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

Thus less than a month into the second phase our soldiers and people in the Mekong Delta had attained notable accomplishments and were continuing enthusiastically and effectively to disrupt pacification, win control of the population, and win the right of mastery. In eastern Nam Bo, on the western bank of the Saigon River, on March the 16th Regiment wiped out the Suoi Dong Hung position and on March the 9th Division took the Tri Tam Subsector and on March liberated all of Dau Tient District east of the Saigon River and the Ben Cui area west of the river. On March the Cau Khoi position was taken and we gained control of a segment of Route 26 in Tay Ninh Province. Thus we had liberated a vast area along both banks of the Saigon River to form a staging area for the attack on Saigon from the northwest. The enemy used
the 3d Cavalry Brigade and a 25th Division force to counterattack along Route 2 at Suoi Ong Hung. That presented us with a good opportunity to annihilate an important part of the armored forces of III Corps, but due to deficiencies in our preparations and combat operations we could only inflict heavy damage on the enemy and force them to withdraw them to defend the area south of Bau Don. The armed forces of Tay Ninh Province during that time coordinated very well by attacking directly Route 22, cutting that road from place to place and from time to time, thus forcing the puppet 25th Division to defend that road in order to insure that Tay Ninh would not be isolated. To the east, between 15-18 March the 6th Division of Military Region 7 extended the liberated area along Route 2 from Xuan Loc to Ba Ria and completely liberated Route 3 from Hoai Duc to Gia Ray. On 20 March it took the Ong Don intersection and Suoi Cat, and by 28 March it had mastered a 50 kilometers-long segment of Route 1 from Suoi Cat to Rung La, thus cutting the lifeline connecting the central Vietnam coast with Bien Hoa-Saigon. The 812th Regiment of Military Region 6 completed the annihilation of Vo Duc and liberated a large area in Binh Tuy Province and the districts of Hoai Duc and Tanh Linh, thus creating a good staging area from which the 4th Corps could later attack Xuan Loc and Bien Hoa. Then the regiment, according to plan, moved quickly to coordinate with the 7th Division on Route 20 in the direction of Dalat. On 15 March the 7th Division launched its attack and by 18 March had completed the taking of the Dinh Quan district seat, a fortified stronghold which backed up to a store outcropping and controlled important Route 20. After taking Dinh Quan the division took the Da Oai strategic zone and, along with the local forces mopped up the enemy, expanded the liberated area and mastered Route 20. On 28 March it launched a lightning-fast mechanized attack which liberated the city of Lam Dong in only 2 hours. Thus we had completed the expansion and connecting of an important, integrated and solid base area extending from Dong Thap Muoi west of Saigon, running from the western and northern parts of Tay Ninh Province to Phuoc Long, War Zone A in northern Bien Hoa, and to Binh Tuy and Ba Ria on the South China Sea. Saigon had in effect been surrounded from the west, north and northeast. The 812th Regiment, reinforced by an element of the 7th Division, took advantage of the opportunity and occupied the town of Di Linh. Thus all of Lam Dong Province had been liberated. That represented a great victory on the eastern Nam Bo theater during that period. It greatly strengthened our position north and east of Saigon and defeated the enemy's scheme to form a defensive enclave.

In Part II ("The End") of his book "Decent Interval, Frank Snepp wrote that "The next day the communist forces opened a new front in the southern part of that area (the puppet Military Region II) and advanced to Lam Dong City, 3 hours from Saigon by road, without meeting any resistance (more accurately, resistance had been quickly crushed). At that very moment Thieu and his generals were once again debating and weighing the possibility of setting up a defense line immediately north of the city (Saigon), extending from Tay Ninh to Nha Trang. Before nightfall, Polgar (the U.S. CIA chief in Vietnam) personally went to the Presidential Palace to inform Thieu and his generals that their plan had been smashed, for Lam Dong Province, the backbone of that defense line, had fallen into the hands of the North Vietnamese troops."
With the loss of Lam Dong and Route 20, the city of Dalat and all of Tuyen Duc Province (as it was called by the puppet regime) were isolated. Route 11, which connected Dalat with Phan Rang on the coast, was a very dangerous, twisting up-and-down road that could not be used to save the city. The liberation of Dalat was the responsibility of the B2 theater, but B2's forces were small and it had to move in close to Saigon and thus could not move up to liberate Tuyen Duc Province. After the Central Highlands were liberated our strong forces there could come down to take Dalat, then continue on to eastern Nam Bo, very conveniently and promptly. Therefore I sent a message to Van Tien Dung, then the commander of our forces on the Central Highlands battlefield, recommending that he send forces down to liberate Dalat because our forces had to advance toward Saigon and could not go to Dalat. Brother Dung replied in the affirmative. But the enemy troops, very confused and terrified, and threatened by our local armed forces there, fled from Dalat. An element of the 812th Regiment, along with local forces, took over Dalat on 4 April, pursued the enemy, and liberated Route 11 as far as the Thanh Son airfield. All of Tuyen Duc Province, including the important city of Dalat, had been liberated.

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

In March the B2 theater had won great victories, thanks to active coordination with the principal battlefield—the Central Highlands—and by taking full advantage of the turmoil caused by the Ban Me Thuot battle and the succeeding battles. The harmonious coordination of all theaters in the south during the strong simultaneous attacks and uprisings were the result of the rapid decline and disintegration of the puppet army and regime. In Hanoi, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee had very closely monitored the overall situation and the situation on each battlefield, promptly reported on all developments in each area, and promptly guided and corrected the activities in each direction. It may be said that the Political Bureau and the Military Commission guided, and in fact exercised coordinated command of all the battlefields and guided the activities of all the offensive columns.
By 11 March we had essentially taken the city of Ban Me Thuot. When he was informed of that victory by the High Command, comrade Le Duan said, "We previously had estimated 2 years but now, after Phuoc Long and Ban Me Thuot, we may step up the pace. Is this the beginning of the general offensive and general uprising?" Flexibility in such a situation is always the key to timely actions. The reporting of that victory was a great source of inspiration, but the Military Commission continued to urge the battlefields to launch strong attacks and win big victories. On 12 March comrade Vo Nguyen Giap sent a message to comrade Van Tien Dung in the Central Highlands which included the following passage:

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

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

* "The Great Spring Victory" by comrade Van Tien Dung, pp 104-5.
liberated. The enemy troops in Da Nang had been surrounded and could escape only by sea, but were annihilated and disintegrated by 2d Corps and the forces of Military Region 5 on 29 March in an extremely tragic spectacle, no less so than in the Central Highlands and in Hue. We soon learned of all of that news, except that about an event rare in the history of warfare: the best puppet general dived into the South China Sea and swam out to a ship in order to save his life. (Related by Frank Snepp in op. cit.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to our plan, the eastern column, commanded by 4th Corps, made up the 7th, 341st and 6th Divisions; the northwest would be the responsibility of the 9th Division, and the 16th and 271 B Regiments; and the west would be the responsibility of Group 232, made up of the 5th and 3rd Divisions. The attack from the south would be undertaken by the 88th and 24th Regiments of Military Region 8. To the north, we would deploy the Gia Dinh Regiment. If there were additional outside forces, they would be added to that direction. The forces for those directions had been assigned and we were closely monitoring developments in order to determine the best time to carry out that attack. In the immediate future it was necessary to annihilate additional enemy manpower defending Saigon, cut Route 4 and the Long Tau River, and interdict the airfields, to tighten the noose on Saigon so that the enemy could not form an enclave at the last minute and especially to drive a wedge between the puppet III Corps and IV Corps and tie down the enemy everywhere. COSVN agreed with the Regional Military Party Committee that it was necessary to launch an immediate attack on Xuan Loc and annihilate the puppet 18th Division and Cavalry Brigade, strong III Corps forces, and move up close to Bien Hoa. Group 232 was ordered to prepare to attack Moc Hoa and win control of the only road--Route 12--that could be used to send the 5th Division and technical military equipment down to cut Route 4 and, along with the 8th Division of Military Region 8, annihilate the puppet 7th and 9th Divisions. If that step were carried out well, we would win a big victory all over the theater and the puppet army and regime would vacillate and become chaotic and not be able to defend Saigon effectively, or else there would be an important political upheaval within the ranks of the
puppets or between the puppets and the Americans, in which case we would imme-
diately grasp the opportunity and launch an offensive and uprising, combining
military attacks and mass uprisings, and combining inside-out and outside-in
attacks on the five most important objectives: Tan San Nhat air base, the
puppet GHQ, the Capital Special Zone headquarters, National Police headquarters,
and Independence Palace, in order to liberate all of the B2 theater.

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

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

We traveled all day and into the night. The headquarters of the military
region was situated on the bank of the Dong Nai River in the Vinh An area. The
jungle there had been devastated but because the trees were large it still pro-
vided some cover. When I arrived there it was late at night. The enemy did
not suspect that location, so it was regarded as being relatively safe. But
night and day artillery shells fired from Hoc Ba Thuc and Cay Gao still
exploded incessantly around the area, at times in large numbers and sometimes
sporadically. All of the comrades who had been called in were present. Com-
rade Nam Cuc, i.e. Nguyen Nhy Y, secretary of the Military Region Party Com-
mitee, who was short and slim but had a resolute will, was arrested with me
by the French in the Catinet secret police station and we were imprisoned
together in the Saigon prison in Saigon in 1944-1945. When he saw me he was
overjoyed and confided, "The situation is very encouraging. I'm anxious to
return to Saigon and visit the poor neighborhood in Tan Dinh, where we set up
a secret organ and were captured together by the French secret police, to see
how it changed during the U.S.-puppet period." Comrades Sau Trung, a mem-
ber of the standing committee of the Military Region Party Committee; Duong
Cu Tam, the military region's political officer; Le Van Ngoc, commander of the
military region; and Dang Ngoc Si, deputy commander of the military region and
commander of the 6th Division, appeared to be happy and enthusiastic. The
4th Corps comrades—Hoang Cam, commander; Bui Cat Vu, deputy commander; and
comrade Tran, commander of the 341st Division, which had become the 1st Division, had arrived during the afternoon. Although it was late at night we sat talking with one another, forgetting sleep and even fatigue. Early the next morning we held a meeting. I reported on the overall situation and on the situation of each battlefield in South Vietnam, the assessment and evaluation of the Political Bureau and COSVN, and the specific guidance of the Political Bureau and the Military Committee of the party Central Committee. I reported on the essential points of the attack on Saigon that had been drafted by the Regional Military Party Committee and approved by COSVN, so that they could understand the overall missions. Finally, we announced the decision of the Regional Command to attack Xuan Loc and annihilate the 18th Division and the 3d Cavalry Brigade and assigned missions.

