THE LESSON OF DIEN-BIEN-PHU

Following is a translation of an article by Maj-Gen. Hoang-van-Thai in the Vietnamese-language publication Hoc Tap (Studies), Hanoi, May 1964, pages 14-22.

Of the long drawn out war of resistance against the French colonialist aggression and U.S. interference, the battle of Dien-bien-phu, a great, strategically decisive battle, was the most important victory ever won by our soldiers and people. It marked the turning point of the military and political situation then prevalent and contributed largely to the success of the 1954 Geneva Conference and restoration of the peace in Indochina.

As we this year commemorate the 10th anniversary of the victory of Dien-bien-phu, our people in the North are enthusiastically engaged in emulating among themselves building socialism, a task in which they have scored many victories, while our people in the South are struggling valiantly against the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen dealing them resounding defeats in the first phase of their "special warfare." Heartened by these great accomplishments, the nation is working hard overcoming its problems and winning new victories. Taking such an opportunity to review this glorious page of history along with the valuable experience of the Dien-bien-phu victory is, therefore, doubly meaningful.

In 1953 the nation's sacred war of resistance emerged into its 8th year. Under the correct leadership of the Party, the people, both civilian and military, were scoring more and more victories. Following the border campaign they triumphed again and again in the midland, at Hoa-binh, and in the Northwest, they secured strategic initiative on the Northern front and placed the enemy in an increasingly passive, perilous position.
After 8 years of war, we had killed and captured a total of close to 390,000 enemy troops, and we had shrunk their occupied territory considerably, especially in North Vietnam. Colonialist France's economy and finances were exhausted. From 3.2 billion francs in 1945 the cost of the Indochinese war rose to 55 billions in 1953, making the French increasingly dependent upon the U.S. imperialists for their war of aggression. In France and the world, the struggle movement for opposing the "dirty war" in Indochina was mounting, causing increasing internal problems for the French colonialists. In spite of the fact that the French Government had then been overthrown and re-established 18 times, that 6 overall commanders and 5 high-commissioners for Indochina had succeeded one another, the enemy simply could not struggle themselves free of the quagmire of colonial wars. The more they fought, the less they believed in victory. It was at this juncture that imperialist France ordered General Navarre to Indochina. A Navarre plan was quickly mapped out relying on U.S. "aid" to save themselves from a desperate situation and to win a decisive military victory and an "honorable way out" of the war of aggression. As for the U.S. imperialists, having been defeated and forced to sign an armistice in Korea, they got involved deeper and deeper in the Indochinese war. Through the Navarre plan they sought to gradually replace the French colonialists, to prolong and expand the war in this area and to block the national liberation movement in Indochina and Southeast Asia.

This sweeping strategic Navarre plan was to be carried out and completed in 18 months. It consisted of 2 phases:

The period from the fall of 1953 to the summer of 1954 was to be one of strategic defensive in the North and strategic offensive in the South. During this phase the enemy would first concentrate its strength in the Northern battlefronts for the purpose of intensifying their raids on and destruction of our guerrilla bases in enemy occupied zone. He would seize the initiative, multiply his attacks of attrition, and eventually cripple our plan for a fall-winter offensive. At the same time, while waiting for a powerful motorized force to be built up, the enemy would avoid any decisive confrontation with the might of our main force in the North. Not until the beginning of 1954, when he had wrecked our fall-winter offensive plan and worn out our main force, would he shift his attention to the South where he would carry out campaigns of pacification the center of gravity of which would consist of the occupation of free Interzone 5 and our extensive guerrilla bases of Western South Vietnam.

Emerging into the second phase -- winter-spring of 1954-1955 -- when he had completed the pacification of the Southern front and organization of the motorized force, he would mass all his strength on the Northern front and launched a strategic offensive and a decisive main-force confrontation from which he expected a decisive victory.

To this end, Navarre ordered wholesale pressganging and looting in areas he was temporarily occupying, aiming at a puppet army of from
168,000 to 280,000 men with 108 battalions of riflemen. These would be used for pacification purposes while the European-African troops would make up the motorized force. Navarre would ask for more reinforcements from France and bring his motorized force from 9 to 27 regiments. It can be said that never before had imperialist France had such a sweeping plan for expanding the puppet force and building up its motorized force with such a speed. To help the French put the Navarre plan into effect, the U.S. imperialists increased their military "aid" from 269 to 420 billion francs, supplied enough equipment for 6 additional artillery battalions, 2 mechanized regiments, 6 transport battalions in addition to 123 more aircrafts and 212 warships of all kinds.

