

UNFORGETTABLE MONTHS AND YEARS

BY VO NGUYEN GIAP

translated by Mai Van Elliott



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UNFORGETTABLE MONTHS AND YEARS
(NHUNG NAM THANG KHONG THE NAO QUEN)

by

Vo Nguyen Giap

Translated and with Introduction by Mai Van Elliott

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FOREWORD

The name of General Vo Nguyen Giap is well known to many Westerners, Americans and the French in particular. For most of them, however, that familiarity begins with the series of Vietminh military victories over the French, especially that at Dien Bien Phu, or the subsequent longer struggle wherein he was the chief strategist in a campaign that culminated in the ousting of an even larger American military presence from his country. But Vo Nguyen Giap's army career goes back more than a decade before Dien Bien Phu, and indeed the first few years of his military leadership in behalf of the Vietnamese revolution--1943 through mid-1946--were probably the most difficult and critical of all.

As Giap makes clear in the fascinating account that is here presented, the delicate and volatile seven months period following the revolution of August 1945 was a particularly uncertain and perilous ordeal for the leaders of the Vietminh. During it their political and military abilities were challenged by a range of intrinsically difficult, but often complexly interrelated, problems that followed one upon the other at a breathtaking and bewildering rate. The difficulty of coping concurrently during this period with the political agents and military forces of Japan, Kuomintang China, Britain, France and the American OSS required an unusually high order of political sagacity and psychological "cool." The success of Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, Pham Van Dong, Truong Chinh and other Vietminh leaders in meeting this extraordinary challenge augured well for their ultimate success.

As for Giap, no army commander, no matter how great his military skill, could have been effective in this situation unless he were also politically astute and able promptly to appreciate the interacting and often critical interdependence of military and political factors. That Giap possessed these qualities is reflected in this account. If Westerners find it surprising to find a military leader so well endowed with political aptitude, it should be pointed out that before 1943, when Giap first embarked upon a military career, he was already a seasoned political leader who had developed a profound understanding of the social and economic problems of Vietnamese society. To appreciate this and to put Giap's army career in perspective, it may be helpful to sketch some of the relevant features of his life before he became his country's foremost military figure.

Vo Nguyen Giap was born in 1911 in a village in Quang Binh province (Central Vietnam) where his family tilled the small plot of land that they owned. Giap's father, who had studied the Chinese classics, taught him to read Chinese characters, but in 1923 sent him to Hue to study at the French language Quoc Hoc school, a hotbed of nationalism that Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong had also attended. There Giap was exposed to the writings of the revolutionary nationalist leader, Phan Boi Chau, whom he met while the latter was still under house arrest.

After expulsion from this school in 1927, Giap returned to Hue, where he assisted Huynh Thuc Khang, publisher of *Tieng Dan* (People's Voice) newspaper, and in 1930 he joined the Communist Party. Following the abortive uprising of the VNQDD (Nationalist Party) at Yen Bay in that year, he and his friends in the Communist Party took part in demonstrations protesting the arrests of these non-Communist nationalists and collected money for them. Giap himself was soon arrested and sentenced to prison.

After his release, he studied at the Lycée Albert Sarraut in Hanoi, earning a living by teaching at a private school. (Some of his students, such as General Le

Quang Dao, later served under his command in the Liberation Army, and several became high civilian officials in Ho Chi Minh's government.) After finishing his studies at the Lycée Albert Sarraut, Giap enrolled in the Hanoi Law School from which he graduated in 1938.

With the establishment of a Popular Front government in France in 1936, the scope for legal activities by Vietnamese nationalists was considerably broadened. In that year Giap, together with Truong Chinh and Pham Van Dong, formed an anti-imperialist popular front, and Giap worked with Pham Van Dong in publishing a series of newspapers. In 1937, together with Truong Chinh, Giap researched and wrote an analysis in depth of conditions among the Vietnamese peasantry. This was published in 1938 under the title of *The Peasant Question (1937-1938)*¹ and had a significant influence for years to come on the approach of the Vietnamese communists to agrarian problems.

With the collapse of the French Popular Front government in 1939, Giap narrowly escaped arrest, and in the company of Pham Van Dong he left for China in the spring of 1940. (His wife was arrested soon afterward and later died in jail.) In Kunming in June 1940, Giap and Pham Van Dong first met Ho Chi Minh. Ho planned to send them to Yen-an for training, but their trip was cancelled with news of the French surrender to the Japanese, and they returned to Vietnam.

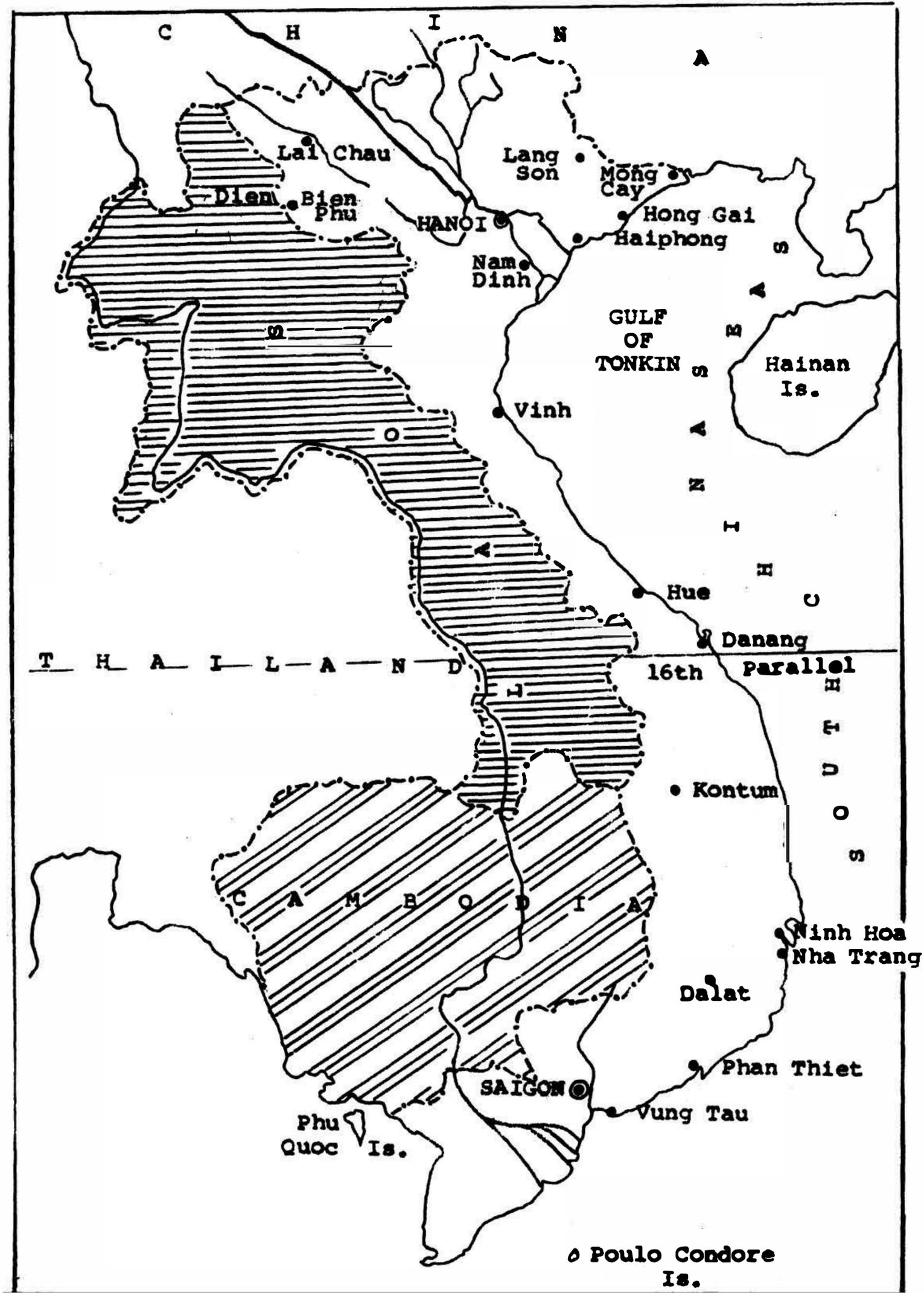
With the pro-Vichy French military forces and civil administration promptly collaborating with the Japanese armed forces that entered Vietnam, the repressive power ranged against the Vietminh at the time of the founding in 1941 under the aegis of Ho Chi Minh was all the more formidable. Only after many difficulties and after painstaking and indefatigable efforts were Giap and Chu Van Tan able to build up two small guerrilla nuclei. Giap operated in Cao Bang province, training minorities and forging the Vietminh guerrilla army, of which the first detachment was formed in 1941. Despite heavy French military repression mounted in Cao Bang during 1942, in which many of the revolutionaries were captured, Giap and most of his men survived, and thereafter his unit gradually recovered and grew in strength so that by the end of 1944 it was able to launch attacks against French military posts.

Soon after the end of the period of collaboration between the Japanese and the French in March 1945, and the prompt internment of French military units, the forces of Giap and Chu Van Tan's Army for National Salvation² were merged into one revolutionary army, under Giap's command. Its units soon began attacking Japanese posts, and by the time of Japan's surrender controlled most of six of the northernmost provinces of Vietnam. With Japan's capitulation, Giap's forces marched towards Hanoi, entering that city on August 26, 1945. Then begins the story that he here so vividly recounts of the critical first seven months of the Vietnamese revolution.

The immediate background and the context of the events that Vo Nguyen Giap describes are admirably set forth in Mai Elliott's very useful introduction. For this and her explanatory footnotes, as well as for her careful and sensitive translation, all those interested in this dramatic and complicated period of Vietnam's revolution will, I am sure, be grateful.

George McT. Kahin
June, 1975

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1. For a translation of this piece see *The Peasant Question (1937-1938)*, by Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap, translation and introduction by Christine Pelzer White, Data Paper #94, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1974.
 2. For an account of the Army for National Salvation see *Reminiscences on the Army for National Salvation, Memoir of General Chu Van Tan*, translated by Mai Elliott, Data Paper #97, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1974.



TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The years 1945-46 represented the most perilous period in the history of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Following the revolution of August 1945, the Viet Minh government headed by Ho Chi Minh faced formidable tasks. The French colonial administration had to be abolished and replaced with a new system. The economy, ravaged by the Second World War and years of deprivations by both the Japanese and the French, as well as by a terrible famine that had killed 2,000,000 people in the North, had to be restored quickly to avert a collapse. In addition, there was the threat of foreign intervention as Chinese and British troops poured into Vietnam to disarm the Japanese and as French forces invaded the country in an attempt to reimpose their colonial rule. All these dangers which imperiled the survival of the new republic were compounded by the arrival of non-communist parties, rivals of the Viet Minh, which were returning in force to the country in the wake of their Chinese sponsors.

The Economic Situation

The newly formed government was practically bankrupt. The state treasury which the Viet Minh took over contained only 1,250,000 piastres, half of which were in old, disintegrating, worthless banknotes.¹ The Bank of Indochina which had always controlled the economy and finances of Indochina remained in French hands, the Japanese having refused to hand it over to the Viet Minh on the grounds that they had the duty to protect it and transfer it to the Allies.² To meet urgent expenditures and to buy much needed weapons from the Japanese and Chinese forces to arm their badly equipped army, the Viet Minh had to rely on voluntary contributions from the people. A "Week of Gold" (Tuần lễ vàng) was launched and the population, motivated by strong feelings of nationalism and patriotism, responded enthusiastically, a total of 20 million piastres being collected.³ However, this was only a temporary measure which had to be replaced by a more permanent form of revenue raising in order to replenish the treasury. The Viet Minh had abolished the heavy and numerous French taxes and instituted a single income tax to raise revenue for the state. But the population, having been exhausted by the war and the famine, was in no position to provide the state with adequate revenue unless urgent measures were taken to restore the economy.

The food situation in the North was extremely critical. Fifty percent of the autumn rice crop had been ruined by flood and drought, and there was a deficit of 850,000 tons. The crop could only feed 8 million people for a period of three months, and this meant there would be four months of famine until the next crop was harvested.⁴ To avert another disastrous famine, the Viet Minh declared a 25% reduction in taxes for the peasants, and an exemption for those whose fields had been damaged by the flood and drought. In addition, the government ordered landowners

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1. *Vietnamese Studies*, No. 7 (Hanoi, 1965).
 2. Tran Huy Lieu, *Cach Mang Thang Tam* (The August Revolution), Vol. I (Hanoi: Su Hoc, 1960).
 3. Nguyen Kien Giang, *Viet-Nam nam dau tien sau cach mang thang tam* (Vietnam: The First Year Following the August Revolution) (Hanoi: Su That, 1961).
 4. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

who had excess land which they were unable to till to hand it over to other peasants for cultivation. It also distributed abandoned ricefields to those who needed land for cultivation, and launched a "share your rice and clothing" (nhường cơm sẻ áo) campaign to reduce rice consumption and collect the food thus saved for distribution among the poor. The government also forbade the distilling of alcohol to save rice and initiated a campaign to plant every available inch of land with secondary crops such as yam, corn, pumpkins, vegetables, etc., which would mature quickly and sustain the population until the next harvest. All these urgent measures proved effective, and with rice shipments coming from the South and Center, another famine was averted.⁵

The ruined economy was strained to the limit by the influx of rapacious Chinese occupation forces. In addition to spreading diseases, the ragtag Chinese troops, especially those from Yunnan under the command of General Lu Han, brought in their wake serious economic and financial disruptions. Chinese looting⁶ and requisition of property angered the Vietnamese, and the government of Ho Chi Minh had to summon all its prestige and authority to restrain the population and avert serious clashes which would provide the Chinese with an excuse to remove the government on grounds of ineptitude to maintain law and order, and install their own proteges--the Dong Minh Hoi (Revolutionary League of Vietnam) and the Viet-Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnamese Kuomintang)--in power.⁷

From the outset, the question of the convertibility of Chinese currency and of the expenditures of Chinese occupation forces in Indochina was a thorny issue. As a concession to the Chinese, the Ho Chi Minh government agreed to allow the Chinese to use their currency in Vietnam.⁸ Right after his arrival in Vietnam, Lu Han arbitrarily fixed the exchange rate of the Chinese gold-unit (kuan-chin) at three times its actual value on the foreign exchange market. This large discrepancy in exchange rates of the gold-unit in China and in Vietnam created a lively currency black market from which high-ranking Chinese officers, with the help of Chinese businessmen acting as agents, reaped windfall profits. The Chinese army flooded the country with worthless Chinese currency,⁹ and this huge influx--coupled with the existing shortage of goods--caused a serious inflation.

No prior arrangements had been made between the French mission in Kunming, headed by Jean Sainteny, and the Chinese government concerning financial support for Chinese forces entering Northern Indochina. Upon his arrival, Lu Han immediately demanded an advance of 15 million piastres from the Bank of Indochina, and then requested 96 million piastres monthly thereafter to meet his expenditures. Since the entire French 1944-45 budget for Indochina was only 285 million, this placed a great

5. Nguyen Kien Giang, *Viet-Nam nam dau tien*, p. 139.

6. According to R. Harris Smith, author of *OSS, The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Delta, 1973), "Black-marketeering and looting swelled with their [Chinese] arrival and the Vietnamese economy was bled dry. Chinese troops filed out of Hanoi, carrying their loot in bullock carts, captured Japanese trucks and, if need be, on their backs. They took everything--plumbing fixtures, roof tiles, furniture--even stripped pipes from building" (p. 356).

7. Hereafter, the Dong Minh Hoi will be referred to as the DMH and the Viet-Nam Quoc Dan Dang as VNQDD.

8. Nguyen Kien Giang, p. 129.

9. According to King C. Chen, "Every flight of Chinese Airlines from Kunming to Hanoi brought in a great number of gold-units, once as high as 60,000,000." King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938-1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 139.

burden on the French who balked at the request. After negotiating back and forth, the sum finally arrived at was 55,000,000 piastres per month (including a 15 million piastre monthly advance).¹⁰ However, although their funds were provided by the French, the Chinese occupation forces demanded huge supplies of rice and other commodities from the Vietnamese government.¹¹ Considering the critical food situation in the North, this was a demand which the government of Ho Chi Minh found extremely difficult to satisfy in full.

The financial situation was further aggravated by the monetary disruption of the Bank of Indochina. From 1940 to 1945, the French had to advance to the Japanese a total of 1.8 billion piastres to meet Japanese war expenditures. In order to fulfill this demand, the Bank of Indochina had to print huge amounts of money in 500 piastre notes, and a total of 600 million were issued in this denomination. After the Japanese surrender, the French announced that these 500-piastre notes were no longer valid, and caused heavy losses to the Vietnamese people.¹² This action by the French triggered a violent protest in the North where merchants refused to sell food to French residents and a demonstration took place in front of the bank, during which the demonstrators were shot at from the bank windows and several Vietnamese were killed.¹³ Under pressure from the Chinese who protested that this French measure would in effect devalue their currency, and through the mediation of General Gallagher who was the U.S. advisor to Lu Han, the French finally backed down and declared that the 500-piastre notes were still valid north of the 16th parallel and could be exchanged for smaller denominations.¹⁴

French Invasion of the South

Throughout the war, the exiled Free French government of General De Gaulle exerted strong efforts to ensure that France would not be eased out of Indochina by the Allies, more precisely by the Americans--President Franklin Roosevelt's antagonism to French colonialism being very well known. In September 1943, De Gaulle ordered the formation of the "Corps Expéditionnaire d'Extrême-Orient" (the name was later changed to "Forces Expéditionnaires Françaises d'Extrême-Orient" in February 1944) in order to get France included in Allied operations against Japanese-held Indochina and secure French rights there. The French planned to have these units incorporated later on in the Southeast Asia Command under Admiral Mountbatten. On March 24th, 1945 De Gaulle issued a declaration spelling out French policy toward Indochina. In essence, France would set up an Indochinese Federation composed of

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10. "Later, at the conclusion of the Sino-French agreements on February 28, 1946, the French government agreed to advance monthly to China 60,000,000 piastres (from September 1945 to February 1946), for military occupation expenses which were to be counted as part of Japan's reparations to France." *Ibid.*, p. 138.
 11. General Ho Ying Chin, the Chinese Chief of Staff, declared on 3 October 1945: "If they are not provided with these needs, the Chinese army will be forced to take necessary measures with regard to these logistics." See Van Tao, et al., *Lịch sử cách mạng tháng tám* (History of the August Revolution) (Hanoi: Su Hoc, 1960), p. 240. According to Van Tao, et al., the Chinese army demanded to be supplied with 400 tons of rice per day. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
 12. See Tran Huy Lieu, *Xa hoi Viet-Nam trong thoi Phap-Nhat* (Vietnamese Society During the French-Japanese Period), Vol. III of *Tai lieu tham khao cách mạng cận đại Viet-Nam* (Research Documents on Modern Vietnamese Revolution) (Hanoi: Van Su Dia, 1958), pp. 79-80.
 13. Chen, p. 136.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

the five "countries" of Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin,¹⁵ Cambodia and Laos, to be presided over by a Governor General representing France who would be assisted by French and native ministers responsible to him.

Following the liberation of Burma, Mountbatten began to lay plans for the invasion of Japanese-held territories in Southeast Asia, with Singapore and Malaya as the primary objectives of the Allied operations. At a meeting with the French held in Rangoon on June 15th, 1945, Mountbatten informed them that Indochina would be the next objective following the capture of Singapore and proposed that they contribute two divisions to this operation, scheduled tentatively for the beginning of 1946.¹⁶ However, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki the Japanese began to sue for peace, and these invasion plans were never put into effect.

Surprised by the sudden Japanese surrender, Paris immediately took a number of actions to restore French rule in Indochina. On August 16th, 1945 De Gaulle dispatched a number of infantry units to Indochina under the command of General Leclerc, and nominated Thierry d'Argenlieu as the High Commissioner for Indochina. Even before the formal Japanese capitulation took place, the French mission in Calcutta had French agents dropped in Indochina to re-establish French administration. Most of these, including Pierre Messmer, the Comissaire de la République for Tonkin, and Jean Cédile, Délégué du Haut Comissaire de la République for Southern Indochina, were caught and incarcerated by either the Japanese or the Vietnamese.

The French were to find in the British occupation forces a valuable ally for the reimposition of their control. At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the decision was made to divide Indochina at the 16th parallel, with the North placed under General Albert C. Wedemeyer, the American commander of the China Theatre, and the South under Admiral Mountbatten, the head of the Southeast Asia Command. With the Japanese surrender, the nature of Allied operations in Indochina changed from invading and driving the Japanese out of the area to disarming and repatriating Japanese troops. This duty was to be performed by the British South of the 16th parallel, and by Chiang Kai-shek's forces North of this line.

In the Southern portion of Vietnam, the Japanese collapse created a power vacuum which was quickly filled by a coalition of nationalist groups dominated by the Viet Minh. On 22 August 1945, these groups agreed to form a People's Committee for the South under the chairmanship of Tran Van Giau, a Viet Minh leader. Well aware that any excesses on the part of the nationalists would provide the British with the pretext to suppress them, the Viet Minh pursued a policy of moderation and tried to restrain the other more extremist groups. On September 2nd, 1945, the committee organized a huge rally in Saigon to celebrate Vietnamese independence which was at the same time being announced in Hanoi by Ho Chi Minh. The demonstrators were fired upon by French agents provocateurs from the cathedral located in the center of town, and 47 people were killed and wounded. Angered by this provocation, the Vietnamese mob attacked a number of French houses, and killed and assaulted some French residents. The situation in Saigon grew very tense.

The first British units began arriving in Saigon on September 11th, and British officers "demanded lists of all armed Vietnamese, ordered that all Vietnamese forces, including the police, should remain where they were, and immediately began taking over vital installations such as the airfield, the power station, the banks and some

15. The French colonial administration divided Vietnam into Cochinchina (a colony), Annam and Tonkin (both protectorates), and maintained that these three "ky" (regions) formed separate states.

16. Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Viet-Nam de 1940 a 1952* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), p. 169.

of the police stations."¹⁷ Understandably, the Vietnamese grew very disturbed by these British actions. Two days later, on the 13th, General Douglas Gracey, the British commander, flew into the city. Although he had been given clear instructions from Mountbatten to limit his operation to disarming and repatriating the Japanese troops, and to leave the administration of civil affairs to the French, Gracey felt that under the circumstances it was his duty to restore "law and order."¹⁸

To protest against what they considered British complicity with the French, the Viet Minh staged a series of strikes. In response, Gracey closed down Vietnamese newspapers and ordered that the Vietnamese surrender their weapons. Then on September 21, he issued a communique declaring martial law, banned all rallies, imposed the death sentence on anyone violating security and order, and demanded that the Vietnamese surrender their arms and the People's Committee for the South to evacuate their headquarters. The next day, Gracey took over the main prison in Saigon, released and armed 1,400 French soldiers who had been incarcerated there by the Japanese since the coup de force of March 9, 1945. These men descended on the city and attacked the Vietnamese. Then in the night of September 22nd, with the reinforcement of French forces newly arrived in Saigon--and with Gracey's acquiescence these French troops attached and occupied Vietnamese government offices. Most of the members of the People's Committee for the South had gotten wind of the impending coup and fled to the countryside. The French operation was "carried out with 'maximum ineptitude and considerable cruelty.'"¹⁹ The Vietnamese fought back, and in the early hours of September 23, began the First Indochina War which was to last until 1954.

While these clashes were taking place, the French were also trying to negotiate with the Vietnamese in the hope of achieving their aim without having to pay the price of a military conflict at a time when France was still recovering from the destruction of the Second World War. Prodded by Mountbatten who had become concerned by the turn of events in the South and summoned both Gracey and Jean Cédile to Singapore on September 28, Cédile began negotiating with the Vietnamese on October 2, 1945. At the order of the Provisional Government in Hanoi, the People's Committee for the South put forth three basic demands: (a) French recognition of Vietnamese independence, (b) French recognition of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh, and (c) cessation of all hostilities.²⁰ However, Cédile rejected these proposals and insisted on the implementation of the March 24 declaration.

Under these conditions, the negotiations failed and the French who had taken advantage of these talks to reinforce their troops with new units from France pushed the war into the provinces of the South. With superior weapons and a larger force, Leclerc broke through the resistance ring around Saigon and quickly expanded the war into the provinces, while the British cleared the triangle formed by the towns of Saigon-Thu Dau Mot-Bien Hoa and held it, freeing French forces for attack else-

17. George Rosie, *The British in Vietnam, How the Twenty-five Year War Began* (London: Panther, 1970), p. 51.

18. "There was never any doubt in his [Gracey's] mind that rule of the country belonged to the French. To recognize the Vietminh would have been a waste of time and would have encouraged them unnecessarily while causing gratuitous anxiety to the French. Any dispute between the Vietminh and the French was none of his business. But, of course, by supporting the pre-war *status quo* Gracey was implicitly taking the French side. Not unnaturally the Vietminh took exception." *Ibid.*, p. 55.

19. Tom Driberg in *Reynolds' News*, 30 September 1945, p. 1, cited by George Rosie in *The British in Vietnam*, p. 61.

20. Nguyen Kien Giang, p. 99.

where.²¹ Within a few months, the French reoccupied urban areas and vital communication routes in the South, but the Viet Minh continued to hold most of the countryside. The French then launched a pacification drive to clear the Viet Minh from their zones of control, and established a network of posts around towns and strategic communication routes. At the same time they pushed the war into South Central Vietnam and into the Western Highlands to cut off supplies from the North and enlarge their occupation zone. They also dispatched forces to Phnom Penh and Pakse to reoccupy Cambodia and Laos and put pressure on the Vietnamese frontier.

In response to the French attacks the Vietnamese government in the South, which was hampered by lack of supplies and adequately trained forces, called for non-cooperation with the French, ordered sabotage of French communications and disruption of French supplies, and launched a guerrilla warfare. Reinforcements from the North and Center were urgently dispatched to the South, and these Southward March (Nam Tiến) units later came to constitute eighty percent of the troops fighting in the South.²² To ensure more effective and coordinated leadership, the command of the battlefields in the South and South Central Vietnam was unified. Hoang Quoc Viet, the representative of the Party Central Committee and the Provisional Government, was sent to the South to implement this directive. On October 20th, 1945 he convoked a conference in Duc Hoa to unify the command of Viet Minh forces in the South and South Central Vietnam and to consolidate the leadership of the Party over the resistance in these areas.²³

The Viet Minh, the Chinese, the Dong Minh Hoi, the Viet-Nam Quoc Dan Dang, and French Efforts to Return to the North

At the same time that the Provisional Government of Ho Chi Minh had to wrestle with these enormous economic problems and oppose the French invasion, it also had to face another grave danger: the efforts by the Chinese occupation forces and their Vietnamese proteges--the Dong Minh Hoi (DMH) and the Viet-Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD)--to take over the government and transform Vietnam into a satellite of China.

Upon entering the provinces across the border from China, Chinese forces immediately proceeded to disarm and eliminate local Viet Minh People's Committees and install members of the DMH and VNQDD in power. A number of towns passed into the hands of these two organizations in this fashion: Lao Cai, Yen Bay, Phu Tho, Vinh Yen, Bac Ninh and Quang Yen.²⁴ However, these two parties were not strong enough to extend their control beyond these cities, and the countryside remained in the hands of the Viet Minh.

Once ensconced in Hanoi, the Chinese began to put pressure on the government of Ho Chi Minh to reshuffle the cabinet to include members of the DMH and VNQDD. Meanwhile, these two parties set up headquarters in Hanoi, published newspapers bitterly denouncing the government and resorted to kidnappings and liquidations of Viet Minh cadres and sympathizers.²⁵ In the face of these provocations and demands,

21. British forces withdrew on March 5, 1946. Before their withdrawal, they handed over to the French a large amount of military supplies which enabled the French to equip new units. See Philippe Devillers, *Histoire*, p. 169. For details on the controversy generated in Britain by General Gracey's actions in Vietnam, see George Rosie's account, *The British in Vietnam*.

22. Nguyen Kien Giang, p. 115.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 122. See also Devillers, *Histoire*.

25. Devillers states that the VNQDD kidnapped several Viet Minh and held them as hostages. For example, they kidnapped Tran Huy Lieu, the Minister of Propaganda,

Ho Chi Minh maintained a policy of compromise toward the Chinese, the DMH and VNQDD in order to avoid pushing the Chinese into more drastic actions. China was then recovering from the war and the Japanese occupation, and her difficulties with the Chinese communists made her hesitant to overthrow outright the government of Ho Chi Minh which enjoyed great prestige among the population and had mass support. To do so would mean provoking a conflict south of her frontier to which she would have to divert her resources. The Chinese were counting on achieving their aims in Vietnam in a more devious and discreet manner by getting their proteges included in the government and then having the latter take over gradually, to avoid arousing popular opposition.

Under Chinese pressure, Ho agreed in December 1945 to form a provisional coalition government with the DMH and VNQDD which would remain in power until a National Assembly was elected to ratify a formal government. To put an end to VNQDD and DMH sabotage of the elections, slated for January 1946, Ho also agreed to reserve for these two parties who were reluctant to field candidates for fear of losing the election, a total of 70 seats in the National Assembly. To allay Chinese fears and to blunt the attacks of the VNQDD and the DMH that the Viet Minh was a communist-inspired movement, the Indochinese Communist Party was dissolved on November 11, 1945 and replaced with the "Indochinese Association for Marxist Studies."²⁶ However, the Party was dissolved in name only, since its cadres continued to operate as before, only now their communist affiliation was kept secret.

After consolidating their position in the South, the French made preparations to return to the North. However, such an operation could only be carried out painlessly if France succeeded in reaching an agreement with Chiang Kai-shek for the withdrawal of Chinese forces, and in persuading the government of Ho Chi Minh to accept the return of French forces to replace the Chinese troops. France had been exhausted by the Second World War and did not want to get bogged down in a conflict with both the Chinese and the Vietnamese. The operation in the South had proved to be much more costly and protracted than the French had anticipated. Though Viet Minh forces in the South had been driven from urban areas, they were far from being defeated and the pacification task was proving to be very arduous. In addition, there were still 30,000 French residents living in the North, and the French were afraid that their lives would be jeopardized if an armed conflict occurred. General Leclerc understood that the Viet Minh in the North were well prepared for guerrilla warfare and feared that if French troops landed without procuring in advance an agreement with Ho Chi Minh's government, his forces would take into the hills to wage guerrilla war and encircle the French in the Red River Delta and the provinces

and Vo Nguyen Giap, but did not dare to hold them for long. There was also an attempt against Tran Van Giau, the head of the Nam Bo (South Vietnam) Executive Committee who had gone to Hanoi for consultations. Devillers also adds that the Viet Minh then took retaliatory actions against the VNQDD and DMH, but cites no names. According to Devillers, "real slaughterhouses" were discovered in April and May 1946 in the villas which had been occupied by the DMH, and where kidnapped French and Viet Minh had been tortured and killed. Devillers, *Histoire*, p. 197.

26. According to Nguyen Kien Giang, "In the face of the heavy pressure exerted by the Chiang Kai-shek group with regard to the continued existence of our Party, this was an excellent measure to help our Party avoid the brunt of their attack. At that time, either the Party continued to operate openly, in which case the Chiang Kai-shek group would use the excuse of 'opposing communism' to suppress the Vietnamese revolution and destroy our Party; or the Party had to sacrifice its name to preserve its forces and continue to lead the revolution. The Central Committee, headed by President Ho, made a timely decision to follow the second course of action." Nguyen Kien Giang, p. 130.

of North Central Vietnam.²⁷ Thus, the French desired negotiations with both the Chinese and the Vietnamese.

At this time, internal pressures in China made Chiang Kai-shek more willing to work out a settlement with the French. During the war years, the Chinese Communist Party had built up a strong army and vastly expanded their zones of control to include strategically located territories. After the Japanese surrender, the Communists moved a large force into Manchuria, while in the North their troops tried to block the entry of the Kuomintang army into Chahar and Hopei, and attempted to take over Nanking and Shanghai in the East. Under American pressure and through the mediation of General George C. Marshall, both sides agreed to a ceasefire on January 10, 1946, and to hold a Political Consultative Conference in Chungking the next day to arrange a political settlement of their conflict. However, the two sides remained deadlocked over the implement of the settlement and, more seriously, the ceasefire did not hold and clashes continued to occur.