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

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

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

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

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

When the work was done I hastened back to the Regional Command headquarters. When passing by the Rang Rang airfield in the midst of our War Zone A, I viewed the criminal scars caused by the puppet air force's continuous bombing practice there since the Paris Agreement. But the runways were still intact and when necessary our small aircraft could still use them which demonstrated the lack of skill of the puppet pilots. Just beyond the airfield, when our car was crossing the Ma Da River at a ford, two enemy fighter-bombers circled overhead: they had discovered our small convoy crossing the river. Our car sped ahead and turned into the jungle. I hid in a trench on the riverbank, watching the enemy aircraft diving and dropping bombs around us. Our anti-aircraft machinegun spewed out bullets at the enemy airplanes, one of which was hit and, trailing smoke, flew away. The convoy which had not been hit continued on.
After returning home at 0100 on 4 April I learned that Van Tien Dung's party had arrived the previous afternoon and had been provided living and working areas. I was very pleased, for the chief of staff and the entire forward headquarters of the High Command—codenamed Group A75—had arrived. They had arrived in time for the strategic, war-determining attack on the final U.S.-puppet lair. As usual, when I returned from a trip, no matter what the hour, my secretary brought me the urgent news and messages from the battlefield, the units and the central echelon. A long message from brother Ba which had been received on 1 April immediately caught my attention:

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

1. It agreed unanimously that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then the conference reached a decision on the working method and on an explicit division of labor among the elements:
COSVN, the Regional Military Party Commission and the Regional Command kept their responsibility of guiding and commanding the general offensive and uprising throughout the B2 theater, especially close guidance of the uprising of the masses in Saigon.

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

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

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

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

*Senior Colonel Nguyen Xuan Dao (now head of the Communications Section of Military Region 7).
his brave cadres and men, who had done everything possible to insure unimpeded communications between the Regional Command and all of the military regions and units in all main-force campaigns in the B2 theater. Now Xuan Dao was delighted to be augmented by the communications facilities of the High Command at a time when requirements had doubled or tripled.

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

While B2 began to implement the strategic interdiction and surrounding of Saigon in accordance with the above-mentioned plan, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee resolutely concentrated all available forces on the Saigon front, in the final, strategic, war-deciding battle. Carrying out urgent orders of the upper echelon and with the fire of enthusiasm burning in their hearts, unit after unit rushed south in order to be in time to participate in the "national liberation celebration." Corps and divisions from the Red River Delta and Military Region 4 carried out a mechanized movement day and night along the Truong Son route. Main-force units of Military Region 5 and the High Command, technical military equipment which the soldiers and people of Military Region 5 had taken from enemy supply depots, advanced southward down the central Vietnam coast under the command of comrades Le Trong Tan, Le Quang Hoa, Hoang Minh Thao and Nam Long, who had been appointed by the Military Commission of the party Central Committee, annihilated the enemy as they urgently moved down to reinforce the prong that would attack Saigon from the east. Following them were supplementary troops from Hanoi, Tay Bac, Viet Bac, and the provinces of the socialist north, who were ready to sacrifice their lives so that our people could advance to dazzling new heights. Meanwhile, in the B2 provinces, especially in the Mekong Delta, many youths enlisted, joined the guerrillas and formed new units in order to create the strength with which, along with the people, to attack and arise to liberate their home areas. In Saigon, one regiment became two regiments—Gia Dinh 1 and 2—and in Military Regions 8 and 9 provinces, such as Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Can Tho, etc., practically all districts had a battalion. Some provinces had five or six battalions. Tens of thousands of youths returned to the military regions to supplement the main-force units. The spirit of the masses was seething. It was truly heroic: the whole nation was on the move, the whole nation was fighting, and the whole nation was arising. Oh! How sacred our homeland, how heroic our people!
During that time, for the enemy's part, they were very confused because they had suffered heavy defeats. The forces of I Corps and II Corps had essentially been annihilated and disintegrated. But they had still obstinately and hastily reassembled their forces and reorganized their defenses in Military Region III and Military Region IV. Thieu came up with a new strategy he called "light at the top and heavy at the bottom," i.e. he withdrew from the remaining areas in Military Region I and Military Region II in order to defend Military Region III and Military Region IV in accordance with the plan proposed by Gavin. If in the past Thieu had mercilessly cursed that plan, now he regarded it as a plan to save his regime, which was in its death throes. But unfortunately, it was too late! Even the Americans were still very subjective, especially Martin, the U.S. ambassador in Saigon. "Martin replied to the (U.S.) Senate that the South Vietnamese forces had carried out an orderly withdrawal from the Central Highlands, although there were reports to the contrary. And when the deputy head of the Vietnam section (of the U.S. Department of State) protested that optimism, Martin promised that within a year he would invite that deputy section head and his wife to visit Ban Me Thuot. Martin also appeared to be annoyed by his aide Al Francis. After reading a gloomy message from Da Nang, Martin cruelly commented that 'It appears that Francis' thyroid glands are acting up again.' Martin did not think that way because he did not understand the truth. He was always telling the pessimists—one after another—in Washington, that he regarded the loss of the northern part of South Vietnam as insignificant and that it had been a drain on the government's resources. The rest of the country was much richer and formed a unit that could be more effectively defended."* Even the CIA and Pentagon analysts took the view that: "Although admitting that large parts of Military Region I and Military Region II had been permanently lost, they argued that the government forces in the other parts of the country were sufficiently strong to at least hold the defense line north of Saigon until the rainy season began in May, after which the North Vietnamese offensive was certain to encounter difficulties because of the weather and the government would have time to reorganize and reassemble its forces and could participate in negotiations from a position of relative strength."**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The War-Deciding Strategic Battle:
The Historic Ho Chi Minh Campaign

After the first part of April, the political stage in Saigon was seething with urgent activity. The people demanded the overthrow of Thieu in order to have peace, in accordance with the request of the PRG of the RSVN. Weyand and Martin wanted to keep Thieu in order to avoid political upheaval, but to expand the government to include many elements, including the opposition, in order to negotiate with the NLF in hopes of avoiding the complete defeat of the "Republic of Vietnam," the so-called "Senate" of South Vietnam also issued a resolution which although it had no value, demanded a change of leadership in order to "save the nation!" Khiem toadied the United States and completely approved of its opinions, but Nguyen Cao Ky invited Cao Van Vien, Le Minh Dao, commander of the 18th Division at Xuan Loc, and a number of others, to stage a coup d'etat. As everyone knows, everything that occurred in Saigon, from military plans, the "Phoenix" plan to kill Vietnamese, and internal and external policies, to the infighting among the lackeys, was decided by the U.S. master. Thus Ky had to seek permission from the United States, but Polgar, the CIA station chief in Saigon, strictly forbade the coup. The straw hero, air force general Cao Ky, had to remain at his home in Tan Son Nhat airbase, awaiting the day he would flee. Of course, with U.S. support Thieu remained in power. He thought that Khiem belonged to Ky's faction so he dismissed Khiem as premier and minister of defense and brought in a lackey, Nguyen Ba Can to head a so-called reorganized government called the "Government of Combat and National Solidarity" and named Tran Van Don vice premier and minister of defense. It was truly a case of not knowing when to quit. Their end was near but those power-hungry men tried to hang onto their positions, while the opportunists continued to be obsequious toward their masters or get ahead by stepping on others. But they continued to mouth the words "nation" and "people."

By then, Martin realized that only by negotiation was there a chance of saving the situation and gain time to save tens of thousands of Americans and their trusty lackeys of long standing, so that they would not be trapped in Saigon.

During the time Ambassador Martin and CIA station chief Polgar contacted the other diplomats and politicians in an effort to search out all ways to arrange those anxiously awaited negotiations, our delegation to the Two-Party Joint Military Commission at Camp David suddenly became extremely important. Occasionally, prominent Saigon figures also arrived to request a meeting and inquire about the military situation, the attitude of the PRG, and the possibility and conditions for talks to avoid a direct attack on Saigon. That was easily understood. The members of our delegation were the only people in the frightened "capital" who were calm and self-confident, like people who were now the real bosses, who understood the true combat situation better than anyone else, and who clearly understood the positions of the revolutionary government. During that period we remained in constant contact with our delegation, and under the direction of the Political Bureau quickly replied to the messages and
guided every thought and act so that they could be appropriate to diplomatic atmosphere and to the developments on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, the White House was extremely anxious: "During the past several days, since Weyand had gone to Saigon, the White House had not dared comment directly on the crisis in Indochina. But on 3 April, when fierce fighting broke out around Saigon, President Ford could no longer remain silent. During his vacation at Palm Springs, Ford spoke with reporters and criticized Thieu from having withdrawn his troops from the Central Highlands too hastily and said that the evacuation of 6,000 Americans from Vietnam was under consideration. In dealing with one of the most delicate matters, he said that as he understood the War Powers Limitation Act he was authorized to use force to assist in the evacuation of Americans from any war zone in the world.*

"His remarks about that matter were not surprising. For in addition to the tense situation around Saigon his administration had to cope with a disaster that was occurring in Kampuchea. The military situation in Phnom Penh had reached the danger point in the past few days. The White House had finally decided to withdraw all U.S. troops there."**

Thus Dean, the U.S. ambassador in Phnom Penh, on 12 April boarded a helicopter, an American flag under his arm, and fled before Martin did. Lon Nol, the leader of the Kampuchean puppet regime, under the guise of going on an official trip abroad, had gone to the United States at the beginning of the month. On 17 April all of Kampuchea was liberated by the revolutionary forces of the heroic Khmer people. It was beautiful coordination between two battlefields that had long been linked together, in a strategic position of the three Indochinese countries relying on one another in order to exist and grow stronger, a solid strategic position that was as unshakeable as the Truong Son range and the great Mekong River.

While the Americans were carrying out the "Operation Eaglepull" evacuation by helicopter from Phnom Penh, in Saigon the pace of the evacuation also steadily increased. "After 7 April the number of U.S. transport aircraft arriving at and departing from Tan Son Nhat airbase greatly increased. Nearly a dozen C-141 transport aircraft left every day, along with a smaller number of C-130 aircraft which landed at night to transport cargo."***

"From the very beginning, flights departed like a shuttle to Clark Air Force Base, mainly carrying DAO personnel and their families. Nonessential personnel would have to leave the country by commercial aircraft so that the

*Frank Snepp, op. cit.
**During the past few days the White House lawyers had prepared a report to Ford on the legal debate about the War Powers Act. In addition to other matters they pointed out that when the act was discussed in committee and on the floor even its sponsors agreed that armed force could be used to rescue American citizens abroad in an emergency. Since they had no other authorization, Ford decided to use that point to justify his use of Marines stationed aboard ships in the South China Sea.
***Frank Snepp, "Decent Interval."
evacuation could proceed rapidly. A State Department official contacted PANAM on 7 April and requested that company to increase its flights to Saigon. The officials of that company did not want to do so, for that would mean that they would have to pay out more to insure the Indochina flights. But they agreed to provide more seats by providing 747 aircraft for the evacuation from Saigon. *

In Washington, high-ranking officials were arguing about providing Thieu with emergency aid of $722 million, which was regarded as a dose of medicine that would bring him back to life. Secretary of State Kissinger wanted to provide maximum aid, but Secretary of Defense Schle *protested*, for he regarded South Vietnam as already lost.

Against such a background, we began to carry out the strategic encirclement of Saigon according to plan. On "D-Day," 9 April, battles to cut Route 4 west of Saigon and the attack on Xuan Loc, the key strongpoint on the life-or-death defense line of Saigon and Military Region III, began.