Clearly, the Navarre plan was a diabolical political and military scheme. Politically, it reflected the increasing collusion between the colonialist French aggressors and the U.S. interventionists both intent on crushing our people's triumphing resistance and materializing their colonialist plots. Militarily, it bespoke the craftiness of the enemy who, to a certain extent, now had come to realize how weak his strategic posture was and how definitely lost his initiative even at a time when he still held numerical, weapon, and technical superiority. He had learned to temporarily fall back on a defensive posture in order to prepare a large, decisive offensive, and he had learned where the key to the whole matter lay -- a speedy expansion of the puppet army that would make his organization of a strong motorized force possible.

However, because of the very nature and goal of the war the enemy was waging -- aggression -- the Navarre plan itself was beset with unsolvable contradictions and imperfections the most basic of which were contradictions pertaining to concentration and deconcentration of troops. France's goal in waging this war of aggression was to invade our country and enslave our people. This called for dividing up its forces in order to hold the many territories it occupied. But such deconcentration would cost the enemy his initiative and a passive enemy would make it the easier for us to destroy him. For the enemy to devote his efforts to build up a powerful motorized army and avoid a passive posture would mean the weakening of the occupation forces. This in turn would not make the occupation of our territories any easier for the enemy; abandoning them on the other hand would run counter to his plan of looting our country's wealth and manpower to feed the war, for this would leave the goal of the war of aggression unfulfilled. The most basic deficiency of the Navarre plan, however, lay in the fact that the enemy was RELYING SOLELY ON HIS SUPERIORITY IN WEAPON AND EQUIPMENT, completely ignorant of the power of the political and moral factors. The enemy had made the mistake of underestimating our strength while overestimating his; the plan he had shaped was tinged with subjectivism and recklessness. He was therefore doomed to failure.

In the fall of 1953 the Navarre plan got underway. The slogan was: "To concentrate strength, to take active offensive, to regain initiative." The enemy now had 112 battalions massed on the plains of the
North -- almost 50% of his entire strength in Indochina -- including 44 motorized battalions representing over half of the enemy's motorized force in Indochina. With this powerful force the enemy launched large mopping-up operations on both the left and right banks of the Red River, struck at Lang-sون, and dropped thousands of bandits and commandos on our Northwest to stir up disturbances in our rear. In mid-October 1953 the enemy opened operation Sea-Gull directed at Nho-quot with a diversionary attack on Thanh-hoa, threatened our free zones of Phu-tho and Hoa-binh, and sought to jeopardize our preparations for the main-force offensive on the Northern plains. Parallel with these military activities, the enemy stepped up propaganda stressing the "victory" of the Navarre plan.

As the fall-spring season of 1953 began, the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee conducted a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the situation showing the strong and weak points of the Navarre plan. It advocated the following military steps for breaking the enemy's plan: "We shall step up guerrilla activity in the enemy's rear, not just in the North but in the Center and the South as well in order to undermine the enemy's pacification scheme and to foil his plans for raising a puppet army and massing troops in the North. Our main force will keep active initiative, it will be motorized for mobility, it will concentrate its strength in order to destroy the enemy's, it will strive to liberate as much territory as possible in strategically important areas where the enemy is weakest."

(Note: Resolution of the Conference of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Lao Dong Party, October, 1953/ It also called for simultaneously foiling Navarre's plot to build up a motorized force and to concentrate on winning back the initiative. To this end, the Political Bureau and the General Military Commission decided to make the Northwest the main direction toward which an attack would be launched for the destruction of the entire enemy force of the Lai-chau area and for the liberation of the entire Northwestern region. The secondary fronts would consist of the midlands of North Vietnam, and the direct auxiliary front would be Interzone 5 and the plains of North Vietnam.

In November 1953 having repelled the enemy's offensive from Ria and Nho-quot, killing 1,500 enemy troops in the process, our troops put into effect the winter-spring plan of operation designed to shatter the Navarre plan. Elements of the main body took turn moving out to their designated fronts.

In mid-November 1953 Navarre found out that we were moving toward the Northwest. He hastily ordered 6 battalions dropped on Dien-bien-phu (20 November) to head off our offensive, cover Lai-chau, and protect North Lacs. For their part, our troops received the order to swiftly surround and hold the enemy at Dien-bien-phu and to simultaneously spearhead toward Lai-chau. Within a period of only half a month from 10 through 23 December our main force had routed or annihilated 24 enemy companies, killed or captured 1,100 men, and liberated many towns and the entire city of Lai-chau.