Because of these internal difficulties the Chinese Kuomintang did not want to get involved in a conflict with the French in Indochina. The Sino-French accord was signed on February 28, 1946. The Chinese agreed to withdraw from Indochina, with the relief of forces to be completed between March 1 and 15, or at the latest by March 31. In exchange, the French undertook to return to the Chinese their territories in Tientsin, Hangchow, Kwangchow and Shanghai, to sell the Yunnan railway, and to exempt Chinese goods in transit through Tonkin from customs duties.

French contacts with Ho Chi Minh's government began at the end of August 1945, through the intermediary of Major Archimedes Patti, the head of the American OSS.²⁸ Over the next six months talks were held intermittently between the French mission, headed by Jean Sainteny, and the Vietnamese government, but no settlement could be reached because of the French refusal to accept the basic demands of Ho: (a) independence for Vietnam, and (b) unification of the three "ky." To the French, independence was anathema, and they continued to insist that Cochinchina remained a separate state. However, after the Sino-French accord was signed, Ho realized that if he did not come to an agreement with the French, both the Chinese and the French would turn against him and accuse him of impeding the Allied operations of disarming and repatriating Japanese troops. Another compelling reason which made Ho decide to settle with the French was his fear of a coup de force by the Chinese and his desire to get rid of these rapacious occupation forces which were creating havoc with the Vietnamese economy.

In addition, Ho was persuaded to settle with the French because of the growing threat of the DMH and VNQDD. These two groups, not happy with their share of power, were getting increasingly violent in their efforts to overthrow the government and

27. Jean Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh and His Vietnam* (Chicago: Cowles Book Company, 1972), p. 53.

28. The American OSS group headed by Major Patti, who had operated in the highlands of North Vietnam during the last months of the war and had enjoyed the collaboration of the Viet Minh, was very sympathetic to the cause of independence from the French. However, Major Patti's pro-Viet Minh stand did not sit well with Washington and he was recalled. In late October 1945 the OSS was withdrawn from Vietnam altogether. Desirous of obtaining French cooperation in establishing a common front against the Soviet Union in Europe, the Americans began to show more sympathy toward the French. According to R. Harris Smith, before departing "Roberts [an OSS officer sympathetic to Ho] sadly wrote a final report, strongly recommending American support for Ho and his nationalist movement. But it was too late. By October 1945, the State Department had already informed OSS in no uncertain terms that the United States would 'respect French sovereignty' in Indochina." R. Harris Smith, *OSS*, p. 358.

to sow disaffection among the population. They stepped up their kidnappings and assassinations, and intensified their denunciation of the Viet Minh. When they got wind of the contacts between Ho and the French, they accused the Viet Minh of plotting to betray the country, and held violent demonstrations in Hanoi demanding the formation of a new government headed by ex-emperor Bao Dai. The people grew very disturbed and the Viet Minh feared that the chaotic political conditions might tempt the Chinese into overthrowing the government to install their own proteges in power.

Besides, the country's ruined economy and the weakness of the Vietnamese forces made it apparent to Ho that he could not fight both the French and the Chinese simultaneously, so he decided to settle with the French and play for time--time to build up his army, consolidate the economy, and make more adequate preparations for a protracted struggle if the French later reneged on the terms of their agreement.

Consequently, on February 16, 1946 Ho indicated to Sainteny that he was willing to negotiate on the basis of Vietnamese independence within the framework of the French Union.²⁹ The problem now was to find a term acceptable to both sides which would denote both independence and membership within the French Union. As the possibility for a final agreement emerged, the French indicated to Ho that they would like to see the DMH and the VNQDD, who were virulently opposed to any settlement with the French, included in the new government to be set up and presented to the newly elected National Assembly for formal ratification to replace the Provisional Coalition Government. The French thought that the inclusion of these parties in the new government signing the accord would prevent them from sabotaging it. Ho himself wanted the DMH and VNQDD to participate in the new government and share the responsibility with the Viet Minh for signing the accord which would allow French forces to return to the North. Consequently he approached the Chinese about the inclusion of these two parties in the new government. The Chinese who wanted to secure an enlarged role for their proteges before their departure from the scene urged the DMH and VNQDD to accept Ho's offer. The new Resistance Government was set up on February 24 and its composition was ratified by the National Assembly at its first session on March 2, 1946. The Viet Minh only held five Cabinet posts--out of a total of eleven--in the new government, but Ho remained President.

With the agreement signed with the Chinese on February 28, 1946 and only the procedures for the relief of forces to be worked out, French war vessels sailed into the Tonkin Gulf. Because of the tides at Haiphong, the French fleet could enter the harbour only between March 5 and 7. However, at the last minute the Chinese army command which wanted to prolong its stay in Vietnam to gather more loot³¹ reneged and declared that they would have to secure the approval of General Douglas MacArthur, the American commander of the Pacific, for the withdrawal of Chinese forces and that they would not permit French forces to land unless a Vietnamese-French accord was signed first. In the evening of March 5, as the French fleet was nearing Haiphong, the Chinese army command became frightened by the prospect of an armed clash with the French expeditionary forces about to land in Haiphong, for which they would have to answer to Chungking, and urged Ho Chi Minh to settle with the French to avert a military conflict.

However, the negotiations between Sainteny and Ho remained deadlocked on the questions of independence and the status of Cochinchina, with the French only agreeing to recognize the Vietnamese right of self-government within the framework of the French Union and to hold a referendum in the South on its unification with the Center and North. Before departing that night, Sainteny asked Ho to think over the matter

29. Devillers, p. 214.

30. Jean Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 62.

31. According to Vo Nguyen Giap, the Chinese army command wanted to stay till after the opium harvest. See *Nhung nam thang khong the nao quen* (Unforgettable Months and Years), p. 98.

for the next day when the expeditionary forces landed in Haiphong fighting would erupt. The reason Ho did not want to conclude the agreement that night was that he wanted to consult the Party Central Committee first on such a momentous decision. Ho had encountered strong opposition within the Party on the issue of negotiating with the French. A number of Party members were opposed to the idea and thought that any settlement with them would be tantamount to surrender.³² That night, an enlarged conference of the Party Central Committee was held in Huong Canh (Ha Dong province) and it unanimously approved the Party Standing Committee's policy of "Making Peace to March Forward."³³

In the early hours of March 6, Sainteny was informed that Ho was willing to sign an accord with France under the formula that France would recognize Vietnam as a free state with its own government, National Assembly, army and finances, and with the proviso that the question of the unification of Cochinchina with the rest of Vietnam would be decided by a referendum to be conducted in the South. An addendum to the accord specified that the number of French troops in the North would be limited to 15,000--of these, the forces performing the duty of disarming and repatriating Japanese troops would be withdrawn after their task was completed (within a maximum period of ten months), while the rest would be completely withdrawn at the end of five years. In the morning of March 6, French warships entered Haiphong and were fired upon by Chinese troops under the command of General Wang Hu-huan who claimed he had not received an official communication on the Sino-French accord. The French returned the fire and fighting lasted for about two hours, during which a Chinese arms depot (the war booty of General Wang) was destroyed and one French warship was badly damaged. However, this incident did not block the Vietnamese-French accord which was signed in the afternoon of March 6.³⁴

32. Devillers, *Histoire*, p. 215.

33. *Ba mươi lăm năm đấu tranh của Đảng* (Thirty-Five Years of Struggle of the Party) prepared by the Ban Nghien Cuu Lich Su Dang (Commission for the Research of Party History) (Hanoi: Su That, 1971), p. 46.

34. Ho Chi Minh, not wanting the Viet Minh to bear sole responsibility for signing the agreement with the French and fearing that the non-communist parties--and in particular the virulently anti-Viet Minh VNQDD--would accuse the Viet Minh of betrayal, managed to secure the signature of Vu Hong Khanh, the Secretary of the VNQDD Leadership Committee (Bí thư chủ tịch đoàn). Before signing, Ho Chi Minh convoked a Cabinet meeting. Nguyen Tuong Tam, the Secretary General of the VNQDD Central Committee and the Foreign Minister in the Resistance Coalition Government, refused to attend and could not be found anywhere. Ho Chi Minh then sent a messenger to fetch Vu Hong Khanh, who was only the vice-chairman of the Resistance Committee and was not a member of the Cabinet. Ho asked the Cabinet to appoint a representative to sign the accord with him, but all the ministers declined to represent the Cabinet. He then proposed that the Cabinet designate its representative by secret balloting. Vu Hong Khanh was selected. After the accord was signed, the VNQDD Central Committee convened a meeting at which Vu Hong Khanh was bitterly denounced for having acted arbitrarily and for having failed to consult the party on this matter. Indignation at VNQDD party chapters was intense, and a number of party members even threatened to break away and form a splinter party. The Central Committee had to send a representative to these chapters to calm things down. This is the account given by Hoang Van Dao, a VNQDD party member, in his *Viet Nam Quoc-Dan-Dang, lich-su dau-tranh can-dai 1927-1954* (The VNQDD: History of Its Recent Struggle from 1917 to 1954) (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1970) pp. 304 and 308. He went on to say that perhaps Vu Hong Khanh did not know that the terms of the Sino-French agreement called for the relief of Chinese forces by French troops, and therefore did not realize that the return of the French would mean the departure of the Chinese forces and the loss of the Chinese base of support for the VNQDD.

The rapid development of events did not give the Viet Minh time to prepare the population to accept the terms of the accord. The news of the agreement stunned the people, and popular indignation and emotion was intense. At a huge rally of 100,000 on March 7, Vo Nguyen Giap and Ho Chi Minh had to defend and explain the action of the government. Giap spoke first, and his speech was a masterpiece of eloquent oratory. In it, he lay bare the stark reality of the country and never once tried to deceive the people with any illusions. With disarming frankness he explained the situation and the reasons why the government had acted the way it did. Following is a summary of the high points of his speech, the full text of which can be found in Devillers' book:³⁵

- (a) All the superpowers--America, England, France and China--had banded together, and the DRV would be isolated if it resisted.
- (b) The revolutionary movement, if it resisted would be able to hold on to only a few regions. Resistance would destroy the military forces of the revolution. Certain areas where the revolution had not penetrated deeply would collapse. "Resisting in this fashion would have been heroic, but our people would have had to bear terrible sufferings for which we cannot predict whether they would be compensated."
- (c) The scorched earth tactic that would have to be employed in a protracted resistance would make life impossible for the people, cause untold miseries and bring about an economic collapse.
- (d) Giap explained that the government had signed the accord to "protect and reinforce our political, military and economic position," and cited the example of the Soviet Union which had signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty of 1918 to stop the German invasion so that it "could profit by the ceasefire to reinforce its army and its political power. Thanks to this treaty, has not Russia become very strong?"
- (e) On the question of autonomy, Giap said: "In this accord, there are terms which satisfy us and others which do not. Those that satisfy us, without filling us with joy, are that France recognizes the DRV as a free state. Liberty is not autonomy, it is more than autonomy, but it is still not independence. Once liberty is attained, we will proceed toward independence, toward complete independence."
- (f) Concerning the reunification of Cochinchina with the rest of Vietnam, Giap said the results of the referendum could be predicted in advance, for "Are there people in Vietnam who do not wish to see Annam, Cochinchina and Tonkin form one country?"

Giap ended his speech by reaffirming the government's aim to obtain complete independence for Vietnam. By this speech, Giap dispelled the hostility of the people and was cheered and applauded wildly by the enthusiastic crowd. Then Ho appeared on the balcony to thunderous applause. He gave a simple speech in which he said that only 15,000 French troops would be allowed to enter the North, and that they would be evacuated in five years. He told the people, "To negotiate rather than to fight is to show political intelligence. Why in fact sacrifice 50 or 10,000 men when we can attain independence through negotiations, perhaps in five years?" He then exhorted the people not to become discouraged and to remain calm, determined, vigilant and ready, and concluded with an emotional declaration: "I, Ho Chi Minh, have always led you on the road to liberty, I have struggled all my life for the independence of our Fatherland. You know I would prefer to die rather than to sell our country. I swear to you I have not betrayed you."³⁶ According to Jean Sainteny, "The sincerity of his tone and the emotion that broke his voice, which was never strong, swayed and

35. Devillers obtained the text of the speech from the Vietnamese newspaper *Quyet Chien*, issue of March 8, 1946.

36. Devillers, *Histoire*, pp. 230-231.

persuaded the crowd."³⁷ Through this appeal, Ho retained the popular confidence which had been shaken by the news of the March 6 accord.

No other period in the history of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam could be compared to the years 1945-46 in the sheer magnitude and complexity of problems confronting the government. As Vo Nguyen Giap put it in his memoir, "the fate of the nation was hanging by a thread." It was undoubtedly due in large measure to Ho Chi Minh's skillful leadership and his enormous popular prestige that the DRV was able to survive its heavy challenges. The French later reneged on the terms of their agreements and, confident in the technological superiority of their army, launched a war of reconquest in the mistaken belief that they would crush the fledgling Vietnamese forces without difficulty. And just as Leclerc had feared, Ho Chi Minh and his government took to the mountains (of Thai Nguyen province in the Viet Bac) to wage a war of resistance that ultimately led to the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

37. Jean Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 65-66.

UNFORGETTABLE MONTHS AND YEARS

by

Vo Nguyen Giap

Hanoi
Quan Doi Nhan Dan
1970

Recorded by Huu Mai

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

May 19th has again arrived.

This year our people commemorate President Ho's birthday in a situation different from that of the previous years.

Today, our whole nation is remembering him.

I would like to record some of the memories about Uncle in the "Unforgettable Months and Years" in the period right after the seizure of power, when the fate of the Fatherland was at times hanging by a thread.

Uncle's guidance and the amazing leadership of the Party Central Committee which he headed, the strength and vigor of our people--from the towns to the villages, from North to South--all these powerful factors, as well as the extremely complicated and confusing situation [in which swarmed] "internal enemies and external foes"--the following chapters probably only manage to describe in part.

On the occasion of Uncle's 80th birthday, I offer these lines of respect and sincerity as my contribution to the commemoration by the people and comrades who remember him, his great achievements on behalf of the nation and the country, and the words he left us before departing.

FIRST SECTION*

"The revolutionary boat is navigating past jutting rocks to sail forward at full speed."

(Directive of the Party Central Committee's Standing Committee on March 9th, 1946).

CHAPTER I

After our arrival in Hanoi [in August 1945], we stayed in Hang Ngang Street. The Party City Committee had arranged for us to live with the family of a local sympathizer. A few days later, the news came that Uncle Ho had arrived. A couple of days before that a Liberation Army platoon from the Quang Trung detachment operating in Thai Nguyen province had received an urgent order to turn around and go back to Tan Trao¹ to provide security for Uncle Ho's trip. The comrade who came to give us the news said that there were times on the road when Uncle had had to use a stretcher.² This meant he was still feeling extremely weak. He always disliked bothering others, even when he was sick and tired.

The situation was very critical. The brothers rejoiced at the news [of Uncle's arrival]. Le Duc Tho³ had been assigned to go to the War Zone to escort Uncle to Hanoi, but before Tho could go Uncle had already arrived. Tran Dang Ninh⁴ and I left for Phu Gia to meet him.

The car sped out of the city. The rows of guava trees along the dikes looked very familiar. Red flags fluttered in the villages around Ho Tay Lake. I thought

* This is the first part of a two-part memoir. The second section will be published soon. Excerpts from the second part have appeared in *Nhan Dan* newspaper.

1. Tran Trao, located in Bac Can province, was chosen as the capital of the Liberated Zone (comprising the provinces of Cao Bang, Bac Can, Lang Son, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang and Thai Nguyen, and a number of adjacent areas in the provinces of Bac Giang, Phu Tho, Yen Bai and Vinh Yen) at a Viet Minh conference in June 1945. (Trans.)
2. While in Tan Trao, Ho Chi Minh fell seriously ill in August 1945 and almost died. According to Vo Nguyen Giap, he was cured by a local Chinese herb doctor who gave him a concoction of burned and pulverized roots dug up in the forest mixed with rice gruel. (See *Tu Nhan Dan Ma Ra* [Born From the People] [Hanoi: Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 1969]). (Trans.)
3. Le Duc Tho, a member of the Politburo of the Lao Dong Party, was the special advisor to the DRV delegation at the Peace Talks in Paris from 1969-1973. (Trans.)
4. Tran Dang Ninh was then a member of the North Vietnam Revolutionary Committee set up in April 1945 to command the war zones in Northern Indochina. (Trans.)

of the day we went to welcome Uncle in Deo Gie. Uncle was then on his way from Cao Bang province to Tan Trao. A few days later, Tan Trao became the capital of the revolution.

In the span of Uncle's revolutionary activities, while he was roaming the far corners of the earth, there had been days of immense joy. There was the day when he discovered the path toward national liberation upon reading Lenin's treatise on the problem of nationalism and colonialism. There was the day when the French Communist Party was set up in 1920 and he became one of its members. And there was that historic day of February 3, 1930, when the Indochinese Communist Party was established. Today was another day of rejoicing for him and for the Vietnamese revolution.

Not so long ago, I was sitting next to a bamboo cot in a small hut when Uncle was seriously ill in Tan Trao. It was in those moments that I could fathom his burning aspiration for our nation's independence and freedom--not only through his instructions about cadres' missions and how to firmly maintain the movement; [he had said] "even if the Truong Son (Annamite) Chain has to go up in flames, we must win back our independence and freedom." His dedication also showed clearly through each small gesture, through the look in his eyes when he suddenly woke up from his fits of fever, and through his struggle with the dangerous illness to wrest each minute, each second to serve the revolution.

Following the Party's and Uncle's appeal, for the last few days the whole nation from North to South had risen with a force akin to that of a rising tide and a swift current. In Hanoi, the revolutionary masses had stormed the iron railing ringing the North Vietnam's Résidence Supérieure⁵ and occupied it. At the security guards' barracks, confronted with the barrels of the machine guns mounted on Japanese tanks, old people, youths, women and men, adults and children, had tightened their ranks, raised high the Viet Minh flags and marched inside the barracks. The tanks, automatic weapons and bayonets of the Japanese troops had to beat a retreat. The Japanese had no choice but to hand over to the revolution the entire stock of weapons belonging to the security guards stationed there. News of victories from every area was pouring in.

We entered Ga village. Uncle was staying in a small but tidy brick house. We went in and immediately saw him sitting and talking with the old man who owned the house. Not so long ago, in the Viet Bac Highlands Uncle had appeared as an old and venerable Nung leader. But today he had become an old delta peasant, very relaxed and at ease in his brown clothes. He was still very thin, and his cheek bones protruded prominently. Veins marked his forehead and temples. But with his high forehead, his black beard, and his eyes--especially the pair of eyes--constantly shining and bright, an extraordinary spiritual strength emanated from his frail body. In spite of everything, he still looked a great deal better than he did during the conference in Tan Trao.

When he saw us enter, the old owner of the house, full of tact, refused to stay no matter how much we insisted. He said a few phrases in greeting and then withdrew.

Uncle smiled brightly, looked at us, and said:

- You look like models of city folks today!

We excitedly reported to him about the situation of the insurrection in Hanoi and in the provinces. He sat and listened intently, with a calm expression. That was the way he was, he never lost his composure whether he was happy or sad.

5. The residence of the French Governor of Tonkin. (Trans.)

We told him about the Standing Committee's intention to organize early a presentation ceremony to introduce the government. According to the resolution adopted at the National Congress in Tan Trao, the National Liberation Committee of which he was Chairman would become the Provisional Government.

With some pleasure mixed with amusement, he said as though to ask us again:

- I'll be the President?

In fact, a very glorious but also very perilous phase for our nation had begun. Uncle had accepted a difficult mission: to steer the recently built boat that was Vietnam past the dangerous cataracts and rocks. He had welcomed this mission before history and the nation, as he answered foreign correspondents three months later: "I absolutely do not desire honors and riches. I have to assume the responsibility of being President because the people entrusted it to me and it is my duty to do my best, just like a soldier obeying the order of the people to go to the front."

CHAPTER II

We returned to Hang Ngang street first to make preparations. Brother Nhan⁶ would come later, and was staying behind to accompany Uncle to Hanoi in the late afternoon.

This was the first time that Uncle had come to Hanoi. It had taken him over 35 years to cover the distance of 300 kilometers separating the small thatch hut in Kim Lien village⁷ from Hanoi. The path he had followed was unlike any of the roads taken by other Vietnamese patriots before him. Alone, he had braved difficulties to march forward on the roads of almost every region of the globe. Capitalism, having reached the peak of its development, had become very ugly. By all means, it tried to erase the boundaries between good and bad, black and white.⁸ It distorted the genuine spiritual values that the human race had achieved up to that time. It was blocking the beacon of justice and freedom.

Uncle had journeyed on gloomy winter days, when the clouds of imperialistic wars were covering the skies of Europe and Asia. The world was in chaos and sorrow; the crimes of imperialism were piled up to a staggering height. At a time when gold was mixed with copper, when it was difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood, he had quickly discerned the light of truth. He came to Leninism. He saw that Leninism was precisely "the sun bringing life and happiness." He saw that Lenin's banner "represented faith and the beacon of hope." As far back as fifty years ago, our great Vietnamese patriot had found in Marxism-Leninism, for our people and other people in the same situation, a unique path toward liberation: "the Path of Revolution."⁹

An enormous change had occurred in the life of our nation. A few days earlier, Hanoi still retained the appearance of a town which was the product of a corrupt colonialist regime in wartime. The whole city was immersed in black market operations. People lived from day to day. There were not enough garbage carts to carry the corpses of those who had died of starvation to the suburbs to dump them in mass graves.⁹ Meanwhile, starving masses of people were still pouring in through the city gates¹⁰ from the countryside. They staggered and wandered like dry leaves falling on a winter evening. Very frequently, just a brush of the arm from a policeman would be enough to make them collapse, never to rise again.

Furthermore, the water level of all the rivers had risen in August of that year. The flood had broken the dikes which had long been neglected by the ruling clique. The six provinces of the delta, the granary of the North, were submerged

6. Comrade Truong Chinh. (Footnote in text.) Now Chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee. (Trans.)

7. Ho's native village in Nghe An province. (Trans.)

8. Meaning truth and falsehood. (Trans.)

9. This referred to the famine of 1944-45 which killed close to 2 million people. (Trans.)

10. These are the gates leading into the old citadel of Hanoi. (Trans.)

under a white sheet of water. Epidemics were raging. So many calamities caused by colonialism were converging at once on the people.

Along with the economic speculators, political opportunists were cropping up everywhere. They were shouting "Independence for Vietnam" as well as screaming "Long live Great Japan." French policemen carrying billy clubs were replaced by Japanese military policemen carrying long swords and dragging their boots on the sidewalks. Not only Hanoi but our whole nation was living through minutes and hours of intense sorrow and suffering.

The great victory of the Soviet Red Army which destroyed the Japanese army in Manchuria in the middle of August had presented our nation with a great opportunity. The revolution rose up like a storm. Within the space of a few days, the stains, the dishonors and sufferings of a regime of slavery were washed away.

The power of renewal of the revolution was extraordinary. The previous day, the entire city was still paralyzed by famine, epidemics and repression. The next day, all the large avenues and the small alleys were seething with activities. Thousands and thousands of people surged through the streets with the strength of a gushing torrent.

The people's revolutionary government had just been set up. The majority of the people did not know who represented the new government. But everyone automatically took it upon himself to establish a new order--the order of the revolution. Crimes, such as snatching people's valuables in the street and robberies disappeared completely. Burglaries almost ceased to occur. Beggars vanished. Commerce, the main activity of the city, had given way to a new activity: revolutionary activity.

A man riding a bicycle arrived at a street corner and announced through a bullhorn: "Fellow citizens, please assemble at point X to participate in a demonstration!" No one knew who he was but immediately the appeal was relayed and spread. Many citizens, acting on their own, stood in the middle of the street with bullhorns to announce the news. Everyone dropped whatever he was doing and rushed out en masse. In a flash, thousands of people had gathered at the demonstration site, ready to do whatever the revolution needed.

The atmosphere in Hanoi became healthy and exciting. "Onward march the Viet Minh troops, sharing a common desire to save their country,"--revolutionary songs resounded from morning till night. Flags with stars became more and more numerous, and more and more beautiful. Houses and streets were bathed in the red glow of the fluttering flags. Revolution was really a day of rejoicing for an oppressed people.

Uncle Ho arrived in Hanoi. In a few days, Hanoi would become the capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the first People's Democratic State in Southeast Asia. Hanoi as yet had not shared our joy of welcoming Uncle's return today. Even the comrade driving the car was unaware. A few days later, he asked for a leave of absence to go to Thai Nguyen and bring his father to Hanoi to attend the Independence Rally and see the President of the country. When he arrived in Ba Dinh square, he realized that President Ho was none other than the old man he had come to fetch in the car a few days earlier.

CHAPTER III

At the Potsdam conference at the end of July of that year, the Allies decided to divide Indochina into two zones to occupy and disarm Japanese troops when Japan surrendered. The British forces were in charge of disarming the Japanese army from the 16th parallel southward. From the 16th parallel northward, Chiang Kai-shek's army would take charge. Naturally, in this vital question, our people were not consulted. Because of American pressure, the French were cast aside.

Before the Chiang group arrived, on 22 August, a number of French military officers¹ appeared at the side of the American delegation when they disembarked from their plane in Hanoi. The French officers were taken by the Japanese to the Metro-pole Hotel. Many French residents were still staying there. When our people saw the French military uniforms, they rushed in to protest. The crowd became larger as more and more people arrived. Defying the bayonets of the Japanese sentries, they tore apart the ropes that fenced in the hotel. Faced with the masses' anger, Japanese MPs hurriedly hustled the French officers to the old Gouvernement Général Palace which was then still serving as the Headquarters of the Japanese army.²

A few months previously, when we were still in the War Zone, we heard the news that De Gaulle had issued a declaration³ concerning a new policy for the French political regime in Indochina. According to this announcement, Indochina would become a federation composed of five different "states" (in addition to Laos and Cambodia, they divided Vietnam into three states: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina). These states would enjoy a regime called "internal autonomy." This federation would have a federal government headed by a "Governor General" representing France, and holding both legislative and executive powers. Through this declaration, it appeared that the colonialist policy of the French imperialists toward us had not changed.

When they heard that the Japanese monarchy was about to surrender, the French government immediately took action. Many groups of military officers, colonial administrators and intelligence officers in China, Ceylon and Madagascar were ordered to enter Indochina by all means. They parachuted in all three regions of North, Central and South Vietnam. Some entered our country by sea. They were unaware of the profound changes that had taken place here in the meantime. Many went searching for the old mandarins and village officials to present their papers. We caught almost all of them, while a number fell into the hands of the Japanese.

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11. Jean Sainteny, head of the French Military Mission (M5) in Kunming (China) and four companions flew into Hanoi aboard a U.S. Air Force Dakota, with the American OSS chief, Major Patti. (Trans.)
 12. French accounts said Jean Sainteny and his crew "bluffed" their way and settled into the Gouvernement General Palace to assert the French presence in Hanoi. (See Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Viet-Nam de 1940 a 1952* [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952]; and Jean Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh and His Vietnam, A Personal Memoir* [Chicago: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1972].) However, Vo Nguyen Giap's version of this incident is supported by the account given by R. Harris Smith in his work, *OSS, The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Delta Book, 1973), pp. 347-349. Smith's book is based on the personal recollections of former OSS officers, on the personal files of former Washington officials, and on extensive research. (Trans.)
 13. Declaration of March 24, 1945. (Trans.)

After we had been in Hanoi for a few days, we received the news that right after the Japanese surrender, the French government had ordered the French Expeditionary Forces in the Far East--which had been organized a long time before that date--to leave immediately for Indochina. Leclerc, a general who had won fame in the struggle to liberate France, was appointed Commander-in-Chief. D'Argenlieu, the Admiral--a former priest and an intimate of De Gaulle¹⁴--was designated High Commissioner. French combat vessels which had survived World War II sailed for Indochina. From the other side of the globe, rifle barrels were pointed toward the revolution.

Uncle Ho and the brothers were very concerned about the appearance in Hanoi of a delegation of over ten French officers. How did the French manage to get here when the Chiang army had not arrived? What was the attitude of the Allies--especially the attitude of the Americans and Chiang toward the French as far as the Indochina question was concerned? This was something that we had to ascertain.

We asked to see the American mission in the name of a delegation from the People's Government. Through this meeting, we learned definitely that the disarmament of the Japanese troops north of the 16th parallel was still the responsibility of Chiang Kai-shek's army. We also noticed that the Americans and the French in Hanoi did not care for each other.¹⁵ While the French were urgently looking for ways to return to Indochina, [Major Archimedes] Patti, the American officer, for motivations that were unclear to us, showed sympathy for the anti-Japanese struggle of the Viet Minh.

Faced with the high tide of insurrection by the whole population from North to South, the defeated Japanese became confused and demoralized. Our attacks in the Viet Bac and in other areas gave them food for thought. If they resisted the revolution, what would their fate be once they were disarmed by the Allied troops? The Japanese saw that they had nothing to gain if they created obstacles for the revolution.

In Hue, on August 23rd, 150,000 people from inside and outside the citadel marched in the city in a show of force. The Insurrection Committee delivered a letter demanding Bao Dai's abdication. The military forces of the insurrection occupied government offices and searched for traitors. Under the enormous pressure of the revolution, Bao Dai declared his willingness to relinquish his throne.

On August 25th, the insurrection broke out in most of the provinces of the South. Eight hundred thousand people in Saigon and Cholon poured out into the streets. The imperial envoy¹⁶ whom Bao Dai had dispatched to the South a few days before had no choice but to resign. Faced with the power of the masses, thousands of Japanese troops had to turn their faces and closed their eyes.

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14. Thierry d'Argenlieu was a Navy officer who later became a monk. "Mobilized into the Navy in 1940, he was one of the first to rally to General De Gaulle in London in 1940. . . . Imbued with the traditions of French grandeur, he was certainly one of the men on whom the President of the Provisional Government could count to reestablish French sovereignty in a liberated country." See Devillers, p. 149. (Trans.)
 15. Most of the American OSS officers--in particular Major Archimedes Patti, the head of the OSS team in Hanoi, and another officer to whom R. Harris Smith gave the fictional name "Roberts"--were sympathetic to the desire for independence of the Vietnamese. This attitude annoyed the French. Jean Sainteny in his memoir, *Ho Chi Minh and His Vietnam*, called Patti "a rabid anticolonialist." (Trans.)
 16. Nguyen Van Sam, the imperial envoy, arrived in Saigon on 19 August. (Trans.)

Tran Huy Lieu,¹⁷ Nguyen Luong Bang¹⁸ and Cu Huy Can¹⁹ were sent to Hue. On August 30th, the Noon Gate²⁰ of the imperial citadel was swung wide open to welcome the revolutionary delegation. Bao Dai read an imperial decree of abdication, handed over the imperial sword and seal, and became a simple citizen of a free country. Thousands of people joyfully witnessed the last moments of the Nguyen dynasty.

Under the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party which then had a membership of about 5,000, the Viet Minh Front with the support of the whole nation, had achieved a great victory in the general insurrection from North to South. The August Revolution had succeeded gloriously. Within ten days, a revolutionary government was set up in the entire country. The colonialist regime which had lasted for eighty long years and the feudalist regime which had survived for thousands of years collapsed. People pulled down the flags of tarnished yellow²¹--a product of the brief Japanese occupation--as though plucking away wormy leaves. This flag sank into oblivion, without leaving a trace.

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17. Tran Huy Lieu was the foremost historian in the DRV and headed the Historical Research Institute until his recent death. (Trans.)
 18. Currently holds the position of Vice-President of the DRV. (Trans.)
 19. Cu Huy Can is now the Deputy Minister for Cultural Affairs. (Trans.)
 20. The "Noon Gate" (Ngõ Môn) is the main entrance to the Imperial Palace. (Trans.)
 21. The flag adopted by the short-lived government of Tran Trong Kim, formed under Japanese sponsorship in April 1945. (Trans.)