To the west, the plan had envisioned using forces of Group 232 to take the town of Moc Hoa, then advance along Route 12, and a combined arms unit advancing to cut Route 4 between Cai Lay and Tan Hiep and, in coordination with the 8th Division of Military Region 8, annihilate the puppet 7th and 9th divisions. But the situation had developed too slowly and the Regional Command was because our forces were not large they could be held up for a long time at Moc Hoa if the enemy concentrated forces and put up a stiff defense, so it recommended to the upper echelon that the plan be changed. While it was keeping the enemy tied down at the Kampuchean border the 5th Division unsuccessfully attacked the town of Thu Thua and the city of Tan An because the puppet 7th and 22d divisions had prepared fortified defenses and put up a resistance, while our division had only infantry and weak fire support. The Group 232 Command ordered the division to attack to annihilate the enemy reaction force and eliminate the enemy's system of outposts north of Route 4 in order to create a staging area from which to control that road and cut it whenever necessary. During the next few days of the fighting the division inflicted heavy casualties on the 1st Infantry Regiment of the puppet 7th Division and an armored regiment and liberated a broad strip along the Van Co Tay River and the Bo Bo Canal immediately north of Route 4, thus directly threatening that road. The forces of Military Region 8 from time to time cut Route 4 between Tan Hiep and Cai Be in My Tho Province, while the forces of Military Region 9 attacked the Cai Von-Ba Cang segment in Vinh Long.

To the east, during the night of 9 April and the early morning of 10 April, 4th Corps, made up of the 7th and 1st (formerly 341st) Divisions and the understrength 6th Division of Military Region 7, attacked the city of Xuan Loc in Long Khanh Province. The powerful attack broke through the city's defenses in many places and rapidly developed to the center of the city. At 0740 on 10 April we planted our flag on provincial headquarters and took a number of other bases and positions, such as the Police Service, the U.S. advisers' compound, the CIA intelligence compound, the ranger base, the railroad station, etc. The enemy still held the subsector and immediately concentrated two

regiments of the 18th Division, along with the remnants of the RF, ranger and armored battalions to put up a defense and launch one counterattack after another. On 10 April the enemy used helicopters to land an airborne brigade in the outskirts of the city to reinforce and shore up the morale of the 18th Division. By 15 April they had sent there two additional Marine brigades, a ranger group, a regiment of the 5th Division, an artillery battalion, and two armored regiments. Thus they concentrated 50 percent of the regular troops, about 60 percent of the artillery, and nearly all of the armor, of III Corps, and the equivalent of a division from the airborne and Marine strategic reserves during the first days of the fighting. They also provided intensive air support for their infantry and armor counterattacks, while also bombing the areas we had taken and our troop formations, as well as our supply lines and rear areas.

They used two types of very lethal bombs, the "Daisy Cutter" and the "CBU,"* used to clear landing zones for helicopters and for mass murder, which the U.S. troops used for many years in Vietnam and surreptitiously turned over to the puppet troops after leaving Vietnam in accordance with the Paris Agreement. (After the liberation we captured a CBU bomb depot and are exhibiting that weapon in the Museum of U.S.-Puppet Crimes on Vo Van Tan Street in Ho Chi Minh City.) That was the first time since 1973 that puppet airplanes had dropped those bombs on targets. It may be said that the puppet troops used everything they had and all strength they could assemble to defend Xuan Loc. Was it that they feared the shocking statement made by their mentor Weyand when he drafted the final defense plan: "To lose Xuan Loc is to lose Saigon." The puppets not only went all-out to defend Xuan Loc, the key, central point of their final strategic defense line, but also hoped to win a major psychological and political battle during that perilous time. During that period the puppet and foreign press propagandized and ballyhooed the fighting ability of the revitalized puppet troops, and that the puppet troops were not in such dire straits and were still strong enough to defend the regime, etc. The U.S. UPI news agency on 12 April, thinking Xuan Loc could hold, said that the puppets had selected Xuan Loc as "a testing ground for the fighting ability of the South Vietnamese troops." That was partly true: the outcome of the battle for Xuan Loc would decide the fate of the puppet army and regime. Thieu very much needed such a victory so that he could appeal for maximum U.S. support and aid, in order to rebuild the puppet army, shore up the morale of their officers and enlisted men and, especially, so that Thieu could remain in power. The United

*The high-ranking CIA officer Frank Snepp in his book "Decent Interval" described those two types of bombs as follows: "The Daisy Cutter was a type of bomb used to blow down trees in helicopter landing zones. It exploded in the air above the objective and cleared an area of up to 100 meters square. The CBU was an even more terrible weapon. It exploded at a predetermined height, creating a billowing cloud with a radius of up to 100 meters and more than 2 meters thick. When it encounters flame the cloud gives off intense heat and creates pressure of tons per square centimeter that disintegrates everything. Anyone surviving that ring of fire will still be suffocated after the bomb explodes, thus creating a vacuum. In the U.S. arsenal, the CBU bomb is the most murderous weapon outside nuclear weapons."
States hoped that the puppets could hold out for a time so that they could have something with which to bargain should negotiations be held.

At the Regional Command headquarters we closely monitored each development of the battle. The reports of 9 and 10 April were very encouraging. The columns were developing their attacks well and we had occupied many objectives. But beginning with the evening of 10 April the situation became tense. The enemy counterattacked insanely even though they had suffered heavy losses. The enemy airplanes attacked fiercely, as if they wanted to destroy the positions they had lost. The Corps complained about shortages of ammunition of all kinds, and especially that the 1st, 6th and 7th Divisions were understrength because they had fought continuously since the fighting along Route 20 began. Then there was a report that the positions we had taken had to be given up one by one. Some positions changed hands several times. The losses of the 1st Division were heavier than those of the other units because it did not have much experience in intensive combat. The situation was very difficult.

Comrades Pham Hung, Van Tien Dung, and even Le Duc Tho were very worried when they saw that the enemy was concentrating increasingly larger forces and we appeared to be slowing down and had failed to take our objectives rapidly and effectively, or had been pushed back. The fighting was very fierce and we were afraid that we would suffer heavy losses at an inopportune time. Thus they suggested that our men be withdrawn from the city and annihilate the enemy troops all around the city, concentrating on annihilating them bit by bit. I recommended that I go there in person to grasp the situation first-hand and work with our men there to find a way to win victory. They agreed.

Thus on the afternoon of 11 April I headed straight for the 4th Corps headquarters. Our vehicle crossed the Dong Nai River by ferry at the Ta Lai ferry crossing and met Route 20 at Phuong Lam. The Corps headquarters was situated on the bank of the La Nga River, a name which entered history with the great La Nga victory during the 9-year anti-French resistance. That battle was commanded by comrades Huynh Van Nghe and Bui Cat Vu. Now comrade Vu was deputy commander of 4th Corps. When I met him on the bank of the La Nga River I happily admonished him to win a second La Nga victory. In fact, I was confident that we would.

After being briefed on developments in the battle and personally inspecting a number of areas, monitoring the enemy's air and artillery activities, reviewing the situation of the enemy troops, and assessing our actual strength, on 13 April we discussed alternatives. By that time the Corps had been reinforced by the 95B Regiment, which had just arrived, a tank company, and a number of field artillery and antiaircraft pieces, and had urgently brought in reinforcements and ammunition, so we still had good fighting strength. The enemy troops were counterattacking to retake the lost positions in hopes of regaining all of Xuan Loc City. The intensity of antiaircraft and air activities was great.

Comrade Hoang Nghia Khanh, the Corp's chief of staff, concisely analyzed the situation and then recommended that Long Khanh be abandoned and that all of our forces circle around to take Trang Bom and then Bien Hoa. Comrade Hoang
Cam, the Corps commander, suggested that we wipe out the puppet 52d Regiment at the Dau Giay intersection and at Nui Thi. Then we would take Xuan Loc. Bien Hoa would be attacked in coordination with attacks in other areas. Many others, such as Hoang Cam, agreed differing only on what forces should be used.

After listening to all opinions I analyzed a number of points and reached a clearcut conclusion: Xuan Loc was an extremely important point on the enemy's defense line, so they had concentrated many forces to defend it. At that time the enemy forces were superior to ours. We no longer had the element of surprise. Thus, it was not to our advantage to continue to attack Xuan Loc. We controlled Route 20 as far as Tuc Trung. Between Tuc Trung and the Dau Giay intersection (the intersection of Route 20 and Route 1) the enemy was not strong. We had to fully utilize our advantage on Route 20 and the enemy's weakness in the area around Dau Giay.

If we took and held the Dau Giay intersection—which we were capable of doing because the enemy there was weak and would be taken by surprise—Xuan Loc would no longer be a key strongpoint because it would lay outside the defense line. Bien Hoa would immediately be threatened. After we had taken Dau Giay the enemy in Xuan Loc would be confused and in a state of chaos because they would be cut off from their rear area, and become surrounded and isolated. The III Corps would be terrified, for large forces would be trapped outside the defense line. Thus we would make two moves. One, we would concentrate our attack on Dau Giay from two directions: Xuan Loc and Trang Bom. Second, we would withdraw from Xuan Loc and advance toward Ba Ria and Bien Hoa. Therefore, we could not take the pressure off the enemy in Xuan Loc but carefully keep them contained and annihilate them if they counterattacked or fled in panic.

On the basis of that analysis, it was decided to:

--First of all, use the 1st Division to annihilate the 52d Regiment at Dau Giay and Mt. Thi, a dominating high point there, liberate a large area, and defend at all the Dau Giay intersection, a position which would become a key position as well as for the enemy. We would stop and annihilate the enemy troops counterattacking from Trang Bom.

--The strong forces of the Corps would keep up the pressure on and annihilate the enemy in Xuan Loc, especially in the area between Xuan Loc and the Day Giay intersection, to support the Dau Giay blocking position.

--Send a force to lay an ambush on Route 2 to block that road, the only road to Ba Ria, and annihilating enemy troops fleeing along it.

--Rationally deploy antiaircraft firepower in order to effectively counter enemy airplanes. Meanwhile, the Hieu Liem artillery base and Group 113 would effectively interdict Bien Hoa air base, from which enemy airplanes equipped with powerful bombs had been taking off to attack us.

Everyone agreed with that operational plan and urgently prepared to carry it out, under the specific guidance of the corps.

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I then discussed with the Corps and Military Region 7 the direction of attack after Xuan Loc was liberated, how the eastern column would attack Saigon once the order was received to do so. When we were discussing that matter we did not yet include in our calculations the forces commanded by comrade Tan, which were advancing south along the central coast. We were still working with the plan of attacking Saigon by using the existing B2 forces.

I made a careful analysis: The city of Bien Hoa, along with the air base and the headquarters of the puppet III Corps, had many complicated structures and fortifications. The enemy would take advantage of them to stop our advance on Saigon. After the loss of Xuan Loc was lost, Bien Hoa would be the most important point in that direction. By attacking Bien Hoa we would attack the "hardest point on the enemy's defensive shield, which would be to our disadvantage and slow us down. The enemy would be weaker--and unexpected--along Route 15 flanking the Long Binh supply depot to the Saigon-Bien Hoa highway. We would then follow that broad highway and rapidly take the principal objective: Presidential Palace. Our advance in that direction would be mechanized, with tanks leading the way--and would develop very rapidly and have good support once we had established a 130mm artillery base at Nhon Trach. Meanwhile, part of our forces would keep the enemy tied down at Bien Hoa, which would be taken care of later.

Everyone agreed with that analysis. I also discussed with those comrades a plan: the 6th Division of Military Region 7, which was familiar with the area, would be reinforced by artillery and tanks and would move secretly and unexpectedly to liberate a segment of Route 15, penetrate through to Provincial Route 19 running through the Nhon Trach depression, quickly liberate Nhaon Trach, and set up a 130mm artillery base there. From that artillery base, before the order was received to attack Saigon, we would shell and interdict Tan Son Nhat air base. When the various columns had advanced into the city it would no longer fire on objectives in the city but would give effective support to the eastern column.

