiness and defending North Vietnam, defeating the U.S. imperialist "special war" in South Vietnam, and performing our international duties.

As part of their "special war" strategy, the American imperialists rapidly increased U.S. economic and military assistance to the Saigon puppet regime.²⁸ In June 1961 they hurriedly began to carry out "preparatory steps," rapidly increasing the strength and equipment of the puppet army; redeploying their forces throughout the battlefield; training regular troops, Regional Force troops, and Popular Force troops in "counterguerrilla" tactics; and expanding their intelligence networks in order to identify the revolution's armed units, bases, and leadership organs. To support puppet regular troops the United States strengthened its advisory structure and forces that provided the regulars with fire support.²⁹ American advisors were assigned down to the subsector³⁰ and the battalion level. American pilots participated in puppet military operations by conducting "tactical bombing" attacks. U.S. troops in South Vietnam were given permission to "fire in self-defense when necessary."³¹ A civilian defense force organized and trained by "the Special Forces of the American Army in Vietnam" supported puppet army combat operations as they implemented their "pacification" program. A network of heavily fortified "special forces camps," each with its own airstrip, was established. These camps were built in important locations along the Vietnamese-Lao border where they could conduct reconnaissance, provide fire support, and block the movement of our personnel and supplies from North Vietnam to the battlefield.

In August 1962 the U.S. Department of Defense established the Military Assistance Command (MACV), commanded by General Harkins, to replace the Military Advisory Group (MAAG). The purpose of this change was to “coordinate the American effort in Vietnam.”

In late March 1962 the United States and its puppets shifted into an “offensive phase.” They mobilized the entire puppet regular army, Regional Forces, Popular Forces, and the police, all under the command of American advisors, to launch thousands of sweep operations. A series of campaigns were conducted in important areas such as the area around Saigon, the Mekong Delta, and the lowlands of Central Vietnam.³² The enemy’s goals were to collect the people into specified areas and institute tight controls over the population; to destroy our revolutionary forces while they were still small and weak; and to seal the borders to block the flow of assistance from the North into South Vietnam.

The principal enemy tactic used to accomplish these goals was the establishment of “strategic hamlets” that would totally control each person, controlling each individual’s food and property inside a neighborhood or hamlet surrounded by a network of fences, barriers, and watchtowers manned by police and armed forces. This tactic included the use of deceitful political and social tricks and economic “bribes” to win popular support. As they built these “strategic hamlets” the enemy also organized a network of intelligence agents and informants to expose our followers and employed military forces to mount sweeps and drive our Party organizations and guerrillas away, pushing our armed revolutionary forces back into isolated base areas in the mountain jungles where they could be attacked and destroyed. This was a poisonous American and puppet scheme combining political, economic, and social tactics. The main focus, however, was placed on military schemes aimed at destroying revolutionary armed forces by “filtering the fish out of the water.”

The enemy plan called for the establishment of 16,000 “strategic hamlets”³³ throughout South Vietnam by the end of 1962. The enemy believed these hamlets would essentially wipe out our armed forces, crush the revolutionary struggle movement of the people in South Vietnam, and demonstrate the ability of the U.S. “special war” strategy to contain and defeat the revolutionary national liberation movement. These new enemy plots and schemes created many problems for our armed forces and our people.

In Region 5, just as the political struggle combined with armed struggle began to develop in late 1960–early 1961, the enemy launched a vicious counter-attack. Using large numbers of troops, superior mobility, and heavy firepower,³⁴ the United States and its puppets constantly attacked our bases in the mountains, mounted sweeps and blockades of the contested areas, and seized and occupied portions of our liberated areas in the lowlands. In the provinces of Quang Ngai and Quang Tin our bases at Do Xa, Con Ha Nung, and Chu-de-lay-a were hit the hardest. By mid-1963 the enemy had been able to establish 3,520 “strategic hamlets,” including 2,750 hamlets in the lowlands and 780 hamlets in the mountains,

and gain control over more than two-thirds of the rural population. With a network of outposts and strong points and a web of roads, airfields, and "strategic hamlets," the enemy was able to establish fairly tight control over Region 5. In the rural lowlands our self-defense guerrillas and local force troops were few and weak. They were not strong enough to support the people in the effort to destroy "strategic hamlets." The narrowness of the contested areas and the mountain region combined with enemy attacks designed to split these areas and isolate them made it difficult for our full-time troop units to find bases and operating areas.

In Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam, after the victories of the 1960 uprisings, in 1961 we continued to intensify the political struggle combined with armed struggle. Our liberated zones grew constantly in size and strength, our political and armed forces expanded, and the mass struggle movement became very strong.

During the last months of 1961, using mass political forces and guerrillas to mount "internal attacks" and province and district local force troops to mount "external attacks," the soldiers and civilians of Cochin China destroyed more than 200 newly established "strategic hamlets" and damaged or caused the disintegration of more than 1,000 other "strategic hamlets." A number of our local areas and units underestimated the enemy plot to establish "strategic hamlets." When the United States and its puppets began to implement the "Stalay-Taylor" plan, using larger military forces and more savage terrorist measures, many local areas did not know how to respond to these measures. In Region 9 (western Cochin China) the enemy launched a continuous series of "Binh Tay" and "Wave of Affection" campaigns. They divided the area into many clusters, each cluster not quite ten kilometers apart. In each cluster the enemy used three to five battalions to encircle the area and then sent in troops by helicopter to seek to destroy the armed forces of the revolution and to help their regional and popular forces set up "strategic hamlets." In Region 8 (central Cochin China) the puppet 7th Division launched a series of sweeps through the Plain of Reeds base area, aimed at destroying our full-time troop units and at enabling Ranger battalions and local armed forces to set up "strategic hamlets." In Region 7 (eastern Cochin China) the enemy extended the "Binh Minh" campaign through the entire year of 1962. The goal of this campaign was to destroy our Long Nguyen base, isolate War Zone D from the Duong Minh Chau base, and drive the civilian population of our base area into "strategic hamlets" along Route 13. They destroyed many of our agricultural fields and rice stores. Short of rice, some units were forced to eat rice gruel seven days a week.

By the end of 1962 the enemy had established more than 2,000 "strategic hamlets" throughout Cochin China, controlling three million out of a total of nine million people. Liberated areas and areas where the masses had seized control shrank. Guerrillas from a number of villages and hamlets were forced to move to other areas or flee to our base areas. Cadre and Party members hid in rice paddies and along canal banks to wait for nightfall to enter the hamlets to contact our supporters and rebuild our armed forces.

In February 1962, as the enemy was beginning to implement its "Stalay-Taylor" plan, the Politburo of the Party Central Committee issued a resolution on the immediate responsibilities of the revolution in South Vietnam. The Politburo issued clear orders for our full-time forces in South Vietnam to take the offensive by fighting battles designed to destroy enemy manpower [kill enemy troops], help local forces increase guerrilla warfare operations, destroy enemy "strategic hamlets," and intensify the political struggle. Our operational tactic would be to fight small battles, battles in which victory was certain, against enemy regular troops conducting field operations and against enemy troops and commando teams mounting helicopter assaults. To deal with the enemy's rapid mobility and his air support, it would be necessary to mount surprise and night attacks, quickly dispersing and concentrating our forces as needed. In operations against enemy sweeps and when attacking "strategic hamlets," our best tactic would be to coordinate the use of three types of struggle: political struggle, military struggle, and enemy proselytizing.

To build up our armed forces the Politburo decided to develop widespread guerrilla forces throughout the three strategic areas and to build up local force troops on all battlefields to stretch enemy forces thin and enable us to fight the enemy everywhere. The expansion of our main force troops would be based on the actual situation in each area, on each area's manpower and matériel capacity, and on the status of their bases. In Cochin China, where guerrillas and local forces were rather well developed, we would need to increase the strength of our main force units. In Region 5 emphasis would be placed on building up guerrilla forces and local forces while, to the extent possible, building up main force units. We would work vigorously to develop specialty branch forces and increase the firepower of our main force troops. We would train all of our different types of armed forces [main force, local force, guerrillas] in anti-aircraft tactics.

In June 1962 the Central Military Party Committee informed our armed forces in South Vietnam that their central, most immediate missions were to intensify military operations and coordinate these operations with the political struggle in order to preserve and expand our forces and to disrupt the enemy plan to set up "strategic hamlets." To implement the Politburo resolution and the instructions of the Central Military Party Committee, COSVN, our regional Party committees, and the military affairs sections of the military regions established concrete policies on force building and provided battlefield guidance for use by the three types of armed forces to deal with the new enemy's war plans and schemes.

Region 5 had experience in forming full-time troop units and in massed combat operations during the resistance war against the French. Since the construction of Group 559's strategic transportation route, because the region was close to our great rear area in North Vietnam and because early in the conflict Region 5 had begun to receive military cadre and weapons from the North, the Region Party Committee and the Military Region Command correctly understood that "if

To overcome this situation, it would be necessary to mobilize the entire Party and the entire population to build up our armed forces and to develop a widespread pattern of guerrilla warfare. The different battlefields and armed units had to carefully study the pattern of the enemy's military operations and the enemy's tactical and technical weaknesses. They needed to review and synthesize lessons learned from our experience in combat during this most recent period in order to defeat the enemy's short-term and long-term military operations by creating conditions in which we could destroy enemy regular troops and commandos attacking overland and landing by helicopter and simultaneously support popular uprisings to destroy the "strategic hamlets."

THE DECISION TO INCREASE SUPPORT FOR THE SOUTHERN REVOLUTION

The Politburo decided to quickly send combat forces to South Vietnam and to expand our mobile main force troops and our specialty branch units. Military Transportation Group 559 received additional troops and equipment to expand our supply and commo-liaison lines to the battlefield.³⁸ After building Route 129, Military Region 4's 25th and 27th Engineer Battalions were transferred to Group 559 to carry out road maintenance duties. In response to the enemy's sweep and commando operations, the General Staff assigned a number of units of the 325th Infantry Division the mission of working with Pathet Lao troops to defend the Kaki Bridge, Ban Dong, and Muong Pha Lan areas and to protect our supply line across Route 9. The cadre and soldiers of Group 559 implemented a number of measures to maintain the secrecy of our strategic transportation route. These measures included "going native,"³⁹ adopting the lifestyle and the eating and working habits of the local population, and actively building political and armed organizations among the local ethnic tribal population. Weapons were issued to a third of our troops stationed along the transportation route.

Following the Ta Khong campaign in April 1961 our movement of supplies and personnel down the route on the western side of the Annamite Mountains grew to new levels. North of Route 9, trucks driven by motor transport troops of the General Department of Rear Services followed Route 12 across to the western side of the Annamite Mountains and down Route 129 to a supply transshipment point at Muong Phin. A regiment of the 325th Infantry Division portered supplies from Ho to Tchepone. The 919th Air Force Transportation Regiment, assisted by Soviet pilots, dropped supplies by parachute to Muong Phin or landed at the Ta Kong airfield. Our aircraft transported tons of supplies to Group 559, including 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles, 75mm mountain guns, 82mm and 120mm mortars, radio communications equipment, etc. From the area south of Route 9 onward, the 70th Regiment of Group 559 used primitive transportation equipment (bicycles, elephants, horses) and human porters to transfer sup-

plies down to A Tuc. From there transportation troops of Military Region 5 moved the supplies forward to Tang Non in Quang Nam province, Dac Lan in Kontum province, and Bu Gia Map in Phuoc Long province.⁴⁰

By the end of 1963 over 40,000 cadre and soldiers of our armed forces, consisting primarily of regroupes from South Vietnam and including more than 2,000 mid- and high-ranking cadre and technical personnel, had marched down Group 559's commo-liaison route to the battlefield. These troops represented 50 percent of the full-time armed forces in the South and 80 percent of the cadre and technical personnel assigned to the command and staff organizations in South Vietnam in 1963. These reinforcements played an important role in the rapid formation of main force units and allowed the rapid strengthening of military leadership and command organizations from the regional down to the provincial and district levels. Group 559 transported a total of 165,600 weapons to the battlefields in the South during the 1961–1963 period. This total included a number of artillery pieces, mortars, and anti-aircraft machine guns. Hundreds of tons of other types of military equipment were also sent south by Group 559 during this period, increasing the combat power of our full-time troops and enabling our battlefield forces to defeat the new enemy tactics.

In May 1962, Senior Colonel Vo Bam, Commander of Military Transportation Group 559, was given the honor of personally briefing Uncle Ho on our road building, transportation of supplies, and movement of troops to the battlefield and on the great and warm-hearted assistance being provided to Group 559 by our citizens and by the tribal ethnic minorities all along the transportation route. Uncle Ho praised the spirit of service and devotion of the cadre and men of Group 559. Uncle Ho counseled them that they must work well, they must work even harder, they must maintain secrecy and surprise, and must care for the welfare of the civilian population. Uncle Ho gave Comrade Vo Bam salt and flowered cloth to distribute to the local population.

As we expanded our overland transportation and troop movement routes, we also began to reorganize our sea transportation route after two trial voyages by the 603 Battalion during 1960. In February 1961 the Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee ordered the coastal provinces of South Vietnam to send boats to North Vietnam to pick up weapons. The Navy Department was ordered to study a strategic sea transportation route that could be used over the long term. On 23 October 1961 Military Transportation Group 759 was established. Comrade Doan Hong Phuoc was appointed Group Commander and Comrade Vo Huy Phuoc was named Group Political Officer.

In late 1961 and early 1962 the provinces of Ca Mau, Tra Vinh, Ben Tre, and Ba Ria sent a number of cadre and soldiers in six motor-powered wooden vessels, which arrived safely in North Vietnam. On 8 April 1962, a vessel commanded by Comrade Bong Van Dia, which had been sent to reconnoiter the sea transportation route and that carried instructions from Hanoi, arrived at the Ghenh Hao pier in Ca Mau province. On 11 October 1962 a motor-powered

wooden vessel built by Haiphong's Shipyard 1 and under the command of Comrades Le Van Mot and Bong Van Dia docked and unloaded the first maritime shipment of weapons at the Vam Lung pier in Ca Mau. A strategic sea transportation route from North Vietnam to the battlefield was now open.

From that time until the end of 1963, using secrecy and surprise, with small vessels disguised as civilian fishing boats, the cadre and soldiers of Group 759 crossed the stormy waters of the South China Sea and slipped past the enemy's blockade to deliver 25 shiploads of supplies. These supplies totaled 1,430 tons of weapons, including mortars, recoilless rifles, and 12.7mm machine guns for delivery to Military Regions 7, 8, and 9. For Cochin China, a battlefield far from the great rear area of North Vietnam and which Group 559's overland supply route did not yet reach, the timely arrival of these supplies was a welcome addition to our strength. This supply route provided additional weapons to our troops in Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam for use in expanding their forces, including weapons that were capable of destroying the enemy's amphibious armored personnel carriers, small riverine vessels, and helicopters.

With the ever-increasing flow of reinforcements from the North and with local recruiting in the South, our armed forces in South Vietnam grew rapidly in numbers, in their scale of organization and equipment, and in combat capabilities. Between 1961 and 1963 our full-time army in South Vietnam increased by 250 percent.⁴¹ Our local force troops grew in a rather uniform manner at the province and district level. Each province had one or two companies, and some of these companies had a strength of more than 500 cadre and soldiers.⁴² Main force troops subordinate to the COSVN Military Affairs Section were organized into two regiments⁴³ and Military Region 5 had under its direct control three regiments and a number of specialty branch companies and battalions. In addition to captured enemy weapons, we also began to equip our main force and local force troops with infantry weapons,⁴⁴ mortars, recoilless rifles, anti-aircraft machine guns, and other types of technical equipment manufactured by our fraternal socialist allies. The balance of forces between our full-time armed forces and the enemy underwent an important change. In 1961 the balance of forces was one to ten in the enemy's favor; in 1962 the balance was down to one to five. This change represented a major failure for the United States and its puppets, because it meant that one important goal of the "Stalay-Taylor" plan, wiping out our revolutionary armed forces while they were still young and weak, now was unattainable.

Along with the expansion of our forces and the strengthening and improvement of our equipment, all battlefields worked on providing political education, ideological leadership, and technical and tactical training to our troops.

In early 1963 the Regional Party Committee and the Military Region 5 Military Party Committee launched a campaign of political activities for our Party chapters and armed units aimed at combating the appearance of rightist and negative tendencies, at combating fear of the enemy's armored personnel carriers, and at learning from our experiences in implementing the "two legs, three spear-

heads" formula for combating enemy sweeps and destroying "strategic hamlets." The Regional Party Committee decided that the region's main force units and provincial local force units would be concentrated for use in operational campaigns, supported by guerrillas and mass political struggle forces, to destroy the enemy's "strategic hamlets." The six-month operational campaign in early 1963 focused on the districts of Tien Phuoc and Tam Ky in Quang Nam province and Phu My and Hoai Nhon in Binh Dinh province. A number of members of the Standing Committee of the Regional Party Committee and of the Military Region Military Party Committee were sent to provide direct leadership to the movements in these districts. In other areas our units were ordered to cling to the local population, attack enemy forces conducting sweeps into our territory, expand attacks against lines of communications, destroy armored personnel carriers, shoot down aircraft, and conduct raids deep inside the enemy's rear areas.⁴⁵

The battles fought by the soldiers and civilians of Region 5 in 1963 were ferocious, totaling 4,000 engagements, large and small. More than 20,000 enemy personnel (including 122 Americans) were eliminated from the field of battle and 337 enemy vehicles, including 40 M-113s, were destroyed. During the first six months of 1963 we took 250 hamlets, and the enemy recaptured 179 of them. The armed forces of Region 5 were gradually honed in combat and grew in maturity. The political struggle movement combined with armed struggle began to undergo a transformation, but the pace of change was slow. The achievements of our combat operations, especially armed operations in support of the people's efforts to destroy "strategic hamlets" in the rural lowlands, were limited.⁴⁶

In Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam, COSVN and the COSVN Military Affairs Section told all full-time armed units that they must fully understand that their primary responsibility during this period was to combat enemy sweep operations. "If we do not actively combat enemy sweeps and do not annihilate enemy forces during these sweeps, not only will we not be able to defeat the enemy plot to collect our people and establish 'strategic hamlets,' our own armed forces may also suffer attrition and slip back into a defensive posture."⁴⁷ For this reason, no matter where units were located they were required to have a plan to counter sweeps. Their plan was to be coordinated with local guerrillas and to be based on the use of combat villages or preprepared fortifications. Our troops were to commit themselves to wear down and annihilate enemy forces while preserving our own forces. Units were forbidden to engage in combat that would result in the destruction of our own units. On the other hand, units were to aggressively seek the enemy out to fight him, relying principally on such tactics as attacks on lines of communications, ambushing enemy forces while they were on the move, using sapper tactics to attack small outposts, assaulting enemy weak points, etc.

Pursuant to instructions from COSVN and from the COSVN Military Affairs Section, regional-level main force units and provincial- and district-level local force troops conducted timely reviews of each operational campaign and

exchanged lessons learned after each battle, meticulously analyzing each and every combat action down to the individual and squad level, the command organization used by each cadre, etc. At the same time, the enemy's new tactical schemes were studied, especially his landing of assault forces by helicopter. Based on these reviews and analyses, our forces and units developed plans and carried out technical and tactical training in accordance with the struggle formula, the particular combat opponent, and the combat duties of each individual force and each unit. Comrade Vo Chi Cong, Deputy Secretary of COSVN, visited the battlefield in central Cochin China. Working with the Region 8 Party Committee and the My Tho Provincial Party Committee to analyze the situation and draw lessons from the combat experiences of our full-time troops, he and the Party Committees laid out the proper tactics for fighting the enemy as follows: besiege and force the surrender or withdrawal of outposts, stand and fight against enemy sweeps, liberate the rural areas.

In November 1962 the first conference of self-defense militia forces in Cochin China was held in the Duong Minh Chau base area. Thirteen localities that had strong guerrilla warfare movements⁴⁸ reported on their experiences in mobilizing the entire population to counter enemy sweeps, destroy "strategic hamlets," and build combat village and guerrilla militia forces. Sister Ut Tich (Tra Vinh province), Sister Ta Thi Kieu (Ben Tre province), and hundreds of other outstanding fighters in the guerrilla warfare movement being conducted in Cochin China were honored at the conference.⁴⁹

RECOVERY OF REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN THE SOUTH

During late 1962 and early 1963, after a period of difficulties, the armed struggle movement combined with political struggle in Cochin China began to recover and grow. On 13 and 23 September 1962 the 1st Company of the 514th My Tho Provincial Battalion, utilizing combat villages, repelled two puppet sweeps at Ca Nai Canal in My Long village, Cai Be district, and at Phu Phong village in Chau Thanh district. On 5 October 1962 the 1st Company drove off another sweep mounted by a puppet Ranger company, shooting down three helicopters in the process. Drawing lessons from these battles, the My Tho Provincial Party Committee instructed all localities to strengthen their combat villages and hamlets, plant wooden stakes in open fields to prevent enemy troops from landing by helicopter, expand guerrilla warfare activities to stretch enemy forces thin, and cooperate with our full-time troops to counter enemy sweep operations.

In Ca Mau, during a battle against enemy troops conducting a sweep, Guerrilla Fighter Nguyen Viet Khai shot down three enemy helicopters with his rifle. In the Plain of Reeds Combatant Doan Van Manh (261st Main Force Battalion of Region 8), who had been cornered by an enemy helicopter, used a submachine gun to fight back, forcing the enemy aircraft to fly away to save itself. This was a

new phenomenon that contributed to a growing confidence in our ability to defeat the enemy's "helicopter assault" tactics. A movement to use infantry weapons to fire at helicopters was launched among the armed forces in Cochinchina.

On 13 December 1962 the 1st Company of the Region 8's 261st Main Force Battalion and the 1st Company of the 514th My Tho Province Local Force Battalion, two units that often worked together in combating sweep operations, were stationed at Ap Bac [Bac hamlet] in Tan Phu village. This was a liberated village that lay within a contiguous liberated zone linking Cai Lay and Chau Thanh districts in My Tho province.

Discovering that revolutionary armed forces were located at Ap Bac, on 2 January 1963 the headquarters of the puppet 7th Division and the Dinh Tuong Subsector Regional Force Task Force, under the command of two American advisors (both colonels) and of puppet General Huynh Van Cao, Commander of the 4th Tactical Zone, immediately launched a large sweep operation designated "Duc Thanh 1/63."⁵⁰ The enemy divided his forces into many separate columns and advanced overland, by water, and by helicopter landings to carry out the tactic of "casting the net and then throwing the spear" with the goal of encircling and wiping out its opponents.

Relying on a network of fortifications and on the irregular banks of irrigation canals connecting to the Ap Bac Canal to establish a battle position blocking the spearheads of the enemy troop columns, and using orchards in the hamlet to move our forces and attack the flanks and rear of the enemy attackers, 1st Company of the 261st Battalion shattered the helicopter assault landing at Ap Bac, shooting down six H-21 helicopters. The company then repelled a ground attack, setting two M-113s on fire. Squad Leader Nguyen Van Dung and two soldiers of his 3rd Squad, 1st Platoon, closed with the enemy vehicles, using hand-held explosive charges to knock out one M-113. The 1st Company, 514th Battalion, fought a fierce battle against an airborne battalion that had jumped into battle from 16 Dakota [C-47] aircraft. The Chau Thanh district local force platoon, fighting alongside one platoon of the 1st Company, 261st Battalion, fought off the enemy advance at the Ong Boi Bridge, organizing an enveloping force that attacked the flank and rear of the enemy force. The 261st Battalion's engineer platoon used mines to sink one enemy vessel on the Vam Kenh 3 Canal and shot up two other vessels, shattering an effort by two puppet Ranger companies to outflank our position by water.

The Standing Committee of the Province Party Committee and the My Tho Province Military Affairs Section, closely monitoring the developments on the battlefield, ordered the 2nd and 211th Companies of the 514th Battalion to mount an attack aimed at the Tan Hiep Firing Range and Than Cuu Nghia airfield to draw a portion of the enemy's forces away from Ap Bac. Political struggle forces of the masses were also mobilized to support the struggle. The people of the villages of Tan Phu, Diem Hy, and Tan Hoi surged out onto Route 4, blocking the road and halting the forward movement of enemy forces. One group marched to

Cai Lay town to conduct a face-to-face struggle, demanding that the enemy halt his sweep operation. More than 700 people from the villages of My Hanh Dong, My Hanh Trung, and My Phuoc Tay conducted a "reverse evacuation," moving in small boats to surround the enemy's 105mm artillery firing positions and demand that they stop the artillery barrages, which were destroying the houses and fields of the people.

The battle lasted from dawn until 2000 hours on 2 January 1963. The enemy regulars, outnumbering us by ten to one and using modern weapons and equipment, were forced to concede defeat and withdraw from Ap Bac. Enemy casualties totaled 450, including nine Americans. Sixteen aircraft were shot down or heavily damaged and three M-113s and one combat vessel were destroyed.

The Ap Bac victory proved that our full-time troops on the South Vietnamese battlefield, with appropriate force levels and adequately organized and equipped, with tactical and technical training, relying on a firm People's War battlefield posture and with the support of the political struggle forces of the masses, were capable of defeating sweep operations by the United States and its puppets using large numbers of troops and new tactics and modern weapons and equipment.

In warfare the defeat of your enemy's military strategies begins by defeating his principal tactical measures. The battle of Ap Bac marked the defeat of the tactics of "helicopter assault" and "armored personnel carrier assault" and signaled the bankruptcy of the "special warfare" strategy of the American imperialists.

Beginning with the Ap Bac victory, a "combined campaign" method of operations, combining the operations of our armed forces with those of our political forces, combining the military struggle with the political struggle at the campaign level of operations, began to take shape.

To exploit the Ap Bac victory, COSVN launched a movement throughout South Vietnam to "emulate Ap Bac, kill the pirates, and perform feats of arms." We had solved the problems of fear of enemy helicopters and of armored personnel carriers. Our cadre, soldiers, and the masses of the people became enthusiastic and trusted in our ability to destroy helicopters and M-113s and to defeat the puppet sweep operations.

After the Ap Bac battle the soldiers and civilians of My Tho province, combining armed struggle with political struggle, overran many enemy outposts, destroyed scores of "strategic hamlets" north and south of Route 4 in the districts of Cai Be, Cai Lay, and Chau Thanh, and moved our forces down to establish positions in Cho Gao and Go Cong districts. In Ben Tre, during July 1963 two provincial local force companies ambushed enemy forces at Go Keo in Giong Trom district, inflicting severe casualties on the 3rd Battalion, 12th Regiment, of the puppet 7th Division.

In western Cochin China in August 1963 two regional main force battalions and the Ca Mau province local force battalion, all under the command of Comrade Pham Thai Buong, Chief of the Region 9 Military Affairs Section, wiped out

the Dam Doi and Cai Nuoc district military headquarters in one single night. The next day our units ambushed an enemy battalion sent in to relieve the local garrisons, shooting down ten helicopters. The population of Dam Doi and Cai Nuoc districts rose up and destroyed more than 100 "strategic hamlets." The Region 9 Military Affairs Section massed four battalions⁵¹ and, using the tactic of "attacking a target and destroying relief forces," crushed four enemy battalions and shot down 20 helicopters.

In Long An in eastern Cochin China, province local force troops assaulted the Hiep Hoa commando training center in Duc Hoa district, killing 800 enemy and capturing many weapons. They then attacked the Go Den training center, killing hundreds of enemy troops.

In Thu Dau Mot, on 18 October 1963, the 5th Battalion, 2nd Regiment, annihilated an enemy regional forces company at Cay Truong in Ben Cat district. During this battle, Combatant Tru Van Tho used his body to cover the firing port of a bunker, heroically sacrificing his own life to enable his fellow soldiers to wipe out the enemy outpost.

Supported by our armed forces, the people of the lowlands of Cochin China conducted a second uprising campaign during the summer and fall of 1963, shattering the enemy's network of "strategic hamlets." Although the puppet army had many troops, they were stretched thin trying to cover everything and were unable to mass their forces to deal with the widespread attacks and uprisings being conducted by the soldiers and civilians of the lowlands of Cochin China. In 1962, we had destroyed 100 "strategic hamlets" but were only able to retain control of 15 of them. The enemy was able to rebuild the other 85 and to construct 100 additional "strategic hamlets." In 1963 the enemy was no longer able to rebuild the "strategic hamlets" that we destroyed. The liberated area in Cochin China grew back to the size it had reached during the time of insurrection in 1960.

In the cities, because of the effects of our armed operations and our movement to destroy "strategic hamlets," the struggles conducted by workers, laborers, students, Buddhists, etc., became more widespread and ferocious day by day. Some Buddhist bonzes immolated themselves in protest against the terrorist policies of the dictatorial Ngo Dinh Diem government. The contradictions between the Americans and their lackeys and within the puppet army and the puppet government became serious. In June 1963 U.S. Ambassador to Saigon Nolting was recalled. Henry Cabot Lodge was sent to replace Nolting. On 1 November 1963 the United States organized a coup in Saigon. Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were murdered by lackeys of the Americans. The Saigon regime, the main instrument used by the American imperialists to carry out their neo-colonialist policies of aggression, collapsed into a state of continual crisis from which it could not recover.

Taking advantage of the convulsions and contradictions within the puppet army and the puppet regime, all our battlefields increased their operations. In November 1963 the soldiers and civilians of Region 5 destroyed 424 "strategic

hamlets” and liberated 219 mountain hamlets. In Gia Lai [Pleiku] province alone, 43,000 residents of 289 villages, representing all ethnic groups, rose up, destroyed the resettlement areas where the enemy had relocated them, and returned to their old villages and hamlets. In the lowlands of Cochin China popular uprisings broke out everywhere, destroying more than 1,000 “strategic hamlets” and capturing 1,500 weapons. This was an excellent opportunity for our soldiers to step up their attacks and kill large numbers of enemy troops. During the 1961–1963 period, however, our main force elements on the battlefields of South Vietnam had only recently been formed and had actually only begun to mass forces for combat operations at the battalion level after the Ap Bac victory. The level of training, equipment, and combat capabilities of our soldiers on the battlefield had improved, but not enough to keep pace with the demands of the situation.

By the end of 1963 the “National Strategic Hamlet Policy” of the Americans and their puppets had been bankrupted. This in turn brought about the total failure of the “Stalay-Taylor” plan and signaled the inescapable defeat of the American “special warfare” strategy. The ruling clique in the United States hurriedly prepared a new plan to expand their war of aggression.

With the results we had achieved in building a regular, modern armed force, and on the basis of our victories on the battlefield, beginning in early 1964 our army seized the initiative and firmly began a new period of combat, increasing our massed combat operations in South Vietnam, completely defeating the “special warfare” strategy of the American imperialists, providing a solid defense for the great rear area in North Vietnam, and moving the war against the Americans to save the nation forward into a new phase.

6

Intensifying Massed Combat Operations: Fighting alongside the Entire Population to Defeat the American Imperialist “Special War” Strategy

NEW AMERICAN AGGRESSION

During the final months of 1963, Vietnam became an increasingly difficult problem for the U.S. ruling clique. After the coup that overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem, the political situation in Saigon remained unsettled and “revolutionary forces made very rapid progress . . . controlling a very large percentage of the population in a number of key provinces.”¹ Confronted with this problem, Johnson, who had just replaced Kennedy as President of the United States,² decided to carry out a secret program called “Switchback,” turning the operations of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Vietnam over to the military. U.S. Defense Secretary McNamara and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Taylor were sent to Vietnam to personally assess the situation and lay out a “stronger and more resolute policy” aimed at preserving the “vital national interests of the United States”³ in Vietnam and the Southeast Asian region.

In February 1963 Johnson approved a plan prepared by McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to increase and expand their “special warfare” operations in Vietnam. The objectives of the plan were to “pacify” the rural areas, completely destroy the military and political organizations of the revolution, and gain control of the entire territory of South Vietnam. The plan also called for the use of airpower to attack North Vietnam and Laos to steadily increase the pressure on North Vietnam to force the North to stop sending support to South Vietnam.

In South Vietnam the United States and its puppets drafted more troops, increasing puppet troop strength by 45 percent as compared with 1962.⁴ They adjusted their strategic deployments, using tactical areas and corps as strategic units and tactical zones and divisions as their basic campaign and tactical-level units. These changes enabled all levels of command to independently launch large-scale sweep operations in support of their “pacification” program.

In addition to the ten divisions of puppet regulars, the United States and its puppets expanded the number of Ranger battalions to serve as assault forces for sweep operations in each tactical area.⁵ They also expanded their "special forces" to almost 23,000 soldiers and used them to patrol, detect, and block infiltration from North Vietnam down to the battlefields.⁶ American support forces and those of their satellite nations more than doubled in comparison with 1962.⁷ In terms of U.S. aircraft alone, aircraft operated by American personnel rose to 955 and the United States assumed primary responsibility for fire support and air transport.⁸ Sweep operations from battalion up to division size increased from 2,948 operations backed by 10,336 air support sorties in 1963 to 6,492 sweeps and 14,749 air support sorties in 1964. Americans and puppet "special forces," located in 74 bases and over 100 camps all along the borders of South Vietnam, carried out thousands of military operations, reconnaissance missions, commando raids, and ambushes against our supply corridors from North Vietnam down to the battlefields.

With regard to North Vietnam and Laos, the American imperialists carried out "Operations Plan 34A" and arrogantly sent destroyers into the Gulf of Tonkin to collect intelligence and to perform acts of provocation and sabotage.⁹ The United States also launched air attacks against Laos in preparation for deeper attacks against targets in North Vietnam beginning in the summer of 1964.

To carry out this plan, Johnson increased U.S. economic and military aid to the puppet government by \$125 million. In April 1964 General Westmoreland was appointed to replace Harkins as Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, and in June 1964 Maxwell Taylor replaced Cabot Lodge as U.S. Ambassador to Saigon.

This was a new war plan, a continuation of the "special warfare" strategy on a larger scale. It represented the high point of the "special war" strategy and the first step in the launching of a "limited war." Like their other plans for a war of aggression, however, the Johnson-McNamara plan was born out of a period of crisis in the puppet government and after they had lost the military initiative on the battlefield.

THE DECISION TO STEP UP INFILTRATION AND SEEK A QUICK VICTORY

Analyzing the enemy's new war plans and activities, in December 1963 the 9th Plenum of the Party Central Committee again affirmed that the formula for the revolutionary liberation war in South Vietnam was to combine political struggle with armed struggle. Both of these forms of struggle were basic and both would play a decisive role, but the armed struggle would be the direct deciding factor in the annihilation of the armed forces of the enemy. The war would be protracted, but we should strive to take advantage of opportunities to secure a deci-

sive victory in a relatively short period of time. With regard to leadership guidance, the Plenum decided it was necessary to seek every way possible to limit and defeat the enemy's "special war," at the same time preparing to deal with a large-scale U.S. imperialist "limited war."

To implement the above formula, "the key issue at present is for the entire Party and the entire population to make a maximum effort to rapidly strengthen our armed forces in order to achieve a basic shift in the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy in South Vietnam."¹⁰ With regard to force building, on the foundation laid by the vigorous development of our guerrilla and local force troops, we would place our main focus on expanding our main force troops. With respect to combat operations, we had to intensify mobile attacks in the strategic areas in order to annihilate puppet regulars and assign the decisive role on the battlefield to massed combat operations.

The Party Central Committee stressed that the conduct of our revolutionary war of liberation in South Vietnam was the duty of our entire nation. However, because of our policy of restraining the enemy and defeating him in South Vietnam, the form of participation in this effort by the Northern region of our country would be different from that taken by the South. It would be necessary to educate all cadre, Party members, soldiers of all our armed forces, and our civilian population to clearly understand the situation, to have a firm grasp of our struggle formula, and to increase combat spirit and readiness to perform their duties on any battlefield. The population and the armed forces in North Vietnam would have to increase economic and national defense capacity to even greater levels, supply all types of assistance to South Vietnam, and rapidly prepare to defeat enemy attempts to expand the war of aggression.

The 9th Plenum of the Party Central Committee (elected by the 3rd Party Congress) displayed a new level of maturity in our Party by its understanding of ideological theory and its ability to organize and implement actions for the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation. The resolutions approved by this Plenum on the "International Duties of the Party" and "Efforts to Move Forward to Gain a Great Victory in South Vietnam" laid out correct, timely policies and directions for our army's use in building up its forces, increasing its combat strength devoted to the defense of North Vietnam, sending main force troops to the South, and intensifying massed combat in South Vietnam in order to, shoulder to shoulder with the entire population, defeat the "special war" being conducted by the American imperialists.