CHAPTER IV

The couple²² who owned the house on Hang Ngang street put the entire second floor at our disposal. Uncle was invited to go to the third floor where he could work in peace and quiet. However, he did not want to be by himself and preferred to stay with us. At that time, following the assignment that Uncle had made, comrades Pham Van Dong²³ and Hoang Van Hoan²⁴ were staying in Tan Trao for a while longer. To the servants and the neighbors, we were simply "the venerable old men and the young gentlemen who had come from the countryside for a visit." Tran Dang Ninh who was then sporting a beard which he was too lazy to shave was mistaken for a "venerable old man."

This floor of the house contained the living room and dining room, and so did not have any desks. Uncle sat and wrote at the immense dining table. His typewriter rested on a small square table covered with green felt which was set in a corner of the room. After working hours, each of us found a spot to lie down and rest right in these rooms. One man lay down on a sofa. The others slept on chairs arranged in rows. Uncle rested on a folding cloth cot which used to be propped up against a corner of the room.

The day Uncle arrived, bands of the Chiang Kai Shek army began to appear in Hanoi. They were reconnaissance and advance groups. Standing on the balcony, we could see these bands of the Chiang's army straggling in. It was hard to believe that this was a recently victorious army. Their faces were puffy and jaundiced, and they looked bewildered. Their yellow uniforms, the shade of tumeric, were ragged and filthy. They lugged baskets full of junky items on poles. Some groups even brought along women and children. Many had difficulty dragging themselves along on legs swollen by beriberi. They appeared like filthy stains on the city recently washed of the stench of the colonialists. They looked even more pitiful than when we had seen them five years earlier in Kunming and Kweilin.²⁵

Uncle presided over the first meeting of the Standing Committee in Hanoi. The revolution had succeeded in almost all the provinces, but the central revolutionary government had not yet been formed. The internal and external situation was very critical and urgent. The Standing Committee realized that the composition of the Provisional Government should be announced right away and that a ceremony should be organized to present the government to the public. These things should be done immediately before the main body of Chiang Kai-shek's army arrived.

The provinces up North were directed to take advantage of the flood situation and, on the grounds that it was difficult to mobilize enough boats, to delay the transportation of the Chiang army for as long as possible. A number of Liberation

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22. According to Devillers, this house belonged to Tran Van Binh, a Viet Minh sympathizer. (See Devillers, p. 142.) (Trans.)
 23. Now Premier of the DRV. (Trans.)
 24. Currently Vice-President and General Secretary of the National Assembly. (Trans.)
 25. Vo Nguyen Giap went to Kunming and Kweilin (China) in May 1940, and returned to Vietnam in April 1941. (Trans.)

Army detachments were ordered to urgently move to Hanoi from Thai Nguyen province. The flood had damaged the roads in many places, so these brothers were delayed. Power had been seized in Hanoi for over a week, but the armed forces of the revolution only consisted of combat self-defense units and a number of security guards who had recently joined the revolution. This was a situation of concern for us.

The morning of the 26th, news came that two Liberation Army detachments had arrived in Gia Lam. Nguyen Khang²⁶ and Vuong Thu Vu²⁷ went to welcome them. After extremely difficult wrangling, the Japanese agreed to let the Liberation Army units enter Hanoi. The military band played marches as the units crossed the Long Bien bridge. The fighters lined up into two columns and moved parallel with the sides of the road, carrying loaded rifles in hand, ready to do combat. The presence in Hanoi of the revolutionary armed forces which had been trained and tested in combat infused everyone with great enthusiasm. A parade of the Liberation Army troops and of the Hanoi City Self-defense forces was organized at the square in front of City Hall and brought joy and confidence to the people.

On the 28th, the membership of the Provisional Government was announced in the Hanoi newspapers.²⁸ The composition of the government expressed the policy of uniting broadly all the social strata within the Viet Minh Front in the task of building the country.

The day before, Uncle had met with the Ministers in the Provisional Government at the Résidence Supérieure. Mr. Nguyen Van To, the Minister for Social Welfare and Relief, saw in the reception room an old man wearing a pair of brown shorts and a crumpled-up cloth hat, leaning on a stick, smile brightly at him and nod his head in greeting. A while later, Mr. To discovered that the old man was President Ho Chi Minh himself.

The Standing Committee decided that the day the Provisional Government was presented to the people would also be the day Vietnam officially announced its independence and the establishment of a democratic republican system. Besides the line and policy of the government, oaths had to be prepared in advance to be sworn in front of the people. Uncle and the Standing Committee discussed a vital task which must be tackled right away: the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.

Alternately typing and writing, Uncle sat and worked in a small and badly lit room located in a long and narrow house lying in the middle of Hanoi's 36 ancient streets. The servants in the house did not know what the old man with the bright eyes, wearing an old faded brown shirt with the top buttons usually left unhooked and smoking cigarettes frequently, was doing, sitting there absorbed in his work. Each time they approached to ask whether he needed anything, he turned around, smiled,

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26. Nguyen Khang was then President of the People's Revolutionary Committee for North Vietnam. He is now a member of the Party Central Committee. (Trans.)
27. Major General Vuong Thua Vu is now the Vice-Chairman of the Joint General Staff. (Trans.)
28. The composition of the Provisional Government was as follows:
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|-------------------------------|---|
| President: Ho Chi Minh | Social Relief: Nguyen Van To |
| Interior: Vo Nguyen Giap | Public Health: Pham Ngoc Thach |
| National Defense: Chu Van Tan | Finance: Pham Van Dong |
| Youth: Duong Duc Hien | Labor: Le Van Hien |
| Justice: Vu Trong Khanh | Education: Vu Dinh Hoe |
| Public Works: Dao Trong Kim | Without Portfolio: Cu Huy Can and Nguyen Van Xuan |
| Propaganda: Tran Huy Lieu | |
| Economy: Nguyen Manh Ha | |

(Trans.)

and exchanged a few phrases of conversation with them. He always answered he did not need any help. They did not realize that they were witnessing historic moments.

One morning, Uncle and Truong Chinh called us in. The historic Declaration had been drafted. Uncle read it to get the approval of the collectivity. As he told us later, those were the happiest moments for him.

Twenty-six years before, Uncle had gone to the Versailles Peace Conference to raise urgent demands for the democracy and welfare of the colonized people. Even those basic demands were rejected by the imperialists.²⁹ He saw then that he could not wait for and depend on the charity of the capitalists, and that he could only rely on the struggle and the strength of his own people.

At this moment, on behalf of the whole nation, he was harvesting the fruit of our country's eighty years of struggle! That day, we saw clearly the glorious joy on his face still emaciated by illness.

29. The list of demands presented by Ho Chi Minh at the Versailles Conference was modest:

- (a) Autonomy for Vietnam.
- (b) Freedom of association, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of movement, amnesty to political prisoners.
- (c) Equal rights between French and Vietnamese.
- (d) Abolition of forced consumption of alcohol and opium. Abolition of forced labor and salt taxes.

See Tran Dan Tien, *Glimpses of the Life of Ho Chi Minh* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958). (Trans.)

CHAPTER V

September 2, 1945. Hanoi was exuberant in red color--a vast sea of flags, lanterns and flowers. The fluttering flags cast a red glow on the roofs, trees and lakes. Banners in Vietnamese, French, English, Chinese and Russian were strung in every street: "Vietnam to the Vietnamese," "Down with French Colonialism," "Independence or Death," "(We) Support the Provisional Government," "(We) Support President Ho Chi Minh," "Welcome to the Allied Delegation."

All the factories and shops, large and small, were closed down. There was no market. All the production and commerce activities of the city halted temporarily. The people of the capital--old and young, men and women--poured into the streets. Everyone felt he must be present at this first great festival of the country.

Streams of people wearing clothes of a variety of colors flocked toward Ba Dinh Square from all directions. The ranks of the workers wearing blue pants and white shirts exuded strength and confidence. The ordinary workers today came to the festival in the position of legitimate masters of the country and of the future. Thousands of peasants poured into the city from the suburbs. Self-defense forces carried spears, swords, and machetes. Some even carried bronze mallets and scimitars mounted on long handles, which they had removed from weapon racks displayed in shrines. Among the peasant women wearing festive clothing, some wore yellow scarves, long tunics with four flaps, and light green belts. Never before had the peasants from the poor quarters around Hanoi entered the city with the pride they exhibited that day.

The old people looked solemn and stern. The girls of the capital were jubilant in their colorful clothes. The children were noisy and excited. Although the economic condition of rich and poor families had not been changed, from that day onward, all the children became the small masters of an independent country. On cue from the whistles of the young boys and girls in charge, they beat their drums, stamped their feet in unison and sang loudly revolutionary songs. Buddhist monks and Catholic priests³⁰ also left their cells to go out into the streets. In orderly ranks they came to participate in the great festive day of the nation.

The beautiful autumn sun bathed Ba Dinh Square which from this moment had entered history. The honor guards solemnly surrounded the recently built ceremony platform. Liberation Army fighters who a few days earlier had received Military Order No. 1 issued by the Insurrection Committee to advance Southward from Tan Trao and "attack the cities and strategic points of the enemy," today stood next to the self-defense units of the capital composed of the workers, youths and laboring masses of the city, to protect the Provisional Government.

After years of roaming the globe, being sentenced to death by the French imperialists, going through many jails and long days of hardships and privations, Uncle Ho had come back to appear before 1 million citizens. This historic fact was, not so long ago, just a dream. Within a short time, the three words "Ho Chi Minh" would reverberate around the globe along with theories usually associated with great men. But on that day, Uncle's name was still unfamiliar to the majority of the population.

30. The Catholic Church in Vietnam supported the Viet Minh government at the beginning. Monsignor Le Huu Tu, the bishop of Phat Diem, served as a Supreme Counsellor to the Ho Chi Minh government. (Trans.)

The people who knew that he was none other than Nguyen Ai Quoc were very few in numbers then.

President Ho Chi Minh, the President of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, emerged before the population as a leader who appeared for the first time in front of a large crowd of people. He was an emaciated old man, with a high forehead, bright eyes, and a sparse beard. He wore an old hat, a khaki tunic with a high collar, and white rubber sandals.

A few days earlier, the question of providing suitable clothes for Uncle Ho to wear at the government presentation ceremony was raised. In the end, Uncle chose this outfit himself. During his twenty-four years as President of the country, in the great ceremonies of the nation, in his visits abroad, President Ho always appeared in this unchanging and simple image, wearing the same cotton suit with no medals on his chest--the same as when he appeared for the first time in front of the people.

The Old Man moved at a brisk pace. This surprised quite a few people then because they did not see in the President the slow and elegant gait of "noblemen." He spoke with a faint accent of someone from the countryside of Nghe An province. Uncle appeared in this manner in front of 1 million people that day. His voice was calm, warm, precise and clear. It was not the eloquent voice people were used to hearing on solemn ceremonies. But people immediately sensed in it profound sentiments and a determined spirit. It was full of life, and each word, each sentence pierced everyone's heart.

Halfway through reading the Declaration of Independence, Uncle stopped and suddenly asked:

- Can you hear what I'm saying?

One million people answered in unison, their voices resounding like thunder:

- Yes!

From that moment, Uncle and the sea of people became one.

This was the Declaration of a Democratic Republic of Vietnam which had just regained its independence after 80 years of struggle by its people. These were also the ardent and moving words of the most enlightened vanguard of the most revolutionary class which had produced children who were absolutely loyal to the interests of their class and nation and who, when facing the enemy's guillotine or firing squads, had snatched away their blindfolds and shouted: "Long Live an Independent Vietnam!"

The ceremony concluded with the oaths of independence:

- "We, the entire Vietnamese nation, swear that with one accord, we will unflinchingly support the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and President Ho Chi Minh.

- We swear that side by side with the government we will preserve the complete independence of our Fatherland and oppose any foreign plots of invasion, even to the sacrifice of our lives.

- If the French invade our country once more, we swear not to:

- serve in the French army
- collaborate with the French administration
- sell food supplies to the French
- act as guides for the French."

One million people, one million shouts blended into one voice. This was the oath of the whole population determined to carry out the words read by President Ho Chi Minh to conclude the Declaration:

"Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence, and it has in fact become a free and independent state. The entire Vietnamese nation is determined to use all their spiritual and physical strength, their lives and properties to preserve this right to freedom and independence."

The "Indictment of French Colonialism"³¹ had been issued thirty years ago. But today was the day when the French colonialist regime was brought before the entire Vietnamese nation to be tried publicly. A page of history had been turned. A new era had begun: an era of Independence, Freedom and Happiness. The map of the world had to be revised because of the birth of a new state: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Along with the General Insurrection which had exploded during the last weeks of August, the Independence Day of September 2 was of vital significance in the political and spiritual life of the nation.

Uncle's worry thirty years ago, "Pitiful Indochina: you will not survive if your shrivelled and decrepit youths do not revive quickly," vanished today. The whole nation had revived. Independence and freedom had come to each citizen. Each had realized its sacred value and his responsibility to protect it. Innumerable difficulties still lay ahead. But for the imperialists who wanted to restore their lost paradise, things would not be as easy as they used to be.

31. "Le Procès de la Colonisation Française" was published in 1925 in Paris by Ho Chi Minh, under the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc. (Trans.)

CHAPTER VI

Dealing with Allied troops arriving to disarm the Japanese army was a big difficulty for the Party. In the North, there was news that Chiang Kai-shek would bring in a large number of soldiers. On the basis of the resolution adopted in Tan Trao by the National Party Congress, the Standing Committee discussed plans to deal with the Chiang group.

We were well aware of the savage ambition of the Chinese Kuomintang. They were the mortal enemies of the revolution. We must guard against their overthrowing us and replacing us with their lackeys. However, at this juncture we had to play for time, we must be tactful and we had to avoid clashes by all means. The revolutionary government had just been set up and needed time to consolidate and build up its forces. The slogan put forward was "friendship between China and Vietnam."

It was not easy to carry out this policy toward the Chiang Kai-shek gang. Our people who had been indoctrinated by our Party for a long time knew that only the Chinese Red Army was our true friends. The KMT army of Chiang Kai-shek was the enemy of the Chinese people and revolution. They were also the enemies of the Vietnamese people and revolution. Our people had a visceral dislike for them. The Chiang troops were more bandits than soldiers. It was certain that when they spilled over into our country they would commit many actions which would anger our people and clashes could easily occur. The Standing Committee had to send people to the provinces up North near the border to propagate the Party's policy, and in collaboration with the leading comrades prepare the people and cadres ideologically before Chiang Kai-shek's troops moved in.

After the Japanese surrendered, Ho Ying Chin--the Chief of the Joint General Staff of the Chinese Kuomintang Army, and a notorious anti-Communist--urged Lu Han to move his troops into North Vietnam as quickly as possible. The plan for the "Entry of Chinese Troops into Vietnam" (Hoa Quân Nhập Việt) had been prepared long before that. The KMT militarists were confident that the situation offered them an extremely favorable opportunity to take over North Vietnam. They figured that at the least they would be able to set up an obedient puppet government North of the 16th Parallel which would carry out all their directives.

The KMT militarists had prepared their trump "cards"--Vietnamese lackeys living in China, such as Nguyen Hai Than, Vu Hong Khanh, Nguyen Tuong Tam, etc. These men belonged to two organizations: the Dong Minh Hoi (DMH or Vietnam Revolutionary League) and the VNQDD (Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang or Vietnamese Kuomintang). They had lived so long overseas that they had lost all contacts with the movement in the country. They claimed to be Vietnamese patriots following the doctrine of nationalism, but in fact they were a group of reactionaries plotting to rely on Chiang Kai-shek's KMT and their rifle barrels to snatch a few crumbs. Chiang's troops entered Vietnam through two routes, and so these groups also split up into two sections and followed in the wake of the Chinese. They advanced very slowly because they were badly disorganized--they lacked means of transportation and had to go on foot; they did not have any logistic support, so wherever they went they had to scavenge for food; they did not have enough soldiers and had to scrounge for recruits along the way.

According to plans, in Yunnan the 93rd division belonging to the 1st Front Army of Lu Han advanced toward Hanoi by following the Red River, but did not arrive in Lao Cai until the end of August. In Kwangsi the 62nd division, part of the

Central KMT forces, accompanied by General Hsiao Wen advanced toward Hanoi through the Lang Son-Cao Bang route, but did not cross the border until the beginning of September.

Two other divisions, the 52nd from the Central (KMT) forces and the 60th from Yunnan would follow later, and would split up to advance toward Hai Phong, Vinh and Danang.

The total number of troops entering the North came to 180,000. The Yunnan divisions included a lot of sick, undisciplined and badly trained soldiers. The divisions from the Central Army were stronger and less disorganized. These four divisions were put under the general command of General Lu Han. Hsiao Wen, a deputy to Chang Fa-k'uei, who had been following Vietnamese affairs for a long time, was given the responsibility by the KMT militarists of setting up a political regime in North Vietnam.

By the time Nguyen Hai Than arrived in Lang Son in the wake of the 62nd division, he heard the news that the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam had been presented to 1 million people in the capital of Hanoi.

The commanders of the 62nd division wanted to disarm our armed forces in Lang Son and Cao Bang. When our troops refused to let them do it, they sent soldiers to occupy the barracks of the Liberation Army. The DMH (Vietnam Revolutionary League), hiding behind the bayonets of the Chiang troops, stormed the headquarters of the Province People's Committees. To avoid serious clashes, our government organs, popular associations and armed forces had to withdraw to the surrounding areas. The people immediately carried out the "empty gardens, empty houses" tactic, and the province towns became deserted.

The Vietnam Revolutionary League went searching everywhere without finding enough people to organize a small rally for Nguyen Hai Than to introduce himself. They had no choice but to print a number of leaflets protesting the Viet Minh's establishment of a Provisional Government and condemning the Ho Chi Minh government on 13 points. There was no one to hand the leaflets to, so they took them and spread them in every nook and cranny.

The VNQDD group headed by Vu Hong Khanh and Nguyen Tuong Tam followed behind the Yunnan 93rd division. Also relying on the Chiang troops' rifle barrels, wherever they went they tried to find ways to overthrow our people's government. They set up headquarters, assembled the local reactionaries, pestered the people, plundered, robbed and killed people. Servants taking after their masters, the rag tag troops of Lung Yun, the VNQDD behaved exactly like bandits.

In some areas where the Party's policy had not been carefully propagated, clashes between our people's army and the Chiang troops erupted. Our government organs and troops received orders to withdraw outside a number of towns and cities in a few provinces near the border and along the railway line coming in from Yunnan.

Within the first two weeks of September, close to 200,000 Chiang troops had spread to almost every province of the North like an epidemic. Close on their heels were their (Vietnamese) lackeys angered and frustrated because they found it difficult to make a "big killing." They were confronted by an extremely large and powerful revolutionary force, and a legitimate government with a stable and firm political base and enjoying the support of the population. They became even more brazen and in the process exposed themselves as uprooted exiles protected by the bayonets of a foreign reactionary army.

On September 11, General Lu Han flew into Hanoi. A few days later, endless notices were posted everywhere. The Chinese KMT militarists acted as though they had come to a place without a government. They assigned to themselves the power to

maintain law and order in the city. They fixed the value of Chinese currency which had become worthless scraps of paper long ago. They even set up regulations to control vehicular traffic in the city.

A few days after Lu Han's arrival, Alessandri³² also appeared in Hanoi. How did this commander of the French Legionnaires in Tonkin who had fled to Kunming with the remnants of his forces after the Japanese attack in the night of March 9th, manage to get here? What was the secret understanding between Chiang Kai-shek's gang and the French?--this was a problem on which we should focus our attention.

32. General Alessandri had obtained the assistance of General Gallagher, the official American advisor to Lu Han, for a flight into Hanoi on 19 September.
(Trans.)

CHAPTER VII

The morning of September 3rd. The day following the presentation ceremony, the Ministers in the Provisional Government came to attend the first Cabinet meeting. The secluded house behind the green iron railing, located in front of the park with a spurting fountain, was formerly the mansion of the French Résident Supérieur in Tonkin. Today, the arched gate was opened wide to welcome the representatives of the people. Exactly half a month ago the people of Hanoi rising up in insurrection had massed here. Defying the rifle barrels of the security guards, an old worker had climbed over the iron railing and onto the roof to remove the flag and replace it with the flag adorned with a star of the revolution. The conference room was on the second floor, and it was completely bare. Not one flower vase decorated the row of tables. The government representatives realized then that they were not plunging into an easy task. Lenin's teaching was never more appropriate than at this moment: "It is difficult to seize power, but it is even more difficult to keep it."

The economic system maintained by French colonialism for 80 long years of domination had sucked each laboring individual dry to the marrows. Then came the World War II years. Another savage imperialist--the Japanese--burst in. Both imperialists competed to squeeze the people as fast as possible. Over 1 million peasants exhausted by famine had collapsed on the lush seas of paddy. Almost another million died of starvation after the ripe paddy was harvested. Then flooding occurred. Another famine as critical as the first one was a looming danger. The population who had been raised to their feet by the miraculous strength of the freedom and independence beacon could not stand up firmly forever if their stomachs remained empty.

The "treasury" that the revolution had just wrested from foreign domination was really pathetic: a few empty buildings, no rice stocks, no money.

Along with this economic legacy, foreign domination also left behind a cultural legacy just as serious: ninety-five percent of the people were illiterate. This was the result of the policy of building more prisons than schools, the policy of keeping the population in darkness and ignorance.

But these were not the biggest difficulties. The biggest problem at this juncture was the foreign troops arriving from all four directions, wave after wave. Some were close by, others were still far away. They differed in skin color and language, but they were alike in their savage ambition: they wanted to seize our country, they wanted to push us back into a life of slavery.

At exactly the appointed hour, President Ho entered from an adjacent room.

- Greetings to you, old venerables, and to you, young brothers.

Uncle's greeting created an intimate atmosphere for the meeting.

That morning, Uncle wore a pair of blue cloth slippers which he had brought from the War Zone. The Nung people had sewn them and presented them to him as gifts, and he had worn them many times to receive foreign guests. He walked briskly toward the conference table. With an expansive and familiar gesture, he spread out his arms and invited the delegates to sit down.

There was no speech to open the meeting. Uncle took from his pocket a small piece of paper on which he had jotted down his ideas. Casting aside the usual formalities, he immediately dealt with the substance of the meeting.

- Old venerables and young brothers. After 80 years of oppression and exploitation, due to the French policy of keeping our country and people in ignorance, neither you nor I, nor anyone among us is familiar with administrative technique. But this does not worry us. We will just learn as we go along, and go along as we learn. We will most certainly commit mistakes, but we will correct them; we have the courage to correct our shortcomings. With our deep love for our country and people, I'm sure we'll succeed. At present, what are the most urgent problems? In my opinion, there are six.

Continuing in this simple style, he raised before the Cabinet the most urgent problems. He said:

"(1) It is necessary to launch a movement to increase production in order to cope with the famine. While we're waiting for the corn and yam harvest which is due in three or four months, we will start a collection of rice. Once every ten days, all the population would go without food for one meal, and the rice thus saved will be collected and distributed to the poor.

(2) We will start a campaign against illiteracy.

(3) We will organize, the sooner the better, a general election with universal suffrage to allow the people to exercise their democratic and free rights.

(4) We will begin a movement to teach hard work, economy, integrity and honesty in order to eliminate the bad habits left behind by colonialism.

(5) We will eliminate immediately the three kinds of taxes: head taxes, market taxes, and boat taxes. The smoking of opium must be strictly forbidden.

(6) we will declare freedom of religion and unity between all religions."

All the problems were dealt with by Uncle within thirty minutes. The staggering difficulties and complications which had been left behind by the colonialists after 80 years of domination, the life and death matters, and the urgent problems confronting the nation were raised by Uncle in a concise, precise and clear manner, along with the direction in which we should move and at times even the measures to solve them. The comrades who had spent time with Uncle saw that this was his usual working style.

The Ministers discussed the points Uncle had raised and happily approved them. Some of the points Uncle raised at that first Cabinet meeting continue to this day to be the great line and policy of our Party and State.

The meeting concluded the same morning. The relaxed, simple and intimate atmosphere of the meeting was a real change of pace and left a deep impression with a number of people who worked with Uncle for the first time that day.

A few days later, Uncle wrote a letter addressed to the people of the whole country: "From January to July of this year, two million people have died of starvation in the Northern portion of our country. Right after that came the flood, the famine became worse, and the people were even more miserable. Whenever we raise a bowl of rice to our lips to eat, we think of these miserable and hungry people, and we cannot help but feel moved in our hearts. Therefore I propose to the compatriots in the whole country, and I myself will do it first: let us abstain from one meal every ten days, three days a month, take this rice--one can of rice for each meal--and save the poor."

He wrote to the peasants: "When food supplies are ample, soldiers are strong; when we plant extensively, we avert famine. If we apply the policy of 'each inch of earth is an inch of gold' we will succeed in both areas. 'Increase production! Increase production immediately! Increase production further!' This is our slogan at present. This is a concrete and realistic way for us to preserve our freedom and independence."

At the beginning of September, the Government issued a decree ordering that within a year all Vietnamese should be able to read and write the romanized script. Uncle wrote the appeal to combat illiteracy: "Those who are illiterate must make the utmost effort to learn. If the wife is illiterate, the husband should teach her; if the younger brother is illiterate the older brother should teach him; if the parents are illiterate, the children should teach them. . . . Women need to learn even more."

September was also the month when schools reopened. Uncle wrote a letter reminding the children "to do your best to study hard, be good, listen to your teachers, and compete with your friends."

September was also the month when the Children's Mid-autumn Festival took place. The letter that Uncle Ho wrote his nieces and nephews on the occasion of the Mid-autumn Festival in the first year of our country's independence, was filled with joy: "The sight of the full moon, the cool breeze, the calm lake, the blue skies of autumn make you laugh and happy. When you are happy and smiling, Uncle Ho is also happy and smiles with you. Can you guess why? One, because I adore and love you; second, because at the time of last year's Mid-autumn Festival our country was still oppressed and you were still a band of small slaves. But at this year's Mid-autumn Festival our country is free, and you have become the small masters of an independent country. Next year, on the night of the Mid-autumn Festival we will together organize a celebration party for old as well as young. What do you think? I have nothing but loving kisses to send you for this Mid-autumn Festival."

The young nephews and nieces certainly were unaware that besides the happiness Uncle expressed in his letter that year he was besieged by thousands of problems and innumerable worries concerning the nation and the country.

CHAPTER VIII

Since his arrival in Hanoi, Uncle's illness had not recurred, but he remained very thin. The wrinkles on his forehead and at the corners of his eyes became more numerous and more pronounced every day.

At the Résidence Supérieure, Uncle got up every morning at 5 o'clock to do exercises. He had written a letter calling on all the citizens to make an effort to perform physical exercises. At the end of the letter he wrote: "As for me, I exercise every day." At the end of his working hours, he came downstairs to eat with us and the guards. We sat at the same table and ate whatever was available. One day, Uncle was busy and came back late. We each thought that the others had saved some food for him, and so forgot to set anything aside. We were all concerned, but Uncle was cheerful as always, sat down at the table and ate the usual amount of rice.

After lunch he sat in an armchair in the reception room, his head resting on the back of the chair, and dozed off for ten or fifteen minutes. When he awoke, he read the papers to check the news. When we were still in the War Zone, we had no oil or electric lamps, so Uncle used to retire to bed early. But here, he usually stayed up late to work. Many nights the fighters standing guard saw the lights in his room continue to burn far into the night. Uncle used the time at night to read books and documents.

His morning working session began with a consultation with the Standing Committee. Uncle attached great importance to the collective system of work. He had told the comrades in the Standing Committee to come to see him every morning at 6 o'clock to exchange ideas before they went wherever they had to go.

His two daily working sessions were always busy and urgent, filled with matters demanding immediate attention and crowded with Party and State affairs. He had to cope with the famine, illiteracy and foreign invasion. He had to take care of the situation in the North, deal with the resistance in the South and concern himself with domestic as well as foreign affairs.

The newly organized government offices were still skeletal in shape and not yet functioning smoothly. Uncle usually listened personally to the cadres in charge of each type of operation, or to the cadres coming from various areas to report on the situation in their localities and discuss ways to solve their problems. The cadres' ranks were still thin and besides they were inexperienced in administrative matters. In many instances, it was Uncle himself who thought of the problems or solutions, typed up the document, put it in an envelope and sent it off himself.

Uncle wrote numerous letters, appeals and newspaper articles to explain, exhort and encourage all strata of the population to implement the line and policy of the Provisional Government and to join the National Salvation Associations.

Every point he raised was realistic and was dealt with in a concrete and concise manner. He used simple and familiar words which the people had been using in their everyday life since ancient times. The only difference was that he was introducing a new content. However, no matter how new his concepts were, those who heard him found them easy to understand, reasonable and full of common sense.

The things he asked the people to practice he had been doing with great perseverance during his whole life. If it was something that was raised for the first

time, then he would set the example by being the first to put it into practice. Take for example his appeal to the people to forego one meal every ten days to relieve the famine. Three times a month, on the days of abstention, he would go to fetch his share of rice and pour it in the trunk intended for the famine victims. Once, Hsiao Wen invited him to a banquet exactly on the day the [presidential] office abstained from food to collect rice. When Uncle returned, the brothers reported they had already contributed his share of rice. However, he still insisted on going without one meal the next day.

To him, all matters big and small were important in their own ways. He frequently instructed the cadres to "set the example for the people," "practice whatever you preach," and "not to act like haughty revolutionary mandarins, otherwise the people would hate and despise you and refuse to support you."

He set a large amount of time aside to visit places far and near. Many times he did not announce his tours in advance. Sometimes he dropped in at a youths' conference, sometimes he went to visit the office of the Hanoi Administrative Committee, or the Vietnam Military Academy. Other times he went to Nam Dinh to visit the textile mill, or to Bac Ninh and Thai Binh provinces. Besides exhorting and educating the people, Uncle wanted to understand the life, thoughts and feelings of the people, and the working styles of the cadres.

Each day, he had to receive many guests. These visitors differed widely from each other. There were Chiang Kai-shek's generals coming to demand rice--huge amounts of it. But rice was not the only thing they demanded. They also demanded money and living quarters--their demands ranged from insignificant things such as light bulbs and a few kilos of sugar, up to and including opium. They demanded all the things they had not been able to rob from our people.

Sometimes it was just a *liên trưởng*³³ pleading to see President Ho about a private matter which he refused to tell anyone else. This private matter which he felt he could only discuss with Uncle was that he wanted to sell a few hundred rifles. Sometimes it was representatives from 'allied' delegations, American as well as British. These visits had different goals, but not all of them were made with good intentions in mind. Sometimes it was foreign correspondents requesting a meeting to find out more about the Viet Minh movement and the line and policy of our government. Sometimes it was people disguised as reporters using the pretext of an interview to gauge our attitude and investigate our situation.

The largest number of visitors came from within our country. They were representatives from National Salvation Associations, workers', peasants', youths', women's organizations, etc. They were representatives of religious groups, merchants or notables and scholars. A delegation of cadres and fighters recently arrived from the South were moved to tears when they met Uncle for the first time. They carried with them the warm feelings of millions of our compatriots who were fighting in the South. A delegation of mountain ethnic minorities who had shared with the revolutionaries their gruel of chopped banana trunk and their bamboo shoots came to visit the capital from the Liberated Zone. Sometimes it was an old man with a long flowing beard who "had come to contribute a few ideas for the construction of the country now that independence had been achieved." Sometimes it was just a few people who, on the pretext of soliciting an explanation about a point in the national policy, asked for a visit in order to meet Uncle.

Many times, Uncle was so absorbed in receiving guests that he came down past mealtime. Seeing how busy and tired he was, we suggested that he cut down on the number of visits which were not absolutely necessary. He said:

33. A position in Chiang Kai-shek's army, equivalent to the rank of company commander. (Footnote in text.)

- Our government has just been set up. Our cadres and people have many things they want to know and they have to ask questions. This is an opportunity to explain in detail the stand and policy of the government and of the popular associations so that everyone can understand them clearly. We should not make the people feel that it is just as difficult now to see the members of government as it was to see the mandarins in the old days.