In coordination with that column, we would use the 10th Sapper Regiment to block the Long Tau River to prevent any traffic to or from the city, and send a force across the Dong Nai River to liberate Precinct 9 in Saigon in coordination with the local forces.

The 1st Division was responsible for pinning down and wiping out the enemy at Bien Hoa, and for protecting the Corps' flank.

The principal force of the Corps--the 7th Division, with the 95B Regiment in reserve--would circle around Bien Hoa, advance along Route 15, then attack directly toward Saigon and take Independence Palace, the Corps' main objective.

The comrades in the Corps all approved of that plan and were enthusiastically confident of victory. Comrades Le Van Ngoc, commander of Military Region 7, and Dang Ngoc Si, deputy commander and commander of the 6th Division, enthusiastically accepted both the immediate mission of wiping out the 52d Regiment and forming a blocking position at the Dau Giay intersection and later taking Nhon Trach in order to set up an important 130mm artillery base to interdict Tan Son Nhat airbase and support the Corps' attack on Saigon.

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We parted company with confidence in victory. My party urgently returned, at a time when everyone was urgently preparing for that enormously important battle. Meanwhile, the puppet troops who had been drawn into Xuan Loc and were trying to win a "world famous" Xuan Loc victory did not suspect that they were about to become "mice caught in a trap."

During the mid-April period all of us were anxiously following every move of the 3d and 1st Corps and the combat arms units, which were coming south to participate in the campaign to liberate Saigon. Groups of cadres were sent to guide the columns. Each unit followed a different route and had a different departure date. The 1st Corps would depart from the Red River. With regard to 3d Corps, some divisions would come from the Central Highlands and some would turn from the coastal road onto Route 11 to Dalat, then follow Route 20 south. The 2d Corps and the 3d Division of Military Region 5 would fight their way down the coast. Some units arrived before the ammunition did, and when some tanks arrived they were out of POL and had only one or two rounds. Some units needed to be supplemented and reorganized. The staff and rear services cadres were buried in work. Everyone worked much longer than normal, night and day. Enthusiasm and energy were multiplied and tasks were completed cleverly and quickly.

Except for the coastal column, each corps sent in advance a group of cadres to the campaign headquarters to receive missions. The groups had to study in advance the assembly areas, and assault positions their units had to occupy, the enemy units they had to wipe out and the main objectives for which the units were responsible. Then they organized coordination among the various areas and columns, among the combat arms, between the main-force units and the local units, etc. The staff cadres of the Regional Command, led by comrade Dong Van Cong, working together with Group A75 cadres commanded by comrade Le Ngoc Hieu, briefed them on all details of the operational plan and thoroughly answered their questions. Comrade Tran Van Dinh organized cooperation between the corps and areas and the sappers and commandos, and assigned to each corps, each deep-penetration division, and the sapper and commando cadres and units guiding the attacking units, objectives that had to be attacked. Everyone went all-out and contributed all he knew to the victory.

Because of the demands of the situation, and because the corps were arriving at the battlefield piecemeal, COSVN and the Campaign Command, with the participation of Sau Tho, decided to wait until all units of the corps had arrived so that we would have absolute superiority over the enemy, launch a rapid, strong, certain-victory attack on the final U.S.-puppet lair, and keep the city intact. The Political Bureau agreed with that decision.

We concerned ourselves with adjusting the campaign plan. On the basis of the plan drafted by B2 to attack Saigon with its own forces, which had been approved by COSVN and agreed to by Van Tien Dung and Le Duc Tho; on the basis of the forces that had been predeployed in the various areas and to avoid unnecessary, time-losing upsetting deployments; and with the spirit that the B2 forces, which were familiar with the battlefield, had to be responsible for areas in which the terrain was complicated and there were many difficulties, it was necessary to reserve the most forward positions for the forces arriving from afar which arrived in time to be deployed. The plan was adjusted, and the forces assigned missions, as follows:
The northern prong, which would originate its attack from Cu Chi and Ben Cat, attack the puppet 25th Division, and advance mainly along Route 1 to take the main objective—Tan Son Nhat airbase—would be the responsibility of 3d Corps. We had originally intended to assign that direction to the 9th Division and the 16th and 271B Regiments, but now those units were transferred to Group 232.

Group 232, as originally planned, would attack from the west, mainly along Route 12, with the objective of taking the Capital Special Zone headquarters. The 271B Regiment was transferred to the southern prong.

The organization of the attack from the south, which was still the responsibility of the 88th and 24th Regiments—now with the addition of the 271 Regiment—was the responsibility of Military Region 8, which designated comrade Ba Theng, i.e. Maj Gen Vo Van Thanh, commander of that column; comrade Tu Than, i.e. Maj Gen Huynh Van Men, deputy commander; and comrade Chin Pham, a member of the standing committee of the Military Region 8 Party Committee, political officer Comrade Tu Chieu, commander of the Long An Province unit, was named a deputy commander of the prong. The main line of advance from that direction was along Route 5, north from Can Giuoc. Its main objective was National Police Headquarters.

Comrade Le Duc Anh, deputy commander of the Regional Command, was designated a deputy commander of the Campaign Command, and comrade Le Van Tuong, deputy political officer of the Regional Command, was designated to exercise direct, unified command of both the western and southern prongs.

The northern column which would attack the 5th Division and advance along Route 13 to take the puppet GHQ, was the responsibility of 1st Corps. The Gia Dinh Regiment was responsible for the Saigon outskirts in that direction.

The eastern prong was previously the responsibility of the 4th Corps, which was now reinforced with part of 2d Corps and the 3d Division of Military Region 5. Comrade Le Trong Tan, deputy commander of the Campaign Command, was designated to command both corps and make the specific decisions in that direction.

Thus all five directions were reinforced with very strong forces, including both infantry and the combat arms. However, there was a shortage of military engineer units and facilities, especially river-crossing facilities. The eastern, western, and southern prongs were strengthened by the addition of strong commands because they were made up of many units and had many complications.

The forward headquarters of the Campaign Command was located in the Van Tam area southwest of Chon Thanh and north of Ben Cat, immediately to the rear of the 3d Corps. The Regional Staff had prepared that site in advance.

On 18 April comrade Sau Tho, representing the Political Bureau, along with the Campaign Command reviewed the campaign for the final time. Everyone expressed a high degree of determination to correctly implement the motto of the
Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee:

"Marvelous speed-boldness-surprise-certain victory." With regard to main-force units, we had a three-fold advantage over the enemy numerically and were many times superior with regard to quality. We had to deploy forces to annihilate the enemy troops defending the outer perimeters and also strong forces to penetrate directly and rapidly to the main objectives in the city. We had to attack rapidly and strongly from the outside, in close coordination with attacks and uprisings inside the city, so that the enemy would not have time to react or carry out sabotage. The troops would coordinate with the uprising revolutionary mass forces to quickly take all installations and neighborhoods in the city in the briefest possible time. That was the content and significance of marvelous speed. It was decided that the five columns would have to coordinate closely in combat and that the five main objectives assigned to the five columns would have to be taken almost simultaneously, but that the Independence Palace would be the central, final objective. When a column had taken its main objective it would have to advance immediately on the Independence Palace. If none of our forces had already taken it, that column would have to take it and raise our flag of victory. If our forces had already taken it, the column would immediately return to its original position.

"D Day" for the attack on Saigon would depend primarily on the arrival of most of 3d Corps and 1st Corps. Previously, in message No 07, brother Ba had given the following instruction: "I have discussed the situation with brother Van and feel that several more days of preparation are necessary. When most of the forces of 3d Corps and 1st Corps arrive (both infantry and technical military equipment) the large-scale attack can begin. It should not be launched now." On the basis of that directive we monitored, every hour and every day, the movement of each unit of the various corps, especially 1st Corps, which was traveling the longest distance. Furthermore, we sent groups of staff and rear services cadres to be on hand at the assembly areas to help the corps inventory their forces, rectify their organization and supplement their ammunition and rear services. The Regional military engineers had to prepare the Ben Bau ford across the Be River northwest of Tan Uyen for 1st Corps, insure that the 3d Corps could cross the damaged Nha Bich bridge and the Saigon River, etc. It was truly a race against time. The situation in general was urging us on and the upper echelon was urging us on. On 22 April brother Ba sent a message which included the following passage:

"The military-political opportunity for launching an attack on Saigon has arrived. We must take advantage of each day in order to promptly launch attacks on the enemy from all directions and not dally. Delay would be disadvantageous both politically and militarily. Acting promptly at the present time is insuring to the greatest possible extent that we will win total victory.

"Immediately instruct the columns to act promptly and stress combining military attacks with mass uprisings and coordination among the various columns as well as between attacks and uprisings during the action process.

"If we grasp the great opportunity, we are certain to win complete victory."

That message arrived at a time when all enemy troops at Xuan Loc had been annihilated, routed at Xuan Loc and Thieu had been forced to resign as president of the puppet regime.

During the night of 13 April and the early morning of 14 April, in accordance with a new decision made by 4th Corps the 6th Division had wiped out a battalion of the 52d Regiment of the 18th Division and an armored squadron, and had liberated the Dau Giay intersection. The next day we took Mt. Thi, Tuc Trung, and Kiem Tan, the last positions on Route 20 and wiped out the remainder of the 52d Regiment. The 6th Division shifted over to the strong defense of those areas and to wiping out the enemy troops who launched continuous counterattacks from Trang Bom. The 7th and 1st Divisions of 4th Corps wiped out bit by bit the enemy forces at Xuan Loc belonging to the 48th Regiment, the airborne regiment and the armored units.

After the enemy failed to retake the Dau Giay intersection and they lost all of Route 20, Bien Hoa became a front-line position but the enemy did not have sufficient forces to defend it. On 18 April the puppet III Corps had to use helicopters to extricate a number of forces from Xuan Loc and take them to Bien Hoa-Trang Bom to bolster a new defense line, and on 20 April the troops remaining in Xuan Loc fled the city along Route 2 past Ba Ria and back to Bien Hoa. We were able to wipe out only part of the fleeing troops because our unit which the Ba Ria Military Command had assigned responsibility for blocking Route 2 was careless and failed to prevent the enemy from fleeing.

Frank Snepp, in the book noted above, related that "On the morning of the 21st the remaining defenses of the Government at Xuan Loc collapsed. The four surviving battalions of the 18th ARVN Division, with its commander, General Dao, were removed from the devastated city by helicopter."

At noon on the 21st Thieu called ex-Premier Khiem and Vice President Huong to his office and sadly told them that he was resigning. Thieu said, "Because of the military situation, which he described as 'hopeless' (Khiem and Huong agreed) there would be no point in his remaining in office, and his doing so would only impede a settlement."**

That afternoon Thieu announced his resignation and turned over his office to Vice President Huong. "During his solemn inauguration ceremony, Tran Van Huong, who was 71 years old, had arthritis and was nearly blind, promised to hold out until 'the troops are killed or the country is lost.'"

The experts at the U.S. Embassy laughed at those hard-line declarations. They regarded them as "a pacifier for Ky and his clique, so that they would not jump in."***

**"Decent Interval," by Frank Snepp
***Ibid.

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"A few months later he (Thieu) told a friend on Taiwan that "Yes, my timing was right. I waited until the disease progressed to the point that he was bedfast. No one can surpass me in what I did for my country."