Following the 9th Plenum of the Central Committee, both North and South Vietnam seethed with combat activities and combat preparations. The Central Military Party Committee and the Ministry of Defense decided to bring main force units subordinate to the High Command and to the military regions up to wartime strength and equipment levels in order to raise the size of the standing army to almost 300,000 by the end of 1964. Besides those cadre and soldiers being sent off to battle in South Vietnam as individual reinforcements and as

“framework units,” in 1964 our army began to send to the battlefield complete units at their full authorized strength of personnel and equipment. The General Staff directed units throughout the armed forces to intensify training and readiness activities so that, when the order was given, we could send battalions and regiments with their full authorized strengths in troops, weapons, and equipment to fight on the battlefields of South Vietnam. The 101st, 95th, and 18th Regiments of the 325th Division were the first mobile main force regiments to march south into battle as complete regiments. Each regiment setting off down the Trail left behind a number of officers, noncommissioned officers, and technical personnel to form a core around which, with the addition of more cadre and new recruits, we could establish a new regiment with the same unit designation.¹¹ The goal of this arrangement was to strengthen our combat forces without increasing the number of unit designations and to maintain and develop the combat traditions of the mobile main force divisions and regiments formed during the resistance war against the French. In later years other mobile main force divisions, including the 308th, 312th, 320th, 316th, 304th, 341st, etc., one after another marched off to fight in the South. Many divisions were cloned into two divisions, and some into three or four divisions, all with the same unit designation and all of which performed outstanding feats of arms in fighting the Americans and annihilating the puppets, adding new pages to the glorious histories of these divisions. This was an innovation in the art of force organization that responded to our need to rapidly expand our forces and to the increasingly heavy combat duties assigned to our army during the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation.

Along with our mobile main force units, our rear services and technical branches also implemented needed changes aimed at satisfying the material and technical needs of the battlefield and at supporting our units during their march to the South. Weapons warehouses, quartermaster warehouses, production facilities, repair stations, and hospitals shifted the direction of their production and support efforts. A number of repair stations for vehicles, machinery, weapons, and artillery, and a number of surgical teams and transit stations for the rearward transfer of wounded soldiers were formed and sent to the battlefield.

Along our strategic transportation route, the use of primitive forms of transportation was unable to provide sufficient capacity to support large-scale combat operations and to move entire battalions and regiments down the Trail. In early 1964, after being reinforced by the General Staff's 83rd and 98th Engineer Regiments and by the 325th Division's engineer battalion, Group 559 focused its personnel and equipment on building a road for use by motor vehicles crossing Route 9 all the way down to Bac and Ta Xeng. Our commo-liaison route was also reorganized, with appropriately configured way stations and the facilities and supplies needed by our troops on their march south. During the 1963–1964 dry season, Group 559 began to employ a method of transportation that combined primitive methods with motorized equipment, but made maximum use of motor-

ized transportation. Because of these efforts, the quantity of supplies shipped to the battlefields in 1964 was four times greater than that transported in 1963. During 1964, almost 9,000 cadre and soldiers marched down our commo-liaison route to fight in the South. Included in this total were a number of full-strength battalions and regiments. A route to transfer wounded soldiers back from the battlefield also was established.

The sea transportation route, which the Navy had taken over in August 1963 and that used steel-hulled vessels capable of carrying over 100 tons, increased the frequency and volume of its supply shipments, sending many shiploads of weapons and a number of mid- and high-level Party and military cadre to the battlefields. Besides the sea transportation route to Cochin China, in late 1964 Navy Group 125 established a sea transportation route to Region 5, delivering supplies to landing docks at Vung Ro (Phu Yen province), Lo Giao (Binh Dinh province), Dam Thuy (Quang Ngai province) and Binh Dao (Quang Nam province). In 1964, using 20 steel-hulled and wooden-hulled vessels, the cadre and sailors of Group 125 delivered 88 shiploads of weapons, a total of over 4,000 tons, to the battlefields of Region 5 and Cochin China. Many of the heavy weapons delivered by sea helped upgrade the equipment of our main force units and supported a number of combat campaigns conducted in various strategic areas.

In South Vietnam, the Politburo of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Party Committee implemented a number of measures aimed at strengthening our leadership and command arrangements, steadily perfecting our strategic deployment posture, and rapidly building up our mobile main force armies on the various battlefields.

In October 1963 the COSVN Military Party Committee and the COSVN Military Command [Bo Tu Lenh Mien] were established. Comrade Nguyen Van Linh, member of the Party Central Committee and COSVN Party Secretary, personally served as Secretary of the COSVN Military Party Committee. Lieutenant General Tran Van Tra, member of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Chief of the General Staff, was appointed Deputy Military Commander and Major General Tran Do was appointed Deputy Political Commissar of the COSVN Military Command.

The 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments and Artillery Group 80 (with a total of five battalions), which were stationed in the base areas of eastern Cochin China, received additional troops and equipment and began training in massed combat operations at the battalion and regimental level. Rear Services Bases A, B, C, and E were transformed into the 81st, 82nd, 83rd, and 84th Rear Services Groups with a more mobile form of organization and method of operation. Each rear services group had warehouses for supply stockpiles, ordnance shops, clinics, transportation units, production teams, collection and purchasing teams, reception teams, etc., which were able to generate, receive, and transport supplies to various sectors and capable of supporting forces fighting in one campaign theater of operations. Eastern Cochin China was systematically developing into an offen-

sive battlefield for the annihilation of enemy forces. COSVN's main force army was gradually taking shape.

In Region 5, Comrade Vo Chi Cong, member of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Secretary of COSVN, served as Secretary of the Region Party Committee and Political Commissar of the Military Region. On 1 May 1964 the Central Highlands Front, subordinate to Military Region 5, was established. Senior Colonel Nguyen Chanh, Deputy Commander of the Military Region, and Senior Colonel Doan Khue, Deputy Political Commissar of the Military Region, were assigned to serve as Commander and Political Commissar of the front.

The main force troops of Region 5, consisting of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments¹² and a number of artillery and sapper battalions and engineer and signal companies, were stationed in base areas in the mountains and the contested areas of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh provinces. Region 5, including the Central Highlands Front, became a combat battlefield for main force troops. The main force army of Region 5 had taken shape.

In this way in 1964 our armed forces were able to build up two mobile main force armies in South Vietnam. Although their numbers were small and their scale of organization still had only reached the regimental level, these battlefield main force armies enjoyed the advantage of a widespread people's war, had firm base areas, and had, in the great rear area of North Vietnam, a massive and continuous source of manpower, material supplies, and moral support. While building up their forces and while conducting combat operations, these armies always received firm and precise strategic guidance from the Party. These factors were of decisive importance in the expansion of our forces and the elevation of their combat morale, ensuring that our troops in South Vietnam would be able to overcome every obstacle and challenge to defeat the puppet main force army, which benefited from powerful American support.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE DEFENSE OF NORTH VIETNAM

Along with the strengthening of our forces and preparations for our main force troops on the battlefields of South Vietnam to intensify their concentrated combat operations aimed at annihilating enemy forces, preparations for combat among the armed forces and population of North Vietnam were carried forward in a very vigorous manner.

In March 1964, the Central Military Party Committee and the High Command decided to shift a portion of the armed forces, including the Air Defense-Air Force Service Branch, "from peacetime status to wartime status." Bomb shelters for personnel and fortifications to protect supplies and machinery were built by state agencies, factories, schools, hospitals, and along the city streets. Thousands of militia self-defense anti-aircraft cells and teams were formed, some of them equipped with 12.7mm anti-aircraft machine guns. Self-defense militia and

the civilian population of many localities held practice combat alerts, practiced the evacuation of casualties, fighting fires, and rescuing victims from collapsed bunkers. They also practiced working with our soldiers to surround and capture enemy commando forces.

On 27 March 1964, Chairman Ho Chi Minh convened a Special Political Conference. In a report read to the conference, Chairman Ho Chi Minh reviewed the great victories achieved by the soldiers and civilians of both North and South Vietnam during ten years of struggle and construction. He clearly pointed out the plans and actions of the American imperialists in their war of aggression and stressed that the failure of their "special warfare" strategy was now inevitable. The proper method of resolving the Vietnam problem was to "end American intervention and withdraw American forces and weapons from South Vietnam. The internal problems of South Vietnam should be resolved in accordance with the spirit of the program of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam."¹³

Chairman Ho Chi Minh announced that "if the American imperialists should be so reckless as to take action against North Vietnam, then they are certain to suffer a disastrous defeat, because the people of our entire nation will resolutely fight against them, because the socialist nations and the progressive peoples of the entire world will massively support us, and because even the American people and the peoples of the nations allied with the Americans will oppose them."¹⁴ Uncle Ho appealed to every soldier and civilian in North Vietnam to "do the work of two people for the sake of our brothers and sisters in South Vietnam."¹⁵

The Special Political Conference was a Dien Hong National Conference held in a new era. Over 300 participants, including veteran revolutionaries, representatives of different occupations and social classes, delegates who had won the title of "Hero," soldiers who had won emulation awards, progressive intellectuals, and patriotic notables representing more than 30 million people of all ethnic groups of our entire nation demonstrated their complete solidarity with the Party Central Committee and with Chairman Ho Chi Minh in the resolve to fight to defend North Vietnam and to press forward with the revolutionary war to liberate South Vietnam and unify the nation.

The Secretariat of the Party Central Committee and the Cabinet of the National Government launched a movement among the entire armed forces and the entire nation to carry out Uncle Ho's wishes with an emulation campaign "for every person to do the work of two people for the sake of our brothers and sisters in South Vietnam."

During the summer of 1964 the acts of provocation and sabotage against North Vietnam committed by the American imperialists and the Saigon puppet regime became increasingly more numerous and more blatant. The "Kitty Hawk" aircraft carrier task force, armed with nuclear-tipped missiles, was sent to the South China Sea. A number of U.S. bomber squadrons were transferred from

American bases in Japan to bases in Southeast Asia. On 27 May a puppet commando vessel captured a civilian fishing vessel from Quang Binh province. During the evening of 26 June a puppet commando team landed on the coast of Tinh Gia district in Thanh Hoa province and destroyed a small wooden bridge along Route 1.

In June 1964 the Politburo of the Party Central Committee issued instructions to "increase combat readiness and smash the schemes of the enemy air force aimed at conducting acts of provocation and aggression against North Vietnam." The Politburo instructions specified that our armed forces in North Vietnam must be combat ready, must resolutely destroy any enemy violating the territory of North Vietnam, and must increase the level of support being sent to South Vietnam. The Politburo said our armed forces in South Vietnam must strike even harder blows against the enemy to support the defense of North Vietnam. We must actively assist revolutionary forces in Laos to consolidate and exploit the victories they have already won and join our Lao allies in intensified operations once the enemy began bombing attacks against North Vietnam.

These Politburo instructions were distributed all the way down to the secretaries of provincial Party committees and Party committee secretaries throughout the armed forces.

Pursuant to these Politburo instructions, on 1 June 1964 Colonel General Van Tien Dung, Chief of Staff of the People's Army of Vietnam, issued a combat readiness alert to all units of our armed forces in North Vietnam. Preparations for battle against the enemy's air force now became the pressing, immediate duty of our armed forces, and especially of the Air Defense-Air Force Service Branch and the Navy Service Branch.

Since early 1964, pursuant to orders from the Central Military Party Committee and the High Command, the Party Committee and the Headquarters of the Air Defense-Air Force Service had changed the missions of the Service from training and combat to combat and training. "Every activity must revolve around combat and take combat as its ultimate goal. When the enemy comes, we must be able to fight and to win. Before the enemy comes we must utilize the time available for training. We must combine training with preparations for combat. Training activities, political and ideological activities, arrangements to provide technical and material support to our units, everything must be tightly linked with combat readiness."¹⁶

The Air Defense-Air Force Service carried out a program of political activities to instill in our troops a full understanding of the new situation and the responsibilities of the Service in order to build their resolve to shoot down enemy aircraft immediately, during the very first battle. Because the Service's own forces were spread thin and were still using many different types of older weapons (85mm, 88mm, and 90mm guns),¹⁷ the Air Defense-Air Force Command decided to concentrate an appropriate portion of its manpower and its firepower to defend key targets, at the same time organizing a powerful reserve force.¹⁸ Lessons and train-

ing programs were updated and supplemented. Time spent in theoretical training was reduced and time spent practicing individual functions and techniques and practicing coordination between gun crews to shoot down the enemy's high-speed jet aircraft was increased. Besides Servicewide basic combat procedures, each unit established a specific set of combat procedures that foresaw different types of enemy attack (air attack, ground attack, naval attack), established proper courses of action, and covered command, supply, and technical support. These were important combat documents that provided a basis for honing the training of our troops and later were developed into official regulations on combat preparations in our air defense units.

Both in firing positions at strategic sites and while on the move, wherever there were air defense-air force troops, Party committees, governmental units at all levels, and the local population wholeheartedly provided assistance to them in manpower and material support by helping to build firing positions, giving these troops priority in receiving food supplies, and bolstering their combat spirit.

To combine training operations with combat operations, in April 1964 the Air Defense-Air Force Service sent the 234th Regiment to work with local air defense forces in Military Region 4 in conducting mobile operations and air-defense ambushes aimed against enemy commando aircraft operating over Nghe An. In June 1964 the 234th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment and Military Region 4's 24th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion were sent to the battlefields of Laos to provide combat support to our Lao allies. There these units shot down six enemy aircraft. Through these combat operations the Air Defense-Air Force Service gained a great deal of experience in command organization, movement of forces, deployment of forces, combat tactics, methods for providing supplies and technical support to units fighting far from their rear areas, and in reconstituting our forces following combat operations.

The Navy was brought up to wartime status on 6 July 1964. To deal with the ever-increasing acts of provocation and sabotage being conducted by the United States and its puppets along the coast of Military Region 4, the Navy Command decided to establish a forward headquarters on the Gianh River under the command of Comrade Nguyen Ba Phat, Deputy Commander of the Navy. A number of patrol boats were sent down from the north to reinforce the Southern area. Patrol boat units stationed along the coast of Military Region 4 left port and proceeded to anchorage areas from which they took turns in sailing out to sea to conduct operations. Our torpedo boats were lowered into the water and torpedoes were readied for combat. Coastal defense artillery units were ordered to Combat Readiness Condition 2. Headquarters staff agencies and military units located ashore hurriedly built trenches, bunkers, bomb shelters, and fighting positions. Cadre and soldiers who were on leave were recalled to their units.

By the end of July 1964 all preparations for combat by our armed forces in North Vietnam, and especially by the Air Defense-Air Force and Navy Service Branches, had essentially been completed.

THE GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT

On 31 July and 1 August 1964, U.S. destroyers and puppet commando vessels continuously violated the territorial waters of North Vietnam. U.S. aircraft bombed the Nam Can border defense post and Noong De village in the western part of Nghe An province. On 2 August the American destroyer *Maddox* sailed deep into the Gulf of Tonkin. The General Staff and the Navy Headquarters ordered the 135th Torpedo Boat Group to resolutely punish any enemy vessel violating the territorial waters of the Fatherland. The 3rd Squadron, consisting of three torpedo boats under the command of Group Commander Le Duy Khoai, heroically attacked and drove off the *Maddox*, also fighting a fierce battle against modern enemy jet aircraft and shooting down one aircraft.

With only a few small vessels that had many technical weaknesses, fighting alone against both an enemy destroyer and enemy aircraft, our young Navy gained a glorious victory and struck a severe warning blow against the American imperialists. "The battle demonstrated the high fighting spirit and the determination to win of our entire armed forces and our entire population."¹⁹

On 5 August 1964, after systematic acts of provocation and sabotage and after fabricating the "Gulf of Tonkin incident" to deceive both the people of the world and U.S. domestic public opinion, the American imperialists openly used their air forces to attack North Vietnam, beginning an incredibly savage war of destruction conducted by large air and naval forces against an independent, sovereign nation. The enemy attack, code-named "Dart," sent 64 sorties of naval aircraft to strike four of our naval bases (Gianh River in Quang Binh, Cua Hoi in Nghe An, Lach Truong in Thanh Hoa, and Bai Chay in Quang Ninh) and the Vinh petroleum storage facility. With a high spirit of combat readiness and having been well prepared, our naval units, air defense forces, and local armed forces in the areas under attack opened fire, courageously striking back against the enemy's attack waves. They shot down eight enemy aircraft, both jet and propeller-driven (A4D and AD-6 aircraft), damaged many other aircraft, and captured one enemy pilot. The U.S. imperialists suffered a major defeat and were completely surprised and stunned.²⁰

August 5 became Navy Day, marking the first victory of the heroic People's Navy. The victory of 5 August had an important practical significance to our armed forces. In our first battle against a surprise enemy air attack, our anti-aircraft artillery troops, sailors, and local armed forces, using ordinary air defense weapons (including obsolete 88mm and 90mm guns, machine guns, and rifles), shot down a number of modern jet aircraft on the spot and captured a pilot alive. After the battle the morale of our units was very high, and the prestige of the enemy air forces had been damaged. This was an important factor that aided us in building up our forces, boosting combat morale, and winning big victories in the future. Concerns and a lack of confidence in our weapons and equipment and in our ability to shoot down modern jet aircraft, which had previously surfaced

among some cadre and soldiers, dissipated. The strengths and weaknesses of the enemy air force were subjected to scientific analysis based on practical experience. Positive lessons learned and weaknesses that surfaced during the battle, such as not accurately evaluating the tactical plans of the enemy air force, not correctly deploying our manpower and firepower, and not fully exploiting our opportunity to annihilate enemy forces, were reviewed and summarized by our units in a timely fashion.

On 7 August 1964, the High Command held a solemn ceremony to honor the units that had won the victory of 5 August. Chairman Ho Chi Minh attended the ceremony. Uncle Ho told the armed forces, "You have won a glorious victory, but don't become self-satisfied. Don't underestimate the enemy because of this victory. We must realize that, with regard to the American imperialists and their puppets, 'even in the face of death these leopards will not change their spots.' They still harbor many evil plots."

After the battle of 5 August, our previous predictions about the enemy's schemes and the forces and tactics he would use to attack North Vietnam now became clearer and more precise. Under the guidance of the General Staff, the Air Defense–Air Force Service quickly completed an overall combat plan clearly laying out the missions of the Service, combat plans, and the proper utilization of forces to deal with each step in the enemy's escalation of the air war.

One day after the victory of 5 August the 921st Air Force Fighter Regiment, after a period of training in a foreign country, returned to the Fatherland secretly and safely. For the first time in the history of our nation, our people's armed forces possessed modern jet aircraft. The organization of the Air Defense–Air Force Service took a step forward. Immediately after their return home the regiment's flight sections began training operations and initiated a combat alert system to maintain constant combat readiness.

Our anti-aircraft artillery and radar forces were reorganized to improve their ability to detect enemy aircraft at long range and to strengthen both our forces defending key targets and our mobile reserve forces.²¹ All units analyzed the combat experience gained on 5 August for training purposes. The General Staff sent the anti-aircraft battalions organic to the 308th, 312th, 320th, and 325th Infantry Divisions to operate in the western portion of Military Region 4.

In November 1964 3rd Company, 14th Anti-Aircraft Battalion, 325th Infantry Division, which was defending the strategic transportation route at Cha Lo in western Quang Binh province, fought an outstanding battle, shooting down three enemy aircraft. During the battle Company Political Officer Nguyen Viet Xuan was severely wounded. He ignored his pain and continued to command and encourage his unit to fire directly at the enemy aircraft. The proud spirit, "Aim straight at the enemy—Fire!" of Martyred Hero Nguyen Viet Xuan provided a shining example and a powerful slogan to encourage our air defense–air force troops and our people's armed forces throughout the years of combat against the war of destruction conducted by the American imperialists.

SOUTH VIETNAM DEFEATS THE AMERICAN SPECIAL WAR

In South Vietnam, the armed struggle movement combined with political struggle, which grew powerfully and uniformly after the Ap Bac victory, defeated the objectives in the enemy's Johnson-McNamara plan right from the start.

Local force troops of the provinces of Cochin China, supported by guerrillas and the people's political struggle movement, repelled many sweep operations conducted by puppet regulars and destroyed or forced the abandonment of hundreds of Regional Force and Popular Force outposts. By the end of 1964 the soldiers and civilians of Cochin China and of extreme southern Central Vietnam had destroyed more than 3,000 "strategic hamlets" out of a total of 3,800 "strategic hamlets" built by the enemy. Liberated areas and areas in which the people had seized control expanded up to the very outskirts of the cities and towns. Bac Ai district in Ninh Thuan province and Duc Hue district in Long An province were completely liberated. In many lowland districts the enemy retained control only of the towns, a few surrounding villages, and the lines of communications.

Relying on our people's warfare battle posture and on the expansion of local armed forces, COSVN's main force regiments began to organize battles involving units of battalion and regimental strength. These battles were designed to counter sweeps, destroy outposts, support the masses in destroying "strategic hamlets," and to train and temper our troops. On 31 December 1963, 4th Battalion, 2nd Regiment, blocked enemy forces conducting a sweep in Duong Long hamlet, Thanh Tuyen village, Ben Cat district, Thu Dau Mot province. The 3rd Battalion, which was stationed nearby, immediately marched to the sound of the guns, and, fighting alongside 4th Battalion, inflicted severe casualties on the puppet 32nd Ranger Battalion. Fifty-seven enemy troops were captured along with more than 100 weapons. Developing this victory, the 2nd Regiment conducted a series of ambushes along Route 13, killing or eliminating from the field of combat hundreds of enemy in battles at Can Dam, Lai Khe, Cay Den, and other locations.

The 1st Regiment was operating in the Tay Ninh-Cu Chi area. In May 1964 the regiment ambushed and destroyed a puppet commando company at Bau Coi. In September and October 1964, the regiment launched a number of successful attacks and ambushes at Suoi Cao, Bau Tram, etc., eliminating from the field of combat two battalions of the puppet 9th Regiment from the 5th Division.

In Region 5, pursuant to COSVN's new policy of launching coordinated operations throughout South Vietnam, the Military Region Command initiated an operational campaign by all regional armed forces during the last six months of 1964 with the goals of annihilating enemy troops, strengthening our own forces, building strong units at the grass-roots level, supporting the effort to gain control of additional population, and destroying "strategic hamlets." Our province and district local force troops and guerrillas held onto the lowlands, fighting off

enemy sweeps and preserving and expanding the liberated zone. The military region's main force troops concentrated their forces to fight a number of battles aimed at annihilating enemy troops and supporting the population in destroying "strategic hamlets."

To launch this wave of operations, on 1 July 1964 the 93rd Battalion, 2nd Regiment, ambushed 41 enemy military vehicles on Route 19 in Gia Lai [Pleiku] province. The 407th Sapper Battalion, supported by the 200th Fire-Support Battalion, attacked the puppet commando training center at Play-Co-Rong on 4 July. Many independent actions fought by our province and district local force troops and supported by main force elements achieved a high level of combat efficiency. These actions included a raid against the Nam Dong Commando Training Center in Thua Thien province, the annihilation of a Regional Force company at Trang An in Quang Ngai province, the destruction of the Phu Huu strong point in Binh Dinh province, and the destruction of the Chop Chai strong point in Quang Nam province.

On 9 August 1964, 90th Battalion, 1st Regiment, supported by seven recoilless rifles provided by the Military Region Headquarters, attacked the Ky Sanh "strategic hamlet" in Quang Nam province, wiping out the Regional Force and Popular Force troops stationed in the hamlet. The battalion then regrouped and took up battle positions to attack enemy troops coming to relieve the hamlet. The battalion succeeded in eliminating from the field of battle one enemy battalion and destroying eight M-113s. The Ky Sanh "strategic hamlet" was completely destroyed. This was the first battle in which Military Region 5's main force troops were finally able to defeat the enemy's "armored personnel carrier assault" tactics. Fear of M-113s, which had surfaced in a number of our cadre and soldiers, disappeared. The Ky Sanh victory demonstrated an innovative and effective method devised by the armed forces of Region 5 to destroy "strategic hamlets." It also demonstrated the ability of our main force units to stand their ground and defeat enemy regulars conducting sweeps across open low-lying terrain.

In December 1964, the 2nd Infantry Regiment and the 409th Sapper Battalion simultaneously attacked three enemy strong points and 11 enemy outposts in the An Lao Valley of Binh Dinh province, supporting mass uprisings that destroyed 38 "strategic hamlets." In these battles almost 700 enemy troops were killed or captured and 300 weapons were confiscated. An Lao district was completely liberated. This was the first time in Region 5 that our three types of troops, in coordination with political forces of the masses, had conducted operations throughout an entire district, and our attack was similar in nature to a combined offensive campaign.

Region 5's main forces and local forces had matured rapidly and well.²² The region's self-defense militia had doubled in strength since 1963.²³ Supported by the armed forces, the people of Region 5 rose up and destroyed 1,485 "strategic hamlets" in the lowlands and 292 "strategic hamlets" in the mountains,²⁴ liberating 23 villages. In many areas the masses gained control of 15 to 20 interconnected vil-

lages with a total population of around 100,000. These areas lay along the coast and close to Route 1 and were linked to our bases in the mountains, providing a firm foothold where our main force troops could rest and from which they could move out to fight to destroy the enemy in the lowlands. The armed struggle movement combined with political struggle grew to a new level, keeping pace with the movement in Cochin China.

In Saigon and the cities and towns of South Vietnam the effects of our sapper and commando operations reverberated throughout the nation and around the world. With only a few personnel and using perfect tactics, our sapper and commando soldiers attacked targets deep behind enemy lines, attacking the Caravelle and Brinks Hotels, the Kinh Do Theater, and the soccer field at the puppet General Staff Headquarters. Large numbers of American officers and technical personnel were gathered at these locations. Attacks were also made against many U.S. and puppet airfields and logistics installations, inflicting heavy damage on enemy equipment and delaying planned sweep operations. The most outstanding of these sapper/commando attacks were the sinking of the aircraft transport vessel *Card* at Saigon Port, the attacks on the airfields at Tan Son Nhat, Da Nang, Pleiku, and Soc Trang, the attack on the Nha Be petroleum storage facility, etc.

On 2 May 1964 Commando Nguyen Van Troi planted a mine under the Cong Ly Bridge in Saigon in an effort to kill U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara. The attempt was discovered and Nguyen Van Troi was captured and murdered by the enemy. The courageous example of Martyred Hero Nguyen Van Troi, who gave his life in service to the high ideals of the revolution, was studied by our youth throughout the nation.

Working alongside the sappers, our artillery troops developed independent attack tactics, creeping deep behind enemy lines and mounting daring attacks that achieved a high level of combat efficiency. During the night of 31 October 1964, COSVN's 80th Artillery Group, escorted by the 5th Battalion of the 2nd Regiment and guided by guerrillas from the villages of Tuong Lan and Tan Tich in Vinh Cuu district, Bien Hoa province, covertly carried mortars and recoilless rifles across the Dong Nai River and shelled the Bien Hoa airfield, destroying 59 aircraft and killing hundreds of American pilots and technical personnel.

At a time when the Americans and their puppets were increasing their "special war" activities to the very maximum, were building many bases, airfields, military ports, strategic highways, and logistics installations, and were preparing to bring in a large American army to join the fight, these attacks by our sappers, commandos, and artillerymen constituted a sharp slap in the enemy's face. These attacks represented a new type of combat operation with a high level of combat effectiveness. Using elite elements of our three types of troops to attack enemy rear bases, kill valuable personnel, and destroy their implements of war became an effective tactic used by our soldiers and civilians in the resistance war against the United States to save the nation.

THE POLITBURO DECISION TO SEEK A QUICK VICTORY IN THE SOUTH

In September 1964, the Politburo of the Central Committee met to assess the situation and approve a new policy. According to the Politburo assessment, the American imperialists were faced with major contradictions in their search for a solution that would rescue them from their current failed position in Vietnam. The solution being studied by Johnson and the American ruling clique, which they were making all-out preparations to carry out, was to send an American expeditionary army into South Vietnam and to launch an air war of destruction against North Vietnam. Our soldiers and civilians would have to very carefully guard against this possibility because the American imperialists were by nature aggressors and warmongers, because Vietnam occupied a very important position in the overall American worldwide strategy, and because the United States possessed enormous economic and military power. Neither the international situation nor the domestic situation in the United States, however, would permit the warmongers of the ruling class to immediately and all at once commit the full force of U.S. military might to the Vietnam War. Their biggest problem, and the factor that had led to the bankruptcy of every war plan the Americans had ever devised, was that on the battlefield the Americans and their puppets were gradually sinking deeper and deeper into failure and passivity. The Saigon puppet regime, the key force on which the United States relied, had been seriously weakened. The battle of Ap Bac and a number of other such battles had shown the Americans that it would be very difficult for the puppet regular army, even with powerful American support, to defeat the armed forces of the revolution in South Vietnam. The only reason the Americans and the puppets were able to stand up to us was because they still controlled the puppet army and because we were not yet militarily strong enough. Our main force army in South Vietnam was still weak and was not yet ready to mount massed combat operations to destroy the puppet regular army.

Our army and our people had new opportunities and new advantages on the battlefields of South Vietnam. The Politburo decided to mobilize the entire Party, the entire population, and the entire armed forces to concentrate all our capabilities to bring about a massive change in the direction and pace of expansion of our main force army on the battlefield, to launch strong massed combat operations at the campaign level, and to seek to win a decisive victory within the next few years.

Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh, member of the Politburo of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Secretary of the Central Military Party Committee, was dispatched to the battlefield by the Politburo. Many high-level cadre with experience in building up main force units and in leading and directing massed combat operations were sent south with Comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh.

In October 1964 the Central Military Party Committee ordered our armed forces in South Vietnam to launch a campaign during the 1964–1965 winter-

spring period aimed at destroying a significant number of puppet regular army units and expanding our liberated zones. Eastern Cochin China, the central part of Central Vietnam, and the Central Highlands would be the main battlefronts for this campaign. COSVN's main force units, which were directed to open fire first, would target their portion of the campaign on the Ba Ria–Long Khanh and Binh Long–Phuoc Long areas. The main force units of Region 5 and the Central Highlands were directed to conduct an offensive campaign against enemy forces in southern Quang Ngai province, northern Binh Dinh province, and the area west of Route 14 in Kontum and Gia Lai [Pleiku] provinces. In all other areas our armed forces would launch strong supporting operations designed to stretch enemy forces thin and to allow us to concentrate our main force units in the main theaters of operations.

The 320th Infantry Regiment,²⁵ the 545th Viet Bac Battalion, and a number of infantry and specialty branch battalions were ordered to set out immediately on a forced march to the battlefields of the South. In early 1965, Regiments 95, 101, and 18 of the 325th Division arrived in the Central Highlands,²⁶ where they were assigned to operate as independent regiments directly subordinate to the Central Highlands Front.

THE BINH GIA CAMPAIGN

In Cochin China, upon receipt of the Politburo resolution and of instructions from the Central Military Party Committee, COSVN's Military Affairs Party Committee and the COSVN Military Command began urgent preparations for an offensive campaign. One by one, the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments and a number of fire-support battalions arrived in War Zone D. Each unit received additional troops and equipment, was given additional tactical and technical training, and worked to increase the combat resolve of its troops and to motivate its personnel to accomplish new feats of arms. A number of cadre groups were sent to Ba Ria and Long Khanh provinces and to the southern districts of Binh Thuan province to study the situation and prepare the battlefield. Because these areas were far from COSVN's base area, close to Saigon and the enemy's strategic road network, and under tight enemy control, we encountered many problems in our efforts to prepare supplies for the campaign. Our plans called for almost 10,000 troops to participate in this offensive campaign, and the campaign was to last for some time, so our food and ammunition requirements were rather large.

COSVN's Rear Services Groups concentrated their forces and equipment to rapidly transport guns, ammunition, and food from COSVN bases to the campaign assembly area. Many rear services cadre went out to local areas to work with province and district supply committees to purchase food from the population. Some cadre traveled deep behind enemy lines and, evading the enemy's outposts and his strict control measures, purchased rice, medicine, and other

necessities, which were transported to the designated points by many different means, such as Lambrettas, cars, oxcarts, motorboats, and human porters. Military proselytizing cadre even contacted a number of puppet officers and arranged for the use of enemy military vehicles to transport rice from Ba Ria and Saigon to our liberated areas. A military medical network was organized, based on our local provincial and district clinics. Group K10 and Group 1500 built piers at Phuoc Chi and Loc An to receive weapons being sent from North Vietnam by sea. It could be said that never since the winter-spring campaign of 1953–1954 had the eastern Cochin China battlefield seen such an enthusiastic atmosphere of campaign preparations. In only two months COSVN's rear services forces, with massive and enthusiastic help from the civilian population, shipped hundreds of tons of weapons and food to the campaign area.

In early November 1964 the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments, the 80th Artillery Group (with a total of four battalions), and a number of support units left War Zone D, crossed the Dong Nai River, and, dividing up to follow many different routes, marched toward the Ba Ria battlefield. On 20 November all units arrived at their assembly areas safely and in secrecy. Also participating in the campaign were three main force battalions from Military Regions 7 and 6,²⁷ Ba Ria province's 445th Local Force Company, and a local force platoon from Hoai Duc district in Binh Thuan province.

The COSVN Military Command organized a Campaign Headquarters to control our operations. Comrade Tran Dinh Xu was appointed as Campaign Commander, Comrade Le Van Tuong was appointed Campaign Political Commissar, and Comrade Nguyen Hoa was appointed Deputy Commander and Campaign Chief of Staff.

The campaign's objectives were to annihilate a portion of the enemy's regular forces and his local Regional Force and Popular Force troops; to intensify guerrilla warfare operations; to support the population in destroying "strategic hamlets"; to expand our liberated areas and link the base areas of eastern Cochin China to the coastal areas of Military Region 6; to protect the docking areas where we received supplies by sea; and to hone our main force troops in battle and increase their ability to conduct mobile operations.

On 2 December 1964, Ba Ria province's 445th Local Force Company attacked the Binh Gia "strategic hamlet" in Dat Do district while COSVN artillery shelled the Duc Thanh district military headquarters, kicking off our offensive campaign. These were very "sensitive" positions for the enemy because they were located in open terrain and because many of the families living in the Binh Gia "strategic hamlet" were the wives and children of puppet Marine Corps personnel. When we attacked the enemy would be compelled to send relief forces, and we would be able to mount a mobile attack and destroy the enemy while he was out in the open outside of his defensive fortifications.

Because our attack force was too small and because the enemy mounted a ferocious counterattack, however, our initial attack failed. In spite of this, faced

with our growing pressure against Binh Gia, on 9 December the enemy sent the 3rd Armored Troop of the 1st Armored Regiment up Route 2 to relieve Binh Gia. Our 2nd Regiment, which was in hiding on Nghe Mountain [Nui Nghe], eight kilometers from the road, immediately moved out to attack. Arriving just in time, the regiment split the enemy formation and annihilated the entire armored troop, destroying 14 M-113s. Many of our cadre and soldiers fought very bravely. Company Commander Ta Quang Ty leaped on top of an enemy armored vehicle, using his submachine gun to kill the entire enemy crew, and then turning the vehicle's heavy machine gun around to place suppressive fire on the other enemy vehicles. Ty's fellow soldiers gave him the title of "the company commander who blocked the enemy."²⁸ Soldier Nguyen Van Xon, 20 years old, had his left arm crushed by an enemy vehicle. Ignoring his pain, with his right arm he threw a hand grenade, which blew the track off the enemy vehicle.

Phase one of the campaign ended. Our forces participating in the campaign were still at top strength and their combat spirit was still very high. On the night of 22 December an oceangoing vessel delivered 44 tons of weapons from North Vietnam to the dock at Loc An, providing a timely infusion of equipment to our units participating in the campaign. After more than half a month of combat operations the Campaign Command Section had gained a thorough understanding of the enemy's method of operations, especially the way in which it mounted relief operations by land and by air. This provided the basis for our troops to continue their attack, to develop a correct offensive posture, to lure the enemy to an area that we had chosen, and to fight a number of key battles.

On 27 December the 445th Company, reinforced by an infantry company of the 1st Regiment, launched a second attack on the Binh Gia "strategic hamlet." After occupying the hamlet our forces regrouped, dug fortifications, and prepared for an enemy counterattack. Artillery units, firing 75mm recoilless rifles and 82mm mortars, continued to shell the Duc Thanh district military headquarters.

On 28 December the enemy amassed 24 armed helicopters and 50 transport helicopters to land the 30th Ranger Battalion in an area southwest of Duc Thanh and to land the 33rd Ranger Battalion northeast of the Binh Gia "strategic hamlet." The 1st Regiment quickly attacked, wiping out part of the 30th Battalion and forcing the rest of the battalion to flee to Duc Thanh. Exploiting this success and learning lessons from a battle that had not been a clear-cut victory, that same afternoon the 1st Regiment maneuvered itself into a position that enveloped both flanks of the 33rd Battalion. The regiment pushed the enemy back into unfavorable terrain and wiped out the entire battalion, shooting down six enemy helicopters in the process.

Anticipating that the enemy would continue to send reinforcements, the Campaign Command Section ordered the 1st Regiment to redeploy and prepare to engage the enemy.