The Liberation Army fighters responsible for guard duty at the Résidence Supérieure and the comrade drivers were the ones who received a great deal of attention and care from Uncle. To them, he was not just the President of the country, he was also a father. They all felt that what they did for him could not match all the care and attention he reserved for them. Though busy, he always set aside some time to chat with them and inquire after them--whether they had enough to eat, what happy or sad things had happened to their families. He paid frequent attention to the internal discipline and the hygiene of the fighters.

At night, all office work stopped. When he saw the fighters sleeping on the ground floor sweltering in the heat, he told them to go up to the second floor where it was cooler. One day, the brothers had a wrestling match and broke a marble table top. The comrade manager (đồng chí quản trị) was upset and ordered them all downstairs. When Uncle returned and saw the situation, he ordered that the brothers be called upstairs again. He said:

- You are fighters. You are young, and you must be active and stay healthy and to have fun. It is good to wrestle. But if you want to do it, you should go to a large grassy place. If anyone falls, he won't hurt himself, and nothing will be broken, and no public property will be damaged. You broke something this time, so let this be an experience for you to bear in mind next time. If you decide to wrestle in the garden one of these days, let me know and I'll come and watch.

The comrade driver rarely read newspapers. Whenever he was free, Uncle called him upstairs, told him to sit in an adjacent room and gave him newspapers and books to read. Once in a while Uncle went in to check. Once when he came in, he saw the comrade driver slouched in the chair, fast asleep, and the newspaper spread on the table in front of him. Uncle quietly left. A while later, he told the driver: "When you start reading for the first time, you usually find things difficult to understand and it's easy for you to fall asleep. If you keep on reading for a while, you'll understand and become interested. And once you're interested you won't feel sleepy."

Winter arrived. Women's associations in many areas thought of the warm clothes Uncle would need for the cold windy days. Young girls in Hanoi and members of the Quang Yen Province Women's Associations brought thick woolen sweaters to the Résidence Supérieure. Each time, Uncle thanked them and asked them to take the sweaters back to distribute to the oldest and poorest people in their localities.

One early morning, the weather was very cold. A comrade came to work with Uncle, wearing only a flimsy summer shirt. Uncle went to his room, took out his own sweater and gave it to the cadre. In Hanoi, living in the Résidence Supérieure in his capacity as President of the country, Uncle's life remained as simple and austere as in the days when he was operating clandestinely in the War Zone.

CHAPTER IX

In the South, the situation became tense, starting from the beginning of September. On September 2, over one million people in Saigon-Cholon paraded with flags and held aloft banners hailing Independence Day. French provocateurs opened fire on the marchers. Four days later, the British delegation began arriving in Saigon. They ordered the Japanese to patrol the city and demanded that our armed forces surrender their weapons. Right from the first day, the British troops showed their intention to intervene in our affairs.

The first British and Indian units belonging to the 20th Division under the command of the British general Gracey began to arrive by plane. On 20 September, Gracey issued Communique No. 1. He affirmed the right of British troops to maintain law and order. He banned the possession of weapons and announced that anyone violating his regulations would be severely punished and could even be shot. The British occupied the prisons and released all the Frenchmen who had been captured by us when they parachuted into the South after the Insurrection and whom we had kept in jail. One thousand five hundred French Legionnaires belonging to the 11th Colonial Infantry Regiment were released from the Japanese prisons and rearmed.

In the early morning of September 23rd, with the support of British and Japanese troops, French soldiers from the 11th Regiment along with a Legionnaire unit newly arrived from France, poured out into the streets. They attacked our police stations and shot and killed our people. The former colonial administrators and French residents were also equipped with arms.

The legionnaires of the colony and the French colonialists who had meekly surrendered to the Japanese troops a few months earlier were extremely savage in their slaughtering and rough handling the unarmed civilians.

Our nation's great resistance against the French aggressors erupted on the southern battlefield. Our southern compatriots who had seized power for less than a month heroically rose up to resist the enemy. They were the first citizens of our free country who shed their blood to carry out the oaths on Independence Day. Thus began the brilliant and resourceful struggle of the people of the South, a struggle which has been going on now for a quarter century.

In the afternoon of September 23rd, the people of Saigon carried out a general strike, and refused to cooperate with the French aggressors. All government offices, commercial enterprises and industrial plants shut down. Markets were empty. All traffic stopped. Obstacles and barriers were erected everywhere. In an atmosphere boiling with anger and hatred, self-defense fighters and the people of Saigon, using any weapons they could procure--sharpened sticks, muskets, air rifles--immediately took up positions, determined to fight back against the invaders.

In Hanoi, during the entire day of September 23rd and far into the night, Uncle Ho and the Standing Committee followed hour by hour the situation in the South. They received the first reports and issued the first resistance directives to the Party Headquarters and the people in the South.

From the 24th on, a series of factories and warehouses belonging to the enemy in Saigon were attacked and destroyed. Electricity and water were cut. The self-defense units and workers' assault groups penetrated Tan Son Nhat airport, burned a French ship which had just docked at the wharf, destroyed the main prison and liberated our compatriots who had been arrested and jailed there by the aggressors.

On September 26th, while manning their combat positions in the city, the fighters and people of Saigon heard the moving appeals of President Ho broadcast by the Voice of Vietnam in Hanoi:

"I believe and the people of the whole country believe in the determination and patriotism of our compatriots in the South.

". . . We would rather die as free men than live as slaves!

"I am convinced and the compatriots of the South are also convinced that the Government and the people of the whole country will do their utmost to support the fighters and people who are sacrificing themselves to struggle and preserve the independence of our fatherland.

". . . We will certainly win because we have the united strength of the whole population. We will certainly win because our struggle is just."

The struggle to defend the city of Saigon took on a new significance. Not long afterward, a slogan appeared: "Let us fight to defend the City of Ho Chi Minh," and very rapidly this became the determination and the action of everyone. It was through the dedication and the action of the fighters and people on the Saigon-Cholon front that this city began to bear a new and glorious name: the City of Ho Chi Minh.

At the beginning of October, units from the 9th Colonial Regiment began arriving by sea. On October 5th, General Leclerc arrived in Saigon during a lull in the fighting. The French and British colonialists were stalling in order to wait for reinforcements. They requested to see our representatives to negotiate. After Leclerc's arrival, an armoured column from the French 2nd Armoured Division landed in Saigon. The colonialists resumed hostilities. They tried to fight their way into areas on the edge of Saigon.

The Central Committee decided to send reinforcements to fight alongside the people and troops of the South, and win the first victories for the resistance against foreign invasion. Southward March units were organized quickly. Many Liberation Army units along with the most outstanding commanders received orders to depart. Many groups of cadres were also sent to the South to reinforce it. The Party's policy was to systematically apply guerrilla warfare and to defeat from the start the enemy's scheme of "swift attack, swift victory."

Parallel with the sending of reinforcements to the South, an ardent movement to support the resistance in the South was launched all over the country, and intensive preparations were made in case the enemy expanded the war. The whole country turned toward Saigon seething with determination to resist foreign invasion and to defend the Fatherland. During the last days of September, in Hanoi, people crowded at all hours in front of loudspeakers to wait for each news item from the South. Youths enthusiastically enlisted in order to go South to fight and destroy the enemy. In many families, fathers and sons applied simultaneously to join the army. Some Buddhist monks even removed their monks' robes and demanded to be allowed to go off and kill the enemy. The Liberation Army expanded very rapidly.

From the coastal provinces in the North to the mountain provinces in the Viet Bac base; from Hanoi, the capital of the newly established DRV, to Hue, the old imperial capital of the Nguyen dynasty, fighters enthusiastically departed for the South. In the North, many Liberation Army detachments left at the same time.

The newly won victory of the revolution made this Southward March different from the previous one. These were not units of soldiers wearing cotton shirts and going barefoot who had been ordered to go South during the days of the General Insurrection. The new government and the people had taken thorough care of the sons who left today for the front. They had the best weapons available to us then. They

wore new uniforms. Their caps were brightly adorned with yellow stars. They wore warm woolen vests and leather shoes. The sea of people seeing them off filled the train stations. The people of the North and Center were contributing their own offspring, their own blood and flesh to the South, and through them conveyed their love for their countrymen.

The Southward March carried out by the whole nation for the sake of the South began. Express trains ran day and night without stopping. The first Southward March Liberation Army units arrived in the nick of time. They were assigned the task of manning the frontline northeast of Saigon. The entire country closed ranks with the people of Saigon and the people of the South in the first days of the nation's resistance.

With the support of the British, Indian and Japanese troops, the French colonialists planned to pacify the South within three weeks. Although they had not had time to make advance preparations, with the support of the people in all the southern provinces and with the reinforcements coming from the whole country, the troops and people of Saigon fought heroically, pinned down the enemy in the city for one whole month and inflicted heavy casualties.

On October 25th, the South Vietnam Party Plenum was held at a site in My Tho province. Uncle Ton,³⁴ brother Ba,³⁵ and a number of comrades recently escaped from Poulo Condore were present. This was a big conference of our Party in the South. Hoang Quoc Viet,³⁶ who had been sent to the South by the Central Committee and the Viet Minh General Headquarters (T^ong B^o) since the middle of August, also attended the meeting. The conference decided many vital questions in order to lead the people of the South, propel forward the resistance against foreign invasion, and strengthen the Party's leadership of the armed forces.

34. Ton Duc Thang, now President of the DRV. (Trans.)

35. Comrade Le Duan. (Footnote in text.) Le Duan is now First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party. (Trans.)

36. Hoang Quoc Viet is now President of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor. (Trans.)

CHAPTER X

When the first "blue uniformed" members of Chiang Kai-shek's army arrived in Hanoi, they went to our government offices and asked to be issued permits to carry weapons. The strict discipline and order of the city impressed them and made them defer to us. We asked Uncle whether we should issue them such permits. He said, "Make a seal and issue them these papers. Soon, they won't need our papers any more.!"

A few days after Lu Han arrived, he immediately demanded that we report to him the strength and organization of our army. To hide our strength, Uncle ordered that the name of the Liberation Army be changed to *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* (National Guards). The term "đoàn" (unit) would make the Chinese think that these were small local armed units, and thus it would attract less attention.

A number of *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* detachments were ordered to withdraw to areas surrounding Hanoi to avoid clashes with Chiang Kai-shek's troops. Once in a while Chinese soldiers came to provoke the fighters responsible for guard duty in front of government offices and organs. Sometimes they came to try to disarm our fighters. The brothers were very angry and resisted. In the end, we had to solve the problem by letting the brothers stand guard behind the iron railing.

At the end of September, Lu Han announced that there would be no time limit to his army's mission in Vietnam. It was clear that Chiang Kai-shek's gang did not enter our country simply to disarm the Japanese army. At the beginning of October, Ho Ying Chin and McClure, the American Army Commander in China, flew into Hanoi from Chungking.

We had only a few hours' notice to announce to the people a rally to welcome the Allied delegation and to give a show of force. In spite of this short notice, three hundred thousand people, their ranks in order and carrying banners, flags and signs, surged past the old *Gouvernement Général* Palace, shouting the slogans: "Vietnam belongs to the Vietnamese," "We support the Provisional Government of the DRV," "We support the Viet Minh," "We support President Ho Chi Minh.!" This welcome was unexpected. Standing on the steps of the palace to return the greetings of our people, the head of the Chinese General Staff broke out in a sweat.

Later, the Vietnamese lackeys [of the Chinese KMT] disclosed that Ho Ying Chin had come to Hanoi to implement the policy of "destroy Communism and block Ho Chi Minh" (*diệt cộng cầm Hồ*) put forward by Chungking. But when he got here, the Chief of Staff knew that he could not rely on the strength of his 200,000 troops to fulfill this intention in a short time. Ho Ying Chin left Hanoi a few days later, after having given instructions to the Chiang generals on what had to be done.

Hsiao Wen began to carry out his assignment. He maintained that the government should be reshuffled and demanded that we reserve several key ministries and positions to the VNQDD and to the DMH.

The lackeys of the Chinese realized that they could not repeat in Hanoi all that they had done in a few province towns in the border region. The first thing they did was to set up their headquarters, hang out flags, and try to draw the reactionary elements among the landlord class and former mandarins, and the thugs and

criminals to their side. They imposed their control on the people of Ngu Xa³⁷ and proclaimed it an "autonomous zone." Nguyen Hai Than sent people out to disseminate leaflets and broadcast with bullhorns that the Viet Minh were dictatorial and had violated the agreements of all (resistance) groups in Liuchou.³⁸

Three years earlier, during a trip abroad to meet the comrade leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, Uncle Ho was arrested by the Chinese KMT. They transferred him through over thirty prisons. The political groups in our country protested and demanded that the Chinese KMT release this Vietnamese revolutionary. However, the Chinese continued to keep him in Liuchou. Uncle finally found out why the Chiang clique refused to release him. In Liuchou the Chinese had organized a puppet political organization called the Revolutionary League for the Independence of Vietnam, led by Truong Boi Cong and Nguyen Hai Than. This gang had accused Uncle of having come to Liuchou to sabotage their organization. After a relatively long period of time, Uncle was released. He asked to return to Vietnam and to take along a few members of the Revolutionary League whom he would personally select. Chang Fa-k'uei agreed. But the Truong Boi Cong and Nguyen Hai Than group protested. And so Uncle returned to Vietnam by himself.

Nguyen Hai Than announced that he had the support of Chiang Kai-shek's troops and that if we refused to reorganize the existing Cabinet, he would use force to overthrow us. To show off his strength, this fortune teller³⁹ appeared in the streets of Hanoi in a small car. On the roof of the car two cronies armed with a light machine gun lay flat on their bellies. In front, two others sat on the mud guards, each clamping a sub-machine gun to his side.

The activities of the VNQDD were more dangerous. Relying on the power of Chiang Kai-shek's generals and field-grade officers in Hanoi, they procured a printing shop. They gathered a group of *bôi bút* (paid hack writers) and published a newspaper called "Viet-Nam." After that, they published a series of other papers; "Lien Hiep (Coalition), "Thiet Thuc" (Realism), etc. With brazen and insolent arguments, they incited the population and sowed division between the people and our leadership organization. They concentrated their attacks on our government and criticized all the lines and policies of the Viet Minh and of the government. They installed a large loudspeaker in front of the "Viet-Nam" newspaper office in Quan Thanh street, and though no one bothered to listen, they talked incessantly all day. Along with these activities of propaganda and slander, they carried out criminal operations such as assassination, kidnapping and blackmail.

Gradually the Americans realized that we were not the pro-Western "nationalists" that they had expected. McClure ordered the American military officers not to participate in large rallies organized by the Viet Minh. Several other American groups began to arrive. They used the pretext that they were coming to interrogate Japanese POWs and to locate the remains of Americans killed in the war. But in

37. An area on the outskirts of Hanoi. (Trans.)

38. Ho Chi Minh, while detailed in China by General Chang Fa-k'uei, agreed to cooperate with other exiled Vietnamese political groups and to join the Vietnam Revolutionary League which the Chinese had set up to unite all these groups and bring them under their control. In order to obtain continued Chinese aid, these groups had to put aside their quarrels and cooperate with each other. At a conference held in Liuchou under Chinese sponsorship, the League decided to form a provisional government for the liberation of Vietnam, headed by Truong Boi Cong, and including Ho Chi Minh, Nguyen Hai Than, Vu Hong Khanh, Le Tung Son, Bo Xuan Luat and Nghiem Ke To. (Trans.)

39. There were reports that Nguyen Hai Than earned his living as a fortune teller when he was in exile in China. (Trans.)

actuality they were trying to gauge the political situation, to assess our material resources, to study strategic communication routes, airports and harbours.

With the agreement of the Americans and Chiang, the French delegation opened an informal headquarters in Hanoi. During this period the French met with Nguyen Hai Than several times and tried to establish contact with the VNQDD. They also tried to see Vinh Thuy⁴⁰ on several occasions, but out of respect for us and fear of offending us, Vinh Thuy avoided them.

Chiang Kai-shek's troops were stationed all over the capital. They set up guard and watch stations, and control booths on every street and entrance to the suburbs. All vehicles circulating in the city had to carry their permits. They brazenly acted as though they had come to occupy the city.

One day, I had to go toward Ha Dong on a mission. Although we had pasted on the windshield a permit stamped with a huge red seal which the Chinese had issued us, when we got to the Nga Tu So intersection a Chiang soldier stepped out onto the middle of the road and raised his rifle to stop us. The soldiers turned the car seats over to search. They found a pistol on the bodyguard. They immediately detained the car and took both of us to a civilian's house which they had seized and made into a guard station. They asked me where I worked. Not wanting to disclose the nature of my mission, I replied:

- In the China-Vietnam Liaison Office.

At that moment, an acquaintance passed by. This comrade immediately went looking for a man working in the China-Vietnam Liaison Office and brought him over. The Chiang soldiers only let us go two hours later.

Practically every night we received letters from Chiang's generals and officers addressed to our government--either making demands or threatening. The Résidence Supérieure was no longer a completely secure place. Uncle had to change his sleeping quarters and his pattern of movement. On some days he stayed in a house at No. 8 Bo Ho;⁴¹ other days he stayed in Buoi village, or in a house near the Nga Tu So intersection. All three houses were later destroyed during the war.

One evening, Uncle's car had just left the Résidence Supérieure and gone a short distance when the bodyguard reported that a strange car was following. Uncle told the comrade driver:

- Let's not go out of the city yet. Drive around the lake.

The car circled the lake once. Looking back, Uncle saw that the strange car was following close behind. He told the driver to turn abruptly into a side street and return to the Résidence Supérieure. The guards opened the gate to welcome him, and wondered why he had turned around and come back so quickly. That night Uncle stayed at the Résidence Supérieure. Internal enemies and foreign aggressors--the situation was very complicated.

Uncle and the Standing Committee had seen through the outward appearance of strength of Chiang Kai-shek's army--their large numbers and aggressiveness--and perceived their internal weaknesses. The most formidable difficulty confronting them was that the strength and unity of our people made it impossible for them to create

40. After his abdication, Emperor Bao Dai became simply "citizen Vinh Thuy" (Vinh Thuy is his personal name) and agreed to serve as a Supreme Counsellor to the Provisional Government headed by Ho Chi Minh. (Trans.)

41. Near the Hoan Kiem (Restoration of the Sword) Lake. (Trans.)

a political base of support overnight. They still wanted to overthrow us, but they realized that without the assistance of the Viet Minh government they could not solve the enormous demand for material supplies of their large army which was shunned and hated by the population. They also had to take into consideration other serious dangers which might befall them.

One day, Chiang's Army Command proposed that Uncle come to see them. Uncle came back late and silently sat down at the dining table. He ate very little. We rarely saw this kind of [dejected] attitude in him. He said:

- I came back so late past mealtime that I lost my appetite.

He said that morning the Chiang Kai-shek group demanded that he sign a paper agreeing to supply them with a huge quantity of rice. He refused. He was certain that they would continue to pester him about the rice problem. He said:

- Where can we find so much rice to give them? Our people don't even have enough rice to eat.

Seeing our anger, once more he reminded us to be patient and forbearing, to remain cordial with Chiang's army in order to focus our strength on the main enemy.

Uncle always adhered firmly to his principles, but he was flexible in his strategy. And once he had decided on a strategy, he pursued it with great determination.

CHAPTER XI

Once an event has taken place it is easy in retrospect to see its inevitable evolution--from its inception as a possibility to its actual occurrence. We can also say very simply: it had to happen that way, it could not have been otherwise.

In fact, in the social field, in the struggle between conscious people, each change goes through extremely complicated stages of evolution. The leader of the revolution must uncover the universal and particular law of things while immersed in a jumble of false phenomena which are difficult to discern, and while surrounded by innumerable intertwined relationships all moving and evolving continuously. Predicting accurately and scientifically the direction of the evolution of things and the broad outline of future events (tình huống lớn) is extremely important for revolutionary operations. Reality and time will be the severe tests. Such [accurate] predictions are the works of geniuses.

World War II began at the end of 1939. The German Fascist Army invaded many European countries. They swallowed France within the space of a few weeks. England was pounded to a pulp by bombs raining down from airplanes bearing the swastika sign. In Asia, the Japanese Fascist army occupied a large area of the vast Chinese mainland. It was exactly at this height of Fascist power that Uncle Ho and our Party predicted their defeat and saw that the opportunity for Vietnam to achieve independence was approaching. Uncle decided to return to the country.

In the spring of 1941, in a cold and humid cave in the forest of Pac Bo, the 8th Central Committee Plenum met, presided over by Uncle. The conference affirmed that, "If the previous imperialist war gave birth to the Soviet Union, a Socialist country, this imperialist war will give birth to many Socialist countries, and revolution will succeed in many countries."

The Party Central Committee and Uncle set forth national liberation as the urgent revolutionary task. The Central Committee pointed out objective factors which would be favorable to the success of the insurrection--among such factors was the entry of Allied troops into Indochina--and said, "Preparing for the insurrection was the central task of our Party and people in the present phase."

That summer, the German Fascists suddenly attacked the Soviet Union. Their force was similar to the power of a cyclone. Within a few weeks they had advanced hundreds of kilometers into the heartland of the cradle of the October Revolution.

In the winter, the Japanese Fascists threw their forces into powerful attacks in the Pacific. In China, the Red Army had to simultaneously fight the Japanese aggressors and cope with Chiang Kai-shek's treacherous KMT army. The Rising Sun flag was raised in French Indochina, in Hongkong, in Burma, British Malaya, and in the Philippines, "the protectorate of the United States." During cold winter nights, while eluding the militiamen sweeping and searching in the Pac Bo area, Uncle Ho predicted the date when the revolution would succeed:

"In 1945 our task will be fulfilled."
(45, sự nghiệp hoàn thành)

This was the concluding line of the poem, "History of Vietnam in Verses," which Uncle wrote and which was printed by lithograph at the time. Recently, researchers from the Museum of the Revolution uncovered a copy of this poem kept in a

bamboo container in a house on stilts in Pac Bo. The owner of the house had been a member of the National Salvation Association in the old days.

Uncle never mentioned this verse again. Since then, carried away by our work, we have never had the chance to ask Uncle how he could have made such a prediction. This has become one of the aspects we have never completely understood about Uncle's personality and his great revolutionary life which spanned close to sixty years.

Today, looking at Party documents dating from this historic period, we again find these predictions. From the end of 1941 to the beginning of 1942, many Party communiques and directives began to mention tactics for dealing with the "British, Americans and Chinese" and the favorable and unfavorable things we would run into when Allied troops entered our country in force. In February 1943, the Standing Committee of the Central Committee ordered that "urgent preparations be made to launch an insurrection" so that "when the opportunity arose we could send the masses out to fight in time."

One night in the spring of 1945, the Japanese coup d'etat against the French broke out. The eighty-year-old empire of the French colonialists in Indochina collapsed in a few seconds. It happened so suddenly that the French could not react in time. Our Party had predicted this event a year earlier. The newspaper *Liberation Banner* (Co Giai Phong), in its issue of 15 February 1944, had written: "The Japanese will act to overthrow the French bandits," and "will carry out a coup d'etat to arrest and jail the French colonialists and the pro-French Vietnamese traitors."

Three days after the coup d'etat, the Standing Committee, in its directive called, "While the French and Japanese Shoot Each Other, the Action Is Ours to Take," clearly pointed out that the opportunity for a general insurrection would arise when Allied troops entered Indochina, and that "even before Allied troops land, our general insurrection can break out and achieve success."

The Resolution of the North Vietnam Region Revolutionary Military Congress held in the middle of April, while setting forth the military task as the first priority and laying down concrete policies to prepare for the general insurrection, pointed out that the entry of Allied troops into Indochina was inevitable.

Our Party affirmed that our diplomatic policy should be: "To take advantage of the contradictions between China, America, England and De Gaulle's France." At the same time, with regard to internal policy, "We should make a resolute effort to prepare our true strength and we should not rely on others."

The Resolution of the ICP National Congress meeting in Tan Trao on 14-15 August 1945 affirmed: "A very favorable opportunity for us to regain our independence has arrived."

Concerning the "imminent entry of Allied troops into our country," the Central Committee proposed to "resist French schemes to restore their former position in Indochina and the Chinese militarists' plot to seize our country."

Our Party again stressed that we should exploit the conflicts between the two Allied factions--France-England, and America-Chiang Kai-shek--concerning Indochina, but at the same time it pointed out:

"The conflict between the English, Americans and French, and the Soviet Union could push the English and Americans to make concessions to the French and allow them to return to Indochina."

The Party's line was to avoid a situation in which we had to cope singlehandedly with several Allied forces all entering Indochina at once, and reiterated: "No matter

what happens, only our true strength will determine a successful outcome from the [confrontation] between ourselves and the Allies."

As Lenin said: "History in general and revolutionary history in particular always unfolds in a richer, more diverse, more complicated, more dynamic and more ingenious manner than the most gifted politicians could fathom." The revolution in our country later unfolded exactly in this fashion. The thing which we are deservedly proud of today is the fact that our Party foresaw the basic direction in which the situation was evolving. The Party's timely forecasts and appropriate measures brought the August Revolution to a successful conclusion and led the fragile newly born Democratic Republic of Vietnam to overcome the enormous difficulties confronting it right at its inception. In the South, the scheme of "quick attack, quick victory" of the French colonialists and British meddlers failed from the start. In the North and in the Center, the Chiang Kai-shek militarists and their lackeys--with an army many times larger than our own armed forces, and equipped with American weapons--failed to overthrow the young revolutionary government as they had planned.

Nonetheless, difficulties and dangers abounded. Before our seizure of power, there was only one foreign army on our soil--the 60,000 Japanese troops. Immediately after we seized power, close to 200,000 Chiang soldiers poured in; 5,000 British and Indian troops moved in; while some tens of thousands of French Expeditionary Forces were being continuously funnelled to Vietnam. Thousands of defeated French colonialist soldiers in Indochina were being rearmed; those who had fled to China were also coming back. Tens of thousands of Japanese troops were still in the country and they too constituted a worry for us. Japan had surrendered, but her forces in Indochina had not suffered heavy losses. As for the Chiang Kai-shek, French and British troops, in spite of everything, they were newly victorious armies.

In the second half of November, the Party Central Committee assessed the situation and adopted a policy to deal with the new situation. The Central Committee issued a directive called, "Resist and Rebuild the Fatherland" (Kháng chiến kiến quốc), dated November 25th, 1945: ". . . It is as difficult to maintain power as it is easy to seize it. The newly formed Democratic Republic Government has had to cope with an extremely complicated situation." The Central Committee said that the tasks for the country at this juncture were to "consolidate the government, oppose the French, eliminate internal betrayal, and improve the life of the people."

In this extremely confusing situation, with internal enemies and external foes swarming everywhere like worms, the task of defining who was the main enemy became critical. The Party analyzed the enemies' situation. Though the Americans had declared they would remain neutral on the Indochina question, they had secretly helped the French by lending them ships to transport troops to Vietnam. There was a contradiction in the relations between the French, British and Americans; on the one hand, they competed with each other for influence in Indochina and Southeast Asia, but on the other hand, they wanted to compromise with each other in order to form a common front to encircle the Soviet Union. At first, the Chiang Kai-shek clique poured their troops into our country with the scheme of overthrowing the government organized by our Party, and replacing it with a puppet government. But seeing how the people were united and supported our government, they had no choice but to establish relations with us. They still feared that we were Communists and were afraid that "the Indochinese Communists would ally themselves with the Chinese Communists to communize Southern China," so they plotted to reform the Cabinet and bring in their own men.

The Central Committee brought up a new assessment: ". . . In the end, Chungking will agree to let Indochina revert to the French as long as the French concede to them many important rights and interests." From this analysis and assessment, the task of the proletariat and of the nation was defined, and the principal opponent of the revolution was clearly pointed out: "The slogan will remain, 'The nation above all else,' and 'The Fatherland above all.' Our principal enemy at the moment

is the *French invaders*. We must focus the flames of our struggle on them.' The task of the Party was set forth: "To mobilize the whole population to resist with perseverance, organize and lead the protracted resistance, coordinate guerrilla warfare with the method of absolute non-cooperation.' The situation continued to evolve in a complicated and critical manner.

CHAPTER XII

I am writing these lines in the days of May 1970.

A long time has elapsed since the day when foreigners could not find Vietnam on maps. Our Fatherland with a 4,000 year-old history, along with the two neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos, was then only a stretch of land on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, lying between China and India, and bearing a vague name invented by the colonialists: French Indochina.

It is long gone and past the day when the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was only an island of freedom emerging amidst surging waves in the vast sea of capitalism in Southeast Asia. Few among friendly and brotherly countries⁴² recognized us for what we were then. And few realized the significance of this historic fact.

The time when imperialism could wreak havoc at will is long gone and past. Today, each of their acts of banditry on this Indochinese peninsula becomes an adventurous step and will inevitably be punished. Each crime they commit here arouses the conscience and emotion of hundreds of millions of people in different regions of the globe. All the expensive cosmetics applied by the colonialists on their puppets and lackeys are useless and wasted. The Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, born amidst the savage flames of war and gunfire, was immediately hailed with joy by all progressive humanity who had long awaited this day. The moment the formation of the Cambodian Government of national unity was announced, it was immediately recognized by dozens of countries far and near.

Today, the hundreds of thousands of Chinese KMT troops are only ghostly shadows from the past, and Chiang Kai-shek is spending his last, waning days on Taiwan, it is difficult for us to picture the perilous moments when close to 200,000 Chiang soldiers poured into North Vietnam from several directions.

The newly born DRV, surrounded by wolves and tigers, had to summon all of its strength to struggle alone with heroism and resourcefulness and to find every means possible for survival. In the face of this urgent and tense situation--as Uncle put it later, in his particular way of speaking--"the Party had to employ all means, even painful means, to save the situation." Every problem that affected the Party, the country and the nation always touched him to the core of his being.

The Party of the workers seized power when it was only 15 years old. On this land bequeathed by our ancestors, that day marked a new beginning for our nation. This great happy news could not be conveyed in its full dimension to our friends far and near.

In August of that year, Uncle wrote a letter under the name of the patriot Nguyen Ai Quoc calling for a General Insurrection. At the beginning of September, Uncle appeared to the population under the title of President Ho Chi Minh. This was a pseudonym Uncle had used a few years before to hide his true identity from the

42. The Viet Minh had hoped that the USSR would recognize the DRV, but Russia remained indifferent. The People's Republic of China was not established until 1949, and recognized the DRV in February 1950. The Chinese recognition was followed by the recognition of the Soviet Union and other Communist bloc countries in the same year. (Trans.)

Chinese KMT. Revolutionaries who had been hiding and eluding the enemy returned to live among the people. However, all Party activities continued to be carried out in secrecy. Party cadres had not come out into the open to operate. Practically all Party members operated in the capacity of Viet Minh cadres. Our Party's line was to avoid at all costs provoking the enemies of the nation and of the proletariat, but in spite of this they still recognized us.

Days after it was formed, the revolutionary government still had not been recognized by any country. Chiang Kai-shek's commanders were forced to deal with us in order to obtain food supplies and lodgings. When they came to see Uncle and when they addressed him, they had to use his title and position as President Ho. However, in all the documents they forwarded to him, they only addressed him as "Mr. Ho Chi Minh." They considered our government a *de facto* government, not one with any legal basis.

The economic situation was extremely difficult. Most of the ricefields in the North were left uncultivated. After the flood came a prolonged drought. The few factories handed over to us by the Japanese could not run. Foreign trade came to a standstill. Shortages of goods became critical.

In the financial field, we had not been able to issue Vietnamese currency. The treasury which we wrested from the hands of the old government had less than 1 million in worthless currency. One million in paper money which was quickly falling in value to consolidate the government and build a new life! Not to mention the French Bank of Indochina which was constantly creating monetary chaos. In addition, the Chiang troops were throwing a large amount of Chinese currency into the market, further endangering our finances and trade.

The people's standard of living was very low. Unemployment accelerated. In many areas people had to eat rice gruel, and there were isolated cases of starvation. A cholera epidemic broke out. Added to this, a typhus epidemic began to spread with the influx of Chiang Kai-shek's army.