On 21 December 1953 in coordination with the Pathet Lao troops, the
Vietnamese Volunteers opened the attack on Central Laos. After a week of fighting, they had destroyed over 3 battalions of enemy infantry, pursued them over 200 kilometers, liberated the city of Kham-moun and the town of Tha-khet (27 December 1953), come within reach of the Mekong River, and split the enemy's front in two. Confronted with this situation, Navarre hurriedly moved his motorized units from the North Vietnamese plains up to Central Laos, and turned the Seno air base into a large collective base for 13 battalions including 9 battalions from North Vietnam. Our troops continued to advance in the direction of Road No. 9 and Southern Laos, and by the end of January 1954 they had liberated the entire Boloven Plateau along with the town of Attopeu and forced the enemy to send reinforcement to Pakse.

On the front of Interzone 5, Navarre on 20 January 1954 massed 20 battalions of infantry, 4 battalions of artillery, and 3 battalions of mechanized troops and launched an attack on Tuy-hoa and Phu-yen hoping to carry out his scheme of occupying the entire Interzone 5, which was free, consisted of more than 3 provinces with 2.5 million people extending over 300 kilometers, and was considered by Navarre as the most dangerous stepping-stone from which our attacks could be launched on the Southern front. In execution of a directive from the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee and the General Military Commission, a small force was left to face the enemy frontally in Interzone 5 while the main body of our troops attacked the Northern part of Tay-nguyen by surprise. In barely 10 days the province of Kontum was entirely liberated (including the town of Kontum) along with part of Gia-lai province. Our attack then was spearheaded toward the vicinity of Highway No. 19. This forced the enemy to hurriedly interrupt his offensive on the plains of Interzone 5, to withdraw, to rush his motorized forces there from the Binh-Tri-Thien and South Vietnamese fronts to reinforce Tay-nguyen, and to turn Pleiku into a new collective base for 13 battalions.

Also at the end of January 1954, in order to deceive the enemy and facilitate the stepping-up of overall preparations for Dien-bien-phu, the Vietnamese Volunteers crossed over from Dien-bien-phu to join the Pathet Lao Liberation Army and launched a surprise attack on North Laos. From 31 January through 18 February 1954, the combined Lao-Vietnamese forces routed and annihilated 15 enemy companies, killed or captured about 2,200 men, liberated the entire province of Phong-sa-ly and the Nam-hu River area which is North Laos' richest, came within reach of and threatened Luang Prabang. Once again Navarre was forced to move a motorized group and a number of parachute battalions up from the North Vietnamese plains and to transform Luang Prabang (5 battalions) and Muong-sai (4 battalions) into new collective bases.

In the meantime, guerrilla activity was vigorously stepped up in the enemy's rear. In the South, joining forces against the enemy, our soldiers and people destroyed or forced the enemy to abandon hundreds of outposts. Taking advantage of the dispersal of the enemy's motorized force on the plains of the North, we severed Highway No. 5 again and again
and struck heavy blows at the Day River front, the Dao River (Nam-dinh) front, and the Highway No. 10 front. The 2 large surprise attacks on the Cat-bi (4 March) and Gia-lam (7 March) airports, in particular, destroyed 78 aircrafts, weakening the enemy air force considerably and giving effective support to the operations at Dien-bien-phu.

Thus ended the first phase of our winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954.

In summary, in 3 months of fighting, from the beginning of December 1953 to the days preceding our assault on the collective base of Dien-bien-phu, our troops and people all over the country eliminated close to 30,000 enemy troops and liberated large areas in the Northwest, North Laos, South Laos, North Tay-nguyen, and so on. Shattered was Navarre's plan for massing his troops and seizing the initiative. Navarre's motorized troops were badly scattered. On the plains of North Vietnam, Navarre now had only 20 motorized battalions approximately where he once had 44.

At Dien-bien-phu our troops still had the enemy encircled, wearing him down little by little and immobilizing him while preparations were under way for the final assault. The enemy was forced to increase his strength to 12 battalions and 7 companies of infantries (subsequently increased to 17 battalions and 10 companies), 3 artillery battalions (including a company armed with 155-millimeter pieces), one battalion of engineers, one tank company, and 6 planes in permanent service. This was arranged in 8 groups of bases consisting of 49 positions with fairly strong field works and each of the positions covering the others in its line of fire. Barbed wire fences ran around these positions for from 50 to 75 meters, or from 100 to 200 meters in some places, with minefields of various kinds set up between them. In the few months of occupation the enemy used up 3,000 tons of barbed wire alone.

