1. page 5, “Introduction”, line 21, after end of paragraph, add:

"... and ideologies of both worlds. In the ending part of this book, the author will discuss about "The Strategy of Isolation" aimed at putting a check to communist aggression.

"Over the years, it is true, U.S. military aid, for some ... ...

2. page 8, “Introduction”, first line at top of page, after “... our defense effort to the aid appropriated.”, add the following:

In about January 1974, the Joint General Staff (JGS) was informed by the U. S. that military aid for the fiscal year 1974-75 would be reduced by US$300 million. The Central Logistics Command of the JGS, responsible for the supply of military equipment, vehicles, arms and ammunitions for the entire Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, studied a preliminary plan to deal with this new situation. In broad terms, the assessment of this plan indicated that the reduced military aid would meet the needs of a smaller level of armed forces that would be limited to defensive capabilities for only a certain appropriate land area of the Republic of Vietnam. This plan was logical in a practical way. However, President Thieu as supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (RVNAF) had proclaimed the national policy of "4 NOs" (with one of these NOs being NO territorial concessions to the communists.) Since this plan of the Central Logistics Command was contrary to the above mentioned national policy, the author did not give his agreement to submit it officially to the President. Lt. General Dong Van Khuyen, the JGS Chief-of-Staff cum Commanding General of the Central Logistics Command, was permitted to present this plan only verbally to the President. As reported by General Khuyen, after the presentation of this plan, President Thieu did not give any further order, and the President did not issue any direct instructions to the author about this matter. Consequently, this plan was shelved. Simplistic as it might sound, the idea reflected the realities of the situation. Whatever the motives .......

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Note: Chapter 6, “The Rout in the Highlands”, will address itself about the possibility to recapture Ban Me Thuot.

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3. page 25 (Chapter 2) at the end of page, after “... agreement had been signed.”, add the following new paragraph:

Generally speaking, the author participated in meetings with the President and the National Security Council (NSC) only a few times at the beginning in the discussions about the military issues in the Paris Agreement. With regard to the political issues (many of them) and the drafting of letters in reply to the U.S., these tasks were assumed by a special committee with the participation of the Foreign Minister and the young aides of the President. The author remembers very clearly that at no time during these meetings did the author declare “The Army is awaiting for the President’s orders.” For the Army to execute the orders of the President or to support the President, it was the evident and normal thing to do and it was not necessary to make such a declaration in these important meetings.

******

4. page 26 (at end of Chapter 2) after “... training by mid-1973.”, add the following new paragraphs:

Usually, ceasefire agreements require the two opposing sides in an armed conflict to regroup their respective troops into two distinct areas and be separated by a demilitarized zone or a clearly drawn demarcation line.

The important shortcoming of the Paris Agreement, which eventually led to the disastrous consequence later on, was the failure to mention and compel the communist forces to withdraw from the territory of the RVN.

Consequently, the Paris Agreement may be considered similar to a hanging rope put around the neck of the RVN and was just waiting for the day to strangle it to death.

Based on recently declassified documents, the book “No Peace, No Honor : Nixon, Kissinger, And Betrayal in Vietnam” (The Free Press, NY 2001) by Professor Larry Berman has clearly expressed by its title the true nature and significance of this Paris Agreement. Professor Berman has further noted that, on the occasion marking the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Paris Agreement at the Nixon Center (Washington D. C.), Dr. Kissinger declared that President Nixon’s promise to retaliate violently if the communist side violated the agreement did not entail any legal obligation!

Furthermore, scholar Nguyen Van Hung in his translation of the book “The Lost Victory” (Thoi Luan publication, 2001) also mentions the views of the former U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker (deceased) about Dr. Kissinger in the following terms: “
(Dr. Kissinger's) understanding of Vietnam was greatly influenced by a number of French personalities and, therefore, (Dr. Kissinger) did not think much of the nationalist Vietnamese and had more sympathy for the communist Vietnamese; consequently, many concessions were made in his secret talks with North Vietnam.

*****

4A. page 37 (Chapter 3) page 37, first line of 3rd paragraph, replace the word "propaganda" by the term "indoctrination" of the first sentence to read:

"During March and April 1973, two different indoctrination teams were . . . . ."

*****

5. page 39 (Chapter 3) at end of page "... part of the national territory.", add the following new paragraph:

This aspect concerned one of the "4 NOs" advocated by President Thieu after the signing of the Paris Agreement:
- NO territorial concessions to the communists.
- NO coalition with the communists.
- NO recognition of the communists.
- NO to neutrality for the South (of Vietnam.)

These 4 NOs were considered national policies and must be upheld for all political and military action (in South Vietnam.)

*****

6. page 41 (at end of Chapter 3 at bottom of page, after "... with remarkable success.", add the following new paragraphs:

Following the unsuccessful withdrawal in the Highlands, General Phu was admitted to the Cong Hoa Military Hospital; General Nghi volunteered to be the Commanding General of the Forward Command Headquarters of MR-III to defend the remaining part of the coastal area. This Command Headquarters was set up in the Air Force base of Phan Rang (the Air Force Commanding General there was General Pham Ngoc Sang.)

On April 26, 1975, at the fall of Ninh Thuan and the Air Force base of Phan Rang, the two Generals Nghi and Sang, together with Colonel Luong (Commanding Officer of the 2nd Regiment of the Airborne Brigade) were listed missing-in-action.

*****
7. page 43 (Chapter 4) 2nd paragraph, line 27, after "... units in the field." Add the following:

Thus, the two Airborne and Marine divisions became two heavy divisions, each having 4 combat brigades instead of 3 (other infantry divisions only had 3 regiments each.)

This was the utmost effort by the JGS to strengthen combat units after the signing of the Paris Agreement."

*****

8. page 46 (Chapter 4) at end of first paragraph after "... Airforce units were not available.", and before the title of the next section “The Reduction in U. S. Military Aid”, add the following new paragraph:

It was this Damocles sword that President Nixon would readily use in retaliation to violations of the Paris Agreement by the communists, as he had promised in several letters to President Thieu. Later on, it was unfortunate for the RVN that President Nixon had his hands tied by the U. S. Congress forbidding him the use of the U. S. Air Force in support of Cambodia and the RVN. Therefore, this Damocles sword was never used.