In these conditions, what had to be done to build a new society? This was a task even more difficult to accomplish than the task of destroying the foundations of the old society. Furthermore, this was a task which the proletariat was only tackling for the first time.

In spite of everything, the situation had changed. The revolution had seized power. The government had furnished the revolution with new means and resources to retain power. The urgent problem at this point was to consolidate and firmly maintain the revolutionary government. Starting from the first half of September, many decrees and resolutions were issued by the Provisional Government.

The old mandarin hierarchy was disbanded. The government apparatus of the colonialists and feudalists was smashed. The government decided to carry out a general election nationwide to elect a National Congress. After that, a decree was issued organizing People's Councils and Administrative Committees by the method of elections through universal suffrage. The People's Councils would be chosen and directly elected by the people. They were the organs representing the people. The Administrative Committees, elected by the People's Councils, would be administrative organs representing both the people and the government. Through these elections, the people's government was consolidated at the base, the unity of the whole population was broadened, and the realization of a worker-peasant dictatorship was guaranteed. The draft Constitution was announced, so that every citizen could contribute his ideas to the first Constitution of the DRV.

The government decided that landlords had to reduce rents by 25%. All old debts in the countryside were abolished. A labor regimen of 8 working hours per day was promulgated. Owners of factories and commercial enterprises had to inform [the

government] in advance of any discharge of workers. Allowances for discharged workers were fixed. Workers had the right to attend military training classes and continued to receive wages during their training period. Study of the *quốc ngữ* (romanized script) became compulsory and free of charge. A decree was issued setting up Adult Education services all over Vietnam, organizing night classes for workers and peasants, and eliminating all classroom and examination fees. Starting right from the beginning of September, head taxes--taxes levied annually by the French colonialists on all adults, 18 years of age and above--and other absurd taxes were abolished.

In this difficult economic and financial situation, where could the government find the money to meet necessary expenditures; especially the enormous national defense expenditures? The immediate solution was to depend on voluntary contributions from the people. On September 4, the government set up the Independence Fund (Quỹ Độc Lập). A week later, Uncle appealed to the people of the whole country to respond enthusiastically to the Week of Gold (Tuần Lễ Vàng). Many people earnestly contributed even their most cherished souvenirs--a pair of earrings bought by an old lady when she was a young girl, two wedding bands belonging to a married couple. An 80-year old lady brought a package wrapped in red silk containing her family's heirloom, a gold ingot weighing 17 taels. Some families even collected and contributed all the jewelries belonging to each member of their households. Within a short period of time, all strata of the population had contributed to the Independence Fund and the Week of Gold 20 million piastres and 370 kilos of gold.

President Ho was especially concerned about the definition of the relationship between those working within the new government apparatus and the people. In October, in his letter to the People's Councils in the provinces, districts and villages, he wrote, "All government organs from the national level to the village level are servants of the people.!"

In ancient times, Tran Hung Dao⁴³ counselled the king that the best way to preserve the country was, "in time of peace, lighten the burdens for the people [in order to strengthen the nation, like allowing a tree] to sink deep roots and develop a resilient base.!" Nguyen Trai⁴⁴ criticized Ho Quy Ly⁴⁵ for losing the country because he only knew how to plant stakes in the river bed to stop the enemy's advance⁴⁶ but failed to realize that the people's strength was of paramount importance. All our nation's heroes with great achievements to their credit considered the people's strength crucial to the defense of the country and to the resistance against foreign invasion.

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43. A general who defeated the Mongol invasions of Vietnam in 1283 and 1287 A.D. (Trans.)
 44. A famous statesman and strategist who helped Emperor Le Loi expel the Ming from Vietnam after a protracted 10-year struggle in the 15th century. (Trans.)
 45. An usurper who overthrew the Tran Dynasty in 1400 and proclaimed himself emperor. Under the pretext of "Hưng Trần Diệt Hồ" (Restore the Tran and Destroy the Ho), the Ming invaded Vietnam, captured Ho Quy Ly and his son, and brought them back to China in 1407. The Ming occupation of Vietnam ended with their defeat by Emperor Le Loi. (Trans.)
 46. A strategy first employed by Ngo Quyen in the 10th century to defeat the Chinese fleet. The stakes which were planted in the river bed were submerged by the high tide. Unaware, the Chinese fleet--which had been lured into pursuit by the fleeing Vietnamese boats--sailed into the river only to be trapped by the stakes which became exposed at low tide. The Vietnamese then turned around and destroyed the Chinese fleet. (Trans.)

Today, President Ho made the appeal: "Eliminate famine, eliminate illiteracy, eliminate foreign invasion." He said, "We must rely on the people's forces and spirits." In contrast with men of ancient times, he pointed out clearly that the purpose of all these activities was to "bring happiness to the people." In his letter to the People's Councils, he wrote: "If the people do not enjoy happiness when our country becomes independent, then independence is meaningless."

"Happiness for the people"--this is what he had raised in the Declaration of Independence: "Each nation has the right to life, happiness and freedom." The happiness which he wanted to create for the people was a complete one. It did not reside only in the benefits recently brought to the people by the revolution. This happiness continued to accrue to the laboring masses in the struggle to eliminate all human sufferings and to build a society in which man's exploitation of man was completely abolished. In this great struggle, the Party and President Ho had chosen for our people the shortest route.

"Happiness for the people"--this is the aim of the seizure of power and the preservation and protection of this power. This was Uncle's ideal. This was his sentiment.

In his letter to the People's Councils, President Ho pointed out a number of shortcomings committed by those working in government agencies, such as violation of regulations, abuse of authority, arrogance, and condoning of infractions. He concluded the letter, "For the sake of the people's happiness, for the sake of the nation's interests, I feel compelled to say that we must engrave the words justice and integrity in our hearts."

In December, he wrote an article entitled "self-criticism" and had it printed in the newspapers:

Because you, the citizens, love and trust me, you have entrusted the fate of the country to my care. My duty is like that of a man at the helm--to navigate the boat which is our Fatherland past the storm and surging waves to safely reach the harbor which is the happiness of the people. Though five months have past since we regained our independence, no foreign countries have recognized us. Though our soldiers have fought gloriously, the resistance has not achieved victory. Though those working in administrative committees are efficient, honest, and have integrity, corruption has not been eliminated. Though the government has done its best to carry out reforms, in many areas political activities have not fallen into an orderly pattern. It is possible to ascribe these shortcomings to the short time that has elapsed, to the fact that our country is new or to other factors. But no, I must say frankly that the successes are due to the citizens' efforts. And the shortcomings are our own fault.

The ordinary workers saw clearly then that the new State was truly theirs. This was something novel. In the history of our country, under feudal dynasties, the ruling apparatus was always the tool of the few--those in power who belonged to the exploiting class--to dominate the majority--the people, the laboring masses. This always brought benefits to the minority, and sufferings and humiliation to the majority. But today, the State belonged to the majority, to the laboring masses. Each hour, each day, the State was safeguarding the people's interests and bringing happiness to the people. What it could not do at present, it would certainly do in the future. The people recognized in Uncle Ho the most noble and beautiful symbol of our people, our country, our revolution, our new government and new regime.

CHAPTER XIII

"This is the Voice of Vietnam, broadcasting from Hanoi, the Capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. . . ." That autumn, each time this phrase sounded from the radio, it vibrated and left a trailing echo. Vietnam had been reborn. The dark and heavy clouds of colonialism had been dissipated. The sky of the DRV was an intense blue. The capital of Hanoi was many times more beautiful than Thang Long and Dong Do⁴⁷ of ancient times. It was exuberant with revolutionary fervor and ready to confront the storm.

The newly granted rights of freedom and democracy were like showers falling on fields long parched by drought. Our people welcomed the revolutionary season's first ripe fruit, like "a thirsty man receiving water, and a hungry man receiving food." Previously, just picking up a leaflet, shouting a slogan of struggle was enough for a man to be thrown in jail by those in power. Today, hanging the flag of our fatherland in front of our houses, walking down the streets which had become ours, holding our heads high, singing loudly a revolutionary song was in itself such a joy, such a moving experience that at times our eyes filled with tears.

Some time ago, Uncle and the Party started the fires of the revolution; today, powerful flames were erupting all over the country. The people had come to realize their responsibility for the consolidation and protection of the new government, for this also meant protecting the fruits of the revolution, the free rights they had newly enjoyed, and their brightest hopes and dreams.

In this tumultuous revolutionary high tide which was sweeping the whole population, the problem at that point was to continue organizing the masses and leading an increasing number of people into participating in struggles of greater and greater intensity. Uncle paid close attention to the mobilization and organization of the workers, peasants and intellectuals. Even in his letters to the old people of the capital, to industrialists and businessmen, to students on the occasion of the resumption of classes, Uncle stressed the need for each particular group to organize itself and for each individual to join National Salvation Associations.

Within a short time, millions of citizens--old and young, men and women--all over the country had been organized into orderly ranks. Even in cities where Chiang Kai-shek's troops were stationed, our National Salvation Associations continued to expand boisterously in the face of their rifle barrels. Everywhere, from the towns to the villages, flags were unfurled and drums were sounded, rallies were held during the day and meetings were held at night. The countryside of Vietnam, quiescent for generations, had never been so full of activity and effervescence.

Our country was surrounded by imperialists, and enemies were threatening us on all sides. The National Congress meeting in Tan Trao had observed: "Only our true strength will decide victory." In a directive written as far back as December 1944, Uncle clearly pointed out that the nature of the struggle to protect our country was one of "national resistance," and therefore "we must mobilize and arm the entire population." His directive set forth the most basic factors for the resistance policy and the building of the revolutionary armed forces. The Tan Trao conference

47. "Thăng Long" (Rising Dragon) and "Đông Đô" (Eastern Capital) were the old names of Hanoi. (Trans.)

which preceded the General Insurrection also set forward the task of "arming the people" and "expanding the Vietnam Liberation Army."

In the evolution of the two protracted resistance wars against the French and the American imperialists, the resistance policy, and the policy of organizing our armed forces--which also dealt with the relationship between the militia of the masses and the regular units--contributed decisively to our nation's victory. Today, reviewing the resolutions and directives concerning these problems, we see that the Party and President Ho had right from the start set forward correct directions and policies.

The militarization of National Salvation organizations which had only been carried out in the War Zones prior to the General Insurrection was now expanded to the whole country. Members of National Salvation organizations--especially the young people--energetically studied military training and practiced martial arts day and night.

There was an enthusiastic movement to find, manufacture and purchase weapons. Forges in the countryside became workshops producing spears, lances and machetes for the self-defense and militia units. Children competed in searching for and collecting scrap iron and steel. Adults contributed metal objects of everyday usage such as brass trays and copper pots, and even objects used for worship such as bronze incense burners and urns, to be melted down and made into weapons.

Under French occupation, all weapons were banned. If a dagger was found in a house during a search, the entire family could be massacred. The longing of each citizen to possess a weapon to defend the newly won independence was beyond words! Holding a machete or a long spear in his hands while standing guard next to the alert drum in the sentinel booth at the entrance to the village, the militiaman felt rising within him, stronger than ever before, the spirit and military ardor which was also gripping the nation.

Self-defense and guerrilla organizations which had been formed before the August Revolution expanded rapidly. President Ho considered them the "Fatherland's wall of steel," and any enemies--no matter how violent and aggressive they were--would be destroyed when they came up against it. In the days of the recent General Insurrection they had been the assault forces supporting the people's uprising and seizure of power in various areas of the country. When the resistance war broke out in the South, and later when it erupted and spread to the whole country, they transformed each street, each village, into a fortress.

At the end of 1945, practically every hamlet, village, street and factory had a self-defense force--stronger ones had one or two companies each, while weaker ones had at least one platoon each. The self-defense forces enjoyed tight Party leadership and government assistance in the form of military training, but other than that they were completely self-supporting and self-sufficient in weapons and supplies.

In areas where fighting had not started, this force constituted an efficient tool of the revolutionary government for the protection of Party, state and Viet Minh organs, and economic and defense installations, for the maintenance of law and order, and for the suppression of reactionaries. In most of the countryside robberies and theft disappeared. A beautiful state of affairs prevailed: people could leave their gates unlocked and their doors open when they went out to work during the day and while they slept soundly at night.

In Hanoi, the capital's self-defense organization attracted almost all the youths--tens of thousands of them. They had cleverly procured for themselves many kinds of weapons--knives, hunting rifles, and even three-finned bombs (bom ba cáng) and Japanese machine guns.

The core of the capital's self-defense forces consisted of combat self-defense units. They were fighters selected from the workers, the poor, high school and college students within the ranks of the Youths for National Salvation organizations. They were equipped by the National Defense Ministry, and in the conditions of the time most of them were concentrated in barracks. The combat self-defense units had to rely on the people for food and material supplies. In addition to the task of protecting the revolutionary government and suppressing reactionaries the combat self-defense fighters also carried out propaganda about the policy and line of the Viet Minh Front and of the State, and they organized and trained the capital's self-defense units.

There was a training school for the Hanoi's self-defense forces called the Ho Chi Minh Self-defense Forces' School. Uncle visited the school many times. Truong Chinh and I used to go there frequently to give lectures. Many combat self-defense comrades later on became outstanding cadres of the Vietnam People's Army.

Simultaneously with the development of the mass forces everywhere, we made great efforts to build up the regular forces. Units of the Army for National Salvation, of the Vietnam Propaganda and Liberation Army, and of the Ba To Guerrillas,⁴⁸ which had merged and become the Vietnam Liberation Army grew by leaps and bounds, and even before the General Insurrection had been organized into detachments, companies and sections. In the new situation, our army continued to expand according to Party policy. Within the space of just one month, our army expanded tenfold in size, compared to the size of the Liberation Army at the time the revolution seized power.

All *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* (National Guards) units were placed under the leadership of the Party, exercised through the Party organization within the army, through the Party Chapters and cadres who were Party members and who played important roles. All *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* units, starting from the level of *phân đội* (section) upward, had political officers. A Central Military Affairs Committee (Quân Ủy Trung Ưng) was set up to assist the Central Committee in leading the armed forces. The Party mobilized a large number of Party members and cadres into the army. Cadres and fighters belonging to the first armed units set up by the Party now became the backbone of the *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* units at the central and local level.

The Resist-Japan Military Academy which was started when we were still in the War Zone became the Vietnam Military Academy. Its scope was enlarged and each training class assembled hundreds of cadres. Uncle often visited the school to give talks. To deceive the Chiang Kai-shek group, Uncle ordered that the name of the school be changed to "Vietnam Cadres' School."

There was an enthusiastic movement to enlist in the army all over the country. National Salvation Associations were busily sending their members to join the army. Self-defense units supplied their best fighters to the *Vệ Quốc Đoàn*. In a number of regions, whole self-defense units were transformed into *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* units. In Hanoi, many street blocks set up Fatherland Altar,⁴⁹ welcomed and accepted people

48. The famous guerrilla unit in Quang Ngai province which was formed after the insurrection in Ba To on March 11th, 1945. On that day, political prisoners held in the Ba To camp by the French revolted and, with the help of the local population, captured the Ba To post. With 30 captured weapons, the first Ba To guerrilla unit was formed and put under the command of Pham Kiet (who is now a Major General commanding the People's Armed Security Forces). (Trans.)

49. The Viet Minh erected Fatherland Altars (Bàn thờ Tổ Quốc) to invoke the patriotic fervor of the population and impress on the citizenry the sacred nature of their duty toward the fatherland. The form (the altar) was borrowed from the traditional ancestor worship, but instead of worshipping their ancestors, the people pledged their loyalty to the fatherland. (Trans.)

who wanted to join the army. Not just the young, but even men of advanced age came to enlist.

At the time of the General Insurrection, some Civil Guard units joined the revolution. Our policy was to accept patriotic individual officers and soldiers who volunteered to join the revolutionary army. Many of them later became good cadres and fighters in our army. In most areas, we still had to rely on the people to supply the troops. The Women's National Salvation Association played a special role in taking care of the fighters.

Our policy was to obtain, by all means, more weapons for the army. Besides the weapons collected at the Civil Guard barracks or seized from Japanese troops in a number of battles, we used the money and gold contributed by the people to buy additional arms from the Japanese and Chiang Kai-shek's troops. In spite of this, we could not meet the enormous demand for weapons and equipment of our army which grew bigger and bigger with each passing day. We used whatever we could get, and as a result the small quantity of weapons and ammunition we had were of a wide variety. Besides the compact and light sub-machine guns invented during World War II and recently introduced into the country by foreign troops, there were rifles with exceedingly long barrels produced in Tsarist times and muskets made in primitive metal workshops. Today, our infantry is modernly equipped with three kinds of straight trajectory weapons firing uniform sized bullets, but at that time we had to use over 40 types of weapons firing bullets of different sizes. In the case of rifles alone, a statistical listing mentioned over 20 types produced in eight different countries:

<i>Vietnam:</i>	Phan Dinh Phung rifles without range finder Muskets
<i>France:</i>	Mousqueton rifles Indochinese rifles Muskets 7.5 mm Mas rifles Semi-automatic Mas rifles Tromblon rifles with grenade launchers 12, 16 and 20 gauge shotguns
<i>Japan:</i>	Japanese rifles with short barrels used by cavalry Japanese rifles with long barrels used by the infantry.
<i>England:</i>	English 7.7 mm rifles
<i>U.S.A.:</i>	Remington 1903 Remington 1917
<i>Russia</i>	(Tsarist period)◦ Russian 7.9 mm rifles with long barrels
<i>China</i>	(Chiang Kai-shek period)◦ seven-nine rifles
<i>Germany</i>	(Nazi)◦ Mauser.

On exercise fields, rain or shine, the *Vệ Quốc Đoàn*, armed with more sticks than rifles, were absorbed in their training day and night. The mothers and sisters brought them at time water, at times rice and different seasonal fruit. Moving into battle, on the way "the people loved them when they stayed in the villages, and missed them when they left." Wherever they went they were taken care of with family love.

It was an army which appeared for the first time in our nation's history--an army composed of sons and brothers of the people, an army born from the people, fed and supplied by the people, and fighting for the people. This army was created by the Party and President Ho, and so it was imbued right from the start with the values of the Party and the virtues of Uncle Ho. Once, when talking about our Party, President Ho translated two verses of Lu Hsun:⁵⁰

50. Lu Hsun (1881-1936) was a revolutionary Chinese writer and the champion of the oppressed. (Trans.)

"Eyes opened wide in defiance, gazing contemptuously at a thousand giants,
Head bowed, serving as a horse for small children.i'

And he explained, "a thousand giants" meant powerful enemies, such as the French colonialists and the American meddlers; it also meant difficulties and hardships. "Small children" meant the kind and numerous masses; it also meant tasks which benefited the country and the people.

This is also the image of our Army. The *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* fighters deserved the fond name which the people of the whole country reserved for them very early on: Uncle Ho's fighters.

Our regular army and the mass military forces were born in the flames of our country's struggle for national salvation. They developed as they fought, they raised their political quality through education by the Party and President Ho as they were tempered by the savage fires of battles. These armed forces grew day by day and in a timely way met the enormous and urgent needs of the country.

CHAPTER XIV

While he was abroad Uncle had spent many years in China. The thick net of the KMT special police surrounded him at all times. He was present during those sorrowful days when tens of thousands of Communist Party members and revolutionary masses were massacred by the Chiang Kai Shek gang in Kwangchou. The KMT had jailed him and transferred him to thirty different prisons. After the Japanese surrender, the Americans urged the KMT militarists to quickly liquidate a threat for them: the Chinese Red Army which was growing day by day under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Chiang Kai-shek was preparing for the last battle, a struggle to the death in the hope of destroying the revolution.

Uncle understood profoundly the class nature of the Chinese KMT. More than anyone else, he saw the danger for the Vietnamese revolution when Chiang Kai-shek's army spilled into North Vietnam. They were ferociously anti-Communist. While the British only needed a few thousand troops to disarm close to 30,000 Japanese troops in the South, the KMT gang brought up to 180,000 troops into the North to carry out the same task. The savage ambition of the KMT army was obvious. They wanted to destroy the revolutionary government and seize our country.

Our policy then was to placate Chiang Kai-shek in order to direct our efforts to the French colonialists who were trying to steal our country. But it was not easy to placate Chiang. Uncle had instructed the cadres on many occasions: "You must avoid provocations at all costs, and you must not allow clashes with Chiang Kai-shek's army to occur. If clashes do happen, you must reduce the significance of important clashes, and small clashes must be dismissed as though they've never taken place." Not everyone saw the significance of this directive. A number of cadres did not as yet understand this policy. For this reason, clashes which should not have occurred happened all the same. These instances caused us a great deal of difficulty in trying to smooth things out. Uncle had a severe attitude toward those whose thoughts and actions were erroneous, and who only saw the parts and not the whole in carrying out the strategy of the Party.

On the one hand, we tried by every means to compromise and to contain the enemy's sabotage activities. On the other hand, it was very important for us at that point to discover and exploit every contradiction and fissure, no matter how small, in the enemy's ranks. In the Provisional Government, President Ho also assumed the diplomatic mission. Diplomacy at that time was an extremely tenuous and complicated task. The Chinese KMT commanders who entered the North belonged to many different factions. Some belonged to the regional Yunnan clique. Some belonged to the regional Double-Kwang clique (Kwangtung and Kwangsi). Many belonged to the central faction of Chungking. They resembled each other in their anti-Communism, but because of their internal contradictions, their reactionary attitude toward the Vietnamese revolution differed in degree.

Besides their intention to intervene in Vietnam, Chungking also wanted to take this opportunity to liquidate a number of stubborn militarists in Western and Southern China. Right at the time when Lu Han moved his troops into our country, Uncle had said: "This is Chiang Kai-shek's ruse of inducing the tiger to leave his mountain lair. We can take advantage of the instability within their ranks." Chiang

Kai-shek for a long time had wanted to punish Lung Yun,⁵¹ the province chief of Yunnan.

Uncle won Lu Han's respect and admiration after only a few meetings. He was surprised at Uncle's wide knowledge and understanding. Uncle discussed with him about the political situation in Vietnam, in China and in the world. He explained and made him understand our struggle to regain independence and our policy of friendship between China and Vietnam. Occasionally, Uncle told him about the ugly activities of the VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League. Lu Han respectfully called him President Ho. Whenever he was told Uncle was coming to visit, he went out to greet him. When Uncle left, he saw him all the way to the door. It seemed he understood the precarious nature of his position, for he usually looked troubled.

Hsiao Wen was the Political Director of the Fourth War Zone commanded by Chang Fa-k'uei. He held the pivotal position in an organization called the "Vietnam Revolution Leadership Bureau" set up by Chang Fa-k'uei. Chiang Kai-shek basically disliked Chang Fa-k'uei and his clique, but Chiang had to use Hsiao Wen because Hsiao Wen had been following the Vietnamese situation for a long time and was controlling a group of lackeys in the persons of Nguyen Hai Than and his men. Hsiao Wen entered Vietnam with a division of the Kwangsi army. [However] right after this division crossed the border, it was recalled by Chungking. Without troops, Hsiao Wen had to join the central government's divisions led by Chou Fu Sheng. According to the assignment of Chungking, Hsiao Wen had the responsibility of solving political problems in North Vietnam.

When he arrived in Hanoi the revolutionary government had already been set up and this general dressed in a blue uniform was faced with a *fait accompli*. He was very annoyed. Uncle ordered that a luxurious house be selected for Hsiao Wen. At first, he refused to move there and took his cronies to set up quarters in the house of a Chinese *tong* leader in Cua Dong street. Seeing that Uncle intended to go and visit Hsiao Wen many brothers tried to stop him, because Hsiao Wen had just arrived and we did not know what his attitude was like. Uncle said, "He's just arrived and does not know the situation, so it is to our advantage to go and see him." In diplomatic dealings, Uncle usually took the initiative and paid attention to making a first impression. Uncle designated a few comrades to accompany him. Seeing that one of them was wearing sandals, he told him to go home and put on some shoes. He said: "When we go to meet them, it doesn't matter how I'm dressed, but you must be properly dressed."'

The comrades accompanied him to Cua Dong street. When they arrived at the house where Hsiao Wen was staying, Uncle told two of them to wait outside, and then entered in the company of the other two. Crossing the iron fence, they saw that besides Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers living here, there were also a handful of VNQDD lackeys. They wore uniforms, carried weapons, and came and went sullenly. Hsiao Wen was in the back of the house. When informed that President Ho had come, he hurriedly came out. Immediately after Uncle's few inquiries, he became cheerful and expansive as though meeting an old friend. Hsiao Wen's respectful attitude toward Uncle surprised the VNQDD lackeys.

Uncle recalled the things that had happened in Liuchou, and told Hsiao Wen to forget past misunderstandings and to cooperate with us in order to solve the problems relating to the relationship between China and Vietnam. Hsiao Wen promised to establish relations with our government. After this meeting, Hsiao Wen moved to the house we had reserved for him near the Bay Mau lake. Uncle relied upon him to solve some of the clashes and complications with the Chiang army.

51. Lung Yun was a cousin of General Lu Han, and ruled Yunnan until 1945 when he was ousted by Chiang Kai-shek after Lu Han had moved the bulk of the Yunnan army to Vietnam. (Trans.)

After Lu Han had been in Hanoi a couple of weeks, Chiang Kai-shek carried out a surprise attack on Yunnan, tricked and captured Lung Yun. Chungking announced that after Lu Han completed his mission in Vietnam and returned to Yunnan, he would replace Lung Yun as province chief. However, they recalled the two divisions of Lu Han and sent them to the Northeast to fight the Red Army. Troops belonging to the central government were dispatched to Vietnam to replace these two divisions. The struggle for power within the ranks of the Chiang militarists was becoming vicious.

The generals under the direct command of Chungking, led by Chou Fu Sheng, were the most reactionary. They directed their lackeys in sabotage activities. Many times they openly arrested and detained a number of our cadres. However, some among them could not turn a blind eye to the great reality of the Vietnamese revolution. The commander of the 2nd Division stationed in Nam Dinh once expressed his agreement with out people's resistance against the French. Another commander came to see us and ask us to supply him with documents and help him write a book on the Vietnamese struggle for national independence.

In Chiang Kai-shek's army, many men who held low positions such as *phó quan* and *xú trưởng* actually enjoyed great power and influence. Generals frequently visited the houses of those officers who had beautiful and clever wives adept at preparing opium pipes. Thanks to this these people became very effective middle men [for our purposes]. We do not know how Uncle very early on discovered these low ranking officers of this category. He directed the cadres in the diplomatic mission to adopt appropriate measures in dealing with each of these men. It was thanks to this group that a number of clashes with the Chiang army were resolved.

To Uncle the revolutionary truth was concrete, and the application of strategy and tactics was also concrete. Although everyone in Chiang Kai-shek's gang was reactionary, with each particular individual we had to use a different treatment. Naturally, the true strength of the revolution was the basis for the application of all strategies. This was an important experience of which Uncle constantly reminded the cadres.

The revolutionary high tide was rising with great force all over China. Chiang Kai-shek's army attacked the liberated zones with the intention of destroying the Red Army, but encountered successive defeats. All the soldiers and officers who were recalled back to China from Vietnam showed signs of worry. Those who stayed on and those who had recently arrived all felt very unsettled. With an extraordinary perception, Uncle seemed to understand fully the state of mind and emotions of the enemies. Uncle applied with great accuracy and effectiveness different measures in dealing with different kinds of enemy, and with each particular individual among them.

Uncle represented strength and the just cause. Many foreign politicians who met him then as well as later all expressed their admiration and respect. Even those enemies notorious for their anti-Communism showed respect when they met with him. Standing in front of him, their aggressiveness diminished considerably. Many foreigners have discussed this extraordinary capacity of President Ho's to transform people. Some said this was due to his vast and profound knowledge, to his superb talent and intelligence, and to his extraordinary energy and determination. Some said this was due to his modesty, simplicity, his optimism, his confidence, his frankness, his openness, his wide experience and graciousness in dealing with people.

All these things are true. But overshadowing all else in President Ho was his selflessness, his dedication to others without a thought to himself, and "his unique and overwhelming desire" to bring happiness to the people, to the country. This life of complete disregard for any self interest had created in him something very pure and radiant. In his immense humanitarianism, even when he was implementing his strategies and tactics, he always wanted to revive the few shreds of conscience still lingering in some people.

Our people's political strength and their high morale, combined with the clever application of strategies and policies by our Party and President Ho succeeded in dampening somewhat the aggressive intents of the KMT militarists who had in their hands close to 200,000 troops.

CHAPTER XV

Less than a week after the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established, the Provisional Government issued a decree ordering nationwide general elections to select a National Congress. Never before in the history of nations which had just won independence through struggle had a general election decree been issued so quickly.

First of all, this was the Party's expression of faith in the patriotism and political consciousness of our people. Our population had lived for almost a century under the domination of the French colonialists. The general elections would be a wide and effective mobilization drive. Through the exercise of their right as the masters of their own country, each citizen would become more keenly aware of their responsibilities toward their country. In a situation complicated by complex internal and external difficulties and confusion, a National Congress officially elected by the people, and a government officially formed in strict accordance with democratic principles would possess enough prestige, legitimacy, and strength to mobilize the spirit and strength of our people to resist [foreign aggression] and rebuild the country, and to deal with foreign nations.

The Provisional Government's decree of September 8 set the date for the general elections in two months' time. The French had returned to the South, and fighting was spreading further and further every day. The great difficulty was not only the French invasion. In the North, the VNQDD and the DMH (Vietnam Revolutionary League) opposed and sabotaged the general elections with frenzy. They became increasingly aware that a just and fair general election would not bring them any advantages.

The reactionaries' newspapers demanded the immediate resignation of the Provisional Government. They loudly announced that the present government was a totalitarian Communist government. They tried by all means to inflame a number of capitalists, former mandarins, landlords and rich peasants in the hope of winning their support and pushing them to oppose us. They were hoping that Chungking would be more forceful in dealing with us.

The KMT militarist clique in Hanoi was aware that a violent overthrow of our central government at this juncture would be impossible to accomplish. Hsiao Wen proposed to Uncle the formation of a government composed of three factions: the Viet Minh, the VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League. He wanted a government in which his lackeys held the majority.

We had on many occasions told the leaders of the VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League that general elections were necessary and absolutely had to be carried out. This was the aspiration of the people, and this was also their right and in their interest. Everything would be done to make it easy for candidates of political parties running for election to present their political line. We also expressed our desire to unite with all forces to build the country and push forward the resistance war in the South which was getting fiercer and fiercer with each passing day.

A general conference of political parties was organized in the second half of November. The leaders of the VNQDD and Vietnam Revolutionary League attending the meeting agreed to form a government of national unification, to unify their armies, to end all conflicts, and to put an end to mutual denunciations in newspapers. However, a few days later the loudspeaker at the office of the "Vietnam" newspaper on Quan Thanh street again started to broadcast non-stop day and night, demanding the

resignation of the Provisional Government. Certainly their Chinese KMT bosses must have pointed out to the reactionaries that they had gained nothing through the new agreements. While continuing with their kidnappings, assassinations and extortions, they went one step further and began to organize demonstrations causing disturbances in the city.

The people of the capital were angry and wanted the government to severely punish the reactionaries. Many wrote letters and articles to the newspapers to denounce their sabotage and their criminal activities. Many combat self-defense and capital self-defense units wrote petitions and issued proclamations expressing their determination to punish them as soon as they received orders to this effect.

The bayonets of Chiang Kai-shek's troops and the *pooe-hooe* submachine guns of the Chinese guards present everywhere in the city were a base of support for the reactionaries. Up till then, it was because our people and armed forces had tried at all costs to avoid any provocations that these reactionaries had not been subjected to any significant punishments.

In view of this situation, the policy of the Standing Committee was to avoid provocations at all costs, but at the same time we had to send people out to struggle, to unmask and isolate the reactionaries in order to show clearly to the Chinese KMT commanders that the more they used their lackeys to sabotage the stiffer popular opposition became. Tran Quoc Hoan⁵² and I discussed a plan to implement this policy in order to put a stop to the sabotage activities which were creating disturbances in the city daily. To do this we had to weigh everything carefully. The demonstrators were always accompanied by armed men. They had the support of the KMT troops who had assigned to themselves the right to maintain order in the city. We had to punish the saboteurs, but we had to avoid provocations at all costs and make absolutely sure that things would not lead to a violent clash.