Thus sure of his strength, the enemy boastfully called Dien-bien-phu the "Strongest Outpost Ever to Protect the West," the "Steel Front of the Free World," and the "Impregnable Fortress." The enemy must have reasoned that, since we had not been able to take Na-san before, there surely would be no way for us to take Dien-bien-phu now, for Dien-bien-phu was much stronger.

Early in March 1954 upon discovering that our troops were moving on all fronts, the enemy subjectively concluded that our main force was by now exhausted and that it had ceased to be active. On 12 March 1954 he grouped part of his motorized force and proceeded with his plan to strike further at free Interzone 5, landing at Quy-nhon and attempting to occupy the entire province of Binh-dinh.

Meanwhile, contrary to the enemy's expectation, our troops launched a large-scale attack on the collective base of Dien-bien-phu only a day later, opening the 2nd phase of the winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954.
The fierce battle of Dien-bien-phu lasted 55 days and nights. It can be divided in 3 phases:

In the first phase, we eliminated the centers of resistance of Him-lam, Doc-lap, and Ban-keo and occupied the entire subzone North of Dien-bien-phu. The enemy had tried hard to destroy our firing positions, sending planes to drop napalm bombs on the hills around Dien-bien-phu, bombarding them with violent artillery fire. But we had held fast to our positions and even strengthened them.

During the 2nd phase, we pushed our main communication trenches and many secondary trenches down to the flat lands cutting the central subzone from the Southern subzone. An attack, difficult but victorious, upon the hills to the East enabled us to tighten our encirclement and shorten our firing range. From all the positions recently wrestled from the enemy, artillery of all calibers were threatening him covering the entire airstrip -- the throat of the collective base. Now the enemy rushed in more reinforcements in an effort to strengthen his motorized force. He organized counter-attacks and shelled our positions intensively hoping to save the situation. A seesaw battle began. Some peaks changed hands several times. In other instances, while we had succeeded in taking half of an enemy strong point, the other half was still in his hands. Our troops fought with imagination and invented new tactics: slow encroachment, splitting the enemy into small groups, cutting up his airstrip into sections thereby making his reinforcement and supply increasingly difficult.

The 3rd phase is the general assault. By now the territory still in enemy hands had shrunk to an area under 2 kilometers whether in length or in width, and the enemy forces had suffered heavy casualties. When hill A-1 was taken from him, all hope on his part for holding on was shattered and his morale reached a new low. On 7 May 1954, we attacked from all directions, seized the enemy's command post and captured the entire enemy staff. That night, the enemy at a subzone to the South attempted a breakthrough hoping to escape from our encirclement, but was annihilated.

Complete victory was won at Dien-bien-phu.

During this campaign, we killed or captured 16,200 men including 17 battalions and 10 companies of infantry (7 of these battalions were European paratroops who made up most of the French parachute force in Indochina), 3 artillery battalions, 1 engineer battalion, and 1 tank company. We also shot down or damaged 62 planes. An overall computation shows that, in the winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954, over the entire country, we annihilated about 112,000 enemy troops or 1/6 of the enemy's effective then. Of this number, 25 battalions were completely eliminated, approximately 1,500 officers were killed or captured, 177 aircrafts of all kinds were destroyed or shot down representing about 40% of the enemy air force then.

Taken as a whole, the winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954 -- the
various strategic offensives, the good timing and coordination achieved on various fronts -- constituted a great strategic counter-offensive of which Dien-bien-phu was the victorious conclusion. The French imperialists and U.S. interventionists were completely defeated and forced to sign the 1954 Geneva Agreements which restored the peace in Indochina.

II

As far as our army and people are concerned, the battle of Dien-bien-phu and the winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954 as a whole were the greatest test of the protracted war of resistance against imperialist aggression. We came through the test with flying colors, won a glorious victory, and learned invaluable lessons in the process. The most important, the vital lesson is that the troops and people's political and moral superiority must always be given full play and it must be turned into a physical force that works against the enemy and crushes him. This lesson is reflected first of all through our Party's LINE ON THE PEOPLE'S WARS.

The Dien-bien-phu victory most eloquently bears out the fact that, important though they may be in war, weapons and equipment are definitely not the determinative elements. What is really determinative is man himself. No matter how modern the weapons and equipment, they must be manned in order to be effective. Man's intelligent action is the greatest motive force that decides any victory.