That was truly the style and thought of a president of the puppet regime.

While waiting for the forces of 3rd Corps and 1st Corps to arrive we were concerned with the synchronized guidance of the Military Region 8 column attacking Saigon from the south. As stated above, that direction was the most difficult one because the terrain was very difficult, our staging area was very far away and our approach route passed through areas long held by the enemy. Some segments had to be traversed secretly at night, and in other places it was necessary to wipe out enemy outposts and wipe out counter-attacking enemy troops in order to reach the outskirts of Saigon. We had to travel a long way, through a highly populated area in which the supporters of the revolution did not always outnumber the families of puppet troops. The masses had not been awakened. It was an operation in which we would have to fight our way through. We had to be good at mass proselyting and at proselyting among enemy troops. Carelessness could cause the defeat of our operation before it had a chance to participate in the attack on Saigon. If our timing was not precise and if our deployment was not solid, we could upset the plan and not meet the D Day attack date. And if we were too early we would reveal the overall scheme and harm the campaign as a whole.

After careful deliberation, during the first week of April we ordered the Military Region to deploy the column. The Military Region had received its mission in February and had organized in advance and prepared its command, forces and plan, but maintained secrecy until an order was received from the upper echelon.

I have received permission to excerpt a few pages from the diary of comrade Tran Ham Ninh, the operational aide and secretary of comrade Ba Thang, i.e. Maj Gen Vo Van Thanh, commander of that column.

The brief, succinct lines of those diary pages, although not giving the whole picture, help us imagine the organization and implementation methods of a small offensive column of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign. I say "small" because to the south we were forced to use forces smaller than in the other directions: only three regiments and two light infantry battalions made up the prong's formation. There were no clamoring tanks or armored vehicles and there was no heavy artillery or antiaircraft artillery. In addition to those units there were other units and organizations, including those of the people, which did not participate directly in the column but contributed considerably to its success. In order to fight their way through, the forces in that direction had to wipe out 45 enemy outposts, liberate 12 villages, fight the enemy on the outer perimeter, penetrate directly to the center of the city, and take by the stipulated time one of the five key objectives in order to overwhelm the enemy with marvelous speed. The key objective they had to take was National Police Headquarters, the innermost defense force and the force which guarded against and quelled the uprisings of the people. It was a key objective of our strategic general offensive and uprising.
Comrade Tran Ham Ninh recorded:

On 6 April 1975

--2330 hours. Everyone is asleep. Why do I keep tossing around, unable to sleep?

--From the fields I could see the light of a flashlight coming toward me. I got up and turned on the lantern. A courier from the cryptography section arrived. It was 12 midnight.

--"What message could be so urgent."

--"A message from ZN."

--"I'm going back now, brother Sau (i.e. Ninh)."

I opened the envelop, took out the message, and glanced at the sheet of paper. There were many instructions. The message was signed by Pham Hung* and Tran Van Tra**

I put the lantern in a corner so that less light would be visible from outside. I read the instructions. There had been a major change. A flashlight lighting my way, I went to see brother Hai Phat (head of the operations section), who was asleep. I gently shook him and he awakened. "I've received a message changing our mission." Those words were sufficient to set up and get out from the mosquito net. After reading and rereading the message, he picked up a flashlight and went immediately to the command headquarters. It was 0100 in the morning.

9 April 1975:

I again left the beloved 20-7 area (an area in Cai Be and Cai Lay in My Tho Province, between Route 4 and the Mekong River), as I had many times before. Why did I feel so nostalgic this time? I had left the area only a week before but had returned after a few days. After I left this time, when would I return? I didn't know. I left my bag of (vegetable) seeds with brother Ba Lac.

My boat passed by the My Long base, which an enemy battalion had abandoned 2 days previously. The half-red, half-blue flag flapping in the breeze was a beautiful sight. The current flowed lazily, as if not caring that in a corner of that base there was still a body of a mercenary.

When we reached Nhi Qui, the sun had not yet gone down. Guerrillas had surrounded the Bo Keo post, so enemy mortar shells were falling haphazardly. The enemy infantry had not yet withdrawn from Route 4, so we could not yet cross the road. At 2100 hours I established contact with the provincial

* Pham Hung
**Tran Van Tra
unit. We organized a road crossing. Thus by 2400 hours, far from the 20-7 area, we rested for the night.

10 April 1975:

Tan Hoi, a staunch area, the inviolable base of the My Tho provincial unit. Of the command staff only Tam Cong was present. The commanders of two battalions who had an appointment to meet with the Command were present, and after having waited a long time were only able to meet with the E2 chief of staff.

At 1500 hours I set out for Tam Hiep, where I met E3 (E88). They were ready.

At 1900 hours I again crossed Route 4. To the right was the Trung Luong intersection, to the left was the Ben Chua bridge. With the help of the people, our column crossed the road safely.

While passing through the Bao Dinh area I met someone I knew. But we didn't have time to talk because the column continued to move forward. My friend's mission was to remain behind and defend that area. We followed a footpath passing in front of many houses. Inside the houses there was complete silence. But it was certain that the women and children in them could not sleep, for the sound of footsteps, although very light, echoed in their hearts. It was a moving, memorable scene.

Due to a lack of close coordination, the column went down to Luong Hoa but went to the wrong place and met no one. It was too late at night, so we slept among the roots of popinac bushes.

11 April 1975:

We arose early in the morning and went up to Song Binh, where we met everywhere. It was reported to J10 (the Military Region 8 Command) and Group 232 that the command of the southern prong had arrived safely. During the late afternoon the command crossed the Ong Vau road and went down to Quon Long (Cho Gao). When we arrived there, it was very difficult to find a level place to spread a plastic sheet on which to sleep. But it wasn't really much of a problem.

12 April 1975:

Quon Long. After a day we still hadn't learned about the whereabouts of E2, E4 (i.e. the 24th Regiment). We also could not learn about the location and activities of E3. We waited anxiously.

The determination of the southern column, to make its way to the assembly position by the stipulated time, was reported to R, Group 232 and J10.

13 April 1972:

The cadre team of E2, E4 arrived. But we still did not know the location of E3 and brother Tu Than.
Two My Tho battalions were operating strongly at the Cho Gao Canal. The enemy resisted fiercely. The enemy was drawn to that area so that we would not be bothered.

That night the division (5th Division). After the other units had launched their attacks, we would have an easier time of it.

E3 was encouraged to go all-out to attack Tan Tru during the night of 14 April.

14 April 1975:

Because of a lack of close cooperation, when the E4 cadre team arrived at Rach Tram no one was there to meet it, so it was unable to cross Route 21 and had to return to Quon Long.

E2 was ordered to return. There had been a change regarding the use of forces. What unit would replace E2 in the formation of the southern column?

The 279th Battalion wiped out the Ong Bai post, thus expanding our corridor.

All of E4 arrived.

Brother Hai Phat's team arrived. Thus only now could the column's command organ assemble. With regard to forces, by that time we had 2E and ed (i.e. the 3d Battalion). As for d10, d14, and another E, we didn't know when they would arrive.

15 April 1975:

Today we left Quon Long and at 1700 hours we arrived at the fields. We organized the formation and set the departure times.

We left Quon Long. It was unimaginably muddy. I didn't suspect that we would be in mud and water up to our waists. Following water coconut trees, we made our way to Rach Tram. When we crossed Route 21 it was nearly 2400 hours. There were no junks to cross the Van Co Tay River. We lay in the field and waited. Nearby was the Thuan My outpost. A little farther was Thanh Vinh Dong. On the other side of the river was Cho Dinh. How bold we were! It had been 15 years since I was there. I had very fond memories. My mother had passed on and was buried near there. My elder brother had fulfilled his mission during the anti-French resistance war. He had sacrificed a few years ago. Only my father and I survived. No! There was still a whole nation.

16 April 1975:

Nhut Ninh. We weren't able to cross the river until 0400 hours. When we took our first break the sun was up. Our clothes were covered with mud. The troops passing by looked strangely peaceful.
22 April 1975:

The command headquarters was still at Tan Phuoc. Thieu had resigned. The command sent message No 72ZN to E3 and E4 instructing them to both step up their attacks and do a good job of proselyting enemy troops. E3's attack was going well at Can Gioc (it had wiped out four outposts). E4 had also wiped out four outposts in Can Duoc.

Difficulties had been encountered in all aspects of rear services support for the past week. Too few supplies were being sent to the forward areas. During the day the column's command sent five ZN messages regarding rear services.

The command established contact with brother Tu Chieu (commander of the Long An provincial unit and deputy commander of the southern column) through E3.

23 April 1975:

Vam Rach Ca (Tan Phuoc). The command assigned E4 the following mission: "The line of development of E is Phuoc Hau and Long Thuong (Can Giuoc, bordering Binh Chanh) in order to fulfill the principal mission."

Rear services were very difficult. We knew that J10 was also experiencing difficulties but in order to insure victory we recommended that J10 (brother Ba Dao) send Nam Tri of Ba Thi to replace Ba Canh (who had not fulfilled his mission) and that J10 report the situation to J50 (the command of the southern column).

During the day E4 liberated Long Cang (Can Duoc) and was surrounding and attacking d2/E42.

Brother Thu Than went to Group 232.

The situation of the southern column was reported to R, Group 232 and J10.

24 April 1975:

The units temporarily halted their rapid advance and reformed their ranks to the spot. The positions of the E and d were reported to R, Group 232 and J10.

The reinforcements for J50 had not yet arrived. Recommended that brother Ba Dao (J10) look into that problem.

Recommended that brother Tu Chieu and E3 send a cadre from Can Giuoc to the command headquarters.

The command asked Tu Chieu whether he had been able to establish contact with the party committees and district units of Nha Be and Binh Chanh.
R ordered Ba Thang to go to Group 232 to receive a mission. A message was sent to Long An instructing him to go to a location on Route 4 in Binh Duc. We waded across the muddy and mosquito-infested Nhat Tao River at 1800 hours.

When we neared Route 4 the rice had been harvested and the fields were dry. We felt very comfortable. We lay waiting until 2200 hours but the situation was changing and we could not establish contact with Long An. We had to return to command headquarters.

25 April 1975:

Long Son. The fields were dry and the rice had been harvested. Received message 111ZN from Group 232 about the campaign's D Day. Repeat, D Day. The awaited day had arrived.

Directed E3 to do a good job of coordinating combat and the proselyting of enemy troops. The command agreed to leave d4/E4 behind, and have E3 take Long Thuong. A message was sent to Tu Chien and Bon Do (E3) instructing them to come to the command headquarters. The Long An Dl unit blew up the Rach Dao bridge.

26 April 1975:

Long Son: Starting today, messages would be numbered from 01. Message 01ZN was sent to Group 232 repeating the D Day date a second time (in reply to Group 232's message 442N).

Reported to R, Group 232, and J10 that we had encountered difficulty en route to the meeting. Recommended that Group 232 assign mission via message. Said that brother Tu Than could not go either.

Received message No 452N from brother Sau Nam (Group 232) assigning mission to the column, which expressed determination to fulfill its mission.

Still unable to make contact with Nha Be and Can Giuoc.

The command reminded brother Phong, commander of the 271B Regiment, to organize a march because the time was pressing.