On 30 and 31 December, as the 4th Marine Battalion was in the process of landing to join the battle, the 1st Regiment dispatched one company to engage

the enemy and lure him deep into a rubber plantation. This gave 2nd Battalion an opportunity to launch a frontal assault while 3rd Battalion swept around to the rear of the enemy formation. The battle grew extremely savage. The soldiers of 1st Regiment lowered the barrels of their heavy machine guns and recoilless rifles to fire directly into the enemy's ranks and used submachine guns and hand grenades to wipe out individual clusters of enemy troops. Combatants Le Van Dap and Hoang Dinh Nghia "ran back and forth, attacking and destroying the enemy wherever they could find him." The puppet Marine battalion was annihilated. We captured eight prisoners, including one American advisor who held the rank of captain, and confiscated all the enemy's weapons. After this campaign 1st Regiment was given the honorary name "Binh Gia Regiment."

Along Route 15 (the road from Saigon to Vung Tau), on 01 January 1965, the 2nd Regiment ambushed and annihilated a convoy consisting of ten vehicles and a company of enemy troops. Two days later the regiment attacked and inflicted severe casualties on the 35th Ranger Battalion, destroying a 16-vehicle military convoy, including two tanks and two M-113s, on Route 2 as they moved up from Ba Ria to Duc Thanh.

In the secondary theaters of operations, the main force battalions of Military Regions 6 and 7, working with local armed forces, overran many enemy outposts in Long Thanh district, besieged the Hoai Duc district military headquarters, supported the local populations in uprisings to destroy "strategic hamlets," and expanded our liberated zone.

On 3 January 1965 the Binh Gia Campaign ended in victory.²⁹

In more than one month of combat our soldiers had fought five regiment-level and two battalion-level battles, wiping out two entire battalions of enemy regulars (including one battalion of the enemy's strategic reserve forces) and one armored troop and inflicting severe casualties on three other battalions.³⁰ Many "strategic hamlets" along Route 2 and Route 15 in Dat Do, Long Thanh, and Nhon Trach districts had been destroyed. Hoai Duc district was liberated. The Hat Dich base area in Ba Ria province and the southern portion of Binh Thuan province was consolidated and expanded, thereby protecting the sea transportation route from North Vietnam to eastern Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam.

This was the first full-fledged campaign to be conducted by COSVN main force units on the battlefields of Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam. During this campaign our soldiers made excellent logistics preparations, correctly selected the operational theater and the targets to be attacked, employed the proper forces and campaign combat tactics, and were able to annihilate entire battalions of enemy regulars, including even a battalion from the enemy's strategic reserve. Although the scale of the operations was small, the campaign was strategically important because it marked the beginning of a new era in our revolutionary war, the era of combining guerrilla warfare with conventional warfare, combining military attacks with uprisings conducted by the masses.

Comrade Le Duan, First Secretary of the Party Central Committee, made the following assessment of this campaign: The liberation war of South Vietnam has progressed by leaps and bounds. After the battle of Ap Bac the enemy knew it would be difficult to defeat us. After the Binh Gia Campaign the enemy realized that he was in the process of being defeated by us.

THE SPRING 1965 CAMPAIGN IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND MR-5

In Region 5, the Military Region Headquarters launched its own wave of operations during the spring of 1965, directing its main force units to fight massed battles using forces of battalion- and regiment-size and supported by local armed forces. These battles were aimed at destroying a portion of the enemy's regular army, supporting the people of the Central Highlands and of the lowlands of Central Vietnam in mounting uprisings to destroy "strategic hamlets," and exploiting the successes of the uprising campaign conducted during the fall of 1964.

The 101st and 320th Regiments overran or forced the withdrawal of a series of enemy outposts along Route 14 in Pleiku and Kontum provinces. The regiments also ambushed and inflicted severe casualties on the 2nd Ranger Battalion and the 1st Battalion of the puppet 42nd Regiment at Dak Long on 30 March 1965. The 409th Sapper Battalion attacked the Pleiku airfield and a U.S. military base called "Camp Holloway" on 7 February 1965, killing 100 enemy soldiers and destroying 20 aircraft. The 1st Regiment attacked the Viet An district military headquarters in Quang Nam, annihilating one enemy company and a battalion command staff and capturing two 155mm artillery pieces. The 2nd and 10th Regiments ambushed enemy forces at Nhung Pass [Deo Nhung]-Duong Lieu in Binh Dinh province, inflicting losses that rendered two infantry battalions and one troop of armored personnel carriers combat ineffective.

After these successes in annihilating or inflicting heavy casualties on a number of enemy regular battalions and wiping out or dispersing a significant portion of the enemy's armed forces at the grass-roots level, the main force troops of Military Region 5 and the Central Highlands worked with local armed forces to support the people in uprisings that destroyed almost all of the enemy's "strategic hamlets" in Central Vietnam, liberating 2.5 million of the three million residents of the rural lowlands. In many areas the puppet governmental structure at the grass-roots level was completely destroyed and a people's government was established. The enemy's "strategic hamlets" now became our own combat hamlets and villages.

Together with the COSVN main force units, the main force troops of Region 5 and the Central Highlands had progressed to the point of being able to conduct massed combat operations at the battalion and regimental level, wiping out companies of enemy regulars on a routine basis and taking the first step toward annihilating entire enemy battalions.

THE WAR ESCALATES IN THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

The puppet army, “the backbone of the special war,” was in danger of annihilation. U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara, returning from an inspection trip to South Vietnam, was forced to confess that “the U.S. has failed militarily in South Vietnam.” General Westmoreland, Commander of the U.S. Military Command in Saigon, said that “if the situation continues to move in this direction, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (the puppet regime) will not be able to survive for more than six months.”

In order to redeem this failure, Johnson and the American ruling clique decided to send U.S. combat forces to South Vietnam, to mount powerful and continuous air attacks against North Vietnam, to elevate their “special war” to the highest possible level, and to make preparations so that, when the situation became desperate, U.S. soldiers could be sent to engage in large-scale combat operations in accordance with the U.S. strategy of “limited war.”

On 7 February 1965, American air forces launched an attack called “Flaming Dart,” bombing the towns of Ho Xa in Vinh Linh province and Dong Hoi in Quang Binh province. On 2 March they began a series of continuous large-scale attacks, which they called “Rolling Thunder,” against many targets throughout the territory of North Vietnam.

On 8 March 1965, following in the footsteps of French colonialist aggressor troops more than 100 years before, the American 3rd Marine Battalion landed in Da Nang.

Faced with this intensified and expanded war of aggression by the American imperialists, a session of the Central Military Party Committee in February 1965 and the subsequent 11th Plenum of the Party Central Committee in March 1965 approved a number of important decisions aimed at expanding our armed forces in accordance with our plan for wartime force development, switching the entire economy of North Vietnam over from peacetime production to wartime production and further expanding the role of North Vietnam as the great rear area for the great front lines in South Vietnam. In this new situation the people and armed forces of North Vietnam would conduct economic production, at the same time fighting to defeat the American imperialist air campaign against North Vietnam and keeping our transportation artery to the battlefield open. The people and armed forces of South Vietnam were directed to maintain the initiative on the battlefield, to maintain a strategic offensive posture, to lure puppet regular troops out to mountain jungle regions and to other selected areas where we could destroy them, to launch strong popular movements to incite the people to rise up and destroy “strategic hamlets,” to expand our liberated zones, and to intensify the operations of our sapper and commando troops and the people’s political struggle movement in the cities. Our goals were to destroy so much of the enemy’s regular army that it could no longer serve as the backbone of the puppet regime; to drive the Saigon puppet regime further into weakness and crisis;

even if the American imperialists sent a flood of expeditionary troops onto the battlefield, to cause the United States and its puppets to sink deeper into a passive and reactive posture.

During the spring of 1965, while resolve to fight and defeat the Americans swept across our entire nation, the 325th Division, the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 33rd, 42nd, 66th, and 88th Infantry Regiments, and scores of sapper, artillery, and other specialty branch battalions poured down the Annamite Mountain chain, marching to the battlefield. The General Rear Services Department formed truck battalions that drove from Hanoi all the way down to Route 9. Group 559 was directed to increase its use of motorized means of transportation to speed the flow of weapons, rice, and other essential supplies to Region 5, the Central Highlands, and Cochinchina. In January 1965 eight supply ships sent by Navy Group 125, each carrying around 50 tons of weapons, unloaded their cargoes in Ca Mau, Ben Tre, Ba Ria, Phu Yen, etc.

THE SUMMER 1965 CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH VIETNAM

In South Vietnam, developing the victory achieved by our 1964–1965 winter-spring campaign, the COSVN Military Party Committee, the COSVN Military Command, and the Headquarters of Military Region 5 launched a new wave of operations during the summer of 1965 aimed at maintaining the initiative, inflicting greater defeats on the puppet regular army, and administering an initial thrashing to the American aggressor army.

The main force regiments of Military Region 5 and the Central Highlands Front overran a series of enemy strong points along strategic Routes 14, 19, 7, and 21 and helped the local population to destroy dozens of “strategic hamlets” and expand the liberated zones in the northern and southern portions of the Central Highlands. On 28 May, Quang Nam province local force troops assaulted positions held by a company of U.S. Marines at Nui Thanh [Thanh Mountain], virtually annihilating the entire company. The Nui Thanh victory greatly stimulated the desire to fight the Americans and built confidence throughout our nation in our ability to defeat the Americans.

In northern Quang Ngai province Military Region 5 Headquarters began preparations for an offensive campaign that would use our main force units to destroy a portion of the puppet 25th Division. Comrade Tran Kien, member of the Standing Committee of the Regional Party Committee and Chief of Military Region Rear Services, was sent to the districts of Son Tinh, Binh Son, and Tra Bong to work with lower-level Party committees to collect food, mobilize civilian porters, and establish supply caches. Comrade Huynh Huu Anh, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Military Region, led a group of cadre to study the battlefield and develop a battle plan.

In May 1965, the Military Region’s main force 1st Regiment, under the

command of Le Huu Tru, marched from Quang Nam down to northern Quang Ngai to launch an offensive campaign in Ba Gia alongside local armed forces. The campaign began during the evening of 25 May when the Son Tinh district local force platoon attacked the Phuoc Loc Popular Forces outpost. This action lured the puppet 1st Battalion, 51st Regiment, out from the Go Cao outpost in Ba Gia to relieve our pressure on Phuoc Loc and enabled 1st Regiment to surround and destroy this entire battalion.³¹

On 30 May, the puppet 1st Corps hastily ordered the 39th Ranger Battalion, the 3rd Marine Battalion, and 2nd Battalion, 51st Regiment, all organized into a regiment-sized task force, to mount an operation to relieve Ba Gia. The 1st Regiment, reinforced by the Military Region's independent 45th Infantry Battalion, massed its forces to fight the key battle of the campaign, essentially annihilating the puppet task force on the road from Son Tinh to Ba Gia, and then assaulting and destroying the last remnants of the task force as they retreated to positions at Chop Non, Phuoc Loc, High Point 47, and Ma To.

Coordinating their actions with the military attack, on 3 June the Quang Ngai Province Party Committee mobilized 100,000 civilians from all districts of the province to gather at the province capital to demand the return of their husbands and children and creating a great commotion. The puppet army and the puppet administration in Quang Ngai were confused and severely shaken. Seizing this opportunity, our local armed forces and the political forces of the masses coordinated their actions to force dozens of outposts to surrender or withdraw, destroying entire networks of "strategic hamlets" and liberating the bulk of the rural lowlands and mountains in Quang Ngai province.

Between 10 and 25 June, 1st Regiment, working with local armed forces, destroyed the enemy's apparatus of oppression and liberated five villages with a total population of 15,000 civilians. Between 4 and 20 July the regiment overran the Ba Gia outpost and liberated three villages along an 11-kilometer stretch of road from Tra Bong to Ba Lanh.

During 51 days of heroic combat, the 1st Regiment, operating under the direct command of the Military Region Headquarters and supported by our local armed forces and civilian population, had skillfully outmaneuvered the enemy, utilized appropriate fighting methods, destroyed five battalions of puppet regulars,³² and supported the civilian population of 29 villages in six districts³³ in uprisings to seize power, liberating almost 200,000 people. For the first time in the history of the South Vietnamese battlefield our troops had annihilated an enemy regiment-sized task force, the largest combat formation used by the puppet regulars at that time, thereby defeating their tactic of conducting relief operations using regiment-sized task forces. After this victory the 1st Regiment was given the title of "Ba Gia Regiment."

In eastern Cochin China, after the end of the Binh Gia campaign, COSVN Military Command recalled its main force regiments to War Zone D. Each unit reviewed and drew lessons from its combat experience, received additional per-

sonnel and equipment, allowed its troops to rest and recuperate, and conducted technical and tactical training. The 3rd Infantry Regiment was formed and added to COSVN's main force formation. The main force battalions of Military Region 7 were gathered together to form a new mobile main force regiment, 4th Regiment, directly subordinate to the Military Region.

After more than two months of consolidation and training in early May 1965 the bulk of the main force units subordinate to COSVN and Military Region 7, including four infantry regiments,³⁴ two independent infantry battalions, the 80th Artillery Group, and assorted specialty branch units, marched out to conduct another campaign.

According to the COSVN Military Command's campaign plan, which had been approved by the General Staff, the campaign area was rather large. The main theater of operations would be the provinces of Binh Long and Phuoc Long, and secondary theaters of operations included five provinces: Lam Dong, Binh Thuan, Ba Ria, Long Khanh, and Bien Hoa. This area was a mountainous, jungle-covered region that was sparsely populated and economically very poor. For this reason, in early 1965 the COSVN Rear Services Department established a rear services apparatus for the campaign. The core elements of this apparatus, the 81st and 83rd Rear Services Groups, worked with the rear services organization of Military Region 6 and COSVN's Forward Supply Council to mobilize thousands of civilian porters and assault youth. These porters and assault youth alone contributed 140,000 man-days to support the campaign.

The goals of the campaign were to annihilate a significant portion of the puppet regular army, to intensify guerrilla warfare operations, to support the masses in destroying "strategic hamlets," and to expand the liberated zone and link COSVN's bases with the southern Central Highlands in order to extend our strategic transportation route from North Vietnam down to Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam.

A campaign headquarters was established. Major General Le Trong Tan, Deputy COSVN Military Commander, was named Campaign Military Commander and Major General Tran Do, Deputy COSVN Military Command Political Commissar, was named Campaign Political Commissar. Senior Colonel Hoang Cam was appointed Campaign Chief of Staff.

On the night of 11 May 1965, the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Regiment, supported by the regiment's organic artillery units, opened fire to launch the campaign with an attack against enemy forces holding fortified positions at the Phuoc Binh District military headquarters. The enemy position was completely annihilated within 25 minutes. That same night the 1st Battalion of the 1st Regiment, Military Region 6's main force 840th Battalion, and a sapper platoon launched coordinated attacks that captured many individual targets inside Phuoc Long city. The enemy massed his helicopters to bring in, one at a time, four battalions to relieve the city. Because we had not correctly anticipated where the enemy would land, our units missed an opportunity to annihilate the enemy.

On 9 June, kicking off the second phase of the campaign, 2nd Regiment, reinforced by a battalion of the 3rd Regiment and supported by artillery and flamethrowers, fought the key battle of the campaign, overrunning the Dong Xoai district military headquarters. Following this victory the regiment maintained control of this area, forcing the enemy to send in relief forces. The 1st and 3rd Regiments, launching their attack at the correct moment, annihilated three battalions of puppet regular troops, one of which was the 7th Airborne Battalion from the puppet's strategic reserve forces.

In honor of this glorious victory 2nd Regiment was given the title "Dong Xoai Regiment."

Between 15 and 22 July (phase three of the campaign) our troops continued attacks throughout the campaign area of operations, securing a number of additional victories. The most outstanding of these was an attack by 2nd Regiment that annihilated an entire infantry battalion and an armored troop at Bau Bang and an attack made by Military Region 6's 840th Battalion, reinforced by elements of the 3rd Regiment, which destroyed the Bu Dop commando training center.

In the secondary theaters of operations Military Region 7's main force 4th Regiment, together with provincial and district local force troops, fought many battles along Routes 1, 2, 13, 14, 15, and 20, isolating the battlefield and blocking enemy relief forces trying to move by road. Our forces supported popular uprisings that destroyed scores of "strategic hamlets," liberated 56,000 of the 67,000 residents of Phuoc Long province, and expanded the liberated zone of eastern Cochin China, linking it to the southern Central Highlands. This made it possible to significantly expand the strategic transportation route from North Vietnam to Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam.

The victories won by the soldiers and civilians of eastern Cochin China in the Dong Xoai Campaign exceeded the goals set by the COSVN Military Party Committee and COSVN Military Command. For example, looking just at the number of enemy troops eliminated from the battlefield, this total reached 4,000 enemy troops, including 73 American advisors. Four battalions of enemy regulars, including an airborne battalion from the strategic reserve forces and dozens of enemy Regional Forces companies, were wiped out or suffered heavy casualties. Large quantities of war equipment were destroyed or captured by our forces.³⁵

The Binh Gia, Ba Gia, and Dong Xoai Campaigns marked a new step forward in the ability of our main force troops on the South Vietnamese battlefields to conduct massed combat operations.

The puppet army was the enemy's key tool in conducting the "special war." The American imperialists had spared no effort or expense in building, equipping, and training this army. During military sweep operations, U.S. advisors exercised direct command over puppet forces down to the battalion level and provided these troops with air cover, artillery support, and transportation support using both vehicles and helicopters. In spite of this, however, the puppet army

could not withstand the overwhelming and ever-increasing attacks of our people and our armed forces. When they encountered our main force troops in the Binh Gia, Ba Gia, and Dong Xoai Campaigns and in many other battles, many battalions of puppet regulars, including even battalions from their strategic reserve forces, were wiped out. The enemy's "helicopter assault" and "armored personnel carrier assault" tactics had been defeated on the campaign level of operations.

The puppet army could no longer fulfill its role as the primary tool for the conduct of the neocolonialist war of aggression being carried out by the American imperialists. The puppet army was now confronted with the prospect of annihilation and disintegration. In the face of this calamitous situation, the American imperialists were forced to send their own expeditionary army to the battlefield to rescue the puppet army. Their "special war" strategy had been bankrupted. Driven into a posture of passivity and defeat, the American imperialists had to switch to a "limited war" strategy. The resistance war against the Americans to save the nation had moved into a new phase.

Following the period of army building under the first five-year military plan (1955–1960), between 1961 and 1965 our army underwent a period of both force building and combat and reached a new level of maturity.

During this period our nation was both at peace and at war. In North Vietnam our people took advantage of the years and months while we still enjoyed peace to concentrate on implementing the first five-year plan to build the technical and material bases of socialism, significantly increasing our economic and military power.

The accomplishments of the five-year plan greatly encouraged our people, engendering among the population and the armed forces of both North and South Vietnam an unshakable spiritual power and an ever-increasing material power for use in the cause of resisting the Americans, liberating South Vietnam, and unifying our nation.

Relying on the great rear area of North Vietnam, our armed forces were built up rapidly in accordance with the second five-year military plan (1961–1965), significantly increasing their level of modernity and professionalism. During the first three years (1961–1963), while North Vietnam was still at peace and needed to concentrate its forces on the work of economic construction, our army successfully resolved problems of force strength and organization, maintained a standing army with an appropriate strength level, vigorously built up a reserve force, expanded our cadre ranks, established a technical and material base, satisfied our immediate combat readiness requirements, and made preparations to expand our forces whenever war broke out. Within the standing army, based on the dual missions of defending North Vietnam and liberating South Vietnam, our army focused on building up mobile main force units and technical specialty branches, with priority given to air defense—air forces, artillery, sappers, etc. After

summarizing and drawing lessons from our experiences in force building and combat operations during the resistance war against the French and during the ongoing fighting in South Vietnam and Laos, our army intensified practical training applicable to the realities of combat and increased the command and organizational abilities of our cadre and the technical and tactical skills of our soldiers to enable us to conduct massed combined arms combat operations. In order to fulfill our combat duties in South Vietnam, our armed forces rapidly opened supply transportation routes both on land and at sea, sending an ever-increasing stream of reinforcements, entire units, weapons, and other supplies to the battlefield.

Beginning in mid-1964, after our initial glorious victory over the modern American air force, our armed forces switched all our forces over to wartime status.

During our history of force building and combat, for the first time our army had been able to concentrate on force building for an extended period of time³⁶ under peacetime conditions. Our army had gained a great deal of experience in building modern, regular forces in accordance with a long-term plan; in resolving issues involving the relationship between force building, combat readiness, and combat operations; and in establishing the relationship between force building and defense in North Vietnam and intensifying the revolutionary war in South Vietnam.

The ten years we spent building a modern, regular force (1954–1964) was a very important period. Using a formula for correctly building up our forces, maintaining a high resolve, and with an excellent organizational system for implementing these measures, our army made clear and significant improvements in its combat power. At the same time the army created organizations that enabled it to expand its forces and successfully accomplish our ever-growing, ever more urgent, and ever more complicated force building and combat missions during subsequent phases.

In South Vietnam, the liberation armed forces were born and grew out of the political forces of the masses. With vigorous support from North Vietnam they developed an ever more complete organizational structure for the three types of troops. With our experience in force building during the period of resistance warfare against the French and relying on reinforcements received from North Vietnam, especially for cadre and technical personnel, elements of our army serving on the battlefields of South Vietnam overcame many difficulties and much confusion with regard to the organizational scale and methods for employing main force troops. Finally, our army in the South developed innovative and effective methods for defeating even the most effective tactics employed by the United States and its puppets. The massed combat operations of our main force troops during operational high points and campaigns destroyed a significant portion of the enemy's regular forces, rapidly shifted the balance of forces in our favor, and contributed, along with the efforts of the entire population, to the defeat of the enemy's "special war."

In conducting a revolutionary war against an economically and militarily powerful enemy aggressor like the American imperialists, our Party, our people, and our army innovatively developed the tactics of political struggle combined with armed struggle, fighting the enemy in all three strategic areas (the mountains, the rural lowlands, and the urban areas), and attacking the enemy with political forces, military forces, and military proselytizing. The three types of troops in the armed forces all had to firmly grasp these struggle tactics and could only achieve victory in combat through their proper utilization. At the same time our troops had to constantly maintain a firm understanding of the laws of warfare, combining guerrilla warfare with conventional warfare and developing the vital role of our main force troops as the core force for use in armed struggle and revolutionary war. This was a valuable, practical lesson for our soldiers and civilians prior to the outbreak of large-scale combat operations against the American expeditionary army.

On 22 December 1964 our armed forces celebrated their 20th birthday. This glorious anniversary was marked by a glorious feat of arms as the armed forces, shoulder to shoulder with the entire population, defeated the "special war" strategy of the American imperialists.

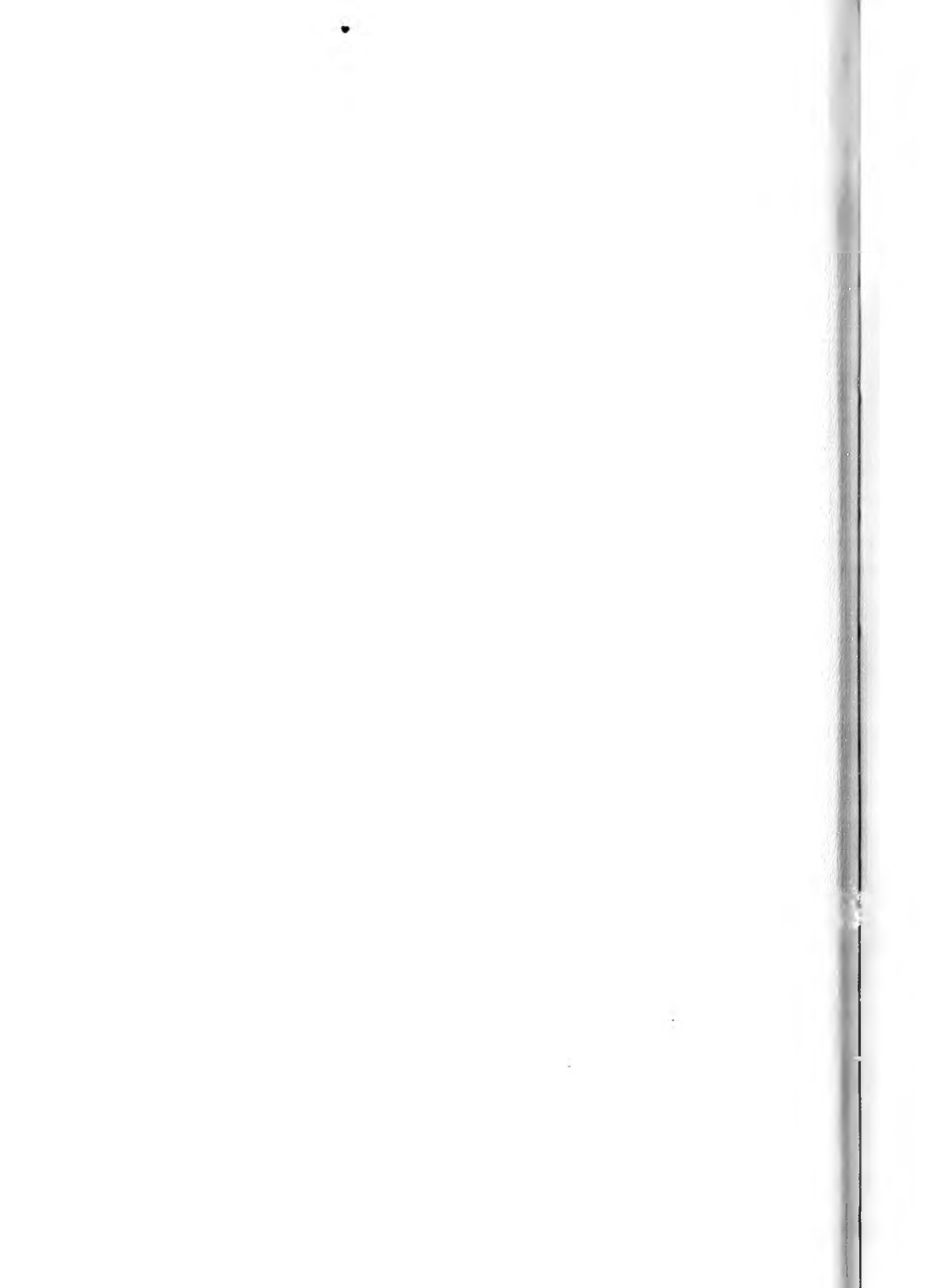
Chairman Ho Chi Minh attended a solemn ceremony celebrating this tradition day of the armed forces. Uncle Ho said,

Our armed forces are loyal to the Party, true to the people, and prepared to fight and sacrifice their lives for the independence and freedom of the Fatherland and for socialism. They will complete every mission, overcome every adversity, and defeat every foe. . . . Our armed forces have unmatched strength because they are a People's Army, built, led, and educated by the Party.³⁷

These sacred words from Uncle Ho were a source of great strength to our army during a period of fierce and pressing challenges as our army entered into a new battle, and, together with our entire population, wrote one of the most glorious pages in the history of our nation and our army.

PART III

The People's Army of Vietnam
Simultaneously Fights and Conducts Force
Building and, Together with the Entire
Population, Defeats the "Limited Warfare"
Strategy of the American Imperialists,
1965–1968



Rapidly Expanding Our Forces and Continuing the Offensive: Initial Victories over the Americans

GENERAL SITUATION

After the Ap Bac victory in January 1963, our People's War against the Americans to save the nation expanded rapidly. Our great, successive victories at Binh Gia, Ba Gia, and Dong Xoai, the high tide of insurrection that secured and expanded the power of the people in the rural lowlands and in the mountains, and the rising struggle movement of the urban population "caused the three principal pillars supporting the American imperialists in their war of aggression in South Vietnam: the mercenary armed forces and puppet government, the network of 'strategic hamlets,' and the cities and urban areas, to either collapse or be badly shaken."¹

With their "special warfare" strategy facing the prospect of total defeat, in early 1965 the American imperialists began to send U.S. and allied combat forces to South Vietnam slowly, one unit at a time. They also expanded their air and naval operations, bombing and shelling North Vietnam. In July 1965 Johnson approved General Westmoreland's "search and destroy" strategy and Westmoreland's three-phase plan² to use the American expeditionary army to pursue their main objective of "breaking the back of the Viet Cong," using American troops to support the puppet army. According to this plan, the United States would send to South Vietnam 44 battalions and a total of 193,887 troops. With this decision the American war of aggression exceeded the scope of the "special warfare" strategy and became a "limited war."

In July 1965 the U.S. Army Support Command in South Vietnam became the U.S. Army Command. General Westmoreland, who formerly commanded the U.S. 101st Airborne Division and the U.S. Military Academy, was appointed Commander of the U.S. Military Headquarters in Vietnam. The 1st Logistics Command, the 3rd Marine Amphibious Force, and a Field Force Headquarters (equivalent to a corps) were established. The number of U.S. expeditionary

troops in South Vietnam increased from 23,000 in January 1965 to 60,000 in June 1965, then exploded to 184,000 in December 1965. Many of the most elite divisions and brigades of the U.S. armed forces, together with a large quantity of war equipment, were committed to the war of aggression against Vietnam.³ The 1st Air Cavalry Division, which was formed in 1961 and was equipped with 465 helicopters, was sent to Vietnam in September 1965.

Following on the heels of the Americans were 20,000 satellite troops, made up of the South Korean Capital (Tiger) Division, the South Korean 2nd Marine Brigade, the 1st Royal Australian Infantry Battalion, and a New Zealand artillery battery.

All forces subordinate to the U.S. Pacific Command, the U.S. military bases in Guam, the Philippines, Japan, and Thailand, and the U.S. 7th Fleet were mobilized to provide combat and logistics support to this army of aggression.

As for North Vietnam, the American imperialists expanded their war of destruction, using air and naval forces to block the flow of support from North Vietnam to the South, to destroy the economic and military power of North Vietnam, and to suppress the spirit of resistance of our soldiers and civilians. "From a program that was primarily political and psychological" it became "a continuous bombing program with greater military significance,"⁴ and this war of destruction became an integral part of the "limited war" being conducted by the American imperialists.

In Laos the Americans expanded their "special war," pushing the rightist army to attack the Pathet Lao army, using airpower to bomb the liberated areas in Laos, and sabotaging the tripartite coalition government. In Cambodia, the Americans used aircraft to strafe and bomb villages along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border and pressured the Royal Cambodian Government to abandon its policy of peace and neutrality.

The armed forces of the American aggressors tramped over the soil of the Southern portion of our Fatherland. American aircraft bombed and destroyed factories, schools, and hospitals, murdering civilians in North and South Vietnam and in the nation of Laos. They used poison gas, napalm, and carpet-bombing B-52s, committing barbarous crimes against the people of the nations of Vietnam and Laos.

The international community was enraged by this savage war of aggression conducted by the American imperialists. Socialist nations and progressive people throughout the world supported Vietnam's fight against the Americans, but they also feared our nation would not be able to withstand the overpowering military might of the Americans.

Facing serious challenges, the fate of the Fatherland and of the socialist system hung in the balance. The urgent, sacred duty of every Vietnamese and the historic goal of our people and our army, fighting on behalf of the world movements for peace and national liberation and for the cause of socialist revolution, now was to resist and defeat the Americans to save the nation.

The battle being waged by our soldiers and civilians against the Americans to save the nation moved into an extremely difficult and ferocious phase. The People's Army of Vietnam now faced a new battle opponent: the American expeditionary army, an aggressor army that possessed modern equipment, heavy firepower, and incredible mobility. The Americans, however, came to South Vietnam in a defensive posture following the defeat of the "special war." In South Vietnam our soldiers and civilians were in an offensive posture. The formation of our three types of armed forces was now complete. These forces were widespread and properly deployed on all the battlefields. Our main force troops now were organized into regiments that controlled the important areas. Local people's war and the political struggle of the masses in the urban areas had developed to a high level. In North Vietnam, our people had completed the first five-year plan (1961–1965) for building socialism, significantly increasing the economic and national defense capacity of the nation. During the past ten years (1954–1964) our army had made significant progress toward becoming a modern, regular force. Our strategic transportation routes, both by land and sea, from North Vietnam to the battlefield had developed, expanding the role of our great rear area in the liberation war in South Vietnam.

During its 11th Plenum in March 1965, the Party Central Committee decided to "mobilize the soldiers and civilians of the entire nation to strengthen our offensive posture and to attack the enemy. Rapidly expand the standing army, strengthen national defense, strive to secure the maximum possible military support from fraternal, allied nations."⁵

On 20 July 1965 Chairman Ho Chi Minh appealed to the citizens and soldiers of the entire nation: "No matter if we have to fight for five years, ten years, twenty years, or even longer, we are resolved to fight on until we achieve complete victory."⁶

THE WAR IN THE SOUTH

In South Vietnam, as early as the first few months of 1965, COSVN had assessed the situation and reached a strategic decision: Based on our defeat of the "special war" waged by the Americans and their lackeys, we would continue to maintain and expand our offensive posture and make preparations to crush the U.S. plan to mount a massive counteroffensive during the 1965–1966 dry season. COSVN decided to launch a wide-ranging political campaign throughout the armed forces and the civilian population to develop to the highest possible level our revolutionary heroism, to build resolve to fight and defeat the Americans, and to maintain firm confidence in our final victory. Party and political activities within our units focused on education, on building resolve to defeat the American expeditionary army, and on seeking tactics to fight the Americans. In May 1965 the Region 5 Party Committee and the Military Region 5 Command directed all

armed forces to make all necessary preparations to fight against American troops. On 19 May 1965, on the occasion of the 75th birthday of Chairman Ho Chi Minh, the Military Region launched an emulation movement called "Resolve to defeat the American aggressors." The slogan, "Seek out the Americans to fight them, pursue the puppets to kill them," was promulgated to all units.

Pursuant to policies set by the Party Central Committee and by the Central Military Party Committee, the people's armed forces in North and South Vietnam rapidly expanded in both size and quality.

In South Vietnam, our guerrilla militia at the village and hamlet level underwent a massive expansion based on the victory won by the People's War over the American-puppet "special war." At the end of 1965 guerrilla militia forces totaled 174,000, more than the enemy's Popular Forces and "Combat Youth." Our local force troops totaled 80,000 and were organized into battalions at the province level and companies at the district level. A number of provinces formed two battalions. A number of local force battalions and companies were combined to form four main force regiments. Seven additional full-strength infantry regiments and a number of specialty branch units, including artillery, sappers, engineers, signal, etc., had been sent from North Vietnam to the battlefield. By the end of 1965, our main force army in South Vietnam totaled almost 92,000 soldiers, organized into 18 infantry regiments and a number of specialty branch units.

During the fall and winter of 1965 the Central Military Party Committee and the Ministry of Defense formed five infantry divisions and one artillery division in South Vietnam. On 2 September 1965 the 9th Infantry Division was formed in the base area of Binh Long province in eastern Cochin China. The division was made up of the 1st Regiment (the Binh Gia Regiment), the 2nd Regiment (the Dong Xoai Regiment), and the 3rd Regiment, which had just been organized from a number of local force units drawn from the provinces of the Mekong Delta. In the lowlands of Military Region 5, the 3rd Infantry Division was formed that same day in the Binh Dinh province base area. The division was made up of Military Region 5's main force 2nd Infantry Regiment and the 12th and 22nd Regiments, which had just arrived from North Vietnam. On 20 October 1965, the 2nd Infantry Division was established in the base area of Quang Nam province. It was made up of Military Region 5's 1st Regiment (the Ba Gia Regiment) and the 21st Regiment, which had just arrived from North Vietnam. On 23 October 1965, the 5th Infantry Division was established in the Ba Ria province base area. The division consisted of Military Region 7's 4th Regiment (the Dong Nai regiment) and the 5th Regiment, which had just been formed from a number of local force units drawn from the provinces of Cochin China. On 20 December 1965, the 1st Infantry Division was formed in the Central Highlands. The units making up this division were the 320th, 33rd, and 66th Regiments, all of which had arrived from North Vietnam during the last months of 1964 and during 1965. The 80th Artillery Group, subordinate to COSVN Military Command, received addi-

tional personnel, weapons, and equipment, and on 15 October 1965 was reorganized into a division-sized unit designated the 69th Artillery Group.⁷

The main force elements of our military regions were organized into regiments and battalions and consisted of the following forces: one regiment subordinate to Military Region 9 (western Cochin China); two battalions subordinate to Military Region 8 (central Cochin China); five battalions subordinate to the Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Region; one battalion subordinate to Military Region 7 (eastern Cochin China); one regiment and one separate battalion subordinate to Region 5's Northern Subregion (Tri-Thien);⁸ and one regiment subordinate to Region 5's Southern Subregion (extreme southern Central Vietnam).

Our sapper and commando forces expanded very rapidly. They consisted of four battalions (the 407th, 408th, 487th, and 489th) subordinate to Military Region 5, the 12th Tri-Thien Battalion, and nine combat teams (designated Teams 3 through 11) and two support teams (A-20 and A-30) subordinate to Saigon-Gia Dinh City Committee.