At Dien-bien-phu the enemy had the advantage of solid defense works, tanks, cannons, and flame-throwers. Enemy troops wore protective jackets, used infrared scopes, and were covered by hundred of aircrafts night as well as day. As for us, all we had was infantry with rifles, machineguns, and a few artillery pieces. Why could we have defeated an enemy many times stronger in weapons and equipment? The answer lies in the fact that, under the leadership of and thanks to the education given us by the Party, our cadres and fighting men were animated by a lofty ideal, an ardent patriotism, and a deep-rooted class hatred, they were well aware of the goal they must struggle to achieve. All this accounts for their abiding determination to endure hardships and surmount problems, their unparalleled courage, and their readiness to sacrifice themselves in the performance of duty.

On the Dien-bien-phu front, this kind of spirit enabled our troops to work creatively, moving mountains and leveling forests, enlarging and repairing hundreds of kilometers of roads to keep the supply lines open, building tens of kilometers of new roads to bring artillery pieces to the firing positions. In the best tradition of the heroes of the revolution, the cadres and fighting men were as bold in action as they were in thought, towing cannons with no other means than their bare hands, transporting tons of steel over high mountain peaks under rains of bullets -- a feat long remembered. They dug hundreds of kilometers of communication trenches closely surrounding the enemy positions, even crossing barbed wire fences and coming within short distances of enemy dugouts. These trenches enabled
them to move directly under enemy artillery fire and napalm bombs and to come so close to the enemy as to make their own weapons highly effective while minimizing the effectiveness of the enemy's artillery and air force.

Throughout the 55 days and nights of fighting, in spite of enemy bombs and shells pockmarking the battlefields and in spite of napalm bombs scorching the hills' tops, our cadres and fighting men continued their advance and performed their duty, those behind taking over those in front fell, all determined to win this one victory. Typical of those animated by this spirit are To-van-dien who tried to steady a cannon, Be-van-Dan who made a gun carriage, and Phan-dinh-Giot who plugged a loophole all with their own bodies. A heroic platoon on hill 67½ in a single day beat off 12 charges from 2 enemy battalions. These are some of the innumerable examples of heroism.

On secondary battlefronts, our troops also showed determination to fight and to win, to endure hardships and overcome problems. They fought valiantly and in support of the battle of Dien-bien-phu. A certain unit pursued the enemy for 12 days over 300 kilometers and 50 high peaks. Another unit moved secretly for months over 1,000 kilometers in the forested Truong-son range and penetrated the enemy's rear. Ultimate in courage was shown by the heroes who raided the Gia-lam and Cat-bi airfields deep in enemy territory. Each of these examples teaches us a lesson on the potential of the political and moral elements.

It is clear that the determination to fight and to win had generated in our troops an unmatched force that helped them over apparently insuperable problems. This is the spirit that terrified Navarre's powerful, well-led troops and eventually forced them to kneel down in surrender, and this is the spirit that had gradually neutralized the effectiveness of their ultramodern weapons.

The spirit -- determination to fight and to win -- mentioned above stems from the revolutionary nature of our army and from the national and class consciousness of the cadres and men who are painstakingly educated by the Party during their formative years and during actual battles. Particularly is it true when this spirit was enhanced following the political training campaigns on the motivation of the masses for land reform, campaigns in which the cadres and men -- most of whom are peasants -- saw their enemies in the imperialists and feudalists, raised their awareness of national and class rights, and realized that their objective of the moment was to win independence for the nation and land for the peasants. Thus, the army's positive, revolutionary spirit was allowed full scope and the political basis for the great victories of the winter-spring campaign was laid.

Maintaining and developing this spirit among the troops was a relentless drive for more education. Not that the negative elements were not present in wartime. No sooner had the first resounding victories of the battle of Dien-bien-phu been won than subjective thinking tending to belittle the enemy began to take shape. This was fortunately corrected
in time. When after the 2nd phase of the battle the fighting got indecisive, violent, and tense, rightist negative thinking took over that affected the conduct of the war. Carrying out instructions from the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee, the General Military Commission initiated a sweeping struggle at the front directed against rightist negative thinking and aimed at bolstering the men's positive, revolutionary spirit for complete victory. This ideological struggle scored the greatest success and contributed a decisive part in the Dien-bien-phu victory.

The Dien-bien-phu victory has once again substantiated Lenin's contention that: "Ultimate victory in any war is determined by the morale of the masses whose blood flows freely on the battlefields." (Note: Lenin, Complete Book, French edition, Socialist Publications, Paris; Foreign Publications, Moscow, 1961, Volume 31, page 137.) The Dien-bien-phu victory has also borne out the fact that the masses of the people are an inexhaustible source of power in war and that victory can only be won with the extensive participation of the masses. The battle of Dien-bien-phu, and in broader terms the winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954, is indeed the most vivid example of the people's enthusiastic participation in the war, and of the support extended by the rear to the front.