Reminded brother Nam Nhi to go to Long An to defend the area 1 kilometer from the Cho Dao post to insure the command's movement.

1800 hours. The command headquarters departed Long Son in the direction of Can Giuoc. Passed through a populated area. Most of the people stayed put.

2200 hours, arrived at Phuoc Lam (Can Giuoc).

2300 hours, the southern column command met to evaluate E3's fulfillment of its mission and to review the good points and deficiencies. Brother Tu Do (regimental commander) and Nam Tu (political officer) of E3 participated in the meeting.
Note: Fulfilled missions, opened up approach route, and prepare to launch a rapid attack.

Stress teaching mass viewpoint to the units: fight for the people, protect the people, liberate the people, motivate the masses to participate in the revolution, and dig shelters for the people.

--Pay more attention to proselyting among enemy troops.

27 April 1975:

Phuoc Lam.

Recommended that Group 232 and R allow us to contact E117 (sappers).

0730, the southern column command met to discuss the attack plan and organization.

Received message No 53ZN from Group 232 stating that Group 232 had instructed brother Nam Man (of the Saigon municipal unit) have Binh Chanh and Ha Be contact the southern column.

--ld/E529 (Chin May) now in the Cau Nhi, Thien Duong area.

0920, the column command assigned mission to E4, accepted by Ba Thuyen, the regimental commander, and Hai Van, the regimental political officer:

--The Ho Chi Minh campaign will liberate Saigon.

--The principal objective: the National Police Headquarters.

--Time: night of 27 April, the advance element arrives in Binh Dang. Night of 28 April, the entire regiment arrives at Binh Dang. Night of 29 April, the attack begins.

--The command headquarters of the southern column: Nam Cau Mat. Field hospital will set up near the headquarters.

--Beginning on 27 April, no firing while en route, until the attack begins. The 1st Long An battalion will serve as the regimental reserve.

--The objectives of E3 are to attack Qui Duc, Hung Long, Phong Duoc and Binh Dang.

--Slogan:
 Question: Ho Chi Minh
 Answer: Long live!

--Code signs:

--Carry liberation flags.

--Wear red armband on left arm.
28 April 1975:

The command headquarters did not know the location of the 271B Regiment. The regiment had only recently come down to the delta, where the going is very rough. The command sent a message to the 271B Regiment and also a message to J10 recommending that it inform us about 271B.

Message was sent to J10 and Group 232, informing them that our supplies were very low and requesting additional supplies.

We sent someone to establish contact with brother Chin May.

Night. The command headquarters and the units left Phuoc Lam-Thuan Thanh with the units, crossed the Quan Com River and advanced to Hung Long. After traveling all night we arrived there and by the time we completed our fortification it was morning.

29 April 1975:

Hung Long: When they awoke in the morning and saw the liberation troops everywhere, the people were extremely enthusiastic. One old woman went out into the field and dug up a red flag with a gold star. I don't know when it had been buried, but it looked very new.

Message No 15ZN, to Tu Nguyen, Sau Nam and Tam Phuong, reported that the command headquarters of the southern column, E4, E3, and d10 had arrived at Hung Long during the night of 28 April. E4 would take Precinct 8 (Y Bridge) and E3 would take Route 5. The column command would also use the 2d Long An battalion.

The command sent a message to the 271B Regiment: "The time for fulfilling your mission has arrived. Move out rapidly."

Message No 16ZN to Tu Nguyen, Sau Nam and Tam Phuong reported that the 1st Battalion of the 3d Regiment would be used to attack the Hung Long subsector.

The command met to discuss the attack plan. Brother Tu Chien reported on the terrain east of Route 5 and on our situation and that of the enemy in the Binh Chanh and Nha Be areas.

In the Rach Cay area the terrain was very wild and belonged to neither us nor the enemy. It was very marshy and impassable.

The deployment of E4 was changed a little. Instead of the whole regiment crossing over to the area east of Route 5 and advancing from Rach Cay to Y Bridge, we would use only the 1st Battalion of that regiment to carry out that plan, while the 2d Battalion of the 24th Regiment would attack along Route 5 to the Nhi Thien Duong bridge, turn and go to the Pham The Hien ferry landing, and from there go to Y Bridge.

E3 would remain unchanged:
Message No 18ZN to brothers Tu Nguyen, and Tam Phuong reported on the liberation of Hung Long, the receipt of the 731 message and attack plan.

1900 hours. The command headquarters moving toward Da Phuoc. The regiments were moving according to plan.

2100 hours. Arrived at Da Phuoc. All elements dug fortifications. The masses at first would not let us dig, perhaps because they were afraid of “disturbing” the soil. We explained that the positions were being dug both so that the troops could fight and so that the people could take shelter from the bombs and shells. If there were no fortifications, the troops and the people would be endangered. Ultimately, they not only let us dig but gave us wood to make covers and glutinous rice for the troops to eat.

After 2400 we had completed the digging of fortifications. All of the fortifications were full of water. Some collapsed after being dug.

30 April 1975:

Da Phuoc. Early in the morning the sound of vehicles could be heard on Route 5. The command headquarters was situated 500 meters from the road.

Liberation Radio broadcast the communique of the PRG and the communique of the Saigon Front Command. I felt very excited when I heard it.

The command sent messages guiding E3 and E4 and relaying the two communiques, and a message reporting the results of the fulfillment of missions.

At 0800, message No 23ZN to brothers Tu Nguyen, Sau Nam and Tam Phuong reported that E3 and E4 had taken up positions at the designated time and had begun their attacks.

At 1000 E4 reported that it had crossed Y Bridge. There was another report: it was advancing to take the column's main objective: National Police Headquarters. The time was exactly 1030.

After 1000, the triangular Da Phuoc post surrendered. The command headquarters moved out to Route 5.

From Da Phuoc the masses used buses and commercial trucks to transport the entire command organ to the Y Bridge. The time was 1130 hours.

1200. The command headquarters of the southern headquarters arrived at the National Police Headquarters, an hour and a half after E4.

The final message, No 24ZN, to brothers Tu Nguyen, Sau Nam and Tam Phuong, reported the taking over of the Municipal Police Headquarters and the National Police Command.

One of the most difficult problems during the period of final preparations for the Ho Chi Minh campaign was that of military engineers taking the advancing
columns across rivers so that they could advance into the city. For example, we had to find a way to take Group 232 across the Van Co Dong River so that the entire formation could arrive at the assault position. Group 232 had been reinforced with additional infantry forces, field artillery—including heavy 130mm artillery—and antiaircraft artillery—and a tank-armored regiment one-third of the tanks of which were T54's. In all, there were nearly 800 vehicles and artillery pieces, but the region only had half of a heavy ferry (the Soviet TPP model). An additional half had been requested from the central echelon but it had not yet arrived. In all other directions there was also a shortage of military engineer forces. The staff carried out a review and concluded that the High Command had reinforced the Saigon Front with the following military engineer forces:

--The 279th Construction Regiment had arrived.

--The 574th Road-Building Regiment of the 599 Command had arrived and would be put at the disposal of the Rear Services Department.

--The 249th Ferry Regiment had four companies and one-fourth of a TPP heavy ferry set. It was estimated that the unit would arrive on about 20 April but it had not yet arrived.

We had decided that the first ferry unit to arrive would be sent immediately to Group 232, for its forces had to cross a river before the others, and may be the only direction to require such facilities if the enemy could not blow up the bridges. The 1st Corps had to cross the Be River, but during that season that river's water level was low and the regional military engineers had already prepared a ford at the Bau ferry landing. For the immediate future, Group 232 would have to rely on the existing forces and mobilize on-the-spot facilities in order to cross the Van Co Dong River.

For that reason, a question that was posed at that time was what we would do if the enemy withdrew rapidly into the city and blew up the bridges on the roads leading to Saigon. Anything could happen, so we had to have contingency plans. We knew that Saigon was situated in an area with many rivers, streams and drainage ditches. The rivers and streams were deep and marshy. The rivers were marshy and the banks were marshy; after one went ashore it was sometimes necessary to cross marshy fields. The enemy had sufficient explosives and know-how to carry out sabotage. In their death throes they had all sorts of insidious plots.

That was a very great obstacle for bringing into play the offensive strength of the combined combat arms' heavy technical equipment. In all directions we had to cross at least four or five bridges. If the bridges were blown up, would our vehicles and artillery be stopped in the outskirts? We could overcome those problems, but the enemy would have time to build fortifications and obstacles and organize a defense, and our commandos attacking objectives inside the city would be isolated and the people could not arise. We would have to attack each defense line, street and house, so we would no longer have the element of surprise or rapid speed, and the city would no longer be intact.
At that time our troops did not have the capabilities of the other modern armies, and could not send in airborne units or land troops by helicopter to take the bridges by surprise before the main body of troops arrived. But that was not a simple matter, for it was necessary to attack and take dozens of bridges at the same time in many different directions.

We had a total of six sapper regiments, added to dozens of commando units which were on a state of readiness in the outskirts and in the city. Those were elite units which had been steeled and challenged over the course of many years of fighting the Americans and had achieved many brilliant feats of arms. Many units had been awarded the "hero" designation. The 3d Corps also had its own sapper regiment. Thus we were fully capable of preventing the enemy from blowing up the bridges and of insuring that the corps could advance directly to their objectives unimpeded.

But it was necessary to change the missions of the sapper-commando units. The Regional Command had previously assigned them the mission of taking the objectives for which they were responsible, from the five key objectives to the other important objectives, while the corps were entering the city, in order to coordinate attacks from within with attacks from the outside. Now their principal objective became taking and holding the important bridges in the various directions until the corps passed. Although there were many commando units and a number of sapper units which were still responsible for objectives inside the city, the strong units had to shift over to the new missions. The change of principal missions had to be carried out very urgently, within 4 or 5 days. The units had to study and draft combat plans while on the move. Another difficulty was that after taking the bridges it was necessary to defend them and repulse enemy counterattacks. That was a tactic the sappers had seldom used, and there was no time for retraining. Even so, confident in the capabilities and traditions of the sappers and commandos, and confident in their strong will and courage, on 25 April we decided to change the missions. The bridges had to be taken and held immediately before H-Hour on D Day, when simultaneous attacks would be launched on the city. If we were tardy the vanguard units and the success of the entire campaign would be jeopardized. But if we were too early our units would in many instances be in great danger, for the sapper units, which made use of the tactic of surprise attacks and not defensive tactics, and who were not equipped to launch direct attacks, would have a hard time holding bridges for a long period of time or retaking them a second or third time. Furthermore, the enemy could launch strong counterattacks before our corps had arrived and then blow up the bridge. The time when a bridge should be taken was determined by the rate of advance of the corps. The campaign command assigned to the commands in the various directions responsibility for assigning times to the sappers.