Rear services operations were strengthened to support the force building and combat operations of our main force troops in each area of the battlefield. In eastern Cochin China, the COSVN Military Command established two additional area rear services groups, Groups 85 and 86. Our forces received a rather large number of additional infantry weapons.⁹

All this meant that during the last half of 1965 our armed forces had formed and deployed three mobile main force armies that held firm footholds in the strategic areas: eastern Cochin China, Region 5, and the Central Highlands. For the first time in history we had main force divisions fighting on the battlefields of South Vietnam. Combining the rapid expansion of our local force units and mass political forces with the formation of mobile main force divisions on the battlefield, our army was able to intensify its massed combat operations in combination with guerrilla warfare to gradually defeat the plots and strategic measures being employed by the American, puppet, and satellite troops.

As we built up our forces, our armed forces in South Vietnam also launched combat operations against the American expeditionary army and defeated them in our very first battles.

After the Ba Gia victory, Military Region 5's 1st Regiment (minus one battalion) moved to Van Tuong to rest and regroup. Van Tuong was a liberated hamlet along the coast of Binh Son district, Quang Ngai province, 17 kilometers from the American base at Chu Lai. As soon as they discovered the presence of our main force troops, on 18 August 1965 American soldiers launched "Operation Starlite" to test their "search and destroy" strategy and demonstrate the technical and tactical superiority of the American military. They used 6,000 American troops of the 3rd Marine Division, 2,000 puppet troops, 200 aircraft, 100 tanks and armored personnel carriers, and 40 artillery pieces in this operation. After a heavy bombardment by air and artillery forces, the U.S. and puppet troops advanced in four columns, using amphibious landings, helicopter assaults, and

overland marches in an effort to surround and destroy Military Region 5's main force 1st Regiment.

At the time half of the troops of the 1st Regiment were out collecting rice. Battalion and regimental cadre were away preparing battlefields. The balance of forces was against us, 20 enemy troops for every one of our soldiers. Because the regiment was experienced in fighting in the lowlands, as soon as they arrived in this area our cadre and soldiers, utilizing combat villages and local armed forces and assisted by the civilian population, had organized defenses and established a battle plan. When the American troops attacked Van Tuong, the remaining forces of 1st Regiment, working in close coordination with the provincial 21st Local Force Company and local guerrillas, used the trenches and hedgerows of the village and hamlets and the Binh Son "American killing belt" fortifications to resolutely block the advance of the enemy column landing from the sea. They shot down U.S. helicopters, destroyed armored personnel carriers, and repelled the enemy's attack spearheads. After nightfall, the regiment massed its forces and wiped out one group of American troops.

In one day of ferocious counterattacks the 1st Regiment and local armed forces killed or wounded 900 American soldiers, shot down 13 aircraft, and destroyed 22 tanks and armored personnel carriers. The first American "search and destroy" operation, using combined-arms and combined-services tactics, had failed in the face of the "determined to fight, determined to win" will and the outstanding combat tactics of our troops. This was a "Battle of Ap Bac" for the American military. With this battle our troops took their first step toward assessing the true strengths and weaknesses (in both morale and tactics) of the American expeditionary soldiers. We had proven we were capable of defeating the American expeditionary army.

Encouraged by the victory at Van Tuong, during the fall and winter of 1965 our armed forces throughout the battlefields of South Vietnam intensified their operations, retaining and exploiting the offensive initiative we already held.

In the Central Highlands, in order to study the fighting methods of the Americans in actual combat, the Front Command launched the Plei Me Campaign in Gia Lai [Pleiku] province, carrying out a plan to besiege a position and annihilate the relief force. Our objective was to deal a painful blow to the puppet army in order to lure American troops in so that we could kill them.

To launch the campaign, on 19 October 1965 the 33rd Regiment overran the Chu Ho outpost and established positions besieging the outpost at Plei Me, an important enemy position 30 kilometers southwest of Pleiku city. Enemy troops launched a ferocious counterattack, dropping more than 1,000 tons of bombs on our positions, but they could not loosen our siege of the outpost. On 23 October two puppet infantry battalions and two tank-armor battalions moved down from Pleiku to relieve the outpost. This column blundered into an ambush position established by the 320th Regiment along Route 21 and suffered severe casualties. The 3rd Brigade of the U.S. Air Cavalry Division, which had arrived in Viet-

nam in September 1965, was immediately sent to Pleiku to rescue the puppet troops and to conduct a "search and destroy" operation against our troops.

The Central Highlands Front Command decided to modify its tactical plan to lure American forces into the Ia Drang Valley 25 kilometers southwest of Pleiku in order to destroy them. During the evening of 11 November, the 952nd Sapper Battalion raided the headquarters of the 3rd Air Cavalry Brigade at Ban Can. Meanwhile, the 33rd Regiment marched swiftly to the Ia Drang Valley. The 66th Regiment, which had just arrived on the battlefield from North Vietnam, was ordered to drop its heavy equipment and, carrying only weapons, ammunition, and a three-day ration of rice, march quickly toward Chu Pong Mountain in order to arrive in time to participate in the battle.

Between 14 and 19 November 1965, the battalions of the 66th Regiment, together with an element of the 33rd Regiment, charged through the enemy's bombs and shells to "grab the enemy's belt and fight him." They attacked as soon as the American helicopters began landing troops and also made surprise attacks against the enemy's artillery fire support bases and his troop encampments. Two soldiers, Le Khac Nga and Le Van Dieu, killed scores of American troops and were recognized as the first "Heroic Killers of Americans" on the Central Highlands battlefield.

To rescue the 3rd Air Cavalry Brigade the U.S. Command was forced to use B-52 strategic bombers in support of ground combat operations. At the same time, the Americans ordered the puppet 1st and 2nd Airborne Task Forces to the area to reinforce the American unit. These task forces were attacked by the 320th Regiment. One element of the task force was annihilated, and the rest of the unit fled in confusion.

On 19 November, the remnants of the U.S. 3rd Air Cavalry Brigade retreated overland from the Ia Drang Valley. Along their line of retreat we attacked and pursued them, inflicting heavy casualties. The Plei Me Campaign was over. Seventeen hundred Americans and 1,270 puppet troops had been eliminated from the field of combat. The 1st Air Cavalry Battalion had been almost completely annihilated, and the 2nd Air Cavalry Battalion had suffered heavy casualties. Fifty-nine helicopters had been shot down and 89 enemy vehicles and many artillery pieces had been destroyed. The Air Cavalry Division, the first helicopter-transported air mobile division in history to engage in combat, a unit the Americans believed would be able to react quickly and conduct rapid envelopment operations, the unit that was the "greatest hope of the American army," together with its combat method of conducting "relief operations to break sieges" and its "leapfrog" tactics, had been defeated in the mountain jungles of Vietnam.

The Plei Me victory demonstrated that our main force troops had high combat morale and a high resolve to defeat the Americans. It also demonstrated the clever and innovative campaign and tactical combat techniques of our main force army. This victory proved our army was capable of annihilating U.S. battalions operating in large formations and that we could disrupt the helicopter-assault tac-

tics and defeat the most elite, most modernly equipped units of the American army even under the most difficult and savage conditions.

In Region 5, the 2nd Regiment of the 3rd Division attacked traffic along Route 1 (the section running through Phu Cat district of Binh Dinh province), forcing the U.S. Air Cavalry Division to mount many operations in the Thuan Ninh and Hoi Son areas to relieve the pressure we were applying there. Hundreds of American air cavalry troopers were killed or wounded in battles with the 2nd Regiment and by the punji sticks, mines, and sniper bullets of our guerrillas. The 1st Regiment of the 2nd Division, in cooperation with Quang Nam local force troops, liberated Hiep Duc district, besieged the Viet An strong point, and repelled the puppet 5th Regimental Task Force at Dong Duong when it tried to conduct a relief operation. The 90th Battalion of the 1st Regiment conducted a mobile ambush in the Cam Khe area on 25 December 1965, killing or wounding almost an entire U.S. Marine battalion as it moved up to rescue the puppet troops.

In eastern Cochinchina, the U.S. 1st Infantry Division and the 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived in the Bien Hoa area. To implement their "search and destroy" strategy and to enlarge the security perimeter of the Bien Hoa base, the American troops immediately launched a number of operations to search the area around their bases. On 8 November 1965, a battalion of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade suffered heavy casualties in a battle with the 1st Regiment, 9th Division, at Dat Cuoc, 30 kilometers north of Bien Hoa city.

Having located our main force troops, on 11 November the 3rd Brigade of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, accompanied by a tank battalion and an artillery battery, moved up Route 13 toward Long Nguyen. That night they stopped at Bau Bang, 25 kilometers north of the Thu Dau Mot province capital, and formed a large defensive position, using tanks and armored personnel carriers as an outer defensive wall. Seizing an opportunity to annihilate enemy forces while they were outside of their fortified positions, the COSVN Military Command ordered the 9th Division to mount a counterattack against the American troops in accordance with a prearranged combat plan. Because time was short, the cadre and soldiers of the division were forced to make their preparations while they were on the march.

At 0500 hours in the morning of 12 November 1965, the 9th Division (minus two battalions), under the command of Senior Colonel Hoang Cam, Division Commander and concurrently Division Political Officer, launched a surprise attack against the American position at Bau Bang. Closely coordinating its various troop columns, the division managed to isolate and divide the American defensive positions at the beginning of the battle, making a deep penetration that reached the enemy's brigade headquarters. Our assault threw the enemy troops into a state of confusion. Hearing the sounds of the battle at Bau Bang, one element of the 9th Division, which had been assigned to tie down the enemy position at Lai Khe, moved rapidly and blocked the enemy's line of retreat. The battle ended after three hours of fighting. In its first battle against our main force troops

on the Cochin China battlefield, the 1st Infantry Division, touted by the Americans as the "Big Red One," the division that American generals and field-grade officers boasted was their "most elite combat division, which performed many outstanding feats of arms during World War II and the Korean War," had lost almost 2,000 men and more than 30 tanks and armored personnel carriers. On our side, during the first direct combat between an entire division and American expeditionary troops, the cadre and soldiers of the 9th Division, demonstrating their firm resolve, seized the offensive initiative, deployed their forces and made their combat preparations rapidly, coordinated the battle in an excellent manner, maintained secrecy and surprise, isolated the battlefield, divided the enemy's forces, and fought a very courageous battle in close combat, achieving a high level of combat efficiency.

In the cities and urban areas, our sapper troops and commandos stepped up their attacks against the enemy. During its war of aggression in Vietnam the American expeditionary army relied on a network of bases, warehouse complexes, airfields, and ports. Its technical and logistical support requirements were very heavy and its bases were scattered along the coast from Quang Tri to Saigon. The disruption of this logistics network was one of our strategic goals. In Region 5, on 5 August 1965 two sapper battalions, the 89th and 409th, attacked the Nuoc Man and Chu Lai airfields, killing 750 pilots and technical personnel and destroying 150 aircraft. Commando Groups [Cum] 3, 4, and 5 of the Saigon City Command attacked the puppet Police Headquarters on 15 August 1965, killing 165 enemy personnel, and planted a bomb at the Metropole Hotel on 1 December 1965, wiping out 200 American officers and technical personnel. Our sappers and commandos attacked airfields at Soc Trang, Bien Hoa, Nha Trang, Da Nang, and Pleiku, and attacked enemy petroleum storage facilities, ammunition storage facilities, vessels, vehicle parks, railroad cars, headquarters facilities, and training schools in many locations. During the last months of 1965 some targets were struck two or three times.

In the rural lowlands and the mountains, our local force troops and guerrilla militia seized the initiative by attacking American and puppet troops in their own base areas, maintained excellent coordination with our main force troops, and supported the people in their political struggle to maintain control of the liberated areas. A number of "American killing belts" appeared around Da Nang, Chu Lai, An Khe, and Cu Chi. Using military and political forces and military proselytizing operations to surround and mount attacks to inflict casualties on American forces in their own bases, the "American killing belts" were typical examples of people's warfare in Vietnam. The civilians and guerrillas of Hoa Hai village, Hoa Vang district, Quang Da province, heroically resisted a sweep operation by four U.S. Marine battalions for seven days and seven nights, killing 47 enemy. The civilians and guerrillas of Village A-1 and Bac village in An Khe district, Gia Lai [Pleiku] province, aggressively defended their hamlets and villages with punji sticks, mines, and booby traps, causing many casualties among the troops

of the Air Cavalry and restricting their sweep operations. On 3 October 1965 the Dien Ban district local force company of Quang Nam province inflicted severe casualties on an American company southwest of Da Nang. On 31 October 1965, the Quang Da province local force battalion eliminated from the field of battle one U.S. Marine company. The U.S. military combat tactic of "protecting strong points and bases" with a many-layered defense in combination with sweeps to expand the "security perimeter" was defeated by the resolve of our local armed forces to remain at their posts and by their flexible, crafty fighting methods.

Maintaining the strategic initiative and combining massed combat operations by our main force troops with local people's warfare, our army stepped up its attacks and counterattacks in all three strategic areas, utilizing many diverse and innovative fighting methods and preventing U.S. troops from being able to exploit their own strengths. During the fall and winter of 1965, over 30,000 enemy troops, including 9,000 Americans, were eliminated from the field of combat. With respect to enemy units, 16 battalions, of which five were American battalions, 53 companies, of which seven were American, and six armored cavalry troops, of which three were American, were wiped out or suffered severe casualties.

"Seek out the Americans to fight them, pursue the puppets to kill them," became an enthusiastic movement among the people's armed forces in South Vietnam. These first victories over American troops on the battlefield provided powerful encouragement to the determination of the soldiers and civilians of our entire nation to fight the Americans. They provided a firm foundation for our later victories and at the same time were one of the foundations our Party used to mobilize and organize the soldiers and civilians of the entire nation to defeat the American aggressors.

THE WAR IN THE NORTH AND ALONG THE LINES OF SUPPLY

In North Vietnam, on 7 February 1965, the American imperialists launched a bombing campaign they called "Flaming Dart." On 2 March 1965, they began a fiercer, continuous bombing campaign called "Rolling Thunder," attacking almost all cities and towns, lines of communication, and storage complexes from the city of Ho Xa in Vinh Linh to the 20th parallel and attacking a number of islands in the Gulf of Tonkin.

In June 1965, as they began pouring large numbers of troops into South Vietnam, the imperialists escalated their campaign another notch by attacking the important road and rail networks north and south of the Red River, the Hanoi-Lao Cai railroad, Route 5 and the railroad line between Hanoi and Haiphong, and even bombing a number of heavily populated urban areas, hospitals, and schools. The Americans used a total of 360 aircraft, including many different types of modern Air Force and Navy jet aircraft, in their war of destruction against North Viet-

nam in 1965. On average they launched 100 sorties per day, the highest daily total being 280 sorties. American aircraft dropped a total of 310,000 tons of bombs on North Vietnam during 1965. The naval forces of the 7th Fleet, including aircraft carriers, cruisers, and destroyers, controlled the territorial waters of North Vietnam and used bombardment vessels to shell important shore targets. This was the first time in the history of warfare that such a war of destruction, using air and naval forces on this scale and with this level of ferocity, had been conducted. Our air defense—air force and naval forces were directly responsible for combating the two most powerful branches of service of the U.S. armed forces.

Responding to the sacred appeal to fight the Americans and save the nation issued by Chairman Ho Chi Minh and the Party Central Committee, the civilian population and the people's armed forces of North Vietnam displayed a spirit of revolutionary courage, carried out economic production while they fought, defeated each step in the escalation of the war of destruction conducted by the American pirates, continued the work of socialist construction during wartime conditions, provided wholehearted support to our brothers in South Vietnam, and performed our international duty of supporting the revolution in Laos.

Carrying out our policy of converting production over to wartime conditions, many factories, warehouse complexes, state agencies, schools, and hospitals were completely or partially evacuated from the cities and urban areas in order to continue their production, teaching, and other operations. We focused especially on the development of local industries. Many agricultural cooperatives raised their output to a high level, producing five tons of paddy per hectare per year. Many lines of communications, docks, ferries, and detours around the enemy's bombing "choke points" were built. Education, cultural, and health activities were expanded. A worker carrying a rifle to his factory; a female collective farmer, with a plow on one shoulder and a rifle over the other, walking out to the fields; children of the "straw hat units" going to class; these were familiar daily images in the lives of the people of North Vietnam.

The Vietnamese Women's Association launched the "Woman of three abilities" movement: able to produce and work; able to handle household chores; able to fight and to provide combat support to replace husbands and children who had gone off to battle. The Vietnam Labor Youth Group launched the "Youth of three readinesses" movement: ready to fight, ready to enlist in the armed forces, ready to go anywhere and do anything that the Fatherland required. The intellectual class had the "three resolves" movement: resolve to properly support production and combat; resolve to step up the scientific-technical revolution and the ideological and cultural revolution; and resolve to build and expand the ranks of socialist intellectuals.

In coping with this fierce war of destruction waged against us by the enemy, our socialist system clearly demonstrated its power. Social conditions remained stable. Production was maintained and in some areas increased, properly supporting the people's living standards, the ever-growing and ever more urgent

requirements of battle in both North and South Vietnam, and fulfilling our international duty to the revolution in Laos. During the course of the war the stability and growth of our great rear area of North Vietnam in all areas of endeavor was a vast source of strength for our army. The combat spirit of our army was based on the resolve of the entire Party and the entire population to fight the Americans and save the nation and grew out of the continuous political mobilization activities of the Party Central Committee and of Uncle Ho.

In April 1965 Chairman Ho Chi Minh issued a decree establishing a wartime military service law. The period of military service of soldiers was extended in accordance with the requirements of combat. All previously discharged officers and enlisted men were recalled to the armed forces. Officers were assigned to positions commensurate with their rank following a three-month training course in one of the officers' schools. During 1965 almost 290,000 men were mobilized into the armed forces, of whom 10 percent were Party members, 50 percent were Youth Group members, and 70 percent were in the 18 to 25 age group.¹⁰ May was the month in which the number of personnel mobilized was the highest—that month 150,000 people were inducted into the army. All units were brought up to full personnel strength according to our wartime table of organization standards. Many new units were formed. Many military specialty branches doubled in strength.

Our self-defense militia forces increased from 1.4 million in 1964 to two million in 1965. Over 3,000 self-defense militia cells and units assigned to fire at aircraft and equipped with rifles, light machine guns, heavy machine guns, and anti-aircraft machine guns, were established, forming a complete and potent air defense curtain to protect the skies over North Vietnam. A number of state agencies and enterprises formed militia platoons and companies. A number of coastal villages in Military Region 4 organized militia artillery teams to fire back at U.S. warships.

Our local force troops grew to 28,000 soldiers, organized into 16 infantry battalions, 32 infantry companies, and a number of anti-aircraft, engineer, and coastal defense artillery units.

Our main force troops grew from 195,000 soldiers in early 1965 to 350,000 soldiers in May 1965 and finally to 400,000 soldiers by the end of 1965. Our mobile main force infantry forces were made up of ten divisions (the 308th, 304th, 312th, 320th, 325th, 330th, 350th, 316th, 324th, and 341st), six regiments, and a number of independent battalions. A number of regiments with combat traditions dating back to the resistance war against the French were sent to the battlefields of South Vietnam with their entire authorized complement of troops and equipment. The Artillery Branch doubled in strength over its 1964 troop levels and was issued long-range 130mm guns and DKB rocket launchers. A second armored regiment, the 203rd, was formed. The Signal Branch and reconnaissance and sapper forces tripled in strength.

Most especially, because of their combat duty of combating the war of destruction being waged by the U.S. Air Force and Navy and their responsibility

for protecting the flow of supplies to the battlefield, the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch, the Engineer Branch, and our rear services troops underwent massive, rapid expansion.

Our air-defense artillery grew from 12 regiments and 14 battalions in early 1965 to 21 regiments and 41 battalions, including eight mobile regiments. These forces formed a powerful low- and medium-altitude air defense curtain over strategic areas, at the same time maintaining mobility and forming anti-aircraft artillery concentrations protecting each individual area.

Our anti-aircraft missile forces were formed during this period. On 1 May 1965, after a period of urgent preparations, covertly shipping in weapons and equipment and constructing a training center, our first missile unit, the 236th Air Defense Missile Regiment (the “Song Da Group”) was formed. In June 1965 a second regiment, the 238th, was established. Almost all the original cadre of these two regiments had experience in the resistance war against the French and in our initial battles against the U.S. air war of destruction. A number of cadre and technical personnel had received training in the Soviet Union. The enlisted men were chosen from many different service and specialty branches: anti-aircraft artillery, artillery, radar, signal, engineer, Navy, infantry. The majority of these soldiers had been tested in actual combat and during operations. The Party and the State also assigned a number of scientific and technical cadre and university and trade-school students to these two regiments. Under the guidance of Soviet advisors, our missile cadre and soldiers began their training classes. Each regiment conducted as many as 37 separate training classes for command officers, missile-control officers, and technical personnel. Training time was cut from one year to three months because of the need to rapidly move personnel into combat positions. Later these personnel received supplemental training while carrying out their combat duties. With the birth of our air-defense missile force, our army acquired a modern technical specialty branch. New pages in the history of the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch’s force building and combat operations began to be written.

Our Air Force troops grew from one regiment to three Air Force combat regiments equipped with Mig-17 and Mig-21 fighters.¹¹ For the first time, an air combat force organized into a modern Service Branch was included within the organizational structure of our armed forces.

Our radar troops expanded from two regiments in 1964 to four regiments subordinate to the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch, five battalions subordinate to the Navy Service Branch, and five air control radar teams for the Air Force. Navy radar units were deployed along the coast and on a number of off-shore islands. They included a number of both fixed and mobile radar stations. The radar regiments assigned to the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch were deployed along three lines with the goal of detecting enemy aircraft at long ranges to support the combat operations of our air defense missile force and our anti-aircraft artillery forces.

The strength of the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch in 1965 grew to a level 2.5 times larger than its strength in 1964, and the troops of the Service Branch made up 16 percent of the total strength of our armed forces.¹² With the assistance of the Soviet Union and other fraternal socialist nations, our Air Defense–Air Force troops were equipped with many types of modern weapons and combat equipment. Party and political activities within the Service Branch delved deeply into technical and tactical matters, encouraging cadre and soldiers to study enthusiastically to fully understand and to be able to skillfully utilize their weapons and equipment. These activities correctly established the relationship between political and technical matters, between humans and weapons, and taught our troops to understand the importance of coordination and solidarity, to be innovative in their fighting methods, and to obey all regulations and guidelines for the use and maintenance of technical equipment. Although they quickly settled into their new organization and stepped up their training activities, the specialty branches also quickly engaged in actual combat operations.

Between February and June 1965, on the firing lines of Military Region 4 our anti-aircraft artillery troops, sailors, and local air defense forces shot down more than 300 U.S. aircraft. On 26 and 30 March, our anti-aircraft artillery troops in Ru Nai, Ha Tinh province, cleverly lured the enemy into a prearranged trap, shooting down 12 aircraft and initiating the use of ambush tactics by our air defense troops. Our naval vessels conducted mobile battles on the Nhat Le, Gianh, and Lam Rivers and in a number of coastal areas, shooting down scores of American aircraft and sinking or setting on fire a number of puppet commando vessels. The militia of Dien Hung village, Dien Chau district, Nghe An province, used rifles to shoot down an American aircraft, thereby launching an emulation movement among the self-defense militia forces to shoot down modern U.S. jet aircraft using infantry weapons.

The battles of 3 and 4 April 1965 to protect the Ham Rong Bridge in Thanh Hoa city were particularly significant. During these battles our young Air Force troops opened an “air front,” working with anti-aircraft artillery troops, naval units on the Ma River, and self-defense militia of the Nam Ngan subsector, to shoot down scores of American aircraft and capture a number of pilots. On 3 April, a flight of Mig-17s commanded by Flight Commander Pham Ngoc Lan shot down two American F-8 aircraft. The next day, 4 April, when the American pirates assembled a force of more than 100 aircraft to continue their efforts to destroy the Ham Rong Bridge, a flight of Mig-17s commanded by Flight Commander Tran Hanh shot down two F-105 aircraft. These initial feats of arms performed by our air force thrilled our compatriots and soldiers throughout the nation. For the first time in our nation’s history of armed struggle we had engaged in an air battle. In their first engagement, the young warriors of the Vietnamese Air Force had defeated the modern air forces of the American imperialists. In the skies, where there were no “fortifications,” where our air force usually had to use a few aircraft to attack many aircraft, our air force combatants had

employed the innovative military thoughts of the Party in air combat, cleverly seizing the initiative, shooting down unsuspecting U.S. aircraft, and then assisting one another to all land safely. An emulation campaign to perform feats of arms using the slogans "whenever we take off we will be victorious" and "shoot down American aircraft right from the initial engagement" spread throughout our Air Force. The 3rd of April became Air Force Day to mark our victory in the very first engagement fought by the heroic People's Air Force of Vietnam. The 24th of July became Missile Day to honor our heroic missile troops.

In July 1965, faced with a new escalation of the war by the American imperialists, our missile forces, formed only two months earlier, were ordered into combat.

At 1553 hours on 24 July 1965, the 63rd and 64th Battalions, located at firing positions at Suoi Hai, Bat Bat district, Ha Tay province, launched their first missiles, shooting down one F-4C aircraft and capturing one pilot. This was the 400th aircraft to be shot down over North Vietnam. Uncle Ho was overjoyed when he heard the report of the results of this first battle victory of our missile troops. He personally wrote a letter of commendation to our air defense missile cadre and soldiers. The official birthday of our heroic missile troops became 24 July. On 25 July the American imperialists halted all operations in the skies over North Vietnam to seek ways to deal with this new threat. Meanwhile, our two missile battalions moved to new firing positions. On 26 July, when U.S. aircraft resumed operations, our missile troops shot down two aircraft, one of which was an unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. At the firing positions that our two missile battalions had occupied during the battle on 24 July, our soldiers, assisted by the local population, constructed fake missiles made of bamboo and mats. Around these "firing positions" we deployed two regiments of 57mm anti-aircraft guns, two battalions of 37mm anti-aircraft guns, and ten militia anti-aircraft teams from Bat Bat district. On 27 July, when the American pirates sent 48 aircraft sorties to "retaliate" against our "missile firing positions," 120 anti-aircraft cannon and hundreds of machine guns and rifles instantly fired back in a fierce barrage, destroying five aircraft, two of which crashed on the spot.

With the Suoi Hai victory, our fighting tactic of combining missiles, anti-aircraft artillery, and a low-level curtain of fire from our militia forces into an air defense combat cluster [cum] was born. During the final months of 1965, the Air Defense-Air Force Command formed three mobile air defense combat clusters made up of missile and anti-aircraft artillery troops defending Routes 1, 2, and 5. Forward headquarters to directly control the combat operations of these air-defense clusters were formed. Within each cluster's area militia forces were on combat alert to coordinate their combat operations with our air defense troops.

By the end of 1965 our air defense-air force troops had, together with the rest of the people's armed forces in North Vietnam, shot down 834 American aircraft. The air defense forces of our three types of troops grew rapidly in both quantity and quality. Many different tactics were employed by our anti-aircraft

artillery, missile, and air force troops. A style of air defense combining widespread local forces with massed combined-arms forces belonging to our main force air-defense units took shape.

On our lines of communications and transportation the battle being fought by our soldiers and civilians was very fierce. From the very first days of the war of destruction against North Vietnam, the American imperialists focused more than 50 percent of their bombing sorties against lines of communications and transportation targets. They used many different types of bombs, conducted waves of attacks concentrated on choke points in combination with efforts to restrict transportation over a broad area, and attacked all our rail, road, and waterway networks, all types of transport equipment, and the production and repair facilities of North Vietnam's communications and transportation sector. They caused a great many difficulties for our troops and civilian population, sometimes causing great backups and obstructions at a number of Group 559's entry points and crossing points in Military Region 4. The Long Dai, Xuan Son, and Ben Thuy ferry crossing points, the Dong Loc three-way intersection, and the Ham Rong Bridge became the focal points of fierce enemy attacks.

"Guaranteeing a clear, unobstructed line of communications and transportation has become a central task for the entire Party, the entire population, and the entire armed forces. It is a task of strategic importance for the consolidation and defense of the Socialist North, for our support for the war of liberation in the South, and for our assistance to friendly nations."¹³ The policy of the Party Central Committee and the Government was to encourage the entire population to work on communications and transportation tasks, using our professional communications and transportation forces as the core for this work and using the engineer, rear services, transportation, and air defense troops of the armed forces as the assault force.

In October 1965, the Cabinet decided to establish the Central Traffic Regulation Commission. Comrade Pham Hung, member of the Politburo and Deputy Prime Minister, was appointed as Chairman of this Commission. Provinces, cities, and a number of important traffic nodes established traffic support sections.

Assault youth teams to fight the Americans and save the nation were established. Tens of thousands of young men and women enthusiastically responded to the call of the Party, leading the way in performing duties in locations of hardship and danger. As soon as they were formed a number of these teams marched off to the Annamite Mountain supply corridor and to a number of key locations in Military Region 4 to carry out the work of road building and maintaining the flow of traffic.

Along the routes that the enemy was attacking, especially those in Military Region 4, the road sections and groups of the Ministry of Communications and Transportation were given additional personnel and were organized into traffic control sections for each individual area. These sections were responsible for repairing roads and bridges, building detours and bypasses, and guaranteeing traffic flow through crossing points and choke points.

The villages and hamlets along the lines of communications all organized assault teams to guarantee traffic flow. These teams were made up of male and female militia members who were responsible for guaranteeing the flow of traffic and supplies along the routes that passed through their hamlets or villages and for helping engineers and drivers repair damage caused by enemy attacks.

With a spirit of ardent patriotism, "Everything for our Southern brothers," our compatriots living along the transportation lines in the rear area of North Vietnam, especially in Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, and Vinh Linh, lived up to the slogan "We will not worry about our houses if the vehicles have not yet gotten through." Many families even donated their doors and wooden beds to cover the roads so the trucks could get through. Many people gave their lives for the sake of the supply shipments to the front. "The battle along the lines of communications throughout North Vietnam is a hymn of praise to our communications and transportation soldiers and to our compatriots living along the supply lines."¹⁴

Sixty percent of the air defense forces in North Vietnam were assigned to protect the lines of communications and transportation. Many anti-aircraft artillery firing positions located inside bomb craters and adjacent to bridge abutments and ferry crossings conducted a continuous battle against the enemy's fierce waves of attacks. One engineer regiment, four engineer battalions, 53 engineer companies, and 17 engineer platoons were employed to build and repair roads and to locate and destroy bombs in order to guarantee traffic flow through the choke points. Using only crude implements, our engineer soldiers devised many ways to disarm delayed-action bombs and magnetic bombs. They were ready to give their lives to keep our vehicles moving and keep the roads open.

On 26 April 1965, the Central Military Party Committee formed the Transportation Department, subordinate to the General Rear Services Department, with the goal of unifying control over all military transportation forces in North Vietnam. The Transportation Department's mission was to receive aid supplies, provide transportation in support of force building and combat operations being performed by our armed forces in North Vietnam, establish supply transshipment points for Group 559, and to support the Laotian battlefield.¹⁵ Colonel Nguyen Danh Phan was assigned to serve as Chief of this department, and Colonel Tran Minh Chung was appointed as Department Political Commissar. All military transportation forces in North Vietnam were reorganized into six troop stations [binh tram] scattered from the supply reception and transshipment points along our northern border and at Haiphong harbor down to Group 559's transportation entry points in southwestern Military Region 4. Each of these troop stations had one truck transport battalion, one engineer company, warehouses, vehicle repair shops, clinics for treatment of wounded soldiers, and an attached anti-aircraft artillery battalion to defend the transportation route. The mobile transportation forces belonging to the Department of Transportation consisted of three truck transport battalions and river transportation equipment of the Hong Ha Boat

Group with a total capacity of 2,000 tons. These mobile forces were also supported by tens of thousands of tons of cargo capacity provided by the State rail, rail-car, and ground transportation networks.

In June 1965 the General Department of Rear Services established Group 665 to support the transportation of troops to the South and the transfer of wounded soldiers from the battlefields back to the hospitals in the rear area of North Vietnam.

Military Transportation Group 559 was developed into a strategic rear services group responsible for road building and transportation to the battlefields of South Vietnam and Laos, for transporting supplies and guaranteeing the safe passage of units marching down the Trail to the battlefield, and for working with the local population and the Pathet Lao armed forces to consolidate and strengthen the liberated areas on the western side of the Annamite Mountain range. Major General Phan Trong Tue, member of the Central Committee and Minister of Communications and Transportation, was appointed to serve as Commander of Military Transportation Group 559. By the end of 1965 the strength of Group 559 had risen to 24,400 soldiers organized into six truck transport battalions, two bicycle transportation battalions, one transport boat battalion, 18 engineer battalions, four anti-aircraft artillery battalions, 45 com-mo-liasion stations, and various support units.¹⁶ In addition, an engineer regiment and four anti-aircraft artillery battalions under Group 559's operational control were stationed along the Annamite Mountain transportation route. Starting with the use of primitive forms of transportation combined with a small amount of motor transport, Group 559 had gradually expanded the scale of its activities and employed massed transportation methods using motor vehicles as its principal means of operation. Beginning with the use of secret transportation as its primary method, Group 559 gradually built up an ability to transport supplies using combined-arms combat methods. "Build roads to advance, fight the enemy to travel." Along the supply line from North to South Vietnam we began to organize a form of transportation using combined-arms forces in which our truck transportation soldiers played the central role.

With the help of Party committees at all levels and of the local authorities and population, our transportation troops made the supply route their battlefield. Transportation plans served as their combat orders, traffic levels and transportation times were their disciplinary regulations, and locations of enemy attacks or natural obstacles became the points where they engaged in battle. Many cadre and soldiers fought resolutely, overcoming every enemy trick aimed at blocking our movement, holding open the communications and transportation artery between the rear area and the front lines, linking together the various regions of our nation, and linking our nation to the other fraternal socialist countries. In 1965, the volume of supplies transported to South Vietnam along Group 559's corridor was almost equal to the total volume of supplies transported during the previous five years (1959-1964). In addition, during 1965 almost 50,000 cadre

and soldiers, including seven infantry regiments and 20 battalions of infantry, sappers, artillery, etc. (equal to the total number of troops sent to South Vietnam during the entire period from 1959 to 1964), marched south to the battlefield. Carrying weapons and individual light equipment consisting of shelter tarps, hammocks, plastic rain ponchos, helmets, trousers, shirts, and individual medicines all packed neatly in a "frog pack," and with a mountain cane and a will to "cross the Annamite Mountains to save the nation," the cadre and soldiers of our armed forces, group by group, marched off to South Vietnam to fight to fulfill the resolve of the entire Party, the entire population, and of Chairman Ho Chi Minh: defeat the American aggressors, liberate South Vietnam, defend North Vietnam, unify the nation, and move the nation forward toward socialism.

RESOLVE TO CONTINUE THE BATTLE

On 27 December 1965, amid the heroic spirit of the soldiers and civilians of the entire nation to fight against the Americans, the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee met in Hanoi. Chairman Ho Chi Minh presided over the session.

Assessing the "limited war" conducted by the American aggressors in the southern half of our nation, the Party Central Committee clearly pointed out that in its objectives and nature, this is still a war of aggression aimed at implementing a neocolonialist policy relying on two strategic forces—the American expeditionary army and the puppet army. The American imperialists are the strongest economic and military power in the imperialist camp. The general world situation and the domestic situation in the United States, however, will not allow them to fully utilize their economic and military power in their war of aggression in Vietnam. Politics has always been the enemy's weak point, and it is still the basic weakness he has not been able to overcome. Meanwhile, the revolutionary forces of our people have grown strong in every aspect. Our armed forces have a firm foothold in the important strategic areas. Even though the American imperialists have poured tens of thousands of expeditionary troops into South Vietnam, the basic balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy is unchanged. Our people have a firm foundation for maintaining the offensive initiative on the battlefield.

The Party Central Committee decided that the strategic formula for our resistance war is still protracted warfare, but we will vigorously strive to "concentrate the forces of both North and South Vietnam and seek an opportunity to secure a decisive victory within a relatively short period of time." North Vietnam must defeat the air war of destruction being conducted by the American imperialist, must protect the cause of building socialism, and must mobilize human and material resources for the war to liberate South Vietnam. We must at the same time make vigorous preparations in all areas to be prepared to defeat the enemy should he be so rash as to expand his "limited war" strategy to the entire nation.

With regard to the work of building our armed forces, the Central Committee session established a policy of increasing quality, expanding quantity, strengthening training programs, and providing additional personnel and ammunition to our main force units. Attention was to be paid to building up local force troops and guerrilla militia forces, especially in vital areas. Our main force units in North Vietnam would serve both to defend North Vietnam and would be a strategic reserve force for South Vietnam.

On 16 January 1966, Chairman Ho Chi Minh spoke to the Conference of High-Level Party, State, and Military Cadre studying the resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee.