We saw that we could mobilize the combat self-defense forces and a number of National Salvation Association members to do this job. While engaging in this activity, the combat self-defense forces would wear civilian clothes, mix with the people and hide their weapons. The best thing would be for us to organize struggles far from where Chiang Kai-shek's troops were stationed.

The task of carrying out the first small attack to develop some experience was assigned to a combat self-defense cell. That day, the men were working in the main headquarters of the combat self-defense when news arrived that the agitators had assembled in Hang Dau street. The three comrades who were assigned this task immediately hid their weapons and ran off to carry out their mission. When they arrived in Hang Giay street, they ran into this group composed of a few dozen men who were using bullhorns to appeal to the people and distributing their newspapers in front of the Dong Xuan market. Chiang's soldiers were standing guard at both ends of the street. One self-defense comrade pushed his way in their midst and asked one of the agitators:

- What newspaper is this?

He replied:

- This is the "Vietnam" newspaper.

- Vietnam indeed! Your newspaper is the newspaper of Vietnamese traitors!

The self-defense comrade snatched the newspapers from his hands and threw them on the ground. The clash broke out. The population who was waiting for just such

52. Now Public Security Minister. (Trans.)

an occasion immediately swarmed in. Surprised by this unexpected punishment, the agitators began to flee in disorder. Many even rushed into people's homes to hide. A self-defense comrade ran after one of them. The people in the house indicated with their eyes where the fellow was hiding--in the corner, behind a door. The fellow was dragged out. He begged to be let go. The owner of the house told him:

- Don't ever do it again! If you continue to sabotage and to slander the government, the people in the city won't leave you alone!

Seeing the disturbance, the Chinese guards fired in the air, but none of them left their sand-bagged bunkers. The agitators were routed. The self-defense comrades, their mission accomplished, pretended to be strollers taking a walk and calmly passed by the Chinese guard station.

Through this incident we were able to evaluate the morale of the reactionaries, and also gauge somewhat to what extent the Chinese soldiers were willing to intervene. Faced with this angry action which they mistook as the spontaneous reaction of the people toward their lackeys, they only responded in a passive and weak fashion.

A few days later the reactionaries organized a huge rally near the Hoan Kiem lake. This time we mobilized a larger force. We discovered their plan early, but they were prepared to deal with us. They shot a self-defense comrade. Their crime provoked great indignation and anger. The population poured in, and used whatever they could find as weapons--some even snatched half-painted bicycle frames from the shops--and rushed in to punish the reactionaries. These fellows had to hide their weapons, throw away their flags, banners and bullhorns, and fled for their lives.

The demonstrations became less frequent. However, the reactionaries stepped up their kidnappings and assassinations. Their targets were people about to run for elections, members of the Communist Party, Viet Minh cadres, members of their own organizations who were sympathetic to us or who had left them to join the revolution.

The KMT militarists, after failing in their attempts to propose a government reshuffle with us, also began to increase their pressure.

At the end of November, a Frenchman was shot and killed in front of the Avia factory. We immediately ordered an investigation. Our government had always maintained a humane and tolerant policy toward French residents. In his letter to the French living in Indochina in October, Uncle had pointed out clearly that honest working and peaceful Frenchmen would be considered as friends. A day later, the KMT army command headquarters sent a letter inviting Uncle to come. The brothers discussed whether Uncle should go or not. Uncle said:

- Since they've invited me, I'll go. They won't dare to do anything at this point.

At 9 o'clock in the morning, Uncle got in the car and left with a few bodyguards. Uncle went to Hsiao Wen's house. Chou Fu Sheng had posted someone there to welcome him and invite him to come to his office in the direction of the Don Thuy hospital. When they arrived there, the Chinese KMT officers requested the bodyguards to remain outside and wait, and invited Uncle to go upstairs to see Chou.

We waited at home. By lunchtime Uncle still had not returned. We had confidence in his ability to cope with all situations, but we were still worried. Past noon, a bodyguard brought back a letter from Uncle. The letter was not sealed. Uncle had written briefly in Chinese: "You brothers back home, continue with your work. I'm still busy." It was clear there were complications. He knew we were getting anxious at home, and had managed to inform us a little about the situation. The comrade who brought the letter said that Uncle was still sitting upstairs with

Chou. We discussed ways to deal with the situation if this became necessary, and sent people to Chou's place to keep watch.

A while later, the comrades who accompanied Uncle telephoned and told us to send a car to fetch them. We did not understand why, and wondered what had happened to the car Uncle took this morning. Uncle did not return until close to 2:00 P.M. It was only then that our worries vanished.

What happened was quite complicated. That morning, Chou Fu Sheng adamantly accused one of our cadres of having shot the Frenchman. The man whom they accused was Son,⁵³ one of our cadres who had been a member of the Leadership Committee of the Vietnam Revolutionary League since the days in Liuchou. The lackeys of Chou were even more brazen and maintained that the car the "culprit" had used was none other than Uncle's car. Uncle clearly explained the illogical points in their accusations. The man whom they accused as the perpetrator had been in Nam Dinh for the last four days on mission. Chou then shifted to reproaching our government for not guaranteeing order and security. Then he brought up the question of rice supplies and complained that we had refused to supply in full the amount of rice he had requested. Chou kept bringing up one thing after another to create a tense atmosphere.

In the end, Chou lost the argument and had to put an end to the conversation. In order to save face and also to prolong this tense situation, he detained the car and Hao, the driver, on the grounds that they constituted evidence which would lead to the discovery of the culprit. In spite of our continuous protest, they only released the driver three months later, but kept the car.

53. Born Vu Nguyen Bat in 1908 in Bac Ninh province, Nguyen Son joined the Revolutionary Youth in 1925, and then went to China where he joined the Chinese Communist Party and took part in the Long March with the 8th Route Army. He returned to Vietnam in 1945 and was named Chairman of the South Vietnam Resistance Committee, a position he held until 1947. In that year he was appointed commander-in-chief of Inter-Zone IV (Central Vietnam). He died of cancer in 1956.
(Trans.)

CHAPTER XVI

Uncle and the Standing Committee saw that a solution had to be found with regard to the KMT group. With no hope of gaining anything by having their lackeys run for election, they would certainly oppose and sabotage the general elections to the end. They were demanding that we reshuffle the government. We could agree to form a provisional coalition government with the participation of a number of men from their group. The condition we put forward was that this government had to organize the general elections well, unify the various armies, and resign when the National Congress convened. As to the problem of the VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League not daring to field candidates for election, we would propose to the National Congress to assign them a number of seats in the future.

We presented these conditions to Hsiao Wen. Unable to come up with a solution himself, he agreed. Nguyen Hai Than had no choice but to go along. As for the VNQDD, at the beginning they refused to give their approval, but since all their bosses shared this opinion they were forced to go along. The Vietnamese Revolutionary League and the VNQDD promised to stop sabotaging the general elections. On December 19th, the Provisional Government announced that general elections would be held on 6 January 1946.

We had overcome a great difficulty. But a number of cadres did not agree with this solution. When they heard that Nguyen Hai Than would hold a high position in the government, some comrades rushed over and requested to see Uncle to express their concern. Uncle did not explain at length, and simply asked:

- Isn't manure filthy? But if it is a good fertilizer for rice, won't you use it?

On 1 January 1946, the list of Cabinet members in the Provisional Coalition Government was published in the newspapers. Nguyen Hai Than was Vice-President. Members of the VNQDD and Vietnam Revolutionary League held two ministries: the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Public Health. That afternoon the new government attended a swearing-in ceremony at the Opera House. Uncle read the proclamation of unity of the political parties, and mentioned the policies of the government, including the following points:

- (a) To make the nationwide general elections achieve satisfactory results.
- (b) To unify administrative organs according to democratic principles.
- (c) To unify the various armies under the command of the government. No political party would be allowed to maintain a separate army.

In his declaration, Nguyen Hai Than said, "As a leader of the people, I feel I'm at fault toward you for not having united [with the other political groups] before this day." He promised "to dispatch my own army to the South to resist foreign aggression alongside the people."

Thirty thousand people of the capital had gathered in the square in front of the Opera House, filling it. Uncle invited the members of government to come out and see the people. Shouts of "long live President Ho" resounded without interruption when Uncle appeared on the balcony. Uncle extended his good wishes to the people on the occasion of the solar new year, and talked about the formation of the provisional coalition government. After that, he presented the new Vice-President to the people. Nguyen Hai Than stepped out to give a talk to the people. Perhaps

out of confusion and nervousness, he let slip a string of words in Mandarin Chinese.⁵⁴ I was standing close by, so I pulled at his jacket and asked:

- What are you saying?

Tran Huy Lieu⁵⁵ was also standing there. He pulled at my arm and said softly: "Never mind. Let the fellow say what he wants."

Uncle ordered that an extremely nice house be found for Nguyen Hai Than, and even gave him the car Uncle had been using every day. A few days later, the Provisional Coalition Government was presented to government employees at the Résidence Supérieure. Nguyen Hai Than arrived by car, followed by a platoon of bodyguards carrying weapons in their hands and covered with ammunition, their legs bound in puttees, looking like exact replicas of Lu Han's soldiers. During the reception, Uncle said in an affectionate tone:

- Today, I'm happy to present to our family a new bride: the Vice-President, Mr. Nguyen Hai Than.

Nguyen Hai Than stood up, self-satisfaction showing clearly on his face:

- I have been wandering overseas for the last couple of decades. Now I'm back here, and I have such a nice and large house to live in I feel very happy.

Drunk with excitement, and perhaps wanting to entertain everyone, he added:

- Now, by way of introducing myself to you, let me read the fortune of Mr. Ho Chi Minh to see what his future will bring.

No one responded to his clumsy remark.

54. The implication here is that Nguyen Hai Than had lived so long in China that Chinese had become his first tongue. (Trans.)

55. Tran Huy Lieu was then Minister of Propaganda. (Trans.)

CHAPTER XVII

Hanoi jubilantly prepared for the first general election in the nation's history. Political organizations carried out a noisy propaganda campaign for their candidates. Exhortation slogans appeared on walls, and on cloth banners hung everywhere. Cars bedecked with flowers enlivened the city. On top of these cars, young boys and girls in costumes beat drums, played music and spoke through bullhorns to introduce the candidates to the people. Newspapers continuously published special issues to mobilize for the election.

From many areas, citizens wrote to Uncle and proposed that he need not run from any province and that the people of the whole country would unanimously send him to the National Congress. Everyone wanted to be able to put down his name at the top of their ballots. Uncle wrote a short letter to answer this proposal:

". . . I'm a citizen of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and as such cannot disregard the regulations for the general elections which have been laid down. I have already run for election in Hanoi, and so I cannot run elsewhere.

"I thank you citizens for your love, and I request that you fulfill your duty as citizens in the forthcoming general elections."

The morning of 6 January 1946. Everywhere, towns and villages were bright with flags, lanterns and flowers. The people, without distinction of age, sex, or economic background, went to the polls. It had not been easy for them to obtain these ballots. This was a ballot of freedom wrested after a long struggle, with a lot of blood and tears shed in the process. Even yesterday, blood had been shed for this ballot: forty-two cadres had sacrificed their lives in the South while mobilizing for the general elections.

This was the day when the new masters of the country exercised their right as the true masters of their land. In Phuc Yen province town, an old man close to 100 years of age asked his grandchild to lead him to the polls. He asked the organization committee to tell him about the backgrounds and accomplishments of each candidate. He handled the ballot with great care, weighed his choice for a long time, and only then decided who to vote for. The young saw the value of their ballots as something containing their hopes and their dreams, and in the things that these ballots could bring in the future. The old understood the profound significance of the ballots of freedom because of the humiliations they had suffered during those long years of living in slavery. Even some blind people demanded to be taken to the polls so that they could fully enjoy the happiness of personally placing their ballots in the ballot box.

The general election was truly a festive occasion for everyone. In many places, the people organized processions with lanterns, torches and Uncle's pictures, theatre performances and joyful get-togethers. However, the self-defense forces had to work hard to guard against sabotage. In Hanoi itself, in spite of the agreements, the VNQDD brought submachine guns to Ngu Xa and prevented the ballot box from being set up. They even forbade the people there to fly flags. The people of Ngu Xa went to Nguyen Thai Hoc street nearby to vote.

In the South and in the southern portion of Central Vietnam, the elections took place under the bombs, napalm and machine guns of the enemy. There were people running for election even in French occupied areas such as Saigon, Cholon and My Tho.

A number of people in Tan An and Khanh Hoa were wounded and killed when enemy aircraft bombed the polling stations. Even in areas terrorized by the enemy, ninety percent of the electorate courageously exercised their right and duty as citizens.

Uncle cast his ballot in a house in front of the Hang Voi school, in Bac Ninh street,⁵⁶ Hanoi. It was a very cold morning. Uncle appeared in simple khaki clothes among voters wearing festive winter clothing. He walked into the polling station, his face bright with joy. After plunging himself into a decisive struggle against the enemy side by side with the nation for thirty-five years, today along with the people Uncle received the first ballot of a citizen of an independent country. When they heard the news of President Ho's arrival, the people in the area poured in, swarming in front of the polling station. When he emerged, the applause and cheers lasted a long time. He raised his hand and waved in greeting, and then went to visit a number of polling stations in Hang Bac, Hang Gai, and Hang Trong Streets, and in Ho Khau village on the outskirts of the capital. He wanted to mingle with the population on this great happy day of the country.

Uncle attached great importance to his right and duty as a citizen. Last March, Hanoi conducted elections for the People's Council. Although he was still feeling unwell then, Uncle made an effort to go to the polls located in Ba Dinh street. Everyone rushed in. Before he wrote on his ballot, he smiled and told the people to move back in order to guarantee the principle of secret balloting which had been specified. He was to cast his [last] ballot to select representatives to the city's People's Council in his 79th year [in 1969].⁵⁷

In the first general election in the country, President Ho ran in Hanoi and received 98.4% of the votes.⁵⁸ The people in the whole country, from North to South, elected 333 representatives to the first National Congress of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

56. Now called Nguyen Huu Huan street. (Footnote in text.)

57. Ho Chi Minh was born in 1890. (Trans.)

58. Vo Nguyen Giap who ran in Nghe An province won 97% of the votes. (Trans.)

CHAPTER XVIII

In the middle of January I was dispatched by the government to the South on a brief mission. In order to protect our young and infant government, the Central Committee realized that it was necessary to push forward the anti-French resistance in the South and in South Central Vietnam to achieve important victories. At the same time, our people in the whole country had to resolutely make preparations for a protracted resistance in case the enemy expanded the war. This trip was intended for me to communicate the great determination of the Central Committee.

The newspapers in Hanoi had just published a special issue on the 100th day of the resistance. Prior to 23 September [1945] the former colonial rulers in Saigon had firmly maintained that as soon as the French opened fire, the "natives" whom they had known for so long would scatter like a flock of sparrows. With this same thought in mind, as soon as they got out of Japanese prisons, French troops immediately opened fire on our people. A number of colonialist generals considered the operation in the Indochina peninsula a mere parade.

The challenge was decisive. On one side was the professional army of an old colonialist country commanded by one of the famous generals of France. They had modern weapons: aircraft, warships, tanks, machine guns and artillery. This "extremely beautiful expeditionary corps," as d'Argenlieu had called them, also had the support of the British interventionists and of thousands of Japanese troops. On the other side were simple citizens armed only with primitive weapons and a determination to fight to the end in order to protect their country.

After one hundred days of flames and bullets, the South and South Central Vietnam were still standing firm. The sharpened sticks of our people under a democratic republican government had proved to be a thousand times more effective than the cannons of the emperors and mandarins of the Nguyen dynasty. In their first conquest, all the French had to do to conquer whole regions was to blow holes in the fortresses of citadels with their cannon balls. This time around, they had run into an indestructible steel fortress constituted by a population who refused to return to their life of slavery.

With the power of their tank convoys the French could penetrate into a number of provinces in the South and in South Central Vietnam. But the important thing was that the resistance could not be stamped out. It broke out strongly everywhere, and it persisted even in the hearts of towns and cities which the enemy thought they had conquered. In these moments of life and death for the Fatherland, our people quickly came up with ways to fight the enemy, bewildering him with a new form of warfare. Towns and cities were destroyed by the same hands that had built them, people in villages absolutely refused to collaborate in any way, gardens and houses were deserted, bridges were destroyed, roads were cut to shreds. Fighters determined to resist to their death, fought with whatever weapons they had in their hands, disregarding bombs and bullets, and clung to each street, each trench. The thing the enemy found most annoying was that their opponents were always around them but remained invisible, and could put an end to their lives at any moment.

The vast countryside in the South remained in our hands. Many guerrilla bases were created. We had large bases in the Plain of Reeds and in the U Minh forest. And a number of bases were located right on the edges of towns and cities.

The enemy landed in Nha Trang at the end of November, and was besieged in the town by the local troops and people and by a number of Southern March detachments. The enemy's plan to advance to Khanh Hoa was stopped. The Vietnamese and highland people, along with the Southern March units fought and wrested each settlement, each village from the enemy in the Western Highlands. Our army retook Ban Me Thuot town from the hands of the French bandits and held it for ten days in the middle of December.

Guerrilla warfare erupted everywhere--in each village, each hamlet, along strategic communication lines, and even in cities and towns deep in the heart of enemy territory.

A number of colonialist military officers previously had been very optimistic about the prospects of their war of invasion. They had placed their complete faith in arithmetic: "The resistants have few weapons. They have even less ammunition. After they have used up their ammunition, which should be in a brief period, all resistance will collapse." After more than three months of our people's resistance, the future appeared to have turned gray for the aggressors. They began to realize the strength of a whole nation rising up to fight for the survival of their own country.

The enemy began to see the danger of a protracted war. They urgently requested reinforcements from France. At the beginning of 1946, the enemy started to conduct relentless and fierce sweep operations into our bases in the South. They focused their strength to occupy an additional number of provinces in South Central Vietnam and to prepare for their new schemes.

I left Hanoi on January 18th [1946], on a warm and sunny afternoon. Before our departure, Uncle once more reminded me to convey his concern to the people, fighters and cadres, and his promise to come down for a visit when he had the opportunity. Uncle reminded me to be on my guard and to maintain secrecy. He always reminded us of these things before we went on mission. The moment we left Hanoi, the atmosphere changed. Without the bayonets of Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers, our country appeared pure, beautiful, and bright with the light of independence and freedom. Banners and the slogan, "Support the heroic resistance of the people in the South," appeared everywhere. Though it was not a festive occasion, in villages and in towns, and even in the ricefields, we saw the red flags with the yellow star everywhere. At each intersection, in each town, there were guard stations manned by the militia.

It had been a long time since I had the chance to return to the southern portion of our Fatherland. This trip was different from previous journeys to the South during the period of clandestine operations. Along with the rest of the country the South had changed and was fighting. Our car sped along Highway 1. The smell of gasoline, the sound of the horn, brought back memories of long trips. I felt very excited when I thought of our people and fighters who were plunged into a decisive struggle with the enemy in the areas ahead of us.

Along the way we met many Southern March units. The sons of the North and of the Center continued to set out for the South. The cadres and fighters were of different ages. Most of the fighters were very young. For most of them, this was the first time they left for combat. And this probably was also the first time that many of them had the chance to go to the outlying areas of our country. These important moments in the life of each man probably would become indelible memories. On their way to the train stations, the fighters--their weapons, ammunition and baggage weighing on their shoulders--sang as they marched. Express trains filled with troops thundered southward, carrying with them the songs and laughter and the hands waving in greeting. The happy days of going off to war were revived in the life of the nation. Many times, I stopped the car and talked with the brothers in the Southward March units.

The following day I arrived in Nghe An. The Song Lam River and the Hong Linh mountain were as beautiful as if they were etched in a painting. All over Vinh city people were training, brandishing their sabers, throwing hand grenades, firing rifles. Old and young, men and women, carrying wooden rifles on their shoulders, marched in ranks in cadence. Were these old men former imperial troops of fifteen years ago who were today standing in line with their sons and brothers? All the comrades in Nghe An asked when Uncle was coming.

Uncle had a deep feeling for his homeland. He loved everything in his native village, from the fans made with *tro* leaves to the hibiscus hedges. After fifty-two years away from home, [on his return] he was able to recognize immediately the road leading to his old house and the old gate in the middle of the village, though things had changed. He remembered each thing vividly, from the house columns where the hammock was hung and in which his mother used to lie, to the location of each lemon, each grapefruit tree in the garden. At that time none of us thought that twelve years would have to pass before Uncle would have the chance to return to his village.

The next day, we left early. After we crossed Deo Ngang Pass we saw the familiar long and narrow ricefields and the white sand dunes of Quang Binh,⁵⁹ these beautiful dunes so typical of Central Vietnam.

Dong Hoi, small and charming and full of memories, lying on the bank of the Nhat Le River, was bustling with the reception of Southward March units and sending off their own sons to the front. Here, I met many relatives. We talked about our families and our country all afternoon and all evening, but still wanted to go on talking.

On the 20th we left for Hue. The suburb of the city appeared with its small charming houses and luxuriant tea gardens. The car ran between two rows of *Ngô Đồng* trees--straight and of the same height--looking as though they were lining up on both sides of the asphalt road. Once we passed the outer fortress at the West Gate, we could see the River of Perfume tranquil under the afternoon sun. The tall Ngu mountain rose high behind the old European quarters. This river, this mountain were ours. The red flag with the yellow star fluttered on top of the highest flag pole in the citadel, behind the Literature Tower. *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* (National Guardsmen) stood guard in front of the citadel.

In the citadel, the residences and rental quarters of former mandarins--*tham tri* (assessors) and *thị lang* (deputy ministers) had been transformed into the offices of the government and of the Viet Minh Front. I met Nguyen Chi Thanh⁶⁰ at the Viet Minh headquarters and told him in detail about Uncle's and the Standing Committee's policies. We exchanged ideas, discussed our work and chatted about the changes that had taken place in the country since we met each other for the first time at the National Congress in Tan Trao.

Feudal Hue was now a thing of the past. The green moss on the walls of the six Ministries⁶¹ was still there, but the revolution had brought so many changes. Corruption and decadence had given way to new and progressive things. Independent Hue was beautiful and bright.

59. Giap's native province. (Trans.)

60. General Nguyen Chi Thanh served as a member of the National Defense Council until his death of a heart attack in 1967. (Trans.)

61. The imperial bureaucracy consisted of six ministries: the Ministry of Rites, the Interior Ministry, the Finance Ministry, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Public Works. (Trans.)

Here, we began to sense the burning atmosphere of the resistance. Hue was then the direct rear area for many fronts. Cadres came here from the frontline in the South and in South Central Vietnam, and from the battlefield in Laos. Some came on mission.ⁱ Others came for medical treatment. Wounded fighters were also transferred here. Many insisted on being sent back to the front even before their wounds had healed or their illnesses had been cured. The *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* trained day and night, never wasting an hour, a minute, before they left for combat. In every office, in every house, in every person, one saw the preoccupation and concern with meeting the requirements of the resistance. Here, the reactionary parties had no base of support and were not active. Chiang Kai-shek's troops and officers also seemed more reasonable and did not dare to practice their impudent tricks.

The brothers and sisters surrounded me and asked about Uncle's health, about news of the North, the situation in dealing with the sabotage of Chiang's troops and the reactionary groups in the capital. Many said the people of Hue rejoiced when they heard Uncle had won the election in Hanoi with the highest number of votes.

Uncle had lived in Hue during his childhood and his youth. In the last years of the previous century Uncle had moved to Hue with his family. His father who had just passed the doctoral exam as the second laureate had been summoned to the imperial capital. It was here also, in 1900, in a small house in front of the Censor's Office that Cung--Uncle's name when he was small--had witnessed the last moments of his mother's life. After his mother died, he returned to Nam Lien.

Five years later, when he returned to Hue, Cung had become a youth named Nguyen Tat Thanh. At that time, the struggle movement in Hue was very stormy. The French forced Thanh Thai to abdicate in favor of his son Duy Tan who was then only 8 years old. People from various areas came to Hue to demonstrate continuously for a couple of days to demand a reduction in taxes. The French brought French troops from the Mang Ca post and opened fire into unarmed citizens. Many were pushed into the river. Blood splattered red on the Trang Tien bridge. It was here that the youth Nguyen Tat Thanh began to embark on his "thousand miles long journey."

A month before I arrived in Hue, Le Van Hien⁶² who had been sent to the South on mission by the government also passed through here. On Uncle's instructions, he had gone to visit the wives of Emperors Thanh Thai and Duy Tan. The wives of these two Nguyen emperors who had been dethroned by the French colonialists were very surprised and moved by President Ho's concern. The wife of Thanh Thai said that since the ascension to power by our government she had replaced her wishes for the imperial family with wishes for the government and Mr. Ho in her daily Buddhist prayers. Her daughter-in-law, the wife of emperor Duy Tan, said that since her husband had been exiled by the French the imperial family had not paid any attention to her.

I stayed in Hue for two days to discuss with the brothers how to implement the Central Committee's directives, how to carry out the determination to push forward the resistance in the South and in South Central Vietnam, and how to make resolute and urgent preparations for a protracted resistance and to guard against the French expanding the war even to Central Vietnam itself.

62. Le Van Hien became Minister of Finance in the Resistance Government formed following the general elections of March 1946. Most recently he was appointed DRV ambassador to Laos. (Trans.)

CHAPTER XIX

All along the route southward, everywhere people asked me to tell them about Uncle's health and activities, and each province asked when he was coming. The local leaders were concerned about the sabotage and opposition of Chiang Kai-shek's troops and their lackeys in Hanoi, and worried about the dangers which might befall Uncle and the Central Committee. During rallies everywhere, youths and children asked why they had not been allowed to enlist, and fighters asked why their units had not been ordered to move South.

The further south we went, the more tumultuous the resistance atmosphere became. The morale of the people in the two provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai was very high. Everyone expressed his determination to fight the French and demanded to go to the front to destroy the enemy. All the girls had cut their hair short.⁶³ Every activity of the enemy, no matter how minute, did not escape the watchful eyes of the people.

In Quang Nam, thirty-seven out of every one hundred *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* had left for combat in the South. Quang Ngai had the highest ratio of fighters going off to the front. Eighty-five out of every one hundred fighters left for various battlefields, leaving only fifteen in the province.

After working with the leading comrades in Quang Ngai for half of the day, I attended an enthusiastic rally in the stadium. That night, I wrote in my travel diary, "This is the eternal spirit of independence of the Vietnamese people. With such a strong and capable people, our Vietnam will certainly achieve complete independence and unification."

Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces were very encouraged to hear me transmit the new directives from Uncle and the Central Committee. Along with making resolute preparations for a protracted resistance in case the war spread here, the leading comrades in these two provinces also discussed sending reinforcements to the front.

Each small village and hamlet along the road seemed to have awakened and become more heroic with the activities of the militia. Militiamen were everywhere, with their simple cotton shirts and brown pants. In their hands they carried either rifles or machetes, or sharpened bamboo sticks, but they radiated an extraordinary strength.

On the 23rd, I continued my journey southward from Quang Ngai with Duc.⁶⁴ Near Binh Dinh we saw a militiaman standing guard on the side of the road, his rifle at the ready. There must have been a guard station nearby. The car was going very fast. Thinking that he must have become a familiar figure around here because of his frequent trips, Duc told the driver to keep going. Suddenly we heard the hissing of bullets and the explosion of the rifle behind. Knowing that we could not hurry past, we stopped the car.

63. Long hair was an encumbrance for girls who wanted to be active. (Trans.)

64. Tran Huu Duc currently holds the position of Vice-Premier for Home Affairs. (Trans.)

As we all got out of the car, two militiamen caught up with us, running, asked why we had dared to drive past the guard station, and demanded to see our papers. We admitted our mistake. Duc showed his letter of introduction which said that his position was Chairman of the Trung Bo (Central Vietnam) Administrative Committee. The militiaman studied the paper for a long time, and then asked in a tone of voice which indicated that he was still annoyed:

- Where is this "Trung Bo" village located?

We had to explain for a while. After hearing our explanation, the angry look on his face vanished, he returned the paper to us and allowed us to pass. Getting into the car we felt both happy and full of respect for him. To raise the educational level of a population newly emerged from a regime of slavery, the revolution would need time. But as far as infusing them with spirit and vigor, the revolution had gone quite a long way in achieving this.

In Binh Dinh the movement to enlist in the army was extremely enthusiastic. In Quy Nhon city there was even a naval unit with close to one hundred men. Even young girls were joining the army. Binh Dinh province had two factories producing and repairing weapons, where 150 workers toiled day and night.

I went to Ninh Hoa with comrade T.2 (the alias of comrade Pham Kiet).⁶⁵ In Ninh Hoa the atmosphere was already a wartime atmosphere. The French had just mobilized 15,000 troops, including an armored regiment, from Saigon and Ban Me Thuot, and moved them to attack Djiling and Dalat.

I arrived at the headquarters of the Region VI Military Committee exactly at the time when the Region Commander was ordering a militia unit, composed of volunteers determined to fight to their death, to go as reinforcements for the M'Drak battlefield. The enemy attacked that whole day. Their armored cars attempted to pierce through M'Drak and advance down toward Ninh Hoa. The units on the frontline reported back by radio. Comrades Nam Long and Huu Thanh were fighting in M'Drak. When they heard the news of my arrival, comrade Nam Long radioed back. We had barely begun to talk when the enemy attacked and the line was cut.

Two days later, we arrived in Khanh Hoa in the late afternoon. The French were attacking in the direction of Nha Trang. Enemy planes hovered over Khanh Hoa, bombing and machine gunning the city. Anti-aircraft guns opened fire. The comrades commanding the battlefront came back to report on the situation, discussed plans of attack and then left in a hurry. In the house next door, a *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* detachment sang the song of troops going off to war. Children continued to play in the yard and only jumped into still shallow individual foxholes when enemy aircraft screeched overhead. Transport trucks camouflaged with leaves carried reinforcements to the front. The fighters in the trucks shouted the slogan "Quyết chiến! Quyết chiến!" ("We're determined to fight!"). In the direction of Nha Trang, enemy artillery continued to thunder, their explosions intermingled with the sound of our mortars returning the fire. In Khanh Hoa, we received many more news concerning the urgent situation of the battlefield in the South.

It was clear the enemy was trying to lift the siege of Nha Trang and to occupy a number of towns along the coast of South Central Vietnam in order to cut the supply line from the North.

65. Pham Kiet led the Ba To uprising in Quang Ngai province in March 1945 and became a leader of the resistance in Central Vietnam. He now holds the rank of Major General and is the commander of the People's Armed Security Forces. (Trans.)

Here, we saw clearly why the South and South Central Vietnam had stood firm during four months of flames and bullets. We had learned many lessons on how to fight the enemy, and we of course would have to continue acquiring more of such bloody experience. But the thing that stood out clearly was the spirit of "we'd rather die as free men than live as slaves" manifest in each citizen. South Central Vietnam was living through difficult moments, but with such a spirit it would remain firm forever, along with the South, and would achieve victory.

I had just arrived in Khanh Hoa when a cable from Uncle summoned me back to the North. We returned to Song Cau, and when we reached Quy Nhon we made a detour and went to visit the battlefield in the Western Highlands. In An Khe, a vast highland region stretched before our eyes. Here, Nguyen Hue⁶⁶ in the old days had raised the standard of revolt. We crossed the Mang Giang pass and reached Pleiku. Most of the people living in Pleiku province were from the Jarai minority. There were many ethnic Vietnamese in the province capital. The troops had made preparations and were ready to fight. Combat troops were already stationed outside the city. We stopped in Pleiku to talk to the people and troops. The fighters were excited when they heard stories of heroism on the frontline and were impatient for the moment to destroy the enemy to arrive.