The direction with the most large bridges was the east. In addition to the bridges across the Dong Nai River, such as the Dong Nai highway bridge and Ghenh Bridge, and bridges across the Saigon River, such as the Newport highway bridge and the Binh Loi bridge there were other smaller, but no less important bridges, such as the Rach Chiec bridge. In the other direction the bridges were not very large but there were many of them and if they were destroyed we would encounter considerable difficulties.
Group 232 had to cross the Van Co Dong River before launching its attack, but it encountered many difficulties. And because it had to maintain secrecy before attacking it had to cross the river at night and take up its assault positions at night in an area still controlled by the enemy: the My Hanh area near the intersection of Route 9 and Route 10 (Duc Hoa in Long An). The point where the Vam Co Dong River that had to be crossed was in the village of An Ninh, more than 10 kilometers northwest of Bao Trai (i.e. Khiem Hanh, capital of the puppets' Hau Nghia Province). If necessary, the Group was prepared to cross the river by force, advance directly to the town of Hiep Hoa, and then follow Route 10. Along that stretch of the Vam Co Dong River both banks were marshy and it was very difficult to find firm terrain. The area west of the river, which we had liberated during the first phase, was in the "Parrot's Beak" area, part of Dong Thap Muoi. It was a largely marshy area with some high-lying area and was sparsely populated. Trees were very scarce. During the wars, both the anti-French war and the anti-U.S. war, when our troops went there the people could provide us with much rice and food, especially fish, but we couldn't touch the firewood, which was precious. All of the troops brought along a small bundle of firewood for his own use. Along the bank of the river, an area controlled by the enemy, we occasionally had guerrilla bases.

An Ninh village was a village with a revolutionary tradition. During Tet Mau Than our 9th Division bivouacked there before attacking Saigon during the second phase of the offensive and uprising. The terrain there was relatively good. There was a strip of high-lying land extending to Route 10, down to Bao Cong hamlet, and then on to My Hanh village, the first village base of the "Hoc Mon-Ba Diem-Duc Hoa Interdistrict Liberation Unit" in 1945--during the anti-French war--and a village of a heroic liberation soldier during the anti-U.S. war: Nguyen Thi My Hanh. Thus at the river crossing point we could cross from our area, which was marshy, and land on the enemy-controlled opposite bank, which was relatively high, and launch the attack immediately. The route from the rear area to the river-crossing point was very muddy and if steps were not taken to correct that problem it would be difficult to use vehicles. The cadres of Group 232, working with the cadres of the neighboring localities, mobilized the people to cut and bundle thousands of bushes and conceal them in many places. As stated above, wood was scarce there so only if the people were mobilized early and over a large area could we have sufficient wood by the deadline. The results were satisfactory and the enemy knew nothing.

Comrade By Triet (Vo Minh Triet), director of military engineers in the Regional Command, who was appointed as commander of military engineers in Group 232, related the following:

"The day before the river crossing the first rainstorm of the season poured water down over a large area. The road became increasingly flooded and muddy. At night the troops moved up to the river and sat on the bank. Everyone, from Brother Nam Nga to the staff, military engineer, artillery and tank cadres, were worried and anxious. There was the noisy sound of vehicles over a stretch of road several tens of kilometers long. When the first vehicle reached the crossing point the last vehicle was still at the starting point on the Vietnam-Kampuchea border. In the darkness, the people came up to the road from all the hamlets and placed on the muddy segments the bundles of bushes they
carried on their shoulders with every vehicle and every artillery piece, especially T-54 tanks and 130mm guns, that passed by the road was further churned up and the mud became increasingly deeper. More bundles of bushes were placed on the road and the vehicles and artillery continued to pass.

"If the task is easy, the people will do it,
If it is a hundred times harder, they will also get
the job done."

That saying is correct both tactically and strategically and is correct in wartime as well as in peacetime construction.

If conditions were bad on the road, on the river they were even worse. If there were sufficient modern ferries there would have been no problem. Comrade Sau Nhan (Bui Huu Tru), deputy commander of the regional military engineer office, who was responsible for the river-crossing ferries that day, told me that "All of the vehicles and artillery were taken across the river on makeshift ferries: in the middle there was a modern ferry platform, but on both sides there were floats we had made. During my several decades as a military engineer I had never worried about so many things as on the day the forces of Group 232 crossed the Yam Co River. That day brother Nam Nga came to make an inspection. The tank slowly crawled aboard the ferry. The more the ferry sank only the faster my heart beat. Fortunately, just as we had calculated, the ferry sank only to the expected level and remained afloat. If the tank had sunk along with the ferry, perhaps my heart would have stopped beating altogether."

"At the designated time the ferries were taken by truck to a point five kilometers from the river and lowered into a stream. Each ferry platform was poled and pulled to the river and then quickly assembled into makeshift ferries. We had to maintain secrecy and work urgently, and technical expertise was required on the part of each man. The commands of each cadre had to be very expert. Then there was the matter of propulsion. The river was broad and the wind was strong, so the "Seagull" motors of the military engineers were insufficient and the ferries tended to drift downstream. Only because the 230th Rear Services Group supplied us with some 50-hp motorboats were we able to cross safely."

That was a river crossing under noncombat conditions. If we had to cross many rivers or under combat condition, it would have been very difficult indeed. The corps and tank and artillery brigades that advanced rapidly across the bridges to make a brilliant entrance into the city could not but recall the contributions of the sapper units. And each feat of arms of a unit or combat arm would have been impossible without the contributions, of one kind or another, of the people.

In the plan for the attack on Saigon, our Regional Military Party Committee had one more problem about which it had to worry: its responsibility toward the cadres and men in our military delegation at Camp David, which was surrounded by enemy troops. The puppet troops had many times made crude threats against the lives of our men. Even after we had just arrived, during Tet of 1973, when I was still a member of the delegation, they used tanks to
surround and intimidate us, and threateningly flew armed helicopters over our roofs merely because the DRV flew its flags in order to celebrate a national Tet. Around Camp David the enemy set up 12 tall guard towers and continually pointed gun barrels at our men. There were many other ugly acts. Thus when we attacked would the puppets leave our men alone? It seemed unlikely. In order to seek revenge, and because there were few of our men and most of them were cadres, the enemy might well carry out a cowardly attack and murder all of them. We felt that we had a responsibility to protect our men there.

At the end of March I invited comrades Ba Tran and Bui Thanh Khiet to discuss that problem and concluded that before we launched our attack on Saigon we had to send a sapper unit that was skilled and familiar with the area around Tan Son Nhat airfield to take all of our men to the liberated zone. The plan was discussed in detail, a unit was selected and I assigned those two cadres responsibility for carrying out the plan.

The plan was urgently put into action and the members of our delegation were informed so that they could coordinate their actions. But while the plan was being carried out we continued to think about the problem and were worried. Most of the members of our delegation were cadres and there were very few enlisted men. They had insufficient combat weapons. And although our sapper unit was an elite one, it was small and was accustomed to attacking, not defending. There were many enemy troops around Tan Son Nhat and they were strongly equipped and had air and armor support. The fighting to break through the encirclement would be very one-sided, on a battlefield that was not to our advantage, and could easily result in regrettable losses. Thus we ultimately canceled the plan. Especially after the decision was made to wait until most of the units of the corps had arrived, after which we would attack rapidly and strongly from the outside, combined with uprisings inside the city, we were certain that the fighting would not be prolonged. If they made careful preparations, our men in Camp David would be capable of defending themselves successfully until Saigon had been completely liberated.

We immediately contacted the responsible cadres in Camp David and informed them of the opinion of the Regional Military Party Commission that the delegation had to have a plan to fight to defend themselves throughout the period of our attack on Saigon. The on-the-spot combat plan had to be based on a system of bunkers and trenches dug with utmost secrecy. They had to be solid bunkers and trenches that could withstand the explosive force of the enemy artillery and also of our 130mm artillery. That task had to be carried out very urgently, and the entire delegation had to be organized into a tightly commanded combat unit.

Comrade Muoi Suong (Col Ngo Van Suong), the political officer of the delegation, related the following:

"When we learned that a sapper unit would come to take us to the liberated area we were all very moved, for we realized that the party was always concerned about us, although there were few of us compared to the many large units. But although not saying anything, everyone had the same thought: when our columns were rapidly advancing into the city we would be a unit already inside. Why
shouldn't we participate in the fighting instead of leaving the city? Why could we not be regarded as an on-the-spot sapper-commando unit? We intended to send a message requesting permission to voluntarily remain behind and fight to the end. So when we were ordered to remain and fight everyone, both cadres and enlisted men, were very enthusiastic. Everyone stayed up all night digging bunkers. To avoid giving away our secret, we dug at night and rested during the day. We dug carefully and avoided making loud noises. The dirt that was dug up was hidden under the floors. Some was put into steel lockers, which became the roofs of the bunkers, thus further fortifying them. Within only a week the men dug a trench network hundreds of meters long, with bunkers and interconnected fighting trenches extending from the house of brother Tuan (the delegation head) to the units and even to the rear services element, and connecting with the remaining (graves registration) part of the DRV delegation. There was even a place for holding meetings and a place for the wounded. During the last days of the war some emissaries from the Saigon puppet regime who had come to take a respite and negotiate with us took refuge with us in those bunkers until Saigon was liberated. They were well protected."

During the Ho Chi Minh campaign our delegation at Camp David shed blood for the historic victory: an engineer captain and a master sergeant were killed, and five or six other comrades, including a lieutenant colonel, were wounded!

On 26 April 1975 a number of jeeps carried Van Tien Dung and I, along with the command organ, southward. The forward headquarters began to work.

Two days later Sau Tho and Pham Hung also arrived there so that we could quickly reach collective decisions regarding the major questions.

By that time the situation was clear. Saigon had been completely besieged.

To the west, on 26 April the 5th Division of Group 232 began its attack on the 22d Division, wiped out its regiments one by one, and completely mastered Route 4 between Tan An and Cau Voi. The 16th Regiment took the Binh Dien and An Lac bridges. The 115th and 117th sapper regiments took Phu Lam. Farther to the west, Route 4 was also cut in the Diem Hy-Nhi Qui-Nhi Binh area of Cai Lay District. That was accomplished by the My Tho provincial forces, including the Ap Bac Battalion—which was awarded the Liberation Army Hero designation and was led by comrade Le Quang Cong, which cut the road during the night of 26 April and the early morning of 27 April. Also on 26 April the 8th Division of Military Region 8 cut Route 4 between the Trung Luong intersection and Tan An. The forces of Military Region 9 also completely dominated the Cai Von-Ba Cang segment. The only strategic road running through the Mekong Delta had been chopped into pieces.

To the east, on 26 April 2d Corps attacked the Nuoc Trong armored training base and the Long Thanh subsector. On 27 April it took the city of Ba Ria. Route 15 was completely blocked. Also during the night of 26 April the 116th Sapper Regiment launched its attack on the Dong Nai highway bridge. On 26 April the 10th Sapper Regiment attacked enemy ships on the Long Tau River Phuoc Khanh and the mouth of the Dong Tranh River and blocked the river when it sank a ship the next day.
The Bien Hoa air base had been shelled by 130mm artillery at the Hieu Liem artillery base since 15 April. Many airplanes were destroyed and the air base was in a state of chaos. On 18 April the enemy had to send their F5 aircraft to Tan Son Nhat and their A-37 aircraft to the Lo Te airfield in airfield was closed, along with the U.S. Consulate in Bien Hoa City. The enemy had only two airfields left: Lo Te and Tan Son Nhat. Tan Son Nhat was sporadically hit by 122mm rockets fired by the 117th Sapper Regiment to the west and by the sappers of the northern column at Quoi Xuan. After the 2d Corps' Nhon Trach 130mm artillery base was completed and opened fire in the evening of 28 April, and the unique attack by the Vietnamese Air Force on the same day, in which five A-37 jets captured from the enemy and led by comrade Nguyen Thanh Trung, Tan Son Nhat was no longer of use to the puppets. The Lo Te airfield was shelled by artillery of Military Region 9 beginning on 28 April, but because that area was controlled by the enemy, we experienced difficulties and the enemy could use the airfield until 30 April, although their use was limited.