*****

9. page 47 (Chapter 4) at the end of the 2nd paragraph, after "... ... and how well the budget was managed.", add the following new paragraphs:

Usually, the RVN Embassy in Washington D. C. or the political personalities had the task of mobilizing support from the U. S. representatives and senators who had the authority to decide on these matters of aid. The procedures of the U. S. Congress for consideration and approval of aid were complex but the Central Logistics Command of the JGS was quite familiar with them for having dealt with them repeatedly in the past years.

The author was sent to mobilize support but that was rather an additional personal effort due to the fact that the author had opportunities to be in contact and work with a number of high-ranking American officers. At the Pentagon, the author presented to the generals concerned the latest information on the enemy’s situation; the details of this presentation were similar to those expressed in the section “Communist Military Preparations” in Chapter 3.

Besides this, there was no American general of the DAO/VN (the Defense Attache Office of the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam) escorting the author, and no American general providing the author with a list of military supplies and weapons to be requested for the granting of aid. This can be easily understood for what was required, first of all, was the obtaining of aid. Without the decision to grant aid, it would be like putting the plough before the horse by submitting a list of military supplies. Once aid was approved, it
would be quite feasible to complete the list of military supplies in a minimum period of time.

Prior to his trip to the U.S., the author was fully conscious that his responsibility and only had contact with the Pentagon and, therefore, afterward simply had a courtesy visit to the U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger (without having to make any presentation,) and returned to Saigon immediately. The author did not give any testimony or make any presentation to members of the U. S. Congress since this task belonged to other people.

*****

10. page 48 (Chapter 4) line 6, the figure 45,000 to be changed to 58,183.

*****

11. page 56 (Chapter 4) after the 2nd paragraph,

"... the enemy to initiate his effort would be in March.", add the following:

"This was an extremely accurate evaluation of the prevailing situation performed by G2 of the JGS which, therefore, took the required counter measures. Unfortunately, we did not have the necessary level of troops to achieve our desired objectives as it was noted repeatedly that the balance of forces already gave a clear advantage to the communist side. Interesting to remember a saying by Napoleon: "God is on the side which has strong battalions and the superiority in the number of troops.”

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11A. page 61 (Chapter 5), 2nd line of 3rd paragraph: note typing error of figure 3rd and not “3d”, in “...activated 3d Division launched ...”

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11B. page 62 (Chapter 5) 1st line of 2nd paragraph, replace the word “first” by “same day” for the sentence to read “At 0700 hrs. on the same day the enemy ....

*****

12. page 73 (Chapter 5) paragraph 2, line 9, after “… as well as that of JGS.”, add the following:

In addition to intelligence about the enemy gathered usually by secret agents, POWs, ralliers, and other information reported by G2 of MR-II, G2 of the JGS also had secret technical intelligence data. Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, the G2 head of the JGS was sent to MR-II to brief General Phu on such data.
13. page 78 (Chapter 5) after end of 2nd paragraph “... and prospering as a nation.”, add the following new paragraph:

It is now known that, prior to the meeting on March 11, 1975 at the Independence Palace, President Thieu already had in hand 3 proposals about this matter:

1/ By the beginning of 1974, General Dong Van Khuyen, the JGS Chief-of-Staff cum Head of the Central Logistics Command had verbally made a presentation to the President about the concept and necessity of a plan to reduce the territory of the RVN and make it appropriate to the reduction in military aid (please see passages in preceding pages with regard to this aid reduction of US$300 million.)

2/ Major General John Murray of the Defense Attache Office at the U.S. Embassy (DAO/VN) had also submitted (exact date not known) a plan similar to that of the Central Logistics Command.

3/ The Australian Brigadier General Ted Sarong had likewise forwarded (exact date unknown) through an official at the President's office a plan on the same lines.

14. page 86 (Chapter 6), after 2nd paragraph, add the following new paragraph:

This was the direct order by the President to General Phu for the re-deployment of the II Corps organic units for the re-capture of Ban Me Thuot. Therefore, there was no reason whatsoever for the JGS to ask General Phu to go to Saigon to work out the operational plans. The II Corps Command and its own staff were fully capable of carrying out such a task. In this plan for disengagement, it was General Phu himself who opted for the Inter-Provincial Road LTL 7B to afford a surprise element and also due to the other roads already being occupied by the enemy. General Phu simply requested the JGS to provide the means to cross the river (the bridge on the Song Ba river had already been destroyed long before.) The author immediately approved this request since either floating bridges or metallic ones were readily available, and they could be transported rapidly to the required location.

The author takes this opportunity to reject the assertion made by Mr. Frank Snepp in his book Decent Interval (Vintage Books/Random House, 1978) in which he states in a caption for a photograph of the author that the failure of this re-deployment of troops was due to the author's decision to choose the Inter-Provincial Road LTL 7B. Such an assertion is totally erroneous.
15. page 87 (Chapter 6) in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th line of the 2nd paragraph, delete the words put in brackets and underlined [...]:

"... during the first Indochina war. I reminded [him of the French failure in the attempt to extricate their troops from Lang Son in 1947. I also reminded] General Phu of how in October 1950 ..." for this 2nd sentence to read: "I reminded General Phu of how in October 1950..."

******

16. also at this page 87, lines 8 and 9, delete the words "...around Dong Khe along Colonial Route 4." And replace these deleted words by "... 5 miles SW of Dong Khe, along the Quang Liet trail." Thus, lines 8 and 9 now read "... Bang southward – had been annihilated in the foothills 5 miles SW of Dong Khe, along the Quang Liet trail."

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16. also at this page 87, add the following new passages after the end of the 2nd paragraph "... should have kept in mind."