Supplying food and munitions was vital during the battle of Dien-bien-phu, it was also one of our most difficult problems. When the enemy dropped paratroops at Dien-bien-phu, he must reason that the impossibility for us to supply tens of thousands of men over a long period of time in a sparsely populated area as poor in resources as the Northwest region would be reason enough for our inability to fight there. With the battlefields located at 400 or 500 kilometers from our own rear, the enemy thought that by simply cutting our supply route he would force us to withdraw. But that was a gross miscalculation on the part of the enemy. The people's inexhaustible power, of which the enemy had not the slightest idea, was so great that no problems and no obstacles could stand in its way.

With the highest degree of determination our people devoted all their energies to overcoming the greatest difficulties side by side with the troops until victory was achieved. Under the slogan "All for the Front," "All for Victory" the people provided the fighting men with tons of food. Thanh-hoa province alone supplied the front with 9,000 tons of rice. Even the people of the Northwest contributed who had only recently been liberated and who were beset with problems of their own. The district of Tuan-giao, whose population consisted of 11,000 men who had been utterly exploited for years and years, gave 1,270 tons of rice, almost 1,000 tons of vegetable, and 300 tons of meat to the campaign of Dien-bien-phu.

In order to bring food and munitions to the fighting men, convoys of trucks, bicycles, horses, and tens of thousands of people with their shoulder pieces advanced in a continuous flow toward the Dien-bien-phu front in spite of enemy planes' attack around the clock. In support of the battle over 260,000 people offered enthusiastically their service at the front. In logistics alone, 33,500 people contributed over 3 million man-days. More than 20,000 bicycles were mobilized for front line service.
With a view to maintaining our supply lines open, tens of thousands of civilian laborers and shock-troop youths courageously engaged in repairing damaged roads under enemy plane attack and directly over enemy time-bombs.

The civilian laborers also saw service at the front hauling munitions to the firing lines, taking care of wounded soldiers. In some instances thousands of them came right on the heels of the troops in headlong pursuit of the fleeing enemy, providing them with food and munitions in time to destroy him.

All through the resistance years, never indeed had so many of our people been to the front so often as during the winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954 and during the battle of Dien-bien-phu. From the unoccupied rear area an uninterrupted, powerful flow of men and wealths reached the front to engulf the enemy to the lowest depths.

This enthusiasm on the part of the people for active support to the front springs from the Party's correct revolutionary line and its sweeping political motivation drive. In the winter-spring campaign of 1953-1954 and the Dien-bien-phu battle particularly, this enthusiasm was the direct fruition of our motivating the masses for the land reform which had recently been promulgated and put into effect. Once they had been educated, motivated, and cultivated by the Party, once they had recognized the close link between the anti-imperialist and antifeudalist struggles, and between class and national rights our people, especially the peasants, spared no pains to come to the support of and win victory for the war of resistance. When the implementation of the Party's land reform had begun, our rear felt itself strengthened both economically and politically and found itself in a position not only to fulfill the front's material requirements but also to impart to it the people's revolutionary enthusiasm and to bolster the fighting men's determination to win.

The victory of the battle of Dien-bien-phu and of the 1953-1954 winter-spring campaign also attests to the Party's enlightened wartime leadership. From the experience of the past 8 years of war, especially during 1951 and 1952, our Party had learned the laws governing the wars of aggression and the enemy's weaknesses and contradictions, all of which had enabled the Party to set forth correct lines and principles. From the point of view of strategic leadership, the victories mentioned earlier were at all possible because the Party's strategic principle was: "INITIATIVE AND MOBILITY" and because it had worked out correct concepts for the war.

As pointed out by the 4th Plenum of the Party Central Committee (early 1953): "Our strategic concept is to temporarily AVOID MEETING WITH LARGER FORCE, TO STRIKE AT WEAK SPOTS, to disperse and destroy enemy strength, and to expand the free zone." The Plenum also instructed our army "In conformity with this strategic concept, to strike where the enemy's guard is down and simultaneously to step up activity behind him; to be
prepared to deal with the enemy's increasingly strong bases whether they are in the delta or the mountainous regions." The resolution of the 4th Plenum thus opened the way to glorious victories on various fronts all over the country during the 1953-1954 winter-spring campaign and especially at the battle of Dien-bien-phu.