Both the Americans and the puppets realized that the situation was hopeless.

"Within the walls encompassing his life, Thieu himself had also begun to realize the inevitable. He could hardly avoid it. Before dawn on the 18th a communist sapper squad attacked the Phu Lam radar station in the western outskirts of Saigon. Thus the fighting was brought to the threshold of the city. About an hour later, General Toan, the III Corps commander, flew in from his headquarters at Bien Hoa to report to Thieu that, in fact, the war was lost, that the army was in disarray and was hopelessly outnumbered. There was no hope of holding out for more than 2 or 3 days."*

Martin, the most unrealistic and subjective of all, now also had to realize that defeat was inevitable and tried to persuade Thieu to step down so that a political plot could be implemented which would, with any luck, stop the advance of our troops. Martin, who jumped from one unrealistic proposal to another, was truly a person who lived in a world of illusion.

"Martin drove to the Presidential Palace to meet with Thieu on the morning of the 20th, after having met with Merillon (the French Ambassador) on the same subject and to the same end. He said to Thieu, 'I said that my conclusion was that nearly all of the generals, although they could continue to fight, believe that resistance would be hopeless, unless there is a negotiated ceasefire, and that negotiations could not begin unless the president resigned or steps were taken immediately to initiate negotiations.'"

On 21 April Thieu resigned. It is not known whether or not that was a result of Martin's efforts.

Also on 28 April Tran Van Huong, who had been the puppet president for a week, was weak and feebleminded but thought that he was "destined" to move heaven and

*Frank Snepp, op. cit.
**Frank Snepp, op. cit.
earth, voluntarily or under pressure, turned over the "golden throne" to Duong Van Minh. As for Minh, perhaps because of his naive nature, he believed in the sorcery of the sorcerer Martin and his assistant Merillon, and although he had long since been pushed out of the picture, at the last minute tried to accept the burden of unconditional surrender.

On the same day, the puppets' III Corps headquarters at Bien Hoa completely fell apart and withdrew to Go Vap so that the next day its commander, General Toan, could flee to the United States with Chief of Staff Cao Van Vien. The military command of the Saigon regime had lost its head.

For our part, we urgently relayed to all cadres and men on the Saigon Front, the following message of encouragement, dated 2200 hours, 28 April 1975:

"The Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the party Central Committee send their determined-to-win greetings to all cadres and men, party members and Youth Union members. Let us heroically advance to winning total victory in the historic campaign bearing the name of the great Uncle Ho."
CHAPTER EIGHT

Final Hours of a Regime:
The Ho Chi Minh Campaign Wins Total Victory

H-Hour of D Day had arrived. The time was 0000 hours, 29 April 1975, the designated hour for all of our columns in five directions to simultaneously launch their attacks on Saigon, annihilate the rest of the enemy's defensive troops, and penetrate directly to the five key objectives. It was the designated hour for all of the commando teams and sapper units to emerge from their hiding places in and around the city, attack the enemy from the inside, take the objectives assigned them, and establish contact with the column advancing into the city from the outside. It was also the designated hour for the party cadres and political cadres to lead the patriotic masses in uprisings to kill the tyrants, disintegrate the puppet administration, encourage the puppet troops to throw down their weapons and surrender, win political power for the people, bring about an earthshaking upheaval, and eliminate oppression, injustice and slavery.

H-Hour of D Day was a common starting point the Ho Chi Minh Campaign Command set for the entire Saigon Front. It was the reference point for calculating every task and act, no matter whether the unit was far or near, whether the unit's conditions were difficult or easy, whether the unit was encountering obstacles or going smoothly, and whether it had begun its activities before or after, early or late. At that hour, everyone would have to make the maximum effort to take their objectives and converge at the central point: the Presidential Palace of the puppet regime.

H-Hour, D Day was also the time the B2 Regional Command had set for all military regions, provinces, units and areas in which the enemy was still present, so that they could simultaneously arise to gain political power and determine their destiny. Villages had to liberate villages, districts had to liberate districts and provinces had to liberate provinces.

There had seldom been an H-Hour more eagerly waited by millions of animated, excited hearts waiting worriedly and happily. It was the H-Hour we had awaited during decades of fierce warfare. It was a D Day made possible by millions of people who fell, every day and every hour, over a period of 10,000 days of fierce fighting.

Those of us waiting at the campaign headquarters waited anxiously. I naturally felt oddly tranquil. By that time there was nothing to worry about. All of the columns reported that things were going well and they were ready. The military regions and the distant units repeated the H-Hour, D Day date so that there would be no confusion. All orders were sent out and correct replies were received. How about the coming tasks? Wait until the guns exploded like new year's firecracker. Those tranquil moments were too brief, but were precious. They helped us purge ourselves from the residual poisonous air of the past and to breathe in pure air for the coming urgent tasks.
It was just like new year's eve. The sound of firecrackers could be heard from all directions.

To the northwest, our 3d Corps attacked and overran Dong Du, the base of the puppet 25th Division, and captured Ly Tong Ba, the division commander. The Corps' sapper regiment took in advance and held the Bong bridge on Route 1 and the Xang bridge on Route 15. The corps advanced toward the city along two roads: the main road was Route 1 and the secondary road was Route 15. But when our troops were crossing Xang bridge it collapsed and two tanks fell into the river, so the Route 15 column had to switch over to Route 1 and advance on Hoc Mon. The forces of Tay Ninh Province coordinated by preventing the 25th Division from withdrawing from the province, and helped the people to liberate their province. Cu Chi coordinated with the main-force troops in attacking Dong Du and taking the subsector. The people in the Cu Chi area, led by mother Bay Nguyen Thi Lanh, a 76-year-old party member whose three sons had sacrificed their lives for the revolution, took the police headquarters and then occupied all of the Cu Chi district seat, kept everything intact, and turned it over to the local troops. Mother Bay herself climbed up to plant a flag on the police headquarters while the enemy was still there. The police were terrified by the vengeful glare of an old, gray-haired mother and the unarmed uprising people, and threw down their weapons and fled.

In the 3d Corps' path of advance, on 29 April the 14th Sapper Battalion took the Cho Moi bridge, the Quan Tre broadcasting station, the police branch, and the Quang Trung Training Center in Hoc Mon. The 1st Gia Dinh Regiment liberated the villages of Tan Thoi Nhat and Xuan Thoi Thong, and took the Tham Luong bridge, the 4th Battalion of the Gia Dinh Regiment, along with the 115th Sapper Regiment, liberated Tan Thoi Hiep village and made two breaches north of Tan Son Nhat airfield so that the forces of the Corps could come in to attack it. During the early morning of 30 April the 3d Corps advanced from Hoc Mon to take its main objective, defeating the enemy's counterattacks and taking the entire airfield by 1400 hours that day.

To the north 1st Corps took the town of Tan Uyen, surrounded the Phu Loi base, and penetrated straight through to Lai Thieu in order to advance into the city. The entire puppet 5th Division was surrounded and isolated between our two columns--3d Corps and 1st Corps--and had no way out. Attacked by the local troops in coordination with the corps, it hoisted the white flag and surrendered. All three regiments--the 7th, 8th and 9th--threw down their weapons and surrendered on the spot. The Binh Duong subsector also raised the white flag in the morning of 30 April. The 1st Corps crossed the Binh Phuoc bridge and advanced to its main objective: The GHQ. The Binh Phuoc Bridge, which had been taken by the 115th Sapper Regiment on the morning of 29 April, was retaken by an enemy counterattack. When our headquarters learned that the enemy had placed explosives and intended to blow up the Binh Phuoc bridge, we immediately sent an urgent message to the 115th Regiment: "Take and hold the Binh Phuoc bridge at all costs.... Immediately cut the wires to the explosive charges the enemy had placed at the bridge...." In the early morning of 30 April the Regiment retook the Binh Phuoc bridge and held it until the 1st Corps passed over it. Ahead of 1st Corps, the 80th Sapper Battalion, along with commando units, during the night of 28 April attacked the Co Loa...
artillery base at Go Yap, which they were unable to take until the morning of 30 April. That same morning, at 0920 hours, the battalion took the "Phu Dong" armor base. At the puppet GHQ, in the morning of 30 April there were no longer any commanders. The puppet troops had lost all their morale, and some had fled. But the 81st Airborne Ranger Brigade continued to defend the gates obstinately.

At 0830 on 30 April the 228 commando regiment commanded by comrade Bay Vinh unsuccessfully attacked Gate 1, so it changed over to Gate 3. Near there were some abandoned enemy tanks. A team took a fully equipped enemy gun, mounted it on a Jeep, and broke through to the Electronic Computer Center. Colonel Ho, who was in charge there, turned the entire installation over to them. The IBM computer system and all puppet personnel management and equipment inventory tapes were intact. The time was 1000 hours. The team drove the Jeep to the main building of the GHQ. All of the enemy troops had fled. There remained only a corporal, who greeted the team and turned over to it a bunch of keys. All documents and property were intact. That puppet corporal was comrade Ba Minh, a regional intelligence agent who had been planted in the GHA long before (he is now a captain with the staff of Military Region 7). Our flag was flown from the main flagpole and the roof of the main building at 1030 hours. At exactly 1200 hours on 30 April comrade Vinh (now Lt Col Le Van Vinh, a Hero of the Armed Forces and now deputy chief of staff of Tay Ninh Province, greeted the forces of the Corps and turned over to the objective to them. Along that column's route the people arose and coordinated with the commandos, especially in An Phu Dong village, wiping out the puppet organs and village police and immediately setting up a new administration. At 0930 hours on 30 April, under the leadership of the local party cell, the people took Subward 2 in the town of Go Yap. Prior to that, in the afternoon of 29 April, comrade Thuan, a district cadre, led the masses in taking and flying a flag from the headquarters of Subward 12 in Phu Nhuan District.

To the west, in the morning of 29 April, Group 232 took the city of Hau Nghia, thus insuring its left flank. One element wiped out the puppet 22d Division and took the city of Tan An and the towns of Ben Luc. And Cau Binh Dien, then advanced toward Saigon along Route 4, insuring its right flank. The main deep penetration element—the 9th Division, advanced from My Hanh and Vinh Loc to the Bay Hien intersection and took its main objective, the puppet Capital Special Zone headquarters. The time was 1030 hours, 30 April. In the area of the Bay Hien intersection the enemy put up a stiff resistance and used A-37's to bomb our troop formations, inflicting a number of losses.

The 429th Sapper Regiment and the 117th Regiment, coordinating with the western column, on 29 and 30 April took a number of key objectives, such as the Phu Lam radar station, the Tan Tao strategic zone, the Vinh Loc intersection, the Phu Tho Communications Center, Ba Hom bridge, and Nhi Thien Duong bridge.

The people in the villages of Hoc Mon and Ba Diem, and especially in the village of Phu Tho Hoa, arose, encouraged the enemy to put down their weapons and surrender, smashed the puppet administration, and flew liberation flags. Many villages set up revolutionary administrations. In Precinct 11, sister Ut Van and brother Sau Hoang, local party cadres, led the masses in arising to take over the administration in Subward 8 at 0900 on 30 April, and took over the administration headquarters of the precinct at 0915, before our troops arrived.