In the afternoon we continued on to Kontum. A year earlier, this region of perilous mountains was the place where the French imprisoned revolutionaries. The people of Kontum belonged to the Ede, Jarai and Sedang minorities. Part of the troops were stationed inside the city and the rest outside. Ethnic minorities people came to see the representative of the government at the old French Province Chief's residence in the city, located near a stream. Among those attending the meeting was a Catholic priest. Everyone talked about "Bok Ho" (Uncle Ho) and asked about his health. The image of Uncle Ho had reached the simple Western Highlands people early and would become more deeply engraved in the hearts of these minorities.

It was here that I met comrade Duc Thanh, a heroic youth from the forests and mountains of Pac Bo, who had been directly trained and educated by Uncle Ho. He had gone to the Western Highlands with the Southward March troops. Later, I heard the news that he had sacrificed his life in a battle to help the ethnic minorities here protect the forest and mountains of the Western Highlands.

We spent the night in Kontum, and the next morning went out early through the An Khe road. On the eve of the Lunar New Year, our car reached the foot of the Hai Van pass. Through our car windows, all we could see was the sea and the fog. In the middle of this vast darkness in which the sea and sky merged and became indistinguishable, a dot of light flickered. I could not tell whether it was the light aboard a fishing boat returning late from the open seas, or the light in a thatched hut on Tien Cha island.

As we moved up the slope, it began to rain. On one side was a precipice, and on the other side rose straight rocky cliffs. The wind blew desolate from the forests. This pass had the reputation of being perilous, [and according to a popular saying] "one man holding the pass can prevent ten thousand people from going through." In the previous century, the patriotic scholars Nguyen Xuan On⁶⁷ and Nguyen Thong,⁶⁸

66. Nguyen Hue led the Tay Son rebellion against the Nguyen and Trinh Lords and proclaimed himself Emperor Quang Trung in 1788 after defeating a Chinese army sent to the rescue of the decaying Lê Dynasty. His reign was short-lived--he died in 1792. (Trans.)

67. Nguyen Xuan On was the leader of a resistance movement against the French in Nghe An province from 1885 to 1887. He was captured by the French in 1887 and taken to Hue where he died shortly thereafter. (Trans.)

68. Nguyen Thong was a famous scholar under the reign of Emperor Tu Duc. Born in

their hearts heavy with the sorrow of their failure to resist the French, had composed poems when they passed through here. A Chinese KMT soldier appeared on the side of the road, and asked the car to stop for inspection. After looking at our papers, he let the car pass. In the provinces of Central Vietnam, the Chinese troops and officers maintained a reasonable attitude. The fog was very dense. It rained harder and harder. The car headlights could illuminate only five or six meters in front of us.

Only a few months had passed, but so many changes had taken place. A foreigner who knew of our activities in the War Zone before the General Insurrection had said, "Your life is really marvellous and interesting. One week, you were still secretly moving in the green forest. A week later, you were in the middle of the capital, each man performing a different task. If I could write, I'd write your stories.!" The wheel of history seemed to revolve at full speed. For the revolutionaries, each day, each hour seemed to go by too quickly. Time was in a hurry. Spring came to us while we were still making our way with difficulty up the mountain pass on a rainy night.

I wondered what Uncle and the other brothers were doing at this hour. The first New Year of independence in the capital must be very happy. About ten days ago, we had heard Uncle's letter appealing to the people and organizations to share their common joy with the fighters on the frontline and with the soldiers' families. This evening, when passing through Danang, we had the opportunity to read this New Year's letter. Uncle reserved his warm feelings for the fighters who were "burning gun powder to protect the Fatherland while the people were burning firecrackers to welcome Spring.!" In his letter, Uncle wrote a few verses:

"When the resistance is victorious
We'll together drink a cup of peach wine
This New Year, we're temporarily separated
Next year we'll certainly be reunited."

This New Year letter was addressed to the whole country, but each person who read it felt as though it had been specially written for himself.

We arrived in Hue the next day. We attended a huge rally at the Thuong Bac quay to welcome Spring. A vast sea of people, flags and banners. The spring afternoon was warm with sunshine. All the people of Hue were here, and were very excited when they heard the news about the situation on the frontline, and the determination of President Ho and the government to intensify the resistance and to resolutely prepare for a protracted resistance in case the enemy expanded the war. The slogans, "Long live independent Vietnam!" "Long live President Ho!" "Prepare for a protracted resistance," and "Support the resistance in the South" rose like rolling thunder to conclude the meeting. For the first time in the history of Hue, our people had welcomed Spring with the shouts "Quyết chiến!" ("Determined to fight!").

Gia Dinh, South Vietnam, he passed the licence examination in 1849, and was appointed Director of Education (Doc Hoc) for the province of Vinh Long. He opposed French invasion of Vietnam in his writings and, as a protest against French conquest of the six provinces of South Vietnam, he moved his family to Binh Thuan which was then still under the rule of the Vietnamese emperor.
(Trans.)

CHAPTER XX

"Each year begins with the arrival of spring." Uncle wrote three letters addressed to the people, the fighters, the youths and children on the occasion of the Binh Tuat New Year [1946].ⁱ This spring was the first spring heralding more springs of independence and freedom in our country. In Uncle's opinion, this Tet (Lunar New Year) was the time to create a "New Life," a time for everyone--rich and poor, young and old--to share their common joy, to think of the soldiers fighting on the front-line.

New Year's eve in Hanoi. As was the custom, the gates of the houses on both sides of the streets were tightly shut on these last nights of the year. In material terms, life was still difficult, but the atmosphere of this Tet of Independence had pervaded each house. Rich and poor, each family had erected a Fatherland altar, displayed flags, offerings of water and flowers, Uncle's picture and lit oil lamps. No one need worry any longer about bringing gifts to their "superior mandarins" and to government officials--a widespread concern among the city people under the French. After the offerings to the ancestors had been consumed, the conversation in each family turned to the discussion of the huge rally of the entire city to welcome spring scheduled for the next day, and to the resistance in the South. A few days earlier, the self-defense units of each city ward had written New Year greetings, reminding the population to constantly think of the fighters who were sacrificing their blood and bones on the frontline, to celebrate the New Year of Independence with happiness and joy, but to cut down on expenses and send the money to the Committees for the Support of the Resistance in the South.

[Hung],⁶⁹ the Chairman of the City Administrative Committee, had just finished his dinner at his private home when Uncle arrived. He came unexpectedly, without announcing his visit in advance. He wanted to go and extend his wishes to the people of the capital on the occasion of Tet. It rained in a light drizzle. The streets, fragrant with the smell of exploded firecrackers, were deserted. The colors of the flags looked darker at night under the lights. Hung took Uncle to the house of a family in Cua Nam (East Gate) street. The head of the family was a self-defense company commander, and his whole family was enthusiastically participating in national salvation activities.

After he left this house Uncle wanted to visit a working class quarter. He asked to be taken to a very poor family. There were still many poor families in the city, but to which house should Uncle be taken? Uncle ordered the car to stop in front of a small alley off Sinh Tu street, the Hang Dua alley. These alleys and these quarters were the seamy side of the city, and for close to one hundred years the colonialists had never given a thought to improving them, even by just installing a water fountain or a street light.

It was dark. The road was bumpy and muddy because of the rain. The flags hanging in front of the low houses touched the heads of the passers-by. Uncle advanced deep into the alley. The door of a house was ajar, and the inside was lit by an oil lamp. Uncle stopped and then went in. The house was quite crowded since many families were sharing it. On the wall in the middle of the house were hung the national flag, Uncle's picture and garlands of paper flowers. People were sitting

69. This refers to Tran Duy Hung who currently still holds the position of Chairman of the Administrative Committee of Hanoi. (Trans.)

and talking merrily. The conversation stopped when an old man, wearing a khaki jacket with a high collar and leaning on a stick, entered.

At first the people looked at each other, each family thinking that the old man was the guest of the other families. Uncle asked them about the preparations they had made for Tet. The people in the house answered good-naturedly. The pot of glutinous rice cakes was boiling in a corner of the yard. Uncle's eyes shone with joy and he said his Tet greetings. Everyone suddenly recognized that the kind old man coming to visit their families this evening was President Ho himself. It was like a beautiful dream: the man in the picture hanging there on the wall had stepped out and stood in their poor and humble house. In contrast to when Uncle first entered, everyone was speechless. All eyes focused on him. He said:

- Our country has just regained independence. The South is still resisting. Our workers are still having a rough time making ends meet, but now that we have independence we will have everything.

Uncle left while the people in the house were still stunned with emotion. In this first spring of independence Uncle wanted to bring happiness to many families in the city. By the time he arrived at the house of a poor government employee in Hang Long street, it was already very late. The people in the house were getting ready to go to bed. Mosquito nets had been hung. The wire strung in the middle of the house was full of clothes. No one in the family had thought that a guest would arrive at this hour, and expected even less that the guest would be the President of the country.

Uncle's program of going to extend his Tet wishes on the eve of the Lunar New Year was completed. Tomorrow, on the first day of Tet, he would have many things to attend to. He would receive the comrades in the Central Committee and in the government, and representatives of organizations coming to present their Tet wishes. He would attend the spring rally for the population of the entire city organized at the square in front of the Opera House. He would visit and talk with a *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* unit, play with children at the kindergarten, and attend a celebration dinner with the guards at the *Résidence Supérieure*.

After seeing Uncle off, the Chairman of the City Administrative Committee went home. As the hour before the New Year approached, he went to the Hoan Kiem lake to welcome spring. The streets that had been deserted earlier were now extremely crowded. Everyone wanted to enjoy the pure air of the first spring of independence. Never before in Hanoi had there been such a crowded and exciting transition night.

The firecrackers welcoming spring began to explode all over the city. Carried away, in his happiness, Hung followed the people going to gather the first buds of spring,⁷⁰ and arrived in front of the Ngoc Son⁷¹ pagoda. As he entered the pagoda, he suddenly saw among the bustling crowd of people on the The Huc⁷² bridge an old man wearing a long gown and a scarf covering part of his face. One quick glance at

70. It is the custom on the eve of Tet to go and gather the small branches of plants that are beginning to bud with the return with warm spring weather. One's fortune for the new year can be gathered from the number of buds on the bough one takes home--a large number indicates good fortune, and a small number a not so good fortune. (Trans.)

71. Ngoc Son pagoda on the Hoan Kiem lake is a famous site in Hanoi. On New Year's eve the people of the city traditionally go there to gather spring boughs and to worship. (Trans.)

72. The The Duc bridge is the curved wooden bridge leading from the lake shore to the Ngoc Son pagoda. (Trans.)

the old man's eyes and Hung recognized President Ho. Uncle was walking slowly among the people jostling to enter the pagoda. The Chairman of the City Administrative Committee then saw a man standing near-by who signalled to him with his eyes. It was Uncle's bodyguard. Uncle did not want the people around to recognize him.

Uncle had witnessed the arrival of spring in a family enthusiastically participating in revolutionary missions. He had also witnessed the coming of spring in a workers' quarter and at the home of a poor government employee. But he also wanted to experience the moments when spring arrived here, among the people, in the streets, in a pagoda lying in the middle of Hoan Kiem lake, familiar to the people of Hanoi. The people who went to the Ngoc Son pagoda that night to usher in the New Year, did they notice that their spring branches were full of buds?

After I returned to Hanoi, the comrades who had accompanied Uncle on New Year's eve related these stories to me. Since then, Uncle practically passed every New Year's eve in the same manner. He went out to extend his Tet greetings to the people. The houses he visited were always the families who had contributed to the revolution, or whose sons were in the army, or families of workers--usually poor ones. Uncle's visits were always sudden and unexpected. He wanted to bring to these families a happiness they had not expected. He also wanted to understand the true atmosphere in each household on those days of celebration. All these activities became simple habits in his very simple and extremely great life.

CHAPTER XXI

I returned to Hanoi right at the moment when the people were in an uproar and angry because French troops had moved into Lai Chau. These were the remnants of French forces under Alessandri who had fled from the Japanese at the time of the Japanese coup on March 9, 1945. Since then, they had been kept by the Chiang Kai-shek government in an area near the China-Vietnam border. In fact, this group had crossed the border at the end of January. Right during the days of Tet, a number of *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* units had received the order to move urgently into the Northwest to block the enemy.

In this period, rumors spread thicker and thicker that Chiang Kai-shek and the French were conferring on the question of Indochina in Chungking. This news had been disseminated by Western news agencies. Chungking remained silent, neither mentioning the conference nor denying the rumor.

The newspapers in Hanoi flocked to interview Lu Han, who declared that the French soldiers entering Lai Chau had been permitted by Chungking to do so. He added that the French had had to follow a route determined in advance. When asked by the newspapers whether the news concerning the Sino-French negotiations was correct or incorrect, Lu Han replied he knew nothing about this.

Also at that time, the French mission in Hanoi sent an intermediary to propose a meeting with us. At the beginning of September the previous year, a foreigner appeared one day in front of the *Résidence Supérieure*, and asked for permission to enter. The guards thought he was a member of the American delegation. When he was taken to the reception desk, he introduced himself as a French officer, said he had something to communicate and asked to see a representative of our government. Hoang Minh Giam⁷³ went out to see him. The officer transmitted Sainteny's request for a discussion with an authoritative representative of the government. He complained that the French delegation was virtually held prisoners by Japanese troops in the *Gouvernement Général* palace, and said that he had tried all sorts of ways before succeeding in getting out here. We felt it was necessary to find out more about the attitude of the French. Giam went to the Japanese general headquarters to meet Sainteny, who expressed his desire to present to our government the French viewpoint on the Indochina question.

Some time later, on Sainteny's proposal, Giam took him to the *Résidence Supérieure*. Uncle and the brothers assigned me to receive him. Sainteny expressed his ideas on French-Vietnamese relations. He appeared flexible and reasonable, but in substance his words were not too different from what De Gaulle had declared previously. That day, Sainteny complained that when he crossed the gate of the *Résidence Supérieure*, the soldier on guard duty had displayed an unfriendly attitude. But actually, the guard was only saluting him with his rifle attached with a bayonet, in the style adopted by our army at the time. From then on, exchange of ideas occasionally resumed between us and the French. Our position was that France had to recognize the independence and territorial integrity of Vietnam before other issues could be discussed.

The French returned and invaded South Vietnam. The war expanded with each passing day. There were times when the discussion became tense. Uncle constantly

73. Hoang Minh Giam is the DRV Minister of Culture. (Trans.)

reminded us that we had to maintain our just stand and explain what was right and wrong, but we should also keep a calm attitude. The exchanges of ideas did not lead to any agreement and were interrupted.

Meeting us again this time, the French mission informed us of the Sino-French agreement on Indochina which would be signed soon. They said they wanted to negotiate a political settlement with us; if we refused, things detrimental to future French-Vietnamese relations might occur.

On February 20th, Moutet, the Minister of Overseas Territories, announced in Paris the clauses of the Sino-French accord. The most important clause was that Chungking agreed to allow the French to bring troops to Northern Indochina to replace Chinese troops which would be withdrawn. Reuters announced this news and coupled it with a threat: "Perhaps the French government would not hesitate to use force if Vietnam refused to accept a settlement." It was clear that the enemies had begun to compromise with each other. The fact that Chiang allowed a number of French troops to return to Lai Chau was a concrete sign.

The French government and also the French mission in Hanoi hoped to use the Sino-French agreement, which had not been signed at that point, to put pressure on us in their discussions.

The VNQDD suddenly carried out violent opposition and sabotage activities. They sent people to disseminate leaflets in each street, appeal to the people of Hanoi to go on a general strike, and protest against the government. They had seen that in the bargain being negotiated neither Chungking nor the French had taken them into consideration. They also "smelled" that the French wanted to settle with us. In this new situation, the fate of their followers was threatened. In their frenzy, they directed their attacks on us. Their action also reflected the desire of the Chinese militarists who were directly commanding the lackeys in Hanoi.

In the morning of 20 February, the thugs blocked the entrance to the capital at a number of city gates. They stopped the peasants coming from outside from carrying their products into the city to sell. One fellow jumped aboard a tramway, locked the engine and forbade the driver to run the car. Another went to a government office, snatched the keys from the hands of the janitor and prevented him from opening the door to let government employees in. A number of men pushed their way into the Dong Xuan market. They climbed on stands and shouted to the shoppers and merchants to disperse. The women selling vegetables and fruit pulled out their carrying poles, chased them and beat them up, and they had to flee.

In the same morning, about 100 thugs gathered on Quan Thanh street. They hoisted a yellow flag inscribed with two words "Dân chúng" (people), then they began to march, shouting and screaming as they went. Those who wore khaki clothes, sunglasses and boots, raised their rifles and forced the people along the way to join the march. They shouted, "Down with the government!" "Down with the pro-French traitors!" and "Set up a new government under the leadership of Government Advisor Vinh Thuy!" They insulted the people standing guard in front of houses on both sides of the streets who either cursed them or watched them with eyes full of contempt. The reactionaries poured toward the Hoan Kiem lake, and headed for the City Hall. People from all directions swarmed around the lake.

A youth went and pulled down the flag hung in front of the Vietnam News Agency, and raised it high. Everyone flocked around him, automatically falling into ranks. A demonstration took shape, composed of thousands of people who raised their arms and shouted slogans supporting the government as they marched.

The fellows carrying the sign "People" had arrived in front of the City Hall. Suddenly right within this group resounded the shout, "Support the Ho Chi Minh government!" and "Down with the saboteurs!" The people standing around immediately

chorused these slogans with loud shouts. A fist fight broke out right within the ranks [of the reactionaries]. The men whom they had forced to join their march turned around and punished them with the help of the people.

At that moment, the people's demonstration arrived in force. The reactionaries panicked, rolled up their banners and flags, and fled. The people marched past the City Hall to Duy Tan street⁷⁴ and then headed toward the Résidence Supérieure. The youths and children in the surrounding streets had gathered in time. They beat their drums and led the newly victorious marchers. The demonstration poured toward the Résidence Supérieure and grew with each passing moment. Uncle appeared at the window, and waved to the people. Shouts of "Long live President Ho!" rose like rolling thunder.

On the 21st, the VNQDD organized another demonstration with a few hundred people. They resumed their shouting and screaming, and demanded that Vinh Thuy assume power. They flocked to Vinh Thuy's house on Tran Hung Dao street. The reactionaries sent a representative inside to request an audience with the Advisor to express the aspirations of the "people." Vinh Thuy avoided him and did not meet him.

In the streets through which the reactionaries marched, the people hung out flags in front of their houses and slammed their doors noisily to express their attitude. The passers-by shouted slogans opposing them. Children, acting on their own, ran in front of the demonstrators shouting "Long live President Ho!" Once in a while a fight broke out between the people and the agitators. From the upper floors of houses and from alleys, bricks and stones occasionally flew out to hit the fellows wearing sunglasses and boots who were shouting and screaming, their arms raised.

It could be that Vinh Thuy at that time was entertaining dishonest intentions, but in answer to the reactionaries' request that he assume power, he told newspaper reporters the next day: ". . . In my opinion, a group of men could not be said to constitute the people. The election of the president of Vietnam will be decided by the National Congress because Congress alone is the official representative of the people in the whole country. When a group of people want someone to be president, it does not mean that that person immediately becomes president.'

74. Now called Hang Bai street. (Footnote in text.)

CHAPTER XXII

The activities to prepare for the resistance in all aspects which had been initiated earlier were now intensified. The greatest difficulty at this point was to make the people understand the critical situation without adversely influencing their fighting spirit. How to heighten a spirit of preparedness to resist while avoiding provocations against Chiang Kai-shek's troops? How to keep the people from being demoralized and confused by the enemy's treacherous and extremely dangerous propaganda which was being spread from all directions, and to make them remain confident in the government and stay calm so as to cope with all complicated and critical situations which might develop?

On February 22nd, under the format of an "Appeal to Firmly Maintain and Intensify the Resistance in the South," Uncle wrote:

At present besides the military war, the French colonialists are using propaganda warfare; they distribute leaflets, post slogans, spread false rumors, in the hope of demoralizing and worrying our people: they are assaulting our morale.

Men of ancient times said: "It is best to assault the heart; attacking fortresses comes second in importance." So a nation which is fighting like ours is doing must be always prepared, and at the same time remain calm, determined and ready to deal with all eventualities.

Whenever the enemy approaches an area, the people there must absolutely apply the tactic of deserting their homes and leaving their gardens empty, so that the enemy will find themselves without food, without accommodation and without roads to travel on, and become exhausted. As long as we hold an inch of ground, as long as there remains one citizen, fighting will continue; and we will remain ready and will never hesitate or become demoralized.

President Ho also raised basic questions: the resistance would be prolonged and would involve the whole population; we would attack the enemy with military as well as political, economic and diplomatic means, and he stressed:

First of all, [we will resist] with our spirit: we will not become discouraged by defeats or arrogant with victories; if we lose one battle we will carry out another one. . . . We will pull our common strength, unite in one accord, maintain order and obey the orders of the government.

This was actually Uncle's appeal to the people of the whole country to get ready to enter into a protracted war involving the entire population and covering all aspects, and to oppose all enemies in front of us, behind us, and right by our sides.

The newspapers in Hanoi came to interview President Ho on the Sino-French accord. Uncle replied: "Since China has not made an announcement, and since this news has been spread by Reuters, I cannot at this point make any comments." He recalled the Three People's Principles of Sun Yat Sen and the resistance of the Chinese people to protect their independence. Though he did not directly condemn the Chiang Kai-shek government, he did show clearly to the people the treacherous and reactionary actions of Chungking.

In those difficult moments, our newspapers fulfilled their duty of guiding public opinion. Concerning the negotiations with the French, the newspaper *Cứu Quốc* (National Salvation), the official organ of the Viet Minh General Headquarters (Tổng Bộ), wrote: "Whether we enjoy complete independence or not depends on our fighting force on the battlefield. . . . When the French want to negotiate, this is the moment for us to fight decisively and to prepare even more fully for war in order to demand complete independence. . . . We do not refuse to negotiate, but we absolutely should not allow the negotiation to become a favorable delaying tactic for the enemy. We are also determined not to let the negotiation lull our nation's fighting spirit into sleep. . . . Our nation's fate has always been decided by our fighting strength."

In Hanoi, the combat self-defense force, the propaganda teams of the Viet Minh City Headquarters, and National Salvation youths fanned out to every ward in the city. They explained [the situation] to the people and helped the city self-defense units get ready for combat. As Chinese KMT troops were present everywhere, all activities had to be carried out discretely. We could not start to dig trenches and build barricades in front of them. The self-defense fighters learned how to use mines so that they could rapidly create obstacles in the city if fighting broke out.

Vệ Quốc Đoàn units were ordered to check all preparations for combat. The Hanoi Administrative Committee mobilized old people and children to temporarily evacuate the city. Newspapers and associations called on the people in the countryside to show a friendly attitude toward the city residents evacuating to their areas, and to do their best to help them.

Along with making preparations for the resistance everywhere, we continued to move toward the formation of a coalition government to highlight the success of the General Elections. Up to that point, negotiations with the reactionary political parties had not brought any results. The VNQDD demanded that we reserve for them seven out of ten ministries in the new government, as well as other important positions. Even their Chinese bosses recognized that these demands were excessive.

The convocation of the National Congress drew near. In spite of the fierce daily opposition and sabotage of the reactionaries, we remained patient and tried to contain their provocations. The situation was extremely critical. A large-scale war could break out in the near future. Uncle saw Hsiao Wen and tried to persuade him. We pointed out the necessity of forming immediately a resistance coalition government composed of members of political parties and of people without political affiliation. In the end, after weighing the pros and cons, and seeing that there could be no favorable solution, Hsiao Wen forced his lackeys to accept our solution.

The National Congress was convening in less than a week. It was only then that the reactionaries agreed to form a resistance coalition government. There would be ten ministries in the new government. The two important ministries of Internal Security and National Defense would be given to neutral people. The Viet Minh Front and the Democratic Party⁷⁵ would hold four ministries. The Vietnam Revolutionary League and VNQDD would hold four ministries. In addition, they agreed with us to create a National Resistance Committee (Ủy Ban Kháng Chiến Toàn Quốc) and a National Board of Counsellors (Đoàn Cố Vấn Quốc Gia).

Mr. Huynh Thuc Khang⁷⁶ was invited to come from Central Vietnam to join the new government. I had known Mr. Huynh since the days when I worked for the *Tiếng Dân*

75. The Democracy Party (Đảng Dân Chủ) had been set up by the Viet Minh to win the support of intellectuals in the North. (Trans.)

76. Huynh Thuc Khang (1876-1947) was a famous Confucian scholar who led the protest movement against taxation in Quang Nam, his native province, in 1908. Arrested and jailed on Poulo Condore island, he was released in 1921. In 1927 he started

(People's Voice) newspaper in Hue. He was a Confucian scholar of great patriotism, courage and integrity, but he did not have complete confidence in the revolutionary policy of our Party. When we dispatched a messenger to invite him, he was hesitant at first, partly because he felt he was too old, and partly because he did not know what the leaders of the "young generation" were like. It was only when he heard President Ho was comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc himself that he decided to go to Hanoi. He wanted to know what kind of man the revolutionary Nguyen Ai Quoc, whose reputation he had heard for a long time, was.

In a meeting with us after arriving in Hanoi he expressed concern about what he called the ongoing "power struggle between political parties." In his opinion, both the Viet Minh and the Vietnam Revolutionary League were struggling for the people, and their leaders were all patriotic men who had spent many years overseas. Now they should place national interests above all else and unite with each other, and they should not clash over partisan issues.

The first meeting between Uncle and Mr. Huynh was very moving. They both quickened their steps and then embraced each other, tears suddenly filling their eyes. They reminisced about the old Second Laureate (Cụ Phó Bàng) who had travelled North and South on many occasions, braving hardships and difficulties, in those long years of darkness and gloom.⁷⁷ And right in the first moments, Mr. Huynh found a very close friend in the famous revolutionary whom he had wanted to meet for so long. After the meeting with Uncle, Mr. Huynh told a friend, "It is a great blessing for our people to have Mr. Ho." He placed his complete faith in Uncle. Though he was much older than Uncle, he always referred to him as "the old father of the nation" whenever he mentioned him.

Mr. Huynh accepted the position of Minister of the Interior in the Resistance Coalition Government to be established.

"Tiếng Dân" (The People's Voice), which was the first newspaper to be published in Central Vietnam. The newspaper was closed down in 1943. (Trans.)

77. Nguyen Dinh Sac, Ho's father, was a sub-prefect in Binh Dinh province until 1915 when he was dismissed for his anti-French attitude. After his dismissal, he wandered from place to place, supporting himself by giving oriental medical treatments. He died in South Vietnam in 1930. (Trans.)

CHAPTER XXIII

The profound changes in Vietnamese society combined with the heroic resistance of our people in the South gradually affected the thinking of a number of men who were in step with the times within the ranks of the French generals and high ranking officers. They felt that De Gaulle's declaration of March 24, 1945 was decades behind the time when compared to the prevailing situation here.

According to French documents, after occupying a number of provinces in the South, the French general staff in Saigon prepared a military plan for a return to the North. In general outline, this plan was as follows: the armored units of Massu and the light and mobile troops of Valluy, with the support of artillery units, would land in Haiphong. Paratroopers would be dropped to occupy a number of vital points in Hanoi, paralyze our central government, liberate 5,000 French troops being imprisoned in the city, quickly rearm them, and assign them the task of helping the paratroops keep Hanoi until the arrival of the armored units; then all forces would advance from there to occupy every strategic position.

However, the French command staff had reservations about this plan because it was highly adventurous. The number of French expeditionary troops in the South had already reached 35,000 men. And the reality of the war had demonstrated that even if the French generals had at their disposal a force several times larger, they would not be able to bring the situation in the South back to what it had been before the overthrow of the French.

In this situation, if they expanded the war to the whole of Vietnam, they would have to cope with the strength of an entire nation. The French generals and high-ranking officers also knew for certain that they would encounter in the North resistance forces several times larger and stronger than the forces they had met in the South. In order to restore colonial domination here, Leclerc figured that he would need an expeditionary corps of 350,000 men, composed entirely of whites.⁷⁸ This was something that France, exhausted after the Second World War, could not provide. And Leclerc realized that even if he could obtain such a large force, the restoration of French position would demand time and would run into many serious difficulties and obstacles. Besides, there were in the North 180,000 Chinese soldiers performing the task of disarming the Japanese. In bringing their troops to the North, it was more than likely that the French might clash with them. And this would be extremely dangerous.

The French generals and high-ranking officers who were more or less in step with the times saw that a settlement appropriate to the situation in Indochina had to be a political one: negotiating with Chungking to have Chiang Kai-shek withdraw his troops and allow French forces to replace them, and negotiating with the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to avoid a protracted war from which it would be difficult for French to extricate herself. The French government had early on tried to negotiate with Chungking. This was an arduous task which, however, was not filled entirely with difficulties.

Previously China had been a victim of France, but now she was one of the five powers in the world. In reality, however, the Chiang Kai-shek government remained

78. The French expeditionary corps was composed in large part of troops recruited from the French colonies. (Trans.)

dependent on the Americans in many respects. There was no love lost between the French and the Americans. However, the French, the Americans and the British shared a common concern, and that was the powerful development of the Soviet Union after World War II. This 'menace,' many Western strategists had complained bitterly, was due to the Allied defeat of fascism during the Second World War. The Americans were making strong efforts to assemble the forces of capitalist countries in Europe to cope with the so-called "Russian threat." Therefore, the Americans could not remain too indifferent to French interests.

In his trip to the United States at the end of August 1945, De Gaulle had broached with Truman the question of American assistance to France on the Indochina issue. Meanwhile the situation in China was placing Chiang in a difficult position. After the surrender of the Japanese fascists, with the tide of revolution rising strongly, the KMT militarists were forced to sign with the Chinese Communist Party the "Agreement of October 10." The two sides agreed to avoid civil war and to use unification, unity, democracy and peace as the basis for the convocation of a political consultative conference. Before the ink on the document was dry, Chiang Kai-shek sent 1,800,000 troops to storm the revolutionary bases. They hoped with this unexpected treacherous action to quickly crush the Red Army. However, they ran into a decisive counter-attack on all fronts. Fighting broke out in eleven provinces. Within one month 110,000 KMT troops were destroyed. The revolutionary flames flared up all over the Chinese mainland. Chiang was forced to find a delaying tactic to prepare his forces by signing the ceasefire agreement of January 10, 1946 and by initiating the political consultative conference.

Chiang Kai-shek was running into many difficulties. Perhaps in this situation he would have to withdraw the bulk of his forces in Northern Indochina back to China to consolidate his rear. At the beginning of January 1946, Leclerc sent a negotiator to Chungking. This was General Salan, the man who had been appointed to replace General Alessandri as the commander of French forces in Northern Indochina. Salan achieved an initial success by obtaining Chungking's permission for French troops detained in China to return to Lai Chau.

Around the middle of January, on the occasion of a U.N. meeting, the French government sent Moutet to meet the representative of Chiang Kai-shek to present concrete conditions for negotiation. Chiang Kai-shek seemed favorably disposed when he received the report. Paris immediately sent a new ambassador, Meyrier, to Chungking with instructions from the French government to obtain an agreement within the shortest time possible. However, Chungking wanted to prolong the talks and to obtain more favorable terms by remaining indifferent and haughty.

As far as negotiating with Chiang was concerned, all the French colonialists were in agreement. However, when it came to negotiating with us, many colonialists openly expressed their opposition. De Gaulle still wanted to maintain the French empire in its former condition. He refused to listen to the advice of people who had what was called an inclination toward "liberty." D'Argenlieu, the high commissioner, an extremely conservative colonialist general loyal to the view and policy of De Gaulle, wanted to preserve intact the special privileges and interests of France. The French colonialists with privileges and interests in Indochina, especially the former administrators, were angered when they heard about talks of negotiating with the DRV. To them, there was only one problem at issue: the restoration of the old colonialist regime to its pre-March 9, 1945 situation. They felt that negotiating with us was a humiliating surrender.

On January 20th, 1946, the political situation in France went through some changes. De Gaulle resigned. Félix Gouin, a member of the Socialist Party, replaced him. Leclerc's plan to negotiate with the Vietnamese government was considered appropriate by Paris. D'Argenlieu felt he had to return to France to defend his policy, and left Saigon on February 13th. While deputizing for d'Argenlieu, Leclerc

directed the French mission in Chungking to try and obtain an early agreement with Chiang, and at the same time he urged Sainteny to push forward the negotiations with our government.