In making reference to the failures of the French Expeditionary forces in Cao Bang and at the Mang Yang pass, the author tactfully wanted to draw General Phu’s attention and help him understand that the mission he had received from President Thieu would be very difficult for him to carry out successfully. The reasons being:

1/ in this battle of Ban Me Thuot, the communists committed over 3 infantry divisions with the support of several important units of tanks, artillery and air-defense. On the other hand, the II Corps did not have any reinforcement troops and only had in hand barely 2 infantry divisions together with one unit of tanks and artillery. The ratio of forces was clearly to the advantage of enemy.

2/ numerous well-known military manuals as well as Command & Staff Colleges have taught the types of difficulties to be expected and how they may be dealt with in order to avoid failure in carrying out operations for the retreat of the troops.

Facing such a situation, the commanding officer in the field always has the right to desist from the given assignment and present his resignation. Should that be the case, the superior authority may reconsider the order or designate another commanding officer with greater capability to replace the former C. O. for the assignment.

******

17. page 88 (Chapter 6) 2nd paragraph, add the following passages:
"... out of the country on a visit at the time. General Dong Van Khuyen (JGS Chief-of-Staff cum Head of the Central Logistics Command) was authorized by President Thieu to accompany his father to Japan for medical treatment of a serious illness.

Although General Khuyen was assuming an important position, the author did not see the need to recall him back immediately:

1/ the success or failure of the operations to recapture Ban Me Thuot rested with the seriousness of II Corps in both its conception and application.

2/ the JGS had the adequate capability to follow-up and provide support to II Corps.

*****

18. page 95 (Chapter 6) after the 1st paragraph, add the following passages:

It was later asked whether or not had it been at all possible for our troops to recapture Ban Me Thuot? The answer would have been “Yes” if the plan had received full support for the following:

1/ immediately airlift the 2 divisions of Airborne and Marine from Danang to Pleiku; then, depending on the terrain, weather and enemy conditions at the time of the operations, there was the option of dropping the entire Airborne division on the Ban Me Thuot battlefield.

2/ move the 2 Groups of Rangers from III Corps to Danang to temporarily replace the 2 divisions mentioned above; these 2 Groups could also be used as reinforcement for II Corps should the situation warrant.

3/ increase to the maximum the number of helicopters and fighter-planes from the Air Force divisions (III Corps and IV Corps) in support of II Corps.

4/ temporary lift of restrictions on the use of gasoline, lubricants and ammunitions of all types until further instructions.

It must be noted that the time for troops deployment under this plan would have been longer than in 1972. It had been possible, previously, to move an Airborne division from Saigon to Pleiku and then from Pleiku to Danang in 2 days. In 1975, it would have required 7 or 8 days to deploy one division from Danang to Pleiku although the flight distance was shorter but the number of Air Force planes was much less (due to insufficient spare parts etc.) and the absence of support from the U.S. Air Force. Nevertheless, the ARVN could have requested the government to mobilize the transport planes of the civil aviation to carry the troops.
Considering the prevailing balance of forces, in the initial phase, the JGS and the Air
Force Command deemed it necessary to assist II Corps by the measures stated in Sections
1 and 3 of the plan outlined above so that II Corps might temporarily have the required
number of troops and firepower to deal with the enemy for the battle of Ban Me Thuot.

The II Corps Command had the duty to work out the detailed operational orders (this
task being an offensive campaign) with numerous appendixes for the re-enforcement
troops together with the II Corps forces to perform their mission in a coordinated and
effective manner.

This plan for the recapture of Ban Me Thuot had several shortcomings which need to
be mentioned:

1/ once the enemy side knew about the troops movements of the 2 divisions leaving I
Corps, it might launch a fierce offensive against the border provinces of Central
Vietnam and intensify its attacks against the Eastern provinces and those in the
Mekong Delta.

2/ the reserve levels of fuel, ammunitions and other supplies were reaching critical
points with prospects for additional shipments completely nil.

Due to the extreme seriousness of this matter, this plan required the approval of
President Thieu, the Supreme Commander of the RVN Armed Forces, for its
execution.

*****

19. page 99 (Chapter 7) after 2nd paragraph, add the following:

The meeting at the Independence Palace on March 13, 1975 is reported clearly above.
In this meeting, President Thieu conveyed to the two Commanding Generals of I and III
Corps, Generals Truong and Toan, his views about the reorganization of the territory in
order to be more appropriate with the reduction in military assistance. Nevertheless,
there was not yet any order given for the retreat except the abandonment of An Loc in
MR-III (III Corps.)

The meeting on March 14, 1975 in Cam Ranh was held after the loss of Ban Me
Thuot, and it was at this meeting that President Thieu gave the order to re-deploy the
troops of II Corps for the re-capture of Ban Me Thuot.

*****

20. page 101 (Chapter 7) after 2nd paragraph, add the following:
The plan for the retreat of the troops in I Corps, which was very logical and complete, also included two contingency provisions to deal with unexpected situations which might result from enemy action.

When the battle unfolded according to plan # 2 as projected, and after all the units of I Corps had retreated inside the Danang base, there were only two possible actions left to be done: either consolidate the defense right there on the spot or withdraw by sea route when the situation made it necessary. Therefore, at that point in time, there was no other alternative plan left to be considered.

******

21. page 110 (Chapter 7) after 2nd paragraph, add the following:

In addition to the Airborne divisions, there were other elite combat units in the RVN Armed Forces such as the Marine division (these 2 divisions belonged to the general reserve forces stationed in Saigon and the near by regions, and they were used to intervene anywhere in the Vietnam war as the military situation required) the Rangers Groups, units of airborne commandos, special forces together with a number of infantry divisions and other units belonging to various branches.

In 1972, both the Airborne and Marine divisions participated in the military operations in Quang Tri province. With the strong and effective support of the RVNAF artillery and the offshore artillery of the U.S. Navy, the Marine division was successful with the task of re-capturing the old citadel of Quang Tri.

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22. page 113 (Chapter 7) after 2nd paragraph, add the following:

Lt. General Nguyen Duc Thang was the second assistant of the JGS. After the retreat from the MR-I, Lt. General Ngo Quang Truong was the third assistant of the JGS. Besides the three generals Khang, Thang and Truong, there was no other assistant of the JGS.