As we entered the fall-winter season of 1953, we were confronted with Navarre's scheme to mass his forces on the North Vietnamese delta and to threaten seriously our free zone. The question was then raised whether our main force should defend the free zone and meet the enemy on the plains of the North, or it should assume an active, offensive posture at important strategic places and wear him down. Out of fear that the enemy would occupy the free zone, wanting to liberate the delta as quickly as possible, and reluctant to fight on mountainous grounds because of the problems inherent in such terrains, a number of cadres both in the army and in regional administrations were in favor of the first alternative. The Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee, on the other hand, pointed this out as an error. The reason was that the prime requirement for liberating more territories was to destroy the enemy's strength, which called for dispersing enemy troops, which in turn demanded that we strike at the weaker, less defended, but strategically important spots so as to force the enemy to thin himself out trying to defend all these places.

Should the first approach be chosen, then not only the enemy would mass more troops in the delta to deal with us, but he also would take advantage of the terrain there to accentuate the effectiveness of his equipment, particularly his air force, artillery, and mechanized troops. The probability was that not only would we not destroy the enemy's strength but, quite to the contrary, we could be the one to be worn down by the enemy and to fall to even keep the free zone free. The Political Bureau upheld the resolution of the 4th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, set forth the "Initiative and mobility" principle, and ruled that our main battlefields would be the jungles and mountains. This eventually led Navarre to defeat: whereas Navarre's plan was to concentrate on the delta of North Vietnam, he actually was forced to disperse his troops in small groups all over Northwest Vietnam, North, Central, and South Laos, and Northern Tay-nguyen. He was looking forward to destroying our main force in the delta but instead was obliged to send his troops to the mountains and jungles where he could hardly take advantage of the superiority of his equipment and where our troops were thoroughly in their elements.

Thus in the 1953-1954 winter-spring campaign, thanks to the skillful strategic leadership of the Party Central Committee, we had moved the enemy troops according to our wishes and created the conditions for their destruction. Attacking the strategically important points where the enemy's defense was weak and where he least expected us, we forced him to disperse his strategic motorized troops over a great many fronts while we ourselves concentrated our main body on strategic Northwest. The enemy had no other alternatives but to passively send his troops to Dien-bien-phu, there only to be dealt decisive blows. Reality subsequently proved the Central Committee's plan completely correct in the great victory of the winter-
spring campaign.

Regarding the plan of action of the 1953-1954 winter-spring campaign the concept of a decisive strategic battle at Dien-bien-phu and the best way to carry it out was brought into question.

Following the complete annihilation of the enemy in the Lai-chau area, our troops closed in on Dien-bien-phu. Although the enemy by then was scarcely able to stand on his feet, his effectiveness limited, his defense works far from solid we for our part knew little of the true situation and were hardly ready. Our plan was therefore to on the one hand hold the enemy at Dien-bien-phu in support of the secondary fronts and, on the other hand, to step up intelligence and preparation work, to bide our time and, should conditions prove favorable, to strike swiftly and decisively and destroy the enemy. Informations gathered indicated that the enemy had had reinforcements brought in and his defense works consolidated. Under these circumstances many voiced their doubt that we could ever subdue the enemy at Dien-bien-phu, while many others held that we still had a chance to strike and knock him down quickly.

Having thoroughly weighed the pros and cons of the question, the Party Central Committee and the General Military Commission decided in favor of an offensive against the collective base of Dien-bien-phu, applying the principle of "Effective blows and Sure Steps Forward."

In the background of all this, we made up our mind to destroy the Dien-bien-phu base. If we failed in this task, we would be denying our troops an avenue of advance, we would not be stepping up the war efforts, and we would not be in a position to enter a new phase of the resistance, to foil the Navarre plan, and to give effective support to the diplomatic struggle that was taking place at the Geneva Conference.

We were indeed in a position to subdue the enemy at Dien-bien-phu because, although strong, he was isolated in a mountain battlefield far from his rear bases. All he could count on to supply him was the air force, but air activity was restricted because of the nature of the terrain. Another enemy basic weakness was his low fighting spirit when he found himself in trouble. As for us, we had the advantage of a concentrated strength, a high fighting spirit, much improved tactics and techniques. It is true that we still faced a great many problems concerning tactics and supplies, but all of them could be surmounted if we stressed our moral and political superiority.

The enemy at Dien-bien-phu had to be wiped out, but this must be done by "effective blows and sure steps forward" and not by striking swiftly and decisively. For the enemy was fairly strong in number, in defense works, and in fire power; he had planes, heavy artillery, and mechanized troops all well coordinated. Furthermore, our troops having no experience in dealing with collective bases must learn as they fought. But had we been so afraid of long drawn out battles, of increasing enemy strength,
of our own supply problems, of our troops being tired and decimated by casualties as to choose to strike swiftly and decisively, then not only would we not have destroyed the enemy but, in all probability, we would have failed altogether.