The French negotiating position as presented by the French mission in Hanoi to us this time was somewhat different from the previous one. However, France still refused to accept our basic demands: independence and territorial integrity. Uncle's unchanging attitude, calm but extremely determined, gave the French negotiators food for thought.

In Chungking, the bargaining between the French government and the Chiang Kai-shek gang finally reached a price acceptable to both sides. The French agreed to return to Chiang their concessions in Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow and Kwangtung, and their leased territory in Kwangchou Wan, and to sell their railway in Yunnan. With complete disregard for our national sovereignty, they agreed with Chiang Kai-shek's gang that Haiphong would become a free port, and that Chinese merchandise transported through the North would be exempted from custom duties. In exchange for these rights and privileges, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to let French forces replace his troops in Northern Indochina, with the relief of forces to be completed within the period from March 1 to 15, or at the latest by March 31, 1946.

This was the content of the Sino-French accord signed on February 28th, 1946. After the signing of the agreement, Salan hurriedly returned to Hanoi to prepare for the return of French troops to the North. Crépin⁷⁹ remained in Chungking to continue discussing with Chiang the procedures for the relief of forces.

On March 1st, Leclerc received the news from Chungking that everything had been settled. French warships had been waiting in their port for many days. According to French documents which became known to us later, Leclerc immediately put the paratroops on alert and ordered the warships to weigh anchor and leave port.

79. Colonel Crépin was the assistant for General Salan. (Trans.)

CHAPTER XXIV

Six months earlier, Chungking poured her troops into the North. Our people's political strength and their high morale, combined with the lines and policies of our Party and of President Ho foiled the enemy's first attempt at invasion. But they remained a peril. However, the revolutionary government had not ceased to be consolidated. By placating Chiang Kai-shek we had to some extent transformed their forces into an obstacle temporarily blocking the return of French troops to the North.

While preparing to guard against the French expanding the war, Uncle and the Central Committee proposed to mobilize the strength of the whole country to help the people in the South overcome the first difficult moments of the resistance. Our people absolutely applied what the Party had clearly pointed out at the National Congress in Tan Trao: "Only our true strength will determine our success." To obtain at all costs important victories on the battlefield was the most effective way of protecting the revolutionary government.

The French simultaneously launched attacks on several different fronts. In the military field, they intensified their "pacification" operations in the South, encroached on the provinces of South Central Vietnam to put themselves in a favorable position, and at the same time were preparing plans for their return to the North. In the diplomatic field they made decisive efforts to strike a bargain with Chiang Kai-shek in order to present our people with a *fait accompli*. In their talks with us they constantly mentioned news concerning the Sino-French accord in the hope of demoralizing our people. The reactionary VNQDD, fomenting their own dark schemes, coordinated rather tightly with French propaganda warfare activities. The situation had changed. Previously we had tried by every means possible to take advantage of the conflict between the French and Chiang in order to focus our strength on the French. Now our two enemies had compromised with each other. They had joined hands in a common conspiracy against us. The revolution was confronted with a difficult and critical situation.

Right after the Sino-French treaty was announced, the Standing Committee made the assessment that this was not simply a bargain between the French and Chiang. This was actually a compromise between the Americans, the British, the French and Chiang on the Indochina question. They had temporarily put aside a particular conflict in order to salvage their common interests which were being threatened by the new revolutionary high tides.

Chiang would force our people to accept the terms he had signed with the French. Before withdrawing their forces, they would attempt to change the composition of our government and bring in their reactionary lackeys. In addition, the Chinese generals here would try by every means possible to hinder our negotiations with France in order to prolong their stay in the North and gather more plunder.

The gravest danger at this juncture was the VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League. They pretended to be the most zealous revolutionaries. They tried to incite the masses with the slogans: "Let us not negotiate with anyone!" and "Either win or die!" They wanted to torpedo our negotiations with the French. Their plot was to push us to oppose the Sino-French treaty since this would give both the French and Chiang the excuse to ally with each other to destroy the revolution. Chiang Kai-shek and the French would accuse us of opposing the Allies and peace. While we tried to stop French forces from advancing into the North, the reactionaries would quickly

set up a puppet government opposing us, and depending on how the situation developed, they would switch their masters. Chinese forces would cling to this opportunity and prolong their stay in Indochina.⁸⁰

The situation changed rapidly. However, our Party and President Ho, with their foresight and perception, had forecast this development. As far back as the last week of November 1945, in the directive "Resist Foreign Aggression and Rebuild the Country," the Central Committee had observed that the imperialists would compromise with each other and allow the French to return. And this point had been raised even earlier, at the Party National Congress held in Tan Trao prior to the successful August Revolution.

To Uncle and the Central Committee, the situation was only evolving exactly in the manner we had forecast. In the brief period just gone by, the Party had resolutely prepared to cope with such a situation. Whether they wanted to or not, the French imperialists had seen a new reality: the whole Vietnamese nation had united and risen up to fight to the death against the aggressors. The DRV had a government which had the strength to mobilize and organize the entire population to resist, and which possessed the authority, prestige and ability to decide all problems dealing with the national sovereignty, the future and fate of its nation. And the French colonialists could not close their eyes and ignore this reality, even after they had concluded the settlement with Chiang. A clear evidence of this was that the French mission in Hanoi had on several occasions asked to meet with our government.

The question at this point was whether to make peace or war with the French. The answer was supplied by Uncle and the Standing Committee:

We can say outright that if the French maintain the position that they would recognize only an autonomous Indochina as stated in the declaration of 24 March 1945, we will certainly fight and we will probably carry out a protracted war using guerrilla tactics. However, if France recognizes the independence of Indochina, we will probably make peace in order to foil the plot of the Chiang gang, the Vietnamese reactionaries and the remaining French fascists, who would like to lock us in a position of isolation and force us to fight several enemies at once.

Our position in the negotiations was to obtain *independence* at all costs and at the same time to *ally* with the French. France had to recognize our nation's self-determination and the national unification of our country. We could agree to allow France to temporarily introduce a number of troops into the North to perform the task of disarming the Japanese and relieve the Chinese forces. However, French troops would only be permitted to stay for a specific length of time. By making peace with the French we would "obtain a breathing spell to prepare for the new struggle and coordinate it with the struggle of the French people,⁸¹ in order to advance toward the acquisition of complete independence."

80. See the directive, "The Situation and Our Policy," of the Party Standing Committee, dated 3 March 1946. (Footnote in text.)

81. The Viet Minh were hoping that the socialist government of Félix Gouin would be more favorably disposed toward granting independence to Vietnam. They were disappointed later when the French leftist dominated government proved as unsympathetic to the cause of Vietnamese independence as previous governments had been. On April 25, 1946, Maurice Thorez, the Chairman of the French Socialist Party and the vice-president of the Council of Ministers, commented to Jean Sainteny on the March 6, 1946 agreements, on the eve of the Fontainebleau Conference: "The agreements are very satisfactory, and we have nothing to add or subtract. If the Vietnamese do not respect the terms, we will take the necessary measures, and let guns speak for us, if need be." Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 71. (Trans.)

The Central Committee stressed an important point:

The vital thing is that when we open negotiations with the French we should not for a moment suspend our preparations, so as to be ready to resist at any moment, anywhere. We should, on the contrary, devote all our energy to intensify these preparations, and we absolutely should not allow the negotiations with the French to dampen our nation's spirit of determination to fight⁸²

On the basis of these guidelines of the Central Committee, throughout the duration of the negotiations the troops and people of the South never ceased to intensify the resistance on all fronts. The people of the whole country resolutely prepared themselves mentally and organizationally to enter a protracted resistance, and were prepared even for the worst contingency: our two enemies--France and Chiang Kai-shek--joining hands with each other to destroy the revolution.

82. Directive, "The Situation and Our Policy," of the Party Standing Committee, dated 3 March 1946. (Footnote in text.)

CHAPTER XXV

The first National Congress of the DRV convened on March 2 [1946]. The meeting came a day before the specified date. The situation was extremely critical. The committee organizing the meeting had even prepared an alternate site in Dinh Bang, Bac Ninh province. In the end, the Standing Committee decided that the National Congress should go ahead and convene in Hanoi. Uncle had told the comrades in the Organization Committee to prepare everything carefully and neatly, so that the proposed agenda could be dealt with and concluded during one half-day session.

The night before the meeting, Uncle stayed up late and smoked a lot. This morning, sitting in the car, he continued to smoke. His face looked calm. His eyes, however, were very bright, indicating he was deep in thought. Since Uncle's arrival in Hanoi, the people had commented at length about his eyes. Two dots of light always appeared in his eyes in photographs. Uncle had devoted all his energy, all his innate talent to offer a decision to the nation at this turning point of history. Not long ago he had composed this poem while in jail [in China]:

One must look far and reflect deeply,
With determination, do not let up the attack
One false move, and two chariots are wasted
With the right opportunity, even one soldier will bring success.⁸³

The boat of the Fatherland was hurtling toward an extremely perilous cataract. The helmsman could not afford to make one mistake, even a minute one.

The Opera House was bright with flags. This flag had originated from the Southern Insurrection⁸⁴ and, soaked with the blood of countless revolutionary fighters, had become sacred, a symbol of the heroic and indomitable struggle spirit of the nation. In the past few days, in their talks with us the reactionaries continued to demand loudly that the national flag and anthem be replaced. We had firmly rejected their demand.

The National Congress had appointed two representatives, Mr. Ngo Tu Ha,⁸⁵ the oldest delegate, and brother Nguyen Dinh Thi,⁸⁶ the youngest delegate, to stand and wait for Uncle in front of the Opera House.

Members of the Vietnam Revolutionary League and VNQDD were still in the waiting room. They were a group of elegantly dressed men, standing and sitting in confusion, bewildered like sheep separated from their flock. They had to await the approval of the National Congress before they could enter the conference chamber. These were

83. "Học Đánh Cờ" (Learning to Play Chess) in *Prison Diary*. (Footnote in text.) (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1972) (Trans.)

84. This refers to the insurrection in the South in 1940 (Trans.)

85. After 1954, Ngo Tu Ha, a Catholic, served as Deputy Minister for Veterans Affairs and as Chairman of the Catholic Liaison Committee. He died in August 1973. (Trans.)

86. Nguyen Dinh Thi, a well-known writer, is vice-president and secretary general of the Vietnam Federation of Literature and Arts. (Trans.)

precisely the same groups of men who up till yesterday were still creating disturbances everywhere. They had scrounged up enough men to fill the seventy seats we had proposed that the National Congress reserve for them.

Uncle smiled, nodded in greeting, and then led the Provisional Coalition Government into the conference chamber. Nguyen Hai Than had excused himself on grounds of sickness and did not come to the meeting. I wondered whether he was afraid he would be forced to use his native tongue if debates broke out during the meeting. The delegates from the South, because of the warfare there, were unable to make it to this historical session of the National Congress and were absent.

Close to 300 delegates, along with numerous local and foreign guests and reporters, stood up and applauded and cheered without stopping. Hundreds of eyes looked toward the old man with the high forehead and the khaki clothes. Many delegates had never met Uncle before but recognized him immediately. The applause and cheers only stopped when the *Vệ Quốc Đoàn* band, dressed in white uniform, struck up the national anthem.

Uncle stepped to the microphone. He stood silent for a while, glanced affectionately at the delegates representing all strata of the population in the delta and in the highlands, who had come here to attend the conference. With emotion, Uncle said:

This National Congress is the first in the history of our Vietnam. It is the result of the General Elections on January 6th, 1946, and the General Elections in turn were the result of the sacrifice and struggle of our ancestors. It is the result of the complete unity of our people, without distinction of age--old and young--and of all the religious and ethnic groups in our country who have united tightly into one bloc and who do not fear sacrifice and danger in their struggle to obtain independence for our Fatherland.

Uncle relayed to the National Congress the proposal of the government for the expansion of Congress membership to include seventy additional seats reserved for the VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League. This proposal was approved by the Congress. The representatives of the VNQDD and Vietnam Revolutionary League entered one after another, and assumed the still empty seats. While the conference was being prepared, it had been proposed that the seating be divided into a left wing and a right wing, and that this group of seventy delegates be seated to the right, but Uncle had said this was unnecessary.

Uncle waited for the new delegates to sit down, and then continued:

First of all, I would like to thank the National Congress on behalf of the Provisional Government for approving the government request. Second, I would like to welcome the delegates from everywhere on behalf of the government. In this session of the National Congress, all political parties are represented, but the delegates with no political affiliation are also numerous, and at the same time women and ethnic minorities are also represented. Therefore, the delegates to this National Congress do not represent any party in particular, but are the representatives of the entire Vietnamese nation.

Uncle reported what the government had achieved to the National Congress. He said:

Right after we seized power and set up a government, we ran into many difficulties. The South was invaded, and the North was afflicted with famine. However, thanks to the wholehearted support of the entire population and the determination of the government to struggle,

we have achieved a few things: first, we devoted all our strength to the resistance; we reduced the famine by increasing production; the government organized a general election, and it is due to the results of this general election that the National Congress exists today.

All the enormous accomplishments of the government in the past turbulent six months were summarized neatly in these few sentences. Uncle then moved on to discuss the important task confronting us:

The most vital thing now is the resistance. Since September of last year, the South has been invaded. The government appealed to the nation to prepare for a protracted resistance and at the same time mobilized troops to reinforce the areas being invaded. From this moment onward, the National Congress and the Government will have to shoulder many burdens and overcome many difficulties. However, I am certain that the nation will, with one accord, rely on the strength of their unity to work, and so no matter how great the difficulties are, the resistance will win and national reconstruction will succeed. Now, the Provisional Government returns its power to the National Congress so that a new government can be organized: a government which will carry out the resistance and rebuild the country.

President Ho concluded his extremely concise and simple report amidst stormy applause.

Since Uncle's arrival in Hanoi, there had never been such a full gathering of representatives from all over the country, including members of reactionary parties, and numerous foreign guests. Even in this meeting, Uncle retained his usual style of speech and his gestures. This unique comportment of his created a special atmosphere at the conference--an atmosphere of unity, warmth and intimacy, like the atmosphere in a family. This was not an easy thing to accomplish in the first large gathering of representatives from all over the country, complicated by the presence of the reactionaries. This atmosphere always prevailed at all subsequent sessions of the National Congress and whenever Uncle appeared at National Congress meetings.

The Congress approved the resignation of the Provisional Coalition Government and unanimously elected Uncle President of the Resistance Coalition Government and Nguyen Hai Than Vice-President. The Congress enthusiastically approved its Chairman pro-tem's proposal that Uncle be invited to form a new government. Uncle entered the conference chamber amidst cheers and applause.

The Congress recessed for a while and then reconvened. President Ho appeared with the members of the new government. He stepped briskly to the microphone and said:

Now, I would like to report on the formation of the Resistance Coalition Government. The Congress undoubtedly knows that this government now presented to you includes representatives of political parties and members without political affiliation who have previously negotiated and settled with each other. This is why the government could be formed so quickly. . . .

Uncle presented the list of government members. The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of National Defense were given to neutral people. Two ministries were reserved for the South, but since the Southern delegates could not arrive in time, they would be temporarily entrusted to political parties. The Viet Minh Front and the Democracy Party held four Ministries: Finance, Education, Justice and Communications. The VNQDD and the Vietnam Revolutionary League held four ministries: Foreign Affairs, Economy, Social Welfare and Agriculture.

Uncle continued:

- The Vice-President elected by the National Congress is Mr. Nguyen Hai Than. The President is myself.

Applause and cheers again rose.

The list of cabinet members was passed by the Congress. Then Uncle talked to the Congress about the formation of a National Resistance Committee,⁸⁷ responsible for directing the troops and people to fight the aggressors and save the country, and about the creation of a National Board of Counsellors headed by Vinh Thuy. The Resistance Coalition Government, the Resistance Committee and the Board of Counsellors took turns standing up and advancing forward to declare their assumption of authority.

The Congress moved to discuss the power of its Standing Committee. A debate broke out because of the conflicting ideas of the delegates. It would be difficult to solve these problems since there was still no Constitution.⁸⁸ Uncle sat and listened attentively. Once in a while he raised his hand and asked to express his opinion. Sometimes a delegate disagreed with him. Uncle listened carefully, and when necessary he calmly explained his ideas further. As always, in his work Uncle constantly created a relaxed atmosphere and encouraged everyone to boldly express his opinion.

French warships were steaming into the South China Seas with their guns pointed toward the North. Many delegates failed to understand the importance of each passing minute, each passing second at this juncture. Uncle many times reminded those engaged in the debate to end their arguments quickly so that the issues could be put to an early vote.

Congress could finally adjourn at 1:00 P.M. Within four hours of meeting, the Congress had approved the formation of a new government, of the Resistance Committee and a Board of Counsellors to the government, determined the power of its own Standing Committee and set up a Committee for the Drafting of the Constitution.

The delegates had to return immediately to their areas to continue the preparations for the resistance. The moment of parting had arrived. Uncle returned to the microphone and concluded the session with a few brief sentences:

Now, the National Congress temporarily adjourns so that all of us can bring an atmosphere of unity, an atmosphere of resistance, an atmosphere of determination back to each locality to work. Before adjourning, I would like to thank the delegates on behalf of the government. At the same time, let us pledge to each other: the National Congress meeting this time is a Resistance Congress and the government elected is a Resistance Government; I hope that the next time Congress meets it will be a Congress of victory and the Government will be a government of victory.

In those difficult moments, Uncle wanted to transmit to everyone a spirit of unity and determination to fight. He also wanted to communicate to everyone his optimism and his confidence in victory and in the future.

87. The National Resistance Committee consisted of 9 members, with Vo Nguyen Giap as Chairman, and Vu Hong Khanh as Vice-Chairman. (Trans.)

88. The Constitution was adopted by the National Assembly in its second meeting of 8 November 1946. (Trans.)

CHAPTER XXVI

In the first days of March [1946] negotiations between us and the French were still deadlocked. The French colonialists remained stubborn and refused to accept our basic demands. Obstinate and insensitive colonialists even thought they had definitively reoccupied most of the South through military action in the past few months. In addition, they believed that the Sino-French accord had provided them with a legal basis and favorable conditions for a return to the North.

General Leclerc and French negotiators in Hanoi might have understood a little about the real situation and seen the danger of a prolonged war if the negotiations failed. However, they continued to negotiate in accordance with the directives from the French government in Paris. There, the obdurate views of the old colonialism still prevailed.

As for us, if a nationwide resistance broke out at this point, we would run into great difficulties, because we would have to deal simultaneously with several adversaries. However, we could not compromise on questions of principle. In the future, if the French landed in Haiphong port while a settlement had not been reached, even if they had secured permission from the Chinese forces, our people and troops would definitely resist with determination. The situation would become very complex.

After the official announcement of the Sino-French accord, newspapers in Hanoi came and requested a meeting with President Ho and to ask for his views. He answered: "This treaty can be divided into two parts. One part deals with French renunciation of special rights in China. The other part concerns our country. As far as the first part goes, not only are the Chinese people satisfied with it, our Vietnamese people also applaud it. As for the second part, this is not the time to comment on it." Then he said: "No matter what, practically all the Chinese people have always, from their youth to their adulthood, in the past as well as now, agreed with our nationalist movement." When the newspapers asked about the situation of the resistance, President Ho said briefly: "The thing we pay the most attention to is making preparations, staying calm and keeping our morale firm."

The newspapers publicly expressed their attitude toward the Sino-French accord with a series of articles protesting against it. The *Cửu Quốc* newspaper wrote: "No one has the right to bargain away the independence of Vietnam." On the question of the economic privileges that the French had promised to reserve for Chiang Kai-shek in North Vietnam, an article said: "Only the Vietnamese government has the authority to decide these rights and privileges." We publicly informed the enemy: "Between the signing of this treaty and its application stand the Vietnamese nation which is fighting."

All armed forces, in particular those located in the areas where troops were stationed or where French forces might advance into, were ordered to be ready to fight and to be extremely vigilant. All vital organs of government had made careful preparations. In Hanoi, a large number of old people and children had evacuated the capital. City self-defense forces had dug holes for planting mines in tree trunks,⁸⁹ and were prepared to topple electricity poles and tramways whenever they received

89. The trees, felled by the mines, would form barricades. (Trans.)

orders to this effect. Reconnaissance of the key positions occupied by Chiang's troops in Hanoi had been carried out. Each combat self-defense unit had its own plan of attack.

Meanwhile, a complication occurred between the French and Chiang Kai-shek in Chungking. In the evening of March 1, Colonel Crépin went to the Joint General Staff headquarters of the KMT army to sign an agreement on the procedures for the relief of Chinese forces. The commanders of the KMT Joint General Staff avoided him. An assistant told the French delegation: the Chinese army could only approve the relief of their forces if General MacArthur⁹⁰ gave the order.

French negotiators in Chungking had signed the Sino-French accord with the agreement of Chiang Kai-shek and his Foreign Affairs Ministry. However, the relief of forces would be carried out by Chiang's Joint General Staff. Ho Ying Chin and the generals here had their own separate sphere of power. They saw it would be idiotic to have their troops withdraw hurriedly from Northern Indochina. Lu Han who had just been summoned back for a conference was then present in Chungking. Some people said they wanted to prolong their stay until after the opium harvest.

French warships were heading toward the North. On March 2, Crépin sent a messenger back to report on the new development to Salan who immediately went to talk with the Chinese group in Hanoi. Chou Fu Sheng who was deputizing for the absent Lu Han said he had not received any orders to allow the French to come in and relieve Chinese troops in the North, and if French forces landed in Haiphong he would order his troops to open fire. In addition, he invented another excuse: since the French had not reached a settlement with the Vietnamese government, he could not allow French forces to enter, because if he did, when Chinese KMT forces withdrew Chinese residents in the North would be subjected to Vietnamese reprisals (!).

The negotiations between Chiang Kai-shek's militarists and French generals and officers dragged on all through the night of March 4th and still remained deadlocked. On the 5th, the French fleet commanded by Leclerc arrived in the Tonkin Gulf. Leclerc told Lieutenant Colonel Lecomte to write a frantic letter to Sainteny:

Knowing that the situation is critical and that the conflict that might ensue will be a large one, I request that you do everything in your power to arrive at a settlement in the shortest time possible.

French generals and officers again went to see Chou Fu Sheng and the commanders of the Chiang Kai-shek army's general staff in Hanoi. The negotiation and bargaining between the two sides resumed. If an agreement was not reached, tomorrow when the French fleet entered Haiphong the two armies would certainly clash head on.

On that same day of March 5th, the newly established National Resistance Committee issued an appeal:

"Citizens, stand up and oppose the aggressors!

". . . The critical hour for the Fatherland has sounded!

". . . i The National Resistance Committee includes representatives of political parties and has the responsibility of uniting the armies, leading the troops and people to rush forward to kill the enemy, to resist and defend the territory of the Fatherland.

"Citizens, support it wholeheartedly, be ready to obey its commands in order to bring victory to the troops and people, and win independence for the Fatherland!"

90. An American general, who commanded Allied forces in the Pacific. (Footnote in text.)

CHAPTER XXVII

That same night, the Chinese group came and requested an audience with President Ho. They informed us that the French fleet had entered the Tonkin Gulf. For the first time, they asked why we had not come to an agreement with the French. They counselled us not to be too uncompromising. They said if we signed an agreement allowing the French to bring in their troops to relieve Chinese forces, they would support it.

After the Chinese group left, French negotiators arrived. They proposed to iron out the remaining obstacles. The French delegation expressed their wishes to settle with our government right that night in order to arrive at a preliminary accord.

It was clear that something had just happened between Chiang and the French. Since the signing of the Sino-French treaty, relations between the Chinese group and the French in Hanoi had gone through some tense moments. The Chiang Kai-shek gang ordered their troops to make preparations. They told us they would not withdraw their forces. Some Chinese officers declared that if the French landed in the North they would attack them. In addition, they sent their lackeys out to sabotage the talks between us and the French by every means possible. Meanwhile the French continued to visit the command office of the Chinese army in Hanoi.

With his usual perceptiveness, President Ho saw clearly that the tension existing between the French and Chinese at this point was only temporary. Their gang leaders had concluded a bargain in Chungking. No matter what, a big clash between the French and Chiang could not possibly occur. Sooner or later they would come to a settlement. However, as long as contradictions--no matter how small--remained between them, we would continue to exploit them. Now, indeed as expected the Chinese KMT gang was changing their tune. The thing that caught Uncle's attention was the haste displayed by both the French and the Chinese.

The talk between us and the French that night again revolved around two main questions: Vietnam's independence and territorial integrity. "Independence" was a frightening term for the French authorities. The colonialists feared that [granting independence to Vietnam] would create a chain reaction, and a struggle movement demanding independence would break out in all the countries of their empire. The French government only agreed to recognize us as an "autonomous" country. France wanted to lock us in a definite framework of colonialism.

On the question of the unification of the three "ky" (regions) the French displayed an extremely reactionary attitude. De Gaulle's declaration previously had divided Vietnam into three countries: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. At this point, they were attempting to restore their colonial domination in the South and were trying with every means to detach the South from the rest of Vietnam.

For our people, "independence" and "unification" was an ardent aspiration and evoked the deepest emotions. We could not accept "autonomy" because in doing so we would surrender in part the liberties we had won at the cost of a great deal of bloodshed, and we would agree to a certain degree to revert to a life of slavery. The South was part of Vietnamese territory--its blood was Vietnamese blood, its flesh Vietnamese flesh--and we could not allow any enemy to cut it away. Although we were then placed in a perilous situation, we could not compromise on these basic goals of our struggle.

Our position always had been that a complete solution had to be arrived at: France had to recognize Vietnam's independence and territorial integrity. This position of principle was once again firmly laid down by Uncle that night.

Throughout the negotiations, the French had on many occasions tried to avoid discussing the question of the South. The French government had only agreed to recognize that Vietnam was a state with its own government, national assembly, army and finances. Finally, on the question of the unification of the three "ky," the French pledged to recognize the results of a referendum [to be conducted in the South]. However, France still refused to recognize our independence, and this issue again brought the talk that night to a deadlock.

Late that night, the French negotiators departed. Before leaving they expressed their wish that President Ho would give further consideration to their proposals. They seemed very worried.

CHAPTER XXVIII

March 6th, 1946.

In the early morning, the French fleet advanced into Haiphong harbour from the Tonkin Gulf. At 8:30, their first landing vessel appeared on the Cua Cam River. Chiang's soldiers stationed along the banks opened fire. Fifteen minutes later⁹¹ the French returned the fire. The Chinese troops' ammunition depot in the harbour went up in flames.⁹² A number of French vessels were hit. Many French soldiers were killed and wounded. The exchange of fire lasted until close to 11:00 A.M.

The Chinese militarists and their lackeys had wanted to take advantage of a clash between us and the French. Ironically the first to clash with the French were the Chinese themselves. The VNQDD and Vietnam Revolutionary League were prepared to carry out serious sabotage activities if we reached a settlement with the French. However, their own masters at this point were demanding precisely that we settle with the French. That morning the Chinese group again proposed to us that we settle with the French early in order to avoid a large scale conflict.

We were still faced with a big hurdle: the word "autonomy" proposed by the French. "Independence" was something which the French government still refused to accept. President Ho saw that the time had come to arrive at a decision. After consulting the Standing Committee, he proposed the solution: "France recognizes that Vietnam is a free state." This was approved by the French delegation.

The French negotiators later said that those were the tensest moments of waiting they had to go through.

So, in the extremely confusing and complicated situation at the time, the negotiations between us and the French had led to a preliminary accord. This was the first international treaty that the DRV had signed with a foreign country.

The signing ceremony was conducted at 4:00 P.M. at a house located at No. 38, Ly Thai To street. French representatives, commanders of the Chiang Kai-shek army's general staff in Northern Indochina, representatives of the American mission and the British Consulate, arrived at the villa separated from the Résidence Supérieure by a park. The small room was simply furnished and unadorned with flags. Guests and hosts stood around a large desk. Present here were people from all the "powers" of the capitalist world after World War II. The figure of a frail old man, with a black beard, wearing faded khaki clothes and a pair of indigo blue cloth shoes, stood out among the group of large, fat and elegant men, most of whom were military officers. That tableau summed up the situation: the DRV surrounded by a thick circle of imperialists.

Hoang Minh Giam read aloud the preliminary accord and the addenda. The contents can be summarized as follows:

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91. Leclerc's order to Valluy to return the fire only arrived about 20 minutes later. See Devillers, *Histoire*, p. 224. (Trans.)
 92. French fire hit the ammunition depot--war booty which General Wang Hu Huan had accumulated and was about to ship to Manchuria. Devillers, p. 224. (Trans.)

- France recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a free state, with its own government, national assembly, army and finances, within the Federation of Indochina and the French Union.

- The French government pledged to recognize the results of the plebiscite on the unification of the three "ky."

- Vietnam agreed to allow 15,000 French troops to enter North Vietnam to relieve Chinese forces. These French troops would be all withdrawn after a specified period of time.

- Both sides would suspend fighting to open official negotiations. There would be a ceasefire in place for the armies of both sides during the negotiations.

The reading of the accord and the addenda came to an end. Everyone looked toward President Ho. He glanced at the clauses of the treaty. In his position as the President of the DRV, he signed first. Then he handed the treaty to Vu Hong Khanh who was standing nearby. Under pressure from his bosses, Vu Hong Khanh had to swallow his bitterness and signed underneath as the special representative of the Council of Ministers. Sainteny, the man who had been delegated to represent the government of the French Republic, signed last.

Sixty-three years earlier, with a few cannons and a few thousand invading troops, a certain Harmand⁹³ had handed to the Nguyen Dynasty a draft treaty with twenty-seven points, forcing the Hue court either to accept or reject in toto and forbidding the court to make any changes. The emperor and mandarins of the Nguyen Dynasty had to bow their heads and accept the humiliating treaty of 1883. A year later, the Hue court signed the Patenotre treaty. This was a treaty selling the country, placing it completely under the domination of French colonialism. From then on, the nation's independence and liberties were lost, including the right to conduct our own foreign relations. The August Revolution had brought extraordinary changes. The whole Vietnamese nation, humiliated, shackled and miserable, rose up. The Vietnamese who had lived in slavery became free Vietnamese. The newly born DRV had stood firm in the raging storm.

Now, the enemy--supported by a large army, and fully supplied with aircraft, warships and armored cars--had had to negotiate with us as equals. The French government had been forced to accept conditions which deep down they did not like. The first to recognize a free Vietnam were precisely the same people who sixty-three years earlier had robbed our country of all its liberties.

We agreed to allow 15,000 French troops to enter the North for a specific period of time in order to boot out 180,000 brutal soldiers of Chiang Kai-shek who declared they would remain here indefinitely.

On behalf of our people, President Ho expressed to the people of the world our sincere aspiration for peace--a genuine peace--in independence and freedom. And since we could not have peace now because of the greed and blind actions of imperialism, this was a moment of compromise to prepare for a protracted resistance which we believed would bring victory.

The signing ceremony was concluded. The French representative raised his glass and toasted President Ho, expressing his joy at having warded off the ghostly shadow of an armed conflict. In a calm but firm voice, Uncle said: "We are not satisfied because we haven't won complete independence, but we will win complete independence."

93. Jules Harmand was the Consul Général and the Commissaire Général in Tonkin and Annam. (Trans.)

The enemy had retreated one basic step. But to us, this victory was only the beginning. The shores of success were still far away. Uncle had told our opponents that our armed struggle would continue until final victory was achieved.

The news that France had signed a preliminary accord with President Ho Chi Minh of the DRV caused great consternation in many parts of the world, far and near.

Not too long afterward, the French reactionary colonialists betrayed all the terms they had signed. They refused to believe the French people's aspiration for peace and the realities that a number of Frenchmen more or less in step with the times had seen in Vietnam. They still longed for the golden age of colonialism and felt they had lost too much when they had to return what they had robbed from a nation which had struggled for 80 years to regain independence and liberty. They forced a great friend of the French people, the man who was negotiating with them, to become--in the words of the French themselves--"the man who sank French imperialism.!"