******

22A. page 124 (Chapter 8) 1st line of 6th paragraph, change the term “MR-II” to “MR-III” for the sentence to read “When MR-I troops arrived in MR-III in a state of total disarray...”

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23. page 127 (Chapter 8) after line 6th and preceding the sub-title “High altitude bombing ... “, add the following paragraph:
There were later on many books criticizing the manner in which the units retreating from MR-I and MR-II were re-equipped and trained again. Granted that any problem may be resolved in many different ways but the author can confirm that the JGS (which included the Central Logistics Command and the Psychological Warfare Command, G3, the Military Training Department etc...) did their utmost to have these units readied again as quickly and efficiently as possible.

******

24. page 127 (Chapter 8) after the 2nd paragraph, add the following:

Upon explosion, this type of CBU (cluster bomb unit) bomb, many smaller bombs would be released in all directions and cause greater personnel casualties than the ordinary bombs.

The “daisy cutter" bombs weighted about 15,000 pounds each and were used by the U. S. forces to clear wide areas for helicopters to land in dense forests. This type of bombs required technical specialists to prepare them in the hulls of C-130 planes which must be flown by experienced pilots.

Clarification and correction are required here: although the RVNAF had asked for the second type of such bombs but had never received them by the time of the signing of the Paris Agreement in January 1973 which, in principle, put an end to the war.

The one and unique “daisy cutter” bomb used at the Xuan Loc battlefield was, in fact, a cannibalized device put together by an American specialist who had to use 8 bombs left behind by the U. S.; these 8 left-over bombs were lacking either detonators or other small components and parts.

Nevertheless, the RVNAF was well aware and knew well about these two types of bombs.

When General Weyand and his delegation came to Vietnam and worked with us at our JGS headquarters or at the Independence Palace, the author only requested the air support of B-52s to check the thrust of the communist troops for the following reasons:

- the communist troops were equipped with sophisticated air-defense weapons which made it necessary for the attacking planes to fly at very high altitudes (in the 1972 December bombing of Hanoi, 15 B-52s were shot down.)
- convinced that the U. S. would no longer intervene in the Vietnam war, the communist side moved their troops in a conspicuous manner and offered significant targets which needed to be exploited and dealt with.
- After the retreats of the II and I Corps, the intervention by the B-52s would enhance the morale of the troops and people in South Vietnam.
- The use of the "daisy cutter" bombs at that time would be like "throwing salt into the sea" with little effectiveness compared to the use of B-52s.


24A. page 127 (Chapter 8) 12th line from the bottom of page, delete the 3 words "and General Weyand" for the sentence to read "... As a result, during the visits of Mr. Eric von Marbod, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (end of February 1975), JGS made a special request for a weapon...."


25. page 141 (Chapter 9) after the 3rd sentence, add the following:

By this time, there were many rumors about possible "coup" to overthrow the government. It was claimed that the author together with a number of generals planned such a "coup" or pressured President Thieu to resign as well as forcing later on President Huong to hand power to General Minh.

The author totally refutes such fabricated rumors and confirm that they were completely unfounded. The reason being: the author was simply and strictly a soldier, not involved in politics and devoid of any political ambition. Furthermore, the author had witnessed earlier the disastrous consequences of "coup d'etat" and, therefore, had never been drawn or participated in any of such doings.

The author also takes this opportunity to refute other allegations made about him in the book "Decent Interval" by Frank Snepp (Vintage Books – Random House, 1978) to be totally unfounded and sheer distortions of the truth.


26. page 142 (Chapter 9) after end of 2nd paragraph, add the following:

The author remembers clearly that, after the meeting, he did not follow President Thieu to the latter's office, and that was also the last time that he saw President Thieu before the lost of the country. At no time did the author speak with tears in his eyes: It is unbelievable for a day like today to come". This is sheer invention for the relation between President Thieu and the author were strictly on the professional and military basis, and there was never a single moment for personal feelings.


(additional revision of this item #27 on May 12, 2003)

27. page 144 (Chapter 9) at the end of page, add the following sentence at the end of the footnote: Please see Appendix D.
The following passages to be entered at the end of the book after Appendix C and preceding the Index.

Appendix D

The above footnotes are quite brief because the author does not wish to talk much about himself. Since a few books later on mentioned unfounded information about him, the author considers it necessary to state the following:

In the years 1970 and 1971, the author formally submitted at least 3 letters of resignation to President Thieu and asked for retirement with the reason of having assumed too long (over 5 years) the function of Chief of the JGS, of having the sufficient period of military service, and of having poor health (as supported by attached doctor’s medical attestation.)

This action was prompted by the author in mid-1970 after a meeting with General Creighton W. Abrams (the Commander of COMMUS/MACV) who informed the author that, according to sources from the U. S. Embassy, President Thieu had the intention to replace the author by General Do Cao Tri. After having waited during a prolonged period for such a replacement order to come, the author was very aware that he was no longer “in the President’s trust” and, therefore, would better submit his request for retirement.

By that time, the opposition political parties and their followers were practically eliminated or neutralized. With the overwhelming majority of deputies and senators being pro-government in the legislature and the setting-up of the “Democratic Party”, President Thieu was in the strong position. Furthermore, a number of the President’s young aides advocated their aim to replace the old and mandarin-like officials in the administration. These aides repeatedly declared that, in order to build a good house, it was necessary to replace the old bricks, the outdated and useless elements and, if need be, replace the whole house altogether.

But why did President Thieu continue to keep the author in his post instead of replacing him as intended? May be, because President Thieu knew well that the author did not have any political ambition, as shown in the past for the author had not betrayed President Diem. President Thieu maintained the author in his post probably for reasons of stability in the RVN Armed Forces. This, of course, is just the author’s guess.

Being in such a situation of uncertainty, of not knowing whether or not he would be able to withdraw from his post, the author then became much less motivated in his job compared to the preceding period. Nevertheless, in all professional conscience, the author continued to carry out his duties to the best of his abilities while waiting for the day to be replaced.