Uncle Ho said, "Now the Americans have 200,000 troops in South Vietnam. They may increase this even more, to 300,000, 400,000, or 500,000 troops. We will still win. We are certain of victory."¹⁷ However, "victory will not come automatically. Our entire Party, our entire armed forces, our entire population must be resolved to fight to the end to secure the national independence and the unification of our nation, and at the same time we must completely fulfill our international duties."¹⁸

Carrying out the strategic resolve of the Party Central Committee, as expressed in Resolution 12 and in Chairman Ho Chi Minh's instructions to resist and defeat the American aggressors, our army in both North and South Vietnam marched forward into a large-scale, ferocious battle against the American expeditionary army and its modern air force and navy.

Increasing Our Combat Power: Defeating the American Expeditionary Army in South Vietnam and the American Air Force in North Vietnam

REINFORCEMENTS FOR THE SOUTH

Our army's victories in its initial battles against the American expeditionary army in South Vietnam and against American air forces in North Vietnam during 1965 solidified our confidence in the ability of the soldiers and civilians of our entire nation to defeat the American aggressors. After the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee the spirit of enthusiasm for the fight against the Americans grew even stronger. The resolve of the Party Central Committee to resist and defeat the Americans infected every cadre, Party member, soldier, and branch of service.

In late 1965 the Politburo foresaw that, with their increased troop strength and mobility, during the 1965–1966 dry season U.S. forces would launch many attacks into the mountain jungles and contested areas to seize the initiative and drive us back onto the defensive. Our soldiers and civilians had to make immediate, across-the-board preparations and maintain the initiative by mounting attacks and vigorous counterattacks. In our view, enemy attacks during the dry season would provide a good opportunity to kill American troops outside of their defensive fortifications.

Pursuant to the resolution of the Party Central Committee and instructions from the Politburo, in February 1966 the Central Military Party Committee met in Hanoi. Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh, who had just returned from South Vietnam, briefed the committee on the battlefield situation in the South.

The Central Military Party Committee decided to exploit our offensive posture, gain greater and greater victories, and strive to achieve decisive victory in South Vietnam. Based on an assessment of battlefield developments, the Central Military Party Committee set forward six combat methods:

- Intensify massed combat operations and launch medium-size and large-scale campaigns by our main force units in the important theaters of operations.
- Intensify guerrilla warfare efforts and conduct coordinated combat operations between the guerrilla militia, local force troops, and a portion of our main force troops.
- Attack and destroy enemy rear area installations and enemy leadership organizations.
- Expand attacks against lines of communications.
- Combine armed operations with the political struggle of the masses in the cities and their surrounding areas.
- Maintain close coordination between the military struggle, the political struggle, and troop proselytizing.

With regard to the positions and responsibilities of each battlefield, the Central Military Party Committee decided that eastern Cochin China, the Central Highlands, and Tri-Thien were the key battlefields on which to engage and annihilate enemy forces. On these battlefields we needed to build, in a step-by-step and focused manner, a large transportation and supply warehouse network to prepare for combat operations using our main force troops. In the lowlands of Cochin China and Central Vietnam our three types of armed forces would increase guerrilla operations and small-scale mobile attacks. Our volunteer soldiers in central and lower Laos would work with our allies to step up activities everywhere and to protect our strategic supply corridor. In Cambodia we had to maintain and exploit the political and economic advantages we held in that nation in support of the fight against the American aggressors.

With regard to force building activities, the policy of the Central Military Party Committee was to rapidly expand our total troop strength and increase the quality of our armed forces, especially our main force units. During 1966 the strength of our full-time forces in South Vietnam would be increased to between 270,000 and 300,000 soldiers, organized into 35 main force regiments and 51 local force battalions. At the same time we would expand our guerrilla militia to cover a much broader area. The specialty branch units of our main force army would be strengthened, sapper and commando forces would be greatly expanded, and we would organize both specialist units to attack lines of communications and "assault units" to operate in urban areas. In North Vietnam, we would further expand our air defense, engineer, and transportation forces in order to defeat the enemy's ferocious war of destruction; maintain our strategic lines of communications; fulfill all plans for providing support to South Vietnam; properly prepare units to fight on the battlefield; and be ready to expand our forces when necessary.

To disseminate the resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee and the resolution of the Central Military Party Committee, and at the same time to reinforce the leadership apparatus and military command structure of the various battlefields, the Politburo and the Central Military Party Commit-

tee dispatched a large number of high-ranking cadre to South Vietnam. The General Staff, the General Political Department, and the General Department of Rear Services directed the battlefields to quickly consolidate their forces, prepare combat plans for the winter-spring campaign of 1966, and predict which areas might be attacked by the enemy. All battlefield units were to prepare for enemy counterattacks and be ready to shift forces to other theaters of operations when so ordered. Nine infantry regiments, three field artillery regiments, and a number of full-strength artillery, anti-aircraft, engineer, and signal units were ordered to set out rapidly for the southern battlefield to reinforce our mobile main force elements in the Central Highlands, Region 5, and eastern Cochin China.

The 24th Regiment (formerly the 42nd Regiment of the 304th Division), the 88th Regiment (from the 308th Division), Regiments 95B and 101B from the 325B Division, the 68th Artillery Regiment (equipped with 105mm howitzers), and the 95th and 96th Artillery Battalions (equipped with 120mm mortars) were sent to reinforce the Central Highlands Front (B3 Front).

Military Region 5 received the 20th Regiment (formerly designated Regiment 18B), the 31st Regiment (formerly Regiment 64A of the 320th Division), the 368B Artillery Regiment (equipped with DKB rockets), and the 19th Artillery Battalion (equipped with A-12 rockets).

The battlefields of Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam received the 141st and 165th Regiments of the 312th Division, the 52nd Regiment of the 320th Division, the 16th Regiment (transferred south from the Central Highlands Front and formerly designated Regiment 101A), Artillery Regiment 84A (equipped with DKB rockets), and four battalions equipped with 120mm mortars and 12.8mm machine guns.

For the first time in the history of our resistance war against the Americans to save the nation our troops marched in regiment-sized units from North Vietnam across the Annamite Mountain range down to the battlefields of eastern Cochin China. The road was 2,000 kilometers long. Every cadre and soldier carried a load of between 30 and 40 kilograms. The commo-liaison trail from the Central Highlands into Cochin China had only recently been built, and many stretches of the route and many of the way stations had not yet been properly organized. The long distance and heavy loads, the savage sweep operations and bombing attacks conducted by the enemy, and severe weather conditions all combined to extend the time required for the march to five or six months, adversely affecting the health of our troops. On days when rice supplies were exhausted our soldiers had to dig up jungle roots to eat in place of rice. Almost all cadre and soldiers caught malaria, some soldiers died on the march, and a number had to remain behind in our medical clinics along the commo-liaison route. Some units suffered heavily, such as the 52nd Regiment, which had a strength of 2,800 soldiers when it set out but had only 1,200 troops left when it arrived in eastern Cochin China. The march further honed the will, endurance, and love of his comrades-in-arms of every one of our cadre and soldiers. Over-

coming all hardships and challenges, our cadre and soldiers strode down the road, following the call of the Party to fight the Americans and save the nation, "following the flame in their hearts."

THE WAR IN THE SOUTH

In South Vietnam, in March 1966 COSVN met and set forward concrete policies to implement the resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee and the February 1966 resolution of the Central Military Party Committee. COSVN directed the three types of armed forces to develop their attack posture, "pull the enemy out of his lair to fight him, stretch his forces thin to fight him, wade into the enemy ranks to fight him, creep deep into the enemy's rear areas to fight him." The Region 5 Party Committee, the Region 5 Military Party Committee, and the Military Region 5 Command also established timely policies aimed at expanding guerrilla warfare to a high overall level to force the enemy to disperse his forces, and, on this basis, launch attacks against the enemy.

Following the 1965–1966 fall-winter campaign, the battlefields immediately began preparing for the 1966 spring-summer combat plan. The civilian population and guerrillas of the liberated villages and hamlets urgently strengthened their combat villages and established cells and teams specializing in attacking enemy communications routes and in firing at enemy aircraft. Many local areas held field exercises to practice countering enemy sweeps. Sapper and commando teams in and around the cities conducted reconnaissance operations day and night to assess the enemy situation and develop plans to attack assigned targets. Main force and local force units received additional troops, equipment, and supplies, and used the time available for political study and military training. Congresses of "Heroic Killers of Americans" were organized in many provinces and military regions to honor units and individuals who had accomplished feats of arms during 1965 and to share experiences in fighting the Americans. Emulation campaigns for the title of "Heroic Killer of Americans," "Heroic Destroyer of Vehicles," "Heroic Destroyer of Aircraft," "Hero Unit for Killing Americans," etc., were enthusiastically launched in all units and battlefields.

In January 1966 the American imperialists used their entire force of American, puppet, and satellite troops to launch their first strategic counteroffensive in South Vietnam. During a five-month period (from January through May 1966) they conducted 450 military sweep operations, of which 20 were large sweep operations.¹ The two principal theaters for the enemy's counteroffensive were eastern Cochinchina and the lowlands of Region 5. These were strategic areas containing large liberated zones where our main force troops were mounting strong operations and exerting pressure on the military bases of the Americans and their puppets. The objectives of the enemy's counteroffensive were to defeat our

main force units,² to support the focused "pacification" program,³ to strengthen the puppet regime, and to regain the strategic initiative on the battlefield.

In the areas north-northeast and southwest of Saigon, the enemy launched many large operations to destroy the Duong Minh Chau, Boi Loi, Cu Chi, and Long Nguyen base areas; War Zone D, Xuyen Moc, and Hat Dich; and to seek out and destroy COSVN's main force 9th and 5th Divisions.

To deal with the enemy counteroffensive, COSVN Military Command directed all units and localities to launch attacks everywhere using the forces they had on hand to prevent the enemy from concentrating his forces in one theater and to force him to disperse his forces to deal with our attacks. Meanwhile, our main force troops would mass to attack areas the enemy had left exposed and attack important targets. Our troops were to utilize mobile attacks to annihilate enemy forces outside of their defensive positions as the principal tactic, in combination with shelling attacks and raids by sappers. North of Saigon the 9th Division and local armed forces mounted continuous attacks and counterattacks in Nha Do-Bong Trang (Thu Dau Mot province), Phu Hung and Ba Nghia (War Zone D), Bau San (the Duong Minh Chau War Zone), etc. In the Nha Do-Bong Trang battle on 24 February 1966, the 9th Division used one element of its forces to launch an attack to establish our position, while the majority of the division waited until the American troops pulled back to a position adjacent to the Nha Do "strategic hamlet." The division then launched a powerful surprise attack, inflicting severe casualties on one enemy regimental task force (consisting of a headquarters element, two infantry battalions, and one armored battalion).

Coordinating their combat operations with our main force troops, local force troops and guerrillas developed many innovative fighting tactics, which in some locations shattered large enemy sweep operations. In Cu Chi district (30 kilometers northwest of Saigon) the 306th Local Force Company and guerrillas from the various villages skillfully used homemade weapons and a tunnel system hundreds of kilometers long to fight off a large sweep operation conducted by almost 10,000 American troops.⁴ During 12 days and nights of combat, the soldiers and civilians of Cu Chi district killed or wounded almost 2,000 American troops, destroyed 100 military vehicles, and shot down and destroyed 50 aircraft of all types. On 7 February 1966, the congress of "Hero Killers of Americans" of Cu Chi district laid out ten possible ways to defeat the enemy in guerrilla warfare⁵ and rewarded the American-killing achievements of many local force cadre, local force soldiers, guerrillas, and civilians.

Southeast of Saigon the 4th and 5th Regiments of our 5th Division, working in coordination with local armed forces, mounted strong attacks against Route 15, attacked the American base at Vung Tau on 12 March 1966 (killing 300 enemy and destroying 30 helicopters), and mounted a mobile attack at Nui La north of Binh Gia, inflicting severe casualties on a battalion of the American 173rd Airborne Brigade.

In our theaters north-northeast of Saigon and southwest of Saigon, none of the "search and destroy" operations conducted by the Americans, puppet troops, and satellite troops achieved their objectives. COSVN's main force army maintained a firm foothold in the bases of eastern Cochin China and defeated the American expeditionary army during its first test of strength on the battlefield.

In Region 5, on 16 January 1966 the Military Region Command issued the following order to all armed forces: Wherever the enemy attacks first, mount a vigorous counterattack; wherever the enemy has not yet launched an attack, continue preparations and take the initiative to launch attacks in accordance with the spring 1966 combat plan.

In late January 1966, the Americans and their puppets mobilized 50 battalions⁶ to conduct sweep operations in the provinces of the central part of Central Vietnam. They concentrated their forces in three theaters of operations: southern Quang Ngai province, northern Binh Dinh province, and southern Phu Yen province. Their objectives were to "seek out and destroy" the Military Region's main force 2nd and 3rd Divisions, to "pacify" a number of focal point areas in the coastal lowlands, to reopen their strategic lines of communications, and to clear the way for U.S. combat forces to move up into the Central Highlands. Strategic Route 19 (from Quy Nhon to Pleiku) in Binh Dinh province was the primary theater of operations for the enemy counterattack. Twenty-one of the 50 enemy battalions on the Military Region 5 battlefield were concentrated in this theater.

To deal with this massive counterattack, in January 1966, Military Region 5 unified command over the armed forces of the three types of troops in the Binh Dinh province area, establishing a Front Command headed by Senior Colonel Giap Van Cuong, Commander of the 3rd Division, Military Commander, and Comrade Hai Lam, Secretary of the Province Party Committee, Political Commissar. Three regiments of the 3rd Division were ordered to the districts of Hoai Nhon, An Lao, and Kim Son to serve as the core force to fight the enemy alongside our local armed forces.

From 28 January until early March 1966, the 22nd Regiment, together with Hoai Nhon district guerrillas, used our combat villages and hamlets to conduct a ferocious battle against the offensive spearheads of the American air cavalry soldiers at Cho Cat, Gia Huu, Chuong Hoa, Hy The, etc. The 2nd and 12th Regiments, working with guerrillas in Kim Son and An Lao districts, skillfully maneuvered their forces to enemy weak points and launched a number of assaults at Vuong Thom, Hill 304, Sung Stream [Suoi Sung], Da Tuong Stream [Suoi Da Tuong], and Loc Giang. In each battle, our soldiers and the guerrillas killed hundreds of enemy troops.

The specialty branch units of the 3rd Division displayed their independent combat tactics, sneaking deep behind enemy lines to conduct daring attacks against enemy rear bases. The 407th Sapper Battalion conducted a raid against the U.S. Air Cavalry Division base at An Khe, eliminating from the field of combat 520 enemy troops and destroying 97 aircraft. The 3rd Division's artillery

units shelled the headquarters of the enemy operation at Bong Son, killing many enemy soldiers and destroying ten aircraft.

On 7 March 1966, the American troops were forced to halt their sweep operation in Binh Dinh province. Combining massed combat operations by our main force troops with local people's warfare and utilizing many innovative fighting methods, the 3rd Division and the local armed forces of Binh Dinh province conducted a heroic battle, shattering the largest counterattack mounted by American and satellite troops in South Vietnam during the 1965-1966 dry season.⁷

In Quang Ngai, on 26 January 1966 the enemy used 13 battalions (including five U.S. battalions) to mount a sweep operation in Duc Pho district aimed at seizing our liberated zone, destroying Military Region 5's 2nd Division, and opening Route 1 for traffic between Quang Ngai city and Sa Huynh. Relying on our people's warfare posture, the province and district local force troops and the guerrillas of Duc Pho blocked the operation and maneuvered their forces to attack enemy weak points. The Pho An village guerrilla team fought off two American companies during a six-hour battle, inflicting 106 casualties on their opponents. The Pho Cuong village guerrilla team organized their forces into two columns that mounted a surprise attack on the headquarters staff of an American battalion, killing 57 enemy. The civilian population of our villages supported the combat operations of our soldiers and guerrillas and organized many face-to-face struggle movements to confront the American troops, thereby limiting their acts of murder and their pillaging of the people's property.

During this same period, in accordance with the Military Region Command's combat plan, the 2nd Division, under the command of Comrade Nguyen Nang, attacked a number of strong points held by puppet troops in western Son Tinh district. The enemy hurriedly transferred five battalions of U.S. troops conducting the sweep in Duc Pho over to reinforce the Son Tinh area.

On 4 and 5 March, the 1st and 21st Regiments of the 2nd Division used tactics that combined the use of blocking forces with mobile attacks to repel many assault waves of American troops in the area of High Point 62 and Chua Hill. U.S. Marines stationed at Chu Lai had to be brought in as reinforcements. On 17 and 18 March, the regiments of the 2nd Division mounted continuous assaults against this Marine relief column at Tinh Ha (in western Son Tinh) and An Hoa (in Binh Son district), eliminating from the field of combat hundreds of enemy troops. The counterattack mounted by U.S. and puppet troops in the Quang Ngai province area was a complete failure.

In Phu Yen province, on 18 January 1966 12 battalions of American, puppet, and South Korean troops launched a sweep operation in Tuy Hoa district aimed at locating and destroying the Southern Subregion's 10th Regiment and occupying our liberated zone. Seizing this opportunity to annihilate enemy forces outside their defensive fortifications, the 10th Regiment and provincial local force troops seized the offensive initiative, eliminating from the field of combat two companies of South Korean troops at Hao Son and the Ca Pass during an attack

that was launched while the enemy was in the process of deploying his forces along Route 1. Following this battle, combining attrition tactics and small-scale annihilation attacks designed to hold each enemy column in check by concentrating our forces to annihilate individual enemy units in separate battles, the soldiers and civilians of Phu Yen province shattered a number of enemy columns, inflicting heavy losses on them.

The enemy's strategic counteroffensive in all three theaters of Region 5 failed because of our widespread people's war posture, our willingness to attack the enemy, and the innovative fighting methods of the armed forces of our three types of troops throughout the Military Region.

In the Central Highlands, the 1st Division and local armed forces launched two successive waves of operational activity. These were the spring operations, lasting from 15 February to 6 March 1966, northwest of Ban Me Thuot and the summer operations, from 25 March to 15 August 1966, in Pleiku. During these two operations the soldiers and civilians of the Central Highlands eliminated from the field of combat over 3,000 enemy, including over 1,000 American troops.

In Tri-Thien, the province and district local force troops, in cooperation with local village guerrillas, crushed the "Lam Son 325" operation mounted by puppet soldiers between 17 February and 3 March 1966, overran the A Sau commando base, expanded the liberated zone in western Thua Thien province, and protected the strategic transportation corridor.

Our sapper and artillery troops attacked and shelled many bases lying deep behind enemy lines, such as the airfields at Da Nang, Nuoc Man, Chu Lai, Pleiku, Tan Son Nhat, and Tra Noc. Many storage facilities for weapons and petroleum products and many hotels where American officers lived were attacked. Hundreds of pilots, officers, and technical personnel were killed and millions of liters of petroleum products and many aircraft and other implements of war were destroyed.

Units of the armed forces of our three types of troops specializing in attacks on enemy lines of communications, of which our engineer troops served as the core element, destroyed a number of bridges and culverts, built obstacles in the roads, and ambushed and annihilated infantry and mechanized forces, blocking enemy movements along a number of strategic routes for many days at a time and forcing the American and puppet armies to disperse their forces in outposts to protect the roads.

Working in coordination with the military struggle, the political struggle and troop proselytizing efforts conducted by the masses continued to increase. In many locations, the masses maintained their legal status and held power even in areas under enemy control. The "three clings" slogan, "The Party clings to the people, the guerrillas cling to the enemy, the people cling to the land," was put forward and implemented in many areas. In Cochinchina, the people held power to at least some extent in 2,600 out of the total of 3,000 hamlets. In extreme southern Central Vietnam, the people destroyed 247 out of 560 "strategic hamlets." The

citizens of Saigon, Hue, Da Nang, and many other cities and towns organized continuous struggles against American imperialist aggression, against terrorism, against the military draft, and demanding democracy and people's rights.

By mid-1966, after six months of fierce and difficult fighting, our soldiers and civilians in South Vietnam had defeated the first strategic counteroffensive conducted by 200,000 American and satellite troops and almost 500,000 puppet troops, eliminating from the field of combat 70,000 enemy troops (including 30,000 Americans), crippling 15 enemy battalions (including nine U.S. battalions), and preventing the enemy from successfully achieving the principal objectives of its counteroffensive.⁸

Evaluating this victory, the Politburo of the Party Central Committee pointed out:

This was an extremely critical period for the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation. We achieved very important successes in strategy, tactics, and in our direction of the war. We won the first round in the limited war being waged by the American imperialists. We were victorious both militarily and politically, but most especially militarily. During the course of the fighting, we learned the strengths and weaknesses of the American expeditionary army and took our first step forward in drawing lessons from this valuable experience and clearly grasping the principles of the national liberation revolution in South Vietnam, thereby giving the entire Party and the entire population the resolve necessary to defeat the American aggressors.⁹

After the failure of their first large counteroffensive during the dry season of 1965–1966, the American imperialists continued to increase their troop strength and made urgent preparations to launch a second counteroffensive. During the summer of 1966 Johnson hastily dispatched an additional 100,000 troops, drawn from bases inside the United States and from American military bases in Europe, to the battlefields of South Vietnam.¹⁰ By August 1966 the number of American troops directly involved in the war of aggression in Vietnam had risen to almost 300,000. The numbers of aircraft and of air strikes launched in the air war against North Vietnam during 1966 were double the 1965 figures: Five hundred tactical aircraft were involved, and the daily sortie average was between 200 and 250 sorties per day, with the maximum figure being almost 400 sorties on one day.

On 29 June 1966 the American imperialists sent their aircraft to bomb the Duc Giang gasoline storage facility in Hanoi and the Thuong Ly gasoline storage facility in Haiphong. This was a very serious new escalation of the war.

In July 1966 the Supreme National Defense Council of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam met in Hanoi. Chairman Ho Chi Minh presided over the meeting. The council was briefed on the combat and economic production situation of the army and civilian population in both North and South Vietnam. The council made an assessment of the enemy's new schemes and reached a number

of decisions on major policies aimed at intensifying the war against the Americans to save the nation.

On 17 July 1966 Chairman Ho Chi Minh made an appeal to the soldiers and civilians of the entire nation: "This war may go on for five more years, ten more years, 20 more years, or even more. Hanoi, Haiphong, and a number of our other cities and enterprises may be destroyed, but the people of Vietnam are not afraid. *There is nothing more precious than independence and freedom.* When victory finally comes, our people will rebuild our nation so that it is even better, even more beautiful, than it was before."¹¹

The words of Chairman Ho Chi Minh were the sacred voice of the Fatherland and had a powerful effect on the soldiers and civilians of our entire nation, encouraging them to unite as one person, to ignore every hardship and sacrifice, and to fight resolutely until we achieved total victory.

In response to Chairman Ho Chi Minh's words, "There is nothing more precious than independence and freedom," during the summer of 1966 almost 200,000 young people, men and women, in North Vietnam and thousands of youths in the liberated areas of South Vietnam enthusiastically enlisted in the armed forces. By the end of 1966 the total strength of our armed forces was 690,000 soldiers.¹² The number of troops training and fighting in North Vietnam was 460,000, and the number of troops fighting on the battlefields of South Vietnam was 230,000. In comparison with the figures for 1965, the technical and material support facilities of the General Department of Rear Services had increased by six times, equipment used in national defense enterprises increased by 3.3 times, and the storage capacity of our gasoline storage facilities increased by 2.7 times. Many groups specializing in training and dispatching troops to the battlefield were formed. We improved our handling of the movement of our troops, improving provisions for housing and feeding troops and for caring for the sick and wounded along the strategic transportation corridor in order to reduce our personnel losses along the Trail to the maximum extent possible. During the last six months of 1966, in addition to reinforcement troops, the Central Military Party Committee sent to South Vietnam two infantry divisions,¹³ four separate infantry regiments, one artillery regiment equipped with DKB rockets, one artillery regiment equipped with A-12 rockets, four battalions of 12.8mm anti-aircraft machine guns, and numerous specialty branch units. The number of replacement troops sent south in 1966 was six times greater than the number sent in 1965. Our combat battalions in South Vietnam increased from 103 battalions (including 65 mobile battalions) in 1965 to 136 battalions (including 98 mobile battalions) in 1966.¹⁴

CORRECTING PROBLEMS

After more than a year of direct combat against the American expeditionary army in South Vietnam and against the U.S. air forces in North Vietnam, our army,

together with our entire population, had demonstrated a very high will to fight and to win and had learned new lessons from our experiences in combat against the Americans. Our army had grown in strength and significantly increased its organizational capabilities and combat power. However, facing a new combat opponent and the ever-increasing demands of a revolutionary war, there appeared among a small number of our cadre and soldiers a number of distorted perceptions and thoughts, such as overestimating the military strength of the enemy, fear of bombing and shelling, and fear of the protracted, ferocious nature of the struggle. Many of the battles fought by our troops did not fulfill our requirements for wiping out entire units and capturing prisoners and weapons. Our losses of personnel and weapons in a number of battles were heavy. Our troops' adherence to disciplinary and other types of regulations and the administration of our troops and our technical and material facilities did not live up to our previous high standards. The material and spiritual lives of our soldiers, especially those serving on the battlefields and along the strategic transportation corridor, were fraught with difficulty.

In order to overcome these shortcomings and weaknesses, and to prepare for an even fiercer battle against the American, puppet, and satellite troops during the 1966–1967 dry season, the Central Military Party Committee decided to organize a wave of political activities called “Resolve to defeat the American aggressors” throughout the people's armed forces. The principal documents studied in this campaign were the resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee and Chairman Ho Chi Minh's 17 July 1966 appeal to the soldiers and citizens of the entire nation. The General Political Department issued directions and guidance plans and prepared education documents to stimulate patriotism, love of socialism, and hatred of the American aggressors in order to build up offensive thinking and determination to fight and to win. The main study methods used were on-the-job training and short-term training, using regular study sessions during combat and operations and reviewing experiences and deriving lessons learned as the primary method. At the same time we emphasized study conducted during Party committee and Party chapter activities and held cadre conferences and short-term political activities during the period between the two waves of combat operations.

In South Vietnam, during August 1966 COSVN and the COSVN Military Party Committee convened the second conference on political activities among the liberation armed forces of South Vietnam. COSVN emphasized that, in the new situation confronting the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation, the work of ideological leadership had to be proactive, flexible, and timely. This work had to ensure that in every possible situation our armed forces would not be confused or hesitant about our combat objectives and that a scientific basis would be used to build confidence and an offensive spirit. The conference honored units that had correctly carried out political work and had made substantial progress in their force building and combat operations. These units

included COSVN's 5th and 9th Divisions; Military Region 5's 2nd and 3rd Divisions; the local force troops of Long An, Binh Duong, and Quang Nam provinces; the local force troops and guerrilla militia of the districts of Chu Chi (Saigon-Gia Dinh area); Duc Hoa (Long An province); Ben Cat (Thu Dau Mot province); Chau Thanh (My Tho province); Mo Cay (Ben Tre province); Phung Hiep (Can Tho province); etc.

The campaign to build "four good" Party chapters pursuant to the instructions of the Secretariat of the Party Central Committee was expanded widely and applied as appropriate, consistent with the conditions of combat and operations encountered by the armed forces. The work of educating Party members to increase their quality, knowledge, and operational abilities was carried out vigorously and constantly, combining study with honing their skills during combat and operational activities. A number of new members were admitted to the Party (over 50,000 during the two years 1966-1967) and the number of Party members who were drafted into the armed forces was sufficient to replace combat losses and to raise the leadership percentage of Party members in the army from 30 percent in 1966 to 40 percent in 1967. Because of these efforts, during a period when the number of troops and the number of units was expanding rapidly and there were many disruptions as a result of combat, all companies and units of equivalent size still had a Party chapter. The leadership quality of the Party chapters, and especially of the Party chapters in units directly involved in combat operations, was raised to a high level. Our Party members unceasingly strove to display their vanguard roles both during combat and during operational activities, resolutely putting into practice the revolutionary ideals that Chairman Ho Chi Minh had expressed in concrete terms for use during this era of combat against the Americans to save the nation: "As long as South Vietnam is not yet liberated, our Fatherland is not yet unified, and our people are not yet peaceful and happy, all of us must devote all of our spiritual resources and our energy to strive for and to sacrifice for the cause of the total victory of the revolution."¹⁵

The work of building Party organizations was directly related to the campaign to build military units that were strong in every respect, consistent with the combat position and operations of each type of unit. Beginning with a number of units that were developed on a trial basis in 1965, the campaign to build strong basic-level units expanded to all companies and company-sized units. Staff, political, and rear services agencies of all levels sent many cadre to assist basic-level units to implement this campaign. Thousands of units and Party chapters achieved the honorary title "Determined to Win Unit" and "Determined to Win Party Chapter."

In May 1966 the first All-Armed Forces Congress of Determined to Win Youth was held in the capital city of Hanoi. The congress reviewed the results of the Determined to Win Emulation Campaign conducted by youths in the armed forces, honored Youth Group chapters and Youth Group members who had made outstanding achievements in combat and combat support activities, and put for-

ward examples of good experiences achieved in the work of educating and mobilizing youth within the army.

Following the first congress of emulation hero fighters of the liberation armed forces of South Vietnam (held in 1965), in late 1966 a congress of emulation hero fighters of the armed forces in North Vietnam was solemnly convened in the Ba Dinh Hall in Hanoi. The congress announced that the Chief of State of the People's Democratic Republic of Vietnam had issued an order awarding the title of "Hero of the People's Armed Forces" to 45 units and 43 individual cadre and soldiers. Good experiences and lessons learned in the work of youth mobilization within the army and heroic examples within the armed forces were used by the army's units and Youth Group chapters for study and to effectively encourage our youth to play the leading role while conducting the unit's force building and combat operations.

Along with the work of political development, military training also changed direction in response to the requirements of our combat missions in this new situation.

Based on the realities of combat operations conducted against the American expeditionary army, the General Staff prepared documents providing guidance to units from platoon up to division level for tactical training in mobile assault operations, ambushes, attacks against enemy forces holding fortified positions, urban combat, the use of measures to preserve secrecy and surprise, sticking close to enemy forces, attacking quickly and withdrawing quickly, and conducting continuous attacks. All these training measures were aimed at our goal of annihilating entire enemy battalions and regiments. After completing their training, a number of divisions held field exercises. A combined-arms combat exercise conducted by the 308th Infantry Division in Dong Trieu, Quang Ninh province, in late 1966 demonstrated that we had taken a new step forward in the combat skills of our troops. Live fire exercises conducted on 17 April 1966 by Regiment 84A, firing DKB rockets,¹⁶ and by the 99th Battalion, firing A-12 rockets,¹⁷ produced excellent results. Chairman Ho Chi Minh and a number of Politburo members personally watched and encouraged these units during this firing exercise. Also in 1966 the General Staff and the headquarters of the various military regions held many training classes for regiment- and division-level cadre, aimed at examining and exploiting good fighting techniques used by the various battlefields that had a high potential for annihilating enemy troops. These training classes helped to raise the capabilities of our cadre in such areas as command organization, deploying in-depth combat formations in a campaign-level operation, securing and maintaining superiority during the conduct of a campaign-level operation, and in organizing to fight key battles.

To carry out the instructions of the Central Military Party Committee and of the High Command, all armed forces schools changed the direction of their training, shifting from long-term training for peacetime conditions to short-term training for wartime. The length of each class was reduced from three years down to

one year, and in some cases six months. The students attending these courses were cadre and soldiers who had participated in combat operations on the various battlefields, former military personnel who had been recalled to service, cadre from the various civilian governmental agencies, scientific and technical cadre, and university students. In response to our need to expand our armed forces, and especially our technical specialty branches, all schools increased the number of students attending basic and supplemental training classes, doubling the number of students. All schools placed special emphasis on training students who were transferring from one branch to another. The Army Officers School itself began training 3,500 students per year. The Signal and Chemical Faculties were separated from the Army Officers School to form the Signal Officers School (in mid-1965) and the Chemical Officers School (in late 1966). Using the realities of combat on the battlefield, with the guiding combat principles of the Party serving as a foundation, and drawing on the combat traditions and experience of the army, our schools studied course content and developed training programs that were suited to our various combat opponents and that responded to our ever-increasing need for cadre, especially cadre for low-level units within the army.

In South Vietnam, in August 1966 Lieutenant General Hoang Van Thai, Secretary of the Region 5 Party Committee and concurrently Political Commissar of Military Region 5, presided over a conference to review and learn lessons from the waves of operations conducted by the region's main force troops from the spring of 1965 through the summer of 1966. The conference raised many new issues regarding campaign-level and tactical-level techniques and political activities during combat operations against the new enemy, the American expeditionary army. In Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam, the COSVN Military Command also reviewed and disseminated a number of lessons learned from experiences in command organization, in Party and political activities during combat operations against American infantry and mechanized forces, and in building "American killing belts." In September 1966, COSVN and the Region 5 Party Committee held a conference to summarize guerrilla warfare, to set forward immediate policies aimed at expanding local armed forces, to strengthen our ideological leadership activities, political education, and military training, and to provide military training and additional equipment to guerrilla militia forces.

Movements to make outstanding achievements in military training and to resolve to defeat the American aggressors were launched throughout the people's armed forces. The goals of these campaigns were to increase the combat power of our soldiers, to build combat-ready units, and to enable our troops to expertly employ mobile attack methods, tactics for attacks against fortified positions, independent combat tactics, and coordinated combat tactics on all types of terrain. The Military Region 5 Command and the COSVN Military Command set forward standards for designating "expert" regiments and "expert" battalions in order to provide concrete incentives for our units.¹⁸

An emulation movement to secure the "Resolved to defeat the American aggressors" flag, a rotating award presented by Uncle Ho, swept through the local areas and the units of the armed forces in North Vietnam. The soldiers and civilians of Military Region 4, Military Region 3, Quang Binh province, and many other localities won the honor of receiving this periodic award from Chairman Ho Chi Minh. On the flag were sewn the combat achievements in shooting down American aircraft that the local soldiers and civilians had attained. Individuals both within and outside the armed forces who had made outstanding achievements in combat or combat support were awarded the personal insignia of Chairman Ho Chi Minh.

Throughout North Vietnam, the task of building and increasing the combat quality of our armed forces, especially those serving in the Air Defense-Air Force Service, was the subject of special attention.

During the early months of 1966, as they were launching their first strategic counteroffensive on the battlefields of South Vietnam, the American imperialists simultaneously escalated their air and naval war of destruction against North Vietnam. They altered their flight formations and increased the number of fighters escorting their bombers and covering and suppressing our airfields, thereby causing many difficulties for our air force when our aircraft took off and attacked the enemy at low and medium altitudes. A number of anti-aircraft artillery units did not properly resolve the question of the relationship between killing the enemy and protecting the target. They emphasized firing to scare off and drive away enemy aircraft, putting up a "curtain of fire." This type of tactic caused the rapid deterioration of gun barrels, used up large quantities of ammunition, and was not effective either in shooting down enemy aircraft or in protecting the target. The enemy's increased use of jamming flight formations and jamming the guidance frequencies of our missile warheads caused 60 percent of the missiles launched by the missile battalions protecting Hanoi to lose guidance and self-destruct (this percentage is from early 1967). Along the coastline of Region 4 and of some provinces in Region 3 the enemy used commando vessels belonging to the puppet Navy and started using American cruisers and destroyers, anchored more than ten kilometers out to sea, to fire 187mm and 203mm guns at a number of onshore targets, primarily at night. Our artillery troops trying to provide counterbattery fire against these vessels ran into many problems. A number of units were confused about how to deal with the enemy's modern technical equipment and new tactics.

Chairman Ho Chi Minh constantly focused his attention on caring for the living standards and the combat situation of our troops. Every day Uncle Ho received a briefing, either in person or by telephone, from the Combat Operations Department on the combat situation in both North and South Vietnam. During these years, although Uncle Ho was growing increasingly old and weak, he still visited many anti-aircraft artillery and missile firing positions and many air force and radar units. When he visited an anti-aircraft artillery position, he would

pick up a helmet to see how heavy it was and touch the gunner's seat to see if it was hot. Uncle Ho stressed the need to economize on ammunition, not to fire just to scare off or drive away the enemy but to shoot him down on the spot and capture the pilot. In each gun crew six soldiers must act as one, in a battery six guns must act as one, all firing at one aircraft. When he visited our air force troops, Uncle Ho instructed them, "You boys should take a lesson from the Liberation Army of South Vietnam, you should grab the enemy's belt to fight him." Uncle Ho donated his entire life savings as a gift to the air defense soldiers defending Hanoi.

To carry out Chairman Ho Chi Minh's instructions, the Party Committee of the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch conducted studies that delved deeply into a number of major problems, such as the leadership and guidance requirements of a technical service branch; determining the relationship between destroying the enemy, protecting targets, and preserving our own forces; the relationship between political and technical matters; the relationship between people and weapons; teaching an understanding of the need to economize and to preserve our technical weapons and equipment; building coordination and solidarity to achieve collective feats of arms; stimulating every unit, every cadre, every soldier to seek good fighting methods and to exploit to the maximum the potential of the technical weapons we currently possessed to create a collective force to defeat the enemy. The Air Defense–Air Force Service Command, headed by Senior Colonel Phung The Tai as Military Commander and Senior Colonel Dang Tinh as Political Commissar, worked with the commands of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Missile, Air Force, and Radar Branches to study the operational procedures and attack tactics of enemy aircraft and to determine the strengths and weaknesses of both the enemy and ourselves. These studies were conducted through democratic discussions and were aimed at seeking fighting methods for use against the enemy.