Facts proved how far-sighted the strategic concept of Dien-bien-phu and the principle of effective blows and sure steps forward were, and how determined yet cautious the Party was in strategic leadership.

The battle of Dien-bien-phu concluded our hard, protracted war of resistance against the French imperialists and U.S. interventionists with a great victory. Dien-bien-phu will forever reflect the indomitable of the nation and the heroism of a people's army that has vanquished a much more powerful imperialist army.

The Dien-bien-phu victory attests to the truth of our era: once a weak nation is determined to unite, stand up, and fight for its own independence and peace, it is fully capable of defeating the stronger imperialists.

Dien-bien-phu is therefore not only a victory for our people alone but also a victory for the liberation movement of all oppressed peoples the world over.

Ever since Dien-bien-phu the struggle movement for the liberation of colonial and dependent countries has been intensifying and winning victories. In the past few years the Cuban revolution of the Algerian resistance have come to successful conclusions, the armed struggles in Angola, Congo, Venezuela, and so forth have been intensifying. In the face of the increasing momentum of the national liberation movement, imperialism has shown how fiendish it really is. On the one hand it tries to maintain old-style colonialism and, on the other, it puts into practice a new kind of colonialism in efforts to perpetuate the enslavement of the people of the colonies and dependent countries. However, faced with the hurricane-like revolutions of the Asian, African, and Latin American nations and with the dauntlessness of the nations arising in emulation of Dien-bien-phu, the imperialists are doomed to failure and the oppressed people are certain to win ultimate victory.

Thanks to the Dien-bien-phu victory, the peace was restored to Indochina and the Northern part of our country was completely liberated. Our South, however, is still smirking under the rule of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen. Today the U.S. imperialists are overtly carrying out an armed aggression against our South, attempting to turn it into a new-style colony and a base from which to launch their plot of aggression against Southeast Asia. They are waging "special warfare" on an experimental basis
and learning ways to suppress the national liberation movements all over the world.

The people of South Vietnam, under the banner of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, are resolutely opposing the aggressors and dealing the traitors and country-snatchers serious defeats. The Southern Liberation Army is fighting under extremely hard and difficult conditions, pitting their unparalleled heroism against the enemy's ultramodern weapons, but it is scoring victory upon victory and is coming of age in the process. It is our firm conviction that, bolstered by the fighting tradition and experience acquired during the anti-French struggle and the spirit of dauntlessness of Dien-bien-phu, the Southern people and Liberation Army will pulverize all plots and schemes concocted by the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen, driving them out of the country, and achieving national independence, democracy, and the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland.

Under the new conditions now prevailing, the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen are struggling more and more desperately everyday amid the same contradictions as had once gripped the French before them: much as the French wanted to beguile our people into relaxing their fighting will they could not avoid killing and terrorizing them; much as they wanted to concentrate their forces to seize the initiative, they could not help scattering them out to cope with the intensifying guerrilla activities; they cooked up devilish schemes but such schemes could not but be subjective and fraught with perils for themselves. The U.S. imperialists too will find it impossible not to follow in the footsteps of failure left by the French colonialists. Nor can the fate of the former imperialists be any different from that of the latter. Ultimate victory will be our people's.

Ten years have elapsed since the victory of Dien-bien-phu. Under the beacon of the Party's correct political and military lines, in the best tradition of Dien-bien-phu, the people of our North are working smoothly, overcoming their problems, trying hard to rehabilitate and develop their economy and to step up socialization. The people's armed forces under the leadership of the Party are working constantly to keep up their good tradition and in manner befitting a people's army. They are emulating among themselves to build a modern regular army speedily, vigorously, and surely. The people's army, the armed people's police, the self-defense militia, and the reserve force have not ceased to grow larger and stronger into a dependable instrument for safeguarding our peaceful labor and our socialist construction in the North. We are convinced that in the event the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen dare to create disturbances in the North and attack it, our entire armed strength together with the people all over the country will be there to pulverize them and their aggression.

Ours are a valiant nation and a valiant army. With the glorious tradition of Dien-bien-phu, with the determination to fight and to win, with the correct leadership of the Party we shall surmount all problems and obstacles and conquer all vicious and barbarous enemies. No react-
ionary forces can stand between the Vietnamese people and victory. The Dien-bien-phu spirit will stimulate us toward new successes in the building of socialism in the North, the liberation of the South, and the peaceful reunification of the country.