Further to the signing of the Paris Agreement and the promulgation of the “4 NOs” policy, the monthly and special meetings with the Corps and Military Regions
commanders as well as the CG of the Air Force, Navy etc... took place at the Independence Palace instead of the JGS headquarters as it used to be previously. These meetings were chaired by President Thieu, the Supreme Commander of the RVN Armed Forces.

From then on, President Thieu took all the decisions completely by himself and gave his orders directly to various units. Thus, President Thieu achieved the position of absolute decision-making to include the executive, legislative and military, which became centered at only one unique seat of authority and power.

After the unsuccessful retreats of the II Corps and I Corps, and the worsening of the military situation, the author requested Dr. Pham Ha Thanh, then Commanding Officer of the RVNAF Medical Services, to be supplied with a dose of poison (the cyanide type as understood) for knowing well that violent treatment would surely entail after capture by the communists. Dr. Thanh is still living in the suburb of Saigon after release from re-education imprisonment.

The military situation right before and after the resignation of President Thieu (April 21, 1975) has already been described in the foregoing passages of this book and need not be mentioned again.

In the evening of Sunday April 27, 1975 after the resolution of the National Assembly to transfer the presidential powers to General Duong Van Minh, and also due to the extreme urgency of events, the author requested verbally Lt. General Tran Van Don (then the Defense Minister in the cabinet of Mr. Can) to present the author’s resignation to President Tran Van Huong, the resignation which had repeatedly been submitted to President Thieu during the 5 preceding years. President Huong, who had been fully aware of this, immediately signed the decree allowing the author to retire from military service. Mr. Nguyen Thach Van, the then presidential assistant, knows well about this matter and is presently residing in Paris (France.)

The author could not possibly cooperate with General Minh since General Minh had expressed the intention to kill the author during the “coup d’etat” in 1963. Furthermore, the author could not have remained to serve a coalition government. Besides, the author had remained in his post too long already (10 years.) There was also poor health which had been the legitimate reason for the author to ask repeatedly 3 times for retirement with President Thieu.

As soon as he was informed of the termination of his job a chairman of the JGS, the author contacted the U. S. Defense Attache Office (DAO) and requested evacuation to the 7th Fleet. Upon leaving Vietnam, the author was in civilian clothes since he was already in official retirement, did not salute the American MPs guarding the premises, and there was nobody to open for him the doors of the elevator since the helicopter was on the grounds of the DAO compound, and he “was not happy like a little kid as untruthfully written and claimed by ill-wishing people.
Likewise, there are other matters which need to be clarified as follows:

By noon time on November 1st, 1963, upon reporting for duty at the JGS to receive his orders, the author (then with the rank of colonel, Commanding Officer of the Airborne Brigade) was shown to present himself to General Duong Van Minh instead of General Tran Thien Khiem (then Chief of Staff of the JGS) as usual.

General Minh asked: “We are carrying out a ‘coup’, what do you think?”

The author replied: “To carry out a ‘coup’ is a major state affair. How come that you (general) are informing me of this only now?”

The above relates exactly what was asked and answered word for word. During that time, an aide of General Minh had the nozzle of his carbine gun against the author’s back. A few minutes later, Colonel Do Mau (then Chief of Military Security) requested the author to make a declaration on the national radio in favor of the “coup”. The author replied that he had nothing whatsoever to declare on the radio.

The author was then arrested and kept in captivity at the headquarters of the JGS. He was spared execution only thanks to the good feeling of friendly fellow-officers and the courageous intervention of his wife.

The next day on November 2nd, 1963, the author was released to go home. The author’s wife later related that after the outbreak of the ‘coup’, President Diem called on the telephone to find out the whereabouts of the author. When told that the author had gone to the JGS headquarters for a meeting and probably being held there in custody, President Diem insisted that the author must try to telephone him directly. About half an hour later, President Diem called again. When told that there was no hope left, President Diem did not say anything else or expressed in any way his desire to come to the author’s house, and no one suggested to the President to go to the author’s house as some people reported.

28. page 171 (Appendix A) at the end of page, add the following:

The responsibilities of the JGS, last established by the Presidential Decree signed in July 1970, are already summarized in this Appendix A.

However, in practical terms, the role of the JGS also saw its ups and downs through the following periods:


The Chief of the JGS (chairman of the Joint-Chiefs-of-Staff) was member of the “National Leadership Committee” (1965-1967) and, therefore, strictly speaking and as far
as military matters were concerned, he was able to make all the decisions and, whenever necessary, had to obtain the views of only two other persons, namely, the chairman of the National Leadership Committee (Head of State) and the chairman of the Central Executive Committee (Prime Minister.) During this period of about 12 months the Chief of the JGS concurrently assumed the position of Defense Minister. In assuming these two positions during 1965-1967, the author did not think that South Vietnam (RVN) had any coherent and effective strategy for the war and, therefore, advocated the "Strategy of Isolation" (please see Appendix E at end of book.)

By the end of 1967, when Generals Thieu and Ky were elected President and Vice-President with the birth of the second Republic of Vietnam, the JGS, the positions of Chief of the JGS and of Defense Minister were no longer merged together and the author returned to his job as Chief of the JGS with the position of Defense Minister assigned to another person.

However, with the communist General Offensive in 1968 and facing a situation of survival for the country, the author had to assume by himself and on himself the prerogatives of taking the necessary military decisions to revert the trends of events. The communist forces were dispersed in small units to attack various centers of our military and administrative organizations. Right in the Saigon-Cholon area, all the principal centers of our government and military commands were attacked and occupied. It was clear that a beheaded body could not have survived long; the very first imperative duty was to dislodge the communist troops and regain control of Saigon-Cholon.