Our anti-aircraft artillery troops held many specialized training programs on how to shoot down low-flying enemy aircraft, conducted supplemental training on combat procedures, held combined exercises with the air force, etc., simultaneously conducting vigorous training and field activities in all weather conditions. After a period of research conducted on the sites of many battles, the instructors from the Air Defense Officers School, with the enthusiastic cooperation of a number of instructor cadre from Hanoi University and the Hanoi University of Arts and Sciences, developed a table of calculations to determine where to site each firing section and each individual anti-aircraft gun to guarantee the placement of a steady and concentrated stream of fire during battles to protect specific targets.

Our missile troops held a conference to summarize combat operations for the year 1965, presenting at the conference many good experiences in moving our forces and constructing battle positions, in methods for firing at low-flying aircraft and in "guerrilla"-type fighting methods used by missile forces. In April

1966 a staff conference of the Missile Branch was convened to standardize the content of training classes, unify command and coordination activities during combat, and to standardize procedures for maintenance of equipment. After the conference, the Missile Branch held a training class for regiment- and battalion-level cadre and for a number of company level cadre and missile-firing team officers. The training class covered the work of studying the enemy and applying the combat leadership thoughts of our armed forces to the special circumstances and combat missions of our missile troops. Our missile battalions employed many types of wide-ranging, mass-type training, such as organizing classes to both teach and study, where good soldiers tutored those who were weak; studying during combat operations; studying while doing repairs and scheduled maintenance, etc. After receiving this excellent training, our missile troops step by step overcame the enemy's jamming tactics, continuing to fire missiles and maintain guidance on them during flight.

Our air force troops focused on improving our pilots' skills, practicing flying during bad weather conditions, low-altitude flying (including flying at low altitude over the ocean), flying at night, and attacking enemy aircraft at medium altitudes. At the same time they trained in the use of air-to-air missiles, in coordinated combat operations between Mig-17s and Mig-21s, in the use of small flight formations, and in the use of surprise and hit-and-run tactics.

Our radar troops focused on providing supplemental specialized training to our guidance operators and radar reporting personnel, combining theoretical training with practical training on actual radar machines to resolve technical problems in order to overcome the enemy's use of active and passive jamming equipment.

Along with these training activities, the organization and deployment of air defense forces in North Vietnam was also studied and adjusted. Because of the ever-increasing scale of combat operations, the use of air defense clusters whose principal organizational component was a regiment or battalion was no longer sufficient. The Air Defense-Air Force Service Command had a decentralized command organization, and we had been forced to establish a number of forward headquarters.

In June 1966 the General Staff decided to concentrate our main force air defense units into five divisions. The 361st, 363rd, 365th, and 369th Strategic Area Defense Divisions were formed, each with an authorized strength of between three and five anti-aircraft artillery regiments equipped with 57mm and 100mm guns. The 367th Mobile Air Defense Division had four anti-aircraft artillery regiments and one missile regiment. The scale of forces used in both static area defense and mobile air defense combat operations was expanded. Command organization and combat coordination between units, between anti-aircraft artillery, missiles, and air force aircraft, and between the air defense forces of our three types of troops was constantly improved. The birth of the air defense divisions was a new step forward in the development of our air defense-air force troops.

As soon as they were formed, our mobile and strategic area defense divisions displayed their coordinated combat power, shooting down many enemy aircraft. In July 1966 the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch undertook a mobile combat operation in the Thai Nguyen area. The combat forces involved in this operation consisted of three missile regiments and three anti-aircraft artillery regiments. In September 1966, while enemy aircraft were mounting concentrated, continuous attacks on the stretch of Route 1 from Ninh Binh to Thanh Hoa, the 367th Air Defense Division conducted mobile combat operations from Phu Ly to the area north of the Ghep ferry. In one month the division fought 664 engagements (608 engagements using anti-aircraft artillery and 56 engagements involving missile forces), protecting the main targets under attack and shooting down 24 enemy aircraft. These were mobile combat operations at the air defense division level, organized in a relatively complete fashion in one theater of operations. They prepared the way for our air defense–air force troops to mount concentrated combat operations at the campaign level in the future.

With regard to the defense of the coastal areas of North Vietnam, the General Staff and the headquarters of the various military regions employed a number of artillery units from our main force elements as the core of our defenses and greatly expanded the artillery forces assigned to local force units and militia forces in our coastal villages. At the same time we launched a movement for the entire population to fight the enemy, putting into practice the slogan “control the close-in coastal waters and drive enemy ships far out to sea,” and “the Party clings to the people, and the people cling to the ocean in order to increase production.” The staff research agencies of the Artillery Branch and instructors from the Artillery Officers School drafted a number of documents providing guidance in methods for constructing onshore fighting positions, determining firing times, methods for using survey tables and range-finders out at sea, etc.

Three regiments of towed artillery subordinate to the 324th, 325th, and 341st Infantry Divisions and three batteries of coastal artillery subordinate to the Navy were transformed into local force artillery units subordinate to the coastal provinces. In early 1966, the artillery forces defending the coastline of Military Region 4 consisted of 17 local force batteries, 16 militia artillery units, and a number of artillery subunits attached to the units defending the islands of Con Co, Hon Ngu, Hon Mat, etc. The artillery forces defending the coastline of Military Region 3, which were built around a number of battalions from the 57th and 154th Artillery Regiments, consisted of a number of clusters of firing positions located at Hai Hau in Nam Ha province; Hoang Hoa, Sam Son, and Tinh Gia in Thanh Hoa province; and on the islands of Hon Me, Hon De, and Nghi Son. Besides these forces, there were also the militia “water combat teams” of the coastal villages of Vinh Linh, Quang Binh, and Thanh Hoa provinces. These teams, equipped with recoilless rifles, handheld explosive charges, and sub-machine guns, regularly took their boats out to sea and, in coordination with our coastal artillery positions, attacked enemy commando vessels.

Between early 1965 and October 1966, the artillery forces of our three types of troops sank 16 puppet commando vessels, set another 19 puppet commando vessels¹⁹ on fire, and sank two seaplanes as they sat on the water. On 3 February 1966, Nghe An province's 15th Artillery Battery made the first counterbattery attack on an American destroyer²⁰ off the coast at Quynh Luu. On 22 April 1966, Ha Tinh province's 4th Artillery Battery hit and set afire a U.S. destroyer with the hull number "567." After October 1966 the American imperialists began using American cruisers and destroyers in place of puppet commando vessels to shell North Vietnam. The battle fought by our artillery forces to defend our coastlines would continue and change into a new phase.

PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE IN SOUTH VIETNAM

In South Vietnam, after our defeat of the American imperialists' first strategic counteroffensive, all battlefields rapidly strengthened their forces, consolidated their positions, and prepared for even more ferocious battles during the 1966-1967 dry season.

In its early 1966 resolution on building up armed forces, the COSVN Party Military Committee set forward the following guidance:

During 1966, we will primarily focus on strengthening, consolidating, and increasing the quality of the units we already have on hand and on receiving and properly handling the new forces we will receive from North Vietnam. With regard to our main force army, we will pay attention to building up divisions, but our main focus will be on ensuring that each individual regiment can truly fight well. We will expand our specialty branch forces, especially sappers and engineers, for attacking enemy lines of communications. With regard to our local force troops and guerrilla militia, the primary focus will also be on strengthening them and increasing their quality. Each separate battlefield may create additional units, depending on the battlefield's own individual capabilities, but we must ensure that any units so created actually have the strength and power they are supposed to have.²¹

Following these guidelines for force building, the COSVN Military Command and the military regions and fronts focused their attention on receiving new forces sent from the North, simultaneously sending cadre to localities to work with local Party committees to encourage the search for new recruits. In spite of many difficulties posed by the enemy's fierce "pacification" operations, the enemy's control over many heavily populated areas, and the heavy attrition still being suffered by our reinforcement troops during the long march down from North Vietnam, the total number of full-time troops on the South Vietnamese battlefield in 1966 grew by 32 percent over the total in 1965 (from 166,248 soldiers up to 219,640 soldiers). The main force troops subordinate to COSVN and to the

various military regions made up 68 percent (151,111 soldiers) of the total troop strength, and of that total the number of specialty branch troops had grown rather rapidly (artillery troops grew by 162 percent and sappers by 64 percent).

On 13 June 1966, the COSVN Military Command formed the 7th Infantry Division, consisting of the 141st, 165th, and 52nd Regiments, in our base area in Phuoc Long province in eastern Cochin China. The 5th and 9th Divisions and the various independent regiments were gathered together, consolidated, and underwent a number of adjustments appropriate to their new combat responsibilities.²² Each division was reorganized to add an additional battalion of 12.8mm anti-aircraft machine guns. Artillery Rocket Regiment 84A (which changed its designation to Regiment 72A), equipped with DKB rockets, and the 20th Composite Artillery Battalion (equipped with 75mm mountain guns and 120mm mortars) were added to the 69th Artillery Group to strengthen it.

In the Central Highlands, after receiving four additional regiments (the 24th, 88th, 101B, and 95B Regiments), the Central Highlands Front Command formed two understrength divisions in early 1966. Because of difficulties in providing these divisions with logistics support, however, in August 1966 both these divisions were disbanded. The main force units of the Central Highlands were organized into two separate elements. The mobile main force element consisted of the 1st Division (made up of the 66th, 320th, and 88th Regiments), Infantry Regiment 101B, and four battalions of mortars and anti-aircraft machine guns. The local main force element consisted of the 24th Regiment in Kontum, the 95B Regiment in Gia Lai [Pleiku], and the 33rd Regiment in Darlac. These regiments were assigned the mission of conducting combat operations behind enemy lines to directly support guerrilla warfare and to conduct combat operations in support of the front's mobile main force element.

In Region 5, the Military Region Command assigned the 31st Regiment, which had just arrived from North Vietnam, to the 2nd Division to bring it up to strength. The Military Region Command also transferred the 20th Regiment down to Khanh Hoa province to work with the 10th Regiment, operating in Phu Yen province, to serve as local main force elements in the Southern Subregion. The artillery forces of the Military Region were reinforced by the 368B Rocket Artillery Regiment, equipped with DKB rockets.

Including the 324th Division, which the High Command dispatched to the Route 9 Front in late 1966, the mobile main force elements of our armed forces in South Vietnam had now grown to eight infantry divisions,²³ one artillery division, a number of separate infantry regiments and battalions, and a number of specialty branch units.

While working to strengthen their forces, the COSVN Military Command and the military region and front commands devoted special attention to the issue of supplying and equipping our main force combat troops. In the Central Highlands, the soldiers and civilians of the various ethnic groups built a new transportation network from our main strategic road across to the east side of Route

14 and down to the provinces of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. The ordnance, weapons, and military pharmaceuticals workshops and the hospitals of Troop Station [Binh Tram] North, Troop Station Central, and Troop Station South in the Central Highlands were consolidated and strengthened. Medical Treatment Teams 80, 81, 82, and 83 were deployed in our various theaters of operations. In eastern Cochinchina, the COSVN Military Command established several new units, including Area Rear Services Groups 86 (Phuoc Long and Quang Duc provinces), 85 (Binh Long province), and 87 (Binh Thuan province) and Hospitals K-77B and K-97.

The rear services agencies of the various battlefields, transportation troop stations [binh tram], and area rear services groups properly handled the receipt of supplies from the supply transfer points belonging to Group 962 [ocean transport], Group 559, and Unit K-20 [ground transport]²⁴ and then rapidly transferred these supplies to points where they could be issued to the units and localities. During 1966 many new types of weapons and implements of war were sent to the battlefield, increasing the equipment of main force and local force units. In Cochinchina the number of B-40 anti-tank rocket launchers in each company in an infantry division increased from three launchers per company to nine launchers per company. Every regiment was issued 18 B-41 rocket launchers. The local force units of Tay Ninh and Binh Duong provinces had their allotment of B-40 rocket launchers increased from six per province to 70 per province. AK assault rifles were issued to units down to the local force level. Province local force battalions were issued 75mm recoilless rifles to replace their old 57mm recoilless guns, 82mm mortars to replace their 81mm mortars, and 12.8mm anti-aircraft machine guns to replace their old 12.7mm machine guns. Each main force battalion was equipped with a K-63 radio and a 15-watt transmitter. The artillery power of all of our main force elements was strengthened by the addition of DKB and A-12 rockets.

With regard to battlefield organization, pursuant to a decision of the Politburo, in April 1966 the Central Military Party Committee formed the Tri-Thien Military Region (designation: B4), using as its foundation the former Northern Subregion of Military Region 5. Major General Le Chuong was appointed Military Region Commander and concurrently Military Region Political Commissar. The armed forces in the Military Region's area of operations²⁵ were assigned the missions of intensifying their operations on all fronts, creating a new battlefield situation in Tri-Thien, and properly coordinating operations with other battlefields to prepare for all possible eventualities (including the possibility that the American imperialists might widen the ground war into central and lower Laos).²⁶

In June 1966 the Central Military Party Committee and the High Command decided to form the Route 9-Northern Quang Tri Front (designation: B5). Senior Colonel Vu Nam Long was appointed Front Commander and Major General Nguyen Xuan Hoang was appointed Front Political Commissar. This was a cor-

rect strategic decision that forced the American army to further disperse their forces, thereby enabling the soldiers and civilians of the lowlands of Cochin China and of the other battlefields to conduct their own operations. The Route 9–Northern Quang Tri Front became a battlefield of attrition where we could annihilate enemy troops, draw in and tie down a significant portion of the American forces, and prevent the Americans from sending additional forces down to the lowlands of the Mekong Delta. It was a battlefield we used for combat operations, to hone our forces, and to elevate the combined-arms combat capabilities of our strategic mobile main force units.

In Central Vietnam, the Military Region 5 Command directed and commanded the main force elements of Region 5 and the local armed forces of Region 5 and the Central Highlands. The High Command directly controlled the combat operations of the main force units in the Central Highlands.

In Cochin China and extreme southern Central Vietnam, in May 1966 the COSVN Military Party Committee established the Rung Sat Special Military Zone (Group 10) to strengthen control over military and force building activities in the Rung Sat base area. In October 1966 Region 10 was formed, consisting of two provinces from Region 6, Quang Duc and Phuoc Long, and Binh Long province from Region 7. Region 10 was formed to consolidate and strengthen our base areas in the mountains, to develop the transportation corridor, and to support combat operations by main force units.

COMBATING THE 1966–1967 DRY SEASON COUNTEROFFENSIVE

During the summer and fall of 1966, all battlefields stepped up combat operations in order to consolidate our battlefield posture, train and hone our troops, and develop the necessary battlefield posture and strength to enable us to conduct military operations during the 1966–1967 dry season. On the Route 9–Northern Quang Tri Front, sappers, working in cooperation with the 324th Infantry Division, crept deep inside the enemy's defensive system south of the Ben Hai River and assaulted a number of strong points. Vinh Linh local force troops crossed the Ben Hai River and worked with the guerrilla militia there to support people's uprisings that seized control of 22 hamlets in the districts of Gio Linh and Cam Lo. In the Tri-Thien Military Region, the main force 6th Regiment and provincial local force battalions moved down into the lowland districts, wiping out Regional Force and Popular Force outposts and supporting popular uprisings that liberated a large, contiguous area from Hai Lang in Quang Tri to Thanh Huong in Thua Thien. Sappers attacked a number of enemy positions inside Hue city. In the Central Highlands, the armed forces of our three types of soldiers were very active in the area west of Routes 14 and 19. Sappers from Military Region 5 attacked the Nuoc Man airfield, the U.S. military vehicle park at Cam Binh, etc. In eastern Cochin China COSVN's main force 9th and 5th Divisions

fought a number of regiment-sized battles at Can Dam, Can Le, Ka Tum, Xa Mat, and Long Khanh.

By the fall of 1966 the second phase of Westmoreland's "three-phase" strategic plan was over. The American imperialists had not been able to reach their goal of "searching out and destroying" our main force units in South Vietnam and had not been able to secure the battlefield initiative. Given their stubborn, aggressive, and warmongering nature, however, they hurriedly increased their forces. By the end of 1966 the number of U.S. and satellite troops stationed in South Vietnam had risen to 360,000 men, and the number of puppet troops had grown to 560,000. These forces included a total of 243 combat battalions (83 U.S. and satellite battalions and 160 puppet battalions). In comparison with 1965, the number of American expeditionary soldiers had doubled, and the number of aircraft, artillery pieces, and armored vehicles used in the war had tripled. They prepared to launch a new counteroffensive during the 1966-1967 dry season.

In October 1966, the Politburo of the Party Central Committee met in the capital city of Hanoi. The Politburo made the following assessment of the situation: "Although they have suffered a continuous string of failures, the American imperialists are now striving to increase their troop strength and their implements of war in order to step up their war of aggression with the objective of settling the Vietnam problem during the 1967-1968 period. The year 1967 will be of extremely great importance to both ourselves and the enemy."²⁷

The Politburo decided to intensify the military and the political struggle in South Vietnam, to defeat the second strategic counteroffensive the American imperialists were planning, and to create opportunities and conditions favorable to big operations in the future that would secure a great victory and change the face of the war. The combat operations of our main force units would have to be developed to a new level to meet our requirement to annihilate enemy battalions, to be able to annihilate entire American and satellite brigades, and to drive each individual puppet division to its knees.

In October 1966, the American imperialists launched their second strategic counteroffensive on the battlefields of South Vietnam. They concentrated their forces in the main theater, eastern Cochin China, the focal point of which was to be the Duong Minh Chau base area, simultaneously trying to suppress and tie us down in the other theaters: the 1st Tactical Zone (from Tri-Thien to Quang Ngai), the Central Highlands, the lowlands of Region 5, and the Mekong Delta. On the Route 9 Front the enemy carried out an active defense aimed at blocking our main force units. With regard to North Vietnam, the enemy increased the operations of his air and naval forces aimed at destroying economic and military installations and attacking our land and water transportation networks leading to the battlefield.

After previously using "search and destroy" as their primary tactic, the American imperialists switched to a two-pronged strategy of "search and destroy" and "pacification." The American troops were the primary force used in

the "search and destroy" prong aimed against our main force units. The puppet army was the primary force used in the "pacification" prong. The imperialists set out the following targets for the counteroffensive: the destruction of a significant portion of our main force army, the destruction of our resistance bases, "pacification" operations to gain population and greatly expand their area of control, relieving the pressure our forces were applying on them in the area surrounding Saigon, and the achievement of a military victory that would change the character of the war by mid- or late 1967.

The United States believed the annihilation of our resistance command organization in South Vietnam and the annihilation of our main force divisions in eastern Cochin China would be a decisive blow that could end the war. Therefore, for their second strategic counteroffensive the U.S. Command concentrated in this theater of operations a total of three U.S. divisions, four U.S. brigades, two puppet brigades, and one reinforced battalion of Australian troops. This force constituted 52 percent of the U.S. infantry strength and 40 percent of the total U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam.

Correctly assessing the enemy's schemes and actions, in early October 1966 the COSVN Military Party Committee and the COSVN Military Command ordered the 9th division and local armed forces to launch a wave of operations in the Tay Ninh province area to seize the initiative, to deliver a preemptive blow to the enemy as he was in the process of implementing his counteroffensive plan, and to protect the Duong Minh Chau base area. At the same time our forces were ordered to prepare and be ready to switch to launching counterattacks should the enemy mount a sweep into our bases. The 5th Division was ordered to mount supporting operations in the Ba Ria-Long Khanh area.

On 4 November 1966, the United States landed troops by helicopter at Bau Gon, launching their Operation "Attleboro" to sweep through the Duong Minh Chau base area.²⁸ Utilizing fortifications that had been prepared in advance, the 9th Battalion of the 16th Regiment drove back two successive enemy attacks, eliminating 600 troops from the field of battle. The American general commanding the 196th Brigade was relieved of his command on the battlefield. The regiments of the 9th Division flexibly employed mobile attack tactics, inflicting attrition and, alongside the cadre and personnel of the staff agencies and units in our base area, killed thousands of enemy troops. On 26 November the American forces were forced to withdraw from the Duong Minh Chau base area.

In order to prepare a springboard position for further attacks into our base area, and at the same time to implement their plan to expand the security perimeter on the northern approaches to Saigon, on 8 January 1967 over 30,000 U.S., puppet, and satellite troops²⁹ launched Operation Cedar Falls to sweep through the Cu Chi-Ben Cat-Ben Suc area, the so-called Iron Triangle. The 2nd Regiment of the 9th Division, together with the local people's armed forces of Saigon-Gia Dinh, used the network of tunnels and fortifications belonging to our combat villages to resolutely block the enemy advance, inflicting more than 3,000 casualties

on their forces. On 26 January 1967 the American and puppet troops were forced to halt the sweep operation. The Saigon-Gia Dinh City Party Committee, the Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Command, and COSVN's main force 16th Regiment continued to maintain a firm foothold on the "steel earth" of Cu Chi.

Having been unable to achieve their objectives during two large operations, the American military urgently prepared a new attack against the Duong Minh Chau base area. Beginning in early February 1967, every day the enemy sent thousands of truckloads of ammunition to their assembly areas at Hon Quan, Minh Thanh, Dau Tieng, Suoi Da, and Tay Ninh city. B-52 strategic bombers and tactical aircraft mounted continuous bombing attacks and spread poisonous chemicals to burn off the jungle vegetation along the roadsides and riverbanks in order to prepare their routes of advance and landing zones.

COSVN, the COSVN Military Party Committee, and the COSVN Military Command provided guidance to our units and local areas, directing them to urgently prepare to engage the enemy.

The Duong Minh Chau base area lay in a large, sparsely populated jungle mountain area in Tay Ninh province. First formed during the resistance war against the French and further built up during the resistance war against the Americans, Duong Minh Chau had become a large base area in Tay Ninh, a place where we had concentrated many vital command and staff organizations, such as COSVN, the headquarters of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam, the COSVN Military Party Committee, and Liberation Radio. In order to utilize the combined strength of people's war in a base area that was almost devoid of civilian population to repel a massive military operation conducted by U.S. troops, the COSVN Military Command decided to divide the base area into many large and small battle areas that were designated "districts," "villages," and "hamlets." The "hamlets" linked together to form combat "villages," and our fortified areas were able to support one another. All cadre and personnel assigned to the staff organizations of the COSVN Military Command and the various Party and National Liberation Front organizations (totaling almost 10,000 personnel) were organized into local armed forces and equipped with infantry weapons and B-40 anti-tank rocket launchers. The 1st, 2nd, and 16th Regiments of the 9th Division and the 3rd Regiment were all given additional artillery and mortars and were deployed in mobile positions west of Route 22 and east of Route 13. All staff organizations and military units were issued a three-month supply of food and ammunition. Combat fortifications were consolidated and extended. A command communications network was extended out to each individual area. Soldiers and self-defense forces of staff agencies trained and conducted field exercises in accordance with the combat plan. Instructions on "crushing the two-pronged attack by the Americans and their puppets" and a document on the "situation and duties for 1967" were prepared by COSVN and the COSVN Military Party Committee and were disseminated to every cadre and soldier. From a virtually unpopulated mountain region, the Duong Minh Chau base area was built

up into an interconnected fortified area with numerous combat forces organized into three types of troops. The soldiers and civilians of the provinces of Tay Ninh, Binh Long, Thu Dau Mot, Ba Ria, Long Khanh, and of Saigon-Gia Dinh intensified their activities of all types in support of the armed forces in our base area.

On 22 February 1967, the enemy, using 45,000 soldiers, 11,000 vehicles (including 2,000 tanks and armored personnel carriers), and 600 aircraft³⁰ launched Operation Junction City to attack and destroy the Duong Minh Chau base area. Combining helicopter assault landings with vehicle-mounted assault columns advancing from many different directions, the American and puppet soldiers surrounded and isolated a campaign area covering a large region (from Bau Co-Dong Pan, west of Route 22, all the way out to the Cambodian border). They then sent many attack spearheads deep into the base area. This was the largest operation of the second strategic counteroffensive, and it also was the largest offensive ever conducted by American forces in South Vietnam.

With preprepared positions, the self-defense units of our staff organizations seized the initiative and attacked the enemy as soon as their troops hit the ground. During the first day our soldiers killed almost 200 American troops, hit and knocked out 16 armored vehicles, and shot down 16 aircraft of all types. Our main force regiments launched mobile assaults on enemy command headquarters, troop concentrations, artillery parks, and vehicle parks at Trang A Lan, Dong Pan, Bau Co, and Trang Bang. After almost one month of sweep operations the American troops still had not attained their objectives. We had fought them everywhere, their forces had suffered attrition,³¹ and their soldiers were tired and confused. General Seaman, the commander of the operation, was relieved of command. In mid-March 1967 the American soldiers were forced to pull their forces back into separate defensive clusters to prepare for a new round of attacks.

Phase one of the campaign was over. Our units had all made outstanding combat achievements, but there had not yet been any big battles of annihilation. The COSVN Military Command instructed all units to draw lessons from their combat experiences to combat the problems of being afraid to concentrate troops to fight big battles and of fear of the American tanks. Our rear services groups quickly issued additional weapons and ammunition, especially B-40 rocket launchers and B-40 rockets. Determined to achieve a complete victory in this campaign, the COSVN Military Command decided to concentrate our main force units to fight one or two battles aimed at annihilating entire American battalions and simultaneously using our local forces to mount widespread combat activities.

On 18 March, the enemy launched an attack from two directions, continuing its attack into the northeastern sector of the base area. The self-defense teams of our staff agencies resolutely fought them off, wiping out small, scattered enemy units and enabling our main force troops to mass for battle.

On 19 March, the 3rd Regiment assaulted a troop concentration of the 1st Brigade, U.S. 9th Division, at Bau Bang, eliminating from the field of combat 400 enemy troops and destroying 63 armored vehicles. On 20 March, the 2nd and

16th Regiments, coordinating their actions closely, inflicted heavy casualties on a U.S. troop concentration at Dong Rum. The 3rd Brigade of the U.S. 4th Division was rendered combat ineffective (suffering casualties of over 1,200 men, losing 72 armored vehicles and 19 artillery pieces, and ten aircraft destroyed). On 31 March the 1st Regiment and the 7th Battalion of the 16th Regiment attacked an American troop concentration at Trang Ba Vung, inflicting heavy casualties on one infantry battalion and one artillery battalion of the 2nd Brigade, U.S. 1st Division.

Although they had used a heavy concentration of tanks and armored personnel carriers, creating a powerful and overwhelming assault force for their sweep operation, the American forces were unable to attain their objectives. Having suffered severe casualties, they were finally forced to withdraw from the sweep area. One-third of their troops (14,000 men), half of their artillery (112 artillery pieces), one-third of their tanks and armored personnel carriers (775 vehicles), and 160 aircraft had been eliminated from the field of combat.³² On our side, 280 cadre and soldiers were killed, including 38 self-defense troops of our staff agencies.

Having correctly assessed the plots and actions of the enemy, actively prepared the battlefield, skillfully organized our staff agencies and main force units into an armed force with three types of troops, employed efficient fighting methods, and launched attacks both within and outside of the area covered by the enemy sweep, our soldiers on the battlefield of eastern Cochin China had inflicted attrition on the enemy, wiping out many enemy troops and implements of war, preserved our own forces, protected our leadership agencies and our bases, and defeated the biggest "search and destroy" operation to be launched by the American imperialists during their 1966–1967 dry season offensive.

In the Central Highlands, implementing the strategic coordination plan for all of South Vietnam, the Front Command launched an offensive campaign against the enemy in northwestern Kontum province. The civilian population of the Central Highlands ethnic minority people transported thousands of tons of rice to our troop assembly areas. The 66th, 32nd, and 88th Regiments of the 1st Division, Regiment 101B, and the 200th and 32nd Artillery Battalions, together with local armed forces, established an in-depth combat position in which the area where we were determined to fight was the area west of the Po-Co and Sa Thay Rivers. The 24th and 33rd Regiments stepped up their activities to lure enemy forces to the areas north of Kontum and north of Ban Me Thuot. Regiment 95B and the engineer and signal units of the Front Command conducted a heavy program of deception operations. The U.S. Command hastily moved a brigade of the Air Cavalry Division up into the Central Highlands, where the brigade, together with puppet troops, launched Operation Paul Revere in the area west of the Po-Co and Sa Thay Rivers, an area they suspected was the rear area for our campaign. Artfully manipulating the enemy and relying on the battle positions that we had prepared beforehand, the main force regiments of the Cen-

tral Highlands Front eliminated from the field of combat over 2,000 enemy troops. In early 1967, the American and puppet forces were forced to pull their forces back to defend the area east of the Po-Co River. Our armed forces on the Central Highlands battlefield, which had been reinforced by the 174th Regiment of the 316th Division and the newly formed 40th Artillery Regiment³³ maintained the initiative in the campaign by continuing to attack the enemy, forcing the Americans to withdraw their forces from the Sa Thay and Sung Thien areas and retreat to defend Kontum and Pleiku cities.

On the Route 9 Front, the American policy was to conduct an active defense aimed at blocking offensive operations by our main force units. In February 1967 they sent the U.S. 3rd Marine Division and two puppet regimental task forces to the area south of the Demilitarized Zone to build a system of strongly fortified defensive strong points, including a firebase at Hill 241 where seven artillery units (including eight 175mm guns) were stationed. From this firebase their artillery fired continuous barrages, creating an arc of fire from Dong Ha through the villages north of the Demilitarized Zone all the way to the western portion of Route 9.

Rocket Artillery Regiment 84B, equipped with DKB rockets, was ordered to cross the Ben Hai River and, in cooperation with elements of the 164th Artillery Regiment equipped with H-6 rockets and 120mm and 82mm mortars and with artillery belonging to the 324th Infantry Division, to attack the enemy. On 28 February 1967, an ammunition transportation squad of Regiment 84B, consisting of ten soldiers under the command of Deputy Platoon Leader Bui Ngoc Du, unexpectedly encountered enemy troops in the area of Cu Dinh Mountain in Cam Lo district, Quang Tri province. The squad drove off 15 separate assaults launched by 200 American Marines, killing 41 enemy troops, capturing nine weapons, and protecting the secrecy of the coming battle.

During the night of 6-7 March 1967, having chosen the most advantageous time, our artillery poured more than 1,000 rounds of all types onto Base 241, killing 1,490 American troops and destroying 80 percent of this enemy base, including 22 large artillery pieces and 35 military vehicles. This was the first large-scale attack by fire employing DKB rockets to be launched in South Vietnam, and it achieved a high degree of combat effectiveness.

In mid-March 1967, the 164th Artillery Regiment of Military Region 4 sent two of its battalions, the 1st Battalion, equipped with 11 100mm guns, and the 11th Battalion, equipped with nine 105mm howitzers, all the way down to the northern bank of the Ben Hai River to prepare to attack the enemy. A regimental observation post, under the command of Platoon Leader Trinh Van Xuat, was placed at the top of the 32-meter-high flagpole north of the Hien Luong Bridge. The civilian population of Bau hamlet, Vinh Thuy village, used wood and bamboo to line the roads to allow the artillery pieces to move. The Thuy Ba cooperative even used their water buffalo to tow the guns to help our soldiers get through the narrowest sections of the road. At dusk on 20 March 1967 our obser-

vation post noted that the enemy had just sent two U.S. Marine Battalions, an artillery battalion, and 30 armored personnel carriers to reinforce the Doc Mieu base (located six kilometers south of Hien Luong). Seizing this opportunity, our artillery fired a barrage of 1,120 rounds of artillery, which we then followed up with 350 rounds of 82mm mortars. During this artillery attack we killed over 1,000 enemy troops and destroyed 17 artillery pieces, 57 military vehicles, and three helicopters.

Also during the night of 20 March, taking advantage of the enemy's pre-occupation with trying to deal with our artillery at Doc Mieu, the 4th Battalion of Regiment 84B, assisted by infantry elements, carried 78 launchers and 258 A-12 rockets across the Ben Hai River. Moving rapidly, our soldiers marched 20 kilometers south to fire a barrage at enemy positions in Dong Ha. Our forces then withdrew safely to Vinh Linh before dawn.

On 13 April 1967, Chairman Ho Chi Minh sent a letter of commendation to our artillery troops. He wrote, "Our artillery has the glorious tradition of having legs of bronze and shoulders of iron, of fighting well and firing accurately." He said, however, "Do not become overconfident because of your victories. You must strive to learn from and emulate the skillful, heroic artillery troops of the Liberation Army of South Vietnam. You must maintain a high 'determined to fight, determined to win' spirit, maintain excellent and close coordination with other friendly units and with the people, economize on the use of ammunition, fight well and fire accurately, and accomplish many more feats of arms."³⁴ Uncle Ho's words of instruction, "legs of bronze and shoulders of iron, fight well and fire accurately," became the eight golden tradition words and the slogan of the heroic Artillery Branch.

This counterpunch thrown by our artillery troops terrified the American troops. They had to pull back from a number of their strong points, and at the same time they sent many waves of B-52 strategic bombers and attack aircraft to bomb our artillery firing positions. The 238th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment was dispatched to Vinh Linh by the High Command to strike back at the enemy. During a 600-kilometer march through many steep passes and across many enemy bombing choke points, the 238th Missile Regiment overcame a great many difficulties, protecting its weapons and equipment. The regiment built its firing positions within range of the enemy artillery south of the Ben Hai River. In May 1967 the regiment shot down one B-52 and a number of enemy attack aircraft.

Exploiting the independent fighting methods of the artillery and missile forces, the main force troops of the Route 9 Front wiped out many enemy troops and implements of war and lured in and tied down a significant element of the American and puppet armies, thereby enabling the other battlefields, and most directly the Tri-Thien battlefield, to step up their own operations.

In Tri-Thien, during the night of 5 April our sapper troops, in coordination with infantry forces, simultaneously attacked a number of targets in Quang Tri

city, the headquarters of the puppet 1st Regiment, 1st Division, at La Vang, and the headquarters of the puppet 3rd Regiment, 1st Division, at Tu Ha. In these battles we killed almost 2,000 enemy, including a number of puppet tyrants, and helped the people in 30 villages rise up in insurrection. The liberated zone of Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces was expanded right up to the edges of the towns and cities and even to the edge of Hue city. The guerrilla forces of the lowland districts rose to more than 10,000 soldiers. Each district now had one or two local force companies.

In Region 5 the battle against enemy "pacification" was fierce and vicious. In the contested areas, 27 U.S. battalions and 21 battalions of South Korean troops launched many sweep operations aimed at pushing back our main force units. In the lowlands, 54 puppet battalions conducted "pacification," totally destroying 300 villages and hamlets. Over 200,000 residents of our liberated zones were forced into areas that were under the control of the enemy. The people of the lowlands of Region 5 conducted face-to-face political struggles combined with wide-ranging combat operations by local armed forces, resolutely holding onto our liberated zone. In a number of villages, our guerrillas stayed in place, driving back the enemy troops conducting their sweeps. In the contested areas, the Military Region's main force units fought a number of highly productive battles, supporting local armed forces and population in combating "pacification." The 12th and 22nd Regiments of the 3rd Division ambushed enemy forces at Long Giang in Binh Dinh, annihilating four companies of the U.S. Air Cavalry Division, and attacked a base held by U.S. artillery and one U.S. infantry battalion at Xuan Son. The 1st Regiment, 2nd Division, inflicted heavy casualties on a South Korean battalion holding a fortified position at Quang Thach in Quang Nam province. The 31st Regiment, 2nd Division, which had just arrived from North Vietnam, won a victory in its very first engagement, overrunning the Trung Phuoc strong point held by 600 puppet troops. During an ambush on a stretch of road between Huong An and Ba Ren, the regiment destroyed 200 vehicles. The 99th Rocket Battalion, equipped with A-12 rockets, with the help of the Party committees and civilian population of Da Nang and of Hoa Vang and Dien Ban districts, covertly moved its launchers and rockets right up to the edge of the Da Nang airfield. On 22 February 1967 the battalion fired 160 A-12 rockets at their targets, destroying 94 aircraft and 200 military vehicles and killing many pilots and technical personnel. The airfields at Nha Trang and Chu Lai, as well as many other bases of the Americans, their puppets, and their satellite nations, were also attacked by our sappers, artillerymen, and the other armed forces of the Military Region.