Prior to Tet, units of the Airborne and Marine, together with a number from the Rangers, were deployed as reinforcement to the Military Regions and Corps. What was left in Saigon was just one and only battalion of Airborne. During the night until dawn when the Tan Son Nhu airport was attacked, 3 companies of Airborne were sent in to support the defense of the airport. During that time, the area of the Army’s English School and the company guarding the JGS Headquarters were attacked by a communist sapper unit which was able to occupy the place. Holding the place which displayed the name of the company guarding the JGS Headquarters, the communist troops mistakenly thought that they had taken the seat of the JGS Headquarters itself and, therefore, did not proceed to attack the proper premises of the JGS Headquarters which housed the offices of the Chief of the JGS, the JGS Chief-of-Staff and a number of other services, the Communications Center with its coding facilities together with many other important equipment of transmission. The premises of the JGS Headquarters were only about 300 meters from the place occupied by the communist troops. The remaining Airborne company was sent to the area of the JGS Headquarters to destroy the communist sapper unit.

Facing such a precarious and dangerous situation, the author decided to recall back to Saigon all the units which had been deployed in reinforcement to the Military Regions and Corps by an airlift including helicopters. Besides Tan Son Nhu airport, all the sports arenas, soccer fields and the Phu Tho horserace track, in the capital city were used as landing facilities. Once the necessary troops were gathered, about over 20 battalions, the
author personally took the direct command of “Operation Tran Hung Dao” to push back the communist troops to the outskirts of Saigon. The Police and Regional forces joined in this operation which also included units from the U. S. and other Allies’ forces present at that time around the capital. As soon as the communist troops were chased far outside the city suburbs, direct command was returned to the Commanding General of III Corps/MR-III.

It is of interest to note that personnel belonging to various headquarters offices, services, depots and military workshops, were militarily organized to become combat units (except for a small and strict minimum number of personnel to run the basic activities of the premises) and participate in the operations in the areas surrounding the city. Since there were a large number of officers at the JGS Headquarters, people were surprised to see first and second lieutenants fighting as privates and superior officers such as lieutenant colonels taking command of companies.

As soon as the task of regaining complete control of the capital city was done, the units from the General Reserves and Rangers were sent back to the Corps and Military Regions.


The two years of 1971 and 1972 marked a turning point in the author’s military life. As mentioned in the preceding chapters, the author had submitted his request for retirement to President Thieu three times unsuccessfully and, therefore, had to continue with his work as usual although with much less enthusiasm compared to the 5 years earlier. The role of the JGS remained unchanged.

The end of 1971 was the time for the presidential elections. This time President Thieu presented himself with Mr. Tran Van Huong. The other tickets were eliminated for not having the required conditions established by the electoral laws and, therefore, forcefully declared that it was a “one-candidate” election by President Thieu.

Before this election, after a meeting of the military with the participation of the Commanding Generals of the Military Regions and Corps, those of the Air Force and Navy, the Chief of the JGS (the author) and Defense Minister Nguyen Van Vy, President Thieu asked for the views of the generals about the coming elections. All the generals present including General Vy (the then Defense Minister) expressed their strong support for the ticket Thieu-Huong. When it came to express his views, the author simply replied that the President had already made his decision, therefore, the author had nothing more to say.

When the communists launched their blatant invasion of South Vietnam through the Demilitarized Zone in 1972, labeled by the press as the “Blazing Summer Offensive” the RVN Armed Forces heroically broke that communist general offensive with the strong support of the U.S. Air Force, such as that of the B-52s, fighting jets, transport planes, helicopters as well as artillery and the firepower from the U.S. fleet off-shore. The most
outstanding battles took place in Quang Tri, Kontum and An Loc. This time, the JGS moved the 21st Infantry Division from IV Corps to III Corps to break the siege of An Loc.

It is, indeed, a despicable act to talk about oneself. The author must, however, give the factual account of the above mentioned events to refute the ill-will assertions about the author's lack of initiative or ideas with a head-nodding attitude for everything.

3/ 1973-1975

With the signing of the Paris Agreement and declaration of the national policy of the "4 NOs", and with President Thieu as Supreme Commander of the RVN Armed Forces, the Joint-General-Staff practically became the JGS of the President. President Thieu gave orders directly to the commanding generals of the Corps and Military Regions, to the Air Force and Navy, and contacted directly the Chief-of-Staff officer of the JGS. The American side was aware of such a situation and prompted General Weyand’s delegation to advise the government to give more authority to the office of the JGS.

It may be briefly said that, at whatever period of time, the JGS fully assumed its role and duties, particularly, from 1968 to 1972. With the signing of the Paris Agreement, the JGS carried out successfully the plan “Tran Hung Dao II” aiming at preventing the communist scheme to “grab land and get the people”. Other actions taken afterwards are already summarized in Chapter 4 (Problems and Policies, 1973-1974.) The JGS was not bigger than the Command of the COMMUS/MACV but had able and experienced staff members. The JGS was organized to perform work in study and research, planning, coordination and follow-up on all military matters, as shown in operations “Tran Hung Dao I” and “Tran Hung Dao II” mentioned above. The Operations Room of the JGS was fully equipped with means and facilities for data gathering, storage and presentation on large screens all required details for the command levels to make decisions in an accurate manner. Both the G3 and Operations Room monitored fully and without interruption the military situation of the entire territory and were ready at any moment to provide the military information required by their superiors.

Two concrete examples:

1/ The I Corps had not reported to the JGS the withdrawal southward of the First Infantry Division out of the city of Hue. Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, Head of G3, was then informed of this development through another source. In a meeting held at the Independence Palace right after this happening in I Corps, the author immediately reported this retreat to President Thieu. The claim made by Mr. Hung asserting that the JGS was not aware of the withdrawal in I Corps is totally erroneous.

2/ Likewise, the evacuation of the generals in I Corps and MR-I by the Navy vessel HQ4 was not reported to G3 of the JGS. General Tho (Head of G3 at the JGS) was only able to know about this evacuation through the communications facilities of the Navy and the Fleet Command.
Being the central command post of the entire RVN Armed Forces, the JGS was operational 24/24 hours through shifts rotation. At times when the military situation became critical in the years 1968, 1972, 1974 and 1975, the entire personnel of the JGS were put on alert and bivouacking in the JGS premises. It is, therefore, sheer invention and completely erroneous to say that there was no one to answer the phone by 4:30 PM on a certain day. Furthermore, the author had the opportunity to see again General Ngo Quang Truong and asked him whether it was true or not that, in the months of March and April, 1975, he had tried to contact the author and had waited one to two hours for this. General Truong categorically refuted such an assertion. Even when it was not possible for him to meet the author in person, General Truong could contact at any time the JGS Chief-of-Staff or any other head of the JGS services, or report directly to the President.