In the lowlands of Cochin China, the People's War spread like wildfire. The local force troops of Long An, My Tho, Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Can Tho, and Rach Gia provinces wiped out or inflicted heavy casualties on a number of enemy battalions operating outside defensive fortifications. In October 1966, Military Region 9's 1st Regiment, together with local armed forces, attacked and caused

a puppet regiment at Go Quao, Rach Gia province, to disintegrate. On 28 March 1967, the 1st Regiment, supported by artillery and sappers, sank eight U.S. vessels on the Ham Luong River, eliminating from the field of battle more than 1,000 enemy soldiers. Sapper and commando troops of Saigon-Cho Lon and of the Rung Sat Sapper Group sank U.S. vessels on the Long Tau River and attacked the Long Binh logistics depot and the Tan Son Nhat airfield, inflicting many losses on the enemy and disrupting his rear area. Of special note was an action on 1 November 1966. Two 75mm recoilless rifle teams from the 6th Binh Tan Battalion and from the Rung Sat Special Zone, with the help of the local population, fired accurately into the grandstands of a parade being put on by the puppet army to celebrate the Saigon puppet government's "National Day," spreading complete panic through the entire gathering.

The 1966-1967 dry season ended. With 400,000 American and satellite troops and 800,000 puppet troops and 895 continuous sweep operations, the enemy still had not achieved the target objectives of his second strategic counteroffensive. His losses in manpower and implements of war were much greater than those incurred during the 1965-1966 dry season.³⁵

Our soldiers and civilians on the battlefields of South Vietnam had maintained the strategic initiative, successfully combined force building with combat operations, developed many innovative fighting methods, defeated the enemy's two-pronged ("search and destroy" and "pacification") plan of attack, and enabled the revolutionary war against the Americans to save the nation to develop to a new, higher level.

THE WAR IN NORTH VIETNAM

In North Vietnam, in coordination with their strategic counteroffensive in South Vietnam, the American imperialists further escalated their war of destruction. They increased their total number of aircraft, the number of sorties flown, and the quantity of bombs dropped, launched massive aerial assault waves against Hanoi, Haiphong, and a number of other cities, towns, and industrial installations, and sowed mines in the mouths of a number of our rivers and in our coastal waterways.

On 20 April 1967, over 100 U.S. aircraft bombed many targets in Haiphong city, initiating a continuous bombardment program against the center of the city. The 363rd Air Defense Division, with three regiments and two separate battalions of anti-aircraft artillery, the 285th Missile Regiment, and local anti-aircraft forces, fought heroically, firmly protecting the flow of international aid through the port of Haiphong. In 1967 the soldiers and civilians of the city shot down 142 enemy aircraft and captured many pilots.

Predicting that the enemy would launch large attacks against Hanoi, the General Staff and the Air Defense-Air Force Command transferred forces to

strengthen the curtain of anti-aircraft fire protecting the skies over the capital city of Hanoi. During the first months of 1967, half of the anti-aircraft artillery units, including two divisions, four separate regiments, and three separate battalions, and all of the Air Force combat regiments of the Air Defense–Air Force Service Branch, were assigned the mission of defending Hanoi. The City Party Committee, the City People's Committee, and the Capital Military Command mobilized and organized collective farmers and workers, cadre and personnel from governmental agencies, youths, students, and city block committees into cells and teams to fire at enemy aircraft with infantry weapons. They also mobilized thousands of laborers to assist our troops in building firing positions. Hundreds of anti-aircraft artillery firing positions, missile firing positions, and firing positions for the self-defense militia combat teams appeared in the rice and vegetable fields on the city's outskirts, under the pillars of the Long Bien Bridge, and on bamboo rafts floating on the city's Western Lake [Ho Tay]. Over half of the residents of the inner city were evacuated. Thousands of fortifications protected supplies and machinery. Tens of thousands of individual shelter holes and bomb shelters were built in the factories, schools, and along the city streets. Chairman Ho Chi Minh, the Party Central Committee, the Cabinet, and the High Command in Hanoi all directly monitored and provided guidance for the battle to protect the Capital and the entire nation.

On 25 April 1967, the enemy sent over 300 aircraft sorties to bomb Hanoi, initiating the most ferocious bombing campaign of 1967. With a high spirit of combat readiness and a resolve to concentrate our forces to protect the important targets and to attack the enemy when he was still far away on his approach to the target, our missile soldiers and anti-aircraft soldiers, together with the air defense forces of our three types of troops, put up a ferocious resistance. On 25 April Hanoi shot down ten enemy aircraft. On 26 April it shot down eight aircraft. A number of aircraft were shot down and crashed on the spot in the fields of the districts of Dong Anh, Tu Liem, etc., on the city's outskirts. Our air force troops made many flights, coordinating well with our ground air defense forces, and on one occasion shot down three aircraft in a single day (16 July 1967).

On 19 May 1967, in celebration of Chairman Ho Chi Minh's 77th birthday, the soldiers and civilians of Hanoi scored an outstanding feat of arms, shooting down eight enemy aircraft. An American aircraft crashed right on Le Truc Street. An American pilot was captured on Thuy Khue Street.

Having suffered heavy losses in his attacks on Hanoi, in June 1967 the enemy had to shift his attacks to the lines of communications from Haiphong and Lang Son to Hanoi and from Hanoi to Military Region 4. The Air Defense–Air Force Service Command swiftly shifted a number of units to these theaters to combat the enemy, at the same time continuing to maintain an appropriately sized force to protect our strategic sites and to defend our lines of communications and dike system during the rainy season. In August 1967 the enemy again concentrated his attacks on striking Hanoi and mining the port of Haiphong. With

increased forces³⁶ that were properly deployed and with combat coordination between the specialty branches, the air defense forces of our three types of troops and the soldiers and civilians of Hanoi and Haiphong crushed the massive attacks launched by the American air forces. In 1967 Hanoi shot down 191 aircraft and captured many pilots. Among these aircraft was the 2,000th aircraft shot down over all of North Vietnam. On 5 November 1967 Chairman Ho Chi Minh sent a letter of commendation to the soldiers and civilians of the Capital. He wrote, "This achievement is a practical remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution."

During the heroic fight to defend Hanoi and Haiphong, our air defense-air force troops reached a new level of maturity in their command organization and their ability to conduct large-scale combined-arms combat, mounting combat operations equivalent to anti-aircraft campaigns to protect area targets and transportation lines.

Alongside Hanoi and Haiphong, the soldiers and civilians of all local areas in North Vietnam continued to increase production, intensify combat operations, and vigorously provide all types of support to South Vietnam. During the last months of 1967, there were many days when we shot down ten enemy aircraft throughout North Vietnam, and the highest one-day total was 19 aircraft (on 19 November). During a battle on 17 October 1967 a 37mm anti-aircraft battalion protecting Dap Cau shot down five aircraft, four of which crashed on the spot. The women's militia platoon of Hoa Loc village, Hau Loc district, Thanh Hoa province, and many other self-defense militia units shot down American jet aircraft using only infantry weapons. Quang Binh province's 85mm artillery battery damaged the U.S. destroyer *O'Brian* (on 23 December 1966) and the U.S. cruiser *Canberra* (on 1 March 1967) while they were shelling the coastal areas of North Vietnam.

The great victory of the soldiers and civilians of North Vietnam in crushing this highest level of escalation of the first war of destruction conducted by the American pirates supported and kept pace with the battles being waged by our soldiers and civilians in South Vietnam, defeating the maximum effort of more than one million U.S., puppet, and satellite troops in their second strategic counteroffensive. The Vietnam People's War and the courageous, innovative fighting methods of the People's Army of Vietnam clearly demonstrated our ability to defeat the large, modernly equipped American imperialist army of aggression. America's "limited war" strategy faced bankruptcy. New capabilities and new opportunities had been opened up for our soldiers and civilians to use to secure even greater victories.

The People's Army, Together with the Entire Population, Conducts the General Offensive and Uprising of Tet 1968

ORGANIZATIONAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE TET OFFENSIVE

By defeating two successive counteroffensives by the American imperialists in South Vietnam and defeating their war of destruction against North Vietnam, our soldiers and civilians had, to a significant extent at least, defeated the U.S. "limited war" strategy. In South Vietnam our army continued to hold and exploit the strategic initiative. The armed forces of our three types of soldiers had expanded quickly and had, through the flexible use of a number of different tactics, destroyed a large portion of the enemy's manpower and implements of warfare. When measured against the political and military objectives the Americans had set for themselves, and viewed in the context of America's actual political, economic, and social situation, the U.S. war effort in Vietnam had reached its apex.¹ Because, however, they had not been able to attain the objectives they had set for themselves in Vietnam, from a strategic standpoint the American imperialists were caught "between a rock and a hard place." A number of their key leadership personnel became disillusioned.² The campaign for the U.S. presidential elections in 1968 further diverted the U.S. ruling clique. However, because of their stubborn, aggressive nature and their confidence in their own strength, the American imperialists continued to send additional troops into South Vietnam,³ intensified the air war of destruction against North Vietnam, and made rapid preparations to launch a third strategic counteroffensive during the 1967-1968 dry season.

Assessing the situation from every angle and clearly recognizing the strategic situation and opportunity that had appeared, in April 1967 the Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee discussed a policy for achieving a decisive victory. Pursuant to the Politburo's resolve, the General Staff sent many cadre groups to all our battlefields to assess the situation and to encourage the battlefields to ready forces and supplies for use in a strategic offensive. The Central

Military Party Committee recalled a number of leadership cadre from the battlefields to report on the situation and to participate in the formulation of a strategic combat plan.

In June 1967 the Politburo approved our strategic resolve: Although our fundamental strategy was still based on the concept of a protracted war, the Politburo decreed that we would increase our subjective efforts to the maximum extent possible in order to secure a decisive victory within a relatively short period of time (which we projected to be sometime during the year of 1968). If we wished to achieve this goal, we would have to defeat the Americans militarily and change the nature of the war in South Vietnam.

In July 1967 the General Staff briefed the Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee on a plan to intensify revolutionary warfare to the highest level through a general offensive—general uprising. The plan called for us to concentrate our military and political forces to launch a simultaneous surprise attack against the enemy's weakest point: his urban areas. The principal theaters of operations would be Saigon, Hue, and Da Nang. Using powerful main force units, we would crush every large puppet army unit, at the same time luring away and tying down U.S. mobile forces in the mountain jungle battlefields (Tri-Thien, Central Highlands, and eastern Cochin China). We would coordinate the operations of the three attack spearheads [military, political, and military proselytizing] in all three strategic areas to annihilate and crush a significant portion of the military forces of the United States and its puppets, change the basic balance of forces on the battlefield, and crush the American imperialist will to commit aggression.

Our strategic intentions and the combat plan were held in strict secrecy. The Central Military Party Committee itself directed and encouraged the various battlefields in carrying out a number of preparatory measures, especially measures to increase the capability of our main force troops to fight large battles of annihilation.⁴ In late July 1967 the Central Military Party Committee held a study seminar on the new situation, our new responsibilities, and problems related to combined-arms combat aimed at meeting the requirement of annihilating American brigades. One hundred fifty mid- and high-level cadre from the general departments, service branches, specialty branches, and large mobile units attended this seminar. After this study seminar, all units held political and military study seminars for cadre at all levels.

A number of training documents written by the General Staff, such as "Company, battalion, and regimental attacks against enemy forces holding fortified positions," "Company Commanders' Handbook," etc., were used in these study seminars, helping to provide our cadre, especially our basic-level cadre, with a uniform system of tactical thought, a command presence, and the ability to manage their troops during combined-arms operations.

The organizational structure and equipment of our strategic mobile divisions, the 308th, 304th, 320th, and 312th, was strengthened. Training of these

divisions was increased to ensure they would be ready for battle when the order was given.

On 19 March 1967, our sapper troops were recognized by the Party, Government, and the High Command as an official specialty branch of the people's armed forces of Vietnam. Chairman Ho Chi Minh, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, and Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Minister of Defense, came to speak with representatives of our sapper cadre and soldiers during the ceremony officially establishing this specialty branch.

Uncle Ho said, "Sapper [dac cong] means special tasks [cong tac dac biet]. This title is a special honor and requires a special effort."

To a sapper, the word "special" permeates every action, from his training through the time when he sets off for battle to the time when he returns. "Your mind must be especially flexible. Your tactics require special practical training. Your political thinking must be especially firm. Your discipline must be especially strict. Your resolve to fight the enemy, your resolve to destroy the enemy also must be especially high."⁵

During 1967 the Sapper Branch trained 3,835 soldiers, provided basic training to 457 new cadre, and supplemental or branch transfer training to 527 cadre from platoon commanders up through battalion commanders. To implement our Party's strategic resolve to vigorously prepare our forces, the sapper branch sent to the battlefields 2,563 cadre and soldiers. These sapper reinforcements were organized into one battalion, 40 teams, seven battalion cadre framework units, and 30 sapper team cadre framework units.

Along the strategic transportation route, Group 559 reorganized its forces into nine troop stations, using as their standard a two-night trip by truck. The vehicle assets of the Group rose from 3,570 trucks in 1966 to 5,372 trucks in 1967. The number of transportation units in the Group increased by five battalions. Senior Colonel Dong Sy Nguyen, Deputy Director of the General Rear Services Department, was appointed as Commander of Group 559. By the end of 1967 Group 559 had built a solid road network with a total of 2,959 kilometers of vehicle-capable roads (275 kilometers of main road, 445 kilometers of secondary road, 822 kilometers of connector roads, 576 kilometers of bypass roads, and 450 kilometers of entry roads into storage areas). Meanwhile, on the forward route managed by the General Rear Services Department, Troop Stations 9, 12, 14, and 16 stockpiled supplies for shipment to Group 559. By October 1967 the quantity of supplies stockpiled in the warehouses at the western end of Route 12 had risen to 10,000 tons, and the quantity of supplies at Route 20 was 4,000 tons.

On 5 November 1967 the entire 559 corridor began to implement the 1967-1968 dry season plan with a total of 61,000 tons of supplies provided to the Group by higher authority. This quantity was double the tonnage for the 1966-1967 dry season. The objective of the plan was to pre-position the supply requirements for the battlefields.

In September 1967 the Cabinet of the Government convened a conference

of the people's air defense in North Vietnam. The conference drew lessons from our experiences in organization, early warning, and constructing shelters, camouflage, dispersion, rescue, and damage repair after enemy attacks. These lessons were aimed at protecting our people, protecting production, and keeping open our logistics transportation artery to the battlefields. The manpower resources of North Vietnam would be mobilized on a massive scale to further strengthen the combat forces of the army and satisfy the need to provide reinforcements to the battlefields.

Shoulder to shoulder with the entire population, our army proceeded to carry out the first step in the preparations for a new combat phase in accordance with the strategic intentions of the Party. In August 1967, the Central Military Party Committee launched a campaign "to improve the quality and increase the combat strength of the people's armed forces and to resolve to defeat the American aggressors."

In South Vietnam, in accordance with the Politburo's plan for a general offensive and uprising, in October 1967 COSVN dissolved Military Region 7 and the Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Region and in their place formed a "Focal Point Region" [khu trong diem], including Saigon and a number of neighboring provinces. Comrade Nguyen Van Linh, member of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Secretary of COSVN, personally assumed the position of Party Secretary of this region. Comrade Vo Van Kiet was appointed Deputy Party Secretary. The "Focal Point Region" consisted of six subregions.⁶ Armed forces assigned to each subregion consisted of between two and four battalions, each of which was given a compact organizational structure and light equipment to turn them into "spearhead battalions" to attack into the heart of Saigon to support and relieve the sapper and commando teams that would attack and seize the key targets. Subregion 6 (the precincts of Saigon city) had 11 sapper and commando teams organized into three troop concentrations: east, south, and north. The organizational structure of the military forces of the subregions ensured we would have both a spearhead and an in-depth deployment of forces capable of mounting a simultaneous attack from many different directions into Saigon. COSVN's main force army⁷ was reinforced by the 88th Infantry Regiment from the Central Highlands and the 568th Infantry Regiment, six separate infantry battalions, two battalions of DKB rockets (the 96th and 208th Battalions), four battalions of 82mm mortars, and a number of engineer, signal, sapper, and chemical defense units,⁸ which had just arrived from North Vietnam. The plan called for the main force units to attack and block American and puppet divisions located north, northwest, and east of Saigon to protect the rear of the subregion forces attacking the city. To strengthen command, COSVN and the COSVN Military Command established the First Forward Command Headquarters, responsible for the eastern and northern wings and for the main force units. The Second Forward Command Headquarters commanded the western and southern wings and forces inside the city.

Military Regions 6, 8, 9, and 10 mobilized their guerrilla troops and drafted new recruits locally to form additional battalions and companies subordinate to the regions and provinces to provide additional forces for the attacks on the cities and towns.

In Region 5 the Military Region's main force army was reinforced with the 577th Rocket Regiment⁹ (with DKB rockets). The 401st Sapper Regiment was formed, combining the military region's 406th and 409th Sapper Battalions with the 403rd Sapper Battalion, which had just arrived from North Vietnam. This was the first sapper regiment in our army's history. In July 1967 Military Region 5 formed Front 4 to command the primary point of attack, Da Nang. Armed forces subordinate to this front included three infantry battalions and the 575th Rocket Battalion, equipped with DKB rockets.

To increase the fighting qualities of its main force troops and local armed forces, the Region 5 Party Committee and Military Region 5 held many conferences for military and political cadre to review and summarize experiences. These included a conference to review the combat campaigns of the main force troops, a conference to review political activities by the armed forces (August 1967), and a conference to review guerrilla war in the lowlands and in the mountains (October 1967).

In Tri-Thien, in May 1967 the Party Central Committee approved a reorganization of the leadership and command system to adapt the system to its new combat missions. The province Party committees and province military units were dissolved. The district Party committees were placed under the direct control of the Regional Party Committee. In the individual operational sectors, groups were formed that were directly subordinate to the Military Region Command. Group 4, consisting of Infantry Battalion 804B and two engineer battalions, was to attack lines of communication from southern Phu Loc to the northern end of the Hai Van Pass. Group 5, responsible for Hue city and its three surrounding districts, was made up of three infantry battalions (804A, 810, 845), two sapper battalions (K1 and K2), and 14 commando teams. Group 6, responsible for Phong Dien and Quang Dien districts in Thua Thien province, consisted of the 6th Infantry Regiment. Group 7, responsible for the districts of Trieu Phong and Hai Lang in Quang Tri province, consisted of the 9th Regiment of the 304th Division,¹⁰ the 808th and 814th Infantry Battalions, the K-10 Sapper Battalion, and two district local force companies. Group 31, responsible for the area from Route 9 to the temporary Demilitarized Zone, had two infantry battalions that were placed under the command of the Route 9-Northern Quang Tri Front (B5 Front). The Military Region's main force army was reinforced with three additional infantry regiments.¹¹

The cities and towns, especially Saigon, Da Nang, and Hue, were reinforced by hundreds of additional cadre and Party members. Mass political struggle forces, the commando teams of the city military unit, and the commando personnel of the associations and revolutionary organizations were strengthened and

expanded. Weapons, food, and medicines were secretly shipped into the cities. As for Saigon itself, the preparatory operations were split up, parceled out, and carried out simultaneously in order to resolve problems caused by the lack of adequate time for preparation¹² and by preparatory requirements that were too large. By the end of 1967, within the city we had formed 19 political organizations made up of 325 families living near key targets and had established 400 concealment points to hide troops and equipment in political "spots," such as in Bae Ai Hamlet, Cau Bong [the Bong Bridge area], the Ban Co area, and Xom Chua in Tan Binh.

On 6 July 1967, Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh, member of the Politburo and Political Commissar of the COSVN Military Command, died after a sudden heart attack. A talented and energetic cadre, Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh had made many outstanding contributions in the areas of implementing and explaining the political and military policies of the Party and in building political organizations in the army. He had contributed to the development of our offensive posture and the intensification of combat operations conducted by our massed forces on the battlefields of South Vietnam during the initial phase of the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation. His passing was a great loss to our army. The Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee quickly sent many experienced high-level cadre to assume key positions in the various battlefields in order to strengthen leadership and command in the strategic theaters of operation. Comrade Pham Hung, Politburo member and Deputy Prime Minister, was appointed Secretary of COSVN and concurrently COSVN Military Command Political Commissar. Lieutenant General Hoang Van Thai, member of the Party Central Committee, Deputy Chief of Staff, and former Commander and Political Commissar of Military Region 5, was appointed Commander of the COSVN Military Command. In Region 5, Comrade Vo Chi Cong, member of the Party Central Committee, was appointed Secretary of the Military Region Party Committee and concurrently Military Region Political Commissar. Major General Chu Huy Man, member of the Party Central Committee, was appointed Commander of the Military Region 5 Command. In the Central Highlands, Major General Hoang Minh Thao was appointed Front Military Commander and Senior Colonel Tran The Mon was appointed Front Political Commissar. In Tri-Thien, Major General Tran Van Quang, alternate member of the Party Central Committee, became Region Party Secretary and concurrently Commander of the Military Region Headquarters. Major General Le Chuong was named Military Region Political Commissar.

By the end of 1967 our preparations for the strategic offensive had achieved some important results. Our full-time armed forces on the battlefields of South Vietnam rose from 204,000 (at the end of 1966) to 278,000.¹³ Our total number of combat battalions had risen from 126 to 190. Our supply situation, especially in weapons and equipment, had been improved. Cochin China alone received more than 50,000 infantry weapons, including a substantial number of B-40 anti-

tank rocket launchers. Our sapper forces had been expanded in all three strategic areas and in all of our three types of troops, and were now organized into ground sappers, water sappers, mobile sappers, specialized sappers, and commando sappers.¹⁴ Preparation of the battlefield, especially in the cities, was proceeding according to plan. Our command system had been adapted to the new situation and to our new conditions, ensuring that the offensive would be capable of opening fire simultaneously and of sending deep thrusts into the cities.

PREPARATORY OPERATIONS LEADING UP TO THE TET OFFENSIVE

During the fall and winter of 1967 the General Staff directed the battlefields to step up their operations in order to kill more enemy soldiers and enable our units and local areas to continue their preparations. At the same time the battlefields were to conduct exercises and gain experience in urban combat methods. This activity period was the first phase of our strategic combat plan.

In the Central Highlands, on 3 November 1967 the Front Military Command launched a campaign at Dak To, in northern Kontum. During this campaign, the soldiers of the Central Highlands seized the initiative, developed a battle position, used deception to lure the enemy into preplanned areas, and launched mobile attacks combined with blocking operations that inflicted heavy casualties on two battalions and six companies of the 1st Brigade of the 4th U.S. Division, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and one brigade of the U.S. Air Cavalry Division.

In eastern Cochinchina the 7th and 9th Infantry Divisions and the 69th Artillery Division, in cooperation with Binh Long and Phuoc Long province local force troops, launched the Loc Ninh–Route 13 campaign, attacking the U.S. 1st Infantry Division and the puppet 5th Division. During two combat phases, from 26 October to 5 December 1967, our units fought 60 battles, two of which were division-sized battles and five of which were regiment-sized battles, eliminating from the field of combat 4,700 enemy (including 3,000 Americans). Our victory in this campaign consolidated our offensive springboard north of Saigon and marked a new step forward in the capacity of COSVN's main force soldiers to fight a concentrated battle.

Coordinating their actions with the main force divisions, the armed forces of our subregions attacked many bases and towns, inflicting heavy casualties on enemy troops and destroying substantial quantities of war equipment. A number of these battles were quite effective, such as a 5 January 1968 attack on an element of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division in Hoc Mon, a 7 January 1968 attack on the Can Giuoc district military headquarters, and an 8 January 1968 assault on the Hau Nghia province capital.

In Region 5, beginning in early September 1967 our local armed forces attacked many provincial towns, including Hoi An, Tam Ky, Quang Ngai, and Tuy Hoa. Our local forces also supported popular uprisings to seize control and

consolidated our hold on important springboard positions around the provincial capitals. The Military Region's main force divisions attacked American troops in western Quang Nam, the Phu My district capital, the U.S. artillery firebase and forward airstrip at Nhung Pass in Binh Dinh province, etc. This was the first time the armed forces of Military Region 5, operating under one unified command, had mounted simultaneous attacks against numerous cities and towns, cooperating with the forces of the masses rising up in insurrection. A number of lessons learned during this operational phase helped the Military Region Command and the provinces to address a number of problems in command organization and preparations for the strategic offensive.

In Tri-Thien, local armed forces attacked a number of small targets on the outskirts of Hue city and consolidated their springboard positions. During the evening of 27 May 1967 three sapper and commando companies, supported by recoilless rifles and 82mm mortars, launched simultaneous attacks against 12 targets in Hue city, including the Huong Giang and Thuan Hoa Hotels (where many American officers were quartered), the radio station, and the headquarters of the puppet 1st Division. During this attack our sapper and commando forces gained a great deal of experience in attacking enemy headquarters and leadership installations.

In September 1967, the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam held its second Congress of Heroes of the Armed Forces. The Congress was extremely moved to receive a letter from Chairman Ho Chi Minh. Uncle Ho wrote, "In 1965, the first Congress of Heroes of the Armed Forces was a Congress celebrating victory over the 'special war' conducted by the American pirates. This Heroes Congress is a congress of those people who will defeat the American's 'limited war.' I am confident that the people and soldiers of South Vietnam, with their heroic spirit and wealth of experience, will secure even greater victories, which will bring total victory to the cause of opposition to the Americans to save the nation."

Meanwhile, in Laos the rightist army, operating under the command of American advisors, tried to seize control of the areas under Pathet Lao control, escalating the American "special war" in Laos to a new level. In July 1966 they seized Nam Bac, a district in Udomsai province. A large force of Lao puppet army soldiers, consisting of three infantry regiments, one independent infantry battalion, and one artillery battalion, occupied Nam Bac and established a defensive line north of the royal capital of Luang Prabang, threatening the liberated zone in northern Laos.

Determined to crush the enemy's schemes and to restore and consolidate the liberated zone in northern Laos, in December 1967 the Laotian Party Politburo and the Politburo of our own Party Central Committee decided to launch an offensive against enemy forces in Nam Bac.

The 316th Infantry Division was dispatched to Laos to cooperate with the troops of our Lao allies in mounting combat operations. After more than a month

of marching, approaching, and encircling the enemy, on 12 January 1968 the 148th Regiment opened fire to kick off the offensive. The 147th Regiment blocked the enemy's line of retreat and pursued fleeing enemy forces. The campaign ended on 27 January 1967. Two mobile regiments of Laotian puppet army regulars were annihilated. More than 3,000 enemy troops were killed or captured. The Nam Bac area, with a population of almost 10,000 people, was liberated. The Nam Bac victory was important strategically, signaling the growth in the combat capabilities of the Pathet Lao Liberation Army and of our Vietnamese volunteer troops. This was the first campaign in which the Lao-Vietnamese allied forces had killed and captured large numbers of enemy regular soldiers, and the campaign contributed to an important shift in the balance of forces in favor of the Laotian revolution. The Nam Bac victory provided timely and effective support to the South Vietnamese battlefield, launching a victorious winter-spring season.

FINAL STRATEGIC DECISIONS AND PREPARATIONS

In October 1967 the Politburo met and discussed in more concrete detail our policy and plans for conducting a general offensive and simultaneous uprising in South Vietnam. After assessing the situation and basing their conclusions on reports from the various battlefields, the Politburo realized it was possible to carry out the plan earlier than we had initially planned. To achieve the element of surprise, the Politburo decided to launch the General offensive during Tet 1968. Major General Le Trong Tan, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Senior Colonel Le Ngoc Hien, Director of the Combat Operations Department, were dispatched to the individual battlefields to brief them on the Politburo resolution and to encourage and oversee preparations.

In January 1968 the 14th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, meeting in Hanoi, approved a December 1967 resolution of the Politburo on "Moving the revolutionary war into a new era, the era of securing a decisive victory."

Assessing the situation from every angle, the Party Central Committee determined that the current situation allowed us to move our revolutionary war into a new era and to raise our revolution to a new level of development. The strategic objectives of the General Offensive-General Uprising were set forward as follows:

- Annihilate and cause the total disintegration of the bulk of the puppet army, overthrow the puppet regime at all administrative levels, and place all governmental power in the hands of the people.
- Annihilate a significant portion of the American military's troop strength and destroy a significant portion of his war equipment in order to prevent the American forces from being able to carry out their political and military missions.

- On this basis, crush the American will to commit aggression and force the United States to accept defeat in South Vietnam and end all hostile actions against North Vietnam. In addition, using this as our basis, we would achieve the immediate goals of the revolution, which were independence, democracy, peace, and neutrality in South Vietnam, and then move toward achieving peace and national unification.

The Central Committee declared that, since the General Offensive and General Uprising would be carried out while the enemy still had more than one million troops and a vast war-making potential, this strategic offensive would be a very fierce and complicated battle. The two main blows would be the attack of our large main force units on battlefields where conditions favored our forces and the attack of our assault units supporting popular uprisings in the cities and their surrounding areas. Eastern Cochinchina and Saigon-Cho Lon would be the most decisive battlefield. Route 9, Tri-Thien, and Quang Da would be the second most decisive battlefield. The three focal points of the offensive would be Saigon, Hue, and Da Nang. Only if we brought the war into the cities could we completely and effectively strike a strategically significant blow. Only if we maintained total secrecy and surprise could we ensure victory in our first attacks.

The Party Central Committee projected various scenarios that might develop and approved our strategic combat plan.

During the fall and winter of 1967 General Westmoreland, the U.S. Commander in South Vietnam, continued to ask for additional troops and continued preparations to launch his third strategic counteroffensive during the 1967-1968 dry season. On 17 November 1967 the U.S. Secretary of Defense ordered an airlift, using 373 C-141 sorties, to transport the 10,000 remaining troops of the 101st Airborne Division to South Vietnam. On 21 October 1967 the 198th Light Infantry Brigade was sent to the 2nd Tactical Zone. On 20 October the 11th Light Infantry Brigade was sent to the 2nd Tactical Zone. As for the Saigon puppet regime, the United States increased the aid being provided to them, pushed them to step up "pacification," increased the size of the puppet army, and modernized their equipment.

Following the conclusion of Operation "Goldstone" into the Duong Minh Chau War Zone, the United States and its puppets prepared to conduct a large sweep in the Phuoc Long area aimed at totally destroying our rear services bases on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. At the same time they prepared to launch many sweep operations in western Tri-Thien aimed at retaking control of the Ashau Valley and blocking our strategic supply route through the Annamite Mountains. In late December 1967, after discovering we had strengthened our forces around Khe Sanh, increased the flow of supplies down Group 559's transportation corridor, and moved additional forces into our bases surrounding Saigon, General Westmoreland hastily canceled his planned operations. He pulled a number of U.S. units back to defend Saigon and sent 12 battalions from

the Air Cavalry Division, the 101st Airborne Division, and the puppet Marine division to the Route 9 area. The enemy believed our movement of forces into the lowlands and our plan to liberate the cities and seize control of the government were deception operations aimed at enabling us to concentrate our forces to create another "Dien Bien Phu" at Khe Sanh and seize control of Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces.

According to the strategic combat plan approved by the Politburo and the Party Central Committee, the Route 9–Northern Quang Tri Front was one of our important strategic theaters of operations. Our combat forces assigned to this front in December 1967 included four infantry divisions (the 304th, 320th, 324th, and 325th), one separate infantry regiment (the 270th), five artillery regiments (the 16th, 45th, 84th, 204th, and 675th), three anti-aircraft artillery regiments (the 208th, 214th, and 228th), four tank companies, one engineer regiment plus one separate engineer battalion, one signal battalion, and a number of local force units. On 6 December 1967, the Central Military Party Committee established the Route 9 Front Party Committee and the Route 9 Front Military Command. Major General Tran Quy Hai, alternate member of the Party Central Committee and Deputy Minister of Defense, was appointed Military Commander of the front. Major General Le Quang Dao, Party Central Committee member and Deputy Director of the General Political Department, became Front Political Commissar. This was a combat battlefield for our main force units that was assigned the missions of annihilating enemy forces and of drawing in and tying down a significant portion of the mobile reserve forces of the U.S. and puppet armies, thereby creating favorable conditions for the focal points of our attacks and uprisings, and especially for Tri-Thien and Hue.

In early 1968, in the midst of bustling preparations for our traditional Tet holiday, the soldiers and civilians of our entire nation were immensely encouraged and moved by the words of a poem written by Chairman Ho Chi Minh to celebrate the new year:

This new year will be better than past new years
 Victory and good news will sweep the nation
 South and North vie with each other in fighting the Americans
 Advance—total victory is ours.

During the night of 20 January 1968, implementing our deception plan to lure in enemy forces, our soldiers opened fire on the Route 9 Front. In the west, the 66th Regiment, 304th Division, assaulted the Huong Hoa district capital. The 2nd Regiment, 325th Division, attacked Hill 832. On 23 January 24th Regiment, 304th Division, overran the Huoi San base. In the east, the 64th and 48th Regiments of the 320th Division and the 47th Battalion of the 270th Regiment launched attacks that cut traffic on Route 9 and advanced to attack the district military headquarters at Cam Lo.

General Westmoreland hurriedly increased defensive forces and sent aircraft

to mount a ferocious bombing campaign in the area around Khe Sanh and against suspected assembly areas for our troops. The U.S. Command in South Vietnam, the White House, and the Pentagon were obsessed with the prospect of a new "Dien Bien Phu." Johnson forced the American generals to swear they could hold Khe Sanh and set up a "special situation room" in the White House to follow the fighting on the Route 9 Front. Although the time for preparations was too short and our battlefield preparations for the blow to be struck by our main force troops were inadequate, the units assigned to the Route 9 Front overcame all difficulties and carried out their attack orders on schedule, thereby increasing the strategic surprise achieved by the general offensive throughout South Vietnam.

THE TET OFFENSIVE

On the night of 29–30 January 1968, the night of the Tet New Year,¹⁵ our soldiers and civilians launched a simultaneous strategic offensive against many of the cities and towns of South Vietnam. At 12:30 A.M. on 30 January 1968, the Central Highland Front's 2nd Battalion, 174th Regiment, attacked Tan Canh town. A few minutes later simultaneous attacks struck Ban Me Thuot, Pleiku, and Kontum cities. With the assistance of our armed forces, tens of thousands of our compatriots of all ethnic groups whom the enemy had forced into "concentration areas" and "strategic hamlets" rose up and returned to their old villages.

In Region 5, local armed forces made simultaneous attacks on the cities of Nha Trang, Quy Nhon, Tuy Hoa, Hoi An, and on 40 other district capitals and towns. At Da Nang city the Military Region's main force 2nd Division, sapper battalions, the Quang Da province local force battalion, and mass forces participating in the political struggle had been preparing since October 1967. However, because we did not have a firm grasp on the situation, our preparations had been cursory, the movement of our forces forward to seize attack positions had not been well organized, and because enemy forces were too numerous¹⁶ and responded fiercely when we attacked, the forces that attacked the city on the night of 29–30 January 1968 were unable to seize their assigned objectives.¹⁷

The Americans and their puppets were shocked by our unexpected simultaneous attacks against many cities and towns. They issued an alert for all of South Vietnam, proclaimed martial law in the cities and towns, and ordered all soldiers on Tet leave to return to their bases, but the order was not issued in time. They mounted a violent campaign of terror to block and push back our armed forces and our unarmed groups of civilians to prevent them from entering the cities. In Ban Me Thuot city, puppet troops fired into a group of civilian demonstrators. In Quang Ngai city, American aircraft bombed our civilians as they were gathering on Route 1.

On the night of 30–31 January 1968, the general offensive exploded into Hue, Saigon, and many other cities and towns.

Hue was one of the three focal point targets of the Tet 1968 strategic offensive. Our armed forces attacking the city totaled eight infantry battalions, one rocket artillery battalion with DKB rockets, three sapper battalions, six commando teams, and a number of local force companies. The northern wing was the primary attack sector. The southern wing was an important assault element and was also the primary sector for responding to enemy counterattacks. Because our plan was detailed and the organization and command of our approach march was properly handled (in spite of the fact that we had a large number of forces and had to divide the approach march into many columns, cross many rivers and streams, and bypass many enemy outposts), all units reached their positions securely and on time. Local Party committees at all levels guided the population in preparing areas and facilities, established supply caches, and arranged for guides to lead units to their assembly areas. The civilian population of the Vien Chinh, Duc Thai, Trang Luu, Muc Tra, and Duong Mong areas prepared food supplies and built hundreds of secret bunkers, enough to conceal an entire sapper battalion right next to the enemy positions.

At 2:33 A.M. on 31 January, the DKB rocket battalion poured a violent barrage into enemy positions at Tam Thai and Phu Bai to kick off the attack on Hue city. From the south, sapper and infantry units simultaneously opened fire, attacking and seizing the puppet 7th Armored Regiment's base at Tam Thai, the puppet engineer battalion at Nam Giao, the Thua Thien province military headquarters, the Thuan Hoa Hotel, and the puppet Combat Police headquarters. The units of our northern wing attacked the puppet 1st Division headquarters at Mang Ca, the Tan Loc airfield, and the Citadel area. After three hours of fighting our troops gained control of the Citadel area, raised the liberation flag to the top of the flagpole at Ngo Mon, and controlled many city blocks on the northern and southern banks of the Perfume River.