It is, therefore, preposterous for Nguyen Tien Hung to distort the truth in the book "The Palace File" (Harper & Row, New York, 1986), written with Jerrold L. Schecter, and slanderously claim that the JGS did not fulfill its duty, and also gratuitously state that the author was a sort of useless general officer devoid of any initiative.

The author hereby rejects entirely such slanders and groundless statements in the above mentioned book.

The reasoning put forth by Mr. Hung is already full of self-contradictions, narrow-minded criticism, unsubstantiated assertion, and sheer theoretical speculation devoid of any realistic evaluation of the situation.

Specifically, Mr. Hung even claims in his book that the JGS was poorly organized for supplying the troops. Yet, in other passages he praises General Khuyen to be highly efficient in supply activities, knowing well that General Khuyen was the Head of the Central Logistics Command of the JGS. Furthermore, throughout the war, our combat units were never short of ammunitions, fuels or food supplies. When military aid was reduced, the levels of supplies were somewhat lower but the supplies were never disrupted. The author does not consider it truthful the story about a Navy unit having nothing to eat and letting its troops to catch oxen of the people to feed themselves. Should that be true, the commanding officer of that unit must be seriously punished and even prosecuted before a military court. Furthermore, the RVNAF had their own stocks and warehouses and did not have to depend on the supply lines of the American units.

Mr. Hung professes to be very knowledgeable about military matters. However, he voices objection to the use of the expression "friend and foe" and says that not only did we not have an independent spirit but were also subservient to the Americans. This is really an odd way of thinking for all the armies anywhere in the world make use of the expression "friend" to mean "we, on our side" and "foe" to refer to "they, the enemy" to differentiate the two opposing camps in the fight.

The author had not seen Mr. Hung in the military meetings with President Thieu and it was later on during the visit to Saigon made by the delegation of General Weyand that Mr. Hung attended a meeting at the Independence Palace with that delegation. Talking
about these meetings, Mr. Hung invariably brings up one criticism after another. It appears that words have been put in his mouth. Most of Mr. Hung's criticism put forth completely erroneous assessments based on groundless premises and empty theoretical speculations. He continuously refers to aspects of research and study, planning, coordination and follow-up in very general terms, and concluded that no one was able to perform such tasks. Actually, whenever it was deemed necessary to make a decision or define a plan of action, it was already required to go through these theoretical phases. Furthermore, Mr. Hung is confused between planning and reacting. As example: I Corps/MR-I submitted 2 plans of possible action for the withdrawal of its units. As the events unfolded, only plan #2 had the conditions to be implemented (to regroup into the 3 enclaves of Danang, Hue and Chu Lai, and finally into the base of Danang.) Once withdrawn into the Danang base, there were only two options available: to carry-out the defense of Danang base to the end at all costs or evacuate by sea route should the situation require. That was the operational plan but Mr. Hung claims that there was no plan whatsoever. It became quite clear that there was no other alternative except: consolidate the defense or retreat.

There was a military rule and principle which needed to be respected: once the superior command had given an order, the subordinate officer must carry out the order. In the course of the execution of the order, should the subordinate officer encounter a difficulty or an obstacle that he could not overcome, he must then report the matter directly to the superior command officer who had given him the order, or to an intermediate level of command, if any. In that way, the superior command would be in the position to follow-up with the situation and, whenever needed, there would always be someone to provide additional information. Therefore, in those cases of direct orders from the superior level to the command in the field, the intermediate levels in the line of command would not interfere and entail the risks of upsetting, even unintentionally, the plan initiated by the superior level of command. That was exactly the case during the period of troops withdrawal in I Corps/MR-I and II Corps/MR-II. It is not clear how Mr. Hung accuses the author of having avoided his responsibilities.

Mr. Hung even implies here that the author was dodging his duties on religious grounds with acts of Buddhist "Thien" meditations! "Thien" meditations are known to help one's spiritual life and mental faculties. There were no reasons whatsoever why these "Thien" meditations could have affected adversely the author's sense of responsibility to perform his duties. The author's sessions of meditation took place outside work hours at night or early morning, and they took place in the author's bedroom, not a kind of tower as Mr. Hung described. Besides, there were many ways to avoid one's responsibilities should one wish to do it. There was no need to say that one was too busy with meditation to have time to carry out one's responsibility!

In addition to the above mentioned criticism, Mr. Hung also tried "to warm up old wine and put it in new bottles" by raising matters which had already been dealt with earlier. Mr. Hung advocated the idea of asking the U. S. to equip two additional general reserves divisions for the RVNAF. He is obviously unaware that this matter had been discussed repeatedly before by the JGS. Due to the reduction of military aid and
manpower, the JGS was only able to create one additional brigade of Airborne, one brigade of Marines, and two brigades of Rangers ( please see Chapter 4, section “Organization of the RVNAF.) With regard to the idea of setting up a factory for the manufacturing of rifles and ammunitions, it had been requested by President Diem before and denied. It was equally wishful thinking to advance this idea in the following years. It was also during the First RVN that the Popular Regional Forces units were put under the Ministry of the Interior. These two organizations were essential in the context of the Vietnam war with its particular characteristics: we had to deal not only with the unites of the North Vietnamese regular forces but also with the regional cadres, local guerrillas and other communist agents working in the population.

It is also erroneous for Mr. Hung to claim that the RVNAF officers in their military operations with the U. S. troops simply resorted to the use of helicopters, calling in artillery and air support. From the lowest to the highest levels, our RVNAF officers had received full training before assuming their commands and, therefore, did not have to be with the U. S. troops in order to know how to perform. Later on, when the armored carriers and the helicopters were introduced in the battlefields of Vietnam, our RVNAF officers had already received training in the use of these new types of equipment.

The matter of supplying our troops with more modern weapons came up only when the communist side introduced more sophisticated armaments of their own, as already discussed in this book. To claim that “Vietnamization” was carried out in a too precipitated manner is contrary to the facts. The U. S. applied the policy of “gradual response” or simply described as reacting little by little at proportionate levels. For example, the TOW was brought into use in the Vietnam war when other types of antitank weapons such as LAW was no longer effective. As for the M-16 rifles, they were given to units of the Airborne and Marine by 1963. By that time, the Airborne brigade was given the responsibility to test the AR-15, newly manufactured by Colts. Later on, the name of this rifle was changed to M-16 which proved to be most appropriate for our troops in the Vietnam war due to its very light weight, relatively short length, easily maintained, and having a great impact in firepower. Being only a light and small 2.23 caliber, the ammunitions could be transported in larger quantities for the operations. The U. S. was apprehensive about these rifles might fall into the hands of the enemies, and supplied them only in a limited way. It was only after the Tet offensive that this rifle was equipped to other units in the RVN Armed Forces.

There is also another small point which needs clarification as well: usually, the author circulated in town in a normal sedan provided for his position (Chief of the JGS) with a driver and an aide in the front seats, without any display of a general’s flag, without an escort of two vehicles (army Jeep) of the Military Police. It is sheer fabrication to say that there were two MP escorting jeeps parked under the tall tamarin trees at the gates of Independence Palace.

Should all the things mentioned by Mr. Hung in his book be factual, the following questions must be asked:
1/ who promoted the author to the rank of full general and to the position of Chief of the
JGS? Was there no one else for that position?

2/ since the author submitted his request for retirement 3 times during the years 1970-
1971, who was the person responsible for not accepting this request and not reorganizing
the JGS?

Is it at all possible to believe the words of Mr. Hung? Incidentally, there is a source of
information confirming that Mr. Hung did not pledge allegiance to President Thieu’s
Democratic Party. Therefore, Mr. Hung has not told the truth on a matter which concerns
him closely.

In brief, the book “The Palace File” (with regard only to the passages about the
RVNAF, the JGS and the author, and I repeat only about these passages) it is simply a
novel of fiction, sheer speculations, no more no less.

It is also in this book that Mr. Hung wants to demonstrate that he was well versed in
both political and military matters and did put forth numerous and grandiose plans.
Nevertheless, he was not able to save the Vietnam ship from the terrible tornado. Mr.
Hung was, in fact, like the “fly and the carriage” in the book of the French writer La
Fontaine.

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NOTE: The following may be considered as additions to the revisions of the book “The
Final Collapse”.

Footnotes for the monograph “STRATEGY OF ISOLATION”, published in Military
Review of the US Command and general Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, USA,
Issue Nr. 52, April 1972.

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Notes by the author:

* Over the past 25 years, there were numerous books written about the Vietnam War in
both Vietnamese and other languages. But there is no book which has put forth any
plausible solution to resolve the war in a positive and beneficial manner for the Republic
of Vietnam. It is hoped that this article “Strategy of Isolation” may be considered to be
one possible answer to this problem. However, whether or not this strategy could have
been put into effect in the face of the then prevailing realities is, of course, another
matter.

** All the 7 points of this strategy must be carried out at the same time in order to attain
the desired results. The most appropriate time to apply this Strategy of Isolation was the
period right after the Tet Offensive (1968.) By that time, the communist infrastructures
of the communist forces in South Vietnam were destroyed in almost their totality. The regular North Vietnamese units were pushed back to the border areas.

*** In fact, the entire strategy was not approved and implemented.

On the part of the RVN, the author presented this strategy to Lt. General Thieu and Air Vice Marshall Ky (the National Leadership Committee, 1967.) This strategy was not accepted because the U.S. did not support it.

On the part of the United States, according to General Phillip Davidson (Vietnam at War, Oxford University Press, 1988) the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland had plans to attack the northern area of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ,) cut the Ho Chi Minh trail, destroy the sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, and bomb the important sites around Hanoi and Haiphong. These plans were not approved by Defense Secretary MacNamara and President Johnson (1967.)

**** In the article “Strategy and Tactics” (Military Center, US Department of the Army, 1980) Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung refers to sayings (from sources not identified) about warfare as follows:

- when both the tactics and strategy in the war are erroneous, defeat comes quickly.
- when the tactics are correct but the strategy is erroneous, battles may be won but the war will be lost.
- when the tactics are erroneous but the strategy is correct, battles may be lost but the war will be won.
- when both the tactics and the strategy are correct, the war will be won rapidly.

Both the RVN and the U.S. found themselves in the second situation.

In the concluding parts of the book, the author has presented the reasons which did not permit the Republic of Vietnam to maintain its survival. It is now necessary to add another reason which does not lack in importance, if not to say the most important reason: both the RVN and the U.S. did not carry out an appropriate and effective geopolitical strategy for the war.

It was because we did not have an appropriate and effective strategy that the communist side was then able to infiltrate more and more troops into South Vietnam and gain the upper hand in the rapport of forces.

As pointedly quoted by the late Peter Braestrup in his book “Vietnam as History”, the objective, accurate and realistic views of Lt. General John E. Murray, expressed in the following words, may be used as concluding remarks for the Vietnam War:

(obtain quotation from book)
“To understand Vietnam requires knowledge about warfare; to know about warfare requires some knowledge about numbers. At the heights of the American presence there, we had 433 combat battalions of U.S. and allied troops. The enemy had 60 regiments (180 battalions.) In the year 1974, after our (US) retreat, the ARVN had 189 battalions and the enemy troops increased to 110 regiments (330 battalions.) Were taken away the B-52s, F-4s, the fleet artillery, everything. And we began to supply South Vietnam with 2% of what we had supplied our American forces there to deal with a smaller enemy presence. We must know about Napoleon (a famous French general) who has said: “God is on the side which has the highest number of battalions”. Indeed. God was on the side of the communists: they had more troops and more power. And this was the reason why we lost the war.”