By 3 February most of the enemy military targets in the city had been taken by our soldiers. The enemy, however, still held out at the headquarters of the puppet 1st Division at Mang Ca. Thousands of our comrades and compatriots imprisoned by the enemy in his many jails were released. The population of Hue city rose up in insurrection, their uprisings becoming strongest after the fourth day of the attack. In many locations the people provided supplies to our soldiers, cared for our wounded, and helped our soldiers reinforce their fighting positions. Under the leadership of Party organizations the people established a revolutionary governmental apparatus and numerous mass organizations. They organized self-defense forces and eliminated tyrants and traitors. In some locations the masses armed themselves and fought arm-in-arm with our soldiers against the enemy counterattack. Many enthusiastic ceremonies to issue guns to soldiers and to say farewell to youths who were joining our army were held in many wards and city blocks. The population of many hamlets and villages of Huong Tra, Huong Thuy, Phu Vang, Phu Loc, Quang Dien, etc., districts rose up and, together with local armed forces, surrounded and destroyed enemy outposts, captured enemy tyrants, and seized power.

In an effort to retake the city, the enemy sent a number of battalions of the U.S. 1st Marine Division, an airborne task force, and a puppet armored troop to attack from the outside into the city in coordination with a counterattack by the remaining elements of the puppet 1st Division at Mang Ca. On 12 February the enemy added a puppet Marine task force and a U.S. Air Cavalry battalion. Napalm bombs, tear gas bombs, and U.S. artillery shells destroyed many heavily populated residential areas, many historical sites, and killed hundreds of ordinary citizens.

The Tri-Thien Military Region Command ordered 3rd Regiment, 324th Division, and 18th Regiment, 325th Division, into the city to join the fight alongside the people and our remaining forces in the city. Relying on solidly built structures, our soldiers and civilians resolutely held their positions. Many vicious battles were fought at the An Hoa gate, the Chanh Tay gate, the Dong Ba gate, the Thuy Quan drainage ditch, and the Tay Loc airfield. At the Dong Ba gate, a squad fought a fierce battle against an entire American battalion, holding its position for eight days.

On 23 February 1968, after 25 days of combat, our soldiers were ordered to withdraw from the city.

The armed force that we used in the attack on Hue was not a large one. Because, however, of the high resolve of the Region Party Committee, the Military Region Command, our units, and the population; because we had an excellent plan for preparations; because we maintained secrecy and surprise; because we employed our forces properly and used appropriate combat tactics; and because we exploited the combined strength of our political and military forces, the offensive and uprising in the Hue theater of operations fulfilled its duties in an outstanding fashion and achieved its high target goals.¹⁸ This was also a very important strategic supporting theater, directly supporting our Route 9-Khe Sanh, Quang Nam-Da Nang, and Saigon campaigns. The success of the offensive and uprising in Hue city strongly encouraged our soldiers and civilians in the other battlefields and had a powerful impact on the U.S. and puppet leadership cliques. Within the general context of the strategic offensive, putting the attack on Hue city into the overall plan aimed at achieving the strategic goals we had set for ourselves, the fact that our soldiers held control of Hue city for 25 days and nights was of tremendous importance, increasing the military and political impact of the Tet 1968 General Offensive and Uprising.

In Saigon-Gia Dinh, during the days before Tet the sapper teams assigned to attack the primary targets within the city dispersed into cells and, traveling by many different routes, joined the flood of people in the streets doing their Tet shopping, secretly hiding their troops and delivering additional explosives and weapons to cache in the homes of our agents. The spearhead battalions of the subregions also began to march toward their objectives inside the city. However, because orders were received at different times, some units had a long way to travel, the command and leadership capabilities of the units were not uniform,

and because the terrain surrounding Saigon was open, contained many swamps, and was covered with enemy outposts, many of the spearhead battalions were unable to reach the assembly areas from which they were to attack to reinforce and relieve the sapper and commando companies.

During the night of 30–31 January 1968, the sound of our guns attacking Saigon rang out simultaneously at the U.S. Embassy, Independence Palace, the puppet General Staff Headquarters, the puppet Navy Headquarters, Tan Son Nhat Airbase, and many other locations. The 11th Commando Team, 17 combatants led by Ngo Thanh Van and disguised as a group of puppet soldiers, drove to the U.S. Embassy by car. After using explosives to blow a hole in the front wall, the team divided into three spearheads to seize the front gate, the back gate, and the residential area for embassy personnel. They then expanded the attack up to the second floor of the main building. U.S. soldiers defending the Embassy counterattacked fiercely, but all their efforts were beaten back. At 9:00 in the morning of 31 January, U.S. military policemen landed by helicopter on the roof of the Embassy, coordinating their attack with an enemy force attacking from the residence of the French Ambassador. Our commandos heroically defended each stairwell, each room, and fought to the last man.

The 3rd Commando Team, consisting of 15 combatants (including one female), advanced to attack Independence Palace, the residence of the puppet President. After being detected by the enemy, our soldiers quickly gunned their vehicle forward and used explosives to destroy the main gate. The cells following them were forced to deploy to fight two battalions of puppet troops on Nguyen Du Street. By 5:00 A.M. eight of our soldiers were dead and four lay seriously wounded. The three remaining combatants resolutely clung to each street corner and each house, continuing to fight the enemy.

The 6th and 9th Commando Teams attacked the puppet General Staff Headquarters. Enemy troops supported by helicopter gunships mounted a fierce counterattack. Our commando troops and an element of the 2nd Quyet Thang [Determined to Win] Battalion, which had just arrived to reinforce them, clung to the positions they had taken, repelling many enemy counterattacks and killing hundreds of enemy troops. After suffering heavy casualties and running low on ammunition, on the morning of 31 January the remnants of our force were forced to fall back to fight the enemy on the outer perimeter.

The 4th Commando Team, with a total of 12 soldiers, hid in the home of commando soldier Tran Phu Cuong at 56 Nguyen Binh Khiem Street. The team was able to capture the Saigon Radio Station and repel many enemy counterattacks. Ten soldiers died a hero's death. Two survivors were cared for and hidden by our agents and taken back to our base area.

On the outer perimeter, the 1st Commando team acted as guides for and supported the attacks of the 101st Infantry Regiment against the Hanh Tong Tay General Supply Warehouse complex, the enemy's Artillery Command at Co Loa, and the headquarters base of the puppet Armored Command at Phu Dong. The 3rd

Infantry Battalion of the Phu Loi Regiment, supported by sapper teams from Di An and Thu Duc districts, attacked and seized the Hang Xanh-Thi Nghe area. The 5th Battalion and the 320th Infantry Regiment, supported by the 7th and 8th Commando Teams, attacked the enemy's large logistics storage facilities at Nha Be and Hung Vinh Loc. COSVN's main force divisions pressed in close to Saigon, attacking a number of enemy bases and blocking and hampering the operations of the U.S. and puppet regular divisions. The 9th Division attacked the Quang Trung Training Center and tied down the U.S. 25th Infantry Division at Dong Du. The 5th Division attacked the Bien Hoa air base, the Long Binh warehouse complex, and the headquarters of the U.S. [2nd] Field Force. The 7th Division attacked and crippled a U.S. battalion at Phu Giao and tied down the U.S. 1st Infantry Division.

The people of Saigon-Gia Dinh, with their tradition of patriotism and having been honed in many years of revolutionary struggle, wholeheartedly protected, fed, and cared for our wounded soldiers, providing our combatants with material and moral support.

The unexpected, simultaneous attacks by our elite units against many important enemy targets inside the city of Saigon and the attacks by our main force units against enemy bases on the city's outskirts constituted a daring, risky combat tactic that sent shock waves racing across our country and around the world, all the way to the United States. We had brought our war of revolution right into the enemy's lair, disrupted his rear areas, and made a deep and profound effect on the puppet army, the puppet government, U.S. troops, and on the American ruling clique.

During the attack on Saigon and the other cities and towns, our sappers and commandos, with an unrivaled spirit of heroism, etched the heroic image of the Vietnamese soldier into the pages of history.

In the other cities and towns of the lowlands of Cochin China, because of differences in the level of preparations by each locality, differences in the combat abilities of our armed units, differences in the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy in each area, and differences in the enemy's response in each location, the progress and results of the general offensive varied. We attacked 13 out of 14 provincial towns (all except Long Xuyen). In My Tho and Ben Tre cities we attacked and held control of the positions we had occupied for three days and nights. In other cities we were only able to hold for one day and night and then withdrew to fight the enemy on the outer perimeter. The force attacking Tra Vinh encountered difficulties from the very beginning and was unable to enter the city, so it turned around and attacked the enemy on the outside, liberating many rural areas.

In coordination with the spearhead attacks by our armed forces into the cities, the people of the villages and hamlets rose up and eliminated tyrants and traitors, dispersed local Popular Force troops, and seized control of their areas. The political forces of the masses in rural areas were reorganized, placed under tight control, and prepared to join the people of the cities and towns and our armed forces in seizing control of the government. Because our military attack

was not powerful enough, because enemy forces were numerous and deployed in depth, and because of fierce enemy counterattacks, the uprising of the masses in the cities did not achieve the results projected in the plan.

On the Route 9 Front, after assaulting and destroying a number of enemy strong points in the west, on 6 February 1968 our troops attacked the Lang Vay strong point, which was held by four puppet commando companies.¹⁹ Because orders had arrived late, the 24th Regiment (304th Division) and the 101st Regiment (325th Division) had to make preparations and deploy their forces into attack formation while they were on the march. Our armored troops were entering battle for the very first time. Supported by infantry and engineers, our armored soldiers secretly swam their amphibious PT-76 tanks down the Sepone River to their assembly positions, arriving right on schedule. Enemy troops were completely surprised and shocked when they saw tanks leading our infantry assault. The battle ended in a complete victory. We killed 400 enemy (including three American advisors), captured 253 prisoners, and seized all the enemy's weapons and military equipment. This was the first combined-arms operation that succeeded in destroying an enemy battalion holding a heavily fortified position in the history of the war in South Vietnam and marked a new step forward in the growth of the combat capabilities of our mobile main force troops.

From 10 February onward our troops switched over to the use of siege tactics against Ta Con, a large concentration of strong points held by American troops on the defensive line at the western end of Route 9 in the Khe Sanh area (in Huong Hoa district, Quang Tri province). Enemy troops holding this defensive concentration consisted of the U.S. 26th Marine Regiment, one U.S. artillery battalion, one U.S. tank company, and eight companies of puppet Rangers and regional forces.

Throughout 50 long days and nights, the 304th and 325th Divisions, supported by artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, sappers, and engineers from the Route 9 Front, built siege positions stretching right up to the perimeter of the enemy base. Our forces defeated many enemy counterattacks and, using sniper weapons and artillery attacks, forced American and puppet troops to endure a living hell. Every day scores of wounded Marines received emergency treatment in bunkers deep in the earth of Khe Sanh. They were forced to use parachute drops and helicopters to supply the enemy troops holding the base. Between mid-February and early April 1968, every day the enemy sent 300 tactical bomber sorties and scores of B-52 sorties to drop thousands of bombs and strafe our siege trenches, but they could not loosen the noose around the Khe Sanh base.²⁰ Concern about a second "Dien Bien Phu" obsessed the American expeditionary army. American generals were forced to promise Johnson they would "hold Khe Sanh at any cost."

On 1 April the enemy massed 17 American and puppet battalions²¹ to launch an operation to relieve Khe Sanh. The fighting on the Khe Sanh Front was vicious. Because of the enemy's powerful air and artillery firepower and because our anti-aircraft defenses were weak, the 304th Division was unable to mount

any large daytime attacks. On 16 April the enemy withdrew his relief forces. Our soldiers continued the siege of Ta Con.

In the eastern portion of the front, the 320th Division fought many small engagements in the areas of Dong Ha, Gio Linh, and Cua Viet, attacked traffic on Route 9, and tied down ten American and puppet battalions, threatening the enemy defensive line along the eastern section of Route 9.

EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE TET OFFENSIVE

The protracted offensive and siege campaign conducted by our main force troops on the Route 9–Khe Sanh Front, together with the simultaneous surprise attacks against the cities, especially against Saigon and Hue, threw the Americans and their puppets into a state of great confusion and fear. On 9 February 1968, General Westmoreland, the commander of American forces in South Vietnam, reported to the White House and the Pentagon that “the opposition has dealt the Government of South Vietnam [the puppet regime] a heavy blow. They have brought the war into the cities, inflicting casualties and damage . . . the entire campaign plan for 1968 has been disrupted.” A U.S. public opinion poll agency [the Harris Institute] announced the results of their research on 25 March 1968: 80 percent of the American people believed the Tet offensive had caused the failure of the U.S. effort to achieve its objectives in Vietnam.

The Tet General Offensive and Uprising conducted by our soldiers and civilians dealt a major, unexpected blow to the American and puppet armies. We had attacked their leadership and command organizations, conducted a protracted siege against their forces at Khe Sanh, and simultaneously had attacked them in many rural areas, inflicting severe losses on them and seriously shaking the confidence of the American and puppet forces on the battlefield. The American imperialist will to commit aggression began to waver. On 31 March 1968, U.S. President Johnson rejected General Westmoreland's recommendation that an additional 200,000 soldiers be sent to Vietnam, announced his decision to restrict American operations in Vietnam, ended bombing north of the 20th parallel in North Vietnam, agreed to send a delegation to hold talks with us in Paris, and announced he would not run for a second term as President. General Westmoreland was relieved as battlefield commander and recalled to the United States. The “search and destroy” strategy was abandoned and replaced by the “clear and hold” strategy.

The Tet General Offensive and Uprising conducted by our soldiers and civilians secured a great strategic victory. In a short period of time we had killed or dispersed 150,000 enemy soldiers, including 43,000 Americans, destroyed 34 percent of the American war reserve supplies in Vietnam,²² destroyed 4,200 “strategic hamlets,”²³ and liberated an additional 1.4 million people. We had struck a decisive blow that bankrupted the “limited war” strategy of the American imperialists, shook their will to commit aggression, forced them to deesca-

late the war, initiated the strategic decline of the American imperialists in their war of aggression against Vietnam, and created a decisive turning point in the war. In its first large-scale strategic offensive against a network of targets deep behind enemy lines, and in concert with mass uprisings to seize power, our army had accumulated a great deal of experience in the organization of forces and the combat arts for urban warfare.

In March 1968, all battlefields analyzed the reasons for success and the shortcomings and limitations of the general offensive and uprising. COSVN and Region 5 concluded that all local areas and units had made efforts, but because the time allotted was short and absolute secrecy had to be maintained, our preparations of supplies, spiritual preparations, and preparation of tactics were all insufficient. We were subjective in our assessment of the situation, especially in assessing the strength of the mass political forces in the urban areas. We had somewhat underestimated the capabilities and reactions of the enemy and had set our goals too high. Our plan for military attacks was too simplistic and our arrangements for carrying out and coordinating combat operations by our forces for coordination between the battlefields and between the military attack and the mass uprisings were disjointed. Our soldiers' morale had been very high when they set off for battle, but because we had made only one-sided preparations, only looking at the possibilities of victory and failing to prepare for adversity, when the battle did not progress favorably for our side and when we suffered casualties, rightist thoughts, pessimism, and hesitancy appeared among our forces.

The Tet General Offensive and simultaneous uprisings by our soldiers and civilians inflicted a serious defeat on the aggressors. In the United States the tide of opposition to the war rose day by day. Johnson was forced to announce that he was "de-Americanizing" the Vietnam War, but he continued the war through the use of new strategic measures. The Americans hastily sent two brigades from U.S. worldwide strategic reserve forces²⁴ to the battlefields of South Vietnam. At the same time they increased the amount of aid provided to the Saigon puppet regime, raising the 1968 defense budget of the puppet regime to 53 billion South Vietnamese piasters. They drafted 65,000 new troops, raising the strength of the puppet army to 650,000.

In South Vietnam the U.S. and puppet armies concentrated their forces to defend the cities, military bases, and strategic lines of communications,²⁵ at the same time mobilizing forces to conduct continuous operations to "sweep" our armed forces out of the cities and surrounding areas and stepping up their attacks against our strategic transportation corridor.

THE WAR IN THE NORTH

In North Vietnam the Americans were forced to stop bombing attacks from the 20th parallel northward, but they concentrated all artillery and naval gunfire ships

to attack the narrow stretch of land called the "panhandle" of Military Region 4 in order to cut the flow of supplies from North Vietnam to the battlefield.

Between April and October 1968, the enemy devoted 79,000 sorties by tactical and B-52 bomber aircraft and 4,596 naval gunfire missions by cruisers and destroyers (including the battleship *New Jersey*, using its 406mm guns) to the "limited" bombing and shelling campaign in Region 4. They concentrated their forces to make powerful attacks against our traffic nodes, forming a continuous line of bombing choke points, with the area under heaviest attack being the area from north of the Lam River (in Nghe An province) to the southern bank of the Gianh River (Quang Binh province). "In a narrow area representing one quarter of North Vietnam, the number of bombing attacks increased by 2.6 times and the concentration of bombs and shells increased by 20 times."²⁶ Because the enemy was attacking during the rainy season in terrain cut by many rivers and streams, many routes were blocked,²⁷ and the quantity of supplies being held at Group 559's delivery points in Region 4 dropped to only 1,000 tons in September 1968.

The soldiers and civilians of Military Region 4, the front line of North Vietnam, proudly withstood these extremely horrendous challenges, suffering great sacrifices and adversity and fighting heroically, and kept our supply artery to the battlefield open.

The Politburo of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Party Committee decided to establish a Headquarters to ensure the continuous flow of supplies through Military Region 4. This Headquarters worked with the Forward Headquarters of the General Department of Rear Services, provincial Party Committees, and provincial people's committees to mobilize all available forces to fight the enemy and ensure the flow of supplies.

The General Staff sent a large combat force to reinforce Military Region 4. The 367th Air Defense Division, the newly established 377th Air Defense Division (formed around three regiments drawn from the strategic area air defense divisions), and the 368th Air Defense Division one by one were sent to Military Region 4 to join the Military Region's anti-aircraft forces of the three types of troops in fighting the enemy.

When our anti-aircraft artillery and missile soldiers first entered the fight they were inexperienced in many areas and did not select the proper areas to concentrate their combat forces for battle. The Air Defense Service provided guidance to units in changing their fighting tactics, combining blocking forces with mobile forces, massing and dispersing in a flexible manner. They studied the enemy's operational principles and gradually increased their combat efficiency. In six months our air defense forces in Military Region 4 shot down more than 100 enemy aircraft.

Our air force troops also were ordered to fight in the skies over Military Region 4. Operating far from their bases in a narrow combat area with limited ground control, our air force fought bravely and cleverly, utilizing small formations and emphasizing the use of secrecy and surprise. In 50 sorties they shot down ten modern American aircraft.

Our artillery troops built solid firing positions on the coastal sand dunes, heroically retaliating against the American cruisers and destroyers when they shelled the mainland. On 28 October 1968, 25th Battery, 21st Artillery Battalion, using 130mm guns, hit the battleship *New Jersey*, setting it ablaze. The Ngu Thuy village militia artillery battery in Quang Binh province (formed on 20 November 1967 and made up of 37 female soldiers between 16 and 20 years of age equipped with four 85mm long-barreled guns) on four separate occasions hit and set ablaze American destroyers.

The Engineer Command sent two river-crossing regiments and a number of engineer units from the Left Bank and Right Bank Military Regions to Military Region 4 as reinforcements. Alongside assault youths and local civilians, our engineer troops worked night and day repairing stretches of road damaged by the enemy and building many detours around the enemy's bombing choke points. The 249th Regiment supported river crossings at Quan Hau, Ly Hoa, Cau Dai, Xuan Son, and the Gianh River. The 239th Regiment provided river crossing support at Nam Dan, Linh Cam, and Ha Tan. Up and down all the transportation routes and at all the ferry crossings of Region 4, our engineer cadre and soldiers ignored danger and resolutely remained at their choke point positions, guaranteeing the safe passage of our transportation convoys. Some soldiers even volunteered to pilot boats over the enemy's magnetic mines to destroy them. They were prepared to give their lives so that supplies could reach the front.

The troop stations subordinate to the Transportation Department in the Military Region 4 area were reorganized to adapt them to the new situation. Three mobile truck battalions subordinate to the Transportation Department and three truck companies drawn from other military regions, a total of 411 vehicles, were sent to reinforce Military Region 4. In mid-1968 the Transportation Department formed four new truck battalions and increased the transportation forces assigned to Route 15. The 1st Hong Ha Boat Battalion used the Nha Le, Van, and Than Canals in Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces in an effort to push our supplies forward.

The State-owned transportation resources in Military Region 4 were militarized and organized into traffic troop stations. Primitive forms of transportation, such as river sampans, seagoing sampans, and transportation bicycles were mobilized in large numbers to transfer and transport supplies over short sections to support our motorized transportation resources.

On 28 October 1968, the Central Military Party Committee formed Headquarters 500, with a strength equivalent to Group 559, to replace the Forward Headquarters of the General Department of Rear Services in handling responsibility for ensuring the flow of traffic and supplies in Military Region 4.²⁸ Major General Nguyen Don was named Headquarters Commander and Major General Le Quang Dao became Political Commissar.

The armed forces of Military Region 4, together with tens of thousands of assault youths and hundreds of thousands of frontline civilian laborers, fought

and transported supplies in a spirit of "the entire Military Region goes into battle" and "everyone in the entire Military Region is a hero."

The soldiers and civilians of North Vietnam continued to defeat the war of destruction conducted by the American pirates on the territory of Military Region 4, maintaining the strategic supply line to the battlefield and ensuring that the soldiers and civilians of South Vietnam could sustain the general offensive and simultaneous uprisings. In 1968, the quantity of supplies shipped to the battlefield increased to twice the total for 1967. The number of troops sent south increased by 1.7 times.

Military Region 4 was worthy of its role as the front line of the great socialist rear area and the immediate rear area of the great, heroic combat front line.

THE SECOND WAVE OF THE TET OFFENSIVE AND KHE SANH

In South Vietnam, after the Tet General Offensive the Central Military Party Committee and the High Command instructed all battlefields to hold their positions, consolidate their forces, readjust forces and provide additional troops and weapons to the various theaters of operations, and prepare for a new round of attacks.

The 33rd, 174th, and 320th Regiments marched down from the Central Highlands to reinforce eastern Cochin China. The 174th Regiment was assigned to the 5th Division to strengthen it. The 36th Regiment, 308th Division, and the 141st Regiment, 312th Division, were sent from North Vietnam to reinforce the Quang Da Front, subordinate to Military Region 5. The 325C Division (consisting of two regiments, 95C and 101C) and the 209th Regiment, 312th Division, were sent from North Vietnam to reinforce the Central Highlands Front. The 308th Division (consisting of two regiments, the 102nd and 88th) and the 246th Regiment were sent from North Vietnam to the Route 9 Front. Fifteen full-strength field artillery battalions, with a total of 96 85mm guns and 27 D-74²⁹ guns, were sent from the north to reinforce the various fronts. Between March and August 1968, the Sapper Branch sent 3,797 cadre and soldiers, including eight complete battalions (at full strength in weapons and personnel)³⁰ to the battlefield.

Our main force and local force troops studied the April 1968 resolution of the Politburo on our new directions and responsibilities. They strengthened their resolve to fight and received reinforcement troops and additional weapons and equipment. Many units quickly reviewed and drew lessons from their experiences in the Tet offensive. As for our sapper and commando forces, which had suffered heavy losses, all battlefields strove to reinforce them and were able to train locally an additional 4,000 cadre and soldiers for these forces.

During the summer of 1968, pursuant to the resolution of the Politburo of the Party Central Committee, our soldiers and civilians in South Vietnam launched a second wave of attacks against the cities and towns, at the same time

combating enemy forces that were conducting a fierce counterattack in the rural areas.

In Saigon, the preparations for our attack into the city had lost the element of surprise that we had during the Tet attacks. Our sapper and commando forces, which had suffered heavy losses, and the spearhead battalions of the subregions, which had lost almost 50 percent of their troops and equipment during the first offensive, had received only a limited quantity of replacement troops and equipment. Beginning on 11 March, the United States and its puppets massed 50 battalions to launch two successive sweep operations called "Quyet Thang" [Determined to Win] and "Toan Thang" [Total Victory] in the region surrounding the city, causing a great many difficulties for our units trying to approach their targets. Because the enemy had discovered our intentions, the Front Command had to switch the primary direction of attack, which was to be carried out by the 9th Division, from the north-northwest of Saigon down to the southwest of Saigon. During their advance toward the city our units were forced to fight as they marched and their forces suffered attrition. The 1st Regiment alone lost over 300 cadre and soldiers. With a firm fighting spirit and a high sense of discipline, our soldiers overcame all difficulties and adversities, resolutely carrying out their combat missions.

At 3:10 A.M. on 5 May 1968, our artillery troops simultaneously opened fire against eight targets within the city, launching the second wave of attacks on Saigon. The commando teams of the sections and branches of the City Command attacked and seized the television station and the Phan Thanh Gian Bridge. Moving out from springboard bases on the outskirts of the city, a number of main force regiments and spearhead battalions of the subregions bypassed the enemy's defensive lines and advanced into the city. Units of the 1st and 3rd Regiments attacked a number of enemy targets in the 5th, 6th, and 11th precincts and then held on, fighting the enemy for periods ranging from three to 17 days. Many ferocious battles were fought on the city streets between our soldiers and American soldiers and puppet Airborne troops. Combatant Nguyen Hong Phuc of the 1st Regiment knocked out four enemy tanks with four B-40 rockets. Combatant Dang Van Tuyet of the 3rd Regiment used a light machine gun and hand grenades to beat back many counterattacks mounted by American troops at the Bay Hien three-way intersection.

On 25 May the sound of our guns again erupted in Saigon as the 3rd Regiment of the 9th Division, the Dong Nai Regiment, and the battalions of our subregions attacked again, fighting battles against the enemy in the 6th Precinct, Go Vap, Phu Lam, etc. The people of Saigon enthusiastically provided supplies to our soldiers and treated our wounded troops. In some areas the people brought food and water to our troops in their fighting positions. On occasion, when U.S. troops arrived just as the rice was finished cooking and our troops had to hold off the enemy as they tried to move to different positions, the people had to hide the rice or carry it along as they moved out with our soldiers. Many families cared

for soldiers who had been wounded or separated from their units and sought ways to send these soldiers back to their units.

Carried out in a situation in which the enemy had brought in a large force, had organized a defense in depth, and was striking back at our forces in the outskirts of the city, this second wave of attacks by our armed forces against Saigon, and especially by our main force troops, demonstrated the tremendous resolve of our soldiers and civilians.

In Central Vietnam, Military Region 5's main force divisions fought many battles in the contested areas, blocking and drawing in U.S. and puppet mobile troops, enabling our sapper units and local armed forces to attack and shell a number of cities and town. The main force troops of the Central Highlands used small elements to ambush and wipe out enemy patrols and, together with our civilians, tore up roads and built obstacles, cutting many sections of Routes 14, 18, and 19. The armed forces of the Tri-Thien Military Region defeated a sweep operation conducted by the U.S. Air Cavalry Division in the Ashau Valley, inflicting casualties totaling almost 1,000 U.S. and puppet troops between 19 April and 16 May. Because of enemy sweeps, fierce enemy bombing attacks and artillery barrages, and supply difficulties, our soldiers were not able to carry out the plan to mass forces to mount a second offensive against Hue city. After late May 1968 the Military Region's main force regiments and a portion of our local armed forces were forced to withdraw from the lowlands to our bases in the mountains.

On the Route 9 Front, fierce fighting continued in the Khe Sanh area. In May 1968, the 308th Division (minus one regiment) marched to the battlefield to join two regiments (the 66th and 9th) of the 304th Division in continuing the siege of Khe Sanh. When they discovered our new forces the U.S. Marines hastily launched a relief operation south of Ta Con. The 308th Division made a number of battalion-level attacks against them, eliminating from the field of combat almost 2,000 American troops and maintaining firm control of their positions. To the east, the 320th Division and the 270th Regiment conducted powerful operations in the Tan Lam and Cua Viet areas, attacking and crippling six American battalions. During this period the American and puppet mobile forces were forced to commit most of their strength to hold the cities and could not send additional forces to strengthen the Route 9 Front.

On 26 June 1968, the enemy announced he was withdrawing from Khe Sanh. Our armed forces rapidly tightened their siege ring, mounted shelling attacks, suppressed the enemy's efforts to transport troops by helicopter, and conducted fierce attacks to block the overland route, forcing the enemy to prolong his withdrawal. The withdrawal eventually took 17 days, during which we killed 1,300 enemy troops and shot down 34 aircraft. On 15 July 1968 our soldiers were in complete control of Khe Sanh. We had liberated an important strategic area in the western part of Route 9 in Quang Tri province and expanded our strategic North-South transportation corridor.

During the 170-day siege of Khe Sanh we eliminated from the field of combat 17,000 enemy troops (including 13,000 Americans) and destroyed or shot down 480 aircraft of all types. Our forces at Khe Sanh successfully fulfilled their mission of drawing in and tying down a large enemy force (which at its largest totaled 32 battalions, 26 of which were American, representing one quarter of all the U.S. combat battalions in South Vietnam) and coordinated their operations properly with the other battlefields throughout South Vietnam, thereby contributing to our strategically significant victory in 1968.³¹

The retreat from Khe Sanh represented a serious military and political failure for the American imperialists. This failure demonstrated the impotence of their strategically defensive posture, increased internal contradictions within U.S. ruling circles, and increased U.S. domestic and international opposition to the war of aggression in Vietnam.

The victory of the Route 9–Khe Sanh Front proved our main force troops were capable of conducting a protracted siege against a large complex of enemy defensive strong points even when the enemy had an overwhelming superiority of air and artillery firepower. Although main force divisions were unable to achieve the goal of fighting a battle that annihilated large numbers of American troops because of limitations in our battlefield equipment and weaknesses in our command and supply arrangements, etc., operating under conditions of great hardship and adversity the main force divisions participating in this campaign honed their skills in many different tactics, such as massed combined-arms combat operations, siege and encroachment operations, attacks by fire aimed at inflicting attrition on enemy forces, etc.

On 13 July 1968, Chairman Ho Chi Minh sent a message of commendation to the soldiers and civilians of the Route 9–Khe Sanh Front. In this cable, Uncle Ho affirmed that “our victory at Khe Sanh clearly demonstrates the unsurpassed strength and strategic skill of our soldiers, civilians, and cadres. This victory has made a worthy contribution to the great victory gained by South Vietnam from Tet up till the present. Together with our victories on the other battlefields, it has opened the door for even greater victories.”³²

THE THIRD WAVE OF THE TET OFFENSIVE

In August 1968 the Politburo of the Party Central Committee met to assess the initial success of the general offensive and uprising. The Politburo decided to step up our overall offensive through the use of military and political measures combined with a diplomatic offensive aimed at inflicting greater defeats on the enemy on every front and at achieving at all costs the strategic objectives that we had set forward for ourselves.

On 17 August 1968 our soldiers and civilians in South Vietnam launched a new wave of attacks. This attack wave lasted until 30 September 1968. In Cochin

China, COSVN's main force divisions and our local armed forces fought over 300 engagements, of which 16 were regiment-sized battles, crippling 15 enemy battalions, including 12 composite U.S. battalions in the Tay Ninh-Binh Long area and on the enemy's outer defensive perimeter. We also continued to shell a number of targets inside the city of Saigon. In Region 5 the Military Region's sapper troops attacked the 23rd (Americal) Division's base camp. The Military Region's main force 2nd and 3rd Divisions attacked the enemy in the area west of Tam Ky city and Quang Ngai city, worked with local armed forces to cut traffic along Routes 1 and 19, and attacked and crippled an element of the puppet 2nd Division. In the Central Highlands the front's main force troops intensified attacks against enemy forces in southwestern Darlac province and northwestern Kontum province, eliminating from the field of combat almost 2,000 enemy troops. They also supported compatriots of all ethnic groups in Duc Lap district in an uprising that seized power there.

Because we did not reassess the situation in a timely fashion, especially after the development of a number of unfavorable factors in the balance of forces and the progress of the war, we did not move quickly enough to shift the direction of our attacks. We continued to attack the cities, leaving the rural areas open and undefended. When the enemy shifted over to the defensive and strove to hold the cities and block our main force units in order to mass his forces to carry out rural "pacification," we did not fully appreciate the enemy's new plots and the strength he used in his "clear and hold" strategic measures.³³ The follow-up offensives launched by our soldiers and civilians did not have the strength of our first offensive and did not achieve the results our first wave of attacks had. Beginning in mid-1968, the lowlands of Region 5 and Cochin China encountered problems. After participating in a series of fierce, continuous combat operations, our main force units in South Vietnam had suffered losses and their combat power had declined.

CONCLUSIONS

Launched at a time when the enemy had changed his strategy and altered the deployment of his forces, the summer and fall offensives of 1968, although not achieving their projected political and military goals, had the practical effect of maintaining our continuous offensive posture and dealing added blows to the already-shaken will to commit aggression of the American imperialists.

America's "limited war" strategy, which they had pursued for over three years, had failed. The United States had hoped to use its expeditionary army to "break the back of the Viet Cong" and destroy the headquarters and leadership organizations of the resistance, but our main force troops had seized the initiative by attacking the lair of the Americans and their puppets. The United States had intended to stay on the perimeter and push the war out to the border area in

order to rescue the puppet army and the puppet regime. However, our soldiers and civilians had taken war into the cities, disrupting the political and economic centers of the neocolonialist regime. The United States had intended to use its war of destruction to prevent North Vietnam from providing support to South Vietnam. That support instead constantly increased.

On 1 November 1968, U.S. President Johnson was forced to announce the unilateral cessation of all acts of war against North Vietnam and to agree to convene a four-party conference in Paris, France. The parties attending the conference were the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam, the U.S. government, and the Saigon government.

This decision was a public admission of the bankruptcy of the American "limited war" strategy in Vietnam, of the failure of their war of destruction against North Vietnam, and of the impotence of the American Army, Navy, and Air Force. North Vietnam had endured great sacrifices throughout the fiercest challenges of war, but it had clearly demonstrated the powerful strength of our outstanding new regime. Over 3,000 modern jet aircraft, the newest models in the American inventory that were being used for the very first time, had been shot down in the skies over North Vietnam. Hundreds of pilots had been killed. Hundreds of warships, large and small, had been set ablaze or sunk. The soldiers and civilians of North Vietnam fought back, at the same time continuing their missions of building socialism and powerfully expanding their role as the great rear area for our great, heroic front lines.

On 3 November 1968, Chairman Ho Chi Minh issued an appeal to the citizens and soldiers of the entire nation: "We have defeated the American imperialists' war of destruction against North Vietnam. This victory is of great importance to our people's great cause of resisting the Americans to save the nation. This victory, however, is only our first step. The American imperialists are very stubborn and cunning. The sacred duty of our entire nation is now to increase our determination to fight and to win, and we are resolved to liberate South Vietnam, defend North Vietnam, and advance toward peace and unification of the Fatherland."³⁴

The four-year period (1965–1968) of combat against more than one million U.S., puppet, and satellite troops in South Vietnam and of defeating the modern American Air Force and Navy in North Vietnam was a period of fierce challenges to our army. The American imperialists had mobilized a high percentage of their military might and utilized their newest achievements in military science and technology (all except for nuclear weapons). With their large numbers of troops, tremendous firepower, high level of mobility, and boundless supplies of combat equipment and logistics support, they thought they could quickly destroy our people's armed forces in South Vietnam and completely destroy North Vietnam. The battles in both North and South Vietnam had been extremely fierce and desperate.

THERE IS NOTHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM!

The great thoughts of Chairman Ho Chi Minh pulled together and amplified the strength of our entire nation, millions of people acting as one, determined to fight and determined to defeat the American aggressors.

Relying on the power of the entire nation and on our people's war posture, our army displayed a strong offensive spirit, rapidly increased our forces, and developed many diverse and effective fighting methods. The victories of Van Tuong, Bau Bang, and Plei Me; the crushing of the enemy's two strategic counteroffensives in 1965-1966 and 1966-1967; the defeat of the American Air Force and Navy's many escalations of the war of destruction against North Vietnam; and the Tet 1968 strategic offensive will live forever in the history of our nation as shining feats of arms by the heroic Vietnamese revolution, of the people, and of the heroic People's Army of Vietnam.

In combat, in victory, and even in adversity and hesitancy, all units, all service branches, and all specialty branches grew in maturity. Our infantry divisions, artillerymen, sappers, air defense and air force troops, engineers, transportation soldiers, main force troops, local force troops, and guerrilla militia soldiers on all our battlefields grew rapidly in both size and in combat ability.

This was a strategic period that was a decisive turning point in the resistance war against the Americans to save the nation. Together with the entire population, our army had defeated the American expeditionary army, dealing a decisive blow that defeated their will to commit aggression and forcing the United States to deescalate the war in both North and South Vietnam. Beginning in late 1968 the American imperialists began first to "de-Americanize" and then to "Vietnamize the war." This was a new change in strategy, a turning point in the downward slide in the American imperialist war of aggression against Vietnam.